

SUPER FOCUS

BY PETER BLAIS

The blond-haired driver of the white pick-up never misses a beat of his free-flowing narrative as he nimbly picks his way between the tall pines lining Pinehurst No. 2. He looks directly at his passenger.

"Pinehurst is Course No. 2," says head superintendent Brad Kocher, sensing rather than seeing the rock that suddenly looms to the left and nudging the steering wheel slightly to the right. "It's fantastic to work with a course that's designed like this and so revered by golfers."

Fantastic, yes. But not without pressure.

Course No. 2 is Donald Ross' Mona Lisa. It's the course that bordered his North Carolina home. It's the one he constantly tinkered with the last years of his life in an effort to reach architectural perfection. And it's the one Golf Digest recently rated 12th among the country's top 100 courses, making it the most popular of the resort's seven courses.

"We have to watch the number of rounds," says Kocher. "Everyone wants to play it. But we have to hold it to around 40,000 rounds a year. We may eventually turn some people away."

Denying golfers the opportunity to plunk down about \$75 (\$25 more than the other courses charge) is a tough sell to the number crunchers at Club Corporation of America, the Dallas-based organization that owns Pinehurst.

The main reason for limiting play is the contoured greens, Ross' trademark. The slopes leave less than 50 percent of most greens available for cup placements.

"With a flat green you can place a cup anywhere except the 12 feet around the edge," says Kocher, pulling out computer-generated diagrams from Golf forms showing, in most cases, that more than half of the area on No. 2's 18 greens is too sloped for cups. "This is the best ammunition I have when I argue to keep the rounds down."

Pinehurst Hotel and Country Club's Course No. 2 isn't Kocher's only responsibility. The 42-year-old director of golf course and grounds maintenance is responsible for all seven courses. That's 732 acres of greens, fairways, roughs and tees. He also oversees the maintenance of 20 acres of hotel and clubhouse grounds, a park, eight putting greens, 30,000-square-foot bentgrass nursery, three croquet courts, marina

Maintaining the 'revered' #2



Pinehurst's Brad Kocher at a "fantastic place to work."

Peter Blais photo

grounds, gun club area and a lawn bowling court.

To help him with this job is a \$3 million annual budget and a staff of 122, including top assistant Bob Farren. Superintendents Gregory Day (Courses 1 and 4), Scott Lavis (Courses 2 and 6), Jeff Hill (Courses 3 and 5) and Todd Biegger (Course 7) take care of day-to-day maintenance.

"My background is really administration," says the Miami of Ohio University alumnus, who graduated in 1971 with a bachelor's degree in business management and has been a superintendent with Club Corporation since it took over his former employer, Inverrary Country Club in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in 1975.

"I like to let people do their jobs. You hire good people, define their responsibilities, then let them do it. You don't hover over them. You set standards and if they meet them, you let them go."

It's a management style that is common throughout the Club Corporation system, says the St. Clairsville, Ohio native. Working for the world's largest operator of private city, country and athletic clubs the past 15 years has been a pleasurable experience.

"Once you're established in a large company

like this, your future isn't determined by the whim of an individual," Kocher says. "I've known a lot of great superintendents who've lost jobs because of a personality clash with a new owner. If you have a good reputation with a big company like this, you're not going to lose your job because you have a problem with one person."

And there's the added benefit of the financial resources available to a large company. Kocher estimates Club Corporation has pumped more money into Pinehurst than it paid for the entire resort back in 1984. Among the projects Club Corporation has undertaken was the conversion of Course No. 2's greens to bentgrass and their rebuilding from drainage level up.

Since Kocher came to Pinehurst, he has directed the rebuilding of greens at four of the seven courses. Course No. 6 has been closed much of this summer while all the greens were rebuilt and three fairways recontoured.

"We've dramatically increased the quality of the entire facility in the past six years," says Kocher.

An avid fisherman and skier, Kocher has an appreciation for the outdoors that wears well with state and local environmental officials. The course received praise for helping protect the

endangered red cockaded woodpecker, which thrives in trees suffering heart pine disease.

The disease often inflicts trees struck by lightning. They eventually attract insects that are food for the three-inch woodpecker. Kocher's crew doesn't spray pesticides near the lightning-damaged trees. Nor do they cut them down. Instead they remove nearby scub oaks where squirrels, the woodpecker's major predator, are likely to nest.

"The state and environmental groups have been good to work with," says Kocher.

As a result of its cooperative attitude, Kocher believes the resort had little trouble gaining local support five years ago for an irrigation system that depends on nearby Lake Pinehurst. If not for the system, Kocher says he would have been forced to restrict watering to tees and greens the day after it first became operational back in 1985. The system has saved the courses several times, most recently this summer, when the area received barely a third of its normal rainfall, he adds.

Kocher and his family hope to continue their relationship with Pinehurst for many years to come. His wife, Beth, is executive vice president of the Pinehurst Hotel and Country Club.

Kocher is looking forward to 1991 when Pinehurst will host the 1991 PGA Tour Final Championship and 1994's U.S. Senior Open.

Then there are the challenges of continuing to improve the courses and overseeing a grounds operation that includes a 19,000-square-foot maintenance shop housing 26 walking green mowers, 29 riding triplex green mowers, nine fairway mowers, 10 riding trap rakes and 11 aerators.

Even the difficulty of finding employees in Moore County, where the unemployment rate is under three percent, and where four new courses have come along to compete for that limited work force in the past two years, is a problem Kocher enjoys tackling.

But one of the main things tying him to Pinehurst is his fascination with Ross, the master designer who laid out the first four courses.

"All he had to work with were horses and manpower," Kocher marvels. "Yet he had the ability to move earth a very short distance and create these mounds. He was lucky the soil was sandy, which made it easier. But it's still amazing he did all this from basically a flat piece of ground."

Let
the
Professionals
Blend
Your
Greensmix



The nation's leading soil blenders

Producing premium blends of sand and organic mixes since 1946.

GREENSMIX owns and operates high capacity soil conglomerators/homogenizers for precision blending of sand and amendments at, or near, your jobsite. **We travel anywhere in the USA or Canada to blend your rootzone mixture.**

CALL TOLL-FREE 1-800-537-1796

GREENSMIX
A DIVISION OF FAULKS BROS.
CONSTRUCTION, INC.

Christine Faulks
715-258-8566
FAX: 715-258-8750

For free information circle #108

Clearly Affordable Two-Way Radios By Motorola Radius

Put the crisp, clean sound of MOTOROLA technology to work for you. RADIUS two-way radios are affordably priced. They will put more communicating power where you need it the most.

MOTOROLA radios deliver years of dependable trouble-free performance no matter where you use them. Indoors or out, the field proven quality of MOTOROLA can help make sure you are clearly understood.

- Low Cost: Radios Start at \$235.00
- Trade-Ins Accepted
- Up to Three-Year Warranty
- Free Two-Week Trial
- Immediate Delivery
- Variable Power Models Available

For more information in regard to the RADIUS line, or to take advantage of our trial offer, please call our nationwide toll-free number: 1-800-527-1670.

*Actual trade-in allowance depends on make and model of unit being traded in.

PAGECOM

Page-Com, Inc. 10935 Alder Circle, Dallas, Texas 75238 1-800-527-1670

For free information circle #109