

Living a dream

Veteran superintendent James Baran helps shape a new public course in northern Ohio.

by Ron Hall
Senior Editor

■ James Baran, CGCS, is living a golf course superintendent's dream even as he works about 12 hours each weekday and another eight hours each Saturday.

Baran's helping supervise the building of the Eagle Creek Golf Club in Norwalk (pop. 17,000) in north central Ohio. He does it with a grin because Eagle Creek will be his to maintain when it's opened to the public next June.

He doesn't mind putting in so much effort now. It will mean a better golf course, and fewer maintenance headaches in the years to come.

He realizes that often—too often—a superintendent is brought in after a new course has been built. Not at Eagle Creek, though.

"I've always been hired to handle problem golf courses and to solve someone else's problems. Now I get to start from scratch," he says, his gaunt face covered by an enormous smile.

It's mid-August and the shocks on his four-wheel-drive Chevy pickup (his "office on wheels") are shot. They've been insulted by too many ruts in the 220 acres that, Jim predicted, will be one of the best 18-hole public golf courses in Ohio.

"This course is going to have a variety of types of holes. It'll have open holes, holes along wetlands, and holes that play out of the woods," says Baran. "It will be a golf course where your wife can play off the front tees and enjoy it, and a real good golfer can play the back tees and get a different look and be challenged, too."

This particular afternoon, 12 workers, two full crews, from Golf Tech & Design, Omaha, Neb., lay wire and plastic irrigation pipe. They can work as fast as the property is shaped.

They're installing a computerized Toro LTC irrigation system with a double row of heads down each fairway, about 500 heads in all. Baran says he'll spend many winter hours programming the system. He's not



For easier mowing, Baran designed wider aprons between greens and bunkers and reduced the steepness of some slopes.



The fairway leading to hole No. 4 in mid-August, prior to seeding with Penneagle.

displeased with the thought.

Baran says Eagle Creek progresses at breakneck speed, at least when the weather cooperates.

That's partly because several of the project's partners—specifically Bob and Ken Bleile and Mark Schaffer—own and operate construction and excavating compa-

nies, respectively.

At one time, in fact, 13 dozers crawled over and pushed the property into distinctive features. They were joined by four track hoes, three rubber-tired front-end loaders and a host of dump and pan trucks.

The project is also progressing well because golf course architect Brian Huntley took advantage of the existing terrain. The property is mostly former farmland and woodlots. Three small creeks run through it.

The owners, Norwalk Golf Properties Inc., wanted to build the course in about six months; they're going to be close. By mid-August they were only six days off schedule in spite of weekly thunderstorms.

Baran anxiously counts the days until he can seed. Then comes 90 turf-growing days before the course is ready for play. He would like to get most of the growing days yet in 1995.

"I'm looking forward to the grow-in. The course will finally start to look good when everything starts to turn green," he

says.

Brillion seeders, in 10-foot swaths, will go in two directions to seed the fairways in Penneagle creeping bentgrass. Roughs get a mixture of Kentucky bluegrass, perennial rye and fine fescues. The fairways and roughs will need between 12,000 and

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14,000 lbs. of turf seed, he estimates.

Baran and his crew will seed tees and greens themselves with Providence bentgrass. They'll use walk-behind units. "We don't want the bentgrass seed to get into the roughs," says Baran.

Baran is a native of the Cleveland area. He spent five years as superintendent of Wooster Country Club, also in Ohio. He's worked 28 years on golf courses, and 18 years as a superintendent since graduating from Penn State University.

Baran joined Eagle Creek in March, just after the irrigation pond had been dug and land clearing began.

He'd been hired, at least in part, because course architect Huntley of Canton, Ohio, recommended that Norwalk Golf Properties hire an experienced superintendent prior to construction. The company, made up of 19 Norwalk-area investors, acted.

That was just one of several long-range adjustments that the owners made after starting the project.

"As the project proceeded, the owners made a decision that they didn't want just another public golf course. They wanted the best public golf course they could build," says Baran.

For instance, the owners had initially planned to save four holes of an existing nine-hole golf course on the property and add them to 14 new holes.

But Baran argued that the character of the new and old holes would be too dissimilar. Also, since the old greens were built on mounded native soil decades ago, Baran predicted never-ending maintenance problems.

Instead, he's building all 18 greens similarly, using about 5,700 tons of greens mix (85 percent sand and 15 percent peat).

Another positive change, said Baran, was allowing bentgrass, rather than Kentucky bluegrass, fairways. Baran said

he'll be able to mow the fairways at a half inch or less, and golfers will appreciate the difference.

Among the other inputs offered by Baran included widening the aprons between bunkers and greens to better accommodate mowers, and reducing the steepness of some slopes, again to facilitate mowing.

Baran credited the course owners, including director of golf Gary Wilkins, for their willingness to make tough financial decisions to build an exceptional public course. For 22 years, Wilkins served as both superintendent and golf professional at the original nine-hole course.

But maybe the toughest decision the owners made was to reduce the number of residential housing lots they would sell adjoining the course.

"I said we needed more room for the golf course," says Baran. "The golf course really is the number one priority at Eagle Creek."

It's no wonder Baran smiles so easily.

Football field irrigation: Getting the right contractor



Irrigation system in operation at the Denver Broncos training facility.

Photo courtesy Hunter Industries.

by Dan Almond

■ Football fields are the workhorses of sports turf, subject to wear and tear by "really big," determined athletes, often during unfavorable weather conditions. The irrigation systems of these fields sim-

ply must be safe, efficient and durable.

The first step in an irrigation project is selecting an experienced contractor who understands that the main focus is athlete safety.

Ideally, you should be involved from the beginning. It's more efficient for the contractor to work through key points of

design, component selection, installation and maintenance with the person who will be controlling the system. At the end of the project, the contractor should supply you with a copy of the working design and the system design "as-built," showing exact placement of all components, includ-

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