

Going from dirt to golf: a whole new ballgame

Conscientious golf course superintendents like Tim Smith are involved in construction from the very beginning.

■ In 30 years working at four golf courses and country clubs, Tim Smith thought he'd seen it all. Then Mrs. Betty Hawkins hired him as superintendent of the new Hawk's Nest Golf Club she was building in a rural section of northern Ohio.

Smith found out that he hadn't really "seen it all."

"Everything that had to do with building the course was new to me," he remembers now. "I'd done little segments of it all, but I'd never gone from dirt to golf. And, believe me, it's a whole new ballgame."

In building the 18-hole course, contractors moved 350,000 cubic yards of soil. That included digging three lakes with seven surface acres of water. It also meant planting 350 new trees on what had previously been leased farmland.

Smith suggests that anyone involved with building a new golf course—superintendents included (superintendents especially)—make sure a good feasibility study is done beforehand. The study should include checking with the appropriate government agencies to comply with all laws. You'd be surprised, Smith says, at the wetlands regulations that exist, the pains associated with getting sewage lines installed and getting utility clearances.

"You run into lots of things you don't expect," Smith relates. "For instance, if you're drilling a well for water that more than 25 people will be using, you'll need \$3,000 to get EPA approval."

Getting the right architect and contractors are also key. The Hawk's Nest architect was Steve Burns; Central Florida Turf was the general contractor. Other contractors laid asphalt for cart paths, did additional excavation work, and designed and built the new clubhouse.

Because her family had been in business in the community for 40 years, Mrs. Hawkins did not necessarily go with the low bidder when selecting contractors.

"She wanted to keep as much money in the area as possible," Smith notes.

Bracing for problems—Tongue in cheek, Smith also recommends making sure the weather cooperates during construction and—especially—during the grow-in.

From ground-breaking in April, 1992 until Hawk's Nest's first nine holes opened in July, 1993, 128 days of construction



Most superintendents involved in golf course construction projects run into bottlenecks they don't expect. Tim Smith found he owed the EPA \$3,000 for approval of on-site wells.

time were lost to rain. Then, just before the front nine began growing in, the weather completely reversed itself.

"Mother Nature didn't cooperate at all, and that was two-thirds of my problem," notes Smith. "When we started running short of water, I cut off seeding the last two acres. The water was gone; if we'd had to go four more days, there weren't any more rabbits in the hat."

One of his employees was assigned the task of hauling in as many trees as he could each day. Three weeks later, when the cycle was complete, he'd start over. The liberal use of mulch around trees helped their survival, Smith believes. He lost only 14 of the 350 new trees.

As luck would have it, with no more "tricks left," Smith watched as the land that would be Hawk's Nest was pelted by a "nice healing rain."

Finishing up—Because of financial considerations, the front nine had to be opened as soon as possible, midway through the 1993 season. The second nine opened April 30 of this year.

"The longer you have, the better," says Smith. "But somewhere along the line, you have to get the cash register ringing."

The finished course is a beautiful mix of bentgrass, ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass. The grasses for the tees and USGA greens were chosen by Smith himself.

The greens are Pennlinks bentgrass cut at $\frac{3}{8}$ "—every day. The multiple (4) tees are Penncross bentgrass cut at $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Fairways are a ryegrass/Kentucky bluegrass mix.

Though business was slow at first, since Hawk's Nest opened up to its full 18 holes, it's "getting better every day. We've had nice write-ups in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, the *Akron Beacon-Journal* and the local paper, the *Daily Record*," Smith relates.

He and Hawk's Nest are a good pair. Smith is a third-generation golf course superintendent who previously worked at Shaker Country Club, Beechmont Country Club, Acacia Country Club and Pine Ridge Golf Course. He was also a golf car service manager for three years at Baker Vehicle Systems.

"Now the golf course work is starting," he says. "My fear was the unknown; now that it's turf, I'm much more comfortable."

—Jerry Roche