

A Job for the Golden Bear and Larry Pakkala

# SAVING ST. ANDREWS

By Thomas Paciello



Triplex mower is much advanced compared to mowing methods when the course opened in 1888.



Holes like this will be preserved to maintain the historic and scenic value of the original course.

"There's too much waste. Golf course superintendents should be looking for ways to save money." That is the attitude that helped Larry Pakkala revive a financial sagging Mid-Ocean Country Club in Bermuda. His talent for cutting costs and still producing top quality landscapes landed him the superintendent job at St. Andrews Golf Club, Hastings-on-Hudson, NY.

For many years St. Andrews G.C.'s claim to fame was its founding date of 1888, making it the oldest golf club in the country. It has recently drawn much publicity when an attempt to subdivide and sell it was forestalled by golf legend Jack Nicklaus. With the club in poor financial shape members were planning to sell off the club real estate. Nicklaus was contacted and rescued the club from devel-

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opers and bankruptcy by purchasing it through his company, Golden Bear Enterprises.

With the historical legacy of St. Andrews intact, Nicklaus and his associates proceeded to develop a plan to bring the club back to solvency. The result was "St. Andrews Village," as the new complex will be called. St. Andrews Village will be a totally redesigned 18-hole golf course and condominium complex. The original 18 holes (on 130 acres) will be remodeled into 14 holes while four new holes are constructed on the 70 acres of newly-purchased land. The 210 planned condominiums will also be built on the new land which overlooks the course.

The conversion from near-bankruptcy to St. Andrews Village

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has not been an easy one. Zoning regulations, planning boards and local politicians and environmentalists have set construction back, but Nicklaus hasn't flagged in his support. "This is a hard place to build," said Pakkala. "The costs are high and there is a lot of bureaucracy. There hasn't been any golf course construction in Westchester county in 20 years." St. Andrews is planned to shut down on October 31, 1982, and reopen in April, 1984. With construction being planned for November, 1982, golf course construction should take 15 months and condominium construction three years to complete.

During the club's down-time Pakkala will don his construction hat to supervise and oversee the numerous contractors. "I'll be particularly responsible for those contractors who haven't done golf course work before," said Pakkala. He'll also be coordinating the grading, seeding and sodding efforts. The course will be rebuilt to USGA specifications and the putting green and driving range will be enlarged. A godsend for any superintendent, automatic irrigation, will also be installed. The club had been using a manual system.

With membership at St. Andrews down to 100 (from 300) cash flow was a major problem and Pakkala's attitude of fiscal efficiency was just what the doctor (at St. Andrews) ordered: "I pride myself in cutting corners and still delivering a good product," said Pakkala. "With the money you save you can help bring your club back to better shape."

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That was just what he had done at Mid-Ocean Country Club. Pakkala restructured the maintenance operation at Mid-Ocean and helped put the course on firm financial ground. His accomplishments there did not go unnoticed.



**Pakkala**, who even drives compact trucks, will oversee and supervise the contractors during reconstruction.

Golf Force, the golf course construction and maintenance subsidiary of Golden Bear Enterprises, learned of Pakkala while doing business with Mid-Ocean. When Nicklaus took over St. Andrews, Golf Force didn't have to look far for a fiscally responsible superintendent. After four years at Mid-Ocean Pakkala joined St. Andrews in March 1981.

"You should spend money to accomplish specific goals," said Pakkala. "A lot of superintendents tag on an inflation figure to their budgets each year and expect them to be boosted accordingly. Every year you should look at your budget and your course and decide what has to be done."

When a problem pops up that has not been budgeted for, Pakkala gets the money somehow; if its not readily available (as is often the case) he'll cut out a lower priority program.

In some ways, Pakkala points out, the golf course superintendent has been his own worst enemy. "The American golfer has been spoiled by the lush, plush condi-

tions supplied by superintendents over the last 20 years," said Pakkala. "Golfers also travel a lot more so they get to see good conditions all year round." He added that with tougher economic times and tighter natural resources superintendents will be using different practices than they have in the past. They will be letting the rough grow more, not spraying as frequently and using different varieties of grasses to get better results with less maintenance. "It is the duty of the superintendent to convey his ideas to the members," he said. "If you don't create good public relations with the members you are in trouble. Most members are professionals. If you can explain what you are going to do in a diplomatic way, they will understand and you'll come out ahead."

"Some members complain because we're reverting to some of the old techniques, but I've never had a problem. I've got a good relationship with the membership here." Pakkala noted that some superintendents don't like to tell

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Pakkala locks in head to manual irrigation system. An automatic system is part of the reconstruction plan.

their members what they're doing. They don't feel the members need to know. Pakkala believes in the exact opposite. He prefers to have his duties and projects in writing and keeping the membership well-informed. It is standard policy for Golf Force to submit a monthly report to the club on the superintendent's progress. (This is done less frequently during the dormant season.)

Pakkala believes the superintendents of today owe a debt of gratitude to the past generations of

superintendents. "We're in a better position to deal with management and members because of the older superintendents," said Pakkala. "Today budgets, salaries and research are better because of the groundwork they laid. The new guys coming out of the universities have really turned things in golf around with the way they maintain courses."

Larry Pakkala is one of those new guys. He likes challenges and that is one of the main reasons he joined on at St. Andrews.

While the club has the Nicklaus organization solidly behind it there is still much work to be done. "Nicklaus has developed a corporation that is designed to better golf," said Pakkala. "That is why he is involved with St. Andrews. The club has some ideal benefits. It is 20 minutes from Manhattan and two minutes from public transportation. We expect to appeal to the international business clientele of New York." He added that the club will probably sponsor a major tournament in 1988 to celebrate the centennial of golf.

St. Andrews is getting back on its feet and regaining the glory of being the oldest golf club in the United States. Larry Pakkala is a major force behind that effort and when it is completed, maybe he'll stay or maybe he'll go on to the next challenge. There might be a clue in this statement to WTT, "One of these days maybe I'll have a big, chunky budget, but I don't know if I could work with it." **WTT**

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