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The hole story

Superintendent Owen Coulson shared with GCI an outstanding photo essay of his maintenance crew's spring aerification regimen at Vestavia Country Club, Birmingham, Ala. Check out this issue's app version to view the complete photo essay.

"Two times each year the membership gives the golf course to the golf maintenance crew so we can 'tear up' the great playing surface that they've been enjoying," Coulson says.

"Each spring and fall for the last eight or so years we have been tweaking our process of aerification to get it perfect. Each time we actually get pretty close but we can usually pin point at least one little tweak here or there. This process has been made easier because of our record keeping from previous years, which includes everything down to quantity and type of pizzas we order for the crew on aerification day (2013 was 15 total for a crew of 22 - 4 pep; 4 saus; 4 Hawaiian; 3 chicken). Our 'checklist' makes it easier to have a starting place for each step of the process. We may not apply the exact same amounts each aerification, but we cut down considerably on the amount of time we spend during the set-up stage for each step.

"The greens at Vestavia Country Club were first constructed by George Cobb around 1951 and then renovated by John LaFoy in 1989. Then in 2001, the top 6 inches of turf and material were removed and new greens mix was brought in and seeded to L-93 bentgrass.

"With the existing drainage and majority of the greens profile being 24 years old and even the newer/renovated portion being 12 years old, a lot of sub-surface cultivation must take place for them to perform in a way that is suitable for our membership. By utilizing the deep-drill machines along with the larger hollow tine in conjunction with our process, we have been able maintain a putting surface that the membership is consistently happy with."



Great idea



Here's an idea from the United Kingdom. To create a better communication link between the grounds crew and the mechanic, John Critchley, the course manager at Les Mielles Golf and Country Club, St. Ouen's Bay, Jersey, UK, has introduced a machine log system. Each machine has an associated clipboard hanging in the mess room, which the operator must complete after use.

"We've had a couple of occasions where poor communication has affected golf course maintenance," Critchley says. "Also, if the mechanic is not on site once you have finished your task, people may forget to report the

faults. It resolves all these scenarios and many others."

To get his crew to buy into the concept, Critchley kept the form simple and clean. It contains blanks for the operator's name, times and dates, and any comments or faults. "It is then the mechanics responsibility to check these and complete any tasks needed," he says. "The crew have taken to this system far better than I thought, it creates organization and professionalism within the department."

Check out Critchley's blog at: lesmiellesgroundscrew.blogspot.com



From THE FEED



We're already past 1,500 downloads of the new GCI app, with more and more readers getting the chance to really interact with the issue. We don't want to brag (well, not directly, anyway), so we'll let some of our followers do it for us!

Joshua Smith @JoshfromCCTX

well worth the download too, now it takes a week to read an issue, it's really amazing.



Thad Thompson @TerryHillsMaint

Anyone interested in golf course maintenance. I urge you to follow @GCI magazine and download their AMAZING app!!!



Michael Shaw @MickPhudd

app is very impressive!



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John Kaminski @JohnKaminski

that was "better spread the word more. The digital version is freakin awesome!"



DakotaMarc @DakotaDunesSupr

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Heavy metal

There's dollars in that rusting scrapheap behind the maintenance shack, just ask superintendent Chris Cook.

Cook and his crew at Bailey Ranch Golf Club, Owasso, Okla., started a metal recycling program during the winter of 2011-12. This past winter, Cook and his crew continued cleaning out the old equipment and scrap metal – old brake levers, reels, tools, shafts, and hydraulic motors. "Once we felt that we had harvested all the useful parts off of the equipment, I contacted a local scrap-metal facility and they explained their guidelines for accepting material – no fuel, oil, batteries," he says. "They brought us a 30 cu. yd. roll-off bin and we got to it. I quickly realized that we were going to need several more bins."

The local scrap metal facility they worked with required a minimum of 3,000 lbs. or they would charge for the service. No problem, says Cook, adding the Bailey Ranch crew recycled nearly 20 tons of metal, which earned them more than \$2,000 for the effort.

"We'll most likely spend that money on various small-engine tools that are in desperate need of replacement," Cook says.

As far as other recycling endeavors, Cook says they're exploring recycling the trash from off the course (mostly beer cans), but they haven't gotten any further than the idea. "I recycle all my trash from the office – print offs, trade mags, brochures, etc.," he says. "This adds up and I probably recycle 20-30 lbs. of paper each month."

FOR MORE...

Check out the issue's app version for more photos of Bailey Ranch Golf Club's metal recycling effort.



Dr. Know

Congrats goes out to Dr. Emily Merewitz, assistant professor in molecular turfgrass biology at Michigan State University, for being selected to receive The Musser International Turfgrass Foundation 2013 Award of Excellence.

The award is given to outstanding Ph.D. candidates who, in the final phase of their graduate studies, demonstrate overall excellence throughout their doctoral program in turfgrass research.

Dr. Merewitz received her B.S. degrees in plant science and plant biotechnology from Rutgers University. She went on to earn her Ph.D. at Rutgers under the tutelage of Dr. Bingru Huang in molecular turfgrass physiology which is now the focus of her teaching and research at MSU.

"I am very grateful to be considered and to have received such a prestigious award," Merewitz says. "It is quite an honor and it will motivate me even more to excel in the turfgrass industry. The industry has been extremely supportive of my research and this award is something that means a lot to me."



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Henry DeLozier is a principal in the Global Golf Advisors consultancy. DeLozier joined Global Golf Advisors in 2008 after nine years as the vice president of golf for Pulte Homes. He is a past president of the National Golf Course Owners Association's board of directors and serves on the PGA of America's Employers Advisory Council.

RUT BUSTER

Are you in a rut? Are you haunted by last year's problems? When was the last time your club introduced something truly innovative? Since you're in the golf business, your answers to those questions may be "yes," "yes" and "I can't recall."

Golf is filled with remarkably creative people who do not imagine new things nearly as often, nor on as grand a scale, as they should. Sure, we've seen the advent of soft spikes and on-line tee times; but what homegrown idea has made an impact at your club?

Innovation requires a slight nudge sometimes. Apple's Steve Jobs summarized innovation – a topic with which he had a tremendous track record – simply saying, "Innovation distinguishes between the leader and the follower."

Innovation is the act of creating new things that solve problems and meet needs in value-adding ways. In golf, innovation comes in the form of products, systems, processes and technologies that make a club easier to use, the course more fun to play and membership a greater value.

Innovation is about what and how. What should we do? How do we do it? Consider the following three questions to get started.

1. WHAT DO OUR CUSTOMERS AND MEMBERS WANT? They tell you every day. Listen and learn. And then find ways to meet their needs by creating new solutions. In most cases, what they want is not complicated, nor is it difficult to provide. Here are the basics on most members' lists:

- Attention... Especially important for women who seek validation of their rights at the club.
- Convenience and simplicity.
- Care and concern for children and families.

2. HOW CAN WE MAKE CUSTOMERS AND MEMBERS FEEL SPECIAL? The ways to do it aren't new, but their implementation might be.

- Know everyone's name. Customer relations software enables you and your staff to connect names and faces with shoe size, the types of golf balls they prefer and their children's birthdays.

- Host focus groups and invite survey participation.

We need to understand **today's highly competitive circumstances**. Most clubs and golf courses operate within a sea of sameness with very little market differentiation.

- Honor the senior members of your club. There is great value in the wisdom acquired through a lifetime of learning.

- Invite your youngest members to answer the question, "What would make our club even cooler?"

Once you've collected the information, consider new and different ways to implement your ideas. Show a bias for innovation – not simply for the sake of change but for the sake of keeping the club current and fresh.

3. WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO TO SET OUR CLUB APART? Encourage innovation in three ways:

- Organizational encouragement sets the standard and expectation for innovation. Leadership helps establish a culture of innovation. Organizational encouragement breaks down barriers and helps great ideas flow across departments and functional areas.

- Supervisory encouragement develops an innovative culture and empowers individuals and work groups to find new solutions to old problems.

- Group encouragement facilitates innovation throughout the org chart. Your dishwashers may have great ideas for making the kitchen work more efficiently. The mechanic may have the ideal solution for finding more tee times on busy days. But you'll never know unless you encourage creativity and show them it's valued.

Think with the future in mind. That's what innovation is all about. For example, what do the 20-somethings want from a club today? Health and fitness opportunities, sure. But what can you offer beyond a treadmill and an elliptical?

Can you help them load an electronic version of their training regimen into a bracelet that stores and tracks biometric information? Can you help them find other technological solutions that make using the club and playing the golf course more interactive and social? Do you support a virtual scorecard that allows them to post directly to social media so they can engage friends during and after their round?

We need to understand today's highly competitive circumstances. Most clubs and golf courses operate within a sea of sameness with very little market differentiation. Use innovation to set your club apart from its competitors. See that your innovation becomes a brand promise for the club. Be better and be different than your competitors. Are you ready?

Winston Churchill said, "Without tradition, art is a flock of sheep without a shepherd. Without innovation, it is a corpse." The best club leaders can shepherd innovation and gain advantage in the highly competitive landscape. **GCI**

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HOW TO

GET

This ain't the time to be monkeying around with job security. GCI g



FIRING

gives you great employment insights from the best in the business!

By Bruce Williams, CGCS

If you work in this industry long enough, then sooner or later you begin to hear the torrid stories as to why golf course superintendents get fired. In fact, as a headhunter I often hear several sides of these story – from golf facilities and from superintendents.

While most superintendents tend to see the pink slips coming, you can be blind to the signs of an imminent career suicide. More times than not, things slowly build up over time. Eventually, there is the straw that breaks the camel's back and disaster can no longer be averted.

Hey, it's tough enough to keep your job in today's market, even if you are performing well. And while some circumstances are outside the realm of your control, there are enough hazards out there that can bring your career to a screeching halt. Let's look at some surefire ways superintendents get themselves fired and, most importantly, how to keep you on a greensmower and off the unemployment line.

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COVER STORY

CAREER COUNTERMEASURE

PLAN B

Have a Plan B for your career and be prepared for the next step. Solid advice is to keep your head on a swivel as nobody knows what tomorrow will bring. Is your resume ready? Have you built a strong set of skills that employers would want? Don't wait until the pink slip arrives to be ready for the next step in your career. Statistics indicate that we will likely have as many as six different employers during our careers. Knowing that, it would bode well to prepare in advance for the inevitable.

WHO'S THE BOSS? Repeat after me: "It's their golf course."

When you believe the golf course is yours and that the members should follow your lead, then it is time to move on down the road. There is a huge difference between taking pride in your work and thinking you rule the kingdom. Never get too big for your britches. Be humble and appreciative that you are entrusted with the care of a golf course and always remember who's the boss.

CHA-CHA-CHA CHANGES. Change is life's only constant, and the golf course management industry is no exception. It may be new standards, new equipment, new cultural practices or any variety of "new" things. Most people who own or manage golf courses are accustomed to change. In fact, they expect change to happen. It is better that you are aware of potential change and then manage it along the way.

Too many times I hear stories of a great superintendent who drew a line in the sand and resisted change only to find that the next change at the club was bringing in a new superintendent who embraced change.

Here's an anecdote. A superintendent friend of mine had a long tenure at nice golf club. With a few years left before he planned to retire the club wanted to do a restoration of the classic golf course. That superintendent believed it would ruin the golf course. So after 30 years of employment he was asked to leave because he did not embrace the change. Remember, there is always somebody waiting in the wings to move into your spot. Instead, learn to go with the flow or be swept away if you don't lead – or want to lead – the change.

SAY WHAT? Keep your ear to the ground and listen to what members or customers are telling you.

Every job has its fair share of complaints and concerns expressed by golfers, owners and management. You need to filter what is being said and then determine your priorities. Most importantly, learn to accept constructive criticism.

If you don't listen or respond to what's happening around you, then you will be thought of as an ineffective communicator. Following a catastrophic loss of turf, lacking the skills to communicate with members and/or management is a close second to generate superintendent pink slips.

It's not unusual to hear the phrase "He wasn't a good communicator..." to describe the previous superintendent. Your ability to keep grass green is a given. Your interpersonal communication skills will make or break you.