

Golfers want a clear view of the hole they're playing. The photo at right is an obstructed view before selective pruning. The photo below right shows the result after pruning.



# 'It's a war zone out there'

by TERRY McIVER / Managing Editor



**A** successful major golf course renovation requires thorough planning and clear communication with members, long before you turn that first shovelful of dirt, says golf course architect Jan Beljan, of Fazio Golf Designers, Inc., Jupiter, Fla.

"Let the players know it's going to be a war zone out there; an organized war zone, but a war zone nonetheless," advises Beljan, who promises that—at least at a private club—it shouldn't be too difficult to get the word around.

But don't rely on word-of-mouth as your only line of communication. Formal notification is important, and something you can't get around. Some members (but not *too* many, if you value your sanity) will, of necessity, be on a renovation committee to approve and budget any major changes.

You've got to satisfy just about every golfer who frequents your course, the low- and high-handicappers alike. To cover all the bases, Beljan suggests you have a representative from all levels of play on the

renovation planning board.

"Thorough communication is essential," says Beljan, "since it is the superintendent who will take the heat for any design flaws."

#### Scope of renovation

"In long-range planning, start with the things that will make an immediate improvement in the appearance of the golf course," says Beljan. An immediate solution might be as basic as "opening up" the course layout.

"Know the long-term goals and short-term priorities, and above all, remember that the character of the course must not be changed," unless that is one of the predetermined goals.

One or two holes or tee areas are simpler jobs. But the full-blown, entire-course renovations require intense planning and communication. A "renovation panel" at a private course will likely include a greens committee chairman, club president, and any consultants who might be involved.

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"If you plan to have a conference with all members," says Beljan, "put all comments on paper. You might even prioritize the issues. Then discuss these with your designer, and consider all agronomic and play-related issues."

You'll also have to explain how the course will play after the renovation, which is especially important to the players who have "easy pars" on certain holes.

Communicating the urgency for a renovation "might require the most explanation to golfers," suggests Beljan, "since 70 percent of golf course design problems are underground, whether it's the root system or irrigation or drainage. They don't see those problems; they see whether the turf is cut a quarter-inch higher or if there are lots of ball marks on greens or uncut hedges.

"It's a strange fact of golf course life that superintendents aren't always recognized as the skilled and qualified people they are," admits Beljan.

"However, [the superintendent's] agronomic knowledge is unique, and must be given full weight when members suggest something be done to 'improve the course.'"

Beljan believes the best way to explain why a renovation is needed is to "show the problem, but without trotting the masses onto the golf course." Give the renovation panel a tour of the problem areas, *not* the entire membership.

Use photographs, slides, videos, even aerial photography if possible, to best explain what is wrong and how it can be fixed. Visuals will also be valuable as a permanent record for flood insurance or other insurance purposes.

#### **Work with the club pro**

The club professional can be the superintendent's best political ally when it comes to communicating with—and earning the trust of—members. When something is going on at the golf course, the members ask the pro about it, often because he or she is the first person they see at the clubhouse in the morning.

You may also have to convince the pro that the renovation will help the course.

"If there is something you want to do

that the pro feels will not help get more rounds or keep members happy, it's not easy," says Beljan. "Inform him in as much detail as possible how it will help him do his job better and keep the members happier." Solicit his ideas when planning.

Cost estimates must, of course, include materials and labor, and should take into account any lost income from reduced play during construction and grow-in. As you calculate your financials, don't forget to include the money you will save from reduced maintenance or fewer worker injury claims that were a result of poor design.

"Explain to members that the big dollars will 'go underground' and be spent on drainage and irrigation and grading for positive surface flow," says Beljan.

Members will want to know what effect construction will have on play. Which nine holes will you renovate first? In other words, which nine would the members rather play twice? If you renovate all 18 holes in one season, try to establish a reciprocal play agreement with a neighboring golf course.

#### **Regulatory concerns**

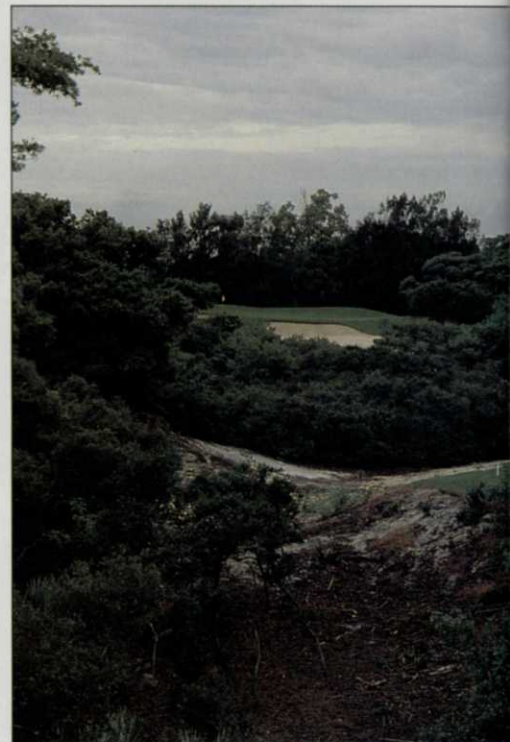
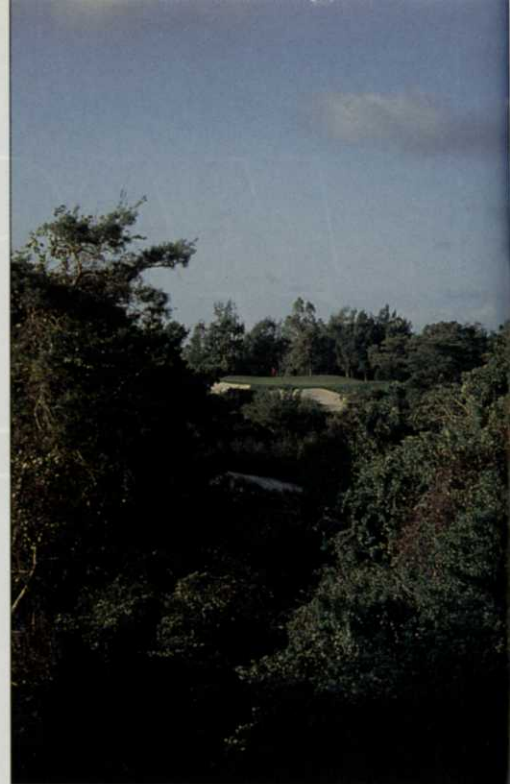
Consider the impact a renovation might have on wetland areas or other protected habitats.

"If you're redoing the entire golf course, regrassing greens, tees, fairways, roughs," advises Beljan, "this may impact areas which are under the jurisdiction of your water management district, or your department of natural resources."

#### **Labor concerns**

Determine any risks you might incur if the golf course crew does the work rather than the contractor's people. If possible, compare the skill level of your people to that of the contractor's crew. It's also important to know whether or not product warranties are nullified if your people complete the project.

A golf course designer or turf consultant can be invaluable in helping with the more extensive renovations, from start to finish. The renovation will go much smoother if you have architectural and agronomic experts on hand.



**Before (top) and after: Another example of improving the view from the tee. Golfers now play this hole with more confidence, yet the challenge remains.**

Finally, don't view a renovation as a cure for slow play. "Of the seven or eight reasons for slow play," says Jan Beljan, "the design is least-often the cause." □