

'Tis the Season for the Average Midwestern Golfer

By Patrick J. Norton, Golf Course Superintendent, Nettle Creek Golf Course



The average midwestern golfer is simply looking for value. Wise and intelligent golf course operators accept and understand this concept...and cater to it. Arrogant and all knowing course developers who were riding high a few short years ago are starting to choke on their inability to understand this same concept. Midwestern American golfers do want golfing value.

What amazes me about upscale public golf courses is the sheer number of them that have been built in the last ten years and the prices that they need to charge in order to be in business! American midwestern golfers have been paying these prices...but now that times are tough...they are paying them no more. Lots of information is out there about high end courses that are suffering acutely...suffering from their overestimation of how much people will continually pay for golf.

Why weren't these people developing somewhat lesser golf courses that would be just as enjoyable for the masses of golfers, like me, who have only so much disposable income to spend on an already expensive sport? Didn't these guys listen during Economics 101 when supply and demand were explained over and over again?

Average golfers simply cannot handle such difficult and expensive golf courses...yet over and over again ChicagoLand Golf would be touting the latest and greatest golf course opening. Granted...there were a few smart operators who developed new golf courses for \$3,000,000 or less...and I'll bet that they're doing just fine as golf tightens up.

There should be no sympathy given to those who had their opportunities to help the game that we all love so much...but instead have reinforced the image that golf is indeed...a rich man's game.

I do not even care to discuss the latest and greatest golf course...because I know that the green fee is too expensive for most people... to pay to play on a regular basis. These courses are touted as 'must play'...which really means must play about once or twice...then search for a more affordable course to frequent!

On a lighter note, this is the time of the year when these same average midwestern golfers tend to get a little bit predictable.

Classic is their ability to continue to compliment the golf course superintendent on the 'primo' condition of the golf course...when in reality it's a matter of the golf course barely holding together through all sorts of weather! It's always humorous in a twisted way...the average golfer just loves what we offer here at this

average, moderately upscale public course...while the superintendent seems to be constantly riding on the edge of disaster...hoping and praying for some late summer relief.

August 2002 has been a blessing...both in terms of beautiful weather and a big turnaround in green fee revenue...after a summer that just kept on going and going. We were plagued with a relatively empty golf course from April through July...and lots of uncertainty as to the reasons. Everybody had a terribly wet spring...but June and July were sporadic...until we began marketing a reduced weekday green fee that didn't require a coupon or a foursome. In essence, we responded to the economic downturn by eliminating our old \$37 weekday fee and slashing it to \$24...and watch the golfers flock in here during the week!

After trying various remedies to boost our greens fee revenue...a simple price reduction did the trick! Our mutual feeling is that looking at the daily total revenue increases is well worth reducing our price...an adjustment called for in the present economy.

Although August has brought us cool weather perfect for healing up summertime stresses...it's still a little soon to say that this golf course is in great condition. Truthfully, I felt a keen sense of embarrassment today as I chopped my way around Nettle Creek participating in the annual F.O.E. (Fraternal Order of the Eagles) outing...of which I am a distinctly non-participatory type of member.

We've been, you see, in a strong golf operations cost control mode for this entire year...due to a very wet spring and a lackluster June and July...which truthfully

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means that starting now and stretching through next spring...monies being spent need to be minimal and entirely/totally necessary! What a novel concept! No money to spend to try to maintain this jewel???

Forget about dollar spot, fertility needs, small projects, big projects, any projects...just cut it all once a week and everybody leave at noon everyday!

Average golfers, however, don't know and don't need to know that my golf course panties are showing and that I feel slightly self conscious about all of the flaws that my six man Hispanic crew has no time to address!

So, as September beckons...'tis the season to tough it out as midwestern golfers everywhere start to gobble up the good rates, better weather, and hopefully excellent playing conditions. 'Tis the season also for fairway mower transaxle replacements, diesel engine overhauls, irrigation lightning strikes, MultiPro radiator replacements, '89 Silverado towing adventures, Saturday 5:30AM employee no shows...just a few examples of summertime happenings of which the average midwestern golfer is blissfully unaware!

Quite interesting also, is the lack of understanding or interest in golf course happenings on the part of the average midwestern golf course ownership duo! Should there be a bev cart gal inside taking too long a break, a

steak too well done, a railing unclean due to a bit of bird poop, or a restaurant customer ungreeted...there will soon be hell to pay!

But...roughs at six inches...fairways infested with disease, weeds, and insects... decade old mowers spewing hydraulic oil all over the greens...and ball marks so numerous that every green resembles a combat zone? No problema for the average midwestern superintendent and his small group of superhuman problem solvers!

Solve 'em quickly, too...because that's the weekly norm as the summer starts to draw to a close. Our owners, bless their hearts, have always been much too concerned with 'front end' problemitas (little problems)...which they tend to micromanage just a bit too much.

Put up with the concerns...solve the problems...and through all of the many sides of summer...improve the golf course. Autumn is about to start... which means that the grass starts to heal nicely...as does the soul of the superintendent as he surveys a more beautiful golf course with each passing autumnal week.

Let the average midwestern golfer have his day...and his season. Let him enjoy our damaged, suffering golf courses...as we apply further first aid in an attempt to survive another season. Our season is yet to come. ♻

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