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Golf courses need to become wildlife weigh stations and oxygen-producing refuges to showcase their environmental hipness.

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a premier match-play event with nine-hole round robins to show golfers that even truncated forms of golf have legitimacy.

As part of this time component, the golf facility must be reconsidered to grow the sport. Before developers plow up 18 holes to build another Home Depot, golf needs to develop sustainable models that not only remain financially viable for the owner but are also intriguing, fresh and interactive for the users.

The No. 1 complaint remains the time issue, particularly for families. The Harmon Club in Rockland, Mass., has solved this with a full-length nine-hole course by Brian Silva, complimented by a short-game course and practice area designed by Brad Faxon. Most importantly, the venue features a multi-purpose clubhouse with a 5,000-square-foot fitness facility.

With the 9-hole stigma removed, affordable facilities like this not only provide some-

thing for everyone, they are likely to be more-relaxed, family-friendly environments that will thrive in a society strapped for time.

“The Harmon Club is a great place to practice and has a very good nine holes to play,” Faxon says. “It has it all, and you don’t have to spend five hours there.”

Perhaps future modifications to upscale daily fees or even country clubs will incorporate amenities like indoor course simulators, bowling, hiking trails and mountain biking.

### Maniacal maintenance

Golf facilities also must rethink how they are maintained. Here’s the part where we talk about going “green.” Ironic, huh? All of these years of greening up your grass to please golfers, and now they are going to start demanding a green that has nothing to do with color.

Forget the environmental details for a moment. Consider golf’s — forgive the business speak here — brand: vast spaces using up valuable resources and hurting the environment. Sorry, but that’s how most of the world sees us.

Those in the golf business know that some of this is true, but not much of it. The game must refute these notions and demonstrate that golf courses are vital to the green movement.

These “vast” spaces need to become wildlife weigh stations and oxygen-producing refuges with thriving native-plants to showcase their environmental hipness and inspire people to associate themselves with the game instead of apologizing for its perceived sins.

There is little question that the next great American business opportunity is the green movement — assuming the corporate goons and political hacks can overcome their shallow climate change bickering to see a blossoming business opportunity.

Position yourself as green, and people will support you. The better job you do, the more people will pay to be part of it.

If golf courses are seen as old-style, gas-guzzling consumerists and an enemies of wildlife, then we will be left behind. Those well versed in solar cells and chill-beam technology are more likely to deliver the bottom-line results that course ownership will demand. They will

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The new American majority will embrace golf courses if those courses embrace a sustainable future.

also provide the image of golf courses as cutting-edge facilities with which Americans want to be associated.

“The challenge facing golf in the future is how we will deal with rising fuel, labor and ‘amendment’ costs in a business where margins are already thin,” says golf course architect Scot Sherman, who has long taken an interest in the environment. “We just need to use less of everything. Although it may sound counterintuitive, we need to use new technology to get us back to more basic and less-costly operations.”

Thankfully, there are cutting-edge members of the golf industry who have long been developing ways to save energy and water and implement sound integrated pest management programs, right?

Count on them changing, too. The generations demanding excessively green turf, ornate flowerbeds and soft soil will be slowly giving way to a new generation that demands a different kind of green. Potential new golfers will evaluate whether they want to associate themselves with the sport. Doing more for the environment only increases the

likelihood of attracting new blood.

The collapse of the financial markets and the increased understanding of climate change as motivation to embrace a different future seem to be ushering in a new majority of Americans looking to conserve and live a more ecologically sensitive life. But will it be enough to encourage golf facilities to make the investment in the sometimes-costly new technologies like electric mowers that will, forgive me, fuel a sustainable future?

“Although almost everyone in golf has experienced the recent pinch, I’m not sure there is much of a movement to improve the financial health of the game by thinking in new or even back to the old ways,” Sherman says. “The only reason I can give is the abundance of ego in our game. There is almost too much ego in golf driving the bigger-is-better mentality, which would catch up with us all one day. Maybe the successful projects of the future will be done by the guy who steps back and says, ‘Let’s build a humble, little place to play golf where everyone will have fun and compete occasionally in a natural setting.’” ■

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In addition to a complete bunker restoration by Forse Design and Total Turf Services, Superintendent Chad Mark tackled green expansions in-house, and he transitioned the intermediate rough to ryegrass.

# Working as One

Management team at Kirtland Country Club unites to sell its master plan to members



Play was not disrupted during the bunker overhaul, except for a few generous drop zones.

**BY DAVID FRABOTTA**  
SENIOR EDITOR

**T**raditional clubs often have traditional members with traditional attitudes about golf. Attitudes like, “Bunkers are hazards, they’re not supposed to be perfect;” or, “We already have a great golf course, so why should we spend a lot of money to make it better?”

Those sentiments were the main chal-

lenges in approving a master plan for The Kirtland (Ohio) Country Club, a 1921 track designed by C.H. Alison.

When widespread renovations were proposed in 2004 — a master plan created by Forse Design — members disagreed on the scope of the project as well as its timing. Some felt that the plan’s initial \$800,000 bunker overhaul and green expansions could be done in-house with a few extra maintenance workers over the duration of several years.

But the management team knew that a piecemeal renovation would disturb the golf course for too long, and the end product could be more expensive and disjointed. The management team soon realized that *selling* the business strategy was as important as *having* a business strategy.

So General Manager Richard LaRocca, Superintendent Chad Mark and Head Golf Professional Tim Bennett worked together to help sell its capital improvement plan through almost continuous member communications that included innovative open houses and town hall meetings.

*Continued on page 46*

TOP PHOTO BY: CHAD MARK; ALL OTHER PHOTOS BY: DAVID FRABOTTA

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## Working as One



From left, Head Golf Professional Tim Bennett, General Manager Richard LaRocca and Superintendent Chad Mark disseminated a wall of information so members could get comfortable with proposed golf course renovations and capital improvements.

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**RAIN BIRD**

*Continued from page 44*

They started at the top. Once the management team could elicit buy-in at the upper levels, then those members could be the biggest advocates for the renovation. So the staff started with the club president and other influential members who knew the golf course had a bunker problem.

Fortunately, the club president and certain committee heads agreed with the strategic plan. It made more sense, both fiscally and architecturally, to complete the project in one fell swoop.

“These are business people, and common sense in business is not to waste money,” LaRocca says. “So if we can implement a financial plan, then we are no longer being reactive; we’ll be proactive.”

After the club had buy-in from various upper levels, it was time to go to work on the rest of its members. As in any club membership, Kirtland had to sell its master plan to golfers with handicaps ranging from two to 20. And like many clubs, some of the oldest members don’t golf at all. The club has 600 registered handicaps for its 300 family memberships.

The management team had to tackle the sales process together, beginning by interjecting the master plan during routine operations and financial meetings. When the team felt resistance, it became clear that the plan required its own momentum.

So the team began sending e-mail blasts, newsletters and other member communications discussing the master plan and golf course renovation. They scheduled get-to-know-the-master-plan sessions that revolved around existing events to garner a good turnout.

As the master plan gained traction in 2006,

### TIPS TO SELL A PLAN

- Prioritize projects and assign phases to them.
- Create realistic timelines.
- Start small: Court committee heads and club leaders before the broader membership.
- Present a unified front and keep other managers apprised of all member communications.
- Include architects and consultants in town hall meetings.
- Secure “yes” votes before vote time.

the management team turned on the heat with town hall meetings and open houses to discuss the changes proposed on the golf course. Kirtland members began to see the value of the renovation, but they seemed to need reassurance that the scope of the project was necessary and that they were getting a good deal, for lack of a better phrase. Clubs, after all, are filled with savvy businessmen who want to understand how their money is being spent so they are comfortable with the deal.

A tour of the maintenance facility during an open house helped reassure members that the management team was being good stewards of the budget. When members walked through Mark's maintenance domain, they were astonished at how tidy it was. But even more impressive were the hand tools that donned the names of each worker to whom they belonged. The accountability appeared to go a long way.

"If you are going to be efficient and able to pay attention to detail on the golf course, then you need to have an orderly shop," Mark says.

Also part of the tour was a price check: Mark labeled his equipment with price tags to help members understand the cost of golf maintenance equipment and how their money was being spent.

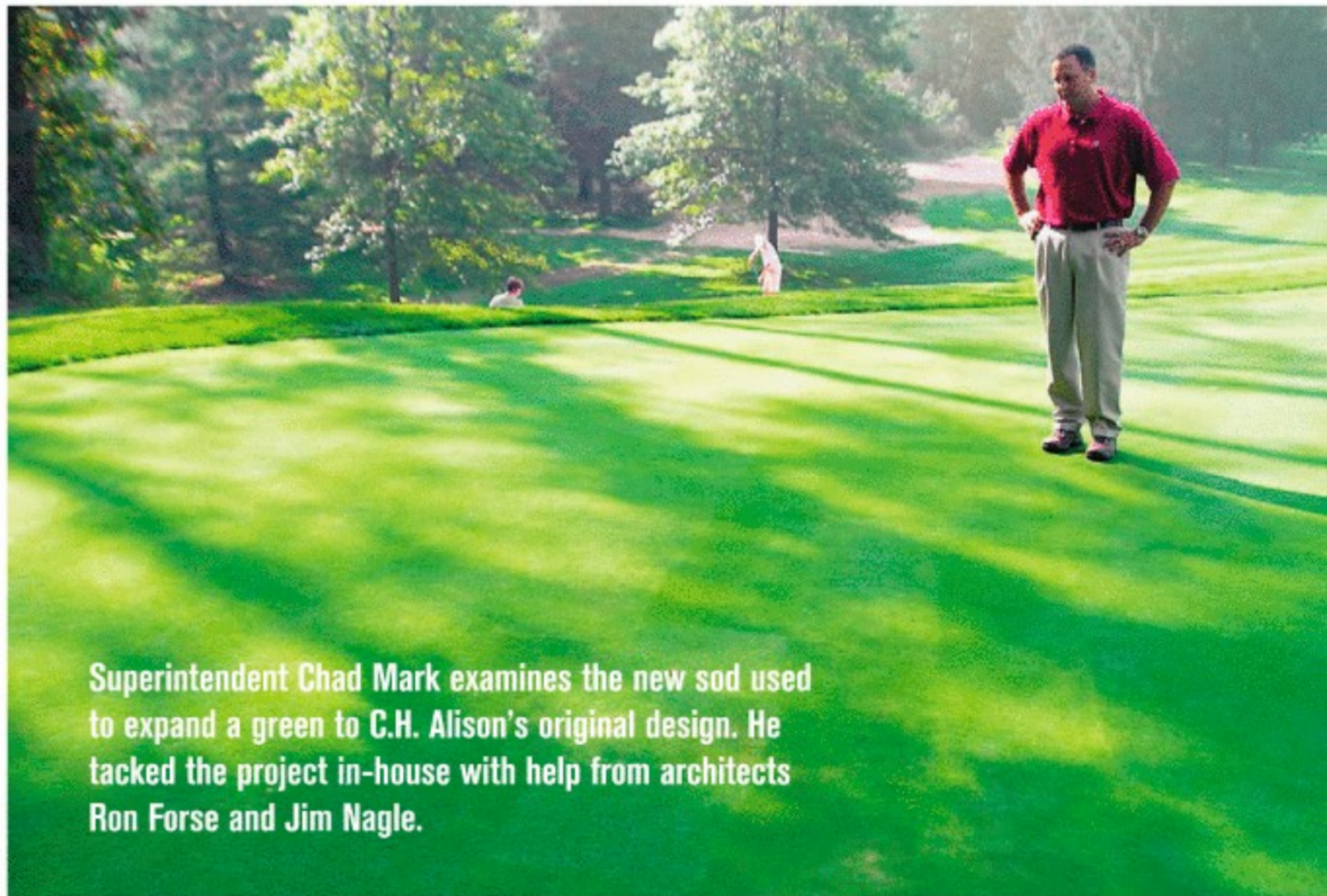
The bunker renovation project and green expansions, which Mark did largely in house with an 86-year-old *Poa annua* and bentgrass mixture cultivated from his practice-course nursery, began late last year. A few holes were finished in the spring, and members, despite their initial hesitation, have been clamoring about it ever since.

Mark is amid a second phase of green expansions and an ongoing tree-removal and maintenance program. The master plan for Kirtland is up to 20 years, including a new irrigation system in 2012.

"When you let things build up, they become more expensive," LaRocca says, citing the almost \$1-million bunker renovation as a perfect example. "We need to be efficient managers of the process to avoid a huge assessment down the road."

And you need to be a pretty good salesman, too. Of course, even though Kirtland's master plans are approved for two decades, the communication from the management team will

persist through each phase as if they needed to approve the process all over again. That's the key to keeping members engaged, apprised and satisfied with the projects on the golf course. ■



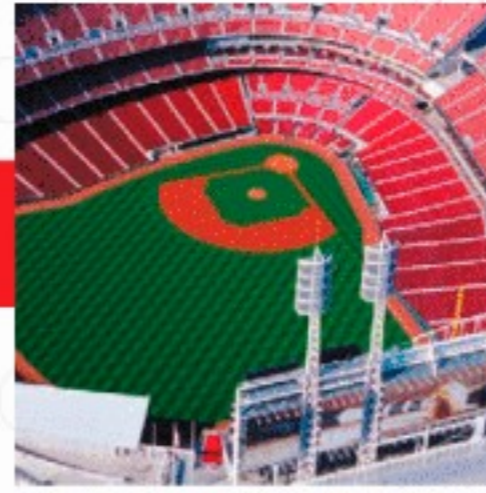
Superintendent Chad Mark examines the new sod used to expand a green to C.H. Alison's original design. He tackled the project in-house with help from architects Ron Forse and Jim Nagle.

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