

It IS easy being GREEN

HOW SOME SUPERINTENDENTS ARE PROMOTING THEIR ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP TO THEIR COMMUNITIES



THE POPULAR GREEN PUSH HAS ENTERED MANY FACETS OF THE GOLF INDUSTRY. PROGRAMS GEARED TO GOLF COURSES THAT ARE COMMITTED TO PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT ARE SPROUTING UP ACROSS NORTH AMERICA. GOLF SUPERINTENDENTS ARE LEADING THE WAY WITH GREEN PRACTICES ON THEIR COURSES AND BEING POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS. REGARDLESS OF THEIR REASONS FOR CHOOSING ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND PRACTICES, IT'S A GOOD THING AND THE BENEFITS ARE BEING SHARED WITH THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

Adam Zubek, Course Superintendent at the Capilano Golf and Country Club in West Vancouver, British Columbia is a strong advocate for a greener golf industry. In his third year as golf superintendent, he has seen a growing number of people participating in the green movement. "Our course, set on the side of Hollyburn Mountain, prides itself on being one of the best member courses in the country. We also pride ourselves on doing what is best for our environment," Zubek explained. Nestled in the British properties and blended well into the landscape of mature coniferous trees, the scenery is breathtaking. "The surrounding mountains marry well with the nature and landscape and maintaining the pristine conditions are of the utmost importance to us," he says.

Introducing environmentally friendly practices on the greens came easy to Zubek and his team. "In 2004, we achieved Audubon Certification and in 2008 we were recertified. The certification is awarded to those

clubs that are committed to adapting environmentally friendly practices on its golf courses," said Zubek. Capilano Golf and Country Club prides itself on maintaining a high degree of quality in a number of areas. "We are of the philosophy that less is more and in order to be environmentally successful you have to respect the balance between course playability, the environment, and amount of inputs."

Communicating your courses successes when it comes to going green has also paid great dividends both internally and externally. "We are strong believers in communicating our environmental practices both to our members and the greater community. Internally, we share our green successes with our members through our club web site. The web site has information on the Audubon program and steps we're taking to make our course even greener." Extending the positive environmental changes that are being made by the course is of equal importance. "In the community we work with

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local Streamkeepers, the district Environmental Manager, local schools, Oceans and Fisheries to promote the work that we are doing on the course. We are also planning to attend our community day this summer and distribute brochures on our environmental initiatives on the course," says Zubek.

Much like Zubek, Course Superintendent John Scott has seen his 36-hole private facility, located west of the Island of Montreal, undertake several green initiatives. In his eighth season with Summerlea Golf and Country Club, Scott is excited about how far the industry has come and the green opportunities that remain. "We're committed to promoting sustainable business practices, believing that it is particularly important in an industry whose product is connected to the earth. As golf superintendents, we have the chance to be a driving force behind the industry's transformation," says Scott. Environmentally friendly practices have been a

"TO BE BETTER STEWARDS, SUPERINTENDENTS NEED TO FIRST IDENTIFY SOURCES OF ENVIRONMENTAL LIABILITIES. IT'S ONLY THEN CAN WE DISCUSS WHAT CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE TO ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENTS WE MANAGE." – BOB BREWSTER, COURSE SUPERINTENDENT, MISSISSAUGA GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB

mainstay at the Summerlea Golf and Country Club for a number of years. "We have implemented an IPM System that allows us to live with some disease. We usually spray when disease pressures are too dangerous to go on further," says Scott. The move will save the course in terms of herbicide usage and reduces their environmental impact. "This spring we had fusarium on approximately nine of our 38 greens and with dry and sunshine in the forecast we held off an application of fungicide. We have been spraying herbicides as a spot treatment for the last five seasons. Ultimately, we may have more weeds later but we can go and spot spray them later."

Although the golf course is not situated in a heavily populated area, maintaining ongoing contact is a top priority for the course. "We are in rural area so relationships with neighbours are on a one-to-one basis. We have no houses or people near any of our heavily manicured areas and we have such a great buffer zone that surrounds our property that we do not have a problem," says Scott. That being said, Scott and his team make a concerted effort to keep the surrounding community aware of products that are being used and encourage feedback. "We will post information on the products we're using and invite the community to ask questions about what is being used

and its overall impact on the environment."

Public relations is much more than interacting with your clients. It's how you relate to your local media. Media-savvy golf courses use public relations to leverage their standing in the community. "We understand the importance of keeping the local media aware of the community functions we host. On a yearly basis, we host two tournaments for the two communities that are in close proximity. We allow them to use our facility to raise funds for community projects," says Scott. The Summerlea Golf and Country Club then notifies the local media of their involvement. "We are able to secure earned media on these tournaments and try to make ourselves accessible when the media is interested in writing about our course or the industry," says Scott.

With 37 years experience as a golf superintendent, 11 of those with his present club, Bob Brewster of the Mississauga Golf and Country Club agrees there is no better time than now for the industry to carve their own environmentally friendly path. Steeped in rich history, the golf course has had the honour of hosting some of Canada's most prestigious tournaments. It is also a proactive golf course that sees value in setting an environmentally friendly example. "To be better stewards, superintendents need to first identify sources of environmental liabilities. It's only then can we discuss what changes need to be made to enhance the environments we manage," says Brewster.

The list of environmental liabilities facing golf courses today is wide and many. "Superintendents need to step back and analyze how they can manage an environmentally sustainable golf course and the challenges facing their course," says Brewster. "In the last few years, we have made a concerted effort to focus on making tangible changes. We have reduced the number of chemicals we use on our new greens. A solid integrated pest management program has served us well." Reducing their environmental impact has also meant monitoring the club's water usage. "Better grass selections for respective climates and computer monitored irrigation systems have been tremendous advances. We are acutely aware that we can make a big difference by reducing the amount of water we use."

Establishing and maintaining relations with the local media is something that the Mississauga Golf and Country Club takes serious. "Each year, we invite the media to play our golf course. This year, we are hosting The Frazz Tournament for the Toronto Star. It's an opportunity for them to get a feel for our brand," explained Brewster. On an ongoing basis, golf superintendents need to source the media outlets that have the greatest ability to affect their business and establish good relations with them. "Your club will find itself ahead of the curve when it comes to media relations if they are proactive rather than reactive. In the end, your hard work and dedication to this task will reap your club positive rewards," says Brewster. ●