

When selling an irrigation system to members and owners, your reasons for doing so had better...

Hold Water

BY PETER BLAIS

Superintendent Greg Phenerger knew he had a problem at his 10-year-old West Course, one of three layouts at Johns Island Club in Vero Beach, Fla. The course's irrigation system was experiencing a leak a week — 55 in a single year on the service Ts. The system's ir-

rigation heads were also throwing water into native vegetation areas that were supposed to be unirrigated.

Phenerger held four informational meetings to explain the need for the new \$1 million irrigation system he recently installed on the course. The first meeting was for members with names ending in A-D, the second for members with names from E-L and so on.

"We wanted to keep the numbers of people low at each meeting

so they could ask questions. Holding those meetings was key to getting the project approved," says Phenerger, who also used photos and other visual aids to make his case. "We had some dramatic pictures of leaks."

As Phenerger discovered, selling members or owners on the costly idea of updating an irrigation system is no easy task. It requires that superintendents do their homework and follow through in a business-like manner.

Determining the need

When a superintendent notices numerous dry areas or wet spots on a golf course, it might be time for a new irrigation system, says John Foy, agronomist for the USGA Green Section's Florida Region. Ted Horton, who recently left Pebble Beach Co. as vice president of resource management to form his own turfgrass consulting firm in Southern California, says other hints that a new irrigation system might be needed are:

- not getting enough water to the right places at the right time;
- developing hard lines along cart paths, wooded areas or native plant growth; and
- controls, whether computer or manually operated, that fail to pull together

Continued on page 60



MIKE KLEMM

Hold Water

Continued from page 58

the irrigation system and evapotranspiration equipment.

Above-ground items — sprinkler heads, pump stations and controllers — can be replaced anytime, says Terry Buchen, a turfgrass consultant from Williamsburg, Va. However, below-ground pipes, wires and hydraulic tubing are a different matter. Those parts usually last 20 to 25 years.

Most modern irrigation systems cost \$750,000 to \$1.25 million, Horton notes. "If you are putting a system on a course in the Northeast — where you get 40 to 50 inches of annual rain with half coming in the growing season — it doesn't require the same sophistication you would in the West, where you might not get any rain from March through December," Horton adds.

Foy says a "bare bones" double-row system with piping, heads, pumping station and control system runs \$500,000 to \$750,000. A top-of-the-line, triple-row system with computer-controls and a variable frequency drive pumping station runs \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million.

"The biggest controlling cost factor is the number of irrigation heads," Foy says. "It's not unusual to see a course with 1,200 to 1,400 heads." But there are solid systems in the middle range — \$750,000 to \$1.2 million — that will cover the needs with not as many heads, Foy notes.

Francetown, N.H.-based architect Marvin Armstrong estimates the costs for an 18-hole course with a computer-controlled system are as follows: a basic single-row system, \$320,000 to \$360,000; a double-row system, \$400,000 to \$460,000; and a triple-row system, as much as \$1 million. Pumping systems, excluding pump houses and utility connections, run between \$40,000 and \$60,000.

Consultant or distributor designer

Once a superintendent determines a new irrigation system is necessary, there are two alternatives: Hire an independent irrigation consultant to design the system or have a manufacturer's local distributor do it.

Irrigation consultants are more expensive, with fees between \$25,000 and \$35,000. But they will design an irrigation system with equipment best

sued to the facility. The local distributor will design the system free in exchange for the course buying that firm's equipment, which may or may not be the best choice, Buchen notes. And a local distributor may not be as skilled as an independent consultant.

A third option is to have the local distributor design the system and then send the design to the manufacturer's national office, where the manufacturer's head designers can also check the plan.

Continued on page 62



MIKE KLEMM

One Superintendent's Story

When Rob Kloska joined The Jupiter Island (Fla.) Club as superintendent in 1995, the members asked him to develop a plan to upgrade the course with the greens being the priority. "I told them, 'If you can't drain them and irrigate them, then you can't build them,'" Kloska says.

At the time, the course had a pump station that could only put out 600 gallons per minute. Some of the main lines were less than 3 inches in diameter. During dry times, the course relied on potable water that the city could shut off during droughts.

Kloska's initial plan called for a new control system. Installed in 1996, it provided some immediate benefits to the existing system. That was followed in 1997 by a new variable frequency drive pumping station that tripled water

flow to 1,800 gallons per minute; a new main line throughout the course; installation of new drainage systems; design and construction of a new reverse osmosis water treatment plant that used saline water on site and lessened the course's dependency on city water; and the enlargement of the irrigation pond.

In 1998, the club renovated the greens and green complexes, including new irrigation, with the assistance of architect Brian Silva. The past two years have seen smaller projects, including installation of new sprinkler heads and the conversion of the remaining hydraulic heads to electric heads.

The irrigation system cost roughly \$750,000, with the entire renovation approaching \$3 million, Kloska says. The drainage and reverse osmosis systems were easy sells because the members

knew the course couldn't depend on city water.

Kloska's green chairman, Bill Battle, is a past president of the USGA, and Kloska has met with him every fall since 1996 to discuss what to do the next year. Getting his green chairman on board and having him help sell the renovation program to the members was vital.

"He was very tough on me at the beginning, asking me why we needed this and why we needed that," Kloska recalls. "He probably already knew. But I think he wanted me to explain it and know why I needed it. He taught me how to approach things in a calm manner and know what questions to expect from people. He carried the torch, and it was never really an issue."

— Peter Blais

Hold Water

Continued from page 60

Foy says it's best to hire outside irrigation consultants.

"They are professionals," he stresses. "Irrigation systems have gotten so sophisticated, I would never feel comfortable designing a new system."

Whether an irrigation consultant or a local distributor designs the system, the superintendent should work closely with the designer on the fine points.

Selling the idea

Erik Christiansen, president of EC Design Group Ltd., an irrigation consultant located in West Des Moines, Iowa, is a former irrigation supplies distributor and superintendent who says it isn't unusual for 70 percent of a green committee to initially oppose the idea of upgrading an irrigation system.

"Many think a superintendent asking for a new irrigation system is similar to his asking for a new truck with a

CD player," Christiansen explains. "[Members] believe the superintendent simply wants the best for himself. Having an independent consultant make a similar request takes the superintendent out of the firing line."

Horton, who was superintendent at Winged Foot GC and Westchester CC in New York in addition to his management position at Pebble Beach, says he never inherited an up-to-date irrigation system at any of his courses, but he was successful at convincing ownership to install them. Horton laid the groundwork at Winged Foot and Westchester, which installed updated systems shortly after his departure. He upgraded the system at Pebble Beach Golf Links.

"The way to sell it is on the fact that water is a precious commodity," Horton says. "You need to demonstrate that you can manage your water in a more efficient manner with a newer irrigation system."

Foy says a superintendent rarely con-

vinces ownership to install a new system overnight, except under extreme conditions.

"The drought this spring and early summer highlighted deficiencies quickly," he adds. "In a few cases, superintendents quickly convince ownership of the need. But it's generally a one- or two-year process."

What's the key to convincing members and owners to spend the money?

"For courses that are still dragging hoses, the owner can probably pay back his investment in labor savings in a relatively short time," Armstrong says. "Course conditioning is almost always a primary factor in a client's decision for bringing us in for renovations. Nine times out of 10, irrigation improvements are an important part of the changes we make." ■

Peter Blais, a free-lance writer from North Yarmouth, Maine, can be reached at pblais@maine.rr.com.

OTTERBINE®.... Your Water Quality Management Specialists



Surface Aerators

- Reduce the problem of algae, aquatic weeds and odor.
- Introduce O₂ into the pond.
- Available in a variety of spray patterns and sizes.



Sub-Surface Aerators

- Introduce O₂ into the pond bottom via Sub-Surface or Diffused Air.
- Perfect for shallow ponds.
- No visible spray pattern.



Bunker Pumper

- Removing water from bunkers, excavation sites or swimming pools.
- 280 GPM pumping rate.
- Floating, self priming portable - only 85 lbs!



Ottershield Lake Dye

- Transforms muddy water into healthy blue water.
- No stained clothes or hands - you never touch Ottershield.
- Neat, clean, packets.



Replace your old Otterbine with a new one and receive a discount of up to \$600.00!! Call 1-800-AER8TER for details.

OTTERBINE, INC. • 1-800-AER8TER (237-8837) • (610) 965-6018 • FAX: (610) 965-6050