



Number one hole, Cortland Country Club. Green invaded by tree roots which affected the putting surface. The required correction was made.

Membership Questionnaires— Find Out Where You Really Stand

by WILLIAM B. STARK, III, and WILLIAM BREWER*

THE CORTLAND Country Club is in many ways similar to other country clubs, at least to those located outside major metropolitan areas. It is a private equity club with somewhat in excess of 300 family

memberships. Although the club's facilities are used for business purposes occasionally, it serves primarily the personal, recreational and social needs of its members, most of whom reside within a radius of six miles of the club.

The club, which is nearly 70 years old, differs from some others in that it is almost exclusively a golf club. The course is set in the gently rolling countryside of one of those fertile central New York valleys carved by a glacier ages ago. At 6,200 yards, it has

been known for some time as one of the most pleasant of golfing challenges.

Until recently — and for over 40 years — the man largely responsible for developing and maintaining this sporty layout and the club's golfing program was Aldor Jones, who served in the dual capacity of club professional and golf course superintendent. The fine course, active membership and his long tenure all are testimony to his skills and intimate knowledge of the game and of the club's membership.

*Golf Course Superintendent, Cortland Country Club, and USGA Green Section Northeastern Region Agronomist, respectively.

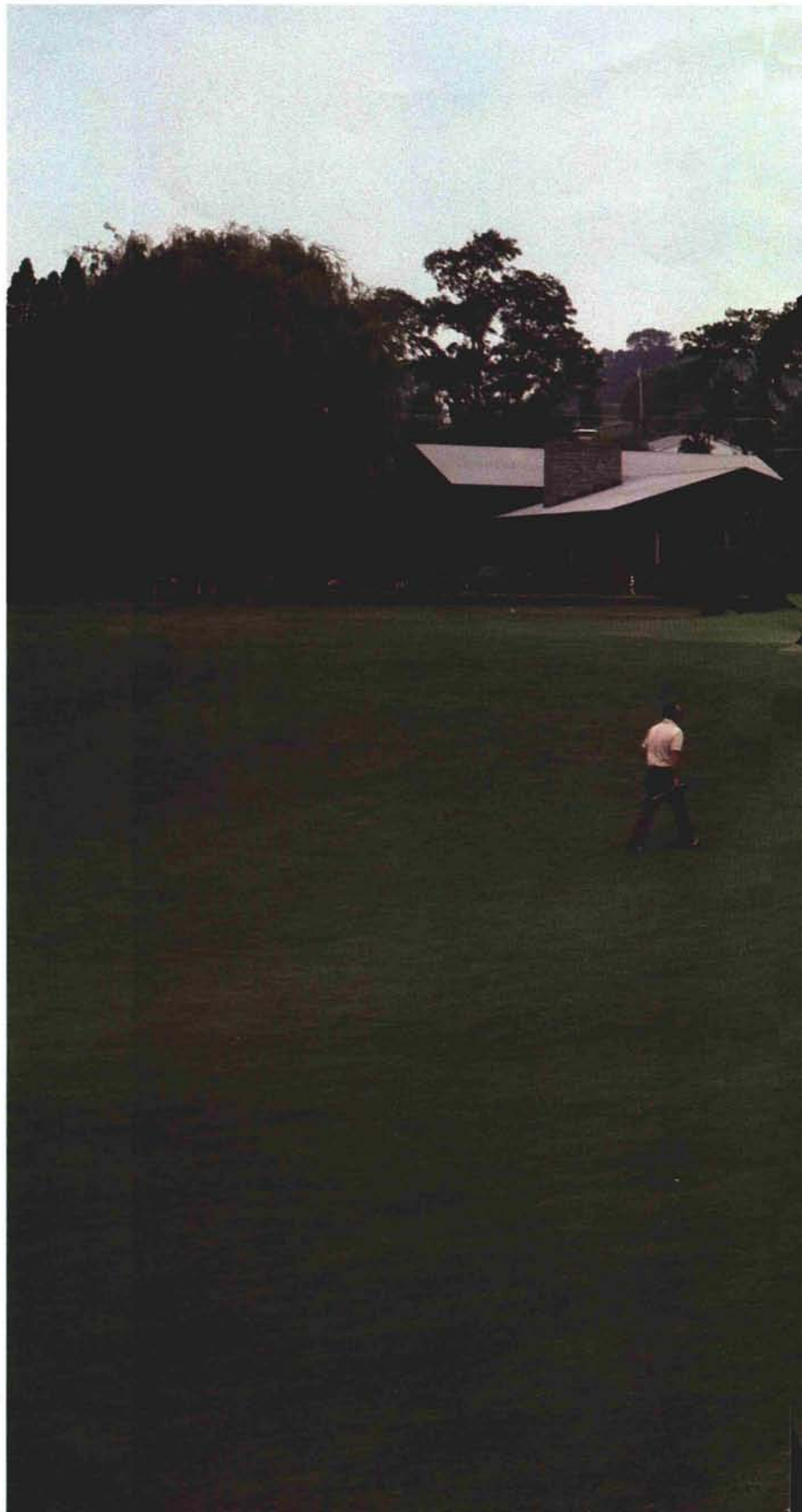
In 1978, as Aldor began pointing toward a well-earned retirement, I was hired to manage the golf course. The following spring, Dick Blair arrived as our new club manager. Then, in the fall of 1979, Aldor turned over his duties as golf professional to Bob McCarthy. Thus, in under two years the club had seen a total change in management staffing and with it a need to achieve quickly a more complete sense of the needs and desires of the entire membership for guidance in present operations and future planning.

To serve this need, the Board authorized the development of a membership questionnaire. With assistance in matters concerning the course and golf programs, Dick Blair drafted the six-page, 39-question survey which was sent to the members in mid-November of 1979. By mid-January, 1980, over 65 percent had completed and returned their questionnaires in the provided envelopes, and by mid-March the replies had been tabulated and analyzed, the results readied for publication in our club newsletter, and we were already formulating some changes in operations for the coming season.

While the questionnaire was not distinctly divided into sections, it first asked for a variety of information that might be termed demographic: each member's age, marital status, type of membership, length of membership, distance of residence from the club, etc. This sort of information provided a membership profile that might not only give us a better insight into membership needs for the present, but also should serve as a baseline for judging trends when some future survey is taken.

THE BIGGEST PORTION of the questionnaire was devoted to enquiries about the current use of the club's various facilities and activities and to a poll to determine how the members felt about the quality of these facilities and activities. Of course, it was in the responses to these questions that we expected to find the greatest immediate guidance, especially since most of the questions also invited members to offer additional comments or suggestions.

It was most gratifying — though not really a surprise — to learn that the overwhelming majority of members gave the club very high marks for such things as the friendliness of other



Number four hole, Cortland Country Club, focusing upon aesthetics and the need to upgrade other portions of the course similarly.



members and the staff, the appearance of the clubhouse inside and out, the service and food quality in our dining room, the growing junior golf program, and — dearest to my heart — most areas of our golf course, its appearance and attractive atmosphere.

But while it is always nice to know that most of what one is working to achieve is being well-supported and appreciated, the poll revealed a number of aspects of each club department that needed improvement. For example, the marks received were less high for club communications, our locker rooms, menu variety and the snack bar, the limited recreational facilities beyond golf and the times during which the course was not open for play by women and juniors.

With regard to the course itself, we learned that we were on the right track with most of the improvement programs which had been initiated during the past two years, improvements made possible by the substantial (more than double) increase in the budget, which had been supported even prior to the membership survey. Our tee rebuilding program received continuing support, for example, along with plans for extending our fairway irrigation capabilities and continuing work on our ponds and toward resolving the few remaining places of poor drainage. One of the areas that I had not scheduled for immediate attention but which our golfers expressed concern about was the condition of our bunkers. Since coming to realize this, we have not only stepped up our regular bunker maintenance, but also have selected an improved grade of sand and begun a program that may result in our replacing all the sand in selected bunkers.

Our membership survey was rounded out with some specific questions about operating changes that were already

under consideration, about the addition of certain recreational activities and with a question that asked each member to single out the one action or effort he, or she, would emphasize if he were a Board member. In addition to those operating changes which were worked into the departmental plans on the basis of responses to other questions (such as snack-bar improvements, changes in dining room hours and expanded times for women's golf), the final series of questions led to plans for organized cross-country skiing in the winter and a drive to attract more members, especially younger members and those interested in adding tennis to club activities.

TO SUMMARIZE, the questionnaire appears to have been worth the time and money invested — about \$200 covered the materials, printing and postage. If only for the improvement achieved in communications among the Board, the membership and the department heads, we recommend the periodic use of such a membership questionnaire to all clubs and recreational facilities. It can help rectify any tendency toward tunnel vision or minority rule, it contributes to proper focusing of long-range planning and to a fine-tuning of day-to-day operations, it reinforces and can correct program and policy directions, it serves to substantiate decisions or requests for staffing or budgetary support, and it provides a standard against which to gauge progress.

In the end, the biggest advantage to be gained from this sort of program may lie with the clearer image that can be provided to us of the needs and desires of those being served. If the baseball adage applies, that you cannot hit what you cannot see, then I am in favor of any device which can help bring me closer to 20/20 foresight.



New Agronomist

Timothy G. Ansett was recently appointed to the USGA Green Section staff as Northeastern Region Agronomist. Ansett received his B.S. in turfgrass management from Michigan State University and his M.S. in turfgrass science from Colorado State University. He was most recently employed as an instructor in turfgrass management and horticulture at Mount Hood Community College, in Gresham, Oregon. Prior to that he had gained valuable insight into helping golf course superintendents deal with management problems as Turf Advisor for the University of California Cooperative Extension Service. With these experiences, and having spent several summers working on golf courses in Michigan, Tim brings to the USGA a blend of education and practical knowledge in the field of turfgrass and golf course management.

Tabulated Responses to First Part of Question No. 28.

28. Golf course conditions

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unable to rate
Greens	(69)	(83)	(10)	(0)	(5)
Fairways	(48)	(92)	(20)	(1)	(5)
Tees	(28)	(81)	(41)	(12)	(5)
Rough	(31)	(97)	(23)	(9)	(6)
Bunkers	(26)	(74)	(43)	(24)	(9)
Drainage	(20)	(81)	(42)	(11)	(21)
Practice area	(11)	(87)	(30)	(18)	(15)