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Executive Golf Course Fact Sheet

When it comes to golf, there is no other place in the world that comes close to The Villages. This golfing community brings endless opportunities for recreational play so residents and their guests may enjoy our many courses year-round. In 2023, more than 2.5 million rounds of golf were played on The Villages Executive Golf Courses alone. With this much bustling activity, it is necessary to have a long-term plan for the sustainability and perpetuity of the golfing experience.

The District occasionally receives inquiries when the golf course conditions do not align with our high standards. Rest assured, the Executive Golf Maintenance team works diligently to combat the typical challenges, such as weather conditions, lack of rain, increased golfer and golf car traffic, etc., that affect and can eventually diminish, the overall condition of the courses. We appreciate all residents who have contacted us with their concerns seeking a resolution or clarification. Please know that our professionally trained staff works around the clock with our contracted maintenance crews to deliver the highest quality play conditions on our Executive Golf courses. The Executive Golf Courses are a living and breathing landscape, and their anticipated life expectancies are regularly impacted by evolving conditions. Variables such as weather and traffic may contribute to the need for enhanced revitalization needs. Golf course renovations and infrastructure improvements can and should be part of our regular planning, especially considering the constant increase in rounds played annually. Our focus remains not only on the design preservation and playability of the courses, but also the aesthetics – a value that our residents and guests enjoy about the unique Villages community.

Golf Course Renovations & Maintenance:

Golf course renovations and course improvements are a top priority for the District. We recognize that the volume of rounds of golf, which far exceeds the “average”, for comparable private golf course and as a result, we have implemented an aggressive 10-year Capital Improvement Plan which will accelerate course renovations. All renovation projects and enhancements to the Executive Golf Courses will be presented to the appropriate Committee and Board as part of an overall asset management plan which consists of multiple renovations annually in addition to smaller, more frequent maintenance projects to ensure courses remain infrastructurally solid. While the average full renovation is every 20 years, we will renovate ours in the ten (10) to twelve (12) year timeframe which will include new greens, tees, fairways and bunkers while incorporating the newer turf varieties that are shade, traffic, and drought tolerant. Likewise, numerous, more frequent smaller renovation projects will include bunker sand replenishing and re-grassing tee tops. Improved bunker sand will be used during projects and drainage will be installed in wet areas on the courses. All of this will be a welcome addition to the golf experience, play performance and overall quality of the Executive Golf courses.

Through our close partnership with Audubon International, we exemplify The Villages’ core value of stewardship, prioritizing high environmental standards and initiatives throughout the Executive Golf Courses – doing our part to preserve the natural surroundings with an emphasis on water runoff and mitigation efforts. Advances in golf course construction methods and newer

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turfgrass varieties aid in our efforts to provide a great recreational playing surface. As we plan improvements, we include grasses that are more shade and drought tolerant, and more capable of handling year-round traffic.

Executive Golf Course Maintenance:

Continued maintenance is needed 365 days a year on our Executive Golf courses. The Executive Golf Maintenance Department works hand-in-hand with our contracted maintenance teams as they execute their daily duties of golf course preparation and general maintenance. Our department schedules regular monthly course closures for maintenance to aid with general upkeep, and it is also necessary to close courses periodically for rest and rehabilitation. This gives the maintenance teams time to perform essential cultural practices such as aerification, which relieves soil compaction and provides oxygen to the grass root zone – an important step for turf recovery during and after the busy season of golf, which here in The Villages is all year long.

The Executive Golf Maintenance Department oversees the contractors and provides accountability and coaching on course maintenance through on-site visits, evaluations, scheduled meetings, course ride arounds, soil testing, weekly reporting, and irrigation audits. We have enhanced the team effort with the contractors who maintain the Executive courses daily. Relationships centered on coaching, follow-through and trust will lead to fulfillment of higher expectations and accountability and ultimately, a better round for each golfer. We have also developed a positive synergy with the Championship Golf team, collaborating to offer combined educational opportunities for course staff, and ensuring we are working toward the same high standards and common goals for water management and other industry standards.

We have also renewed our focus on environmental stewardship. Through pursuit of our Audubon certification for all 36 of our Executive courses, we are finding ways to improve habitats for local wildlife, preserve native plant areas that require less fertilization, and being good stewards of scarce water resources. The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses (ACSP) is an award-winning education and certification program that helps golf courses protect the environment and preserve the natural heritage of the game of golf. The program helps golf officials enhance valuable natural areas and wildlife habitats that golf courses provide, improve efficiency and minimize potentially harmful impacts of golf operations.

Typical Maintenance Schedule:

Golf course maintenance teams start their day at the crack of dawn, so they have time to prepare their course for golfers with little disruption. Working early, with little disruption, enables them to operate at peak efficiency. Productivity substantially decreases later in the day when employees must be more mindful of play, so maintenance teams try to get the most from the first few hours of their day, typically well before sunrise.

On a typical morning, golf course maintenance workers mow turf across all 36 Executive Golf courses. In addition to mowing, our contractors and staff change hole locations, move tee

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markers, rake bunkers, clean up debris, scout for pests and irrigate select areas. After their morning work, a second round of tasks begins. This work often includes mowing rough, edging cart paths, and trimming the turf around bunkers and trees. Often, much of this work is completed before lunch to maximize the play experience of our golfers.

Despite an early start, not every job can be finished before morning play; weather, contractor availability, staff size, equipment availability and the golf schedule are just a few key factors that play a significant role in maintenance productivity. Unfortunately, in the vast majority of situations, it will be necessary for maintenance work to continue after golf play has commenced. Therefore, it's important for golfers to give maintenance teams time and space as they work hard to produce great playing conditions.

Golf Course Maintenance Standards:

The Executive Golf Maintenance Department takes great pride in the work that we do to provide our residents and guests with a pleasurable and challenging playing experience. We do this by ensuring that we document our maintenance standards to clearly define resident expectations and match them with the maintenance procedures. Because these expectations are defined by direct feedback from the players, guests, staff members and other professionals, maintenance standards are a valuable tool in determining whether time and money spent in maintaining certain aspects of the Executive Golf courses are actually focused on the areas most important to the players.

Why Is Golf Maintenance Important?

Here are some facts about golf course maintenance, and what can happen if steps are not taken to care for our beautiful Executive Golf courses:

- **Mowing**

If there is grass growing actively, the golf course areas need to be mowed frequently, if not, aggressive measures must be taken to clean or even re-grass the field to return to its normal playability state. Usually, grass on the tees and fairways should be mown at least every three days. Mowing heights can be slowly reduced for overgrown grasses, although playing quality may be different than the usual, that's if these areas can even be restored at all. As for putting greens, they become an issue, particularly if they are left to grow and not mown due to their very low normal mowing heights. Also, we use specialized grasses in many areas including the tees.

One thing that should not be taken for granted is the fact that mowing is the best way to control weeds. Thus, if this is suspended for long periods, there is a higher likelihood that weeds will grow abundantly, and more work must be done once maintenance continues.

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- **Irrigation**

The need to irrigate depends on several elements, such as rainfall, soil type, and temperature. If the grass is not sufficiently watered, it can wither and die quickly. On the other hand, some types of grasses can tolerate drought better than others. These include Zoysia grass and Bermuda grass. Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue, bentgrass, and Poa annua are cool-season grasses that can't tolerate drought. The type of playing surface also makes a difference. Rough areas usually tolerate dryness more than the putting greens, which are the least tolerant, and won't typically survive without water for a day or two.

- **Fertilizer And Protectant Application**

Fertilizers and wetting agents are generally applied to make sure that the turf remains healthy and provides the best playing conditions. Plant protectants, on the other hand, are applied at certain times to prevent diseases, insects, or weeds from destroying the grass or affecting playing conditions. We must periodically close courses to apply these products, or we will experience turf decline because of insect and disease outbreak. Weeds will most likely invade, causing many problems in terms of playability for the rest of the season.

- **Bunker Maintenance**

Regular bunker maintenance is essential in creating excellent playing conditions, and it also inhibits weeds from appearing in the sand. If bunkers are not routinely maintained, these weeds will soon cover the sand. Consequently, if the sand remains unrepaired, the bunkers' conditions will seriously decline. Sand washouts can ultimately lead to sand contamination, and when this happens, it must be completely replaced – more work and more cost. The bunkers, too, will need to be rebuilt as part of the overall renovation plan for Executive Golf courses. Bunkers test a golfer's ability to either play in the sand or avoid hitting the sand. They represent a temporary handicap to be overcome with skill, determination, and luck. More than 52% of players say high-quality bunkers are essential to a positive golfing experience. Per our contract(s), bunkers are raked out three (3) times per week. Players should also rake out bunkers after all play within the bunker.

- **Weather & Water Challenges**

Golf maintenance teams are having to maintain cold season and warm season turf in the same place at the same time during the high season. Spring is the time of the year that we call "transition season", where we are not only transitioning from one season to the next, but also from one turf type to another. It gets a little too warm for the ryegrass that we put on the tee boxes, however it's still a little too cool for the bermudagrass to take back over. Dry and drought conditions place extra stress on turf conditions, when only limited amounts of stormwater or reclaimed irrigation water are available for Executive Golf courses. All our Executive Golf courses are held to strict water allocations set by Southwest Florida Water Management District or the St. Johns Water Management District. Our courses are not allowed to water more than they are allocated during each

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month. Priority of areas when watering for Executive Golf is the greens, then the tees and fairways and lastly the rough.

Some of our Executive Golf courses experience high bicarbonate and pH water build-up in the irrigation lines and frequently have irrigation problems such as inoperable sprinkler heads. This makes it necessary for maintenance teams to flush out the system and inject products into the irrigation system to combat the problem. Important applications of fertilizers and pre-emergent herbicides are also completed on a seasonal and as-needed basis.

- **Water Features:**

Water retention basins, ponds and lakes are other aspects of many golf courses that require maintenance. Maintenance includes cutting the grass around the water bodies, as well as aquatic weed control. Nearly everybody of water in Florida has alligators in it, be aware of your surroundings at all times, do not feed, harass or otherwise molest the alligators.

- **Traffic & High Volumes of Players:**

High amounts of foot and golf car traffic on the Executive Courses produces compacted soils which increase drainage, disease and weed pressures. With 2.5 million annual rounds on our Executive Courses, they sustain significant damage and abuse from the heavy use. The high-use season is January through May. We recognize that the volume of rounds of golf, which far exceeds the “average”, for comparable private golf course and as a result, we have implemented an aggressive 10-year Capital Improvement Plan which will accelerate course renovations. All renovation projects and enhancements to the Executive Golf Courses will be presented to the appropriate Committee and Board as part of an overall asset management plan which consists of multiple renovations annually in addition to smaller, more frequent maintenance projects to ensure courses remain infrastructurally solid. While the average full renovation is every 20 years, we will renovate ours in the ten (10) to twelve (12) year timeframe which will include new greens, tees, fairways and bunkers while incorporating the newer turf varieties that are shade, traffic, and drought tolerant Likewise, numerous, more frequent smaller renovation projects will include bunker sand replenishing and re-grassing tee tops. Improved bunker sand will be used during projects and drainage will be installed in wet areas on the courses.

- **Ball Marks:**

One of the other high priorities for Executive Courses is repairing ball marks every day. When golf balls fall from the sky, they make depression marks on the turf. In turn, these marks make the putting green uneven. Consequently, golfers find themselves misdirecting their putts. A properly repaired ball mark heals completely in 2-3 days, while an unrepaired ball mark takes 15-20 days to heal properly. Predictable slope, speed

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and putting surfaces are crucial to a good golfing experience. Maintenance crews inspect each green with a “ball mark repair tool” to repair all visible marks.

- **Divot Repairs:**

Players sometimes cut the turf during golf strokes or by shuffling their feet. The daily damage caused by divots will depend on the number of rounds played, and we play a lot of rounds of golf annually on our Executive Golf courses. Low-traffic courses don't see frequent divot damage, while heavily used courses need more daily repairs. The most critical divots to fix are those located in the primary field of play.

Golf Etiquette and Helping to Maintain The Golf Courses:

- Keep golf cars on assigned paths only.
- Show up early for your tee time and obey the cart path rules. Depending on seasonal conditions, driving off the path will result in damage to the turf areas. Also, comply with the speed limit rules.
- Golf car tires must have a rounded vertical tread with a maximum depth of ¼ inches. Total tire width must be a minimum of 8 inches. Tire pressure must not exceed 28 psi.
- Fix noticeable ball marks using a tool to close the mark and then smooth with the putter or your foot.
- Before leaving a bunker, a player should carefully smooth over all holes and footprints with the provided rake.
- Practicing good golf etiquette not only enhances the friendly atmosphere that The Villages is known for, but it can make a significant difference on the health and playability of the courses. For example:
 - Taking the time to fill your divots and repair your ball marks not only provides an even playing surface for the players behind you, but it also helps the grass recover and grow in more quickly.
 - Observing cart directional signs and stakes and avoiding driving too close to tees and greens protects the playing surface. Courses are monitored frequently to identify areas that might be especially worn, prone to mud or erosion, or working to regenerate. Please be mindful of these areas as you visit your favorite courses.
 - Retrieving your ball from the cup with your hand slowly and carefully while the flag remains in the cup, in accordance with a recent United States Golf Association (USGA) rules update, means that future putts will not be adversely affected by a

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cup with dinged edges. When damage does occur, maintenance staff must cut a new hole location – an extra step in an already busy day.

- Replace your divots, avoid walking on the steep face of a bunker, repair any pitch marks or indentations caused by hitting the green. Using a tee, knife, key or repair tool, repair the mark by working the edges towards the center, without lifting the center of the mark. Don't tear the grass. Finish by smoothing the area with a club or your foot. Try to get the area smooth enough to putt over.
- Land in the bunker? Take a few moments to rake out your footprints and play area. This makes the area more aesthetically pleasing and playable for the remainder of the day. It also allows the maintenance team to focus on other detailed work.
- Don't talk while others are hitting and do not distract other golfers. Always be silent and stand out of view of golfers. Make sure you stay off your phone and always know when other golfers are hitting.
- Be careful where you walk at all times, and do not spend too much time looking for balls. When in a group, help other players to find their ball to keep the game play moving.
- Maintain an appropriate pace and avoid slow play. Keep pace with the group ahead of you and keep the game moving. Don't hit a ball into the group ahead of you.
- Don't step on your fellow players putting lines - the imaginary line that connects the ball to the hole. If your ball is on a player's line, volunteer to mark the ball. If your ball is not furthest from the cup: mark your ball, either with a plastic marker or a small, thin, dark coin such as an old penny. After you have marked your ball, place your putter down at a 90-degree angle with the heel touching your marker. Move the marker from the heel to the toe of your putter. Reverse the procedure to return the ball to its original position.
- Do not stand where you might distract a fellow player and don't move. Don't make any noise when your fellow player is preparing to putt. If you hold the flagstick, do so at arm's length so the flag doesn't flutter in the breeze, and make sure your shadow doesn't fall across the hole or line. The flagstick should be removed right after the player has hit the ball.
- If you lay down the flagstick, lay it off the green to prevent doing any damage to the green.

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- Always yell “FORE”, when an errant ball is hit towards others. Fore is a commonly used golf term which means “duck and get to cover”. While it is rare for someone to get hit by a golf ball, it can happen and may result in serious injury.
- After everyone has puttied out, immediately walk to the next tee.

Did You Know? Fun Golf Course Facts!

- A properly repaired ball mark heals completely in 2-3 days, while an unrepaired ball mark takes 15-20 days to heal properly.
- A typical 9-hole golf course covers approximately 60 - 75 acres of land. The total landmass of golf courses in the United States equals about 1/2 the state of Connecticut.
- A typical 9-hole golf course produces enough oxygen to support 2,000 to 4,000 people. Golf courses nationwide combine to filter 13 million tons of dust from the air every year.
- Golf courses have a cooling effect during the hot summer months. The average temperature on the golf course is typically 5- 7 degrees cooler than a residential area and 7 -1 5 degrees cooler than an urban downtown setting.
- Golf courses delay play on frost-covered turf (especially greens) because stepping on frost-covered grass causes the frozen leaf cells to rupture. The turf will turn brown and eventually die.
- Why do golf course superintendents aerate turf? Because it reduces compaction on a golf course by removing soil cores from the ground, allowing the movement of water, air and nutrients to the turf roots. Highly traveled areas plus poor soil composition creates compacted surfaces.
- How much has technology and research improved the speed and quality of a putting green? In the early 1960s, professional tour event superintendents cut putting green turf heights at about 1/4 inch. Today, the height of putting green turf for professional tournament competition is 1/8 inch or less.
- How do trees affect the quality of a putting surface? All things being equal, a putting green with air circulating around it will be in better shape than a green with little or no air circulation. Trees tend to reduce circulation, thereby having a negative effect on putting green quality. Older, more mature trees adjacent to putting greens will negatively impact surface conditions because the tree roots will grow under the putting surface and disrupt

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the flow of water and nutrients.

- What is a golf course superintendent doing when he/she syringes a green? Syringing is the process of spraying a light cover of water on a green during hot weather to reduce the temperature of the turf. This prevents putting surfaces from becoming "baked" and "dried-out," and having a negative impact on putting surface quality.
- Golf courses have a positive impact on the economy. It is estimated that more than 25 million people annually spend 2.5 billion hours outside, playing one of the nation's 17,000-plus golf courses. The impact of golf facilities on the economy is \$20 billion annually.

Information related to Executive Golf is available at:

<https://www.districtgov.org/departments/golf/golf.aspx>

For additional information, please visit DistrictGov.org or contact Mitch Leininger, Executive Golf Maintenance Director at 352-674-1805 or ExecutiveGolfMaintenance@DistrictGov.org

Sources:

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