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REALGOLF

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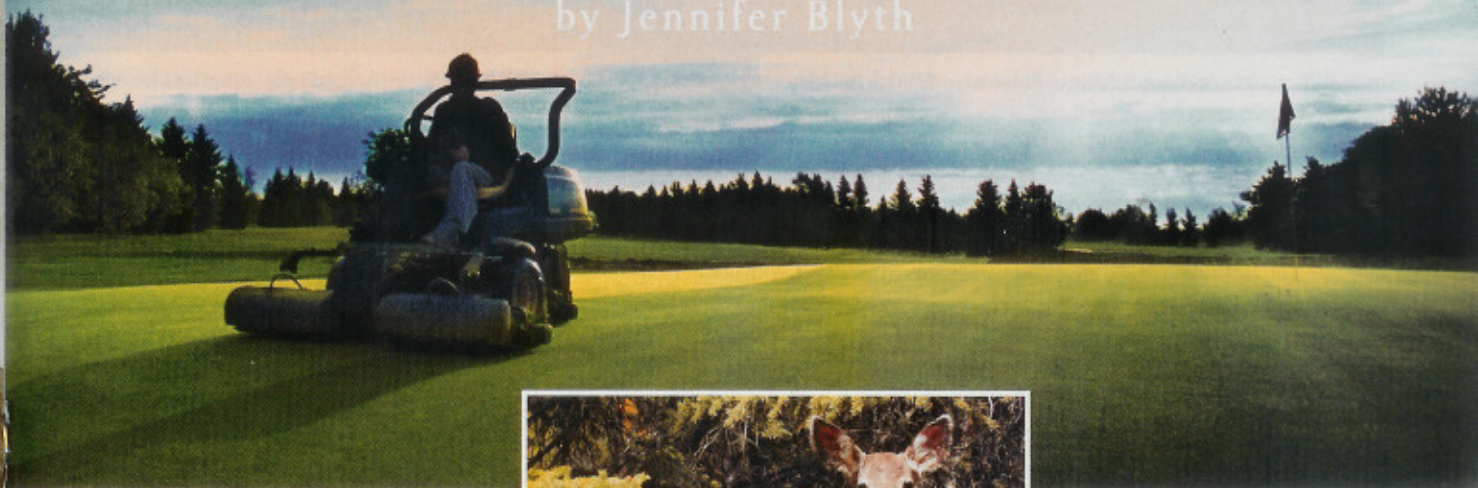
Jim McLaughlin

On Palmer, Augusta &
his favourite courses

Going GREEN

At several of Vancouver Island's premier golf courses, it's more than the greens that are 'green'

by Jennifer Blyth



FOR destination courses like Bear Mountain and Olympic View in Victoria, Arbutus Ridge in the Cowichan Valley and Crown Isle in the beautiful Comox Valley, "green" isn't just the colour of business; it's the philosophy behind it.

At Victoria's Bear Mountain Resort, where mountains and forest backdrop stunning ocean views and two Nicklaus-designed, 18-hole courses – the original Mountain course and brand-new Valley course – "we wanted to be proactive and do as much as we could without jeopardizing the quality of the turf," explains course superintendent Darren Burns. "Our greens department does care about the environment and we are doing our best to limit any negative impacts on the fauna surrounding the area and at the same time promote more wildlife."

A member of the international Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, Bear Mountain has made strides in minimizing its environmental impact. Steps the course has taken include integrating pest management to control turf problems and what Burns considers the course's most important improvement: "a spoon-feeding fertilizer



WILDLIFE & FAUNA
Golf courses are making strides to promote more fauna and wildlife in an effort to minimize their environmental impact.

program" that uses lower volumes of liquid fertilizer on a more frequent basis. "This allows the turf to absorb the product into the plant, thus limiting any runoff or leaching. We also use organic fertilizers when called for." Eventually, Bear Mountain's efforts will include Audubon certification.

Near Duncan, Arbutus Ridge Golf Club is one of only five golf courses in Canada to have measured its carbon footprint, says general manager Jason Lowe. To explore ways to reduce that footprint, its recently launched Greening Committee comprises members from various departments who meet monthly to pursue projects like setting up recycling

stations. The ultimate goal is to become carbon neutral, says committee chair Gracie Wilcox.

"Thirty years ago the thought process was 'more was better,' and golf superintendents didn't have the schooling or products available that we have today," Burns says, pointing out that the number of courses participating in the Audubon program is evidence of how this has changed. Still, the perception persists among some people that golf courses harm

the environment, when in fact it's just the opposite. "We do more to protect the environment than most homeowners do," Burns notes. "A well-maintained turf will out-compete weeds, thus reducing herbicide applications."

The Audubon Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses advises courses on developing effective conservation and wildlife enhancement programs. Through these initiatives, which can include mounting nesting boxes, using integrated pest-management techniques or preserving groundcover, courses enhance habitat for wildlife and preserve natural resources for the overall community.

After taking an inventory of its ecosystems and earning Audubon's Certificate in Environ-



mental Planning in April 2008, Arbutus Ridge is now working to meet criteria in five specific categories, beginning with wildlife and habitat management, which it has nearly completed. Other sections include chemical use reduction and safety, water conservation, water quality management, and outreach and education.

For Arbutus Ridge's sister course in Victoria, Olympic View Golf Club, the decision to pursue certification was natural. "I think Olympic View has always been managed with environmental concerns in mind. Just the setting of the course alone, where the front nine wraps through meadowland and the back is cut

through thick forests and rock outcroppings, has always given us a great appreciation for our surroundings," says assistant superintendent Patrick Solski.

Here, initiatives such as replacing old sprinklers with newer technology have made the course 30 per cent more water-efficient. Over the next five years, Olympic View plans to continue upgrading, aiming eventually for complete water self-sufficiency. And from an esthetic perspective, preserving the course's natural water systems enhances the stunning rural landscape.

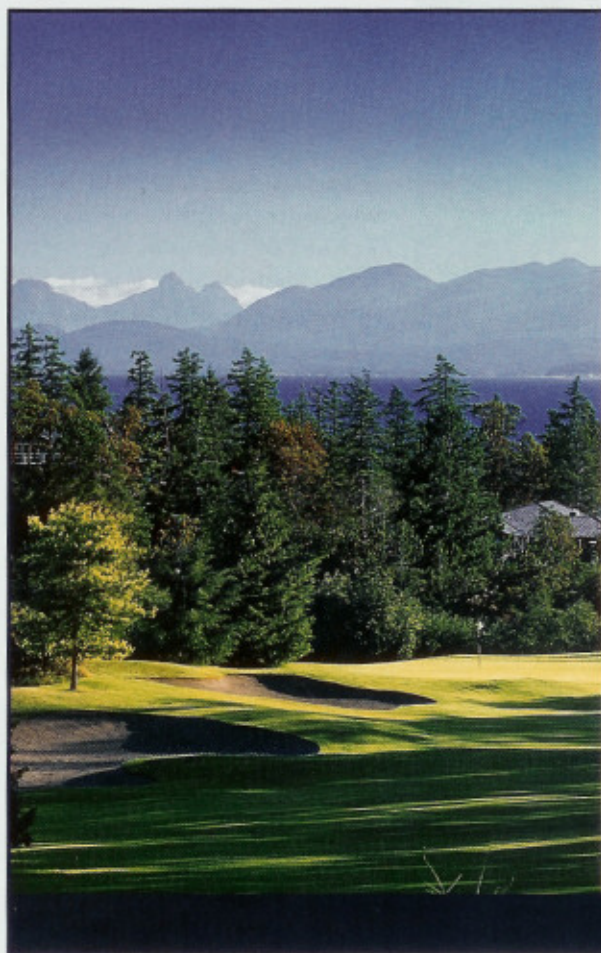
SHEEN OF GREEN

(l-r) Olympic View GC, Crown Isle and Bear Mountain. All three clubs have taken steps to make their courses more environmentally friendly and natural.

Accordingly, initiatives for wildlife include naturalizing out-of-play areas, zero maintenance in forested areas, providing wildlife corridors, using native plants and creating naturalized buffer zones around ponds.

For the Comox Valley's Crown Isle Resort, Audubon certification was simply "the right thing to do," says superintendent Mike Kearns. "We take our responsibility in caring for this property seriously, and realize the importance of doing so in a way that works hand-in-hand with our surrounding environment. As a golf

Olympic View GC/Crown Isle



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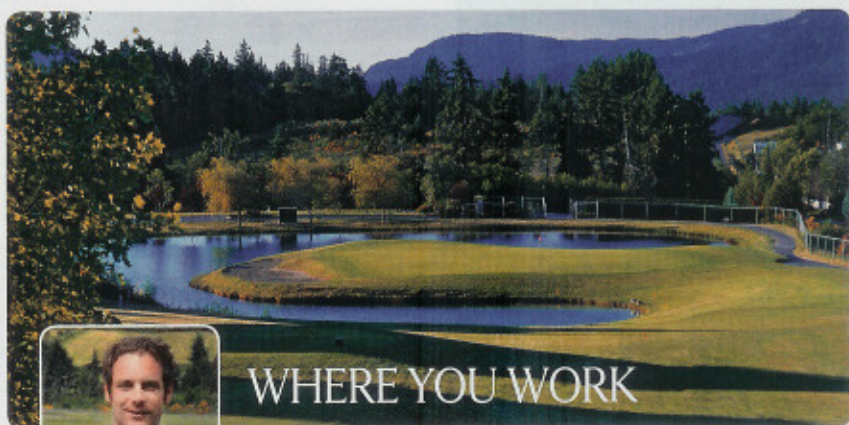
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course that is central to a housing development, this has added importance. Certification with the ACSP will help us measure our efforts and keep our maintenance procedures 'on track.'"

Currently in the early stages of evaluating and assessing its property, Crown Isle's steps to date have included site evaluation and mapping; an inventory of plant material; reducing mowable areas with some naturalizing; and establishing buffer areas around all ponds. Native plants are incorporated in all new planting, and irrigation upgrading has yielded a 30 to 40 per cent reduction in annual water use. Additionally, Crown Isle staff are working with

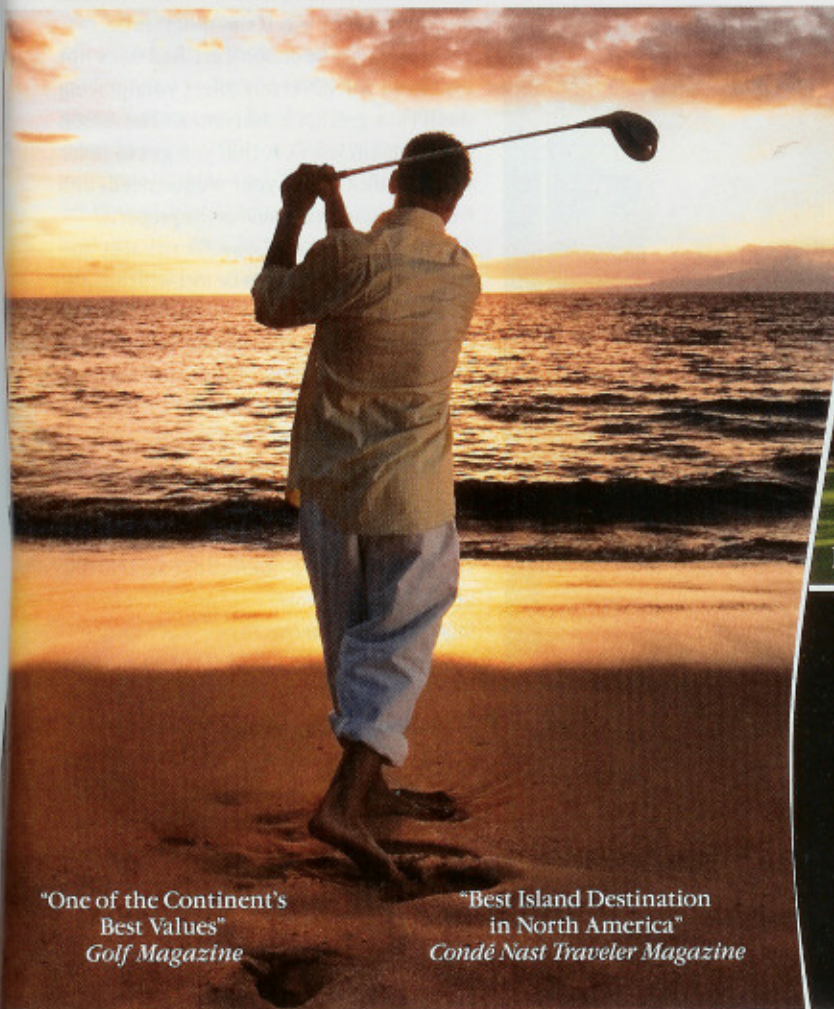
(Bear Mt., Ron Sangha)



WHERE YOU WORK

Jason Lowe believes in the benefits of Arbutus Ridge's Greening Committee. To start a committee, he offers the following suggestions:

- ▶ First, find a person to chair the committee, then determine its mission statement and goals.
- ▶ Create an inventory of current environmental initiatives and then compile a list of future projects, identifying any costs and a payback period to help prioritize goals.
- ▶ Get as many people involved as possible and begin with less extensive projects so committee members can begin projects right away; quick results can show everyone how the committee is working. At some point, it may be necessary to bring in third-party expertise and guidance, particularly when planning out long-term goals.
- ▶ Meetings should be structured and held regularly. While scheduling can be a challenge, motivated members will help the committee thrive, especially as they see the results of their efforts and personal philosophies come to fruition. ○

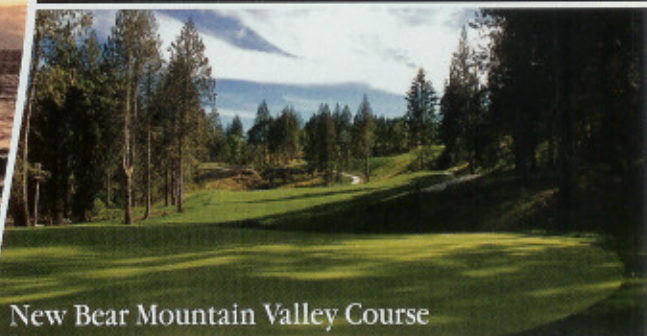


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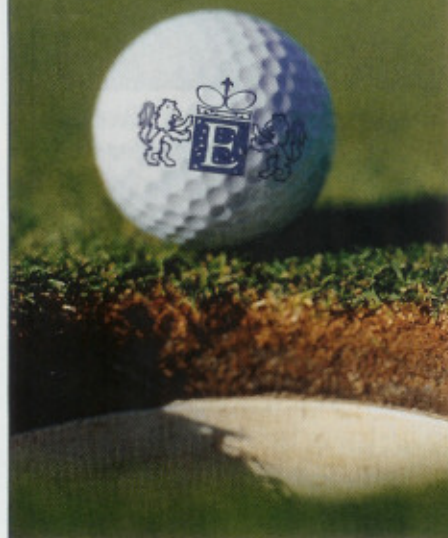
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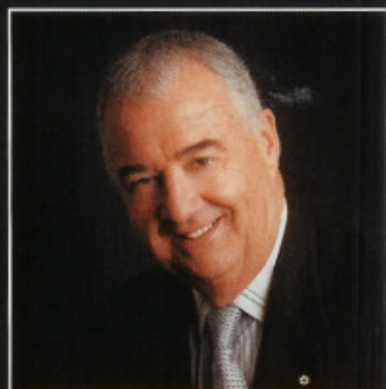
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the City of Courtenay to create a native tree grove adjacent to the golf course that will be used to educate the public and schoolchildren about native plant materials.

For Arbutus Ridge, the Audubon program links the course's aims of corporate social responsibility and sustainability with the goals of individual staff members. "It ties into our personal and business values and beliefs. Many of us want to do our part [personally] and carry those beliefs to the workplace," Lowe says.

At Bear Mountain, Burns agrees: "My staff and I take pride and enjoy doing what we are doing. To see all the wildlife enjoying our golf course is enough reward in itself"

And while there can be preliminary costs associated with greener business, there are also rewards. "I think it will be mandated some day and it's good business to be doing things before they are. It means we are progressive and have vision," Lowe says. The effort will also be able to offer a competitive advantage.

"[Getting] certified has a cost that comes with it but all of the initiatives we have taken on will pay for themselves in the long run," says Solski. "Many of the smaller projects have little to no cost. In fact, naturalizing areas decreases our maintenance costs and the increase of wildlife and habitat [may] increase revenues; [offering] golf the way it was meant to be.

"Becoming Audubon-certified does not mean you will adversely affect your playing surfaces or greens," Solski notes. "The reason this program works is that you get to tailor your certification to your unique needs and what your guests demand of the property."

Further, suggests Lowe, "drawbacks and challenges simply need to be met with innovation and creativity." For example, in 2008 Arbutus Ridge began collecting \$5 from complimentary green fees it gives to charities, relaying \$2.50 to Junior Golf and \$2.50 to the Greening Committee. "We give out many complimentary rounds for great causes, and the \$5 fee has been accepted by those whom we donate to and those receiving the actual vouchers. It's for a good cause so there is understanding," Lowe explains. Even better, "our Greening Committee now has a budget."

At Olympic View, Solski notes the course's "green" efforts have had a positive impact.

"Initially with some projects there are people upset to see changes to the golf course, but when people are properly informed about what we are trying to do, it's easier to paint that mental image of how fortunate we are to play the game we love in an ideal setting, while not detracting from our natural surroundings." ☺