

No brag, just fact: Old pro Spodnik has seen it all

PGRs and triplex fairway mowers are among the valuable tools available to today's superintendents, he says.

■ John Spodnik's next project is to build a new putting green. His son Jeff can't wait, since he's the one who'll soon be using it, in his backyard, thanks to his dad.

Spodnik, well-known to many golf course superintendents across the U.S., recently retired as manager of real estate operations for the Westfield Companies. For 34 years, he served as superintendent of Westfield Country Club, Westfield Center, Ohio.

Westfield is a gem of a course, or actually, two 18-hole courses. The first nine links—which would later become half of the South Course—were built in 1937.

The changes begin—Spodnik, with his silver hair, ready smile and neatly-pressed golf togs, could be mayor of Westfield Center. In fact, for a time he served the town as councilman. He draws welcome hellos and good wishes from people he meets on the street every day. He and his wife Mary live in a quaint, white wood-frame house next to the village post office.

Spodnik still radiates a boundless energy, and interest in the superintendent's job. He rattles off his own accomplish-

ments—no brag, just fact—and the changes he's seen over the years, with few pauses and much pride.

Spodnik took charge of the Westfield grounds in 1960, after assisting Mal McClaren at Ohio's Oakwood Country Club. It was during the first of the modern golf course booms.

Four years later, he and architect Geoff Cornish expanded the South Course to a full 18 holes. The North Course opened in 1975.

Duties expand—Spodnik says he wanted his job as a golf course superintendent to be "more than just cutting grass." Perhaps he had the foresight to know that some day the job would indeed require much more than that—first as the public's demand for the sport grew, and then later, as special interest groups began to target golf as an enemy to the environment.

Early on in his career, Spodnik benefitted from his friendship with other Ohio superintendents. They were, as Spodnik recalls, "a close-knit group." This mutual hand-holding was needed, as they all waited for needed turf maintenance technology.

"Chemical companies didn't have systems, didn't have a lot of the good fungicides or insecticides," Spodnik recalls. "We'd go to meetings and ask each other, 'What did you use for this or that problem? Did it work?'"



No 'civil war:' John Spodnik with Steve Numbers, top, and Mark Jordan, supers for Westfield's North and South golf courses.

"It was the school of hard knocks."

Away from the course, Spodnik has served as secretary/treasurer of the Northern Ohio Chapter of the Golf Course Superintendents Association for the past 35 years. It's the largest GCSAA chapter in the nation with 368 members.

"That's why we've had so many presidents in the national (GCSAA) association," says Spodnik. "We have more people, and more of those people are willing to become involved in association work."

This year, Spodnik received a Distinguished Service Award from the GCSAA for his contributions to the industry.

40,000 rounds—The Westfield links see their share of use. The North and South courses host more than 40,000 rounds a year combined.

But Spodnik says the courses are in good hands. Steve Numbers is the superintendent at the North Course, and Mark Jordan manages the South 18. But that's where the Civil War reference to dueling territories ends. They're good friends, and partners in golf course excellence.

Numbers and Jordan are both in the midst of major projects. For Numbers, its total bunker renovation, a trend among



This new water feature separates Westfield's North and South courses.

courses everywhere. "We're lowering the profile, so that when it rains, the water percolates through, and there's no standing water," says Numbers. "Even with a light rain, we're unable to rake traps. With new sand and lower profile bunkers, the rain and raking won't disturb playability."

Jordan's latest accomplishments include installing a Rain Bird Maxi System on the South Course—complete from pump house to sprinkler head.

A 35-million gallon reservoir was dug at Westfield after the devastatingly dry summer of 1988; and in 1990, holes 2, 3, 5, 8 and 9 on the South Course were remodelled to accommodate additions to the entertainment center.

A new irrigation system is planned for the North Course, and should be installed within the next year or so.

Trends—As superintendents change, so do trends in golf course maintenance, as all three men attest.

Spodnik and Numbers view plant growth regulators (PGRs) as one of green industry's major developments in recent years. "I swear by 'em," Numbers says, of PGRs on fairways.

"If you time them right," adds Spodnik,

"the superintendent still has the color he wants, and there's enough growth for turf to recover, without the problems of excess growth.

"At one time, we didn't have many choices; we had growth 'retardants,' which worked for some people. (The improved) growth regulators have been great."

Spodnik notices what he calls the "full-cycle" of equipment trends, in which—in some cases, anyway—everything old is new again.

"The triplex greens mower was a blessing," recalls Spodnik. "When I started, we cut every green and tee with a 22-inch walk-behind mower. Now, we're going back to the walk-behind. (Supers) want them cut so close, without tracks from the machines—the 'triplex circle'—on the aprons."

They all see more interest in using out-front rotary mowers in roughs, again in pursuit of a neater cut.

Spodnik, Numbers and Jordan shoot for consistent green speed rather than tournament-like stimpmeter readings.

"We want green grass all the way around," insists Spodnik. "(Superintendents) are backing off their fertility levels



Aware of the importance of community involvement, Spodnik often led lawn care seminars for local civic groups.

and are running into moss problems, disease problems, turgrass decline problems."

Spodnik plans to keep in touch with his friends at Westfield, whenever he and Mary aren't travelling.

But first, there's the matter of that putting green...

—Terry McIver

'Charting' equipment use & wear

■ Bob Rogers of Carolina Country Club, Raleigh, N.C., has his crew track every single hour equipment is used and the daily service record of each piece of equipment.

Each mower, aerator—whatever—has its own "key chart," so called because the ignition key for each piece of equipment is kept with

each chart.

The chart is printed on a 28x45-inch piece of poster board. The number next to the equipment name is the manufacturer's recommended hours of use between each oil change.

When an operator uses the equipment, he fills in the date, his initials, number of hours he used it, and a check mark after he's checked the oil and greased it.

The advantage, Rogers says, is that the mechanic can see at a glance how long the equipment has been in use and how it's been cared for.

"This gets us away from the 'rainy day oil change' system," in which the job is done sporadically, usually on days when the weather keeps you indoors. "You can damage mowers, especially the smaller mowers, that way," he says.

Charts are covered with plastic to keep them clean, and notes are written in grease pencil for easy erasing.

KEY CHART					
TORO 450-D 100	OPERATOR	TM	JR		
	DATE	8/3	8/4		
	HOURS USED	4	2		
	OIL/GREASE	✓	✓		
CUSHMAN #1 60	OPERATOR	RH	RH		
	DATE	8/2	8/3		
	HOURS	6	4		
	OIL/GREASE	✓	✓		
JACOBSEN GREENS KING 30	OPERATOR	LK			
	DATE	8/3			
	HOURS USED	5			
	OIL/GREASE	✓			

