

Steel tackles management along with turf

By Vern Putney

David Steel, golf course superintendent at Eastover Country Club in New Orleans, at age 40 is deeply involved in the far broader picture of golf — ownership, management and operations.

His newest title is general manager. He's a vice president in a trio who, in 1990, formed a 25-member limited partnership to buy the country club.

Donnie Pate is president of Eastern Development Co., Jimmy Headrick is the golf professional and vice president, and Steel VP/GM and superintendent.

Eastover was under construction when Steel went there in 1987 as superintendent. The private 18-hole, par-72, 6,800-yard course opened for play in the summer of 1988.

Eastover achieved its goal of 450 members on Dec. 31 and cut off membership. The clubhouse at the moment is modest. The accent is on links action.

"Our members are here because they want to play," Steel said.

Steel sees his current and future roles tied to management — of the course and people.

"I think my main attribute is the ability to see that things get done properly, to train crews to do the job of meeting high standards I've set. I'll admit to bordering on being a perfectionist, though I realize day-to-

day attainment of such a level isn't possible," he said.

"Still, we've learned that placing responsibility upon our employees and providing them with a piece of the action can be mutually rewarding," he added.

"For instance, we persuaded management to permit foot/beverage club manager Bernie Bevon to become an owner. Addition of such key persons means two-way commitment for the long haul. Anyone involved in an ownership capacity will do a better job."

With this business philosophy, it's unlikely Eastover ever will sink from sight, though it is four feet below sea level.

Rainfall in 1991 reached 102 inches, compared to the average of 60.

However, the course was built with bad weather in mind. Drainage is excellent. Should there be four inches of rain one day, golf would follow the next. Cart use might be limited, because 30,000 linear feet of cart paths must be protected.

Steel said Eastover is the only one of about 15 courses in the New Orleans area to undergo winter fairway overseeding.

Such treatment of greens, tees and fairways provides better playing conditions, he said.

This, he believes, contributed greatly to swift realization of the membership goal.

"When most clubs encounter an economic problem, the tendency is to start cutting costs,"



David Steel, right, with Jimmy Headrick, left, and Donnie Pate, center.

Steel said. "We maintained our forward outlook and increased budgets."

Steel and associates are not resting on their laurels. They are seeking out other club properties with a collective eye toward renovation and rejuvenation.

"Our objective at Eastover from Day One has been to construct a quality course, conduct a friendly and efficient country club, and make a profit," Steel emphasized. "We intend to expand this area of interest, retaining Eastover as a flagship."

Steel and colleagues appear to have been highly successful with their aims and the loyalty of 13 full-time employees.

They are perhaps proudest of their leadership role in helping charities. More than \$200,000 was raised for charity in 1991, and already booked for 1992 are such money-raisers as the American Cancer Society, Easter Seals, Hospice, Catholic Charities, Children's Hospital, Cystic Fibrosis and Alumni Association.

Steel was introduced to golf at age 11 as

part of a family membership at Brookwood Country Club in Jackson, Miss.

At 15, he began getting paid for help around the pro shop and the course. At 5 a.m. Sundays, he mowed greens, then hustled to the pro shop to help dispense sodas, sell golf balls, clean clubs and other duties. He was a full-timer on weekends, moving to maintenance work in the summertime.

Steel graduated from Mississippi State Turfgrass Management School in 1973, and in January 1974 became assistant pro at Live Oaks Golf Club in Jackson.

The next summer he moved to a job as superintendent at Pine Hill Golf Club, a course under construction in Monroe, La.

After nearly five years in the demanding dual role of superintendent and golf pro at Pine Hill, he switched to turf equipment sales. But in 1984 he returned to superintendent duties at Lakewood Country Club here.

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