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sand works down. Instead the grass grows through the sand. Oakmont has followed basically the same regimen since the mid-1970s.

"This is the sacrifice our members have to pay for the fast conditions that we try to maintain," explains Kuhns.

Crew members usually mow the greens twice daily, first with a Toro 3100, then with a Toro 1000 walker.

Although Kuhns says Oakmont is committed to using less chemicals, some preventive spraying is needed on the greens "for certain diseases." Other insect and disease controls are sprayed "as needed."

Kuhns estimates Oakmont's greens get 3½ to 4 lbs. of N per year. The greens are fed as they're aerified each spring and fall. This is supplemented by several liquid, foliar applications during the season. As Thanksgiving approaches, Kuhns puts



Galleries arrive early, even as the pins are being set, when Oakmont hosts a U.S. Open. It's been the scene of seven Opens.

down an application of Milorganite.

"If the demands of members are fast, fast, fast, it costs a lot of money and takes

a lot of time," admits Kuhns, who came to Oakmont about four years ago from Laurel Valley.

Renovating golf greens without wrecking careers



Prepare temporary greens well in advance of a renovation, according to James F. Moore and other golf course experts.

USGA Green Section suggests not forcing it down peoples' throats.

by Ron Hall,
Senior Editor

■ A major greens renovation project can be one of the most rewarding times in a superintendent's career. Or it can become a nightmare. How thoughtfully the superintendent prepares and educates the club's leadership often spells the difference between the two outcomes.

James F. Moore of the USGA Green Section offered suggestions about how a superintendent—more precisely his or her career—can survive a major greens renovation. About 300 superintendents listened to Moore, a former superintendent himself, at the GCSAA Conference this past winter.

"The number one reason why projects fail is because people don't take the time to get on the same page before the project starts," says Moore.

He admits that his observations are colored by some of the club membership squabbles and hard feelings that he's witnessed concerning the topic of greens renovations. In fact, the decision of whether to renovate or not can split a club's mem-

bership into unfriendly camps, and put the unwary superintendent in a precarious position.



Moore: Tread softly with members. Let them decide the answers to some of your problems.

Moore's common-sense guide to renovations:

1) Determine the need for a renovation. Seek the assistance or professional outside of your club. Document the need.

2) Determine the scope of the proposed renovation. Again, document your recommendations.

3) Prepare financially. (Perhaps this should be the first step.) Major renovation is expensive.

4) Assemble a pre-construction team to help uncover any potential stumbling blocks. The team might include an agronomist from the extension service, the contractor, an architect, key people from the club's membership, and a "clerk of the works," somebody whose sole function will be overseeing quality control of the renovation. The clerk could be your capable assistant.

5) Educate the club's leadership and members. Take them (particularly the most skeptical ones) to the greens and dig holes to show them what's going on. Moore suggests starting the education process about two years prior to actual work.

6) Provide the club with the professional documentation that you and your team have assembled. Then, get out of the way. Let them make the decision.

7) Start preparing suitable temporary greens as soon as practical after the club decides that it wants to renovate.

"A lot of clubs get into trouble when they try to force it (renovation) down the members' or the players' throats," says Moore. "If you try to run this thing through, all you're going to do is alienate half the people that pay your rent."

And, stresses Moore, never forget—"If the project goes good, the superintendent will often get credit for it. If the project goes bad, the superintendent will *always* get credit for it."

You could face a renovation sooner than you think

■ Is a greens renovation in your near future? In all likelihood, yes.

Most superintendents will undertake a greens renovation within the next five to 10 years, believes James F. Moore of the USGA Green Section's Mid-Continent Region.

"We've got a lot of old greens that have somehow survived all the changes in the game of golf because we've got better superintendents, we've got better irrigation, we've got better chemicals and we've got better equipment," he says.

"After a while our talent is not going to be enough to bring these old greens through and we're going to have to do something."

But Moore also points out that not all ailing greens necessarily need renovation. Some greens, in fact, can be improved by removing nearby trees and opening the greens to more sunlight and air movement. Aggressive core aeration to break up layers caused by previous mismanagement can bring others back to health. A water injection unit may help too. "You want to look at all the options," says Moore.

Even so, here are forces that are driving courses toward major renovations, says Moore:

—**Increased play.** Clubs that averaged 25,000 rounds a season a generation ago now host 30,000 to 35,000 rounds. Municipal courses can exceed 60,000 or 65,000 rounds. (Moore believes all superintendents should know the number of rounds their courses host each season.)

—**Rising expectations.** "People are more mobile now. It was one thing when all they did was play on your course," says Moore. "Now they go on vacation and play in places that are absolutely breathtaking. Then they come back they want to know why your course isn't breathtaking."

—**Environmental pressures.** "Right now you can go out and spray pretty well anytime you want to," says Moore. "That probably won't continue."

—**Lessening water quality.** The use of treated wastewater on courses continues to increase and is mandatory on many new courses.

—**Improved grass varieties.** "You can't knock Penncross, but you've got to remember it was delivered to us in 1956," says Moore. "It's carried us for a long time. There are at least six or eight new bentgrasses out there that are better than what we've relied on."

—**The possible loss of methyl bromide** as a soil fumigant. Methyl bromide allows the conversion of a green from one grass to another because it kills everything in the rootzone, including seeds of unwanted varieties. Methyl bromide is alleged to be an ozone destroyer. It's being scrutinized by regulators.

Weighed against these reasons to renovate are two powerful reasons discouraging major renovations—cost and down time for the golfers.

Moore estimates a cost of somewhere between \$4 and \$6 per square foot, and an expense of as much as \$500,000 for an entire course. "A lot of clubs don't think they can afford that," he says.

A superintendent can help solve the problem of down time by preparing temporary greens well in advance of renovation, Moore believes. Some clubs even offer special incentives for members and guests when temporaries are in play. Some schedule fun events, and actually pick up new members who can see that these clubs are serious about offering quality golf, as evidenced by the renovation.

"You can understand why some people in your club don't want the greens rebuilt," says Moore. "They're just so happy playing golf, they'd like to be able to play golf any time they want to."

A third but, maybe, less common objection to a needed renovation may be membership's reluctance to change "classic architecture."

Moore admits that this is a tough call, but he maintains that courses built for previous generations of golfers weren't intended to host as many rounds as they do today.

—R.H.