

Sensible Budget Crunching

Being a savvy, free-thinking turfgrass manager is critical

EDITOR'S NOTE: Balancing the Budget was the Hands On topic in the last issue. Bob Wagner's article arrived just a little too late to be used. As we continue to contend with a volatile economy that's trying to recover, Bob's contribution is a reminder of how you can be creative in controlling costs

By Bob Wagner

Most of us are facing the fact that the current economy has affected the golf industry. Whether it is a decline in rounds played, lower merchandise sales, shortfalls in membership revenue or a reduction in food and beverage income, we are being asked to closely scrutinize our golf course operations. In many cases, we have been asked to reduce operating costs, some more drastically than others, but still provide the playing conditions that our paying customers deserve.

The largest line item in most budgets is labor and associated benefits. This is normally the first place we look to trim costs. In order to reduce manpower and still get the job done, a great deal of organization is required of the maintenance team. I am very fortunate that my assistant superintendent, Jackson Reiswig, possesses good organizational skills and manages the staff to its full potential.

At Coral Creek Club, we feature Tifeagle greens, Tifdwarf collars, and (mostly) Tifway 419 in fairways and roughs. Regular cultural practices like aerifying and verticutting are required frequently to maintain these surfaces. To conserve resources, we will be reducing the number of aerifications on the tees, fairways and roughs to two instead of three. While I adhere to the belief that the more you can aerify, the

better the turf becomes, I do not anticipate any short- or long-term negative impacts from this reduction. The tees and fairways will still receive their annual verticutting, but perhaps only once instead of the preferred two.

The budget constraints that we face should not affect the putting surfaces in any way. Golfers' primary focus is always on the greens, and to eliminate or reduce cultural practices in any way could result in a reduction of quality, especially on today's ultradwarfs. We still plan on verticutting greens every 7-10 days at .125 in. deep, followed by the proper topdressing of 304-T sand. More than likely, we will verticut the greens in two directions with a Graden unit twice again this summer, an aggressive verticutting at a depth between .38 and .5 inch; the deeper we can go, once again, the better the result.

We plan on core aerifying the greens and collars four times this summer, with inside diameter tine size being .5 inch minimum. We will try to space the holes as closely as we can without damaging the turf, because the tighter the spacing becomes, the more organic matter we can remove.

This will be followed by a heavier topdressing, once again with the 304-T sand. In the years past we used an outside contractor for aerifying. This year we'll do it in house. Equipment sharing among area golf courses has become more common and necessary as we

ing and using each others' specialized equipment.

Coral Creek Club closes for the summer, as most of our membership migrates to cooler climates. This allows us to accomplish our intense cultural practices with a more flexible schedule than most other clubs. It also allows us to utilize gang mowers for fairway and rough mowing out of season, and if we don't get completely finished with an operation for the day or before the weekend, it's really not an issue. We can save on labor hours this way, and certainly avoid the dreaded budget killer of overtime.

The high, flashed, sand faces of our bunker design can lead to serious erosion problems during the rainy season. Since we are closed, we minimize the time spent fixing the washouts by filling sand bags with G-Angle bunker sand and placing them in the bunkers. Prior to opening, we simply cut the bags, and evenly distribute the sand in the bunkers. We have saved thousands of dollars by utilizing this sand-bagging procedure, and with the course being closed, this practice does not affect the golfer.

Being a team player at your facility has never been more important. The golf course superintendent has always been a key component to the overall health of the club, and will continue to be so. Being a savvy, free-thinking turfgrass manager is critical in these

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attempt to take on these tasks using our own manpower.

Fortunately, we have a very good relationship with Jeff Strother at the nearby Gasparilla Inn and Club that allows us both to be comfortable lend-

current times. It is important to remain upbeat and accept the challenges that we all face. Think of it as a great opportunity to show what an asset you are to your club, and at the same time possibly strengthen your job security. ■