

Field days are actually fun

I must admit, I wasn't sure what I was in for when I was making my flight arrangements for Portland, Ore., to attend 1998's batch of field days. But what I found after six days in the Corvallis Valley is that I'm now a whole hell of a lot more knowledgeable on the foundation of any good golf course — grass.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with these yearly happenings — there can't be many of you — field days are ways for grass seed companies to share their latest research findings and grass varieties with distributors, retailers and superintendents. Most field days start with opening remarks from company presidents, guest speakers and research technicians that plot the company's current position and future plans. Following these remarks, and lots of coffee, attendees are lead around the test trials of the company's various grass varieties to check in on the progress.

It was this field tour segment that I questioned at the outset. Being my first time to the fields, I wasn't sure what I would gain out of looking down toward my shoes at five or six varieties of tall fescue. But what I failed to factor in was that while I was, in fact, staring down at my shoes, there would be a voice booming out of a speaker that would actually explain to me what I was seeing and what I should look for in the different varieties.

Overall, what I thought would be of no help to me at all ended up being a valuable, educational experience.

A pat on the back should go to the seed companies that hold these days. I realize that they're designed as marketing events, yet they offer enough of an educational slant that they end up serving a dual purpose — a pleasant surprise.

While I'm busy passing out the back slaps, a special thanks to the folks at American Golf Corp.'s Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club, OB Sports' Langdon Farms Golf Club and The Reserve, as well as the staff at Trysting Tree Golf Club.

Pumpkin Ridge, Langdon and The Reserve truly epitomize the "country club for a day" concept, while Trysting Tree showed us what a good youth program can do to help push affordable, accessible public golf forward.

Teeing off before my group at Trysting Tree were two boys not older than 14. My playing partner, a local who plays the course two or three times a week, suggested that I watch how well the boys move their game along. He proceeded to tell me that before kids play the course they are put through an extensive program that teaches the kids the written and unwritten rules of the game. For \$5, he said, kids come out and spend the whole day.



Michael Levans,
editor

Help a new market into the game

Now that much of Golf Nation is focusing on helping more inner-city youths and others in America gain access the game, I suggest aiming at a whole other segment of society: liberals.

Liberate Liberals on the Links, we could call this initiative. Liberals really could be liberated by being introduced to the treasures of this game, a few of which are integrity, honesty, honor, a sense of decorum, history and tradition, and parameters for good and decent behavior.

I say we should help liberals out here because it appears not enough of them practice this game. A recent National Golf Foundation survey found that Republicans outnumber Democrats 3-1 on golf courses. Liberals would argue that the survey substantiates their feeling that golf is a sport for the wealthy. This is not true, since another survey a couple of years ago found that there are more millionaire Democrats than Republicans, especially within the ranks of Congress.

So, what can we say?

1) This is a sport for the thinking man, and therefore it is obvious in which party the intelligence lays?

2) This is a sport of skill, and right-brained people are obviously less apt to fall over themselves than left-brained?

4) This is a sport where honesty and integrity count more than anything, so we're surprised, in fact, that so many liberals play at all?

To the point at hand: I'm calling for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, PGA of America U.S. Golf Association, PGA and LPGA Tours, American Society of Golf Course Architects, Golf Course Builders Association of America, Club Managers Association of America, National Club Association, state golf associations and any others with a heart to jump aboard the train here: Liberate Liberals on the Links.

And if you're not part of an association like any of these, take this challenge to a personal level. Invite a liberal friend to play a round of golf with you. Unveil to him the character of the game of golf, then watch to see the metamorphosis.

...

Hats off to the many superintendents around the country who devote so much time to advancing the study of maintenance practices, equipment and products.

I asked Dan Dinelli of North Shore Country Club in Glenview, Ill., how he found the time to perform the research he does (see page 21).

He deferred any praise, saying: "It's a group effort. My cousin, Jerry, and I grew up here with my Dad being the superintendent. Juan, my superintendent, grew up with us... We all grew up together and work as an awesome team. It allows us flexibility to engage in other activities — trying to further the concept of sustainable turf management techniques at North Shore Country Club.

"We all enjoy doing it. The golf course gets taken care of by seasoned veterans. It's fun, but it's not a one-man show by any means."



Mark Leslie,
managing editor

LETTER FROM THE PHILIPPINES

Western ways in the East

By JOHN FARLEY

BORACAY ISLAND, The Philippines — An average day in The Philippines starts out like any Stateside day. Up at 5 a.m. and lacing the boots while throwing back a bowl of corn flakes and a cup of Joe. Then a quick commute to the office that requires headlights. Unlock the shop, start the coffee pot and post that day's maintenance activities on the schedule board. This is the point where parallels end. From 5:30 on, a different part of the world comes to light.

The Philippines is not unlike its many struggling Asian neighbors. Many of the countries in Southeast Asia have been affected by foreign occupations, dictatorships and war. The Philippines was hit with all three and their affects have taken toll. A

young democracy by our standards, The Philippines is a republic where traditional Old World ways are being forced to mesh with modern New World technologies. Sometimes they mesh and sometimes they don't. Most of the time they don't.

One of the most important things I've learned since working in Asia is to keep cool and be more patient. If you're too impatient, or lose your temper too often you'll eventually lose the respect of your crew — not to mention your mind. As managers we're all aware that it's important to know when to push and when to back off. Sometimes you just need to roll with the punches.

The general pace of life is a bit slower here. The sooner you realize that the better. Of course, this puts a premium on planning

and organization. You really need to "get out in front" of things and be as pro-active as possible. It also helps to have a couple back-up plans in case plan A goes awry. My advice for rookie managers is to wear comfortable boots and don't get too wound up.

Another aspect I had to get used to was the size of the crews. In a region where labor is so cheap, crew sizes run three and four times larger than Stateside courses. This, coupled with the language barrier, made course construction a genuine challenge. I found that a good foreman is worth his weight in gold. With the right person leading a crew, a lot can be accomplished.

Many things are done manually here rather than mechanized as in the States. An example is the amount of hand-digging we do. Entire green cores and huge

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LETTER TO LESLIE

Mark, you have written editorials that I felt were right on target. None, however, were as appropriate as "Resist and refuse to double under."

The golf industry is producing the product that millions of people want ... and nobody should feel guilty about that. Uninformed activists have an easy target with "lush, green, pest-free" golf courses. After all, who needs them, right?

Paul Harvey is responsible for helping many millions of Americans form their opinions on many issues over the years. In this regard, he needs to be responsible for influencing the public with facts, not fancy. Thanks again.

Ron Gagne, Regal
Chemical Co.

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Letter from Philippines

Continued from page 10

fairways bunkers are trenched by hand. All the spoils are bagged and hand-carried, and gravel and sand is even sometimes placed by hand. It's also not unheard of to hand plant entire fairways. Seventy-five women line up across the fairway and away they go. Each lady has a sack of sprigs and a putty knife. Each sprig is manually planted and a fairway can be grassed in a day with an enormous success rate. Nearly every sprig takes.

There's a term here: "Philippine Time." This is applied to situations where things don't happen exactly when scheduled. This means 10:00 a.m. meetings start at 10:30, deliveries promised first thing in the morning show up around noon, and jobs to be finished in a couple of days usually take three or four.

My first job in The Philippines was an 18-hole rebuild at the old naval station at Subic Bay. The old course was in the middle of a rain forest and jungle. It's one of The Philippines' last virgin rain forests standing.

It came complete with native jungle tribes, wild pigs, cobras, pythons, monitor lizards, parrots and fruit bats the size of small dogs. It was like working on the Discovery Channel every day.

The surroundings were spectacular, which was a nice offset because the work was a real trial at times. Golf construction is still relatively new to the Philippines and this fact is reflected by the inconsistent materials. Sand and gravel deliveries had to be monitored daily. What usually showed up in the truck was nothing like the sample we had approved. The minute you stopped checking your materials, a dirty load would be delivered. The main reason for this is the processing operations. Most of the sand and gravel is hand-sifted and loaded. Without proper screening plants, consistent loads were a rare commodity.

An additional headache at Subic was the weather. Monsoons and typhoons plagued our construction efforts and earthmoving activities. I've come to refer to seasons in Subic as the muddy season and the dusty season. You're either slogging through mud or coughing up dust.

It was at times like trying to breath through a wet wool blanket. Mud slides, washouts and flooding were our main concerns. Despite the adversities, we were able to complete our construction efforts in 12 months.

My current job is at a Graham Marsh design on the tiny island of Boracay. Here, problems are quite different, yet equally difficult. Being on an island poses unique dilemmas. We have to bring in all materials and equipment by boat and barge. I've lost barges to pirates, had barges sink trying to dock and, of course, getting stuck on sand bars is common place.

Like Subic, the crew in Boracay is very good — hard-working individuals who are willing to put in a full day. The work is tough and their living conditions are less than what we're accustomed to. Most of the crew live in houses made of thatch and bamboo. Many don't have running water or power at their places. Despite their situations, their attitudes are amazingly upbeat.

I've developed a great deal of respect for The Philippines and its culture. I've also learned so many things since working here over the years. My only hope is that I've been able to teach my crew half as much as the Philippines has taught me.

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