

SuperFocus



Brad Bonino at Tahoe City Golf Course.

Family affair earns accolades

By KATHIE HOXSIE

TAHOE CITY, Calif. — Ask the Bechdolt family how they transformed greens and fairways in poor condition into turf that some players say rivals Augusta National and St. Andrews and they'll tell you a \$200,000 tale of meeting environmental demands, relying on in-house expertise, and continuously fighting political hassles.

Their historic nine-hole Tahoe City Golf Course, elevation 6,200 feet, abuts this resort community's commercial core. Designed in 1929 as six holes and first managed by Scotland's May Dunn (the Dunns of Musselburgh), TCGC sits just above heavily regulated bi-state Lake Tahoe and is only 300 yards from the Truckee River, the lake's only outlet and water source for thousands of downstream users.

Compliance with California's water quality regulations is par for the course for all of California's five Tahoe golf courses. In 1989, TCGC was required, within three years, to stabilize three stream zones, construct three groundwater wells and two surface wells, install

grease traps and infiltration basins, and devise and monitor a chemical use plan.

Overall, the Bechdolt family spent about \$132,000 to comply. Each of the wells cost \$7,000. Upwards of \$12,000 is spent yearly for testing of ground and surface water. Other improvements have included new sand traps and tees, extensive planting of flowers and trees, and modernization of some cart pathways.

Ownership of the course has been in Bechdolt hands for 42 years. Today six adult brothers and sisters, all golfers who grew up on the TCGC, run the business. To them, TCGC is a vital economic community asset as well as a prime recreation option for residents, second homeowners, and American and foreign tourists.

Because the owners are spread geographically from Southern California to Washington, the year-old corporation meets twice yearly in Tahoe City and uses teleconferences to conduct routine business. A majority vote rules.

"We have our feuds," admitted nephew and manager Bobby Bonino, 31, a University of San Francisco graduate in hospita-

lity management who also has an associate degree in business administration.

"There are problems sometimes. They amount to what I know is right versus what they (the Bechdolt owners) think is right."

More than 30,000 rounds of golf are played here in the five to six months that the links aren't snow covered. A snowmobile rental service leases the course during the winter. Between May and September, TCGC hosts six tournaments, including Cal Bechdolt's Cool Caddy Open for LPGA caddies and players and three Northern California Golf Association events.

Sloped 10 to 15 percent, TCGC is a natural wetlands fed by 28 underground springs which cross the course diagonally. Only an acre and a half of the property is hard surface. Uphill on one corner of TCGC are 33 residences, a church, and community center. A cemetery, an elementary school, softball fields, a supermarket and other businesses flank other fairways and greens.

"We had been careful with our chemicals, but we hadn't done testing or checked our fertilizer," said E. J. Belding, a civil engineer and general contractor who is married to the chair of Tahoe City Golf Course, Inc., the Bechdolt partnership corporation.

E.J. spent six months analyzing the most cost effective way to meet environmental criteria. He researched wetlands literature at the University of Nevada, Reno, the University of California, Davis, and the University of Denver. He putted through such tomes as "Constructed Wetlands," "Guidelines for the Construction of Wetlands," and "The Analysis of Constructed Wetlands."

"I found that in terms of water quality at low temperatures, say 48 degrees, bacteria go to sleep. Water goes through the plants, however, and into the Truckee River. Chemically speaking, you don't get any breakdown," E. J. said.

E. J. and TCGC's greens superin-

tendent Brad Bonino, Bobby's brother, who came to TCGC in 1989 with six years greens experience, engineered two wetlands areas and one major pond. Previously, TCGC had only one pond.

The wetlands, which are four to six inches deep, function as secondary water treatment facilities to cleanse contaminants. They can handle a one-hour flow velocity of a 20-year storm.

The ponds are settling basins which catch debris and process harmful nutrients.

"We annually get 10 to 20 yards of silt out of one of the ponds," E. J. said. "We reuse the silt as fertilizer on other areas of the course."

Capitalizing on the ability of certain native plants, e.g., cattails and reed grasses, and bacteria to absorb pollutants, TCGC staff recently transplanted some natives from a nearby mountain meadow.

"We're now getting root zones to be effective, but it will take 15 to 20 years for them to really take hold," E.J. said.

"I think they're doing well, even better than expected due to our short growing seasons. We keep babying the system along."

His current favorite reference for keeping TCGC in shape is "Constructed Wetlands For Water Quality Improvements."

By California law fertilizer is kept to a minimum. Brad uses Turf Supreme Mini Pellets on the greens every three weeks. Tees are fertilized bimonthly, fairways lightly twice a year. Dry spots are handwatered daily. Some weeds are handpicked, most are mowed to prevent overseeding. In the autumn, greens are treated with the fungicide FFII to keep snowmelt down.

"All the while we are tested once a month by the state water board to see if anything is leaching into the ground water," Brad said. "We have about five test wells over the course."

Detention ponds, cobbled ditches, and

Continued on next page

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Internships a win-win situation for courses, students

By MARK LESLIE

As turfgrass management becomes more technical and specialized, golf course superintendents are finding it increasingly important to have more knowledgeable crew members. And so they are pursuing agronomy students, offering positions on their crews in a win-win situation — the student intern gains experience and the superintendent gets a knowledgeable employee.

"Having a dependable core of folks who are going to understand more in-depth what turf maintenance is about, and what golfers want, is an asset," said Bob Brame, agronomist with the U.S. Golf Association's Mid-Atlantic Section.

Saying that most of his interns from "top-notch programs like Michigan, Iowa and Ohio State," Medinah (Ill.) Country Club superintendent Danny Quast said: "They already have four or five years working on a golf course. All the basic training has been done. Plus they come with a great attitude and they're excited about the job, conscientious, educated and experienced. That's a perfect formulation."

"We not only have the facilities to house people, which I think is key. We're making internships very valued positions instead of learn-as-you-go," said Greenwich (Conn.) Country Club superintendent Greg Wojick. "We're looking for the top one percent of students, enticing them with top pay, living quarters, bonus potential and responsibilities that are not typical for an intern."

Those responsibilities include pest monitoring and scouting, chemical applications, and manhour recordkeeping, inventory control, a full range of technical training, irrigation scheduling and other administrative duties.

"In the past, a lot of courses have thrown students out into low-level jobs and had them bite off as much as they could chew," Wojick said.

"We're giving them a lot of responsibility in the maintenance facility and then, when



Apartments in Greenwich (Conn.) Country Club's housing unit would rent for \$1,200 a month, says superintendent Greg Wojick.

appropriate, putting them out in the field," he said.

Having turfgrass students is "certainly an important improvement," said Bruce Cadenelli, superintendent at Caves Valley Golf Course in Finksburg, Md. "You have another pair of trained eyes — someone who is more enthusiastic and energetic."

"It's been difficult getting good people. I think when we do, it is in a small way,

paying back the profession, and it's win-win. The club gets good people to work and it's an opportunity for them to learn," he added.

"I've been in the business 30 years and seeing my interns go out and be a success is the most rewarding part of it," Quast said, adding that he has hired a number of them as superintendents at his three courses.

Attracting best interns: Major investment, big rewards

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filling up [job openings]."

One of Caves Valley's five maintenance buildings is a 1,200-square-foot structure. It contains a one-bedroom apartment for an assistant superintendent, and two college-style dorm rooms that share a livingroom and bath. A washer/dryer room is also included.

"The rooms are not luxurious but certainly adequate for the four-to-six-month period they [students] will be with us," Cadenelli said.

For the 1994 season Caves Valley has attracted one student each from the universities of Massachusetts and

Maryland, Penn State, Michigan State.

"It's not the Ritz," said Danny Quast of his dormitory at Medinah (Ill.) Country Club, "but it serves its purpose."

His 11 rooms include two set aside for interns, each room with two beds. Employees are served three meals a day seven days a week at the clubhouse dining room.

To keep up with the Greenwich Country Clubs, Caves Valleys and Medinachs, other courses must first find the cash. But, as the USGA's Brame put it: "The kick has been making the initial investment. Even if a course can rationalize building a facility, it still has to come up with the money."

Turf students garner GCSAA scholarships

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Joseph Livingston of Elk Point, S.D., an Iowa State University junior majoring in turfgrass management, received the Chester A. Mendenhall Award as the outstanding student in the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's (GCSAA) 1993 scholarship competition.

The award honors the late charter member of GCSAA.

Scholars are selected on the basis of academic excellence and potential to become leading professionals in golf course management and related fields.

Robert G. Marshall of Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, a senior at Michigan State majoring in turfgrass management, received the Ambassador Award as the outstanding student from outside the United States.

Other winners and the schools they are attending are Michigan State University students Matthew J. Ashton of Lake Orion, Mich., and Mark Krick of Brighton, Mich.; Colorado State University students Jason Aerni of Roundup, Mont., and David L. Calder of Bemidji, Minn.; Penn State University students Stephen P. Edkin of Lebanon, Pa., Edward W. Gross of State College, Pa., and Gary L. Heath of King City, Mo.; North Carolina State University student Chris Hartwiger of Raleigh, N.C.; and University of Nebraska student Troy J. Merkel of Omaha, Neb.

Family pulls together

Continued from previous page

small landing areas add to the course's appearance and playability, said Bobby. "It did and does cost a little more money to function and meet regulations," Bobby said. "But it's better than getting a \$1,500 to \$10,000 fine for not complying."

To cover expenses, the Bechdolts raised greens fees to \$32 and spent profits. They hope to replace their 40-year-old clubhouse, consolidate the maintenance yard into it, and repave driveway and parking areas. Within the next 10 years, they plan to add more of the easily cleanable, black fiberglass concrete paths. All will require environmental permits.

For now, however, the Bechdolts are battling with a bi-state environmental agency and the county over a proposed community plan for the town and a storm drainage project. Aspects of the community plan might require dangerously narrowing the course and relocation of a green. The county is seeking easements on the course which would temporarily shut down two fairways and move a hole during excavation of an 18 to 20-foot ditch.

"We would like to see something done, but it will all be tied up in litigation," E.J. said. "Most frustrating is ignorance ... political answers that aren't cost effective."

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