

staff and serving as a club liaison.

Jim Kron was named superintendent at Poplar Hill Golf Club in Farmville, Va. Previously, Kron, a member of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, was assistant golf course superintendent at Horsehoe Bay Golf Club in Egg Harbor, Wis.



Kron

Golf course superintendent **Kevin Collins** left Tower Ridge Country Club in Simsbury, Conn., and is now at Washington Golf Club in Washington Depot, Conn.

The city of San Diego hired a manager to run its golf courses. **Mark Woodward**, who has been the parks and recreation director for Mesa, Ariz., for the past 10 years, was named San Diego's golf operations manager, overseeing courses at Torrey Pines, Balboa Park and Mission Bay. The 52-year-old Woodward replaces Jim Allen, who resigned in May before a financial audit critical of the golf operations was released.

Kimberly Heyl, superintendent at Fenwick Golf Club in Old Saybrook, Conn., was elected as a corporator of the Middlesex Hospital in Middletown, Conn.

Michael Marino, superintendent at Stonington (Conn.) Country Club; **Brent Palich**, superintendent at Potowomut Golf Club in East Greenwich, R.I.; and **Ralph Simonelli**, assistant superintendent at Warwick (R.I.) Country Club, are new members of the Rhode Island Golf Course Superintendents Association.

The Connecticut Association of Golf Course Superintendents added new members recently. They are: **Michael Astram** of Northern Designs, **Jason Booth** of Pine Orchard Yacht and Country Club, **Rob Giampietro** of Bull's Bridge Golf Course, **Paul Legault** of A-OK Turf Equipment, **Brian Sepot** of Longshore Club Park, **Timothy Quirk** of Turf Products Corp. and **Thomas Vorio** of Pine Orchard Yacht & Country Club.

James MacDonald, golf course superintendent at New Haven Country Club in Hamden, Conn., retired.

Robert Witkoski, golf course superinten-

dent at Washington Golf Club in Washington Depot, Conn., retired.

At the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation awards banquet in December, **Mike O'Connell**, golf course superintendent at Maketewah Country Club in Cincinnati, Ohio, was presented with the Professional of the Year award for his commitment to the golf course maintenance profession and his years of involvement in the Greater Cincinnati Golf Course Superintendents Association. O'Connell's award was presented by OTF past president John Fanning of Verdicon/UHS.

At the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation awards banquet in December, **Pamela Sherratt** of The Ohio State University's department of horticulture and crop science, was presented with a Professional Excellence Award by John Street for her accomplishments in turfgrass research and education, particularly in the areas of sports turf research and extension.

PGA golf professional **Albert Murdock** was named director of golf at the Links at Las Palomas Golf Club in Puerto Peñasco, Mexico. Currently, Murdock is vice president of the Southwest section of the PGA. He is a current member of the Senior Goldwater Cup Team and a guest instructor of the Stanford and Arizona State University golf camps. Murdock will direct the new course operation at Las Palomas, which is scheduled to open in May.



Murdock

PGA National Resort & Spa and the PGA National Members Club named **Desi Howe** the director of golf for the five-course facility in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. Previously, Howe was the director of golf for the Doral Resort & Spa in Miami.



Howe

The International Network of Golf's membership elected a new advisory board. The new board members are **Tom Landers** of Pub Links Golfer, **Mitch Laurance** of Ace Productions, **John Steinbach** of TaylorMade-Adidas Golf and **Dean Stoyer** of Nike Golf.

Re-elected to new three-year terms were **Jack Bacot** of Carolinas PGA Golfer and

Tony Leodora of TL Golf Services. The remainder of the current ING advisory board are: **Laurie Dovey**, **Ron Garl**, **Holly Geoghegan**, **Rick Jamison**, **Dove Jones**, **Lynn Luczkowski**, **Ronnie Musselwhite** and **Mike Purkey**.

The 15-year-old ING is a non-profit, media-based networking organization that has a mission to enhance and promote communication and education in golf. The organization is managed by a six-person executive committee, elected by the advisory board. The current committee includes **Jay Hubbard** of Tour Edge Golf; **Mark Grody** of Corporategolf.com; **Tim O'Connor** of O'Connor Media; **John Glozek** of Long Island Golfer; **Geoff Converse**, a freelance golf writer; and executive director **Mike Jamison**.

Pearl Carey, a former president of the Western States Golf Association and a member of the USGA Regional Affairs Committee, was chosen as the second woman to receive the USGA Joe Dey Award. Given since 1996 in recognition of meritorious service to the game of golf as a volunteer, the award was presented Feb. 6 at the association's annual meeting in Santa Barbara, Calif. The award is named in honor of the late Joe Dey, who served as USGA executive director for 35 years – from 1934 to 1969 – and was later commissioner of the PGA Tour.

Matthew Bradley was named golf sales representative for Bayer Environmental Science. He will cover southwest Florida from Tampa through Naples and is responsible for the complete portfolio of Chipco golf products.

Golf Ventures West hired **Steve Anderson** as equipment territory manager for the southern Phoenix market.

Redexim Charterhouse hired an additional sales professional, **Nate Patrick**, to support its network of North American distributors.



Patrick

Chris Nordling is a product manager for trimmers, brush cutters and lawn edgers for Shindaiwa.

Jim Doll joined Tecumseh Power Co. as product line manager for walk behind mower engines. GCN



Jack Brennan founded Paladin Golf Marketing in Plant City, Fla., to assist golf course owners and managers with successful marketing. A former associate publisher for *Golf Week*, he can be reached at Jackbrennan@ij.net.

Using a market analysis

As golf becomes more competitive, marketing your course becomes more important. In previous columns, I've suggested the need to compare your course to other courses in your area regularly. The goal of this is to keep your regular golfers coming back and to attract new players who have taken up the game recently, have relocated to your area or are unhappy with the course(s) they have been playing. Keeping core golfers and acquiring new ones also is the goal of the competitive courses in your area, so to "win," you need to make sure your course is at least as good as the other courses or ideally, superior to them.

This leads to the question: What makes a good or superior course experience? The answer is a combination of cost, course reputation, location, course condition, service quality and other factors. Given all these factors, comparing two or more golf courses might seem more complicated at first than it really is.

A simple and time-proven tool used by marketers to make practical comparisons is called a SWOT analysis, which stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This marketing tool can be adapted to a superintendent's job even if his course doesn't have an overall marketing plan.

The first step of a SWOT analysis is to decide which courses you want to compare. My rule of thumb is that any course within a reasonable driving distance for a golfer is a direct competitor. Other considerations include similar greens fees, ease of access to the course, course conditions and playability. Simply put, a competitive golf course is any other one your regular golfers might consider playing.

Once you have identified your competition, the main challenge in a SWOT analysis is exercising the discipline and time necessary. A SWOT analysis takes time and is only as good as the individuals involved, so consider asking some of your employees and other managers on the course to join.

The process is simple: You take each aspect of the analysis and list the answers for your course and each of your competitors.

Strengths

List the strengths for your course and your competitors in separate columns. Key strengths from a golfer's perspective will include things like speed of play, de-

sign of the course and value, which is the what-you-get-for-what-you-paid equation. Turf conditions could be a strength depending on the turf, green speed, lack of weeds and insects, and the consistency in turf quality. Playability – another strength – could be the width of the fairways. Other possible strengths are signage, course location, staff expertise and service attitude.

Weaknesses

Next, follow the same process by listing weaknesses of your course and your competitors. Try thinking of things that are genuine negatives for golfers. The condition of the cart paths might be a strength, a weakness or neither. However, knowing a competitive superintendent is operating with three-quarters of the staff he had a year ago is a potential negative for that course and might factor into the equation.

Opportunities

When considering opportunities, the focus needs to be on your course. A number of your opportunities already will be listed in your weaknesses column. For example, if you listed a moisture problem on a green as a weakness, then correcting that situation is an opportunity.

But opportunities should go beyond correcting negatives by considering positive actions you can take to improve your course with your present crew and budget. This might include ideas that help attract new golfers or make your course more enjoyable for members or regular golfers. For example, Ron Garl, a Lakeland, Fla.-based golf course architect, says a significant number of golfers practice more than they play, even if that's just working on one aspect of their game that needs improvement. So, with many golf courses, improving the practice areas is a marketing opportunity.

I would consider your master plan if your course has one. Opportunities should include any steps you can take toward making that vision become a reality.

Finally, special events in your community or on your course create opportunities to make a great impression on visitors or first-time golfers.

Threats

Threats include things such as an outbreak

of turf disease, but the emphasis of a SWOT analysis is on outside situations or conditions that can affect play. An example is planned roadwork that makes it difficult to get to your course for weeks or months. New ownership of an area course is always a marketing threat because improvements on the course probably are planned. Similarly, a planned renovation of a course in your market area, or the announced construction of a new course, must be considered threats because they might attempt to take away some of your golfers.

Threats also can be unknowns such as the hiring of a new superintendent, consultant or management company.

Analysis

The most challenging aspect of a SWOT analysis is considering all four factors at once to get a big picture of your course's marketing position and actions you can take to improve your position.

When considering strengths, ask yourself if you're making golfers aware of them as often as you should. For weaknesses, decide if they can be remedied or improved easily or if you have to put up with them for a time. Opportunities need to be ranked and prioritized for action. Threats have to be evaluated by how likely they are to happen, their potential impact and what you can or must do to counter them.

When considering all aspects of a SWOT analysis at once, you might see some interactions between variables. For example, when anticipating and taking proactive steps to combat a threat, you might end up adding a new strength to your course.

When completed, a SWOT analysis provides a practical evaluation of your course relative to competitors and helps drive an action plan to improve your course and your marketing position.

The value of this four-step exercise comes from repeating it at least once a year. Your first SWOT analysis creates a benchmark of where your course stands versus the competition. Later comparisons allow you to measure your progress in overcoming deficiencies and improving in all factors you choose to consider. The goal is to produce a superior course for your golfers. GCN

Tree management

Trees are beautiful and necessary on most golf courses, but because of abundant trees, many American courses inadvertently have hurt their agronomics and playability.

While superintendents and golf course architects don't agree about everything, we're generally in accord that too many American courses have too many trees. Many superintendents have an inherent conflict with trees, and golf course architects generally think overplanting limits design options and doesn't look attractive or natural.

There is, however, a widely different perception among golfers about trees on a golf course. Looking back, heavily treed American courses were probably inevitable, factoring in American ingenuity, the concurrent rise of golf and the "city beautiful" movement, which emphasized parks and tree planting to humanize and renaturalize crowded cities.

The gradual change of opinion is reflected in the writings of the first generation of golf course architects in America who didn't like trees in virtually any form.

"Trees in the course are a serious defect, and even when in close proximity prove a detriment," wrote C.B. Macdonald, the father of American golf course architecture in 1906. And in 1928, he wrote: "I should like to make this distinction – no course can be ideal which is laid out through trees."

The tide changed slightly when golf course architect Harry Colt softened his stance in 1920. "Trees are a fluky and obnoxious form of hazard, but they afford rather good protection, and if a clump of these exists at such a spot, it might well be considered justifiable to leave it standing," Colt wrote. "Where very few trees exist, every effort should be made to retain them, and in every case the architect will note the quality of the timber with a view of retaining the finest specimens."

Donald Ross took similar positions. "As beautiful as trees are, and as fond as you and I are of them, we must not allow our sentiments to crowd out the real intent of a golf course of providing fair playing conditions," Ross wrote. "If it, in any way, interferes with the properly played stroke, the tree is an unfair hazard and should not be allowed to stand. On the other hand, there is no need to ruthlessly cut down everything before us. If it can be arranged so that holes are slightly elbowed, trees can frequently be

spared. On hot summer days, they are most welcome, especially around tee boxes."

Besides the cost savings of using the natural landscape, Alistair MacKenzie also saw a more practical side to trees. "On an inland course, the only way, except at enormous expense of providing hazards as high as sand dunes, is by the use of trees in groups," MacKenzie wrote. "Trees make an excellent corner for a dog-leg. Firs, pines, cypress, silver birch and California oak make beautiful backgrounds for greens."

In 1933, the "Good Doctor" eloquently condemns poor planting style. "Playing down a fairway bordered by straight lines of trees is not only inartistic but makes tedious and uninteresting golf," he wrote. "Many green committees ruin one's handiwork by planting trees like rows of soldiers along the borders of the fairways. Alternative groupings of trees, planted irregularly, create most fascinating golf and give players the opportunity of showing their skill and judgment in slicing, pulling round, or attempting to loft over them."

However, green committee chairmen took another piece of advice from Colt's partner, C.H. Alison, to heart. "If you have any planting to do, do it at the start," Alison wrote. "Trees take a long time to grow."

To expedite tree growth, many ignored the experience of A.W. Tillinghast by planting quick growing varieties, which tend to be short lived. Tillinghast wrote: "Trees of the better sort, well shaped and really fine specimens, are admired and loved by the vast majority of people in all walks of life everywhere." He also abhorred straight planting lines. "Fairways should be rather irregular in shape and not like bowling alleys extending through the woods," he wrote.

George Thomas wrote: "Trees and shrubbery beautify the course, and natural growth should never be cut down if it is possible to save it; but he who insists in preserving a tree where it spoils a shot should have nothing to say about golf course construction."

William Flynn captures the new beliefs in 1927. "Old ideas have been discarded, and the prevailing belief is that trees, most emphatically, have a fixed place on a golf course," he wrote. "This is true for many reasons. First, because there are few, if any, sites available that are devoid of trees and it is very costly to cut them down and remove them. Second, trees add beauty to a golf course forming picturesque backgrounds and de-

lightful vistas. Third, their shade is most refreshing on a hot summer day. Fourth, they are of great practical value in segregating the various holes."

The overplanting problem isn't new and was recognized by these experts almost as soon as it began. Our love of trees allowed tree-planting committees to hold sway for almost a century. Even when no money was available for other things, clubs – despite cautions from generations of course architects and superintendents – planted trees that have filled in almost every conceivable gap between fairways and, as they matured, crowded and narrowed fairways.

Golf could be more interesting if green committees weren't so focused on increasing difficulty through tree planting. The agronomic problem caused by trees is summed up by a veteran superintendent who asked, "Do you want turf or trees?"

After seeing the long-term results of continual tree planting, we've seen many high-profile courses succeed with tree-removal programs recently.

Most courses should focus on tree management rather than strictly planting or removing trees. Courses built around mature timber will have problems eventually. Your course should plan for removal and replacement of selected older trees, substandard varieties and diseased trees to keep a viable mix of young, medium and fully mature trees for long-term health.

When planting trees, consider the turf's need for morning sunlight by planting them no closer to the fairways, greens and tees than their mature height on the east side, or tell your members to expect highly trafficked areas to begin a slow decline.

Plant trees in naturalistic clumps of three to 12, leaving gaps in between to allow the possibility of a recovery shot. One superintendent objected to my tight spacing of trees initially, fearing it would increase mowing time. Later, he said the extra time of detail mowing between trees spaced 10 to 12 feet apart was more than offset by production mowing in the open areas.

I marvel at how clubs can find money to plant trees, but have no money to get proper advice on how to do it. Others won't use golf course architects, who have a grasp of playability and aesthetics, in favor of a local landscape architect or nurseryman who doesn't. The cost of moving trees will offset any fees eventually. GCN



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Chapters can do more



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Where does the greatest opportunity lie to advance the professionalism of golf course superintendents further? The question conjures up a wide variety of possible answers.

Is it via the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America with its ever-expanding programming? Not necessarily, even though the GCSAA should be recognized for its continued efforts to better serve its members and the golf industry. I'm only saying this isn't the best means available because so few in golf have consistent contact with the GCSAA.

Is it via the continued inspired work of individual superintendents? Not necessarily, because the indispensable work of each superintendent collectively throughout the country already has had its meaningful impact on the industry and doesn't promise the opportunity for unbridled future professional advancement.

Then where will this opportunity be found? It's through the enhanced operational performance of the 104 GCSA regional chapters, which represent the front-line interface between the world of the golf course superintendent and the tens of thousands of golf club/course officials and millions of golfers throughout the country.

The basic issue that needs to be addressed within chapter programming to advance the profession is the far too persistent practice of focusing the chapters' primary communications vehicles (i.e. — newsletter, educational and guest speaker programming) on close to 100 percent of agronomic/turf management subject matters. This doesn't serve the chapter members well because they're consistently being overloaded with technical education via a wide variety of sources, or the nation's local golf communities whose officials don't have the patience or interest to digest this same steady flow of technical information.

The result of this short-sighted chapter programming is the equivalent of putting the world of the golf course superintendent in a closet, region by region, and closing the door. Recommended corrective measures include:

- Reorganize chapter **newsletter** content along the following approximate lines: 35 percent technical writing, 35 percent national and regional industry news, and 30 percent chapter activities and member-welfare issues, most of which can be sourced by subscribing to

national information services.

- Restructure chapter **educational programming** to continue to include precedent-setting technical subjects, which would then be complemented with basic 101-level programming intended to educate club/course officials to better understand the working world of the golf course superintendent.

- Restructure **guest-speaker presentations** by inviting speakers to present topics that parallel the subject matters suggested above for newsletter and educational programming.

This implies that club/course officials would be invited to attend many chapter seminars and monthly meetings. To ensure more effective and affordable educational programming and meeting speakers, four to eight chapters might form regional circuits that would schedule four to eight varying educational topics and speakers for a season. Then rotate these seminar subjects and speakers through each participating chapter's events/meetings.

Because it's recommended that local course officials be invited to attend monthly meetings, it's further suggested the monthly tournament format be adjusted to allow each chapter member to invite a guest official from his course to play in the day's golf tournament on a two-man-team basis and then stay on to listen to the guest speaker of the day — a win-win situation for all parties.

Finally, in the quickly advancing communications world, is there a good reason why every chapter doesn't develop its own Web site to promote activities and to permanently catalogue its education and speaker programs? Currently available information indicates about 60 percent of the 104 GCSA chapters have, or are planning, their own Web sites. For any serious business or association not to have its own Web site is tantamount to inviting eventual organizational suicide. The 25 or so chapter Web sites currently in play throughout the country provide an excellent collective model for the remaining chapters to emulate.

Suggesting the above is clearly "easy talk" but obviously not an "easy walk." Little of permanent importance will happen until chapters can engage qualified people to manage their varied membership, newsletter, educational, tournament, speaker and Web-site programming professionally. Statistics show that only about 10 percent of the 104 GCSA chapters currently engage

an association manager or executive director. The rest of the chapters essentially rely on executive secretaries to administer membership and direct-mail programming.

In contrast, the 41 PGA sections throughout the country each has an executive director and its own Web site — affordable necessities because the national PGA underwrites section operations. The GCSAA is not yet there, maybe some day? But chapters shouldn't wait for this eventful day because these challenges can be addressed now.

The easier part of this challenge would be finding qualified executive director candidates from the retired corporate and military communities; by soliciting from the empty-nest parent community; and by advancing qualified executive secretaries that are presently engaged.

Before looking at the more challenging aspect of funding executive director types, it's important to ask why the PGA has only 41 sections and the superintendents have 104 chapters. The answer is that it's far easier to fund operational programs with larger, more consolidated regional membership bases. Many GCSA chapters are too small to self-fund their own operations. As the GCSAA looks to formalize its relationships with the affiliated chapters during the years ahead, chapter consolidation might be an early topic of consideration.

Assuming that chapters will some day be able to maintain a minimum number of members, adequate operational funding would be realized by positioning dues comfortably above present levels (i.e. members pay more for better service provided by professional staff), and by realizing added advertising/sponsorship revenues from the expanded newsletter, education and Web-site programs. The money is there, if mined properly.

All of the above suggests the need for a series of annually repeating workshops to educate chapters how to find, fund and effectively utilize professional staff. No doubt, this resource will develop as need arises. Clearly, the process would be significantly enhanced should one or two chapters volunteer to develop a model management program.

It's time for the world of golf course superintendent to open its doors and let the light shine out through the prism of more effective chapter performance. GCN

Hiring quality workers

Many golf course superintendents are in the midst of preparing for a new season. They're undoubtedly enjoying their time studying and pricing new equipment and turf supplies. But most of them find much less joy recruiting and selecting the people who will use the equipment and supplies to create a magnificent golf course.

The choices they make will go a long way to help determine the level of stress they will face this year and the success of their courses. Good procedures for choosing equipment and supplies and hiring employees have more similarities than one might think.

Consider the purchase of a new fairway mower. Superintendents begin by specifying what they need – width, power, cut, features – given the mowers they already have and the characteristics of their course. Then they collect information and compile – formally or informally – a list of possible makes and models they might purchase. Finally, they collect detailed information, including cost, and select a mower to purchase.

When hiring the best people, a similar procedure is used, albeit with two considerable differences. First, the choices are more important because there are greater productivity differences among people compared with brands and models of equipment. Second, each superintendent is practically on his own when hiring employees.

Unfortunately, most hiring procedures are less detailed and less reliable than those generally used to purchase new equipment.

So what's included in a reliable hiring procedure? Begin by specifying what's needed. In the human resources field, this means defining the competencies one seeks that will enable the person in a certain position to succeed. A formal definition of competencies is the combination of observable and measurable skills, knowledge, performance behaviors and personal attributes that contribute to enhanced employee performance and personal success. One should select three to five competencies that are most critical to success in a position, given the existing staff and the task to be completed. Employee competencies might include experience operating equipment, positive work attitude, reliability and being a team player. Recruiting without first specifying the desired competencies is like wandering

around a trade show without knowing what you are looking for.

Recruitment is defined as the process of attracting individuals on a timely basis, in sufficient numbers and with appropriate qualifications to apply for a job. The focus of this definition is on attracting a pool of applicants – not just one qualified applicant. This focus is the most common mistake made by managers, including golf course superintendents. The goal of recruiting is to attract a quality pool from which there's a high probability of hiring a great candidate. Without a pool of candidates, the probability of hiring a great candidate is low.

So how is a great pool of candidates achieved? Recruitment is a process of marketing a club or course and the position available. One must develop a recruitment plan that reaches great candidates and entices them to apply for a position. The plan can include informal word of mouth, want ads, job announcements in the newspaper or on the Internet and formal job services. What-

ever the method to reach potential applicants, the recruitment material must provide a picture of the course or club and the position that stimulates qualified candidates to apply.

The following provides the information needed to write great recruitment material:

- List words and phrases that describe positive attributes of the club or course;
- List words and phrases that describe positive attributes of the position;
- Describe the position;
- List the qualifications required for success in the position;
- Find out what great candidates for this position are doing now (be creative); and
- Know how candidates should apply.

Selection involves choosing from the pool of candidates who best match the competencies needed to succeed in the position. The interview is the most important part of that.

The following are some ideas to consider when planning your interviews.

- Determine the fit of the candidate for the position, and promote the position and the course or club so the candidate is likely to accept should he be offered the position. Hiring is like dating – either party can end the process at any time.

- An interview is a formal, high-tension situation. While working to make both parties feel at ease, it should be treated as a formal interaction, not as a bull session. Careful planning and preparation is crucial.

- Prepare questions in advance that are built to measure the candidate on the selected competencies. Each candidate must then be asked these same questions. The box to the left contains some questions that correspond to the example competencies described above. Note that several of these are behavioral questions asking candidates to describe how they have handled a specific situation previously. This type of question has been found to be effective.

- Be careful, but not paranoid, about illegal questions. The easiest rule is a simple one: Ask only questions that relate to or measure the candidate's likelihood to succeed in the position.

Although it seems difficult and time consuming, hiring outstanding candidates produces rewards far greater than the cost.

GCN



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Interview questions

Introductory

- How did you hear about our job opening?
- Had you heard of our golf course or club before seeing the position announcement? (Let the person expand if answer is "yes" but do not pressure him.)

Experience operating equipment

- Describe your job experiences, especially those related to operating equipment. (Ask follow-up questions as needed so you completely understand his job experiences.)
- Tell me about the last time you learned or improved your skills in operating equipment.
- Where do you feel your greatest training needs would be to excel in this position?

Team player

- Give me an example of when you worked effectively as part of a team.
- Do you prefer to work alone or with others? Why?
- Give me a recent example in which you had a fellow employee with a poor attitude. What did you do?

Reliable

- Give me an example of a time when you were late for work. How did you handle the situation?

Build to fit

GOLF COURSE BUILDERS HAVE HAD TO ADJUST TO THE CHANGING MARKET AS THE ECONOMY RECOVERS AND DEMAND INCREASES

by
JOHN
WALSH

Q What's the current state of golf course development?

Compared to where we were five years ago, the industry is down considerably. New golf course development is probably down 50 percent. On the same hand, things are looking good for the coming year. In the last year, it seemed like there were many more development inquiries than the previous three or four years. It seems like there's even more work today than there was a year ago. Much of that has to do with the improved economy, the fact that 9/11 happened more than three years ago and people aren't as negative about golf as they were four years ago because of the overbuilt market. Now, the type of developments has changed. There's a shift in what's being built today.

Q Have we hit the bottom of the down cycle?

The bottom was hit six months ago, maybe even a year ago. The people developing golf courses sat back. They still wanted to build their golf courses but thought maybe they ought to wait awhile to see what was going to happen. That money has loosened up again, and the people that had access to money are moving forward.

Q Who's funding golf course development projects?

There are a couple of arenas. You have the wealthy people who feel they can build a better mousetrap or have always wanted to build a course. Then there are the land developers – those who have had good projects during the past five years. They are building some big, high-end golf courses.

On the other hand, some of the middle-market housing folks have figured out that

providing open space to their development is almost as beneficial as providing a golf course, and the cost is much less. The high-end housing – especially in markets such as Southern California, Scottsdale, Ariz., and Florida – has slowed down somewhat, but there are still a lot of high-end courses being built in those markets due to the housing demands.

Q How did overbuilding happen?

First, let's look at it from the housing developer's point of view. That's where most of the golf construction was in the past. That's the market where courses were being overbuilt five to 10 years ago. Everyone thought we needed more high-end daily-fee golf courses, but that market has really slowed down. The large housing developers were pumping golf courses into the market, and they didn't care if the golf course made any sense financially as they developed them only to help sell lots.

The land developers were giving the golf course land to golf developers who had little involvement in the sale of lots, but only ended up owning the golf course. This type of golf course developer is almost extinct today because the money for these types of projects has dried up, and if the developer does have money, they can purchase existing courses for less than constructing new ones. There's not a lot of venture capital out there to build golf courses and make a profit on the golf course alone.

Q So some of these home developers built golf courses solely to boost the housing sales?

Right. They were loss leaders. They didn't care if the golf course made money. They figured the cost of building the golf course would be absorbed, and they would make

their money back by selling lots. That's fine and dandy for the housing market, but it wasn't good for the golf market. That caused the supply and demand to get way out of kilter.

Q Are there some areas of the country that are overbuilt and underbuilt?

Most areas in the country, maybe 75 percent to 80 percent of the U.S. golf market, are overexpanded. Any major city, especially in the South and maybe the Midwest, is overbuilt, but there are still a few markets that are underserved. There are still some Southern California areas that could use a little more golf. The places where it has been hard to get permits because of the bureaucracy – such as the Washington, D.C., markets and parts of California where it can be a six- to 10-year process to get a golf course approved – those are probably a little underserved.

The other underserved markets would be those specialty golf locations – the Bandon Dunes, the Whistling Straits – those are still very popular among golfers. It's the remote, boutique, high-end daily-fee courses that still have demand, which are in many markets across the United States. But that market could be saturated in five or six years as well because there are many new projects of this type in the planning stages.

Q Is there anything the industry can learn from what happened in the late 1990s?

Unfortunately, it's the supply-and-demand curve – simple economics. When the market starts looking good again, people will start building golf courses again. From a contractor's standpoint, it's difficult to operate within these cycles, although I had been calling for this slowdown for five years. Thank

GOLF COURSE NEWS INTERVIEWS BILL KUBLY, C.E.O. OF LANDSCAPES UNLIMITED, A GOLF COURSE DEVELOPMENT COMPANY BASED IN LINCOLN, NEB., ABOUT THE STATE OF GOLF COURSE DEVELOPMENT.



Photo: Mark Longwood Photography



Photo: Mark Longwood Photography

Bill Kubly, c.e.o. of Landscapes Unlimited, says there's a huge need for less-expensive golf courses to be built.

goodness I was wrong, and the boom lasted another four to six years longer than I thought it would. I saw this happening, and we were prepared for it. That's why we, as a big contractor, focused on doing more renovation and diversifying what we do. We also own 20 golf courses that we developed ourselves. We saw what was happening to our own golf courses, rounds were down, revenues were down, so it had to happen. It just took a little longer than we thought.

Q Is there a benefit to being an owner and a developer?

Absolutely. We're really the only golf course construction company that offers the full services of being able to project manage the entire project – from building the clubhouse, the maintenance building, the cart shed, the golf course, as well as having management knowledge from owning our own courses. There are probably a few builders that have done a couple turnkey projects, but we have done it many times. Turnkey golf development is a great service. It's a consulting aspect we can offer our clients. We can hold their hand. We can tell them where not to make mistakes or waste money because we've been there before ourselves.

Q As an owner, how involved are you?

My ownership division is headed up by Mike Jenkins. Of the 20 golf courses we own, we manage 12 of them. In some cases, we have management companies as one of our partners. For instance, we own part of a golf course

in Indianapolis, and Troon is our partner, and they manage it. We don't manage them all, but we still have to oversee those projects because we have an investment in them.

Q Is there something that you keep an eye on as an owner?

Four or five years ago, we would take a piece of land inside a housing development and build a golf course and own and operate it, but that market is dried up, so we don't have many of those projects anymore. I personally like to have a pet project at all times to oversee myself. Sutton Bay in South Dakota was a pet project. I probably spent 50 or 60 percent of my time on Sutton Bay. That's a property my company and I have ownership in, so that became my labor of love for several years and will continue to be for many more. I have a couple of other special courses that we own as well.

It's the fun part of the business for me, but because we're not doing many of those anymore, I focus more on operations, especially those that are close to me. We own four golf courses in the Omaha, Neb., market, and I probably stick my nose in there more than I should, but I'm a nitpicker. I'm a detail person, and if we're going to own them, I want to make sure we're doing it right. I want to be proud of our projects, even if they're not in the high-end arena. I can be just as proud of a golf course that we own and manage that makes money with a \$20 green fee than a private club with a \$75,000 initiation fee.

Q What's the company's ownership plan?

In the old days, we did the build-to-flip-type courses when the market was really good. We felt like we could build a golf course for less than anybody, and then we'd sell it as soon as the right buyer would come along. That worked well back in the heyday when many courses were being sold. Today, our rationale is that we want to own projects that can pay their way and are profitable even in the down times. We have a strike price for every course we own. If somebody wants one of our golf courses bad enough, most of them are probably for sale. We don't advertise them for sale because we really like the projects we have. We sold a couple projects last year that didn't quite fit right in our portfolio, and we also purchased a couple that were in markets that we like and understand. We like core groups of courses like our Omaha group. We like golf courses in the South, yet we have a core of two golf courses in Washington, D.C., and we love those. We want to own golf courses that can carry themselves and that don't have to be fed financially on an annual basis.

Q Is there interest in owning some of the golf courses you'll develop in the future?

If there's a project that we see that is an absolute grand slam, we'll invest our capital in it, but we don't want any surprises. We built a few six or eight years ago that are great golf courses but are in bad markets, maybe a market where people won't pay high-end daily fees. So those are the ones we have culled out of our portfolio. We've learned a lot over the years, but if it's a great location and a great opportunity, we'll jump in. In the past, the land developers almost always gave us the land, and on top of that, they gave us lot rebates or concessions to build a golf course on their property. There are some great deals out there, if a person wants to be in that business because there aren't many people with the capital anymore. There will be some good opportunities during the next five to 10 years.

Q Will the industry experience a boost in development during the next five years?

It will be very gradual. It might stay level. We're not going to see the growth we saw in the 1990s. I expect the industry to stabilize at somewhere between 150 and 200 new golf course construction projects a year in the United States.

Q From a demographic perspective, where's demand going to come from in the future?

Demand is going to come from the baby boomers who have money to spend on exclusive golf at special kinds of destinations. Much of the market today consists of high-end country clubs or high-end national clubs, such as Sutton Bay or Sand Hills or the high-end golf destinations like Pacific Dunes or Pinehurst. The demographics are the 40- to 65-year-old group right now. It's a bit beyond baby boomers, but that's the group that has the money to spend and can afford to join those types of clubs or enjoy spending that kind of money for a golf trip.

Q Is there a need for more less-expensive golf courses to be developed?

There's a huge need. The industry is poised to grow the game, but it's hard to grow the game when the average round of golf is \$50 or \$60. The problem is how do you build a golf course that can be marketed for \$20 or \$25 a round. It's difficult to get a golf course built for that kind of price, unless there's some help from municipalities that have a rationale to provide their constituents with low-cost golf. But that's out of vogue. Most of

those markets have an oversupply of golf courses, but the prices haven't come down. What's going to happen – and it's happened in a lot of markets with the pricing pressure – is that some of the middle-market golf courses, and even the high-end golf courses, will have to be repositioned as a lower-priced facility. That's going to happen for financial reasons. It will be the second, third and fourth owners of these courses who will get it down to where they can afford to have less expensive golf.

Q If there's going to be less-expensive golf, what part of golf course operations will be less funded?

First of all, if it's a new project, the construction costs have to be lower than what they have been. Secondly, players' expectations have to be lowered a bit. Everyone is conditioned to expect perfect wall-to-wall green conditions. So the superintendent will be involved in that. I get tired of people in the Midwest saying you have to spend \$600,000 or \$700,000 on maintenance a year. You don't have to. There are ways to reduce the maintenance cost. It's part maintenance, part expectations and part construction costs or low acquisition cost going in, which will reduce the cost of a round of golf.

Q What type of projects are you looking for?

We look at all golf course projects – new construction, renovations and irrigation installation. We're probably the biggest golf course contractor in the country, so we take a look at everything. We're a specialty company that probably negotiates 30 percent to 50 percent of our work. Many of the owners today are interested in their contractor's reputation and financial strength, and that is where we have flourished. The rest of our jobs are open bid, usually with a prequalified group of bidders. If it's a project that's going to have six or more bidders, we probably aren't going to waste our time looking at that project. With that many bidders, there usually are some bottom feeders out there that are taking projects just for work, so it would be hard for us to be competitive.

On top of that, we've expanded into sports fields, parks and landscaping to help us keep our volume where it needs to be because of the softer golf market.

Q Are there any other types of projects you wouldn't get involved with?

We would see who's involved in the bidding. If the owner hasn't been very selec-

tive about whom he's going to allow to bid – if we know one or two of them shouldn't be on that list – we'll back off. Or if it's a high profile project with difficult conditions – either a lot of rock or very wet conditions or an impossible schedule – we'll steer away from those as well.

Q Are there any projects you haven't done that you would like to do?

I pride myself in developing the talk-of-the-town-type golf courses – the premier courses in the United States. I like to have a couple of those under construction at all times, but we don't want all of our work to be high end. We take just as much pride in building affordable golf courses because we believe in that market. We do a lot of renovation work on the really high-end golf courses – Torrey Pines South, The Southern Hills, The Colonial, The Dupont Club, the Broadmoor Mountain course. We steer much of our work in this direction. Usually, these high-end renovations are either on a negotiated basis or with a very select bid list.

Q How much of your work is new construction and how much is renovation?

My guess is 20 percent renovation and 80 percent new golf on the golf course side. If you divide up all of our business, 15 percent is landscaping and recreational development, 15 percent renovation, and 70 percent new golf.

If you did that by numbers of projects, we might only have 15 new golf courses that we build each year. We probably work on 40 renovation projects a year, and then 15 or 20 recreation development projects. We'll be working on anywhere from 70 to 90 projects in a year, and only 20 or 25 might be new construction.

Q Is reconstruction more of a trend nowadays?

Yes. A reconstruction is actually a golf course that happens to be built on the site of another golf course. We call them blow-ups, whereas many renovations can be called restorations if the course is being reconstructed to its original state or look. There are still a lot of renovations where they are rebuilding only the greens and tees and maybe installing a new irrigation system, but many more courses are more of a rebuild. About a third of our high-end renovations are of the reconstruction type.

Q Is most of that with high-end courses?

Some are. I've also seen some in-field golf courses that might have been a low-end country club or a public course in certain markets that have been converted to a high-end private club where they get some lots designed in their excess acreage. They repositioned a lower-price course into a higher-end product because of the great location.

Q Have you done anything overseas?

We've worked in Barbados. We did the Sandy Lane project where Tiger Woods spent his honeymoon. We've worked on several projects in the Dominican Republic. We have a couple of projects in the works in Italy, and we have some upcoming work in Mexico.

Q What is the biggest difference working outside the United States?

In most cases, we'll supply the expertise, maybe five to 10 people to a job, and we become more of a construction manager in which we will show the local people how to build the golf course, and we'll manage the construction. We'll build it for them, but we'll use their work force and machinery, or we'll have the owner buy machinery. At Sandy Lane for instance, we had the owner of the project purchase all of the construction equipment necessary to build their golf courses because it was a 36-hole project. Our work outside the United States is more of a management process than it is taking a lump sum contract to do the work.

Q Is it more or less preferable to work that way?

It's more preferable because the only way we'll look at those projects is on a fixed-fee basis where we'll know we're going to make a profit. The negative side of that is that we have our people out of town, traveling throughout the world, which is difficult. It's critical to make sure you have your payments lined up properly because the last thing you want to do is chase your money in a foreign country.

Q What's the easiest and most difficult part of being a developer?

The easiest part is the passion. Unfortunately or fortunately, passion drives this business a lot. Everyone thinks their golf course will be more successful than the one next door. The best part about development is this passion, and I have it for the projects we get involved in. The bad part for many developers can be the cost overruns, underestimating the mar-

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This year, the golf business is forecasted to remain similar to last year. However, some superintendents believe this year will be better than last. And some owners, despite tightening golf course maintenance budgets, have spent money to improve their course. The Coeur d'Alene Resort Golf Course (14th hole pictured) is one course that's being renovated this year.

