



GRAND TRAVERSE growing strong

Two hotels, multiple condo units, two golf courses, and two more courses being built, all make it essential that the GTR management team and staff be on the same page and ready to go.

by TERRY MCIVER, Editor-in-chief

PHOTOS BY JOHN PAYNE

Grand Traverse Resort is the Midwest's largest full-service, year-round resort and conference center.

Located at the 1400-acre Grand Traverse Resort Village, in the northwest corner of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, it has been rated among the top 20 mainland resorts and top 50 travel destinations in the world.

Landscape management responsibilities include the grounds around the Tower Hotel and the smaller Resort Hotel; 236 condominiums; and the two Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary championship golf courses. The Bear Course was designed by Jack Nicklaus. Spruce Run was designed by Bill Newcomb.

A Gary Player signature course ('Northern Knight') is expected to open in 1998. Another, Lee Trevino signature course has yet to be named, and is planned for a 2000 tee time.

Everybody on the same page

Mike Meindertsmas, director of golf at the Resort, is into the people and business management side of things.

"I manage our superintendents and assistants and golf professionals, and even our construction, so my success rests squarely on the shoulders of the people who work with me.

"Being involved with all the aspects of golf operations is a real benefit," explains Meindertsmas. "It's a little bit atypical to have a director of golf who oversees golf maintenance, golf pro shop operations and golf development operations, but it makes all the sense in the world. At times, at some courses there can be a polarity between maintenance and the professional staff, whereas having one person lead the charge for both entities gets you away from that 'early tee time you didn't know about', or 'why are they aerifying today'?"

"The communication systems are there so that everybody knows what everybody's doing. There's no intentional or unintentional surprises."

Many equipment colors

Meindertsmas is not a brand loyal equipment buyer.

"When we buy equipment, we buy the piece of equipment that's going to work best for our situation," he explains. "Some

▲ Fairways at the Bear Course have ample landing areas, but it takes a precise approach to avoid mounds, bunkers and ponds.

of it happens to be red, some of it happens to be green, some of it happens to be orange, some of it happens to be a different shade of green. That's the most logical way to do it, in my opinion. The maintenance of the grounds is diverse enough to warrant different types of equipment."

New courses going in

James Bluck II has managed Spruce Run since April. Prior to that time, he was assistant at The Bear.

Bluck coordinated the resort's certification efforts for the Audubon Cooperative program. With those duties completed, his attention is focused elsewhere.

"We're involved mainly with the construction of the new golf courses going in," says Bluck. "We have four or five holes going through the existing course, which keeps us quite busy. We're losing one hole and having to use a practice par 3 until it gets replaced, and we're building different sets of tees to direct players away from construction.

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"We're building an additional pond and drainage through to the clubhouse parking lot. A lot of the drainage goes through Spruce Run, so we've put an additional 100 feet or so on the pond, and two foot underground piping for drainage."

Bunkers a challenge

Doug Kendziorski has been superintendent of the Bear Course for three years, during which time he's seen the need for changes in bunker design. The high bunker faces are a Nicklaus trademark, but they're tough to tend, and are trouble for guests.

"Golfers have torn chunks of turf out as they climb out of the bunkers. We've been going around and fixing them as we go this summer. We want to bring that edging down to the very base of the bunker. We'll pull the sand down, put in new edging, add topsoil to it, and sod it. We've done it extensively at Spruce Run for the past three or four years. They're so much easier to maintain if they're flat-bottomed bunkers.

"Taking some trees out where we can get better morning sun has helped greatly," says Kendziorski. "I can't stress enough the importance of morning sun. Number 3 is probably the healthiest it's been in five years because we removed 10 or 12 trees."

Wetting agents work

Both golf course crews are using wetting agents again, with good results.

"We've had great success this year, versus the past three or four years when we

got off the wetting agent program," says Kendziorski. "This year we jumped back on the program, and started out with one of the new generation of wetting agents (Primer 604, from Aquatrols).

"The wetting agent really makes a difference in the man-hours we have to spend maintaining the hot spots on the greens. On the tees we probably use 25 percent less water, or close to it. On greens, we probably use 10-15 percent less."

Kendziorski is committed to giving golfers the best course conditions possible.

"There's nothing the golfers like more than having a golf course that's true from green to green, where the bunkers are raked and level, trees are nicely trimmed and everything's in place," he says.

"And it really doesn't take a lot more time to train someone to do the job right every time."

Lots of work needs good people

As superintendent of grounds, John Meyer keeps the hotel and condo properties in shape, which he claims is a simple task compared to finding enough good



Mike Meindertma, director of golf at Grand Traverse Resort, knows the environmental and financial concerns connected to product applications.

workers.

"The easy part of the job is mowing the grass, pruning the bushes and planting the flowers," says Meyer. "The hard part is finding qualified employees in sufficient numbers when you need them."

Meyer advertises in the local paper and by referrals.

"The grass doesn't stop growing in August," says Meyer, "and I need people to work up until November 15, to help put up Christmas lights. I have probably 600 man-hours in Christmas decoration work."

Meyer's 20 employees manage flowers, trees and shrubs. They fertilize the grounds, install irrigation; mow and mulch; service the interior plantscapes of the hotels; conduct spring and fall cleanups and apply control products. In winter comes the snow-related work.

The impression one gets after visiting the Grand Traverse Resort is that it's staffed with a dedicated team of people who are hands-on, people-oriented and friendly.

And, they are clearly tuned in to customer service.

"Everybody's got the same philosophy," says Bluck. "Quality comes first. Concentrate on guest service, have as nice a golf course as you can." □



Grand Traverse Resort has four silver medals from *Golf Magazine* in the golf resort category.