

By **CHET WENDER**

Golf Course Superintendent
The Plainfield Country Club

ALMOST every day a harried business executive, stealing a few hours for a round of golf, remarks to a golf course superintendent how much he envies him in his leisurely, carefree job.

What such businessmen fail to realize is that golf course superintendents must be "big businessmen" themselves to be successful; in fact, they are confronted daily by the toughest competitor there is—Nature.

Few people understand how business-oriented a golf course superintendent must become to be successful. Mowers, aerators and sprinkling systems have the same importance as the business tools of cost accounting systems, long-range planning, reports, supervisory techniques and budget development.

The planning and execution of a golf course maintenance/improvement program is no easy task. It never has been and never will be. In fact, it is becoming even more complex and demanding because inflation is driving costs upward and forcing superintendents to more finely hone their management skills. To cope with inflation I constantly strive to increase my staff's productivity, keep abreast of, and purchase labor-saving equipment, and carefully plan maintenance-saving course improvements. Then I merchandise these items to my greens committee through our annual report.

Obviously, what works for me will not necessarily provide the answer for another superintendent whose climate, course, and greens committee may vary greatly from my own. But my techniques have proven successful at the Plainfield

The Plainfield Country Club traditionally is ranked among the toughest 50 courses in the U.S. Founded in 1890, this rolling 7,018 yard championship course was designed by Donald Ross. A public 9 hole course adjoins the private championship layout.

\$20 Thousand In Savings Through Labor Management

Country Club and I believe in them.

Years ago, before costs began skyrocketing, 15 men maintained our 18-hole private championship course and an adjoining 9-hole public layout. Today nine men maintain the course and do an even better job than the 15-member crew did.

What's the secret? There isn't one.

My labor costs per man are up 15 percent because I pay at least 50 cents an hour more than many superintendents in New Jersey. However, by paying the top dollar for a well-trained and willing crew, our productivity has increased and our costs have stabilized in spite of inflation.

Statistics at Plainfield bear me out. Operating expenses to maintain golf courses have risen during the last three years an average of 45 percent nationwide compared to just 17 percent at Plainfield. Increased costs of such items as chemicals have been offset by eliminating 5,000 manhours, by adopting good techniques and by purchasing labor-saving equipment even if the initial cost is higher.

A crew is the first key to success. Although we have cut 5,000 manhours from our operating budget, my men can cope with interferences such as excessive rain or special events previously not scheduled in order to keep the course playable. My small, but efficient crew mows the greens every day before the

first golfer tees up and sprays at least monthly, again in the morning before golfers tee up.

By having capable help, I am free to plan our overall program, to maintain detailed cost records, to submit monthly reports and to present an annual report on our stewardship. If our greens committee wants to know what we did on a specific day a year ago and what it cost, we have records to tell them.

An annual report is an excellent tool to plan ways to improve course playing conditions and thus reduce expenses. It also aids a superintendent in recapping accomplishments and in presenting future plans logically to the business-oriented greens committee. They are more apt to approve a written plan than a make-shift short goal presented verbally.

Labor-saving techniques and equipment also help in our campaign to keep the Plainfield course in A-1 condition despite inflationary pressures. For example, we apply spray materials to our greens and tees by pulling a 103-gallon fiber glass tank (with a 15-foot boom) with a Cushman vehicle. The technique has reduced the task to a simple one-man operation and the costs in labor and time have enabled us to spend more on chemicals.

Fertilization is an important function in our maintenance "game-plan" and our technique is to fertilize every two weeks—depending upon the season and humidity level—to help grass grow uniformly. I'm a great believer in organic fertilizer
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Editor's Note: Since 1952 when he became golf superintendent at the Plainfield (N.J.) Country Club, Chet "Red" Wender has risen to the top in his field. In this exclusive story, Wender explains how he keeps the rolling course at Plainfield ranked among the 50 toughest courses in the nation. Perhaps the underlying key to Wender's success is his high standards. As he once remarked, "A superintendent is his own worst enemy. He could cut corners and the average person would never notice the difference. But he just can't! He's got to strive for perfection to live with himself."



Chet Wender, superintendent, examines turf on the 18th green. He's been testing his theories about management and labor savings for 23 years. Adoption of good techniques and equipment has eliminated 5,000 manhours.

\$20 THOUSAND IN SAVINGS (from page 15)

and do not limit myself to any one type.

On greens and trees we use natural and/or synthetic organic fertilizers such as Milorganite and Witroform ureaform at a rate of no more than one-half pound of N per application. A straight mixture of milorganite is applied on fairways and supplemented with a second application containing one-half pound of Blue Chip ureaform per 1,000 square feet. We fertilize with organic fertilizer May through September.

The second application is put down in the fall. Because of our New Jersey climate, we put the first fertilizer application down in late May or June and we never fertilize when it is hot and humid.

My man makes two passes over the greens and trees and applies half the fertilizer in one direction and the rest at right angles to the first pass using an electric cyclone spreader pulled by a Cushman vehicle. This process has reduced the manpower requirement from two men to one.

Although it is common practice on other courses, we do not syringe our greens. In my opinion, syringing is harmful because it cooks the grass. We start watering fairways at 8 p.m. We have an all-electric automatic sprinkler system with heads that are turned on automatically for 15-minute periods to completely water greens, fairways and tees by 5:30 a.m. every morning. Anything more than 15-minutes is wasteful at Plainfield because that is all the soil can absorb at once.

My philosophy of growing good turf is to throw everything but the kitchen sink at our greens, tees and fairways. Our use of fertilizer ap-

plications on fairways, two or three pounds of actual N per 1,000 square feet annually, should be applied after the turf is dry. We apply fertilizer on an off day, generally Monday—especially in the fall—when using the 15-0-15 application. Otherwise, burning will be readily noticeable if golf car and foot traffic is heavy.

Our disease control program is preventive so our chemical costs and manhour expenses exceed those at courses where superintendents try to save dollars with curative programs. A curative program, in my opinion, is being penny wise and pound foolish. Inflation or otherwise, it is better to spend a few extra dollars in spraying than to risk losing greens to disease and being forced to undergo an expensive renovation program.

We spray greens and tees every week from mid-May through October, depending upon the weather, and also fairways every 21 days from June through August. We use one-half ounce of Clearys 3336 and three ounces of Thiram per 1,000 square feet. In addition, twice a year we spray fairways with a combination fungicide and insecticide. A regular spraying schedule is as important as a regular fertilization schedule, and I can honestly say I've never had a disease control problem at the Plainfield Country Club.

Renovation is expensive, so labor saving equipment, good personnel and proper techniques are important. We top dress our greens and tees at least twice, and up to four times yearly. Although top dressing is expensive, it provides excellent long-range results in maintaining high quality putting green surfaces. It discourages thatch build-up and encourages new, vigorous growth, better strains of grasses, upright growth, and less grain and disease.

The combination of water, fertilizer and air penetration minimizes the effects of heavy play and abuse.

We aerate our greens with a Ryan Greensaire with $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch tines set $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 inches deep. We go over the green in the same direction with a belt-driven vertical mower with blades set flush on a concrete pad so cores can be broken. We then drag the greens in several directions with a steel matt to further break cores and work them into the soil.

Next we blow off our greens to clean off excessive cores after using the vertical mower. Lastly, we mow the greens. If the greens are top dressed, we wait at least one week before resuming our fertilization program.

In order to maintain quality fairway turf, a thatching program should be implemented on an annual basis. We thatch in September or early fall—never in spring—because of our variable weather. If the weather goes against us, we'd never get the fairways to heal.

Opening up turf and soil permits better use of materials, penetration of air and water, and a deeper root system. Thatching has always been important and is doubly so today because of increased maintenance costs.

We never thatch our greens and we never thatch below 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches on fairways. I think only one in fifty golf courses has an ideal thatch level. I believe you'll never have problems unless thatch exceeds an inch in depth. Incidentally, we break up thatch material by pulling a heavy-duty, tractor-drawn steel mat in several directions, followed by mowing to "chew" it and let the pulverized material lay on the fairways. It serves as a mulch and within a week, with regular

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mowing and watering, is not noticeable.

At times what you don't do is as important as what you do. Until about 15 years ago, for example, I spiked the fairways, but have since discontinued the practice. I believe fairway spiking: encourages *Poa annua* growth, causes unnecessary damage, more work, is unsightly and angers players who are unhappy with the playing conditions. However, aeration can have a place in turf management when used properly. A thatch machine such as Ryan's Mataway will assure better and tighter turf so fairways can be cut at a one-half-inch championship height.

No matter what a superintendent does or doesn't do, no matter how good a businessman he is or what precautions he takes, Nature can defeat him overnight. We can't be cocky in this business because our jobs are 99 percent luck and one percent common sense. But I love my work and enjoy competing with Nature. If I had to live my life again, I wouldn't change a thing. □

Bermudagrass Care Requires Many Inputs

Standard management practices of irrigation, vertical mowing, and fertilization must be carefully programmed with chemical weed control to maintain weed-free, high quality bermudagrass, as shown by results of research done at the University of California, Riverside.

"If the interrelationships and timing of these practices are not considered," says W. W. Wright, research associate, "the results may be undesirable with respect to weed control and turf appearance."

Wright reported on the effects of cultural and chemical renovation of weed-infested bermudagrass turf during the American Society of Agronomy.

He conducted the research in cooperation with Dr. V. B. Youngner, professor of agronomy, UCR, and Dr. V. A. Gibeault, agricultural extension environmental horticulturist at the Riverside campus. The study was partially supported by a grant-in-aid from the U.S. Golf Association-Greens Section.

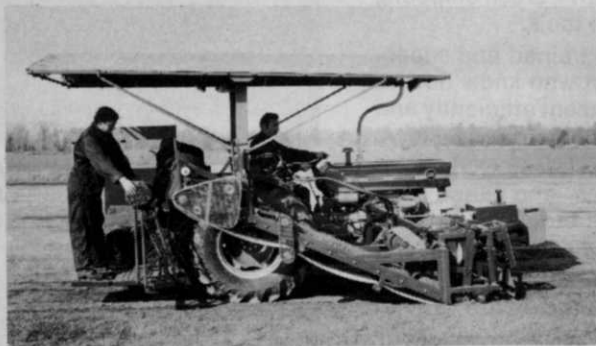
"In a randomized split, split plot

experiment," Wright said, "irrigation, vertical mowing, nitrogen fertilization, and chemical weed control were evaluated for the renovation of a weed-infested common bermudagrass turf. These factors were considered from the viewpoint of long-term effects and maintenance of an improved condition once it was attained."

The researcher reported that the following results were observed after two and one-half years of regular treatment: over all the cultural practices, the highest quality turf was obtained with the use of the herbicide Kerb, although certain broad-leaf weeds were not controlled. Both fall and spring vertical mowing increased weed populations despite herbicide applications. For this reason vertical mowing, unless done for reseeding or thatch removal purposes, is a questionable practice. Fall vertical-mown plots contained considerably more weeds than spring vertical-mown plots. Soluble and slow-release fertilizers gave comparable turf quality. The frequency of irrigation influences the performance of chemicals and the effects of other cultural practices.

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