

# Managing and

**Management tips from Duncan McGilvray, Course Manager at Letchworth GC in North Hertfordshire.**

If one person manages the golf course efficiently, and takes control of the many varied responsibilities involved, the benefits to the golf course and the club as a whole, are immeasurable.

This may be a rather obvious statement to make but I have to say there are still very many private members' golf clubs which do not hold one person responsible for managing their course, and because of this the golf course and its members have to suffer sub-standard conditions and long term problems.

The person or persons who may be responsible at the moment may range from the General Committee, the Green Committee, the Green Chairman or Convenor, the Secretary, or how about the Course Superintendent or the Estates Manager? Or even a "working" Course Manager (whatever that may mean) and in a few isolated cases it may be the Head Greenkeeper.

With all that confusion around I am not surprised that there are many private members' courses not being efficiently managed. But let's not blame anyone for this rather confusing situation. At the moment there is no workable alternative. To be quite frank there are not enough suitably qualified Golf Course Managers to go round. I do believe however that there is an answer and an ideal which can be achieved in the foreseeable future.

To manage a golf course you need a Course Manager NO MORE – NO LESS. There may be Managing Committees and even Managing Sub-Committees which are there (quite rightly in my view) to ensure the members interests, but there should be no argument against the necessity of every golf course having a suitably qualified Course Manager to be responsible for the golf course.

To whom that person is answerable may be a matter for debate but we must hold one person responsible and that person must be a Course Manager.

In the next few months we will cover what I believe is the absolute minimum requirement/remit/job description of that person and I fervently hope that it will become the rule at every private members' club and not the exception. With the Greenkeepers Training Committee now well established, and the many training providers (including BIGGA and the approved colleges), there will be no excuse for not finding the relevant training to develop the necessary competency levels and skills required to be a successful and effective Course Manager.

## **1. TAKING A MAJOR ROLE IN THE FORMULATION OF POLICY**

What is "policy"? Simply explained, it is an agreed system within which we work. Note the word "agreed". The Club sets policy – not the Course Manager. That point is extremely important – we may think the course is ours but it belongs to the members and we are employed by those members to carry out their instructions. That said however – because we are trained to manage courses and possess the knowledge, expertise and above all, experience to avoid potential future disasters – we must be involved and indeed take a major role in the formulation of such a policy.

If for example the club aimed to have a policy of no aeration: "we don't want all those holes in the greens disturbing our putting" – and lots of water so that "we can hold the ball on the green more easily" – it would be the Course Manager's duty to convince the Club of the catastrophic results and that a different policy should be adopted.

In this way policy is set and the Course Manager is responsible for that policy being carried out.

I do not wish to go into detail regarding what a policy should contain but suffice to say it should cover every area of the course from greens and conservation areas, to clubhouse surrounds and car parks. It should also contain all staff and committee responsibilities. This may sound daunting at first but, believe me, if policy is set out, your working relationship with the Club will be much more amicable and workable.

The biggest aggravation I hear from colleagues is that the Committee/Secretary/Green Chairman (or all of them) are always "interfering" in the work on the course. If you set policy and work within it, there is no need for any "interference" – everyone knows what the aims are, and how they will be achieved – the course will be managed in a way which the Club can understand and relate to, and in the case of a written Course Policy Statement (which is highly recommended), is clearly defined and documented.

## **2. TO OVERSEE THE SHORT, MEDIUM AND LONG TERM MAINTENANCE OF THE COURSE WHICH IS DICTATED BY THAT POLICY**

This covers the common sense decisions, made by us without realising it, on a day to day/week to week/month to month basis.

It covers decisions on staff working singly, in pairs, in groups, using overtime effectively and managing your staff's time as well as your own, eg. two or three tasks may be carried out at the same time thus making obvious savings, not only in time but also in machinery wear and fuel costs.

I also think it's essential to re-evaluate how/when we do anything on the golf course

on a regular basis. There is always a more efficient way no matter how well we think we do it already.

The most important work in the above heading is oversee – Course Managers are paid to manage, not to sit on machinery cutting grass all day every day – you save your club a considerable amount of aggravation, and therefore money, because you think and manage.

I do believe, however, that in our position we must earn the respect of our staff by not only being capable of doing any task we ask of our staff (no matter how menial) but also assist staff where and when appropriate. What we have to do is find the balance between overseeing, administration and the physical use of our own labour as part of the overall Greenstaff, so that the course is run as efficiently as possible.

Overseeing should not mean spying on staff. This is time wasting and counterproductive. In my experience staff respond extremely well to trust.

## **3. TO PRESENT AND IMPLEMENT WORK SCHEDULES**

The Course Manager must be capable of assessing the detail and duration of every task on the golf course and convey this information whenever asked. The largest work schedule which must be presented, approved and implemented will probably be the Annual Winter Programme. This may be presented in many different forms but we have found the "3 Part System" to be very effective (Parts 1 to 3 in order of priority).

### **PART 1. NECESSARY ANNUAL COURSE MAINTENANCE**

For example:

- Checking drainage and cleaning ditches, etc.
- Checking trees, staking/tree ties/lopping, etc.
- Checking/replacing small bridges.
- Painting course furniture and machinery overhaul, etc.
- Health & Safety updates, etc.

### **PART 2. AGREED PRIORITY WORK**

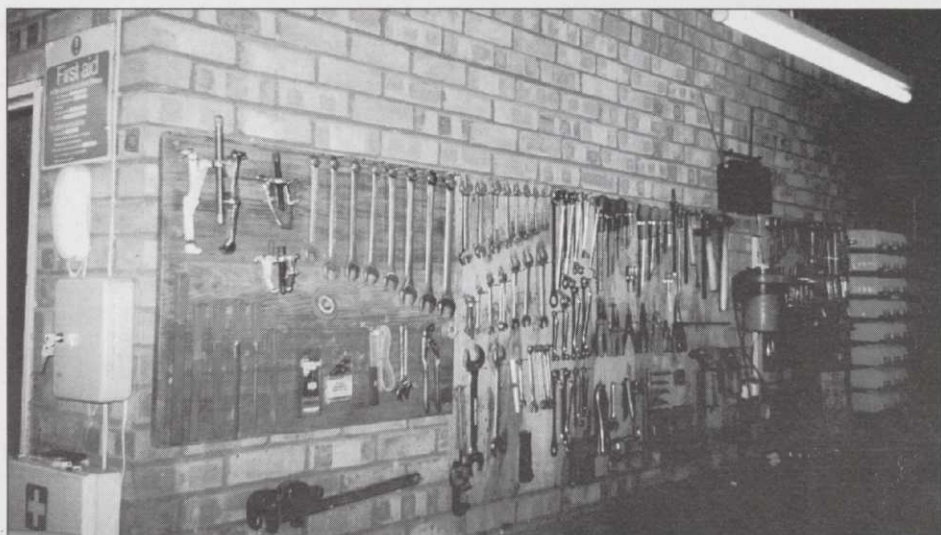
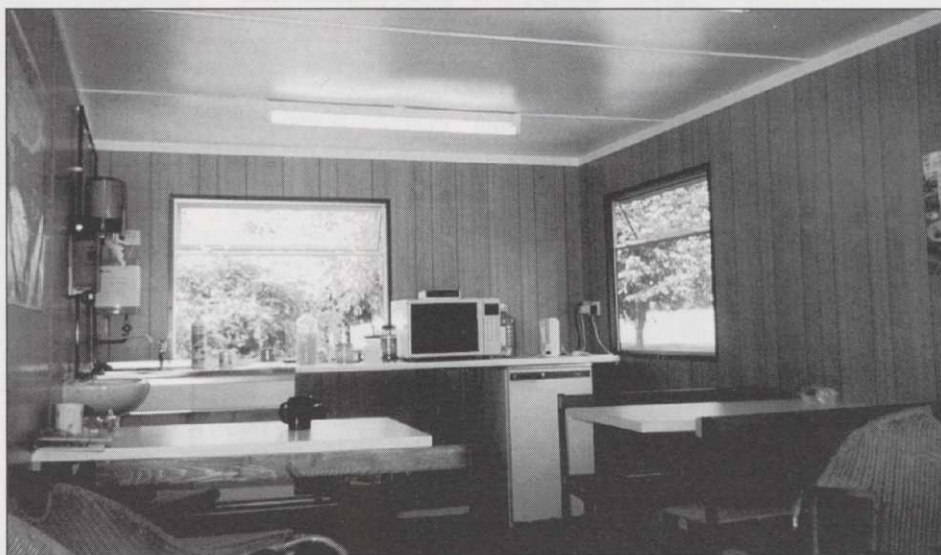
The Committee/Green Chairman/Secretary will have more of an input in this section. It is effectively what the membership would like done on the Course, for example, new paths, new tees/larger tees, tree planting, etc.

### **PART 3. GOLF COURSE ALTERATIONS**

Following a recognised Golf Course architect's appraisal this section would cover improvements to the Course in design terms, e.g. movement of bunkers, green re-design/re-construction, etc. The Winter Programme should state when it starts and is due for completion, eg. October 31st, 1994 to March 17th, 1995 as well as stating how many staff will be



# taking control



A place for everything: Canteen facilities, top, and workshops at Letchworth GC

involved, and how that staff will be allocated to each project. Ideally a Master Plan would have been prepared as part of the Policy Document, so that Annual Winter Programmes are not viewed in isolation, but part of an overall strategy looking well into the future. Regular Course Reports to the Club should be produced throughout the year as a form of work schedule, covering progress and future work envisaged on the course, so that the Committee, and ultimately the membership, know what has/what is/what will be carried out on the course. (More detail of this under the later heading of Communication). Forward Planning is so important in ensuring things run smoothly for ourselves and our staff as well as the membership. Without going into any detail, written schedules have to be kept in a folder with access for all staff, which is updated on a daily/weekly/monthly basis so that everyone knows what is planned for

today/tomorrow/next week/next month. This is of course in addition to Year Planners, Holiday Schedules, Fixture Lists, etc. In this way the allocation of staff, materials, and machinery will be as efficient as possible. However, in the real world there are changing circumstances, and these have to be accommodated, but this should not be used as an excuse for not planning ahead.

#### 4. TO PRESENT AND IMPLEMENT MACHINERY MAINTENANCE PROGRAMMES

A proper Machinery Maintenance Programme is very much reliant on finance and this will therefore be covered more fully under the next article heading of "Controlling Finances".

However, I would like to cover two very important points under this heading now.

An accurate machinery/equipment inventory which is updated immediately following

any change is absolutely vital and is the responsibility of the Course Manager. An efficient, clean, tidy and well-designed workshop, as well as good, comfortable canteen facilities where all staff know where all tools and equipment are kept sets the scene for the whole course. If the workshops are well kept I would bet that the Course would be too.

#### 5. KEEPING ACCURATE RECORDS

Thank goodness for the Health & Safety Executive. Above all others they are the authority which has forced all of us into keeping accurate records. I must say I have certainly improved in this respect following their inspection, ie. chemical records, usage records, machinery repairs, etc. Another form of keeping records is via the desk diary. This tends to be used as the focus of all our operations.

It holds the obvious things like appointments and dates for golf days and the like, but having kept many years worth of work activities on the course, as well as what and how materials have been applied, it is a formidable record for the Club.

It is also important, should you move on, that the next Course Manager has the knowledge of what has gone on in the recent past, and would undoubtedly make his job easier.

And lastly, an accurate plan of the Course is essential in ensuring that everyone knows what's underground as well as what's on top. Expenditure records will be covered under Controlling Finances.

#### 6. KEEPING UP TO DATE WITH MODERN METHODS, MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

In this ever-changing environment, with the myriad of materials and machinery, it is our duty to keep up with developments in all areas. I have to say that the best way I have found is to meet with colleagues at every possible opportunity, both in the line of business, eg. BTME, Education Conferences and Workshops, Saltex Exhibition, etc. as well as semi-social occasions, such as BIGGA golf days, etc.

The obvious occasions are the demonstration days given by companies within the trade which are very helpful, but still find talking to colleagues on those days more beneficial. We seem nowadays to be inundated with product information and the tendency is for it to go straight in the bin. However, we owe it to our employer continually to look at the most cost effective way of managing the course, and if that means reading every circular, book or magazine article, then we have to do it. Today's golfing member deserves an efficiently run golf course for the money he or she is paying, and more and more of these members are questioning where their money is being spent.

A Course Manager totally responsible for the course is I believe the only way to make sure that requirement is met in future.