

Outsourcing grows, to supers' benefit

By ANDREW OVERBECK

Using outsourcing for various tasks is becoming increasingly attractive to superintendents and golf course operators across the country. Independent contractors can often out-perform the regular maintenance staff in specialized tasks like fertilizer applications and aerification or rela-

tively simple jobs like maintaining the clubhouse grounds. More and more superintendents are employing these services because it saves time, manpower and maintenance costs and provides access to specialized services and new technology that were previously out of reach.

"Outsourcing jobs means

there is one more headache that superintendents don't have to worry about," said Terry Buchen, president of Terry Buchen Golf Agronomy International, a consulting firm based in Williamsburg, Va. "They can make more use of their existing crew. For example, going to bulk fertilizer applications means that

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the crew doesn't have to spend time unloading bags and filling up spreaders or putting it out."

Outsourcing not only helps to streamline operations but it also helps keep capital expenses to a minimum. "Instead of paying \$10,000 to buy an aerifier, clubs are more than happy to budget \$2,000 a year to aerify the greens," said Buchen.

Time is money, according to Tim Anderson, superintendent at Prestwick Country Club in Frankfort, Ill.

"I could buy a Vertidrain and a Hydroject machine and over time and I may save money," said Anderson. "But the bottom line is that the contracting company can come out with three tractors and three Vertidrains and in one day get through the whole course. It would take me a whole week."

Matt Taylor, director of golf course operations at Bonita Bay East in Bonita Springs, Fla., also uses outsourcing to handle several tasks that were at one time eating away at his manpower hours. Taylor employs contract maintenance to handle fire ant bait, mosquito insecticide and fertilizer applications.

"It is cost-effective and the efficacy is improved," said Taylor. "We just started this year with the wall-to-wall fertilizer applications. When I first looked at it I was dead set against it, because I'm already paying for the labor and I've got a 160-gallon sprayer. But since the bulk fertilizer truck has 40-foot booms and greater capacity, it gets done twice as fast."

For these reasons, bulk fertilizer applications and other specialized services have become more popular.

Elwood, Ill.-based Tyler Enterprises, a manufacturer of custom-blended fertilizer, rolled out its first bulk fertilizer application truck this fall and has been overwhelmed by the response from area golf courses.

"We started the service in September and we are fully booked through the end of November," said Bill Davis, sales manager for Tyler Enterprises. "We are already ordering a second truck."

According to Davis, superintendents are getting into bulk fertilizer applications not only because it saves time but because it is more accurate. "We map the course in GPS as we apply, showing exactly how much has been applied and where," said Davis. "At the end we can give the superintendent a read-out of the course. It takes the hit and miss out of the way."

However, not everyone is that impressed with the with bulk fertilizer applications. The 40-foot throw of bulk application trucks is one limiting factor. "I have a lot of narrow fairways and wetlands areas that make using a truck with a 40-foot spread impractical," said Chuck Anfield, superintendent at Heritage Bluff Golf Club in Channahon, Ill.

Control over timing is another issue. "I can buy bulk fertilizer and store it myself," said Anfield. "I am old school. I want to be able to put it down right when I think it needs it. Using bulk application, you are locked into a date and have no flexibility." ▶



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