

More money makes projects happen

More members...more money. A simple reality of golf course maintenance at work at Arrowhead Country Club in North Canton, Ohio.

"We have really worked to try to present a strong first image as you come to our club," says superintendent Daryl Decker, who has served as lead superintendent here for 11 years.

More money has also enabled Decker to add about seven persons to his summer crew.

"We've known that we needed more people," says Decker. "But then again, we've always been a small club. When I first came here 11 years ago we had 135 members. We're now at 250 members. Some of that is just a natural growth, due to the mem-

bership size.

"The new members came along because management realized we needed to increase the budget. We were starting to fall behind in maintenance levels, let alone being able to accomplish the extras. As they realized the need for additional income, they brought in the new members. The past 9 to 10 years have been, 'Let's just maintain it.' Now the attitude

is 'How can we improve it?'"

One maintenance need Decker hopes will become a reality is an automatic irrigation system to replace the existing quick-couple system.

Scheduling

Arrowhead uses many high school and college students during the summer. With so much school-aged help, Decker feels it's important to be an understanding boss when it comes to granting worker requests for time off during summer, as long as he knows—at the time the workers are hired—what time off they will need through the summer.

"I understand that this is not their lives," says Decker. "This is what they do for income, to get themselves through school, or to help out at home. I can't bring myself to demand 'You are here from June 1 to September 1!'"

"They have football practices, cheerleading, volleyball, church camps, scout camps, a variety of different things they're all involved in.

"I work with them when I hire them on. I try to keep a family atmosphere as we work the crew here. What I ask in return is, on those busy days when I come in and say 'We have to jump,' let's jump."

Workers get an entire weekend off every other weekend.

Decker pays \$5.75/hour, a wage that was made possible due to the budget increase.

Sod solutions

Decker has occasionally had to replace larger turf areas with sod, and he agrees that proper soil preparation is essential to eliminate layering.

"If there's any way you can get a couple inches of good, loose soil down there, you've won half the battle," says Decker, who uses bluegrass sod when planting into native soil on banked areas.

He says soil amendments are critical to the success of sodding on harder, clay soils.

"The roots are never going to penetrate," says Decker. "It might look good for a little while, but as soon as you hit a drought or stress time, all the rooting is up in the top layer, because it can never pene-

A desire to 'make it better' has fueled improved course maintenance and special projects at Arrowhead Country Club.

by TERRY McIVER / Managing Editor



'I just love the business,' says Daryl Decker, who helps employees balance work requirements with outside interests.

Tips from Darryl:

- 1) Allow flexible hours for summer-only employees.
- 2) Use soil amendments to help create good, loose soil before installing sod.
- 3) Place seed-filled repair boxes on par-3 tees.
- 4) Irrigate deeply, syringe, hand water and use wetting agents to minimize heat stress.
- 5) Use overseeding mixes in areas of high pythium probability.



trate that hard layer underneath."

Decker uses lots of organic soil amendments when he works with sod; these include peat moss and leaf compost, or porous ceramics such as Isolite and Profile, to help with water retention and to help loosen up the soil.

"If it's a real hard, wet, clay type of material, I'll put in sands, I'll put in organics, something to kind of create a little better soil condition. If I'm already dealing with a good organic soil, I may not add anything but some starter fertilizers down in that root-zone, so that as that root goes down in, it has something to feed off of, instead of a top application. I like it already in the soil, where the root has the ability to work to it. You lose less of the material.

"I've had good results with Isolite and Profile in some greens and tee areas. I also used Isolite on one tee surface, for better water retention, and blended some organics into that.

"We worked all these products through six inches, rolled it, packed it and loosened the top surface back up again to lay sod on it."

Arrowhead's tees are small, which has usually



been compatible with the number of rounds played a season, which Decker estimates to be 25,000.

"But with the membership increase, I do have more divot repair to do on par-3 tees. More play means more divots and divot repair." Repair boxes filled with a seed mix have been placed on par three tees.

Weather zigs

The less-than-predictable weather patterns continued in parts of the Midwest this spring and summer, and Decker had to do his best to keep his head above water as far as scheduling and effective maintenance.

"It has not been a typical summer. Spring was wet. Normally, by mid-May, we're on a routing maintenance schedule. This year it was mid-June.

"We had a period from early April through mid-June when there was virtually never a rough cut where there wasn't clumping grass. You'd mow for three days and it would rain for four, so you were starting right back over again with that spring clean-up and spring preparation. We went from that right into 85 degrees and sunny, and now, we're cool again."

Heat stress solutions

When it comes to heat stress, Decker, as all supers do, tries to prevent first, then cure.

"Preventively, we try to prepare the turf for the heat stress. In the spring, we try to establish deep rooting through irrigation patterns of long, deep watering cycles.

"As far as curatives for heat stress, we try syringing,

One of the best things about the staff, says Decker, is that no one takes a 'that's not my job' attitude.

At left, one of the many ways the Arrowhead crew beautifies tee areas.



'We try to keep our crew from being totally over-run with the projects,' says Decker, who installed this ornamental pond (right) with the help of the club professional, Dave Cavalier.

hand watering, the typical things. We were out yesterday with the wetting agent tablets, and some hand watering of the localized dry spots.

"I believe in holding back on nitrogen levels. I don't push the fertilizer regimes. This helps keep the turf real lush during heat times."

Decker does not aerify greens in spring, since play is light.

"We do fall aerification and sand topdressing. That helps wherever we have compaction.

"We try to be a little more conservative with our water because with the type of system we have, we can't go out and randomly throw water around. And in some aspects that may have helped us overtime, because we've tended to take those weaker turf strains out; because of the stress, they go under and it's kind of been a 'survival of the hardiest.'"



Bluegrass/ryegrass

Memories of the Midwest heat wave of 1995 linger, and Decker is careful when choosing turfgrass varieties.

"We shy away from ryegrasses when we do any overseeding on fairways for the simple fact that we are prone to pythium here and the ryes have a tendency to be a little more susceptible to pythium," Decker observes. "So we go with a two- or three-way blend.

Arrowhead's greens are cut at 1/8-inch, six days a week, with walk-behind mowers. □



No more wash-outs

One low-lying section of Arrowhead Country Club was constantly being flooded by heavy rain.

"We had problems with water coming down through here and eroding out. It was getting to be a real problem," remembers Decker. "We would pick up water from the housing development at a higher elevation. Everything from seven or eight acres funneled right into this spot of runoff. We had caverns form in here from the water running through."

Solution: "We came in with the concept of a dry stream bank. We cut it out, shaped it a little bit, laid a plastic layer down and then put cobblestone in on top of it.

To beautify the area, a perennial wildflower mix was sown in. "We're going to mix bulbs in with that and some of the lilies and hostas," explains Decker. "As you look up this hole next year, there's going to be a mass of wildflowers up behind it.

"Last Sunday we picked up an inch of rain in 15 minutes and that spot had no erosion."