

Superintendents weigh in on importance of playing

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tendent at the private Hyannisport (Mass.) Club, often plays with club members, particularly board members.

"Members ask employees questions about the course," Passios said. "But they tend not to ask the right people and their questions never get back to the person with the best answers, the superintendent."

Playing with members improves communication at the club, Passios said. Many clubs require the superintendent to play with certain people, often the green chairman, on a regular basis. Finding the time to play a full round within the 60-to-70-hour work weeks of most superintendents can be difficult, however.

"I've started out to play 18 holes with a member and ended up playing five or six because there was something that I had to attend to," Passios said. "But those five holes are still quality time and you learn a lot."

Superintendents at public, as well as private courses, should make the effort to play frequently, according to Dennis Lyon, director of the City of Aurora, Colo.'s four golf facilities. Having the head pro and superintendent play together on a regular basis allows the two to compare notes and better understand each other's needs, he said.

"We have a superintendent/pro tournament three times a year," Lyon said. "The superintendents at our courses play the pros. The course hosting the tournament is usually in tip-top shape. Our regular players benefit from that. But the best thing is the camaraderie and exchange of information that occurs between the superintendents and pros. The dialogue is non-stop."

Dusch plays several times a year with Atlanta National head pro Gordon Leslie, a strong player who missed the cut for the U.S. Senior Open by a single shot last year.

"We talk a lot," Dusch said. "Since we're both pretty good players, we're talking apples to apples when we discuss the course from the player's viewpoint. And members seem to respect what you say a little more if they know you play."

To help his staff better understand the game from the customer's perspective, Lyon holds an annual golf outing with the superintendents, pro shop staff, City Council and Council-appointed golf advisory committee. What they've discovered is most important to customers is the condition of the greens and tees followed by whether the drinking water cans are full, the bathrooms are clean and the ball washers contain water.

"A good superintendent should look for every opportunity to communicate with board

members, pros and customers," Lyon said. "Playing golf is one way to do that."

Because of the seasonal nature of many resort courses, it is difficult for superintendents at those facilities to find the free time or tee times to play regularly. Ron Mahaffey, head superintendent at The Lodge at Ventana Canyon, plays as often as possible at his 36-hole complex in Tucson,



Charles Passios

Ariz. But he also seeks input from his two assistants and the rest of the management staff, all of whom play frequently.

"I sit down daily with my assistants and weekly with the rest of the management staff," Mahaffey said. "What they have to say about the courses is very helpful."

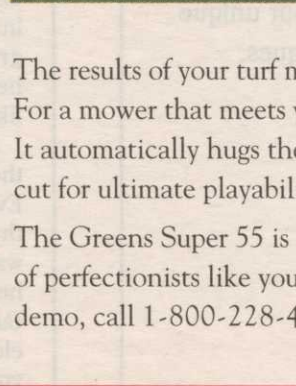
Mahaffey, Lyon, Passios and Dusch all agree it isn't neces-

sary to be a single-digit handicap player. It is helpful to enjoy the game and understand the rules in order to better communicate with players. But absolutely necessary? No.

"A good friend of mine, John O'Connell [who died last year], was superintendent at Blue Rock Golf Course [in Yarmouth, Mass.] for 37 years," Passios said. "It received all kinds of play and John kept it in beautiful shape, even though he didn't play at all."

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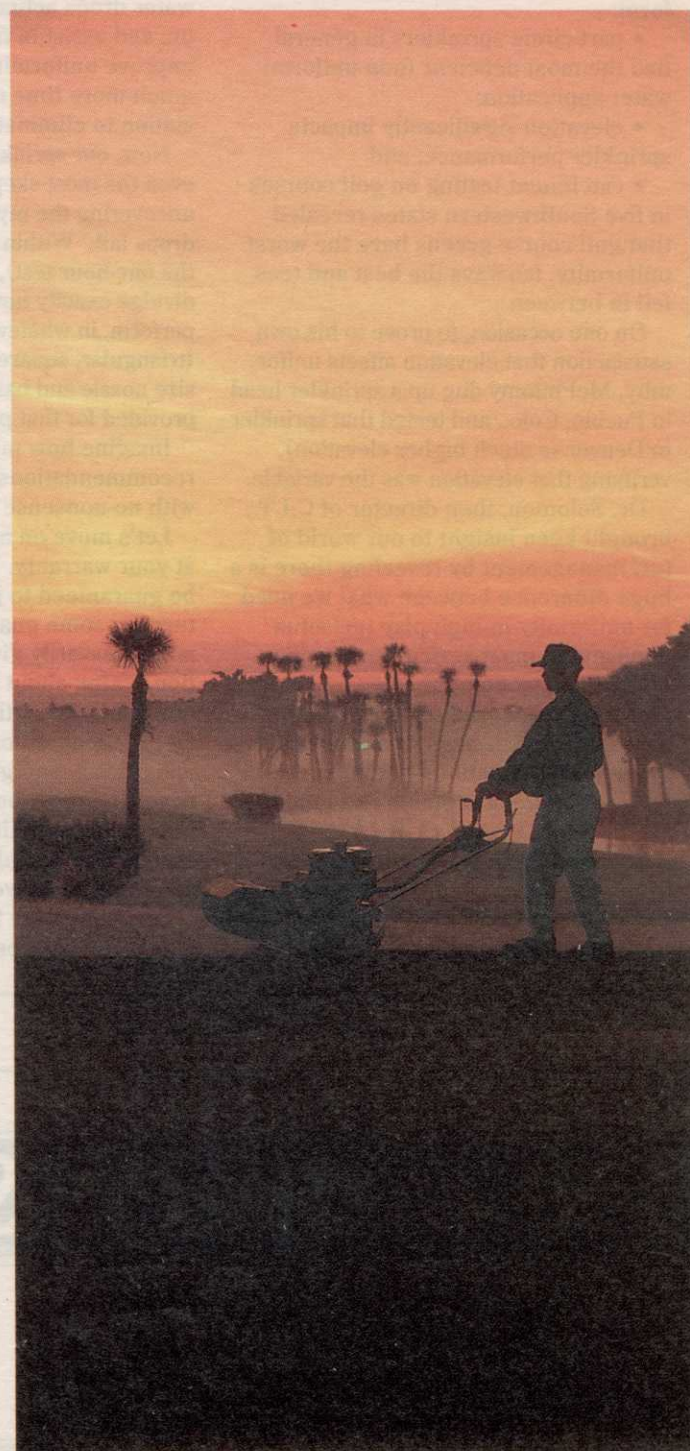


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