

# Greens Chairman Meeting Highlights

Canterbury CC green chairman, Mr. George Dawson, addressed the Northern Ohio GCSAA at the annual green chairman meeting at Youngstown CC giving his views on a green chairman's responsibilities as it relates to the superintendent.

## Gentlemen:

It is with some trepidation that I address you. You superintendents in the audience have spent a lifetime dealing with greens chairmen--and I have only 3 years trying to give Burdick a little couth. Therefore, I am going to speak randomly about several items that are important to me.

Within certain given limitations wherever you find a well-conditioned golf course you're going to find a good golf course superintendent. But that does not mean that you're going to find good greens chairman. So part of these remarks should cover the care and feeding of greens chairmen.

I doubt if many of you realize that Bill Burdick has a PhD in psychology. When I first became greens chairman, Bill was nervous and uptight about getting a tired old man of my years and demeanor in a position where I could perhaps make decisions. He got quite ill... and as a result of the illness he became deaf. Whenever I asked him to modify a green or change a trap or even mow the rough lower, he couldn't hear me. Whenever I talked to him about pension benefits, bonuses, salary increases, or nymphomaniacs, his hearing improved remarkably. It is incredibly important

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for greens superintendents to turn a deaf ear to the suggestions of transient greens chairmen whose only knowledge of agronomy is what they gathered from a Thoreau novel in their prepublish period.

Another point that I would make is that greens superintendents cannot win with everyone, although after watching your performance last month at the Brown Derby Motel, you certainly have a better batting average with barmaids than most. . . You were told in agronomy school that working in a country club atmosphere is going to be at best difficult and at worst impossible. So when you hire on to a club where all members have a vote, you are in deep.... You know that all clubs have at least one member who doesn't like the job you're doing or the height of the rough or something, and he is going to constantly agitate to the president or the greens chairman about having you fired or at least change your habits. When you get a new chairman it is important for you to communicate with him as to who these people are so that he can be on guard as soon as he takes on the assignment. At the risk of being sacrilegious, if Christ had been a greens superintendent, four of his disciples would have written to God complaining about his qualifications. Therefore, the greens chairman's job is primarily one of being a foil or buffer for you. I frankly think that is his most important job.

In a magazine called Golfdom, I was quoted as saying that somehow a greens chairman has to be precluded from building a monument to his tenure. The greens superintendent's job is to forestall that monument unless it has some tremendous value. In that same article in Golfdom magazine a year or so ago, Peter Miller said: "It's an advantage to not have a chairman. I think I can better plan the direction the course is taking. Long-range plans can be developed". I don't mean this to be a debate between Peter and me,

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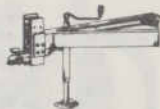
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Greens Chairman Meeting Highlights continued...

but boards of directors of private clubs take their responsibilities very seriously, I agree with Peter that their disinclination to make long-range plans works as a detriment to the operation of the golf course. However, there is no way that a board of directors is going to turn \$100,000 to \$300,000 over to a greens superintendent without having to be responsible for the monies expended on behalf of the golf course. Whether or not the greens chairman is competent or capable of monitoring these monies, the conscience of the rest of the board of directors is relieved of apprehension about the use of the monies. Thus I don't think that there will be a near-term change at most clubs about the reporting structure of greens superintendent to greens chairman to board. Club presidents change almost every year. Each board is reluctant to plan past their tenure and few are willing to commit funds from the coffers of future boards.

I had hoped to entitle this speech, "The Future of Greens Chairmen and Greens Superintendents". Unfortunately my crystal ball is no better than anyone else's. However, as a personal thought, if

golf courses as we know them today are to continue, costs must be cut astronomically. Let me quote a few numbers: In 1967 the dues in the clubs on the east side of Cleveland were about \$55.00 per month. Today they are \$125.00 a month. For the same period of time, the buying power of the dollar has declined 48 percent. Thus you can see in real terms that clubs have increased their relative costs over 25 percent faster than inflation. There are lots of ways to reduce overhead. From my point of view the first place to start would be in the kitchen during the winter months but I will not get into that in any great detail because that is outside our area of influence.

However, a general manager of a club, can and should integrate long-range plans for food service with house and course maintenance. Those of you who are not General Manager or aspire thereto will want to look at all three factors projected ahead for ten years.

A second aspect for cost-cutting consideration is the golf course maintenance and capital equipment. Much of your equipment is maximized daily or weekly at any golf club but some of it could be used on two, three, or four courses. Similarly, as the state of the art increases, compensation to qualified greens superintendents has to increase commensurately. It may be that clubs will not be able to afford one. It may be that a greens superintendent as we know him today will be gone.

With all the chemicals, licensing, and OSHA restrictions, etc., the superintendent may have to service two or three clubs in order: One, to enjoy the income which his degree of skill deserves, and two, make it possible for golfing to continue among people who are not filthy rich. This may, as Peter Miller discussed briefly last month, require outside services, independent contractors.

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It may also require that golf courses not be kept as immaculate as they are today. Perhaps we will return to the golf links concept where certain aspects of the golf course were left wild, untended, as in Scotland. Golf courses are now competitive. Each vies with each other to have every blade of grass at uniform height, every tree trimmed, and every tee exactly horizontal in all directions. It may be necessary for people to relinquish some of that uniformity and esthetics for practical reasons. We may all end up with triplexed mowed greens, narrower fairways, shorter courses. I really don't think many clubs can stand the increase in costs based on the current curves.

With further incursions by IRS into corporate expense accounts, country clubs will have to rely on after-tax dollars. I tried to estimate the actual number of members a Canterbury that are being financed completely or in part by expense accounts. I couldn't do it reliably. But my guess is that over half of the resident members expense a high percentage of their cost. Since greens superintendents form the basic continuity of clubs--it might be adventgeous for them to lead in the investigation of Contract Maintenance. Obviously if a superintendent contracts for 2 or 3 or 4 courses, there will be fewer jobs. And this is not the GCSAA is committed to. It will take a lot of courage to render yourselves out of a job. It will take courage to become independent contractors and give up the seniority and fringe benefits that clubs are now sponsoring. But I think the problem is real!

Let's come back to realities, the maintenance of the golf course requires only about 15 to 25 percent of the cash flow of the country club. But the golf course is the basic reason for the club. Therefore, if the superintendents and chairmen can be in the vanguard of cutting costs and being more efficient the clubs will survive.

The GCSAA has been a leader in talking about potential problems--last month's discussion of the place of Unions was very illuminating. Bill Rice's remarks were germane. Peter Miller's confessions were super. You didn't drive all the way to this delightful club to have some half-drunk, short haired greens chairman tell you that you picked the wrong career. Hopefully I am not saying that! What I am trying to say is that through GCSAA you have a group of young, well educated professional people. That you are the only group that has a continuous relationship with golf courses. That the path for the future of these golf courses lies largely in your hands.

Waiting for club presidents and chairmen to anticipate the future is wrong. They are only interested in living this year out because there will be another president to argue about the dues structure next year. Golf course costs are insidious. Those of you who represent golf courses instead of country clubs know how efficient you can be right now. What I am asking is that you look ahead ten years and anticipate the changes.

These remarks are mine. They do not reflect the thinking of Bill Burdick, the Board, members of Canterbury, or my wife.

# Creed

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