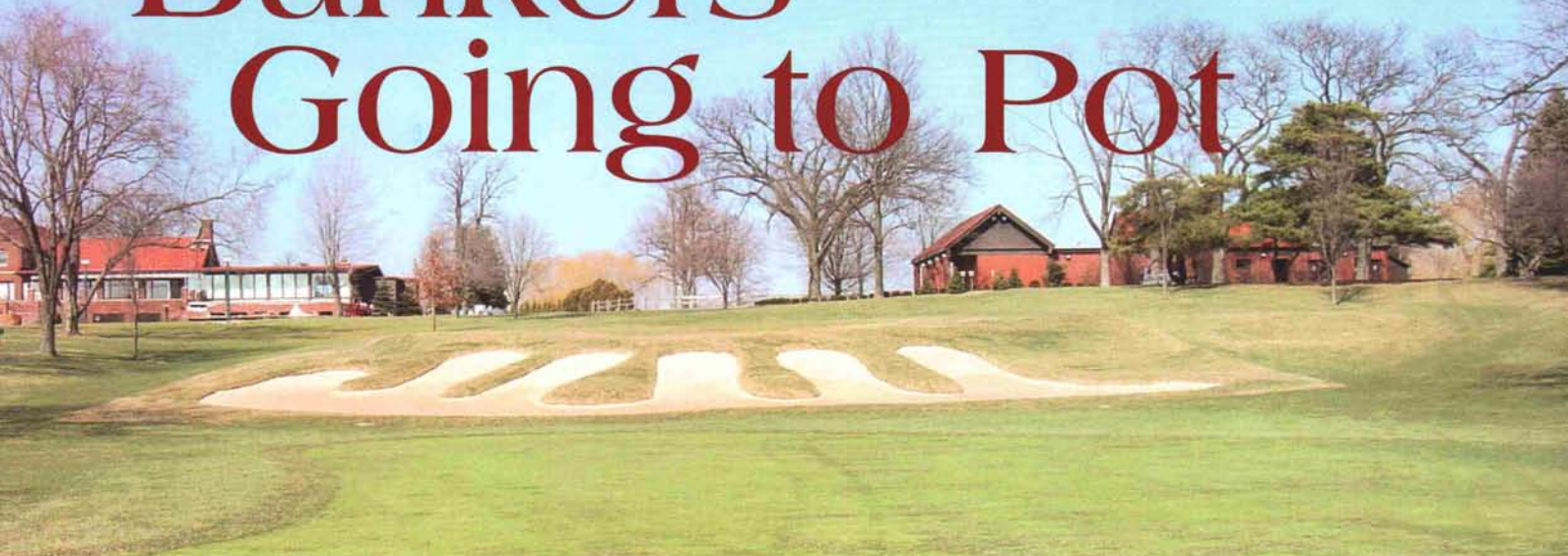


Bunkers Going to Pot



Green bunker, hole no. 16.

Photos by Ray Schmitz

It's a brave new world for those building new golf courses or renovating existing ones.

Last fall, venerable Flossmoor Country Club—which celebrated its centennial in 1999—completed a bunker renovation project in thoughtful, deliberate fashion.

Innovations in golf equipment technology and stronger, long-driving players have rendered obsolete or diminished the impact of design features at many of our nation's well-established clubs.

Renovation projects walk the fine line of staying true to the original architect's vision while updating to accommodate advances in the game.

Last fall, venerable Flossmoor Country Club—which celebrated its centennial in 1999—completed a bunker renovation project in thoughtful, deliberate fashion. Superintendent Ray Schmitz, CGCS, recounts that the process began three years ago, when the club consulted an architect. An ad hoc committee comprising past club champions, club members, the green committee chair, the golf pro and Ray himself tempered the architect's prescription by touring the course hole by hole and evaluating each bunker.

This process revealed that some bunkers were no longer valid hazards; for example, a bunker 200 yards out from the tee only served to penalize the high-handicap golfer. Meshing the architect's advice with input from the ad hoc committee, a plan emerged to eliminate seven of Flossmoor's 84 existing bunkers while adding four in new locations.

A construction crew embarked on the bunker renovation right after Labor Day 2001 and finished just before Thanksgiving. Another major project occurred simultaneously: the installation of a new irrigation system. Ray's careful planning coordinated both crews and ensured that at least nine holes were always open for membership play.

According to Ray, the new "pot bunkers" are more parallel with the fairway than the old-style bunkers, which were "flat, just a hazard that was perpendicular to the line of flight." Also, Ray reports that shadows really enhance the look of the new bunkers; their appearance actually changes with

the play of light and shadow as the sun moves across the sky.

The process involved removing as much as possible of the sand base in the bunkers and bringing the grass sodded face all the way down to the floor of the bunker. “One neat thing we did here was we changed all the sand in the bunkers,” recalls Ray. “They went into the old bunker, dug a giant hole, put all the old sand in that hole and capped it off with clay, then they brought in new sand. That saves time and eliminates one problem for the super on what to do with all the old sand. It also eliminates the traffic of hauling the old sand out.”

Flossmoor opted for Waupaca’s Northface sand. “It’s expensive, but we chose their sand because of virtually no clay content in the sand.” Ray adds that from here on out, all bunkers will probably be raked by hand . . . a very labor-intensive proposition.

Another efficiency measure employed during the project involved treatment of the old sod. Instead of cutting the old sod out, the crew rotatilled it and laid the new sod right on top of the pulverized sod and soil.



Fairway bunkers, hole no. 5.

Happily, the overlap between the bunker renovation and irrigation upgrade allowed for installing a sprinkler head at each bunker, the better to water the new sod.

While the new bunkers are deeper than their predecessors, Ray notes, “We tried to avoid going too deep because of potential problems with drainage. Your drainage outlet has to be lower than the floor of the bunker.” So far, so good on that count; adds Ray, “With all the rain last fall and even this first week of March, drainage has been perfect so

far, no standing water in the bunkers.”

This spring, Ray expects to develop a punch list for the bunker renovation project and refine a few rough edges. Overall, though, he says, “I’m pleased, so far the members are pleased—and they’re very enthusiastic about getting a chance to play it.”



Fairway bunker, hole no. 10.