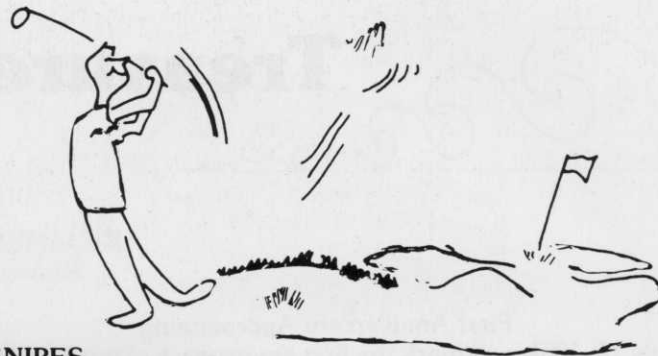


NORTH FLORIDA

DIVOTS

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With the constant rise in the cost and maintenance of new turf equipment, North Florida Chapter members are searching for viable ways to keep costs down.

Members eager to volunteer their thoughts and suggestions were Chip Powell, Deerwood Country Club; Bob Willis, Ponte Vedra Country Club; John Hayden, San Jose Country Club, and Jim Shine, Sawgrass. These superintendents agree there are some definite ways to reduce equipment and maintenance cost, but unfortunately there are some things they will have to live with.

Fuel and lubricant prices are very predictable of late; they are constantly on the rise. North Florida superintendents realize they cannot directly affect these cost increases. However, close monitoring of consumption in individual turf equipment units gives them not only an inventory check but also a preventative maintenance aid. Excessive use of gas or oil may be a symptom of a problem about to surface. Early corrective measures could avoid considerable downtime in the future.

All four superintendents feel it is unnecessary to rely solely on the distributorship for parts. Parts such as bearings, seals, belts and bedknives can be bought from local suppliers at a great savings. "I found a belt that I needed at a local supplier for \$2.80. Contacting my distributor, I found the same belt for an exorbitant \$24.60," said Chip Powell.

The next cost cutting area was stocking of parts. Bob Willis said, "Do not skimp on parts (high use items) because nothing is more costly than downtime." It's plain common-sense to keep high use items on hand. However, one should not go to the extreme and overstock. Keeping an extra hydrostat (hopefully not a high use item) would be carrying things a bit too far. If you trade in or sell the machine, you are like a quarterback with no one to pass or handoff to. He eats the football; you absorb unnecessary cost.

The recent cry of superintendents is do not trade in old equipment. Used equipment can become valuable for stripping of needed parts or for rebuilding to use as back up units. "Sawgrass is a resort course and it has to constantly be in first class shape," said Jim Shine. "Sawgrass does not have the flexibility that a private course might have if equipment problems develop." That's why Shine has back-up units for each piece of equipment.

How far one goes in rebuilding equipment depends largely on the maintenance shop set up and the mechanic. A line must be drawn between which repairs can be done in the shop and those that should be done outside. Tying up your shop mechanic with unfamiliar, specialized repairs costs you time and money. Close scrutiny of any equipment that might be rebuilt is necessary in comparing rebuilding cost to a new equipment purchase. Will you actually be saving? Be careful your desire to cut cost does not backfire!

John Hayden has said, "The most cost and attention received on a golf course is that of its employees." No matter what system of preventive maintenance one has, it is not worth a plug nickel without good mechanics and operators. The superintendents interviewed kept coming back to a humanistic approach to keep maintenance cost down. Operator education is important to the life expectancy of turf equipment. Your best operator in most situations is your best teacher. By taking notice of an individual's abilities and placing that person with the right piece of equipment, you will have completed a highly productive bond of man and machine. As your new operator begins to learn his equipment, respect for that equipment and pride in his work will grow. Irony dictates this to be true the majority of the time though the worth of the man at \$3.35 an hour is not equally equated with the cost of a \$30,000 fairway unit.

High turnover of employees on a golf course can be a real equipment killer. Experimenting with a constant flow of new operators can cost money and increase the accumulation of gray hairs. Stopping to take a small interest in the way of a "thank you" or just asking how one is getting along may keep that fairway unit out of a lake or that greens-mower off a tree.

Superintendents hate to see their mechanics go on vacation. A good mechanic is the heart of a shop, bringing life to all the units in the maintenance facility and keeping track of the vital signs with up-to-date maintenance records. If you think this is over-dramatized, try May through September without a good mechanic and watch your maintenance costs soar like an eagle.

The knowledge and thoughts shared in this article represent the best means of controlling equipment and maintenance cost. ■