

Communicating with members a top priority

Editor's note: This is the third in a series of articles by Willoughby Golf Club superintendent Kevin Downing outlining the renovation process at the Stuart, Fla., club.

By KEVIN DOWNING

STUART, Fla. — The information phase of a reconstruction project is the most important component of the entire process.

Keeping members or golfers informed of critical timetables and alterations is paramount to their understanding of the enhancements being made to their course. Those of us in golf course management realize that the changes will make the course much better, however members often view the work is an inconvenience to their golf activity.

Being upbeat about the benefits can make even the biggest doubters your best allies during the pre-construction phase. Here at Willoughby Golf Club we used a variety of methods to communicate the impact of the project:

- Light-hearted notes were posted in the locker rooms five months prior to construction to prepare the membership for the changes at the course.

- Four months prior to the commencement of the project, the greens chairman gave a presentation and preliminary overview at a membership meeting.

- We held a special meeting six weeks prior to the start of construction and we presented graphics and information about the contractor.

- Question-and-answer sheets were available, providing in-depth descriptions of the scope of the work.

- Weekly progress reports are being posted on a neighborhood/in-house community television channel.

- Monthly updates are given in the club newsletter.

Throughout the information phase we focused on the items that members would be able to visualize once the course re-opens. Talking about drain lines and soil components can be very boring to members so make sure that you emphasize the positive aspects that will enhance playability and aesthetics.

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The bidding process and the development of construction specifications can make or break a renovation project. We chose to bid with six different companies who all had good track records.

Pre-qualifying contractors by monitoring their results from

previous projects within your area is essential. Approximately one year prior to the commencement of the job, each company was invited to a personalized tour of our facility and was presented with a breakout of the construction specifications. After receiving all bids, we narrowed the selection to

two contractors and began a second round of negotiations. We continued to allow for substitutions to the specifications as we monitored various vendors and supplies. It is amazing how long the contractual and legal reviews can take and, unfortunately, we only finalized the contract just four months

prior to the start of the job.

Next month, I will focus on some of the pitfalls involved with a multi-contractor job and the importance of coordinating your staff with the workload.



Letting the membership know that the greens were going to be sprayed out prior to closing was a major concern to the board of governors



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