

MORE BUDGET TALK

A budget is prepared to be used as a guideline for expenditures by the Green Department for a coming fiscal year. It reflects anticipated needs for the golf course and related areas on the grounds, to continue present standards, to improve areas of maintenance, and to keep up with everyday inflationary trends. Over the years we have seen budgets for golf courses more than double. It is difficult for the average golfer to understand why this has happened, but if we sit back and look at what trends the golf industry has experienced these past ten years, I feel that most understanding people will agree that there is justification for these tremendous escalations. Another important item to remember, the most important consideration about golf course care and budgeting, is that we, as golf course managers, can only predict what Mother Nature has in store for us. Our experience with 1981 C-15 greens is a prime example of how unexpected expenses can throw a well-thought-out budget off the anticipated mark.

Many of our supplies are by-products of the petroleum industry. Gasoline is four to five times more expensive than it was in the early 70's. Supplies in the chemical and fertilizer areas are now three times more expensive than they were in the early 70's. Hauling soil, sand or gravel is triple the price from just a few years ago. When we buy sand or soil and have it shipped in large trucks, the major expense is not the product, it is the shipping. Parts for restoring our own equipment have all gone up tremendously in the past four years. When major repairs come up on some of the larger pieces of equipment, we may have to send it out to be fixed knowing that the minimum for labor will be \$35 per hour. Most times the labor bill for the repair is 3 to 4 times higher than the parts used to fix the machine.

Another change in the golf business is that there is just plain more people playing the game of golf. This means we have to hustle around with more people to get the work done ahead of play. Every year the golf committee wants to know the earliest possible tee time we can give them on weekends or what problems will occur with more players teeing off from the 10th tee. The women have more players every year. On Tuesdays, they have to have a semi-shotgun start for them to finish their play at a reasonable hour or just finish their golf before the men play. All this extra play does increase the labor part of the golf course budget. There is no getting around it. No matter how frugal and efficient we become, we will incur more expenses keeping the golf course with galloping inflation and increased play.

All golf courses have experienced the same inflationary pinch that we have. In seven years we have seen our budget increase almost \$100,000. So have other 18 hole golf courses. In seven years we have averaged increases around 10%, yet many of our supplies have taken yearly increases of 25%. It seems to me that we have been conscientious and mindful of ways to control costs in areas of labor and machinery to offset what could be even higher expenses for the golf course. The demands of the golfer are greater just with their presence. Several years ago a sickle bar could be used to trim the outside part of the golf course. Now we trim it with rotary mowers every 10 days during the golf season. Trimming around trees was done before each of the three major holidays of the summer season. Now it is done on each of these plus each time prior to invitationals and large outings. At one time, we were able to rake the traps three to four times a week in the afternoon between groups of players. Now it has to be

done nearly six times a week ahead of play. And now that we will be experiencing Monday golf outings this coming summer, new ways of doing routine work with no golfers will have to be devised in order not to endanger crew workers or interfere with the golfer. We know, as businessmen, that the decade of the 80's will be one of volatile economics. If this becomes a reality, budgeting the golf course maintenance will become even more difficult. More communication and close work with committees will be necessary to better prepare each year.

We have experienced change every year on the golf course. Things will continue to change if we wish to improve the operation and quality of the golf course. Some rethinking will be necessary at all golf and country clubs. Ideas like assessing part of the golf cart rental for construction of new and old cart paths can be initiated. Guest fees for juniors, women, and non-resident members is another idea being tried by some golf courses in the Chicago area. Reduction of mowing schedules without reducing the quality of the course may have to be tried. Cart paths may have to be built in areas where heavy play leaves traffic areas worn to the soil by season's end.

A golf course budget is a guideline. In most cases, we can come fairly close to determining what the year-end total will be. Our membership expects and should get the most for their dollars spent for the club operation. Approximately 20% of their dollar goes toward the golf course care. The golf course is **the** attraction for the club. We should make every effort to provide a quality golf course for the golfer. If we short-change the golf course, the quality will go down. We will not have what the golfer wants if we run out of fertilizer and chemicals or manpower to provide these conditions. Even though we can not guarantee perfect conditions all the time because of the variables that nature provides, we should at least have the tools to combat the problems that Mother Nature hands us.

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