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A LETTER TO MEMBERS

Getting them to realize how hard it is to keep a course both playable and enjoyable.

I write this column every month with you, the superintendent, in mind. I try to make your life easier, more interesting, educational, and just plain fun. Your comments keep me going and give me ideas for future subjects. But this month's column isn't intended for you but for the people you serve, the golfers who enjoy the fruits of your labors, and address some of their concerns and complaints about maintenance.

It's obvious no one is having success getting through to real golfers about how hard it is to keep a course both playable and enjoyable. Our national organizations aren't doing enough, and according to many of you, your clubs aren't either. So let me try. Feel free to cut out the letter below and post it in the locker room or somewhere else you think it will do the most good.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Check out this issue's app edition and/or online edition for a downloadable and printable PDF of Tim's letter.

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Dear Golfer:
On behalf of superintendents everywhere, I hope you have a great round today. There's no better game in the world than golf and nowhere better to have fun and challenge yourself than on a golf course.

However, when you're out there, I hope you'll notice the conditions and think about what went into maintaining the course you are lucky enough to be playing.

The Golf Course Superintendent at your facility is a highly trained and educated professional whose job is to take care of your club's most precious asset. No one cares more about the course conditions and maintenance than you

GCS. However, in the current economic climate – and this is true wherever you're reading this – it is very difficult to provide quality playing conditions when dealing with reduced staffing, old equipment, cost cutting and small budgets.

Add to that list one more item: Complaining from the members/golfers like you.

As a club member or fee-paying guest, you are entitled to complain about poor conditions or problems on the course. However, it never fails to amaze me how people who are otherwise successful and astute in their own businesses can become so emotional and irrational about an area in which they have very little knowledge.

Just because you have a backyard or a garden does not make you qualified to be a golf course superintendent. GCSs have spent years in school and on the job learning and honing their craft. They are experts in chemistry, biology, agronomy, turf science, entomology, tree management and much, much more.

Please do not judge a golf course simply by how "pretty" you think it is. Making a course pretty also can make it unhealthy. You want a course to be playable for as many different types of golfers as possible as well as attractive.

The greatest cause of harm to a golf course isn't weather or weeds or bugs. It's golfers, particularly those who don't do the little things – rake bunkers, fix ball marks, repair divots, drive on cart paths, pick up garbage (like broken tees) – that are vital to the course's health.

What's that old line from the 1960s? If you aren't part of the solution, you're part of the problem.

Here are a few other things you might not know. Don't jump to conclusions if you see an irrigation system running during or soon after a rainstorm. Some courses are required to dump effluent

water periodically to meet environmental regulations. Irrigation systems need to be checked regularly to monitor sprinkler heads and throw patterns. Perhaps your superintendent is irrigating new sod or seed, or watering in new chemical applications.

Speaking of rain, have you ever wondered what happens to grass after a downpour? Before complaining that the rough is too long, consider the damage a two-ton piece of equipment would do to soggy soil and turfgrass.

If you spot unraked footprints in a bunker, don't assume someone on the grounds crew put them there. Chances are it was another golfer who was too lazy to clean up after himself. And speaking of bunkers, don't complain about their slopes breaking down if you and your buddies walk up and down them to get in and out of the sand. Walk in and out at the lowest, flattest point and the bunkers will stay in better shape longer.

Don't get me started on greens. Yes, they have to be aerified (otherwise they'll decline). Someone isn't going to like their speed, but the course has to be set up for the greatest good, not the small percentage of players who really are good – or think they are. Furthermore, green speed changes every hour based on weather, traffic, environment and the time of year. Yes, hole positions must move every day or else one area of the green will get too much traffic and suffer.

And yes, ball marks really do damage greens and are all golfers' responsibility to repair. Particularly the golfers who made them.

As for the weather? It's not an excuse, it's a fact.

I'm not saying golfers sometimes don't have the right, even the obligation, to complain about course conditions.

(MORAGHAN continues on page 56)

Hey.

Do you sell stuff to superintendents?

We notice you're reading this page.

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(MORAGHAN continued from page 34)

They do. But only when they know what they're talking about and have first made an effort to understand the situation, talk to the superintendent, and ask intelligent questions.

Because as I said above, the golfer is just as responsible for a course's condition as the superintendent is. (Among the best things you can do is help others in your group understand their effect on the course and take better care of it.)

Finally, please thank your superintendent every once in a while for the terrific job he or she is doing under difficult, and constantly changing, conditions. Say hello, strike up a conversation, and you never know what you might learn. You might even get some helpful tips for that backyard garden you have at home.

Enjoy your game, enjoy your course,

Tim Moraghan
 Principal
 ASPIRE Golf GCI

(KAMINSKI continued from page 46)

statements and my Green Section article, the demand far exceeds the supply.

So what's the solution?

I'm not even sure what the problem is to be honest, so it's hard to come up with a solution. I tend to focus more on what it takes for students to reach that highest and often unattainable goal rather than the title of their first position following graduation. My focus with students in the 2-year program is about setting and understanding goals.

Often falling on deaf ears, I try to explain how sacrificing titles and even financial gain early in their career may be necessary to reach their career goal. We even have superintendents in as guest speakers who share their stories of personal and professional sacrifice that ultimately led them to their current position. The host of the recent U.S. Open at Merion comes to mind.


If there's no solution (and possibly no problem) then what's your point?

I guess I don't really have a point. My general feeling is that the market is still strong and that although the road to success is a long and difficult one, the cream will ultimately rise to the top. Those that don't have the intestinal fortitude will leave the business, making way for those that had the patience and luck to stick it out.

If we really want to help our early career (and future of the industry) professionals, perhaps titles should be reserved for positions that deserve titles. Giving new employees a false sense of leadership and position within the club through watered-down titles only continues to reinforce an entitled generation who grew up receiving a trophy just for showing up.

Success in this business is tough. Showing up isn't enough. GCI

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