First Impressions
Superintendent uses CourseVision to explain course changes

David Smallwood knows from experience how important it is for superintendents to make good first impressions with the greens committees when they take over a new course.

When he arrived at Shackamaxon Golf and Country Club in Scotch Plains, N.J., in March 2010, Smallwood knew it would take an innovative approach to sell the membership on some of the changes he wanted to make. That's where CourseVision, a software program that maps golf courses from aerial photos and provides instant information on the course to superintendents, provided him the tools he needed.

"CourseVision puts everyone on the same page — literally," Smallwood says. "It helps me communicate more effectively with the members and my crew. It makes my life immensely easier."

The Problem

Smallwood wanted to undertake a bunker renovation and tree removal program when he first took over the course to upgrade the playing conditions and provide better playing experiences for golfers. In addition, certain trees shaded greens too much, which made the job of maintaining them difficult.

At previous courses, Smallwood said he would get the square footage the old-fashioned way — he would send crew members out with wheels and string to take measurements of the perimeter of the course, greens and other features (including bunkers) to get an approximate square footage. Then he would map it out on graph paper and write notes by hand.

While such an approach is traditional for superintendents, it's time-consuming and prevents crew members from doing what they were paid to do — take care of the course, Smallwood said. He wanted to acquire the same information in a more efficient manner if he could.

The Solution

When superintendents contract with CourseVision to provide a complete map of their golf course, it starts with an aerial photograph of the course acquired by CourseVision from city, county and federal sources along with private suppliers. Then the fun begins.

In an easy-to-use Portable Document Format (PDF), the team at CourseVision combines the photo of the course with GPS coordinates to create a two-dimensional map of the entire property with exact measurements, square footage, and the latitude and longitude of all the course's features. Then the team adds layers on top of the photo such as turf, bunkers, water features, buildings and gardens. Superintendents can turn on and off any of those

layers as necessary to get at the information they need, which provides them a powerful presentation tools to committees and crew members alike.

"It seemed intimidating at first," Smallwood says. "I'm not a computer expert by any stretch, but I decided to give it a try. I called them, and [partner] Jeff Ryan tutored me every step of the way. By the time I was done with the tutorial, I knew I had a powerful tool in my hands."

Smallwood practiced with the program and became so proficient at it that he cut 45 minutes of his first presentation time because he didn't have to stop and explain as much to the committee — he could show them instead.

One of the features Smallwood appreciated the most in the program was the "sticky notes" feature, which allows him to highlight problem areas to anyone who needs to see it. That makes the selling of such maintenance practices as tree removal much easier.

"If we have a weak area on the 7th green, I can call up specific trees and show members the shading problems that are causing the weakness," Smallwood says. "When they can see it for themselves, it's not as difficult for me to convince them to let me remove the tree."

Smallwood says CourseVision, available for a one-time $1,500 fee, also helped him during the brutal summer of 2010 because he could spend less time explaining how to maintain the golf course to his 18 seasonal workers.

"I could print out a map of an area and tell them, 'This is what I want you to do here,'" Smallwood says. "It made my life much easier when I didn't have to spend so much time explaining. It also cut down on errors because I was able to be so exact."

Smallwood says CourseVision's customer service and their willingness to help him use the product to its maximum potential have made him a customer for life. "Their team has been there for me every step of the way," Smallwood says. "Their customer service is a major reason I would recommend CourseVision to everyone. It's an amazing tool."