

## Superintendents seen as victims of own success

(From page 32)

plain what the hazardous condition is. If they think you're just being snobbish, they may ignore your warnings.

In conclusion, Veron said the rising professionalism of superintendents has a "down" side.

"You are the victims of your own success," he said. "As you continue to improve turfgrass conditions, you continue to raise the expectations of all of us who enjoy your work. And when you don't meet those expectations, too often you can wind up in court."

## Demographics, environmental regs dictate design

Golf course development has entered a new era, says Kevin Downing, golf and landscape operations manager for a South Florida developer and a member of the USGA Green Section Committee.

And any developer who doesn't understand that the rules have changed may end up spending all his capital on the permitting process or — worse — if he does get through permitting with his bankroll intact, "he may not be able to sell his real estate because he builds more golf course

than his market can handle."

Downing, a last-minute substitute speaker for Tom Meeks, USGA director of rules and competitions, repeated the presentation he had made a few days earlier at the annual Tifton Turfgrass Conference in Tifton, Ga.

"If you build a golf course for the three-handicapper, you had better be prepared for a very long sell-out because there aren't that many three handicappers walking around out there," said Downing, who plays to a low handicap himself when on top of his game.

"With the kind of money you're talking about at today's upper-end country club community, people just aren't going to buy into a golf course they can't play."

Downing described the evolution of Willoughby GC in Stuart, a 600-acre development on sensitive wetlands (including some native habitat for the federally protected scrub jay) surrounded by commercial development and a major thoroughfare — U.S. One.

"It used to be vogue to design 'target' golf courses," Downing said. "Now it's mandatory."

His company spent \$1.1 million on the permitting process, drawing up three completely different land-use plans before finally getting permission to turn the first shovelful of dirt.

Because of new requirements for upland buffers and special treatment of littoral zones, the protected scrub jay habitat and the requirement of a local agency that 25



MIKE BAILEY/FGCSA

Kevin Downing substituted at the last minute for a USGA official who could not make the trip from Far Hills, N.J., for the conference.

percent of the native vegetation be left untouched, Downing said the golf course had to be routed before the architect was hired.

"Furthermore, we had done focus groups to make sure we knew what our potential market wanted in the way of a golf course community," he said. "They not only told

(Please see *GOLFERS*, page 36)

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## Golfers won't buy into courses they can't play

*(Continued from page 34)*

us what kind of roof tile they preferred, they also told us that they wanted to look out on a green golf course and blue water.

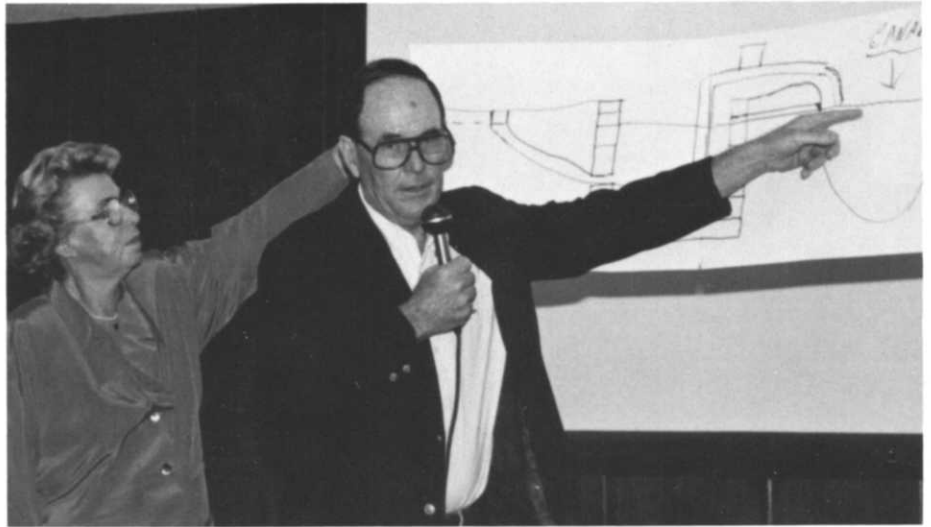
"The vistas they had in mind and the regulatory agencies' ideas of what was beautiful seldom coincided. When 25 percent of your course is scrubland and nobody wants to look at it from the golf course or from his home, it's some trick to hide it."

Downing said the focus groups also helped the developer pin down exactly how much his clients were willing to spend on dues which, in turn, told him what the operating budget of the golf course would be for the next six years.

"Finding an architect who was sensitive to environmental limits and who was willing to design a course with the vistas we felt our buyers would demand at a degree of difficulty we thought they could handle and which could be maintained for six years at \$550,000 to \$750,000 a year was not easy," he said.

The group finally settled on Arthur Hills, who had designed the much acclaimed Bonita Bay project in Naples. "Pete (Dye) refers to him as the King of Naples.

"And Art had to agree to tone down the contours on his greens — which is sort of his signature — and do some other things to make the course playable for our average prospect: an 18-handicapper who hits a 180-yard slice."



MIKE BAILEY/FGCSA

Alice Dye helps hold husband Pete's hand-drawn illustration of the sump pockets he uses to drain low-lying fairways.

## The water doesn't know Pete's basins can't work, so it goes ahead and drains

Golf course architect Pete Dye has invented the hydrological equivalent to the bumblebee.

The bumblebee, as all aeronautical engineers know, is aerodynamically unstable and cannot possibly fly. Fortunately, the bumblebee is not an engineer and doesn't know it cannot fly so it goes ahead and does it anyway.

Much the same can be said about the "catch pockets" or "sump basins" Dye uses to drain low-lying courses in south Florida without elevating the fairways.

"I never could get an engineer to agree that it should work," Dye said. "But it does. I guarantee you that Old Marsh (a Dye-designed course in North Palm Beach), where the fairways are only a foot above the water table, the course will be open after a 2- or 3-inch rain that closes down the rest of South Florida."

Old Marsh is built on marshland so sensitive that "we would not have got the permits unless I could guarantee that every drop of water — rainfall or irrigation —

*(Please see ALTERNATIVE, page 38)*



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