

# Taeger's forte: Organization, organization and more organization...

By ALTON PRYOR

LOMPOC, Calif. — In his three years as golf course superintendent at Village Country Club here Bob Taeger has organized his 10-man staff into a fine-tuned team. They measure their success by getting things done before members even know the task needs doing.

"One thing the crew has learned is that their standards are even higher than those of the members," Taeger said. "It's our golf course. If we work to our standards, we find we don't have any problem with our clientele. It makes our life easier. If we should let our standards fall lower than our clients', I don't think we would be here."

Taeger has set up a somewhat unique arrangement with his crew. He runs the crew like independent contractors. "I have one man from my staff assigned to the front side, and another to the back nine. They are considered the 'owners,'" he said. "Then, I have equipment operators, a rough man and a fairway man who are on their machines 40 hours a week."

Three other crew members are what he considers operators-operating triplex mowers and walk-behinds, doing the greens and trimming.

Taeger's front-side and back-side "owners" do all the work they can, but if they get behind and need help, they give the superintendent a work order.

All members of the crew—whether working or playing golf—are expected to be observant of the entire golf course, not just their work area.



Photo by Alton Pryor

Bob Taeger jokingly pantomimes the mistake he made when having all the ball washers refurbished at once, rather than only half of them.

This team concept not only works for Taeger, but pleases his crew, giving them a feeling of being needed, not used. "My crew has worked for me for three years now, and we have gotten really good," Taeger said.

His method of organizing his crew allows him to use them more efficiently, too.

"It enables me to use the best man for particular jobs. Instead of locking a man into a job he isn't suited for, I develop specialists," Taeger noted. "Some people can sit on a mower for eight hours each day and enjoy it, while others can't."

Village Country Club is the fourth golf facility at which the 33-year-old Taeger has worked since he was 15 years old, but his first test in the superintendent's position. "Up until I became a superintendent, I underestimated their positions," Taeger admitted. "There is a

complexity and wide range of responsibilities that I hadn't appreciated."

Taeger operates with an annual budget of about \$500,000. "I am totally in charge of that money and I take that as a big responsibility." From that total, some \$225,000 of it goes for labor and utilities. He is extremely cost-conscious about spending the balance.

Village Country Club contains virtually 100 percent kikuyugrass fairways and poa annua greens. "Five years ago," Taeger said, "kikuyu was considered nothing but a weed, and you could find more books on how to eradicate poa than you could on how to grow it. But we're getting our respect these days, even from well-known turf experts."

One beneficial aspect of maintaining kikuyu is its

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## Taeger places emphasis on 'organization'

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lower fertilizer requirement. The only reason Taeger ever fertilizes it is to get a darker green color. During the growing season, however, it needs steady mowing. While it grows very fast in the summer, it shuts down in the winter, and needs mowing only every two weeks or so.

"A lot of my salesmen don't understand why I'm not buying much fertilizer or why I don't need more reye grass seed," Taeger said. "But I have a real common-sense membership here, and as long as the playability is good, esthetics comes second."

It may be helpful that his membership's average age is 74. With kikuyugrass, the ball nearly always sits up high, much like on a tee. It is an ideal surface for those who don't take deep divots.

An initial problem with kikuyu was that it kept creeping into the greens, marring the putting surface. Taeger found that he can keep it limited to the collar of the green by using a broadleaf herbicide called Turflon. "We used to spend a lot of man-hours just pulling kikuyu from our greens," he said. "Now we apply a very small amount of Turflon in August, September and October, at 30-day intervals with a backpack sprayer, and it does the job for us."

It is the business aspect of the superintendent's job that Taeger had to learn when he took the job at Village Country Club. "I have an engineering committee,

a beautification committee, a greens committee, a board of directors, a general manager, my crew, and my membership. All of these people want to be educated on what I'm doing and why I'm doing it," he said.

He is still smarting from his most recent mistake. He decided to have all the ball washers refurbished. His mistake was in sending them all out at the same time, rather than on every other hole.

Taeger has also had to con-

tend with a bacteria problem in his deep well. Shortly before he took the job at Village Country Club, a new irrigation system had been installed. The sprinklers were replaced with sprinklers with smaller orifices. Algae, which flowed through the Rainbirds, kept clogging the new sprinklers.

It took three years to diagnose the problem. It was finally determined the cause was an iron-reduction bacteria in the well. This bacteria adhered to

the walls of the main irrigation line. During the warmer summer months, clumps of algae adhering to the bacteria would break off and plug the sprinklers.

Taeger first thought the problem was in his lakes. He tried using copper sulfate in the lakes without success. Finally, he learned that farmers in the area were having the same problem with their drip irrigation lines. He believes he can now effectively treat the problem by dripping chlorine into the well.

Taeger has also joined "Turfnet," a program on the internet. Turfnet is now prima-

rily an East Coast program. What he is finding through internet chats is a way of comparing prices for things he needs to purchase. He feels he can save hundreds of dollars through this comparison shopping.

"I can sometimes buy products in Florida cheaper than I can from Los Angeles, and the company picks up the shipping charges and there is no tax," he said.

While Taeger is young, he is obviously progressive, and has determined where his priorities lie, which makes for a satisfying arrangement with both his workers and his club membership.

## Toro backs 'Par for the Course'

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America has announced The Toro Co. has returned in 1996 as a supporting sponsor of the association's television show, "Par for the Course," which airs nationwide on ESPN.

"Par for the Course," which offers a look at the world of golf and its beauty, will return to ESPN for a second year in 1996. Twenty-five original, half-hour episodes will be produced this season. New episodes are airing each Sunday morning at 7:30 Eastern through Aug. 25.

As a supporting sponsor, Toro is receiving a logo billboard on "Par," which will appear after segments that highlight the playing fields of golf and include information about new course design and construction.

"Educating viewers about golf and the environment is a common goal of 'Par for the Course' and the Toro Co.," said Mike Anderson, director of marketing and service for Toro. "We are pleased to continue our partnership with GCSAA in presenting 'Par' and its entertaining and informative messages."

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