Field days are actually fun

I must admit, I wasn't sure what I was in for when I was making my flight arrangements for Portland, Ore., to attend 1998's batch of field days. But what I found after six days in the Corvallis Valley is that I'm now a whole hell of a lot more knowledgeable on the foundation of any good golf course — grass.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with these yearly happenings — there can't be many of you — field days are ways for grass seed companies to share their latest research findings and grass varieties with distributors, retailers and superintendents. Most field days start with opening remarks from company presidents, guest speakers and research technicians that plot the company's current position and future plans. Following these remarks, and lots of coffee, attendees are lead around the test trials of the company's various grass varieties to check in on the progress.

It was this field tour segment that I questioned at the outset. Being my first time to the fields, I wasn't sure what I would gain out of looking down toward my shoes at five or six varieties of tall fescue. But what I failed to factor in was that while I was, in fact, staring down at my shoes, there would be a voice booming out of a speaker that would actually explain to me what I was seeing and what I should look for in the different varieties.

Overall, what I thought would be of no help to me at all ended up being a valuable, educational experience.

A pat on the back should go to the seed companies that hold these days. I realize that they're designed as marketing events, yet they're also an educational tool that they end up serving a dual purpose — a pleasant surprise.

While I'm busy passing out the back slaps, a special thanks to the folks at American Golf Corp.'s Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club, OB Sports' Langdon Farms Golf Club and The Reserve, as well as the staff at Trysting Tree Golf Club.

Pumpkin Ridge, Langdon and The Reserve truly epitomize the "country club for a day" concept, while Trysting Tree showed us what a good youth program can do to help push affordable, accessible public golf forward.

Teeing off before my group at Trysting Tree were two boys not older than 14. My playing partner, a local who plays the course two or three times a week, suggested that I watch how well the boys move their game along. He proceeded to tell me that before kids play the course they are put through an extensive program that teaches the kids the written and unwritten rules of the game. For SS, he said, kids come out and spend the whole day.

LETTER FROM THE PHILIPPINES

Western ways in the East

By JOHN FARLEY

BORACAY ISLAND, The Philippines — An average day in the Philippines starts out like any State-side day. Up at 5 a.m. and lacing the boots while throwing in Asia is to keep cool and be patient. You'll eventually lose the respect of your crew — not to mention your mind. As managers we're all aware that it's important to know when to push and when to back off. Sometimes you just need to roll with the punches.

The general pace of life is a bit slower here. The sooner you realize that the better. Of course, this puts a premium on planning and organization. You really need to "get out in front" of things and be as proactive as possible. It also helps to have a couple back-up plans in case plan A goes away. My advice for rookie managers is to wear comfortable boots and don't get too wound up.

Another aspect I had to get used to was the size of the crews. In a region where labor is so cheap, crew sizes run three and four times as large as Stateside crews. This, coupled with the language barrier, made course construction a genuine challenge. I found that a good foreman is worth his weight in gold. With the right man at the helm a crew, a lot can be accomplished.

Many things are done manually here rather than mechanized as in the States. An example is the amount of hand-digging we do. Entire green cores and huge

LETTER FROM LESLIE

Mark, you have written editorials that I felt were right on target. None, however, were as appropriate as "Resist and refuse to double under." The golf industry is producing the product that millions of people want...and nobody should feel guilty about that. Uninformed activists have an easy target with "lush, green, pest-free" golf courses. After all, who needs them, right? Paul Harvey is responsible for helping many millions of Americans form their opinions on many issues over the years. In this regard, he needs to be responsible for influencing the public with facts, not fancy. Thanks again. Ron Gagne, Regal Chemical Co.
All the spoils are bagged and hand-carried and gravel and sand is even sometimes placed by hand. It’s also not unheard of to hand plant entire fairways. Seventy-five women line up across the fairway and away they go. Each lady has a sack of sprigs and a putty knife. Each sprig is manually planted and a fairway can be grassed in a day with an enormous success rate. Nearly every sprig takes.

There’s a term here: “Philippine Time.” This is applied to situations where things don’t happen exactly when scheduled. This means 10:00 a.m. meetings start at 10:30, deliveries promised first thing in the morning show up around noon, and jobs to be finished in a couple of days usually take three or four.

My first job in The Philippines was an 18-hole rebuild at the old naval station at Subic Bay. The old course was in the middle of a rain forest and jungle. It's one of The Philippines' last virgin rain forests standing.

It came complete with native jungle tribes, wild pigs, cabs, pythons, monitor lizards, parrots and fruit bats the size of small dogs. It was like working on the Discovery Channel every day.

The surroundings were spectacular, which was a nice offset because the work was a real trial at times. Golf construction is still relatively new to the Philippines and this fact is reflected by the inconsistent materials. Sand and gravel deliveries had to be monitored daily. What usually showed up in the truck was nothing like the sample we had approved. The minute you stopped checking your materials, a dirty load would be delivered. The main reason for this is the processing operations. Most of the sand and gravel is hand-sifted and loaded. Without proper screening plants, consistent loads were a rare commodity.

An additional headache at Subic was the weather. Monsoons and typhoons plagued our construction efforts and earthmoving activities. I’ve come to refer to seasons in Subic as the muddy season and the dusty season. You’re either slogging through mud or coughing up dust.

It was at times like trying to breathe through a wet wool blanket. Mud slides, mud washouts and flooding were our main concerns. Despite the adversities, we were able to complete our construction efforts in 12 months.

My current job is at a Graham Marsh design on the tiny island of Boracay. Here, problems are quite different, yet equally difficult. Being on an island poses unique dilemmas. We have to bring in all materials and equipment by boat and barge. I’ve lost buggies to pirated bad buggies, tried to dock and, of course, getting stuck on sand bars is common place.

Like Subic, the crew in Boracay is very good — hard-working individuals who are willing to put in a full day. The work is tough and their living conditions are less than what we’re accustomed to. Most of the crew live in houses made of thatch and bamboo. Many don’t have running water or power at their places. Despite their situations, their attitudes are amazingly upbeat.

I’ve developed a great deal of respect for the Philippines and its culture. I’ve also learned so many things since working here over the years. My only hope is that I’ve been able to teach my crew half as much as the Philippines has taught me.

Letter from Philippines

Continued from page 10

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