

No-Fear Computing!



us — not you, me or anyone else — can really grasp the magnitude to which the computer is going to directly or indirectly change the way we work and live our lives over the next few years. We're not talking the Jetsons or Star Trek (as in futuristic) — we're talking about the next two? three? or maybe five years down the road. (Possibly before your favorite jeans wear out.)

• It's also safe to say there is no industry — or ever has been one throughout history — that is evolving as rapidly as the computer

world is today. We're not talking about years (or even months) here. Dramatic changes and improvements in software and hardware are announced virtually every week, if not every day — which will trickle down to our industry.

• Although golf course management is a primarily "outdoor sport," this will change somewhat over time. One of the driving forces will be the integration of very sophisticated technology, including GPS (global positioning systems).

Read that as satellite) and GIS (geographic information systems) technology into irrigation, pest and disease tracking/prediction models, pesticide application and labor management systems.

GPS-based irrigation control software packages and GPS-based pesticide application technology were unveiled at the Las Vegas GCSAA show earlier this year.

Both GPS and GIS technology will allow (and mandate) management of more and more of the golf course from within, either by yourself or one of your staff. As technology evolves, golf course superintendents will spend less time *doing*, and more time *managing* their resources, including information.

• Perhaps the most important reason to take the plunge is evidenced by the growing number of superintendent and assistant job announcements today that specify "advanced computer literacy required." Enough said.

So what is this No Fear! business about?

Having been asked to speak at several of the upcoming conferences and seminars, on subjects ranging from computing in general, to the Internet, to TurfNet Online specifically, I have been forced to try to distill my own personal learning curve over the past few years into its basic elements.

What has allowed me to start from scratch and learn how to use one of these things at (ahem) the gateway to middle age? It boils down to (borrowing a phrase from the athletic apparel company): No Fear!

If you are envisioning mountain climbing, parachuting or hang gliding, that's not the image I meant to portray. Better, picture a four-year-old, perched on a stool, gazing at a computer screen, deftly wielding the mouse, navigating a simple game. That is the essence of no-fear computing!

Kids have no preconceptions or misgivings. It's a toy, with one big button on it. Turn it on, turn it off. Doesn't bite. Doesn't scratch. Doesn't sting. The computer doesn't hurt them, and they, by-and-large, can't hurt it!

BY PETER L. MCCORMICK

TurfNet Associates, Inc.

This is the time of year when the season winds down for many of you around the country. You're on the downswing, over the hump. During this calm before the approaching storm of winter conferences and trade shows, I thought I would take a step away from our traditional format and focus on the mechanics and mentality of using (and learning to use) computers in golf course management today.

Now, before you say, "I couldn't give two flying foxes about computers" and turn the page, read on.

Why computers? Let's start with several assumptions:

- It would be safe to say that no one of

Doing it

Make the decision to do it.

It's a natural first step for anything. Now is as good a time as any. Don't wait for New Year's Day to make the resolution though, because then comes the National, then vacation, then you're back into it before you know it. Take advantage of the off-season (if you have one) for some personal development. Do it now.

Do a little homework.

Pick up a copy of one of the Computers for Dummies series of softbound books, which are good primers for getting started. If you try the library, check the copyright date. Older than last year? Forget it. Find another book. Many magazines will swamp you with jargon.

Buy a decent computer capable of running today's software, preferably for home. Surprise the kids for the holidays. Or, better yet, treat yourself. Don't try to start with someone's castoff from a garage sale. You'll only add to your frustration.

The price is right.

You can buy a Pentium 166 or 200 today with all the bells and whistles (CD-ROM drive, faxmodem, sound card, monitor and all) for less than \$1500. Add a color inkjet printer (or a low-end laser) and tax and you're at \$2000. Half of what that system would have cost 18 months ago. It's plenty to get started, and will more than likely serve you well for several years.

Why buy for home?

The workplace is no place to learn to use a computer — way too many distractions. Set yourself up with a desk in a quiet corner of the house, with a good desk chair, decent lighting and a phone jack nearby. Once things quiet down, power up!

Play a game.

Before you dive into the heavy stuff, fire up the Windows Solitaire game. Beyond entertainment, Solitaire is there for a reason: it's a great way to learn to use the mouse. What's the big deal? The first time you move a mouse with your right hand and try to coordinate it with the little arrow moving around on the monitor, you may wonder if your fingers are actually connected to your brain.

Start simple.

Most new computers today come

loaded with an assortment of software. Many offer one of the "suites" of applications, like Microsoft Office or Lotus Smart Suite, which have advanced word processors, personal information managers (electronic Rolodexes and datebooks), spreadsheets, and database programs.

The advantage of the suites is they have a common "look" and "feel" throughout the variety of applications. The downside for the novice is these advanced programs can be overwhelmingly complex. I doubt even serious users barely scratch the full

potential of Microsoft Word. Not the place to start!

Some computers also have a simpler group of programs, like ClarisWorks, which are generally easier to learn how to use. My best suggestion: start with a very simple word processor, like Windows Wordpad. Compose a short letter, practice changing your margins, highlighting text, changing fonts and text sizes, bolding, italicizing. Then, save your work, and print it.

Learning is cumulative.

One of the fascinating aspects of learn-



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ing to use a computer (and believe me, the learning never stops!) is that it builds on itself.

I recall the first evening with my first computer four years ago, trying to fumble through WordPerfect. It took me two hours to figure out how to center the text on the page. But I discovered how to do ten other things during the process. And so it goes.

Read the manual.

Do real men ever read a manual? Only if you want to shorten the "exploration" process in the previous paragraph from two hours to about 10 minutes.

Don't attempt to read it like a novel. Your chin will hit your chest in about three minutes. Use it to solve specific challenges.

Better yet, use online help.

One of the downsides of loaded or downloaded software is you often don't get a printed manual at all! Many software manufacturers are building their manuals into the help sections in the program itself.

And that's really better, because it's searchable by topic, and usually much faster to find an answer than thumbing through a manual.

Ask questions.

Leverage anyone you know who knows more than you do. Your assistant, wife, assistant's wife (easy now), crew, neighbors — yes, even your kids. Several months ago, when I first tackled HTML to do our website, I found my Internet service provider to be of great help, dramatically shortening my learning curve. Swallow your pride. Ask!

Take a class?

I really shouldn't comment on this one, because I've never done it. I have heard numerous guys tell me, "Yeah, I'm going to take a computer class one of these days" — but there it ends. You're better off just diving in, rather than procrastinating further by waiting for the time, place and motivation to come together all at once in order to do the class thing.

Safety nets:

Save your work early and often.

I learned the hard way. Too many

times. Start a new project, spend an hour working on it, then go to print it. Before you can hit the PRINT icon, the power goes off.

Poof!

Kiss your hour's work goodbye. The remedy: When you create a new document or file, name it, save it, and save it again periodically. If the program has a "prompt to save every "so many minutes" feature, use it.

Create a "data" directory or folder, and save all your files there. Then, back it up.

It's much easier and simpler to back up (create duplicate copies of) your files if they are all located in one central place, rather than scattered all over your hard drive among your program files. Get a tape drive, or one of the newer ZIP or JAZ drives, to make a backup copy of your important files, in case of a problem.

SITHOAWA

This is perhaps the most valuable

tip of all. A wonderful acronym. When you're stymied, stuck, frustrated, aggravated, or ready to put your fist through the monitor, invoke the SITHOAWA rule:

Shut It The Hell Off And Walk Away!

Learning to use a computer is much like learning to play the piano. At first intimidating, at times frustrating, yet ultimately rewarding and enjoyable. Progress at both is maximized by frequent practice of short duration. But you can't learn either until you sit down at the keys.

Computer geeks and accomplished pianists are no smarter than you or I. They just started a little earlier and perhaps applied themselves a bit more.

To coin another phrase from that athletic apparel company: Just do it!

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Taking care of business

How important is administrative help to a golf course maintenance operation?

BY SHELLY FOY

USGA Green Section

AND ROBIN RABY,

Administrative Assistant

Royal Poinciana Golf Club

Times have changed for golf course superintendents. Gone are the days of spending most of your time where you need to be spending most of your time ... on the golf course. Today's superintendent can be found in the office working on budgets, ordering supplies, answering the phone, fielding questions from members, and trying to keep up with mounting administrative paperwork.

A recent poll of superintendents in Florida who do not have administrative help revealed the following:

- On a normal day, there may be 20 phone calls to respond to, and during construction or renovation, as many as 30 to 50 calls daily.

- Many superintendents who need administrative support are still trying to convince their boards or general manag-



ers that there is a need for a secretary or administrative assistant. Depending on the golf course, administrative duties for superintendents are averaging 15 to 20 hours per week, or more.

For those of you in need of administrative help, how do you justify this extra support?

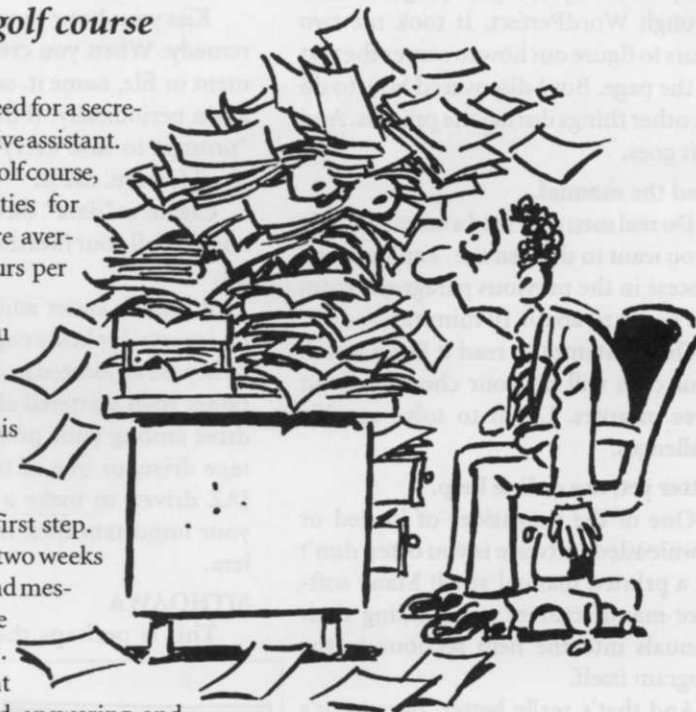
Documenting your needs is the first step.

- Keep a log for two weeks of all phone calls and messages you receive during the day.

Record the amount of time you spend answering and following up on those calls. Were you able to return the calls in a timely manner, or was it a couple of days before you could get back to them?

- Record the time you spend on paperwork each day. Be sure to include time in meetings with managers or staff, as well as seminars you attend to maintain your certification and licenses. How much time do you spend typing memos, reports, and club newsletters? Who takes care of the office when you are away, another employee, an answering machine or no one?

Before turning in your request to the board or general manager, look over your budget and see if there are things you would not mind giving up to have administrative help. Be willing to



compromise if necessary. Having someone to share the load is worth a little compromise, even if your budget will only allow part-time help.

Another option may be to let an existing employee split their day between the golf course and the office. There may be someone who would not mind spending some of the day inside and taking on a little extra responsibility. One golf course superintendent said that having office help was as important to his golf course operation as the irrigation or spray technician. He also said he would sacrifice one person on his golf course to have administrative support.

Bill Jeffrey, CGCS, expressed great frustration at the lack of administrative help because he is spending more hours at his office just trying to keep up with it all. He spends one hour before the crew comes in, at least an hour and half after they leave, and 4-5 hours every Friday afternoon working on administrative duties. Bill had office help for 12 years at a previous golf course, and now has been 10 years without that help.

"In that 10 years, the amount of administrative work has increased tenfold," says Jeffrey. "When I had office help, I felt like I got more accomplished, was more efficient, and I was definitely less frustrated."

For Bill, who has small children, taking work home is not an option. There is no office space, and no quiet time to do paperwork. "Personal time? Ha, forget it".

Once you have documented the need for office support, the second step is determining the duties and responsibilities of your administrative support person.

The following are suggested guidelines.

1. Review the position; define responsibilities and the required education level for the job. Basic duties may include:

- Processing purchase orders
- Comparing invoices and related documents to determine correct billing for products received

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Operations Checklist

Robin Raby, administrative assistant for Royal Poinciana Golf Club, developed the following Organization Checklist for Golf Course Operations:

• Procedures of Interviews and Hiring Practices

- Is application information complete?
- Are proper procedures maintained during oral interviews?
- Is identification reviewed and current?
- Are references checked?

• Employee Handbook

- Does the maintenance facility have its own employee handbook? If applicable, is the handbook available in other languages?
- Do employees sign an acknowledgment for receiving and understanding rules and regulations in handbook?

• Employee Files

Personnel files should be kept in the maintenance facility. Each file should include:

- Application
- Employee Orientation Check-list
- Medical History
- I-9
- W-4
- Emergency Contact Form

- Copy of Drivers License, Social Security Card, and/or Resident Alien ID
- Signed Acknowledgement of Probation Form
- Signed Acknowledgement of Receiving Employee Handbook
- Signed Receipt for Protective Equipment Received

• Drug Free Program

- Is there a program in effect?
- If so, do employees fully understand policy and consequences if policy is not complied with?

• Sexual Harassment Policy

- Is a policy written and posted?
- Is policy reviewed with new employees?
- Do employees understand policy?

• Workers Compensation

- Are copies of completed forms kept in a separate medical employee file?
- Are they signed by employee (if possible), as well as management?

• OSHA 200 Forms

- Are the OSHA 200 forms filled out properly?
- Are they posted, as law requires?

• Payroll

- Is payroll done in office?
- Are backup copies of timecards/timesheets kept if originals are forwarded to main office?

- Sorting and preparing invoices for coding and approval
- Following up on deliveries or services promised by vendors
- Assisting in keeping equipment maintenance histories and inventory
- Keeping employee records up to date
- Taking phone messages and scheduling appointments for superintendent; Responding to questions that do not need the superintendent to answer
- Accurate filing for immediate reference needs
- Computer/Word Processing work (letters, memos, reports etc.)
- Maintaining records for preparation of annual budget
- Maintaining file of applications received

2. Compare salaries, skill levels and experience with those of similar positions in your area. When determining salary, consider the demands of the position and specialized skills required.

For example, a secretary may answer the phone and refer calls to someone else. An administrative assistant may be required to help answer the caller's ques-

tion. An administrative assistant should also be aware of labor laws and hiring practices. Making sure that these are followed will help prevent labor-related legal action against the superintendent and club.

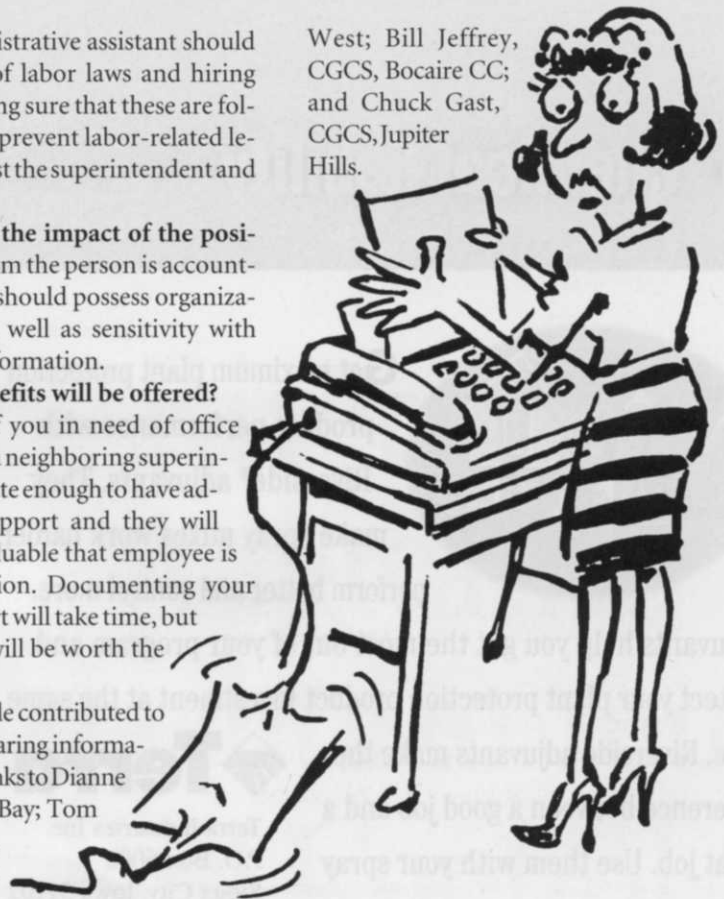
3. Consider the impact of the position and to whom the person is accountable. He or she should possess organizational skills, as well as sensitivity with confidential information.

4. What benefits will be offered?

For those of you in need of office help, chat with a neighboring superintendent fortunate enough to have administrative support and they will tell you how valuable that employee is to their operation. Documenting your need for support will take time, but the end result will be worth the effort.

A lot of people contributed to this article by sharing information. Special thanks to Dianne Radkin, Bonita Bay; Tom Trammell, CGCS, Metro

West; Bill Jeffrey, CGCS, Bocaire CC; and Chuck Gast, CGCS, Jupiter Hills.



• **Safety Meetings**

- Are monthly safety meetings conducted?
- Is attendance of each meeting taken and topics of meeting documented?
- Are emergency phone numbers posted and updated?

• **Vacation and Leave of Absence**

- Do employees complete a request in writing for vacation and leave of absence?
- Is there a policy in effect concerning leave of absence and return to work? Do employees understand and sign this request?
- Are forms kept in employee's file?

• **Attendance and Tardiness**

- Is attendance and tardiness documented and kept in employee's file?
- Is there a monthly sheet kept for all employees?

• **Procedures of Termination**

- Is proper procedure followed prior to and when terminating an employee?
- Is appropriate paperwork completed?
- Are exit interviews conducted?

• **Invoices/Accounts Payable**

- Are copies made and kept in vendor files before submitting for payment?

- Are orders complete and prices correct before submitting for payment?

• **MSDS**

- Is the MSDS book current with sheets for chemicals, herbicides, insecticides, etc.?
- Is there an inventory of all chemicals, herbicides, insecticides and cleaning compounds and solvents in mechanic's shop and maintenance area?

• **Insurance**

- Are materials readily available for employee's pertaining to insurance coverage?

• **Miscellaneous**

- Are copies of pesticide license(s) in one main file, as well as in employee's file?
- Are job descriptions written and given to employee pertaining to position and job expectations on the golf course?
- Is a Hazcom Policy in effect?
- Is a Hurricane Preparedness policy written, if applicable? Is it reviewed before each season?
- If applicable, are forms available in Spanish?

Thorough record-keeping at golf courses is required by law. Some superintendents may not be familiar with current laws and record requirements. There may be penalties involved if found negligent from non-enforcement. How many of the above items do you have completed?

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Public relations is part of the job!



You don't see public relations experience high on any list of qualifications for a golf course superintendent. Yet in the long run, the successful superintendents are the ones who recognize and practice good public relations within their clubs. There are several initiatives you should be aware of:

- A series of three syndicated news articles released by the GCSAA focusing on:

- 1) superintendents as community assets,

10 Ways Superintendents Promote

Usually, the superintendent isn't thought of as the marketer for the golf course. But, superintendents *can and do* have a big impact in promoting the golf course beyond providing premiere playing conditions. Here are a few of their public relations efforts:

1. Publish bulletins to local residents about chemical use on the golf course, explain IPM programs and pesticide methodologies and other aspects of golf course management.
2. Post GCSAA's Greentips in the pro shop or club house. This series of fact sheets provides important information to golfers such as golf car use, frost delays, recycling and pesticide use.
3. Provide regular lawn-care tips to the local news paper.
4. Write articles for publication in professional journals, such as Golf Course Management magazine.
5. Give reporters legitimate news, such as information about an upcoming tournament.
6. Invite reporters and other key contacts to play golf at the course.
7. Inform golfers in advance of construction or maintenance practices. Then golfers can schedule guests when the course is in top condition.
8. Invite school children to see what golf courses do for the environment.
9. Provide instructional posters on divot and ball mark repair to the golf professional.
10. Contribute to the community. They speak to garden clubs, environmental organizations, civic and business groups and schools.

Statistics: Fifty per cent of GCSAA members volunteer their time in nongolf community activities and 72 percent donate their time to community golf events.

Reprinted from GCSAA's July August 1997 Leaderboard

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2) superintendents and the Audubon School Program and

3) superintendents and their importance in the game of golf.

We will be running these articles here so you can clip or copy and use them at your club or in your community.

• FTGA launches pro-turf campaign. Pro golfer, Lee Janzen is featured in several public service announcements. Five huge billboards touting the merits of turfgrass sprouted up in five locations in Florida early this past spring as part of an ambitious public-relations campaign by the Florida Turfgrass Association. The campaign is an effort by the association to create awareness of one of the state's most precious natural resources..

Besides turf's obvious positive benefits for the general livelihood of the populace, the FTGA advertisements and promotional pieces point out that the turfgrass industry in Florida generates nearly \$15 million in expenditures annually. Almost 4.5 million acres of turfgrass exist in Florida, employing 185,000 people.

• FGCSA Video. A recently completed

A recently completed video is being made available to all superintendents for employees, members, owners and the general public.

project by the FGCSA, this video is being made available to all superintendents in Florida to use as an informational tool for employees, members, owners and the general public. It promotes the role of the superintendent in managing golf courses as a community asset and the positive influence a golf course can have on the environment.

Our industry has made public relations a key mandate this year. Use the sidebar on 10 ways superintendents promote and the following "Field of Dreams" syndicated article to do a little public relations on your own.

Superintendents are creating real fields of dreams

Whether you live in a well-developed urban setting, a sprawling suburban tract or a small rural community, it's likely that many of the people you interact with are golf enthusiasts.

Those who enjoy the sport are aware of the key person at the golf course when it comes to providing maximum enjoyment of the game.

A recent survey by *Golf Digest* revealed that nearly 50 percent of its readers indicated the golf course superintendent as the most important individual at their facility. That figure surpassed combined selections of the golf professional, course champion, club house manager and beverage facility personnel.

The golf course superintendent is the professional entrusted with the management and maintenance of the course. It's a responsibility that has grown in impor-

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tance during the past three decades as golfers have come to demand optimal conditions for playing the game.

Those heightened expectations have been largely fueled by expanding television coverage of professional golf events that highlight the nation's top courses. Also, budget limitations, unpredictable weather patterns, governmental regulations and increased participation all have an impact on the superintendents' operations.

"You won't find one member of the profession who doesn't say their career is a challenge," says Paul McGinnis, certified golf course superintendent and president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA).

There was a time when a person could climb the career ladder from a maintenance crew member to staff assistant to superintendent through on-the-job training.

But the level of knowledge necessary

The golf course superintendent is the professional entrusted with the management and maintenance of the course. It's a responsibility that has grown in importance during the past three decades.

to manage and maintain healthy turfgrass, administer large budgets and comply with environmental, safety and employee regulations has made education paramount.

The vast majority of superintendents have two- or four-year degrees in turfgrass science, agronomy or biology. This professional background is often supplemented with continuing education courses provided by organizations such as the GCSAA.

"I think most people get into this profession for two reasons," McGinnis says. "No. 1, many of us grew up on a golf course either as a worker or playing the

game. And No. 2, superintendents have a love for the outdoors and environmental stewardship. We understand what it takes to manage a facility so that it is a benefit to the community."

Golf courses also are becoming outdoor classrooms for schools, civic groups and junior golf programs. It's not unusual for people to take to the course, not in search of birdies, but of animals, aquatic life, various plant species, composting projects and nature trails.

"The facilities not only offer recreation, but provide an environmental sanctuary to numerous plant and animal species," McGinnis says.

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