

# Anatomy Of A Greens Budget

During a recent educational seminar held during the annual spring meeting of the Massachusetts Golf Association, near Boston, several noted authorities on turfgrass management dissected the problems with maintenance management.

Included on the panel were Wayne Zoppo, president of the New England Greens Superintendent Association; William G. Buchanan, Mid-Atlantic Director of the USGA Green Section; Geoffrey Cornish, president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects and Richard J. Shea, member of the MGA committee and a green chairman at Bellevue Golf Club, Melrose, Mass.

Over 600 club officials, superintendents, club pros, managers and owners attended the spring educational seminars. Following is a transcript of the greens budget study.

**Zoppo:** One of the biggest problems for superintendents today is vandalism. You never know from one day to the next what the course is going to look like. At my club, we have spent an average of \$600 the last few years just on flags and flagsticks alone. Picket fences are always being damaged and destroyed. Ball washers are always being broken. Bridges are being burnt. Sometimes greens are ripped up. Tee markers are always being stolen. That will give you an idea of the type of vandalism.

Because we have only 2,000 rounds of golf a year, some of this damage happens in the daytime hours. Some of the things we are doing to prevent vandalism are: the caddy takes in the flags at night and one of the golf course workmen puts them out in the morning. Each member of the course crew is instructed to ask any non-member to please leave the golf course. We have a security officer patrolling the grounds from 4 to 8:30 p.m. daily.

I'm not really sure if this works, though, because the kids that are asked to leave, of course during the daytime hours, sometimes come back at night and cause damage. Another alternative is to let local policemen play the course during slow periods of play, this way they have more of an interest when something might happen at the club.

In an effort to try to save money instead of using the standard type of tee markers, we use 2x4's which we cut up into 2" x 2" blocks. Another solution to vandalism is to consider fencing in the course, but this would cost an enormous amount of money.

Labor for a golf course operation is one of the major problems for the superintendent because of the acute shortage of trained workmen all over the country. The superintendent and club officials should make a determined effort to attract a better class of steady workers. Work requirements on the course can be analyzed carefully so a minimum crew of reliable workmen can be maintained permanently. Wages and other fringe benefits which are comparable to other forms of employment in the area must be kept. You must also remember the most modern labor saving equipment should be available to the superintendent for his efficient operation, which in turn, saves labor. A good example of this is a sand trap rake.

It is difficult to set up any type of general standard as to how many workmen should be employed full-time. It all depends upon how much equipment repair work is performed on the facilities. Another factor we can take into consideration, is how much construction work is performed, spring and fall. First of all, you need a good man who can get the job done right, and second of all, good men are hard to hire for only short periods of time. It is also difficult to set up any general standard as to how many men are needed to maintain the average 18-hole course

during the growing season.

Much depends upon design, the physical characteristics of the course and also being able to get the maximum efficiency out of the modern hydraulic equipment available today. Other factors to consider are, how much play do you have? How many times do you cut greens, fairways, tees and aprons? The number and extent of sand traps to be maintained? How much rough do you have? How often do you cut the rough? The degree of excellence the membership expects and requires, and how much money is available to the superintendent to perform his duties correctly?

In the last 10 years there has been a great emphasis on grooming the course to the extent some courses cut greens six and seven days a week, fairways, tees and aprons are cut four to five times a week and all roughs are manicured to the point where it is in peak condition all the time.

Now with labor costs to maintain a golf course skyrocketing in the last few years, almost every golf course superintendent has undoubtedly been asked at one time or another to trim his labor costs. How do we do this? We could consider cutting greens only four times a week, the suggested method would be to cut greens Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday. This would save an enormous amount of overtime on weekends. Fairways could be cut two or three times a week instead of four to five times a week. The rough doesn't have to be in peak condition all the time. The superintendent can aim certain weeks of the year to have his rough in peak condition. Years ago when you hit a bad shot, it wound up 30 feet into the rough and you were penalized. You wound up in an area that probably wasn't cut all season. Now most likely, this area is cut all the time. I feel that these are the areas that we can really save some money.



# Anatomy

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I'd like to give the green chairmen and the superintendents another thought to think about. Up until last year I was a great believer in spraying my greens every single week for disease with some type of fungicide. But with money the way it has been the last few years, last year I went to spraying my greens every 10 days, which worked out very well. I didn't have any problems but

I think it should be left up to the superintendent as to how many times, a week or every two weeks he sprays, but this is food for thought.

You have to remember that every golf course is different. The superintendent and the greens chairman are the people who have to make the final decisions, and implement an efficient operation as to the level of maintenance that the

membership can afford.

**Buchanan:** Maintenance of the golf course, is the prime area where everybody talks about reducing the greens budget. To be able to do the work on the course in an efficient manner, we have to have equipment. The days of the 20 man crew are gone. With courses today, if you are a highly mechanized course maybe you can operate with seven to nine men. But this is only the course which is well mechanized. Manufacturers have been aware of the situation and are coming out with some really fine turf maintenance equipment. We realize the price of this equipment is getting way up, but the number of man hours saved in operating this equipment efficiently and in the manner for which it's designed can really make a big difference in the overall maintenance cost. The labor saving value for these greens mowers, the sand trap rakes that claim big capacity, and these mounted spray rigs and mounted topdressers is just remarkable.

An example with the triplex greens mowers — we've seen that it really doesn't affect the putting quality of the greens that much. Granted, there is some minor differences, even on the PGA tour this last year out of their 40 some odd tournaments, about 25 percent of their courses are still using triplex mowers during the championship. So only the clubs that can really have the luxury of the high budgets and the maintenance crew, still mow with the single unit, except maybe on the weekends or in the spring and fall, when the crews are lower and time is critical on the weekend.

Just as an example, triplex mowers with single units find a lot of clubs going out and breaking the course down into six areas. Each person will have three greens to mow with a single unit and so you've got six people out mowing. It might take a man an hour and 45 minutes to two hours to get this operation done. By the time he gets his equipment back and cleaned up he's ready to go again. You can purchase two triplex greens mowers and two people can mow the course in the same time it took all six to do it. So we're talking about four man hours to mow the greens as opposed to 12 man hours. This is a savings of eight man hours each time.

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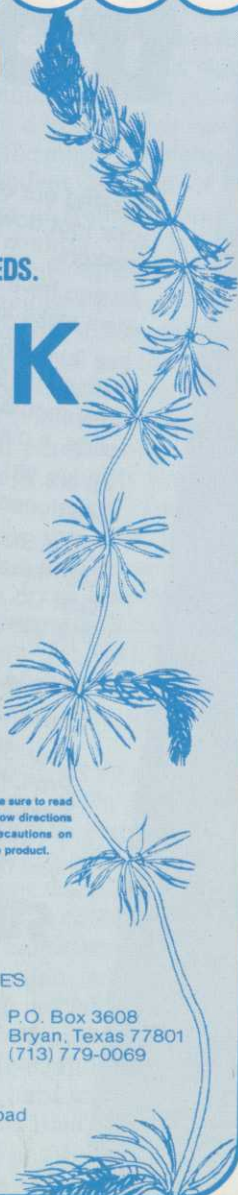
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Not every club is going to be able to go with these numbers. We had a fellow on the west coast who sat down and figured if he's paying his people \$2 an hour, he can save 10 minutes a day on any particular operation that's done, he can save \$600 a year. If he can increase this to 30 minutes a day, or 30 minutes every time this particular operation is done, he can save up to \$2,300 a year. If you can save an hour each time you did some major operation, you can save up to \$4,500 a year. Which is quite a little difference. Triplex mowers and power sand trap rakes reduce bunker maintenance unbelievably.

With these mechanical sand trap rakes, crews are raking down three inches, saving an unbelievable amount of time and all the bunkers are going to play the same, because all of them have been raked to the same depth. There's another benefit in this, raking at a three inch depth, automatic weeding takes place in the bunker so you can save again on chemicals and man hours. When raking at a three inch depth, weeds never have a chance to really get up and grow.

Most of this equipment is fairly common. Each manufacturer has his own product. With what we have seen, a lot has to be asked to compare the machines and everything else.

If you have a particular green or a particular area on the course giving you trouble, it probably would be worthwhile to close this area down. So in the spring or fall, close this area to play. If it's a green, put in a temporary green or an alternate green, or whatever you want to call it. Spend a little money to make this thing nicer. Make an acceptable putting area. You can go ahead and make a 2,000 sq. ft. area that your golfing membership can play and have a reasonable chance of making a putt on. This will give your green a rest. You can do your aerification, you can do your topdressing, just eliminate the traffic off of this area and give it a chance to recover. This will save an awful lot

of money in the long run, trying to maintain a weaker area. We can have a stronger grass, we're going to have to use less fertilizer, we have to.

**Cornish:** These times have happened before where course budgets have been cut. But the overwhelming lesson that has been learned from those periods is that the man who has to make the final decision where that money is to be saved is the superintendent. The late Lawrence Dickinson repeatedly pointed out that even during the depression and war years. Superintendents were the men that made those final decisions.

In regard to design, of course there are two ways money can be saved. One is on the long range program, that is namely establishing what we refer to as a master plan for the golf course and generally mean that master plan objectives are to make your course more interesting for everybody, retain the interest of a high handicapper or the low handicapper. The first thing to think of is the trees. Trees can increase your maintenance costs as every superintendent will tell you. Look your trees over. You don't have to eliminate beautiful specimen trees, but you can think of doing some pruning to let a little more light and air through. Incidentally, talking with a number of clubs, they tell me we're going to cut down on the tree work in the rough. We're not going to do any of that over winter, but gentlemen I want to assure you that if you do that and don't keep after that pruning and thinning, you're going to find that your fungicide bill goes up immensely, because you are going to be cutting the air and light out from the putting greens and also from the fairways.

I know as I go around the nation and Canada, more and more superintendents are topdressing with straight sand and almost inevitably there are big savings, but it is important to get those sands analyzed before you start. And the USGA has put out specifications in that regard to show medium sand is the ideal one. I know some disasters that come about through topdressing with the wrong sand. The USGA also recommends it be coarse sand.

There's no control over what's happened in inflation. Most costs

are fixed. Member flak should be directed to the chairman of the green committee. He's going to have to wear a new hat this year. He's got to be a diplomat. He's got to communicate to the members why the changes are taking place on the golf course.

**Shea:** First of all, I think we have reached the point where we are in agreement we have to cut back on maintenance costs. We have to alter our standards of course maintenance. How do we get this message across to our members that in light of increasing dues you're going to have to put up with courses that aren't quite what you'd like them to be. As green chairmen, we have to get the point across to our members diplomatically. I'm not sure that can be done, but I think we have to try.

Just how do you think this can be done? Nobody really has the answer because we all come from so many different parts. If you own the club yourself, you don't have to be diplomatic. But most of us come from clubs that have members. And our members have a right to know what's going on. I suggest that you do it through communication. First of all, establish exactly what the standards are going to be. Once you've established what these change of standards are going to be, inform your members.

You do this in two ways: First, all our clubs have different members. I think you owe it to them to check with some of the older members. If you sat down with them and explained exactly what you're trying to accomplish, then you can tell them the changes you're making this year are not really going to affect the dues, but perhaps it would have some effect on next year's charges. If you converse with them head-to-head, I think they'll understand. Secondly, most clubs have some type of a vote that goes out to their membership. Gently put it to a vote and then let it go out. Tell your members you're going to alter the standards somewhat and request their cooperation. You can put it up on a bulletin board you're going to do certain things on the course and tell them why. But you don't hide from your membership what you're going to do. □