

## Contemplating a New Maintenance Facility?

# Before You Build

*Early in 2000, when I was assigned my slot to write an Ask the "Expert" article, I imagined my topic would be "how to construct a new maintenance facility." After all, monies had been allocated in our next fiscal budget to do just that. That was back in January of last year. As I sit down to write, it is nearing the end of November and our new maintenance facility is but a piece of open flat ground behind the current shop. Not much to write about there, although for the first time in a long while I can see the back wall of our existing shop. It is amazing what can accumulate if you let it. In any event, with regard to advising on the construction phase of such construction projects, I will have to defer to those who have already gone through such an undertaking. As for myself, it looks like my expertise will be confined to what I have learned so far: the steps to take before you build.*

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### Identify a Need

The first and foremost step in any project of this magnitude is identifying the need. To do this, you must examine your current shop facility and maintenance operations closely and ask a few simple questions. You might be able to overlook taking 30 minutes wasted out of your day to dig out that dust-covered aerator that has not been used since last spring. But, can you overlook that same half-hour spent trying to get to a mower that was just used yesterday? How much heated, useable working space do you currently have? If it is under 1,500 square feet for an 18-hole golf course, I am sure you, your equipment technician and your entire staff are experiencing very tight working conditions. Does your present shop meet current legal requirements concerning the ADA regulations, chemical rinse pad and chemical storage? What about security and safety—are your employees concerned about an overcrowded shop? Have you ever investigated your village fire codes? Do you need to install a fire suppression system? Do you have to climb over equipment in order to exit/enter your shop? Can you store all of your current maintenance equipment inventory under one roof? What about their specialized implement attachments?

Do you have adequate heating, air-conditioning and ventilation systems? I know one particular instance where a local superintendent has endured inside-office temperatures below freezing through the cold winter months. Whoops, that reminds me, time to plug that space heater in. How about office space, meeting room, lunch room, wash-room, showers, locker-room facilities—are they adequate for you and your staff? Do they exist at all? These are just a few considerations you

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should be pondering in determining your need for an expanded/updated maintenance facility. And, after you've exhausted all other alternatives in finding another acceptable solution to your needs, you must try to sell the project to those controlling the purse strings.

### Research/Planning

More than 300 golf courses call Chicago and its immediate suburbs home. More courses are being built every year. There is no need to reinvent the wheel here. Talk to your fellow superintendents and visit their maintenance facilities. Ask as many questions as you can brainstorm regarding what works for them, and maybe more importantly, delve into what does not. Make yourself a wish list and include all the amenities your present shop is lacking. Investigate dimensions to give yourself an idea of how much space you will actually need for your maintenance operations to be successful.

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Before construction ever began on his new maintenance facility, Nick Hongisto at Schaumburg Golf Course made sure the proposed building was going to be large enough by taking the floor plan and making scale model cutouts of all his equipment and furniture. By doing this, he knew exactly what the minimum square footage of the new maintenance building should be. When Brian Bossert of Bryn Mawr Country Club was in the throes of planning his new building, he conducted weekly meetings to get input from his maintenance staff as well. Here at Bartlett Hills, I went so far as to have each of my full-time employees draw up his own plan of what the new shop facility should include, with the only parameters being the outside dimensions of the building. From these five separate drawings, we derived a master floor plan for the building. The important thing here is let your staff's voices be heard; after all, they are the ones who will be using the facility the most. The more people involved, the more possibilities you will discover. Then, after information-gathering has been completed, hire an architect.

### Location, Location, Location

As many questions as you have about the building and its size and type, you will also have about the location. Questions about the feasibility of the site chosen should be of primary concern. Does the site offer enough space for a building of the size you want? What are the soil types? Are utilities nearby? What will your neighbors say? Is it a secure location? Is it accessible for delivery trucks? Is parking space available? How about accessibility to/from the golf course for employees? Will trees require removal? Any severe grade changes that would increase excavation costs? Can the area be viewed/heard from the

course, or from the clubhouse? Will it be in a floodplain? These are but a few of the considerations to mull over when choosing your shop facility location; all of these issues will have a direct bearing on the total cost of your project. The important thing here is to choose several possible sites. Weigh the pros and cons of each of your options. And be prepared to use a site that may have not been your first choice.

### Budgeting

Building construction costs for a regular pole-type building begin at around \$21/square foot and can escalate up to and even exceed \$90/square foot depending on all of your amenities. An architect will help considerably with nailing down an approximate cost of your future maintenance facility. It is the job of the golf course superintendent to convey to the architect how meeting the needs outlined is vitally important to a successful, efficient golf course maintenance facility. Communicate your wish list and do not settle for less than you need, available space being the most coveted commodity. If you need a minimum 6,000-square-foot building to meet your equipment storage needs, settling for a 4,000-square-foot building is an unacceptable compromise. Plan on a building that can accommodate you and your staff for the next 50 years or so.

In closing, I realize that I probably raised more questions than I had answers for. If that is so, then I have succeeded. Asking questions is the only way we can obtain answers. If you are about to embark on a project of this nature, my message to you is the lesson I have taken to heart: "Knowledge is your friend." The more you learn about the process before you build, the more likely

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Since 1995, Luke has served on the Board of Directors of MAGCS, serving as chairman of the Membership, Golf, Arrangements, Scholarship and Employment Committees; and carrying out the duties of secretary/treasurer in 2000. Currently, Luke is the vice president of MAGCS, and is eager to lead our association in 2002. His work ethic is apparent in the manner in which he has tackled both his job and his association responsibilities.

Luke could not have achieved his current status if not for the support of his family. His wife, Debbie, son Kyle (9), and daughter Julia (4) are his inspiration, and his time away from work is spent doting on them. Luke

enjoys coaching his son in Little League, and participating in their soccer and hockey leagues as well.

The January meeting is extremely important to the future of our industry, as our association will decide how we will vote on GCSAA's Professional Development Initiative in February in Dallas. Luke and the entire Board of MAGCS hope to see a big turnout on the 22nd. Remember Florida—our vote DOES count!



your new maintenance facility will be the well-oiled machine you knew it always could be. Pick the brains of your peers. Talk to those who have already gone through this and visit their maintenance shop facilities. Learn from those who know. It is this type of helpful cooperation that separates our profession from others. And just think, it's as easy as picking up the phone. 

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