Getting the Word Out

by **JOHN H. FOY**
Director, State of Florida, USGA Green Section

> "What we have here is a
> failure to communicate."
> *Cool Hand Luke*, 1967

WHILE THAT classic movie line is over 25 years old, poor communication is still a major problem in golf course management today. A couple of years ago, Bob Brame, USGA Green Section agronomist in the Mid-Atlantic Region, surveyed the staff and found that communications/public relations was the number-one pitfall of golf course maintenance.

So how does one achieve effective communication? We all have seen different strategies used, ranging from one-on-one discussions to group presentations, as well as club newsletter articles and course information boards. My turf tip for this year involves a communication method that has worked very well at a couple of courses in the Jacksonville, Florida, area.

Eddie Snipes, CGCS at the Oak Bridge Club at Sawgrass, in Ponte Vedra Beach,

Florida, realized that despite his efforts, the majority of golfers were not aware of what was happening on the course. Out of frustration, he began putting out weekly one-page course communication sheets. Based on the success that occurred at Oak Bridge, Bob Flanagan, CGCS at Jacksonville Golf and Country Club, in Jacksonville, Florida, also began putting out similar communication sheets.

These course communication sheets contain information on activities accomplished that week, as well as upcoming practices or programs to be aware of and updates on recent environmental conditions.

For example, at Oak Bridge, during the week of February 22-26, 1993:

- 1.88 inches of rain occurred.
- A fertilizer plus pre-emergent was applied to the roughs.
- The greens were groomed.
- New mulch was added to landscape beds around the clubhouse.

- Junipers were planted around the parking area.

It was also noted that a representative with Rhone-Poulenc would again be conducting mole cricket research on the golf course.

At Jacksonville Golf and Country Club, for the week of October 25-29, 1993:

- Cordgrass was planted on the 16th tee lake bank.
- Fairways 13, 14, 16, and 18 were overseeded.
- A sod webworm spot treatment control was conducted.
- 7.1 inches of rain occurred between the 24th and 26th.

A short paragraph on the mowing of the recently overseeded greens and what to expect for the next two to four weeks was included with this weekly report.

When disruptive or inconvenient operations are scheduled, "special alert" communication sheets are put out the week prior. At Oak Bridge, before course aerification was initiated on February 15th, a special alert was published that described the method of cultivation along with the benefits of this practice. Mr. Snipes pointed out that when references such as turf management books were cited, acceptance increased.

From start to finish, about one hour a week is required to produce these course communication sheets. After writing up the information in a bullet item format, one of the club's secretaries does a layout on a computer with a word processing program, such as WordPerfect. A couple hundred copies are then produced and placed on the pro shop counter, on a sign board at the first tee, in the locker rooms, and at the snack bar.

Also at Oak Bridge, the weekly communication sheets are saved for later use. For each meeting of the green and golf committees, copies are given out. This has proven to be a popular method for reviewing and planning course management activities.

Although you may not have access to a computer and a laser printer to produce the "slick" course communication sheets being used by Messrs. Snipes and Flanagan, a typewriter and a photocopying machine can be used just as effectively. Devoting a little bit of time each week to "getting the word out" can make all the difference in the world as far as maintaining good communications and successful course management is concerned.

At the Oak Bridge Club at Sawgrass, course communication sheets are posted on the information board at the first tee, in the locker rooms, and in the snack bar.