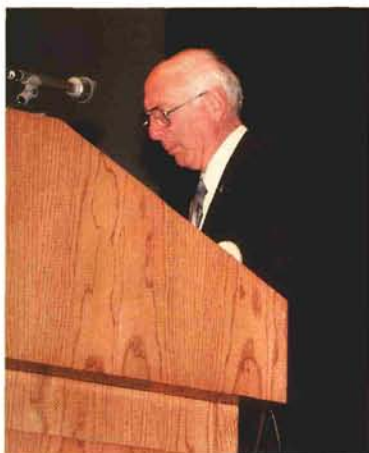


BASIC OPINIONS — BUT NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF TODAY'S MANAGEMENT

This is our editorial page, a new feature added to the 1987 Green Section Education Program. Here are three editorials discussing Basics in turfgrass management for golf. But how can Basics become controversial? Decide for yourself.

So You Think You Understand Automatic Irrigation

by **CLIFFORD A. WAGONER**
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Clifford A. Wagoner

IS AUTOMATIC irrigation really automatic, or should it be called controlled or timed irrigation?

Since the name is questionable, how can we really understand automatic irrigation? Is it possible with all the sensors and computers to irrigate golf courses automatically? My experience in designing, installing, and managing a system for 25 years leads me to believe that even though more accuracy may be possible now, any irrigation system still must be very carefully managed. If we understand automatic irrigation, why, after 25 years, are the same problems evident?

Systems are still being installed with spacings exceeding the manufacturer's specifications, undersized piping, insufficient supply of water, and a large number of heads on one valve. Also, the heads on the same valve are on varying slopes that are not compatible. In a glaring misuse of technology, wires are connected in the field when using valve-in-head sprinklers. This eliminates the flexibility of individual controls. An

alternative may be to use terminal boxes so adjustments can be made as needed. In many installations, sprinkler heads are selected without giving any thought to water quality. Furthermore, some sprinklers are designed to turn one revolution in three minutes. This item needs to be taken into consideration if you plan to use the system for short cycles or syringing.

No one industry has done more to acquaint the user with its products than the irrigation industry. Just look at the number of exhibitors at every turf conference. The volume of available material is staggering. In spite of the tremendous amount of technical data, automatic irrigation remains a mystery to many people.

Even if a system is poorly designed, a fine-tuned management program may possibly overcome the shortcomings of poor installation or poorly designed systems. Heads should periodically be checked for worn nozzles and for height of head in relation to ground level. Revolutions per minute should be

constantly checked. Controllers should be frequently checked for accuracy in station timing and starting intervals. Pumps must be checked for volume, wear, and efficiency. Pumps and controllers must be synchronized.

Many clubs are on their second automatic systems, and some are on the third, and yet the golf course superintendent has elected not to become involved. Many excuses are given, but to me, there is no excuse. If a club begins the process of selecting a design engineer without the superintendent's being involved, the superintendent must assert himself enough to help make those important decisions.

Bart Starr and Art Holtz, keynote speakers at the GCSAA 1987 Conference, both said that perfection may be out of reach, but everyone must strive for excellence. Even though we may not fully understand automatic irrigation, if we assert ourselves during the planning and installation process and strive for excellence, golf course irrigation will certainly improve.

A field controller.

