

*Transition in the tropical region*

I remember one winter as an assistant superintendent in South Florida taking messages for my boss from other superintendents in our area who were having problems with their greens.

I told them that I would be happy to have my superintendent call them back but he has told everyone else the same thing so far — let your overseeding go and grow bermudagrass.

It seems to me that overseeding in a tropical region is more of an insurance policy than anything else. If we do get the cold weather that seems to visit us about once every 20 years, you'll be in good shape. If it turns out to be a warm winter, grow the bermudagrass.

Other reasons that come to mind for overseeding this far south include masking contaminated putting surfaces, maintaining a very green color and having the status associated with bentgrass overseeding.

I do not like the whole idea of cultivating the current bentgrasses anytime anywhere in Florida, but the last time I wrote about this, it seemed rather controversial so I will avoid further discussion of the matter here and get to the point of this article.

When it was announced at our last chapter meeting that the topic of this issue of *The Florida Green* was transition, another form of transition came to mind.

Transition by definition is change and if any profession has been through

transition in recent years, it is ours.

The president of our chapter asked the floor for suggestions as to how we could get more superintendent involvement at our meetings.

“Figure out a way to do this job in less than 60 hours per week,” I thought.

“At the same time, figure out how we can sleep at night facing the alphabet soup of regulatory agencies with many regulators who seem to take pleasure in disrupting our day, and still find the time and achieve a state of mind conducive to the proper development of our families.

“If you can show superintendents how to do this they will come with bells on.”

I personally have attended our chapter meetings religiously and sought to be involved and active in our chapter only because I perceived this use of my time as a valuable investment.

There is no doubt in my mind that I was able to negotiate better deals with suppliers and obtain the help and counsel of my peers at a higher level than my counterparts who chose not to attend meetings or get involved.

But I must admit, it was very difficult at times to get the SFGCSA to the top of my priority list while facing a mountain of minutia.

There is no doubt in my mind that all of our superintendent members who chose not to attend the meeting were busily addressing concerns that seemed major. There is also no doubt in my mind that most of them will forget, in time, how they used their time that day.

On the other hand, I feel sure that as long as I am breathing I will not forget Tom Mascaro's talk, the interaction I had with people in my field whom I admire and respect and I know my club and



*Scott Wahlin*  
By Scott Wahlin, CGCS

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profession will benefit as a result of this meeting. Our profession and the demands placed upon us are changing daily and involvement in our associations is as critical now as it ever was.

I would like to give one example of how quickly change has been occurring in the environmental compliance arena over previous years.

When I started applying pesticides to golf courses 19 years ago there was little concern for environmental safety.

Even though I considered myself to be conscientious, I know now that I was ignorant of many areas that needed consideration. Most of the chemicals I remember using have been removed from the market and replaced with better ones with less potential for negative environmental impact.

There is no doubt that these developments are very positive for everyone. But I sense that the pendulum has passed the bottom of its axis and is again moving away from a balanced state.

I have worked diligently to assure that my operation meets or exceeds the expectations and requirements of the various regulators who come to call. But the time required and the worries associated with compliance are all in addition to what was considered the scope of a superintendent's responsibilities 10 years ago.

For example, when I started as a superintendent, I had a notebook to document chemical applications and maintain inventory lists, and a label book that I kept up to date using the labels off the containers I used each day.

I now have a two-drawer filing cabinet filled to the gills with permit applications, correspondence and all the other necessary information to help assure compliance.

I was visited by a regulator the other

day who told me that I had to get another permit from his agency because I had obtained more than one permit from them in the past year!

I have one file that contains all the environmental compliance information I had compiled from 1987 to 1991. I have a file of equal size in April 1992! What was I doing with my time from '87-'91?!

Many people who view our profession from the outside have extremely romantic visions of what it is to be a superintendent. I have heard people say that being responsible for a golf course must be like having a jealous mate.

If I were going to personify a golf course, I would choose to visualize an intensive-care unit filled with 18 individuals who would not have the luxury or inclination to be concerned with jealousy. The rising expectations of the people who pay the bills is adding to the critical status of these 18 individuals, bringing additional stresses to the superintendent.

It seems to me that expectations continued to increase every year. There is no doubt that we have accepted and, for the most part, met these expectations. But ladies and gentlemen, we are dealing with a hybrid of greens grass that was released in 1965!

When you hit the wall of limitation on this grass, there is nothing on the other side but dirt, embarrassment, hard feelings and very little golf.

To give a non-superintendent some idea of how close greens can come to becoming bare overnight, I have found I can grow very acceptable greens at my club at a height only  $2/100$ s of an inch over a height where they decline and die rapidly. To most people,  $2/100$ s of an inch is not much, but to a superintendent, this can make the difference between sleep and restlessness.

It should be noted that when Tifdwarf was released in 1965 we used a ruler to measure mowing heights. Now we use a micrometer.


So is the transition being experienced by the golf course manager/superintendent all bad?

I don't think so.

Certainly I know and have known many top professionals in our industry who have been fired unfairly and I feel bad for them... but adversity brings opportunity.

As Tom Mascaro pointed out in our meeting the other day, the best way to increase your compensation and security is to assume more responsibility.

I believe the profession of golf course management will take major strides in terms of stature in the next five to seven years, and it will become a much more lucrative and secure profession.

But this profession is in transition and transition, by definition, is change. 

**I believe the profession of golf course management will take major strides in terms of stature in the next five to seven years, and it will become a much more lucrative and secure profession.**

In the last issue of *The Florida Green*, I wrote an article about the dark side of the environmental movement which was well received. I'd like to follow up that article with a few more comments.

First I urge all superintendents attending this year's Poa Annuu weekend in Naples to sign up for the FGCSA's educational program by Dr. Michael Coffman. I believe you will receive no more important information for the preservation of your job and the welfare of this country than the message you get from Dr. Coffman.

Copies of Dr.

Coffman's first bok, *Environmentalism: The Dawn of Aquarius or the Twilight of a New Age*, and his new one, *Saviors of the Earth?* will be available to those wishing to purchase it.

By now, most superintendents have heard about the preliminary results of the GCSAA-sponsored, superintendent-mortality study released at the conference and show in Dallas this past February.

Based on this study, using statistical analysis of death certificates of 618 former GCSAA members, it appears that *those* superintendents actually *did* have higher rates of certain types of cancer than the population at large. No conclusions can be drawn regarding cause and effect.

The study is based on superintendents who practiced their "art" — as opposed to "science" — in the infancy stages of

pesticide use, during the 1930s through 1960s.

Little regard was paid to proper training or safety, and many of the products used then are no longer available because of their dangerous nature.

We have all heard the stories from our older superintendents about mixing lead arsenate with mercury in poorly ventilated rooms wearing no protective clothing or respirators, or how these materials or similar ones were applied in a cloud of dust by similarly unprotected persons. Older superintendents have commented that they are surprised that more of them haven't contracted cancer, given the unsafe practices of 20 years ago and more.

Considering these past unsafe practices, any of us could logically conclude that superintendents should have a higher incidence of pesticide-exposure-induced cancers, but this is not what has yet been determined.

As Dr. Burton Kross, head researcher of this study, says, "Because this is a statistical study, you can't establish any cause-and-effect relationship from the data".

In other words, nothing from this study so far implicates pesticide exposure as the cause of cancer.

Lung cancer was identified as the major concern and was the cause of death in 59 of the 818 cases studied. But we have no way of knowing how many of these former GCSAA members were smokers.

Statistically significant excess mortality from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and brain cancer were also discovered, but toxicological data and epidemiological

*And  
furthermore,  
I'd like  
to say . . .*

## Mark My Words



*Mark Jarrell*

Mark Jarrell, CGCS

## Jarrell: We'd better acknowledge our image

evidence linking these cancers to pesticide exposure are inconclusive.

Large intestine and prostate cancer mortality rates were also higher than the general population of white males.

All these statistics really mean is that further research is warranted, which is exactly what is going to happen in the second phase of this study. Information may be developed which proves conclusively that pesticide exposure contributed to the early deaths of some superintendents in the past and, perhaps, some useful safety precautions will be recommended for those of us using pesticides today.

And maybe not... which brings me to the point of this article: the golf industry had better wake up and acknowledge the fact that 90% of the population of the U.S. does not play golf, and that golf is perceived as elitist, non-essential, polluting, resource-wasting despoiler of the environment by a large percentage of non-golfers.

Things will never change until our positive environmental message is taken to the mainstream media. We need to quit preaching to the choir.

Within one day of release of the preliminary report on the GCSAA mortality study, syndicated radio moron Paul Harvey "reported" that "not only are golf course pesticides killing the birds, but they're killing golf course superintendents also."

You may recall that about a year ago, Mr. Harvey was taken to task by GCSAA and individuals for his broadcast claiming that golf course pesticides were responsible for the lack of songbirds at his home course, so this latest invective is obviously an immature reprisal.

Mr. Harvey's irresponsibility is especially disheartening because he is a golfer, but he is far from alone in his unfounded attacks on golf courses and their maintenance practices. FGCSA director Mike Mongoven recently faxed me an anti-golf diatribe from the Gannett News Service detailing "the hazards of golf," and golf architect Jan Beljan has collected dozens of similar articles from various sources over the past couple of years.

We think we are doing a good job of educating people to golf's positive environmental impact, but we are living in a very insulated world.

When I write an article for *Golfweek*, maybe 40,000 or 50,000 golfers will see it. An article like this in the *Florida Green* may be read by 4,000 or 5,000 - all in the golf industry - depending on how often our 3,000 copies get passed around.

An idiot like Paul Harvey is probably heard by hundreds of thousands, if not millions, and Gannett News Service stories are definitely read by millions.

Vice President Al Gore and EPA Director Carol Browner are still lacing up their boots, but I fear a heavy footprint will yet be tread upon the golf industry by these two before they leave office.

Our message needs to be heard by the general public.

How this is best accomplished, I haven't a clue. Perhaps the GCSAA, the USGA, the NGF, and all local golf and turfgrass associations need to pool resources to buy space in *USA Today* or other national newspapers, or even television time, to extol the valuable environmental contributions of turfgrass and golf courses.

Something needs to be done to reverse our negative image before it's too late.

## Jackson: Interview with Mother Nature

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pleasing average temperatures for the tourism brochures? Listen Boobie, to get averages I have to create many highs and lows, and that goes for temperature, humidity, and rainfall."

Everybody in the cafe was staring at us. I could feel my neck and my ear lobes getting hot. I knew I wasn't going to win this argument. I counted slowly to 10 on an imaginary Stimpmeter to cool off before I spoke.

"Listen MN, we know you make the rules and you can break or bend them at will. Unfortunately, our bosses and our customers want us to follow a predetermined set of rules so they can sell a per-

fectly conditioned golf course 365 days a year.

"They don't understand your position half as well as we do, and you keep us guessing plenty. Although we hope for moderation on your part, we definitely pray for patience on their part when you challenge us with your unexpected highs and lows during transition."

Putting on my most sympathetic expression, I asked, "Have you ever considered taking lithium during the spring?"

She transfixed me with a laser stare that I knew was guiding a lightning bolt at my heart. Then she leaned back in her seat and laughed, "Lithium! Valium! Snapple! Jack Daniels! I've tried them all. Nothing really works me like seeing you guys scrambling around trying to hang in

there after I've gone crazy."

She put her hand on my arm and squeezed gently as she whispered in my ear, "Don't worry so much. You guys do a pretty good job of catching what I throw at you. I'm not making any promises mind you. I do have my responsibilities; but I will try to get the message across to your golfers."

The interview was over. She gathered up her belongings, slid off the stool, and headed for the door.

Halfway to the entrance she stopped, looked over her shoulder at me, winked and said, "You might want to cancel that verticutting you had planned for next week. There's a cold front coming out of Canada that's not on the maps yet and it's going to be a real stinker!"

I finally caught up with Mother Nature down at the Vernal Equinox Cafe the other day. She was sipping a cappuccino and watching the Weather Channel on the TV over the bar.

I couldn't tell by her expression if she was pleased or disturbed over her handiwork as the radar images and weather maps flashed across the screen.

I pulled up a stool next to her, motioning to the bartender that I would

have whatever she was drinking. Without taking her eyes off the TV, she said rather coolly, "You Florida boys have had a mild winter haven't you?"

"Well, yes!" I said, "And we all thank you from the bottom of our budgets."

"Don't be too quick to thank me," she said, "I don't know what happened to the jet stream this winter. Sometimes it's tricky to handle, even for me! I had planned for some of that Georgia and North Carolina ice and snow to dip down and get rid of some of your insect problems even if I had to scare the bejeebers out of the citrus growers in Sebring."

I sensed she wasn't in the best of moods, but I had some questions I needed to ask.

Tom Benefield knew that I had met Mother Nature before and he wanted me to get an interview with her to find out what we could expect during this year's transition. I took a deep breath and began, "We were wondering if you have

something planned for this spring that we should know about?"

Ignoring the question, she turned slowly towards me. I couldn't be sure, but I thought I saw a hint of a smile.

"How did you like those record high temperatures in February?"

She was baiting me. I thought about the overseeding we had lost prematurely to the heat.

I tried to remain composed as I answered, "Nothing you do surprises us anymore!"

"Oh really!" Her eyebrows arched and her eyelids closed down to mere slits as she spoke. "That almost sounds like a challenge!"

I knew I was in deep Milorganite. Headlines about killer ice storms that devastate Florida on April Fool's Day flashed before my eyes. I tried to retreat gracefully.

"We would never think of challenging you. In fact, we try to work with you as best we can to keep our courses playable through transition. Sometimes your — ah — how shall I say — 'surprises' can be devastating to our programs."

"Surprises!" she exploded. "You call my March heat waves and April frosts surprises! I've been doing that stuff for centuries! Don't you read the weather records?"

"Haven't you people learned how to cope, yet?"

"I can't be concerned with your precious transition programs and spring tournaments. Don't you understand the immense pressure I'm under from the Chamber of Commerce to produce

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## An Interview with Mother Nature

### Green Side Up



*Joel D. Jackson*

Joel Jackson, CGCS