

Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

We lost at least seven members of the Florida golf turf industry last year. I knew four of them fairly well, and three

of the seven died of heart disease.

Their ages ranged from 38 to 52 — far too young to be checking out of this life in my opinion. Their deaths left too many children and loved ones behind to grieve and carry on.

The most recent was Jeff Hayden, 52, whose cause of death was heart failure. His wife, Sandy, sent the members of the Florida GCSA a letter as if Jeff had written it as his final words to his friends. Her letter is the reason for this message.

Jeff was a superintendent for a long time before becoming a territory manager for Golf Ventures. He was a hard worker and fanatically devoted to helping his customers. He was also always ever involved in volunteer activities for the turf industry. He was an overachiever of the best kind and he will be missed. But as Sandy pointed out in the letter, Jeff had one glaring flaw — he didn't take care of himself.

When he died, Jeff hadn't seen a doctor in 24 years. He maintained a hard-driving work schedule with long days and he pushed himself to perform for others. He also smoked, which is a major risk factor for heart trouble.

Superintendents generally have long days and are pressured to perform. Some stress is self-imposed, and some comes from high expectations and criticism from golfers about course conditions. Here is where I begin to see the irony of superintendents taking care of their golf courses more than they take care of themselves.

I can't count the number of times I've heard or seen comments from superintendents about having to beg and plead and rant and rave for enough renovation time to maintain a healthy stand of turf. They go into great detail and cite all sorts of research to demand course down time to aerify and verticut to keep the turf healthy and vigorous. I would like a show of hands of all those who go the same lengths to insure their own physical health.

Superintendents take soil samples, water samples and tissue samples periodically to

It's Time to Attend to Your Health

BY JOEL JACKSON



I SEE THE IRONY OF
SUPERINTENDENTS
TAKING CARE OF
THEIR GOLF
COURSES BETTER
THAN THEY TAKE
CARE OF
THEMSELVES

determine baselines and changes to their golf courses.

But how many are on some program of routine physical exams based on age group to check up on changes of their own bodies? There are reams of research that say you should have regular checkups. But for whatever reason, we who are so quick to cite endless scientific facts about the health of our own turf ignore other scientific facts when it comes to our own health. Trust me, I know this from personal experience.

I am a coronary-artery disease patient. I have a 13-year old bypass graft that doesn't work like it is supposed to. I skipped my annual physical last year. I'm human. I've been riding the computer too much lately and not exercising like I should. My diet wasn't outrageous, but I knew I was out of shape. I didn't want to hear any bad news. But I couldn't renew my prescriptions without a checkup. I had to go. It had been five years or more since my last stress test, so they scheduled a follow-up visit.

First, doctors should change the name from "stress test" to "fitness evaluation." I was stressed out just thinking about the possible results.

Well, I passed the test. Seems the heart muscle is doing OK. Enough collateral capillaries have formed around the blocked artery to keep the heart healthy, but I have to change my daily routine from coffee maker and computer to Nordic Track and Total Gym first thing in the morning. It's a maintenance decision I'm willing to make.

I don't want to leave my family in the lurch and have my friends crying at a premature memorial service. How about you?

Joel Jackson, CGCS, retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.