

What a Club Expects of Its Superintendent

by ALLEN E. GROGAN, Green Committee Chairman, Baltusrol Golf Club, Springfield, N.J.

The golf course superintendent is the most important person on the staff of a golf club. He is in charge of the only asset we have to sell—the golf course. His relationship with the club is a most important one, and in many cases not a happy one.

What does a club expect from its Superintendent? In some cases, miracles. But realistically, the answer is to do the best job possible with what is available. There is no absolute measure of performance. Conditions vary too much from club to club and many factors determine how much a superintendent can do. Among the controlling factors are:

1. Climate.
2. Location.
 - a. Soil condition.
 - b. Water supply.
3. Club finances.
4. Labor supply and quality.
5. Member demands for other services.
 - a. Pool.
 - b. Tennis courts, etc.
6. Unreasonable demands for course condition.
7. Personalities.
 - a. Is green committee chairman effective?
 - b. Has superintendent been able to establish rapport with the chairman, club Officers, and board?

Each club has its own personality and requires a superintendent who can answer its demands. A well qualified individual may be unsatisfactory at one club, but may do an outstanding job at another club. In many cases, the club has made the job of the superintendent much more difficult than it need be. At times, every club will become interested in another superintendent, and every superintendent has occasionally wished he was working at some other club. I think each of us should look at our superintendent and the job he is doing. We should ask ourselves a question—Is he doing his job well? No matter what your answer, try to figure out the reason for it.

If you, as Green Chairman, are unhappy with your present superintendent, it may still be better to work with him, since he knows the club and the course, rather than to try to make

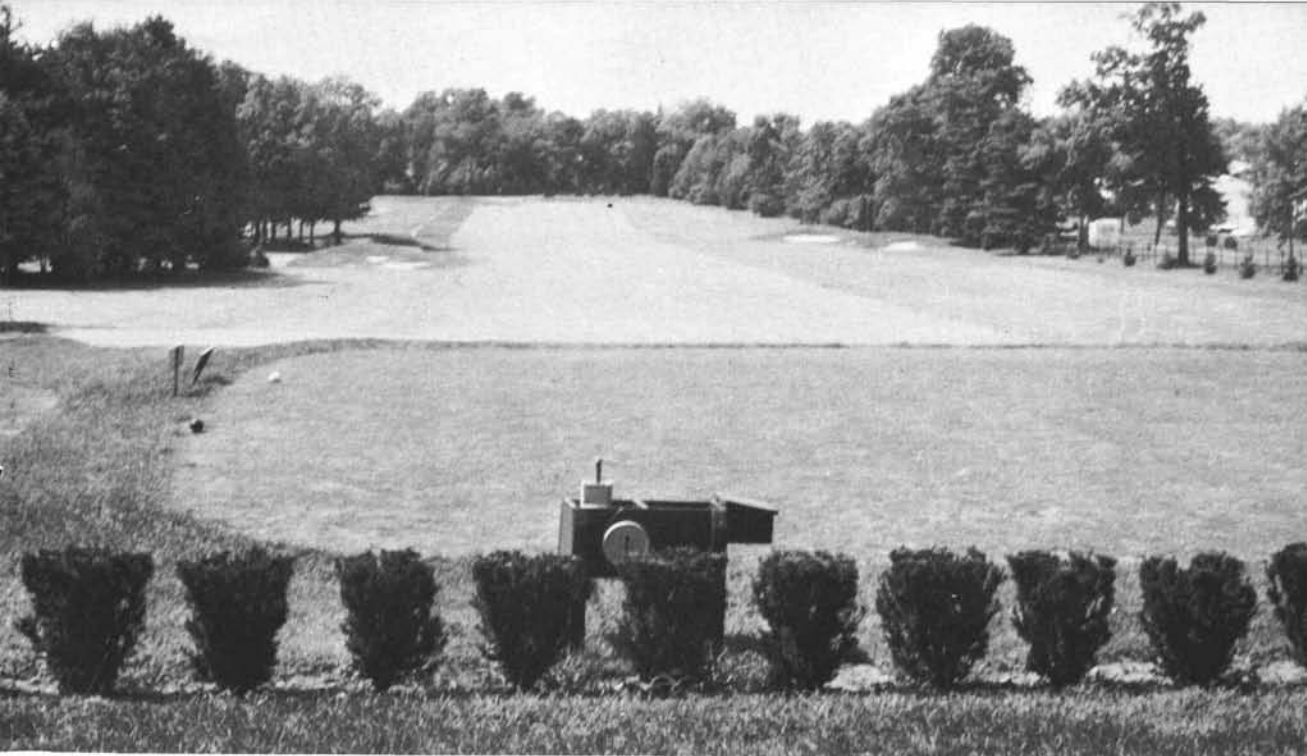
a change. Again, the reasons behind his apparent failure may be a club failure, and no superintendent could do the job expected of him under present conditions. To help with this analysis, let me comment on some things we should expect from a superintendent.

The green chairman is usually the primary rating authority of the superintendent. Before attempting an evaluation of a superintendent, I feel the green committee chairman must be fully qualified in his job. The chairman cannot be selected as part of a new broom campaign. He must be groomed, brought along, and prepared in green committee work, just as management is developed in business.

Many clubs change green committee chairmen every year or so. This is a problem for both the new chairman and the superintendent, and it can lead to many interesting solutions. Some chairmen step in and immediately tell the superintendent how to do his job—in detail. Others back off and let the superintendent do everything, hoping that all will go well during his term as chairman. Then he can either tell his friends, "how I ran the green committee the year the course was so good," or "the superintendent let me down," if things do not go well.

The best approach is for the chairman and the superintendent to work together very closely. Each must understand the other's problems. It is very important that they constantly communicate with one another about the job they are trying to do together. The chairman should—

1. Provide overall direction for the efforts of the green department.
2. Assist in long range planning.
3. Provide management information for the superintendent.
 - a. Time scheduling and work planning.
 - b. Labor policies.
 - c. Work practices.
4. Shield superintendent from direct contact with members.
5. Provide liaison and communication between green department and members, club officers, and board.
6. Work with superintendent to give



This fairway has been prepared with the necessary equipment and with proper timing so that later results were gratifying.

members the course they want at a price they are willing to pay.

- a. Find out what is really wanted.
 - b. Let members know what is being done and why.
7. I feel that the chairman should be a good golfer and a person who is interested in the whole golf course. A good golf course is not just fine turf. It requires overall management of the whole club property to make a great golf course.
8. It is a good idea to play golf with your superintendent. You get to know one another better. The superintendent may be amazed at how his course looks to the player. You never really see a course until you play it.

The superintendent should—

1. Listen to the comments and the suggestions of the chairman with an open mind and discuss these ideas with him. The chairman understands the desires of the members and they must be satisfied.
2. Run department in a sound business-like manner.
 - a. Plan work well ahead and make each day's operation fit into the master plan.
 - b. Constantly review actual costs as related to budget.

c. Operate department to get maximum use of members' investment.

- (1) Use all possible labor saving equipment as much as possible. When equipment is purchased it must be used effectively or club officials will lose faith in your judgment.
 - (2) Set up and follow schedule for—
 - (a) Routine operations.
 - (b) Maintenance of equipment.
 - (c) Cleaning of shop area.
3. Work with chairman in developing a long-range plan for each hole of the course. This helps in that the long-range plan stays for future implementation even when the chairman changes.
4. Set up detailed operating and capital budget. What better way to sell a program than to show what it means to the club in money. All programs eventually come down to the budget.
5. Keep fully informed on the latest developments in the turf industry and advise your chairman of this information. He is just as interested in turf as you are. Your relationship must be one of easy two-way communication. The budget is a very valuable tool in

planning for the next year's work. First, set-up a master plan for a five-year period covering every hole on the course. I suggest that you set up a loose leaf book with a page for each hole. Each page should have a scale drawing of the hole and then add comments regarding the work required for that hole. During the initial stages of annual planning, review your plan book and decide what to put on the coming year's work schedule.

I recommend a three-year capital budget, up-dated each year. With this set-up, capital requirements do not come as a shock to the board, and equipment purchases can be handled in an orderly fashion. This forces us to plan our operation more thoroughly than if we just live from year to year. Another advantage is that you always have the board and the club officers presold on your program. If things go well, you may be allowed to get something from next year's shopping list a year early.

The operating budget should be compared with those of the prior years and then projected a year into the future. Budget time is a good time for questioning. Look at each operation. Question each expense. Are we getting full value? I feel that the ground work on the budget and all other plans should be done by the superintendent. He should then review and finalize his program with the chairman.

The budget determines the whole program for the coming year, and it must be set up in detail. Only then can an intelligent analysis of the budget be made. The preparation on the budget must start with a realistic picture of what the members want and what the club can afford. The club officers and board must understand what can be done at different expense levels. The key is the close relationship of the chairman and the superintendent. When both understand one another's problems, much more can be accomplished. The chairman contributes his understanding of the members requirements and his knowledge of what will be approved by the officers and board. The superintendent contributes knowledge of costs and what can be done at each expense level. A good team reinforces one another and produces a stronger program.

A good record comprised of well thought-out, detailed budgets and final expense records provides a history that the superintendent and future chairman will find invaluable.

In his day-to-day operation, the superintendent must manage the assets he has to work with in the manner calculated to give the club maximum return on its investment. Some suggested practices are—

1. Set up staff for the most efficient operation possible.

- a. Constantly review jobs on the course.
- b. Are crews the right size?
- c. Do we have the right equipment?
- d. Use good labor practices.
2. A well-planned purchasing program—
 - a. Avoid panic purchases.
 - b. Compare purchase value on a routine basis.
3. Set up and follow through on equipment maintenance.
 - a. Make sure work is done as planned.
 - b. Keep shop neat to facilitate work and improve employee morale.
4. Take time every day to look at your course and appraise its condition.
 - a. Put your comments on paper and review them with the chairman. This helps him in his job of liaison with the board and club officers.
 - b. It is hard to rate yourself objectively. Confer with your chairman, the USGA Green Section, and others for constructive comments.

The superintendent is in the business of managing the golf course, not just its turf. This is a very challenging job and requires constant updating of his supply of knowledge. We continually learn more about our jobs as we go along. Most superintendents seek knowledge from every available source—USGA, State and Federal Agencies, personal contact, colleges and other sources. The superintendent must constantly review why things are being done in their present manner. Labor practices, equipment, and maintenance policies should constantly be studied to see if there is any room for improvement.

Baltusrol, where we have two outstanding golf courses, has not been without its share of turf management problems. We were host to the 1967 United States Open. Conditions were excellent. Two weeks later our courses were in very poor condition. Our problems stemmed from a number of causes:

1. Heavy accumulation of thatch in our fairways.
2. Large areas of silver crabgrass.
3. In many cases *Poa annua* population of 80 percent in fairways.
4. An outmoded manual irrigation system.
5. Limited amounts of old and obsolete equipment.
6. Equipment maintenance was being done in an old house.
7. Tees were too small for increased volume of play.

To solve our problem we had to—

1. Build a new modern maintenance shop.
2. Equip our staff with modern labor saving equipment.
3. Install a modern automatic irrigation system.
4. Renovate fairways to remove thatch, goosegrass and *Poa*. We then established championship-quality bentgrass fairways.
5. Rebuild and enlarge our tees.

We had to accomplish these objectives within the financial limits of the club and still get the job done in an amount of time that the members would tolerate.

The planning started in 1967 and 1968. All our planning was finally reduced to capital and operating budgets. When we had studied the plan through, and the board had approved it, we called a meeting of the membership and sold our plan to them. As the work progressed, we made several interim reports to the members and complaints have been held to a minimum by our interest in member communication. The members understood our problems and what we were doing to solve them.

Test areas were renovated in 1968 and after results were observed the fairway program was continued in 1969 and completed in 1970.

A modern shop was built for the green department in 1969.

A multi-row automatic irrigation system was installed in the years 1969-70.

A tee improvement program is about half completed at present.

Our superintendent practically had to build two new golf courses in three years. The job was completed in a relatively short time and within budget. Our success was due to proper planning. *Everything was put in writing.* Costs were studied both on an operating and capital budget basis. Next time you have a proposal for your board, put in in writing first. We found many ideas change after they are down on paper and can be studied. Somehow, many ideas "sound" better than they "write."

Results are what count in this or any other business. As each year ends, ask yourself, "Have the members had a course in the condition they wanted? Did the year go so well that no one thought of the green department or were you mentioned many times in bitter, mumbled conversations at the bar? Did you stay within your budget or did you upset the club's fiscal apple cart?"

No matter what happened, study the year and try to learn from it. Look to the coming year and plan for it. Work on your master plan and implement the next phase. The chairman and the superintendent must work together to produce an effective overall course management program for the overall good of their club.

What Does a Superintendent Expect from the Club

by RICHARD C. BLAKE, Superintendent Mt. Pleasant Country Club, Boylston, Mass.

In today's constantly changing business world, a great deal of thought and effort goes into the selection and employment of a qualified and professional golf course superintendent.

During the last decade the demand has been for the college-educated, business-oriented man who has practical experience obtained by working under a qualified superintendent, usually at a well-known and well-groomed golf course. Generally, these men will have worked at several different golf courses and obtained all the practical knowledge possible. They realize

the importance not only of technical knowledge, but also of the common sense approach to turf management. In short, they can do the job as well as know why it is done.

Most superintendents are dedicated, hard-working, dependable, and have spent considerable time learning and living their chosen profession. They enjoy their work, and when you enjoy your work, you are usually good at it. Unfortunately, emphasis has been given to learning the technical aspects of our profession at the expense of learning the business aspects and in dealing with people, and it is in this area