

Clippings

...worth recycling

Then and Now

By Pat Kriksceonaitis, GCS,
Essex Country Club

As I sit at my desk and tally the year-end totals for water fertilizer, plant protectants, and man-hours, it's hard to believe how different the maintenance program is from just five years ago. Members' expectations have increased. The amount of play has increased. Being on the town's aquifer means limitations on water, fertilizers and plant protectants. What have I gotten myself into?

Back in the stone ages, if the greens were hungry, they got fed. If the tees were hungry, they also got fed. Now only 50 to 60 percent of the fertilizer applications are on a blanket application basis.

The rest of the time only high-wear areas and specific areas in need of more growth are fed. The large, sunny, well-drained greens and tees don't get nearly as much food as the smaller beat-up ones.

To compensate for the increased traffic, it would be nice to increase the aeration. However, the players who are

increasing this play would go ballistic if the playing surface was disrupted more often. So now we spike the greens instead of mid-season aerating.

Depending on the season, some aeration is done, but it's solid tines instead of hollow. The whole green or collar isn't done. Once again, it's the high-traffic areas where the play gets congested on a green or tee or fairway. The majority of the playing surface isn't disrupted.

Even with the turf being managed more closely these days, the need for plant pesticides is as important as ever. Gone are the days when if it was Thursday, the spray rig must be applying something.

The frequency and amount of pesticides have been greatly reduced. While most of the fungicide applications done on greens and tees are on an area-wide basis, there are several weeks or months between treatments with only some follow-up to the severely shaded or stressed areas.

Insecticides have almost disappeared from the routine program. In 1995, no treatment for cutworms was necessary, and only three acres of turf were treated for beetle grubs (and two acres were tennis courts).

How is this possible?

By knowing the property, mapping hot spots and monitoring for the

different pests, a lot less active ingredient needs to be used on an annual basis.

So what does this all mean to the maintenance program? The annual amounts of fertilizer and plant protectants are greatly reduced. The amount of man hours needed for monitoring and spot treatment is greatly increased.

The need for more year-round personnel who are conscientious and reliable is greater than ever. The more we limit the artificial life support systems, the more efficient and accurate we have to become in their usage.

Can the playing surface be what our members expect? It's possible, but not without greatly increasing the human monitoring and management of them.

From Turf Talk — A publication of the New Hampshire Golf Course Superintendents Association

The Word "Green" in Golf

A good deal of confusion surrounds the use of the word "green" in proper golf terminology. Should one use "green fee" or "greens fee?" Is it a "greenkeeper" or a "greenskeeper?" Exactly what area does the word "green" pertain to on a golf course? And is it the "USGA Green Section" or the "USGA Greens Section?"

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Green is a noun and has two proper golf meanings. The first meaning is chiefly of Scottish origin. It simply defines all territory of a golf course, or all areas outside the confines of the clubhouse.

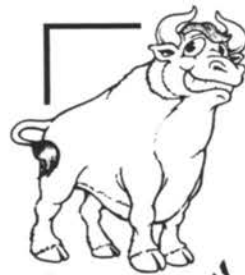
Thus, it can be used in relation to all outdoor areas of a golf course. The second meaning, most readily known to modern audiences, means the area of short grass surrounding a hole.

This area is generally mown and rolled to the smoothest possible texture. In keeping with the first meaning, a greenkeeper is someone whose responsibilities entail maintaining all areas of the golf course outside the clubhouse. The term was changed to golf course superintendent in the United States several decades ago.

In almost all cases of using the word green in golf terminology, the use should be singular. Green fee, greenkeeper, green committee, and USGA Green Section are all correct uses.

One final word on this subject. Green, in proper golf terminology, does not refer to any particular color found on a golf course. It only applies to areas or regions of a golf course.

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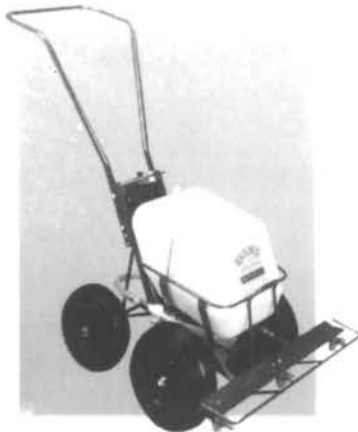
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Can We Talk?

Is Productive Communication Possible at Your Club?

I was touring a golf course recently with a fellow superintendent and was overwhelmed by how perfect his grounds were.

The fairways were tight and weed-free, greens were uniform — even the rough was consistent. Then a funny thing happened. A group of members stopped to give him their comments on the conditioning:

“Hey, did you f- up the 12th hole yet?” “What the hell are you doing on number seven?” “These fairways are horrible; I can’t hit my three-wood off them.”

These are actual quotes from respectable members of a prestigious club. Four or five more groups approached us on our tour, and not one had a positive comment. There wasn’t a single, “Hello! Good afternoon.” It may not be this bad at all clubs, but a pervasively negative tone seems to be prevalent at many clubs today. What’s going on?

In the last few years, it appears that the playing surfaces at our club have gotten better and the appreciation of a job well done has diminished. Has this raised the stress level of you and your turf?

Has the recent rash of job openings in the region made you more-or-less secure in your job position? I’m getting a stress headache just thinking about it. The stress on the average golf course superintendent is greater now than ever, and it’s not going to subside in the near future.

Why is that? Have we promised our

members more every year so that it’s difficult to live up to expectations? Has TV golf conditioned our members to expect indoor arena conditions every day regardless of the weather, amount of play or budgets? How about our members’ personal lives? Have they become so negative from all the downsizing in business and the uncertainty of their immediate future?

I think the answer is “yes” to all three questions. I think one problem many of us have is promising the moon, even when we know our booster rocket is short on fuel. During the good years, Mother Nature may help us reach our destination safely, but during the bad years, even with the 14-hour work days and the miracle cures for diseases, the finished product just doesn’t meet expectations.

Often the amount of play is too much, the window of opportunity to do “meaningful” work is small, and the cultural practices, so needed to maintain fine turf, are frowned upon by committee members.

And beyond all that, the cost of producing a hundred acres of immaculate turf is usually more than our clubs’ budgets can handle. Then our members go home and watch a perfect golf course host the best players in the world. What do they think during the commercials?

“Time for a cold one?” Well, maybe, but more likely it’s “I hit a putt just like that today and my ball didn’t come close to the hole! Our greens are horrible.”

Television, which during the 60s was responsible for the upgrading and increased popularity of the game, has gone beyond that and dissects every aspect of the playing surface and the player’s golf swing.

It is no longer a game played on unique and different golf courses, which offer a multitude of diverse

conditions. There are now written and unwritten uniformity standards which the announcers live by in the commentary of the action.

On TV, golf greens must all putt the same. It doesn’t matter if one green is surrounded by trees and built on clay, and the next green is open and built of sand. Uniformity rules and “knowing the greens” doesn’t enter the commentary. Funny thing is that the turf management professionals have gotten so good that uniformity is usually achieved.

Television has increased our paychecks and decreased our job security. The average member, even at wealthier clubs, has seen his or her standard of living remain stagnant, or even decrease, in the last 10 years.

The profit margins are squeezed ever tighter. Downsizing has been the operative word since the mid-80s in most larger corporations. Most people’s personal budgets aren’t so large that they can spend lavishly on nonessential items. Golf and club life may be essential to one’s mental health, but it usually falls after the house, car and schooling for the children.

How about the chaotic world around us? Just turn on the six o’clock news. Many of us have become desensitized to the killing and corruption broadcast on the evening news.

But it does affect the psyche.

After a tough week at work worrying about the acme balloon account not producing as expected, and hearing rumors of a layoff because of a poor quarter, and hearing from your wife that the car has just died, and your kid is taking a field trip into the city (right where a killing occurred last week), Joe Member is going to play a round of golf at the club.

On the first tee he has high blood pressure, only two hours to play because he has to get home, and no

practice since his last round. How is he ever going to shoot a good number? How is he doing to complete his round calmly and full of praise for a job well done?

The job at hand isn't as simple as showing up for work and getting maximum efficiency out of the staff and yourself. That doesn't work at many clubs. We have to do more — not with our hands, but with our leadership, in several areas.

First, we need to put the "game" back into golf. How do we do this? Every club will be different. Maybe talk with the pro or the club president or the golf chairman — whomever you have a good rapport with.

Get the conversation around to recognizing any problems that may exist. Then you can take it in any positive direction you want. It will take

many discussions before any tangible results are made.

Second, get the club to write a mission statement. If the club can express in writing what it wants and stands for, then it will be easier for you to communicate what needs to be done to achieve those goals.

With a mission statement, you can go to any of the golfing industry consultants (USGA, NGF, state agronomist, fellow superintendents) and get supporting documentation on what is needed to do the job.

Third, communicate to your golfers that when they play golf they should leave the negative trappings in the parking lot. This is a great game, and it is being hurt by people taking the sport out of it.

We cannot change the way society puts pressure on all of us. We can, by

using a little imagination and foresight, change the way our members view us and our golf courses.

We need to convince them that our few acres of turf are there for their enjoyment. Anything less, and they're not getting their money's worth. So during these winter months, think of a positive way to put a spin on what you do for your club and what your club does for its members.

Our jobs and our mental health will only be made better with a little positive communication.

From: Turf Talk, New Hampshire GCSA

Credit: Hole Notes, October 1995

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