

What Is It You Do In The Winter?

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When you are out and about meeting new people, the standard question asked is, as an icebreaker, "what do you for a living?" Everyone loves to talk about themselves so this is a perfect way for two people to engage in a conversation, talking about work. Now, when you ask me what I do and I respond with, "I am an assistant superintendent of a golf course," you generally receive two responses. First, the courtesy, "oh really?" followed by a puzzled look on their face. Not only did I say I worked for a golf course, but I also said I was an assistant to something. Now they are really confused and with a slight cock of the head, their follow-up question is, "So, what do you do at the golf course?"

This question is easy in the summer, I manage a golf course and I make it look and play the way it does everyday. At this time of year, you have to go into much greater detail because you know the next question. "What do you do during the winter?" When I am asked this question my first reaction is to laugh and say not much, but in all actuality, we get a lot accomplished in the winter. The winter months are a more stress-free, laid back and enjoyable time of year. It is a time for us to take a breath, not sweat daily routines and not worry about the course playing perfectly. I love it when it snows. The course looks so good under a blanket of snow. It signifies us changing gears and taking care of our needs indoors. I am going to share with you how we prepare Dellwood Hills in the winter, for the summer months.

Our priorities for the winter months are simple but don't necessarily have a definite deadline until April 1st.

Painting. It is becoming a thing of the past with plastic hazard stakes and all weather wood. Back in the day painting was a major labor expense with all the pieces on the course we had to cover. There were garbage cans, ball washers, water cooler stands, tee signs and benches. Fortunately, we only have to paint our tee markers. Our benches are now stained with polyurethane and we only have to stain them every three years.

Tree pruning and removal. We have an ongoing process with tree removal due

to the large amount of trees at the end of their life expectancy. Our course was built 35 years ago and was littered with a large amount of garbage trees for quick growth. Today, these trees are dying and are becoming a safety concern to our membership. Every tree we cut down is carefully selected to ensure its removal is beneficial to the course. We will prune and trim up trees for playability and mobility. We also look for unwanted branches like suckers to be removed.

Burning. What do we do with all of our rubbish? We are fortunate to have the space on site to burn most of what we cut down. This saves us big bucks rather than having it removed by a separate company. After obtaining a permit from the city, we have a controlled burn. These burns are a long and slow process and usually take two or three weeks for us to finish. Most of what we burn is last year's material along with the past summers debris. We only burn in the winter because marshmallows taste the best this time of year.

Reel grinding and mechanical work. Our mechanic stays busy by taking all our equipment apart and putting it back together again. He is in charge of making everything look and work like new again while also doing the annual maintenance, like reel grinding. When the temperatures dip below the single digits in the early mornings I help out until the temperatures rise up after lunch. What a great way for assistants to learn new traits of the job.

Education. January kicks off with the Green Expo and what a great way to start thinking turf again. A bit of education combined with a great opportunity to network allows us to effectively brush up on our skills. We do not always attend the national show but again, it is a great opportunity for anyone to attend. Other than attending the shows, we get a chance in the winter to meet up with other superintendents and have a round table discussion and talk turf. This was reassuring last year due to our severe weather where everyone was in the same boat.

Brainstorming. Anything and everything we think of is discussed throughout the winter to help out our operation. There are some crazy ideas that get

brought up but that is what we want to encourage, creative thinking. It is also a time to read up on all our publications we receive throughout the year. Numerous times we will toss aside a publication or just skim over it in the summer. The winter months give us an opportunity to catch up on key articles that pertain to us.

Clean and reorganize our facility. It is very easy to overlook misplaced items during the season when time is tight. I'm not talking about a misplaced shovel, I'm talking big items that don't get put back on the shelves or up in the rafters. It is amazing how time goes by and certain things don't get done. We are starting our third year in our new facility and we are still working out kinks to make our operation run smoothly. Each year we find better ways to maximize productivity.

Plowing. The clubhouse is open year round, and we maintain the sidewalks along with our maintenance facility's parking lot when it snows. This isn't a big deal because most of what our job entails is weather dependent, rain or snow.

Audubon Society. I am currently taking on this project for Dellwood Hills to become a certified course. This is very rewarding to me as I get my feet wet with many new issues and then I have the opportunity to implement them into our regime. It is a very time consuming process, and I dedicate about 8 hours a week to completing the project.

Everyday, it goes without fail, I answer questions about our profession because people are so intrigued with what we do. I am happy to tell them, I manage a team which performs maintenance tasks to a golf course, so when you come out and play, it looks and plays the best possible way. You see, back in college, I couldn't sell my major to someone within 30 seconds and now, as an assistant superintendent, I am happy to explain what I am passionate about. The more we can educate golfers on what we do, the more they will see our perspective and understand the ins and outs of our profession.