

Atlanta Club Mixes Innovation, Tradition

Few golf courses around the world are as steeped in history as the Atlanta Athletic Club. For starters, it was the home course of the legendary Bobby Jones, who not only played there, but served for a time as its president. Its first Athletic Director was John Heisman, who gained nationwide fame as the man for whom the trophy awarded to college football's best player is named. It also hosted the Ryder Cup matches in 1963 (East Lake Facility), the U.S. Open in 1976, PGA Championships in 1981 and 2001 and the U.S. Women's Open in 1990 and is slated to host its third PGA Championship in 2011. Yet for 21-year Superintendent Ken Mangum, one of the club's greatest traditions is its continuous innovation.

Atlanta Athletic Club's Highlands course is the only known course planted with Diamond Zoysia tees and fairways, a slow-growing grass that offers the desired aesthetics and requires less mowing, thereby saving money. The club also maintains a comprehensive water-reuse plan that has proven invaluable in helping the golf course withstand a prolonged drought. Mangum also was one of the first golf superintendents to switch from purchasing most of its course maintenance equipment to leasing. Mangum says the innovations have contributed to the "sustainability of the club."

"We know that 75 percent of the people who join, join to play golf," Mangum says. "Keeping conditions up so that people choose you over somebody else is good for the longevity of the club."



Leasing Bolsters Bottom Line

Mangum turned to leasing through John Deere Credit in 1998 as the Club embarked upon a series of improvements in preparation for hosting the 2001 PGA Championship and recognized it had fallen behind in replacing course maintenance equipment.

"It's real easy for a club to say, 'we want to spend our money on a new swimming pool or a new room in the clubhouse, or something for the members,'" he says. "So your equipment replacement program was always in competition with other things."

Mangum believed that switching from purchasing to leasing equipment would allow the club to upgrade its fleet quickly, operate newer and more reliable equipment, and allow the club to move equipment acquisition costs from capital expenditures to the operating budget.

"It's not pitted against a capital improvement," he says. "Having it in your operating budget ensures you have the equipment for daily operations and it's so much better from a cash flow standpoint."

At the time he first proposed leasing, Mangum believed the switch would produce immediate savings in equipment repair costs. He was proven right. The club's equipment repair and maintenance budget dropped from \$110,000 to \$60,000 with the start of the lease in 1998. Today, those costs stand at \$82,000, still 25 percent below where they were when the lease program began.

The Atlanta Athletic Club's JDC™ MasterLease through John Deere Credit allows Mangum to



John Deere 220 E-cut Greens Mower

replace greens and fairway mowers on three-, or four-year cycles. Bunker rakes, which get daily use, are replaced every two years. He also is looking forward to acquiring a new John Deere 220 E-cut greens mower. The new mower may eliminate the need to double-cut greens. Because the new mower's reel speed is independent of the ground speed, "not only will it give us a better cut, but it might save some wear and tear on the perimeters of the greens," he says.

At a time when many golf courses have struggled to obtain financing, Mangum says he didn't have such worries because of the JDC™ MasterLease.

"There has never been an issue," he adds. "I think we are able to get a good value for the club by keeping everything under one roof.

"We've always been a progressive club in our facilities and our golf courses," says Mangum. "I think that pays big dividends."