

Equipment Strategy Part of Big Picture at TCI

Pat Franklin is a strategic thinker who believes a golf course superintendent's role runs much deeper than agronomics. By maintaining course conditions that continually attract players and entice them to return often, the superintendent is an important revenue producer as well, contributing to the "big picture".

Franklin brings more than 30 years of professional experience, helping to build great golf courses that offer beautiful vistas, challenge players, and operate profitably. a career that began at age 14 when he says his dad told him to go out and get a job. He worked part-time at a local course near Indianapolis then later he became an assistant superintendent at the Country Club of Indianapolis.



His career took a major step forward in 1990 when his boss encouraged him to apply for the superintendent's job at River Glen, a new course that was being built in suburban Fishers, Ind. He also served as superintendent during the construction of the Pete Dye-designed Plum Creek Golf Club at Carmel, Ind. Franklin then joined The PGA Tour and became superintendent at the TPC of the Twin Cities and later at the TPC at Deere Run in Silvis, Ill., before he was offered the combined role of superintendent and general manager at TCI.

"You have a game plan when you come to work, but you do not know really what is around the corner," he says. "I really enjoy that part of it. And also the gratification of taking dirt and turning it into grass is pretty neat."

Franklin formed a strong relationship with John Deere that was cemented during his days with The PGA Tour when the company provided him with loaner equipment during course construction. "The last thing you want to do is use a brand new fairway mower the first time you mow a fairway."

Today, he leases state-of-the-art golf course maintenance equipment through John Deere Credit, allowing him to keep newer, more efficient equipment, accurately budget equipment expenses and treat his equipment costs as an operating expenses rather than a capital expenditure.

"I wouldn't have the equipment I have, if I didn't have a lease," Franklin says.

Having reliable equipment is critical at TCI. Built in 2003, the course defies the stereotypical notion of Iowa. It is built on wooded, rolling terrain that offers few flat lies, dozens of sidehills, ravines, water hazards and undulating greens.



It is a course that consistently rates among the nation's toughest pay-for-play courses by leading golf publications and a place where a player may be

just as likely to see a coyote, fox or turtle as they are to find the Titleist they sliced out of bounds. "It's not a golf course where you are just going to get out and hit a ball and keep hitting and spraying it. You have to think about it," Franklin adds. "You may go through your whole range of shots on this golf course. I think that's what is really unique about it."

Since he began his career in Fishers, Franklin has relied upon John Deere equipment and considers Brad Watson at Van Wall Equipment Co., and John Deere Credit as critical partners. TCI maintains a JDC™ Master Lease that enables the course to replace equipment on three- to four-year cycles. Franklin's team at TCI currently manicures the course's rolling fairways with the John Deere 3235C fairway mower, which he will replace when the lease on the equipment expires.

"I know that if I owned it, we would be trying to make it last longer than it probably should," he says. "Now, I'm right on the cutting edge of technology or one year at most behind. We couldn't do that if we owned the equipment."

In his role as general manager, Franklin knows first-hand the economic pressures of running a successful golf course and he closely scrutinizes all spending. For example, when fertilizer prices skyrocketed in 2008, he slightly increased the time span between applications. He also has learned how to carefully manage rainwater to control irrigation expenses and has planted grasses that thrive with less moisture than grasses typically planted in Iowa. Franklin appreciates the flexibility of the JDC™ MasterLease to revise his equipment replacement schedule to match changing budgets.

"There have been some pieces of equipment that we have looked at and stretched out to make that payment work within our budget so it has been a really good thing," Franklin says.

"I understand what I have to do to be a part of the team," he adds.