

# The Superintendent's Unseen Contributions

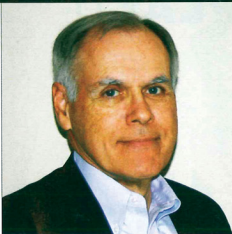
## Georgia Golf Environmental Foundation Releases Funds for Turf Research

A golfer hits a shot from 153 yards out, it climbs into the air, lands six feet from the hole and rolls to within three feet for birdie. Then the player makes a mistake. No, it is not that he missed the putt, which he did. It is not that he placed a 3 on his scorecard instead of a 4, which he didn't. His mistake was in not repairing the ball mark in his excitement and enthusiasm of the great shot. The result is an imperfection in the green that may take longer than a week to heal. If he repaired it, the imperfection wouldn't have been so noticeable and would have healed in much less time. The things that are seen on a golf course give it the beauty and enjoyment that golfers desire. However, the things that are often unseen are those that the golf course superintendent usually finds most difficult to manage and attend to.

Generally, the golf course superintendent is the unknown, unseen part of the management team. Not invisible but just unseen. Frankly, most of them want to keep it that way. In a way, they are like baseball umpires. A major league umpire once said, "Our job is to stay out of the way and keep the fan's attention on the game; if they focus on us, we haven't done our job." The superintendent is like that also. If golfers enjoy the game and the course, then the superintendent is not often seen or even thought of.

The Georgia Golf Course Superintendents' Association (GGCSA) is made up of members from around the state. As a professional organization, they act in the interests of the golf clubs and courses they represent, however few people outside the golf industry are aware of their efforts.

The GGCSA recognized several years ago that its members needed to be on the "cutting edge" of their profession. Changes in turf management and new research required that members be continuously



informed and educated in their discipline. Therefore, the Association created the Georgia Golf Environmental Foundation (GGEF) with a mission to promote education and research in turfgrass improvement and management.

It is funded by contributions from members and from firms and organizations interested in better turf management practices and in the promotion of research in the area. The Foundation is guided by a Board of Trustees made up of GGCSA members and interested parties selected by the GGCSA membership. It is a little known and unseen part of the Association.

Currently, the GGEF is undertaking its largest funding for a research project. The project is limited to a problem that is significant in turfgrass management yet, again, is often unseen: thatch. Thatch has a technical definition that most agronomists and turf management experts use. However, for the layperson, thatch is a layer of grass lying between the green stems and the ground. Homeowners often ignore it because it decays and adds nutrients to the soil. Also, homeowners may use a grass-catching lawnmower to remove the clippings from the lawn in order to reduce thatch. However, if there is a buildup of thatch without appropriate decay, it can

reduce the effectiveness of fertilizing, reduce the amount of water penetration into the soil and root system resulting in less resistance to drought, increase sensitivity to temperature and moisture extremes, and interfere with the performance of pesticides, thereby making the grass more susceptible to insect and disease problems. Since all of the characteristics of a lawn are associated with a golf course, thatch and its effects can occur there as well.

Agronomists at the University of Georgia submitted a proposal to investigate a new means of removing thatch from turfgrasses. The research is a seminal effort in that no other researchers have attempted this line of study. It involves the use of fungi in the degradation of the layer of dead stems and other debris. The Foundation's Board believes the research will be objective, novel and may produce results that will be of great benefit to golf course turf management in Georgia. The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America was a co-sponsor of the project.

Few outside the GGCSA know the work of the Foundation and its members. However, a *USA Today* editorial once made this observation: "Can you name the CEO of Starbucks, one of the few U.S. companies that has mastered the art of growing without losing quality? Can you name the CEO of Southwest Airlines, the only major airline to achieve profitability in the face of economic disaster? Most can't. Don't believe in legends and superstars, follow a leader who's not interested in seeing his or her picture on the cover of a magazine." Perhaps we can't name our golf course superintendent and, perhaps, though visible, he goes unseen by most of us. However, given the observation above, perhaps being unseen is the best place to be. ☺

*Ray Dillon, Ph.D. (pictured), is a member of the GGCF Board and Buck Workman, CGCS, is the golf course superintendent at Catechee Golf Club in Hartwell.*