

# GOLF 'SCAPING

## The business of dealing with greens committees

**So some people think they know your job better than you do. How do you set them straight? These supers have some interesting opinions.**

■ If you're in the market for real estate, the old saw tells you the three keys are "location, location and location."

Likewise, if you're a golf superintendent, the three keys to dealing with the greens committee are communication, communication and communication.

"That's what it boils down to," notes **Ron Wisniewski** of Flushing Valley Country Club, Flushing, Mich. "The more information you can give your greens committee, the better off you are."

He says that when asking for money for capital improvements, superintendents should:

- 1) be realistic about what you ask for;
- 2) don't sell yourself short; and
- 3) don't B.S. the committee.

"After a while, you get to know how much they want to spend," says Wisniewski, who has been at Flushing Valley for nine years.

**Listen first**—At Evergreen Country Club in Manassas, Va., **Dave Anderson** says "the entire membership is, more or less, the greens committee."

"I listen to them, across the board," he adds. "Besides writing monthly newsletter articles, I encourage two-way communication. I tell them to call me, stop me on the course, to jot it down." He gets about six requests per year from his ad hoc "greens committee."

If three or four comments are on any one aspect of the course, and he decides the suggestion is a good move for the oper-

ation, Anderson will go ahead with the project.

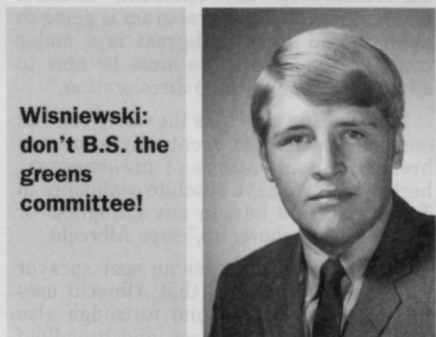
He also defined his own parameters before accepting the job two years ago.

"I made sure I was the one directing which way to go," he now notes. "I made sure the greens committee knew that I knew my business better than they did."

"In the past, board members were trying to micro-manage the course. I didn't want to get bogged down in the quagmire of club politics."

**A changing guard**—It's about the same for **Bill Gauwitz** of Mount Hawley Country Club in Peoria, Ill.

"You've got to keep the lines of com-



**Wisniewski: don't B.S. the greens committee!**

munication open," he comments. "The problem comes from the board level—not the greens committee—because it changes every year. The greens committee understands the realm of management within the dollars, but the board does not. So I have to justify what I'm doing almost yearly."

Anderson says new greens committee chairmen are always a challenge.

"I try to spend at least a half a day with new chairmen or presidents to let them know what-all is involved with my work," he admits. "I try to relate it to them in their terms, whether they're a banker or lawyer or whatever."

**Gene Daniel** of River Hills Country Club in Lake Wylie, S.C., has also had to handle a

variety of different greens committees with different personalities and different styles in his 15 years with the course.

"The main thing I try to do is inform them," he says. "It's more informal. I see them riding around the course and I talk to them. Or I'll stop by the greens committee chairman's house, or he'll come down to the shop."

When it comes to the membership, communication is easy because River Hills is affiliated with a retirement village. "Word of mouth is the fastest way to communicate around here," Daniel says. "You tell one person, and everyone knows it the next day."

**Routing requests**—Gauwitz handles small requests from the greens committee or even members immediately. "Large requests—and mostly they're verbal—either come to me or a member of the board to vote on."

While the others depend on informal communication, Wisniewski likes his to take a more formal format. He makes members put suggestions in writing to either him or the greens committee. The greens committee then discusses the member's proposal and votes on it. The decision is passed on from the committee to the member who made the suggestion.

While no one contacted by **LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT** had any extremely bad experiences (that they would admit publicly), there is no doubt that the problems between superintendents and their greens committees occurs. The lounge talk following countless local superintendents meetings indicates so.

"The horror stories are out there," says Anderson. "But everyone's starting to realize that you have to be communicative and flexible and realize that your greens committee and your members are your customers. Everybody nowadays is in the customer service business—and it is a business."

—Jerry Roche