

THE MAKING OF A GREAT COURSE

Old Marsh Golf Club used to be a cattle ranch located on wetlands. Scheduled to open last month, the Pete Dye creation is now one of Florida's finest.

It is a rare gray morning on the back nine at Old Marsh Golf Club in North Palm Beach. Golfers are greeted by families of wild sandhill cranes and dense hammocks of tall cypress, sabal palms and pines.

And that's exactly what developer Robert B. Whitley had in mind when he asked Pete Dye to transform a cattle and horse ranch into a championship course.

The 450-acre, 18-hole Old Marsh course was designed by Dye to be unique in Florida because natural prairies were incorporated. The predominantly grassy marshlands provide a natural setting of beauty that ideally lends itself to a Dye creation.

An 11,000-square-foot maintenance facility includes offices, storage space for \$350,000 worth of new maintenance equipment, a caddy lounge and a separate, 600-square-foot chemical and soil storage building.

Wooden bulkheads, long a Pete Dye trademark, have been used sparingly. However, boardwalks spanning the marshes and wooden cart bridges have been built throughout the course. Complicated irrigation and drainage systems protect five separate, 18-acre natural Everglades parcels and 30 acres of newly-created marsh from fertilizer and pesticide runoff.

Florida protects wetlands because they are vital for fresh water supply replenishment, flood control and irrigation. Perhaps most importantly, they are feeding grounds for many species of Florida's wading birds. Florida has lost an estimated 12 million acres of wetlands—about 60 percent—between 1850 and 1973, according to state estimates. For this reason, Old Marsh developers spent two years getting all the needed environmental permits before breaking ground. A strict monitoring program has guaranteed protection of the natural wetlands.

Wetting non-wetlands

To irrigate the golf course, Old Marsh chose the Toro Vari-Time II hydraulic system. State regulations allow no irrigation in the wetland areas. There-



Old Marsh superintendent Dennis Weber says the Steiner TRS 20 is "an up-and-coming piece of equipment" for golf courses with steep banks.

fore, almost every pop-up head that Toro manufactures—including 690s, 670s, 650s, 640s and even Super 600s—had to be used. To pump water through the system, a PSI pump station with 1800 gpm capacity was selected.

The cost of irrigation installation, including materials, labor and pump station was approximately \$350,000. Drainage materials and installation cost approximately \$225,000, says superintendent Dennis Weber. Very little fill has been used on this unusual course. The greens are generally on the same level as the surrounding trees and vegetation.

"This is my first Pete Dye-designed golf course, and due to the stringent environmental standards, I really got an education from him on the subject of drainage," says Weber. "Almost 50 percent of our construction costs on this course were underground," he adds.

Excess irrigation and rain water flows into an average of 50 drain tile catch basins on each hole. The runoff water is then moved through a series of custom-fit pipes into deep-water lakes where vegetation cleanses it. Gravity flow eventually takes the water from the lakes into one major outfall canal which is force-pumped three miles into the South Florida Management District canal system, says Weber.

"Everybody here in South Florida has problems with draining their greens. But Old Marsh is using a method preferred by Dye that has



Shown here is hole No. 5 while under construction. That hole has been made even more difficult by a man-made marsh surrounding it.

proven to be effective," he notes.

Beneath the putting surfaces, a 14-inch layer of ortona sand (with five percent Canadian peat tilled into the top six inches) was placed over a four-inch deep layer of pea gravel. Under the pea gravel, a herringbone drainage field draws the water into six-inch diameter feeder pipe that leads into a 24-inch main line. That line delivers the excess water into the strategically-located lakes.

Bermuda is king

The irrigation system was designed so that areas grassed with non-Bermuda species can be shut off while Tifdwarf on the greens will still be irrigated.

The Tifdwarf greens are overseeded in winter with creeping bentgrass. Tifgreen 328 Bermudagrass was planted on tees and approaches.

Centipedegrass, carpetgrass and Bahiagrass were chosen for rough areas because of their natural, contrasting appearance. Centipedegrass was sodded onto the pot bunkers and the faces of all steep banks. The full-time maintenance crew will fertilize the roughs only twice per year and cut it only about six times, to retain the natural look of each grass.

Generally, fertigation is the chosen method of feeding. That, however, is supplemented with dry applications broadcasted with Lesco rotary spreaders on greens, tees and approaches. PTO-driven Lely L4000 and Vicon PS402 tractor spreaders are used on fairways.

New cutters

Weber says that a pair of Toro 450D mowers was purchased to cut the fairways and roughs, while the Toro Groundsmaster 72 is used for roughs around trees. The Toro Turf Pro 84 trim mower is used for an intermediate fairway cut. Three Lesco 300 triplex mowers cut approaches and collars. Ten Jacobsen 22-inch greens-mowers share duty on Old Marsh's tees and greens.



Old Marsh has five preserved natural wetlands bordering the course.

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Weber calls the Steiner TRS 20 with Triplex mower and four-wheel drive, "an up-and-coming piece of equipment" for use by golf courses with steep banks. Four Honda ATC 250s came in handy for supervisors during the course construction stage, but more importantly, are now efficient transportation vehicles when used with trailers for the Jacobsen mowers.

"Because the course is so spread out, it's nearly impossible to just walk over to the next green with your mower, so we divided the course into five sections for mowing purposes," Weber explains.

Six Cushman 461 Trucksters transport other workers to their job sites within the course, while four Massey Ferguson tractors serve to pull implements like sweepers and spreaders.

Since pesticides are required year-round in this part of Florida, Weber purchased a Hahn truckster with sprayer, model 3157. He likes to minimize thatch build-up on his fairways by using an Olathe Model 61 PTO-driven blower, pulled by a Massey Ferguson 240 tractor to blow clippings off fairways. In total, Weber purchased 77 pieces of new equipment to



Pete Dye incorporated natural prairies into Old Marsh's design.

maintain the course at old Marsh.

Top of the line

The market demographics for both home buyers and club members is decidedly upscale. Prices for homes being built at Old Marsh start at \$500,000. Two-hundred-thirteen lots are reserved for single-family homes (90 of which have already been sold). Homesites start at \$125,000. The five participating builders are providing custom homes ranging in size from 2,900 to 4,500 square feet. The homes have natural materials and color schemes that express "old Florida" in

their quality, style and compatibility with the surroundings of native flora.

Membership in the traditional club is limited to 300 members, who each pay an equity fee of \$35,000. A \$3.5 million clubhouse—sitting proudly between the 9th and 18th greens and overlooking a beautiful, preserved marsh, was due to welcome members in late December.

Designed by Atlanta architects Nichols Carter Grant, the 21,000-square-foot, one-story structure features natural wood and tabby stucco construction, with rich earthtone colors finishing the exterior. In addition to featuring a dining room and cocktail lounge, a spacious men's locker room with sauna, steam room and an adjoining men's grill, the Old Marsh clubhouse also houses the golf shop and administrative offices.

Near the clubhouse is a 275 x 200-yard practice area complete with four target greens with bunkers, two chipping and two putting greens. Weber believes it is one of the best practice facilities available.

"Being a part of the construction of this course was a great experience, but it sure was nice to see that first foursome tee off," says Weber. **LM**

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