



## The Late Season Superintendent

By Monroe S. Miller

Anyone who lives in New England or who travels there as often as I have has heard this saying: "You can always tell a Harvard man, but you can't tell him much." I've heard the same thing said about Norwegians and politicians.

By this time in the golf season, the same could be said about a golf course superintendent. You won't be able to tell him much; he isn't listening anymore.

By this time in the golf season, when we are so close to the end, he's heard everything at least a hundred times. His intensity level has dropped noticeably; his ambition is waning. He is, simply put, exhausted, both physically and mentally.

Despite the beautiful autumn season, he glances at his watch frequently. He is not looking for the minute or the hour, but rather the date. "Two weeks until Thanksgiving," he says with a sigh. "It will soon be over."

Someone riding by a Wisconsin golf course this time of year might remark on what a picturesque scene it makes; the setting can be lovely. On a day when the sky is unclouded, the misty light of late fall makes the leaves remaining on the trees seem as colorful as they were two weeks previous. Such a spectator would probably enjoy the cheery sound of the mowers and the tractors at all the different quarters of the golf course. The sight of the players in their fall garb adds to the scenery.

But to be a tourist and to be a toiler in a scene like this are two very different things late in the golf season.

The late season superintendent is working harder now than he was during the height of the golf season. The crew has usually shrunk by two-thirds, leaving him little choice but to assume the hat(s) of equipment operator, cup cutter and spray technician.

He wouldn't mind those things at all, if someone else was handling his other duties. Remember, late season is the time for budgeting and bidding, year end reporting and winter planning. There are seemingly endless committee meetings, too.

Worry is a part of the life of the late season superintendent. Halloween can, literally, be a nightmare for him. He knows he has no second chances with low temperature fungicide applications or irrigation system winterization. The golf course operation is more forgiving in the other seasons; there is no forgiveness in the late season.

Frustration is there, too. He sees days of golden opportunity, chances to get major work done. Too often, it's the old 'no money, no staff' story. The players will be upset when the same projects are started in June next year.

The late season superintendent is weary of the seven-day work week grind. He aches to go to church with the rest of his family; he actually begins thinking of how nice it would be to "sleep in" until 7:00 a.m., or to even have a day off.

His equipment exacerbates his frustration. Late season machinery is less dependable than it is after a winter trip through the shop. Maybe equipment gets tired, too.

Believe it or not, the late season superintendent is a little lonely. The monthly WGCSA educational program is completed; the Symposium is over. He won't be seeing his colleagues again for quite awhile. And he finds himself missing the college and high school kids who were around all summer. They not only worked hard, but their happy and upbeat attitude kept everybody in good spirits. Even on a bad day.

The golf course is even a little lonely. These acres were meant for players and they just don't look the same without them.

The late season superintendent doesn't have much of a sense of humor. Please forgive him. He's heard "lay that sod with the green side up" more times than he cares to think about. Don't ask him if he "likes his job better than working" and for heaven's sake do not make any remark about "riding around in a golf cart all day."

Don't be offended when the late season superintendent looks straight ahead when he passes you on the golf course. He's reluctant to establish any eye-to-eye contact; he isn't in the mood for any chipper conversation about golf or the golf course.

If you are able to engage the late season superintendent in a conversation, for your own sake don't ask him what he's going to do all winter. The question grinds on his nerves in the middle of the year. Now, that dreaded question could precipitate a rude (or worse) reaction.

And, after so many months of really excellent playing conditions, don't grumble to the late season superintendent about green speed (too slow) or the length of the fairway grasses (too long). You might find yourself on a mower.

Don't bug him about moving the cups more often; he did it himself yesterday and it was nearly dark before he was done.

It has probably always been this way with Wisconsin golf course superintendents. With the changing seasons come the changing attitudes. By late season, those of us in this business need a couple of months of normal scheduling to recapture the enthusiasm and high level of energy that will be needed next year to provide the things golfers want and expect.

It may be that the drastic changes in the mindset are what make the profession so appealing to those of us in it.

But in the late season, sometimes I wonder. Ask me again next spring.



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