FREE BALLS? YES ... AT THAYER CC

No, that is not a misprint. Thayer’s new policy won’t find those lost balls for you. It gives them the chance to learn for themselves: “A beautiful marriage,” new Thayer Country Club superintendent Joe Duncan said the different groups are learning more and more from each other as time passes. “That relationship has existed for a long, long time, but we depend on each other more than ever before,” said Duncan, owner of Evergreen Lawn Care Inc. in Troy, who succeeded Hank Chafin at the OTF Conference and Show here, Dec. 8-11. “We’re learning that everything we do is an integral part of each other’s work. Things that happen on sports turf and on golf courses, and the research they are fostering, affect us all.”

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TACKLING UNREASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

It’s interesting how jobs seem to define who we are. For instance, when we ask, “What is a golf course superintendent?” we’re really asking what job does he or she do, and, believe me, everyone’s got an answer about what they’re supposed to do. First of all, everyone seems to agree that a superintendent’s primary job is to manage turf. But how much turf should be managed? They’ve played a lot of golf, they have a lawn, they have a lot of money, and they know how their greens ought to look and play. That makes them experts on how turfgrass ought to be managed. Right?

Sometimes that’s how it sounds when I talk with golfers about superintendents. Well, I’m here to tell you that good golf course superintendents do a whole lot more than manage turfgrass. In addition to all of the work and expertise it takes to manage turf, they manage water, and from this environmentalist’s perspective they also manage wildlife, wetlands, lakes, streams, forests, landscape ecology, insects, the weather, the media, the government, their staff, and the biggest challenge of all: the unreasonable expectations of golfers.

What do I mean by unreasonable? From an economic and environmental perspective, think about wall-to-wall manicured turfgrass, both in terms of man and machinery hours as well as in loss of habitat. Think about fertilized turf right down to the edge of water bodies, both in terms of cost of fertilizers, man hours to spread it, money, and they know how their greens ought to look and play. That makes them experts on how turfgrass ought to be managed. Right?

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Unreasonable expectations of golfers

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for humans and animals alike.

How about greens cut so short for speed that the grass itself is nearly killed, and that if they actually lose a green, they lose their job. These are only a few of the dilemmas faced by superintendents every day — only a small balancing act.

We all need to face the fact that the game of golf is designed and managed for golfers. They are the revenue and they want what they paid for. But the trends are changing.

Federal, state and local government agencies are increasingly regulating and permitting the construction of new courses, as well as making major impacts on the way existing courses are managed. All golfers need to understand this. If they care about the game, particularly its future, they need to be much more reasonable in their expectations and much more supportive of superintendents who are trying very hard to deal with the conflicts arising from all those who have a stake in the game — golfers, governmental agencies, turfgrass, habitat, wildlife, and the environment at large.

On the other hand, people have told me that organizations such as AI, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and the U.S. Golf Association are not doing enough to promote superintendents as professional land managers. I can only speak on behalf of Audubon International in this regard.

AI is a not-for-profit environmental organization with a mission to improve the quality of life and the environment through research, education and conservation assistance. That’s our job; it’s what we do. We’ve always maintained that we’ll work with anyone if it advances our mission to improve the environment.

What we’re not in the business of doing is promoting anyone’s job, including that of golf course superintendent. We do, however, publicly recognize anyone who demonstrates a commitment to protecting and enhancing the environment through their jobs. We recognize school teachers, farmers, corporate executives, homeowners and, of course, golf course superintendents.

As a matter of fact, Audubon International’s highest environmental achievement award, The John James Audubon Environmental Steward Award, has only been given twice, and both times to golf course superintendents — Tim Hiers of Collier’s Reserve and Peter Salinetti of Schuyler Meadow Club — not because of their job, but because as they perform that job, they have demonstrated their commitment to fundamental environmental principles.

At AI, our job is to provide the information, framework and opportunities to help people rise to the highest levels of environmental accomplishment. Although it is not our job to recognize golf course superintendents as a group, we can and will recognize superintendents who take up the mantle of managing their courses with the environment in mind.

This is, in fact, the challenge that we all must face in life. No one else will do it for us. Audubon International will continue to publicly recognize those in the golf course industry who demonstrate environmental dedication in the construction and management of golf courses and we will continue to recognize superintendents who rise to the top of the profession in this regard.

We hope golfers, and others in the industry, will do the same.

Killington Golf Club joins Audubon

KILLINGTON, Vt. — Killington Golf Course has joined the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System (ACSS), a national program designed to help landowners preserve and enhance the environmental quality of their property.

"It’s a great program to make people aware of the environment on the golf course," said superintendent Chris Voutas. "We’re putting out bluebird and bat boxes and encouraging wildflower growth. We’ll also cut down on water and pesticide usage."

The ACSS provides an advisory service to help golf courses develop effective conservation and wildlife enhancement programs.

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