

# Latini mastered a new language and game

By Vern Putney

Ennio Latini never saw a golf course until he was 20, and that was on the business end of a shovel. He never even took a swipe at a golf ball until he was 21 (1954), and that was with a rake. But he has more than made up for lost youth.

The game, in all its facets, has been Latini's way of life for 38 years.

Deeply involved in daily down-to-earth course operations, Latini reserves his deepest bows to the early "greenkeeper" pioneers and

their hands-on experience.

"They were the backbone of the industry," he said. "They learned from their mistakes, errors they pointed out as red flags in the field of experience. They emphasized that the game and the course should be made as attractive as possible, and that there always are ways to improve things. I've tried to follow these guidelines."

The game of golf was a complete mystery when the native of Italy landed in New York City at the age of 17, a farm boy unable to



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## SUPER FOCUS



Ennio Latini in action at TPC Sawgrass.

speak a word of English and whose contact with sports was limited to an infrequent boot of a soccer ball.

Now 58, the superintendent of Cold Spring Harbor on Long Island, N.Y., has missed only one or two national course superintendent championship tournaments since 1969. He captured the title in 1974 and has finished second, third and fourth. Latini was third in the Senior Division at two Sawgrass courses in Jacksonville, Fla., in February.

Latini met and married Marie Antonucci in 1953 and they moved to California. He jumped at a golf course job offer, strange as it was, and learned about golf the hard way, from the bottom up.

Early in 1954, Latini and a fellow crewman found some golf balls while raking traps and decided to take a few awkward swings with the rakes. Latini was hooked. He bought a set of four worn irons and two woods.

Lunch hours were spent on the driving range, hitting balls endlessly. He decided that he was only following orders of superintendent Bill Eaton, who said, "Learn to play golf, then you'll know what your members want."

He was so intent on pursuit of par that an errant shot produced a display of temper. Latini quit in frustration and then returned six to eight months later, vowing he would henceforth play the game as it should be played, like a gentleman. In control, Latini succeeded.

In 1956, at a tournament called Pomona Valley Open at Los Serranos Country Club in Chino, Calif., Latini won his amateur flight. He converted a \$75 merchandise award into a full set of new irons and woods. He won the President's Cup there in 1957, beating actor Maurice Jara, and was club champion in 1958.

He was champion from 1960-1963 at Lomitas Golf Course in Ontario, Calif., setting a course record of 63. In 1963, he became head

superintendent at Mountain-view Country Club at Corona, Calif.

In 1967, he returned to New York with his family and landed at Hauppauge Country Club in Smithtown. He switched to Brookville Country Club in Glen Cove, N.Y., from 1969-1973, and then moved to Cold Spring.

He credits early mentors, brothers Zell and Bill Eaton, with shaping his career. Bill worked with tennis great Jack Kramer, a silent partner in leasing and developing Los Serranos Golf Course into a top notch 36-hole layout. And former Boston Red Sox player Lind Storti, whose superintendent duties meant shuttling from California to Butte, Mont. taught Latini how to test soil and check drainage on greens.

Perhaps Latini's biggest break came when a bulldozer operator failed to show to finish greens work. The machine lay idle. Latini asked if he might give it a try and Zell OK'd the idea.

Latini climbed aboard and drove into a new field, building greens and tees, so many that every time he built or designed a green or tee, it was a new challenge. He also acquired landscaping knowledge and skills.

Though he moved to new job heights on the bulldozer, Latini thinks larger machinery has disadvantages. He said turf around sandtraps, greens, and tee boxes deteriorates under too heavy a load. He prefers hand work to keep turf healthy and playable.

Latini's "green thumb" is evident in the 500 varieties of trees he has planted at Cold Spring. Upon his arrival there, the course was virtually wide open.

He concluded: "Whether trying to stay close to par as a competitor, an increasingly difficult task, or adding an extra touch to the course, I owe the game of golf a world of thanks. There is no other sport like it."

## GCSAA opens Asian extension

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Saying its worldwide position as a leader for golf course superintendents will give it "a competitive edge," the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America will open an extension office in Singapore to serve Pacific Rim countries.

GCSAA's Pacific operations will offer education/training, certification, publications, conferences, trade shows and research.

"Because golf is booming in this area of the world, a window of opportunity exists for GCSAA to provide these services to ensure that the standards of world-class golf are being met," said GCSAA President William R. Roberts.

The Pacific operations will cover Japan, Guam, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, Korea, The Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand and India.

Roberts said emerging government interest

and concern over environmental and development issues are driving the need for long-term education and quality control throughout this region.

"No other single organization exists anywhere in this area with the resources to provide the services that GCSAA does," he said. "Our long-respected position throughout the world as a leader and standard-bearer for golf course superintendents will give us a competitive edge."

GCSAA has a growing number of members in the area. Nearly 4,000 golf courses are in operation, with hundreds more under construction or planned.

GCSAA Pacific operations will be under direction from the headquarters in Singapore, working with coordinators from the various countries to ensure educational demands and specific language translation needs are met.