

The Superintendent and the Architect

Understanding the role and intent of the other makes for happier working relationships and better golf courses

by Betty Ford

At times it may *seem* that the work of the golf course architect and the superintendent are at cross purposes—the architect who creates designs that are difficult and expensive to maintain, or the superintendent who ignores the intent of the original design and lets the course evolve too much.

To get the architect's perspective, we spoke with Brian Ault and Tom Clark, principals in the Kensington, Md. firm of Ault, Clark & Associates.

"When we leave a course," says Clark, "it is in the hands of the superintendent. Nine times out of ten when we come back several years later, we'll see things are entirely different. Greens may be grown in, or a bunker shape and character have completely changed over a period of time."

Changes are not necessarily the fault of the superintendent—it may be the equipment or other factors. To prevent or retard such evolution, Ault and Clark suggest that the superintendent familiarize himself with the original plans and be cognizant of the architect's intent. Ault also advises that the architect be invited back as a consultant from time to time.

"During the development of a new course," says Clark, "we always hope to get a superintendent on board at the start of construction so he can help act as project liaison. He can also help as far as interpretation of some of the plans and specifications for the contractor. And he is welcome to make suggestions during construction that will help his maintenance." With the superintendent present from the beginning of the project, it is easier to maintain the

course according to its original intent. "This is not to say we get everything perfect the first time. Maybe a year or two later a superintendent will notice the landing area on one of the holes is really too short, or maybe he finds a bunker is obsolete so why maintain it. There are a lot of adaptations that occur during the development of a course and we are willing to modify. There are a number of things we interact with the superintendent on because he's there daily."

Few superintendents have the

"Our public courses now look like private courses of the 19th century"

opportunity to be in on the development of a course from its beginning, but they can always check the original plans, and certainly for any reconstruction work, the principles are the same. Says Ault, "Superintendents need to learn the philosophy of the architect and respect the intent as much as practical because the golf course is always evolving and growing and very subject to change. Ignore it for a while and it will change drastically. Sometimes for the better, most of the time, not."

"We work as much as possible with the natural features of the terrain," says Clark. We must be cognizant of the drainage slopes and how that landscape will effect the playing of the game. But we look to the superintendent to make sure we don't forget that the golf course must be maintained.

We may want to use a steep slope to emphasize something, to create a shadow or a contrast of terrain. Once in a while we need to be reminded, 'Hey, I've gotta mow that slope.' Often we adjust it to get our point across and at the same time permit easier maintenance. That slope is going to be mowed twice a week forever."

The architect depends on the superintendent to act as construction supervisor. "It is important for the superintendent to be on site so that he sees what goes underground—especially with the irrigation system—the right size pipe, etc., and when the greens mix goes on are there exactly four inches of gravel, two inches of barrier layer, 12 inches of mix. We can easily come and walk around the course and say it's fine, but it's what is underneath that is important. The contractor should realize that he must satisfy the superintendent. The superintendent has a lot of power during construction."

A superintendent involved in the remodeling of a golf course, has a lot of input from the beginning. "One of the first things we do during a remodeling project is get the superintendent and the pro together and ask them their opinions of everything on that course they would like to see changed. They are the ones who are there every day," says Clark.

Architects constantly give superintendents challenges and manufacturers scramble to create equipment to make their design innovations practical. In turn, superintendents keep architects informed as to new developments

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in the maintenance industry. "They inform us of a lot of things—which items, concepts or ideas are working and which are not."

Today, golfers demand

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innovative design. "They see games on TV, they expect those kinds of playing conditions and course concepts. Our public courses now look like private courses of the 19th century," notes Ault. "And in all likelihood, the fancier the course the more maintenance it's going to require."

Not only are golfers demanding more, but there are more and more golfers, putting more stress on existing courses. "We could

build 10 more courses around Washington and they would be filled tomorrow," says Ault. "We have 10 of them laid out but they can't build them right now because of the permits."

Tom Clark, president this year of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, sees this as one of the two major obstacles to new construction. As a result, the ASGCA has formed a committee whose work is to produce publications and a national computer data base to help in this process.

The second problem is financing new courses. Now with S&L money dried up, "we have to come up with creative ways to finance golf courses. Bill Love, another member of the Ault-Clark firm, is chairman of the ASGCA committee addressing this problem."

How can superintendents become better acquainted with the problems, purposes and perspec-

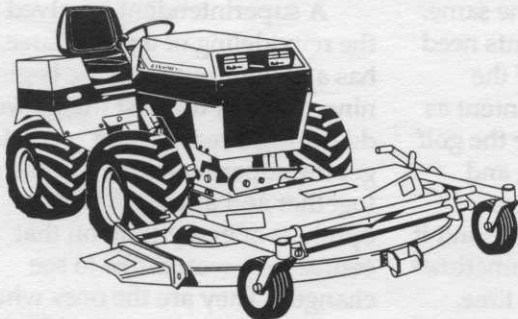
tive of the golf course architect? Probably at conferences, says Clark, who will present a program at GCSAA's national meeting. "Bob Graves and Jeff Cornish also put on a seminar on golf course architecture. It's very informative and I think superintendents would be better advised to know that we did something this way because we had to. Everyone likes to second guess the architect. You may not have known that under this spot was a nest of migratory swamp beetles or something and consequently we couldn't disturb the area. We had to put this bunker here because it filters out the water containing fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides."

Being informed is 90% of understanding, says Clark. Continuing education, staying up-to-date by information exchange, and attending conferences are the best methods.



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