

VICTORIA NEWS



Condos peer over the Cordova Bay Golf Course from the Claremont Ridge. Travis Paterson/News Staff

Wet winters make for lush Cordova Bay Golf Course

Feb. 8, 2018 12:00 p.m.

It's home to 73 species of birds, two goats, and a surprising 160 rounds of golf on a sunny weekend day in January.

A walk anywhere in Saanich is risky during the winter, but locals know there's more than enough sunny winter days to play at Cordova Bay Golf Course. Even if it goes from sun to hail to sun in the time it takes to finish a par-five hole, which it did when this reporter recently visited the course, it's still not reason enough to hire an electric golf cart, as most refuse, says superintendent Dean Piller.

"It's a flat course, and it's popular for seniors who walk the course, all year round," Piller said.

(The neighbouring Ridge Course, a nine-hole par-three, does have hills.)

Piller has worked as the superintendent at Cordova Bay since it opened 27 years ago. In the past dozen years his expertise has been used as a volunteer at the 2016 Ryder Cup at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn., the British Open at Turnberry, Scotland, in 2009, and at the 2005 U.S. Open at Pinehurst, N.C.

Golf courses often face criticism for using pesticides and other harmful practices for the environment but Piller points out that not only has his golf course been free of insecticides since 1996, the course acts as a filter for stormwater coming down from the Cordova Ridge.

"It was worse when the gravel pit was in operation," Piller says. "We've had the water tested, and the water that's flowing into areas of the course is a lot dirtier than the water flowing out."



The course is a matter of pride for Piller in several ways. Not all birds nest there but many do (as golf courses go, Cordova Bay is certified as a bird sanctuary by Audubon International).

The grounds are also home to raccoons, deer and otter, and have hosted the occasional visit by a cougar or bear. There's also Jack and Freddie, the goats who live in the same shed Bill Mattick built for his famous goat a generation ago.

While he isn't a daily golfer, Piller is an avid player in the world of greenskeepers, having won the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association as the Gordon Witteveen Award winner for 2017. The award goes to the superintendent (or assistant) who authors the best article for publication in the CGSA GreenMaster magazine during the past year.

Piller earned the attention for penning an article on 'overcoming thatch' that was published in the fall. The problem of thatch arises from the constant clippings, which have to be removed, adding to the workload of the grounds crews, he said.

"It's not just fighting invasive species, it's managing a 200-acre piece of the city that's home to red tail hawks, eagles and ospreys," Piller said. "We've converted 12 acres

to natural meadow and a half acre to a herb and veggie patch for Mattick's restaurant. This place is for people who love the outdoors."

reporter@saanichnews.com



Bird boxes such as these stand on the edge of ponds at Cordova Bay Golf Course which is also an Audobon sanctuary. Travis Paterson/News Staff