

Some architects using own construction divisions

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Clients have become more aware of how courses get built and are much more sophisticated than they used to be... Most of our clients are quick to accept that combination."

The majority of the people involved in the Rulewich Group come from construction backgrounds.

"We have seven shareholders who are part of the Roger Rulewich Group," Rulewich said. "Five of them are involved more with construction than design. All seven of us were with [Robert Trent] Jones [Sr.]."

Rulewich's construction services work particularly well on renovation projects. "Remodeling is probably the place where the idea works best because we can work quickly, efficiently and we're right there with it... Most of our remodeling projects start small but end up expanding into something bigger once the clients see how well everything goes," Rulewich said.

Working directly with the architect's construction team can also minimize the type of work-order changes that usually result in higher construction costs. "The promise we make when we do the shaping is that there are no change orders, there are no extras," Rulewich said. "We'll eat any changes if we have to."

The Rulewich Group has a fairly large equipment inventory, mainly because several of the principals worked on Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Trail and held onto the machinery when they started their own firm.

"Equipment is something you can play with," Rulewich said. "You never want to carry more than you need or can keep busy. So you have to be ready to buy and sell and move equipment

around rather quickly... I'm often surprised when I get out on a site and find out how much we have. In Alabama, we even had a D-8, which is a big machine that I wouldn't think most shapers would have. But it made sense on that project, and now it's making sense on our project in Myrtle Beach."

DENIS GRIFFITHS

Griffiths' construction firm is a rather low-key affair that evolved from the Georgian's love of automobiles and anything mechanical.

In the early 1970s and 1980s, Griffiths and then-partner Ron Kirby dabbled in the construction arena, but more to satisfy Griffiths' passion for machinery than to embark on a new venture.

"We did a lot of work out of the country, which gave me the opportunity to climb on a lot of machinery," Griffiths remembered. "I started on a box blade and ended up on dozers. When you couldn't speak the language and explain something to someone, it was often easier to climb on a machine and try to show them what you wanted to accomplish."

Kirby left in 1986 and Griffiths signed on to do a project for an Atlanta developer who had little use for architects who couldn't act as builders, too.

"It was one of those deals we had to do, the first course at Chateau Elan in 1988," Griffiths said. "We bought some pieces of equipment and rounded up some people. Since then we've done seven or eight projects."

Far more of Griffiths' projects are done with major golf course builders than with his own construction company. "We try to stay in the Atlanta area if we get involved with the building," he said. "There are a lot of great contractors out there and

we want them to know we are not in competition with them."

The real benefit to using Griffiths' construction services, he explained, comes when a developer already has a relationship with major earth-moving, drainage and clearing contractors. This is often the case with a residential golf course development.

"The developer knows he's getting the most competitive numbers on the market already and we can make a real good fit with them by picking up the shaping, features and irrigation subcontracting," Griffiths said.

Griffiths also noted that design changes are easier to implement with his own construction crew. And there is no additional expense to the developer.

"We spell out to our clients that this is the price and if we build it, no matter if we have to change it 14 times, it's our money, not yours," he said.

ROBERT LOHMANN

Lohmann has been in the design business since 1984 and started his construction firm, Golf Creations, two years later.

"Basically, it was providing a shaper on remodeling jobs that were too small for a construction firm but too large for the superintendent to handle alone. We'd bring in a shaper to help shape tees, greens or bunkers, then the superintendent would finish the job," Lohmann said.

Frequently, the superintendent ended up asking Lohmann to finish the drainage, put in an irrigation system or do some sodding. Over the years, the firm grew. "Today, we may do the whole project and have a construction superintendent on site with an entire crew," Lohmann said.

Being able to take the architect's

vision all the way through to the final product is a key advantage of using his construction firm, Lohmann said.

Early in his career, Lohmann found himself drawing plans for developers who would then finish the job using their own crews.

"Sometimes," Lohmann said, "it would turn out bad. The first question people would ask is 'Who's the architect?' So we started asking for the opportunity to work with the developer through construction and provide the key shaper or construction superintendent to make sure it turned out okay."

Lohmann rarely gets involved in heavy earth moving, irrigation or cart-path installation. "We're more of a landscape company that does golf course work," he said. "It's a turnkey situation that allows me to satisfy the developer who wants to make sure the job turns out right at a guaranteed price. We can give the developer a plan and promise that it will cost this much and no more."

Being the builder also gives Lohmann the chance to get in and out of a job quickly, without having to deal with an outside contractor.

Since many renovation jobs are done when play is at a minimum — i.e. off season or after dark — speed is important. "It's just me and the owner," Lohmann said. "We know what we need to do and we just get it done."

Lohmann estimates Golf Creations is involved with half the jobs he designs. The rest are done by golf course builders.

Lohmann's regular construction crew consists of three shapers, three superintendents and a seasonal crew that peaks at 40. His equipment includes tractors, skid loaders, trenchers, small bulldozers (the biggest is a D-4). Dump trucks are rented or the task subcontracted out. ▶

ARCHITECTS SURVEY

Wetlands regs, financing get mixed reviews

By MARK LESLIE

As developers fire down the home stretch towards opening more than 400 courses for the third consecutive year, it appears neither wetlands regulations nor finding enough good builders will stop the growth — although both may hamper it a bit. On the other hand, easier financing may enhance opportunities.

A *Golf Course News* survey of course architects discovered that 42.8 percent of those polled felt it is getting difficult to find qualified golf course builders for their projects, while 57.2 percent replied it is not difficult.

Asked if their clients were finding it easier to obtain financing, 73.2 percent replied "yes."

WETLANDS REGULATIONS

Meanwhile, feelings ran the gamut on the impact of wetlands regulations. Forty-three percent of the architects responded that wetlands regulations are slowing the planning process, but an equal 43 percent said they are having no effect, while 14 percent felt the regulations are actually speeding the process.

"It is getting more difficult each year. The rules keep changing," said Rick Robbins of Cary, N.C.

"Every new regulation slows the process," said

Gary Linn of Knott & Linn in California. "The new wetland rules essentially require a full 404 Permit, which can take one year to obtain. Complete avoidance is the goal in design, although usually that is not feasible."

The regulations are "slowing down the permit process at all levels," said Bobby Weed of Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.

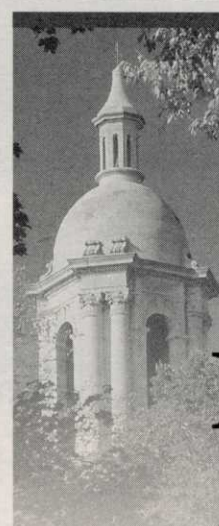
But Lloyd Clifton of Deltona, Fla., was one of the 43 percent who reported "no change in the time frame" with the new regulations.

And in some places there is actual encouragement.

"Regulations are speeding the process somewhat," said Scott Applegate of Signature Course Design in Stuart, Fla. "Misinformation from environmentalists is a major cause of slow permitting and planning."

Perry Dye of Denver reported: "It depends on the state and the circumstances. Everyone is gaining experience in mitigating these conditions, so the process moves faster, more professionally."

"It is slowing down out of state, but here in Michigan it seems to be the same as before — not too slow," said Lorrie Viola of West Bloomfield.



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