

Superintendents Deserve Some Recognition

By Joe Gambatese
Special to the Journal

The following is an excellent article which I'm sure all of you readers will appreciate. It is a reprint from The Montgomery Journal Wed, Aug. 1, 1979.

No one does so much for a golf course and gets so little recognition as the course superintendent and members of his hard-working crew.

A favorite topic of conversation among golfers is the condition of their course. They love it when it's in good shape and the grass lush, as it is at most courses this summer, and they complain to high heaven when it isn't.

When a golfer visits another course he is quick to comment about its condition, especially the greens, either favorably or unfavorably.

Most golfers know who the golf professional is at a course. They see his name in the sports pages and he is very visible, near the first tee, with his name on his golf shop, where most golfers do business with him. The golf pro is their friend and teacher. But the superintendent is for the most part invisible to the golfer, being hard at work either in his shed far from any tee or fairway or out on the course tackling a problem.

The superintendent has come a long way since the mid-1920's when I first met one. In those days he was called a greenskeeper, and he did little more than cut grass, rake sandtraps and maybe fertilize. In most cases he had little if any formal training or education.

Today, especially if he is young, he is likely to be a college graduate in agronomy and course management. He has to have special knowledge in the use of a variety of chemicals on the market for fertilization and the control and treatment of turfgrass diseases and pests. He has to contend with all kinds of weather conditions, often unpredictable, and be familiar with 101 details necessary to provide his members with a golf course they will enjoy playing. He has a very valuable piece of property in his hands. A slight mistake in the application of the turfgrass chemicals could cost a club thousands of dollars.

It's time the course superintendent got the recognition that's due him. A start has been made at some courses where the superintendent's name appears on the score card along with that of the golf professional. Some signs on golf shops list the superintendent as well as the professional staff. More needs to be done.

The Mid-Atlantic Association of Golf Superintendents has some 200 members in Maryland, Northern Virginia, the District and Delaware. A superintendent must have two years' experience in charge of a course before he can acquire Class A status, and another two years before he can receive certification after passing tests conducted by the University of Maryland's Department of Agronomy. He must attend monthly meetings, seminars and conferences and keep up with new developments in other ways in order

to renew his certification every five years. Sam Kessel of C.C. of Fairfax is president of the association.

In support of turfgrass research, the superintendents have joined with the Maryland Turfgrass Council in cosponsoring a golf tournament at Indian Spring C.C. on Aug. 21 to raise funds for the H.B. Musser International Turfgrass Foundation. Foursomes will be made up of a superintendent, his club's professional and two club members, preferably officers.

We interviewed some superintendents at Montgomery County courses to elicit information about their works and problems which might be of interest to golfers. Some answers follow:

Bob Shields, Woodmont C.C., who was national president in 1965: "A superintendent's first responsibility is to maintain the golf course in the best condition possible within the budget allowed. First priority is given to the greens. Then the tees, fairways and bunkers in that order."

Herb Heinlein, Indian Spring C.C.: "The greatest improvements in the condition of golf courses have come through the advances being made continually in chemicals and turfgrasses. We have to be certified by the State of Maryland to use the chemicals and are required to have available for inspection a log showing the use we've made of the chemicals, the amounts applied and weather conditions that existed."

David Burdette, Sr., Congressional C.C.: "We cut our greens (to 1/16 inch), change the cups and move the tee markers every day. We mow fairways and tees three times a week. We place the pins in different positions each day to direct the flow of traffic so as to avoid wear and tear, and avoid soft spots under wet conditions. Some of the worst damage to greens comes from spike marks caused by golfers who scruff or drag their feet."

Bill Emerson, Chevy Chase Club, last year's Mid-Atlantic president: "All divots should be replaced, if for no other reason than consideration for the players who follow and the appearance of the course. Rye or bluegrass on a divot cut to the soil level is like a piece of sod, and will regrow if replaced properly and pressed down."

George Thompson, Columbia C.C.: "Most damage to a course is done by ball marks on the greens which are not repaired immediately and golf carts which are driven too close to greens and tees and in other forbidden areas. We realize that most of it is inadvertent. The players are preoccupied with their game and forget. All golfers should learn how to repair a ball mark properly. One that is repaired immediately will heal in a day. Otherwise it might take 10 days or more to heal."