

# Show Them Where the Money Goes

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**An annual display of turf maintenance equipment, steam cleaned and painted, has been an important communication tool for Dominic Thomas at Huntingdon Valley. The display impresses members with the scope and importance of the superintendent's job and helps lower resistance to future purchases of new equipment**

"The membership just does not appreciate the necessity and high cost of turf maintenance equipment which is needed to achieve the playing conditions they demand."

This phrase has probably been said by many superintendents faced with the tasks of golf course maintenance today. Costs of labor prohibits the luxury of hand mowing greens, trap raking, night watering, weed pulling and the various chores which before only men could perform. Labor

has been replaced by sophisticated machinery. New developments in turfgrass and efforts of the Golf Course Superintendent's Assn. of America and the U.S. Golf Assn. Green Section have all helped to upgrade the professional status of the superintendent in the eyes of the membership. He no longer just "cuts grass."

The day when the superintendent could spend all of this time strictly on golf course maintenance has passed. Now the superintendent finds himself engaged in increasing communications with his members and the surrounding community. As income into the club continues to decline, and with assessments and dues reaching the saturation point, the costs of labor, equipment and turf management continue to put the superintendent on the spot with his membership. Memberships continue to demand superior playing conditions, but are not always ready to pay for the cost of this luxury.

Dominic Thomas, superintendent at Huntingdon Valley CC, Hunting-

don Valley, Pa., has found the solution to this communication gap by giving the membership a greater insight into the scope and importance of course maintenance and the need to continually purchase and upgrade equipment.

The solution is so simple and practical, that it is amazing that the procedure is not a standard practice at all clubs.

The communications program Thomas conducted with the membership at Huntingdon Valley was based on a special three-day, open-air display of the many and varied pieces of equipment required to maintain and improve the attractive 18-hole, 300-acre course. The program, inaugurated two years ago, was planned for the day of the club's annual meeting when the board of directors and a majority of the membership would be on hand. The display was kept over the weekend so that everyone could see it.

Plans for the display began during the winter—that time when bad weather blankets most of the courses



*Tools of the trade: The 53 pieces of equipment at Huntingdon Valley are arranged in front of the clubhouse.*

in the North bringing operations to a standstill. Thomas and his groundcrew nucleus of four began a clean-up campaign on all of their equipment. Armed with a steam cleaner, grease gun and paint brush, 53 assorted pieces of gear, ranging from tractors and seven-gang mowers to snow blowers and trap edgers were overhauled, cleaned, greased and repainted by Thomas and his crew.

These items were then put on display attractively arrayed on the lawn adjoining the clubhouse. Superintendent Thomas and his staff were on hand to explain to the members each piece of equipment and its role in maintenance operations.

One of the bonuses of the tearing-down, rebuilding and refurbishing of the gear throughout the wintertime was the increased operating efficiency and life of the equipment. Thomas has been conducting this wintertime clean-up program for 30 years and claims it can add up to 10 years of life and performance on the piece of equipment.

"One good example in this equipment maintenance program," Thomas says, "is that I still use the first verticutter ever made and it looks and performs like new. This 20-year old piece of equipment was included in the display, and most of the members thought it had recently been purchased because of its sparkling new looks."

Thomas' budget calls for some \$15,000 to be spent on equipment over the next three years. "This can be attributable to the favorable reaction of members to the equipment display," he says. Bill Goldthorp, club president, and DeWitt Smith, greens chairman, both experienced unexpected dividends from the equipment display. "The display was an ideal means of pin-pointing for the board of directors and the membership at large the importance of our year-long program of maintenance, and the necessary budgetary dollars that go with the program," according to Goldthorp and Smith.

"Planning is the keynote of the total operation at Huntingdon Valley," says Larry Higgs, general manager, "and a viable five-year turf maintenance plan has been developed to cover all foreseeable contingencies and insure continuation of a satisfied membership as well as beginning new programs for the future." Thomas

now has the knowledge that he can plan a three or five year seeding program with the assurance that he will have the equipment available in the future to meet the needs of the seeding program.

"We know that the average member appreciates our work in a general way," Thomas says, "but this display of equipment really brought home the tremendous number of operations we go through to insure them the best playing conditions. I



*Members are able to walk among the cleaned-up equipment at the club's annual spring membership meeting.*

expect less annoyance when we slow down a foursome as we're finishing cutting a green or when we are aerifying," he says.

The membership is also enthusiastic about the equipment display. Comments from many members centered upon a number of newly acquired items added to the Huntingdon Valley equipment lineup to perform various operations formerly carried out by manual labor. Thomas was on hand to point out how the ever-growing shortage of work force candidates was being met by mechanized operations.

"Today's country club has developed into a big business complex," says general manager Higgs. "With increased Government intervention in the form of Internal Revenue Service guidelines or Supreme Court decisions, to the need for computerized billing and accounting procedures, or the need for turf management practices, there is a need for professional management.

"Thomas and Higgs have supplied the professional management needed

to make a country club a success," says Goldthorp, "and keep us abreast of the changing times. Through their efforts of communication, both between themselves and the membership, a continuity of management has been achieved which has supplied the club with activities to appeal to all members of the family: golf, swimming, tennis, squash, bowling and trap shooting." Growth is assured at Huntingdon Valley through a very favorable dues schedule for sons and daughters and junior members.

"We don't believe in a minimum house charge," says Higgs. "We want the club to offer a variety of activities to the members without them feeling coerced to attend." The management team of Higgs and Thomas represent a total of 66 years at Huntingdon Valley. Thomas is a 43-year veteran, with Higgs serving as general manager since 1948.

"In some clubs this amount of longevity might be construed as stodgy, staid, entrenched management," says Goldthorp, "however, in the case of Huntingdon Valley, it means the membership has confidence in their guidance and management philosophies."

Contrary to the dwindling emphasis now being placed on the role of committees in the operation of the country club, Huntingdon Valley encourages committee participation. "With proper guidance, committees are a very good way to get the membership interested in the operation of their club," says Goldthorp. "They act as a buffer between the members and club officers and offer a great deal of executive, merchandising and business talent which you couldn't afford if you had to go to the outside to purchase. The result has been positive attitudes towards change and good constructive criticism."

"A well-run, successful country club calls for many ingredients," Higgs sums up, "and one of the most essential elements is close attention to constant improvement of playing conditions. Excellent teamwork with the superintendent is a prime requisite. We have this in abundance with superintendent Thomas and his staff and we welcomed the opportunity which this equipment display provided to underscore their vital contributions to our membership." □