Family affair earns accolades

By KATHIE HOXSIE

Tahoe City, Calif. — Ask the Bechdolt family how they transformed greens and foreways in poor condition into turf that some play-tale of meeting environmental demands, continues fighting political hassles. Their historic nine-hole Tahoe City Golf Course, elevation 6,200 feet, abuts within three years, to stabilize three for all of California's five Tahoe golf ter well and two surface wells, install year for testing of ground and surface water. Other improvements have includ-ed new sand traps and tees, extensive planting of flowers and trees, and modernization of some cart pathways. Ownership of the course has been in Bechdolt hands for 42 years. Today six adult brothers and sisters, all golfers who grew up on the TCGC, run the business. Bechdolt owns a family who has been making the Tahoe City Golf Course corporate, held up by chemical and ecological asset as well as a prime recreation option for residents, second home-owners, and American and foreign tourists.

Because the owners are spread geographically from Southern California to Washington, the year-old corporation meets twice yearly in Tahoe City and uses teleconferences to conduct routine business. A majority vote rules.

"We have our feuds," admitted nephew and manager Bobby Bonino, 31, a University of San Francisco graduate in hospitalit management who also has an associate degree in business administration. "There are problems sometimes. They amount to what I know is right versus what they (the Bechdolt owners) think is right."

More than 30,000 round of golf are played here in the five to six months that the links aren't snow covered. A snow-mobile rental service leases the course during the winter. Between May and September, TCGC hosts six tournaments, including Cal Bechdolt's Cool Caddy. Open for LPGA caddies and players and three Northern California Golf Association events.

Sloped 10 to 15 percent, TCGC is a natural wetlands fed by 28 underground springs which cross the course diagonally. Only an acre and a half of the property is hard surface. Uphill on one corner of TCGC are 33 residences, a church, and community center. A cemetery, an elementary school, softball fields, a supermarket and other businesses flank other fairways and greens.

"We had been careful with our chemi-cals, but we hadn't done testing or check-ed our fertilizer," said E. J. Beiding, a civil engineer and general contractor who is married to the chair of Tahoe City Golf Course, Inc., the Bechdolt partnership corporation.

E. J. spent six months analyzing the most cost effective way to meet environ-mental criteria. He researched wetlands literature at the University of Nevada, Reno, the University of California, Davis, and the University of Denver. He put through such ones as "Construction Wetlands, "Guidelines for the Con-struction of Wetlands," and "The Analy-sis of Constructed Wetlands."

"I found that in terms of water quality at low temperatures, say 48 degrees, water goes through the plants, however, and into the Truckee River. Chemically speaking, you don't get any breakdown," E. J. said.

E. J. and TCGC's greens superint-endent Brad Bonino, Bobby's brother, who came to TCGC in 1989 with six years greens experience, engineered two wetlands areas and one major pond. Previously, TCGC had only one pond.

The wetlands, which are four to six inches deep, function as secondary water treatment facilities to cleanse contaminants. They can handle a one-hour flow velocity of a 20-year storm. The ponds are settling basins which catch debris and process harmful nutrients.

"We annually get to 20 years of silt out of one of the ponds," E. J. said. "We reuse the silt as fertilizer on other areas of the course."

Capitalizing on the ability of certain native plants, e.g., cattails and reed grasses, and bacteria to absorb pollu-tants, TCGC staff recently transplanted some natives from a nearby mountain meadow.

"We're now getting root zones to be effective, but it will take 20 to 30 years for them to really take hold," E. J. said.

"I think they're doing well, even better than expected due to our short growing seasons. We keep babying the system along."

His current favorite reference for keep-ing TCGC in shape is "Constructed Wet-lands For Water Quality Improvements." By California law fertilizer is kept to a minimum. Brad uses Turf Supreme Mini Pellets on the greens every three weeks. Teens are fertilized bimonthly, fairly lights twice a year. Dry spots are handwatered daily. Some weeds are handpicked, most are mowed to prevent overseeding. In the autumn, greens are treated with the fungicide Fliel to keep snowmelt down.

"All the while we are tested once a month by the state water board to see if anything is leaching into the ground water," Brad said. "We have about five test wells over the course.

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March 1994
Internships a win-win situation for courses, students

BY MARK LESLIE

Asturfgrass management becomes more technical and specialized, golf course superintendents are finding it increasingly important to have more knowledgeable crew members. And so they are pursuing agronomy students, offering positions on their crews in a win-win situation — the student intern gains experience and the superintendent gets a knowledgeable employee.

"Having a dependable core of folks who are going to understand more in-depth what turf management is about, and what golfers want, is an asset," said Bob Brame, agronomist with the U.S. Golf Association's Mid-Atlantic Section.

"Seeing that most of his interns from 'top-notch programs like Michigan, Iowa and Ohio State," Medinah (III.) Country Club superintendent Danny Quast said; "They already have four or five years working on a golf course. All the basic training has been done. They come with a great attitude and they're excited about the job, conscientious, educated and experienced. That's a perfect formulation."

"We not only have the facilities to house people, which I think is key. We're making internships very valued positions instead of 'learn-as-you-go,' said Greenswich (Conn.) Country Club superintendent Greg Wojick. "We're looking for the top one percent of students, enticing them with top pay, living quarters, bonus potential and responsibilities that are not typical for an intern."

Those responsibilities include pest monitoring and scouting, chemical applications, and manhole recordkeeping, inventory control, a full range of technical training, irrigation scheduling and other administrative duties.

"In the past, a lot of courses have thrown students out into low-level jobs and had them bite off as much as they could chew," Wojick said.

"I'm giving them a lot of responsibility in the maintenance facility and then, when appropriate, putting them out in the field," he said.

Having turfgrass students is "certainly an important improvement," said Bruce Cadenelli, superintendent at Caves Valley Golf Course in Finksburg, Md. "You have another pair of trained eyes — someone who is more enthusiastic and energetic. It's been difficult getting good people. I think when we do, it is in a small way, paying back the profession, and it's a win-win. The club gets good people to work and it's an opportunity for them to learn," he added.

"I've been in the business 30 years and seeing my interns go out and be a success is the most rewarding part of it," Quast said, adding that he has hired a number of them as superintendents at his three courses.

Attracting best interns. Major investment, big rewards

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filling up [job openings]."

One of Caves Valley's five maintenance buildings is a 1,200-square-foot structure. It contains a one-bedroom apartment for an assistant superintendent, and two college-style dorm rooms that share a livingroom and bath. A washer/dryer room is also included.

"The rooms are not luxurious but certainly adequate for the four-to-six-month period they [students] will be with us," Cadenelli said.

For the 1994 season Caves Valley has attracted one student each from the universities of Massachusetts and Maryland, Penn State, Michigan State. It's not the Ritz," said Danny Quast of his dormitory at Medinah (III.) Country Club, "but it serves its purpose."

His 11 rooms include two set aside for interns, each room with two beds. Employees are served three meals a day seven days a week at the clubhouse dining room.

To keep up with the Greenwich Country Clubs, Caves Valleys and Medinas, other courses must first find the cash. But, as the USGA's Brame put it: "The kick has been making the initial investment. Even if a course can rationalize building a facility, it still has to come up with the money."

Family pulls together

Continued from previous page

small landing areas add to the course's appearance and playability, said Bobby. "It did and does cost a little more money to function and meet regulations," Bobby said. "But it's better than getting a $1,500 to $10,000 fine for not complying."

To cover expenses, the Bechdolts raised greens fees to $32 and spent profits. They hope to replace their 40-year-old clubhouse, consolidate the maintenance yard into it, and repave driveway and parking areas. Within the next 10 years, they plan to add more of the easily cleanable, black fiberglass concrete paths. All will require environmental permits.

For now, however, the Bechdolts are battling with a bi-state environmental plan might require dangerously narrowable, black fiberglass concrete paths. All will require environmental permits.

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