

Delegation as a handy 'tool'

The modern golf course superintendent's job often includes multiple tasks which have nothing to do with growing healthy turf.

"As we concentrate on those other things—environmental issues, safety issues, pesticide issues, personnel—we find that we spend less time on the art of greenkeeping," says David S. Downing II, CGCS, director of golf course operations for Wild Wing Plantation, Myrtle Beach, S.C.

"I think we need to develop a better balance, because the bottom line is: golfers still play the game on the grass," says Downing, who has become very good at balancing duties. He was the first employee hired at Wild Wing, during the rough-in stage of the first course. Nearly six years later, all four courses at the thousand-acre site are complete. Downing manages 94 employees.

"With a complex of this size," explains Downing, "we set the quality standards, the guidelines of how often, when and how we want things done. Then we rely on the superintendents and assistants to make it happen."

Each golf course is operated as an individual entity rather than a zone. Each superintendent or assistant has a work crew, and daily reports are made for each course.

Constant play

Wild Wing hosts 100 to 150 players per day in the slow months, and 175 to 200 in March, April and October—per course!

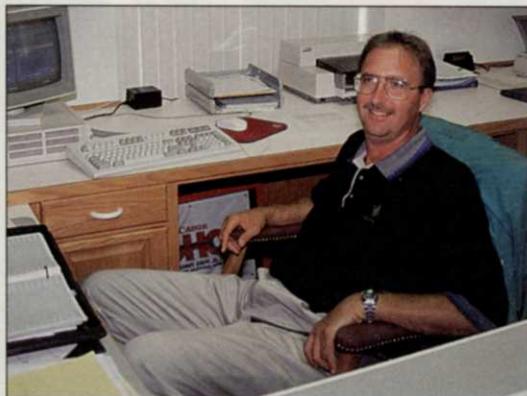
"Because we strive to produce conditions at least equal to a premium country club, it's a balancing act to reach the neces-

sary level of efficiency while keeping the player's experience the top priority.

"I'm proud of the course, especially the greens, with the amount of rounds we do," says Downing, who credits the superintendents, assistant supers and crews.

New technology

Downing watches for new technology



David Downing hopes employee safety training pays off in employee commitment and loyalty.

and tools for the superintendent, including turfseed and control products.

"We've started innerseeding A-1 perennial ryegrass into the greens. We use plant growth regulators (PGRs), not just on the roughs, but to control growth on the bermudagrass fairways and tee boxes during the rainy season, when mowing time can be limited. Because we oversee with perennial ryegrass early in the season to keep a constant green, we also use PGRs to hold the bermudagrass in check and give the rye a competitive advantage."

Loyalty and retention

Wild Wing offers a competitive employee package, also explores ways to fur-

ther strengthen employee retention.

"Last summer alone," recounts Downing, "nearly 5000 jobs opened up. Fifteen golf courses have been built in the last two years. Sixty percent of our crew has become pretty stable, but that still gives us a 40 percent turnover."

"Training is a plus in retaining employees. We emphasize that we're training them for their benefit—to ensure their safety, to improve their skills, and to make their work day flow more smoothly. Because we're doing all this for them, we expect a good job and some commitment in return."

The club's groundwater table varies between two and five feet below the surface. "It gave us great flexibility on lake construction during the building process. The holes dug for the lakes filled up gradually, but naturally. The soil that was removed was then used for the fairways, greens and mounds. Wetlands are prevalent here and we've dealt with many of those issues during construction. The courses are built with the holes primarily parallel to the wetlands areas to reduce the impacts."

Downing says the construction style makes for less efficient use of the land, but was in the guidelines set by the local Coastal Council and Corp of Engineers.

"Now that building is completed," says Downing, "we basically concentrate on proper maintenance of the wetlands areas and avoiding doing anything that might disturb them."

The 9th Annual John Deere Team Championship Golf Tournament was held at the course in October 1995, which motivated Downing and his crews to crank up the turf management a notch. Many of his superintendent associates played in the tournament, which Downing considers to be one of golf's big events. □