

Woehrle's Wonderland **EXPERIENCE COUNTS AT OAKLAND HILLS**

By George L. Zeis



The latest mower at Oakland Hills is hydraulically and electrically operated and used extensively on fairways and greens. (Inset) **Communication** is the only way to make sure members know how you maintain and improve their course. Woehrle keeps in touch with members.

Experience counts in the business of golf course management. Each day Oakland Hills Country Club, 20 miles north of Detroit, draws from the experience of Ted Woehrle, former president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

Woehrle started his career with a degree in agriculture from Purdue University and then built his base through superintendent positions at Chicago's Beverly Country Club, The Country Club of Florida in Delray Beach, and Point-O-Woods in Benton Harbor, Michigan. He has held the head job at Oakland Hills for 14 years.

The posh club was completed in 1919. There are currently 300 acres

under his care. The two courses, one par 70 and the other par 72, contain 118 sand traps. The longest fairway is 577 yards.

Woehrle reports directly to the Oakland Hills Country Club's General Manager. He operates on a job description basis. In other words, all his major responsibilities are spelled out in writing and have been approved by the Board of Directors.

There is also a Greens Committee which functions as a monitoring, recommending and advisory group responsible to the Board of Directors only. This committee is appointed by the Board to serve at the pleasure of the Board of Directors. It consists of a chairman, eight

Class A members, two lady golfers, Greens Superintendent and the Club Golf Professional. The Club Manager and one member of the Board of Directors are officio members of the Greens Committee. The committee meets each month from March through October.

Woehrle is a firm believer in communicating with all groups involved. "I cannot assume that Club Board members are fully aware of the maintenance and improvements being made," he pointed out.

"For example, work was needed on our large water hazard. Pictures were taken before improvement

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work was started, while it was being done and after the job was completed. There is nothing that will beat pictorial reporting on situations like this."

What does it take to operate and maintain the Oakland Hills Country Club? "Lots of money, lots of planning and a lot of attention to detail," Woehrle pointed out. "Our budget is about \$400,000 annually."

Woehrle points with pride to the tournaments that have been held at Oakland Hills. They include four U.S. Opens—the fifth to be played on this course in 1985; a Western Open and two PGA Tournaments. In 1981 the Second Annual Senior U. S. Open (for those over 50 years of age) was held at Oakland Hills Country Club and attracted a number of professional golfers.

During the peak summer months, 25 people are on the golf course payroll. The season runs from April 1 to December 1. Peak employment starts in June and tapers off gradually in September. College students constitute the largest number of part-time workers during the summer months.

Ten of these employees work about 10 months of the year. This group functions as a skeleton crew during the off-peak work season. Three remain on the payroll the entire year.

Top wage scale for the longer period workers is \$6.25 per hour. Summer help is paid \$3.75 per hour. Full time employees are covered with Blue Cross/Blue Shield

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insurance, have paid holidays and come under the Teamsters Retirement Program.

While Oakland Hills may not have the difficult layout of Pebble Beach, it has real eye appeal. All fairways are creeping bentgrass. Automated irrigation of all fairways is available during dry periods. Fifty-five thousand feet of irrigation line, starting with eight-inch



Careful attention to cutting equipment minimizes down time. Woehrle takes a personal interest in equipment maintenance.

mains down to one-and-one-half-inch lines carry water down all fairways. Heads are spaced 90 feet apart.

"We have three wells," Woehrle pointed out, "from which water is pumped into two reservoirs, one of which is an acre-and-a-half. "During dry periods we use as much as a million gallons of water per night. Watering is done three times per week during drought periods. This means we could use as much as 12 million gallons of water per month. We had a dry 1982 summer and did a lot of irrigating."

Approximately 400 pounds of bentgrass seed are used per year to maintain the excellent quality of fairway turf. Barring loss of turf, for whatever reasons, Woehrle pointed out that his bent turf withstands considerable wear and tear but holds up well.

Approximately 45 tons of various analysis fertilizer are used per year. Ordering is done in October; delivery is made in November and payment is made in December. Handling fertilizer purchases this way, Woehrle pointed out, gives him a savings of about nine percent.

Approximately 50 gallons of herbicide are used each year and in-

cludes dicamba, MCPP and 2,4-D. Applications of herbicide are made in the spring when plant growth is at its best.

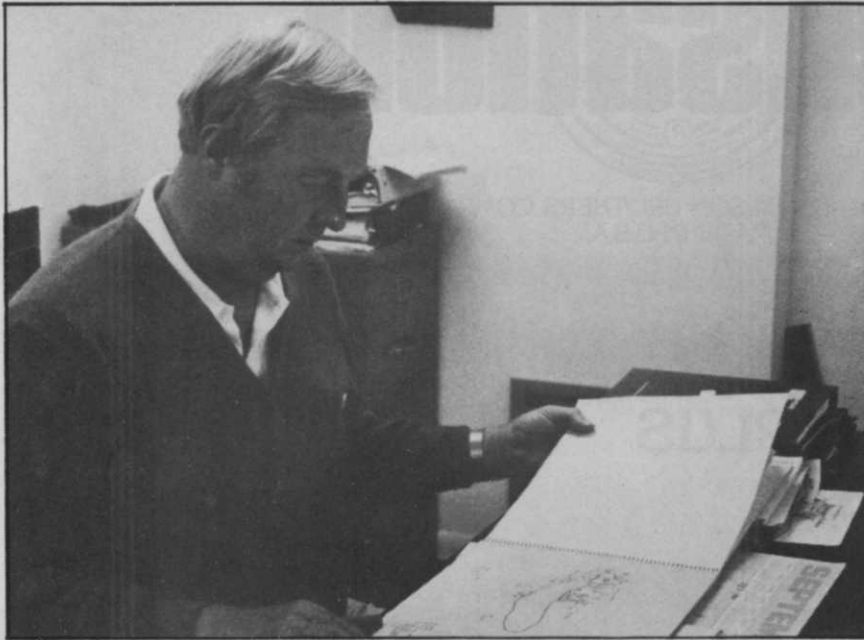
Mowing and maintenance equipment take a good share of the annual budget. Seventy mowers are owned by the Oakland Hills Country Club. Most are the reel type. Rotary mowers are used only for trimming along fence rows and similar areas.

Seven gang mowers of the reel type are used, each cutting a swath 18 feet wide. Fairway mowers, including the tractors, cost approximately \$25,000 each. The reel mower attachment, alone, costs about \$9,000 each.

A special Toro reel mower was purchased in 1982 for \$16,000. It is hydraulically and electronically operated (via a gas engine) and is used extensively on fairways and greens. It cuts an 84 inch swath. Another special feature of the mowing unit is the attachment for catching grass clippings.

Mowers are purchased from local dealers and include Toro, Jacobsen and Roseman.

"With the rather delicate nature of the mowers," Woehrle pointed out, "it is important to have the same operator use the same ma-



Woehrle carefully manages the \$400,000 in his budget.

chine whenever possible. Down time on mowers can be a big problem, particularly during a season when grass grows rapidly."

The rough height of cut will range between two and three inches. Under normal conditions, nine holes are mowed per day and with abnormal growth, 18 holes daily.

The intermediate courtesy rough (six feet wide) is mowed at a height from one-and-a-half-inches to

two-inches with regular growth and is done three times per week. Mowings are made daily if growth is rapid.

Fairways are mowed daily at a height of from one-half-inch to five-eighths of an inch. Cross cutting is done weekly and verticutting monthly. Aerification is done annually on fairways.

Weather often dictates the greens cutting but the mowing height ranges between $\frac{3}{32}$ of an

inch to $\frac{3}{16}$. Regular mowing is done daily, verticutting two times a month, double cutting as required, sanding (light dusting) every three weeks and aerification annually.

Tees are mowed to a height of one-half inch three times per week.

Traps are edged and contoured semi-annually and are dug up and respread annually.

All machinery is inspected and repairs made as needed during winter months. This includes inspection and repair work on the 20 gas-powered golf carts and the 80 electric carts.

Woehrle also initiated a tree inventory program several years ago which is done annually during the winter months. In addition certain grounds work is done during the winter months as weather permits.

Ted Woehrle has praise for several universities that have done

"It is important to have the same operator run the same machine whenever possible."

considerable work on turfgrass development.

"Three schools have been particularly active in turf grass research and management," he said. "They are Michigan State, Purdue and Ohio State."

And though education at universities and technical schools is valuable, Woehrle gives one the impression that that working under the direction of a competent golf course manager is one of the most valuable experiences any aspiring "Super" can get.

"One of my most gratifying accomplishments during 26 years as a golf club superintendent," he said, "has been training 37 men who currently are golf course superintendents around the country."

While Woehrle didn't say so in as many words, it is evident that job satisfaction has made his working career a real personal success.

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Just 4 of 118 bunkers on the two courses. Traps are edged and contoured semi-annually.