

# “If They Only Knew . . .”

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**G**OOD DRAINAGE has long been identified as an essential element of a reliable putting green turf, and hundreds of programs have been developed over the years for improving the internal drainage characteristics of putting green soils.

Golfers, on the other hand, are often much more interested in the condition of the visible portion of the putting green surface, and don't always understand the ramifications of poor drainage. At times they can be less than sympathetic to the plight of the superintendent. Nonetheless, it is the task of the golf course superintendent to explain these problems in order to gain the support needed to employ whatever solution is dictated by the circumstances. It has been said that “a picture is worth a thousand words,” and this is the premise that Mr. Chris Baier, golf course superintendent of The Pines Golf Course in Newport News, Virginia, used to illustrate the problems of maintaining the putting greens on his course to his membership.

The Pines Golf Course is located in a climate that often experiences extended periods of heat and humidity, and this accentuates the problems created by poor drainage. The greens were constructed of native clay soils, and all manner of fill was used during their construction. Old railroad ties and even the rails themselves have been found beneath greens as they have been reconstructed. It is even rumored that a buried piano is the cause of the localized dry spot frequently observed on the sixth green.

The clays found on the golf course are extremely difficult to work with when they become wet and, in some cases, drain lines have had to be excavated by hand when trenching machines proved to be completely ineffective. In fact, a brick factory, operating in the early 1800s and utilizing local clays for its products, was located right next to the golf course property.

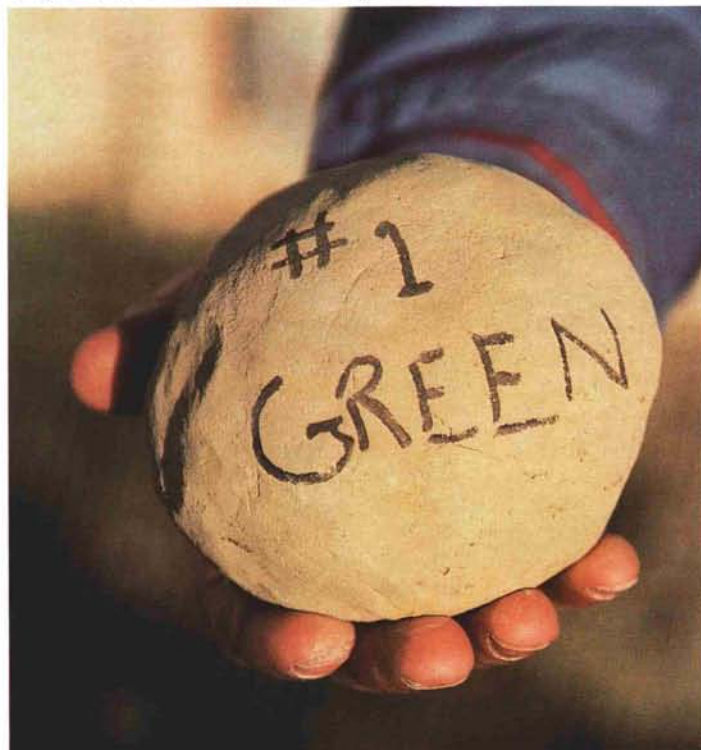
The maintenance crew quickly discovered how pliable the material was and, during breaks and at lunch, began molding figures out of it. When left out

in the sun to dry, the figures became incredibly hard, and so the idea was born to make tee markers in the same manner. Chris and staff experimented with several shapes before the final design was selected and mass production begun. The process was simple; the shapes were molded, a pin inserted, and they were left in the sun to cure. Finally, the markers were painted and sealed, leaving them impervious to water.

Though the golfers were unimpressed by the design selected, they were quite shocked by their origin, and the message definitely got through. Thanks to this creative and inventive communication aid, Chris Baier now has a Verti-Drain and has completely reconstructed five greens. Two more are to be rebuilt this spring, and the club has been convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that reconstruction is the only answer to their problem. Chris no longer ponders, “If they only knew . . .”

Incidentally, the markers, though no longer in use, proved to be extremely durable, though they did become a frequent target of theft.

*Gray clay after molding and curing.*



*The finished product!*

