

Unseasonably warm weather good for revenue but battles spring course prep

BY ANDREW OVERBECK

While golfers from Maine to Michigan were enjoying the warm, Indian summer conditions that extended the playing season, superintendents were busy getting prepared for the inevitable cold wind, ice and snow of winter.

The basics of the process are the same for most courses: blowing out the irrigation system, putting down the greens covers, applying snow mold fungicide, dormant seed and potassium-based fertilizers, top dressing tees and greens to combat desiccation and doing a general course clean up.

While the extent to which these basics are followed varies from course to course, most superintendents are praying for what Terry Buchen, principal of Terry Buchen Golf Agronomy International, calls the ultimate winter conditions. "If the ground is completely frozen and you get a good snow cover on top that stays there all winter — that's the kind of weather you want."

But Joseph Baidy, superintendent of the Turning Stone Casino Resort in upper New York state, realizes that he probably won't get those conditions, and with young greens he isn't taking any chances.

"We've top dressed the greens three times to protect the crowns from desiccation, we've put down three applications of potash, and two applications of snow mold." And although he's tested out his green-side drainage, he'll be checking up for ice all winter. "We'll take the covers off and check whenever possible. If we have ice we'll have to get in there with Milorganite, coal, even do some verticutting backwards to get the ice off and get air to the turf," said Baidy.

But while he is preparing for the cold, Baidy admits that he has been walking a fine line by taking full advantage of the warm fall weather that is helping the new turf take hold. "You don't want to let it get too lush, but at the same time you want to grow it," said Baidy.

Over in Massachusetts, Stephen Cadenelli, superintendent at Cape Cod National Golf Club, is proceeding a little

differently. Winter on the Cape is not typically as severe, but cold weather is still a threat. "We have to be more concerned with pink snow mold out here, which can put a lot of pressure on the turf and cause it to be a little slower to recover in the spring," said Cadenelli.

This year, Cape Cod National will also be top dressing from tee to green. "We need to watch for desiccation on the tees and greens, but our primary goal for doing the fairways this year is to help build up the root zone and control the thatch," said Cadenelli.

And according to Cadenelli, the warm temperatures have been an advantage, giving his crew more time to get maintenance projects done. "We are doing stuff now that we usually wait until spring to do."

The seasons usually change more dramatically for Gerald Faubel, superintendent of Saginaw Country Club in northern Michigan. "We get a good snow cover up here, so we don't cover

the greens, and desiccation really isn't too much of a problem since the trees block most of the wind."

But warm weather have presented Faubel with a new set of challenges. Crews have had to continue watering the course due to unusually dry weather and winter preparations have been delayed. "We normally start putting down applications of snow mold fungicide in early October once the fall rains come. This year we have had to push that back and we are now combining applications in order to get everything down," said Faubel.

Al Pondell, the superintendent of Deerfield Country Club in suburban Chi-

cago has had similar warm weather difficulties. He'll likely have to make additional applications of snow mold fungicide as the winter progresses, but chalks

it up to the dual responsibilities of the job. "You know, you put down the snow mold, and you'd rather not get a lot of play, but the fact being that's the way revenues are, and at this time of year if you are able to get guys out playing golf that's what you want."

With above average winters predicted for the Midwest and New England this year, the cold weather will eventually set in and superintendents will have to be prepared. "We are going to pay for this warm weather later," warned Buchen.

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Willowbrook Golf Course makes hay in the snow

By MICHAEL LEVANS

BELLE VERNON, Pa. — When the skies turn gray and frosty mornings put an end to the season's rounds, Tim Stawovy is ready to kick Willowbrook Golf Course into high gear.

Stawovy needs three to four days of transition time and Willowbrook transforms from a 9-hole golf course averaging 40,000 rounds a year to a down-hill ski area attracting 24,000 skiers a season.

"Our mainstay is golf," said Stawovy, part owner of Willowbrook, "but skiing helps out significantly with the year's bottom line."

Using parts of two hillside fairways, Stawovy and his crew are able to create two slopes — a junior slope of 600 feet and a main run that measures 1,400 feet. "Not very big, but a great place to start out," he said.

The key to the quick conversion, said Stawovy, is pre-installed equipment that

is up year-round but out of the way of the golfers and easily accessible once the snow starts to fly.

"We have snowmaking pipes buried in the ground so they're out of sight, but we've designed a way to slide the rest of the snowmaking equipment, like guns, into the ground and into place for the season fairly easily," said Stawovy.

The structures of the three lifts — rope, poma and J-bar — have been constructed so they're out of play, and stay up the entire year. Stawovy simply takes the seats off the lifts when spring comes around.

"Cosmetically it looks like a golf course in the summer and a ski slope in the winter. It's a pretty slick conversion," he said.

The change-up doesn't end on the grounds. The clubhouse features a fake wall that hides the golf course's stock of ski boots. "We put all the boats on the shelves and as soon as spring comes we cover it with paneling so it looks like a wall. The

skis go out in a room on the porch."

Stawovy started tinkering with the idea of the ski conversion back in 1970 as a way to supplement the course's income. Being less than one hour away from Seven Springs and Hidden Valley, two of Western Pennsylvania's premier ski resorts, Stawovy thought he could fill the niche of a small, beginner's slope to prepare skiers for the bigger hills.

The terrain, climate and location seemed agreeable, he just needed a way to get skiers to the top.

"We bought an eight horse-power commercial rope-tow, but we found out that it could only handle six or seven people at a time," he said. "We found a local guy to build one out of the rear end of an International milk truck. That one could handle as many as we could put on it."

With the new lift, skiers, mainly beginners, took advantage of the \$4 lift ticket and go their turns in shape.

"In 1975 we took the next step. We realized that to have good skiing in the East you need snowmaking," said Stawovy, who bought his first snowmaker, an air/water type gun, from Seven Springs, in nearby Champion, Pa. "We ended up sticking with the guns and compressors since you can make snow at higher temperatures. But for the most part, coverage is pretty easy to maintain. We're skiing on grass, so if we get six inches we can do it, there are no rocks or tree roots the snow has to cover."

Stawovy's future plans include moving the operation to the north side of property to increase the length of its season. "We're one of three slopes that face south. One is in Vermont and the third one is out of business," he said. "When you face South you get direct sun in the morning and as soon as you turn the snow makers off the snow melts. That doesn't help the cause."