

Spring Break

By NATE USELDING
The Bridges Golf Club

It's that time of year again where we are transitioning into our spring season and spring break is upon us. Do you remember all the good times you had on your spring breaks in high school and college? Have you ever thought about reliving those times minus the craziness? March is the peak season of travel for students and families to take advantage of a week off from school and venture off to a warmer climate. For the past two years, my wife and I made plans to travel for our own spring break to sunny Mexico, and we're off again this year.

It is our annual one-week vacation where we set aside money monthly for a whole year to splurge on a week of rest and relaxation. We pick the month of March, not because everyone else travels during this month but because it works the best for our work schedules. March is a perfect time of year because all the major projects are completed and there are only last minute preparations left to attend to. So why not take a week of vacation to recharge our batteries, acclimate our bodies to warmer weather and get ready for the upcoming season?

One of the great things about going to Mexico is coming home with a lot of pictures to share, not only with our family and friends, but also our Hispanic employees. You should see their faces light up when I show them a picture of a place in their home country. Granted, it is usually a picture of a popular tourist attraction or the beach, but for them it was a picture of home, the place they were brought up. Sharing stories with them about Mexico, a place we've both visited, really brings them back to their childhood memories. This small gesture of sharing with them my stories and pictures really allows me to connect more on a personal side with them rather than just a business one. This is important to me, as I want to build a relationship with them at work that isn't always about work. I feel they responded to this rather well, and amazingly they continue to ask questions throughout the year about my trip and when I'm going back.

Last year while staying at our resort, I noticed the beach was raked smooth every

morning from the previous days foot traffic. I had to find out how this was accomplished because it didn't look like they



Raking the beach in Mexico

used a machine. One morning as I went out for coffee, I was early enough to catch the employee working on the task at hand. He was working all by himself on smoothing out the beach, so I went over to talk to him about this process. I put my Spanish speaking skills to the test. With my broken Spanish, I had a conversation about what their maintenance practices were since that is what I was most comfortable talking about in Spanish. It turns out they are assigned job duties and their schedule rotates weekly. This week he was in charge of raking the beach by 9 a.m., a job that took roughly three hours to complete. He explained to me how he enjoyed it and proceeded to show me his biceps and joked to me that it was better than doing the garbage duties!

So what did he rake the beach with? It was a 2-

inch metal pipe that was in the shape of a letter T, about 6 feet by 6 feet and weighed a ton. His job was to start at one end of the beach and go from the water to the resort and back dragging the pipe behind him, which smoothed out the sand. All that was left were small impressions where he walked. During our conversation on the beach, I told him about the machines we use for the bunkers back home on golf courses. He was familiar with them but said they make too much noise and would wake up all the guests at the resort. Basically, their jobs were like ours; they didn't like to make noise

around guests and didn't want to be seen. Most of the landscaping, mowing and watering were done mid-day when guests were either out sightseeing

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or out on the beach because peak times around the resorts are early morning and late evening.

While it is important for me to relax on my vacation, these experiences inspired me to play a round of golf and hopefully tour a maintenance facility this year in Mexico. You never know what you may learn from a different operation that you can implement at your course. I was amazed at how similar the duties and routines were at two different operations, a golf course and a resort. I learned a lot last year about the upkeep of resorts, but most importantly I learned how to connect with our Hispanic employees in the least likely of places, while on spring break.

It's in the Hole

GCSAA Survey to be sent in March

Third phase of GCSAA's National Golf Course Environmental Profile project is coming soon. Widespread participation of GCSAA members and non-members is needed for continued success in the third phase of the association's Golf Course Environmental Profile Project. The results will be used to provide an accurate portrayal of nutrient use on golf courses.

This phase will collect data from golf course superintendents on the amount of nutrients applied to golf courses. Surveys will be distributed beginning March 19 in both hard copy and electronic forms, with the cutoff date for the receipt of information April 27.

"We have been pleased by the response rate of the first two phases," GCSAA Director of Research Clark Throssell, Ph.D., said. "It is important that we have strong participation by both GCSAA member and non-member superintendents to compile the necessary data. It is vital that we get data from all types and sizes of facilities. The information will help GCSAA to better serve them in managing their facilities."

The survey is part of a multi-year project being undertaken by GCSAA that will evaluate environmental performance on golf courses. The Golf Course Environmental Profile project is designed to collect information that will allow superintendents and other facility personnel to become better managers, help them operate more efficiently and lead to GCSAA developing more valuable programs and services. Such information will include details about playing surfaces, natural resources, environmental stewardship efforts and maintenance practices on the golf course.

Throssell indicated the data are still being analyzed from the first two phases, one focusing on the physical profile of a golf facility and the other on water use and conservation. The first comprehensive report of the first two phases will appear in a peer-reviewed scientific journal this year. The Environmental Institute for Golf funded the first two phases of the project, thanks in part to a grant from The Toro Foundation.

The Environmental Institute for Golf, the philanthropic organization of the GCSAA, is a collaborative effort of the environmental and golf communities, dedicated to strengthening the compatibility of golf with the natural environment. For more on The Institute, visit www.eifg.org.

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