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which Flanagan estimates would have cost the club about \$1.45 million, not counting the revenue loss from closing for three to four months.

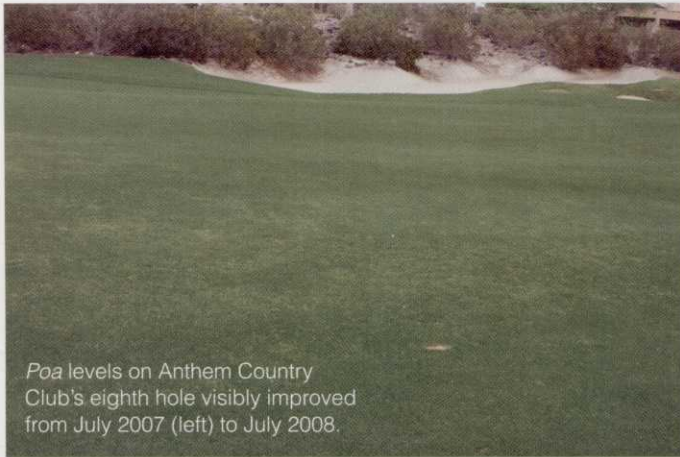
“The membership is happy the ball’s rolling,”

he says. “I hope by the end of next summer the *Poa* on the greens will be mostly gone.”

At the same time, the *Poa* population had become unwieldy in the fairways, rough and tees, too. The 18-hole course was sprigged with

419 bermudagrass when it was built in 1998, and it’s overseeded with ryegrass every September. Flanagan estimates the *Poa* population was at 6 or 7 percent the year of the Trimmit program.

“That might not sound like a lot, but part



Poa levels on Anthem Country Club’s eighth hole visibly improved from July 2007 (left) to July 2008.



Anthem Country Club

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of the problem with *Poa* is if you have it in the fairways and the rough, the seedheads will move around easier and infest the greens," he says.

To gain control, Flanagan instituted a PGR program on the rest of the course, too, including two postoverseeding applications of Primo Maxx, two fall applications of Trimmit, a Trimmit application in March, monthly applications only to the fairways from April to July and one final high-rate (0.75 ounce per 1,000 square feet) Primo application before overseeding, which takes place around Labor Day.

"It's been phenomenal," he says. "The Trimmit has taken the *Poa* population down to less than 1 percent."

An added bonus has been reducing fairway mowing.

"In the summer, our slower time for golf, we started mowing fairways two times a week instead of three," Flanagan says. "That saves me labor and fuel. Is it a lot? Well, it's not the main



Superintendents can't be too aggressive when using plant growth regulators because heavy use can compromise turf's ability to recover from stress.

reason I use the growth regulators – that's for quality of product – but it's important with the high cost of fuel."

Though Flanagan's made some strides with his aggressive PGR programs, he's experienced bumps along the way.

"We have to be careful about stunting the greens," he says. "It's happened before. We've been too aggressive, they've gone off color and essentially stopped growing."

Though such a situation can make golfers happy because of faster greens, it compromises the greens' ability to recover from any stress.

"When that happened, we knew we had to

back off and make an extra fertilizer application to get them to grow out," Flanagan says.

He also learned a lesson after making Trimmit applications to the greens, fairways and rough during the winter months. In addition to going off color, it took most of the winter for the greens to regain their ability to grow.

"The first year we continued to make applications every other week during the whole winter on greens," Flanagan says. "They turned grey – the members asked a lot of questions. We knew we definitely shocked them."

Flanagan learned Mother Nature is a growth regulator herself, so there's no need to make ap-

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plications during the coldest months in Nevada. Last winter, the second season of his aggressive PGR program, Flanagan only made Trimmit applications on greens during weeks when the weather was warm, not every other week.

A DAB WILL DO YOU

Experimenting with PGRs to control *Poa* also has yielded good results at Merion Golf Club in Ardmore, Pa. There, director of golf course operations Matt Shaffer oversees 50 employees working on two courses – the championship East Course and the West Course. The championship course, which is preparing to host the 2009 Walker Cup and the 2013 U.S. Open, has hosted 16 USGA championships, more than any other golf course.

“We use PGRs for two primary reasons – *Poa* control and playability,” Shaffer says, noting the East Course’s 13-year-old bentgrass greens are about 5 percent *Poa*.

Combined, the courses have an annual maintenance budget of about \$2.8 million. Less than 2 percent of that is spent on PGRs.

“But they have more than a 70-percent effect on our playability,” says Shaffer, who maintains Merion’s greens daily with Stimpmeter readings of 11 to 12.

Because the maintenance staff is so vigilant about the course’s playability, it has experimented with a unique PGR application method during the past few years.

“Starting in the very early spring, we dab the *Poa* with a 20x rate of Cutlass and Primo and then we continue to maintain our regular spray applications overtop,” Shaffer says. “It turns the *Poa* jet black, completely shutting it off. The Cutlass goes crazy on the bent, and it crawls across the void. It looks horrible, but it doesn’t affect putting.”

Shaffer credits Merion’s agronomist, Dave Petfield, with creating this strictly experimental application method.

“He came up with it four or five years ago, and we’ve been doing it ever since,” Shaffer says. “Dabbing is really common, but I don’t know anyone else who does it with a 20x rate of Cutlass and Primo. We’ve been doing it for a number of

years, and that product was never commercially available. Now that product is called Legacy.”

Merion’s maintenance staff began using Legacy on its West course this season at 6 to 6.5 ounces per acre. Previously, it had been applying Trimmit at 35 ounces per acre.

“It’s now a quarter of the cost and 100 percent more effective,” Shaffer says.

There are some potential drawbacks to this method, Shaffer acknowledges. One is bumpiness. Merion double-cuts and rolls greens daily, but courses with a higher height of cut might not create the smooth surface that makes this method work.

The second is color. Jet-black spots on the greens aren’t something members expect.

“You have to educate your members,” Shaffer says. Sooner or later they understand, especially when it doesn’t affect play.”

But TV viewers are another story.

“We used this method this spring, but we probably won’t next year because of the Walker Cup,” Shaffer says. “Our members understand, but the general public might not.” GCI

Other PGR strategies

While *Poa* control is one of the main reasons superintendents use PGRs, it’s not the only one. Here’s a look at three more PGR uses.

During championship years, the maintenance staff at Merion Golf Club in Ardmore, Pa., will use PGRs in the rough to keep it tighter and healthier, says director of golf course operations Matt Shaffer. Though Shaffer hasn’t historically used PGRs in the rough during nonchampionship seasons, he’s thinking about doing so considering the rising costs of fuel and labor associated with cutting 50 to 60 acres of rough on the championship course and 45 acres on the West course.

Though the cost to apply the growth regulator may be high in labor, Shaffer believes using PGRs on the rough would save in the end.

“I know some superintendents who are using it all the time in the rough,” he says. “It’s certainly something we’re going to consider. The cost offset would be close, and you’d have a stronger rough because the plant wouldn’t be using all that energy for topical growth.”

For the last six years, David Hay, CGCS, has incorporated Primo into Indian Wells Country Club’s overseeding program. The 36-hole facility in La Quinta, Calif., has common bermudagrass primarily and 328 bermudagrass in the summertime. The course is overseeded with perennial ryegrass in October.

“We started doing research with Primo – it was a joint venture between the Hi-Lo Desert Golf Course Superintendents Association and Syngenta – and after seeing the results, we started putting some of it into practice and it worked,” Hay says. “Before that we scalped real hard to get rid of the bermudagrass and return to ryegrass. We would hope it would cool down,

and the bermuda wouldn’t come back.”

Now, instead of relying on hope, Hay and his crew apply Primo in the overseeding process after making the first cut in short turf areas like fairways, tees and approaches.

“It helps slow the bermuda down and gets the ryegrass to start pillowing so it matures a little quicker,” he says.

Though this method costs about \$1,000 more per season than the old way of doing things, it’s worth it for Hay.

“We’re getting a better stand of turfgrass as early as we can so it will mature as fast as possible and handle wear and tear,” he says.

Ken Nice, superintendent at Bandon Dunes Golf Resort in Bandon, Ore., considers his approach to PGR use to be unique. He rarely uses them.

Bandon Dunes’ goal is to create a links-style tight, fast surface. As a result, the course’s primary turf type is fine fescue; plus, it has low nitrogen inputs.

“Fine fescue is a relatively slow-growing turfgrass,” Nice says. “It’s a slow metabolizing grass, and under normal circumstances it doesn’t grow a lot. The second part is we’re using about a quarter of the nitrogen than a conventional course would in the U.S.”

Though Nice has used Proxy for *Poa* seedhead suppression on greens and green surrounds in the past, he doesn’t have a regular PGR program.

“We’re trying to create a surface that’s authentic to true links golf,” he says. “So if you were playing the old course at St. Andrews or Muirfield, then you could come to Bandon and say this is the same surface I saw in Scotland.” GCI

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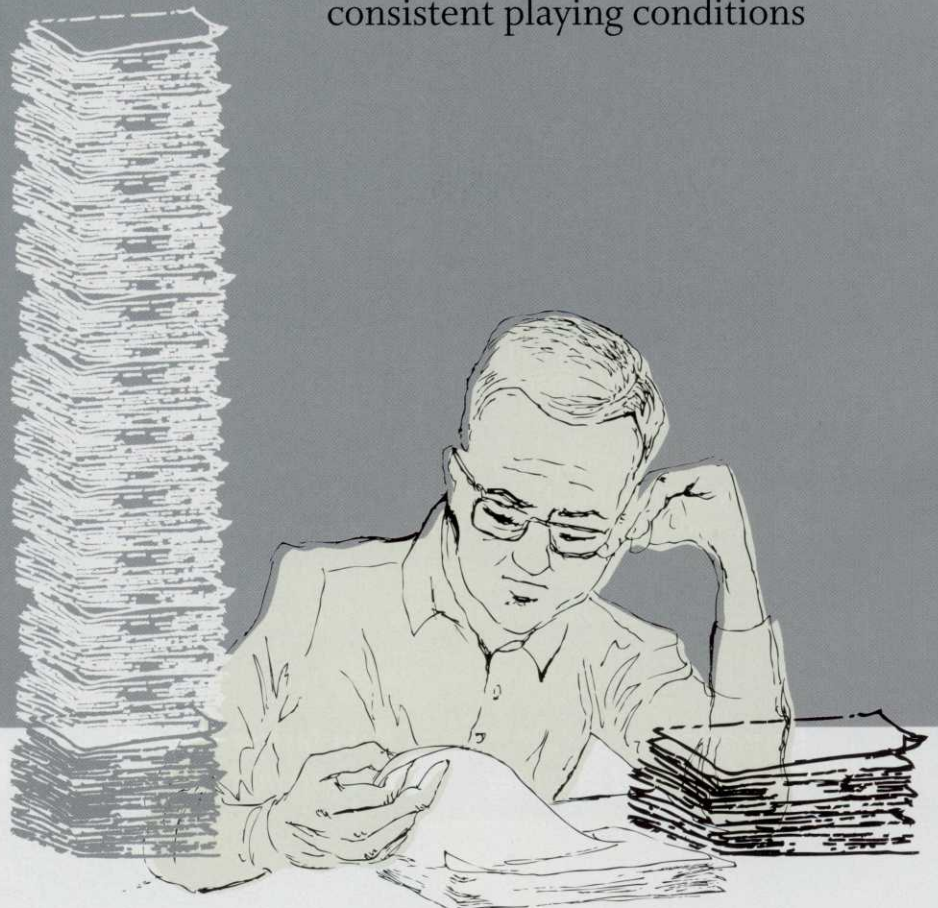
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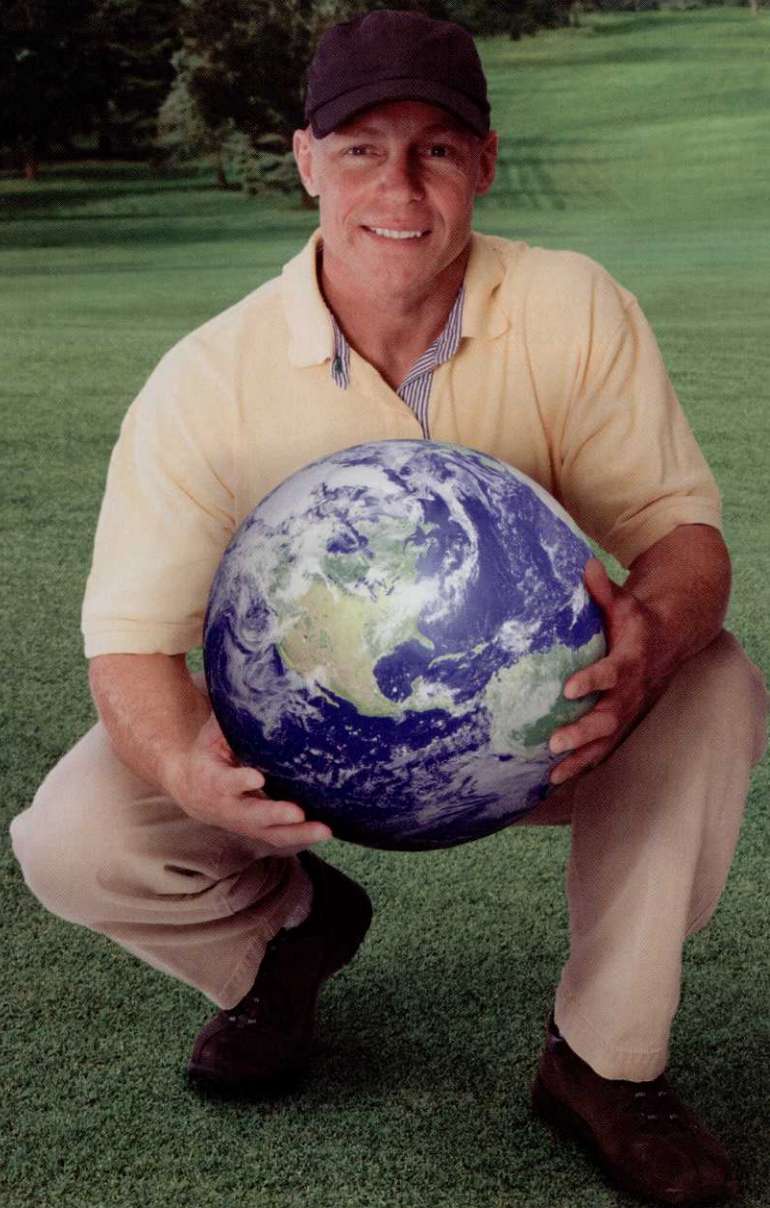
Look, listen and learn

Proper training pays off
with improved and
consistent playing conditions

The demands placed on a golf course maintenance staff aren't unlike those required of workers at an amusement park. Versatility is crucial in both settings. Ideally, every amusement park worker should know how to operate the Ferris wheel, how to help nauseated people off the roller coaster and the best way to unwedge stuck bumper cars. On a golf course, each employee must know how to mow the green on 14, trim the fairway on 7 and run the string trimmer around the tricky tee perimeter on 11.

But that's where the parallel ends. Working on a golf course, one deals with the complexities of turfgrass and answers to an audience with high standards and expectations. Hiring people who can multitask with machinery and tools, yet be patient with an agenda that's at the mercy of unpredictable golfer behavior and weather, are just some of the staffing and training challenges golf course superintendents face.





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VALUABLE KNOWLEDGE

At many courses, management shows new hires a number of instructional videos, sometimes including one that lays out the most basic understanding of golf – there are 18 holes, here’s how golf is played, this is what a putting green is, etc. Then there are safety videos, which are more about what not to do on a course.

“Basically, these videos say ‘Don’t do anything stupid,’” says Randy Allen, senior director for golfing grounds at Grand Dunes Golf Club in Myrtle Beach, S.C. “Like, don’t stand in front of a front-end loader, don’t climb trees, don’t even stand on something to reach something in a tree, etc.”

There also are videos that cover broader safety issues, such as lightning storms and heat stroke.

Individual pieces of equipment – utility vehicles, chain saws, rotary rough units, tractors, various mowers, etc. – often come with training videos. At The Club at Mediterra in Naples, Fla., new employees might watch as many as 30 videos – many supplied by the manufacturers.

Besides videos, some courses have hard-copy training materials covering all maintenance practices, safety issues, and core standards for set-up and guest service, as established by the superintendent or, at times, by a parent company that owns the course.

After the preliminary video and/or written training, employees usually are taken out on the course, probably by an assistant superintendent. A common practice is to have new employees watch the experienced workers in action. After initial introductions, the assistant superintendent will leave, and the new hires will shadow the old hands on their rounds the rest of the day.

Proper training at this early juncture will usually pay off with improved and consistent playing conditions, says Kevin Kienast, golf and ground superintendent at Four Seasons Resort Aviara near San Diego.

“After the initial training, follow-up training in the field should be practiced regularly,” Kienast says.

OLD HABITS DIE HARD

When hiring experienced golf course workers, inevitably there are adjustments to make.

“Sometimes you have to really hound people until they break bad habits they got into at their old job,” says Scott Whorall, director of golf course operations at The Club at Mediterra. “Within a few weeks, you know if they’re going to catch on. If not, we’ll try to find another role for them at the course.”

On the other hand, a person occasionally will bring a technique or way of thinking that improves the process at a new course.

STAFF TRAINING DO’S AND DONT’S

Do

- Create a well-defined organizational structure
- Convey the mission, vision and goals for your course
- Foster a climate conducive to open communication
- Develop detailed job descriptions for applicants
- Empower workers
- Make safety a top priority and provide bilingual materials if necessary
- Teach fundamentals of the first one or two tasks

Don’t

- Micromanage your staff
- Forget what it’s like to be new
- Be adverse to learning from new hires



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"If someone has a smarter method, we'll implement it," Whorall says. "We're always looking for a better way."

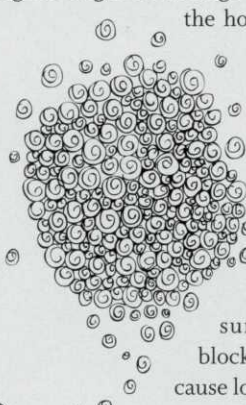
Many superintendents believe it's important to observe people in their first weeks on the job.

"Some guys are just naturally talented at certain things," Whorall says. "We take notice of what people's strengths are. If someone is particularly detail oriented, we'll give them jobs that require someone that's conscientious."

At the end of the day, it's the superintendent's job to see what's needed on the course. Some things are done daily, such as mowing greens, collars, approaches and fairways. Routines vary according to the season. During summer and spring, fairways might be mowed three times a week, down to twice a week during the fall. Routines also depend on how things are growing. For example, if there's been a warm spring, or during a tournament, fairways might be mowed four times in one week.

Throughout time, a superintendent learns what to look for and develops an intrinsic knowledge of the course's present needs and a sixth sense about future needs. But imparting that knowledge to new staff, some of which have never even mowed a lawn at home or driven a car, can be challenging.

While a supervisor knows the general basics of what's happening with, say, the practice of syringing greens, he can't oversee every spot where grass might be wilting. Workers have to learn where



the hot spots, hydrophobic places, are. For example, it might be 120 degrees on the canopy of a turn, and the grass will burn out if it isn't misted. One green might be getting plenty of air movement, which evaporates the water on the grass. Another green might be surrounded by trees, which block air. When such conditions cause loss of water, grass gets hotter, causing disease or other problems. It takes a lot of time for a worker to learn how to discern the particular needs of each microenvironment, which has to be inspected three or four times daily in hot weather.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MORALE

In sharp contrast to the tranquil serenity of a golf course environment, there's constant pressure on the collective shoulders of a maintenance staff. Usually their mistakes are plainly visible and often not fixed easily. Staff must mow and conduct course set-up away from the golfers as much as possible, which slows down their work routine. Unless they've been on the job for years, they're often learning new groundskeeping techniques and equipment operation. The inconsistent and unpredictable progression of golfers over the course only exacerbates the struggle to tend

to every hole, every day. So it's no surprise golf course superintendents seek ways to maintain their staff's morale.

Superintendents have to give workers basic knowledge of how to complete a given task and make them understand how important it is, but then let them go to it.

"If a superintendent is constantly trying to step in and make every decision, the employee will feel he's just a piece of meat," Allen says. "But if you empower him to do the job, he'll take more pride in doing it, and in turn, he'll do a better job."

"You try to impart wisdom without micromanaging," he adds. "I try to allow people to make their own decisions. You can't tell a guy how to weed eat the grass, you have to give him a weed eater and let him figure it out. This shows them they're important, that you have confidence in them. If you give them a chance, more than likely they'll figure out a better way to do it. A front-line person who's dealing with it every day will figure out a faster way or a neater way or a more economical way of doing it than you will."

At some courses, green committees and club presidents think they're experts in golf course management, but they don't know as much as they think. When they try to tell a maintenance worker how to do his job, it usually ends up with some kind of disaster.

"One way to get the best work out of your staff is to ensure they're aware of the big picture," says Mel Waldron, golf course superintendent at Horton Smith Golf Course in Springfield, Mo. "Let everyone know what the goals and expectations are – for a given day as well as throughout the coming weeks or months – and their work will be better and more consistent."

To help boost morale, The Club at Mediterra holds a cookout or pizza party every month. It also cross-trains workers so they don't become bored doing the same thing every day. Additionally, about every six weeks, it holds employee focus groups in which employees can candidly voice ideas or gripes with no repercussions.

PREVENTING A LANGUAGE HANDICAP

In markets where staff is likely to consist of Hispanic workers, Spanish language versions of all training videos and materials are available. It helps to have at least one supervisor, or even one worker or mechanic, fluent in Spanish and English. There are always instances in which someone has to be called in from a distant fairway to translate a conversation. The Club at Mediterra has a literacy council consisting of golf club members who volunteer to teach course workers English after working hours. These volunteers are acknowledged at the annual golf course maintenance open house. They might even ask one of the Hispanic employees to show off his new language skills by reading something in English.

But even for English-speaking staff members, there's a learning curve when it comes to communication.

"Assistant superintendents are usually kids just a few years out of school, and they have more to learn about communication with their peers than they do about soil nutrients," Allen says. "They get hung up on little stuff and tend to make big things out of small things. We try to get them to understand that a mower that doesn't start isn't a crisis, but a green under 3 inches of water ... that's a crisis." GCI

