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Hole of the

No. 14
The Snead Course at The Greenbrier Sporting Club
White Sulphur Springs, W.V.
A Fine Tribute

The Greenbrier Sporting Club’s “The Snead” course is named after what famous golfer? We hope your answer isn’t Ben Hogan. Of course, the White Sulphur Springs, W.V.-based course is named after none other than the wondrous Sam Snead, who grew up in the area.

Lee A. Hancock, superintendent of the Tom Fazio-designed Snead Course, says the 447-yard 14th hole (pictured here) is one of his favorite holes on the course, which opened in the spring. “The fairway is contoured to favor a right to left tee shot to maximize length so that a player can avoid the bunkers,” Hancock explains.

The shot into the green is straight up the center but can be tricky depending on pin placements. An errant second shot could wind up in Howard’s Creek in the back of the green.

The maintenance issues on the 14th hole include the obvious creekside dilemmas, Hancock says. “Recently, during the remnants of Hurricane Jeanne, we had waters up and into the fairway, and washed silt and debris onto the course and bunkers.”

Overall, the hole stands up for itself well, Hancock says. “It satisfies all the requirements of a great golf hole.”

It’s safe to say that Snead, who had a record 81 PGA Tour wins, would love the hole and the course.

Golfdom’s Hole of the Month is presented in partnership with:

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Florida gets hit by hurricanes, but who could have predicted we’d have four within six weeks this year? The city of Lake Wales in Polk County has the distinction of being the geographical center of the Florida peninsula. It also marks the spot where the paths of Hurricanes Charley and Frances crisscrossed the state this year within three weeks of each other. That’s the kind of déjà vu nobody needs.

After the first two knockout blows, Hurricane Ivan and Hurricane Jeanne kept everyone on pins and needles until they landed their own left hooks and scored two more major blows to Florida. Even areas not affected by wind damage were impacted by large amounts of rainfall from the storms. As those systems moved inland they spawned hundreds of tornados and flooding in states up and down the eastern half of the United States. While Florida was grabbing headlines as the point of landfall, many other states were being devastated by flooding from the slow-moving storms. There’s enough misery to share for everyone east of the Mississippi.

Several lessons have been learned or relearned:

- Native trees fared better in the storms than imported specimen trees.
- Beach erosion is a natural process. Living on barrier islands is a gamble.
- Shortcuts in construction lead to lots of structural damage.
- Trees and power lines do not make good neighbors.
- A house sitting in a grove of trees is a sitting duck.
- Waterfront and low-lying property is prone to flooding.
- People should learn to be more self-sufficient instead of depending on the government.
- Florida would never have been developed if not for air conditioning.

Debris cleanup has become a cottage industry. I saw dozens of trucks from other states parked at motels because the county doesn’t have enough manpower or vehicles to get the job done. It took more than a month before the piles of debris along our street were picked up, and they’re still far from finished.
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KEEP YOUR COOL
Here's how some superintendents overcome the burdens of their often-onerous jobs and remain creative in the face of difficult daily maintenance obligations

BY BRUCE ALLAR

Chuck DeCerce had an entire winter to prepare for what he feared would hit him last spring, but that didn't make things any less stressful for the superintendent at Mechanicville (N.Y.) Country Club. As the 2003 golfing season—DeCerce's first at the club located near Albany—wound down last fall, he had plans to fertilize the greens and build temporary facilities for the late-autumn players.

However, pressure from the club's members to play an extra few weeks on the regular greens forced him to delay his plans, and he got caught: A significant early snow, followed by an early onset to winter, froze over his unfertilized putting surfaces. Then, like a plague, snow mold left its mark on the greens at the beginning of this year.

And DeCerce took the heat. "It all comes back on me," he says, of the criticism leveled this spring when the greens looked awful. Not until mid-June, when the grass finally returned to form, did the complaints completely end. And DeCerce, who already knew from past experiences at other courses the potential perils of delaying fertilization, had to endure a tough stretch while his crew members learned the lesson for the first time. "I had to go through it again so they could see it," he says.

DeCerce calls that experience the most stressful of his career. But when things spiral beyond your control, he observes, you still have to go out and do the rest of your job. "You have to put it aside," he says of the problems.

The superintendent is able to persevere because he carries with him the attitude that no goals for his course should remain unaccomplished—that every day is a march toward perfection. But he and other superintendents also employ specific strategies for overcoming the burdens of their often-onerous jobs and for remaining creative in the face of tremendous day-to-day maintenance obligations.

Comparing notes

During the long March-through-October grind, DeCerce tries to decompress by fitting in a couple of long weekends with his wife and two daughters. To keep his creative juices flowing, he makes it a point to visit other golf courses—particularly those designed by Devereaux Emmet, who laid out Mechanicville—and compare notes and share inspirations with their superintendents.

In addition, he'll play his own course from every tee, from the ladies' to the tips ("which I have no business doing") to see it from every golfer's perspective.

"I come back with a 4-inch notebook filled with things that have to be changed," DeCerce says. "My crew hates it when I play our course. They try to get me passes to other places."

DeCerce also makes a point to have lunch once or twice a month in the clubhouse, so he can pick up the buzz about issues affecting the golfers. At one such session, he overheard a group of women complaining about poor access to one of their tee boxes, which was cut off by a small fence. DeCerce went out with a chainsaw the next day, cut a hole in the fence board, put up two

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stakes to border the gap, and made the course's female players a happier group.

Paul Dotti, now in his ninth year at Edgewood Country Club in River Vale, N.J., also likes to play other courses. "We're all in the same boat," he says.

His favorite way to rethink the possibilities for his own track, however, is to leave work early on some days, then come back near sunset for a ride around the grounds.

"The members aren't bothering you," he says. "There are no cell phone calls. Things start to jump out at you."

Dotti's creative flashes have led to big-impact projects at Edgewood, a private course with three nines. His par-4 No. 6 on the White nine lacked excitement until the superintendent spotted an unused hillside behind the tee — it actually had become a dump area — and thought it would make a great vista for a par 5. To make others share his vision, he cleaned up the spot, took some dirt up the hill, flattened out several square feet and then brought Edgewood members and pros up to stand on the elevated potential tee. "I got it approved," he says. And now it's become a signature hole at Edgewood.

Projects like this one relieve the maintenance grind for both Dotti and his crew, who do most of their major renovations themselves, including waterfalls, stone bridges, new greens and irrigation improvements. The big jobs provide a morale boost to the staff.

"If they know they're going to rake bunkers and mow greens every day, there's not a lot of incentive," Dotti says. But at Edgewood, "they don't know what to expect when they come into work each week."

Dotti tries to stay in project mode as much as possible from September through May, realizing the summer months will always be maintenance-intensive. The big projects save Edgewood money — Dotti says he can sometimes do them for 25 percent of what outsiders bid for the contracts — but they also keep the superintendent stimulated. "It's very relaxing for me to be out there on a bulldozer shaping stuff," he says.
Having a five-year plan for his course gives Joe Boe, a nine-year veteran at Coral Oaks Golf Course in Cape Coral, Fla., a way to see beyond the day-to-day stresses. Each year, he lays out all of the things he hopes to accomplish and assigns them dates on a calendar.

When he’s feeling worn down, Boe says, “I try to look forward to the next project.” The fun stuff — driving skid steer loaders and other equipment — gives him needed breaks from growing grass.

“When I find that I want to snap back at stuff, little stuff that doesn’t normally bug me, I know it’s time to take a break,” Boe says.

Boe says many of his best solutions occur to him when he’s driving his car and able to turn things over in his mind. Others come when he’s driving his bike.

Boe cycles regularly with his wife, often through areas of great natural beauty. There are obvious destressing benefits from the

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Keep Your Cool

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exercise, and he'll notice how homeowners landscape their properties in ways he had not observed previously. Or he'll see a new example of nature at her best in a noncultivated area. Says Boe, "I'll think, 'Hmm, I could do that at the course.'"

Boe is given enough license at the Arthur Hills-designed Coral Oaks to keep his creative juices flowing. He keeps up with the best ideas in his area by attending local superintendent meetings, which are moved from course to course. Participants play a round of golf, swap "horror stories" and listen to a speaker offering expert advice.

Maintaining composure
Oakmont Country Club's John Zimmers derives much of his incentive from fear of failure. The fifth-year superintendent at the championship course near Pittsburgh realizes there will be some difficult stretches no matter how good you are or how hard you work. He also tries to remember who's watching him.

"When you have a young staff or a lot of interns, they keep you motivated because you think you owe those guys,” Zimmers says. "You have such an impact on what they'll do with their futures.”

Sometimes it can be a good thing to let your staff know when you're down, he says, because they’ll rally to help you out. But that’s only if the stress lasts for a brief period. If the boss withdraws for the better part of a week, or longer, it’s a problem for everyone.

While Zimmers admits that he doesn’t have enough hobbies (he does find time in the fall to attend Pittsburgh Steelers and Penn State football games), he’s found ways through experience to stay on an even keel, often by getting out with his staff and immersing himself in a variety of tasks. "The longer you do this,” he says, "the more you try to balance things because you never want to take things out on the staff.”

Mark Wilson, in his 15th year at Valhalla Golf Club, the Louisville, Ky., course that hosted this May's Senior PGA Cham-

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Valhalla Golf Club’s Mark Wilson (right) says superintendents need to accept the bad with the good to stay focused.