

Ed Bale, CGCS and Northwood GC

By Ken Williams, CGCS

Northwood GC played host to the annual GCSANC Institute this past fall. Superintendent Ed Bale, CGCS and staff were tremendous hosts for the event. Due to time and space limitations, an article profiling Ed and the course could not be run at that time. We are finally able to share the story of Ed and Northwood GC for you now.

Northwood got its beginnings through the Bohemian Club, an exclusive all-male group of the elite from business, political, and entertainment worlds. The Bohemian Grove Encampment is just across the Russian River from Northwood. Members of the club spend two weeks every summer there and they wanted a place to play golf. Jack Neville was a Club member as well as on the Walker Cup team in 1923. He also won the California State Amateur in 1912, '13, '19, '22 and '29. Neville is probably most known as the architect for the Pebble Beach Golf Links. Jack is credited with the idea to build a golf course at Northwood. Neville drew up plans in 1925 but interested Alister MacKenzie in the challenge to build a course on the wooded land. MacKenzie, along with Robert Hunter and the American Golf Construction Co., completed Northwood in 1928. Many of the rich and famous played Northwood in the early years, including Bob Hope and Bing Crosby. Roger Maltby is a regular during the annual grove encampment and Clint Eastwood has been seen bouncing balls off the magnificent redwood trees.

The course went through a succession of owners and fell into neglect when the current owner, Northwood Recreation acquired the property out of foreclosure in 1970. Superintendent Ed Bale, CGCS and his family had a summer home on the course, which they had built in 1960. Being a family of golfers, they jumped at the opportunity to purchase Northwood with a few other "locals." They were concerned that it would no longer continue as a golf course. A prior owner had already subdivided three fairways with plans to build homes around the perimeter and reduce the size of the course.

Few changes have been made since 1928. Three of the holes were shortened; two slightly to make room to build a road around the course, and the third, the par 3 eighth, was shortened about 20 yards. The old #8 tee was too close to the landing zone of #9 and several injuries had occurred. Ed and his crew enlarged all of the tees to accommodate the greatly increased rounds. The devastating flood from the Russian River in 1986 did extreme damage to the course. All mounding and bunkers on #8 were rebuilt from the two to three foot deep deposits of sand and silt that covered the green. In all, two tees and over 2.5 acres required total rebuilding.

When Ed took over, all of the bunkers had grown over from lack of maintenance during the 60's. Ed began restoring them in 1988. He has 10 done with at least five more to go. A master plan, done in 1994 by Ron Fream and Dave Dale of Golfplan, includes plans for drainage, cart paths, green rebuilds, and other improvements. Tackling the drainage issue was at the forefront for Ed. "We had three huge lakes that accumulated during the winter with no place for the water to go. Once we got rid of the big lakes, we began addressing all of the little lakes we get," states Ed. Besides floods and drainage, shade is another obstacle for them. "The course sits within a redwood forest and most of the course sees no sun from November through March as the sun drops behind the trees." "It's a Poa course with bent, rye, and common Bermuda. The turf gets pretty thin, especially with a heavy rain year." Average rain totals are around 60 inches with some years in the late 1990's of over 100 inches. To attempt to get more sun on the course, Ed learned to climb trees in 1985. "We couldn't afford to hire a tree service at that time. I'm the adventurous type, so a friend in the business taught me." Ed would climb in the trees all during the winter season with his crew on the ground. Says Ed, "I was able to get a bit more of the precious sun on the greens, tees, and even some fairways. I have not climbed much lately, and at almost 48 years of age, it's not as easy doing so anymore." Fortunately for Ed, he still has the friend who taught him climbing to hire to take care of the current needs of the course.

Northwood consists of about 28 acres of maintained turf. Ed and his assistant, Robbin Hackett, have a crew of three full-time, 1 part-time, and 1 part-time mechanic. Greens are mowed daily between 3/16 and 7/32 depending on time of year. "If you want fast greens, go some place else," states Ed. With average green size around 4500 square feet, lots of slope to limit pin placement, and that elusive sun, Ed cuts them as high as he can get away with. "They roll about six to seven feet, but it depends if you are on the uphill or the downhill side of the pin to decide if you think they are fast or slow," says Ed. "I learned about course maintenance by doing it. I have a turf degree in grease, dirt, and dead grass," states Ed. Homer Williams took care of Northwood for over 30 years and died in 1973. He was a friend of the Bale family. Ed would go and hang out with Homer while he worked. "I was mowing greens with a Jake 22 when the handle was as tall as my head." Ed use to sit on Homer's lap while he pulled a 3-gang Toro with an old Oliver tractor. "Homer would operate the pedals in those days and let me steer," says Ed.

After high school, Ed spent a year in college, but left to pursue his love of music. Ed plays drums and has played professionally for over 27 years. He never made quite enough to survive, so he went back to work at Northwood in the early 70's. He wanted to see what other courses did, so he got a job at Santa Rosa CC working under Harold Bratton. Ed worked there one season, got laid off, and got a job part-time at a hardware store. The punk rock scene hit about then and Ed started backing-up a female punk rock band out of San Francisco. Things were obviously pretty good for Ed back then! He joined another SF band that put out two records. "That first record was an underground hit, and I still get calls from record collectors looking for copies. I only have a few, but I did sell a couple for some pretty good money, says Ed.

In March of 1980, Ed's Dad called and asked him if he would consider coming back to work at the course to take over the maintenance. Unfortunately, the course was in

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NCGA Golf Course Superintendent Internship Program Announces Four Openings

The Northern California Golf Association is taking applications for four openings in the highly regarded Golf Course Superintendent Internship Program. The internship program, the only one of its kind in the nation, can be up to two years in duration. The paid internship requires participants to complete ten blocks of instruction that include managerial skills, irrigation system management and equipment maintenance to name a few.

Applicants must have at least two years of college with course work that includes

agronomy, horticulture or turf management. Several of the recent interns have had four-year degrees. Prior work experience on a golf course is highly recommended. The applicants must also understand the game of golf. Courses that will host an intern will be in the East Bay, North Bay, San Joaquin Valley and Monterey Peninsula areas. Applications can be obtained online at www.ncga.org. All applications must be postmarked by May 10, 2002.

For more information contact the NCGA at 831-625-4653.

Ed Bale (Cont'd)

pretty poor shape. "At that time, I was playing rock and roll from SF to LA, but still not getting rich." Steady money finally lured him back full-time to Northwood. Ed joined GCSAA in 1985, GCSANC in 1987, and became certified in 1988. States Ed, "Funny though, even after 22 years in the business, I still can't get used to the early hours."

Northwood has continued to improve over the years and now hosts about 60,000 18-hole rounds annually. It has come a long way since 1980 when Ed spent those first few years working alone, piecing together the now-abandoned quick-coupler irrigation system, and of course, dreaming of rock and roll. /

Tips for Managing Winter Salt Problems

By David Wienecke, agronomist, USGA GREEN SECTION, Southwest Regional Update

Precipitation throughout much of the lower elevation zones of the Southwest Region has been well below normal for the past three months. Ordinarily the winter months of November, December, and January can be counted on to provide golf courses in the southwest with two to six inches of rain showers. These showers, combined with milder temperatures, provide turfgrass plants the conditions needed for enhanced root growth and recovery from the stresses of summer heat and the maintenance required for tolerating heavy golf play. Additionally, these deep root zone soakings help cleanse the soil of potentially toxic salt accumulations by leaching the salts into the deeper soil profiles and well away from roots. The rainwater flushing also dramatically enhances soil infiltration and percolation potentials making subsequent irrigation much more effective for deep soil penetration.

So far this year, the deep water precipitation flushing has not occurred and we need rain! We are also seeing light rainfall resulting in salts wicking up into the root zone and causing yellowing in some turfgrass areas.

Until we get more rainfall you may wish to consider the following recommendations for making the best of the winter of 2001 - 2002.

* Irrigate your turfgrass - If rainfall of less than 1/4" is forecast, enhance the flushing and penetration effects of any rainfall by irrigating either during or immediately following rainfall with a heavy irrigation (i.e. 15 - 30 minutes minimum or to the point of saturation). Not only will you improve water penetration you will ultimately use less irrigation water than if not coupled with natural rain due to enhanced surfactant action of the rain. If you get heavy rainfall, supplemental irrigation is not needed.

* Flush salts - Irrigating concurrent to natural rain enhances salt flushing action well below root levels. Use an Electrical Conductivity (EC) meter to monitor salt movement down through the soil profile. EC meter readings are a good gauge to show how much flushing is needed to get salts below the root zone. For Annual bluegrass (*Poa annua*) greens, the goal is to keep the EC below 2.7 dS/M.

* Aerate - In cases of extremely dry conditions, you may want to spike or aerate monthly using 1/4" solid core tines to enhance water infiltration. This should not be done to dormant grass. Aerate only into actively growing turf.

* Use turf penetrant surfactants - In absence of the surfactant effects of rainfall, application of soil penetrant surfactants can also help get water moving through the soil.

* Educate golfers, crew, and club officials. Head off criticism by explaining the reasons for irrigation and other practices employed to compensate for less than adequate rainfall. You are enhancing water penetration while concurrently flushing salts farther away from the root zone.

Ideally we hope for higher precipitation amounts in February, March, and April to recharge our soils and flush salts as we get ready for our summer season. In case it doesn't happen, using these stopgap procedures will improve your turf health and vigor. /