



## THE PAUSE THAT REFRESHES

The scene outside my kitchen window says it is finally winter. We have had several inches of snow and, for the most part, golf is over for the year. The brief pause in the golf year will be welcome to superintendents and their families here in the North Country.

Mostly, northern superintendents like cold and snowy weather – “it tends to keep the riff raff out” is a commonly heard remark, usually repeated with a smile. It is a period I have always called “winterlude,” a time of normal workweeks, turf conferences and family vacations. A friend of mine who works in the south once asked me, “If cold miserable weather is so great, how come so many of you head south in the winter?” Good point!

It is especially easy to look forward to 2013 these days. Last year was a lousy one, a year many of us would like to forget. For much of America, it will be remembered for the drought and its effects that were felt far and wide. One look at the U.S. Drought Monitor tells the story. Wide swaths of the country were both dry and hot. In our town, below normal precipitation during the six-month heart of the golf season – including almost no rain in June – wreaked havoc on our golf courses.

Irrigation systems and pump stations weren't designed for the extra water, and superintendents exhausted themselves trying to keep up. Water supplies were depleted and leaks in irrigation systems were as abnormal as the weather. Thrust blocks that have held perfectly for 25 years were loosened in the dry soil as it shrunk, creating some really big problems. Stress levels on turf and golf course staff were at an all-time high. It may have been a challenging season, but it wasn't much fun.

If you believe tragedies often come in threes, then it was confirmed with the loss of Geoffrey Cornish, Stan Zontek and Neil Armstrong. Geoff and Stan were good friends; Neil Armstrong walked on the moon shortly after I assumed my Army duty station 20 miles north of Saigon. I met him briefly at the Bob Hope Christmas

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Show in 1969 and knew how much he loved golf. He was a great American I will never forget... although he didn't hit a golf ball on the moon as many assume – that was astronaut Alan Shepard.

And along with too many Americans, we faced the “Big C” up close and personal. I am not referring to my experience with skin cancer; in November my wife Cheryl was diagnosed with breast cancer. She has inspired me through surgery and subsequent treatment. It is an awful and brutal disease. Her courage, positive attitude and strength made me realize, once again, that I am a lucky man to have her as a spouse. She is my new hero.

The winter period isn't always as peaceful and calm as some seem to think. It can also be as stressful and difficult as summer. Maybe we don't worry about pythium or summer patch these days, but the concerns about pink snowmold and gray snowmold are real. The problem is you cannot do much when the golf course

is under three feet of snow.

And there isn't anything scarier to northern superintendents than ice accumulation. Not much can be done with problem, either, although we have tried everything imaginable. I remember damage to turf due to ice accumulation that wasn't fully healed until July 4th.

Some of us have the additional concern that comes from working with a golf facility that doesn't generate any income for several months. We might have the time to repair and repaint, but the GM says the budget won't allow it.

And then there is the responsibility of snow removal. We all want lots of snow, but cannot pretend we enjoy plowing it on weekends and evenings and holidays. “That's my life,” one colleague said to me. “Mow and plow!” Others have tasks related to cross country skiing and snowmobile trails.

The winter conference season should be a good one. Our WGCSA Symposium honored Charlie Wilson with the Distinguished Service Award in December, and the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association had its first Webinar in January, although you also had the option to attend in person. The GIS is being held in a favored place – San Diego. My guess is that it will be well attended and well received.

After the GIS, it is funny how we suddenly become fed up with winter weather and thoughts turn to spring. We are refreshed and anxious to get outdoors. It is a new season, opening day, green grass, and maybe even a new piece of equipment.

We are confident that we will return to more normal weather and, once again, experience what a great and satisfying profession managing a golf course can be. Bubbling to the surface is our perpetual belief that this year will be our best ever. **GCI**