



Living in the Real (Golf) World

By Pat Norton

Do we live in the real world? Is our golf world anything at all like the cold, hard world that the news media constantly portrays?

Do we ever face the prospects of massive layoffs, wage and benefit cuts, or the specter of our golf courses simply going out of business due to poor economic conditions? It'll probably never happen in our lifetimes!

Do any of us foresee that golf will suddenly become less popular, ultimately reducing the need for our specialized services? I don't think so. Golf is on the rise, and its popularity continues to rise dramatically as the baby boom generation ages.

What great news for us all! Imagine being a tennis professional, or owning an indoor tennis facility. What are the long-term prospects for that kind of business? I'm not up on the facts, but I'd much rather be involved in golf, in whatever capacity. Imagine being a landscaper or a lawn care operator - related to our field, but not as specialized. They are more directly tied to the economy and usually face stiff competition from others trying to survive in the real world.

I think I'll stay right here in the golf world, thank you very much. There is a rosy future ahead for golf, and a solid future for all who stay involved in golf course management.

But, let's keep a real world perspective when analyzing our profession. The status of Wisconsin superintendents has skyrocketed since 1960, mainly due to the popularity of golf. Our status has also risen because of the efforts of GCSAA, WGCSA, WSGA, WTA, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Big thanks are also due to all those superintendents, past and present, who have helped to organize, shape, and drive these organizations. Our favorable status has been hard earned by our brethren. We must all keep it going.

Much of this progress, however, is internal and noticed mainly by others in the golf industry. We are all very good at attending meetings, seminars,

golf outings, and conferences. When there we all look, feel, and behave very professionally. How often do our golfers see us in these settings? Not very often!

The more intelligent superintendents know that bringing club officials, owners, members, or even friends to a meeting or seminar can do a world of good. It gives those "outsiders" a peek into our golf world and helps them understand us.

The less intelligent group, of which I am a part, never brings along club officials or others to monthly meetings or outings. Consequently, the people I work for and many club members here have a preconceived notion of what I represent. There is little talk of me as a superintendent (a little known term) or as a person backed up by a host of professional organizations, professional research, and professional knowledge.

The everyday, workaday, real world sees me as a "glorified groundskeeper"! And who is to blame for this faulty notion? I am 100% to blame! I am not enough of an advocate for myself or my profession!

The ultimate litmus test of attitudes toward superintendents is the following question that I ask myself: "If I ever decided to leave my present position, would the powers-that-be value the importance of the superintendent enough to unquestionably consider

only those replacement candidates who have formal golf course training, education, and experience?"

Or would a lessor qualified, less costly, more inexperienced candidate be considered? A frequent practice is for a club to immediately turn to the assistant as a probable replacement. This is great as long as that person has formal turfgrass education and training. We've all seen examples of golf courses hiring a superintendent who can't handle the job.

The real golf world is filled with golf facilities that take for granted both the superintendent and at times the golf course. If you have doubts about that opinion, then compare the number of trained, competent superintendents in your area to the total number of golf courses. Do you get the feeling that we're in the minority?

Or look through the WGCSA directory sometime. Where are all the of these golf courses located and who are the so-called superintendents managing them? These courses hire somebody with a bit of experience and a heartfull of desire, throw them out onto the course and then expect conditioning like Augusta National. It takes a lot more than just desire and hard work to properly manage golf courses these days. The average club official, owner, or member certainly does not realize this fact, however. Maybe that's a peek into the real golf world.

Those of us who are involved and strive for professional recognition, therefore, must continue to carry the ball. This means a constant promotion of our profession to the golf world will always be necessary. Right now Bill Roberts and GCSAA are doing an out-



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standing job of promoting the golf course superintendent. Our national association should retain Roberts as permanent president based on the accomplishments that have been piling up during his year at the helm.

Our biggest asset is the fact that our work is out there for all golfers to see. Golfers love to talk and compare different courses. If yours consistently compares favorably with others in your class, you come out a winner.

Our operating philosophy here at Cedar Creek has always been best possible conditioning at least possible cost. That attitude is one that I've had to learn from an owner who is very, very cost conscious. Many of you who are reading this column are probably in the same situation and can identify with these words.

As a profession I feel one of our weakest areas is lack of cost consciousness. We do not have to actually pay the bills, are not responsible for meeting payroll, or even wonder if our paycheck will be forthcoming. That would be a taste of the real world, now wouldn't it?

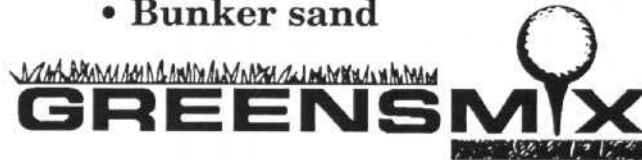
The real world is where we all live, work, and raise our families. Especially where we work. Make your golf world resemble the real world by being a steward for not only the golf course and the environment, but for the money that's entrusted to you.

Enhance the value that your employers place on your professional position so that they would never ever consider replacing a professional superintendent with a local groundsman.

It would be an injustice to the golf course, an insult to the profession, and a slap in the face to your fellow superintendents. 🏌️

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