



Read about how Roney investigated options to reduce costs in the Online Extras section at golfcourseindustry.com.



TOURNEY PREP AT SAUCON VALLEY

Jim Roney, superintendent for Saucon Valley Country Club in Bethlehem, Pa., is four years into a master-planned renovation of three golf courses. Just for "fun," he and Saucon Valley's Old Course will host the 2009 U.S. Women's Open Championship in July. I asked Jim what his concerns and goals are as he prepares for his first major championship.

Q When you arrived at Saucon Valley four years ago what was your impression and what did you address first?

A After reviewing our 850-acre facility my first goal was to immediately improve the environmental growing conditions of our turfgrass. Our property is heavily treed; many are evergreen species that limit air movement and sunlight penetration. The club is located in the lowest point of the valley, which decreases air movement, morning sunlight penetration and surface water drainage. The tree population needed to be reduced.

The club reviewed all the options of scientific, non-partisan tree removal evaluations, including my proposal for clearing by our staff at a lesser cost. The committee allowed me to proceed with the in-house removal plan. I hired a qualified arborist and proceeded.

The second concern was drainage. We are the lowest point in the valley with the Saucon Creek running through the middle of property. Drainage is severely limited and with an event approaching, moving water off site quickly is vital. In addition, located close by are the now defunct New Jersey zinc mines, which when active used an incredible amount of water, leaving our property dry. This is no longer the case. We have increased our budget for specialty drainage projects and creek work throughout the property to quickly move the excess water away from high-play areas.

Our club is 87 years old and we have traditional soil green profiles that are pitched for surface drainage only and did not drain. My plan was to increase the downward movement of water through vigorous coring, deep drilling, regular sand topdressing and the inclusion of the internal drainage systems provided by the TDI and XGD drain-lines in all our greens.

During the first four years we used the drill-and-fill method two times per season with regular coring to remove and replace the soil with sand topdressing. Each drill-and-fill, followed by standard coring, allowed us to incorporate 160 tons of sand into the profile.

Finally, with the internal soil profile improved we decided to regrass to the current species of bentgrass, which is a combination of Penn A1/4. However, before the regrassing process was to begin, the USGA elected to award Saucon Valley with the 2009 U.S. Women's Open Championship.

Q What was your reaction when you learned of the upcoming major championship to be played on the Old Course at Saucon Valley Country Club?

A I was ecstatic and a little nervous. However, this is the goal to which many of us in the industry aspire. The event also gave the club an opportunity to review many of the issues that affected play, such as the need to regrass putting surfaces. We reviewed the design features so they would become relevant to today's equipment, player strengths and overall game improvements.

With the notice of the championship, it gave me the needed push to organize a priority list for the upcoming golf course review. Working with the committee, we established the following agenda:

- Organize, execute and complete the proposed regrassing of the Old

Course putting greens to bentgrass. This began in 2005.

- Have the course stand up to the best women players' efforts, while playing fair and making par a good score.
- Establish a multiple variety nursery with samples of each putting green turf species variety under consideration.
- Establish a 10-year master plan for all golf course renovation projects.
- Determine a course closing period, which would allow us ample time to properly complete the projects, review all design enhancements needed, establish a proper stand of turf to provide the best possible putting surfaces for the championship without impacting the event. The Old Course closed in 2007 for the renovation.
- Hire a golf course architect with classic golf course renovation experience. The club chose Fazio Design.
- Begin the process of educating and communicating to our members. Many were new members who did not know or fully understand Saucon Valley's golf history and tradition.

The event also brought attention to the need to upgrade the overall golf course beyond the greens to meet the expectations of the membership. This included an architectural review of teeing grounds, bunkers, fairway contours and infrastructure items such as cart paths/service roads, irrigation needs, additional drainage and more tree removal for turf health, gallery and tenting needs.

One vital addition to this project was hiring an archivist to organize the massive collection of club history, including numerous pictures, diagrams and original architectural notes. Organizing our history really assisted the club, our architect and the USGA in the completion of this renovation project. Our goal was to follow the original design intent of Herbert Strong. **GC**