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## Best-Laid Plans

***Renovation and improvement efforts and other capital projects can run smoothly with teamwork and proper planning.***

The criteria for successful completion of a golf course capital project sound simple in theory: See that it's finished on time. Keep it within the budget. And make sure the owners and members are happy with the outcome.

Through careful planning and assembling the right management team to work with the professional consultants involved, capital plans can be relatively painless in practice as well. And in the case of properties such as Pelican Marsh Golf Club in Naples, Fla., which received 2012 Renovation of the Year honors from Golf Inc. magazine, the results can also be award-winning.

### ***Timing is Everything***

The United States Golf Association advises typical south Florida courses to evaluate the need to rebuild their greens complexes every 12 to 15 years—and by 2012, Pelican Marsh, which opened in 1994, had surpassed the recommended life span of healthy greens complexes.

“Soil tests showed that the greens were holding a lot of water because of insufficient drainage, and we needed to make the course more playable,” notes Director of Golf Course Operations Brook Maxwell.

As one of 91 golf courses in Collier County, the property also needed to remain viable in a competitive marketplace. According to a 2012 National Golf Foundation report, the Naples area ranked first in the

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nation in golf holes per person, with 212 people per hole, and it was the nation's top-ranked spot for the most 18-hole private clubs per capita.

Economic conditions were right for the \$1.8 million renovation project as well. "We were able to negotiate aggressively and get the pricing we needed in the down-turned economy," says Kimberly Doerseln, Pelican Marsh's Marketing Director.

## **Capital Ideas**

The capital project at Pelican Marsh included the complete reconstruction of all greens and a number of player-friendly improvements to the tees, bunkers and surrounds.

While the greens were planted with Tifeagle Bermuda grass, tees were planted with Celebration Bermuda grass. In addition, 22 acres surrounding the new greens were sodded with Celebration Bermuda. By enlarging the greens from 1.6 to 3 acres of total area and restoring them to their original configuration, the renovation recaptured about 40 percent of the green and tee playing areas that had been lost to invasive growth and previous renovations. Golfers can now enjoy a greater variety of tee positions and more challenging pin positions.

The renovation also included remodeling the course's mounds, or moguls, which provided more areas of ingress and egress for golf-car traffic. The new moguls are more aesthetically pleasing and playable. In addition, Maxwell reveals, "We softened the mounds to make them more maintainable."

A new state-of-the-art greens irrigation system, converted from hydraulic to electric, has allowed Pelican Marsh to reduce its water usage. The system features 125 computer-controlled sprinkler heads, and 25 fairway satellite boxes were replaced.

## **Doing the Homework**

Because of weather and other unexpected issues that can arise during capital projects, superintendents agree that having a long-range plan, and adhering to it, is essential. "We planned and negotiated for three years, and stuck to our plan from day one," Maxwell reports.

## **The End Results**

So far, the properties have been pleased with the end results of their efforts. Pelican Marsh has increased its pace of play by recapturing its original artistic design, reports Doerseln, and the property has seen significant revenue increases in all key areas of operation. "Not only did we improve our facility," she adds, "we improved our profitability and secured the longevity and maintainability of our club for years to come."

From January 2012 until January 2013, she reports, the number of active golf memberships at Pelican Marsh grew from 281 to 324. Even though prospective members could not play or see the golf course during the renovation, 28 golf memberships were sold in the six months the course was closed.



## **Remember the Members**

For a capital project, it's important to keep owners and members satisfied through all phases. One of the best ways to keep them happy is by including them in the process from the beginning.

The Pelican Marsh staff solicited input from the club's 300-person membership by holding three open forums during the 2011 golf season. According to Maxwell, 70 to 100 people attended each of the sessions, and the decision-makers relied on the general consensus to formulate their plan. "We didn't cater to each personal request," he says.

The Naples property also created a brochure, which explained the timing of the renovation project, the scope of the work and the goals of the project, to get members on board.

The course was closed in 2012 from mid-April to mid-October while reconstruction was underway, but Pelican Marsh members had reciprocal access to more than 70 local properties. They were able to return to their home course, which originally was slated to reopen in mid-November 2012, four weeks ahead of schedule. Pelican Marsh's course renovation project, which came in at 10 percent under the original budget, also was completed without an assessment to the members.