

Bonne Etiquette!

Golf course superintendents and the Green Committee can lead the way.

BY MATT NELSON

A topic common at USGA Green Section Turf

Advisory Service visits is the perceived erosion of golf course etiquette. Often, this topic receives nothing more than lip service, such as, "Yes, it would be nice if golfers would fix their ball marks and replace divots." Over the years there have been some excellent articles that showcase the efforts of golf course superintendents teaching golfers the proper way to repair ball marks on greens; however, a comprehensive golf course etiquette policy is infrequently discussed. Etiquette is an aspect of the game whereby golf course superintendents and the Green Committee can take the lead. Given the various aspects of golf course etiquette, including safety, course care, pace of play, and consideration of other players, the Green Committee may be the perfect entity to develop a golf course etiquette policy to be ratified by the board of directors or owner.

A golf course etiquette policy document should include specific criteria with respect to each facet of etiquette. These would include expected pace of play for 18 holes, perhaps with clocks at select locations on the golf course to inform players of their position. Details on searching for a lost ball, parking of golf carts, advancing to the next hole, flagstick removal and replacement, and ball retrieval from the hole (no putters!) should be included.

Player and maintenance staff safety should be featured prominently. Starting



times in the morning and maintenance gaps in the schedule must be abided to protect employees and safeguard maintenance efficiency and quality.

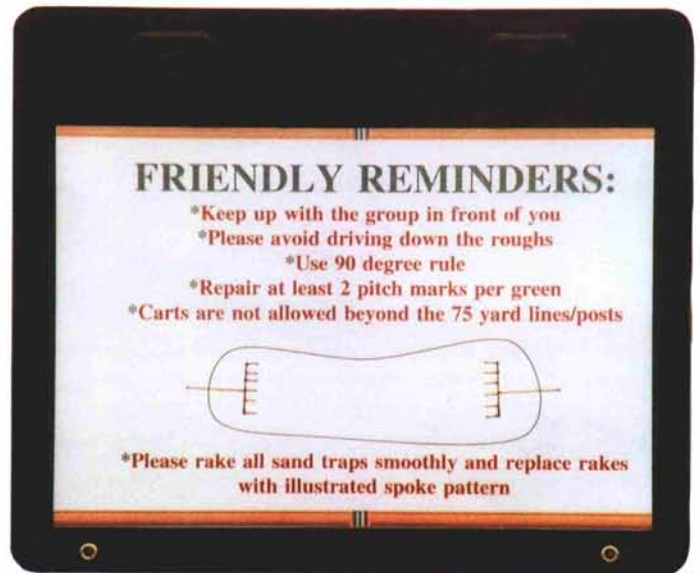
Care of the golf course will include procedures for repairing ball marks and divots. Divot repair should address divot replacement and filling with a soil and seed mixture, whichever is the preferred policy at the golf course. Bunker raking, entering and exiting bunkers, and position of the bunker rakes can also be set in the etiquette policy. Golf cart policy, including path restrictions, should be explained and detailed. Trash disposal and electronic device use are items to include in the etiquette policy.

The golf course superintendent has an important role in the process of developing an etiquette policy. The superintendent should instruct the Green Committee on proper ball mark repair; the best way to deal with divots based upon grass species, growing conditions, and maintenance availability; how to rake bunkers; and where the rakes should be placed. The superintendent can provide digital images or pictures for the document to illustrate divot filling, ball mark repair, exiting bunkers, controlling carts, retrieving a





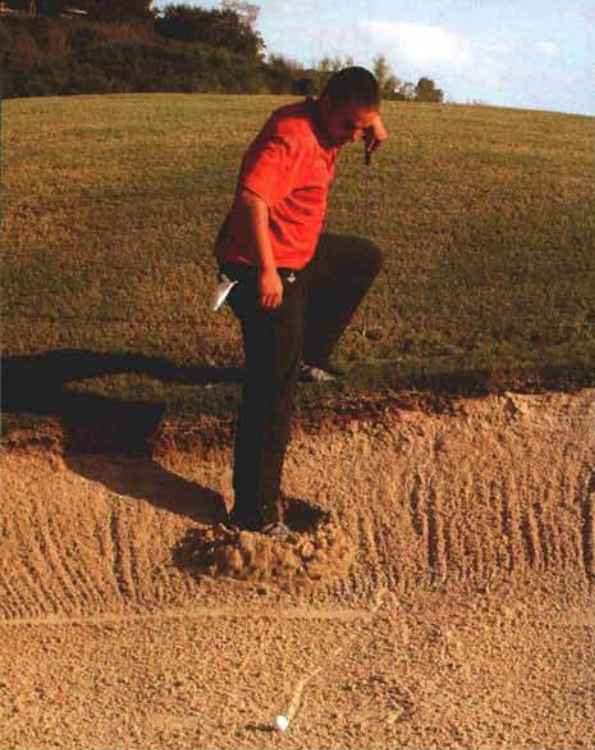
The pro shop staff and starter can provide reminders about specific etiquette items and how to carry them through correctly on the golf course.



Tasteful signage and creative educational reminders encourage golfers to contribute to the overall quality of the golf course.



The Green Committee and the golf course staff are perfectly suited to help golfers take ownership of their golf course and respect the game.



Occasionally, golfers need a reminder about the basic principles of etiquette on the golf course. Bunker raking, entering and exiting bunkers, and the position of bunker rakes should be described in the golf course etiquette policy.

Etiquette is an aspect of the game in which golf course superintendents and the Green Committee can take the lead. Developing a golf course etiquette policy document should include specific criteria, such as the expected pace of play for 18 holes. Placing clocks at select locations on the course helps keep golfers on track.

In developing a golf course etiquette policy, the golf course superintendent should provide pictures that demonstrate proper repair techniques and how to deal with conditions specific to the golf course property.

ball from the hole, and other tips. Pictures that demonstrate proper technique will add significantly to the value of the document.

After an etiquette policy document is developed and ratified by the board of directors or other appropriate authority, disciplinary action for breaching etiquette rules should be determined. This would include a written warning for a first offense, a formal admonition from the club/committee for a second offense, and perhaps a suspension of privileges for repeat offenders. The USGA website features guidelines on golf course etiquette at <http://www-usga.org/playing/etiquette/etiquette.html>. The end of these etiquette guidelines includes the following statement on enforcement: "If a player consistently disregards these guidelines during a round or over a period of time to the detriment of others, it is recommended that the Committee consider taking appropriate disciplinary action against the offending player. Such action may, for example, include prohibiting play for a limited time on the course or in a certain number of competitions. This is considered justifiable in terms of pro-

tecting the interest of the majority of golfers who wish to play in accordance with these guidelines. In the case of a serious breach of etiquette, the Committee may disqualify a player under Rule 33-7."

At a private club, the etiquette policy can be included in the member handbook, and new members should be expected to read and sign the policy as a condition of playing the course. The Green Committee should make a presentation at the annual meeting, educate all golf course staff, and serve as ambassadors of etiquette.

Public golf courses usually consist of a core group of regular golfers, and etiquette should be discussed at the annual meeting. In addition to the Green Committee serving as etiquette ambassadors and educating staff, it may prove helpful to include etiquette tips on the club's or Parks and Recreation Department's website or in a weekly newspaper column or newsletter. Etiquette also should be instilled regularly in high school and junior golf programs.

At resort courses, information dissemination and enforcement will present a greater challenge, but eti-

qu Shore tips can be shared. The pro shop staff, starter, and player assistants can make weekly points of emphasis out of specific etiquette items. Creative educational reminders can be used on video displays, scorecards, or tasteful signage. Golf lessons also are an avenue for sharing the importance of etiquette and the spirit of the game.

The Green Committee is perfectly suited to helping golfers take ownership in their golf course and respect the game. Many new golfers simply have not had the exposure to golf etiquette and tradition that players growing up with the game have. Longtime players also can use a reminder periodically to further embolden the traditions of the game that many hold dear.

The golf course superintendent can encourage the Green Committee to lead the development of an etiquette policy document by setting up an initial meeting, offering a sample list of items to be addressed, and providing pictures for a handbook, website, or other form of communicating with golfers.

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