



Limited flexibility

SMALL BUDGETS FORCE SUPERINTENDENTS TO BE MORE CREATIVE AND APPROACH MAINTENANCE DIFFERENTLY

by
**JOHN
WALSH**

A dollar saved is a dollar earned, right? Well, golf course superintendents with small budgets are trying to earn thousands of dollars. They're reducing expenses in areas of their budget – equipment, labor, pesticides, fertilizer and water – without negatively affecting course conditions too much.

For Pat Blum, golf course superintendent at the nine-hole, semiprivate Colonial Acres Golf Course in Glenmont, N.Y., the environment is the driving force behind

his budget. Last year, he spent \$61,399, including labor, maintaining the course, which has been certified by Audubon International and is part of the Environmental Protection Agency's National Environmental Performance Track.

"We're the only golf course in U.S. history to be accepted into any EPA program," Blum says.

As part of the Performance Track program, Blum set three goals to reduce outputs – such as waste, volatile organic compound emissions and synthetic pesticides – and is trying to meet those reduction goals in three years.

Blum's first goal is to reduce the total amount of waste produced by the maintenance staff, which used to produce 3,000 pounds of waste annually. Blum wants to reduce that to 2,100 pounds. Currently, the staff is producing 2,500 pounds and has done so by recycling, using more plastic containers and reducing the amount of paper waste.

Blum's second goal is to reduce the amount of synthetic pesticides used to 1,000 pounds a year. In 2004, Blum and his staff used only 438 pounds. In 2005, they used a little more than 1,000 pounds because they were part of a regular-pesticide-use study.

Blum's third goal is to reduce the energy used in the pump house to 1,000 kilowatts a year, and currently is within 50 kilowatts of that goal. To reduce usage further, the pond aerator will run one hour less a day.



Photo: Colonial Acres Golf Course

Last year, Pat Blum spent just \$61,399 maintaining the nine-hole Colonial Acres Golf Course.



**Install Confidence.[®]
Install Rain Bird[®]
EAGLE[®] 705/755
Wind Tolerant Rotors.**



Find out why consistently windy conditions are no longer a golf course irrigation challenge.

Visit www.rainbird.com/windsolution.



Go to: www.golfcoursenews.com/readerservice - select #21



Photo: Gary Gold

Pat Blum's environmental efforts have saved money.

"When we first started the environmental goals, a lot of people said that it couldn't be done, which motivated me even more," Blum says. "It's a snowball effect. You start saving in one area, and that leads to savings in another. Colonial Acres is a course where I found a way to make it happen. Other courses can do it, too, understanding that soil profiles and energy capacities are different."

The savings from Blum's environmental efforts have kept the course in business. In the spring, play declined partly because of weather and fuel prices.

"We would be out of business right now if we were spending what we did in 1998," he says.

Selling the idea of a more environmentally sound course to Colonial Acres' 20 stockholders wasn't difficult, according to Blum.

"I needed to get this place environmentally sound and wanted to do it for my daughter, and that was my pitch to the

owners," he says. "They all have grandkids, so it was an easy decision for them."

Not so well equipped

Aside from savings through sound environmental practices, superintendents can stay within a tight budget by using equipment wisely. Because The Willows at Kenton County in Independence, Ky., is part of the 54-hole Kenton Golf Course, its staff shares maintenance equipment, such as tractors, aerifiers, topdressers and sprayers, with the other two courses that comprise the facility. Sharing equipment that isn't used daily results in noticeable savings, according to Teron Bay, CGCS, at The Willows. He estimates sharing equipment saves each course \$200,000 a year.

Bay and his staff also make due with old equipment.

"The general thought is that equipment should be turned over every five or six years," he says. "We have tee and greens mowers that are in the 15- to 20-year-old

range. We also have to adjust our expectations because this old equipment doesn't work as well as newer mowers or give as fine a result."

Bay says he and his staff have a "beg, borrow and steal" mentality because they have to use every possible resource available to the facility.

"We borrow a lot of equipment from neighboring courses, as well as letting them borrow equipment from us," he says. "We also have to find treasure in what others would see as junk. We're able to rebuild and even build equipment and attachments from scratch."

At the nine-hole Signal Point Golf Course in Fort Benton, Mont., golf course superintendent Cameron Tuss hasn't purchased new equipment in five years. Tuss says he has the basics but doesn't have what he calls luxury equipment, such as a fairway aerifier, leaf blower or debris sweeper.

The equipment Tuss uses forces him to do things differently. When greens are top-

"TURN BACK THE HANDS OF TIME"

Are your bunkers suffering from the adverse effects of time? Are rocks, silts, and clays beginning to build up causing your bunkers to look, function, and play like concrete?



Courses all over the world rely on the Sand Storm by ZScreen LLC for all their bunker maintenance needs. The Sand Storm cleans and "recycles" your sand right in the bunker, saving you time and money. Say good-bye to the short term repair method of "removing and replacing" your bunker sand, and say hello to a more cost effective, long-term solution.



ph: 623-581-0307

www.zscreen.com

info@zscreen.com

Go to: www.golfcoursenews.com/readerservice - select #22

dressed after they've been aerified, he has to drive around in a truck filled with sand because the topdresser is so small.

Mark Copley, golf course superintendent at the 18-hole Ontario (Ore.) Golf Course, uses older equipment, too. His greens, grounds and rough mowers are 5 years old and the fairway mowers are 9 years old. Although older, Copley says the equipment runs well, thanks to the mechanic who keeps them in great shape. Yet even though the equipment is working well, Copley fears the fleet could go down all at once. Currently, he's working with the green committee to create a capital expenditure budget.

At Colonial Acres, Blum is saving money on equipment, mainly through wear and tear and fuel, because he's maintaining less turf. He hasn't bought a new piece of machinery in three years.

Short handed

Labor is the biggest part of any maintenance budget, yet with smaller budgets, superintendent don't have many people to help them. The staff at The Willows includes three full-time workers other than Bay and three to five part-timers who work 24 hours a week from March 1 through Thanksgiving.

The staff at Ontario Golf Course consists of three people for grounds and two in the clubhouse – all are seasonal. Copley also

has a mechanic that works 20 hours a week for nine months.

Blum's staff consists of two full-time employees (one of which is Blum) and one part-time employee. He has no full-time mechanic.

Blum says the labor line item in his budget has leveled off since 1998 because the amount of maintained turf went from 22 acres in 1997 to 14 acres. Pond and native area expansion contributed to this reduction.

Along the same line, increasing no-mow areas has helped Bay.

"Over the past five years, we have let more than 100 acres of once mowed areas grow up as nature areas to save on equipment and man-hours," he says. "This saves us more than 40 man-hours a week."

Copley says that with a smaller budget, fuel prices hurt a course like his more than a bigger-budgeted course.

"Fuel prices are killing us," he says. "We used to spend 40 hours a week cutting the rough, and now were down to 30. I'm letting the native grass go, but the golfers aren't responding to it well."

Less input

Management of smaller-budgeted golf courses also has to spend money wisely when it comes to pesticides and fertilizers. Because The Willows is a municipal golf course, the county bids on the chemicals

used on all its courses.

"We get better pricing on the generic chemicals," Bay says. "The prices of [some name-brand] products are fixed no matter how much you buy."

Copley says he's able to make two full fertilizer applications that are nutrient specific.

"I'm lucky to get one-quarter of what should be put down," he says.

Thankfully, Copley says he doesn't have to use insecticides. He applies two broadleaf herbicides and uses plant growth regulators on the greens. He also uses fungicides for snow mold and anthracnose. Most of the fungicide use is preventive rather than curative.

With a small budget, Copley says the threshold for acceptance of course conditions is high among the golfers that play at Ontario.

"We struggle with weeds in the fairways, but golfers understand as long as they see us spraying," he says.

Since Copley arrived at Ontario, he trimmed unnecessary items from the budget based on soil tests. For example, he eliminated the broad use of wetting agents and focused on hot spots.

Last year, Blum spent \$4,800, reduced from \$9,800 eight years ago, on pesticides and fertilizers. During that time, there was a trial-and-error period switching from synthetic pesticides to organic ones.

Use sparingly

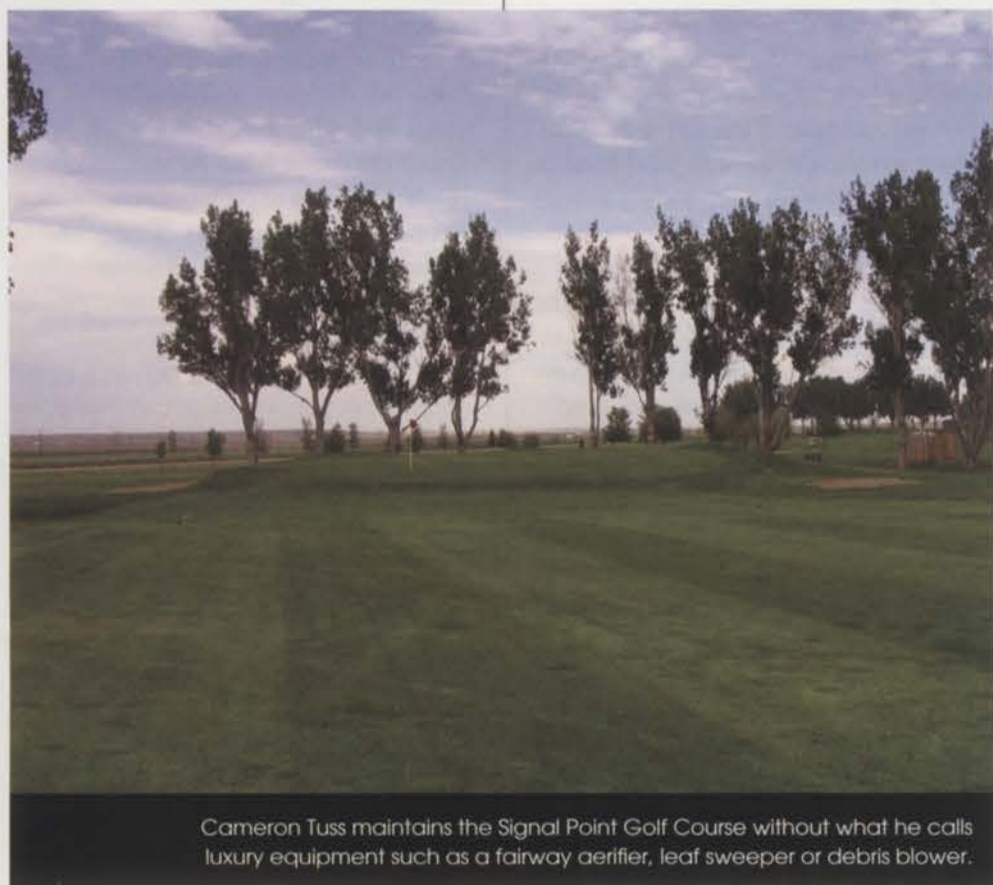
Water use is another area that needs to be managed carefully. Bay says he keeps the course pretty dry.

"We do a lot of hand watering, even on fairways and tees, to keep water use down at times," he says. "There's some brown grass at times, but we keep it at an acceptable level before we start to lose golfers."

The water used to irrigate Colonial Acres is 100 percent runoff, which is collected in a holding pond. Well water or city water isn't used. Blum says the tees, greens and fairways are irrigated, but the fairways don't get irrigated as much as the greens and tees.

Other examples of getting by on a small budget include making your own tee markers, directional signs and benches, which Bay and his staff do.

"We do a lot of recycling," he says. "We're pack rats. If anybody in the county is throwing something away, we'll take it." GCN



Cameron Tuss maintains the Signal Point Golf Course without what he calls luxury equipment such as a fairway aerifier, leaf sweeper or debris blower.

Photo: Signal Point Golf Course



Install Confidence®
Install Rain Bird®
EAGLE® Wireless Rotors.



Find out why it's no longer a challenge to add or supplement irrigation practically anywhere.

Visit www.rainbird.com/wireless.

RAIN BIRD

Go to: www.golfcoursenews.com/readerservice - select #23