

Tall oaks shade the course much of the day to give it a dramatic appearance.

# Plantation Golf Course



The riverside soil was sandier than the soil on the rest of the course.



Lovegrass atop numerous mounds frames the 18th hole.





Plantation golfers are treated to many blooming shrubs in the spring.

# Battles the Elements



**F**or two days the sky over Murrells Inlet, SC, was black, the winds were gusting at more than 80 mph and the rain did not stop. Arthur Jeffords and Mike Purvis could only watch as the downpour washed away newly-seeded areas of their half-built Wachesaw Plantation Golf Club into the Waccamaw River. Wadsworth Golf Construction Company's graders stood idle where their operators had left them when the hurricane began.

Jeffords, the general manager, and Purvis, the golf course superintendent, will never forget the first of three hurricanes in 1985 that dumped 18-inches of rain as they struggled to meet the course's October opening date. Who could imagine that just over a year later those memories are dulled by the severe drought they faced last year?

You wouldn't expect a drought in the coastal "Wet Lands" of South Carolina, but droughts the past two years have started to change the way superintendents take care of their courses. Fortunately, says Purvis, he was better prepared for the drought than he was for the hurricanes.

The Grand Strand, one of the highest concentrations of golf courses in the world,

stretches along the Carolina coast and serves millions of tourist-golfers each year. The resort industry is the bread and butter for many of the area's residents. But from the beginning, the 57 local partners of Wachesaw Plantation Development Limited had something different in mind for their golf course and real estate development.

Rather than finding another stretch of coastal forest to carve out a golf course, the partnership wanted to build a private community where residents could treat themselves to golf without competing with tourists.

They found two former rice plantations two miles inland from Myrtle Beach, just far enough away from the coast for residents to escape the resort traffic. During Colonial times, the owners of the Richmond and Wachesaw Plantations had to defend themselves from the Indians they had displaced. Today descriptive plaques, some located along golf cart paths, mark the sites where Indian tribes once congregated.

The inland plantations were protected from coastal storms. They were also located along a plentiful source of fresh water, the

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The plantation purchased a hydroseeder since seeding often had to be done between storms and a large amount of roadside seeding remained.

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Waccamaw River, today part of the Inter-coastal waterway. The short distance from the coast simplified shipping the rice crop to cities along the coast or across the Atlantic Ocean.

"This was the first private course in the area," says Jeffords. "All other courses are daily fee or semi-private to serve the resorts along the coast. Although these courses are excellent, the local residents had no club to call their own exclusively."

It was unique for a group of developers to solicit trade from the local population instead of the resort industry. While Wachesaw had to compete with the quality of the resort courses, it also needed a spectacular golf course to attract buyers for lots on which to build homes among the old oaks. To achieve both goals, they hired Tom

Fazio, a golf course architect recognized for his Scottish-links style.

The construction of the development and the golf course required permits from the U.S. Corps of Engineers, the Coastal Council and wildlife authorities. Extra effort was spent to maintain the scenic beauty of the setting. It was the intent of the management to blend the homes and cottages, to be built later, with the golf course.

In October 1984, Wadsworth Golf Construction Company started sculpting the 130 acres to match Fazio's rolling, heavily-mounded design. More than 450,000 cubic yards of soil were redistributed to appropriate locations for the greens, tees, mounds and bunkers. Whereas most area

***More than 450 cubic yards of soil were redistributed to appropriate locations for the greens, tees, mounds and bunkers.***

courses are relatively flat, Wachesaw Plantation is a spectacular combination of undulating narrow fairways, steep mounds covered with wild lovegrass, strategically-placed grass and sand bunkers and trees everywhere.

More than 15 acres of bunkers, slopes and roughs were too difficult to sod, sprig or broadcast seed. "We hired a contractor to hydroseed these areas," Purvis explains, "but just as he got started seeding the hurricanes hit. This was June and we had to open by October. There was no room for delays. As a result, we ended up buying our own Finn HydroSeeder so we could seed as soon as the soil was shaped and raked. We were always trying to beat one rainstorm or another. The contractor just couldn't drop everything and run out to us to seed." Seeded slopes were also washed out on more than one occasion and had to be reseeded, said Jeffords.

The other construction expense which has

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***Wachesaw Plantation is a spectacular combination of undulating narrow fairways, steep mounds, sand bunkers and trees everywhere.***



Grass and sand bunkers are a characteristic of golf course design by Tom Fazio.



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paid continuing dividends since the course was completed was for building the greens to United States Golf Association specifications. "When your goal is to make a profit," Jeffords explains, "you question each expense. We could have gotten by without US-DA greens, but in retrospect we saved money. They withstood both the heavy rains and the drought at a time when the course had to look its best for our potential lot buyers."

A number of big name professional golfers associated with resort courses in the area have been impressed by the condition of Wachesaw's greens says Jefford. Because they decided to use Tifdwarf instead of the usually faster bentgrass, Jefford is especially proud Wachesaw's greens were recently rated 9.6 on the Stimpmeter, faster than bentgrass greens at some nearby courses.

The fairways were stolonized with Tifway II while centipedegrass was planted in the roughs. This provided color contrast between the light green centipede and the dark green bermudagrass and also gave the serpentine fairways definition. Centipede was also used in the grass bunkers. Lovegrass covers the slopes and crowns of the numerous berms.

***When the drought conditions returned a year later, the beefed-up irrigation system and the plentiful water supply kept the course in top condition.***

It was Jefford's idea to hire Purvis before construction was completed. "A few dollars in salary have saved us hundreds in problems later," he boasts. Purvis admits the time he was able to spend with Fazio and the construction company helped him make the transition from the plush, precise conditions of the 60-year-old private Florence Country Club, in Florence, SC, to the wild nature of Wachesaw.

Purvis arrived at his new post just as the fairways were being shaped for the final time and the greens were being built. "I know exactly where every irrigation and drain line is located and why it was put there," he states.

Ironically, when he arrived the area had

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A multitude of mounds, characteristic of Tom Fazio's design, makes mowing difficult.

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been experiencing a drought. As a result, special attention was paid to the selection and installation of a pump and irrigation system to meet drought conditions. "We have a wall-to-wall Toro system with a PSI pump station designed to let us water the priority turf during a drought," he reveals. When drought returned a year later, the beefed-up irrigation system and the plentiful supply of water from the Waccamaw River kept the course in top condition. The numerous newly-planted dogwoods and shrubs were watered by using the hydroseeder as a water truck.

"Fazio's design conserves water in many ways," says Purvis. The centipede and the lovegrass require less water than the bermuda. The trees and mounds shelter most of the course from high winds and provide shade for at least part of the day. "Two holes were shortened by Fazio to preserve old oak trees," he adds.

Drought turned to deluge within weeks of Purvis' arrival. Fortunately, since the area is known for heavy seasonal downpours, an extensive drainage system had been installed throughout the course. "Catch basins and french drains were installed in all bunkers, swales and low spots," Purvis explains. "We were ready when the rain started falling."

As final touches were made to the course, Purvis had his crew hydroseed along the edge of the woods to extend the rough into the forest. The Finn also came in handy for seeding the banks of the lakes and the river. As the development prepared to open, roadsides and areas along walking trails and cart paths were hydroseeded.

Maintaining such a course has not been simple. Purvis' crew swells from 11 to 14 in the summer. He likes to hire turf students

from Horry Georgetown Technical College, his alma mater. Since it is a private course (20 to 100 rounds per day is the most play it receives) the crew can work around golfers without disturbing them.

Purvis has had to rig Flymos and verticutters with ropes to maintain steep slopes. Most bunkers are raked by hand. Once a year in the spring the crew thins out the lovegrass with weed eaters. Purvis even used the hydroseeder to spray a fertilizer solution onto the steep banks.

The steeper slopes in the short rough are cut with a Steiner four-wheel-drive tractor with a 48-inch rotary deck out front. This tractor is articulated and has a low center of gravity to help it hold onto slopes as steep as two to one. "Even so, we've rolled it a few times," Purvis confesses.

The centipede roughs are cut at two inches with a pull-behind reel gang and trimmed with a riding rotary. A five-gang riding reel mower is able to keep most of the undulating bermudagrass fairways at one-half inch. The Tifway II has resisted cart traffic damage and withstood the beating of clubs on the tees. Tees are cut every other day at one-half inch.

"We mow all our greens with walk-behind reel mowers," says Jeffords. The former director of golf at Sea Pines in Hilton Head takes special interest in the greens. "I've always felt the director of golf should be reasonably educated in course maintenance," he states. "It gives the superintendent two votes instead of one with the greens committee."

In November, the entire course is overseeded with perennial ryegrass. "Twenty percent of our residents make Wachesaw their second home," says Jeffords. "When they are here in the late fall and winter they want to see green grass everywhere, not

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The lovegrass mounds are thinned each spring to allow penetration of irrigation and rain.

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just on the tees and greens." The attraction of the course has done its job. Most of the lots in the first 700-acre phase are now sold. Jeffords and Purvis are beginning to plan for another 18-hole course for

the 400-acre second phase.

Since 1985, two more private equity golf developments have been started in the Grand Strand. As Jeffords explains, the private equity club is originally financed by an investment group. When all memberships are sold out, the ownership of the club au-

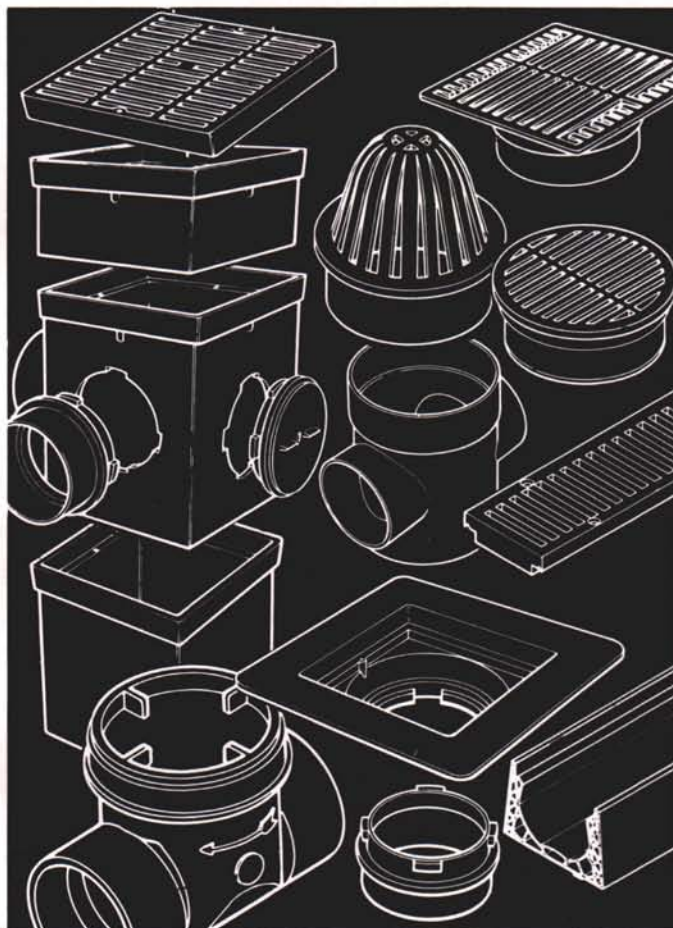
tomatically reverts to the members. To become a member, you must own one of the lots in the development. Both the value of the lots and the membership appreciate. Buyers of lots do not have to buy memberships in the club.

The half-acre lots in Wachesaw Plantation range from a base price of \$39,000 to \$125,000 for premium lots. Membership in the club has risen from the original \$9,000 to \$19,000 today. At present, there are slightly more than 300 members.

The original 57 investors have sold their shares to Olin II and C.G. Mills, of photography fame. The Mills brothers will release their rights of ownership to the members upon sell-out. At that time, Jeffords and Purvis will report to the membership.

But this eventuality is far away in their minds. They are busy working with the architects and planners on the next phase. Wachesaw Plantation's second golf course may be designed by a different golf course architect to provide different types of courses within the same development. "We couldn't be any more satisfied than we are with Fazio's work," says Jeffords. But like a number of new major golf development sites, PGA West for example, the attraction of two varying golf course design styles is great.

After all, attracting buyers is the name of the game in private equity golf clubs. It seems to be catching on in the Grand Strand and in other golf meccas across the country.



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