

Winterkill...It Did And It Didn't

A veteran superintendent has come up with a very interesting, although hardly viable suggestion. "If I could arrange it," he cracked, "I would put in a rule for my members. It would be very simple. . . 'Florida is off limits to any person wishing to play this course.' For my money, the worst thing that ever happened was Florida in the winter. Every April it drives me up a wall."

What happens to said super and virtually every other colleague who must ply his knowledge and ability under the most dreadful of weather conditions in New England is the mass exodus of golfers from sunny Florida to the unpredictable spring of Massachusetts and other points northeast.

"My members go to Florida and play their clubs off on lush grass and smooth greens," the superintendent continued. "Then, when they return to our course, they expect to pick up where they left off. It's ridiculous, especially when we're coming out of a winter like the one we had to put up with this year."

This brings us to the unrelenting problem of spring on New England golf courses - the persistent presence of winterkill. That malady does just what it implies. It kills the grass and turns it into a brownish, sickening color. Acute cases can turn a course into a depressed area.

The winterkill of 1978 was further distressing to the superintendent because of the no-growth spring experienced in New England. As late as the second week of May the ground temperature remained in the low 40's and delayed the germination period of plants almost endlessly. An added deterrent was the presence of strong northwest winds. So, if winterkill had invaded your course, its recuperation was a long, drawn-out process.

There was an inexplicable aside to the occurrence of winterkill this year. For the most part, when it overtook a course, it was devastating. There were reports telling of certain areas where a full 18 greens were wiped out. Yet, there also were strange absences of winterkill. . . in areas where the disease was almost expected to visit.

One popular Eastern Massachusetts course was browned out by winterkill. The damage there was virtually irreparable and the uncooperative spring brought shivers to its superintendent. The feeling was that he might have to rebuild 16 of 18 greens and replace more than half of his tees.

That was the sharp, piercing edge of winterkill's invasion. But at an adjacent course, only a few miles away, there was no incidence of winterkill. The superintendent there was almost at a loss for words. "I kept looking for it, almost wishing I'd get a few spots," he told. "But there was nothing. The unusual aspect of it was the fact that I had done nothing to combat the possibility of winterkill. I just let the weather run its course and hoped for the best. I got it."

Most people assume that the Blizzard of '78 was the prime reason for the high occurrence of winterkill. "That's false assumption," one super advised. "In my case, I think it might have helped. I didn't plow my greens at all. It gave me complete snow cover all winter and the blizzard in February just added to the protection. But that was my good fortune. In places where

ice had already formed, the added snow just compounded the problem. It kept the ice there longer and gave winterkill all the time it needed to do its dirty work."

Another superintendent reported that winterkill played hopscotch with his course. "It was a crazy pattern," he revealed. "I had a tee completely ruined by winterkill. And right next to it my practice putting green was as lush as August when the snow disappeared. I think it's just a part of the unpredictable properties of weather elements. I can't explain it. Weather is one thing that no one can explain."

Winterkill, then, was a killer to some and a welcome absentee to others. When it did hit, it was devastating, cruel and persistent. Those, who escaped it, were lucky. Those, caught in its path, are still fighting the effects of its attack. New England. . . a true test for the golf course superintendent.

Gerry Finn

Next Meeting



July 11, 1978

Dedham Polo & Country Club

Host Superintendent - Robert Mucciarone

DIRECTOR'S MEETING 9:30

MEMBERSHIP MEETING 11:00

BUFFET LUNCH 12:00

GOLF: (Championship Tournament) 1:00

DIRECTIONS:

From Rte. 128, take Rte. 109 toward Westwood. Take first right and go 1 mile. Club is on the left.

Please Make Reservations by calling or writing: Robert Mucciarone

Summer St., Westwood, MA 02090

Tele. 329-9682

Look Homeward For Supers

You are a committee of one, twelve or whatever. And you're looking for a golf course superintendent. So, you place an ad in the national golf and trade magazines and await the arrival of the most important ingredient in your country club operation. Right? Wrong!

"One of the worse things any group seeking a superintendent can do is go out of the area for that person," a veteran member of the profession said during the University of Massachusetts Turf Conference. "It has been proven a thousand times over that the best superintendent is the homegrown superintendent. He knows the lay of the land, so to speak, and more important - he knows the behavioral pattern of that land."

The midwest section of the country has underway a very successful apprentice program for would-be superintendents. Young students of the turf are placed on local courses where they learn the rudiments of the job and concentrate on the properties of the turf, the climate and other factors affecting life of the plant.

"From this warehouse of potential leaders, we get most of our new supers," Bob Williams of Highland Park, Illinois told. "It's just a matter of being practical. You wouldn't hire an Eskimo to be a lifeguard at a beach, would you? It's the same in golf course maintenance. You want the person who is familiar with the grounds to be groomed."

Of course, the analogy is not all that drastic. Certainly, there have been successful transfer superintendents who made the switch from one section of the country to another without incident. But, it stands to reason that a country club is taking some measure of risk with a job candidate whose experience has been concentrated in an area foreign to it in soil makeup, rainfall, temperature and general topography.

Williams tells of one midwestern superintendent - highly skilled and highly regarded by everyone in the region - who suddenly decided that he would try his hand on the West Coast. "The job out there was for more money and a good opportunity for the right man," he disclosed. "But the weather trends, growing conditions and types of plant diseases were altogether different from what this fellow had encountered back where he knew the land. It took him only two years or rather it took the new club that long to realize a mistake had been made. Just think of all the grief, frustration, disappointment and money which would have been saved and avoided had those people hired someone from their immediate area."

The country club employment committee would do well to

heed this advice, but Williams also adds that the aspiring superintendent stands to gain from the same situation. There is a tendency for young students of the profession, assistants and others to reach for the moon when they're only equipped with a step ladder. They flock to the national magazines and become addicted to the want ads there. Sooner or later they make their move and the precarious state takes hold.

"Not only do the young ones look for greener pastures, some of the established supers think along the same lines," Williams remarked. "We all have our moments of anger with our present employers, times when we're ready to pitch it all and strike out for new courses and trails to conquer. But hasty decisions - influenced by emotional upheaval - can be killing to a superintendent's future. You know, we are the most secure of the three executive branches of the country club. There is less turnover among supers than either the club professional or clubhouse manager. That proves, then, that not too many of us go off on a tantrum and escape to supposedly better jobs. The few, who do, often live to regret it."

The key to both job security and efficient course grooming has to be that familiarity with turf, weather, and the rest according to local conditions. And the man who knows the land, is going to be the best man to exploit that land into a well-groomed golf course. This is why super-seeks should look homeward for the best qualified candidate.

Gerry Finn

Newsletter Notes

Want to thank the people at Wellesley Country Club for having us as their guests. Everyone had an enjoyable day and a special thanks to host superintendent Tom Schofield and golf pro Les Bond. It was very unfortunate and uncontrollable the winter kill damage this course has absorbed. I am sure with good weather, patience, and hard work by Tom and his staff the course will return to the fine condition it is known for.

Dr. Joe Troll attended along with his new assistant Kirk Hurto. Mr. Hurto started in January working with Dr. Troll at Stockbridge. He is a native of Illinois and says he and his wife love New England. On behalf of the association we are glad to welcome Mr. Hurto and hope to see more of him in the near future. Dr. Troll also gave the date of July 26 as the day of the U. Mass. Field Day. Viewing of the turf plots will be from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Lunch and discussion will follow.

The date for the August meeting at Mt. Pleasant C.C., Lowell is August 16. Please mark it on your calendar.

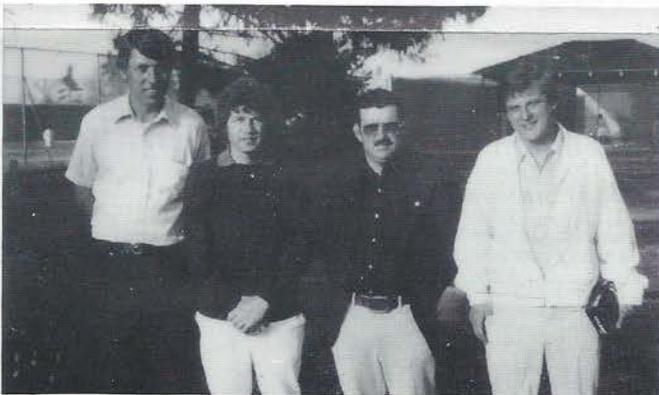
Welcome Paul Miller, Superintendent at Tedesco C.C. as an Associate Member. Paul is in his second year at Tedesco after serving under Charlie Gardner at Oyster Harbors for 6 years.

Many thanks to the Magovern Company in Windsor Locks, Conn. for their contribution to the Lawrence S. Dickinson Scholarship Fund. Would like to encourage other Friends of the Association and fellow superintendents to give to this worthy cause.

Sorry to hear that Elmer Fuller passed away. He was a retired member of our association. Mr. Fuller was a member for 52 years. Our sincere sympathy goes out to his family.

Had a pretty good turn out at Wellesley C.C. but I know there is more of you out there. So help your association and participate. See you at Woodland C.C. for the Superintendent/Greens Chairman Golf Tournament.

LARRY BUNN
Newsletter Chairman



Left to right - Ed Wiacek, Wayne Zoppo, Bert Frederick, and Ron Kirkman.

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Kernwood C.C. Links Is Allen's 'Baby'

by BILL BROTHERTON Times Sports Staff

SALEM — When Lester Allen was a strong 11 year old lad in 1920 he used to walk two miles daily from his Western Avenue home in Beverly just to caddie at Kernwood Country Club. The kids used to earn a healthy 15 cents per hour in those days and they had to punch a time clock to prove they weren't cheating the members.

Well today, 58 years after he first toted a bag at the Salem course, Allen is retiring as Kernwood's greens' superintendent, a position he's held since 1945. And the course is his "baby. It's just like a member of the family."

No longer will the 69 year old agronomist have to worry about diseased greens, outdated watering systems, and mowing fairways.

Instead, retirement will allow Allen to work on his vegetable garden, catch up on his reading, tinker with electrical gadgets and watch game shows on the television set he built by hand.

Lester and Eleanor Allen have lived in that big yellow house which borders the course's eighth hole since 1961. Their five children have long since departed but nine cats and a "friendly but deaf" dog named Pammie keep the couple company.

"We've had a lot of pets through the years. . . so many old dogs," recalls Allen. "At one time we had 21 cats running through the house. People threw them on the course and they'd automatically come to our door."

The Allen's children - Albert, Ronald, Beverly, Murial and Donald - used to play in the bunkers and roll on the greens during their younger days and all five worked on the Kernwood links at one time. In fact the three boys put themselves through college with their earnings.

Lester and Eleanor lost their two eldest boys in the armed forces. Albert died shortly after 20 years in the service and Ronald was a victim of an accidental shooting in Washington, D.C. Strangely, Albert survived being shot at by the Russians and the Lexington explosion.

Their photographs still rest among pictures of their three other "prides and joys" on book-filled shelves.

Lester Allen was born in Gloucester and moved to Beverly at an early age. He caddied at Kernwood for eight years and made enough money to put himself through Wentworth Institute.

After a short stint as an auto mechanic, Lester returned to the Salem club as assistant to greenskeeper Robert Mitchell. That was in 1931 and 14 years later, Allen assumed control himself. Now, he's stepping down, relinquishing his job to Dean Robertson, a "hand-picked" replacement from Newbury who worked at Chestnut Hill for 12 years.

Allen is, and probably always will be, considered one of the area's top superintendents. He is former president of the Golf Course Superintendents of America and the New England Turf Council. He taught courses in agronomy at U.Mass (Amherst) from 1950 to 1967. He's also consulted at Tedesco, Salem, Happy Valley and Thomson clubs during his long stint.

"I've been thinking about retirement for three years now," confides Allen. "I'm not getting any younger. . . I don't consider myself senile by any means but Eleanor and I have been in and out of the hospital lately. I've had arthritis for years and ulcers developed a while ago. They're all by-products of the occupation I guess."

"It's a job that never gets done," confides Allen, "it's a 25 hour job, eight days a week. And with today's advanced equipment it's even worse. When I started I had seven men on my maintenance crew. Today there are still seven. You figure 60



Dean Robertson, President of GCSA of New England, presents a plaque to Lester Allen from the association for his years of service to the GCSA of New England. Mr. Allen and his family were honored by members, friends, and fellow superintendents at a retirement party at Kernwood Country Club.

carts going 18 holes twice a day will do a number of the course. It certainly makes it more difficult to maintain."

Still, Lester wouldn't change a minute of his life. "I've loved it. It's been a good living and every day presented a new challenge. I'd hate to be in a factory every day doing the same thing. Here I was outside and I determined a program for maintenance.

"The course is like another child. You say you'll retire and forget about it but it's tough. It's a little baby . . . when you're away from it you worry about it constantly."

Last night the Kernwood members gathered to thank Allen for his many years of service. Lester was aware of his "surprise" tribute ahead of time. "It's a secret," laughs Allen, "I'm not supposed to know about it.

"It's been a good life," he concludes, "I met a lot of nice people and have a devoted, loving family."

TOURNAMENT RESULTS at WELLESLEY COUNTRY CLUB

Blind Draw Net

First Place

Ron Kirkman
Bert Frederick 57
Ed Wiacek
Wayne Zoppo

Second Place

Larry Bunn
Don Hearn 48
Julie Aksten
Allen Cumps

Third Place

Pete Coste
Dave Loker 59
Dick Zepp
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