

No Place Like Sedona

Indiana transplant Pat Grimes finds peace and prosperity among the red sandstone outcroppings of Oakcreek Country Club.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY STEVEN TINGLE

PAT GRIMES TAKES a drag off a Pall Mall Blue and shakes his head. “Who’d’ve thought I’d learn so much about drainage in the desert?” he asks. He points to a sediment trap, one of several he and his crew have installed, and says “I’d rather clean silt out of ten square feet than ten thousand.” The “ten thousand” Grimes is referring to are part of 135 acres called Oakcreek Country Club, situated amid the vortexes, psychic healers and red rocks of Sedona, Ariz.

Sedona, a city in the Upper Sonoran Desert of Northern Arizona covered in red sandstone formations with names like Bell Tower, Cathedral Rock and the Devil’s Bridge, might be one of the most beautiful places on the planet. It’s a landscape most haven’t seen in person, one so awe-inspiring it at first appears fake, as if at any moment John Wayne will come riding over the ridge to say, “There are some things a man just can’t run away from.”

Yet millions run away to this desert each year, searching for things as diverse as lymphatic drainage, sweet grass smudging, herbal colon cleanses, aura photog-

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Pat Grimes Profile



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raphy, past life regression and wine made by rock stars. They come to scale the red rocks and stand in the vortexes, swirling centers of energy emerging from the surface of the earth. They come to find the path, the way, their center, their calling.

Back in his home state of Indiana, Grimes dreamed of escape, too. "I wanted to move West from the time I read my first Louis L'Amour," he says. Grimes followed that dream and started work at Oakcreek in January of 2006. "It's a beautiful place," he says. "I have no desire to go anywhere else."

Good for everybody

There is a teeny tiny spec of transition zone in the state of Arizona, and Oakcreek is right smack in the middle of it. Built in 1968, the course was a design collaboration between Robert Trent Jones Sr. and Robert Trent Jones Jr., although word 'round the water cooler is there wasn't a lot of collaboration; Junior did the front, Senior did the back. It started out as a typical desert layout but they continued to add grass. The course is flanked by homes and looks as though it could be in West Palm Beach, Hilton Head or Atlanta. Only the vistas and climate

▲ Grimes has a laugh as Rusty, the course dog, looks on.

Grimes with assistant superintendent Tom O'Neil, a 25-year member of the crew at Oakcreek. "I've got a great crew. I'm really lucky," Grimes says.

betray its location.

"As far as growing grass, man, this is about as tough a gig as you'll find," Grimes admits. "I can have pythium pressure three months solid during monsoon season," which can last from early June through September. Monsoon season in Arizona? Around the city, road signs in low lying areas alert motorists not to cross when roads are flooded, a confusing warning as tumbleweeds roll past. But believe it or not, drainage is Grimes' biggest problem. "We've installed four and a half miles of drainage since I've been here," he says. "The turf requires so much water in these arid conditions it's going to pool and puddle somewhere. Although, I've reduced water usage by 47 percent between 2007 and 2011."

Much of the irrigation water Oakcreek uses is effluent from the community. Grimes points to a pond fountain spewing crystal clear water. "That's my effluent,"

he says. "It's one UV treatment away from being drinking water." Grimes shakes another Pall Mall from his pack. "The requirements up here are a whole lot more stringent than down in the valley," he says. "We have to sample daily." Oakcreek is working with the community to be able to take more effluent in the near future. "It's good for everybody," Grimes says as he flicks his Bic, "good for everybody."

Oakcreek office

At the maintenance facility Grimes lets the crew know they can knock off a little early as a long-haired mutt runs out and jumps in his cart. "Get back in the office, Rusty," Grimes orders half-heartedly as the dog licks his cheek. Walking Rusty back to his cluttered office, Grimes apologizes for the mess. "I don't spend much time in here," he says. He motions toward the window. "My office is out there."

Out there, Oakcreek is covered in a potpourri of grass. "I'm basically trying to grow rye and blue," he says, "but there's Bermuda all over the place. It just comes in with the storm flows. I've even got some 419 in the tees that's been tracked up from the valley on people's shoes." Oakcreek's greens are mostly *Poa*. "About 65 percent," Grimes says. "The only bent

I really have left are the old German bents from the '60s. You can tell because they turn purple when it gets cold."

Grimes stops at the edge of the rough to inspect what looks like a circular dog cage. "Javelina trap," he sneers. "With the cooperation of Fish & Game we've taken out and relocated 75 in the past four years." Grimes' game warden duties don't stop there. He deals with coyotes, coons, ducks and blue heron with piss so pungent it can turn *Poa* brown in minutes. "We get so many ducks, sometimes you can't see the pond," he says. "I have to get my "banger" out and shoo them off now and then." Grimes now knows to call the authorities before "shooing" — his first attempt caused a lockdown

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of the neighboring school.

A maintenance employee drives past and Grimes waves, his wide smile as standard as his mirrored sunglasses. "I've got a great crew," he says. "I'm really lucky." He drives his cart toward the golf shop and stops next to the practice green, the course spreading out to the east and west. The red rocks stand in the distance like sentries, guarding 135 acres of green rooted to a brown terrain. Grimes is silent, taking it all in, not letting the view get old, not even after six years. He reaches past the steering wheel for the Pall Malls.

"Like I said, man, I got no desire to go anywhere else." ■

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