

RIVER MARSH GOLF CLUB SUMMER GRASS RENOVATION: BENT TO BERMUDA

By Delaney Cha

This summer, River Marsh Golf Club at the Hyatt Regency Chesapeake Bay in Cambridge, MD will be undergoing a major facelift to provide guests and members with an even better playing experience.

For River Marsh, the project will be a total renovation of tee boxes, fairways, and approaches converting the bentgrass to bermudagrass. The renovation is currently scheduled to begin on July 8th and the staff is anticipating the course to reopen on August 19th, which means that the course will be closed for six weeks during the summer season.

"[The project] has to happen during that time, that's when this grass really thrives, which is part of the reason why we're turning the golf course over to bermuda," said Abby Messick, Director of Golf at River Marsh. "The bermudagrass loves sunshine, it likes hot weather. It's humidity resistant, it's more

resilient to all of the things that stress our bentgrass during our busiest time of year. Bentgrass provides us with a real challenge during those hot and humid months and this change will give us even better playing conditions during a very high traffic time of season for us."

With the help of Collins Wharf Sod Farm (Eden, MD), the process will involve eliminating the existing bentgrass and then sprigging the new variety of bermuda. The entire golf course will undergo this process with their 18th hole at the top of the list given its waterfront viewpoint to the hotel.

She explains, "We have so many events at the resort and on our Manor Lawn just off of #18, and obviously, the back of the hotel was built to see that hole, that view. We've received lots and lots of questions about what progress will look like, mostly from brides getting married on our beautiful waterfront and we want to do all that we can to ensure they get the scenic backdrop they expect."

While the project is a massive undertaking, it has been noted to be a very beneficial change to help improve the impact of the course on the environment and the surrounding watershed.

"Environmentally speaking, it requires far less water," said Messick. "We won't be using the volume of water in season and throughout the year like we have been and have needed to with the bentgrass."

By the end of the year, the renovation will decrease River Marsh's water consumption by 40%, eventually growing to a 50% decrease in water consumption annually.

She continues, "The grass will also require fewer chemicals and pesticides. We expect to cut down chemical use by 70% by the end of the year. These are primary reasons for this project."

With the new bermudagrass being highly resistant to heat and drought, Messick is hopeful to see what additional benefits the transition will bring the team at River Marsh.

"We expect the new grass will give us more security than our existing bent. Back in 2002, before we were scheduled to open in early August, the bentgrass was hit with disease literally overnight and we lost about 10 acres of fairways. We've been fighting that same circumstance nearly every season since our opening. The grass is just so fragile," said Messick. "We hope that our superintendent won't have to suffer as many sleepless nights in July and August as he does now with a more disease resistant turf."



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She also explains how the change from bentgrass to bermudagrass can help golfers with an extra advantage.

"There is a difference in the playability between the grasses and it will be interesting to watch our members and repeat guests learn to play the course with the bermuda. The ball kind of sits up more on bermudagrass than it does on the bentgrass which almost requires you to 'pick' the ball a bit more. Hopefully, this change will help our wide variety of golfing guests see even more successes on the course. Plus the additional benefits of quicker recovery from foot traffic, divots and carts will also help with greater playability," she said.

Even with the benefits of replacing the grass, the timing is less than ideal for River Marsh as the project happens in the middle of the busy summer season. But the team is dedicated to giving the grass the best opportunity it can to flourish and be ready to play in August. And while the course might be closed, River Marsh is not!

"This is the important part," said Messick. "In my mind, the golf course itself will be closed. But, the Pro Shop, 'The Cove' our golf simulator, the practice ranges, and the putting greens, everything, all of those things stay open."

"For our resort guests and our membership, we will be facilitating tee times with other local courses and transportation from the resort for our resort guests and for our corporate groups that come in to host meetings and stay at the hotel."

Messick continues, "We're working with local partners, and other pros and directors of golf, and the area courses are all being very kind and generous. We've tried to do that over the years too when others have gone thru the renovation process ahead of us. It's just a testament to the camaraderie and the golf community that is built here, everyone is very much looking out for one another and doing all they can to support."

The team at River Marsh will act as liaisons between the guests and local courses in the area. By creating partnerships with surrounding courses, like Hog Neck, Green Hill, Talbot Country Club, and others, it strengthens the community on the Eastern Shore even more.

"Rich Setter, Rob McDonald, Marc Kimminau, and Ashen Anania have all been very kind. We just have a lot of great people who are willing to help us."

At the end of the project, the expectation for the course and the staff is that the experience gets better and better.

"Our Hyatt team and our ownership are really looking forward to the renovation itself, it's really important to us to continue to grow and improve our offerings and this golf facility," said Messick. "We're still open during the renovation. We have junior camps running this summer and our overall goal is to get even more people and juniors to play this great game."

"We want guests to know that we will remain available for future bookings and to assist in any way we can. We'll be doing a lot of Glow Golf and "Happy Hour at the Range" events with the hotel and we expect the simulator will remain busy. And we've got a lot of things on deck for our members to keep them swinging while the renovation is happening on the course. Our team could not be more excited to make these improvements to the course for our members, our guests and the environment. We're really excited to get to this project, it's been a long time coming and we see nothing but amazing things ahead for River Marsh. We can't wait to reopen in August with an even better product for our Eastern Shore golfers and guests!"



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