

# A GLIMPSE INTO THE Future

Gadget guru Christopher Sykes, superintendent of Cherokee CC in Knoxville, Tenn., looks like he might need an assistant to carry around the technological equipment he depends on daily.



**C**hris Sykes runs down a mental checklist of all the technological devices he carries before checking on Cherokee CC in Knoxville, Tenn., where he is the superintendent.

Cell phone: Check. Digital recorder: Check. Palm Pilot: Check. Walkie-talkie: Check. Pager: Check. With the inventory complete, Sykes breathes a sigh of relief. Now he's equipped to face whatever challenges the golf course throws at him.

"There's so much to remember every day between taking care of the golf course and managing my staff that I can't imagine how superintendents used to do it before technology advanced to where it is today," Sykes says. "I have 500 computer files that I use to help me do my job. Without a way to access them on the course, I'm not sure what I'd do."

Though technology is only another tool for the profession, it's streamlining maintenance operations so superintendents can spend the bulk of their time practicing what they enjoy most: the art of golf course management.

Sykes embraces technology as an integral part of his career, and he doesn't understand why more of his colleagues don't take advantage of it.

"If you stick yourself in the past, you will be left behind as the industry moves forward," Sykes says. "The superintendents who learn how to harness the power of technology will be those who progress professionally."

Perhaps the most important technological innovation of the past 30 years was the introduction of personal computers to the industry. According to the 2001 GCSAA Leadership survey, 41 percent of superintendents ranked computers as the most important piece of personal technology they use in their work. PCs revolutionized the way superintendents conduct business, says Bob Collins, certified superintendent at Cripple Creek Golf & CC in Bethany Beach, Del.

"Nearly all superintendents have computers now, and with the advent of e-mail and the Web, computers are almost indispensable," Collins says. Superintendents can save time because they don't have to recreate routine documents every year, he adds. Having computer files also makes record storage easier, Collins says.

David Stone, superintendent at The Honors Course in Ooltewah, Tenn., says he uses his computer primarily for word-processing and budget spreadsheets. He also keeps files of the instruc-

tions he gives his crew so he can monitor their progress on jobs. "It's been an incredible help to me in streamlining the process," he says.

The prevalence of computers inspired development of: computerized irrigation systems; global positioning system (GPS) maps of golf courses; and the use of Web sites and e-mail to disseminate turf information to industry colleagues at lightning speed. (The GPS is a government network of 24 satellites orbiting the earth that tracks the location of moving objects on the ground.) These technologies allow superintendents to perform tasks, from water applications to staff budgeting, more efficiently and effectively than before.

Cellular phones, which followed on the heels of computers, liberated superintendents from their desks, allowing them to spend more time in the field. Collins says if you'd told him five years ago that he would carry a cellular phone,

## Superintendents expect computer-driven mowers and the global positioning system to be at the forefront of the next generation of technological advances

he would have said you were crazy. Therefore, he finds it ironic the phone is now his constant companion.

"I carry my cell phone with me so my assistants can reach me if a crisis arises on the course," Collins says. "It makes me more secure about my job and relieves a lot of stress because I know I can always be in contact."

The advances in cellular phone and two-way radio technology have turned the gadgets into more than communication devices, however. Many cellular phones have Web access, which helps superintendents stay in touch as they prowling their courses looking for problems, says Dan Dinelli, superintendent of North Shore CC in Northbrook, Ill.

"You can be out on the course in the morning and check a weather report without having to go back into the office," Dinelli says. "If you find there's going to be a storm, for example, then you can use the device to change the settings on your irrigation system or communicate some

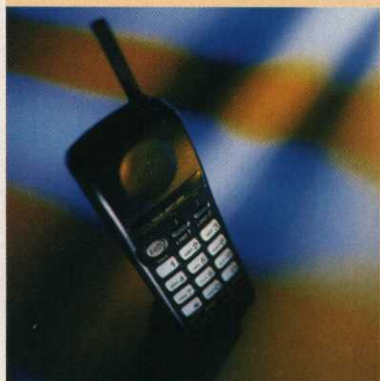
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### Choosing Communication Tools for You and Your Crew

**W**hen Bill Spence arrived at The Country Club at Brookline (Mass.) in 1984, he noticed crew members walking around the 230-acre property with small, outdated Motorola two-way radios that barely reached the first green from the first tee. He had to improve the communication system — and fast.

"We tried to boost the range by using a repeater, but it was only a matter of time before we had to make a change," Spence says. "Communication is far too important on a golf course to let an inefficient system hurt it"

The sophistication of communication tools has expanded considerably since the days of the older two-way radios, says Bob Farren Jr., director of



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golf course maintenance at Pinehurst Resort in Pinehurst, N.C. Farren says the increasing complexity makes it imperative for superintendents to choose the right systems.

Spence and Farren offer the following ideas about what you need to know before purchasing a new communication package for you and your crew:

#### ■ Conduct a survey to determine how much range your radios will need.

Both Spence and Farren say a survey is an essential first step to buying communication equipment.

"You have to know what your limitations are before you can buy a system," Farren says. "Topography plays a large role in determining how much power you'll need to reach all areas of your course."

#### ■ Shop around.

Farren, whose system includes two-way radios and cellular telephones, says shopping around is particularly important for cellular phones because the number of companies with differing offers is staggering.

"You want to acquire the right package," Farren says. "With the number of companies on the market, you should be able to find a deal that's both economical and effective."

#### ■ Make sure the radios/phones are multichannel and programmable.

Spence says having multichannel capability is vital for his facility. The clubhouse, pro shop and front desk all have specific frequencies to use, which makes it helpful when the maintenance staff needs to contact them.

"If you have a problem on the course — for example, a golfer collapsing from a heart attack — you need to get to the front desk immediately to call for help," Spence says. "You don't want to be fumbling around trying to get someone to respond on an open frequency. Multichannels address that issue."

#### ■ Investigate the equipment's toughness.

"I've seen radios fall out of golf cars and pockets and bounce off the ground," Spence says. "You have to make sure that whatever equipment you buy will stand up to that kind of treatment."

#### ■ Check the availability of parts and service on the system you purchase.

Superintendents should find out where the closest service center is and how quickly it can turn around a repair, Spence says.

"The last thing you'll want to do if your radio goes down is drive an hour to a repair shop that will take a week to fix it," Spence says. "Your communication equipment is like any other piece of equipment you own. You don't want it out of commission for long, so you'll need to know who can fix it fast."

— Frank H. Andorka Jr., Managing Editor

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piece of information to the crew. It will make you more efficient."

Dinelli says superintendents can also use Web-access phones to view Web sites that have information to diagnose pest problems more accurately and quickly, allowing superintendents to treat problems with precision.

#### Where to go

Where superintendents would like technology to expand in the future is as diverse as the number of superintendents you ask. For example, Sykes says he'd like to see robotic, GPS-driven electric mowers where superintendents could program mowing patterns and the machines could mow without operators. He also feels electric equipment is the future, particularly with energy shortages and noise-pollution concerns spreading across the country. "You'd save money because you'd be able to reduce your staff," Sykes says.

Dave Ward, superintendent at Olympia Fields CC in Olympia Fields, Ill., says GPS-controlled equipment will revolutionize the profession's future. He'd like to be able to track his maintenance equipment from his desktop (or even a hand-held computer) through GPS. He'd like to see manufacturers install sensors on equipment that would diagnose mechanical problems while machines were out in the field *before* the problems became a major hassle. In addition, Ward's dreams go further.

"Someday, maintenance equipment will have sensors to alert you to soil, pest and disease problems," Ward says. "It will feed the information back to you on a hand-held computer so you can make an instant decision about what actions to take. I'm looking forward to that day."

Unless the latest technology can work in concert with what already exists, however, it will never reach its full potential, Dinelli says. The major missing piece — and source of constant frustration for Dinelli — is the lack of software to allow computerized systems to work together as one.

"That's what diminishes its overall power to affect the way superintendents do business," Dinelli says. "It's so piecemeal. Plenty of superintendents see the potential, but until someone can find a way to make all the computers work together, we'll only scratch the surface of what technology can do." ■