

Constructing the Future

By Jake Schneider, Assistant Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

A diverse crowd of 54 assistant superintendents, vendors, and superintendents attended the 4th annual WGCSA Assistant Superintendent Winter Seminar on February 15 at Whispering Springs Golf Club in Fond du Lac. Construction and renovation was the general theme of the event, and attendees were fortunate to hear from an array of informative speakers.

Todd Quitno from Lohmann Golf Designs started the morning with a talk about technology and how to use the latest and greatest gadgets to your advantage both in daily maintenance and in garnering support for course improvements. Todd pointed out that assistants who were raised in the ultra-connected world in which we live in can often act as bridges between the past and the present but that they have to understand the limits and opportunities of technology. With the ease of use and affordability that digital cameras offer, he recommended taking as many pictures as possible to record vari-

ous processes and to document the “why” of our maintenance operations. While digital cameras are relatively common and widely-used, QR codes (Google it) are a more recent development that offer an innovative way to relay information to your golfers. In general, Todd offered the following advice when building support for improvements: understand where you (and your course) came from, photograph everything, build a case, deliver your message and tell the story, think outside the box but always keep a foot in it, and connect with everyone.

Following Todd’s talk, Dustin Riley from Oconomowoc Golf Club discussed the fairway re-grassing project that he recently undertook. Dustin titled his talk, “Fairway Regrass: Sell the Results, Not the Project”, and he did just that by realizing that not everyone (most golfers) likes to talk turf, by giving them a taste of what’s to come by starting small, by communicating with photos, and by putting in extra effort to produce successful results. And,

although he would have done some things differently if he had to do it again, the project was impressive and undoubtedly successful. Dustin was generous enough to share the details of the process that he used, but those details would encompass another entire article.

Steve Schmidt, the longtime superintendent at Butte des Morts Country Club, next talked about the changes, both in maintenance and in construction, that he’s seen over the years. Steve has been involved in a wide variety of projects, from building greens and tees to helping with a sanitary sewer installation. As daily green speeds have progressed (or regressed, depending on your opinion) from 8.5 to 11+ feet, he foresees the need to potentially change the contours of the old, sloped greens at Butte des Morts. In closing, Steve offered the following tips for a long, successful career: tour the course and talk to the golf pro daily, communicate in person, and know your limitations when it comes to special projects.



Whistling Straits Emily Kucksdorf, Joe Sell and Chris Zugel spoke on projects at the highly renowned course.



A great turnout of superintendents and assistant superintendents attended the 4th annual event.


After a hearty lunch, Whistling Straits superintendent Chris Zugel and his two assistants, Emily Kucksdorf and Joe Sell, discussed the special challenges and projects that are associated with maintaining a highly-renowned golf course that hosts major championships. On a yearly basis, the Straits course sees 25,000 rounds of golf and 13,000 rounds that are accompanied by caddies; that's a lot of course traffic.

Of course, many of the mere mortals want to tee off where the pros do, and in tournament years, they've found that green net-

ting that gets caught in golf spikes is great deterrent. As you can probably imagine, there's a tremendous amount of prep work that takes place that's outside the scope of normal golf course maintenance. All told, it takes two to three months to set everything (grandstands and other infrastructure) up and only two days to get it out. Interestingly, during tournament years, they uncover cart paths and roads that are buried under soil in normal years.

Construction on the Straits course is never-ending, and in recent years, many of the

changes that have taken place have been aimed at creating the "infinity pool" look around the greens. Now, many of the greens appear to be much closer to Lake Michigan than they really are. With the length that today's players have, it wasn't surprising to learn that they've also been adding a lot of tees. Although the pros won't necessarily play from the tips, the course set-up officials like to have as much flexibility as possible. Personally, I prefer the forward tees.

All told, it was a terrifically informative day. Thanks to the speakers, to those who attended, to the assistant superintendent committee, to Brett Grams and the WGCSA, and to Matt Schmitz, who hosted us, and please be on the lookout for more assistant superintendent events in the future. 

Speakers included (from top to bottom) Todd Quinto, Lohmann Golf Designs, Dustin Riley, Oconomowoc GC, Steven Schmidt, Butte des Morts CC







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