



Within the Leather

by David Kazmierczak, CGCS

As I look at my calendar on Wednesday, March 19, 2014, I see there are two appointments today that I need to tend to and one tomorrow. Friday is wide open as I am going on a small trip with my family to Milwaukee to visit friends on the back end of spring break. It's not Cancun, but at least we are getting away from here for a day or two.

A closer glance at the calendar reveals a disturbing two word revelation in very small font. The calendar says tomorrow spring begins. A quick glance to my right, peering outside my office window at three fresh inches of snow upon heaps and mounds of now petrified, crusty old snow, begs a couple questions: Did the originator of the first calendar live in Texas, or did they save a large bag of a certain cash crop for late March distribution and consumption? Either way spring in Minnesota in 2014 is at this moment is just a nasty rumor.

Now I know that the first day of spring is

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simply about the rotation of the earth on its axis as it pertains to the sun and all that and means nothing when it comes to actual weather patterns, especially in the northern United States. But come on, seriously? After the brutal winter on 2013-2014 in Minnesota are we really in store for another month of below average temperatures, snow and general misery?

I say all this with a bit of tongue in cheek. Surely if you have lived your entire life in Minnesota or are even a 15 year transplant like me you understand that this is not an anomaly. Winter can and usually will progress well into April and by golly that's what you signed up for. If you don't like it- leave. However, with this being the second consecutive year of potential late openings at golf courses there is a real danger associated with what most would perceive as just a miserable inconvenience. Golf courses are businesses. They only make money when they are open. There is a limited time for that around these parts and delays means a cut in revenue, and cuts in revenue for a business that is operating on thin margins is not good.

Unfortunately, something has to give. I am concerned that if this

weather pattern continues, and golf courses opening in May instead of April becomes the norm, it will greatly impact our industry locally. April for many public golf courses is essentially a make or break month. It's the difference between a good revenue year and a bad one. Take away April a few years in a row and I'm afraid there might be a few courses that simply will give up and close.

Now there is a line of thinking out there that is just exactly what needs to happen. The dwindling golf market has hit the point where there is more supply than demand and the natural attrition of golf courses is better in the long run for the industry. That might be somewhat true unless you happen to work at one of the shuttered properties. Then April means a whole lot more than it used too.

I prefer to think that if one golf course dies, we all take a hit. It means that all the guys on the crew are out of a job. It means they will be looking for employment in a full market and probably have to look elsewhere. It means one less course for our vendors to sell to, meaning they then will have to find ways to keep their margins up, potentially raising prices and lowering industry support. It means the scaling back of our industry. So what can be done about it?

Well, obviously we can't change the weather. (Although you and I know that there are people at your club who think that maybe you should be able to). So perhaps it's time to get really creative with things like budgeting, labor scheduling, expense tracking and the like. If it means saving your job, and the jobs of your crew, I can imagine you would do just about anything. I can see real potential in equipment sharing and maybe even people sharing in the future if things deteriorate.

In any case, maybe it is time to get out ahead of the curve and start to investigate these kind of money saving ideas if they haven't been done before or revisit some of them if they were not fully explored. The sky is the limit when it comes to imaginative thinking and while not every good idea is workable, creative thinking usually brings about efficiency and cost saving. After all, looks like you will have plenty of time to ponder while watching the snow slowly melt. You can use your time to think of ways to streamline your operation, or pray for 60 degrees and sunshine.

Either way you are doing something. C'mon spring, hurry up!