# Supers, managers speeding along the information highway

By J. BARRY MOTHES

So, exactly where are you on the information fairway? Dead center, 250 yards out and rolling along? Or stuck behind in the rough, lost and possibly out of play?

The use of computers by golf course superintendents for everything from irrigation systems and inventory to letters to greens committees is steadily on the rise. And several significant developments on the horizon have increased the chances for a stark and potentially crippling gap between those who use them and are comfortable with it, and those who don't, and aren't.

A 1995 survey by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) revealed that about 75 percent of its members now have computers in their offices, according to David Bishop, a technical information services manager for the GCSAA. The vast majority of those with computers had upper-end models with the windows environment.

Of the 365 superintendents who responded to the survey, the most extensive on computer use ever done by the association:

• 90 percent use computers for word processing.

• 60 percent use them for irrigation-related software.

• 50 percent use them for data-base management and record-keeping.

• 10 percent use them for education-related software.

"The percentages were not particularly surprising that many superintendents out there have access," Bishop said. "But we were surprised at the level of technology and the size of computers they have. Most are upper-end models. The level of technology out there is a little higher than we thought."

That's encouraging and relevant news to Bishop. He's working on developing a World Wide Web site for the GCSAA that will be available to GCSAA-member superintendents. A demonstration of an "on-line" prototype was on display at the International Golf Course Conference and Show in Orlando in February. Bishop said the GCSAA hopes to have an operational web site up and running by this summer.

Meanwhile, as Golf Course News reported last month, the U.S. Golf
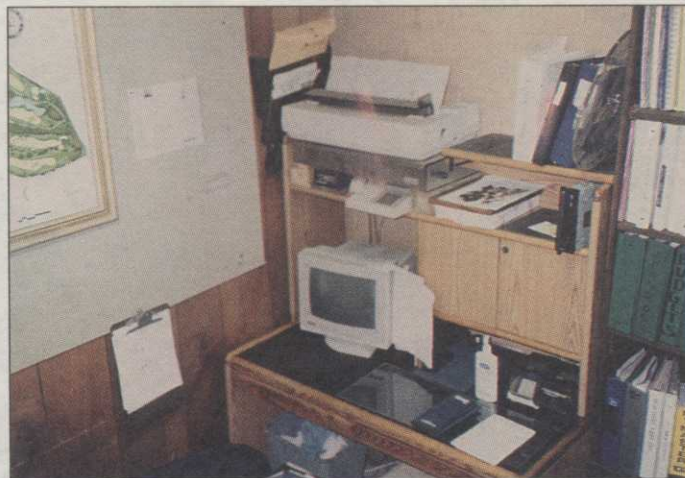
David Mahoney has used several innovations to fit all his needs into this small office.

# Updating your office with just two outlets and a phone line

By DAVID W. MAHONEY

Technology is great! Computers, faxes, printers, copiers, scanners, modems and slick answering devices are aiding and speeding communication. Fax me this, get a message, surf the Net and prepare a document for your next green committee meeting. All from your office. Sounds great! Go out, buy the equipment and good luck having it fit your office. Technology has overwhelmed the average superintendent's office.

While we're all waiting for the new maintenance facility and updated office, secretary-equipped, it's still nice to take advantage of today's wonders to improve our output, content and efficiency. Having a small cubicle to work from,
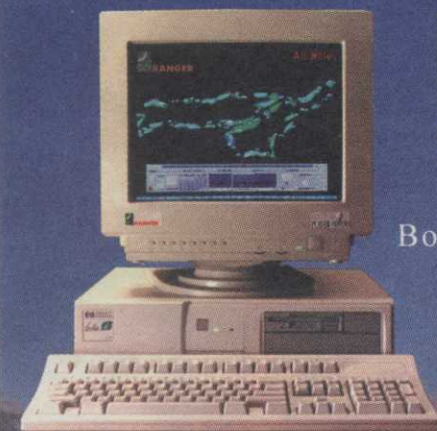
here are some tips on how I've made the most of what I have to take advantage of what's out there.

• Computer: My recommendation for anyone buying a computer is: Buy the version that was yesterday's best, a month ago. Technology changes so quickly, if you purchased the best available computer — let's say Pentium 90 with 16 MB of Ram memory — you'd pay $4,500. However, if you purchased just a wee bit less Pentium 75 with 8 MB Ram with expansion capabilities, you'd pay $2,400. Buy the almost-best. Don't sell yourself short on what you need. The computer game is a steeple chase: The hardware has more disc space, memory and speed; yet the software developers are right behind, filling up your new machine to the max. The greatest misstatement on this subject comes from Bill Gates himself, who said, "Ten MB of hard drive is more than anyone will ever need."
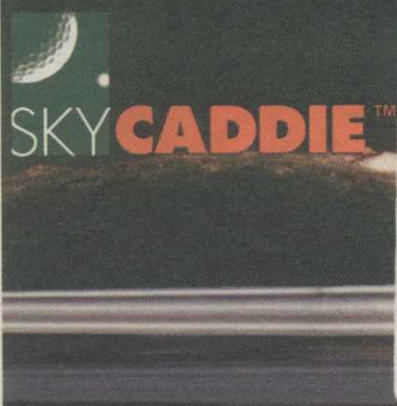
*A graduate of the Penn State Turfgass Program, David W. Mahoney has been property manager at Siwanoy Country Club in Bronxville, N.Y., since 1988.*

# In the market? Check needs vs. availability

By MARK LESLIE

One computer software system streamlines maintenance activities. Another fine-tunes the irrigation system. A third ensures the pump station operates at maximum efficiency. A fourth, equipment-oriented, is geared to mechanics. Yet another is a monitor hooked up to weather satellites, allowing the superintendent to get an up-to-the-moment look at weather conditions — anywhere in the country.

"We're on the brink of maybe becoming too technological," said certified golf course superintendent Kevin Ross of Country Club of the Rockies in Edwards, Colo. "It's a huge investment in time just to find out what software to buy. Maintenance is definitely more efficient today, but you barely scratch the surface of the potential of all the software programs."

Yet the area "barely scratched" touches all parts of the golf course operation — both maintenance and management.

At Country Club of the Rockies, for instance, Ross has five computers. Ross has one, his assistants another and his mechanic one. Another is dedicated to the irrigation system and an old model is destined for the common cafeteria, for the crew and handicap software. He also has a weather center and intends to add a pump station computer.

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"If 20 or 30 years ago somebody had said you're going to program your irrigation system with a computer in the office, people would have thought they were on drugs," Ross said. "Not only are we doing that, we're programming with hand-held radios. It's very difficult to keep up with the technology and do a dynamite job."

For superintendents in the market for software programs, Ross suggested:

1) Called all the companies and get demonstration discs.

2) Have the superintendent, assistants and mechanic run through those discs.

3) Do not compare any notes until everyone has looked at them. Then compare what each person liked and did not like about each program, deciding what best fits the course's needs.

4) Make sure technical support, which is crucial, is comprehensive. Most of the programs are windows-oriented, making them easy to use.

Is the decision to buy any of these software programs an easy one to make?

"The weather station is a no-brainer," Ross said. Otherwise, no.

But each golf course's needs are different, he said, so superintendents should decide what personally is best for them, not their colleague's.

## ProShot monitors, speeds play, increases income

By DONNA LEA HAWLEY

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — "We have three big issues," says Mike Moran, head golf professional at Haile Plantation Golf and Country Club here. "Providing amenities to our members, speeding up play, and monitoring where our carts are. Installing the ProShot system helps us with all three."

The ProShot system was installed at Haile Plantation in late 1995 and it was one of the first of 100 Club Corp. of America courses scheduled for this program. Installation included a survey of the golf course that mapped each fairway, green, bunker, and other major features, installation of a small satellite dish on the clubhouse, a computer in the pro shop, and a small antenna and display unit on each golf car.

ProShot was installed as an amenity for members at Haile. "We aren't concerned about recovering the cost from our members and haven't increased fees," Moran said. "I think if a course needed to recover the cost of installation, players would pay an additional dollar for green fees to play with it."

Moran finds that ProShot helps speed up plays. Before the system was installed, players used time to look for yardage markers on the sprinkler system; now they get an exact readout in the cart. Players no longer have to pace off a distance or take time guessing. If each player saves only five seconds per shot a foursome can save 30 minutes in playing time.

The club can also monitor slow play using ProShot. The computer monitor in the pro shop provides a number of displays including a map of the whole course showing the location of all the carts. "If we see a group of carts on the 6th hole, for example," said Moran, "we can call a ranger and ask him to go clear up the problem. We can also send a message that will appear only on one cart's display asking them to pick up their speed of play."

The club can also use the system to monitor its carts. If one goes into a restricted area, , a club employee can send a message to that cart to remind the player to stay on the cart path.

**CIRCLE #321**

## Small office, tall order

When you bring your computer home, and its attachment, printer, modem, you need to plug it in. (Make sure you purchase a computer with an internal modem; it avoids needing its own outlet.) First buy a quality surge protector, not an outlet strip. Estimated cost: $25. This will protect your computer equipment.

Also, check with your electrician to see if you can have a dedicated circuit breaker for all your computer equipment. There's nothing like having your arc welder on line with your office equipment.

• **Modem/Fax**: Most computers now have an internal fax/modem (cost: $150). You can send and receive faxes and log on with the modem to Turfbyte, Turftalk, Metbyte, TGIF, or even surf the Net. The nice feature about a computer fax and its software is multiple-faxing. Let's say you have created a report for the green committee. You want to fax it out to all eight members. With the software, you need only click the green committee directory and all members are sent the fax.

I generally use my computer fax for just that case. I feel the need to keep a conventional fax for so many "as is" documents that I need to fax.

• **Printer/fax copier**: Devices that so often were only at the clubhouse now should be in everyone's office because of new technology. Thanks to Hewlett Packard, one machine does it all. I own the Hewlett Packard "OfficeJet" ($599). It faxes, prints and makes copies. New versions can also scan. I'd recommend this machine for everyone because of its versatility and high quality.

• **Switching device**: With limited outlets, it's necessary to purchase a surge protector, protecting circuit breakers, and using outlet strips. Don't overload. What do you do with a phone line that needs to dial, fax or modem? I use a switching device from Comshare ($175). Your main phone line hooks into the device. Then the switching device determines — through the sending tone or lack of a sending tone — if an incoming call is a phone call, a fax or a modem wanting to access your computer. Buy the best switching device. I've been burned buying the $49 box which claimed it could do it all, yet did a "Patty Melt" on my desk on its first phone call.

As with purchasing any piece of equipment, determine your needs. There's a great deal out there that you can overpay for that won't meet your desires. Develop a relationship with your local computer store and use them as a resource. It took us awhile to figure out what to purchase and how to use it all. We now run two computers, a printer, two faxes, a modem, and a local computer bulletin board out of a small two-outlet office.