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# Barn or Turf Care Center: Which Do You Have?

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**T**HE FIRST golf courses in America often were constructed on farmland. Most had a farmhouse, outbuildings, or a barn that served to house golf course construction equipment, horses, and a few pieces of mowing equipment. In the early days, only a few pieces of equipment were needed for golf course maintenance, so hand tools and the few mowers were stored in the place affectionately known as “the barn.” *Barn* is still a term used by many

people, as in “Can you give me directions to the barn?” or “He is probably out in the barn!”

Some golf courses were not so privileged even to have a barn, and had to make do with any structure that was convenient and somewhat weather resistant. Old sheds, aircraft hangars, military surplus buildings (Quonset huts), or even wooden lean-tos were used to store maintenance equipment. The basement of the clubhouse, farmhouse,

or pro shop may also have been used as the operation center. In fact, substandard maintenance facilities predominated in golf up through recent years. There are still many inadequate maintenance facilities, but the rapidly changing golf course industry is making it increasingly difficult to operate from outdated, archaic buildings. Even so, in the midst of this change, we frequently find ourselves referring to the “barn” or “shed” as the place where we work! These are terms



that no longer belong in the golf management vernacular.

Sherwood Moore, longtime superintendent and recipient of the USGA Green Section Award, recalls receiving mail addressed to the "Greenkeeper's Shack." Sherwood could live with the term *greenkeeper*. In fact, it has a romantic ring to it, reminiscent of Old Tom Morris and his distinguished profession of "keeper of the green." But the term *shack* was hardly appropriate. Sherwood promptly disposed of the letter and all similar correspondence out of respect for his profession.

Words are powerful tools! Psychiatrists, motivational experts, preachers, and business professionals know the importance of selecting the right word. If the word *barn*, for example, is used to describe the place where you work, some may refer to Webster's definition, "a farm building for sheltering harvested crops." What confusion there must be when you tell them you are a golf course superintendent! The USGA is a real stickler for proper terminology because of its importance in the interpretation of the Rules of Golf. A *trap* is a device for catching mice,

not errant shots! *Sand bunker* is the proper term.

A *cup* is for holding your favorite beverage! The proper term in golf is *hole*. Perhaps the following definitions will help clarify the choice of *Turf Care Center* as the title of this paper.

**Turf Care** — To watch over, protect, and tend to turf.

**Center** — A place at which an activity or complex of activities is carried out.

During the 1960s, automatic irrigation brought modernization to golf course maintenance and spurred dramatic changes in the game of golf. Golf during the first half of the 20th century was played primarily on non-irrigated ground, with the exception of greens that may have received some irrigation. A puff of dust after a fairway mashie shot was a common sight. The installation of fairway irrigation systems drastically changed the way the game was played, turning hard soil with thin turfgrass to thick, lush green grass and moist soil.

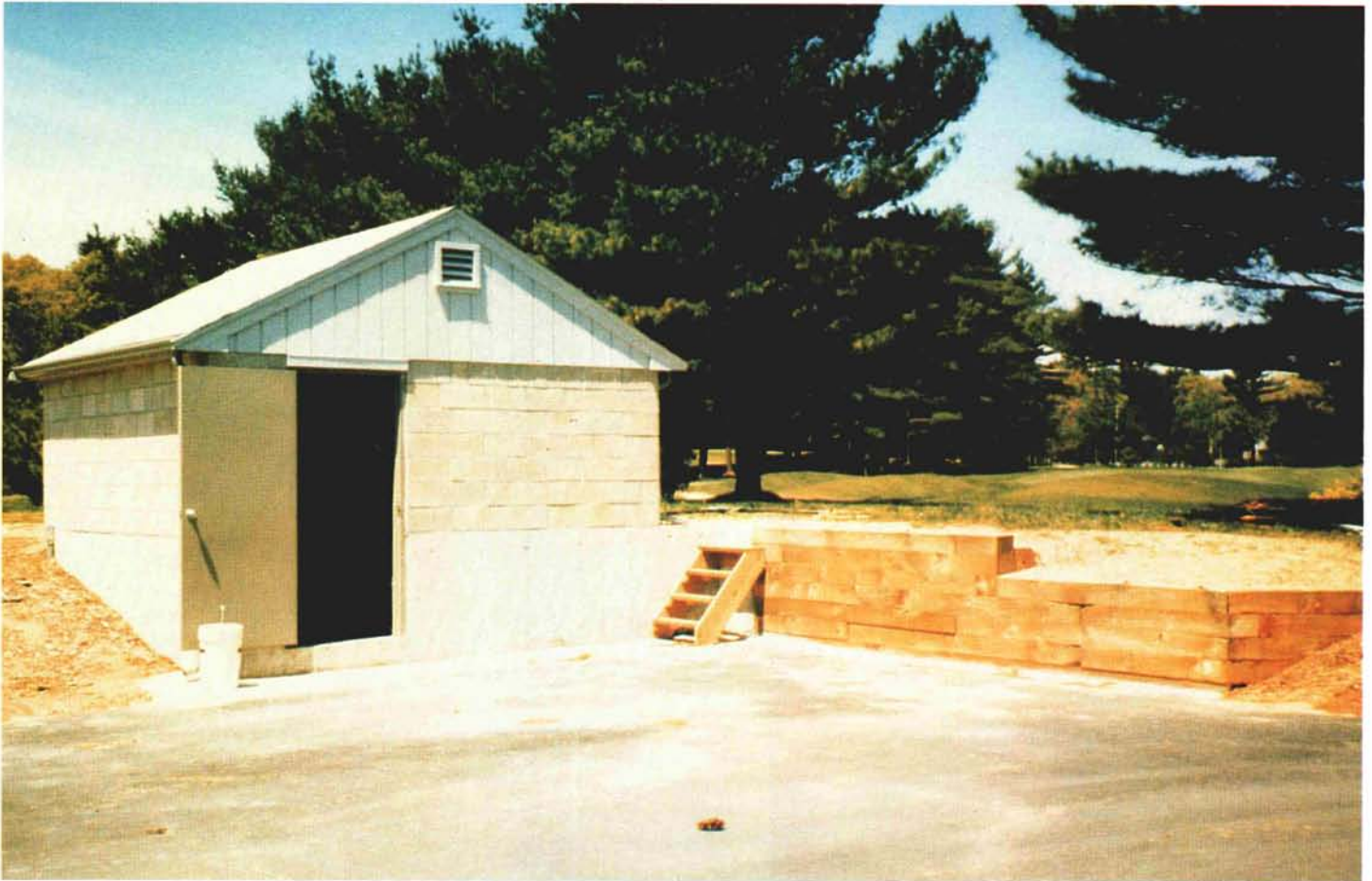
Every golfer had to adjust to the new playing conditions. Some enjoyed the longer, green grass, but others (particularly the pro-

fessional and advanced golfers) found it more difficult to impart backspin on a golf ball nestled in deep bluegrass fairway turf. The cry was to lower the cutting heights. Unfortunately, lower cutting heights on bluegrass fairways caused many problems, including *Poa annua* infestation, scalping, and significant stress and pest injury. Management practices changed in response to the new demands for low-cut green turf. Maintenance barns became jammed with new equipment needed to reduce manual labor and meet the new demands for improved turf conditions. The barn also became the workshop for the repair of increasingly complex equipment, as well as storage of the ever-increasing array of accessories, fertilizers, pesticides, and golf carts. Additional smaller buildings sprang up to accommodate new hardware and supplies.

A few golf courses, very few, constructed new maintenance buildings that were spacious and better capable of housing equipment. The majority failed to keep up, slipping further into obsolescence.

A number of changes have occurred over the years that have increased the cost of

*Chemical storage buildings can cost \$40,000 alone! Future regulations may increase that cost.*





maintenance facilities. High-tech equipment has become a big part of every golf course inventory. Millions of research and marketing dollars have gone toward developing precise mowing equipment and sprayers than can meter pesticides at fractions of an ounce per acre. Some turfgrass equipment costs as much as a Mercedes sedan! In fact, the average value for an 18-hole golf course equipment inventory is in excess of \$500,000. Also, there may be between \$20,000 and \$100,000 worth of goods that are stored and used on the golf course each season.

Modern irrigation systems require a computer terminal that must be stored in a clean, dust-free environment. Government regulations require that employees have areas to eat, shower, change clothes, and receive periodic training during the season. Mechanics are now required to work on more than 100 pieces of equipment, some weighing as much as 8,000 pounds with 100 feet of hydraulic hose and 40-horsepower diesel engines. Usually, 18-hole golf courses require 8,000 to 12,000 square feet of area under cover to adequately store equipment and provide the space for proper main-

tenance. The day of reckoning has arrived for a great number of golf courses in America, and it is time to take a serious look at the buildings that function as the backbone of the golf course management department.

There are several reasons for the high percentage of poor Turf Care Centers. It is easy to understand how the tremendous growth of golf and the introduction of new maintenance equipment simply overwhelmed many of the existing facilities. Another reason is that many golf courses choose to spend money on the clubhouse dining room, locker rooms, tennis courts, swimming pools, and other non-golf-related activities. Golfers and other members view these areas as priorities because they spend the majority of their time there and on the golf course. Few golfers bring their guests to the "barn" to show off the new reel grinder or pesticide storage building! It is no wonder the old barn stays "the old barn"!

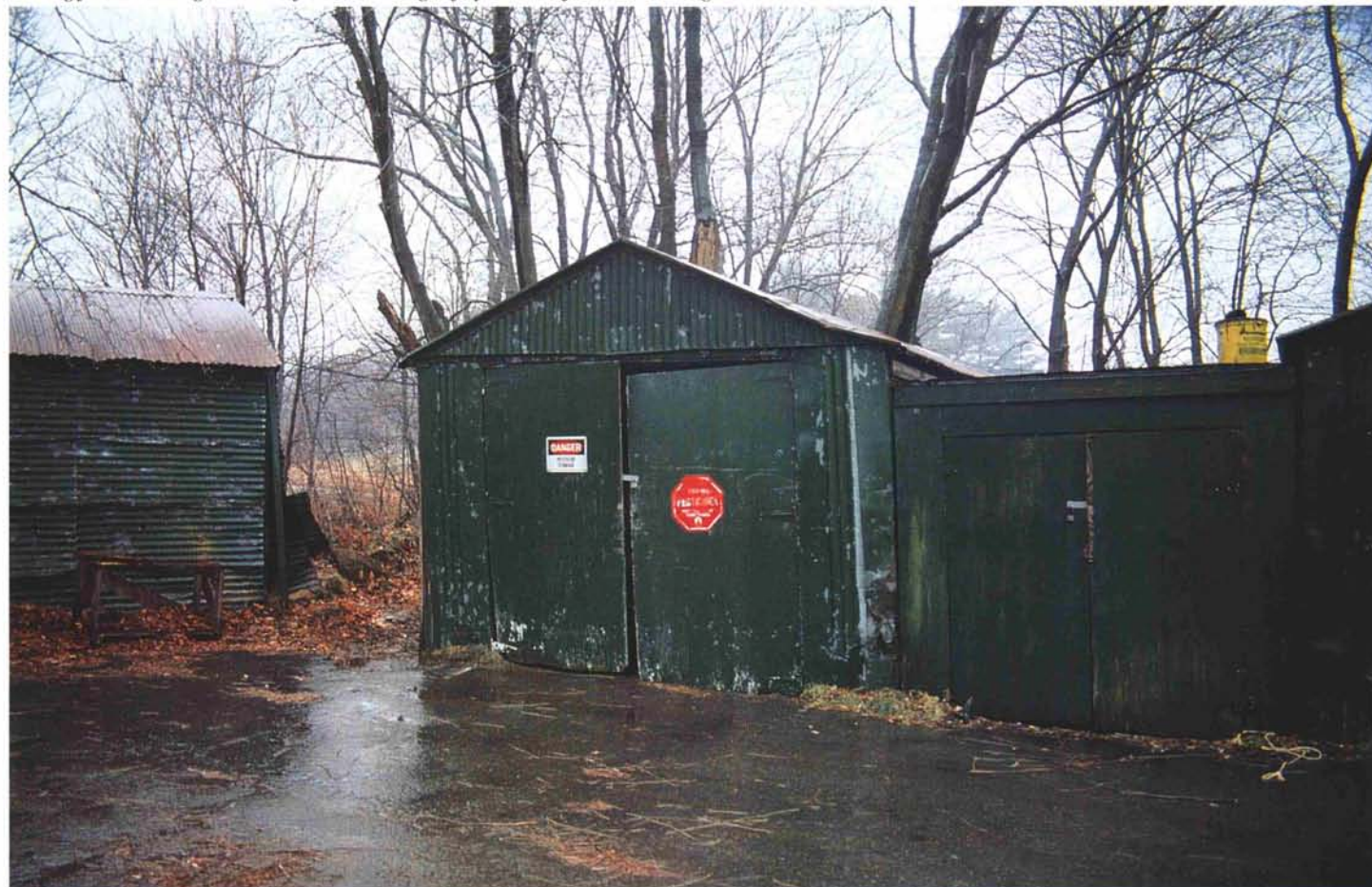
In reality, the reasons for improvement are not always spurred by the desire to have an efficient, modern Turf Care Center. Too often, condemnation is the spark that sets

the flame burning. Following are a few more reasons:

- A golf hole was redesigned and the old maintenance barn was in the way. As a result, a new Turf Care Center had to be built.
- The roof caved in on the adjacent golf cart storage facility, which was the same age as the maintenance barn. That frightened the membership into building a new Turf Care Center.
- Natural disasters such as flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, tornado, etc., often are a precursor to a new Turf Care Center.
- The building was reaching such a state of dilapidation that the membership feared lawsuits resulting from injury to the employees. On rare occasions, a government official may even condemn the maintenance building.

If you do not foresee a similar scenario happening at your golf course, then you could begin with a professional evaluation of the entire golf course by a company specializing in golf course building architecture. A list of these companies is available through the National Golf Foundation. The evaluation includes a priority listing of

*Waiting for written legislation before addressing safety needs is foolish and dangerous.*







*A covered storage area keeps topdressing materials dry and free of debris.*

the needs of all buildings on the property. Listing the needs of the maintenance facility along with the clubhouse, locker room, swimming pool, and other facilities will better help the membership to visualize the entire project. The membership must view the plan as affecting the entire club, not just the maintenance of the golf course. This concept is very significant; it may be the factor that leads to success.

Putting the construction of a Turf Care Center at the top of the priority list can be difficult to justify, even though it may be badly needed. Many projects are killed before they make it to the drawing board because of poor planning and preparation on the part of the superintendent. Dreaming, planning, and knowing the need for a new building are not enough. It still must be sold to the golfers! Presenting a project of such magnitude requires tremendous preparation. You simply cannot stroll into a green committee meeting and proclaim, "I need a new maintenance shop!" First of all, it is not your maintenance shop. Do not use possessive terms such as mine, our, or we. It is better to say, "The golf course needs a new Turf Care Center. I have researched the subject and found that . . ." A well-conceived plan will address the reasons why the golf course needs a new Turf Care Center.

Make sure to gain the support of the green committee or appropriate golf course officials, and approach the meeting as a team. The first question you will be asked is, "Why do we need a new Turf Care Cen-

ter?" If you are not prepared, you may lose the first and most important battle. An appropriate response might be, "We need a better Turf Care Center to ensure the safety of our employees, provide the area to fulfill the needs associated with the maintenance of a golf course, and meet, or exceed, future environmental regulations." Then, begin to describe the changes in the golf course industry, and present the facts.

There are different approaches that lead to the construction of a new Turf Care Center. The approach chosen at your golf club will depend on specific circumstances and objectives. The following is a suggested program that can be used to help develop a strategy at any golf course considering the pursuit of a better Turf Care Center.

#### **Step 1: Commitment**

Commit to the many hours of work associated with this project. It may take several years and an unbelievable amount of time before the first shovel or hammer sees action. Give this project the same attention as you would grooming the golf course for membership play. Nothing worthwhile is ever easy, so do not become discouraged if no one seems interested initially. Keep a committed attitude and continue with your plans and presentations.

#### **Step 2: List of Experts**

Find experienced people whom you will use as an information source and for pro-

fessional guidance. Your resource list should include:

- Ten superintendents who have recently constructed new maintenance facilities.
- An efficiency evaluation company or building architect — the National Golf Foundation can supply a list of clubhouse architects and consultants.
- Site engineer — The site engineer will handle the permitting necessary to construct the buildings. Some golf courses choose to do their own permitting in hopes of saving money. This is a difficult task for the amateur, and it is recommended that a professional be paid to file all of the necessary permits.
- Government and town officials who will be involved with the project — Meet with them, be polite, and make sure they know you are interested in doing everything properly and making the project run smoothly. Ask what you can do to help them and what information they require.

- Professional organizations — National Golf Foundation, Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, USGA Green Section, Club Managers Association, and other organizations that may be able to supply information needed for the project.

#### **Step 3: Task Force**

Key people at the golf course may include the club manager, building committee, green chairman, president, and other interested parties with decision-making power. For municipal and public-fee golf courses, the list may include the city manager, selectmen, park board, citizen golf members, and others. Some municipalities have a planning and organization department to evaluate the efficiency of the golf course. The important point is to have the different groups of people working together to one end.

#### **Step 4: The Presentation**

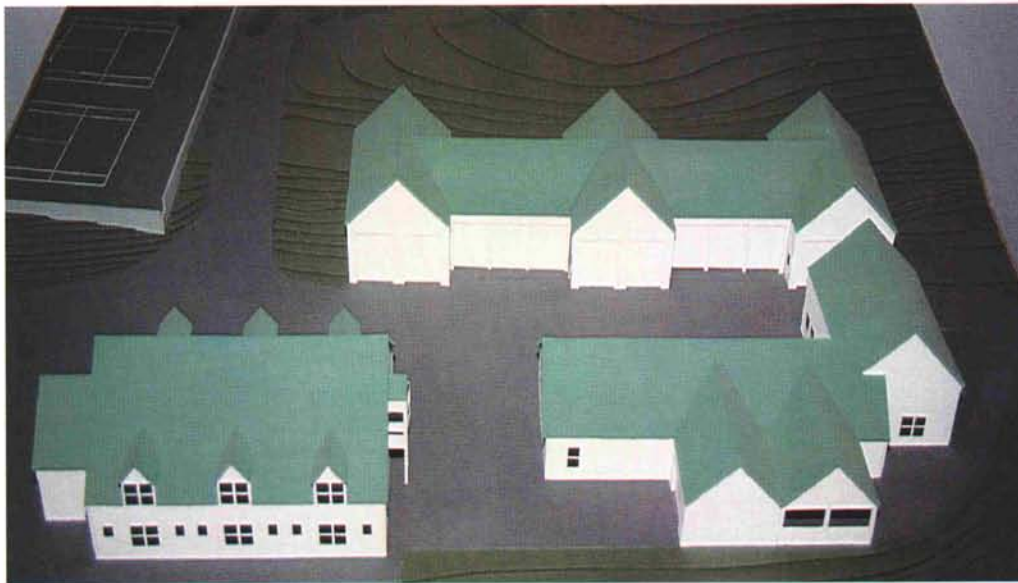
Assuming that a professional architect/consultant already has done an evaluation, a professional presentation using models and visual aids now can be given to the committee in charge of approving the project. Be prepared to justify the need for each area of the project. Facts and figures on the necessity of a separate grinding room, for example, should be available if needed. Do not become bogged down in details unless questioned. The objective is to gain support and funding through the use of a professional, convincing presentation.

Hopefully, after several meetings, a budget figure will be reached and approval to begin





*(Above) The superintendent's office should present a professional appearance. Paul Miller, Nashawtuc Country Club, Concord, Massachusetts.*



*(Left) A detailed model helps people visualize the finished product.*

construction will be granted. The superintendent and architect already will have met many times to discuss the presentation and develop specifications for the Turf Care Center. After approval, meetings will continue and the drawings and specifications will be further refined. Visiting a minimum of ten new Turf Care Centers and thoroughly researching the subject are very important steps. Most golf course superintendents who have built a new facility would do something differently if given another chance.

After the plans are developed, a contractor is chosen and the plans are further refined. Some clubs choose to hire a project manager because the construction of a new

Turf Care Center can cost \$400,000 to \$1.5 million. This is a huge responsibility, and the superintendent may not have the time or ability to supervise a project of this magnitude, especially during the golfing season.

Many communities are very sensitive to building activity and development within their neighborhoods, and it may be wise to contact local residents to discuss your plans. One golf course project in Wisconsin spent thousands of dollars preparing and planning, only to have the town residents file a petition which stopped the entire project. Involving the community shows responsibility, good stewardship, and indicates that the golf course is concerned about the local community.

## Conclusion

Golfers and club members often are willing to invest money in the construction of a new Turf Care Center if they are presented with the facts in a professional manner. It is time that the Turf Care Center at every golf course be viewed as the "nerve center," as Dr. Beard describes it in his book on turfgrass management. Every day on the golf course begins and ends at the Turf Care Center, and this place will always be the focal point of golf course management.

*Special thanks to Greg Wojick, superintendent, and Dan Denehy, club manager, of the Greenwich Country Club, Greenwich, Connecticut.*