

PLACE IN THE MARKET

Brennan believes being a leader in a marketplace is essential to running a profitable golf facility.

"I say there are 22 immutable laws of marketing, and the first law is leadership," he says. "You have to put yourself in a position of leadership in your marketplace because the leader always wins. It's like Coca-Cola versus Pepsi."

A facility can be a leader in a number of categories, such as course conditions, slope rating, staff friendliness, the ability to host quality outings, and partnerships with other businesses in the area, such as hotels and restaurants.

"You have to find a category in which you excel – it can be more than one – and market that to the public," Brennan says. "What you're doing is positioning yourself in the marketplace, as opposed to branding, which is something a Pebble Beach or an Augusta National does well."

There are many tools with which developers and owners can ascertain their club's place in the market.

"I've used Pellucid, a consulting firm, to research golf demand in my target market area," Irwin says. "This, combined with the facility survey, usually makes it clear what type of facility should be developed and how to position an existing facility."



Brennan

But distinguishing a facility in a crowd can be challenging, says John Johnson, owner of J2 Golf Marketing.

"We talk about golf courses, but within the industry, there are municipal, daily-fee, upscale daily-fee, private and resort facilities," he says. "All of these are golf courses, but they appeal to different people."

Johnson provides an example in Ponte Vedra, Fla., where he worked with two clubs, Sawgrass Country Club and Marsh Landing Country Club.

"Both had country club as the last two words in their names and were a few miles from one another, but they were polar opposites," he says. "Sawgrass was a place for retired individuals, and Marsh Landing was a club where many of the members were young with families. We had to develop a new niche for each club for them to retain existing members but also develop a new clientele base to ensure their futures."

BUILD YOUR BRAND

Johnson agrees that determining what a course or club does best and then aggressively marketing those aspects is vital to strengthening the bottom line of existing facilities and allowing new facilities to establish themselves.

"You must develop a look and feel for your club, whether you're a high-end private club or a lower-end, daily-fee course," he says. "You do that by developing a visual theme for your course that positions you apart from the competition. You build your brand in the minds of your members through collateral materials, Web sites and e-mails. You need to reach out on a continual basis to your current and potential members."

Checklists and comment cards, sent via mail or e-mail to members, asking what they would like to see added to a course, can help position a facility as one that strives to meet the needs of paying customers. Staging social events for members, such as wine-and-cheese parties and equipment demo days, also can help define a club as member and player friendly and set it apart from other facilities that don't go the extra mile.

"Think outside of the box a little with some of your marketing efforts," Johnson says. "Everyone who visits a club, whether or not he or she is a member, wants to feel special."

One of the pitfalls course developers and owners need to avoid is trying to be all things to all people, Irwin says. Yet it's possible to be good in a number of categories as long as you don't overdo one aspect of the club's operation to the detriment of others.

"I worked with a wonderful semiprivate club in Chicago that was good at three or four aspects, which were all running smoothly," Irwin says. "The club has a Pete Dye-designed course, a 25,000-square-foot clubhouse and a 300-seat banquet facility. They were doing 30,000 rounds a year, about 10,000 each by members, the general public and outings. It was one of the best run golf businesses I've seen."

But while it's possible for a facility to be good at more than one thing, it's prudent to create an identity the market can readily understand, Irwin says.

"For example, it might be difficult to convey the idea you're a great family facility when your course has a slope rating of 149 or if you cater to corporations," he says. "Do your market study, and build your identity around a single concept at which you can be the best."



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ONE OF A KIND

The owners of the historic Renault Winery in Galloway, N.J., knew exactly what their property needed to complete plans for an all-inclusive resort: a world-class golf course. So the owners commissioned Arthur Hills and Ed Shearon to design and build a course that ambles easily through the winery's vineyard. The course was the final piece in the property's overall development plan that includes the winery, a hotel and several gourmet restaurants.

After three years, the course is approaching 25,000 rounds a year and is having the desired spillover effect on the hotel and restaurants, says Dennis Delvecchio, general manager for the Renault resort.

"Our niche in this market is that we're a one-of-a-kind destination," he says. "There's nothing like it anywhere on the East Coast, where you combine a winery, a hotel, fine dining and a championship golf course. We have set ourselves apart from the competition."

Building the golf course took some foresight and nerve. The area around Atlantic City is saturated with daily-fee courses, and adding

another track to the mix was risky.

"We knew it would work because we created an oasis here," Delvecchio says. "The owners live on the property, and they wanted to create a family feel and atmosphere. You can drive 30 minutes to the Atlantic City casinos and boardwalk, then return here and enjoy everything we have to offer in a country setting, whether that's playing golf on a great new course, enjoying a glass of wine, swimming in our pools or sampling a gourmet meal."

FLEXIBILITY AND QUALITY PEOPLE

Course developers and owners must not only understand existing conditions of their marketplace, they must also conduct long-range market analysis to forecast how changing conditions will affect their facilities, says Scott Beasley, vice president of operations for Meadowbrook Golf, based in ChampionsGate, Fla.

"You've got to know the direction you'll be heading in the future," he says. "Market conditions might change. You have to be flexible enough to be able to change what you're doing to accommodate different needs of the market

and your members."

For example, if you don't already have a fitness center at your club, babysitting on Friday nights and kids' tees on your golf course, you're behind the curve, Reeger says.

"All these little things that made blue-tee, 5-handicappers cringe a few years ago are what sets courses apart from the competition today," he says.

Finding and hiring quality people to staff your facility also is crucial in building and sustaining a brand, says Mike Diffenderffer, a former national director of marketing and membership for the Tournament Players Club network and now a part-time consultant.

"That was one of the things I did for 21 years – hire and train professional salespeople who could tell the whole story of the club and why it's different," he says. "And you have to be totally honest about what you are. It's not like you're selling a car. You have to see your members every day of the year." **GCI**



Beasley

The Renault Winery's niche in the market is that it's a one-of-a-kind destination on the East Coast, combining a winery, hotel, fine dining and a championship golf course. Photo: Renault Winery





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Annandale's OVERHAUL

Billy bunkers and hybrid bluegrass highlight
the refurbishment of the old California course

BY PETER BLAIS

Great comedic actors such as Jim Carrey occasionally leave their comfort zone and try a love story. Best-selling authors such as John Grisham sometimes venture from the mystery novel to pen a work of nonfiction. The same can be said for golf course architects. So one shouldn't be surprised when an East Coast architect such as Brian Silva spreads his wings and flies west.

Architect Brian Silva recreated the distinct edging on the Billy bunkers, saying it was an important step to complete the traditional look and play characteristics of the course. Photo: Tommy Naccarato

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AT A GLANCE Annandale Golf Club

Web site: www.annandalegolf.com
Location: Pasadena, Calif.
Type of project: Reconstruction
Cost: \$7.9 million
Construction started: January 2007
Course reopened: November 2007
Architect: Brian Silva
Builder: Landscapes Unlimited
Golf course superintendent: Ed Kutt
Project superintendent: Rob Christie

Years ago, a nearby freeway crowded some holes and shortened others, leaving an awkward configuration of five par-3s. Photo: Annandale Golf Club

aging course variety and leaving Annandale with the somewhat awkward configuration of five par-3s. It was these and several other wrinkles Silva planned to iron out.

Golf course superintendent Ed Kutt and project superintendent Rob Christie of Landscapes Unlimited thought Silva did an excellent job working within the existing routing while dramatically improving shot values.

"Players have a lot more options now when attacking pins while dealing with the occasional false front," Kutt says. "The course is a lot more challenging yet still very playable."

COMPREHENSIVE OVERHAUL

Working with Kutt, Christie and several Annandale grounds committee members, Silva directed a comprehensive overhaul of the course. The team:

- Redesigned then rebuilt all 18 greens.
- Restored 75 bunkers in Bell's style, then added a dozen more in that same style.
- Regrassed the fairways with Bermudagrass.
- Sodded 47 acres of rough area with a new strain of bluegrass.
- Added tee complexes.
- Created a short-game practice area.
- Installed an updated irrigation system.
- Regraded and equipped every fairway with extensive new drainage capabilities.

Construction started Jan. 2, 2007, and culminated with the course reopening Nov. 2, exactly 10 months later. Everything went pretty smoothly from a construction standpoint, Christie says.

"We enjoyed a dry winter, which was fortunate because the previous year we had a record amount of rain," he says. "We took a road re-

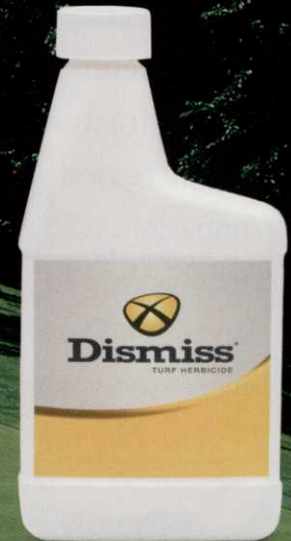
The New Hampshire-based renovator of classic designs such as Donald Ross's Seminole Golf Club in North Palm Beach, Fla., and Seth Raynor's Country Club of Charleston (S.C.), recently completed his first West Coast project, a \$7.9-million refurbishment of Annandale Golf Club in Pasadena, Calif.

"For about seven months during 2007, I was here every week," Silva says. "But the Annandale project was special because it was my first job on the West Coast. My 'one visit per week' mantra was all the more appropriate."

Founded in 1906, Annandale, one of the oldest clubs on the West Coast, is a Willie Watson design where George Thomas collaborator Billy Bell served as caddymaster before putting his own stamp on the course in the 1920s. Bell's role at Annandale illustrates the extent of his influence in West Coast design circles for 50 years. In 1918, Colorado Boulevard (where the Rose Parade begins) was extended, splitting the original Annandale routing in two. Eventually, the club moved its course entirely to the north side of Colorado.

It was then, in the mid-1920s, Bell redesigned the bunkers and built the "canyon holes" – 14, 15 and 16 – to account for holes lost in the move. Forty years later, erection of a nearby freeway crowded some holes and shortened others, dam-

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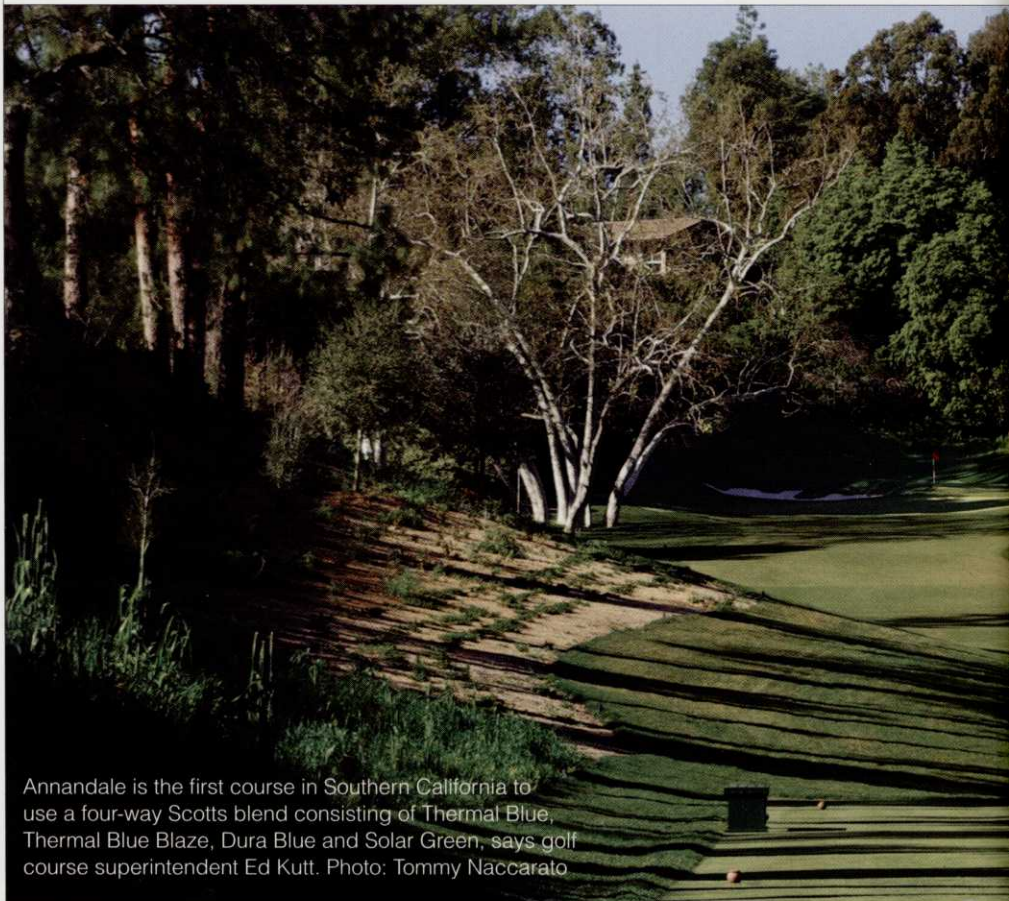
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COURSE CONSTRUCTION



Annandale is the first course in Southern California to use a four-way Scotts blend consisting of Thermal Blue, Thermal Blue Blaze, Dura Blue and Solar Green, says golf course superintendent Ed Kutt. Photo: Tommy Naccarato

claimer, sort of a giant rototiller, sprayed Round-up all over the course and rototilled everything. It was a little unsettling not knowing exactly what we would come up with 12 to 14 inches down, but there were no major surprises.”

Some areas are steep, such as the tees on No. 16 that sit atop a hill, but there were no environmental constraints. Although homes are nearby, most sit far back in the hills. There are only a few houses close to the course, which meant the team couldn't start construction before 7 a.m. But that didn't present any considerable problems, Christie says.

To address the five par-3s configuration, Silva transformed one par-3, the 17th, into a drivable par-4 and converted the 470-yard sixth hole from a short par-5 to a demanding par-4. His alterations were well received.

“That's my favorite, No. 6, where the new green complex has no bunkering at all,” says Mark Sarkisian, a longtime member of the grounds committee at Annandale. “It's surrounded by tight chipping areas a la Pinehurst and Augusta National.”

BILLY BUNKERS

Architecturally, one of Silva's major themes was

evoking the Billy Bell feel with the bunkering without any specific restorative goals on the greens.

“The reason behind this was simple: We had period photography showing the distinct bunker style,” Silva says. “That's what was restored in the existing bunkering and mimicked on the new bunkers.”

Recreating the distinct edging on the Bell bunkers was an important final step to complete the traditional look and play characteristics. Being on site once a week was critical to the finished product.

“I got two or three cracks at every single bunker with the paint gun, when they were initially roughed in, then again in the dirt before they sodded the edges, then one last time – a touch here and there – before the sodding took hold,” Silva says.

While Silva dove into the Bell tradition, Kutt and Christie immersed themselves in the technical aspects of bunker construction. The hazards were a style known as Billy Bunkers, not named after Bell but after former Augusta National superintendent Billy Fuller. The bunkers consisted of drainage, topped with a 2-inch gravel layer and a layer of geotextile with sand over the top.