

• GOOD FOR THE
Environment,

AND GOOD FOR THE

Golfers



By Christopher S. Gray Sr.,
Contributing Editor

IT ALL BEGAN WITH A CONVERSATION with the owner of my golf course during a late-night budget meeting.

“How much money did we actually save with all these environmental programs?” he asked.

“By my numbers, more than \$250,000,” I replied.

He thought for a moment and said, “We should tell our golfers about this.”

I responded, “No sir, we should give some of the money back to them and then tell them about it.”

And that’s the beginnings of Marvel Golf Club’s “Affordable Golf from

Establishing native areas on the golf course has proven to be the largest savings contributor. Nearly 50 acres of maintained turf has been converted to native grass areas in the past three years.

a Better Environment” initiative. In a nutshell, the initiative reduces the daily greens fees for the entire 2009 golfing season from \$35 to \$25 for an 18-hole round (with golf car) seven days a week. But the key to this program is why we’re able to do it: It’s because of the numerous environmental programs implemented throughout the golf course that have resulted in substantial maintenance budget savings. We’re providing a message that there are real and tangible benefits for implementing environmental programs on golf courses.

A wall in the clubhouse is dedicated to the “Affordable Golf from a Better Environment” initiative. On the wall hangs a 20-foot-by-30-foot poster frame that’s packed with information detailing the four major areas of environmental savings: native-area establishment, water management, fertility management and pesticide management.

Establishing and expanding native areas on the golf course, typically where golf balls shouldn’t go, has proved to be the largest savings contributor. Over the past three years, nearly 50 acres of maintained golf course land has been converted to native grass conservation areas. Through the techniques of timely glyphosate applications and selective controlled burns, the native seed bank was stimulated to germinate. Fortunately, in this geographic area (southern Kentucky), the predominant native species that prospered was broomsedge bluestem, which grows to about 3 feet and turns brown. After the broomsedge was established, no further maintenance practices were necessary in these areas.

The significant budget savings come in the form of associated mowing costs and reduced fertilizer applications.

When you don’t need to mow 50 acres of land, you save labor, fuel and equipment expenses that go directly to your bottom line — not to mention the savings from not having to purchase and apply 50 acres of fertilizer. The cumulative savings from native-area establishment have added up to more than \$150,000.

In terms of water management, it’s not simply a matter of reducing the actual amount of water used to irrigate the golf course. The secondary costs involved with irrigation add up more quickly when you examine the associated expense numbers.

Electricity used to transfer water into the retention pond or to operate the water source as well as run the irrigation pumps are the highest costs with irrigating the golf course. By capturing storm water and harvesting wastewater directly from the property using nothing more than gravity and pipes, we significantly reduced the amount of electrical energy needed to provide sufficient water for our irrigation cycles.

These programs have virtually eliminated drawing fresh water out of Kentucky Lake, which lies adjacent to

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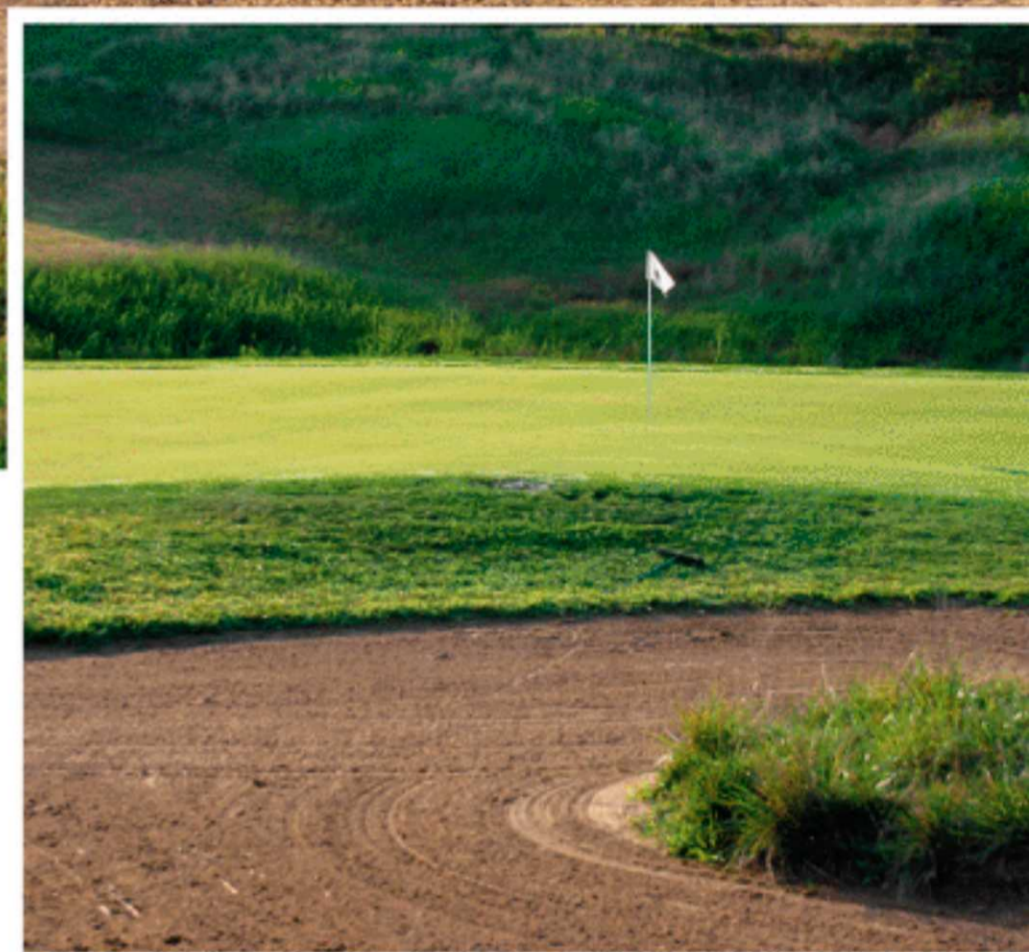
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Good for the Environment ...



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the golf course — which has saved more than \$40,000 in electrical costs.

To irrigate more efficiently, we employ a regimen of well-timed wetting agent applications. These wetting agents allow us to irrigate with less water, while maintaining proper and consistent levels of moisture throughout the soil profile. The cost of the wetting agents is more than offset by the reduction in irrigation cycles needed to provide a healthy playing surface for the golfers. In total, wetting agents have saved the maintenance budget about \$10,000.

Marvel Golf Club was the first course in the United States to use transcontinental-seeded bermudagrass for tees and fairways. This seeded variety has many outstanding attributes, including being able to fertilize with smaller amounts than traditional nonseeded bermudagrass.

We fertilize our tees and fairways with a simple straight urea (46-0-0) at a rate of .70 pounds per-thousand square feet per month. Timely irrigation, im-

mediately after application, reduces the volatility of the urea. These practices lead to a 30 percent reduction of fertilizer use for tees and fairways, saving more than \$30,000.

For the greens, we developed a spoon-feeding program with water soluble, cost-effective Plant Marvel fertilizer. These applications provide the A1/A2 bentgrass with the proper levels of nutrients needed to survive in the hot Kentucky summers. We maximize the fertilizer uptake efficiency by applying less fertilizer more frequently, which minimizes potential loss by leaching. Comparatively, the spoon-feeding program saves about \$7,500.

Regarding pesticide management, we established rather high threshold levels for each area of the golf course.



By spoon-feeding the greens, Marvel Golf Club saved about \$7,500. The idea is to maximize the fertilizer uptake efficiency by applying smaller amounts of fertilizer more frequently.

This has also led to a considerable reduction of fungicides and herbicides. Additionally, with the assistance of a Tier 1 pesticide assessment model, we identified and approved only low-risk pesticides for use on the golf course. To date, there have been no insecticide applications made to the transcontinental tees and fairways, which has meant an enormous savings to the pesticide maintenance budget. In all, we have reduced the total number of necessary pesticide applications by about 20 percent, saving nearly \$15,000.

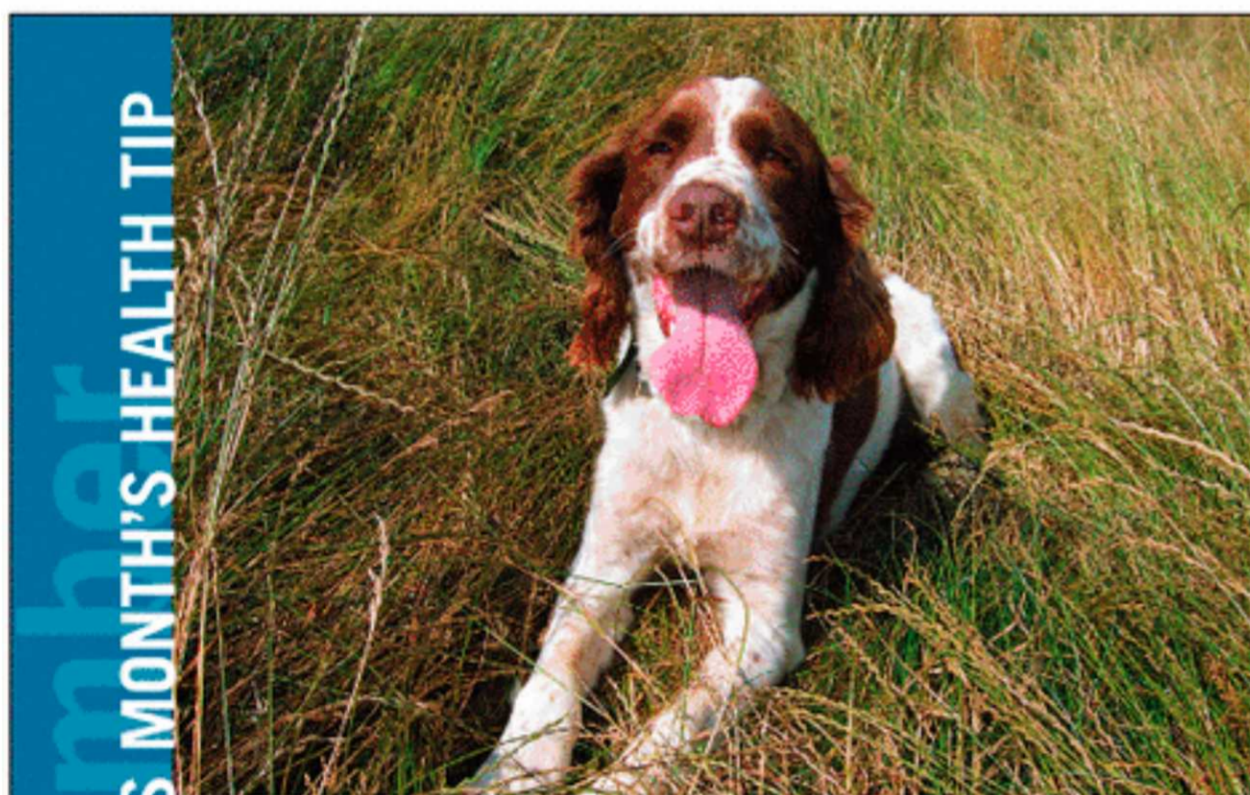
For years, our industry has tried to publicize the various environmental benefits of golf courses to the average

golfer, but unfortunately these efforts have largely fallen on deaf ears. The average golfer who plays a few times a week isn't interested in the environment as much as he's interested in how much he has to shell out for a round of golf, especially in these difficult economic times. That's not to say he or she doesn't care about the environment, only that he or she would rather focus on winning that \$2 Nassau among his golfing buddies.

It's the casual golfer the initiative reaches by spelling out exactly how each environmental program has saved the golf course money, which in turn results in lower greens fees for the golfing season.

Message delivered and money saved. ■

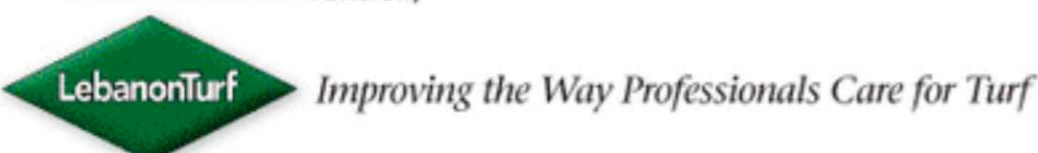
Christopher S. Gray Sr., a contributing editor for Golfdom, is golf course superintendent and general manager of the Marvel Golf Club in Benton, Ky.



THIS MONTH'S HEALTH TIP

When the school bell rings, don't let your dog go back to school! Many dogs will naturally follow kids — or will be encouraged to tag along. Many become lost, injured or cause a nuisance around the schoolyard. Keep your dog confined when children leave for school. If you drive, don't take your dog with you. Animals learn quickly and can find their own way to school later on. Brief separations during the days just before the new school year will help those children and dogs that are especially close. And if your dog is missing, call the school first!

Higgins. His owner is Chris Cantrell, assistant superintendent at Chattanooga Golf & Country Club in Chattanooga, Tenn. (Photo by: Nicole Cantrell)



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