

Look before leaping!

Before doing any type of renovation on your course—know what you have, determine what you want, then make sure you keep it separate from your regular maintenance program.

By ROBERT A. BRAME

Renovation is anything done to a golf course beyond regular maintenance. Even minor improvements which are not a part of regular maintenance should be considered renovation.

There are many reasons why you may want to improve your course, or some part of it: to improve aesthetics, to make it safer, to make it easier to maintain, for environmental reasons, or to improve fairness, although everybody will probably define the issue of fairness differently.

Safety is becoming an increasingly important reason for renovation. Many older courses weren't

cont. on page 14G



designed for the number of golfers they're now getting. This increases the likelihood of accidents. Pay particular attention to the location of tees relative to fairways, or the location of cart paths relative to a green or a fairway.

Whatever your reasons for wanting to renovate, put together a plan that defines and communicates its need:

Research what you have on the course.

Bunker battles

Some suggestions to guarantee problems with renovated bunkers:

- ▶ don't remove sand before rebuilding,
- ▶ select poor quality sand,
- ▶ design to foster erosion problems,
- ▶ poor or inadequate drainage,
- ▶ don't provide supplemental irrigation for bunker banks.

Spell out exactly what you want.

Communicate clearly what you would like to do and why.

Separate renovation from maintenance.

The question of who should do the renovation always comes up. You might be tempted to do the project in-house, particularly if it's a small project. If you do, dedicate the necessary personnel for the renovation—and for that project only. Keep this work separate from regular maintenance. You can't do them both and do them well.

Besides, for most projects, you'll want to get them done as quickly as possible. Drawing out a renovation over many months, or perhaps several years, usually results in an increasing level of member frustration. Before starting a renovation, get a feel for what your members are willing to commit to.

It's almost always a good idea to hire an architect. Besides planning the details of the project, the architect can help explain and sell it to your membership. Somebody is going to have to be able to stand before the membership and answer the questions

Classic mistakes to avoid

- ▶ **Trying to be something that you're not.** There is only one golf course known as Augusta National, and there is only one course exactly like your own. Work on improving the strengths of your course. Don't imitate.
- ▶ **Not knowing what you have to start with.** Go through the files at your course (even attics or basements) for any original drawings, plans or photographs of your course. Check with longtime members. A local library or soil conservation service may have photographs of the course.
- ▶ **Mixing design themes.** This is not an uncommon mistake when renovating bunkers or tees. Keep them the same style around the course.
- ▶ **Reconstruction of tees or greens when a relatively simple correct environmental problem is at fault.** Look first at air movement or sunlight. Sometimes the condition of a green or tree can be improved by simply removing trees and opening it up.

New green blues

The poor performance of new greens can be due to one or more of any number of factors, including:

- ▶ using different soils, like rebuilding sand-based greens when others on the course are soil,
- ▶ grassing with a different turfgrass,
- ▶ rushing a green into play too soon,
- ▶ not building a nursery at the same time,
- ▶ not taking time to identify the best materials,
- ▶ sloppy construction.

and field the concerns of the people who are going to pay for the work. Your members need to see the long-term picture, not the short-term inconveniences.

Make sure you're aware of the architect's qualifications. Do his/her ideas and philosophies fit with your club's finances and philosophies. Get out and look at other similar projects they've done. Check with other superintendents who have worked with the architect. Would they hire that person again?

Be equally diligent in hiring any contractors that you're considering for the project. Have they done similar projects that you can look at? Again, talk to other superintendents who have worked with them. Be sure to let contractors know about the agronomic conditions of your course, particularly if they're unique, before they

begin the job.

Be aware that there are things to consider that might be affected by your renovation. Will you need to change your irrigation? Add or relocate a sprinkler head? Install additional lines? Require more pump capacity? Will you need to add or improve drainage? Buy or lease additional maintenance equipment as a result of the renovation? Increase the size of your maintenance building? Think ahead.



Bob Brame advises to keep renovation separate from maintenance.

As you look at renovation work on your course, make sure you have the infrastructure in place to handle it. Don't bite off more than you can chew, especially in the first year. □

—This article was adapted from a talk given by Robert A. Brame, Director of the USGA Green Section's North Central Region, at a seminar in Rocky River, Ohio, this past April.