



How to Sell Your Story

Maintenance Field Day at Martin Downs CC Draws 150 Members, Local Press

BY JOEL D. JACKSON, CGCS

One of the biggest problems superintendents face is that golfers don't really know what they do. Bridging that disconnection has been one of main goals of the GCSAA in its recent marketing blitz to show golfers the value of having a professional superintendent on staff.

John Cunningham, superintendent of the 36-hole Martin Downs CC in Stuart took the GCSAA message to heart and has done something very successful to take that message to his members. Cunningham just held his 2nd Annual Turf Maintenance Field Day and the attendance shot up from 85 last year to more than 150 this year.

Of course nothing of value is ever achieved without hard work and preparation, and for three weeks prior to the field day there's a lot of nervous anticipation by the staff that is not accustomed to being in the spotlight. But once the curtain goes up, all settle down to talk about their jobs to an audience of interested listeners and the experience becomes a positive reinforcer for



Martin Downs Superintendent John Cunningham (standing on chair) welcomes more than 150 club members to the 2nd Annual Turf Maintenance Field Day. Photo by Joel Jackson.

staff and members.

Cunningham is passionate about communicating with his members and instilling pride in his staff. He approached his board of directors last year about holding a field day and they approved. He hasn't looked back since,

and the field day has taken on the importance of a major golf event at the club.

When Cunningham took over six years ago, he began a program of improvements to make the maintenance facility a less drab and cluttered environment to work in. Once that was accomplished he thought, "We complain that golfers don't know who we are or what we do, why not bring them down to maintenance and show them?"

He got the idea for the field day approach from attending the South Florida Turf Expo in Ft. Lauderdale. He said, "What if we set up six or seven stations. Broke the members up into small groups and had them move from station to station on a timed schedule. We could have tables set up in the building and serve lunch when we are done."

And so the Martin Down Turf Main-

The members make a connection to the staff. They are no longer just faces passing by on the golf course.

They understand these people are trained professionals and have pride in what they do... Once they learn about what really goes on behind the scenes, they are a lot more positive about the club in general and complaints go way down



Assistant Superintendent Eric Kunkel (far right) explains to members how and why aerification and top dressing equipment is used on the course. Photo by Joel Jackson.

TifSport™
Certified Bermudagrass


New Standard for Athletic Turf Grass

Compared to Tifway (419):

- Superior Cold Hardiness
- Genetically Ensured Purity
- High Density, High Tensile Strength
- Improved Traffic Tolerance
- Mole Cricket Non-Preference
- Tees and Fairways Easily Maintained to 1/2 inch or Higher for Roughs
- Sold Only as Certified



1487 Blackdirt Road • Whitesburg, Georgia 30185
1-800-273-8608



Are You Getting Soaked?

Water Availability is diminishing, and getting more expensive every day. These tiny particles can help save you big money on water.

University Tested, Superintendent Approved.

HYDROZONE™ Call toll free 877-994-3494 for a *free* video. Conserving Water for today, and the future. HYDROZONE™

Demonstration Stations

- Crew Operations Room
- Superintendents Office
- Aerifying and Topdressing equipment;
- Chemical Room
- Fuel Island, Storage bins and Wash Down Rack
- Reel & Bedknife Grinding Demo
- Mower Height Adjustment Demo

tenance Field Day was born.

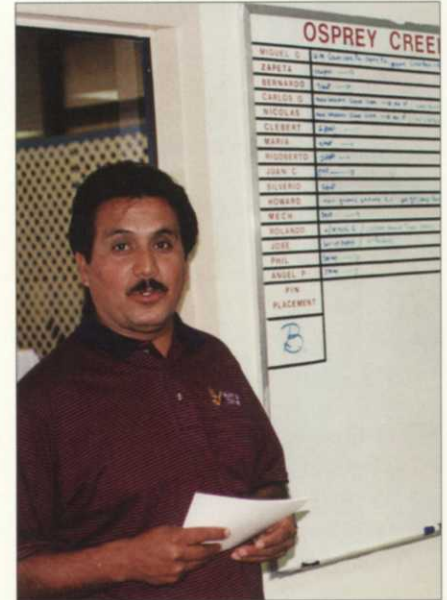
The day of the event the members play in a morning shotgun tournament and then drive down to the maintenance facility where the tournament results will be scored. They participate in the program that lasts less than an hour and then sit down to lunch in the maintenance building.

Cunningham explained, "We have

seven stations this year. Each presentation will last approximately seven minutes including questions and answers which is where we can really display our expertise. Each presenter writes his own spiel and we rehearse the whole program three times and have a dress rehearsal the morning of the field day. We critique the content and time the presentations to make sure they fit the schedule.

"You know a mechanic's strong suit isn't usually public speaking, but once he gets started explaining the precision of what he does and answers a few questions like, 'How many reels do you grind on just this one machine?' And he says, '150.' The members begin to realize there's more to maintenance than meets the eye and his pride builds.

"The whole crew is involved. There will be seven tour guides — one to take each group around to each station when time is called. We have a table crew to set up for lunch and we have six or



In the operations room Assistant Superintendent Jesus Romero described how the daily work is assigned in morning staff meetings to organize men and equipment for efficient course preparation. Photo by Joel Jackson.

Computer-Exact Custom Mixes. Every Order. Every Time.

- All Loads Scaled
- Soil Analysis Available



- Next Day Service
- Volume Orders

Visit our website at www.golfAg.com!

Traps Installed to Spec.



Golf Agronomics meets all your top dressing needs with our ability to customize your mix with a variety of soil amendments including:

- Dolomite
- Hi-Cal
- Charcoal
- Wetting Agents
- Humic Acid
- Minor Elements
- Rock Phosphate
- Gypsum
- Customer Products

**GOLF AGRONOMICS
SUPPLY & HANDLING**

Serving all of Florida

(800) 626-1359
(941) 955-4690 Fax



seven members of the staff preparing lunch. Last year we had a barbecue this year we are having a Mexican fiesta theme.

“We did go to the expense of renting banquet tables at a cost of \$350, with board approval, to improve over last years presentation. We also have hired entertainment this year from a local club to add to the fiesta ambience.”

Cunningham says the paybacks and benefits of such an undertaking are worth the effort, “The members make a connection to the staff. They are no longer just faces passing by on the golf course. They understand these people are trained professionals and have pride in what they do. They also learn that maintenance is a lot more complex than they realized and that it is a team effort. Once they learn about what really goes on behind the scenes, they are a lot more positive about the club in general and complaints go way down.

“Just as important is what the staff gains from the experience. We push them out of their comfort zone a little bit. They are nervous. Most don’t sleep the night before. Every wife has heard the presentation umpteen times, but they do just fine. The pride and improved morale from pulling it off creates such a positive working atmosphere that it is a win-win success for all concerned.”

Cunningham is already planning the topics for next year’s field day and the members are showing off their newly acquired insider knowledge about golf course maintenance facts. GCSAA’s Kelly Loganbill came down from Lawrence, Kan. to see what Cunningham was doing since he had ordered 500 of those golf maintenance inserts that have appeared in golf magazines. The association will be looking at how to present his field day formula as a tool for everyone to use.

The local paper also had a reporter present and there was a great positive half-page article in the *Stuart News* about the event. So, there is a way to tell your story and no reason for your members to not know about what you do. It’s up to you. Go for it. It works.



The superintendent’s office was one of seven stations visited by the members. Here John Cunningham (center) describes his various roles and responsibilities as the Martin Downs C.C. golf course superintendent. Photo by Joel Jackson

Positive Feedback

Editor’s Note: Martin Downs Superintendent John Cunningham sent the following letters he received from some of his members after the Feb. 7 Field Day. Do you think these people will be advocates for the golf course maintenance department when issues arise?

Dear John,

You and your staff are to be commended for the truly exceptional Turf Field Day exhibition.

This is something every golfer and club member should attend. It certainly demonstrated why golf course maintenance requires money, equipment and dedicated employees.

We never get to see what goes on behind the scene by such capable people, and also we never get to know these same people as we pass them on the golf course.

The various stages of the demonstration were quite unique and the presentations really informative. The guys did a super job.

Needless to say, the food and entertainment were a nice touch and greatly appreciated by the membership.

We are all looking forward to the next one.”

Eleanor and Dick Santee

Dear John,

I just want to thank you for a very interesting and informative afternoon at the Turf Field Day. All the gentlemen did an excellent job in their presentations. Thank you for making this huge effort in educating the membership. You and your staff do an excellent job.

Kathy de Wendt

What a special treat your field day was. It gave me a new respect for all you and your staff do. The presentations were so professional. I’m glad to be a part of the Martin Downs Country Club family.

Gayle Bue