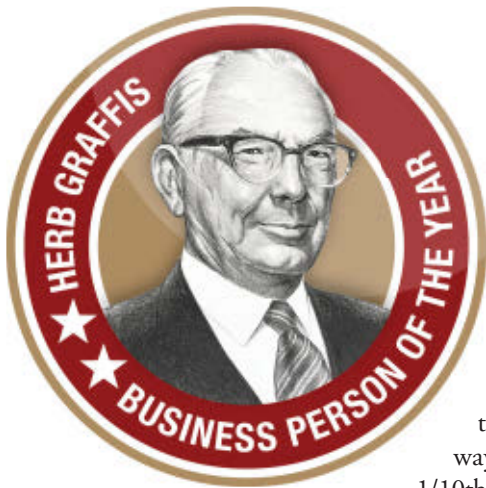


The Guy's Got Guts



PAUL
CHOJNACKY
KEEPS
PASATIEMPO
GOLF CLUB
A STEP
AHEAD

BY SETH JONES

The native grasses under Paul Chojnacky's feet crunch with each step. The golf course superintendent at Pasatiempo Golf Club in Santa Cruz, Calif., knows the grasses are still alive, despite the way they look and the fact that only 1/10th of an inch of rain fell in the month of December.

These crunchy native grasses are a stark contrast to what was in this same area of the course just two seasons ago. Two seasons ago, this area was irrigated turfgrass.

Not anymore.

"There are some homeowners who have lived here for the last 30 years, they think we don't know what we're doing. That it's just a bunch of weeds and that we're killing all the grass. You hear those comments all the time," he says.

He tugs on some of the grass to show that there is resistance in the roots, that these grasses are indeed alive. It'll take time to establish all of these native areas. The health of this grass really isn't in his hands anymore. With no irrigation lines in the area, it's really in God's hands now, and maybe, hopefully, the spirit of Dr. Alister MacKenzie, who lived on the course.

The payoff if the grasses hold on — and Chojnacky is confident they will — is that it will return the 1929 Alister MacKenzie design even closer to its original look, something Pasatiempo strives to achieve on a daily basis.

"The way golf is moving, especially in the state of California where water resources are so limited, this is definitely the future," Cho-

jnacky says, eyeing the yellowed native grasses. "There are going to be more courses that have to do this. We're just a step ahead... which is a good place to be."

Forward thinking and action

There were many things that earned Chojnacky (pronounced *shu-nos-kee*) the honor of being named the recipient of the inaugural Herb Graffis Business Person of the Year award, named after the man who founded *Golfdom* magazine (see sidebar) back in 1927, two years before Pasatiempo opened for play.

The award is meant for someone in the golf industry who, through forward thinking and action, made their golf operation more successful. Chojnacky's accomplishments at Pasatiempo made him an easy pick.

Consider some of the ideas and plans he's implemented and overseen: As far as we can tell, he was the first superintendent to utilize goats to clear brush in canyons, an inexpensive alternative to using manual labor or chemicals; he has implemented a plan removing 25 acres of irrigated land from the course, creating a savings of \$150,000 annually; he is in the midst of creating a new water storage system on the course to help relieve the course of its total dependence on city water; and he is striving to keep Pasatiempo the most faithful MacKenzie course in the world.

"Every day he has shareholder members and public players he's trying to satisfy. It's a course with 80 years of history and a renovation program to implement. He's trying to

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(and Goats!)



The Herb Graffis Business Person of the Year award is named in honor of *Golfdom's* founder, World Golf Hall of Fame member Herb Graffis. Graffis was one of the first people to look at golf as a business when he and his brother Joe founded *Golfdom* in 1927. With his foresight, Graffis helped advance the game in numerous ways, from co-founding the National Golf Foundation and founding the Golf Writers Association of America to his work advocating on behalf of superintendents and helping elevate their profile. It is in all due respect that we present this award in Mr. Graffis' honor.

And the Winner Is...

“

We're just a step ahead... which is a good place to be.”

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maintain old *Poa* greens. He's trying to secure long-term water,” D. Scott Hoyt, general manager at Pasatiempo and a 35-year veteran of the golf industry, says of Chojnacky. “I'm not sure another golf course would throw this much at a superintendent and ask him to be successful day in and day out.”

Chojnacky thrives in a unique business model — Pasatiempo is privately owned, yet also relies on high-end public play.

“The expectations are extremely high there, the place is unlike anywhere I've ever been. There is a high-end private and a high-end public aspect, and there needs to be a balance,” says Josh Lewis, former assistant superintendent of the course, now at Chambers Bay Golf Course in University Place, Wash. “That's probably the toughest part of the job — keeping the private folks happy yet getting the public players to come back. Paul being a people-person is necessary... having a psychology degree helps him at times.”

“He's always trying new things — aeration, native grasses, goats, ways to run a water treatment plant through the course, overcoming the water restrictions,” says Brian Boyer, superintendent at nearby Cinnabar Hills Golf Club. “He's a new-school superintendent with old-school knowledge.”

Got your goat

Chojnacky made waves in the industry back in 2010 for his use of goats on the golf course to clear overgrowth in steep canyons. He remembered goats being used to clear brush back in his home state of Wyoming, and wondered if it would work on a golf course.

“I brought (the idea) to a greens committee meeting, and I remember being worried they'd laugh,” Chojnacky recalls. “The meeting was on a Wednesday afternoon. The next morning, everyone was asking me, ‘When are the goats coming?’”

Chojnacky did some research on the internet to find some local goats. Based on the

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steep terrain, the company asked for \$1,200 per acre cleared, leading to a \$15,000 bill. Chojnacky did the comparison, and figured it would have cost \$110,000 to have had his crew perform the same task. It also would have taken four years. The goats finished off the job in 10 weeks.

“It was also a big entertainment factor for our members. They loved it,” Chojnacky says with a smile.

With the canyons now cleared, the course more closely resembles what MacKenzie created. Previously the depth of the canyons was masked by the overgrowth and sightlines were compromised. A more open course now greets players, thanks to the goats.

Reducing irrigated turf

The overgrown canyons were a problem, but they paled in comparison to the



course’s water issues.

Pasatiempo currently has one water source, and that’s drinking water from the city of Santa Cruz. The cost of irrigating the turf was a “ridiculous amount,” Chojnacky says:

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Chojnacky looked to weed-eating goats when he needed to clear overgrowth in Pasatiempo’s steep canyons.

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And the Winner Is...

Chojnacky has rejuvenated Pasatiempo's native grasses and reduced the amount of irrigated turf on the golf course, saving the club \$150,000 annually.

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\$2,500 per acre foot. "That's some of the most expensive water in the country, definitely in the state of California," he says.

Plus, if water restrictions come up, the course is at the mercy of the city. In the summer of 2009 the course was told it had to cut back 30 percent of its water usage. If it didn't respond, the city could fine it or even shut the water off, Chojnacky says.

The club was spending \$85,000 a month during the dry months to keep the course green. The club happily approved a plan to reduce the amount of irrigated turf from 100 acres to 70 acres. Areas clearly out of play were selected to go back to natural, another move MacKenzie would appreciate.

"You're going to save by not having to water, first and foremost. (Also,) not having to fertilize, it's a lot less labor, and you don't have to go out there and spray," Chojnacky says. "It equals a saving of about \$150,000 a year, most of it in water savings."

Investing in water

Chojnacky and the team at Pasatiempo didn't want to stop there when it came to water savings. As Chojnacky says, being a step ahead is a good place to be.

The course is working with the city of Santa Cruz and neighboring Scotts Valley to store up to 1 million gallons of water on the course. The plan is to one day irrigate turf with a combination of fresh city water, well water and effluent water.

Chojnacky estimates the course will save 40

Why we chose Chojnacky

Last Fall, *Golfdom* asked readers to nominate candidates for the first ever Herb Graffis Business Person of the Year Award. We had a lot of great candidates, but one stood above them all. Here's a run-down of some of the things that made us select Chojnacky:

- » Reduced irrigated areas of the golf course with new irrigation system, saving \$150,000 annually
- » First to utilize goats on a golf course, saving his course \$95,000
- » Working with the City of Santa Cruz to

create a new water storage area to enable the course to keep its own water and face fewer water restrictions

- » Tasked with making Pasatiempo the most intact Alister MacKenzie design in the world
- » Keeps a regular blog updating golfers about

course conditions (www.pasatiempomaintenance.com)

- » His willingness to share his insight as evidenced by presenting at the recent Symposium on Affordable Golf in North Carolina and hosting the 2010 Northern California Field Day

to 45 million gallons of water a year. Plus, Pasatiempo looks forward to not relying so much on the city for such a valuable asset.

“Right now we’re 100 percent reliable on the city of Santa Cruz,” Hoyt says. “As soon as they have a cutback due to a water shortage, we’re the lowest on their totem pole, no matter the meetings we’ve had with the city officials and the water officials. We just can’t convince them we’re a business — to them, we’re just a golf course.”

The new water collections system occupies a lot of Chojnacky and Hoyt’s time.

“It was probably the No. 1 task that (the club) has tasked for me to accomplish when they brought me here,” says Hoyt, who has been at the course for eight months. He previously was at Cinnabar Hills for 13 years. “We’re dealing with two different cities, two different water boards, multiple water consulting teams, we’re going to have to put in a pump station and storage tanks... it’s a huge project.”

Getting results

There are more reasons *Golfdom* chose Chojnacky, including his excellent blog (www.pasatiempomaintenance.com), his willingness to share his insights with fellow superintendents (Chojnacky spoke at the recent Symposium on Affordable Golf in North Carolina and hosted the 2010 Northern California Field Day,) and his desire to see his colleagues succeed (former assistant Lewis said Chojnacky was always focused on his career development).

From goats to reduced turf, it’s clear our Graffis BPOTY is a gutsy guy, maybe even a risk-taker. But are they really risks?

“I wouldn’t say Paul is a risk-taker because I think he knows everything that’s going to happen,” says Boyer. “It may seem like a risk to you and I, but he’s confident in his abilities that he will get the results he wants.”

Chojnacky gets results. And he also gets one more award for the trophy case.

“It’s a surprise,” Chojnacky says of winning the award. “But it’s certainly appreciated.” ■

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

If you know of someone who should be considered for the 2013 Herb Graffis Business Person of the Year award, don’t hesitate, nominate them today! The winner will get an expenses-paid trip to the 2013 Golf Industry Show as well as a cover story in *Golfdom* magazine. Make your nomination by visiting <http://www.golfdom.com/awards/business-award>. Don’t worry, the nomination form is limited to 500 words, so nominations can be made quickly and easily.

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