



# Beyond the Millennium

By Mark Kienert



We've all been guilty of the day-dreaming from time to time that comes from looking, wishing, or hoping that our tomorrows are better than what we have experienced today. So for a little fun I chose to do a little crystal ball gazing for myself. I think it is important for all of us to look into the future, to anticipate its changes and what effects they will have on our industry and our working environment.

How many of us anticipated legislative mandates that forced us to remove our underground fuel storage tanks or further yet, would have thought that we would have to build separate chemical storage facilities? I bet my guess would be like yours. Not many of you would have foreseen those impending changes, either.

What changes do you see for yourself beyond the year 2000? To get some insight for myself, I philosophically planted that idea on our local internet relay chat group and at GCSAA's membership forum to see what kinds of response it would generate. I have to say that the conversation at the local level was greatly appreciated and a little more on the mark than what I gained from the national forum; but both were useful and thought provoking.

I'm sure the greater response to my question on the local level was due in part to people knowing me. The three responses I gained from the GCSAA forum reported that we would be mowing with lasers in the future. That would be great from the superintendent's and the mechanic's standpoint. I think that the turfgrass blade would be instantly cauterized, minimizing disease infestation entry wounds. Obviously, this machine would have to be designed with many of prisms and mirrors not to mention one whale of a power source. I wonder if it would fracture sand topdressing particles into smaller pieces that would cause problems

with the fines filtering down causing a layering effect?

With any advance, there is always trouble. The purpose of posing my question on GCSAA's membership forum was to see if I could glean any forward thinking from the leadership of our association. They obviously have to plan for the future, (especially if they hope to be re-elected,) but alas, none came forth. I did receive a personal response from Mr. Joel Jackson, editor of one of Florida's "better" chapter newsletters, who poked a little fun at our newsletter editor Monroe Miller by suggesting that he would become editor-in-chief of Buckley's *New Review* by the year 2000. Joel, if you do not know him, is golf course superintendent at one of the new Disney's Golf Courses named Osprey Ridge. He suggested that we will be looking for "pure strains of grass." We would still be at "loggerheads with the environmentalists," who insist that "No Man" is better than man with best practices, but on a positive note will have gained ground with the "common sense" folk.

He sees laser guided mowing units and "Global Positioning Satellite" systems monitoring equipment tracking. (We could use that right now to track any employee that falls asleep while operating the mowers or find out their

favorite ball hawking areas. They are not looking for morels, you know!) Mr. Jackson also predicts that 30-50% of superintendents will be on-line. Thanks for your response, Joel. Can you forward Mr. Buckley's home phone number to Monroe?

Stan Mesker wrote, "The superintendent of the future will be even more of an administrator than today. Already our local membership directories have mechanics and irrigation technicians listed where there used to be none. Our business is becoming more technical. I suspect that we will have to have even more 'experts' on our staffs because no one person will be able to do it all." Thanks, Stan, for your thoughts as well.

I can concur with Stan's thoughts. Who couldn't use a compliance officer to keep our facilities up to date with all the legislative changes mandated by the bureaucrats that we elect into office each time we cast our vote? I have also seen the need for an office assistant to handle telephone calls and place orders with vendors. You have to realize that not all golf course superintendents have access to their club's secretaries. The person I'm speaking of wouldn't necessarily have to be a full time person either. It would be so efficient to be able to

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have someone just to run errands, to do the small typing for committee and board reports, to make posters to communicate upcoming golf course maintenance practices, or to just keep the files organized. Too many times my files end up piled on the floor, as I have to make desk space ready for the next batch of work, which ends up on the floor.

Our Wisconsin group hit the issues a little bit harder and wrote to express some fears and frustrations as well. Issues like job security and what to do when you are feeling a sense of "job burnout" were discussed. Still another wrote about the saturation of turf students into the profession. Others pondered how much longer the current "golf building boom" would last and wondered if water would become an issue again at some point in the 21st century. Will Wisconsin and Minnesota find themselves having to sell water to the dry desert southwest as more and more senior citizens retire to those warm winter weather points?

We had one member write about the GCSAA's certification program

complaining about the ease of some of the program's exams. He also saw the need for higher membership standards when speaking of joining the GCSAA. One member even suggested that there be an entrance exam just to gain membership into the GCSAA similar to those that physicians take to become certified and licensed by the AMA to practice medicine.

Another member wrote about maintenance standards in our industry and where they were heading. He felt that everyone's expectations of golf course conditions had grown to the point that it is almost to the point that you are made to feel like you are walking into someone's "white carpeted" living room and you wondered whether or not you should remove your shoes. His concern was over the escalating costs required to maintain a golf course for those players "with Augusta of the Mind." Still, two other members implored that golf course superintendents must hone their communication skills or be left in the dust. "People" management skills would also become increasingly important as we begin bidding for

laborers from a limited pool.

So you have heard the predictions of others and I suppose I will have to lend my two cents as well. Labor will become increasingly difficult to find and to retain. One of the big three equipment manufacturers (A) will purchase C and stomp on B in the process. The building boom will continue with still a number of new golf facilities coming on-line. For those of you wishing to own your own golf course, wait, there will be many bargains to be found out there caused by some of this speculation.

The cost of golf will continue to rise with the high budget venues still raking in tremendous profits for the product they produce. As always the cost of fossil fuels and weather will have larger part in the cost of maintaining golf courses. The individual golf cart will be a hit in the market place and their popularity will overtake the present two person carts. These will cause further maintenance headaches if we don't watch them. And unfortunately, even with 401K programs, people in this industry will largely find themselves unprepared for the cost of retirements burdens. ♣



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