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What's A Superintendent To Do? *When Rising Expectations...Confront Declining Resources*

Fore Front

You can almost always have a sure bet if you say that whenever two or more golf course superintendents get together they will eventually discuss the requests of their course's golfers and how this conflicts with the budget they have to do the job.

A similar wager about those inside the clubhouse would probably be just as safe, with the twist being that the clubhouse dwellers would be concerned with how the superintendent fritters away their funds while the man down the road is doing such a superior job.

This is the confrontation of rising expectations and declining resources. The golfers desire more and more, or at least make unrealistic comparisons to other courses, while the superintendent is granted lower budgets and faced by higher costs for all goods and services.

"What's a superintendent to do?" asks the headline. Certainly a question easier to pose than answer, but nevertheless, a question that deserves exploration and attempted answers.

This problem of rising expectations and declining resources is not new, nor is it isolated strictly upon golf course superintendents. Each and everyone of us face it daily, just as almost everyone else is bound to do sooner or later. Obviously, the solution is not an easy one or the problem would not persist for so long a time, nor with so broad of scope. A complicating factor added to the problem is what works one place has no guarantee of working anywhere else.

In the most basic of terms, a golf course superintendent faced by this problem has few possible alternatives. He can rely upon the reputation he has developed and trust that his recommendations will be accepted. He can arrange "test plots," and "demonstrations." He can do whatever he believes is proper, given a certain budget, even though the golfers may complain. Or, he can follow the dictates of the golfers for as long as the budget holds out and then tell them that that will be all of the maintenance and management they can have until more money is forthcoming.

Certainly, there are other possible solutions, but these

basic points probably get the idea across. The solution is not going to be an easy one, and patience and understanding on everyone's part will be required.

Of the above suggestions, probably only the first two have any chance of working for the superintendent and the course. Basically, both of the above suggestions rely upon "education" of the member, by the superintendent.

Reliance upon a reputation is undoubtedly the best possible position for anyone. If the superintendent's suggestions have proven acceptable in the past, they will certainly have a better chance in the future. However, superintendents cannot wait until the last minute to try and build a basis for acceptance, it is a continuously on-going proposition of informing the golfers what you are doing, why you are doing it and letting them brag about the splendid results.

"Demonstration plotting," is another usually acceptable approach, providing there is sufficient time and even small amounts of money for the project. More and more superintendents are setting aside relatively small areas of the actual playing surface from time to time and demonstrating the differences a particular operation can make to the course. Following the application, operation, or whatever, the golfers are asked to decide which of the two areas they want, providing they are willing to pay for it. Most often, if the superintendent has done his homework and knows the total cost figures, the golfers will opt for the improved conditions because they can actually see the differences.

The only other serious problem a superintendent will have is to educate his golfers on the effect just a few miles distance can make in the maintenance budget of two courses. Natural terrain, soil conditions, the course's maintenance history and even rainfall can vary tremendously in short distances, and have significant effects upon what a superintendent can or cannot do given any amount of money. In fact, the whole idea of comparative golfing should be overcome, but because grass has always been greener elsewhere, it is unlikely that such thinking can be easily reversed today.