1998: A tough nut to crack

It's all well and good to say "If you can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen." But how do you advise people who don't know what fire can be until they face it? That is what happened when 1998 came to town, like a sizzling cowboy looking for trouble.

The "heat" was a war zone of ice in the Northeast, a flood zone in the Midwest and West, a fire zone in the Southeast. It was a series of calamities coast to coast, of challenges that tested golf course superintendents and operators to the max in many places. 

When Bruce Berger, superintendent at Quarry Golf Club in Palm Coast, Florida, said, "I talk to superintendents in their 30s who say they won't last another five years." In their cases it was second only to California with 71 courses under construction. Only Florida with 1,170, and California, 942, have more. Michigan was ready to plunge into a permanent economic dormancy. The doom-and-gloomers were having a financial apocolypse. Now the state is leading the country in golf course and new car production. That's it. I'm swearing off prophets of doom forever.

An October story described how "A man died on the 13th hole of Colonial Charter (in Myrtle Beach, S.C.) golf course when he and his wife apparently were struck by lightning."

County Coroner Robert Edge said the couple initially left the course at 10 a.m. and were never seen again. "In terms of golf course superintendents, what we've missing is that they can use the chemicals without fear of huge negative impact on the environment.

"Working with EcoSoil's Biojet system, Dr. Joseph Vargas of Michigan State University revealed a cure for poa annua and strongly hinted at a soon-coming method to kill poa trivialis."

"When I got into this business in the 1950s we were talking about how to get rid of poa annua. Here we are, 40 years later, talking about how to get rid of poa... If this works as well as it appears, it's huge," said Vargas about the natural, biological control Xanthomonas campestris.

The facts, mam, just the facts

One of my many duties here at Golf Course News is to seek out stories for the general News section pages. I comb through news clips, the Internet, press releases and telephone calls from readers to put together these 5-4-5 paragraph stories that generally appear in the first few pages of GCN.

As a highly trained and seasoned journalist, as well as a Jack Webb enthusiast, it's my duty to report "The facts, mam, just the facts." But every once in awhile I'd love to tack on just one more little paragraph, making what I feel is a needed observation.

Well it's the Year in Review time and the boss gave me the thumbs up. So here goes.

In June, we ran a story titled "Caddyshack course to face face lift," describing how Wayne Huizenga was intentionally killing the grass at Rolling Hills Golf and Country Club in Davie, Fla., in order to begin a $3.5 million renovation of the once-proud public course that was featured in the 1980 movie Caddyshack.

Florida Panthers Holding Inc., which owns six courses, is changing the shapes of the greens and sand traps, adding 10 acres of water and transforming the 27-hole course into an 18-hole championship track. Huizenga, owner of the NFL's Florida Marlins, expected to open Rolling Hills in early 1999.

About time. The course where the best movie ever made about superintendents/caddies should be a shrine. Nice to know Huizenga realizes that. Now if he would just unload the Marlins, the world championship baseball team he also killed on purpose.

That same month, another news story appeared, "Mich. tracks spread like wild fire." The article quoted National Golf Foundation