



# In Concert

They're on different sides of the fairway, but architects and superintendents *can* work together harmoniously

MIKE KLEMM

# W

BY SHANE SHARP

HILE GOLF AS WE KNOW IT WAS not around during the Renaissance, it would have been something to see Michelangelo designing an upscale track while Galileo calculated the course's watering requirements, drainage slopes and mowing strategies. Today, a golf course designer gazes upon the land that is his canvas and envisions routing, slopes, bunkers, tees and greens. A superintendent, however, stares at the same land and sees drainage issues, bunker faces that will need to be walk-mowed and greens that will require more maintenance than a 1957 Chevy.

When art and science come together to produce 7,000 yards of golfing enjoyment, players assume that architects and superintendents have worked in harmonious fashion throughout a course's development. But that's not always the case.

"If the superintendent is knowledgeable about the game and knows how the game is played by skilled players, he or she can be more sensitive to what we're doing as designers," says Jan Beljan, a design associate for Tom Fazio

Golf Course Designers. "If the superintendent is not sensitive to what we do, part of the artistry of the course is lost."

But art is in the eye of the beholder, and there can be strain on the architect/superintendent relationship created by intense competition for golfing dollars. Now that the supply of new golf courses has caught up with the game's burgeoning demand, course owners are looking for a competitive edge, which often involves owners hiring high-priced architects such as Tom Fazio or Pete Dye, and demanding the most awe-inspiring courses conceivable.

The competition between owners leads to more memorable, challenging golf courses for players, but it also translates into course conditions that are nearly impossible to maintain without generous maintenance budgets. This brings to mind an important question at a time when golf has arguably never been more popular: Will the intricate relationship between architects and superintendents grow like healthy bentgrass, or will it fizzle under the strain of competitive pressure?

▲ Arizona's Gary Panks, who designed the spectacular Sedona Golf Resort pictured above, is making a name for himself as a maintenance-friendly designer.



## Maintaining your Mona Lisa

Just as it costs a museum more to preserve a painting from Pablo Picasso, it's often more expensive for owners to maintain layouts designed by today's pre-eminent architects.

"Certainly, it costs more to maintain a Pete Dye or P.B. Dye golf course," says Paul Kauffman, superintendent at Prestwick CC in Surfside Beach, S.C. "There's a lot of mounding, centipedegrass and areas you have to walk cut. [Architects] do a great job laying out challenging golf courses, but it's challenging for us, too."

But superintendents, after all, are trained and paid to maintain courses, no matter how demanding the maintenance or famous the designer. That's the attitude taken by David Downing, director of golf course operations at Barefoot Resort & GC in Myrtle Beach, S.C. Speaking of courses with big-name architects, Downing oversees tracks bearing the names of Fazio, Davis Love and Greg Norman.

"If you're looking for a great course, you have to deal with high maintenance," Downing says. "Green complexes are tough to maintain if they are dramatic. Part of what makes a course great are those things that are hard to maintain."

That's not to say there are no memorable low-maintenance courses. Some of the traditional layouts of Willard Byrd, Arthur Hills, Clyde Johnston and Russell Breeden require little maintenance outside of mowing fairways and greens, and routine maintenance such as spraying, overseeding and aerification.

Matt Sapochak believes that Winyah Bay GC in Georgetown, S.C., fits the bill as a memorable low-maintenance course. Sapochak redesigned the course in 1995 and was its superintendent for a year. "I was going to be superintendent here for a while, so I wanted to design a course that was low maintenance but had high-end conditions," says Sapochak, now general manager at Winyah Bay.

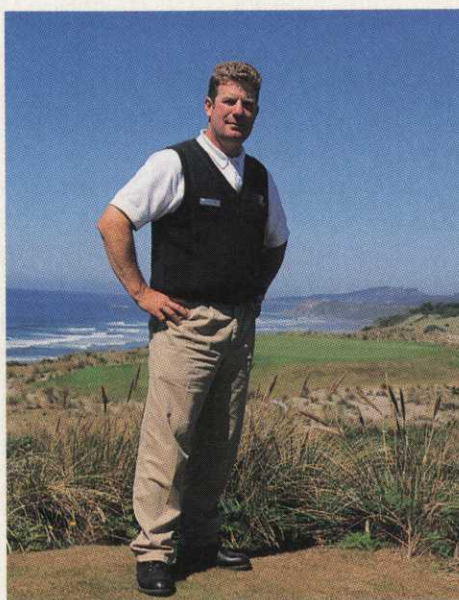
## Who's the boss?

If you're under the impression that architects make all the calls when it comes to designing their layouts, then you may also believe the New York Yankees front-office makes decisions without input from owner George Steinbrenner. When you break down golf

course development to its essence, the architect is merely the consultant to a client, who is the owner. While some owners let architects call the shots, others strong arm architects into producing the courses they want.

The architect's responsibility is to give the owner what he or she wants and is paying for, Beljan says. "If that requires a lot of detailed maintenance, and that is what the owner can afford, then that is what the architect will provide," she adds.

The owner usually determines when a



LARRY KASSELL

superintendent is brought into the design process. Many architects depend on owners to have superintendents present during construction. Other architects, however, insist that superintendents be brought into the process early to eliminate unnecessary revisions.

"In most of my projects, we just deal with the owner," says architect Clyde Johnston. "But my contract states that the owner has to have the superintendent onboard before the irrigation goes in. If a superintendent wants to be around before that, that's even better."

But not every owner has the budget to bring in a Fazio or a Pete Dye to design a course, or has the desire to micromanage every aspect of a course's development. Kemp Causey, owner of the Calabash Golf Links in Calabash, N.C., wanted a simple, traditional course that was easy to maintain. So he selected Willard Byrd, known for his straightforward layouts,

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**A lot of time was spent reviewing everything to be sure it was as maintenance friendly as possible.**

**TROY RUSSELL  
BANDON DUNES**



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to design his dream course.

"You won't find any bulkheads, bridges or high-maintenance items here," Causey says. "I just tried to take God's piece of land, which only had 7 feet of elevation, and have Willard build a good course."

### **Of philosophy, technology**

To outside observers, architects and superintendents may appear to be rivals. But the truth is, the two professions are not as far apart as they appear.

Chad Ritterbusch, director of communications for the American Society of Golf Course Architects, explains that a healthy give-and-take relationship enables architects and superintendents to coexist.

"There's a trade-off that exists between

CC in Mesa) in the early 1980s with three-to-one grass slopes that required a lot of hand labor," Rupert adds. "Panks is more conscientious about these things. There are ways of making a course penal without compromising the topography."

With more than 600 courses, Michigan has become one of the hottest golfing destinations in the country. Bill Kehoss, superintendent at Timberstone GC in Iron Mountain, Mich., says a smattering of Michigan architects embrace the concept of getting superintendents involved in building courses from the beginning.

"At our course, the architect had the original superintendent out from the start," Kehoss says. "There was a good relationship between the two, but this is probably an exception and not the norm.

"The superintendent changed some of the grass that was going to be used on the course from the original recommendation," Kehoss notes. "The course is already hard to maintain because of the rocky terrain, and the recommendation [by the superintendent] saved us a lot of additional work."

In Cherry Grove Beach, S.C., the Tidewater GC underwent a number of improvements, many of which were designed to lighten superintendent Bob Graunke's load. The greens were replanted with A-1 bentgrass, an improved strand that's more tolerant of the Southeastern climate. Bunkers were rebuilt under the supervision of course designer, Ken Tomlinson, and they are easier to maintain.

At Bandon Dunes in Bandon, Ore., superintendent Troy Russell says the course's architect, Scotsman David McLay Kidd, had ease of maintenance in mind when he designed the course, which opened last year.

"During the course of construction, a great deal of time was spent reviewing everything to be sure it was as maintenance friendly as possible," Russell says. "In most cases, shapes or traffic routes were altered if they required extraordinary maintenance. The graceful contours of the course are not only pleasing to view, they also mean you don't have to put mowers where they aren't designed to go."

### **Where credit is due**

Architect and architecture historian Geoffrey Cornish praises the eagerness and adaptability



LARRY KASSELL

▲ David McLay Kidd had ease of maintenance in mind when he designed Bandon Dunes in Bandon, Ore.

the two [professions], but with the advent of new technology and design methods, architects are able to create more stunning designs without impacting maintenance as much," Ritterbusch says.

In Arizona, Scottsdale-based Gary Panks is making a name for himself as a maintenance-friendly course designer with such tracks as The Raven at South Mountain and the Sedona Golf Resort. Arizona superintendent Bill Rupert says Panks layouts are challenging and penal without being extreme. It makes a big difference when an architect considers the everyday job of the superintendent and his staff when he's designing a course, Rupert says.

"I was unfortunate enough to have maintained a Pete Dye course (Red Mountain Ranch



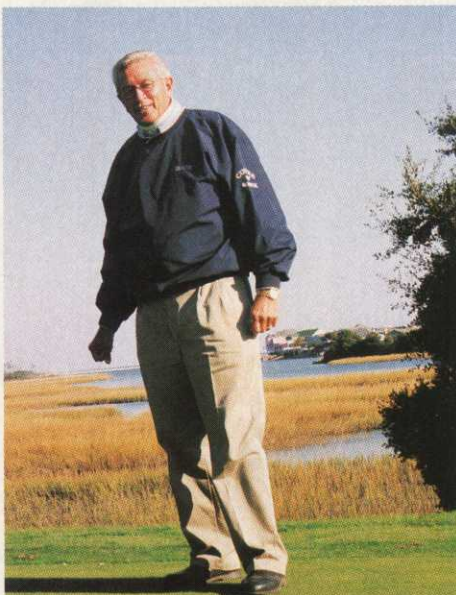
of superintendents for maintaining the complex layouts produced by today's architects. "The game has changed, courses have changed, but the only thing that has not changed is the dedication of the superintendent," he says.

Cornish says designers and superintendents are intricately bound by the triangle of basic considerations — an equilateral triangle that espouses three essential factors when laying out a golf course: the game itself, eye appeal and maintainability. As long as the two professions adhere to the basic principles of the triangle, design and maintenance should be able to coexist in perpetuity.

"Some of the greatest courses we've seen are emerging from blackboards today," Cornish says. "Technology has helped vastly in terms of maintaining these courses."

Despite differences in their professions and their approaches, Cornish stresses that most superintendents and architects have a mutual respect for each other.

Good designers know the importance that superintendents play in their projects. "We re-



The greens were replanted with A-1 bent, an improved strand that's more tolerant of the climate.

BOB GRAUNKE  
TIDEWATER GC

spect the fact that they respect our design and our philosophy," Cornish says. ■

*Shane Sharp is a free-lance writer from Charlotte, N.C.*

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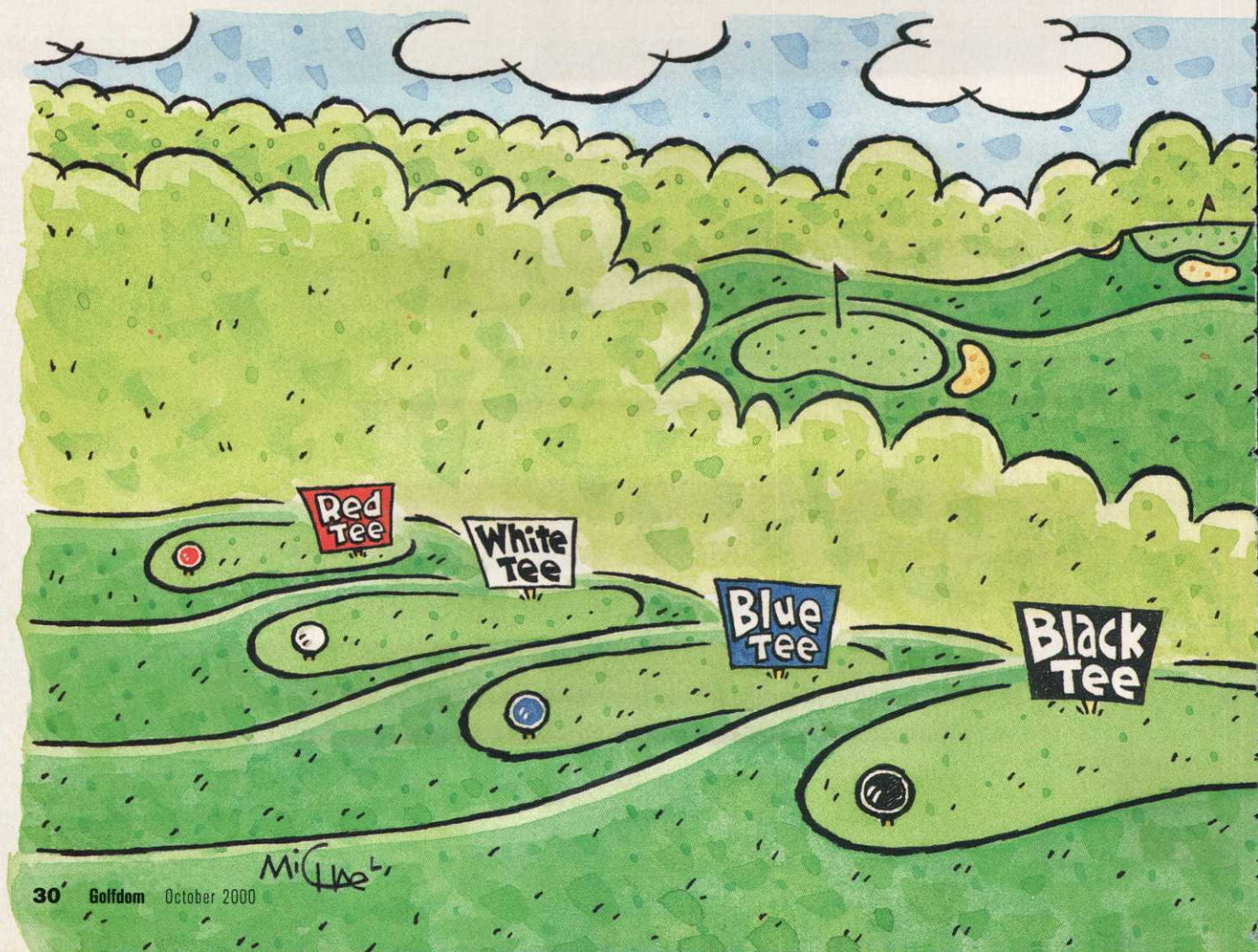


# The Politics of

**Modern course design involves a mix of egos, miscommunication, beliefs and bureaucracy. Boy, do we have some funny (but disturbing) stories for you**

**W**hen amateur architect George Thomas and his engineer sidekick Billy Bell were building Riviera CC in 1926, they had one annoying problem. It wasn't the site, their crew or their budget — it was developer Frank Garbutt, who didn't play golf or know anything about it. But that didn't stop Garbutt from visiting the site regularly and offering architectural suggestions for each hole.

Since Thomas was providing his services for free, he didn't have to listen to Garbutt. But instead of insulting the developer by telling him to bug off, Thomas and Bell agreed to talk to each other nonstop whenever Garbutt visited, never allowing the clueless client to get a word in. Eventually, Garbutt stopped making site visits.





# Design

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD

Times have changed in golf— sort of. There are no amateur architects and only a handful of designers who have the clout to overrule problematic clients without fear of being canned. In most cases, client design ideas become the focal point of projects regardless of the clients' architecture backgrounds — just like green committees when they cluelessly overrule superintendents and then blame everyone but themselves when things go wrong.

Modern course design involves a peculiar mix of clashing egos, miscommunication, artistic beliefs, maintainability and politics — all converging as dirt is moving, but rarely to the betterment of a project. Yet this power struggle in the golf business goes on because, unlike a building or home design that relies on precise engineering, a golf course can be built and

maintained no matter how many odd ideas are injected into the design.

However, the balance between client involvement and architectural wisdom has tipped so far into the client's favor that many of the courses opening cost millions more than necessary. Worse, many of the courses are falling apart because the architect wasn't given enough freedom to make the holes work or because superintendents weren't hired during construction.

Several architects shared their horror stories with *Golfdom*, all off the record out of fear that even the mention of their names will be used against them by future clients and their peers. Many of these tales are humorous, but others are disturbing, considering what's at stake.

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## The Politics of Design

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A few architects did share their advice on dealing with politics in golf (see sidebar), but as anyone involved in the business today knows: There are no clear-cut answers to dealing appropriately with tricky political situations. Because as superintendents, managers, professionals, contractors and architects are finding out too often, golf course jobs live and die by who treads most carefully through a set of land mines laid out by developers, who are usually doing their first and often last golf projects. Now, for the stories:

### Par 4s equal bad fortune

One architect, who deals with several overseas projects, offered his worst client nightmares, including the story about the Chinese fellow who didn't want any par 4s because "four" in Chinese means "death." The fellow said par 8s were good, though, because they mean prosperity. "The more par 8s on the course, the better," the architect recalls the man telling him.

Then there was the client who insisted on combining French Renaissance garden design philosophy into golf course architecture. "That was interesting, too," the architect says.

### Trees of life

We've all heard of hugging memorial trees, but how about the famous club that desperately sought a U.S. Open, but told USGA officials it wouldn't cut down problematic trees nor even trim them because human souls were entrenched in the bark?

### Right, left, right, left ...

Another successful architect told of the client who bitterly complained about the fairway bunker built on the right side of the first hole. The client said, "It shouldn't be there because everyone slices [their balls]," the architect recalls.

"I was confident he would like the second hole, with its fairway bunker on the left," the architect said. "But when he saw it, he said, 'Why not put a fairway bunker left if no one hits there?'"

### Tee-d off

A popular and respected architect recounted this typical development nightmare:

"One day, the money half of the partners was making a rare site visit. As we walked the holes, I tried to give him a play by play of what was going on, and what the finished product was going to look like. When we got to a par 3, I figured there was no way our tour could not brighten, especially with such a naturally wonderful golf hole. I explained that the back tee played to about 185 yards and the angle of the wetland bank favored a right-to-left shot. Pointing out the first peninsula, I showed how the angle was less difficult and the distance on the hole was reduced to about 140 yards [from the middle tee]. Then [we moved on] to the last tee setting and a hole of about 105 yards. I turned to the money guy expecting him to toss me a crumb, and he said tersely, 'Why so many tees?' Only mildly



### Do Your Research

Several architects note that researching who you might be working for is one of the best ways to avoid tense situations during the designing of a course. It's simple but important advice. Consider this story from a former American Society of Golf Course Architects president relating a classic example of someone not researching his client, which led to disastrous results:

"An architect went to a prestigious club in the Minneapolis area to be interviewed for a potential remodeling project. During the course of the interview, he extolled the virtues of Rain Bird Irrigation Products. Had he done some research, he would have known that some board members were executives of the Toro Corp."

The same architect points out that simple research — perhaps a phone call to a superintendent in the area who formerly worked for the client — is the kind of basic research many designers don't do because they are too excited about the prospects of working for particular clubs or developers.

"Any club that frequently changes architects is likely the cause of its own problems," the architect says. "While architects certainly can do poor work or not fit the bill at a particular club, any club that goes through four well-known architects for four renovation projects is trouble."

So if you're a superintendent or architect, don't go to a club with the idea of removing several trees without knowing they are part of the club's current memorial tree program. And don't respond the way one architect did when a green committee chairman asked him, "Can you save this tree?" To which the soon-to-be-unemployed architect replied, "No problem, just tell us where you want us to stack the logs." — **Geoff Shackelford**

flustered, I waded in with the typical stuff about par 3 and players of various abilities and playing lengths and angles, and all that stuff. I went on for three or four minutes only to again be greeted with, in an even more terse delivery, 'Why so many tees?'

"Then I got more direct, something to the effect of ... it's a par 3 ... people take divots ... you need the extra space for the turf to repair itself ... and so on. Giving new meaning to terseness, the money man said, in a totally serious fashion, 'Why don't you just use a rubber mat?' With no further words, we moved on to the next hole."

### Not funny

A long-time architect known for his graceful handling of tough clients had this to say when we contacted him:

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## The Politics of Design

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"The political issue! Will you make it politically correct? Will we have elephants and donkeys? You have a difficult subject. I have found little that is comical about committees and golf course remodeling. Unfortunately, most of this end of the business is uncomfortable and often confrontational."

### A failure to communicate

How do you make situations less confrontational? Architects and superintendents, even though sometimes pitted against each other on design issues, tend to be the victims in the end. Even the consensus of two knowledgeable industry veterans is usually not enough to convince committees and developers to listen to the experts.

Many of the architects questioned for this article said each case is distinct, but there are some ways to handle these delicate political situations. Most say that superintendents and architects must find creative ways to give clients an out so they can admit they were wrong and not turn situations into tense battles.

"When committee persons have their own personal design 'solutions,' I find it best to direct the conversation toward design 'concepts' and 'philosophy,' says Don Knott of Knott-Brooks-Linn Design. "I'll say, 'I like the concept of your idea,

but we should look at a variety of design options that accomplish your concept.' Or I'll say, 'It's an interesting idea and one that I will certainly consider in relation with other variables and options.'"

Renowned architect Brian Silva advocates open communication and involving all parties in the design process as the best way to deal with differing viewpoints and to help create the best result.

"Often when looking at a problem, a great deal of good is derived from standing there and asking, 'What do you think we should do here?' That's key — because a lot of clients have a general idea or concept in mind — and it's your job to convert that on the ground to grading, shaping, fine shaping and the like," Silva says.

The bottom line: Most everyone tries too hard to make their points or to settle situations without simple non-confrontational communication and good listening skills. It's always difficult dealing with egos, armchair architects and experts on everything, but skillful communication is your best bet in dealing with the politics of design. ■

*Geoff Shackelford, a contributing editor for Golfdom, knows that politics make the world go 'round. He can be reached at [geoffshackelford@aol.com](mailto:geoffshackelford@aol.com).*

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**Consultants have a place in the industry, but it's elementary to know who you're dealing with before hiring one**

# The Search for Sound Advice

**BY LARRY AYLWARD**  
EDITOR

**T**he moral of this story is as unmistakable as a push-up green: A good consultant can help you as much as a bad consultant can hurt you.

Those who have worked with consultants will tell you that good ones can only make you more capable superintendents. Bad consultants, however, can take you down for the count.

"Consultants are there to make you better," says Jim Ferrin, CGCS at Whitney Oaks GC in Sacramento, Calif. "I use them to help make me a better business person. I've been able to save money because they come up with programs that can enhance the facility."

"There's a fear of consultants and rightfully so," contends Mark Clark, CGCS for Troon Golf & CC in Scottsdale, Ariz. "I've seen a lot of dead bodies follow some of these guys around."

Most superintendents agree that good

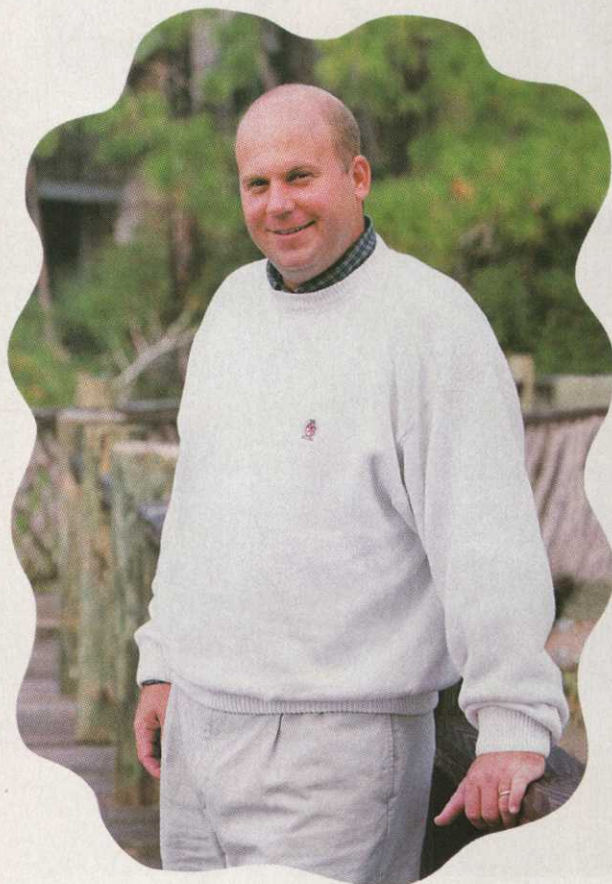
consultants have a place in the industry. What William Bengeyfield reported in the *USGA Green Section Record* in 1976 remains true today:

"Turfgrass consultants are a product of today's technology and golfer demands," wrote Bengeyfield, the former editor of the USGA publication. "There's a need to share and exchange information among all those interested in professional turfgrass management."

"The truism, 'No one has all the  
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ARTVILLE





**“Find someone who understands your objectives and is going to support you.”**

**—Allan Pulaski,  
The Landings Club**

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answers’ is more applicable today than ever before.”

But what makes a good consultant, and how can you identify the profile of a bad consultant? Let us count the ways.

Allan Pulaski, director of golf course and grounds maintenance at The Landings Club in Savannah, Ga., says a good consultant is foremost a team player.

“Find someone who understands your objectives and is going to support you,” says Pulaski, who was interviewing irrigation consultants in August. “My objective is to find the best team player. You need someone who’s going to walk in stride with you.”

Good consultants also won’t tell you just what you want to hear, Ferrin says.

“They will tell you if you’re not doing a good job,” he adds. “They’ll tell you what you don’t want to hear.”

But good consultants won’t tell others — most importantly, your supervisors and peers — what you don’t want them to hear about agronomic problems on your golf course.

When a superintendent and a good consultant meet with the general manager, the green committee chairman and the board of directors, a superintendent knows what that consultant is going to say because the two are united in their views. “[The consultant] won’t pull a 180 on you and say things you don’t agree with,” Pulaski says.

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### USGA Wields Powerful Name

For years, USGA’s Green Section has been a popular consulting service for superintendents. And from a political standpoint, USGA consultants wield plenty of power.

While superintendents are the agronomic voices for their respective courses, most realize that green committee members and owners deeply respect the USGA’s opinions. Throughout his career, Jim Ferrin, CGCS at Whitney Oaks GC in Sacramento, Calif., has lobbied members to do this and that to the golf course. But on many occasions, they only conceded when they heard the same things from a USGA consultant.

“In terms of a political element, the USGA has been wonderful,” Ferrin says. “USGA is a powerful entity and should be respected.”

While Ferrin has found the USGA helpful, he prefers the more specific information offered by private consultants that he has hired. Mark Clark, CGCS for Troon Golf & CC in

Scottsdale, Ariz., says his peers have criticized the USGA for its lack of in-depth information, but he still believes the organization is superior.

“A lot of people don’t like the USGA because they don’t think the USGA tells them anything,” Clark says. “But I disagree.”

Clark prefers USGA consultants because they have visited so many courses and have excellent experience.

“When they get to our course, they have all kinds of tid-bits about things that are working and not working,” Clark says. “That’s the kind of stuff I like to hear.”

Clark also notes that USGA’s name carries clout. He says his members don’t know the names of independent consultants, but they know the USGA.

“I’d just as soon pay money and have the USGA’s name stamped on Troon CC,” Clark says. “I’ll get more bang for the buck.”

**— Larry Aylward**





**“[A good consultant] will tell you what you don’t want to hear.”**

— Jim Ferrin  
Whitney Oaks GC

*Continued from page 38*

Good consultants possess solid agronomic backgrounds, and they aren’t afraid to get down and dirty — literally, Ferrin says. More than that, they aren’t afraid to tell you that you need to do this and that, and they will follow up with you to make sure you do.

“They will call you and get on your case,” Ferrin notes. “Those are the kind of consultants I want.”

A good consultant also understands the ins and outs of your course and the demographics of its location, Ferrin says. Just because a consultant has an impeccable reputation doesn’t mean he can slack off in preparation. A good consultant knows how much a course can afford to spend to upgrade. “A good consultant knows how to find the right equation for you,” Ferrin says.

“[The person] can enhance the programs you’re having success with, and direct you into other programs to offset failures,” Clark adds.

Good consultants can also help you save money. For instance, a salesman might try to sell a superintendent a new supercoated slow-release fertilizer that will work wonders on the golf course. But a good consultant might advise the superintendent that the course doesn’t need a fancy fertilizer and can be spruced up by simply adjusting mower heights, Ferrin says.

“So then I’m paying roughly \$1,800 every other month for fertilizer rather than \$7,000,” Ferrin says. “The aesthetics are just as good, and the grass is as hardy as ever.”

So what makes a bad consultant? The last thing a superintendent wants is a fly-by-night consultant who provides him with a canned spiel and is never heard from again. Likewise, a good consultant is genuinely concerned about a superintendent’s efforts to improve the course and will tweak his program to fit the superintendent’s agronomic and fiscal needs.

Clark is cynical about some consultants. He says he has seen at least six superintendents lose their jobs in the last five years over the backlash caused by consultants’ accounts of what superintendents weren’t doing to maintain their courses. “What happens is upper management hears what a consultant has to

### The Consummate Consultant

Jim Ferrin, CGCS at Whitney Oaks GC in Sacramento, Calif., lists his qualifications for a top agronomic advisor:

- ▶ Has a background in golf and possesses the agronomic sense to make decisions to benefit the business of the club and the conditions of the course.
- ▶ Someone with whom to compare notes.

- ▶ Doesn’t just tell you what you want to hear.
- ▶ Makes proper determinations.
- ▶ Understands your financial limits.
- ▶ Follows up with you to see how things are going.
- ▶ Makes you more organized.
- ▶ Someone you can trust.



say and thinks the superintendent is an idiot," Clark insists.

Clark isn't down on all consultants and agrees that many want to help superintendents improve their courses, which would improve their standing with members, green committees and owners. "Some consultants are good at doing that, and kudos to them," he says.

There are other circumstances that can get superintendents in trouble with consultants, Clark says. For instance, some superintendents may be under pressure from their general managers to hire consultants. But the superintendents don't realize the general managers might

## **Superintendents shouldn't let their egos get in the way of taking advice.**

be using the consultants to get the superintendents fired. A good consultant would figure out such a scenario and walk away from it, Clark says.

There are things superintendents can do to make working with consultants more constructive. First, superintendents shouldn't let their egos get in the way of taking advice.

"You have to be willing to admit that you don't have a patent on all of the brains in the world," Pulaski says. "You're insecure if you're not willing to ask for help and find a better way to do something."

Superintendents can benefit more from consultants by letting them figure out a course's imperfections on their own, Ferrin says. That way, superintendents will discover if consultants have anything worthwhile to say.

"One thing I've learned is that you need to let consultants do the work," says Ferrin, acknowledging that he once did the consultant's work for him. "Let them make the proper determinations."

The bottom line: Hiring a consultant is like buying a car. You had better do your homework and know how it works.

"Consultants have a place in our business, Clark says, "but you have to know who you're dealing with."

"You have to be careful," Pulaski adds. "I'm sure there are some consultants who can be influenced by green committee

chairmen a lot quicker than they can be influenced by superintendents."

Consultants and other advisers should take a cue from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a 19th century English poet and theologian, who said of offering advice: "Like snow; the softer it falls, the longer it dwells upon, and the deeper it sinks into the mind." ■

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