Super ideas: tree recycling, chemical cuts, and a tee blower

By Joel Joyner

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Innovative solutions to help save time and money in a maintenance operation is just what golf courses need when the economy starts to turn sour. From self-supporting tree recycling programs to reducing chemical use on the golf course to innovative debris blowers, superintendents John Gurke, Andrew Dalton and Larry Balke have implemented creative solutions that have proven successful at their courses.

TREE PROGRAM

At the Aurora Country Club in Wheaton, Ill., in the Chicago land area, superintendent John Gurke has developed a tree planting program that supports itself. Located on a small acreage property in a residential area, the club has no room for a landscape waste disposal site, according to Gurke. "We must recycle all landscape waste on site," he said. "What we've done is start a self-perpetuating tree program, whereby we cut and split all large tree material into firewood and chip smaller material for mulch."

The by-products are then sold to club members — delivered, stacked, and/or spread — for a cost of $50 per dump truck load. The money is deposited into a new tree fund. "This way, we pay for new plantings with money garnered from dead or removed plantings," Gurke said.

Bay Hill gets new greens, super

By Gary Burchfield

ORLANDO, Fla. — For 22 years, superintendent John Anderson raised corn and soybeans in north central Iowa before "retiring" to run a golf course in Florida. He took over as superintendent at Bay Hill Oct. 1 when longtime superintendent Dwight Kummer resigned to join a Florida company.

However, it's not all new for Anderson. He has been at Bay Hill for 13 years, the last 11 years as assistant superintendent. He knows the course. He knows the conditions. But now, the buck stops at his desk.

"There is a little extra pressure in March with the Bay Hill Invitational because it's on national TV. I've been through several of them as assistant superintendent, but this will be my first one as the golf course superintendent," Anderson said.

RECENT IMPROVEMENTS

With a nationally televised event coming up this spring, Anderson has a big job in front of him. Fortunately, the par-72, 7,207-yard Bay Hill Championship course, is in top condition. Anderson recently overseeded the greens with Laser Poa Trivialis and the roughs with Palmer Perennial Ryegrass. Additionally, all 18 greens were re-grassed last summer. They were planted with Tifdwarf 11 or 12 years ago, and that grass was about at the end of its natural life," Anderson said. He hired an outside firm to get rid of any soil pests or trouble-some organisms. After the treatment, he planted with TifEagle sod on plas-tic so it was basically bare roots when we put it down on the new base. It took about two years if the developer shows ongoing commitment to the environment."

Each year, a comprehensive report is submitted to Audubon International that details the environmental work done during the previous year. "We present information about projects planned for the next year, our efforts to protect the native wildlife population, and our work to limit pesticide use," said Jim Schilling, director of golf course operations here at the facility.

The report also addresses ongoing habitat enhancement and educational programs that teach club members and the community at large about the environment, course maintenance and the ways golf courses can be good neighbors.

GOING NATIVE

During 2000, the club replaced a total of two acres of golf course turf with native grasses and natural vegetation, enhanced an acre of habitat and natural areas near the golf courses and eliminated 15 sprinker heads and adjusted 50 more, resulting in additional irrigation water savings. "The most recent 2001 project removed 29,500 square feet of grass that needed maintenance."

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REDDING PESTICIDE PURCHASES
Superintendent Andrew Dalton at the Copper Hills Golf and Country Club in Oxford, Mich., just north of Detroit, has reduced his pesticide purchases by roughly 80 percent. The facility is a 27-hole, upscale, semi-private golf club. Dalton maintains Providence bentgrass greens and fairways and Pennscross bentgrass trees.

"Having many wooded areas, wetlands and fields, I tried to develop a conscientious maintenance program that consists of natural and organic fertilizers," said Dalton. "By using these types of products in my fertilizer program, I've been able to minimize fungicide applications. I have reduced pesticide purchases by about 80 percent which ultimately saves my club roughly $20,000 annually."

During his three years at Copper Hills, Dalton has only sprayed fairways for diseases and pests once during the growing season. "I'm not saying that I don't get disease. But when I do see it, it's a few spots here and there. Quite frankly, it's not worth our time, effort and money to treat it unless it goes beyond our threshold levels," he said.

A big savings for the club was not spending a dime last season on fungicides, said Dalton. "I had some fungicides in storage from the previous year that helped protect the greens and tees," he said.

Dalton primarily uses organic fertilizers NatureSafe by Griffin Industries and Soil Synergy by the Sanctuary Co. Since implementing the program back in 1999, the benefits continue to grow each year. "We bought a Lely spreader, mounted it to a tractor we had, and spread the organic material ourselves. Every year we save more and more money," he said.

REDICING OLD EQUIPMENT
Larry Balko, superintendent at the Heatherwood Country Club here in Birmingham, Ala., was faced with the challenge of removing debris from the tops of elevated tee boxes. "In the fall, leaves are falling faster than we can blow them off," he said.

Balko’s mechanic, Gary Dalton, searched the maintenance shop and discovered an old Billy Goat blower that had a broken handle.

"He cleaned out the old gas, changed the oil, and it fired up with the first pull," explained Balko. "He then removed the broken handle and mounted it on the..."
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back of a Toro SandPro in a three-point hitch style. "He had to do some welding and make a few modifications, but we can use the hydraulic lift," said Balko.

"The Billy Goat blower does the work of two people with backpack blowers," he said. "Needless to say, it isn't the best, but my general manager was very happy about saving to the club money." •

Oxford Greens

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sloping topography that will provide views of the surrounding countryside. "We expect Oxford Greens to become one of Connecticut's finest golf clubs," said Hill.

$150 million project

In addition to golf, the $150 million Oxford Greens Estates and Golf Club development will offer its 400 future homeowners a gated community and amenity-rich, main-tenance-free lifestyle. Model homes are expected to open in Fall 2002. The development is projected to generate more than 250 jobs and $2.5 million in annual taxes for the town.

Millford, Conn.-based TDP is targeting the Oxford Greens residential community to the state's soon-to-retire baby boomers—particularly those in Fairfield, New Haven, and Litchfield counties—who want a country club lifestyle without a move South. According to developers, there are more than one million baby boomers in the state, which represents the eighth-highest percentage for a state in the country.

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