Winter hangover lingers in Midwest
Crown damage, desiccation rampant

By Mark Leslie

Superintendents from Minnesota and Michigan to Iowa and Illinois were up against the wall this spring, their courses belted with desiccation, crown damage and direct low-temperature kill that set season openings back weeks.

"Instead of having March, April, May, we're having March, March, March," said Bruce Williams of Bob O'Link Golf Club in Highland Park, Ill., president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA). "Harsh winter kill seems endemic from Colorado through Kansas, Iowa and areas like that."

"When we first started greening up in late April — which is very late for us — all the high spots came out green and all the low spots were dead stone-cold dormant," said Dick Stuntz of Alvamar Country Club in Lawrence, Kan., attributing damage to a snow-melt that froze again.

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While Jerry Faubel of Saginaw (Mich.) Country Club was "very fortunate against the wall this spring, Iowa and areas like that."

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Job benefits boom making superintendents more mobile

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comes along. Most supers interviewed felt that after 3 to 4 years, they were taken for granted and the super who replaced comes along. Most supers interviewed always received more wages and benefits. Another "take-it-for-granted" theory is that the new super will get the equipment and maintenance budget increase the superintendent who left couldn't get. And the super who left for greener pastures will get more money and benefits, plus increased capital and maintenance budget considerations compared to his/her predecessor.

Let's take a closer look at the fringe benefit package for all types of golf courses:

✓ Paid vacations, holidays, and sick leave are pretty much standard in the industry for the majority of supers.
✓ As are dues paid to the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA), local chapter dues, conferences/seminars/chapter meeting expenses and golfing privileges for the super and his/her family members, including using the rest of the facility.
✓ Supers are usually allowed one group of golfing guests per week or, at worst, every other week.
✓ Medical insurance, for the entire family, is common with most golf courses, but becoming less common with public entities because of the large expense involved (Quite a few management companies take away health insurance for the hourly worker as the first way to cut costs).
✓ Dental insurance and life insurance are in slow decline, because of the state of insurance industry premiums. Life insurance, when offered, usually equals up to twice a super's annual salary. Disability insurance is usually available as part of a life-insurance policy.
✓ A vehicle provided by the golf course, a monthly vehicle allowance or a combination of the two is common. Vehicle allowances vary but usually take the form of a monthly fee paid to the super who either leases or purchases the vehicle while making monthly payments. The super usually provides for insurance, while gasoline and maintenance are provided by the golf course. When the course provides a vehicle, the course pays all costs for the lease/purchase, fuel, insurance and maintenance. When a super leases or purchases a vehicle he/she sometimes will charge for mileage in lieu of a vehicle allowance, at the maximum allowed rate of 31 cents per mile for all business-related travel. Under this arrangement, the super will pay for all fuel, maintenance and insurance.
✓ Meals are furnished, more often than not, during working hours only, and at special functions as they occur.
✓ Bonuses vary from the traditional Christmas affair, which is common at most courses, to the annual performance bonus which is sometimes tied in to staying within the maintenance budget. Bonuses are also given as part of a profit-sharing program, at development-type courses, and/or for just doing a good job.
✓ Clothing allowances are becoming more common, seeing as the superintendent wearing the golf course logo identifies him/her as an employee and helps generate income from sales in the pro/golf shop. Items not provided by the golf course are usually available at cost.
✓ Pension plans are also becoming more common as some are provided by the employer. Many will allow for employee contributions as well. A few are the matching-fund type where the course matches contributions made by the super.

The 401(k) plan is becoming more popular as the employer oversees all contributions and investments. Some pension plans will let you take it with you, if you change jobs, but it must be reinvested for income-tax purposes promptly. Most pension plans do not tax any money until it is taken out (usually if the super is in a lower tax bracket) when they retire beginning at age 59 1/2 years old. However, they must begin withdrawing by age 70. Most plans are now fully vested in 4 to 5 years.

Some new trends include:
• Discounts — on housing lots, or completed houses and lots on development-type courses.
• Deferred compensation — where the plans are fully vested in 4 to 5 years and are taxed when they are withdrawn, similar to pension plans. Supers may contribute to some. Private deferred compensation plans are non-funded, fully vested plans, and thus do not grow as an investment and are usually a non-contributing type.
• Stock options — in publicly held companies involved in land-development, courses are also a viable benefit. Some land development courses, because of their many connections with mortgage banking firms, offer supers deal on mort-