

Visits to new course projects often reveal different degrees of conflict between superintendents and architects. Disagreements over the look or playing style of a golf course seem to be at the heart of the tension. Or they can involve simple personality differences.

Though each case is distinct, many involve capable, well-intentioned architects locking horns with capable, well-intentioned superintendents — and nobody wins.

Observing the flexible working relationship between Austin GC superintendent Doug Petersan and architect Ben Crenshaw reminds me that these tense situations are unnecessary. To watch these two men work seamlessly in completing Austin GC was a case study in architect-superintendent synergy. Petersan and Crenshaw each have firm convictions and the knowledge to insist that their points of view are the only views, but such attitudes didn't emerge on site.

Petersan had a course to open in November and was not blessed with ideal conditions to cultivate the zoysiagrass necessary to immediately give Austin GC the type of playing surface Crenshaw wanted for his dream club. For Crenshaw, this is a chance to present his friends and fellow Austinites a classically styled golf course in a state that lacks classic architecture. But to get the design just right, Crenshaw wanted to make subtle modifications to the look, size and even the location of bunkers. Before the greens were ready to be seeded, he fretted over every contour, even grabbing a rake and making subtle modifications until the end.

This is the kind of last-minute, high-pressure, conflict-prone work that's commonplace in quality golf course construction, but which often tends to strain relationships between construction superintendents and architects. Why?

Watching Petersan and Crenshaw work, it was clear they understood what each other was trying to accomplish. If there were disagreements, Petersan was comfortable communicating to Crenshaw what was a priority in getting the course open, and which design modifications could wait until after play began. If Crenshaw insisted a change was vital to the design, then Petersan figured out how to find a way to

They Were in Accord at Austin

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



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make it work. There were no friendship-ending conflicts and no tension — just two people working toward the best course possible.

Their successful working relationship hinges on trust and communication. Crenshaw and his fellow founding members know how they want their course to look and play. They communicated this mission to Petersan, who was brought in from the start, giving him the opportunity to select the appropriate grasses and create a maintenance program. And Crenshaw never failed to consider Petersan's workload or priorities before making a request, which is where most architects encourage conflict.

Getting to the heart of superintendent-architect tension is vital for the future of golf course construction projects. If preventable disputes keep occurring, experienced superintendents will stay away from grow-in projects where their veteran skills are most needed. Meanwhile, architects capable of building quality courses are going to stay away from the sites, cash their checks and turn out uninspired designs if they sense their visions will not be maintained.

A superintendent needs to be brought in at the start of project. Then the superintendent needs to know what kind of look and style he or she is expected to create, a clear directive that must come from the architect. The architect and developer need to know what they want and rationally express their views, which doesn't happen as often as it should.

It's Communication 101. When all is said and done, good dialogue is still the element that separates successful projects from the not so successful.

Austin GC is evidence of that.

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