Suppliers set to attack growing renovation marketplace

By ANDREW OVERBECK

As new courses continue to flood the market, perhaps to the point of saturation, older courses are starting to revamp and renovate existing layouts to keep up with the increasing competition. Renovation efforts, more often than not, start with improving and upgrading the course's irrigation system.

"There are a lot of things that a course can do to improve playing conditions," said Mike Donoghue, division director for Rain Bird Golf. "But irrigation is one of the most important. In addition to having more control, they will also save money on energy and water use, and by having a more reliable and maintenance-free system, they will save money on labor."

The new three- and four-row systems offer better coverage of traditionally hard to reach areas such as roughs, green surrounds and areas around tee boxes. When adding new heads, however, increased pump station capacity is another need that must be addressed.

"Designs have changed drastically from 90-foot spacing down to 60-foot spacing and three rows around greens," said James Simonini, market manager for golf and irrigation at SyncroFlo. "All of a sudden the [existing] pump station cannot meet the new demand."

"Retrofit is huge in golf," said Simonini. "The market is easily three times the number of new courses coming online and probably more."

As a result the industry is gearing up to attack the retrofit and renovation market with new products and services.

FINANCING

Many companies have created leasing programs through outside vendors to help courses bear the brunt of an irrigation renovation.

"The key to this market is financing," Continued on next page

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The irrigation upgrade at Pueblo de Cochiti GC helped the course keep up with the local market.

Pueblo de Cochiti GC keeps up with the Jones' By ANDREW OVERBECK COCHITI, N.M. — In a move to improve playability and reposition the course against new competition, Pueblo de Cochiti Golf Course recently finished a complete irrigation renovation.

"The system that was in the ground was 20 years old," said superintendent Pat Brockwell. "It was a two-row system and had an undersized main line. We were fixing leaks at least once a week. It was just time."

The course was also losing business to newer facilities in the area.

"They were able to put a better product out there," said Brockwell. "We knew that we had to upgrade to keep up with the local market."

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The new system is a four-row system with part circles on the outside to cover roughs. It has just under 1,700 heads that are driven by a 3,000 gallon-per-minute pump station. During the dry season the system peaks out at 700,000 gallons a night.

The new system gives Brockwell more control. “Before it was brown roughs and green fairways or green roughs and soggy fairways. Now we have turf wall-to-wall,” he said.

Pueblo de Cochiti is located in a high desert environment at 5,600 feet elevation and has special irrigation needs due to climatic conditions. During the winter, nighttime low temperatures range from zero to 20 degrees but reach 50 to 60 degrees in the daytime. The irrigation heads must be protected from the freezing weather but still able to operate during the day.

This created some interesting challenges for the installation company, Yarmouth, Maine-based Irrigation Systems.

“Do renovation work all at once instead of dragging it out over several years. By just biting the bullet for one season we are done.”

— Pat Brockwell

“In the high desert situation, the ground can get cold enough to freeze a normal valve-in-head sprinkler. Because they need to water in the daytime we built a modified block system with a series of electric valves and valve boxes that run individual heads,” said Warren Michaelsen, Irrigation Systems president. “Because those are 18 inches underground, they are less vulnerable to frost and that allows them to drain portions of the system without shutting the whole system down.

The summer months also used to be a challenge for Brockwell, but the new irrigation system has helped to mitigate dry conditions.

“We irrigate quite a bit in the summer because we cannot rely on rain,” he said. “This year we have less than five tenths of an inch of moisture so the new system came not a minute too soon.”

In addition to renovating the irrigation system, the course was lengthened by 300 yards, some new tees were added, cart paths were installed, its three lakes were relined, two fairways were rebuilt, and bunkering and storm drainage were improved.

All the work was done in one season, nine holes at a time, and completed in early June.

“If I have any advice for others,” said Brockwell. “It would be to do renovation work all at once instead of draging it out over several years. By just biting the bullet for one season we are done.”