

Questions for Superintendents Around the State

Editor's Note: The purpose of Hole Notes is to get information to MGCSA members. Some of the most important information is that from exchange between superintendents. It could be a simple idea, a complex plan or a certain philosophical approach to golf course management.

In this issue, three superintendents were asked the same questions. Sometimes the answers will be similar but the ideas is to exchange information and perhaps learn from a fellow superintendent. A thank you to Bill Larson, Town & Country Club; Tom Parent, River Oaks, and Tom Johanns, Bemidji Town & Country Club.

How critical are environmental concerns in the performance of the superintendent's job?

Bill Larson: It has become increasingly more critical. Being able to provide the membership with a product they are happy with and understanding the public's concern regarding this situation is our biggest challenge. This issue just isn't going to disappear! It is the responsibility of superintendents to expand their knowledge and be prepared to respond to the public's concerns.

Tom Parent: I feel that environmental concerns are extremely important. Our industry is faced with a negative impression from much of the public. It's our responsibility to maintain our golf courses in as environmentally friendly manner as possible. We all know the use of pesticides and fertilizer are necessary in the operation of a golf course, but the key issue is to limit their use to a minimum. At River Oaks, we installed a disease forecaster/weather station to monitor environmental conditions at our facility. Although these units are expensive, they allow us to make more intelligent decisions, and we are able to justify our fungicide use. This unit has paid for itself many times over. We have also installed a fertigation system to reduce our fertilizer use.

In 1994 we cut our nitrogen applications by 60 percent. We need to do everything possible to limit our negative environmental impact and extol the positive aspects of golf courses. As an example, we should all join the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program and follow its guidelines. Think of the positive press we would receive if Minnesota golf courses had 100% membership in this program!

Tom Johanns: Environmental concerns are a very important aspect of a superintendent's job performance. With the increased emphasis on environmental issues in our industry, it is our job as professionals to implement solid IPM programs and adjust our practices to include more natural and biological controls.

Do you use growth regulators on any part of your course?

Bill Larson: We have done some experimentation the past couple of years on fairways. This year we are implementing a program on fairways, steep hillsides and boulevards.

Tom Parent: As you can see from my answer to the first question, I am a proponent of using turf chemicals as a last resort. However, mowers also generate pollution. If you collect clippings, there is a waste disposal problem. Is there a valid trade-off? Since ours is a relatively new course, we have not needed to experiment with these products to suppress Poa Annuua. We did use Scotts T.G.R. in the fall of 1991. If you want your greens lightning fast, and you don't want to mow more than twice a week, this is an excellent product. We did experiment with Primo in 1994 around our bunkers to reduce hand and bank mowing with mixed results.

Tom Johanns: I have not, at this point, used any growth regulators on my golf course.

Are you rolling greens or considering rolling? If you have, describe your experience and why you started. If you do not intend to

roll, tell why.

Bill Larson: We have had a roller for one season now and we are still learning exactly where its place should be in our maintenance program. We have been successful keeping our greens at or slightly above 9' on the stimpmeter on a consistent basis without the roller. For special events and tournaments we have used the roller and increased our speed up to the 10' to 10'6" range. It has been brought to our attention that this is too fast for our golf course because of the older back to front pitched greens. Se we need to be a little careful about how we use it. One definite benefit is how smooth the green gets after rolling.

Tom Parent: Yes, we roll our greens. Last year, we started rolling once a week, usually on Tuesdays. We found that weekly rolling significantly increased the smoothness of our greens. Being a municipal golf course we do not need to maintain ultra-fast greens. We get more complaints about our greens being too fast than too slow. Excessive green speed slows play. And let's face it, for a daily fee course — time is money. Although we do not roll under saturated conditions, we don't worry about compaction from this procedure. We aerify and topdress monthly from May through August. We use a GA-30 with 1/4 inch tines and have done so for the last four years. This gives us a light topdressing and aerification with greens recovering in three to five days with little or no impact on ball roll.

Tom Johanns: I am not rolling greens at the present time. I look at rolling as another management tool to help achieve a faster, smoother putting surface. Research indicates that the benefits of rolling appear to be short-term. I would not be an advocate of repeated rolling for the negatives that would result. I have a hard time instituting a practice that could increase compaction in soils when our whole management scheme is geared toward reducing it!!