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“The first thing we had to do is remove as much thatch as possible, creating some cavities for air and water to move through.”

### KEY POINTS

- Blue Hill Country Club had to address significant thatch issues and heavy soils.
- First, the maintenance team dethatched and aerated to encourage air and water movement through the soil.
- Next, they began to incorporate sand into the soil profile through drill-and-fill methods.
- As a result, the facilities problematic greens improved dramatically.



Jason Adams used photos of the soil profiles throughout the course to convince the greens committee of the importance of draining the greens and incorporating sand into the profiles.



# Dealing with *Poa* push-up greens

The turf team at Blue Hill Country Club troubleshoots the thatch and soil issues that were hampering their greens.

by Jason Adams

Four years ago I was hired at Blue Hill Country Club, a 27-hole facility that was constructed in 1925. The club was the host of the 1956 PGA Championship and hosted an LPGA event for several years.

After evaluating the property, I realized that there were some significant thatch issues on some of the greens, as well as some very heavy soils 4 inches below the surface. The combination of the two resulted in greens with severe isolated dry spots, inconsistent playing surfaces and poor drainage after high amounts of precipitation.

The first thing we had to do is remove as much thatch as possible, creating some cavities for air and water to move through. That first year we core aerated three times, twice with  $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch tines on a 2-inch by 2-inch spacing and a  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch core aerating. We also performed a  $\frac{5}{16}$ -inch needle tine three times throughout the season and deep-tined with 10-inch deep  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch tines in the fall.

It was a drastic change in aeration than what the members were used to. In the past, they were only allowed to pull cores one to two times per year with varied deep tine in the fall. They relied more on the hydroject to fracture the soil profiles underneath.

After the third year of this program, the top six inches of the soil profile showed dramatic improvement, as well as the playable consistency of the greens. It was now time to attack the deeper depths of the soil profile.

During the early summer of 2009 – with record heat in the northeast and a July rainfall – several greens at Blue Hill CC became severely stressed with no place for the moisture in the root zone to go. The soil profile was saturated with 90- to 100-degree heat. The result was significant annual bluegrass loss on about seven greens on the course. They just couldn't dry down.

The No. 9 green, which had been notorious for being a problem green, suffered the worst that summer with a 60 percent loss in turf. The No. 9 is one of those greens that has poor drainage with heavy soils underneath, sits in a pocket on the property and was surrounded

by trees.

During my second season, we had removed 20 large pine trees from behind the green and followed that up with removing six large oak trees on the southeast side of the green to encourage the morning sunlight.

Once we had recovered from the summer, it was time to sell the membership on modifying the lower 6 inches of our profiles.

The first thing I did was to compile a series of photos of the soil profiles from every green on the golf course. The photos were put into a PowerPoint presentation along with "drill-and-fill" photos from Norfolk Golf Club, my previous club. I described the importance of draining the greens and the incorporation of sand into the profiles.

It was decided by the green committee and the board of directors that this was an important step in the conditioning of Blue Hill Country Club. That fall we performed the drill-and-fill process on 10 of the 18 greens on the course.

The results this summer from our "problem greens" were dramatic. The greens rooted and drained better than they ever had in the four seasons I have served





as superintendent of Blue Hill Country Club. It was decided that we would continue this process on all 19 greens on the main course for the next four seasons.

This fall we completed our second application of drill-and-fill on the greens. Approx-

mately 40 tons of sand was drilled into 8,500 square feet of greens. We hired an outside company to perform the process, which cost the club \$8,500. Blue Hill then provided the labor to keep the machine hoppers filled during the process.

This process is very labor-intensive because of the loading process and the height of the hoppers. It is also imperative that kiln-dried sand be used during the process for easy flow through the machines. We had a staff of 20 guys who all took turns loading 5-gallon buckets of sand, hauling them to the machines, loading carts and stationed on the machines filling the hoppers.

While it doesn't sound like a difficult or taxing process to complete, after about the fourth or fifth green everyone's shoulders and biceps start to get a little sore. That's where you tag out and perform another duty for a while.

After each green is completed, we push off the remainder of sand and soil that is left behind, the greens are dragged with a broom and then blown off. The greens come out pretty

clean and smooth after all is said and done.

Our PGA Golf Professional, Lou Katsos, played the following day and was surprised how well the greens rolled. Lou has been a huge part of the success in all of our practices by relaying the importance of what we are trying to accomplish to the members.

The positives of this process are that we are starting to modify the soils in the old push-up greens so they can perform up to the members' expectations and have a fighting chance with Mother Nature. The negatives are that it is an expensive process – about \$17,000 if you use bagged, dried sand. In addition, you have to have a lot of labor to complete the process efficiently.

Moving forward we will begin to incorporate the process of the dryject. This process will also help to introduce sand a deeper depths and fracture the lower levels almost helping to "mix" the soil profiles. **GC**

*Jason Adams is superintendent at Blue Hill Country Club, Canton, Mass.*

### Pros & Cons

#### PROS

- Modifying the soil profile encouraged better air and water movement through the greens.
- Greens better met member expectations.
- Greens became more resilient to adverse weather conditions.

#### CONS

- The process was costly – about \$17,000 if you use bagged, dried sand.
- It required a lot of labor to complete the process efficiently.
- The aeration process disrupted the playing surface for the members.

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# FITTING IN

While golf turf management remains a male-dominated industry, women are succeeding as superintendents. Three female supers discuss how some of the old industry stereotypes are disappearing. *By Jim Black*



“

As a young superintendent going to local association meetings, I wasn't able to attend the ones held at all-male clubs. That was a challenge for me as a woman. But many of the stereotypes that existed when I began my career have since gone by the wayside, which is great.”

—Tracey Holliday, Sterling Farms Golf Course

According to Golf Course Superintendents Association of America statistics, there has been an occupy movement going on in the golf course maintenance industry.

That is to say, the role of the golf course superintendent is occupied by men at the rate of 99-1, a trend basically unchanged for the past five years. Naturally, this begs the question, “Why aren't there more women in the role of the golf course superintendent?”

“I think it's partly due to the lack of exposure to the career opportunity,” says Tracey Holliday, superintendent of Sterling Farms Golf Course in Stamford, Conn. “If a woman has never played golf, caddied or been around people who expose them to the profession, then they won't ever realize such a career path exists. Being a golf course superintendent requires tremendous dedication, time, physical and mental toughness. It's not for everyone — male or female.”

Over on the West Coast, Patty Reedy, South Course superintendent at The Los Angeles Country Club, agrees with the hypothesis that through lack of exposure to the game, few women realize turf management is a viable career option.

“Women, and people in general, aren't typically drawn to this

“

The industry isn't worse off for not having more female superintendents. It's better for having some female superintendents.”

—Patty Reedy, The Los Angeles Country Club



sort of a career," says Reedy, who's been the top turf manager at Los Angeles CC for the last five years. "And like many, they probably don't even know it's a career possibility."

Given the odds, is the challenge for a woman to achieve superintendent status, not to mention at a top flight facility, insurmountable? Reedy says being a minority in any industry comes with challenges.

"I don't see that it's something one can't overcome with hard work, determination and an unapologetic attitude about being a minority," says Reedy, who earned her agronomy degree from Texas A&M University.

And perhaps a sign of more modern times, Reedy says her career path wasn't lined with naysayers offering discouraging advice about managing golf turf and achieving a superintendent's position.

"My experience has been overwhelmingly positive," Reedy says. "From my mentors and professors starting out in college to my current boss, Russ Myers, I have been encouraged, guided and supported. In fact, when my

own self-confidence was lacking, it was these men who saw something I couldn't see and urged me on."

On Mackinac Island, Wawashkamo Golf Club is Michigan's longest continuously operated golf course and in 1996 was named by Golf Digest as one of "America's Historic Golf Landmarks."

Superintendent Karen O'Dell, a 1993 graduate of Michigan State University's turf program, says she hasn't received much flak about being a woman in a "man's profession."

"It's never been an issue one way or another," she says. "I've worked hard just as the guys have throughout my career and have never asked for any special treatment. The grass doesn't know that I'm a female and it gives me fits and good days just like everyone else."

"Most people think it's pretty cool when I

tell them I'm a golf course superintendent," she says. "I get comments about how lucky I am to work on a golf course every day and get to enjoy Mother Nature. I have to agree with them."

Inside the clubhouse, players are often surprised that the role of the superintendent is being managed by a woman. Like the superintendent profession itself, memberships and clientele in general are predominantly men, so it can come as a bit of a surprise for some that the 'keeper of the green' is a lady.

On the island at Wawashkamo, which in Indian literally means "walk a crooked trail," O'Dell says, "Having such a small staff (we joke and say we are the "maintenance two" – not the maintenance crew – just me and my assistant Ron Morden), we love the club and the his-

**"I've worked hard just as the guys have throughout my career and have never asked for any special treatment."**

*—Karen O'Dell,  
Wawashkamo Golf Club*



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— R.O.



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