



Surviving A Recession

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Superintendent, Rolling Meadows Golf Course



Spring is around the corner and it may be an early one based on the forecasts. The new season brings new ideas and a renewal of commitment to our profession. On the downside, many WGCSA and GCSAA members are seeing budget reductions. In Wisconsin, a poor weather year coupled with a nationwide recession has

many clubs scrambling for income. Layoffs and reductions of capital purchases were common discussion at the Orlando Conference and Show.

Many superintendents are already doing more with less in order to provide our customers or members the best product. We take pride in what we can do with the resources we have. It is very difficult when the golfers we have been working for ask us to cut back expenses but not quality on the property.

How do we survive budget cuts in our operations? Do we fight and raise our voices or just whimper away feeling bad? Preparations for this scenario should have started years ago with proper record keeping and good communication between the superintendent and the manager or board.

I am guilty of being lax with the record keeping the past few years. I used to track man-hours for each person in the maintenance program, and repair costs for each piece of equipment. With man-hour reports, we can quickly show what jobs will not be done when asked to cut labor costs. In addition, we can justify a more efficient piece of equipment that will save labor hours. Capital purchases are often first hit for cuts. Proper maintenance records can show a current unit is costing more in repairs than the cost of a new machine depreciated out over time.

Communication is essential before, during and after a budget tightening. If you have communicated with your managers before a crisis, you will have gained their faith in your judgment. Remember we were hired to be experts in our field and we need to act like it. In

a good relationship, management will come to the superintendent to ask what can be done, rather than dictating what should be done.

For me, it is possible Rolling Meadows will be asked to contribute more profit to our county's general fund. As an enterprise fund, we produce revenue that may be needed as municipalities are seeing less revenue sharing from the state. As an exercise (for now), we were asked to provide cuts of 4, 7 and 10 percent to our budget. It was an eye-opening experience that I would suggest everyone try. A 4 percent cut was not that hard, but 7 and 10 percent cuts affected some very valuable items. Playing conditions affect customer satisfaction, so fertilizers, chemicals, topdressing and labor cannot be cut that much. Other items like utilities, insurance and repairs to equipment or irrigation are automatic expenses and difficult to reduce.

No matter what type of club we are at, many of us will be asked to make serious budget cuts at some point in our careers. If the income is not there, expenses need to be cut. By being prepared, we can present sound logical arguments on how cuts to labor and products will affect the golf course and the bottom line. By being proactive, we can recommend reductions in areas that will have the least effect on our employees' job satisfaction and the conditions we produce for our clubs.

Good luck in the coming year, and remember to take time off for family and fun. ♣



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