



## A Superintendent's Hats

*I was honored to have been asked to write this article about the role of a superintendent in the reconstruction of an existing course or the construction of a new course. I started to think about these responsibilities and pondered the "hats" that a superintendent must wear during the course of a project. After getting to my third page of notes, I realized how relieved I was to have my job and not the job of a superintendent!! Without a doubt, the Club Manager/Grounds & Greens Chairman/Director of Golf, Agronomist, Golf Course Architect, etc., etc., make many decisions that impact the character and playability of the golf course. However, it all begins and ends with the superintendent who serves as the hub of this wheel. To be better prepared to accept this responsibility, the superintendent must learn to wear many hats effectively.*

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The story always seems to begin with the question, "Why has our course fallen from the ranks of the elite?" or "Why are our numbers paling in comparison to the new course down the street?" Members and board members want answers and results immediately. The superintendent now has to wear his 1st hat – the "Problem Solver." The superintendent will be responsible for effectively answering these questions by presenting solutions such as hiring outside consultants who will analyze the problems of the particular golf course.

Convincing the appropriate boards or committees that band-aids no longer work on their course is probably one of the most important tasks a superintendent attempts. At this point, major renovations need to occur to restore the golf course to its once elite status. This becomes the reason for hat #2, "Marketer," to be worn. The superintendent starts to gather support from the local USGA rep, agronomist, tree expert, or even a golf course architect, to validate the proposed project with the board or committee, as well as assure the success of the project.

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"It is most important to assemble the proper team to deliver the club's goals. The team members need to be cohesive and give and take toward the common good of the project"

*Dan Dinelli, CGCS  
North Shore Country Club*

So now we are convinced that one of the consultants you are about to hire is a golf course architect (at least I hope!). There is no question that the superintendent should be a part of the selection committee. The cohesiveness of the relationship between the architect and the superintendent will be one of the key elements in the success of the project. Hat #3, "Design Associate," allows the superintendent to explain the intimate details of the golf course, thus providing invaluable insight for the golf course architect and enabling him to develop a successful design. The superintendent should know how each change being proposed by the golf course architect is going to affect not only maintenance, but the playability of the course. The superintendent, who is most accessible to members and golfers, will need to be able to answer their questions. It is imperative that both members and golfers understand the superintendent is not the golf course architect! The architect should be able to validate everything that is proposed with the support and cooperation of the superintendent.

Now that the design is finished and approved by the superintendent and the board or committee, it is time to set schedules, establish specifications, and bid the project to the appropriate contractors. These are jobs for the "Project Coordinator," hat #4. Questions about how many phases it will take to complete the goals set forth for the project and whether or not the course should remain open or closed during construction will be posed to the superintendent. Since the superintendent holds the most experience with growing grass and preparing the course for play, the architect and the owner must rely on any proposed schedules the superintendent may provide. The superintendent **must**



*Let the construction begin as the superintendent acts as the representative of the owner overseeing what will eventually become his or hers to manage.*

be sure there is enough growing time for the turfgrass to mature based on when the club or course needs to be fully operational. The superintendent, backed by the consultants, needs to stand firm on what he or she believes is in the best interest of the golf course, which is to open as healthy and dense a stand of turf as possible.

The architect should undoubtedly involve the superintendent in writing the specifications for construction, hat #5, "Research Assistant." It is the job of both the architect and the superintendent to stay on top of every changing technology as it relates to turfgrass, fertilizers, and construction materials. Researching the products to be used on the project and selecting the ones that will not only make the course more efficient to maintain, but also give the clientele the best playing surface, is arguably the most important task at hand.

New course construction is obviously different in that growing media do not have to be simulated or turfgrasses matched for color or texture. Greens and tees are the most viewed and scrutinized features of a golf course, so selections in construction material and turf are vital.

"Saving money in the construction or renovation of a golf course should never be discussed when it comes to materials. Cutting corners when it pertains to sands, mixes or even seed varieties is like writing yourself a death sentence. The USGA has put many years of research and testing into guidelines for greens

and bunkers that work. I don't see why anyone would not use them."

Matt Kregel, Superintendent of the Club at Strawberry Creek (Matt was also the assistant superintendent during the renovation of The Ivanhoe Club).

Consistency with construction materials becomes a much bigger issue when a renovation project is phased in over several years. Sand veins change at sand and gravel pits and sods may vary due to availability of certain seed varieties. Phased projects could mean a different contractor with each phase, which means various methods of installation. The superintendent and architect both have to monitor these potential variables with contractors and/or materials because consistency is a major part of being able to manage the project after the construction has finished.

As construction begins on the project, hat #6, "Project Manager," is introduced. The superintendent is the conduit between the contractor and the architect, the architect and the owner, and the contractor and the owner. The superintendent will be asked to represent the owner in regard to change orders, pay applications, and overall quality control. The architect will rely on the superintendent more than the contractor in scheduling site visits for approving subgrades for topsoil, staking grass lines, etc. We all know the contractor does not want the architect breathing down his neck every step of the way! The communication at this time during the project is crucial because

neither the architect, superintendent, nor contractor want to be responsible for delaying a project in crunch time.

The 7th hat, "Teacher" really must be worn at all times. The superintendent and the consultants must be sure all members or golfers are educated continually during the course of the project. It is imperative that all members and golfers are kept updated with before and after pictures made available to them in the clubhouse. These will serve to inform and excite the golfers. Put them on the bulletin board to show the planning that took place, the processes that were undertaken, and the finished product. This may eliminate questions and undue concerns the golfers may have.

"The architect and the contractor get to leave after this project is over, but I have to stay and deal with all the screw-ups!"

*A superintendent on the edge*

It is true that everything planned, specified, purchased, installed, and built will be the responsibility of the superintendent. In most cases, the superintendent will be asked to maintain these new conditions better than the old ones without expending more energy or money. Through experimentation with what may be new maintenance practices for the staff, this goal may be achieved. There is no question that everyone who plays the golf course will have increased expectations after this project is complete.

The most important thing to remember about any project that a superintendent undertakes is to educate oneself, the board or committee, and the golfers. The superintendent cannot assume this responsibility alone; it must be shared by the entire project team. My advice for all superintendents is to wear the appropriate hat at the appropriate time and be the hero at the end of the project.

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*Everybody wins when the finished product in a successful renovation project is completed on time, within budget, is more playable, and easier to maintain - all thanks to the golf course superintendent.*

