

On Board: Q & A with your BOD

The last few years have been challenging for golf course management. Comparatively speaking how has your club/budget been impacted, how do you perceive the season ahead and are you optimistic in the long term for the industry? **Matt McKinnon, Superintendent at The Legacy Courses**



The last few years at The Legacy Courses at Craguns have been fairly consistent. The fall of 2008 and winter of 2009 was our lowest point in business and the future business of the course in 2009

was not bright. Budgeting for 2009 was a very difficult year for me since we really did not have an idea of how much business we were going to receive. It seemed like people were waiting until the last minute to book their tee times or sign up for their membership. Budgeting for 2009 brought a reduction in labor, chemicals and fertilizers and what ever else we could save money on. Once these cuts were made we had to manage a little differently. One area that I have always kept a very close eye on is my labor numbers, 2009 was extremely important to keep close attention to these numbers. I felt at the end of each week I had to know where I stood compared to my budget. 2009 turned out to be an o.k. year

for business but it did not help to increase our budget for the 2010 season.

Spring of 2010 started out with great weather giving us the opportunity to open the course in March, two weeks earlier than any other year we have been in business. The 2010 season was another o.k. season we did increase rounds some especially with opening early. Business in 2011 was a lot better than 2010 even though we had a very slow start in the spring but the fall was great. In the end we have increased rounds from 2009 to 2011. Budget wise for 2012 we will increase our numbers slightly to perform some much needed maintenance of our bunkers. Staffing will be the same as in the past few years but with one less supervisory position. Booking for events in the clubhouse and for golf is looking very good. I am very excited for the 2012 season but I am a little concerned where the price of gas is going. The prices will not only add to our expenses this year as it did in 2011, but it will most likely decrease the amount of players from outside areas. I am optimistic for the Golf Industry I think we are all very capable of adapting to any change that is thrown at us

On Board: **continued.**

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The golf industry for years has had its ups and downs. As with the current economy, the trough this time is just a bit deeper. Here at Heritage Links we have been in a tight belt situation for a number of years. Previous decision by former management employees left us in a hole before the economy went south and have made it additionally challenging now. We have had to let employees go, cut hours and reduce the overall maintenance expenditures of the course without sacrificing quality. Personally it has meant many extra hours and fewer days off. It has however taught me just how far you can push turf and in what directions you can push it to keep quality and still keep costs down. Many of us do not realize just how

important basic turfgrass agronomic principles are until you are forced to rely on them and not be able to mask shortfalls with chemical applications. Having done this a number of years now, it becomes interesting to hear others discuss cost cutting strategies and what they think may or may not work, and then be able to interject my thoughts having done it in the real world.

As for the future of golf, I would have to say that it is what we make of it. The Minneapolis market is saturated with available golf, if courses as a group do not band together to protect pricing structures, and get out of the discounting game many will not survive. Additionally, we as superintendents controlling the largest asset and liability of the course do not help protect the bottom line we will also contribute to those failures. Finally, the golf professionals will need to step up and find ways to bring new golfers into the game. The PGA, GCSAA, CMA and NGCOA all recognize the problems and have spent thousands developing programs to help. If we all work together, we can make golf thrive again. If not.....



Eric Counselman, Superintendent at Somerby Golf Club

The last few years have definitely been challenging for us all. As a younger facility, we are focused on growth. As our club grows there continues to be new roles and responsibilities. We have been fortunate over the years to have our Course Maintenance budget stay steady, the belt tightening tends to come from the additional responsibility associated with growth. I feel fortunate that we have not had reduce our budget while adding responsibilities, as I know others have done.

Similar to others, we have aggressively marketed new customers. In 2011, we were able to add 88 new memberships with significant introductory offers. Although the first year of these memberships was reduced, this makes me very optimistic for the season ahead and eager to see if we will grow equally in 2012. Turf wise, I am optimistic that mother nature will be more agreeable, and we'll all have less stress this season.

I have concerns for our industry as a whole. Undoubtedly, we are over built, and with the excess supply revenues have dropped greatly. We, the industry, are not operating at a sustainable level. And I believe long term this will stabilize, but that it will be a very different



industry than we saw in years past and even different than now. I think we will continue to see few professionals getting into our business and many getting out, leveling the demand for our skills set. I believe revenue and budgets will eventually align again, most likely at a much lower level than we were accustomed to in years past. I believe the largest residual influence will be on the quality of our product (in spite of our best efforts), customers will become accustomed to cheaper golf but a lower quality too. It's like a ride in an airplane; you increase altitude, climb, climb, climb, up, up, up, hit some turbulence, lose some altitude, falter a bit, some ups and downs, but eventually the plane stabilizes for a smooth ride, not at the altitude you were once at, but steady none the less. I think there will be a couple more bumps, but we are really close to stabilizing.

ARE YOU READY?

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