



WHAT RECESSION?

"There's no recession here," says The Meadows Golf Club owner Hank Finelli Jr., whose 18-hole public golf facility is located 20 miles west of New York City in Lincoln Park, N.J. With golf course superintendent Andy Schuckers, CGCS, The Meadows has, before, during and presumably after these tough times, created an enjoyable, well-conditioned and challenging golf atmosphere with a maintenance budget that's about 50 percent less than industry standards.

With a full parking lot and no gaps between groups, I toured the golf course with Andy to see what advice he could offer those struggling this season.

Q With financial cutbacks occurring throughout our industry, what have you and The Meadows GC done to remain busy and successful?

A We're on a small piece of property (130 acres), which helps with keeping expenses to a minimum. However, we must maintain quality conditions or our customers will go elsewhere. We do this by continuously reviewing our finances; forecasting upcoming expenses and potential increases in equipment, supplies and labor as early as possible; pre-ordering our entire agronomic inventory, which saves a minimum of 10 percent; and relying on used equipment more than new equipment.

I talk to vendors to see who's selling a quality unit with low operating hours, look for golf course lease agreements that are ending to locate certain low-mileage specialty units, search the equipment Web sites and pore over equipment records and base purchasing decisions on operating hours and the type of repair work accomplished to a particular unit.

We also:

- Talk with area superintendents to see who may have equipment ready to sell or exchange with a unit we have;
- Look for employees who have varied golf course experiences in construction, maintenance, equipment management, landscaping, turfgrass and who really want to work hard;
- Provide each employee a 40-hour work week, without overtime, with four, 8-hour work days and two

4-hour work days to accomplish necessary tasks each day;

- Aerify during spring break so we can employ part-time labor, such as vacationing college students, to assist in the process and clean-up;
- Schedule agronomic practices to coordinate with on-course activity such as outings, special offers, tournaments, leagues and general daily play. Often we'll accomplish work very early or late in the day so as not to interfere with play or slow down our operational pace; and
- Implement daily multitasking with on-course assignments.

Q Your putting surfaces (*Poa/bent*) are outstanding for the volume of play they receive. What cultural practices are involved in their maintenance?

A Our turf quality is based on our budget. However, we realize 50 percent of a round of golf is played on the putting surfaces. With this reality, the majority of our efforts are dedicated to the greens.

We focus on early season deep-tine coring to vent the subsoil, smooth the playing surface, reduce compaction and we follow up with ¼-inch hollow tine in mid-April (spring break) to stimulate root growth and follow with sand topdressing.

We'll hollow core again in August using ½-inch tines and topdress accordingly. Using the large pull-behind top-dressing units, we light topdress our greens throughout the season and match the amount of sand with plant

growth rates. All work is accomplished while we have a full labor source.

We use plant growth regulating materials regularly to reduce costs. We apply trinexapac-ethyl to all surfaces as well as our bunker banks/faces, around tree basins, cart path edges and curbing and within the primary roughs to reduce mowing frequency, keep turf density and allow players to locate their golf balls without impacting pace of play.

I believe in the appropriate height-of-cut for all surfaces, especially greens. A proper cutting height reduces mowing, pesticide and labor costs. Fast greens are difficult to maintain and affect pace of play, which limits the amount of play on the course.

We routinely apply wetting agents to decrease all forms of irrigation, and I use agronomic forecasting updates to coordinate pesticide and fertility applications.

Q What do you look for beyond agronomics to assist your operating philosophy?

A Much of the work accomplished at the golf course during my 13 seasons has been done in-house. We enjoy accomplishing as much as we can without outside help. Also, I consider the following: accomplish as much work as possible prior to play; hire the right people who you can trust; create a schedule for all present and future operations, on and off the golf course; be flexible, especially with Mother Nature – don't let weather add to your work load; if no work can be accomplished due to weather issues, head home for the day; multitask; do more with less; treat equipment like the owner is riding in the seat next to you; be open-minded and look hard for the right price – it's out there; and keep prices fair and competitive. **GCI**