

# The Gator Growls

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## Fishing is Cheaper

According to statistics published by the USGA, the NGF, and the GCSAA, over the past ten years the average 18-hole golf course budget has soared from \$150,000 in operating expenses and \$25,000 in capital expenditures to \$400,000 in operating expenses and \$75,000 in capital expenditures.

Due to inflation and governmental regulation, the superintendent who managed a golf course in 1976 actually had much more leeway than the superintendent of an average course today.

Since these two items have become a fact of life in all phases of society, golfers should be sympathetic to the problems facing superintendents today.

Yet the majority of golfers don't want to hear about the difficulties encountered in managing a golf course.

To understand this contradiction, all a superintendent need do is look at golf membership. On most courses in Florida the average golfer is retired, somewhere between the age of 60 and 80.

The key word here is retired (fixed income). These average golfers simply want to play golf everyday for the rest of their lives without it wiping out their retirement.

And since fishing is less expensive than golf and there are no membership dues, it is important that superintendents, as professionals, give them the best course for the dollar.

Accomplishing this feat is no easy task and it helps if a superintendent has a guideline to follow, such as the one listed below.

### Operation Evaluation

Begin with the most difficult assessment by asking yourself the following questions.

DO I:

1. Enjoy going to work every morning?
2. Give 100 % to my job?
3. Keep up with current trends in maintenance?
4. Attend meetings and conferences?
5. Promote the game of golf?

6. Know what kind of conditions my members want and expect?

AM I:

1. A good manager?
2. Working toward certification?
3. Involved in continuing education?
4. Delegating work in the most efficient manner?

If you can't answer in the affirmative to all these questions, you may have a beautiful course, but you are probably wasting some of your member's money.

Now move on to the most expensive budget item, employee salaries and wages, which usually comprise about 60 % of a golf course budget.

If your employees are working over time (we all have to mow, etc., on weekends), shuffle your schedules to give crew members an amount of time off during the week equaling the amount of time they put in on weekends.

Not only will you save over-time pay, your employees will miss less work time because they will be able to do things during the week that cannot be attended to on weekends (doctor and dentist appointments, etc.).

While evaluating employees, look at their efficiency in completing daily operations. Ask them for their ideas on improving job output. Frequently, you will find that crew members are looking at a problem from a totally different perspective than yours; and sometimes their ideas have merit.

Next, take a look at your equipment. This category includes equipment maintenance, capital purchases of equipment, fuel, insurance, etc., and claims approximately 20 % of the average golf course budget.

Preventative maintenance will result in fewer breakdowns and longer life from your equipment, and it is obviously the least costly form of maintenance. Educate your employees on operation and use of equipment. Your mechanic should routinely change oil, filters and lubricate, etc. and keep up-to-date records on all equipment.

When buying replacement parts, check with local or national parts houses and use dealers only when all other avenues have been exhausted.

(cont. on page 23)

(cont. from page 22)

When making major equipment purchases, have the equipment demonstrated on your course. Contact other superintendents who use this piece of equipment and get their opinions. Then buy the piece with the best performance and the least amount of down time, not necessarily the cheapest.

Reduce fuel costs by eliminating unnecessary trips around the course. In other words, don't send a crew member from point A to point Z and then back to point B.

Check with your insurance agent to see what you might do to qualify for lower rates. For example, providing a sprinkler system in your equipment building could reduce the risk of damage from fire, thereby lowering your rates.

Fertilizers and chemicals are the next budget item. Government regulations have really limited the superintendent's flexibility in this area. Cutting costs here is made doubly difficult by insects like the mole cricket which, like any unwelcome guest, overstays its welcome.

Calibrate spreaders and spray rigs to ensure proper coverage. In order to save material costs and labor time, use fertigation as a supplement to your fertilizer program. Also, don't rely on memory for application rates. Read all chemical labels to avoid mistakes.

Of course there are still miscellaneous items, such as supplies, topdressing, sand, etc., which require that you shop around for quality and price.

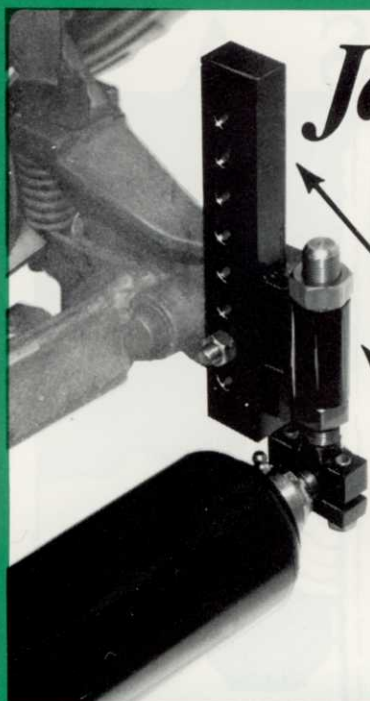
As a final recommendation, keep daily records. Frequently things that happen on a golf course have a tendency to recur about the same time year after year. If you know something is going to happen, you can prepare for it and save money by solving the problem before damage occurs.

And remember, fishing is cheaper. ■

## VALLEY RESERVATION SYSTEM

The Phoenix and Valley of the Sun Convention and Visitors Bureau is one of few such organizations in the United States to have a central reservation system. Visitors can call toll free 800/528-0483 or 602/257-4111 in Arizona, to make reservations at over 100 hotels and resorts in the metropolitan Phoenix area, as well as the Grand Canyon National Park Lodges. Reservations can also be made for car rentals, apartments and condominiums, bus tours, air tours from Phoenix, and even mule rides in the Grand Canyon.

The reservation system was developed in 1978 to meet ever increasing tourism needs. By making one toll free call, visitors can check availability at all participating hotels and resorts, rather than calling each hotel individually. This service is especially helpful to the traveller during the winter months which is the Valley of the Sun's peak tourist season. ■



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