

Arnold Palmer Designed Lonnie Poole Golf Course receives Audubon International certification

ORLANDO, FL - Arnold Palmer Design Company's 2009 Lonnie Poole Golf Course design at North Carolina State University has passed strict sustainability standards and become a certified Audubon International Signature Golf Sanctuary and member of the organization's Signature Program.

Established in 1996, Audubon International's mission is to work with others to deliver high-quality environmental education and to facilitate the sustainable management of land, water, wildlife and other natural resources in all places people live, work and play. The Lonnie Poole Golf Course is one of only two university-owned golf courses to earn the certification and among more than 90 projects that have received the certification.

The N.C. State golf course, located on N.C. State's Centennial Campus, meets Audubon International qualifications due to careful planning to fit managed turfgrass seamlessly into the surrounding environment. The golf course also serves as a living lab for sustainable turfgrass management and environmental stewardship.

Brandon Johnson, Vice President / Senior Architect and former N.C. State graduate, worked closely with Arnold Palmer and the school during the entire design process to ensure the course would be eligible for the elite certification.

"One of our fundamental design tenets is to work with the environment in a responsible and sustainable manner whenever possible. We are extremely happy that our efforts at Lonnie Poole Golf Course have been recognized by Audubon International" said Johnson.

"One of our goals from the start of the project was to design and create an environmentally friendly, responsible and educational golf experience. The opportunity to work with my Alma Mater and apply the principles and skills they taught me was a full circle moment."

The course was named by Golfweek Magazine as one of the Best New Courses and Best Campus Courses in 2010.

"This is really an honor for us." said Arnold Palmer about his design company work on the project. "I worked closely with Brandon, who is such a talented architect, to create a golf course that is challenging, fun and respects the land where we are building. That is always our first goal. That fact that this course fulfills an athletics role, but is also a college classroom for research and teaching is something we're very proud of."

Dr. Danesha Seth Carley, sustainability program coordinator for the N.C. State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, was integrally involved with the planning and construction of the golf course. Carley said that Audubon International certification was always the goal.

“The success of the golf course industry transition towards sustainability will depend, ultimately, on changing the awareness of sustainability issues within the industry and its clientele,” Seth Carley said. “Everyone must understand the relationship between their everyday lives and the resources on which they depend. This course is specifically designed to uphold these sustainability elements.”

Dr. Charles Peacock, a professor in N.C. State’s crop science department, emphasized that the Signature Program is an elite Audubon International category. Peacock, who has worked for the past 15 years with close to 200 different Signature projects worldwide, said that only new locations are considered for Signature Program membership, making the certification particularly notable. There are only 92 other signature sanctuaries.

“It’s in a whole separate category, and it’s a very selective category,” Peacock said.

Extensive, undisturbed vegetative buffer areas are among the Lonnie Poole Golf Course’s distinguishing features. These buffers include mixtures of fine fescue and native warm-season grasses, loblolly pines, American beautyberry and butterfly weed. It is not uncommon for golfers to see deer, beaver and even foxes during a round of golf.

“We were able to integrate the regulated Neuse River buffer zones into the strategy and aesthetic of the golf course while respecting and preserving its integrity. They served as a template and inspiration for how to treat other portions of the site” Johnson said.

“These buffers were integral to the design and were a big part of what allowed us the Audubon International certification,” Seth Carley said.

Dr. Tom Ruffy, professor of crop science at N.C. State, helped lead the initial push for Audubon International certification during Lonnie Poole Golf Course construction in 2007. Ruffy said the golf course maintenance staff, led by superintendent Brian Green, was key in the installation of the adapted plants and overall turf maintenance.

“The staff are aware of the importance of environmental protection and the distinction of the Audubon program,” Ruffy said.

Another winning feature is the surrounding constructed wetlands.

“Wetlands are natural water filters,” Seth Carley said, citing research from N.C. State that the constructed wetlands provide many ecological benefits. “The biological, chemical and physical conditions within wetlands create ideal conditions for removing many pollutants from water.”

The Lonnie Poole Golf Course not only fulfills a recreational and athletics role but also provides the university with a functioning laboratory for research and teaching. Turfgrass Management, Professional Golf Management, Crop Science, Horticulture, Entomology and Plant Pathology programs as well as College of Agriculture and Life Sciences sustainability students all use the golf course in their studies and research.

Within the golf course, programs involving wildlife conservation, habitat enhancement and environmental issues are balanced with the economics, operations and practicalities of running a golf course. In addition, the nearby Centennial Middle School uses the facilities for sustainability lessons in their science curriculum.

Beyond all of the wonderful environmental, educational and sustainability benefits, the golf course itself is a bombers delight with it's wide fairways and large greens. Situated atop rolling terrain that includes dramatic views of the Raleigh skyline, the par-71 tips out at 7,358 yards.

"It's a very fun course to play." said Johnson. "Start to finish, this has certainly been a dream-come-true."