

# For Schmidt, success lies behind, challenge ahead

By Bob Spiwak

Dick Schmidt was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth. If any kind of spoon was involved in his youth, it was a golf club at Indian Canyon golf course in Spokane, Wash. You might say he was born to the game. Now 51, he's still involved.

Schmidt is operations manager at Sun Mountain Lodge, 25 miles south of the Canadian border in north central Washington. Perched on a hilltop overlooking the calendar-perfect Methow Valley, the resort is halfway and \$20 million through four phases of a multimillion-dollar renovation. It has all the amenities, from river rafting to heli-skiing, an outdoorsy person could want. All but golf.

The resort, operated by Village Resorts, Inc. of Lakeland, Calif., does offer golf packages at nearby nine-hole Bear Creek Golf Course in Winthrop and at 18-hole Lake Chelan, 60 miles away. But it does not brag of a course of its own. Yet.

Enter Schmidt. A PGA pro, Class A certified in Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, he came to Sun Mountain last September from the renowned Port Ludlow course on Puget Sound. He was superintendent there many years, and also built the course designed by Robert Muir Graves. Ludlow also is operated by VRI.

In addition to superintending, Schmidt's last labors at the top-rated resort course were as director of golf and recreation.

For more than a year, upper Methow Valley has been rife with rumors that Sun Mountain was going to build a golf course. Management neither has confirmed nor denied these rumors. The very low profile may be to avoid hassles such as have befallen the proposed Early Winters Resort a dozen miles to the west.

Early Winters has been trying for 20 years to begin its ski hill and golf course designed by Graves. The earth remains untouched.

Schmidt's appearance may be no coincidence. His father, Louis, built the Indian Canyon course designed by H. Chandler Egan in the 1930s, and stayed on as super-

intendent. At age 11, Dick was mowing greens and at 15 was doing everything from night watering to cleaning the driving range. When the regular crew did not show, Dick and his brother took over.

"When there was nothing else to do. We caddied," Schmidt said.

He left Spokane at 18 for Meadowlark Golf and Country Club in Great Falls, Mont., to become assistant pro. Two years later he was back in Washington at Bellevue's Overlake Club, again as assistant pro, where he gave many lessons.

In 1965 he returned to Overlake as assistant to superintendent Milt Bowman.

"Two weeks later, about half the members did not recognize or acknowledge me," Schmidt said wryly. "But as assistant pro, I'd given them lessons a few days earlier.

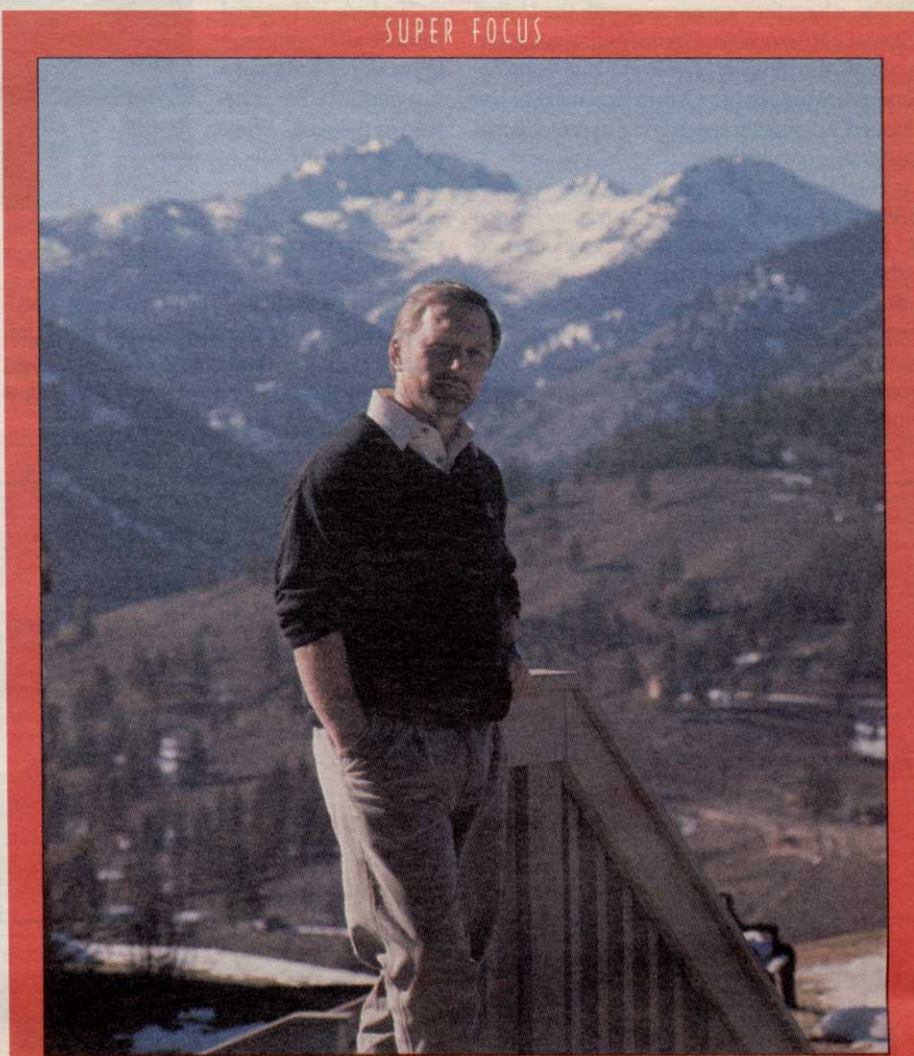
"Even then," he continued, "there was a need to change the overall image (of the superintendent) to one of a professional. It was a struggle because of the attitudes of the pros and the members. We still were called greenskeepers."

When his dad moved from Spokane to Inglewood Country Club in north Seattle as superintendent, Schmidt became his assistant. That club was owned by Jack Barron, who later built the original Sun Mountain Lodge.

A year later, the Quadrant Corp. began developing golf course communities in the Seattle-Tacoma area. Schmidt became construction superintendent, and oversaw the building of a half-dozen courses.

With a father who built world-class courses such as Sahalee and Indian Canyon; an uncle, Clarence, who built Esmeralda in Spokane and Twin Lakes in Idaho; a brother, Ray, who constructed Kayak Point in Everett, Wash., Bellevue Muni and Arnold Palmer-designed Semiahmoo, little wonder Dick sought a monumental endeavor of his own imprimatur. He got it at Port Ludlow.

In 1973 there wasn't a tree down on what was to become one of the Northwest's premier courses. Graves had it designed and the



Dick Schmidt outside Sun Mountain Lodge.

Bob Spiwak photo

centerlines had been surveyed. Of 160 acres dedicated to the course, "80 were peat bog, the other half basalt rock. We couldn't bail out the peat. In some places it was bottomless. We had to use five-foot-wide plank walkways we made out of cedar trees we dropped to get crews out to bridge the peat."

"Bridging" meant laying rock atop the bogs, which compressed the peat and eventually created a road for access. Graves and

Schmidt were determined that the natural forested, rhododendroned site be disturbed as little as possible.

"We ended up with 160 acres of rock. Fortunately, there was a hillside that was all sand," he smiled, "and we trucked this in to lay about two feet over the entire 160 acres."

He pointed out the seventh green. "There are 35,000 yards of sand subgrade on that

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# California mechanic's oil leak invention hits it big

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sprung three hose leaks that day but the Sentinal saved the day.

The detection device sounds an alarm that warns the operator after only three to five ounces of oil spill so he can shut down the machine immediately and get it off the green.

"With that kind of (hydraulic) pressure you can lose all the oil within two to three minutes," Singh said. "I've been very impressed with it. I just bought a mower six months ago and am going to put one (Sentinal) on it."

Singh explained that his crews oftentimes are mowing before day-break when it's difficult to see. "Even in daytime often you can't see a leak, especially if it's a minor one," he said.

Lee Scriber, assistant superintendent at Lafayette Country Club, said leaks can easily be mistaken for the mowers that are rippling or not cutting correctly.

Holland added that early-morning mowing is often done in fog and with dew on the grass.

"Once I saw a course lose 17

greens," he said.

Singh said: "In the 20 years I've been here we've probably had a dozen leaks on greens. A couple of times we had to sod quite a few places... Not only is it expensive, but the resodded greens are uneven."

"We've tried everything possible — taken charcoal, washed soap in, used foam, swept it... there's no way to get it out," he said.

Holland said crews have followed leaks by verticutting the green and then overseeding. "That's not costly

but its not eye-appealing either," he said.

Holland four years ago arranged with Martinez to market the invention. After making some modifications to the unit over the next three years, Holland struck a deal with Toro giving the company exclusive rights to The Greens Sentinal in the new product turf market. Holland retains rights to the "after market," those mowers already in the field.

Toro has 45 distributors in the United States, and officials will

talk with European distributors about the Sentinal in April, he said.

Martinez' invention uses a two-chamber tank, whose center chamber has a float in it that allows for the pitch and roll of greens. It indicates when the oil pump has an air leak on the suction side.

It bolts onto the hydraulic oil tank or fender and can be modified for use on machines other than Toro's.

Holland also expects to tap the market of fishing fleets, road sweepers and the like.

## Schmidt

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green alone."

Schmidt said building Port Ludlow was the ultimate golf course construction job. During the final seeding, they prayed that the fairways and greens would not settle. That would mean destruction of tile and irrigation lines. In two years of moving material, he estimates two million yards of fill were used. Now, almost 20 years later, he says two greens and a fairway are settling.

He stayed at Ludlow as superintendent and director of golf and recreation. The job was expanded to director of golf for Village Resorts' operations in Washington, Utah, Arizona and California. He retains that title as well as that of operations manager at Sun Mountain. He travels to the other courses to oversee the pro shop budgets, sales and policies as well as landscaping and maintenance.

At Sun Mountain, he is responsible for job training, budgets, employee relations, and, he stresses, instilling Village Resorts' "core values": quality, respect and integrity.

"Management should treat employees as it expects the employees to treat the guests," he said.

He looked out from the closed lounge on a deck cantilevered over the valley. Below were hundreds of acres of valley floor, the pristine Methow River ribboning its way across them. Looking at the snow-covered vista, fairly certain that some of it would contain a golf course, Schmidt pondered what he envisioned.

"If," he grinned, "we build a course here, I want it to be a world-class operation — one where word of mouth will draw golfers from all over. Look at this place. It has scenery, serenity. No airplanes, no traffic noise. I want this course to look as though nature, not a construction company, built it. Golf in the Methow on a world-class course would be simply awesome!"

For a PGA pro, GCSAA superintendent, three times Turfgrass Association president and regional GCSAA board member, the challenge seems appropriate.

He's constrained from divulging any information, but in his eyes you could see him thinking, "Let's do it."

Bob Spiwak is a freelance writer based in Winthrop, Wash.



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