

That Man Who Makes the Grass Grow

No mystery what the golf course superintendent is responsible for, right? Lush fairways, well-kept tees and greens, nice, cared-for bunkers, and perhaps some pleasant little flowers cheerfully surrounding the course. C'mon, what more could there be to the job?

Well, maybe 30 years ago the superintendent's life was nice and

surface into the best possible condition, and he knows how to budget carefully for all of it. He's a manger too, handling personnel, delegating responsibility.

It's no wonder he's not exactly thrilled at being considered a grasscutter, and it's this unfortunate gulf between what he is and what he is often perceived as that frequently sets

Most course superintendents are victims of mistaken identity. Guess who suffers?

simple and filled with nothing more complicated than a couple of lawnmowers, but today that image is as antique as a hand scythe. Still, it holds onto our collective imaginations enough to cause some real problems at country clubs.

Today's superintendent is no rustic. He is, purely and simply a professional. Most likely, he graduated from college with a degree in landscape architecture or agronomy. He knows about the science of turf, the complex range of chemicals that must be used to care for the golf course, how to get the

superintendent-member relations on edge. Anyone who thinks the whole place is being taken care of by a mower-man is not going to realize, nor is he going to want to learn, that there are legitimate reasons for the course not always being in top shape. So explanations that have to do with bad weather, drainage problems, or a sudden and unexpected turf disease will fall on deaf ears. Nor will an impatient member want to hear that there was a legitimate horticultural reason for the water sprinkler going off in the middle of his backswing on the 12th during the noon hour on

Continued on Page 2

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OUR OBJECTIVE: The collection, preservation and practical knowledge and to promote the efficient and economical maintenance of Golf Courses.

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Makes the Grass Grow *from Page 1*

Thursday. The course should be immaculate, period. Nothing else will do.

Not every membership is this hard on their superintendent, of course, but a good many could learn a bit more about what he does before jumping to conclusions. Then, maybe he'd be less likely to be the scapegoat when things go wrong, and more likely to get due credit when they actually happen to go right.

A big part of the problem of course, is that this is not a high-visibility job. You're out on the course at the crack of dawn when there's not another soul around, and later in the day you're off doing something else when the members do show up. People don't see you, and a lot of them find it easy to assume you're therefore not doing your job. It really comes down to nothing more complicated than better three-way communication among members, committees, and the superintendent himself.

Too often, what communication there is isn't representative anyway. Generally it comes from one of two groups. First, there are the aggressive players who want to add a bunker in front of the fourth green; or perhaps extend the water hazard on the 11th out more into the fairway; or scalp the greens to look like glass. In other words, they think it would be a great idea if the superintendent made their country club play like PGA

Continued on Page 3

That Man Who Makes the Grass Grow

Continued from Page 2
West, or Riviera.

Tugging on the other end of the rope are the recreational types who want the fairways widened, the rough cut short, and maybe even a couple of traps taken out. Why not make the course easier and more enjoyable, they reason.

Every golfer is a course designer just looking for a chance to show what he can do, and the superintendent is caught in the middle of a pack of experts who are, after all, his members. And if he's not careful, he might actually put some of their more vocal recommendations into effect thinking it's a chance to bring about some harmony, and *really* alienate everyone else.

Preventing this is relatively simple. The superintendent ought to answer to the golf and greens committees, and to no one else. And since the committees in most cases represent a cross-section of playing levels and therefore of "improvements" that should be made, clubs should set up regular meetings between the superintendent and the committees- or at least the committee chairs-where suggestions can be aired and debated in a constructive atmosphere.

And the superintendent? He'd be wise to make himself as visible as possible so he can get to know his employers-the members. It's not difficult. I know of one who makes it

a point to personally cut the cups on the practice green on Saturday and Sunday mornings, as a pretext for falling into conversation with the players. He feels it's a simple way to get a good idea of how satisfied they are with things, and a friendly way to learn their suggestions, which he himself can then bring to the committees.

Think of your superintendent as a referee, who can't possibly please all of the people all of the time. Think of him too as a professional, especially when it comes to delicate combinations like chemicals and turf. But for everyone's sake, don't think of him as just the man who makes the grass grow.

Article by John R. Johnson, a landscape architect with the golf course architecture firm of Arthur Davis and Associates in Gainesville, Georgia.

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GOLF DIVISION UPDATE

Sunnyvale's Golf Division is assisting the University of California Cooperative Extension Program with a creeping bentgrass variety trial. The project turf plot will be seeded in October 1989 and will run for at least three years; and based on the initial results, may be extended to five years.

The plot will be located at the Sunnyvale Municipal Golf Course under the direction of **Dr. Ali**

Continued on Page 4