Computers - A Must!

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Guest Columnist

Few subjects today occupy the attention more of Golf Course Superintendents than that of computers and how they might fit into the world of golf course management. Speculation and rumor both encourage and confuse the most interested. Systems that have been recently marketed generally do not address the comprehensive needs of the golf course maintenance industry - and often lack quality control support.

The good news is that the help and answers everyone is looking for are not very far away. We can realistically expect solid products to surface within the market place in 1986. To be in a position to take full advantage of this coming opportunity, the Golf Course Superintendent should begin his preparations now.

The first realization that must be dealt with is that any number of hardware systems will get the job done. The key to the successful use of computer systems within the field of golf course maintenance is the quality of software programs developed specifically for this purpose.

The very real challenge of selecting one hardware system from many has been somewhat simplified within the golf industry of late. Many software writers and vendors are designating IBM hardware. For example: the USGA with its national handicap system; and Toro, Royal Coach and Rain Bird in the golf course irrigation area. Meaningful software now being considered for the golf course maintenance field will, in all probability, make a similar decision - favoring IBM hardware. Theoretically, a club should find it difficult to justify the purchase of any hardware other than an integrated IBM system, or an IBM compatible system, for the reason that computer standardization is desirable within a club and the industry itself.

The American system of free enterprise, however, challenges this premise. Very sound and presently available software packages in the fields of accounting and data base management, for example, have been designed to be used with various hardware systems and are being marketed vigorously. It is not unlikely that a club could commit to a computer system for the clubhouse - without knowing that it does not readily accommodate golf course maintenance needs.

This circumstance would place the Golf Course Superintendent in the awkward position of having to justify a secondary computer system within the club for his purposes. More than likely, he would also be subject to some criticism for not alerting the club to the problem beforehand. Clearly, the Superintendent needs to become familiar with developing computer system options within the industry and to communicate this infomation to his club - in the very near future. It is essential that a club commit to a computer system only when it has firsthand knowledge of what specific software programs are available and which apply universally to both the clubhouse and golf course maintenance areas.

Further good news worth noting is the scope and depth with which computers will address needs of the Superin-

tendent - beyond our best expectations. Following is a brief listing of the application areas where computer system will make the Golf Course Superintendent a more informed and better manager of people, equipment, natural resources, moneys and terrain: (1) word-processing for report writing and filing; (2) data base systems for storing, sorting and analyzing on-site information and data; (3) an informational network capability to share information and data with national data base operations; (4) labor hour management and ananlysis; (5) equipment inventory - maintenance and depreciation scheduling; (6) a cross-reference inventory generic versus brand name equipment parts and materials; (7) budget development, tracking and analysis; (8) chemical applications-computations, cost and effectiveness comparisions within a data base environment; (9) irrigation and pump systems management; (10) graphics; (11) publication & literature inventory listings and cross referencing; (12) diagnostic inquiries and research; and (13) landscape design.

It is difficult at this time to pinpoint the anticipated cost of the computer systems that would deliver the above capabilities. Preliminary studies, however, suggest the total cost of the hardware and software system would be recoverable within a year's time — before consideration is given to the many intangible benefits that will accrue to the Superintendent and his club from computer usage. Should appropriate hardware already be positioned within a club, these costs would be significantly less.

Finally, it is suggested that the Superintendent begin now to acquire "hands-on" experience with a computer. One sure way is to acquire access to a Personal Computer through the club, or personally, with relatively inexpensive word-processing, home accounting and data base software programs. Any reasonable effort to get some golf course and personal business done on the PC will afford the Superintendent and his family a comfortable way to become computer oriented and ready for more critical tasks - in the near future.

It is important that the Golf Course Superintendent begin to take the initiative with computers soon — as developing circumstances within the golf industry expand this opportunity and offer every chance for the turfgrass manager to excel. An entire industry is preparing to take a big step forward with computers. It is imperative that the Golf Course Superintendent be prepared to join in and contribute to this advance. The alternative is obvious. The Met GCSA is ready to help its memebers in this regard. ∎

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