

There is Strength in Numbers

Teamwork pays off.

BY ERIC MATEKOWSKI

Wildwood Golf Club is a private facility of 500-plus members located 12 miles north of Pittsburgh. In early 2007, Wildwood Golf Club completed construction of a new golf turf maintenance facility. The successful completion of this project can be credited to a team of dedicated individuals who worked together toward a common goal.

Our team consisted of the club president, grounds chairman (a past president), general manager, golf professional, and golf course superintendent. Each team member had responsibilities unique to his role at the club. For example, my role as superintendent was to define, quantify, and communicate the need for a new building. In addition to defining the project parameters and building specifications for the new facility, during construction I also had to ensure that there would be no interruptions to golf play.

The general manager's responsibilities included securing the resources required to complete this project as well as managing potential cost overruns. The club president's and grounds committee chairman's roles focused on maintaining open lines of communication with the board, committees, and general membership. It was important for us to update the membership on the status of the project. Wildwood's golf professional was a valuable conduit to the membership, as he fielded questions when golfers passed through the pro shop. The most important aspect of his participation was that he always came to the team to obtain the information necessary to answer members' questions accurately, in addition to bringing to light concerns expressed by the members. This interaction allowed us to remain proactive and share the responsibilities of guiding the project from concept to completion. We were all dedicated to this worthy investment in the club's future.

The grounds and turf care department at Wildwood Golf Club had clearly outgrown the existing 4,400 sq. ft. maintenance building. It had served the club well for 50-plus years, but now we needed to upgrade the maintenance infrastructure. Prior to construction, the team worked together to address six particular issues:

1. How would the importance and value of investing in a new maintenance facility be stressed to the membership?
2. Where would the new structure be located?
3. How would the building be designed to meet present *and* future needs?
4. Who would handle permitting and licensing?
5. How would the bid process and awarding the contract be handled?
6. Would the current capitalization plan need to be amended to complete this project as desired?

The construction of a new maintenance building was initially funded as part of a two-phase capital improvement program that had been approved by the membership in 2001. The first phase, completed in 2002, involved resurfacing the clubhouse parking lot, renovating and resurfacing cart paths, and renovating significant areas of the course. The second phase centered on construction of the new maintenance facility. However, following completion of the first phase, Wildwood's board of directors elected to delay the second phase until the economic environment improved. This vote was prompted by the post-9/11 economy and the tenuous state of country club membership; it was an uncertain time.

In the summer of 2005, the board of directors began to discuss enacting the



Steve Gonzalez, general manager, and Eric Matekowski, golf course superintendent, met on a regular basis to examine the progress of our new facility. The weekly meetings helped monitor the project and control costs by minimizing the need for change orders.

second phase assessment of the original capital improvement plan. While the issue of selling the new facility to the membership had been discussed in 2001, it had not been pursued in earnest. Convincing the membership to initiate the construction process would first have to begin by defining the financial needs of the project. To clarify need and urgency, we examined the existing building. It needed a new roof, garage doors, and several other costly integral structural repairs. Additionally, the existing building could not be expanded and, even if it could, no one would allow this to happen because of its current location.

GETTING ORGANIZED BEFORE GOING TO THE MEMBERSHIP

Prior to presenting the project to the membership, we felt it was important for the team to resolve the design and determine where the new building would be constructed. The existing building, located at the entrance to the club, was unsightly, small, located far from most of the golf course, had no room for expansion, and had no public sewage. To further support our case that a new building was needed, cost estimates for repairing and even expanding the present facility were gathered. The multiple limitations of the existing site made any thought of upgrading the current building unrealistic. When cost estimates were compiled, they were presented to the membership to further support moving ahead with other options for the development of a maintenance facility. Under the leadership of the club's president, general manager, grounds committee chairman, the head golf professional, and me, the team began evaluating five potential sites for the new building.

Our search revealed a site that offered access to a public road, easy access to the golf course, and could be cost effectively connected to public utilities. The chosen site was located



The old maintenance building at Wildwood Golf Club was woefully inadequate. It served the club well for 50-plus years, but it needed to be replaced.

to the right of the fourth fairway and behind the fifth tee. Access to the golf course could be facilitated by installing a 30-foot-long by 10-foot-wide path from the new building site to the existing continuous cart path. Although space is somewhat limited at the course, the proposed site offered the opportunity to expand, if necessary, in the future. One tremendous advantage over the old location was the adequate space for parking and storage. Access to a public road and proximity to utilities helped to keep construction costs down, and the proposed location minimized the impact on daily club operations as construction progressed.

The next step was designing a building that would meet present and future needs. One of the team's most important goals was to be able to house all of the equipment. The construction of a new golf course maintenance facility is rarely a high-profile item, but when our membership approved funding for the new facility, our team was unanimously supportive of maximizing the size of the building within the confines of the budget. Requirements included housing all equipment, office space for the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and mechanic, men's and ladies' locker rooms, and a break room large enough for the entire crew during peak season. Once the budget and space requirements were determined (10,000 square feet), the general manager and I began

to tour recently constructed maintenance facilities in our area. This planning was informative and allowed us to learn from others on how best to manage the use of space. To be able to maximize usable space, the team felt the building design should minimize the use of interior walls (although this meant putting sprinklers throughout the building) and the office space, lockers, and break room should be built on a mezzanine above the mechanic's area. It was now time to present our concept to the general membership.

The board of directors presented the project to the general membership at the 2006 annual meeting. We wanted to tell the entire story, so the general manager and I constructed a collage displaying the condition of the existing building. Renderings of the proposed building were placed prominently in the entrance hall to the clubhouse and in the men's grille well in advance of the annual meeting. These initial efforts provided an opportunity to answer questions before the proposals were presented to the entire membership. Our homework and preparation paid off. The president and grounds committee chairman, representing the board of directors, presented the proposal to the general membership and it was well received. The membership agreed that Wildwood Golf Club needed to proceed with this project, particularly when information was



The new 10,200 sq. ft. maintenance facility can house all of the equipment and accommodate the employees. Through the efforts of a dedicated team, something special happened at Wildwood Golf Club.

presented regarding the cost, environmental impact of upgrading the present facility, and the fact that there was no real opportunity to expand the current facility. With the blessing of the membership, the board of directors approved the \$550,000 assessment.

OBTAINING PERMITS

The permitting phase of the project involved multiple governmental agencies and necessitated being present at numerous meetings. The team enlisted the services of a project management firm to help lead this process.

- The site had to be approved by the township, and a formal storm water management plan needed to be developed. Multiple neighborhood hearings were conducted. Noise and storm water drainage issues had to be addressed, and neighbor's concerns needed to be alleviated before the permits were issued.
- The county had to approve the environmental impact plan before an actual building permit could be obtained.

- The general manager met on several occasions with the township manager and land management supervisor to provide all of the necessary documentation.

- The team, including Wildwood's legal counsel (also a member of the board of directors), attended multiple township meetings to openly address all concerns of the golf course neighbors.

We underestimated the demands of this phase of the project. Almost eight months of time and effort were required to complete the permitting process. Wildwood Golf Club incurred additional expenses for storm water drainage (\$30,000), sprinklers throughout the building (\$38,000), disability (ADA) compliance issues (\$5,000), and the placement of a fire hydrant within 100 feet of the new building (\$5,000). The delay also resulted in significant increases in construction costs due to the rising prices of steel and other construction material. Throughout this process, the team's commitment to the new maintenance facility was tested.

However, in August 2006, we finally had all of the necessary permits and could begin construction.

After we obtained and evaluated project bids, the construction contract was awarded to the general contractor who had built our pro shop and cart maintenance facility. Given our history with the general contractor and the fact that the project was awarded early, preliminary excavation and site work preparation were initiated while waiting for building permits to be issued. The team agreed that our general manager would serve as Wildwood Golf Club's project manager. During construction, my role as superintendent was to monitor and coordinate daily on-site activity and, most important, ensure that there was no disruption to play while work was being done on the new building.

The team met twice a week to discuss the project status and progress. Often these meetings consisted of the team simply walking the construction site. Progress could be monitored and, if necessary, suggestions were offered



Our goal was to have the demolition and reclamation of the old building site completed prior to the start of the 2007 golf season. An open house and tour of the new maintenance facility were scheduled for opening day.

THE FINAL STEPS

Construction was completed in late January 2007, and the occupancy permit was awarded. Prior to moving in, workbenches, shelves, and storage areas were constructed. By early February everything had been built, painted, and positioned in the shop. By the second week of February 2007, all of the equipment was moved and we were operating out of the new building.

While construction costs were higher than initially projected in 2001, we were able to complete the project within budget. Several construction items, such as interior finish work, originally planned to be outsourced, were completed with in-house staff to control costs. These costs were absorbed in the operating budget or capitalized under 2007 proposed expenditures.

The entire process, beginning with the

board's approval of the second phase to completion of construction, took 15 months. The entire membership is proud of what has been accomplished.

The grounds department went from a building that was too small, in poor repair, and had no public sewage, to a 10,200 sq. ft. building that accommodates all of our current needs. This project could not have happened without the commitment of a group of dedicated people with a vision for the future. I would like to personally thank the team: General Manager Steve Gonzalez, Club President Dr. Ron Stoller, Grounds Chairman David Fitzsimmons, Head Golf Professional Bernie Hough, General Contractor Bob Glancy, the Wildwood membership, and my crew for all of their help and support throughout the process. Through their concerted efforts we were able to make something special happen for Wildwood Golf Club.

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to the general contractor. Our general manager served as the point of contact to funnel all concerns and suggestions to the general contractor, who was committed to this project and frequently participated in these informal meetings. The regular site visit schedule allowed the team to stay current with the construction progress. We kept the membership informed and made sure that communications to those inquiring about the project were consistent. Most important, we avoided issuing major change orders so that costs were controlled.

By November 2006 concrete floors had been poured, the walls and roof had been erected, the storm water management system had been installed, utility lines had been connected, and garage doors were attached. From the outside, the building appeared complete. As the new facility took form, the general membership began to take notice. The team received questions regarding the state of construction, expected completion date, and demolition of the old maintenance facility.



The golf course team worked to be as proactive as possible with the membership. As the building took shape, many questions were asked about the state of construction, expected completion date, and when the old building would be demolished. The questions were accurately answered on a regular basis.