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Home *on the* Range

Doug Petersan left the posh Baltimore CC for a new Bill Coore-Ben Crenshaw project in Austin, Texas, and the veteran superintendent couldn't be happier

STORY AND PHOTOS BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD

Austin GC is designed to play fast and firm. Superintendent Doug Petersan selected zoysiagrass fairways and green surrounds with putting surfaces a combination of Crenshaw and L93 bentgrasses.

If you've ever been to Baltimore CC, you know the 36-hole club features a landmark A.W. Tillinghast course, world-class facilities and is set in one of the country's most picturesque neighborhoods. Sure, the superintendent position there entails dealing with swimming pool, tennis and croquet committees, but it's still one of the most ideal jobs in the industry.

About nine years ago, the Timonium, Md.-based club was able to lure Nebraska native Doug Petersan from another classic course, Kansas' Prairie Dunes CC in Hutchinson, Kan., to become its superintendent. Petersan's eight-year run at Baltimore included an upgrade in course conditioning and what many architec-



tural fanatics consider to be the best bunker restoration work ever undertaken.

But during early 1999, Petersan's friend and golf architect, Bill Coore, mentioned the new Austin GC to be designed and built in Austin, Texas, by Coore and Ben Crenshaw. In an offhand conversation, Coore asked Petersan if he would be interested in taking the job as superintendent, not expecting serious interest. Initially, Petersan was mildly intrigued. But after mulling the offer — and considering that his son was already attending graduate school at the University of Texas in Austin and that he felt his work at Baltimore was complete — Petersan agreed to take the Austin job that July.

The Nebraska Golf Hall of Fame member and respected industry veteran left behind job security and one of America's finest clubs for the uncertainty of a new course, all at the age of 58. Why?

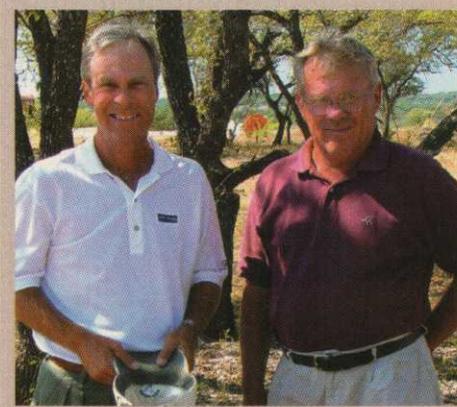
"First, I knew who I'd be working with and what kind of golf course they wanted," Petersan says of Coore and Crenshaw. "These guys are interested in growing turf for playing golf instead of growing turf to look pretty. Second, I thought it'd be fun."

For Crenshaw, an admirer of Petersan's work at Prairie Dunes CC and Baltimore CC and a long-time friend, the chance to bring Petersan to Austin was something he "never imagined." The two have worked well together.

In October, Crenshaw said he had spent more than 100 days on the site, monitoring each phase of construction and consulting with

Petersan on all aspects of the club. Their discussions ranged from grass selection to finding the correct bunker sand, to less likely subjects such as the clubhouse's layout and look.

Petersan and Crenshaw also laid out a distinctive plan for the aesthetic style of the course. With an emphasis on a natural look for the bunkers, native areas and even the main-



For Ben Crenshaw (left), the chance to bring in superintendent Doug Petersan, who previously worked at Prairie Dunes CC and Baltimore CC, was something Crenshaw "never imagined." The two are good friends and work well together.

tained turf areas, the plan led to many intriguing grassing decisions by Petersan.

"We want the course to look like we placed it on someone's ranch," Crenshaw says of its rustic look, a break from the Texas custom of wall-to-wall turf and large, cleanly groomed bunker edges.

Austin GC is designed to play fast and firm, with no pressure from Crenshaw on Petersan for perfect greenery. Thus, Petersan selected zoysiagrass fairways and green surrounds with putting surfaces a rare-for-Texas combination of Crenshaw and L93 bentgrasses. With the lowest recorded rain total this summer in the state's history and not a drop during July and August, how did the grow-in go? In a nutshell, not good for the fairways but great for the greens.

The first green was seeded in May, and the final surface sowed in mid-July when temperatures were more than 100 degrees daily — so it's hard to imagine that any aspect of the grow-in went smoothly. Yet the quality and health of the green surfaces appeared almost perfect as the course neared its late-November opening. But in early October, Petersan said there was still work to be done on the greens.

"We lightly topdress and then water them for an hour on Saturdays, and maybe spot water them on Thursdays or Fridays only if need be," Petersan says of his maintenance program, which might turn a few heads but is in line with the USGA Green Construction recommendations.

Also unique to Austin GC is Petersan's innovative use of Diamond zoysiagrass in the green collars to better handle green mowers' turns, which can damage sensitive bentgrass. The Diamond zoysiagrass sodded on tees and collars grew in well despite Petersan's disappointment with the quality of the sod he received.

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Home on the Range



“We want the course to look like we placed it on someone’s ranch,” says Ben Crenshaw of Austin GC’s rustic look.

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But the sprigged fairways didn’t take as well.

Even after several months and Petersan’s deft touch, the Texas drought combined with oppressive heat to prevent enough zoysiagrass fairway growth for the course to open in November without the aid of ryegrass overseeding. But because the greens, tees and surrounds grew in so well and because he has an understanding client, Petersan wasn’t fazed by the setback.

“When you’re growing in a golf course, you don’t select grasses because they’ll give you instant cover and a fast grow in,” he says. “The key is not what we have in November, it’s what we have in five years. We wanted a traditional playing surface, so we went with zoysiagrass.”

Petersan was cognizant of the troubles many superintendents have with the sensitive nature of growing in a course, especially one for the seasoned clientele that will be at Austin GC.

“You have to know who you’re working for and know what kind of playing surface they want,” Petersan says. “A lot of people think their

Unique to Austin GC is the use of Diamond zoysiagrass in the green collars to better handle green mowers’ turns, which can damage bentgrass.



job is to grow grass, and everything is sound if it’s green. But that’s [not all of] it. You’re there to provide a quality playing surface.”

The other distinguishing aspect of the Austin GC job is one that would give many less-patient or less-experienced superintendents nightmares. But that aspect — the constant fine-tuning of the design — is the element of the design and construction process that will make the course stand out. Crenshaw, who lives only 30 minutes from the course, is passionately involved in the playing strategy and look of the layout. The two-time Masters champion was making subtle changes to the layout in the final days before the opening.

“It’s a dynamic process,” says Petersan, who relishes the chance to work with Crenshaw and favors course adjustments for the long-term good of the club. Petersan did have to prioritize which adjustments needed to be made and which could wait until after the course opened, a fact Crenshaw was well aware of when voicing thoughts about the shape of various bunkers, fairway widths and tee locations.

Has it been worth it for Petersan? Despite success with the greens and frustration with the weather hampering fairway growth, Petersan is pleased with life and work in Austin.

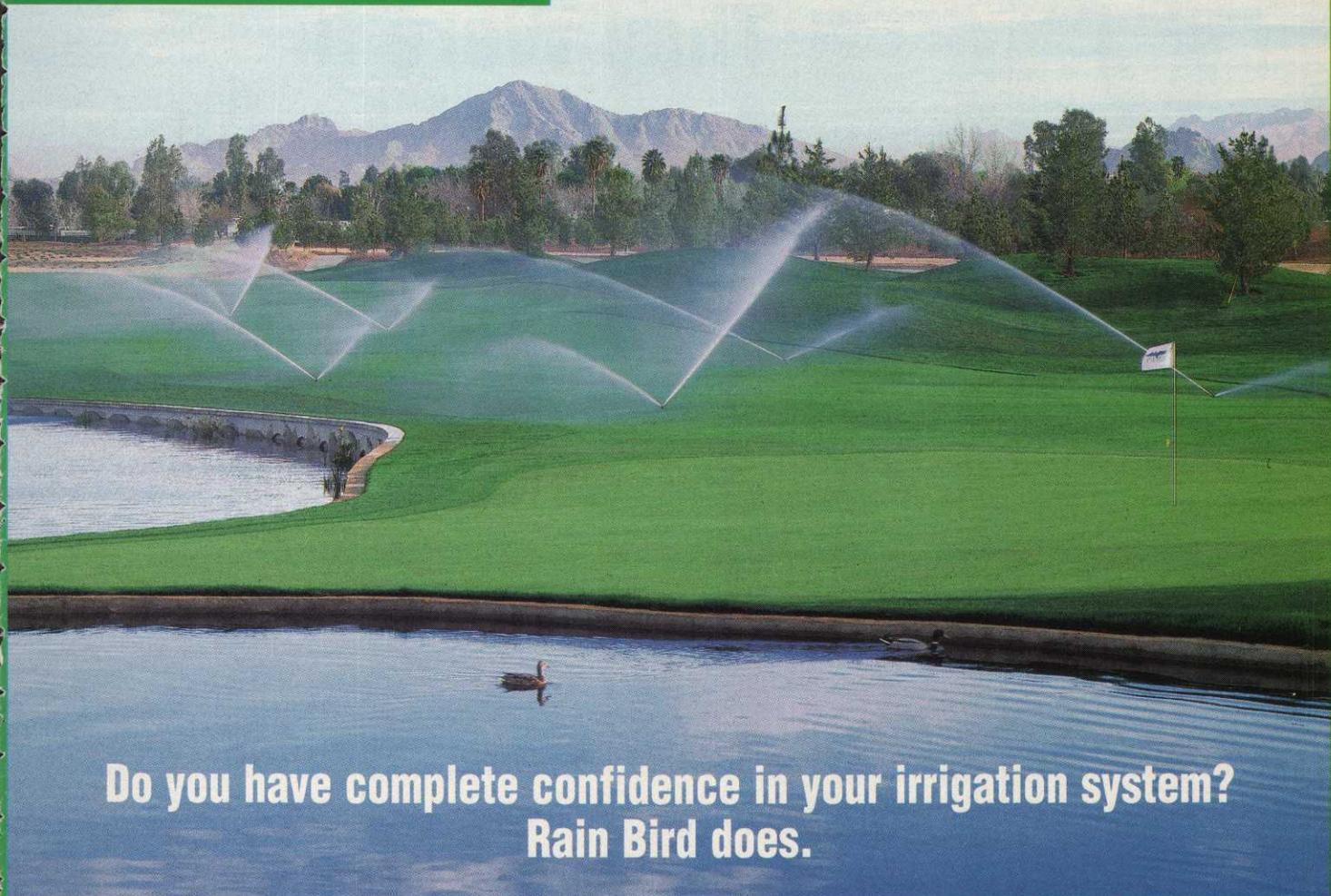
“The real hero in this is Rae Jean,” Petersan says of his wife, who worked in the Baltimore CC office while Doug was superintendent. While Petersan has worked many 80-hour, seven-day weeks, he says his wife has patiently made the transition to life in Austin because she knows how much the project means to Petersan. Rae Jean will also work at the Austin GC maintenance facility.

The results of Petersan’s hard work and the devotion of his talented staff already shows in the look and character of the golf course. Texas has never seen anything like it architecturally, not only in the maintenance style of the bunkering and native areas but in Crenshaw’s green complexes. The greens combine the traditional Texas back-to-front pitch, but contain numerous subtle bumps and contours that will lend long-term playing interest.

The “long term” best defines Austin GC. It’s refreshing to witness a golf project that entails a solid grasp for the present and the future. ■

Contributing editor Geoff Shackelford can be reached at geoffshackelford@aol.com.

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Visits to new course projects often reveal different degrees of conflict between superintendents and architects. Disagreements over the look or playing style of a golf course seem to be at the heart of the tension. Or they can involve simple personality differences.

Though each case is distinct, many involve capable, well-intentioned architects locking horns with capable, well-intentioned superintendents — and nobody wins.

Observing the flexible working relationship between Austin GC superintendent Doug Petersan and architect Ben Crenshaw reminds me that these tense situations are unnecessary. To watch these two men work seamlessly in completing Austin GC was a case study in architect-superintendent synergy. Petersan and Crenshaw each have firm convictions and the knowledge to insist that their points of view are the only views, but such attitudes didn't emerge on site.

Petersan had a course to open in November and was not blessed with ideal conditions to cultivate the zoysiagrass necessary to immediately give Austin GC the type of playing surface Crenshaw wanted for his dream club. For Crenshaw, this is a chance to present his friends and fellow Austinites a classically styled golf course in a state that lacks classic architecture. But to get the design just right, Crenshaw wanted to make subtle modifications to the look, size and even the location of bunkers. Before the greens were ready to be seeded, he fretted over every contour, even grabbing a rake and making subtle modifications until the end.

This is the kind of last-minute, high-pressure, conflict-prone work that's commonplace in quality golf course construction, but which often tends to strain relationships between construction superintendents and architects. Why?

Watching Petersan and Crenshaw work, it was clear they understood what each other was trying to accomplish. If there were disagreements, Petersan was comfortable communicating to Crenshaw what was a priority in getting the course open, and which design modifications could wait until after play began. If Crenshaw insisted a change was vital to the design, then Petersan figured out how to find a way to

They Were in Accord at Austin

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



THERE WERE NO
FRIENDSHIP-ENDING
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TWO PEOPLE
WORKING TOWARD
THE BEST COURSE
POSSIBLE

make it work. There were no friendship-ending conflicts and no tension — just two people working toward the best course possible.

Their successful working relationship hinges on trust and communication. Crenshaw and his fellow founding members know how they want their course to look and play. They communicated this mission to Petersan, who was brought in from the start, giving him the opportunity to select the appropriate grasses and create a maintenance program. And Crenshaw never failed to consider Petersan's workload or priorities before making a request, which is where most architects encourage conflict.

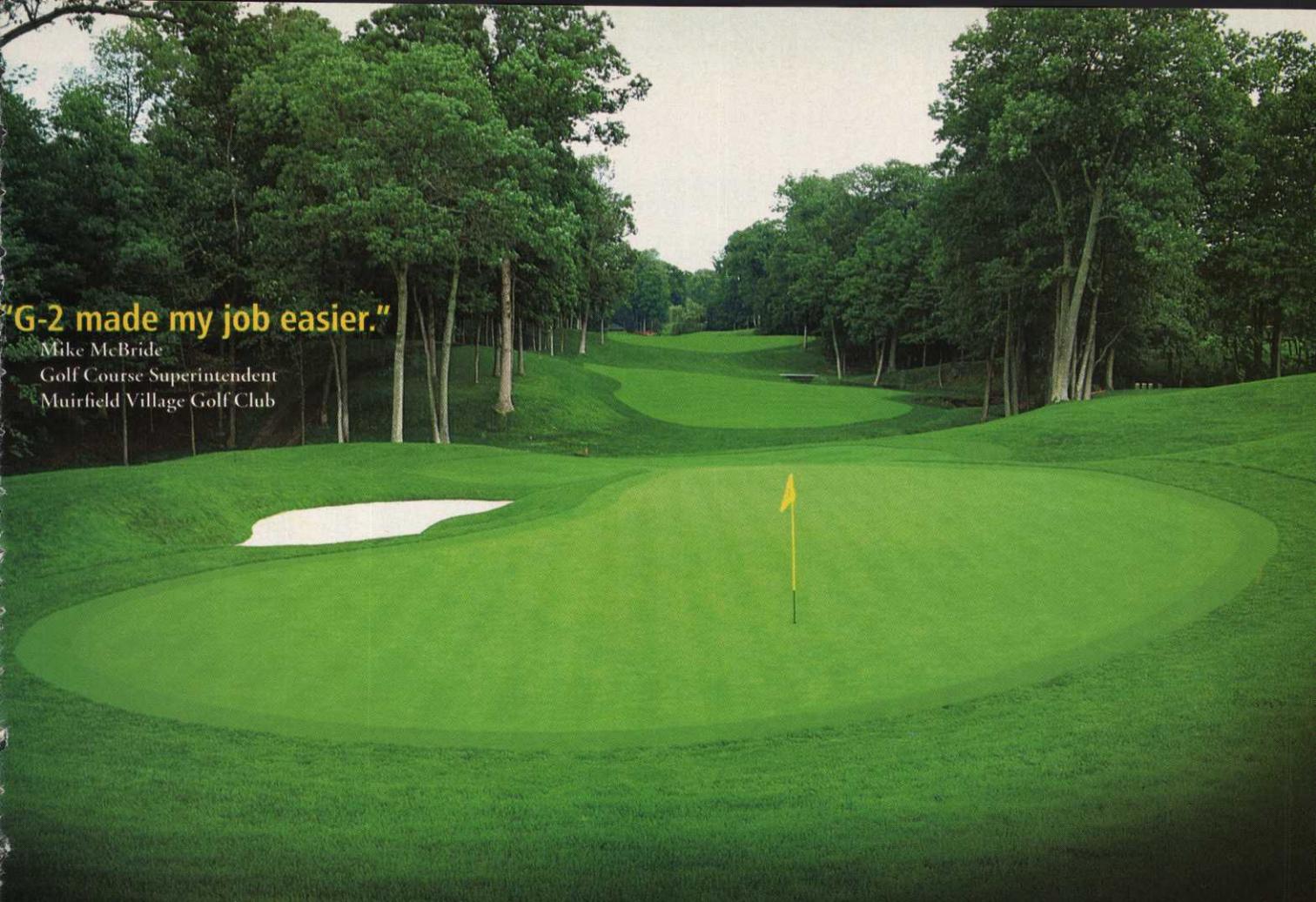
Getting to the heart of superintendent-architect tension is vital for the future of golf course construction projects. If preventable disputes keep occurring, experienced superintendents will stay away from grow-in projects where their veteran skills are most needed. Meanwhile, architects capable of building quality courses are going to stay away from the sites, cash their checks and turn out uninspired designs if they sense their visions will not be maintained.

A superintendent needs to be brought in at the start of project. Then the superintendent needs to know what kind of look and style he or she is expected to create, a clear directive that must come from the architect. The architect and developer need to know what they want and rationally express their views, which doesn't happen as often as it should.

It's Communication 101. When all is said and done, good dialogue is still the element that separates successful projects from the not so successful.

Austin GC is evidence of that.

Geoff Shackelford's latest book is Alister MacKenzie's Cypress Point Club. He can be reached at geoffshackelford@aol.com.



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When selling an irrigation system to members and owners, your reasons for doing so had better...

Hold Water

BY PETER BLAIS

Superintendent Greg Phenerer knew he had a problem at his 10-year-old West Course, one of three layouts at Johns Island Club in Vero Beach, Fla. The course's irrigation system was experiencing a leak a week — 55 in a single year on the service Ts. The system's ir-

rigation heads were also throwing water into native vegetation areas that were supposed to be unirrigated.

Phenerer held four informational meetings to explain the need for the new \$1 million irrigation system he recently installed on the course. The first meeting was for members with names ending in A-D, the second for members with names from E-L and so on.

"We wanted to keep the numbers of people low at each meeting

so they could ask questions. Holding those meetings was key to getting the project approved," says Phenerer, who also used photos and other visual aids to make his case. "We had some dramatic pictures of leaks."

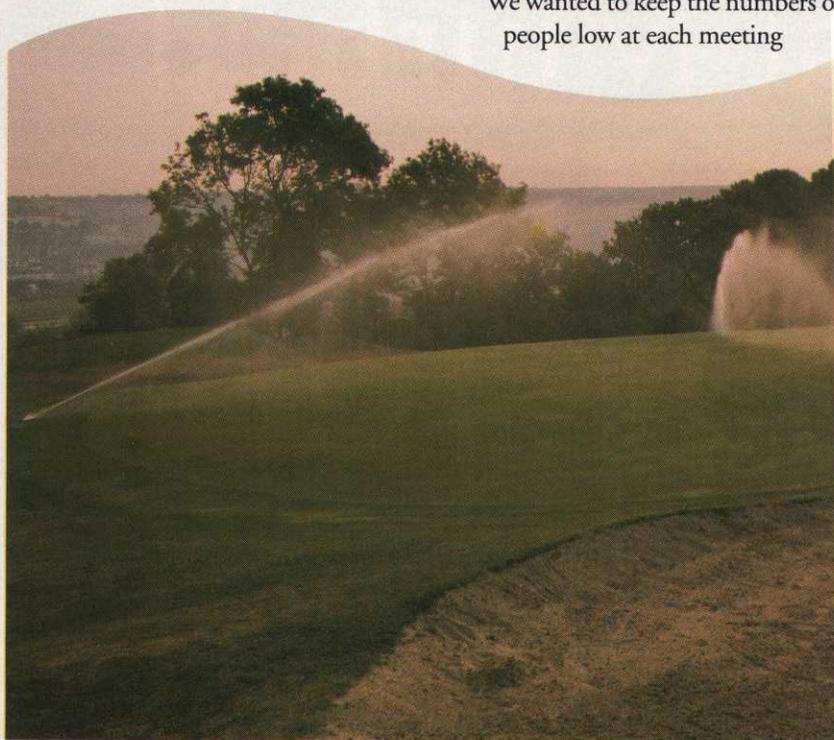
As Phenerer discovered, selling members or owners on the costly idea of updating an irrigation system is no easy task. It requires that superintendents do their homework and follow through in a business-like manner.

Determining the need

When a superintendent notices numerous dry areas or wet spots on a golf course, it might be time for a new irrigation system, says John Foy, agronomist for the USGA Green Section's Florida Region. Ted Horton, who recently left Pebble Beach Co. as vice president of resource management to form his own turfgrass consulting firm in Southern California, says other hints that a new irrigation system might be needed are:

- not getting enough water to the right places at the right time;
- developing hard lines along cart paths, wooded areas or native plant growth; and
- controls, whether computer or manually operated, that fail to pull together

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MIKE KLEMM

FUNGICIDES
DON'T
LAST
FOREVER.

BUT WE'RE WORKING ON IT...



This December find out how far we've come...

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Hold Water

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the irrigation system and evapotranspiration equipment.

Above-ground items — sprinkler heads, pump stations and controllers — can be replaced anytime, says Terry Buchen, a turfgrass consultant from Williamsburg, Va. However, below-ground pipes, wires and hydraulic tubing are a different matter. Those parts usually last 20 to 25 years.

Most modern irrigation systems cost \$750,000 to \$1.25 million, Horton notes. "If you are putting a system on a course in the Northeast — where you get 40 to 50 inches of annual rain with half coming in the growing season — it doesn't require the same sophistication you would in the West, where you might not get any rain from March through December," Horton adds.

Foy says a "bare bones" double-row system with piping, heads, pumping station and control system runs \$500,000 to \$750,000. A top-of-the-line, triple-row system with computer-controls and a variable frequency drive pumping station runs \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million.

"The biggest controlling cost factor is the number of irrigation heads," Foy says. "It's not unusual to see a course with 1,200 to 1,400 heads." But there are solid systems in the middle range — \$750,000 to \$1.2 million — that will cover the needs with not as many heads, Foy notes.

Francetown, N.H.-based architect Marvin Armstrong estimates the costs for an 18-hole course with a computer-controlled system are as follows: a basic single-row system, \$320,000 to \$360,000; a double-row system, \$400,000 to \$460,000; and a triple-row system, as much as \$1 million. Pumping systems, excluding pump houses and utility connections, run between \$40,000 and \$60,000.

Consultant or distributor designer

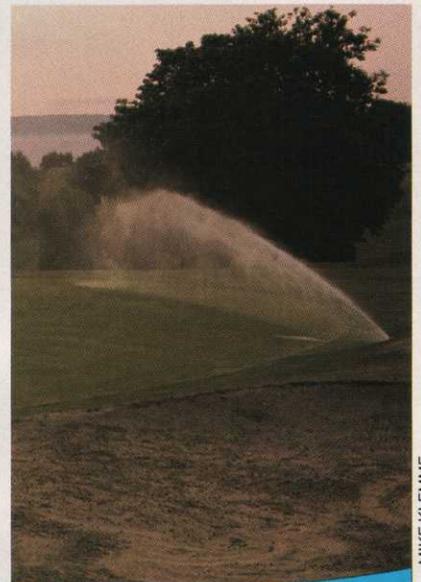
Once a superintendent determines a new irrigation system is necessary, there are two alternatives: Hire an independent irrigation consultant to design the system or have a manufacturer's local distributor do it.

Irrigation consultants are more expensive, with fees between \$25,000 and \$35,000. But they will design an irrigation system with equipment best

sued to the facility. The local distributor will design the system free in exchange for the course buying that firm's equipment, which may or may not be the best choice, Buchen notes. And a local distributor may not be as skilled as an independent consultant.

A third option is to have the local distributor design the system and then send the design to the manufacturer's national office, where the manufacturer's head designers can also check the plan.

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MIKE KLEMM

One Superintendent's Story

When Rob Kloska joined The Jupiter Island (Fla.) Club as superintendent in 1995, the members asked him to develop a plan to upgrade the course with the greens being the priority. "I told them, 'If you can't drain them and irrigate them, then you can't build them,'" Kloska says.

At the time, the course had a pump station that could only put out 600 gallons per minute. Some of the main lines were less than 3 inches in diameter. During dry times, the course relied on potable water that the city could shut off during droughts.

Kloska's initial plan called for a new control system. Installed in 1996, it provided some immediate benefits to the existing system. That was followed in 1997 by a new variable frequency drive pumping station that tripled water

flow to 1,800 gallons per minute; a new main line throughout the course; installation of new drainage systems; design and construction of a new reverse osmosis water treatment plant that used saline water on site and lessened the course's dependency on city water; and the enlargement of the irrigation pond.

In 1998, the club renovated the greens and green complexes, including new irrigation, with the assistance of architect Brian Silva. The past two years have seen smaller projects, including installation of new sprinkler heads and the conversion of the remaining hydraulic heads to electric heads.

The irrigation system cost roughly \$750,000, with the entire renovation approaching \$3 million, Kloska says. The drainage and reverse osmosis systems were easy sells because the members

knew the course couldn't depend on city water.

Kloska's green chairman, Bill Battle, is a past president of the USGA, and Kloska has met with him every fall since 1996 to discuss what to do the next year. Getting his green chairman on board and having him help sell the renovation program to the members was vital.

"He was very tough on me at the beginning, asking me why we needed this and why we needed that," Kloska recalls. "He probably already knew. But I think he wanted me to explain it and know why I needed it. He taught me how to approach things in a calm manner and know what questions to expect from people. He carried the torch, and it was never really an issue."

— Peter Blais