

Two at a time for Arcola

Superintendent Mike Mongon says that golfers' rising expectations have caused him and his staff to 'double team' this popular Paramus, NJ, golf course.

Mike Mongon follows the "Noah's Ark" Theory of Golf Course Maintenance. Mike is superintendent of the Arcola Country Club, Paramus, NJ, and he always uses two of everything.

Arcola CC features several "runway" tees such as #12 which is 82 yards long. That's the Robert Trent Jones touch from a 1957 redesign project caused by the Parkway.

He starts each project at the beginning of the front nine and at the beginning of the back nine so that both nines finish at the same time.

"In other words, I'll have two people raking sand

traps, two people cutting tees, or two people operating Turf Tracks at the same time," says Mongon, in his ninth season at Arcola. "Theoretically, they all finish at the same time and the golf course looks even throughout. Golfers don't encounter inconsistencies such as short and high roughs on the same day. I came up with this theory in answer to the escalated level of maintenance golfers have come to expect within the past 10 years."

Big Apple golfers

As a destination course for both Manhattanites and New Jersey suburbanites, Arcola lies within shouting distance of the Garden State Parkway and only 20 minutes from Wall Street.

Built in 1909, the course underwent a redesign by Robert Trent Jones when Parkway construction rerouted six holes in 1957.

Continuing improvements

During the past three years, Mongon supervised a facelift by the Robert Jones Company, redoing several holes each year. The last seven holes were completed in the spring of 1996.

"We wanted to get the bunkers more into play in accordance with today's golf game," notes Mongon, who attended the Rutgers University Turf Program. "Jones' touches are large greens and long, runway tees—some of them 80 yards long.

"We built some new tees and reworked other areas, restoring ponds and bringing grass bunker faces down. I learned that bunkers have ears, noses, knobs, bays and capes as well as faces."

Lend a hand

Bunker maintenance now requires a combination of intensive hand work and an intricate system of specialized equipment,

including Turf Tracks for bunker edges and "Fly Mows" which ride on cushion or air to cut all the noses, ears and knobs. Mongon's crew includes a full-time staff of eight, most of whom have been at Arcola for at least nine years, a seasonal staff of seven and five summer employees. With first tee-off at 7:45 a.m. each day, the crew completes much of its work between 6 a.m. - 9 a.m.



Originally all bentgrass greens, tees and fairways, Arcola began experiencing *Poa annua* encroachment back in the 1950s. Since Mongon began managing the turf to encourage bentgrass development, populations of the desirable grass species have increased to 70 percent throughout the course.

Prescription fertilization

He precision-times fertilizer applications, using 2 ½ lbs. of N per year on fairways divided into three treatments: lightly in spring, one pound in August, and heavier yet in October. He also removes clippings. As a maintenance measure, he applies Prograss herbicide in the fall, 10 days after fertilizing.

"In the spring we can see where the *Poa* was and how effectively Prograss controlled it," says Mongon. "We've been able to really increase our bentgrass populations with this program and we don't have a big problem with seedhead formation in the summer."

A different approach

Mongon uses different management techniques on the lower and upper nines at Arcola. That's because the upper nine has a well-drained, sandy-loam soil which remains relatively dry all year, the lower nine has heavier soils and restricted air circulation. He and his crew have removed and pruned a lot of trees in the lower nine to improve air circulation. Also, they have renovated ponds to lower the water table by a foot and a half, and resloped existing spillways to facilitate drainage.

"Disease is usually worse on the lower nine holes," says Mongon. "Our strategy is to keep the turf plants healthy enough to ward off diseases. We use proper irrigation



Mike Mongon, superintendent at Arcola Country Club, Paramus, NJ, tailors his management practices to serve the precision conditions on each hole.

and mowing techniques, and spoon-feed the turf to avoid growth surges. But pythium pressure is always there when conditions are hot and humid." He follows a rotation of products, include Fore, Alliette and Banol fungicides throughout the summer months.

While pythium prevails on Arcola's lower nine, the upper nine has more bentgrass. "And brown patch just loves bentgrass," says Mongon. "It's very predictable, brown patch always appears the first or second week of August at

Arcola. Each year I evaluate the environmental factors, and they usually indicate spraying the last week of July. So I spray just prior to when symptoms appear, treating whole fairways that are habitual offenders."

Though Mongon rotates his fungicide products throughout the summer season,

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—Mike Mongon

he uses ProStar fungicide for brown patch control. "It allows us to eliminate some of our redundant sprays because ProStar lasts so much longer," he adds. "It's a very good material. When timed properly, an application of ProStar will last 21 to 28 days, which is usually long enough to get us through any brown patch pressure."

Manage, manage, manage

Intensive cultural practices also keep

disease, weeds and insects under control. Mongon aerifies the entire course once or twice a year, using a Hydroject on greens every three weeks. He also lightly top-dresses greens every three weeks and verticuts greens, tees and fairways twice each year. He monitors conditions constantly and follows different maintenance practices for different areas of the course.

For several years, Canada geese created severe problems for Mongon and his crew. Since five of the holes border water the geese adopted the golf course as their home. He tried balloons, grape juice, scare cartridges and cords around the ponds, but nothing worked. Last year he bought a trained border collie named McKenna to live on the course.

"The dog stalks the geese, rounds them up, and in general makes them very uncomfortable. The geese finally decided to leave after they realized that McKenna was not going to go away."

What a great staff

As government relations liaison for the New Jersey Turf Association, Mongon actively works toward better conditions for turf managers. He served on a drought task force in 1995, devising a water conservation plan for golf courses. He also publishes a newsletter for Arcola's 265 members. He regularly explains maintenance procedures.

"I have the best staff around and a really nice membership to work with. My main goal is to provide consistency on the course so that a golfer can use the same stroke on the same hole whenever he or she comes to play," says Mongon.

"It all goes back to the Noah's Ark Theory. It seems to be working here so I think I'll continue using it." **LM**