

# Superintendent skills

By Jim Converse



Jim Converse is one of America's leading botanical artists. His paintings and drawings have appeared in numerous national publications, and his weed and grass identification books have become standard tools of the trade. Jim is far more than a botanical artist, however, with years of

practical turf experience. Before assuming turf management responsibilities at OM Scott & Sons Company, more than 20 years ago, he worked as a golf course superintendent. After tours in Scotts Research and Retail Training areas, Jim was transferred to the ProTurf Division where he headed their training and educational programs. He is currently concentrating his talents in the area of visual communications.

## The maintenance building

It's doubtful if early golf course designers gave even the slightest consideration to the construction of maintenance buildings. Maintenance just wasn't that involved and surely not all that important. Most any building could serve as a place to store a few pieces of equipment, and if it had a little extra room for repairs, so much the better. Thus, the structure that served as the former owner's tool shed, milk barn, or horse stable often became headquarters for golf course maintenance. Some have turned out to be amazingly suitable and efficient buildings, while others barely serve the purpose. But, if there is a lack of uniformity in construction, think about the location. Just finding the maintenance building on many golf courses can be a major undertaking.

The increased requirements of golf course care often stretch the original maintenance building into a small complex. Today's equipment not only necessitates more storage space, but also additional facilities for repair. Fertilizers, fungicides, seed and other turf care products also require places for proper storage. Many times the intricate controls and parts for automatic irrigation are housed in this area. The superintendent's office is here, along with the files that hold soil analysis, water quality reports, inventory lists, purchase receipts and a host of other vital records. It also serves as

a home base for all the workers on the golf course.

Maintenance buildings may lack a uniformity of construction and location from golf course to golf course, but they do serve the same basic function. That function is to act as a 'hub' for all golf course care. How efficient the performance of that hub is, is most often determined by the method in which it was organized.

It is the superintendent who must decide the arrangement of the maintenance building and how it ultimately operates. It is he who determines where equipment will be placed, how supplies are to be stored, how the office is to be organized, where the workers will park their cars and such trivial things as the location of trash cans. Only he can judge the fate of empty fertilizer bags, oil cans, or worn-out and obsolete equipment. Total responsibility for how the maintenance area is organized and how it contributes to the overall golf course operation rests with the superintendent.

People who have the opportunity to visit many golf courses come away with vivid impressions of the maintenance building and the area around it. What they see can range from very impressive at the top of the scale, to almost disastrous at the bottom. At the top are the facilities that give an appearance of exceptional orderliness, thought and care. Equipment is clean and stored properly. Fertilizer and supplies are arranged in an orderly manner. Tools are hung in their proper places. The superintendent's office has a business-like appearance. Areas around the building are cleanly trimmed and mowed. The whole workplace gives an impression of organization without an unreasonable penchant for neatness. It's a situation which helps each golf course worker realize the importance of his own efforts.

The view at the bottom of the scale is stark, but just as vivid. Equipment is covered with dirt, grease and grass clippings, and shoved into a haphazard mass of disorder. Tools and piles of soil, which have been in the same place for weeks, are scattered across the floor. There are all

kinds of things to trip over. Broken fertilizer bags spill their contents into mounds of waste and clutter. The superintendent's office is a study in disarray and confusion. There are rotten tires, pieces of equipment, boards and empty coke cans around the edge of the buildings. Weeds that are over three feet high almost hide the rusty running gear of a 1936 Chevy truck.

These two descriptions may seem exaggerated and distorted, but in truth there is more than just a little reality in both. A good superintendent could never place himself in the picture we have painted at the bottom of the scale. By the same token, he can't become so preoccupied with neatness and orderliness in the maintenance area that golf course care becomes secondary.

Someone once said, "Show me your maintenance building and I'll tell you what kind of superintendent you have." It's a statement with a lot of fact. For it's the one place on the golf course that reveals most about the superintendent and his approach to his responsibility. It can be a building that is too long, too short and far too inconvenient. But, its organization and utilization as the primary tool in maintenance serves as a strong measure for his effectiveness.

The maintenance building is seldom seen by more than just a few people, and it was never intended to be a thing of beauty. Nothing about its construction can guarantee superior greens or disease-free turf. It is only an arm, or tool for the care of the course. There are superintendents who insist that the maintenance building and golf course maintenance have very little in common. In the literal sense, they are right. But, the maintenance building can act as one of the best barometers for predicting the total response of golf course care.

The maintenance building, its care and operation can be a true reflection of the superintendent. It mirrors his ability to organize, control and execute the responsibilities of his profession. It tells us much about his approach to his work and attention to details. Work that originates in an atmosphere of disorder and confusion is almost certain to end that way.