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## Bunker maintenance in mind

Some golf course superintendents have asked me about my thoughts about how individual bunker design relates to maintenance. Well, I've been thinking about bunkers a lot lately, given the golf economy's downturn and the rising standards expected of bunker maintenance.

Bunker maintenance requires time and money, particularly when you think about how golfers expect bunkers to be perfect playing surfaces. During the past 40 years, I've seen the quality of greens progress from bumpy to perfect, tees maintained to former green standards, fairways maintained to former tee standards, and roughs maintained to former fairway standards. Now the focus is shifting to make bunkers better, if not perfect, playing surfaces. The goal seems to be that they're groomed to make bunker shots just as difficult as fairway shots.

But to me, a lower standard of bunker maintenance would save money and restore integrity and meaning to bunkers. It would be a cheaper, easier way to make a course more challenging, in contrast to the expense of earthmoving, grassing, irrigation, cart path construction and subsequent maintenance required to extend tees for more length.

The standard, preferred course of action seems to be to spend more on bunker construction and maintenance. Bunkers always have been considered more expensive to maintain than turf, although in the old days, raking them three times a week versus mowing rough three times a week shouldn't have cost substantially more. Nowadays, higher bunker standards require daily hand-raking and edging and weekly leaf/clipping blowing. Some courses deep-rake bunkers to loosen sand for better play when there's been too much rain and water bunkers to firm them when there's been too little rain.

With high standards desired, bunkers consume a far higher percentage of maintenance dollars than their total and relative acreage would suggest. Bunkers cover no more than two to three acres or about 2 to 3 percent of the 100 to 150 acres typically maintained. But they might consume 20 to 30 percent of the maintenance budget if all maintenance actions are accounted for.

To facilitate desired conditions, bun-

kers are constructed with a bunker liner to separate sand from subsoil and full herringbone tile with flush-outs or large clean-out boxes. Some have experimented with the equivalent of choker and gravel layers for better drainage. Many course managers think nothing of using sand from a thousand miles away because it's whiter or eliminates plugged lies because of its angular structure. Buying this type of sand is expensive because of the special screening required to make it fit USGA recommendations perfectly and shipping costs. And it's not just a one-time expense because the sand must be replaced every so often.

Despite these higher construction standards, bunkers still cost a lot to maintain. Superintendents say liners reduce, but don't eliminate, their maintenance problems of clogged drains, sand that washes from rainfall and the need to replace sand from wind loss or contamination. The consensus is that sand needs to be replaced and bunker drainage rebuilt every three to five years without a liner or every five to seven years with a liner. Perhaps some of that rebuilding is because of rising golfer expectations as much as it is contaminated sand, which might still play acceptably long after it's lost its color from contamination.

### Changing style

Architects are focused on bunker design and placement to enhance play, but I've changed philosophies of bunker style to accommodate new expectations – and budget realities – to reduce bunker maintenance.

One way is to reduce the number of bunkers. Given that few sites have the natural sandy soil, it's hard to justify bunkers as natural design elements. Architects probably have overemphasized the use of steep-sloped cape-and-bay-style bunkers, morphing them into visually dramatic and artistic elements that can be a signature design. Many golf architects prefer the look of cape-and-bay-style bunkers with sloped sand. Fabric bunker liners were supposed to make these more practical, but they don't eliminate sand washing completely.

I've flattened my cape-and-bay-style bunkers, reducing maximum slope from 25 percent to 12 percent, which usually allows them to hold up in moderate rains. However, attaining the same visibility us-

ing half the slope doubles the bunkers' front-to-back dimensions, increasing size and daily hand-raking.

We can creatively use fairway slopes, grass bunkers and mounds, steep banks and good old-fashioned depth perception tricks to make shots challenging. In many ways, using different hazards should allow us to make each hole a bit more unique. For instance, aren't there too many greens with bunkers left and right already?

Another style change is to reduce bunker sizes. Before, a maintenance-friendly bunker had 16- to 20-foot-wide minimum bays to turn mechanical bunker rakes at the bunker ends comfortably, making for fairly large bunkers. Smooth curves and edges allowed courses with a tight budget to rake right to the bunker edge with power rakes.

Smaller bunkers should reduce raking time as well. Aesthetically, this is often an improvement because smaller bunkers are often in better proportion to the greens and create the right aesthetic balance. Superintendents are finding hand-raking consumes as much labor as power-raking because they always use two-man crews (one riding the power rake and another to hand-rake edges). And while hand-raking takes more time, travel time of utility vehicles is greatly reduced.

Generally, superintendents prefer flat sand bunkers with steep grass banks. They accept the regular schedule of bunker-bank hand maintenance – or look the other way as employees push the limits of riding mowers – more than the unpredictability of sand shoveling.

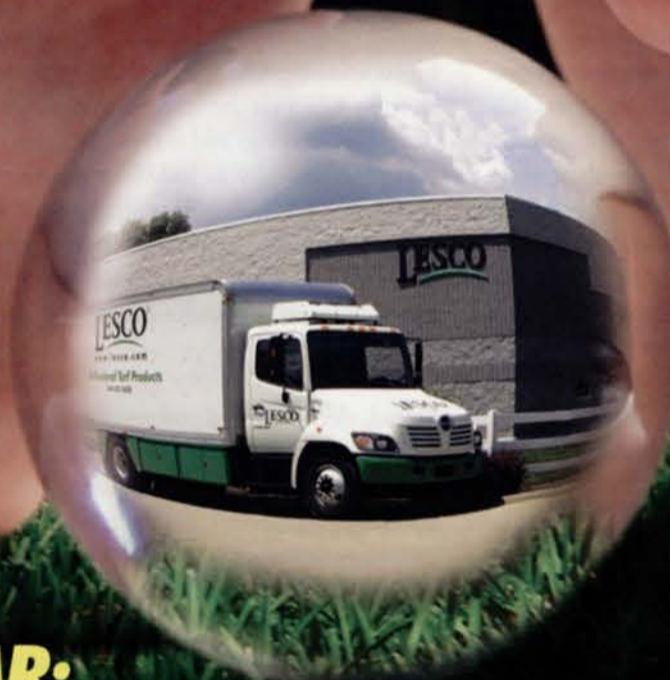
In this instance, players side with superintendents. In a cape-and-bay-style bunker, a shot missing the green by 5 feet often plugs in sloping sand, while a 10-foot miss finds flat sand and a better lie. In flat-bottom bunkers, the 5-foot miss deflects off the grass bank and lands lightly in the flat bottom, giving all misses better lies.

Bunkers are placed and shaped at the discretion of the architect. If money is a factor, it makes sense to use discretion to build bunkers that are more easily maintained. If I do, my bunker designs will less likely be eliminated during the next recession, as has happened to so many bunkers during times when money is tight. GCN

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## A first-time ballot

A vicious circle can be defined as when one thing leads to another thing and then the other thing reverts back to the one thing. Unfortunately, the GCSAA election process offers one of the better examples of how a vicious circle can undermine effective governance. Over 99 percent of all eligible votes within GCSAA national elections are accumulated by chapters in blocks, which are then used as tradable chips in upcoming elections. This happens because Article I of the association bylaws empowers the board to define the standing rules for membership, which states “a member’s vote will automatically be assigned to the chapter unless the individual member indicates on an appropriate form that he/she wishes to vote as an individual.”

Left standing, this defaulting election policy will continue to increase the number of indifferent, uninformed members while at the same time discouraging natural leaders within the membership from seeking board/committee service.

The obvious way to move away from chapter block voting would be to allow members to vote as individuals directly to the GCSAA via the Internet where: (i) eligible voters could gain access to a computerized election process via their unique member ID numbers; and (ii) safety protocols would prevent members from voting more than once on any single issue.

This would appear to be the perfect solution to a serious problem. However, when elected association leaders are canvassed by interested parties – including myself – about this matter, they consistently state or imply that because members generally are indifferent to, and therefore not adequately informed about basic election issues, they can’t be trusted to vote.

There it is, the vicious circle: Individual members shouldn’t be given the opportunity to vote because they’re uninformed. But they’re uninformed because the chapter block voting process dictates this. The obvious solution to this dilemma would be to educate GCSAA members about election issues via the Internet and chapter town hall meetings and then allow them to vote electronically as individuals directly to the GCSAA. But this isn’t about to happen because it’s apparent that elected GCSAA and chapter leaders don’t want members voting as individuals.

### Checks and balances

Sound, election-based government requires a system of checks and balances to insure conflicts of interest don’t permeate and undermine government. The best example illustrating this premise is the three branches of the U.S. federal government. Imagine how the federal government would function if the executive branch served alone, without the counter-balancing influence of the legislative and judicial branches? The office of the president would become a dictatorship, and the country would be diminished accordingly.

Similarly, it should be noted the GCSAA bylaws virtually are void of any system of checks and balances and the association is indeed being diminished accordingly. For example:

1. Article V assures that chapter delegates will cast all votes for their chapter members in GCSAA elections – an approach that bypasses individual member voting, which is the very cornerstone of a system of checks and balances.

2. Article VII grants the board of directors the sole power to appoint all members of the nominating committee. Regrettably, this: (i) fosters board secrecy because those with contrary thinking are denied board access; (ii) denies the membership the opportunity to hold the board accountable because member issue-voting can be/has been denied indefinitely; and (iii) creates a serious conflict of interest because the nominating committee, along with politically appointed past presidents and members at large, serve as the board oversight task force every third year, i.e., the board is basically reviewing itself.

3. Article VII solely authorizes the

president to establish all standing committees of the association and to appoint all members to each of these policy-setting committees – an approach that basically positions the president as a monarch or dictator, depending on which side of the political fence you reside.

To be fair and accurate, recent GCSAA boards of directors can’t be held responsible for putting these lax bylaws in place. The onerous policies contained within these bylaws were established many years ago. Clearly though, it’s time to revisit this situation now.

The obvious solution to addressing these lax mandates would be to amend the bylaws. However, this is an almost impossible task because a mandatory two-thirds member voting approval is required to amend the bylaws and the articles of incorporation. (See my November 2005 column.)

Against this backdrop of bylaws lacking any semblance of checks and balances, it’s time to sample membership opinion on a key democratic issue, i.e., would the members prefer to vote in GCSAA elections as individuals, or default their votes to chapters to vote for them?

Accordingly, all classes of GCSAA members are invited to participate in this straw poll electronically (a yes or no vote) as indicated in the box below. Results will be published in a forthcoming issue. Granted, this is a nonscientific poll asking voting ineligible GCSAA members to participate, but I’m seeking the widest possible sampling of informal membership opinion at this time.

Like it or not, this straw poll will serve as a referendum to measure member indifference to voting opportunity. Light member participation will advance the premise that GCSAA members can’t be trusted to vote because they don’t care enough to be informed. Clearly, the GCSAA bylaws need to be revised to reflect a more democratic process if the association is going to have any chance of effectively leading/serving its members in a demanding 21st century. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time the GCSAA membership has been invited to provide a collective opinion about an associationwide issue. Cast your ballot as you like, but don’t blow the opportunity. There might not be another. GCN

### HOW TO VOTE

Please visit the bottom left-hand corner of the GCN home page (www.golfcoursenews.com) to vote.

I would like to see block chapter election voting discontinued and individual member voting guaranteed via the Internet.  Yes  No



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# Implement a recruitment plan

**T**hink about the success of great sports coaches – Vince Lombardi of the Green Bay Packers, Don Shula of the Miami Dolphins, Mike Krzyzewski of the Duke Blue Devils and Bobby Cox of the Atlanta Braves. They're outstanding leaders, but they didn't win championships every year because winning a championship requires more than strong leadership. An exemplary coach also must have gifted players and excellent team spirit.

Similarly, a first-rate golf course requires more than a first-rate superintendent. It requires an excellent staff, as well as motivation, commitment and team spirit among all employees. These requirements are influenced greatly by, if not dependent on, recruitment.

With a tightening job market in most parts of the country and uncertainties about immigration policies, some frustrated superintendents and assistant superintendents think hiring reliable employees is impossible. Some resort to hiring whomever can be found.

Recruiting is frustrating for almost all managers; however, it's crucial. Because of the need for excellent employees and a responsibility to the club, it's critical to excel when recruiting. Excellent recruiting is more than just writing want ads. It starts much earlier by developing a recruitment plan.

You wouldn't wait until turf showed a nutrient deficiency to plan your fertilization program, or wait until you found weeds or insects in turf to plan your pesticide program. Waiting until it's time to recruit new employees or fill a position isn't much different.

The first part of a recruitment plan is to consider and shape the image of your facility as an employer. Believe it or not, there are businesses, including golf facilities, that don't have to recruit because they have a waiting list of applicants. They have the image of a preferred employer. Who are the preferred employers in your community? How did they become preferred employers? Here are two examples:

1. A manager of several agricultural businesses, including a turf business, always spoke in the college human resource course I taught. His business was a preferred employer. He would often

sheepishly tell the story of a young man who came to his business seeking employment. After a few minutes of questioning the young man, he realized, to his amazement, he had moved more than 50 miles for the sole purpose of working at his business.

2. A business is a preferred employer for high school students at three local schools. It has mastered the challenge of providing student employees flexibility and knowing they'll show up when assigned work. It accomplished this by providing opportunities for the students to indicate work preference but then required student employees to honor the resulting schedule. It worked.

So how does a golf course become a preferred employer? It's not that different from how a golf course becomes a preferred course for golfers. First, you must provide a great workplace, which doesn't mean excessively high compensation or just being nice to employees. It means you have to have competitive compensation. Most importantly, you must be a great employer by:

- Treating employees with respect;
- Being relentlessly fair to employees;
- Providing clear expectations and detailed feedback;
- Creating opportunities to grow and advance; and
- Developing a team atmosphere that's attractive to join.

Next, you have to promote your course as great workplace. A good place to start for promoting your maintenance staff as a preferred workplace is members or golfers at your course. At many facilities, members look down at the maintenance staff and perhaps all staff. That attitude is detrimental to the future of the club or course as it makes recruitment more difficult. Part of your recruitment plan should be to reduce or eliminate that attitude. Here are some ideas:

1. My wife and I exercise at the St. Paul Gym on the University of Minnesota campus. There's an information board just inside the door. The names

and pictures of every staff member were posted on the board so I was able to learn the names of the employees I interact with. Seeing the pictures personalized the staff for me and provided recognition for them. Why not post pictures of your staff in the pro shop, clubhouse or even near the first tee?

2. Develop a recognition program where employees' accomplishments are highlighted with their name, accomplishment and picture where all can see. The recognition should be for specific accomplishments, not overused employee-of-the-month-type programs.

Starting and continuing programs like these take time and energy. Keeping a program like this in place will happen only if you make it a priority. Making it

a priority can come only from a recognition that being a preferred employer is critical.

Another key part of a recruitment plan is identifying the labor pools that

are most likely to contain excellent candidates for positions on your staff. Thorough recruiting targets specific, identified labor pools rather than the general labor market. Some examples:

- For years, McDonalds has been a master at targeting the pool of part-time high-school students. As that pool shrinks, it's also targeting senior citizens.
- One golf course that targets high school juniors and seniors, who in many cases work at the course through college, has a more select pool. They send a letter to all juniors and seniors elected to the honor society.
- Other golf courses target members of the local school golf team or children of members of the golf club.
- Many of you target the immigrant labor pool; however, this pool is shrinking in many areas of the country.

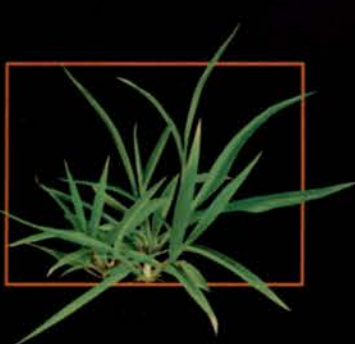
No one pool fits all. The challenge for you is to develop a recruitment plan complete with the right labor pools and then earn and create an image as a preferred employer within that pool. This isn't easy, but if it were, everyone could do it. GCN

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# Planting seeds for the future

A TEXAN PREPARES TO TAKE HOLD OF THE GCSAA'S REINS

by  
PAT  
JONES

GCN INTERVIEWS  
RICKY HEINE,  
CGCS, THE  
INCOMING  
PRESIDENT OF THE  
GCSAA.

Most superintendents find their passion working on a golf course in their late teens or by playing on their high-school golf team. Ricky Heine, CGCS – soon to be president of the 20,000-member GCSAA – found his passion as a 13-year-old sod farmer.

“I grew up on a farm and loved the outdoor environment,” he says. “My older brother, Bobby – who’s almost 22 years older than I am – was working as a golf course superintendent and needed to grow in a truckload of sod. I respected him a lot and wanted to be like him and be a superintendent from the time I was about 10. So, when I was about 13, he brought me a truckload of sod, and I hired other kids from my class to help me. We planted the whole truck of sod by hand and turned it into a three-acre sod-production farm. That’s how I earned money when I was little.”

Nowadays, Heine earns his living as the general manager and director of grounds at Golf Club at Star Ranch, a semiprivate facility near Austin, Texas. He’s only 43 but has been a GCSAA member for 23 years, joining before graduating from Texas A&M in 1985. He’s one of those guys who just never found a reason to wander too far from home. His job in Hutto, Texas, is less than 30 miles from where he was born. Now, a fellow who stayed close to home will travel the world and mix with the powerful and famous as the GCSAA’s top elected official. Here’s how he’ll handle it.

**Q** Your year as president is about to begin. Does it feel like the finish or starting line?

It feels like the starting line, but it’s actually been 17 years of continuous board service. I started out with the Central Texas GCSA, then the Lone Star GCSA and now the national. Once you commit

to becoming engaged in the GCSAA, you really never finish. You just pass through phases.

**Q** What’s the most important thing you’ve learned about the industry during your time on the board?

I’ve learned a lot quickly. Probably the most important thing is that change doesn’t happen in a vacuum. The profession is changing as we speak. The golf business is more competitive, and time is so precious for our customers. Facilities and superintendents have to understand that change is inevitable and manage it.

You have to broaden your perspective and knowledge of the facility from turf only to the full spectrum – insurance, net income, food cost, risk management – you name it. Now, superintendents are getting those questions. Some are responding, and some aren’t as quick to get on board. Successful superintendents will respond. I’m not sure this dynamic is any different than any other industries or professions. Change is a constant in modern life.

**Q** Do you have a theme for your presidency or any specific goals?

I see my role as planting seeds and providing the direction and leadership that will advance the association and the profession. I don’t have a checklist or agenda that I will carry with me this year.

During my six years on the board, I don’t think anyone had a set agenda, but I think about what past president Jon Maddern said: “We are a board of nine ... not nine individuals and a president.” The president has to involve the other eight members, including the newest members. Once the debates are over, we have to support each other and

respect each other.

But, that said, I identified three key initiatives at the delegates’ meeting. First, we need to support our chapters to become more effective and efficient. Second, we must increase membership so we can have a stronger voice and advocate even better on its behalf. And third, now that our first class A group has met the new PDI standards of continuing education, we must effectively market them to employers and golfers like never before.

**Q** The new PDI/certification requirements went into effect mid-year. What have the short-term impacts been in terms of membership numbers, classifications, etc.?

When we first brought this concept forward in 1994, we knew membership would decline if standards were adopted. Plus, you’ve had the recession, 9/11 and a flat golf economy. There’s no doubt we lost some members because of the standards, but we reaffirmed our commitment to the concept. Some membership growth has been lost, and PDI implementation didn’t help that, but once we establish our professional value in the marketplace, the idea of PDI will be vindicated.

**Q** What do you think the impact will be in five or 10 years?

The value of golf course superintendents will grow during the next five to 10 years, and even more during my lifetime.

**Q** Has your general manager title presented any challenges for you politically?

No. There have been a couple of cases when people asked about it. It’s just a few more people to manage and a few more areas of expertise to keep up with, but it’s the same philosophy: detail and





follow through.

I served as a superintendent for 16 years, and I'm still involved with our golf course management team. Three of my guys and I have been together for 18 years. They probably know what I'm thinking before I even think it.

The GCSAA wants to provide the tools and opportunities for members to become general managers if they want to, but we don't promote that. I didn't go through a formal education process and seek the position, it just happened.

**Q** Has it given you a different perspective that might help you lead the association?

I hope so. Golf is becoming more of a business every year. I've learned a lot about running this facility, and I've tried to manage it like it was my own these past three years. That's been a great experience for me. If a superintendent becomes involved with the success of the facility, it will help the business succeed and advance his or her career. Understanding produces knowledge, and that knowledge can lead to respect, appreciation, pay and tenure for our members.

**Q** What's your take on chapter restructuring?

I'm in Texas, and we have six chapters around the state. We've discussed this a little. We're watching, listening and learning. It has to do with chapter effectiveness. We have pilot programs in Michigan and Pennsylvania. The concept is the affiliated state chapter can provide the effectiveness and efficiency while the unaffiliated local groups provide the networking, camaraderie and some education. Why do we need duplication of services such as Web sites, bookkeeping, insurance, etc.?

We've hired two field staffers to manage the process. One is working more

Photo courtesy of Carlton Wade Photography

on current chapter structures, and the other is working with Michigan and Pennsylvania to be a liaison to help with the restructuring. Eventually, this could lead to more in-the-field staff if the testing proves productive.

**Q** What should members who grumble about board expenses understand about board

service they don't know?

At the last delegates' meeting, there was solid approval for the checks-and-balances process. Once we communicated the business case for what we've been doing, the response was better. It will be less and less of an issue. Members can be assured nothing inappropriate is happening. No one on this board ran to enrich themselves. I don't expect

a pity party about the demands of the position either. We knew what we were getting into. The most important thing to know is we spend what we need, not necessarily what we have budgeted.

We do our best to do what's right and spend the association's money as if it were our own. When I get off this board, I won't have a stockpile of unused logo shirts and clothes to carry me into retirement. That said, the association task group recommended ideas about expenses and reductions, and we'll look at those. We need trust and transparency. I'm hopeful we'll accept those recommendations. They were good ideas.

**Q** National board service has taken its toll on previous members. Do you think you could have survived all the way through had it not been for the governance changes put in place a few years ago?

I have a great employer, so that helps. Also, consider average tenure for superintendents was about five years, and now it's about eight years. The change was evolutionary. Past boards had to do some heavy lifting. But – it sounds contradictory – we now have greater control even though our time and travel commitment has been reduced. I would have survived, but it wouldn't have been as much fun.

**Q** How can your work load be less and control greater?

It's like being a managing superintendent. We have our indicators that tell us how the association and staff are doing. It's very defined, and we can measure performance. We tell our c.e.o., 'We want this done.' At year's end, when those indicator numbers come in, we can decide if we've been successful or not. The control comes when those numbers are in. That's where the rubber meets the road.

**Q** Given that, are you encouraged that more people are interested in serving?

Yes, extremely. More good members are considering it. They're not waiting for the right time when their careers are established and they can do it. We also understand people are more family-centric as well. It's all about that balance. You have to have a strong relationship with your family and employer to even consider it. I successfully navigated

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