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THE CRICKETS ARE CRYING AUTUMN

We have had a summer here in the upper Midwest I used to dream about. It was cool and a little on the dry side with only a few severe storms. In terms of managing a golf course, it will be remembered as one of those "easy years." It's a good thing they come along every once in a while to make up for seasons that are extremely stressful.

Colleagues in other parts of the country haven't been so lucky. It rained constantly during periods in the Northeast, as witnessed by the heroic efforts required of Craig Currier for the U.S. Open at Bethpage. In the Northwest it was hot in July and the drought in Texas is downright scary. They won't remember this summer as fondly as we will in the Great Lakes area.

A few golf courses experienced some winter injury, but most profited from the heavy snow that came at Thanksgiving and didn't leave until the birds had returned in early spring.

We were worried all summer about the millions of folks losing their jobs to the poor economy, hoping there would be a recovery soon enough to save them. Some of us, however, aren't so sure that Obama's spending of borrowed money is the answer to all that ails us. It has to be paid back, with interest, someday.

In our state, manure was a big topic of discussion, led by the Midwest Manure Summit held at Lambeau Field in Green Bay. I hope that doesn't mean that the Packers are going to stink this fall. We enjoyed the International Cow Chip Throwing Contest in Sauk City, only a few miles from my home. We watched with interest as the U.S. senators from Iowa tried to justify sneaking big money earmarks into the federal budget to study the smell of hog manure. Closer to home, the issue took a twist when we learned dairy cattle are a major contributor to greenhouse

gasses and global warming. Genetic scientists are at work creating a cow that produces less methane. I wonder if they were able to get an earmark in the budget for that project.

And in my home county, Vice President Joe Biden called the county executive to get the latest on Dane County's manure digester. This was right after he said flying was dangerous because of swine flu. Given his performance so far as veep, if anyone could use a manure digester, it's probably Joe!

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Minnesota had an interesting early summer season as they watched the vote counting for a U.S. senator come to a close. Al Franken was sworn in, a nice complement, some say, to their choice of Jesse Ventura as governor a few years back. Just south of here in Illinois the politics were even more interesting with Governor Blagojevich and Senator Burris. There's never a dull moment in the upper Midwest.

The summer was so pleasant people were actually enjoying their front porches and backyard decks. The mosquito population never really got started, which was a plus for outdoor activities including golf. Oh, I grumbled a little bit about how long it was taking for my garden to mature – I wondered if I was going to have to cultivate a taste for green tomatoes. But, summer annuals, which start to look pretty weak by summer's end, were in full color and robust health.

Cheryl and I are Army Lt. Ryan Norton's godparents, and he is never

very far from our thoughts. His father, Pat, is a golf course superintendent west of Chicago, and his mom, Sue, sent us the temperature forecast for the week of July 24-July 30 at his duty station in Iraq. For that week, the daily high averaged to 120 degrees F. and the low averaged to 92 degrees F. That data, coupled with photos of Army and Marine soldiers dressed in their full uniform and gear, made me embarrassed that I ever complained about a summer in Wisconsin.

That confession notwithstanding, for the first time ever I hated to see summer go. The pleasant weather, day after day for weeks on end, was a dream come true for this former golf course superintendent. But all good things come to an end and we're on the threshold of autumn. The local and club tournaments are over, the club champions have been determined, golf course crews have shrunk in numbers as kids return to school, and soon the workday will have to begin later as daylight disappears. Soon enough, many of our golfers and club members will head South and West, leaving before the snow and cold arrive. Our colleagues in those regions will be gearing up as we slowly wind down.

Nature tells us summer is over, too. There is a tangy, almost spicy aroma to the air. The sumac are turning red, the birch are showing some yellow color in their canopies, and the Queen Anne's lace is fully flowered. The crickets and locust are crying autumn, in a way substituting for the songbirds that greeted us in the early morning hours for all these months just past.

By and large, this first summer of my retirement as a golf course superintendent has been everything I imagined it would be. If this continues for the other seasons as they come and go, I will consider myself a very lucky man. **GCI**