Web Wizardry Aids Golfer Education

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.

Joe Liebsch, superintendent at Kennett Square Golf & CC in Kennett Square, Pa., fits the traditional profile of a computer-savvy superintendent. He graduated in the early 1990s on the cusp of the computer revolution. So he has been using e-mail and surfing the Web since it's inception, right?

Well, Liebsch is proof that stereotypes don't always match reality. Before Kennett Square computerized its irrigation system, he insists he had never touched a computer.

"It's not that I was afraid of them," Liebsch says. "I just never had a real reason to use them."

The club's decision to install a computer in his office changed that. As Liebsch explored the power of the machine that now sat on his desk, he realized how much it could help him communicate his maintenance message to his members.

"It was easy," Liebsch says. "My message for those superintendents who don't want to learn how to use a computer is that there's nothing to be afraid of. It's one of the most powerful tools you can have."

First came e-mail. Liebsch says he enjoyed the instant feedback it gave him, not only from fellow superintendents, but from members of his club. He's a great believer in educating his membership as much as possible to head off rumors about what was going on at the course.

"It's amazing how, after a round of golf, all golfers suddenly become agronomic experts," Liebsch says. "The rumor mill starts turning, and suddenly small problems become enormous. Nothing I can say will change their minds because the '19th Hole' crowd has spoken."

Liebsch is always looking for innovative ways to reach his members. So when the club created a Web site and told department heads to design their own sections, Liebsch jumped at the chance.

"You can write the same article over and over about winter kill in the newsletter, and you'll still get complaints and questions afterward," Liebsch says. "With the Web site, your members can watch your program step by step. That level of involvement helps."

If your course doesn't have a Web site, you

EDUCATING YOUR MEMBERS THROUGH YOUR CLUB'S WEB SITE WILL HEAD OFF RUMORS ABOUT WHAT'S *REALLY* GOING ON AT THE COURSE

should become an active advocate for one. With a little effort, you will suddenly be able to reach your golfers at a level you wouldn't have imagined previously.

A good Web site allows your members to take a virtual tour of the maintenance facility (Liebsch says some of his members assumed he worked out of a barn), meet your staff and inform them about ongoing maintenance projects. In short, wise Web site use provides you the opportunity to deliver an ongoing education about good course maintenance to your golfers.

Under Liebsch's direction (with the help of his dedicated staff), the maintenance department's section (*www.golfmember.com/ksgcc/grounds.html*) has blossomed to 12 pages, the largest section on the site.

Liebsch updates his section daily with weather reports, course conditions, and special maintenance projects that might be going on that day. He also confesses that he posts green speeds, but he tempers that heresy by explaining to golfers exactly what conditions may lead to slower than normal greens.

"It takes me 10 minutes a day to update the daily information, and the response I've had has been phenomenal," Liebsch says. "For the small investment of time, the payoff has been great."

Liebsch recently documented why his bunkers washed out after a rainstorm passed through the area. Within a week, the green chairman had approached Liebsch with offers of extra funds to clean up the mess.

That's the power of using the Web. It's time you did a better job of wielding it.

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