

From the Twilight Zone:

Are we strengthened by unity... or conquered by division?

I've just returned from Tampa and the annual FTGA Conference and Show, and still can't announce a turf coordinator for the University of Florida. The optimism that I expressed in this column in the last *Florida Green*, that this issue

would be settled by now, was obviously premature. As disappointing as this situation is, those of us working so hard on the matter are continuing our efforts to resolve it, and actually see positives about the protracted process.

I am typically one who disdains the minutiae and mitigating circumstances of an issue, having to distill things to their simplest formulations. However, peeling back the layers of the University's bureaucratic onion is quite interesting.

Frustrating is another word that comes to mind, but my exposure to this Twilight Zone is short and sweet compared to those living there. We will be meeting again within days to determine our next step.

On a brighter note, one of the most gratifying projects I've ever been involved with has yielded spectacular results! Rick Tatum and I volunteered to contact our various equipment distributors to try to secure equipment desperately needed at the various locations where turfgrass research is conducted, and have been overwhelmed at the response.

Hats off to Nick Crane and Kent Busser from Nucrane Machinery, Tim Kilpatrick and John Swaner at Kilpatrick Turf, James Branstrom and Bryan Riddle of Pifer, Inc., Jeff Hayden and Jim Sartain of Golf Ventures, and Joe Limberg from Hector Turf for donating or lending over \$100,000 worth of turf maintenance equipment to Gainesville, Fort Lauderdale, and Belle Glade.

Others have orally committed to this project and will be recognized in future columns. Thank you, gentlemen! You've always been there for us

and deserve recognition for all your contributions to the turf industry.

I try to avoid climbing on the soapbox very often, but while on the subject, I think it necessary to admonish those superintendents with attitudes of arrogance and disdain for the commercial members of our various golf and turf organizations.

I've heard it and witnessed it for years, and still fail to understand it. Almost every golf outing or industry function is totally or heavily financed by our vendors or other commercial enterprises, but some superintendents still voice their preference for "superintendent only" events, or otherwise show their contempt for our comrades on the commercial side.

I just don't get it!

I do understand the desirability of meetings strictly with your peers for relevance, practicality, confidentiality, and efficiency, but these kinds of meetings can be scheduled as often as needed without offending those who usually foot the bill for most of our activities.

Being a history buff, expressions like "Divide and conquer," and "In unity there is strength," are particularly meaningful to me. We need the support of everyone who has an interest in the golf and turf industry - not the alienation or indifference of a large and important segment.

Though golf is played by 25 million Americans, it is a hobby for them and it is a career for us, and we will have to fight the environmental and regulatory battles.

I don't think it too simplistic to say that most of the negative financial, regulatory, and environmental impacts to our industry are a result of our weakness and fragmentation (divided and conquered), while most of our victories (in unity there has been strength) were achieved by working together.

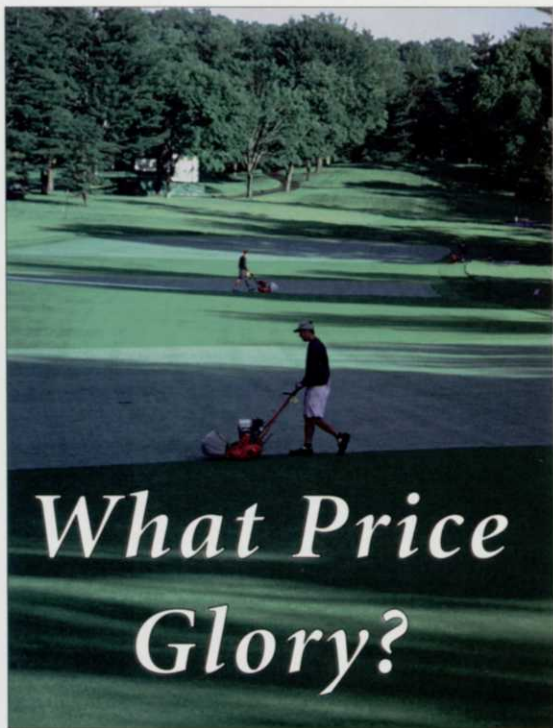
As persuasive and effective as Tom Benefield has been with the water issues, and as much as he deserves the lion's share of the credit for his successes, I doubt he would have been given the time of day if he were representing his own selfish interests instead of the FGCSA and FTGA. Think about it!

Mark My Words



Mark Jarrell, CGCS
Assistant Editor

Why do we do it to ourselves?
While it may be true that a superintendent is often his/her own worst critic, superintendents striving for success and



Hand mowing fairways at the 1997 U.S. Open. Photo by Darren Davis.

perfection drive changes in the industry.

Ironically, it is these same superintendents that also create many of the woes we face.

In the South, we have been living on the edge for the past decade trying to manage 30-year-old grasses to suicidal green speeds beyond the biology of the plant. A reprieve may be on the horizon in the form of a crop of new ultra dwarf

grasses... a case where the turf breeders have been forced by legions of frustrated and often fired superintendents to do something to meet the insatiable demand for speed by today's golfer. It was a matter of survival or lunatic glory.

And now with a glimmer of hope and reason in the form of these new grasses, what do I see superintendents doing on national television? Hand mowing fairways!

I can reluctantly accept the fact that it may be possible at a major event. When over a hundred superintendents, suppliers, friends and volunteers gather to experience the aura and history of a major tournament, reality becomes blurred and your wildest maintenance fantasies can come true. When your fleet of equipment is supplemented by loaners and attended by extra mechanics, the impractical becomes the possible.

These magical mystical events are things

legends are made of. Courses resurrected from floods. Balls rolling off greens from people breathing too hard. Knee deep rough. Greens, tees and approaches pinstriped and checker boarded.

Hey guys, it looks great on TV, but I don't play golf from a blimp.

And now, hand-mowing fairways?

Television is the great instigator. After touting and publicizing hand-mowed fairways at two events this year, the 1997 U. S. Open and the 1997 PGA Championship, the question is already being asked, "What would it take to hand mow our fairways?"

It was a hypothetical question, but the fact that it was asked at all is depressing. Status is a mysterious thing. And money can buy status. And if you have the money, by jiminy, you can hand-mow your fairways to your heart's content.

A quick review of the fairway fiascoes at the Open and the PGA revealed a staff of 25 was required *just to mow the fairways*. Let's see... 25 people at \$6.00 an hour, 4 to 4.5 hours per mowing, three mowings per week, 52 weeks per year = \$93,600 per year in labor alone... *just to mow fairways?*

Where are these people going to park their cars when they come to work? How are the people and equipment going to fit in a maintenance building that is most likely under sized and poorly designed anyhow? How many more mechanics will be hired to service the expanded fleet of mowers and utility vehicles assuming they don't just walk each mower around the course.

And who are these highly dedicated and motivated people and will they be used 40 hours per week? They could make one heck of a bunker and cart path edging crew on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Could your budget take a \$312,000 hit in the labor line item?

This whole discussion is preposterous and yet I know that at some club somewhere, hand mowers will find their way onto the fairways as an everyday routine. Status will demand it, and we will have done it to ourselves again.

Green Side Up



Joel D. Jackson, CGCS Editor