

Reduce Design Problems

ASK THE SUPERINTENDENT

By Conrad Scheetz
Executive Director, GCSAA

If we could roll back the clock to the early 18th century to the shipyards of New England, we could picture in our minds the gangways where the keel of a foremasted schooner had just been laid; we can picture the architect who had labored for long hours over the plans of the schooner; we can picture the ship builder with his tools and his men climbing like ants all over the gangway starting the construction process.

What this picture has not included thus far is the man who many months prior to the start of construction was involved in the basic planning and progress of the new ship.

During the design and construction phases of the schooner the captain was intimately involved, and he was the one who had to walk the decks and manage the people for years to come.

The same principle holds true for construction of a golf course.

If one were to visit the construction site of a new golf course, he would find the representative of the architect, a representative of the golf course builder, and a representative of the owner.

Unfortunately, the representative of the owner is more likely to be a land planner or a financier, and more often than not, not a man who is trained in the science of turfgrass management. And more important, not the man who will be responsible for the maintenance and playing condition of the course in future years.

In all likelihood, the course will have been designed by an architect and plans submitted to a governing board. The board in turn takes these specifications and lets them out to golf course building firms, and a con-

tract is let for construction of the course.

At some time, usually very close to the end of the construction period, a superintendent is hired. It is then his job to maintain the course with the conditions of construction he had no control over.

To be sure, the architect may well have designed the course in accordance with the owner's specifications. It may play long, short, tough, or easy. It may be aesthetically perfect, and meet all qualifications for championship play. The owner may have received full value for his dollar from both the architect and the builder — but the course may be very difficult and expensive to maintain.

Consider the advantages of having a golf course superintendent on the job from the beginning.

A good superintendent cannot replace an architect or a builder. These men are trained in their particular areas of expertise. We do, however, maintain that a good superintendent who is involved in the early stages of the development of the course can lend his expertise in areas that will have a long-term effect on not only the cost of the course but also on its playability and long-range reputation.

The choice of a superintendent must be made wisely. He should be well-grounded in all aspects of his profession, and have demonstrated ability. College degrees in turfgrass management are not enough, nor are years of practical experience. A balance of education and practical experience is most desirable.

A superintendent may or may not be able to read a transit or run a caterpillar, but because of his experi-

ence he can readily envision the finished course and foresee how it can be best managed upon completion.

He is not in a position to dictate to the architect or builder, but his suggestions for soil mixtures, grass varieties, drainage and layout can improve the overall play and maintenance of the course. Although a famed architect or builder can provide immediate prestige to a new golf course, it is the daily management of those facilities that will give a course its reputation.

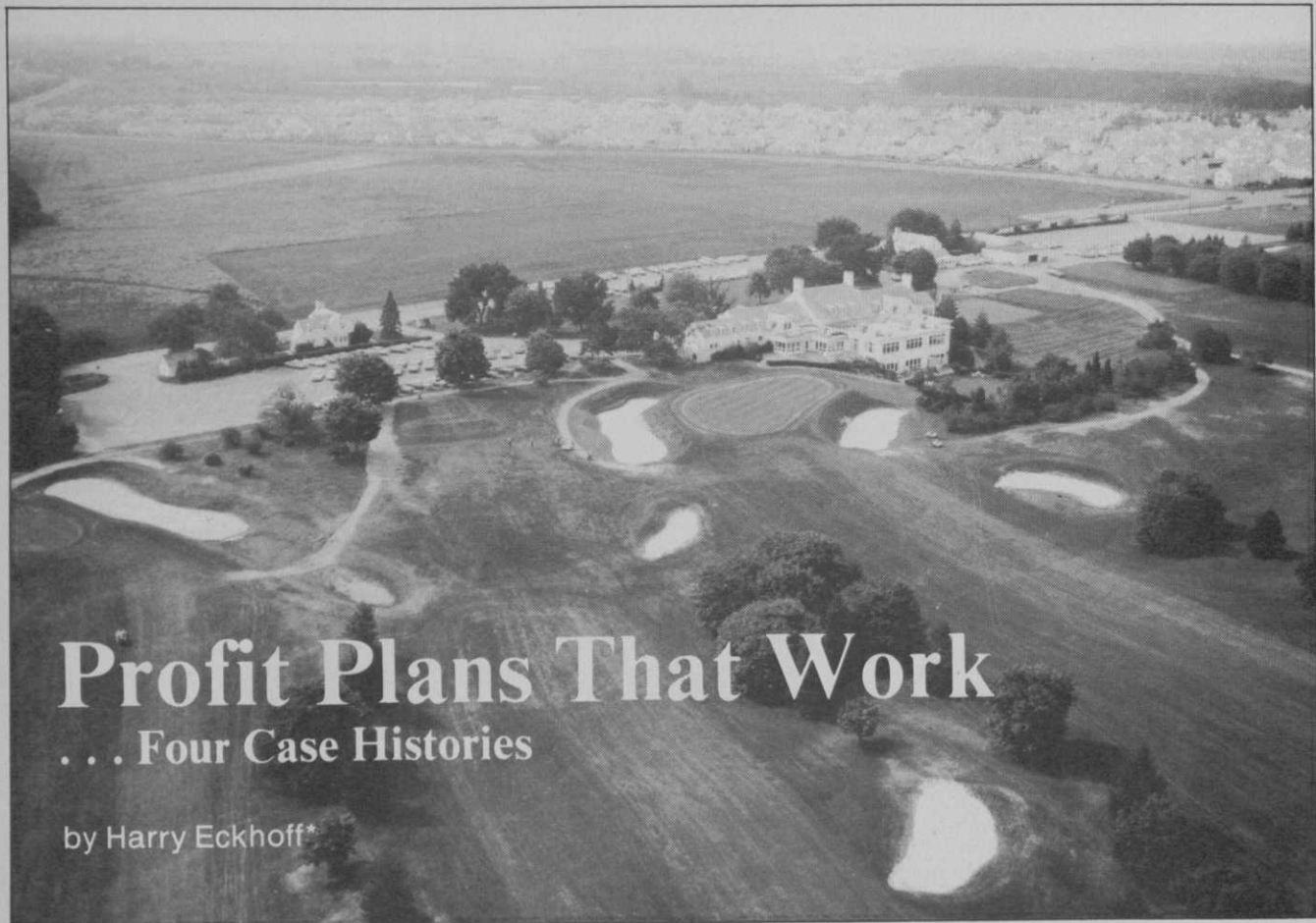
There are a number of specific ways a good superintendent can guide the construction of a course. For example, one architect is currently thinking of building very deep sand traps that are lined on the green side with near-vertical railroad ties, or similar lumber.

This can of course be quite unique and will affect play greatly. A good superintendent knows the capability of modern motorized trap rakes, and whether or not they can get into a given trap. If they cannot, the course may well have equipment it cannot use. Also, one of a course's most expensive commodities — labor — will be poorly employed in the time-consuming process of hand-raking all traps.

Another design example that a superintendent might spot in development states is that sand traps located too close to greens will restrict the use of riding greens mowers, which again means higher labor costs.

Some courses are going to tees that are elevated with sharp drop-offs on each side. This is pleasing to golfers because of increased view of

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Profit Plans That Work

... Four Case Histories

by Harry Eckhoff*

The concept of operating golf courses for profit is comparatively new. Private member-owned golf clubs dominated the nation's golf development scene almost completely until about 20 years ago. It was generally believed that one could not make money on a golf course operation.

In 1953 the trend began to change. At the end of 1953 there were only 1321 profit-motive golf operations in the country. Twenty years later this number had soared to 4710 — a whopping increase of 256 percent. During this same period private member-owned clubs increased 58 percent; municipal golf operations were up 115 percent. By 1975 there will be more profit-oriented golf operations in the country than private member-owned. The National Golf Foundation's computerized national inventory as of January showed 4720 member-owned facilities; 4710 for-profit operations and 1466 municipal facilities.

The for-profit category of golf courses includes privately owned daily fee courses, semi-private facilities and non-equity private clubs. Owned by an individual, partnership or corporation, its primary purpose is to operate as a successful business venture. Accordingly, operating policies are designed to return to the owners the greatest feasible net profit.

Many such facilities offer various types of annual golf playing privileges in addition to daily green fee play. The so-called pay-as-you-play country clubs and a large number of golf courses associated with real estate developments fall in this category.

Forsgate Country Club, located midway between New York City and Philadelphia near Jamesburg, N.J., is an excellent example of a successful profit-oriented operation.

This once exclusive 18-hole club failed as a private club. In 1954 the entire operation grossed less than \$100,000. Owners decided in 1955 to transform the operation to a "public" country club. By develop-

Forsgate Country Club, Jamesburg, N.J.

ment of an associate membership plan and a large restaurant and banquet business this operation has continuously prospered and served its clients well.

Edward M. Burke, vice-president and general manager, said, "We are presently doing over a \$2-million gross which includes food, beverage and golf. In 1973 we ran a 48 percent food cost and 27 percent liquor cost. Due to this large volume, we ran a combined food and beverage payroll cost of 21.5 percent which enabled us to net \$163,673 in our food department and \$250,879 in liquor sales."

Burke further said that in 1973 the club served 206,040 meals — 30,522 in the grill room; 43,876 lunches; 63,310 dinners; and 68,332 at special functions such as banquets, golf outings, seminars and weddings.

Forsgate's golf membership is an associate type — \$75 a year single (\$100 husband and wife). This entitles card holders to play for \$5 weekdays and \$7 weekends and holidays. Burke said the club now has

*National Golf Foundation Mid-Atlantic Regional Consultant

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PROFIT continued from page 32

over 1000 members. The club enjoyed a total of 43,028 rounds of golf in 1973 as follows: member play — 21,377; guest rounds — 8375; special groups — 8079; and evening golf leagues — 5197.

Forsgate now has 36 holes of golf. It just recently opened a fourth nine designed by Hal Purdy.

The golf club maintains a fleet of 147 electric golf cars. Rental fee for 18 holes is \$11.55 including tax. Burke said, "We rented 1413 for nine holes and 14,049 for 18 in 1973. Our gross income from golf cars was \$160,028."

Forsgate offers banquet packages designed to meet almost any need. Companies can make complete arrangements for all-day meetings including use of conference rooms, meals, golf, etc. Many firms hold such seminars periodically, often on a monthly basis. Forsgate has become a popular site for golf and other sports events, business seminars, weddings, press conferences, special meetings and parties of all types. Plans are underway for the

addition of a magnificent 300-room hotel/motel complex which should make Forsgate's present offerings even more popular.

When asked to what he attributed Forsgate's success, Burke replied, "A big factor in our business, besides doing the job, is advertising: Three percent of our gross income is budgeted for advertising, last year we spent \$64,836 on various types of advertising."

Forsgate has had highly qualified and stable management — a requirement for every successful business operation. Burke, who joined the operation in 1955, is a former executive with both the New Jersey Club Managers and Restaurant Association. As vice-president and general manager of Forsgate, he now directs a staff of over 125.

Forsgate has been owned by two generations of the Abeel family. In 1954 J. Forster Abeel, Sr., now chairman of the board, had the foresight to "go public," which turned the venture around from a losing private club operation to a profitable business. John F. Abeel, Jr. is now

president of the club.

Ramblewood Country Club is located at Ramblewood-on-the-Green, a sizable real estate development near Moorestown, N.J. It ranks high among the nation's well-operated club facilities despite the fact it has had serious difficulties in its early history.

The developers, Goodwin Homes, Inc., initially made the mistake of offering lifetime memberships for \$1280 and unlimited annual golf play privileges for \$300. When the first 18-hole, Ed Ault-designed course opened in 1961, Ramblewood had already signed up over 300 members.

At the end of the first full year of play, management discovered that the course was far from breaking even. Actually, there was a deficit of more than \$70,000.

Harry Goodwin, then president of Goodwin Homes, Inc., was determined to make the course self-supporting. He contacted the National Golf Foundation's Eastern consultant and invited him to assist

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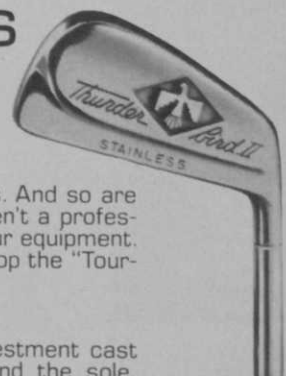


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PROFIT continued from page 34

in explaining the facts of golf course operations at a planned meeting with the membership.

At the meeting, attended by almost 300, the members were advised that if they wished the facility to remain as a private operation, dues would have to be increased to \$400 the next year. Members were given 90 days to make their decisions. Goodwin also explained that if the proposal was voted down, he planned to offer an associate membership for \$25 a year which would entitle holders to play on payment of green fees.

Fortunately for the club owners, the membership turned down the proposed increase in dues. Almost immediately after initiating the associate membership plan, Ramblewood's operation moved into the black.

Today Ramblewood is an outstanding example of a non-equity, profit-oriented club operation. It is still owned by the developer. However, the club facility and the land

sales are two separate entities, both of which are highly successful. Over 2000 homes have been built and there are 700 units of apartments and townhouses, some of which are rentals. Also, the golf course has been expanded to 27 holes.

Edward A. Coach, who joined Ramblewood nine years ago and is now the club's general manager, reports the club currently has over 600 members. The club has a fleet of 85 powered golf cars; and 12 more on order. Rental fees are \$9 any day. According to Coach, the cars grossed \$100,000 in 1973. Types of memberships and the 1974 rates offered at Ramblewood are as follows:

Annual membership — entitles holders to unlimited golf play, tennis courts, use of health center and full use of clubhouse, dining and bar facilities. Cost are \$350 for men, \$250 for women, and \$125 for juniors (under 16, son or daughter of member). Dues are payable in advance. Membership begins the day you join and is in force for one year thereafter.

Individual social and golf membership — Cost is \$50 a year. This membership includes the same privileges as the one cited above except that one must pay green fees each time he plays golf. Green fees are \$5.50 weekdays; \$6.50 weekends and holidays; \$3.00 weekdays after 4 p.m.; and \$3.50 weekends after 3 p.m. About 50 percent of the membership is of this type. Guest green fees are \$7.00 weekdays; and \$8 weekends and holidays.

Swim club membership — This entitles one to use the pool and tennis courts for the season; the bar and dining facilities for a calendar year. Annual costs for the swim club membership are \$150 for husband and wife; each additional child up to 18 is \$28; single adult charge is \$95. Guest fees are \$2 weekdays for children under 14 and \$3.50 for adults; on weekends, \$2.50 for children and \$4 for adults.

Ramblewood also enjoys a sizeable banquet and golf outing business — usually four or five events

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CONDOMINIUMS, PAR 61, AND PROFIT

By Joe Much, National Golf Foundation Pacific Northwest Consultant

Every year in the United States, dozens of golf courses change hands and a few are simply forced out of business.

Sometimes these are private clubs that have found it economically practical to dispose of property surrounded through the years by urban or suburban sprawl. Fortunately for the game and the 15 million Americans who consider it their favorite recreation, most of these golf clubs are replaced, usually by bigger and better operations, further out of town and usually in more attractive surroundings of the rural, "low rent" district.

But most of them are daily fee golf courses whose owners have wearied of the continuing battle of mounting taxes and operating costs, the long hours involved and the necessity of continually raising fees to make ends meet while facing the criticism of customers because of it.

Frequently the increasing value of the golf course property for other usage reaches the point at which the daily fee operator actually is losing money by staying in the golf business.

That is, his land appreciates to the point where it is worth more per acre than he can realize in profit margin at his golf course. Occasionally, a city or town faced with the loss of recreational facilities and open space through the sale of a golf course for other usage will make the purchase itself and operate the course on a municipal basis. Spared the burden taxation and backed by the resources of the municipality, the course survives and often flourishes

as never before if properly administered.

Sitll, courses are lost in almost every section of the nation each year when real estate developers and land speculators turn out to be the most attractive market for a beleaguered daily fee golf course owner.

Every year, scores of daily fee operators face the decision to hang on or sell. Because of their abiding affinity for the game, their investment of time and money in golf and often a feeling of responsibility to the golfing public, the vast majority of them elect to remain in business at the same old stand.

In burgeoning Eugene, Ore., one farsighted daily fee course owner found a way to have his cake and eat it too — retain his golf course while capitalizing on land values.

Robert Hope owns Oakway Golf Course, which, until the spring of 1973 was an 18-hole regulation course — 6,135 yards long, par 72.

His complex also included a golf shop with a lunch area, a driving range with a number of covered stations, a small office building for a teaching professional and an adequate, paved parking lot. The golf complex covered about 125 acres of a total 17-acre area owned by Hope.

As Hope described it, Oakway was an "ordinary" golf course, opened in 1945 after being built without professional design or construction expertise. While the terrain was excellent, the course offered little in the way of an unusual challenge for accomplished golfers, particularly when compared to the intriguing Eugene Country Club layout, which shared a common boundary.

Situated just outside the city limits, Oakway for years was the

only 18-hole regulation golf course open to the public within 10 miles of downtown Eugene. Because the city grew from 35,000 population in 1950 to 85,000 in 1970 and the metropolitan area had an even more dramatic growth, Oakway enjoyed an excellent market.

"We were making a reasonable profit," Hope said, "but we realized there would be a limit both to the volume of play we could accommodate and the price we could charge for golf in this area."

The course was also reaching an age when extensive remodeling would soon be necessary in order to keep it playable. Remodeling golf courses is an expensive proposition, especially when the job includes replacement or irrigation facilities.

In the middle 60s, a second private golf club, Shadow Hills, was built near Eugene and another 18-hole daily fee course, Emerald Valley, was opened at Cresswell, just south of the city. But it was not competition that brought Hope to his decision. Neither was it taxation, although this was threatening to become a factor when the Oakway area was annexed to the city in the early 70s.

Largely because of back-to-back golf courses, along with a natural growth pattern to the north of the city, the general Oakway area became prime prospective residential property.

"There comes a time," Hope explained, "when you are foolish to keep your property as a golf course. There comes a time when every day it is a golf course you are losing money. The land is simply too valuable."

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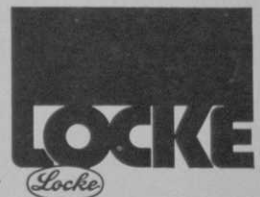
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TURFGRASS RESEARCH a management tool

BY Robert Ferguson, president, Agri-Systems of Texas

After a first-round 69 over a rain-drenched course in the recent Byron Nelson Golf Classic at Preston Trails Country Club in Dallas, Lee Trevino was quoted as saying, "If we don't get any more rain, then those greens are going to get lightning fast. The greens were easy to putt. They were still wet and the mower didn't pick up all the grass on the greens. You have to have mowed greens to know that and I had mowed greens."

Trevino's statement underscores the importance of turf condition in the play of the game. When one stroke often makes the difference of several thousand dollars in prize money, it is absolutely necessary for the best players to be aware of the subtle differences in playing quality that may result from a rain shower, from a difference in grass texture, or from mowing techniques.

When a player spends time looking over the line of a putt or a chip, he is either consciously or subconsciously examining the quality of the turf and making an estimate of the effect it will have on his stroke.

Agronomy and golf may appear to be diverse fields of study, but the fact is that golf courses suitable for high standards of play are remarkably dependent upon the science of agronomy. Improvements in grasses, drainage and control of pests have been the result of basic research in genetics, soil science, plant physiology, plant pathology and entomology, all of which comprise the spectrum of plant and soil sciences known as agronomy.

Agronomy and golf meet on the golf course because the game is played over a grass-covered expanse, but the refinements of plant growth technique resulting from scientific

research, come into play only when some middleman or "brokers" enter the picture. Among these brokers are the extension agronomists whose job it is to relate usable scientific information to practical problems in the field.

Another middleman is the golf course architect. For too long the architect has been viewed as a man who knows the game of golf and who can fit together 18 holes of golf on a given piece of property. His artistic talents and his ability to provide a testing series of holes have been appreciated. He has not, however, been appreciated nor has he always shown great aptitude, for embodying sound principles of plant and soil science in his design procedures. Yet this is one of the major requirements for design of a successful golf course.

All the subtle sculpturing of land forms, all the beautifully contoured sand traps, and all the artistic blending of foliage masses will lose their appeal if play has to be cancelled because the greens are too wet, or if the club members must play on a temporary green because of disease attacks on one of the permanent greens. Press agentry and artistic flair notwithstanding, the architect of the future will not survive if he does not have at least a rudimentary knowledge and appreciation of sound agronomic principles.

The other middleman, and the one most intimately involved in bringing sound agronomy to bear upon the quality of the golf course is the golf course superintendent. Enormous credit is due these men who keep such large expanses of turf in such near-perfect condition.

The knowledge of plant and soil sciences is only one of the many re-

quirements of a superintendent. He must be a labor supervisor, a diplomat, and a purchasing agent, among other things. If he fails to grow good turf, however, it matters little how he fulfills his other roles. It may seem harsh judgment, but a superintendent who cannot provide near-perfect turf is a failure.

Historically, golfers have been the leaders in sponsorship and monetary support of research efforts. In the United States such research had its formal beginnings in 1920 when the Green Section of the United States Golf Association was "created for the purpose of collecting and distributing information of value respecting the proper maintenance and upkeep of golf courses."

In the half-century since the sponsorship of this first research by golfers, almost every state and metropolitan district has seen the formation of turf associations and golf course superintendents' associations. Invariably, one of the objectives set forth when these associations are formed is to encourage and sponsor turfgrass research at the state experiment station.

And invariably golf interests have been dominant among all the groups who have supported such research. Thus, golfers have generously borne more than their share of the support for research which is to their benefit as well as to that of all other users of turfgrass.

In still another manner, "benefits have flowed upstream." Very often researchers have not appreciated the problems existing on golf courses and the results of their research have missed the mark, but golfers have expressed their needs to superintendents and architects, and the information has been relayed to the extension agronomist and eventually to the researcher. An example of this inter-relationship is in the history of fertilizer usage.

Since the end of World War Two, fertilizer production capacity has increased remarkably and until recently, fertilizer materials grew progressively cheaper. Researchers noted that production of most crops could be increased greatly by the use of more fertilizer, particularly nitrogen. Many of the research personnel equated better turf with in-

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