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Family's decision pays off for golfers

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Any business needs improvements to keep up with the times, and the decision to make the financial commitment can a challenge – especially in a family-owned operation.

And if that family business is a golf course with aging greens, tree problems and cart paths requiring repair, the projected dollars mount quickly.

Finally, the Berrys made the “let’s-do-this” call, and golfers who play Golden Hills Golf and Country Club in Lexington are richer for their decision. In baseball terms, the Berrys hit a grand slam with new green complexes and surfaces, rebuilt bunkers, tree removal and repaved cart parts the most noticeable changes.

John Faye Berry developed the property that opened in 1988, and now son Chad, the superintendent, and daughter Dian, general manager and financial officer, run the club. They understood the need for upgrades, did their homework and the results are earning rave reviews.

“We had made improvements in the past as we could afford, which is the way we had been taught,” Dian Berry said. “But we hadn’t done anything like this. From the financial side, I was scared to death.”

The improvements came during a time Golden Hills faced another challenge – installation of a sewer line that impacted six holes and the driving range. The business and government had finally settled a years-long dispute over the sewer’s route and, Chad Berry said, “We made the best of the situation and decided, ‘When they come, we will redo the greens.’”

Berry had been testing grasses for several years. He used the shade-challenged 17th for a proving ground in 2012 and last year reworked the fifth and 14th.

Looking at the new Tifeagle bermudagrass putting surfaces today, “You would never believe they are only 12 weeks old,” Chad Berry said. “They were really ready to play after six weeks. We took videos and it’s amazing to see how they grew from day to day and week to week.

“We might be the only ones who appreciated the hot and dry weather. The long, hot dry days give the most sunlight and the highest soil temperature that are ideal for growing bermudagrass.”

Through the renovation on the course and installation of the sewer line, the 325-member club remained open for play with temporary greens.

“We had reciprocal opportunities at other clubs, but some members wanted to play here, so we changed our plans,” Dian Berry said. “We didn’t have that many players, and it was great to see all the cars back in the parking lot on Aug. 8. The membership has been great; they have stuck with us.”

The club dates to 1988, is open to public play and its history includes a club champion named Dustin Johnson.

In keeping with the family aspect of Golden Hills, Chad Berry’s sons worked on the project, and Dian remembered some long-ago advice from her dad.

“We were in his truck one day,” she said. “He told me, ‘You’ve got to spend money to make money – if you put it in the right spot.’”

The results are proof that they did.