



# Changing Times

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

I have been at Rolling Meadows for six full golf seasons and the honeymoon period is definitely over as things change. I still enjoy what I do, and coming to work every day, but things have changed. The honeymoon officially ended last fall when I proposed some fee increases that did not go over too well with the season passholders. It was not what you would call a riot, but women cried and men anguished in loud voices.



As an enterprise fund, our goal at Rolling Meadows is to break even financially while providing good playing conditions. We have a small agronomic budget to begin with for 27 holes, so when the expenses increase the golfers fees have to increase. It was a disappointing time and I did receive some personal attacks from golfers I thought respected my work. In looking back, you learn who your supporters are from tough times.

Unfortunately, the rate increase was not enough; like many courses our rounds played decreased, and we will run a deficit this year. For me a deficit means extra public relations work to keep the county board members informed and comfortable with our operation. It also means extra work communicating to customers and staff. In the big picture, one deficit does not a disaster make and we have had a proven record of success, but I need to convey that message to the board and golfers.

A deficit also means budget cuts for next year as we come up with ways to make up lost ground. It is hard to cut labor because labor relates to course quality and customer satisfaction. Large cuts I made were to course repair projects, capital equipment and we will leave our second assistant position vacant for a second year. Cuts like these can only be made for the short term. Equipment wears out and annual improvements to the course are expected by the customers.

Golf is changing rapidly, changing as the game of golf becomes the business of golf. Changing, as we experience an economic and weather slump. Marketing is becoming more important as courses are running deals and specials all the time. For Rolling Meadows, we have a great layout, good conditions and the best "regular" prices around. However, with everyone else advertising deals we need to advertise more to keep up. What a waste of money that is. That 1976 Greensking II will need to last a couple more years because the money is going toward advertising.

I am not complaining so much as letting others know they are not alone as many courses are facing cuts and

staff layoffs. I wish I or the WGCSA Board had an answer or simple fix but this problem is bigger than we are. For the meantime, we can do a few things to help our courses and staffs get through this, besides praying for El Nino to bring an early spring.

Keep communicating with your staff, boards and golfers. Be clear but courteous when saying what cuts to staff or purchases will mean to the course conditions. Work as a team with your board and crew. As managers, we are looked at to lead, so give your board or ownership input into what can be done and what should not be done. As important as communicating with the board is staff input on what changes can be made to least affect them and the golfing experience. Until things improve, adapt and proceed the best you can with the skills God gave you.

The GCSAA Conference and Show in Atlanta is around the corner. Although budgets are tight, it is a great educational opportunity to better yourself and the golf course. If your club pays the way or you are trying to get them to, it is a good investment in the club's future. There is no other place to meet all our vendors and learn about educational topics from green speed to budgeting. Many of the nation's top professors and researchers are there to answer your questions.

If you're not so lucky to have your club pay the way, it is still a good investment in your future as a superintendent. This year we are lucky; the show is a one day drive away, so you can car pool and save some airfare. You may think that is easy for me to say, but for the second year in a row I will be paying my own way. Last year out-of-state travel was not allowed by my employer and this year I hope to go to another conference in spring. I cannot ask twice to leave the state.

If you cannot make it to the GCSAA Conference and Show, we have some great educational opportunities right here in Wisconsin; the Symposium coming up November 12th and 13th in Kohler and GCSAA seminars December 11 and 12 in Fond du Lac, or the WTA Industry Expo January 9 and 10 in Madison. Do not miss these chances to better yourself and your club while supporting the industry.

Good luck putting your courses to bed this fall and have an enjoyable and relaxing holiday season. ♣