

Giedd: Time to pull back on maintenance spending?

By PETER BLAIS

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. — Are the gobs of money golf courses are throwing into their maintenance budgets today really worth it? Maybe not, according to Ken Giedd, director of course maintenance at the 63-hole Kingsmill Resort here.

"Grooming standards have increased to the point where it seems many of the things superintendents do are simply a way to keep up with the Joneses [competition]," Giedd said. "But I think we're close to the point of diminishing returns. Superintendents do a lot of stuff to satisfy the owner or greens committee. I'm not sure golfers really see much of a difference, though. I think we could

pull back, do fewer things, and no one would really care."

Giedd speaks from 27 years experience in the golf course maintenance business. He graduated from Virginia Tech University with a bachelor's degree in agronomy in 1969 before heading into the Army. The government stationed him in Seoul, South Korea and made him superintendent of the 8th Army Golf Club. Giedd oversaw a major reconstruction of the course, where eventual Tour players Orville Moody and Bob Eastwood served as head pro and assistant pro, respectively.

Giedd was eventually reassigned and named club manager of the course at Fort Lee in St. Petersburg, Fla.

After his discharge from the service, Blacksburg Country Club brought Giedd back to his native state as head superintendent. "All the Virginia Tech professors were members of the course and several of them were on the greens committee," Giedd remembered. "That was pressure."

After a two-year hitch at Blacksburg, Giedd moved to the Hermitage Country Club in his hometown of Richmond. The course hosted the 1950 PGA tournament and provided Giedd with his first professional tournament experience when the Senior Tour stopped there in 1983-84.

Kingsmill hired Giedd in 1985 just as work on the Arnold Palmer-designed Plantation course was winding down. The Plantation and Pete Dye-designed River Course gave Kingsmill 36 holes. The complex stayed at 36 until July 1995 with the opening of the Tom Clark/Curtis Strange-designed Woods course. While Giedd had a limited hand in the construction of other courses, the Woods layout was his first opportunity to be involved from the outset. In fact, his involvement was more than he originally expected.

The builder filed for bankruptcy halfway through construction of the Woods course. Giedd was put in charge of the project six months from the projected opening date. "The irrigation



Ken Giedd

days those last six months, but we got it done."

Today, Giedd oversees the Woods, Plantation and River courses, the nine-hole, par-3 Bray track, plus the landscaping of the resort's entire 750 acres. He manages 75 employees and a \$2 million annual budget.

"Anheuser Busch has a progressive capital budget, too," he added. "We're putting in a new practice green in August and just finished a new driving range last year."

The resort is also finishing up work this summer on a \$10 million expansion to its conference center and sports club. Landscaping responsibilities at those facilities will also fall under Giedd's jurisdiction.

"The nice thing about working for a company this size is the resources you have access to," Giedd said. "For example, we have a sodium problem with the irrigation water here. The engineers and environmental people at Anheuser-Busch have helped solve that problem. We've also pulled out all the old underground storage tanks, built a fertilizer storage area, piped the equipment wash-down area into the sewer system and built a new chemical storage area."

"The only disadvantage is that things can move slowly in a corporate environment and you don't have the freedom to do some things that you might in a smaller organization. But the pros far outweigh the cons."

Another pro Anheuser Busch brings to Kingsmill is the PGA Tour variety who frequented The River Course during July's Michelob Championship

was in, greens seeded and the rough shaping done," Giedd remembered. "We took it from there, doing the rest of the work in house or contracting it out. There were some long



at Kingsmill. "The tournament is sort of staring over your shoulder 12 months a year," said Giedd, who begins serious preparation six to eight weeks before the event.

Anheuser Busch was successful in getting the dates for the event transferred out of hot, sultry July and into the cooler climes of late October for the 1997 event. While that pleases Kingsmill's marketing department, it could create some headaches for Giedd.

"We're on the northern end of the Bermudagrass zone already," he said. "When we start scalping it down for the tournament in late October, it's going to be tough to keep it alive through the winter. We'll do some experimenting this fall to see what works and what doesn't. October will be great for the players and spectators, but it could make it tougher for us."

Of course, excuses like the cold won't hold much weight with golfers if conditions are less than ideal the next time they visit Kingsmill. "The superintendent's job has become much more demanding since I first started in the business," said Giedd, who has organized monthly gatherings for Williamsburg-area superintendents for many years. "Now a phone call to those guys is often about the best I can do."

"The biggest change is the governmental and environmental regulations a superintendent has to deal with. A superintendent today has to be able to juggle more responsibilities. It doesn't seem so long ago, 1968 I believe, that they were just introducing the first riding greens mower. The job has gotten more complex and there is a lot more money involved."

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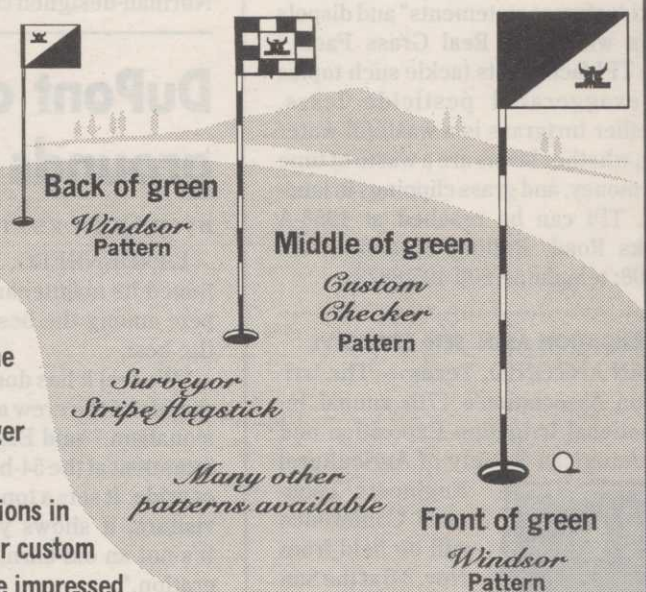
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