

Super Focus



Shannon Cook stands in front of an area on her course flooded by January's rains.

"Chance favors the prepared mind."
— Dr. Louis Pasteur

Shannon Cook silences doubters

By MARK LESLIE

A star search that found Shannon Kerr Cook in a college placement booth transformed a fledgling nurserywoman into a barrier-breaking professional in golf course maintenance.

Little did Aart deVos know that when he plucked a young, then-single Shannon Kerr out of a pool of Fullerton College graduates, a star was born.

"I did not know she was going to be a golf course superintendent," deVos said, but, "She was a very determined person. Part of my initial screening is to open the door but make it difficult. I gave her some jobs that required perseverance — really rotten jobs. I put challenges in front of her and she accepted them. That means the person has management capability."

A dozen years later, the married-and-divorced Cook is superintendent at Monterey Country Club in Palm Desert, Calif., managing an all-male, all-Hispanic 15-member crew, and fighting blistering summertime heat

and occasional floods like those in January and February that, first, carried away two bridges, then their two replacements.

"We take it all in stride," Cook said after the second flood. "That's what makes this job exciting and challenging."

Exciting and challenging for one of just three female superintendents in California and perhaps 100 in the entire country.

Cook's boss, Dennis Orsborn, said he was initially concerned about how Cook would handle the cultural barriers of her crew and being a superintendent in a male-dominated industry.

"But because of her abilities as a manager she downplayed any confrontations that might have occurred, or problems that might have developed... Therefore, it never became a problem," he said. "You have to earn their [a crew's] respect. She was able to do that rather quickly."

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Cook steps from her utility truck after passing over a flooded brook once spanned by a steel bridge.

Floods push superintendent Cook & crew to new heights

Superintendent Shannon Cook deals almost annually with minor flooding at Monterey Country Club in Palm Desert, Calif., but January and February 1993 was a time for the record books.

An area that receives three to five inches of rainfall annually got a dumping of five inches in the span of a two weeks in early January, causing major flooding. After a brief reprieve, more than 2-1/2 inches fell in one day Feb. 7-8, again flooding the region.

During the January rainfall, a wash that runs through 27-hole Monterey Country Club flooded more than 10 acres, affecting the 3rd and 7th holes on the West Course, and 2nd and 7th on the South Course. The third nine-hole East Course was unaffected.

The four-foot-wide wash flooded to 30-foot dimensions and carried away two of four heavy steel bridges.

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CIRCLE #114

Grow-in tips

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Amur fish, where applicable. Cover overflow pipes with mesh screen for obvious reasons.

- If it is in the owner's best interest, offer to be owner's representative to act as a liaison in his/her behalf with the architect/contractor.

- Receive bids for "Big 5 Capital Budget" items and schedule delivery as they are needed.

- Order grow-in fertilizer/pesticides and schedule delivery

when needed with temporary/permanent storage capacities in mind.

- Have bunker sand tested and make recommendations to owner/architect. Put out sand samples for key golf people to hit shots from, if applicable. Bunker sand must follow USGA recommendations.

- Protect/mark off all tree locations susceptible to construction damage to roots or soil elevation changes.

- Coordinate silt fencing/hay bale locations with architect/contractor around catch basins and

all other areas susceptible to erosion onto sensitive areas.

- Irrigation system should be flushed out and **fully** tested well before grassing commences.

- Consider hiring your irrigation technician and have him work with/for the irrigation contractor during all irrigation installation. Be careful: This can be a sensitive area for employee relations.

- Contractor will sometimes ask for your guidance and approval of all seeding rates and equipment calibration. Work together for this very important

common goal.

- Measure golf course yardage and sprinkler head yardage with laser distomat. Local golf association can do it, hire a private contractor to do it, or rent a laser distomat (\$50-\$150/day) and do it yourself.

- Mark all irrigation equipment with white pizza pans or white large kitchen trash bags for color irrigation as-built aerial photograph. Scale of photograph is usually 1 inch=200 feet, 1 inch=100 feet, or ultimately 1 inch=50 feet if the budget allows. Overlay as-builts can be made of topograph-

ical, drainage, and underground utilities as well.

- Order all golf course accessories, i.e. ball washers, cups, flagsticks, etc. one month prior to opening.

- Irrigate only during daylight hours. Wake the turf up in the morning, put it to bed late each night. Consider using field controllers only and have one employee irrigate semi-automatically 4-6 holes/each to water properly and to observe any stuck heads that can be fixed quickly and easily. Using the master controller to grow-in a golf course, other than for initial testing, is **not** recommended as an employee/s of yours should be observing the watering to make sure that enough/too much is properly applied. Turf students are an excellent choice to help with the grow-in irrigation special techniques.

- Make the **critical decision** about when golf course will open for initial play. Probably the hardest decision you will make during grow-in.

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Flood

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"We still can't find the bridges," Cook said. "They're probably buried somewhere under silt."

Crews replaced the lost bridges with two old ones, so that a second nine holes could be opened up. The back side of the course was closed about two weeks and opened Jan. 22 before the Feb. 7-8 rainstorm repeated the terror and carried away the two replacement bridges.

"We have a wash every year, but not to this extent," Cook said.

Her plans were to wait out the rainy season, then hire an earth-mover to level sand out and grade it. Her crews will then seed it.

Until then, all four affected holes will have modified tees.

The entire operation was exacerbated because crews had to trailer equipment around to the other side of the golf course to mow the greens and tees there. It was a 45-minute drive to the neighboring town to reach a bridge.

Yet, through most of the ordeal, Cook kept 18 holes open — nine holes on the East Course and another nine between the South and West courses.

The two floods were Cook's biggest challenge in her career, she said. Yet, every day, she said, "I get a lot of satisfaction in looking over the golf course and seeing what great things the crew has done. We've all worked together to make it very playable and very beautiful. I get a lot of satisfaction out of that."

Nicklaus Turf

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the world. The firm specializes in developing and implementing grassings, irrigation, course improvement and pest management programs. Each concentrates on the most current environmental philosophy of low chemical, fertilizer and water use.