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Eagle Creek's Deep Environmental Roots

Orlando Course Is a Sustainability Stalwart

Florida boasts more Audubon International Certified Signature Sanctuary golf courses than any other state, but among public-daily fee venues, Eagle Creek Golf Club stands out.

Since the day it opened in 2004, the Ron Garl-Howard Swan design—centerpiece of a residential community just west of Orlando International Airport—has maintained its Silver Sanctuary certification. Its dedication to sustainable practices and policies manifests in so many ways, on and off the course, that there's little mystery why Eagle Creek is one of Central Florida's most popular places to play golf in ideal conditions year-round, and harmony with nature.

"We get many more locals now," says Kenny Nairn, Managing Partner CFL Golf of Eagle Creek as well as 36-hole Kings Ridge

in nearby Clermont, and a native of St. Andrews, Scotland. "Our mix used to be 90% visitors, 10% locals in the wintertime, but now it's 50-50. So many more locals. They've got the time to play golf now. They work from home, and many more have taken up golf. Our local audience is much more aware of what we do on the golf course; it's been great for us because we can educate them a bit better."

Nairn's ownership partner of 14 years, Larry Snyder, is a fifth-



generation Certified Golf Course Superintendent. Completing the circle of stewardship at Eagle Creek is superintendent Jeff Clark, who was there when the course opened, left for another facility, then returned three years later.

"Not to blow Jeff's trumpet, or our own, but he came back to us because he didn't like what they were doing on the golf course," Nairn adds. "One of his ambitions was to keep improving what we were doing. One of our mantras is to keep it going with Eagle Creek and Audubon International. Since 2009 we've been on a mission to raise the level of conservation. That's the word I use more than anything: conservation

Sandhill Crane nest





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of the whole facility.”

More recently, especially as people stayed home during the Covid years, residents have taken this commitment to heart. “They didn’t realize that we were Audubon [Certified]. As we’ve created more awareness, they realize where they live, what all these bird houses are for, what we do with all our ‘washout’ plants, our cans, our FETs. And we’ve done some education in high schools and middle schools. It’s been an interesting journey.”

As Eagle Creek’s residential footprint nears its maximum, Nairn gives the builder credit for working with his crew to relocate bird boxes when necessary, keeping bank erosion to minimum as new homes have gone up and water levels have gone down, and generally following that conservation mantra. The community leaves the protected Florida Crane population alone, and the golf course crew has even spotted a few owls come through. “I’ve lived in Florida for 26 years and have never seen them before,” Nairn says. “We took some photos and sent them off to Audubon International, and they shared them the ornithology department at UCF [University of Central Florida].”

Nairn names off other recent stewardship strides at Eagle Creek. On the heels of Hurricane Ian in 2018, they removed close to 60 waste bunkers, reverting them to more natural habitat for animals (and less maintenance for his crew). They’ve also reduced the

amount of maintained turf, a strain of Mini-Verde that doesn’t require overseeding. “We haven’t overseeded for eight years,” he says. “We apply a natural pigment that most people would never know, and our water conservation is amazing.”

Clearly, environmental stewardship is not only part and parcel of Eagle Creek’s culture, but central to Nairn’s worldview as well, dating to his early years as the son of Scottish hoteliers—first in St. Andrews, then on the island of Islay, then on the country’s west

coast where he took up golf—then as a PGA golf pro in his adopted home state, where the plethora of wildlife still amazes him.

“Before my partner and I set up our company, we were based at Celebration Golf Club for 16 years, which is a former Disney community. People would ask if all the gators and wildlife were animatronic,” he says with a laugh. “We still get those questions today. But gators are part of the community, too. People don’t realize they’d see so much wildlife out here. It’s amazing.”

For more on Eagle Creek, visit www.eaglecreekorlando.com.

To learn more about how your local golf course can gain recognition for your environmental efforts and learn how to expand your initiatives through Audubon International’s numerous environmental certifications, visit www.auduboninternational.org.

Audubon International, an environmentally focused non-profit organization, offers members numerous certifications and conservation initiatives to protect the areas where we live, work, and play. Their certifications are designed to increase environmental awareness, encourage sustainable environmental efforts, and educate both their members and their communities. 🌱



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