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## TURFGRASS MAINTENANCE

for all your needs, especially in the summer in Colorado when it's dry, but it's an excellent tool when I want to green-up the course quickly before a big event. I can be specific about how much fertilizer I put down."

### CONSIDERATIONS

At Bayville Golf Club in Virginia Beach, Va., Cutler Robinson, CGCS, uses fertigation to apply about 20 percent of his chemical treatments.

"Fertigation lets me slow release my chemicals," Robinson says. "I use a baseline of potassium to build the turf. My perfect world would be doing 20 to 30 percent of my feeding through fertigation, another 20 to 30 percent through organic feeding and 50 percent or more through traditional fertilizing methods.

"One of my biggest problems is that I can't get product all the time, and some of it's very expensive," he adds. "So, cost and availability are factors, at least for me."

Swinhart gets around those obstacles by planning ahead.

"Sure there's a cost factor involved because the products you use with fertigation are more ex-

pensive than most granular products," he says. "I tend to buy all my gypsum and fertilizer in bulk, and that helps me with my per-bag price. I'll bring in two truck and trailers of both each year."

Any course with an irrigation system can fertigate. A system's effectiveness might vary from course to course, depending on topography and climate. In areas that receive high average rainfalls, it might be more of a challenge to monitor the application or fertilizer through an irrigation system because of the possibility of runoff caused by heavy rain. If the topography of a golf course is severe, the benefits of fertigation might be less because fertilizer and other chemicals applied through the irrigation system might accumulate at the bottom of berms and hills.

"A superintendent should study the lay of the land and where the irrigation lines run," Harivandi says. "You also need to know what times of the year are best for fertigation. Weather changes the needs of a plant, whether it's dry or wet, warm or cold, and you have to adapt to that. Courses in Nebraska, for instance, don't need nitrogen in the middle of the summer. Because you aren't looking at a date on the calendar and

blasting fertilizer four times a year, you need to be more diligent and precise with your feeding if you fertigate."

There are subtle side benefits to fertigation, Harivandi says.

"When you're fine-tuning a system, you learn more about your course and how best to care for it. You use less water with fertigation. But you do so because you're more tuned into your use of water and not overwatering like many courses do."

There also might be environmental benefits to fertigation. It reduces the need to broadcast large amounts of fertilizer and other chemicals onto the turf, which can lead to runoff into aquifers or other nearby above ground water supplies.

At Old Ranch Country Club, Richard Swinhart buys gypsum and fertilizer in bulk to save money. Photo: Old Ranch Country Club



Because they contain chemicals, the tanks used for fertigation must be placed in a containment building to avoid soil and water contamination if there's a leak in a tank.

And while tanks containing pesticides can be tied into an irrigation system, most superintendents shy away from using these chemicals in their irrigation system because of environmental concerns.

"I consider having the ability to fertigate my course a huge plus," Jasinski says. "I worked at a course that didn't have it, and the superintendent was very persistent with the president of the green committee to approve buying a system to add onto the existing irrigation system. It's better to have a fertigation system than to not." GCI

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## THE SKINNY ON FERTIGATION

### Pros

- Allows more efficient fertilizer, other chemical and wetting agent use
- Running wetting agents through a fertigation system can reduce water consumption
- Reduces manpower costs associated with hand-watering and spot fertilization
- Can be fine-tuned to meet specific demands of turf during various times of the year
- Reduces potential for environmental harm by avoiding runoff associated with using large amounts of fertilizer at one time

### Cons

- Somewhat costly, especially if adapted to existing irrigation systems
- Chemicals used in fertigation systems can be expensive, and availability is an issue sometimes
- Fertigation can be used only on golf courses that have irrigation systems
- Demands careful planning and monitoring to assure maximum benefits
- If a course's irrigation system is old, using it to fertigate might provide uneven results and spotty color

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BY STEVE AND SUZ TRUSTY

# Change with the times

## FACILITIES IMPLEMENT EFFICIENT STRATEGIES TO REFLECT MARKET CONDITIONS

As rounds have declined in various markets in the golf industry, facilities have sought operational efficiencies to reduce expenses, increase revenue and compete more effectively in the marketplace. Some of these changes have been driven by the impact of economic pressures. Others have been adopted as proactive measures to avoid such pressures. Though the areas of focus are varied, almost all appear to be long-term changes – a permanent shift in the operating structure of a golf facility.

### ASSESS CURRENT CONDITIONS

Although golf course management companies usually don't reveal the details about their operational efficiencies, input from such companies in other course-specific situations provides ideas. First, bring in an experienced individual from outside your course administration or management team to review and rate your current operation. If the budget won't allow you to hire an outside consultant, consider bringing in one of your peers in exchange for providing similar services at his facility.

Next, identify problem areas and group them within the two main categories they impact: expenses and revenue. Cre-

The Crystal Springs Golf Resort, which includes six courses is connected by a wireless network. And, all the different software programs used at the facility are interactive. Photo: Crystal Springs Golf Resort



ate more specific subgroups under each category to fit the operational structure of your facility. Break down the specific problems under these subgroups. Identify the patterns. Brainstorm for solutions, first with your consultant/peer, then with your staff and administration.

Two major areas frequently targeted for improvement are personnel and technology. Generally, personnel is one of the top expenditures of the golf course. Restructuring to eliminate most mid-management positions usually proves to be beneficial.

With greater access to high-speed Internet connections for remote courses and the advancements in software programs designed for the hospitality industry, including golf courses, there are multiple technology options to explore. One resource for working through this process is the Club Managers Association of America and the Hospitality Financial & Technology Professionals joint publication: "RFI (Request for Information) Tool for Managers to Use When Selecting a Club Management System."

A document explaining how to use the tool and a copy of the RFI that can be customized to fit the needs of a course are available for downloading at the organizations' Web sites, [www.cmaa.org](http://www.cmaa.org) or [www.hftp.org](http://www.hftp.org).

Another resource to help compare your facility to similar ones is the CMAA 2007 Club Operations and Financial Data Report. The report includes data for club operations during 2006. The survey tracked a series of questions about club operations during the past 20 years. Results also are available in a customized format that allows clubs to compare the overall results to their specific profile of club type, region, membership size and operational statistics.

#### AHEAD OF ECONOMIC FORCES

The economic downturn in the auto industry has affected the entire Detroit area, driving businesses to seek operational strategies to increase efficiency in the leaner and meaner environment. Jim Kokenyesdi,



Wild Turkey, one of six golf courses part of Crystal Springs Golf Resort, is highlighted in a golf package that cross-promotes all six courses. Photo: Crystal Springs Golf Resort

manager of Fore Lakes Golf Club, a 7-year old, 18-hole public course in Kimball, Mich., says he and his staff have taken an aggressive approach to the market from the beginning. Still, they've seen a decline of many of their corporate events, and most of the remaining ones are smaller with tighter budgets.

"Gas prices are hovering around \$3.50 a gallon," Kokenyesdi says. "Business is tough. Throughout the past few years, we've started utilizing more advanced technology, including software programs that work with each other, to help integrate our overall operations and manage our expenses better."

The course initially used paper-based systems with computer-generated documents or spread sheets. Keeping the information current and sharing it between departments consumed valuable staff time and often kept the client waiting as schedules were checked. Kokenyesdi researched the options and started initiating the conversion four years ago. Now the kitchen software ties directly into the purchase orders, and the banquet and meeting event software tie into the booking program. Everything in the pro shop is automated.

Kokenyesdi uses the Active Network for the club's electronic tee sheet and point-of-sale information. Tee times also are generated online

through the Web site [www.activegolf.com](http://www.activegolf.com).

Scheduling data for all departments can be checked from any computer on site, or even from linked Blackberries off site, and new information is immediately posted so anyone can book a tee time or meeting event, Kokenyesdi says. All financial information automatically feeds into the QuickBooks accounting system, including purchases from anywhere on the course.

Another major benefit of the software is maximizing tee times.

"We can see where the down time is and take steps to capture it," he says. "We might offer a special promotion or send an e-mail blast to a targeted group of our regular golfers. We now start league play on the first and 10th holes and are able to book nine holes before that by using the computerized system. The system color codes nine-hole and 18-hole play, making it easier for those booking tee times."

Another high-tech addition is an upgrade to a Toro automated irrigation system that incorporates a GPS program. Details of the existing system were posted on the computer, but in a coded format developed by the previous super-

intendent that was difficult for others to follow. With the new technology, details can be accessed from any computer and from a hand-held PDA while on the course. The exact square footage of greens, tees, fairways, bunkers and ponds also will be mapped out creating greater efficiencies in planning fertilization and control product applications.

Staffing is another area of change.

"We've basically eliminated the mid-level management positions with Kathy Torello-Almanza, events and clubhouse manager, and I filling the roles of department heads," Kokenyesdi says. "We've asked our department-level managers to take on greater responsibilities. We anticipated the cost savings. The bonuses are improved communications and the ability to set priorities and act on them more quickly."

Kokenyesdi is exploring advertising options with a few trial spots on regional cable stations. He's found the targeted e-mail blasts effective but is cautious about overusing them and lessening their impact.

As part of planned growth, Kokenyesdi seeks a new market segment each year. He's generated

**More golf facilities adopt high-tech**

TECHNOLOGY ADVANCEMENT	2007	2004
WIRELESS CONNECTION AT THE CLUB	61%	32%
MAINTAIN A WEB SITE	91%	76%

Source: CMAA Club Operations and Financial Data Report, Computer Equipment and Software.

**Expense categories as percentage of total golf-related income by club type**

EXPENSE	YEAR/TYPE	YEAR/TYPE	YEAR/TYPE	YEAR/TYPE	YEAR/TYPE	YEAR/TYPE
	2007/GC*	2007/CC*	2004/GC	2004/CC	2002/GC	2002/CC
SALARIES	15	16	18	18	15	14
HOURLY LABOR	27	24	24	24	25	25
PAYROLL TAXES AND BENEFITS	7	9	8	8	7	8
TOTAL	49	49	50	50	47	47

Source: CMAA Club Operations and Financial Data Report

Note: Golf-related personnel expenses have remained fairly stable as a percentage of golf-related income according to CMAA reports generated in 2007, 2004 and 2002. This reflects personnel level adjustments keeping in line with income adjustments during this period. However, with total golf-related personnel expenses ranging around 50 percent, this is one area to track closely when considering operational efficiencies.

\*GC=Golf Club, CC=Country Club

success expanding into Canada and reaching out to seniors. A considerable upgrade of the banquet space one year, followed by construction of a gazebo the next, drew more special-event business. High-speed Internet access became available last November. The increased transmission speed boosted efficiency. It's part of the next outreach, along with the upcoming installation of retractable flat-screen TVs in the meeting rooms to attract smaller, education-based group and corporate events.

"I see the need to adopt operational efficiencies as an industrywide challenge," he says. "To hold our own in the marketplace, we need to gain a little more strength each year."

**MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES**

Crystal Springs Golf Resort in Hamburg, N.J., features six golf courses, four practice facilities and the David Glenz Golf Academy. Along with two luxury hotels – the original 175-room Minerals Hotel & Spa and the 200-room Grand Cascades Lodge, which opened in July – amenities include two spas; an array of indoor and outdoor pools; basketball, tennis and racquetball courts plus a 6,000-square-foot fitness center; as well as 11 cafes, bistros and restaurants.

The focus on creating a recreation destination doesn't stop there. The owners, who took over Crystal Springs Golf Resort in 1995 and started building from there, previously developed a ski

business that operates adjacent to the complex. They're also involved with a large real estate operation covering much of the adjoining area.

Crystal Springs' target market is metro New York and New Jersey that's filled with upscale, computer-literate consumers. So, management spends a lot of effort drawing people to the resort's Web site, says Art Walton, vice president of golf operations.

"We make sure it's up to date, delivering the information in a user-friendly format," he says. "We offer several types of memberships, some focused on the golfer and others, like our social membership for area residents, more on the other amenities. All provide extra benefits as incentives for using more services. Some memberships obligate the user to spend specified amounts in certain areas."

The facility operates as one entity all connected with a wireless network. The different software programs – Micros for the restaurant functions, the Active Network for property management and accounting programs – are interactive. The reservations system can handle tee times or hotel rooms and offers alternatives from the variety of choices. The software allows management to distinguish the various membership types, accomplish the customer tracking and centralize the billing. The centralized billing ensures a customer at any part of the facility receives an integrated statement. Revenues and

expenditures are posted as they occur.

With the cluster of golf courses in a relatively small geographic area combined with the broad range of other amenities, comes the opportunity to cross-promote, selling the package. The challenge is exposing potential buyers to all possible sales opportunities – without overkill. On site, brochures and collateral pieces are placed strategically where people gather, subtly suggesting other experiences to explore.

Good systems only work well if they're matched with good people, so Crystal Springs focuses on recruiting, training, supervising and developing people.

"We promote from within, which has been a valuable element of our growth," Walton says. "As a result, we have relatively low turnover in our key positions. Most of those at the senior levels have worked up from junior positions, gaining experience as they advanced. That also allows us to leverage our personnel over multiple areas. While we have a superintendent at each course, our three directors of golf each oversee two facilities. Food-and-beverage has similar multiple site management."

Three, soon to be four, of the courses have been built during the past 10 years. Just six miles separates the furthest course from the central hub.

"We realize great efficiencies by operating multiple courses out of a single clubhouse, as well as trimming personnel needs, property taxes and insurance are reduced," Walton says.

Much of the maintenance equipment, other than what's used daily, is shared among the courses. Though each superintendent develops the maintenance program specific to the needs of each course, product purchases generally are consolidated for better price points.

Frequent department meetings and overall strategy sessions keep everyone focused and moving in the same direction.

"But you can only trim operations to a certain point," Walton says. "There are so many fixed costs and factors beyond your control that affect costs. Revenue is the first priority, so we hold marketing meetings weekly. If you can control the revenue side, operate efficiently, and differentiate your product, you can stay ahead of the market." **GCI**

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# BUILD UP A CAREER

SUPERINTENDENTS NEED VERSATILITY, OPTIMISM  
AND BUSINESS SAVVY TO SUCCEED

BY MICHAEL COLEMAN

**W**elcome to the challenge of life – a career. Between the jagged rocks and the icy slopes, there's a path to the top for those that are up to it. Reaching the pinnacle of your career is like climbing Mount Everest – you need to hang on because an avalanche of challenges will convince you it's just that.

The real question is: Can you reach this goal?

To get to the top of the mountain, you have to keep your professional eye on the summit, whether it's a prized location or maybe the perfect family scenario. Achieving success as a golf course superintendent depends on how you define it and go about it.

"I never targeted myself for any one club or name," says Jon Jennings, CGCS, who's been at the Chicago Golf Club for the past eight years. "You also need to have a clear vision and communicate with the people



considered as a career progresses, especially if you have a family.

"We've discussed it openly with our children and let them know there's a possibility we could move at some point," Jennings says. "They're aware of it ... but I don't know that it makes it any easier."

Balancing family priorities can have a significant impact on a career. For those who strive to keep the family happy, a lot of movement might not be the best option. Not every family can pick up and move like a MASH unit.

Experience in many areas contributes to a successful career, says Joe Baidy, CGCS, at The Alps Club in Moscow. Willing to relocate doesn't hurt, either. Armed with an agronomy degree from Penn State and experience at well-conditioned golf courses, Baidy landed the position in Russia after previous stints at Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, N.Y.; Fox Chapel Golf Club in Pittsburgh; Acacia County Club in Lyndhurst, Ohio; and Turning Stone Casino Resort in Verona, N.Y.

However, relocating doesn't guarantee success. Charles Dey has been the superintendent at Springdale Golf Club in Princeton, N.J., since joining the club in 1974. His professional position at Springdale was his second one.

"I thought it would be a stepping stone and I could move on to any place I wanted," he says.

"And then I thought, 'Why not make this a place to have a career?'"

Since that day, Dey has been improving the course while his experience and knowledge have grown, bringing the club up the ranks along with him. He attributes his ability to balance career and family as a factor of his success in life.

"I was very fortunate," Dey says. "I still have the same wife, and I put two kids through college."

Family time is seen as optional in the eyes of some employers, says Joe Flaherty, CGCS. The 42-year veteran has been able to successfully balance family and career through his progression at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, N.J., from 1964 to 1999 and, since then, in his position as superintendent at Hyatt Hills Golf Course in Clark, N.J.

"The biggest pitfall, as far as career development and maintenance, are the absolutely crazy hours some courses ask guys to work," Flaherty says.

Working 60 or even 70 hours a week has become too common at many courses, Flaherty believes, and is a pitfall he's been able to avoid throughout the years.

"To me, you're not well-rounded if you're working those kinds of hours as a young person," he says.

Flaherty encourages assistant superintendents to find a balance and use time off to re-

that work for you, whether it be your assistant, technicians or staff."

Jennings' approach has been to keep an open mind about opportunities. If an opening put him on a road to where he wanted to go, he looked into it. He started as an assistant at the private Onondaga Golf & Country Club near Syracuse, N.Y., and then at En-Joie Golf Club, a municipal course in Endicott, N.Y. Then he stepped up to Hiland Golf Club, a resort in Queensbury, N.Y., and later Patterson Golf Club in Fairfield, Conn., a private club where he was superintendent for seven years.

Relocating is a job aspect that needs to be



Photo: Dreamstime.com

**“The biggest pitfall, as far as career development and maintenance, are the absolutely crazy hours some courses ask guys to work.”**

**-JOE FLAHERTY, CGCS**

charge because it's difficult to be sharp at work if you never get a chance at downtime. Worse than that, it's hard on the family constantly working 10- to 12-hour days.

“You can do it, but it'll wreck your personal life,” he says.

Overworked staff is often caused by poor management, says Flaherty, who was president of the Golf Course Superintendent Association of New Jersey in 1978-79. High-quality superintendents don't simply work their staff until dark; they plan ahead and manage the crew so tasks are completed in an efficient time frame. Because keeping experienced staff helps a club run better, treating employees fairly is good business, good management and good for your career.

**KEEP LEARNING**

As far as successful maintenance operations are concerned, Dey encourages superintendents to be frugal with money and understand budgets, which isn't a common skill right out of college. In other words, Dey suggests superintendents re-

spect the courses for which they're responsible.

“Treat it like it's your own, but remember it's not yours,” he says.

Dey also reminds veterans to stay hungry and be open-minded. Learning from a technically savvy assistant can be a bonus for veterans that started before computers were on every desktop.

Baidy also says learning is important. He attends seminars, conferences and GCSAA activities to keep abreast with new trends in the business. Complacency can be a drag on one's career advancement, he warns. Assistant superintendents should look at options outside a traditional superintendent position such as course construction, irrigation installation and commercial opportunities.

Jennings says he generally attends his compliment of classes for continuing education in fewer than two years – but he doesn't stop there because learning is crucial to being the best you can be.

“The information is growing so fast, you've got to stay on top of it,” says Lyne Tumlinson, director of career services for the GCSAA.

Tumlinson recommends focusing on the areas that might hold a superintendent back. For superintendents with more experience, it's the skills far from turf care that tend to lag behind.

“A lot of them don't have as much knowledge or education in the areas of business, communications and leadership,” she says.

While the soft skills such as leadership and communications are helped by experience, educational opportunities can speed learning significantly. The GCSAA has numerous classes on its Web site to address common gaps.

In addition to learning, just keeping a positive attitude and enjoying the work and coworkers is

a big part of success.

“I'm pleased with my career,” Baidy says. “I've been connected with golf since I was a caddy at the age of nine, for more than 50 years. I enjoy the challenges and people I've met during my career.”

**BUILD RELATIONSHIPS**

Remembering the names of colleagues one meets is beneficial, too, Jennings says. Little things like that help you stand out from others and can lead to opportunities to discuss the next phase of your career.

“The key is, when you meet someone, to follow up with them,” Jennings says. “Send an e-mail or a quick note afterward to help the memory of you stick in their mind so that if, down the road, there's something you might need assistance with, that person recalls who you are.”

All superintendents need to build relationships at the local and national levels, Tumlinson says. She recommends finding a superintendent that holds the kind of position to which you aspire, get together with him and learn the profile of his career and how he attained success.

Dey agrees networking is an important factor to success, especially for younger professionals. He recalls working side by side with his first superintendent and talking with him even after getting the Springdale job. When you have a good relationship with colleagues at nearby clubs, even borrowing equipment occasionally is a possibility.

**EXPERIENCE AND MENTORS**

For younger professionals, versatility comes in handy. Early on in a career, a superintendent should plan ahead, examine all the options and

**Education shift**

➤ Education is an integral part of a superintendent's success. Here's an eight-year comparison:

	1998	2006
Master's and beyond	3%	3%
Bachelor degree	37%	44%
Associate degree	23%	24%
One to two year certificate	17%	13%

Source: GCSAA