



A Tough Sell

By Monroe S. Miller

The question most dreaded by the majority of colleagues I know is "what do you do in the winter?"

Neighbors ask it. Family members ask it. Friends do, too.

Unfortunately, golfers ask it. So do club members.

I gave up trying to explain our winter work years ago. Nowadays, I answer with impertinent and cute answers like, "I spend three months in Florida" or, "we play euchre and hearts all winter."

But the fact that golfers wonder what we do all winter makes it difficult to convince them of the need for a capable, well-trained and well-paid, full-time staff.

In my own instance, I've found the need for that full-time staff increasing significantly in recent years. It seems that in the past three years we haven't moved inside until mid-December.

Our routine work ends with topdressing during Thanksgiving week. The days following turkey day are spent with tree trimming, bunker work, small construction projects and other similar jobs.

Frequently, we decide to begin our shop work when the fear of not finishing it takes us over. The result of that is that a lot of good projects aren't done when they best could be — in the absence of golf players. What an ideal time to have a larger full-time staff.

My own efforts to increase both the numbers of full-time staff and their quality have been reasonably successful. But it has taken a long time. It seems like only yesterday when Vince and I worked shoulder to shoulder all by ourselves all winter.

The tough sell has been made a little easier by acknowledgment of the sheer numbers of machines now required to maintain a golf course: seven triplex mowers and a fiveplex for fairway cutting; a dozen walking mowers for greens and tees, plus three triplexes for early and late season duty; eight utility vehicles and four trucksters; rotaries, rough mowers, trim mowers, bunker rakes, etc. etc. The list is impressive and includes eight aerifiers as

well as four tractors. And a load of tee and green equipment.

Then there are the golf course superintendents who run the club's golf car fleet. More work. Add in the snow plowing some are responsible for and you begin to worry already how it will all get done.

Additionally, many of us are forced into winter vacations with our families, for obvious reasons. Then consider the fact that most of our major educational conferences are held in the winter months.

All the questions about "winter staff" are especially frustrating because they are the ones charged with keeping the course in playing condition during the spring and autumn months when student employees aren't available. There never is any question about the importance of that mission. It seems obvious that it is sensible to keep them intact for the entire year; it saves paying costly unemployment compensation and receiving nothing in return. It also satisfies the need competent people have to work all year.

This all makes you wonder how any official with any authority in any golf course operation could question the numbers of our full-time employees.

It also made me wonder just how many people did staff Wisconsin's golf courses on a full-time basis. So I posed the following question to 45 members of the WGCSA at either the August or the September meeting: "NOT including yourself, how many full-time year 'round employees do you have?"

Here are the results:

1. The average number of employees for each of the 45 golf courses was 3.18.

2. Since two of the courses are 36 hole facilities, I ran the average with them counted as four 18 hole courses. The average was lowered to 3.04, an insignificant change. However, one of these 36 hole courses was a muni with access to a central shop where a lot of the equipment is repaired and refurbished.

3. One of the respondents operated a nine hole golf course. Compensating

for this changed the initial average by 0.03, another negligible change.

4. The specifics of the data went like this:

- NO full time employees (gcs only) . 4
- One full-time employee 8
- Two full-time employees 8
- Three full-time employees 6
- Four full-time employees 3
- Five full-time employees 10
- Six full-time employees 4
- Seven full-time employees 1
- Eight full-time employees 1

By the way, I work with Dave, Pat, Brian, Val and Joel during the winter months (as well as spring, summer and fall). And we all agree that we could do so much more with just one more . . .

4

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+

4

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