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United We Sand, the feature article by Chuck Barber discusses the importance and viewpoint of topdressing as it impacts our playing surfaces. Photo credit: Luke Cella

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United We Sand

Chuck Barber



Shane Conroy attempts to answer the question that gets asked of our membership each year around this time. Just because the grass goes dormant, doesn't mean there is nothing to do.

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2013 MIDWEST EVENTS

3/11	Midwest March Meeting, Royal Melbourne CC
3/19	Annual Assistant Winter Workshop, Golf House
4/30	Midwest April Meeting, Calumet Country Club
6/10	Midwest June Meeting, Edgewood Valley Country Club
7/20	Midwest Family Night Picnic, Cougar Baseball Game
8/26	Midwest August Meeting, Crystal Lake Country Club
11/14	61 st Midwest Turf Clinic, Medinah Country Club

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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.

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Shane Conroy
Park Ridge Country Club

The Question

We've all been asked it; some more than others. How you answer is up to you, but for all of us who work in the industry, it's a question we hear too often: "What do you do in the winter?"

With colder temperatures becoming a trend and hours of daylight fading as fast as the Bears offense, winter is upon us. Winter gives us greenkeepers the chance to catch our breath and look back on the season that was. It also allows us to prepare for the upcoming season, which will be here before we know it. However, before that new season arrives, everyone just can't help asking 'the question.' We can all answer easily and accurately, if we are so inclined. We all know our work doesn't stop just because the calendar says January. In fact for some of us there is enough work that we could still show up at 5:30 on a Saturday morning if we wanted, just to keep up with the flow of our routine.

Just because the bulk of the work moves indoors doesn't make it any less important. Equipment has played a vital role during the season. It's been used day in and day out. Now is the time for inspection and repair. Anything with reels or blades gets ground or backlapped. The oil is changed in each machine, and each engine and component is inspected and repaired to make sure it performs at its optimum. Carburetors are rebuilt if necessary. Bearings, bushings, and seals are checked and, if needed, replaced. Hoses are examined and repaired. And that's just the beginning. Each facility has its own fleet of equipment, and there are a lot of pieces to maintain. Each technician has his own system for maintaining and servicing this fleet. With the help of the superintendent and assistants, he makes sure that each piece of equipment is ready to go come spring. Whether the tech likes to start with the walk-behind mowers, utility vehicles, rough and bank, there's no doubt it's a large undertaking that couldn't be done without planning and the right people.

Sprayer maintenance is another large chore in the off-season. Tanks must be cleaned and sanitized; nozzles and filters must be cleaned; gaskets, pumps, and solenoids need to be checked and repaired. Sprayers, in my opinion, are not the most fun piece of equipment to work on, but they may be one of the most important in our fleet. Forgoing work on the sprayers during the off-season is a recipe for disaster. Come spring, when that proxy/primo application goes down without a hitch, you'll be glad you put in those winter maintenance hours.

Tee and green equipment is another piece of the puzzle when it comes to winter work. Wood pieces such as benches, trash cans, coolers, par three divot boxes and cart arrows need to be sanded and stained. Metal pieces are no different. Ball washers and trash cans also need a sanding and a fresh coat of paint. Tee markers that have chipped or broken during the year are repaired and painted as well.

Facility maintenance also comes to the forefront during the winter. Each of us has a shop, office and/or clubhouse to look after. Some of that work needs to wait until our duties on the course aren't as demanding. Some of that work can't be done while members are actively using the facilities. Many of us are working in shops and offices that are older than we are. These buildings need attention, whether it's minor or major carpentry. The off-season is great for checking some of those facility jobs off your list. It's also a great way to gain valuable experience working on projects that don't necessarily occur on the course.

Speaking of the course, let's not forget the winter work that actually gets done outdoors. The early part of this December was mild. It allowed crews to continue outdoor projects that, in years past, Mother Nature made tough to



Bearings are just one of the few things that get checked and replaced in the winter months.



United

We Sand

TOPDRESSING IN THE MIDWEST OF AMERICA

Chuck Barber, *St. Charles Country Club*

PHOTO CREDIT: MATT HARSTAD

For two years I was the Editorial Chair for *On Course*, and for two years I sought member driven content. I was marginally successful, but we all have demands on our time that preclude our sitting down and formalizing what we do into two pages of coherent content.

Further, I didn't follow up well with the membership to make sure that the content came in on time.

Fast forward to the MAGCS Board of Director's strategic planning meeting on November 28, the notion of hiring a 'staff writer' to collect content and generate articles came up. This got me thinking.

What if I collected a few blurbs of content from members on a variety of topics and wrote the articles myself? All I would need would be boatloads of free time and, well, a variety of topics that I hadn't identified yet. It was in this spirit that I began to collect some information on sand topdressing from the MAGCS membership and to write the article myself. I don't have boatloads of free time, but I know I can do this. It's my sincerest wish to bank a great many articles on a variety of topics throughout the winter, so that when the time comes *On Course* can continue to provide industry-leading content in one of the best magazines any GCSAA Chapter has to offer. Any of you reading this should now be warned: I will contact you asking for information on yet-to-be-named topics and will further ask for editorial license and the public use of the information. So, now you know I will be pestering you even more than I already do.

The information I gathered led me to believe that although methods, frequencies, equipment, material handling, loading, and deployment varied a great deal there were some significant commonalities. The goals of each topdressing program seemed to revolve around organic matter management,

thatch dilution, and putting green speed consistency and smoothness. "Our biggest goals are thatch dilution, green speeds, and maintaining a firm surface," says Matt Harstad, superintendent of Calumet Country Club.

Kevin Goss of Sugar Creek Golf Course believes that thatch dilution is the most important of his topdressing goals. The greens at Sugar Creek (or Sugar National to those of us that have been there) were built with a 1:1:1 mix of sand, soil, and peat. While that might not appear to be the best root zone, Kevin says the greens are unusually healthy. He credits this to more than adequate surface drainage. As a result, the greens are relatively problem free.

Sand selection revolved around 'what we've used here in the past.' Shane Ritchie of Schaumburg Golf Club explains, "I don't know if there was any logic behind it (sand selection) originally, but there was no reason to change it." Fines free sand from any source was the most important criterion, as well as delivered cost.

"There are times that I wish we could afford dry sand, but that's way too expensive and we don't have any place to store it," Matt Harstad reported. Material handling, delivery, and application time seem to be the biggest obstacles. Aside from storage of various kinds (parking lots, railroad tie and cinder block bins, to cart paths), finding the time to get out on the golf course is always a concern.

"The biggest challenge is finding a window of opportuni-

ty," Goss says. Sugar Creek is a dawn-to-dusk, nine-hole operation. They are not enthusiastic about the idea of blocking off tee times in favor of cultural practices. At the same time, Mother Nature has to provide the right weather, so doing one small thing means a great deal has to go correctly first.

Imagine that you've found the right sand, the right equipment, the right opportunity, and the right people. How often are you going to topdress? Scott Goniwiecha of The Glen Club says, "I like to topdress greens, tees, and approaches every two weeks weather depending."

Shane Ritchie further explains, "Our program is basically every two weeks in the growing season for thatch control and

John Gurke, CGCS at Aurora Country Club, has a wholly different philosophy. "The heavy sand application we make in December is still present throughout the early spring months (March and April). In late April we typically contract DryJect service which provides another heavy dose of sand that persists into early summer. For the summer months we might only topdress two or three times lightly." Gurke goes on to explain that they will follow the growing season with either another DryJect or core aerification.

Gurke also says, "We find that there are no layering issues when not lightly topdressing every week or two, and our quality of cut throughout the summer is much better than when we were topdressing more frequently."



Incorporating sand with the T.B. 200 Brush. Photo Credit: Chuck Barber

ball roll consistency. Twelve tons in a very light application over six acres of greens, brushed in with the T.B. 200 brush." Coco mats, pull-behind static brushes, and rotary brushes were the preferred method of incorporation. The consensus also is to use "sand" mowers, or back-up machines, for 2-4 days after each topdressing.

"After we mow, I always use an old set of mowers for three days. This, combined with a few heavy watering cycles eliminates any issues with quality of cut," Goniwiecha explains.

Kevin Goss agrees with this schedule. "You can't just throw a lot of expensive sand around and automatically topdress your way to good soil." Soil modification is not a goal at Sugar Creek, but rather thatch management. "I don't think it wise to build a sand layer on heavy soil. After 10 years you might be in good shape, but in the interim you will have a perched water table and short roots. Everyone likes their new topdressing machines.

The preferred methods of topdressing are either dedicated or pull-behind twin rotary spreaders. According to Dave Blomquist, CGCS, 15 years ago the machines that we have today weren't available. "We used walk-behind fertilizer spreaders with bagged sand. It was the only way to get the light, even application we wanted." Now, with computerized spreader settings, a wide range of sand depths available, and easier loading, topdressing is much easier than ever before. Former NFL Coach Herman Edwards once said, "A goal without a plan is a wish." Each superintendent identified their individual goals for sand topdressing and formulated a plan to make it work. It is safe to say that sand topdressing is a major component of their golf course management strategies.



Everyone likes a new topdressing machine. Photo Credit: Chuck Barber

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The BullSheet

John Gurke, CGCS, Associate Editor



FEBRUARY 2013

Dates to Remember

February 3-5 – GCSAA National Championship and Golf Classic in San Diego, CA.

February 4-8 – GCSAA Education Conference in San Diego, CA.

February 6-7 – Golf Industry Show in San Diego, CA.

February 6 – University of Illinois Turfgrass Alumni get-together at 310 10th Avenue in the Gaslamp District from 5:30 til 7:00 PM.

February 6 – MAGCS 2013 Hospitality Reception from 7 til 10 PM at the Hotel Salomar at 435 6th Avenue on the Rooftop Lounge.

February 7 – GCSAA's 2013 Annual Meeting in San Diego, CA somewhere.

February 19 – MAGCS Annual Assistant Winter Workshop, Midwest Golf House

March 4 – MAGCS Past President's Meeting, Geneva Golf Club, Ed Braunsky, CGCS hsot

March 1 – Deadline for applications for the Billy Casper Golf Agronomy Internship Program.

March 6 – CAGCS Chicagoland Forum, Naperville Country Club, Steven Biehl and Tim Anderson, CGCS MG

March 11 – MAGCS Monthly Meeting at Royal Melbourne Country Club, Dave Groelle, CGCS

March 13-14 – Reinders 21st Green Industry Conference at the Waukesha Expo Center in Suburban Milwaukee, WI.

March 30 – Deadline for nominations for GCM's Most Valuable Technician (MVT) award.

WELCOME TO THE NEW MEMBERS OF THE MAGCS FAMILY:

- **Ross Page**, Weber Park Golf Course, Class SM
- **Brian Palmer**, Shoreacres, Class SM
- **Steve Freese**, VGM Club, Class E
- **Jacob Koch**, White Eagle Golf Club, Class C
- **Ronald Townsend**, Exmoor Country Club, Class C
- **Josh Roeder**, Hinsdale Golf Club, Class C
- **Brian Moore**, Chicago Golf Club, Class C
- **Bret Jons**, Green Acres Country Club, Class C

Congratulations to **Cory VonTunglen**, former assistant superintendent at Olympia Fields Country Club who is the new golf course superintendent at Midlothian Country Club.

Congratulations to **Tim Davis**, AA Retired Superintendent of Shoreacres. Tim has joined the staff at Dirt-n-Turf Consulting. If you are looking for him, he can be found at: Tim@dirt-n-turf.com

As the football season came to a screeching halt for most of us when the Vikings beat the Packers on the final day of the regular season (go figure—the Packers screw the Bears even when they freakin' lose), it came to my attention that the three logo balls I keep on my desk may be telling me something...



Guess who turned a year old last month? I know—too easy. Of COURSE it was the Golf Range Association of America (or GRAA as we've all come to know it). The association was launched at last year's PGA Merchandise Show in January, when it also unveiled its Golf Range Magazine digital publication. You can find out more, as well as view archived issues of the mag at GolfRange.org. Really. It's not like you're shoveling snow this winter, right?

Those of you who have been around these parts for a spell might remember **Marty Baumann**, former superintendent at Mount Prospect Golf Course (1988-1992) and Fresh Meadow GC after that. After putting Illinois in his tail lights, Marty headed northwest where he found a home in Anchorage, Alaska as superintendent of Anchorage Golf Course, one of just 14 courses in the entire state. With a seven-month golf season (who'da thunk that?) and 22 hours of daylight each day, along with some very unique soils and other challenges from Mother Nature, Marty says life on the course is very interesting.

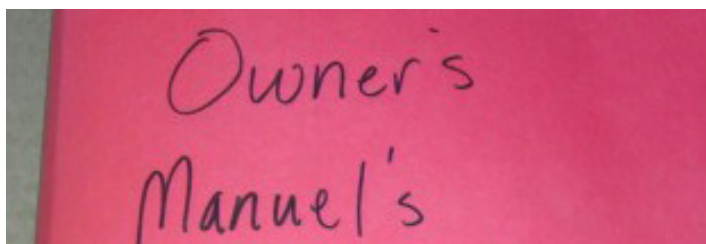


Marty also wants anyone interested to know that he has a summer intern position available for this season. If you know a student or budding golf course superintendent-to-be who wants



a little adventure out of their summer, contact Marty at 907-522-1613, or at mbaumann@AnchorageGolfCourse.com. Deadline for applications is March 15th.

FAR be it for me to point out someone's grammatical imperfections or their butchering of the English language, but



really?? I won't name names, but let it be known that this was found in the desk of an assistant superintendent at St. Charles Country Club and his boss says his name is Travis. Oops. Just as I was beginning to bask in my grammatical glory, I took a walk into my shop locker room and stumbled across this..... Nobody's perfect.



Q: What is it called when **Tom Prichard** throws a big ol' country-style bash in his maintenance barn?

A: An Ivanhoedown.

It was 60 years ago this month that *Bull Sheet* reported on 11 cases of the recently-discovered Dutch Elm Disease in our state. The reports all originated in a 150-mile long belt from Urbana-Champaign southeast to the Indiana state line. The northernmost case was in Urbana, about 140 miles south of Chicago. Stay tuned to find out if it makes it here.

50 years ago this month two revolutionary advancements in fertilizer technology were being discussed in the pages of *Bull Sheet*: Hydraulic Feeding and Coated Controlled Release granules. The former, it was reported, could lightly feed fine turf areas without burn by mixing a slurry of water and fertilizer in a barrel, making sure to keep it well-agitated "with a canoe paddle," and applying it through a hose attached to the barrel in 8-12 foot swaths for even distribution. The former was even more of a mystery, the report stating simply that the fertilizer granules will be "coated for controlled release, similar to some of the cold tablets that are on the market." Wonder if either of those will pan out...

And 40 years ago this month, *Bull Sheet* ran **Jim Burdett's** (pictured right)

article (which he based on the speech he gave at the Midwest Turf Clinic) on the newfangled idea of watering with sewage effluent. My guess is that 40 years from now we will still be talking about this.





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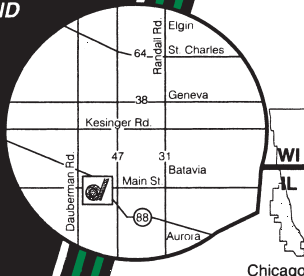
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