

## Aeration Isn't Half Bad at Cog Hill

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

**G**olfers complain about aeration, and superintendents gripe about golfers who complain about aeration. Golfers will never understand why superintendents must aerify, and superintendents will never understand why golfers can't understand why they must aerify.

Who would have thought that aeration would become golf maintenance's version of the Hatfields and McCoys? But at least one superintendent has brought harmony to a volatile situation.

You can call the plan half-baked, but superintendent Ken Lapp and his crew at Cog Hill CC in Lemont, Ill., have had great success in quelling golfers' complaints by aerating only one-half of a green at a time. "I'm not saying this is the ideal way to aerate, but it works for us," Lapp says.

The philosophy behind Lapp's approach makes sense and is good for business. Cog Hill features four courses with 90 greens (72 holes, five alternate holes, eight putting and chipping greens, and five target greens), so aeration is a major project. If Lapp and his crew aerate all of the greens at once, there will be plenty of irate golfers. But because they aerate each green partially, they're providing golfers with at least a half-decent putting surface.

Lapp and his crew begin aerifying the course's soil-based greens in the late summer, usually after Labor Day. They aerify one-half of a green, remove the cores, roll the entire green and then move the pin location to the unaerified side of the green.

When Lapp and his crew finish aerating one-half of each of the 90 greens, they return to their starting point about two weeks later and begin



MIKE KLEMM

**Even after aeration, golfers have smooth putts around the cups at Cog Hill CC. "[Our aeration] schedule keeps our clients happy," says superintendent Ken Lapp.**

aerating the other halves. "We then move the pins back to the original aerified sides," Lapp says.

Lapp admits that the halves of the greens that were aerified first haven't completely recovered by the time the crew begins aerating the other halves. But the key customer service component in the process is that Lapp and his crew are trying to meet golfers' demands for the best service. "They're putting across aerated turf, but we're giving them a smooth surface when they're around a cup," Lapp notes.

Lapp has been at Cog Hill for 27 years, and he says aeration complaints have fallen 80 percent since he and his crew began the schedule nearly 10 years ago. "It has been great for the course, businesswise," he says.

It's not a perfect procedure, Lapp says. The process throws a monkey wrench into the course's normal irrigation plan.

"When you open up a green, you have to water it heavier than normal," Lapp says. "But in this situation, we have

halves of greens that are not aerated and are getting more water than usual."

Lapp could send his crew out to hand water the aerated greens, but that would cost too much in time and money. Besides, the extra watering only makes the unaerated sides more soft, which isn't a major problem, Lapp notes.

Cog Hill's owner, Frank Jemsek, was the one who suggested to Lapp that the course could get a leg up on the competition in customer service if it implemented the half-green aeration strategy.

"I thought it was the craziest idea in the world," Lapp recalls. "I'm from the old school of aerating an entire green at one time."

But Lapp knows it's more important to have satisfied golfers. He doesn't know if the aeration schedule has led to new business, but he contends that it's leading to repeat business among existing customers. "This has worked well for us at Cog Hill," Lapp concludes. ■