

A golf course today is an expensive investment. Rising land prices and construction costs often call for a budget of \$500,000 or more to put 18 holes into play.

That level of spending limits the locations where courses can amortize the investment. Some public and private groups are hesitant to plunge that deeply. The money must also be spent wisely.

So, many cities and private investors are relying on feasibility studies to guide their decisions. Often used for other developments, a feasibility study is a relatively new concept in golf course planning.

What is a golf feasibility study? It is simply a report combining facts about the market area, need for golf facilities and projections on whether a new course will be successful.

Doing a feasibility study is specialized work. There are probably no more than 10 qualified individuals or firms in the country offering such services. They include architects, landscape architects, engineers and certain others with golf business backgrounds.

One of these is Richard Phelps, president of Phelps-Brauer & Associates, Inc., Denver, Colo. As site planning consultants, his firm is strong in golf course design. With Brauer & Associates, Inc., Minneapolis, Minn., they offer feasibility studies, all design, engineering and construction supervision services for golf courses and other recreational facilities.

Phelps is the golf specialist. He spent summers while in school working on golf courses. He graduated from Iowa State University with a major in Landscape Architecture, then took his M.A. there, specializing in golf architecture. His thesis on course landscaping was adopted by the United States Golf Assn. Green Section as a basic reference. He was principal designer for more than 30 courses before establishing his own firm in 1967.

Phelps believes a feasibility

study is a must in planning most golf courses. It should precede all other steps.

Purposes of a feasibility study include:

- Determining whether the community's market area can support a new golf facility and what type;
- Recommending whether one or more proposed sites would be suitable for a golf course;
- Projecting probable construction costs, annual income and expenses of a new course.

"The value of such research to any public or private group is tremendous," declares Phelps. "There is no way they can plan their financing or even decide if the course will pay for itself without all relevant figures."

Here is a step-by-step economic workout of a typical private membership club:

1. A group of 500 citizens organizes or are sold the idea for a new country club in a growing community;

2. Each of the 500 puts up \$600 as an initiation fee to provide \$300,000 for the purchase of necessary land (about 150 acres);

3. After land is acquired, each member is assessed an additional \$1,000 to provide one-half of the \$1,000,000 needed to construct and equip the golf course, clubhouse, tennis courts and swimming pool. Contracts are let and construction begins;

4. The remaining \$500,000 for construction is obtained through mortgage financing. This requires annual payments of about \$75,000 for 10 years to cover amortization and interest at 8 per cent;

5. Construction is completed and the club opens. Annual dues are set at \$500 per member family, as an equal share of the annual net operating cost of \$250,000;

6. In addition to dues and assessments, each member pays \$150 annually for 10 years as his share of the mortgage principal and interest;

7. For the use of golf, tennis

and swimming facilities, each member family pays an additional \$75 annually for locker rentals, storage and cleaning of golf clubs;

8. Finally, the typical country club finds that rising labor costs and insufficient sales volume cause a loss in the restaurant operation. To encourage members to make more use of the club, a minimum charge of \$15 per month is imposed on top of dues. This is credited against a member's food and beverage bill for the month.

With this much money at stake, any major error in planning can be fatal. Such mistakes can be: misjudging the need for a new club, planning of too elaborate facilities, underestimating costs or proceeding with too few members. For a daily fee or municipal golf course, problems of finances are often due to overestimating the market, and/or underestimating development costs.

One recent study by Phelps-Brauer in a small midwestern city illustrates the point. The city owns considerable land around its airport. Using cost estimates from several years ago, officials had been hoping to build a new 18-hole golf course for \$200,000.

Needing professional guidance, the city retained Phelps to study the plan. His report estimated the cost of what they wanted would be about \$300,000, with only a small clubhouse. Research also uncovered a potential water shortage for irrigation.

The overall report was favorable in terms of feasibility, however. The potential site was a good one. Potential play should pay for the course and make a profit in future years. Plans are going ahead for its development.

Not all studies confirm the need and feasibility for a course. A realistic, objective look often saves a private group or city from financial disaster.

A private group in a Rocky Mountain area city retained

*continued*

## PLANNING A NEW COURSE?

*continued*

Phelps to study the potential for a new 18-hole course. The city already operated one public course. The client, a real estate firm and other investors, hoped to promote construction of a second course on city land, then build a country club and housing units on adjoining private ground.

The final report did not agree with the client's optimism. It found the potential site to be mediocre as a golf course setting.

It found that previous cost estimates, and thus financing plans, were inadequate. It raised legal questions about proposed private capital being used to develop a municipal course, without proper control. It predicted that a second course would probably cause both courses to lose money for several years.

Understandably then, the client dropped the idea. The site may still be used for a future municipal course when population gains warrant it.

Other studies may concentrate on selection of a site, if several are available, or advising an existing club whether to rebuild, expand or move to a new location.

A study usually takes 60 to 90 days. The final report averages about 50 pages. Major subjects covered are: the market area, the growth of golf past and future, golf play and needs in the community, site evaluation, cost projections, financing methods, projected income and expenses and suggested operating policies. □

## From farm to feasible golf course

The Royal Crest Dairy farm has made the big switch to the Royal Crest GC.

Because their farm is located on the eastern edge of Lorain County, Ohio, in the path of greater Cleveland, owners Joe and Bill Madak found their farm and retail milk business being smothered by homes.

Instead of giving up the land and moving elsewhere, they decided to cash in on the booming urban expansion. They figured they could use family labor on a golf course, the same as on the farm.

The Madak Brothers have been cooperators with the Lorain Soil and Water Conservation district since 1953. They had a going conservation plan with the district, aided by the district conservationist of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service. The golf course plan was developed by using information from a soil survey and by studying area golf courses.

The Soil Conservation Service made a topographic survey of the original farm plus 70 acres purchased to provide space for 18 holes. Pond sites were mapped and a drainage plan worked out.

The Madaks hired a golf course specialist to lay out fairways, greens and tees, and an experi-

enced contractor installed the tile, built the ponds and constructed tees, greens and fairways.

The soil survey information, plus a mechanical analysis by a soil laboratory was used to determine the best mixture for the surface of the greens. Tests showed a large amount of silt and an absence of sand, typical of soils in northeast Ohio. To insure good drainage on the finished greens, the Madaks purchased \$6,000 worth of sand and mixed it with topsoil. Peat was also added to make the greens soft. The mixture for the first nine holes was laid out in two one-fourth-acre plots about eight inches deep. It was plowed and fitted periodically for six months and was treated to kill weeds. As a result, greens have uniformly good playing qual-

ity. The three ponds hold irrigation water storage.

The dairy barn was remodeled into a clubhouse, after tongue and groove pine ceiling and inside walls were sand blasted.

Construction started in 1964. The first nine was opened two years later; the second nine opened this spring.

Joe and Bill say that a basic tile and surface drainage system is a must on these soils. "I think our investment in tile will pay off in a short time," says Bill. "We had the only playable course in a 23-mile radius during the last week of March. Fifteen hundred people played. That makes \$3,000."

The Madak Brothers and their families say they are happy working with the public and that prospects look bright.

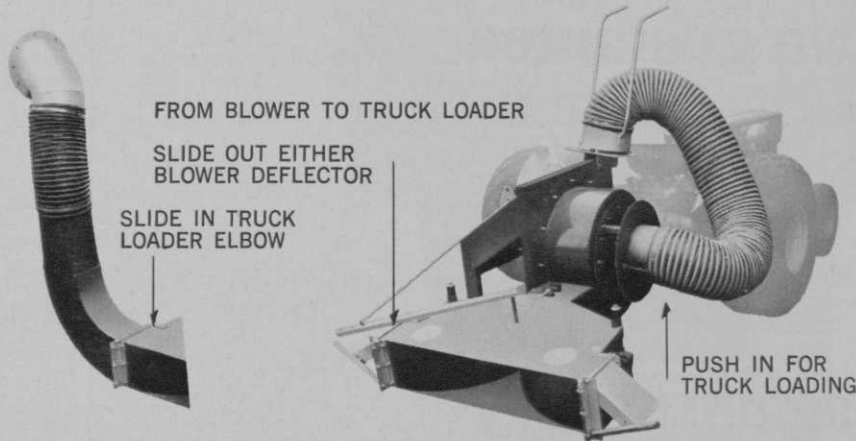


*Richard S. Keep, district conservationist, checks out the grounds in front of the remodeled barn that now serves as the clubhouse for Royal Crest GC.*

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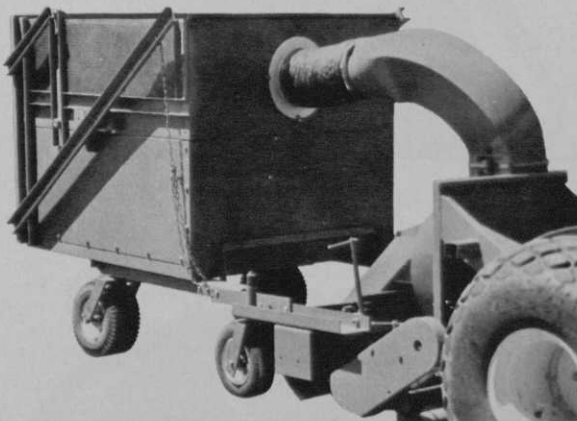
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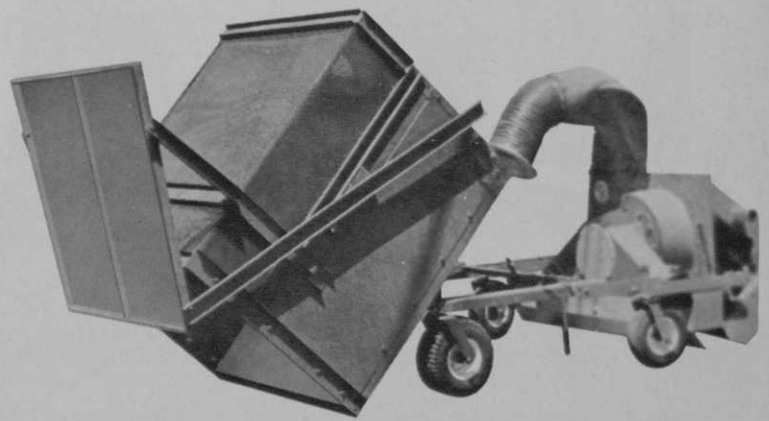
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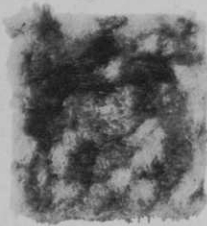
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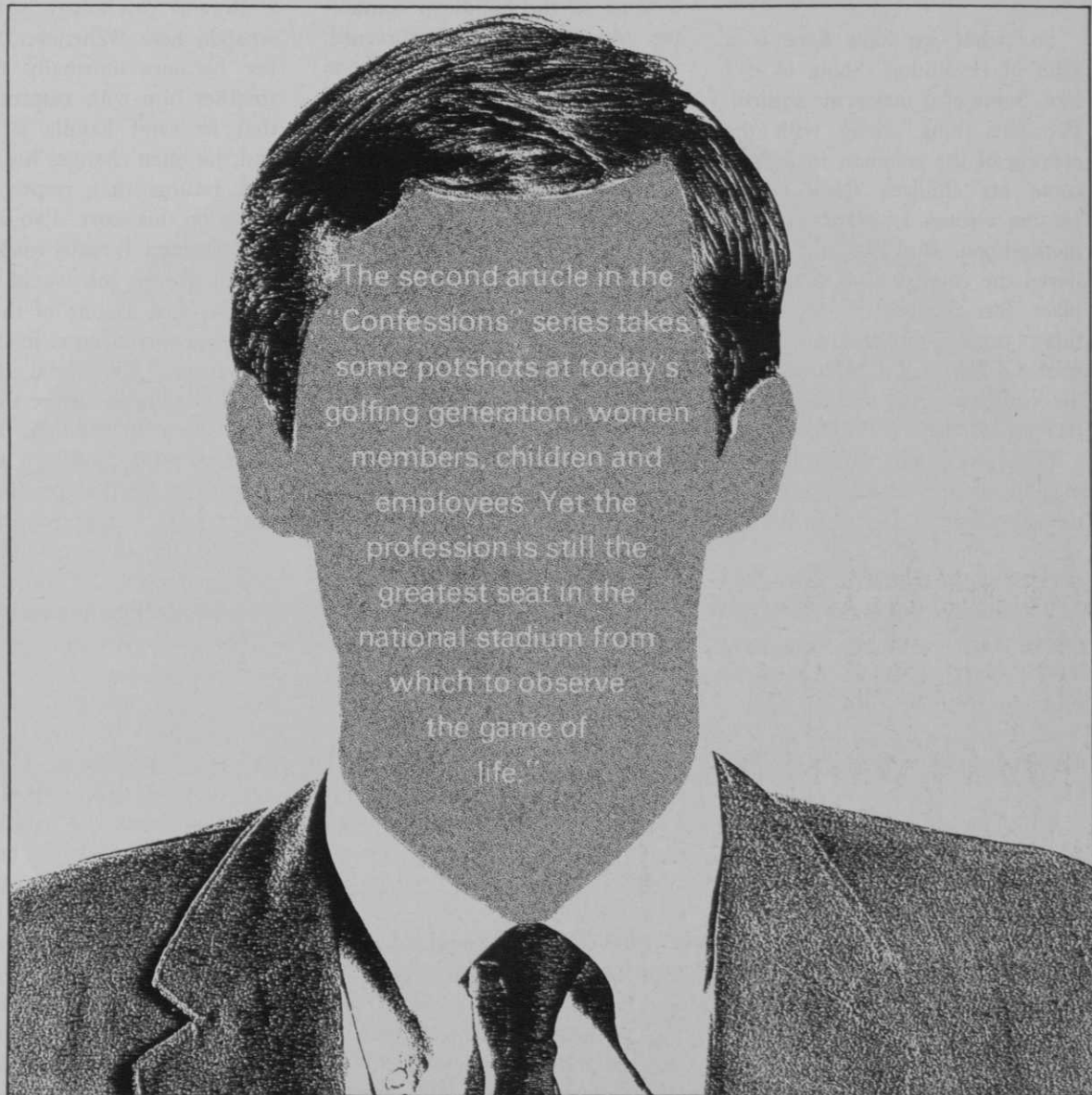


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The second article in the "Confessions" series takes some potshots at today's golfing generation, women members, children and employees. Yet the profession is still the greatest seat in the national stadium from which to observe the game of life."

ANONYMOUS

## Confession of a club manager

Let's face it. The old days of the country club manager standing in a cigar-store Indian position as a form of dignified convenience and conversation piece for status-hiking members are long gone.

Myself, I don't have time to serve as some showcase decoration. The job has changed—maybe for the better, maybe not. But it has changed. So has the country club clientele.

The old guard was really some-

thing. I've been around long enough to have tolerated them. Those who were the overbearingly rich, I'm talking about. The country club set was bathed in money and stuffy, with a cold approach to new friendships.

I suppose there are some of this type still left. There is a place for the exclusive-seeking cod. However, today's generation has moved into the country club field despite the stern looks of the

upper crust. There's just too much money around nowadays to stop them.

For instance, at my present job the working man has infiltrated to a great degree. And I mean, roll-up-your-sleeves-and-grunt breed of working man. Why, some of the plumbers in our locale make as much if not more than so-called executives. Their money is just as clean, just as acceptable.

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## CONFESSION OF A CLUB MANAGER

*continued*

So, what we have here is a kind of revolution. Some of it I like. Some of it makes me squirm. For one thing, along with the coming of the common man have come his children. Now, don't get me wrong. I am not against motherhood. But I've always believed the country club is not the place for children. I do everything to discourage their presence. Of course, I'm talking about the clubhouse, not the individual recreational areas of the club.

It follows that with the displacing of the establishment by the newcomers I must set my service policy differently. I find some of the problems at the table. My members demand cheaper prices than the public restaurant down the road. And I find it easier to comply than to argue. Right now, we're running 10 entrees, and six of them under \$5.

With the coming of members who swing rather than bow from the waist is the annoying accompaniment of wholesale participation in club affairs and club dictate. I am overwhelmed by committees. For example, last month I suffered through 11 committee meetings. The time spent amounted to 60 hours—most of them wasted.

It has been my experience that everyone who sets foot into a country club figures they can run it better than the manager. I foster this feeling at every meeting of every committee, which means 90 per cent of the advice goes in one ear and out the other.

I hope I live to see the day when there is established one executive board to oversee the operation of the club. And it must be a group of men who are close to the scene. Picture, if you will, a steel salesman telling me how to make the cut and set the price for a roast beef sandwich. It makes no sense. But it happens.

Notice I said men members for

the executive board. Women? They should restrict their contributions to the handicap committee. As far as I'm concerned, women are a definite detriment to the functions of the clubhouse, especially house committees. They waste their time arguing over what color to select for drapes. I fear any kind of committee with a woman on it.

Naturally, the touchiest problem of all in our profession—which is more business manager than club—involves labor. You can pick up a job pushing a broom in these parts for \$2.40 an hour. So you can see that I must be kid-glovisish with my help.

At the present attack on my senses, there are 131 employees. That's full and part-time. But in the case of country club operations, it means there are 131 problems to be dealt with.

In my travels (I've been associated with 10 clubs, but only three or four on a solid basis) I find that loyalty is the hardest workable asset to find among employees. And that covers everyone from the chef down to the kid who shines shoes.

Chefs can be a delicate problem, as we all know. Again, I have a particular gripe with their cult. Presently, our head man is paid an annual salary of \$15,600. His fringes are ridiculous, among them one month's vacation plus weekend work only during two other slack months.

Waitresses? What can I say about them? We have quite a crew, some good and some otherwise. My biggest headache is absenteeism. And I can't see why. Our members are pretty good tippers. I'd say on the average, a girl takes home \$150 a week.

Returning to the membership for a moment, let me pass comment on the nasty version of same. In every club, there are the few who look down upon all employees—the club manager is included—as just so much rubbish. These are the unwanted members, but who are nevertheless

equipped with enough where-withal to be accepted.

Reverse psychology is the best weapon here. Whenever a member becomes unusually nasty, I smother him with respect. I find that he can't handle it. In the end, he often changes his attitude and returns that respect. Don't laugh on this score. I've tried it a million times. It really works.

My present job would have to be classified as one of the better club managerial posts in the area. We have 1,300 social members at \$200 a throw before they even get a setup. In addition, there are another 400 golfing members whose tab for that privilege runs over \$500. Our payroll rises \$1,500 a day in regular times and goes as high as \$2,200 a day at the peak of the golfing season.

There is virtually no social snobbery at our club. I surmise that 70 per cent of the members are congenial because they have the same problems. This is a sign that the social gap of yesterday has narrowed considerably and it draws closer by the hour.

As far as my duties are concerned, the range has expanded. I must now be able to tell how many cups of coffee can be drained from a pound can. I must be familiar with air conditioning, plumbing, carpeting, golf cars, fertilizers—the whole bag. What it amounts to is a working knowledge of every facet of the club operation, both indoors and out.

My compensation I consider adequate. With the fringes, *et al*, it comes to some \$25,000 a year. But I feel I earn it and then some. I average 90 hours a week and I'm constantly on call. Yet, I sincerely believe I am engaged in a budding, fascinating business.

With all its little setbacks, demands on my ability and patience and day-to-day chinning with certain members, I highly endorse the profession.

It is a wide, wide world of experience, the greatest seat in the national stadium from which to observe the game of life. □





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A landscape superintendent in one of the Chicago suburban towns recently stated that he thought Dutch elm disease had peaked in 1968 because "we have reached the point where there are hardly any more elm trees left to die."

The statement wasn't quite accurate, but it did emphasize that the disease had taken an alarming toll in 1968, far higher than in the last six or seven years. The Dutch elm blight was first detected in the Chicago area in 1955, but not until 1962 did it start making serious inroads into the elm tree population. (The disease was first detected in the East in the early 1930s, and by the early 1940s was causing widespread destruction east of the Appalachians.) Each year since then the casualty count has been of crisis proportions; last year the word "catastrophe" was associated with it and by now, with the exception of the Far West and Southwest, few areas of the country have been spared.

A sampling of the casualty figures gives an idea of what has been happening around Chicago in the last few years: Lincoln Park, located on the lake front, in the last three years lost two-thirds of the 3,000 elms that once stood there, most of them victims of the blight. In 1968, 1,100 trees were lost. Most of them were at least 50 years old.

Evanston, north of the city, thought it was hard hit in 1965 when 500 trees were marked for destruction. Last year the toll was even higher; more than 650 trees were condemned.

To the south of the city, Homewood reported losses of only about 3 per cent in 1968, but since 1965 more than 550 elms have died. An estimated 3,000 remain.

West of Chicago there is a belt of five contiguous towns that is re-

ferred to as "the tree towns." Elms, oaks and maples are indigenous in this sector and grow in abundance. But the elms are being cut down. The public works department in one of these towns, Elmhurst, reported that losses in 1968 ran to 725 trees. That's approximately 5 per cent of the elm population, and losses last year were four or five times greater than five years before. Glen Ellyn, at the western edge of the tree town sector, reported that nearly 500 of its 10,000 elms were infected in 1968, the highest amount on record. Of an estimated 60,000 elms in the Elmhurst-Glen Ellyn belt, about

ferred to as sanitation by forestry people. Since chemicals haven't yet been compounded that destroy either the beetle or its fungus, the only holding action possible against the spread of Dutch elm appears to be sanitation. After the trees are removed they should be burned. Otherwise, the beetles aren't going to be destroyed.

Golf courses that surround Chicago are faring somewhat better than municipalities in the battle against the beetle. Their elm tree losses in 1968 probably didn't exceed 3 per cent, although a few superintendents reported that from 5 to 10 per cent of their trees were denuded. Practically

## DUTCH ELM: WHAT IS IT? WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

By JOE DOAN

3,000 were lost.

According to entomologists, a beetle that is about one-tenth of an inch long and capable of flying relatively long distances is causing the havoc. It either transports a fungus or a fungus is spawned from its eggs. The fungus then infests the tree's circulatory system and chokes off the flow of moisture to its branches. Usually within a few weeks the leaves wilt, turn yellow, curl and drop off. When this happens there is no chance that the tree can be saved. It should be removed as soon as possible so that surrounding trees aren't infected.

Removal of dead trees is re-

all of the superintendents agree that last year was the worst for the disease.

Courses along the north shore of Lake Michigan seem to be hardest hit of the Chicago clubs. Probably this is because there are more elm trees concentrated in this district than west or south of the city. Joe Dinelli, superintendent of North Shore CC, reported that he lost 46 elms in 1968, almost exactly 5 per cent of the number still left on his course. In five previous years a total of 110 elms at the club succumbed to the beetle. Big holes are beginning to appear in the wooded areas at

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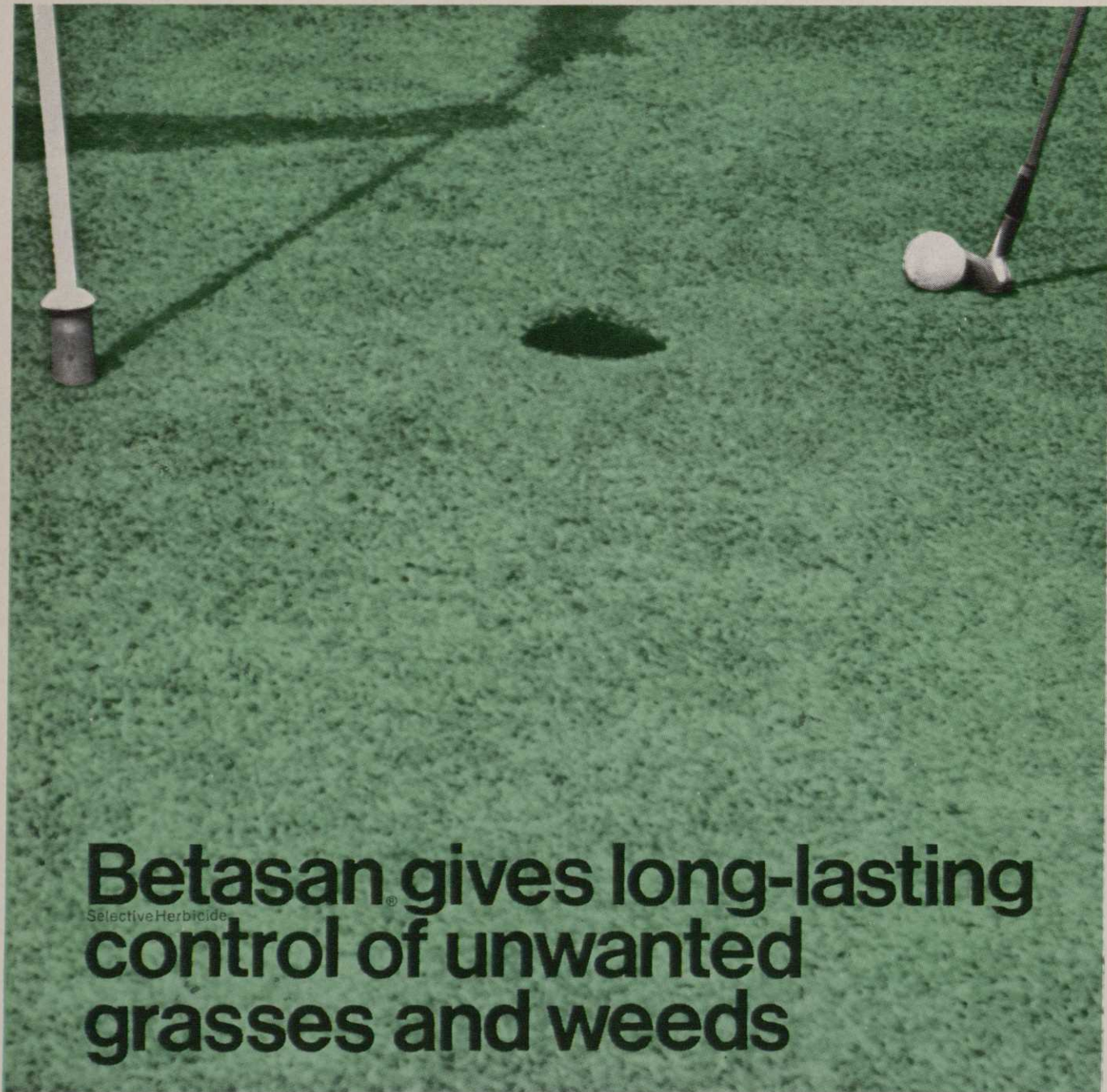
*The fungus-carrying elm bark beetles tunnel (right) to the water-conducting vessels of a once-healthy elm tree (left). Result: fallen leaves in midsummer (center).*





Dutch elm disease continues to take its toll. In the hard-hit Chicago area, superintendents are carrying on a desperate fight using insecticides and replacement programs





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