

Superintendents must shoulder the weight of golf's financial challenges

If you believe the hype, a revenue-sapping contagion descended on golf courses across the country in 2001, leaving decimated levels of play, memberships and budgets in its gruesome wake. Sounds like the end of the golf industry, doesn't it?



Andrew Overbeck, editor

the same or more on turf equipment in 2002 as they did in 2001, while only 28 percent said they plan on spending less.

The last five years have produced a glut of new layouts and created fierce competition among existing courses. Therefore, cutting back on course maintenance is, and

agement Group. "A well-conditioned golf course may be your only competitive advantage. It is the last place we will cut back."

Looking behind the numbers also shows that many superintendents are spending more money this year because they held off on purchases in 2001.

One superintendent, who wished to remain anonymous, outlined the challenges that have faced his course. "We have allo-

economy, we have had some tough operating budget decisions to make for the upcoming season," he said. "We have gone without needed equipment, causing deterioration in our ability to provide acceptable playing conditions."

While a healthy majority of

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superintendents realize that cutting back the equipment budget is the equivalent of asking golfers not to play their courses, a significant number of respondents said they will be performing under adverse conditions this year.

Even those budgets that will remain the same or increase slightly will be stretched to the limit. "My budget is somewhat more than it was in 2001," said Tracey Holliday, superintendent at Sterling Farms GC in Stamford, Conn. "But I will still be trying to purchase equipment prudently by buying used or "demo" equipment." (For more budget hints, read Raymond Davies' column below)

Will financially strapped clubs continue to maintain proper course conditioning? My bet is that superintendents facing revenue shortfalls will find a way to keep courses in good shape - if they don't, the golfers can and will play elsewhere.

Sure, 2001 was not a great year. The economy is in recession, terrorist attacks briefly stunted travel and slowed golf rounds, and most of the country had less-than-ideal golf weather at some point during the year.

Some courses had seasons that were so bad in 2001, that they had little choice but to slash budgets. One superintendent blamed the events of Sept. 11 and corporate layoffs for his club's financial woes. "We lost 30 members and my equipment budget is more or less gone," he said. "I was forced to layoff half of my crew."

However, the results of GCN's News Poll (see page 3), suggest that a majority of courses are striving to make the most out of the revenues they brought in last year. Seventy-two percent of the respondents said they plan on spending

should be, the last option. "Our budget is slightly more than last year," said Steve Adams, president of Adams Man-

aged slightly more money this year despite the fact that rounds and spending were down last year. With the troubled



GUEST COMMENTARY

'Managing up' is the key to increasing influence

By RAYMOND DAVIES

Superintendents handle tremendous responsibility, make decisions easily, and deal with multiple problems quickly and effectively. Despite the fact that today's professional superintendent takes strong control over their department, many feel they have no power or influence over upper management.

Superintendents spend a lot of time complaining about the green committee chairman who expects the impossible, the director of golf who just called to say he has a big tournament on Monday, the board that will not approve the purchase of desperately needed equipment, and the golfers who expect pristine conditions. Statements such as "don't get involved in club politics," and "I don't know why they won't replace this ancient irrigation system," typify this mind set.

What would happen to this great profession if more superintendents exercised appropriate influence on the decision-making processes that affects their ability to perform?

The task of influencing the decisions made by our superiors is commonly referred to as "managing up." Managing up means you are no longer a victim and are taking action.

A BUDGET IS THE COST OF A PLAN

Many superintendents do not like to plan out maintenance activities, but they lose the opportunity to influence the expectations of the owners by not tying the actions they intend to take with the resources they are requesting. Successful superinten-



Raymond Davies

dents are those who consistently acquire the resources needed to meet those expectations.

Communicating the difference between a budget and expected turf conditions is a core task. Essentially, the budget is the cost of a plan. Following this principle, the business will determine the turf conditions necessary to meet golfer demands and the green fee that will be charged. The superintendent is then tasked with the development of the best possible maintenance plan that will create those specified conditions. The cost of the maintenance plan becomes the budget proposal.

If the budget must be reduced to make the business profitable, the management plan is reduced in a comparable manner. For example, if you cannot afford to mow fairways five times a week and have to cut the budget, the owners are told in advance that the fairways will instead be mowed three times per week. If they must have the higher mowing frequency, then the budget for mowing fairways must be supported and other maintenance activities can be investigated for potential reductions. But the boss can no longer have it both ways.

GROUND YOUR ASSESSMENTS

A key skill used to successfully communicate our views to management is called "grounding your assessments". In the simplest terms, this means backing up recommendations or views with evidence that supports them effectively.

These can be facts or other information that are consistent with the assertion we are making. Most people speak in general terms that are hard to interpret. Asking for a new tractor because

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