

Greenkeeping Cost Survey Reveals Interesting Variations

OUT of a mass of data sent to us by a number of green-chairmen and greenkeepers, all of whom we hereby thank, GOLFDOM has been attempting to ascertain if there could be any approximation of a standard in greenkeeping costs based on conditions involving wage scale, size of course, character of topography and equipment. Many of these courses upon which figures were obtained were courses with which we were acquainted and from this data in particular we had hoped to get a fair average of costs preliminary to determining unit costs along lines advanced by several well known greenkeeping authorities.

The wide variation of data we have received indicates that instead of working from actual practice to a fairly reliable theory on greenkeeping costs, the matter will have to be handled the other way around. In this respect the research scores one victory for the theorists. Closer investigation of some of the figures revealed that the highest maintenance costs were not strictly maintenance charges, but involved considerable construction work. The figures for California and Texas were high until the twelve-month season was taken into consideration. Fairway watering costs also added to the California totals.

Upon checking up on some of the costs that were higher than those of clubs in the same territories having approximately the same labor market we found that the clubs paying the higher wage, which was usually only five cents an hour more, did so because experience had shown that the men obtained by the slightly higher wage were much more valuable in proportion to their cost.

Green Mowing Time

Figures on mowing greens have the expected variation due to the different green areas, but it seems definite from all figures given that the time required by power mowing is a little more than half of that

required for hand mowing in the majority of instances reported, so labor cost and the opulence of the budget determine whether or how the work is to be done. Green mowing crews range from six to one man in the cases of the reporting clubs. Of the clubs having six men the fastest work for mowing 18 greens was reported as two hours. The average time for a six-man crew was three hours. As near as we can tell from the available data, 45 minutes to an hour is the time required for mowing most greens by hand, with the higher figure being the average for the representative metropolitan district greens.

There is a marked tendency to confine the other work of the green-men to the vicinity of the greens. They are held responsible for the weeding of greens, the condition of the traps and bunkers surrounding the greens and for top-dressing, in the majority of cases of first class clubs reporting. In some instances the work of these men also goes into cutting tees, landscaping work around course and club grounds, and screening compost.

Size of Force

The nine-hole courses reporting show a marked uniformity in the size of the greenkeeping staff. Three men with the greenkeeper seem to be the number deemed sufficient by most of the nine-hole courses. The difference in the standards of maintenance depends on the equipment employed by these three men almost as much as it does on the men themselves, according to our observation.

With the 18-hole clubs there is a wide range with respect to the size of the force. Some of the courses that are in pretty fair condition for the representative smaller city 18-hole course are getting by with as few as six men during the greater part of the busy season, with a man or two brought in as pinch-hitters during rush times. But the majority of the 18-hole clubs indicate that a 10-man force is the smallest it is safe to operate with if the

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course is to be kept in good condition. From this 10-man minimum the size of the 18-hole force increases until the high mark of 20 is reported by three clubs. In these cases the staff is responsible for the care of tennis courts, polo fields, bridle paths, and general landscaping work on the grounds.

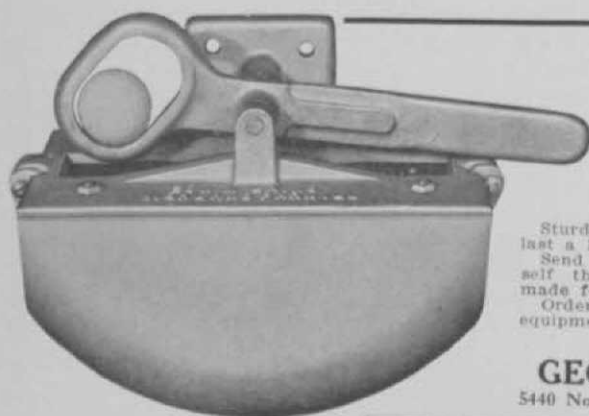
The wage varies from \$1.75 a day in one southern town up to \$5 and \$5.50 in the metropolitan districts. As far as determining the annual labor cost which might be taken as a good general figure, the reports offer no hope. Figures on the annual labor expense of 92 clubs paying a daily wage of \$3.75 or \$4 reach from \$4,000 to \$24,000. The difference is shown in the conditions of the courses, for with all of its uncertainties greenkeeping has advanced to the point where the more that is spent with reasonable judgment the better the course is bound to be.

Some green-chairmen protest that the house end of the club gets a better break on the budget than the green end, and although they may argue strenuously against promotion of the club's activities

along road-house lines instead of as a golf establishment, their one best bet is to cite the condition of courses that have had money spent on them. Checking the figures on such courses as we were acquainted with, we were strongly impressed with the fact that the more money available, the better the course is, notwithstanding the ever present perils of thoughtlessness, extravagance and lack of knowledge.

The growth of fairway irrigation is going to revise greenkeeping cost figures decidedly, according to the evidence before us. If golf clubs want the vastly improved turf condition resulting from fairway irrigation they'll have to pay for it. Notable work is being done by California pioneers in fairway watering and by others who are adapting the California ideas to eastern requirements in cutting down the watering costs by providing systems that are as nearly automatic as possible. It deserves fullest encouragement. A yearly labor cost of \$30,000 where fairway watering is employed to the fullest extent is not at all out of line, so the reports show.

One of the problems that the green-chair-



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men and the greenkeeper have to solve is finding winter jobs for the good men on their force so that club can get the men back when the season opens. Even in the south and west coast with their 12 month season, part of the year is slack and might involve the discharge of men in whose training the club has an investment. At New Orleans they employ the men they want to keep in mixing fertilizing material, repairing and painting fences, benches, shelters, etc., and in other such jobs around the course and clubhouse. At Dallas one club keeps its best men on the payroll during the winter painting, overhauling, raking leaves, trimming trees and dragging the greens every day with large cocoa mats.

One interesting case of year 'round operation is that at the Denver Country club where golf, skating and tennis often go on at the same time. Here is one of the cases where the watering costs figure largely. In hot weather they have to utilize their water by working men in relays dur-

ing a 24-hour schedule.

In many of the reports it was noted that a mechanic is listed. Such a man is highly desirable on any payroll and even on a small force the qualifications of one man who can and will keep the equipment in first class working order are worthy of highly favorable consideration.

A number of the reports commented on the expense of rough cutting, due to the necessity of the work having to be done by hand. This item, and the wisdom of so designing tees and hazards that machine maintenance may be easily and extensively employed, will show labor savings in the future and current architectural practice is taking them into consideration more than ever heretofore.

Labor costs for 1928 as compared with those for 1927 are about at a stand-off. In no case reported was there more than a few hundred dollars' difference. This probably indicated the results of budgeting rather than greater utilization of labor or any change in the wage scale.

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