

# Open Letter to the Club Membership

by HOLMAN M. GRIFFIN, Director, USGA Green Section Mid-Atlantic Region, Charlottesville

**D**EAR CLUB MEMBER:

It is definitely not my intention to bore you with a lot of agronomic facts, however, I would like to leave you with some interesting observations on your management team. We need to look beyond what we call the "user's itch" or the appearance of the playing surface on a golf course to fully appreciate what went into making it good or bad, as well as for an honest evaluation of your management team. Of course this most often leads straight into agronomics, but let's forget about that aspect and approach the subject from a different angle.

There are many golf courses in the country that have a reputation for always being in great condition, and it is no coincidence that these courses have at least three things in common; more than 18 holes, an adequate budget, and good management. The first common element has to do with traffic. By virtue of having more than 18 holes, a portion of the golf course can be closed for maintenance without disrupting play, therefore, the maintenance goes on, but you don't see it.

Certainly there are exceptions to every rule, and a good substitute for additional holes might be a minimum amount of traffic, or simply closing nine of 18 holes for maintenance on any given day. Any course that has less than 50 rounds of play a day (18,200 to 20,000 per year) and/or less than 20 golf carts has a tremendous advantage regardless of other considerations.

Fine and dandy, all you have to do now is get ride of 75 golf carts and expel two-thirds of your golfing membership to have fine turf. The economics of that situation are badly out of balance, but no more so than trying to maintain, or to expect excellent grass on your golf course at a price of \$1,500 per hole per year. The national average per hole for golf course maintenance in 1973 was \$6,554.00.

Before you jump to any conclusions based on that figure, i.e., your budget is too high or too low, you might believe that an *average budget* will give you an *average golf course*. But even this is not necessarily true. Last year I visited golf courses with budgets ranging from just over \$26,000 to \$160,000 for 18 holes. There are literally hundreds of items that cause such a disparity, and I believe there was little fat in either budget figure. Chevrolet and

Cadillac are both General Motors products with a great many essential features in common. They do somewhat the same job, but there is a vast difference in initial cost, cost of maintenance, and class. This analogy applies just as well to golf courses as it does to automobiles. The style you maintain is directly proportionate to the amount of money spent.

Now tie all this together with the third ingredient found at most well kept golf courses—good management. Most golf clubs have an "executive director" or green committee chairman and an "administrator" or golf course superintendent. These positions carry separate responsibilities, and yet they are so closely related that no distinguishable line can be drawn between them. Quite often a strong green chairman or a strong superintendent may assume almost all of the work load for both jobs, yet seldom does a golf club make a single individual responsible for both positions. No matter how the responsibility is divided, there must be close cooperation and mutual understanding between the green committee chairman and the golf course superintendent.

If your membership selects a green committee chairman simply because he is a good golfer, has time on his hands, promises to keep the greens cut short, or because he was elected to the Board of Directors of the club and someone on the board has to take the job or some other similar reason, you may well be headed for a host of problems.

A good chairman is a man who understands and appreciates both the problems of the golfing membership and the golf course superintendent. He seldom involves himself in the mechanics of the operation for the same reason that the president of General Motors (going back to a comparison of automobiles and golf courses) doesn't work on his assembly lines. He hires competent people to handle the mechanics of the operation and then depends on their experience and knowledge. His talents are mostly devoted to the corporate structure and financial aspects. If a green committee chairman dictates what is to be done on the course from day to day and how to do it, you don't have, and probably don't need, a golf course superintendent. In this situation you probably have a golf course superintendent pictured in your mind's eye as a subservient, somewhat



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inarticulate, poorly educated grass cutter, most often found at the barn with a three day growth of beard and dirty clothes. So what is a golf course superintendent anyway? The majority of modern superintendents have a college certificate in turf maintenance, many have a four-year college degree, and a few have advanced degrees. They may also be "certified golf course superintendents" in lieu of, or in addition to the above.

If it surprises you that anyone would go to college to learn how to cut grass, then you haven't tried to read any of the more recent turf management publications. Most of us don't trip lightly over words like isobutylidene diurea, 2,4-Dichlorophenoxy acetic acid, and photo phosphoralation—to mention a few. In

addition to knowing a few big words, a golf course superintendent needs competence in budget preparation, personnel management, equipment maintenance, public relations, and countless other areas. Growing grass may well be the easiest part of the job. Just remember though, even a top manager isn't equipped with a magic wand. He must have something to work with.

If this sounds like pleading the cause for equal rights of a minority group, please forgive me. Respect and recognition have to be earned, but I do hope after reading this you will have a somewhat different outlook on the management situation as well as some awareness of your responsibility to and for the efforts of your management team in your behalf.

# The Turfgrass Service of the USGA Green Section

**D**irect turfgrass advisory visits to USGA Member Clubs started in June, 1952. In the 22 years since then, the Green Section Staff has increased to eight specialists, and it has made over 25,000 golf course visits! Every USGA Member Club should be a subscriber, for you have information other clubs need and can use. Why not put this highly trained team to work for you on your course?

Every club subscribing to the Green Section Turfgrass Service receives the following benefits yearly:

1—Several direct conferences with a Green Section agronomist, in this manner:

A—A scheduled half-day, on-the-course consultation, followed by a written report from the agronomist to the Course Superintendent and Green Committee Chairman or club representative. Second visits are available at reduced cost if requested.

B—Consultation with the agronomist at local group meetings and turf conferences.

2—Assistance by correspondence and telephone.

3—A subscription to the USGA *Green Section Record*, dealing with golf turf affairs, six times a year, addressed to the Golf Course Superintendent. (This is in addition to the subscription sent to the Green Committee Chairman in connection with USGA Membership.)

4—A voice in the direction of turf research whose results benefit golf courses. The subscription fee covers all services and expenses; there are no extra charges for travel. (The fee for the Green Section Turfgrass Service is additional to dues for USGA Membership). A list of regional Green Section offices can be found inside the front cover.

## APPLICATION FOR TURFGRASS SERVICE OF USGA GREEN SECTION

(Open to USGA Members only)

Date \_\_\_\_\_, 19\_\_\_\_

Full Name of Club or Course \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Mail Address (street or box) \_\_\_\_\_

Post office \_\_\_\_\_, State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Application authorized by: \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Course Superintendent \_\_\_\_\_

We hereby apply for the Turfgrass Service of the United States Golf Association Green Section and certify that we are eligible for the class checked below.

We enclose the fee (see schedule below) for the current year ending December 31. The USGA *Green Section Record* is to be addressed to our Golf Course Superintendent (this is in addition to the subscription sent to our Green Committee Chairman in connection with USGA Membership).

This application is automatically continuous from year to year unless interrupted by advance resignation.

### Check Proper Class:

\_\_\_\_\_ Less than 18 holes . . . . . \$250  
\_\_\_\_\_ 18 to 27 holes . . . . . \$300

More than 27 holes:

\_\_\_\_\_ 36 holes . . . . . \$325  
\_\_\_\_\_ Per regulation course in  
addition to 36 holes . . . . . \$ 75

Please send receipted invoice

Requests to agronomists for second visits will entail an additional charge of \$100. For the third or more requested visits within the year, an additional charge of \$200 each will be made. Clubs will be billed in October for all additional visits during the year.