

# WESTERN VIEWS

December 1994

Official Publication of the West Michigan Golf Course Superintendents Association

## Welcome to New Members

1994 has been a busy year for the Association. We're happy to have you on board!

Jan Castanza, Sales Representative,  
Dow Elanco

Gene Chapman, Area Manager, Pro.  
Greens & Turf Aerification, Inc.

George Crouch, Superintendent,  
Eastern Hills Golf Course

Robin Foondle, Assistant  
Superintendent, Gull Lake Country  
Club

Ray Hentschel, Sales Representative,  
Century Rain Aid

Jeffery Holmes, Director of Golf, Egypt  
Valley Country Club

Lawrence Kavall, Superintendent,  
Lakeland Hills Golf Course

Jason Larabee, Assistant  
Superintendent, Silver Lake Country  
Club

Christopher Nosich, Assistant  
Superintendent, Berrien Hills Country  
Club

Christopher Olsen, Assistant  
Superintendent, Forest Hills Country  
Club

Jon O'Connor, Superintendent, Gull  
Lake Country Club

Vern Slager, Assistant Superintendent,  
Kalamazoo Country Club

David Schultz, Boylan Sales, Inc.

David Taylor, Territory Manager, W.F.  
Miller Company

## Upcoming Events

January 10.....WMGCSA meeting,  
The Highlands

January 17-19...Michigan Turfgrass  
Conference, Lansing

February 9.....GCSAA Regional  
Seminar, Wetlands and  
Golf Courses, Gaylord

February 20-27..GCSAA Conference  
and Show, San Francisco



## Classified

1976 Toro Groundmaster, \$900  
(3)Toro Proturf 84's...2 running, one for  
parts, \$1,200  
Westpoint/Terra Fairway Aerifier, \$600  
300 Gallon FMC Sprayer, needs repair, \$300  
Walk-behind rotary mower, 22" Mijer, \$100  
Snowthrower and cab, fits Toro 72, \$500  
Fertilizer and/or Material conveyor, gas  
and electric powered, \$250  
Roseman hydragang and powerpack, \$800  
(2) Pallets plastic grids for turf stabilization,  
\$100/pallet  
call Al at Cascade Hills C.C. (616) 949 1420

Ron Lee Sand Blade, Model 340 for Toro  
Sand Pro, Complete, \$450,  
Contact Paul Schippers, The Moors G.C.,  
(616) 323-2753

## 1994 Fall Party

This year's Fall Party was held  
at Spring Lake Country Club, hosted by  
Paul And Melissa Richter. You missed a  
good party if you didn't attend.

We had about 88 people in  
attendance. There were door prizes given  
away throughout the night. Jim Bogart  
won the TV/VCR at the final drawing.  
The appetizer table and meal were  
outstanding! Thanks again to the vendors  
for sponsoring the appetizers.

Many thanks to Paul and  
Melissa for a wonderful evening.

Remember... next year try to  
attend this wonderful event. This is the  
one event your association provides that  
you can share with your spouse or  
significant other.

Steve Tedhams, Fall Party Chairman

## Mechanic's Corner

To remedy some of our problems  
here at Forest Hills with greasing LF-100s  
we have changed some and added some  
grease fittings.

On the bearing housings of the  
reel, as some of you know, the grease  
fitting is on the outside of the bearing. No  
grease is pushed through the bearing, so  
the old grease, possibly contaminated with  
water, stays around the bearing. We moved  
the fittings to the inside so we could push  
grease through the bearing and still use the  
same relief ports to let old grease and  
contaminates out.

Another area we've had trouble  
with is the rear wheel hub. The bearings  
would occasionally fail. Instead of having  
to take the wheel off the spindle every time  
we wanted to grease these bearings, we  
drilled holes for fittings on the back of the  
hubs.

Steve Tedhams, Forest Hills G.C.

SERIALS

OCT 1994

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Editors Note: Please write me if you have  
any corrections or if you are interested in  
doing an article for us at:  
Western Views  
1447 Hope S.E.  
Grand Rapids, MI. 49506

## Do You Know What Your Golfers Think? Using Surveys As a Measurement Tool

Have you ever had that sinking feeling as a golfer walks towards you that this person is going to make some ridiculous suggestion (again). Do you try to be diplomatic and patient as you remind yourself the customer is always right, or do you just blow him off? The best reaction is probably somewhere between those two extremes.

There's never enough time or money. We simply have to set priorities. How we set those priorities on the golf course should be determined by what will result in the greatest customer satisfaction. This concept may seem to be overshadowed by the daily problems of keeping the grass both alive and manicured, but it is important to keep in mind whom we are ultimately trying to please: the customer.

Modern management training has come to emphasize a concept called Total Quality Management (TQM). This is a business philosophy devoted to integrating customer-driven quality throughout an organization. It stresses continuous quality management. Every decision made by management is geared to pleasing the customer. To do this, there must be some reliable method of obtaining feedback from the customers. This allows management to measure the effects, positive or negative, of changes in operations.

It's not likely the average golf course is going to totally adopt and implement a TQM strategy, or that a superintendent is going to tell the boss that the boss's opinion is no longer relevant because he's now only concerned with the customer's opinion. I do think that a superintendent can take an active role in measuring the attitudes of the golfers and using the results as a primary basis for making decisions and setting priorities. Some may criticize his methods, but who can question the priorities when they're customer driven?

This was my goal when I set about measuring the attitude of the members at my club. I wanted to know how many members were satisfied and how many had real complaints. What were our weaknesses and strengths? Where should I be focusing my efforts next year?

There has been little published about measuring the attitudes of golfers,

particularly in regards to the maintenance of their golf courses. I requested a search at the T.G.I. F. library at M.S.U. with key words: "survey; and golfer attitudes". Many articles had been written about surveys of superintendents by our professional associations, but only two articles in the past 15 years were found mentioning any reference to surveying golfers about their attitudes on golf course conditions.

I also asked other local superintendents if they had surveyed golfers or heard of any being done. None came to light. I suspect that superintendents and their bosses must be relying on their own feelings and the vocal minority of golfers (who are rarely satisfied) for setting priorities on the golf course. If this is true, the silent majority have little chance for input, even though they provide most of the revenue.

I think most of us would agree that there are a few golfers at our golf courses that get entirely too much attention. Too many qualified, hard working superintendents have

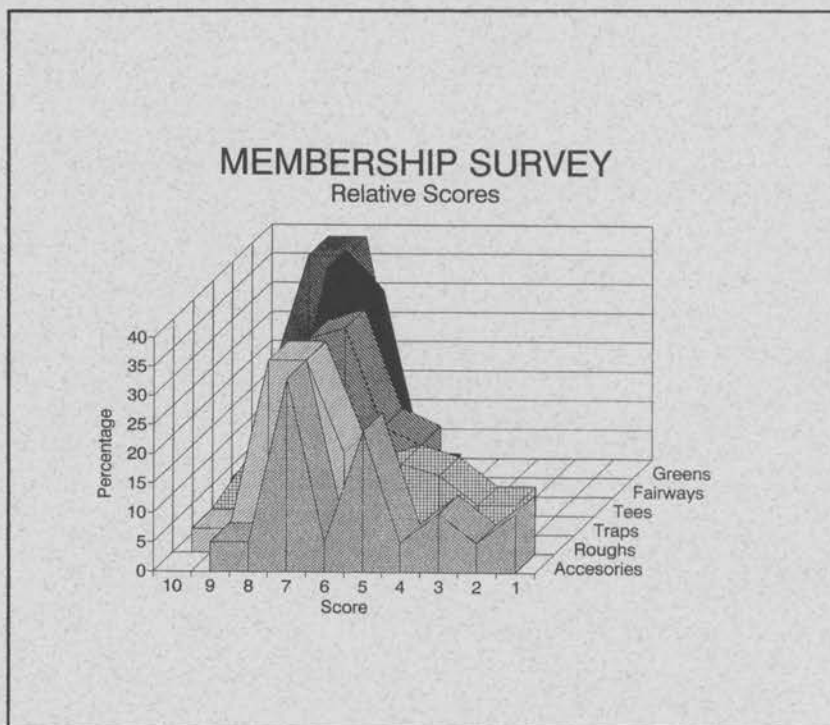
been run out of their jobs because of them. Having solid data that shows the majority of golfers are satisfied would help both the superintendents and their bosses put these troublemakers in their place.

### Designing the Survey

There are a number of ways of obtaining attitudes from a group. Personal interviews have some advantages, but they are prone to bias, especially if the interviewer and subject know each other. I knew that, in my case, anonymity was essential. I choose to use a self administered questionnaire to obtain golfer's attitudes.

It's not easy designing a questionnaire that accurately measures attitudes. Many times the subjects don't understand the questions. It's also difficult to eliminate bias in the ways questions are worded and what answers, if using multiple choice type questions, the subjects are given to chose from. Sometimes, the results of a question turn out to be worthless for other reasons. When designing my questionnaire, I regularly gave the rough draft to other people to

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## Sample Survey

Introduction: The goal of this survey is to develop a means to measure membership satisfaction in regard to course conditions and identify possible areas of improvement. As always, please bring any comments or suggestions to your superintendents attention.

- 1) Considering what course conditions were like 5 years ago, how would you rate the overall condition of the course on a scale of one to ten, one being horrible, ten being perfect: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) How would you rate the following areas of the course, on a scale of one to ten:
 

Greens	_____
Tees	_____
Fairways	_____
Traps	_____
Roughs	_____
Accessories	_____
- 3) On average, what did you think of the green speed? Check one:
 

<input type="checkbox"/>	very fast
<input type="checkbox"/>	fast
<input type="checkbox"/>	medium fast
<input type="checkbox"/>	medium
<input type="checkbox"/>	medium slow
<input type="checkbox"/>	slow
- 4) Would you, personally, like to see green speed:
 

<input type="checkbox"/>	Increase significantly
<input type="checkbox"/>	Increase slightly
<input type="checkbox"/>	Stay the same
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decrease
- 5) On average, what did you think of putting consistency ( did the ball roll true)?
 

<input type="checkbox"/>	excellent
<input type="checkbox"/>	good
<input type="checkbox"/>	fair
<input type="checkbox"/>	poor
<input type="checkbox"/>	not sure
- 6) What do you remember of maintenance crew activities while you were golfing?
 

<input type="checkbox"/>	never saw or heard them
<input type="checkbox"/>	kept their distance, didn't disturb me
<input type="checkbox"/>	generally kept distance, some distraction
<input type="checkbox"/>	significant distraction, disrupted play
<input type="checkbox"/>	not sure or no comment
- 7) When talking to your superintendent, do you feel your comments or suggestions regarding golf course maintenance were:
 

<input type="checkbox"/>	taken seriously, acted upon swiftly
<input type="checkbox"/>	listened to, acted upon when convenient
<input type="checkbox"/>	listened to, but rarely acted upon
<input type="checkbox"/>	ignored
<input type="checkbox"/>	not sure, or, no comments or suggestions made
- 8) If you had guests, on the average, how do you think they would rate the course condition, one a scale of one to ten: \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) Which statement most accurately reflects your feelings toward the golf course at Silver Lake?
 

<input type="checkbox"/>	great value
<input type="checkbox"/>	good value
<input type="checkbox"/>	average value
<input type="checkbox"/>	poor value
<input type="checkbox"/>	value not a consideration

## Survey, Continued

fill out, then discussed their responses with them to see if the questions were measuring what I had hoped to measure. Some questions were dropped, and many were changed. In the final draft, the questionnaire requested the members to rate six main areas of the golf course on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being perfect. I also included 8 other questions.

Ideally, a questionnaire of this type could be sent to all customers (this would technically be a census instead of a survey). The next best choice would be to randomly select a large percentage of the group to receive the questionnaire. In my case, because of time and financial constraints, I chose to use a quicker and cheaper method. There were a couple of events coming up on the schedule at the club so I decided to use a convenience sample. I placed surveys on tables as the members sat down and returned later to pick them up. I had my results instantly. The first group receiving the questionnaire consisted of 16 ladies who regularly play golf on wednesdays. The second group consisted of 70 men getting ready to play a saturday morning event. The club has approximately 300 full members.

## Results

I combined the results of the two surveys, with 16 ladies and 25 men responding. The responses for the two groups were surprisingly similar. By compiling both scores on each of the six areas of maintenance receiving scores on the survey, I constructed a graph comparing the relative scores. The x-axis is the score from one to ten and the y-axis is the percentage of members giving that score. The six areas are arranged in order of importance, the most important in back.

Of the six areas rated, the greens recieved the highest rating. The fairways and tees also recieved good scores. The Sand traps recieved some low scores. The roughs recieved decent scores. The golf course accessories, which would be the least important to the game of golf, recieved the lowest scores.

On the other questions, I combined both surveys and gave the percentage of members giving each of the responses available. Some of the results were:

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## Survey, Continued

- 52% of the golfers responding wanted green speed increased, 48% said they were satisfied.
- 97% said putting consistency was good or excellent
- 97% felt the crew was generally keeping their distance
- 89% of those who had made suggestions felt we listened to them and acted upon them
- 97% said guests seem pleased
- 95% felt the course was a good or great value

I received numerous verbal suggestions immediately afterwards. The members seemed very happy to be asked for their opinion and it seems this survey stimulated ideas about how to improve the course.

## Conclusions

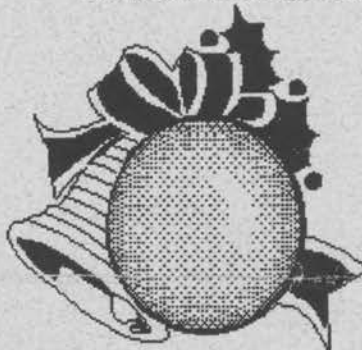
I think the responses on the survey reflect the feeling of the golfers at my club. I'm sure the survey questions and methodology can be improved upon. While I would add some questions on the next survey, I would keep this core of questions the same to help measure change over time.

Green speed will be increased slightly at my club, despite my feelings that

golfers are overly concerned (obsessed) with green speed. Stimpmeter readings at our course ranged from 7.8 to 9.2 during the year, averaging about 8.2. Those readings should average about 8.5 next year. This may not be as fast as some would like them, but for the average golfer, faster greens do not help. Golfer's estimation of green is very subjective, based on many other factors other than the actual speed.

Negative attitudes about traps will be explored, and improvements considered, but the cost of rebuilding traps and replacing sand may be excessive in relation to the importance of traps. Nobody likes a sand trap, no matter how nicely it's maintained.

Accessories will be significantly



**Happy Holidays !**

improved on both the men's and ladies tees. I had realized that our accessories were a little worn-out, but didn't think the golfers noticed or cared much. I was surprised how strongly the members felt about them. The cost of upgrading our accessories is relatively cheap compared to other course improvements. This should give our customers a much better impression of the course.

## The Future

The same survey should be given each year, preferably to all members. By comparing green speed measurement to golfers attitudes about the green speed, it could be determined if the golfers can truly gauge how fast greens are, and whether faster greens really make them any happier. Likewise, their should be a noticeable change in the attitude about accessories after a major upgrading.

I've received some interest from other superintendents in developing a survey that could be used to measure golfers relative satisfaction between different clubs. It could be very enlightening to compare how members of other clubs feel about the maintenance of their courses, using the same rating system.

Tom McGuinness, Silver Lake C.C.



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