



## On The Road With The USGA—December 2009

By Bob Brame, regional director, Central Region

### December 3, 2009

Thanksgiving has once again come and gone, as has another golf season. If there is one thing we can count on it is that nothing stays the same. Change is a reality of golf turf management and life in general – nothing stays the same indefinitely. While the tough economy continues to pull down the golf industry, there have been a few signs of improvement. Or, is it wishful thinking? It is safe to say it will either get better or worse. The best posture for 2010 is to plan/budget for an ongoing slump. Just as a budget should not be based on unusually mild weather, it should also not be based on a return to where we were a few years back. Hopefully it will happen, but discretion is the better part of valor.

Having been in the golf turf maintenance industry for more than 38 years (18 as a golf course superintendent and 20 as a USGA agronomist) I can think of no better way to ensure an efficient operation than to subscribe to our Turf Advisory Service (TAS). Not because I work for the USGA, but because I've seen the value from multiple perspectives. USGA agronomists continue to see more courses and maintenance regimes than any other entity in golf. Our recommendations are anchored on university research and field observations. Every maintenance operation can benefit from a candid and objective review. Through the process of applying the recommendations made as part of a TAS visit the investment will return with interest. Our fee structure for TAS subscription continues to be held to minimal levels through USGA underwriting. In addition, there will be no increase in 2010. Plan/budget for at least one visit in the season ahead.

*Half day visit - \$2,300., or \$1,800. if paid before May 15<sup>th</sup>*

*Full day visit - \$3,100., or \$2,600. if paid before May 15<sup>th</sup>*

Keep in mind, even with early (before May 15<sup>th</sup>) commitment and payment, visits can be scheduled anytime during the season. The early season discount accentuates the importance of planning ahead.

In addition to budgeting for at least one TAS visit in 2010, take the time to review and update the written agreement with your course superintendent, or superintendent with your course officials. If there is none, the winter season is a good time to establish one, although the best time for an annual review is midsummer. A written agreement that clearly spells out responsibilities and compensation is the basis for a lasting relationship and a more efficient maintenance operation, especially during a tough economy. There are no guarantees and contracts can be broken, but they offer better assurance that everyone is on the same page. In the final analysis, the golf course is the primary asset at most operations and the superintendent is responsible for managing that asset – put it in writing.

The conference season continues with an excellent lineup at the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation Conference and Show next week (December 7 – 10) in Columbus, Ohio. Our 'Morning with the USGA' program will once again be part of the program on Wednesday morning. This open forum is always interesting and enlightening. Some cost savings tips will also be presented on Thursday morning.

See you in Columbus. Or, as always, call or email anytime.

Source: Bob Brame

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