

# Effective Communications During Tough Times

We all know the challenges facing the our economy these days, and we have all seen how it has affected the revenues and maintenance budgets at our golf courses. Every case is unique and no one solution will fit all situations. But there is one common denominator that can be applied to all courses, and that is developing effective communication methods for getting your message across to management and members or customers.

Each golf course may have a wide variety of leadership and communication skills in various key positions from vocal members, board and committee members to department heads, general manager and the superintendent. Being able to identify and utilize the most effective communication tools at your location will be fundamental in your success and the club's during these trying times.

If there is an information vacuum about the vision and strategy of the club overall – and especially in course conditioning, which is usually of paramount concern by the members and customers of a facility – that void will be filled with speculation, rumor and doubt unless you fill that void with facts and information.

There is little doubt that superintendents everywhere are stretching fewer budget dollars to maintain golf courses across the state. The net result is that course conditioning priorities must be jointly agreed upon by members, management and maintenance. It is

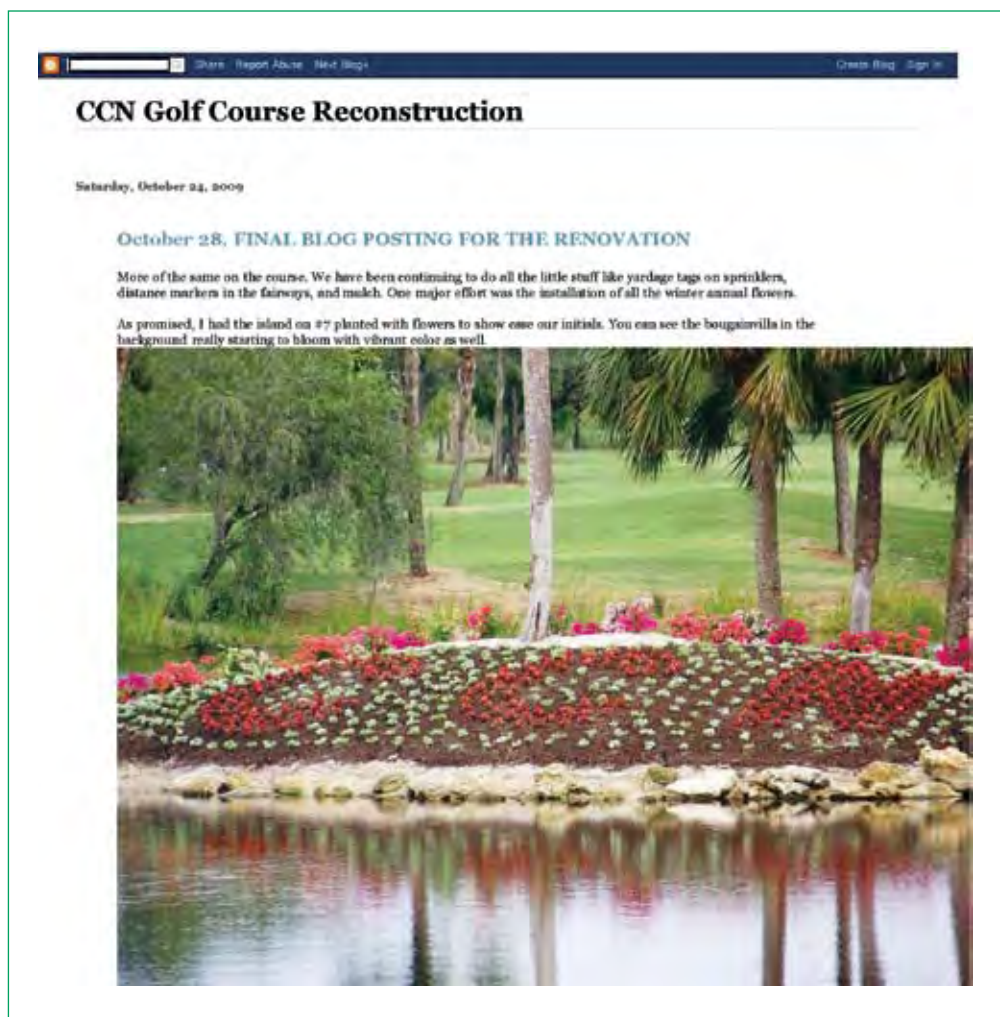
not reasonable for anyone to expect the same level of manicured appearance when labor and materials budgets are reduced as they have been consistently over the past few years.

However, clear effective communication from the superintendent and club management can provide information and facts that can educate and lead to understanding by members who previously did not give golf-course maintenance requirements a second thought. Here are some comments from your

peers about ways they are effectively communicating to their clubs:

## SPREADING THE WORD

Roy MacDonald, at the Hobe Sound Golf Club in Martin County, sets the stage for what most courses have had to deal with the past few years. He writes, “We had poor growing conditions like everyone else this past winter. In fact it was the coldest winter I have experienced since moving to Florida in 1981. Coupled with the fourth consecutive



*Blog entry by Bill Davidson during CC of Naples renovation last summer. Photo by Bill Davidson.*

year of reduced revenues and maintenance budgets and the funds running out of our emergency Hurricane account created a perfect storm for course-conditioning challenges.

“For example, we had discontinued our pre-emergent weed control applications in response to budget cuts and attempted to get by with post-emergent applications when and where needed. The long, wet cold winter weather thinned out our bermuda turf and weeds managed to fill in the gaps. We had to do something to demonstrate how we couldn’t continue this way without expecting disappointing conditions.

“I created a spreadsheet depicting the expenditures for labor, chemicals, fertilizers and services that covered the last 10 years. The board was able to see the direct relationship between the gradual decline in certain aspects of the course conditioning relative to the reduced spending for the resources needed to maintain a desired level of maintenance. As a result of that presentation, a posi-

tive budget adjustment for chemicals and fertilizers was approved.”

### COMPUTING THE VALUE OF COMMUNICATING

Meanwhile over in Naples, Bill Davidson at the County Club of Naples, is capitalizing on the advent of online blogging to keep his members informed about course projects and conditions especially during the summer when so many of them are away. I logged on to Bill’s two blogs and could immediately see the educational value as he explained maintenance procedures and was able to insert photos and videos to illustrate his points.

Davidson explained, “Last year during our course reconstruction project, I blogged almost weekly and it became almost a cult following among the members as they could track the progress of the changes to the course via the photos and comments. Previously I had chronicled our summer aerification and verticutting programs to show

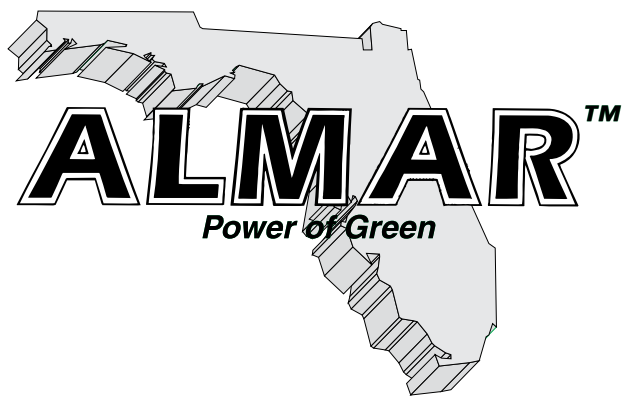
the members the build up and removal of the thatch material and why it was important.”

Davidson also does a monthly full-page newsletter article except in the summers when he blogs. Yet he says that despite all the success he’s had online and in newsletters, the best way he communicates is face to face.

“I make it a point to go into the golf shop at least three to four times a day. I like to see when our avid golfers and active members are playing and make it point to swing by the practice tee, putting green or golf shop so I can be sure to share with them on a one-on-one basis. My club appreciates the face time.

“It also helps that my green chairmen is a bit of a ‘techie’ also. We are able to communicate via text message to stay on top of things easily and rapidly.”

To see how Davidson used online blogging to keep his members informed, you can visit his blog sites at <http://ccnsummer2010.blogspot.com> and <http://ccnrebuild.blogspot.com>



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