

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

COMPUTERS ON THE GOLF COURSE



Just a few short years ago, it was unusual for a golf course superintendent or sports turf manager to have a personal computer in his office. Hardly anyone knew or talked about spread sheets, data bases, random access memory, programs, phone modems, or hard discs.

Today, I venture to guess that nearly 20 percent of all golf course superintendents spend some time each week in front of a computer screen. Parks, universities, and schools also have entered the world of elec-

tronic management in a big way. It's no wonder that a number of state turf conferences this winter have included seminars on the use of computers.

It's truly amazing what you can do with a personal computer if you devote the time and energy to learn the basics and practice, practice, practice. Learning to use a computer is like learning a new language. If you stick with it, your newfound ability to communicate instructions is both enjoyable and rewarding. After all, whether you're playing Mario Brothers (a Nintendo game) or building a budget, many of the principles are the same. By learning a few tricks, you can impress both yourself and others.

Some superintendents were introduced to computers when they added a central controller to their irrigation systems. Nearly all irrigation controllers today are simply personal computers operating with special programs. They are not limited just to irrigation. Irrigation programs only take a few minutes to run. That leaves hours of time to use the computer for other purposes. Since the computer is paid for, it's a waste not to use it to capacity.

By purchasing various management programs you can use the same computer for time management studies, calculating equipment depreciation, keeping precise records of maintenance practices and inventories, developing detailed historical data, and forecasting costs. You can write reports, schedule vacations for your crew, and build lists of your key suppliers. You can store cabinets full of information on a few floppy discs.

Working together, superintendents and computer specialists have begun to develop programs specifically for golf courses. In creating this software, they identify key areas of importance to superintendents and structure data bases around them. All you have to do is input numbers for each category and the program does the rest. The same type of custom-programming is found in irrigation software. The superintendent really doesn't need to get involved in programming at all.

One advantage of computer software is it can be updated as new and better ways of handling data are discovered. You don't have to buy a new computer. You simply insert a floppy disc into the drive on your computer and load the new program.

Computers have saved thousands of dollars in water, energy and labor costs for irrigation. They can do the same for many other areas of golf course management. It won't be long before most golf course superintendents talk about computers and programs in their daily conversation.

Bruce F. Shank

EVENTS

CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

15-16 Athletic Turf Management Seminar, Jacksonville, FL.
Contact: National Institute on Parks and Grounds Management, P.O. Box 1936, Appleton, WI 54913, (414) 733-2301.

19-26 GCSAA International Golf Course Conference and Show, Orange County Convention/Civic Center, Orlando, FL. Contact: GCSAA: 1617 St. Andrews Drive, Lawrence, KS 66046-9990, (913) 841-2240.

20-22 Western Pennsylvania Turf Conference & Trade Show, Pittsburgh Expo Mart, Monroeville, PA. Contact: Dr. Thomas Watschke, Dept. of Agronomy, Agric. Admin, Bldg., University Park, PA 16802, (814) 863-1613.

27-28 Northeastern Pennsylvania Turfgrass and Grounds Maintenance School, Luzerne County Community College, Nanticoke, PA. Contact: William Pencek, Lackawanna County Ext. Service, 200 Adams Ave., Scranton, PA 18503, (717) 963-4761.

MARCH

6 Southeastern Sports Turf Institute, Citrus Bowl, Orlando, FL. Contact STMA, 400 N. Mountain Ave., Upland, CA 91786, (714) 981-9199.

14-16 Massachusetts Turfgrass Conference, Springfield Civic Center, Springfield, MA. Contact: Dr. Joseph Troll, Box 489, Hadley, MA 01035, (413) 549-5295.

20 West Coast Sports Turf Institute, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, CA. Contact: STMA, 400 N. Mountain Ave., Upland, CA 91786, (714) 981-9199.