

**I**t has been a record-setting miserably hot summer here at Lake Omigosh Golf Club in central Florida. Following the coldest, wettest winter in 50 years, golf course superintendent Duffy McDuffy says this year is turning out to be Mother Nature's way of saying, "I told you so!"

Amid abnormal weather patterns and a constantly shrinking maintenance budget, Duffy has been playing Russian roulette with his maintenance program while trying to stretch those dollars as much as possible. Delayed purchases of equipment, and canceled pre-emergent weed and insect-control applications are slowly but surely detracting from overall course conditioning.

The greens and tees are OK, and the fairways are respectable. The roughs have a few more weeds popping up than we're accustomed to seeing. Duffy is scrambling to spot-treat nematode and mole cricket hot spots since those preventive applications were cancelled.

But Duffy needed to give Lake Omigosh members a wakeup call, considering they've cut the equipment, labor, chemical and fertilizer line items. So Duffy showed them a spreadsheet comparing the current and past budgets. They get it now — you end up doing less with less.

However, a few vocal members have been criticizing Duffy's competence. They've forgotten what the course looked like before he got here, and how he overhauled the whole maintenance program. I've talked to a few of them, but they're totally clueless about what it takes to maintain a golf course, and say every explanation is an excuse.

I don't think Duffy will become a scapegoat, but folks are so bummed out by the economy and onerous political campaigns and shenanigans that they may take their frustrations out on something they think they can control, like the superintendent's employment. I know Duffy and his fellow superintendents must be walking on eggshells. It's up to the board members to stifle such talk and, if need be, accept the resignation of a few bad apples and not let the vocal minorities run the club.

But Duffy refuses to be a gloomy Gus; in

## A Reality Check at Lake Omigosh GC

BY JOEL JACKSON



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fact he has tried to embrace the changes in his programs brought on by the fall off in club revenues. Using computer software, he has created slide shows that depict how certain out-of-play areas could be naturalized to eliminate irrigation, mowing and the need for regular weed control. They would still need some occasional maintenance, but he could save significant dollars.

He also showed how we could improve perennial trouble spots on greens by selective tree pruning or even removal if necessary. He admitted some traditional cultural programs and mowing schedules had remained essentially unchanged over the years because they worked as is. But having been forced to cut labor, he saw many ways he could reduce the frequency, in some cases, without noticeably affecting playing conditions. He also told the board that new products were also helping to control many pest problems more effectively at lower rates and with fewer applications.

Duffy also made a point to show the general manager, club president and green chairman some of the articles in trade magazines that forecasted several years of slow economic recovery and the changing habits of the golfing public. He also made sure they were very aware of the increasing regulatory focus on overall water use and policies dealing with water quality and spray drift. These laws could further restrict how all golf courses are maintained, especially if they aren't based on sound and realistic science and research.

So long from Lake Omigosh, where the superintendent is learning how to adapt, the crew is praying for cooler weather, and the members are getting a reality check.

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*Certified Superintendent Joel Jackson is executive director of the Florida GCSA.*