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Kirk Richmond, CGCS, at Crooked Stick Golf Club in Carmel, Indiana, joined the Brotherhood in 2006 and recently hosted to the 2009 US Senior Open. He visited with superintendent Russ Apple during his grow-in at The Pete Dye Course at French Lick to share management ideas. And while there is strength in numbers, it's more important to know that a familiar face just up the road uses the Penn bentgrasses too.



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## SHARED SACRIFICE

For many of you, calling 2009 a “tough year” is an understatement.

That’s why this month’s cover package attempts to provide some perspective on budgets, as well as suggest an intriguing new perspective for compiling your 2010 budget.

This year many of you – some for the first time – had to determine how you were going to operate at an acceptable level with an average 10 to 15 percent reduction in your maintenance budget. Similar budget reductions are on 2010’s horizon, as well.

In fact, according to recent Golf Course Industry research, nearly 65 percent of golf course superintendents indicated they had their budgets slashed in 2009. And of those cuts, more than 84 percent of superintendents indicated those cuts came at the expense of personnel.

In the wake of these budget reductions, many of you whom I talked to throughout the year said you were doing the best you could and would make it through 2009 with the limited resources at your disposal. And while economists have declared an end to this devastating recession, no one expects the road to recovery to be devoid of a few bumps and potholes.

This presents a unique problem that, if it hasn’t already, will test your management skills in the coming year. Many of your team members who survived the first round of budgetary bloodletting were left with a mix of feelings and emotions. At the forefront was the elation that they still had their jobs during this time of record unemployment. But over time this devolves into a sense of frustration and emotional fatigue. What’s left is the perception that, at least for the foreseeable future, everyone must do much more with much less, and are powerless to do anything about it.

Be warned. This is a dangerous, emotional quagmire for any team to fall into.

Recently, I discussed this problem with Jon Gordon, a management consultant and author

of the book “The Goldfish and The Shark.” Gordon says feelings of fear and impotence keep even the best teams from working to their highest potential. Instead, their energies become scattered and the foundation of principles they once focused on crumbles, impacting quality.

“You can tell when someone has become disengaged by the way they act,” Gordon says. “Are they complaining and blaming others? When people feel powerless they complain and blame more and it’s a symptom that they may have checked out.”

Sound familiar?

“You’ve got to rally your team together,” Gordon says. “You need to be very transparent and open and say to your people: ‘Here’s where we were. Here’s where we are, and here’s where we’re going.’”

A unifying vision provides your team a focal point, Gordon says, and it’s something they can grab hold of as they ride out the bumpy road to recovery. Most importantly, Gordon says this vision needs to outline the role each team member will play.

“Drill this down into them,” he says. “Ask them how they

can contribute to this vision to move your operation forward. Then, tell them you’re going to help them achieve this shared vision. The most important thing is to empower every member of your team and show them how they can be a part of the solution.”

While your 2010 budget is the financial framework for your maintenance strategy, devising or revisiting your strategic objectives for your course, sharing these goals with your team and outlining their roles will go a long way toward keeping everyone engaged and oblivious to some of the bumps in the road ahead. **GCI**



**Mike Zawacki** Editor

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## Moving and Shaping

From time to time, I get calls from engineering firms offering to “do my grading plans.” I politely decline as I just can’t separate grading from golf course design. And I wouldn’t want to – “design” is about 10 percent of the business, and I do the other support work just to feel that thrill of “pure creation” occasionally.

I typically draw extensive grading plans for projects requiring public bids. Detailed plans allow accurate bidding and layout, but they do have some downsides – Golf course architects have no equal when it comes to changing their minds, and drawing 18 holes of plans over a few weeks to “get them out the door” usually results in repetitive design. It’s better to “noodle” on designs over longer periods, and the best courses are typically built this way.

Since I was collaborating with Notah Begay III, and trying to build a great course, I emphasized more “face time” with shapers at Firekeeper, since the field is the best place to finalize green contouring and bunker placement.

One advantage of partnering with Landscapes Unlimited is that they don’t need detailed plans on a gently rolling site like Firekeeper. I drew plans for all greens, a few unusual tees, the lake, and the three major fairway cuts. Most other features, such as subtle fairway shaping to move drainage and framing the hole, were simply sketched in and then discussed with the shapers prior to and during shaping.

The “field approach” requires the contractors trust that I wouldn’t add last minute Sahara-sized bunkers that weren’t in the budget. In addition, I needed to commit to being on site whenever needed, and inexpensive air fares made frequent, “last minute” site visits financially feasible, and cell phones and e-mailed pictures were used for reviews between visits.

Firekeeper was blessed with nearly perfect golf terrain and the absence of expensive rocky and wet soils. Most earthmoving is comprised of scraper hauls and localized, balanced (none hauled in or out) bulldozer cuts and fills.

About 90,000 cubic yards of scraper hauls came from the lake and three major fairway cuts. The cost of scraper dirt varies with the length of the haul. If we can haul cuts within the same hole or adjacent holes, it’s very cost effective. Longer hauls slow down the process and add cost. The design placed the irrigation lake in the southeast corner of the property, only close to the southern end of holes 12-17. Landscapes Unlimited opted to place much of the lake cut on the 15<sup>th</sup> fairway to avoid long hauls, which required some field redesign of both that fairway and other greens where I anticipated hauls to be made.

Making such field adjustments is not uncommon and often results in better designs. Greens built with only localized bulldozer cuts and fills are less expensive and usually result in a more natural look. More importantly, working with the land provides a more unique green, built to fit its site, rather than a green that could have been built nearly anywhere else.

After bulk earthmoving, the shapers craft the “magic” we all love about golf courses. I can’t stress enough how important shapers are to the quality of any project, and how important it is for the shapers and architects to be on the same page. Frankly, the shapers have to “get it” for our vision to be implemented.

When it works out the way it did at Firekeeper, it’s nearly the perfect world – create a good product and have fun doing it.

That “10 percent pure creation” thrill was alive and well in Kansas for the Firekeeper design and construction team. **GCI**

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## Design/Construction Journal

Over the next few months, Jeff Brauer’s column will detail the ins and outs of his experiences participating in the design and construction of a new golf course in Mayetta, Kan.

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## BOOST PERFORMANCE WITH MINIMAL RESOURCES

**T**imes are tough and you're probably not going to get that new irrigation system this year. But let's pretend that you just received a budget windfall – a 5-percent goose in capital funds over last year without any foreseeable increase in expenses. It's not a huge chunk, but an opportunity for upgrades.

Your turf maintenance equipment is in pretty good shape, so you've elected to dedicate the entire lump to irrigation. Finally, those recurring hotspots that show up on your approaches and collars can be more permanently addressed. Where to begin?

Most irrigation consultants will suggest you begin, well, at the beginning. Where can you make the most effective and logical upgrades with limited funds that will affect the long-term performance of your irrigation system – and therefore your golf course? What single irrigation system component could yield the greatest results for your turf management program?

### EVALUATE AND PONTIFICATE

You dust off your irrigation master plan that was tucked away for such an occasion and know exactly where to go based on system age, wear and overall performance. When considering new features, look toward your control systems first. Pump controls and a central/satellite upgrade can offer new heights of system control that will deliver efficiencies from the piping system to the base of the sprinklers.

Upgraded pump controls and logic can enable you to use your entire system more efficiently by maximizing your pump curves through the optimization of your hydraulic tree in each irrigation set, while keeping your main and laterals filled and pressurized more consistently. This is a significant

move, so unless you're adept at reading pump curves and familiar with the technology, bringing in an outside professional might be in order.

Pump controls also should be considered if you wish to add an injection system to your irrigation set-up. Most superintendents find it cost effective to apply gypsum, wetting agents or other water-enhancing products through their irrigation systems in small, digestible increments, head by head.

Golf courses, particularly muni courses, take tremendous abuse throughout the season. Healthy root growth is important to turf's durability and resilience, so by injecting more frequently you can quickly rehabilitate stressed turf areas without worrying about manual product applications. Moreover, if you're dealing with water or soil pH problems, these tools, along with turf moisture/pH sensors can help establish and maintain the desired balance.

looking at features. As a rule, if you upgrade your field satellites, always select a model that offers more stations than you currently need. For any golf project, future system expansion is inevitable.

Some sites might lend themselves to remote-control capabilities. Activating and programming irrigation from any point on the site can save precious time and eliminate grief, especially when troubleshooting irrigation systems or syringing. Larger facilities with multiple functions will find remote control capabilities particularly helpful.

There are both universal and brand-specific remote control products out there that put power in your hand. Remote control capabilities are one of the more practical upgrades, and at the same time they're amazing time savers. Those who have them vow never to go without again – most state their handheld remote is the equivalent to additional staff.

Where can you make the most effective upgrades **with limited funds** that will affect the long-term performance of your system?

### BRAIN POWER

As it relates to controls, it may be time to graduate to a new, digital, solid-state irrigation control system.

Newer controllers are affordable and offer more features than most water managers are willing to use. But most manufacturers offer modularized features, so you can pick and choose your desired functions without buying the total package.

There's a wide selection of control systems available to you. Again, consult your master plan and consider all of your site's needs before you start

These are only a few opportunities on the list to improve irrigation performance. Any upgrade that significantly affects system delivery and pressure – adding or changing sprinkler heads, zones, pump controls and so forth – needs to be carefully evaluated and accurately specified, so ensure you have access to an expert. If you ever get that budget bump, be ready. Need another good reason to properly plan for such an occasion? The green committee may only give you a short window to act and then the dollars could disappear. **GCI**