

CORPORATE OFFICE GROUNDS RECEIVES GOLF COURSE CARE

By Robert W. Baird, Louisville, KY

A groundskeeping crew was "transplanted" from a suburban Chicago golf course to a corporate headquarters and has applied many of the same techniques used in golf course management to large estate management.

The mowers, tree trimmers, shrub pruners, and turf managers still get to work at 6 a.m. like they used to do to beat the golfers, but now it's mainly out of habit. The crew has renovated some 30 acres of turf that now look like fairways.

Boldly green against the white steel architecture of the Baxter Travenol Laboratories headquarters in Deerfield, the landscape appears like a well-tended golf course. However, not a single flag, green, tee or golfer can be seen. Instead you might see corporate executives taking lunchtime nature strolls.

The golf course comparison is not contrived. Landscape architectural firm Sasaki Associates, Watertown, MA, wanted a grounds less maintenance-demanding than a golf course in their original landscape design for the complex which opened in 1975. But the turf management technique of Otto Damgaard Sons, Des Plaines, IL, landscape contractors, which took over maintenance responsibility of the grounds in early 1979, showed painstaking methods not unlike those used by golf course managers.

The maintenance crew of Damgaard, under the direction of Bob Block, is the same one that for years had tended the greens and fairways of Sportsmen's Country Club in nearby Northbrook. But that was before development pressures brought a change in ownership at Sportsmen's and a change in plans for the golf course site. Sportsmen's was to be no longer a golf course but a housing development. It was only after concerned citizen action that 18 of the 45 holes at Sportsmen's were preserved as a public course under the Northbrook Park District.

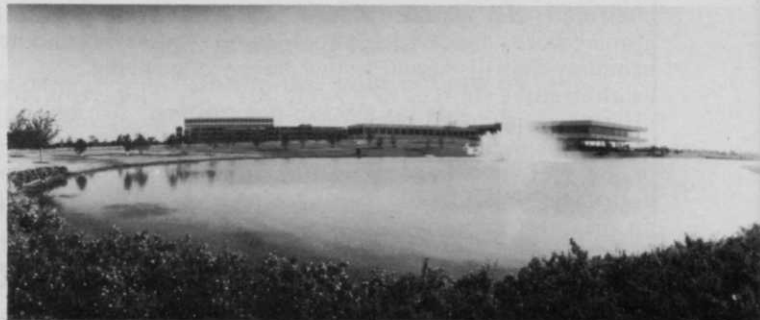
So Block and his crew found themselves in need of a job. A third party put them in touch with Damgaard and the crew of Sportsmen's became the crew of Damgaard, most of them assigned to the Baxter Travenol operations.

One of the first assignments for Damgaard's new crew was to upgrade the turf on 30 acres of high visibility turf on the 188-acre site located along the well-travelled Tri-State Tollway linking Chicago with Wisconsin. Fescue had taken over the area.

"I was quite sure we could turn the situation around," Block recalled. He believed the turf could be re-established without the expense and trouble of sodding or re-seeding.

"The idea was not to tear it up, but upgrade it," says Ronald Damgaard, president of the landscape firm.

What resulted was a seeding operation using a seeder equipped with a series of thatching knives three inches apart that cut slits into the turf to a



Baxter Travenol Headquarters after renovation to fairway-like appearance.

depth of $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Seed was metered precisely and directed by tubes on the seeder.

"You put the seed where you want it. You get a much surer catch and a purer stand, quicker," said Block. And because seed loss was only a fourth of that in conventional methods, only 35 pounds per acre was needed. The operation, completed in the fall, used five hybrid Kentucky bluegrass varieties. Today's turf is a noticeable improvement over a fescue-dominant stand.

Another operation Damgaard and Block credit with healthier turf was aerification with a "calcined clay" aggregate used as a soil conditioner. Such conditioning is desirable in the highly clay, hardpan soil predominating in the immediate Chicago area. The clay holds too much water; breaking up the soil improves the drainage. A great deal of topsoil understandably was brought in during site development. To properly drain trees, underground drainage tiles were used.

Block keeps a flexible fertilization program using monthly, nearly weekly, applications of both liquid and dry materials, as well as fall applications of potash and Milorganite. The liquid fertilizer is a water-soluble 20-20-20.

Block and his crew say expertise comes from close familiarity with turf, trees and shrubs, living with them on the job. One of his crewmen, Bill Israel, a 43-year veteran of the golf maintenance business, is assigned to special projects. He trims special trees on the grounds, and keeps close tabs on a focal point contorted Scotch pine inside a Japanese garden. The pine rises above a glazed tile courtyard, but does not get a lot of water because the tile absorbs solar heat. The pine receives water two hours twice a week.

Israel was able to nurture grass to grow on the steps of a formal stairwell that leads, for symbolic effect, from the corporate headquarters to the edge of one of several retention basins in front of the site.

The care provided by a former golf course crew has helped make Baxter Travenol a landscaped showplace.

WTT