

The First Green Foundation — Environmental Education Outreach in Action

Most primary grade teachers and students have never been on a golf course. In the state of Washington, this is changing.

BY FRED SOLLER

On a cool fall day, Kristen Larson's Advanced Placement science class walks from nearby Sammamish High to Glendale Country Club in Bellevue, Wash., near Seattle. When they arrive, they grab clipboards, waders, and an orange. They head to Kelsey Creek, a stream that traverses the golf course, and the students will test the stream's water quality and oxygen level. They also will calculate the stream's volumetric flow rate, but first they must measure the stream's dimensions and its velocity (that's where the orange comes into play). Before the trip to Glendale is over, the students have learned about the golf course property, some of the maintenance and management programs for course care, and, most likely, even tried their hand at putting, many for the first time.

Golf courses provide real-world examples for all subject areas. Steve Kealy, superintendent at Glendale, has worked with Lynn McKay's advanced horticulture students and the City of Bellevue to restore a portion of the Kelsey Creek streambed, an active salmon spawning stream, when a big storm tore through the course. Lynn's students designed the plantings and planted them at the course when Glendale received the city grant.

In Spokane, Wash., approximately 10 classes come to Spokane Country Club each year on Planting Day. The students help grow some of the plants beforehand, and when they all arrive at the course, they put in the plants, enjoy a BBQ hosted by golf course superintendent Jeff Gullikson, CGCS, and even learn some golf course etiquette on the putting green.

LINKS AS LABS

The field trips described above are made possible through First Green Foundation, an innovative environmental education outreach program that uses golf courses as environmental learning labs. Golf course superintendents and/or local golf course representatives host students on field trips to the course, where they may test water quality, collect soil samples, identify plants, design plantings, assist in streambed restoration, and are

involved in learning the ecology and environmental aspects of the golf course. In addition to the course itself, students also may be introduced to other aspects of the golf world — maybe the food and beverage or golf operations side of the business.

The Washington State Office of Public Instruction has provided credit to teachers who have participated in First Green workshops. The workshops are designed to provide the teachers with an understanding of the learning



Teacher group hearing how rainwater runs off hard surfaces (like asphalt) and into storm drains, and how all people need to think where water that leaves their property ends up.



Steve Kealy, Superintendent at Glendale C.C., helps measure stream dimensions for determining water flow measurements.

resources available for use on golf courses. Presenters with expertise in education and science have discussed topics relevant to the golf course. One of the reasons that First Green is valued by the state is because it provides real-world learning experiences for all types of students.

INCEPTION

Bill Meyer, Ph.D., president of the First Green Board of Directors, and Jeff Gullikson, CGCS, launched the First Green in the state of Washington in 1997. Their goal was to promote and provide environmental education on golf courses, using golf courses as outdoor learning labs. The program operated with administrative assistance from Washington State Golf Association (WSGA) from 2000 to 2005. In 2005, First Green Foundation received tax-exempt status, and Karen Armstead,

Ph.D., became the Executive Director. The foundation provides teacher in-service and golf course superintendent professional development programs, and also acts as a resource in connecting teachers and local golf course superintendents.

BENEFITS OF A FIRST GREEN PROGRAM

Benefits from the program are many. The flexibility for the golf course superintendent, the teacher, and the school to create specific topics for each class is just one of the benefits. A partial list of other benefits of participation in a First Green Program:

- Helps to promote a golf course as a community asset.
- Enables superintendents to demonstrate environmentally sound practices on the golf course.

- Gives teachers, students, and their families a chance to learn about the game of golf.
- Provides public service in creating a better understanding of how golf courses operate and their benefits to the community and environment.
- Connects the golf course to the school and assists the superintendent and teachers in creating the curriculum.
- Creates volunteer opportunities for golf course memberships and golfers who want to support environmental education.
- Superintendents have a chance to do some early recruiting directly to students who may now be interested in future employment opportunities on the golf course.

THE FIRST GREEN AND AUDUBON INTERNATIONAL

Another great opportunity for The First Green program is how it pairs nicely at golf courses that are either certified or working on their certification in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses. Certification in the Audubon International program involves participation and achievement levels in the following categories:

- Environmental Planning
- Wildlife and Habitat Management
- Chemical Use Reduction and Safety
- Water Conservation
- Water Quality
- Outreach and Education

The Outreach and Education component of the Audubon program is often a challenging category for golf courses involved in the certification or renewal process. The First Green program is a natural fit.

"The First Green program is a great way for a golf course to reach out to the community. Teaching students about environmental stewardship on the ground is exactly the kind of outreach Audubon International recommends," says Joellen Lampman, Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Programs Director.

For more information on the Audubon program, visit:
<http://auduboninternational.org/ge.html>

EXPANDING TO OTHER LOCAL PROGRAMS NOW POSSIBLE

Initially, First Green focused on Washington state only. Then, the program reached out and provided training to superintendents in the metro Portland, Ore., area.

Recently, a number of golf course superintendents from across the country have contacted First Green about starting their own local programs. First Green also has heard from superintendents interested in starting First Green as part of their local golf course superintendent association chapter.

In response to these requests, First Green created a website application process to offer local program materials and resources (First Green experience, toolkits, and ability to purchase the learning lab materials that First Green uses in Washington State). For First Green Application link, view: <http://thefirstgreen.org/sites/courses/layout9.asp?id=625&page=35275>

For a small annual fee (billed to the golf course superintendent each January), First Green provides:

- Access to First Green resources
- Certificates to post at the golf club and for the teacher to post at the school



Planting Day at Spokane Country Club finally comes after the planning and preparation.

- Stories and photos that may be used on the First Green website
- Press releases to the local news media when clubs submit field trip updates and photos

Many golf courses practice strong environmental stewardship daily, but unfortunately many students and teachers are not aware of this. First Green is a unique, practical, community-based environmental education program that brings teachers and students to the golf courses, supporting the role of golf courses in the communities. Students, teachers, and

parent chaperones go home after a field trip and share their positive experiences with family members, friends, and co-workers.

First Green is good for the game of golf and adds a new face to the future of golf.

For more information about The First Green, visit: www.thefirstgreen.org

Special thanks to Ms. Cathy Relyea and Karen Armstead, Ph.D., of First Green Foundation for their invaluable contributions to this article. They both can be reached directly through The First Green.

Note: On the First Green website, view the *Introduction to First Green* video. The USGA earlier helped fund this video and since has funded a number of additional grant opportunities for teacher workshops and to expand First Green's marketing presence through its website. WSGA provides funding to First Green as it supports various First Green activities and programs along with partner Western Washington Superintendents Association.

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Seeing an aerial map of the area surrounding the golf course helps all understand the role the course plays in protecting the Kelsey Creek water quality.

