

# The Secret World of the Night Water Man

*The night water man is a golf course employee of the past. Older superintendents remember this key employee, but younger members of the profession may not even be familiar with the term. Today's "irrigation technician" maintains the sprinklers and the controllers, and makes necessary adjustments to the settings. He may also spend some time monitoring various aspects of the watering functions.*

*The night water man of the hose and roller-base era had to be dependable, resourceful and very, very strong. The water lines on most golf courses ran in the rough between two parallel fairways and the same sprinkler and hose were dragged by hand from one fairway to the other.*

The night water man of the hose and roller-base era had to be dependable, resourceful and very, very strong. The water lines on most golf courses ran in the rough between two parallel fairways and the same sprinkler and hose were dragged by hand from one fairway to the other. The roller bases were 24" to 36" wide with rather large and heavy brass sprinklers mounted on them. The hose was rubber, 1" in diameter, and came in 100' lengths. Often, when the sprinklers were further from the water source, two, three or even four lengths of hose were required. Greens were watered first each night with some greens requiring only one set while others required two or even three sets. Tees were next, with most getting only one set. Most greens and tees demanded only one 100' length of hose, while some necessitated only a 50' length. Greens and tees were the easier part of the job.

Most of the time, the water man walked, although some water men used a tractor, Jeep or pick-up truck. Because he was in and out of the vehicle so often, it was usually easier to walk. In later years, the Cushman and the golf cart facilitated riding, as they were easier to get into and out of and the water man could drive closer to the sprinkler than he could with a larger, heavier vehicle.

The water man could not put out more sprinklers than he could get back to in time to change them or turn them off. Turn-off also required coiling the hose and placing it near the valve. Most superintendents liked very neat coils.

Another problem: most irrigation systems had a lot of small pipe and only one or two sprinklers could be operated at the same time in a given area. This was particularly an issue on fairways, where often only one sprinkler at a time could be operated on the two fairways served by a single irrigation line. Remember: greens were first, tees were second and fairways got whatever time remained in the shift. Also, bluegrass fairways got longer sets, and it was almost never possible to completely water any fairway in

one night. The water man had to remember where he left off so he could continue the following night (or nights); again, after the last set, the hose had to be neatly coiled and placed by the valve.

Then came a newer type of irrigation system. Larger irrigation lines ran down the center of each fairway. The sprinklers were mounted on bayonets and the valves were placed such that each sprinkler watered to the next valve in either direction. This eliminated the scalloped look on the edge of the fairway. The greens had valves under center sod cops or several pop-up sprinklers on the edges, and one valve operated the entire green at one time. Placement of these valves and sprinklers did take prevailing winds into consideration. It was common, however, to use a bayonet swivel el, hose and roller-base sprinkler to catch areas otherwise not covered.

By this time, Cushmans were commonplace and most golf courses had a Cushman with a homemade rack loaded with sprinklers mounted on it.

Suffice to say, the night water man was in a position to have many adventures. It was not uncommon to startle a pair of young lovers or spook a wild animal. To turn and see a pair of owl eyes watching could cause the night water man's heart to skip a beat. Night water men got lost in the fog, drove into sand traps, creeks and trees—stories abounded.

One rule seemed to be that at least once a night the water man would get soaked, almost never by the sprinkler he was setting, but by the next one up the line. Without fail it caught him full across his hot, sweaty back, and the water was always very cold.

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Many superintendents excused themselves after dinner at home and drove back to the golf course to see how the night man was doing and to have some communication with him. Other communication between this duo consisted of short blackboard notes. Typical notes to the water man might read "give no. 10 green an extra 10 minutes tonight" or

*(continued on page 14)*



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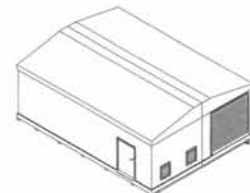
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“be sure to water the approach on no. 14.” Return notes could read “leaky valve on no. 6” or “front tire on Cushman has slow leak.”

The late Louie Haseman, longtime superintendent at Cherry Hills Country Club, was the night water man at Lincolnshire Country Club early in his career. Once, while standing back watching the sprinkler he had just set, he heard a big splash and looked around just in time to see his Jeep sinking into the lake. He took off his shoes and his trousers, dove into the lake, swam down to the Jeep and turned off the lights and ignition. His message on the blackboard when he went home that night was “Jeep in lake.” (For the record, I did ask Louie why he turned off the lights and ignition. He said, “I’ve thought about that, and I don’t know why. But it sure seemed like the thing to do at the time.”)

Most older superintendents have worked as night water man for some period of time and therefore have a special understanding of and respect for the night water man. Most members of the grounds crew did not know how hard he worked and how much he contributed. Most golfers did not know he existed.

I have made it sound as though I am a former night water man. That is not the case. I did do some day-watering during my five-summer stint at Olympia Fields Country Club, but most of the material herein comes from stories I have been told over the years.


One contribution was from Mike Mulvihill (Tri-State Companies) who was working as a trainee (or intern) for the late Roy Nelson at Ravisloe Country Club. Roy had devised a “five-minute set” program for fairways due to a heavy soil condition. Two teams, each consisting of one man, one

Cushman and two Rainbird 808 sprinklers with bayonets worked down each fairway, tee to green. The men would turn on one sprinkler, race back to the last sprinkler and then move it beyond the one just set, and so forth. Mike felt that if any casual observer had to describe what was going on, he or she would reply, “I don’t know—it must be some kind of race.”

The late Walter Pieper, longtime Flossmoor Country Club superintendent who had many night water men working for him and who worked his own share of nights, furnished most of the roller base and hose information. He liked neat coils.

These stories trace back many years and are related here as accurately as possible. The real message is: “The next time your

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automatic irrigation system fouls you up, don’t wish for the good old days!” 



The 2001 Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards call for entries is announced by Syngenta Professional Products; Rain Bird; Textron Golf, Turf & Specialty Products; and Pursell Technologies Inc., in partnership with GCSAA and *Golf Digest*.

The awards recognize golf course superintendents around the world who have demonstrated a commitment to environmental stewardship efforts on the golf course. Applicants are evaluated in the areas of resource conservation, water quality management, integrated pest management, wildlife/habitat management and education/outreach. Three national winners (representing one public, one private and one resort course facility), an international winner, up to three winners from each of GCSAA's 102 affiliated chapters and a number of merit winners will be selected for the 2001 awards. Previous national and international winner of the Environmental Steward Awards or as a winner of *Golf Digest's* Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards are not eligible to apply unless they have changed facilities.

Applications are available from the May issue of *Golf Course Management* magazine, chapter leaders, *Golf Digest*, participating sponsors and the GCSAA Service Center (800/472-7878). The application also is available on the GCSAA Web site ([www.gcsaa.org/environ/elga\\_form.html](http://www.gcsaa.org/environ/elga_form.html)) and may be completed and submitted electronically. Entries are due to GCSAA by October 1, 2001. Winners will be announced in November and will be formally recognized during GCSAA's 73rd International Golf Course Conference and Show, February 3-10, 2002, in Orlando.

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