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**H**ome stretch! As hot and humid as it may get this month, we know that the days are getting shorter and Labor Day is just around the corner. It's just a matter of time before summer stress conditions begin to subside. This is often replaced by a different challenge: fall projects.

If your club is like the one that I manage, then your workload often increases in the fall. At some point summertime becomes routine. We know that we will be faced with the challenges of disease, drought, heat and humidity. As difficult as these may be to manage, they can become mundane challenges.

I remember my first day on the job as an assistant to Dave Ward (now at Olympia Fields C.C.) at Kenosha C.C. in 1979. We met Skip Willms (Onwentsia C.C.), who was then the golf course superintendent at Racine C.C., for lunch. During that meal, Skip told me that I should take advantage of my time as an assistant to learn as much as possible. He also said that once you have been a golf course superintendent for a few years, that the job of

maintaining the golf course becomes routine and that even though it is additional work, you begin to look forward to the challenge of improvement projects. At the time, I could not fathom that the daunting task of maintaining a golf course to highly professional standards would ever be routine. But it is true that over time it does become almost second nature. Projects become a way to interest and sharpen our skills. The added pressures of attempting to complete a project without diminishing the quality of day-to-day maintenance, and getting it all done before the onset of winter, add to the challenge.

I have gained knowledge through the completion of improvement projects that I would never have had the chance to acquire in any other way. It has also afforded a wonderful opportunity to get to know other people in the industry. Our fellow industry professionals, whether they are golf course superintendents, architects, irrigation contractors, shapers, engineers, etc., have a wealth of experience that is readily tapped. I am constantly reminded of how lucky we are to work in an industry where professional courtesies and knowledge are so freely shared. The experience of working with, learning from and getting to know other industry professionals through improvement projects has been invaluable to my growth as a golf course superintendent and has enriched my life personally as well.

A great sense of pride comes from completing a major improvement task and knowing that your facility is a better place because of your diligent efforts and the dedication and cooperation of a great staff and supporting cast of contractors, suppliers and consultants. The

satisfaction of building a winning team and seeing that team accomplish things that might otherwise seem impossible or much too expensive is one of the continuing appeals of our jobs. It is also a good reason for clubs to think twice about replacing an experienced superintendent. An experienced golf course superintendent can usually save his employer significantly more than the higher wage that he has earned. If you have never taken the time to calculate what a project cost your club to implement in-house, as compared to the potential expense of a turnkey operation where everything from project management to the actual work was left to a general contractor, you may be surprised at just how valuable you are to your facility's operation. It is not a bad idea to remind your employer of that value on occasion as well, especially since budget time is approaching for many of us. 