

Low Tech Strategies That Enable the Big Picture

By **Bob Lohmann**, Founder and Principal Lohmann Golf Designs and Golf Creations.

Editors Note: We welcome back Golf Course Architect Bob Lohmann after a 20+ year break. Readers can research Bob's previous articles at Michigan State Library's Turfgrass Information File.

All of us in the golf business struggle at times to reckon the old-fashioned, traditional qualities of the game with the technological advances that have so greatly affected the way we play that game — and the way we tend to our courses. But one thing's for sure: Tech isn't going away. The sooner we get a handle on it, the better off we'll be — and the better we'll deal with the next wave of technological advance.

Here's some low-tech ways to think about putting technology to work:

Be historians.

Start with collecting and organizing the data you have. Gather all of the docu-

ments sitting in the corner of your office, review them, understand them, and archive them. In short, take on the role of course historian at your facility.

Why? Well, because that information is the stuff you'll need, eventually, to do all sorts of important things, mainly strategizing regarding how best to maintain key aspects of your course and making the case internally for future improvements.

First, take your paper plans and have them scanned into digital format for ease of organization, space and future use. These are the first things architects, contractors and consultants ask for when working with a course client, and digital is the way to go these days — for ease of sharing and, let's face it, digital is built to last. Paper is not.

We suggest scanning to .jpg or .pdf format at a resolution between 175 and 200 dpi, which will give you adequate

quality at a manageable file size.

Collect data you don't already have stored and make a record of it, digitally, even if it's a simple Word file or spreadsheet. For example, gather that information that is stored in the brain of your irrigation technician, especially if he/she's the only connection to that info — and get it recorded using GPS. Hire a consultant to help, someone who understands how things are installed so they can interpret the data accurately. Then request all future information in paper and digital format.

The value of archiving this sort of information is manifold. It allows you to make connections to the past, which in turn allows you to understand the story behind your club. This was vital at Poplar Creek Country Club in Illinois, a municipally-owned facility where we recently wrapped up a major storm water management project. Prior to approval, we illustrated the incredible increase in development around the golf course over the last 30 years, using documents we and the owner had archived. Our data helped paint a picture for the Park Board commissioners and the permitting agencies, so we could illustrate the value and need of our project. More importantly, it expedited the approval process.

Be a "paparazzi."

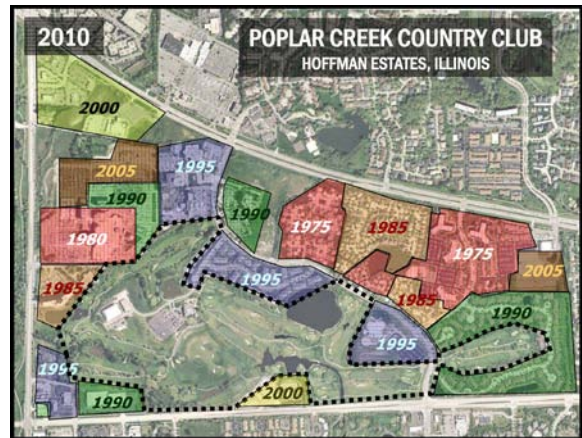
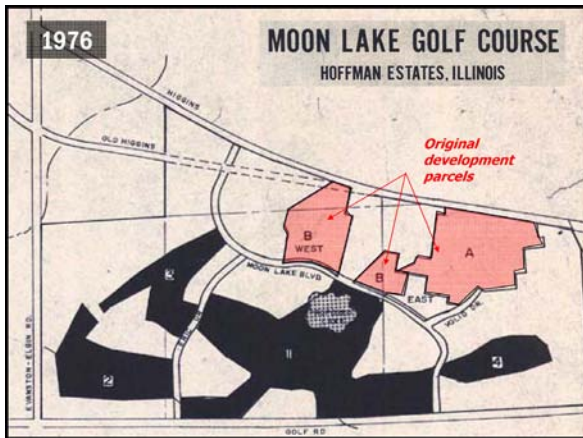
Take photos of everything. The best way to tell a story is to illustrate it, and for us aging folks, it's also the best way to remember those stories! Proper photo imaging also allows an architect, for example, to demonstrate proposed changes to a particular hole with alarming realism. What, you don't like the bunker there? We'll move it, and here's how it will look over there — think about how much time and trouble that can save in the field!

Again, this sort of digital documentation helps a superintendent sell a project to higher-ups. It's a great tool for marketing and presenting to your boss or to your stakeholder golfers, giving them a feel for things before, during and after the course-improvement process.



Fig. 1 – Scan historic and current documents into digital format for ease of organization, preservation and future use.

AN ARCHITECTS OPINION



Original plans (left) allowed the development of current plans to show the development over 30 years. These plans were vital to getting approval for a storm water management plan for the course.

This type of imaging also allows you to start exploring materials and aesthetics well in advance of actual construction. If you're lucky (and we all know that most luck is "made" by those who are best prepared), you'll ultimately get to build your ideas — then go back and review how they compare to your initial proposals.

It's important to document where and when you took your photos, too. The simplest way is to mark and locate this info on a course map, either by hand or digitally. This allows you to go back later and take the "After" pic-

ture in the exact same position. It sounds tedious, but trust me, it'll add a level of authenticity to your story and to your presentations.

Be prepared.

There are all manner of projects that superintendents may wish to undertake that have nothing to do with hiring outside help. But all of these projects need to be paid for and staffed. I think most supers have a list of goals for their course, in their heads. Write those goals down in a strategic plan that stretches from daily management, to long-term management, to future renovation. With this list of

goals, you can prioritize them and start strategically building your case for funding and logistic support.

One helpful way to think about this planning is the living will. Create one that focuses on the key features of your course. Trees are a good example: Hire an arborist to survey and categorize your trees and assess them for value. More important, do your own assessment that includes a plan of action in the event of a course renovation, a severe weather event, or an unforeseen herbicide disaster!

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Changes at Westmoor Country Club

Top Left - Hole 8 Before Renovation

Top Right - Digital rendering of Proposed Changes Hole 8.

Bottom Right - Hole 8 as constructed. (Photo courtesy of Epic Creative.)



Clubs should be prepared for potential natural disasters as Jefferson City CC in Missouri faced. A ice storm like this could change a course forever.

This plan is essential to have on hand for discussion and remediation purposes, and the more prepared you are, the easier it is to turn a “tragedy” into an opportunity. Jefferson City CC in Missouri

is a great example of how a tragedy jump-started an improvement project. While our firm was trying to gain approval for a renovation program there, which required significant tree removal, the club was hit with a devastating ice storm. The damage was in fact devastating, but it opened up an opportunity: the cost (and shock) of tree removal was covered by insurance money, thus freeing up some dollars in the project budget, and the newly cleared spaces allowed us to reinstate some concepts that had been nixed due to trees. Turns out those improvements are some of the members’ favorites.

Be curious.

None of the above steps are, in and of themselves, particularly high-tech. But they all enable the more practical, ef-

ficient use of time and resources. They also are great catalysts for the generation of ideas. That last item, the ideas themselves, should not be overlooked. In the design and construction business, we see great technological advance all around us. But technology has its limits, and we feel the best ideas are still fostered through face-to-face discussions and brainstorming.

So we encourage you to be curious. Ask questions. Engage your staff, members and management in discussion and research. Reach out to your colleagues, architects and builders and exchange ideas. Find out what’s going on at other courses and in the rest of the industry. But most important, engage the resources at your disposal to thoroughly document and understand your own course’s past and present. Then once you’ve done that, use that information to work towards securing its (and your) future. 🌱

AN ARCHITECTS OPINION



Above Left: Hole 8 at Jefferson City Country Club before renovation.

Above Right: Hole 8 at Jefferson City Country Club after renovation facilitated by a massive ice storm. The ice storm allowed a non-political removal of trees paid for by insurance.



Changes at Westmoor Country Club

Top Left - Hole 3 before renovation.

Top Right - Hole 3 during construction.

Bottom Right - Hole 3 after construction with a wider view from the tee.

