

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE'S VISION OF GOLF

Timberlake creates an environmental beauty that also strives to grow the game at Mirimichi GC.

BY CHRISTOPHER S. GRAY, SR.

When pop singer and actor Justin Timberlake decided to get into the golf industry, he had three directives for his golf facility. The first directive stated that the golf course had to be “green” in terms of being environmentally responsible. The second edict declared that the facility be open to the public where it could serve the community. And the final decree affirmed that the golf facility be used to grow the game of golf.





After a visit to Mirimichi Golf Course in Millington, Tenn., it becomes apparent that Timberlake's lofty goals are being exceeded in every imaginable way, and they've barely re-opened for play after some impressive renovations from the original design. They have raised the environmental bar for balancing the golfer's experience and expectations with adapting the course features to player's use, with protecting and enhancing the environmental features of the entire property that the golf course lies on.

Mirimichi, a Native American word meaning "place of happy retreat," is without question one of the most dedicated and zealous golf facilities when it comes to environmental stewardship. And that stands to reason.

After all, Timberlake is a true environmentalist. During his last nationwide concert tour, he hired a company to calculate the carbon footprint of each concert performance and then paid to have trees and bushes planted in each of the cities he performed in to offset

that carbon impact.

With Timberlake's commitment to being environmentally responsible, Mirimichi's directive to be "green" became a quest to be the best.

Environmental juggernaut

Being a cutting-edge environmental leader, Mirimichi became the first course in the country to achieve certification as an Audubon Classic Sanctuary from Audubon International, as well as the first course in the Americas to achieve Golf Environmental Organization (GEO) Certification, an international non-profit organization, widely recognized as the leading authority on sustainable golf. Mirimichi is the only course in the world to hold both certifications.

At the helm of this unprecedented environmental juggernaut is Kenny Herzog, director of agronomy and Dustin Green, superintendent, who both manage the conditioning of the golf course. Their actual roles at Mirimichi

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Mirimichi

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extend beyond turfcare.

“Kenny and Dustin are the true leaders here at Mirimichi,” says Rich Peterson, general manager. “Everyone else at the facility is their supplemental support cast. Kenny and Dustin are empowered to pull resources from whatever department they need.”

During the grow-in stages, Green periodically sought help from the pro shop staff to become bunker crews and mowing crews to assist with the renovation project. This type of inter-department support illustrates the palpable philosophy that exists at Mirimichi of being one “family.”

“The thing I am most proud of here at Mirimichi is the way our people interact with each other on a regular basis,” boasts Peterson.

Being able to achieve this level of environmental success doesn’t come without a true dedication from every employee at the course, not just the maintenance staff. Creating and cultivating a workplace togetherness is an accomplishment that separates Mirimichi from most other facilities.

At the forefront of this team philosophy is making sure that all employees are educated with the environmental features of the facility. Every employee, from the bus boy cleaning off the tables in the restaurant to the office secretary handling phone calls, receives environmental education training about Mirimichi.



This training consists of two hours of classroom education, including a 52-page training manual and a required written test, and an additional two hours of on-course education.

“We wanted to make sure that all the golfers and guests visiting the course could ask any employee about the environmental efforts we are doing, and be able to get the right answer,” Peterson explained.

And they have a lot of environmental efforts to talk about.

With the latest renovation, the total amount of manicured turf has been reduced from 200 acres down to less than 90 acres. This dramatic drop in acreage has been beneficial in several areas. The amount of maintenance “inputs” significantly decreased, while the native areas were expanded and logically reshaped to better match the pat-

Above, Mirimichi has become a gathering spot for the local community. The course hosts community events every other week.

Below, Timberlake wanted area kids to get a chance to learn the game locally like he did.






tern of the play from the golfers. This type of “adaptive management” allows for increasing the size of the native areas while decreasing the likelihood that golf balls disturb them.

Newly designed water filtration and drainage enhancements, along with recirculating creeks, have notably reduced water consumption by being able to recapture two-thirds of all the water applied to the course. The other one-third that can't be recaptured is filtered by wetlands and turf before leaving the course. Through the constant water-monitoring program at Mirimichi, exiting water has been shown to be consistently cleaner than when it first entered the golf course ecosystem.

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The water that is able to leave the course exits cleaner than it arrived, having been filtered by wetlands and turf.

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Their willingness to embrace new, leading-edge technology at Mirimichi has led to several innovative renewable energy solutions.

Rather than use gasoline or grid-supplied electricity to operate their golf cart fleet, Mirimichi will be utilizing solar paneled roofs on the golf carts to power the electric batteries.

Argon-filled windows have been, and will continue to be, installed to help conserve energy in all the buildings because of their increased insulating ability and resistance to heat flow.

A brand new, LEED-certified clubhouse is still in the planning stages, but preparation work has already been completed that will ultimately lead to utilizing geothermal energy.

"We expanded No. 1 lake and did the construction specifically for the purpose of sinking a geothermal grid into it... to provide the heating and cooling for the clubhouse," said Peterson.

Having just finished up the renovation stages on the course, the entire staff at Mirimichi is starting to explore new environmen-

tal opportunities that can be incorporated within the operation. Already planned is an on-site, two-acre vegetable garden where vegetables and herbs will be grown for use within the food and beverage department.

Community outreach and involvement

Unlike many other golf facilities, Mirimichi is not simply designed to collect green fees and push through as many golfers as possible. The concept, being brought to reality, is to be a community-gathering place with a neighborhood feel, which also provides everyone with a truly special golf experience.

The popular gathering spot of Mirimichi's community work can be found at their 10,000 square foot outdoor patio and bar, offering spectacular views of the golf course for golfers and patrons to enjoy food and beverages.

Every other Friday evening, this venue becomes host to deck parties of 150 to 200 people from the community's families and kids. The parties feature down home cooking, like



Growing the game

Having grown up just two minutes away from the course, Timberlake learned to play golf on the property, back when the golf course was called Big Creek. Naturally, he wants to afford the same opportunity to learn and pick up the game to anyone in his hometown. And while no one who played Big Creek would recognize the course today, the newly added practice and learning features will allow for far more people, both young and old, an avenue to enjoy the game.

The centerpiece to growing the game is the Mirimichi Performance and Learning Center; a brand new 10,000-square-foot facility that has been specifically designed for club fitting and technologically aided swing instruction. The facility includes three teaching bays that have roll-up doors that allow students to hit from inside the facility out to the driving range. The facility also features Callaway CPAS and TrackMan technology that ana-

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crawfish boils, fish fries, buffets and Hawaiian-themed luaus, with whole roasted pigs. Complete with the occasional live band and dancing, these parties have helped amass an enormous amount of positive exposure and goodwill within the community.

Staying true to their environmental endeavors, Mirimichi has developed and implemented an education outreach program that focuses on their environmental projects and issues currently taking place on the property.

Along with publishing their own environmental literature, which is available at the facility, the staff regularly speaks to local groups to raise local "eco-consciousness" by explaining the environmental efforts and benefits being accomplished on the property.

Recently, one of the speaking events was held at the local hospital for the doctors and nurses to illustrate and emphasize the game of golf as a healthy recreation activity that can be included as a part of a person's health and wellness program.



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The most impressive aspect of Mirimichi is the level of comprehensiveness that has been achieved.

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lyzes anyone's golf swing, from the beginner to a professional, and shows the resulting ball flight to help identify problems.

The adjacent, overly generous 100-acre practice facility features a 30-station driving range that hits out to 9 different target greens. There's also a completely separate teaching driving range in addition to the main range.

Included within the practice facility is a short-game area that focuses on all the golf shots within 75 yards. This dedicated, spacious complex offers specialized practice for bunker shots, chipping and pitching at varying distances.

One of the coolest, and exceptionally rare, features at Mirimichi is their natural grass 18-hole putting course. With the holes averaging about 25 yards long, a player's putting skills are constantly challenged. This miniature golf course alone makes visiting Mirimichi worth the trip.

To help hone player's new golfing skills or just to

prepare them for the Championship course, Little Mirimichi is a 9-hole, par 35 executive course, which measures out at 2,530 yards. With five sets of tees, this course provides an excellent training course for newer players, while allowing more skilled players a faster and shorter golfing experience, while testing a range of skill shots.

The par 72 championship course at Mirimichi measures out at 7,461 yards from the tips, making it long enough to challenge even the most experienced players. But with five sets of tees, the weekend hacker can still score well with the appropriate tee selection. Either way, it's the stunning contrast of native areas, deep pit bunkers and winding creeks set against the dark green turf of the fairways and greens that everyone will remember. The large, undulating Champion Bermuda ultra dwarf greens roll true, but will challenge all golfers, regardless of skill level.

The most unique and impressive aspect of all the work being done at Mirimichi, whether it's their environmental efforts or their efforts to grow the game, is the level of comprehensiveness that has been achieved. Mirimichi is not simply a golf course, but rather it's a gathering place for the families and community members to come and enjoy.

Peterson sums it up best:

"If I'm a Dad, maybe after work, I bring my kids here, we get a decent meal for a good price. Then we go out and play for an hour until the sun goes down. Then I feel like a hero. That's exactly what Justin wants." ■

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