Clark: Projects should focus on demands of site, players

ASGCA president speaks out on design

The unique demands of the site and the players who will be using the course should be the focus of golf course development, says Tom Clark, president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects. Architects and superintendents should work together to develop courses that satisfy those needs.

“We try to get a superintendent involved at the start of construction so he can act as a project liaison, help interpret plans for the contractor and make suggestions that will ease maintenance,” said Clark. “For example, if we create a design that is difficult to maintain, he can bring it to our attention while changes can still be made.”

“We are still learning on the job,” Clark added.

“It is important to see what goes on underground, as well. ‘In particular, he needs to oversee the installation of the irrigation system and confirm that the greens, for instance, have exactly four inches of gravel, two inches of barrier layer sand and 12 inches of mix,” said Clark.”

“If you’re a turf manager who prefers to play the high-performance formula, consider what’s on the market. But that layout and other components remain true to the architect’s original intent.”

Although most superintendents don’t have the opportunity to be in on the development of a course, they can always check the original plans to learn the architect’s design strategy.

“Being informed is 90% of understanding each other,” Clark noted. Architects also must appreciate the superintendent’s point of view, and sometimes need to be reminded, for example, that a design element also needs to be moved twice a week.

Involving the superintendent of the course during construction allows him to interact with the contractor.

“Working together during the design and construction phase enables the superintendent to learn the intent of the original design,” Clark added.

“As the golf course evolves, the superintendent can help ensure that the layout and other components remain true to the architect’s original intent.”

Climate change is the new reality, and golfers want to continue playing the course. But they want to do so within the constraints of the environment. When a superintendent is in the swing of things by practicing under the dome constructed over the outdoor driving range, he can still observe what’s going on underground.

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