

## LANDSCAPE PROFILE

# A STAR IS BUILT

It doesn't look like much now—just rock, dust, and hills. By October, Star Pass TPC in Tucson will play host to its pro golf tournament.

by Ken Kuhajda, managing editor



If brown is your color, you may want to go to Tucson, Ariz. But you'd better hurry.

That's where Star Pass Tournament Players Club will soon be rising from the rocks that dominate the southeast Arizona landscape.

Star Pass, its ground broke in April 1985, doesn't sport any green.

The brown of the desert and hills of west Tucson dominate. Today, Star Pass doesn't look much like a world-class course. It will soon.

If all goes as planned, Star Pass will host the Tucson Match Play tourney this October.

By then, course superintendent Harold Vaubel prays, the tees, fairways, and greens will be a lush green.

Star Pass, one of a growing list of TPC-owned and operated clubs, will add to Tucson's list of new and impressive courses.

### Building on rock

Most likely, the Wadsworth Golf

Below, superintendent Harold Vaubel (left) and Wadsworth Golf Construction superintendent Kevin Sutherland. Top left, assistant superintendent David Michael. Near left, irrigation trenches are carved.



Construction Company, Star Pass builders, took a peek at the planned site and brought along extra dynamite.

The terrain has not made the job easier for Wadsworth job supervisor Steve Robison, who has been on the site since groundbreaking.

"This has not been an easy job to work because of the rock," says Robison. His co-worker, greens shaper Mike Hatchcock, agrees. "I can verify that because of my back," he says with a smile.

By the time Wadsworth finishes, they will have seeded bentgrass greens, and stolonized bermuda 419 fairways and bermuda 328 tees.

Then it's up to Star Pass superintendent Vaubel and crew to nurture hybrid bermuda, common bermuda, bentgrass, and desert vegetation that will lie on the course's 120 acres.

### How to build a course

In the last year Wadsworth has:

- staked fairways and cleared vegetation. Some vegetation, such as the saguaro cactus, was held for later placement (Arizona law says you can't kill several desert plants, including the saguaro cactus, many of which are well over 100 years old).

- shaped fairways, in the process, dynamiting the impeding rock.

- performed all drainage work and installed the irrigation system.

- reshaped and removed all excess rock, backfilled the trenches, and then reshaped the course again.

- performed prep work for the topsoil. They then placed top soil layers of up to 6 inches over the course.

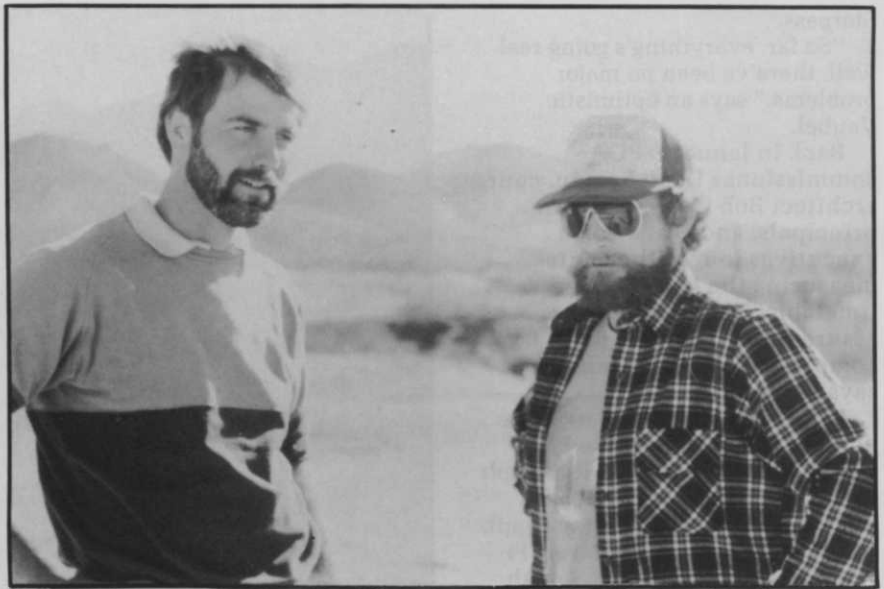
- prepped the greens, beginning with drainage tiles, a 4-inch gravel blanket, a 2-inch course sand blanket (choker layer), and a 10-inch greens mix comprised of fine sand with organic matter added (in this case, 20 percent Canadian peatmoss).

- seeded the greens, sodded the green slopes and bunker slopes, and stolonized the fairways and tee tops.

Wadsworth, no stranger to building golf courses in Arizona, has also enhanced the natural mounding that the TPC requires for a stadium golf effect.

They've also left room for underground utility cables. None will be above ground.

Wadsworth has 32 employees on site, including three shapers and 11



Greens shaper Mike Hatchcock(right) and Wadsworth supervisor Steve Robison take a break at Star Pass.

operators. The company should be off-site by early May.

Arizona has become a sort of second home to some Wadsworth employees. Construction superintendent Kevin Sutherland, a Michigan native, has spent the last three years in Arizona building new courses.

Among those: Desert Highlands, La Paloma, and Ventanna Canyon.

### A good opportunity

Assistant superintendent David Michael, 28, is working on his third under-construction course. That's what superintendent Vaubel was looking for in an assistant super: someone with construction experience.

Vaubel had previously served as superintendent at Albuquerque Country Club and Desert Forest Golf Club, and assistant superintendent at Tucson National Golf Club and Goodyear Golf and Country Club.

Michael, formerly superintendent at La Mariposa Sports Club in Tucson, says working for the PGA represents a "challenge and a good opportunity."

As he tours the course, Michael seems to know every hill, every swale. The new course has become his friend.

"With the PGA, the number one concern is quality," he says. "With the pros, the quality of their game is number one and so is the quality of their courses."

Michael, who gave up a career in

electrical engineering after his junior year in college, obtained his agronomy degree from the University of Arizona.

Trodding golf courses since age six, Michael has no regrets. He's living his desire.

Vaubel and Michael will employ an 18-man crew at full strength.

The only other employee at this time is head mechanic Al Fleming, a former staffer at Tucson Country Club.

### Water, water, water...

After Wadsworth clears out, Vaubel and Michael will begin nurturing the baby turf to life.

It's going to take a lot of care. Semi-arid Tucson gets only 11 inches of rain per year. Irrigation with effluent water (state law prohibits irrigation with potable water) will be ongoing, perhaps as much as 10 to 15 minutes per hour.

The 100-degree heat of the average Tucson summer, coupled with bentgrass greens, will provide a challenge for Vaubel and crew. The fairway and tee bermudagrass should prosper.

By early fall, says Vaubel, the course will be in shape for the 500 or so members the developer, Uniwest, hopes to draw.

In addition, the hilly surrounding areas will be bustling with construction of houses and condominiums. Uniwest is developing some 800 acres at Starpass.

Starpass.

"So far, everything's going real well, there've been no major problems," says an optimistic Vaubel.

Back in January, PGA commissioner Dean Beman, course architect Bob Cupp, Uniwest principals, and Wadsworth executives toured the course, measuring the construction timetable. They came away assured that the course will be completed by tournament time, says Vaubel.

"They said that Star Pass is the number one priority of the PGA," says Vaubel. Just in case, Randolph Golf Course in Tucson has been lined up as a back-up for the event.

Currently the PGA controls 14 courses throughout the U.S. with four slated for opening in 1986. Each year four more are slated to open.

Star Pass, barring unforeseen disaster during the August "monsoon season" (what residents call the rainy period); should be ripe come October. **WT&T**



This common desert scene will be a faded memory when Star Pass hosts its first pro tournament this October.

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