

Battling *Poa annua* by complete renovation

Dave Portz, Superintendent at Brookside County Club in Mecungie, Pennsylvania, has had to cope with and manage the 100 percent *Poa annua* fairways he inherited in 1973. Two years ago he began experimenting with partial renovation of his most troublesome fairways and greens. This year he renovated the entire course. "Technically, my job is to maintain the golf course," Portz says, "but we're also faced with the problem of maintaining the course to the membership's specifications."

That meant cutting the turf to a height that was better for play, but not for the health of the turf. The end result was an infestation of *Poa annua*. "When the height of bluegrass comes down, so does the health of the grass," he explains, "and like most superintendents, when the grass began to show signs of stress, I would water. But, too much watering weakens the plant and encourages the poa which begins to flourish and spread and flower and spread even more."

While annual bluegrass may look ideal for golf courses, Portz learned that cutting too close and over-watering creates a cycle that is next to impossible to stop once it begins. You can live with poa," continues Portz, "you just have to keep it soaking wet, and spray continuously for diseases to prevent weakening of the plant. The time and labor is phenomenal."

Preparing for a change

So after battling poa for seven years, he began to look for alternatives. "I had looked into every possible renovation technique but none seemed effective enough," says Portz. "We had almost a 100 percent infestation of poa, and since total eradication is impossible, I wanted to initiate a program that would give me a more than adequate population change."

Even before Portz began thinking in terms of an actual poa control program, he began preparing for the day that he could broach the subject with the Board of Directors. Five years ago, he began working on reducing his thatch accumulation, knowing that it tied up nutrients, insecticides, and fungicides. It is also very difficult to keep moist.

"What we did was verticut and aerify to bring the thatch layer down,"

explains Portz who initiated the process routinely year after year until he felt the course was ready for renovation. "Removing the thatch was our top priority," he recalls, "because there wasn't any way that we could prepare a new seedbed with a high or deep thatch layer to contend with."

Crawling comes before walking

Two years ago, with most of his thatch layer removed, Portz decided to experiment with Roundup. After much consideration, the tenth fairway was chosen. A 14-foot test strip was sprayed and the rest of the fairway remained untreated as a check strip for the experiment. "We sprayed it, overseeded it, aerified it, and waited," explains Portz. "The results were just beautiful."

After his success on the 10th fairway, Portz decided to try the treatment on his chipping green. As with most experiments, there is always the chance that something can go wrong. "I had the feeling that all would go well," says Portz, "but just to make sure we decided to treat the chipping green since it is an out of play area."

As expected, it went off without a hitch. In fact, the results of these two small-scale efforts convinced him to experiment further and propose an entire renovation of one fairway. "Because we only did a 14-foot strip on the 10th, we couldn't manage it properly, and we ended up with a poa problem again," he continues. "But, despite the problems associated with 'double' management, the director of greens was so impressed with the results that we decided to go ahead and do a whole fairway in 1978."

"The Board of Directors decided

unanimously to renovate the 13th fairway since it was the most troublesome and had held up the least well during the summer months," he explains. "We didn't get total kill of the fairway, but we were experimenting with rates and used too low of a rate to kill some of the bent grass that was in the fairway. However, we did have a good change in population and that's what we were looking for."

"Proceeding with the 13th renovation, we left a 50-foot check strip of poa in front of the green to draw a comparison as the season progressed," recalls Portz. "The check strip was under the same management program as the new fairway and as the summer progressed, the check strip gradually went out as poa will do if not managed properly. The balance of the fairway remained in good condition."

Saving labor and water

While the membership was somewhat uncertain about undertaking a major renovation, the 13th fairway provided a vision of what they could expect in the future. And, as if that wasn't enough, Portz added some astonishing cost saving statistics. "During the summer of 1978, we had 36 waterings plus syringe time on all of the fairways except number 13, where we only watered three times with no syringe time. So right there, on just one fairway, we had a huge savings in both water and labor."

"Coupled with the economy and the rising cost of fertilizer, chemicals and labor, the cost savings and a visual demonstration of encouraging results enabled me to talk with my membership realistically about con-

The new growth on 13 contrasts drastically with other fairways after treatment.



sidering a complete renovation. I was convinced that a renovation program with Roundup would make me happy, would work, and would be ideal for their golfing needs," he continues.

"We crawled on the tenth fairway, walked on the thirteenth, and then we ran. At the 1979 annual meeting, the entire renovation was okayed."

Spring vs. Fall

The decision to launch a full scale renovation was only the beginning for Dave Portz and his crew of six full-time employees. Since they got the go-ahead, they have faced countless other decisions whose full impact remains unknown to this day. For the most part, Portz is optimistic about the choices he made.

"Obviously, the method of renovation a superintendent chooses depends on two things: the level of infestation on the course; and the membership — the kind of conditions they want and how quickly they want it," he explains. "In our case, where we have a strong membership, we needed to choose a method that would eliminate the poa without closing the course to play. If we had chosen to

plow the course under, we would have had to close the course. But through the use of Roundup, we were able to eliminate our existing annual bluegrass and still provide a playing surface for the membership, even, if it was dead grass. The only restriction we enforced was that golf carts were not permitted on the fairways during seed germination, and we also had to close for two half days when we sprayed the front and back nine holes."

Because Portz chose a rather unprecedented method of renovation, all his decisions were based on knowledge about Brookside he acquired during his seven years as superintendent and the education he received at Penn State along with consultation with technical reps. In view of the fact that most annual bluegrass in southeastern Pennsylvania germinates in the fall, Portz chose to renovate the Brookside course during the spring. "We felt that a spring renovation would help reduce competition from poa seedlings," he explains.

Complete renovation

Because mother nature was working against Portz this spring, he held

off with the renovation as long as he could in hopes that the cool, wet weather would clear. But, as March turned into mid-April, he could wait no longer and proceeded with the process as scheduled. Portz, always a fanatic about keeping records, kept a daily log of weather conditions, soil temperatures, and maintenance activities.

Portz and his crew sprayed the Roundup on April 19 and 20, nine holes each day. They waited a week and then seeded, using a Rogers 548 seeder. The seeding process took four days. Prior to this, they had made a half rate application of Scott's starter fertilizer.

The mechanical process, although time-consuming and exacting, flowed just as planned. "We cleaned up the thatch and debris from seeding as soon as it occurred and on May 2 we spiked and broadcast-seeded the fairways," says Portz. "We used a Ryan Renovaire and put slicing blades on it, doubled them up, and welded them together at the tip so we could get better penetration and a wider groove in the fairway. Then we simply broadcast our ryegrass and the balance of



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the bluegrass."

Rather than seeding in the commonly-used square patterns, Portz chose a diamond shape instead. "The diamond shape pattern was easier for us to use," he recalls, "because it speeds up recovery. The narrow slits at the end of the pattern heal faster than a square trying to come in on all four sides."

After they had rolled the fairways, trying to close up the slices, they waited until germination before continuing with a fertilizer application. "We did not fertilize at the time we seeded because we had already made an application of starter fertilizer in April," he continues. In addition to rolling the fairways, seeding was followed by periodic waterings to keep the seeds moist.

While everything was going according to plan, mother nature again made her presence known with fluctuating temperatures and heavy rains. "Even though we did have some problems with the weather, and our recovery period was delayed, I don't think it hurt the program," he claims.

It was during this time that Portz also made a preemergent application of Tupersan for crabgrass control. "We felt this application was necessary since crabgrass germinates primarily during the time we were renovating, and we were helping make the seeds more viable by disturbing the soil. However, pre-emergent crabgrass control is a regular part of our maintenance program, so we did not include this application in our total renovation costs," he continues.

A better course at a cheap price

"We were not going after a total 100 percent change, but only a change in population. Initially, we had hoped for a 80-20 split, 80 percent ryegrass/bluegrass combination, and 20 percent *Poa annua*. That would have been fantastic," says Portz, "but as it stand now, we are nearing a 70-30 split. And, we'll be more than happy with it."

The change in population isn't the only thing making Portz and the membership of Brookside happy. "For the past seven years it has cost \$10,000 to \$12,000 to maintain the poa infested fairways. Now, after we renovated the course for \$300 an acre (not including labor), I estimate the maintenance costs will be as low as \$6,000 to \$8,000 a year. That's a savings of more than one third."

And while labor costs will continue to go up, Portz contends that additional savings will come from less

water consumption and fewer fertilizer and fungicide applications. "As of now, we have a new management program," says Portz. "We will be managing for bluegrass, not for poa, and as such we will be using less water, and fungicides, and thereby reducing overall management costs."

The key to success

"Water management is the key to success," he concludes. "I'm just going to shut it off and let the new bluegrass

stress. Any poa remaining or returning after the renovation will be reduced or eliminated through proper water management. Now I've got the poa to a population level where I can live with it and work around it without having it interfere with the maintenance and care of my ryegrass and bluegrass. My priorities are finally in the right place." □

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Budgeting process: the organizational reality

Editor's note: This is the second in a series of three budgeting articles by Organizational Systems Inc. The first article appeared in October, 1979. It covered basic aspects of budgeting, including types and preparation. The third article in the series will cover the budget as a tool for control, a form of progress report, a standard for performance evaluation and a source of information for future planning.

In the first article "ABC's of Budgeting" we mentioned two aspects of budgeting — one as an accounting process and the second as a managing process. In that article, the main focus was on the accounting aspect and how it relates to the managing process. It is essential to understand the accounting concepts involved in budgeting because accounting is a common denominator for all the different activities that go on in any organization.

In a similar vein we put forth two different views of a budget, one as a set of resource allocation decisions and the other as a plan of activities for a specified period. For the purpose of putting a budget together, we again emphasized the planning view rather than the resource allocation view of the budget. What is the true picture then?

Although accounting is the common denominator for all the activities occurring in the organization, it has its own limitations. By its very nature, accounting produces a record of only the financial transactions. Who spent the money on what, and where did the money come from; this is the essence of accounting records. It will not say how money spent on a particular fertilizer at a particular time helps the revenue to go up during the season. A purely accounting view of budgets may interfere with the logical relationships between these two events. It is unfortunate, but true, that conflicts arise between managers who hold such different views and cannot communicate with each other.

The same is true of budget seen as a resource allocation decision. Some decisions must be taken as regards how the revenues are to be utilized for acquisition and maintenance of equipment and facilities. Who should get a larger share of this total pie — somebody whose work directly earns the revenues for the organization, or somebody whose work maintains the

quality of facilities which ultimately provides satisfaction to the member and player? It is obvious that two managers with differing natures of work will also hold different and mostly opposing views.

It is an organizational reality that managers have their doubts and beliefs about what a budget means. These are lost under the surface in their day to day activities, except when they mutter about money being short for some of the activities which they consider important. However, these same differences of opinion surface glaringly when it is time for a budget, and, if not given proper attention and action, become topics of open conversation during professional meetings and conventions.

It is relevant, therefore, to look at the budgeting process as a meeting ground for different professionals with their own skills, competence and experiences, and how they play different roles in the preparation, presentation and approval of a budget which they will implement in the future to produce services that will satisfy the players and give them their money's worth.

Points of view

We shall try to understand the roles different actors play in terms of a "can do" approach. "Can do" essentially means three things:

- (i) the scope of what a particular manager can do;
- (ii) the limits on what a particular manager can do; and
- (iii) the strategy to be adopted so that a manager can do what he wants to do.

It is possible that each one of us has either used the "can do" approach successfully, or has seen someone else use it successfully at some time or another during a budget process. A manager or committee member can play one of the four roles: someone who prepares a budget; someone who presents a budget; someone who approves the budget; and finally someone who implements the budget. We shall discuss in detail what each one "can do."

Who prepares the budget?

Scope: A superintendent who prepares the budget has two main concerns about the scope of what he can achieve. First is the scope for getting

as large an amount of money as possible for his operations or projects. The second concern is to create as much cushion as possible. Most superintendents feel they need the cushion to protect themselves in case they underestimated the costs or overestimated the revenues.

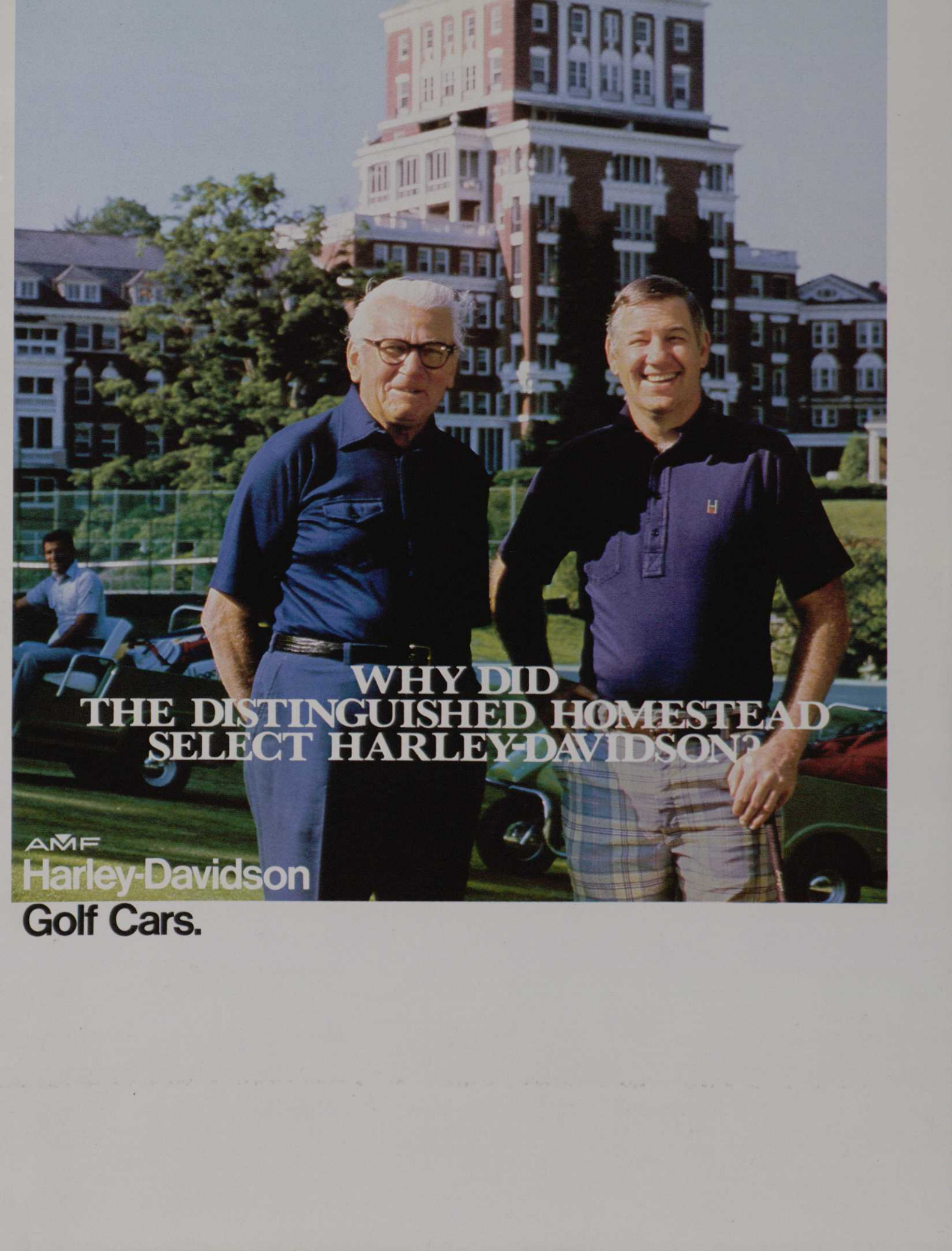
Such behavior should not be attributed to greed. Although we all come across our share of greedy managers, more often than not it is the manager's devotion to his job and to his profession that makes him aim for as large a budget as possible. Every superintendent has a cherished dream of acquiring a particularly versatile and useful piece of equipment that also happens to be quite expensive, or he wants to do a little better job of the regular operations and that always requires a little extra expenditure. Inadvertently, his past requests for the extra amount of money happen to have been rejected, but he hopes that this time there may be a better chance of getting it.

The desire for a slack or padding normally arises out of a defensive posture. If the manager bases his estimates on his current information about prices and if later the prices go up, the superintendent runs the risk of overstepping his budget and looking incompetent in the eyes of the higher ups. As we shall see later, this tendency is definitely related to the uses the budget is put to.

Limits: What the superintendent actually achieves with respect to the size of the budget and the slack is limited by several factors. The first factor is the amount of resources or income available to the organization. In most cases, the budget committee uses conservative estimates about the size of income. This restricts the size of the total pie. The second factor is the competition offered by other managers to get their inflated budgets through. The third factor is what projects fit into the goals visualized by the approving authority. The fourth factor, and not one to be ignored, is the committee members' knowledge of operations. All these factors determine what the superintendent finally gets for his department.

Strategy: A fairly common strategy used by superintendents to get their

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Budget *from page 14*

projects through is informal persuasion. This is also called "soft selling." It is commonly carried out through casual talks with budget committee members accompanied by hints as to how a particular project is becoming more and more essential. There are a few instances where such "soft selling" has met with success.

The disadvantages of "soft selling" are two-fold. One is that the budget committee members tend to be weary of superintendents who keep harping on their projects at the slightest opportunity year after year. The second disadvantage is that the superintendent is seen as the one who needs the project rather than the organization needing it. On the face of it, such a distinction seems too fine, but in reality the superintendent is put in a manipulative position. It is the club and the members who want a certain quality of course, and the superintendent is there to ensure such quality. It is an irony then that the superintendent should have to "sell" a project.

A far better strategy, therefore, is to prod the committee into a bit of soul searching, and force them to decide what they want. This can be done with ease and no more effort than is needed to prepare your plans. Along with the projected budget, it is necessary to prepare an information sheet (see Table 1, page 24) that summarizes possible changes in plans, eg. adding or dropping a project, changing the level of some operations; a list of items (with their account numbers) which would require correspondingly more or less expenses; and most important of all — the consequences of such a change in terms of quality of operation and how reputation/revenues are likely to be affected. The final column is for the remarks of appropriate approving authority as to the changes they feel are appropriate in accordance with the goals of the organization.

This information sheet technically deals with the development of alternatives. Since the superintendent who prepares the budget is the most likely person to be conversant with details of the operation, the information sheet will provide accurate data about exactly how changes in budget amount will affect operations. Such information is valuable for the authority that makes a decision about resource allocation. In addition, if you need \$5,000 for a particular operation, then you are not likely to be offered \$2,500 as a compromise figure. The approving authority

will either have to provide adequate funds or drop the project entirely.

This strategy forces the committee to make a hard decision with concrete information. This avoids the situation where budgeting process turns into either a gamble or haggling for the piece of pie. An additional precaution is to have the information sheet ready and circulated in advance to the budget committee members so that they find enough time to chew on the priorities they have. The notes on the consequences of each change also help them understand how the change will affect performance of other departments.

Who presents the budget?

The practices regarding who presents the budget to the approving authority vary greatly from place to place. In a large organization, the budget passes up through a number of levels, and the person who presents the budget may be far removed from the level where the budget is prepared. In a small organization, the department heads who prepare the budget are requested to attend the budget meetings, and are allowed to defend their budgets and asked to make compromises. In the field of club management the General Manager is expected to present the budget and get it approved. It is, therefore, essential to look at his role in the budgeting process. We shall start with the assumption that the person who presents the budget is different from the one who prepares the budget. If such is not the case, then the same activities can be carried out by the persons who both prepare and present the budget.

Scope: The manager who presents the budget performs the function of giving a complete view of what different activities will be carried out during the budget period, and how the resource allocation will maintain a balance between all these activities and keep them smoothly interlinked.

Limits: The manager is limited in this respect by two facts. One is the extent to which he is informed about the nature and details of all the operations; and second is his own professional background. These two are not independent. The controversy over the General Manager concept clearly points out that a General Manager tends to favor departments in which he has had most experience. Many times such favoritism is not intended, but simply occurs due to the fact that he can see behind many of the de-

mands by the particular department. At times the past experience is an asset, and at other times it is a limitation in the sense that it prevents him from taking a balanced view of the budget.

Strategy: In order to avoid problems of favoritism and thereby causing unbalanced operation of the club, the person who presents the budget needs to perform the following activities. First, the manager must put together all the departmental budgets. Second, it is essential to confirm the nature of effects of changing certain operations in one department on some other operation in another or same department. Overstated claims about such consequences can be weeded out through such confirmation. Third, prepare sets of operations/projects that will be affected if one of the projects were to be dropped. Fourth, ask the departmental managers for their own priorities of certain projects. This information is vital, particularly when the manager who presents the budget is not aware of technical intricacies in some departments. These four steps should produce all the information needed by the approving authority to make effective decisions.

Who approves the budget?

Scope: The budget approving authority which is normally the budget committee has two functions to perform. One is to set goals for the organization. Sometimes the club's goals are set by some other body, eg. the Board of Directors. In such a case it is up to the budget committee to operationalize the goals in terms of what actually needs to be done. The second function is to ensure that budgets approved on the basis of operationalized goals are passed down with clear information about what criteria were used in the actual approval decision.

Limits: Most often the functioning of budget committees is hampered by conflicts about what are the appropriate goals for the organization. If these conflicts are not resolved prior to the approval stage, the entire budgeting process will be distorted. Clear-cut goals are the basis of effective decision-making.

Strategy: The best strategy for the budget committee is to collect information from the Board of Directors and/or club members about what they want. This information is to be used to prepare a statement of goals. There is no doubt that influential members can get in what they want,

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Designer's forum

By Michael J. Hurdzan



Michael J. Hurdzan, Ph.D., is a partner in the golf course architectural firm of Kidwell & Hurdzan, Inc., Columbus, Ohio. He is a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects and the

American Society of Landscape Architects. He is currently writing a book on the history of golf course architecture.

Who needs government courses? We all do.

The most active golf course builder today is the government. This activity is occurring at all levels from small cities to nations, but the effect is the same, and that is to keep golf growing. The reason for this seemingly recent government support of golf is both because governmental agencies have accelerated expenditures for golf course development, and the private sector has dramatically decreased their activity. The reason for this inverse shift is simply **money**. There is no other reason except that the cost of building a golf course has risen to a point where private investors do not consider a golf course a good investment.

As an example, to build a very modest 18 hole, par 72, 150-acre golf course in the midwest would cost about \$700,000. To this must be added: land cost of perhaps \$2,000 an acre or \$300,000; nice, functional clubhouse for \$250,000; adequate maintenance and cart building of \$60,000; \$100,000 for maintenance equipment; and miscellaneous costs for cart paths, bridges, parking lot, tree planting, *ad infinitum*. So, to build this modest course of about 6500 yards, with 40 sandtraps, multiple tees, average size greens, and an adequate irrigation system, the total would approach \$1.5 million. Definitely not pocket change. In addition the earning potential of this facility might be for only 30 weeks per year with an anticipated usage of 40,000 rounds. So to amortize this golf course over 20 years, the balance

sheet would look like this:

| Cost of Development | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Land cost | \$ 300,000 |
| GC Construction | 700,000 |
| clubhouse & furnishings | 250,000 |
| maintenance bldg | 60,000 |
| maintenance equip. | 100,000 |
| misc. (paving, etc.) | 90,000 |
| TOTAL | \$1,500,000 |

| Operational Cost (Amortized over 20 years) | |
|---|------------------|
| Principal | \$ 75,000 |
| interest (12%) | 75,000 |
| maintenance | 100,000 |
| TOTAL YEARLY EXPENDITURE | \$250,000 |

Cost per round of golf =
(assume) $\$250,000 \div 40,000 =$
approx. \$6.00 per round

It must be emphasized that these figures do not reflect income from golf carts, clubhouse operations, proshop sales, nor do they indicate expenditures for taxes, insurances, or administration. But for purposes of general discussion, our fictitious golf course may net from \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year. On an investment of 1.5 million the income would amount to about 3-4%, a poor return when compared to apartments, condos, or even Certificates of Deposit. The risks may not be worth the yearly income but real profit in the golf business is in the appreciation of land value that may not be realized until the course is sold.

But how can government persist in developing golf courses if the economics are so poor? The basic reason is economic advantage. First the Federal Government has tax money to allocate for recreation and green space. Participation is on a 50-50 basis with local government. Assistance for a creditable project, if need for such a project is demonstrated, comes from the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS), formerly the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR). This means that the selected local governmental agency could build that \$1.5 million project with \$750,000. In addition, most local governmental agencies already own the land they intend to build on; will pay no sales tax on approximately \$700,000 worth of goods, materials and equipment needed; will pay no property tax or income tax; and they are probably self-insured. The net effect

is that instead of one round of golf costing \$6.00 as for the private investor, the round of golf on the municipal golf course may cost \$4.00.

At this point private owners are going to proclaim discrimination, restraint of trade, socialism and many other words of protest. But they may be short-sighted and are only concerned about their own personal financial gains. If one would consider the situation, they might see in calm reflection that this government interest in golf is healthy for all of us.

First, municipal golf courses belong to the people so every member of our society feels he has the **right** to use it without fear of being asked to leave because of his poor or slow play. The number of new golfers who take up the game because of this atmosphere is difficult to estimate, but could be substantial.

Second, most municipal golf courses employ a PGA Pro on a 12-month appointment who is expected in many situations to give free lessons at a community center during the winter. How many private owners set up free programs to start new golfers and nurture a market?

Third, the profits earned from the municipal golf courses are usually poured back into a general recreation fund that supports ball fields, tennis courts, playgrounds, etc. Again, it is impossible for the private sector to participate in such philanthropy. Low-cost municipal golf keeps our game a game of the masses who can only afford low-cost green fees so that the low income can enjoy a day of golf for \$4.00 inclusive.

The mere existence of a government golf course in the area causes the value of your property to increase.

Many privately-owned golf courses do exist near municipal golf courses and do quite well. They are successful because they provide better and faster playing conditions in a warm, personable golfing atmosphere. They may even charge \$2 or \$3.00 more than the municipal course.

Golf is growing at 3% per year. Cut out government-supported golf and imagine what the growth rate would be and the total impact on the golf industry.