Improvements possible for annual show

All of us have opinions and suggestions pertaining to the recent International Golf Course Show in Las Vegas. I'd like to share a few thoughts with you.

Show attendance was excellent. In addition to the large number of superintendents, I noticed an increased number of builders, club management executives and golf course architects.

The builders' dinner honoring Don Ross was a tribute to a good friend of many, and especially the golfers themselves. Don Rossi was a tribute to a good business relationship.

Show attendance was excellent. It's a menace that is clogging the courts, scaring business owners and homeowners alike, enticing and/ or inflating insurance companies, challenging industry... and now it has invaded the world of golf. It's court suits—a major new industry, born largely of greed, and often the perpetrators in malice.

Money's game. We use it to pay the bills, buy groceries, go to the theater. But the love of money is the root of evil. It's a root that has taken hold in American society to the extent that, hey, Bud, the front steps to your house had better be well lighted or someone might fall and sue you for the injuries they sustain. Judging by court rulings of the past several years as this suit-craziness has gained momentum, you could lose your house.

So, a person innocently enters the greens-keeping business thinking it is a safe job. Nobody bothers you and you don't bother anybody—except the grubs and other pests attacking your course.

How do you safeguard yourself? The message at the 62nd International Golf Course Conference and Show was painfully clear at several sessions. It was as if speakers had gotten hold of advance copies of each other's scripts.

Their message: Document, document, document! How sad it is to see those neighborhoods children wander onto your course and you warn them to leave— for whatever reason, be it protection from the pool or flying golf balls—write down the instance and file it, file it, file it. When you train your crew about the spray equipment, record it, then file it.

There's a huge difference between having only a verbal defense and having documentation when you appear in court.

This pertains not only to superintendents and club managers. Architects and developers now have to look over their shoulders, and watch closely how their subcontractors are doing their jobs. Arnold Palmer found that out at his home course in Florida.

Now, Jack Nicklaus has discovered the same thing in Breckenridge, Colo.

Two famous and wealthy men were sued. Two questionable decisions were made in court. Were they lacking the documentation that could have saved them as architects and golf course builders? I don't know.

But I do know this: There's a sickeningly pervasive society with these suits, and just a little extra care can save a person hundreds of thousands of dollars down the road. Anyone already caught by society's culprit of the 1980s won't forget it; the rest of us would be wise to heed it.

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Superintendent-pro relationship critical to success

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green, the pro is usually the first to hear a member's comments about the course, whether they be complimentary or critical. If kept informed of maintenance practices, the pro can respond to criticisms by passing the praise on to the superintendent and his staff with the reasons for the improved conditions.

Many times when the comments are less than flattering, the superintendent has a legitimate reason for the problem and plans to correct it, or why a particular project or practice is being done at this particular time. Armed with that information, the pro can respond to criticisms before they get blown out of proportion.

The superintendent must constantly provide the pro with information about any potential complaints. Examples would include an unplanned pesticide application, spraying on a hot summer day, an irrigation leak in the middle of a fairway, a sprinkler that ran all night, the need for top dressing and aerification.

Because of the pro's visibility, he is many times the most important person in the superintendent's public relations effort. For this reason the superintendent must take the initiative to foster a positive feeling between them.

Each person has specific responsibilities, and must be allowed to exercise the authority necessary to accomplish them.

For example, the superintendent must decide when the course needs to be closed because of a heavy rain. He must consider the potential damage that could be caused to the course as well as the potential negative publicity he will receive by closing it on a busy day. By assessing all factors, and recognizing that he is maintaining the course for play as well as for the health of the turf, he will make the appropriate decision.

This decision, and the reasons for it, must then be communicated to the pro so that he can do his job of selling the unpopular decision to the golfers. The decision to restrict carts often causes friction because the golf pro often gets a percentage of cart revenue. If the pro realizes that limiting cart traffic, and his related revenue, on marginal days will result in improved conditions in the long run, that will eventually result in more play and hence more revenue.

• The superintendent can help the pro do his job of settling rules disputes by knowing the rules well marked.

The course is an athletic field, and the out-of-bounds must be marked just as in football. Hazards must be clearly defined and staked as well. The superintendent must have a good working knowledge of the rules in order to do this portion of his job properly. The two should discuss any areas where the marking may be questioned before they are marked.

One area usually in question is the bank alongside a pond and how far up the hill the hazard should begin. There is generally a compromise between making the ruling cut and dry and for the ease of maintenance.

• The superintendent and pro should occasionally play together.

By doing so, the superintendent can show the pro what the standards of play and how his job affects everyone who plays the course. The pro can point out areas where he has received the most feedback.

They should discuss and agree on the proper speed of the greens for daily and tournament play, and for that particular time of year.

They should also discuss the height of cut and grass types in fairways and roughs. The average golfer does not possess the skills needed to play on tournament-conditioned courses.

They should decide and agree on standards that are proper for healthy turf and still provide an enjoyable round of golf for the clientele and budget at their course, not the one across town or on television.

• Each should improve professionally through participation in their respective professional associations. They should welcome the opportunity to showcase their club to a meeting or tournament of the local chapter of the PGA or GCSAA.

Treating the other person's peers in a respectful, courteous and professional manner will leave a lasting impression.

Superintendents usually try to showcase their course for their own association meetings. They should do even more, if possible, to ensure the course is in peak condition for the pro-ams and PGA tournaments.

• Finally, and most importantly, they must individually do their respective jobs to the best of their abilities. They must be enthusiastic and work hard at their jobs.

Good relations between the two is always a sure way to earn the other's respect and admiration. The appreciation of their employer and golfing public will soon follow.

Ken Flisek is superintendent at The Woodlands in Falmouth, Maine.

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