

# Pondering The Salary Issue and Claiming Time for Golf Course Maintenance, Sans Golfers

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**A**re you overpaid? Are you kidding . . . on the contrary . . . if I were being paid by the hour I'd barely make minimum wage . . . you should see my bills . . . I thought I would have it made when I finally got my own golf course . . . thank goodness my wife has a good job, or we'd never make the mortgage payment . . . you'll never get rich in this line of work . . . HA!

I've asked many fellow superintendents that simple (but loaded) question, and the above represents a fair sampling of the responses I've gotten. Oddly enough, I've never gotten a single positive response. One-on-one, most of us are willing to share the trials and tribulations of the middle-class rat race, but I've never seen it addressed by our chapter on an area-wide basis.

Is this Association providing you with the tools you need to maximize your earning potential?

Are superintendents' salaries an issue for this Association to concern itself with?

Why do so many superintendents leave the profession just when they are getting good at it?

Why is the superintendent third on the payroll hierarchy at so many golf courses?

Right now, some of you are probably asking, "What kind of *Ask the "Expert"* column is this? He's asking a lot of questions, but he has no answers." You're right! I have a lot of questions.

Why does my plumber make more money than I do?

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*Why do so many superintendents leave the profession just when they are getting good at it? Why is the superintendent third on the payroll hierarchy at so many golf courses?*

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Who decided that the median salary of my profession should be around \$50,000?

If it's true that experience is so important, why isn't it included on those darn salary surveys?

Has the tremendous technological boom taken some of the magic out of greenkeeping?

Do you really need a green thumb to practice this profession anymore?

Is it an art or a science . . . both . . . or neither? Can your boss do your job?

Is it possible to be overpaid?

I have been appointed the MAGCS's Education Committee chair for Y2K, and the answers to these and other burning questions of the day are going to be among the topics commented on by this year's Education Committee.

Now, on to something I do know something about. Traffic management.

I am the superintendent of a municipal (park district) golf course in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. Residents of the park district enjoy a significant discount over nonresident players, and can purchase a season pass entitling them to unlimited playing privileges. As you might expect, the golf course is very busy; in fact, for as long as I can remember, annual round totals have exceeded 50,000. On an 18-hole golf course, that translates to golf from dawn to dusk every day the sun is shining. One of the challenges of maintaining a golf course with that kind of traffic is just finding the room to do routine mowing, much less applying plant protectants, topdressing, fertilizing, etc.

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## Pondering the Salary Issue . . .

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I began my golf maintenance career with stints at Bob'O'Link and Inverness country clubs, two of the area's outstanding private golf facilities, where the course was closed on Mondays. We didn't get the day off, of course; the downtime was used to accomplish all manner of course work without having to dodge golfers. I got to thinking that if private clubs recognized the need for unimpeded maintenance access where round totals barely reached 20,000, surely I could sell the idea to my superiors just to give our old, worn-out golf course a break. After conducting numerous surveys, analyzing tee sheets and just plain pestering, we were able to get some maintenance time for the course.

A whole day? You must be dreaming.

How about half a day? Nope.

Would you believe three hours on Monday mornings? I'll take it!

Since we have been able to count on those three golfer-free hours, we have found things to do that I never considered when pitching the idea to the powers-that-be. Those of you who also get some free time on the golf course, I'm sure would agree that you'd never give it back without a fight. To those of you who still have to dodge golfers seven days a week, consider the following points in making your argument.

1) It doesn't matter what day of the week the course should be closed. Talk to your pro or manager and find out what day would be least affected by a short closure. Get him or her on your side. A short list of tasks that can be done expeditiously without interruption include: supplemental irrigation, any spraying, aerification, fertilization and topdressing (especially on fairways), paving cart paths, tree pruning or removal . . . the list can go on and on. The point is, getting these jobs done when the course is closed means less intrusion to the golfers (customers) when the tees are open.

2) Insist on reopening the course on the first tee only. By doing so, you have bought an additional two-and-a-half hours on the back nine.

3) Consider reentry time for plant protectants in making your case. Many of the products we use on a regular basis are labeled with instructions to wait until the spray has dried at least before allowing public access to the site. The label is the law, and I think we often turn a blind eye to this requirement (this was particularly helpful in making my case). Time to water in certain fertilizer applications is also a valid point.

The fact of the matter is, our line of work is a lot like the restaurant business, and we are the chefs. We work behind the scenes, we all use many of the same materials to provide distinctly different recipes. We all have our own secret blends of herbs and spices. Our reputations are on the line each and every day; today's rouladen is tomorrow's leftovers. You deserve the time to prepare your special soup du jour.



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