

Still on Top

Ten years after participating in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program.

BY JEAN MACKAY AND SHAWN WILLIAMS

Shortly after the first golf courses enrolled in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses (ACSP) in 1991, a number of them began vying to be the first to achieve certification. In 1993, Kapalua Bay Course in Hawaii was honored with that distinction after submitting binders full of

photographic and written documentation of its environmental efforts. Kapalua was quickly followed by courses from around the country whose superintendents had likewise set their sights on being among the cream of the crop.

Now, more than a decade later, we asked our first 10 certified courses to share their insights about participating in the program, achieving certification, and staying on course with good environmental stewardship. Their responses shed light on the extraordinary contributions they have made to golf and the environment.

A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Certification was a laudable accomplishment for our first 10, yet, in many



Like all of the first ten certified courses in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program, Semiahmoo Golf and Country Club (Blaine, Wash.) has seen its efforts grow and mature over the years.

ways, it was also only a starting point for environmental change. That was part of the motivation for achieving certification for P. Stan George, CGCS of Prairie Dunes Country Club. "I felt it was important to pursue certification so that members and others would recognize and appreciate the unique prairie environment that has existed here for eons," recalls George.

Over the years, Prairie Dunes had been gradually invaded by woody plants and was on a path to becoming "Honeylocust Dunes," explains George. He used the ACSP as a springboard to launch a major prairie restoration project involving the use of fire as a management tool.

"Education, proceeding slowly, garnering results, and acting with political

acumen were essential to the success of the program," says George. "Our greatest accomplishment has been garnering recognition from the membership regarding the special property we have here. More than half of the course is in a native prairie state now, with much of it undergoing prairie restoration.

Since becoming certified in 1993, our stewardship efforts have grown to include club-owned native areas outside the golf course proper and significantly increased removal of woody vegetation in our tall-grass prairie environment."

Vance Much, superintendent at Semiahmoo Golf and Country Club, shared a similar experience: "Our efforts have grown in many ways since becoming certified. Not only have we continued to maintain and even add to our wildlife areas, we have also involved many of our members with homes on the golf course. Many have consulted with me about fertilizer and chemical use, mowing heights, moss control, and other landscaping concerns. They have also established feeding stations and birdbaths in their yards. It has been

truly encouraging to see people take such an active part in our program.”

ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS

Certification often takes a champion — someone who says, “We can do it,” and then follows through. The people who led our first 10 certified courses proved to be nothing short of champions of the environment, as well as staunch advocates for the ACSP.

Over the years, several of the superintendents moved on to other golf courses, where they promptly began working toward another certification. Tony Radzki (Cantigny, Ill.) brought the ACSP to two subsequent golf courses and helped to spearhead the program at a local school. Peter Leuzinger (St. Charles, Ill.) championed certification at the Ivanhoe Club in Illinois, pioneered the course’s participation in the Audubon Signature Program during a major course renovation, and currently staffs Audubon International’s Midwest Field Office. And Greg Plotner (Tampa Palms, Fla.) carried his Audubon expertise into a management position at IGM/MGGI, where he has been instrumental in helping the company’s courses adopt the ACSP.

Other superintendents have stayed on and kept the ball rolling at the same course for more than a decade. Since achieving certification in 1993 for the Village Links of Glen Ellyn, Assistant Superintendent Chris Pekarek has specialized in community outreach. “Initially, public outreach served as a way to let people know how the golf course was operated, but later it expanded to involve residents in similar stewardship activities,” says Pekarek. Pekarek spearheaded a local environmental program styled after the ACSP, and today a remarkable 385 residents have registered. In addition, the golf course has adopted six elementary schools and helped raise funds to benefit their conservation efforts.

Likewise, consistent involvement has paid environmental dividends for Hole-

The First 10 Golf Courses to Achieve ACSP Certification

1. Kapalua Land Company, Lahaina, Hawaii
2. St. Charles Country Club, St. Charles, Illinois
3. Prairie Dunes Country Club, Hutchinson, Kansas
4. Aurora Country Club, Aurora, Illinois
5. Tampa Palms Golf & Country Club, Tampa, Florida
6. Applewood Golf Course, Golden, Colorado
7. Village Links of Glen Ellyn, Glen Ellyn, Illinois
8. Cantigny Golf Club, Wheaton, Illinois
9. Semiahmoo Golf & Country Club, Blaine, Washington
10. Hole-in-the-Wall Golf Club, Naples, Florida

in-the-Wall Golf Club, organized by ACSP Chair and club member Fred Yarrington. “We have changed the environment of the Hole-in-the-Wall golf course dramatically since joining the ACSP,” shares Yarrington. “By steady effort, we have eliminated most of the original turf areas that were not in play, as well as reduced approximately 10 percent of the maintained turf area that formerly was treated as in play. This resulted in a substantial reduction in materials, labor, and irrigation water formerly used to maintain the course . . . and made the property much friendlier to wildlife.”

DYNAMIC AND LASTING STEWARDSHIP

A lot has changed since the ACSP began in 1991 — the program itself has undergone several revisions, the golf industry has made significant strides in its commitment to addressing environmental concerns, and, of course, the leadership at these courses has shifted as board members and staff have come

and gone. Yet, each course has remained committed to good environmental management.

“What we have tried to accomplish since becoming certified is maintaining and enhancing what we have already done, while continuing to promote the program both internally amongst our membership and externally throughout our community,” shares John Gurke, CGCS, who has been involved in the ACSP at Aurora Country Club (Illinois) since the beginning. The program’s emphasis on continuous improvement helps superintendents focus their efforts where they are needed most each year.

“One of the best features of the ACSP is that you can choose your level of participation,” acknowledges Village Links’ Pekarek. “You may only have an interest in setting up a few nesting boxes or creating a few native perennial landscape beds to add beauty to your course. Whatever you decide to do, you do it the way you want it done and on your timetable.”

“Participation in the ACSP is really an educational process,” says Yarrington, “and certification is a technique to enable those responsible for care and maintenance of their golf course to insure they perform their task in the most effective way to protect and improve the environment for their property.”

Audubon International salutes its first ten Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary golf courses and the 525 courses that have followed them for doing just that. We hope the program continues to provide guidance for a growing and lasting stewardship of the environment.

JEAN MACKAY, director of education for Audubon International, has been an important conduit in working with golf courses involved in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. Audubon International Environmental Technician SHAWN WILLIAMS works primarily with ACSP golf course members and specializes in serving his native Canadians.