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## WATCH AND LEARN

**M**any golf course superintendents are entering the “off season” and seeking opportunities for continuing education. As you assess the options for local, state or national technical conferences and gather information to keep current on topics that impact your operation, don’t overlook the opportunity to volunteer at a professional golf event in your region during 2009.

You may ask, “Why should I take time away from my golf course in mid-season to help someone else?” Consider the following:

1. By attending a professional event, you’ll be able to experience the massive effort required, involving extra equipment, personnel, course closings, enhanced staffing, additional financing, tournament budgets and posttournament cleanup regimes. This is an opportunity to document the scope necessary to accomplish certain high-maintenance tasks through pictures, videos, daily notes and idea exchanges. After several days of volunteering, you’ll be able to bring this information back to club committees and present a logical debate about why your course can or can’t provide similar conditioning levels based on budget, staffing and equipment realities.

2. Not everyone can volunteer for the Masters or U.S. Open Championship. However, you’ll see and learn as much, if not more, by attending a PGA Tour, LPGA Tour or Nationwide Tour event in your region. The preparation is as thorough with upgraded conditioning demands and similar daily tournament set-up procedures. You may be able to spend time talking with the host golf course superintendent during down times between preparation segments.

3. Beyond personal education, your goal should be to gather information to improve operations, course conditioning, labor delegation, equipment maintenance, practice area preparation and fostering relationships with club committees and outside contractors. Arrive at the golf course each day with a multipoint outline of questions

for the host mechanic, irrigation technician, spray technician, associate golf course superintendents and on-course operation personnel or vendors. Don’t hesitate to ask why, who, how or where. Asking pertinent questions will garner great ideas, tips and options that may improve your operation, budgets, spray and fertility programs, irrigation philosophy and turfgrass cultural practices. Watch and listen to those who have been through previous tournament experiences.

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4. Every golf course has Rules of Golf issues and questions that go unanswered, such as proper golf course marking of water hazards, out-of-bounds issues, abnormal ground conditions, penalty strokes and other weird situations that may be debated within the grill room. Observing Rules of Golf experts in the field may provide answers or opinions that can resolve an ongoing concern at your facility. The best time to approach on-course officials is during practice rounds.

5. Volunteering at tournaments is an opportunity for your staff. For assistants and interns, this should be viewed as a means to meet, greet and network with more experienced professionals. If you’re sending staff to an event, do so with a specific assignment to gather information that will assist your operation or their self-improvement. Emphasize that just sitting in and listening to the “mature” golf course superintendent will provide valuable educational opportunities, future connections and enhance the “we” and team concepts of coordinating your operation for a major event.

6. Planning and organizing is the most difficult task for any host club and superintendent. Though not on the scale of a major championship or PGA Tour competition, your club’s annual invitational event will be enhanced by witnessing what’s involved. Golf course setup, fairway contouring, hole locations, bunker preparation, primary rough heights, equipment placement and maintenance logistics are all areas worthy of observation. Take pictures or video to document the maintenance plan of the host superintendent and, inevitably, your own event will benefit.

7. You can learn from the host facility before the event. If it’s close to your facility and the host superintendent is changing or rebuilding a certain feature of his golf course, such as teeing grounds, sand bunkers, drainage, tree removal or putting greens expansion or regrassing, make a point to visit during various stages to record and observe what’s happening. This experience will be valuable if your golf course is contemplating on-course changes.

8. Usually the sponsoring organization, be it the USGA, LPGA or PGA Tour, will have a field representative visit periodically to monitor the progression of the course changes or to review course agronomic conditioning. This is another opportunity to ask questions, take pictures and learn firsthand the current technology for accomplishing these projects.

If you use your tournament volunteer experience to your advantage, it may enhance the reputation you have within your own club. Additionally, you’ll be able to accept greater career challenges, improve your job security, develop quality training methods for staff and use your own time more wisely.

By experiencing golf course preparation at a higher level, you’ll be prepared to communicate what’s involved to prepare a golf course for the world’s best players and how it can enhance your own golf course to your membership. Through professional documentation, indicate the thoroughness of your operation for your member’s daily enjoyment. **GCI**