



Photos: Todd Quitno

up not having to buy any. We had more than we needed.”

Time was a concern, too. LGD overcame time constraints to finish the renovation on schedule. Quitno says the project timetable was always tight and the weather at the time was a big factor in delaying the project’s start.

“We couldn’t break ground until Labor Day of 2003,” he says. “The original plan was to complete all 82 bunkers by the end of 2003, and we nearly finished on time – only because Golf Creations really ramped up its resources at the end of last year and Dave Behrman’s staff helped a lot by doing some of the drainage work in-house. Toward the end of the project, we were doing something in the neighborhood of 10 bunkers a week (start to finish), which is an unbelievable amount. The last few holes were completed in the spring of 2004.”

### Financial success

Budget also was a critical factor with this project. Behrman’s crew and LGD worked together to stay on target.

“We spent our \$882,000 budget, which included a \$45,000 contingency fund,” Behrman says. “But the reality is, we brought the work Bob Lohmann did in at \$792,000. Beyond that, we did what we call some add-on projects. We dredged some ponds, installed additional drainage, bought some new equipment to manage the new bunkers, remodeled the entire driving range and built a new practice chipping range. So, we ended up doing about \$90,000 of extra work and stayed within our overall assessed budget of \$882,000, which the club raised through a direct assessment.”

In particular, the club was careful not to detract players or negatively affect the club’s revenue, Behrman says. The course remained open during renovation but experi-

enced periodic hole closings when necessary.

“My impression was that it didn’t hurt us at all, in part because we stayed open the entire time,” he says. “Actually, we allowed for longer hole closings, but Golf Creations did such a fine job, they were quite limited. From my standpoint, there was little to no impact.”

That is until members began to see the new holes, Quitno says.

“When the bunkers were completed with

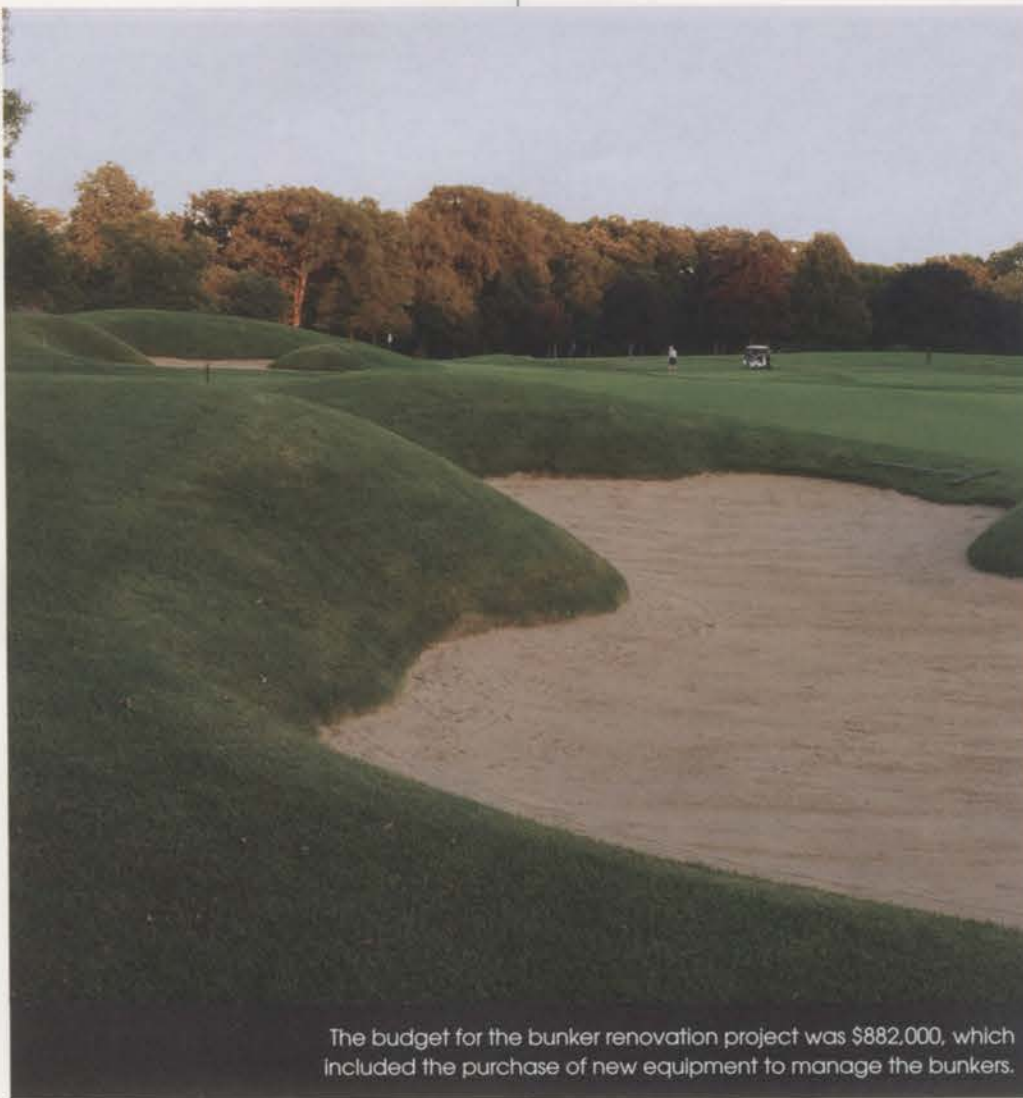
sand and sod, they were roped off for several weeks until they were ready for play,” he says. “The hole closings were not a problem once the membership saw the finished product they were getting. In fact, support really snowballed during the construction phase.”

Lohmann’s experience served him well in this project. He has completed more than 30 original golf course designs. Presently, LGD is working on the Canyata Club in Marshall, Ill., where nine holes are open and another nine will open for play in 2005. Also, the firm’s first East Coast design, the Mattaponi Springs Golf Club at Penola Station in Ruther Glen, Va., opened this fall.

“In some ways, original course design like our work at Canyata and Mattaponi Springs is more straightforward than renovation because you’re dealing with a blank slate,” Lohmann says. “It’s a completely different animal compared to the sort of work we undertook at Midlothian. Older clubs have histories and physical attributes that must be protected and enhanced.” GCN

*Hal Phillips is president of Phillips Golf Media and is based in New Gloucester, Maine. He can be reached at onintwo@maine.rr.com.*

Photo: Kevin Horan



The budget for the bunker renovation project was \$882,000, which included the purchase of new equipment to manage the bunkers.

## Experienced help

### HIRING RETIREES SUPPORTS OPERATIONS AT THE SHARON GOLF CLUB IN OHIO

by  
JOHN  
WALSH

Labor is considered by many in the golf course maintenance industry one of the most important issues, if not the most important issue, it faces. The seasonal labor pool is shrinking. Management at some courses has responded by hiring immigrant workers, which can bring its own set of challenges. But at The Sharon Golf Club, superintendent Frank Dobie and co-assistant superintendents Norm Renner and David Willmott, don't have labor problems because they turn to a different labor pool – retirees – to staff their crew.

Dobie, who has been the superintendent and general manager at Sharon since 1966, has been hiring retirees since then. He says the number of retirees he has hired throughout the years has increased slowly.

"The labor pool was enormous in the 1960s," he says. "I never had a problem. We had 30 to 40 applicants every spring, and we could pick the cream of the crop. The 1960s were unique, and as the labor pool shrunk, retirees became a more important labor source."

There are 33 people on the golf course maintenance staff at Sharon. Some employees work year round but most are seasonal; and 35,000 man-hours were worked last year, which included 1,100 hours of overtime, according to Dobie. Man-hours include overtime, sick time, and holiday and vacation time. Twenty-two of the golf course maintenance employees are retirees and work 20 to 30 hours a week.

There are numerous reasons why retirees are a good fit for golf course maintenance



Jack Meyer works between 20 and 30 hours a week.

Photo: David Willmott

jobs, Dobie says. For starters, it's a seasonal business. The golf season at Sharon starts April 15 and lasts until Nov. 1.

"The majority of our staff are people who only want to work the season, usually that means students and retirees," Dobie says. "Since students can only work three months out of the year, most of the spring and fall work is done by the retirees."

"The retirees we hire have pension income and health-care coverage, so their primary motivation is staying physically and mentally active," he says.

Dobie likes retirees because they have good common sense that's acquired from years of experience, and retirees are dependable, arriving to work on time. They also pace themselves while working and take very little sick time off. One of the workers is 83 years old and has been at Sharon for the past 17 years. The youngest retired person at Sharon, which is private, is 52.

"There's no horseplay," Dobie says about the retirees. "With young people, you get enthusiasm and strength but not experience. However, we need some young people and students because you need a balance. There is a synergy created by the retirees' common sense and the students' enthusiasm."

"If it's a rainy day, retirees would rather go home, whereas the students, who need money for college, want to get as many hours in as they can," he says.

This year, there are three students working on the maintenance crew.

"Students stay about three years," Willmott says. "After they graduate from college, they move on to their careers."

Norm Renner, who has been at Sharon for 38 years, says retirees average eight to 10 years on the job.

"They seem to require less training time," Renner says. "They also are more cautious with equipment and have fewer accidents."



Photo: David Willmott

From left, Lonnie Porter, Dennis Blackburn, Don Armbrust and Ray Bailey work on a catch basin at The Sharon Golf Club.

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Female workers like Betty Wilcox help the staff achieve the synergy it needs.



Retirees like Gene Federinko (left) and Neil Akins come from a variety of careers such as the trades, the military and the professions.

Photos: David Willmott

And they don't get easily bored with routine assignments."

Synergy is achieved by having females on staff, too, according to Dobie.

"We've always had female employees," he says. "There is a large labor pool of female workers when you count retirees, housewives and college students. We have three female employees this year, including a college student, a retiree and a housewife."

"Females tend settle the guys down and even things out," Willmott says. "They are very capable of doing the physical work, too."

Another reason Sharon, which features 18 holes, hires retirees is because they come from the neighboring rural and suburban areas where they have experience with physical, outside work, according to Willmott.

"It is an advantage being in a rural area near small-sized cities," Dobie says. "Most of our staff come from nearby Wadsworth and Medina. None come out of Akron or Cleveland (the two larger cities that are further away from Sharon). It's very important for the retirees to have a short commute to work."

The retirees come from a wide variety of careers such as the trades, the military and the professions. Willmott says the career experience of the retirees is a benefit. For example, one of the crew's spray technicians is a retired chemical engineer.

The military experience that some of the retirees have also helps with the job, partly because it brings discipline, Willmott says.

Willmott, who's been at Sharon for nine years and has aspirations to become a superintendent there, says there needs to be realistic expectations of retired workers' physical abilities.

"Some jobs can be physically challenging for some, so this must be considered in work assignments," he says.

"Occasionally, we hire a retiree that is a good worker but not suited to the jobs in that department," Dobie says. "We give them the option of transferring to another department in the club. This is all done in cooperation with the various department heads."

### The right fit

Throughout the years, Dobie says he has interviewed hundreds of retirees who've implied pay is a secondary consideration.

"Many of the people we hire were bored after they retired," he says. "They want to keep their minds and bodies active as long as possible."

"They're working here for numerous reasons, but most of them just want to get out of the house and interact with others," Willmott says.

Some of the perks for the retired workers are that they can take vacations during the summer and have liberal golf privileges at the club.

"The amount of accessibility for employee golf here – five days a week at restricted times – is a great drawing card," Dobie says.

"Our employee golf privileges are also a big attraction for some," Willmott says.

Another advantage of hiring retired workers is the strong sense of responsibility and pride they have developed from life's experiences, according to Dobie.

Most of the staff is task oriented. For example, once the fairway crew is finished mowing, they go home. The same holds true for those who mow greens, rough, tees, aprons and maintain bunkers.

"The bulk of the routine maintenance is done by noon so golfers aren't interfered with," Dobie says. "We're down to 11 workers in the afternoon: One is the secretary, and two are mechanics. Our efficiency is much better if the maintenance crew is off the course when members are playing."

"Members want fast greens, green fairways and no interruptions," Willmott says. "They don't want to see maintenance staff on the course."

Dobie says having a majority of the course maintenance staff be retirees might not work in other settings, but it has been effective at Sharon. GCN

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The bulk of the work for employees Tom Kaufman (left) and Carl Jungman is finished before noon.

Photo: David Willmott



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Successful superintendents must sell their management programs and philosophies to the green chairman, green committee and golfers to whom they answer.

## The right relationship

### AN EFFECTIVE GREEN CHAIRMAN KNOWS HIS ROLE AND UNDERSTANDS THE SUPERINTENDENT'S JOB

**I**n the 1930s, venerable golf course architect Alister Mackenzie wrote, "The history of most golf clubs is that a committee is appointed, they make mistakes, and just as they are beginning to learn from their mistakes, they resign office and are replaced by others who make greater mistakes still, and so it goes on."

In other words, not much has changed during the last 70 years. While it's inevitable green chairmen and their committees will continue to make mistakes, an astute golf course superintendent will recognize

the most common missteps in advance and head them off. A survey conducted by the USGA Green Section staff found that while courses might vary and decades will pass, there's a commonality about what makes a good green chairman and what makes a person in the position ineffective.

While the green committee has the responsibility to oversee the management of the golf course, it shouldn't be involved in a course's day-to-day management. Instead, it's an advisory board making broad-based decisions about budget and policy.

The green chairman organizes and conducts regular committee meetings and maintains a close relationship with the superintendent. A good green chairman, as suggested by the USGA Green Section:

- Understands the role of the superintendent and is familiar with his challenges — he's an advocate for the superintendent;
- Is the liaison for the board of directors, members and the superintendent regarding golf course operations;
- Is up to date about golfers' concerns, questions and comments about the course;

- Is involved with the golf schedule and how it impacts the maintenance calendar;
- Maintains regular contact with the superintendent to discuss course conditions and special projects;
- Employs a competent and progressive superintendent who should report directly to the green chairman;
- Assists the superintendent with the budget process and policy decisions; and
- Gives the superintendent the authority to close the course because of weather or turf conditions and prohibit the use of golf cars.

An effective chairman and committee, working with a competent superintendent, can make improvements and implement plans on a golf course that will be enjoyed by golfers for many years. On the other hand, an ineffective committee and superintendent can drag a course down, creating problems that will linger for a long time.

### What it takes

David Fearis, CGCS, was a golf course superintendent for 28 years. A past president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, Fearis is presently a turf and ornamental product specialist for Kansas City, Mo.-based PBI/Gordon Corp. He says the ideal green chairman is level headed, well liked and well known at his course.

"He should also have a passion for the golf course," he says. "The green chairman sets the stage for the board of directors and makes recommendations, but he is not the final decision-maker."

Tommy Witt, certified golf course superintendent of Northmoor Country Club in Highland Park, Ill., and GCSAA past president, says leadership is a key attribute of an effective green chairman.

"As author John Maxwell said, 'All things rise and fall with leadership,'" Witt says. "The green chairman should be approachable and have good listening skills. Honesty and integrity are tremendously important, too. Ideally, this individual would have previous committee service to understand the history of the club and the vision for the future. The green chairman should seek the position for the right reasons — what is best for the club in the short and long term. He should be a visionary, not someone who represents a segment of the membership or has a personal agenda. Finally, this person should use good judgment and have the confidence and strength to make decisions that are right for the club."

Mike Heacock worked for American Golf Corp. for more than 17 years as a superintendent and then finally as vice president of agronomy. Presently, with more than 32 years experience in the industry, he's vice president of maintenance for Pacific Golf Management in Japan. The company has more than 93 properties in its portfolio.

"My first green chairman taught me that my responsibility to the committee was to thoroughly research my proposals so the club could make an informed business decision," says the former president of the southern California superintendent's association. "That sounds simple, but it's not done that way at many clubs. This green chairman was the first to teach me to view my profession as a business."

### Desired traits

So, what are the elements of a good green chairman and committee? The following describes good and bad characteristics. It's important that the superintendent understand these dynamics to become more effective and successful.

**1. An effective green chairman puts in the time.** The green chairman must educate himself about turfgrass management and learn the challenges at his course. This involves attending seminars, visiting other courses and reading trade magazines. He should spend time with the superintendent and develop an honest relationship with him. A chairman who doesn't make the time commitment generally isn't capable of making informed decisions.

"The green chairman must be willing to listen and learn," Witt says. "At least once in his tenure, he should get up at 4:30 a.m., go to the club and see what it takes to prepare a golf course. Understandably, many green chairmen have no idea. They live and work in an entirely different environment. They most likely have never considered the superintendent's challenges of working with a limited staff and budget; dealing with uncontrollable elements such as heat, drought, flooding and freezing; and the fact that they have



A maintenance level should provide playing conditions agreeable to most of a membership and place reasonable agronomic demands on a course.

to satisfy the expectations of hundreds of members."

Fearis says a green chairman should attend the annual Golf Industry Show at least once.

"It is an eye-opener, and it helps him understand the job of a professional golf course superintendent," he explains.

**2. A poor green chairman wants his place in history.** Woe to the superintendent who finds himself with a green chairman who has a large ego; someone who wants to leave their mark on the course. This can lead to odd and impractical design changes, wasting labor and money, and adversely affecting the course. Worse, going

"My first green chairman taught me that my responsibility to the committee was to thoroughly research my proposals so the club could make an informed business decision."

— MIKE HEACOCK

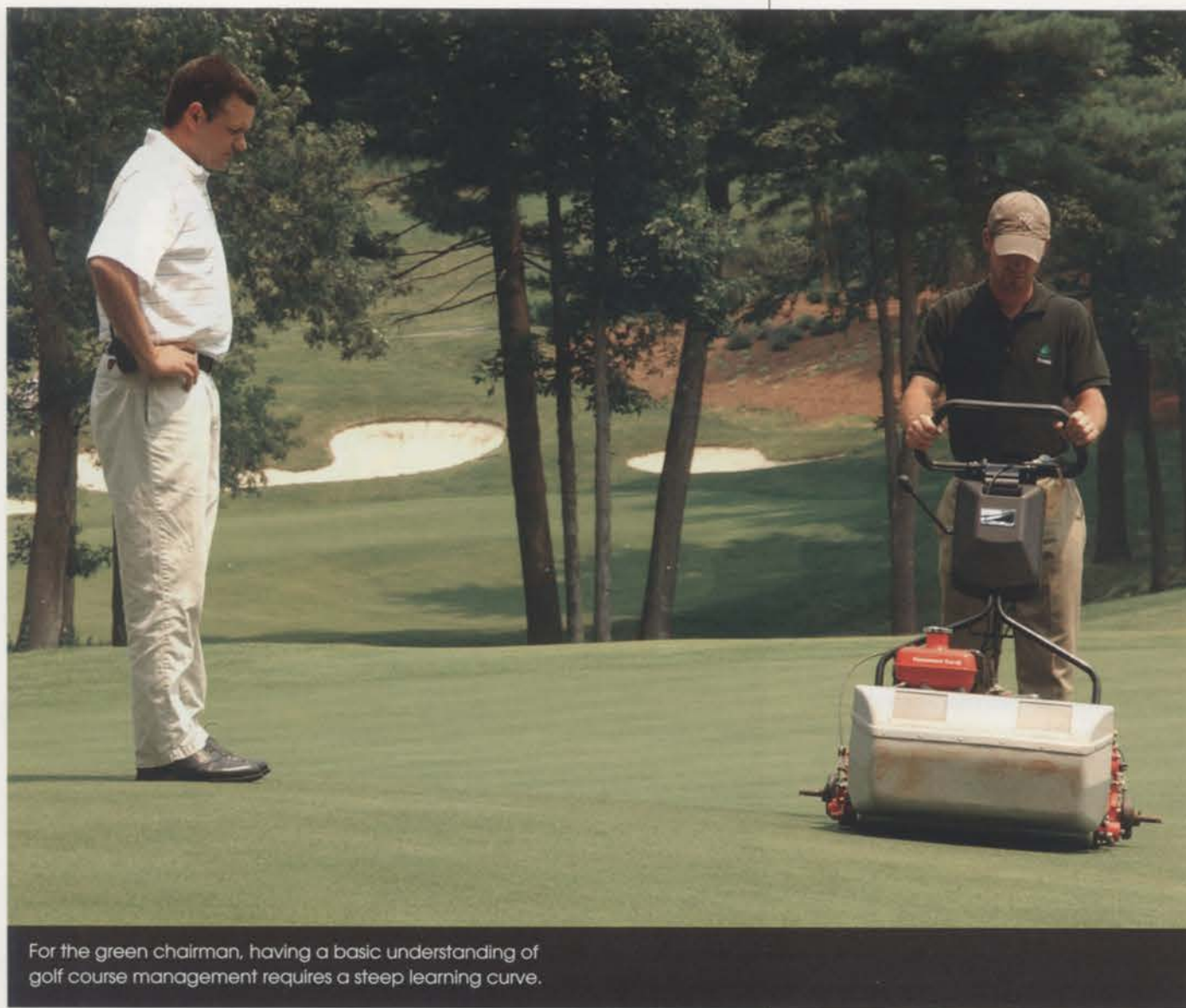


Photo: David Wolff

For the green chairman, having a basic understanding of golf course management requires a steep learning curve.

along with these projects can hurt a superintendent's credibility. To avoid this pitfall, green chairmen and their committees should listen to and use competent consultants and develop a master plan for long-range improvements.

**3. Don't be a micromanager.** Having a basic understanding of golf course management requires a steep learning curve. Unfortunately, sometimes a little bit of knowledge can be dangerous. A superintendent shouldn't have his every move

priorities for maintenance issues.

At one time, Heacock was the superintendent at a club in Southern California. The green chairman there was a top Los Angeles attorney and accomplished amateur golfer. This individual didn't believe frost could cause turf problems.

"One Saturday, he ignored my urgings to stay off the course and proceeded to play with his foursome," Heacock says. "There was heavy frost on the course, but I wasn't about to tackle my green chairman on the first tee. I spotted him at lunch in the clubhouse a few days later and asked him to walk the first fairway with me. I showed him the now black footprints his foursome had left. He looked at me and said he had no idea this would happen. He became my biggest supporter, which was great because he was far and away the most powerful and influential man in the club."

On the other hand, sometimes a superintendent can learn from a green chairman who presents a different point of view.

"At this same course, we had a wet winter and often closed the course due to soggy conditions," Heacock says. "On one such day, the next green chairman asked to walk part of the course with me. It was raining, and we splashed water with every step. He asked me if we were doing any damage, and I answered that a lot of traffic would harm the course. He offered that not many golfers would play in these conditions, and maybe the course could be opened for anyone who wanted to walk. He couldn't understand how a few golfers could damage greens in the rain. He had a fresh perspective and was absolutely right. He taught me to question common folklore and think about our 'customers' – the members."

**4. Don't be a figurehead.** The green chairman should be a voting member of the board of directors. If not, he has no leverage in the outcome of important and controversial issues. He also will be a more persuasive advocate for the golf course.

**5. Realize that golfers place unrealistic demands on course conditions.** While most golfers want "member-guest" conditions all the time, this is seldom a realistic goal because of agronomic and budgetary restrictions. The level of maintenance should provide playing conditions agreeable to the majority of the membership while placing agronomically reasonable demands on the course.

"Everyone wants good quality conditions, but many golfers don't know what they really are," Fearis says. "Developing a set of maintenance guidelines for the golf course will clarify maintenance priorities and keep the entire organization moving in the right direction. Of course, weather and other situations can affect this plan, so also be flexible."

**6. Tough decisions must be made.** Being a green chairman isn't a popularity contest. It's impossible to please every member. Although the goal of the superintendent is to avoid disruptions to play, sometimes solutions to agronomic problems require just that. Badly deteriorated bunkers might need reconstruction, an antiquated irrigation system might need an expensive replacement, and playability problems and poor turf conditions might mean tree removal. There are many undesirable consequences for not following through with the necessary corrective programs. The popular band-aid approach is rarely effective. This wastes money and perpetuates problems. The green chairman needs to do what's right for the course and its future in the most cost-

"Developing a set of maintenance guidelines for the golf course will clarify maintenance priorities and keep the entire organization moving in the right direction." — DAVID FEARIS

scrutinized. A green chairman who begins directing maintenance staff personnel can only cause confusion and chaos. There must be a clear understanding that the superintendent is the expert and will set his own



effective manner possible. As the old saying goes, "It seems there is never enough money to do the project right the first time, yet there always seems to be enough money to do it over."

**7. The green committee should represent a cross section of members.** Large committees can be ineffective because it's difficult to stay on track. There's too much discussion and too little decision-making. A good size is five to seven members. Unbalanced committees sometimes fail to consider how their actions will affect golfers of different abilities. The green committee should consist of golfers of both genders and all abilities. This offers varied perspectives and opens lines of communication with other golfers.

**8. Unfortunately, tenure is short.** Many of the most serious mistakes made by green committees simply are due to a lack of tenure. Just when it seems a green chairman has acquired enough knowledge to be a valuable resource, his term expires. Unfortunately, this also wastes much of the superintendent's time because he has put a tremendous amount of energy into educating the chairman and committee members. Frequent turnover makes continuity extremely difficult. Ideally, the chairman and committee would serve for at least three years. One excellent means of guaranteeing continuity and experience is for the club's immediate past president to become the newest member of the committee. Soon the committee will consist of individuals who are familiar with the entire club operation.

**9. Everyone must communicate effectively.** Regular communication is one thing, but effective communication is quite another. The chairman and committee members change on a regular basis, so the committee that hired the superintendent probably won't be the one he answers to a few years later. Because individuals often volunteer to effect change, it's likely the goals of the committee will change according to its makeup. Few superintendents consider themselves salespeople, but that's a large part of their job. Successful superintendents must sell their management programs and philosophies to the chairman, committee and golfers they answer to. This takes a lot of written and oral communication. Chairmen and committees who take an arrogant approach and think golfers and members will take their word for it, frequently experience strong opposition and a lack of support.

The position of green chairman is any-

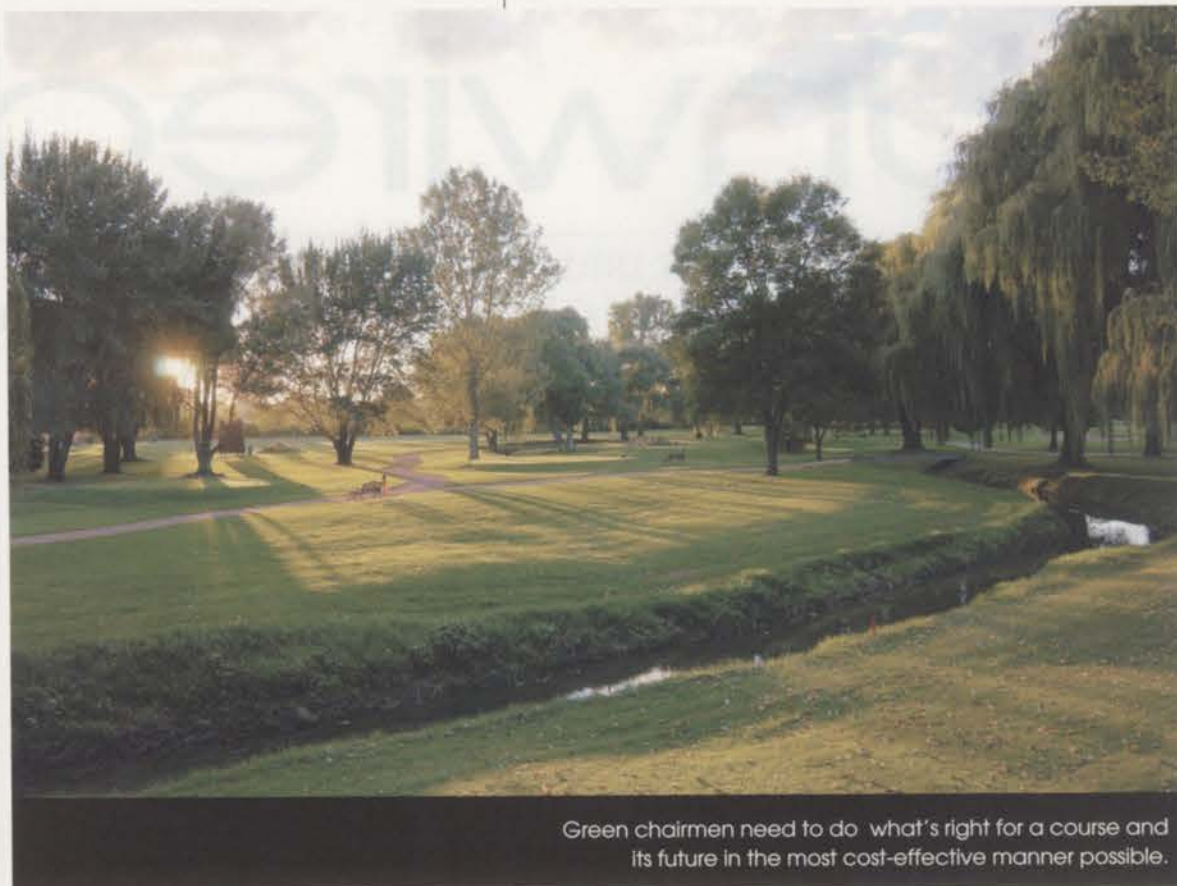


Photo: David Wolff

Green chairmen need to do what's right for a course and its future in the most cost-effective manner possible.

thing but a no-brainer. The job should be filled only by an individual with exceptional leadership skills, an interest and willingness to learn new vocabulary, the mental toughness necessary to make hard decisions and the time to do the job right.

Not many people meet these criteria. As a result, most green committees are led poorly and, in many cases, do more harm than good in spite of their best intentions. The unfortunate truth is that the lack of good leadership might be the biggest problem many clubs face.

### Be proactive

Witt says change is inevitable. During a superintendent's tenure, green chairmen and committees will come and go. The key is to manage that change.

"Very few superintendents get in serious trouble because of turf issues," he says. "They would be well advised to pay significant attention to building people, communication and relationship skills. It's just too big a part of our job to ignore. Learn the green chairman's personality. How does he prefer to do business, letters, voice-mail, e-mail, meetings, digital photos? Whenever possible, offer several options for the proposals you present to him. Help the chairman look good. Make him a hero."

Another critical factor is establishing credibility with the club.

"A superintendent is going to run into a green chairman he may not like, but find a

way to get along because it will make life much easier," Witt says. "Taking the high road in these relationships will be the most advantageous in the long run. It's vital to take the time to develop relationships. How can the chairman, committee or members support you if they don't know who you are? The constant turnover only heightens the challenges of effective communication and positive relationships. This doesn't happen overnight, but the time and effort the superintendent invests makes a tremendous difference in his success." GCN

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Photo: David Wolff

Green chairmen need to understand the maintenance practices of superintendents.

# Unwired

GAPS IN WIRELESS IRRIGATION SYSTEMS NEED TO CLOSE BEFORE THEY GAIN COMPLETE ACCEPTANCE

by  
DEREK  
RICE

**D**uring recent years, wireless technology seems to have become ubiquitous. From the use of cell phones and pagers to the ability to surf the Internet wirelessly from a local coffee shop, most people take technology for granted.

So with all the wireless technology available, it should come as no surprise that wireless irrigation systems for golf courses are well into development. However, the move to completely wireless systems has been slow to happen for the golf course industry, according to David Davis of David D. Davis Associates in Crestline, Calif.

"I would say that if we give our clients a

choice of a wireless system, a wired system or a hybrid, about 95 percent of them are going to want a combination of the two, and all the different manufacturers offer that," says Davis, who specializes in irrigation system design for golf courses.

## Defining wireless

There are a number of reasons for the slow acceptance of wireless irrigation systems. For starters, there seems to be some confusion in the industry about what a wireless irrigation system means. To some, it means being able to control the system through radio or cellular signals. To others, it means a system com-

pletely without wires, which combines wireless rotors and wireless controls. No such system currently exists on the market, according to Davis.

"If you ask most people today about wireless, it only has to do with the central controller to the satellite communication system," he says. "Someday, and they're experimenting with it now, it will mean wireless from either the central only or the field unit to a rotor."

While some might disagree, many of the wireless controllers on the market aren't completely wireless systems, according to Rick Holanda, superintendent at Aronimink Golf Club in Newton Square, Pa.



Most golf courses choose a hybrid irrigation system that is part wired and part wireless.

Photo: The Toro Co.