

Red River Flooding Changes Priorities

By MARK S. LANDA

Sometimes all that is needed to make a decision is a little extra push. That little extra push can come from an extreme condition such as the spring flooding of the Red River of the North. The flood set records for the Grand Forks, North Dakota area as it made its way north to Canada. The river crested at 54.3 feet above the river bottom. The normal river level is between 12 and 16 feet with flood stage in Grand Forks set at 28 feet. Serious problems start to develop when the river level hits about 40 feet. At the height of the flood, almost all of Grand Forks and its twin city of East Grand Forks, Minnesota were covered by flood water.

Also covered with floodwater was the Grand Forks Country Club, which lies along the Red River, just south of Grand Forks. Parts of the course are threatened by high water during normal spring flooding, but this year's water levels were unprecedented. The flood caused many problems for the country club, as it did for everyone in the region. Just getting to work was a chore. Staff members boated to work for 28 days as river water covered most of the course and all access roads. As dikes started to fail in the Grand Forks area several days before the river crested, Course Superintendent Mark Bergstrom and his staff moved equipment to the highest points on the course. This move proved necessary as the maintenance shop was covered with 17 inches of water. The clubhouse lower level filled with eight feet of water as the river flowed in through the windows.

Clean up started immediately. Mark and his crew washed the silt off the greens as the waters receded. Silt was a major problem for the entire course. More than 200 cubic yards of silt were removed from the 17th hole alone. It took 2½ weeks for trash pick up alone. And then the real work began. Six of the 18 holes received major damage. More than 100 acres needed repair with approximately half of those needing to be re-seeded. It wasn't until August that the entire course was open for play.

An important element in the repair of the course was the DAKOTA Turf Tender 440, a new piece of equipment the Country Club purchased after the flood. The Turf Tender was first introduced to the public at the 1997 Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) Trade Show in Las Vegas, but Mark had been familiar

with the machine earlier. Grand Forks is the headquarters for DAKOTA and several superintendents in the area, including Mark, had been consulted during the development of the machine. Mark provided input on marketplace needs and also critiqued the machine as it was being developed. He therefore knew how versatile the machine could be.

Originally, Mark had intended to wait and make a Turf Tender part of his 1998 budget. He realized it would be a valuable addition, but did not think it was critical for 1997. The flood of 1997 changed his thinking. Because of the variety of work required to repair the extensive damage, his existing machinery would be tested to its limits. Also causing problems was a labor shortage as the clean up and reconstruction around the two cities used every available person. Normally, Mark has 14 people working on the course during the summer months but this past summer he only managed to retain that many for about two weeks. For the majority of the summer Mark and eight staff members handled the grounds responsibilities. The staff worked as many hours as it could handle, six days per week. Each person was given one day off each week to rest up for the following week. When the golf course opened to play all 18 holes, it was time for some staff members to return to school. This forced other staff members to work seven days a week. A labor saving device was desperately needed.

The versatile Turf Tender proved to be indispensable in flood repair. Many different materials were hauled in the Turf Tender to repair damaged areas. Sand was hauled and unloaded into bunkers. Coarse aggregates were hauled to repair and replace destroyed cart paths. The Turf Tender's low impact footprint allowed Mark and his staff to haul full loads across the course without doing more damage. Topdressing was also made much easier. Instead of the five or six people normally used for topdressing, the Turf Tender allowed the entire process to be done with only three people. Of the three people, one person hauled material and filled the topdresser with the Turf Tender, a second person did the topdressing while the third person brushed the greens. Since the machine can be loaded with a tractor and loader instead of a shovel, labor time

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is saved and the chance of injuries can be reduced. This machine did the work of several people. As a result, those people were free to work on other projects.

Mark has been in the golf course industry for quite a while. His career started when he worked part time for the Owatonna Country Club in his hometown of Owatonna, Minnesota. Mark worked at Owatonna Country Club during the summers while in high school and also after he started college at the University of Minnesota-Crookston. He then moved to Grand Forks where he was employed at the University of North Dakota, first as the campus mowing supervisor and then as the assistant superintendent at the university-owned Ray Richards Golf Course. In May, 1995, Mark was hired as superintendent at the Grand Forks Country Club. At that time, he had no idea of the difficulties he would face less than two years later.

Even though the Red River flood of 1997 is little more than a memory for the Grand Forks Country Club, it has

had some lasting effects. The labor shortage continues. Most of the remaining maintenance staff is working seven days a week to keep the course in tip top condition until the end of the season. Hopefully this is just temporary.

More importantly, the way things are done have been changed forever. The new DAKOTA Turf Tender will help save time, labor and expense for years to come. Mark was impressed with the versatility of the machine. It is the perfect grow-in machine. It can be used for construction, repair work or regular maintenance, and it will spread almost any material including topdressing and fertilizer. The savings in time and labor Mark experienced with the Turf Tender made it a good purchase for this year even if it hadn't been needed for flood repair. The Turf Tender can pay for itself in saved labor costs and by eliminating other unneeded machinery. In the long run, the purchase of a Turf Tender that was forced by unusual circumstances will end up paying dividends for a long, long time.

To: Members/MGCSA

Applications are now being accepted at Mayflower Country Club in Fairfax, Minn. for the full-time position of GENERAL MANAGER for 1998. Salary is negotiable. Mayflower CC is a 9-hole course.

Inquiries should be directed to:

JIM POSS, secretary
Mayflower Country Club
Box 333
Franklin, MN 55337

Phone: 507/557-2726

— CORRECTION —

Lucas Mahal and Tamara Johnson Receive Garske Legacy Scholarships

Lucas Mahal, son of Doug Mahal, Head Golf Course Superintendent at The Minikahda Club, Minneapolis, and Tamara Johnson, daughter of Bill Johnson, former Head Superintendent at Edina Country Club have been awarded \$1,250 Garske Legacy Scholarships.

Mahal is a student at Vermillion Community College in Ely. Johnson, who also received the scholarship last year, is a student at the University of Wisconsin/LaCrosse.

The Garske Legacy Scholarship program is designed to assist children and grandchildren of Class AA, A, B, C, Associate and Affiliate members.

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