

Springbank Links

BY SHANNON WOODWARD



Golf is so much more than a game. It is a chance to zone into an athletic challenge within beautiful, picturesque surroundings. The lay of the land, the course conditions, the natural hazards and even the wildlife become a part of the experience.

At Springbank Links Golf Club being responsible about the environment is a top priority. Since the course first opened in 1997, Springbank has taken big steps towards environmental stewardship. From importing specific species of fish to using organic slow-release fertilizers to installing a wind turbine for clubhouse power, Springbank is truly a 'green' golf course.

An on-site water treatment plant between holes No. 1 and No. 2 recycles the waste water created by the surrounding community of Emerald Bay and the clubhouse. It is converted into a high-quality end product, called effluent, and pumped to two lakes on the back nine. Here it is mixed with river water and

eventually ends up on the golf course via spray irrigation. The turf grass utilizes the applied water, making it a 'zero-discharge' system. The other environmental benefit is that the amount of fresh water needed to maintain a golf course is significantly reduced.

"Having a partnership with our environment is very important to our ownership group," says general manager Kevin Heise. "It is also very important to our members and of course, it is high on the public radar these days."

Head superintendent John Faber explains, "The key is to balance what the golf course needs to stay healthy without over applying water or nutrients." Faber goes on to admit, "This is not the easiest way to operate, but like most things, it is doable – if it is a priority. Personally, I am extremely happy to be involved with it and our members are very proud that their home course is undertaking these practices."

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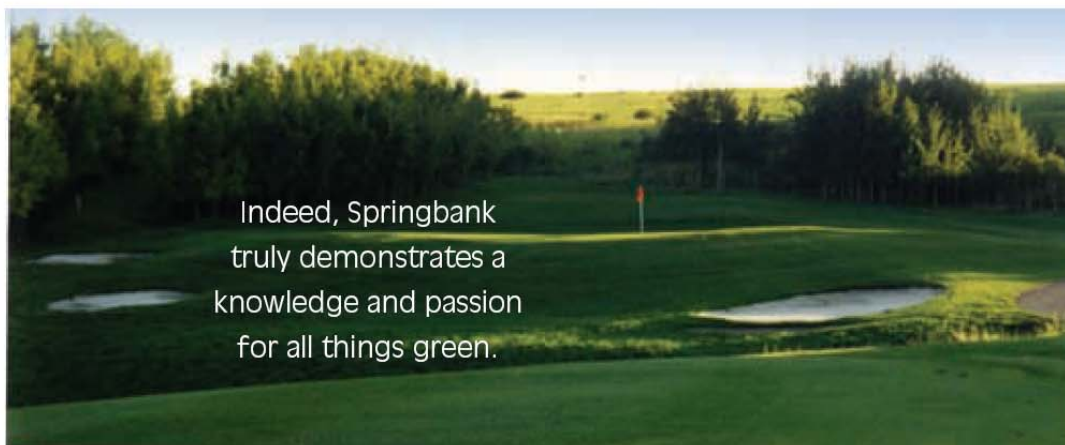
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Indeed, Springbank truly demonstrates a knowledge and passion for all things green.

To help schedule the amount of water applied, a state-of-the-art weather station has been built behind green No. 10. It records 'real-time' weather information to help program the course's irrigation system to increase or reduce watering windows which, in turn, provides the healthiest growing environment for turf grass.

"Golfers also love it for a different reason ... they can log onto our website and check out the current playing conditions before they tee it up," says Heise.

While golf courses may have, in the past, been perceived as un-environmentally friendly businesses, Heise feels this is a misunderstood perception.

"Golf course superintendents are lead enthusiasts and take a very active role as environmental protectors," he says. "The care that goes into planning, managing and operating a course is very, very impressive."

Springbank Links has been on the cutting edge of introducing new methods for green action. For example, besides the already mentioned clubhouse wind turbine, a wind-generated lake aerator has been installed to produce oxygen for the fish and help

combat weed growth. In addition, grass carp and rainbow trout have been introduced into the two lakes to better control aquatic vegetation and reduce insects – including mosquitoes.

"The grass carp consume three times their body weight in weeds daily," explains Heise. "They tell me they will get around 40 pounds – they are not jumpers, but cruise along the surface between meals."

Springbank has also teamed up with a local Alberta hatchery and rearing barn to release ring-neck and blue-back pheasants in the densely-treed front nine. Wild pheasant populations are subject to extreme fluctuation, primarily due to lack of suitable cover during our winters. Their release helps maintain the biodiversity of the ecosystem.

Other wildlife in an abundance include white-tailed deer, hawks, bald eagles and red fox ... even a bull moose has been spotted strolling down fairway No. 17.

"Wildlife sightings are a huge thrill for anyone and is a great indicator we are doing a good job in providing a safe haven for them," says Heise. "However, with this many deer out here it makes it impossible to plant most flowers, but we would much



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rather forego certain types of flowers as opposed to deterring the deer.”

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But the course offers much more than their strong initiative in environmentalism. Springbank Links is home to 130 acres of beautifully landscaped championship golf. All 18 holes offer a unique natural fingerprint as the course was carved into the existing landscape. The route design was done by architect Rod Whitman, who designed Wolf Creek Golf Resort in central Alberta.

Whitman focused on maintaining the existing landscape when crafting Springbank, which sets up well for preservation. It also helped create two completely different nines, a true bonus for golfers. The front nine is carved throughout steep coulee valleys that overlook the spectacular Bears paw Reservoir. It boasts exciting elevation drops, forced-carries over ravines and gullies

and tee shots through chutes of trees. The back nine is a more traditional Scottish links style – rolling terrain, bunkers, wild fescue grasses and water hazards. Golfers get a very unique and refreshing experience every time they play.

The renowned Devil’s Triad (holes No. 5, 6 and 7) features the course’s most challenging corner. The elevation changes here are incredible; the next stop for such dramatic changes are the Rocky Mountains.

“The Triad can definitely make or break your game,” says Heise. “If you play well through those three holes, you can score well, but it can also eat you up if you are not on your game or select the wrong clubs.”

Playing a total of 6,777 yards from the tips, the course can be as challenging or forgiving as you like. But with five sets of tees, you can almost roll the ball around the course from the front or junior tees.

For further course information, a new GPS system on the golf carts has been installed this year. “It is the best system on the market these days,” says Heise. “As far as staying innovative, it is a very cool tool and golfers really enjoy it.”

The system provides yardages (how far you drove the ball and how many yards to go) as well as exact pin placements, pro tips, hole graphics, an electronic score card, a ‘real-time’ leader board for events and even a sports ticker so you stay on top of things.

“Basically anything that can shave some strokes off a golfer’s game, golfer’s love,” says Heise. The GPS also doubles as a great management tool – the pro shop and marshal carts each have special screens that show where every cart is on the course. This

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prevents slow play and can track down a golfer quickly for any messages.

The golf course itself has undergone yearly renovations since its debut 12 years ago. Changes to both the esthetics and playability of the course have been the focus. Larger landing areas, more trees and more tee boxes are efforts Springbank Links has made to be a suitable choice for golfers of all ages and abilities.

"When we first opened, I admit we had an extremely golf tough course – too tough," explains Heise. "One of our mandates has been to make it as user-friendly as possible, without taking out the challenge – and we have had great results. People who played the course even four years ago will be very surprised and impressed with the improvements we have made to date."

Catering to families and kids of all ages, Springbank has also revamped their clubhouse this past winter. It now has a junior lounge, games room, billiards, foosball, a large screen for Nintendo Wii and even installed a California Forno pizza oven and pizza bar. "The kids love it," says Heise. "It has been a great move for family golf."

For its actions towards environmental stewardship, maintaining stunning scenery and providing championship golf, Springbank Links is a golf club moving in the right direction. The future looks bright for this growing course and also for the environment it protects. **BC**

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