

So Kuhns decided to leave Oakmont, even if it wasn't necessarily on his own terms. And he would second-guess that choice, as well as himself, right up until the time Fowler said he was their man.

"Sometimes things happen in your life where it's a pretty bitter pill," he says. "And you just really question whether you made the right decisions in life."

First lieutenants

Kuhns' numerous protégés, many of whom share his Western Pennsylvania roots, are forever indebted to him and his decision to leave Oakmont. The list is topped by the four superintendents — Scottie Hines, Mark Hughes, Scott Bosetti and Doston Kish — who have tended to Baltusrol's Upper and Lower courses since Kuhns' arrival in 1999.

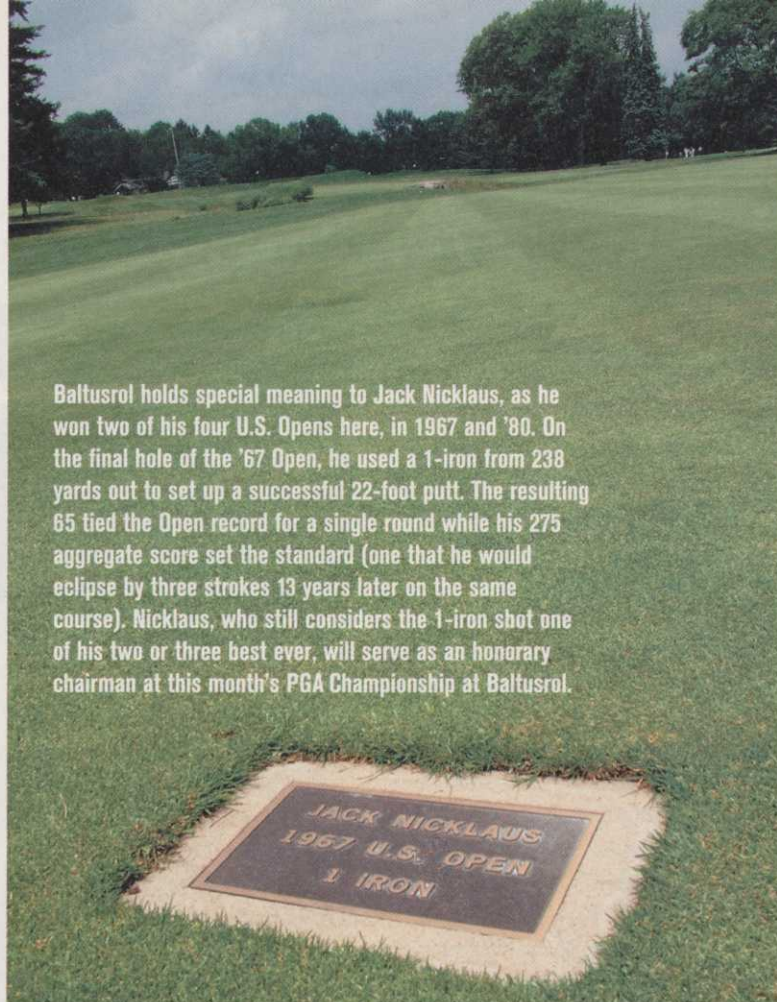
"I've worked for Mark on and off for almost 20 years now," Hughes says. "Mark has been like a father figure to me. He's had a lot of good people who have worked for him through the years, and a lot of them have gone on to be superintendents at some pretty prestigious clubs. So he really has a network of people who are there to support him. He's been important to a lot of people's lives."

With Kuhns' blessing, Hines and Hughes, both certified superintendents, have since taken control of their own courses; Hines at Wind Song Farm Golf Club in Maple Plain, Minn., and Hughes at Monroe Golf Club in Pittsford, N.Y.

"I don't hire life-long assistants," Kuhns says. "I hire an assistant who is hungry, who wants to go on to be a superintendent. That guy is going to work hard to achieve that goal and to move on."

Bosetti, 34, and Kish, 26, now supervise the Lower and Upper courses, respectively. They share several traits, specifically career path. When Kuhns first hired them at Oakmont, he did so despite their young age, inexperience and the fact that neither had a long-term interest in greenskeeping. Bosetti was con-

Baltusrol holds special meaning to Jack Nicklaus, as he won two of his four U.S. Opens here, in 1967 and '80. On the final hole of the '67 Open, he used a 1-iron from 238 yards out to set up a successful 22-foot putt. The resulting 65 tied the Open record for a single round while his 275 aggregate score set the standard (one that he would eclipse by three strokes 13 years later on the same course). Nicklaus, who still considers the 1-iron shot one of his two or three best ever, will serve as an honorary chairman at this month's PGA Championship at Baltusrol.



templating a career in federal law enforcement and Kish was eyeing a degree in golf course architecture from Penn State.

"To say the least, Mark Kuhns took a chance on both of us," Bosetti says. "And Doston and I probably have the same philosophy — that this guy believed in us, and the last thing we're going to do is fail for him. I'm not going to make him look bad by any means, and I'll damn near kill myself out here before I'd fail."

Kish, who took over the Upper Course at age 24, was 17 when he began volunteering for Kuhns at the Family House Invitational at Oakmont. "Being an event that Mark held, it was very serious," Kish says. "He treated it just like the U.S. Open, and I fell in love with the intensity of it."

Kuhns admits he's a taskmaster, which, he adds, can be overbearing sometimes. But it's often necessary. His first responsibility as Baltusrol's director of grounds was having to replace many of the employees who had worked for the now-retired Flaherty. Time was short, as the club was slated to host the U.S. Amateur the following spring.

"There was a lot of old thinking and a lot of things that weren't going to change," Kuhns

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Baltusrol Welcomes PGA for First Time

Upon taking over as director of grounds at Baltusrol Golf Club in 1999, Mark Kuhns quickly began altering the club's Lower Course. His intent was to lure the U.S. Open to Baltusrol for the first time since 1993 and eighth time overall.

But the United States Golf Association (USGA) had other thoughts. Winged Foot Golf Club instead got the 2006 bid.

Baltusrol's disappointment was soon offset when the Professional Golf Association (PGA) jumped at the chance to schedule its championship at the Springfield, N.J., course. The PGA originally offered its 2007 tournament and then bumped it to this summer when The Country Club, in Brookline, Mass., rescinded in February 2002 after experiencing logistical problems while hosting the 1999 Ryder Cup.

"One of the big problems with hosting a Major is moving people in and out," Kuhns says. "And if you don't have a second golf course or another 200 acres of land to work with, forget it. We've got 180 tractor-trailers that have to come in here (this summer) to deliver material. We're literally building a city."

Baltusrol has never hosted a PGA event. Kuhns, who hosted the 1994 U.S. Open as the certified superintendent at Oakmont (Pa.) Country Club, couldn't be happier working with the PGA and its senior director of tournaments, Kerry Haigh, especially when it comes to game-day decisions the week of Aug. 8-14.

"That's one nice thing about the PGA: They're not really demanding a dried-out prune situation," Kuhns says. "I asked Kerry, 'When does your agronomist come on board to assist us with any problems or guide us with setup?' He said, 'Well, we really don't have an agronomist, Mark. We don't go to clubs where we need an agronomist.' So there are no committees, no three or four people trying to decide where the pin should be or what the height of the rough is going to be."

Kuhns predicts the PGA champion will shoot a 4-under-par. Mark Hughes, the former superintendent of the Lower Course, says the course will offer "immaculate conditions."



"I know the greens will be firm and fast," Hughes says. "And the rough will be extremely difficult for players to get out of."

Under the guidance of Kuhns, Lower Course Superintendent Scott Bosetti and architect Rees Jones, several notable changes have occurred since 1999:

- For the sake of added length and historical restoration, new tees were built on holes 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17 and 18. Totalled, the par-70 Lower Course measures 7,400 yards and is the longest course among the four Majors this year. In addition, it features the longest hole of the Major season — the 647-yard 17th.

"The 17th hole at one time was 630 yards and nobody had ever reached it in two until John Daly in the '93 Open," Bosetti says. "So just in case someone wants to get a little itchy and wants to try to do that again, we lengthened it to 647. It's a true three-shotter now."

- All of the rough inside the ropes was replaced with more than 40 acres of sod comprised of approximately 80 percent Kentucky bluegrass and 20 percent perennial ryegrass. The fairways, tees and greens

No hole has been renovated more than the dogleg right No. 13. A new tee adds 25 yards, and the fairway has been narrowed to 25 yards, with five new bunkers to the left and a relocated fescue-lined stream to the right. "Normally there wasn't any fear of bombing the driver off the tee," Lower Course Superintendent Scott Bosetti says. "Now, we put a little fear into that."

remain a mix of *Poa annua* and bentgrass.

"There's a big difference between solid bluegrass and the native junk, which is pretty much a hodge-podge of bent, *Poa* and ryegrass. It's got a dark, deep color to it," Bosetti says. "It doesn't mind being mowed a low height, and when it grows out it gets gnarly and thick. Every time someone hits it into the rough, it's going to be a consistent lie. That was one of the things that we strived for."

- A rough renovation tightened the fairways, in most cases to 24 yards to 30 yards in width. "It's definitely a new look," Kuhns says. "We've narrowed all the fairways to PGA specifications from 260 to 330 (yards) out from the back tee."

— By Thomas Skernivitz

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says. "I had to have a team that was loyal to me in a very short time."

Which meant opening the spigot to the PA Pipeline. "Scottie Hines was the first man with me," Kuhns says. "In fact, when I left here from the interview and went back to Pittsburgh's airport, I went straight to his course (Riverview). When his owner saw me coming, he knew something was up. You could see it on his face: 'What's he doing here? Oh, no.'"

And in almost every case, guys like Hines and Hughes couldn't say no.

"One of the reasons why I came to work for Mark," Bosetti says, "was to learn from him and gather as much knowledge as I can off of him, to where eventually I want to be a director of a course like Baltusrol or an upper echelon club."

Not that Bosetti or Kish would have ever thought of leaving before the PGA Championship. "That," Bosetti says, "would be like driving across the country and having someone pull your car in the garage for you. No way."

Beyond the PGA

The PGA Championship is by no means the end of the maintenance crew's trip. Scheduled this winter is a strategic meeting to discuss the immediate direction of the club. Some of the topics: What was learned from the PGA? Will Baltusrol continue to pursue Majors? If so, when will the bunkers be renovated and moved farther into play to offset "long" equipment? And what about the trees that need to be cleared to make room for more grandstands?

"I don't know if we'll be able to maintain the championship stature day in and day out," Kuhns says. "But certainly we've taken it to this level, and we don't want it to slide too far back going forward."

Likewise, Kuhns has every intention of following through on his obligations to the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA). He's a national director with the group, with plans to run for the GCSAA's secretary/treasurer position and possibly president.

"When I was interviewing for this job, I told

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(the search committee) that if they had any reservations with my involvement in that professional group, I wasn't the man they wanted for this job," Kuhns says. "One of the guys stood up and said, 'You're the type of guy we're looking for. That's national recognition.'"

And as Kuhns himself would discover soon after his hiring, there's nothing wrong with a little national recognition. Curious as to why he was chosen over so many other qualified candidates, and still stinging from his experience at Oakmont, Kuhns had a few questions for Fowler over lunch.

"Why Mark Kuhns?" Kuhns asked his new boss. "I'm not a knight in shining armor-looking guy or a rugged mountain man. I'm just me. Why me?"

Fowler noted Kuhns' four-year degree from Penn State and the parallels between Baltusrol and Oakmont. The search committee, he added, had

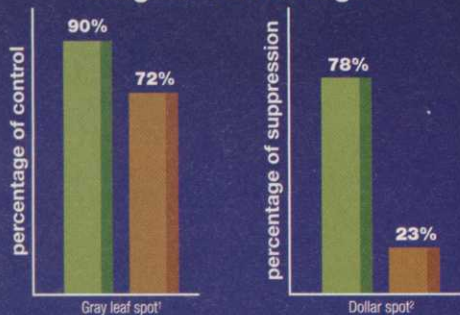
appreciated that Kuhns not only hosted three Major tournaments but was the "top dog" each time. And it didn't hurt that Kuhns had provided the committee a portfolio that included 20 of the approximate 4,000 slides in Kuhns' personal collection.

"Those 20 pictures weren't necessarily colorful shots, but they depicted the detail you

► Kuhns and his two superintendents are never short of help, thanks to 14 interns, some of whom are shown here watching television inside the club's new multimillion-dollar maintenance facility/dormitory, affectionately dubbed the "Kuhns Mahal."



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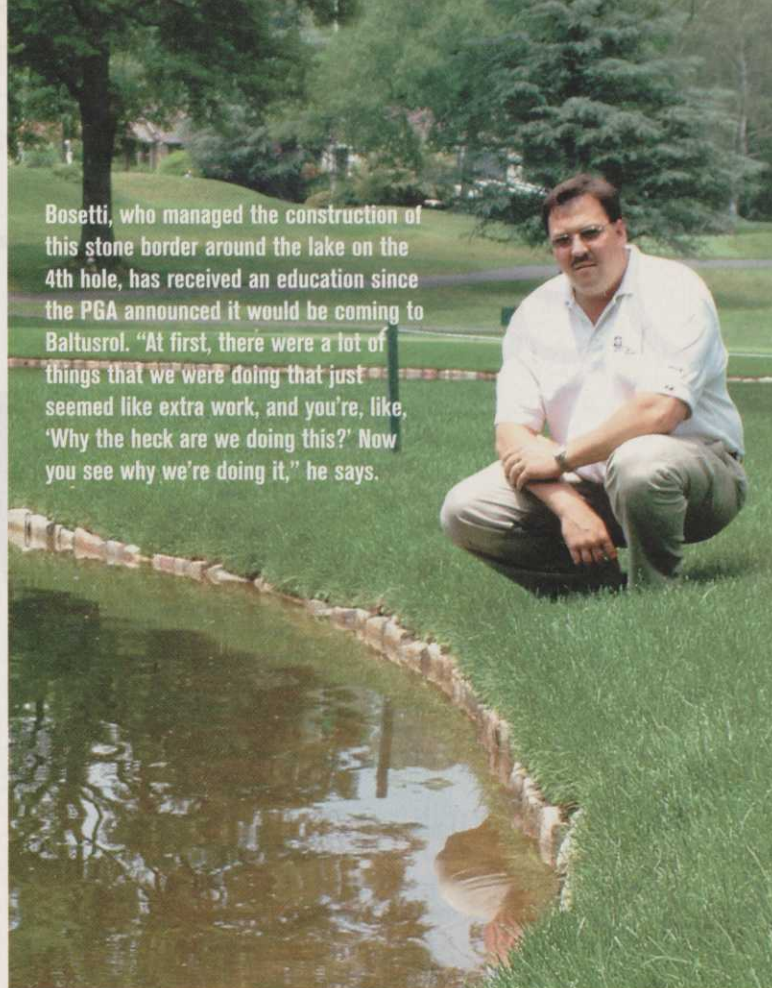
see around the collars and the bunkering and around the clubhouse," Kuhns said. "That was significant. They said the pictures were worth 1,000 words."

Worth even more were the glowing words of Kuhns' references — 35 of them, to be exact — including some from an old friend he had met 39 years earlier at Laurel Valley Country Club.

"Dick Fowler is leafing through all the references and he goes, 'This is the keeper right here — yep, if you're good enough for Arnold Palmer, you're good enough for us,'" Kuhns says.

Six years later, Kuhns still glows when recalling those references — votes of confidence when he needed them most. "When people step up to the plate for you, sometimes they're just being nice," he says. "But when all those people in those letters recognize the fact that you did something significant in your life, then it makes you feel real good."

The lament of Oakmont is gone. There is no more second-guessing himself. Mark Kuhns has found new life at the final resting place of Baltus Roll. ■



Bosetti, who managed the construction of this stone border around the lake on the 4th hole, has received an education since the PGA announced it would be coming to Baltusrol. "At first, there were a lot of things that we were doing that just seemed like extra work, and you're, like, 'Why the heck are we doing this?' Now you see why we're doing it," he says.

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Oakmont's OVER

Members seek to restore classical course to its glory days . . . and bring it up to date

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF



John Zimmers says members have the utmost respect for "Mr. Fownes."

Oakmont Country Club, one of America's great classical golf courses, is undergoing a major restoration. The late Henry C. Fownes, the steel industry tycoon who designed the Pittsburgh-area course in 1903, is also directing the makeover.

How can that be, you ask, considering that Fownes has been dead for 70 years? Simple. Fownes is an institution at Oakmont, where his spirit and influence abound. Everybody involved with Oakmont's restoration, including superintendent John Zimmers, knows who's the boss on the project.

"We're not going to do anything unless we can base it on what Mr. Fownes did," Zimmers said of the restoration, which will conclude in the fall.

You can still feel Fownes' presence at Oakmont. You can picture him walking the creaky floors in the historic clubhouse. You can en-

vision him, dressed in his gray knickerbockers and plaid cap, hitting out of the course's famed church pew bunkers.

Oakmont, regarded as a National Historic Landmark, is the only golf course Fownes designed. Born in 1856 and laid to rest in 1935, Fownes was an excellent player. He qualified for the U.S. Amateur Championship five times in the early 1900s. He designed the 18-hole course because he was bored with playing the nine-hole courses in the area.

"He set out to make the hardest golf course in America, and I think he achieved what he wanted to do," Zimmers says. "I think he'd be proud of what we're doing today."

What they're doing is extensive. The club hired Fazio Golf Course Designers to engineer the restoration and builder McDonald & Sons to do the physical work. Zimmers and his staff have assisted throughout the project.

The ambitious restoration, aided largely by the use of old photographs of Oakmont in its heyday, has touched about every part of the course. When it's finished, the club will have spent about \$2.5 million on it, including a new irrigation system.

"They wanted to put the course back to the original design that Mr. Fownes had," Zimmers says of Oakmont's 400 members. "They have the utmost respect for Mr. Fownes."

Not every Oakmont member agreed on every aspect of the restoration, notes Bob Wagner, who was Oakmont's grounds chairman and president in 2003 and 2004 and has played a major part in planning the restora-

HAUL

tion. "But most of the members were behind the notion to restore the course, and the things that we're doing have been widely accepted," he adds.

The restoration has taken part in accordance with two big golf tournaments: the U.S. Amateur, which occurred in 2003; and the U.S. Open, scheduled for 2007.

When Zimmers arrived at Oakmont in 1999, he viewed the restoration plan from the ground up — the ground being the maintenance facility. Zimmers is a firm believer that a superintendent and his crew can only be as good as their maintenance facility.

"When you go to any maintenance facility, you can generally tell how that operation is run just by looking at the facility," Zimmers says.

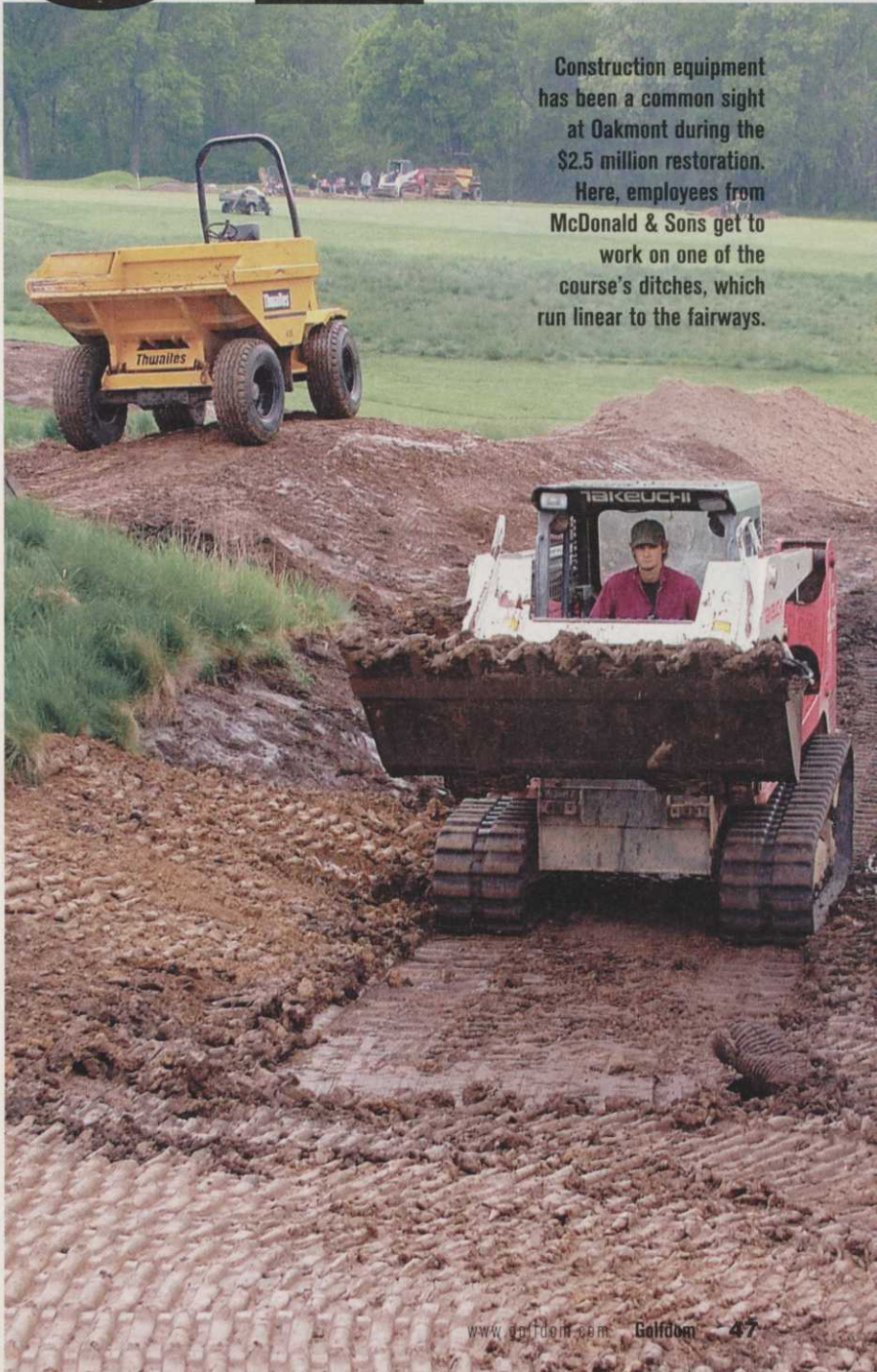
Zimmers asked for an upgrade and got it. The maintenance facility was updated with a new wash and fuel pad as well as a new chemical building. Zimmers admits it's difficult to show members a return on investment for upgrading the maintenance facility. "But five years down the road, the members are truly proud of it," he adds.

Trees toppled

On a recent tour of the golf course, Zimmers stops his utility vehicle and points to a vista. "Look, you can see the tees on No. 2, No. 8, No. 5 and No. 4," he says. "You couldn't see any of this before. This was a jungle."

He's talking about the trees, of course. There were few, if any, trees on the course when

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A large photograph showing a yellow dump truck and a red Takeuchi bulldozer working on a golf course restoration project. The bulldozer is in the foreground, pushing a large pile of dirt. The dump truck is in the background, parked on a dirt path. The scene is set on a grassy area with trees in the background.

Construction equipment has been a common sight at Oakmont during the \$2.5 million restoration. Here, employees from McDonald & Sons get to work on one of the course's ditches, which run linear to the fairways.

Oakmont's Overhaul



Thousands of trees – including some very big ones – were removed from the course to create vistas like the one above.

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Fownes designed it, but they accumulated like houses in the suburbs over the next 90 years.

“The trees were planted mostly in 1961 as part of a beautification program,” Wagner says.

It got to the point where players couldn’t see one fairway from another because they were lined with huge pin oak trees. The course became so

overgrown with trees that playability was affected and some areas of turf had become weakened because of poor air movement and shade.

Oakmont’s board of directors decided it was time to bring down the trees. Oakmont was designed as a links-style course, not a parkland course, they reasoned. But the board’s decision sparked controversy, Wagner says. In fact, a faction of Oakmont’s members threatened to sue the board if it gave orders to cut down the trees. The matter ended up in front of a judge, who was also a member of Oakmont, who ruled in favor of the board.

So the tree removal program began in earnest in 1995 under the direction of Mark Kuhns, who spent nine years at Oakmont and is now director of grounds at Baltusrol Golf Club, site of this month’s PGA Championship.

“We started taking the trees out with the intention of restoring the holes to where they were when the course was first designed and built,” Wagner says.

Zimmers and his crew performed the majority of the tree-removal program from 1999 through 2005. It’s finished now, and about 5,000 trees are gone.

Most of the work was done in-house. Assistant superintendent Jason Hurwitz manned a chain saw often during the winter months when the tree cutting was performed. Hurwitz was part of a core group of five workers who toppled the trees.

“Rarely did anyone see a tree hit the ground,” Hurwitz says, explaining that such an experience can spark sentiment and emotion. “It was done almost exclusively in the winter, and mostly in January when the club was closed.”

But every spring when the members returned to the golf course, most of them liked what they saw and supported even more tree removal. When members saw the impact the tree removal was having on the course — more sunlight and air movement, healthier turf and wonderful vistas, among other things — they liked it.

“It’s wide open now,” says Zimmers, who counts about five tall elm trees still standing on the course. “It’s like members are playing a different course.”

It’s so different that some members are literally getting lost on the course. The trees they had used for landmarks are no longer there.

"I've had several people tell me that they didn't know what holes they were on," Zimmers says.

At length

Tom Marzolf, who has been with Fazio Golf Course Designers for 23 years, has been the architectural anchorman on the restoration. Marzolf's first order of business upon arriving in 1999 was lengthening Oakmont from the tees to get them ready for the U.S. Amateur. More than 200 yards was added to the course, which now plays about 7,220 yards. Length was added on holes three, four, seven 12, 15 and 18. A new par-3 tee on No. 8 will make the hole 290 yards for the U.S. Open.

Marzolf says the members understood the course had to be lengthened in reaction to players being able to hit the ball farther with their monster drivers and high-flying balls.

"Look at every golf course in the Top 10 — they've all done lengthening," Marzolf says. "You have to respond or you get left behind."

Much of the restoration has taken place in the past year. Oakmont's bunkers and greens are getting a good go over.

It's no surprise Fownes designed Oakmont with 300 bunkers, knowing he wanted a course that provided the ultimate test of golf. But many of the bunkers were removed from the course to cut back on overall maintenance and many were renovated.

Zimmer and his crew are in the midst of restoring the existing bunkers and adding 10 new ones, which will bring the total number to about 200.

Of course, the project included the mother of all bunker restorations — the refurbishing of the church pews bunker, one of the most sacred and famous bunkers in golf.

The crew took so many photographs of the church pews bunker and from so many angles that, well, let's just say that a super model has nothing on the bunker complex when it comes to Kodak moments. "We had it down to a T," Zimmers says of the church pews project, which began last fall and was finished in May.

Over the years the floor of the church pews bunker had accumulated so much sand that it had become raised. "It was too high," Marzolf says. "So we had to lower the floor back down and rebuild the bottom. Once we did that we had to rebuild the pews themselves.

We put fresh topsoil on them and planted clean fescue grasses."

The lowered bunker floor has made a big difference, Wagner says. "You go in there now, and you have a different kind of a sand trap to get out of it," he says with a chuckle.

The crew also added two additional pews to each end of the bunker. Marzolf says the pews had to be added because the "most famous bunker in American golf" no longer invoked the fear of God in players that a hazard of its stature should. Thanks to equipment technology, the big hitters — from some Oakmont members to the pros who will play in the U.S. Open — drive their balls past the church pews bunker with relative ease. So the bunker was stretched down the left of the third hole and down the left side of the fourth hole.

"It sounds like a daunting task to go into the most famous bunker in the country and do those things," Marzolf says. "But when you break it all down, we just did things that made sense."

Still, it was a bit distressful doing surgery on such an historic hazard. "We certainly breathed a deep sigh of relief when we were finished with it," Hurwitz says.

All of the bunkers, which received new drainage and sand, were restored "to what a Fownes bunker should look like," Wagner says.

"He had a certain kind of a rollover of grass on his bunker," Wagner adds. "It's a distinctive look. All the bunkers will be uniform now."

Oakmont's other hazards — its ditches — are also getting a go over. What's odd about Oakmont is the course has no water hazards. But it has the ditches, which run linear to the fairways. The ditches are also functional hazards and provide good drainage on the course. "When it rains all the water goes into the ditches and is taken off the property," Zimmers says.

But over the years the ditches, much like roadside ones, became full of heavy organic matter and a mixture of grasses. They were inconsistent in their depth and weren't aesthetically appealing.

"We decided to clean them out and restore them," says Zimmers, noting that he and his crew used old bunker sand to cap the ditches and then planted fine fescue sod in them to achieve a defined look. "Now if you hit your ball in the fescue, you can hit it out," Zimmers says.

“Look at every golf course in the Top 10 — they’ve all done lengthening. You have to respond or you get left behind.”

TOM MARZOLF

FAZIO GOLF COURSE DESIGNERS

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Oakmont's Overhaul

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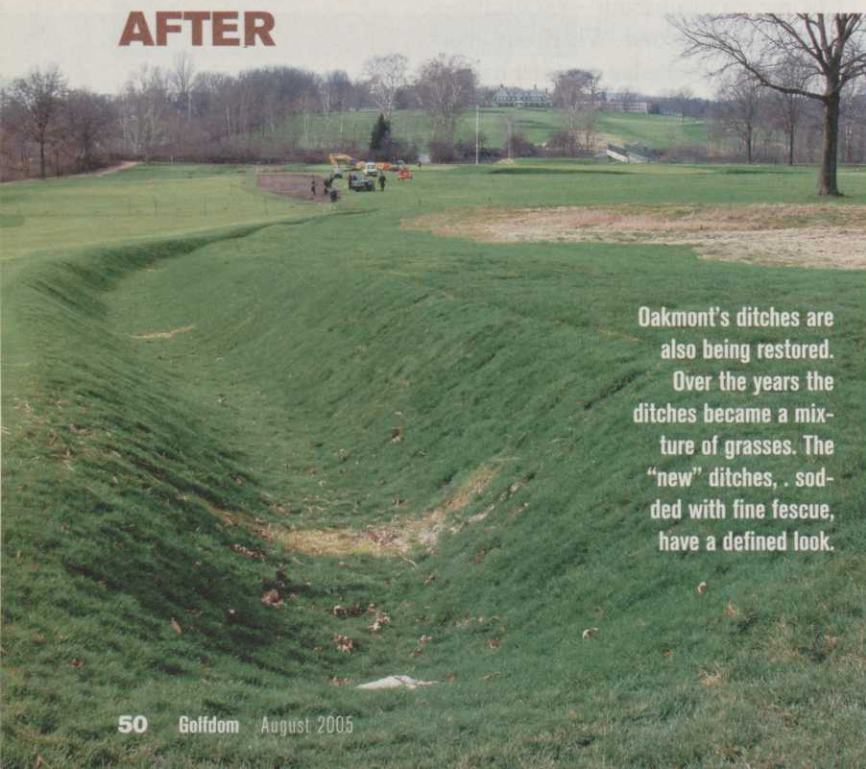
Like the bunkers and ditches, Oakmont's push-up greens needed some renewal. They hadn't been disturbed in 102 years.

"We've had high rainfall the past three years," Zimmers says, noting that several greens, after a heavy rain, would form bird-baths, which became havens for turf disease.

Zimmers says Oakmont is installing the XGD, or Existing Greens Drainage, on all of its greens. Developed by Stuart, Fla.-based T.D.I. International, XGD is a subsurface drainage system to remove surface water more rapidly and lower the water table in the green, thereby improving turf growth. T.D.I. International says its system is a permanent solution to poorly drained and compacted greens.



AFTER



Oakmont's ditches are also being restored. Over the years the ditches became a mixture of grasses. The "new" ditches, sodded with fine fescue, have a defined look.

Zimmers likes what he sees so far with the XGD. "It will make a big difference," he says. The first green to be fitted with the system was No. 8, the course's most problematic green. "Now it's nearly our best green," Zimmers adds.

The greens were also restored to their original size, although their topography remains the same. As old greens go, the fringes tend to encroach them after many years and the greens get smaller. "Looking at old pictures of the course we found that a lot of what used to be part of the greens was now fringe or rough," Wagner says. "So we resized them to be consistent with how they were originally built."

Marzolf made subtle design changes to the No. 2 and No. 17 greens. The pros would've had a field day with the 17th hole, a drivable 315-yard par 4, if the green wasn't altered slightly. The pear-shaped green, which could easily be reached in two, needed to have more bite.

So the club decided to let Marzolf lower the grade of the green on each side. "Now a slightly mis-hit shot will slide toward the bunkers," Marzolf says, noting that the hole's basic design was not altered. "You have to aim that shot at the center of the green and be precise."

Although not part of the restoration, Oakmont, which sits on the north and south sides of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, built a new pedestrian bridge across the highway in 2002. The club now has two bridges that extend over the turnpike. The new bridge was much needed to accommodate the people traffic that comes with hosting big tournaments, such as the upcoming U.S. Open.

While Zimmers and his staff had little to do with the actual construction of the bridge, they played a major role in coordinating the effort. There were permits to obtain, bids to take and contracts to award. And Zimmers is proud to say the course was open for play the entire time during the four months of construction.

Playing his part

Oakmont is known for several things, including its lightning-fast greens, and its passionate and demanding membership. In golf circles the course is also becoming known for its hardworking superintendent, the 35-year-old Zimmers, who learned the ropes of golf course maintenance from Paul R. Latshaw while working for him at Wilmington Coun-

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