

BY MARGARET HEPP

## Modern marvels

Golf and parks superintendent Jeff Kreie leads an upgrade in Ulysses, Kan.

Born and raised in Ulysses, Kan., Jeff Kreie is inclined to be ever-so-slightly old school. But while he's been at the same golf course 27 years, he's not archaic. Let him finish when he says he used a "modern" 50-year-old grinder during his first years at Bentwood Golf Course – he's referring to the manufacturer, Modern Equipment.

Kreie has made frequent tweaks to keep the machine up to speed. It belonged to the father of Bentwood's former superintendent, who used it to grind push-mower reels. It was still going strong when Kreie finally got rid of it earlier this year.

"We bought a bunch of Foley parts and made it work," he says. "We built some jigs and turned it into a rotary grinder. It did a nice job. It didn't have an overhead bar or any of the fancy stuff for strapping down and

tightening the reels, but it worked the same way as the reel grinder."

Change comes gradually in Ulysses, and Kreie knows just how to make it happen. He's now the city golf and parks superintendent, and he's slowly but surely updated his grinder repertoire to include a Foley Model 388 relief grinder, purchased in 1991 for about \$2,300, and a Foley 405 spin grinder, purchased in 2006 for about \$15,300.

"Those old Foley relief grinders were kind of the only thing going for little budget clubs for a long time," he says. "We might be the only nine-hole course in the area that has a spin grinder. At the time, \$2,300 sounded like a lot of money. Now, \$15,000 sounds like a cheap greensmower."

Kreie works with about 50 reels. Most superintendents in the area send their reels out daily to technicians, but he says the job is more cost effective when done in house.

"One of the reasons for buying the spin grinder was to be able to trim reels up during the season," he says, adding that the sheer quantity of work was becoming a daunting task with such a small staff. "We throw them in there, touch them up, and they're like new again. It's so much nicer when you can walk off. You don't have to stand there and drag the motor over the reel again and again."

With the Modern grinder, reels required constant baby-sitting. If equipment mainte-



Bentwood Golf Course crew members acquired new grinding skills after manufacturer representatives put on a clinic at the course. Photo: Bentwood Golf Course



nance was in its infancy when Kreie first started, it's matured, gradually, to become partially self-sufficient. The rest of the course is growing, too; another nine holes should be complete this fall, along with a new effluent water system.

When Kreie first started in 1981, he was the only person on the crew. Today, he has six employees and a large parks system, but he still doesn't have an assistant to help him grind reels. Several of his crewmen have taken on the job, and when a handful of Foley representatives stopped by earlier this year to give the Bentwood staff a grinding clinic, they were impressed.

"Foley verified we've been doing things correctly," Kreie says. "I was glad to know my guys picked it up pretty well."

New skills acquired in the clinic were how to get the right kind of relief and how to square up the blades on the grinding unit. Kreie no longer has time to do his own grinding – he worked on the Modern for five years before he passed the

torch – but he says when something comes up, he tries to fix it.

"I go out and poke around – probably make things worse," he says, laughing. "Since the new reel grinder, I have to hit the books to get in there and figure it all out. At the golf course, there's something broken every day, but I want my reels working well."

Because he values work quality, Kreie says his crew never rushes a grinding job.

"We can get a whole set of reels done in a day, but the tendency is to do more than one thing at a time," he says. "We never have done that."

Bentwood doesn't own a bedknife grinder, and Kreie says he'll probably never buy one, despite the upgrade to an 18-hole budget of about \$300,000, which includes \$50,000 for capital expenditures. He prefers to use the Foley 388 to touch them up. It also keeps him from the necessity of frequent bedknife purchases.

"We don't keep throwing away a bunch of bed-

knives," he says. "I haven't ever seen a bedknife grinder, and I just can't imagine why they cost so much. We can jig up the old relief grinder and touch them up pretty quickly."

Starting with the upgrades to his first grinder, Kreie has relied exclusively on Foley for grinding, and he plans to continue this in the future.

"Foley's got name recognition, but I had no preconceived notions," he says. "The other companies teach that relief's unnecessary on the reels, but I think it's important. Plus, Foley fits our budget."

As Bentwood matures, Kreie and his crewmen have their work cut out for them. He predicts they'll be doubling the hours on their mowing units, so he's arranged a second set of reels to keep the new tempo at the golf course. Meanwhile, Kreie maintains a steady pace. He doesn't always have time to keep his nose in everything, he says, but time, and progress, move on. **GI**

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