A little paint keeps wayward carts in line

Course clutter substantially reduced; drivers stay on the straight and narrow

By Peter Blais

"Ughyyyyyyyyyyyyy." That's all co-owner John Shields could mutter to himself as he gazed out at the ratty ropes and tilted posts stretching along the golf car paths traversing Glenn Dale (Md.) Country Club.

"How do we get rid of that stuff? We need something to keep the cars on the paths. But what can we come up with that's aesthetically more pleasing," Shields asked himself.

Like most golf courses, Glenn Dale occasionally spray painted the grass around greens, tees, wet spots, ground under construction and other areas where golf cars were forbidden to tread.

"About two years ago it occurred to us to extend that practice to the car paths. It's worked great," Shields said.

Two crew members took stiff-bristled brooms and vigorously swept the paths under construction and other areas where the lines were supposed to act like the lines on the highway works best. Occasionally spray paint (about $150) to edge the edges. Next, they used a four-wheeled broom to cross that side of the path. Lines on each side are handed out at the sign-in desk. But do players respect the boundaries?

"We have as much observance of the golf car policy as we did with the ropes and stakes," Shields said. "And it's aesthetically much more pleasing. You look out at the course and you don't see ropes or stakes anywhere.

"You don't even see the white lines when you look from fairway to fairway. The only time you see them is when you're in a car driving down the path. The members (about 500) know the rules and most accept them. The hardest part is getting guests to understand what you're trying to do. That's why we give them the card at the start of a round. And rangers remind them from time to time. We've heard of several courses that were used because golfers tripped over ropes," Shields said.

The lines also eliminate ruling problems concerning what to do when a ball comes to rest near a post or under a rope. Maintenance with weed whackers around posts is eliminated. So, too, is the three hours a week rangers averaged straightening posts and replacing ropes.

Occasionally edging paths to keep grass from infringing on the lines keeps a neat appearance, Shields said.

A cheaper alternative to buying a sprayer is using four- or six-inch hand rollers. Hand applying two, three, or four miles of white paint may take more time initially than using a machine: But the thicker coat will last longer, up to two years. Thinner, machine-applied coats must be done two or more times annually.

"And don't forget that traffic paint has a fast-drying agent. You have to be prepared to go the minute you start with a machine. If you stop for a few minutes, it will clog up the nozzle. If you just leave the cover off the can for 15 minutes, you get a thick film on the top," Shields said.

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