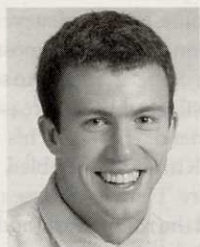


Labor Day has come and gone but hard work still remains

Most superintendents look forward to Labor Day because it signals the unofficial end of the summer season. As throngs of golfers begin to thin out and hot weather moderates, the pressure on superintendents usually begins to ease. All that's left to do is concentrate on fall clean-up work.

However, due to the drought conditions that plagued much of the United States this summer, many superintendents are facing the arduous task this fall of preparing already stressed turfgrass for winter. For courses in drought-affected areas that stay open year-round, it will be even tougher to maintain playable conditions.

In this month's issue, Kathy Antaya, an agronomist with the United States Golf Association's Green Section, walks us through the difficulties of repairing turf damage while still obeying water restrictions (see page 7). Her message is clear: courses will have to use alternative cultivation strategies to minimize damage and maximize recovery. Superintendents will have to aerate more delicately, seed more vigorously and apply fertilizer more regularly. More aggressive turf renovation practices will



Andrew Overbeck, editor

likely have to wait until spring.

This means golfers will have to learn to live with damaged areas and less-than-perfect playing conditions and superintendents will, as usual, bear the brunt of

their complaints.

Frustration levels are already running high as helpless superintendents realize their untenable situation. "If I could have done something to solve the problem, I would have done it by now," an exasperated superintendent said to me about his inability to minimize the impact drought was having on his course.

Since these conditions do not lead to high job retention rates, it is now more critical than ever to explain specific drought-related difficulties to course officials and golfers.

Superintendents need to take the time to communicate and let golfers know what impact the drought is having on the course,

why certain areas are damaged and what steps are being taken to bring the course back to more playable conditions. In the meantime, though, golfers will have to accept the damage and move on.

This will require superintendents to be more proactive and course management to be more under-

dated design. While the sections and monthly features remain the same, we have changed our typefaces and improved the layout to make news and information more visible, readable and accessible.

The last six months here at GCN have been busy as we have added to and readjusted our editorial content



standing. As Antaya puts it in her article, "compromise will be key."

...

As you may have already noticed, *Golf Course News* has an up-

to better reflect the evolution of the industry. We encourage reader feedback as we work to further solidify our position as the business newspaper for the golf course industry.

POINT

Single-year renovation plans provide more advantages

By JEFFREY D. BRAUER

Your parents and grandparents probably gave you much advice, such as warning you about the problems of excessive debt. Remembering the depression, they were financially conservative. However, they also told you, "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing right the first time," and "Better to do it today than tomorrow."

In golf course renovation, this advice often collides. Historically, master plans for phased renovation were nearly universal because they kept courses open and avoided large expenses and debt. Since this approach also has pitfalls, I usually recommend to owners who have the ability to borrow money to accomplish as much as they can immediately.

You can avoid many problems by adopting a single-year renovation program as opposed to a multi-year program. Architecturally, a multi-year plan often results in inconsistencies in:

- Design. An architect's style changes – assuming the club utilizes the same architect over the long haul.
- Construction. Different contractors have different shaping and construction techniques.
- Play. Older USGA greens play differently than newer ones and suppliers go out of business, so you may not get the same material for greens mix or bunker sand.
- Maintenance. All of the problems above may necessitate separate maintenance regimens for every hole. Avoiding these problems will save money in the long term.

Image wise, short-term programs avoid or minimize problems of:

- Resentment. Golfers won't get mad because of continuing course



Jeffrey D. Brauer

Continued on next page

COUNTERPOINT

Multi-year renovation plans maximize financial resources

By BOB LOHMANN

When enacting a renovation plan, should courses bite the bullet and suffer the slings and arrows of revenue streams gone completely dry? Or should they spread the work over a few years, thereby testing the patience and loyalty of golfers who are obliged to play temporary greens in the company of bulldozers and sod-cutters?

These are the questions facing course owners who live and die by how, and how well, these questions are answered. It is the job of the architect to help them make the best-informed, most practical decision possible.

At Lohmann Golf Designs, we've done dozens of renovation jobs where the course was closed down completely, remodeled and re-opened the next playing season. We've executed dozens more on the installment plan. And while the architect himself is often better served by shutting a course down and completing renovations in one fell swoop, oftentimes the client is best served by spreading out renovation/restoration work over the course of several playing seasons.

Why? The answer is simple and predictable: money. It's difficult to come up with the \$2 million to \$5 million needed to overhaul an entire 18-hole golf course these days. For a majority of operators, that kind of money isn't always available – not all at once. It is the architect's responsibility to maximize a client's available cash, which often means creatively planning, staging and executing renovations over two or three years, sometimes longer.

My firm just broke ground on the renovation of Randall Oaks Golf Course, a municipal facility in Dundee, Ill. We've been working with the course doing small bits of our master plan, since 1986. Last year,



Bob Lohmann

Continued on next page

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DEMAND FOR AFFORDABLE GOLF GOING UNMET

To the Editor,

I am writing in response to your editorial on affordable public golf (GCN September 2002), and I wholeheartedly agree that we need more of it. As a golf course architect, I enjoy designing public courses as much as private courses. These courses reach many more golfers and, when correctly designed and maintained, can offer just as rewarding an experience as an expensive private club.

Having designed many public, municipal and First Tee golf courses, I know first-hand how quickly the courses fill with players and how many more people are able to participate in the sport when public golf is acces-

sible and affordable. This speaks to the need and demand we find in today's affordable golf sector.

My most recent new course, Providence Golf Course, is one of the most affordable public golf courses in central Virginia. Built on a frugal budget of \$2.4 million, we were able to create a beautiful and challenging golf course that looks like it has been there for decades. We left many specimen trees on the site to create a park-like atmosphere. We also worked around wetlands and environmentally sensitive areas to incorporate natural hazards, which aided in cost-efficiency as well as added design interest. We only moved 90,000 cubic yards of dirt to build 18 holes.

The land used for Providence Golf Course, (part of which once housed a poorly designed and maintained course) had remained empty for a number of years until funding from a new owner, Buddy Sowers, came in and made the project possible. The greens fees range from \$22.50 to \$45.00 (including cart), affordable by any standards, and there are rarely any tee times unclaimed.

If more developers would research the demand and profitability of afford-

able golf courses, this often-undervalued niche in the marketplace could flourish.

Sincerely,
Lester George,
George Golf Design
Richmond, Va.

MAINTENANCE CONTRACT NOT A RESULT OF 'UNDER BIDDING'

To the Editor,

I would like to respond to the statement made in the article entitled, "IGM faces lawsuit in New Jersey" (GCN September 2002). In October of 2001, Environmental Golf (now ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance) was selected as the maintenance outsource provider at Glenwood Country Club in Old Bridge, N.J., in spite of the fact that our fee was higher than the previous maintenance contract with IGM. The award of the maintenance contract was not a result of "under bidding."

Sincerely,
Terry McGuire,
ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance
Calabasas, Calif.

Single-year plan

Continued from previous page

disruption.

- Lost momentum. When politics, costs and hassle stop a project, it causes long-term problems and results in new, out-of-place architectural features.

FINANCIAL ADVANTAGES

There are also numerous financial advantages of renovating all at once, most notable of which is better construction value. One new USGA greens complex costs \$70,000, while several may cost \$45,000 each. The contractor's mobilization and supervision expenses, for example, are about the same whether building one green or 18, so large projects get economy of scale.

Courses will also get more value out of architectural fees. Architects can review many holes as easily as one during design or construction evaluation, and usually have similar economies of scale. You are more likely to attract a top architect with

a bigger project, which should also get better results.

There is also less lost revenue. Clubs doing a few holes annually often find that auxiliary revenue declines significantly, while employee costs remain the same, because golfers stop using the club – and sometimes give up their memberships. Clubs doing renovations all at once have been creative at arranging alternate play venues and making the "lost year" of play a unique experience for members.

When you combine these economies of scale with the current low interest rates, the annual interest cost of a large project may not be significantly higher than paying for individual projects.

Courses must ensure these benefits, however, by actually finishing quickly. This requires extensive preplanning. At our recent renovation at Indian Creek in Carrollton, Texas, the owner wanted the course out of play only six months. To accomplish this, our design plan:

- Avoided environmental permitting restrictions by providing compensatory flood storage, avoiding wetlands and minimizing tree clearing.

- Used much of the existing routing and features to minimize time and cost of construction.

- Limited bidding to Golf Course Builders Association of America certified contractors, who were qualified for a fast-track project. We placed strict schedule requirements – and penalties – in the specs.

- Timed work to hit optimum grassing dates in summer.

Given today's low interest rates, the availability of high-quality contractors who can accelerate construction and the importance players place on having their course available, it is usually best to complete a renovation in one year. ■

Jeffrey D. Brauer is president of Jeffrey D. Brauer GolfScapes and is a past president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

Multi-year plan

Continued from previous page

the town finally pulled the trigger on bonding \$2 million for a complete overhaul of Randall Oaks – but even now, we plan to execute our updated master plan over the course of two years. Why? The town can't afford to lose all of its golf course revenues, so we're shutting down one nine at a time.

It is important to remember that municipal course revenues often fund other town recreation initiatives. If that money disappears completely, other municipal programs can suffer or disappear, too.

And municipal courses aren't the only facilities affected by this dynamic. Daily-fee courses live and die by the revenue generated from

greens fees. It takes a pretty stable financial situation (with little or no debt service) to justify closing the course and sacrificing a season's income.

The private equation is just as cash-dependent. Several years back, we renovated Meadowbrook Golf Club, a private layout in Racine, Wis. Initially the club was anxious about closing its entire golf course down, so we first renovated a single hole – to show what we could do. The members liked what we did, so they authorized my firm to close the course for a year and completely renovate it. We finished on time and under budget, and the members love their new course.

However, that single golf season missed (due to course construction) severely strapped the club

financially – mainly because other club revenues fell off so drastically. No golf meant far fewer bar tabs and far fewer meals in the dining room.

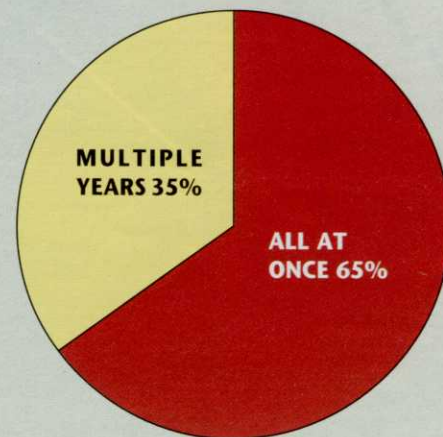
Also there is considerably more risk these days in shutting a course down completely because competition among private, daily-fee and municipal facilities is so strong. In the 10 months it may take an architect to remake a club or course, they risk losing golfers forever. There have never been so many choices for golfers; they may just transfer their loyalties to the (new) club or course down the road. ■

Bob Lohmann is the principal of Marengo, Ill.-based Lohmann Golf Designs. He is past president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

GOLF COURSE NEWS POLL

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Is it better to spread renovation work out over multiple years or to get it done all at once?



Stringing out the process really has a long-term effect on customers and their support of your facility. If your facility is down or under construction for too long, they move their habit elsewhere and you may never get them back. Make it short, sweet and complete and you have the best chance of keeping your loyal customer base.

— Rick Harrington, PGA golf professional, Mohawk Park Golf Club

Many clubs believe that piecemealing renovations over time is an economical solution. However, reapplying for permits, attracting the same contractor and sourcing the same materials and supplies makes a five-year plan a very costly affair.

— Jerry Weyer, Jerry Weyer Golf Course Designs

We spread our project out over two years so that our members and outside guests would have at least nine holes to play on over the summer. The owners also needed to have part of the course open so they could continue to generate revenue.

— Michael Kuhn, golf course superintendent, River Bend Golf & CC

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