

Golf course development labeled 'team effort'

By Peter Blais

Having superintendents work with and help select golf course architects and contractors are becoming increasingly important as superintendents are brought in earlier and earlier in the golf course development process, according to architect Michael Hurdzan.

The most successful projects result from a team approach between superintendent, architect and contractor, the Columbus, Ohio-based designer said during a recent Golf Course Superintendents Association of America seminar in Manchester, N.H. Each contributes his expertise without invading the others' turf.

Basically, according to Hurdzan, the superintendent knows how to obtain the best plant growth at the lowest cost. The architect visualizes the golf features and communicates his ideas to the contractor. The contractor builds the course in the quickest and most efficient manner.

The superintendent should work directly with the architect rather than the contractor, especially during new construction. This keeps the design intent intact and holds down costs.

The superintendent can act as the owner's technical researcher in the earliest stages of development, helping provide the architect such information as soil maps and descriptions; underground water resources; property boundaries, easements and right-of-way provisions; E.P.A. restrictions for the site; buried utilities; historical or ecological designations; zoning and floodplain restrictions; and proposed upstream or neighboring uses.

As the project progresses into the design phase, Hurdzan said the superintendent can help save thousands of dollars with input on technical matters like type of greens construction (U.S.G.A., Purr-Wick); irrigation system and pumping plant types and brands; blending of turfgrasses; bunker sand type; drainage system and network; clearing and selective thinning of adjacent or no-play areas; type and blends of soil additives or amendments; types and blends of fertilizers or pH adjustment materials.

Once construction starts, the superintendent can expect to put in 60 to 80 hours per week, Hurdzan said. His responsibilities include design and construction of maintenance buildings; location and construction of service roads, storage areas and limited cart paths; providing power to pump station sites; selecting and bidding maintenance equipment and supplies; spot inspections of irrigation and tile installations, greens mix and seed bed preparation; construction of rain shelters, restrooms and drinking water stations; preparing maintenance budget and ordering supplies for early growth phases of turf; acquiring all building permits, utilities and services; and interviewing potential employees.

In some cases, the contractor's responsibility ends with planting. In

others, it may extend to establishing the course - i.e. watering, fertilizing, mowing, mulch removal, rolling, erosion repair, additional rock picking, etc.

Because of his training, the superintendent can establish and mature the course as well, if not better, than the contractor, Hurdzan said. This is the latest a superintendent should be hired.

Other tasks the superintendent must complete before the course opens to play include interviewing and selecting staff; measuring the

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course; establishing mowing heights; smoothing and firming putting surfaces; selecting and installing cups, pins, tee markers and other accessories; filling, compacting and smoothing bunkers; planting landscape features;

marking property lines, out-of-bounds and water hazards; installing safety signs and devices.

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even greater, Hurdzan said.

Direct communication between superintendent and contractor becomes necessary since even a minor construction mistake can drastically affect ongoing play. The two must coordinate their efforts regarding entrance roads or fence breaks to bring in equipment and materials; areas to stage and store equipment and supplies; the sites for borrow pits and disposal piles; local laws, regulations and E.P.A. requirements; designated travel lanes or traffic patterns; location,

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Team effort

size and depth of underground utilities; local materials suppliers; golf, tournament and work schedules; knowledge of local soils, weather and grasses; club's infrastructure and members' personalities; construction shutdowns and planned or required maintenance; selection of vegetative, plant or seed materials.

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Selecting an architect isn't easy.

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More than 350 people have shingles reading "Golf Course Architect," said Hurdzan.

"They're all different and come with different skills. So how do you choose one?" he asked.

Occasionally a developer or superintendent is pre-disposed to se-

lect a particular architect based on personal experience or recommendations. If not, there are two primary lists of architects available.

The National Golf Foundation publishes one. The only requirement to be included is a check that doesn't bounce, said Hurdzan.

A better one, "and this is only my opinion," is the American Society of Golf Course Architects membership list, Hurdzan said.

The ASGCA requires those applying for membership to have designed seven courses in the previous 10 years. Several projects must be favorably reviewed by a screening committee before an applicant is accepted as an associate member. The associate's work must be reviewed again before he or she is accepted as a full member three years later.

"Being a member of the ASGCA lets a developer know that architect has at least met some minimum requirements," said Hurdzan, a past ASGCA president.

A request for proposal detailing what the developer wants done and asking for information about the architectural firm is sent to those architects working in the area. The returned proposals should include how the architect works, to what extent they are personally involved, how they charge as well as a complete list of work done in the last five years and contacts for each job.

"One of the most important considerations is the skills of the people you'll be primarily working with," said Hurdzan. "For instance, if you hired Robert Trent Jones, you might see mostly Roger Rulewich. Or if you got Tom Fazio, it might be Tom Marzolf or Jan Beljan. If you hired Jack Nicklaus, don't expect to see much of him. But that's probably fine. The people who work for them are generally very well qualified. Just don't be surprised when the big names don't show up all the time."

Another consideration is price. Fees for an 18-hole course generally range from about \$100,000 to the \$1.25 million commanded by Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer. Are a Palmer or Nicklaus worth the additional money?

"The designer label doesn't really mean anything unless you're trying to sell something," said Hurdzan.

For example, say a developer had 300 home sites and figured the Nicklaus or Palmer names could bring an additional \$10,000 per lot. If the developer was right, that's another \$3 million.

"I'll guarantee their courses aren't a damn bit better than ours," said Hurdzan, whose firm charges \$200,000 for 18 holes. "But if the developer needs to sell houses, and he can get an extra \$3 million from the lots, then he might consider Nicklaus' or Palmer's \$1.25 million fee a bargain."

With the growth of golf in the late 1980s, architects were often too busy to consider much new work, regardless of the price. That was before talk of recession, the S&L crisis and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

"The economy is changing," said Hurdzan, who has noted a recent drop-off in the three to five requests for proposals per week his firm was receiving before the economic downturn. "Developers can afford to be picky today. Even the cheapest golf courses cost \$2 million, so they should be picky."

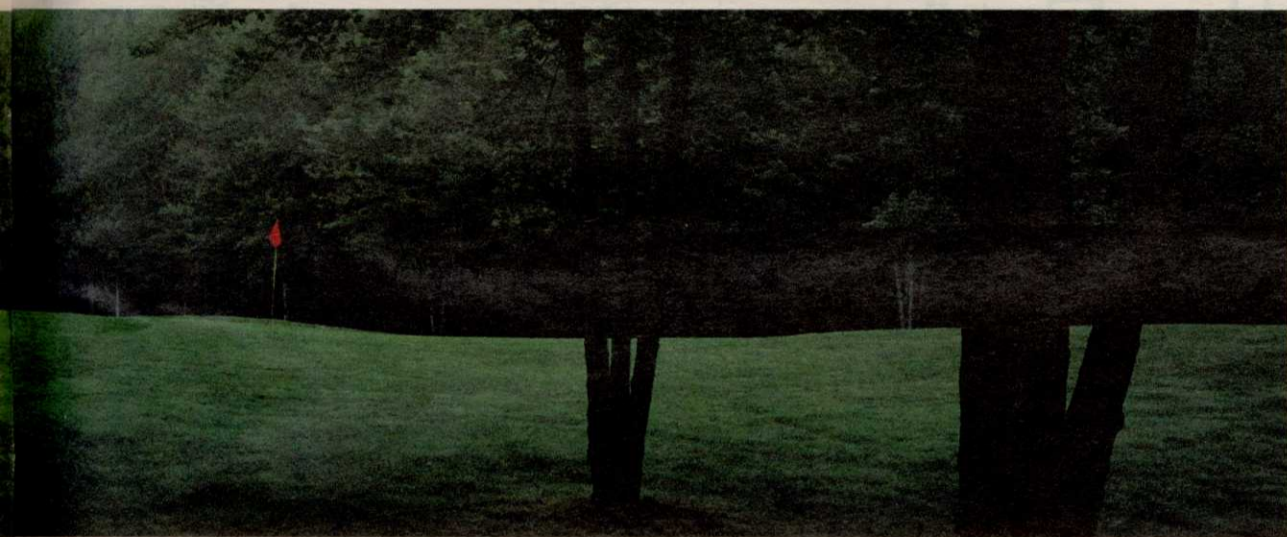
After reviewing the proposals, he recommended selecting three to five of the best, inspecting their work and talking to past clients.

Next interview the top two or three candidates. Have them visit the site, at the developer's expense, and walk a few holes together.

"Ask them what they see. You should have a good idea after that who it is you want," said Hurdzan.

Finally, make a selection and fill out a contract detailing probable timetables for the work.

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