

An Association's True Meaning

By an Anonymous Affiliate Member of the MGCSA

Wow! How about going from one extreme to the other? The difference between the winter of '97 and this winter is a perfect example. It is nice that Mother Nature has given us a break so far, but after conditions of the last two winters, that was actually a very easy task.

It's great to see spirits so high around the golf courses. I even saw smiles on both the course superintendent and manager as they walked by each other. It's rumored that even some of the golf course board members forgot they were turf maintenance experts and have offered less advice. Many attitudes towards the maintenance crews are much better this year than at the same time last year. Maybe Mother Nature throws unusual conditions at us to make us appreciate her and each other more.

My travels to the courses this spring consist of a lot less visions of ice rinks. To this day, I have not put on my hockey skates to glide over to take some turf samples, although it is hard to not bring them with me. It was easier to leave the rusty ice auger and chisel at home.

Many weather professionals have stated we experienced some of the worst winter conditions during November of '96 to April of '97 in recent memory. Conditions were right for turf damage in many areas. Many experienced superintendents indicated that was the harshest they had seen in a long time — if not the worst. Ideas and techniques that were almost long buried in memory were brought out to test the most experienced of the turf managers. The lessons learned are always invaluable.

The flooding of the Red River Val-

ley was predicted for the spring of '97. The media alerted everyone, and as can be expected, there were many volunteers to help with this disaster. It was well understood that very little could be done to prevent the damage that was about to happen, but the spirit to help was still there. Most people felt sorrow for everyone caught in or by the river's fury.

These two examples of environmental hardships are both very similar in many circumstances, with one very big exception. Flooding victims lost their houses and belongings, while some sups thought they were going to lose their jobs. To lose your house and belongings is indeed very unfortunate, but at least there was help offered to them in different ways to help them rebuild. But to lose a job? Could this be possible in a situation, as stated above, the worst conditions seen to date were thrown at us? Unfortunately, during my travels in the winter and spring of '97, I saw many worried faces in the maintenance shops.

In all other industries, with all the high tech advancements, research and testing being done, they still concede that there is nothing they can do to stop Mother Nature at her worst. The golf course maintenance industry is no exception. It seems, however, some golf industry people think that since maintenance people work side-by-side with Mother Nature that maybe she slipped some cheat sheet notes to them to reveal all her secrets and remedies. It is now most people's opinion that there was no common *human factor* that was the cause for the turf damage that was seen on many greens across the state.

In November of '96 is when many turf maintenance people from within the association started discussing the problems they were seeing on the courses. Ideas and solutions were presented. *Hole Notes* had articles on winter damage. Groups of superintendents alerted the media of possible heavy winter damage to the golf courses in their local area. The association had a special meeting to discuss the topic with the regional USGA representative. I am not a fan of labor unions, but I do think that industry associations are very critical in advancing their cause and standing their ground.

It is human nature that makes us not want to go through difficult times alone. I believe that the networking, discussions and brainstorming that went on within the MGCSA was very critical and did a lot for the self-preservation in all of us. To withstand the uneducated, pure emotional pointing of the finger would have destroyed many people trying to stand alone.

Given the bad circumstances, the majority of people did understand, but the few that complain the loudest are usually the most uneducated on this subject. I believe it is times like the winter of 1996-97 that makes our association stronger. The stronger the association, the stronger the recognition and the more educated people in and around our industry will be.

With the passing of time everybody learns something new in all aspects of life. So, with the lessons learned from the past year's turf challenge, have a great '98 and don't forget your cheat sheet!