Mid-Atlantic Association of Golf Course Superintendents NEWSLETTER

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Lee Dieter, C.G.C.S.
Editor

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President's Message

I can not imagine anything more pleasing than the beauty of spring and the enthusiasm that it generates in me. This enthusiasm certainly manifested itself at our first meeting of the year. With the gracious hospitality of the Chevy Chase Club and our host George Renault, we had a great day of education, a fine evening of camaraderie and two of the best meals served anywhere. Of course our thanks also go to the USGA for the educational program during the day's session. Thank you Eric Shiel, Stan Zontek, and David Oatis, as well as the other speakers for the day. Just to let you know, we had 154 persons attend the USGA portion of the day and 110 for the MAAGCS meeting in the evening.

We just completed our second annual ski trip. This event which was organized by Social and Benevolence Chairman, Joel "Jean Claude" Ratcliff was enjoyed by all who attended. Next year can you match the real snow?

Lastly, it looks like a great year coming, while we are still enjoying the spring lets all turn out at Laytonsville Golf Course and join our host Nick "Trump" Vance for a day of golf, education, and fellowship. I hope to see you there on April 11.

Walter Montross, CGCS, *President*

VERTI-DRAIN, A NEW APPROACH

by Lou Rudinski, CGCS

Like many golf courses throughout the Mid-Atlantic area, the last two years have been difficult on our putting surfaces. Localized dry spot as well as wet wilt on the same greens created a drastic management decision for us at Eisenhower Golf Course.

Our green until two seasons ago were considered perfect. Little stress was experienced in spite of dawn to dark play in all sorts of weather and a limited irrigation supply pond. I might add at this time we were closed the entire months of January and February. Our downfall began with several poor decisions. First, public outcry demanded we open the course all winter. Naturally the reasons for open play was "other courses were open and they have no problems with their greens." Second, budgetary cuts forced us to purchase drum type aeration equipment. We all got the sales pitch on that one! "One man, no clean up, all 18 holes in one day!" Needless to say, severe compaction, short roots, and Poa Annua began to show their ugly faces. No one would listen as I was the only one able to see the future damage. The aerator, in spite of increased use, did not penetrate deep enough to allow roots beyond two inches of USGA greens mix applied over the years. We have all seen the effects of water movement through lighter soils placed over heavy soils. The higher elevations of our greens dried rapidly in spite of twice daily hand watering and the center low spots got wetter the more we tried to combat the dry spots. Excessive rainfall followed by temperatures near 100° baked the centers of many greens. The dry spots remained as the water moved laterally out of the high spots. Wetting agents helped very little and were temporary at best.

Our next course of action was the use of the Verti-Drain aerator. Due to advance scheduling of outings and the high cost of purchase, contract aeration was the direction to follow. Early March we embarked on our first test of deeptine aeration. Hollow tines would not pull a core worthy of mention. Also the tines would only penetrate 5 to 6 inches, if they did not bend or break first. Solid tines gave us 7 to 9 inches and even then we experienced bending on occasion.

Filling the holes with topdressing was not as successful as appearance would lead one to believe. Bridging and/or collapsing of the core space prevented blending of the layers in the greens. Some benefit was realized but only one aeration was not going to correct the cement-like soil. I also suspect the kicking action we are sold on to fracture the soil was negated by the wet springtime soil. Rather than cracking I feel the soil merely gave way, such as silly putty. Drier conditions would have to be met to realize the fracturing of the soil advertised by the manufacturer.

Our second attempt at deep tine aeration again due to golf schedules and availability was the fall of 1988. At that time the greens were dry compared to early spring. We decided again on ¾" solid tines and experimented with a larger hollow tine on four greens. A full ¾" round by 7" long core was removed from our worst greens. I say experimented, as the task of removal of these cores was extensive, fully testing our new core processor and patience of the operator. Filling the holes with topdressing was a bigger challenge than expected as our delivery system was not sufficient to replace the extreme amounts of soil removed. After a full day of attempted mechanical spreading we decided on wheel barrows and manpower to dump and spread the replacement soil. After trial and error a grid pattern was soon established and sped up the project considerably. The amount of dressing used was 1 ton per 1000 sq. ft. literally burying the greens. Using the backs of rakes to push the soil in several directions filled the holes nicely and little settling was experienced. The remaining 15 greens received slightly more than normal amounts of topdressing as again I felt bridging and/or collapsing of holes prevented fully filling of the aeration holes.

This spring, late April to be exact, all 19 greens are to be aerated using this monster tine. The four greens presently show good recovery and have remained green all winter. The solid tined greens, although showing faster recovery in late fall, do not show green color nor drain as quickly after rainfall. The hollow tine greens in addition are firmer after a thaw and do not footprint as severely as the other greens.

If you embark on this course of action (I feel it's one step short of rebuilding), be sure your greens are as healthy as possible as some lifting out of sod will be experienced. In addition, some scuffing from the core processor may occur if portions of the greens lift unevenly. A continued program for several years, should gain greater depth as well as near total removal of poor soils. The last word of caution before a decision is made to use this method of soil replacement, remember "Murphy's Law", and the Boy Scout motto "Be Prepared" as it is a major operation.