

THRU THE GREEN

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The Golf Course Superintendents Association of Northern California
— Committed to Responsible Turfgrass Management —



Dual Member Blaker Hosts Joint Meeting

Imagine trying to operate and maintain a championship resort golf course that in some years may see as much as 150 days of snow cover. Those are the conditions that face the recent host of the Sierra Nevada/NorCal Joint Meeting, Joel Blaker. A member of both Associations, Baker and his staff at Tahoe Donner, now must turn their attention to the task of preparing to close the course until next spring.

The five to six month season keeps Blaker and staff busy. "We average over 30,000 rounds during that period," Blaker says. "With the short growing season, how we emerge from winter becomes critical. Snow removal each spring is a huge undertaking, but it's necessary for good spring conditions," Blaker continues. There is the six miles of drainage that Blaker suggests has greatly decreased the amount of winter turf loss.

Aside from the challenge each winter brings, Blaker is gearing up for a new challenge in 1999. "Next spring we begin the replacement of our irrigation system," he says enthusiastically. The current system has its shortfalls and Blaker is anxious to see and hear the sound of

trenchers. The two year project will replace 9 holes per year.

The history of Tahoe Donner is an interesting one. The public facility was constructed from 1971 to 1975 and designed by Joe B. Williams. Tragically, it was to be Williams last project. Before the course was completed, Williams passed away suffering a heart attack as he landed his plane at the Truckee Airport. It has since earned the reputation as one of Tahoe's finest resorts, much to the credit of Blaker and his staff.

A native of the Midwest, Blaker received a two year degree in 1985 from Des Moines Community College and headed out west where he began his career with the City of Sunnyvale. With the goal of working at a private club, Blaker subsequently moved to Peachtree Country Club and then on to Tahoe Donner in 1991. It appears that Blaker, after seven years at Tahoe Donner, has settled into his role as a mountain superintendent, but he insists there is still more to come. "Some day, I intend to design, construct, own and operate my own course," he says with a smile. I might be 60 years old, but that's my aspiration.

Media Director Continues To Top Board Agenda

Over the last 12 months you have likely seen many references in the Board Room Briefs to a proposal which advocates the hiring of a Media Director. The proposal has been a point of discussion at nearly every board meeting since last October and continues to receive strong consideration.

The idea to promote the Golf Course Superintendent profession is not new. The GCSAA Board several years ago established image enhancement as one of four mandates and since has made great strides in elevating the position of the Golf Course Superintendent within the golf community. On a chapter level, the Oregon Golf Course Superintendents Association has employed a Media Director since 1992. The success of their public relations efforts have been well chronicled. Recently, the South Texas Superintendents Association has likewise hired a Media Director and early reports indicate it has been of great benefit. Other chapters have recognized the benefit of public relations as well and have instituted programs to promote the profession through media days.

Communicating The Message

For years superintendents have groused about the lack of recognition they have received within the golf community. Many of the accolades for course conditioning have fallen upon the shoulders of

the golf professional who have for years enjoyed the stature of the most recognized and important person at a golf facility. Unfortunately, writing articles and preaching amongst ourselves has done little to change the public image of the superintendent. As one golf writer once said, "In the minds of some, the superintendent represents the crazed uncle out back."

It's clear that if any significant change is to occur the message must be carried directly to those that can make a difference in the minds and attitudes of employers, members and golfers - the media. The question then becomes who is going to carry the message.

We have all heard or read at one point in our careers stories or presentations that encourage superintendents to take a more active role with the media. Invite them to lunch they say, or write an article in the local garden section. Not bad ideas in concept, the problem — who has the time? Furthermore, within the world of golf there are important stories to be told about superintendents and the things they do, stories that most golfers find interesting. The challenge is who has the time or the expertise to share them.

At the board level we have recognized for some time that one of our responsibilities is to take an active role in public relations. Yet, in spite of our desire to improve the stature of our profession on a

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