

Steady workers a dream come true

The days of 'political appointments,' goof-offs are gone at Ridgewood Country Club.

by TERRY MCIVER / Managing Editor

For years, the summer workforce at Ridgewood Municipal Golf Course in Parma, Ohio, was composed of teens whose fathers "knew somebody at city hall."

It was never a surprise when, on a day in early June, a few guys with very little ambition and a strong desire to goof off would mosey onto the course to begin their summer of fun.

"We had our share of misfits," remembers superintendent Ted Benze, who smiles with relief as he describes the changes that took place about eight years ago, after a new city administration took over. At that time, Benze had strongly suggested to the new mayor that politics be left out of golf course crew staffing.



Ted Benze finds continuity pays off when it comes to maintaining a well-trained, dedicated workforce.

Benze now relies on a dozen retirees to round out his peak-season staff of 22, and he praises the work ethic and dependability of the older men.

"Before," remembers Benze, "you'd get seasonal help and you couldn't keep them year after year. There was constant retraining. Now, I've got one guy who cuts greens, one guy who cuts fairways, right on down the line. The one who takes care of the greens mowers has been here eight years."

Ridgewood is located smack-dab in the middle of Cleveland's largest suburb. Main roads pass less than 100 yards from the clubhouse and along the number 10 and 11 fairways. The city's biggest shopping mall is about 500 feet away.

Disease hits hard

Benze says the heat wave of '95 didn't seriously affect Ridgewood's turf until the end of August, but when it hit, it hit with a vengeance.

"I usually buy pesticides out of season, but this summer was one of the few times we bought during the summer, due to the disease pressure," says Benze.

"There will always be a year like this year, where you get some surprises. At one time [during the heatwave] I had something I thought was sum-



mer patch; but I checked it up so fast that I'm not positive it was summer patch, or a form of anthracnose, or the two working together. I went out there with six ounces of Cleary's 3336, which everybody was trying, and it worked for me.

"Mercury would have knocked it down," insists Benze, "but it's not

labelled to use anymore. That's why you see a lot of these things showing up that never did before. You haven't been able to use mercury during the summer for 15 years now. You can use it during winter only, for snow mold control."

Designing to aid playability

Benze has modified the course design

considerably during his 15 years at Ridgewood. The back nine is now the front nine, a change which was made based on player preference and general playability.

"We've added blue tees, and an irrigation system (see sidebar) and enlarged the fourth tee, which used to be the 14th."

One hole on the front nine was decommissioned, and a new hole was added in its place, primarily as a way to shorten the walk between two holes which were very far apart (a player peeve for many years).

Benze buys good trees at bargain prices in late summer from a local nursery known for its end-of-summer clearance sales, such as red maples for \$30. He also grows trees in a small nursery near the maintenance shop. □

New irrigation system a double-row wonder

A new Buckner "Genesis" double-row irrigation system installed at Ridgewood Golf Course two years ago has made water management much more efficient.

Superintendent Ted Benze decided to use city water as the source for the system, after determining that a nearby lake contained too much septic and salt content. The lake has since been cleaned, but it still lacks sufficient volume.

Pressure drop is one of the challenges you face when you draw from a water source that also supplies a city of 88,000 people, especially during a heat wave, but the new system helps Benze adjust run times easily to compensate.

"Last year I had 120 pounds of pressure coming in from the city," recalls Benze. "This year I was lucky to have 57 pounds.

"The Buckner Genesis has been a big asset. Last year I was able to pump close to 1000 gallons per minute. This year, because of the pressure coming in to



the place I could only pump 600. If it wasn't for the convenience in changing the program around, I would never have been able to do it easily. I can change run times or lanes in less than 20 minutes. Using city water was still the best way to go."

The area from tees to fairways is covered by single-row irrigation; fairways are covered by a double row configuration.

C.J. Colein & Associates of Rochester, Mich., designed the configura-

tion. Benze is glad he went the route of an irrigation consultant. He tried to solicit bids and designs from individual contractors, but it became too confusing and complicated.

"I would recommend anyone—public, private or municipal golf course—to go that route," attests Benze.

"Carol Colein came up with a bid package and a system that fit our needs, and it turned out better than we expected." □

—T.M.

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