

A Tale of Two Seventies

Editor's Note: One article couldn't possibly do justice to 75 years of history. So, in honor of the Midwest's 75th anniversary, On Course presents a special decade-by-decade retrospective. This installment features the psychedelic 1970s. Coming in October: the '80s.

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. It was a decade of extremes. The Seventies brought many new ideas and innovations into being; however, the decade also meant the demise of many others. The passions of the Sixties' social revolution evolved into laissez faire attitudes toward civil rights during the Seventies. The incident at Kent State and the decreasing involvement in the Viet Nam War diminished the antiwar protests. The free growth enjoyed during the post-World War II era became burdened by the governmental restrictions of the Seventies. It was a time when society began to take a hard look at our planet and implement changes to protect it.



In 1976, celebrations nationwide mark America's bicentennial.

As a new college graduate in 1970, I was ready to put the "Age of Aquarius" behind me. Get on with life and my career as a golf course superintendent. The best times of my life were ahead. There were many new products available to help me. I had just purchased a new Chevy 3/4-ton pickup truck for \$3,100, and a new Jacobsen Greensking for about the same price. My first-year salary was a whopping \$7,500!

The riding bunker rake, hydraulic fairway mower and systemic fungicides would come along during the next 10 years, but for now I had all I needed. In my "shop" (a 20' x 40' garage) or sitting alongside, I had a Toro 76" professional, Cushman truckster, Cushman golfster, Massey Ferguson 2135 turf-special tractor, Roseman 7-gang mower (with the pins in for rough, down on the castor wheels for fairways), Jacobsen Greensking, two Jacobsen 20" putting-green mowers, a Roseman 3-gang pull mower with hydraulic lift, and other outdated, worn-out vehicles. I was the superintendent, assistant superintendent, night waterman, mechanic and boss to seven seasonal employees. I was a happy guy; life was good.

The shop had no bathroom (save a Port-a-Potty out back), no office, no pesticide storage, no water in the winter once the line froze each year in mid-December. These things were of no real concern, though, because in 1970 there were no OSHA regulations, no EPA, no pesticide regulations and no worry. We didn't wear rubber gloves to mix our pesticides, we knew of no dangers for not using them. We used mercury-based fungicides (Caloclor and Calogran) and arsenicals

(continued on page 20)

(Chipco lead arsenate and tricalcium arsenate) and Acti Dione (cycloheximide, which has an LD50 of 3), unaware of the hazards. This was just part of the job.

As the decade developed, we would soon see many changes affecting our jobs. Development of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would make conservation and environmental protection a practice, not just a concept. We could no longer just go ahead and dredge a pond, dig a septic field or even burn a brush pile without a permit. With the EPA came pesticide training and licensing for operators and applicators. OSHA legislation changed the workplace dramatically. If that wasn't enough, the Nixon administration implemented a wage and price freeze. Then there was the gas and oil embargo, the truckers' strikes of the mid-Seventies and the 55-MPH speed limit. These were not the best of times. The freedoms of the post-World War era had certainly ended. However, although we felt inconvenienced, these changes would extend our lives and the life of our planet. We were becoming a society that was more environment- and safety-conscious.

World events brought a change in attitudes of the nation. The Apollo XIII near-disaster made us reexamine the financial and human costs of the space program. The nuclear near-disaster at Three Mile Island made us rethink the safety of our energy sources. The Viet Nam War made us look at our foreign policies. Our society became more protective of what we had, and became more conservative about development. Green space became a preservation issue and the government even made funding available to municipalities, spiking a mini-building boom in municipal golf development. The gas and oil

embargo brought about the demise of "muscle cars" and drag strips. Air pollution and fuel consumption were necessitating changes from the auto industry. Soil erosion and wetlands issues were limiting housing and commercial development. Planned development of sensitive areas killed the Winter Olympics in Denver in 1976. And so the golf course management industry would also see changes.



Nuclear disaster is narrowly averted at Three Mile Island in 1979.

One of the biggest changes to affect our business was the loss of products that we had used for many years. In the long run, the materials we lost were a blessing because I don't think that I or many of my colleagues would be here today if we had continued to apply mercuries and arsenicals. When I think back to how we handled some of these products, I can only thank God that my children were born with all of their fingers and toes. But the products we lost were eventually replaced with safer ones, sometimes better at controlling the pest, sometimes not. This was the beginning of the systemics. These new products were almost always more expensive due to more thorough testing and lengthy licensing procedures from the EPA.

People were enjoying more free time and golf enjoyed a significant growth curve during this decade. The Sixties had brought televised golf to the masses. The

Seventies brought televised golf to the masses in COLOR. Just in case any golfer needed to be reminded, green is good, brown is not. Thanks to these telecasts, the local hacker yet soon-to-be golf agronomist (because of what he knew from watching TV) could now sit in the men's grill or 19th hole and make comparisons between his own course and the lush grass at the Masters or U.S. Open. I don't think any superintendent has slept very soundly since color came to televised golf.

Equipment technology changed dramatically with the improvement of small engines and hydraulics. Engines became smaller, lighter and more powerful. Hydrostatic drives eliminated gearboxes. Hydraulics powered the motion of the machine as well as lifted the mowers. Hydraulic-drive motors eliminated belts, chains, idlers and lots of bearings in places that were impossible to grease (anyone have a Toro Super Pro 5-gang?). The self-contained fairway mowers, Toro Parkmaster



In 1979, Iranian militants seize the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and take hostages.

and Jake F-10, evolved into lighter, smaller machines with new technology. Just about every course was mowing greens with Greenskings, GM IIIs or even the Hahn.

Golf course architecture and construction were changing to meet the growing need from the boom of the previous decade. Big-



Henry Aaron blasts his 715th home run in 1974, erasing Babe Ruth's 39-year-old record.

ger greens afforded more pin locations so they weren't trampled to death from this surge in play. Many public 18-hole courses in this area saw rounds top 50,000 during the decade—not bad for an eight-month season. Irrigation systems improved and had to cover more areas of the course because of the increased wear. Architects had to begin designing space for cart paths, and how many superintendents learned to fit them into the existing terrain? It seemed like we were always adding drainage, tees or cart paths during the Seventies.

One aspect of the industry has remained fairly consistent since the Seventies. That is our own GCSAA chapter, the MAGCS. It is a tribute to the loyalty and love of this business demonstrated by our membership. Within the MAGCS, Illinois Lawn was the distributor of Jacobsen, Cushman, Ryan, Rogers and 54 other brand names. Toro was first distributed by George A. Davis, then later by Chicago Toro. Wally Fuch's Turf Products outgrew his garage in Wheaton and moved to County Farm Road in West Chicago. Nels

Johnson, Burdett's, Roseman Tractor, Century Rain Aid, Henry Frenzer, Clesen's, Lemont Paving, H&E Sod and Brookside Soil Testing were all in business back then and advertising in *the Bull Sheet*. BOJO was doing business in Peotone, long before any talk of a third Chicago airport there. Scotts started a Proturf division. Par Ex, Milorganite, Aqua Gro and Chipco were all part of our arsenal back then.

The MAGCS was facing some changes as well. The title "golf

course superintendent" was fast becoming the preferred moniker for our position. The first certified superintendents were recognized. Our members were very outspoken against the move of GCSAA headquarters from Chicago to Lawrence, Kansas. Ray Gerber, editor of *the Bull Sheet*, wrote a scathing editorial against it. He made sense. The move didn't. Geographical center doesn't make any sense unless you only are of a driving mentality. Ever try to fly to Lawrence? Our turf concerns were about the mysterious decline of C-15 (Toronto) greens. Several area clubs ended up rebuilding all of their greens as a result. There was a new insect pest in the mid-Seventies. *Aeteniuss Spretulus* had everyone wondering how they were going to keep their turf.

Then, we adapted to whatever the challenge was—as we continue to do now. Several of our concerns then are still problems now, while other concerns are certainly cyclical. *Poa*, keep it or kill it. Low-mow bluegrasses were quite the rage (Warren's A-20 and A-34) . . . not much different from today in light of the recent installations at Geneva G.C. and Phillips Park G.C. Growth retardants were coming on; now they are being perfected and widely used. Wastewater irrigation was

(continued on page 22)



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"The King" dies on August 16, 1977.

being used on the North Shore of Chicago and is now the main ingredient in irrigation resources in many parts of the country. We lost DDT, but its demise has given us back the eagles, herons and egrets.

The Seventies were a decade of conservative and cautious growth. Budgets grew to keep up with the growth of the game. But so many times, they didn't keep pace with inflation of the economy. Labor budgets in the MAGCS in

the late Seventies ranged from \$95,000 to \$157,000. Superintendents salaries ranged from \$19,000 (with housing) to \$40,000 (without housing). In 1978, Medinah C.C. offered \$25,000 to \$35,000 for responsibility over three courses. Sugar Creek offered \$14,300 to \$17,500 for a nine-hole job. The city of Elgin advertised \$18,000 to \$22,200 for one nine-hole and one 18-hole course.

We worked with what we had, and didn't know anything different. As the leisure-time industry grew, so did we. The challenges of the decade made us grow as professionals. It was a ride of peaks and valleys. The trials and tribulations gave stories to tell, occasions to remember and helped us build on what we are. Yes, life is good! Ladies and gentlemen, Elvis has left the building! 

Author's note: The preceding are the ramblings of a grass-stained wretch who was fortunate enough to live most of these events in a more-or-less cognizant state. He wishes to acknowledge the 120 issues of the Bull Sheet and the 60 issues of the USGA Green Section Record for inspiration in jogging his memory. The material presented is as factual and accurate as the recollections of the author who accepts full responsibility for these proceedings and anything else that happened during the Seventies.



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