Computer model man
Ed Connordoes it again
By Mark Leslie

The man who brought you the computer
terrain model to preserve historic golf courses
has introduced another technology to the world
of golf course construction. Move over, stakes
and grade lines. Come on down, laser emitters,
gyroscopes and radio-controlled drag scrapers.

"Golf course managers are coming out of the
woodwork to look at it," said Edward Connor
of the laser equipment he has now used to grade
tee areas at Pebble Beach Golf Links in California
and Seminole Golf Club in Florida.

"We've gone now a long way in eliminating
that problem. We can grade tees very con-
dently at one percent or even half a percent.
And it's so fast that one man can do what used
to take a crew of five people..."

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a gun and a rod. That takes two people and it's
tedious. It's moving a little bit of dirt and
shooting with a rod and moving some dirt
and shooting it again. With the laser you do
everything from the seat of the tractor —
from adjusting the height of your target to
adjusting the slope if you find out you entered
in the wrong degree of slope into the laser."

Connor added: "All of my construction
career I've been taught to avoid straight lines
and formal features on a golf course to simulate
nature's random look. Tees, however, demand
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Connor added: "All of my construction

On the Green

"I'm no longer crowning tees because every time I crown a tee, from year to year I see half of it being used and half of it not being used. The part that would put the ball below the player's feet is not being used," Connor said the laser is also effective because "I don't have to jog down back and forth."

"In the old days, when a tee area was short of dirt, I'd have to shut the tractor down and bring in dirt I wanted to hold the grade. What I do now is just hit a button, raise the mast another one-tenth of a foot and it drops the grade. So I can use what dirt I've got to achieve the perfect surface. And if the hole tee ends up being a couple tenths lower or higher, it's of little consequence."

Dramatic Effects
Connor fondly recalls the day a year ago that he happened upon the laser device, which he said he called "fugacious" for use on golf courses. He was renovating Palma Ceia golf course in Tampa, and was driving onto the site one day when he went by the 17th tee, which was at eye height.

"I did a double-take of this tee. It was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen. I could look at it at eye height and it looked like it was sliced with a diamond cutter. It was perfect," he said. "Wow, what did that?" I had been around golf course construction all my life and never seen a tee look that good.

He checked with the course builder, Sunbelt Services of South Florida, "found out where that machine was and a week later I owned one."

Connor said one reason the city of Nash-ville was persuaded to redo the tees was "This was where they were going to spend only 20 percent of their money but they'd get 80 percent of the praise."

"I told officials: 'People see a tremendous improvement in the look of the course. That's what's going to make it politically palatable for you to spend the money and take the courses out of play for a season. When golfers come back, they will dramatically see a difference, whereas if you are just doing greens, the greens only looked stressed here a couple of months a year and the improvement in turf environment is not obvious until several seasons have elapsed.'"

"He said, 'The greens have been the artist's tapestry. It's hard to look at a green and say there's a mistake unless it's really blatant. But you could always look at a tee and notice a flaw immediately.'"

Connor looks to a future of designing and renovating golf courses using the computer models, laser equipment, and whatever other marvels modern high-technology brings.

"The thing I've had going for me and the reason I've managed to get jobs is that, by combining these technologies, we have made significant improvements in preserving famous old golf courses like Pebble Beach and Seminole. The combination is hard to beat," he said.

"It took me about six months to put the lasers in, and computer together. I thought it would be a lot more popular than it is, but maybe it's more difficult to get people to accept it. If expensive and time-consuming. But in the long run I think it's really going to be."

"He said that until 1987 when he renovated Pinehurst No. 2 in North Carolina, a preservation-oriented philosophy was impractical. The technology was too expensive and too slow.

"That is no longer the case. Computer models of course features become more valuable with each passing year, as subtle changes occur in greens and bunkering due to top dressing, wind, rain and settlement," he said.

"The greatest success of the computer modeling concept is due to recognition by estate management of golf facilities like Pinehurst, Seminole and Pebble Beach that the long-term benefits of accurate records and importance of preserving old golf courses features."