

# Westwood benefits from Montross' turf talents

By Vern Putney

When "Mostly" Montross switched careers a quarter-century ago, teenager son Walter little suspected that golf would shape his life.

After the senior Montross became the general manager at Annapolis (Md.) Roads Country Club, Walter began at the bottom of the links ladder as caddie, cart maintenance worker and all-around gopher. His big break came when directed by the golf course superintendent to help out on the golf course.

Although the work was much more physical than it is today, there was nothing he enjoyed more; except perhaps playing golf.

Pointed to the right profession, Montross has occupied several prestigious industry positions since graduating in 1975 from the University of Maryland, Institute of Applied Agriculture.

A certified superintendent since 1984, he's been president of the Greater Washington Golf Course Superintendents Association (1981), I.A.A., Maryland Alumni Association (1984), and Mid-Atlantic Association of Golf

Course Superintendents (1989). Montross also served on the Virginia Turfgrass Council's board of directors from 1986-1989. He and wife Linda have a 9-year-old daughter Tracy, and a son Geoffrey, 7.

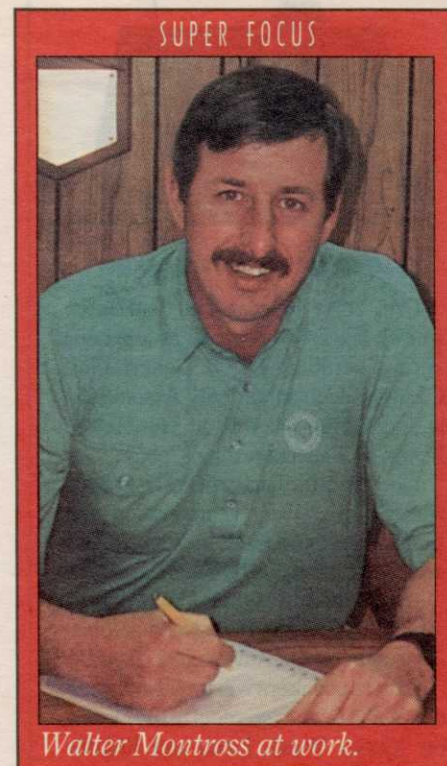
Montross believes job appeal stems from the variety of tasks involved: the look of the course from day to day, month to month; and the longer-term observations, such as maturing trees and finished construction projects. He notes that as projects mount, playing time diminishes.

After 11 years as superintendent at Springfield Golf and Country Club, Montross moved to Westwood CC in Vienna, Va. A private 18-hole course, Westwood is located just outside Washington, D.C., in northern Virginia. Built in 1954, Westwood measures 6,405 yards from the white tees.

When approached about coming to Westwood, Montross learned the club was interested in changing fairway turf from 90 percent poa annua to something more hardy to the Mid-Atlantic region. The goal: tighter, drier lies in the summer months.

Club officials years before had decided that upgrading the course was both necessary and desirable. The club had completely rebuilt all greens and begun to rebuild many of the old postage-stamp tees before Montross came aboard.

Fairway turf remained the only serious



Walter Montross at work.

problem. Montross did not know which type of turf would be chosen. In the Washington area, almost every type of grass can be found in the fairways. Within a 20-miles radius,

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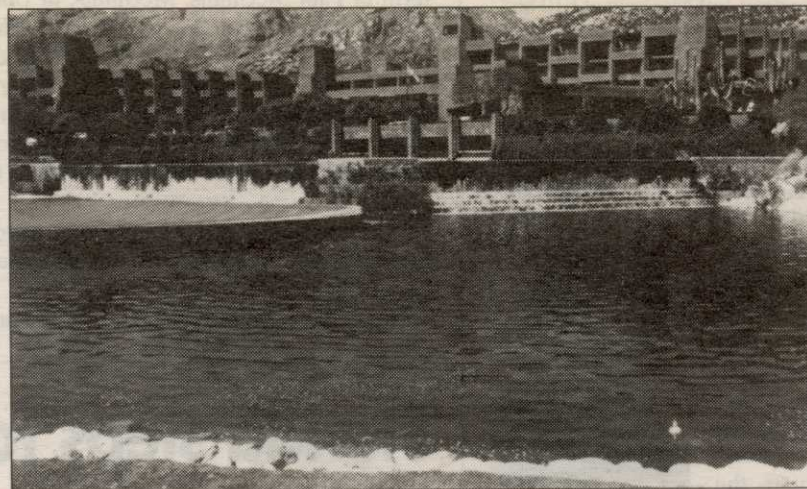
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# Montross' challenges at Westwood far more than 'just growing grass'

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Zoysia, Bermuda, rye, blue, bentgrass and combinations of each can be found.

As Montross learned more about the unique traits special to Westwood, he formed an idea about the grass best suited. He chose bentgrass. He felt this type turf would provide year-round quality, with the potential to play summer rules most of the year. Until this time, it had not been extensively tried as a fairway turf in this area. Many years ago, there was an attempt to grow bentgrass fairways, but it was not overly successful and had been ruled out as a viable choice.

In Montross' mind, the ballgame had changed. Lightweight mowing with clipping removal, better pesticides, better irrigation systems and a better chance of controlling poa annua had tilted the scales toward probable success.

Two local clubs recently began experimenting with bentgrass. About four years ago, Burning Tree Club in Bethesda, Md., had transformed two fairways from Bermuda/rye to bentgrass. Riverbend CC in Great Falls, Va., had been introducing bentgrass into their fairways the past three years. Though different methods were used to establish bentgrass, success followed.

This work — coupled with many calls to the U.S.G.A. and Virginia Tech — convinced Montross to take the plan before the membership. While three new area courses had chosen bentgrass as their fairway turf, Westwood was the first to convert all fairways at one time from the high percentage of poa annua to bentgrass.

Because the fairways had been intensively managed for poa the past 20 years, the switch posed some interesting problems, not the least being the fear that, with so much viable seed in the ground, there was the potential to simply grow poa all over again.

Westwood approved Montross' proposal. First step was to use Roundup at 1 gallon/acre to kill existing grass. Next was extensive renovation (thatch was a major concern) of the fairways. Seeding with Pennlinks bentgrass followed. This variety was chosen because of its particular growth characteristics.

The golf course was closed only on the day Roundup was sprayed. During the grow-in period, members moved the ball from the fairways to the rough. Another idea implemented was to set up the entire course as a par three by mowing tee areas anywhere from 120-200 yards away from each hole. Montross began this program Aug. 28, 1990. Targeted date for reopening the fairways was Oct. 14, when Westwood would host the Virginia state high school golf championship. Fairways re-opened, fully regressed, on Oct. 10. The grass was in excellent shape, except divots exploded. This ceased as a problem in 30 days, as lateral

rooting occurred.

Little more than a year later, the playing surface is excellent. The bentgrass survived one of the worst summers in the Mid-Atlantic region. The only problem was the expected reinvestment in the fall of 1990. Westwood ended up with a little more than hoped for, about 40 percent. Last fall, Montross again reseeded, using Pennlinks and the new Dominant bentgrass.

"This blend has looked

excellent in our nursery," he said. "We are experimenting with the use of various growth retardants, pre-emerge products and Progress in attempting to find a program that will reduce poa annua levels to around 20 percent."

Westwood CC has begun the complete renovation of all sand bunkers. This will entail removing all old sand, re-establishing drainage and adding new sand. These 65 bunkers embrace

130,000 square feet. In addition, seven new bunkers will be built.

Apace with Westwood's vision of the future, Montross sees an equally positive outlook for the technological end of the golf course business. The superintendent's position has evolved tremendously, and Montross is excited to be a part of it. However, as golfer demands have increased, many superintendents face increasingly difficult situations. Next big step may be to

convince golfers that not every facility has the resource or capability to be like the course last viewed on TV.

Montross would encourage those about to enter this field to take a Dale Carnegie course. It might be more topical than ever. "Growing grass," he noted, "now is just a small part of the business. Pesticides, public and press relations, communication and planning have emerged as more prominent issues."

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