**MOVIN' ON UP**

**Handling change key to Schlick's Marriott success**

**By PETER BLAIS**

Variety, they say, is the spice of life. In Tom Schlick's case, it is what makes Marriott Golf's director of grounds operations look forward to coming to work each morning.

"I realized pretty early that I wasn't cut out to be a maintenance superintendent," said the University of Florida graduate, who oversees Marriott's 19 golf facilities and has grown in two of them. "I like new construction. They can take three to five years to complete and things are changing all the time."

"Change is what appeals to me about this job. I'm involved with everything here — construction, architects, manufacturers. It's different every day."

Schlick hadn't planned on a golf industry career. After earning his bachelor's degree in ornamental horticulture, he started his own commercial landscape contracting business in New York. While bidding on Marriott's Wind Watch Golf Club in Haupage, Long Island, he was offered the assistant superintendent's post.

"I hadn't considered a golf career," said Schlick, who worked part-time on the University of Florida's Gainesville course grounds crew while in college. "I knew nothing about golf course maintenance. But it was the late 1980s and the recession was hitting strong in New York. So I decided to give it a try."

Schlick helped grow in seven of the Joe Continued on page 42

**RDC makes splash along East Coast**

**By PETER BLAIS**

**PARSIPPANY, N.J.** — RDC Golf Management Co.'s recent purchase of Heritage Links Country Club (CC) in Gainesville, Fla., puts the relatively young management firm into double figures in courses. The semi-private club is RDC's third acquisition in the last year and gives the Parsippany-based company 10 courses at eight locations along the East Coast.

"We're looking to add an average of four courses a year through lease, purchase or management arrangements, although our preference is acquisitions," said company President Chris Schiavone, who co-founded the firm in 1993. "We're looking at properties from Florida to New England. We don't want to be the biggest, just the best in our regions."

RDC is planning $500,000 in improvements to the Heritage Links' course and 25,000-square-foot clubhouse. The company has added $100,000 to the course equipment purchase budget and will soon begin a major upgrade to the irrigation system and cosmetic changes to the course.

"The members and public guests will see significant improvements in all areas of Heritage Links' operations, with particular attention to course conditions and the food and beverage operation," said RDC Vice President of Operations Steve Phillips.

These are two areas of particular importance to Schiavone, whose experience operating golf courses took root at 54-hole Fiddler's Elbow CC, a new Continued on page 44

**Palmer selects 1st course franchisee**

**ORLANDO, Fla.** — Arnold Palmer Golf Management recently signed on its first franchisee, Braeburn Golf Course operated by Reflection Ridge Corp. in Wichita, Kan.

"As our first franchised course, Braeburn is our newest prototype and will be closely watched by both the industry and the thousands of independent owners around the United States," said Peter Nanula, Chief Executive Officer of Palmer Golf Management.

"Said Braeburn owner Reg Boothe: "I decided recently that a franchise opportunity with Palmer Golf was the perfect opportunity for Braeburn. To me, association with the Palmer system is a major launching pad to distinguish our course from the rest of the competition."

The idea to franchise courses under the Palmer brand came to executives of the company who observed that many course owners were either unwilling to sell their facilities or to bring Continued on page 44

**Lightning liability a tricky issue at golf courses**

The following article was reprinted with the permission of NewsLinks, a quarterly newsletter published by Golf Property Analysts of Harrisburg, Pa. Ian Melkinsky is an associate with the law firm of Fox, O'Brien & Frankel LLP in Philadelphia.

**By IAN MELKINSKY**

A New Jersey court has handed down the nation's first known ruling that lightning is not an act of God when it hits a golfer.

On March 28, 1993, Spencer Van Maussner, a member of the Atlantic City Country Club, was playing the back nine when one of his golf partners saw lightning along the way, they proceeded toward the clubhouse. While they walked, Mr. Maussner put up his umbrella and was struck by lightning. Although he survived, he was severely injured and sued the Club and its owners.

The case was dismissed before going to the lower court and ruled on April 4 in Maussner v. Atlantic City Country Club, Inc. that breakthroughs in engineering and forecasting have given golf courses the capability to protect golfers from lightning better than ever. Therefore, though courses do not have an affirmative duty to protect their patrons from lightning, they are liable if they establish protective systems and the systems do not work.

The appeals court found that the Atlantic City Country Club had, by its actions (the Atlantic City club's practice was to monitor the weather, and it had an evacuation plan that consisted of golf course personnel driving onto the course to warn golfers), assumed a duty to warn golfers and that it is for a jury to determine whether the club exercised the duty reasonably. On remand, the court must permit discovery of industry data to help the jury determine what protection the club offered to its golfers and whether the club reasonably instituted and carried out these precautions.

The ruling sets the stage for continued Continued on page 42
Schlick
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Lee-designed holes under con-
struction at Wind Watch and even-
tually took over as head superin-
tendent. He stayed on for a year
after the course opened.
"Tom was the first superin-
tendent I'd ever met who understood
a course's entire business oper-
ation," said Marriott Director of
Golf Operations Bill Nault, who
has worked with Schlick since the
two were first paired at Wind
Watch in 1989. "He was able to
balance the growing of turf with
the business decisions the pro
makes to maximize rounds and
make the operation profitable.
Bringing those two needs together
is a tough thing to do."

Added Schlick: "It's critical in
the daily-fee environment for a
superintendent to understand the
need to make a profit and to work
with the pro and golf director to-
toward that goal. An owner expects
to make his 10- to 15-percent re-
turn. If the general manager is
having a bad month, the superin-
tendent can help by delaying costs,
like an ornamental planning, for a
few months. I've worked with good
golf directors and they'll usually
return that money to the mainte-
nance budget as soon as they have
a good month."

Schlick earned a Golf Course Superintendents Association of
America regional Environmental
Stewardship award at Wind
Watch (1992) and both a national
(1993) and regional (1994) award
at Marriott's Shiloh Falls Golf
Club in Preswick Dam, Tenn.,
where he served as site manager
during construction of the Jerry
Pate-designed layout.

As the Marriott golf empire
grew, then-Marriott Golf Presi-
dent Roger Maxwell, generally
regarded as a golf merchandising
genius, realized he needed a di-
rector of agronomy to deal with
that side of the business. Forty
candidates were considered for
the job. Maxwell recommended Schlick
before he left to start his own com-
pany. Maxwell's replacement, Claye
Acheson, offered him the position.

"It helped that I already worked
for the company and knew the
Marriott method of doing things," Schlick said of his selection. "But
I also felt I had proven myself on
two tough projects. If I didn't know
the answer to a problem, I kept
asking people until I found the
answer. That is an important abil-
ity for a person in my position in
an industry that is evolving as rap-
idly as golf."

Relationships changed as
Schlick moved up the corporate
ladder. Peers became employ-
ees. Critiquing a former co-
worker's performance occasionally
caused problems.

"But again, I was fortunate to
work with good people who, once
the dust settled, handled things
professionally and moved on. I've
made mistakes and it's helped to
admit my error in those cases.
You are dealing with intelligent,
college-educated people. If I
make a mistake, they know it."

Schlick enjoys his job, al-
though the 70,000 miles he trav-
els yearly can be taxing, espe-
cially with a 2-year-old at home.

"If the right resort project
came along, I'd consider going
back to the field to grow it in," he
did. "It would have to be a huge
project, like our Desert Springs
facility near Phoenix."

Lightning
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courses must post signs that iden-
tify safety procedures to be used,
but it added, "[i]f a particular golf
course uses no safety precautions,
its signs must inform golfers that
they play at their own risk and
that no safety procedures are be-
ing utilized to protect golfers from
lightning strikes."

In reaching the conclusion that
the act of God defense was not
dispositive, the appeals court
looked to cases that hold that
the imposition of a duty turns on
whether it is fair under all cir-
cumstances in light of public
policy considerations. Contin-
uing, the court indicated that light-
ing is increasingly falling into
the category of hurricanes and
tornadoes; disasters that have
become more predictable.

Although there are a number of
companies that provide protective
systems that reduce the risks,
courses must now carefully con-
sider the extent, if any, they are
willing to "interpose" themselves
between their patrons and God.