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YOUR ROLE IN CONSTRUCTION

A golf course superintendent recently suggested that, while he has enjoyed my columns about the practical aspects of course renovation, I could help him more directly by writing about how he might be involved in an upcoming renovation project.

It's a great suggestion because a superintendent usually becomes an owner's representative based on the theory that he knows most about the golf course components that are installed. While this is true, superintendents rarely have much training in construction management, and in general, the golf construction industry is less sophisticated about contract administration than other fields, where full-time administrators are the rule, and it's often a separate profession from designers.

Of course there are seminars, books and even college majors about construction administration. Federal, state, county and city agencies often have their own contract administration manuals and protocols. It's a big subject, so let's look at the big picture of construction evaluation.

A superintendent's role in construction can be stated simply as watching all construction as if he's going to live with the results, which is exactly what happens. After construction, a superintendent's job will be affected by how the contractor handled the details. Every poorly tied-in, green seed-bed edge; bad irrigation thrust block; missed drainage area; or uneven piece of sod a superintendent can prevent by directing a contractor to install them correctly means there will be one less problem for him to fix after construction. Even if the contractor fixes the problem under warranty, it's one less hassle and one less

deterrent to maintaining the course. So, it's likely a superintendent will push for the best detail work possible.

In theory, a superintendent should see everything put in the ground to assure the best possible installation. Construction evaluation is a full-time job if done right. In practice, a superintendent – given his other responsibilities, which ought to be reduced by being out of play or through delegation – should ride throughout the course as often as possible, visiting each construction operation as frequently as possible, often unannounced, to let work forces know he's watching regularly. The more a superintendent sees, the more mistakes he's likely to catch or prevent.

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Contractually, it's not as simple. Normally, a superintendent is protecting an owner's interests by having his crew do a quality job under a prescribed budget and a services contract, if any. A superintendent's work as an owner's representative means he'll be working within parameters set in a golf course design agreement and a multimillion dollar construction agreement to get what an owner paid for under those agreements. Those agreements can be daunting, but a superintendent can't avoid them, and his first order of business is to become

familiar with their basic outlines and most important details.

Responsibilities can vary, but generally, a golf course architect is responsible for designing and specifying the improvements, usually with an owner's and superintendent's input and approval. During construction, an architect probably is contracted to visit the site about once a week. Under those limitations, he can't see every construction operation or detail, especially if buried after installation, so a designer and club will rely on a superintendent to monitor construction quality daily. Depending on a superintendent's exact role, he'll report any problems to a golf course architect or have the authority to direct a contractor to correct mistakes.

A contractor is responsible for building the project to a golf course architect's specifications. The best ones follow the letter of the specs closely and even try to provide a bit more while still trying to make a reasonable profit.

Human nature and the dynamics of the three-party contract suggest that, no matter how professionally everyone approaches the project, there will be at least some minor conflicts of opinion, if for no other reason than a contract is set up to encourage that for the best resolution dispute.

That type of contract puts a superintendent right in the middle of things. He'll find, like all things, it's really a people business. A superintendent's first responsibilities include maintaining a professional presence and attitude on behalf of an owner, working within the parameters of a construction contract between an owner and contractor, receiving what might be reasonably inferred in the construction contract from the contractor, and working within a construction contract and budget.

Next month, we'll cover specifics. **GCI**