Look back before you leap

A-hh, it was a very good year, all in all. And, I believe, as we reach one milestone we should look back at what we've gone through and get it all in order to where we're going. As George Santayana said: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

"Don't brood on what's past, but never forget it, either," admonished Thomas H. Raddall. What are lessons from our personal— and the golf industry's collective— experience in 1997 that we can take with us in the year 1998?

From the positive side, many points, including:

- Women and juniors are dying to get involved in golf; those who accommodate them will prosper.
- Explore new avenues for financing. A lot more money is available in the marketplace. Chapter recruiters and potential investors should check with these sources.
- Women's participation is growing in major championships. How can we learn from your personal—and the golf industry's— collective—experience in 1997 that we can take with us in the year 1998?

Mark Leslie, managing editor

Believe it or not, horizons are expanding

In 1994, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSSA) launched new initiatives in the areas of professional image, golf and the environment, and chapter relations. A year later, it added career development to the mix. To upgrade the superintendents' professional image and enhance career possibilities, the association began encouraging members to look beyond the position of golf course superintendent as an ultimate goal. GCSSA organizers reasoned, quite correctly, that superintendents developed in becoming a superintendent were transferable to other jobs and even ownership positions within the golf industry.

"All the experiences I had along the way were important in getting me to this position," said Kyle Evans (GCN June 1997), who was assistant superintendent at one course and head superintendent at two others before becoming managing partner of Belgrade Lakes (Maine) Golf Club, a new facility he and his partners plan to open next summer.

Evans' comments appeared in a regular feature we launched earlier this year titled "Movin' on up" in which we highlight the accomplishments of former superintendents who have climbed the golf industry career ladder into positions many superintendents may have formerly believed unattainable.

Evans made the ultimate jump to course owner. So, too, did Dick Schulz (GCN May 1997), operator of the Oaks Course near Atlanta. Making that leap required the most important asset any entrepreneur can possess—the willingness to take a chance.

"I'm a risk-taker," Schulz said. Added Evans: "You can't hit unless you step to the plate."

The golf course management companies have made a new position more common in recent years. The title is usually something like Director of Agronomy or Director of Course Operations. This person oversees maintenance operations and personnel at all the courses a management company runs. If the company is large enough, that person may have more than one director of agronomy reporting to him. That is the case with Mike Heacock (GCN January 1997), vice president of operations with management colossus American Golf Corp., the Santa Monica, Calif.-based operator of 250-plus courses.

"To be an effective manager, you have to be able to stand back and deal with the individual superintendent when you come to the company. He is his professional world," said the AGC executive and former course superintendent, who also noted that he has to get things done through other people is a key for any successful multiple-course operator.

"People's skills are also important for Carefree Resorts Director of Golf Operations Ed Miller (GCN February 1997), who oversees The Boulders in Carefree, Ariz. The Lodge at Ventana Canyon in Tucson, Ariz.; and Carmel (Calif.) Valley Ranch."

"I look for the best talent when recruiting superintendents and then give them the authority to do their jobs," said Miller, a long-time superintendent himself.

From the negative side:

- Building a golf course where 18 more holes saturates a market is not a good idea.
- Expecting that golfers will attend your new golf course just because it's there is without any marketing and advertising is foolish.
- The "easy deals" are gone, according to management companies who, not long ago, were buying poorly operated facilities and turning them around quickly.
- Beware new government policies, such as updated versions of wetland regulations and OSHA's attempt at ergonomics control.

There is a story of a person who expressed amazement at Johann Sebastian Bach's ability on the organ. Bach replied: "You simply have to hit the right key at the right time. The organ does all the rest."

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