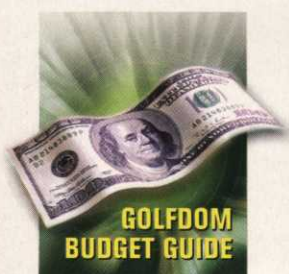


Money 'Talks'

It's vital for superintendents to communicate effectively when negotiating their maintenance budgets

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR



Jim Cross (center), certified superintendent of Rumson Country Club, keeps his green committee members—including co-chairmen Jim Morrison (left) and Jake Gehret—abreast of how much money it takes for his crew to perform certain tasks.

The green committee members at New Jersey's upscale Rumson Country Club are well-educated and well-to-do. Many are employed as stockbrokers, bond traders and bankers in nearby New York's financial district.

Jim Cross, certified superintendent of Rumson Country Club, knows he's up against some fiscal phenoms when it comes to talking money and configuring the golf course's annual maintenance budget. "I can't pull the wool over their eyes," Cross says with a chuckle.

A seasoned superintendent, the 50-year-old Cross realizes how important it is for superintendents to communicate effectively when negotiating their maintenance budgets, whether

it's with a course's green committee, financial committee, general manager or owner. Superintendents also need to learn proper business lingo so they can hold informed conversations with the financial know-it-alls and understand the logic behind bottom lines and profit margins.

W. Davis Folsom, a professor of marketing and economics at the University of South Carolina, guesses most superintendents never took accounting in college. While they don't need to understand economics with the intensity of Alan Greenspan, superintendents do need to understand the basics of business—and then some.

"Superintendents aren't dealing with revenue, but they're dealing with cost," Folsom says. "They have to know the difference between a capital expenditure and expensing an item."

Rick Slattery, superintendent of Locust Hill Country Club in Rochester, N.Y., says it's more imperative than ever—in a stagnant economic environment—that superintendents know finance.

"It's not only for your own survival, but also for your club's survival," Slattery says. "Everyone is in this together."

Learning the lingo

Communication between superintendents and their courses' financial experts must be two-way for it to be effective. However, superin-

Continued on page 40



COURTESY OF RUMSON COUNTRY CLUB

Continued from page 38

tendents are the catalysts for that communication on both ends.

Superintendents must understand the language spoken by the business-savvy people they deal with. On the flip side, superintendents must ensure those same people understand what they're talking about when superintendents speak to them about agronomics.

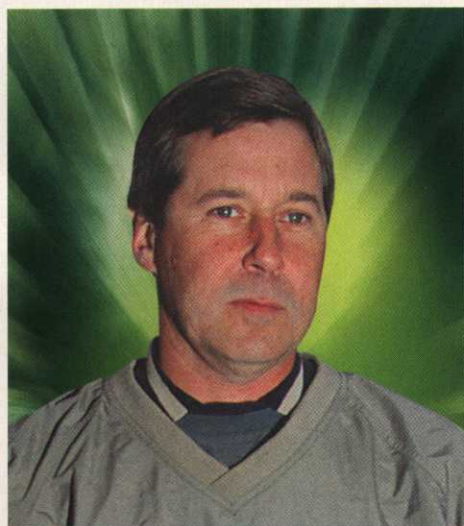
For example, a club's green committee member who's employed as a financial analyst on Wall Street expects a superintendent to understand the business language he's speaking. However, he'll also expect the superintendent to talk in novice terms when discussing the implications of insect damage if turf is not treated with an application of imidacloprid.

"You have to understand that they don't know your lingo and probably won't make an attempt to learn it," Slattery says.

But it often takes time and patience for superintendents to learn their lingo.

Joe Boe, superintendent of Coral Oaks Golf Course, a municipal course in Cape Coral, Fla., meets a few times a year with the city's finance department to discuss his course's budget and financial state. Boe admits "number crunchers" intimidated him when he began working at Coral Oaks about nine years ago.

Boe says the city's financial wizards are detailed in their approach — they seek precise figures on how much it costs to operate the course per hour and per acre. But after a few rounds of dealings with the finance department, Boe says he had a clearer picture of his



"You have to understand that they don't know your lingo and probably won't make an attempt to learn it."

RICK SLATTERY
LOCUST HILL COUNTRY CLUB

A Good 'Business' Man

Jim Cross is all business when it comes time to present his budget to the green committee. Cross, certified superintendent of Rumson Country Club, offers these tips:

- **Give a complete presentation.** "Use spreadsheets and include supporting statements for both maintenance and capital requests," Cross says. "This should be in the form of text, graphs and literature."
- **Look professional.** "Wear a coat and tie, and speak clearly and concisely," Cross says. "Package the budget neatly in a binder with cover page, index and dividers so the information is easy to read and find."
- **Provide copies of the budget to everyone and personalize them if possible.** "The more involved everyone is in the process, the more likely they are to take ownership of and support the cause," Cross says.

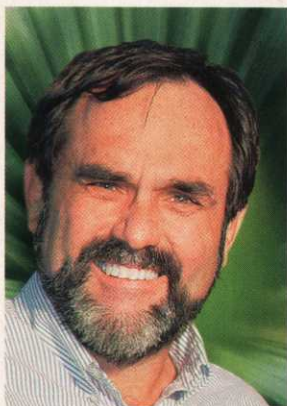
course's economics. "You have to get it down to an exact science to know exactly where the money is," he adds.

Boe says it's important for superintendents to understand specific statistics such as cost per acre. Then they will understand why — or why not — they're granted certain funds at budget time.

Cross, who has been at Rumson for 15 years, says he doesn't get jumpy when he discusses financial matters with his club's green committee. That's because Cross is no dummy when it comes to numbers. He originally attended college to study business and accounting, and what he learned has helped him in his business dealings with the green committee.

If superintendents don't have a handle on

Continued on page 42



"They have to know the difference between a capital expenditure and expensing an item."

W. DAVIS FOLSOM,
ECONOMICS
PROFESSOR

Continued from page 40

business basics, Slattery advises them to attend seminars or classes to learn them. They could also learn from reading books or Web sites on the Internet.

"You don't need to know everything in-depth, but you need to know enough to talk intelligently with the people who handle the money," Slattery says.

If you don't know the business ropes, Boe recommends you talk to the people at your courses who do, such as general managers and food-and-beverage managers.

"Talk to them to see how they break things down," Boe says. "Then look at your own operation."

Folsom says superintendents can learn business basics by reading the *Wall Street Journal*

if they have time. "[The paper's] writers never use business jargon without defining it."

Folsom also recommends securing a copy of *Barron's Dictionary of Finance and Investment* for a quick study of financial terms. Folsom also offers his own publication, *American Business Language*, a pocket dictionary of business terms.

Superintendents fresh out of college may have studied business and finance as part of their turf curriculums. More colleges, such as Rutgers University/Cook College and Penn State University, offer business courses to better prepare future superintendents. For instance, undergraduate students in turfgrass science at Penn State must take classes in soil science and business management.

Rutgers offers similar courses in its four-year and two-year programs. In fact, the classes are more defined in the two-year program to accelerate the learning process.

"The two-year certificate program is applied and focused on what superintendents will need," says Bruce Clarke, director of the Center for Turf Science at Rutgers. "In fact, some of the students in our four-year program takes certain courses in the two-year program."

While more up-and-coming superintendents are learning about business in college, Slattery believes their best financial education will occur on the job.

"It's experience under fire,"

Slattery says. "It's hard to learn a lot of it until you get right in the middle of it."

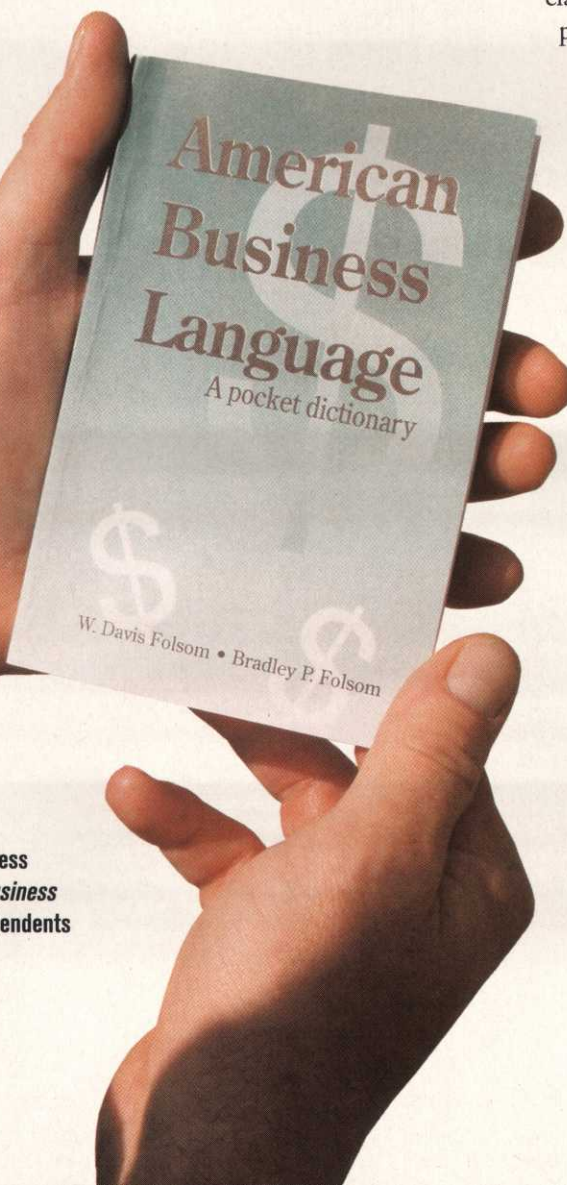
Teach your members well

The green committee members at Rumson Country Club know what they want for their course. "My job is to explain to them how to get it," Cross says.

To help green committee members understand better what he and his crew do — and how much it costs — Cross provides each committee member with a copy of his operational manual, which discusses the course's maintenance

Continued on page 44

A pocket dictionary of business terms, such as *American Business Language*, can help superintendents keep up on the lingo.



Continued from page 42

objectives in not-too-technical terms.

Cross is careful not to turn his talk into an Agronomy 101 seminar when he speaks to green committee members about maintenance projects and their costs. His goal is to educate them enough so they understand why he allocates certain dollars to the budget for particular items.

Throughout the year, Cross keeps members abreast of money spent on labor, the largest segment of the budget.

"I provide them with weekly spreadsheets of all the jobs we do — mowing, irrigation repairs and spraying — and how much time it takes to do those jobs each day," Cross says. "They need to realize how many man-hours some jobs take."

Cross also clues members in on chemical, fertilizer and equipment costs.

Slattery, a superintendent for more than 30 years, points out that golf course maintenance is a tough sell to a course's financial decision makers because maintenance is so intangible. For instance, it's difficult for a superintendent to sell the financial decision makers on a 10 percent increase in pesticide spending because they can't *see* the effect pesticides have on a course.

"It's easy for them to spend money on new chairs in the dining room or for an extension in the grill room," Slattery says. "But when you try to sell them on something like an irrigation system — where you're asking them to essentially take a million dollars and bury it in the ground — it's a very difficult sell."

That's why it's important for a superintendent to communicate effectively — and in this case, illustratively — that a new irrigation system will help improve a course's playability and consistency. Slattery says it's also vital for the superintendent to convince others that the investment will pay for itself in X amount of years.

How you look is also important when communicating with a course's financial authorities, says Cross, who wears a coat and tie when addressing Rumson's green committee about budget manners.

"The audience is made up of business professionals and, in my experience, they are more accepting of my requests when addressed in a businesslike manner," he says.



"You have to get it down to an exact science to know exactly where the money is."

JOE BOE
CORAL OAKS GOLF COURSE

On the up and up

Even if your course's green committee members don't work as bankers, Slattery stresses that superintendents should never try to pad or manipulate their budgets. Superintendents should view their golf courses' monies as their own and spend it accordingly.

"Every time you purchase a chemical, fertilizer or a part for a mower, think about taking money out of your own wallet to do it," Slattery says. "And then stop and ask yourself, 'Should I do this?' If the answer is, 'No,' then don't do it."

Sooner or later, an owner or green committee will realize you're spending money wisely, Slattery says. Then they will respect you for your financial capability, and you'll develop credibility with them.

Then it will be much easier to talk business with them come budget time. ■