

Nebraskans take 'barn-raising' teamwork to another level

By MARK LESLIE

SUTTON, Neb. — You could ask Jerry Gangwish down at Sutton Coop Grain, or Don George at the town's propane gas dealership. Or Mayor Virgil Ulmer up at city hall, or teacher-cum-golf-association-president Tom Newman over at the high school.

How does a town — farmers, teachers, grain sellers — pull together and build a golf course... in a community numbering just 1,300... for \$550,000... in 1994?



Dean Glorso

Guts, determination, forward thinking and citizen-government cooperation is the

resounding reply. But in this area of the country where "neighbor helps neighbor and that's the way it is," no one wants to take much credit.

"I never played golf in my life. But I like to see other people play golf. A lot of people enjoy it," said George, owner of George Brothers Propane, who obtained turfgrass seed wholesale and furnished a seeder and two to three men for a week to plant it.

"It was a lot of work but a fun project," said Gangwish. "We fertilized and planted grasses and used our skidloader to do quite a bit of [railroad] tie work around embankments."

"We had to put a lot of different pieces together to make it work," said Ulmer. "But people were real good about it. We had good city council support. We created the Community Redevelopment Authority which gave us the mechanism to acquire the ground and package the deal. The golf association reorganized and put in a lot of volunteer effort. Without all of this, it wouldn't have been able to happen."

"You see communities where people come out and help get the job done as a



Sutton, Neb., Mayor Virgil Ulmer (walking toward the trailer) rallied volunteers to lay acres of sod.

cost of mitigation. And you do see the city boys out helping with equipment and things," said City Administrator Mac Tilberg. "But we took a lot stronger aggressive approach and, from a market-share standpoint, feel we've got a golf course of championship ability."

Every community, he said, has "a little 350-yard par-4, grass green course. But we looked for a small-town market niche for a championship course, and [architect] Dean Glorso gave us that look, with a lot of the Dye influence. We have a lot of unique design. The public participation allowed that niche to be identified and approached, and successfully implemented. That's the difference."

Whatever the townspeople of Sutton got in their new golf course had to be a step up. Golfers here have been playing on the nine-hole Horseshoe Bend Golf Course which sported sand greens. After putting out, a golfer would smooth over the putting surface using a pole with a pipe on it. The cup was always in

the middle of the green. The sand was kept firm with mineral oil.

The floods of 1993, combined with 120 mph winds all but closed the course, and the golf board stepped forward with plans to build Fox Hollow Country Club on a different, 80-acre tract of land closer to downtown. City officials, led by Mayor Ulmer, decided it was a good idea to help financially. And organizers proceeded last March to hire Glorso to design the course and Van Kirk Brothers, a local earth-moving and pipe-laying contractor, to build it.

While the city was "more a driving force in the feasibility and contractual arrangements, the actual construction was driven by the private sector," Tilberg said.

Glorso, who worked for four years with Perry Dye at Dye Design, Inc., said: "I was concerned construction would be drawn out for a couple of years. But because of community support and volunteer help, it went quickly. We were done in about 120 days."

That's 120 days for nine holes. The second nine will be built once Fox Hollow is making money, Tilberg said. "Worst-case scenario is that it could be 20 years from now. Best-case is five to 10 years."

Because he was the only person involved who had golf course construction knowledge, Glorso contracted to be on site at least 10 days a month. Meanwhile, volunteer labor — and goods — arrived from myriad sources:

- Over the course of the construction, 100 to 200 people worked on it. "People with the skill levels necessary pitched in. A lot of golf association members helped do dirt work and rake greens. A lot of city workers helped with drainage work. Contractors worked on it, but were supported by 10 to 20 volunteers at a time," Tilberg said.

Volunteers basically worked after work and on Saturdays. "They'd show up at 3 or 4 o'clock, and I had started at 7 a.m., so I worked some very long days," a weary Glorso said.

Newman, who maintained the old course for free the last half dozen years, was instrumental in organizing people.

"At times I didn't know if anyone would show up, but when it got down to the pinch they always did," Newman said. "We had 50 volunteers coming and going at various times — eight to 10 for seeding, eight to 10 for tie work. We never had big enough projects that we needed everybody there at once."

Asked about the level of cooperation, Newman said: "Overall, it was very good. In a town this size, we still have small percentage who feel 'it will never work, never work.' But they're changing their minds since it greened up last fall."

With clubhouse construction underway this winter, construction trade people and farmers have gotten more involved, Tilberg said.

- Northern Burlington Railroad was pulling up railroad ties and donated 5,000 to the town.

The Volunteer Fire Department did a lot of the railroad tie work and built two bridges. Building bulkheads around waterways with the ties is labor-intensive and Glorso wasn't on site during a majority of that work, "but I came back in a week and they had it done," he said.

- A company in town that does concrete work donated labor to lay the cart paths.

- A veterinary clinic, which has a couple thousand 10- to 15-year-old Scotch pine trees that are 10 to 12 feet tall, donated 250 trees and hauled them the quarter-mile to the course.

People on the local tree board (Sutton is a Tree City USA) were instrumental in planting, staking and mulching trees.

- A local company donated a tractor to pull the seeder, and donated an employee for a week or more.

- "The mayor himself ran a scraper out there every day," Tilberg said. "He was instrumental in getting this done. He was a driving force."

- Jim Smith, a local irrigation contractor who had never irrigated a golf course before, "did an excellent job along with his son and a couple of other people," Glorso said. "They took 45 to 60 days to install a valve-in-head, two-row

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Sutton officials add community's financial resources 'to do the job right' at Fox Hollow

By MARK LESLIE

SUTTON, Neb. — JFK suggested "Ask not what your country can do for you..." But in this small-town community, city officials asked, "What can we do for you?" And therein lies the key to the success story that has become Fox Hollow Country Club.

When floods and winds essentially washed away the old nine-hole Horseshoe Bend Golf Course, the golf association set its sights on rebuilding the track on roughly the same site. But the 40 acres it had available would have meant many concessions in quality, and ultimately, perhaps, failure.

"There was not room enough to do it right," said City Administrator Mac Tilberg. "The grass-roots effort of a small community is always full of compromises. That compromise here was: 'Let's do what we can with what we have to work with.' It was then that the city asked, 'Can public resources assist to do it right?'"

The city needed to build a drainage way through town that would affect the proposed course, and saw the opportunity to improve the prospects for a better golf facility.

Nebraskan teamwork

Continued from previous page
RainBird system with close to 300 heads. And we had relatively few problems."

- The irrigation crew drilled an irrigation well that provides 2,000 gallons per minute, and another towns person donated the pump.

Van Kirk did the major earth-moving, and owner John Van Kirk ran a bulldozer to do a lot of shaping on the fairways while Glorso shaped all the greens and bunkers.

•••

"Compared to other courses in small towns, this has a lot of character," Glorso said, "mainly because of the natural terrain. There are some swales off the farm fields adjacent to us."

Towns have built courses for less money, "but they basically run a harrow over the ground and seed it," Glorso said. "This course is not typical of what the average small town has."

Tilberg was more adamant. "This course is pretty magnificent," he said.

Newman echoed: "Glorso made sure our golf course was unique — and it is. Most towns in this rural area have average courses. But ours is going to be quite a challenge."

Being intimately involved in such an effort "was a lot of fun," said Glorso, who has worked on high-end projects at the far end of the financial spectrum. "It gave you a good feeling about what people will do together."

A market analysis had suggested that "a much nicer course could pay for itself as well," Tilberg said. "Private resources were not 100 percent available to make it happen."

So, it was proven that two groups are stronger than one.

"If anything, what makes this course unique is the mix of citizens and government," said Mayor Virgil Ulmer. "A lot of courses are built in this part of the country by municipalities, or by volunteers where the

municipality doesn't have the wherewithal. People form an association and put a course together. In our case, we blended the two.

By doing that, we were able to keep the golf course privately held, but it still will be open to the public. It has enabled us to build a nicer course" than if either the municipality or volunteers had done it alone.

With the Community Re-development Authority (CRA) involved in the drainage project,

"we now had the ability to move this course with some local government intervention," Tilberg said. "The CRA is the long arm of the government and has the capacity to work with these agreements and cut the deals. We basically redeveloped the golf course from where it was to where it is now."

Officials, he said, "helped move the golf course to a nicer site adjacent to the highway, where it became a course genuinely for the public. It has a view and a good

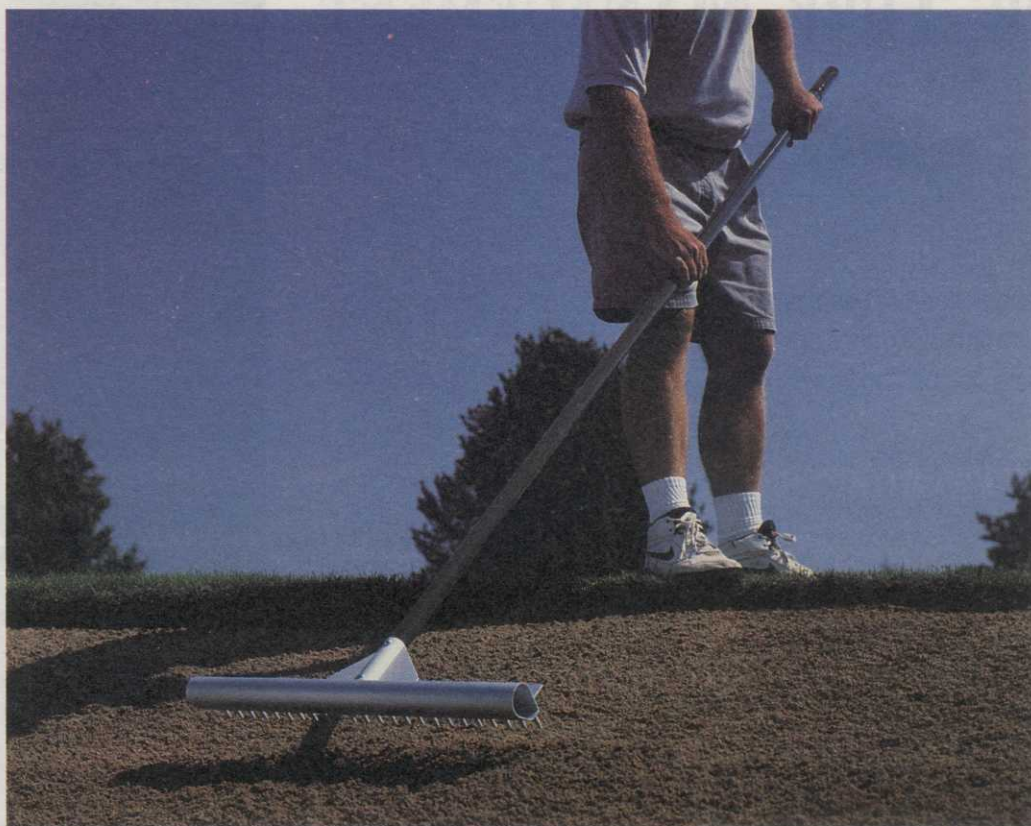
market site location that made it more than just our little course in the middle of town that no one else would know about."

Kicking in \$300,000, the city arranged legal agreements with the private sector, Fox Hollow Golf Club Association. The association is repaying the public participation in a couple of different debt-service schedules — one on a payment of a certain amount per year until the note is paid off; another being a tax increment financing that is like a tax abatement.

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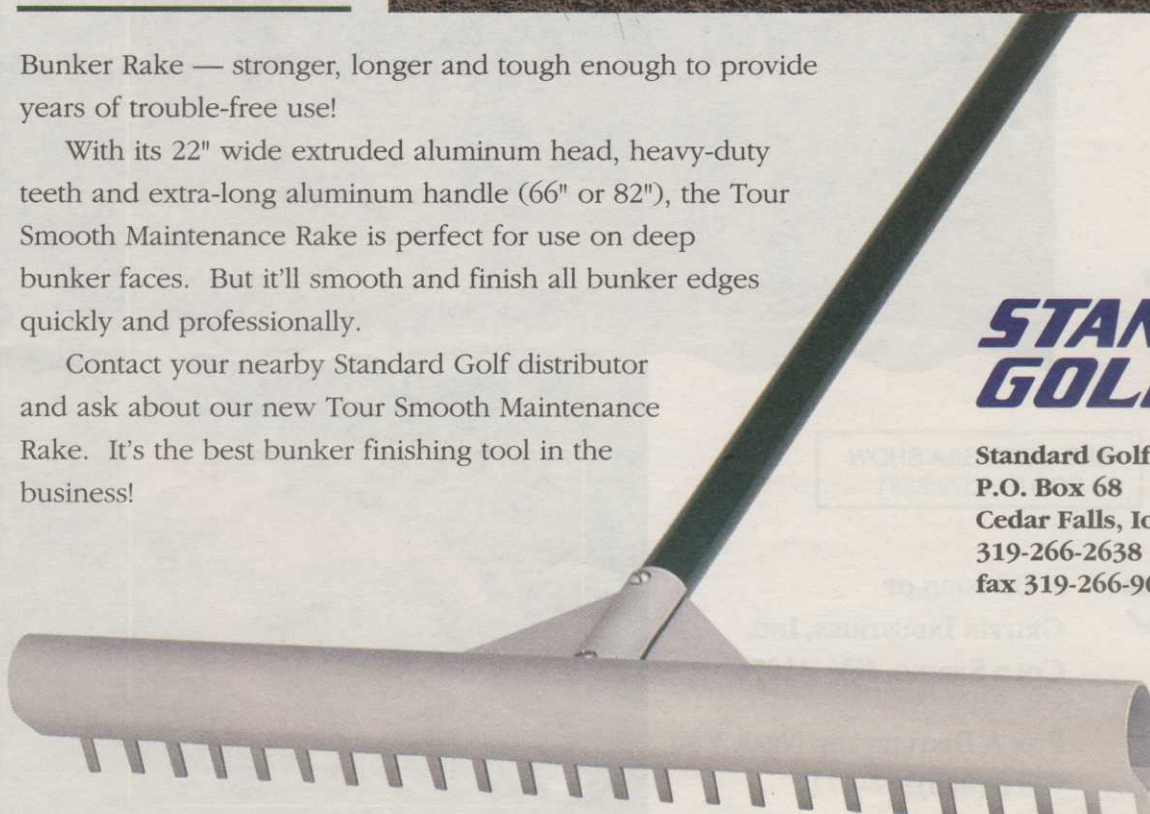
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