

# Putting the Problem in Older Hands

By Hans Tanner

*To help ease the labor shortage as well as control inflationary budgets, superintendent Al DePorter began a unique practice: he hired a greens crew whose average age was 69 years old*

Comparatively speaking, Gus Landschoot is the baby of the greens crew at Clifton Springs CC, an 18-hole course outside a town of about 2,000, some 25 miles from Rochester, N.Y. Gus Landschoot is 62 years old.

Only three other members of the seven-man regular course maintenance staff are under 70 (65, 66 and 67); another is 70 and the remaining two are 75.

Al DePorter, the man who assembled this crew, is no longer at the club, but he's putting together a similar one this spring at nearby Newark, N.Y., CC, where he's taking over a nine-hole course which he says is in "terrible shape."

And 27-year-old Gary Kuhn, DePorter's successor, is so impressed with the condition of Clifton Springs, he's retaining the crew and adding another senior citizen as a replacement for Al's father, 71-year-old Al DePorter Sr., who is switching to Newark with his son.

Making older men feel a part of today's life is becoming increasingly difficult because more and more doors of industry are closed not only to those 65 and over, but also to many men approaching that age. DePorter has eased that situation in his area and even has a waiting list of men wanting to work.

But obviously DePorter is not hiring these older men just out of the goodness of his heart or because he realizes somebody has to help the aging. Mounting costs are putting the squeeze on golf course operations these days, and the clubs working on small budgets are having a difficult time maintaining decent course conditions.

"I'd say last year we operated on about only half the budget of a city course," DePorter says. "We paid these men \$2 an hour, which is slightly over the minimum wage guaranteed in New York State. Did they grumble about the money? Not on your life. Remember that from 65 to 72 a man can earn only \$1,680 a year and still collect social security.

"Why the board of directors at Clifton Springs decided to do something special for these men two years ago and without my knowledge voted to increase their hourly rate. The men appreciated the thought, but one after the other came to me and complained they couldn't work as many hours if they got the raise. And they didn't want to work fewer hours. I know in this day that sounds inconceivable, but it happened."

Getting capable help at the price a small club can pay is another problem facing more clubs every year. This also has been solved at Clifton Springs and now will be at Newark.

"I'm not saying this just to brag about how well my idea is working out," DePorter reports, "but I guess I'd have needed to hire 11 kids or younger men to do the work seven did for me at Clifton Springs. We paid about half as much as the big courses, and we got twice the results. Our greens and tees were as good or better than any in the Rochester area. The final nine holes were completed in 1964—two years after the front side—and in that short time the tees have become so good that we put practice putting cups in the back part so people waiting to tee off could sharpen up their putting. The tees are in the same grass as the greens and are cut one-sixteenth inch higher."

DePorter has some good backing for his boasts about Clifton Springs' greens and tees. Sam Urzetta, the 1950 United States Golf Assn. National Amateur champion and now head professional at the exclusive Country Club of Rochester is a frequent visitor there.

"They do an excellent job," Urzetta praises. "The greens are in fine condition and the tees have to be among the top three in this whole area. It's amazing what these old fellows have done for the golf course and what working there apparently has done for them."

And just who are these men?

J.C. Frowley is 75 years old and starting his fifth year at Clifton Springs. He was a farmer, but had to give it up because of health reasons. However, DePorter notes, "He looks better every month he's at the course."

Bernard Steyaert is the other who's 75. He's starting his 10th season at

Clifton Springs after taking a mandatory retirement from his masonry profession at 65 and spending the next year "not really enjoying retirement." Bert mows rough three days a week.

Bud Farnsworth is 70. He owned a bottled gas business, but a heart attack forced him to sell out. He mows the rough during the summer and does some greens in the spring and fall. This is his second year.

Ross Hooper is 67 and took a mandatory retirement at 65 from the village maintenance department in



Al DePorter

Clifton Springs. His normal job is mowing the 2d, 4th and 6th greens and the 3d, 5th and 7th tees. He's starting his third year.

Flormond Governor, 66, is beginning his fifth year at Clifton Springs after taking an early retirement from Garlock, Inc. He mows 1st, 5th and 8th greens and the 2d, 6th and 9th tees (since all three have double tees, he actually does six).

Gus Landschoot is the junior member of the staff at 62 and joined the club a year ago. Gus was an auto mechanic, so he puts his past to work fixing and maintaining equipment. He also mows the 10th and 11th greens and the 11th and 12th tees, and, like Governor and the rest, has double tees.

DePorter's dad was a regular for

five seasons at Clifton Springs. With him moving to Newark this spring, new Clifton Springs superintendent Kuhn has added 65-year-old Albert Lannon, who retired from Goulds Pumps in nearby Seneca Falls during the winter.

"I may add more after I see how things go," says Kuhn, who was assistant superintendent at famed Oak Hill CC in Rochester last year. "Did I consider replacing them with younger fellows? Not on your life. I've seen what kind of shape this course has been in. I'm just happy they all are willing to stay and work for me. It's great for a newcomer to have this many men who know what they're doing. I'm sure they'll make my job easier," Gary adds.

DePorter says "economics" was the reason for his move from the now manicured Clifton Springs' 18-hole layout to the rundown nine-hole spread at Newark.

"It'll be a challenge," he said while waiting for the snow to melt so he could get started on his new job. "But my move has meant jobs for four more senior citizens. In addition to the one Gary hired at Clifton Springs, I've got three newcomers. Bill Vander Lycke is 60, Frank Peters, 66, and Bill Cromie, 65. Vander Lycke was at Newark for 14 years but had moved to St. John Fisher College in Rochester as head groundskeeper. Now he's back here. Peters was a lathe operator at Garlock, Inc., and retired a year ago, and Cromie recently retired as a rural mail carrier for the Post Office department.

"And I have my dad and Merm Knauss, who's 68, was a hair dresser for 50 years and was my pro shop assistant at Clifton Springs. He's going to work out on the course now. He and I joined the others on the course in the fall in previous years, so he

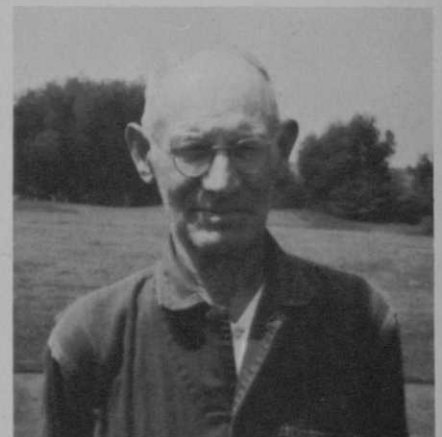
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Bert Steyaert



Flormond Governor



J.C. Frowley

really knows what it's all about.

"This course is in such horrendous shape, it'll be a real challenge to make something out of it. But I'm sure with the dedication of these men we'll be able to do it."

DePorter has tried college boys in the past and isn't entirely sold on them, even as fill-ins for his older crew. "We had good college kids last summer," he says, "but I've had some work for me who weren't worth having around. The biggest trouble with them is that they come too late in the year to help with the busy early season rush getting the course ready, then they have to leave before fall cleanup time. And once in a while the night life of the younger fellows results in them arriving late the next morning or not at all. My older men haven't been late once.

"You might think that illness would be a problem with these men, but it hasn't been so far. Not one missed a day last summer. Say, that reminds me of something else—the competition.

"They won't admit it to you or when they're together, but they all try to outdo one another. They take pride in having their greens and tees immaculate. Two years ago one of them was sick a day and when he called me, he said, 'I was supposed to mow such-and-such a green today. Don't let anybody else do it because they don't know how, Al. Would you do it for me?' And if one of the members or a guest happens to mention that a particular green or tee is the best on the course, well, the man who takes care of it walks a few inches taller for a day or two.

"The greens at Clifton Springs were mowed every other day, the tees every other day, the fairways three times a week normally and the

rough once a week. But getting back to the old boys, having them for various lines of work helps a great deal because they come up with labor-saving, time-saving and money-saving ideas that allow us to do much more than our budget should allow us to do.

"And when they see a stone in the fairway, they stop and get it out, even if it means going all the way back to the barn to get a pick axe or something else. Most of the younger fellows would either run over the stone with the mower or just go around it and leave it there. If these fellows see a low spot in the fairway or rough, they go ahead and fill it in and seed it without being told. They come to me the moment they see any disease on the greens anywhere.

"They do all kinds of jobs, too. By that I mean they don't exclusively mow greens—we had 19 at Clifton Springs—or tees—we had 30—or fairways or rough. They all water, spray, fertilize, seed, cut trees, plant trees, top-dress and whatever else needs to be done. They all hand-week the tees and greens under their care, too, and that's a tough, long job."

Having an entire staff of elderly men must have its drawbacks to partially, at least, offset all the advantages, and DePorter is quick to point out the major one.

"You become attached to them. Yet you have to realize you may lose one or two or more in a very short time. The other drawbacks are minor compared to that one. What are the others? Well, cutting cups and raking traps is hard on them, and that's about the only difficulty they have with their jobs, but I try to give the younger of them as much of that work as I can. I have another problem, though. That's trying to arrange their time so those under 72 don't earn too much, yet the time has to be spread out enough to get all the jobs

done over the season."

It takes only a few minutes with the crew to discover what this has meant to them. Their quotes reflect much the same thoughts.

"It's a wonderful way to keep in shape. I wished I came here 20 years ago . . . I couldn't get a job sweeping floors and this sure beats that anyway . . . We can't get a job anywhere at our ages and as it turned out, it's been for the best."

Although none were friends before they got together at Clifton Springs, they're very close now, help each other with jobs at their homes and engage in a lot of good-natured kidding.

Surprisingly, not one of them ever has played golf, which sometimes leads to some funny confrontations on the course. During Clifton Springs' annual invitation tournament a couple of years ago, one of this area's better amateurs, noted for his temper as well as his golf, missed a short putt on the ninth green in front of a large gallery. Sizzling, he stomped to the 10th tee and promptly duck-hooked his tee shot into the trees.

"Hey sonny," advised one of the grounds crew helpfully, "you're not supposed to hit it over there. The fairway is over that way."

"We nearly lost one of our old gentlemen right then and there," DePorter recalls with a chuckle.

"I've been a professional since 1942, but at the age of 30, with a wife and five children, I went to Penn State and graduated with a degree in turf management," DePorter explains. I feel strongly about the role of a superintendent. Every professional, manager or chef has an important role in a club, but the man most responsible for their jobs and the club's existence is the superintendent. Without a course, there would be no members and no club.

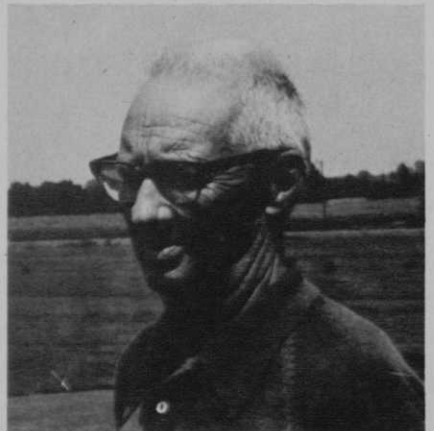
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Gus Landschoot



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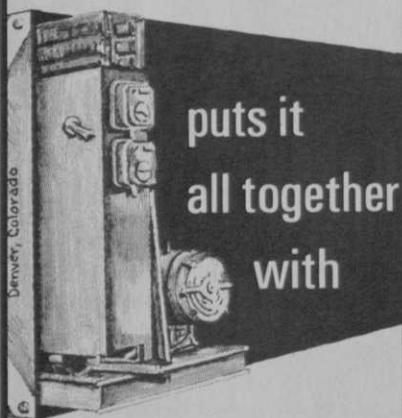
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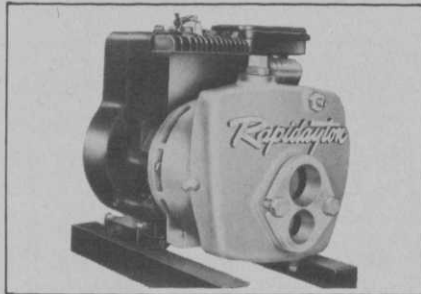
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### New Products continued from page 68

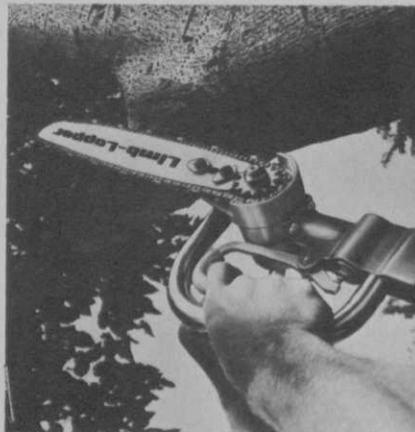
**Tait Mfg. Company** introduces the H-Pak pump and pressure tank combinations, which feature a choice of shallow well of convertible jet pump on a 13- or 30-gallon horizontal tank. The shallow-well jet pump comes in one-third or one-half hp models with capacities to 1,250 gallons per hour and 25-foot depths. The convertible jet comes in one-third, one-half and three-fourths hp models with capacities to 1,140 gallons; it can accommodate depths to 160 feet.

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**Limb-Lopper Company, Inc.**, announces the Mark II Model HC power chain saw. It weighs six pounds including a 12-inch bar and chain and features a one-fourth-inch pitch chain on a narrow profile bar, a 10-inch cutting area and a three-quarter hp hydraulic motor.

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**Hornung's Pro Golf Sales, Inc.**, has a Combination Club Cleaning Machine, which is able to clean four or five irons or one wood at a time. It can be easily installed in the storage area of a pro shop. Price with heating unit: \$275.

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**Skagg's Turf Equipment** introduces a core shredder attachment for its Ryan WG24-1 Aerator. It shreds cores as it aerates and is easily mounted. The cores can then be used as topdressing.

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### Older hands continued from page 44

Yet most clubs key their operation around the manager or professional. I think this is why we were so successful at Clifton Springs. I made the superintendent and the crew the most important part of the club's operation. And my old-timers deserve a great deal of credit for making it the course it is."

Without these older men, there's no doubt that Clifton Springs would be just another run-of-the-mill country golf course. And there's no doubt, either, that without Clifton Springs, these men would be unhappy, made to feel unwanted by a society that has passed them by and in some cases, wouldn't be alive today.

Many other golf clubs around the country could improve their course conditions, cut their budgets for course maintenance and most important, keep some senior citizen a living, working, happy part of the community by following the example set by Al DePorter at Clifton Springs and now at Newark CC. □

*Hans Tanner received a degree in business administration from the University of Rochester. For the past 20 years he has been a sports writer for the Democrat & Chronicle in Rochester. At 21, Tanner was the youngest accredited golf writer ever to cover a U.S. Open (1953).*

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