

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

SPORTS TURF COULD BRING NEW LIFE TO TURF EXTENSION



Extension turfgrass specialists in many states are fighting for their jobs. As key specialists from the '60s and '70s retire, they are often not replaced. Frozen or declining budgets are forcing many universities to consolidate two or more turf positions into one. Turf researchers are being forced to solicit grants from private industry and state turfgrass associations to save their programs.

This erosion of skill will not stop until a strong new reason to fund turfgrass research and assistance is found.

The fact is one already exists—the unsafe condition of public athletic fields. Ask yourself the question, “Are recreation and health in this country as important as agriculture?” Here’s another one, “What percentage of the population is concerned about fitness as compared to agriculture?” Since turf extension has always been a stepchild to agriculture, these questions are extremely valid and separate the turf specialist from the farm service for consideration by taxpayers and budgetmakers.

I can hear the farm extension agent saying, “We carried turf all these years and now you want to turn your back on us.” The response is we just want to have turf, more specifically sports turf, considered for its own needs, not as a place for the “leftovers” in a depressed farm economy.

Sports turf is breathing new life into turf extension programs in North Carolina, Texas, Maryland, Illinois, Virginia and California. It can do the same for Arizona, Florida, New Jersey, New York, Ohio and other states where strong programs are being threatened by budget cutbacks. State turf associations are starting to push sports turf in Texas, North Carolina and Maryland. They are providing seminars and services that public institutions could not afford otherwise. These public employees are meeting a public need for better and safer sports facilities.

Turf specialists can no longer be accused of spending most of their time serving golf courses at public expense. Although the majority of courses today are public, it is just one sport. There are many more sports and many more supporters when a turf specialist serves “all sports.” And, we aren’t talking just about games, we are talking about safety, health and fitness. The demand for sports fields has never been as great and continues to grow by leaps and bounds. As their use increases, their condition declines. Park superintendents can’t keep soccer fields safe with the amount of use they receive.

To get more use out of existing fields, parks and schools are installing lights and adding another 30 hours of wear and tear each week. Superintendents reason that lights on two fields can save them the cost of building and maintaining a third field.

Just like lights can help public institutions get more use out of their fields, improved field maintenance recommended by extension turf specialists can keep these fields safe under much greater use.

The point is turf specialists can justify their own salaries by keeping our limited number of public sports fields in play and saving public agencies the cost of defending themselves in injury lawsuits. If governments can afford lights, certainly they should be able to afford the important services of turf specialists.

We have to stop the erosion of the turf extension service. A strong reason to stop it exists. Without public turf specialists, I doubt if public fields will make it through the next decade, and instead of paying turf specialists we will be paying lawyers.

Bruce Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

JANUARY

21-23 Virginia Turfgrass Conference and Trade Show, Virginia Beach Pavilion Convention Center, Virginia Beach, VA. Contact J. R. Hall, (703) 961-5797.

21-22 Northern California Turf & Landscape Exposition, Santa Clara Convention Center, Santa Clara, CA. Contact Northern California Turfgrass Council, P.O. Box 268, Lafayette, CA 94549.

31-1 Sports Turf Managers Association Annual Meeting, Phoenix Civic Plaza, Phoenix, AZ. Contact STMA, 1458 North Euclid Ave., Ontario, CA 91764. (714) 984-4677.

31-2 58th International Golf Course Show, Phoenix Civic Plaza, Phoenix, AZ. Contact the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, 1617 St. Andrews Drive, Lawrence, KS 66046. 1-800-GSA-SUPT.

FEBRUARY

15-18 American Society of Golf Course Architects Annual Meeting, Royal Lahaina Hotel, Maui, Hawaii. Contact ASGCA, 221 North La Salle Street, Chicago, IL 60601. (312) 372-7090.

18-19 Southwest Athletic Turf Clinic, Will Rogers Memorial Complex, Fort Worth, TX. Contact Athletic Turf Association, Inc., P.O. Box 1114, Hurst, TX 76053. (817) 282-4965.

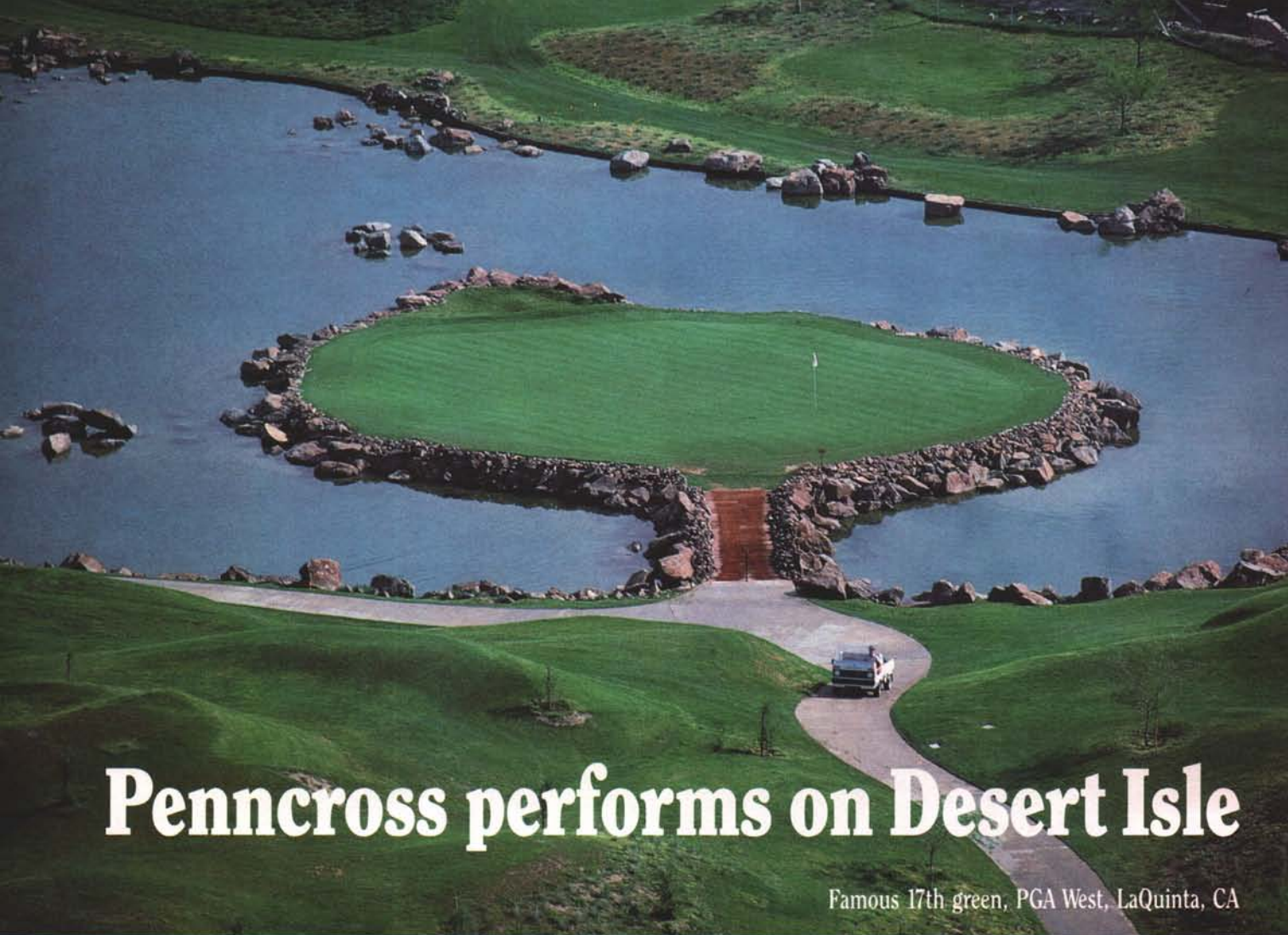
MARCH

2-5 Massachusetts Turfgrass Conference, Springfield Civic Center, Springfield, MA. Contact Dr. Joe Troll, University of Massachusetts, Dept. of Soil Science, Stockbridge Hall, Amherst, MA 01003. (413) 549-5295.

9-11 Winter Turf Short Course, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN. Contact Tom Samples, Box 1071, Knoxville, TN 37901-1071.

APRIL

4-6 National School Boards Association Annual Exposition, Moscone Convention Center, San Francisco, CA. Contact NSBA, 1680 Duke St., Alexandria, VA 22314. (703) 838-6722.



Penncross performs on Desert Isle

Famous 17th green, PGA West, LaQuinta, CA

Penncross not only survives, but thrives on all 18 greens at this innovative Pete Dye designed course.

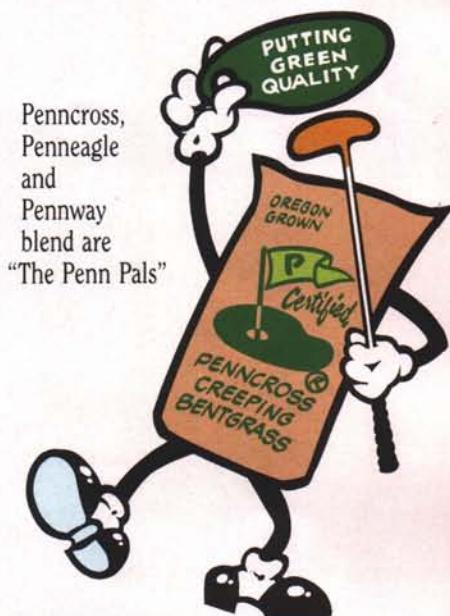
You've seen this awesome 17th green in pictures, or maybe you've had the good fortune of playing this 147 yard challenge, but we're reasonably sure you didn't know that it's Penncross creeping bentgrass. Television announcers won't tell you and magazines don't print it, but the putting greens that have made more champions on some of the greatest courses in the world are Penncross.

PGA West is a revolutionary new course with target greens, stadium spectator mounds and punishing hazards. Why would such an innovative designer use a strain of bentgrass that's been around for so many years?* We maintain that there is no better all-around bentgrass anywhere!

Some people say that bentgrass won't survive the intense sunbelt heat. We have evidence to disprove that notion. Penncross, and its Penn Pal, Penneagle have grown in popularity on courses from California to Florida . . . where bermudagrass used to reign.

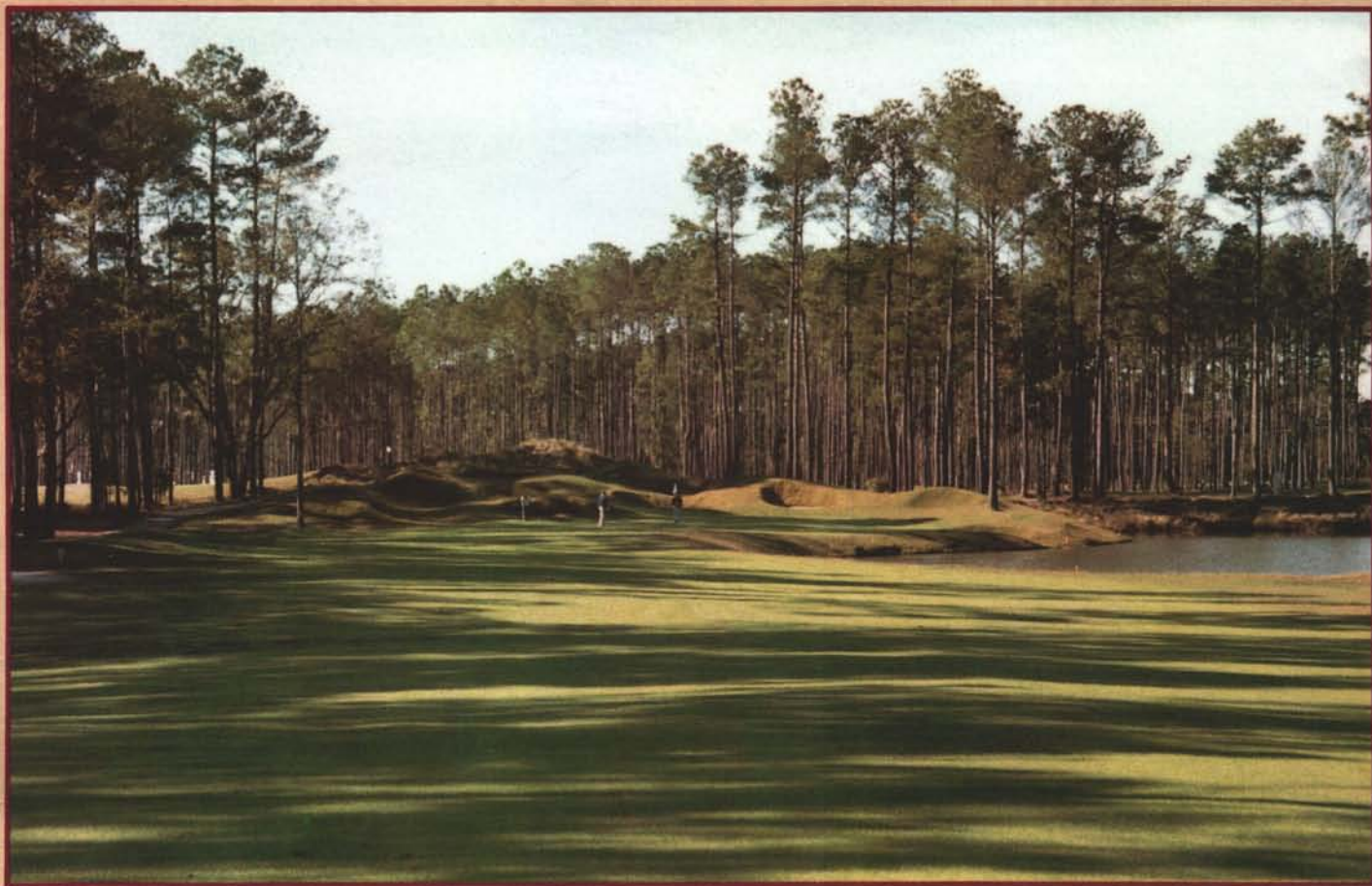
Pete Dye specified Penncross for *this* desert isle, as he did for his famous Sawgrass island green in Ponte Vedra, Florida. Penncross is no ordinary putting green grass . . . and Pete Dye is no ordinary designer.

Watch Penncross perform in the *Skins Game* at PGA West, Nov. 29 and 30, 1986.



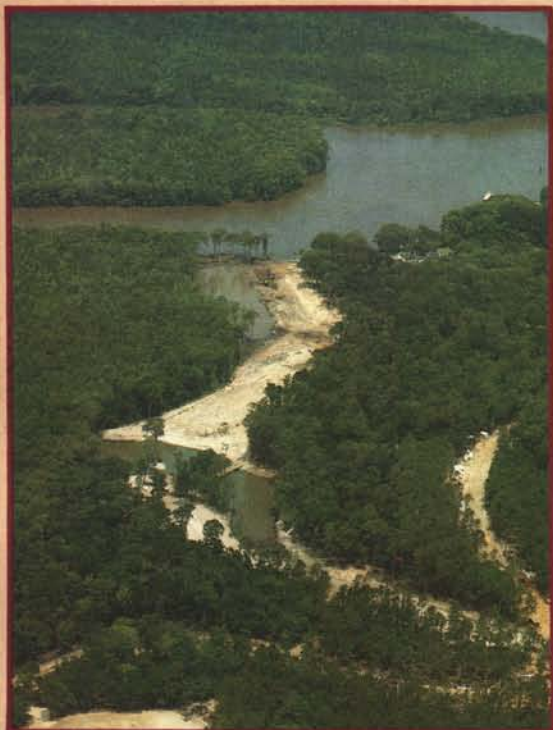
Penncross, Penneagle and Pennway blend are "The Penn Pals"

*Penncross is a tried and true cultivar developed by Professor Burt Musser at Penn State University and released in 1955.



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



For 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.

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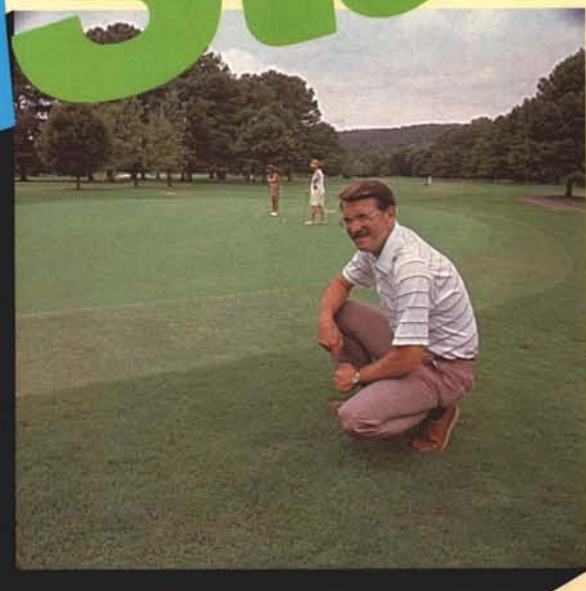
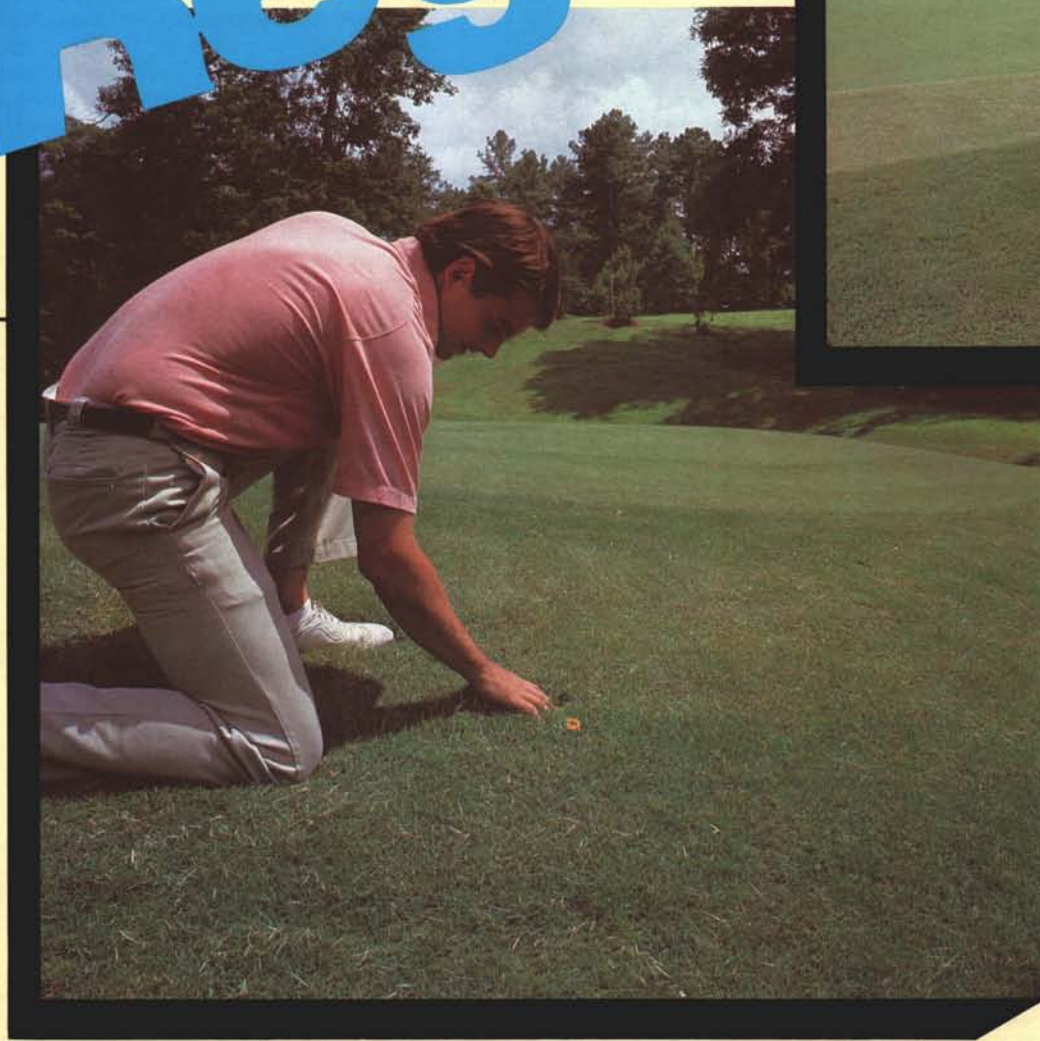
Wachesaw Plantation is a spectacular combination of undulating narrow fairways, steep mounds, sand bunkers and trees everywhere.



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.

Plantation

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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 Wachasaw 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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