



The Other Aspects

By Pat Norton

I missed a golden opportunity back in October. Our course hosted the usual season ending Mens' Scramble (in which I played my usual mediocre game). During the awards ceremony following golf, I was introduced to the assembled crowd and thanked for our efforts toward shaping up the golf course in 1995. Almost everybody reading these lines has been in the same situation at some point, I'm sure.

So what did I do when thrust into a very minor spotlight for a few moments? Did I respond graciously, say a few words of thanks, throw in a few tidbits of golf course happenings for '96 and ask everybody to patronize our great golf course in the future?

Or did I clam up at the mere men-

tion of my name, get that uncomfortable feeling, wave feebly to the crowd, and all but refuse to say anything?

Unfortunately, I neither said nor did anything close to what was appropriate for the occasion. Later on I'm driving home...trying to kick myself...which is difficult to do at 60 mph. "What an idiot," I say to myself. "Say something...say anything, you dork."

So what's the point? It's that guys like myself are pretty good out on the golf course and pathetically uncomfortable at public relations. Talking to a roomful of boisterous golfers is not that difficult, shouldn't be avoided, and actually should be taken as an opportunity to let people know just who you are and a bit of what happens out there.

Public relations is really very easy to do. It is one of those 'other aspects' of golf course management that we are not used to doing. Consider, though, that each of us has a golf showpiece just outside the door that can profoundly affect the golfer in very positive ways. Talk about positive public relations and a recipe for PR success!!

Also remember that most golfers, especially at public facilities, have no idea who is really responsible for the beauty that surrounds them. A new friend of mine admitted to me rather sheepishly that he's been golfing for twenty years and had no idea that a formally trained and educated person was needed to manage a golf course!!

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And just who is going to educate these golfers if we don't seize the opportunities when they present themselves?

So what are some of the 'other aspects' of being a success in your field...in this case, golf course management?

An obvious strength must be the ability to shape and groom a golf course so that the best possible product is presented to the golfer on a daily, weekly and season long basis. In a recent telephone conversation with a VERY veteran superintendent he pointed out the simple truth that "we are paid to produce a product...which is a great golf course." That is a very easy and accurate way of explaining what we do, and a heck of a lot better than "I take care of a golf course" or some such lame explanation.

And although golf playability is the chief criteria by which we are judged, there are a host of emerging 'other aspects' that are employed by forward thinking superintendents. These 'other aspects' will soon be adopted as standards by which course officials at every level will judge us.

A new and emerging 'other aspect' for many golf course operations is the desire that the course blend more harmoniously with nature. Most of us would probably agree that the days of manicuring the entire course are fading fast. It is generally cost prohibitive and doesn't leave the landscape with any food or shelter for wildlife.

Many new courses down here in Illinois have employed the native, prairie look in their design and construction phases with great results. People here in general are proud of their prairie pioneer heritage and it does show up on their golf courses.

Others, such as Nettle Creek, have the extra acreage to incorporate prairie grasses, wildflowers and perennials as a substitute for lining the roughs with ornamental trees. These relatively simple ideas can dramatically change the look of a 'parkland' type course if space and budget allow. We have used this look to effectively frame in fairways, as a back drop on mounded greens, on tee banks to create the illusion of teeing off out of a chute, and especially as borders for OB areas.

Understanding these non-traditional golf course concepts—plant knowledge, design, establishment, and maintenance of these areas—are new

'other aspects' for many golf course superintendents.

Another new aspect for many of us, especially us older types, is the use of personal computers in our work. For example, I am writing this piece with pen and paper and, then, a typewriter. I am not in the least computer literate or even comfortable with word processing. Yet, I've had access to a computer in the office and at home for about five years now. It's just a lot more comfortable and creative for me to write using this old fashioned method.

The guys who do feel comfortable with PCs have a huge advantage. Our golf professional uses his PC for word processing on a daily basis with very effective results. Lots of good event info, outings pairings, membership and golf shop promotions, employee memos and schedules—a real host of solid information is produced in a fraction of the time necessary to do it with this typewriter.

Another aspect that's certainly not new, but is missing from the careers of many superintendents, is that of professional involvement. I know of two superintendents locally who do not attend any meetings, seminars or national conferences. They are not members of MAGCS, ITF, or any other professional organization. It sort of stuns me that they're totally content to stay confined to their own little corner of the golf world. Take it from a guy who has been fairly involved and is now relatively uninvolved—it's a lot more fun and interesting to be involved in all of the extras that are out there.

Professional involvement also tends to grant credibility and respect to the golf course superintendent in the eyes of his or her employer. Club officials will recognize the extra effort to be involved, respect the person who makes the effort, and generally encourage this participation and service.

One 'other' aspect that's been very important and enjoyable for golf course managers in this era is the opportunity to manage course construction and remodeling projects. Just about all superintendents have been involved in some type of golf construction in their careers. And most of us view our roles as being the person responsible for continually improving the golf course, which at almost any golf course nowadays, includes some remodeling or reconstruction. The golf course that does not modernize and update is either brand new or otherwise simply

not in need of the services of a modern, educated superintendent.

The last of the 'other aspects' to discuss is that of regulatory compliance. Golf course managers must now, with very inadequate knowledge or training, comply with a host of regulatory issues. And since it's no fun at all to tackle this issue, many of us tend to somewhat avoid the issue. By doing so, our golf courses are put in a position of non-compliance on one or more issues. But, is the issue that simple and does the fault lie directly with the superintendent?

No, not usually. Compliance can be a very tough sell to an ignorant or reluctant governing board. It often-times gets pushed down the priority list of planned projects.

It is the responsibility of the superintendent, ultimately, to aggressively pursue compliance until all areas do comply. It's no fun, there's no visible reward, and it's too easy to remember that other, more enjoyable priorities beckon us.

In closing, let's recognize that each of us has our respective strengths and weaknesses. Let's also recognize that there are so many aspects to modern golf course management that it's impossible to be an expert in them all.

The challenge is to enhance the aspects that are among your strengths and embrace the 'other aspects' that are becoming such an important part of our careers. Those who do will rise to the top of the heap. Those who do not embrace the 'other aspects' may be left behind as the last years of this century fly by and the next century of golf course management looms. ♣

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