

STRICTLY GOLF

U.S. Senator points finger at golf course managers

All agree: environmental responsibility falls squarely in the lap of the golf course superintendent.



Superintendents are environmentalists who must work with Congress for fair legislation, say Bob Ochs (left) and Bill Roberts (center), representing the GCSAA, and Senator Howard Metzenbaum.

■ Can it be? Is the golf course superintendent really viewed as an environmental villain in the hallowed halls of our national government?

"Golf courses were using four to seven times the (intensity) of pesticides as agriculture," Sen. Howard O. Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) told members of the GCSAA earlier this year in Anaheim, Calif. "You've got to cut down your use of pesticides and water."

Metzenbaum, doubtless feeling the euphoria and energy that followed his

party's first Presidential victory in 16 years, told the superintendents that they should more closely align themselves with environmental groups.

"Many of you have earned the title of environmentalists. But as an industry, you can and should do more. Help educate the people who use your golf courses; they can live with brown spots and weeds—it won't hurt their game."

Kirk Kahler, government relations liaison for the GCSAA, sees a slight difference

between Metzenbaum's perception of the golf course superintendent and that of the EPA.

"The EPA thinks golf courses are head and shoulders above the rest of the green industry," Kahler says.

Another message that comes through loud and clear when legislators like Metzenbaum take the pulpit: the big-time industrial polluters are a moving target, but our lawmakers know exactly where to find golf course superintendents.

"You people are in a position to do something about this environment," Metzenbaum says. "I think you'd be a lot smarter to figure out how to join and work with the Congress and administration. And become the leaders in your community. I urge you to take the leadership in pre-

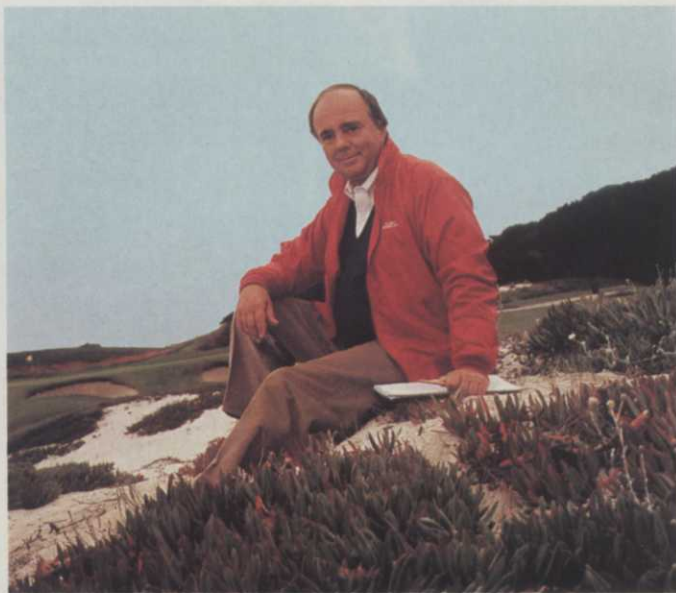
ELSEWHERE

Golfers like sign posting programs,
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Run-off comes in handy against Calif. drought,
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'Scout' programs popular on some golf courses
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Jones: Architects, supers must show environmentalists 'we follow the rules.' Photo by Terry Husebye

...serving the environment. Get off your butts."

Bill Roberts, the GCSAA's past president, defends Metzenbaum's statements.

"He's not saying anything different than we're saying," Roberts observes. "We are simply going to have to be environmentally responsible."

Famed golf course architect Robert Trent Jones Jr., in a speech to the USGA Green Section (just one day following Metzenbaum's presentation), confirms:

"Get off your butts."

—Senator Howard Metzenbaum

"The message is loud and clear," Jones says. "The environmental movement is here to stay. But let me caution against the violent kneejerk reaction to environmentalists. They only want what we want: to make the country a better place."

"Show them that we follow the rules. That we are dedicated environmentalists and getting better. That we have learned to be lean with our chemicals and water. That we now have new and different kinds of grass and plants."

"Golf is not an environmental problem—it's an environmental answer."

—Jerry Roche

'Informational' sign posting earns high marks from golfing public

■ This program, using write-on, wipe-off signs, didn't just advise golfers of pesticide applications. The signs also served to inform golfers of other maintenance practices like aerifying and top-dressing. Participating golf course superintendents, to varying degrees, took advantage of the opportunity to give golfers course maintenance information beyond chemical applications.

Posting is growing at golf courses in the United States. Some states require it to warn golfers of the possible presence of pesticides. (Nebraska does not.) Typically, courses post with pre-printed signs in language—depending on one's views of pesticides—that might seem threatening.

"This was not the typical 'caution/warning/pesticide-applied' approach," explains Dr. Roch Gaussoin of the University of Nebraska. The university, in cooperation with the Nebraska Golf Course Superintendents Association, came up with the more informational posting program. "These signs had multiple uses."

A snapshot of the courses using the

voluntary posting:

- Four public, three semi-private, and three private.
- Two nine-hole and eight 18-hole courses.
- Five with fewer than 30,000 rounds per year, four with 31,000 to 60,000 rounds, and one with more than 60,000 rounds.

Golfers responded positively to a different kind of posting program at 10 Nebraska golf courses in 1992.

- Annual maintenance budgets ranging from less than \$50,000 to \$249,000.

When Gaussoin surveyed golfers and superintendents at the 10 courses at the end of the 1992 season, both groups said they supported this more-inclusive posting.

For instance, 74 of the 75 golfers answering the survey said they felt the program should continue the following

season, while eight of the 10 superintendents said they would definitely use the program the next season. The other two said they probably would.

Although a few of the golfers admitted they were indifferent to posting, most felt either "positive" or "very positive" toward the program.

Gaussoin said six of the 10 superintendents said they felt a stronger relationship with golfers on their courses because of the program. None felt the posting had weakened their relationship with course users.

"Public relations is one of the critical facets of being a superintendent," said Gaussoin. "Anything a superintendent can do to improve the relationship with golfers is obviously a plus."

Gaussoin said superintendents shouldn't worry about giving golfers too much information about golf course maintenance.

"It's a benefit because the golfer feels a little more involved in what the superintendent is doing, and can perceive what the superintendent is doing as doing as more professional," he added.

—Ron Hall