



A Tranquil Time

By Monroe S. Miller

I'm sleeping like a rock these days. It's almost scary—I don't hear a thing for eight hours, and I hardly move. It all makes one feel guilty, being so comfortable and relaxed and free of care. But it is, after all, winterlude.

Contrast is what makes it so startling. This winter season—cold and calm and quiet—couldn't be more different than last summer—hot and hostile and stressful. I barely slept last summer and only now am I getting caught up.

A tranquil time like this is absolutely essential to the physical and mental health of Wisconsin golf course superintendents. The golf season is too intense, the days too long, the pressure too great to not have some time to recover. That is especially true after a brutal summer like the one 1995 served us.

The advent season was really welcome this past Christmas. A church is a great place to slow down and think and relax, removed from the breathless pace that Christmas itself can even bring. A church is a quiet place, too, and especially comfortable when people like us are trying to get back on an even keel.

The frantic pace too many Americans keep can lead to hypertension, ulcers, heart disease and any number of other stress related disorders. Golf course superintendents are not immune. I always thought as I got older the job would get easier—experience and savvy and all that.

It might have been true, if the world had stood still as I aged. But the times have changed, as I have. Nowadays it is FED EX and fax, call waiting and answering machines, car phones and beepers. Hurry up—it isn't the 1960s (when I grew up) anymore when "time is on your side" as the Rolling Stones declared. Add to the mix the ever increasing demands from golf players, and golf course superintendents find the days don't have enough

hours and the weeks don't have enough days.

Guys my age worked on golf courses when greens were cut at 3/16" and fairways were short if they were cut three times a week at 7/8". Crews numbered half a dozen or so. Many courses in Wisconsin didn't have irrigated fairways. Everything about the game was simpler, the pace was easier and there was plenty of time for all we had to do, simply because there was less of it.

Often times our crews today number in the range of 15 to 30; many are young and need close supervision. The level of government intrusion is greater, creating the additional workload of paper. Who would have believed a short ten years ago that some golf course managers would have secretaries today just so they can actually get on the course once in a while?

Weird—on summer mornings after the crew is rolling I am already thinking ahead to the next day—"will we have time tomorrow to do all the things that HAVE to be done along with too many others that should be done?"

The pace in our shop is hectic all too often. Dave arrives at 3:30 a.m. to get equipment ready for the dozen and a half who arrive at 6:00 a.m. Or 5:00 a.m. Then he works at a quick pace until late day, making repairs and servicing the expensive pieces of machinery that have to roll tomorrow. He only hopes I don't ask him to fill in as an operator at mid-day, usually because we are behind and have too much to do without him. The time stress affects his work greatly.

Getting frazzled and frustrated wouldn't be so bad if you had a long luxurious vacation to look forward to. Sorry—for most of us that is out of the question. No summer vacations, ever. Come Labor Day and school begins—no vacations then, either. It is just plain damn difficult to get some

leisurely weeks away when the weather is nice, which makes it vital to turn the pace 'way down' these cold dark days of the year.

It is hard to figure. Not long ago we were hearing that Americans would soon enjoy a shorter work week with more free time for family. Computers, robots, microchips, and all the rest of other new technology of the current revolution were supposed to leave us wondering what to do with ourselves. What, for crying out loud, happened?

Just the opposite. Instead of giving us more freedom, the time-saving inventions leave us with less time and more frustration. Golfers are on a cell-phone while a partner lines up a putt—making the most of limited time. I even saw one last year on our course with his laptop computer on the seat of his golf cart as he headed to the range for some practice!

All that technology, and we are no better off. The sanctuaries are all but gone. Maybe that is why I treat myself to mowing greens most summer mornings—exercise for sure, but also the feeling of sanctuary it gives me.

One sanctuary is not gone. We still have winter days. Cold, dark days and short days. Normal times for us. Home on weekends, most of them anyway. Great holidays. Crisp and fresh air. Plenty of meetings, some out of town. One, at least, in a warm climate. Time with family and friends and colleagues. And black coffee really tastes best in the winter time. The tranquil time.

Four hundred years ago, old Queen Elizabeth I, while near death, said those famous words "all my possessions for a moment of time." These are our moments of time, peaceful and quiet.

And right on cue, sometime in March, one of us in our shop will say to someone else, "I'll sure be glad when opening day gets here." I will probably be on one end of that conversation! ♣