

IT'S WHAT'S UP FRONT THAT COUNTS

Tom Mascaro

The credit for suggesting a title for this presentation of thoughts goes to Tom Burrows. It's a good one and brings into focus a very important aspect of the responsibilities of the golf club superintendent.

Much emphasis has been placed on the grooming of the golf course to produce the best turf and playing conditions possible. This is as it should be since the very existence of the club revolves around the golf course. Unquestionably the grooming of the course and its excellence in playability determines the success of the club organization. This condition, of course, is the prime responsibility of the superintendent of the club. However, it has become more and more apparent that there are other responsibilities which, when fully assumed by the superintendent, round out his position as a true executive of the club's operating organization.

This responsibility is up front and in many instances this is where it counts.

After all, not all the members play golf. A portion of the membership enjoys only the club house facilities. Their desire to belong to the club is not based on the excellence of the golf course. Enjoying the club house facilities certainly includes its outside appearance; namely, the entrance, the parking lot, and the lawns and landscaping around the club house.

Actually the excellence of the grounds surrounding the club house affects the attitude of all the members. If the golf course itself is great, the golfing members may overlook a shabby club grounds appearance, but they will certainly demonstrate more pride if they are pleased with what they see as they enter the club grounds.

Another important aspect is the impression upon guests when they visit the club. Every member takes great pride in everything related to his club. He likes to show it off to his guests. He points with pride at the beauty and grooming of his club the minute his car turns into the driveway. We also must assume that if the whole picture assumes a shabby, unkempt appearance, he makes a mental note that someone ought to be replaced. Perhaps more times than we realize, this mental note is loosened and released verbally after a few drinks at the bar or in the locker room.

Another important aspect of this picture is the condition and appearance of the club house grounds at night. Dinners, parties, banquets with guests present usually revolve around night time activities. What does all this look like when the sun goes down? Let's face it—a very human inclination is to go home after a hard day's work and forget the whole thing. Is it possible that the club house has not been visited at night for longer than you can remember? It's possible. Here is an area of responsibility that should really be investigated. Is the lighting adequate? Are you taking advantage of the fabulous effects that indirect lighting will produce—both winter and summer? Are there great puddles that must be watched out for or loose stones that trip people and ruin "my lady's slippers"? Does the kitchen fan blow the aroma of rancid grease in your face as you walk by or do you find yourself with one foot in a half filled garbage can as you round that dark corner from the parking lot? Dead bushes look terrible at night and wilted petunias look worse.

The golf club superintendent who recognizes his responsibilities "up front" is in turn recognized by every member of the club. Word gets around fast that "here is a man who cares about our club."

Assuming these responsibilities "up front" can be and is rewarding in many ways. Recognition that you exist in the club organization and the praise you receive for these efforts produces a warm feeling that money can't buy. Recognition and importance go hand in hand with job security and salary increases. You will find that a closer relationship will develop between you and the membership. It is obvious, too, that a much closer and pleasant relationship develops between the executive operating team of the club; namely, yourself as golf club superintendent, the pro and the manager.

All in all this whole concept of "What's up front that counts" can be summed up very easily.

It's not hard to get the answer. Simply dress up like a member. Ask your wife (or girl friend) to dress up in her best, too. Then take a ride. Visit your own club. Make two visits, one in daylight, one at night. If you and your lady are proud of what you see, you can throw out your chest and take her to cocktails and dinner. If you both are not impressed with what you see, your best bet would be to go back home, have her cook some hamburgers while you get into some comfortable clothes and after gulping down your dinner, make yourself comfortable at the drawing board and begin planning.

FROM JOHN HUSAR — THE LOCKER ROOM The Chicago Tribune

The area's golf course superintendents are back from various national and regional turf conferences and ready to put their layouts into final shape for the coming season. Uppermost in their minds, however, is the increasingly difficult problem of finding enough workers for maintenance staffs.

It's no longer easy to hire competent men who are willing to work demanding hours on a seasonal basis for minimal pay by present-day standards, according to Ben J. Chlevin, executive director of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

"So many golf courses regard labor as it was in the 1930's," Chlevin said, "when unskilled workers were satisfied to work from April to October or November and then disappear until next year. Today we have to think in terms of job security and fringe benefits to keep these men interested."

Most experts agree that a golf course needs at least one maintenance man for every two holes. Many employ students during the summer, but have had trouble keeping them on the job as fall approaches.

"Let's face it," Chlevin said, "the only good things about these jobs is that they're outdoors, clean, and in beautiful surroundings. Everything else is against them—the hours, the days, the wages, and so on."

Without adequate labor, superintendents are finding their talents stretched to meet demands for improved facilities, Chlevin contends. They are using bigger and better machines, but fewer men are around to do the other work.

"There now is a lag—and it has grown quite sizeable—in what the superintendent is trying to do and what he has the means to do," Chlevin said. "It all boils down to the nightmare of 'wondering if he'll be able to keep that night watering man, with those ungodly hours—especially if he's a good man.'"