



# The Quiet Golf Course

By Pat Norton

The golf course is quiet. Almost every day now the golf course is quiet. After two years of madly rushing about, trying to keep ahead of the public golfers, Cedar Creek is eerily quiet. At times out here on the course, the quiet is great. At other times, when there just doesn't seem to be any golfers out here, the quiet can be deafening. We are all having a difficult time adjusting to the quiet, slow pace of golf here at the "new Cedar Creek".

One characteristic that I'm sure that almost all public golf course superintendents possess is the ability to adjust to the maddening pace. Imagine years of service at your golf facility under these fast paced, always rushed, ultra-early morning working conditions. The golf course is always crowded with golfers. Time for course maintenance is limited throughout the week. Compromises in the daily routine, and ultimately the condition of the course, are all too common. The golfer must always be given top priority.

Suddenly one spring, everything changes. The same golf course, the exact same piece of property, sees a drop in weekly rounds of more than fifty percent. There are simply a lot less golfers. More than a few times we have all sat on the southern boundary of Cedar Creek waiting for the golfers to appear. We feel like Patton's Third Army must have felt waiting for the enemy to appear on the horizon. In this case, though, the enemy never appears.

The golfers that do eventually appear are well behaved, courteous, golf educated and appreciative of our efforts. We can't believe that this is really happening!

Needless to say, course conditioning is bound to improve. Any idiot can manage bentgrass adequately when there is almost no wear and tear put on it.

Our smaller tees, which used to receive a brutal pounding, now actually look filled in with an acceptable amount of grass covering the surface. Cultural practices, such as topdressing and

verticutting, can now be accomplished with relative ease.

I guess that the main point here is that course conditioning had better improve as play decreases. Otherwise, a guy should probably consider a career change.

Those public superintendents who work with limited time, and limited budgets, are the people that I most admire in this business. They are providing remarkably good playing conditions while contending with all of these other restraints. More importantly, these people are learning good golf **business** practices. They are more directly exposed to revenue generation, and truly realize that there is not a bottomless pit filled with cash somewhere in the clubhouse. "Doing without" is usually standard practice, which forces a few more compromises in the management scheme.

These superintendents are often the most interesting ones to converse with at seminars or monthly meetings. Spare me with the "shop talk" discussion of the latest grass variety, fertilizer, growth regulator, or piece of mowing equipment!

Instead, let's talk about the business of golf. Does course maintenance impact directly on revenue or membership levels? What are the daily policies and procedures that ensure continued success for any golf facility? What are the keys to successful long-term operation of a golf course? Those are some of the questions that should probably be asked more often at WGCSA monthly meetings.

At Cedar Creek, the critical key to success is now to attract as many members as possible in order to survive as a private club. Is good golf course management a big factor in our drive towards success?

Undoubtedly. Is it the dominant factor, the most critical factor? Not necessarily.

Many management factors must combine to create an atmosphere that will help to attract potential new mem-

bers. A good golf and social program, good restaurant and banquet hall service, and friendly staff personnel are a must. Sometimes I would suppose that I'm guilty of narrow-minded thinking—the golf course may not always be the most important management area.

The other factor in the drive towards a full membership is time. It takes time for our golfers to realize that we are seriously committed to a private club format. It also simply will take some time for three or four hundred members to come out of the woodwork and decide to plunk down the cash for private club membership.

In the meantime, we are known as "the quiet club". Area golfers are certainly not quiet in their opinions about our new club format. "That deserted golf course" or "that beautiful, empty golf course" are almost daily comments heard from disgruntled area linksters.

Our quiet situation has prompted a few changes in our course management scheme. We are keeping very tight control of maintenance expenses, including labor. Man-hours must be kept to between 300-350 hours weekly over the summer months. Fortunately, this doesn't include myself, or Gary, our assistant superintendent.

The big challenge for us, now that we are private, and oh, so quiet, is to enhance daily playing conditions enough so that potential members will be impressed enough to join here in '93. Capital improvements have been forgotten about for the foreseeable future, which simplifies our mission.

It doesn't do much good to worry about our quiet situation. My opinion and basis for security is that a high quality golf course was built here initially, and will always require a relatively high level of course conditioning. Our operating philosophy has always been, and continues to be, to strive for a certain degree of quality. If we let the golf course go into the tank in order to save a few bucks then we certainly won't succeed as a private club.

I must admit that for my own selfish reasons, I am sometimes happy to see the golf course so quiet. Best be careful, though! Pretty soon now this golf course will wake up, will be teaming with 300 plus members and their guests, and will require a lot more effort to keep it looking and playing good.

Considering that, I guess I'll enjoy the peace and quiet while it's here.