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# Purchasing is an art

*Whether the superintendent is buying materials, services or labor, he must be certain the club is receiving full value for every dollar it spends.*

**by Robert M. Williams**

Superintendent, Bob O'Link G.C., Highland Park, Ill.

**B**usinessmen are generally in agreement that integrity is the foremost ingredient behind the successful management executive. So it is for the modern golf course superintendent also. He has become a vital part of the club's management team and thus responsible for spending large sums of money. Whether he is buying greenkeeping materials, services or labor, he must ensure that the club is receiving full and efficient value for every dollar spent.

After approval of the grounds and greens department budget by the greens committee and the board of directors, the course superintendent is generally authorized to proceed to spend the money as indicated.

In the post war years since 1945, we have seen these budget figures climb from around \$40,000 or \$50,000 to the present figures of anywhere from \$100,000 to \$150,000 for the total annual expenditure for a high standard, private, 18-hole club. This would of course include both the operating and the capital expenditures.

So, it is quite obvious why it is considered so important by the club's officers to make doubly sure their superintendent is a wise and careful planner and spender of the club's money.

## WAGES—BIGGEST OUTLAY

Golf course superintendents are spending about 75 per cent of the

course maintenance funds on salaries and wages. This percentage holds pretty true, regardless of the size of the budget. If you use the figures of \$50,000 to \$75,000 for salaries and wages, you are within the "ball park". That is of course to be qualified further as 18-hole, private clubs, in the areas where golf is enjoyed on about a seven-month season.

Getting a day's work for a day's pay is not a bad objective for both the club and the workmen. For too many years past, clubs and superintendents alike have been at fault by not paying rates to men from whom they expected much in return.

Fortunately for everyone, the picture is rapidly changing to where many clubs are now offering their greens staff realistic wages and many fringe benefits that are meeting the competition in allied fields. Paid insurance, uniforms, retirement plans and paid vacations are a few examples of items that can be used to aid the superintendent in procuring the kind of workmen that will give the club full value of their labor dollar.

Anything less than a satisfied workman contributes to inefficiency and a waste of money.

## CAREFUL BUDGET

Whether the club's money is spent for commodities as seed, soil, fertilizer, chemicals, labor or a contract asphalt job, the same

basic concepts hold true in any case. Over the years, I have become a strong advocate for good budgeting and we find that it is just as important as a planned guide for the spending of funds as it is in getting the appropriations in the first place.

If the superintendent has made a thorough study of his annual plans for the year ahead, with due consideration to his long range planning as well, he can estimate to within 1 per cent to 2 per cent of his annual expense requirements (barring of course, some unforeseen, abnormal emergency situation).

Armed with a good, well thought out and planned budget in one hand and the authority to spend this fixed amount of money in the other, the thinking superintendent has the battle of stretching dollars half won.

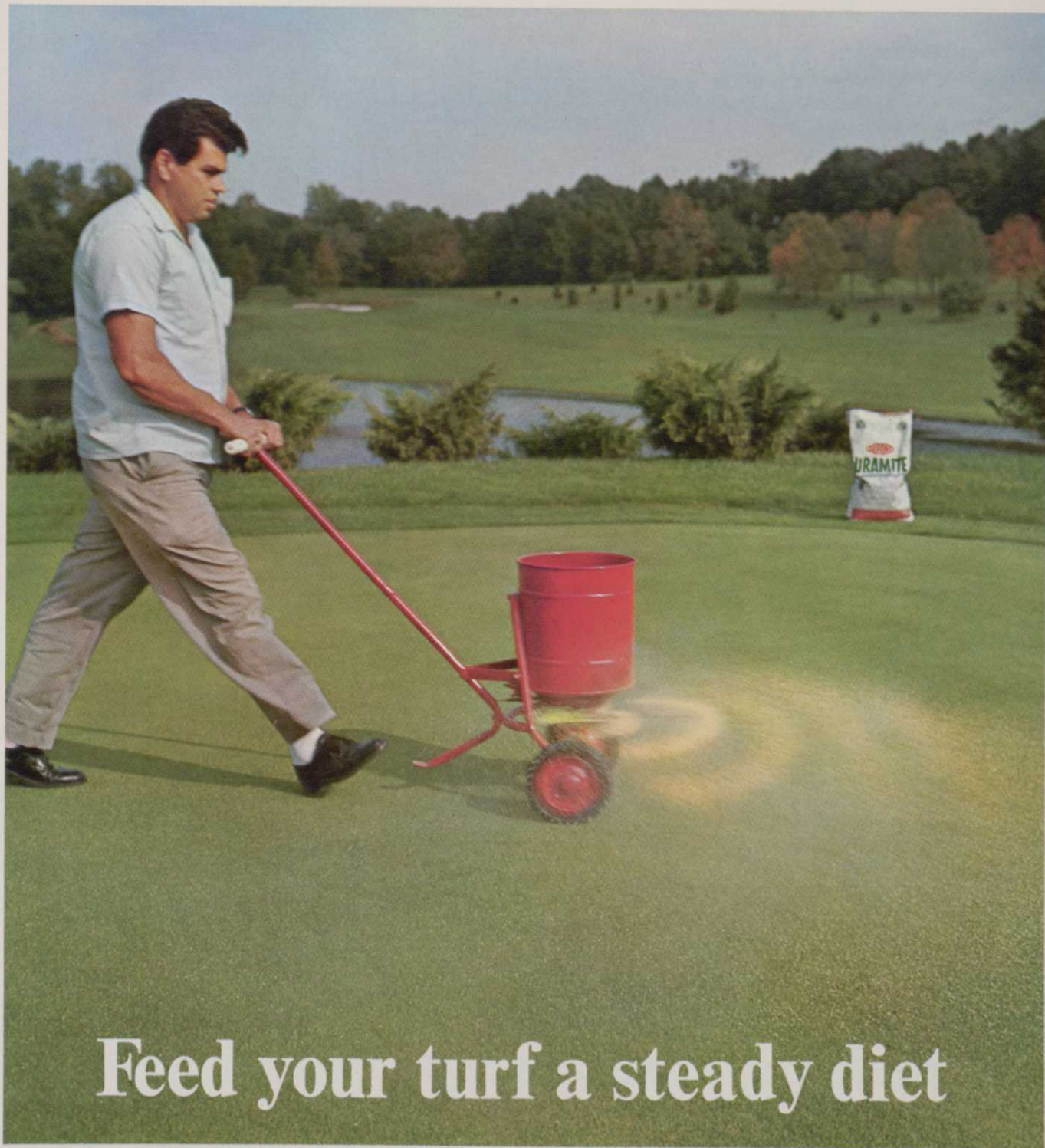
## OFF-SEASON BUYING

The winter season is the usual time for administrative planning and it can also be the most appropriate time to do some of your spending. The suppliers are anxious to move materials and to keep their warehousemen busy in the slow season. In addition, the superintendent can make sizeable savings on materials by buying his entire season's requirements as bulk purchases with quantity discounts.

The distributors are using a general practice these days of winter

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## Purchasing Continued from page 44

delivery with a delayed billing to April or May when the golfing season is again under way. Of course, this is only idle talk if one does not have adequate storage space that is both dry and safe from pilferage.

The winter quantity discounts are currently running anywhere from 5 per cent to as much as 15 per cent. And this is no small matter when you consider that expendable course maintenance materials will run around \$10,000 per year on the average. This means a reduction of cost of anywhere from \$500 to \$1,500, which is well worth consideration.

One chemical fungicide manufac-

turer for instance, currently offers one bonus case for every eight cases purchased during the winter months. This is a 12½ per cent reduction amounting to some \$75. Still another example is where the distributor offers a bonus item worth about \$150 for each \$1,000 order placed with him during a certain off-season period.



turer for instance, currently offers one bonus case for every eight cases purchased during the winter months. This is a 12½ per cent reduction amounting to some \$75. Still another example is where the distributor offers a bonus item worth about \$150 for each \$1,000 order placed with him during a certain off-season period.

Now, only if you anticipate and need one of these items can this arrangement be considered a worthwhile incentive. After all, there is no efficiency in getting a power saw, for instance, if you really don't need it.

## UPDATE EQUIPMENT

When it comes to new equipment

purchases, a somewhat different approach should be taken. Today, many clubs have an equipment inventory that represents a replacement cost of roughly \$80,000. Amortizing this figure over an average life expectancy of some 12 years, we come up with a little over \$6,500 per year as an average annual expenditure.

Incidentally, these figures are not "guesstimates" but the approximate average at our club and of several others in our vicinity. As most superintendents are aware, the big question to resolve here is, when is the most efficient and proper time to trade in each piece of equipment? The answer

to this question will differ from one machine to another as well as from one course to another. A good rule of thumb is usually developed by the experienced superintendent at each club.

When either the inconvenience, time lost or cost of repairs due to breakdown becomes a factor of any consequence, it is time to consider replacement. Also, we have found that the rapid improvements in many new pieces of specialized equipment have brought about a demand for items we never heard of only a few years ago.

Additional factors to be considered in equipment purchasing involve trade-in values, identical

specifications to all bidders, demonstrations, a sensible preventive maintenance program and care in the general operation and handling of the equipment.

A philosophy I've often heard repeated by greens committee members regarding new equipment is that, during a relative period of economic prosperity, the grounds equipment should be built up to an efficient and desirable level. Then, during a recession cycle, the club can well stand to tighten its belt for a year or two.

This opinion seems to be shared by a number of clubs in the vicinity.

## CONTRACT SERVICES

This is a rather new concept in buying materials and services combined that has been making its way into the golf maintenance picture of late. For example:

- Fairways can now be fertilized by a contractor who furnishes the materials and does the spreading as well, with his equipment.
- Specialized equipment is now being used by landscape contractors who will offer to furnish and plant trees up to 10 and 12 inches in diameter, on your course, at almost any time of the year when the ground is firm enough to hold the equipment.
- Helicopter spraying of trees and turfgrass areas is now a reality here in the Chicago area through contract services.
- Small asphalt contractors offer complete golf car path installation services.
- Specialized tree expert contractors can move in large crews to complete a pruning or removal project in a hurry.

Clubs are seldom attempting to do their own reconstruction or renovation work anymore. They are keeping their regular crew solely for maintenance and accomplishing the extra jobs with contract services. Even labor can be purchased by day-to-day contract suppliers.

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#### **NOTE:**

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## Operation putting green

*Besides covering all matter connected with the greens, this year's meeting saw yet another superintendent given the USGA Greens Section Award.*

by Desmond Tolhurst

**T**his year's USGA Greens Section conference on golf course management was held on January 26 at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City. The topic was the putting green—from design to maintenance.

After the introductory remarks by Henry H. Russell, chairman, USGA Green Section Committee, the morning sessions got off to a fine start with a talk by William C. Campbell, 1964 U.S. Amateur Champion. Mr. Campbell discussed what the golfer expects the putting green to be.

He pointed out that greens—and tees—are getting so good these days, that we might try what is done at St. Andrews, Scotland, for winter play, that is, play from green to tee. He also noted how important putting, percentage-wise, is and quoted Ben Hogan's remark that golf is actually two games: one is played in the air, the other on the ground. They are quite separate and have little in common.

On size of greens, Mr. Campbell came out against the modern obsession with large greens, saying that they were not only costly to construct and maintain, but put too much of a premium on putting. He conceded that on long par three's and par four's, larger greens were needed. They were also necessary, he said, on courses where heavy play necessitates having many different cup positions to equalize wear.

Mr. Campbell pointed out that



James L. Haines receives USGA Greens Section Award from Wm. Ward Foshay, of New York, USGA President.

one factor too often overlooked in greens design is the prevailing wind. For example, slopes on greens should not be so steep that the wind can blow a ball hit from a trap onto the green right back into the trap, as had happened to him in actual tournament play! He also inveighed against monotony in greens design. A square green, elevated above fairway level, and sloped from back to front for drainage may not be so bad in itself, he said, but on some courses, they are all like this.

Creative use of the immediate area surrounding of the green was recommended by Mr. Campbell. It should not be as easy to play a shot from off the green as on the green. Swales and mounds around the green can make getting down in two from off the green a matter of golfing skill rather than routine shotmaking.

In this connection, Mr. Campbell cited Pine Valley's No. 10, where the slope of the green favors a deep little pot bunker—certainly a devil of a hole! He also mentioned the



great ground formation around Augusta's ninth green, and the dip short, the bunker left, and the swale at St. Andrews' 17th, the famous "Road Hole," as examples of what he considered good design.

The only large greens Mr. Campbell said he liked were large, terraced greens. This was not inconsistent, he claimed, as this type of green is in reality two greens in one. The only proviso he stipulated was that there should be enough room on both levels for pin locations. There should be, he said, at least five to six feet of relatively flat ground around the pin.

Mr. Campbell expressed a preference for greens that are firm to pitch to, and fast to putt. As regards grain, he thought that this was not too bad as long as all the grain lay in the same direction. But when you find on one green that the grain goes in four different directions, this is just too much! A line should be drawn between the challenging putt and the unfair putt.

Campbell concluded by saying that he favored a putting ball. This might seem like sacrilege to some, he said, but, with all the liberalization in the rules, why not?

The next speaker was Dr. Marvin Ferguson, mid-continent director, USGA Green Section, whose topic was green design. He emphasized that good golfing conditions and economical maintenance are not incompatible, and went on to agree with the previous speaker on the subject of large greens, but from the maintenance angle.

Superintendents don't like the larger greens, he said, because of the inordinate length of time it takes to mow them. Over the nation, the average time taken to mow a green is 35 minutes (around 6 minutes per 1,000 sq. ft.). When greens are as large as 12,000 to 15,000 sq. ft., the time taken to mow each green soars to just over an hour to an hour and a half. This can get pretty un-



Dr. Marvin Ferguson, mid-continent director, the USGA Greens Section.

economical, Ferguson claimed, in terms of the man-hours needed and escalating wages.

Of course, when greens are too small, another problem arises. Assuming you wish to cut the hole no nearer than 12 feet from the edge of the green, you will encounter a marked shortage of areas available for pin placements.

Some slope, Dr. Ferguson said, is desirable on a green to provide surface drainage. Sharp breaks, however, do prove difficult to water. A green does not have to be wet to hold a shot—contrary to popular opinion—as long as the soil is mixed properly underneath its surface. With a proper soil mix, you can keep the green drier and discourage *Poa annua*. Such a green will hold a shot, and resist footprints.

Dr. Ferguson wound up his talk with a plea to course designers to keep golfer challenges and the future maintenance of the greens in mind when at the drawing board. Neither should be neglected, and neither need be sacrificed to the other.

The next item on the agenda was a new movie made by the USGA Greens Section in cooperation with Clemson University entitled, "The ABC's of putting green construction." This covered thoroughly the building of a golf green according

to USGA specifications. (Enquiries about the film, and a booklet on the same subject should be addressed to the United States Golf Association, 40 East 38th Street, New York, N.Y. 10016.)

Immediately following the movie, there was a panel discussion on greens construction and materials by three of the USGA Green Section agronomists. James L. Holmes was moderator, and Holman M. Griffin and James B. Moncrief were the panelists.

All three agreed that the movie gave the USGA specs well. Holmes observed that they had thought at one time that surface drainage was not so important if you could guarantee soil permeability with a green built to proper specifications. However, this is not true. You still need good surface drainage.

A novel method of coping with water holding depressions in greens was also discussed. Using a chain saw (equipped with an old blade for this one time use), cut slits eight inches deep and 3/8 inch wide on the problem area. A herringbone pattern is very satisfactory. Fill the slits with calcined clay. The wounds in the ground grow over in 10 days to two weeks, and this method drains these pockets very well.

Holman Griffin then pointed up the importance of off-site mixing. He also stressed how vital it is to give equal consideration to aesthetic, agronomic and architectural factors in golf course work.

Bentgrass greens are moving further south every year, said James Moncrief. Nevertheless, it is just as vital to use good construction with the bermudas as well as the bent. As he pointed out, the old adage that the three most important elements in good greens construction are drainage, drainage and drainage, is just as true in the South as elsewhere. He also cautioned at cutting corners during construction. What usually happens is that you have to go back in a few years

*Continued on next page*



## Putting green

*Continued from preceding page*

and start over again.

The panel concluded its session by pointing out that if you use USGA specs to construct greens you can control the work of the contractors. You can prove they have done the work right or wrongly. They also observed that while you must water frequently with a green built to USGA specs, it is not true that it needs more fertilization than greens built in other ways.

The next session was entitled "Grasses for putting greens." Alexander M. Radko, Eastern Director, USGA Green Section, lead off with a discussion on the popular strains of bentgrasses.

Of the seeded varieties, he said, Seaside makes a very fine putting green. Penncross, a true creeping bent, can become "fluffy," if not properly managed. In the velvets, there are only a few selections. The latest, Kingston, from Rhode Island, produces dense, upright turf, but does have a tendency to thatch. He stated that while S. German seed is now again available, it is not so good as it contains Seaside as well.

Of the vegetative selections, Radko pointed out, Arlington tends to swirl, with the grain growing in all directions. Congressional is traffic resistant, he said, while Collins is now scarce. Cohansey has a light green color, is upright and aggressive and is adapted to the southern regions of bentgrass growth. Nimisila, from Ohio, does as well in the South as the North, and has a dark green color. Washington has only one drawback—it turns purple in cool weather.

Radko also talked about the light green color of Old Orchard, the rarity and graininess of Metropolitan, and the Penn State varieties, Pennlu and Pennpar. He thought we would see more of Evansville shortly, and touched on the velvets. He wound up his talk by showing slides of the grasses discussed.



Left to right, Richard Craig, James R. Fulwider, Edward Roberts, Jr., and William Bengeyfield.

James B. Moncrief, USGA Green Section agronomist from the Southeast, then rose to discuss Bermudagrasses. Common came in, he said, after 1751, but it was not until 1945 that Dr. Bair selected the finer bladed bermudagrasses.

He observed that Everglades is quite cold tolerant and resists scuffing better than other selections. Bayshore, a medium green grass, he said is fading out at this time. Tiffine, a light yellow grass introduced in 1953, is now being replaced by newer selections. However, it does see use as collars on bent greens, because bent can resist Tiffine. This grass is mainly seen now in the area in which it was originally selected.

Tifgreen was used more than any other bermudagrass, Moncrief said, but it had difficulty in the Transition Zone between bents and bermudas. (There was an increase of three per cent of bent over Bermuda planted last year in the Transition Zone.) Tifgreen is a vigorous grass, he pointed out, and withstands traffic well. It tolerates 1/4-inch mowing, and 3/16 inch is possible if you are on your toes.

Tifgreen is now being replaced by Tifdwarf, said Moncrief. This is a mutation from Tifgreen, released in April, 1965. It was used in 90 per cent of Bermuda plantings last year—on 40 to 50 courses



William C. Campbell, '64 Amateurchamp.

in the Southeast alone. The problem peculiar to Tifdwarf is that below 50 degrees, it has a purplish cast.

However, Tifdwarf is superior to Tifgreen in most every way. It is one step along the way to the ultimate goal—to create a bermuda that will compare with the best bentgrass. This "perfect" bermuda, Moncrief said, should tolerate 3/16 inch mowing, and not go off color in cold weather. The only drawbacks to Tifdwarf are those it shares with other bermudas—it is susceptible to nematodes, and it also must be overseeded.

Moncrief concluded by talking about the varieties used for overseeding. Originally, ryegrass was the only one used. Unfortunately,

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