

Landscapes Unlimited returns to winner's circle

Kubly's company named Best Builder of the Year

By MARK LESLIE

LINCOLN, Neb. — Two decades ago would-be golf course designer Bill Kubly took a golf course construction job until he could afford to be a course architect. Today, Kubly's Landscapes Unlimited, Inc. has been named Golf Course Builder of the Year for the fourth time in the last six years — and he has no intention of changing careers.

"I wake up every day thankful that I found something to do — just by accident — that I've enjoyed for a long time," said Kubly from his offices here. "It happened purely by accident. My degree is in landscape architecture. I started in golf course construction right out of college. I felt when I was financially able I would get into design, but I fell so much in love with construction that I've stayed with it."

In *Golf Course News'* 9th annual Builder of the Year survey, the 21-year-old Landscapes Unlimited placed first, with an average mark of 96.527 out of a possible 100.

Golf course architects nominated 12 companies for the award. Three-time winner Wadsworth Golf Construction Co. did not enter the competition. Winners were determined by responses from the developer, architect and superintendent on each of a company's projects completed in 1997. They were asked to rate the construction firm's work through a series of questions.

Ryngolf-Eastern of Deerfield Beach, Fla., finished second in the balloting; Niebur Golf of Colorado Springs, Colo., third; Crown Golf of Glenview, Ill., fourth; and 1996 winner SAJO Construction, Inc.



The 18th hole at Quarry Oaks Golf Course, designed by John LaFoy, built by Landscapes Unlimited, and voted by *Golf Digest* as the Best New Affordable Course.

of Richmond, Texas, fifth.

Unsolicited accolades poured in from those surveyed about Landscapes Ultd.

"We have had the opportunity to build numerous courses around the country and [they] are the finest and most detailed contractor we have worked with," said developer David Chapman of The Traditions Club in La Quinta, Calif. "I cannot tell you how impressed I am with them. Simply the best."

"Everything Landscapes does is first-class," said Ross McCown of Quarry Oaks Golf Course in Lincoln.

"There are very few firms that would react to site and weather conditions as favorably, aggressively and creatively as Landscapes Unlimited did on our project," said M. Lee Niles of Southern Irrigation Consultants, who worked on the Shady Oaks Country Club project in Fort Worth, Texas. "Their staff and their efforts are reflective of a firm that exemplifies the standards and qualities of the Golf Course Builder of the Year."

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Did Kubly foresee this type of success when he formed his company?

"No. I thought when I got into this business that it might last 10 years and we'd be done building golf courses. Fortunately, I was wrong," he said. "Our volume is 50 times more than I ever thought it would be."

Kubly attributes his success to surrounding himself "with people a lot smarter than me, people who are very hard workers, who are very committed — not only to Landscapes Unlimited but to the game of golf, though that sounds like a cliché."

Saying that he owes a lot to Richard

Watson of Richard Watson, Inc. in Lincoln, where he cut his teeth in course construction, Kubly singled out Landscapes Unlimited Executive Vice President Kirk Kyser, Vice President of Construction Jim Barger, Vice President of Irrigation Roy Wilson, General Manager Brad Schmidt and his many project managers for their contributions to the company.

"I can't do all the things I used to do because we have so much work," he said. "I remind guys the reason we're successful is our reputation. Yes, we do want to grow, but we want to grow and be able to maintain that quality level we're famous for. If we had enough high-quality people we could have 10 more jobs tomorrow."

Landscapes Unlimited has "stabilized at 15- to 25-percent percent growth each year," Kubly said.

The firm has added two project managers, each of whom manages three or four jobs; four superintendents and three new irrigation superintendents as well as office staff, he said. Landscapes now employs more than 600 in-season and 350 in the off-season.

"We don't want to overgrow," Kubly said. "Plus, we feel the business has probably peaked in the number of courses that will be built in a year. You hate to over-expand and then not be able to keep all those people busy."

He foresees the golf industry continuing to open 400 or more courses a year for the next two or three years, then slowly declining.

The firm works on 25 to 35 jobs during the year, including quite a bit of renovation work, mostly on 18-hole courses.

"We had six or seven major renovations this year," Kubly said. "It's a good business. It's fun working for existing clubs. You get a lot of day-to-day feedback. And it's most fun with clubs needing a major facelift. You have many club members — and sometimes city forefathers — who really appreciate what's being done. ... We did a major renovation at Ben Hogan's course, Shady Oaks in Ft. Worth, this year and the response was so uplifting, working with people who appreciate what you're doing."

"You wonder how long [golf industry growth] can sustain itself," he said "That's a good reason for us remaining in the renovation end of the business."



Photo by Patrick Driskey



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