

SuperFocus

Duo puts new face on Incline Village course for 30th

By DOUG SAUNDERS

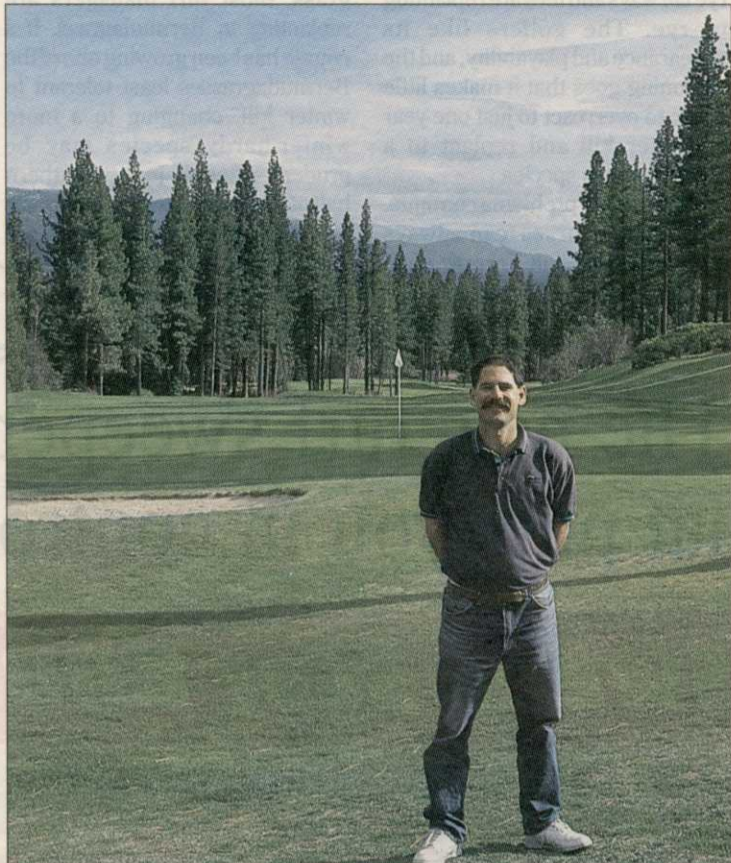
LAKE TAHOE — “Two heads are better than one” has become an idiom of success at Incline Village, where two men trained in turfgrass management are leading an extensive overhaul of its nationally ranked Championship Course.

Leading the restoration are two superintendents: director of golf Mike Hair, and head superintendent Gary Skolnik.

Located on the north shore of Lake Tahoe, Incline features a classic Robert Trent Jones Sr. design the architect once called the “ideal mountain golf course.” The 6,915-yard layout rolls through thickly wooded, hilly terrain that offers spectacular views of Tahoe and the surrounding peaks of the Sierras.

The golf course is celebrating its 30th anniversary this summer. It was built as the centerpiece of Incline Village, a real-estate project that has grown into a thriving town. The Incline Village General Improvement District, which owns and operates the course, has undertaken an extensive overhaul of the course and its operations to make a resort worthy of recognition for the next 30 years.

Hair came to Incline from Colorado, where he was head super and general manager at South Suburban Country Club near Denver. His selection as Incline’s director of golf in 1989 is testimony to the increasing number of superintendents moving into managerial positions.



Superintendent Gary Skolnik is proud of the improvements at Incline Village.

The course had been run by various outside agencies and numerous superintendents for two decades. It was up to Hair to map out a strategy to bring the course up to its true potential.

“I had to approach it from two fronts — capital improvements and operational improvements,” Hair explained. “To make things go, we needed to upgrade equipment and facilities first.”

For years, maintenance was run out of a small area under a deck behind the snack bar. An

8,000-square-foot maintenance building took its place, while new machinery, irrigation system and carts were procured.

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Three years ago, Hair hired Gary Skolnik from Bishop Country Club in eastern California. Skolnik was an avid golfer at a young age and also worked in landscaping through his teens. Blending these two loves led him to enroll in the turf management program at the College of the Desert in

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— Gary Skolnik, superintendent

Palm Springs.

Skolnik’s two years at the college allowed him study under renowned turf specialist Melvin Robey, as well as do intern work at The Lakes and Mission Hills country clubs. He was the first graduate of the turf program to earn his Class A classification.

He took his knowledge and bilingual talents (Spanish) to secure work at Mission Hills, the Wigwam in Arizona, and Newport Beach Country Club. He took his first head superintendent’s job at Bishop in 1990, but the opening at Incline intrigued him.

“The Wigwam and my favorite course, Spyglass, are both Trent Jones Sr. designs,” Skolnik said. “So when I heard about the opening at Incline, I jumped at the chance. The fact that it was a beautiful place for my family also figured in my choice to come here.”

According to Hair: “Bringing Gary has been a major step for our operational improvement. His bilingual skills have helped develop a loyal staff of Latin workers. The basics of maintenance are easy, but it’s the implementation that demands talent.”

When Incline was built 30 years ago, construction crews had to deal with granite bedrock

that held little topsoil. With little percolation or filtration, the course suffered from puddling and inconsistent conditions. Some fairways were built up with large granite boulders and covered with fill after the land had been logged out.

Skolnik’s first priority was installation of a state-of-the-art irrigation system and new drainage lines. “We’ve put in over six miles of drainage in the last three years,” said Skolnik, whose tenure at Incline has been longer than any other superintendent at the Lake Tahoe resort.

Soil samples also showed a high acidic content. To rectify this, Skolnik “sweetened” the soil with 140 tons of sugar beet lime. Walk-behind greens mowers were secured to develop smooth, fast putting surfaces.

Drought has had a major effect on the surrounding pine and fir forest. To deal with the threat of beetle infestation and more tree loss, Skolnik has been working closely with the Nevada Department of Forestry to implement a forest management program to sustain the wooded areas that surround the course.

“The trees make this golf course,” said Skolnik. “It has to be a priority to save them.”

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Mixing can equal benefits

Continued from page 13

application of Banner systemic fungicide and Daconil 2787 contact fungicide provides longer-term control of dollar spot and brown patch.

“Banner gives excellent control over dollar spot, while Daconil is strong against brown patch,” said Danneberger. “Together, they actually expand the spectrum of disease control. This is a big benefit for turf managers when conditions favor both diseases.

“The benefits don’t end with disease control,” he added. “Tank mixing is the best option in resistance management. By combining two different chemical modes of action, you greatly decrease the chance for development of insensitive strains.”

Dr. Paul Vincelli, assistant professor of plant pathology at the University of Kentucky, agreed tank mixing is a good way to avoid insensitivity problems. “I always recommend that turf managers avoid exclusive use of any one chemistry,” he said. “Tank mixing two chemicals with different modes of action is one way to accomplish this.” He said that during extreme disease pressure, tank mixing can be very effective. “There are times when conditions may be right for both dollar spot and brown patch. That’s when a tank mix may take care of both problems.”