ciation continually reviews and improves its specifications for greens construction – not only from a scientific standpoint, but also from a cost standpoint. Current specifications are based on scientific laboratory testing that will ensure, with proper construction, a green that will perform for many years.

Along with the USGA-specified green, the California green has gained a lot of popularity during the past 10 years. Although this construction method had its early share of problems, many superintendents are reporting excellent performance with this method.

Superintendents should thank technology for producing excellent sand-particle sizing and root-zone blending. Golf course material suppliers presently have sophisticated sand screening and mixing machines at their disposal. These machines ensure the proper material will be produced and mixed for greens root zones. The increased popularity of the California green might be a result of the technological advances in sand screening machinery. The most critical part of the California green is the sand-particle sizing. With today's machinery, the particle-size specifications needed for the construction of a California green are much easier to obtain.

These two methods create debate among superintendents and academics. Regardless of which green method an individual prefers, both have their place in today's golf course construction world.

Irrigation

The old design of a common irrigation system that watered greens and surrounds isn't used anymore. This might be one of the biggest reasons for great greens quality and proper water management. Presently, most golf courses have a dedicated greens system that waters the green surface only. This offers the flexibility to water the green surface independently from the surrounds area, therefore, putting exactly the amount needed on the green. Irrigation companies also should be commended for developing efficient sprinkler heads and computerized controls that offer considerable flexibility.

Water management

Overwatering might have been the biggest mistake made when superintendents switched from managing soil push-up greens to managing sand-based USGA greens. Their past experiences with push-up greens, in which watering almost every night was the norm, didn't translate to sand-based greens. The perched water table theory of the USGA green ensures efficient water usage. This table, along with independent watering systems, has changed the face of watering practices to more of a fill-the-glass approach. For many, this approach means irrigating to fill the root-zone cavity (the glass) to field capacity, plus an additional amount sometimes for flushing through positive drainage. Then, the turf is dried down the cavity water (drink the glass) nearly empty, and the cycle is repeated. This method of watering has produced excellent turfgrass and water conservation results. Many of the past failures of the USGA green have been directly related to overwatering. Now, through experience and irrigation design, these overwatering failures have been reduced drastically.

Cultural practices

One benefit of the new superbents has been the development of equipment that will help manage them. Using aerification equipment, which produces tight spacings – as close as one inch by one inch – seems to be popular. Much more attention is being given to thatch and organic matter build-up than ever before. Many superintendents are basing their programs on a 15- to 20-percent surface area removal impacted theory – or using research conducted by Dr. Bob Carrow of the University of Georgia – which suggests a maximum of 4-percent organic matter be in the upper 2 inches of the green surface, to design their aerification programs.

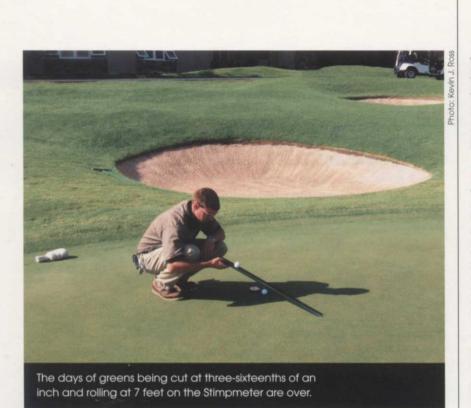
The development of true dethatching units also has been beneficial for managing the thatching potential of present day bentgrasses. These machines offer depths as deep as 1.5 inches and various blade widths from 1 to 3 millimeters. Many superintendents are performing dethatching and aerification operations at the same time. This can increase the SARI drastically and lower the thatch/organic matter percentage quickly.

Topdressing

Looking back to the three-sixteenths of an inch cutting heights of the 1970s, superintendents could count on one hand the number of times per season greens would be topdressed. That has changed. Lighter topdressing applied more frequently throughout the major portion of the growing season seems to be the standard. Many clubs are using fertilizer-type rotary spreaders with kiln-dried sand throughout the summer every two to three weeks. Some clubs are even using green-died sand for the light and frequent applications. The color of the sand blends into the turf surface so well that golfers can't tell the green has been topdressed. Along with these light dustings, superintendents probably are topdressing



course maintenance



more heavily than in the past. Credit should be given to material suppliers for producing spec topdressing sand, whether colored, dry or normal. There also is a fairly new product on the market: sand (topdressing) coated with fertilizer. Initial research shows positive results from this material when used in conjunction with aerification.

Mowing and green speed

It wasn't that long ago that three-sixteenths of an inch was the normal cutting height for greens. At most courses today, three-sixteenths of an inch might get someone a pink slip. Tees, approaches and some fairways are cut at this height. Today, some golf courses are cutting greens below a tenth of an inch. But how low can one go? The bottom is approaching rapidly.

There's no question the need for speed has brought these low heights, and speed is most likely here to stay. When determining the perfect speed, a variety of inputs should be considered - from green design to player's ability. The best way to determine a proper green speed might be to follow the model of Mike Morris, superintendent at Crystal Downs Country Club in Frankfort, Mich. He ran a two-year study using weather data, membership surveys, cultural practices and Stimpmeter readings. With these inputs, Morris was able to determine the optimum green speed range the membership desired and what he could deliver on a daily basis. Maybe the most important policy Morris and his club came up with was not to alter green-speed range. So no matter what the day, tournament or not, it's the same. This eliminates, quite possibly, the biggest problem many superintendents do to themselves: Soup up the greens for the big club tournaments (13 feet) and then slow them back to reality a week later (10 feet). The floodgates for complaints have been opened now.

Fertilization practices

There are two big changes regarding analyzing greens fertilization. First, the total amount of nitrogen used per 1,000 square feet has declined dramatically throughout the past 30 years. "Turfgrass Science and Culture," the textbook written by James B. Beard in 1973, stated the nitrogen requirement for bentgrass should be 0.8-1.4 #N/M per growing month. Now, even Beard acknowledges that was too high. Today, some greens are being managed with as low as 1-2#N/M per year, while a new course grow-in might be as high as 6-12#N/M. Disregarding a grow-in situation, the nitrogen amounts have declined from Beard's first recommendations to the current 0.25-0.50#N/M range per growing month.

The second change is the popularity of foliar feeding. This might be the one practice that has led to the use of decreasing amounts of nitrogen. Spraying low amounts of nitrogen with the use of a solubles/liquids has become one of the most popular methods of fertilization during the past 10 years. This method, or spoon-feeding as it's been coined, isn't strictly limited to greens. Many courses have used this on tees, and fairways are becoming a popular spoon-feeding target, too. The ability to spray these materials more frequency while using extremely low rates benefits the health of the turfgrass. This type of approach can't be accomplished with traditional granular fertilizers.

Seeding vs. sodding

For years, seeding had been the preferred method for greens establishment, and sodding was taboo. But sodding has made major gains, which have been made primarily because of the ability of sod producers to grow quality sod and address the layering phenomenon. In the past, failures of sodded greens have been related mostly to an incompatible match of the root-zone mix with the sod medium. With proper laboratory testing to determine the compatible match of a root zone and the material the sod is grown on, the sod disasters of the past are pretty much over.

With sodding gaining more acceptance, the debate about whether courses should be sodded completely is heating up. Developers and owners can make money more quickly if courses are sodded entirely. Sodding probably won't displace seeding, but it seems to be an acceptable method and can no longer be labeled taboo.

The future

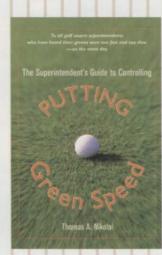
Are superintendents practicing the ultimate greens management? Maybe. Can the height of cut be lowered more? Not much. Years ago, Penncross was considered the ultimate, as was five-thirty-seconds of an inch and 10 feet on the Stimpmeter. Anything could be possible 25 years from now. GCN

Kevin J. Ross is director of golf course management at Country Club of the Rockies in Vail, Colo. He can be reached at kjross@vail.net.



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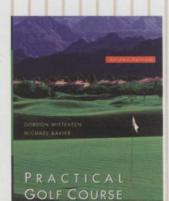
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Business management

More than discounts

FACILITIES OFFER VALUE TO ENTICE GOLFERS TO TRY AND INCREASE ROUNDS AND REVENUE

by ROB

lay is down, yet more golf courses are being built. This situation has called for existing courses to go the extra THOMAS mile to attract customers. Discounting rates, offering extra amenities and implementing new marketing plans are a few ways courses are trying to accomplish that.

> According to Allen Anderson, director of marketing at Grand Geneva Resort in Lake Geneva, Wis., golfers travel as far as 90 miles to play the resort's two championship layouts - The Highlands and The Brute. Even with a slumping market, Anderson says rounds at the resort have increased throughout the years without the resort having to discount rates across the board.

> "Grand Geneva was designed and intended to be a premier course and a special experience," he says. "We have found if customers get conditioned to discounted rates, that's what the course becomes. Having said that, we're not insensitive to (economic) conditions."

> Packages and options are available for different times of day or days of the week at Grand Geneva. A tiered-rate system discounts play in the afternoon, after peak morning hours. "Sizzling Sundays" were an answer to lack of play on Sundays, which are turnover days at resorts. Grand Geneva's offer of \$119 for 36 holes is more than 50 percent cheaper than the normal rate. Golfers start on the Highlands course and make the turn as tee times permit on the Brute course.

> "It attracted golfers in droves," Anderson says of the promotion. "It was a huge success and continues to be."

> The Harbor Golf Club in Ashtabula, Ohio, doesn't offer packages, though two of the club's competitors, Maple Ridge Golf Course and Chapel Hills Golf Course, do. They offer a special that allows golfers to play 36 holes with a cart and lunch for \$35

and \$36, respectively. Harbor Golf Club's Joey Huang says specials will be considered in the future.

Huang is one of 12 former members of the Ashtabula Country Club who purchased the course this past winter, renamed it and opened it to the public. He thinks the Harbor Golf Club will stand out in the market for several reasons.

The biggest difference is the condition of the course," he says. "We have the best greens in Ashtabula County. (Superintendent) Doug Schira does a fantastic job for us.

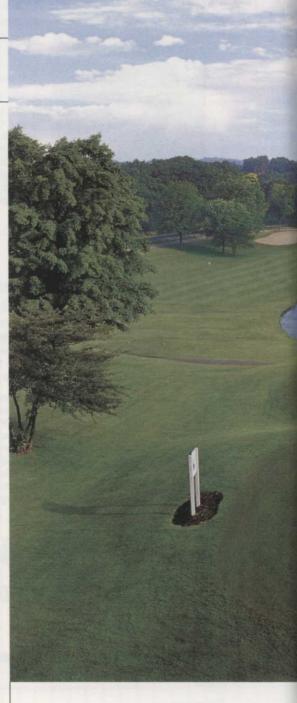
"We really want to provide a great golf experience," he adds. "We provide a great course to play for a public-course price."

Most of the seven courses Harbor Golf Club competes against offer 18 holes and a pro shop with snack bar. Two of them have a driving range. But the Harbor Golf Club offers a swimming pool, tennis courts and two driving ranges - one for woods and one for irons.

Additionally, the club offers three levels of membership - single, family and junior. Unlimited use of the driving range, pool and tennis courts will separate the club from others in the area, according to Huang.

StillWaters Golf Club in Dadeville, Ala., isn't discounting rates either. The club once housed 36 holes of golf but now maintains 18 holes for play. The open course, The Highlands, is a par-72 layout with undulating fairways and five sets of tees from which golfers can choose to play. Todd Rogers, StillWaters' general manager, says initial improvements were made by new owner Phillip Zettler in the spring of 2004 before the course reopened, but nothing was done specifically to attract more golfers.

"The reason we had to spend money initially on the course was because of the lack of funds spent before we took over," Rogers says. "The bunkers were trash, weeds had



taken over, etc. All we did was give it a quick facelift and then started playing golf."

The \$45 greens fees might deter some local play, but Rogers says StillWaters is looking to bring in players from surrounding areas such as Auburn and Montgomery.

"They might be a little high for the area, but we don't seem to attract the local crowd even at \$30," he says. "Most of our golfers are in the resort from out of town."

The Brute, one of two courses at Grand Geneva Resort in Lake Geneva, Wis., is the centerpiece in a collaboration with other area courses to attract more golfers to a destination.

There's added value to the \$45 greens fee, according to Rogers. That cost includes unlimited golf, a cart to use throughout the stay, range balls and help from the head golf pro to select the right tees for play.

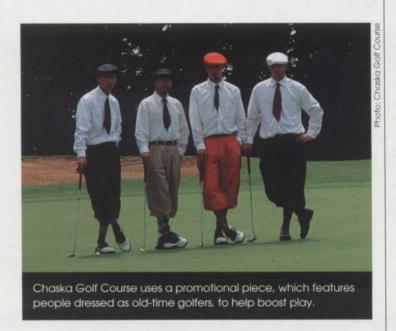
In addition to golf, StillWaters offers villas and guest suites for overnight stays. It also will work with golfers to customize golf packages that include meals and nearby recreational activities.

Marketing plans

Aside from attractive rates, marketing is another way to boost rounds. Word of mouth might go a long way for the Harbor Golf Club, but the new ownership is making its first move by aggressively advertising in local newspapers and on radio stations. As a private course, 7,000 rounds were played at the Ashtabula Country Club during 2004. Looking at a pair of competitors, Huang says 18,000 to 22,000 rounds were played elsewhere. He believes a realistic goal for the Harbor Golf Club is to double the number of rounds from the previous year.

Grand Geneva spends significant marketing dollars at golf shows, as well as advertising on sports talk radio and golf-specific publications, according to Anderson. But its marketing goes one step further. Along with four other courses, Grand Geneva was

business management



instrumental in creating the Geneva Lake Area Golf Council. Instead of looking at the opening of a new area course (Hawk's View) as a threat, the staff at Grand Geneva looked at it as an opportunity.

"We're not competing against each other as much as we are other destinations," Anderson says.

In addition to golf, Grand Geneva offers tennis, four restaurants, a spa and a water park resort.

In Lebanon, Ore., Mallard Creek's general manager Mark Tunstill is a member of local groups such as the chamber of commerce and tourism and economic development boards. Tunstill says he's better able to promote the course through these groups.

In Appleton, Wis., Chaska Golf Course was voted "Best of the Fox River Valley" for nine consecutive years and has a fourstar rating in *Golf Digest's* "Places to Play" to lure golfers. But the course doesn't rest on just that, according to course manager Stephanie Jack. She involves the entire staff when making recommendations and brainstorming before the start of every season at an orientation.

"This day is spent with all course staff – grounds and golf shop – involved in the interchange of ideas and goal building for the season," Jack says. "There are many returning staff every year, but sometimes the best ideas come from our novices."

This thinking has led to a singles-only golf league and a week established to teach adults the game of golf. The adults program was initiated in the early 1980s and includes beginning and intermediate golfers.

About an hour away from Chaska are The Golf Courses of Lawsonia. This 36-hole club offers a links course and a woodlands course. Some weekday rates have been discounted to locals. The club also uses off-site booking Web sites to attract more golfers, according to Gary Zimmerman, director of golf. Additionally, Lawsonia displays a booth at golf shows and has increased the overall advertising budget.

"Our competition is mainly from newer, upscale destination courses," Zimmerman says. "We are putting money back into both the courses, and we're adding new forward tee boxes to give the higher handicap player a more enjoyable round."

All are welcome

Reaching golfers, including potential players, of all ages is yet another way to help increase rounds and improve business. Regardless of handicap, Mallard Creek is focusing attention on existing and future golfers. Realizing that it's easier to retain current customers than to attract new ones, Tunstill helped generate a program that's enticing to both. Every Wednesday evening from 6 p.m. until 7:30 p.m., the course offers free golf clinics to anyone interested. The facility promotes this in-house, in the newspaper and at a local ice cream parlor for maximum exposure.

Mallard Creek focuses a great deal of attention on young golfers – knowing they're the future of the game. Kids ages 15 and younger play free when accompanied by a playing adult. Sometimes restrictions apply.

The course also features a certified junior program. Kids, ages 12 through 15, play for free anytime once they finish the weekend certification course. Mallard Creek also is introducing the Duckie Course, which is a shortened kids course with rubber duckie tees. The front nine measures about 1,400 yards, and the back nine is about 1,500 yards.

Operational differences

The way a course operates also can influence business. With an emphasis on customer service, Jack says Chaska relies on crossover efforts between the clubhouse and maintenance staffs to provide golfers with a more enjoyable experience. Jack says she rewards the employees with higher pay.

"I have never paid minimum wage to staff as I am asking for more than minimum efforts from all who are employed at Chaska," she says. "In our area, we are considered leaders in the industry and continue to think outside the box or ahead of our competition to continue to be the best choice possible for those who love golf."

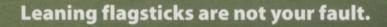
Because the Chaska superintendent is at the course prior to opening, he can unlock the gates and provide early golfers with cart keys to begin play. Golfers are given the option to play and pay at the turn. This help goes both ways. In return, the clubhouse staff helps with course maintenance, especially late in the season during the aerification process.

Whether it's course conditions, value for their dollar or added amenities, golfers tend to play where they're most comfortable, and courses are doing what it takes to attract them in a rather tight market. GCN

Rob Thomas is the associate editor of Golf Course News. He can be reached at rthomas@gie.net.

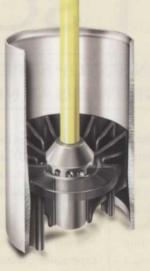


Dealing with fewer golfers on Sundays, Grand Geneva Resort implemented a 36-hole deal that allows golfers to save money and increasing the number of rounds they play



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Course management

Superintendent Gregg Gomes completed a grow-in at Antler Creek Golf Course in Peyton, Colo., which opened this past fall. It was Gomes' first grow-in project.

From scratch

INEXPERIENCE DOESN'T STOP SUPERINTENDENTS FROM OVERSEEING GROW-INS AT NEW COURSES

JOHN

eing a golf course superintendent at a new course can be more challenging than being a superintendent at WALSH a course that's been established. Hours are longer, and preparation is more involved. A superintendent doesn't have to have grow-in experience to get a job opening a new course, but successfully opening a new course is a significant accomplishment to put on a superintendent's resume. He's proven he can oversee a grow-in. Such is the case with John Johnson, superintendent at Winterstone Golf Course in Independence,

Mo.; Gregg Gomes, superintendent at Antler Creek Golf Course in Peyton, Colo.; and Mike Giddens, superintendent at the 9-hole First Tee of Lakeland YMCA in Florida.

Previous experience

Neither Gomes nor Giddens had previous experience executing a grow-in before taking their current positions. Johnson had some experience before taking the job at Winterstone, but not as the superintendent in charge. Before Johnson came to Winterstone, he was an assistant at Prairie

Highlands Golf Course in Olathe, Kan., for two years, and before that spent two years at Loch Lloyd Country Club in Belton, Mo.

"The move to Prairie Highlands was lateral, but I went there to get grow-in experience," Johnson says. "You work long hours on a grow-in. It's a full-time commitment. You have to think hard if you want to take a job like this. (At Winterstone), I worked 63 straight days for 12 to 14 hours a day. When you have the weather, you have to work."

Gomes previously worked at the Santa Ana Golf Club in Santa Ana Pueblo, N.M., and before that worked in Colorado for seven years. Although he never did a growin before Antler Creek, he felt he was very strong agronomically and had enough friends that had done grow-ins.

Before he was hired at First Tee, Giddens worked at the private, 18-hole Lone Palm Golf Club in Lakeland for three and a half years as an equipment operator. He was one of 20 guys on staff. While at Lone Palm, he also was in school earning a degree in turfgrass management. He graduated in December 2004 from Florida Southern College in Lakeland.

Giddens' connection to First Tee started with an inauguration event for the contributions made by the U.S. Golf Association to the First Tee of Lakeland YMCA. Golf course architect Steve Smyers and his wife, Sharon, also were involved with raising money for the golf course project.

"I was interested in volunteering and went to talk to Alice Collins, the president and c.e.o. of the YMCA for this region, and Steve and Sharon and I explained my situation to them," Giddens says. "My name was mentioned during the superintendents committee, which was looking for a superintendent for the facility. They asked me and said it was my job to lose."

There are three superintendents on the committee who were selected by the YMCA to oversee the facility.

Giddens says the biggest drawback for him was not having the years of experience as a superintendent, but he was fortunate to have the committee for help.

"I've never done a grow-in before," he says. "I was involved with a small grow-in of a nursery green at Lone Palm, but nothing to this extent. Not everyone gets to start at a new course from scratch and see it through all the way. However, some superintendents might have knowledge about what to do with a grow-in, even though they haven't done one." Giddens completed an internship with John G. Walton Construction last summer that provided him with some grow-in experience.

First timer

The First Tee course was previously an 18hole par-3 course that closed about three years ago. The facility was built in 1965 and was owned by George Jenkins, founder of the Publix supermarket chain. Publix owns the land now, and the YMCA operates the facility. Giddens reports to an executive director of the YMCA.

The course, which also has a driving range, opened last month. It was scheduled to open November of last year, but was delayed because of the four hurricanes that blew through Florida. Grassing started in October 2004. Giddens says he took it day-by-day and week-by-week and wasn't pressed to meet a deadline.

With a budget of \$120,000, Giddens doesn't have much to work with and depends on volunteers and help from other area courses to maintain the First Tee.

"Right now, I have a volunteer staff of three, but I'm in the process of hiring one full-time person and two part-time workers," he says. "One of my temporary employees is a Champions Tour caddy.

"I was using equipment from other courses," he adds. "And the industry has stepped up. One superintendent on the committee talked to Toro, and the company let us use equipment that was part of a grow-in package. Toro will keep some of the equipment, and then I'll purchase some equipment from them. Additionally, some courses have donated older pieces of equipment."

The lighting and netting for the driving range also was donated.

The First Tee course features Jonesdwarf Bermudagrass on the greens and Celebration Bermudagrass on the fairways, tees and approaches. The course was sprigged except for the greens surrounds, which were sodded.

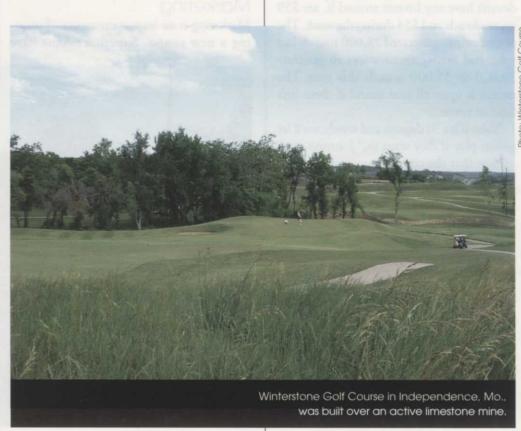
"Smyers had used Jonesdwarf before but not Celebration," Giddens says. "But after speaking with the committee, they decided to use it. I've worked with 419 Bermudagrass in the past, and Celebration is darker in color compared to 419, and it holds its color throughout the year. There's a huge visual difference, and it's an aggressive grass."

Settled down

Winterstone, which opened in May 2003, was built over an active limestone mine that's 50 to 100 feet below the ground's surface. And every day at 3:15 p.m., the ground shakes because of the mining, which can cause problems.

"My first year had a lot of irrigation blowouts, but last year I didn't have any," Johnson says.

During the construction of a new course,



course management



a superintendent usually is brought in when irrigation heads are being installed, according to Johnson, who flagged all the heads at Winterstone.

"The last thing we did was seed greens in August," he says. "From September of '02 to May of '03, we were in grow-in mode," adding that the staff still prepared the course a bit after it opened.

Johnson also was in charge of hiring his entire staff. Even though this is his first head superintendent job, hiring wasn't new to him because he was involved in the hiring process at Prairie Highlands and Lock Lloyd.

The green fees for Winterstone, which doesn't have any houses around it, are \$59 on weekends and \$54 during the week. The public course generated 28,000 rounds last year, and management wants to generate 30,000 to 35,000 rounds this year. The course is open all year round if there isn't frost or snow.

"Even if it's 30 degrees and windy, we'll let golfers play if they want to," Johnson says.

Now that the course is up and running, Johnson says he would consider another job.

"I would pack up and move, but I wouldn't mind staying here," he says.

Western opening

The 18-hole daily fee Antler Creek course, which features Dominant Extreme bentgrass on the greens and a dwarf bluegrass/ fescue mix on the rest of the course, opened last year. The course had a soft opening Sept. 3, 2004, and the grand opening will be July 3 2005.

Gomes, who has four full-time people on staff and 20 part-time workers in the summer, says this job is a step above his last one and he feels more pride in it. He says the main reason for the move was to do a grow-in.

"This course is like my baby," he says.

Gomes' biggest challenge with the growin was that he did it without a pump station. He used gravity fed water and worked through that for five months. Because of the lack of pressure, the irrigation heads became clogged and stuck. Gomes says 70 to 80 pounds of pressure is needed and he only had 50 pounds. The 2,000 irrigation heads we're fixed manually, and the lines were flushed, but there wasn't enough pressure to completely flush lines so some sediment remained until the pump station was installed to provide the right amount of pressure.

Gomes' grow-in responsibilities might not stop there. He says another nine holes could be added to the course as early as October.

Gomes, who has worked on eight golf courses, was surprised by the climate similarities between New Mexico, where he used to work, and Colorado. In New Mexico, where he was at about 5,000 feet above sea level, the winds blew all the time. In Colorado, where he is about 7,000 feet above sea level, the wind blows just as hard.

"Sometimes I can't water because it's too windy," he says.

Gomes plans on being at Antler Creek for quite some time.

Marketing

Marketing is an important aspect of opening a new course. Superintendents have different involvement with the marketing of a course. Johnson says Winterstone had a soft opening with not much advertising because management didn't want to run 25,000 people through the course by the end of its first year.

"We relied on word of mouth and newspaper articles," he says. "Then last year, we went with ads on the radio and newspaper."

Giddens says he has no marketing responsibilities, which are mostly taken care of by Sharon Smyers.

Dos and don'ts

The main difference between working on a course that has been opened for some time compared to working at a new course is the construction mode, Johnson says.

"I realized how much work can get done because you're not waiting for golfers," he says.

One important aspect for a superintendent working on a grow-in is hiring a good assistant, according to Johnson.

"We work a lot of hours," he says. "It will cause problems if you don't have a good assistant."

Gomes has another suggestion, whether a superintendent is going work on a growin or not.

"Never put yourself in situation where you can't be successful," he says. "I've never made a lateral move. Don't make lateral moves." GCN

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Superintendent Mike Giddens started grassing the First Tee at Lakeland YMCA in Florida in October, The course opened last month.