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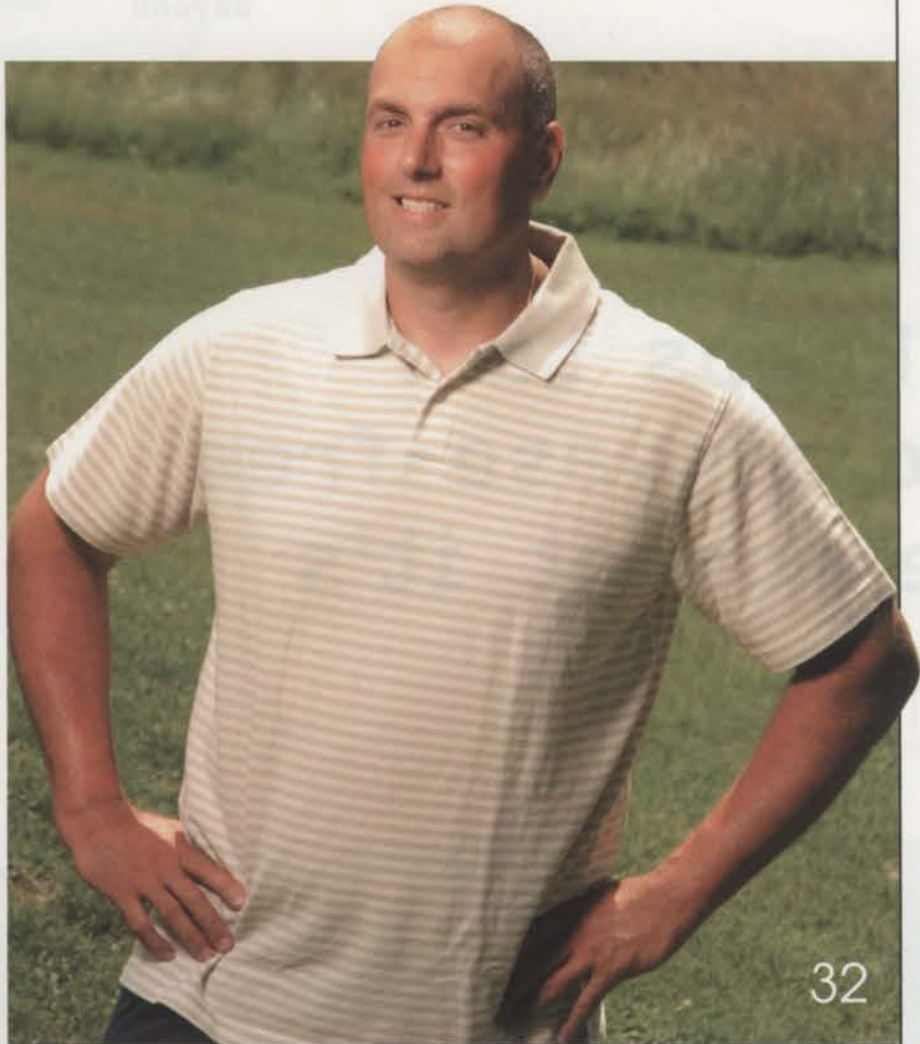
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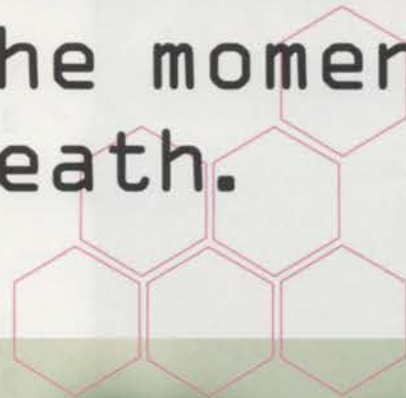
Cover photo: Gary David Gold

EDITORIAL MISSION STATEMENT:

Golf Course News reports on and analyzes the business of maintaining golf courses, as well as the broader business of golf course management. This includes three main areas: agronomy, business management and career development as it relates to golf course superintendents and those managers responsible for maintaining a golf course as an important asset. *Golf Course News* shows superintendents what's possible, helps them understand why it's important and tells them how to take the next step.

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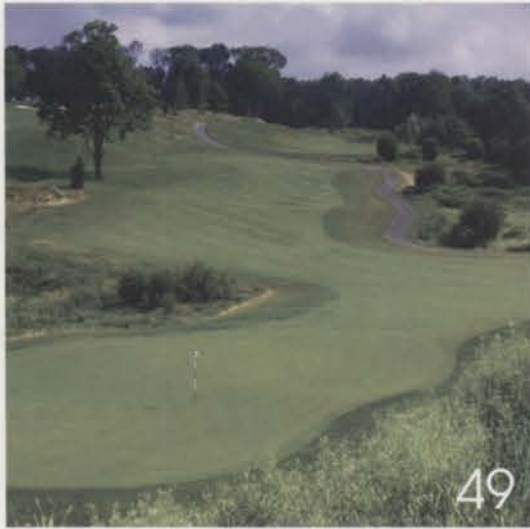
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John Walsh
Editor

Fuel effects

Last year there was a lot of buzz and media coverage about high fuel prices and their impact on golf course maintenance. Although there doesn't seem to be much coverage or buzz about the topic this year, it's still negatively affecting golf course superintendents, forcing some to tweak their budgets.

In June, golf course managers in California were paying more than \$3.25 a gallon for petrol. Some in Florida were paying more than \$3.00 a gallon. Higher fuel prices affect golf course maintenance in several ways. The most notable is that they're driving up the cost of fertilizers and pesticides because fuel is used to manufacture and distribute those products. During a recent fertilizer plant tour, LESCO and Turf Care Supply officials said the price of urea, the primary raw ingredient in fertilizer, increased 30 percent from 2005 to 2006. Higher fuel prices also affect equipment operations on the course, mainly through the use of mowers and utility vehicles.

As a result of these price hikes, some superintendents are changing their practices to soften the financial blow. For example, some are switching from gas-powered golf cars and utility vehicles to electric or hybrid ones. Others are switching from gas-powered greens mowers to electric ones. Some are using more plant growth regulators to help reduce the number of mowings per week. Still, others are expanding native areas and reducing areas of maintained turf, which helps reduce labor costs, too.

However, it seems not every golf course superintendent is negatively affected by higher fuel prices. In fact, it seems superintendents at private golf facilities are less affected because members at those clubs don't want to see a decline in the quality of course conditions and are willing to take the financial hit until fuel prices come back down. Prices will decline because of market conditions. It's just a matter of time. Using alternative fuels, drilling for oil in places such as Alaska, building nuclear power plants in less-populated areas of the country and a more steady Middle East are a few market factors – no matter how far off in the future they seem to be – that could help ease fuel prices.

Up to this point, it doesn't seem like any portion of the increased fuel prices are

being passed on to golfers. But how long can that happen? Golf course owners are relying on skillful superintendents to do wonders with their maintenance budgets. On the other side of the golf course equation are the golfers who have high expectations of course conditions. So, something has to give. Either the golfer pays higher green fees or course conditions slip a bit. Maybe this has happened already at some public golf courses.

If course conditions slide, some golfers will become unhappy and play elsewhere, rounds and revenue will decline, and a few more courses will go out of business in saturated markets. According to the National Golf Foundation, 68 golf courses closed in 2003, 63 courses closed in 2004, 94 closed in 2005, and 90 are predicted to close in 2006. See a trend here? High fuel prices might be the straw that breaks the camel's back, so to say, and could be one more factor of course closings.

Fuel prices will undoubtedly have an impact on course quality at some facilities. The question is whether golfers will accept that or even draw a connection between increased costs and conditioning. The challenge for those facilities will be to educate golfers about that connection or to justify increased green fees. Either of those options are a tough sell in a highly competitive market.

NGF predicts 130 course openings this year. Subtract the number of course closings projected, and there's a net gain of 40 courses this year. That's not much growth. Nonetheless, it's still growth. It's a tough time for the golf course business, but the industry will get through it, no doubt.

An economic climate like this is forcing managers to adopt better practices and run better businesses. Will facilities revert to their previous practices if times get better? I doubt it. The industry has entered a new era in which doing things "the way we've always done them" just isn't good enough.

The impact of fuel prices is just part of the equation that's pushing the industry to reinvent itself. It's not fun, and it's not easy, but it has to be done for the golf industry to survive and thrive in the 21st century. GCN

John Walsh

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Spending money wisely

I appreciate Jim McLoughlin's column about the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America board perks ("GCSAA board perks," May, page 20). His opinions are pretty much where I was at during my two years on the board. While many of the perks are reasonable, some were a bit excessive. Obviously, not everyone at the GCSAA believes that, or they would have been changed. I know most GCSAA members have no idea about how many dollars are being spent to support the board each year.

The perks are only part of the story. The other issue is about some of the locations where meetings are held and some of the social functions related to those meetings. While I agree some of these meetings are a part of conducting business, I don't think we really get our dollars worth when we send multiple attendees to many events where we don't even have any significant meetings planned or outcomes expected. I know there are others who will disagree about the value of us being at such events, but all too often some of these trips involve very little real business. As I stated earlier, this is just my own personal opinion, and I know others disagree.

At our board budget meeting last fall, I challenged my fellow board members to think about where we held our meetings and how we spent our members' dollars. I don't think anything has changed since that time, but I hope the new board members and future boards recognize it as an important issue. It's the duty of the elected board members to use the members' money wisely.

I want to thank Jim for putting this subject in the spotlight where hopefully more GCSAA members will give

it some thought. I want to thank him for caring about our industry, staying involved and providing quality education to many of our members in his local programs.

Gary K. Carls, CGCS
Sunnyvale (Calif.) Golf Course

Ha! Ha!

I read Pat Jones' piece/commentary ("The politics of golf," March, page 62) and got a good chuckle out of it, even though there's more than humor there. Sometimes truth is stranger and funnier than all the fiction we see on the boob tube. Actually, as I was reading the commentary, the columns written by David Feherty came to mind. Feherty's humor and Jones' run in the same vein. (That was a good one about the sheep!)

Anyway, keep up the good stuff and keep it in the short grass.

David Whelchel
Golf course architect
Hurdzan/Fry
Columbus, Ohio

I read Pat Jones' bobblehead piece ("Bobbleheads," <http://www.golfcourse-news.com/news/news.asp?ID=2385>) and thought I was listening to Andy Rooney on 60 Minutes. Some sense of humor. It's somewhere between Louis Grizzard, Dave Barry and Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*. He must be spending a little too much time with writers Geoff Shackelford and Brad Klein.

Ed Walsh, CGCS
Shelter Harbor Golf Club
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Clarification

The marketing column in the May issue ("Electronic marketing," page 16) was co-authored by Phil Wiggins of Wiggins Golf Consulting in Pinchurst, N.C. GCN

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College curriculum shift means interests vary

by John Walsh

It's no secret managing a golf course involves much more than managing turfgrass. Because of that, university turfgrass professors are helping students become more well-rounded in preparation for the real world. They're doing this by tweaking their curriculums and offering more business and communication courses.

Kansas State University in Manhattan made significant changes to its turfgrass program in 1998, and as a result, the number of students who entered the program increased. It all started with professional golfer and KSU alumnus Jim Colbert giving back to the university by helping fund and build a golf course for the school to help attract more students, according to Jack Fry, professor in the horticulture division at KSU.

KSU had a turfgrass program for decades but wanted to improve it, so some of the university's professors asked the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America for direction to develop a cutting-edge program. As a result, KSU incorporated a business minor into its program and added six to nine credits of communication that involved writing and speaking.

"We had a different twist on the turfgrass program," Fry says. "We also had the students take 12 credits of hotel and restaurant management, which gave them an idea of what it's like to work in the clubhouse even if they don't want to work there."

KSU turfgrass students also have to complete two internships worth six credits. Students can complete both internships on the golf course, or complete one on the golf course and one in the clubhouse.

If a student completes the program, he will earn a B.S. in agriculture with a major in horticulture with an option of majoring in golf course management, according to Fry. With that degree, students inevitably receive a minor in business.

The revamped program was implemented in 1998 and had 40 to 50 students enrolled, then it jumped to 160 in the early 2000s, and now it's down

to 110, partly because of the golf market economy.

"We hope to put out better quality students," Fry says. "One thing the change in the program did was broaden the pool of students, such as those who like golf, want to work in the pro shop, or in sales for manufacturers or distributors. But we tell those students to keep their options open with the possibility of becoming a golf course superintendent."

Since the program's inception, the school has worked to improve it. For example, the department brought back 30 graduates to have them tell the university where improvements could be made. The graduates said an introductory course to mechanics was needed. Based on that response, the university is looking to partner with a company to provide that education, according to Fry.

KSU also received feedback from other universities.

"Most of the feedback we got when we started the program was from institutions with high enrollment, such as many of the Big Ten schools who found it difficult to change their turfgrass programs because they have a long history of focused turfgrass programs and because of political reasons," Fry says. "However, we were encouraged to do this from the top down — from the president's office."

Despite the perceived difficulty, change is occurring at The Ohio State University in Columbus. If a student majors in turfgrass science, there's a 25-hour minor component to that. At least half of the 100 students minor in agriculture or business, according to turfgrass professor Karl Danneberger.

"We're also working with the hospitality school so the kids can get experience with food and beverage," he says.

Iowa State University in Ames offers its students majoring in horticulture a minor in business, which is 15 credits and taken through the business department. Someone who doesn't want a minor in business can be directed into more business-related classes. There are also business majors who minor in horticulture, and all students take accounting, according to Nick Christians, university professor of horticulture at Iowa State.

Christians says these business options have developed during the past 10 years,

but it's difficult to make the changes because the business college has high enrollment with little available space for those who aren't business majors.

Overall, the trend is to offer more specific classes and majors, Christians says, noting it's always a battle between offering nonturf courses such as English and philosophy or more specific courses within a major.

However, Christians says the horticulture department is always able to meet the demand for more business education through the business minor. Additionally, a number of Christians' students are earning MBAs through evening programs.

Danneberger says the classes students take are changing based on their interests not because Ohio State is mandating change.

"As advisors, we encourage them to do that," he says. "They're given advice, and a lot of students are moving that way. We introduced a sports-turf class involving budgeting and communications. We would have never done this years ago. We are adjusting to the market."

"Most students in turf come into this business to work outside," he adds. "It's what they like to do. But as they progress, they realize they need to communicate, budget, deal with people, etc. As advisors, we push them into professional support areas such as human resources, communication and accounting."

Fry says this kind of change to a school's turfgrass program is long overdue and more of it is needed at other turfgrass programs throughout the country. However, there are drawbacks.

"There's no doubt you have to give something up, such as a biochemistry class for an accounting class," he says. "But it can be difficult to do that because of the politics involved and because so many students are enrolled in business classes there's no need to require additional students to take them."

Overall, recent turfgrass science students are more well-rounded compared to students in the past, Danneberger says.

"Students should have a more global view," he says. "Golf course management is more than cutting greens one-eighth of an inch. It's about dealing with people. Our job is to expand the students' views."



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