

Seeking aerification, three clubs pool resources

By PETER BLAIS

FALMOUTH, Maine — In a novel display of Yankee ingenuity and cooperation, three private Maine clubs have agreed to share the cost of a fairway aerifier none could have afforded separately.

Superintendents Kevin Ross of Falmouth Country Club, Chuck Ravis of Augusta Country Club and Kyle Evans of Waterville Country Club agreed to spend roughly \$6,600 apiece on a \$20,000 Ransomes GA-60. A lawyer is drafting a contract covering when each course would use the aerifier and how repairs would be paid.

"Basically, I get it the last two weeks of September," Ross said. "Kyle has it the first two weeks of October and Chuck the last two. And we agreed that no matter where it breaks down, we'd share any repair costs equally."

"Spending \$20,000 for a piece of equipment I needed just two weeks a year didn't make sense. But getting it for less than \$7,000 made a lot of sense."

Ross, Evans and Ravis are all experienced superintendents. They have known each other for many years and are familiar with one another's staffs, especially the mechanics.

"I'm comfortable with their guys and they are with mine. When we presented the idea to our boards, they all jumped on it pretty quickly," Ross said.

Superintendents have a long tradition of lending equipment to fellow superinten-



Three Maine clubs have pooled their resources to purchase the Ransomes GA-60 aerifier.

dents at nearby courses. The spirit of cooperation among course managers, even those at competing facilities, is a source of pride.

But agreeing to share the cost of a new piece of equipment among several courses with different owners is unusual.

"It [jointly purchasing equipment] used to be done a lot in the 1960s, but clubs got away from it," said Terry Buchen, head superintendent at Double Eagle in Galena, Ohio. "It

sounds like it's starting to come back.

"Spelling out the details on a contract is a neat idea. A lot of people might be interested in that."

Sawtelle Bros., a Lawrence, Mass.-based equipment company, agreed to accept half the purchase price last fall and the other half this spring, making it easier on the three clubs involved, Ross said. All three should be able to share in the depreciation benefits as the aerifier ages, he added.

If the agreement works out, and Ross is confident it will, the clubs could share future costs of more-expensive equipment like fairway verticutters or greens aerifiers, he said. Other Maine clubs have approached Ross and the others about their agreement.

"I got a call from Steve Hoisington at Martindale [Auburn] the other day," Ross said. "He's interested in sharing the cost of a [Toro] HydroJect with Portland Country Club and Val Halla [Cumberland] Golf Course."

"The key is to reach an agreement with people you can work with. Chuck, Kyle and I have done that."

Deep drill aerators offer alternative

By PETER BLAIS

FALMOUTH, Maine — The condition of the greens on Falmouth Country Club's front nine has traditionally been a step behind the back nine. The roots, which averaged 10 inches in length five years ago, had shriveled to 4 to 5 inches by last spring.

That's when superintendent Kevin Ross decided to try the Floyd & McKay Deep Drill Aerifier on his front nine putting surfaces.

"By the end of the summer, all the greens were uniform," Ross said. "The roots were back to six to eight inches. I consider that a big improvement."

Verti-Drain and the Aerifier are the two major players in the fast-growing deep aerification market. Both bore past the hard pan that shallow aerators can compact 3 to 4 inches below the surface.

They fracture the soil to a depth of 10 or more inches, allowing air and water in and gas out. The loosened soil promotes better percolation, creates healthier root growth and delays or eliminates the need to rebuild greens.

"Thirty years ago, greens were cut at 1/4-inch, three or four times a week," said Pat Lucas, superintendent at Innis Arden Golf Club in Old Greenwich, Conn., and owner of Earthworks, a customized aerification company serving Northeast golf courses.

"Now they are cut at 1/8-inch every day. That's pushing the envelope and removed any cushion for error we used to have. Deep aerifying gives us back some of that cushion."

The 3,000-pound Floyd & McKay Aerifier uses variable-sized drills —

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