

Lou Tonelli & Lake Merced GC To Host Scholarship Tournament

By Ken Williams

The GCSANC is privileged to visit Lake Merced GC for its annual Scholarship Tournament on August 5th. Lake Merced GC was originally constructed in 1922 but has undergone many changes over the years. Guiding many of the changes has been the venerable Lou Tonelli, who has done a masterful job with the classic course.

Lou began his career at the California Golf Club in 1962. He came to Lake Merced in 1968, became the Assistant in 1970 and became the Superintendent in 1978. "Lou is a legend around here," states Bo Links, a popular member of the Board and Greens and Grounds Committee at Lake Merced. "To show how much respect we have for Lou, we allow Lou to set his maintenance schedule before we schedule a single event." "Lou's been a tremendous part of our club, and I don't know what we'd do without him," declares Links.

The course that we'll see for the Scholarship Tournament will be quite different from the original design. The course was remodeled in 1964 to make way for Interstate 280, losing 5 acres in the process. Robert Muir Graves did the remodeling job utilizing the existing tree corridors and incorporating a previously unused canyon for holes #4 and #5. The course was done in a popular theme at the time with saucer shaped greens and bunkers located well back of the putting surfaces.

In 1998, Rees Jones was hired to remodel the course into a more modern design. He and his construction crew re-did all 18 greens and tees, four fairways, and all the bunkers. In the process, Adrian Bertens and Hydro Engineering re-did the irrigation system. All of this was done in 88 days, all while never closing the course. The membership played on bentgrass temporary greens while the work was being completed.

The newly installed greens were planted to Penncross bentgrass that performed well the first year but began struggling in Daly City's cold, overcast, "summer" climate. So Lou began inter-seeding with Peterson Creeping Bluegrass to improve the greens overall health. Since reinstating the Poa, the greens



Host Superintendent - Lou Tonelli

have been immaculate. In fact, Lou is now overseeding with a little A-4 bentgrass just to work toward the optimum Poa/bent mix.

Lou has had to work hard maintaining the new design. The slopes surrounding the greens and bunkers are steep and must be hand mowed. Lou's crew utilizes a gauntlet of 22" commercial rotary mowers to accomplish this task. The greens are so tight; Lou often uses the circle mowing technique (yes, the "circle-jerk" technique he originated but made famous at the Olympic Club during US Open preparation) when mowing with a triplex. "I recently lost nine well trained employees when the INS came in and cross referenced their Social Security numbers." "I've had to triplex greens as a result," states Lou. "The problem is, we just have nowhere to turn the mower."

Even after all the changes, there is no rest for Lou. He is now working on plans for a new maintenance building to go down near the 11th hole. Ground breaking is scheduled for this January. Also on the horizon, Lou

has plans to install a million gallon storage tank and new pump station in preparation for the arrival of reclaimed water.

Lake Merced GC is host to approximately 21 outside Monday tournaments per year. Lou was nice enough to give up one of his maintenance days to host the GCSANC's Scholarship event. States Lou, "I've never been on the Board, but I always try and help the Association when I can." Lou is quick to credit Assistant Superintendent Bob Borti and Equipment Mechanic Mel Bacani for keeping the day-to-day operations flowing well at Lake Merced. Lou even has one of his daughters helping him out as his Administrative Assistant. In his spare time, Lou's passion is training hunting dogs and competes with them regularly. He has won a number of competitive meets with his dogs including the recent Western Regionals.

Lake Merced GC is going to be a great venue for the Scholarship Tournament. Hope everyone can come out to see Lou and the handiwork of his fine staff!