Supers, managers speeding along the information highway

By J. HARRY MO ThES

S o, exactly where are you on the information highway? Dead center, 259 yards out and rolling along? Or stuck behind in the rough, lost and possibly out of play?

The use of computers by golf course superintendents for everything from irrigation systems and inventory to letters to greens committees is steadily on the rise. And several significant developments on the horizon have increased the chances for a stark and potentially crippling gap between those who use them and are comfortable with it, and those who don’t, and aren’t.

A 1995 survey by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) revealed that about 75 percent of its members now have computers in their offices, according to David Bishop, a technical information services manager for the GCSAA. The vast majority of those with computers had upper-end models with the windows environment.

Of the 365 superintendents who responded to the survey, the most extensive on computer use ever done by the association:

- 90 percent use computers for word processing.
- 60 percent use them for irrigation-related software.
- 50 percent use them for data-base management and record-keeping.
- 10 percent use them for education-related software.

"The percentages were not particularly surprising that many superintendents out there have access," Bishop said. "But we were surprised at the level of technology and the size of computers they have. Most are upper-end models. The level of technology out there is a little higher than we thought."

That’s encouraging and relevant news to Bishop. He’s working on developing a World Wide Web site for the GCSAA that will be available to GCSAA-member superintendents. A demonstration of an "on-line" prototype was on display at the International Golf Course Conference and Show in Orlando in February. Bishop said the GCSAA hopes to have an operational web site up and running by this summer.

Meanwhile, as Golf Course News reported last month, the U.S. Golf Superintendents Association of America has the vast majority of those with computers, managers speeding in the rough, lost and possibly out of play?

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In the market? Check needs vs. availability

By MARK LESLIE

One computer software system streamlines maintenance activities. Another fine-tunes the irrigation system. A third ensures the pump station operates at maximum efficiency. A fourth, equipment-oriented, is geared to mechanics. Yet another is a monitor hooked up to weather satellites, allowing the superintendent to get an up-to-the-moment look at weather conditions anywhere in the country.

"We’re on the brink of maybe becoming too technological," said certified golf course superintendent Kevin Ross of Country Club of the Rockies in Edwards, Colo. "It’s a huge investment in time just to find out what software to buy. Maintenance is definitely more efficient today, but you barely scratch the surface of the potential of all the software programs."

Yet the area "barely scratched" touches all parts of the golf course operation — both maintenance and management.

At Country Club of the Rockies, for instance, Ross has five computers. Ross has one, his assistants another and his mechanic one. Another is dedicated to the irrigation system and an old model is destined for the common cafeteria, for the crew and handicap software. He also has a weather center and intends to add a pump station computer.

For superintendents in the market for software programs, Ross suggested:

1) Called all the companies and get demonstration discs.
2) Have the superintendent, assistants and mechanic run through those discs.
3) Do not compare any notes until everyone has looked at them. Then compare what each person liked and did not like about each program, deciding what best fits the course’s needs.
4) Make sure technical support, which is crucial, is comprehensive. Most of the programs are windows-oriented, making them easy to use.

Is the decision to buy any of these software programs an easy one to make?

"The weather station is a no-brainer," Ross said. Otherwise, no.

But each golf course’s needs are different, he said, so superintendents should decide what personally is best for them, not their colleague’s.

Updating your office with just two outlets and a phone line

By DAVID W. MAHONEY

Technology is great! Computers, faxes, printers, copiers, scanners, modems and slick answering devices are aiding and speeding communication.

Fax me this, get a message, surf the Net and prepare a document for your next green committee meeting. All from your office. Sounds great! Go out, buy the equipment and good luck having it fit your office. Technology has overwhelmed the average superintendent’s office.

While we’re all waiting for the new maintenance facility and updated office, secretary-equipped, it’s still nice to take advantage of today’s wonders to improve our output, content and efficiency.

Having a small cubicle to work from, a graduate of the Penn State Twoface Program, David W. Mahoney has been property manager at Siwanoy Country Club in Bronxville, N.Y., since 1988.

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