

HOW TO MAKE AN 'UNBUDGETED' PURCHASE

How does a superintendent persuade his green committee to okay the purchase of equipment in mid-season, months away from the new fiscal year? This kind of request is not as unusual as it sounds. I've known of cases in which a superintendent discovers a piece of equipment at the GCSAA show, for instance. If he had known about it, he would have included the item in his budget. In my case, several superintendents at nearby clubs had purchased riding triplex greensmowers. They told me these remarkable machines saved time, labor and performed superbly. These were weighty arguments to throw at a superintendent whose walking greensmowers were about to expire; but good arguments or not, they still were not sufficient to persuade me to confront the green committee with a purchase request when the season was far from ended.

Wishes have a way of latching onto needs: when the two meet, some action is required. So it was with me. I had scheduled extensive construction to begin after Labor Day—a time when my crew would be without the support of the summer-working college students. I knew it would be a "hassle." The five or six men who ordinarily would be mowing the greens, which was half my crew, could better be employed on the construction project. So, I decided to try to persuade the committee to buy the riding greensmower.

Once this decision was made, the next obvious step would be to present my case before the committee.

As I read the situation, I had one major hurdle to jump: inflation. Most clubs—and mine was no exception—reacted to the present inflation by tightening up on spending. I could convince the committee, if I could prove to them that the machine was all I promised and that it would pay for itself within a short time.

I knew I had four elements working in my favor that might offset the committee's natural hesitancy to spend additional funds.

In 14 years as superintendent at Briarwood, I've never requested anything frivolous. Every piece of equip-

The budget is not sacrosanct; it can be amended to include new purchases—provided the request is justified and the committee is willing to listen

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ment has created a better-groomed and more efficient course; consequently, trust was an integral element in the working relationship I had established with the chairman of the green committee, the committee, the board and the membership. In fact, three of the past chairmen still serve on the committee, including the one who originally hired me. I knew that I would be listened to. Secondly, the green chairman is mechanically inclined and has an excellent rapport with my experienced and wonderful mechanic. Thirdly, my mechanic has loyally and expertly been repairing the club's grounds equipment for 13 years. The club officials and members respect his ability to keep the equipment in top repair. In addition, my crew is known for their consideration of the equipment entrusted to their care. They, too, are loyal, well-liked and trusted. These considerations I hoped would create an open climate in which the subject of amending the budget could be thoroughly broached.

I called the local dealer and asked if the triplex mower was available for a demonstration on a day I knew the green chairman would be at the club. Then I called the chairman and asked if he was available to attend the demonstration, emphasizing how important the demonstration would be to the club. He kindly consented to attend, even offered to call a few committee members to find out if they could also attend.

On the designated day, the green chairman and one of the past green chairmen showed up to watch the demonstration. Both were significantly impressed by it and by the way the mower passed their own tests. They

timed it and requested the operator to mow our most difficult green—one that has traps up very close and narrow at both ends. They were both pleasantly surprised that two of the crew on such short notice could operate the mower with such skill and ease.

They were particularly impressed by the machine's smoothness and consistency, the same characteristics that had attracted me, plus the efficiency with which it operated as compared to the walking greensmowers.

After the dealer left, leaving the demonstration model with us for 10 days' use, my green chairman asked how we could amortize the mower if it were purchased now. That was the only realistic method, said the chairman, by which arrangements could be made to buy the mower before the next budget period.

That evening I phoned the sales representative and asked him to send me a bid as soon as possible.

A few days later my chairman surprised me by asking if I could submit the bid by the next board meeting, only 10 days away. He requested that I submit with the bid a letter to him justifying the purchase, showing how the mower could be amortized. He wanted a picture of the mower included with the report for the board committee's viewing. I was elated, sat down to write the letter and decided to ask for two mowers instead of one!

The letter detailed the present daily practice of sending out five, sometimes six, walking greensmowers, a job which takes half the grounds crew. The time consumed in mowing the greens, a putting green and nursery, runs about a total of 15 hours or three hours per man, sometimes longer.

The new riding mower rolls the dew down, then rakes up the creeping bent in front of the cutting blades, eliminating the dew, and helping to eliminate thatch and grain.

Considerable time is saved due to faster and easier transportation from the grounds maintenance building. Operator fatigue also is minimized by the riding mower.

On days when there is no play, usually on Monday mornings, the mower can mow all putting surfaces in

continued

UNBUDGETED continued

about 4½ hours. (This time was clocked on an inexperienced driver and would be reduced as he gained experience with the machine.)

The letter went on to cite specific instances of time- and labor-saving examples with which we had experimented. These in turn were broken down into total hours per week saved and then translated into dollar figures. I went on to add to the regular jobs the mower performed, a list of other maintenance jobs that are time-consuming but essential that the men would be free to perform.

My reasoning for purchasing two mowers was that two men, instead of five or six, could mow in five hours or less. In case of breakdown, one machine would provide backup. Buying two machines would save the club \$500: one would be purchased outright, the other billed in October.

The letter further detailed the method by which the club would save money by hiring one man to replace two crew members who left in August. By eliminating the higher salary of one man, in eight weeks, from August to

October, the club would save \$1,248 (a little less than half the cost of the mower). I mentioned also that both walking greensmowers were six years old, and the board already had approved a purchase of a new (\$600) one.

I assured the board that both mowers could be amortized in two years. They would allow the maintenance department to perform better and more efficiently and would be some insurance in the event of a labor crisis.

I listed the names of the six surrounding clubs that had greensmowers and the names of the superintendents who swore by them.

My chairman saw me a few days after receiving my letter. Without blinking an eye at my new request for two mowers, he asked me to send the letter to the other members of the grounds and green committee.

A few days before the scheduled meeting, he informed me that he had talked with all of the committee, who, by now, had read the letter. Everyone was positive, except some wanted one mower, some two. "Okay, let's try for

two," he said, "and see what happens."

I was invited to the meeting but was required only to stay a short time. My wise chairman had talked personally with all of the board (especially the treasurer) the day before meeting. Consequently, the board took only a short time to reach its decision: two machines, one of which would be paid for in July and the other at the start of the fiscal year, but with the understanding that we use both now.

Neither I nor the board has regretted buying the two machines. Both riding greensmowers have performed far better than I expected. The members, I think, have noticed the difference in the putting quality. They, too, are happy about the purchase.

In reviewing the whole problem of purchasing before the start of the new fiscal year, two elements contributed to the successful conclusion of the problem: one, a sympathetic and aware membership who is sensitive to the needs and advancement of the grounds and green committees; and the other, more obvious, one, a certain boldness, tenacity and courage of conviction by the superintendent. □

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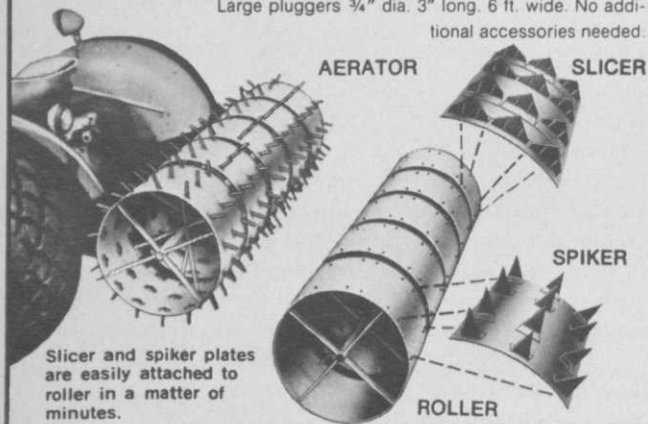
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