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WHO, WHAT, WHO AND WHY?

You've probably heard of "Who, What and Why," but when contemplating irrigation system improvements it should be Who, What, Who and Why?

WHO WILL DESIGN YOUR IMPROVEMENTS?

Will it be an irrigation consultant, the distributor, the irrigation contractor, yourself or a club member who's a retired engineer? Costs, comfort level, independence and even proximity will all factor into the decision.

You must feel comfortable with your designer. You want to get along with him/her because you'll be working closely for what could be several years. Equipment distributors may have design services and can provide a design representing each manufacturer's equipment. If you go this route, will you be able to tell the differences between the distributors' designs? If the improvements are not too extensive, then can you determine what is needed on your own? The designer should not only be experienced with golf course irrigation design, but have experience designing with the product you want. At a minimum, make sure there are detailed plans, product specifications and details. A set of installation and behavior rules, payment schedule and construction schedule also make a smoother project. If using an outsider, ask their references if they came in on budget.

WHAT EQUIPMENT WILL YOU USE? This includes which manufacturers, sprinklers, controllers and valves (i.e. Hunter, Rain Bird, Toro, etc.), and should include less obvious components such as pipe, fittings, wire and valve boxes. These

days there are many important choices for irrigation systems – HDPE versus PVC, decoder versus field controllers, hard wire versus wireless communication – and some of them should be made early in the design process.

When it comes to hard goods, the products have many similarities and differences. Do your homework. Research which product works best for your course and, more importantly, your irrigation and water management philosophy. The improvements should match your style. If you are dealing with a large project – such as a full-replacement system – then consider

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visiting the manufacturers' factories to get a feel for the equipment's design and quality. The "what" should also include pipe-pressure ratings, fitting types, isolation, quick couplers, individual or blocked control and blocked sprinklers or valve-in-head everywhere.

WHO INSTALLS IT? Is it an irrigation contractor, a builder, yourself or the landscaper who tends the clubhouse grounds? The installer must be experienced in golf course irrigation system installations, not home lawns or athletic fields. The guy who installed the president's sister's system won't cut it.

Golf irrigation is different than other types of irrigation. The pipe is bigger,

different material fittings, there is lots of wire and proper grounding is imperative. Experience, financial viability, proper machinery and personality are characteristics that enter into the installer selection process. Consider the foreman who will be overseeing the crew. Many of the larger irrigation installers have several crews. Are you getting the "A" team or the "F" team? Along those lines, how deep is the crew's experience? If the foreman takes a day off, is a qualified supervisor still on site? Get a reference list and call them. Talk to other courses the contractor has done, but may not be on the reference list. Visit courses where the contractor is working and look at how the irrigation system is being installed.

WHY THE BACK-UP FOR THE THREE PREVIOUS DECISIONS AND WHY ARE YOU UNDERTAKING THE IMPROVEMENTS IN THE FIRST PLACE?

With the economy as it is and a large amount of money that will be spent for irrigation improvements it is important to back up your decisions. Document your due diligence for a designer, equipment supplier and installer. Have reference lists. Have notes on talking to people. Have pictures of site visits and write down your thinking process. Have a budget that includes all aspects of the project. Have all your bid documents and proposals organized and put all the numbers in a spreadsheet. You may not need it, but if someone asks you how and why you picked the who or a what, you want to easily explain why and be able to convince the board, owner or whoever that it was the best choice based on all the factors of experience, cost and schedule. GCI