

PLAN AHEAD FOR equipment replacement

Don't wait until the budgeting process starts to inform your facility's decision makers about your equipment needs.

By PAUL BASTRON, CGCS

Your equipment replacement program starts and ends with your budget. How can you make sure there's enough there to acquire the type of equipment you need to provide the playing conditions that your customers demand? You can't, but you can increase your chances by keeping your facility's decision makers informed about what you need.

This requires a plan. It doesn't have to be elaborate or formal. It just has to work for your situation. The procedure that we use at Glen Flora Country Club includes:

- ▶ Proper equipment maintenance to prolong the useful life of equipment and increase future replacement flexibility.
- ▶ Scheduling replacement dates.
- ▶ Justifying and selling our program and the need for equipment to our members.

I'll briefly outline what we do.

Old equipment lasts, when cared for

We all recognize the need for reliable new equipment, but I still like to keep a few "antiques" restored and in good working operation. For example, our old Ryan utility cart probably wouldn't last a week if everybody on our crew used it. But it makes a perfect divot cart for Leo who treats it like his own.

We have a Ford tractor that's about 40 years old. We use it every day to cut the range and other areas around the course.

It's good for the members to see some old equipment being taken care of along with the new equipment. And, believe me, this older equipment gets noticed!

Software helps track costs

We've found that tracking our equipment costs is a huge asset at replacement time. We use an inexpensive computer program ("What Vehicle History?" from Organic Computer Wizardry, Paonia, CO; 970/527-6756). Our equipment technician Bob Collier found it, and it only cost about \$100. It tracks service and costs. It tracks each service event and organizes the information by vehicle, service and date.

It keeps track of labor hours, parts used and comments, and there's an inventory system to track stock levels if you chose to do that. Software can usually do a lot more than most people need. You'll probably have to customize the program to fit your needs. Computers give technicians a better way to track equipment and maintenance.

'Replacement years' a guide

By being organized we're also better able to monitor which equipment gives us the most trouble and should be replaced. Because we have an accurate record of our inventory, which we've grouped into categories (reel mowers, rotary mowers, cultivation, and so forth), it's easier to schedule projected replacement dates. I simply prepare a list of the equipment according to the replacement year.

We try to present this information in as clear a fashion as possible. This makes it easier for our committee and other key people, particularly the finance director, to understand our needs.



Paul Bastron's fondness for good machinery is evident in this immaculate Harley Davidson which he often rides to and from Glen Flora Country Club just north of Chicago.



The 18-hole Glen Flora Country Club course usually gets about 18,000 rounds a season. It's maintained by a combination of vintage and newer equipment and tractors.

These lists work best when they're readily available. We don't want to wait until budget time to inform our decision makers of our equipment needs.

Tell board all you can

We set up a meeting in the spring or summer to show our board members what we have in the way of equipment, and what it's used for. At the same time we point out equipment that should be replaced, or any problems we're having with a particular piece of equipment.

This is a good time to point out details such as quality of cut, down time and hydraulic leaks. They're usually very interested in this. We give them a copy of our equipment lists for the next two or three years. When they see \$150,000 or \$200,000 worth of equipment listed out, they get a better idea of how vital it is to keep it up on an annual basis.

Even if you've done everything you can to document and publicize your equipment replacement needs, it's no guarantee

Dealer speaks up for maintenance

Mark Downey of G&T Equipment Co., Kansas City, Mo., sees first hand the problems that arise when end-users don't follow preventive maintenance schedules. Downey is a John Deere dealer.

"Normal greasing intervals, oil change intervals and air cleaner intervals are not observed," says Downey, "and we're going to see this as more of a problem. With the advent of two-year warranties, we're going to see warranty issues in that second year derive from poor maintenance.

"[Dealers] may be caught in the middle, with the customer thinking it should be covered by warranty, and John Deere saying it's not."

Downey therefore takes an active role in equipment training.

"As a salesman, if that equipment does not perform because it is not maintained properly, I miss a sale next time. So that's why I always conduct training sessions. I've been doing it for three, four years."

Equipment companies will clamp down on equipment abuse if the leasing concept is to ever succeed, says Downey.

"They're going to ask for engines back and inspect them."

The bottom line is...the bottom line.

Equipment is an expensive proposition, all they way around.

"The lack of maintenance is driving the cost (of equipment) up, because a lot of that cost in this market is derived by the extensive warranty," says Downey.

"Dealers aren't the ones who are charging that, it's the manufacturer who is charging for warranty. John Deere has to amortize enough in the price to cover the warranty expense over the two-year period. And that's got to be a large portion of Deere's market price. I have no idea how John Deere amortizes that, but they have to. It's like medical insurance," Downey explains.

"The more people who go to the doctor, the higher insurance costs get. When they start going for things that aren't really necessary, it's no different from when you fail to grease a mower. We, as a dealer, want to keep you happy and warranty it. John Deere has to take a look at that at the end of the year, and say, 'we have to add another 'X' percent to the cost to the dealer because the warranties are really costing us.' It's a cause and effect type of thing. And the dealer is caught in the middle. Thousands of dollars are written off by us through our shop because of unpaid warranties." Terry McIver

your requests will be approved. The final decision is often made at a closed-door budget committee meeting. That's another reason why it's important to keep all the decision makers at your facility—particularly the finance director—informed of your needs. We give Budget Committee members a brief description of the proposed equipment and costs. Because of our previous efforts they should have enough information to make a decision.

We realize that it's not likely we'll get everything in the way of equipment we would like so we've learned to stretch the life of equipment. One way to do this is to use aging equipment in less critical areas.

Equipment 'shifts' rotate machinery

For example, we don't buy new mowers for tees or collars. We buy the new ones for greens, and shift the older units to tees and collars. Our mowers used for green banks are shifted to intermediate roughs after four to six years. Triplex mowers are shifted from greens to approaches, range and nursery after about four years.

Educating your decision makers will increase their awareness of the importance of keeping up with your equipment needs.

—The author is superintendent at Glen Flora Country Club, Winthrop Harbor, IL.

The Club has about 210 golfing members and the 18-hole course gets about 18,000 rounds a season.