

derives from the fact that customers who are satisfied with the service they receive are inclined to return and share their satisfaction with others.

Regardless of the industry, most organizations know that their level of service directly affects the success of their business. But, does every employee at your club know how his or her job affects the entire operation? When customer service is a cornerstone, it takes only one weak link in the chain to damage the service reputation of the entire club. All employees need to know their value and how their role fits into the overall company business plan. We should hire and train employees to go above and beyond in the world of exceeding customer expectations. **Every** employee has to sell and market. **Every** employee must develop his or her own way of providing positive impact on the customers' experience in order to ensure they are satisfied.

Are your customers satisfied? How do you know if you don't ask? Many ways exist through which a club can determine whether or not its customers are being satisfied—and if the customers' needs are being met. Using customer satisfaction surveys and entering the gathered information into a database for analysis will improve service and reveal any areas that need improvement. Surveys are useful to managers because they can identify, measure and quantify customer expectations. Customer satisfaction surveys are in many ways more valuable than currency, helping to increase customer retention and loyalty.

Building Relationships

Relationships are very important to customers. Consider the old adage that says, "People do business with people they like." Strong customer relationships and loyalty take energy and time, lots of energy and time! You can't establish or develop any relationship without first developing trust. Reliability, good faith and professional integrity are the ingredients of trust. Be upfront and honest from the start. Certainly, there are times when customers will not be satisfied. But, by handling problems quickly and openly, customers may

have a greater understanding if problems do arise. "Promise only what you can deliver and deliver what you promised." Learn what is important to your customers and partner with them to help them achieve their goals. Once you demonstrate that you have the customers' best interests in mind, and you have tied your success to their satisfaction, you've built a strong relationship.

Customers like personal attention. They like being greeted by name, having kindnesses and courtesies extended to them, and feeling appreciated. Warm, sincere, personal attention and service are what make customers feel comfortable. By building close personal relationships with your core customers, clubs can record and analyze their preferences and habits in order to better serve their future golf business needs, and operate more productively.


Perception of Value

Warren Buffet, multibillionaire and chairman of Berkshire Securities,

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once said, "Price is what you pay—value is what you buy." Price-driven consumers make up a large sector of the public golf clientele. Customers will not pay for golf services or experiences they don't value. They simply will not return. Buffet added, "Cus-

(continued on page 22)



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tomers show little loyalty, especially if their perception of your company's product and value is low. Deliver value that your customers recognize, appreciate and reward, and they'll come back repeatedly." That is the challenge in the upscale public golf market—ensuring that your customers see more value in their experience than the cost to them.

What is perceived value? How can we enhance the perceived value of our courses? The value of a product is not its cost. In fact, the value of the product should far outweigh its cost, **should** being the key word. For example, let's say a product you offer is priced at \$80. You have assigned a value of \$80 to that product. The value to the customer, however, should be more than the selling price. If it is worth less than \$80 to the customer, then he or she has no motivation to buy. But if the value seems equal to or greater than the selling price, they are motivated to trade their money—the cost—for the item or experience—the value. The product may be worth \$100 to the customer.

Then he or she will gladly give up \$80 for the experience. The more the perceived value surpasses the cost of the product, the more the customer will want to buy it from you.

Ensure that the customer sees much more value than cost. Marketing and advertising strategies that emphasize your value are the surest way to differentiate yourself from your competitors—and gain a greater share of business. Clubs embracing the principles of value exchange are operating on an entirely new playing field. They don't evaluate their performance based on comparisons with last year's figures or with their competitors. They define their target customer base, build relationships with that base, quantify the current and the full value of these relationships, and commit the entire company to building strong customer service skills.

Conclusion

The bottom line in any business is profit. Satisfactory profit means staying in business. Any business that is customer-driven is controlled by

the viability of its customer base. Clubs can increase customer base by providing satisfying service to existing customers while working to attract new ones. The ultimate goal of any customer-based business is to maintain customer satisfaction and add value to the purchases they make. The golf industry is no exception. If this goal can be attained, growth is all but guaranteed.



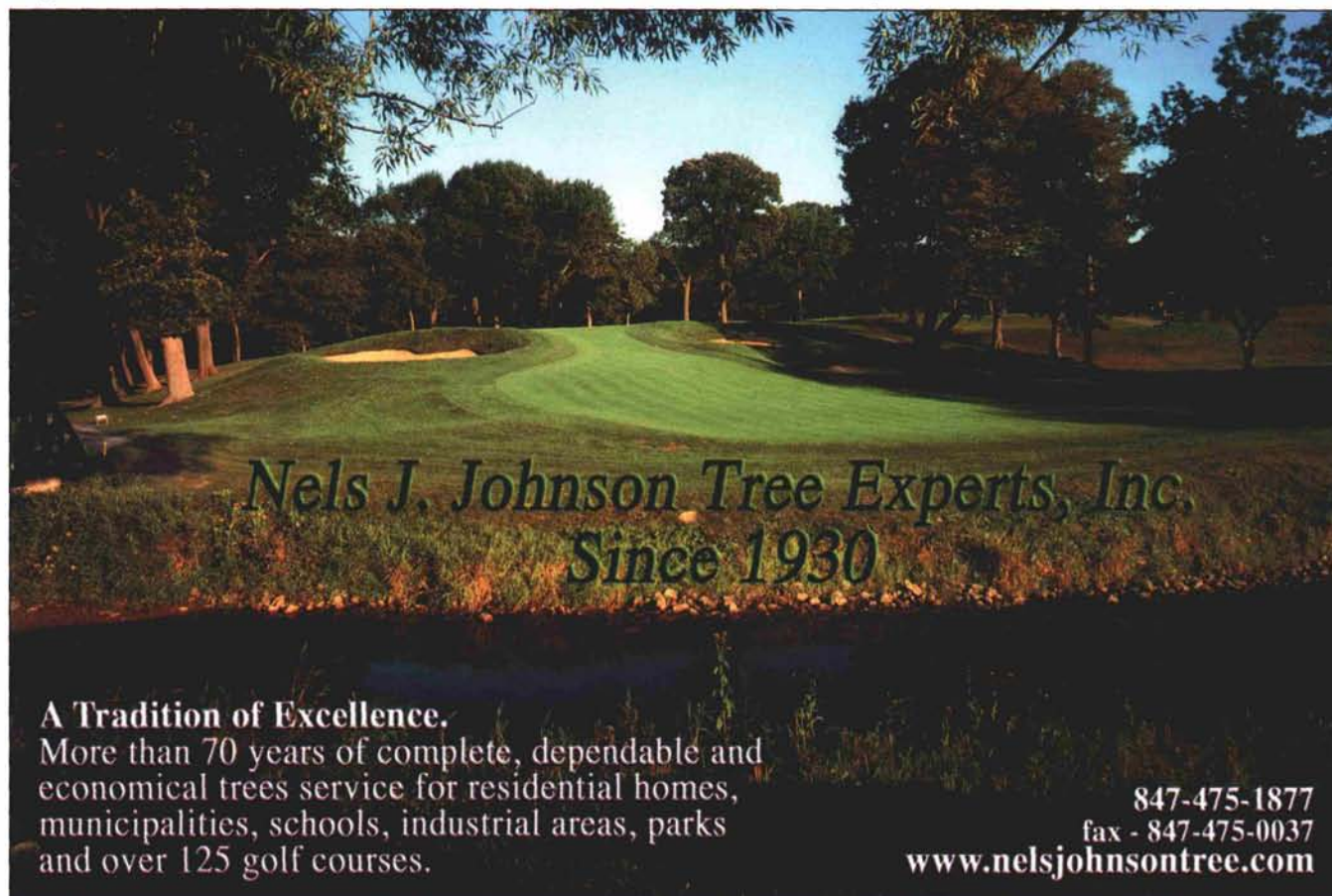
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Rusty Grass

What do car rust and turf rust have in common?

You can't stop either one, once they start!

It is that time of the year when your workers and golfers are going to turn up a bit orange after walking or playing on the turf. The orange color is the result of microscopic spores produced by a fungus, named after the Italian scientist, Dr. Puccinia (English pronunciation puck-sin-e-ah or Italian pronunciation poo-chi-nia). The orange spores are very, very tiny, similar in size to pollen grains. We all know pollen; it can bring on allergic responses. Rust spores are similar in shape and surface features to pollen grains. It will surprise you to learn that most people are not allergic to rust spores; however, it never hurts to keep an eye on your workers or golfers after operating in the rusty grass. The biggest problem with rusty turf is that your clothes and equipment develop an orange tint. Rust spores are marvels of nature, designed to survive heat, drought and exposure and equipped to attach to most surfaces for a free ride.



Rust fungi grow in most living plants, including turf.

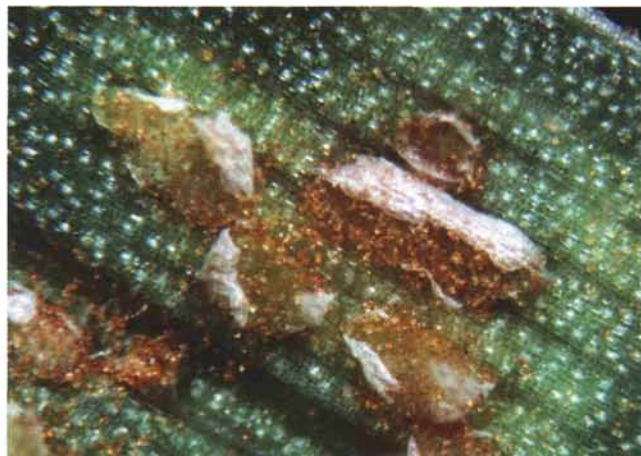
There are many species of rust fungi, but usually only two cause disease in Illinois: stem rust and crown rust. They are different diseases and can attack grass at different times, but in general they are managed using the same tactics.

Rust fungi grow in most living plants, including turf. However, the life cycle of a rust fungus is complicated. Many rusts not only produce orange spores, but black, brown or colorless spores as well. You do not often see these because they are fewer in number and harder to see than the orange or rust-colored spores. Rust fungi are very old fungi and existed long before America, Europe or the Middle East civilizations developed. They are known to have existed before recorded history. Ah, you say, how can I know they existed before recorded history? Well, rust fungi have been found as fossils, history "recorded" by nature. The bottom line is, the rust fungi have been around a long time and they "know" how to survive. This means that humans must learn to live with them and not try to eliminate them.

Each spring, the rust fungi start their growth cycle. Some attack grasses in the spring while others attack bushes like barberry growing as a hedge. We do not often notice them in the spring, but as the summer progresses, the fungi all start attacking and growing in grass leaves. By August and September, when it is normally hot and dry, the grass is growing slowly, and this allows the fungus enough time to produce billions and billions of rusty spores before you mow your lawn. When you do mow or walk in turf, you stir up the spores and the air and you can turn rust-colored.

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In Illinois, rust diseases are generally not a problem that requires an involved control program. However, managers of those turfs that develop



A close-up look at rust spores.

severe rust disease in the fall might want to consider a more aggressive program that involves cultural and chemical approaches. In addition, when selecting a grass (seed or sod), pay attention to the rust resistance offered. Rust disease is very important for grass seed production in the Northwest region of the United States because the grass is allowed to grow tall and long, and the environment there is conducive to severe symptom development. As a result, turf breeders try to select grasses with good rust resistance. If your major concern is managing the problematic rust spores and not the turf disease, here are a few pointers.

leaf is cut off. Mow the grass at least once per week. Once the leaf is cut off, the fungus will die.

Irrigate your lawn/turf before you play on it or mow it.

Lightly wetting the grass leaves will prevent the spores from puffing up when you mow it or run on it. This is also a good idea if you want to reduce the amount of orange spores in an athletic field. A light wetting should not interfere with the game.

Allow more light and more wind.

Trimming trees, removing old bushes or whatever you can do to improve the amount of light that

What can you do to reduce the amount of rust spores?

Keep your grass growing and mowed in the summer.

Give your turf enough water and fertilizer to keep the leaves growing. This means you will have to mow it all summer, but it reduces the time the fungus has to develop before the

reaches your turf and the amount of air circulation will help reduce the severity of rust diseases.

Apply fungicides!

There are a number of fungicides that can be applied to reduce the infection of rusts, but remember, rust infection starts in early summer and continues through the early fall. Therefore, if you have had a rust problem in the past and feel that fungicides are needed, I would suggest that you limit your applications to those problematic areas. This will reduce the cost and amount of fungicides that you will have to invest in. Note that I do not recommend this. I prefer not to see fungicides applied to turf for the management of rust diseases. It is costly, adds a toxin to the leaves and you have to do it repeatedly during the summer to get good control. In addition, the rust is only a problem if you do not like the color!

Select good grass seed or sod.

Some grasses are less prone to fungal attack or better resist summer heat and drought. You should always use premium-quality grass seed or sod as these varieties often develop less rust disease. Keep this in mind for new turf establishment or overseeding.



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the Bull Sheet

John Gurke, CGCS
Contributing Editor

DATES TO REMEMBER

October 6 — Fall session of the Rutgers Professional Golf Turf Management School begins at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, in New Brunswick, NJ.

October 7 — MAGCS/ITF Combined Golf Day at Prairie Landing Golf Club in West Chicago, IL, **Tony Kalina** host.

October 8 — Wisconsin Turfgrass Association's Fundraiser Golf Outing at The Bull at Pinehurst Farms in Sheboygan, WI, **Tony Rzadzki, CGCS** host.

October 10 — 23rd Southern Illinois Turfgrass Field Day at the SIUC Horticulture Research Center in Carbondale, IL.

October 10 — Illinois Golf Hall of Fame induction ceremony, featuring Class of 2003 inductee **Oscar Miles, CGCS**, at The Glen Club, Glenview, IL.

October 21-22 — Illinois Arborist Association's 21st Annual Conference and Trade Show at the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Tinley Park, IL.

November 5 — 51st Annual Midwest Turf Clinic at Medinah Country Club, **Tom Lively, CGCS** host.

November 15 — Annual MAGCS Fall Dinner Dance at Aurora Country Club, **Julie and John Gurke, CGCS** hosts.

MAGCS sends its deepest condolences to Karen Minnis and the many friends and family of **George Minnis**, the man who gave so much of himself to run this Association for

so many years. On September 4, George succumbed to the cancer that he had been fighting so bravely; he will be missed by us all.

As mentioned above, the Southern Illinois Turfgrass Field Day will be held this month on the 10th at the SIUC Horticulture Research Center in Carbondale. Call 618-536-7751 for registration information.

Congratulations to **Don Spier**, formerly of Simplot Partners, who as of August 19 joined Precision Labs.

More congrats to **Derek Florian**, former assistant superintendent at Aurora Country Club, who is the new superintendent at Fox Valley Golf Club in Aurora, replacing the retired **Lynn Wesson**. "Come back, Shane!"

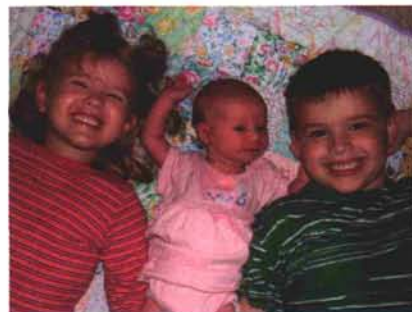


Derek Florian.

A hearty MAGCS welcome to Keith Krause, formerly of Crystal Downs Country Club in Michigan (and NOT Prairie Landing G.C.!), who is the new assistant golf course superintendent at Aurora Country Club. "Never mind, Shane—have a nice life!"

And while we're at it, congratulations to our own **Cathy Miles Ralston** and her husband Phil on the birth of daughter Amy Catherine on September 5. Amy joins big brother Ryan and big sister Kristin to round out the Ralston family

(hopefully the last Ralston—this magazine just doesn't run without Cathy). Amy was 7 lb., 11 oz. and 20 inches long, and mom, daughter, dad and siblings are happy, healthy and tired!



Amy with big siblings Kristin and Ryan.

Wow—more good news to pass around. Congrats to the team from Fox Bend Golf Course for winning the John Deere Championship held at Eagle Brook Country Club in Geneva (**Greg Johnson** host) last month. **Bob Kohlstedt** and Leon McNair posted a searing 53 en route to their victory, enabling them to compete in the 2003 John Deere World Championship at Grayhawk Golf's Talon and Raptor courses in November. Best of luck to you there!

Some more sad news to report—**Kathy Newyear**, the manager of golf operations at Orchard Hills Golf Club, lost her husband, Dean, last month. MAGCS sends its sympathies during this most difficult time.

MAGCS thanks its generous sponsors for their support for our September meeting at Shoreacres (**Tim Davis** host). They are: Nadler Golf Car Sales, Nels J. Johnson Tree Experts, Turf Professionals Equipment Company, Palatine Oil, BTSI, Anton's Greenhouse, Mariani Nursery, Bear's Turf Products, Simplot Partners, Arthur Clesen, High PSI, Pendleton Turf Supply and Kaplan Trucking and Paving. It's been said numerous times before, but these very fine events at some very fine venues would not be possible without the generosity of our great sponsors. Thank you, and look for a complete wrap-up of the annual championship in our November issue.

(continued on page 30)



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The MAGCS Annual Scholarship Golf Outing and class 'C' championship was held at Orchard Valley Golf Course on September 9 on possibly the best day we've had for golf all season. **Jim McNair**, CGCS and **Harry Lovero**, our hosts, provided us with an immaculate golf course on this wonderful day. Kudos to **Erwin McKone**, class 'C' advisor, and his committee for making this the best and biggest scholarship outing thus far—it promises to keep getting bigger and better! Thank

you to the staff at Orchard Valley, including PGA professional Tom Tierney and his people, food and beverage manager Dianne Dixon and her staff, and of course to **Marsha Traves**, Patti Thorson, LeAnn Scott, Kelly Schroeder and **Sharon Riesenbeck** for running the two betting holes and netting more than \$1,100 for our scholarship coffers. Also, congratulations to Erwin McKone and **Brian Racette** on their victories in the class 'C' championship. Finally, many thanks to our

sponsors, who once again stepped up to the plate and made the day possible. They are BTSI, Henry Frenzer, Master of the Links, Simplot Partners, Lesco, L & M Greenhouses, Syngenta, Eco-Ponds USA, Flowtronex PSI, Conserv FS, Earth Works, Nadler Golf Car Sales, Palatine Oil, Northfield Block, J.W. Turf, Arthur Clesen, Chicagoland Turf and Bayer/Chipco Environmental. You are the best!



Ed Fischer, Chad Ball and Bob Kronn.



Kevin DeRoo, Erwin McKone and James Burns.



Class 'C' champions Erwin McKone (net) and Brian Racette (gross).



Rick Reed, Dean Bemis and Mike Clesen.



Darin Douglas, Roger Johnson, Russell Stratton and Mike Murphy.



Brett Parcher, Dan Stahl, Harry Lovero and Jim McNair—our gracious hosts.



Jan Jarvis (a.k.a. Pancho Gonzalez), Joe Voss and Bob Emmerich.



Kelly Schroeder, LeAnn Scott and Sharon Riesenbeck, who ran the betting holes along with Marsha Traves and Patti Thorson (not pictured, but you've all seen them before).