

## **Comeback in the Caribbean**

Erin Stevens Brings Anguilla's Temenos Golf Course Back from the Dead

By Tim Cotroneo



*Erin Stevens, Temenos Golf Course's Superintendent*

The opening of the Greg Norman designed Temenos Golf Course in 2006 was a first for the tiny island of Anguilla. This multi-million masterpiece, with a dozen holes featuring water and the Caribbean Sea, was Anguilla's introduction to the game of golf. Two years later, facing a reeling tourism outlook and a pile of mounting debt, Temenos abruptly closed.

In the world of Caribbean golf, Erin Stevens has developed a reputation as a superintendent capable of taking on and turning around golf projects considered high risk/ high gain. In 2009, Anguilla's Cap Juluca Resorts decided to roll the dice on the re-opening of Temenos. When Cap Juluca contacted Stevens, he wasn't the only consultant the Anguilla management called on to revitalize the course.

"A couple of other consultants were contacted by Cap Juluca management and asked what they thought it would take to get Temenos up and running. I guess their answers, timeline, and budget didn't match up with Cap Juluca's plans," Stevens said.

### **Four Months until Christmas**

After an initial walk-through of Temenos' once sterling 18 holes and analyzing the course's equipment needs, Stevens gave it to Cap Juluca straight. He could bring the 7,000 yards of Bermuda grass back to life. But the timeline of less than four months leading up to the all important Christmas week opening, was daunting. This impending goal was a stretch even for a superintendent who had made a career out of surpassing overly optimistic expectations.

*Temenos' 391-yard 12<sup>th</sup> Hole – The “before” photo*



During the week of his August meeting with Cap Juluca officials, Stevens marched through his standard walk-through of the course. By the time he completed surveying Temenos' ninth hole, Stevens calculated what he thought was a feasible plan.

Stevens would need to tap everything he had learned during his 13 years in golf course management to revitalize a course that had lain dormant for almost two years. “Besides spraying and spot spraying, we began an aggressive aerating and verticutting program. In addition to the entire course being dead or dormant, we were dealing with nasty weed and pest infestation,” Stevens said. More than once this Maryland native would credit

both his naval training and early apprenticeship under Paul R. Latshaw for the regimens he would meticulously implement to revive Temenos.

“I was mentored by Latshaw at Congressional and then again at Riviera. Latshaw was notorious for his aggressive regimens. Working under Latshaw meant being instilled with the basics, as well as learning the latest in cutting edge course technology. We would focus on an individual hole until everything looked just right,” Stevens recalled. More than a decade after his baptism as a superintendent, the 38-year-old Stevens would apply these same rigorous methods to Temenos’ 18 championship holes.

*The 12<sup>th</sup> hole “after” photo*



### **Renovate or Revitalize**

Part of the reason Stevens was approved by Cap Juluca for the Temenos project was his belief that major course renovation was not necessary. The other consultants who had interviewed felt that Temenos’ greens and bunkers should be totally re-done. This proposal would prove extremely costly. “I just didn’t feel like I needed to disrupt the structural integrity of the course. The grass was another story. I needed to re-grow or bring back all the dead and dormant grass,” Stevens said.

Stevens' initial plan included an aggressive aerating program. His team also flushed the soils, while adding nutrients, and maintaining a rigorous fertilizer and chemical regimen. Another key element of his future success would be finding the people and the equipment necessary to fill some glaring holes in his operation.

*The 430-yard 18<sup>th</sup> hole – “before” photo*



“I was able to bring back many of the key employees who worked at Temenos previously. Temenos is the only golf course on the island. So it wasn't like I had other courses to tap from. I also hired top notch mechanics from Canada and Switzerland to repair the equipment fleet that had broken down,” Stevens explained.

The clock was ticking and Stevens made early initial progress. Then the unthinkable happened, Temenos was shut down for the month of October due to a break down in contract negotiations with the previous owner. “The fact we were able to open Christmas week, after taking a month off, could only be attributed to the strict programs we implemented the first month on the job. My team hung in there during all this and really did a terrific job,” Stevens said.

Challenges are par for the course in the life of a superintendent. Stevens discovered early on that a superintendent often needs to turn negatives into positives. “When I

worked on the El Camaleon Golf Course project in Playa Del Carmen, Mexico, we were hit by Hurricane Emily and Hurricane Wilma during the course's building process. Our two ocean holes were destroyed twice. Today, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> holes are even more beautiful than the original design, Stevens said.

### **Amazing Before and After**

Comparing the before and after photos of the Temenos metamorphosis is stunning. Temenos' *after* photos are not only a testament to the highly disciplined grass program implemented by Stevens' team, but also a credit to a very creative water management program. "Temenos is water management at its finest. We're working at about 50% of the water capacity that the course ran on previously. This project has been a reminder that every course needs to honor sustainability and manage its water in good conscience," Stevens said.

*Erin Stevens on Temenos' 18<sup>th</sup> tee box*



What has been the most rewarding aspect of Stevens' Temenos experience? "For me it's seeing the reaction of golfers viewing the course for the first time. Most golfers will never know what the course looked like back in August," Stevens said with a smile. Sometimes in the world of golf course construction, the "after" is all one needs to know.

*Tim Cotroneo is a freelance writer from Lino Lakes, MN, with a passion for golf and a future Caribbean zip code.*