

Autumn is the time of year when northern superintendents check snow tarp inventories and their southern cousins watch for signs of migrating snowbird flocks.

The circle of golf course maintenance life rolls on, and it's always unpredictable.

Up North, folks are breaking out the Ouija boards and *Farmer's Almanacs*, trying to figure out when to drain the irrigation lines and put the system to bed, as well as the best time to drag out the tarps and position them while accommodating late-season golfers to keep revenue flowing in.

Down South, it's time to wrap up the renovation cycles and stop aerifying, verticutting and topdressing. It's time to start grooming the putting surfaces so the snowbirds won't be too disappointed they're putting on bermudagrass instead of bentgrass.

Bill Davidson, CGCS, superintendent at the Country Club of Naples, calls his summer/fall renovation time "The Hundred Day War." It's an appropriate name for the three deep-tine aerifying and verticutting regimen he puts in place every June, July and August to control thatch on bermudagrass.

Once the irrigation systems on courses in the Snow Belt are put to bed for the winter, it's time to rehab, repair and repaint the equipment inventories. It's a nice break for the rolling stock as the equipment gets new parts and an annual facelift. That's one leg up the northern courses have on courses in the South, where equipment is on the go all year long.

I wish golfers understood that difference when they review capital equipment budgets and try to understand why equipment is replaced more frequently in the Sun Belt. There's a logical reason: Courses in the Sun Belt are in use year-round, while courses elsewhere see six months of use.

To a certain extent, I have always envied the northern superintendent who could "take a break" from the hustle and bustle of the daily routine during the winter grass-growing hiatus. I know extreme weather can be a concern in all regions of the country. But it seems that in the

Fall Season Greetings

BY JOEL JACKSON



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heart of a "routine" winter, the folks from the Snow Belt I see at conferences aren't usually the ones talking on their phones during breaks.

I can always tell when fall is approaching, not by shorter days or falling leaves, but by the presidents' messages appearing in the chapter newsletters I receive when swapping publications with fellow editors throughout the country. Beginning in September or October, and as late as November, the messages read something like: "Thank God, the golf season is almost over."

For us down South, however, after a hot, miserable summer of projects and renovations, the golf season begins to crank up. But, as I have gradually learned, the ebb and flow of year-round golf operations had its origins in the stop-and-start routines up North, where die-hard golfers wanted to delay fall closing dates and pushed for earlier spring opening dates.

I'm sure fighting those political-agricultural battles was not easy in those times. And no doubt there were other challenges, such as tree trimming and snow management projects during the winter. However, those one-, two- or three-month breaks in routine sure sounded tempting to a Floridian such as me.

Seasonal changes remind me that superintendents and golf courses throughout the country are unique in their own ways and similar in others. It's those similarities that bind us together and those differences that allow us to share and learn from each other — so we can be better stewards of our properties and of our clubs' financial resources.

Until next time, fellow sodbusters, keep the green side up — or covered up, depending on where you are.

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