

NEWSLETTER



December 1978

Golf Course Superintendents Association
OF NEW ENGLAND, INC.

Sponsors and administrators of the Lawrence S. Dickinson Scholarship Fund — Awarded yearly to deserving Turf Management Students.



Holiday Greetings

High Price of Elegance

Where has all the elegance gone?

For the most part, it went out with waiters in tuxedos, fresh water in the finger bowls, linen napkins, a LaCorona at each table setting and service under glass.

Yet, it still does exist. . . in some of the fancy, downtown eating clubs and the last bastion of social distinction - the lavish country club. In the latter stage, though, it is teetering under the pressures of financial strain on the membership. Alas, elegance comes at a high price and some of the country clubbers aren't buying it.

Discarding the extremes of the country club set, the average gathering place of businessmen, strays from the upper middle class, their wives and guests has gone the route of practicality. In a word, it simply costs too much to put on the dog. And, those who do, are barking loudly about it.

What has happened is a spiraling drain on the financial resources of the typical country club member. Dues are on the upswing, assessments are the rule rather than the exception and competition from surrounding restaurants has taken its toll on the frequency of dining out at the country club.

This, in turn, has made many a clubhouse operation a losing proposition. And many clubs are seriously thinking of a cutback in service, plus a reduction in hours when such shrinking services are available.

The average member has taken to the "enforced" dinner with a certain amount of reluctance. The so-called minimum eating charge has turned the country club into a social dilemma where members partake of its services only until their minimum charges are exhausted. After that, they turn to other sources for their socializing and entertainment.

The country club, then, must ask itself whether or not it should continue to offer the rudiments of elegance at a loss. It is not enough that dining rooms are virtually empty every night. An accompanying enigma is the fact that usual services in the form of waitresses, waiters and chefs are going wasted while having to be paid for.

There also is the danger of the golf course being the victim of such wastefulness since funds originally intended to be directed toward maintenance there often are detoured to help defray the cost of retaining an elegant atmosphere in the clubhouse.

Let's fact it. The age of elegance is diminishing.

It is not uncommon in these days of the tight social and recreational dollar to find country club members taking their lunch at fast food eateries. The old three-martini-hot lunch has been replaced by the cheeseburger in a box and chocolate milk shake to go. Unless the country club member enjoys the luxury of an open end expense account, he is thinking twice

about spending huge sums to keep his social status quo.

The member should be concerned with this kind of transition and has to become heard in the makeup of the social and dining services his club offers. Does he want the full-service, red-carpet treatment at the expense of a sub par-conditioned golf course or is he willing to forego the fancy frills so that his playground comes out in the shape to which he is accustomed?

Why not change to a moderate form of clubhouse living? Surely, the member can acclimate himself to such revision if he rationalizes between the two eventualities. . . one a clubhouse bathed in elegance, the other a golf course deteriorated by the transfer of budget money.

The golf course superintendent is caught in the middle of this confused situation. Time again, he has been tagged the designated scapegoat for less than acceptable conditions on the course when it is the diversion of money from his operating budget which has caused the expected tailoff in playing conditions.

So, it is up to the country club, itself, to set its course and then accept the consequences of such direction. Frankly, the price of elegance has skyrocketed out of sight. It's time to forget about extraordinary self-indulgence and wake up to the results it brings on the backbone of the country club - the golf course.

Gerry Finn

NEXT MEETING

Jan. 8, 1979

Franklin Country Club

Director's Meeting 10 a.m.

Lunch available at club

Membership Meeting 1:00 p.m.

Educational program to follow

DIRECTIONS:

From Rte. 495 take King St. Exit to Rte. 140. Take right and club is about 1 mile on Rte. 140. From Rte. 95 take Rt. 1 South Exit. Off Rte. 1 South take Rte. 140 to Franklin. Club is on Rte. 140.

NOTE: Special thanks to our host superintendent Gary Luccini and the members of Franklin Country Club for allowing us the use of their facilities for our meeting. It is most appreciated.

GM Concept Counterattack

It had to come. There we were. . . expounding on the benefits of the general manager concept of country club operation when some bright bulb wiggled in his socket and asked the logical question, "Why not look at the track record?"

And suffice to say, the track record of the general manager concept does not come out at a 100-watt glow.

Stories exposing the general manager as an incompetent are running the scuttlebutt routes and nesting themselves in the four corners of the country club clubhouse, pro shop and maintenance building.

There is one classic episode which points out the high risk involved in hiring a GM who hasn't done his golf homework. It spins a tale of woe centering on a certain general manager who thought he was saving his club wage money when he sent a locker room attendant home at what he thought was the logical quitting hour of 4:30 p.m.

It just so happened that a tournament was being played that day. When members and their guests plodded into the locker room around six o'clock and thereafter, they found all the lockers closed and no keys to be found. After several shouting matches, threats and incidents coated with mayhem, the GM was forced to dig up a master key and get his irate members back into their dinner clothes. Chalk up one for the GM-opponents.

There are other stories with absurdity attached. They all emphasize the possibility that the job of overseeing the three-play country club operation of clubhouse, pro shop and golf course presents a task so enormous in professional preparation it could take a person 10 years of study and practical experience before any semblance of order is realized.

It does make sense, too. In other words, even if the concept is accepted by one and all, where does the country club go to find a capable general manager?

The thought of the necessary knowledge required to direct a clubhouse manager, golf professional and golf course superintendent is, indeed, staggering. It is not a matter of having administrative talent. Behind such talent there must be a thorough understanding of each particular job and the background in each field to justify its direction.

What kind of background goes with the attempt to tie all three factions together? Obviously, there must be formal education in the field of business administration. Next, there has to be more than a passing interest and command of the operational tools in running a pro shop. And last, but not least, it is mandatory that the GM be well versed in the technical and practical aspects of conditioning a golf course.

Along the way, he must acquaint himself with buying methods for food, beverages, golfing equipment and maintenance material. Furthermore, he should be able to adjudge weather conditions and their effect on the course in the testy matter of knowing when to open and close it.

"By the time a man or woman drinks all that knowledge and experience, he could be ready for retirement," spouts that some bright bulb. "I think that what we have here is an impossible mission. Of course, the three jobs are related but there is so much diversification in them on an individual level that a thorough understanding of each is almost beyond reason. Then, too, such a selection never could come from the present staff of the club and that means huge additional financial outlay."

Ah, the bulb has struck a telling blow for the anti-GMers. A major part of the reason for having a general manager is to

assist in the very difficult task of holding the line on operational cost. The hiring of a "fourth" party would result in an added salary in the \$30-40,000 range. And working that into an overall budget constitutes the use of magical powers. Such powers also went out with Harry Houdini.

Well, that brings us right back to the starting point. . . the general manager concept might be worthwhile and beneficial in spirit but how can it be applied sensibly? That assignment appears to fall into the category of dangerous adventure, too risky for this mind. Perhaps somewhere out there someone has the answer. If so, color yourself a genius and line up a general manager's job for yourself.

Gerry Finn

Budget Your Time - Delegate

Most people are familiar with the concepts of budgeting their money and spending it in ways that give them maximum benefit. But too many "Money-smart" people are spend-thrifts with their time.

One of the prime offenders is the manager who believes he must be personally involved in every aspect of his operation. This person has forgotten that a good manager is one who has trained his staff so well that he could walk out of his office at any time and be assured that routine decisions will be taken care of as well as if he were present. The superintendent who understands this and who has trained his staff to take care of the day-to-day mechanics of running a golf course is the one who has time and energy to devote to trouble shooting and long-range planning.

The key to effective delegation of routine decisions is to make it clear to your employees just how well informed you want to be about the actions they take on responsibilities you have given them.

How much independence you give a particular person should depend on the skill and experience he has. The ultimate in delegation is to allow him to make decisions and act on them without informing you.

Another form of delegation is to ask a staff member who has brought a problem to your attention to explore various ways of solving the problem, evaluate the alternatives, make a decision, and tell you what he has decided. You will then have a chance to discuss the situation in more detail if necessary. This is an excellent way to assess an employee's ability to make good decisions.

Effective delegation lets you win in two ways. You save your valuable time by not getting involved in minor decision others can handle, and you also take an important step in training your staff. This on-the-job training increases an employee's value to your organization and contributes to good morale and teamwork.

Be aware, though, that no matter how good your system is, mistakes will occur from time to time. The test of a good delegation system is how the situation is handled. On one hand, don't ignore the problem and hope it won't reoccur. But don't make such a fuss over it that a potentially valuable employee loses all confidence in his ability to make good judgments. Use this opportunity to initiate a discussion about what the proper actions would have been and why.

Credit: "Forefront"

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GCSAA Prepares For 50th Conference and Show

One hundred and thirty-three hours of educational sessions and seminars and a three-day turfgrass trade show will highlight the 50th International Turfgrass Conference and Show, sponsored by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America in Atlanta Feb. 4-9. The theme for the annual gathering is "Appraising Our Past - Discovering Our Future."

This year's show will be the largest in GCSAA's history with more exhibit space sold by November than the total sold for the 1978 show. Attendance is expected to exceed last year's record-breaking 5,500. More than 200 companies, nearly 30 of them new to GCSAA's show, have contracted for booths.

Seventy-seven speakers from universities, industry and the turfgrass field will present up-to-date information on a variety of topics relating to the needs of turfgrass managers. Session topics include: The Way of Change, a look at new

trends in golf course management; Water - What's the Future?; Turf Management - North; Turf Management - South; Public Course Management; Research - Appraising Discoveries; Are You an Executive?; Conflict Management; Course Management; and a panel discussion of greens construction, sand topdressing and flood damage repair.

Prior to the conference, the association will sponsor eight in-depth seminars: Principles of Landscape; Principles of Nutrition; Personnel; Irrigation Equipment/Operations; Insects; Weeds; Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Training; and Turf Disease Identification.

The conference also will be preceded by GCSAA's 40th annual golf tournament at Sea Island Golf Club and the Island Club, St. Simons Island, Ga.

Other features of the event include social events, a visit to three Atlanta area golf courses and the ladies' program which includes a choice of tours.

Newsletter Notes

This being my last newsletter I would like to take time to pass along many thanks to people who have put in many hours helping to make this newsletter successful. First of all a great deal of credit must go to our writer Gerry Finn. His articles have been of great interest to our readers and very timely. He also has written about a number of topics which has resulted in excellent information for the superintendent. I receive about 15 newsletters from all over the country and many times Gerry's articles are used by other associations. This is proof in itself of the quality of writing he has done for our association. Working along with Gerry on the articles is Leon St. Pierre. He gives Gerry inside information about what is happening in the superintendents' world. Leon has done this for many years and does an excellent job of conveying the superintendents thoughts to Gerry.

I also wish we could somehow get more people to participate in the association. Every meeting you see the same 25 to 40 people. We have about 120 active members along with 30 sales people. We should have at least 75 people at each meeting. If you can't get away from your course one day a month, you're doing something wrong. If you can't travel whatever distance is required to attend the meetings each month, at least attend the ones in your area. The group from the Springfield area who rarely miss a meeting deserve special credit for their interest. They are Dr. Joseph Troll, Max Mierzwa, Bob Johnston, and Allen Cumps. Another person who comes a long distance to each meeting is Brian Cowan from Cape Cod. They never complain about the distance they travel. There are more of you out there who are able to attend more meetings. I hope next year you make it a point to participate in the association.

In three years as Newsletter chairman, I have received only one article from other superintendents. Last May, Charles Lane sent an excellent article on Mosquito Control. It doesn't take a lot of talent to write an article. It does take a little time, but I am sure all of you during the course of the year have to make reports in your jobs. Writing an article is

no different. One of our best ways of education is the exchange of ideas among fellow superintendents. Give it a try, I am sure you will enjoy sharing your ideas with others.

Last month Woodland Country Club honored superintendent Norm Mucciarone for 25 years of service. In Norm's honor, there was a golf tournament during the day followed by a dinner dance in the evening. Gifts were presented from the members and grounds crew to Norm and his family. A little history on Norm tells us he served in the Navy the years 1944 to 1946. After that, he attended the Winter School at Stockbridge. When he graduated from the Winter School, he became assistant superintendent to Tony Sperandio at Franklin Country Club. He also worked for Tony at Framingham Country Club before moving to Marlboro Country Club as superintendent. He also was superintendent at Lexington Country Club before coming to Woodland Country Club. While at Woodland Country Club, he has rebuilt every green except the 18th. Along with the greens, the traps were re-built. Numerous tees have also been done over. He has installed an automatic water system and completed a very successful Poa annual program on his fairways. Woodland Country Club has a reputation as one of the best golf courses in New England. Many major tournaments are held there. Norm has also served on the Board of Directors and many committees of our association over the years. To add to all this, Norm and his charming wife Blanche have raised 9 lovely children. Truly a great superintendent and human being, Norm has earned the honor bestowed upon him and his family by the members of Woodland Country Club.

Want to wish a speedy recovery to Frank Higgins of Sawtelle Brothers who is in Mass. General Hospital. Frank had surgery on his shoulder. Hope you're up and on your feet again soon. After all, Frank, the B. C. Eagles need all the help they can get! Just had to say that.

Hope to see you all at the next meeting.

Larry Bunn
Newsletter Chairman

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* Contributors to the Lawrence S. Dickinson Scholarship Fund

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