



Everything in Its Own Time

By **David Brandenburg**, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

It is an annoyance for golf course staffs that the leaves fall from the trees at different times. This year the ash went first in late September followed by the oak and hickory leaves in October with the maples hanging on until mid-November. Then sometime over the winter the willows will fall and be waiting for us in the spring.

The annoyance comes from the number of days employees need to work to clean up the leaves for playability of the course with blowers, mulchers and rakes. Special attention needs to be given to drain grates that seem to have a magnet for leaves to settle in and then cause flooding during rains.

One would think the high winds we had in October would have blown all the leaves away, but leaves seem to fall in their own time, not ours. Despite the technological advances humans have developed we really have no control over nature and its powerful forces.

We also have little control over the economy even though many leaders have a plan or theory to fix it. From an informal survey at the symposium, few in attendance have not seen their budgets reduced despite rising costs. The past few years a budget freeze is as good as a budget cut as it seems our costs are increasing greater than the rate of inflation.

Most operators agree there is an oversupply of golf courses but no one wants theirs to be the one who closes. Many daily fee operators are hanging on hoping for the economy to improve and golfers to take up the game in greater numbers. A few WGCSA members have been downsized right out of a job and even more are facing winter layoffs for the first time in their careers. Either of these situations bring on doubts of personal value to their clubs and concerns of financial and insurance problems for their families.

Near the end of summer it was clear our club needed to make additional substantial cuts in order to avoid additional borrowing. The advantage I have as a general manager is I get to make the recommendations where these cuts will be. At the same time the disadvantage to being the general manager is; I have to make the decision where the cuts will be.

My decision was to lay off our mechanic for a period of at least 16 months. It was a difficult decision but one that would have the least effect on course conditions and clubhouse service operations. No matter how hard the decision was for me, I cannot nor will not fully understand how hard it was for the employee I laid off. We can imagine thoughts of why me, what will I do and how will

I support my family, but until we are on the receiving end of that discussion, we will never understand.

It has been quite a few years since I have been involved in the day to day equipment maintenance as we will now be sharing the mechanics duties.. I don't mind the work, I am just not sure James and I will have the time to commit to it on a daily basis given the large property we maintain. Time may tell if my decision was the proper one but in the mind of our mechanic it will never be the right decision.

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Congratulations to Sweetgrass Golf Course for being selected to host the LPGA's Futures Tour event June 20-26, 2011. John Holberton is the golf course superintendent of the 18 hole layout that was named to Golfweeks best new courses list in 2009.

The 2011 Futures Tour event is expected to have a purse of \$110,000 at the Paul Albanese designed 7,275 yard par 72 layout.

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Congratulations to WGCSA Legacy Scholarship Winners Mikka Schaller Daughter of Scott and Joan, Haley Shaw daughter of Pat and Debbie and Alexandria Rodgers Daughter of Bill and Cindy.

Three \$500 scholarships are awarded each fall to children and grandchildren of WGCSA members whom are enrolled in a school of higher learning.

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With widespread turf losses throughout the country this year you may want to consider ordering seed early this winter for next year. Sales in fall were brisk with some breeders running out of popular varieties which could affect spring seed prices.

Fertilizer prices could also be rising as Harry L Mathis, corporate director of materials for Lebanon suggests superintendents may want to order fertilizer early and pay close attention to the price of corn.

Mathis states "As corn goes, so goes nitrogen and as nitrogen goes, so go fertilizer prices." The U.S. Department of Agriculture's corn forecast, which was recently adjusted downward 3.6 percent, caused a ripple effect that likely will be felt at golf courses. The forecast sent corn futures soaring to near \$6 per bushel, a price that encourages farmers to plant more corn, which in turn, requires increased nutrients. The subsequent jump in worldwide demand for nitrogen increases

costs to fertilizer producers such as Lebanon Turf.

"We were sailing along in pretty stable condition this summer, and then the USDA numbers and the corn harvest sparked the markets," Mathis said. "It just goes to show how fragile and interconnected the supply chain is."

While market conditions have stabilized in the last several weeks, Mathis predicts that prices for fertilizer products high in nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium will increase by 10 percent or more for the 2011 growing season. Any disorder in the worldwide supply chain, which could be brought on by disruptions at nitrogen plants and shipping interruptions, could cause another spike in costs. "N, P and K are in the mix together," Mathis said.

Mathis says the best way for end-users to control their costs is to place their orders and take delivery before "crunch time." "The corn number is real; the nitrogen situation is real, and when the season hits, low inventories of raw materials stateside could force some significant availability and pricing issues in the spring," he said.

Hopefully we will see a reduction in gas prices by the spring opening of golf courses because we do not need a triple price whammy!

Another long season is coming to an end and a few more gray hairs have shown themselves. My wife suggests I dye them but I usually respond with its better to be gray than bald. Of course I am not sure what I will say when I am bald. Perhaps it will be easier to not worry about hat hair.

Only a few weeks until the annual polar bear plunge into Lake Michigan. The second time was harder than the first, so I will need to psyche myself up for third dip. If your not busy and need a rush show up at noon January 1 to Bradford Beach in Milwaukee. Come early though because the beach is packed with people.

Enjoy the offseason as a time to recharge and work normal hours as you prepare for next year. The Christmas Season is a perfect time to enjoy family and friends.

Our prayers and thoughts are with those that are laid off or at clubs that are struggling to make payments in these unprecedented economic challenging times for the golf industry. Merry Christmas to all. 🌱

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