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Alan Blondin on golf: Renovations will idle some courses during summer

A few Grand Strand golf courses are closing all or part of their holes for significant renovations this summer.

Rivers Edge Golf Club in Shallotte, N.C., is closed to change all 18 of its greens from L93 bentgrass to the same SeaDwarf Paspalum grass that Pine Lakes Country Club now features wall-to-wall.

Sandpiper Bay Golf Club in Sunset Beach, N.C., has closed nine of its 27 holes to replace greens on the Piper nine with Mini-Verde Ultradwarf Bermudagrass.

Arrowhead Country Club in Myrtle Beach is keeping 18 of its 27 holes open this summer as it sods nine greens at a time for a conversion from 13-year-old A1/Crenshaw bentgrass to Mini-Verde.

And Tidewater Golf Club and Plantation in Cherry Grove is closing on June 22 for improvements on tees and other areas of the course. It should reopen by Aug. 1.

Not only is Rivers Edge which abuts the Shallotte River and marsh the farthest north the warm-weather and salt-tolerant Paspalum grass is being installed on all 18 greens, the course is attempting the first no-till conversion from bentgrass to Paspalum.

"We've battled with the greens and with bad water, and we've pretty much lost every summer," said Dave Downing, president of Signature Golf Group, which manages the course. "With the Paspalum liking salt water, we think it will do well."

In no-till, the new grass is planted without tearing out the existing surface, though it has been fumigated and aggressively aerated. The process allows the greens' contours to be preserved and also allows a shorter downtime compared to more standard greens renovation methods. Downing hopes to reopen as early as Aug. 1.

Rivers Edge's practice putting green was converted to SeaDwarf cultivar of Seashore Paspalum last summer, and Downing plans to use a higher concentration of sprigs and more fertilizer on the greens this summer. "We made some mistakes while we were growing it in, but we learned a lot about how to do it better, so it was a good test," Downing said.

Paspalum has also been used at Rivers Edge along a bulkhead on No. 9 and on the small 15th tee box, with varying results.

At Sandpiper Bay, work on the Piper nine, the practice putting green and the practice chipping green is part of the second phase of a three-year, three-phase project to convert all 27 greens to Mini-Verde, which has become the most popular Bermuda for greens on the Strand in recent years.

Greens on Sandpiper's Sand nine were converted last summer. "Our owners, our members and guests, and everyone we talk to is very pleased with the smooth roll and great speed that these nine greens have," Sandpiper Bay general manager Tim Tilma said.

Bunker renovations began this month and a bridge will be repaired on the third hole in July before the Piper nine's scheduled reopening on Aug. 17.

At Arrowhead, the Waterway nine has already been converted to Mini-Verde and head pro Eddie Dennis said he's happy with the outcome. "And we don't have to have guys out there hand-watering them all day," he said. "There are times in the summer [bent] gets stressed out, and with the heavy amount of play we get ball marks took their toll. The new forms of Bermuda ... can putt as fast as bentgrass now so we decided to do it."

The Cypress nine is in the process of being converted, and work on the Lakes nine is expected to begin in late July or early August. Other minor improvements are being made to each nine while closed.

Boeheim invites friends

A number of celebrities and special guests are joining tournament host and Syracuse men's basketball coach Jim Boeheim at the second annual Know Your Score: Fight Prostate Cancer Celebrity Golf Tournament and Gala on Aug. 29 in Myrtle Beach.

The event begins with an 8 a.m. 18-hole celebrity golf tournament at Long Bay Club and includes a gala with cocktails and a silent auction of sports memorabilia at Kingston Plantation.

Expected to join Boeheim are former baseball player Ken Griffey Sr., Wes Matthews of the 1986 and '87 Los Angeles Lakers NBA championship teams, TNT golf reporter Jim Huber, Boston Celtics legend Sam Jones, former pitcher Frank Viola, Paul DiMeo of Extreme Home Makeover, musicians Branford Marsalis and Mike Phillips, ESPN billiards commentator and actor Mitch Laurance, and world billiards champion Ewa Mataya Laurance.

Proceeds benefit the Know Your Score: Fight Prostate Cancer campaign and ZERO the Project to End Prostate Cancer. For information on participation opportunities between \$100 and \$900 visit www.KnowYourScoreMB.com or call 843-477-8833, ext. 296.

Zagat raters like Strand

Caledonia Golf & Fish Club and Leopard's Chase Golf Club at Ocean Ridge Plantation are among the most decorated courses in Zagat Survey's sixth edition of its America's Top Golf Courses survey.

The Mike Strantz-designed Caledonia is the 13th most popular course in the country, while the Tim Cate-designed Leopard's Chase, which opened in 2007, was named the No. 2 newcomer in the country behind Chalmers Bay in Washington. Caledonia is also in the top 50 of the top-rated courses, and both Caledonia and Ocean Ridge are also among the top 50 in the country in service.

The ratings are based on the experiences of 6,054 avid golfers who played an average of 8.8 rounds per month. The survey covers 1,149 of the top public, semi-private and resort layouts.

Zagat's top-10 courses in South Carolina include Caledonia, Tidewater Plantation, Heritage Club, The Dunes Golf and Beach Club, and Barefoot Resort's Dye, Love and Fazio courses. Top-10 courses in North Carolina include Leopard's Chase, Tiger's Eye Golf Links, and Rivers Edge Golf Club.

Full ratings and reviews can be found in the sixth edition of Zagat's America's Top Golf Courses guide book.

Tops in N.C. named

Seven courses in Brunswick County made the North Carolina Golf Panel's list of the top 100 courses in the state in 2009.

Tiger's Eye Golf Links is the top-ranked area course at No. 32. Also on the list are Leopard's Chase (34), Bald Head Island Club (38), the Reserve Club St. James Plantation (40), Crow Creek Golf Club (72), Rivers Edge Golf Club (77) and the Sea Trail Jones Course (84).

In Coastal region rankings only, Crow Creek, Oak Island Golf Club, Sea Trail Maples and Panther's Run at Ocean Ridge Plantation were among the panel's top five "Best Bang for the Buck" courses, and the Reserve Club and Leopard's Chase were among the top five most difficult courses.

Golf league tees off

Wild Wing Plantation has started a nine-hole summer golf league on Wednesday evenings from June 17 to Aug. 26. It features 5:30 p.m. shotgun starts, a course rotation, two-man teams of the players' choosing and different formats each week. Registration is \$20 and entry fees are \$20. Call 843-347-9464.

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