

“ I have a better grasp of it all. It’s far easier to maintain nine holes, everything being equal. You don’t miss much on nine holes.”

— Bruce Carlson, superintendent and co-operator of Marion Golf Course.

Keiser’s greeting-card company. After returning to school to get his turf degree, he worked at Congressional Country Club, Inverness Club and then became an assistant at the 36-hole Harborside International, where he was in charge of his own 18 holes. He then returned to work for Keiser, this time as superintendent of The Dunes. If he was interviewing for a superintendent’s job at an 18-hole club, Southward says members would probably say to him, “Oh, you’re only at a nine-hole course.”

It’s not just superintendents at other courses who dismiss nine-hole superintendents as minor league. While it’s a secret that many of them don’t readily admit, many nine-hole superintendents say they didn’t consider nine holes as legitimate courses before going to work at them.

Yakubisin is forthright about his early days at the Rolling Rock Club in Greensburg, Pa. He says a major reason he took the job was the rumor that the club would add another nine holes, and he wanted to be able to list a grow-in on his resume. At that point in his life, Yakubisin’s intention was not be a nine-hole superintendent for the rest of his career.

“I had the nine-hole stigma in my own mind,” the certified superintendent says.

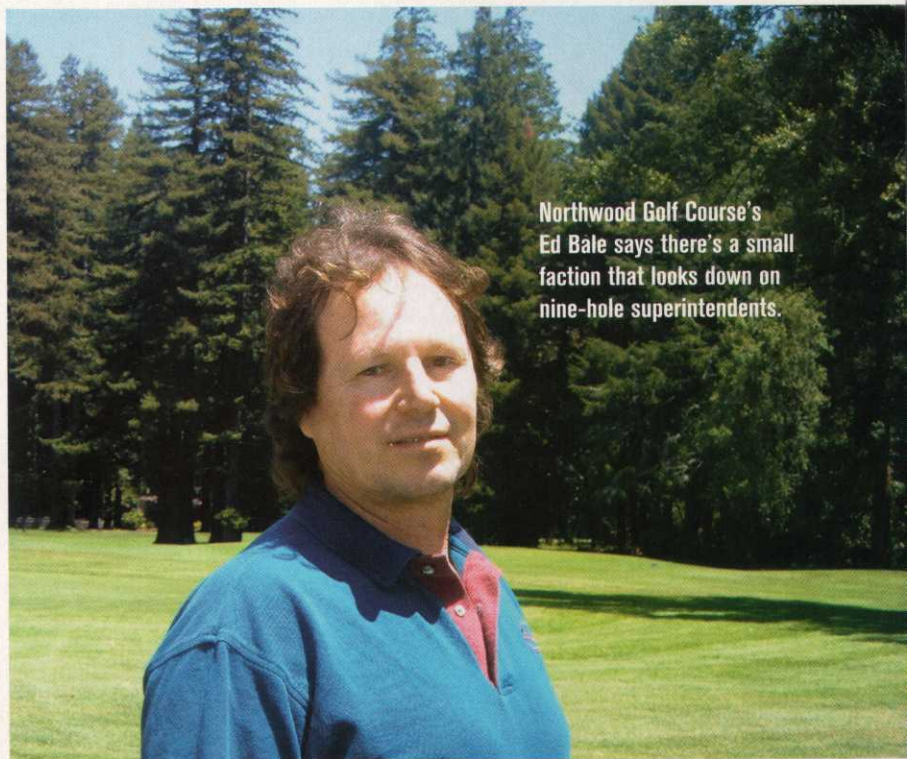
His thinking was that nine holes “could catapult me to a better position. And if (the grow in) didn’t work out, I’d move on and go back to 18,” he says.

Yakubisin was at Rolling Rock for more than five years before construction on the new nine holes finally began. But at that time Yakubisin made the decision that he was not going to leave the course anytime soon, even if it wasn’t expanded to 18 holes.

It’s ironic that anyone even remotely familiar with golf would hold nine-hole courses and their superintendents in a low light considering the history of the game and the realities of the job.

Many of the early golf courses in the United States began as nine-hole layouts. Newport hosted the first U.S. Amateur and U.S. Open held within weeks of each other in the fall of 1895 as a nine-hole course. Myopia Hunt Club, considered the first world-class layout built in the United States, was the site of a U.S. Open as a nine-hole course. Shinnecock Golf Club began with nine holes, too. And for nearly a decade, the Seth Raynor/Charles Blair

*Continued on page 32*



Northwood Golf Course’s Ed Bale says there’s a small faction that looks down on nine-hole superintendents.

## Fine by Nine



**Alan Southward is superintendent of The Dunes Club, the best nine holes built during the modern era.**

*Continued from page 31*

Macdonald-designed Ocean Links Golf Course hosted an invitation-only amateur event that featured some of the best players in the world.

In reality, almost every celebrated Golden Era architect designed nine-hole courses, including Donald Ross, A.W. Tillinghast, Perry Maxwell, Stanley Thompson and the team of William Langford and Theodore Moreau.

At first glance, it might appear that superintendents of nine-hole courses have less work to do. But the fact is they are often more well rounded and more hands-on than many of their counterparts at 18-hole courses.

Carlson gives his perspective.

"The biggest difference is I don't do any of the work with 18 holes; I just direct," he says.

At Foxboro, Carlson's crew consisted of four people year-round and an additional 20 during the peak season. At Marion he has one year-round employee and five seasonal workers. And he does a lot of the work, from mowing to repairing.

At Norfolk, Adams has three year-round workers, including himself.

"We're forced to wear many hats," he says.

Adams says his assistants receive intensive on-the-job training in many areas. They turn wrenches, grind reels and repair electrical systems.

**Bruce and Susan Carlson are proprietors of Marion Golf Course, where they "wear many hats."**

With Norfolk's seasonal crew at 10 and each member working between 30 to 35 hours a week, Adams can have them hand mow approaches and hand rake bunkers every day. A few years ago, he and his crew rebuilt all 24 bunkers in house, converting bland sand bowls into appealing hazards.

At The Dunes Club, Southward can be found changing cups and spraying, jobs that many 18-hole superintendents don't do or don't care to perform.

At Northwood, which is open year-round, hands-on for Bale involves scaling the massive Redwoods and Douglas firs from which the course is carved to perform limbing of epic proportions. He also fixes equipment and restores bunkers. He recently finished a 12-year drainage project.

Bale had no formal education in turf when he became the Northwood superintendent, but over the years he has read voraciously and taken enough classes through the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America to become a certified superintendent.

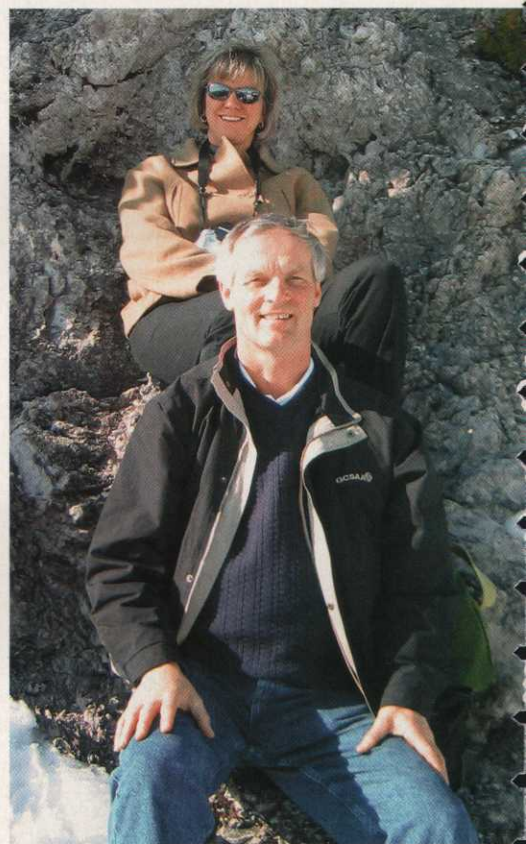


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“It was the school of hard knocks, and I have a degree in grease, dirt and dead grass.”

— Ed Bale, certified superintendent of Northwood Golf Course, on his education process.

*Continued from page 32*

“It was the school of hard knocks, and I have a degree in grease, dirt and dead grass,” Bale says.

Nine-hole superintendents also say they are more in tune with what’s going on throughout their entire courses.

“I have a better grasp of it all,” Carlson says. “It’s far easier to maintain nine holes, everything being equal. You don’t miss much on nine holes.”

For instance, he says at the 18 holes of Foxboro where every hole is tree-lined, “you could work for a month and not see the whole golf course.”

Yakubisin had nearly 10 years of being a

nine-hole man at Rolling Rock before the club added nine more holes under the guidance of architect Brian Silva.

“I was into being out there and doing some of the physical labor,” Yakubisin says of his early years. “Now it’s more administrative.”

The fact that superintendents at nine-hole layouts are not spending the majority of their days filling out paperwork and attending meetings — but rather working on their courses — is one of the biggest attractions of the job and a reason many stayed and found that happiness can come on nine holes.

Before tending to Northwood, Bale spent years trying to make it on the San Francisco music scene, reaching regional fame as the drummer of the band Freestone. He went back to Northwood to help out his father, learning the superintendent business along the way. Although he still plays in two local bands, Bale has settled comfortably into his job there.

“I realized as things went on that this is the place to be,” he says.

For Carlson, his love for Marion grew as he uncovered the deep history of the course.

“It holds a real special place for me,” he says. “I don’t ever want to leave it.”

*Golfdom Contributing Editor Anthony Pioppi is the author of the book “To the Nines,” a celebration of notable and memorable nine-hole golf courses throughout the United States.*

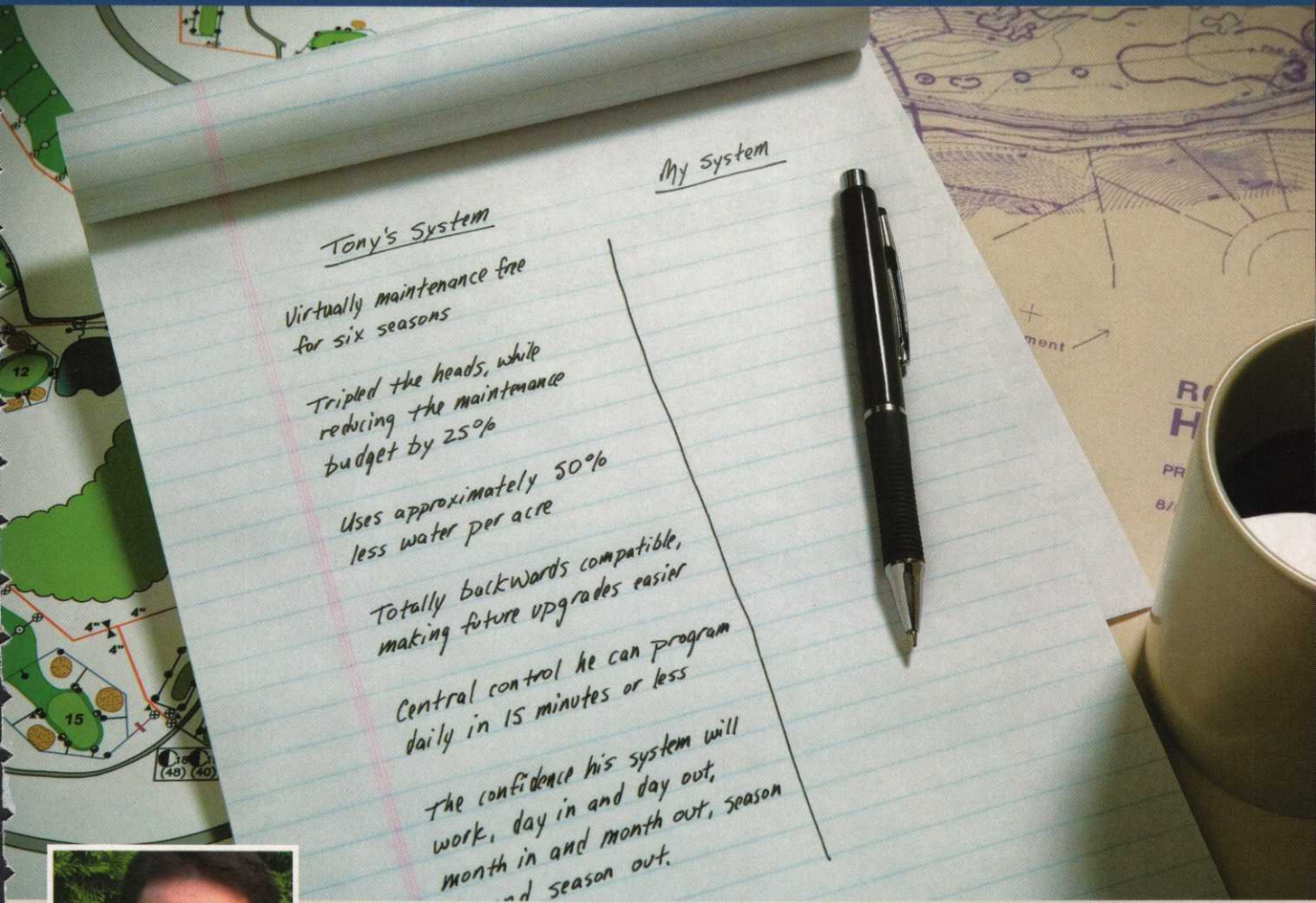
### We Want to Hear From You

Are you fine by nine holes? If you’re a superintendent of a nine-hole golf course, we want to hear from you about your experience. Do you feel looked down upon because you only have nine holes? Are you happy tending to only nine holes? Send e-mail messages to [dfrabotta@questex.com](mailto:dfrabotta@questex.com)

“I had the nine-hole stigma in my own mind,” John Yakubisin of the Rolling Rock Club admits.



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# Staying Ahead of Market Dem

Golf construction slows in-line with demand, so builders and architects tout real-estate projects and sustainable design **BY DAVID FRABOTTA, SENIOR EDITOR**

**G**olf construction has seen better days. Competition for work is tough among builders and architects, but renovations and creative business strategies are helping many survive the lull in new construction.

“Some companies have it pretty tough,” says Steve Forrest, president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects and a principal with Arthur Hills/Steve Forrest and Associates in Toledo, Ohio. “There were about 120 courses built last year, and there are 180 members of the American Society of Golf Course Architects. That means a lot of people need to scrounge around for renovation projects. It’s a very competitive marketplace, and not everyone survives.”

The building boom in the 1990s, which peaked with 400 openings in 2000, has stag-

nated to historic lows following an ebbing demand. For the first time in six decades, 2006 showed a net of 26.5 fewer golf courses (18-hole equivalents) as 146 courses closed while just 119.5 new facilities came online, according to the National Golf Foundation.

But industry observers agree that’s good news. New supply from the previous decade relegated many older courses to obscurity as players opted for new and updated layouts. Some closures were a result of oversupply in certain areas that cannibalized weaker courses, and some were profitable divestitures as owners cashed in on real-estate development. Those trends are expected to continue as the industry waits for demand to spike.

“Golf construction has always been cyclical,” says Tom Shapland, president of the Golf Course Builders Association of America and president of Wadsworth Golf Construction in Plainfield, Ill. “It’s not uncom-



The Sand Golf Club in Sweden is one of many overseas project helping architects and builders diversify revenue streams.

# ands

mon for one or two sources of work to be down at any given time. But we don't feel like there is too little work. We've always been able to sustain ourselves."

The current cycle of sustainable business for architects and builders begins with renovations. Since the boom time and now, many architecture and construction firms went from about three-quarters of their business in new construction to less than half.

National trends reflect a similar story. In 2006, about 100 18-hole equivalents reopened after makeovers, up 39 percent from the 72.5 courses recorded in 2005, according to the National Golf Foundation. By the end of 2006, there were 97 18-hole courses closed for renovation, up from 74.5 courses at the end of 2005.

At Wadsworth Golf Construction, Shapland says just about a quarter of his business was renovation during the building boom. Now it's more than half.

"Competition is tough and aggressive, but there's nothing the matter with that," Shapland says. "We're not afraid to compete, whether we compete solely on price or what we like to believe is a combination of price and value."

Shapland says he was fortunate to be well-

positioned in a down market that might have caught many builders unaware, especially those drawn to the seemingly lucrative field right before the bubble burst.

"Now that it's found its own level a little better, some people have gone out of business and some have gone out of golf," he says. "Some of our competitors do a good job of balancing sports field construction with golf course construction, which is something we haven't done a lot of."

Delving into athletic facilities and overseas business has proven successful revenue generators for many builders and architects. GCBAA has about 110 builder members, so Greenfield projects in the United States won't provide enough business for all of them.

"Business is tough, but it's still good," says Paul Foley, executive director of GCBAA. "There's not a lot of weeping and crying, but you need to scramble a bit today, and builders seem to be doing that pretty well.

"The smart ones, the good businesspeople, have found other avenues to generate revenue," Foley adds. "And we think they will be even stronger as the business comes back because they've branched out and were forced to do things to keep their businesses viable. They're finding there are other niches besides the construction of a new golf course."

The real question that business owners must examine is: What kind of company do you want to be? There is plenty of business abroad as developing nations continue to bol-

*Continued on page 40*

**The good businesspeople have found other avenues to generate revenue, and they will be even stronger as business comes back.**

### Lifecycle of Golf Course Features

Greens*	15-30 years
Bunker sand	5-7 years
Irrigation system	10-30 years
Cart paths (asphalt)**	5-10 years
Cart paths (concrete)	15-30 years
Practice range tees	5-10 years
Tees	15-20 years
Corrugated metal pipes	15-30 years
Bunker drainage pipes	5-10 years
Mulch	1-3 years
Grass	varies

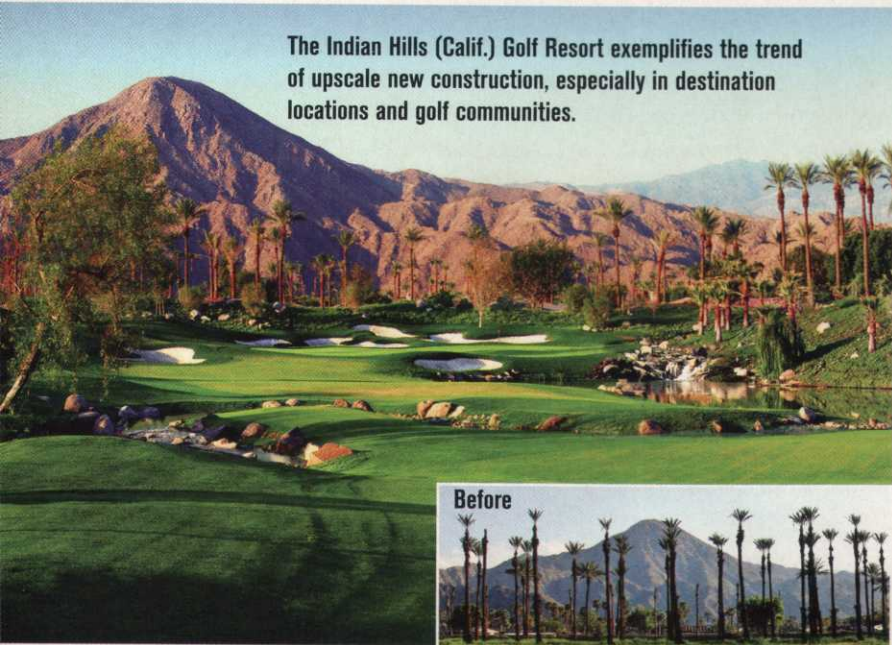
\*Depends on construction

\*\*Assumes routine maintenance

Source: American Society of Golf Course Architects

## Staying Ahead of Market Demands

The Indian Hills (Calif.) Golf Resort exemplifies the trend of upscale new construction, especially in destination locations and golf communities.



*Continued from page 39*

ster the earnings of a burgeoning middle class. But growing your business in the international arena means a fair amount of globetrotting and the increased cost of doing business. It also means that valuable operational personnel are unavailable at home.

There have always been local, regional, national and international players in the architecture and builder professions. Many need to balance the desire to grow with quality-of-life issues and revenue. Many smaller builders can make a good living staying local, but opportunities to grow the company are limited by location.

Conversely, high-growth firms might be

cutting margins thin in an attempt to keep workers busy and gain clout. It's the same old business paradox of growth versus profits.

The subsequent diversity in business models among architects and builders results in healthy companies and healthy professions divided by expertise, business strategy and job preferences.

"Some are strictly doing renovations, and some are small companies that only do maybe six to 10 holes a year," Shapland says. "But competition on the types of jobs that we generally compete for has virtually the same group of competitors that we've had for the last five or six years. In some respects it's good because it spreads out the industry a little bit."

### Not all business as usual

While competition might be the same, renovation projects have become more diverse as a result of the glut of high-end courses that opened during the last 10 years and a slowing demand among golfers. Operating margins are tight for many semi-private and daily-fee courses. And many older courses are competing for traditional members who might be spending more time and money at hyped-up new builds rather than their traditional clubs.

That dichotomy has prompted many traditional facilities to restore classic features originally laid out by renowned architects, such as the work being done by Ron Forse, Keith Foster and Ron Prichard. Others are basically starting from scratch and carving out development opportunities to subsidize the cost of renovation and hedge operational challenges. And the land is selling like hot funnel cakes at the county fair.

"Residential is a necessary component in about 95 percent of the cases," Forrest says. "We've caught wind of 30-percent to 50-per-

### 2006 Golf Development Summary – 18-Hole Equivalents

	STATUS												Total Courses Under Development
	Open			Under Construction			In Planning			Proposed			
	New	Expansion	Total	New	Expansion	Total	New	Expansion	Total	New	Expansion	Total	
<b>Daily Fee</b>	55.5	12.5	68.0	139.5	45.5	185.0	188.0	41.5	229.5	157.5	23.0	180.5	663.0
<b>Municipal</b>	7.5	1.5	9.0	15.5	3.0	8.5	21.0	4.5	25.5	30.5	6.0	36.5	89.5
<b>Private</b>	30.0	12.5	42.5	66.5	13.0	79.5	39.0	11.0	50.0	36.0	7.5	43.5	215.5
<b>Totals</b>	93.0	26.5	119.5	221.5	61.5	283.0	248.0	57.0	305.0	224.0	36.5	260.5	968.0

Source: National Golf Foundation