position ourselves—just in front of the point of diminishing returns.”

Along with the resort manager and golf director, Kocher also helps determine how much to charge golfers.

“You want your business to grow. You don’t want to price yourself out of the market,” he says. “But you don’t want to leave money on the table.” If the golf operation can show fiscal responsibility, he adds, it is more likely to be blessed with extra money when it’s needed.

“We keep track of the numbers weekly: every Friday, every manager will know how we did through the previous Sunday—all financial considerations, with the exception of capital which comes out about once a month. You always know where you stand.”

**The staff**—Because the Pinehurst golf maintenance department employs up to 135 during peak season, it’s important that those are the right 135 people.

Tenure of the five superintendents ranges from about two to about nine years, and Kocher’s management style is part of the reason.

“I try to give everybody the latitude that I’d want if I were in their shoes, and then the resources to do their job,” Kocher explains. “We set standards of operation and we make the managers accountable. Each of our superintendents knows nutritionally and quality-wise what we’re trying to attain, and then has the latitude to hire the right people and do it.”

Kocher calls himself a cheerleader; he says he doesn’t hound his staff and he avoids using the word “problem.”

“If there’s a level of expectation that’s not met, we’ll talk about it and find out how it can be met,” he notes. “We have a staff of 10 that meets once a week for no more than an hour. If there’s anything that needs to happen during the week, we do it on a one-on-one basis.”

As 1994 was gaining momentum—April/May play is heaviest, followed by July/August—Pinehurst’s golf operation was going through the process of shutting Course 2 down from late July to early September.

“We close Course 2 down so that when we go into fall season, we’re in good shape,” notes Lavis. “That’s what really hurts.”

Course 2 is treated differently than the other six. For instance, during the week of the Senior Open June 26-July 3, greens were mowed 19 times, brushed six times and rolled eight times. “The tournament, along with the wet, humid weather, really thinned the grass out,” notes Lavis.

During the summer months, Lavis and his staff tried several methods to limit damage—including the annual process of shutting Course 2 down from late July to early September.

“We close Course 2 down so that when we go into fall season, we’re in good shape for guests,” explains Lavis. “That’s our really busy season. When we kept it open, we were struggling; but now that we close it down, greens respond and do well.”

Pinehurst superintendents generally raise cutting heights, increase topdressing to protect the bentgrass crowns, and closely monitor nitrogen applications in the summer.

Different rollers are also employed.

“In general, in the spring, fall and winter, we mow at .170 inch with Wiley rollers,” says Lavis. “In the summer, we mow at .190 inch with solid rollers.

“We always go to solid rollers in the summer. The Wiley rollers have grooves that dig down in the turf more and they’re a lot more aggressive on the turf, especially when you get heavy rains. The whole theory with a Wiley is that not every grass blade gets rolled down before it gets cut.”

About four years ago, the greens started getting a thorough airing out during humid weather, too.

“We’re now up to 30 of our greens with at least two high-speed fans,” says Pinehurst’s director of golf course maintenance, Brad Kocher. “They’re doing a tremendous job. They don’t get rid of humidity, or cool the air temperature, but they create the air movement that makes the bentgrass plant evapotranspirate. If bentgrass is just sitting there in the humidity, it doesn’t look as good.”

**Pinehurst’s owner—Club Resorts**—has committed to focusing on golf, Kocher says.

“We have upgraded the courses dramatically since 1984. We’ve converted Courses 2, 3 and 5 from common bermuda fairways to 419 bermuda fairways. We’ve re-done greens on Courses 2, 3, 4 and 6 in the last few years. We built a new teaching center, put a lot more money into maintenance, bought a tremendous amount of equipment, and now we’re getting ready to build a new Tom Fazio course.”

Because seven courses are involved, equipment pooling is not uncommon. Each course has its own set of frequently-used equipment like transport vehicles, greens mowers, tee mowers, fairway units and Sand Pros. Beyond that—fairway blowers, verticutters, aerators—the courses share.

“We take all six aerifiers out,” notes Kocher, “and we’ll do all 18 greens on a course by 9:30 a.m. We just—wham!—throw the equipment at the job. We can aerify and topdress all seven courses in one day.”

Progress, though, is a never-ending process. Says Lavis: “Everybody’s learning a little more every summer and we’re getting a little bit better.”

—J.R.