

LEISURE VILLAGE ASSOCIATION

LANDSCAPE REVIEW

by Mike Udem, Landscape Superintendent

The pruning cycle has fallen from once every three months to approximately once every five months. This is a history of how we got there and how we will recover.

Time line of events effecting the Landscape Department past and present. To best explain the metamorphoses of the current state of the Landscape Department let us start back at the summer of 2015. In the summer of 2015 we were sure we would be losing the Landscape Department. At that time, we were understaffed because of workers comp claims. People were working on restrictions or not at all because of their claims. Since we knew we would be losing the Landscape Department we did not replace any workers that left. At that time Villages were being pruned approximately four times a year. It is my opinion that many of the crews try to outdo each other by finishing their Villages quicker. The problem with this is that they left a lot of work undone like removing and replacing dead shrubs in order to accomplish this end. This left a lot of deferred maintenance for the new replacement crew.

This brings us to October 30, 2015, when we laid off the Landscape Department. For over two weeks we ran the Landscape Department with nine people plus workers from Resident Services until we began receiving new workers. You must remember new workers must be trained. We cannot train 35 new workers at once. When the department was laid off a few key people were kept for training purposes. Even so, these people cannot train people and maintain a property that requires a crew of 48. Since November 2015 we have been acquiring and training persons three to five at a time and absorbing them into the crew. Truth is we were behind schedule before we even started with the new crew.

We have devised a solution to this challenge. In normal operations we would be preparing for our annual applications of weed grass herbicide in August and September. This would again result in brown areas of dead weed grasses. We have decided on a different strategy. Last year we performed a concentrated effort to control Kikuyu grass. We feel we did a sufficient enough job to allow us to substitute this year's application and apply a plant growth regulator (PGR) to the turf instead. What this will do is reduce our mowing frequency from every week to every other week as we do in the winter months. This will allow us to

apply twice as much manpower to pruning than we are presently able. In the past we have traditionally used the winter months to catch up on pruning and special projects. It is in the summer months that we fall behind. This year we are way behind because of a lack of trained manpower during these critical summer months. With the use of a PGR applied August 15 to 18 we will be able to return to our winter mowing schedule immediately and maintain that schedule until next March.

If we continue to use a PGR through the summer we can continue on a mowing schedule of every other week. This will allow us to stay on schedule throughout the year. A similar program was experimented with in the 90's. It proved effective for labor savings but was abandoned because of the diversity of grass species in the turf. Let me explain that. PGRs work differently on different grass species. In the 90's the turf in Leisure Village was very different than today. No weed grass control was in place. Many species existed in the turf areas. Different species require different application rates. It was difficult to get a uniform response. Presently that is not the case. For the last ten years we have been on a weed grass prevention program along with an annual over seed program. This has resulted in a stand of turf that is basically 95% perennial rye grass. A PGR program can be implemented that will be very effective.

In addition this will allow us to use the new staff that we have been grooming for the past eight months. Suggestions have been made that we hire a new contractor or extra workers. The problem with this is that any additional crews will face the same challenges that we have just overcome. New crews will not know their way around the Villages and they will not be familiar with our red stake policies. Home owners remove red stakes, some plants are grandfathered in, and the directory for red staked houses is not always up to date.

We are very close to turning the corner to the type of landscaping we are used to. It is my professional opinion that with patience and the implementation of a PGR program in the summer we will surpass the quality of the landscaping of the past.

Attachment

Village Voice

October 2016