Bay area courses recovering

Irrigation systems, greens major victims of quake

BY MARK LESLIE

In the aftermath of an earthquake that turned some San Francisco area communities upside down, Northern California golf course superintendents braced for the predicted next trembler and worked to get their courses back in shape.

While the nation's eyes focused on the deadly tragedy at the Bay Bridge, nearer the epicenter 50 miles to the southeast, Santa Cruz's downtown was leveled and some people's lives permanently changed. Lost in the tumult of more important matters was the Oct. 17 earthquake's effect on the region's golf courses.

The major problems at the courses were damage to clubhouses and other structures, breaks in irrigation systems, cracks on the putting greens and bent grass and sand eroding away from bunkers.

Flymo makes triumphant return to U.S.

BY PETER BLAIS

Largely banished from U.S. golf courses in the mid-1980s, the Flymo mower is making a triumphant return heading into the 1990s, thanks to a safety device developed by a Florida distributor.

The Flymo, a walk-behind mower that rides on a cushion of air, has long been one of the most popular means of grooming around bunkers. But injuries have often occurred because of severe conditions and operator carelessness, according to Precision Small Engine Co. owner Andy Masciarelli, one of Flymo's major U.S. distributors.

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Taking into account two weeks of rainouts, Martin said the work was completed in 95 working days, with crews of as many as 120 men on the course at one time and working dawn to dusk. "As phenomenal as all of this sounds, there are procedures and techniques that can be used over again to develop a golf course in this time frame," Martin said. "A 'critical path' of construction was developed immediately targeting various tasks to be completed by certain days to maintain the pace..." This golf course had some large hurdles to clear to finish construction. However, the critical path concept could be used on other courses to complete a '90-day miracle.'

Jones explained that Cenvill was building a residential development and wanted the course built quickly for sales reasons. "We wanted a product out there to let people know we were serious about building homes and a course. Development of a golf course turns a construction site into a place you can live," he said. Ross agreed about the importance of a course to such a development. "It's axiomatic that in that case you've got to have a golf course to sell real estate," he said. Jones sent accolades to Martin; Kenova, Kuhn Construction of Illinois, which was the heavy earth mover; and Landscape Contractors of Illinois, which seeded the course.

Construction of 20 holes and a practice facility included:
- Moving 800,000 cubic yards of topsoil and clay.
- Laying 21 miles of irrigation pipe, or three times the average amount, Martin said.
- Installing 11,100 heads in a three- to four-row irrigation system that gives the 200-acre course wall-to-wall coverage, according to Jones.
- Installing single-head control to give superintendent Jacobsen the ability to better control the million-gallon-a-day peak predicted use of water.
- Building a pumping station underground so that only the roof is visible, to reduce aesthetic impact and lower the noise level.
- Digging several small lakes.
- Constructing nearly everything to USGA specifications (except that the greens do not have the choker layer of sand).
- Building greens that average 7,000 square feet.
- Seeding the greens, tees and fairways with bentgrass and the roughs with a bluegrass-ryegrass-ferns mixture.

"This was a big project under any time frame," Jones said. "I don't think anyone's ever done anything like this."

Martin said that when Cenvill proposed the six-month time frame he and Jones were at first taken aback, but then "thought it was possible if we got the right players." Jones said Cenvill held a bid conference with a dozen golf course contractors in April. "We demanded the course be built on our time schedule. The only one interested was Kenova and they outlined a plan to get it done," he said. "Kenova would have four irrigation crews working at one time. There'd be 80 people on the course from Kenova alone — 125 altogether sometimes.

"The cooperation and coordination were simply extraordinary."

"Everything had to fall right into place," said Balogh. "There was no time for error. We were working in several different areas at the same time and needed supervision right there and had to move on immediately... like earth moving: as soon as the shaping was done the fine shapers moved right in."

Despite the speed with which the course was completed, Balogh said he could have cut three to six weeks off the time if he had all the equipment he wanted on site from day one. But Kuhn was also busy at other sites and couldn't immediately provide all the gear.

At the peak of construction, 44 pieces of equipment were on site, including 15 scrapers, six bulldozers, eight trucks, two front-end loaders, two box blades, four shaping bulldozers, two seeders, two trenchers, two backhoes and one greenmixin machine.

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Martin said the earthwork was well coordinated between residential and golf course, but the drain...
Stadium courses

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projected to accommodate 1,000 spectators; the same number as
had been seated in bleachers in
years past. "We figured we would
need 18 inches per person or 1500
linear feet. In actuality, the last
day of the tournament we had
probably 3,000 people watching
golf from the mound," he said.

"Some of those occupied a
"Skybox" for patron sponsors
which was constructed on a flat
area, to the golfer's right. To the
golfer's left was ABC-TV booth. In
past years, ABC had to build a
tower and put a booth atop that. In
1989, they simply constructed the
booth. They had a great view."

Miracle

Continued from page 26

age was also critical. "All eight lakes
on the course serve as detention
for the initial phases of the devel-
opment," he said.

The earth, Martin said, was es-
sentially topsoil that had to be
moved from housing sites. That
topsoil was moved onto the fair-
ways, which were sometimes
raised two to three feet, well above
the recommended six inches.

The rest was clay, which was
used under pads of houses. One
way to get clay, he said, is to dig
lakes; thus the lakes.

"The design will surprise people
in the area," said Martin, who has
worked with Jim Spear and de-
signed a half-dozen courses be-
fore Carillon. "Cenvill went the
extra mile to get things done. They
were a great client and knew what
a golf course can do for a develop-
ment."

The 18th hole features a penin-
sula fairway. Water comes into play
on 11 holes. There are only 60-plus
sand traps but those are 4,000- to
5,000-square-foot traps. And the
builders are still busy creating
eight- and 13-acre lakes (deep
enough to sustain fish) to buffer
the golf course into the housing.

"I was quite nervous about it
getting done," said Jones. "No one
thought it could be done... This is
unheard of."

But Kenova's Balogh said: "I love
challenges like that. I'd do another
one tomorrow."

He may get his chance. He said
he has already been contacted by
several groups in the Chicago area
that are interested in what he calls
"The Fast Track Way."

"We came here into this area
(southwest Chicago suburbs) from
Florida, and we have found one of
the most natural looking and most
easy workable spots we've ever had
-- excellent relationships with the
unions and suppliers, dedicated
managers, and a great labor force,
people willing to give you 12 hours
of hard work for 12 hours of pay.
Even with all the planning and
equipment, it takes good people to
do a good job."

People will be able to judge that
job on July 1 when the Plainfield
course officially opens. But Jones
decided, "You can play three holes
right now."

If Luikens has a problem with
his dirt piles, it is one he readily
accepts. "We have to mow the rows
or benches with a Flymo and a
Weedeater. It takes about two
hours and that's costly. Over the
years we've lengthened holes, moved
ditches, put mounding down the sides of fairways, any-
thing to improve individual holes
or groups of holes. The big hill
behind No 18 will probably benefit
more people in more ways."

How does Luikens justify a
$100,000 "bump" on a daily fee
course?

"Ask yourself," says Luikens,
"does the daily fee golfer deserve a
course with all the excitement he
would expect to find on a champi-
onship tract played by pros? We
think he does."

Gary Rippy, TPC's head profes-
sional concurs. Rippy adds the
course averages 37,000-40,000
rounds per year, of which 25,000
are tournament rounds.

"Those include corporate out-
ings," advises the pro. "Plus, we
hosted the Golf Digest ROLEX
Intercollegiate and the U. S. G. A.
Senior Women's Amateur this
spring and summer and will host
the Lee Trevino State Open this
Fall." In 1988, TPC was the site of
the Insurance Youth Golf Classic
tourney and several qualifying
events as well.

The comment of one PGA Tour
official to superintendent Luikens
sums up the effort and finished
product. "He told me that we had
the most natural looking stadium
on Tour," said Luikens. And a
pretty nifty stage for the fat lady's
finale as well.

Frances Trimble is a freelance
writer based in Houston, Texas.