Course owners must cooperate to survive & thrive

BY MIKE TINKEY

Are you interested in an effective formula to improve your bottom line? Golf course owners and operators are making a significant positive impact to their bottom line working together in cooperative marketing, purchasing, research and governmental and regulatory affairs. Also, cooperative communication is building strong and effective bridges to decision-makers in the public and private sectors that are yielding additional positive results.

Clay Brittain, chairman of the board of the Myrtle Beach National Golf Co. — which owns 153 golf holes in Myrtle Beach, operates three hotels and is actively involved with his family in the travel, tourism and hotel industry — attributes working cooperatively with the local businesses in your industry as one of the keys to success.

"Working with others doesn't necessarily mean you don't compete," he says. "When you make the golf industry successful you have a better chance to be successful yourself."

He is proud to being one of the original organizers of the Myrtle Beach Golf Holiday, which is widely considered to be the largest and most effective golf marketing group in the country today. The Myrtle Beach cooperative effort attracts more than 2.5 million golf rounds a year and the number of courses in the area has grown from one in 1960 to more than 100 by 1997.

Each tax dollar spent on golf advertising produces $74 in spending by golfers. Working together, owners have realized group health insurance savings of 18 percent per employee with increased benefits. These are examples of cooperative efforts in South Carolina.

Mike Hughes, the Executive Director of the National Golf Course Owners Association, noted that "the answer to how a small state like South Carolina can become a golf powerhouse, lies in cooperative efforts in South Carolina."

Mike Tinkey has more than 20 years of experience in the resort, club and hospitality business. He is director of the NGCOA Smart Buy Program and president of Sports Management & Marketing Services, a consulting company specializing in golf and tennis resort and club operations.

Letters

Last, but certainly not least, Mr. McLoughlin suggests a national certification program for golf consultants. As we in the appraisal profession have learned all too well, more governmental intervention is not the answer. The answer is finding the right people and giving them the necessary tools to perform their job. These services require experience, independence, and objectivity. The best consultants will not "rubber stamp" a project and the smartest will not seek that rubber stamp. If this is done, the experienced people will become more easily identified and the industry will benefit as a result with better projects coming from better planning.

Laurence Hirsh, president Golf Property Analysts Harrisburg, Pa.

Kubota’s GF1800 diesel front mower delivers more power with its easily engaged Foot- Control-4WD. This “on demand” 4WD locks in on-the-go by simply pressing a pedal.

The 18 horsepower GF1800, with its 3-cylinder diesel engine, is ideal for commercial mowing jobs that demand maximum performance and efficiency as well as outstanding maneuverability. There are three shaft-driven mower choices – 48" mulching rear discharge mower, 54" or 60" side discharge mowers – all with cutting heights from 1" to 4". The independent hydraulic PTO clutch ensures smooth mower engagement. The PTO brake stops the mower quickly and secures the PTO shaft when the PTO is disengaged. Hydraulic lift system is standard.

The hydrostatic transmission features a single pedal to manipulate both speed and direction, eliminating shifting and clutching. Four-wheel traction, and rear-wheel steering for tight turns, let you work efficiently on all types of grass.

For the best quality cut, step up into Kubota’s GF1800.
Leslie comment
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Ocean Course Purchase Agreements or otherwise, directly or indirectly, with any other person, entity or qualified organization participating in the auction, TOM agrees to grant ASNY $150,000 to enable ASNY to complete the [environmental] study...

The agreement, which included another $100,000 to ASNY at the end of its study, was signed by ASNY President Ron Dodson and TOM Vice President Daniel M. McCormack on Sept. 9, 1993.

Of course, that promise of $250,000 bit the dust with the other commitments. But ASNY personnel don't wish to work with people who have shunned, and some would say "used" them. (The first bid had to include an environmental group and VIT courted ASNY to join in the process.)

Ah, commitment. They say lack of it is a reason for the high divorce rate nowadays. Who would have thought inhabitants of Golf Nation would witness it in their own family?

Meanwhile, some may have been shocked at the seeming complicity of the government in this matter. The Resolution Trust Corp., which was such a stickler for involving environmental organizations in the original auction of the Ocean Course, apparently went into an environmental fog during the second sale. The RTC essentially trashed the original sale — to the partner-ship of the New York Audubon and VIT — because neither would agree to a unilateral RTC provision allowing other environmental organizations to get involved, if they disagreed with how the Ocean Course was being managed.

But in the second auction, the RTC's agreement contains absolutely no language regarding environmental management of the course.

Spokesman Mike Fulwider simply stated that, under the Coastal Barrier Improvement Act, the RTC was obligated to market the property to environmental groups only the first 90 days (two years ago). Although several groups besides the New York Audubon had stated an interest, RTC took the position that it had fulfilled its commitment, Fulwider said. "Therefore, we were free to market it to the gen-eral public. Our primary concern is meeting our statutory responsi-bilities and recovering as much as for the taxpayers as we can in the sale of that property."

People in the golf industry, especially in recent years, have promoted awareness that they are the true environmentalists — the ones enhancing wildlife habitat hands-on.

One entity alone can now threaten all that goodwill.

Who's involved if the RTC gets another black eye in this bank-ruptcy mess which was arguably caused by the government itself? The golf community would have to pressure one of its own to stand on the environmental high ground. But, one person falls off that high ground and so do commuters from Honolulu to Halifax.

Like maintaining golf courses, designing them can be a stress on a family. It involves long days and sometimes long seasons for superintendents, long days and extensive travel for architects. Designer Barry Serafin, this month's Q&A subject (see page 27), puts his career and family in this perspective: "Right now, all my projects are in central Ohio [where he lives]. I have a 6, a 3- and a 1-year-old and I like to be home as much as possible. You have to keep your priorities straight. It's so easy to get so involved it takes over your life. Once that happens, it gets in front of your God, in front of your family and things like that. Once your priorities get out of whack, so does your life."

Referring to his association's request for proposals on the construction of putting greens (see story page 13), U.S. Golf Association Director of Research Dr. Mike Keiser said, "We've held off building any projects until all the architect and soil labs ought to back this. It should not be left solely in the hands of the USGA. Superintendents and superintendents, he argues.

Who's involved in new golf course construction?" he asked. "In the world, research is done by the architects, not the mainten-ance men. In effect, [the in-dustry] is doing the same as ask-ing the plant manager (carter) to design a good fur-nace, etc. The USGA gets dragged into this because of our [green-spec] guidelines."

Kenna added: "There's very little research into the most im-portant factor: Ensuring you have a good property to work with and that it's been built well."

There's no accounting for taste differences in turfgrasses, says Turf Merchants Inc. Vice Presi-dent Steve Tabbs. "In Las Ve-gas, a desert, they are managing a New Jersey perennial ryegrass year-round. That's what they want. In Palm Springs, a desert, it's the opposite. They love Bermudagrass and want perennial ryes just to overseed and then to die out. And those two spots are only 200 miles apart."

Texas A&M University's Dr. Milk Engelke, a noted plant breeder, commenting on breeding turfgrasses: "It sounds like wedding preparations. You hear phrases like 'The prospects are excelling,' 'The Candidate is potentially' and 'Now we have to go through generations of breeding in characteristics.'"

RFG troubles
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affected and how much small equipment there is out there used by contractors and landscap-ers. All this stuff, especially on a golf course, is specialized high-dollar equipment. "I think there's going to be a lot more fallout as that part goes on here. If there are any problems with this in the long run, it could damage our fleet and you could be talking about a lot of money."

With golf course work crews everywhere facing the brunt of the summer heat, mechanics also note engines using the new RFG seem to have problems starting and when running temperatures hit the mid-80s and higher. On top of all this, prices for the new gas have been creeping up steadily the past six months.

"You're paying a little more at the pump and you're paying for nothing," said David Pellerin, head mechanic for six years at Portland (Maine) CC. Pellerin said he recently discovered a melted head gasket for the first time on a National triplex bank mower and has had to make constant adjust-ments to mowers and RFG carts.

"I believe the gas is here to stay, so we're going to have to make the best of it. I'll probably start going by a higher octane."

Pinkeye comment
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defining the objectives, creating a structure, selecting leaders, establishing funding and tracking results.

In South Carolina the course owners worked together to determine the economic impact of the tourism expenditures on golf market and facts to support the industry to state employment and taxes. Primary data is collected confidentially from golf course operators throughout the state. The initial program was a cooperative project with the South Carolina Parks, Recrea-tion and Tourism Department (PRT), the South Carolina Chapter of the NGCOA and the University of South Carolina. The study is reported this year and every one or two years thereafter, will continue to receive research funding through marketing partnership program with the PRT Department.

The data on golf course operations accumulated for the most recent study was extended $1.5 billion. With these related expenditures added in, the economic impact of golf has been widely reported as $1.5 billion. Each tax dollar spent on golf advertising produces $74 in spending by golfers. The South Carolina PRT 1994 marketing and advertising budget, which is funded primarily from admissions tax paid on golf greens fees, drew an 18 percent increase over 1993.

The economic impact from golf course operations has added more than 10,000 full-time jobs for the state, with a payroll for those employees of more than $227 million. Golf generates $5.7 million in direct taxes and over $10.7 million in combined tax revenue.

"Attracting more golfers means more jobs, more income and more tax revenue for the state," acknowledges South Carolina's Gov. David Beasley.