

Breaking New Ground

Environmentally friendly turfgrass

by J.W. Dysart

Golf courses favoring “environmentally friendly” turf are doing more than saving on chemical costs—they’re winning awards. Case in point: Hammock Bay Golf & Country Club in Naples, Fla. The course, which uses the environmentally friendly SeaDwarf turfgrass, was named among 2004’s “Top Ten Best New Private Golf Courses” by *Travel & Leisure Golf Magazine*.

Apparently, SeaDwarf is a perfect fit for the course, because the turfgrass is highly salt tolerant. It also requires 75 percent less nitrogen than conventional turfgrasses and up to 50 percent less irrigation water than bermudagrass, according to Stacie Zinn, a spokeswoman for Environmental Turf (www.environmentalturf.com), the makers of SeaDwarf based in Fort Pierce, Fla.

“It’s good to see that something we worked so hard on is getting this kind of recognition,” says Lou Conzelmann, regional agronomist for WCI Communities, which developed the course. “This ranking should make our whole group very proud and happy to have been a part of the planning and construction of Hammock Bay.”

While well aware of SeaDwarf’s environmentally friendly reputation, Conzelmann says WCI’s choice of the turfgrass was overwhelmingly based on the nearby poor water quality supply Hammock Bay owners had to face. He says WCI was convinced SeaDwarf would be able to thrive despite the water challenge, but he had no idea just how well.

“It turned out to be a great playing surface for the greens, tees and fairways,” he says. “It’s a great looking grass and a great playing surface for golf.”

“Working with WCI Communities has been one of the best partnerships we’ve

been involved in,” adds Wiley McCall, Environmental Turf’s president. “Being the first developer to use SeaDwarf 100-percent from tee-to-green and in the rough, they gave us the opportunity to showcase our grass and prove that it could do what we said it could do. It’s been more like a

partnership than a customer relationship.

“This ranking confirms what can happen when you put together an excellent development and design team, a dedicated construction crew, a talented golf course superintendent and a quality grass,” says McCall.



An aerial shot of hole 3 taken on January 23, 2004, at Hammock Bay shows how well it, one of the first holes sprigged with SeaDwarf seashore paspalum, had grown in.

SeaDwarf will also be used at Lakeside Turf Course in Inglewood, Calif., where superintendent John Barrios is overseeing a switch from bermudagrass to SeaDwarf turfgrass near the course's race track. Plans include excavating the existing turf and soil to a depth of six inches, ripping and tilling the sandy loam beneath and then grading with a 2 percent slope on the straights and a 4 percent slope on the turns, Barrios reports.

After installation of drainage lines along the inside of the course, Barrios will be preparing the earth for SeaDwarf with Perm 02 Pre, a new growing medium. Essentially, it's a mixture that includes grids for stabilization and baked clay particles to promote drainage and root growth. The project is slated to be completed well in advance of the 31-day Autumn Meet at Hollywood Park, beginning November 9, he says.

"The thing I've learned is, you cannot treat every place the same," Barrios says. "Climate plays a major factor. Before making any decisions, numerous tests were run, both at labs and physically on the track. The new turf has more cushioning than we have experienced with the Bermuda because of its density. It is more cold tolerant, it roots much faster, and it grows at a much cooler soil temperature than Bermuda."

Other early adopters of SeaDwarf include Jim Hardy, co-designer of the golf course at Hammock Bay Golf & Country Club; Ed Miller, golf course superintendent at Quail Ridge Country Club in Boynton Beach, Fla.; and Chuck Collins, an agronomist and former golf course superintendent at Galveston Country Club, based in Galveston Island, Texas.

The new grass has also been endorsed by PGA tour instructor and trick-shot-artist Mike Calbot—aka "The Golf Doctor." "For the average golfer, the firmness of the grass will promote better ball/club-face contact—thus, more fun and better shots," Calbot says. "On the fairways, the ball sits up on top of the grass, and it's easier for contact with mid and longer irons and fairway woods. I think golfers will notice the improved difference in their game."

Calbot travels all over the world performing in trick-shot shows and teaching golfers the finer points of the game and says the environmentally friendly aspects of SeaDwarf cannot be underestimated. "The golf courses that I visit around the world are always looking to cut budgets and are concerned about the environment. In



The 6th hole at Hammock Bay, formerly the first hole at the old Marco Shores, displaying the SeaDwarf seashore paspalum.

Florida, it's already a huge grass. I can also see a great need for it in the islands, the Bahamas, the Mediterranean. I just came back from China where water is a huge problem. This grass, as I see it, has no downside," he says.

SeaDwarf, like Environmental Turf's other grass varieties, was developed for courses looking for alternative warm-season grasses. The company engages in the research, development, marketing and distribution of these warm-season turfgrasses, and licenses their varieties to a number of sod producers.

Other turfgrasses available from the firm:

- Aloha Seashore Paspalum

A fine textured turfgrass developed by the University of Florida, Aloha can be used on golf courses, sports fields and on high-end residential lawns. The turfgrass delivers a deeper green color and longer roughs than SeaDwarf, according to Zinn. Like SeaDwarf, Aloha may be irrigated with highly salty water, requires up to 50 percent less water for irrigation and up to 75 percent less nitrogen for fertilization than bermudagrass. University of Florida researchers have also found Aloha Seashore Paspalum is resistant to the green bug aphid, a stubborn industry pest.

- UltimateFlora Zoysia

Developed by the University of Florida, UltimateFlora Zoysia is ideal for use on

residential lawns and common areas, Zinn says. UltimateFlora Zoysia may be installed anywhere you'd use St. Augustine turfgrass and has a medium texture and deep color. It's also been found to be chinch bug resistant and is faster growing than many other zoysias, Zinn Says. UltimateFlora Zoysia is also fairly shade tolerant.

- PristineFlora Zoysia

A new fine-textured zoysia developed by the University of Florida for golf course and ornamental use, the turfgrass works well on high-end residential lawns, as well as decorative landscape areas. PristineFlora Zoysia is faster growing than many other common zoysias and is fairly shade-tolerant, Zinn says.

- DeltaShade St. Augustine

A new and improved variety of St. Augustine turfgrass that offers true shade tolerance, the variety grows in heavy shade and provides a thick, lush look. It has also been shown to be fairly cold tolerant in tests conducted successfully as far north as central Tennessee, Zinn says.

- Hammock Centipede

Developed by University of Florida as an extremely low maintenance grass for residential lawns, Hammock Centipede's heat tolerance allows the turfgrass to be grown in hot climates, unlike other centipede-grasses. Hammock Centipede also has a deep green color not commonly found in other centipedegrasses. Its low fertilization and slow vertical grow allow it to be mowed as infrequently as approximately six times per year, according to Zinn.

More information on Environmental Turf and its grasses can be found on its newly renovated Web site, which was redesigned for both consumers and industry professionals. The site offers turfgrass maintenance tips, free book downloads, research information, a frequently updated library of news and articles, related links and a directory of where to buy the company's grasses in local markets. 🌿

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