

# THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

## GOLF BEGAN SIMPLE—WE MADE IT COMPLEX

**O**n a recent trip to Oregon, I had the unique pleasure of witnessing some of the old, simple aspects of community golf. My guide was Tom DeArmond, a former seed grower. Today he owns Oregon Turf & Tree Farms and Prograss, a lawn care company.

Hidden on the back roads of seed country is a nine-hole course that has not changed since the Great Depression. For two bucks a day (honor system) you can play all the golf you want, that is if you don't mind the sand greens, a few weeds on the fairways, and carrying your own clubs. Dragging the greens, which are really made of loose, sandy clay like a baseball infield, before you putt is quite an experience.

The course has no irrigation system, hasn't been fertilized in two years, and does not have a full-time superintendent. Its operating budget is less than \$13,000 a year. The land is worth about \$100,000 by today's standards and is owned by 80 or so shareholders, most of whom inherited their shares. DeArmond inherited one share from his father.

I'm not suggesting that we should return to the days of sand greens and dirt cheap fees. But I do think that we may want to remember that golf began simple. We made it complex.

The recent recession and heightened concern over pesticides have forced the golf and sports turf industries to substantiate their methods. We need to sharpen our pencils a little more when we weigh costs versus benefits. We also need to gain control over some of our competitive urges and refocus ourselves on the users of golf courses, athletic fields, and recreational facilities.

The impression I've gotten from recent letters and phone calls is that many superintendents recognize a certain degree of overkill in competing with other courses. Keeping up with the Joneses is not always cost justified.

One case that ended up in court involves a golf course greens committee that fired its superintendent and sued its irrigation contractor. The dispute arose because the course's updated irrigation system was designed for the moist, humid environs of the Midwest. Records show that the course's greens actually required irrigation less than 30 days a year. The committee, however, expected a system like those found on desert courses. It refused to pay the contractor and spent an additional \$200,000 to buy a more entailed system.

In another case, a course replaced three seven-gang fairway mowers with lightweight five-gang units. Two additional mowers and operators were needed to mow the same amount of turf. Play has not increased enough to support the extra expense. The difference had to be made up by increasing greens fees.

Mistakes like these are not the fault of the products. They are human errors caused by insufficient forethought. Unfortunately, the golfer often ends up paying for others' mistakes.

Like DeArmond, our livelihoods depend upon chemicals and equipment. Today we all need to be more aware of the costs of turf maintenance and the safety of the chemicals we use. Our future depends on our actions. The alternative is to return to sand greens.



*Bruce Shank*

# EVENTS

CALENDAR

## MAY

**15** North Carolina Turf and Landscape Field Day, Turf Field Center, Raleigh, NC. Contact: R.H. White, NCSU, P.O. Box 7620, Raleigh, NC 27695-7620, (919) 737-7615.

## JUNE

**24-25** Annual Turfgrass Summerfest, Washington State University Puyallup Research and Extension Center, Puyallup, WA. Contact: Northwest Turfgrass Association, P.O. Box 1367, Olympia, WA 98507, (206) 754-0825.

**27** Field Day, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Contact: New York State Turfgrass Association, P.O. Box 612, Latham, NY 12110, (800) 873-8873.

## JULY

**28-30** International Power Equipment Expo, Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center, Louisville, KY. Contact: Expo '91, (800) 558-8767 or (502) 473-1992.

**29** Turfgrass Field Day, South Farm, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO. Contact: Missouri Valley Turfgrass Association, 344 Hearnes Center, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211, (314) 882-4087.

**31-2** American Sod Producers Association Summer Conference and Field Day, Red Lion Inn-Lloyd Center, Portland, OR. Contact: ASPA, 1855-A Hicks Road, Rolling Meadows, IL 60008, (708) 705-9898.

## NOVEMBER

**19-20** Southern Grounds & Turf Maintenance Exposition and Conference, Myrtle Beach Convention Center, Myrtle Beach, SC. Contact: South Carolina Board for Technical & Comprehensive Education, 111 Executive Center Drive, Columbia, SC 29210, (803) 737-9355.

## DECEMBER

**2-4** The 38th Annual Turfgrass Conference, Denver, CO. Contact: Rocky Mountain Regional Turfgrass Association, P.O. Box 903, Parker, CO 80134, (303) 688-3440

Send announcements on your events two months in advance to editor, *Golf & SportsTURF*, P.O. Box 8420, Van Nuys, CA 91409. Fax: (818) 781-8517.