

# The Green Committee

## its functions and malfunctions

Fred M. Adams, M.D.

*Serving in an advisory capacity and acting as a buffer between the superintendent and the membership, the green committee can make a true contribution to its golf club*

Having served as the green committee chairman at Orchard Lake (Mich.) CC for 14 years, I have made some observations regarding this important committee's functions and malfunctions from both the committee's and the superintendent's points of view. Committee responsibilities in a country club have always been an enigma to me. On one hand, the board of governors goes to great lengths to hire competent and well-trained club managers, golf professionals and golf course superintendents; it then turns right around and appoints committees composed of interested but poorly trained, thoroughly inexperienced club members who are eager to run the operation. In many instances, this paradox leads to undermining the trained personnel, and inefficiency, confusion and chaos are the result.

Many golfers picture themselves as agronomists merely by virtue of having played golf for many years and at many different courses. They have drawn their own conclusions as to what makes a great golf course from both an architectural and maintenance point of view. With their appointment to the green committee, the self-styled "agronomists" finally have the opportunity to implement all the changes they've dreamed about and can hardly wait for the first committee meeting to present all of their ideas for course improvements.

In actuality, how much preparation do green committee chairmen have for this job? They probably have lawns at home which are fertilised regularly, watered irregularly, sprayed occasionally for weeds, and mowed about once a week with surprisingly good results—but they certainly are not, by any stretch of the imagination, agronomists. Chances are they have no concept of plant morphology in relationship to what the fertiliser requirements may be; have never heard of the types of subsoils or their makeup in relationship to the types of subsoils or their makeup in relationship to maintenance procedures; think *Poa annua* is a rare, exotic potted plant and Dollar Spot has something to do with the Internal Revenue Service. In short, most green committee chairmen are ill-prepared to offer much in the way of constructive criticism to a superintendent's turf maintenance programme.

### Selecting the chairman

Therefore, the board of directors should select a chairman who realises he does not know much about agronomy and is satisfied to leave the enormously complex problems concerning the growing of grass to the man who has been trained for this job—the superintendent.

The projected tenure of this chairman is equally important. In my opinion, no man should be offered this job unless he is willing to serve for at least five years and possibly longer. As it takes at least two years for the chairman to begin to understand the inherent complexities and uncertainties that arise with managing turf, the green committee chairman should have had an indoctrination period of two to three years as a committee member prior to being offered the chairmanship. This will give the superintendent an opportunity to make his own observations concerning the abilities and temperaments of green committee members. The club president would do well to consult and heed the superintendent's feelings when appointing a new chairman.

What should the green committee's functions be? *It should act primarily in an advisory role rather than in a supervisory capacity.* There are problem areas related to turf management with which even the best trained superintendent needs help.

### **Value of communication**

Communication is one area in which the green committee should assume prime responsibility. It should act as a buffer between the membership and the superintendent. When unforeseen problems as well as planned construction and reconstruction projects arise that affect playability of the course for any period of time, members should be apprised of these contingencies so they won't hound the superintendent and make his life miserable. The blow can be softened if the membership is informed through the newsletter, a special communication or word of mouth. When presented with the facts, most members will accept the inconveniences, especially when they realise that the improvements are being made for only one purpose—to further their enjoyment of the game.

However, it is up to the superintendent to initiate the flow of information to the committee so that it can be properly disseminated. Nothing would be more embarrassing or frustrating to a committee member than to be asked why certain procedures are being carried out when he himself does not know what is being done and why. The club manager and golf professional staff must also be informed about the superintendent's plans for the course. It is vital that the golf club's three departments coordinate all their activities at all times, preferably in writing. What a ridiculous situation arises when the greens are aerified the day before a special tournament simply because the superintendent was not notified of the event.

Another area in which the green committee can offer invaluable help to the superintendent concerns personnel relations. While all costs are constantly rising, the biggest increase in today's green budget is due to the labour force. To forestall union activity, country clubs had better be aware of competitive wage scales and be prepared to offer such commonly accepted fringe benefits as medical and life insurance and pension plans for the green crew. Many superintendents are generally unfamiliar with all the complex ramifications of the various benefit plans. Therefore, there should be someone on the green committee who has experience in personnel management and labour negotiations, so that he can properly assist the superintendent.

It is also practical to have an individual on the committee who is knowledgeable about machinery to aid the superintendent in making an inventory of all his mechanical equipment and prepare a long-range plan for an orderly and sensible replacement of these items. Such planning eliminates having to go before the board of directors and ask for four new greens mowers, two new tractors and one seven-gang fairway unit—all in one year!

To elevate his status in the members eyes, the superintendent should appear before the board of directors at their regular meetings. He should most certainly be present to seek board approval for a major capital expenditure either for equipment or renovation procedures, so that he can answer any questions that arise.

### **The superintendent's image**

Many golf course superintendents do not exhibit enough self-confidence. This should not be the case, inasmuch as they are generally well-educated scientists who know far more about growing turf under the most trying conditions than any member of his green committee. But too often superintendents compromise their well-founded principles of agronomy for fear of losing their job if they incur the wrath of a committee chairman. No one expects them to know all the answers and it is realised that unexpected weather conditions and plant diseases occur that can make superintendents look bad. It is also realised that not all the mistakes that endanger turf are the result of Mother Nature's vagaries, an unco-operative and demanding manager or an un-

reasonable board of directors. Intellectual honesty on the part of a superintendent is appreciated. Making excuses for errors in judgment is not the way to inculcate the confidence that is so necessary for the green committee to have in the superintendent. The committee will quickly learn to respect a man for his opinions and judgment if he is forthright and can back up his statements with scientific facts and logic. If the superintendent does not have an answer to a given problem, he should promptly admit it and show willingness to try to find someone who may have the solution.

The superintendent should take it upon himself to introduce his entire crew to the green committee. On the other hand, committee members should familiarise themselves with the crew members' names and their jobs. Nothing motivates most workers toward conscientious performance of their jobs more than recognition.

### **Avenues of improvement**

There are other possible avenues toward image improvement for the superintendent. One is the establishment of an accreditation board for superintendents, which the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America is currently working on. This programme should elevate the golf superintendent to the professional status he so richly deserves. It is about time the golfers throughout the world appreciate what it takes in "blood, sweat and tears" to grow and maintain turf. Certification is likely to encounter opposition from some superintendents—possibly from those who have not had formal education in turf management and who fear that the examinations will be devised to expose their lack of such an education. The examinations, therefore, should be designed to test an individual's practical knowledge of currently accepted turf management principles, thus assuring a potential employer that the accredited superintendent has been trained either through his own experiences, enhanced by regular attendance at turf conferences and refresher courses, or through a formal educational programme leading to a degree in agronomy.

Superintendents can also avail themselves of the visitation service of the United States Golf Association Green Section, which offers on-the-spot evaluation by experts in the field. The protection this service gives to the superintendent against a committee demanding unrealistic course or maintenance procedure changes is of prime importance. Conversely, not all superintendents are as knowledgeable as they appear and maintenance procedure changes that should be brought about can be better and more subtly accomplished by these experts.

Membership in the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and local GCSA chapters should be a must for all superintendents. They should also attend their annual national conference and regional GCSA chapter meetings. Equally important are turf conferences sponsored by state universities to relate the turf research they are doing, superintendents as well as green committee members can benefit by attending these conferences. Such conferences will quickly teach green committee members to appreciate the complexities involved in growing grass. It is interesting to observe these men become more humble and less dogmatic in their attitudes toward the well-trained superintendent.

Each club would benefit by having a registered golf course architect on a retainer basis. Much money is wasted and many golf holes are ruined by the amateurish attempts at renovation by the green committee. One of the greatest insurance policies a membership can have against such a situation is through the services of a good architect.

In any efficiently run, successful business, appropriately trained individuals are given the responsibilities of the many facets of the operation. Why can't golf courses be managed on a similar basis? The superintendent as an agronomist should be treated and respected as the scientist that he is and be given the responsibilities that are obviously in his domain, with the green committee assisting him in an advisory capacity and also serving as a buffer between him and the membership.—*With grateful acknowledgements to 'The Golf Superintendent'.*