

# For the Golf Course Superintendent There's a Time to Hold — and a Time to Fold

by RILEY STOTTERN

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I'VE BEEN on and around golf courses — and around this profession — literally since childhood. My grandfather was a superintendent in Florida before moving out west, and I remember often being with him on the golf course. My father also was a golf course superintendent, and I worked with him many summers building and maintaining the golf course. So, as you now know, I am a third generation golf course superintendent, and I know that they have come a long way in the last 60 years — from laborers to professional managers.

Things have changed since grandfather's day, much of it out of necessity. We must keep up with the masses who now clamor to play the game. That's good, but my grandfather would probably roll over in his grave if he could see the way we do things today. We put heavy equipment on our fine turfgrasses these days — greensmowers, aerifiers, and vehicles loaded with sand for top-dressing, grandfather wouldn't even put a wheelbarrow on a green without laying planks.

I had a delightful time recently reading passages from a "golf course superintendent's diary." It had highlights dating back to 1916. One of the earliest installments went like this: "May 22, 1916 — the machine for mowing greens arrived today. Everyone in the work crew wanted the job of pushing it over the greens. I have selected only those men who have an even stride and do not tire easily. An even cut is most important."

Does anybody remember actually pushing an old reel type mower to cut the backyard grass? I do. It was tough on a hot summer day!

Somewhere in the GCSAA archives is a fascinating 16mm film tracing the history of golf course management. Everyone should see it. To me, one of the most interesting scenes is a row of women on their hands and knees in a line across a green pulling weeds. Rather labor-intensive. Today, we must use chemicals. There's really not much other



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choice, but we must use them carefully and discriminantly. And we do.

Lately, we've come under some fire about the use of chemicals on golf courses. We're doing a good job of application, but we must do a much better job of communication with the public in this controversy. To help us do this, GCSAA has created a new staff position of Manager of Governmental Relations. The position has been filled by Zachary Grant. He will work closely with Bob Still, our new Manager of Media Relations and with others in our communication and education programs. But back to our golf course superintendent's diary.

Elsewhere the author records part of his fertilizing program.

"I am using fresh peat moss, old, well-rotted, short-straw stable manure, and two ounces per square yard of Carter's Complete Grass Manure." That's the way it was.

Here's another installment dealing with the same general subject, dated March 21, 1921:

"Street sweepings were for many years an excellent source of fertilizer. With the advent of asphalt-paved streets

and the increase in horseless carriages, it appears that oil from the asphalt and from the automobile is being absorbed in the street sweepings. Mixed into the compost, the oil remains, and if it is applied to grass, will most likely kill it. Beware, and avoid street sweepings."

YOU CAN SEE, here was the beginning of progress, of professional growth and technological advancement.

Just as scientists have long done, golf course superintendents began to keep records. By keeping records and trying different methods, they could begin to see what worked and what didn't work.

Golf course superintendents had already seen the need for an organization or organizations to help them develop professionally. It was in 1920 when our journalist made this notation:

"I shall note in my greenkeeping record that today the United States Golf Association adopted a resolution to form a Green Section for the purpose of collecting and distributing information of value respecting the proper upkeep of golf courses. This is a great step forward, since we have so many problems with disease, insects and lack of general knowledge most important to growing good turf. I am looking forward to receiving the first bulletin of the Green Section."

Over the years the golf course superintendent, along with other members of a team that constitutes the game of golf as we know it, has striven to improve, in order to meet the needs and demands of those who play the game.

By 1925, a man named John Morley was making the rounds and talking about organizing a National Association of Greenkeepers. This organization would meet regularly and publish a periodical for educational purposes. Today, we can see very clearly what has come of that. From its humble beginnings at Sylvania Country Club, in 1926, in Ohio, that tiny band has grown into the 7,000 member Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

We've come a long way since then in education. Continual training is required of all diligent golf course superintendents to keep abreast of rapidly changing conditions. The GCSAA certification program has been very significantly upgraded. Next year, for example, we go from an open-book to a closed-book examination. The year after that, at least one year, or 15 Division I continuing education units, will be required for certification. By 1994, you will need at least an associate's degree or the equivalent to be a GCSAA-certified golf course superintendent. By 1999, three years of college or the equivalent will be required, and by the year 2004, it will be necessary to have a bachelor's degree or the equivalent.

This is not to say that many golf course superintendents today aren't highly educated. Almost half of the golf course superintendents attending last year's GCSAA International Turfgrass Conference held bachelor's degrees. More than 25 percent held two-year degrees. Quite a few held master's degrees — and there was even a Ph.D. or two.

**T**ODAY, it is not uncommon for golf course superintendents to work with annual budgets totaling half a million dollars. They are entrusted with the operation and maintenance of very

expensive modern machinery and equipment. They are the custodians of millions of dollars worth of precious land and other assets.

Not too long ago, Tom Watson compared the golf course of today with an artist's painting, "In the end," he said, "it is the golf course superintendent who has to finish the painting, and in addition, maintain it so the paint doesn't chip. Superintendents are the people most responsible for the players' having fun. If the golf course is not in good shape, it's not much fun to play. If it is in good shape, then it's very enjoyable, and superintendents have to work hard, be well educated, and enjoy what they're doing to achieve results."

And how about the club professionals, club managers, the architects, the builders, the owners? We're *all* important to golf. We're all part of the team. We are all playing, in more ways than one, what many of us believe is the best game ever invented.

As golf course superintendents, our technical knowledge and professionalism have reached new heights. We are experts now, and we usually know what's best for the golf course. But we must always communicate; especially when we are meeting with our green committees, our club owners, and so forth. After all, they are our employers. When you know you're right, it is your responsibility as a professional to hold

your cards just as long as you can — and that's as long as you think you have a chance of convincing them. One of the greatest problems we have in our personal relationships as golf course superintendents is that we sometimes have a tendency to be too idealistic when it comes to the golf courses we manage. Jobs are lost because of an inability to recognize that sometimes we just have to fold.

**S**OMETIMES WE can wisely fold and pass our hands to the next person. By that I mean bring in an expert. Everyone knows the definition of an expert. That's someone who comes in from more than five miles away carrying a briefcase. One of the most helpful assistants we have, at times, is the outside consultant, whether the occasion calls for an agronomist or an architect. After all, who really cares who plays the hand — who folds and who holds — as long as we get what we want, and that is what is best for the golf course.

I like to think that in some ways golf course superintendents are like the turfgrass on which golf is played. With proper care, turfgrass is constantly regenerating while the older turfgrass serves as a base. The game has been entrusted for now to our generation. May we continue to carry on in the best tradition of our predecessors!

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# The Trials and Tribulations of a Green Committee Chairman

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by **HOWARD KEEL**, Former Green Committee Chairman, Bel-Air Country Club, Los Angeles, California

**A**S A PROFESSIONAL actor and singer, I have traveled a lot and have had an opportunity to play some of the most wonderful golf courses in the world. I have been a member at Bel-Air Country Club since 1952, and my golf course is a very special place to me. I'm always glad to get back home and play golf on these wonderful acres with 18 great holes.

Over the years, I think golf has saved my sanity many times because, in my profession, you can have a lot of empty

time on your hands. You can study and try to improve your mind. You can drink or chase girls. You can exercise and try to keep yourself in shape in various ways, but I found golf real early, and it has been a godsend to me. I use my spare time playing and enjoying the golf course.

About three or four years ago, some friends came to me and asked if I would run for the board of directors at Bel-Air. I didn't know if this would be the prudent thing to do, but, nevertheless, I

agreed to try. As it turned out, I was elected, and Angie Pappas, the president, asked what I would like to do. "Green committee chairman," I blurted. I don't know exactly why. Lo and behold, he appointed me, along with some other people just to look after me.

I think they seriously doubted my ability as a green committee chairman, but I had one very good thing going for me. We had — and still have — a very fine superintendent — Steve Badger. I immediately got together with Steve to