

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.

TODAY, 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.

SOMETIMES 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!

The Trials and Tribulations of a Green Committee Chairman

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

AS 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

let him know I knew nothing about grass, but that I loved golf. The first thing to do under these circumstances is to get into a golf cart and go around the course. I learned to pick his brains so he'd leave mine alone. We have had some wonderful tours around the course since, along with some real battles.

One of the first things that had to be done, I felt, was to develop better control of golf carts. I went to the board for approval (because you always have to go to the board for approval). As a matter of fact, you have to be a board member to be a green chairman, and I think that is ridiculous sometimes, but it is true. Now I am not a cart lover. I would rather walk, and there is no doubt golf carts hurt golf courses, but we have to live with them. We have at Bel-Air some pretty affluent and very successful people. I call them Indian Chiefs. They each have their own little wigwam and they run it. They built it themselves. When they get on the golf course, they want to run that too, and they do a pretty good job.

I have found one can drive a golf cart fairly sanely for a few holes, but as one starts to miss the two or three foot putts, insanity comes into your being, and it's a Meet your Maker flight going down some of those hills in golf carts. People start driving across tees and greens, or they throw clubs at carts, etc. I decided that, in order to try and save some of the turf, I'd put down a white line. I went to the board and got approval and wrote a little note saying that from now on you would not cross the white line as it were. And if you do, you will get a warning. And if you do it again, you'll walk for a while.

AS IT IS in all clubs, there are people you just don't get along with. I have a few, and I can understand why they don't get along with me. But this one person was the first one I saw, and I found him at the side of a hill too close to the green with his cart. And I thought, "I can't write this guy up. It won't do any good, so I am just going to take him out of the cart. He's red-lettered. He has had it." So I did. I left a little note with the caddiemaster and immediately got on an airplane and went to England. I no sooner got to my hotel room when I got a phone call. The other gentleman, who had been playing golf with this guy, wanted to know what I was doing.

"You can't take him out of a cart," he said. I asked, "Why not? He disobeyed the rules!" He said, "But he can't play if he is not in a cart." I replied, "That is just

tough! He can walk for a few holes." But he said, "He can't go 18." So I said, "So you lose a little money. You have been making a pigeon out of this guy for years."

Well, you can imagine, this raised quite an uproar for quite a while. I was called Hitler and a big overgrown unspeakable word and a lot of other things. I learned fast to use the term, "Write me a letter."

You get 10,000 suggestions from everybody, but in my three years as green chairman, I received exactly three letters. Two of them didn't make any sense at all, and one was sent to me by an old friend of mine. Old Smokey we called him.

He complained about the cart path on the right side of the 16th hole. He said it was just not fair. I talked with him and told him that there is one thing about golf. It is not fair! It is not meant to be fair. The only way to enjoy golf is to be a masochist. Go out and beat yourself to death. Most golfers do. I passed through that period in my life about 15 or 20 years ago. Finally, Old Smokey wrote me a letter to say something must be done about this golf cart path on the right side of No. 16 because a lot of errant golf balls hit the path and go out of bounds. It is just not fair. So I wrote him back a letter and said I understand your problem but you must understand our problem too. It is very expensive to change the route of this cart path, because right next to it are some very expensive homes, and it would be very costly, if not impossible, to change it. I suggested one thing however; "Smokey, just take your right hand and lay it a little more open - - - -."

At Bel-Air we have some great characters. Fred MacMurray is one. Fred has a reputation of being a little close with the buck. He has a lot of bucks. He has more bucks than Bob Hope has. When I was a young lad, I came to L. A. in 1936 and had a job in the parking lot at Paramount Studios. I parked cars six days a week from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. with no time off for lunch and for \$9.00 a week. I would dust off cars, brush them up, anything I could do to pick up a dime or 15 cents. I did old Fred's car for a while but could never get a tip out of him. Never once. Years later we did a picture together called *Callaway Went Thataway*.

I had never met Fred since those early parking lot days. Paramount called a little meeting to introduce us all to Fred and Dorothy McGuire and the rest of the cast. They introduced me to Fred.

"Howard, this is Fred." I said, "Yes, sir, I've met Mr. MacMurray before. I used to park your car, at the Paramount Studios in 1936. I used to wipe it off, clean it off and you never tipped me one bloody dime." Then I said, "Thanks a lot," and walked away.

He started to "uh uh uh" and to this day, he comes up to me and says, "Howard, that story you tell about me . . ." "Fred," I say, "I'm afraid it is true. You don't recognize me now because at that time I was 17 and stood 6'3" and weighed 135 pounds and was in dire need of food."

There is also another story about Fred MacMurray. He was making a picture for Walt Disney once in London, and he was on expenses of \$1,000 a day. Walt came over to London to see how the picture was going, and on the set one day he said, "Fred, want to have dinner together tonight?" They went to a lovely restaurant, very expensive, and the check came and they sat there, and they sat there, and finally Disney picked up the check and paid it. But he was thinking, "How cheap can a guy be? At least he could pay for dinner on \$1,000 a day." Well, they finished the picture and Disney got a letter from Fred. In it was an itemized statement of all the monies he had spent in London and a check for the money he did not spend. That's our Fred, a wonderful, wonderful person.

ONE THING I do advise if you ever become a green chairman is, when you get on and you have a committee, fire the committee. It is not only a favor to yourself, but it is a favor to the golf superintendent. He only needs one boss. It's bad enough to have one dummy to put up with so why be surrounded by a bunch of dummies. That's one of the first things I did, and I got some real arguments.

I am not a very diplomatic person. Nothing like old Clayton Farlow on *Dallas*. He is just the nicest old boy I've ever known. But I am not really like that. I think that's really the only reason they made me green chairman. They figured anyone who could handle J. R. would make a good green chairman.

There are a few different sides to the people involved at Bel-Air, but probably not all that different from other clubs. I did bend a lot of noses with the cart issue, I sometimes get emotional. My father was a coal miner, and he could swear for ten minutes and never repeat a word. At times I can be a chip off the old block. Sometimes Marion Farmer, my good friend, golfing partner, and mem-



ber of the USGA Executive Committee, closes his eyes when he walks over to the golf cart. He never says anything to me but I know what he is thinking. One time I found a former club official parked in his cart alongside and right next to a tee with some friends. This is against our cart rules, and I pointed this out to him with a few choice words. They freely translated into "as a past-president, you are not setting a very good precedent for future members or others by breaking the rules." Sometimes you make good friends and sometimes you don't.

Being a good green chairman is helping your superintendent. If you have a good superintendent, you can be a good green chairman. Steve Badger and I get along very well. I love the game and the course. I have had a wonderful three years as green chairman, and I learned a great deal from Steve. We did a few things around the course that I think helped, but you have to be very careful with golf courses. You must not denigrate the course in any way.

You can have a great track, but only if you are willing to take care of it. I think part of the problem with our automobile industry today is that they keep hanging things on their automobiles, hanging things on until it doesn't look anything like it was. If they had taken all that money and spent it on improving the



(Top, left) Carts.

(Top, right) Cart paths.

(Above) Every Green Chairman's dream — good greens, a cleanly cut hole, a clean cup liner, and a clean flagpole.



Howard Keel

basic product, they would be much better off. I think it is the same with a golf course. You have to be very careful how you go about improving a course. I'm still on the long range planning committee and involved at times with the current green chairman. But don't ever have an ex-green chairman on your committee, because you are in big trouble.

I have tremendous respect for the golf course superintendent because of the wonderful things he is doing with golf courses in the United States and around the world. This gives us all the opportunity to enjoy life and have a wonderful time. So use the golf course. Don't abuse it.