

TAKING A LOOK BACK

Whatever the Title, We Still Keep the Green

By David A. Court, CGCS



As the GCSAA is celebrating its 75th anniversary, I can't help but think of all the progress that has been made in our industry over the years. Even though I haven't been in the business for 75 years, it has been more than 30 years since graduating from high school and taking on that summer job at Fort Lauderdale Country Club.

Back in the early 70s the professional on the course maintenance was commonly known as the "green keeper." Ken Roberts, then the green keeper at FLCC was kind enough to give me my first job on the course. He was also the person who initiated the idea of pursuing a career as a golf course superintendent. He didn't lead me in the wrong direction.

In the last 30 years so many changes have taken place in the way golf turf has been maintained. I think it's worth noting how these changes have taken place through the years. I'm sure many reading this will relate to the article and perhaps someone will add some personal experiences in a later issue of the magazine.

Jacobsen, Toro, Roseman and National were the common names in mowing equipment. As I recall, Jacobsen walk mowers with their two-cycle engines were commonly seen along with Toro Series IV as the typical mower used on greens. Greens were mowed as low as 1/2 inch and the stimpmeter was not heard of at that time.

Back then Tifgreen 328 was the grass of choice on greens but Tifdwarf was the new up-and-coming grass for the newer courses. Triplex mowers with wide balloon tires were coming out in the early 70s. These mowers would take the place of walkers on greens in order to save on manpower. One triplex could do what three or four walk mow operators could do. For many of the clubs today it has become more desirable to go back to the use of walk mowers. As the saying goes "What goes around comes around." The triplex still has many uses from mowing tees, collars, verticutting use and at times we see it as a fairway mower for professional tournaments and to create special mowing patterns.

Remember the F-10, Parkmaster, HF-15 and HTM 175? They did a great job replacing pull frames of 5-, 7-, or 9-gang mowers once used on fairways and rough. I'm still using our HF-15 occasionally to scalp down fairways and to reduce thatch build-up.

Topdressing of greens has gone through a metamorphosis not only in the materials used, but the in equipment that applies these materials. Years ago it was not uncommon to use a 70/30 mix on greens. Organic matter was comprised of Florida or Canadian Peat to a product of the sugar cane industry known as Doc Anderson's Topdressing. Equipment used for topdressing has also made a big change. The walk-behind top dresser that would take all day to complete topdressing of nine holes has been replaced with Terra Toppers, Dakota and Tee-Crop equipment that gets 18 greens topdressed in as little as two hours.

Battling insects seemed much easier when we have products like Aldrin and Chlorodane. These were great on mole crickets and grubs as well as other turf pests. The replacements for these seem to be targeted at single pests and less broad spectrum. I'm referring to Chipco Choice, Merit and other pyrethroid products.

A great deal of progress has been made in educating the maintenance staff on the proper way of handling pesticides and other toxic substances used the work place. Today it is expected that the handler of toxic substances will take proper

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precautions using personnel protective equipment. This was not always the case. Years ago the practice of spraying greens could involve a three men. One man would spray with a "Spray Hawk" while two men would handle 150 ft. of hose and keep it out of the way. Today sprayers are vehicles with booms that can be raised by the push of a button in order to follow ground contours. It all depends on the bells and whistles on equipment.

I think the area that has made the biggest impact in turf maintenance has been irrigation. Courses have gone from manual, quick coupler, single row systems to the sophisticated com-

puterized systems of today. The antiquated system of the past required night water men to drive from fairway to fairway, plugging in sprinklers on a time table that was as variable as the person doing the job. Superintendents just hoped that the water man would not fall asleep on the job or talk to their girlfriends on the phone too long; otherwise wet spots were sure to occur. I'm sure that superintendents of yesteryear could write a chapter in a book about night water men and some of the characters that they had working for them.

Irrigation systems being installed today require far more technical expertise. Automatic systems years ago were designed to run in about 10-12 hours to fulfill maximum ET requirements. Now these systems can water the same amount in as little as five hours. Larger pumps stations (VFD), larger mainline pipe sizing and computerized control have made a tremendous difference. The two leaders in irrigation technology continue to upgrade software to the point where what was good six or seven years ago is obsolete today. Isn't that the way many things are though? That's progress.

The maintenance staff has also made some changes over the years. In the 1970s it was very common to see more women working on the golf course. At Colony West where I worked on the crew for Richard Lemmel, we had the best crew of all that I have been associated with. We had a crew of 12, six women and six men, and we maintained 36 holes. Everyone worked great together.

Today we see much more of the Hispanic and Haitian labor force throughout South Florida. It is so important for clubs to have someone in a management position who can translate and make sure that instructions are clearly understood. Education training films in both English and Spanish have become very popular. One series of videos has been produced by FGCSA Past President Darren Davis and Paul Latshaw. Safety training films have also become a major part of today's operation. Many clubs today employ a person who serves as the human resources director who handles many of the tasks of employee relations, insurance problems, employment and termination's.

In the past 30 years or so many changes have occurred in the role of the golf course superintendent. As I stated earlier some of the readers will relate to this article and others getting started in their careers will see it as a bit of history.

Happy 75th Anniversary to the GCSAA. I hope to make it for the 100th. Let's see where progress takes us in the next 25 years.

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