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Look for these articles on our home page and in our e-newsletter this month.

SELLING ACCEPTANCE
Convincing the membership to greenlight a construction or renovation project can be a hurdle sometimes, but there are ways to make the process go more smoothly.

THE GREENSMOWER OF THE FUTURE – NOW
The day has come where machines are available to replace golf course maintenance staff.

TOOLS FOR TALLYING
The Golf Course Builders Association of America's new guide to cost estimating can help to keep those building or renovating a course on budget.

PODCAST: GET SCHOOLED ABOUT SOIL
Soil testing can be a useful tool for planning a course's pesticide program. Learn how to get the most out of it.

GIS COVERAGE
In the run up to the Golf Industry Show, which takes place Feb 5-7 in New Orleans, we feature several articles about the industry's biggest event. After the show, don't forget to view our video interviews from the show floor and read our coverage of the educational sessions.
New Quick Adjust Reels. Yes it’s now this easy to adjust the height-of-cut. Just click in a power drill on either side of the cutting unit, hit the trigger, watch the gauge, and you’re done. No wrenches, and no need to double-check both sides. (Thanks to SpeedLink technology, they match perfectly every time.) But don’t just read about these reels. See them for yourself at GIS 2009 or call your John Deere Golf distributor for a demo. Consider us part of your crew.
PRIVATE PROBLEMS

He's not a member, grandma. He's a caddy.” Ah, yes … the whiny voice of the pubescent Spaulding Smails character in the movie Caddyshack. It brings a smile to the many golf/comedy enthusiasts who are familiar with the movie.

Spaulding reminds me that, during the next few years, there might be fewer places in America for the bratty rich kids to speak so eloquently of nonmembers because 10 to 15 percent of private clubs - equating to about 500 facilities - are in danger of extinction, according to the National Golf Foundation. An increasing number of private clubs are dealing with declining membership - 13 percent on average, according to NGF – and allowing outside play from non-members.

Furthermore, among at-risk clubs – defined as those reporting financial difficulties – the average membership decline is 29 percent, and 57 percent of them say they’re operating at a loss, according to NGF. Reasons for declining membership include the financial downturn, job relocation, a desire for course variety, access to fields of play, and family obligations. Private clubs are responding to membership decline by offering special membership arrangements, making capital improvements (if they have access to enough capital), expanding health-conscious offerings and targeting women and children.

But even implementing those revenue-generating ideas isn’t going to save all the financially troubled private clubs. A more drastic change will take place for some: going public. But this is nothing new. It’s been happening for years. Conversions have outnumbered closures 10 to one during the past 10 years, according to NGF. Between 1999 and 2008, 387 private clubs converted to public facilities, and 39 closed. However, it’s more likely the older, more storied clubs (many with old money) will remain private, and the newer clubs that lack distinct history or reputation – and obviously financial stability and planning – will be the ones to convert to public facilities.

Conversions could be a double-edged sword for superintendents. They probably won’t have as easy a time maintaining a public course compared to a private one because of the increase of the number of tee times and outings and the variety of golfers. However, they’ll probably have fewer headaches caused by those power-wielding members nagging them about every little detail on the course. Instead, it’ll be all about the bottom line. Salaries could fluctuate, too, and budgets will be managed even tighter. All considered, they’re different problems resulting in the same headaches.

Superintendents facing pending conversions should use their network to talk to peers who’ve been in similar situations. After learning more about the transition, some superintendents might decide to spruce up their resume and seek a job change.

When the private-to-public conversion happens at serviceable facilities, superintendents will have to adapt and manage the operation differently. Be prepared for that. Also recognize you may be better off as a result of public money’s potential, albeit with fewer laughs caused by the Spaulding Smails of the world.

For club members, they won’t have to worry about the Al Czerviks of the world razing their beloved courses to build condos, office buildings or homes. They just might be booking tees times with the Danny Noonans and Tony D’Annunzios of the world. It might be that or shelling out a lot more dough to join the upper echelon of exclusive private clubs.

H

John Walsh
Editor

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Pat Jones’ column that quotes Ben Franklin (“Different, yet the same,” November issue, page 66) — “we must hang together, gentlemen, or surely we will hang separately,” — applies to the different factions of the green industry, and on a grassroots level, to professionals and superintendents. The way things are now, if pros and superintendents can’t work together for the betterment of the course and their jobs, owners will use that as another reason to let one or the other go and find a cheaper alternative.

Todd Kueppers
PGA Professional
General manager
Chisago Lakes Golf Course
Lindstrom, Minn.

Multiple designations
“Changing roles” (November issue, page 30) is a great article. I have a question, though: How about those certified from the GCSAA and CMAA? I may be the only one. A goal of mine was to become certified with all three organizations (GCSAA, CMAA, PGA of America). Only one to go.

David Gourlay CGCS, CCM
Chief operating officer
Colbert Hills Golf Course
Manhattan, Kan.

Editor’s note: We checked with the GCSAA about how many certified golf course superintendents are also certified club managers — and Gourlay is the only active CGCS/CCM the association

(continued on page 89)

MORE GOLF?

The most critical aspect of the golf industry is the declining number of rounds, which is affecting many areas. Capital purchases for golf maintenance are being postponed; new carts aren’t being purchased; PGA members are being fired and their contracts are being reduced; superintendents are losing their jobs and being pressured to cut costs; golf equipment isn’t being sold; and golf course owners and operators are struggling with less income.

For the past several years, I’ve watched the industry struggle with how to reverse this trend and have seen many programs developed to bring new people into the game with limited and marginal success. A lot of time and energy has been spent without asking the people who’ve provided our past success — current golfers — to participate in the process.

Instead of trying to convince someone to start playing the game, wouldn’t it be easier to convince existing golfers to play more? Studies show most of the new golfers who stay with the game have been introduced to it by someone who plays already. So, by encouraging people to play more golf, we could achieve double the value of such a program.

I encourage industry leaders to start a “More golf?” campaign similar to the successful “Got milk?” campaign. Imagine the economic impact if we could encourage the existing 20 million golfers to play one more round of golf.

Jeff Hoag
Co-owner
Scott Lake Country Club
Comstock Park, Mich.
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**USING WINTER WISELY**

One of my favorite questions this time of year is, “What do golf course guys do in the winter?” I guarantee those of you employed at courses that close during the winter have been asked this before. After a poor attempt at being funny, I tell people what really happens. And after my answer the winter have been asked this before. After getting more involved with my association, overhauling equipment, writing articles, etc., I generally get a surprised look from someone who seems impressed, and he responds, “Really?”

A wise man once said the off season is for improving and formulating your plans for the coming year. Meanwhile, the growing season is for implementing plans and programs you created during the off season. Others have said the off season is when we should look to improve ourselves professionally and personally, finding a balance between the two.

In November, I pondered how I could improve myself and the facility heading into 2009. I always need to improve and learn more about golf course maintenance, but on what should I concentrate? Worthwhile areas all professionals can delve into include:

- Taking or teaching classes;
- Working with a technician to maintain an equipment fleet;
- Discussing your future with the facility and beyond with your superintendent in your annual review; and
- Participating in the national and chapter associations.

**SHOP SCHOOL**

There are times when I think I know more about maintaining an equipment fleet than I do. Admittedly, I don't know much about diagnosing significant problems. My skills consist of these basic maintenance tasks:

- Fluid, spark plug and rim/tire changes;
- Grinding reels/bedknives; and
- Bearing/seal changes on cutting units.

These basic tasks are necessary to help technicians if maintaining a large fleet with no other support. But by no means do my skills take the place of our technician. Consequently, I spend much of the winter with the technician, learning how to improve my skills in diagnosing these types of problems.

While talking to a group of technicians at a conference last year, we discussed how some new assistants who graduated recently lack basic skills. Among turf techs, the biggest concern was the lack of mechanical knowledge. Some turf programs offer technical courses, but practical experience is superior. We need to roll up our sleeves, get our hands dirty and learn from technicians.

I spend much of the winter with the technician, learning how to improve my skills in diagnosing these types of problems...

We need to roll up our sleeves, get our hands dirty and learn from technicians.

**GIS**

This year will be my third opportunity to attend the Golf Industry Show. I’m fortunate I’m afforded the chance, particularly considering economic hardships. Having been an assistant for eight years, there have been years in which I haven’t been able to attend, so I understand and appreciate the opportunity. Take every chance you get to attend conferences and continuing education. It doesn’t matter if it’s locally or nationally, the experience is worthwhile. If you don’t know what’s available, ask your superintendent or others in your area what you can do and how much the club will be able to support your professional development.

I heard a disturbing story last year from a local superintendent who asked his assistant if he wanted to attend the GIS, and his response was, “Let me check to see if my friends are going.” Assistants shouldn’t hesitate to take every chance they get to help themselves and their employer. The potential connections and meetings can be extremely valuable to your future.

**ASSOCIATION INVOLVEMENT**

Networking and relationships will always be the best asset of belonging to a professional organization. This off-season, talk to your superintendent or call your chapter office to find out about becoming involved. Association committees always need able bodies and minds – volunteer to join. Similar to attending GIS, serving on a chapter committee helps you build relationships with other professionals. In serving my chapter, the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents, I’ve met superintendents who’ve become mentors to me just as much as the people for whom I’ve worked. Opportunities for involvement are endless.

If you asked a group of moderately involved superintendents, they’d probably say that just by participating, they’ve benefited. Either through continuing education offerings, golf events, community service projects, article writing, public speaking/moderating and networking, association involvement gives you the tools for success in a competitive market.

For example, there was a position open at high-profile club being built in the Chicago area last year. Out of more than 200 applicants, the three finalists were highly engaged assistant superintendents who served on the MAGCS's assistant superintendent committee. That means the assistant committee is doing its job: preparing assistants to become superintendents.

What will this New Year bring for you? Hopefully, it will include a renewed understanding that opportunities to grow are all around you. Use your downtime to relax and become a better professional. Sometimes growth and change are difficult, but if you think about it and try, you might surprise yourself.