

bunkers are being reshaped and will be filled with some of the best sand on the market from the Chardon, Ohio-based Best Sand Corp., Caldwell says.

Even before the bunker renovation, which began in mid-August, Caldwell says maintenance costs for bunkers at the Minneapolis Golf Club have soared the past decade. Caldwell has had a \$13,000 line item in his golf course maintenance budget for bunker repair and renovation for several years.

"It's mostly for adding sand in the bunkers," he says, noting that he and his staff monitor closely the sand's depth.

So meticulous

Bunkers didn't receive nearly the attention 10 years ago as they do now. Their maintenance requirements have increased steadily since. Caldwell's staff has gone from raking bunkers with a machine to raking them by hand.

Bowsher, who's in his 20th year as a superintendent, says he never thought he would spend so much of his maintenance budget on bunkers, especially labor.

"When we prep them for tournaments, there's a lot of meticulous work that goes in to make them consistent," he says.

After the Scarlet course's restoration, Bowsher had to hire 10 additional employees on his staff because of the increased maintenance caused by renovation of the 65 bunkers, many of which were transformed with high faces to make them appear "dramatic."

"On a given day, we're sending eight to 10 guys out [to work on the bunkers]," Bowsher says.

It's not just the bunkers themselves that require more maintenance, Bowsher says. It's an entire bunker complex. The turf around steep bunker faces is often on steep slopes as well and must be hand-mowed and hand-trimmed. And then the grass clippings often must be blown out of the bunkers.

"It all adds up," Bowsher says.

It all adds up faster, though, for golf courses that can't afford to throw a lot of money at bunkers. Straka visited a facility recently that had been hit hard by poor economics, which was evident on the golf course maintenance crew that had shrunk from 14 members to six

members in a year. But that didn't mean that golfers' expectations for excellent conditions had shrunk, Straka points out.

"How are you supposed to maintain your bunkers the way you did last year with half of your staff?" he asks.

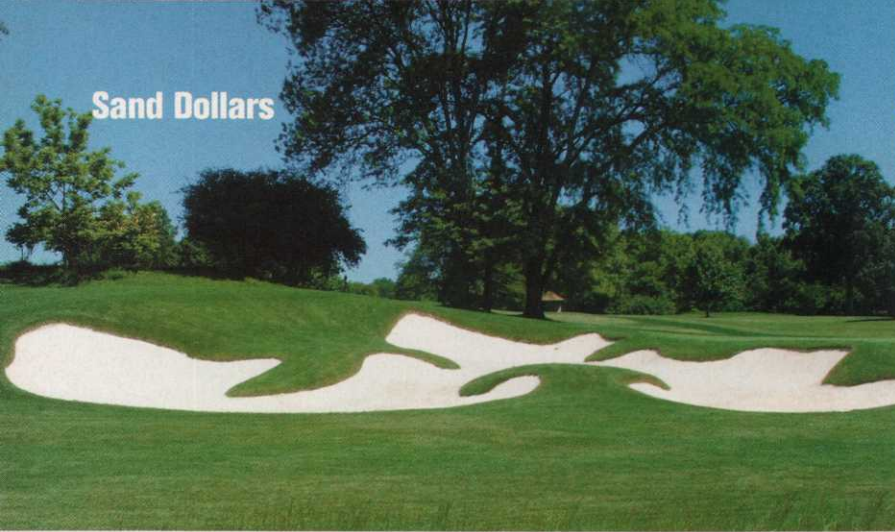
Not every superintendent can increase his or her budget for the betterment of

Continued on page 62

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Sand Dollars



At The Ohio State University, the Scarlet Course's bunkers received much attention as part of a \$4.2 million renovation.

Continued from page 61

bunkers. In his previous job as superintendent of Virginia Oaks Golf Club in Gainesville, Va., Bowsher says he struggled with upping the budget for bunker maintenance because he couldn't do it at the expense of other important tasks.

Caldwell says he has never had to rob Peter to pay Paul to spend more on bunker maintenance. He simply tells members "that it will cost this if you want this." He tells them money must be added to the budget to com-

plete the task, or something must be trimmed from the budget to create money. And it's always something not expendable that Caldwell tells them he'll have to cut.

"You tell them something they don't want to lose, and then they're more likely to raise the budget," he says. "That's the politics of the deal."

Spending more money on bunker maintenance upfront can help reduce it later. Straka says recent technology, such as bunker lining, has helped to combat increased bunker maintenance. While courses might spend more to build or renovate bunkers by implementing the technology, those courses are spending less in the long run to maintain the bunkers because of the benefits associated with the bunker lining.

Brian Flynn, the marketing manager for IV-GOLF, says it has taken several years for bunker renovation products, which are proven to control damage and erosion caused by washouts, to catch on with superintendents.

PHOTO BY: LARRY AYLRARD



But he's not surprised. "The golf industry is a slow-moving industry," says Flynn, whose company manufactures Sandtrapper, a bunker lining that features a polymer technology. "[The product] pays for itself in the long haul," he says.

Bowsher says bunkers linings were installed at the Scarlet course as part of its renovation. While there's still a lot of maintenance to be done in and around the bunkers, it doesn't include having to repair washed-out sand after a heavy rain thanks to the bunker liners.

Straka says problems arise when owners and/or architects decide to build artistic-looking bunkers with high faces of flashing sand, but they don't build them with bunker linings.

"They don't spend the money up-front," Straka says.

After a few heavy rains, the sand washes out, and the bunker's bottom begins to erode and contaminate the sand. Then the bunker looks like a melted chocolate sundae and golfers begin to gripe.

The future

Flynn understands why superintendents gripe about increased maintenance (and money) for bunkers.

"So what if there is soil or rocks in a bunker," Flynn says. "So what if the grass is growing over the edge of the bunker."

But Flynn says the trend among some owners and architects is to build dramatic golf courses, which include dramatic bunkers, and he has no problem with that.

"You're always going to have a variety," Flynn says. "That's why there's impressionist art, modern art and post-modern art."

So bunker maintenance will continue to take a chunk out of superintendents' maintenance budgets. But what's important now is to not let it become even more of a two-headed monster, Straka says. If costs are \$3 now for a square foot of bunker maintenance, they should not be allowed to rise to \$6 a square foot in five years.

"We need to keep it more at the status quo," Straka says. ■

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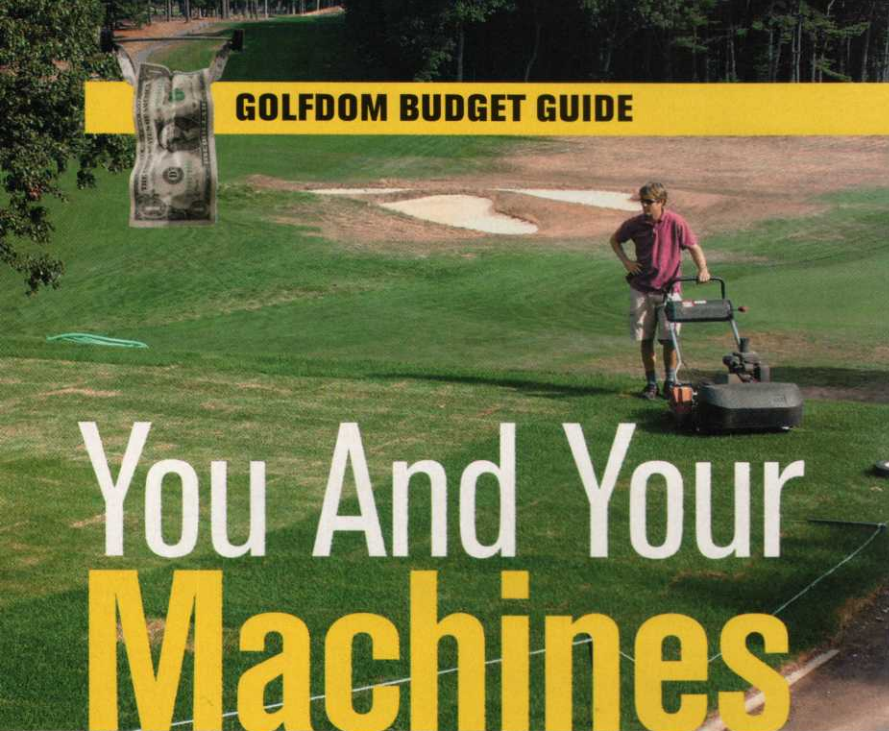
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You And Your Machines

It helps to consider the following items when tackling the “Equipment Maintenance Repairs” line item

BY RON FURLONG
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

When sitting down to tackle my budget every November, it seems like I can sail along fairly smoothly until I get to the line item, “Equipment Maintenance Repairs.”

This seemingly simple little line item usually sends my smooth ride bumping and veering off toward the ditch. Not only is it a large item (for me, the only line item with a bigger dollar figure is wages), but it tends to be more complex than anything else in the budget.

For me, it has always helped to consider the following items when tackling the “Equipment Maintenance Repairs” line item. I suggest you ask yourself the same questions:

- How many new pieces of equipment will you be adding to the fleet?
- Will all the pieces be brand new, or will you be adding on some used equipment?
- Considering the new purchases and leases, how many of the older units will be used as backups and how many will be sold or traded in? Basically, is your fleet growing in size because of the new items or staying virtually the same?
- How much was spent the previous year on this line item?

- Was the figure higher or lower than budgeted?
- Historically, do you budget high enough in this area?
- Have you created any significant no-mow zones on the golf course, cutting back on mowing hours?
- Are you reconsidering any different management practices that may influence equipment hours? Some examples: adding or subtracting a midsummer solid-tine aeration; increasing or decreasing greens topdressing throughout the season; increasing or decreasing plant growth regulators or fertility rates; changing tolerance levels on weeds; changing tolerance levels on “brown” rough conditions in mid-summer.

■ Will your crew size be larger or smaller than the year before?

■ Is your crew full of long-time quality employees who you trust not to abuse equipment? (Usually a high turnover equals more abuse of equipment.)

■ How much has the price of things increased versus last year? Oil, especially, is an item to keep an eye on.

■ Are you happy with your equipment technician?

■ Is he or she keeping up with preventive maintenance?

■ Does this person need additional training in any specific areas (like hydraulics or grinding)?

■ Are you and your assistants keeping the crew alert to maintain the equipment? Is everyone checking oil daily and greasing the zerkers that need to be greased?

Of course, not everything can be anticipated (a worker running a fairway mower out of oil, for example, or a golf car ending up embedded in the base of a cedar tree), but going through this checklist before deciding on a monthly figure is bound to make your numbers more accurate.

It just might help make the worst line item in your maintenance budget a little less of a headache. ■

Furlong, superintendent of Avalon Golf Club in Burlington, Wash., can be reached at rfurlong5@gmail.com.

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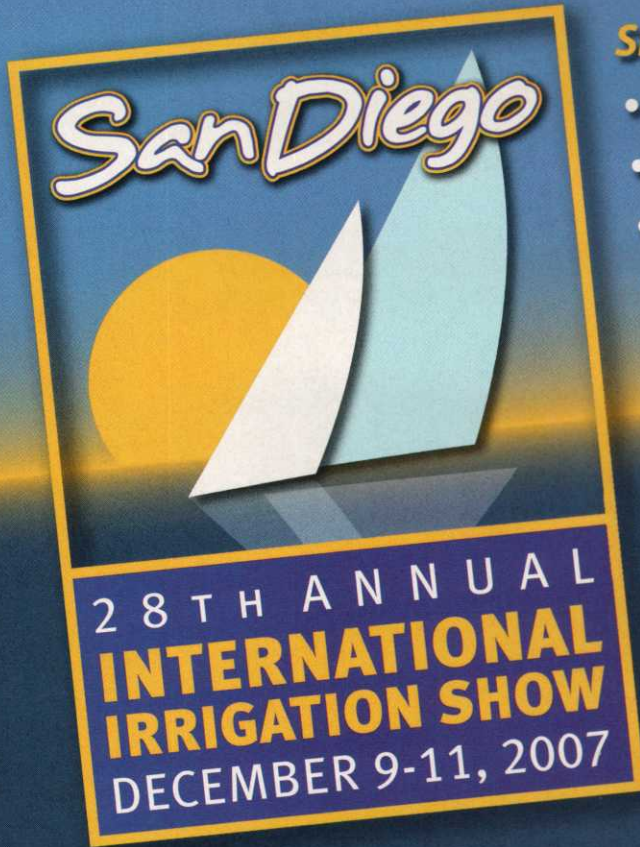
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