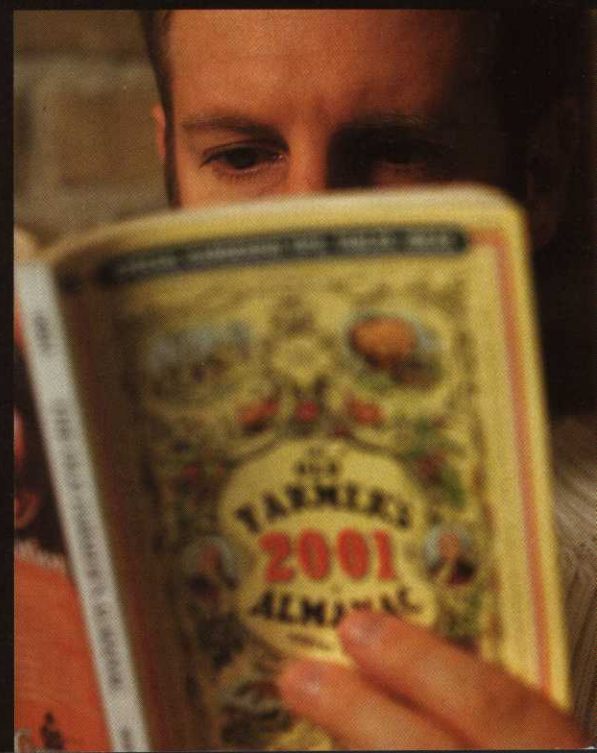


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By the Numbers

Continued from page 30

Many of the board members are accountants and bank workers who have knowledge of numbers but know little about golf course maintenance, Boe says. That can be a

HOW MUCH DOES YOUR COURSE GET?

Maintenance Budget Categories

\$1 million or more	14%
\$600,000 – \$999,999	20%
\$400,000 – \$599,999	22%
\$100,000 – \$399,999	34%
Less than \$100,000	8%

Information is based on a Golfdom/Readex survey of 286 superintendents conducted in March-April 2003.

Golfdom

problem, especially when board members take pride in watching over city money and are careful about spending it.

But Boe takes it upon himself to educate the board members about his job. He invites them to Coral Oaks to show them what he does and what it takes to do what he does.

It's part of the selling process, which most all superintendents have to do at one time or another to convince the financial decision makers that they *really* do need something.

But the selling process is not always easy because golf course maintenance is often something that isn't easily seen. "We have to sell on results," Slattery says, adding that results are often difficult to show quickly.

It's not like spending money on the clubhouse where the by-products — new carpeting, new chairs — are immediately visible and

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What to Cut and What Not to Cut When Cuts Must be Made

Immediately following the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, rounds fell off dramatically at golf courses nationwide. Joe Boe, superintendent of Coral Oaks GC in Cape Coral, Fla., says his course resembled a ghost town.

With no money coming in, Boe was forced to cut his maintenance budget, as were other business segments of the operation. "We couldn't spend our whole budget because we weren't earning enough money to cover it," Boe says.

When such a situation arises, what's a superintendent to cut from his budget? Several superintendents say budget cuts in midstream of a fiscal year often begin with labor.

Labor is the easiest area to cut because it's the largest area of a golf course's budget, often 60 percent or more. When the remaining line items combine to comprise 40 percent or less, it's difficult to trim 10 percent to 15 percent from one of them.

Boe began his cuts with labor. Before Sept. 11, Boe was down a person on his crew and was looking for someone to hire. He scrapped that plan and watched as



If forced to cut his budget, Florida superintendent Joe Boe would not cut anything related directly to the turf's health.

the clubhouse and pro shop also made staff cuts.

The budget cuts Boe didn't consider were anything related directly to the turf's health. Other superintendents agree they would avoid cutting fertilizer and fungicide budgets unless it was a last resort.

In fact, Sam Sprague, superintendent of Rainier Golf & CC in Seattle, says he'll go over budget on fertilizer, chemicals and

equipment — the things he needs most to maintain the turf — to keep the turf alive and healthy.

"I'd rather have to explain [to my bosses] why I was over budget on those items than explain to them why the greens are dying," Sprague says.

There's another option to saving money — albeit a throwback alternative. It's called bartering. Dale Morrison, superintendent of Trappers Turn GC in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., didn't budget for black top for his parking lot, but he didn't need to. Morrison also didn't budget for a recent tree-removal project on his course because he didn't need money to pay for it. Morrison received the black top and the tree removal for free ... sort of.

He bartered for them. To the man whose company gave him the free black top, Morrison supplied free golf. To the man who cut down the trees, Morrison let him take the wood. It's like the way fur traders did business 300 years ago.

To read more about bartering, see Morrison's story, "My Budget Goes Further, Thanks to Bartering," on page 36.

— L.A., Editor

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By the Numbers

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tangible. In the short term, a golf course “looks” the same, even after money has been spent to improve it.

Many financial decision makers want proof that their investments will pay for themselves and reap paybacks in five years or less. Sometimes that’s hard for a superintendent to prove, especially if he or she is asking for an extra

\$100,000 to buy a few new fairway mowers.

Of course, the financial picture is different from course to course, Slattery points out. Some private clubs don’t focus as much on the bottom line and are more concerned about the quality of the course. “They’re more apt to spend money without a short payback if they know they’ll get a better golf course,” Slattery says.

WHERE THE MONEY GOES

Spending for Products

Category	Mean Spending	Estimated Spending/ Past 12 months
Irrigation water	\$30,800	\$511.3 million
Fertilizer/plant nutrition	\$22,900	\$380.1 million
Fungicides	\$21,000	\$348.6 million
Turf seed	\$9,210	\$152.9 million
Herbicides	\$8,650	\$143.6 million
Irrigation supplies	\$7,520	\$124.8 million
Insecticides	\$7,480	\$124.1 million

Information is based on a Golfdom/Readex survey of 286 superintendents conducted in March-April 2003.

Golfdom

Keeping track

A budget is not easy to produce, but it doesn’t have to be as painful as a bad day on Wall Street.

Slattery’s fiscal year runs from Nov. 1 through Nov. 1. But he doesn’t begin gathering information for his budget on Oct. 15. Throughout the year, Slattery keeps monthly expense reports, tracks the current budget and documents other important information that could affect the upcoming budget.

“You don’t want to be scrambling to put numbers together when the time comes to do the budget,” Slattery says. “We start the budget process in September.”

Budgets are based on priorities. For instance, the line item that lists pesticides is more important than the item that lists tree programs. The superintendent, of course, must

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WHAT'S YOUR LINE?

A sample of a line-item report. Superintendents, of course, fill in the blanks.

	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Payroll												
Payroll taxes												
Employee benefits												
Equipment repair												
Irrigation repair												
Shop supplies												
Electric												
Heat												
Pesticides												
Fertilizer												
Topdressing												
Tree Program												
Outside contracts												
Education												

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Continued from page 34

manage *all* of the line items. Yes, sometimes he robs Peter to pay Paul.

"If one line item begins to get out of control for one reason or another, you have other areas to fall back on," Slattery says. "For instance, let's say you used a lot of fungicides this year. So you decide you're not going to prune the six trees on No. 2 as you planned because it's more important for you to keep your turf alive. So you delay the pruning until next year."

Pulaski creates a budget sheet for differ-

ent segments of the six courses. He figures how much will be spent on greens as far as fertilizers, fungicides, herbicides and insecticides. Then he figures the same expenses for fairways, tees and other areas. From those numbers he has an idea of how much money should be budgeted overall for the six courses.

There are pitfalls to avoid. Sprague advises superintendents to try to avoid coming too much over or under on any given line item. "Those are the red flags," he says, noting that the course's board of directors won't hes-

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My Budget Goes Further, Thanks to Bartering

By Dale Morrison

Think you're locked into a final budget for this year? Not if you practice what I like to call "horse trading." Yes, bartering is an almost forgotten art whose time has come again. It's in the nature of the age-old system of bartering that ensures the satisfaction of all parties involved in a transaction.

Many factors affect the amount of money in a superintendent's budget, such as rounds, weather, and the age and condition of maintenance equipment. There are other elements, such as lightning strikes and turf-damaging gophers, which are out of our control but also have an impact on our budgets.

In any case, there just never seems to be enough money.

However, I've discovered a way to enhance my budget. I can get what I need without spending any money. I just figure out who has what I need and if I have something they need. They may need equipment, supplies or a service, and I make them a "bartering offer." I barter for irrigation, equipment parts, materials and services from outside contractors.

For instance, at Trappers Turn GC in Wisconsin Dells, Wis., where I'm superintendent of a 27-hole upscale public course, I had a problem on hole No. 1 on the Canyon course. There are two land-cross bridges over a small stream that were in bad condition. My staff was forced to clean up the crossings after it rained.



Dale Morrison has traded free golf for use of equipment he doesn't own.

After heavy rains, the crew usually had to add gravel to fill in the washed-out holes. Of course, the best way to fix this problem would be to replace the crossings with bridges that would put an end to these repetitive maintenance cleanups. But fabricated steel bridges were totally out of the budget. Actually, there was nothing in the budget for bridges.

But bartering made new bridges possible. I had something a local golfer wanted — a place to golf. And he had something I needed — a portable saw mill. We came up with an agreement and on a handshake the deal was done. The golfer milled the timber that my staff harvested from our woods on the golf course. In return, he received free golf and use of the driving range. The support beams and the decking materials for the bridges are made from oak. I know that we could

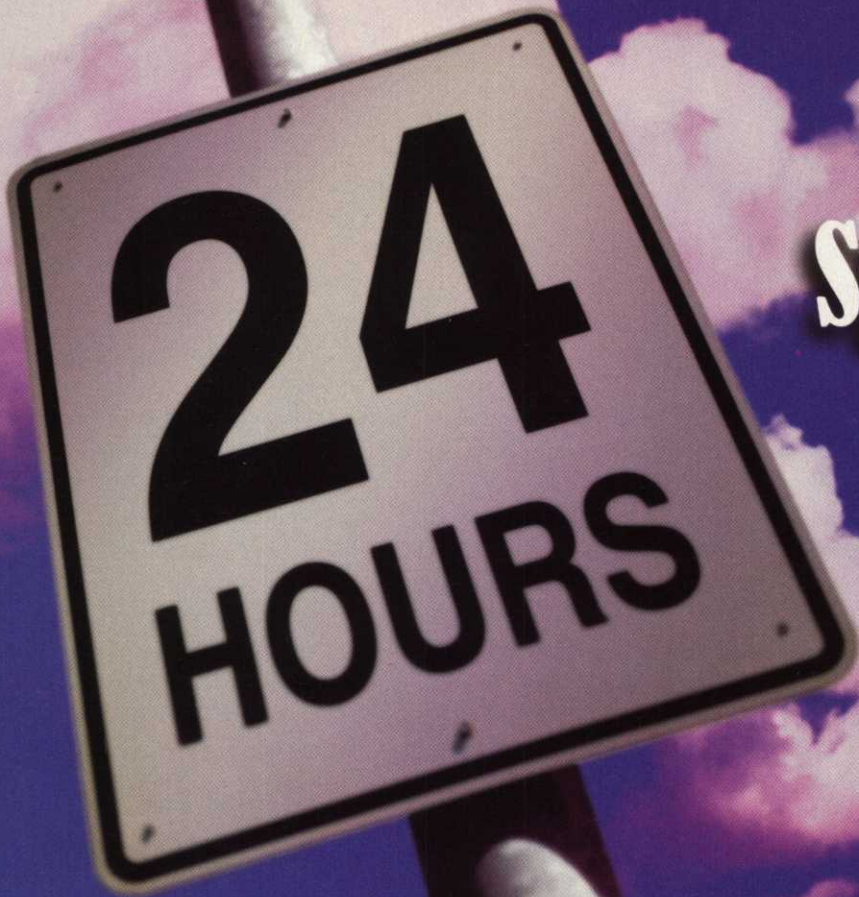
never have afforded the cost of oak lumber for the bridges. I saved Trappers Turn at least \$1,500 by bartering and actually built better bridges because of the natural resource of oak available.

Through bartering, I've met many needs that were unattainable because of budget constraints. I've traded free golf passes for the use of equipment that the golf course does not own, such as use of a hydro-mulcher, aerifier and air compressor. I've received reduced costs of materials — even some free materials. This includes an array of necessities from dirt to blacktop. This year alone I've saved the course more than \$9,200.

For me, bartering has proved to be the answer to making improvements on the golf course that otherwise would be out of the question.

Along with the bartering technique, I use yet another age-old process of saving budget dollars. Shop till they drop — their prices, that is. When purchasing anything from equipment to irrigation parts to chemicals to fertilizers, make sure to ask your salesperson if his company is running any "specials." Ask if he will match the prices of his company's competitors. Ninety percent of the companies will match or offer a lower price to get your business.

One last way to save on your purchase is to pay in a shorter time frame than the customary 30 days. Most companies offer a discount as incentive for you to pay early.



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By the Numbers



"If I could give one piece of advice to any assistant or superintendent coming up in this business, it's to put a contingency line in your budget."

ALLAN PULASKI
LANDINGS CLUB

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itate to ask him to explain why he is so far over or under on an item.

It's not as simple as it sounds to avoid such inconsistencies, especially with certain items such as chemicals, Sprague says. In Seattle, disease pressure varies from year to year which makes predicting a budget for chemicals difficult. The same goes for fuel.

"You can't always predict where the price of fuel goes," Sprague says. "This year I'm way over budget on fuel because I didn't foresee such a high rise in costs."

Many superintendents rely on the courses' previous histories of spending as a guide for their budgets. Sprague says a course's recent budget history tells a story and helps a superintendent be more on target with his current budget. "I look back at least three years when I do the budget," he says.

Pulaski says he studies budgets from the previous five years.

"We don't base anything off them, but we have them as a reference," he says. "What I mean by that is there are some line items you always budget \$8,000 for and if you look at history you might only spend \$2,000 a year. Well, then you don't need \$8,000 there, and history tells you that. You can't just rubber stamp the same budget year after year."

Keeping a history also lends credibility to the budgeting process. Then a superintendent can explain why he spent so much on fungicides in one year ("because the area had

30 inches of rain and disease pressure was high") compared to two years before ("because the area only had 3 inches of rain and disease pressure was low").

While history is integral to forming a budget, putting a contingency plan in a budget is important to take care of unexpected happenings.

Two years ago, Pulaski began placing a contingency line in his budget. *Webster's* defines "contingency" as "an event that may occur but is not probable." In golf course maintenance, that event could be a hurricane or a tornado and the subsequent damage from such storms. The bottom line is a contingency line in a budget will cover damage caused from a dire event, which means a superintendent can breathe easy.

"If I could give one piece of advice to any assistant or superintendent coming up in this business, it's to put a contingency line in your budget," Pulaski says.

Contingency does not equate to fat. And because the money is presented as "contingency" in a budget, it's an easy sell to the green committee chairman, a general manager or whoever signs off on a budget. Those decision makers realize that if a superintendent places a \$50,000 contingency in the budget and no severe setbacks occur, the \$50,000 is not spent. So they know the superintendent is not padding the budget.

"If you have a \$500,000 budget, there's no reason why you can't have a 10-percent contingency built in," Pulaski says. ■

When OT Is Not OK for the Budget

Rounds are down, revenue is slow and many superintendents can't afford to pay their crew members a lot of overtime. What to do?

"We try to stay out of overtime as much as possible," says Sam Sprague, superintendent of Rainier Golf & CC in Seattle. "It makes scheduling more complicated, but it keeps the budget more even keeled."

Courses that do pay overtime pay close attention to how much they're spending.

Allan Pulaski, director of golf course and grounds maintenance for the Landings Club, a six-golf course operation in Savannah, Ga., tracks overtime by keeping a man-hour chart, which lists all the job tasks for a week and how long it takes to perform them. He also compares his cost per acre to competitive courses' cost per acre to keep overtime expenses in check.

Rick Slattery, superintendent of Locust Hill CC in Rochester, N.Y., knows he might need his crew to work overtime

during the golfing season. To compensate for overtime paid during that period, Slattery might release his seasonal workers in mid-September rather than late September.

A superintendent might consider staggering the work schedule to control overtime. Slattery suggests working half the crew for eight hours Monday through Thursday and a half-day on Friday and Saturday or Sunday. The workers still get 40 hours, and the course still has workers on the weekend. — L.A., Editor

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Make the Connection

Long-term strategic plans are vital to superintendents' jobs, and they can streamline the budget process

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR., MANAGING EDITOR

Dan Dinelli, certified superintendent at North Shore CC in Glenview, Ill., convened a meeting with his board of directors, his grounds and greens Committee, and golf pro in 1995. The goal was to create a long-term strategic plan for the course to ensure its continued improvement.

He says his decision followed a family tradition — passed down from one generation of Dinelli superintendents to the next — based on a long-ago adage he learned at his grandfather's knee.

"My grandfather [who worked at Northmoor CC in the Chicago area from 1922-1971] told me there were two things a superintendent should never be without," Dinelli says. "One was a putting green nursery for testing new products and making repairs. The second was a long-range plan. I had the putting green already, so I decided to create a strategic plan to complete the circle."

Creating a strategic plan — and tying it to specific budget numbers — can be a daunting task for superintendents. With so many variables, from the weather to a tough economy to political infighting in the clubhouse, the idea of setting a schedule beyond the next board meeting may seem like folly.

But it doesn't have to be that way. For most superintendents who've

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