

Carl Wittenauer rose from his seat at the restaurant and headed to the men's room. He pushed open the "Gents" door, walked in and positioned himself in front of the urinal. Wittenauer stared straight ahead and scanned the USA Today sports section posted on the bathroom wall above the urinal. What a great idea, Wittenauer thought of the posting, to help a man pass the time while he goes about his business. Then the light flashed on in Wittenauer's noggin.

"I should do this at my golf course!" he said to himself.

Today, signs posted above the men's urinals at Brookside Golf & Country Club in Worthington, Ohio, where Wittenauer is the certified golf course superintendent, are all the rage and are used to inform golfers about various agronomic projects happening on the course. "It's a great way to communicate," Wittenauer says.

Ahh, "communicate." Sometimes that's a dreaded word in the golf course maintenance profession. Superintendents signed up to grow grass, not to explain to golfers why they must aerify and topdress. But what an important issue communication has become.

Many superintendents have learned that communicating with golfers about what they do and why they do it is one of the toughest parts of the job. Because when golfers get talking and complaining about something you're doing on the golf course that affects playability, there's nothing to spray on the turf to stop them. They'll keep grumbling, and soon they'll be questioning your decision-making skills. Then they'll question your credibility. And then they'll just plain bash you.

If you don't stop the madness, you'll be constantly defending yourself. And sooner or later something will give.

Wittenauer found himself in this predicament with his club's demanding 325 members. He realized he had to do a better job of communicating why he would make certain decisions, such as closing the greens on chilly spring mornings because of frost, which sometimes delayed tee times and infuriated golfers.

Wittenauer tried other communication methods, newsletters and e-mails among them,

Taking His Message to the Men's Room

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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but nothing worked. But that night while standing in front of the urinal and reading the sports section, Wittenauer knew the urinal posting was a can't-miss communication tool. He knew the club's mostly male members might not read the club newsletter or e-mails updating them about course maintenance projects, but surely they would scan postings about such matters if they were placed in a strategic place.

And Wittenauer figured every man playing golf was bound to hit the head while at the club. And every man who did would position himself in front of the urinal and stare straight ahead until he was finished. That's just what men do — and they love to read while doing so.

Two years after debuting the urinal posting at Brookside, Wittenauer says it's working better than any other communication technique he has used in his 21-year career at the club. "Guys tell me, 'Hey, I read [such and such] above the urinal, and now I know what's going on,'" he says.

Wittenauer only posts memos that address important updates and hot issues so they carry a sense of urgency. He also says it's important to post memos that get to the point quickly. "They're not going to stand there forever," he adds.

The urinal posting has not only worked splendidly, it has made Brookside's members more appreciative of Wittenauer's efforts to communicate with them.

"Communication is key," Wittenauer says. "Members want to know where their money is going and what you're doing with their course."

Andrew Rankin was the first to patent the urinal in the United States in 1866. We'd like to thank him for his invention. We're not sure who invented the urinal posting, which became popular in the early 1990s, but a free round of golf at Brookside and a drink at the 19th hole on Wittenauer await the person who did.