
There is a big demand for high-quality public golf, partly because we live in a transient society.

By the year 2000, almost 33 million people will be swinging clubs on courses around the country, according to the National Golf Foundation. More than 4,000 new courses—resort, private, and public—will be needed to meet this demand. And while it will always be important for most courses to closely watch maintenance costs, controlling these costs will be imperative for public courses that hope to combine high-quality conditions with affordable daily fees. That chore rests both with golf course architects who design these courses and the superintendents who maintain them.

Such courses are more than just wishful thinking—they already exist and their numbers are growing. Osprey Cove, an 18-hole 6,800-yard par 72 public course situated around a 900-acre residential community in St. Marys, GA, is the perfect example of how a golf course architect and superintendent can team up to keep course conditions high and daily fees relatively low. Green fees for this first-rate course are \$16 during the week and \$21 on the weekends. Yearly memberships may also be purchased by

home and property owners in the community.

Osprey Cove was designed and built by McCumber Golf, a golf course design, construction, and management firm headquartered in Orange Park, FL. Of course, the name which first springs to mind when you think of McCumber Golf is Mark McCumber, PGA tour pro and president of Mark McCumber Associates, the company's course design division. However, the firm, which has built or designed more than 40 courses, is run by older brother Mark, who serves as CEO.

"The four brothers [Gary, Tim, Jim, and Mark] grew up playing golf on a Donald Ross-designed public course in Jacksonville, FL," says Cheryl Robertson, director of communications for McCumber Golf. "They are terrific examples of how a career can be determined by the elements of one's youth. Mark became the professional, but Jim, a low handicap golfer, encouraged Mark to pursue the tour, even though he was very involved in the brothers' business. Any one of the McCumber brothers will quickly agree that the exposure to golf at

Osprey Cove: Upscale Public Golf In Flight

By Matthew Trulio



such a young age was not only a positive influence, but one that shaped their careers."

Learning to play golf on a public course helped shape their approach to these facilities, says Robertson. "One of the perspectives McCumber Golf takes is not only should a public course be 'playable' to all skill levels, but it must also give the player an opportunity to develop a sense of strategy while learning more about the technique in his or her game.

"Another consideration is that maintenance of the golf course must be cost-conscious," Robertson continues. "Having owned and operated a residential/resort golf complex, Jim [McCumber] believes in making golf operations make sense. So, concisely put, the McCumbers have a philosophy about this business: Make it playable, make it challenging, and make the dollars spent make sense."

Designing The Old-Fashioned Way

"The public determines demand, and you have to price yourself accordingly," says Mike Beebe, a golf course project architect and vice president of McCumber Golf, who designed the course at Osprey Cove and oversaw its construction. "To do that, you have to keep construction and maintenance costs down. Of course, it helps to start with a good site, such as one that doesn't have a lot of rock which requires a lot of blasting.

"We take a classic, traditional approach to course design, along the lines of Donald Ross or Albert Tillinghast," comments Jim McCumber. "We like to use the natural characteristics of the site and we don't want to introduce anything foreign or contrived. We want the course to look like it's been there awhile."

There were plenty of natural characteristics to work with at the 900-acre Osprey Cove development site. The land is owned by its developer, the Gilman Paper Company, which has operated in the area since the 1940s. Although the company had selectively removed most of the larger trees during the years, the area was still more or less tree-covered, according to Beebe.

The site borders the St. Marys River basin. The river itself is not visible from the course, but the development encompasses many tidal marshes which are protected by law.

"That was something we had to take into consideration when routing the



The elevation on the site varies less than six feet. Greens are intentionally not blocked by bunkers.

course, but the more positive side is that the tidal marshes are very attractive," Beebe recalls. "We were able to route several of the golf holes along the marsh edge. There are about six holes that play right along the marsh.

"We had one section of property that was an open field area, which used to be a rough nine-hole golf course, and we routed a hole through there," Beebe continues. "So we came up with a nice mixture of holes—holes in the open, holes along the marsh, holes along the trees, and holes along seven or eight lakes that we built."

One feature that did *not* come naturally to the site was elevation, which changes no

more than five or six feet in the area. To create what little elevational changes there are on the course, McCumber used the fill gained from creating lakes, which in turn are used to retain stormwater. However, only 350,000 cubic yards of material were moved during the entire project. "In the construction of some courses, they'll move as much as one million cubic yards of material," Beebe points out. "That gets very expensive quickly."

When designing any course, the architect reveals, McCumber always looks at strategy of the game and maintainability, in addition to overall course aesthetics.

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Tidal marshes required special attention during design and maintenance.

Zoysia was used on bunker faces to reduce maintenance. (Left)

Osprey Cove

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Each hole has a minimum of four sets of 328 bermudagrass tees, which allows the course to be both playable and challenging to players of all levels. The Tifdwarf greens are gently contoured and moderate in size. "But most importantly, we've tried to match the size and contour of the green to the shot we're asking the golfer to hit," Beebe emphasizes. "On a 445-yard par four hole, for example, we wouldn't put in a heavily bunkered 4,500-square-foot green. It just doesn't make sense to ask a guy to hit a long iron onto a green like that. What's more likely is that we'd put in a larger green, open at the front so that if a golfer wanted to he could bounce his shot onto the green."

"We tried to place our hazards and route the course in such a way that the golfer has to think about what he must do from shot to shot," Beebe adds. "The neat thing about old-style courses is that they can be played day-to-day by their regular golfers, but they can also be toughened, through maintenance, if you're going to hold a tournament. For example, if Osprey Cove wanted to hold a Georgia State amateur tournament, you could make the course 'tournament tough' by letting the rough grow up, making the greens firm and fast, narrowing the fairways, and using difficult pin placements so that the course would be tough enough for the competition."

Employing design features such as softly contoured greens was as much a function of simplifying maintenance as it was of course playability. Osprey Cove has been designed to require a minimum of hand maintenance. To help achieve this, sharp slopes and bunker faces were avoided.

"Another one of the things we did at Osprey Cove was to use zoysiagrass on the bunker faces—everything else is bermuda," Beebe explains. "Zoysiagrass is slower growing than bermuda and requires less maintenance in terms of fertilizer and mowing. It also has a different color and texture, which makes the bunker faces stand out.

"We want to make sure that the course we design is going to be maintainable with everyday equipment, because once we're gone the superintendent has to maintain the course, *every day*."

Maintenance By Design

"Here at Osprey Cove they didn't move a lot of dirt, so we have a lot of soft

contours," says Burr Johnson, 34, superintendent of the course. "There isn't anything real sharp that requires a lot of hand labor. The bunkers probably require most of what little hand labor there is."

Johnson was hired as superintendent prior to the grow-in period in the summer of 1990, and the course opened that year in October. His career in golf course maintenance began after he completed a three-year program in golf course operations at Lake City Community College in Florida.



Golf and landscape crew at Osprey Cove.

From there he went on to become an assistant superintendent at the famed Ravines in Middleburg, FL. Designed by McCumber Golf, the Ravines is an 18-hole championship course that is open to daily fee clientele.

Johnson later moved on to become superintendent at Palmetto Pines in Cape Coral, FL, and Cotton Creek Club in Gulf Shores, AL. He applied for the job at Osprey Cove not long after he first heard it was going to be built. "The Ravines was also a McCumber course, and I had kept in touch with the McCumbers over the years," he says.

During the grow-in period, Johnson and his golf maintenance and landscape crew often spent 12 to 14 hours a day on the course, but today he averages about ten hours a day, with every other weekend off. Next to his crew and the course's soft contours, he lists course owner Howard Gilman [of Gilman Paper] as his greatest ally.

"Because of Mr. Gilman and his desire to keep this course in top shape, we may have a little more money to spend on maintenance than the average public facility," Johnson asserts.

Of course, that doesn't make maintaining Osprey Cove easy.

"Private facilities usually have a little

more time for maintenance than public facilities," says the superintendent, who has worked at both. "Private courses are often closed one day during the week for maintenance, and the members understand that, usually. At a public course, you're trying to get play through. So the tee offs may begin a little earlier, and they may end a little later. That means that maintenance usually starts earlier and ends later. But wherever you are, you just try to do your best."

The greens at Osprey Cove are mowed seven days a week at 5/32 of an inch using Jacobsen Triplex Mowers. Using the same machines, the tees are mowed at 3/8 of an inch. Two to three times a week, depending upon the month in the growing season, the fairways are mowed at 1/2 inch using a Jacobsen F-10 Fairway Mower.

Greens receive 18 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet, per year. Tees receive ten to 12 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet, per year.

"We use IBDU and Nitroform products because they give us a slow release of nitrogen," explains Johnson. "That way, we don't get a big growth spurt and we can keep on top of our mowing. It really worked well this spring, which was particularly wet."

When the spring or any other time period isn't particularly wet, Johnson can use the course's Rain Bird Links Master irrigation system, which controls approximately 600 heads on the course. However, natural precipitation usually satisfies the bulk of the course's irrigation needs.

"Basically, we water according to the weather, although last summer was dry and we were glad we had the irrigation system," Johnson admits.

Osprey Cove was overseeded two weeks before it opened in October. Johnson used a Marvel Green Classic blend from Lofts Seed on the greens, at 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet. On the tees he used a sports mix perennial ryegrass at 15 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Using the same seed blend, the fairways were overseeded at 25 pounds per acre.

"We also had to use a fungicide during our overseed period to keep our ryegrass healthy," Johnson points out.

"A lot of courses overseed 'wall-to-wall,'" he continues. "We don't overseed the rough here at all, and that saves us 67 acres of overseeding."

Aside from a few bouts with armyworms and cutworms on its greens, Osprey Cove has had few problems with insects. How-

ever, the superintendent believes that mole crickets may present a challenge in the future.

"We're starting to see some mole cricket activity and we've been treating the worst areas with Orthene," he says. "We've been trying to wait for the younger ones so that we can get a better kill. Mole crickets are getting worse in this area, and insecticides to treat them keep getting taken off the market. There's quite a bit of research going on now using the parasitic nematode to control mole crickets, and I sure hope that works out."

Whether he's treating mole crickets or fertilizing greens, the superintendent has to be careful with *anything* he applies to the course because of the nearby, fragile marsh environment.

"We use pesticides that won't leach into the tidal marshes, as well as slow-release fertilizers," he states. "It's really sensitive when you get around the marshy areas, but I think McCumber did an excellent job of routing the course through the marshes without affecting them."

As for the players at Osprey Cove, most seem to feel they're getting more than their money's worth. The course has several interesting holes, according to McCumber architect Beebe, including nine and 18, which finish from opposite directions on a double green. Hole 11 is short 135-yard par three. Between the tee and the green is a "natural waste area" filled with sand and live grass. Directly in front of the green is a deep sod wall bunker.

"Everybody seems to really enjoy Osprey Cove," Johnson enthuses. "It's a fun course, fairly wide open with fairly big greens."

McCumber Golf says it plans to become more involved in upscale public course design and construction because the of growing demand for such facilities. Beebe explains, "A large percentage of the golfing public likes to play on nice courses, but may not be members of the local country club. They don't mind paying \$20 or \$30 a round to play on a public course if the design and maintenance is comparable to that of a private course.

"There is a big demand for high-quality public golf, partly because we live in a transient society," Beebe continues. "Even if a person can afford to join a country club, it doesn't make much sense to do so if that person knows he or she will be transferred in the next couple of years. So the concept of upscale public golf is sound. We're convinced that people want it."

HUNTER APPOINTS MANAGERS



Lynda Wightman, a Hunter Industries sales representative for more than six years, has been named district manager for San Diego and Orange counties. She will represent the company's Professional Series and Institutional Series sprinklers and will work directly with distributors, irrigation specifiers, landscape architects and contractors, irrigation consultants, and municipalities.

Mike Kearby has been named Hunter's regional sales manager. He will coordinate the regional sales program for new Hunter golf course irrigation products and will also provide technical and educational support.

MILORGANITE CELEBRATES 65th

Milorganite, a natural organic fertilizer, celebrated its 65th anniversary in March. It was first introduced as a turfgrass fertilizer primarily for golf courses. It now is widely

used in the homeowner and professional markets and is distributed nationally and internationally.

Milorganite is a slow release, non-burning fertilizer which supplies plants with the nutrients essential for growth, including iron which helps produce its dark green color.

NFIB BACKS TAX CHANGE BILL

The National Federation of Independent Business/Arizona, is supporting a bill to repeal a tax on environmentally hazardous products and replace it with a registration fee that would be less damaging to small businesses.

SB 1170, spearheaded by state rep. Herb Guenther, would replace the 8.5 percent tax on the retail price of such environmentally hazardous products as motor oil and household and automotive paints with a \$10 registration fee for retailers. The funds would be used to clean up groundwater at hazardous waste sites throughout the state.

Jill Andrews, state director of NFIB/Arizona, said the 8.5 percent tax, scheduled to go into effect in June, is excessive and businesses will have difficulty complying with it. She added that business and trade associations supporting SB 1170, which include the Arizona Chamber of Commerce, the Arizona Retailers Association and the Retail Grocers Association, have estimated that the environmental tax would generate about \$55 million.

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