



*The Ridgewood Country Club, Ridgewood, New Jersey.*

# Selling an Irrigation System

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**T**HE IRRIGATION system provides the lifeblood to most golf courses; this is certainly the case at the Ridgewood Country Club, in northern New Jersey. Much of the original irrigation system, which was installed in 1935, is still in use, although it had become clear by the late 1970s that the system was suffering from hardening of the arteries. The cast-iron main lines were deteriorating, the pumphouse was a Rube Goldberg special, and the holding pond was inadequate. As time passed, the continuing deterioration of the irrigation system was causing turf problems and taking time away from other important projects. It finally became clear that our system needed major work.

Unless he is involved in the construction of a new golf course, the average superintendent will never go to

his board of directors with a larger financial request than what he needs for a new irrigation system. With costs ranging upward from \$150,000, it is best to be prepared for the hardest selling job of your career. The one common denominator that every member of the board of directors and every golf course superintendent possesses is a respect for the value of the dollar. If you keep this in mind and attempt to develop a sales plan along these lines, you can be successful.

It is most important first to determine whether the need is for complete replacement or for major updating of the existing system. Records can be a most important tool. Some of the questions we considered:

How many hours has the staff spent on irrigation repairs?

Have repair costs increased yearly?

Has there been an increase in hand-watering time?

Have renovation needs increased due to turf loss?

Have electricity and/or fuel costs risen due to inefficient pumping operations?

Has the condition of the course suffered because of the decline of the present irrigation system?

Have other projects been put off due to the additional time spent on a deteriorating system?

If you answer yes to some or most of these questions, you have undoubtedly already sold *yourself* on the need for replacement; now it's time to go to the decision makers.

I found it most helpful to inform the membership gradually of the worsening

problems. Our club newsletter (*Tee Leaf*) allows me to place an article in each issue, and throughout the past few years many of those articles touched on the faults of the irrigation system. This was done when the course was in good shape, not just when poor conditions existed. This, I found, was paramount in the general membership's understanding of the problems.

We constantly fed information both to our green and grounds committee and the board of directors relating to expenses and conditions as they pertained to the system. Before too long, both groups knew what to expect before conditions changed. This was important to the sale of the new system and to the average club member who might otherwise have been critical of poor conditions under stress situations.

With the irrigation system change imminent, we began testing various available equipment. We used sprinkler heads of different sizes, shapes, and capacities, and we checked information on control systems and company backup assistance.

**A**T THIS POINT we suggested to the board, through our committee, that we retain a consultant and consider a full evaluation of our system. This was approved unanimously. Through our golf course architectural consultant, we were introduced to a specialist who has designed irrigation systems for the past 15 years. His experience suited our needs perfectly. We spent much time examining our existing system. Hydraulics, pumping capacities, and existing equipment were scrutinized to determine possible use in a new operation. We also looked at the possibilities of relining the larger cast-iron main lines, which were installed in 1935. Every direction was considered before a presentation was made.

Within two months we were able to present options to our board of directors. We recommended that we install an entirely new system, including a pumping station. The existing cast-iron and galvanized pipe would be useless in a new installment, but in one instance it could be used to carry water from an existing deep well to our holding pond to be used as a reservoir for the new system. We also recommended we use a system that could utilize an IBM PC computer as its central programmer. The ability to have access to prospective improvements in our course record-

keeping procedures was important in our final decision. After close and careful consideration, our board of directors authorized us to design the new system and examine available contractors. Again, the design specialist and I spent hours altering, changing, contacting information sources, and finally deciding on a plan that was workable and, hopefully, acceptable to the club.

With the plans completed, we went back to our board of directors with estimated costs. While the board was determining the financing aspect of the project, we contacted irrigation contractors in our area. Both our golf course architect and the local irrigation distributor were most helpful in this area. Both had used companies from the northeast and were not reluctant to share their experiences.

The club requested that we have four bids for our project, and we set our sights on meeting that requirement. We initially made contact with eight contractors who were recommended by our sources. Each was asked to submit a list of all the completed irrigation installations he had done in the last three years. We also required that each submit proof of his ability to be bonded for the estimated cost of our installation, approximately \$500,000.

**A**FTER EACH CONTRACTOR presented his list of completed installations, I sent a questionnaire to the superintendents at those clubs. We were most interested in on-the-job cooperation, interference with play, clean-up after installation time, and quality of work. Without question, these responses were most helpful to us and our board of directors.

With this information in hand, our committee decided to allow the top four contractors to bid on the installation. Job specs, general conditions, a design map, and an approximate material quantity list were sent to the four and a date was set before which bids must be submitted. It is also important to note that all four contractors were required to visit our course, look over the site, and meet with the committee members who were available when they visited. This also proved helpful in familiarizing the committee with the personalities of the prospective installers. Even though these visits took place during the week, it was surprising how many of our committee members were available to meet

and, more importantly, question the contractors.

Immediately after the bid date, the committee met to choose the contractor. A checklist was developed to rate each contractor, taking into consideration his years in business, total installations in the immediate past three years, responses from our questionnaires, and finally his bid.

It is especially important to note that our board of directors did not require us to necessarily recommend the lowest bidder, but rather the contractor we felt would do the best job for Ridgewood Country Club. As it turned out, we did choose the contractor with the lowest bid, but only after we saw his qualifications met the high standards our club had set.

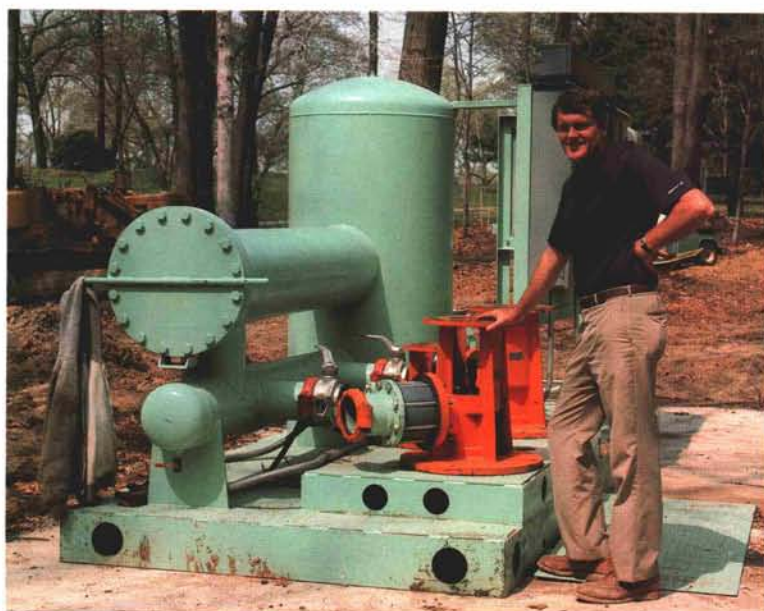
**W**ITH THE BID established, our committee, the design specialist, and I examined the additional costs of the system that were not in the bid specs. Still needed was the cost of the IBM PC computer, the pump house, dredging of our holding pond, and increases to our electrical service at the new pump house area. Within three weeks we were able to present a total package to our members at a general membership meeting. The board of directors had previously decided to seek a membership assessment for the cost of the irrigation project. This meeting was scheduled for a vote on that assessment.

Although we spent many years informing our members of the deteriorating conditions of our existing irrigation system, it wasn't until that meeting that I would find out if I had done my job properly.

Questions were asked, answers were given, and a vote was taken. The final tally was approximately 85% positive. We had done our job.

And now our irrigation installation is complete and we are all looking forward to our finest golfing season in recent history. Although much time was spent selling the irrigation system, that time will prove invaluable in future years as we work with a completely reliable irrigation operation.

There is no question that few jobs require more work than convincing your membership of the need to replace a deteriorating, costly irrigation system. But likewise, you will rest just that much easier once a new system is installed. It is certainly worth the effort.



*(Top) Enlarging the reservoir was a vital step in insuring an adequate supply of water.*

*(Above) Superintendent Ed Walsh with the new pumping unit at Ridgewood. "It is certainly worth the effort."*

*(Right) The new system goes in.*

