



Hibernation is out of the question for Snow Belt supers

By ANDREW OVERBECK

While the days are shorter and the temperatures colder, there is no shortage of golf course and non-golf course tasks to keep Snow Belt superintendents busy throughout the winter.

One look at the organizational chart that superintendent Stephen Maas uses to keep his winter jobs prioritized at the Valley Club in Sun Valley, Idaho, illustrates just how much work is left to do as the snow falls. "I use a timeline to outline the projects that need to get done before spring," he said.

From the usual indoor work such as repainting tee markers and servicing equipment to outdoor tasks such as monitoring snow depth and ice layers, Maas has

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— Michael Bavier

his hands full.

Maas also performs additional duties for club members during the winter time. At Christmas-time, Maas and his crew assist in the hanging of lights and decorations and one year even built an ice rink.

In addition to spending countless hours plowing snow and fixing equipment, Michael Bavier at Inverness Golf Club in Palatine, Ill., finds the time to spread the holiday cheer. "We collect all the trees that we have cut down over the year and deliver the firewood to the members," he said. "It keeps them happy and my crew busy."

Each year, Maas is also in charge of maintaining an outdoor platform tennis court. The sport is played in the winter in sub-freezing temperatures and is popular with hardy club members. "It is kind of a cross between ping-pong and tennis," said Maas. "It is a wooden court that is lit up and surrounded by a cage. The floor is heated and we are in charge of keeping the place clean and turning on the heaters."

Maas has also been involved in interesting agronomic projects during the winter. The Valley Club, which is located at 5,500 feet elevation, planted more than 9,000 pine trees on the property. During their first winter, Maas had to keep the reflecting sun from damaging and burning the young trees. "We had to go out and put down Milorganite on the south and southwest side of the trees in order to minimize the reflection," he said.

This winter, however, Maas plans to take it a little easier. Unless of course he actually goes forward with his idea of using a snow groomer to erect a physical barrier around the perimeter of the course to keep out the voles that burrow down into the turf during the winter.

"One year we tried it with skis, last year we used a snowmobile and this year we may just try the SnowCat. We'll see," said Maas.

Rye/Bermudagrass transition

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west, is remembered by Southwestern superintendents in a much different light. A mild summer left warm-season grasses lagging behind. By September, as time arrived for the beginning of overseeding preparations, Bermuda fairways had gained precious little ground during the summer's mild temperatures.

As soon as perennial ryegrass began to be delivered, temperatures soared. Clubs and courses forced into early overseeding by hopes of pre-season golf in the stripes of ryegrass suddenly found themselves dropping cool-season seed and turning on water in perfect warm-season weather. The struggle to establish quality playing conditions will continue into much of the winter.

How does this affect conversion back to Bermuda?

"We'll probably have a really good transition," said Jim Janosik, a certified superintendent at LaQuinta (Calif.) Resort and Club. Janosik oversees the 36 holes inclusive of the Mountain and Dunes courses. While having a good transition is a good goal, Janosik, like all Southwestern superintendents, knows that he also needs a good crop of ryegrass for a good winter.

Shoemaker, a veteran of two Phoenix Opens while at the TPC of Scottsdale, explained: "Dense, lush ryegrass means for little Bermuda underneath at transition, but the better the ryegrass coverage the better it looks to everyone, so you have to walk a balance."

DESERT SUPERINTENDENTS

The Southwestern desert superintendent must actively manage transition by steering into the skid as soil temperatures rise in the spring. This means not shutting off the water to rid the course of ryegrass. The perennial rye actually hardens off a good deal and gets stubborn when dry. At the same time, Bermudagrass that is just beginning to wake up needs soil moisture, so shutting off the water can sometimes lead to undesired effects.

Shoemaker likes to aerify and gives a tip: "Early aerification makes a big, big difference." He also believes that seeding rates kept around 500 pounds per acre, rather than the 700-pound rate, can provide a good winter ryegrass crop while helping in the spring with decreased competition during transition.

"I also like to get down on height of cut early and be less than .400 inch in early May on fairways," said Shoemaker. By taking as much shade off the Bermuda as possible, this technique helps a smoother conversion.

"We'll be as low as we can possibly go, in the .300-inch

range," agreed Janosik.

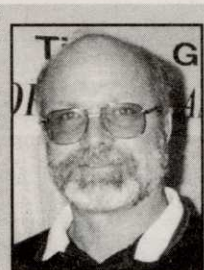
Southwestern superintendents who actively manage their spring transition by careful overseeding preparation, active weather watching, solid irrigation management and cultural practices timed to encourage warm-season grass development can become masters of conversion.

Many have found that each year brings a new and different set of circumstances that need to be counted as determining factors. Having great fairways for almost 12 months is not the result of just sitting back and watching the weather change. †

Dave Wilber is owner of Wilber Turf and Soil Services, an independent soil and agronomy consulting company. He services clubs and courses in the United States, the Caribbean and Scotland.



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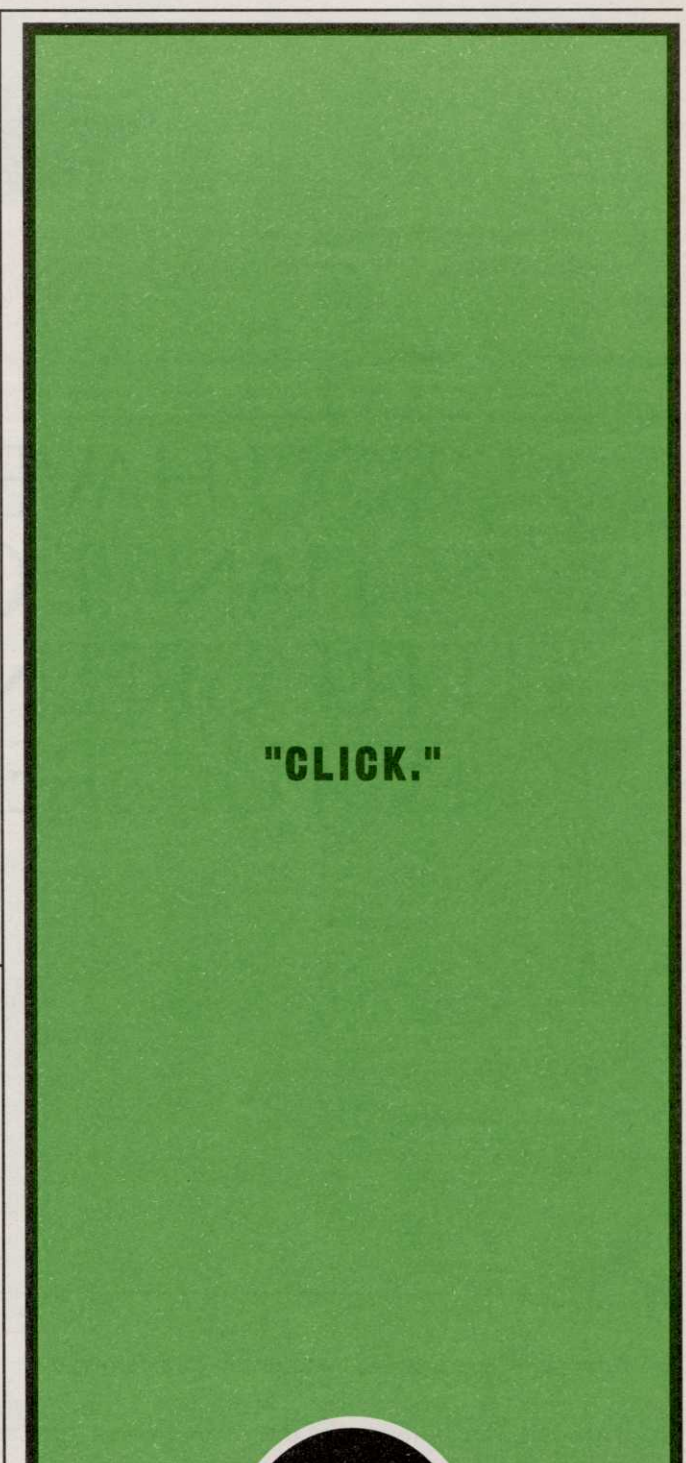
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