

When Charles Lange, golf course superintendent of Baymark Golf in Virginia Beach, Virginia, set out to attract bluebirds to his golf course, he didn't expect that he'd also attract positive publicity. But sure enough, Lange built good community relations right along with the 20 birdhouses he and 22 students from a local elementary school built and mounted last June.

Lange invited the children to visit Baymark and help him as a way to get youngsters interested in wildlife and at the same time restore nesting sites for cavity-nesting birds, such as bluebirds, along the Chesapeake Bay, where the golf course is located. The *Eastern Shore News* carried the story of the kids' unusual field trip in its weekend edition. The article recounted the day's events and painted a picture of golf course staff as thoughtful natural resource professionals — a far cry from the *Caddyshack*-style negative stereotyping that has long been a concern of the golf industry.

"We were really pleased with the outcome," says Lange. "Not only did we educate kids and garner some positive publicity, but half the boxes had nests within two weeks and almost all were occupied by midsummer."

ACTION AND OUTREACH — A WINNING COMBINATION

Baymark Golf is not alone in using nest boxes as a way to educate youth and foster community relations. Numerous golf courses enrolled in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program report positive results each year — in terms of not only the birds they attract, but also the goodwill they breed.

Like Baymark Golf, Cherry Creek Golf Club in Greensburg, Pennsylvania, added an educational component to its nest box project that was lauded by golfers, course homeowners, and the mentally and physically disabled students who spent a day installing the nest boxes and learning about the environment. Golf course superintendent John

On Course *With Nature*



Nurminen was well prepared for the field visit with bird pelts, stuffed birds in display cases, and other educational materials borrowed from the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh.

"When the students arrived, we used the museum materials and I gave a brief lecture about the property, animals, and various habitats we were going to see," said Nurminen. "We loaded the carts, toured the property, and installed the students' birdhouses. The day concluded with a brief golf lesson and a pizza lunch. Every one of the students left with a greater understanding of the beauty that surrounds them and a smile from ear to ear."

HOUSE FOR SALE

Half a world away on Australia's Gold Coast, Lakelands Golf Club took a dif-

ferent approach to its nest box project, but achieved similar success in attracting birds and positive attention alike. Golf course superintendent Stephen Marsden worked with the course's membership department to mail a letter to Lakelands' members, inviting them to "Buy a House at Lakelands."

For Sale:

Property at Lakelands Golf Club

Five good reasons to buy a house at Lakelands:

1. Live on the site of Australia's first Jack Nicklaus signature golf course.
2. Be part of an exclusive community.
3. See whose house will generate the most offspring in a calendar year.
4. Receive quarterly updates on the activity in your house.
5. Re-purchase or sell your house at the end of the year.

Results of Audubon International's yearly Nest Box Survey reveal that the 45 golf courses that responded fledged 3,928 young birds in 2001 (2002 data not yet available). With only a small percentage of golf courses reporting, the actual number of young birds born on golf courses is likely many times greater.

"We weren't sure how well this idea would be received," reported Marsden. "At worst, no one would be interested, but we would have provided eight new nest sites." As it turned out, all the bird-houses sold in two weeks.

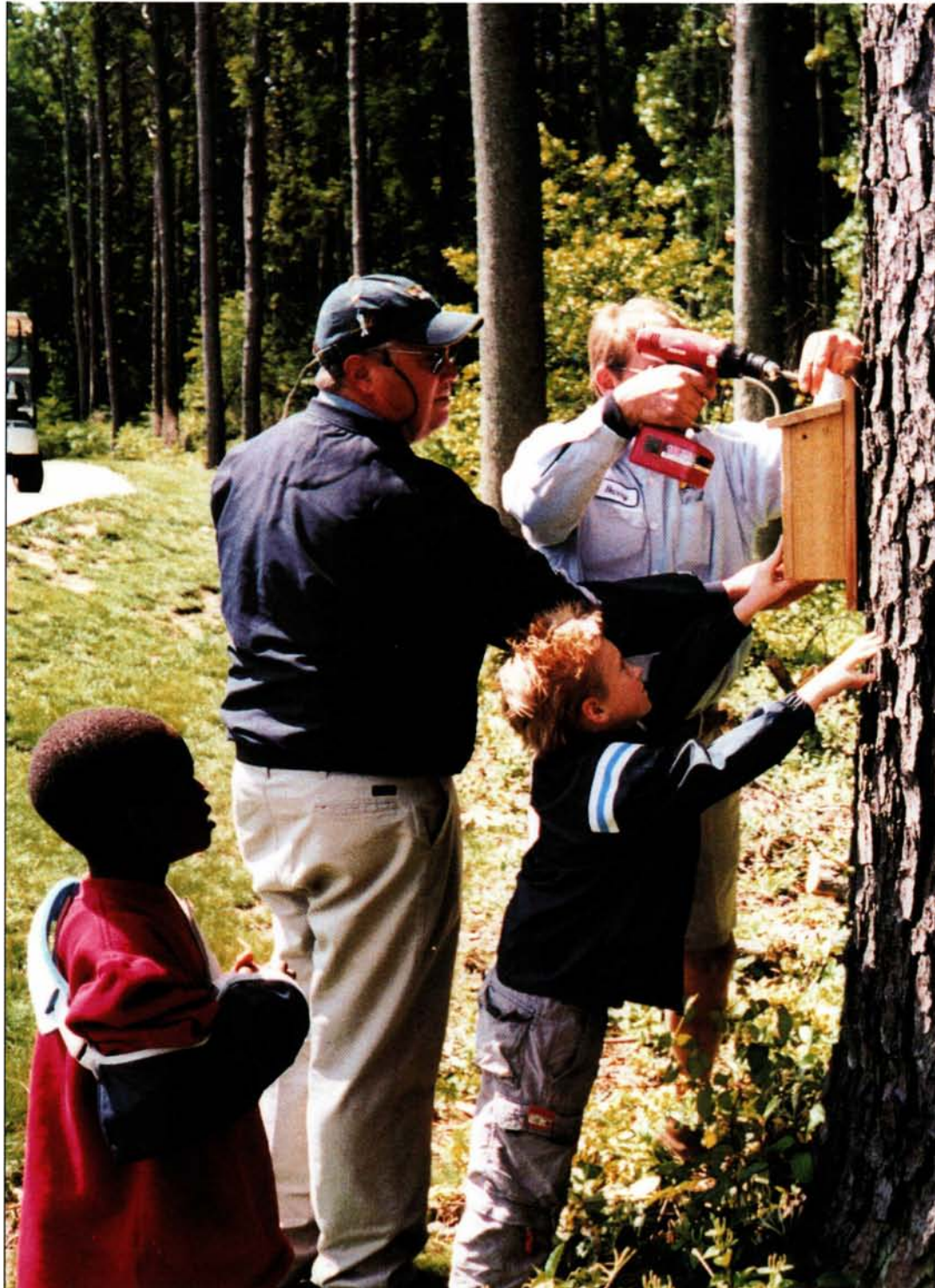
With that encouragement, Lakelands' membership department and Marsden hit upon the idea of extending the sale of its nest boxes to local businesses and suppliers. But like all hot real-estate markets, the price shot up from \$50 per house to \$250 for corporate supporters. The money raised paid for additional nest boxes and other Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary projects.

Marsden thanked his new "home-owners" with a letter and placed a small plaque with the owner's name on the front of each box. He updates owners quarterly with a report of bird activity.

"The members are very happy with the concept," said Marsden. "But more important, they're pleased with the fact that Lakelands values the environment in which we operate."

Nest boxes have long been a simple tool for increasing nesting sites for cavity-nesting birds. They're easy to make, mount, and monitor — and, best of all, they work. For golf courses involved in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, nest boxes also are proving to be a useful tool for educating golfers and the public that *birds*, not just *birdies*, have their places on golf courses.

JEAN MACKAY is the director of educational services for Audubon International. To find out more about placing nest boxes on your golf course or joining the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, contact Audubon International at (518) 767-9051, extension 10, or visit www.audubonintl.org.



Students from Kiptopeke Elementary School (Virginia Beach, Virginia) demonstrated their concern for the environment as they helped workers at Baymark Golf mount nest boxes.