Superintendent salaries now averaging over $57,000

By JAY FINEGAN

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The average base salary for golf course superintendents rose this year to $57,057, according to a survey by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA).

Half of all superintendents earn more than $50,000 a year, 25 percent make more than $68,000, and 10 percent pull down more than $88,000. The salaries represent a seven percent increase from the average base salaries in 1998, or an annualized average increase of 3.6 percent.

For assistant superintendents, the average base salary rose to $29,638, up from $27,981 in 1998 – a six percent jump. Some 77 percent of assistants are salaried employees; the remainder are paid hourly.

The 2000 “employment profile” by GCSAA also shows an average age of 41 for all superintendents, while the median experience level is 11 years, up from 10 in 1998. The data show that, on average, superintendents take their first position as head super at age 30, with 15 percent of them still in the profession at age 50.

In education, the profile showed that nearly 80 percent of all superintendents hold a minimum of a two-year certificate, an associate’s or bachelor’s degree, or a graduate degree.

The results of the survey, based on 3,527 responses, show a modest rise in the number of golf facilities run by professional management companies – 14 percent this year, versus 13 percent in 1998. Much of the increase, the report said, appears to have come from an increase in the numbers of relatively small management outfits.

Other findings from the study include these:

• The median budget managed by superintendents is more than $550,000, including maintenance, capital equipment and payroll.

Medan crew size checked in at 17.

• As in 1998, less than a third of superintendents indicated a desire to become a general manager (GM). Superintendents most often report to GMs (29 percent), the survey found, followed by green committee/board of directors (19 percent) and directly to course owners (18 percent).

Nearly 75 percent of survey respondents worked at 18-hole courses, with 41 percent of them private, 38 percent daily-fee and 12 percent municipal.

Gray leaf spot spot forces mass regrassing at Philadelphia CC

By JOEL JOYNER


On certain golf courses in the region, turf damage amounted to as much as 90 percent. At the private Philadelphia Country Club, opened in 1930, head superintendent Michael McNulty knows quite well the constant struggle to maintain ryegrass fairways against gray leaf spot.

The club installed ryegrass on its fairways in 1982, and McNulty first noticed gray leaf spot in 1994. “We’ve been successful using Heritage and Dacconil,” McNulty said about the fungicides used to control the problem. But now, ryegrass vulnerability to gray leaf spot has prompted a more financially prudent approach.

As one of the last remaining courses in the Philadelphia region to offer ryegrass fairways, this year will mark the beginning of the club’s conversion to bentgrass. The 27-hole layout will regrass nine holes at a time, hoping to complete the first nine by early next spring. For the initial phase, McNulty killed off the rye by gassing it with methyl bromide and by laying down the granular product Basamid on the fairways and tees.

“We’re also taking the opportunity to change over our greens to Penn A-1 bentgrass at the same time,” McNulty said.

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Moss in N.E.  
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to fight moss invasion. These days, some superintendents spray bleach or dish detergent to desiccate the grass and suppress moss growth.

Noel Jackson, a Ph.D. plant pathologist at the University of Rhode Island, explains that "the mercury fungicides had a good suppression effect on spore germination of mosses. The mercury supplies are now exhausted and the ban against manufacturing them leaves nothing else on the market that has the persistence of the mercury against moss. With the iron sulfate, superintendents get a quick knock down, but it's only a temporary expedient."

**COPPER HYDROXIDE STRATEGY**

Frank Rossi, a Ph.D. horticulturalist at Cornell University, is working on a micro-nutrient of copper hydroxide to help prevent moss growth. He has discovered that four applications, two weeks apart in the fall, not only reduced moss populations on the order of 80 percent, but also prevented new moss growth in the plots even after the treatments stopped.

"In the summertime, at higher concentrations, there has been some injury to annual blue-grass," he said. "On the plots we only topped dressed and didn't treat, the top dressing obviously made the moss problem worse."

Rossi is now testing "extremely low levels of copper hydroxide that are applied throughout the golfing season. "We are working towards copper being used as a micro-nutrient that not only prevents moss invasion, but doesn't injure the grass," he said.

According to Rossi, superintendents have two possible approaches at the moment. "There's the desiccant route, which is probably a variable means for getting control of existing plants," he said. "And there's the nutritional route, where we strive to get suppression and prevention of further moss invasion."

"The desiccant methods will knock back what's there," he said, "but they won't prevent moss from returning. We have a lot of questions about spray volumes, availability, injury, and long-term effect issues. But for now, I think we're on the right track."

For Cybulski and many superintendents in the Northeast, the fight to control moss on the greens goes on. "The most effective procedure would be, ideally, to raise the height of cut on the greens," said Cybulski. "But golfers demand green speed and performance, and that makes moss tough to control."

**Water crisis**

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"The problem," he said, "is that your older sewage systems are gravity-flow, so the lowest end is the regional plant and at the upper end you have homes, businesses and golf courses. Unfortunately, there aren't water lines to deliver reclaimed water back up to those areas. So Ripley's idea is to build a system that taps into the sewage line - you get the water as it comes downstream. You'd dump the solid waste back in and let that go down to the regional plant. That allows you to claim some of the water. You'd recycle it on-site, and deliver it back to the golf course."

For the time being, that approach would not be cost-effective, according to Huck. "It's not yet perceived that we're into a serious situation in regard to water availability," he said. "But five or 10 years down the road, the guy that builds his plant now will be ready to go, and the other guys might be looking at brown fairways for a couple of years until they could install their own plants."

It remains to be seen how quickly Southern California golf courses react to an emerging crisis. Pat Gross, the Green Section's southwest regional director, isn't optimistic. "The unfortunate thing about golf course owners, whether it be private clubs or public courses, is that they don't pay attention until the water company is going to turn off the tap," he said. "I don't think the awareness is there yet about how these changes are going to impact the industry."

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