Westwood benefits from Montross' turf talents

By Vern Putney

When "Mostly Montross" switched careers a quarter-century ago, teenager son Walter Me suspected that golf would shape his life. After the senior Montross became the general manager at Annapolis (Md.) Roads Country Club, Walter began at the bottom of the links ladder as caddie, cart maintenance worker and all-around gofer. His big break came when directed by the golf course superintendent to help out on the golf course. Although the work was much more physical than it is today, there was nothing he enjoyed more; except perhaps playing golf.

Pointed to the right profession, Montross has occupied several prestigious industry positions since graduating in 1975 from the University of Maryland, Institute of Applied Agriculture. A certified superintendent since 1984, he's been president of the Greater Washington Golf Course Superintendents Association (1981), IAA, Maryland Alumni Association (1984), and Mid-Atlantic Association of Golf Course Superintendents (1989). Montross also served on the Virginia Turfgrass Council's board of directors from 1986-1989. He and wife Linda have a 9-year-old daughter Tracy, and a son Geoffrey, 7.

Montross believes job appeal stems from the variety of tasks involved: the look of the course from day to day, month to month; and the longer-term observations, such as maturing trees and finished construction projects. He notes that as projects mount, playing time diminishes.


When approached about coming to Westwood, Montross learned the club was interested in changing fairway turf from 90 percent poa annua to something more hardy to the Mid-Atlantic region. The goal: tighter, drier lies in the summer months.

Club officials years before had decided that upgrading the course was both necessary and desirable. The club had completely rebuilt all greens and begun to rebuild many of the old postage-stamp tees before Montross came aboard.

Fairway turf remained the only serious problem. Montross did not know which type of turf would be chosen. In the Washington area, almost every type of grass can be found in the fairways. Within a 20-miles radius,

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Montross' challenges at Westwood far more than 'just growing grass'

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Zoysia, Bermuda, rye, blue, bentgrass... combinations of each can be found.

As Montross learned more about the unique traits special to Westwood, he formed an idea about the grass best suited. He chose bent-grass. He felt this type turf would suit best suited. He chose bent-

Zoysia, Bermuda, rye, blue, bentgrass and combinations of each can be found in the unique traits special to Westwood. The only problem was the expected re-investigation in the fall of 1990. Westwood ended up with a little more than hoped for, about 40 percent. Last fall, Montross again reseeded, using Pennlinks and the new Dominant bentgrass. "This blend has looked excellent in our nursery," he said. "We are experimenting with the use of various growth retardants, pre-emerge products and Progress in attempting to find a program that will reduce poa annua levels to around 20 percent."

Westwood CC has begun the complete renovation of all sand bunkers. This will entail removing all old sand, re-establishing drainage and adding new sand. These 65 bunkers embrace 130,000 square feet. In addition, seven new bunkers will be built. Apace with Westwood's vision of the future, Montross sees an equally positive outlook for the technological end of the golf course business. The superintendent's position has evolved tremendously, and Montross is excited to be a part of it. However, as golfer demands have increased, many superintendents face increasingly difficult situations. Next big step may be to convince golfers that not every failure has the resource or capability to be like the course last viewed on TV.

Montross would encourage those about to enter this field to take a Dale Carnegie course. It might be more topical than ever. "Growing grass," he noted, "is just a small part of the business. Pesticides, public and press relations, communication and planning have emerged as more prominent issues."

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