

Teaming up with outside Contractors



Josh Therrien, Black Sheep Golf Club

PHOTO CREDITS: JOSH THERRIEN

Many questions need to be asked when it comes to moving forward in capital projects and course improvements. A priority to know is “who will be doing a majority of the work?”

Do we outsource the job to a contractor or complete the project in house? As Dave Biery's Assistant at Black Sheep Golf Club, I have had the experience of simultaneously doing both. Black Sheep has partnered up with a single contractor to complete a number of projects utilizing the experience of that contractor and our own staff.

When the Club needs excavation work to be done for particular projects, Black Sheep calls on Mike Riordan of Riordan Renovation Company. Mike is an excavator who does work on his own specializing in course restorations, designs and grading projects. In the past sixteen months Mike, our grounds staff, and myself have restored/built twenty bunkers, added drainage, expanded a tee, and resituated an entire green complex. When major amounts of dirt need to be moved Mike solely preforms most of the excavation work. He also lends a hand in the trenching and installation of drainage. When excavation is finished, our staff completes the rest of the project. However, when projects are on the smaller side and little excavation is required, our staff is able to take on the whole project in house. Knowing our abilities while having trust in an outside contractor has proven to be an efficient and affordable way to make desired improvements. Sometimes courses are too quick to act and immediately hire someone else to do the work that they may be capable of completing in house. This can get costly very fast. However contractors can provide equipment, ideas and experience that can get the job done in a smooth manner. There are many factors a golf course superintendent must look at when deciding what can be done in-house, when to hire an outside contractor, or in some cases a combination of both.

Know Your Contractor

It is vital that you become familiar with an outside contractor in order for you and your staff to work with them efficiently. Besides the general prerequisites, there are a number of things you should know about a contractor. Don't be afraid to ask questions, specifically about and to your intended contractor. Some questions to ask beyond the common maybe:

- What exactly is included in the service fee?
- How is the work billed; by the hour, or by the job?
- What equipment will be provided? How will they get it to the work site without damaging surrounding turf?
- Will additional equipment have to be rented? Who is responsible for renting it?
- Will the contractor be using fuel that you have on property? If so, who will record and pay for fuel usage?

“Sometimes courses are too quick to act and immediately hire someone else to do the work that they may be capable of completing in house”

Before the financial negotiations are settled, it is smart to know exactly what elements of the project the contractor is responsible for and what components staff will provide. A simple list of the work to be done out of house and in house is crucial for all parties to understand. This is also a good time to attach a timeline within the course calendar of general estimates for each phase to be completed.



Mike Reardon begins to cut drainage trenches to tie the new part of the green into the existing drain lines.

If the contractor is charging by the hour, it is also a good time to calculate tasks your staff can execute and complete in house. However, be careful not to over involve your staff and take them away from the daily maintenance of the course. A creative and resourceful manager excels in being able to schedule and balance course maintenance and projects. He or she will often utilize slower times of seasonal turf growth to ramp up projects with staff. It can be tough especially when wrapping up projects in spring and sometimes contractors are in high demand during the shoulder seasons that the Midwest provides. Planning ahead is always the key to getting the job done and dealing with our weather.

Know Your Staff

When taking part in any project, we want our crews to perform like a well-oiled machine. This happens through our organization of materials, personnel and timing. We must be ready to problem solve and adapt on the fly – a trait all successful people in our industry possess. As managers, we need to stay well ahead of progress in planning daily tasks and having the correct supplies, materials, and equipment ready. It is nice to be able to tackle improvements out of the golfing season so that project can take priority and the attention instead of general course maintenance.

Elements of knowing your staff at project time may include:

- What are we capable of doing as an entire team? With or

without an outside contractor?

- Is the staff going to be organized enough to work with and around a contractor so both parties do not get in each other's way?
- Does staff have the skill and expertise to tackle the project without too much on the job training?
- Are we truly able to dedicate enough time to the project

to complete our portion of the work?

Case Study

Problem: The 24th green at Black Sheep has a severe breaking slope on west half, reducing the amount of pin placements that can be fair to play.

Solution: Reconfigure the green, taking it from its original oval design to a kidney shaped green and reduce its slope.

Additional work to complete: Remove large and hard to maintain waste bunker near approach and replace with three smaller bunkers; contour approach around the green. In addition, one bunker will be added behind the green. The completed project will enhance the player's perspective and playability of the golf hole by making it more of a risk/reward par five.

Responsibilities

David Esler (Black Sheep Course Architect):

- Redesign hole with influence from Club President and management staff.

Mike Riordan (Outside Contractor):

- Perform all excavation including rough and finish grading



Staff carefully moves sod from existing section of the green to the new portion. Green was constructed using the California method of putting green construction.

- to the addition of the green complex
- Trench and tie in drainage for green and new bunker complexes.
- Grade new approach where waste bunker was while excavating in new bunker complexes
- Will provide heavy equipment and survey tools to perform work to be done.
- Utility carts and hand tools that he may need will be provided by Black Sheep

Black Sheep Staff

- Provide root zone mix for new section of green to be built. Old sand from existing green will be used in a future tee expansion project..
- Assist Mike Riordan in laying drainage and provide materials.
- Trench, lay out and install irrigation to contour around new section of green and approach.
- Cut and remove sod from old section of green then lay it on new section of green
- Utilize bentgrass sod from a section of fairway that is to be shortened and lay it on new approach.
- Lay fescue sod in rough and bunker surrounds from fescue section of driving range that will be seeded at a later date.
- Add liner and sand to bunkers.



Black Sheep staff topdressing seams on new sod and preparing new bunkers for liner installation during the early spring of the year.

Time Line

The project started in late November of 2012 after the course closed for the season. It was still in progress in spring of 2013. A temporary green was placed 100 yards short of the approach making the hole a par 4 during construction and grow-in. Utilizing the expertise of our outside contractor and knowing exactly what we had to do, we were able to open the putting surface for play in early June. The approach needed a couple of weeks more to mature. After a heavy topdressing and solid growth offered by favorable conditions and a well-planned and executed project, the whole complex was complete. @



After measuring proper irrigation head spacing, the staff re-routes lines and places piping for each head.

Common Questions to Ask When Contracting Work



The new area of putting green offers a more gentle cupping location that can be used throughout the whole year. Fescue sod was taken from the area adjacent to the fairway (in background) to cover the old bunker cavity in foreground.

Get a few estimates that lists products, materials, labor costs and a timetable. Choose from the professionals you know or have qualified references and are established.

Request proper licensing (not many contractors need a professional license in Illinois).

Request proof of insurance (general liability, property damage, and workman's compensation).

Find out if they plan to sub contract out any portion of the project.

Obtain a contract as agreed upon by both parties. It should include:

- Names and addresses of both parties
- Estimated start and completion date
- Payment schedule for contractor, sub-contractors and suppliers
- Obligations for all necessary permits
- How change orders will be handled and approved
- Detailed list of materials
- Any warranties offered or extended
- Oral promises should be added to the written contract
- Cancellation clause
- If permits are needed for the project, let the contractor get them.

Make final payments when work is completed to your satisfaction.

This should include:

- All work meets the standards spelled out in the contract
- You have written warranties for materials and workmanship
- You have proof that all subcontractors and suppliers have been paid
- Job site is clean to your satisfaction
- You have inspected and approved the completed work

The successful project as pictured this June was a combination of outsourcing and utilizing the staff at Black Sheep Golf Club for a portion of the work. Three new bunkers replaced a large, difficult to maintain waste bunker, and the green was reshaped and softened to open up more cupping locations for all to enjoy.

