

# Communication is a BIG Part of My Job

By David Court, CGCS

Communication with members, staff and upper management is a big part of my role at Black Diamond. *Member News* and e-mail blasts are quite common. We let the membership know about aerification and overseeding schedules as well as the course closing schedules. With the frequent possibilities of frost – something we didn't have in South Florida – we will announce starting-time changes and the shift to shotgun starts a day ahead of time so the members can plan.

All department heads and assistants have e-mail addresses so they can be contacted by members. I often find myself answering questions by e-mail or if necessary, the old-fashioned way, telephone. If a topic requires more attention we will put the message out on *Member News*.

I make myself available several times during the week. If work schedules permit, I play in a Thursday Scramble with the men. My wife, Janet, and I are invited to dinner for Trivia night, Name that Tune night, and, yes, even Bingo. We love the fact that we are able to participate with the members at their functions and parties. If members have questions or comments, this gives me time to address their concerns one-on-one in a more relaxed atmosphere.

Communication with the crew is done as needed with safety meetings and during frost delays and rain events. We try to take advantage of these down times and present information to the staff and discuss any issues that have



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come up. Some of the issues are those that I hear about through the members. This is also a good time to present the Employee of the Month award for them to be recognized by their peers.

Communication with the senior staff is done at our Wednesday meetings. Upcoming events are discussed including tournaments, weddings and outside outings. A calendar of events is also published for members in the monthly newsletter to which all department heads contribute articles. This is my opportunity to get the word out about our Audubon Certification progress, effluent water updates and when we can expect the beginning or completion of any projects.

Communication is one of the most important aspects of our jobs. We do it all day long without even realizing it. Just stopping to talk with a member of the club or the crew can make a big difference with people on all levels.

I never consider my position as a golf course superintendent to be a job but more of an adventure, especially on a good day when you only have to work half days: 5:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. Did I mention that it helps to have support and communication on the home front as well?

## Effective Communication is Vital for Success

By Kevin Sunderman

Effective communication among a superintendent, senior management and the membership is vital to the success and survival of both superintendent and club.

The first step is to establish and maintain a healthy communication line among the superintendent, general manager and greens chairman. This



Kevin Sunderman

should be easy.

At the end of the day, relay any important information to your general manager and/or your greens chairman. Some days won't require any communication. Others might require 30 minutes or more depending on the situation.

Serious matters are often best discussed face-to-face, and don't wait until the end of the day. Make sure, however, always to send a follow-up e-mail on important matters to create some sort of documentation. Documentation can help you remember the specifics of previous issues. Also, documentation is insurance for those unfortunate CYA situations.

Anticipate situations. Relay answers/explanations to questions that haven't been asked. For example, if a mower has left a hydraulic leak all over No.14 fairway, let management know about it right away. When they are questioned, they have an answer. Managers and board members hate nothing more than being caught off guard.

Second, good communication between the golf professional and the superintendent is necessary for coordinating both golf and maintenance activities. After a series of "surprise shotguns," I finally coordinated weekly meetings with the head professional. These meetings only require 15-20 minutes to review the upcoming calendar. They ensure the greens aren't being verticut the morning of the ladies' invitational and they allow the golf shop to know when the golf course will be fertilized.

In fact, a meeting can make it easier to get time blocked for course work because the golf shop can plan ahead when making tee-times. It might be a good idea for the general manager to sit in on these meetings so he knows what has been scheduled.

Finally, communication to the general membership leaves everyone feeling informed and confident that you know what's going on with the golf course. This can be done several ways. Face-to-face contact in the golf shop and on the golf course is not always fun but usually very effective.

Our club manager sends weekly e-mail blasts to the membership. I include a few sentences every week just to inform the members of whatever seems pertinent at the time. Contributing to the club newsletter is always important. Writing articles that educate on a basic level provides your members with the basis to understand what has happened or what is to come.

For example, writing about transition before it takes place prepares your members with the understanding of what will be happening. Then when they see it, they can say, "Yeah, it's just transition. It'll be better in a few weeks." Our newsletter is bimonthly so I often write updates to be posted on bulletin boards throughout the club on the off months.

The difficult economic times have made it even more important to have good communication with those around you. It is impossible to provide the same level of conditioning as a few

years ago without a significant increase in the budget. Without effectively communicating this with management and members, a superintendent's reputation could be damaged because he did not provide the expected conditions or went over budget to do so.

To keep my manager and board members better informed, I frequently pass along e-mails and articles describing things like the increasing fertilizer and chemical costs. I also try to show them specific examples in order to make the increases "real." If I can show them an invoice from last year and another one from this year, it tends to hit home more effectively.

I then make it a point to follow up with them to answer any questions they may have as well as discuss ideas for dealing with these increases. We have lengthened the time between fertilizer applications. This decision is a result of informed discussions with club management. Once the decision was

made, we then let the members know that we had to reduce the total amount of fertilizer and what would result.

Keeping the membership up to date is just as important as communicating with management. This year at Isla Del Sol we have decided not to overseed; we did so wall-to-wall in years past. While this makes agronomic sense, the real reason behind the decision is the financial saving the club will experience. As soon as the decision was made, I began informing the members through bulletin board postings, e-mails, and most importantly face-to-face communication.

I make sure to let them know of the consequences of the decision. If they know what to expect they are usually much more comfortable with the decision. It's also important to paint both sides of the picture. Not only am I preparing them for a less green golf course, but also I am letting them know that they will benefit with more roll.



Warn them about the bad news, but leave them feeling good. By keeping members informed, they tend to feel more involved. As I write this, I got a call from a member who suggested that every day we rope off a different hole to give it a break from the cart traffic.

Other issues that have been discussed because of the changing times include the increasing regulation of water, fertilizer and pesticide use and our efforts to be more environmentally proactive. In years past our members would have not been happy to see our lake banks allowed to grow, but this year, in attempt to create a buffer zone, we did just that. With plenty of notification, the members understood why and actually supported the decision to do so.

Communication is always an important tool for a successful superintendent no matter what issue needs discussing. The bottom line: it doesn't matter what methods you

use to inform your members as long as you do it effectively. The more you communicate with management and members, the better understanding they will have about your operation. Over time it will improve your credibility and make them more confident in your abilities.

## **SUPER TIP** for **Your Topdressing Program**

*By Sean Sullivan, CGCS*

As I was traveling the Far East (East Georgia) this past February, I came upon a new step in the topdressing program. The new step has been added only recently, because three years ago when I was working in Georgia, it was not being used. I was visiting the superintendent at Sea Island Seaside

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