



Fewer Dollars Requires More Sense!

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

By all accounts this year's symposium was jam packed with important and useful information many of us can use immediately. The committee did a great job securing speakers and the topic couldn't be more important given today's economic challenges.

Many thanks to Shelly Mazurek and Jaime Staufenbeil from Milorganite who do all the behind the scenes work to make the symposium happen. The committee has it easy with those two to pick up the pieces and do all the organization. Also thanks are needed for Milorganite who supports all the speaker and building costs to allow the profit from the symposium to go to the O.J Noer Foundation.

Incoming WGCSA President provided the opening remarks and presented the Legacy Awards to the following students.

Kurt Van Auken son of David Van Auken of Antigo Bass Lake is attending UW Lacrosse, majoring in Exercise and Sports Science.

Mikka Schaller is the daughter of Scott Shaller of North Shore Country Club and is attending UW Madison, majoring in Political Science.

Maggie Janzen, daughter of Roy Janzen of Forest Hills is a 2 time winner attending UW Stout majoring in Food Systems and Technology.

Shelly Mazurek of Milorganite thanked the group for attending and presented Joe Deschler with a shirt and hat for being the only person in attendance that was at the first symposium 44 years ago! Perhaps Joe went to his first symposium as a 10 year old so he is not really that old, but I have my doubts on that.



Stuart Lindsey

Stuart Lindsey of Edgehill Golf Advisors presented "Turf Care in Tough Times" and gave an industry wide financial picture. It was not pretty or a pick-me-up for those in attendance. The industry as a whole is facing a declining participation rate based on total population along with a declining play rate among occasional and frequent (committed) players. This drop in rounds played comes at the same time the number of golf courses has increased further diluting available rounds. The one positive trend for the industry overall is more courses closed in 2008 and 2009 than opened.

Research shows that time is far and away the biggest reason golfers are playing less followed by cost which was a distant second. Results of the same research shows players choose the course the play based primarily on course conditions followed by price, pace of play while layout brings up the fourth reason. This information led to a discussion that the difficulty of modern golf courses is slowing



Dr. Frank Rossi

down play and reducing rounds numbers because players do not like to take 5 hours to play 18 holes.

Golf course superintendents can look at their courses for ways to speed up play by reducing the challenge for the average handicap player. Changes can be made to course setup, green speed, rough height and tree pruning to increase the pace of play.

Stuart then turned his presentation to the profitability of golf courses or perhaps the lack of profit would be a better description. As the management at golf courses saw a trend of decreasing rounds they cut prices to try to keep their market share. Since price is not the primary reason golfers choose a course the reduced rates did not increase rounds. Instead the discounting reduced revenue at a time costs are rising.

As managers of a golf courses largest cost center golf course superintendents are asked to reduce costs and endure budget cuts. Lindsey discussed the neces-

sity for superintendents to use time studies to understand, prioritize and justify their labor budgets. Labor can account for up to 70% of a golf course budget while managing personnel can take up to 70% of the superintendent's time.

Stuart felt staff training should be the turf mangers number one priority and gave two pieces of advice. "If employees don't know what you expect from them, they will not meet expectations". That makes a lot of sense and seems simple but surprisingly often gets left behind in a busy schedule. The second piece of wisdom was "what gets measured gets done, but what gets rewarded gets done better".

Stuart expressed that time-studies should be used to evaluate methods to increase staff productivity and compare one employee's efficiency with another's inefficiency.

Golf courses of all types have many challenges to survive and prosper through the current economic downturn. Smart operators will be able to provide quality conditions in a time efficient manner to produce a profitable golf course.

After the cheerful prognosis from Lindsey, Dr. Frank Rossi, Cornell University presented "The Bethpage Project: The Art and Science of Pesticide Reduction". Dr. Rossi presented work done at the Green Course at the Bethpage State Park after legislation was proposed to ban all pesticides on municipal golf courses in New York State.

The Green Course is one of 5 at the state park that covers 1,500 acres and sees 260,000 rounds annually. The Green Course opened in 1936 and is considered one of the easier layouts in comparison to Bethpage Black or Red.

The projects first goal was to develop an improved understanding of strategies to reduce pesticides for putting green main-



Eric Watkins



Dr. Jim Kerns



Kristopher Pinkerton, Brian Ferrie, Rod Johnson, Robert Vavrek



Todd Quinto



Bob Vavrek

tenance. The second was to demonstrate to policy makers the potential effect a immediate ban would have on golf courses.

The research included greens with 3 different treatments; conventional treatment, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) treatment and a non-chemical treatment that was abandoned and changed to a biologically based reduced risk treatment.

The 6 non-chemical greens had widespread turf loss from dollar spot leading to a 20 to 30% reduction in rounds and a change to the biologically based reduced risk research. This result was important in convincing legislators a total loss of turf chemicals would be detrimental to the golf industry.

Some of the greens were maintained with an alternative cultural plan using reduced mowing frequency by rolling on non-mowing days, solid tine cultivation every 3 to 4 weeks, weekly spiking and a "dusting" of top-dressing every 7-10 days. Only N, Fe and Primo were used with no Phosphorus or Potassium.

Dr Rossi presented the keys to progressive IPM.

- Use historical records to learn from the past
- Manage plant health populations

- Check predictive disease models
- Thresholds of disease do not work on greens
- Use Environmental Impact Quotient
- Treat greens preventively
- Focus on playability not aesthetics for tees and fairways
- Seek large scale reductions in applications

Overall Dr. Rossi presented some great information on reduced fertilizer and pesticide applications use that saved money while providing a satisfactory playing conditions.

Next up was Todd Quinto, Golf Course Architect with Lohmann Golf Designs with a talk titled "Can Smarter Renovations Cost You Less in The Long Run". Todd expressed the top 5 factors of renovations are:

- Improve course conditions
- Minimize ongoing costs
- Pace of Play
- Difficulty of Setup
- Think Proactively

Proper tree management is important for mature courses as aging trees or trees in the wrong location can cause problems with shade, moisture competition,

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air circulation, debris cleanup and microclimate conditions. Tree location can also compromise course playability and the original design concepts.

Tees can be examined and adjusted in size in relation to the amount of play they receive. Operators can eliminate unused areas to reduce product and labor costs. Tees also need to be looked at as an important part of course setup through tee marker placement and players using the tees that meet their abilities.

Next Todd discussed greens as the most important aspect of play. Proper re-grassing efforts can be key to reducing water and chemical inputs while providing a more consistent playing surface from green to green. Quinto has found green roll-offs regaining popularity to provide higher handicap players an easier recovery when they miss a green and give players the perception of a larger green surface as they make their approach shots.

Sand bunkers have become a hot topic as a labor-intensive part of the golf course. Once considered hazards with little input, sand bunkers are now expected to perform with consistency from hole to hole. Quinto gave numbers comparing the building and maintenance costs of flat sand bunkers to bunkers with the sand flashed up. Todd gave the attendees plenty to think about for future course improvements.

Bob Vavrek, Senior Agronomist, United States Golf Association Green Section presented "Maintenance Standards - One Size Does Not Fit All". With today's economic challenges, maintenance standards can be a golf course superintendent's best friend in justifying the results of budget cuts.

Bob was quick to point out bigger is not better when it comes to maintenance standards for your club. The best examples he has seen are 1 to 3 pages long in com-

parison to some 30 to 40 page monstrosities no one reads or understands. Maintenance standards are an effective tool to manage controversial topics and not employee manuals or job duty descriptions.

Standards should address mowing heights, green speed, hole locations, bunker conditions, tree placement, irrigation philosophy, winter play, frost delays, cart policies, aerification or topdressing practices and other items that effect play.

A course without standards has ambiguous goals, hopes and wishes that are tough to follow and even harder to justify. Vavrek offered that a team approach needs to be used to create the standards with all departments and interested parties involved. He was clear to say "standards" are attainable based on the budget and property while "better" is a just a goal. Don't promise what you cannot offer and be sure to use ranges in your standards not absolutes. Superintendents can use time-labor-studies to justify what they can and cannot accomplish while digital photos and graphs can simplify technical info.

Wednesday morning brought Dr. Frank Rossi back for "Beyond Organic: Sustainable Golf Turf Management" and a continuation on his research on reducing inputs. Organic is a buzz word that is often misunderstood and used. Organic does not equal safe and synthetic does not equal danger. During the recent economic challenges the general public's concern with the environment has declined. Most citizens want to protect the environment but less are willing to pay more to do it during a recession.

Golf's has some challenges as a fossil fuel dependent recreation viewed as a cosmetic, elitist sport. Dr. Rossi's work has shown that we cannot maintain quality turf by cultural practices alone and we need to use turf protectant products to meet golfer expectations.

Sustainable golf recognizes the cost of each practice independent of the organic or synthetic label. It focuses on inputs and outputs along with the carbon footprint of products and practices on the golf course. On the positive sustainable golf also focuses on golf's environmental positives with carbon sequestration, watershed protection, recreational value and economic value.

Sustainable golf uses economically sound and socially responsible management to reduce or change inputs to provide playing conditions. We have the opportunity as turf managers to provide an environmentally compatible management system that puts a premium on precision. Overall, golf course maintenance has been sloppy with our methods and can do a better job at doing our job through precise measuring and application at the proper times.

Dr. Rossi spoke on global warming or climate change as he calls it, and the effect humans may or may not have on it. No one knows for sure why the climate is changing but it is and we can expect it to continue.

Carbon footprint is and will continue to be a term we should familiarize ourselves with. Not just the carbon we produce from our actions but how much embodied energy is there to make and deliver the fuel, fertilizer, turf products and water that we use? Golf courses can reduce their carbon footprint by mowing less often and mowing less acreage. Efficiencies in mowing patterns and transporting around the golf course will reduce our footprint. Something as simple as a mowing pattern with less turning can reduce fuel consumption by 20%.

In conclusion sustainable golf turf management places a premium on precision in all that we do, makes economic sense, keeps our focus on the output and is a fresh look at turf science that is here to stay.

Dr. Eric Watkins, University of Minnesota continued our education with "Low Maintenance Grasses: Reduce Inputs, Not Quality." We have



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many grassing options for golf turf in Wisconsin and Minnesota so we need to look at the research and features of each type of grass.

Watkins current work involves finding low input grasses that are disease and insect resistant, drought tolerant, slow growing and use less fertilizer for greens, fairways and roughs.

Plots for greens include Creeping, Velvet and Colonial Bentgrasses along with Hard, Chewings and Sheep Fescues. It is early in the process but it will require a change in golfer's expectations for the fescues to be selected as the quality was bad but the playability was good. The modern golfer expects good quality and playability.

Fairway plots were given three levels of traffic and no water in 2006 and one irrigation event during a drought in 2007. Creeping and Velvet Bentgrass, Kentucky, Supina, Annual, Rough and Canada Bluegrasses, Hard, Tall, Chewings and Sheep Fescues, Tufted Hairgrass, Redtop, Alkaligrass, Timothy and Perennial Ryegrass were all tested. With the dry conditions in 2007 the fescues showed some promise as for long term survival.

Dr. Watkins also presented the best methods for turning Kentucky Blue roughs into fescue and other native grasses. Minnesota and Wisconsin have just started the LIST Study to find Low Input Sustainable Turf". The study will cover 10 locations, 12 species and 3 mowing heights. The results from this widespread multi-state study will be valuable to the future of golf course maintenance.

Dr. Jim Kerns, University of Wisconsin Madison gave a talk titled "Novel Dollar Spot Management Strategies that Reduce Fungicide Expenditures". From a quick history of pathology and dollar spot we learned the disease was a problem in the 1920's when it was called little brown patch. When fungicides of the 1970's and early 1980 effectively controlled dollar spot it was considered a minor problem and little research was continued on the disease. This time-out in dollar spot research has led to a lack of understanding for this increasingly challenging disease. Adding to the challenge is the fact current disease forecast models are often not effective and dollars spot has shown resistance to some fungicides.

Golf courses are using much less nitrogen than years ago in effort to reduce mowing frequency and over-plush conditions so the symptoms of dollar spot are more evident. Dr. Kerns is working with a multi state collaboration to forecast when we can expect outbreaks of dollar spot so treatments can begin preventively when they are more effective.

Kerns also is working on research to determine if early season applications of fungicides can delay dollar spot outbreak later into summer. Early cleanup of the disease may allow a reduction in total fungicide applications during the year. Dr. Kerns joined Dr. Rossi in advising not to use

threshold levels to determine when to treat dollar spot, because by the time we notice the disease it spreads quickly and is more difficult to control.

The symposium has historically finished with 3 real life experiences on the year's topic by active golf course superintendents. Rod Johnson, Pine Hills Country Club, Kris Pinkerton, Oshkosh Country Club and Brian Ferrie, Horseshoe Bay Golf Club gave insight into how they have reduced expenses in their maintenance departments.


Rod Johnson has used time-studies for 28 years to become more efficient and is mowing less while using more part time employees to "mow and go". Capital equipment purchases have been put on hold and staff hours have been cut. Rod and his staff have become relied on growth regulators to reduce growth and fine tuned pesticide rates and intervals between applications.

Brian Ferrie adjusts programs every year to become more efficient but for the past few years has been forced to adapt even more. A smaller staff has led to increased challenges for the crew. Brian has recommended and obtained bigger and more efficient equipment to allow the staff to compete their duties quicker. As a second club for most of his members Ferrie is tasked with providing a great product every day as it may be months between member visits. In other words a first impression for the year may be the only impression he gets with a member.

Kris Pinkerton discussed a difficult couple years at Oshkosh as member numbers dipped reducing income. His staff has adapted to maintaining and managing the HVAC system, swimming pool and tennis court facility and staffs. Money was saved in fertilizer applications, longer mowing intervals, less line trimming and no annual flowers. Oshkosh had 3 member work days where the members filled divots on fairways on Monday evenings. The events allowed for some one on one communication between the staff and members.

Bob Vavrek, Agronomist, United States Golf Association Green Section ended the symposium with his annual wrap-up of the speakers and the take home messages. All the symposiums I have attended have been good but this one hits the top of the scale with timely valuable information we can use immediately. Time-studies were hit on by multiple speakers as necessary for turf managers to justify labor expenses.

Cuts to budgets are with us for the near future and may help bring golf towards a mindset to balance environmental conservancy with playability.

Thank you to the speakers for the great content, and to the attendees who took time to join us. Those who could not or did not join us this year really missed out on a premier educational opportunity. 

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Seasonal Changes and Planning

By **Brett Grams**, Chapter Manager, Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association

I hope the fall months allowed you to complete a successful 2009 Season. For the majority of our members we will soon be entering the slower season. It is my hope that most of you can take a little more time away from your operations to spend with friends and family. For most of us, winter is a time to recharge, plan, and prepare for next year and it's new set of challenges. For most of us, reviewing our successes and shortcomings can help us to try to predict our future needs. The financial challenges have been high in recent years and 2010 appears to be no different.

Just like most of you, the WGCSA Board of Directors and I have been busy planning for 2010. Our great Association is facing the same challenges. The board and I have been very busy in the recent months trying to create new opportunities for growth and to make sure we continue to offer our members and our industry the support we all need.

For those of you that were able to attend our Fall Business meeting on November 17th in Kohler you were able to learn about some of the multiple things our association is implementing for 2010. For starters we will be working out any glitches and bugs to our new website. Our Association is firmly committed to use the website and the advantages it offers to enhance how we communicate with each other. This technology allows for streamlined communications, quicker response times to members needs, the ability to update membership information, online registration for meetings, and to seek feedback from you in a very

inexpensive manner compared to conventional mailings.

Our vendor members and companies will also see changes to our offerings and selections for sponsorship and advertisements next year. We are completing the 2010 Industry Partners Program. Our Affiliate membership has been very dedicated to our Association for many years and we need them to continue to offer this support now more than ever. The Affiliate Companies have requested more ways to communicate their products and offerings to our membership. We have expanded opportunities by creating ad space on our new website and in the "new and improved" Membership Directory and Handbook for next year. These ads are a "win" for all for our members as the improvements we are creating are being implemented without raising any of our member dues.


Anticipated reductions in both State and Federal funding for our own OJ Noer Research Facility, Professors, and Support Staff, along with the studies being conducted at the UW are also a challenge that the WGCSA is committed to improving. The board is working out the details of a new fundraiser that will raise funds for research without relying directly on our members. We anticipate we will be asking all member facilities to consider donating rounds of golf which then will be offered to all golfers via an online auction. These proceeds will be earmarked for turf research. The board and I are very excited to get the details finalized and the specifics to you ASAP. We should be able to have a large positive impact for funding needed research in 2010 and beyond if we

can get the support from our member clubs.

In closing, change is also happening to our hard working Board of Directors. I would like to thank Matt Schmitz and Mike Lyons for the time and efforts they graciously donated to better the WGCSA. Also, Dustin Riley will be handing over the President's Gavel to Brian Zimmerman in January. Dustin has personally championed many efforts in his tenure leading our association. Please join me in thanking them for their efforts.

I wish all of you a successful end of 2009 and even better 2010! 🌱

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Chapter Delegates Meeting Offers Insight and a Look Ahead

Compiled by David Brandenburg, Editor, *The Grass Roots*

Ninety GCSAA chapter delegates, representing 95 chapters, convened in Lawrence, Kan., and Kansas City, Mo., Oct. 9-11 to participate in a wide range of discussions, including the state of the golf economy, association governance, golf's relationship with the environment, and membership growth and retention.

Candidate presentations

In addition, candidates for president, vice president, secretary/treasurer and two open director positions met with the delegates. A shortened version of the candidate presentations will be available on GCSAA TV in the near future. Fitzroy, Wollaston Recreational Facility/Presidents Golf Club in North Quincy, Mass., is running unopposed for president; as is Bob Randquist, CGCS at Boca Rio Golf Club in Boca Raton, Fla., for vice president. Current directors Sandy Queen, CGCS at City of Overland Park, Kan., and Pat Finlen, CGCS at The Olympic Club in San Francisco, Calif., oppose each other for secretary/treasurer. Both of their two year director terms expire this year. Four candidates are vying for two open director positions: Bob Farren, CGCS at Pinehurst (N.C.) Resort; Todd Lupkes, CGCS at Palouse Ridge Golf Course in Pullman, Wash; Bill Maynard, CGCS at Milburn Golf and Country Club in Shawnee, Kan.; and Mike Wooten, CGCS at Cedar Ridge Country Club in Broken Arrow, Okla.

Association operations and financial update

Thirty-one of the 39 new chapter delegates participated in an orientation session to learn more about their role and in greater detail how GCSAA functions as an association. The full contingent of delegates heard a state of the association presentation from GCSAA Chief Executive Officer Mark Woodard, CGCS. He noted GCSAA has been challenged financially by declines in industry advertising, trade show space, and conference and show attendance. However, he said GCSAA is in a better position than many associations because of a healthy financial reserve, a supportive industry, a loyal membership and no long-term debt.

Woodward also said the association's solid footing is buoyed by its participation in numerous allied association initiatives and by the importance owners and influential golfers place on the golf course superintendent.

"In my first 15 months on the job I have had the opportunity to travel all over the nation and meet with a broad spectrum of the industry," Woodward said. "Two things stand out: First, golf has never been more unified and

committed to strengthening the game; and second, the recognized value of the GCSAA member is at an all time high. GCSAA has its challenges, but the leadership really looks at the situation as one of opportunity. We are in a strong position and much of the credit for that goes to the membership."

Sustainability

Delegates were also updated on the work of GCSAA and The Environmental Institute for Golf in sustaining the game. Chief among the efforts is the Golf Course Environmental Profile. GCSAA Director of Environmental Programs Greg Lyman explained that the nutrient survey results would be released in early December, building on the land use and water use/conservation reports issued over the past two years. Lyman noted that the data from the surveys has been crucial in working with lawmakers, media and allied golf associations in detailing golf's environmental footprint. Lyman also discussed the importance of the development of the new superintendent competencies, which will include an element of environmental management.

Perhaps the highlight of the meeting was a presentation on sustainability by University of Kansas Professor of Journalism and Mass Communications Simran Sethi. An internationally respected authority on sustainability and contributor to NBC Nightly News, Oprah Winfrey Show and Planet Green Channel, Sethi spoke about the sustainability with a focus on the triple bottom line: people, planet and profit. She applauded GCSAA, its members and The Institute for their commitment to transparency and continuous improvement in managing facilities.

"It's a challenge for you, and I realize that," Sethi said. "You have to serve your employers and you are pressured by golfers for perfection. You must have patience in this effort. Communications will be important. You will have to demonstrate why a change of behavior is important. Use the tools out there that are available to help. I think what the association and you are doing is wonderful. As long as the association and you are committed to transparency and continuous improvement, then you can be successful against detractors."

Other discussions included:

- GCSAA governance issues, including voting procedures, dual membership and the chapter affiliation agreement, which will be renewed Dec. 31, 2009.
- Efforts by GCSAA to manage its expenses and gen-