

MAGCS Directors Column

“So, Who’s Complaining”

by David Behrman

Deer Creek Golf Club, Park Forest, IL

On a recent trip to the hardware store, I chanced upon one of my fellow superintendents. The topic of conversation, as it often is, was the weather. As we became quite involved, one of the salespersons stood by and listened intently as we discussed rainfall, temperature, and humidity as if our very existence depended upon the weather and the weather alone. After much discussion and consoling over the hand Mother Nature had been dealing us lately, we came to the conclusion that the weather in Chicago is changing. For the good or bad we didn't know, but, it was definitely changing. Now that this dilemma was settled, we turned to go about our business. At this point the stores ever patient employee had one unnerving comment, “You guys complain more about the weather than the farmers.” As I drove back to the golf course, pondering this personal assault, I decided to find the answers to a few questions that Chicago weather had brought to mind.

Is the weather in Chicago really changing?

Is there one ideal place in Chicago where the weather is better?

Do superintendents really complain more about the weather than farmers?

In order to find the answers to these menacing questions one needs a better understanding of Chicago weather and its' predestiny to change.

Chicago weather is primarily determined by its' location. Sitting in the center of a vast band stretching from the arctic of the north to the warm gulf waters of the south. Lacking any major land barriers, icy cold or warm moist air masses have equal access to the area, often colliding over Chicago in a struggle for dominance. The factor that moderates these two warriors is Lake Michigan; which helps control the temperature extremes.

Major weather systems are guided into the area by dominant winds blowing 18,000 feet above the ground. These currents bring weather from three locations. The cool of Canada when the northwest current blows. As it diminishes the western winds of the Pacific may predominate and bring weather across the rockys or southwesterlys provide Gulf moisture for our air.

So, the possibility for a change in the weather can come as quickly as a change in the direction of the wind. It is almost that simple, but, what about the fact that the weather seems to be changing. Is that really true? Yes, in fact the weather can change constantly due to environmental changes made by man. How many golf courses when they originally built were surrounded by farms and open space, rather than, homes and office buildings? If you fall into this category, many changes took place so slowly that you may not have realized they were taking place. The summer temperature averages two degrees warmer and the winter as much as five degrees warmer. Humidity is about six percent less. There are ten times as many dust particles in the air. You will find you experience cloud cover ten percent more than you used to. There is a one hundred percent increase in winter fog and thirty percent more summer fog. Finally, wind speed is twenty to thirty percent less. Gusts have decreased and the wind calms five to twenty percent more. (I wonder if any of this affects your maintenance program.) So,

it is safe to say our weather is changing. As to whether we are experiencing changes on a large scale it is harder to prove since weather bureau records only date back to 1870. However, scientists are sure that the very environmental changes I mentioned earlier combined with industrial pollution are impacting changes on a large scale. It also appears these changes are occurring very slowly and will require a significant amount of time to document a major climate change in a area such as the midwest. It can be noted, however, that due to the increase in the size and number of the buildings in the city of Chicago it now affects weather in all the surrounding areas. This occurs due to the fact that the city produces a large mass of warm, humid, dust laden air; known as a heat island. This air combines with the cool upper atmosphere to form clouds. These clouds combine with incoming storms to form a storm of greater intensity as it leaves the city; causing heavy rains, thunderstorms, hail, and strong winds generally in a area twenty to thirty miles from the city, the location of which depends on wind direction. (I think many of us have dealt with this type of storm).

Now that we all thoroughly understand Chicago weather we can easily answer question number two. Is there an ideal location for weather in Chicago? Yes. (Any guesses as to where.) If you answered the north shore, you are correct. By this I mean the area along Lake Michigan north of the city. This area is two to five degrees cooler in the summer and averages two to five degrees warmer in the winter. It receives between one and three more inches of rainfall than any other area. There is always a slight breeze either coming off or moving onto the lake dependent on the land and water temperature difference. And finally the air is cleaner due to this breeze and the lakes cleansing action. (It almost sounds like heaven.)

As for the final question, “Do superintendents really complain more about the weather than farmers?” Well, the jury is still out on that one. I'd personally like to think we're just more vulnerable to the effects of adverse weather. After all, weather not only causes wilt, wet wilt, disease, and desiccation; I have also seen weather raise blood pressure, trigger an upset stomach and it has even left a few hangers in the wake of a storm. So, what seems like complaining to outsiders is probably two professionals engaged in the lively art of conversation.

Announcing GCSAA Regional Seminars

On January 6-7, 1986, the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents is planning to co-sponsor with GCSAA two, two-day seminars at Pheasant Run Resort in St. Charles, Illinois. A combination of a management seminar and technical presentation make a nice choice for superintendents to choose from on a regional basis. Dr. James Beard is giving a class on **Basic Turfgrass Botany and Physiology**. A presentation by Dr. J. Stephen Hazel titled **Business Communication and Assertiveness Techniques** will be given simultaneously to balance your choice for one of two very popular educational sessions.

Betsy Evans from GCSAA has been working with Peter Mirkes and Peter Leuzinger from MAGCS. This will be our fourth year to co-host a regional seminar. Our seminars are becoming more popular every year. Watch for GCSAA's announcements so you can get your name in early.