

## Coverings taking a unique swing at opening festivities

with a golf putting green created from exhibitors' tile and stone

Special to the Daily Journal/Messenger  
April 26, 2008 - 12:00 a.m. EST



The green will be accessible to Coverings' visitors Tuesday, April 29, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Wednesday, April 30, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., and promises to be a fun recreational spot where they can try their hand at sinking the ball in the hole on, possibly, the most imaginative and decorative landscape ever.

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Florida without golf? That would be like a day without sunshine. Coverings without creativity? Equally bleak and dismal. So, for its return to the Sunshine State, Coverings is creatively bringing golf to the 37,000 attendees who will be trekking to the Orange County Convention Center for the April 29 to May 2 expo and conference for tile and stone.

A golf putting green, artfully composed of tile and stone that were contributed by various Coverings exhibitors, will be a special attraction in the main entry of the convention center. An unprecedented and gutsy undertaking, this "slice" of golf setting was designed and produced by students in the Ceramic Engineering & Art Departments of Clemson University. Coverings commissioned the creation, requiring that it be not only a showpiece for the materials but fully functional as well. An additional criterion was it had to be modular so that it could be easily transported, especially from Clemson to Orlando.

All eyes will be on the first-of-its-kind tiled putting green for the opening ceremony of Coverings as pro Jan Stephenson, a former LPGA champion and a designer of golf courses, officially inaugurates it, joined by the show's Board of Directors. The green will be accessible to Coverings' visitors Tuesday, April 29, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and Wednesday, April 30, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., and promises to be a fun recreational spot where they can try their hand at sinking the ball in the hole on, possibly, the most imaginative and decorative landscape ever.

The challenge to create a tiled putting green was enthusiastically met by the Clemson team, led by Dr. Eric Skaar, professor of ceramic engineering, and Molly Kennedy, assistant professor, at the university's School of Materials Science & Engineering, together with Susan Grier, a professor and guest lecturer, who represented the Visual Arts Department. They collaborated to develop a syllabus for the project so that it would give the 13 participating students a taste of a hands-on assignment, plus immerse them in the experience of an actual client relationship.

"We jumped at the chance to work on this Coverings concept," said Skaar, "because it offered us the opportunity to stimulate the students' thinking about the link between art and science, and also expose them to working with a client and addressing installation. Additionally, we agreed it would help them gain a more intimate knowledge of industrial materials—tile, adhesives, application methods — while also gaining an understanding of the role of public sculpture in a traditionally non-art context."

For the students, the greatest challenge was to take such an out-of-the-box idea and make it practical. And, in addition to this mind-bending exercise was the challenge of working together as a team — with a mix of majors who are "left brained" engineers and "right brained" artists.

"Working on this project has given me experience with other students in different majors," said Meredith Myers, of Thomasville, N.C., a junior in engineering.

“They’ve helped show me new ideas that I wouldn’t have thought of.” Visual Arts senior Savannah Camp, of Chapin, S.C., summed it up: “It’s about teamwork and creativity.”

Consensus, though, is that the project overall has been an extraordinary learning experience they’ll benefit from for years to come. “It has definitely taught me the need to consider as many options as possible at once, so if one method does not work out there will be others waiting in the wings,” said Ross Economy, of Raleigh, N.C., also an engineering junior. Jessica Jackson, of Collierville, Tenn., an engineering senior, said the project has “given me more perspective on new ideas and working with different people. It also has been a lesson in patience and in hands-on work.”

The 22-foot long green is a bejeweled landscape that, other than its unconventional cladding, will be familiar turf for duffers, with a requisite body of water, palm trees, contoured and rolling knolls, plus in a true tip-of-the-cap to Florida, some outdoor denizens, such as a turtle and alligator. And, for anyone fearing that tile is not the best surface for a golf ball to travel, a single pathway of grass carpeting has been incorporated, leading to the hole.

“We are so proud to be able to present this tiled artistic masterpiece to our Coverings guests and have a legendary golf pro like Jan Stephenson help put the spotlight on it,” said Glenn Feder, president of client services for National Trade Productions, which manages and produces Coverings. “The students and faculty of Clemson have awed us with their vision, imagination, talent and pure pluck in designing and producing something so extraordinary as this golf sculpture. They’ve proven the tremendous versatility and irresistible beauty of tile and stone materials with this achievement.”

Feder explained that the concept to create a golf putting green from exhibitors’ materials was the outgrowth of a similar initiative conducted at last year’s Coverings in Chicago. There, the show partnered with The Chicago Mosaic

School, whose students created three show-stopping “Tile Totems” — six-foot-tall columns that were part of the opening ceremony. These towering art pieces captured the attention not only of local press, but also of Mayor Richard M. Daley, and they have ultimately found a permanent exhibit spot at Chicago’s famed Navy Pier, one of the Midwest’s leading tourist destinations. Feder said plans are underway, as well, to find a permanent exhibit spot where Coverings can contribute the putting green.