

Golf clubs have not been spared the damage from senseless acts of destruction. Specific preventive measures are a necessity, but long-range planning also must be considered  
by DOUGLAS LUTZ

The kid zoomed out of a swale in the middle of Van Cortlandt's fourth fairway and braked his mini-bike to a skidding stop. The rear wheel dug in deep. It left a gouge in the ancient turf bigger than any divot ever taken in 83 years of continual play on this fairway.

Glancing back, the kid saw Maintenance Supervisor Tom Dance's old green and black Parks Department pickup emerge from the tun-

nel under Mosholu Parkway. Gripping throttles tightly, the kid "vroomed" loudly several times. He waited. As Dance closed the gap between himself and the mounted intruder, the kid "vroomed" again.

Suddenly, in a wild run down the fairway, the kid full throttled in a direct path to the green. Careening crazily, he drove right across the middle of it!

Dance stared in disbelief. Now, more concerned about the damage to the fourth green than to what the mini-bike vandal was up to, he drove quickly down between the fourth and fifth fairways and ran to inspect the green. Gashes of tire-torn ribbons were cut a half-inch deep in a wavy pattern across the damp green. Again, Dance stared, shocked. By the time he recovered and gave chase, the kid had streaked back up towards Mosholu Park-

way. Unable to get away cleanly, the kid abandoned his mini-bike, scrambled through a hole in the chain link fence and hopped on the back of a waiting friend's larger cycle. The kid got away, but left behind the first piece of tangible evidence Dance could use to track down the gang that had been vandalizing Van Cortlandt's ancient grounds.

The green virtually destroyed was one of the oldest in this country. Van Cortlandt Park, Bronx, N.Y., opened in 1889, is America's oldest municipal golf course.

What motivates a kid to vandalism? What could possibly be in the mind of a teenager who would deliberately drive across an obviously manicured piece of land?

Vandalism has been with us for a long time. Historically, it can be traced to the fourth and fifth centuries. The Vandals, a warlike no-

# THE HIGH COST



madic people, roamed Gaul, Spain and North Africa, leaving devastation in their wake. They even defied the highest authority, the Holy Roman Empire, when they attacked Rome itself in A.D. 455. Their name was added to the language as an over-all term for destruction and damage, particularly to public property.

Vandalism knows no geographical boundary, no particular socioeconomic level. Ghetto gangs tramping uninvited and illegally across a city park golf course are essentially the same as the affluent "chicken" drive crowds churning up the greens of a small town country club.

Vandalism is probably the largest single problem facing today's superintendent and no doubt the most frustrating, particularly at municipal and public layouts, al-

though not necessarily confined to these more accessible courses.

Coping with blight-bound greens, parched fairways and conditions such as *Poa annua* and Henbit come with the territory. And, they can be handled. Superintendents can spray, prune, reseed, resod, because the problems can be recognized and frequently anticipated. Preventive maintenance can be performed. Coping with vandalism, however, is another matter. It gives no warning. It's usually a hit and run violation, frequently carried on under cover of darkness. Sneak attacks are common.

Vandalism is seemingly unmotivated. Certainly senseless. Almost exclusively a crime of youth. Anger and frustration on the parts of superintendents are understandable reactions. They do not, however, solve the problem nor pre-

*In left photo, Tom Dance, maintenance supervisor at Van Cortlandt Park, inspects damage to an 83-year old green made by a mini-bike vandal. Posted signs, center, now make it illegal for a non-ticket visitor to enter the course. Court summons and a fine await violators. One possible answer in halting vandalism is by making the course accessible to community youngsters. The course, right, is open in winter to ice skaters as a pond is frozen on the par-three 13th hole.*

vent its reoccurrence. Preventive measures are needed at a very high level of understanding because vandalism cannot be handled as one might handle damaged turf, although it is certain some superintendents may have been tempted to take a shovel to the backside of the problem.

Tom Dance's dilligent detective work at Van Cortlandt in tracking down the kid on the mini-bike by tracing the serial number through the dealer and turning his in-

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# OF VANDALISM

## VANDALISM *continued*

formation over to the authorities, is certainly beyond the normal duties of a course maintenance supervisor. Dance was determined, however, to take stern measures to stem the vandalism tide at Van Cortlandt. "I figured we had a chance to make a real example of one kid and maybe others would think twice about destroying Van Cortlandt," he said recently.

Dance, as a result of his persistence, has brought the youthful offender before a judge accompanied by his parents and an attorney. It has been costly and time consuming for the parents, which may prove to be another form of deterrent. Parental attitudes toward vandalism are sometimes difficult to understand, though. In this instance, the boy's father asked the judge what his son was accused of that was so horrible. "Did he commit murder?" he asked. To which the judge, a golfer himself, sternly responded, "He committed malicious mischief and caused over \$10,000 in property damage."

Dance thought the fine, if it ever came to that because the vandal was a youthful offender, would probably be \$500. That's a small percentage for financial restitution when considered alongside the estimated \$10,400 worth of damage the mini-bike crowd had done at Van Cortlandt.

Thievery, of course, is frequently coupled with vandalism. "We lose 18 flagsticks every month, all year long," Dance reports. Van Cortlandt's problem stems, in part, from the layout itself. Mostly far removed from the clubhouse, it would need continual police patrol, according to Dance. "What we need are full-time rangers," he says. This seems to be true of many courses, even those completely fenced in.

Police power at Van Cortlandt rests with the New York City Police Department who naturally have a lot more to do than keep an eye on golf courses for potential acts of vandalism. The local precinct, however, does spot check the course during their normal rounds. Occasionally a patrol car on watch can be found hidden under the bridge that carries Moshulu Park-

way over these ancient grounds. Hit and run tactics vandals employ make spotty surveillance of this kind an ineffective deterrent. Dance, of course, is right. A continual patrol in the remote areas of Van Cortlandt is probably the key to thwarting vandals there.

Other courses in the metropolitan New York area have utilized ranger patrols as a means of coping with potential troublemakers. Morris County in New Jersey has a full-time county police officer on duty at their 27-hole Flanders Valley layout. In addition to speeding up play and maintaining order, he has summons and arrest powers. Vandalism is virtually unheard of at this beautiful championship course.

Some other preventive measures have been undertaken at Van Cortlandt that may ultimately prove helpful and may be worthy of imitation elsewhere.

For the first time in the long history of New York City golf, No Trespassing signs have been posted at Van Cortlandt. Tom Dance initiated this device which now makes it illegal for non-players to be on the course. Court summonses and \$25 fines, once the word gets around, may deter unwanted visitors and those intent on vandalism. Dance also thought it might help in keeping non-paying golfers off the course. "Tight controls are needed at all levels," he said, "Our particular problem is accessibility. There are many holes in our fences and we're continually patching them up. Sinking pipes, stacking logs and so forth. If the rules were observed by everyone it might influence the vandals, too."

Dance has requisitioned floodlights to illuminate the combination clubhouse/boathouse and maintenance buildings. This plan was brought about by recent attempts to vandalize the Quonset hut equipment building. Luckily, the intruders were frightened off in time. "No telling what they might have done," Dance says. The problem is that the park gets pitch black at night, so access is fairly easy and undetectable, too. We need bright lights."

Jimmy Jackson, Van Cortlandt's professional, has another ap-

proach. Involvement is his best weapon. For a number of years Jackson has gone into ghetto schools to lecture on golf, complete with shot making demonstrations. Jackson, the only black professional at a New York City course, hopes to influence potential vandals into an appreciation of golf and the city courses. He would like to bring back long missing caddie programs, too. As he says, "Any kid who grows up around a course isn't likely to tear it up."

The problems outlined at Van Cortlandt are not unique to big city courses. Norman Nelson, general manager at Four Hills CC in Albuquerque, N.M., a private club that is not fenced in, has adopted a no nonsense attitude toward vandals. The parents of any teenager found on the course who doesn't belong there are automatically billed a \$50 fine! Kids have been hauled into court for driving cars around the course, and their parents have had to foot the damage bills. Nelson said recently, "We have a night patrol man full time. One night he saw this kid riding a bicycle on one of our bentgrass greens and called the police. They set up road blocks around the area and caught the kid. He had caused damage estimated at \$250, and we sent the bill to his father who sent me a check. It's that simple!" Nelson added a thought for all of us when he said, "The discipline was then up to his father." Perhaps serving notice on the parents in a community is one of the keys to coping with vandalism. It seems to be working at Four Hills.

"Considering labor, materials, loss of play and loss of revenues, which is a big thing for us, we've spent between \$10,000 and \$20,000 to completely replace a green totally damaged by cars spinning out on it," Harry Stadille reported from Cottonwood CC. Cottonwood, east of San Diego in El Cajon, Calif., is a semi-private club open to all in more ways than one. This commercial course is not fenced in or posted and is situated out of town in a remote area. It has been prey to all kinds of vandalism and is particularly vulnerable to thievery. According to Stadille, who is manager of the shop and assistant to

*continued on page 58*



## VANDALISM from page 56

Cliff Crandall, head of the course, they operate as much like a private course as possible. He said recently, "We pour 45 per cent of our revenue back into the grounds. We've put as much as 1½ million gallons of water a day on the course in trying to maintain private club quality." That kind of dedication becomes frustrating in the face of daily destruction.

Nighttime raids on the golf car fleet recently ran into a wild "Indianapolis 500" run across the sculptured grounds. Vandals hot wired the electric cars and drove out for a game of "chicken," being sure not to miss some of the Seaside and Old Orchard bent greens. To cope with this particular problem, on-off switches were added with pre-set buttons to break the current and short circuit the system. Stadille felt it was a temporary solution at best. "What we need is a full-time night patrol. It's the only way we can hope to handle the nighttime vandals."

Cottonwood has had instances of daytime stolen clubs and ransacked cars in the parking lot as well as its share of players sneaking on without playing. This latter problem has been handled somewhat by summoning the police and charging the offenders with petty theft for stealing greens fees. Sometimes as many as 10 to 15 a day are apprehended.

Stadille wasn't too confident of solutions to their vandal problems without fencing and without a night patrol force. Golf in the San Diego area is big business, with 67 courses available to the public. It would be a great loss if a commercial course dedicated to providing country club playing conditions for the non-affiliated golfer had to surrender due to the evils of vandalism.

In one of the most heavily trafficked golfing areas of this country, the Northern sweep of Ohio that encompasses Cleveland, Akron and Toledo as well as many small communities, vandalism has been on the rise. High spirited youths, fresh from victory on weekend gridirons or those smarting under the stigma of defeat, have frequently carried

their unbridled enthusiasm or unexpressed anger into golf's domain.

A.J. Krebs, professional at Pleasant Valley CC, a semi-private layout in Medina, about 10 miles west of Akron and 28 south of Cleveland, recently reported some unusual activity at his course. "One night someone took a shovel and cut a very popular four letter word into the middle of a green."

Krebs says that most courses in his area have added security forces of some kind in their own best interests. "After all, you're protecting a big investment out there," he says. Pleasant Valley, in anticipation of further student weekend vandal visits, now has Friday, Saturday and Sunday night patrols.

Several golf cars have been rigged with high intensity lights and their governors have been removed by the management.

Now when the VW wheelmen take to the course at night, apprehension is at least a possibility. They can be caught and have been, according to Krebs. "We have caught several violators, but they usually turn out to be under 16, so there isn't much prosecution," Krebs reported and then added, "No one likes to see a boy go to jail."

The Lakewood G & CC in New Jersey, which dates back to the days when horse drawn wagonloads of fresh air seekers rode through pine scented forests, has been very fortunate as far as vandalism goes. Lakewood is still a resort town. Its growth, by comparison with the genteel horse and wagon era, has been noticeable though unspectacular. Harold Dore, professional and manager, reports minor incidences of vandalism. He was at a loss to put his finger on why they had been so fortunate. "We're not fenced in and the door to our half-way house is broken down three or four times a year, but that's usually because of stealing. We do lose 40 to 50 slimline flagsticks a year at a cost of approximately \$20 each, though. Part of the loss must be due to vandals, or malicious mischief, I would imagine." Lakewood is one of the finest public courses in the metropolitan New York area. Perhaps its good fortune will continue

*continued on page 61*

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## VANDALISM from page 58

and vandalism will not interfere with the splendid play available at this venerable layout.

Several unique vandal problems at Audubon CC in Louisville, Ky., are tied to their off-season. When snow blanketed the course in February, Audubon's famous hill holes became attractive playgrounds once again for winter sports, including night sledding. Bonfires lit the evening festivities. Unfortunately, they were built from trees chopped down on the course and from redwood slats broken off the concrete tee benches. Perhaps worst of all though, they were built right on the greens.

In relatively flat Louisville the best hills for sledding are at Audubon. Unfortunately, they follow a path that carries the runners across one of the excellent greens. Cuts up to three inches deep in places have left ugly scars because some of the sledding enthusiasts had completely ignored the unfrozen ground. Thawing snow on soft ground provided no base for the runners. As a result, some fine old bentgrass greens will need repair this spring. Tom Sams, course superintendent, said recently, "Fortunately, we maintain a large nursery at Audubon. We have C19 and Cohansey as well as some Penn-cross that we use on some of our rebuilt greens, so we'll be able to repair the damages."

Sams reports that prior to fencing the entire course, \$5,000 to \$10,000 vandal damage was committed every year at Audubon. Now vandalism has been cut 75 per cent. There are still problems, however. "Around Christmas time we can usually figure to lose a half dozen of our best 20-foot pines to premeditated, adult vandals," Sams said. "Now you know most houses can't accommodate that large a tree, so it's got to be clubs and institutions doing the cutting. There's a strange 'holier than thou' attitude that seems to prevail in the need for a 20-foot tree."

Sams feels most vandalism is not premeditated, but is done on impulse and has to be stopped in the initial stages. "We haven't made any arrests to date," he reported, "but

we scared the hell out of a lot of people, put a little fear in them. I've been known to swear a bit too, when I've found kids on the course who didn't belong there."

Metal rakes used to be a problem at Audubon's bunkers. "They made great tools," Sams explained. Since substituting plastic rakes, he's noticed a drop in damages around the greens and bunkers. Replacement of rakes has been less costly, too.

"Even with a full-time watchman the kids still come into the pool area," Sams expounded further on Audubon's problems. "Vandalism is something you just have to live with. Kids walking across a course and they get on that nice cushiony green and first thing you know they're digging a heel in or jumping up and down. It's not planned, it's impulsive."

Perhaps resorts have suffered the least from vandal damage. Isolated as many of them are, the opportunity for vandal attacks is not as readily available as it is for many of their less fortunate competitors.

"We are a self-contained, fenced-in unit," Jack Parnell, professional at Callaway Gardens, Pine Mountain, Ga., responded recently. "And we have our own security force. There have been no problems of vandalism at Callaway Gardens." Parnell considers himself and Callaway very fortunate, based on the stories he has heard from other professionals.

Callaway Gardens is noted for its natural beauty and extensive recreational facilities, not the least of which is golf. Its brand of golf, with two 18 hole par 72 layouts and a par three course spreading their blankets of green over a huge tract bordering several lakes and with the Appalachian foothills in the background, is indeed fortunate not to have been one of vandalism's victims.

Recent examination into methods of coping with vandalism seems to indicate a signal reaction, a frontal attack. Dealing with the immediacy of a problem by arrest, fencing, posting or other police action may be necessary in many instances. Emergency conditions will frequently be overcome by speedy and often drastic action.

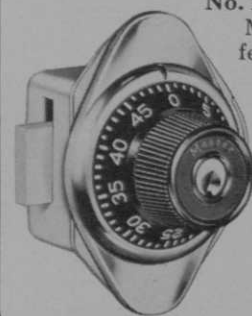
*continued on page 91*

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**VANDALISM** from page 61

Perhaps, though, long-range considerations should go hand in hand with expedient decisions.

Jimmy Jackson's approach at Van Cortlandt should be given further thought. Superintendents might consider approaching school authorities with a proposal to give lectures to students on golf course ecology. Reaching young people is not as difficult as it might appear, particularly when they are approached with an unusual subject. How many kids, after all, know the years of tender nourishing a piece of land needs to make a green that putts true? Ecology, survival of our natural resources and our own environment, are subjects not necessarily part of today's curriculum, but they certainly are in the forefront of young people's thinking. The impetus for a lecture might well be the most recent rash of vandal attacks on the local course that have surely been reported in the local papers. Not to accuse, to point the finger, but rather to extoll the virtues of what is, in many areas, the only decent piece of open expanse of green terrain left.

Invitations to visit the course, watch work in progress by a maintenance crew, see first-hand the results of years of labor and tender care, might appeal to young people. The fenced in/out-of-bounds/private/exclusive attitude may well be triggering beligerence from young people of today who feel shut out about so many things. It may be time to open up and seek involvement with the ranks from which vandals generally come.

Use of golf facilities by the community, on an invitational basis, for activities such as picnics, concerts and school horticulture programs could be beneficial to the club as well as the kids. The club would benefit because it would help educate the kids to the tremendous virtues of maintaining a decent course in the best ecological interests of all members of the community. Not just their self-serving interests. The kids would benefit because they would be involved. And the parents. Non-golfers would better understand the concerns expressed over vandalism

through an appreciation of the physical beauties of golf course terrain. Closing down the range for two or three days a month could prove meaningful in the long run.

Community clean-up campaigns at municipal facilities have been very successful in introducing youngsters to the fascinations of a golf course. When Norwalk, Conn., completed Oak Hills Park, one of the finest public courses in the East, a great deal of trash was left behind. Having hacked their course out of a magnificent oak forest on several former private estates, the fairway edges were lined with mounds of stumps, branches, brush and weed clumps. The entire community was invited in to police their newest park facility. They responded proudly, golfers and non-golfers alike. Several weeks saw the completion of the clean-up project. Some dedicated golfers came out of the teenage and younger work contingents—and very few vandals.

Caddie ranks have always generated appreciative golfers. Caddie programs should be initiated, particularly at municipal layouts. Involvement of youth is the best insurance against vandalism. Decent caddie fees to encourage participation should also be included. It's a small price to pay for the benefits to be realized ultimately in reduced vandalism costs.

Earl Martin, head professional in his 20th year at Western GC in Los Angeles, said recently, "We need more junior classes and junior programs, especially at private clubs. The kids have to be involved. We recently ran a juniors tournament, up to age 18, with 137 in the field." Martin has been witness to a tremendous influx of youngsters to the game. Two years ago Western led the nation in rounds played at an 18-hole layout with 147,000. This past year they were second only to Rancho in Los Angeles with 113,000. "It's been my experience," he explained further, "that many professionals have had great success with junior programs. You don't get many acts of vandalism when the kids are involved."

Off-season activities when courses are winterized is a growing trend, as reported earlier in GOLFDOM,

continued on page 92

tournament to be played at the convention site at least every other year.

Another comment on the Boston show was the fact that exhibits would be held on two floors, instead of in one big hall. Although this might create a second-class image such as the Professional Golfers' Assn. is trying to overcome with their two tent system, I don't think this argument is valid in view of the attitude and attention that superintendents gave manufacturers this year. They are spending more time seeing everyone, and not just concentrating on some of the "giants'" booths.

The smoothness and success of the show can be credited to the hard work done by the GCSAA executive committee. The educational sessions started and ended on time. Although several competitors were placed side by side and some manufacturers had to hide in the shadows of bigger exhibitors or in remote corners, the intense attention exhibitions are receiving from superintendents should eliminate these problems almost entirely in future shows. □

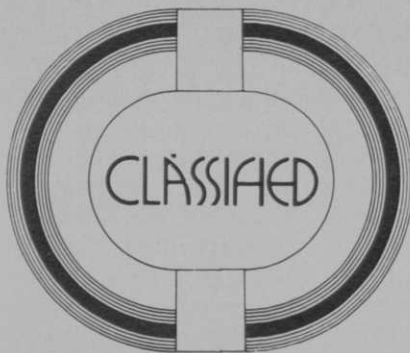
#### **VANDALISM** from page 91

cross-country skiing and snowmobiling in particular. Ice skating on the club lake or pond, under controlled access conditions, might also be considered. Sledding also, as mentioned previously, can be destructive and costly. It need not be, however. When the ground freezes solid and a heavy layer of snow puts the fairways to sleep for the season, advantage could be taken to involve the young people in the life of a golf course. Any layout with a decent hill can become a winter paradise for the family sledding crowds.

Vandalism, possibly today's most difficult problem for superintendents will always be a source of frustration and destruction.

The percentage of dollar impact on maintenance cost will always include a share for vandalism.

Meeting the vandalism problem head on with specific preventive measures is a necessity. It might also be wise to look into long-range planning as a way of cutting down the overwhelming percentages. □



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