

TOURNAMENT-LEVEL MANAGER

The four courses at Pebble Beach represent the ultimate challenge in country club management. As director of operations, D. J. Pakkala wouldn't have it any other way.

By Terry McIver, associate editor

As Director of Golf Course Operations for the Pebble Beach Co., D.J. Pakkala manages four of California's finest country clubs. He faces the challenges of multiple golf course management daily.

Just imagine your busiest day multiplied by four. The simple math yields a complicated answer.

Pakkala agrees that the challenges of being in charge of four courses are entirely different than the responsibilities for one. But he delegates well to each of his superintendents: Carl Rygg, Pete Bibber, Larry Norman and Bill Davis.

"Thanks to the climate, we're growing grass on a daily basis, and I serve as a consultant," says Pakkala. "I'm an agronomist who can answer my staff's questions and advise them on the way we ought to maintain the course."

But Pakkala does not rule with an iron hand. He has earned the respect of his superintendents, largely for his respect of each man's talent and experience.

"D.J. allows each of us to exercise individual expertise in maintaining the courses," says Rygg. "There are high standards for each course, but we can address our problems with our individual techniques."

"He's also positive about any situation. With D.J., the glass is always half-full."

Pakkala's responsibility for the quality of play and appearance of the Pebble Beach, Spanish Bay, Spyglass Hill and Del Monte courses makes him a different sort of public relations specialist. He represents the Pebble Beach Co., "and that means representing perfection; there's always room for more."

That perfection has made the Pebble Beach courses the locale for many a television commercial or magazine ad. And of course, many a golf pro has visited the famed links. The U.S. Open was played there, and it returns



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in 1992. Thus, Pebble Beach holds a place in golf history as the only public course in the U.S. to host a major professional tournament.

Professionalism grows

Pakkala thinks one man in charge of many tracks is becoming a common job description, thanks to a wealth of qualified turfgrass experts. Good college training is thus an important first step for turf managers.

"The business is now so technical," says Pakkala. "You're more involved with the environment, more familiar with the laws that have to do with chemicals and their effects on the environment. I don't think there's any other way of being successful in the business without having been trained in a college or university. A lot are trained in business, economics or

accounting and then go into turfgrass management. The love of the outdoors, of being in a growing environment, is the common thread."

And of course, there's the love of the game. "Most all (superintendents) have some love of golf," says Pakkala. "It fits in well with their personal lifestyle."

Opportunities abound

Although many qualified experts occupy the turfgrass profession, golf's growth will bring increased job prospects. Pakkala believes, as do many industry observers, that the golf boom will continue for the next 15 years.

"I also see a trend," he predicts, "in which many development companies are hiring people like myself, people who have been in the business for 15 to 20 years, to manage their golf facility from start to finish. Developers need a person to represent the owner, who can relay information to the architect and contractor, and to serve as a liaison between the architect and developer."

"As I understand it, the only thing to keep us from the one-course-per-day goal is lack of builders. There are many architects and designers, but we need more builders."

Choosing a life

Pakkala's own passion for golf and the green industry began when he was 11 years old. His desire to play the game was so strong he'd hitchhike to the local course to get in a game before dark. Sitting down later to a warmed-over dinner was the trade-off, but to D.J., it was a worthy compromise.

His original career interest was in mathematics. But during college, his love of the outdoors guided his instincts to change his major to turfgrass science.

"I didn't know whether I wanted to be punching computers or working in an office all day long," he remembers. "That's when I made the change."



The oceanfront links of Spyglass Hill are under the watchful eye of D.J. Pakkala and superintendent Bill Davis.

His first superintendent assignment was at age 29.

Pakkala established another first for superintendents when he did occasional television commentary for nationally-broadcast tournaments such as the Bob Hope Classic and Dinah Shore Open in Palm Springs, Calif. "I used my experience with the game and my turf expertise to provide unique insights into course design and turf characteristics, and how they affect tournament play," he notes.

Biologicals an answer

Pakkala's multi-course duties expose him more than ever to the conflicts between chemical companies and environmentalists. Pakkala supports developments in biotechnology as a solution.

"I believe that chemical producers are doing their utmost to work with the EPA and environmentalists in producing products that are safe on the environment," he says. "And they're spending a lot of money in research and development to put their products on the market. The more they can work within integrated pest management—using natural means to take care of those pests they have difficulty with—the more they will be working together with the environmentalists...and the safer we're all going to be.

"I think it's an educational process. The GCSAA and the USGA have done a lot of work and are still working on it, sharing with the uninformed pub-



D.J., Tom Weiskopf, left, and architects discuss design issues at the Del Monte course.

lic what we're really doing."

Pakkala says the biggest challenge to any greens manager is "to tie it all in with Mother Nature. The hardest thing to deal with is the 24-hour-a-day possibility of changes in the weather. "Weather affects everything we do as managers, from the amount of play, to diseases that may be brought about by

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certain weather conditions."

Work hard, stay healthy

If professional golf course managers are to keep pace with rapid change in the industry, they must, Pakkala believes, take care of themselves first.

"Superintendents on today's best courses are under stress every day," he explains. If the course is a member-only operation, a superintendent could have numerous people offering opinions or complaints. For these reasons, Pakkala believes it is increasingly important that a superintendent not forget his well-being, his family's well-being or his job responsibilities.

He insists that, "We've got to become more aware of ourselves as persons. Lots of guys work 12-hour days for 12 months of the year. We need to be conscious of that. I once realized that if I were to die tomorrow, the golf course would still be here. That puts it into perspective.

"There is a tendency," Pakkala explains, "to take the attitude that it's my golf course, and it's my responsibility. That's certainly noteworthy. But not to the extent that we forget about everything else."

Being on the Pacific shoreline offers Pakkala a welcome escape should his day ever get a bit too hectic.

"Go down to the ocean; look out and watch the gulls flying around without a care in the world. The Lord takes care of them. It leaves you with the impression that nothing really matters."

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