

Multi-Task Mowing

A strategy for combining routine jobs to compensate for limitations in resources.

by JOHN FOY

PALM BEACH County, Florida, claims to be the Golf Capital of the World. Across the state on the west coast, Collier County and the town of Naples are supposed to have the highest numbers of golf courses per capita of any location in the United States. With hundreds of courses already in these areas and more coming on line each year, it is difficult to argue against these claims. Furthermore, I would venture that there are not many other areas of the country where you will find a similar concentration of highly maintained courses.

While the primary focus is the winter season, there is really no off season for South Florida courses. Furthermore, the vast majority of courses are part of real estate developments and must be maintained from property line to property line. The combination of year-round operation and very high standards dictates large budgets and a lot of staff. Golf course management in South Florida is indeed a unique proposition.

While the majority of USGA Turf Advisory Service (TAS) visits in Florida are conducted in South Florida, we also visit a number of clubs and courses throughout the rest of the state. Visiting courses in Central and North Florida provides diversity in management concerns and, in some instances, a good reality check. This was the case this past fall when a TAS visit was conducted at the University of South Florida Golf Course in Tampa. The University Course is a daily-fee operation and the green fees are on the low to moderate end of the scale for Florida. Typical of other daily-fee operations, the annual budget is based solely on the revenues generated.

The operating budget and size of the staff at the University Course are below average for the Central Florida area. Naturally, this presents a number of challenges to Jim Torba, the course superintendent, who also oversees maintenance of all of the sports fields for the university. With 18-hole rounds starting on the first tee, and nine-hole rounds going off the tenth tee each morning, simply getting the course ready for play each day is a big chal-

lenge. Yet, as they say, "necessity is the mother of invention."

Given the limitations in both time and staff size, multi-task mowing has proven to be a good solution for accomplishing daily course maintenance. Working with the head mechanic, Francesco Pisacane, some simple modifications to the triplex putting green mowers were made so that

facility. Thus, there was a very minimal investment in money and time.

Each day the operators assigned to mow the greens also change the hole location before going to the next green. This process is utilized to help minimize scalping of the freshly changed hole plugs. Besides increased operating efficiency, Mr. Torba pointed out that because of the additional training and



Jim Torba, golf course superintendent at the University of South Florida Golf Course (Tampa, Fla.), uses some creative ingenuity to combine routine jobs to compensate for limitations in resources. Simple modifications to a triplex putting green mower result in the ability to make mowing multi-tasked.

multi-task mowing could be practiced. The modifications consist of a bracket to hold a hole cutter, a plastic milk crate attached to the back of the mower to carry a sand bucket and tools, along with a PVC tube and metal frame for carrying flagsticks and a dew whip. All of the materials needed to fabricate these modifications, except the milk crate, were found at the maintenance

higher skill level of the operators, fewer problems are experienced with changing and location of the holes on the putting greens. Thus, if limitations in labor are an issue at your club or course, you might want to consider multi-task mowing.

JOHN FOY is director of the USGA Green Section Florida Region.