

# ‘Working’ Plan

Superintendent  
offers ideas on how  
to get tasks done —  
and save  
money  
in the labor budget  
at the same time

**BY RON FURLONG**

I recently came across an Oscar Wilde quote that states, “Anyone who lives within his means suffers from a lack of imagination.”

For whatever reason, the author’s words got me thinking about how we tend to settle for things and, more to the golf course management point, settle for things because that’s the way we’ve always done them or that’s how we’ve been taught to do them. This contemplation led me, somehow (must have been a really slow day), to wondering about what types of inventions or, if you will, advances, could be conceived to help golf course superintendents in the future — specifically

to help them with the ever-growing problem of money spent on labor.

With prices for just about everything we purchase for the maintenance of the golf course skyrocketing — especially fuel — and the seemingly common trend of stagnant if not decreasing budgets, something has to be done to help us tow that difficult line. Decreasing money spent on labor, the No. 1 line item in almost every golf course superintendent’s budget, is perhaps the only reasonable way to combat the troubling issue of budget woes. And the only way to cut down on those labor costs without sacrificing quality is to come up with better and more efficient ways to do things.



I'm a good one for Top 10 Lists, and this topic seemed to literally cry out for one like a baby who hasn't eaten in four hours (recent newborn, can you tell?). So let's make this one a Top Five List. We'll call it (a bit tongue in cheek, if you don't mind):

### **The Top Five Inventions or Creative Advancements to Save on Man-Hours.**

(Not exactly catchy, I admit, but nevertheless to the point)

#### **5 Robotic Mowers**

You know the visual we all have of the mass of fairway mowers at Augusta National during Masters week charging across the 15th fairway like an army and mowing it in two minutes (if it's not two minutes, it can't be much more). Now imagine that same scene but with no one riding the fairway mowers. A bit scary, eh?

#### **4 No Maintenance Week**

How would this sign go over posted outside the first tee on Monday morning: NO MAINTENANCE WEEK! ENJOY! Actually, it would probably not be as bad on Monday morning of the week as say Thursday or Friday. And you might not want to show your face on the weekend.

#### **3 Deceptive Budget Reasoning With Green Chairman or Owner**

Quote professional football player Keith Davis to him or her: "We didn't actually overspend our budget. The allocation simply fell short of our expenditure."

#### **2 Growth Regulator Rates to Halt Vertical Growth For Entire Season**

I actually tried (by horrible accident) Primo Maxx at six times the rate. Not recommended.

#### **1 The Ultimate Versatile Mower for All Your Mowing Needs**

Picture this at the next trade show: A mower that can cut your fairways at one-half inch; then, at the push of a button, mow your rough at 1.5 inches; then, at the push of a button again, mow your approaches and tees at four-tenths of an inch. And then,

**Want to cut down on labor and, hence, money spent on labor? Then put away the string trimmers, and let the brush take over the water's edge.**

on the way into the shop, you mow the surrounds quickly at 1 inch with one more push of the button. Let's keep the mower off the greens though, shall we?

OK, these five ideas may be a bit on the unrealistic side, but there are some sound and creative ideas that could help superintendents cut down on labor money.

I posed the question — "What advancement in golf course maintenance could be made to help superintendents save on man-hours?" — to Larry Gilhuly, director for the United States Golf Association's Green Section in the Northwest Region. Gilhuly's answer surprised me a bit. He didn't come up with the expected answers, such as "better and more reliable electric mowers" or "more drought-tolerant grasses." Instead of addressing the superintendent's mindset, he directed the issue toward the everyday golfer.

"Honestly, having players that understand that fast greens do not always mean good greens would make superintendents' lives much easier," Gilhuly said.

*Continued on page 38*

Picture this at the next trade show: A mower that can cut your fairways at one-half inch; then, at the push of a button, mow your rough at 1.5 inches.





*Continued from page 37*

At first, I simply assumed Gilhuly had misunderstood my question. Green speed? But after thinking about it for a moment, I realized he was definitely onto something. What if we are able to convince golfers that true and consistent greens are a much better barometer to measure the playability of greens

than how fast and firm they are? Think of the cascading effect on maintenance practices. Less rolling; less double cutting; more than likely less fungicides because of less stress; as well as less hand watering because of less stress. I have a funny feeling that wetting agents, growth regulators and fertilizers would all get more life out of them with slightly higher cutting heights.

All of these things would ultimately lead to fewer man-hours spent on rollers, mowers, sprayers and manning water hoses, as well as no doubt decreasing equipment repair hours in the long run.

The famous scientist Linus Pauling once said, "The best way to have a good idea is to have a lot of ideas." With that in mind, here are some suggestions to help in the battle against the dreaded labor budget. Maybe there are a couple good ones in the bunch:

■ **Creating or extending no-mow zones on the golf course.** This is, without a doubt, the No. 1 thing any superintendent can do to cut down on labor. Obviously, the less there is to maintain, the less it will cost to maintain it.

■ **Creating or extending buffers around water features.** Same principal as the no-mow zone idea. Let the reeds and lilies take over the water's edge. Put those fly-mows and string trims away.

■ **Changing our acceptance levels on weeds.** Do we really need to kill every weed on the golf course? I think some clover and chickweed could be allowed to survive in the rough. Remember, a weed is only a weed if it is truly unwanted.

■ **Raising heights on greens.** As mentioned before, the benefits of this simple action could be remarkable.

■ **Better-trained employees.** The better trained your workers are to do jobs, no doubt the better and, ultimately, quicker they will be able to do them.

■ **Organization.** Keep in mind that this comes from a guy who makes a list of the lists that I need to make. If I do something that wasn't on a list, I'll add it to a list and then cross it off. Having said that, I do believe that organization helps efficiency, and efficiency helps productivity, and, well, you get the idea.

*Continued on page 40*



Fast greens do not always mean good greens. If superintendents can convince golfers of this, they can cut back on a lot of maintenance practices that will save them money.



## 'Working' Plan

Creating or extending no-mow zones on the golf course is the No. 1 thing any superintendent can do to cut down on labor.

*Continued from page 38*

■ **Equipment advances.** I'm no engineer, but I have a few thoughts in this area for any who may be listening:

■ A cup cutter that removes the entire plug (year-round) without it falling apart and having to dig it out.

■ Dew whips that have a lifespan of more than a year.

■ A fairway mower that mows in the early morning without creating a mess of clippings.

■ A way for a sprayer to spray out as low as a half gallon of water per 1,000 square feet without having to drive 5 mph over your fairways.

■ Irrigation components with more durability than aluminum cans.

■ A more-efficient way to clean up behind an aggressive dethatcher.

■ A utility car that can be driven, by accident of course, into a lake and come roaring out on the opposite bank as clean as a whistle.

Right now, I kind of feel like American entertainer Oscar Levant when he said, "There's a fine line between genius and insanity. I have just erased this line."

This seems like a good place to bid adieu. ■

*Furlong is superintendent of Avalon Golf Club in Bellingham, Wash. He can be reached at rf7500@aol.com.*

SUPERIOR TURF MAINTENANCE  
EQUIPMENT... ENGINEERED  
FOR PROFESSIONALS

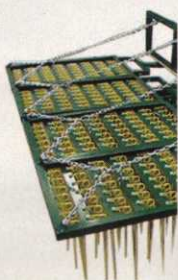
 **woodbay**  
TURF TECHNOLOGIES

# CUT, RAKE AND ROLL!



## **dynaBLADE**

Our unique tungsten carbide tipped blades are designed to outperform and outlast conventional products. Available for most OEM greens, fairway, grooming and spiking mower applications.



## **FDS 9200**

A new level of dethatching. Our proven turf dethatching technology is engineered for durability and efficiency. Free floating sections conform to undulations. Hardened steel construction means extra durability.



## **greensIRON 3000**

High performance turf-roller system. Superintendents trust the greensIRON 3000 to achieve consistent, championship putting greens. Add our Turf Ventilator and Turf Broom attachments to create the ultimate greens maintenance system.



Call Toll Free: 1-800-661-4942 for more information or visit [www.woodbayturftech.com](http://www.woodbayturftech.com)