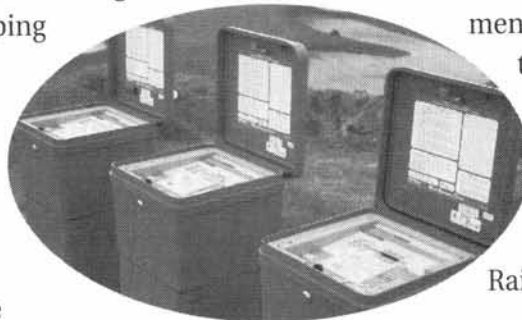




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FEATURES

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FRONT COVER

The signature hole at Crystal Lake C.C.

—#18, par 4, 400 yards (photo by Mike Preble)

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John Gurke

The Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents (MAGCS), founded December 24, 1926, is a professional organization whose goals include preservation and dissemination of scientific and practical knowledge pertaining to golf turf maintenance.

We endeavor to increase efficiency and economic performance while improving and enhancing the individual and collective prestige of the members.

The MAGCS member is also an environmental steward. We strive to uphold and enhance our surroundings by promoting flora and fauna in every facet in a manner that is beneficial to the general public now and in the future.

Bad Greens Deserve a Failing Grade

*Paul Vermeulen
Director Mid-Continent Region
USGA Green Section*

Educating golfers on topics relating to successful course management is one of the greatest challenges faced by superintendents. At no time is this fact truer than when the turf on a bad green has a history of deteriorating during the summer season. In this instance, superintendents have the difficult task of explaining how multiple factors can interact, causing a green to deteriorate. This task is also made more difficult by the fact that golfers, as students, have little patience for learning the finer points of agronomy and just want to know who, rather than what, is responsible for the interruption in their game.

When attempting to educate a large audience that has little patience, it is always best to keep the lesson plan as simple as possible.

One plan that has worked well for superintendents in the Mid-Continent Region is to assign a letter grade of A through F to each of six factors that commonly influence turf performance during the summer months. In so doing, golfers can glance at a report card and instantly appreciate the gravity of the situation. Furthermore, they can also see for themselves what steps need to be taken to restore the turf and improve its reliability in the future.

The first factor that can influence turf performance during the summer months is subsurface drainage, i.e., water infiltration rate. Good subsurface drainage is critical to the performance of closely mown turf because it prevents the root zone from remaining flooded following heavy rainfall. During periods of high-temperature stress, flooding of the root zone can suffocate the root system and lead to severe injury.

Clay soils have the poorest subsurface drainage because they have very small pore spaces between soil particles and are prone to severe compaction. When compacted, a clay soil can have a water infiltration rate of less than 0.2 inches/hour, which is a disastrous situation in anyone's book. Sandy soils have the best subsurface drainage because they have large pore spaces between soil particles and are somewhat resistant to compaction. Sandy soils that meet USGA specifications for putting green construction have a water infiltration rate between 6 and 24 inches per hour.

An example of a grading scale that can be used to illustrate subsurface drainage as influenced by soil type is as follows:

- A – Sand-modified soil overlaying a bed of gravel with drainpipe (USGA or California construction).



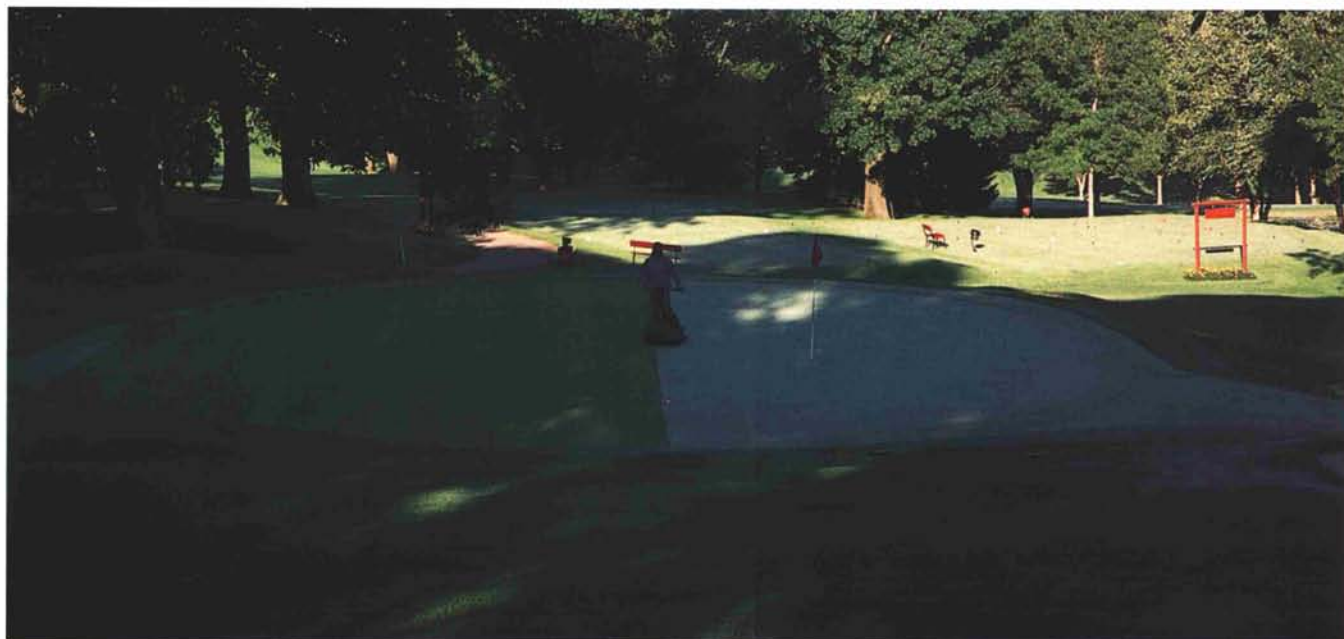
Poor air circulation, poor surface and subsurface drainage, and poor ventilation cause bad greens to fail during the stressful summer months.

- B – Sandy loam soil with drainpipe.
- C – Sandy loam to loam soil without drainpipe.
- D – Amended clay loam to clay soil with or without drainpipe.
- F – Clay soil that remains saturated for extended periods following heavy rainfall with or without drainpipe.

The second factor that can influence turf performance during the summer months is the dominant turf species growing on the putting surface. The dominant species of turf influences summertime putting green performance because some species have greater heat tolerance than others. Species with good heat tolerance are able to maintain lower canopy temperatures through the process of evapotranspiration, whereas those with poor heat tolerance easily overheat and slowly

deteriorate from fungal infection and physical wear. The slow decline of older creeping bentgrass varieties with poor heat tolerance during the summer months is commonly referred to as summer bentgrass decline (SBD).

A list of newer creeping bentgrass varieties that have good summertime performance in the Mid-Continent Region includes, but is not limited to, A-4, Cato, *(continued on page 28)*



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*Bob Maibusch, CGCS, MG
Hinsdale G.C.*

Thank God it's July! If we haven't heard every imaginable complaint by now, we will this month. The greens are too hard or too soft, too fast or too slow. The fairways are too short, or too long. You've probably received all of these criticisms in the same day. How about the ever popular, "Why can't we have conditions like XYZ Country Club?" Ironically, this question usually comes on the heels of having a member of XYZ Country Club who was playing your golf course yesterday lament that he wishes his club could be similar in condition to yours.

With the promise of increased heat and humidity, disease pressure, drought, normal wear and tear, and trying to finish up those "special" projects that seemed to pop up during the last few months, July promises to be a very difficult month. At least in August we can look forward to Labor Day.

I have often thought that the most successful golf course superintendents I have met, haven't necessarily been the ones most skilled at growing grass.

They are all very good turf managers, but more importantly, they are good people managers, who are even-tempered enough to absorb criticism without lashing out at the critic.

Dealing with adversity is an essential part of being a good golf course manager. We are faced with challenges outside of our control on a regular basis. If you do not have the ability to go with the flow and adjust accordingly, you will not last long in this profession. Your staff will lose respect for you, and your employer will become disenchanted as well. That's why attending monthly meetings is so enjoyable. It gives us all the opportunity to share our common frustrations.

Most people, if a situation is communicated effectively, will understand your plight and may even be sympathetic to it. Dealing with such people is easy. The difficult people, although they ask for an explanation, really aren't as interested in the reasons for less than ideal conditions. They're more interested in venting their frustrations and attempting to get a rise out of you. Hopefully, most of us do not have this caliber of person in a position of authority over us.

I am convinced that a certain minority of people are not satisfied unless they have something to complain about, and can make someone else as miserable as they are. In fact, I once had a club president who commented to me that there is 5% of the membership, who, if he announced that monthly dues had been cut by \$25, would complain that it should have been a \$30 or \$50 reduction. Experience teaches you who

those people are and you learn not to debate them. In fact, I have found that many times the best way to defuse the situation is to just let them spew and sputter, no matter how wrong they may be, without attempting to correct them or rationalize current conditions or some decision that you made that they have taken umbrage with. I may follow up with letters to them at a later date detailing the reasons why we could not accommodate their requests or correct their criticisms, but I try not to waste too much time engaged in arguments that I cannot win.

I am often reminded of a quote, which I heard many years ago at a commencement address. The speaker said that in life, sometimes you have to let some people be right to make up for them not being anything else. How true.

Most of us who look objectively at the people we deal with day in and day out would agree that the vast majority of them are pleasant and agreeable. By and large, they are appreciative of the work that we do. Try to remember that during the next few weeks as you deal with a variety of summer stresses.



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Fred Behnke

Over the years, the MAGCS has taken a leadership role in the environmental arena. Our members have distinguished themselves on a national level in numerous ways. We have produced four different Environmental Steward Award winners (Tim Kelly at Village Links won an unprecedented three times) and at least eight of our members have won regional honors. Peter Leuzinger has established himself as a nationally recognized authority on wildlife habitat enhancement and serves as the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program's regional liaison. Dan Dinelli is doing groundbreaking research on composting methodology and the use of biologicals in "holistic plant management." Peter Voykin was among the vanguard of the wildflower naturalization movement. The list goes on and on, and I apologize to the many not mentioned, but the point illustrated here is clear. MAGCS members have grabbed the environmental torch and are lighting the way for the entire golf world.

Golf course superintendents tend to be "rugged individualists" who spend their careers doing things their way. One of the beautiful aspects of the profession is the fact that each golf course is as unique as the person entrusted with its care and feeding. There is no prototypical golf course superintendent; each of us produces a similar product in a distinctly personalized way. How is it, then, that


among such a diverse profile, so many of us have stepped forward to defend our profession from those who would pigeonhole us with strip miners, whalers and other environmental raptors? The answer is clear: each of us loves the land in our own special way.

Several programs have been established to promote the notion that golf courses are friends of the environment. The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System, Adopt-A-School and Backyard Sanctuary programs are excellent ways for you to stand out as well as learn some "new tricks." Look for a series of articles on these programs in this and subsequent issues of *On Course*. The Environmental Steward Award is another way for you to get recognition for your hard work and a great way to share your environmental awareness with others. I would encourage any member to take any of these programs "out for a spin." I guarantee you'll learn something and have fun doing it.

Regionally, the MAGCS is planning to join a consortium of organizations dedicated to forming a "Chicago Wilderness." A group devoted to the preservation of biodiversity in the greater Chicagoland area, the consortium comprises organizations including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chicago Botanical Gardens, Brookfield Zoo, The Field Museum, USDA Forest Service, and the Cook and DuPage County Forest Preserve Districts, to name a few. Even the Sierra Club and Nature Conservancy have joined forces with Chicago Wilderness. Interestingly, when I first contacted the Chicago Wilderness office to inquire about the MAGCS joining the team and they learned that we represented the golf course industry, their initial reaction was quite cool: "Oh, I'm not

sure you're not part of the problem." Sadly, more than a decade of work by the GCSAA and our environmental partners has not totally dispelled the illusion that golf courses are toxic to the environment. Obviously, a great deal of work remains to be done on that front. The wonderful data you supplied through the 1997 MAGCS Environmental Survey (completed when Don Ferreri chaired the Environmental Committee) enabled me to show that the more than 18,000 acres of naturalized land on the golf courses represented by the MAGCS could contribute greatly to their objectives. They agreed that perhaps their impression of golf was not based on fact but on what they had heard.

People, I will repeat: there is still a lot of work to be done to sway public opinion away from the idea that golf courses are ecological "killing fields." We need to participate in this type of forum to correct misconceptions and engage in meaningful dialogue with those whose perceptions are colored by uninformed opinions and who listen to people with microphones spewing sensationalistic balderdash.

The 1999 MAGCS Environmental Committee includes Don Ferreri, Tod Hopphan, Chuck Anfield, Greg Martin, Dr. Tom Voigt, Tony Kalina, Luke Cella, Tom Fahey, Tim Kelly and Brian Greene. We stand ready to assist individual members with environmental initiatives they may care to embrace. At the MAGCS, we are blessed with a multitude of members who have been there and done that. Give me a call and I can hook you up with someone who can provide solid, hands-on experience with any number of environmental issues. 

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Steve Van Acker -N- Crystal Lake C.C.



Larry Tomaszewski

July's MAGCS meeting will be hosted at a seasoned old country club, Crystal Lake, by a seasoned, experienced professional, Steve Van Acker. This is a meeting members won't want to miss!

Growing up on 140 acres of farmland in Huntley, IL, Steve knew his career and future would involve the land. Steve's love of the outdoors and golf, and his agricultural background, really steered his future in one direction. And 43 years later, with more than 25 years in the golf management business, Steve has truly answered his "calling." He has spent the last nine years as superintendent of Crystal Lake C.C.

A destination course, Crystal Lake C.C. was built in 1922 in a small town called Crystal Lake, the last stop on the train line. The original course was 36 holes and changes/improvements continue to occur, thanks to Steve and his staff.

In contrast to the newer, open courses, Crystal Lake lets its age show on a tight 18-hole layout on 135 acres with lots and lots and LOTS of big old trees. Making the course even more challenging are four lakes, more than 70 bunkers and Steve's signature hole, #18.

Yes, Crystal Lake has a venerable history, but as the old saying goes, "What have you done for me lately?" Steve has been busy with:

(continued on page 32)



Jason, Mary Kay and Steve Van Acker

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