



Winter Fantasyland

By Pat Norton, Golf Course Superintendent, Nettle Creek Country Club

Over the months of the winter just completed...I came to realize that it was all a fantasy...it was all beyond the possible...once again I had to accept that it just would not happen...and my golf course dreams once again were crushed. Reality soon set in...as the rush of spring finally arrived...and wintertime golf fantasies faded out and were replaced by the everyday golf course routine.

Of course, what is being referred to the opening paragraph is that set of ideas that were allowed to bubble up in the mind of superintendents everywhere during the winter months. We had quite a few weeks of relative down time...which gave us the chance to reflect...and regenerate the creative juices. The juices soon overflowed out of our brains and out onto the shop floor as we were forced to decide on winter work priorities...getting everything repaired, refurbished, replaced, repainted, retooled, reground...overhauled, oversprayed, overtime, overcooked...at times a bit overwhelming!

All had to be accomplished within a new operating budget that each superintendent carefully prepared...recommended and agreed to...only to quickly find out as winter and the shop work slowly progressed...that every piece of existing equipment needed 25-40% more \$\$\$ invested into parts and shop occupation time...than was ever expected. So much for the idea of staying within budget...

Even with the significant increase in equipment repair \$\$\$ budgeted here for '08...courtesy of GolfVisions...we found it to not be a problem spending it all.

The thinking then naturally morphed...as it does every winter... into fantasizing about acquiring new equipment...and eliminating some of the work that went into preparing this existing fleet for yet one more season of fighting the golf course battle.

I felt like the commander of an outmatched army...trying to fight with tanks that did not want to fight anymore. I felt like Merlin the magician...waving my spray can around and around...trying to conjure up a new spell that would transform this old, tired equipment into something new, something beautiful, something orange, red, or green.

Visions of replacing those worn out CarryAlls...those ancient...almost dead Toro 3100 tee mowers...pestered me as we contemplated the process of machinery rescue and resuscitation. Trouble is, my talents lie elsewhere. I was pretty good all winter long in the process of triage...of deciding the

priorities concerning machinery R&R. Making it all come back to life meant for a long, slow recovery...with myself simply an observer, an expediter, and a decision maker. The patient will probably survive in spite of my best intentions...

Our Toro 5100-D fairway collar mower...long a valiant workhorse here...has received over the years...a new set of reels, numerous changes of bedknives, a replacement engine, and a replacement transmission. *Jump starting it every morning last season made us all feel like doctors in the ER applying their paddles to a human victim. That machine used to literally jump up off of the floor about six inches as it tried to come back to life...and perform its mowing duties just a few more times. We just wanted to make sure that all of the working juice was sucked out of it before we consigned it to the scrap pile...and possibly replace it.*



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The discussion here concerning equipment replacement is our version of the old joke about the guy who says he's still using the same carpenter saw after all of these years...four or five different blades and four or five different handles...but still the same saw, right?

We all started this creative thinking process back over the Thanksgiving weekend as we pondered the season just completed...and the upcoming budget year. Budget time and early winter shop work in December naturally progressed into that normal off season feeling of wanting to junk any piece of equipment older than five years...and buy all kinds of new equipment.

It would be sort of like a present for the holidays...with the unbreakable rule being that any piece that was a serious problem last season...would be unquestionably junked or traded in before the first of the year.

I think that I would much rather get a new greens mower...or maybe a semi load of B&B trees...for Christmas than some old sweater or funky tie. I would be willing to trade my beloved books received as presents...in exchange for that new John Deere turf tractor sitting in the showroom at Hogan Walker Implement. Or maybe the company would let me trade in some of my vacation time for a set of greens rollers...and have them sitting underneath the Norton family Christmas tree...waiting for dear old Dad.

We are now on the doorstep of spring here in the upper Midwest. It is also the time of year in which superintendents everywhere start dreaming about nature...of getting outside...and getting back to work. Every dream we have is tinted green...and everything is already in superb, beautiful shape out on the course.


We dream of what our courses should look like in their ideal state...with all of the longed for improvements to the course already in place. Everything is magically in place. Trees never planted are eighty foot wonders...while bunkers never installed look so good...so perfect...and so numerous! All of the course design changes that Lohmann ever proposed...have been completed by Scotty Schaul on his dozer that never runs out of fuel and never quits shaping. In a dream...it all just happens so easily...so completely...with never a thought of money needed to accomplish it. Maybe Bob will do some 'pro bono' work down here at little old NCCC! Ah...what a beautiful golf course fantasy!

The reality is that today is March 4th and somebody is tardy getting their contribution to the Grass Roots sent into our new editor! I do get to sit here key-boarding away looking out over a beautiful scene out my south window of a field of prairie grass in the foreground...with the hills on the opposite side of the Illinois River on the horizon.

Out my west office window is a large golf course pond teeming with wildlife...with the fairway and

green of the beautiful seventh hole just beyond. In my travels out onto the course this winter...I noticed quite a few flaws...but also quite a bit of the simple beauty of a golf course in the wintertime. We take advantage of the opportunity to go out onto the course for a three hour visit whenever snow leaves us and the temperature is tolerable.

In the shop through the door behind me...I can hear and feel the guys working away on equipment in a clean, warm, well lit area...and write with a feeling of confidence that our equipment, our people, and our golf course...will be ready for spring. Lots of seasonal employees are stopping in...wondering when they can get back out here and begin working...and golfing.

It seems that the time for fantasizing...for idle day-dreaming...and for being indoors...is just about at an end. March and April are the months when spring finally arrives. That wonderful reality every year...that feeling of everything coming back to life...more than replaces the fantasies of the winter months just endured and finally completed. I think that it is time to shake the wintertime fantasies out of my head and get back out onto the course. Springtime realities await...



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