

GUARDING GREENS

A superintendent goes underground to justify purchasing fans.

BY MATT HENDREN

For superintendents, nothing is more frustrating or stressful than having a problem with greens that cannot seem to get under control.

But imagine that scenario with a twist: You have a problem with your greens and you have a solution to the problem. But you can't execute the solution due to circumstances that are out of your control. This is exactly the situation that Alan FitzGerald, superintendent at LedgeRock Golf Club near Reading, Pa., found himself in.

Needed air movement

LedgeRock Golf Club, a Rees Jones-designed course, was built in 2006 in a

beautiful part of Pennsylvania known for its densely populated hardwood forests. The course was expertly designed to intermingle among the trees, but this design caused a problem that wasn't foreseen during the design.

"A couple of our pocketed greens really started thinning out from lack of air movement," FitzGerald explains. "We took as many trees out as we could and did as much culturally as we possibly could within the constraints of the property." FitzGerald knew one way or another he needed to get air movement across his problem greens. He needed to add fans.

"We wanted to add fans but that was going to be a major capital outlay," he says. In order to convince the golf board the fans were necessary FitzGerald looked underground, to a technology that was first introduced to him during construction.

Soil monitoring

The Toro Turf Guard is a wireless soil monitoring system that is buried below greens or fairways and measures levels of soil moisture, salinity and temperature.

"I just like the concept of knowing what was going on without having to go and check everything all the time," he says. Strategically placed sensors allow superintendents to create and map irrigation zones, which

FitzGerald uses the sensors primarily for root zone temperature.





LedgeRock Golf Club was designed by Rees Jones and built in 2006.

enables superintendents to make better decisions about watering.

The use of sensors such as Turf Guard ensures each part of the course gets the right amount of water. But the systems can do different things for different courses, says David Angier, Sr. Marketing Manager for Toro. "This product is not just one thing to every golf course. It measures moisture, it measures salinity and it measures temperature," Angier says. "There are customers that use it for all three and there are customers that might only use it for one of those elements." While the Turf Guard system has several uses, Angier says the primary use is moisture sensing.

Proof positive

With the help of Toro, FitzGerald was able to show the board quantifiable proof

that adding fans to his worst greens was not just a concept to solve the problem, but the real answer.

"I talked Toro into giving me the sensors for six months so I was able to show their capabilities to the board," he says. If everything went as planned the sensors would show proof that the fans were working. They did just that. The demo of the sensors was so successful that LedgeRock now has 18 of them. "Basically we have nine greens covered with two in each green," explains FitzGerald. "The main thing I use the sensors for is temperature to see what sort of temperature we are looking at in the root zone."

Thanks to a useful technology, FitzGerald can sleep at night without fretting over his greens. ■

Matt Hendren is superintendent for the city of Kansas City, Kan.

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