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APPLES AND ORANGES?

I recently bought a new car. My Subaru was vibrating between 65 and 85 mph to the point it couldn't be driven comfortably and slower than 65 just doesn't work for me. I hate car shopping with a passion. So to make it more interesting, I couldn't help but compare purchasing a new car to purchasing a new irrigation system. I looked at the differences in the two purchases systematically and analyzed a number of important issues.

SELECTION. I had no idea what car I wanted, so my selection was huge. With so many different manufacturers out there and I had to use a process to narrow down the list to at least five or less. This problem does not exist with irrigation. There are just a few choices out there and you can quickly narrow your choice to two or three companies and move on to the other buying issues.

STYLE. Cars can be sedans, coupe, cross overs, SUV's or hatchbacks. In irrigation we have block or valve-in-head, decoders or field controllers. In car-buying the style may not be important, but in irrigation systems the control style has become a major decision.

FEATURES. With a car there are lots of different features. Many are included in packaged groups and once you pick a specific package you get everything that it includes. For example, a power package may include power windows, mirrors, door locks and cruise control. Irrigation systems are no different in that once you pick a control system level – for example in Rain Bird there is Stratus, Nimbus and Cirrus the features

are automatically included. Similarly, the price is higher the more features in the package. And as with a car, in most cases you start with a lower level and add in just the individual features for an additional cost. With an irrigation system you also get features that you may not want and therefore will not use. In the car, you will probably use them if they are there.

TRADE-IN VALUE. I got to trade in my Subaru for a fair amount that acted as my down payment. Depending on the

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age of your irrigation system it may have resale value, but it certainly will not be any substantial amount. There are some third-party refurbishes and resellers who might take the old equipment off your hands, or you might find a golf course that can use your stuff for parts. If you get really lucky you might also be able to sell your old pump station cheaply. Basically, there is no trade-in value.

NEGOTIATING. For some, not me, the fun in car buying is the negotiating. Once you know what you want you start seeing how low you can buy it for. Irrigation systems have some negotiating room, but not really that much. Irrigation sys-

tem negotiations quickly get to a point that if you want a lower price you have to decide what you are willing to give up – fewer sprinklers, less isolation, etc. For example, how many sprinklers are you willing to eliminate and where?

FINANCING. New car financing is pretty easy unless your credit rating is crap. There are options: bank financing, dealer financing, leasing or manufacturer financing. Irrigation is a little more difficult. One reason is the cost – millions of dollars are not financed in an hour or less. There is bank financing usually as a mortgage on the property or club house which will require an up-to-date appraisal. Member financing by assessment or savings through capital improvement requires informational meetings and maybe a vote. Many times there is a combination of different financing options. There is also leasing and manufacturer financing but these are rarely used as bank financing is almost always more attractive to a club/owner.

PRICING. A car has a sticker price attached to the window but it just indicates an order of magnitude and a place to start (see negotiation). In irrigation, for each individual item; sprinkler, valve, controller – there is a list price for each. There is no list price for the entire system like a car, but like the car, the list price doesn't really mean anything. In irrigation, the price is based on the package or a percentage off the list price. You're not sure what the price will be until there is a design and something to price from. GCI



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by Bob Lohmann

think **BIG**

GCI's Bob Lohmann explains how courses can be a solution to their communities' water mitigation problems.

When superintendents, along with most of us in the industry, consider water management issues, I think we naturally think first about water "quality" or the increasing concern over water "availability." Clearly these are pressing concerns.

Golf courses have not generally been seen as a positive force for the public when it comes to the maintenance of water quality, or the preservation of water resources. We in the industry know the real truth, though: Wetland areas and the natural filtration qualities of turfgrass can ably serve a community's water quality goals while returning that cleaner resource to the water table we all share. Obviously this message is not being communicated to the larger public well enough, not nearly. We all need to do a much better job in this regard.

But water management issues should be more broadly considered. They don't have to be a source of insecurity for golf course superintendents. They can actually enable better public relations in the immediate community and enable course managers themselves to upgrade their course products, at prices that are reduced or even mitigated by the very water management issues many communities are obliged to address.

Plan projects that make the most of a water element and show off the course's commitment to water management.





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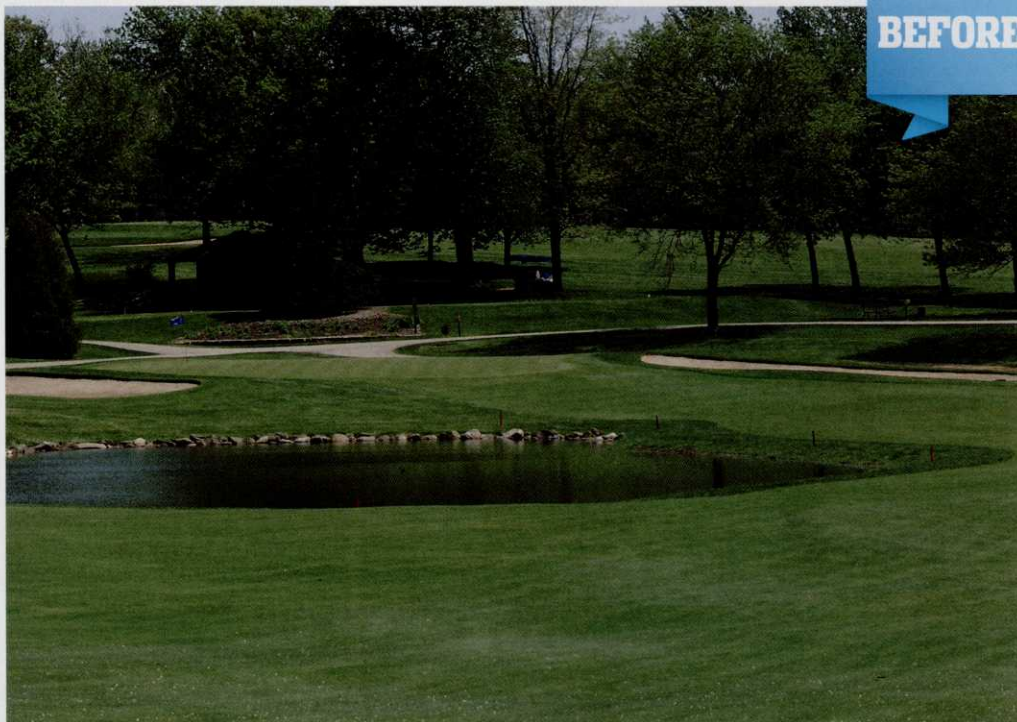
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Let me flesh out what I mean, and allow me to cite multiple real-life examples.

We're working right now with a community in Wisconsin where the city is desperate to identify places within its jurisdiction where it can direct water, store it, clean it up, and release it to a nearby river. The city is obliged to address these water quality and storage issues, by law. The city-owned golf course is going to be key to implementation of these remediation plans — and this municipality is going to receive a valuable redesign and upgrades in the bargain, with limited, if any, impact on its own capital budget.

The project team, which includes Lohmann Golf Designs as the golf course consultant, is 50 percent finished with the design



WESTMOOR

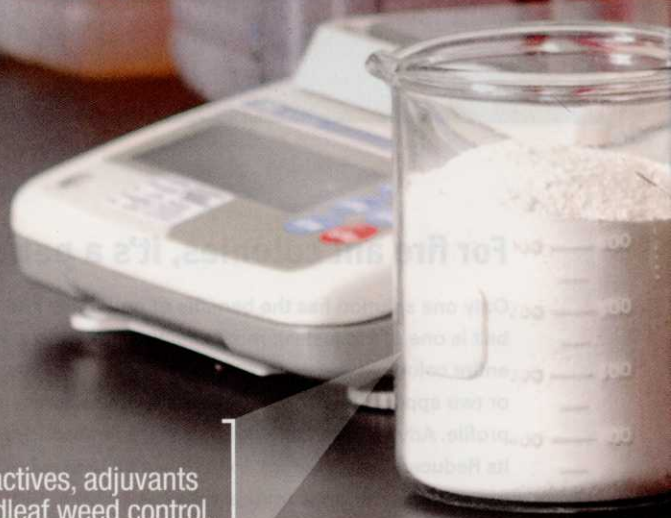
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AFTER



The Westmoor Country Club in Wisconsin was approached by the City of Brookfield to work together in handling a public water-quality problem: a nearby neighborhood development was causing silt, salt and other debris to enter into the city stormwater systems. The course worked with Lohmann and the city to redesign the 15th hole to take on and clean the water. The redesign included adding a filtrating wetland system, an expanded water feature and stone retaining wall.



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Water quality systems can be worked into existing planned renovations.

phase of this project. We're building two large retaining ponds that will impact 4-5 different holes. As is, the course is a modest layout with a few interesting hills and dales, but it is never going to host a U.S. Open. In other words, those four to five holes — including four brand new greens — will all be vastly improved by the renovation, while further course-wide upgrades will also occur as some 100,000 cubic yards of fill are deployed from the creation of these ponds.

The overall price tag has not yet been determined but it will be covered by the city's stormwater division, mainly via funds provided for the bigger, city-wide water quality effort. So the course improvements will likely

have minimal impact on the golf course's operating budget, other than some fertility costs during grow-in.

Superintendents need to think big and get strategic. Most every community is struggling with these same water management issues. Golf courses are vital, vibrant members of the community that also happen to be vast, in terms of acreage. It only makes sense that they actively partner with cities and counties to be part of larger solutions that also benefit course quality, course maintenance, course budgets and golfers.

The course does not have to be municipal in order to make this sort of partnership work. A few years back, another Wisconsin com-

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“We have to acknowledge that while water conservation is a serious issue, sometimes the problem is actually too much water.”

munity, the City of Brookfield, approached a longtime client of ours, the private Westmoor Country Club, about solving a festering water-quality problem: silt, salt and other street debris running off a particular neighborhood development. The compromised water resource was already coming onto the golf course through an existing pipe.

The club, with our help, took control of the remediation effort. We created a filtrating wetland system on the 15th hole where this water could be cleaned before it re-enters the city stormwater system, and we

redesigned the hole to accommodate the change – expanding the water feature around the green and building an attractive stone retaining wall. We fit this work into a larger renovation effort that was already underway, but all the work at 15 was funded by the city.

Superintendents need to view these projects not as nuisances, but as opportunities – for their courses and their communities at large. We have to acknowledge that while water conservation is a serious issue, sometimes the problem is actually too much water.

In suburban Chicago, we’ve just finished a serious renovation job that was enabled by a similarly serious stormwater management issue. Poplar Creek Country Club had been a nice, upscale municipal facility for decades. But over the last 30-plus years, the land all around it had been developed both residentially and commercially, creating huge stormwater problems for the golf course and immediately adjacent landowners.

We vastly expanded the on-course water storage capability to accommodate the runoff that had routinely flooded the golf holes and upstream properties. In the process we upgraded all 18 holes in some capacity, improving drainage in flood-prone areas, naturally, but also integrating into the routing all this new

pond and wetland space (read: more drama, more risk-reward elements). Again, that much pond-digging creates a great deal of fill. We put all that fill to good use in raising golf features (out of the floodplain), creating more playability (forward tees) and improving separation of uses (mounding around the range).

Today, The Bridges at Poplar Creek is a far better golf course in almost every respect. Was the course budget unaffected by all this renovation work? No. But the park district realized achieving long-term sustainability, a grand mission of the district as a whole, required a change and so they committed the necessary funding. Indeed, a course renovation project would never have been considered if the larger

(continued on page 102)

MORE control.

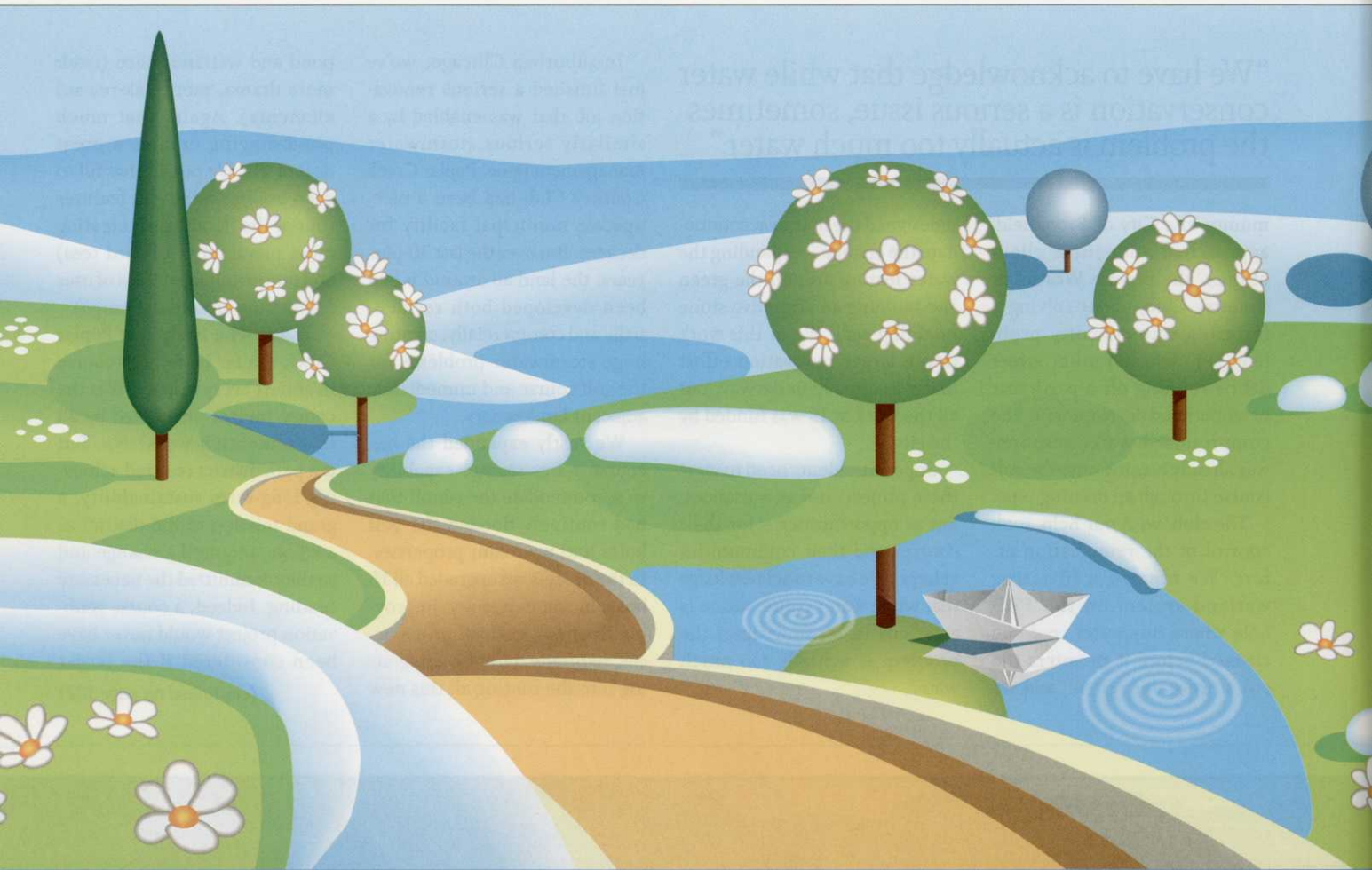
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Early to rise

A short, warm winter means early *Poa* emergence. Superintendents discuss their strategies for coping.

By Helen M. Stone

As if golf course superintendents didn't have enough to worry about, springtime temperatures set records across the nation. According to the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), more than 15,000 daily record-high temperatures were set in March. Meteorologists used words such as "astonishing" and "amazing" to describe the phenomenon, and NOAA declared it the warmest March on record in the contiguous United States.

But before you could get the shorts and sunglasses out for good, temperatures close to normal quickly returned, along with dire weather warnings in the Midwest. Weathermen have been blasted for inaccuracy since the Babylonians used astrology to forecast temperatures in 650

