

It Takes A Team

Working together toward a common goal.

BY PAUL VERMEULEN

Given the new-found interest in America's classic venues, course officials in all regions of the country are becoming more familiar with extensive renovation, or, if you prefer, restoration plans. Nowhere is this trend taken more seriously than in the upper half of the Mid-Continent Region, where more than 40 projects have been completed in the past five years, and another ten are scheduled for completion in the next 12 to 18 months. Having been involved with much of this work, I have come to appreciate that producing exceptional results requires much more than the efforts of a single individual.

For a major renovation/restoration project to be successful, several key players must be involved with its development and implementation. These players would include the architect, superintendent, golf professional, course manager, ranking course officials, and technical advisors. As all of these individuals must work collaboratively for a successful project, it is important that each recognize his or her own role and avoid overreaching into someone else's realm of expertise.

Starting with the architect, his/her primary role is to develop working drawings and project specifications that clearly define the scope of work. To this end, an architect must rely on others for valuable input. For instance, architects must have a complete briefing on over-riding agronomic issues, how the course

is played and by whom, financing limits, and any special interests in a particular architectural theme before they can produce plans that will ultimately garner high praise. As a person in need of specific and detailed information, it stands to reason that an architect can only be as good as those with whom he/she is surrounded.

Next on the team roster is the superintendent. With experience and education in all things agronomic, the clear role of the superintendent is to provide technical expertise and to implement quality control procedures as the project unfolds. Additionally, the superintendent should seek out and work with various technical advisors, where appropriate, to ensure that the results will endure when the project is completed rather than fade through the years.

The golf professional's role in the success of a renovation/restoration project is one of unique importance and, unfortunately, is too often ignored. While lacking certain technical detail, providing insight as to how the course can best be enjoyed by golfers of all skill levels can be of equal value when compared with the selection of a particular turf species for the fairways. Also important is the fact that golf professionals are in close contact with the golfers and, as such, are ideally positioned to accept the responsibility of building support and enthusiasm in the preliminary stages of a project.

Rounding out the team roster are the club manager and ranking course officials, whose responsibilities include determining the financing of a project, providing leadership when faced with project opposition, and keeping golfers informed as to the project's progress. As one can readily appreciate, all of these individuals must believe in the renovation/restoration objectives in order to communicate a unified, positive message.

Absent committed members of a team, the task of developing, selling, and completing a major improvement project is virtually impossible. Furthermore, if completed without a unified team, the results will probably become the subject of harsh criticism, as the renovation project would not reflect a collective effort, but rather the lone ideas of one or two individuals.

With the outcome of a renovation/restoration project hanging in the balance, the best place to start is by recognizing the roles that must be filled by key individuals. Then, as the project unfolds, individuals must focus on their own duties in a manner that supports the activities of the others. In the end, it is only the results that are truly important and not who receives credit.

PAUL VERMEULEN joined the USGA Green Section in 1987 as an agronomist in the Western Region and has been the director of the Mid-Continent Region since 1996.