Sittin’ PRETTY

/ BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF /
PHOTO BY: LARRY AYLWARD

CHRIS DALHAMER SQUINTS his eyes to protect them from the wind-whipped rain. It’s a steel-gray day at Pebble Beach Golf Links, where Dalhamer is the golf course superintendent, on the northern California coast. A stiff breeze blows off the rumbling sea. A dusky fog rolls in. There’s a nip in the air.

Dalhamer, who grew up in nearby Monterey, has seen better days — literally. But even on such a colorless day, Pebble Beach Golf Links remains a striking portrait — and a view to behold.

That’s because Pebble Beach Golf Links, one of the four golf courses at Pebble Beach Resorts and site of this month’s 110th U.S. Open, is so distinct from most of the world’s golf courses. Several of the course’s 18 holes border the Pacific Ocean with mountains providing a majestic but placid backdrop. Some of the holes, including the frequently photographed No. 8, are located on rocky and ragged cliffs high above the deep, blue sea.

Dalhamer stands on the edge of the eighth fairway and stares down at the gorge that opens beneath him. He watches as the breaker waves crash into the stony shore, their white caps foaming. He breathes in the smell of the salty sea and listens to the lapping surf.

Dalhamer will never take the view — and the potpourri of senses — for granted, even on a day when Mother Nature is in a wistful mood. “Sometimes I get caught up in my everyday duties, but I try to step back and be thankful for where I’m at,” he says.

Dalhamer, who first started working at Pebble Beach as an intern in
Pebble Beach Golf Links has hosted five U.S. Opens. Many maintenance crew members have been there for at least two of the tournaments.

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1993, isn’t the only one who feels this way about the 91-year-old course, designed by Jack Neville and Douglas Grant. So do many of the golf course maintenance workers he oversees, including several who have worked at the course for more than 25 years.

Clayton Hughes has worked at Pebble Beach for 29 years, but the scenery continues to impress him. A few years ago, Hughes was building steps on the eighth tee. He walked up them upon finishing.

“It was like I was stepping up to heaven,” he says. “The ocean was all around me. I was in awe. It’s my favorite spot on the course.”

Pebble Beach’s grandeur is also not lost on newer employees, including assistant superintendent Billy Hausch, who has worked at the course for three years.

“Once in awhile, you have to stop while you’re out there,” Hausch says. “The sun is shining just right, the fog is rolling in and you say to yourself, ‘Man, this is a really cool place.’”

PEBBLE BEACH IS a cool place to work, all right. That’s why so many golf course maintenance employees have worked there for so long. And as evidenced by the collective years they’ve spent there, many of them don’t plan to leave anytime soon.

When individuals work together for many years, they develop chemistry between them. They learn each other’s strengths and weaknesses. They recognize each other’s tendencies. That has happened at Pebble Beach.

“You ought to see us come together when we go out to aerify the course,” Hughes says, his face beaming. “Everybody knows exactly what to do. We blow through the golf course and leave it like we weren’t even there. It’s awesome to see.”

The crew’s members have the utmost respect for each other.

“We count on each other,” says spray technician Rick Pieper, who celebrates his 33rd anniversary at Pebble Beach this month. “There isn’t anybody on the crew who wouldn’t do whatever they could for you. They will be there for you.”

Dalhamer knows that firsthand because he has experienced it. He also won’t talk about his role at Pebble Beach without mentioning his crew.

“You surround yourself with good people, Continued on page 27
What's New at Pebble Beach?

Chris Dalhamer points out where there will be no intermediate cut between the fairway cut and the ocean during the U.S. Open.
When Chris Dalhamer began his job as golf course superintendent of Pebble Beach Golf Links in 2005, he was already thinking about getting the course ready for the 2010 U.S. Open.

“That was the focus from day one: What do we want to do in the next five years and how are we going to get there?” Dalhamer says.

There has been plenty to keep Dalhamer and his 29-member crew plus six interns busy. They rebuilt all of the bunkers and added some new ones. They also improved drainage throughout the course.

“We've tried to polish Pebble Beach as much as possible,” says Dalhamer, who expects about 100 volunteers to join his crew for the tournament, June 17-20.

What will golfers who played in the 2000 U.S. Open (won by Tiger Woods in a rout) notice that's different about the course this year?

For starters, the ocean will be back in play at Pebble Beach for this U.S. Open, unlike in 2000. That means players will have to contend with the water on holes four, six, eight, nine, 10 and 18. There will be no rough or intermediate cut between the fairway cut and the ocean. Misplaced balls will roll easily off the turf and over the rocky cliffs into the deep, blue sea.

The fairways will also appear and play differently. Dalhamer says the United States Golf Association’s Mike Davis, senior director of rules and competitions, has added a serpentine edging to the fairways, which had more of a straight edge in 2000. The tiered rough that was popular at the previous two U.S. Opens will also appear at Pebble Beach.

The course has also added about 200 yards since 2000. New tees were built on the third, ninth, 10th, 11th and 13th holes. It's the first time the course has played more than 7,000 yards.

According to the United States Golf Association Green Section’s Pat Gross, there will be no green filters on the television cameras at Pebble Beach, which means the course might not appear so vibrant in color.

“This is a good thing,” Dalhamer says. “It's reality. I think it's great we'll see a little off-color in certain areas.”

— Larry Aylward
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and people you can count on,” he says.

That includes Jack Holt, the assis-
tant superintendent at Pebble Beach for
nearly 30 years.

“When you have a guy with that
much experience — someone who has
lived and breathed out here 365 days a
year for almost 30 years — you can’t put
value on it,” Dalhamer says.

Holt may be the seasoned veteran,
but he calls Dalhamer “the rock” of
Pebble Beach. He’s says the crew feeds
off Dalhamer’s calm, cool and collected
demeanor.

“Chris has the ability to ride through
difficult times on an even keel,” Holt says.
“If you can’t portray that steadiness and
reliability to your crew members, then
they’ll be running around like a bunch of
chickens with their heads cut off.”

Dalhamer is a buck-stops-here kind
of guy. That’s another thing the crew
likes about him. They also like that he
views himself as one of them.

Although Dalhamer is sometimes
confined to his computer with an Excel
spreadsheet staring at him, there’s noth-
ing he enjoys more than hopping on a
fairway mower or digging a ditch.

“That’s where I got my start,” he
says of the physical labor. “That’s what
I enjoy most.”

Dalhamer also believes that grab-
bining a shovel and jumping in a ditch
with crew members shows them he’s not
afraid to get his hands dirty.

“Anything I can do to help the crew,
I’ll do it,” he says.

As one can imagine, there’s a lot
of pressure that comes with the job as
superintendent of Pebble Beach Golf
Links. Mark Michaud, who was superin-
tendent of Pebble Beach in the mid-
1990s when Dalhamer was an intern and
an assistant, said being superintendent
there was like being on a treadmill that
didn’t stop. Michaud, now the superin-
tendent at Shinnecock Golf Links, said
the Pebble Beach job burned him out.

Dalhamer, who Michaud later
appointed as his assistant, knows just
what Michaud is talking about. Pebble
Beach never stops — it’s open daily,
even on Christmas. The tee sheet is
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DALHAMER AND HIS CREW ARE ALSO
MOTIVATED BY THE FACT THAT PEOPLE
ARE PLAYING $499 A ROUND TO PLAY
PEBBLE BEACH.

The par-3 No. 7 is one of the most popular golf holes in the world.
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always full, and there are tournaments galore. The course gets up to 70,000 rounds a year.

Sixty- to 70-hour workweeks are the norm. If there’s a tournament going on, Dalhamer and his crew can count on working 100-plus hours.

When asked how he avoids burn out, Dalhamer, who had worked 21 straight days at the time of the question, chuckles. “It’s tough,” he admits.

There’s no doubt the job is not for everyone. It takes a special and committed person.

The job can also be downright intimidating. For instance, in January when Dalhamer looked at the year in front of him, he saw the PGA’s AT&T National Pro-Am in February, the U.S. Open in June, the Walmart First Tee Open in September and the Callaway Pebble Beach Invitational in November. And then there’s all of the smaller but just-as-important tournaments mixed in. Talk about a crazy-busy year.

But Dalhamer and his crew didn’t look at 2010 like it was an episode of “Survivor.”

“We’re using the busy schedule as a motivational thing,” Dalhamer says. “Look at all the opportunities we get in one year! Some people don’t get that much in 10 years. It’s a tough, tough schedule, but it’s achievable.”

Dalhamer and his crew are also pressured and motivated by the fact that daily golfers are paying $499 a round to play Pebble Beach. The crew takes pride in preparing the course to play as perfectly as possible for Joe Golfer as it would for Phil Mickelson.

“Everybody expects the course to be in the best shape possible,” Dalhamer says.

DALHAMER, WHO TurnerS
39 this month, may have been destined for this job. He’s not only Monterey Continued on page 31
Dalhamer (right) says it’s vital to surround yourself with good people, including assistant superintendents Jack Holt (left) and Billy Hausch (middle).

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born and bred, he has always enjoyed working outdoors, something he attributes to genetics.

“Many of my relatives are farmers in Ohio, where my dad was born,” he says.

During high school and college, Dalhamer worked summers and winters as a greenkeeper at Poppy Hills Golf Course, a public course in Pebble Beach. That’s when he got hooked on golf course maintenance. Dalhamer, also an avid golfer with a 10 handicap, graduated with a bachelor’s degree in business (and a minor in plant science) from Chico State University.

After college, he participated in the Northern California Golf Association’s internship program and landed at Pebble Beach, where he worked under Michaud. About 18 months into the two-year internship, Michaud named him as an assistant superintendent, a post Dalhamer held for about five years. It was a good time to work at Pebble Beach as Michaud and his crew readied for the U.S. Amateur (1999) and the U.S. Open (2000).

“I owe a lot to Mark,” Dalhamer says. “He gave me an opportunity at a young age.”

Dalhamer was impressed with Michaud’s work ethic and sense of urgency to get things done. “His motto was: Let’s get as much done as we can get done today instead of putting it off until tomorrow,” Dalhamer says. “That’s a theme I’ve carried through.”

But Dalhamer left Pebble Beach in 1999 to take the superintendent’s job at nearby Carmel Valley Ranch Golf Club in Carmel, Calif.

“It was a good opportunity locally where I could grow in the profession,” he says. “It was a good place for me to hone my skills.”

When Troon Golf, a Phoenix-based management company, took over Carmel Valley in 2001, Dalhamer was soon promoted to senior agronomist for the West Coast. He enjoyed the position

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“I look at it as an honor and a privilege.”

— Chris Dalhamer, on hosting the U.S. Open

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Dalhamer and his staff don’t ever take the views of Pebble Beach for granted — like this view of No. 6.

Dalhamer and his staff don’t ever take the views of Pebble Beach for granted — like this view of No. 6.

“You think about the qualities it takes to handle that kind of job, and Chris has them,” Gross says. “He has a good work ethic, he’s easy to work with, and he’s one of the nicest guys you’ll ever meet.”

Dalhamer accepts the compliments with an unassuming nod and quick smile. He appreciates the support, but is not one to rest on his laurels. There’s no time for that, especially at a place that bustles like Pebble Beach.

“I’m not somebody that needs the limelight,” he says.

Dalhamer will say that hosting the U.S. Open, which he calls the Super Bowl of golf, is the highlight of his career. And the great thing is he gets to do it at a spectacular place like Pebble Beach.

“I look at it as an honor and a privilege,” Dalhamer says. “Here I am at a golf course that’s one of the top in the world. And I not only get to maintain it, I get to maintain it for the U.S. Open.”

Even on a gray and rainy day, tending the turfgrass at Pebble Beach Golf Links is still a thrill.

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