



This Season Is Now History

By Pat Norton

Well, the 1996 golf season is now over for...at least for us northern types. The relief of 'another long, stressful season being completed' is genuinely mixed with that sinking feeling of 'here comes another long, cold, winter...too much darkness, too much cabin fever...worst of all...too much dry, pale white, pasty, itchy skin...Aaahh!'

As I write this I realize, as many of us do, that autumn and early winter are quite a nice time for us all...most pleasant golf course days in September and October...with the arboreal splendor reaching its peak in mid-to late October instead of two weeks earlier as in our former life...in that other 'dairy state' which is now but a place on the map to us Illinois residents!

Conquered now, and all but forgotten are the challenges that presented themselves this past season on this golf course, or any other, I'm sure. I remember fretting and somewhat freaking out during the last days of August as I contemplated the upcoming autumn...seemingly too much to do, too few people to work with, and not nearly enough course labor \$\$\$ budgeted...not a chance, I told myself, of maintaining this golf course to my satisfaction!!!

Somehow, creative and interesting solutions were found to these and all of the other challenges that superintendents face, usually with positive results...

The end result is that upon closing down the course each November each of us can reflect back upon the golf season...as we 'Carry All Cruise' through our little golf kingdoms, silently talking to ourselves..."Hey man, this little project over here did turn out really gooooood!" or "These golfers are right...I really do know what I'm doing!!! I am a 'golf course genius'!!!

Driving a bit further, though, I encounter a few bad areas still needing my magical touch...still needing a big dose of TLC. But don't worry...the "turf doctor" is still "IN"...in fact, here at 'Everpresent CC', I'm always 'IN'... I'm always out there on the course...that's why they put lights on those damn vehicles, isn't it??? So that we'll never have an excuse for not being there, right???

Man, sometimes I get so sick of being at that golf course so much!!! Can I go home now??? Can I go home...ever??? Please, please, please, I just...want...to...see my family...for a few hours!!!

Those solitary drives around the course are when I do my best ranting and raving...usually by the time I reach my ultimate destination I've calmed down somewhat, wiped the foam away from my mouth, and refocused my vision.

I realize then that things aren't so bad...I could be working in a shoe store somewhere just like Al Bundy...in fact, my family says that there are many similarities between us...

I realize also, as another season is but mere history, that too often I focus in on the negatives about this line of work...the long hours...and simply how much time and

effort it takes to do justice to this or any other golf course! And just about every superintendent that I know personally has this same problem...it's a very personal thing when that entire golf course out there has your signature all over it.

To do it right, it simply takes a lot of time...well, now that the season is over let's all take a month or six weeks off from work, and relax!!!

There are tons of things that I've learned since getting involved down here at this course in northern Illinois. One idea that's really gotten into my head this season is this idea of 'customer service.'

Great customer service is something that I had always discounted, taken for granted, and never felt was one of my responsibilities...until I began working with a guy who really understood customer service and has used it to great advantage, both personal and financial.

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After a couple seasons of observing him, and having it rub off on me, I realize thoroughly that great customer service is helping our golf course stand out from the rest...at least a little bit. Public golfers really appreciate being treated nicely, and usually reciprocate by giving us their repeat play.

We fully realize that we're definitely not the best public course down on this side of ChicagoLand. But we do have an ever improving golf layout, a great golf value, and a reputation for providing great customer service. Other better known, more popular courses close to Chicago have very poor reputations when it comes to golfer service. Probably they can afford to be a bit unfriendly, or even rude. They have the luxury of being closer to all those public golfers...we on the other hand realize fully that the bulk of our play comes from the far SW suburbs. These golfers have a lot of 'choice' golf course available to them before they ever get out here to Morris. Heck man, we're 20 minutes SW of Joliet!! We're not exactly surrounded by huge numbers of scratch golfers!!

Great customer service as a successful business philosophy does not mean that things are priced and sold at bargain prices everyday. It means that everything that a public golf course sells...green fees, cart fees, membership fees, outing package prices, shop merchandise, food, and drink...everything-is priced such that golfers will accept your pricing structure and repeatedly patronize your course because the course is almost always in very good shape, improvements are constant, and the service is great. It all adds up to higher and higher levels of income, and a thriving public golf course.

If any of the key ingredients are missing, however, you are dead in the water, pal. And that is where some public golf courses struggle...treat people at your course better even than you'd expect to be treated when you golf. Isn't that simple?

So how can a superintendent provide great customer service? Most of it is internal, 'behind the scenes' type of stuff...like communicating with the golf shop staff when course cultural practices are imminent...and being cooperative when 'the big dogs' in the ownership group ask a guy to do something...or simply having a good sense of humor and talking to the golfers and members as much as possible.

A very important way for us to provide that great customer service is to have our staff people well trained in the delicate art of getting the work completed without bothering the golfers...which sounds easy until you consider my situ-

ation. We have quite a few Hispanic/Mexican staff personnel...some of whom speak almost no English...needless to say the ability to speak Spanish, at least somewhat, helps immensely.

Even with that ability, though, it's a daily challenge to communicate with and train these people. Usually, we're all going back and forth between the two languages...starting a sentence in Spanish, then switching to English when the need arises.

All in all, though, this golf season was a very good one for us. Other courses that are within 45 minutes of us would much rather forget 1996...they had a disastrous year, due mainly to the weather. A very wet spring, then the huge mid-July storms and the resulting flooding...a very bad year for some courses.

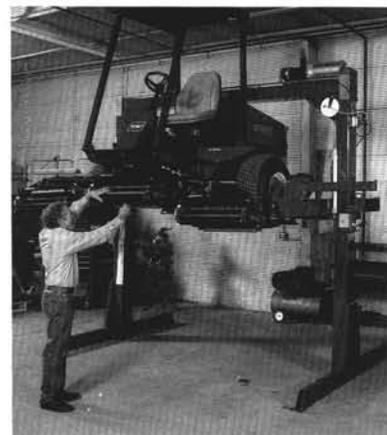
The big trick is figuring out ways to keep those income figures climbing! The other big trick is figuring out ways to avoid spending money for course maintenance...fortunately for me the focus of our entire group is the golf course...one of our main goals is to increase the value of the course for reselling someday.

Consequently, we've been able to take a really rough golf course property and begin the transformation into a course that makes us all proud!!

So, as the season just completed gets hashed and rehashed by our golfers, our management team starts to focus on 1997!! There is certainly no shortage of areas needing budgetary funding...like maybe the compensation package of that 'near genius' superintendent??

It is getting to be that time of year, isn't it?? 🍀

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