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ture into focus. As the spectators and the athletes enter the facility and view the field, the stage is set for their experience. The spectators'—and the athletes'—perception of a good or bad game are linked with their perception of the quality of the field, and thus connected to their "image" of those who care for the facility.

In today's world, the sports turf manager also must be conscious of how environmental "correctness," safety and playability affect the liability situation. Sports turf managers must set standards for the highest level of quality and establish procedures to ensure that those standards are being met. When deficiencies are found, they must be defined and action documented to show corrections are taking place. It's an ongoing cycle.

It takes foresight to look at your facilities critically and perceive the things that could go wrong. Sports turf managers must watch for trends that might lead to potential problems and take the initiative

to correct conditions before those problems become a real danger.

And finally, the sports turf manager must communicate the essence of all this to the community, through reports and press releases, through contact with the media, booster clubs and community groups, and always through common-sense working relationships with the people.

Sports turf managers must take the time to explain why we do what we do, and why we don't do certain other things. We must be open, honest and straightforward. If we've made a mistake, we must admit it and take actions to correct it. We must analyze why mistakes occurred and prevent them from happening again.

If we establish a good working relationship with the community, and keep engaging in conversation, even when a difference of opinion exists, we're working on developing that positive image. We're building our image when we say we'll do "x, y and z" and then do x, y and Z; when we promptly comply with a community request that is sensible and reasonable.

We're building a positive image when we make sure that every member of our staff understands what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how it affects the overall good of the facility.

We're building a positive image when we explain our current financial and labor limitations, then develop specific plans of action and ask for volunteer contributions of funds, equipment or labor to accomplish those goals.

We're building our image when we work with facility users to develop workable alternatives to fill their needs and keep the fields safe and playable.

Sports turf managers must be willing to exert extra effort to achieve the best possible facilities and clearly communicate their role to the community, in order to create and maintain the highest professional image.

—Greg Petry is executive director of the Waukegan, Ill. Park District and president of the Sports Turf Managers Association.

## Golf courses as 'good neighbors'

by Ron Hall,  
Senior Editor

■ Here's another hat for golf course superintendents to wear—the hat of the goodwill ambassador to your communities.

More of you need to share the good news about golf to friends and neighbors. No, you don't need to tout the game itself. The growing ranks of beginning golfers suggest that's not the problem. You've got to shine a more pleasing light on the properties on which the game is played. Nobody knows more about them than you.

You realize that the courses you maintain are not green islands within your communities. They can't afford to be perceived as being isolated. Not any more.

There are too many lingering misconceptions by the public that golf courses are not good neighbors. A surprising number of people, including some golfers, see golf courses as water wasters and polluters. (see April '95 LM, page 6G)

Superintendents realize that there's little basis for these concerns. You understand that the impact of a golf course in a community is overwhelmingly positive.



The Tampa Palms course earned an Audubon certification in 1993.

You can tick off a half dozen benefits—more if you think about it—of having a properly maintained golf course in your communities. Some of you, in fact, do an excellent job of alerting your communities

to the positive environmental benefits of your courses.

But a lot of the public apparently never hears this message. When it does, it  
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responds enthusiastically.

**At St. Charles**—The local artists arrive at the bend in the wooded lane. They spread easels on the mossy ground, then direct their attention to capturing on canvas the colors and textures of nature.

The artists aren't in a wilderness; they're guests of St. Charles Country Club. They're in a corner of 68 acres of woods and meadows surrounding the golf course in St. Charles, Ill., about an hour's drive west from Chicago's skyscrapers.

Peter V. Leuzinger, CGCS, is pleased that artists find beauty near the golf course. "We picked a nice spot for them next to the stream. There's an old bridge, a couple of fallen logs, and some pretty flowers in spring," he says.

He's equally happy when delighted fourth graders make their annual nature field trip to these same woods. Or when a course co-worker brings Scouts to these 2 1/2 miles of trails and paths.

"We appreciate the opportunity to be able to send a good message out into the community," says Leuzinger. "These people are going to talk to their friends, and they'll have good things to say about us."

A brochure that Leuzinger prepared describes some of the natural attractions found along the St. Charles trails which, until the club's crew widened them, had been deer paths. Leuzinger also recommends investing in good signage to identify, using common and scientific names, trees and plants.

"Let the public come out to your property as long as they don't get onto the golf course," urges Leuzinger who was superintendent at St. Charles for 20 years before switching to the nearby Ivanhoe Club this past year.

These and other similar good neighbor efforts are coming none too soon, not just in Chicagoland but nationwide.

Educator Dr. Winand Hock says that National Golf Foundation surveys indicate that 25 percent of U.S. golfers believe that golf course chemicals pollute lakes and streams. The surveys also suggest that just 25 percent of non-golfers believe golf courses are "good" for the environment.

"Clearly we haven't done a good job of communicating the facts that a good chemical management program does not cause environmental problems," says Hock, director of the Pesticide Education Program at Penn State University.

He adds: "We need to get the word out

## Letting your communities know

■ Need some ideas to get your community more aware of the value and beauty of your golf course? Consider these:

—**Allowing bird watching** on off seasons or days. Sponsoring an annual Christmas bird count.

—**Partnering with a garden club** in helping you identify unusual or threatened plants at your course.

—**Working with schools** on field trips, or helping with student science projects that deal with environmental matters you're familiar with.

—**Inviting community leaders** to the

course to show them special programs, like wetlands preservation, water conservation, and state-of-the-art pesticide storage, mixing and recycling systems.

—**Joining and/or speaking** a local service organization. Explaining just what you do.

—**Sponsoring an annual photo contest** involving your golf course.

You and your staff should be able to come up with more. When you do, please let us know. Write to us at: *Landscape Management Magazine*, 7500 Old Oak Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44130.



**A visit to St. Charles by local students on a field trip was a wonderful promotion for the country club.**

about who we are and what we're doing."

**At Tampa Palms**—Greg A. Plotner, CGCS at Tampa Palms Golf and Country Club course, is another example of how that can be done.

The 8-year-old course he maintains earned certification as an Audobon Wildlife Cooperative Sanctuary course in 1993. It was recertified the past two years. Plotner's crew maintains the course to provide wildlife with excellent nesting and feeding habitat while also providing golfers with the best possible playing conditions.

Admittedly, he has a lot to work with. Of the 250-acre parcel of land, only 90 acres is turf, 40 acres is lakes and the remaining 120 acres is forested wetlands areas rife with wildlife.

Also, Tampa Palms has the talents of David Coogan, a trained landscape technician, who has a unusual knowledge and interest in aquatic plants. The aquatic garden that Coogan installed next to the fourth hole is so unique that Plotner creat-

ed a simple brochure describing the eight different major plants it contains and their usefulness to area wildlife.

Other wildlife-friendly features of the course include bird nest boxes, manmade brush piles in out-of-play areas, and—in one instance—a large artificial perch into a waterway which has become so popular that it's first-come-first-serve among the turtles, herons and other critters.

But Plotner's efforts are more far reaching than habitat enhancement. They include integrated pest management and ambitious water protection and conservation efforts, too.

For instance, Tampa Palms maintains buffer zones around all of its lakes and ponds. The buffers—including other naturalized, out-of-play areas—do not receive fertilizer or irrigation.

"We have found ways to keep these water bodies pristine. There's no reason to have low-cut turf on some areas of the golf course," says Plotner.

By installing low-volume water fixtures in the clubhouse, and by freely offering lawn watering information to golfing members, the golf course staff reinforces its concern and helpfulness.

"All too often, golf courses only promote the virtues of golf. This, of course, is important. But it ignores the natural beauty and the environmental qualities of the course," adds Hock at Penn State. "What we need to do is more than just place a

value on the tees, greens, fairways and clubhouse.

"Is your course environmentally friendly? I say, of course it is," says Hock.

"But have you told anybody?"

Greg Plotner, CGCS, Tampa Palms Golf & Country Club says a good first step is the formation of a "resources committee." The committee at Tampa Palms includes several staff members, a Hillsborough



**Plotner: keeps turf at a higher cut than most.**

County (Fla.) Extension Agent, and a fertilizer expert.

"You're going to bring in some people from the outside who are going to have a lot of expertise and talent," adds Peter V. Leuzinger, CGCS, St. Charles Country Club, near Chicago. "Combine them with the staff and talent that you have and you're going to have one heck of a program."

On-going communication, both within your course and

within community, is equally important.

Plotner suggests seeking opinions and member involvement with bulletin boards in the clubhouse or in the locker rooms. Leuzinger suggests newsletters and press releases.

"Don't be bashful about what you have. Tell your local communities" admonishes Dr. Winand Hock, director of the Pesticide Education Program at Penn State University.

"You the golf course superintendent is a local environmental expert. You know more than most of the people in your community about environmental conservation," he adds.

## What price speed?

**Superintendent Mark Kuhns reveals how his crew keeps historic Oakmont's greens so fast and true.**

by Ron Hall,  
Senior Editor

■ Few of us maintain greens as fast as those at the championship course at Oakmont Country Club, Oakmont, Pa. Nor should we.

But not many of us host a U.S. Open either, as Oakmont did in 1994, its seventh Open. Or have an annual budget of about \$1 million. (Actually there are two courses at Oakmont.) Or have *Poa annua* greens. Not *Poa annua* like many of us know it as a pesky annual weed grass, but perennial strains of *Poa annua*.

Okay, okay, enough already, we know—Oakmont does.

Certainly, green speed is not as vital for us as it is on a course that doesn't want to be brought to its knees by the likes of a Jack Nicklaus or a Greg Norman. Nonetheless, it's fascinating to hear how Mark



**Kuhns: plays greens to check their speed.**



**The Greens at historic Oakmont Country Club are mowed twice, first with a riding mower then with a walking mower.**

D. Kuhns, CGCS, makes the Oakmont greens so fast and true. He told fellow superintendents just that at the GCSAA Conference this past winter.

Kuhns says he tries to check each green daily, usually with a stimpmeter in one hand and a putter in the other.

"I like to see the ball roll on the green," he says. "I like to see if the ball is bouncing or if it's wavering left or right. Also, it gives me an indication, even without a stimpmeter, how fast a green is." And he's not afraid to roll greens to make sure putting conditions are consistent around the course.

Oakmont members like their *Poa annua* greens fast, real fast. Most members, in fact, are willing to sacrifice color

and lushness for a hint of brown if it means more speed.

Obligingly, Kuhns keeps the greens on the dry side. "The only reason we have the irrigation system is just to get by between rainfalls in my climate," he says. With only four inches of rootzone to work with anyway, he feels the turfgrass responds best to light, frequent watering, usually by hand.

Twice each season his crews aerify the greens with a Cushman Ransomes Ryan GA 60 unit with 3/8-inch four-inch tines. Once the Oakmont crew pulls the plugs, it turns the greens almost white with a top-dressing of pure sand. It's almost a week before the greens can be mowed again. The *Poa annua* is so tight, little of the

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