

“Implementing environmental measures slowly is not a huge capital expense and in the long term actually can reduce overall maintenance costs.” – David Warwick, Avondale Golf Club



Avondale looks to the future

Over the past decade, Avondale Golf Club in Sydney has established itself as one of the pioneers of golf course environmental management in Australia, if not the world. Whether it's the club's involvement with Audubon, its aggressive promotion of native flora, through to the continual fine-tuning of environment management practices, the club has won many admirers both in Australia and around the globe.

For course superintendent David Warwick, such a reputation has been hard earned and as the accolades have come they reaffirm an ideal that was founded more than 20 years ago when he was a humble apprentice.

Warwick's affinity for environmental management can be traced back to an article on Audubon he read in the GCSAA's journal Golf Course Management. The article struck a chord with the young greenkeeper and it wasn't until he assumed the mantle of superintendent at Queensland's Arundel Hills Golf Club a number of years later that he started instituting some of his ideas.

Around that time general environmental awareness was starting to build among the public and some of the environmental initiatives Warwick had instituted at Arundel Hills made headlines in the local media. Seizing on this, his general manager at the time saw Warwick's efforts as a major drawcard and the publicity endeared the club to the local community.

That trend continued when Warwick was successful in getting the superintendent position at Avondale Golf Club. The club's location and setting were tailor-made for Warwick and his ideas and instantly he could see the huge potential the course offered.

In the late 1990s Warwick attended the GCSAA conference in Orlando, Florida and

Avondale Golf Club has for years set the benchmark when it comes to golf course environmental management. ATM asks superintendent David Warwick where to now for the club.



at the Golf Show visited the Audubon stand. Arriving back home he convinced management and committee that joining the programme was in the club's best interests. Having already documented a lot of what the course was doing environmentally, certification proved to be a relatively straightforward process and the club became one of the first in Australia to be part of the Audubon scheme.

"I reckon 99 per cent of Australian superintendents would get Audubon certification," claims Warwick, who has been superintendent at Avondale since 1996. "Everyone is environmentally conscious and doing good work, it's just the paperwork that makes some people apprehensive. I have taken and adapted things that I have seen and read about over the years, implemented them here and then documented it which is the key.

"There are a lot of guys out there doing some great work and the level of environmental

consciousness within the industry has without question improved in the last couple of years. That has come about through education, the AGCSA and the likes of the Claude Crockford award recognising environmental excellence and the great work of other superintendents. The industry is right up there now and it's great to see everyone doing their bit."

At the 2004 conference in Melbourne, Warwick's efforts were recognised at the highest level when he was bestowed the AGCSA's Claude Crockford Environmental Award. It was at that same conference Warwick met a man by the name of Terry Muir.

Approaching Muir following his keynote presentation, Warwick introduced himself to which Muir responded, "I've been looking for you!" A few weeks later Warwick was showing Muir around Avondale and from that day forward a close relationship was born.

"Terry Muir has been a godsend for the industry," states Warwick. "Since that conference we have developed a strong working relationship and have a lot of respect for what the other has done. Quite frankly, I think the man is a bloody genius. I've learnt so much from him and I would like to think that I've helped him in some way enhance the e-par system.

"Terry and his business have been a blessing in disguise. He has done so much to help our industry and I think the principles of Audubon and e-par work well together. One is about the paperwork and documenting things and the other focuses on the practical environmental aspects out on the course."

With Muir's help Avondale recently conducted an energy audit and also hosted the drumMUSTER pilot day in Sydney late last year which netted nearly 800 containers.

Also aiding Warwick in his environmental endeavours is Avondale general manager Symon Scott who together with the committee has been a strong proponent of such initiatives at the club. To further engender support, Warwick is a prolific communicator and in his committee reports environmental management issues always top the agenda.

FINE-TUNING FOR THE FUTURE

While Avondale has firmly established its credentials in the area of environmental management, Warwick says there are still certain aspects he wants to focus on. Not surprisingly, topping the list is water management.

In the summer of 2006/07 water storage levels dropped to such a critical stage that fairway irrigation was halted. Avondale, which has just one 29M storage facility on course, is totally reliant on the collection and containment of stormwater which comes from the surrounding 220ha catchment area. The dry conditions that summer hit home just how vulnerable the club was.

In response to this, in the latter half of 2007 the club commissioned a water management report. Although finding an already high degree of irrigation efficiency and management in place, there were still opportunities to increase efficiencies through a number of means.

Ironically, the report highlighted that if the club extended its irrigation system it would be able to water the course more efficiently. The report found that the greatest area of water waste was overwatering of fairways in order to provide adequate water for rough areas. By installing more sprinklers in those areas the club would not only have better surfaces but would actually save on water usage. Other recommendations in the report included conducting a feasibility study into sewer mining, as well as increasing dam storage capacity.

Other work on the cards includes looking at installing rainwater tanks for machinery washdown, while Warwick is also keen on introducing more native grasses to rough carry areas and integrating the surrounding bushland further into the golf course.

"We haven't reached a peak, so to speak, but it's now more about maintaining the level we have got to and fine-tuning a few areas," says Warwick. "We have a fantastic base here at Avondale and the staff have played a huge part in that, particularly former horticulturalist Alex Palmer and our current horticulturalist Mark Massingham.

"The other advantage we have is that the club has the money to reach these environmental goals. In a way it's unfair to highlight Avondale because we have the resources available so it's easier for us compared to those courses that don't have the money. But I can guarantee you the guys in those clubs have just as much drive as I do when it comes to the environment and they are doing some great work given the constraints they have to operate in.

"Implementing environmental measures slowly is not a huge capital expense and in the long-term actually can reduce overall maintenance costs. That's what we have found here over the years. Environmental management should be seen as an investment and one which all clubs should make." 🌱