

Removing trees to improve play

Veteran golf course superintendents say tree management programs may be necessary on many golf courses.

■ Stanley Zontek says the chain saw is a marvelous tool in the fine art of maintaining golf turfgrass.

"Sometimes turf managers have to get out there and clear some underbrush and down some trees," claims Zontek, who travels the Mid-Atlantic region as the USGA's turf expert.

"The essence of our jobs as turf managers is to grow strong healthy grass, and we're not going to do it in the shade and we're not going to do it in pockets of poor air circulation," he adds.

Few golf course superintendents would argue with Zontek. They know their reputation and job hinges on how well they grow and maintain quality turf. They're

graded on the condition of turf, not the beauty or utility of trees.

Even so, stately or colorful trees grace most U.S. golf courses. Golfers, for the most

part, appreciate trees and recognize them as valuable on the course.

Zontek himself claims he's not advocating "the wholesale removal" of trees on courses, particularly those that don't cause turf maintenance problems for the superintendent and aren't hazardous for golfers. "Who's going to argue with the spring color of sunburst honey locust after just coming out of a bleak winter?" he asks.

Danny Quast, golf course superintendent at the Medinah Country Club about 30 miles west of Chicago, says superintendents can provide fine turf and keep valuable trees on their courses.

They'll need a separate tree program to do it. They'll also probably need the help of an arborist.

Quast has had arborists on staff at both Milwaukee Country Club (where he was employed previously) and now at Medinah. "You need to have a management program for the trees just like we do our turf," he says.

A tree inventory was conducted by Dr. Tom Green before Quast joined Medinah. Green of the Morton Arboretum also graded the trees on a scale of 1-6, with one being a newly-planted tree and six being a dead tree or stump. In all, Green developed 225 pages of information about the 7,000 trees at Medinah.

"The information needs to be developed into a working program," insists Quast. (See accompanying article.)

He offers these suggestions for implementing a golf course tree program:

✓ Purchase a chipper. They're expensive but with rising landfill costs, they'll pay for themselves in a few years.

✓ Have available and use the proper tree care equipment—power saws, hand saws, cabling equipment, etc.

✓ Many trees on a golf course can be



trimmed from below with a pole saw.

✓ Make sure your arborist has an ornamental pesticide license.

✓ Never let your arborist climb alone.

—Ron Hall



Quast: anyone hitting a tree with a mower at Medinah must report it.

The tree program at Medinah C.C.

■ Medinah Country Club, site of three U.S. Open Championships, was built in a region once covered with oak forest. On its 650 acres are 799 white oaks, 449 burr oaks, 538 red oaks, 393 sugar maples, 326 shagbark hickories, 304 green ash and 103 American elm.

Medinah's working program involves:

- the services of an arborist (possessing a pesticide license),
- a planting program,
- pruning schedule,
- insect/disease control program,
- cabling and bracing procedures, and
- removal.

At Medinah, 120 new trees are planted annually. About 80 percent of these trees are species of the native forest; the remainder are chosen for their adaptability and ornamental characteristics.

Regular pruning, says superintendent Danny Quast, is necessary for the safety of players and spectators (40,000 a day attended the Open in 1990), and to improve the appearance and health of trees. He says some trees on the course were "topped" years ago. They're rotting from the top down. This improper pruning probably took 40 years from their lives.

Tree insect and disease problems on the large oaks are controlled by injections (Mauget's) and the smaller oaks receive Dursban spray in May and again in June. Every American elm at Medinah is treated at least once every three years to fight Dutch elm disease.

Quast says there are many reasons to remove particular trees on a course, including "just plain ugly."

—R.H.