

New courses outpace demand

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It's not all gloom and doom for course owners, however. The macro-trends are favorable. Collectively, inflation-adjusted course revenues have doubled over the last 11 years from \$7 billion to \$14 billion. According to the NGF, one third of the increase (\$2.4 billion) came from new players, and two thirds (\$4.7 billion) have come from higher greens fees.

"Thus," the report says, "the growth in greens fees revenue has come mostly from real pricing increases on a per-round basis, and only to a much less extent from new players." But then comes the bad news: "The per capita spending increases experienced in the 1990s are likely not sustainable indefinitely."

The solution, of course, is to attract more new players to the game, and the good folks at NGF are ready with a plan.

To ensure a more prosperous future, the report states, the industry needs to see 100 million more rounds over the next decade - beyond the "natural" growth. Where will they come from? From the 41 million "high potential" people who would like to golf or who would like to play more often.

Working with the international management consulting firm McKinsey & Company, the NGF has come up with a five-step action plan that can be implemented at the individual course level. To wit:

- **Targeted programs.** Create a wider variety of programs designed to ease the entry and development of high-potential target groups (e.g., programs for women, mixed singles, parent/child and married couples.)

- **Tailored products.** Develop products that appeal to a broader spectrum of golfers and that ease the transition from ranges to courses (e.g., better utilization and marketing of existing par-3, executive, and nine-hole courses, and more and better practice facilities.)

- **Dynamic pricing.** Provide special pricing in much the same way as an airline. The golf product can be priced in many ways (e.g., by time of day, day of week, group discounts and frequent player programs) to create value for both customer and owner.

- **Skills training.** Make learning the game more fun and inviting. Golfers want to learn in a friendly, non-intimidating environment. Golf instruction must become more than just swing mechanics. It should encompass strategy, course management, short game, and other important aspects that a golfer must learn to become a genuinely committed player.

- **Enriched understanding of golf.** Provide a stronger connection to the game's traditions and values. An important part of the golf experience involves the history, traditions, etiquette and other nuances of the game about which committed players are so passionate.

"The golf industry is at a crossroads," the NGF report concludes. "We may continue to grow at a slow but steady rate, or we may take advantage of a very large and addressable opportunity to increase participation." ■

Coping with consolidation: a superintendent's strategy for success

Anthony L. Williams, CGCS

In the beginning, golf was simple. There was only one golf course. Therefore golf management was simple. There was only one way to do things, so no comparisons could be made.

After the success of the first golf course, many new courses were built that were similar in function but had very different goals. Some courses focused only on financial results, for example, while others focused more on playability and scenic design. The competition for players and ratings grew at a sizzling pace. The growth of the golf industry created an opportunity for corporations to begin operating groups of courses with unifying standards and goals. This strategy uses the synergy of bulk buying and standardized procedures to increase efficiency.



Anthony Williams

Many golf management companies use these concepts successfully. However, the superintendent of a newly acquired property often faces unfamiliar challenges. The fear of replacement, budget reviews and lengthy policy manuals all create stress. The superintendent must overcome this stress by aligning his goals with those of the management company. Succeeding in this situation is difficult, but can be very rewarding.

There are two primary goals a superintendent should focus upon during a management change at his property. The first is to fully understand the objectives of the new management company, and the second is to adjust the operations to best meet these new objectives.

TAKE PROACTIVE APPROACH

As superintendent, you must become proactive and accept the process of change. Soon after acquiring a property, representatives from the management company will arrive to assess the course and its management. These operational meetings are critical to the superintendent's future at the property. The superintendent must obtain the company's objectives for the property in these meetings and demonstrate the organization, work ethic and communication skills needed to achieve these objectives.

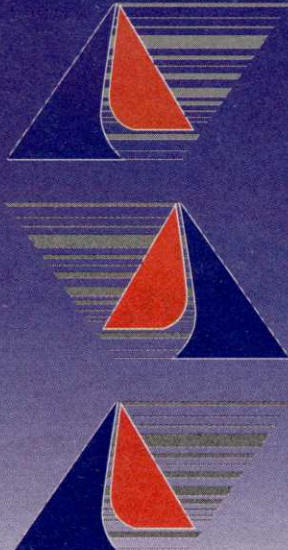


The 356-yard par-4 18th hole at PineIsle with the Renaissance PineIsle Resort Hotel in the background

As superintendent, you should meet as many representatives from the management company as possible. Use the telephone, fax and e-mail to share your property's needs with all levels of new management. Remember to present a professional image in all areas of contact. Ask direct questions about your role in the company. You must be willing to accept any criticism as a direct opportunity for improvement. If possible, acquire an action list that will note items that are of highest priority for completion and work on those items. The new owner will notice any self-directed shift towards their priorities. This will demonstrate a shared vision, which is the cornerstone of successful change.

Documentation and communication of your early efforts

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will greatly influence a management company's perception of you and your crew. Ask for all mission statements and policy manuals to be made available to your entire staff. Make any changes necessary to align your current procedures to the information provided. Although this is not an easy task, it is necessary to help calm any fears you or your staff may have about the new operating procedures.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

We have all heard stories of superintendents being

dismissed without having an opportunity to change, but in most cases a well-educated, hard working superintendent is a valuable asset. The accomplishments of a professional golf course superintendent are always the result of dedication and perseverance. If you know what is expected and deliver quality results, your services will always be in demand.

Golf management companies are a growing force in the industry, and superintendents must adapt to the unique challenges this trend will bring. A golf management company can offer the superintendent structure, promotions and increased recognition.

I have been fortunate to work at the same property for 14

years under three different owners, six general managers and three directors of golf. As director of grounds for the Renaissance PineIsle Resort, I have been exposed to tremendous professional opportunities within the Marriott Golf family. I have great compassion for those who have had negative experiences with golf management companies, and I hope the strategies I have suggested will help others find success in their own situations. ■

Anthony L. Williams is superintendent at Renaissance PineIsle Resort. This article first appeared in "Through the Green," published by the Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association.

MAILBAG

Old Brockway

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have gone through to get their course certified. This is a feather in their cap. The Tahoe basin has a short season, and environmental restrictions that few other superintendents have to adhere to.

I take my hat off to the whole staff at Old Brockway for their efforts. It took a great amount of work by a lot of people and agencies to get them their certification requirements fulfilled. Again, to Lane and his staff, keep Tahoe blue, and the greens true.

Sincerely,
Gary M. Puckett
Golf operations manager
Brevard County, Fla.

We want to hear from you

Letters to the editor are an integral part of *GCN*, so let your voice be heard. Send all correspondence to:

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Anderson in GCSAA's chairman's club

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Golf course developer and real estate investor Lyle Anderson has pledged to the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) Foundation. The pledge is earmarked for the foundation's \$5-million "Investing in the Beauty of Golf" endowment campaign and puts Anderson in the "chairman's club," which recognizes contributions of \$25,000 to \$50,000.

"The success I've enjoyed in developing golf course properties has been supported in many ways by golf course superintendents," Anderson said. "The association and its foundation are valued partners to the game and business of golf."

The GCSAA Foundation enhances golf by funding applied research and advanced education in course management. Since its inception in 1955, the foundation has provided more than \$1 million in research support, and has funded more than 1,000 scholarships.

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