

We've Been Hit

By NATE USELDING

Assistant Superintendent, Dellwood Hills Golf Club

"What the heck is that?" Those were the first words out of my mouth as I looked at the 13th green on my way into work. Are you kidding me? We awoke to 280 divots taken out of a green at Dellwood Hills on April 13. An aspiring golfer found our 13th green to be an excellent spot to practice his swing. That night he tore it up, he was the best of the best and made himself a name at Dellwood. Two hundred and eighty thick divots sprayed all over the green and approach but no golf balls in sight. A sheer act of vandalism occurred without anyone knowing.

Vandalism isn't a frequent occurrence at Dellwood Hills but we do see it roughly a half a dozen times each year.

There are many access points to our course with different housing developments separating many of the holes. These holes are the hardest hit by destruction and we are aware of them, but nothing has been this severe before.

Flagsticks, ball washers, tee markers and benches have all gone missing but you never have to venture far as most times they end up in the pond or woods nearby. As I drive into work every morning I am able to see five different holes and usually check to make sure everything is still in place.

It wasn't 280 divots randomly taken either, there was a purpose. After hacking away at our green with nice penmanship, he left behind a clear message to someone within our company. We contacted the Sheriff's Department and a deputy came out to assess the situation. His first question was "What do you think they used to do this damage?" We debated beforehand if it was a 9-iron or a wedge but to make things easier we just said a golf club. His response, "kind of hard to believe they would use a golf club to do this." A month later we are still looking at the aftereffects of the damage

with no leads and no help with the situation.

Who was this person targeting the golf course or a certain individual? We tried making the connection to what was written to whom we know and nothing came of it. The Sheriff's Department had nothing else for us and now we are back to square one. We have never caught anyone nor do I think we ever will. Usually when something of this magnitude happens, there is a buzz around town, or at



the club, and something comes about. Still no one has come forward and we are left with filing a report and hoping for something someday. As a kid, a neighboring course experienced high schoolers dumping gas and oil out all over greens and tees and spelling out some choice words. These kids got caught because they couldn't keep their mouths shut and someone turned them in. We hope this happens in our situation.

Vandalism happens everywhere from someone missing a putt and in disbelief jamming their putter in the ground to tossing a tee marker in the woods. Those are minor cases but when someone drives a car on a green and whips a cookie, what are you to do? You can't avoid vandalism but we can try to control it. Is putting up a perimeter fence the answer? You may deter them but if they really want to get

in, they will. Security cameras are out of the question and so are motion lights because of their price. Our greatest assets are our neighbors as they patrol their neighborhood and keep a watchful eye on the course. Quite a few neighbors are members at our club and we rely heavily on them to report suspicious activity. In the 12 years I have worked on a golf course, this is the worst I've experienced. I'm sure you may have stories about other places that are worse. I guess we luckily

avoided all serious situations of real physical damage.

To fix our "new" practice facility, three of us carefully replaced all the divots but not to their original spots. We got lucky because the divots were thick and had a lot of root mass to support growth and hold moisture. Cutting and piecing them to fit took a couple of hours and, once complete, the outline of the damage was still there. We aggressively topdressed and watered the area over the following weeks with occasional plugging of dead

spots. It will be a couple weeks of topdressing till the outline is completely healed over and not noticeable. If there is any good news to come of this situation, the area attacked by this hack was on the front quarter of the green, which only is good for two or three pin locations. We don't have a green nursery at Dellwood Hills and we must recover lost turf the old-fashioned way, reseeding.

How can you put a price on what you need to do in the next two months until it is completely healed? Do you pull it out of a hat or is there a way to calculate labor, love, water and sand? I like to embellish the price of destruction in the police report, in hopes of one day catching someone. We should also charge the person for three rounds of golf fees, seeing he took 280 strokes.