



Members of Princess Anne Country Club were educated as to why the course needed a new irrigation system.

*Editor's note: This is part two of a two-part series on what it takes to achieve a successful golf course renovation. In this article discussing how superintendents address the challenges that come with course renovations, we look at the issue from owners' and general managers' perspectives. Here, club management discusses the importance of understanding the challenges faced by a club going through a renovation and the important role the superintendent plays in communicating it. The author, Lloyd von Scheliha, is a marketing manager for Rain Bird's golf division. Part one of the series, "Talk It Up," appeared in the August *Golfdom*.*

From the management's perspective, the superintendent should be a partner in a golf course renovation. Superintendents help management determine renovation needs; they convey the necessary renovation facts to course users; they help balance the many renovation considerations and act as the voice of the club on the project.

A golf course renovation offers significant challenges to club management no matter what type of facility is being renovated. In order to successfully traverse the renovation minefield, the course superintendent and club management must work together closely to maintain clear lines of communication during course renovation projects.

The superintendent plays a crucial role in equipping management with the informa-

Continued on page 70

PHOTOS COURTESY: PRINCESS ANNE COUNTRY CLUB

Field

Superintendents are the eyes, ears and voices of a club during a renovation

Generals

BY LLOYD VON SCHELIHA



Architect Tim Liddy hand grades along the eighth green.

Continued from page 68

tion necessary to obtain approval for the project as well as keep the information flowing once the project is under way.

After Princess Anne Country Club opened a new clubhouse in March 2005 to replace the original historic building, the club's board of directors continued to carry out the strategic plan and sought an additional \$4.5 million for a "renewal" of the course that was built in 1920 in Virginia Beach, Va.

"Our superintendent, Matt Boyce, was critical in this renewal project," says Bill Shonk, the club's general manager.

Shonk explains that Boyce served on the club's Golf Course Renewal Committee and was an active part of the presentations to the membership and neighborhood civic organizations with golf course architect Tim Liddy, USGA Green Section agronomist Stanley Zontek, McMahon Group consultant Frank Vain, and Renewal Committee chair Gary Beck. Boyce walked them through the issues facing the course, the value of the new grasses and the shortcomings of the course's existing irrigation system. He helped equip the club's members with the facts necessary for them to make the decision to proceed with the project.

Chico Lager had a similar experience with his club's superintendent at Burlington Country Club in Burlington, Vt. Lager, the club's greens com-

mittee chair, acted on behalf of management for the renovation project. Burlington's superintendent, Fred Martell, provided Lager with the facts and information he would need to address the questions and concerns of the board. The valuable input from Martell played an important role in justifying the project and selecting vendors.

The superintendent is also vital to help management balance the club's needs during a course renovation. Balancing the varying elements involved with a course renovation is far more complicated than a simple teeter-totter. It is more like trying to balance a piece of plywood on a golf ball.

Management considers how the project will affect play, member satisfaction, timelines, tournaments, position relative to peer courses, food and beverage sales and pro shop sales, to name a few things. Doing a renovation a section at a time can keep the course open but likely will extend the time horizon for the project.

Lager experienced this at Burlington. While the need for upgrading the irrigation system was not in dispute, Lager worked with his superintendent and irrigation distributor to justify the new system and rationalize the appropriate time frame to install it. As a result of these discussions, it was decided the course would remain open while the new system was

Continued on page 72

Providing appropriate explanations and documentation ensures everything remains totally transparent.

Continued from page 70

installed. They determined that intermittent play disruption was permissible for a reasonable time frame in order to install the system all at once.

Shonk took a different approach because the project at Princess Anne was a total renovation. Because many members join a country club just for the golf, taking the golf course out of play generally meets with significant resistance. However, to achieve the ultimate goal of the project, the Princess Anne staff determined that closing the course was the most appropriate thing to do. The Club negotiated with local area golf courses to allow members to play at those facilities during the project.

Since taking the course out of play also takes a toll on operational revenues, Shonk justified a \$1-million operational impact and contingency fund to offset losses in revenues.

From management's perspective, the superintendent must fully engage in the

project from the beginning. Lager explains that Martell had an active role in identifying vendors for renovation services, communicating progress to club members and vetting contractors. While the final decision on vendors was mutual, Lager says Martell's insight was invaluable to gaining the club's approval.

As a project progresses, many club managers seek their superintendents' full attention to it. This means the superintendent might need to separate himself from the day-to-day operations of the course. Lager explains that the superintendent must be responsive to the contractor to ensure the project progresses on time.

To see timely completion of a renovation, Shonk says management must provide the superintendent the authority and resources to carry out the project. For the superintendent, this comes with a fair amount of autonomy as well as accountability. Shonk says projects progress more smoothly if superin-

tendents have a reasonable amount of decision-making authority.

Likewise, Shonk says the superintendent must be accountable by providing comprehensive overviews or explanations for costs incurred outside the scope of the original contract. There should be a shared understanding between the superintendent and management that unexpected costs will, by their very nature, come up. However, providing appropriate explanations and documentation ensures everything remains totally transparent.

The bottom line: Positive interaction between the superintendent and club management is an important factor in the success of a renovation project. Having a clear understanding of expectations will ensure all parties are working toward ideal renovation results.

While management's expectations can be numerous, having superintendents provide club management with renovation facts,



appreciating club management's many considerations, and being the eyes and ears on the ground are elements that are universal for any successful renovation project. ■

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The Princess Anne Country Club embarked on a golf course renewal project just two years after opening a new clubhouse that replaced the original historic building.