

No 'bunk' bunker program

A Michigan superintendent discovers that the first step in delivering better bunkers to his members is to ask them for their help.

By RON HALL/ Managing Editor

If your bunkers are overdue for renovation, consider borrowing from a program that Alan C. Bathum used with good results at Cascade Hills Country Club, Grand Rapids, MI.

Like most things that turn out well, Bathum followed a simple step-by-step approach to accomplish his goal to upgrade the bunkers at Cascade Hills. Key to the process was the care he took to build cooperation with the club's management and members. This is, arguably, the most vital ingredient of any major course improvement project.

Bathum, with 20 years golf course experience, five of them at Cascade Hills, knew that renovating all 56 bunkers on the original 18-holes of the 27 holes at the country club would be a big job. It needed the blessing, not only of management, but of the membership too.

That's why he *had* to have a plan.

Actually his plan is part of a larger vision that he and other Cascade Hills officials, like the club manager

and club professional, began developing soon after Bathum came to this club. At that time, each person identified capital improvements that they thought the club needed. The professionals have been addressing them one at a time ever since.

"Bunkers was definitely one of the improvements we needed, particularly bunkers that drained," said Bathum.

Thunderstorms and heavy rains often filled them with water.

"It really hurt the playing conditions," he admitted.

Even so, members of Cascade Hills (or any course, for that matter) often don't see bunkers at their worst because superintendents and their crews usually tidy them up before golfers can get to them. But the members at the club were well aware that their bunkers needed help.

"We asked them (members) to prioritize what they felt was most important. Bunkers came up real close to the top," said Bathum of a survey of members' wants.

Armed with the results of the survey, the superintendent formed a sub-committee made up of himself, the greens chairman (at the time the club president too), club manager, golf pro and several individuals from the greens committee to plan for bunker renovation.

After some discussion, and after meeting with other superintendents in their part of Michigan, the subcommittee tentatively chose a construction company out of Canada, Turf Drain Inc. The committee asked the company to rebuild two bunkers on the eighth green in the fall of 1995 on a trial basis so that members could judge them during the 1996 season. They were particularly concerned that they get the right sand for their bunkers.

Early in 1996 the committee gathered



Superintendent Alan Bathum followed a plan for renovation.

Members at Cascade Hills CC appreciate the improved appearance and playability of bunkers at their course.



Two neat bunker tools

Terry Buchen, CGCS, sees a lot of neat things at golf courses because of his consulting business Terry Buchen Golf Agronomy, Williamsburg, VA. He mentioned the following two pieces of equipment at a fall turf conference at Penn State.

Marshall Fearing, superintendent at Castle Pines Golf Club, Castle Rock, Co, uses a giant vacuum to remove sand from bunkers. The vacuum is owned by the Hall-Irwin, a company based in Greeley, CO. Tom Briddle, director of golf services for Hall-Irwin, says industrial vacuums are often used to remove loose soil from utility or trench excavations. So, why not use one for taking sand from bunkers?

"When you use a mechanical device in a bunker you're taking a risk of destroying the bunker, and I've ruined a few in my career" says Briddle.

The vacuum was modified to work in a bunker by attaching the hose to a snow blower. "A man can't hold the suction hose," says Briddle who says the machine can move a couple of cubic yards of dry sand an hour.

In northeast Ohio, Frank Dobie at Sharon Golf Club, uses, an attachment he invented and sells, the Sandpacker, for the Toro Sandpro. The purpose of the Sandpacker, is to firm up the sand in a bunker, but still rake the top 1/4 to 1/2-inch.

"The whole concept is pretty simple," says Dobie. "Visualize a ski going through powder



cost estimates from the architect Bruce Matthews of Design 3, Lansing, MI, (who provided them with photos and drawings), and from the construction company. It then made its presentation to the greens committee and Cascade Hills board of directors.

Both bodies gathered in a special meeting about a month later and agreed to ask the membership for a special assessment to handle the costs. Within another three weeks the members voted positively on the assessment, and construction on the bunkers began in September 1996.

"The work went fairly quickly. We had half the bunkers done in the first 2 1/2 months," recalled Bathum. By the spring of 1997 they had all been renovated.

Bathum says members are now happy with the bunkers, and he is starting to prepare for a renovation to the course's irrigation in the next couple of years. □



snow. We took the shape of the front of the ski and put it where the cultivator bars were."

The weight of the steel on the front edge of the unit is enough to pack loose sand and the serration's on the back of the steel give the sand the raked, finished look.

Dobie's been selling the Sandpacker for 10 years, and most units are sold word of mouth, he says. To learn more about it, call Dobie at 330/239-2458 or Gary Bogdanski, who makes them, at 330/239-1939.

Tips to smooth the process

Superintendent Alan C. Bathum makes the following suggestions for anybody contemplating a major bunker rebuilding program:

- ▶ **Document the condition of your bunkers with photographs.** They're a good tool to help convince members that improvements are in order—particularly when they're compared to photos of good bunkers.
- ▶ **Educate and gain the support** of your greens chairman or immediate supervisor on the scope of the project. Keep that person advised during the renovation. This is important.
- ▶ **Meet first with small groups** at your club and gain their support, so they can begin talking up a bunker improvement program.
- ▶ **Keep your renovation subcommittee small.** "If you have 8 to 10 people making decisions, it makes it tough on the architect, tough on the superintendent, and tough on the construction company," says Bathum. Don't forget the golf professional who can give you valuable input from the players' perspective.
- ▶ **Hire an architect.** "We've done a lot of renovations in the past but we felt we needed an architect for this big of a project. An architect helps you early to recognize costs and concerns, and can also help sell the project to the membership."
- ▶ **Find out as much** as you can about the construction company that you intend to hire. Check with other superintendents who have used that company.
- ▶ **Don't become too rigid** with your improvement project. You want to be able to make changes early in the project if it will make the project go smoother.