

# My First Year As A Golf Course Superintendent

By THOMAS JOHN SCHMIDT  
*Moorhead Country Club*

I stepped into the maintenance facility and took a good look around, no doors, no plumbing, no heating and no electricity. Just a giant shell 30' x 80'. It's January 17 and I have to sharpen all the reels, fix equipment and build a maintenance facility before an early spring approaches. My main goal was to get the building done so I could move the equipment from its three locations on to a central spot — the new maintenance building. Most of my equipment was in the old maintenance building which had been a victim of the 1997 flood. My triplexes and fairway units were in a snowbank and the rest was in a Masonic lodge garage. This was a sure sign of a very fun winter.

I spoke and met with dozens of contractors, getting bids on the new maintenance facility and above ground gas tanks. After designing the inside of the shop and making construction decisions I felt I was ready to start on the new maintenance building and finally began heading in an upward direction. My two-page to do list never seemed to shorten. As soon as one project was done two more were added to the list. Bringing back the assistant superintendent, Brandon Chaffons, and a mechanic was a must. The assistant had been around for seven years and was a godsend. He knew the ins and outs of the golf course and where to find everything.

We traded a membership to a gentleman named Dwight Guebler who had been a builder. Guebler, my assistant Brandon and myself proceeded to frame the inside of the maintenance shop bathroom, breakroom, pesticide storage and grinding room. We worked weekends and late nights on the interior and used the day hours for our endless list of other tasks.

February was here and the snow was already beginning



Tom Schmidt, Superintendent at Moorhead Country Club.

to melt on the mighty Red River. The river was coming up to its banks and we had to secure our drainage ports to keep excess water from backing up on to the course. It was time for the mechanic to start putting the equipment back together, five Cushman's of the 1970s vintage and only one of the five was in working condition. I needed equipment desperately. I set forth a package deal and traded in some equipment. I received a 455D, a fairway unit 5200 and a Workman. I strongly believe without this new equipment I would not be here. Well, now I had the equipment looking up and the shop was moving in the right direction. This brings us to the golf course which also needed some extra attention. We began to prune the front nine trees which took part of January and all of February. Yes, they were desperate for a good pruning.

As the snow continued to slowly melt away, I kept looking for the grass to come through the greens. The only thing I was able to see was sand; this made me a little worried. We shoveled seven of our 18 greens which we found were covered over half an inch with mason sand. I thought that this spring I would have to seed excessively but I believe that the removal of the sand prevented this overseeding.

By mid-March things were really starting to shape up. We had moved into our new maintenance facility completed except for some sheetrocking, tape and texture and painting.

April brought us to the First Annual Moorhead Member Clean Up Day. I had a very successful turnout. Thirty people showed up to lend a hand in raking matted turf areas and the clean-up of leaves. This helped out immensely and gave us our first jump on the year.

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# First Year—

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April 7 was our opening day. The training process started as my seasonal staff was beginning for the season. The implementing of new programs, schedules and new training procedures finally paid off when the course was in great shape for an April and early start.

May and June brought their downfalls or should I say downpours. Fourteen inches of rain fell in May and 16 inches in June. Besides the rain the Red River flooded or crested five times; luckily only a few areas on the course were affected. the only good part about the rain was that we never needed to use our irrigation system those months. This allowed us time to move and fix three major breaks from the previous year.

June was great for irrigator breaks. A mere \$6,000 was spent on our 20-30 breaks. Out of which 15-20 heads weren't repairable. Piece by piece we fixed and dug and fixed until it was working pretty good. The course was looking in very good shape.

July and August were hot, humid and not a drop of rain. Two months of watering — I was a Toro key holder most mornings. I had approximately 30 heads in which 15 had never been wired and the other 15 had been cut. These were slowly fixed as the opportunity arose. I knew we had some major problems ahead. With budget restraints and getting people to understand we needed to spray our fairways for



weeds. Knotweed was taking over and people were beginning to get frustrated. I could only explain that I was in the process of asking for extra monies needed in order to do what was needed to rid of the weeds. No answer about the extra monies so I went ahead and sprayed. I aerified the fairways for the first time in years. Everything was getting back to normal and actually better than before. The course looked fabulous. The best it had looked all year. It was what I pictured Moorhead Country Club should be.

Every decision I had to make this year, whether it small or large, right or wrong was surely a learning and growing experience.

As I look back over the season I believe I made the right choice in accepting my first Superintendent job. Of course, at the trying times of the year I sometimes second-guessed my decision, but as next year approaches I know I will have more control along with experience—"weather permitting."

I would like to thank a few people for their generous help throughout the year: Greg Vigen, Fargo Country Club; David Woods, Oxbow Country Club, and all their crew; the Moorhead and Fargo city golf courses; Larry Murphy, the golf professional at Moorhead Country Club, and General Manager Michael Borgie.

I have worked for many superintendents: Scott Austin, Steve Shumansky, John Christianson and my friend and mentor Michael Brower. I would like to thank them for the many practices I have learned from each of them and I hope I can do the same some day. A special thank you to my wife who took on the burden of my 70-hour weeks with two small children in a new area.

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