

## El Cheapo

By Jake Schneider, Assitant Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

Please, take a moment to find “cheap” in the dictionary. See that devilishly handsome, bespectacled, borderline dwarf whose picture is next to the definition? Yeah, that’s me. As my boss, former boss, and pretty much anyone who knows me on a personal level will tell you, it is with great reluctance that I part ways with my hard-earned money, and for the most part, my wallet does a terrific job of carrying around spare oxygen in lieu of any real cash. In my defense, I argue that it’s necessary to actually have money to be cheap, but that argument falls apart after mere seconds of interrogation. So, you hopefully see that I am well-qualified to discuss ways to save some benjamins.

Like many courses, we’ve been asked to cut expenses from our budget in recent years. And, although it hasn’t been easy, we’ve managed to beat our goals without a decrease in course conditioning. Sure, we rake the bunkers less on the weekends, mow fairways with long angles, and have cut our intermediate rough in half, but these are fairly unnoticeable measures that are typically followed when times are tough. However, I like to think that we do some things that may be unique, at least to some, and they are as follows:

1. Change your light bulbs. In 2009, we invested two grand to convert our T12 fluorescent shop lights to the much more efficient T8 lights. Although this was a significant investment, it was projected to cut our lighting bill by \$1200/year, and we also received a \$600 rebate from Focus on Energy. Besides the long-term cost savings, the quality of light from the new bulbs is dramatically better, and our eyes no longer burn when walking

out of the shop on a sunny day.

2. Recycle everything. A few times each year, we hold cookouts for our employees, and while we don’t serve surf-and-turf, it takes a decent chunk of change to feed 15 people. One of the ways that we fund these cookouts is by recycling scrap metal and aluminum cans. Although it isn’t anyone’s idea of fun, the employees who do course setup also separate the cans from the rest of the garbage, and after the season, we have a good-sized load to haul to the recyclers.

3. Craigslist it. Over the past two years, we’ve sold the following items on Craigslist: a manure spreader, a tractor, artificial tee mats, and fertilizer spreaders. Recently, we were also able sell all of our old irrigation satellites through the Noernet. Together, these unused items have added nearly ten grand to our bottom line, and we have extra shop space to boot.

4. Flower bed conversion. In a perfect world, all of the flower beds would be transformed into green stands of turf, but we all know that that’s neither reasonable nor aesthetically pleasing. In 2009, we converted many of our most prominent gardens from annual flowers to perennial plantings. Although the perennials aren’t maintenance free and initially are a little pricy, they paid for themselves in two years. We had a landscape architect put together the plans for the perennial beds, and they now provide great and varying colors and textures from early spring to late fall.

While the previous list is neither comprehensive nor is it filled with earth-shattering innovations, they have made a significant impact at Blackhawk and have the potential to do the same at your facility.

There have been some suggestions lately that the worst of the recession is behind us and that our industry is heading in the right direction. Although Madison has been more insulated from the fallout of the economic downturn than many areas, it does seem as if we’re picking up some positive momentum and that there’s renewed interest in membership. As the golf season gets rolling, I hope that the 2011 year is a prosperous one for you and your facility and that one or more of the ideas from El Cheapo helps your course succeed.

**Dennis Hamilton**

**608.295.2494**

**Ken Goodman**

**847.878.8420**



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