

# Overcoming adversity

For Tom Shephard, his crisis wasn't weather related. Instead, overseeding presented its own unique hell.

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We encountered more adversity over-seeding process this year than we ever have. Hat's off to my staff for not only overcoming it, but for keeping on schedule as well. It all started when our Turf Vacuum – used for picking up the scalped clippings – blew its engine a week before we closed for overseeding. We ended up having to borrow a disabled Sweeper from another nearby club and between the two, got one working. Next, our fairway mower broke its frame in four different places. Then our spring rake broke down three separate times. That was followed by our top-dresser blowing one of its four rear tires. Of course, it was an inside tire and it was fully loaded with sand at the time. Add into the mix that we had nine separate 2-inch lateral waterline breaks and four 6-inch mainline breaks during the process, and you can understand the challenges.

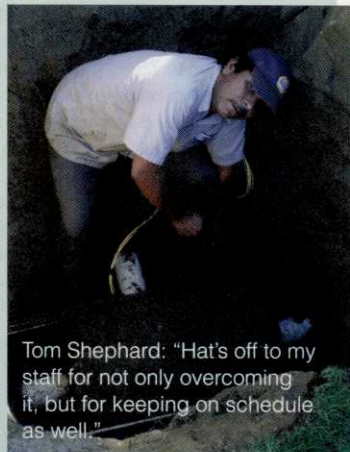
Compounding the problem, the day we finished seeding the front nine fairways and roughs, we discovered that we had a communication wire broken between our irrigation computer and the field controllers that operate the front nine watering. We had to call in a specialist who took two days to track the underground wires and find the break, which was between No. 2 green and No. 3 tee.

After everything was finally seeded and we just needed to keep the new seed wet until it germinated, we encountered a major problem. On Sunday afternoon around 1 p.m., our irrigation computer crashed – ever experience that wonderful feeling? That left us with no way to water our new seed. We contacted Rain Bird Irrigation Support and were told that the only thing that could be done was for them to build us another computer on Monday and ship it to us from Tucson, Ariz. They said we should have it sometime on Tuesday. However, we had already been watering the seed for three and a half days and it was starting to swell up, indicating that it was about ready to germinate. At this critical time we could not afford to go two or three days without water. Once the seed starts to swell, it must be kept wet or it will dry out and die.

Anyway, to make a long story short, I rushed home and got my laptop computer. Then I spent the next seven hours loading up the software and drivers to operate the system and figuring out how I could connect the laptop to the irrigation communication wires running to the controllers. This was after contacting Rain Bird again and getting permission to install and use their software on a non-Rain Bird computer. There is a key code needed to load the software.

It was a good thing we got the laptop going, because the FedEx plane had a mechanical problem and we didn't get our replacement computer until Wednesday afternoon.

Well, everything was going great for the next three days, until one of our 100-hp irrigation pumps went down. Fortunately, we were able to adjust the irrigation computer software to operate with fewer gallons per minute and we were able to get by temporarily with one pump less. I really have to hand it to my staff because they really put forth an extraordinary effort to overcome this unique sequence of adversities.



Tom Shephard: "Hat's off to my staff for not only overcoming it, but for keeping on schedule as well."

# Ten minutes from disaster

Summer was very challenging, and Ken Thompson reminded his crew of that fact every day.



It is no secret that the summer of 2010 was one of the warmest and challenging years that I have faced in over 20 years as a golf course superintendent. Between March and September, we recorded 14 record daytime highs, 44 days over 90 degrees, and received less than 6 inches of rain from June thru August – all of it totally unprecedented! There was not a day that did not, in some new way, challenge our staff. But when it was finally over, our course had survived and was still in great shape.

I credit our success first and foremost to our staff of men and women who endured the tortuous heat to "hold" the course through hand watering. Most work days lasted over 10 hours, and were mostly spent moving from green to green, tee to tee, fairway to fairway, and rough to rough dragging 100-foot hoses.

Our staff began each day performing the basic duties of mowing and course set up. As these tasks were finished, they would then switch over to hand watering. By mid morning, our full-time staff of 10 was "on a hose" watering hot spots or syringing. As we have done since I arrived here in 2003, we only used the irrigation system when hand watering and syringing was not enough to hold the course. By the summer's end, we had hand watered for a total of 1,175 person hours.

We were most careful to not over water the greens and tees. For the greens we normally had three persons syringing – applying a very fine mist over the green with a specialized nozzle which was done to keep the surface temperatures from climbing too high. These persons were instructed to raise the nozzle up in the air instead of downwards, and to get on and off the green within the count of "7." This team was followed by my assistant or me to check each green for hot spots. In this way, only what needed water received it, while the entire green was evenly cooled down. We did a very similar program on the tees.

Our program of syringing fairways was to run a two-minute cycle during the early and mid afternoons. At the same time, a team walked each fairway and rough with hoses watering hot spots.

This program of syringing and hand watering prevented the soils from becoming wet, balanced the evapotranspiration rates, and controlled surface temperatures. It also helped with disease suppression and prevented any significant turfgrass root loss.

Some other things we did to reduce plant stress was to use solid rollers on all our mowing equipment, do our mowing in the early morning, roll greens in place of cutting them on the hottest days, raise cutting heights (by only a few 1000ths), and needle tine the greens and tees to keep the soils breathing. Over the past years we had held to an aggressive aeration program which had reduced our thatch and increased our soils pore space, contributing to having a healthy plant going into the summer.

It was a very challenging summer – and I told the staff every day that if we let our guard down we were "only ten minutes away from a disaster!" Our staff responded to the task ahead and never gave up to the heat. To them I give all the credit.

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