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Uncontrollable factors such as weather can bring a facility's short-term goals into focus more clearly. Photo: Glenn Dale Golf Course



"I make all of my decisions based on long-term goals," he says. "My primary want is to make my operation sustainable. To do this, I need to commit to our organic programs. I also need to focus on proper staff who know how to make our players feel welcome."

MAKING TOUGH CHOICES

The definition of wants and needs for long-term planning is important, but it also must be addressed for the short term as well. Uncontrollable factors such as weather still affect a tee sheet and can bring short-term goals into focus.

Joe Hills, co-owner of Waverly Woods Country Club in Marriotsville, Md., and Blue Mash Golf Course in Gaithersburg, Md., says the two daily-fee courses have been well received in the local competitive market. Hills knows that course conditions are his primary priority. During the summer months, he wants players to be able to use the carts on the fairways. But a serious drought and severely high temperatures this past summer forced him to make a difficult choice.

"The weather had taken such a toll we felt we needed to protect the turf, so we made it mandatory to keep the carts on the paths during our busy month," he says. "Our rounds declined because of this decision, but we felt this was the right choice in the long run. Our wants and needs changed places."

Another variable that can drive the direction of wants and needs is liability. For Garry Setting, owner of Sea Pines Golf Resort on the central California coast near Morro Bay, property upkeep is an important concern because the eight-building facility consists of a nine-hole course as well as a 43-room hotel and restaurant.

"Our lodging income is my main focus," he says. "I would like to replace the roof and add a new entry to our conference room. But recently, my insurance carrier brought to my attention some potential liability problems that drove other projects from the wants category,

such as fixing walkways and sealing our parking area, into projects that needed to be addressed. We try to look at our needs three times a year, and this gives us the flexibility to deal with issues like this more easily."

Jeff Hogue, owner of Scott Lake Country Club, a 27-hole public facility near Grand Rapids, Mich., also knows the importance of being flexible.

"We spend a fair amount of time establishing long-term plans for Scott Lake, but reality is a big factor when determining what we can or can't do," Hogue says.

One of Hogue's long-term goals has been to find ways to balance his tee sheet with 75 percent of his play during the week and 25 percent of play on the weekends. This want has directed him to find ways to use his layout to bring in mid-week golf league play and create ways to make it easy for players to fit golf into their busy schedules.

"There has been a shift in the golfing public," he says. "Ten years ago, the regular golfer worked all week, and the Saturday or Sunday round was played in the morning. The regulars had to call by Thursday to guarantee a time. Today, the new regulars have more time constraints because they attend family programs, such as soccer and tee ball, on weekends. Now I have more

play in the afternoons and more players interested in just playing nine holes. Today, 60 percent of our rounds are nine-hole rounds. I've seen this trend and have taken it as a signal to make adjustments in my operation."

Hogue had wanted to improve his driving range for several years, and after seeing how time constraints were changing golfers' habits, he embarked on an ambitious expansion of his range, which required moving three golf holes that played around the existing range.

"We put together a plan to do the work without closing the range or the course," he says. "I opened the range this spring and have seen

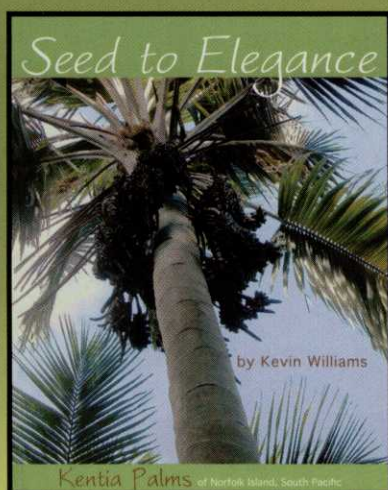


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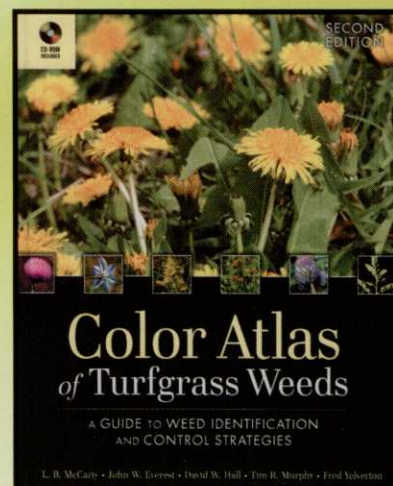
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OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT

Lodging income is the main focus for Gary Setting, owner of Sea Pines Golf Resort, an eight-building, nine-hole facility in Los Osos, Calif. Photo: Sea Pines Golf Resort



a phenomenal increase of activity. It also helped that I surveyed my market and knew that with other ranges closing I would be the only range available within a 20-mile radius."

Ron West of R.H. West Management oversees the operations of five courses in the Indianapolis area, which multiplies the challenge of determining wants and needs. His portfolio runs the gamut of operations, from overseeing the private Royal Oak Golf Club to leasing two municipal courses to owning two more daily-fee facilities.

"I let the department managers of each facility, such as the superintendent, the head pro and the food-and-beverage manager, list their own wants and needs," West says. "We also hold a two-day fall meeting in which we bring all of the managers together to develop our plan for the next operational year. This meeting lets us determine overlapping needs."

West found a few advantages to defining wants and needs while operating multiple facilities. He bundles the needs for all of his courses to get the best price possible for supplies. He shares equipment, such a core harvester and an aerifier, through his operations so the investment can benefit all operations. He also gleans ideas from his different managers so that information can be shared.

"It's interesting how the managers at the public courses, who have learned to do more

with less, can provide helpful suggestions toward our operation at our private facility," West says. "Sharing knowledge is invaluable."

KNOW YOURSELF

It's clear one of the most important steps in determining a golf facility's wants and needs is to define the facility's identity. An honest assessment of how one's course fits into a specific market can help determine where to spend. Whether an owner has just one course or several, the bottom line is that in a competitive environ-



Setting

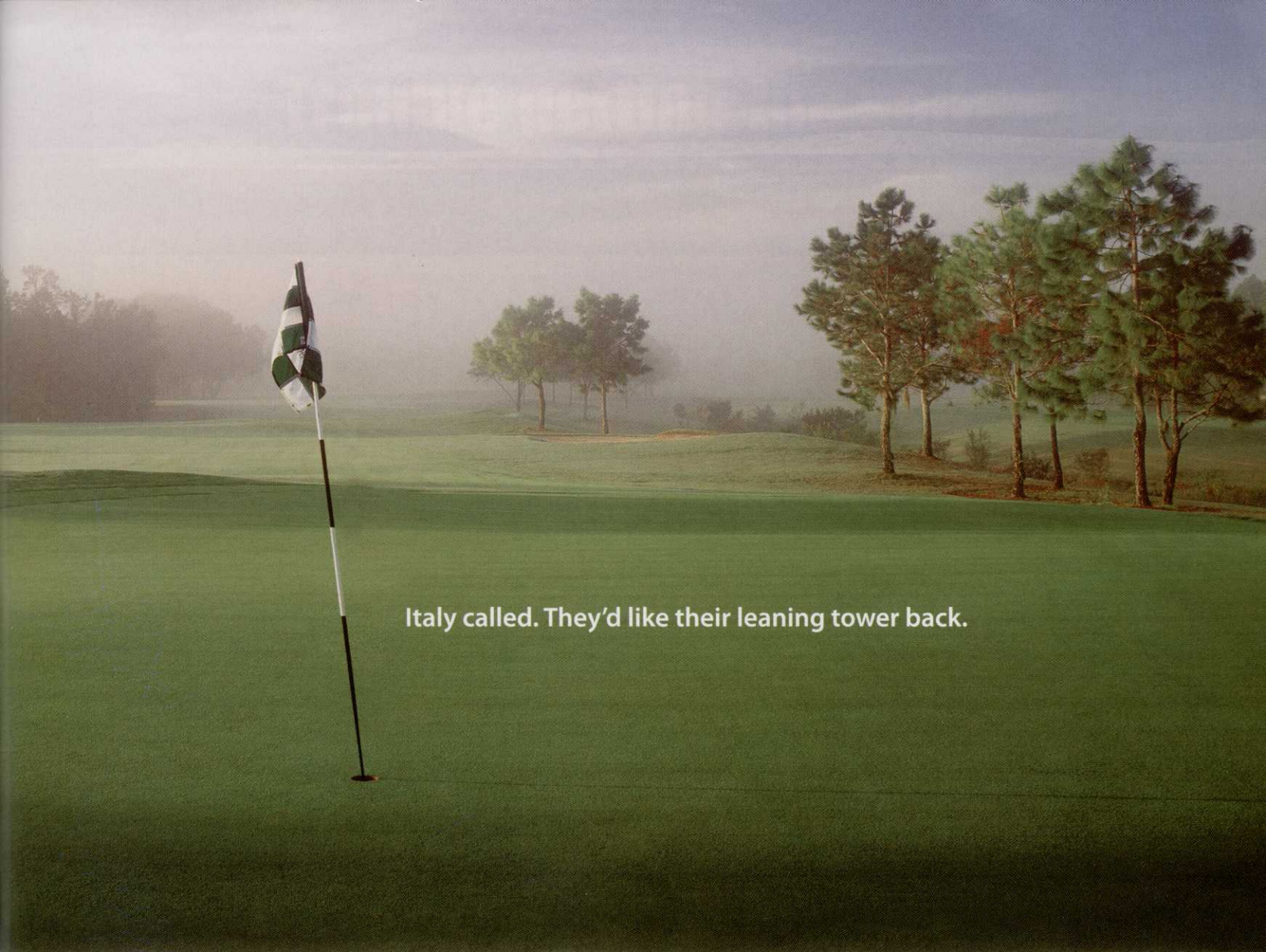
ment, there's little room for budget mistakes.

"There was a rather misdirected effort during the past decade as courses bought into the concept of the 'country club for a day' approach," Hills says. "Increased spending on pro shop upgrades, expansive clubhouses, increased

staffing and improved entrances went from the want list as more operators saw them as a true need. This has led to some misdirected expenditures that have gotten some courses into financial trouble."

Shields concurs.

"The most important thing is to determine who you are, and then do what you can to be the best you can," he says. "If you want to jump your facility to the next level, make sure you have the resources to make that jump a success." **GCI**



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BY JOHN TORSIELLO

Define your niche

Facilities should determine what they do best, set themselves apart from the competition and market themselves for success

The owners of what would become Bloomingdale Golfer's Club in Tampa, Fla., knew they needed to differentiate their fledgling facility from the dozens of golf courses in the Tampa area in the early 1980s. Simply put, they needed to find their niche the marketplace.

"We needed to position ourselves apart from the other clubs in the area," says John Reeger, owner of golf consulting firm Briefcasegolf and a Class A PGA pro who became the director of golf at Bloomingdale. "Bobby Stricklin, who was one of the partners in the project after it was taken over from the initial developer, determined it was going to be a golfer's club. There were a lot of good, young players in the Tampa area at the time, and we wanted to be the place where they all played."



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FACILITY OPERATIONS

The owners of Bloomingdale, which has since been sold several times, structured their membership fees in creative ways to accommodate skilled golfers who had to travel significant distances to play the course.

They also offered special memberships to young players, such as future PGA Tour member Brian Kamm, allowing accomplished players and pros to pay \$200 a month, play all they wanted and hit balls on the practice range until their hands hurt.

"We had 200 players with single digit handicaps, 100 players who were a 5 and under and 50 players who were scratch," Reeger says. "Lee Janzen and Colleen Walker were members. We had a plethora of good golfers, whether they were milkmen or c.e.o.s of companies. We catered to the better players. That was our niche, and it worked."



Reeger

TARGET CUSTOMERS

This "golfer's club" concept has been attempted in other areas of the country with mixed results, Reeger says. It all comes down to knowing who you are, who your customers are and, most importantly, knowing what your customers want

and what you can provide. Sometimes those variables are area specific.

"The golf business is so fragmented and decentralized," Reeger says. "Some golf companies try to employ the same concept everywhere. The problem with that is once you've seen one club, you've seen them all. Where's that unique quality that sets you apart?"

The trick is to find out what 2,500 people in your market want and then give it to them, Reeger says. Sounds easy, right?

"You have to know who you are before you can create your business plan and marketing program," says Allan Irwin, c.o.o. of Empire Golf Management. "It's imperative you know who your customers or members are to be able to develop membership and golf marketing plans properly."

And just how does a developer or owner reach out to those 2,500 potential customers Reeger mentions?

"You have to do your market research on other courses in the market that are comparable to yours," says Jack Brennan, president of Plant City, Fla.-based Paladin Golf Marketing. "When I'm called in to look at a golf course, the owner usually wants me to play the course first. I play the other courses in the area first and see what my client is up against, and then we determine a game plan."

An Arthur Hills and Ed Shearon designed golf course was the final piece in the Renault Winery's overall development plan. The course is approaching 25,000 rounds a year. Photo: Renault Winery

