

Management duo getting it done at Ferncroft

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It didn't take long for David Swales and Damon DeVito to make their mark at Ferncroft Country Club in Danvers.

Swales and DeVito, the Managing Directors of Ferncroft, took over in early February after the club was purchased by Affinity Management and immediately went to work on a drainage issue that had plagued the course for years.

The timing couldn't have been better.

The North Shore was slammed by a week of rain in mid-May that left streets looking more like streams - and most golf courses looking more like lakes. But the new Ferncroft, which is now a separate entity from the nearby hotel, survived rather well. It was a welcome surprise to members who grew accustomed to issues of dampness.

Between February and April, the new ownership tackled the drainage problem on 12 of the 18 holes, did repairs on the irrigation system that was installed last year, irrigated both sides of the driving range and made significant investments into equipment to help the staff maintain the quality of the course.

"(The repairs) have been put to the test," Swales said. "The good news is that it's worked extremely well."

Swales estimates the course collected roughly 30 inches over a four-week period and was closed for a couple days.

"If we hadn't done the drainage, we could have been down for a month," said Swales, who is originally from England. "We were happy we did that - and obviously the members were, too. They were saying they couldn't believe how dry the course was."

Quick action during golf's offseason and plans of expansion have made the transition into new ownership at Ferncroft rather smooth. When Swales and DeVito took over, they came in with a plan. Both have the experience that shows they are capable of getting things done.

Swales, before co-founding Affinity, managed the prestigious Wentworth Club in England before moving to the Keswick Club in Virginia, where he teamed with DeVito to considerably increase that club's membership in just three years.

DeVito, meanwhile, has an MBA from the Darden School and a bachelor of arts and bachelor of science from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania. Previously, he was a consultant with the Boston-based consulting firm Corporate Decisions, Inc., where he focused on growth strategies and management issues for Fortune 500 companies.

The duo has been thrilled with the staff that was already in place, especially PGA Director of Golf Toby Ahearn. They feel the future is bright for the club.

Improvements have been made to the 19th hole, the tennis courts are open and a tennis pro has been hired. Men's and women's locker facilities and additional dining will be added to the 19th hole building. And the current locker room building, located by the pool, will be renovated into a health, fitness and spa center.

"We want to make Ferncroft a top notch private country club," Swales said. "We want to create a destination for members to feel comfortable in using, somewhere for them to hang their hats."