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Monroe Miller is a retired golf course superintendent. He spent 36 years as superintendent at Blackhawk Country Club in Madison, Wis. Miller can be reached at groots@charter.net.

THE CRICKETS ARE CRYING AUTUMN

We have had a summer here in the upper Midwest I used to dream about. It was cool and a little on the dry side with only a few severe storms. In terms of managing a golf course, it will be remembered as one of those “easy years.” It’s a good thing they come along every once in a while to make up for seasons that are extremely stressful.

Colleagues in other parts of the country haven’t been so lucky. It rained constantly during periods in the Northeast, as witnessed by the heroic efforts required of Craig Currier for the U.S. Open at Bethpage. In the Northwest it was hot in July and the drought in Texas is downright scary. They won’t remember this summer as fondly as we will in the Great Lakes area.

A few golf courses experienced some winter injury, but most profited from the heavy snow that came at Thanksgiving and didn’t leave until the birds had returned in early spring.

We were worried all summer about the millions of folks losing their jobs to the poor economy, hoping there would be a recovery soon enough to save them. Some of us, however, aren’t so sure that Obama’s spending of borrowed money is the answer to all that ails us. It has to be paid back, with interest, someday.

In our state, manure was a big topic of discussion, led by the Midwest Manure Summit held at Lambeau Field in Green Bay. I hope that doesn’t mean that the Packers are going to stink this fall. We enjoyed the International Cow Chip Throwing Contest in Sauk City, only a few miles from my home. We watched with interest as the U.S. senators from Iowa tried to justify sneaking big money earmarks into the federal budget to study the smell of hog manure. Closer to home, the issue took a twist when we learned dairy cattle are a major contributor to greenhouse

gasses and global warming. Genetic scientists are at work creating a cow that produces less methane. I wonder if they were able to get an earmark in the budget for that project.

And in my home county, Vice President Joe Biden called the county executive to get the latest on Dane County’s manure digester. This was right after he said flying was dangerous because of swine flu. Given his performance so far as veep, if anyone could use a manure digester, it’s probably Joe!

For the first time
ever I hated to see
summer go... *But all
good things come to
an end.*

Minnesota had an interesting early summer season as they watched the vote counting for a U.S. senator come to a close. Al Franken was sworn in, a nice complement, some say, to their choice of Jesse Ventura as governor a few years back. Just south of here in Illinois the politics were even more interesting with Governor Blagojevich and Senator Burris. There’s never a dull moment in the upper Midwest.

The summer was so pleasant people were actually enjoying their front porches and backyard decks. The mosquito population never really got started, which was a plus for outdoor activities including golf. Oh, I grumbled a little bit about how long it was taking for my garden to mature – I wondered if I was going to have to cultivate a taste for green tomatoes. But, summer annuals, which start to look pretty weak by summer’s end, were in full color and robust health.

Cheryl and I are Army Lt. Ryan Norton’s godparents, and he is never

very far from our thoughts. His father, Pat, is a golf course superintendent west of Chicago, and his mom, Sue, sent us the temperature forecast for the week of July 24-July 30 at his duty station in Iraq. For that week, the daily high averaged to 120 degrees F. and the low averaged to 92 degrees F. That data, coupled with photos of Army and Marine soldiers dressed in their full uniform and gear, made me embarrassed that I ever complained about a summer in Wisconsin.

That confession notwithstanding, for the first time ever I hated to see summer go. The pleasant weather, day after day for weeks on end, was a dream come true for this former golf course superintendent. But all good things come to an end and we’re on the threshold of autumn. The local and club tournaments are over, the club champions have been determined, golf course crews have shrunk in numbers as kids return to school, and soon the workday will have to begin later as daylight disappears. Soon enough, many of our golfers and club members will head South and West, leaving before the snow and cold arrive. Our colleagues in those regions will be gearing up as we slowly wind down.

Nature tells us summer is over, too. There is a tangy, almost spicy aroma to the air. The sumac are turning red, the birch are showing some yellow color in their canopies, and the Queen Anne’s lace is fully flowered. The crickets and locust are crying autumn, in a way substituting for the songbirds that greeted us in the early morning hours for all these months just past.

By and large, this first summer of my retirement as a golf course superintendent has been everything I imagined it would be. If this continues for the other seasons as they come and go, I will consider myself a very lucky man. **6CI**



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Stephen Tucker is the equipment manager at the Ritz-Carlton Members Golf Club in Bradenton, Fla., and past president of the International Golf Course Equipment Managers Association. He can be reached at 941-309-2913 or stephen.tucker@ritzcarlton.com.

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE PROGRAMS

Preventive maintenance programs have come a long way in the last 10 years.

Think back when records were kept on index cards; now everything is becoming automated and computer driven. No matter which method you employ, having a program in place is more vital now than it has ever been before.

Preventive maintenance programs not only track when maintenance is due, they provide information for equipment purchases, budgets and labor to justify spending. Utilizing programs such as Trims, Toro's My Turf, TurfCentric, Avior or others will help you run annual expenditure reports. These systems allow you to monitor your costs for each piece of equipment and identify when a piece of equipment needs excessive repairs that may outweigh the purchase of a new one.

You also can use these systems to identify previous parts costs. Many times it's easy to glance over price in pursuit of a part, and this feature identifies when part prices fluctuate. The system tracks what you last paid for a part, which provides a reference point that alerts you when you may be paying too much.

Another great feature of preventive maintenance programs is they can monitor labor costs – whether to justify a budget or the need for an assistant technician. You also can monitor your budget in these programs to help you with your monthly planning of maintenance practices. This will ensure that you can properly plan so you do not exceed your budget or that you're aware before it happens. In these economic times being able to plan and be prepared is half the battle.

Some of these systems are tied into dealers and allow you to purchase parts online, which alleviates the long wait times and gives you a method of tracking when your parts were ordered.

There's a big price range for these systems – from free to \$2,500-plus – but you can't put a price on proper management of your facility's fleet. Once you have all the data in front of you, how would you ever be able to properly manage without it?

Select a preventive maintenance system based on the data you want to track and how much work you're willing to do to get it. Some systems have tiers based on the amount of information you wish to record and others have devices that are attached to machines that will send the information from the machine to your computer.

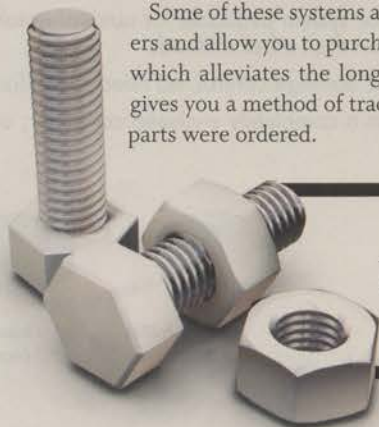
A baseline system would just track your equipment fleet and the preventive maintenance done and not necessarily the actual repairs or parts inventory. The more expensive systems track everything from labor and budgets to parts inventory and create reports for items such as hours' usage, repair costs, labor reports and equipment inventory.

The challenge in implementing a preventive maintenance system is making the time to sit down to do it.

Also, knowing your way around the computer is a huge help and will reduce the time you spend learning the program's basic functions. Basic systems may take only a day to set up, while more detailed systems could take a week of off-and-on work to complete.

Most program manufacturers offer some sort of training. For example, some will come to your work site for a nominal fee while others provide online or telephone training. Most of them have step-by-step instructional videos.

Whether you keep the information on index cards or you utilize one of the systems on the market today, every operation, no matter how big or small, needs some type of system. **GCI**



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being able to plan and be prepared
is half the battle.




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CONSUMER RESEARCH

A glimpse of how golfers' behavior affects the business of golf facility maintenance and management.



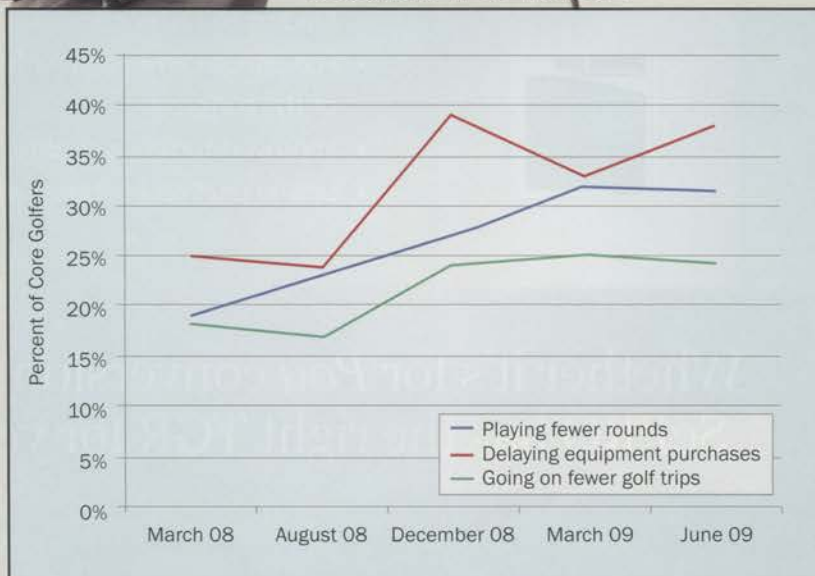
TAKING CUES FROM CONFIDENCE

Just as consumer confidence is a key indicator for the greater economy, golfer confidence is an important metric for the golf industry.

The National Golf Foundation has been tracking golf consumer confidence during the recession that began in December 2007 by periodically surveying core golfers about their rounds and spending habits.

As the chart at right shows, after worsening in 2008, golfer confidence has stabilized recently. As a comparison, consumer confidence information is included below.

GOLFER CONFIDENCE



Source: NGF research

CONSUMER CONFIDENCE



Source: The Conference Board Leading Economic Index for the United States

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Rethink Tomorrow

Gearing Up for GROWTH

Despite a historically shaky collective reputation, management and contract maintenance companies are positioned to grow.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

You could say that golf course management companies' reputations precede them. Whether it's based on personal experience or hearsay, many industry members – especially golf course superintendents – have their minds made up about the third-party firms that manage entire golf operations or single departments, such as maintenance.

Regardless of their collective reputation, management companies serve a niche in the industry. With a down golf market and a recession in the U.S. economy over the last 20 months making the operating environment even more challenging, these firms are poised to grow, according to data provided to Golf Course Industry for the Top Management Companies List.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

Anecdotally, many say that the negative perceptions about management companies are tales from the past and peoples' opinions about them are improving.

"Management companies' reputations have improved," says Terry Buchen, CGCS, president of Golf Agronomy International. "There was a lot of anxiety when they first became prominent on the scene, but it has subsided and there is a more positive attitude about them in recent years."

GCI research shows that half of superintendents' perceptions of management companies has not changed over the last 20 years. Twenty-eight percent say their perceptions have improved; 22 percent say they've gotten worse (see page 22).

Steve Gano, vice president of operations for Championsgate, Fla.-based International Golf Maintenance, says good companies have been able to dispel negative perceptions through proven track records.

"We've made some significant headway," he says, adding that it helped that 2008 GCSAA president Dave Downing, CGCS, is an executive in a management company. Plus, high-profile superintendent and past GCSAA president Bruce Williams, former director of golf courses and grounds at Los Angeles Country Club, this month started in a development role with ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance.

Greg Pieschala, president of ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance, Calabasas, Calif., says battling stereotypes is not an issue for his company, though that wasn't the case five years ago.

"At that time we were encountering ambivalence among superintendents, but that's a thing of the past," he says. "Today when we have an opening, we're blessed with a lot of very high quality people who want to work with us."

Pieschala attributes ValleyCrest's ability to overcome the perception obstacle to several internal programs, including training it conducts through the GCSAA and structuring an incentive program that rewards superintendents for actively participating in the GCSAA and achieving and maintaining certification. He also believes that ValleyCrest benefits from being a contract maintenance firm vs. a traditional management company.

"If you're a superintendent, that makes all the difference in the world," Pieschala says.

However, GCI research shows that 50 percent of superintendents don't differentiate between the two types of companies and, in fact, 36 percent have a more favorable perception of traditional management companies than contract maintenance companies (see page 22).

Critics of third-party operators say they don't always do what's best for the golf course and take away the superintendent's autonomy. Upon the arrival of management companies they see their operating and capital improve-

ment budgets shrink and feel pressure to deliver the same conditions with a reduced budget while answering to someone who may be off site.

"I can only really speak for KemperSports, but when superintendents become part of our system, there's a lot of tools and support," says Steve Skinner, CEO for Northbrook, Ill.-based KemperSports. "From peers, to regional support personnel and from a technical and agronomic basis."

As for autonomy, Skinner says KemperSports believes in the brand of the individual golf course and the local staff's expertise.

"They're the ones who understand the desires of the local golfers and our customers," he says. "We give them the tools and support to rely on, but we don't look to tell them how to do their jobs. They're high qualified and well trained and they have the authority and responsibility for producing a quality product."

Gano shares a similar philosophy.

"There are a hundred ways to get the job done, and we're all for guys doing it their own way, but when we know a job can be done more efficiently, we absolutely provide that idea to the superintendent," he says. "All of our ideas come from our superintendents and we share that idea with the rest of our clubs."

One assumption is the belief that when management or contract maintenance companies come in, the existing staff will be fired.

"Too often we hear about that negative perception, but in reality we've saved guys' jobs," Gano says. "There are superintendents who haven't been given the right tools, the budget isn't what it needs to be and we can convince the board that they're not providing superintendents with the right resources. The superintendent on a property knows the history. That's a huge piece of the puzzle, so we'd be crazy to automatically get rid of the superintendent."

Unfortunately, some clubs have used management or maintenance companies to make changes at the superintendent level so they don't appear to be the bad guys, Gano says.

"And that gives us all a black eye," he says. "If we have the sense that they're only talking to us to change the superintendent, we won't allow a club to use us to do that because it doesn't translate into a long-term relationship."

KemperSports doesn't systematically fire superintendents or other managers when it brings on a new facility.

"We look to retain and retrain as much as possible," Skinner says. "We go in and interview

The Top Management Companies List

THE TOP 35 MANAGEMENT COMPANIES

RANK	COMPANY	HEADQUARTERS	WEB SITE	LOCATIONS	% GROWTH '09 vs. '08	% GROWTH FOR 2010 (EXPECTED)	HR CONTACT	MAINTENANCE PURCHASING CONTACT
1	Troon Golf	Scottsdale, Ariz.	troongolf.com	145	15	15	Sandra Simonson, 480-477-0455	Charlene Gallob, 480-606-1000
2	Billy Casper Golf	Vienna, Va.	billycaspergolf.com	107	n/r	n/r	Doug Wayne, 703-761-1444	Bryan Bielecki, 703-761-1444
3	American Golf Corp.	Santa Monica, Calif.	americangolf.com	105	n/r	n/r	Joe Stegman, 310-664-4037	n/r, 310-664-4000
4	KemperSports Management	Northbrook, Ill.	kempersports.com	99	10	10	Susan Somers-Evans, 846-850-4875	Adrienne Flentge, 847-850-4885
5	ClubCorp USA	Dallas	clubcorp.com	90	0	5	Laura Komegay, 972-243-6191	Doug Miller, CGCS, 927-888-7580
6	Eagle Golf	Dallas	eaglegolf.com	75	0	5	Cindy Kristek, 214-722-6008	Unfilled, 214-722-6000
7	Century Golf Partners / Arnold Palmer Golf Management	Addison, Texas	centurygolf.com	60	15	10	Lisa Taylor, 972-419-1400	Chris Hamill, 972-419-1400
8	Mariott Golf	Orlando, Fla.	mariottgolf.com	41	n/r	n/r	n/r, 407-206-6000	n/r, 407-206-6000
9	Lindsey Management Co.	Fayetteville, Ark.	lindseymanagement.com	38	10	10	Betsy Fox, 479-521-6686	Dennis Collins, 479-521-6686
10	OB Sports Golf Management	Scottsdale, Ariz.	obsports.com	30	5	15	Brandon Cajthaml, 480-948-1300	Tom Christy, 425-891-8551
11	IRI Golf Group	Rancho Santa Fe, Calif.	irigolfgroup.com	23	0	14	Susan French, 704-882-4899	Larry Benson, 704-882-4899
12	Landscapes Golf Group	Lincoln, Neb.	landscapesgolf.com	20	20	5-10	Rhonda McGinnis, 402-423-6653	Tom Everett, 402-423-6653
13	CourseCo	Petaluma, Calif.	courseco.com	18	7.6	10	Michael Shapiro, 707-763-0335	John Lauer, 707-763-0335
14 (t)	East West Partners Club Management	Chapel Hill, N.C.	eastwestclubs.com	17	n/r	n/r	Angie Gardner, 704-799-8511	Mark Clayton, 704-799-8511
14 (t)	WCI Communities	Bonita Springs, Fla.	wcicomunities.com	17	n/r	n/r	n/r, 239-390-3643	n/r, 239-390-3643
16	Kitson & Partners	Orlando, Fla.	kitsonpartners.com	16	30	25	Ed Whalley, 407-246-8482	Dean Wochaski, Golf Maintenance Solutions 757-427-1712
17	Western Golf Properties	Lake Forest, Calif.	wgolfp.com	15	15	20	Bobby Heath, 949-900-8241	Rob Ford, 949-900-8246
18	Heritage Golf Group	San Diego	heritagegolfgroup.com	14	0	14	Judy Munoz, 858-720-0694	Norm Goodmanson, 530-257-2576
19 (t)	Donovan Brothers Golf	Chino Hills, Calif.		13	8	n/r	Tri Nguyen, 888-825-4322,	n/r, 714-528-6400
19 (t)	Touchstone Golf	Burnett, Texas	touchstonegolf.com	13	30	10	Kathy Mallari, 512-756-8000 x 101	Local superintendents, 512-756-8000
19 (t)	Walters Golf Management	Chesterfield, Mo.	wgmgo.com	13	18	15	Deborah Walsh, 636-532-8833	Dennis Barron, 636-532-8833
22	Meadowbrook Golf	Championsgate, Fla.	mggi.com	12	5	20	Jaime Edmondson, 407-589-7200	Greg Plotner, 407-589-7200
23 (t)	HMS Golf	Woodstock, Ga.	hmsgolf.com	11	16	20	James Haslam, 770-928-3841 x 4	James Haslam, 770-928-3841 x 4
23 (t)	Honours Golf	Birmingham, Ala.	honoursgolf.com	11	0	20	Phil Oakes, 205-298-0001	Jim Dereuil, 205-298-0001
23 (t)	SunBelt Golf Corp.	Birmingham, Ala.	rtjgolf.com	11	0	n/r	Sharon Green, 205-769-1330	Ricky Huey, 205-942-0444
26	Affiniti Golf Partners	Alpharetta, Ga.	affinitigolf.com	10	40	20	Lee Andrea, 678-679-0523	Whitney Cove, 770-294-3709
27 (t)	Coral Hospitality	Naples, Fla.	coralcollection.com	9	11	13	Linda Mitchell, 239-449-1800	Bill Januska, 239-449-1800
27 (t)	Empire Golf Management	Pomona, N.Y.	empiregolfmanagement.com	9	0	0	n/r, 845-362-9146	n/r, 845-362-9146
27 (t)	In Celebration of Golf	Scottsdale, Ariz.	incelebrationofgolf.com	9	11	20	Tracy Malmstone, 480-951-5771	Andy Rioux, 480-951-5771
30 (t)	JC Golf	San Marcos, Calif.	jcgolf.com	8	0	1	Tami Shober, 858-675-8500	Bob Dobek, 760-591-3151
30 (t)	OnCourse Strategies	Austin, Texas	oncoursestrategies.com	8	12	12	Tracey Snyder, 512-347-1244	Jim Papa, 512-388-2873
30 (t)	Signature Golf Group	Murrells Inlet, S.C.	signaturegolfgroup.com	8	0	10-15	Donnie Locklear, 843-215-3673	Dave Downing, 843-215-3673
30 (t)	Traditional Golf Management	Toano, Va.	traditionalclubs.com	8	25	33	Paul Mauk, 757-566-1138	Paul Mauk, 757-566-1138
30 (t)	Vision Golf Management (formerly S&S Golf Management)	Fort Myers, Fla.	visiongolfmanagement.com	8	10	100	Bobby Sarver, 239-415-1110	Joe Fenner, 239-561-1444
30 (t)	Wilson Golf Group	Stillwater, Minn.	wilsongolfgroup.com	8	0	5	Greg Stang, 651-439-6981	Greg Stang, 651-439-6981

THE TOP 5 CONTRACT MAINTENANCE COMPANIES

1	ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance	Calabasas, Calif.	valleycrest.com	58	18	15-20	Raul Diaz de Leon, 818-223-8500	Mark Crutcher, 818-223-8500
2	Intemational Golf Maintenance, a Meadowbrook Golf company	Championsgate, Fla.	igmnc.net	55	n/r	n/r	Melissa Howe, 800-413-5500	Tyler Minamy, 800-413-5500
3	OneSource Landscape & Golf Services, an ABM company	Tampa, Fla.	one-source.com	23	0	10	Rhonda Buring, 813-886-0001	Scott Jamros, 352-259-7717
4	Davey Tree Expert Co.	Auburn Hills, Mich.	davey.com	11	0	20	Mary Shafor, 248-475-9155	Mark Jackson, 248-475-9155
5	Shearon Environmental Design	Plymouth Meeting, Pa.	shearondesign.com	5	10	20	Anh Nguyen, 610-828-5688	Tony Houghey, 610-828-5688

(t) = tie n/r = not reported

METHODOLOGY

In June, July and August of 2009 we solicited data from management and contract maintenance companies in the golf course industry. We received responses from 52 firms that manage or provide maintenance services for more than one golf course. In addition to contact information for key personnel, we asked for the number of locations they manage, how much they've grown since 2008 and what their growth projections are for 2010. Some companies that manage eight or more facilities do not appear on the list because they declined to participate.

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