

Monterey challenge sometimes less than heaven for Miller

By FRANK POLLARD

You think of the Monterey Peninsula as heaven? How about as a superintendent's nightmare. Four golf courses with four different designs. Different soil and turfgrass characteristics. Varied climatic conditions. And a worldwide television audience ready to pounce on the superintendent for every blade of grass that has turned brown.

Want the job? Ed Miller got it two and a half years ago and he has tackled it with aplomb. Leaving Desert Forest Golf Club in arid Carefree, Ariz., Miller has handled the challenge of being responsible for four world-renowned resort golf courses with a combination of sound agronomic tools, common sense, communication skills and an ability to develop player friendly approaches to course management.

"We have been totally supported by the ownership and top management here at Pebble Beach," said Miller, "which has enabled us to staff our operations with high-quality personnel."

Therein lies the key, he said.

"I've always felt effective management is a direct function of good communication, equally delegating authority and responsibility, and a synergistic team effort when it comes to giving people credit for and using their ideas and contributions," said Miller. "The demand for superior course conditioning throughout the country has increased enormously over the past 10 years and, with it, is emerging a new breed of superintendents who are not only competent agronomists but people who are management-oriented."

"It is imperative that these people have the ability to communicate well at every level."

Miller spends some 60 to 70 hours a week on the job. If you can't find him in his office in front of the computer working on new plans and techniques,



Ed Miller, right, with Pebble Beach superintendent Brad Hines.

Frank Pollard photo

he's probably out on one of the Pebble Beach courses working with the superintendents, lending a hand when needed.

Just 35, Miller holds a bachelor degree in business administration from the University of Wisconsin; a certificate of completion in turfgrass management from Penn State University; and has worked at Desert Forest Golf Club; Cherry Hills Country Club in Englewood, Colo.; Medinah (Ill.) Country Club; and Walnut Grove Golf Course in Cochran, Wis. Along the way he learned that no two courses are alike, and can't be treated as such.

"We've tried to identify our long- and short-range goals for each of our golf courses [Pebble Beach Golf Links, The Links at Spanish Bay, Old Del Monte and Spyglass]. We also feel that basic soil and fertility management equates to healthy turfgrass — and other plants, for

that matter," Miller explained.

"If you take care of the soil properly, the soil will take care of the turfgrass plants. If we don't look below the surface, we sometimes find ourselves treating the symptoms of the problem. If we find and identify the cause of the symptoms when we have a problem, and then treat the cause rather than the symptom, we find in almost every case by using basic agronomic management techniques that, in the end, we apply fewer chemicals."

Miller said "effective management of soil and its fertility" should get a great deal more attention than it does.

"If you have a healthy, balanced soil it's going to support plants with less water and resist disease and insect pressure. This may be the single most important component of Integrated Plant Management.

"To have disease or insect infestation," Miller continued, "you need a pathogen,

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a host grass or plant and the right environment for the particular problem that may arise. If you can eliminate any one or two of these conditions naturally through good irrigation, soil and fertility management, the disease will probably not become a problem."

Miller feels superintendents will soon be using some new turfgrass strains that will answer and alleviate problems of water shortages as well as disease and pests. He is planning to introduce a new strain of buffalograss to conserve water in the primary roughs on the Old Del Monte Course and out-of-play areas at Pebble Beach.

This is another example of Miller's common sense approach. He feels the superintendent must be savvy and practical enough to "trust basic agricultural practices."

"Part of managing turfgrass programs, particularly with an existing stand of turf, is continually broadening the genetic base through overseeding. We totally re-grassed Pebble Beach this past year. And we're not going to stop this program."

"If you keep incorporating new grass plants that are young and aggressive growers, they have the ability to resist problems and are more competitive with weeds such as Kikuyugrass and other noxious plants. It's simple genetics. We tend to forget that grasses do have a lifespan and need replacement on a continuous basis."

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South Texas GCSA elects Ihms president

Keith Ihms of Pine Forest Country Club in Houston has been elected president of South Texas Golf Course Superintendents Association Inc.

Ihms' fellow officers are Vice President Michael Wood of South Shore Harbour Country Club in League City and Secretary/Treasurer Don Cole of Greatwood Golf Club in Missouri City.

Elected to the board of directors were Randy Broyles of Westwood Country Club in Houston, Doug Browne of Steven F. Austin Golf Club in San Felipe, Mike Burris of Bay Oaks Country Club in Friendswood, John Freeman of Deerwood Golf Club in Kingwood, Mike Link of The Woodlands in Conroe, John Walker of Weston Lake Country Club in Fulshear, and John Cater of Turf Tech.

South Texas GCSA awarded lifetime memberships at the annual Christmas party to L.W. Dubose Jr. of Houston and Tom Leonard in appreciation of their continuous support since 1958.

Ihms also presented to \$500 scholarships to Daniel Fullelove and Todd Martin on behalf of STGCSA during the superintendents luncheon at the Texas Turfgrass Conference in Houston in December.