

It is nothing new for a superintendent to be told by financially-cautious committees to trim his budget, because the rate of growth of maintaining the course has outstripped the rate of growth of the incoming revenue of the club. However, this year many superintendents appear to be faced with a dilemma. What items can be trimmed from maintenance budgets and still won't lower the quality of course the membership desires? Is the choice to be new equipment purchases, replacement of depreciated and worn-out equipment, cutbacks in labor personnel but not labor budgets, or elimination of capital expenditures?

Almost unanimously the superintendents throughout the United States, contacted by GOLFDOM, acknowledged that capital expenditures for golf course improvements again is the first item struck from the budget. GOLFDOM's February survey projected a 32.3 per cent drop in capital expenditures for improvements in 1972. There are two reasons for this. First, newer courses are being so thoroughly designed, that few renovations are needed. If it becomes a question of renovating the course or keeping the dues and assessments down for the members, the latter choice is preferable. Members appear satisfied to play that "same old course." Secondly, many superintendents are operating with less maintenance personnel than in past years, but the high cost of labor has not offered any budget relief in this area. When one has to cut back the labor force it doesn't leave time for crews to work on capital improvements.

The problem golf course superintendents, indeed golf clubs, are having with finding an adequate labor force could be the subject of several articles in its own right. However, some of the reasons given by superintendents indicate the labor situation is going to continue to deteriorate. One superintendent in the Northwest said that the shipping strike caused an economic slump, which produced declines in club membership rosters. Clubs there have what he terms a "poor" labor force. "It is becoming a question of can we afford to hire

## MAINTENANCE OUTLOOK 1972-73

GOLFDOM's informal survey of golf course superintendents' maintenance budgets reveals belt tightening on new equipment purchases. A critical point is being reached in labor shortages at northern courses

manual labor at the going rate?" he says. "For example, we are not able to draw on workers who are willing to work at the wages the club can afford to pay. Because we cannot or in some cases, will not, pay the going rate, workers have found it cheaper not to work."

"This is also a problem in the Northeast," says one Massachusetts superintendent. "Although there is high unemployment in our area, we cannot pay the wages to attract these workers. We have also suffered a decline in our membership. When the club only has so much income coming in, committees continue to trim the maintenance budget, but clubhouse operations are not subject to the cuts that we are. They keep pouring money into the operation of large clubhouse facilities."

According to one Connecticut superintendent the availability of college students, those interested in agronomy and those just looking for summer jobs for tuition, has eased the labor problems in his area—but not completely. "We can draw upon a lot of college students, who are willing to work at wages clubs are willing to pay, in the summer. However, most of the real work and need is in the spring and fall," he states.

There is a difference of opinion about the effect increased mechanization has had on the superintendent's labor force. One Arizona superintendent discounts many of the claims that sophisticated equipment, such as trap rakes and tri-plex mowers, save labor dollars.

They may save time, but they also require a skilled operator, which means he wants a higher wage, so you have really made a trade, he says. A Georgian and Connecticut superintendent, however, both disagree saying that operating sophisticated machinery requires no skill and training.

Although budgets are tight, superintendents are buying two items en masse: the mechanical sand trap rake and the tri-plex greens mower. It appears from the survey that superintendents are not replacing all the items that are due to be retired, but are hanging onto them for another year. These items include heavy equipment such as tractors and mowers.

That "luxury" item sand trap rake is experiencing phenomenal success, which is surprising because budgets do not have provisions for them. Apparently superintendents have sold their greens chairs on their necessity. The transition to tri-plex greens mowers is also surprising. Many superintendents feel that the current tri-plex is not the complete answer and that it has one major drawback: the buildup of thatch on the greens. However, because manufacturers have added interchangeable heads and verticutting equipment to the tri-plex to help alleviate thatch, superintendents feel the tri-plex at least is not causing any great permanent harm to their greens. Many superintendents who have purchased tri-plexes are alternating them with the walk-behind mowers to prevent thatch build up, or at least minimize it. Superintendents who purchased one tri-plex last year are also buying the second and third ones. We are doing this, says one Chicago-area superintendent, so that we have two tri-plexes for greens and one exclusively for mowing tees and aprons. It can also be used as a back-up for greens.

Outlays for automatic irrigation are also in a nebulous area. New courses or ones doing extensive renovation are making the transition from manual to automatic. Other superintendents may have to wait for budget dollars to open up before the club converts from manual to automatic. "We've got along for 20 years with the pres-

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counterproposal, putting into it the basic structure of the needs of the club. The counterproposal should be prepared with the knowledge that there will be modifications as the give and take of negotiations get under way.

As negotiations begin, a thorough examination should be made of the club's bargaining strength. Primarily, the strength hinges on the attitude of the club membership and the effectiveness of the board of directors. No employer has bargaining strength without the support of the policy makers. It would be foolish to attempt to drive a hard bargain in negotiations only to find out that at the critical moment, when a strike is threatened, that the board of directors will not support the position taken. This would usually mean a higher than necessary settlement

with the union. In this regard, timing of negotiations becomes critical. The club membership may simply not tolerate any delays or interference in the use of the facilities if they occur during periods of heavy use. These matters must be considered in advance because little time for extensive planning when negotiations reach their critical stage will be available.

## CONCLUSION

No article can cover the entire field of labor relations. It will be enough, however, if the reader understands that labor problems can be considerably diminished, if not eliminated, if approached in a reasonable and understanding manner. Furthermore, problems with employees can be avoided more easily before they start than after your employees have chosen a union. □

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ent system," says one Florida superintendent. "My greens chairman is saying let's try it for a couple more."

Superintendents throughout the nation do not appear alarmed at the growing number of chemical regulations and legislation being proposed or implemented by Federal or state governments. "Most superintendents, aware of today's climate by the public for safe ecological chemicals, have switched to alternatives or replacement chemicals. "Their cost has not significantly affected my maintenance budget and I'm still getting the desired results," says a New York State superintendent. One Oregon superintendent is enthusiastic about the bulk buying of fertilizer in large paper bags. They weigh 600 pounds and suit the fertilization requirements of his course for a year. One suggestion, echoed by several superintendents, was for chemical manufacturers to give superintendents more hard data on the chemical life and decomposition rate of turf materials. Superintendents are also very wary and unsure of the new Department of Labor's Occupational and Safety Health Administration guidelines and the effect this will have on their operations or budget.

One San Diego superintendent

summed up the feelings of the superintendents contacted by GOLFDOM on the present and future status of golf course maintenance budgets. "We have reached a critical operation standpoint," he says, "which means that budgets only have three ways to go. They can be reduced, but the members must be informed of the effect this will have on the playing standards that can no longer be sustained due to these cuts. The budget can be stabilized with only cost of living and inflation increases. This negates any spending for capital improvements and little loose money for new equipment purchases. Or, budgets can continue to increase and correspondingly, so will dues and assessments. I foresee a leveling off or stabilizing of the golf course maintenance budget for this year and next."

One interesting point made by one superintendent was that clubs are no longer asking the superintendent "How much money do you need to maintain the course?" Instead they are working the opposite way. They are analyzing how much money they will have coming in and then disbursing that income accordingly. It is a more inflexible system, but a necessary one to keep club officials within their budgets. □