

woods such as holly, oak, maple, and pine. The course opened in 1980.

"I was lucky, because I had the opportunity for input into its construction," he says. "Most of the changes I suggested were minor, like not uprooting certain trees. I watched them put in the irrigation system, so I know where *everything* is."

Money Matters

The land for Gator Hole, Tilghman concedes, was in his family—a family that is well-known in North Myrtle Beach. However, the course itself is the product of the brothers' hard work.

Their finances, especially during construction and the first few years of operation, were tight. To help keep down costs, Chris bought as much used equipment as he could.

"We almost never bought brand new equipment, but we always bought good equipment," he explains. "We cut our roughs today with a vintage, 1970 Toro Park Master.

"The last two greensmowers we bought cost about \$200 a piece, and we completely rebuilt both of them for about \$2,000," he adds.

Working within the budget, Tilghman notes, has been tricky, but dividing management responsibilities was never an issue. Phil is the general manager of the course. (He's also the Mayor of North Myrtle Beach.) Chris, of course, filled the superintendent position.

"Since Phil and I are owners, we put a lot of money back into the golf course," Tilghman says. We're not Hilton Head—blue collar people from the North come down here to play. We just try to make the *course* the best it can be, and it works. We hear about it from the golfers."

Adds Tilghman, "We're a relatively short course, so we need an edge. Ours is quality."

Keeping The Edge

The golf course maintenance team at Gator Hole includes Tilghman, his assistant, four full-time equipment operators, a full-time mechanic, and two part-time mechanics. In the summers, two to three interns from nearby Horry Technical College's golf/turf management program work on the course, as well as other college students.

His philosophy of course maintenance is simple: If it works, consistent-

ly he'll do it. Tilghman is not one to do something simply because that's the way other courses in the area do it. He experiments, blending his hands-on experience and formal education, until he finds what is best for his course, such as overseeding earlier than other courses in the area.

While most courses in Myrtle Beach overseed in October, Tilghman overseeds in mid-September. "My reasoning is that October is a pretty big month for us," he explains. "By overseeding in September, the greens are already germinated and pretty hard by October, so we get a jump. People told me I was crazy to time it this way because of disease pressure, but after four years of doing it I notice some of them are following suit."

He overseeds the Tifgreen bermuda greens with a single ryegrass variety, blended with a single fescue variety, at 30 pounds per 1,000 square feet. Thirty days later, he overseeds again "to fill in the greens" with *poa trivialis* at three pounds per 1,000 square feet.

The Tifway fairways are overseeded with either a single or multiple vari-

continued on page 32

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Tilghman

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ety ryegrass at 400 pounds per acre. He uses the same seed on the Tifway tees at 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

"The fairway rate is a little heavy for around here, but that's the way I like it," he says. "Historically, February, March, April, and May are our heaviest golf season—this way, we have them playing on ryegrass predominantly, and I think that gives us an edge in appearance and playability."

Aeration, using a Toro machine, is another area where Tilghman goes against the local grain. He aerates the greens in February using 1/2-inch tines.

"Most people are afraid to aerate then because of the cold," he notes. "But one year, I had to do it early for some reason I can't remember, and the results were fantastic. We probably have 10,000 to 15,000 rounds of golf played here by the end of fall, so it's tough to get through spring without localized dry spots if you don't aerify. We always seem to get a mild winter break in February, and the week before we aerate, we fertilize. Then I punch holes and drag the plugs back in.



Chris Tilghman.

We do it again in early June, July, and August, but with 5/8 inch tines."

Although he used to aerify the fairways with the same unit, he's switched to a PTO-driven Howard Turf Quaker, which he says vibrates while cutting grooves in the sandy soil. The results he says, have been "tremendous" and the cleanup is minimal. The downside, says Tilghman is time: It takes him a week to 10 days to use the machine on all the course's fairways. The fairways are also verticut two to three times in the summer with a Jacobsen Fairway Verticutter.

If Tilghman seems particular about how his course is maintained, he is even more so about its irrigation. He uses a Toro Vari-Time 4000 hydraulic controller, and all the course's heads are fully automatic.

"During the summer, I usually water everything twice a week, but "I don't have anything set as far as an irrigation schedule goes—it's always done as needed," he asserts. "It's a matter of 'feel by eye.'"

Rewards Of Staying The Course

An easy-going individual by nature, he still has high expectations for Gator Hole's playing conditions. However, he has relaxed somewhat in the 12 years since it opened.

"When I first got out of Clemson, I wanted to do *everything* on a golf course," he laughs. "But then comes the reality of 'Hey, this is a business and I've got to make it work.' So you cut your expectations a little, and that's okay because you don't have to do everything you ever dreamed of to have a quality course. I'll still have high expectations of how I want the course to look and play. I still want to have an edge." □

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Tensar Erosion Blanket TB1000 is a synthetic erosion and revegetation blanket that controls bare soil erosion, provides long-term ground cover, and extends mulching until vegetation is established. It has a lofty web of polyolefin fibers stitch-bonded between two high-strength biaxial nets.

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Cobra creeping bentgrass has a semi-erect growth habit, uniform dark-green color, and excellent heat and humidity resistance. It is ideal for greens, tees, and fairways. The variety was developed by Rutgers University in cooperation with International Seeds.

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Poa Variety

Finelawn's Supra Poa supina forms a dense, aggressive turf, which can overcome weeds and invasive grasses including annual bluegrass. The variety is ideal for shade situations. When subjected to diseases, such as snow mold, it bounces back quickly.

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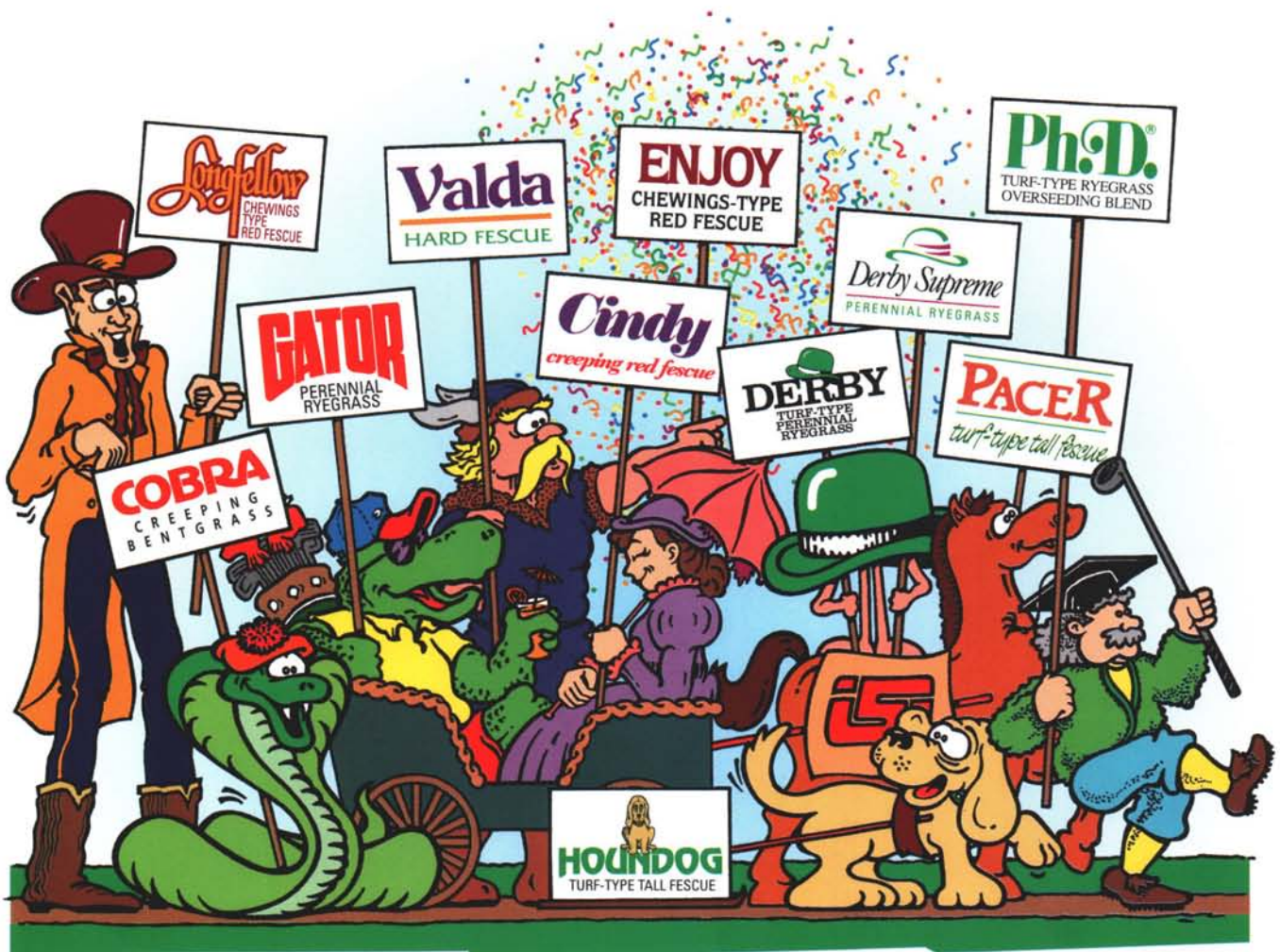
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