

Noise/Nuisance Ordinance

by Brian Green, C.G.C.S.

Seldom, if ever, do I think of myself as a noisy individual. But talk to some of the new golf course neighbors and you'd think I'm the loudest man in town. In fact, your neighbors at your courses might be thinking of you in a similar manner. Add to this a loosely written Nuisance Ordinance and you may find yourself caught in the middle of neighbors' opinion, police enforcement and a demanding golf membership. Such has been this spring's experience at Sunset Valley in Highland Park.

We're a public operations, in the 50,000 round category, that in good weather can't get any more crowded with golfers. As one fellow said, "It's like a river of golfers starting at dawn steadily flowing continuous foursomes till dark." It's our job to get out in front of this stream to set up the course for a day of play. So everyday at 5:00 a.m. machinery is heading out for the front nine. This normal maintenance scheduling has been taking place for over sixty years.

One thing in life that is constant is change. Two things in particular have changed over the last twenty years that we're all too aware of. First, this decade of regulation, the new and improved Nuisance Ordinance for example. Second, our neighbors have changed from wooded lots and flood plain wetlands to houses or condominiums, all housing many opinions of our operations.

After several stand-offs with our Police Department responding to calls about noise before the ordinance guidelines of 7:00 a.m. weekdays and 9:00 a.m. on weekends, I realized that this uncomfortable situation of refusing to bring the machinery off the course and the police just trying to do their enforcement bit could go on all summer. The new neighbors simply could call every morning of this season getting a quick response from the police. At this point we decided to approach the City Council for a waiver of the Noise/Nuisance Ordinance in order to continue our operations of providing a well maintained course for the golfing public's enjoyment.

In order to establish grounds for a waiver, we needed to gather a lot of background information. Included in this information was a chart of decibel readings that we had done with a hand held dB meter. We tried to compare our noise with other familiar sounds at a distance simulating our closest neighbors approximately 100 feet.

Distance	Machine	Average dB Reading
1. 100 feet (fenceline)	A Toro Triplex Mowing A Green (Mowing Noise)	63 dB
2. 100 feet	A Single Automobile Traveling at 30-35 m.p.h. (Road Noise)	64 dB
3. 100 feet	A Small Pick-Up Truck Traveling at 30-35 m.p.h. (Road Noise)	69dB
4. 100 feet	A Regular Rotary Mower Cutting a Homeowner's Yard (Mowing Noise)	70 dB
5. 100 feet	A Sand Raking Machine Raking a Sand Trap	61 dB
6. Inside Home (8 feet)	An Air Conditioner Running Inside the Home	65 dB

*A special note: We were not able to record ANY elevated noise levels of our operations from our greensmowers, sand pro or golf carts inside a building with windows closed.

To further check our statistics, we talked with Toro Manufac-

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(Noise/Nuisance Ordinance cont'd.)

turing. They confirmed our findings and added that a better muffler system has not been looked into because they meet all federal noise standards and the demand for quieter machines has not been voiced.

Keep in mind, we've done probably everything that your club is doing before we got to this point. For example, always avoid neighbors' homes till the last part of mowing schedule, avoid using loud equipment like rotaries, diesel tractors, blowers and weed eaters till later in the morning, and always try to reach an understanding with any complaint. Also, we never use any tractors before noon on weekends, mowing only Saturday afternoons. All these adjustments were for about seven complaints in the last eight years, three of these being this spring.

It took two appearances in front of the City Council, coupled with hours of background information and fifty local golfers to get our need for a waiver expressed. The Council majority approved a waiver for greensmowers only and for this public course only. It felt like a small victory considering other work that needs to be done and also the five private clubs in the area that were not considered.

Towards the end of the City Council meeting a lawyer spoke up on our behalf that could help all clubs in this situation. He said that this Nuisance Ordinance is so loosely written it's not enforceable. He added if someone tries to hamstring your golf maintenance operation with use of such an ordinance, you should find an easy victory in the courts. Other supportive comments were from the Council itself saying "Local residents certainly

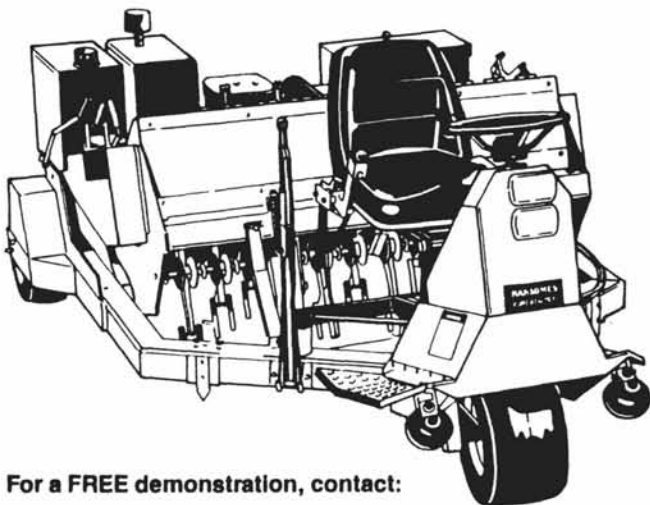
knew the course was there when they moved in" and "To vote against a golf course in this day and this town is like voting against a church or religion."

Any clubs feeling a similar pinch should feel free to contact me. Also remember we all have a lot of support in our communities, people that have no problem donating time and energy when it comes to looking out for the golf courses.



*Our Hosts for the July Meeting
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