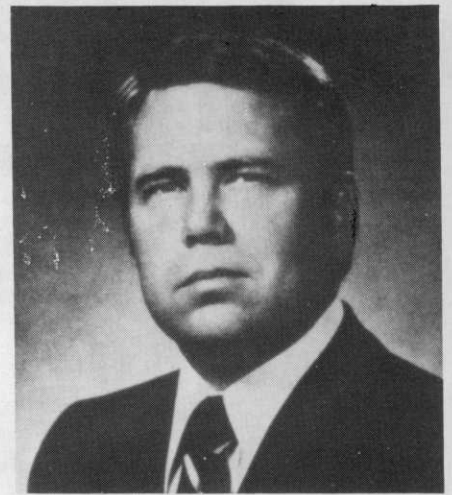


"Mr. Green Committee Chairman"



Paul D. Cato, Jr.

by **PAUL D. CATO, JR.**
President, Colonial Country Club, Fort Worth, Texas

FOR THE LAST three years, I have been green committee chairman at Colonial Country Club, in Fort Worth, Texas, the home of the Colonial National Invitation Tournament. This is a golf-oriented club, with over 40,000 rounds played each year. Golf has been good to Colonial, and the Board feels strongly about the continued improvement of the course. Over the last three years, more than \$400,000 has been spent on golf course improvements, including a new automatic irrigation system and pump station, a new and efficient maintenance building, a new 10,000 square foot putting green, a new design and construction of the par 3, 13th hole, a new 16,000 square foot bentgrass nursery, and all our asphalt cart paths were relocated and replaced with concrete.

In 1977, Paul Cano, our golf course superintendent, retired after a 42-year career at Colonial. Replacing him was very difficult, but during this process I gained tremendous respect for the profession of golf course superintendents. We interviewed several men for the job, and I can truthfully say that every applicant was extremely qualified, proud of his profession, and

interested in improving himself. With this background and experience I do not consider myself an expert, but I have learned just enough to develop some opinions. So the following thoughts are the way I see it as *Mr. Green Committee Chairman*.

Most clubs are judged by their golf course, its layout and condition. Country clubs were created primarily for golf, and members need to understand the importance of their golf course. If it were not for the course, the clubhouse, tennis courts and swimming pool would probably not have been built. It follows that the green committee should be one of the most important and most active in the club. With this understanding, it puts great importance on the selection of a green committee chairman. In my opinion, a chairman should meet the following qualifications:

1. He must be an active golfer (not necessarily a low handicapper) and enough a student of the game to have a working knowledge of the Rules of Golf.

2. He must be a fair, understanding and flexible person who has enough maturity and self discipline to recognize that he is not an agronomist.

3. He must be a man who has easy access to the Board of the club, probably as a member of the Board. This enables the Board to be kept up-to-date and to be in a position to understand and explain the activities on the course to members. An informed Board is easier to sell on budget or the need for additional capital expenditures.

4. He must be a man who has time to give to the job and a great pride in the golf course.

The other committee members should be basically like the chairman. They need to be chosen by the chairman, or at least approved by him. The committee must have very good communications. I recommend a small committee, three people or less, and in many cases only a chairman without a committee. Meetings with the superintendent are held at all times in many places, and this makes getting a large committee together very difficult. The chairman and superintendent should have regular meetings while they inspect the course.

The green committee chairman should help the superintendent with his budget and with policymaking problems. The green committee chair-

man has a good feel for the pulse of the club's thinking and of its financial condition. He should work closely with both operating and capital expenditure budgets. The operating budget should be updated every six months to better relate to the changes constantly occurring on the course. Most of these changes will be in labor, since this makes up about 70 percent of the operating budget.

I feel that the large turnover rate in the labor force is a major problem on most golf courses. Part of the reason for the problem is the low wage scale set up by many clubs. It is increasingly difficult to find good men to work the odd hours, often under less than comfortable conditions. You get what you pay for! It is not good business to put expensive equipment and a valuable golf course in the hands of low-priced, unskilled labor. With the equipment technology in the turf industry improving daily, our golf courses should be able to do more with less people, but it will mean that each workman must be better qualified.

When you have good management, you do not have surprises. This is especially true on your capital expenditures. It is essential to have good records on maintenance equipment and to be realistic about its estimated life. Be certain that your Board knows when your large dollar needs will occur. The green committee chairman and superintendent can hurt their credibility with large emergency needs in capital expenditures.

The green committee chairman and his committee should demand a high degree of maintenance on the golf course. The superintendent is responsible for the manner in which the golf course is maintained. He should not have any doubt about what condition the Board and green committee chairman expect. He must know the standard set down by the Board, and along with this responsibility, he must have authority and complete control over his crew and equipment. The green committee chairman and his committee cannot nit-pick the golf course. They must judge the superintendent and his organization on the com-

plete job. The superintendent and his crew must try to view the course and its condition as the green committee chairman and club members see it.

There must be a close relationship between the green committee chairman and the golf committee chairman, just as there should be a close relationship between the superintendent and the golf professional. Communication and mutual respect is essential or the club will be the loser. The superintendent and the golf professional must pursue the same goal — "The playing condition of the golf course!" I strongly recommend that these two men have regular meetings on the course so that each man can better understand the other's problems. A well-informed golf professional can be a great public relations man for the superintendent. I believe that for such things as hole locations, tee marker location, and width of fairways, the superintendent must have the cooperation of the golf shop for the good of the club.

The superintendent must have a calendar of all scheduled golf events

The superintendent must have full schedule of events so there are no surprises.



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at the beginning of each year, and course maintenance needs must be considered when making the calendar of events. For instance, it is bad to find the greens aerified the day before a big club tournament, simply because the superintendent wasn't notified. At times of adverse weather, this line of communication is also very important. I feel that the superintendent should have a complete authority over whether golf carts are to be permitted on the course and when play is to be kept off the course because of freeze or frost. Other closings of the course should be by mutual decision of the superintendent and the golf professional. If they don't agree, then the green committee chairman and the golf committee chairman must step in and do what is best for the club. The green committee chairman and superintendent must never forget that the main reason for the golf course is to accommodate the members.

The green committee chairman and superintendent have a commitment to the club to maintain the philosophy and character of the golf course. All major changes must be approved by the Board. The green committee chairman's job is not to rebuild the course the way he wants it. The green committee chairman and superintendent can and must prevent changes such as: the greens changing shape, loss of hole locations, bunker changes in their depth or shape, uncontrolled tree growth, or changing of green contours. I recommend annual photographs of the golf course so that it does not change in front of our eyes without our noticing it. Hiring a qualified golf course architect is often beneficial in maintaining your philosophy in course character. An architect can also be of great assistance in rebuilding and making major changes when they become necessary.

What does a green committee chairman expect from his superintendent?

The superintendent must have confidence in the green committee chairman and he must be extremely loyal to the chairman. The chairman must never hear of something the superintendent says from another source; it must be said directly to the chairman.

The superintendent must be organized, have the ability to handle men, and be tactful enough to handle members. He must have goals, both long and short range. His standards

for maintenance should be high, with extreme pride in the golf course. He must be a leader of men and must be able to delegate responsibility.

The superintendent, like the green committee chairman, should play golf and be knowledgeable about the Rules of Golf. He must know how to define the hazards correctly and realize the importance of these hazard lines being maintained. He must have ability as a mechanic, and with his work on budget, planning and purchasing, he needs to be a good businessman.

It goes without saying, but he must be well-founded in principles of agronomy. He must keep abreast of new developments in the industry. The green committee chairman can help by making sure the club sends the superintendent to state and local turfgrass conferences, the annual GCSAA International Turfgrass Conference and Show and the USGA Green Section Annual and Regional Meetings. The superintendent then accepts the responsibility to attend all sessions and gain as much knowledge as possible to bring back to the club and his organization.

The superintendent must have an open mind to the fast changes in the industry. He should also have a good nursery of both his green and fairway grasses where he can experiment before gambling with them on the course. The superintendent cannot be afraid to say, "I don't know," or "I was wrong." Excuses, alibis and blaming others will cause the green committee chairman to lose confidence. No superintendent can afford for this to happen. The industry has a lot of specialists who are willing and able to help, such as the USGA or the outstanding universities in our country. A good superintendent will make use of all technical resources available to him.

As *Mr. Green Committee Chairman*, most of the reward comes in your own mind and the pride you have in the changes, or lack of changes on the golf course . . . and in a member saying, "I have never seen the course in finer condition."

This address was made at the USGA Green Section Regional Conference at Irvine, Texas, in 1978.



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