



Each one of Prestonwood's superintendents and maintenance supervisors had a hand in fine-tuning the Club's new maintenance building.

A 'championship' maintenance facility

Prestonwood Country Club near Raleigh, NC, is one of the Nike Tour stops, but when it built its new maintenance building, it was the members it needed to please.

By RON HALL/Managing Editor

It's about 3 p.m. on a steamy Carolina afternoon. Laborers dressed in work boots, blue work pants and short-sleeve shirts swarm around compact tractors and large fairway mowers.

Some are refueling their machines. Several are blowing dirt and debris from them with air hoses that they pull down from overhead reels. Others are washing equipment. Each unit is readied for tomorrow's jobs. Then, the machinery is parked inside

the adjoining building. This maintenance program is truly a *program*.

Its heart is its maintenance building, and that heart has to be both big and efficient when that program is responsible for 54 holes as it is at Prestonwood Country Club in Cary, NC.

Indeed, just about every important function or decision related to golf course maintenance at Prestonwood CC radiates from the low-profile, 23,250-square-foot building.

The two-year-old maintenance building here is more than concrete block and steel, copper wires and plumbing. It's the hub of three 18-hole golf courses that, themselves, are surrounded by new, upscale residential neighborhoods. That's because the sale of homes and building lots drive Prestonwood CC development. The attraction, of course, is the golf and related recreational and social amenities at the Club. It's probably the largest private country club in North Carolina.

Hot economy spurs boom

There is no end in sight to development in and around Prestonwood CC. Nearby Research Triangle Park's concentration of high-tech industries is transforming Cary and other once-tiny communities surrounding Raleigh and Durham. Nobody knows when construction will stop. Or slow. Professional people are flowing into central Carolina to snatch up high-paying jobs. Many are eager to play year-round golf too.

"This is home to most of us. It seems like we spend more time here than we do at home," says John Hilton. He's referring to Prestonwood's maintenance building. He's head superintendent at Prestonwood CC, and he jokingly refers to himself as "the grandfather" of the staff.

While most golf or country clubs can't afford the maintenance facility's price tag, almost all of them can learn something from the cooperative effort that went into designing and building the facility.

Memories of dirt floor, no room

In a sense, the building reflects the strides that golf course maintenance has taken in the 30-plus years since Hilton started his career in golf.

"I can't help but remember the first building I ever worked with. It was open on two sides, had a dirt floor and was about 40 feet long and 10 feet wide," says Hilton, a genuinely pleasant man who sees his role at Prestonwood as contributing the practical experience he's gained over the years while fostering a spirit of "family" among the 66 fulltime golf maintenance employees.

It wasn't that long ago that Prestonwood CC itself was working out of a building that never really met its needs either. Not from the beginning. Not from 1986 when the initial developer of the country club bought 1200 acres of mostly farmland, and 1 1/2 years into the project, hired veteran superintendent Hilton to team with Ron Gilmore, director of golf course operations, to finish off 27 holes of golf, plus a 4-hole, par-3 addition.

"The construction was difficult because it was being done in a flood plain. It was kind of a tough project to do," recalls Hilton. Creeks criss-cross the property. Sustained rains make them overflow their banks. (Hilton estimates the 54 holes are now traversed by 17 to 20 miles of drainage.)

Prestonwood's first 9 holes opened in June 1988, the second in August 1988 and the third in September 1990. Since then, 9 holes have been added to each course, along with two practice greens (one of 23,000 sq. ft. and the other 11,500 sq. ft.), and a one-acre practice tee built to USGA greens specifications.

Early in construction Gilmore and Hilton started building the management team: Robert Coiley, superintendent of the Fairways Course; Bob House, Highlands Course superintendent; Jon Allen, superintendent for the Meadows Course; Christopher W. Griffith, Irrigation Superintendent.

In 1991 Prestonwood CC took a huge step forward when James Goodnight, Ph.D., bought the country club and dou-

bled the size of the original development. Dr. Goodnight owns SAS Corporation, a NC-based, global software company.

"It was Dr. Goodnight's intention to improve it, expand it and make it bigger and better," explains Gilmore. He did. But, golf course maintenance struggled to keep up working out of the 20-by-100 foot maintenance building.

"You really couldn't put anything inside of it," recalls Gilmore who, at one time, tried to maintain 49 holes of golf out of the 2,000-square-foot building. (Later a 20-by-40 foot mechanic's shop was added.) Equipment sat outside. Chemicals were stored in a vacant house on the other side of the development. They had to be brought to the shop to be mixed.

Getting started

By 1994 it was evident that Prestonwood needed a bigger and better maintenance facility to continue delivering championship-caliber conditions to members.

"Our members pay a lot of money to belong to the club and play golf. We recognize that they deserve a lot for it," says Gilmore.

Final approvals by General Manager Don Thomas and Dr. Goodnight allowed the Bobbitt Construction Company to begin work on a new maintenance building in October 1994. However, Goodnight and Thomas insisted that:

- ▶ there be a single maintenance building,
- ▶ it be low-profile and unobtrusive,



Eastern bluebirds thrive at Prestonwood CC thanks to nesting houses built in the wood shop by Norman Banks, Ph.D., a retired nuclear scientist and longtime club member.

▶ it be landscaped so that surrounding home owners don't resent living near it. (A task performed by former landscape superintendent Bill Mason, and maintained by current superintendent Kurt Nitschke.)

"Once construction started we all felt like this building was 'my' building. We all volunteered information and requests. Everybody had a hand in it," says Hilton. He insists that the team approach led to many improvements in the original design.

The one thing that everybody agreed upon is that the facility had to go beyond

Room to move

The new maintenance building at Prestonwood is made of concrete block with steel studs. The interior is finished in fire-proof sheetrock. It's 310-by-75 feet (23,250 square feet) and contains:

- ▶ offices for the superintendents and two receptionists,
- ▶ a five-bay maintenance and equipment storage area;
- ▶ a chemical storage room with recessed concrete floor;
- ▶ a fertilizer storage room;
- ▶ a wood working and signage shop;

▶ an employee lounge with full kitchen;

▶ an equipment repair shop with grinding room;

▶ a set up room with ice maker and washer and dryer. There's also a covered wash pad adjacent to the building.

The building also houses a central controlled computerized irrigation system for all 54 holes and surrounding landscape totalling 55 satellite field controllers. This Toro Network LTC system is maintained by Christopher Griffith, irrigation superintendent. □

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Equipment lift is a great time and labor saver, say Prestonwood mechanics.

existing statutes, including the pouring of the 5-inch concrete pad upon which the building rests—a single pour to avoid joints and seams. Then there's another 1½ acres of concrete surrounding the building with reinforced fiber mesh for added strength.

Liquid storage a priority

"All areas in this building are of great concern to us, but there are three areas in particular that we wanted to take extra care with," says Hilton. They are: chemical

storage, the wash pad, and the fuel system.

"The fuel system has made my life a lot nicer," claims Joe Seagroves, equipment superintendent and one of four equipment mechanics. He says the ignition key of each piece of equipment is coded so that the "Fuel Master" system records the amount of fuel each unit uses and how many miles of hours are on it. The system provides an accurate fuel inventory, prevents operators from putting the wrong fuel in their vehi-

cles, and aids in tracking PM.

Not that everything is rosy in the mechanics' lives in spite of working in a new building and with practically new mowers and tractors.

Since all the equipment is about the same age (finishing the first year of a three-year John Deere lease), routine maintenance on over 100 units all happens about the same time. "In a way, it's kind of a maintenance nightmare," admits Seagrove.

Nor, did everything associated with the maintenance building turn out perfect. For instance, nearby homeowners complained about the night lights at the facility—too bright. "We had to go to a different type of light," says Hilton.

But these are minor glitches, and Hilton says he and his team of superintendents and their crews can maintain Prestonwood's 54-holes more efficiently and, ultimately, to a higher-quality level because of the state-of-art facilities.

The superintendents and mechanics that use the building daily come up with new suggestions to make the facility more efficient and safer.

"We stress safety and sanitation here, and try to put things in place that allows us to have those things," says Hilton. "Everybody is free to put their ideas on the table. It's a real good environment here." □



Workers try to keep everything in its place in the maintenance building.



Equipment Supervisor Joe Seagroves (left), Superintendent John Hinkle (center), and Ron Gilmore, director of golf course operations, have room to work efficiently.