

Pondering The Salary Issue and Claiming Time for Golf Course Maintenance, Sans Golfers

by Fred Behnke
Mount Prospect G.C.

Are you overpaid? Are you kidding . . . on the contrary . . . if I were being paid by the hour I'd barely make minimum wage . . . you should see my bills . . . I thought I would have it made when I finally got my own golf course . . . thank goodness my wife has a good job, or we'd never make the mortgage payment . . . you'll never get rich in this line of work . . . HA!

I've asked many fellow superintendents that simple (but loaded) question, and the above represents a fair sampling of the responses I've gotten. Oddly enough, I've never gotten a single positive response. One-on-one, most of us are willing to share the trials and tribulations of the middle-class rat race, but I've never seen it addressed by our chapter on an area-wide basis.

Is this Association providing you with the tools you need to maximize your earning potential?

Are superintendents' salaries an issue for this Association to concern itself with?

Why do so many superintendents leave the profession just when they are getting good at it?

Why is the superintendent third on the payroll hierarchy at so many golf courses?

Right now, some of you are probably asking, "What kind of *Ask the "Expert"* column is this? He's asking a lot of questions, but he has no answers." You're right! I have a lot of questions.

Why does my plumber make more money than I do?

Why do so many superintendents leave the profession just when they are getting good at it? Why is the superintendent third on the payroll hierarchy at so many golf courses?

Who decided that the median salary of my profession should be around \$50,000?

If it's true that experience is so important, why isn't it included on those darn salary surveys?

Has the tremendous technological boom taken some of the magic out of greenkeeping?

Do you really need a green thumb to practice this profession anymore?

Is it an art or a science . . . both . . . or neither? Can your boss do your job?

Is it possible to be overpaid?

I have been appointed the MAGCS's Education Committee chair for Y2K, and the answers to these and other burning questions of the day are going to be among the topics commented on by this year's Education Committee.

Now, on to something I do know something about. Traffic management.

I am the superintendent of a municipal (park district) golf course in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. Residents of the park district enjoy a significant discount over nonresident players, and can purchase a season pass entitling them to unlimited playing privileges. As you might expect, the golf course is very busy; in fact, for as long as I can remember, annual round totals have exceeded 50,000. On an 18-hole golf course, that translates to golf from dawn to dusk every day the sun is shining. One of the challenges of maintaining a golf course with that kind of traffic is just finding the room to do routine mowing, much less applying plant protectants, topdressing, fertilizing, etc.

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Pondering the Salary Issue . . .

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I began my golf maintenance career with stints at Bob'O'Link and Inverness country clubs, two of the area's outstanding private golf facilities, where the course was closed on Mondays. We didn't get the day off, of course; the downtime was used to accomplish all manner of course work without having to dodge golfers. I got to thinking that if private clubs recognized the need for unimpeded maintenance access where round totals barely reached 20,000, surely I could sell the idea to my superiors just to give our old, worn-out golf course a break. After conducting numerous surveys, analyzing tee sheets and just plain pestering, we were able to get some maintenance time for the course.

A whole day? You must be dreaming.

How about half a day? Nope.

Would you believe three hours on Monday mornings? I'll take it!

Since we have been able to count on those three golfer-free hours, we have found things to do that I never considered when pitching the idea to the powers-that-be. Those of you who also get some free time on the golf course, I'm sure would agree that you'd never give it back without a fight. To those of you who still have to dodge golfers seven days a week, consider the following points in making your argument.

1) It doesn't matter what day of the week the course should be closed. Talk to your pro or manager and find out what day would be least affected by a short closure. Get him or her on your side. A short list of tasks that can be done expeditiously without interruption include: supplemental irrigation, any spraying, aerification, fertilization and topdressing (especially on fairways), paving cart paths, tree pruning or removal . . . the list can go on and on. The point is, getting these jobs done when the course is closed means less intrusion to the golfers (customers) when the tees are open.

2) Insist on reopening the course on the first tee only. By doing so, you have bought an additional two-and-a-half hours on the back nine.

3) Consider reentry time for plant protectants in making your case. Many of the products we use on a regular basis are labeled with instructions to wait until the spray has dried at least before allowing public access to the site. The label is the law, and I think we often turn a blind eye to this requirement (this was particularly helpful in making my case). Time to water in certain fertilizer applications is also a valid point.

The fact of the matter is, our line of work is a lot like the restaurant business, and we are the chefs. We work behind the scenes, we all use many of the same materials to provide distinctly different recipes. We all have our own secret blends of herbs and spices. Our reputations are on the line each and every day; today's rouladen is tomorrow's leftovers. You deserve the time to prepare your special soup du jour.



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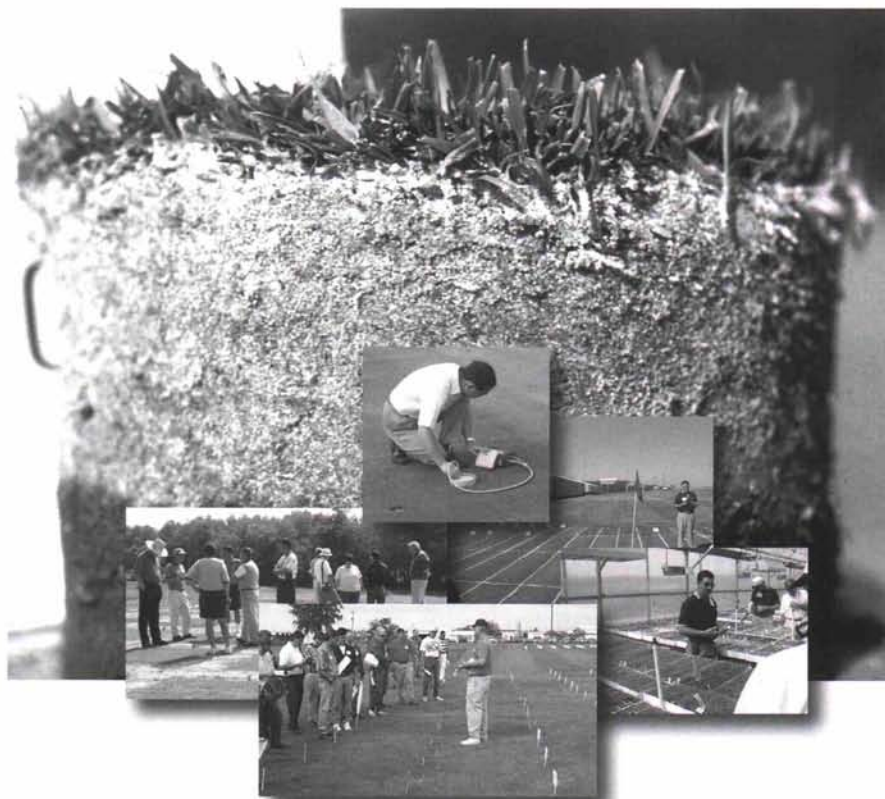
by Carl Hoppman
Director of Development, ITF

I want you to become involved with the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation by hosting a public golf course turfgrass research day. Public golf courses and daily-fee golfers receive the benefits of turfgrass research just as private clubs do. Public links players have a responsibility to support Illinois turfgrass research. Their contributions ensure the best playing conditions on the courses they play.

We have proven that a small amount of effort and involvement on your part can create a way for the daily-fee golfer to be personally involved as well as invested in supporting Illinois turfgrass research. He or she is the real end-user of the great turf surfaces you provide. These golfers fully respect your professional knowledge and if you explain to them just how much you rely on turfgrass research to succeed, they will gladly contribute to such a worthy cause. You are the key!

Bartlett Hills G.C., Mount Prospect G.C., Orchard Valley G.C., Poplar Creek G.C., Prairie Landing G.C., Sportsman's C.C. and Woodbine G.C., sparked by their respective superintendents, raised a tidy sum this past summer. The trial-and-error method employed at turfgrass research days there has helped us develop several approaches to be success-

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The Illinois Turfgrass Foundation . . .

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ful, without requiring too much of your time and effort.

First and foremost, share your mission with your golfers. Our mission is to enable the daily-fee golfer to have the personal opportunity to contribute to turfgrass research that will preserve the near-perfect playing conditions he/she enjoys. Your golf club has joined hundreds of Illinois golf courses to raise funds for this worthy cause.

Next, publicize your event in advance. Tell your golfers that your club is joining hundreds of Illinois Turfgrass Foundation member clubs statewide to donate funds for turfgrass research. Let them know that for every round of golf played at the course on the appointed date, \$2 will be donated. Ask them to schedule their tee-times and support the cause!


A very popular contest during the event is a "closest to the pin" competition on a par-3 hole. Pick one that is fairly short (140-160 yards). This will enable even a less skilled player to be competitive. Sell chances to enter the contest for \$5 . . . allow multiple shots at \$5 per shot. A good prize for the winner is complimentary golf for four, with golf carts. Additional prizes, such as merchandise from the pro shop, will further entice golfers to participate. You can inform the winner by phone at the event's conclusion.

Another popular contest involves selling raffle tickets on a par-3 hole. Pick a hole on which it is fairly easy for golfers to hit the green. Sell raffle tickets for \$5

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apiece. If a golfer hits the green, he/she wins two more tickets. At the end of the day, draw the winning ticket and notify the winner by phone, or post the winning ticket in the pro shop. Again, complimentary golf for four with golf carts is a nice prize; additional merchandise is a great incentive.

As director of development for the ITF, I am willing to help you in any way to make your involvement in this program as simple as possible. Please sign up for a public golf course turfgrass research day during the upcoming 2000 golf season; together, we can make it work! 

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Information Is The Key . . .

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collection to be real-time data acquisition systems that collect geo-referenced data by using sensors and automated machine controls.

At the center of modern data collection methods, and perhaps the most common method of data acquisition tagged to site-specific management, is the use of a GPS receiver and a combination of computer hardware and software to collect site data. GPS uses a network of 24 satellites to provide geographic information, or coordinates, for points on the earth's surface. GPS was developed by the Department of Defense more than 20 years ago as a means of providing 24-hour positioning information regardless of weather. Global positioning systems have a wide range of applications and can be used as a vehicle navigation and/or guidance tool, surveying instrument, asset tracking tool and mapping instrument, to name a few examples.

Data Types

Two primary types of data may be collected to characterize site conditions: spatial and non-spatial data. While each data type may provide useful information in itself, an optimal management instance would utilize both spatial and nonspatial data. The integration of both data types allows the potential for a more detailed characterization of past, present and future conditions.

Spatial data is data that has a geographic position or a location. One may think of it as information that describes the location of geographic features as well as relationships among those features. Nonspatial data is descriptive data that is not tied to a geographic location. The power of data collection comes from collecting both kinds in concert with one

Prior to collecting data, we might ask ourselves the typical questions of what are we collecting, why are we collecting it and how we will use the data once it is collected.

The answers to these questions allow us to use the collected data more efficiently and effectively.

another. The collection of both spatial and nonspatial data is applicable in virtually any management operation, albeit agronomic, equipment-related, irrigation, etc.

DATA ORGANIZATION

In stressing the importance of data collection as a means of initially implementing site-specific management strategies, it is important that data is collected with a purpose in mind and not just collected for the sake of collection. In essence, prior to collecting data, we might ask ourselves the typical questions of what are we collecting, why are we collecting it and how we will use the data once it is collected. The answers to these questions allow us to use the collected data more efficiently and effectively. Ultimately, the inclusion of collected data in management decision-making processes allows us added potential to characterize, quantify

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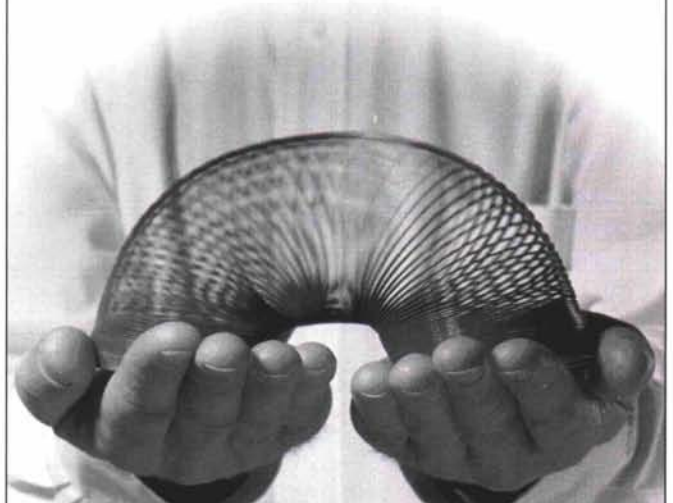
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Information Is The Key . . .
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and qualify site conditions with the goal of better understanding the complexities of managing a golf course.

In this manner, geographic information systems provide site managers with a valuable tool for organizing and characterizing site data. It is the best tool for analyzing, preserving and managing collected data. A GIS is essentially a customized computer software system that offers two unique features: combined spatial and nonspatial data representation and data representation in thematic layers.

From an analytical standpoint, a key component of GIS

software is its ability to organize data in layers, with each layer storing one type of data (referred to as thematic data). Within the GIS, each thematic layer can be overlaid on top of another for analysis, map creation and other purposes.

Presently, several GIS packages are on the market that are available to golf course superintendents. Available GIS packages include MapInfo, ArcView and ArcInfo. Other data management packages customized for use in golf course operations include GCS, TRIMS, Qqest and others. While many of the packages customized for use in golf course management are largely focused on general nonspatial data management and organization, it is

likely that these packages will develop further to include GIS functionality, thus allowing true integrated management of both nonspatial and spatial data.

IMPLEMENTATION METHODS

Data collection and organization are two aspects of the site-specific management model that allow any site manager to implement its concepts immediately. As site-specific management is a progressive management strategy, applying it to multiple application areas must start with initial tasks that progress towards more detailed and specific applications (Figure 3). With available tools for data collection/organization and the promise of future

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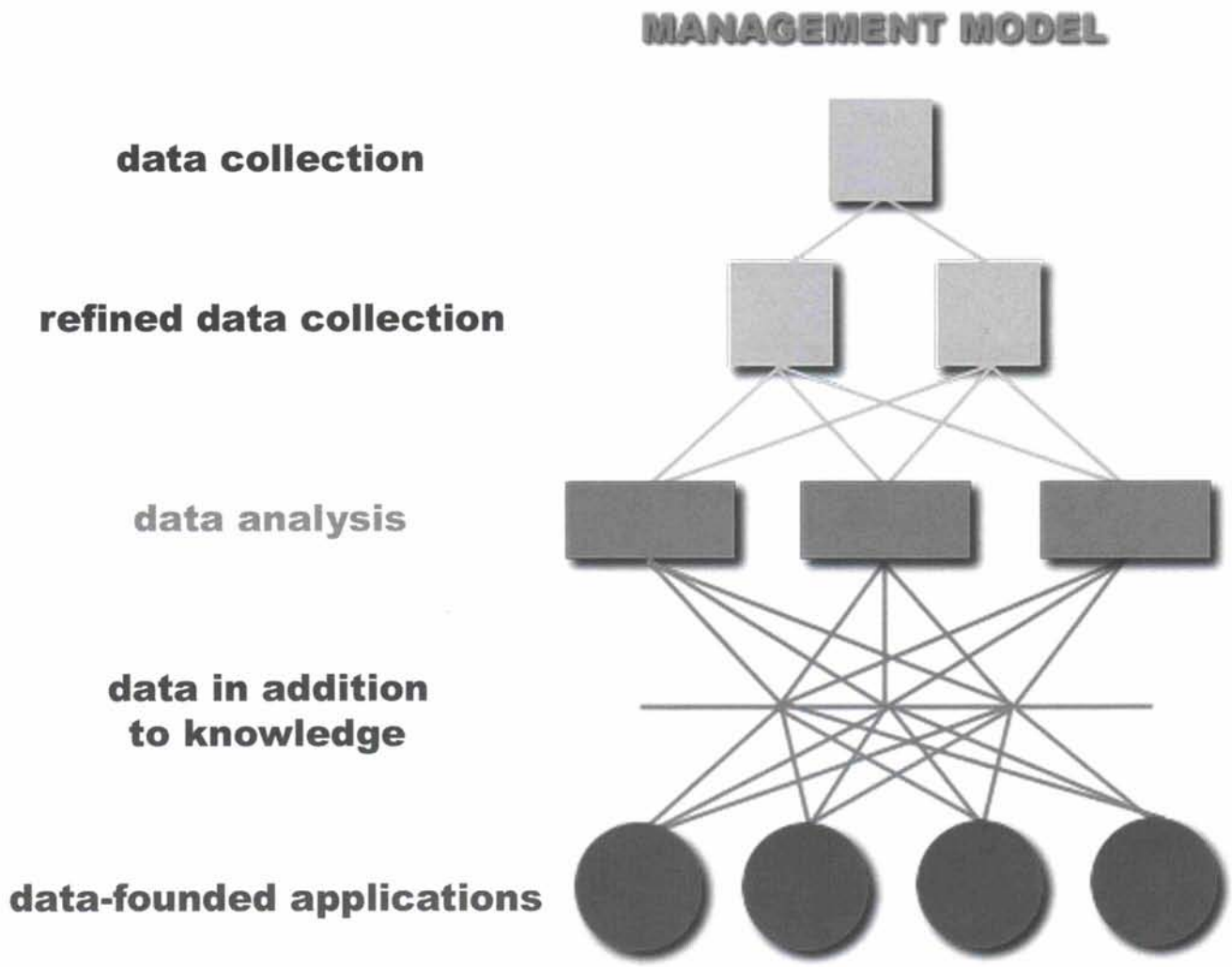


Figure 3. Progressive Concepts in the Site-Specific Management Model