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MANICURING COURSE OR COST

A. J. Powell, Jr., Turf Specialist

Year after year continuous pressure is placed upon the golf course superintendent to better manicure the golf course. Certainly this is good. We like to have beautiful surroundings instead of a ghetto-type atmosphere when playing golf. Trash, tall weeds, uncut and uneven grass, ill-defined fairways and green collars, tracks in sandtraps, bare ground under the ball washer, etc., all tend to discredit the beauty of a golf course. Professional superintendents would like to make the course as beautiful as possible with the amount of money that is allotted. Of course, money is the problem. Budgeted maintenance costs for golf courses increase year after year and much of this increase is due to the additional manicuring that is demanded.

What happens if the budgeted maintenance costs cannot be increased because of extremely tight money or other extenuating circumstances? Can the superintendent get by cheaper with his maintenance costs? That is unlikely since the labor costs always increase year after year. A possible solution is to show course officials specific cost items. If records are maintained on labor, equipment, and material costs, certainly the superintendent can point the finger at the grooming costs. For instance, labor is the major cost item. If a superintendent can show how many hours during the year were spent on raking sandtraps, on his men walking from green to green, on mowing around trees and hard-to-get-to areas, then he can show the club officials some possible avenues of cost reductions. Putting the final touch on a golf course just prior to tournaments costs money. Let them know it!

New and better equipment is continuously being developed to help cut labor costs. It is not too difficult to figure on paper the amount of labor that can be reduced if additional or appropriate equipment is purchased. It does not require a statistician or an engineer to figure the cost and depreciation value of a piece of equipment for one year. It does take time, but always remember that labor cost is the big factor in your maintenance budget.

Consider some additional possibilities to cut costs, even though they may infringe upon the players' joy of the game. Sandtraps are beautiful and useful but they must continuously be raked. The golfer does not always seem to want to act like a gentleman or observe the rules of etiquette. Sandtraps may have to be redesigned in order that tractor rakes can be used and a heavier, less playable sand may be feasible. It is nice to have white or colored sand, but is the cost worth it? You might suggest to the club officials that money could be saved if the golfer did rake his own tracks, thereby suggesting much stricter rules and possible fines. Concerning this forced etiquette, tell the officials what the club members can do to help you.

At least some herbicide, water and seed costs could be reduced if the superintendent was allowed to mow the fairways $\frac{1}{4}$ " higher than usual. The fairways within 100 yards of the tees could be mowed once a week at a $2\frac{1}{2}$ " height rather than twice per week at $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. Although the game might be slower, the roughs could be maintained at a height of 3 or 4 inches as they were likely designed. Also, the members might be willing to sacrifice some color on the fairways and allow you to spend less money for water. Certainly water is not a cure-all on fairways. The golfer would even get more distance on his shots.

If the course is really interested in cutting costs,

they could enforce rules to confine golf carts to cart paths and roughs. They could use less annuals and high maintenance plant materials around the clubhouse. They could let the swimming pools and tennis courts take care of themselves or at least remove their maintenance costs from your course budget. This would help you budget your costs.

Consider decreasing the size of the greens. A tremendous increase in budgeted requirements has been due to increased green size. Sometimes smaller greens with less so-called "character" will provide just as many pin placements as a much larger green. Because of the possible compaction and wear problems, it would certainly be your decision and not the club's. Another possibility is to use a control fungicide program instead of a preventative program. Especially after having been at a course for several years, you can pretty well determine when most diseases are going to appear.

Additional attention to the crew during the fertilization task, might be all that is needed to help reduce costs. Properly selected contact herbicides or soil sterilants around trees will certainly help cut mowing costs. These could even be applied during the winter when labor is more available. Throughout the year you can maintain a list of jobs to be accomplished during the winter. You can write very strict specifications for purchases. In this case, when several suppliers realize that they have an equal bidding basis, you will pay the lowest price possible. With proper budget planning, many of your supplies can possibly be purchased during the winter or prior to the winter when discount prices are available. **Looking ahead is the solution.** Always consider job economics, and buy the right mower for the job and the right rake for the trap.

In any case, if cuts in costs are necessary, be sure and maintain your benefits and rights to continually improve yourself. Fight for your goal to become better educated. Turf conferences are not expensive and can be very helpful to you and your club toward better purchasing, management and overall supervision on your course.



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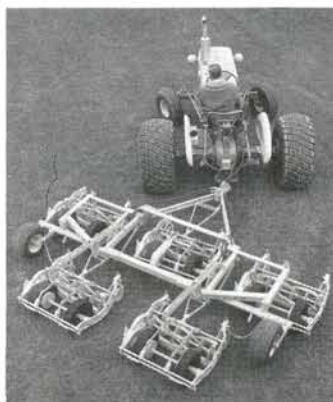
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