The following article was originally delivered before the Massachusettes Turfgrass Conference at the University of Massachusettes by Mr. Paul Voykin. Mr. Voykin is Golf Course Superintendent at Briarwood Country Club in Deerfield, Illinois. In addition to his innovative ideas in turfgrass management, Mr. Voykin is responsible for numerous articles appearing in national and local publications. Additionally, Mr. Voykin is the author of a book entitled ASK THE LAWN EXPERT. **He has also played an active part in the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.**

Shortcuts in Management

Shortcuts in management is really preventive management. In other words, you must have preventive management in order to have shortcuts. (We will call that Voykin's Theory of Total Collapse.)

There is an adage that old-timers use and I think it fits all the jobs and shortcuts that are poorly worked out and hastily done. It goes something like this. "There was never time nor money to do the job properly the first time, but lots of time and money to do it right the second time around."

A shortcut is justified only if it saves time and money, and if it produces a better golf course for your members. A good and efficient shortcut really means intelligent planning and follow-through. That will be my objective, and I'll try to cover all situations, starting with the greens.

GREENS

On open bare elevated greens with Poa annua infestation in the center we formerly used 4-mil plastic sheet cover to green up the brown centers. It worked very well, except that it took a lot of time. Now we use Stayz-Green dye, instead. Our greens are Washington bent and, as soon as the autumn temperatures drop below 50 degrees the greens turn purple-black and all growth ceases. So when we spray greens for snow mold, usually in the middle of November, I throw one gallon of dye in to the 200-gallon spray tank mixture for snow mold. The 200 gallons cover approximately five greens. (My greens are small.)

This application with green dye does several things. One, it greens up the drab purple-black color of the greens for our ardent late-autumn golfers. The members like the idea because it gives them a green target to shoot at, just like in summer. But something else happens-- a thermal factor occurs. The dyed grass absorbs heat, which results in some minute growth over the winter, a desirable extra nap that I like to have for its protection just in case no snow cover occurs in January and February. Since I have started using it, the Poa on the open and bare elevated greens hasn't dessicated. It's really an interesting phenomenon. Also, when I cut my greens for the first time in early spring the color is the most beautiful I have ever seen, no matter how severe the winter has been.

We have early ladies' play at Briarwood and not just on Tuesday morning, but every day, except for weekends when they play in the afternoon. Our male golfers have complained to me for years about spike marks and the dragging of feet by some of the women around the cup area. Of course, some of the men can be blamed. It's not always the woman who are the culprits. But I could see their point. Nobody likes to come out after lunch by himself or with guests and find the greens all beat up. I solved this problem by mowing over the cup area and by making 2 or 3 passes on each side right after lunch and just before the male golfers stepped out on the course.

continued on next page

This strategy met with great approval by our men golfers, especially the real low handicappers. For them, the fresh putting surface was much smoother, truer, and faster. But let's face it. I was wasting two men to cut greens, or portions of them, once in the morning and once again in the afternoon.

There had to be an easier way. There had to be a shortcut. And really, with just 4 swipes over each green in the afternoon, the area away from the cup was sometimes shaggy because it was longer than the mowed area. So I quit cutting altogether in the mornings. I reduced my maintenance by mowing only in the afternoon, or by starting just before noon when the ladies were beginning to get off the course or were on the last few holes of each nine.

This brought even more compliments from the men, who remarked on how consistent the greens were this year. They asked what I did. Did I lower the greens mowers? Or what? The men were putting so smoothly -- just like on Saturday and Sunday mornings. Frankly, the ladies never noticed the greens not being cut. They are more worried about the watering in mornings. We would whip the dew off the first three or four quickly in the morning and that was it. I had observed that between the afternoon cutting and the one next morning there wasn't that much growth, because in the afternoon mowing the turf grass on the greens is dry and not heavy with dew and perhaps moisture from the previous night's irrigation. The grass is more upright and the mowers give the greens a much closer shave, which makes some of the male golfers think that I lowered the greens mowers (which I have always kept at a tight 3/16 of an inch).

There are other advantages to mowing in the afternoon, from a greens keeping point of view. One is appearance: since the clippings aren't as wet as when mowing in the morning, they are easily dispersed when you throw them into the rough. The result is very good: no more messy piles and unsightly clumps all over the place. Another advantage is that during humid and hot nights the greens in the afternoon are less puffy than in the morning, and there is no scalping unless you're using a lot of nitrogen. I am also convinced that afternoon mowing reduces thatch and grain, because dry suface allows the mowers to get a better bite. This results in less disease, also, not only because of reduced thatch but because the possibility is eliminated of spreading the disease with the mowing equipment early in the morning when the grass is wet.

CHANGING CUPS

We all change cups before golfers get out, but sometimes on Wednesdays, when heavy play is expected in the afternoon, I will change cups just before noon or right after the women finish playing. This

continued on next page . . .

gives the men a brand-new cup while the ladies are playing the old cup that was changed for them on Tuesday and which most of them like to see in the same place on Wednesday. Besides, the cups are not nearly as beat up by the men as they are by the women. This is a fact, because of high handicap the women take more putts than men do. But even if it wasn't true, remember that the surface is firmer in the afternoon, thus handling abuse better. Overnight there is some recuperation.

AERIFYING

What can you say about aerifying greens that hasn't already been said? Well, I have something to state, even though I am sure some of you here won't agree with me. It's been my observation that aerifying greens in the fall is the best possible time to carry out this maintenance procedure. It is a shortcut to better maintenance for the following good reason.

No matter what great and modern aerifying equipment you are using, your equipment will leave wheel marks in the spring when the surfact is softer. This condition lasts for weeks, however minute and invisible it might be, and this is detrimental to good putting on swift, low-mowed greens. But in the fall, when the soil is much firmer, there is less depression abuse by the equipment. And even if there was, it's disappeared by the time spring play begins.

The popular belief of some, that Poa annua comes up in the holes if you aerify in the fall, is a lot of hogwash as far as I am concerned. If your other cultural practices, such as fertilizing, watering, top dressing, seeding, and spraying are done with common sense, you won't get more Poa infestation in the fall than you would in the spring or summer.

FERTILIZING

Now what about fertilizing? I think one of the worst things that we do sometimes in our greenkeeping profession is to overfertilize our turf, especially when it comes to greens. I believe the time has come to shut our ears to some of the turf scientists who still advocate high nitrogen levels to maintain good turf.

The shortest cut I know, to reduce maintenance on greens and to provide terrific putting for your golfers (and fewer headaches for yourself), is to reduce your application of fertilizer on greens. I fertilize twice, once in May and once in early fall, using only nitrogen and potash and absolutely no phosphorus -- which I think is just asking for Poa annua problems. In between, I use very small amounts of a soluble slow-release fertilizer. Rather than go out and make separate applications, I shortcut this technical cultural maintenance program by mixing a small amount of soluble fertilizer in the tank with my disease-control fungicide tank mix. This way, I don't lost valuable time and labor. The fertilizer product that I use is compatible with almost everything, because I use so little of it.

TEES

I know of one superintendent who had very small tees on his public golf course. He conscientiously moved them at least three times a day. This man ran a busy golf course with fifty thousand rounds per season. His boss finally budgeted some money and allowed the superintendent to expand all the tees, tripling their size. The young superintendent was now able to spread the tee traffic over much more turf area, thus reducing the tremendous waste of time reseeding the only tiny tees every week and moving the markers three times a day. Happily, he was also providing the golfers with better teeing conditions, as well as with a more challenging golf course.

continued on next page

His mowing now was done with a new triplex unit, thus saving time. His fertilizing was done quickly with the old fairway spreader going over the large tees in a fraction of the time it took before. Most of all, he was making better use of his water. Now he was irrigating his large tee areas, rather than mostly rough and but a small portion of the tee areas. The construction of the larger tees opened up the dense forest area that had been shadowing the previous tees, thus providing better air, water, and light -- a ventilation providing better photosynthesis and a reduction of turf disease. This story is an example of improvement that took lots of money, time and work, but one which provided a very satisfactory shortcut in maintenance in the end.

FAIRWAYS

Like almost everyone here, I too, have a problem with Poa annua. Of all the good shortcuts in maintenance at Briarwood, none has been more effective than the use of perennial rye grass to improve our fairways. I tried Kentucky bluegrass, bent grass, and Poa trivialis without much success until I tried drill seeding Manhattan perennial rye grass into our predominantly Poa annua fairways.

It has been my observation that the taproot system of perennial rye grass penetrates right through any thatch, and then survives, best of all grasses, any intrusion of Poa. With other turf grasses the seedlings come up, then limply wilt out and disappear in the hot weather. In the fall the strong surge of Poa annua usually wipes out any surviving grass. Not so with Manhattan. It persists through hell and high water. Manhattan's other plusses are that it comes up fast, it doesn't like a lot of fertilizer or water, and, of course, it's less expensive than other turf grasses. All these, to me, are shortcuts to maintenance for the superintendent, with fewer headaches for him.

TRAPS

I have semiautomatic pop-up irrigation heads around my greens. But what makes our sprinkling heads for greens different from most golf courses is that ours don't water the traps surrounding the greens. We use part-circle watering only near the green traps; thus we don't flood the traps during irrigation. It still amazes me that part circles have been in existence since the 1920s -- and used successfully by homeowners to water their lawns -- and yet every automatic system I have ever seen in our area of the Midwest still continues to water traps when the greens are irrigated. Definitely, the greatest shortcut in trap maintenance at Briarwood was the installation about ten years ago of part-circle heads next to green traps.

WIND AND SAND

Most golf courses in our area haul sand in the winter with ten-ton or semi-trucks. It's done over the frozen ground, usually in January, when they refill traps, which is usually every two or three years. We

stopped doing that at Briarwood last year. Instead, we refilled the traps in November -- for these shortcut reasons. We learned that much of the sand that is hauled in winter and piled high in the traps for spring spreading gets blown out of the traps by either cold winter or by early spring winds before the crew gets to level them. Ten to twenty percent of the sand is lost, depending on the trap locations.

Another reason to spread sand in the spring is that there are just too many problems -- and frustrations -- with other important spring jobs that need to be done before the surge of golfers during the first warm week. Such as, perhaps, broken irrigation pipes, cleaning all sticks and branches from the whole course, and contention with weather idiosyncrasies. As well as labor crews who don't show up on time.

Another drawback with winter sand hauling and spring spreading is that golfers in the spring tend to get fried-egg lies that are buried in the fresh new sand. However, new sand that is spread way back in November will settle nicely by spring, and fewer golf balls are imbedded. So last fall I asked two of my amigos, who usually leave at the end of October, to stay the next month and spread out and level the sand, before winter set in. They spread -- and I got sand and extra labor money in my new budget to keep them until the job was finished. I consider this an important shortcut in maintenance -- and in "wasted" sand.

RAKES

There seems to be a controversy with the U.S.G.A. and with some of the golf pros in the Midwest in regard to whether the trap rakes should stay in or out of the sand traps. The U.S.G.A., I believe, recommends that the trap rakes be left beside the trap, all the way out. I know of many pros and superintendents who think that the rakes should be inside the trap -- all the way. in. I like to keep half in and half our. However, we sometimes use both recommendations to suit our purposes. Let me tell you the reasons.

When we power rake the traps we take out any rakes inside the traps and leave them, neatly, outside the sand traps. The shortcut in maintenance here is that the busy sand trap operator on his machine needn't waste time putting back the rakes after he finished power raking the traps. However, in those times when we use our triplex mowers around the sand traps, we place the rakes, which are out of the traps and in the way, back into the sand traps.

The shortcut in maintenance here is that the operator doesn't waste time taking the rakes out of the traps and laying, them out near the edge of the trap the way he found them, but instead, quickly, moves on to the next trap.

Now, when I send out some of my crew to hand rake the sand trap banks, I ask them to place the trap rakes half in and half out -- the way I like it.

Let me finish with this statement on traps. We still have too many golf architects who love to put in many and beautifully steeped traps that they never will have to rake. If the architects had shovels in their hands when they designed them, they wouldn't have made them so difficult to maintain. We don't have the labor to keep shoveling sand by hand on precipitous traps after every rain or after the night irrigation. At Briarwood, we reduced our maintenance by sodding the steepest sections of traps to keep the sand from constantly eroding.

ROUGH

One of the best ways I know to cut down maintenance is to reduce the rough mowing and grooming in out-of-the-way golf course areas. These areas are around lakes and creek banks, in back of traps, in groves of trees, and in the mulching of every leaf that falls in autumn. Some of these areas never catch a golf shot, even a wild one.

I am sure all of you are acquainted with my views on overgrooming. I think we do too damn much of it. The desire to improve and to excel in the maintenance of our golf courses has been carried to a ridiculous and costly extreme. My contention is that if

we did less grooming, the country clubs could save money and have a more challenging golf course and with fewer headaches.

Let's all of us here set aside next season some of the golf course land that doesn't come into play. Let's return it to the birds, rabbit , bees, and butterflies. Let's leave a little token preservation for Mother Nature's creatures, and then, as we walk through the long grass, let's stop and bend down to smell the wild flowers.

TREES

One of the most time-consuming jobs on a golf course is mowing with hand rotary mowers around all trees that come into play. I have tried growth retardants without much success. So here is what I do now to shortcut this time-consuming and tedious job.

We no longer mow around trees every time the grass gets three or four inches high. We wait (despite some complaints) until it's almost a foot high before we do any mowing with rotary mowers. Se set these as low as possible. We then rev up the engines and scalp the long grass to the very bottom -- we really knock it down. The shock to the grass, especially if the weather is ideally hot, is so devastating that it keeps the grass down for many weeks. I wish it would be hot and dry for months instead of weeks; but alas, like unwanted grass coming up through our sidewalks when we can't get it to grow on the fairways, the grass around the trees never stays permanently damaged, but slowly comes back again.

By using our method, your mowing around the trees is reduced considerably. We also have noticed that when grass does come up again it is remarkably sparse and never as thick as before. Cutting grass around every tree whenever the grass grows a few inches higher than the rough does nothing but encourage and stimulate an even more vigorous growth. However, I must add that keeping the grass down on the opening hole and the tenth hole is a good idea. This enables the players to get away fast without having to lose time looking for lost balls in shaggy grass around trees on these opening holes.

continued on next page . . .

MACHINERY

This is where it usually starts. Yes, TROUBLE!! If your equipment isn't working, you aren't going to be able to have many shortcuts in maintenance. You need the right tools and the right equipment, all in top working condition, to do the job properly.

So machinery up-keep is very important. You all know that. We also know that the best way to make sure that equipment is working properly is to check each one carefully a day or two or a week before using it. Expecting everything to start smoothly on the very day you are going to use it without first making sure it is ready is bad planning. Plan ahead and go over the equipment with the mechanic and also with the man who is going to operate it. If this, for some reason, is impossible to do, then have your mechanic come earlier in the morning to get everything ready for the job ahead.

I have a mechanic who checks out the machinery as soon as the operator comes in off the golf course. After checking it, he puts it away. But I also insist on something else. If there is something even slightly wrong, I ask the operator when he comes in to let the mechanic know about it immediately before it becomes a compound problem. Even the best mechanics, when they are busy (and because the are human), sometimes miss mechanical problems. I also explain carefully to all the operators that if anything goes wrong with their equipment to come in immediately and let the mechanic know the problem, or to call in from one of the four telephones we have placed strategically out on the golf course. I don't want them to persist in mowing or spraying or whatever with equipment that is being hindered by even a small mechanical problem. This will avoid ruining some delicate area with dull mowing blades, leaks, or other malfunction.

Sometimes new operators do that because they don't wish to waste time, are scared to come in, don't know better, or persist in finishing the job come hell or high water. No operator should ever be sent out unless he is thoroughly familiar with the machine, or has had explained to him a few of the major things that suddenly might go wrong with the equipment he is using. The operator also must be assured, if you are a good boss, that he won't be ridiculed or scolded because he does come in, or if he calls you for help when there is really nothing wrong but in his opinion there was a question and a doubt. Pat him on the back instead.

I have prevented many major equipment breakdowns and saved lots of money for the club by this one simple rule for the crew: Stop if you think something doesn't sound or look right, and then call me or the mechanic right away. This can be a real shortcut in maintenance, believe me. I do one other thing -- shortcut -- to safeguard our equipment and to make sure the golf course jobs are done properly. Immediately after the equipment goes out in the morning the mechanic takes his tools and goes out to personally check and see if his equipment is running smoothly. He does that again in the afternoon.

CREW

Unless you have a well-trained crew that is knowledgeable about the game of golf, your efforts to run a classy golf course are going to be diminished. One thing I do at Briarwood, and which has been a tremendous shortcut in crew training, is to take them to the Western Open every year in June. And then in the fall, at Briarwood, we have a Mexican Open golf tournament. The Mexican Open is not only a farewell fiesta to some of my wonderful greenskeepers, who go back to Texas for the winter, but also an opportunity for them to learn more about golf by playing in a tournament held especially for them. This has been a great shortcut for me for better labor production, because in knowing the game of golf the crew members realize the reasons for the many things we must do to keep the golf course in topnotch condition for our members. They are now far more enthusiastic and attentive in their work, and prouder of their status on the golf course no matter how menial the job might be. They are "professionals." Allowing them to play golf has been an outstanding benefit to our members, and a great employee-employer relationship for me. They plan on Mondays after work, at which time we allow crew members with five years seniority or more to use carts. Crew members who stay and and live on the grounds are allowed to play a few holes ever evening when the members are off the holes near my shop.

But let's face it. There has to be some other incentive besides letting them play golf to having a well-trained and disciplined crew. **I am talking about money.** We try to keep up, not only with other outstanding golf courses, as far as wages go, but also with allied professions such as nurseries, landscapers, lawn and garden maintenance companies, and so on. I try to give my workers a cost-of-living bonus every year in the labor budget.

continued on next page

Our members are very aware of my excellent golf course crew and realize their value, and the long-standing loyalty of the men, and this also helps me put my labor budget across.

SOD FOR GREENS

I have a beef with some sod growers, and I think it's legitimate. The sod growers misrepresent their so-called "sod for greens" because in our area it is never even close to the height we would like it to be for transplanting onto the greens. Maybe for fairways, but for greens, never. It sometimes is even too high for the tees. What they call green sod is usually delivered 3/8 to 1/2 inch high from the nursery, and it takes a whole season or more to get it down to the putting green height we maintain on the established greens.

Evidently the growers have reasons for keeping it that high. But if that's the case, then the sod nurseries should not call it sod for greens, and definitely should not list it for sale unless it's closer to the height at which most of us mow our greens.

The problem with high new green sod is that when you bring it down too soon after transplanting, you either lose it or it is scalped to such a degree that Poa annua or disease takes over the shocked and weakened areas. The shortcut to sod for greens is by taking the long way around, which is to grow a sod nusery for greens yourself, and I am sure most of you here are doing just that. But the nursery has to be large enough and mowed low enough that if you suddenly have to resod one of your greens, the sod from your nursery can be swiftly transplanted and be in play within a month or less, with putting as smooth as the rest of your greens.

GREEN CHAIRMEN AND BOARD MEMBERS

I want to say that it's wonderful to have all the young men from colleges, to have them come into our great profession. But I seriously believe that we have an overproduction of young talent. Too many young men are underqualified and they are going for low, low salaries, undercutting the more qualified people who should be getting the top jobs in our profession.

The final shortcut that I wish to mention is for the ears of green chairmen and board members. The supreme shortcut to your golf course problems is a qualified and experienced golf course superintendent. And they, like a good golf professional and a good club manger, don't come cheap. Sadly and incredibly, some clubs look only at how cheaply they can get a superintendent and not how good he is.

To all the young men sitting in the audience, let me lay it on you straight. All your degrees and diplomas, all your microscopes and thermometers won't be worth much to you, to our great profession, and to the clubs you seek to work for unless you first get some practical experience from a qualified superintendent. Books, equipment, and all the dgrees in the world are not going to help if you cannot show a man how to use a rake and shovel properly -- and learn how to work with the Almighty.