

# The Balancing Act During Renovation Construction

BY **CHRISTOPHER SOLTIS AND LLOYD VON SCHELIHA**

## **CLUBS HAVE MANY THINGS TO THINK ABOUT DURING THE CONSTRUCTION PHASE OF THE COURSE RENOVATION. THE CLUB MUST CONSIDER:**

- How much the renovation will affect play
- The timing of the construction
- How to manage the membership and the expectations after the system is installed.

The single biggest factor is how the construction will affect play. As a general rule, the more play you allow, the longer the renovation will take. As with all things in life, there are two sides to every coin. If a club decides to shut the course down completely for the renovation, the up-side is that the renovation will likely be completed in a shorter time frame; however, the down-side is lost revenue from food and beverage sales, cart rental and tournaments, to name a few.

If the club decides to keep the course open to play, it will maintain its revenue stream, but will have an on-going project, which may cause member unrest.

Since most clubs need to maintain the revenue stream, many are choosing to remain open during construction. The difficult balancing act begins early in the process. There are creative ways of addressing members concerns.

## **CASE STUDY**

Let's revisit our hypothetical course from an earlier article, the Old Father Country Club. The club decided to do a complete renovation, but wanted to remain open to play. Initially the green committee decided to shut down one hole at a time and have members play a 17-hole round. This was met with significant opposition because the members wanted to play a full 18-holes.

The solution was to build a par 3 hole near the clubhouse. This acted as the 18th hole during construction, so no matter what hole was shut down for construction, there was always 18 holes to play. The added benefit was that after the renovation was completed, the club had a very nice practice hole near the clubhouse, and if the superintendent needs to close down a fairway for maintenance,

the club always has this hole available. The obvious offset is that it increased the cost of the renovation.

Another significant factor in the construction process is the time frame of the project. It's vitally important that the club have a realistic expectation of how long the construction will take and what is the optimal time to begin the work. Many things affect the construction process including: weather and soil conditions, as well as the size and complexity of the irrigation system.

A realistic timeframe must be discussed with the contractor. However, you must expect the unexpected. In some parts of the country weather factors may cause a renovation to take as long as two seasons. Do not set unrealistic expectations for your project. It's also important to understand that delays happen and that weather is the single biggest cause of delays. If everything goes smoothly and there are no delays, everyone is happy; however, if you encounter some delays, you will not be surprised.

Managing the members is another factor.

To put it in perspective, the average 18-hole irrigation system for a western region course has seven miles of main line pipe, 50 miles of lateral pipe and 100 miles of wire. It's no small task to get the pipe and wire in the ground, let alone install valves, heads, and controllers and ensure the irrigation communication is operating correctly. Changes in terrain will just add to the complexity of the project.

It has happened that a club member who owns a construction company begins to second-guess the work that's being done on the course. If this is allowed to interfere with the process it can cause unnecessary delays to the project and headaches for everyone involved. This doesn't mean the golf course contractor should operate without accountability; however, if you've done your research and selected the right contractor, you can trust their expertise and experience. Remember, it is not in a contractor's best interest to stay on a job any longer than necessary.

The club should work with the contractor to keep the membership apprised of the progress. There are a couple of examples of how this might be accomplished. The club

and contractor can develop a list of project milestones, which can be displayed creatively in the clubhouse to represent the roadmap to the completed project. As milestones are met, the members can see the project progress even though there is still construction equipment on the course.

Another example is to ask the contractor to hold “Field Days” and allow members to come onto the construction site, see what is involved and ask questions. This helps manage members’ perception of the time and complexity of the operation. It also allows members to feel a part of the project. These are only a couple suggestions of what has been done successfully to manage the membership expectations and perceptions.

Finally, it’s important to understand that the renovation is not always finished after the last truck drives off the property. It does take time to fine-tune the irrigation system for optimal performance. Depending on the complexity of the system, it might be worth hiring an irrigation technician who can focus on fine-tuning the irrigation system after the contractor is gone. It can also take up to a full season for the turf to fully recover and re-establish itself. Therefore, do not expect optimal playing conditions the day the construction is completed.

The effect on play, the timing of the construction, managing the members and understanding the expectations after the

system is installed are all important considerations in the construction phase of the renovation. If a club recognizes and addresses these items up front, the construction process will go smoother than expected. A clear channel of communication and realistic expectations between the club and the contractor will ensure the best possible outcome for the renovation project. **BR**

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