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GOLF COURSE NEWS

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U.S. golf course supply

	Daily Fee	Municipal	Private	Unknown
Open before 1990	6,331	2,185	5,146	—
Opened in 1990	166	37	86	—
Opened 1st Qtr. '91	14	7	16	—
Under Construction	351	86	205	5
Total	6,862	2,315	5,453	5
Total of all courses when construction complete: 14,635				

Source: NGF

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MAINTENANCE SURVEY

Superintendents at nation's best courses respond

Developer submits chem-free plan

Sherman Hollow's Truax draws fire, support over Green Life use

By Peter Blais

HUNTINGTON, Vt. — Hoping to end a six-year battle to gain state environmental approval, Sherman Hollow developers will submit plans to manage the controversial golf course without pesticides or fertilizers.

Sherman Hollow, Inc. will present details of its organic turf management program at a July 25 hearing before the same Vermont State Environmental Board that voted 2-to-1 against the project last September because of fears regarding pesti-

cide and fertilizer use.

The use of a non-toxic soil conditioner called Green Life, in conjunction with an organic program, will allow the course to be maintained without chemicals, according to Sherman Hollow President Paul Truax.

"This should remove concerns about the use of pesticides and fertilizers on the proposed golf course that, for the last six years, have prevented Sherman Hollow from receiving a golf course permit from the state of Vermont," Truax said.

Green Life has been researched and tested on several courses over the past 10 years by a Glendale, Calif., company hoping to make inroads into the environmentally conscious

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Maintenance costs high all around

From staff reports

Paced by a double-digit increase in payroll taxes and employee benefits, golf course maintenance costs rose 7.8 percent at private country clubs in 1990, according to a recent survey of 250 facilities.

Last year's increase brings the national average figure to \$27,266 per hole and continues the spiraling cost of golf course maintenance, which has jumped 500 percent in the past 20 years, reported the international accounting firm Pannell Kerr Forster in its annual publication *Clubs in Town & Country*.

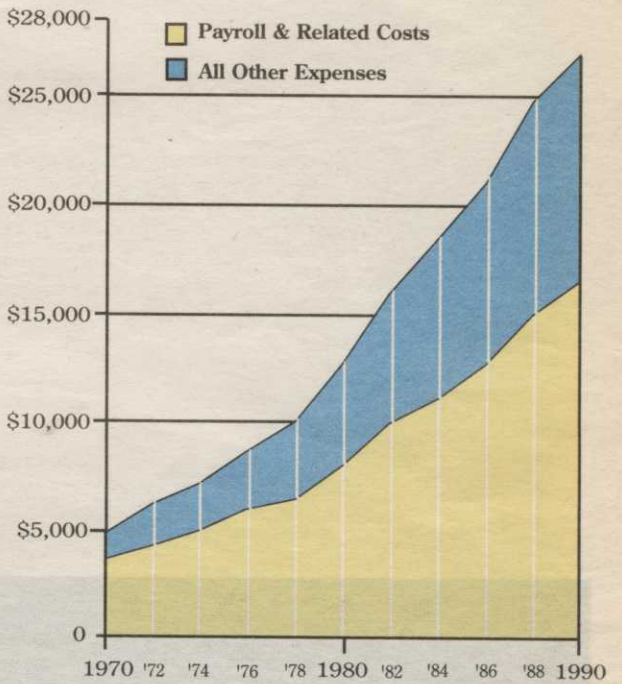
The highest per-hole costs occurred in the Far West, \$34,328. The South, \$27,443, East, \$25,143, and Midwest, \$22,567 followed.

Nationally, payroll (\$14,031) along with payroll taxes and employee benefits (\$2,718) averaged 61.4 percent of per-hole maintenance costs. The \$16,749 total is more than four times greater than the \$3,800 spent on the same items 20 years ago.

Why have labor costs risen so dramatically? Golfers' demands for perfect conditions simply require greater numbers

Continued on page 19

Yearly average costs per hole at country clubs



Source: Pannell Kerr Forster

Florida lawmakers put water law on hold

By Peter Blais

The Florida Legislature will delay action until next year on a proposed water tax that could greatly impact the state's \$5.5-billion golf industry.

The Legislature adjourned last month before committees released bills to levy a 10-cent charge on every 1,000 gallons over a water user's allotment — a fee some estimate would cost many courses \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually.



'A lot needs to be worked out before the Legislature goes forward.'
— Bobby Brantley

But Gov. Lawton Chiles has promised to make passage of a water tax a top

priority when the Legislature reconvenes early next year, according to Florida Golf Council Executive Director Bobby Brantley.

"We're pleased the bill didn't pass," Brantley said. "A lot needs to be worked out before the Legislature goes forward with plans to tax water consumption."

Besides raising much-needed revenue, tax supporters say the extra charge

Continued on page 12

GCSAA out \$1.4M to McLoughlin

By Mark Leslie

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America will appeal a May 9 jury verdict in a Topeka, Kan., federal district court awarding \$1,457,742 to former Executive Director

James McLoughlin.

The jury verdict awarded McLoughlin \$457,742 for breach of a separation agreement and \$1 million for libel — \$500,000 compensatory damages and \$500,000 punitive damages.

GCSAA attorney Robert Ochs said he would first file motions with Judge Richard Rogers for a new trial, and if that is denied, he will appeal the decision to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Cir-

Continued on page 22

Costs surveyed

Continued from page 1

and more skilled workers than two decades ago, according to superintendents.

"Look at a nice golf course 20 years ago and compare it to the same course today. There is no comparison," said Dave Fearis of Blue Hills Golf Club in Kansas City, Mo.

"Back then golfers were satisfied if the greens were in good shape. But golfer demands have evolved to the point where greens, tees, fairways and even roughs have to be perfect. That takes more people, equipment and chemicals."

Fearis feels course personnel deserve the higher pay. "Many courses have worked on the principle of giving the member as much as possible while paying their employees as little as possible," he said. "Hopefully that's changing. It doesn't make sense to pay a guy \$6 an hour to operate a \$40,000 piece of equipment. Pesticide applicators have to be licensed today, and you can't expect them to work for that. You can't pay low and get the quality course members demand."

Jerry Owens, Southeast regional superintendent with American Golf Corp., agreed golf course workers have long been underpaid. Still, he is surprised at the salaries of some superintendents.

"I made \$13,000 as head superintendent at Pinehurst No. 1 just 10 years ago," he said. "Now the average salary is \$36,000 to \$37,000. A couple of my course superintendents are making over \$90,000. It's pretty amazing."

Demand for a longer playing season has also added to labor costs, said Roger Lowell of Webhannet GC in Kennebunk Beach, Maine.

"We used to open around May 5 and pretty much close up shop after Labor Day. Now we open in early April and are still having tournaments in mid- to late October. A longer season means more people, more play and more money," Lowell said.

Raymond Davies of Virginia Country Club in Huntington Beach, Calif., said older members occasionally ask him why, with all the high-tech equipment available today, his crew is larger than it was back in 1940.

"It's the same reason we're cutting fairways at 1/8-inch rather than the 3/4-inch they were

back then," he explained. "Golfers are demanding better conditions. So we mow the fairways 2-1/2 times more frequently than they did then. We mow the roughs twice as often as we did just a few years ago. They want us to use a walking mower on the tees now rather than the triplex we used not so long ago."

Davies estimates 50 private clubs operate in the greater Los Angeles area. Virginia CC's annual \$800,000 maintenance budget figures out to \$44,444 per hole, approximately \$10,000 more than the average for the Far West, but barely among the top 20 most-expensive-to-maintain facilities in his area.

"Demands have gotten greater and greater and that costs money," Davies said. "But they (members) don't seem to care about price. They just want perfect conditions."

But Los Angeles is unusual, Davies conceded. The only concession his members have made to the five-year drought gripping the area is to quietly accept the occasional brown spot in the rough. They still demand lush green turf at all times from tee to green, he added.

"Up in Santa Barbara, water conservation has become chic," he said. "Residents take pride in checking their water meter daily to see if they've used less than their 60-gallon allotment. They take pride in their brown lawns and expect the same conditions at their courses. It's almost embarrassing to have green turf there. But I don't see brown turf becoming chic here unless the drought gets a heck of a lot worse."

That type of attitude shift in golfer demands is necessary to slow the steady rise in maintenance costs, superintendents agree.

"People have to be re-educated," Fearis said. "The great courses in Scotland aren't perfectly green all the time. With the costs of pesticides, water and labor going up, golfers need to be willing to accept the occasional weed or brown spot."

"Our costs keep going up and we have to raise fees to pay them," said Owens, adding that American Golf has extended higher weekend greens fees to include Fridays at some semi-private courses. "We can't price golf so high that the average guy can't play. If we keep going we'll reach that cap very soon."

Labor isn't the only item going up. Also on the rise are course supplies and contracts (\$4,785 per hole); repairs to equipment, course buildings, water, and drainage system

(\$2,811); and all other expenses (\$2,921).

Owens, for example, said petroleum-based supplies are 10 percent higher than they were before Iraq invaded Kuwait last August.

A \$3,000 all-purpose turf vehicle a few years ago costs \$10,000 today, he added.

It is difficult to reduce the maintenance budget with inflation adding to payroll costs and new laws, like the one recently passed in Kansas forbidding clippings being dumped in landfills. But rising costs can be slowed.

Lowell has cut his pesticide use in half the past few years in response to environmental concerns and his course's pocketbook.

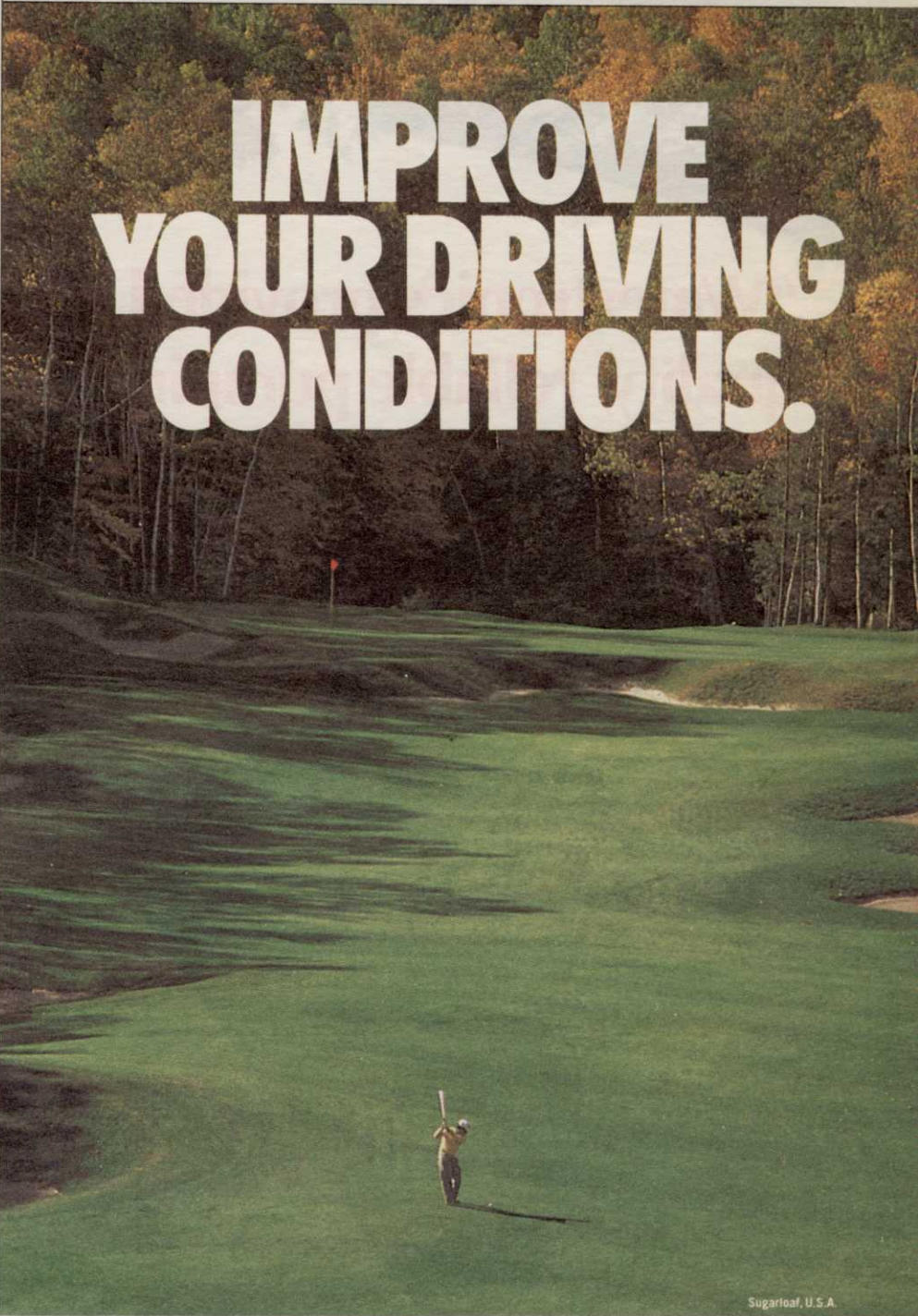
Fearis keeps his overtime budget in check by hiring more part-time employees, especially retired people. Retirees generally don't want full-time hours and are usually very responsible, he said. He also keeps fertilizer and pesticide applications to a minimum.

Owens emphasizes slow-release fertilizers to help slow grass growth, reducing mowing frequency and equipment wear. He is willing to pay more for good people, figuring one good worker can do the work of two poor ones. He also pays a little extra for multi-function rather than single-function equipment whenever possible.

The higher per-hole maintenance costs in the West and Southeast mainly result from the 12 months of play usually available in those areas compared to the eight or nine months in the East and Midwest, superintendents agree.

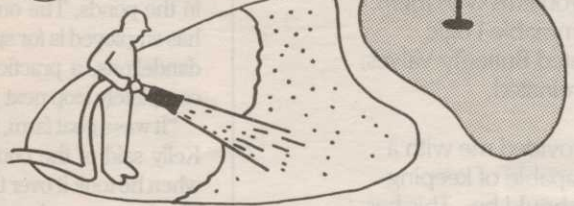
"Being open 12 months means higher maintenance costs," Davies said. "Equipment doesn't last as long. We use more water and have wall-to-wall coverage. These are tough conditions to maintain a golf course. We just don't get much of a hand from Mother Nature."

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