



The author.

# NO!!! Ask the "Idiot" Part I

*"Everything is funny as long as it is happening to somebody else."*

— Will Rogers, U.S. humorist and showman

The above statement is true with respect to just about any awkward or uncomfortable situation we find ourselves in with our families or friends, or while at work. I believe this idea relates to our jobs more, because the majority of us try to take our work seriously. As bad as a situation is at the time and how unfunny it seems at that moment, the mood relating to the situation is easily fixed with time. Sweet, old time. It's how a moment of panic, desperation or fury becomes a joke and a learning experience. In the midst of procrastinating and deliberating for a topic, I realized that the humor we find after the fact offers a prime opportunity for writing about some of our funniest moments in the golf industry.

Transitioning into 2005 and relegating the holidays to the backburner until next year, the majority of winter continues to lie ahead. Therefore, winter sports are not out of the question for most of us superintendents. In fact, this is sometimes our only opportunity to spend a lot of time with the family and take advantage of other activities or hobbies. One local superintendent, sparked by a recently played pond-hockey game, remembers a situation involving his crew, some equipment and the idea of a makeshift Zamboni.

*"What was he thinking?" The longtime assistant superintendent of a west-suburban club (that is, Aurora) decided, as his boss drove off to an extended "planning-for-next-year" lunch with Wally Fuchs, that a crew hockey game was in order. Aside from the fact that he and the mechanic were the only crew members who actually knew how to play hockey, and the only ones with skates, he still had it in mind to get out there and lace 'em up. The ice was glass-like perfection, or at least it HAD to be, having spent all that time underneath a two-foot snow cover. The only real snag to his plans was that snow—two feet of it can be really heavy to shovel, especially when one has an Olympic-sized rink planned. A quick equipment inventory was all it took to decide upon his next move: Plow the snow with a Sand Pro equipped with a blade! After airing up the now-flat tires, charging the battery and spraying liberal amounts of ether into the carburetor, the little Sand Pro that could was driven out to the pond where it was soon discovered that it, in fact, couldn't. Couldn't move, couldn't plow and couldn't get back off the pond. A check of the watch showed ample time to retrieve the Sand Pro—all that was needed was a jog back to the shop for the end-loader and a chain. After more air, more charging, and more ether, out chugged the old Ford end-loader to the pond's edge where the chains were attached and the Sand Pro was pulled to shore and sent back to the shop with its tailpipe between its legs. This is where the light bulb turned on, when the planets aligned, and where the epiphany occurred. "Why not use the end-loader to move the snow?" thought he. "If it can hold a Sand Pro, it surely can hold this Ford tractor, right?"*

Now, some ponds deepen gradually from the shoreline outward. Unfortunately for this assistant, this particular pond was NOT one of those. This pond

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went from a shoreline of 6" rip rap (SO attractive) to 8' deep within . . . well, within the length of a Ford end-loader. Needless to say, the tractor broke through the ice approximately one (1) second after its rear tires left the solid shore. The ability to use the bucket to maneuver it back out was lost when the engine coughed, then choked, then finally drowned, leaving no other option but to set the parking brake and walk back to the shop, change into dry clothes and think of the next move.

The story ends almost as it started—the pond remained covered in snow (except where the tractor went through), the skates remained in the shop and there was no hockey game. The only difference was that the assistant was \$350 poorer—this being the cost of a diesel tow truck to pull the tractor out of the pond and drag it back to the shop for dewatering. He is no longer in the business.

Fun as it is to be involved in winter hobbies, cold water in the winter just isn't as soothing as it can be on a hot summer day. Yet, can anyone really control the effects of water? Follow along to find out what happened to the next "sucker" at a country club not too far away from the last.

Once upon a time at a country club not to be named, in Elmhurst, Illinois on Grand Avenue, a superintendent (whom we'll call, for story purposes, Joel) assigned a gentleman named Enrique to hand-water flowers out on the golf course. Enrique was an older man from Mexico who spoke little English. It was about midday when Enrique started watering a flower bed dividing two separate tees boxes on the ninth hole at the country club. At the same time, on the opposite end of the golf course, a contracted company was working on the acid-injection system's tie-in to the irrigation system. This club, at the time, had an older VT4 controller system. The superintendent (Joel) had to run the system to test the acid-injection system that was being installed. The decision to run the irrigation heads in the rough (group 6, P2) was the most apparent and safest choice among midday play. However, the slow VT4 computer system would have to briefly pass through the group 6, P1 (tees) program before starting group 6, P2 (rough) program. This meant the

possibility existed that a sprinkler or two on the tees might run for a split second.

A focused and determined Enrique was watering away, minding his duties. An older member approached the tee box and teed up in front of Enrique. Unaware, the member was also standing just in front of the Toro 657 irrigation head to that tee. Coincidentally, this is the exact moment superintendent Joel sent the command to run the irrigation in the rough. Sure enough, the VT4 system ran the sequence of priority, cycling briefly through the (P1) tees first before firing up the rough (P2). A doctorate is not needed to determine what events took place next. The irrigation head just behind the member popped up for a brief moment, darting the member vigorously in the rump then immediately shutting off. The member hit the roof, jumping a record-breaking distance into the air, sufficient enough to contest in any Olympic high jump event. Turning around, the member saw an equally surprised Enrique with a hose in hand, the only water source in sight. Infuriated, the member began chasing and threatening the poor and helpless Enrique. Enrique, totally innocent, but possessing what looked to be irrefutable evidence in hand, began to retreat shouting, "I did nottin'!"

Shortly after getting a second wind and correcting himself, the member finally moved on and made the turn to the no. 10 tee. The destination of the member was quickly disrupted when he bumped into the golf course superintendent; again, we're calling him Joel. The time was now right to give it to the superintendent, and give it he did. "One of your workers tried to kill me!" he bellowed at the superintendent as he leaped from his cart. Shortly after attempting to comfort the member over his distress from this episode, the superintendent—confused and unaware of what had actually happened—strutted away lamenting the effects of age and how senile people can get. While poor Enrique, he was never the same man again.

People can sometimes be affected so dramatically by a **change** in events that they will never carry themselves or react to situations the same again. Change—it's such a difficult course to pursue, but may also be for the better or for worse. Ponder on

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some of the changes you have made in your life, and compare them to the types of changes you are going to read about in this next predicament.

A long, long time ago in the late fall at a country club, not to be named, in Valparaiso, a superintendent and committee members surveyed around some greens for new tree locations. They studied and collaborated on playability, course architecture and aesthetics. Finally, when the esteemed gentlemen came to a decision, they placed small flags in the rough areas around the greens where they wanted to transplant the new trees. Soon enough, winter struck and a blanket of glittery white snow covered the ground in Valparaiso announcing what should have been the end to another golf season. What makes this story notable is that Mother Nature quickly put an end to the notion of a completed golf season. Like an invading army, a warm stretch of weather came in and melted the snow away. Respectfully, some golfers decided to follow suit and extend the golf season . . . yea! Obviously, at this point the pins and markers had been removed from the holes for winterization. The "I have to play" addicted golfers decided what a good idea it would be to use the little flags that were around the greens to indicate hole placements. Time moved on, and before too long the golfers were once again stashed away warmly in their little homes protected from a cold winter season. For a second time, a layer of

powdery white snow camouflaged the beautiful country club in Valparaiso and its marking flags.

Later that winter, the highly motivated and determined tree transplanting company scheduled time to come and do their work in the beautiful holiday snow, awww!! What ended up being truly beautiful were the faces of the superintendent and the membership that spring, after the snow melted. For these men observed a sight one could never imagine to see in a lifetime: trees, yes, newly transplanted trees on the greens in Valparaiso. The story doesn't stop here; some greens were fortunate enough to have more than one flag and thus, more than one tree. Happy holidays, and how do you spray for that?

One would really have to strive to surpass the aforementioned events. Although, ghastly as these occurrences are, they're not in the same league with an employee driving a Cushman in high gear through the maintenance shop blaring, "No brake, no gear" (in Spanglish) and subsequently crashing that vehicle through his boss's office door, whilst said boss was on the phone arguing with his ex-wife. Of course, this did happen once, at a country club, not to be named, in a town called Naperville. Imagine the initial reaction of this superintendent, holding a disconnected phone and covered in dust.


I was told of a time when a superintendent hired his own brother-in-law (we'll call him Todd) to work at a golf course, the name of which I won't mention at this time, but it was located in the Fox Valley and featured lots of springs and brooks. The crew of this golf course, including the new brother-in-law (Todd), learned of others out east who would entertain themselves water-skiing in canals. They achieved this feat by tying a rope to a car bumper and driving along the canal's bank.

One day after work hours, after the superintendent had left the course for what was supposed to be the end of his day, the self-motivated "I must do this" maintenance crew established water-skiing as their goal for their day's end. Now this (spring, brook) golf course had a long pond on no. 14, which was perfect for the not-so-brilliant, teenager-heavy ground staff. "What the hell, if they can do it, we can," thought the guys as they fired up

a modified, heavy-duty cart, loaded up the skis and tow-rope, and headed out to the rendezvous point. The game was on, and the brainstorming crew member was in the water awaiting the cart to pull him up onto the skis. However, the modified cart just wasn't modified with enough power, and our first skier never came up. So like the Sand Pro, the modified cart headed back to the shop with its modification between its legs.

"Ding-ding, ding-ding." The bells went off in their heads. "Our old LCG tractor," the crew members said. They raced to the shop and started her up, and down to the pond to link the rope up. From (1) into (8), the gears popped into place; next thing you knew, the skier came up to race. Down the 14th hole he went like a bullet, zigging and zagging, his hair flowed like a mullet. The rest of the crew, they jumped up to cheer, for their friend got around like a drunk man on beer. Soon he retired, "VICTORY is mine." Todd then exclaimed that he'd go the next time. The first fool got out; his turn was gone, now it was Todd who's thrown in as the pawn. As Todd put on the skis, ready and still, the crew saw a big truck come over the hill. "Oh shi\_!!" they screamed, and all scattered away, leaving poor Todd out in the bay. No more carts, no more life, there was nothing in sight, the whole crew had left and called it a night. Here poor Todd sat, a portrait forever, a man in a golf course pond alone, with skis and life preserver. With no rope and skis on he was left for dead, because now came

Todd's boss, bound for his head. The boss was usually stern, because that was his way, but changed his mood now and became very gay. He started knee-slapping and laughing at Todd, "What a sight, your friends have all left you" to sleep there for the night. Eventually Todd managed and came in to dry, but now has to live his life knowing he was . . . THAT GUY!

Still hungry for more? Ponder this thought over the next month. Imagine a superintendent after the stresses of Labor Day who is thinking of finally getting some relaxation by going south on a whitewater rafting trip. On vacation at last, he receives a phone call from his assistant superintendent concerning a bomb threat at his golf course. If your interests include Acme, Wile Coyote and the Road Runner, then check out how the chaos unravels next month in Part II of "Ask the 'Idiot.'" 

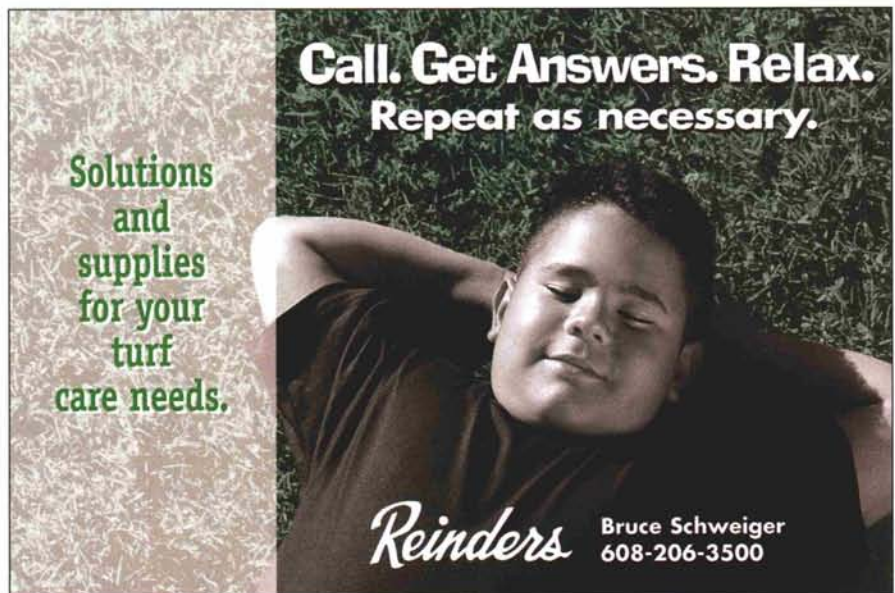
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