Alonzi testifies: Tissue analysis saves turf and money

By PETER BLAIS

MAMARONECK, N.Y.—The 6th East green at Winged Foot was supposed to be a showpiece.

Over the years, the front of the putting surface had settled, creating a severe slope. Tom Fazio was called in to restore the green, reducing the grade and creating more pin placements.

But shortly after Fazio departed, problems arose. The front section of the green, which had required 15 inches of new soil in some places, started to wilt and go under stress more easily than others.

Superintendent Robert Alonzi thought the 6th was probably percolating faster than his other putting surfaces and needed more water and fertilizer. He blamed it on the additional soil.

But coincidentally, shortly after completing the restoration, Alonzi started using tissue analysis. The Karsten Turf Analyzer showed the restored green to be very low in potassium and iron.

Alonzi increased the feedings of winter weeds like wild onion and garlic.

The whole process takes about 20 minutes.

Alonzi performs tissue analysis on specific areas on an every-other-week basis — greens and tees one week, fairways the next. Over the past two years, he has developed a baseline that helps him decide whether to increase or decrease fertilizer and other treatments.

“It’s another tool for the superintendent,” Alonzi said. “It doesn’t tell you to go out and feed the grass this material or that material. It gives you a reference point from which to work.”

Alonzi said the analyzer has allowed him to reduce overall pesticide use while providing information that allows him to effectively adjust fertilizer applications to materials with needed micronutrient levels.

“In the long term, it’s worth the cost,” said Alonzi. “We spend that much on a single piece of maintenance equipment. If a club couldn’t afford it then it might be worth contacting a lab with an analyzer that could perform the test for a fee two or three times a month.”

Karsten Turf General Manager Ernest “Buck” Menendez said roughly 30 courses have purchased the unit since it was first introduced in 1991. Many of these have been 36-hole facilities or management companies that can share the equipment among several courses.

“It’s an expensive piece of equipment,” Menendez conceded. “But fertility management is a concept that’s gaining steam. If this helps superintendents maintain their turf through stress periods, then it’s a good investment.”

Elm disease battle

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