

The long and short of it

By CHARLES McCREA

Superintendent, Engineers CC, Roslyn Harbor, N.Y.

While short-term planning is needed, a long-range master plan is how the super will ultimately improve the quality of the course.

Today's golf course superintendent is faced with the problem of not only maintaining the existing course that he has, but also of improving it to keep pace with the rising standards of excellence expected on all courses.

The problem is particularly difficult at older courses that weren't built to handle today's heavy play. Physical changes and improvements must be made, but first they must be planned.

Engineers Country Club, where I am the golf course superintendent, typifies these problems. The course was built in 1915 and opened in 1917. As best I can find out, it was called Engineers because it was built by an association of engineers. The course had very limited play with small undulating greens.

The course had several changes of ownership since 1917, going from private, to semi-private to public and then back, in 1953, to a private operation again.

Our membership leased the club in 1953, and then, in 1965, motivated by a desire to make capital improvements to the club, purchased the club and the grounds surrounding.

Mr. John Jagodzinski served the club as superintendent for almost forty years prior to his retirement in 1966. He recognized all the physical problems at Engineers, but since the club did not own the

grounds, there was a reluctance to make physical improvements on someone else's property that would be left there at the expiration of the lease.

During the transition period, when John was leaving and I was coming on the job, he spent a lot of time with me going over the whole course, pointing out the problem areas and trouble spots that he had learned from experience. This first-hand knowledge has served me well in making plans for our programmed course improvements.

Twenty years ago, in the metropolitan New York area, only some of the private clubs had fairway irrigation systems. Many systems were no more sophisticated than hose and sprinklers. Now, almost all courses, private and public, have fairway irrigation systems, many of which are fully automatic. Some courses now are installing rough irrigation systems and others converting old manual single row systems to double-row automatic systems. Again, this is being done to keep pace with the rising standard of excellence among golf courses.

Some courses are maintaining tees at putting green length. Others are mowing fairways with the ten-bladed reels that leave the fairways almost as smooth as the greens. In fact, one senior superintendent, who has spent almost 65 years as-

sociated with the game of golf, said to me recently that the fairways that we played on are better than the greens of thirty years ago.

At my club, a partial rough irrigation system has been installed, tees have been enlarged, but much more needs to be done to establish and maintain the high standard of excellence desired.

The greens are physically too small to support our heavy play. They average under 4,000 square feet with some smaller than 3,000 square feet. The problem of the small size of the greens is further compounded by the fact that many of the greens are undulating and have only limited cupping areas.

We also have problems with our practice area, irrigation system, clubhouse landscaping, and golf course trapping. In fact, at times, it seems that all we have are difficult problems.

Proper planning, obviously, is the best way to overcome these problems. And this planning that we course superintendents do falls into two general categories: 1) Short term planning and 2) Long term planning.

We all have our short term plans. They can vary in size according to our wants.

They involve planning our aerification programs, planning our daily and weekly work schedules, and planning our fertilizer and fungicide programs. They can be mental notes or written instructions on the blackboard to the crew.

The important thing is that we have at least some plan of action so that we don't show up at work at seven o'clock and find ten men waiting for us and only then decide what we want to do with that eighty man hours that we have at our disposal.

As important as our short term plans

continued on next page



Long and Short of It

continued from page 35

are in carrying out our normal maintenance, we still need other plans. Maintenance *alone* won't solve some of the problems of our courses. Some of the problems have been built into the course and others are the result of changing times and the demand for better playing conditions.

To meet the challenge of these rising demands and to correct old problems, as superintendents we should make plans to correct them. I call these long range plans at our course, a master plan for programmed course improvements.

This long term is probably just as important, though not as exciting, as the actual construction. Because in order to sell our program to the membership, we will have to show them a well conceived and well thought-out plan of action or program that will lead to a more enjoyable golf course for the members.

I've found out that members like to hear the word "program" because it again conveys this idea of advance planning, which they have to do everyday in their business life, and which they like their superintendents to do.

The intent of the master plan is to evaluate the present golf course facilities and the demands placed on them, with respect to the standard of excellence and then make the necessary suggestions to correct problem areas.

When you are formulating your master plan for improvements there are several areas that should be covered. Included in this list would be most of the areas that go to make up a golf course, such as greens, tees, fairways, traps and roughs. Also, be sure to include such things as the irrigation system, the maintenance facility, clubhouse landscaping, practice area and the plantings on the course, including the trees.

Some of these areas such as the fairways and fairway renovation can be handled financially within the normal yearly maintenance budget. However, if a ma-

ior program of burning off the fairways is done, then it should be included in the long-term master plan.

We can't establish a rigid set of standards for what every golf course should and should not have in these areas. The individual superintendent knows best what is required at his golf club. For instance, he knows how big his tees should be, what traps need modernizing so as to facilitate their maintenance and appearance, how his irrigation system can be improved, or where more trees should be planted.

By presenting these requirements in an over-all master plan, you will make your greens committee, and ultimately the over-all membership, aware of the golf conditions at your club and how they can be improved.

You can also prevent such a situation that I heard of where the club had spent \$80,000 on a watering system, and the next year, the superintendent asked for money to enlarge some of the tees. The greens chairman reminded him that the club had just spent \$80,000 on a watering system. To which the superintendent replied that the new watering system did not make the tees any larger and they were still a problem.

I feel that today's golf course superintendent is the best qualified individual to come up with this over-all plan. If the scope of the plan includes modification of clubhouse grounds or the irrigation system or changing the course trapping, he may want to hire the help of a professional in these fields, but, since the superintendent is charged with the responsibility of everything outside the clubhouse door, he should take an active part in initiating improvement programs.

It may well be that the club does not have the money to make capital improvements, but I think it is important that they then realize the limitations of the present course and live with them as best they can until something can be done.

If such a plan isn't presented by the superintendent, you can be sure golf coun-

continued on page 54

Long and Short of It

continued from page 36

try clubs will continue to improve the clubhouse instead of the golf course.

This master plan can be on a hole-by-hole basis if necessary pointing out deficiencies such as a poorly drained area, the need for some trees, replacing old traps expensive to maintain and so on.

It can be a master plan to improve several areas at the course as the practice tee, the irrigation system and the clubhouse landscaping; tying the improvements into a three to five year building program.

Later, the superintendent will have to wear another hat, namely, that of a salesman to sell the plan. He will also have to assist in working out financing by cost estimating projects and by determining what portion of the work he and his crew can do, and what portion should logically be contracted out.

It's amazing how much work in our area a superintendent with a good crew

with good morale can accomplish between March 1st and April 15th and October 15th and December 1st, if he is allowed to make capital or physical improvements at the expense of manicuring the course during this time.

Golf course superintendents have played an important part in the tremendous growth of golf in this country and in the rising standards of excellence expected on courses. We must not become complacent now, but should strive to give *even better* playing conditions. Think of tomorrow's improvements today, wrap them up in the framework of a long-term plan, go out and sell them and your course has got to be better three years from today. ●

About the author — Graduated from Rutgers U. in 1959 with Bachelor of Science in Plant Science. Was Lt. in Air Force 59-62. Then Supt. at Rutgers U. golf course, Green Acres CC in Lawrenceville, N.J. before move to Engineers CC in January 1967.

LO-BLO, the Air-Broom...®

keeps courses tidy year around, handles the leaf problem, permits play all thru Fall Season.



SAVES TIME, LABOR, MONEY AND MUSCLE.

● Grooms greens, aprons, traps faster, better than six men; cleans leaves and litter around Clubhouse & Parking Area (right under cars). Especially valuable for Fall leaf problem.

● Removing aeration plugs is a breeze for the Lo-Blo, only one of its many uses. You just walk this terrific blast of air "window" style, blowing litter to a central point for gathering.

← NOW AVAILABLE . . .

New 10 HP SELF PROPELLED MODEL
ALSO 4, 6 and 8 HP Models

ATTACHMENTS — Flexible Hose Attachment to clean hard-to-reach places & Course Equipment. Water hose allows "quick-wash" of patios, poolsides. Also excellent snow-throwing blade.

If you haven't seen this versatile machine, write or call and we will arrange a demonstration for you.

ATWATER-STRONG CO.

ATWATER, OHIO 44201
(A.C. 216) 947-2344

For more information circle number 169 on card