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# MARCH 2002

Volume 55 No.10

### FRONT COVER

Midwest Golf House in Lemont, IL, is home to the Chicago District Golf Association and a host of allied organizations, including MAGCS. March's monthly meeting takes place in Golf House's state-of-the-art auditorium. (Photo by Randy Kane)

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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.





## ON COURSE WITH THE PRESIDENT

Luke Strojny, CGCS Poplar Creek G.C.

# Making Our Move


*The 2002 golfing season is almost here. The way the weather was going, I thought spring would arrive in January rather than March. Who would ever think that a sunny, 60-degree day in January could happen here in the great Midwest? Mother Nature brought us back to reality at the end of January with, in my eyes, a much-needed winter storm. Hopefully, the remainder of winter and the coming spring are somewhat normal weather-wise.*

Back in January, Brian Bossert, Don Ferreri and I met with Robert Markionni, executive director of the CDGA, about MAGCS plans to move our operations to Midwest Golf House. Beginning this spring, staff from the CDGA will begin to handle a portion of our operations. They will be responsible for producing and distributing our mailings. To put members' minds at ease, George Minnis will continue to be our executive secretary,

responsible for event registration and database management. In the near future, the MAGCS will begin to set up our office there. This will include changing our phones so that during business hours, a live person will answer your call and be able to either assist you immediately or direct your call to the appropriate Board member. In any event, this month's meeting will be held at the Midwest Golf House on March 12; it will be a great opportunity to come see the facility.

Although I am writing this president's message before I leave for the GCSAA conference, I would like to once again thank all of those who make our hospitality room such a great success. A special thank-you goes out to all our commercial members who once again stepped up and contributed to this year's room. I know I have said it before, but if not for their generosity, our room would have to be held in a suite with

a couple bowls of chips and pretzels and maybe a keg or a couple cases of beer. Again, when you make this year's purchases, please remember those who give to the MAGCS through the hospitality room, through our monthly golf meetings and through an advertising presence in *On Course*.

I will share with you some of my thoughts about the national conference in my April message. I know you can't wait. 



Midwest Golf House.

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# Rethinking Our Niche

*I've always thought that one of the best things about being a golf course superintendent is the fact that customer relations isn't really part of the gig. Sure, you need to be around, chat it up with the regulars, communicate effectively with boards and greens committees, etc., but when push comes to shove and you're having one of those days when you don't even want your dog around, you can get out and be "on the course."*

Late-night board meetings, 350 bosses, "expert" advice and television expectations notwithstanding, "I'm going out to tag some trees."

I have even said, "This would be a great job if it wasn't for the golfers."

Har de har har.

Last year my place of employment took a revenue hit that caught all of us a little by surprise; after five straight years of ever-increasing revenues, we were unable to meet our budgetary expectations. Some people (myself included) thought these expectations were a little optimistic, but I came in under budget by \$200 (within 0.025% for those of you keeping score—I was actually pretty smug about that). Anyway, when the dust had cleared, we needed to assess what happened . . .

Thirty-plus days without carts is a good place to start. Yeah, that was it, the weather was terrible. Shoot, every decent day foursomes were backed up three-deep at the first tee. We just didn't have enough nice days, and we don't charge enough too. Yeah, that's right, resident rates are too low. Heck, every time one of our senior residents tees it up, we lose money because we charge them less than it costs us to produce a round. We don't have enough times for big-money nonresidents. Right, when those people play, they pay top dollar, buy balls, lunch at the turn and keep the beverage cart rolling. We need to make more space for them. Not to mention September 11 . . .

We had it totally covered. By the time the litany of reasons (excuses) was over, we deserved a bonus for doing as **well** as we did.

Then came the bombshell,

"Okay, so what did **you** do to enhance the golf experience when it became apparent that our revenue numbers would fall short of expectations?"

"Uh, me?" (Long, uncomfortable silence.)

"Well, that's not really my job." (*Oh God, don't say that!*)

"I've never worried about the revenue end before." (*Are you sure you want to admit that?*)

*Last year my place of employment took a revenue hit that caught all of us a little by surprise; after five straight years of ever-increasing revenues, we were unable to meet our budgetary expectations . . . Anyway, when the dust had cleared, we needed to assess what happened . . .*

(continued on page 6)

“Isn’t my team’s extraordinary effort in providing exemplary playing conditions in spite of nearly insurmountable weather obstacles enough?” (Better, but too argumentative and doesn’t your “team” include the pro shop staff, grill personnel and anyone else the customer contacts while visiting the golf course?)

(You’re in a trick bag now, Fred. This is that thinking-outside-the-box stuff you’ve been able to avoid up till now . . . paradigm shifts and all that . . . think fast!)

(Do-b-e-d-o-b-e-d-o—STOP THAT—now concentrate.)

“Uh, well, to be honest, I hadn’t considered that my role could be more proactive, in a direct sense, past the point of my traditional job guidelines.” (In other words—I didn’t know you wanted me to do that—honest, but like cotton candy, full of air, and in the end leaving you hungry for more.)

I’ll spare you the rest of this postmortem; suffice it to say that by the time I crawled back to my hole, it was with some schooling:

- 1) I had a newfound sense of being a part of a greater whole (the most important part, of course—my vanity is still intact at least).
- 2) I was added to the distribution list for a motivational periodical extolling the virtues of proactive customer relations.

Number two was received with a certain sense of disdain. The first issue reached my hands well after the initial shock of the “paradigm conversation” had worn off. Well past when the usual “I should’ve told them . . .” (you know, those post-crisis pearls of wisdom that surface a day late and a dollar short) had come and gone. Anyway, the fear of being quizzed about some obscure reference in the booklet and not having read it led me to grudgingly read every stinkin’ page. It was actually pretty interesting. Here are some anecdotes I found memorable.

*Years ago, a 10-year-old boy approached the counter of a soda shop and climbed on a stool. “What does an ice cream sundae cost?” he asked the waitress.*

*“Fifty cents,” she answered.*

*The youngster reached deep in his pockets and pulled out an assortment of change, counting it carefully as the waitress grew impatient. She had “bigger” customers to wait on.*

*“Well, how much would just plain ice cream be?” the boy asked.*

*The waitress responded with noticeable irritation in her voice, “Thirty-five cents.”*

*Again, the boy slowly counted his money. “May I have some plain ice cream in a dish then, please?” He gave the waitress the correct amount, and she brought him the ice cream.*

*Later, the waitress returned to clear the boy’s dish and when she picked it up she felt a lump in her throat. There on the counter the boy had left two nickels and five pennies. She realized that he had had enough money for the sundae, but sacrificed it so he could leave her a tip.*

*The moral: Everyone in this world is important. We should always treat others with courtesy, dignity and respect.*

*Adapted from A Lifetime of Success  
Pat Williams  
Fleming H. Revell*

Okay, so how does this little homily relate to golf course management, if at all, that’s up to you to decide, but I am reminded that, in many cases, the players we see chopping up our tracks have set aside their troubles for a brief period of time and may be experiencing one of the high points of their week.

Plato said, “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.”

It might be useful to remember that when you’re in a hurry to fix some crisis or just get home after a

long, hot day and you have to wait endlessly for some high-handicapper to go through his/her five-minute pre-shot routine before you can proceed. Give them a smile and a nod, make them feel welcome at your course.

Finally, (I promise):

*Charles Steinmetz (1865-1923) was a pioneering genius in harnessing electricity. After he retired, Steinmetz’s former employers at General Electric occasionally relied on his brilliance.*


*Such was the case when an intricate set of machines broke down. In-house experts could not find the cause of this malfunction so GE leaders called Steinmetz.*

*After testing various parts, Steinmetz finally pinpointed the problem and marked the defective part with a piece of chalk. Steinmetz then submitted a bill for \$10,000.*

*Surprised at this unexpected high price, GE honchos asked Steinmetz to resubmit an itemized statement. He complied with a new invoice that read as follows:*

|                            |                    |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>INVOICE</b>             |                    |
| Making one chalk mark:     | \$1.00             |
| Knowing where to place it: | \$9,999.00         |
| <b>Total</b>               | <b>\$10,000.00</b> |

*Adapted from The Little, Brown  
Book of Anecdotes  
Clifton Fadiman  
Little, Brown and Co.*

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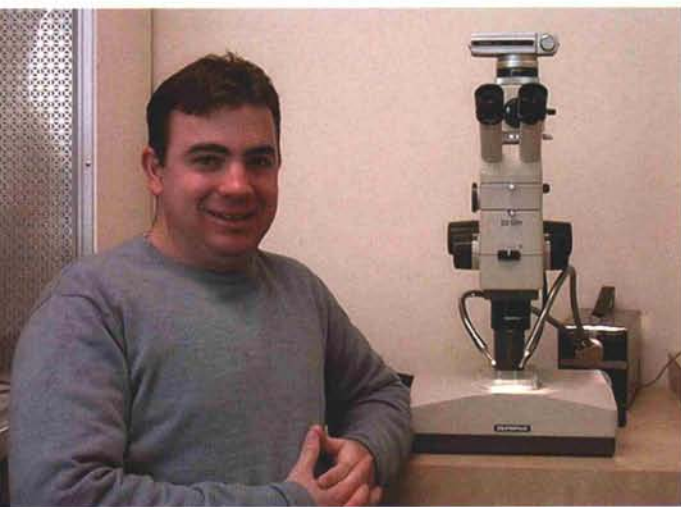
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# Randy Kane, Ph.D. & Lee Miller -N-



In February, Lee Miller joined CDGA staff as Interactive Turf/IPM coordinator and manager of turfgrass research.

# Midwest Golf House



Thanks to a mild fall, construction on the three-hole short course at Midwest Golf House was proceeding nicely as of late November, 2001. (See more photos at [www.cdga.org](http://www.cdga.org).)

*Midwest Golf House officially opened its doors in June of 2001. This state-of-the-art facility houses offices for the Chicago District Golf Association, the CDGA Foundation, Chicago Women's District Golf Association, Greater Chicago Club Managers Association, Illinois Junior Golf Association, Illinois Turfgrass Foundation, First Tee and last but certainly not least, MAGCS, all under one roof. MAGCS will have a part-time staffer in the facility later this year; down the road MAGCS will store its archives and have a full-time presence in the Golf House.*

The Midwest Golf House property is 15 acres (the land was a gift from the Jemsek family) in Lemont and includes an eight-acre, three-hole short course. This course will provide playing opportunities for beginners, juniors, the disabled and economically disadvantaged golfers. The course, constructed by Wadsworth Golf Con-

struction, is ready to have its greens, tees and fairways seeded this spring. Ultimately, it will provide an outdoor laboratory for turfgrass research with a 12,000-square-foot putting green that will host bentgrass variety trials, and fairways that will have bent and low-mow bluegrass variety trials.

The building's interior contains a 100-seat auditorium (MAGCS will use this room for the March meeting), a conference room/museum/library, a turfgrass research lab, a greenhouse and office space for all the golf organizations that call Midwest Golf House home. Two key figures frequently found lurking around the new facility are Randy Kane, Ph.D., and the new Interactive Turf Program (IPM)/field research assistant Lee Miller.

By now, we all should know Randy, who has been available to Chicago-area superintendents as a CDGA employee since 1985. Prior to that time, Randy was earning his undergraduate degree alongside many other current MAGCS members in the turf program at Purdue; he went on to complete his M.S. and Ph.D. in plant pathology at Cornell. Randy is the CDGA's director of turfgrass programs as well as an active member of MAGCS, serving on the Editorial and Education Committees. He is also an ITF advisor and a USGA

Green Section committeeman. With the addition of Lee Miller, Randy will have a second pair of hands to assist him with research work at the Golf House and with the Interactive Turf (IPM) Program. Hopefully, with

Interactive Turf (IPM) Program and field research. Lee recently completed his M.S. in plant pathology at the University of Georgia, where he researched fungicide resistance to dollar spot under Dr. Lee Burpee.

Previously, Lee received his undergraduate degree in turf management from North Carolina State. Over the years, he has worked in a variety of capacities in the green industry, including internships at East Lake Club in Atlanta and at BASF in new product research and development. This new Naperville resident is engaged to be married on November 16 of this year.




Lee's help tackling the 2002 workload, he can post more than the four 18-hole scores he posted in 2001.

The aforementioned Lee is the newest addition to the CDGA and Midwest Golf House. On February 1, 2002, Lee embarked on his new role as CDGA's manager of turfgrass programs. He will assist Randy with the

Come meet Lee and see the Midwest Golf House for yourself on March 12. Cornell professor Tom Maloney will present an educational session titled "How to Find and Hire the Best Employees" followed by lunch across the street at Cog Hill.





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# Improving Your Fairways With Topdressing

## History of Topdressing

Topdressing is not something new to golf maintenance. In 1875, Old Tom Morris began to topdress greens with sand to make them firm and smooth. With golf developing in America, topdressing began as a process of composting the greens at the end of summer accompanied by seeding with South German bentgrass. Piper and Oakley, in their book *Turf for Golf Courses* (1917), state, "In case sand or sandy soil can be secured cheaply and in abundance, it is an excellent plan to use it to topdress very clayey fairways. Not only does the sand make a better surface for golf purposes, but also it helps the grass by absorbing the rainfall much better and by preventing baking in hot dry weather."

## Why Do We Topdress?

Thatch control, drainage, compaction correction and smoothing surface irregularities are four of the primary reasons for topdressing. What others say: "Topdressing is the practice by which a thin layer of soil is applied to an established turf or new turfgrass planting." – A.J. Turgeon, *Turfgrass Management*, fourth edition, 1996.

Dr. James B. Beard, in his publication *Turf Management for Golf Courses* (1982), writes, "Topdressing is usually not practiced on fairway turfs due to the immense volumes of material needed, the high labor demand and the slowness of operation translated into an extremely high cost relative to what can be accomplished." In his most recent publication, Dr. Beard states, "Topdressing usually has not been practiced on fairway turfs in the past. However, situations do exist where topdressing is used increasingly for root zone improvement, smoothing and enhanced drainage to maximize playing time."

"No other practice but topdressing has such an immediate and positive impact on the health of the grass. As the topdressing particles filter down between the grass blades, the plants get a welcome reprieve from the pounding feet of golfers and the sheering action of the mowers." – Gordon Witteveen, Michael Bavier, *Practical Golf Course Maintenance* (1998).

## Questions to Ask If You Are Considering Fairway Topdressing

Are embedded balls a constant problem? After a hard rain, is the course closed, or are carts restricted for an extended period of time? Many times a golf course superintendent will be placed in a situation where he/she has to make the decision whether or not to let carts on the course for regular play or outings. Are mower tracks on fairways a problem?



If the answer is yes to one or more of the above questions, consider yourself a good candidate for fairway topdressing.

Try to apply 1" – 1.5" of sand per year for three to four years for a total of 3 - 6" of sand over that period of time. In many circumstances, topdressing can be greatly reduced or terminated once a desirable level has been reached. At that time, conventional aerification may resume pulling the sandy plugs to the surface and separating them from the thatch, allowing the sand to return to the turf and removal of the thatch.

## Factors to Address Before Topdressing Fairways

Does your soil currently provide adequate drainage? Have the fairways received regular aerification to remove thatch and incorporate soil back into the thatch? Fairways that are thatchy will not drain well due to the thatch absorbing water and holding it near the surface. A thatchy

*(continued on page 12)*