

BY MARISA PALMIERI

Weather watcher

A Web-based monitoring system serves the maintenance staff at Evanston Golf Club well

It's a bright, sunny morning in Skokie, Ill., one of the first days of fall. The maintenance staff at Evanston Golf Club has plans to seed part of the facility's nursery, but before superintendent Dan Charlton gives the go-ahead, he has to check the weather.

With seed prices rising along with everything else, Charlton's not going to OK preparations for an early afternoon seeding project if there's a chance of rain showers.

Charlton logs on to his Web-based weather-monitoring system, runs the radar and, sure enough, there's a storm coming in from Milwaukee.

"We need it to be dry so all the seed doesn't wash away," he says. "So I'll monitor this storm, and if it's going to come in, we'll find other things to do today."

There are a number of reasons Charlton swears by his weather-monitoring system, but the efficiency it creates in terms of scheduling is the No. 1 benefit to him.

"It's a great scheduling tool," he says. "Not only with our daily routines, but also with the forecast throughout the week. If it's predicting rain two or three days from now, we'll mow or fertilize before that."

Ultimately, a well-scheduled maintenance crew saves money in terms of labor, Charlton says. But savings don't stop at labor costs. Like in the nursery seeding instance, accurate weather-monitoring systems can pay for themselves in terms of materials, too.

"All it takes is part of an application to get washed away because you were unaware of a weather system coming in," he says. "Preventing that could pay for the weather-monitoring system for an entire year."

Evanston Golf Club uses the online version of DTN/Meteorlogix's WeatherSentry Turf Edition, the subscription for which Charlton estimates is \$95 a month. Before

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upgrading to the online version, the club had a stand-alone system, which required a monitor and an on-site satellite dish. Because Charlton wasn't working at Evanston when this unit was purchased, he's unsure about the initial hardware and set-up costs.

SHOPPING AROUND

Last year, when Charlton's subscription for the Meteorlogix system ended, he shopped around to see if he could find any free or cheaper services that provide similar results. Alternatives he considered included the National Weather Service, a free site called Intellicast and a local television station's weather page.

"I checked those out for about a month to see what I liked better," he says. "But I ended up renewing my subscription because I couldn't find anything that was better or equal for less."

At the time he renewed, Charlton also added the service's Lightning Manager feature. At first

he was hesitant to add the lightning-protection upgrade because the facility already has a Thor Guard lightning prediction and warning system. But now he's glad he did – the systems complement each other well.

"My system is more of a check of Thor Guard," he says, noting the real benefit to that product is its sirens, which take the human element out of warning golfers and employees a lightning strike is possible.

The WeatherSentry lightning feature tells him if lightning strikes within a set radius and has tracking capabilities that allow him to see what direction the storm is coming from.

"If we got rid of Thor Guard, it would be my duty to sit in front of the computer and then run outside with a bull horn to warn people and hope they hear me," Charlton says. "But if I can predict a storm faster than Thor Guard and can get employees to a safe area, that's invaluable. You can't put a price tag on preventing someone

from getting injured or killed because a storm came in."

Charlton's 17 maintenance employees appreciate the warnings, too – they keep them safe and dry.

"I always make sure to get them off the course before the heaviest rains come," he says.

Charlton can even check the radar from out of town on his smartphone and advise his staff about the weather. He recalls one instance when he was on the road for a long weekend and checked the weather at the course.

"I called my assistants and told them a storm was coming, but they argued it was a bright, sunny day," he says. "I told them I checked the radar and they better pull it in. Twenty minutes later they got hit with a huge storm. Later, someone at the club told me they made the comment, 'Here he is halfway across the country and he still knows the weather better than we do.'" GCI



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