

Golf Course “Open House”

Hosting an open house at the maintenance facility or on the golf course is a great communication tool and education venue for golfers.

BY JED SPENCER, CGCS

We live in the age of the “light-switch mentality.” For instance, golfers believe that we, as turfgrass managers, can simply flip a switch and speed up the greens, or flip a switch and make turfgrass diseases go away, or flip a switch and make the course firm and fast. I wish I had a light switch because this profession would be a piece of cake. To overcome the “light-switch mentality,” we must communicate effectively to show golfers that the light will only be switched on through the understanding of what actually takes place on a day-by-day basis.

A recent survey revealed that 90 percent of golf course superintendents believed most golfers did not know what superintendents do on a daily basis. But over 90 percent of superintendents said that communication is the skill most important to their success. This begs the question, “Are we, as superintendents, doing our job of really communicating with and educating our golfers?”

At Chenal Country Club in Little Rock, Ark., we use a combination of communication vehicles at all times to inform members of everyday mainte-

nance items and special projects. Newsletters, website, green committee meetings, board meetings, and special emails are tools we use to reach members so they know what is

happening at the facility.

For example, one can write an article on cultural practices, discuss aeration schedules in a meeting, or send an email the week the greens are to be aerated, but, inevitably, no matter how much information is communicated beforehand, one or more golfers will call asking why a procedure is being done and when the course is going to be “good” again. Some forms of communication may only go so far to help golfers really understand the “hows and whys” of golf course maintenance. Sometimes golfers need more — something tangible.

To help with the communication process, a golf course maintenance “open house” is a good way to educate golfers directly about course maintenance. Hosting an open house gives

**GOLF COURSE
OPEN HOUSE**
Friday, May 23
5 p.m.
Bear Den Putting Green
Cocktails
&
Prizes

Hosted by our Golf Course Superintendents and the Turf Maintenance Staff, this fun and educational program offers an insight into the cultural practices of the golf course, and why the Turf Staff uses the techniques they do to keep our courses looking great!

Sponsored by the 2008 Greens Committee.
For more information call 821-2077.

Fliers can be used to spread the word to golfers about a golf course open house.

Hosting an open house gives



Gathering golfers on the course is a great way to show how etiquette, in this case properly repairing ball marks, serves to preserve quality playing conditions for everyone to enjoy.



An open house creates the perfect opportunity for golfers to familiarize themselves with sophisticated mowing equipment, such as this fairway unit. Few golfers realize that the price tag of a new fairway mower is more than most new cars.

the superintendent the ability to combine previous information — from articles, meetings, and emails — with firsthand experiences to show golfers the ins and outs of golf course maintenance. Writing an article on the benefits and importance of aeration can be informative, but it's not necessarily memorable for golfers. To see an aerator in action and pull soil cores on their putting greens, however, is an experience golfers will not soon forget.

In order for an open house to be successful for both superintendent and golfers, a few items must be in order. First, get buy-in from upper management and golfers. One must be supported in this endeavor in order for it to be productive. In my case, my general manager and green committee members helped spread the word that an event unlike any other club event was going to take place. It was also communicated that this open house would not just be an informational session. By creating a buzz around the event, it is more likely to stir the excitement that will stimulate golfer interest and get people talking about information that may not normally seem interesting.

Next, communicate the specifics of the event to your golfers through the use of articles, meetings, postings, website, emails, and other communication vehicles at your facility. We encouraged and enticed our members to attend through complimentary beverages of all types, prizes such as special ball repair tools, and special privileges such as being interactive with actual course maintenance practices.

At the open house, begin by introducing your key staff members, and give some basic information about the turf maintenance department. It will surprise many to learn just how much equipment costs or the amount of acreage that is maintained. For the main event, choose items from your maintenance plan that can be demonstrated, such as aerating a couple of passes on a green so as to best review the process and benefits of aeration, changing a hole location, verticutting, bunker maintenance, tee and collar mowing, or topdressing. The visual demonstration of these activities helps



Performing a new cultural practice that is unfamiliar to golfers at your facility, such as verticutting fairways? A demonstration can effectively communicate the process, what to expect, and why it is beneficial.



During the open house, this aerator was equipped with three different tines to provide side-by-side comparisons of the three aeration strategies employed throughout the year on greens. Attendees came away with a clear understanding of how summer venting with small-diameter solid tines is different from traditional core aeration using hollow tines.

golfers put the previous articles, discussions in meetings, and photos together to form a better understanding of what is required to maintain a golf course. An educated golfer is a more supportive golfer.

Other topics of discussion might not even be directly related to the golf course, such as reviewing your environmental plan or visiting the turf maintenance facility. The key is choosing topics pertinent to your facility and management plan. Of course, there are topics that apply to golf in general that every facility can review, including a demonstration of proper repair of ball marks, bunker etiquette, correct bunker raking procedures and rake placement, golf cart operation and adherence to traffic restrictions, and other examples of golf course etiquette.

For an even bigger impact, plan a few activities in which attendees can actually participate. Golfers who operate a bunker rake, change a hole, or try to mow a straight line with a fairway mower, will leave with a memorable experience they will not soon forget and are likely to share with others.

There are a few factors that can lead to a successful open house. Through the course of your event, remember to be aware of how you are communicating. Being consistent with your information will save you from being questioned in the future. Communicate in simple

terms. For instance, the majority of your audience does not know how calcium affects plant health, but mention that monitoring all nutrients is important for plant health and performance. Also, keep your answers short and concise because too much information may confuse and clutter the most important topics you want golfers to remember. Use language that the lay person can understand, and use examples and analogies to explain technical processes and operations. Finally, be ready for any and all types of questions, but keep control and focus the discussions on the topic at hand. For example, should you receive a question about the height of cut in fairways while in the middle of discussing aeration practices, simply respond that other issues, although no less important, can be reviewed after you finish with the topic at hand.

There are many benefits to be gained by hosting an open house, including increasing awareness of critical course maintenance practices, providing you and your staff quality face time with golfers, disseminating accurate information while also dispelling myths or rumors, and laying the foundation for projects or future maintenance activities that can reduce questioning and aid in course care. Through demonstrations, answering questions with precise details, dressing

professionally, and spending time with concerned and inquisitive golfers, you will increase your status of professionalism. No longer will you be “that guy in the barn” to some golfers. Rather, you will be “the superintendent of the golf course.” Moreover, giving golfers turf maintenance experience and a better understanding of what we know and do enhances their opinion of you, your staff, and your crew. The perception that you are the expert in golf course maintenance at your facility is an integral part of your facility’s success.

Be progressive with your communication program and use the tools at hand. This includes newsletters, green committee meetings, board meetings, website, and special emails. If you want to go further, enhance those vehicles with events like an open house, which provides firsthand experiences for your golfers. In summary, a golf course maintenance open house will create an engaging and interactive learning environment that will benefit both golfers and staff members.

Now where did that light switch go?

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