

## COMPARING BUDGETS BY BRIAN WHITLARK

In travels throughout the Southwest Region, from time to time the question is raised with regards to what the course down the street is spending with hopes of making an argument for more money or labor for their own course. While this update will provide a few methods used to compare golf course operations, it is important to point out that the validity of such comparisons is questionable. The difficulty associated with comparing course operations can be attributed to such items as:

- Greens size, method of construction and turfgrass variety varies from course to course.
- Public, private and semi-private courses vary significantly with regards to golfer expectations.
- The number of bunkers and bunker design on the golf course play a significant role in the budget and labor hours spent in maintenance.
- Water and soil quality can have a big impact on the products and labor hours dedicated to growing turf in challenging conditions.

Clearly, this list is not comprehensive, but it gives a few examples of why comparisons from course to course are difficult at best.

Comparisons may be useful in certain circumstances. The list below provides a few indicators that can potentially be used to compare and contrast courses:

- Maintenance cost per acre. As an example, figures from the Florida GCSA report high values of \$56,000, \$75,000 and \$125,000 maintenance cost per acre, with median values of \$15,000, \$13,000 and \$10,000/acre from three different regional areas, respectively.
- Labor hours per week. Based on recent visits in New England, high end clubs in the region typically use approximately 1,000

man hours per week (excluding the superintendent and mechanic), with an average closer to 600-700 man hours per week.

- Labor hours per hole. At one time, the rule-of-thumb as reported by the GCSAA was to use one laborer per hole (excluding the superintendent, assistant superintendent and mechanic) for higher tier courses.
- Maintenance budget dollars per golf round. For example, if the maintenance budget is 1 million dollars and the total number of rounds for the year is 15,000, then the maintenance budget dollars per round would be \$66 (\$1,000,000/15,000 rounds).

Across the board, most superintendents in the Southwest Region have had their budgets frozen or reduced in recent years, which is likely why some look to compare course operations with hopes of increasing resources.

Rather than focusing on resources you don't have, use this opportunity to educate golfers and course officials that in some cases golfer expectations and the related course maintenance to satisfy those expectations have gotten out of hand, and it is time to scale back on such items as bunker maintenance and out of play areas. The key is to document and communicate changes needed to sustain a healthy bottom line during difficult economic times.

As always, the Green Section staff is here for you and your golf course to provide the best possible playing conditions, especially during adverse economic conditions.

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