FORT MYERS COUNTRY CLUB IS BACK IN FULL SWING

Golfers are excited about the much anticipated Fort Myers Country Club grand re-opening. The legendary Donald Ross course built in 1916 gets a much needed renovation.

Nearly a century ago, the late Donald Ross designed the 130-acre Fort Myers Country Club Golf Course located between McGregor Boulevard and US 41. This iconic facility has been masterfully managed by the City of Fort Myers since its inception. The toll of brutal summer rains and decades of use has impacted the course so much in recent years, that the City began regularly closing the course after heavy summertime downfalls.

This summer the course finally received a much needed renovation, bringing it up to 21st century standards. As the lead civil engineer for this project, our team worked closely with the City of Fort Myers staff, Wright Construction and the golf course architect, Steve Smyers, to incorporate an innovative system of water retention and water quality infrastructure into the new design.

Our familiarity with the grant programs through the Department of Environmental Protection was instrumental in helping the City obtain $840,000 in TMDL water quality restoration grant funds to make this project happen.

To ensure the City’s facility would be open for the public during peak season, the team met a very aggressive construction schedule. The schedule was compressed into six months, and it ran from April to October, which is the

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most challenging time to renovate a golf course because it is rainy season. The course re-opened to the public on schedule, just in time for City residents, seasonal residents and visitors to enjoy the golf course during the season of cooler weather and less rainfall.

The new course kept many of the same challenging elements from Ross’ original design, yet incorporated enhancements that are suited to today’s golfer and modern equipment. The project features revamped fairways, greens, pathways, tees, roughs, and sand traps. The irrigation, drainage, and utility facilities are also now modernized and more efficient.

The new water management system retrofits are particularly beneficial to the course, because they serve a dual purpose as hazards for the golfers, and as stormwater infrastructure that improves water quality and attenuation. For maximum efficiency, stormwater runoff that flows into the ponds is being reused for course irrigation.

The City Public Works Department and the Community Redevelopment Agency collaborated to make the ponds on the golf course even more impactful to the community, because they serve a dual purpose as hazards for the golfers, and as stormwater management features.

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THE PROTECTED BURROWING OWL DIGGING ITS WAY INTO CEMETERIES

The Florida burrowing owl is a threatened species in the State of Florida and is therefore protected, along with its burrows, by several state and federal regulations. The Florida burrowing owl is a small, ground-dwelling owl with long legs, a round head and very large bright yellow eyes. They are not only unique due to their size; they are diurnal which means they are active during the day time, unlike many owls that are active at night.

Burrowing owls derive their name from the burrows they dig in the ground, which serve as their nest as well as a refuge from predators. Although they are capable of digging their own burrows, they are known to take over the burrows of other animals such as armadillos. They prefer open areas with low grasses and historically occupied prairies. Many burrowing owls have adapted to occupying developed parcels of land, such as golf courses, airports and oddly enough, cemeteries.

Cemeteries provide ample suitable habitat with maintained grasses, disturbed plots of earth, which makes burrowing easy, and grave stones that serve as perches. Their burrows are often found under grave markers. These owls can be common residents for many cemeteries in Florida and can disrupt regular burial operations.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service require permitting prior to disturbing the owls or their burrows. We have been assisting cemeteries with these permitting services to help keep cemetery operations running smoothly.

For more information on Burrowing Owl Permitting Services, contact ecologist, Sarah Webber at 954.626.0123 or swebber@johnsoneng.com.