

Picture *This*

It's one thing to make your golf course environmentally friendly. It's another thing to spread the word of what you're doing to benefit your course and the entire industry

Dave Barber treads up the nature trail between the third and fourth holes at Cranberry Highlands Golf Course. It's the height of summer and the trees, brush and myriad plant life that enclose the trail are in full bloom. Birds whistle and squirrels scatter against a placid backdrop. The forest's lushness provides a haven from the searing sun on this July day.

The half-mile nature trail isn't a secret spot where Barber, golf course superintendent at Cranberry Highlands, goes for a little downtime during a busy day. Just the opposite, Barber wants everyone — from Cranberry Township, where the course is located, to Pittsburgh, the city that borders the town — to know the trail exists. It's an integral component of the golf course, which prides itself on its environmental prowess.

Barber and his maintenance crew built the trail last year. Cranberry Highlands invites various groups, from Boy Scouts to birdwatchers, to walk the trail. Trail guides, including Barber, take the time to educate visitors about the golf course, telling them how they use pesticides responsibly and how the course acts as a haven for wildlife, among many other things.

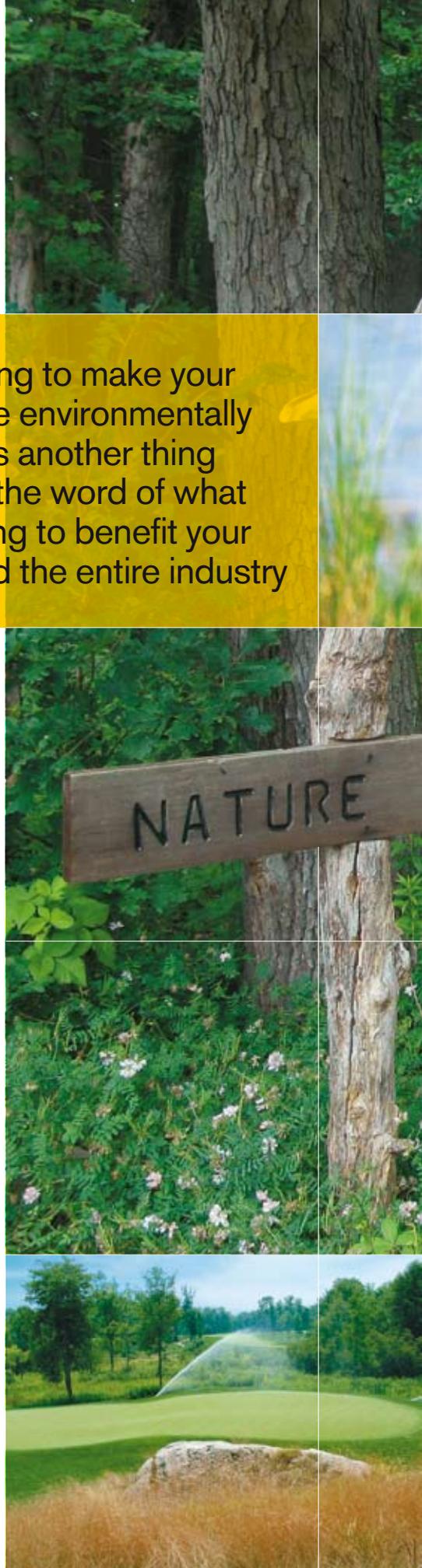
"I want the course to make an environmental statement because a lot of people believe golf courses are just pesticide dumps," Barber says.

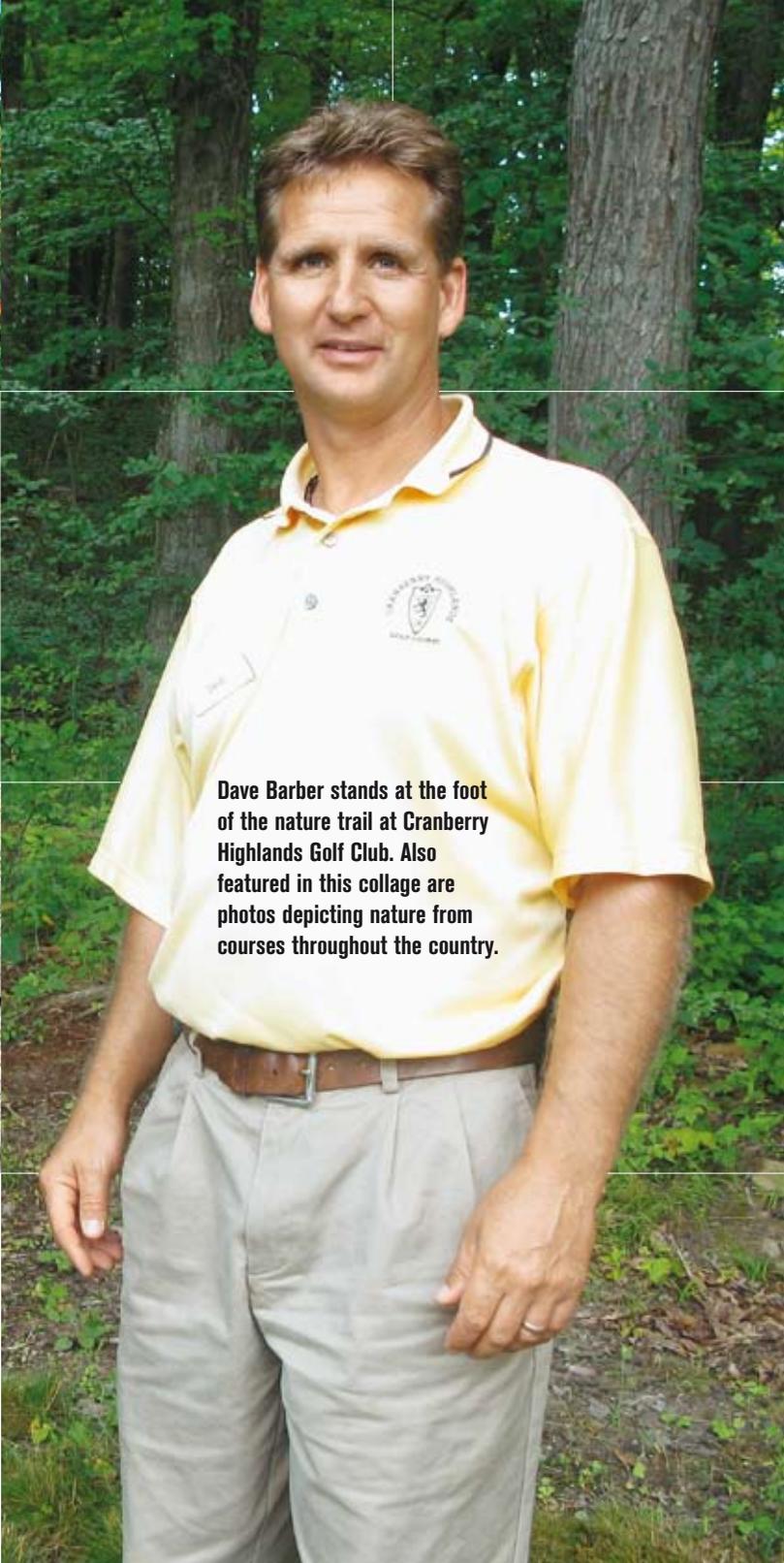
It's one thing for superintendents to implement programs to make their golf courses environmentally sound. It's another thing for them to spread the word — to golfers and non-golfers alike — of what they're doing to benefit their courses and the entire golf industry.

More than ever, golf courses are being scrutinized for their ecological worth in this so-called "green" age. Activists accuse courses of various infractions, from wasting water to using too many pesticides. Alas, many superintendents realize the importance of stepping up to promote their courses' eco-friendly sides through various endeavors.

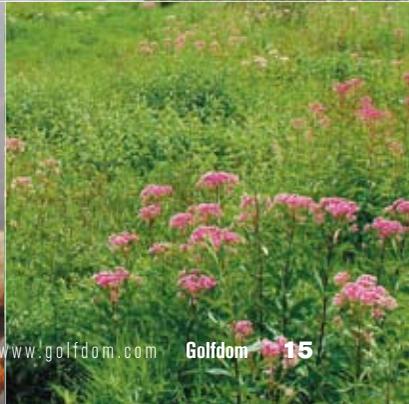
"We have to be more proactive," Barber says.

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF





Dave Barber stands at the foot of the nature trail at Cranberry Highlands Golf Club. Also featured in this collage are photos depicting nature from courses throughout the country.



On the offensive

From its beginning, Cranberry Highlands Golf Course has touted a message of environmental stewardship. Barber, who was brought on during design and construction of the course in 2001, worked closely with Bill Love, who's known for his environmentally friendly architectural approach.

In January 2009, Cranberry Highlands achieved certification in environmental planning from the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses, an international program administered by Audubon International, a not-for-profit environmental education organization.

Barber, who spearheaded the project, has used the certification to promote the course's image. Throughout the course, golfers and other visitors will find a colorful brochure with the title, "Find Sanctuary at Cranberry Highlands: An Audubon-Certified

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PHOTOS BY: JOE HUBBARD AND LARRY AYLWARD

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Golf Experience,” that details the course’s environmental philosophy.

At Sand Ridge Golf Club in Chardon, Ohio, superintendent Brent Palich and other staff members conduct educational walks around the course pertaining to bird and plant life. They tell people that Sand Ridge occupies 300 acres, 150 of which are wetlands. They also tell people the course, which opened in 1998, was designed and constructed to function in harmony with the environment and is maintained with the same intent by Palich and his crew. Sand Ridge is a member of Audubon International’s Signature Cooperative Sanctuary Program, which means it was planned and



“The members are extremely proud of the property as a golf course and a nature preserve.”

– Brent Palich

constructed and is managed with a focus on environmental quality.

Because buzzwords like “green,” “sustainability” and “carbon footprint” are becoming household words, superintendents are fielding more questions about how those terms fit into what they’re doing on their golf courses. They

must be prepared to answer them, Palich points out.

Sand Ridge has assembled a PowerPoint presentation to highlight its environmental achievements and sustainability projects. The presentation will soon be posted on the club’s revamped Web site.

Palich is pleased to know the environmental message is hitting home when he sees members giving their guests tours of the course, sans golf clubs, and pointing

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10 Things You Can Do to Promote Your Course’s Environmental Prowess

Christopher S. Gray Sr., superintendent and general manager of the Marvel Golf Club in Benton, Ky., has implemented several environmental programs at his course and has received several honors for his environmental work. Most recently, he was named the “Environmental Communicator of the Year” by the Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association. Below, Gray lists 10 things superintendents can do to spread the word to golfers and the general public about their environmental endeavors.

1 Course Signage — Actually seeing and experiencing the environmental feature while reading about it is one of the most effective means of conveying your point. While smaller signs are functional, larger display boards give you more space to communicate.

2 Newsletters — For club-specific information, this is a time-tested no-brainer. These classic information providers hang around the clubhouse, locker rooms, lounges and restrooms — ensuring that people will pick them up and read.

3 Web site — Most everyone checks out a golf course’s Web site. Having a section

dedicated to your department will provide an excellent place to highlight your department’s environmental work. Include contact information for people who want more information.

4 Blogs — For the truly up-to-date, maintaining an environmental blog has become one of the most effective tools for communicating environmental efforts, exchanging ideas and sharing philosophies.

5 Presentations — You should have a few of these, of varying lengths, ready to go. Whether it’s for your greens committee or a local school, a well-prepared, informative presentation resonates with most everyone.

6 Poster Boards — There’s still value in producing an attractive poster board for the clubhouse and locker room. With today’s technology, creating these are simply a matter of copying and pasting what already been done electronically.

7 Nature Walks / Environmental Tours — Setting up a course that highlights the environmental work and feature of your

course and facility offers guests the opportunity to absorb your accomplishments and ask questions on matters they may not fully understand. These tours are perfect for your members, visiting students and the media.

8 Bird Counts — There are few greater ways to get your members and community involved in your environmental work than being part of a bird count for your golf property. In addition to walking the property, counting the different species of birds gives validation to your environmental efforts.

9 Press Releases — Preparing a simple, yet well-worded, press release for local and state newspapers will expand the reach of your environmental stewardship efforts far beyond just the golfers of your community.

10 Write Articles — Local newspapers are often looking for guest articles and columns that specifically address local issues. Contact the newspaper’s editor with ideas on how to promote environmentalism with a lead-by-example mentality.



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out the variety of plant life and nature, such as the dam built by a beaver in one of the wetlands.

“The members are extremely proud of the property as a golf course and a nature preserve,” Palich says.

How does Rick Slattery communicate that his golf course is environmentally friendly? “Any chance I get, and to anyone and everyone who will listen,” says Slattery, the superintendent of Locust Hill Country Club, and 18-hole private club in Pittsford, N.Y.

Slattery aims to manage high-quality turf with low inputs. His motto is, “Let grass grow, don’t make it grow.”

“Like a drumbeat, I persistently explain my management style to the Locust Hill membership,” Slattery says. “The membership dynamics are always changing — long-time members need to be refreshed, and newer members need to be educated with the basics.”

Slattery says he’s fortunate to have the opportunity at Locust Hill to communicate his environmental message on a larger stage because the club hosts an annual LPGA event. In interviews with local and national media, Slattery touts his environmental programs.

Tim Fleegel, superintendent of



“The animals are here, and we’re just kind of here with them,” says superintendent Tim Fleegel, whose course created a wildlife bulletin board (left) in the pro shop for golfers and the course’s employees to post photographs.

Bear Mountain Ranch Golf Course in Chelan, Wash., gets a little help from his furry friends to tout his course’s environmental endeavors. Bear Mountain, carved out of the hillsides that border the Cascade Mountains in eastern Washington, features an abundance of wildlife often seen by golfers. It’s easy for those golfers to assume the course is a haven for wildlife — not a detriment to the environment.

“People view our course as a friend, not a foe of the environment,” Fleegel says. “A reason for that is the amount of wildlife golfers see while playing.”

One morning, Fleegel was driving his utility vehicle around the course when he came upon a doe cleaning off her newborn fawn. A few months ago, a

mother bear and her two cubs climbed a tree near the first hole. Besides deer and bears, the land surrounding and including the course is also abundant with coyotes, bald eagles, osprey and snakes.

A wildlife bulletin board was created in the pro shop for golfers and the course’s employees to post photographs of the critters they see on the course.

“The animals are here, and we’re just kind of here with them,” Fleegel says.

Wildlife is also welcomed at New Jersey’s Newton Country Club, where Les Carpenter is superintendent of the 18-hole private club. Carpenter says natural areas on the course are used as nursing grounds for does and their fawns.

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Township, is also a base for bears, wild turkeys and several bird species.

Carpenter has utilized the media to help get the word out about his course's environmental endeavors. Newton achieved certification in environmental planning from the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf Courses in 1998 and was recently recertified.

"When we first were certified, we did a television spot with the local television station," says Carpenter, who's in his 25th season at Newton. "We've had five different newspaper articles written about us since then."

Because they've gone on the offensive to promote their environmental programs, superintendents like Carpenter, Barber, Palich, Fleegel and Slattery are prepared for environmentalists who might accuse them of being reckless when it comes to ecological responsibility. All they have to do is tell them what they're doing.

"If someone was to accuse me of that, I would tell that person the course has gone from 0 to about 40 acres of naturalized areas since 1998, and that I've stopped irrigating 10 other acres in that time," Carpenter says.

Transcending the message

While Barber does his share of public relations to spread the word about his course's environmental initiatives, he credits the township's trustees for com-



"We've had five different newspaper articles written about us."

— Les Carpenter

municating the course's environmental initiatives to the public.

Barber maintains solid communication with the township's manager and five supervisors, all of whom are elected officials. Barber explains to them in detail what he's doing on the golf course and how it impacts the environment. They, in turn, tell others who reside in the township.

Barber is thankful the township has embraced the course's environmental programs. But he's not surprised. Even prior to the golf course being built, the township had a sustainability program in place anchored by a water tertiary treatment plant, in which treated water is disinfected chemically so it can be used for groundwater discharge and other purposes. So when the course was built, irrigating it with the township's effluent was an easy choice.

"We're the pioneers in this area to use effluent," Barber says.

Cranberry Highlands also implemented golf course hayrides last fall

— yes, you read that correctly — to help transcend its environmental message. The plan is attract parents and their children to the hayrides and educate them.

"We take them around the course and talk about the course and the environment," Barber says.

Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts and other community groups can also help transcend a course's environmental message. At Newton Country Club, local Cub Scout groups have been assigned to watch over the bird boxes on the course. Yes, arranging for Cub Scout meetings on your course will take up even more of a superintendent's time, but it's worth the effort, Carpenter says.

More important than ever

Superintendents need to tout golf's positive role in the environment. And they need to become their courses' spokespeople for this message.

"This has and will become even more of an extension of our jobs," Palich says.

Despite the daily challenges of maintaining his course, Palich has challenged himself even more to educate people about the club's environmental approach.

Slattery will continue to speak to whomever will listen about his environmental philosophy. He's also working the other side of the fence by preparing future superintendents to spread the word.

"I've had close to 50 interns and assistants come through Locust Hill while I've been here," he says. "Many of them have gone out on their own with a philosophy they learned here." ■