

I'd like to add my two cents to the management-company controversy, which is about a nickel more than it's worth.

As I see it, management companies are a natural by-product of the evolution of the golf course maintenance industry, and technology is the catalyst. The "art and science of greenkeeping" began a shift in emphasis from mostly "art" to mostly "science" during the 60s thanks to television's coverage of golf's finest venues. Golfers' higher expectations set in motion the irresistible forces of technological innovation which began the transformation of

"greenkeepers" into professional golf course superintendents. The coming of age of the environmental movement during this same period accelerated the pace of this transformation, as targets were placed on golf courses as enemies of "the environment." Turfgrass programs around the country proliferated and the

curriculum became more technical and scientific.

As a golf course superintendent whose career has spanned more than 26 years, I can attest to our profession's technical evolution and an acceleration in this rate of change. Golf course superintendents as a group are extremely knowledgeable, dedicated, and innovative, but the diversity of disciplines for which we're now accountable makes it impossible to be proficient in all of them. Superintendents are not all cut from the same cloth. It has been my observation that most have strong agronomic backgrounds, but from there the diversity of talent branches off in many directions. Some of us are excellent with people, some have mechanical aptitudes, some have design skills, some are horticultural geniuses... it depends on the superintendent's training, personality, and personal interests. Job security and survival, however, depend upon the golf facility's wants and needs, and their perception of the superintendent's ability to provide for and satisfy those wants and needs.

Management companies have recognized and capitalized on this reality. The legitimate ones offer a diverse pool of expertise that can be applied in an efficacious manner to more than one facility. This is the theory, anyway, and it can work at the low-end club without a qualified superintendent, and the high-end club whose qualified superintendent cannot meet all the club's expectations. Most superintendents, naturally, would prefer that the club allow him to hire a qualified staff and utilize contract services to fulfill all requirements, but that decision is out of his hands. It really doesn't matter whether it was a sound decision or not at this stage.

There are a few things a superintendent can do to protect his job:

- 1) Keep all senses attuned to your club's needs and develop strong lines of communication with the decision makers. As Dan Jones was fond of saying, "You've got to give them what they want even if they don't know what that is."
- 2) Take advantage of educational opportunities that are pertinent to your club's particular needs and that address your personal deficiencies. Prove to your club that you are a valuable asset in many diverse fields and they will find it difficult to seek your replacement. Note that the larger management companies require attendance by their superintendents at educational venues like chapter meetings and FTGA conference and show.
- 3) Support those trade organizations like FGCSA and FTGA that support university research, as they are the ones most likely to develop products and practices to save your club money. Economics may not be the reason for all decisions to switch to a management company, but it is at the heart of most of them.

Management companies are not a passing fad or a blip on the radar screen — they are a reality of golf course maintenance moving into the new millennium. You can fight them, join them, or coexist with them — just think long and hard about your strategy. Just remember that General Custer thought he had those Indians right where he wanted them just before the battle of the Little Bighorn!

From Art to Science

Mark My Words



Mark Jarrell, CGCS President, FTGA

What's the old saying, "Everything old is new again?" I hope so. It's been tough enough listening to the media hype, alarmists, survivalists and the four horsemen of the Apocalypse go on and on about what's going to happen when Y2K chimes in.

If you're reading this, then I guess they were all wrong. Of course I read someplace that one mathematician figured out that the 1,000 years since Christ's death actually took place in 1997, which wasn't exactly as catchy a sound bite as Y2K.

It's pretty amazing to be part of a change in centuries, to say nothing of millennia. Maybe at my age it just seems significant. There's a whole generation of crumb crunchers and rug rats that won't even

notice as long as their Nintendo Play Stations are Y2K compliant.

I hope you checked out your irrigation computers and they just kept humming along, or beeping or whatever. At any rate, it seems like the biggest headache associated with the year 2000 will be to find some sort of catchy handle. The years 00 to 09 may indeed be a challenge, but I have faith in man's ingenuity to solve even that one.

What I'm more concerned with is the evolution of our social graces as we rocket into 2000 and beyond. The developments in technology in the coming years may revolutionize the way we manipulate information and machines, but people still need to practice professionalism and good, old-fashioned manners.

The item that sparked my concern as we mount the millennial threshold is such a simple thing that I almost hesitate to mention it, but at

the same time, it makes me wonder where we're headed.

Last August at the Florida Turfgrass Conference in Gainesville, nine turf students were given scholarships to aid them in their education. Four months later only two of them have written thank-you letters to the association.

I'm sure they said "Thank you" to the presenter at the podium that night, but they also have an obligation to the hundreds of members who worked to put on fund-raisers to raise that money and those who sat through committee meetings on budgets and awards that resulted in allocating those scholarships.

Their thank you's should be a matter of record in the association's minutes and publications, so everyone knows their efforts are appreciated. I don't want to chastise these youngsters too harshly for perhaps a lack of understanding or momentary lapse in etiquette, but there is a lesson to be learned.

Professionalism starts when you learn to say "please" and "thank you" at home.

Work habits and personal conduct begin during these embryonic days of a career. Might as well learn to do it right early on and build a good reputation from the start. I can remember listening to a motivational tape by Arnold Palmer. One of the things he talked about was how his parents taught him proper table manners at an early age.

Wise words from the son of greenskeeper whose father had to use the back door of the clubhouse. Arnold now owns that golf club and has been a Presidential guest at many a state dinner.

It just goes to show you never know where your road may lead you. No matter what the destination or what millennium you're in, good manners will help you along the way.

Millennium Stew

Green Side Up



Joel Jackson, CGCS Editor