

# By the Numbers

With the help of financially savvy superintendents, *Golfdom* offers tips to help keep your maintenance budgets in line



BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

**T**en million bucks. That's how much money Allan Pulaski is responsible for as director of golf course and grounds maintenance at the Landings Club, a six-golf course operation in Savannah, Ga. Pulaski would be lying if he said managing that much dough didn't make him nervous.

"It's why I don't have any hair," the 30-something Pulaski says, only half-jokingly.

Pulaski's annual budget at the Landings Club is about \$5 million. Throw in \$3 million to \$5 million more for annual renovation projects and the financial plan is pushing \$10 million. That's a lot of scratch, even by Warren Buffett's standards.

Many superintendents join the golf course maintenance business because they love agronomics and want to work outside where the world is lush and green. But many learn quickly that they also have to know something about that *other* kind of green. While they don't have to have corporate-level accountant experience, they must have some sense about dollars and cents. They must know the fiscal matters of their business because they have to put together that unnerving "B" word — a "budget."

With the help of several veteran superintendents who are well-trained in the art of budgeting, *Golfdom* offers tips to help you keep your maintenance budgets in line, from how to work with financial decision makers to making cuts when necessary.

### What they want

Different golf courses have different goals when it comes to budgeting. Some clubs are more concerned about the bottom line, and some clubs are more concerned about having fantastic greens. "Sometimes you don't see the business restraints at a private club that you would see at

a more business-oriented club," says Rick Slattery, superintendent of Locust Hill CC in Rochester, N.Y., who has worked at both types of clubs.

Slattery says members at Locust Hill, a private club, are more liberal with money if it's available to spend. But before coming to Locust Hill, Slattery worked at a semiprivate course where he says the owner was interested in making money before spending it.

"He basically told me, 'Rick, if you make the course better and more people come here to play because of it, then I'm going to make more money. So I'll take my share off the top, and the club gets everything else.'"

Slattery improved the course's condition, and more people came to play it. Hence, there was more money in the coffer to spend on maintenance. "Instead of spending money up-front, the owner wanted it in his pocket first," Slattery says.

While golf courses approach budget-making differently, there are also many common denominators that most endure in the process. Slattery says a big problem with many courses' budgets is that they're not rising at the same level of golfers' expectations for outstanding turf.

"That's the most difficult part of forming a budget — assessing those expectations," Slattery says. "So superintendents have to be creative and hard-working to massage their budgets to get more for the same amount."

To better assess golfers' expectations, superintendents must get inside golfers' heads to find out what they're thinking. Then they must communicate with them.

Superintendents also need to communicate effectively with the people they are negotiating with on budgets, whether it's the green committee, the financial committee, the general manager or the

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owner. Slattery advises superintendents to learn business lingo so they can hold informed conversations and understand the logic behind bottom lines and profit margins.

Slattery notes that members, owners, general managers, and members of green committees and financial committees are business-savvy people.

"You have to be able to speak in business terms," Slattery says. "You have to be able to talk their language, just like we try to communicate our language in terms like 'top-dressing' and 'verticutting'."

You also might have to persuade members that the extra money you need for equipment repair will be worth the investment. Sometimes it takes a little politicking, especially at the private level where "everybody is an owner," says Sam Sprague, superintendent of Rainier Golf & CC in Seattle.

Joe Boe, superintendent of Coral Oaks GC, probably deals with more bureaucracy than superintendents at private clubs because his course is owned by the city of Cape Coral, Fla. Boe works with the city's financial advisory committee to plan his course's budget.

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## Credibility Rules in the Numbers Game

One of the most important aspects of a creating a viable budget has nothing to do with keeping numbers. It has everything to do with being forthright.

Many superintendents warn their peers against padding or manipulating their budgets so they can have extra money to spend or look good at the end of the year when their maintenance programs come in under budget.

"It's all about credibility," says Rick Slattery, superintendent of Locust Hill CC in Rochester, N.Y. "The days of trying to obtain all the money you can for the course whether you need it or not are over."

Joe Boe, superintendent of Coral Oaks GC in Coral Oaks, Fla., says padding a budget will only get a superintendent in trouble. He knows some superintendents who splurge and buy items they don't need with the extra money they've placed in their budgets.

"I know some superintendents who say, 'I have to spend this money, or I'm not going to get it next year,'" Boe says. "So the last two months of the year they spend like crazy and buy whatever they want."

Boe says such spending is a waste of the golf course owner's money. It also doesn't say much about a superintendent's credibility in managing someone else's money.



It's vital that superintendents show their employers that they can handle their money with care, Slattery says.

"It's easy to spend someone else's money — and not properly," he adds. "It's vital that you treat employers' money exactly like you would treat your own."

Don't try to hide costs in your budget, such as having the club pay for your family to go with you to the GCSAA conference. It's unethical, and it could get you in a fix.

Eventually, Boe and Slattery believe a superintendent who's throwing money around will be busted by a by-the-numbers green committee member or someone else paying close attention to the budget.

"Don't try to hoodwink anybody," Slattery says. "These people aren't dumb."

If something in the budget runs amok, superintendents should communicate the

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**RICK SLATTERY**  
**LOCUST HILL CC**

problems immediately to their financial superiors, not six months later, Slattery advises. Then they'll view you as a more responsible money manager.

Last year, Slattery spent more on fungicides than he budgeted because of severe disease pressure created from the fallout of a wet spring and a sultry summer. But Slattery communicated to the board of directors and financial committee members — in person and by e-mail — what was going on and that he would try to make up the excess money spent by cutting in other areas of his budget, which he was able to do in the end.

Keeping his peers apprised of what was going on financially made them realize even more that Slattery was being careful with money, which further added to his credibility as a responsible superintendent.

— Larry Aylward, Editor




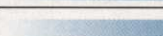

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Many of the board members are accountants and bank workers who have knowledge of numbers but know little about golf course maintenance, Boe says. That can be a

### HOW MUCH DOES YOUR COURSE GET?

#### Maintenance Budget Categories

\$1 million or more	 14%
\$600,000 – \$999,999	 20%
\$400,000 – \$599,999	 22%
\$100,000 – \$399,999	 34%
Less than \$100,000	 8%

Information is based on a Golfdom/Readex survey of 286 superintendents conducted in March-April 2003.

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problem, especially when board members take pride in watching over city money and are careful about spending it.

But Boe takes it upon himself to educate the board members about his job. He invites them to Coral Oaks to show them what he does and what it takes to do what he does.

It's part of the selling process, which most all superintendents have to do at one time or another to convince the financial decision makers that they *really* do need something.

But the selling process is not always easy because golf course maintenance is often something that isn't easily seen. "We have to sell on results," Slattery says, adding that results are often difficult to show quickly.

It's not like spending money on the clubhouse where the by-products — new carpeting, new chairs — are immediately visible and

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## What to Cut and What Not to Cut When Cuts Must be Made

Immediately following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, rounds fell off dramatically at golf courses nationwide. Joe Boe, superintendent of Coral Oaks GC in Cape Coral, Fla., says his course resembled a ghost town.

With no money coming in, Boe was forced to cut his maintenance budget, as were other business segments of the operation. "We couldn't spend our whole budget because we weren't earning enough money to cover it," Boe says.

When such a situation arises, what's a superintendent to cut from his budget? Several superintendents say budget cuts in midstream of a fiscal year often begin with labor.

Labor is the easiest area to cut because it's the largest area of a golf course's budget, often 60 percent or more. When the remaining line items combine to comprise 40 percent or less, it's difficult to trim 10 percent to 15 percent from one of them.

Boe began his cuts with labor. Before Sept. 11, Boe was down a person on his crew and was looking for someone to hire. He scrapped that plan and watched as



**If forced to cut his budget, Florida superintendent Joe Boe would not cut anything related directly to the turf's health.**

the clubhouse and pro shop also made staff cuts.

The budget cuts Boe didn't consider were anything related directly to the turf's health. Other superintendents agree they would avoid cutting fertilizer and fungicide budgets unless it was a last resort.

In fact, Sam Sprague, superintendent of Rainier Golf & CC in Seattle, says he'll go over budget on fertilizer, chemicals and

equipment — the things he needs most to maintain the turf — to keep the turf alive and healthy.

"I'd rather have to explain [to my bosses] why I was over budget on those items than explain to them why the greens are dying," Sprague says.

There's another option to saving money — albeit a throwback alternative. It's called bartering. Dale Morrison, superintendent of Trappers Turn GC in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., didn't budget for black top for his parking lot, but he didn't need to. Morrison also didn't budget for a recent tree-removal project on his course because he didn't need money to pay for it. Morrison received the black top and the tree removal for free ... sort of.

He bartered for them. To the man whose company gave him the free black top, Morrison supplied free golf. To the man who cut down the trees, Morrison let him take the wood. It's like the way fur traders did business 300 years ago.

To read more about bartering, see Morrison's story, "My Budget Goes Further, Thanks to Bartering," on page 36.

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tangible. In the short term, a golf course “looks” the same, even after money has been spent to improve it.

Many financial decision makers want proof that their investments will pay for themselves and reap paybacks in five years or less. Sometimes that’s hard for a superintendent to prove, especially if he or she is asking for an extra

\$100,000 to buy a few new fairway mowers.

Of course, the financial picture is different from course to course, Slattery points out. Some private clubs don’t focus as much on the bottom line and are more concerned about the quality of the course. “They’re more apt to spend money without a short payback if they know they’ll get a better golf course,” Slattery says.

### WHERE THE MONEY GOES

#### Spending for Products

Category	Mean Spending	Estimated Spending/ Past 12 months
Irrigation water	\$30,800	\$511.3 million
Fertilizer/plant nutrition	\$22,900	\$380.1 million
Fungicides	\$21,000	\$348.6 million
Turf seed	\$9,210	\$152.9 million
Herbicides	\$8,650	\$143.6 million
Irrigation supplies	\$7,520	\$124.8 million
Insecticides	\$7,480	\$124.1 million

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#### Keeping track

A budget is not easy to produce, but it doesn’t have to be as painful as a bad day on Wall Street.

Slattery’s fiscal year runs from Nov. 1 through Nov. 1. But he doesn’t begin gathering information for his budget on Oct. 15. Throughout the year, Slattery keeps monthly expense reports, tracks the current budget and documents other important information that could affect the upcoming budget.

“You don’t want to be scrambling to put numbers together when the time comes to do the budget,” Slattery says. “We start the budget process in September.”

Budgets are based on priorities. For instance, the line item that lists pesticides is more important than the item that lists tree programs. The superintendent, of course, must

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### WHAT'S YOUR LINE?

**A sample of a line-item report. Superintendents, of course, fill in the blanks.**

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Payroll												
Payroll taxes												
Employee benefits												
Equipment repair												
Irrigation repair												
Shop supplies												
Electric												
Heat												
Pesticides												
Fertilizer												
Topdressing												
Tree Program												
Outside contracts												
Education												

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manage *all* of the line items. Yes, sometimes he robs Peter to pay Paul.

"If one line item begins to get out of control for one reason or another, you have other areas to fall back on," Slattery says. "For instance, let's say you used a lot of fungicides this year. So you decide you're not going to prune the six trees on No. 2 as you planned because it's more important for you to keep your turf alive. So you delay the pruning until next year."

Pulaski creates a budget sheet for differ-

ent segments of the six courses. He figures how much will be spent on greens as far as fertilizers, fungicides, herbicides and insecticides. Then he figures the same expenses for fairways, tees and other areas. From those numbers he has an idea of how much money should be budgeted overall for the six courses.

There are pitfalls to avoid. Sprague advises superintendents to try to avoid coming too much over or under on any given line item. "Those are the red flags," he says, noting that the course's board of directors won't hes-

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## My Budget Goes Further, Thanks to Bartering

By Dale Morrison

**T**hink you're locked into a final budget for this year? Not if you practice what I like to call "horse trading." Yes, bartering is an almost forgotten art whose time has come again. It's in the nature of the age-old system of bartering that ensures the satisfaction of all parties involved in a transaction.

Many factors affect the amount of money in a superintendent's budget, such as rounds, weather, and the age and condition of maintenance equipment. There are other elements, such as lightning strikes and turf-damaging gophers, which are out of our control but also have an impact on our budgets.

In any case, there just never seems to be enough money.

However, I've discovered a way to enhance my budget. I can get what I need without spending any money. I just figure out who has what I need and if I have something they need. They may need equipment, supplies or a service, and I make them a "bartering offer." I barter for irrigation, equipment parts, materials and services from outside contractors.

For instance, at Trappers Turn GC in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., where I'm superintendent of a 27-hole upscale public course, I had a problem on hole No. 1 on the Canyon course. There are two land-cross bridges over a small stream that were in bad condition. My staff was forced to clean up the crossings after it rained.



**Dale Morrison has traded free golf for use of equipment he doesn't own.**

After heavy rains, the crew usually had to add gravel to fill in the washed-out holes. Of course, the best way to fix this problem would be to replace the crossings with bridges that would put an end to these repetitive maintenance cleanups. But fabricated steel bridges were totally out of the budget. Actually, there was nothing in the budget for bridges.

But bartering made new bridges possible. I had something a local golfer wanted — a place to golf. And he had something I needed — a portable saw mill. We came up with an agreement and on a handshake the deal was done. The golfer milled the timber that my staff harvested from our woods on the golf course. In return, he received free golf and use of the driving range. The support beams and the decking materials for the bridges are made from oak. I know that we could

never have afforded the cost of oak lumber for the bridges. I saved Trappers Turn at least \$1,500 by bartering and actually built better bridges because of the natural resource of oak available.

Through bartering, I've met many needs that were unattainable because of budget constraints. I've traded free golf passes for the use of equipment that the golf course does not own, such as use of a hydro-mulcher, aerifier and air compressor. I've received reduced costs of materials — even some free materials. This includes an array of necessities from dirt to blacktop. This year alone I've saved the course more than \$9,200.

For me, bartering has proved to be the answer to making improvements on the golf course that otherwise would be out of the question.

Along with the bartering technique, I use yet another age-old process of saving budget dollars. Shop till they drop — their prices, that is. When purchasing anything from equipment to irrigation parts to chemicals to fertilizers, make sure to ask your salesperson if his company is running any "specials." Ask if he will match the prices of his company's competitors. Ninety percent of the companies will match or offer a lower price to get your business.

One last way to save on your purchase is to pay in a shorter time frame than the customary 30 days. Most companies offer a discount as incentive for you to pay early.

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"If I could give one piece of advice to any assistant or superintendent coming up in this business, it's to put a contingency line in your budget."

**ALLAN PULASKI**  
**LANDINGS CLUB**

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itate to ask him to explain why he is so far over or under on an item.

It's not as simple as it sounds to avoid such inconsistencies, especially with certain items such as chemicals, Sprague says. In Seattle, disease pressure varies from year to year which makes predicting a budget for chemicals difficult. The same goes for fuel.

"You can't always predict where the price of fuel goes," Sprague says. "This year I'm way over budget on fuel because I didn't foresee such a high rise in costs."

Many superintendents rely on the courses' previous histories of spending as a guide for their budgets. Sprague says a course's recent budget history tells a story and helps a superintendent be more on target with his current budget. "I look back at least three years when I do the budget," he says.

Pulaski says he studies budgets from the previous five years.

"We don't base anything off them, but we have them as a reference," he says. "What I mean by that is there are some line items you always budget \$8,000 for and if you look at history you might only spend \$2,000 a year. Well, then you don't need \$8,000 there, and history tells you that. You can't just rubber stamp the same budget year after year."

Keeping a history also lends credibility to the budgeting process. Then a superintendent can explain why he spent so much on fungicides in one year ("because the area had

30 inches of rain and disease pressure was high") compared to two years before ("because the area only had 3 inches of rain and disease pressure was low").

While history is integral to forming a budget, putting a contingency plan in a budget is important to take care of unexpected happenings.

Two years ago, Pulaski began placing a contingency line in his budget. *Webster's* defines "contingency" as "an event that may occur but is not probable." In golf course maintenance, that event could be a hurricane or a tornado and the subsequent damage from such storms. The bottom line is a contingency line in a budget will cover damage caused from a dire event, which means a superintendent can breathe easy.

"If I could give one piece of advice to any assistant or superintendent coming up in this business, it's to put a contingency line in your budget," Pulaski says.

Contingency does not equate to fat. And because the money is presented as "contingency" in a budget, it's an easy sell to the green committee chairman, a general manager or whoever signs off on a budget. Those decision makers realize that if a superintendent places a \$50,000 contingency in the budget and no severe setbacks occur, the \$50,000 is not spent. So they know the superintendent is not padding the budget.

"If you have a \$500,000 budget, there's no reason why you can't have a 10-percent contingency built in," Pulaski says. ■

## When OT Is Not OK for the Budget

**R**ounds are down, revenue is slow and many superintendents can't afford to pay their crew members a lot of overtime. What to do?

"We try to stay out of overtime as much as possible," says Sam Sprague, superintendent of Rainier Golf & CC in Seattle. "It makes scheduling more complicated, but it keeps the budget more even keeled."

Courses that do pay overtime pay close attention to how much they're spending.

Allan Pulaski, director of golf course and grounds maintenance for the Landings Club, a six-golf course operation in Savannah, Ga., tracks overtime by keeping a man-hour chart, which lists all the job tasks for a week and how long it takes to perform them. He also compares his cost per acre to competitive courses' cost per acre to keep overtime expenses in check.

Rick Slattery, superintendent of Locust Hill CC in Rochester, N.Y., knows he might need his crew to work overtime

during the golfing season. To compensate for overtime paid during that period, Slattery might release his seasonal workers in mid-September rather than late September.

A superintendent might consider staggering the work schedule to control overtime. Slattery suggests working half the crew for eight hours Monday through Thursday and a half-day on Friday and Saturday or Sunday. The workers still get 40 hours, and the course still has workers on the weekend. — L.A., Editor



# Make the Connection

Long-term strategic plans are vital to superintendents' jobs, and they can streamline the budget process

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR., MANAGING EDITOR

**D**an Dinelli, certified superintendent at North Shore CC in Glenview, Ill., convened a meeting with his board of directors, his grounds and greens Committee, and golf pro in 1995. The goal was to create a long-term strategic plan for the course to ensure its continued improvement.

He says his decision followed a family tradition — passed down from one generation of Dinelli superintendents to the next — based on a long-ago adage he learned at his grandfather's knee.

"My grandfather [who worked at Northmoor CC in the Chicago area from 1922-1971] told me there were two things a superintendent should never be without," Dinelli says. "One was a putting green nursery for testing new products and making repairs. The second was a long-range plan. I had the putting green already, so I decided to create a strategic plan to complete the circle."

Creating a strategic plan — and tying it to specific budget numbers — can be a daunting task for superintendents. With so many variables, from the weather to a tough economy to political infighting in the clubhouse, the idea of setting a schedule beyond the next board meeting may seem like folly.

But it doesn't have to be that way. For most superintendents who've

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created strategic plans, it makes them more secure during the budgeting process. Strategic plans can boost superintendents' credibility with boards and provide continuity when bosses change (and make superintendents less susceptible to the whims of capricious *new* bosses). The plans encourage collective decision-making, meaning superintendents have a better idea what's expected of them from year to year. Finally, strategic plans give superintendents leverage around budget time. After all, it's harder for the board to deny superintendents the funds to complete strategic projects that everyone agreed to beforehand.

### **Lead by example**

John Miller, certified superintendent at The Golf Club at Yankee Trace in Centerville, Ohio, occasionally teaches a class at the GCSAA Con-

ference and Show called "Planning Your Way to Better Golf Operations." During the seminar, he discusses the paralysis that can grip courses if superintendents wait for somebody else to start the process of creating a strategic plan.

"Superintendents' bosses aren't always quick to jump on the idea of strategic plans because it's not a priority for them," Miller says. "If you can't get anyone above you interested, create your own long-term strategic plan for the maintenance shop. Once your operations become more efficient, you'll peak the interest of those to whom you report."

Miller's most recent foray into strategic planning came after he joined Yankee Trace in 1993. He arrived during a period when the municipal course was having trouble getting financial information from the city administration. In 1997, Miller decided to implement a strategic plan to streamline the process. A

## Should You Have a Standard Operating Procedures Manual?

It's an idea that strikes fear into the hearts of some superintendents: putting on paper exactly what they do to keep the golf course in top shape. They fear that the information backs them into a corner and lays the groundwork for them to be fired if they're unable to maintain the course by the book.

But superintendents who've taken the time to create standard operating procedure (SOP) manuals dismiss those fears, saying instead that the documents have saved them numerous arguments with their bosses over the years.

"Our SOP wasn't developed to be used against me," says Steve Hammon, superintendent of Traverse City (Mich.) Golf & CC. "It diffuses any political issues because the requirements of my job are there in black and white."

SOP manuals come in handy when superintendents are arguing for money to increase staff or replace equipment, says Dan Dinelli, certified superintendent of North Shore CC in Glenview, Ill., who supports putting together as detailed a maintenance manual as possible. In his manual, he publishes a typical weekly schedule on what maintenance tasks are done and how many hours each job takes. He makes the SOP manual available to golfers.

"It's a real eye-opener for most golfers to see what we do during the course of a week," Dinelli says. "It shows a level of professionalism and planning to the golfers. It also helps explain what procedures we're doing and why."

Rick Tatum, director of golf operations at Grey Oaks CC in Naples, Fla., says superintendents should engage the help of the USGA Green Section in developing manuals.

"It gives the book legitimacy in the eyes of golfers if there's an outside agency involved," Tatum says. "The Green Section agronomist can tell your golfers exactly what the standard is for the golf course and list everything necessary to do the job properly, including staff numbers and equipment."

Dinelli says an SOP manual also provides superintendents with ammunition during the annual budget battles.

"If tasks are laid out and specifics of what it takes to get the job done are there for everyone to see, you can make a more forceful argument for funding levels commensurate with what you have to do," Dinelli says. "If they ask you for cuts in your budget, you can ask them which procedures they'd like you to eliminate. It forces them to make the decision, not you."

Could a SOP manual back a superintendent into a corner if Mother Nature decides to deluge his course with rain for four straight weeks, vandals strike it or the pro decides to hold four previously unscheduled events to drive revenues? Tatum says no.

"Most people are reasonable," Tatum says. "If you can explain what caused you to deviate from the schedule, they're pretty forgiving."

Dinelli agrees.

"In fact, an SOP is a huge plus," he says. "If the board comes to you and says, 'You fell short on your maintenance procedures on these three days; you can more easily defend yourself by explaining what happened on those days that prevented you from doing what you planned to do. It's a great backup.'"

— Frank H. Andorka Jr., Managing Editor

goal of the plan was to obtain more frequent financial reports.

"[The administration] only gave us numbers every six weeks, which made it difficult to make adjustments on the fly," Miller says. "You never knew whether to spend money on a project or not because you weren't sure what the revenues were. We finally took the initiative and asked for the financials more often."

The result is that Miller now gets real-time financial data, which allows him to keep closer tabs on expenditures. It allows him to be more nimble financially and keep his budget on track. In these economically difficult times, such management is crucial.

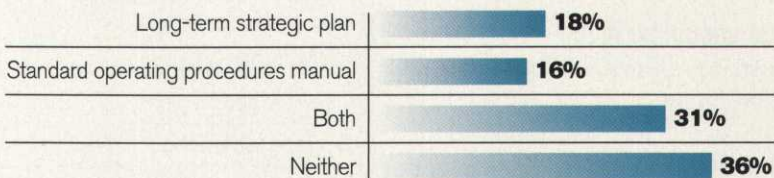
"We accomplished the first piece of our strategic plan quickly," Miller says. "That's made the other pieces of the puzzle easier to achieve."

#### Getting started

The first step is to identify the crucial

### SUPERINTENDENTS LOVE IT WHEN PLANS COME TOGETHER

*Golfdom* recently conducted an online poll that drew 95 responses. It asked, "Do you have a long-term strategic plan for your golf course, a standard operating procedures manual, both or neither?"



*Golfdom*

members of the course who need to be involved in composing a plan, Miller says. The list often includes the owner, board of directors, professional and other department heads.

"A strategic plan is crucial to making sure everyone has the same idea of where the course is currently and where it wants to go in the future," says Rick Tatum, director of operations for Grey Oaks CC

in Naples, Fla. "Without a plan, the superintendent is going to be jumping left, right and center as new green chairmen enter the picture. A strategic plan codifies where you want to go and smoothes out some of those transitions."

Dinelli says superintendents shouldn't underestimate the importance of creating a mission statement as the first step of a plan. It should include goals from the different constituencies at the course, including golfers. It puts everyone on record about exactly what they expect of the course from conditioning and management perspectives.

The object of a mission statement is to get everyone to agree where the course needs to go, Miller says. It should define where the course has been in the past, where it stands now and where it should be within a specified time. He said it took the management team at Yankee Trace nearly a year to come up with one.

"It's time-consuming, but it's better for everyone if you do it carefully," Miller says. "You want to address the concerns of everyone at the course. It should be collaborative and it will help bring everyone together."

Dinelli also recommends getting a third-party (like an architect or the USGA Green Section) to help write the mission statement and plan, particularly if there are going to be renovations involved.

"It makes it more objective if you have outside help," Dinelli says. "It also means you've invested real money in

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## Strategic Planning

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the plan if you hire someone to shepherd the project. Once the money is spent, it's harder for future boards to disavow it."

### What should be in it

The strategic plan should have as many details as possible, Miller says. It should clearly define who has responsibility for each piece of overall club management. Getting into the minutiae of clubhouse management may seem unnecessary to superintendents, but a clear division of labor is critical to a smooth-operating club.

Miller talks about one specific area of responsibility that was outlined in his strategic plan: changing the light bulb in the hallway between the restaurant and the pro shop. It seems like a small point — when the light bulb burned out, someone should have changed it. But it rarely got done because no one had ever decided which department was responsible. The strategic plan assigned responsibility for the job, and now the light bulb doesn't remain unchanged for days.

"It's a small point, but it's one of those little things that needs to be done to make the course run at its optimum efficiency and professionalism," Miller says. "Golfers notice those things. The issues you address during strategic planning can be as simple as that, but they should also focus on longer-term goals as well."

Strategic plans take some of the guesswork out of superintendents' lives, Tatum says. "With a plan, you don't have to say to yourself after each project is done, 'What's next?' You'll already know."

While details are vital to the success of the plan, it's also important not to commit to unrealistic goals. The group should create a list of the top 10 priorities for the course after getting everyone's input, Miller says. Further discussions should whittle it down to the three or four most important goals. Those priorities provide the basis for a three- to five-year strategic plan, although the actual length of a plan will depend on the course, he adds.

## COST ESTIMATING and PHASING PLAN

### NORTH SHORE CC (REPRODUCTION OF ACTUAL PAGE FROM PLAN)

#### Unit Price Estimate

Construction Task	Unit Price
New tee development	\$1/square foot
Existing tee leveling	\$1.10/square foot
Contour fairway (strip and replace sod)	\$6/square foot
Bunker construction/renovation	\$1.15/square foot
USGA greens construction	\$35,000 (avg.)/green
Green resurfacing	42 cents/square foot
Topsoil	\$10/cubic yard
Excavation (cut/fill on-site)	\$1.70/cubic yard
Fill material (off-site)	\$7/cubic yard
Shaping (small dozer)	\$1,000/day
Existing cart path removal	\$2.50/linear foot
Proposed cart path construction (8-foot width)	\$10/linear foot
Proposed cart path construction (10-foot width)	\$11.75/linear foot
Slope/lake bank stabilization	\$3.75/square yard
Irrigation installation	\$500,000 (installed)
Drainage inlet (12 inches by 12 inches)	\$135 each
Level existing drainage inlets	In-house
Catch basin (18 inches)	\$250 each
Catch basin (24 inches)	\$750 each
4-inch solid polyethylene (ADS Type)	\$4.40/linear foot
4-inch perforated polyethylene (ADS Type)	\$5.60/linear foot
6-inch solid polyethylene (ADS Type)	\$5.60/linear foot
8-inch solid polyethylene (ADS Type)	\$7/linear foot
10-inch solid polyethylene (ADS Type)	\$9/linear foot
12-inch solid polyethylene (ADS Type)	\$11.50/linear foot
15-inch solid polyethylene (ADS Type)	\$13.50/linear foot
18-inch corrugated metal pipe	\$16/linear foot
Native grass/wildflower plantings	\$1,000/acre
Sod	\$2.50/square yard
6-foot shade tree	\$700 each
10-foot ornamental tree	\$600 each
10-foot evergreen tree	\$750 each
Lightning protection	\$1,250/tree
Annual pruning service	\$20,000/year

"You break the plans into short-term and long-term goals," Miller says. "Keep the goals in manageable chunks. Otherwise, it can get too overwhelming."

The list may change as the course evolves, but the basic goals should remain the same, Miller says. He prefers working on one project from start to finish before moving down the list, but he's flexible. "If I can figure out how to do more than one project at a time, I'll do it."

And about budgeting for these long-term plans? Miller says it's important to include detailed dollar amounts for each project.

"You don't want to commit to any long-term project without making sure you can tell the interested parties how much it's going to cost," Miller says. "The last thing you want to have happen at the end of this process is for anyone to be surprised at a dollar figure."

Tatum says that budgetary consider-

"Superintendents' bosses aren't always quick to jump on the idea of creating strategic plans because it's not a priority for them."

**JOHN MILLER**

#### **THE GOLF CLUB AT YANKEE TRACE**

ations will end up determining the exact length of the plan. It means more work for superintendents on the front end. Research the proposed projects and find out what they will cost as precisely as possible, Miller says. Call colleagues who have done similar projects to find out how much money they spent. In the end, such due diligence will help superintendents.

"The beauty of the process is that

everyone — the general manager, the food and beverage manager, the owner — will have committed to the plan by the time it's over," Miller says. "It allows superintendents to justify budget requests more easily. If they choose not to give you the money, you can point to the plan and explain to them what won't get done because of their decision. It can be compelling for them."

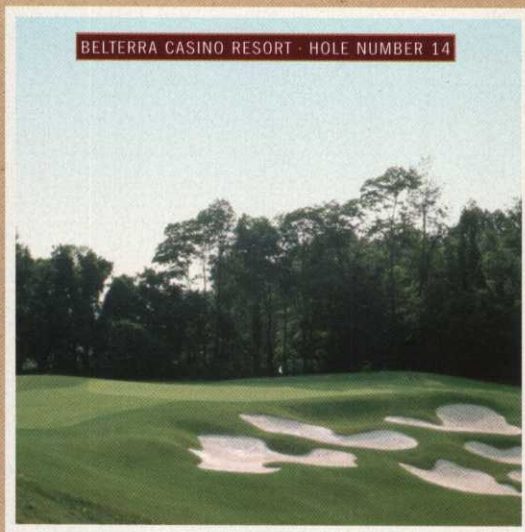
Tatum said achieving consensus on priorities is essential to keeping the lines of communication open as the plan moves forward.

"In essence, what you're telling the powers that be is, 'Your goals are now my goals,'" Tatum says. "It makes the working relationship smoother."

#### **Implementation is up to you**

Once the plan is laid out, how it gets implemented is up to the group, Dinelli says.

*Continued on page 46*



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## Strategic Planning

*Continued from page 45*

"For each new year, you'll have X amount of money to spend on capital projects," Dinelli says. "You can juggle the projects depending on what you have funds for at the time. It's a great road map, but it has to allow for some flexibility."

Miller says keeping slavishly to the

exact schedule laid out in the strategic plan is unnecessary. If there's not enough money in the budget to do the scheduled project, find one in the plan that *is* fundable and do it first. He understands the financial situation of clubs can change from year to year, and the strategic plan should never become a straightjacket.

"It's OK to move items around during the actual implementation," Miller says. "As long as everyone has agreed to the outlines of how to get the course from point A to point B, the implementation can be flexible."

If a club decides to phase in projects to spread out the financial burden over several years, it should choose

### COST ESTIMATE and PHASING PLAN SUMMARY

#### NORTH SHORE CC (REPRODUCTION OF ACTUAL PAGE FROM PLAN)

#### Golf Course Strategic Preservation Plan

Hole	Phase I 1996	Phase II 1997	Phase III 1998	Phase IV 1999	Phase V 2000	Total
1		\$7,450	\$ 10,650	\$8,000		\$26,100
2		\$7,290	\$7,500	\$3,100		\$17,890
3		\$250	\$10,300			\$10,550
4		\$5,280	\$6,400	\$700		\$12,380
5		\$7,150	\$6,800	\$1,500		\$15,450
6		\$9,890	\$3,650	\$1,300		\$14,840
7		\$4,400	\$8,100	\$3,200		\$15,700
8		\$13,290		\$650		\$13,940
9		\$9,115	\$5,500	\$1,500		\$16,115
10		\$1,570	\$14,350	\$2,300		\$18,220
11		\$700	\$1,600	\$6,500		\$8,800
12		\$4,875	\$7,075	\$3,900		\$15,850
13		\$2,075	\$15,850		\$500	\$18,425
14		\$2,300	\$1,600		\$350	\$4,250
15		\$830	\$25,600	\$4,200	\$2,100	\$32,730
16		\$1,745	\$10,475			\$12,200
17		\$4,480	\$10,100	\$2,000		\$16,580
18		\$3,725	\$9,100	\$1,700		\$14,525
General Improvements	\$32,500	\$15,000				
Annual Tree Maintenance	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$100,000
Practice Range	\$36,950					\$36,950
Irrigation System	\$10,000			\$500,000		\$510,000
USGA Green Construction		\$41,650		\$315,000	\$315,000	\$671,650
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$99,450</b>	<b>\$163,065</b>	<b>\$174,650</b>	<b>\$875,550</b>	<b>\$337,950</b>	<b>\$1,650,665</b>

*Note: Regrassing greens rather than rebuilding greens to USGA specifications will reduce the total cost of improvements to \$1,083,665, a reduction of \$567,000.*

those projects carefully, Dinelli says. Some projects, like redoing bunkers, are easily phased in. Installing a new irrigation system, however, is something Dinelli believes should be done at one time.

He also recommends "piggybacking" projects on one another when feasible. If you need to dredge your ponds and have areas of the course that don't

drain well because they're too low, it makes sense to use the soil dredged from the pond as fill for the other project.

"You look to create synergies between different projects," Dinelli says. "It's often easier to sell projects to the membership that way."

Dinelli says that following his grand-

father's advice was one of the best decisions he's made since he's been at North Shore.

"It softens any thoughts among the members that I'm making decisions in a vacuum, without input from everyone at the club," Dinelli says. "It's been one of most useful tools I've had, and I'm glad I did it." ■

# HOT PRODUCTS

If you're planning your 2004 budget, you might be able to use these products. Check them out on page 87.

**2004  
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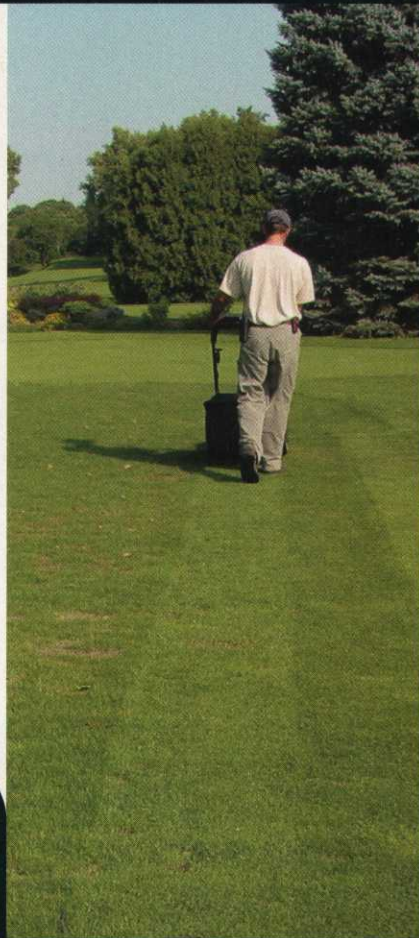
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