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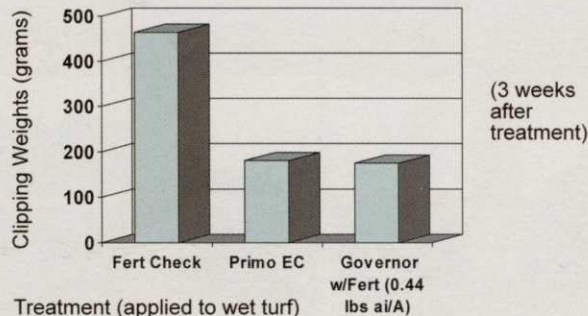
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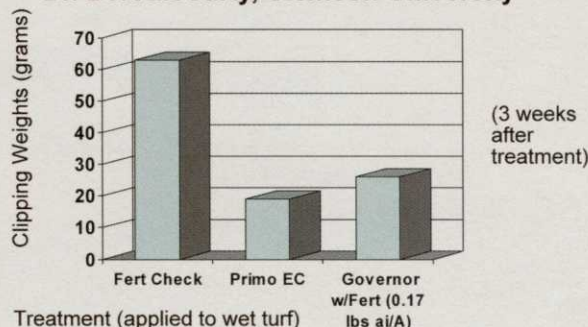
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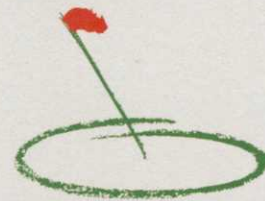


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Ted Pasko (left) and Don Lawrence suggested ways to increase rounds at golf facilities during the OTF conference and trade show. Photo: Heather Wood

## Events, partnerships can help boost rounds

**W**hen times are trying (or even when they aren't), it pays to be creative with golf course operations.

This was the message a panel of golf course owners and managers sent to attendees at the session "Marketing your golf course – thinking outside the box" at the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation's conference and trade show in Columbus, Ohio, in November. Some panel members acknowledged rounds have been decreasing this decade and outlined ways they're trying to remedy the situation.

As far as Don Lawrence of Red Hawk Run Golf Course in Findlay, Ohio, is concerned, electronic organization of tee sheets is a marketing must. The system allows a golf course manager to track customers and see what type of customer spends the most and on which items at a course. The manager can send out e-mail blasts to these customers to alert them about special events or for other reasons.

Likewise, Lawrence keeps the course's clubhouse available for weddings and banquets, primarily in the winter months when

course business is slow.

Ed Fisher of the Hamilton County Ohio Park District values programs in which golf courses partner with organizations to promote the game of golf. One day last spring, the county opened up one of its courses for the Professional Golfers' Association of America's Play Golf America promotion.

"About 950 people came; 400 of them were already customers, but 500 of them were new families," he says, adding that a higher number of families came during the months following the



event to sign up for programs. "We'll jump on it if the PGA does it again."

The county's courses also have partnered with the PGA for Link Up To Golf, which offers a welcome package to new golfers. The course offers lessons and opportunities to play with the golf pro for a discounted price.

Rich Kitchen knew little about golf course management when he first started Locust Hills Golf Club in Springfield, Ohio, with his twin brother, John, in 1966.

The course is located in a dry township, which limits his refreshment offerings. He hasn't let that slow down business, though. Pork chops and ice cream have become popular



food items. The course is also a hit with church groups and other organizations who aren't interested in serving alcohol at their outings.

The food offerings are some of the characteristics for which the course is known, and Kitchen relies primarily on word of mouth to drum up business.

Another marketing tool is the

course's dedicated times for discounted fees for college students. The fee is reduced to \$5 for nine or 18 holes. Kitchen doesn't budget money to advertise this special.

"The advertising is right there in the price," he says.

The course also offers specials to appeal to golf outing groups, couples and families.

Attracting families, becoming part of a golf program, offering golf lessons and hosting charity events are a few ways to help increase the number of rounds at a facility.

Ted Pasko, owner of Deer Ridge Golf Course in Bellville, Ohio, hosts events with local charities as a way to gain publicity. Public service announcements advertise the events on the local media. For example, they hosted a food drive in which golfers bring food items instead of paying the green fees.

Pasko has tried different types of advertising, but in the end, he agrees with Kitchen's marketing strategy, the kind that money can't buy.

"Golfers aren't going to play your place if they haven't heard from a buddy that it's a good place to play," he says. —HW


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## Managing Bermudagrass during the winter

**D**uring the winter in many parts of the country, turfgrass is dormant and there's not much to manage. This winter started off is a little different because many regions of the country were experiencing balmy weather. Golfing in January in places like Connecticut, Ohio and New York? Surprisingly, yes.

During the fall, golf course superintendents in the North spend time preparing turf for dormancy during the cold of winter. But in the transition zone and South, the goals of fall maintenance are a bit different. According to

Chris Hartwiger, a USGA Green Section senior agronomist in the Southeast region, there should be three main goals:

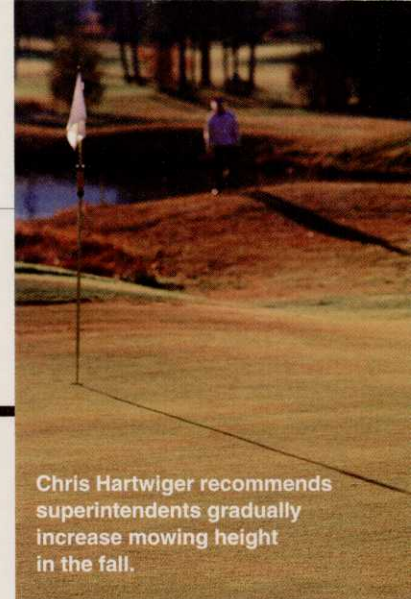
1. Put the grass to bed healthy;
2. Manage growth to avoid excessive winter green speeds; and
3. Provide golfers with the best putting conditions of the year.

Mowing height management is one aspect of maintaining healthy turf. Cool temperatures during the fall and winter months are a natural growth regulator. Green speeds can increase with no change in mowing height when the turf falls out

of optimum growing conditions, Hartwiger says. Speeds on greens cut at 0.125 of an inch in the summer will be different than greens cut at 0.125 of an inch in the fall. Superintendents should gradually raise the mowing height in September to prepare for the winter, but they might have to roll greens to maintain green speeds.

At the Carolinas GCSA Conference and Show in November, Hartwiger presented a few items to consider about mowing height management:

- You have to raise mowing



Chris Hartwiger recommends superintendents gradually increase mowing height in the fall.

height, and September is time to do that;

- You should increase height incrementally;
- How high you raise the height depends on the climate; and
- Mowing heights should be decreased incrementally during the spring.

Aside from mowing heights,

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green covers are another management practice that can aid turf during the winter. They're more prevalent in the North, but they can be used effectively in the transition zone and South as well. Green covers help prevent winter injury, which is the Achilles' heel of Bermudagrass putting greens, Hartwiger says.

Covers can prevent winterkill, but they don't guarantee you'll never have winterkill. Many superintendents face the decision to cover or not cover their greens. Varieties of ultradwarf Bermudagrass are found as far north as Memphis, Tenn., and as far south as Key West, Fla. Hartwiger says those with Bermudagrass north of central

Georgia should have them, and those below might want to have them if temperatures dip below 25 degrees for a significant length of time.

Hartwiger says covers aren't popular and many superintendents have a negative perception of them, however, it's the USGA's view that they're an insurance policy for greens. Research suggests the cover type isn't critical, but using one that's easy to use is.

The average weight of a cover is between 150 to 180 pounds, and a simple system is needed to secure one. One goal is to cover or uncover a green in 10 to 12 minutes with three guys. However, some superintendents say it takes an average of six guys

to cover or uncover a green and it takes longer than 15 minutes because if wind is present, the cover acts like a sail and it's hard to control. Ideally, when covering greens, the maintenance staff should follow the last foursome of the day.

Covers can keep greens green and growing during the winter if greens are covered when the temperatures stay consistently below 45 degrees, Hartwiger says.

The average cost of a cover is \$1,000 for one green, Hartwiger says.

Green covers also can protect Bermudagrass greens from a late spring frost. During spring transition, Bermudagrass greens

green up in late February or early March, then they can get hit in late March with a frost, which knocks their growth back a bit.

Also in the spring, light, frequent topdressing can be used to dilute organic matter. Disease can be an issue in the spring, too, but not as much as during summer because the grass is growing so vigorously.

Asked which ultradwarf Bermudagrass was the best, Hartwiger ranked Champion – which he says grows in better than Miniverde – first, TifEagle second and Miniverde third.

"There have been instances in which people were golfing six weeks after Champion was planted," he says. — John Walsh

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## Short notice

> Joe Hubbard, CGCS, and the maintenance crew at The Old Course at Broken Sound prepared to host the Allianz Championship for the first time

Soon after the mega-spotlight shone on Miami for the Super Bowl on Feb. 4, a smaller spotlight shone on the area. This one for golf.

Nearby Boca Raton, and more specifically, The Old Course at Broken Sound, played host to the Allianz Championship and its ancillary events Feb. 5-11. In addition to the tournament, the event featured the Drive for Wives ProAm, which groups pros

with NASCAR drivers, owners and amateur players.

Like preparing for the Super Bowl, director of golf maintenance Joe Hubbard, CGCS, started preparing for the golf event well in advance. But he didn't exactly have as much advance notice as grounds crew at Dolphin Stadium likely had. In fact, Hubbard didn't even have as much time to plan as those getting ready for this tournament




Eight hurricanes blew through the area and left the course with 2,000 fewer trees.

usually do. Last year, the event was held in Iowa in July. This year it was relocated to Florida, and the date was moved up a few months.

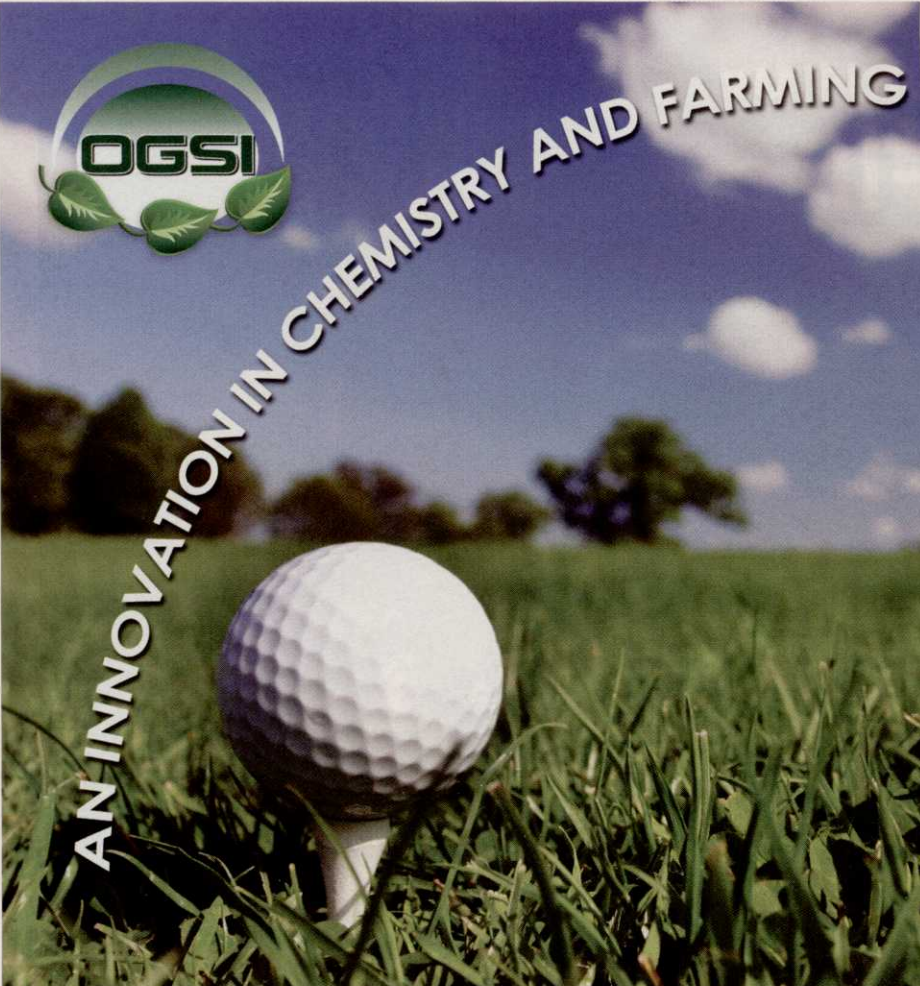
Yet Hubbard believed he and the course were ready. Besides, it wasn't his first time hosting an event of this caliber. He has had


practice with state and amateur tournaments at previous jobs during his 35-plus years in the industry, 23 of those as a golf course superintendent.

Hubbard started at the 18-hole Broken Sound in August 2004, just before hurricanes Ivan and Charlie and a year before Katrina



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and Wilma blew through. Eight hurricanes later, the course is left with 2,000 fewer trees than it had when Hubbard started.

The losses, which especially hit holes 3 and 15, include several 100-year-old oak trees and black olive trees. The course is still impacted.

"A lot of palm trees either splintered and died or are dying now," Hubbard says.

Some of the dying trees remain on the course for woodpeckers and raptors because the course has been entered for consideration in the Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary Program for golf courses, he says. The crew is gradually replanting the lost trees, most of them na-

tive to Florida.

"Of course, you can't find 100-foot trees to replace the lost trees," Hubbard says. "If you're young now, by the time you retire, the trees will be back up to where they were."

The missing trees slightly altered the look of the Joe Lee-designed course, which was renovated by Gene Bates Golf Design and reopened in 2003. The course now feels like a links-style layout, more like something one would find in North Carolina, Hubbard says.

Other unique aspects of the course are its unique-looking bunkers and the fact that it's not lined with homes, which seems to be the norm for golf courses in

the region.

But like many other courses in the South, The Old Course consists of Bermudagrass. Hubbard and his crew have been working to get it tournament ready, which takes some extra work this time of year. The turf isn't in the best condition because of the cooler weather and increased traffic, so the crew is applying more fertilizer. Additionally, pine straw has been added to native areas to enhance them.

The preliminary weather report looked promising a few weeks before the tournament, but one never knows, Hubbard says.

"Last year at that time, it was 38 degrees with 35-mile-per-hour

winds," he says.

After the Allianz Championship and its ancillary events end, the crew will remain busy, maintaining the course at tournament conditions for the media and the club's members for a day. Then they'll maintain the course at its usual condition until May, when rounds decline. Hubbard says he'll get a chance to breathe then.

But it won't be long before the process starts all over again. The club will host the tournament for at least three years.

"I told the crew to learn from any mistakes this year, apply them next year, and still have fun and take it all in," Hubbard says. "Not a lot of people can say they worked a tour event."—HW



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
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**Jack Brennan** founded Paladin Golf Marketing in Plant City, Fla., to assist golf course owners and managers with successful marketing. He can be reached at [jackbrennan@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:jackbrennan@tampabay.rr.com).

## CALCULATING YOUR ROUNDS

This is a good time of year to be involved with golf course marketing. Ideally, the marketing effort for a facility begins just after Thanksgiving and continues with a targeted sales process that lasts through at least March. The only difference between Northern golf courses and Southern golf courses is that courses in the South are slammed with business at times during the winter when courses in the North are closed. However, management of all courses should be reorganizing their marketing strategies and implementing their sales tactics at this time.

Whether your course is closed for the winter or you're watching every tee time book, by now, you've evaluated the past year's successes and shortcomings. But what constitutes market success, and what constitutes market failure? Where do you start with your evaluation? I'll give you a hint: It has little to do with budgets, profit plans or making a bonus. Reaching those types of objectives is always satisfying, but you should ask yourself how your course fared with regard to market share? What's your share of the market, and what's your fair share of market rounds?

One of the first things I do when I'm on a new assignment is calculate a market demand analysis. I want to know how many rounds of golf a market (i.e., the population) should be playing, how many golf courses are in the market, and what the average number of rounds being played per an 18-hole equivalent is. Knowing these numbers, you can determine your course's average market share.

But there are numerous subjective adjustments or considerations that must be made to provide a closer view of your course's average share or fair market share. For example, municipal courses and resort courses usually will generate more rounds than market averages, while private clubs will generate slightly fewer rounds than market averages.

To conduct your own market demand

analysis, start with the National Golf Foundation's participation rate and average rounds played per golfer for the state you're in. For example, for Florida, the NGF's participation rate is 10 percent. The average annual rounds per Florida golfer was 33.3 for 2005, according to the NGF.

The next step, determining your market area, is more subjective. First, determine where your course draws most of its play from. Two accepted areas for medium-level and above public golf are a 20-mile radius and a 40-minute drive time. Choose the one that fits the majority of players who golf at your course. With that population figure, you can calculate the beginning number of market rounds played. However, some demographic adjustments also must be considered. Determine the first population- or consumer-based number first.

**“But there are numerous subjective adjustments or considerations that must be made to provide a closer view of a course's average share, or fair market share.”**

For example, let's say a course's market has a population of 100,000 within a 40-minute drive. Ten percent of 100,000 equals 10,000 golfers, and 33.3 multiplied by 10,000 golfers equals 333,000 market rounds of golf. If there are nine 18-hole equivalents in a 40-minute drive area, there are 37,000 average rounds played per 18 holes. That's the starting point.

One calculation or adjustment to consider is that NGF's state participation rate and state average rounds calculations are for the



population age 18 and older instead of the total population. So, an adjustment factor of 17 percent to 25 percent is appropriate for the majority of golf markets to be inclusive of the 0 to 17 year olds because they participate less and play less frequently, according to Edgehill Consulting and Pellucid Corp., golf market research specialists. By adjusting the Florida market average by 17 percent, average rounds per 18 holes come out to 32,190 rounds. With a 25-percent adjustment, average rounds come out to 27,750.

Average age and household income are the two demographics that impact rounds played calculations the most. Remember, we're trying to get a snapshot of a market. If the average age for a market is higher than the state's average age, increase the number of average rounds by that percentage. For example, if a market has an average age that's 5 percent higher than the state's, average rounds increase by 5 percent to 33,800. Now, if the average household income also is higher than the state's average household income by, say, 2.5 percent, don't increase the new calculation by that amount. Go back to your original 32,190 market average, multiply by 1.025 for what now creates a range of 32,995 to 33,800 for average market rounds. In general, as golfers age, they play more golf; and as their incomes rise, they play more golf.

Use these types of calculations as an analytical opportunity to see how your course is performing relative to market share as a whole. Are rounds at your course within this range of market averages? Does that mean your share is good, bad or indifferent relative to your course's positioning in the market? What's your realistic fair share of market rounds? These are questions of which you should know the answers. **GC**