

STEWARDS OF THE LAND: AN OPPORTUNITY

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THE PRESENT TIME offers great challenges for golf course management. These challenges also represent opportunities for golf course superintendents to demonstrate their professionalism — perhaps more so than any other time in history. Superintendents must take advantage of educational opportunities and research information, and try to gain experience to meet today's challenges.

So, what are these challenges?

The sometimes negative public perception of golf courses and the need to maintain the integrity of these green spaces combine to create a challenge that the golf industry must continue to face head-on. We are on the brink of a new understanding, one that is based on scientific research of golf course uses and benefits and the ecosystems they provide. It is part of the superintendent's responsibility to help spread the word.

The concern for our environment is a legitimate one. Golf course superintendents have responded to the challenges set forth by public concern and environmental regulations. The environmental agenda will continue to create new challenges that will demand action by the golf industry. These challenges will give superintendents the opportunity to maintain a position of leadership in environmental awareness and protection. We must demonstrate our skills in golf course management, especially in the areas of environmental protection and regulatory compliance. It is important, as stewards of the land, to be leaders in the environmental arena. We must be proactive; taking a reactionary stance in regard to environmental regulations is not really an option anymore. Any incident of non-compliance can and will be magnified under close public and media scrutiny. This is something that our industry cannot afford.



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Documenting successes in golf course management and sharing these experiences with fellow superintendents is a practice that benefits the profession as a whole. We must actively involve people in our business who do not attend local and national turfgrass meetings. Volunteering to write articles for publications and offering to give presentations at state or local chapter meetings is becoming a professional responsibility.

Demonstrating professionalism can occur at several levels. Furthering your education and becoming a certified golf course superintendent, for instance, gives a superintendent credibility that is recognized throughout the golf industry. A superintendent reaffirms his or her dedication to the profession by fulfilling the continuing education requirements set forth by GCSAA.

Other activities that enhance superintendents' professional standing in-

clude community service, participation in associations and charitable organizations, and participation in local government.

Research and Technology Transfer

Developments in research and technology provide new tools to assist superintendents in effectively managing their courses. The USGA Turfgrass and Environmental Research Committee, for instance, is helping to find new ways to solve old problems. Turfgrass programs at institutions of higher learning continue to expand their research activities and provide critical information to our profession.

On the other hand, the effective dissemination of this information is just as important as the research itself. GCSAA has been a leader in the technical transfer of research and technology through its education activities and publications. GCSAA and other associations must continually seek new educational opportunities and improve existing methods of information exchange. Superintendents must have access to this information to maintain the environmental integrity of their courses.

GCSAA is currently developing an Environmental Management Program (EMP) to assist superintendents in the environmental education process. This is a unique opportunity to become recognized leaders in the application of proven, environmentally sound management practices. The EMP consists of six distinct areas of specialization: underground storage tanks; integrated plant management; employee safety and right-to-know; water quality and application; golf course development; and storage, disposal, and recycling. GCSAA has developed these areas of specialization to meet the demand for up-to-date training on environmentally

safe practices. At least 14 new seminars are being established to serve the EMP program.

As superintendents add to their skills, they also add to their earning potential. Those who have exceptional skills will be in demand and thus command a higher salary.

Use the Latest Technology Available

Diagnostic kits for the timing of pesticide applications, weather stations and computer models for irrigation decisions, and antibody tests for residue levels are technological advancements that give superintendents the scientific information they need to make responsible decisions.

Any reductions in pesticide and water use resulting from new technology should be documented. EPA is very interested in gathering information concerning pesticide application reductions. By documenting reductions in pesticide and water use on established courses, we may be able to assist the acceptance of course developments in the future. However, the documentation of this information must be started now in order to pave the way for tomorrow's golf courses.

Public Perception and Public Relations

Scientific information and technological advances are important tools in developing club member awareness and

changing the public's perception about the utility of golf courses. There is a new understanding about the uses and benefits of these green spaces. Golf courses are assets to the community, and that message must be communicated to the public.

GCSAA is developing public information tools such as the GreenTips fact sheets and the video "Links with Nature" to assist superintendents in pointing out the positive benefits and golf course impacts on the environment and the surrounding community. These can be used by the club to inform members and the media and address questions that may arise concerning golf course operations.

Sharing your management experiences with others is another way to demonstrate professionalism.



The ecological benefits and non-golf uses that courses provide need to be continually highlighted in order to get the message across. This can partially be accomplished by developing contacts with your local media. Golf courses and turfgrass provide the following environmental benefits:

- Produce oxygen.
- Remove pollutants from the air.
- Cool the atmosphere (act as a heat sink).
- Absorb sound and glare.
- Prevent erosion.
- Filter natural and synthetic contaminants from rainfall and irrigation.
- Provide crucial "greenspace" in urban settings.

These green spaces also provide the following ecological and community assets. Golf courses are:

- Key sanctuary for birds and other wildlife.
- Disposal and treatment sites for effluent wastewater.
- Attractive and environmentally sound "covers" for landfills and other ecologically damaged locations.
- Sites for non-golf recreational activities, such as jogging, walking, bird watching, cross-country skiing, and fishing.
- Businesses that provide hundreds of thousands of skilled and semi-skilled jobs.

● Places for social interaction and community events.

● Community improvements that add value to land, thus increasing local tax bases.

The habitation of wildlife on courses is a subject of considerable public and media interest. If there are special instances of wildlife habitation on your course, take some pictures and contact your local media.

USGA and GCSAA are currently working cooperatively with the Audubon Society of New York in promoting their Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary for Golf Courses program. This voluntary program is an attempt to organize a nationwide network of privately owned and managed wildlife areas. The superintendent will receive informational publications and technical guidance for habitat enhancement as part of the program. Those who have taken an active role in this program will be recognized through regional and national awards programs.

Those already involved in the game of golf are aware that the green spaces for which superintendents are responsible are more than a place to play a round of golf. It must be part of our mission to educate those outside of golf on the value of these green spaces and to reposition golf courses as public and community assets.

You, along with other allied association members, have the responsibility of fulfilling this need for a new understanding of the uses, the environmental benefits, and the community assets that golf courses provide. As superintendents, however, you must bear a greater part of the burden because of the technical expertise that you possess.

Environmental challenges are increasing in frequency, and it is essential that superintendents be knowledgeable in these areas. The USGA and the GCSAA are responding with the development of environmental programs. Superintendents must respond and continue to satisfy their need for environmental and regulatory knowledge through continuing educational opportunities.

Today it is not good enough simply to be an expert or specialist in the areas of turf and ornamental management and other management responsibilities. Superintendents must educate and position themselves as environmental specialists as well, to enhance their professional leadership position as stewards of the land.

It is important, as a steward of the land, to become a leader in environmental issues.

