Inform uninform of winter chores

By GLENN PETERS

In the years that I have worked as a golf course equipment technician, people always ask me: "What do you do all winter?" This is the question I am asked most frequently, both by people who play the game and those who seem to think that there couldn't be very much to do once the temperature drops and the snow flies.

What follows is a brief synopsis of what happens at the Sunset Ridge Country Club maintenance facility during the winter months.

First and foremost, I prioritize what equipment will be worked on and in what order. Once this is done, the work begins with a visual inspection of each machine for obvious problems and, then, a thorough pressure washing is done. Hoods, fenders and body panels are removed to clear any accumulation of grass and dirt.

The most important aspect of our maintenance program, which affects both course playability and condition, is the sharpening of the cutting units. All cutting units, from greens to rough, are sharpened during winter maintenance. Oil changes, lubrication, tune-ups and overhauls are performed at this time as well. As the maintenance on each piece of equipment is completed, it is inspected again and then waxed. Waxing of turf equip-

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Dr. Milt Engelke is project manager of the Turfgrass Breeding, Genetics and Management Program at Texas A&M University, where his major emphasis is developing turfgrass for the arid and semi-arid regions of the South and Southwest. He released Prairie buffalo grass in 1989 (the first turf-type buffalo grass), three strains of creeping bentgrass (Cato, Crenshaw and Marianna) and four strains of zoysagrass (Pallisades, Crown, Cavalier and Diamond). Engelke earned his PhD in plant breeding from the University of Wisconsin/Madison in 1974 and received the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Distinguished Service Award in 1994.

Golf Course News: Could you review your recent work with new strains of creeping bentgrass, both those that have been released and those we can expect to see in the future?

Milt Engelke: The Texas A&M bentgrass breeding program was initiated in 1985 with support from the United States Golf Association and Bentgrass Research, Inc. (Fort Worth), with the primary emphasis of targeting physiological mechanisms of heat tolerance and superior disease resistance within creeping bentgrasses.

Management practices center on the lack of heat tolerance, which is partly due to the lack of root persistence during stress periods. The root is obviously im-

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Vandals are controllable
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front sign was missing and we
found it in a ravine four miles
away.

The vandalism is not always
done by wayward youths with
nothing better to do. "Sometimes
it's kids," Williams said. "But
sometimes it's over-exuberant
golfers who have too many
cocktails. It could also be dis-
grunted patrons or employees."

Regardless of who is doing the
damage, golf courses need secu-
rities from vandals. Although many
clubs and courses have some form
of security in place — such as an
alarm system in the clubhouse
where the cars are stored —
most problems happen because
courses are so easy to get onto,
even with fencing.

And short of hiring an army of
security guards, it is difficult —
if not impossible — to patrol 130
acres or more.

"It is a difficult security prob-
lem," said Michael Hughes, ex-
ecutive director of the National
Golf Course Owners Association
in Charleston, S.C.

Of all the advice on how to
deter vandalism (see sidebar),
the one golf course owners and
superintendents deem most ef-
fective is to toughen up security
at the access points with a good
"community watch" program.

"Your best defense is to have
good relations with your neigh-
bors," Hughes said.

Hughes got agreement from
course architect Michael Hurdzan
of Columbus, Ohio, whose
Widow's Walk course in Scituate,
Mass., was recently hit by vandals
while it was still under construc-
tion. "If the community is involved
(with the golf course), there is
little to no vandalism," he said.

"To solve vandalism, you have to
go into the psychology of why
people do it. I think it's a machismo
thing — something to brag about.
The answer is to have people take
pride in the golf course and take
away the motivation to destroy it."

And if a community is proud of
its golf course, chances are people
will report vandalism if they see it
happening. That is what happened
in Scituate where two teenagers
were caught because of a commu-
nity watch program there. Some-
one spotted the youths riding dirt
bikes across the greens and fair-
ways that had been shaped and
were ready to be seeded, and re-
ported it to the police. The teenag-
ers did about $2,600 worth of dam-
age to the course.

Scituate's town superintendent,
Richard Agnew, said that along
with community watch, he used
the "shame on you" approach. "We
called the newspapers immedi-
ately to embarrass them and their
parents," Agnew said. This may
not work if vandals are underage
and their names cannot be pub-
lically revealed.

Although community watch
programs may be a good strat-
y for public courses, what
about exclusive country clubs?
The private Oak Park Country
Club in River Grove, Ill., straddles
the boundaries of two working-
class neighborhoods. Superinten-
dent Alan T. Fierst said that regard-
less of their differences, the
golf club has fostered a good rela-
tionship with its neighbors.

"The homes bordering our prop-
erty act as watchdogs for the
people who may pass through their
yards," Fierst said. In return, the
does some tree trimming for the com-
unity. "It's a good PR program," he said.
Fierst said vandalism still hap-
ens — but damage to the greens
such as scratching out names or
slogans — happens only one or
two times a season.

Even the best community watch
program is not flawless. Chances
are, vandalism will happen to a
golf course sooner or later. But
when it does, course owners and
superintendents should check
their insurance coverage.

"I think a lot of golf courses
don't realize this is something that
is covered," said Richard Gross,
vice president of market-
ing at CNA Insuance Co. in
Chicago. Most policies cover
vandalism to the greens, he said.

Although most vandalism is
more a nuisance than a financial
burden, the biggest concern, Gross
said, is if many greens are
ruined and the course is tempo-
rarily out of business until repairs
are made. If that happens, many
insurance companies now offer
business interruption insurance.
Again, check the policy, Gross
said. And if it's not, get it. "Even
if it's just for peace of mind."

The Results Are In.
Seed Research of Oregon set out to find the Best 18 Bentgrass Greens in North America, planted exclusively to
our own varieties of creeping bentgrasses—Providence (SR 1019), SR 1020, or the Dominant Blend. A winner
was selected from each of the five regions and out of those five our judges chose...

...THE "BEST 18 GREENS IN
NORTH AMERICA"

SOUTHEAST
Mike Brisbois
The Legends at Chateau Elan
Braselton, GA

EAST
Kevin Pryseski
Cattail Creek Country Club
Glenwood, MD

DOMINANT
Providence

WEST
Jon Clark
Northview Golf & CC
Cloverdale, BC

SOUTHWEST
Paul Ellwood
Club Terravita
Scottsdale, AZ

MIDWEST
Don Tolson
Fox Hollow at Lakewood
Lakewood, CO

SR 1020

Because of their proven, exceptional performance—Providence,
SR 1020, and Dominant Blend creeping bentgrasses are used
extensively, throughout the world. On golf course greens and
fairways the SRO Bents consistently produce beautiful dark
green, upright growing, fine-textured turf with reduced main-
tenance, less thatch, and excellent wear tolerance.