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## A DELICATE BALANCING ACT

**H**erb Kohler has several passions – his family and the Kohler Co. that he commands and has been serving people for more than a century. In recent years his new motivation is golf. Through Kohler's connections and business savvy a global golf brand of top-level courses and resorts has been built, including Blackwolf Run, The American Club, The Dukes Course and the site of 92nd PGA Championship, Whistling Straits Golf Course.

Maintaining Kohler's golf interests

Lake Michigan waters at the edge of the golf course. We can focus our efforts towards course preparation and uncontrollable issues such as weather. Our weather issues are heavy rains, which impact the conditioning of the golf course and delay maintenance efforts, and fog, which won't affect turf but will impact our schedules. All we can do is wait for it to dissipate.

Currently, the set-up requirements, are similar to the 2004 PGA:

- Primary rough grass is 3 to 4 inches at the start of Championship

for every contour out there. As Pete walks the course he talks through what he wants to change next. It's hard to keep up with him, physically and visually. He tests your knowledge and ability to keep pace with his imagination. It's important to ask questions, but not too many because with Pete it's always a work in progress.

We made changes to the 3rd and 6th putting surfaces, primarily contour changes to putting surface areas by way of changing the size of the green. Pete wanted to be able to test the world's best players and at the same time, offer a course that allows the daily guest to enjoy their round. Not an easy task.

The par 3, third hole will have no rough behind the green setting and drop off into the water of Lake Michigan. The short drivable par 4, 6th hole will have a pot bunker in the center of the green making it tough if a player attempts to drive the green.

**“As Pete (Dye) walks the course he talks through what he wants to change next. It's hard to keep up with him, physically and visually. He really tests your knowledge and ability to keep pace with his imagination.”**

– Michael Lee, Kohler Co.

is manager of golf course maintenance Michael Lee, a 17-year veteran of the Kohler Co. Lee and I caught up recently as he prepared for his fourth championship and second major at Whistling Straits.

**Q** **Entering the final weeks before the PGA Championship descends onto Whistling Straits, how is the golf course and its conditions?**

**A** Our biggest concern is how we exit from the winter season of freezing temperatures and snow cover. Currently, we are doing well. The bent and fescue survived and we have no significant turfgrass replacement for the PGA Championship.

Since construction we capped fairways with 2 to 3 inches of sand. This has helped with winter to spring transition, moisture levels and surface compaction. This gives us a head start on the growing season with the cool

week with no graduated rough cuts merged into the taller fine fescue.

- Fairway height-of-cut is just under ½ inch with minor changes to contouring for better definition and gallery movement.
- Putting green speeds are from 11 to 12 feet.
- Bunkers – we have a whole lot of hazards!

**Q** **Pete Dye is known to be diabolical with his designs. Any interesting Pete Dye twists to the course? And, what is it like working with Pete?**

**A** (Laughs) First, it is a privilege to work with Pete. He is 84 and doesn't miss a trick. On his last visit he says he forgot what he ate for breakfast but that's because he missed it to catch a 4:30 a.m. flight to walk the course (Whistling Straits is not an easy stroll) ahead of play. He knows every square foot of the course and has a purpose

**Q** **Since your golf course property is so vast, does this impact your volunteer requirements?**

**A** We spend a lot of time on staff planning so we can match labor resources to the work that's required. We will use 60 to 70 volunteers coming from as far away as New Zealand. We have a large employed staff, about 85, when we combine the Irish Course work force that will accomplish much of the work but the volunteer corps will handle the extra chores. For the most part we do the exact jobs as any other week, but the Championship schedule demands we have half the time to do each job and we do them twice a day rather than once. Volunteers apply for their positions similar to our employed staff. The first obligation is to the golf course, followed by professional networking and the social aspect of the volunteer experience. **GCI**