

# Behind *the* Scenes



Administrative assistants help superintendents stay the course

BY ROGER KAMHOLZ

(From left) Ann Shelton of the Atlanta Athletic Club, Dianne Rabkin of the TPC at Treviso Bay and Tracey Zimmers of Oakmont Country Club are vital to their respective clubs' maintenance operations.

One of Dianne Rabkin's favorite job perks is the Florida sunrise. As superintendent Todd Draffen's administrative assistant, she greets it at the start of every workday.

"There's something about getting up early," Rabkin says on a recent morning. "The view is magnificent. There was a little bit of fog this morning, and you can watch it as it burns off."

As light floods her office at the TPC at Treviso Bay in Naples, Fla., Rabkin often stops to listen for the familiar sounds of morning.

"I love the sound of the equipment in the morning," she says. "I'm kind of hooked on the maintenance department."

Many golf course superintendents, especially those with larger staffs, employ administrative assistants like Rabkin to handle the heavy doses of clerical work that come with maintaining a golf course. General managers ask superintendents to adhere strictly to budgets, so administrative assistants watch spending closely, and give their bosses weekly and even daily accounts of how much cash remains for the month or year.

Administrative assistants also are responsible for staff payroll, supply and equipment orders, and human resource functions. And

the more knowledge they absorb about turf management, the better they can support their bosses.

The 56-year-old Rabkin joined the TPC at Treviso Bay a few months ago after spending two years as the administrative assistant for superintendent David Smith at Pelican Marsh Golf Club. She worked at Bonita Bay for eight years prior to Pelican Marsh. At an early age, Rabkin helped in her father's interior decorating business. Later, she worked as an administrative assistant in several fields, including finance and insurance.

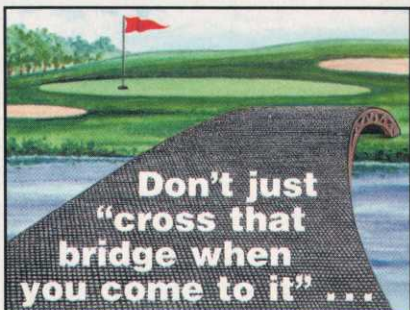
"I've always been a support person, and [enjoy] that," she says. Rabkin's love for the outdoors is what drew her to golf courses. Her family often went hunting and fishing when she was growing up, so the job let her stay close to nature. She even helped start a bird watch group at a course where she previously worked.

At the Atlanta Athletic Club, director of golf courses and grounds Ken Mangum has had the same administrative assistant, Ann Shelton, for 22 years. Also a nature lover (she once had a small family business selling plants she grew at home), Shelton manages payroll, benefits, sick leave and vacation for about 70 employees. Shelton purchases uniforms and

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gloves, tracks capital requests, and balances the monthly and special-project budgets. During the past six years, the club has hosted PGA events, rebuilt both its golf courses and expanded its practice facilities, and Shelton's assistance has proved invaluable.

"When you're doing \$5-million to \$6-million projects . . . and keeping up with all that and all the invoices aside from your normal budget . . . it's a pretty big job," Mangum says.

"One of the things she's really good at is taking care of our guys," Mangum adds. "A lot of them don't know about insurance or their benefits. She really takes good care of them."

And they reciprocate. Whenever the landscape department trims flowers around the course, the workers bring them to Shelton instead of throwing them away, and they avoid coarse language around her. "For me, they have a lot of respect," Shelton says. "And I think that is directly related to Ken."

Some affectionately call her "granny," though she's only a spry 58 years old.

Grounds department office manager Tracey Zimmers nurtures her guys, too — and that includes her husband of 16 years, John Zimmers Jr. At Oakmont Country Club near Pittsburgh, where John is golf course superintendent, she likes to help new staff members get acclimated, advising them on where in town to shop or bank. The Pennsylvania course takes on several interns each season who hail from all over the country and the world, and it's not long before Tracey is attached to the group.

"It's great to watch all these guys who are young and ambitious grow in the industry," she says. "Then it's sad when they go on to their own jobs. In the same regard, it's a proud feeling."

John says the grounds staff gets as much from Tracey's presence as he does. Tracey and John have worked together since 1997, when he was involved with building Sand Ridge Golf Club in Chardon, Ohio. They came to Oakmont

in 1999. Before that, Tracey worked 10 years in the mortgage business.

Besides hefty accounting work like keeping tabs on John's five budgets, she was absorbed last June in readying Oakmont for the 2007 U.S. Open. It was the course's eighth U.S. Open, more than any other venue. Oakmont hosted more than 100 volunteers, which presented a logistical headache that John was glad to have Tracey oversee. She arranged the hotel rooms, catering, uniforms and transportation for the volunteers.

“A person in this position has to be a self-starter and has to be able to get along with a lot of people. And don't take yourself seriously.”

**ANN SHELTON**, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, ATLANTA ATHLETIC CLUB

Oakmont is a demanding, high-profile course where the members expect championship-level conditions daily. "Ultimately, my responsibility is how [good] this golf course is," John says. "That's what I get judged on."

And the scrutiny takes its toll. "The hardest part of the job is having to watch these guys be placed under so much pressure and stress," Tracey says. "Some of it is uncontrollable, like the weather."

Working alongside her husband, Tracey understands John's job and the long hours that come with it. She often counsels other wives of superintendents who wonder why their husbands must work so many hours.

Moral support is another important intangible that administrative assistants bring to the work setting. ■

*Kamholz is a freelance writer from Chicago.*