



Coming Back *from* Katrina

NEW ORLEANS'
METAIRIE
COUNTRY CLUB
WAS BATTERED
BY HURRICANE
KATRINA. BUT A
NEW MAKEOVER
AIMS TO RETURN
IT TO ITS PROUD
SETH RAYNOR
ROOTS.

By Anthony Pioppi

THE IMAGES OF HURRICANE KATRINA still are fresh in our minds: People stranded atop cars in rising floodwaters. Homes lifted off their foundations. And the Louisiana Superdome packed wall to wall with people.

Like so many other Gulf Coast areas touched by Katrina, Metairie Country Club, located in the first suburb outside of New Orleans, did not emerge from the Category 3 hurricane unscathed. The golf course lost 70 acres of turf to the storm's floodwaters. But today, nearly seven years on, Metairie is on its way back.

It has a new clubhouse. Its greenside bunkers underwent a recent renovation. And membership is rising steadily, thanks to a healthy New Orleans economy propelled by the city's shipping, banking and construction industries.

Sandy waste

Metairie's Seth Raynor design is in the midst of its own makeover. Mature trees that died or were removed are being replaced not by more trees, but by sand waste areas. The material used to create those areas comes from

the greenside bunkers.

The project came about after a number of live oaks and other varieties of trees succumbed either to floodwaters, age or the renovation of the layout. The idea to introduce five sand features, comprising about 20,000 square feet, came from architect Ron Forse, who is overseeing the undertaking.

One of Forse's inspirations was the recently completed work that Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore performed at Pinehurst No. 2. Crenshaw and Coore removed massive expanses of turf and replaced them with sandy waste areas that harken back to the original Donald Ross design. Forse and Metairie refer to their work as "sandscapes." Bob Faren, Pinehurst's director of golf course and grounds maintenance, coined the term for the Coore-Crenshaw features.

Maintaining playability

Metairie's members were influenced in their approval of the makeover by photos Forse showed them of the 17th hole at the National Golf Links of America. A sand mound there

PHOTO BY: DAVID MARCHAND (TOP); COURTESY OF FORSE DESIGN (RIGHT)

has been an integral part of the Charles Blair Macdonald design since its inception.

According to Metairie General Manager Ken Hamrick, the goal in adopting the sand-scapes was to break up open space while maintaining playability.

“We didn’t want to make it more penal,” Hamrick said. “We wanted to keep the playability as is, if not improve it. It’s easier to play out of than 2 1/4-inch bermuda rough.”

Director of Golf David Marchand said the placement of the new features determines how players negotiate a hole.

“The look is going to help shape shots,” he said.

By utilizing the bunker, superintendent Andy Alexander estimates the club is saving \$28,000 more than it would have had it purchased new sand.

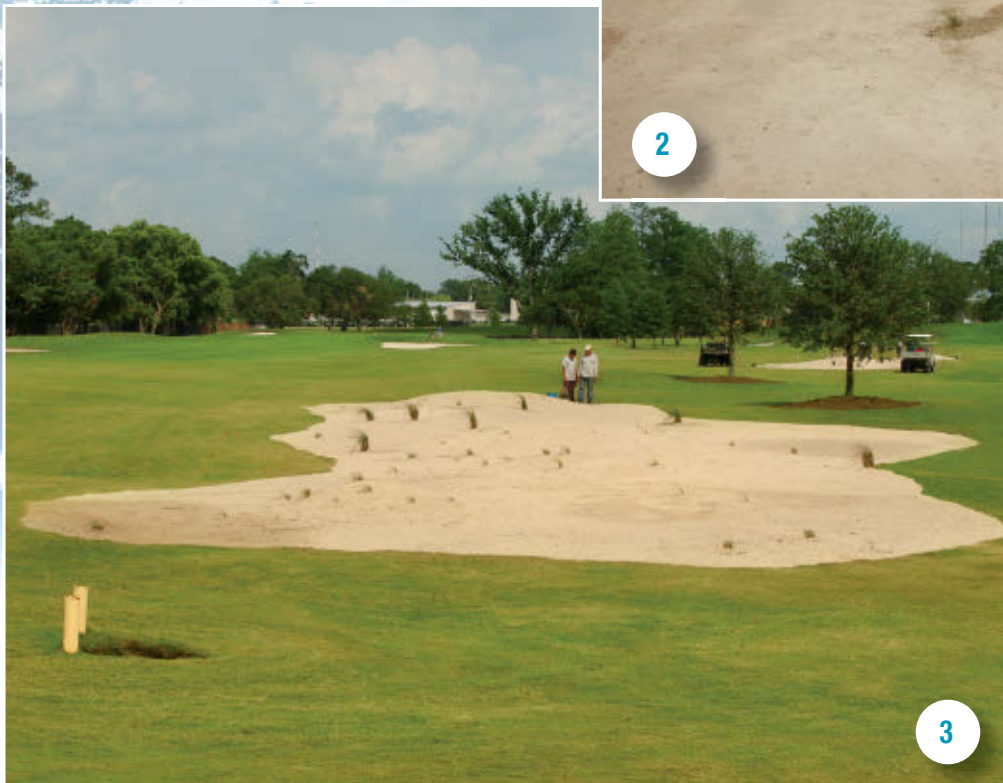
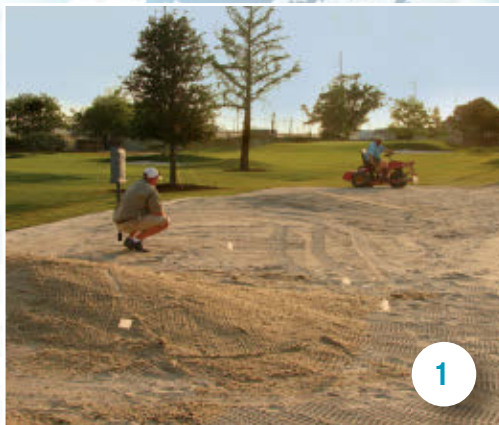
Stages of the renovation

According to Alexander, the project was completed in phases, beginning with the selection of the five sites. Then, turf and soil were removed at a depth of three to four inches in those locations. Most of the sod was used in

other areas of the course. As sand was removed from greenside bunkers, it was deposited on the rough then shaped by Chad Lambert of Sur-Line Turf Inc.

When Lambert finished all of the sand-

Continued on page 28



1 Architect Ron Forse came up with the idea to introduce sand features on the course.

2 Sand was removed from greenside bunkers and deposited on the rough.

3 When the sandscapes were finished, their shaping was perfected and locations for native grasses were selected.

Back in Form



Coore and Crenshaw's work on Pinehurst No. 2, pictured, served as an inspiration for Metairie CC.

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— METAIRIE GENERAL MANAGER **KEN HAMRICK**, ON ONE OF THE GOALS IN ADOPTING THE SANDSCAPES

Continued from page 27

scapes, Forse’s design associate Jim Nagle returned to tweak the shaping and to select locations for the native grasses that were planted by Metairie’s grounds crew staff and horticulturalist Don Hammon.

Sand not used for that project was tilled into the sand cap, which was installed on the course during the Forse renovation eight years ago.

Forse’s work includes a landscaping plan that calls for the addition of trees. They will be located in areas that won’t impact play. Hammon also has added ornamental grasses, roses, hollies, azaleas and other plants well away from the areas of play. Together with Forse and Nagle, he selected the grasses used in the sandscapes.

Long history

Forse and Nagle first worked at Metairie in the early 2000s, completing a major reconstruction of the layout in 2003. The project’s intent was to regain the original Raynor layout as much as possible. Over the years, nearly all of Raynor’s design was lost to a series of ill-advised alterations.

As a guideline for the work, Forse used a 1941 aerial photograph of the layout taken before most of the modifications took place.

According to Nagle, when he and Forse first visited Metairie about 10 years ago, it was

vastly over-treed, typical of plantings done in the 1950s and 1960s. “As soon as you’d get off the fairway you were into areas with no grass, roots and leaf debris,” Nagle said.

In August 2005, two years after the course was completed, Hurricane Katrina came ashore, causing so much damage that Metairie shut down the golf course until December.

In the years immediately following Katrina, Metairie not only had to regrass the 70 acres destroyed by floodwaters, in 2007 it also began a \$19 million clubhouse renovation, completed in March 2010.

Some members were put off by the continuous onslaught of renovations and dropped out. Membership, once 1,240, dropped by about 400. The exodus slowed when the club launched a two-month membership drive in November 2009, generating 114 new members. And in the following two months, membership continued to grow. It now stands just shy of 1,000.

The average age of Metairie’s members has dropped from 59 to 51. Hamrick estimates about 35 percent of them play golf regularly.

Soon, all of them will be enjoying a golf course that is one step closer to reclaiming the original intent of Seth Raynor. ■

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