

Reducing Maintenance Costs— And Keeping the Quality Up

“WITH PEOPLE having so much leisure time and golf increasing so much in popularity, I had to find a way to get things done in less time,” said Charles Santoianni.

Superintendent of Sayville, New York's Island Hills Golf Club, Santoianni has concluded that the business of maintaining golf courses will probably never return to what it was a few years ago.

“Golfer traffic has gotten heavier and heavier for about the last four years,” Santoianni said. “We have one 18-hole course, and it used to be that we could work on nine holes from seven to nine o'clock in the morning, then open them to golfers and get the second nine holes completed before the

golfers got on it. We can't do that anymore.

“On Tuesday, for instance, we have 225 ladies playing in the morning and we have to be off the course by nine a.m. We're lucky to get back on it by three o'clock, and three-fourths of our working day is shot. It goes like that every day, with about 600 golfers on the weekend and a total of 1,500 or 1,600 per week. We can't do maintenance work at night because the daytime golfer pressure has made it necessary to water at night.”

Too Much Overtime

The expenses were getting out of hand, Santoianni said. Because his crew was forced to work at odd

hours, overtime costs were reaching about \$10,000 per year. With golfer numbers continuing to increase, he didn't expect to see any change in the future. “And,” he added frankly, “there's a possibility of money getting tighter and budgets getting smaller.” So, with an eye on costs, he modified his maintenance program.

Mechanizing as many operations as possible and reorganizing his fungicide program are the two major ways he's saving money and getting the job done more efficiently.

Adding a Toro Sandpro to Santoianni's stable of equipment has cut the job of raking sandtraps from

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Santoianni compares his recently-obtained Sandpro with the smaller machine his crew formerly used to rake sandtraps. The bigger machine reduced the time requirement by more than half, he says.



The 27-year veteran of turf management combines a four-season, full-fairways preventive fungicide program with frequent spot-checks. His biggest disease problem in past years has been Pythium.



Whether it's fertilizer, fungicides, or insecticides, applications must be timely to get the desired results, Santoianni says. His goal is not only to cut costs, but to get the job done on time.



Charles Santoianni, superintendent of Island Hills Golf Club, Sayville, New York, found that mechanizing some operations

and modifying his fungicide program provided the increased efficiency he needed in the face of increasing golfer traffic.

seven and one-half hours (three men at two and one-half hours each) to three hours (one man). A Hahn Triplex greensmower reduced mowing time on greens, aprons and tees from 10 hours (four men at two and one-half hours each) to three and one-half hours (one man). "And one-half hour of that time is spent greasing the machine," the superintendent noted. "Since we mow daily, that savings in time amounts to \$28 a day."

"Also," he added, "since we've become more mechanized, we can put more men to work on maintaining the rough, which has always been our biggest headache."

Santoianni has ordered a Cushman spray wagon which will reduce the 24-hour job of spraying greens (two men at 12 hours each) to four or four and one-half hours (one man). "I'd like to get two wagons eventually to use on the fairways," he added. "We could get all the fairways sprayed by two men in five or five and one-half hours."

Savings Pay for Equipment

Any new equipment carries a significant initial cost, Santoianni pointed out. But he believes the long-term savings — and a better looking course resulting from timely maintenance — will make them well worthwhile. His goal is not to put good employees out of work, but to avoid increasing the size of his crew more than necessary, eliminate overtime from the payroll whenever possible, and get work done on time.

Santoianni's second cost-cutting move consisted of taking a long, hard look at his fungicide program. What he saw caused him to modify his program and resulted in a savings in cost.

"For the last couple years, Pythium has been our big problem around here," Santoianni said. "I'd been using a contact fungicide that was costing me a total of \$1,400 for three applications on my fairways over a one-week period. I tried a different product — Acti-dione RZ — and found out I could control

Pythium for one-quarter to one-half the cost."

Santoianni made that particular discovery almost by accident. "I'd been using Acti-dione RZ in my fungicide program since 1956, but I hadn't really tried it on Pythium."

Simply experimenting with a different fungicide may save Santoianni as much as \$1,000 each time he treats a Pythium outbreak on his fairways, he said.

Curative to Preventive

Over a two-year period, Santoianni has been gearing his fungicide program away from a curative approach and toward a preventive program. This involves less reliance on full-systemic fungicides and greater reliance on a four-season, full-fairways program.

Despite the greater cost of a full-fairways application, Santoianni believes it saves money over the course of a season by minimizing the number of curative applications and the damage that occurs before the disease is controlled.

(continued on page 28)

CUSTOM LAWN (from page 16)
have to offer and then help them appreciate your efforts.

Much as each businessman should periodically take inventory of his physical assets, we should also take realistic stock of our promotional ammunition, meaning our own ability to "package" our service so that a positive overall message is conveyed to our customers. If you know that promotion and merchandising are your weak points ... get help! This is the age of specialization and paying a promotional expert is preferable to paying a bankruptcy lawyer. Hiring a professional advertising agency or counselor may be one of the best investments you can make, just as you tell your customers that they will receive special knowledge and skills when they retain you.

As custom lawn application services become even more popular with ex-do-it-yourself homeowners, it seems inevitable that the number of profit minded laymen attracted to this field will increase because the investment required to get started is relatively small and superficial know-how can be acquired in a short time. This has been the case in

COACHELLA (conclusion)

this combination can be programmed into our flexible irrigation system, which has been designed with this combination in mind."

McGehee points out that the New Zealand grass gets more watering because there is no retention mulch on the fairways, as there is on the greens. During May the fairways got 30 minutes of watering every 24 hours (three inches a week) and 20 minutes for the greens. The entire 125 acres are watered at night in 13 hours. Slightly longer watering periods were anticipated as the weather got hotter in the summer.

The course opened on schedule April 30, and golf superintendents are watching with great interest the 125-acre experiment at Ironwood. If the New Zealand grass proves to be a good, year-around grass, it will mark a milestone in desert golf course history.

Unfortunately, if the new grass does survive well the year around, it will not help already established golf

the past and it's a good bet that the trend will continue, particularly with the large number of capable people who have lost jobs in the past two years and are seeking security in their own businesses.

Even though the opportunities in this field presently are still vast, at some point in the future the competition will become keener. By that time many of these promotional minded newcomers will have gained extensive practical experience and staked out strong competitive positions in their markets.

Today's complacent professional who ignores the handwriting on the wall and does not sharpen his promotional skills with as much care as he devotes to his equipment runs the risk of experiencing a harsh financial jolt in the not-to-distant future. Knowing how to identify and control insects, fungi and weeds is, of course, indispensable to the conduct of a professional lawn service, but this knowledge can be obtained rather quickly. Knowing how to identify and control a customer in a rapidly changing market may be more important in the long run to the financial health of the professional. □

courses that have been using bermudas. They could hardly afford the shut-down time required to kill off the bermudas before reseeding with the new grass. But any additional courses built by the existing golf clubs could take advantage of it.

Additions to courses are constantly being made in the Coachella. Although Ironwood has a ways to go before it sells out the condominiums and lots associated with its country club, it already has plans to add a nine-hole executive course, and, south of the clubhouse, an additional 18-hole course that will be shorter and less difficult than the present one. Then, too, seven acres have been set aside for a par three short course.

Since last year the Coachella golf growth has looked something like this: Ironwood has completed its first 18. Indian Palms has added another nine. Sunrise and Sun King each has added another 18. Palm Desert Country Club has added a nine. And so it goes. The Coachella continues to get greener and greener. □

REDUCING (from page 22)

"We start our fairway program about March 15 to April 1 with RZ, sometimes in combination with chelated iron," Santoianni explained. "That first application usually takes care of leaf spot. Our last application depends on the weather, but you have to spray sometime for snow mold. One year, we made our last application just before Christmas."

Santoianni's preventive four-season treatment usually amounts to 36 to 44 fungicide applications per year. Besides the regular treatments, Santoianni and his assistants check the turf regularly for disease problems that may have come on since the last regular spraying. "There are a couple key spots I always check, where disease always starts first," the 27-year grounds-keeping veteran noted. "But usually, the only time we make an extra spraying is when we find Pythium."

Getting the most value out of any chemical depends on proper timing, Santoianni said. He'll reschedule a routine fungicide or fertilizer application if the weather conditions aren't right. "Knowing when to use any product is the secret of getting effective results," he said. "Your most effective products — including fertilizer — can be ineffective or actually damage the grass if they're applied under the wrong conditions. Then you've not only wasted your money, but you may have done harm rather than good."

Santoianni has experimented with still another innovation that he thinks will make for more timely and economical insecticide use. "I tried a sample of Diagnostic Aid last year, and it really will help you find out what kind of insects are present," he said. "Different insects are present at different times of the year, and you need to get your insecticide on at the day of hatching. Diagnostic Aid can really help you target your applications. I plan to use it next year, spot-checking a few greens about every two weeks."

Santoianni considers his program of increased efficiency and budget-consciousness a return to "the old way." But with increased golfer traffic on most courses, and the looming threats of recession and inflation, a program that trims the fat from the operating budget may be more of a glimpse into the future.