

More Less

By Mike McCullough

Oh, the good old days. Remember back when the economy was good and the stock market was at an all time high? Rounds were up, staffs were at full strength and budgets surpluses were not uncommon. Can you believe that was less than three years ago? Times have changed and so have the philosophies of most maintenance staffs: Do more with less.

A few examples of how golf course superintendents have adapted to the new economic times are listed below.

Cost of materials - Inflation is never going away and neither is the escalating price of materials. Some of the bigger ticket items - fertilizers, pesticides, soil amendments, etc. - have gone up in price every year. What some superintendents used to pay for a reasonable topdressing sand seven years ago has now tripled in price. Some facilities have seen dramatic cuts in the material budgets with fertilizers being a prime target. It gives a new meaning to the phrase "lean and mean." Do more with less.

Contractors - Bringing in outside agencies to assist with on-course projects has been increasing in popularity the past few years. Performing course projects with in-house labor can be very rewarding and time-consuming at the same time. Granted, time spent on new projects is time away

from current maintenance practices, but saving a buck or two has become the "FC" (financially correct) thing to do. Do more with less.

Equipment/equipment technicians - Replacing equipment may not occur with the same frequency as before. Lease agreements may become a more viable option for clubs instead of the large outlay of capital for new equipment purchases. The importance of having a good equipment technician is more valuable now more than ever. Adhering to strict preventative maintenance schedules and accurate record keeping can increase the longevity of existing equipment inventories. Do more with less.

Manpower - Hiring freezes, retirements and layoffs are just a few causes of shrinking maintenance staffs. What's left behind makes for some very creative job assignments. Having members of the staff cross-trained so they can perform vital parts of the maintenance program is critical in maintaining the high standards (see next paragraph) created before the drop in workforce. Do more with less.

Course conditions - In a perfect world, the conditions of the golf course would be proportionately related to the budget

cuts. Fictitious general manager: "You are going to have to reduce your maintenance budget by 20%." Fictitious superintendent: "Okay, then we are only going to change cups on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, mow fairways twice a week instead of three times a week, spot rake bunkers every third day and forgo the tree pruning program." Fictitious general manager: "Great, I'm sure the regular players won't mind at all." The reality of the situation is that golf course conditions have to be the same and in some cases even better. Do more with less.

Budgets - In some business circles, cost-cutting techniques are referred to as "trimming the fat." For already lean maintenance budgets, it is more like putting on pants that are three sizes too small. It can be very painful and very, very uncomfortable but somehow, somehow you wiggle your way into the "I can't believe I was once this size" pants. One prominent golf course superintendent told me he is back to his 1998 budget. Do more with less.

One thing I have observed about this industry and the individuals who steer the ship, is that they always find a way to make it work. Fabricating a piece of equipment for a specific task, seeing a substantial reduction in workforce but no decline in playing conditions or covering up the irrigation systems shortcomings, are simple illustrations of doing whatever it takes to get the job done.

The constant drone of doing more with less is getting as stale as a two month old loaf of bread. Perhaps less is more. ●

2003 Field Day at Metropolitan Golf Links

By Ray Davies, CGCS

The GCSANC - University of California Cooperative Extension with co-sponsor an educational event is designed to give golf course superintendents and associated professionals an inside look at a golf course where a unique/interesting project is underway or has recently been completed. The event will showcase a project for which on site-learning would be beneficial to superintendents.

This year's Event will be held at Metropolitan Golf Links, a newly constructed golf course located on the site of an old municipal landfill, and later the Lew Galbraith golf course. In the early 90's, the port of Oakland closed the golf course and began placement of dredging materials that resulted from an effort to deepen the port channels. More than a million cubic yards of dredged ocean soils were placed on the site. The soil was then processed to encapsulate the municipal landfill according to EPA regulations. Some

of the material dredged was sandy. The intent was to plate the capped landfill with this material, wash the salt from it and grow turf for a golf course.

It was not just another golf course construction project. There were some interesting and unusual problems to be worked out. What grass should be grown in soils dredged from the ocean? Can Paspalum spp. really perform this far north? Why are there no trees? Where do you put your mainline, laterals, and drainage when there is only 18 inches of soil? What do you do when there is no soil to cover the landfill liner on the last 4 holes? How do you design the drainage system for shallow salty soils? Would you want to use reclaimed water on extremely saline-sodic soils dredged from the ocean? Should you try to dig a well? Is that plating material really sand and how thick does it need to be to drain properly? ●

On April 28th you will have the joy of learning from the challenges faced and the frustrations experienced in the construction of the newest golf course in Oakland. You will here presentations by Gary Ingram, CGCS, Kevin Pryseski, CGCS, Raymond Davies, CGCS and architect Fred Bliss, ASGCA. In addition to the questions above, you will learn about related wetlands issues, airport and FAA issues - (both fun and interesting), managing change, and meet some of the students in the GCSAA supported "Oakland Turfgrass Educational Initiative".

This workshop will improve your project management skills, problem solving skills, and agronomic understanding of perched saline-sodic soils. Hope to see you out at Metropolitan for this outstanding educational event! ●