

Fast Rise of Course Costs Worries Greenkeepers

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It is no use hiding the fact that greenkeepers are up against a tough proposition in even maintaining the status quo, let alone making the necessary improvements that need to be made after so many years of neglect. Today, they are called upon to produce an improved layout with very little increase in allowance. Most of them are doing their best in trying to solve this almost impossible task, and quite a few are much concerned about their future in not being able to meet the requirements asked of them. The question has been discussed by greenkeepers in solemn conclaves, and it is only by publishing the results of the findings at those meetings that facts can be brought to the attention of those in authority.

During the summer I took an extended trip along the whole length of the Pacific Coast. I journeyed from Vancouver to Trenton which is 180 miles east of Toronto, then south to Chicago and home to California. During the trip, I saw many golf courses and spoke to quite a few greenkeepers. They all seemed to be afflicted with the same problem of trying to improve conditions without unduly raising costs. It is not my intention to name either clubs or greenkeepers, but to try to set forth, in an impartial manner, facts as I found them. I want to be fair to club officials and state their side of the question, and to lay all the cards on the table from a greenkeeper's point of view. It is only by this means that we will be able to meet on a common ground and try to find a solution to a very important problem.

Since the war ended, and even during the last 2 years of the war, most clubs have added many new members; some clubs have doubled their membership rosters. Most clubs have increased the entrance fee. There seems to be no difficulty in acquiring new members, but very few clubs have increased monthly dues.

With this added income, it is only natural for club officials to try to catch up with some of the work that has been neglected during the last 16 years, for during the war it was almost impossible to secure competent help, and during the depression, greenkeepers knew that very little money was available for maintenance.

Adjust to Today's Costs

There is nothing wrong in trying to improve playing conditions and in constructing new buildings to make it more pleasant for members. Club officials are elected each year and when elected have a duty to perform to the members who elect them to office. Seeing this increased revenue, they immediately start to create new work to beautify the grounds, improve playing conditions on the course, and to win their spurs by obtaining the good wishes of all the members. I have lived long enough with clubs to know that all Boards of Directors wish to improve the condition of both grounds and clubhouse. This is a meritorious ambition, but where the mistake is being made is in overestimating the club's increased revenue and making it tally with present day costs. It is just a simple case of arithmetic.

Suppose a club has increased its revenue from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per month and has had needed work done that has upped costs from \$4,000 to \$12,000 per month. It is easy to see that the club will soon be in the red. That is what greenkeepers are up against today. How can improvements be made when the present revenue does not meet increased costs? This problem is making a lot of greenkeepers grey-haired and is somewhat bewildering to club officials. What man among us could have forecast the inflationary condition that exists today, and is there any among us who can predict accurately what will happen next year? The only sensible thing to do is to see that expenditures do not exceed income, to postpone great improvements until things are more normal, to buy what is necessary for good maintenance, and to so arrange the labor-force so that we can obtain a maximum of results with the smallest amount of time and effort.

To think that we can do differently than we have been doing during the last 16 years, imagining that we are living in a new era with money to burn, is to be living in a fool's paradise. The facts are these: whatever we buy today, whether it be meat or seed, eggs or fertilizer, vegetables or hose; paint, machinery, flags, towels, cups, and the thousand and one things that are required to run a golf club are upped in

price. Club revenue must increase in proportion.

Wages of course labor (but not green-keepers' salaries) during the last ten years have increased 300%. Even at that price with vacations allowed and other benefits given, we do not get the same amount of work we used to get a few years ago. There are so many jobs for the offering that the labor force is more indifferent than it has ever been before in the history of golf. I am not arguing about the right or wrong of this, but we must face facts as we find them. Today it is impossible to get cheap competent help, so, while there are two jobs for one man wages will be high and might go higher.

Consider Machine Saving

We could perhaps put more machinery on the course but then again machine prices are high and skilled men with higher wages will be required to run them; even at that it would lower the costs a little. There is still so much hand labor to be done at most first class courses that costs would not vary much by the addition of new machinery. The chief benefit would be much better playing conditions due to the efficiency of new machines.

Whatever is done there are the ever

growing taxes. There are increases in school taxes, the costs of county and city government are mounting steadily higher; then too the Federal government is reaching out to get whatever it can in the form of a percentage on entrance fees, monthly dues. Above all there is the social security tax on all men and women engaged in club work which is likely to be increased unless something is done to stop the distribution of funds to improvident, lazy and selfish persons who are taking improper advantage of a worthwhile law.

Most of us thought that the postwar years would ease the burden of our profession. During the last 16 years the green-keepers and green chairmen have had an uphill fight to maintain good playing conditions for the golfers on very little money. We have seen work pile up and worthwhile projects vanish in thin air. We have witnessed steady deterioration of machinery, greens, traps and tees, so who can blame club officials for trying to improve conditions and restore the status quo. But if costs rise to greater heights and become permanent there are only two things club officials can do: Either let things drift to a breaking point or raise the revenue of the club by whatever means available.

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