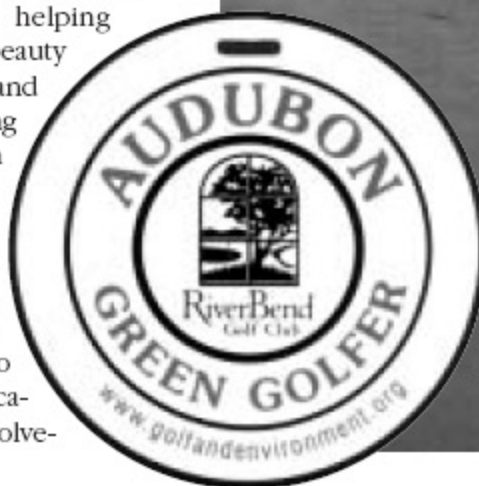


Captivating Your Audience

BY KATIE MCGRATH

RiverBend Golf Community is one of a growing number of golf-residential communities across Canada. Flanked by a rare parcel of Carolinian forest and bordered by the Thames River, our unique community has attracted nature-lovers, bird watchers, and outdoor enthusiasts. Our residents and golfers are, in the best sense, a captive audience, and our job is to captivate them—by helping them recognize the beauty and value of our land and wildlife, and encouraging their participation in stewardship activities.

As part of our certification as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary, we launched several creative programs to increase member education, awareness, and involvement.



Golfers pledge their support for the environment by taking the Audubon Green Golfer Pledge.

Green Golfer Initiative

This year's Sand & Seed Social was also the perfect time to launch the new Green Golfer Club from Audubon International. This effort encourages golfers to pledge to support "Environmental Etiquette for Golf." We made special bag tags for the occasion and distributed them to all members who took the pledge. (Note: For more information about the Green Golfer Club, visit www.golfandenvironment.org)

Photography Contest

We host seasonal photography contests to help the grounds department to see the property as members and residents see it. We provide a deadline and a theme, such as wildlife or fall colors, and anxiously await the beautiful submissions. Prizes include gift certificates and custom framing and matting. We are often granted permission to display the photographs in the grounds department lunchroom to remind us all to be stewards of the environment.

RiverBend's Annual Sand & Seed Social

What better way to educate our golfers on the art of ball mark repair and to answer the oft-asked question, "To fill or to replace?" Our Sand & Seed Social invites members to enjoy nine holes of golf and a complimentary meal at the clubhouse, while also demonstrating proper land management practices.

The evening begins with a brief talk on the importance of repairing the playing field for the competitors who follow. Golfers then head off for a 9-hole shotgun start on all 18 holes while staff members head off with loads of divot mix in tow. Although it can be difficult to keep up with the emptying of divot bottles, golfers are patient and generally awe-struck by the number of divots left through the season by their fellow golfers. One ton of divot mix later, golfers head back to the clubhouse for a complimentary feast and an evening with friends.



The Sand and Seed Social makes education fun, as golfers learn how to repair divots properly and support the course's environmental best practices.



A painting class gives people a whole new perspective on the golf course.

Painting Workshops

One of our most popular programs has been a series of watercolour workshops designed to raise awareness of our natural surroundings. Participants of all artistic abilities are welcome. The golf club supplies all art materials, snacks, and transportation to different inspirational sites on the property. Each time we gather we share a new skill, and then turn our focus to our environment. This workshop has given confidence to reluctant artists and new inspiration to seasoned painters. It is our hope that by capturing beautiful landscapes in watercolour, we will be moved to protect them for the future. ●

Katie McGrath is the Stewardship Coordinator at RiverBend Golf Community in London, Ontario, Canada.