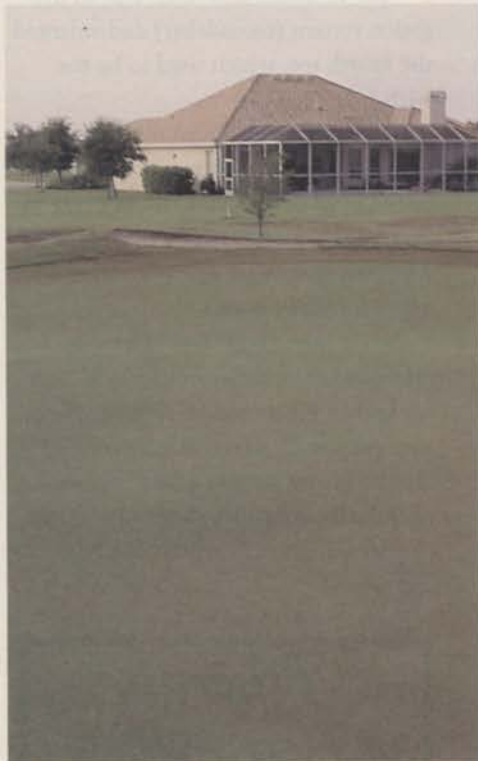


Learning by doing

by TERRY MCIVER / Managing Editor



Dan Hall's prescription for fast greens: 'If I have a big event coming up on a Sunday, I topdress lightly on Tuesday or Wednesday. Then we single-mow on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, and double-mow on Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings.'



You can't tell Daniel Hall, Jr.'s story without first saying something about his dad.

D. Lester Hall, Sr. began working on courses in 1915, when the only "utility vehicle" was a good, strong mule or plowhorse.

He developed U-3 and Hall Superior bermudagrasses, and helped build Atlanta's Peachtree Golf Course.

Hall Jr., 68, learned the art, craft and science of golf course turf management from working with his dad,

and, later, from his own study and experimentation. A few continuing-education credits were added along the way to dot the i's and cross the t's, but the wealth of his knowledge has come from the doing.

There isn't an area of turf management to which Hall hasn't applied his own methods, intuition and common sense. He's taken what he's needed from all the theories and let the rest go dormant.

Peachtree, San Jose, Imperial and Savannah are just some of the golf courses he's walked and rode, seeded and hoed.

Hall has been the superintendent at Serenoa Golf Course in Sarasota, Fla. since it opened in 1989.

A public-fee course in a neighborhood of more than 30 public courses, Serenoa holds its own against the competition. Thanks to Hall, his crew, and club president and pro Jim Owen, Serenoa is known as the best-conditioned course in Sarasota. It'll host about 70,000 rounds of golf, in this, its sixth year of operation.

Working with the weather

Stormy weather has made mole cricket control especially challenging.

"This is the worst year I've had for mole crickets only because the pastureland around the course has been flooded," says Hall. "They used red-eye fly (a predator form of biological control) out here four or five years ago; last year and the year before we didn't have any mole crickets."

Hall spot-treats with control products only when mole cricket or other pest populations warrant.

Eighty-plus inches of rain pelted the course from June to October, which altered Hall's usual fertility program.

"This year, with the rains, I put out about 18 pounds of nitrogen per 1000 square feet. Normally, I run about 12 to 16 pounds, depending on rainfall.

"Potash is more essential than nitrogen, as far as I'm concerned," Hall explains, "in a ratio of almost 1:3. But then, I don't use any potash until mid-October, when the overseeding starts to show."

Hall believes in the value of Milorganite as a nitrogen source.

"It's clean, it's easy to apply, and it will not burn except under sheer, stupid misuse. It absorbs heat and energy, it's got carbohydrates, amino acids and nitrogen; it's not going to release if the ground temperature is much below 72 degrees, because the bacteria's not working. It serves the same purpose as charcoal, and the golfers don't complain about it."

Serenoa is home to a thriving wildlife. Deer

roam the course in the early mornings to nibble on sugar-rich bermudagrass. Eagles and heron nest on the course, and live off fish from Serenoa's 83 acres of lakes.

Well-respected in changing times

Hall has always won the respect of co-workers and employers, thanks to his airtight knowledge of the business and a no-nonsense style.

Throughout his career, he's usually been able to convince golf course owners, club presidents and whomever else was his boss at the time that the way of the experienced superintendent is the only way to care for a golf course.

As the jargon of golf has expanded to include terms such as "bottom line," "profit-and-loss statement," and "stockholder dividends," Hall believes it's important that superintendents—largely at the private courses—communicate clearly what corners must not be cut in the interest of profits.



If you want to really ruin Dan Hall's day, tell him he's got to stay inside. Hall, left, insists that a superintendent has to be out on the golf course every day. 'When you get to be a manager, you lose contact with the people. You're in the office with the paper, the computer and the telephone.'

The status quo, says Hall, has become "saving money," which can be bad for a work environment and bad for turf.

He quotes turf research legend O.J. Noer: "A golf course is no place to waste money, but it's also no place to save money.'

"And Noer also calculated that for every dollar a course saves off bottom line in salary, it costs them \$3 to \$7 per year."

The member syndrome

"You take the most prominent people in the community—doctors, lawyers, businessmen, judges; it doesn't make any difference who they are," explains Hall. "Normally, those are the better-educated people in the community. As a general rule, they're also the most affluent people in the community, who donate the most time in areas of leadership for charitable institutions. And they do a lot of good.

"But for some reason, the minute they become a member of a board of directors of a private country club...you start to get political factions. Some want to renovate, and some don't want to renovate...And guess who's always in the middle of it? The superintendent!"

Hall estimates the average tenure at a Florida golf course to be about five-and-a-half years.

"Some younger fellows are also being squeezed out," he says. "Some are now selling equipment. They became disenchanted. Many would not go to work for a private course for any salary."

Member apathy for the superintendent's plight doesn't bode well for Florida superintendents who have had to deal with up to 100 inches of rain this summer.

"When them Yankees start coming down from the East Coast into the Naples/Ft. Myers/Sarasota area, and find that the golf courses are not in the condition they normally have

QUOTABLE QUOTES

from Dan Hall Jr.:

- ▶ 'Nobody knows the road better than somebody who's already travelled it.'
- ▶ 'What members forget is that the superintendents at tournament courses have had all year to get ready.'
- ▶ 'If you know turf, it really is the simplest part of the whole operation.'
- ▶ 'I know superintendents who wouldn't know how to start a triplex mower.'

been in, there's gonna be hell raised. There'll probably be guys who'll lose their jobs.

"That's why I would never work at another private golf course, especially in Florida."

Balance responsibilities

Today's "do-it-all" superintendent, says Hall, wants to give equal attention to all areas, which isn't always easy.

"If he's someone who is naturally most adept at growing grass, he'll spend more time on the appearance of the grass.

"And I don't care how smart you are. Whatever area you focus your attention on, other areas have got to go lacking. There are very few people who can oversee that infinite number of specialties."

Hall plans to work at Serenoa until it dries up and blows away, which is unlikely to happen, with all the rain they've had down there.

The point is, he will not retire.

That's one of the traits of many superintendents from Hall's generation. Their "What's-life-without-work?" philosophy is hard to dispute. □