

An honorable profession

Out of the barn and into the "maintenance complex." Out of the era of horse-drawn equipment and into the era of cyber-hotlines, GPS systems and subsurface injection. Out of the era of widespread chemical applications and into the era of custom-made composts and biological controls, with an eye on wildlife, waterfowl and winged bug-eaters.

My, what a trip golf course superintendents have ridden these last 100 years of this last century of this third millennium.

The profession of golf course superintendent — soon to be called golf course manager, I predict — has long been an honorable one. As my friend John Ebel points out, God even made Adam the first "tender of the green." What higher appointment could you ask for?



Mark Leslie
editor

Now they have taken their work to a higher level. Superintendents have long worked the soil, the dunes, the land, the turf. They have cared for the waterways, the pathways and the skyways (read trees). They have put in an honest day's work and more — yes, usually more during playing season — welcoming in the sun and then ushering it out.

The fruits of their work has been that others may play. But today, the fruits of their work encompass so much more:

- Bird counts on golf courses have been shown to outnumber those in bird sanctuaries, for goodness sake.
- Runoff water carrying oils and chemicals from streets are now proven to be cleansed by turfgrass, so in some places (like Purdue University) courses actually are used to improve water quality.
- Study after study have shown that impact of modern golf course chemicals on runoff and leachate are so minuscule as to be harmless.
- In a time of urban sprawl, superintendents are maintaining 100 or 200 acres, perhaps more, of open green space that people so desire. In case after case we see course properties shared with hikers, bird watchers and equestrians. And from one corner of North America to the other, grounds crews are planting native vegetation, installing birdhouses, doing myriad tasks to enhance their properties as habitat for wildlife of all sorts.
- And all the while, superintendent chapters around the country are supporting, with their money and labor, research projects to even better do their jobs in an environmentally superior manner.

Superintendents' contributions today far surpass what the public, perhaps even the golfing public, know. From their environmental work with school children to their scholarship aid to their support of youth programs, they are proving an honorable profession. And to the golf course operator, I ask this question: Who is the most important employee on your payroll?

The expertise with which the superintendent maintains the course usually determines whether golfers will return to play again. The future economic, as well as environmental, well-being of a golf course is, to a large extent, in the hands of that superintendent.

In North America we've come a long way. Superintendents are most often considered part of a vital golf course triumvirate along with the general manager and head professional. I just spoke with two superintendents who are also the general managers of their clubs — one private and the other daily-fee. The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, the chapters themselves, and the U.S. Golf Association Green Section can take a bow for gaining this recognition.

And our superintendents need only look across the Big Pond to see how far they have come. At some European courses, the greenkeepers are not even allowed into the clubhouse.

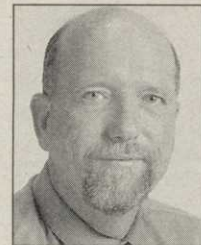
As Audubon International President Ron Dodson told me: "There are some really topnotch superintendents in Europe who are doing great work. But in other places, the greenkeepers are still relegated to the barn with Bill Murray," the slobby groundskeeper in the movie "Caddyshack."

Yes, in America at least, superintendents are hailed as members of an honorable profession and as key figures in the most honorable game.

Future bright for management

Score \$300 million from a lender and you've got to be feeling pretty good about your industry in general and your company in particular heading into the new millennium.

Gerry Smith, ClubCorp's executive vice president of marketing and communications, was still on a financial high shortly after The Cypress Group's recent \$300 million commitment in private equity capital to fund future growth of the Dallas-based multi-course operator (see story page 1). Smith's confidence heading into the third millennium echoes that of many who see consolidation as the wave of the future in the golf course industry.



Peter Blais
managing editor

"A handful of companies will continue to grow and emerge as the industry leaders," he predicted. "We believe we are among those, certainly in the private club and resort business. The market, from our perspective, seems to have swung more to an acquisition-oriented market rather than a to-be-built market. That should be obvious from the Cobblestone deal."

ClubCorp, which operates roughly 200 golf courses, and fellow management company giant American Golf Corp. (AGC), formed a joint venture earlier this year to purchase Cobblestone Golf Group's 45 courses for \$393 million. Not only are management firms gaining that sort of financial clout, they are also gaining experience. The perception is that management companies are a relatively new concept. But AGC has been around for more than 30 years and ClubCorp more than 40.

"We understand this business, what it takes to have a successful property," Smith said. "When we look at an acquisition, we can look at it through 42 years of experience, and make an investment that will give us the returns we are looking for. That's the key."

ClubCorp made its mark in the private course arena. But with the shift toward public golf, the firm has adapted to the times. The company currently owns 25 public-access courses, making it one of the largest operators of public facilities in the country.

"Understanding the membership component and having the ability to deliver what members expect has been a key to our success," Smith said. "We try to apply that philosophy to our public-access courses and resorts. We have an internal saying: 'We would like to treat every guest at our resorts as if they were a member of a private club.' We have the same culture serving all our customers, whether they be members, resort guests or daily-fee players."

While acknowledging that individual owners and private club members will likely continue to operate most of the courses in the United States into the next century, Smith predicted the percentage of management company-operated facilities will continue to grow.

"We bring advantages in purchasing power, systems, processes, agronomy, food and beverage, membership, research," he said. He is equally confident about the future of golf.

"This as an extraordinarily attractive sport, both from an individual and a corporate standpoint," Smith said. "It's difficult to find another sport that offers as much as golf when it comes to corporate entertainment, networking and socializing. It will continue to grow."

When it comes to environmental commitment, sometimes it's never enough

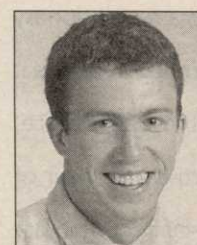
In the past year, the golf course industry has continued to make great strides to lessen its impact on the environment. From new classes of low-rate chemicals to innovative new techniques and technologies and ground-breaking pacts, the industry is becoming increasingly environmentally friendly.

Back in March, fertilizer manufacturer, Griffin Industries, joined more than 200 golf courses and became the first company to sign on to the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary System. Griffin's 20-odd properties and

thousands of acres across the United States are a part of the program.

Eco Soil and Chubb Insurance also penned a unprecedented agreement in March that gave courses using the BioJect biological distribution system a reduced insurance rate. The deal gave Eco Soil customers using Chubb insurance expanded environmental liability and property coverage because they identified courses using biologicals as a lower financial risk. Chubb, in turn, protects the club, its owners, officers and directors from environmental claims.

New chemistry that reduces the amount of pesticides, chemicals and fungicides used on courses has also come to the forefront in 1999. For example, Novartis introduced Compass fungicide that utilizes a mesostemic mode of action and can be applied at a greatly reduced rate of .15 ounces per 1,000 square feet.



Andrew Overbeck
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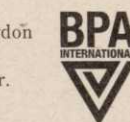
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