

Q&A with Jay Rehr

Mr. Jay Rehr was the speaker at the Mechanics Meeting at Greystone on November 7th. This meeting was a departure from our usual format in that superintendents were asked to invite their course mechanic or technician as a guest. Mr. Rehr is owner of Turf Equipment Consulting Company. He has twenty year's experience in this field. Mr. Rehr worked for 16 years as an equipment technician with Augusta National Golf Club. He has 16 Masters' Tournaments, two U.S. Open Tournaments, two Senior Opens, and one British Open under his belt, among other tournaments and events. According to Mr. Rehr, "The equipment technician and staff are among the most important parts of the golf course. So to have a successful course, or a successful event, you need efficient and effective equipment maintenance."

Turf Equipment Consulting Company provides several services. Among them are *Daily Maintenance Operations* which includes observation and assessment of a course, its operations and crew to determine the best ways to increase productivity, performance, and course quality. Evaluation considers everything from equipment setup to maintenance shop layout, activity scheduling and tips for better use of equipment. The Company also specializes in *Tournament/Event Preparation and Maintenance* and *Maintenance Facility Design and Layout*. For more information on Mr. Rehr's services you can go to www.turfequipmentconsulting.com, or e-mail him at jay@turfequipmentconsulting.com or phone 706.860-2527.

Mr. Rehr stresses the importance of establishing a routine for everything involved in maintenance. "Once you get into a routine you find ways to do things faster, whether it's maintenance, sharpening or changing oil. It's important to adapt the routine in ways that doesn't conflict with the work of others. Technicians should work with the superintendent to establish a schedule. Look at the shop set-up with the superintendent and rearrange to maintenance shop

for greater efficiency. Things you push, such as hand mowers, should be near at hand. Things you ride can be stored further away."

Q. Who sets the height of cut on the mowers?

A. One and only one person sets the height of cut for each set of mowers (greens, tee and fairway.) That way the mowers are all exactly the same.

Q. What's the difference in stimp readings for the British Open from a U.S. event?

A. They walk greens and use triplexes on the fairways. St. Andrews greens stimped at 11.5. Their fairways stimped at 11.5. Over there this is exceptional. Their way of golf course maintenance and their way of thinking about it is really different than ours. Supers over there set the cut and height on mowers.

Q. If you have an obsolete piece of machinery, when do you discard it?

A. At my last course they kept everything. My personal feeling is that if I don't touch it in six months (unless it is something that's used for special jobs) it needs to go to the Dumpster, or be cannibalized for parts. With rotary mow-

ers, weed eaters, backpack blowers, if you have to do any work to the motor, it is not worth it to repair it. If I bought it for less than \$500, and I use it for six months and it breaks, it will go to the dumpster. You have to figure in the cost of labor in repairing these low ticket items. Oh, and be sure to drain the gas and oil before putting it in the dumpster.

Q. How do you set your reels?

A. It depends on the type of grass as to how tight or loose you should set your reels. Use two strips of paper, cut the top and leave the bottom on Bermuda. For bentgrass, test with one strip of paper. It should cut smooth as a pair of scissors. It goes without saying that settings that work for me and my golf course may not work for yours. Every golf course is different and variables have to be factored in. Consult with mechanics at other courses, but remember that just because it works for them doesn't mean it will work at your golf course. But it's a good starting point.

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Jay Rehr accepts plaque from Tom Vlach

Q. & A with Jay Rehr, Continued

Q. Does it solve problems to sign out equipment?

A. It works well when one guy is responsible for a piece of equipment. They take better care of it. If you can assign equipment to each individual that's good, but most golf courses don't have the equipment to do that. Operator abuse is always going to be there when you have untrained or uncaring operators running equipment.

Q. What is your opinion about electric versus hydraulic triplexes?

A. I like electric. Number one, because there are no hydraulic oils to leak. The less equipment I can put on the course to cause a leak, the better it is for the course. Batteries will need to be changed out every now and then. I like electric hand mowers. I don't have to change oil or spark plugs. It saves on the budget. If you don't know electric find an electrician and learn from him.

Q. Do you have problems with operators adjusting equipment?

A. If you have one or two operators that you think do this you can start marking screws or stop bolts. When the equipment comes in, check your marks to determine if it's been tampered with. If it has then go to your superintendent.

Q. As a technician do you have a formula for replacing equipment?

A. I've never had the luxury of changing out equipment every three years. At Augusta National we had mowing equipment twelve years old. I've seen tractors that are 17 or 18 years old. In Barbados they change equipment every three years because the salt water there eats everything up.

Q. We're cutting our rough around two inches and it grabs and pulls. What can we do to correct this problem?

A. Change the rotary blades once a week. You might try slowing the ground speed down just a little.

Q. What kind of records do you keep?

A. Some golf courses use a piece of Plexiglass over a listing of equipment to keep up with their maintenance. Some use computer programs for their maintenance as well as all repairs. Some just keep it on an Excel program. I tell people that whatever system they use should be organized, consistent and provide for continuity.

Q. What trends do you see in the "Mechanics World?"

A. Unfortunately, mechanics and technicians don't set the trends, we adjust to them. I've watched mowing equipment on a 17 year cycle. It went from heavy to light and now it is reversing. Mechanics/technicians are getting a lot smarter. They are networking more. Turftech is a good system. Information is key. Nobody knows everything. Call your peers and your distributors. If they don't have answers, call the factory. Someone at the factory will have the answer.

Q. What about magnetic bed knives?

A. I think they are a good thing on hand mowers. They've come out with new magnets that work a lot better. I wouldn't go to the expense of retrofitting.

Q. Do you recommend training/seminars for course technicians?

A. Call me. (Laughs.) Most equipment manufacturers will provide videos with their equipment for the operators.

They also have classes for technicians at the dealer and the factory that you can check into.

Q. How are salaries trending?

A. They are trending up, but it is a slow process. It is why mechanics are becoming technicians. The same reason greenskeepers became superintendents.

Q. What is your opinion on leasing versus purchasing?

A. You can't modify leased equipment and I like to modify my equipment. We took a Series 5 cutting head. One side cuts 3/8ths an inch. The other side we've modified to cut 3/4ths an inch, but it's still square. If you modify leased, you must unmodify it when it goes back.

Q. As a mechanic, how often do you go out on the course?

A. Every day. Check the mowers. Look at the grass. If you're on the course every day, the operators get used to you coming around. They will start telling or showing you the problems they are having. Every piece of equipment is yours. Take ownership. It's like a totem pole. The technician is on the bottom, but he holds everybody up. That's your job. You can't have a golf club without a mechanic.

