Finding the key to progress

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Arriving in Chipping Sodbury Golf Club’s car park on a mid week morning in early January, off season, what struck me was the activity.

There was barely a parking space to be found, while a glance out to the golf course highlighted a course full of players, comfortably working around the diggers and 360s which were doing the donkey work on a large irrigation installation project.

You didn’t need to be Sherlock Holmes to deduce that here is a successful go-ahead golf club. But how is it able to ride against the tide, at a time when many clubs are struggling to make ends meet?

Club Manager, Bob Williams, doesn’t claim to have all the answers, but he has been extremely pro-active in identifying the problems and coming up with potential solutions.

One thing he is very sure of, however, is the need for the Club Manager and the Course Manager/ Head Greenkeeper to have a good and close working relationship.

“The golf course is the most important asset any golf club has,” said Bob, who works extremely closely with Head Greenkeeper, John Keenaghan, as well as the Club Chairman, Mike Darby.

“I do think this is where a lot of clubs get into difficulties – when the relationship between the two main people in the club is not concerted and they are not moving forward, together and at the same level,” said Bob, who added that the Club Chairman, Mike Darby.

“The activity on courses issues could now be

 fj increases year by year until the age of 30. The objective to reduce the age profile of the club, which at present is having positive results. A lot of the younger guys who are members of other sports clubs in the area have joined, and for the last few years we have run an inter sports club golf tournament, which has proved very popular,” said Bob, who revealed that the club had brought in 88 new members in the last year.

But this is not a time to let the grass grow under their feet (excuse the pun), the intention this year is to profile their green fee charges between high usage periods and off peaks.

“We will have a peak time Wednes- day and Friday when visitors will pay the full fee. If you want to play Monday, Tuesday or Thursday you will pay another fee and after 2.30pm it will be another rate. In the summer after 6pm you will be able to play for just £12.”

“Hitting set about revamping the membership structure the on-courses issues could now be

ness card which gave discounts to local companies,” explained Bob, who also explained that a Family membership had been introduced with children up to the age of 14 becoming a junior member at no additional charge.

With the new categories in place for the last two years on-going research has revealed that ‘Flexi-play’ members average approxi- mately 15 to 20 rounds a year, which ultimately suggests that their membership is costing around £550 per annum.

In needing to counter the high weekend usage the club also reduced the membership fee for five day memberships as an encourage- ment to senior members to play between Monday and Friday, thus freeing up the weekends for those unable to play during the week.

This then allowed the final piece of the membership jigsaw which was designed as an incentive for younger members who wish to play at weekends.

“We then created the ‘Golf Club 18-30’ category which is a reduced fee that increases year by year until the age of 30. The objective to reduce the age profile of the club, which at present is having positive results. A lot of the younger guys who are members of other sports clubs in the area have joined, and for the last few years we have run an inter sports club golf tournament, which has proved very popular,” said Bob, who revealed that the club had brought in 88 new members in the last year.

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addressed in earnest. John had been coping with a failing irrigation system for several seasons – the early ‘80s Watermation system coming to the end of its useful existence, helped along the way by a freak weather event.

“We think we had a lightning strike which took out the automated system about three years ago. A power surge burned the computers right out and took out all the decoder- ers,” recalled John.

“The consequences of this were.

“We then had to make a decision whether to go for another year knowing that it was extremely labour intensive and the system, which was failing, might not hold out for another year.”

“T’l get finished around 6am, go in, brief the team before going home for a sleep before getting back to the course a couple of hours later. At its worst I did it for two weeks in the late spring early summer of last year, these were desperate times that needed desperate measures, fortunately it wasn’t a dry summer,” said John, a BIGGA member for 15 years.

“Knowing this was not a situation that could be allowed to continue for too long, Bob, together with John, began looking at ways of funding a new system.

“When we had the blow-out we didn’t have the cash to put in a new system. We then had to make a decision whether to go for another year knowing that it was extremely labour intensive and the system, which was failing, might not hold out for another year.”

“To move the process along Bob commissioned irrigation consul-
There was barely a parking space to be found, while a glance out to the golf course highlighted a course full of players, comfortably working around the dingers and 360s which were doing the donkey work on a large irrigation installation project. You didn’t need to be Sherlock Holmes to deduce that here is a successful go-ahead golf club. But how is it able to ride against the tide, at a time when many clubs are struggling to make ends meet?

Club Manager, Bob Williams, doesn’t claim to have all the answers, but he has been extremely pro-active in identifying the problems and coming up with potential solutions.

One thing he is very sure of, however, is the need for the Club Manager and the Course Manager to work together and at the same level, “said Bob, who works extremely closely with Head Greenkeeper, Mike Darby. “I do think this is where a lot of clubs get into difficulties – when the relationship between the two main people in the club is not cemented and they are not moving forward, together and at the same level,” said Bob, who also wears another hat as Chairman of the EGU Marketing & Sponsorship Committee.

“The golf course is the most important asset any golf club has,” said Bob, who works extremely closely with Head Greenkeeper, John Keenaghan, as well as the Club Chairman, Mike Darby. “The Club Chairman, Bob Williams, explained Bob, who also explained that a Family membership had been introduced with children up to the age of 14 becoming a junior member at no additional charge.

With the new categories in place for the last two years on-going research has revealed that ‘Flexi-Play’ members average approximately 15 to 20 rounds a year, which ultimately suggests that their membership is costing around £550 per annum. In needing to counter the high stepped pricing we also reduced the membership fee for day membership as an encouragement to senior members to play between Monday and Friday, thus freeing up the weekends for those unable to play during the week. This then allowed the final piece to the membership jigsaw which is a reduced fee that increases year by year until the age of 30. The objective to reduce the age profile of the club, which at present is having positive results. A lot of the younger guys who are members of other sports clubs in the area have joined, and for the last few years we have run an inter sports club golf tournament, which has proved very popular,” said Bob, who revealed that the club had brought in 88 new members in the last year.

But this is not a time to let the grass grow under their feet (excuse the pun), the intention this year is to profile their green fee charges between high usage periods and off peak.

“We will have a peak time Wednesday and Friday when visitors will pay the full fee. If you want to play Monday, Tuesday or Thursday you will pay another fee and after 2.30pm it will be another rate. In the summer after 6pm you will be able to play for just £12.”

Having set about revamping the membership structure the on-courses issues could now be addressed in earnest. John had been coping with a failing irrigation system for several seasons – the early ‘90s Watermation system coming to the end of its useful existence, helped along the way by a freak weather event.

“We think we had a lightning strike which took out the automated system about three years ago. A power surge burned the computer right out and took out all the decoders,” recalled John. The consequences of this were that for the last two years hand watering or manually operating the irrigation was the only way forward. We were able to use the sprinklers on the greens but we had to turn them on and off by hand and, as you lose so much by evaporation doing it during the day, I ended up working through the night just watering greens.”

John would start around 11.30pm – driving to a green, turning on the sprinklers, letting them do their stuff for around 10 to 15 minutes before switching them off and moving on to the next green.

“Til get finished around 6am, go in, brief the team before going home for a sleep before getting back to the course a couple of hours later. At its worst I did it for two weeks in the late spring/early summer of last year, these were desperate times that needed desperate measures, fortunately it wasn’t a dry summer,” said John, a BIGGA member for 15 years. Knowing this was not a situation that could be allowed to continue for too long, Bob, together with John, began looking at ways of funding a new system.

“When we had the blow-out we didn’t have the cash to put in a new system straight away and we took that conscious decision to hand water and hope that we didn’t have a burning hot summer,” said Bob. “We then had to make a decision whether to go for another year knowing that it was extremely labour intensive and the system, which was failing, might not hold out for another year.”

To move the process along Bob commissioned irrigation consul-
The golf course is the main product of a golf club. We had to make sure that the product was right”

Bob Williams