

THE USGA SECTION — AS I SEE IT

By Dr. DOUGLAS T. HAWES

The Turf Advisory Service was started in 1953 by the USGA using its Green Section which previously had been mostly a research oriented group. The visitation service is the major, but not the only role of the USGA Green Section. Other roles of this staff of 13 agronomists distributed geographically among seven offices around the United States include: producing professional articles for the USGA Green Section's magazine, the *RECORD*; speaking at turf conferences; answering correspondence on agronomic problems from member clubs; gathering turf research information and distributing it to fellow agronomists and making it available to member clubs; encouraging researchers in the field to do more turf research that golf courses can benefit by; and insuring Championship turf conditions at USGA Championship sites.

The staff has over 50 total years of experience with the Green Section itself. All members of the staff have a B.S. Degree, usually in agronomy or a closely related field. They all play golf, although handicaps range from under 10 to over 20. Most of them have worked on golf course grounds as part of a maintenance crew before joining the Green Section staff. Some members of the staff have a Masters Degree and one has a Ph.D. These individuals are specialists who visit subscribing clubs to the specialized job of consulting with the emphasis on assisting the clubs to have better maintenance at the lowest possible cost. Their function is to assist in keeping the superintendent up-to-date on the latest research information, to act as a neutral unbiased source or opinion for past and future maintenance practices. The Green Section staff has no particular product to sell — they are selling their service which is underwritten by the USGA. Member clubs are the only ones that receive this service. For a fee of \$200, the club receives a half-day visit and a written report with recommendations geared for their particular golf course. The Green Section agronomist's visit is a time to ask questions. We feel that you will benefit most by having at least one annual visit from our agronomist. It is the author's intent to visit clubs that he is servicing at different times of the year so as to see what turf conditions are like at that club in Spring, Summer and Fall. This information enables me to better evaluate overall maintenance practices at the golf course.

This service therefore, is essentially an extension service to USGA member clubs by golf course maintenance-oriented personnel. The Green Section has been called recently by Joseph C. Dye, a former USGA Executive Director, "the unsung hero of golf". He goes on to say, "It is safe to say that if there had not been a Green Section the good conditions we take for granted at our courses would have been delayed at least a generation or two." The Green Section is a scientific agency whose mission it is to assist USGA member clubs in the upkeep of their golf courses. This assistance also includes a Research and Education Fund that annually distributes \$50,000 to researchers around the country. The motto of the Green Section is Better Turf For Better Golf.

Who subscribes to the Green Section Visiting Service? We have over 1,000 clubs that subscribe to the Green Section Visiting Service and we expect in 1981 to go over 1,300. The center core of these clubs consists of the leading country clubs in the Nation. It should be noted that of the 100 Top Golf Courses, as ranked in the November, 1979 *Golf Digest*, over six times more of these courses subscribe to the Turf Advisory Service than clubs at random from among the Nation's golf facilities. Any U.S.G.A. member club whether it is a very small 9-hole private club, a municipal club, or a very large resort golf complex may avail itself of our services. Any club can become a USGA member. All courses, all superintendents, all club members and golfers benefit in some ways, whether they are USGA members or not, by the Green Section Turf Advisory Service.

We assume that any club receiving our service wants an unbiased estimate of their existing and potential problems. We assume they want to know what corrective actions may be taken rather than to remain blissfully ignorant of troublesome situations that may be developing. We have many clubs which never give us a call until the conditions have reached the crisis point. Although we can be of help in telling them how best to recover from their problems and how to avoid problems in the future, it seems to us that a mere \$200 a year every year pays for itself — like regular visits to the dentist. In many cases clubs would have been able to avoid their present crisis if annual visits had been part of their overall maintenance budget. ■