DOWNING’S WILLOUGHBY GC REBORN AFTER RENOVATION

Editor's note: This is the final installment in a series of articles on the renovation at Willoughby Golf Club by superintendent Kevin Downing. After six months of work, the club reopened on Nov. 1.

By KEVIN DOWNING, GCSC

STUART, Fla. — Sitting in the men’s locker room on opening day can really provide you with direct feedback on the successes or failures of a project. After having the membership removed from their home club for six months, there are anxious moments while listening to folks comment about their first impression of their new and improved course. Let me share with you some of the comments that we have received and some that any golf course superintendent can expect to hear after a reconstruction or renovation.

Expectations

As explained in a previous article, we believed most of the comments or opinions would likely be about things that the golfers could actually see or experience. It is only reasonable that most people would render an opinion about an improvement or modification rather than comment about improved drainage or better turf texture. The first four or five groups in the clubhouse commented about the usual things such as green speeds, bunker consistency and tee leveling, which were major objectives of the overall project. As expected, nobody commented about the new under-ground tubing, the fairway drainage or the new zeolite-to-sand ratio in the greens mix. The moral of the story is to make sure you spend adequate time and energy to make visual enhancements to the course.

Our design modifications were

Continued on page 13

BUILDERS WEATHER LOW CONSTRUCTION DEMAND

“Cutting construction costs is like a game of Tetris,” said Lee Hetrick, executive director of the Golf Course Builders Association of America. “The bidding is very competitive, and contractors are finding work in the industry busier as they try to

Continued on page 22

Our Course Renovation

Nearby Complete

ATHENS, Ohio — Architect Barry Serafin’s transformation of the Ohio University Golf Course has been mostly completed, with greens and tees growing in and fairways being seeded. The course has been closed this year to allow the builder, Quality Golf of Sunbury, to construct the final phase of Serafin’s plans. University officials hope to reopen the course in June 2003.

Continued on page 13

HIGH-PROFILE RENOVATION

Continued on page 13

Architect Tom Fazio points out some of the changes at Augusta National to Jim Nantz and Ken Venturi of CBS Sports prior to this year’s Masters.

AUGUSTA, Ga. — Without a doubt, the most talked-about renovation of 2002 was the lengthening of Augusta National. The public got to see the result of Tom Fazio’s much-anticipated renovation during the 2002 Masters in April. But last year’s renovation isn’t the end of it, according to published reports, Fazio is working on lengthening the fifth hole, known as “Magnolia,” a 435-yard uphill dogleg-left, in time for the 2003 tournament. According to the Augusta Chronicle, the tee has been moved back 15 yards while the fairway bunkers have been moved forward 90 yards. The entire fairway will also be shifted right to create a more daunting dogleg.

Neither Fazio or Augusta National chairman Hootie Johnson have spoken about the changes, but Johnson said in April that “we are going to address the weakness of the fifth hole.”

HETTRICK SAID RENOVATION WORK IS HELPING TO KEEP SOME IN THE INDUSTRY BUSY AS THEY TRY TO
Renovation

continued from page 11

focused on green surfaces that needed more cupping space with the new ultra-dwarf turf or just a few holes that were improved by rethinking course strategy. The bunker complexes were all adjusted to create a better playing surface in conjunction with some nice visual enhancements to the bunker faces.

"The major focus of our renovation was our greens and tees, so I fully expected to see the effects of those changes," said John Ginnetti, vice greens chairman. "However, I was delighted to see the dramatic changes that have resulted from the work done on our bunkers. The strategic placing of a few fairway bunkers and the facing of bunker edges with sod has given many of our holes more character."

GROW IN

Our particular grow-in was more challenged by the utilization of personnel rather than the agronomic needs of the turf. Our staffing requirements necessitated a rollback of approximately 25 percent of our team, until it was time to start gearing up for the reopening. We probably didn't accomplish as much as I would have liked, but our major thrust centered on the playing areas and in particular the holes where we performed major construction. After creating two or three priority lists and focusing on all the details, you must once again stay on top of the grooming issues because that is what everybody will notice.

MEMBER SATISFACTION

Even though our area was predominantly involved with the re-construction, it was also extremely important that the entire golf team catered to the membership that was in residence. Our pro shop staff and club staff stayed abreast of the members' needs by arranging a reciprocal program and continued to coordinate special events. Even though these folks had to deal with tractors, bulldozers and various other inconveniences, the entire process was well coordinated and stayed very close to the original timetables. Always take the time to share progress reports with members because the informed individual can become your best ally.

FINANCIAL

Cost accounting and accurate budgeting can also be a success indicator of a re-construction project. I would strongly advocate the golf course department introduce a vehicle to stay current on expenditures throughout the project. My administrative assistant kept me current during the entire process just to help minimize any surprises near the end of the job. Our performance rating is sometimes measured on financial success rather than how many puts are made or how well they like the new tee signs.

The time and effort involved with planning and implementation really does become enormous when you look back on a job. But to share in the excitement when the players finally get back on their course is something very special.

PGA Village

continued from page 11

tax breaks the city extended to Lumbermen's. According to Valdivia, more than $50 million in public funds would have been available to the developer.

"That area of San Antonio is booming and has seen a lot of development over the last 20 years," he said. "The notion that you need to offer someone an incentive to build there is pretty counter-intuitive."

The new agreement replaced the tax incentive with an agreement that the city would not annex the property for 15 years, which would still provide a substantial financial benefit to Lumbermen's. On Oct. 27, the day after the city council approved the latest deal, opponents organized as Save Our Aquifer filed a motion in federal court to freeze the plan until a citywide vote could be held.

From the beginning, the process has been one of ups and downs. Each time one side has appeared to gain a victory, the other side has come back with a victory of its own. Just when it looked as if the PGA and Lumbermen's would look elsewhere for a site, the city council came through with a new plan.