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SPORTS

Friday, Jul. 31, 2009

Area golf column: Spruced Tidewater, Rivers Edge reopen today

Alan Blondin - On Grand Strand Golf

Both Rivers Edge Golf Club and Tidewater Golf Club and Plantation are reopening today following significant renovations, while improvements at 27-hole facilities Arrowhead Country Club and Sandpiper Bay Golf Club are nearing completion.

Work done to Tidewater, which was recently rated 41st in Golf Digest's ranking of America's greatest public courses, focused largely on tees and included: enlarging, improving and sodding existing tee boxes, controlling erosion on the par-4 10th hole and improving drainage on some fairways and greens. On the scenic par-3 12th hole over marsh, a tee box was extended, a tree to the left of the green was removed and a bunker on the left side of the green was expanded.

Rivers Edge, which has struggled with green conditions practically since opening in 1999 because of poor water quality from the marsh that abuts the layout, now features the same salt-tolerant SeaDwarf Paspalum grass on its greens that is wall-to-wall at Pine Lakes Country Club.



The skyline of Cherry Grove can be seen across the marsh from the Number 3, 157-yard par-3 three, at the Tidewater Golf Club. TOM MURRAY tmurray@thesunnews.com

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Greens on the Arnold Palmer design were changed from L93 bentgrass through a no-till process that entails planting new grass without tearing out the existing surface, though it is fumigated and aerated.

"I'm really pleased with how it went," said Rivers Edge superintendent John Shaver. "The Paspalum turned out real well. We've got it groomed out pretty good. It will take maybe two more weeks to really get it there. We have it rolling maybe around 8 on the Stimpmeter."

A bunker was reconstructed behind the green of the par-3 fifth hole. It was in the original design but it was filled in because

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the sand constantly blew onto the green. Shaver's staff built a mound atop the front face to keep sand from washing onto the green and put bales of pine straw behind the bunker to deter erosion. Shaver plans to add purple love and pink ruby grass on mounding around the hole.

Rivers Edge was closed for about eight weeks and Shaver completed fertilizing Wednesday. "Overall we're in real good shape," he said. "We got rid of some of the weeds in the rough and fairways. Now we're hoping to see some business."

Both Sandpiper Bay and Arrowhead have kept 18 holes open throughout the summer as workers change greens over to Mini-Verde Ultradwarf Bermudagrass.

Sandpiper Bay is renovating its Piper nine and plans to reopen it Aug. 17. Arrowhead has been replacing greens through sodding nine holes at a time, and is on its final nine known as the Lakes. The Waterway nine was done early this summer and the Cypress nine reopened Monday.

"Everything has turned out great,"

Arrowhead head pro Eddie Dennis said. "The grass is beautiful. It's looking good and this last week when it started to get real hot, we were playing on the Lakes course, which still had the [A1/Crenshaw] bentgrass, and it was showing some signs of weakening. It's a relief to have that grass here in August when it gets smoking hot. There's no stress, no excessive watering. It just handles the heat.

"... Barring anything unforeseen, we should have everything fully operational and all 27 back open by the first week of September."

Representatives of Mini-Verde developers Modern Turn inspected the new greens at Sandpiper Bay's Piper nine Wednesday and gave a positive report. The holes have been closed since May 23.

"We are on schedule and things are going well," said club head pro and assistant general manager Richard Kascsak. "They require a little bit more [time]. If push came to shove and we needed to play on them today, we could. But there's no need to rush them."

The course is also replacing boards on bridges on the Piper nine, the tee box on the third hole was leveled, and the practice putting green has been redone with Mini-Verde. Kascsak hopes to reopen the practice green before the Piper nine.

Greens on the Sand nine were redone last year and the Bay nine's will change next summer.

Hall commits to Tidewater

Walter Hall, a Champions Tour member who started his senior professional career on the Sunbelt Senior Tour, has committed to play in the Sunbelt-run South Carolina Senior Open at Tidewater from Sept. 8-10.

Hall, 62, was the leading money winner in the Sunbelt Tour's inaugural season in 1996, winning four of the six events he entered. He has since earned nearly \$7 million on the Champions Tour with one win, 13 top-three finishes and 62 top-10s.

Hall returned to the Sunbelt Tour in 2007 to play in the North Carolina Senior Open at Tanglewood Park in Winston-Salem, N.C., and won after opening with a pair of 64s.

The event at Tidewater annually attracts one of the Sunbelt Tour's biggest and strongest fields. The past six champions are Champions Tour members Gene Jones (three titles), Steve Thomas and Jim Chancey, and European Senior Tour member Bertus Smit.

There are a limited number of amateur spots available for the Sept. 7 Pro-Am preceding the

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