

Making ‘Over Par’ a Good Thing.

In late 2014, Tom Dempsey, Saddlebrook’s owner, was very disappointed in the condition of his golf courses and new practice facility. All had slipped into unacceptable condition, the result of many factors which had accumulated over several years. He decided it was time to reinvest whatever it took to bring both golf courses and the new Saddlebrook Golf Academy Practice Facility up to International Standards.

In early 2015, Saddlebrook Resort hired Chip Lewiston, Golf Course Manager very experienced at bringing distressed golf courses back to “International Standards” conditioning. He has experience both nationally and internationally in golf course management. He also has televised PGA Tournament preparations experience and had the true desire to help turn things around.

Course conditions in 2015 were an issue not only to resort guests, but also to the Saddlebrook Golf Academy. To attract guests and especially golf students, the courses needed to be at the highest standards throughout the year. This was certainly not the case in 2015. That was all about to change.

Discussion, planning, and prioritizing between Manager and Owner developed the over-all strategy. The goal was to visually and physically vastly improve these three areas. Additional manpower, equipment, and materials were requested and received to begin the reconditioning and reconstruction needed. The long term goal was to achieve consistent exceptional conditioning throughout the year.

It proved to be an exceptional year of record rains in 2015, which hampered progress throughout the year. However, progress was beginning to show. Since the beginning of 2016, efforts to stay on schedule with improvements began to fast-track. Work was being done on all aspects of course improvement by then and there was much more being done than we have time or space to discuss for this article.

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A few of the improvements include the initiation of many new cultural practices designed to vastly improve greens quality and speed. Programs were initiated to clean up broadleaf and grassy weeds. Hundreds of hours were directed towards staff training and development, resulting in an efficient and well trained staff.

Projects of all types have been designed and implemented to improve the over-all playability of the courses. This includes greens reconstruction, tee leveling, drainage improvements, and much more. These improvement projects will be on-going over the next few years.

The results of these projects will provide a totally new look and character to the appearance and playability of the courses.

We are proud of the work that has been done to date. The improvements are obvious. The managers and staff take great pride knowing it has been a tremendous team effort in which everyone involved played a part. It is our plan and goal to make these courses and practice facility some of the best in the world. We hope you will come to see the results.

