

needs to evolve back to its origin, more connected to the natural world and local community. A new business model must address the fundamental problem of the business. We must reduce inputs. Especially water. We need to do this for financial reasons we need to do this for environmental reasons. Everyone in the business must make an extra effort to educate the paying golfer on the real intent and true spirit of the game and why it's important to preserve and protect our natural resources," says Mead.

Andy Sheehan, CGCS, now a sales representative for Davisson Golf, has seen the sustainability issue come to the fore throughout his territory in the mid-Atlantic. "What I'm seeing now," Sheehan says, "is people are once again having to prepare 'real' budgets which, in a way, is good. It's forcing them to be smarter superintendents.

"Guys will order, say, 14 bags of fertilizer for a greens application," Sheehan says, "because that has always been the number of bags it took to fertilize their greens. They don't take into account the area of their greens, calibration of their spreaders, or the fertilizer analysis it's just 'what we've always done.' Sales is no longer about being a good pitch man. You have to help out and be a consultant. I've helped lots of guys calibrate their spreaders and sprayers and they end up saving in the long run because they can more accurately determine their needs and stay within budgets."

Nothing wrong with that, Andy. **GCI**

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## GUEST COLUMN

# Time for change

**G**olf courses have long been perceived as environmental wastelands that use high amounts of chemicals and too much water. We all know these intensively managed areas have slowly begun to integrate organic and sustainable management practices. Although this topic is very highly publicized, actual changes in practices are sluggish. Maybe golf is such a traditional game that even its managers are afraid of change? If we want golf to thrive in the future we need to change the way we do things so the game is able to sustain itself.

For the game of golf to endure the rigors of the social, economic and environmental demands, attention must be given to specific areas of golf course management. According to the Environmental Institute for Golf this includes water management, integrated plant management, wildlife/habitat management, energy/waste management, and golf course siting, design and construction. As a course manager, improving in all five areas is a daunting task, not to mention the money and time consumed. With man hours being decreased, budgets being slashed and unprecedented environmental conditions present, it can, at times seem impossible. Like any new skill, we need to crawl before we walk and walk before we run and not dive head first into the two foot kiddie pool. Here are some simple steps towards making your facility more sustainable.

### **New generation, new ideas**

As a new breed of young, up-and-coming turf managers, we bring a new train of thought to the industry. Challenge yourself to seek changes from the ordinary by thinking outside the box.

Use your intelligence to initiate and try new, well thought out

ideas. Don't become complacent. Test your comfort zone and step outside boundaries. Assess your daily practices and justify why things are done. Doing things the same way because it has always been done that way won't cut it.

### **Learn principles of habitat/wildlife management**

Golf course managers are generally not well-educated in habitat/wildlife management. This can be attributed to the unique differences between golf course and habitat/wildlife management. Golf course managers want things perfect immediately and habitat/wildlife managers understand this process takes time and has a lower threshold for perfection. Furthermore, courses tend to strive for uniform monocultures, whereas habitat/wildlife management seeks polyculture and diversity. Learning, but more importantly, understanding the basic principles of habitat/wildlife management will make our jobs easier.

Also, understanding the environment we are in can help us in becoming better golf course managers. We can look at things holistically and manage systems as a whole, instead of independently. Nature is a system in which things are always in relative balance and changing one thing may cause harm elsewhere if proper care is not taken.

### **Spread the good word**

If the general public was asked what they thought about golf courses, the majority would define them as resource hogs and heavy chemical users. We need to encourage communication of the positive aspects of golf courses, such as providing wildlife habitat, as well as serving as water treatment systems that can not only catch runoff, but also reduce the amount of pollutants that reach groundwater sources. We

need to spread this message.

Be accessible to the community. Many non-golfers have valid concerns about golf courses and how they are managed. Educate and explain to people what you are doing and why you are doing it. Do things the right way, especially when no one is watching. Also, handle criticism effectively and take advice with an open mind.

Most importantly, share your information with your peers whether success or failure. Your local GCSAA chapter can be a great outlet for this. We are all in this together.

### **Every little bit counts**

In today's rebuilding economy, it's difficult to justify improvements towards sustainability. Budgets are being slashed and golfers are still expecting comparable or even improved playing conditions. This seems impossible, but with the right action plan the mission can be accomplished.

Prioritizing is important. Choosing areas for improvement need to be thought out, justified and hopefully cost effective. Projects can be as small as installing compact fluorescent lamps at your facility or as large as an irrigation system overhaul.

There are also federal and state funds available for habitat/wildlife management, especially if there is a species of concern at your facility. These funds are highly sought after but may be a way to move towards sustainability with spending little or no funds.

We owe it to ourselves and to the future of golf to do our very best to ensure the long-term vitality of the game.

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