

It's an Open-ended work schedule for Baltusrol's Flaherty

By DIANE MILLER

Many champions have been made and broken on the gently rolling, generously bunkered holes at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, N.J., the site of this year's U.S. Open and site of 13 national championships since 1901. But few have been challenged more, or performed better than Baltusrol's longtime superintendent, Joseph Flaherty Jr.

Flaherty began his association with Baltusrol as assistant superintendent in 1964, and he has never worked elsewhere. He comes by turf management naturally. His father, Joe Sr., was superintendent of Manasquan River Golf Club in Brielle, N.J., for 29 years and that is where Joe Jr. grew up.

"My dad tried to steer me away from it," said Flaherty, "but I like basically everything about it."

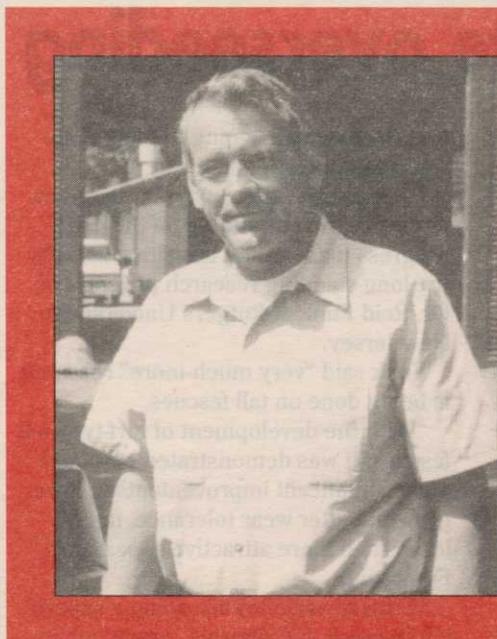
The only real downside to turf management is the loss of family time, he said. "It's very hard to give up weekends and holidays when you have a young family."

He met his wife, Eileen, while on a ski trip to Switzerland.

"I was looking for someone with American cigarettes and she had Kents," Flaherty said. They have four children — none of whom are pursuing careers in turf management, though Flaherty said he hasn't influenced them not to enter the field.

Flaherty is a graduate of Rutgers University in New Brunswick and is a certified golf course superintendent. He thought about earning a master's degree in business administration early in his career, but the two "courses" in his life didn't mesh. Things went fine the first semester, but during the second semester he missed the mid-terms because they were held in the middle of May and missed the final exams because they fell in June.

"It just didn't work with the [golf]



SUPER FOCUS

'You get up, eat, work, and go to bed. By the time the tournament starts, you and the whole staff are exhausted when you most need to be ready.'

— Joe Flaherty Jr.

course schedule, so that was the end of that," he said.

Late in 1967, Flaherty succeeded Ed Casey as superintendent at Baltusrol. The 1993 Open on June 17-20 is the fourth in Flaherty's 29-year tenure. Besides hosting the U.S. Open in 1967, 1980 and 1993, Baltusrol hosted the Ladies U.S. Open in 1985.

Preparation for the 1993 Open began upwards of three years ago when major construction projects got underway around the Lower Course, which has been the site of Opens since 1954. The club called on architect Rees Jones to make suggestions to update the course for the 1993 event.

Projects completed during the fall and winter of 1991-92 included several new tees and bunkers. Last fall, existing bunkers were reconstructed. Most of the major construction work was done by Pavelec Brothers Golf Course Construction Co., Flaherty said.

Routine maintenance was the order through mid-May, he said. His staff of 30 and his two assistants worked around the

club's regular member golf schedule through May 1, but golf was limited after May 1 as preparations began in earnest. Since then, no carts or guests have been allowed on the Lower Course and some tees are roped off.

The 1993 Open looks to top all others at Baltusrol. It is completely sold out — 30,000 tickets in all. In previous years, day passes were still available through the final rounds.

Attendance is not the only aspect of the tournament that is growing. In 1980 there were 19 hospitality tents. This year there will be 46. On the Upper Course, as many as 6,000 cars will be parked.

U.S. Open General Chairman and Baltusrol member Dick Miller said his club contacted others that had used their second 18s for parking. They wanted to investigate the amount of damage it caused and how costly it was to repair. They found damage was less than might be imagined and costs for repairs were relatively modest.

Tents and bleachers started going up on April 15, and construction of hospital-

ity facilities, which is contracted out by the United States Golf Association, was well underway around the fringes of the Upper Course in mid-May. The hospitality tents measure 40 by 60 feet, have platform floors and are air-conditioned, Miller said. All are corporate-sponsored and strictly for corporate guests.

Baltusrol members take an active role in the tournament. As many as 860 serve as volunteers and 49 different committees handle various aspects of planning, Miller said.

The long hours of preparation are, perhaps, the worst part of being superintendent at a U.S. Open host club, said Flaherty.

"You get up, eat, work, and go to bed. By the time the tournament starts, you and the whole staff are exhausted when you most need to be ready."

Everything has gone well during previous Opens at Baltusrol, he said. "The best part of hosting an Open is, when it is all over and everything went well. You start praying at about 5:30 Saturday night that someone wins and there is no playoff."

Flaherty doesn't have a favorite in this year's field of players. "It was exciting in 1980 when Jack [Nicklaus] won because it was a big comeback for him," he said.

Flaherty's biggest fear going into the Open is rain. "The thing that is always in the back of my mind is rain," he said. "In 1967 and 1980, the day after the tournament ended, it rained like a son of a gun. We came within a day of having major problems."

Miller said that while hosting the Open is a massive undertaking, everyone is excited and enthusiastic about participating.

"Joe deserves whatever recognition he gets," Miller said. "He has done a terrific job preparing the course and should be justifiably proud of the course and its condition."

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Buyer beware: A mulch on the market can cause nitrogen starvation

Golf course superintendents should beware of a mulch that can cause nitrogen starvation shock to annuals and shallow-rooted perennial plants growing in the immediate area.

Dr. Francis Gouin of the University of Maryland reported in the Free State Nursery News that the dangerous mulch originates in the pallet industry, which is solving its solid-waste problem by grinding its discarded pallets into mulch. The ground wood is sprayed with a colorant to make it look more acceptable.

Since lumber has a carbon/nitrogen ratio of between 700-to-one and 800-to-one, when this material is applied to the ground, it sucks all available nitrogen from the soil to a depth of about three inches.

Gouin said the only way demolition wood and wood chips can be converted into mulch is by composting. It is not possible to satisfy the nitrogen needs of both the microorganisms that do the decomposition of wood and the plants by applying additional nitrogen to the soil, he said.