

We were definitely a limited-budget facility and we tried to do a lot without sacrificing the quality of the course. Our budget for 18 holes was a minimal \$115,000: tiny by comparison to what I'm used to in Chicago, but adequate for our 120-acre, 18-hole facility in northwest Wisconsin. Fungicides were rarely needed, insecticides almost nonexistent, herbicides applied in the spring and fertilizing done on an as-needed basis. These factors together combined to bring us a quality facility on a limited budget—a very limited budget.

In order to have funds to improve the course, we all agreed to take on more responsibilities and thereby save on our payroll, so our days were filled, spare time unheard of. Once the golf season started, my first order of business at sunrise everyday was moving and staging the golf carts for the day's use, then off to check greens and change cups . . . then on to whatever construction project or

mechanical need was pressing at the time. By the end of the day, I was needed to park carts and then water at night with our manual

*The end of March
brought in a
freak winter snow-
storm that dropped
a foot-and-a-half
of snow and pushed
opening day back
three weeks on
the front nine
and four weeks
on the back nine.*

irrigation system, which meant my day concluded around 10 p.m. We usually reserved weekends for family time, or what we

called family time. I ran the pro shop and my wife bartended and that was our quality family time, while my parents stayed home and babysat our one-year-old daughter. As summer seemed to drag on, I looked forward to fall when my hectic schedule would slow down. During the fall and winter months, I was actually able to get some decent sleep and recuperate my worn out, frazzled brain and muscles.

An owner must take responsibility for a multitude of hidden concerns that a superintendent need not. The biggest concern, in my opinion, was covering the expenses for the whole establishment, including the restaurant, bar, pro shop, golf course and of course, the mighty taxes. The minor concerns seemed just as important, such as a full tee sheet and golfers late for their tee times, a bartender not showing up for his/her shift, the food delivery

(continued on page 12)



When the author and his family purchased Spring Valley, the place was in decline. Vision, knowledge and old-fashioned hard work paid off. "We turned it into a profitable business," notes Mark. Indeed, in 1998 Golf Digest nominated Spring Valley as best and most beautiful in western Wisconsin. Here is hole #10, a 302-yard par 4.


Golf Course Ownership . . .

(continued from page 11)

arriving late for the party booked for that evening, or the ice machine breaking down on a 90° day when the tee sheet is full of golfers. No matter how big or small the concern may be, the owner needs to recognize and fix it.

The life of an owner/superintendent is a hard one, working seven days a week for months on end and dealing with every aspect of the golf facility, not just the grounds. The long, 14-hour-plus

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days for seven or eight months a year took a toll on both our families. After two-and-a-half years of running our facility, we decided to sell and return to a "normal life." I do believe those years helped me realize that just because you own a facility, does not mean your life is luxurious and fun. I am definitely a happier person being back in the Chicago area as an assistant superintendent at Ruffled Feathers Golf Club in Lemont. 



Hole #6, par 5, 565 yards.



Hole #9, par 4, 370 yards.

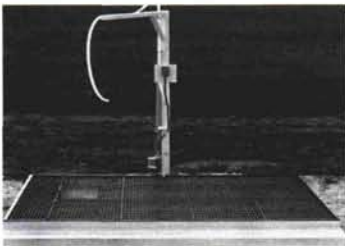


Hole #8, par 4, 375 yards.

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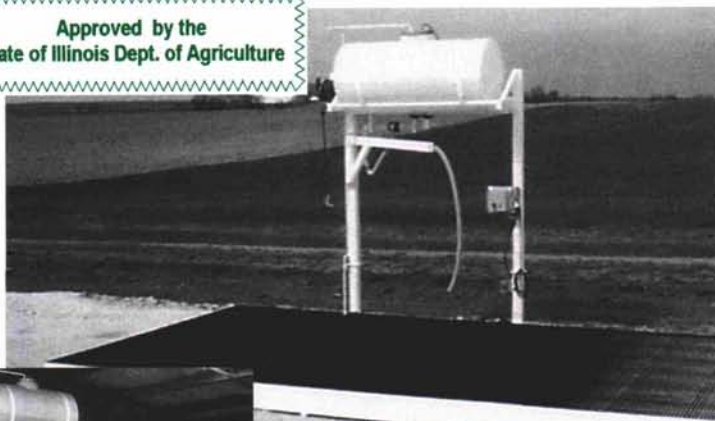


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Do It With Someone . . . Or By Yourself?

Dan Murray, CGCS
Settler's Hill G.C.

At every golf course, a time arrives when a large project or renovation needs to be done. The inevitable question comes up: can we do this ourselves, or should we hire a contractor? Many variables must be taken into account—each golf course is unique. Depending on the size of the project or the time of the year, the answer can change from job to job. In some cases, you may want to look at using a qualified golf course contractor.

Contractors have experience in completing many different projects. They do this work on a day-to-day basis, so their crews are already trained. They have seen a variety of approaches to doing projects, and can bring in interesting viewpoints. Contractors are aware of the most up-to-date techniques, which you may not be knowledgeable about. Hiring a contractor may give you many options on the best and most inexpensive way to complete a project. Also, since contractors do this work on a daily basis, they are aware of specialty suppliers or newer materials. These new materials may work better than existing products. What's more, a product that you never heard of might be out there.

Another benefit: Contractors have the ability to buy in large quantities at lower costs. Contractors will also have access to specialized equipment that will help expedite the project. You may be able to rent or borrow certain equipment, but only

contractors will have some items. Most golf courses are equipped to grow and maintain grass, whereas qualified golf course contractors are equipped to do construction. Many equipment options will help the job progress more quickly—and with less mess.

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No doubt, by choosing the right contractor, you should be able to get the work done in a minimal amount of time. Contractors will have all the necessary resources to complete the work with a minimal amount of fuss. Since their profitability is in relation to the amount of work they can complete, they will want to do as many jobs as possible and not dilly-dally around. In hiring a contractor, you should also be able to get a firm price for completing the project—no hidden costs or surprises. Sometimes, this price concerns boards or owners. However, depending on the size of the job,

some contractors may be able to offer some type of payment plan.

One drawback to using a contractor may be trying to get the contractor's schedule to match yours. Weather delays, combined with the reality that a contractor is performing many projects, sometimes can cause problems. Also, some contractors may not know or practice proper etiquette around golfers or on the golf course. They will not know the golf course as intimately as you and your crew. Your contractor will need guidance from you to complete some portions of the work. Finally, the cost for a contractor to complete the work may be higher than if you do all or a portion of the work in-house. You should explore all the costs before you make the final decision.

Another option, of course, is to do the project or renovation in-house. For some individuals, this can be a very rewarding experience. Using your existing crew for the job gives them a nice change of pace. Many employees look forward to the fall because it promises construction projects. After a summer spent doing the same thing day after day, employees welcome the chance to try different things. Your crew will have the opportunity to learn new skills and how to operate different pieces of equipment. You may find that you have some talented individuals working for you right now! Moreover, by doing the work yourself, you gain a great sense of pride and accomplishment. You can have no greater feeling than looking at a finished

(continued on page 24)

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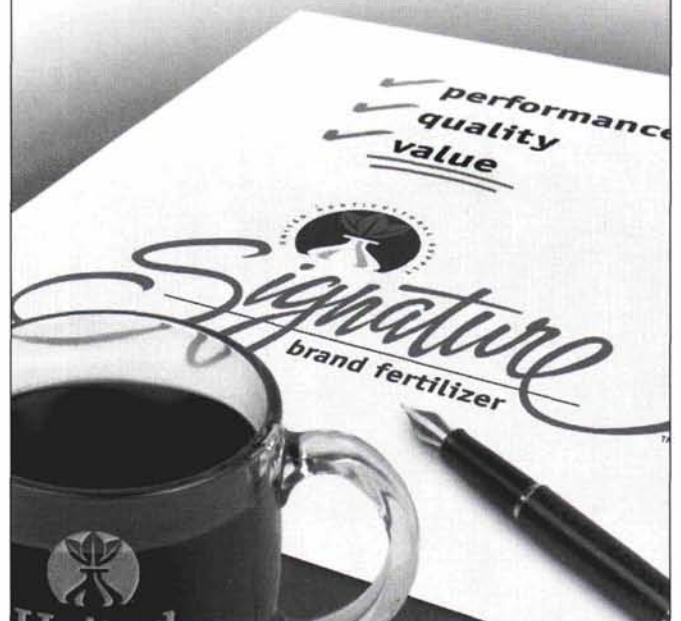
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The Winning Team: Audubon International and Golf

Tod Hopphan
Elgin C.C.

This is another in a series of articles written by members of the MAGCS Environmental Committee.

Are you part of a winning team? Is your successful operation due to your individual efforts or attributable to a group working together for the same goal? What affiliations have you formed to help you in your goal of complete success in the golf course industry? Have you networked with other groups or explored every avenue available to you in this journey? Chances are, you have accomplished all of the previous to be at the level of excellence you are at today.

The one thing I have learned this year, is that you have to know who your friends are and lean on them in times of trouble. In our industry, we have a great pool of friends to rely upon. I have worked in this industry, in various capacities, for more than 23 years and thought I had it all figured out. As always, was I wrong! I have had the opportunity to learn from some of the masters of the turf (Carl and Hans Hopphan, Walt and Wally Fuchs, Greg Johnson and Bill Leith, to name a few), and feel very lucky for the experience. Went through a lot of good years and bad. However, through all these experiences, I have had a host of people willing to help me. I hope everyone who reads this article feels very fortunate for what we have in our Association. It is comforting to dial up the phone and have a multitude of people willing to assist you with a problem. These people want to do it,

As you are probably aware, over the years I have been a strong supporter of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program sponsored by Audubon International (AI). I have pushed, no, shoved, everyone in our Association to at least seek membership in the program.

not for profit, but with a charitable heart. I want to thank all those who have been there for me over the years and I can never say thank you enough for the support.

Boy, what a lead in! Now that I have everyone tearing up, I get to my point.

As you are probably aware, over the years I have been a strong supporter of the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program sponsored by Audubon International (AI). I have pushed, no, shoved, everyone in our Association to at least seek membership in the ACSP. As mentioned previously, this is a group that wants to assist us in our industry. No hidden agendas, just guidance. In a world where golf courses are not viewed with the most favorable eye, Audubon International is an organization that wants to help, an ally. This is a program you should involve yourself with, or at

(continued on page 18)

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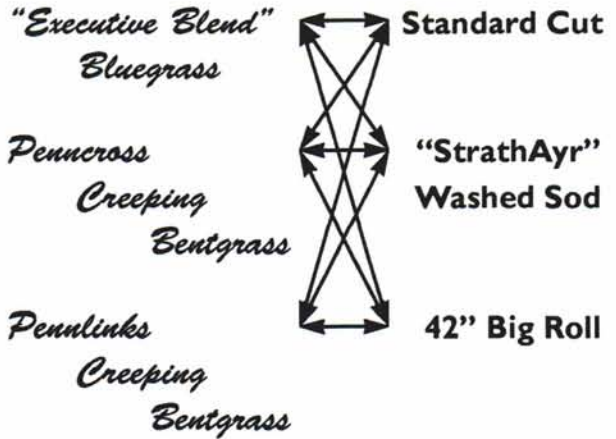


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The Winning Team: Audubon . . .

(continued from page 16)

least support by sending in your \$100 membership fee.

You may be saying to yourself right now, Tod, my course has nothing to offer to AI. I'm a small course with no natural areas or features. We mow corner to corner, or don't have the area, budget or support to offer to such a project. I sympathize with you! I have been down that road. My answer is this: you are right, most courses don't have the potential to develop such outstanding natural areas like Ivanhoe, Olympia Fields, Cantigny or many other courses in the greater Chicagoland area. But you are green! You grow grass, and maintain trees (in some cases), shrubs and flowers that are home to many species of wildlife, even if only squirrels and geese. With the ever-expanding development that surrounds us, golf courses are one of the last havens for wildlife. If properly managed (and most are), any golf course is a great site for wildlife. So why don't you at least belong to this great group, Audubon International, and get as much help as possible to develop your property to its fullest potential. Anything you have to offer is terrific. Just join! (Today!)

Another point I want to emphasize is Illinois' current standing in the U.S. for certified cooperative sanctuaries. I feel very proud to have been associated with one of the first 10 courses in the country to be deemed a certified golf course through the ACSP. Of those first 10, five were from Illinois! Until recently, Illinois had held the lead, but we have fallen behind. Today, AI-ACSP registers 2,101 courses; of those, 201 are deemed certified sanctuaries. Currently, Illinois ranks second in the country with 16 certified golf courses. Sounds great, but we are a distant second


to Florida, with a total of 28 certified golf courses. What's with that? Some interesting notes on other

With the ever-expanding development that surrounds us, golf courses are one of the last havens for wildlife. If properly managed (and most are), any golf course is a great site for wildlife.

states that rank high in number of certified courses: in third place with 10 certified courses is . . .

New Jersey. I was surprised to discover that some larger, more populous states such as Texas (six certified) and New York (seven certified) did not rank higher. Also, California has only six certified courses. Go figure, dude!

We are doing well, but we can do so much better. I know of a lot of courses in the Chicagoland area that could easily, or have tremendous potential to, be certified. With the help of Audubon International and the many certified courses in the area, no excuse exists for not starting the procedure for certification this winter. I want to offer my services (as limited as they are) if anyone has questions.

So—come on guys, let's make a push this winter to regain our lead and show the country once again that we are the environmental leaders we know ourselves to be! Best of luck. 

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Prunin' Time

*Tim N. Taddy
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Winter will soon be upon us with all of her fury, so it's time to think about pruning the trees on the course. The most obvious reasons for trimming trees are to clean out deadwood, improve clearance for golf clubs and open fairways for the flight of the golf ball. Removing deadwood from trees not only renders the trees healthier, but also makes them safer in high winds—sparing you too much to clean up after a good wind, too! Elevating the low branches to make swinging the golf club easier, and cutting back certain trees from fairways, could be interpreted as removing some of the challenges posed by the golf course, but on the other hand, a tree's growth habits can sometimes make a hole downright unfair.

Less obvious reasons for tree trimming exist, too, and I'll discuss a couple of these now. American elms are one of Mother Nature's most beautiful creations. They should have their deadwood removed even

more frequently than most trees. The reason: the elm bark beetle, one of culprits in the spread of Dutch elm disease, is attracted to the odor given off by dead elm wood. If the trees are free of deadwood, the beetles are far more likely to keep on trucking to the next victim.

The most obvious reasons for trimming trees are to clean out deadwood, improve clearance for golf clubs and open fairways for the flight of the golf ball.

Certain species, such as Norway maples and lindens, become so thick in growth habit that it is very difficult to grow grass under them. These trees should be thinned out every couple of years so the grass can

get a little more sunlight. If you have just too darn many of these sun-robbing trees than your budget can handle, mulching under them with wood chips is one solution. Wood chips are not the nicest surface from which to hit a golf ball, but they are better than mud.

Winter is also the best time of year for shrub pruning. Whether you are just thinning shrubs and removing the older canes or whacking them right down to the ground to rejuvenate older shrubs, now is the best time.

With the ground becoming quite hard now, tree guys can get out on your course with their bucket trucks with minimal damage. We can also remove large trees without tearing everything up. Unlike the winter of '97, when the ground never did freeze, we can hope for dropping temperatures—cold weather will go far towards keeping insect populations down next year. Good luck and good trimming—spring will be here before we know it! 