



November

The 54th Annual Midwest Turf Clinic was held at Medinah Country Club, on November 1, 2006. The theme for this year's clinic was the future of golf. Tony Kalina and his committee are to be congratulated for organizing and bringing together an outstanding group of speakers.

Michael Bavier, CGCS, moderated an engaging and lively morning session, beginning with a panel of four Chicago-area golf course architects: Mr. Bob Lohmann, Mr. Tim Nugent, Mr. Rick Jacobsen, and Mr. Greg Martin. They responded to the following questions:

How is technology steering golf course architecture?

Lohmann: We need to remember the 80% of golfers who are not benefiting from the advances in equipment technology; our designs need to provide enjoyment for the less skilled golfers too. We should also be aware of the maintenance equipment that the golf course superintendent has, so that we do not design more than his resources can manage. We need to look at the technology from both ends.

How do architects accommodate for playability?

Martin: Golf is essentially about fun and friendship. With that in mind, our objective is to provide golf courses that people can enjoy playing with their friends.

Lohmann: Multiple tees can be very helpful in making a course more playable, but you do have to educate the golfer to play from the right tees.

Nugent: In the last ten years we have begun to see more open design in golf, where multiple routes are presented to players, as opposed to the bowling-alley-style golf hole. We are also using mounding as backstops to help the golfer keep the ball in play.

Lohmann: Poorly planted trees have grown up to where they are killing the grass and blocking the shots of poorer players. But golfers are starting to understand the benefits of tree removal for more angles and open views.

Jacobsen: Trees on golf courses do more to hurt the less able golfer than they do to defend the golf hole.

What are the biggest mistakes in remodeling?

Martin: Using length only to drive a remodel is a bad idea. Length alone can do very little to make a golf course truly better.

Nugent: Prolonging a project over too many years. Eventually a club loses patience with being under construction.

Jacobsen: Some common mistakes in remodeling are: not budgeting enough to do a project right the first time; unrealistic expectations for the grow-in time; poor planning of the sequence of work, such as installing a new

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irrigation system ahead of bunker renovation and then having to relocate the new pipe and sprinklers.

Lohmann: It is important to have a complete set of plans, plus the oversight of the architect during the actual construction. Some private clubs try to work off simple schematics with no plans and the end results are often very poor. Public clubs are bound, by law, to work from detailed plans, but they are also obligated to use the lowest bidder as contractor. This often creates problems with quality control.

How do you handle projects that are done on a low budget with limited resources?

Jacobsen: If the funding is not available to do a job right the first time, then it is better to hold off until the funding is adequate.

Lohmann: If you have a good plan, you can attack the project in the proper order, from the ground up. You can do the work in phases, beginning with drainage which is the most vital component of a healthy and playable golf course.

Nugent: When we are called to a club it is usually because there is an immediate problem; something has to be done now. But if your budget is limited, you should consider scheduling the work for mid-summer, when most contractors are idle. You may secure a premium contractor for a better price.

Jacobsen: One reason why budget is so often limited is because the club does not consider their course to be worthy of investment. In these instances, if you provide an improvement which is highly visible, the project may then gather momentum and commitment.

Our next speaker in the morning session was **Allen James**, President of **RISE** (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment), an association representing manufacturers, distributors, and other industry leaders involved with specialty pesticide and fertilizer products.

Mr. James spoke to us about the significant increase in localities attempting to “re-regulate” pesticides that are already thoroughly regulated by federal and state agencies. Not only are such efforts unnecessary, they restrict consumer and professional applicator choices for products proven to be safe and effective.

RISE has recently appointed Stacy Pine spine@dclrs.com to develop and manage a grassroots program for preventing and challenging local attempts to restrict product choice. In the newly created position, Pine will manage industry issues at the municipality level in cities and towns across the country. She will work closely with key RISE allies at the national, state, and local level to ensure that the specialty pest management and fertilizer products used by professionals will remain available for purchase and use.

James encouraged our association to appoint a representative to work with RISE and to develop a team for monitoring and responding to these issues at our local level.

After a delightful lunch, **Ed Fischer**, CGCS, moderated the afternoon session, beginning with **John Spitzer**, Assistant Technical Director of the Research and

Test Center with the **USGA**. Mr. Spitzer spoke to us about his role in monitoring closely the effects of advancing equipment technology on the playing of the game.

It is of the greatest importance to golf’s continuing appeal that advances in equipment technology are measured against a clear and broadly accepted series of principles jointly agreed upon by the R&A and the USGA. The purpose of the equipment rules is to protect golf’s best traditions, to prevent an over-reliance on technological advances rather than skill, and to ensure that skill is the dominant element of success throughout the game.

Our final speaker for the afternoon session was **Paul Vermeulen**, who has served as USGA Green Section Agronomist for the Mid-Continent Region since 1996.

Ed Fischer, CGCS, announced that Vermeulen has very recently accepted the position of Agronomist with the PGA Tour. We will all certainly miss Paul Vermeulen. He has been a great supporter of the golf course superintendent, and we wish him success in his new appointment. Mr. Vermeulen spoke to us on the superintendent’s role in golf’s future.

When Paul began calling on golf courses in the region, fairways were generally being cut at .500, but today it is not unusual to find fairways that are cut at .350. Though the trend is not necessarily for shorter fairways – what we are seeing on the horizon is a demand for more consistent and more accessible fairways. Sand topdressing and deep tining are providing fairways that dry out faster after rainfall. And when these two practices are combined, the need to aerify with conventional, hollow-tine core aeration may be abated, making the fairways more accessible throughout the entire golf season.

Not surprisingly, the trend on putting greens is for higher levels of quality and performance.

The irrigation of golf courses is moving toward more sprinklers than ever before, for greater control of uniformity.

Bunkers are being positioned further up the hole, and we are beginning to see more and more of these bunkers near the center of the corridor. In the last ten years, the playing condition of the bunkers has become the number one topic of discussion with the USGA Agronomist during his turf-advisory visits. The trend is for extensive drainage systems and fabric in bunkers. Special grade sand is coming from pits that are hundreds of miles from the club. There are clubs that have paid up to \$120 per ton for bunker sand.

Perhaps the most refreshing trend is the willingness of clubs to remove trees that have either grown into the line of ball flight, or shade the turf too extensively. Ten years ago, the subject of tree removal on golf courses was taboo. With each passing year, the discussion becomes easier.

