

BY JOHN WALSH

# Mind as well

Superintendent convinces club board to buy mower package sooner than scheduled

Sometimes golf course superintendents get what they want sooner than they expect. Jeff Mann did.

Mann, golf course superintendent at the 18-hole Ulen Country Club in Lebanon, Ind., has been at Ulen for about seven months. Previously, he was an assistant golf course superintendent at Harbour Trees Golf Club in Noblesville, Ind.

The superintendent at Ulen before Mann signed a mower package in 2002, and the club verbally committed to a new mower package in 2007. However, Mann says he and the staff were having problems with the mowers, which would be costly to fix. For example,

there were some computer modules on the fairway units that needed repaired. Also, the blade reels on the fairway units needed to be replaced. Mann converted his fairways in September from ryegrass to creeping bentgrass and needed to increase the number of blades per reel on the fairway units.

"I took the board through it and said if we buy (in September 2006), it would be cheaper because the prices will go up in 2007," he says. "And, because I was going to be getting new fairway units and verticutters with the new package, it made sense to get the new package (in September) rather than buy new reels (in September) and new mowers this year."

The purchasing decision-making process

went something like this: The board asked Mann what he wanted, and Mann put together a wish list. Then the board gave Mann a dollar figure for the mowers that was lower than Mann's number. To compromise, the board asked Mann which mowers were not critical.

"We eventually came to an agreement," Mann says.

The board granted Mann permission to purchase two fewer pieces of equipment than he wanted.

Mann says the operators and his assistant also provided input before making the decision to purchase the mowers. Because the operators get to demo the equipment, they provide important feedback. And because Mann's assistant has been around for a while, Mann says he's seen a lot of equipment in his day, so he values his opinion.

Mann's mower fleet consists of:

- Four walking greensmowers (Toro);
- Three walking tee mowers (Toro);
- Two fairway units (Toro);
- Four triplex greensmowers (Toro);
- One trim mower (John Deere);
- One Sidewinder, a three deck rotary mower (Toro);
- Two ZTR rotary mowers (Toro); and
- One Lasteq, a seven-deck pull-behind mower.



Because the fairways at Ulen Country Club were converted from ryegrass to bentgrass, Jeff Mann needed to increase the number of blades per reel on fairway units. Photo: Jeff Mann





Jeff Mann prefers to lease more of the cutting units he and his staff use rather than purchase them; but the board at the Ulen Country Club preferred to purchase mowing equipment all at once. Photo: Jeff Mann

The older units in the fleet are the two ZTRs, the three triplex mowers, the trim mower and the Lastec.

Purchasing cutting units is Mann's and the club's philosophy, yet Mann says he would prefer to lease more mowers.

"The board said it wanted to get new equipment all at once," he says. "But I don't like to run fairway units more than five years because you start seeing problems, especially on hydrostatic mowers. The board didn't discuss leasing with me. But it will be interesting to see what ownership sells because some of the mowers are getting to the end of the line. If you lease, it takes the selling aspect out of it."

Mann says the board knows it will be getting hit with the cost for new fairways units in five years.

"The members understand the importance of maintaining a newer fleet," he says.

The longevity of walking greensmowers is different than fairway units. Mann replaces the reels after three or four years, but the greensmowers as a whole will last seven to eight years.

Mann, whose maintenance budget is

\$582,000, says he would prefer to lease fairway mowers and trim mowers instead of purchasing them. However, he says it's possible the club will lease more equipment in the future based on his reasoning.

"If I get into a leasing program, we know we're rolling into new equipment," he says.

#### RELATIONSHIPS

Aside from the decision to purchase mowers instead of lease them, Mann says he decided



to buy from Toro because he had a lot more experience with Toro than with Jacobsen and John Deere.

"Jacobsen hasn't been able to establish a good relationship in this area," he says. "We've had a hard time getting parts."

Before Mann arrived at Ulen, which has 300 members, he says the club was using John Deere equipment.

"The other companies didn't impress me as much as Toro," he says. "Toro's service is excellent. It came down to price. Toro gave me the best deal, and the financial stability of the club enabled me to get the package I got. However, I went into the decision-making process with an open mind. Next time I need to purchase or lease equipment, I'll look at any company in this area. Customer service, the ability to get parts, and what I'm going to get after the sale are more important than price." **GCI**

Jeff Mann says greensmowers as a whole will last seven or eight years, however, he replaces the reels after three or four years. Photo: Jeff Mann