

Troon's secret

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senior vice president for science and agronomy.

Spangler joined the company as a Troon North superintendent shortly after the course opened. Through scrupulous research for three years before Troon Golf acquired a second property, he and Garmany established the basic agronomic programs and procedures that would lend brand-level recognition to Troon-managed clubs.

Spangler relied on what he calls "intellectual agronomy," challenging the "old hat" methods he felt veered from good science. "There is little evidence to support the rigidity of many of the maintenance practices we see," Spangler said.

"The foundations of the Troon Golf program are soundly rooted in pure and natural agronomic fundamentals," Spangler added. "Our philosophy is really very simple. We try not to match wits with Mother Nature. We allow our practices to emulate the biological systems already at work in the soil."

THE TURNBERRY CASE

Early on, it was easy to manage a few properties. But as Troon Golf began to boom, it had to find a way to create some consistency in its course conditioning program.

A case in point is the fabled Scottish golf complex at Turnberry Resort. The Ailsa layout there, on a rockbound coast, was designed after World War II by Mackenzie Ross. In 1997, when golf course manager George Brown heard that Troon Golf would be managing the facility, he was concerned that they would come over and dictate a maintenance standard totally foreign to the treasured Scottish facility.

Spangler assured Brown that Troon Golf would under no circumstance ever try to "Americanize" a golf property as storied as Turnberry. In fact, he regards Brown's agronomic plan as a textbook study that mirrors his own beliefs in sustainable agriculture.

The trademark maintenance program fell into place when Spangler gathered the superintendents from each facility to write the "Troon Golf Minimal Agronomic Stan-

dards," 12 basic concepts that every Troon Golf maintenance staff must implement.

According to Spangler, the plan is universal and applicable to each golf course with only minor tweaking. "At first, they resisted writing down everything that was being done at each property," he recalled. "They thought it would be much too complicated, because they were all coming from different places."

Troon Golf superintendents now meet annually to address and fine-tune their cohesive agronomic program based on their experiences over the previous year. "Basically, we have compiled a data base of agronomic and maintenance information that everyone can utilize," said Spangler.

IN ON THE GROUND FLOOR

The capability to oversee initial project planning and all phases of construction start to finish is a key component in the Troon Golf operation.

"We managed our first two facilities from the day the construction started, giving us total control over the quality," said Garmany. "Quite often, for the first

year or two of a contract, a client's association with Troon Golf is solely with the construction management team."

Troon Golf launched its construction management arm in 1994 with the second course at Troon North Golf Club, the Pinnacle, followed by Legend Trail Golf Club in Scottsdale.

More courses are calling on Troon for its agronomic and business expertise. In Tokyo, for example, Troon Golf is in place to help struggling golf facilities change their operations to weather economic hard times. Pressured by lenders to do something about declining rounds and falling green fees, course owners and developers are relying on the company's business and training models to turn a profit, without compromising quality.

Garmany is confident that Troon Golf will meet its goals for the next five years by staying focused on the specific needs of upscale golf properties. "If we continue to create extraordinary, manageable golf experiences through agronomy, service, and financial performance, our future is assured," he said. ■



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