



Surviving the Information Age

What do you want to learn today?

The Police (rock band of the late 1970s and early '80s) may have been thinking about the future back in 1980 with their release of *Outlandos d'Amour* and their song "Too Much Information." A couple lines of the track read:

Too much information running through my brain,

Too much information driving me insane.

In our "Information Age," these lyrics strike a chord that most comprehend. We are continually bombarded with news, events and data every single day. Certainly it is nice to be "informed" of what is going on in our world, but how do you pick out what is really important to know?

In our world of golf course maintenance, look at the multiple avenues through which information reaches us. As the first of the month approaches, periodicals (including our fine *On Course*) start to flow across the desk. As our golfing season wanes, seminars and conferences are offered and meetings are planned. Fellow superintendents have an abundance of information and are willing to share if asked. And let's not forget the ever-present World Wide Web and all it has to offer. How do we discern which information is good and useful and which isn't?

The answer to this question begins with more questions. What do you want to learn? Can you apply this information to your practices? Does it have the potential to make a positive impact? Is the information just trivial and nice to know? Of course, this questioning process is what keeps us looking for answers. However, the key to making sense of our digital age is to have a plan. After all, our time is limited.

When skimming a magazine, take a look at the headlines. Don't be drawn in too quickly, just get an idea of what the written word is about. Skip to the last paragraph of an article and see if there are any concrete conclusions. Judge to see if the details are worth your time and read the first sentences of a few paragraphs. If the preview is interesting and has potential, give the article a full read; if not, look to the next headline.

When selecting a seminar to attend, read the description carefully. Is the topic apropos to your goals and expectations? Does the seminar have the potential to provide you with information that you can use? Before attending the seminar, create a list of the information that you wish to gain from it. This list outlines your goals for the seminar and becomes a tool to use while in attendance. Often, we are unintentionally misled during a sem-

inar and the questions we bring are never answered. Take an active role in the seminar and use the list to find answers to questions that were not answered directly.

The World Wide Web can certainly send any of us into information overload. Far and away, the most effective way to use the Web is by searching as specifically as possible for your answer. Again, the key to the World Wide Web is not to wallow or wander, but to have a plan. Know what information you desire and look for it. Take a look at the sources of the material and judge for yourself if it is worthwhile to you.

Talk to the people in our profession. Use their knowledge and experience. Pick up the phone or post a question on a bulletin board. If one of our colleagues does not have the answer to your questions, somebody may offer a valuable lead, a place to start.

Remember when you took a class in school? The teacher, professor or instructor took care of lesson plans. Goals and expectations were all laid out for you on that first day of class in that sheet called a syllabus. The year was mapped out. Your knowledge grew. The goals set forth by your instructor were met. Who holds your lesson plan now?

You do.





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Time to KARE

Editor's Note: In the July issue of On Course, MAGCS president Kevin DeRoo wrote about rescuing an orphaned, injured fawn and KARE (Kane Area Rehabilitation and Education) for Wildlife, the organization he came in contact with as a result of those efforts. Here is a more in-depth look at that group and its president, who gives endless hours, boundless energy and her own funds to a worthy cause.

Every summer, superintendents and their crews dedicate long hours each week and often do not have the privilege of a single day off for weeks or even months. And we count down the late summer days when we cannot wait for the leaves to drop and the greatly anticipated snow to fly, for these changes herald a time when we can slow down and relax with our family and friends. Regardless of the season, superintendents are often true environmental visionaries with the greatest affection for their wildlife and natural surroundings. Then I met an equally true outdoors-oriented person, Vicki Trost of St. Charles, IL. After spending an afternoon with her, I had to admit that my long hours and endless days of summer sounded pretty good in comparison to her schedule, which is driven by her passion for wildlife.

The KARE Foundation (Kane Area Rehabilitation and Education for Wildlife) was founded in 1992 to help injured, orphaned and seized wildlife.

When you meet Vicki, she may seem like a typical suburbanite: “typical” in the sense that she lives in a quiet community and goes to work each morning as an insurance claims adjuster in Naperville. That, however, is just her day job and one facet of her identity. Each evening, Vicki goes home to a bunch of screaming “kids,” about 200 of them. This is when her “real” job begins. Vicki is president of the KARE Foundation. KARE stands for Kane Area Rehabilitation and Education for Wildlife. An organization founded in 1992 by a group of wildlife rehabilitators to help injured, orphaned and seized wildlife, KARE—with Vicki championing the cause—has created five suitable places for people to bring injured or orphaned wildlife. The wild creature is eventually released back to the wild, but only after it has been treated and evaluated as ready to survive on its own. Vicki works 365 days a year to provide the adequate care those creatures need. There is no escaping their demands, because they are literally right in her back yard.

KARE is a large component of Vicki's life, but she is not an extreme activist. For instance, she does not oppose hunting at all. Instead of preaching her views on responsibility to wildlife, she prefers instead to educate people, young and old, about the importance of wildlife and helping injured and orphaned animals. Perhaps her disposition to nurture came from her long-ago dreams and aspirations of becoming a veterinarian. Vicki soon came to the realization, however, that working with the common household cat or dog would

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not be as rewarding to her as she had once thought. Then about 15 years ago, in search of something more along a journey of self-discovery, she took in a small squirrel. Today, she lives in a wooded area off of the Fox River, where she has made a home for more than 200 animals.

Upon arrival at her residence/wildlife refuge, you enter the driveway and realize what her mission is all about. Vicki has welcomed and opened her home to several varieties of wildlife, including raccoons, foxes, birds of prey, deer, a bobcat and more. Some of the animals she takes in become permanent residents at her home; reasons include being too tame and inability to survive in the wild. Others are exotic species, nonindigenous to the area. However, many others are in transition, and Vicki is always careful not to handle releasable animals too much. She has decreed some areas as off limits to ensure the animals' best chance for rehabilitation and eventual relocation.

In addition to the countless hours spent tending to her "kids" in a physical, nurturing sense, Vicki is often awake until 1 or 2 in the morning completing endless stacks of paperwork and reports for the state. Vicki and the KARE Foundation are licensed through both the state and federal governments; this licensing authorizes them to handle deer and birds of prey. The Foundation is inspected two to three times a year. Because the workload is so daunting, Vicki has assembled a small army of dedicated volunteers to share the responsibilities of the facility. No matter what the challenge, Vicki and her team manage to do whatever it takes to ensure the proper care is provided. All of her volunteers jump right in to help out, even if it requires changing a schedule or working a little longer to get the job done. Vicki is the first to say that without her volunteers, she could not do all she does.

The KARE Foundation operates strictly through donations. As if giving her time and energy to the cause were not enough, Vicki supplements the missing funds for supplies out of her own pocketbook. "If you

need it, you have to have it, so you're going to buy it," she remarks. Right now, donations only cover one-third of the total expenses.

Vicki and KARE surface in the news occasionally, but she never takes individual credit for the work the whole team accomplishes. And she maintains that education is of the highest importance. Vicki knows more about wildlife than most and dedicates time in her busy schedule to educate kids and adults through lectures and animal interactive programs at local schools.



Birds of prey, such as hawks, require elaborate cages. Price tag is \$1,800 apiece, underscoring KARE's need for donations.

Frequently, Vicki will receive an emergency call about an injured or sick animal, only to find out later that the animal is a baby or is "fledging." For example, someone may see a struggling red tail hawk that may appear in need of help, but the mother hawk is actually watching over it, allowing it to learn to survive on its own. If a person were to approach this hawk, he could be dealing with a dangerous or undesirable situation. All birds grow rapidly to adult size for purposes of survival. Often, in the case of the hawk, a look at the tail feathers could diagnose the problem. If the hawk appeared to have one or no red tail feathers, the bird was fledging. A full tail of red feathers, on the other hand, indicates a full-grown adult hawk. This example illustrates that proper steps are always needed in approaching or caring for an injured

animal. If you want to help, make sure you contact the right people. Call animal control or a local veterinarian before you take action. Sometimes serious harm can be done even if your intentions are good.

Have you ever spied a sick bird that has fallen from its nest, or perhaps a lone fawn that was lying injured on the side of the road? Have you wondered what, if anything, could be done to rescue the animal and bring it back to health? I never entertained these thoughts until I met Vicki and realized how much is accomplished by her and her highly dedicated volunteers, all of whom have a devotion to helping the injured and orphaned animals they receive. In a casual manner, Vicki states, "Nobody knows me until they need me." And I thought, how true that is! I know from a personal standpoint, I would not have looked into or helped with the KARE Foundation until by chance I needed them in the future. It is always easy to ignore something and go about your day. We are all guilty of that. After all, we are always so inundated with other responsibilities, we have little time to stop and reflect on the important things in life.

It was a complete honor to spend time speaking with Vicki and observing her work with the animals. Vicki has so much passion and excitement for what she does and is eager to share the unique stories of each rehabilitation performed. Even though KARE, and Vicki, have achieved so much, their mission is one that will never be complete. And the organization, its president and volunteers rarely receive recognition for their dedicated work. Vicki describes receiving the greatest joy when she releases an animal she has rescued. Finding fulfillment in this goal, the many hours she spends with the wildlife bring her the ultimate reward and the satisfaction of a job well done. Given her busy schedule, though, Vicki barely has the time for fundraising or acquiring more help to further assist the Foundation.

In our profession, we see on a constant basis examples of how wildlife and golf courses mutually

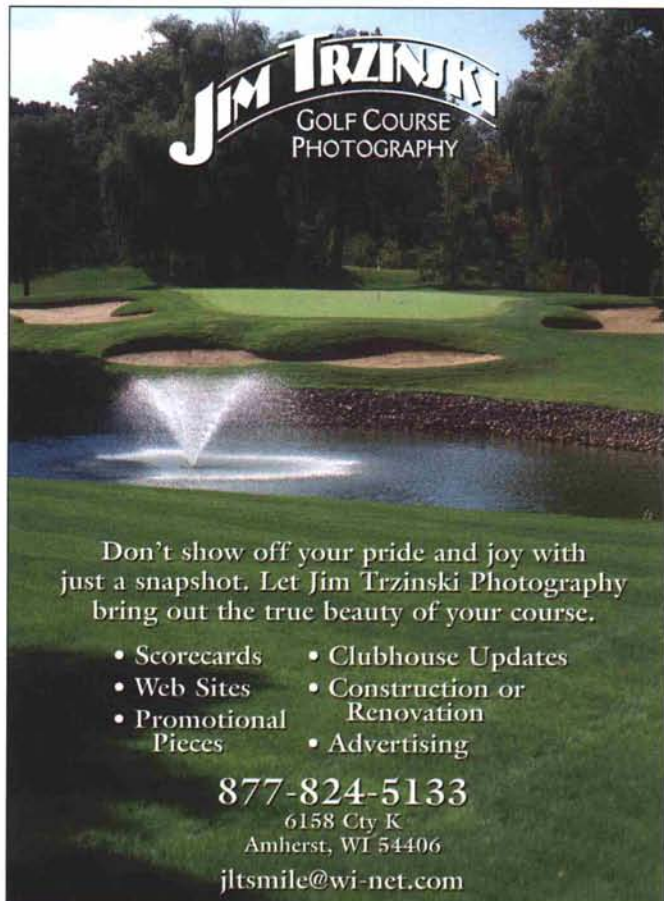
benefit from each other. One of my foremost duties as an assistant is touring the course in the morning and taking in the sunrise as the rest of the world wakes up to start the day. Almost daily, I see one particular red fox, which resides along the third hole. She seems to be the topic of conversation among our golfers. This positive reaction to the fox and other wildlife illustrates the point of what the golf industry has been trying to prove, that there is more to golf than the game. Golf is about nature and the great outdoors. Vicki Trost is someone who can further inspire us to take care of the wildlife community within and adjacent to our golf courses, and protect these creatures from the concrete urban sprawl. There is a greater need for the proper habitat for our furry and feathered friends, and we can educate ourselves on creating and maintaining such areas, designated throughout the course. We have at our disposal resources such as the GCSAA, the Internet, the National Audubon Society and KARE.

Do you want to help Vicki and the KARE Foundation? Especially now, with the growing concerns over the West Nile Virus, KARE has found that the need for additional cages for hawks and other birds of prey stricken with the disease is soaring. Each cage (as pictured) costs approximately \$1,800. Please don't wait to help out. Donations can be made to KARE through the Web site, www.karefor-wildlife.org, which doubles as an educational resource.

KARE also encourages and welcomes schools and organizations to request a program or lecture. For more information, call 630-377-1895.



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Building Customer Satisfaction

The sagging economy, the September 11th horror, a broken stock market, corporate accounting scandals, employment uncertainties and rumors of war have combined to create widespread anxiety and discontent among consumers. The profound and lasting effects have been felt across the board in all industries, from steel to stocks, and from soda to sports. Hotels and airlines suffered tremendous losses, numerous failures, great uncertainty and negative growth as a result. It's possible that a full, complete economic recovery could take three or more years. Even then, businesses and industries as we once knew them have forever changed. The golf industry is no exception to the hardship and the pending changes.

There are not enough golfers being introduced into the game for all golf courses to be as profitable as in years past, particularly in the upscale sector of public golf. . . .

Clubs that can create profitable customer relationships through enhanced customer service and added value will continue being successful.

What has changed in golf in light of the most recent slump? Maybe we should take a look at what **hasn't** changed for many years. Golf growth is flat! According to the National Golf Foundation (NGF), golf produces around 2 to 3 million new players each year, and, oddly, it loses the same amount each year. Yet the number of courses continues to grow. Why? Over-building of golf courses has led to saturation, and in combination with the economic slump, declining round counts have followed. There are not enough golfers being introduced into the game for all golf courses to be as profitable as in years past, particularly in the upscale sector of public golf. New golf construction starts have made competition fierce. Consequently, in light of a declining market for golf rounds, increased competition and bottom-line profit pressures, club managers have had to adopt cost-containment measures to minimize expenses and improve profits while limiting the impact these cuts have on the quality of their customers' golf experience—or suffer trying. Therein lies the big dilemma in the golf industry: How do we maximize profit, increase customer base and develop new golfers within the current economic setting and available budget? Clubs that can create profitable customer relationships through enhanced customer service and added value will continue being successful.

Customer Service

The Chicagoland golf industry has never before had so many high-quality and affordable places to play golf. Arguably, public golf in Chicagoland is the finest public golf market in the United States. Competition is fierce, and the striving for greater customer satisfaction and expanded clientele base is fiercer. In order to draw more customers to your club and improve your bottom line, the establishment of customer loyalty through good customer relationships is critical. By truly learning to "serve" our customers, long-term profitability and success is achieved.

Customer service is an expression that is used commonly to mean "taking care of one's customers." The fundamental goal of a customer-centered business is to maximize its customers' satisfaction. The rationale

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