

# Walking Shaker Ridge's New Greens

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## **EXTREME MAKEOVER: BENTGRASS EDITION**

By Chris Graf

Nematodes are microscopic worms but they can cause big problems. Just ask Shaker Ridge Country Club Superintendent Jim Seaman.

He first discovered nematodes at Shaker Ridge in 1998. The parasitic worms were feeding on the roots of the course's greens.

Seaman was able to control the nematodes with a pesticide sold by Bayer, but the product was taken off the market in 2007 by the EPA. He had enough of the pesticide to carry him through until 2012 and hoped that a comparable product would be available before he ran out. When it became apparent that this wasn't going to happen, Seaman realized the nematodes would eventually destroy the greens.

"It was at that point that we had a decision to make," says Seaman. "We could take a reactive approach and re-grass the greens as they were destroyed, or we could be proactive and re-grass with a species that could handle nematodes."

After Shaker Ridge decided to pursue the proactive approach, the club's members enthusiastically embraced the decision.

"Our members really got behind us, and everyone got excited about the process," says Seaman.

## **BENT OVER BLUE**

After several years of intensive planning, Shaker Ridge began ripping out the greens and replacing them in September 2012. They chose bentgrass to replace the existing annual bluegrass greens.

Annual bluegrass is a weak grass with shallow roots. It is good for putting but is not good at handling extreme temperatures, Seaman added.

In comparison, bentgrass can tolerate both extreme heat and extreme cold – which we have in the Capital Area. It is less susceptible to pests, insects, and disease and therefore requires less pesticide. Bentgrass also has a root system that requires less water, and it can tolerate lower mowing heights. As Seaman points out, lower mowing heights translate to a finer putting surface.

### **PREPPING WITH DRAINAGE**

Before installing the new greens, SRCC made improvements to their drainage. Sod was stripped and internal drainage was added to the 11 holes that didn't already have it. After that, the soil was fumigated to kill stray seeds and insects.

Once the greens were ready for the new sod, it was trucked in from New Jersey in refrigerated trucks. The sod was washed before it was shipped, a process that removes the soil from the sod and leaves behind just grass and roots. A truck of sod arrived at the course each day, and a crew of 18 workers laid it on the greens.

Seaman and his staff worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week during the three weeks it took to install the greens. They were lucky enough to have great weather.

"It went about as smoothly as it could have," says Seaman.

### **SOD: PRICELESS**

The cost of the project was \$500,000, but Seaman says it was worth it. He did his research ahead of time and spoke to many superintendents who had undertaken similar projects.

"They all told me that they were very pleased and that they would do it again," says Seaman.

This year is the "grow in" year for Shaker Ridge's new greens, and they need time to adapt to their new environment. Seaman is not cutting them as low as he will in the future, but he is very pleased with their performance.

He hopes that the new greens will encourage golfers to come check out the course.

“It is the premier putting surface,” says Seaman. “You won’t find a better one.”