Reverse the curse: Turn income-depleters into income generators, or...

... How to save money even when dealing with monopolies!

By TERRY BUCHEN

The old cliche that there are two things that are certain in life, death and taxes, is obviously quite true and one more should be added to the list: All golf courses must get their electricity from a monopolistic electric power company and none of us has a choice. Having dealt with many different electric power companies, I have learned first and foremost that they are reluctant to volunteer information that would help anyone save money or what services that they have available. But here are some major money-savers.

MONTHLY ELECTRIC BILLS
At least once a year I have the power company do a rate survey of our entire operation, including the pumphouse, maintenance building, clubhouse and any other facilities that are on separate electric meters. Quite often after the survey results are known, our rates have been reduced because we have used more electricity than the year before. Examples include the pumphouse, since we experienced a drought, and used more power. Each power company has different rules and regulations. So, try it out of them and ask many questions because they will usually not volunteer information.

The biggest question many golf courses have are the demand charges that pumphouses have to pay even during the "off season" in the transition zone and cool-season courses. These charges are substantial and power company representatives should be asked about their regulations to find out if any further savings could result.

ELECTRIC TRANSFORMERS
One big way to save money is to buy your own transformers for your entire club operation. We did this at Double Eagle Golf Club by charging all of the 480-volt, three-phase transformers and putting them all on one electric meter. By doing this, we did not have to pay the demand charges on our irrigation pumphouse, which saves us about $800 to $1,000 per month when the pumps are not being used in the off-season.

After two years, we had paid for the transformers and are now pocketing savings. We bought our transformers during construction of the club, which is much easier than at an existing club.

When talking with power company officials on existing clubs, ask about turning in your existing transformers and purchasing your own. They don't like to hear these kinds of questions because it takes away from their revenues, but many times, throughout the country, the rules do allow buying your own transformers. Some power companies will assign your course a permanent supervisor, who can monitor your operation better to help you save as much as possible.

Put a pencil to it to see if you can save money at your course. When you install your own transformers, you will have to perform and pay for routine maintenance, which is minimal, and for fuses when they blow out, which isn't very often.

One further note: If your course is having many power failures, especially on the irrigation pumphouse, it is best to have an electric company supervisor assigned to your operation who can help get the power turned back on, especially after lightning storms, because sometimes they "forget" that grass cannot survive long without water. This happens quite a lot on rural courses. Do not assume they know you have no electricity.

DEALING WITH NATURAL GAS
On many new development courses with housing, the owner must pay for and install natural gas lines for the houses and course—its maintenance building, clubhouse, pumphouse, etc. With many natural gas companies, it is optional who retains ownership of the gas lines, you can sell tap fees for any further hook-ups and keep the fees as an income-generator. Usually at some point in time, you can sell the piping back to the gas company and make a profit.

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Former Golf Course Superintendents Association of America President Mike Bavier, far left, and former Canadian Golf Superintendents Association President Gordon Witteveen, far right, stand with students, from left, Hiram Hield of Lucaya Golf Club, Ishmael Roberts of Ruby Golf Course and Shervin Bastian of Emerald Golf Course.

BAHAMS — Former Golf Course Superintendents Association President Mike Bavier and Canadian Golf Superintendents Association founder Gordon Witteveen taught a two-day workshop here for the superintendents and crews of the island's three golf courses.

Called "The Magic of Greenkeeping," the seminar attracted 32 greensmen, including superintendents Sherwin Bastian of Ruby Golf Course, Ishmael Roberts of Princess Resort's Emerald Course and Hiram Field of Lucaya Golf Course.

Bavier, of Inverness Golf Course in Palatine, Ill., was GCSAA president in 1981, while Witteveen is in charge of the five Metropolitan Board of Trade courses in Toronto and was president of the Canadian GSA in 1969.

The pair have spoken in countries around the world.

The seminar features practical secrets of greenkeeping and stresses the importance of catering to the whims of discriminating golfers.

"Mike and I are avid golfers, and we were impressed with the courses there and their condition," Witteveen said from his office. "The very same golfers who play in the Bahamas in the winter are our customers in the summer."

Sewer lines are another utility that should be explored. With many sewer companies, golf course developers have to pay for installation of the sewer piping. But the good news is that the developer can recover some of their costs by collecting "tap fees" from any entity that hooks up to it. The ownership of the piping is usually turned over to the sewer company, but the tap fees many times turn over to the developer who paid to have it installed.

SEWER LINES

NYSTA AWARDS

The New York State Turfgrass Association (NYSTA) awarded eight $500 scholarships to students at the grand finale of the NYSTA Turf and Grounds Exposition. Cornell University winners were Jason A. Straka and Christopher Hennes. Gregory Wall and Ryan M. Paschal (posthumously) were the two winners from SUNY Cobleskill. The University of Massachusetts' two winners were Robert Alonzi Jr. and Christopher Caporici. G. Michael Elston of SUNY Delhi and William R. Michalski of Alfred State College were also awarded scholarships.

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