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# GOLF COURSE<sup>®</sup> INDUSTRY

Jason Stewart

A man with a grey beard and mustache, wearing a blue polo shirt with horizontal stripes, a blue cap with sunglasses on top, and a watch on his left wrist. He is standing on a green golf course with a white building in the background. The text 'Dream job' is overlaid on the image.

# Dream job

What does it take to land the job you really want? Or the first job, for that matter? We asked around and got some darn good advice.

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## IN THE TURF NEIGHBORHOOD

**A** horrible or good neighbor? I quietly ask myself this question every time I pass a northeast Ohio golf course. *Golf Course Industry* is based in the northeast quadrant of the state, a once-industrial hotbed that includes Cleveland, Akron, Youngstown, Canton, and dozens of other fascinating cities and communities. The golf in our region is splendid.

Family-owned courses still dot the terrain, which becomes desktop flat west of Cleveland. Municipalities continue to boost the game by offering residents quality products at affordable rates. Most of the private clubs remaining in the region — recessions aren't kind to northeast Ohio — are venerable. **Ross, Flynn, Colt, Alison, Thompson and Tillinghast** designed courses for industrialists and entrepreneurs. Ditto for **Jones, Dye and Fazio**.

Playing golf in northeast Ohio isn't exorbitantly expensive or time-consuming. I can leave our office at any moment, head 30 minutes east, west or south (Lake Erie makes it implausible to drive north), and find somewhere to walk nine in less than two hours for under \$25. We live in a "buyer's" golf market.

I strategically curtail personal and work travel from May until October, because I detest missing significant stretches of the prime golf season. I become somewhat despondent in early November when frost emerges and daylight dwindles. I begin to make mental notes of the courses I failed to patronize the previous six months.

Winter isn't what it used to be in northeast Ohio. I have lived in the region for a decade. Many of those years I have squeezed in a round during all 12 months. Bonus golf can be the best golf.

The real standouts in northeast Ohio are the people responsible for maintaining the region's courses. Thousands of present and past superintendents were either born or developed in northeast Ohio. Some have moved to warmer places. Those who stick around often experience long and fulfilling careers. Loyalty seems to flow in both directions in northeast Ohio. It isn't like that everywhere.

Unfortunately, we don't know as many superintendents working in the neighborhood as we should. Our *Golf Course Industry* team strives to avoid playing geographic favorites. We wouldn't be a viable or effective national and international content provider if we told stories originating from the same region. Does that make us bad turf neighbors?

Every year, I tell myself I'm going to schedule one or two local superintendent visits per month. Every year, I fail to hit that target. Similar to the region's sports teams, it's a maybe-next-year mentality.

I realized my lack of local connections while editing **Jacob Hansen's** profile of the relationship between current Northern Ohio GCSA members and the 100-year-old chapter (page 24). Jacob, our outstanding 2023 summer intern, recently launched his sports writing career at the *Chagrin Valley Times* in suburban Cleveland.

The NOGCSA is the planet's first formal superintendent chapter. The camaraderie and idea exchange continually elevating the industry stems from a 1923 meeting between **Col. John Morley** and his peers at Youngstown Country Club. The challenges and expectations facing today's superintendents are stark contrasts to what Col. Morley and his peers experienced in 1923. But the impetus behind a local chapter remains the same: support and lift your peers any way possible.

Our editors and writers navigate a murky space. We don't work on golf courses (anymore) and we're not chapter members, yet our storytelling duties make us an extension of the industry. We care deeply about the people who make golf the greatest game of all.

There's no right or wrong answer to the question at the start of the column. I feel conflicted when I pass or play a northeast Ohio course where I don't personally know the superintendent. As somebody who tries to play 27 holes per week, including nine holes almost every Wednesday at Bob-O-Link Golf Course on Cleveland's far West Side as part of the Hooligans Golf League, I feel good about financially supporting the people who produce meaningful recreation and protect greenspace in an urbanized region.

Maybe next year, when the NOGCSA turns 101, I'll develop into a better industry neighbor and find hands-on ways to make Col. Morley proud. **GCI**



*Guy Cipriano*  
**Guy Cipriano**  
 Editor-in-Chief  
 gcipriano@gie.net

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GIE Media, Inc.  
 5811 Canal Road  
 Valley View, Ohio 44125  
 Phone: 800-456-0707  
 Fax: 216-525-0515

**PUBLISHER**

**Dave Szy**  
 dszy@gie.net

**EDITORIAL**

**Guy Cipriano**  
 Editor-in-Chief gcipriano@gie.net

**Matt LaWell**  
 Managing Editor mlawell@gie.net

**Terry Buchen**  
 Senior Contributing Technical Editor

**GRAPHICS / PRODUCTION**

**Jim Blayne**  
 Creative Director

**Kaitlin Sellers**  
 Advertising Production Coordinator

**SALES**

**Russell Warner**  
 National Sales Manager  
 rwarnar@gie.net • 216-393-0293

**Jimmy Clark**  
 Account Representative  
 jclark@gie.net • 216-393-0220

**CORPORATE**

**Richard Foster**  
 Chairman

**Chris Foster**  
 President and CEO

**Dan Moreland**  
 Publisher Emeritus

**James R. Keefe**  
 Executive Vice President

**Kelly Antal**  
 Controller

**Christina Warner**  
 Audience Development Director

**Michelle Wisniewski**  
 Production Manager

**Maria Miller**  
 Director, Conferences and Events

**Irene Sweeney**  
 Marketing Director

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## NOT A POSTCARD DAY IN PALM SPRINGS

By Judd Spicer

In the waning days of summer, Hurricane Hilary — ultimately downgraded to Tropical Storm Hilary — pounded the golf-centric Coachella Valley with rainfall totals surpassed on just four other occasions since record-keeping began in the City of Palm Springs in 1893.

On an annual basis, the city averages 4.61 inches of rain. On Sunday, Aug. 20, 2023? According to *The Desert Sun*, nearly 20 percent of that annual rainfall total dropped on the city in an hour's time.

All told, Tropical Storm Hilary poured 3.18 inches of rain over Palm Springs in one day. Among the other eight desert cities encompassing the Coachella Valley region, the City of Palm Desert received a reported 3.82 inches, the City of Desert Hot Springs 3.55, and the City of La Quinta 3.24.

In concert with the storm's subsequent late afternoon and evening wind gusts reaching nearly 60 miles per hour as the rainfall began to quell, Hilary's damage tally, according to Riverside County and reported further by the *Sun*, is estimated at more than \$126 million, with the majority of damage and ensuing costs occurring in the Coachella Valley.

A mere 11 days following Hilary, a thunderstorm of the monsoonal variety crashed the valley's east-end rural communities to the tune of 3 more inches of rain, with portions of the region's more densely populated areas receiving approximately a quarter inch to an inch of soak, coupled with earnest dust storms.

While Riverside County's estimates categorize road/bridge damage and individual assistance efforts as sizable

portions of the costs, the valley's 121 golf courses were not spared. Dozens of courses suffered a ranging degree of damage, with some losing but a few trees and others the recipient of ails more severe.

### Tee up the rally

Though the reported rainfall totals proved aberrant, desert golf course operators, agronomists and superintendents are no strangers to weather extremes.

Nor are they wont to play the victim. Nor are they ill-prepared for the powers of Mother Nature.

Thunderbird Country Club in Rancho Mirage presents the layout and topography of having four holes play through the Whitewater Wash, with another hole susceptible to run-off from the highway adjacent.

"You always know something like this could happen, so you've got to be prepared for it," Thunderbird superintendent **Ben Vann** says. "But you can never quite be prepared for the magnitude. Over this past winter, we had rain events happen four times, but we cleaned those up within a week's time, no problem. Yet this, with Hilary, it was like taking all four of those winter storms and dumping it into one storm."

In recent years, Thunderbird — which opened in 1951 as the first 18-hole course in the Coachella Valley — enjoyed a full renovation project with architect **Tripp Davis**. The work, according to Vann, included the benefits of myriad contingency conversations with the designer, along with the added asset of having an engineer assessing water flow and damage mitigation. Between forethought and aftermath, Vann found his property well-armed for the inclement.

"I was most concerned about the amount of water, so I drained all of our lakes pre-storm so the water had a place to go, and the lakes wouldn't overflow and flood anything," Vann adds. "And even though we ended up with a lot more rain than I expected, we still came out all right."

Having the right tools on-hand also

provided a proactive push.

“Pre-storm, my GM came up to me and asked if we should get a bulldozer in here, order one,” Vann says. “I told him that, from my time working on the East Coast in South Carolina, I’ve seen this a bunch of times, that these storms can veer

away and we’re gonna end up wasting our money. But I ended up ordering the bulldozer before the storm, and it turned out to be one of the best things we could do. The storm was on a Sunday, and the equipment showed up the following Tuesday, so we just jumped right into the cleanup.”

From damage derived both discovery and potential benefit.

“The biggest part was the amount of material deposited in the wash, the amount of sand,” Vann says. “But this runoff material is actually beautiful. There are some rocks in it, but it’s some of the nicest material that I’ve seen come down the wash. And that actually helped us, in that we can use it to put some interesting shapes into the wash, to make the bottom channel slightly deeper to accept more water and hopefully hold more mud.”

Between timing and teamwork, valley properties galvanized around the cleanup.

PGA WEST in La Quinta, with its nine-course, public and private spread, is known as “The Western Home of Golf in America.” In concert with serving as host of the PGA Tour’s annual American Express, the properties are involved with a course-by-course improvement and restoration project. This summer, PGA WEST’s improvement work focused on the Mountain and Dunes courses.

“We just rebuilt the greens over there (this past summer), but, short of one of the putting greens, they came out with no damage from the storm,” PGA WEST director of agronomy **Brian Sullivan** said in late September. “We did intend to reopen them earlier, but now what we’re



In hindsight, Sullivan reflects upon the sagacious decision to not “blowing bubbles” on his storm prep.

“Fortunately, there’s some specialty drainage equipment,” he says. “Over at the Mountain and Dunes, there’s a 30-foot pump we call Big Red, and there are three of ‘em. We looked at those a few months ago and said, ‘Boy, I bet somebody needed those.’ In advance of Hilary, we decided on the spot — ‘Let’s get those ready.’ And that was a fortuitous choice. We’ve been using them ever since the storm.”

Along with championing a community rally and cleanup teamwork from both the City of La Quinta and a neighboring club, Sullivan says the most revealing, if not impactful, result of a palpable weather event may be in learning which of your horses are true thoroughbreds.

“One of the positives is that when somebody has to save the barn, you find out who the firefighters are,” the agronomist analogizes. “Internally, we found out who some of the people are that you really wanna go to battle with. That was one of the most valuable lessons of all. These people are proud of what they’ve done, and when we reopen on November 1, we’ll have a staff who knows they did their very best in spite of some odds against us. And, to me, that’s the fun part.”

At nearby SilverRock Resort in La Quinta, storm damage included ample mud on carts path (and some path damage), along with standing water on fairways and paths. Additionally, most of the bunkers were either washed out or water-filled, while Hilary downed 30

doing is repairing any damage to bunkers and cart paths. Instead of reopening and then closing (for overseed) in a few weeks’ time, we decided to go to overseed earlier and then actually open it earlier. We’re trying to make it a better situation for ourselves.”

trees. The property’s lauded Santa Rosa Mountain setting proves both beauty and beast.

“Our biggest challenge at SilverRock is the watershed we get off the mountains, which borders much of the property,” SilverRock general manager **Randy Duncan** says. “We’ve got large native areas designed to hold a lot of that water — which they did. But water coming off the mountain in such huge amounts, it just can’t accommodate that much.”

Akin to PGA WEST, an *e pluribus unum* approach at SilverRock proved paramount to recovery.

“Our crew worked really, really hard,” Duncan says. “It was all hands on deck, with guys from outside services helping the maintenance crew. We literally had everybody out there to get the course back to playability — which we did. We all have a sense of pride in this place. We all want what’s best for SilverRock. And if that means getting outside of your normal job, that’s what it means. And that commitment doesn’t surprise me, but I still have so much gratitude for that.”

With teamwork came the further tenet of malleability. SilverRock advanced its overseeding date by two weeks, and Duncan believes the nimble timing may derive actual benefits.

“We’re about eight or nine days removed, we’ve had ideal weather and great germination” Duncan said at the close of September. “And we’re excited about the fall and upcoming peak season. I think the course is going to play better than ever. So far, knock on wood, this is one of the best overseeds I can remember and I’m hoping that’s the silver lining in all of this.”

Of course, whatever the forecast, whatever the rally, whatever the season, whatever the belief system, to borrow the Yiddish adage: “Man plans, and God laughs.”

It’s important that superintendents can as well.

“I’m a golf course superintendent; we worry 24 hours a day,” Sullivan says. “That’s why they pay us.”

*Judd Spicer is a Palm Desert, California-based writer and senior Golf Course Industry contributor.*

## Tartan Talks 88

Greens are the most scrutinized and intricate course features in the industry. Renovating them requires tremendous coordination, communication and execution.

**Drew Rogers** and **Mike Gogel** are comfortable with the extensive process required to renovate greens, and they shared some of the methodology and philosophy behind greens-focused projects on the *Tartan Talks* podcast.

Rogers, who works primarily in the Midwest and South Florida, says agronomic conditions and expectations are often the impetus for a greens renovation. Once he engages with a club, green speeds are a frequent topic during renovation conversations.

"The expectations of members and players have constantly been climb-

ing so green speeds are forcing our hand in a lot of scenarios, whether it's the grasses on the greens or the slopes that comprise the greens," he says. "That gets folded into how we treat where we are going to go in the future."

The Arizona-based Gogel also works in warm- and cool-season environments. He compares constructing a green to building a house, with conditioning demands often determining how much of the surface can be used.

"If I go out and build a 5,000-square-foot house and have marble tile, flat-screen TVs and amazing sound systems, and I have to live in the garage, what's the point?" Gogel says. "I pay to build it, I pay to maintain it, but

I don't use it. Same thing as a green."

Download the podcast on the Superintendent Radio Network page of popular distribution platforms for more greens renovation insight from Rogers and Gogel.



## COURSE NEWS

South Seas on Captiva Island along Florida's Gulf Coast is preparing to debut *The Clutch*, a 12-hole short course designed by **Beau Welling** that will open for play later this year. The new golf offering is part of the continued rebuilding process at South Seas following Hurricane Ian. The Clutch is named after a turtle's nest and seeks to foster a love of the game in all ages and skill levels. Work was overseen by Welling and senior design associate **Chase Webb**. Clarke Construction Group served as the course builder. ... Architect **Bill Bergin** and Duinick Golf are nearing completion of an extensive restoration at Valdosta (Georgia) Country Club. Bergin and his team replaced

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greens, fairways, bunkers, cart paths and the irrigation system on the 18-hole championship course. They were also responsible for creating a six-hole short course, practice facility and short-game area. ... Areté Collective unveiled a partnership with **David McLay-Kidd** to build the architect's first course in the southern United States. The course will be part of Loroloma, a private Hill Country community within the 2,200-acre Thomas Ranch master plan debuting outside of Austin, Texas. The course is scheduled to be completed in late 2024 for select play, with a full opening by spring 2025. ... Pawleys Plantation Golf & Country Club in Pawleys Island, South Carolina, reopened after a greens and bunkers restoration project. **Troy Vincent** of Nicklaus Design Group led the project for Founders Group International, the course's parent company. Work included restoring green complexes to their original specifications and installing TifEagle Bermudagrass on the surfaces, installing Tahoma 31 Bermudagrass on collars, and modifying multiple fairway bunkers. ... The Estates Course at the Arizona Biltmore Golf Club is in the final stages of grow-in and is scheduled to open for daily-fee and member play this month. Designed by the Lehman Design Group and Scottsdale resident **Tom Lehman**, the new Estates Course features recontoured fairways, enhanced tee boxes and green complexes, and new sand and grass bunkers. ... Audubon International welcomed Black Desert Resort, a new golf course development in Ivins, Utah, as a registered member of the Audubon International Signature Sanctuary Program. Black Desert will work closely with Audubon International's team of environmental specialists to formulate a plan to earn property-wide designation as a Platinum Certified Signature Sanctuary, starting with its 19-hole championship golf course. ... The Country Club, in Brookline, Massachusetts, was selected as the host site of four upcoming USGA championships, including the 2038 U.S. Open and 2045 U.S. Women's Open. ... The **Tom Doak**-designed North Course at Te Arai Links has opened, bringing the highly regarded New Zealand resort to 36 holes.

## INDUSTRY BUZZ

Western Kentucky University student **Elliott Pope** is the repeat winner of the Mendenhall Award of \$6,000 in the 2023 Scholars Competition offered through the GCSAA. Pope has worked on the

crew at Columbia Country Club in Columbia, South Carolina, and The Club at Olde Stone in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and completed internships at The Tree Farm in Aiken, South Carolina, and Maidstone Club in East Hampton, New York. ... FMC is preparing to launch Durentis, a proprietary insecticide focused on season-long protection from above- and below-ground chewing pests, including all 13 species of grubs

and fall armyworms. ... Envu named **John Price** as head of U.S. Turf & Ornamentals. Price joined Envu from SBM Life Science, where he served as the North American head of marketing and innovation. ... The ASGCA announced executive director **Chad Ritterbusch** plans to retire from the position he has held since 2004. Ritterbusch will stay in his current role until a successor begins in summer or fall 2024.




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# Heather Schapals

SEASCAPE GOLF COURSE

**H**eather Schapals knows how to get the most out of the resources at her disposal. Schapals is the superintendent at Seascape Golf Course, a daily-fee club in Aptos, California, along Monterey Bay, roughly 40 miles north of Pebble Beach and 80 miles south of San Francisco.

She assumed her post at the start of the 2023 season and oversees a crew of 10, including herself and her husband **Michael**, who serves as her mechanic. Michael's predecessor departed Seascape around the time the previous superintendent left.

"It's a huge help to have him here with me, because I can ask him to do anything," Schapals says. "He's been involved (in the golf industry) longer than I have."

A Wisconsin native and a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Schapals worked at several clubs in the Midwest before heading west in 2017. Her last stop prior to coming to Seascape was Chambers Bay, where she worked the U.S. Women's Amateur last year. She was also part of the crew of female volunteers that worked the recent U.S. Women's Open at Pebble Beach and has worked the PGA Tour's BMW Championship on two occasions earlier in her career.

Appearing on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast with host **Rick Woelfel**, Schapals talked about working with a small crew and the importance of setting priorities.

"There are so many things that are important that you want to put at the top of the list, but it changes," she says. "I set a schedule for the week of what I hope I can get accomplished with the crew and we just see what we can get done each day, depending on play, depending on if somebody calls in sick. It's a balancing act. It changes every day."

Any superintendent has a list of tasks they would like to perform but can't get to because of staffing and employee-hour issues. Schapals is no exception.

"I wanted to get sand in the bunkers here that haven't had it for years," she says. "That project has been slow, because at the same time, my booster pump went out. So, we've had problems with watering and leaks. There are just so many things. You must take it one day at a time and not let it get to you too much when you can't quite get to everything. I can't

do it all, so we just do the best that we can."

Schapals cites the importance of maintaining regular communication with general manager **Gary Nelson**, director of golf **Brant Wilson**, the golf staff and the club's ownership. She takes pride in and appreciates those relationships.

"That takes a little bit of the stress off me," she says. "I have to say I probably put most of that stress on myself when we can't get to everything I hoped."

Schapals concedes she sometimes must adjust the work schedule because of staffing issues.

"I can't get the bunkers raked every day," she says. "That's something that's a little unusual to me. We rely on our golfing members to fill their own divots because I can't get out there with divot mix in the fairways. We run a little short on some of those things that would be good to do."

Even with her broad range of responsibilities, Schapals spends time on the golf course alongside her crew.

"I try to make sure that I'm working with them," she says. "That's always huge. I try to make sure that I take time to talk to all of them. To let them know that I'm there if they have a question."

"I want to make sure that any thoughts that they have on the job, on the work they're doing out there, if they see something they could do differently that they think would be better, I'm open to those options. Just making sure they don't feel like they're underappreciated." **GCI**



There are just so many things. You must take it one day at a time and not let it get to you too much when you can't quite get to everything."



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# COMMUNICATION SHOULD BE YOUR BEST FRIEND

Superintendents are undoubtedly some of the smartest folks in the golf business — who else could carry on a conversation that swings wildly from agronomics to equipment depreciation schedules to balanced budgets to federal labor laws? They're also among the most accomplished problem solvers, passionate and selfless members of any course's management team. But none of that makes them great communicators, and that's unfortunate. In fact, it's worse than that — it's career threatening.

We recently heard the story of a young Texas superintendent who was doing a great job nurturing greens and fairways at a daily-fee course where extreme weather conditions and 60,000 rounds a year are the norm. A small but supportive membership was eager to praise his efforts whenever they saw him, which quickly became less and less. And when he did make an appearance on the course, a conversation seemed the last thing he was interested in. He lasted a little more than a year, replaced by a gregarious Texan who is happy to explain why greens were slow to come around this past summer and why his Texas A&M Aggies are the team to beat on any given Saturday.

More than any piece of technologically advanced equipment, a fleet of hardworking utility vehicles or even a loyal black lab, communication when practiced consistently and sincerely can be a superintendent's best friend. **George Frye**, the former director of golf maintenance at Kiawah Island Golf Resort, once wrote: "Good communication builds trust and respect from the top down and the bottom up" and that "the best way for superintendents to build professionalism and awareness is by keeping golfers, members, owners and staff informed." He called communications "the best public relations tool you can employ."

Here are three ways that some of the best superintendents employ with their own management as well as golfers to improve their reputations as communicators and become one of their course's best ambassadors.

## PREPARE YOUR PLAN

Make the agronomic plan your North Star — when it comes to improving your communications effectiveness. Having a plan you are proud to communicate tells everyone — including would-be critics — that you have command of your responsibilities. Your agronomic plan should address the following components:

- **Staffing plan and organization of management** — Everyone's labor challenges are a little different but similar in the respect that superintendents should be consistent, transparent and equitable when designing and implementing their staffing and compensation plans.
- **Cultural practices** — Show how you intend to approach the routine care and upkeep of the course.
- **Specialty components** — The plan should address your approach to fertility, irrigation needs and requirements, chemicals and pesticides, arboreal philosophy and your strategy for a balance of trees, shade and healthy turf.

*Tip: A liberal use of photographs and diagrams brings your plan to life for experienced and unsophisticated stakeholders.*

## SCHEDULE "FIELD DAYS"

Provide guided tours of your maintenance operations facility and the course with particular

focus on improvement projects and historically problematic areas. Your three objectives:

- **Getting acquainted**
- **Demonstrating your knowledge**
- **Answering questions**

*Tip: Set aside one day each quarter to teach golfers about the course and your seasonal priorities for turf management.*

## MAKE IT PERSONAL

Eight of 10 lost wallets are returned when they have a family photo within them. When the opportunity presents itself, don't be shy about telling your golfers about yourself and your family. You probably have more in common than you think.

- **Tell them your credentials** — Golfers want to know that you are well-educated and experienced.
- **Brag on your teammates** — Let golfers know that you're supported by a great team and that it's important to you that they have opportunities to advance their careers.
- **Share little-known facts about your course** — Water and soil quality are examples, as are special critters that call your course home.
- **Host Scouts and youth groups** — Children will go home and tell their parents about the smart person they met — they might even be more willing to cut the grass!

Like many other aspects of golf course maintenance, communication is a delicate blend of art and science. It may not come as naturally as other parts of the job, but it's one that can be easily improved. It's worth the effort. **GCI**



**HENRY DELOZIER** is a partner at GGA Partners, trusted advisors and thought leaders. He is currently Chairman of the Board of Directors of Audubon International.

# GOAL

How can you land ▶  
a top, dream, or  
destination job?  
Jason Stewart  
of Brickyard  
Crossing at  
Indianapolis  
Motor Speedway  
shares some  
perspective.



# any job

By Matt LaWell

What does it take to land the job you really want? Or the first job, for that matter? We asked around and got some darn good advice.

There are no hard and fast rules that apply to every job application. Every posting will receive loads of qualified applicants — and plenty of unqualified applicants, too — and a handful will rise to the top. But crafty cover letters and packed résumés don't always translate to interview success. And good luck trying to translate

what every board member really wants.

What does it take to land that top job? We hit the road, picked up the phone, and — yes, even in 2023 — turned to social media for the kind of advice, experience, and life stories you wish you had when you were starting out. (And if you *are* just starting out? What perfect timing!) You might want to save this issue for future reference.



## JASON Stewart

*Indianapolis Motor Speedway,  
golf course superintendent*

Nothing has ever gone the way I've planned it. I never planned to stay here for all these years. I didn't know I would marry the person I knew when I was a little kid. We went to school together, we went to college together. She was the best wingman I ever had. And we did not plan for twins.

I'm a golf course guy. I went to school to be a golf course superintendent. I did an internship here and never planned on staying, but I am from Indianapolis, and I love the place, so it just kind of worked out. And my wife, Denise, had no intention of leaving.

**After Roger Penske**

bought the Speedway, he told me, 'You're going to take over all of this. This is what I want, and I want you to do it. You're going to do it and you're going to be great.'

**It's almost like** I just stayed here and kept working. That's a really shitty way of explaining it. There was a lot of hard work. But that's not typical for somebody trying to find a destination job. I started at the very bottom and I just kept going up and outlasted everybody.

**Know exactly what** your strengths are. Knowing who you are and what you have to deliver, that takes some really honest thought and conversation with people who know you. That's important. Because then you know what you can do and you can offer that up.

**Out of school,** I wasn't doing to the level what guys are doing now. I was suit and tie, had my résumé tidy, but that was about it. Now they have their own personal websites, portfolios. You have to one-up all the time.

**Perception, how you** look and dress, your professionalism, that's what gets you a higher salary and bumps you up into the next level. Everybody knows people who do a hell of a job on the golf course, but you can't show up in the wrong clothes to meet with a group of people who see things through a different lens. They don't want to give you their money or time if you can't figure that part out.

**You have to** be relational and you have to be somewhat charismatic. And you can work on that.

**It can be** a lot easier to just dig a hole.

**Your whole life,** you're told what to do. You never have the autonomy to make decisions. But every time you take one step, it gives you the confidence to start making decisions. You have to go on those job interviews to see what they're like. We have these mock interviews with our interns. I bring in HR and another department head, and we sit down. It's a formal setting and these kids are a wreck. They're still in school, they've never had a setting like that. And even our best performers, they're stepping all over their words. You know they've rehearsed these things and they just can't get them out. But that's where they get better.

**Go do it.** Make a mess of it. Force yourself to go in there and do the best job you can. Prepare for it, but be OK with messing up, because you're learning. You either win or you learn.

**By your 10th** time, you should be pretty damn good at it.

**You may or** may not get what you want. You have to be patient, and you have to keep going after it.

**No matter how** much it pays, if you're miserable, it's not worth it.

**Denise was** a coach for teachers and she would tell me to celebrate my accomplishments instead of lingering on my failures. 'Don't see the dead grass.' That was extremely helpful.

**I tell her,** 'I'm not doing this shit anymore. I'm done. Done. I don't care. I'll do something else.' And she says, 'You know it's the last week of August, right? You quit every year.'

**Nothing will ever** happen on your time.



## CHAD Mark

*Muirfield Village Golf Club, director of grounds operation*

**Every day** is an audition. You can't fake it and then all of a sudden put together this great interview.

**I remember when** I interviewed at Kirtland (Country Club). I got that job a long time ago, in 2003, and I didn't do anything fancy. I hand-delivered my résumé because I was nearby and met the GM for a few minutes.

**My philosophy has** always been it's their interview to give. I didn't ask to give a presentation. I didn't try to take over their time. You have to remember to let them dictate where it goes. Some clubs are going to be wowed and a guy will get a job because of it. Other clubs might not hire a guy because they didn't stay within the lines of the interview.

**They might have** a list of 15 questions they wanted to ask you and only get to three of them because you took over the interview, and it may or may not hurt you.

**I didn't really** interview for this job. Quite frankly, I was surprised when everything happened. I worked for a great general manager who helped grow me in this business, **Richard LaRocca**. I was very close with Richard. When **Paul B. (Latshaw)** left here, I was solely focused on Inverness Club. Didn't even cross my mind when I heard Paul left. Richard called and said, 'Call my nephew.' I said, 'Richard, I can't leave here now.' 'You need to call my nephew.' His nephew is **Nicholas LaRocca**,

who's our general manager. I guess Nicholas had seen enough through the years to know he thought I would be successful here and he wanted to bring me here. It just emphasized to me that if you do it right every day, people do notice.

**Boards and committees** often don't understand what we do. There are always going to be some turf questions in an interview for a superintendent position, but our guys are asked more business and staffing and communications questions. Boards know that if they get the right set of candidates, most of those guys can do the turf part. But can they manage probably the biggest budget at the club? Can they hire people in a really tough labor market? Can they retain those people? Can they communicate to their people, the board, committees, and the entire membership? Can they be a team player and work well with others? I think that's what's gotten a lot of our guys opportunities. We've worked on those things here on a daily basis.

**For everyone who** has left, there have also been guys who have interviewed and not gotten the job. We look at that like we look at everything here: What can we do better next time? We take a hard look at every person's interview process and see where it went wrong. If we're lucky, we can get some feedback from the club and see what somebody else did better than them, and then work on correcting that and making them better the next time they interview.

**We go pretty** hard to recruit our interns and to get them to have a great experience that will help them with their career. I'm going to Penn

State next week. We go on the road quite a bit. There were a lot more students when I was in school. We would go on the websites, find what jobs were available and apply. Now, we go recruit them. That's different.

**Some of them** we want to have back as full-time employees. They'll work their way up the system, get to the assistant level, then move on and get their own gig.

**I've been very** fortunate. Throughout my career, I've never had to hire an assistant from outside my organization. I'm a big believer that my toughest recruiting right now is to get those young, hungry graduates out of school through the system. I have several assistants right now. I know who the next superintendent here is.

**We lost our** last assistant last April. It was a great position for him to elevate himself, and I'm not going to keep a guy back from something like that. That's why they work so hard.

**If I was** encouraging a young guy to get into this, I would say either major in or minor in business.

**I minored in** agricultural business. I think that helps me. I took almost as many business classes as I did turf classes. We took everything from accounting, to leadership, to management, to statistics.

**I have a** son who's 19 years old. He's in college and he's thinking about going into this, and I think it's great.

**As superintendents** make more money, clubs are going to expect more from the business side.

**The successful superintendents** I see run it like a business.



**TONY**  
**Kowalski**

*Pete Dye Golf Club, general manager,  
previous golf course superintendent*

**JASON**  
**Hollen**

*Pete Dye Golf Club, golf course  
superintendent*

**TONY:** I got here opening day of 2019. Jumped right in as superintendent.

They didn't even advertise for the job, like a lot of good jobs in this industry. So just staying in contact and networking, that's the message I would send to all the young kids in turf school. Meet as many people as you can, go to conferences, talk with people. I'm a perfect example of that paying off.

It was the end of August '21 when I officially got promoted to GM. I was

kind of doing the job for a month or two before that. We had a hire not work out and the owner was racking his brain for what to do and I decided to perk up and say, 'What about me?' Some days, I've lived to regret that, but most days it's been solid—particularly once I realized (Jason) was moving back to the area and it was a perfect fit.

**JASON:** I was in Florida. Tony gave me a call and told me about his news. I had planned to call him probably 30 days later because I was going to come home and mow fairways for him. That

» » » » **Bottom  
Line**

Keep a clean car. Story I heard from one of our past presidents: Came down to the final two after two interviews. The superintendent walked both out to their vehicles and casually looked around inside. One was super clean. One had trash on the floorboards.

— Tim Kreger, Carolinas GCSA executive director





got the ball rolling.

**TONY:** I went the more traditional route to find somebody. We posted it, and with everything that was going on — he was trying to manage his current job down there and figure out how to move home — you never did see the ad we had out, did you?

**JASON:** No. I had no idea.

**TONY:** We kind of had our minds set with where we were at the time maybe there was someone younger looking to cut their teeth. I didn't think we were going to be able to find somebody with the experience that he could bring to the table.

**JASON:** Serendipity.

**My entry to the golf industry** started with a connection through my mom. She knew somebody who knew the designer of the course at Snowshoe. That's where I started. For introverted people, it's talking and telling people what you want to do. You never know when you hit the right person.

**I was in** the design and construction side of it, and when we made a decision 14 or 15 years ago to return to West Virginia, I was not going to go on the road, so I went to the maintenance side. So I approached it differently than I would have out of turf school. 'I have this experience. Can that get me

in as an assistant?' There were a couple places that decided that was OK. It is who you know. I've been fortunate enough that's what worked out.

**TONY:** I interviewed at a couple places at various levels. Got a phone interview, an on-site interview, had successes and failures in that, and then this worked out.

**The failures gave** me a comfort level for this position. I remember the first interview I got, I never got past the phone interview and I realized how stiff the competition was. I got a chance at Wilmington (Country Club) to be a part of a lot of things but having direct interaction with the people who actually run the club and membership was always a little bit above my pay grade. That was one of my weaknesses.

## Numbers to know

What's more important when you are hiring assistants?

76%

POTENTIAL

24%

EXPERIENCE

@GCI magazine  
Twitter poll, Oct.  
3-4, based on 435  
responses

**What does it take** to get in front of the people who are actually going to make the decision? Each situation is different. Depends on what club you're applying to.

**You walk in** and there are 14 people and they're all looking at you. 'Oh. Time to know what I'm talking about.'

**JASON:** I'm introverted but I've worked through it for many years to be extroverted.

**TONY:** Guys who are successful have to.

**JASON:** Speaking in front of a group of people every morning for the past 15 years? I have to be.

**TONY:** We've been fortunate to harness local talent and local potential. Out of four assistants, how many have turf degrees?

**JASON:** There are two degrees, but they're not really turf degrees.

**TONY:** We're in the business of delivering chances.

**JASON:** When I started at Stonewall, I looked locally at what I had. Somebody gave me a chance with a non-traditional route and I started to do that for others. All of our assistants' experience is golf course experience. It's not from a school. They're well-suited for right here, right now.

**TONY:** All four of them, they maybe don't have the piece of paper to back up their career choice just yet, but they have that intangible hunger to succeed and learn and grow. When you're sifting through a pile of résumés, that's kind of what you're looking for — or at least that's what I've been looking for. Because I can train the right attitude, but I can't train the right attitude into somebody. I've worked with a lot of people who look very good on paper, but they're not worth a shit in the field.

**JASON:** That's very true. Very true.

**TONY:** A degree gets your foot in the door, just like knowing the right person when the job comes up is going to put your name on the list. It gets you a chance, and it's an advantage. But at the end of the day, you have to show up and do it.

**JASON:** In each of the four assistants, there is a spark. They want to do better. They want to work to be appreciated. There are different levels of motivation in each of them, and it's nice to be able to count on it.

**TONY:** Most people are interested in going to the flashy places that are going to fast-track their career. I get it. I did the same thing. I do not blame them. Keeping our focus on finding the right people in the area and showing them what we do, right now, seems to be more of an effective approach.

**JASON:** I think a lot of our success right now does lie in being able to cultivate local talent — and it can come from strange places.

Reach out to someone you respect in that position, ask for help, show vulnerability, and listen to counsel.

— John Reilly, Longboat Key Club

Make sure you ask for the job every chance you get.

— John Cunningham, Grandfather Golf & Country Club, as told to John Reilly

## TYLER Bloom

*Tyler Bloom Consulting, founder and search expert; former golf course superintendent*

Do you have a clear vision of what the next step is? Is it really, authentically clear what that job is? How much does it pay? Where is it located? What kind of resources do they have in place? What kind of culture would you be best suited to thrive in? It doesn't always have to be a top-100 club or a club that's hosting the U.S. Open, but what *really* is your dream job? And can you succinctly communicate what that is? Are you self-aware of your own strengths, weaknesses, behaviors? Of your reputation? Because

that reputation is going to follow you. It's going to leak out. Clubs are putting more emphasis on thorough vetting of their executive leadership team—industry references, back-door references, member references, legal history. Candidates have to get out on paper who they are and what they represent.

**You can find** anything on the internet. Public records, felonies, misdemeanors.

**I try to** give really direct feedback, because they need to hear it. If not, they'll just kind of keep going through the same motions and making up some story about why they didn't get the job. I think it's just better to be direct with people.

**Make sure your** résumé and portfolio are up to date and polished — if you have a portfolio. I'm surprised how many people don't. That's been very disappointing, that people don't take their careers seriously enough to document their successes.

**You have to** do your homework on yourself.



What have you achieved? If you're not confident about why you're great, it shows in an interview.

**A candidate recently** brought his drone for some aerial photos of the course prior to his presentation. That was pretty outside the box. And then he put together a spiral-bound presentation for every committee member, named every committee member, gave them their own custom report. That's the level that should be expected. That was great.

**There are variables** outside your control.

**Sometimes the personality** just doesn't match. No matter how good they could be on paper, there could just be an awkwardness—*anything*—that doesn't fit the club. Some candidates I think are a home-run hire and the club doesn't want anything to do with them, and it's just the personality.

**It's a very** humble community, almost to a fault. It can hurt people in interviews. You don't need to be braggadocious, but you need to be

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able to say, 'Here are my accomplishments in my current role. Here are the obstacles we've overcome.' Some great candidates get in the room and totally undersell themselves.

**Most candidates** are very professional, very cordial. They don't want to talk poorly about somebody else's property, and they're sometimes almost too nice. Every committee wants their golf course to be better. You have to find flaws to the smallest degree, and you need to exploit that and tell them what you will do better. If you go into an interview and say, 'Everything's great here,' you're not getting the job.

**We all deal** with complacency. You drive by things that used to piss you off and get you fired up, and now you let them go. That trickles down to the staff.

**You have to** keep reinventing yourself—in leadership, environmental stewardship, technology, member relations, golf IQ. And it's tough. People want to have lives. You put

in all this hard work and at some point you want to reap the rewards, but it's a grind.

**Five years** at a place, you've probably gotten pretty accustomed to the growing environments, what works, what doesn't work, maybe you've done some projects, and there's no long-range improvement plan. And if your facility isn't improving, maybe that's when you need to start looking for something better for you.

**Superintendents need** to be able to communicate and say when they're getting stretched in too many different areas.

**I had** a club president tell me, 'I don't give a shit if we get a guy that's got three years of superintendent experience or 15. If that guy comes here and does an awesome job, we want other clubs to recruit our guy. It's our problem to pay that guy what he's worth. I'm done with getting incrementally better. I want the guy other clubs come and steal from us.' **GCI**

# Bonus « « « « « guidance

## PHILLIP FISCHER

*Indianapolis Motor Speedway,  
senior grounds manager*

**Résumés are all** opinion-based. There is no right way to do it. Same thing with portfolios. You can overdo it for some people, but maybe not for everybody. You never know. You should take that risk and overdo it, because if that's what you feel like you should do for a job, the people who are going to hire you, if they're impressed by that, you guys are going to probably work together pretty well. I've turned in a portfolio and was told, 'This is too much.' I remember walking out, thinking, 'I'm probably too much for your golf course.' No way I was going to work for that club. And I'm glad I didn't.



Non-retouched client photo: GreenJacket System coming off in the spring!

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# Worthy of the title

Amid its 150th anniversary celebrations, **Royal Montreal Golf Club** preps for its second Presidents Cup.

By **Matt LaWell**

© COURTESY OF ROYAL MONTREAL GOLF CLUB (3)



**E**xactly 150 years have passed since a Quebec octet formed Royal Montreal Golf Club, whacking gutta-perchas at old Fletcher's Field in downtown Montreal not long after Canada became its own country. The game was so new then on this side of the Atlantic that three of the eight were native Scotsmen. Sixty-four years have passed since the club moved — for the second time — to Île Bizard, an island situated about 25 miles west of that original site and home to hundreds of acres of nature. And 26 years have passed since **Greg Greer** arrived on the property, eager for experience and embraced by the place and its people.

Greer was a course technician back then, fresh out of turf school. He learned all about Royal Montreal's 45 holes and the industry under longtime course and property manager **Blake McMaster** and never left. When McMaster retired in 2011, Greer was ready to slide in and take over. The 13 seasons since have been filled with regular maintenance, projects big and small, and more than a few memorable moments. Next summer, Greer and his team will prep Royal Montreal's Blue Course for its second Presidents Cup this century.

You might think that after so many years at the same special spot, Greer has outlasted just about everybody else on the maintenance team.

You would be wrong.

Just among the 56 maintenance team members, Greer cracks *only* the top 15. One of his two assistant superintendents, **Marcio Melo**, arrived in 1993. The head gardener and a current irrigation technician arrived in 1992. A handful of course operators have worked on the grounds since the early 1980s. And the club arborist, **Eric Schattauer**, has tended to its trees since 1979.

"A lot of people have made their living working at Royal Montreal, and they're key cogs to the operation," Greer says. "You can rely on them. They know where they're going, they know what they're doing, and you can always expect them to do good work. We've always put together a good team and everybody cares about what they're doing. That's important when

you have 450 acres of golf course to maintain on a day-to-day basis."

**Royal Montreal** relishes its history as much as the people who have helped to make it great for so long.

Charter members played just six holes after **Alexander Dennistoun** — one of those three founding Scots and the club's first president — laid out the first course near his home in 1873. Why six? Space was a factor, but there were also precious few templates on the continent. The course expanded to nine holes, then 18, before the end of the century. **Queen Victoria** granted the course royal distinction in 1884. There are still just 66 courses around the world with that designation. In 1895, it was among the five charter clubs that formed the Royal Canadian Golf Association.

The next year, urban expansion pushed the course to its Dixie location, where the number of holes doubled to 36 and the club hosted five Canadian Opens. Further urban expansion pushed operations well beyond downtown in 1959 to an island perfect for the game, where **Dick Wilson** and **Joe Lee** designed the original layout, the number of holes increased again to 45, and the Canadian Open rolled in five more times. Only Glen Abbey Golf Course in Oakville, Ontario, designed to be the championship's permanent home, has hosted the event more frequently.

"We want to be as near to tournament conditions as possible day in and day out," Greer says. "We want to be ready to host a tournament at any time. Our members have

truly supported the extracurricular maintenance that's required to get there — aggressive vertical mowing, heavy sandings, you name it — and it's become an accepted part of what we do now. They understand we're doing it to benefit them."

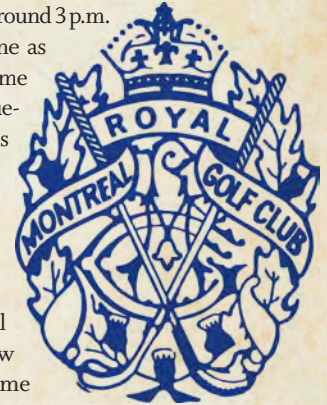
Greer, his assistants, Melo and **Jason Lariviere**, and the largely seasonal team — all but about eight of the 56 maintenance team members work on the course only from mid-April to mid-November because of Montreal's often harsh winters — take a traditional approach: Everybody starts at the same time, normally 5:30 a.m. during the peak of the season, with some part-timers heading out around noon and most remaining till around 3 p.m.

"We get as much done as we possibly can in the time we have," says Greer, a Quebec native who estimates that about 30 percent of the team were also born in the province with many of the rest being first-generation immigrants from Portugal and Poland who are "now Quebecers but just came from other places."

"Our rough areas are extremely vast, so we focus on key play areas early on, and then we're just mowing through the day. There's so much land between holes that our staff are able to keep doing what they're doing while respecting the golfer. We really frontload everything. We try to get as much as done as we can in the morning — mowing greens, fairways, tees, we try to blitz all that as quickly as possible for first tee. The mowers never stop."

Most of those mowers, like most of the Canadian flag, are red.

"We have over 200 pieces of equipment and almost 100 percent of our mowing equipment is Toro, as well as our spray rigs and some of our utility vehicles," Greer says. "We have a lot of 16-foot rough mowers that are extremely productive and



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have been reliable over the years. I wouldn't buy it if it didn't work, and everything we've purchased over the years has proven to be good quality, user-friendly, repair-friendly, and we have zero regrets."

Royal Montreal recently switched to the Toro Reelmaster 5010-H hybrid fairway mower, "and they've been fantastic," Greer says. "Great mowing quality and fuel savings because of the hybrid electric motors on them. All of our walk mowers are all Toro, all our spray rigs are Toro, our bunker rakes are Toro, and nothing's really disappointed me. All of it has proved its value over the years. I don't think the golf course would be the same without some of the high-quality equipment."

Greer understands equipment — and even how to work on some of it. Before he moved up to become course and property manager, he worked at least a little while everywhere on and off the course. "One thing that Blake really focused on was getting our hands dirty on everything," he says. "I used to be somewhat comfortable with basic repairs and maintenance of equipment. But the equipment has come such a long way and so quickly that I would

be lost. If you don't have good equipment technicians, it makes it

very, very difficult. It's changed quite a bit over the years."

Longtime lead equipment technician **Roman Wojciechowski**, who started at Royal Montreal during the 1980s and retired two years ago, maintained everything in the shop for decades. The new equipment technician — "and I say new, he's been here since 2008" Greer says with a laugh — is "an absolute whiz when it comes to electronics and figuring out all the bells and whistles that now come on most of the machines, the fuel-saving functions and features, all the little electronic switches that make the mowers work. They do a great job and there's a lot of equipment. We have two people working in the shop full time and there are times I would love to be able to give them six."

Experience and institutional knowledge help bridge the gap.



**Rees Jones** helped redesign Wilson's and Lee's Blue Course in

advance of the 2007 Presidents Cup, a U.S. win remembered across the Great White North for **Mike Weir's** Sunday win over **Tiger Woods**. That layout remains — full of raised greens bracketed by Wilsonesque bunkers that were excavated and restored throughout the summer — for the 2024 event, which tees off Sept. 24. Countdown clocks are everywhere.

"We want to have the golf course in the best possible shape going into winter just so we can get right into managing turf after what we hope will be a nice, easy, reasonable winter," Greer says"

Because snow might remain on the mix of bentgrass and *Poa annua* into April, some infrastructure is already being built around the grounds. Foundations, grandstands, more than 600,000 square feet of hospitality suites. "We wanted to get as far ahead of it as we could," says **Scott Dickson**, now in his 19th season at the club and his fourth as GM and secretary. "We'll be building till the snow flies."

That has provided Greer and his team with a little extra challenge, as has what Greer describes as a small renovation to the 9-hole course.

Final preparation for the Presidents Cup will resume as soon as weather allows. Dozens of the club's more than 200 annual events will be shuffled outside September or pushed back to 2025. Construction around the first tee, which will accommodate more than 3,500 spectators, will start July 2 and wrap up about two weeks before the event.

"We've had to alter, we've had to pivot. There's a lot of coordinating for 2024," Dickson says. "It's a blitz, but this coming year is even more of a blitz than any other year." **GCI**





# CURATING IMPRESSIONS

*Impression: An idea, feeling, or opinion about something or someone, especially one formed without conscious thought or based on little evidence.*

No matter your title — superintendent, director of agronomy, head of grounds — it might be more accurate to label yourself “chief creator of first impressions.” The work you do is key to what a potential member, old member, guest or casual golfer sees and thinks of where you work. How pretty, clean, manicured and consistent the presentation relies largely on you and your crew.

A good first impression starts well before the golf playing experience and before stepping onto the first tee. Other contributors to these pages will write about the on-course elements that affect someone’s opinion. I want to offer a different, more expansive point of view.

As superintendent, you’re an important member of your club’s management team. (If not, that’s a different issue, one that you should immediately try to fix.) And as management, you should care about

“

Of course, I’m looking at the plantings, the signage and the outward appearance of the club entrance. But nothing is more important than the attitude and demeanor of the first person welcoming me.”

every aspect of club operations, whether your direct report does or not. Always be on the lookout for those elements, large and small, that affect the first impression. Don’t confine your responsibilities to the landscape, trees and turf. Every day, try to take a fresh look at the entire operation, seeing it with the eyes and attitude of a first-time visitor.

It starts the moment you arrive on property. Well, maybe not at 4:30 in the morning, but you know what I mean. Particularly at a private club or any club that claims to offer a “private-club experience,” notice how — if at all — the guest is greeted. It could be the guard at the entrance, someone at the bag drop or the person behind the counter. The first human interaction is key.

Whenever I’m invited to a club, whether to work or play, and there’s someone at the front gate, I watch carefully to see if they already have my name on a list or if they have to call the superintendent or general manager to let me in. If you’re not prepared to welcome me, my enthusiasm

for the day has already dwindled.

No matter who is showing up, for whatever reason, at whatever time of day or night, the arrival experience sets the tone

for the entire day and whether it gets off on the right or wrong foot.

Of course, I’m looking at the plantings, the signage and the outward appearance of the club entrance. But nothing is more important than the attitude and demeanor of the first person welcoming me.

Then, do they know my name by the time I get to the bag drop or clubhouse entrance? Or am I just another car driving up? It’s a personal touch that someone is going to remember.

Where you have me park and how I’m directed there are surprisingly important touch points. Nothing is worse than arriving at a strange club and not knowing if I’m to park over here or there, near the golf shop or the opposite end of the building. Will it be a long shlep with my bag? Is someone with a cart going to drive to my car to pick up me and/or my clubs? Why do you think The Ritz-Carlton and Pebble Beach Resort are so well regarded? Service, hospitality and warm welcomes.

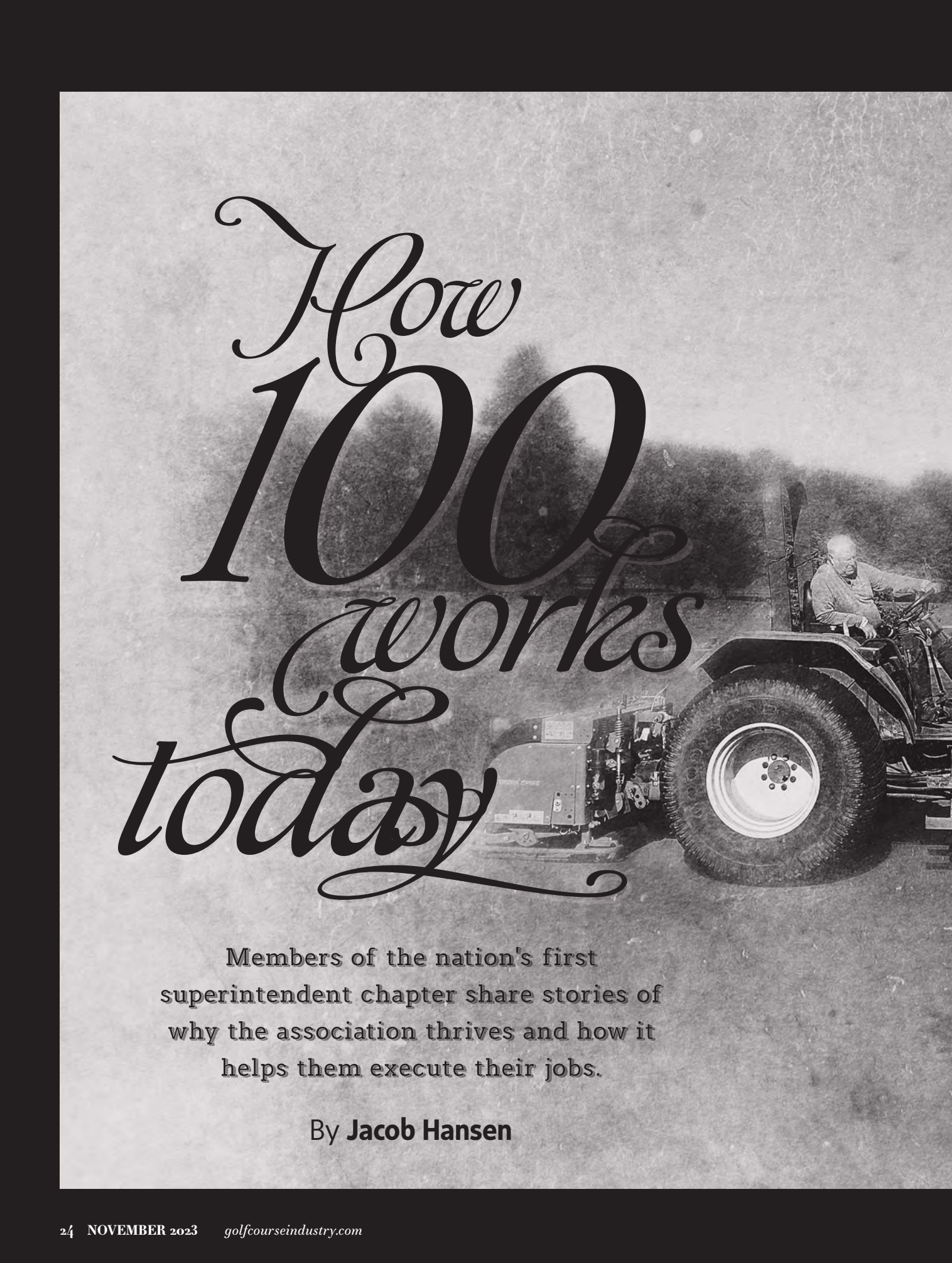
At my next stop — bag drop, golf shop or locker room — is someone ready and able to tell me where I go and who I am to meet? Does someone point me in the right direction or lead me to a specific door? We’re called “visitors” for a reason: We’re visiting, and probably don’t know our way around.

Are the locker rooms well-equipped? Are there guest lockers clearly marked? Or is there another place to store my shoes and stuff? I’ve got

*continues on p. 48*



**TIM MORAGHAN**, principal, ASPIRE Golf (tmoraghan@aspire-golf.com). Follow Tim online at, Golf Course Confidential at [www.aspire-golf.com/or](http://www.aspire-golf.com/or) on Twitter @TimMoraghan.

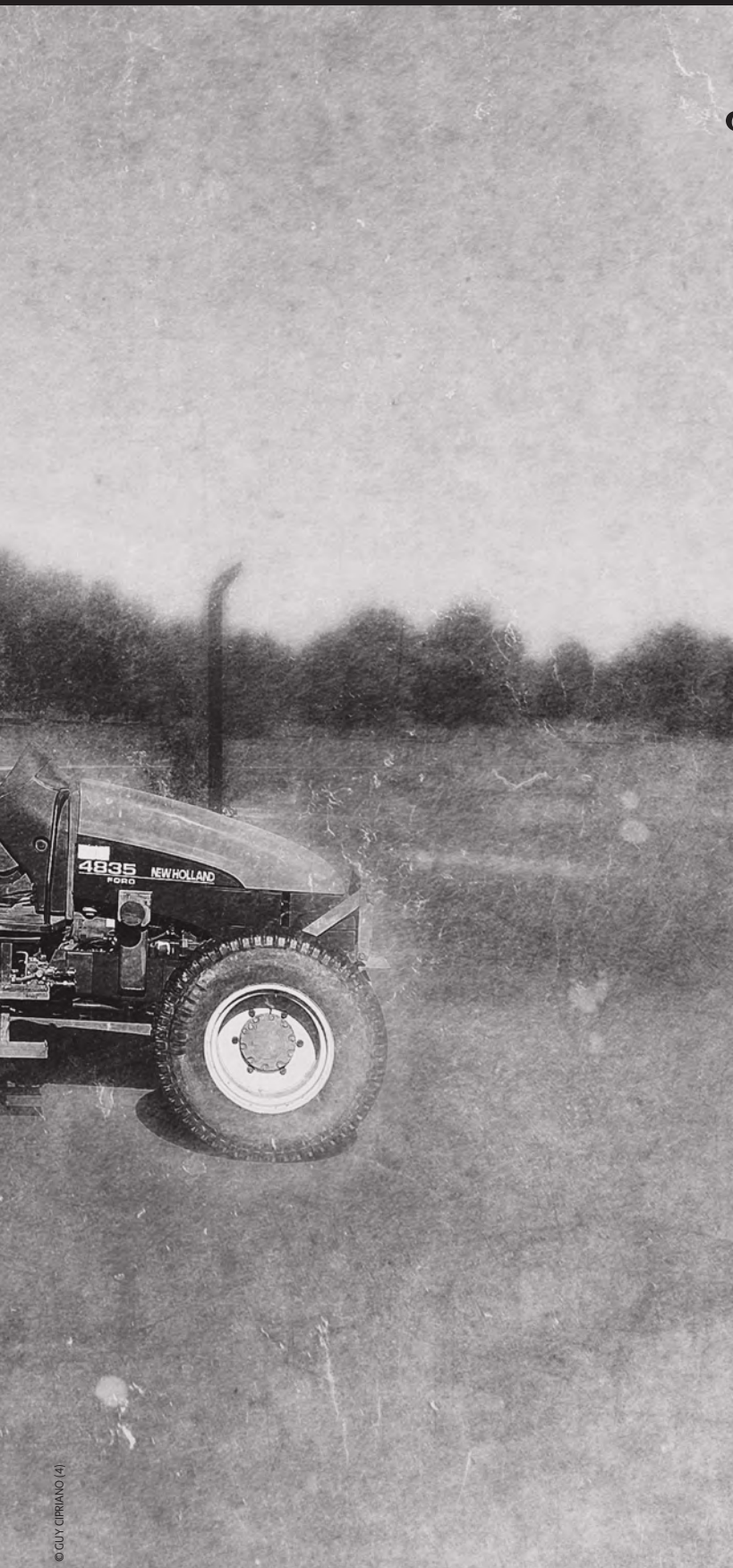


# How 100 works today

Members of the nation's first superintendent chapter share stories of why the association thrives and how it helps them execute their jobs.

By **Jacob Hansen**





In May 12, 1923, the Northern Ohio Golf Course Superintendents Association was formed. On May 12, 2023, the association celebrated 100 years. **Col. John Morley** established it at Youngstown Country Club, the course where he was the superintendent. There, he met with a group consisting of **Fred A. Burkhardt, Frank W. Ermer and William “Rocky” Rockefeller**, leading to the creation of the Cleveland District Greenskeepers Association, later becoming the NOGCSA.

Now 100 years later, the association consists of more than 300 members — carrying with it families, a brotherhood and a sense of togetherness where they help one another out.

#### A FAMILY AFFAIR

In Avon, Ohio, a growing suburb on Cleveland’s West Side, sits Bob-O-Link Golf Course, a 36-hole, family-owned public facility. The facility opened in 1969 with just a pair of 9-hole courses — the White and Red links. Current owner **Bill Fitch** started working on the course before it opened during the fall of 1968.

During the day, Bill would work on the farm with his father and then head over to the course in the evenings, where he mowed and handled night watering. He worked on the course throughout college. The original owners built the course to sell it. At the time, the property was going for \$500 to \$1,000 an acre.

“When I was working with guys that I had gone to school with, I kept saying, ‘Someday, I’d like to purchase this,’” Bill says. “They said, ‘Well, keep dreaming.’ But the dream came true.” In 1977, Bill and his partner bought the course on a land contract.

In 1998, Bill had to make the decision to either buy out his partner for ownership of the course or sell it to his partner where he would turn it into a housing development. Bill bought out his partner to assume ownership of the course after he saw his son and current superintendent **Bryan Fitch** demonstrate curiosity in the operation.

“I remember I was showing the interest and it was kind of one of the things where I would say to them, ‘I hope they’ll do this,’” Bryan says, “but it was something, even from back then, that I was interested in doing, which I think maybe made their decision a little bit easier.”

Bryan is the youngest of four siblings. He has a brother and two sisters, but he’s the only one of the four

**It's much easier to be part of that group than it is to not be and not have someone to call."**

**-Bryan Fitch,  
Bob-O-Link Golf Course**



▲ Bill and Bryan Fitch of Bob-O-Link Golf Course in Avon, Ohio.

in the golf maintenance industry. His siblings were involved with the course when they were younger. His mother, **Donna**, still helps operate the course.

"They all worked here while in high school and college," Bill says. "They kind of picked up different professions, but they were here and kind of got us to where we're at right now."

Former superintendent **Jim Prusa** told Bill to sign up for the association when he was attending its monthly programs. Bill says he would've liked to have done more with the association, but he had little time.

Bill is a retired NOGCSA member; Bryan remains actively involved in the association.

"Bryan has brought it up a couple of levels here," Bill says. "I would probably still be cutting fairways at an inch and greens at a quarter of an inch, but the knowledge that he has picked up talking to other people and everything else, we've got it down to greens playing a lot faster than we had them."

Bryan has been a member of the NOGCSA for 16 years, although he started attending meetings with his father as an 8-year-old. He recalls remembering names and details from those early meetings. Bryan still attends meetings, with Bill covering for him at the course when he's gone.

"My biggest thing is that the network of people just gets bigger and bigger," he says. "When it comes to anything from purchases to stuff that pops up at the course, being able to have that line of people to call to ask them helps."

Bryan also stresses the importance of not being alone. "It's not as big of an island to be out there alone as you think it is," he says. "It's much easier to be part of that group than it is to not be and not have someone to call."

After attending the first 2023 meeting and seeing the history of the association, Bryan felt further

inspired. "For 100 years, there were people who chose this as a profession," he says. "It's not just the question of 'What do you do in the winter?' and 'You must golf a lot.' I think people outside don't even have an idea of what it takes. I think that maybe after seeing this, it shows that this was something that's been around for that long and it's been a profession for that long."

Bill explains why the NOGCSA must endure.

"I know initially, like when I first got into the association, there'd be close to 100 people at meetings," he says. "I could just look back upon the knowledge that I picked up. It's really something that's going to continue to be a need for, and it's something you'd like to pass on to Bryan and future generations."

#### STILL IMPROVING

May 2023 was a special month for Avon Oaks Country Club superintendent **Terry Boehm**. He celebrated both the association's 100-year anniversary and his 30-year anniversary at Avon Oaks.

Avon Oaks is an 18-hole, family-oriented club that opened in 1957. The club recently completed a full-course renovation that involved revamping tees and bunkers and installing a new irrigation system. Avon Oaks is gradually transitioning its rough over to "more of a turf-type tall fescue," Boehm says. The project initially began all the way back in 1998.

"In 1998, we did a little bit of renovation work on No. 2 and No. 3, and then we didn't do anything for 10 years," Boehm says. "And so we came back in 2008, and started doing a green complex here, a green complex there, whenever we could scrape up enough funds."

After completing a hole or green complex at a time, members told Boehm, "We want to be done with this. We want to get this whole thing renovated." The club concocted

a plan to finish the renovation in three years.

The renovation commenced in fall 2019, with the course remaining open the entire time. Boehm is happy the renovation is done. “I’ve been enjoying the fact that I’m focusing on daily maintenance again,” he says. “For about three years, I felt more like a construction supervisor than a golf course superintendent.”

Boehm didn’t start in the industry. He graduated from Indiana University with a degree in accounting but had second thoughts about entering that business.

“I was a senior in Indiana, and I started to go, ‘Do I really want to be an accountant?’” Boehm says. “I applied to Michigan State University’s turf program because **Jim Loupee**, the superintendent I was working for, was a Spartan grad. I applied up there at the same time as interviewing for accounting jobs, and I got a job offer coming out of school in accounting and an acceptance letter at Michigan State all about the same time back in January of my senior year of college.”

Boehm talked to his parents. His father told him to do what he loves and he won’t regret it. “He was absolutely right,” Boehm says. Boehm took over at Avon Oaks in January 1998 after superintendent **Carl Schwartz** retired.

Boehm remembers meeting local and national turf legends such as **Terry Bonar**, **Frank Dobie** and **John Spodnik** at NOGCSA gatherings. “They would take time out of their day to come talk to me and that still means a ton to me,” Boehm says.

The togetherness and the way superintendents help one another is one of the reasons Boehm appreciates the association. “The association means a lot to me because I love reaching out and talking, sharing notes, playing golf, whatever it is with other superintendents,” he says. “I love the fact that this industry is that way. Some industries might be



very cutthroat — *this is a trade secret, we can’t share this with the competition*. I don’t think I’ve ever run into a superintendent that wasn’t willing to show me every possible trick he had and helped me along the way. I certainly try to help anybody I can as well.”

Boehm tries to get to every association meeting. “I’m kind of old school in that I like face-to-face interaction,” he says. Boehm has been with the organization since he started working in Ohio and still loves meeting people.

“It helps just to talk with other people that are going through the same thing that you’re going through,” he says. “I always say, ‘I think this industry is a tough industry to be arrogant.’ I don’t find too many arrogant superintendents because Mother Nature can put us in our place so quickly. You can have things look really good and then all of a sudden maybe you got a disease outbreak, maybe you got a big flood that washed out all your bunkers.”

Boehm thinks it is “really cool” to be involved with a 100-year-old association.

“Every year you sit there and look at how things were done 100 years ago ... and Colonel John Morley, how he started getting people together, sharing information and becoming better at their jobs,” Boehm says. “That’s what this is all about. By getting together, meeting and learning from each other, we’re better at our jobs, and we’re producing better conditions.”

Despite being at Avon Oaks for 30 years, Boehm is still improving. “I’m still learning every day,” he says. “I always said if I ever feel like I know it all, they should fire me right away because it means I’m not interested in learning.”

#### UP IN SMOKE

**Stephen Maclay**, the current NOGCSA president and former superintendent at Valleaire Golf Course in Hinckley, is extra thankful for the association as it “saved our

▲ Bob-O-Link Golf Course in Avon, Ohio.



▲ Northern Ohio GCSA president Steve Maclay.

golf course,” he says. It wasn’t always golf for Maclay and his path into golf course maintenance was different.

Maclay grew up in Pennsylvania and attended culinary school in Pittsburgh out of high school. He graduated with an associate’s degree in culinary arts and “ended

up absolutely hating it.” Maclay had friends from culinary school who lived around Medina, Ohio. Looking for a change of scenery sounded like a good idea to Maclay.

He started working at Weymouth Country Club as a grounds crew member. “The superintendent there, **Ken Aukerman**, put me under his wing and taught me a lot of things,” Maclay says. “I started going to Wooster, Ohio State ATI, and he promoted me to assistant while I was in school. So that was their way of helping me through school.”

After five years at Weymouth, he went to Red Tail Country Club for a year as an assistant. Then, in 2006, Maclay became the superintendent at Valleaire, where he spent nearly 18 years before transitioning to a position with the Cleveland Metroparks at nearby Ironwood Golf Course earlier this fall.

On an otherwise normal night in May 2021, Maclay was watching his son play baseball in nearby Hudson when he received a phone call around 8 p.m. “I got a phone call from the clubhouse saying that the shop was on fire,” he says. “I thought they were playing a joke on me and didn’t really appreciate it. And then they sent me a picture. And luckily it was the end of the game, so I grabbed my family, we hopped in the car and got on the turnpike to come back, and we could actually see the smoke from the fire from the turnpike.”

Maclay was “a total mess” and had his wife call NOGCSA administrative director **Michelle Frazier-Feher**.

She immediately sent an email to the members and the association’s board, letting them know what was going on.

“Finally, we got back to the shop and pretty much everything was gone at that point,” Maclay says. “Everything inside of it, all my equipment, all my chemicals, all my personal things that I never thought to be a problem to leave in there, everything was gone. And once they pretty much deemed it a total loss that night, we finally went home.”

Maclay slept maybe an hour before heading back to the course. When he arrived, Maclay witnessed the strength of bonds within the association. “That morning, I had no idea what was going to happen because we had no equipment and it was May, right in the middle of beginning the season,” he says, “**Jim Robinson** from Pine Hills right down the street pulled up with two greens mowers for me so I could mow my greens.”

It didn’t stop there. “Throughout the week, I had multiple courses just donate equipment for me to use,” Maclay adds. “Basically, the surrounding areas and the association saved our golf course by lending me equipment. Someone lent me a sprayer for a couple of days so I could spray my greens and tools, cup cutters and things that you take for granted during the day. They had extra so they let me borrow.”

The support he received “was an extremely humbling experience” for Maclay. At one point, he even had to turn away some offers because he already had enough equipment to operate. “As far down as Columbus, we had guys wanting to bring stuff up. It was very humbling and stressful, tiring, you name it. I felt it.”

Reflecting on the ordeal, Maclay is grateful for the association.

“It’s very, very comforting, knowing that you’re not alone,” he says. “It’s a brotherhood and sisterhood and everyone has your back. No

matter what it may be. It’s comforting to know that you’re not alone. People have gone through this before so they can relate, you can vent to them. It’s like having an extended family, almost.”

Maclay now realizes there is more to the organization than he previously realized. “I took it for granted before because I really honestly just joined the board for a résumé builder. And, you know, as the years went on the board, I started realizing it’s definitely more than that. But when the fire happened, it was like, ‘Oh, OK, this is what it’s all about.’ Helping our industry, our peers, our co-workers, anyone and everyone. We’re all there for each other.”

#### SHARING IDEAS

**Tom Bolon**, superintendent at Lake Forest Country Club, has spent lots of time on golf courses since he was a teenager. A 25-year NOGCSA member, Bolon realizes how critical the association is for superintendents.

Bolon grew up playing at East Palestine Country Club in East Palestine, Ohio. Bolon played the 9-hole course twice to record 18-hole rounds. Already interested in golf course maintenance, Bolon would ride around with the superintendent/golf pro whenever he wasn’t playing.

Unsure of future plans, Bolon enlisted in the Marine Corps during his senior year of high school — until he received a letter about Ohio State ATI’s Turfgrass Management Program after graduation. He told his father it sounded fun. He then contacted his military recruiter to get out of his commitment.

After talking to Ohio State ATI and recommending he get a job on a golf course, Bolon started working with Mill Creek Metroparks near Youngstown as a seasonal laborer before his first semester of college. He arrived at Lake Forest, a private club between Cleveland and Akron, as an assistant superintendent in August 1998.



◀ Lake Forest Country Club superintendent Tom Bolon.

The people have been the key to keeping the association going, according to Bolon. “How close-knit, steadfast, dedicated we all are to keeping the association going and the number of people that have stepped up into board positions and have held on to the integrity of the association is admirable,” he says.

One way the NOGCSA stands out is through its use of sponsorships. “We’re supported by sponsorships, but I don’t believe we rely on sponsorships to do what we need to do,” Bolon says. “Sponsors may take offense to that, but I know a lot of the other neighboring associations every year, every

He was promoted to superintendent in 2000 after **David Webner** landed the head position at nearby Westwood Country Club. Bolon’s affiliation with the NOGCSA started before he became superintendent.

“I think it’s an investment in your future and an investment in your yourself,” he says. “And just having that exposure and that access to all the knowledge that’s around you is well worth it.” Bolon adds that the educational and networking opportunities are “100 percent invaluable.”

The association benefits Bolon and his peers in other ways. “When new products come out and you have access to talk to different guys in the association about how they’re using them,” that helps, Bolon says. “Or, ‘I just screwed up, I’ve got something going on and I think I might’ve messed up, can you come over and take a look?’ Or, ‘Have you ever seen this and what’s your experience with it?’” The association can “help in a tough time, just gathering different ways that people do things.”

meeting you’d go to, it’s put on by Toro or Syngenta, or there’s a huge sponsor for the event. You don’t see that with Northern Ohio. Everybody’s treated equally.”

Bolon is very grateful for the association. “I don’t think that I would be where I am today if I wasn’t involved in the association,” he says. **GC**

*Jacob Hansen is a Northeast Ohio-based journalist who recently participated in Golf Course Industry’s summer internship program.*



*PART 3*

# ROUTINES AND RELATIONSHIPS

STUFF BREAKS. THINGS HAPPEN. EQUIPMENT MANAGERS EXPLAIN THE MINDSET REQUIRED TO HANDLE A JOB WITHOUT A TYPICAL DAY. PLUS, PERSPECTIVE ON HOW THEY HANDLE PEOPLE.

By **Guy Cipriano**

**K**en Nail's workdays at TPC Tampa Bay begin when the crew meets at 5:30 a.m. inside a maintenance facility nestled between West Lutz Lake Fern Road, the first tee and ninth green, and a spacious practice area. Once the meeting ends and co-workers scatter to the always packed Florida course, Nail follows a greens mower to the practice green.

He intently observes a few passes. If the Bermudagrass surface doesn't look as tidy as expected or a mower doesn't hum as intended, he can immediately troubleshoot. If everything looks and sounds acceptable, he returns to the maintenance facility and creates a checklist for the day. Sunrise means another trek outdoors to inspect how machines are performing on regulation surfaces. Nail then returns to the shop again, this time to begin making repairs. Mowers return to the maintenance facility a few hours later, and Nail checks cutting units and tunes the machines for the next day.

A veteran equipment manager who works in a market where machines operate year-round, Nail avoids rigidity when plotting hours, day, weeks and months. "You can sit there and make a plan for the day," he says, "and by 5:40 that plan is out the window."

In a colder spot amid industrial settings in another country, **Tim Thurston** can relate to what Nail experiences. Thurston worked as a superintendent and sold turf equipment before settling nicely into a role as the equipment manager at Ambassador Golf Club in Windsor, Ontario, a busy public course across the Detroit River from the homonymous American city. He understands why plans matter. He also realizes there will be mornings like the one he encountered in early October, when Ambassador superintendent **Steve Hatch** needed him to mow greens. "One thing in this position, you never know what you might be needed for," Thurston wrote in an email shortly after completing the assignment.

Thurston is Ambassador's gate-opener, arriving at the course on peak-season mornings at 4:30 a.m. He begins the morning walking through cold storage areas, visually inspecting equipment for oil leaks, flat tires and other abnormalities. He then opens the back doors and stages equipment the Ambassador team needs for the day. Greens are mowed daily; fairways are typically mowed on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. When Hatch arrives, the duo chat about the upcoming day. "If he's going to try to do something different, I find out about it right away," Thurston says. Surprises are non-existent when the crew arrives. Thurston knows who's headed where and on what piece of equipment.

Outdoor checks are built into Thurston's routine. He begins traversing the **Thomas McBroome** layout around 30 minutes after morning assignments commence. He spends at least an hour on the course checking cuts and listening for odd noises. Repairs and the administrative parts of the job consume late mornings and afternoons. Modern equipment managers spend more time on computers and phones than their predecessors. Thurston estimates he's on the computer for around three hours per week

ordering parts, compiling budgets and communicating via email. "I'm totally fine with being on a computer or phone," he says. "It's something I learned from being in sales."

**Shawn Bergey**, the equipment manager at Philadelphia Cricket Club, a 45-hole facility with golf courses spread across two campuses, says finding computer time during the peak season can be tricky. "It's very hard to take five seconds and read my emails or do something like that," says Bergey, who leads a team of three responsible for

maintaining more than 200 pieces of engine-propelled equipment. "I always tell these guys in the shop that we're firefighters. All we're doing in the summers is putting fires out, just getting a machine running and getting it out of here to the point where our guys can do their work."

Grinding becomes a major part of the job during the winter, although Bergey's team performs what he calls "touchups" on disfigured blades and reels during the peak season. "Just because we're grinding," he says, "doesn't mean that everything else stops." And outdoor work rarely halts at high-level clubs such as Philadelphia Cricket Club. There's always another tree to trim or hole to trench, which are tasks requiring specialized equipment requiring regular maintenance.

Asked if it's possible for an equipment manager to follow a plan, Bergey responds in East Coast candor. "It's not even close to possible," he says. "Whoever told you they *don't* do a daily schedule is 100 percent correct, because if you do that, you might as well already plan on getting it destroyed."

**Ryan Haptonstall** quickly comprehended the necessity of adaptability. A former diesel mechanic who transitioned to the golf industry in 2020, Haptonstall started 2023 at a new job as the equipment manager at Avon Oaks Country Club in Cleveland's west suburbs. His routine evolves depending on veteran superintendent **Terry Boehm's** needs. A room possessing the equipment lift, toolbox



**I ALWAYS TELL THESE GUYS IN THE SHOP THAT WE'RE FIREFIGHTERS. ALL WE'RE DOING IN THE SUMMERS IS PUTTING FIRES OUT, JUST GETTING A MACHINE RUNNING AND GETTING IT OUT OF HERE TO THE POINT WHERE OUR GUYS CAN DO THEIR WORK."**

—**SHAWN BERGEY**,  
PHILADELPHIA  
CRICKET CLUB

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

*Golf Course Industry* is partnering with Bernhard and Company to tell the story of today's golf course equipment managers. The series will explore the importance of the position, the backgrounds of the people filling roles, what the work entails and what turf's mechanical future holds.

**PART 1: September:** The mechanical void

**PART 2: October:** Golf's most fascinating backgrounds

**PART 3: This month:** Routines and relationships

**PART 4: December:** What's next

and Haptonstall's desk rests outside Boehm's office.

"You're not just working on engines or working on cutting units," Haptonstall says during a late-summer conversation below the lift. "Yesterday I was a trailer-repair guy. I patched up a hold and fabricated some latches for it. Other days you're solving other weird kinds of problems, like the windows aren't going down on Terry's truck. You have to come up with a lot of weird stuff on the fly. Situational fabrication."

Haptonstall executes reoccurring tasks early in the day. He pulls into the maintenance facility on the northwest corner of the Avon Oaks property at 5:30 a.m. Neither quiet nor solitude greet him. Busy Interstate 90 sits a well-struck mid-iron from the building and a few loyal part-time crew members retired from other industries are already preparing for their assignments. Haptonstall walks the storage area examining equipment. He considers himself fortunate because experienced operators make similar checks before heading to the course. "A lot of the guys here notice stuff and they are all about the machines," he says. "They like to be on them. If they notice something, they want me to fix them right away so they can get back out there."

Greens mowers undergo the most rigorous pre- and post-mowing inspection. Haptonstall regularly places the units on the lift. He checks rollers to ensure there's "no play in them," and clips paper to test quality of cut. If the paper requires forceful contact to clip, Haptonstall knows he must swap or grind the

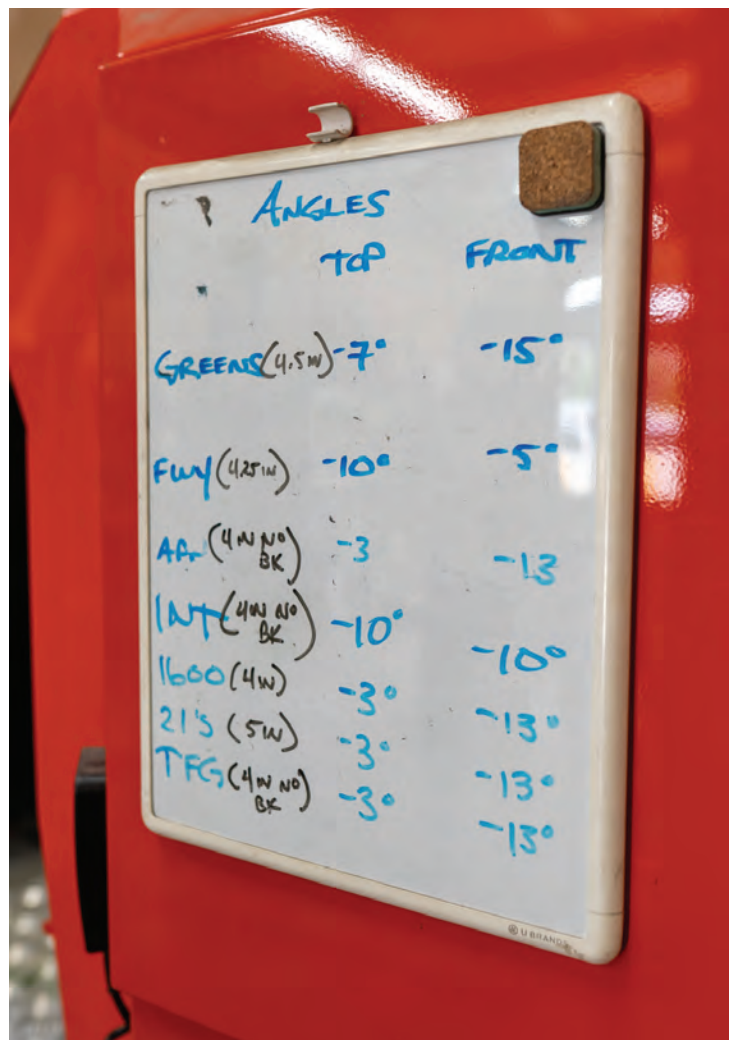
reel. Elevating a machine allows him to thoroughly inspect units for leaks, grease and rust.

Prioritization follows the morning hustle. Equipment managers strategically shuffle between tasks on days critical repairs aren't required.

"I have developed the patience and understanding to step back if I get frustrated and move onto something else," Kenosha (Wisconsin) Country Club equipment manager **Justin Prescott** says. "One of the great things about being on the golf course is that there's so much to do. I can walk away from one project — unless it's absolutely necessary to get it done — and do something else for a little bit and return to it."

**People create the** biggest variable for an equipment manager. Rookie and experienced operators, superintendents, assistant superintendents, sales professionals, mobile service technicians, general managers, pros, kitchen staff and even members can creep into an equipment manager's day.

"I've always been a planner, so that was one of the tougher things," says **Justin King**, the equipment manager at Jamestown Park Golf Course, a municipal facility in Jamestown, North Carolina. "When I had something I wanted to get done, it seemed like no matter what, I was getting pulled somewhere. The more I talked to and met the people in the industry,







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the more I've come to realize that's just how it is. In the last couple of years, I shifted my mindset and just accepted it."

TPC River Highlands equipment manager **Robert Martyszczyk** finds on-course communication to be productive. The rolling land bordering the Connecticut River soothes minds and offers abundant spots for casual and technical conversations. Private conversations outdoors, especially with new operators, yield respect for the equipment and the role Martyszczyk plays in keeping it running.

"They might not want to ask a question in front of the group like, 'Hey, I forgot about this,'" Martyszczyk says. "It's a good way to get to know the summer crew and build that rapport. They can talk to me and see that I'm approachable."

Ansley (Georgia) Golf Club equipment manager **Trent Manning** estimates he spends 10 percent of his time on the course observing equipment, inspecting quality of cut and "coaching" operators. Nail recently encountered issues with the cleanliness of equipment following assignments. He explained to operators in private and group conversations how clean equipment benefits the course and their personal work routines. "Minor things can turn into big things down the road," Nail says. ArborLinks (Nebraska) equipment manager **Bryan Epland** jokes that sometimes his job feels like "it's 30 against one."

Nobody affects an equipment manager's routine or morale more than a superintendent, thus making the relationship between the pair the most important interpersonal dynamic within a turf team. Fractures in the relationship can damage workplace culture and negatively impact the presentation and playability of a golf course.

Equipment managers interviewed for this series indicated failure to communicate invasive cultural practices such as aerification, verticutting and topdressing in advance



## Training time

Launched in the United Kingdom earlier this year, the Bernhard Academy is the turf industry's go-to provider for continuing education. The program will expand to North America later this year by offering in-person and webinar-style workshops.

The Bernhard Academy is aimed at superintendents, equipment managers, assistant superintendents, mechanics, greenkeepers, apprentices and anyone who wants to gain a better understanding and appreciation for turf appearance through quality of cut from a technical or management perspective.

The idea behind the Bernhard Academy is to support the turf industry by providing the latest information, help and support. Sessions will cover management, leadership and technical parts of the job.

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can erode the relationship with a superintendent. Equipment breakdowns are unpredictable; major agronomic events can be placed on a calendar.

"I've had superintendents who really didn't communicate that well," Nail says. "They would pop things on you at the last minute. It's like, 'You really knew about this for a week and you're just telling me the day before?' That's so disheartening."

**Joe Moreira**, the equipment manager at 27-hole Etowah Valley Golf Club & Lodge in western North Carolina, says it sends a powerful message when a superintendent shows interest in his position and overall well-being. Family-focused schedules and professional development opportunities demonstrate

to an equipment manager their importance to a course's success. Monday-Friday schedules are common among equipment managers.

Quality relationships aren't all take. The best professionals understand they are one cog in a larger operation.

"The superintendent can't think the turf and course are above all more important," Prescott says. "As an equipment manager, you can't think the equipment above all is more important. You have to understand you are an integral part of wherever you are. But you have to make sure, just like your machines, to make everything work. If there's no grass to cut, I don't have a job." **GCI**

*Guy Cipriano is Golf Course Industry's editor-in-chief.*



## RULES FOR GREEN CHAIRS

**M**ore than once in my 40 years writing about golf maintenance have I come upon the green chair who thought he knew everything. He — with this genre, it's always a he — mistook his success in business and his swelled bank account with being the smartest guy in the room. He treated other members as ignorant dolts, publicly relegated his greenkeeper to the status of a “grass grower in overalls” and did not trust him to attend board meetings or to speak up in public.

No wonder green committee chairs are easy to mock. The criticism dates back more than a century, when keen observers of golf design and agronomy like **Horace Hutchinson** and **Alister MacKenzie** dismissed such self-appointed experts as an impediment to sound course management. Everyone in the business knows of green chairs who tried to “make their mark,” whether by removing left-side fairway bunkers to accommodate their hook, or by having their brother's landscaping firm deliver 3,500 pine trees after clearing them from the 1964-65 World's Fair site in Queens (true story).

One regular championship site had the same green chair for 34 years. Another club with a stellar major history had 16 chairmen in a 17-year stretch and managed, in the process, to drive out their nationally treasured superintendent. There are clubs where the incoming president gets to appoint a new green committee chair, often with members of his own choosing. And I've seen committees that did not know where the maintenance building was and had never met with the assistants.

Thankfully, I've also seen it done right. Here are some basic rules and

guidelines for how to make the relationship between green chair and superintendent work well.

### RECRUITMENT FROM WITHIN

The chair usually needs to be recruited from within the existing committee, but that tenure need not be long. A few years will suffice. The point is to avoid appointment by favoritism and to be properly socialized in the details, procedures and diplomacy of club politics.

### DIVERSE COMMITTEE

Five to seven members are plenty, more gets unwieldy. They should be a diverse representative of the membership in terms of gender, culture and playing skill.

### ADVOCATE FOR THE SUPERINTENDENT

Green chairs with an “agenda” are dangerous. They need to be enablers of what the superintendent needs. That means listening, spending time out on the golf course looking at things, talking to assistants and crew members, and reading trade journal articles (and not relying on Siri for last-minute advice). They need to be able to go before the board and the general manager to make a case on behalf of the superintendent for everything from aerification schedules to equipment needs. Advocating does not mean being uncritical; but they should follow a basic tact of publicly supporting their superintendent while reserving criticism for private conversations.

### ENCOURAGE PLAYING

It always helps doing the job if the superintendent is a golfer. Skill level does not matter, but seeing the course from the per-

spective of everyday users is a benefit. I've seen clubs where superintendents feel as if their play is an intrusion. I can understand if they would rather relax with golf elsewhere, but the green chair should openly encourage play and occasionally encourage play with diverse members, even (especially) with those critical of course conditions. Nothing will do more to promote understanding and quell criticism than a round with the superintendent.

### DEFLECT, STEER CRITICISM

The green committee is the club's suggestion box. Members should be encouraged to file concerns in that direction. There needs to be a procedure for handling such issues that does not involve direct conversation between golfers and the superintendent — other than a casual or complimentary sort. Judgment and criticism leveled directly by members leads to misunderstandings, flared tempers or unproductive outcomes. The same goes for email/text traffic of anything that is not laudatory and supportive. Criticism and ensuing correspondence should be CC'd to the green chair. Extensive private back-and-forth can easily lead to misunderstanding, wasted time and unresolved bad feelings.

### PLAN FOR REGULAR CONSULTANCY

Budget for annual outside advice rather than waiting for a crisis. Better to have the funds allocated regularly so that independent agronomic advice becomes a normal part of the work routine. **GCI**

*Editor's note: Visit [www.golfcourseindustry.com](http://www.golfcourseindustry.com) for three bonus rules for greens chairs.*



**BRADLEY S. KLEIN, PH.D.** (political science), former PGA Tour caddie, is a veteran golf journalist, book author (“*Discovering Donald Ross*,” among others) and golf course consultant. Follow him on Twitter (@BradleySKlein).



# First — and last — impressions

**Entries, exits, landscape beds, and parking lots: Ron Furlong explains how seemingly little things play a big part in shaping perceptions of your course.**

**W**e have all heard how important first impressions are. But have we actually considered it in depth at the golf course?

Research highlights the importance of first impressions, both when meeting someone and, more to the point, when going somewhere. There's actually a little science at work here.

First impressions are based on what is known as the Primacy Effect, which refers to an individual's tendency to better remember the first piece of information they encounter more than they do the information they receive later on in a sequence — the sequence, in this case, being their visit to your golf course.

You could even take this a step further to include the Recency Effect, which is that the last impression of your visitors is also more important than anything learned or experienced in the middle of the event.

Safe to say first and last impressions can go a long way in helping shape others' views of your golf course presentation. Which is not to say the stuff in the middle of their experience — basically the round of golf itself — is not vitally important. It is. That's what we all spend the majority of our time focusing on anyway. I would venture to say about 97 percent of our efforts as superintendents focus on the course itself.

If we consider the Primacy and the Recency Effects, maybe we should be focusing a little more on those entry (and exit) points. Maybe they mean a little bit more than many of us have actually given them credit for.

What are those first and last impression points on a golf course property? And what can we do to highlight them? Although each property is different, we all have similar situations that overlap on most, if not all, golf courses.

I've come up with nine common first and last impression points that are fairly universal. Each property and each situation will be slightly different for everyone.

## THE ACTUAL ENTRY POINT

Until the day comes when we are all flying around in hovercrafts or we are transporting via beaming technology, every golf course will continue to have its own entry point. Consider this the turn-in from the road. The turn-in leads directly to the parking lot. Or, like at our course, Avalon Golf Club in western Washington state, a turn-in leads to a private road that leads to the clubhouse.

Highlighting that entrance point, which is also your first first impression point, can go a long way to shaping people's views of your golf course.

What we ended up doing at Avalon a few years ago was totally renovating that entry point, which is the turn-in from the public road in front of Avalon to our ¾-mile private road. A new sign with a giant letter "A" was built into the hill at the turn-in, as well as an accompanying landscape bed. This enhanced that first impression, which in the past had been given almost no design thought.

The entry point is also what everyone who is not heading to your golf sees driving by. Their only impression of you may very well be this entry point.



### THE PARKING LOT

Sure, they're not glamorous to discuss. But parking lots are a necessary evil. For many parking lot situations, there isn't a heck of a lot you can do. But there are a few ideas.

Freshly painting white lines every couple of years does wonders, as does a pavement resurfacing every so often. A couple other things we've done in the past at Avalon include installing additional streetlights and routinely filling potholes.

You're unlikely to flourish or flounder based on the condition of your parking lot. But the area plays a part in the first and last impressions created at your course. Primacy and Recency.

### THE CLUBHOUSE

Being the outdoor folks most of us are, we are considering just the exterior of the building. Well, not so much the building itself, as that falls more into the care and consideration of infrastructure. We're talking about focusing on the immediate grounds around the clubhouse.

Normally, this means landscape beds. If landscape beds have any place on a golf course—I could argue they often don't—it's around the clubhouse. The design and maybe even the care of these beds should be handled by a professional landscaper. This person should be someone with a vision, which not everyone has.

I must say I've found that because our golf course maintenance team handles the clubhouse beds at Avalon, less can sometimes be

more. As great as landscape beds can look if done right in highlighting the entrance to your building, if not continually maintained, especially in the growing season, they can turn on you. Find the right balance. You will know it when you hit it.

### THE PRACTICE GREENS

I think most if not all of us would agree that the practice green (or greens) should be in the same condition as any other green on the golf course. They can't be weak reproductions. If your greens on the course are rolling at 10.8, your practice green needs to be rolling at 10.8 as well. For most superintendents, nothing more than checking this box is required here. Let's move on.

### THE RANGE TEE

Not all golf course driving ranges are created equal. Some courses highlight their ranges, while others consider a more minimal approach. I don't think the latter is always necessarily bad. A minimal range is an option for many who want to devote all their resources to the course.

Even for the minimalists, there are things that can be done. Install some, but not too much, landscaping around the tee. Keep a grass tee freshly divoted. Make sure it is big enough to handle the use it gets—most are not. And if hitting off mats, keep them fresh. This is an investment, but worn mats are, well, unsightly.

### THE FIRST TEE

I'm a little torn with this one. Do you highlight the first tee? Or do you keep it more consistent with the other tees on the golf course? An argument

could be made either way, but I think I'm leaning toward the more consistent presentation approach.

If you don't have a ton of landscaping around most tees, I'd say do the same with the first tee. I love consistency. I notice it at other courses. It jumps out at me. I don't think I'm alone.

### THE FIRST HOLE

Same as above. No reason to highlight anything on No. 1, although you should be cognizant of the condition of your opening holes before play hits them. I say holes plural because Avalon has three rotation nines, so we have three No. 1s. While they mostly represent the rest of the golf course, things don't always go as planned in golf course maintenance. There are always obstacles and diversions each morning. This is where making sure those diversions don't cost the appearance of the first hole can sometimes take precedence. Other than that, treat them as equals.

### THE LAST HOLE

Honestly, nothing really. This hole should not feel any different from the 17 before it. Maybe tough with some teeth, but nothing out of the ordinary.

### THE ACTUAL EXIT POINT

If you can do something for folks as they head out after a wonderful round of golf, do it. Tell them you are glad they came and hope they come back. For us, it's a tall sign toward the end of our ¾-mile private road. The sign simply says: THANK YOU FOR SPENDING A DAY WITH US AT AVALON.

Short and sweet and pretty much sums it up, right?

Although I personally think it should say, "Y'all Come Back Now, Ya Hear?!" **GC**

*Ron Furlong is the superintendent at Avalon Golf Club in Burlington, Washington, and a frequent Golf Course Industry contributor.*



# Power of one more

Extra holes can leave a strong final impression, serve a functional purpose for turf teams and help settle wagers. Perhaps they are primed to become the next emulated thing in golf course development.

By Lee Carr

**E**ighteen holes is the standard round of golf. The handicap system and formal competitions revolve around the familiar number. When St. Andrews cut two holes in each of their eight common greens, and retained two single holes, the total was 18. In 1834, **King William IV** bestowed “Royal & Ancient” status upon St. Andrews, known as the home of golf, in Scotland. Golf professionals followed suit.

An indeterminate number of holes then is as old as the game itself. How and why a proper “19th hole” came about is more debatable. Many people believe one extra hole was created for settling

matches that were all square, but an extra hole (or holes) could also be used to extend the routing back to the clubhouse. An extra hole can also serve as a substitute for a hole that is temporarily unavailable.

Legendary Run Golf Course in Cincinnati, Ohio, was designed in the mid-1990s as a private club and it is now a hugely popular public facility. It’s known for its holes inspired by renowned courses, such as Turnberry (No. 4), Dornoch (No. 7) and Inverness (No. 16). Hole 19, with an unforgiving carry over a pond, was built as a hog hole and named Legendary. It plays from 100 to 163 yards and is an easy place to lose a ball — or a bet!

About 75 percent of golfers play it. “On the busiest days, we close it to turn carts around faster,” superintendent **T.J. Collins** says. “For outings, it’s used for hole-in-one or closest-to-the-pin contests. We don’t get much feedback unless it’s closed. Then we hear about it!”

The hole also serves a more functional purpose.

“It’s handy when we do things beyond routine daily maintenance,” Collins adds. “We utilize No. 19 when we have an in-play irrigation repair, aerification work or a project on another hole. Rather than disrupt our player experience, we close the hole we need to work on and ask players to use No. 19. They get to play a full round and we can work. It helps tremendously with efficiency.”

Most 19th holes are par 3s, but a property with multiple extra holes will likely have more variety. **Forrest Richardson**, architect and author of “Routing the Golf Course,” created a par-2 bonus hole at Mountain Shadows, a popular par-3 course in Paradise Valley, Arizona. “We had this space between No. 17 and No. 18, so we created a par-2 wager hole,” Richardson says.

A resident who views the hole from her backyard has recounted how much people enjoy it. “That’s the key to extra holes,” Richardson says. “They’re fun. They do settle bets. They can also be used for practice and instruction.” Extra holes can be a product of renovation work, usually resulting in placement randomly throughout the course. It’s part of the way courses shift and change.

Routed through lava fields, Black Desert Resort, in Ivins, Utah, will have a 19th hole soon. Designed by the late **Tom Weiskopf**, the course prioritizes playability for all skill levels and the aesthetics are striking. The 19th plays from 80 to 90 yards and is still growing in under the direction of superintendent

**Ken Yates**. General manager **Brenton Rice** has noticed how the 19th is already generating buzz. “Once ready, it will offer entertainment, like closest-to-the-pin and beat-the-pro contests,” Rice says. “Groups will also be able to reserve it for team-building activities.”

Payne’s Valley in Branson, Missouri, has a gorgeous 134-yard bonus hole. Surrounded by cliffs with flowing waterfalls, the island green was designed by the visionary **Johnny Morris**, founder of Bass Pro Shops. He worked with **Tiger Woods**, leader of TGR Design, and **Beau Welling**, senior design consultant for TGR Design, to create it.

Morris wanted the last hole to finish below a large rock escarpment, but the 18-hole routing made this tricky. The solution became a 19th hole. Welling and the team had never seen the finished product until a promotional event. “The final look of it was all Mr. Morris and the team at Payne’s Valley,” Welling says. “I get comments from people who have played it almost every week.”

Extra holes can make a big impact.

#### CONSTRUCTION, MAINTENANCE AND TRENDS

The construction of the 19th at Payne’s Valley was intense. The lake was shaped with rebar, framing wire and gunite. This was completed in stages to allow for machinery to access the green. The bunker was reshaped numerous times. Carefully designed, the green’s drainage exits below the bottom level of the lake and daylight out the side of one of the lower cliff walls. This also allows for positive gas exchange for the root zone.

“The bridge to the green is 5 feet wide so only certain equipment can be used. Air movement is another challenge,” says **Steve Johnson**, director of golf maintenance at Big Cedar Lodge. The water around the

hole has largemouth and hybrid striper bass that are fed by the team member assigned to course setup for the day. After playing the 19th, The Cliffhanger Trail is a one-mile ride back up the cart path to the clubhouse. It’s an experience.

Johnson gets asked about the maintenance. “A standard walk-mower fits across the bridge along with our 648 aerifier and our walk-behind topdresser,” he says. “To verticut we remove the front two cutting units from the triplex to cross the bridge then put them back on. We use a SprayBug to make our weekly fungicide or foliar applications. Tee work is challenging with similar access constraints.”

Still, the benefits outweigh the work. “The grandeur and magnitude of this 19th hole make it all worth it,” Johnson adds. “It’s the sort of hole people imagine, but it’s real.”

The 19th hole at Legendary Run is maintained like the rest of the course with the same mowing heights, frequencies and applications. Due to its structure, there isn’t much additional turf. “The green is about 5,000 square feet and the tees are 7,500 square feet,” Collins says. “In a time crunch, we may skip a mowing or rolling. Our GPS pace of play tracking system does not factor in play on the 19th hole. Accessory ordering is plus one.”

As the trend for more diverse playing options continues, maintenance considerations should help guide that creative work. “More golf holes alleviate golfer congestion and reduces wear and tear, but it adds to the maintenance costs,” Collins says. “In addition to regular rounds, new strategies for three-, six- or 12-hole rounds make sense if the tee sheet can be managed.”

Not everyone welcomes extra holes. “The pushback is normally that people do not want to lose any yardage,” Richardson says. Yardage remains a prime con-





The grandeur and magnitude of this 19th hole make it all worth it. It's the sort of hole people imagine, but it's real."

– *Steve Johnson,*  
*Big Cedar Lodge*

## SPOTLIGHT

► Top: The Forrest Wager at Mountain Shadows in Paradise Valley, Arizona; Bottom: The 19th hole at Legendary Run Golf Course in Cincinnati, Ohio.

sideration for many courses and not all facilities have the land that extra holes require.

“It’s rare that we have a client that wants only a practice range and 18 holes of golf,” Welling says. “They want extra holes, and/or they are increasingly interested in the idea of golf returning to the clubhouse with a number that doesn’t have to be nine. Nine is good too, but people want more optionality for how they play. Everyone is looking for something more innovative.”

Troon operates Black Desert Resort and the management team knows the extra hole will be worth the investment. “Where the 19th hole sits in relation to the resort, it’s one of the first things guests see when they check in,” Rice says. “We market the

course as 19 holes and that’s a draw.”

Looking forward to hosting PGA Tour and LPGA events, Black Desert Resort is also finding ways to engage people coming into the sport, including a 36-hole putting course. “In trying to keep up, figuring out a different routing for a shorter round of golf is

necessary,” Rice says. “We are excited for where we are and where we are headed.”

“We are seeing driving ranges get lit and a lot of short courses,” Welling adds. “It’s like the 18 holes of golf, there is a culture to that, but there is a culture to the new stuff, too. There

is more music, more interaction, even more activation in food and beverage. The score is less important because it feels like a different experience.”

Extra holes and other different options create opportunities to push the boundaries. “Some of the short courses we are doing have holes



## Quanta of golf

The quanta of golf is a concept worth understanding and sharing. Credit goes to **Beau Welling**, founder and CEO of Beau Welling Design. Plainly stated, quantum is the smallest unit of something. Playing a single hole would be the smallest unit in the game of golf. Quanta is the plural form of quantum so we will refer to extra holes as the quanta of golf.

Centuries ago, the number of golf holes was not standardized as people played in fields, at will, when possible. As courses were developed, the choice became nine or 18 holes. The number of people who enjoy golf is larger than the number of people who are attracted to its traditional format. What many people want has shifted.

"When you look at recreational activities in the United States that have grown over the past 20 years, like running, hiking and biking, they are all very unstructured in time," Welling says. "These are all things you can enjoy for 20 minutes or many, many hours. You can do them by yourself or with others."

The only option for golf, other than nine or 18, was essentially limited to the range. "One reason there has been this explosion of different types of practice and even the short course phenomenon is giving golfers more options as it relates to time, options that can be configured to the amount of time they have to spend playing," Welling says.

Extra holes, the quanta of golf, is part of that. If someone finishes 18 and wants to play a little more, maybe there is a three-hole loop that returns to the clubhouse. Maybe a player only has an hour. That's enough for that same loop and maybe a bucket at the range.

"It's that matrix of optionality. We as a species want more and more choices, more customization. It can be loops, extra holes, more experiential short game areas, putting courses, all of this stuff," Welling says. "It's innovative and offers flexibility for how people spend their time. It's finding the right quanta of golf."

that are really short," Welling says. "Because of that, we can do things you wouldn't do on a regulation-size hole in terms of the size and shape of greens, severity of slopes, things like that. There is more freedom from a design standpoint."

Extra holes go by many names — bet hole, wager hole, 19th hole, hog hole and more — but extra holes are extending beyond a 19th for many properties, with multiple purposes. As courses diversify, there is potential to take some pressure off the maintenance team. Designed well and executed thoughtfully, extra holes are full of promise. **GCI**

*Lee Carr is a northeast Ohio-based writer and senior Golf Course Industry contributor.*

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# Greatness of Gravel

By Judd Spicer

How fun are the first 13 holes at a Minnesota par-3 facility? So fun that ownership asked a superintendent-turned-architect to design 10.5 (?!?) more.

**A**n idiosyncratic number of holes, a superintendent-turned-architect and impeccably timed clubhouse vibes are combining to see a short course make big waves in northern Minnesota lake country.

Debuted in the spring of 2022 amid the golf-bustling scene of Brainerd, the aptly named 13-hole par-3 Gravel Pit has enjoyed anything but a rocky rise in the months ensuing. Rather, the reception has been so enthusiastic as to warrant the design and debut of 10.5 (yep, that's a 0.5) new holes soon to be added to Gravel Pit's compelling roster. The nearing completion will find Gravel Pit among a short list of national properties sporting multi-

ple short courses.

"We talked about how people could have more fun here, and we were like, 'Well, more holes!'" says **Chuck Klecatsky**, co-owner and operator of the Gravel Pit.

Such an ethos has defined the grounds since Gravel Pit was transformed from an actual, working gravel pit, active as recently as 2020.

Sound unique? Well, the course architecture echoes the uncommon account.

**Scott Hoffman**, the superintendent at nearby Madden's on Gull Lake for 43 years, eventually traded mower for blueprint with his celebrated design of The Classic at Madden's, which debuted in 1997. Hoffmann didn't hesitate when tabbed to design Gravel Pit.

"I was first approached by **Nathan Tuomi**, the owner of the property, and his son **Sam** had the idea to do something golf-oriented there," Hoffmann recalls. "We went out and looked at it, and I just thought, 'Gosh, this could be a really fun and dramatic par-3 course.' Within a few days they said, 'Let's go!' and less than a month later, we were moving dirt."

Tipping at just a shade under 1,900 yards—and just under 1,200 from the forward tees—the lucky 13 holes of diverse plays (ranging from 76 to 213 yards) is far from a pitch and putt experience. "When people come off the course, we want them to say, 'That was kinda hard, but it was really fun,'" Hoffmann says. "You'll come out with

some birdies but also some doubles.”

Such a player response echoes the initial vision.

“Nathan wanted something dramatic, not just a ho-hum par-3 course, and that got me excited,” Hoffmann adds. “We were able to use a number of template holes from some of the (design) masters, and some of the other holes are what God had given us. I’ve always felt like there’s a fine line between creating holes that are ‘too extreme towards fairness,’ and those become holes which are good holes but seldom great holes. I kinda try to walk that edge.”

Walking said line meant making creative use of the land.

“One side (of the property) was very coarse and rocky, and the other side was just a big hill of fine sand. So, what we decided we had to do was remove the sand from the hill and cover the rocky stuff on the other side, and, at the same time, to create some interesting terrain on the big hillside,” Hoffmann says. “And we had one smaller pond in the center of the course, but Nathan wanted to create more water, so we kept creating more, and we tried to keep it as natural as possible. And those ponds are stocked with trout. It’s a fun thing to watch the osprey hover over and all of a sudden they come up with a 14-inch trout.”

A unique substratum beds the aesthetic.

“And it’s quite rare to do this” Hoffmann says, “but the greens are all made out of that fine sand that was in place there already.”

A superintendent’s bedrock purview and planning has already led to benefits of practice for superintendent **Brandon Myers** and the course owners.

“One of the neatest things is that, as the project developed, Scott talked a lot about sustainability. He really had us in line for a low-water, low-chemical, low-maintenance budget,” Klecatsky says. “He made design and grass decisions that are now playing out how he believed they most likely would. Like most golf courses,



es, the Gravel Pit is an evolving item. It’s fun to see the course grow in and, as I always say, ‘You can’t make new grass old.’”

And yet, an old game can find a fresh vibe. Mixing a mature look of native grasses with, say, beer buckets for tee markers, gives an example of Gravel Pit’s appreciation for the game’s foundations with an inclusive canvas of fun.

“I think non-traditional golf is becoming more accepted, and it’s interesting to see people’s attitudes change,” Hoffmann says. “A lot of people just want to go out and spend a couple hours and have a good time with their friends. It’s a place where you can go out in shorts and a T-shirt and feel right at home. I don’t think I’ve played it yet while wearing a collared shirt.”

Amid a craze of short and putting courses across the country, the growth of Gravel Pit seems ideally timed.

“A 13-hole golf course is not the shock that it would have been a decade ago,” Klecatsky says. “People have played these concepts in different parts of the county, so we feel like we’re part of this cultural switch, where time and experience are more important than the formality of an 18-hole round.”

So well-received has been Gravel’s introduction to a region with a handful of primo championship plays that adding more holes in short time was not a decision over which the ownership waffled. In some contrast to the earnest offerings of the original 13 — where even good players may well lose a ball or two — the new course will have some tilt toward higher handicappers.

“We have the land to the south of the property with some great elevation changes,” Klecatsky says. “And without water on that side, we talked to Scott about creating a routing that would allow the beginner to enjoy a less visually intimidating course but also allow the good player to hit some shots.”

Lessons learned from preparing the first course for play are helping the new holes settle nicely. Projected opening for the second course is April 2024.

“We just finished seeding in recent days and mowed our first green,” Hoffmann said in late August, “so we’re praying for no big storms or washouts. Things are coming along. And I won’t say it’s easier — we’ve got elevated tees, a punchbowl hole and a postage stamp green — but it’s a little shorter and a bit more accessible. There won’t be as much native grass or water. A lot of topography, with mowed fescue, smaller greens, and more subtle contours.”

And, in pure Gravel Pit fashion, the finishing 0.5 hole will play as a 60-yard, downhill putting epilogue.

From holes short (and shorter), the entire Gravel Pit vibe — featuring pumped-in music during the day, live music at night, an awesome beer list and a patio perch from which guests can see nearly the entire course — is one that Klecatsky believes has grown organically.

“You can dream about people liking something, but it just sort of happens,” he concludes. “It’s really fun, and I feel blessed to be part of it. It’s a cool feeling that you can’t make happen — it just is, or it isn’t.” **GCI**

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Globetrotting consulting agronomist **Terry Buchen** visits many golf courses annually with his digital camera in hand. He shares helpful ideas relating to maintenance equipment from the golf course superintendents he visits — as well as a few ideas of his own — with timely photos and captions that explore the changing world of golf course management.



## JOHNNY THE WONDER DOG

**T**ed Austin, equipment manager at the McCall (Idaho) Golf Club, likes to have fun recycling parts from golf maintenance equipment. “Johnny” is made from old parts from a John Deere 9009 rough mower. The main body is a lift arm that was bent, while the legs are roller arms. The eyes are bearings from the rollers. The tail is a piece of a lift chain from a Cushman Core Harvester. There was no cost for the parts, it took about 20 minutes to build, and Austin has done this type of fun recycling many times before by not overthinking it and letting the creative juices flow. **Eric McCormick** is the golf course director and **David Druzisky** is the renovation architect.



*Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG, is president of Golf Agronomy International. He's a 51-year, life member of the GCSAA. He can be reached at 757-561-7777 or [terrybuchen@earthlink.net](mailto:terrybuchen@earthlink.net).*



## ROTARY MOWER BLADE SHARPENING AID

**T**his tree stump, measuring 33 inches high and 16 inches in diameter, has been turned into a holder for a John Deere 9009 rotary mower blade while it is being sharpened. The slit that the blade fits into is  $\frac{3}{8}$ -th-wide and 1-inch deep and was cut in with a chainsaw. A sledgehammer holds the blade in place while it is being sharpened. An angle grinder with a flap disc is used instead of a grinding stone because it leaves a smoother surface and it does not overheat the blade as easily. The sharpened blade center hole is then placed on a nail to check for a proper balance. It takes just a few minutes to sharpen each blade. Golf course director **Eric McCormick** and equipment manager **Ted Austin** at the McCall (Idaho) Golf Club have a lot of great low-cost ideas. **David Druzisky** is the club's renovation architect.



*Moraghan continued from p. 23*

a hang-up about the selection of products, particularly mouthwash and talcum powder. A good friend of mine judges clubs by the presence of free sunscreen and its SPF.

At every stop, I'm watching the employees — shop personnel, starters, even your maintenance crew — looking for enthusiasm. That is, diligently doing their jobs professionally and mindful of the members and guests, the people paying their salaries. No matter who it is, and even at a private club (maybe especially at a private club), they need to treat us like customers (as in we're always right) and do everything they can to ensure we have a good time while we're there to play a game.

I'm a range rat, certainly not the only one, so let's get a little closer to your "turf." Does the range have all the necessary paraphernalia to help me prepare? A thick, dense turf cover; bag stands properly spaced; neat, clean and relatively new range balls (in ample supply, of course); a way to clean the clubs during and after practice; a good short-game practice area? And if the club has separate ranges for guests and members, is it clear to me that I should go here or there? Don't set me up to be embarrassed.

Carts should be clean and charged. Water bottles? Divot sand? A rake on the back if that's how you do it? Pencil? Scorecard? If there are forecaddies, make sure they know to communicate with the player from the outset. Don't presume I'll be hitting driver off the first tee and take off with the rest of my clubs; ask what club I want to hit. And don't assume I'm going to hit a good first shot, so don't walk too far away too quickly, just in case.

Ah, caddies. Some golfers love them, others not so much. It's a relationship that needs to be managed starting on the practice range where the caddie should introduce themselves, watch the player hit some shots (and clean the clubs afterward), and work to establish a friendly, but not too friendly relationship. How it evolves during the round will be a mutual undertaking.

Caddies should know to never tell a good player where NOT to hit a shot, unless directly asked. Tell me where you want me to hit it. And don't tell me how to play the shot unless asked. But be sure to give me accurate yardages. On the first green, I ask the caddie to give me a line, then I'll play it as I see it. If the caddie was correct, I'll continue to listen. But if I don't ask for help, don't offer it.

Some other items you have control over:

- Are the tee markers pointed in the right direction?
- Are the flagsticks straight?
- Are the rakes in the proper position (in or out of the bunker,



- whatever the course standard is), and placed where they're most likely to be needed?
  - Yes, all of the above can easily be changed after just one group plays through. But if there are rangers or others riding around the course, they should look for these details on every hole and fix them as necessary.
- Speaking of marshals, they do have a role, especially on busy days. Unless my group is behind, the marshal should be no more than a distant presence.
- A few more things ...
- Restrooms, both men's and women's, should be neat, clean and properly supplied.
  - Make sure there's enough drinking water on the course, either on the beverage cart, in the golf cart, in coolers or at the halfway house. This is as much a health issue as a convenience.
  - Beverage cart drivers need to know when, and how, to approach — or not approach — a group. Nothing bugs golfers more than a cart driver who doesn't know when to stop and wait for the group to hit, sitting well out of the way.
  - If there's a halfway house or snack shack, staff there should know that time is of the essence. They can suggest the signature or specialty item, but then move on. And if they can know the names in the group and offer a personalized greeting, all the better.
  - Is the beer cold? The cigar selection large enough? Are there at least one or two "healthy" options?
- Look around your club and you'll identify dozens of other little things to check, improve and educate the staff about. Everybody working at the club should live by this tried but true statement: You get only one chance to make a good first impression. **GCI**



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## CONVENIENT WHEN NEEDED

When I first looked at Idle Hour Country Club on satellite imagery, I noticed what appeared to be two par-3 holes located side-by-side. Having never been to the golf course in person, I wasn't completely sure exactly what I was looking at, but it definitely looked unique.

Before my interview, I walked the golf course and saw firsthand two parallel par 3s sharing the same hole number — two. The green on the left sat high upon a knob, and the green to the right sat low in a natural depression. Later, I would learn the two holes are referred to as Upper and Lower Two as you might guess.

The golf course was originally designed by **Donald Ross** in 1924 for **Mr. E.R. Bradley**, a Kentucky Colonel who owned a horse farm named Idle Hour. The golf course was situated on a 170-acre parcel of farmland Col. Bradley owned and he named it Ashland Country Club.

As I continued to research the history of the golf course, I learned it is the only golf course designed by Ross in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. In 1946, following the death of Col. Bradley, the membership renamed the club Idle Hour in his honor.

I have studied the original Ross drawing of Ashland on numerous occasions and there was only one par 3 in that location. In 1968, the country club hired golf course architect **Robert Simmons** of Camden, Indiana, to redesign the golf course. Clubhouse expansions along with pool renovations and other amenities now occupied land previously serving as the first and

ninth holes in the original Ross design, and the club needed to replace them.

Simmons was a disciple of famed golf course architect **Dick Wilson**, and he modernized the golf course creating two new holes on adjacent land in the northeast corner of the property owned by the club. He rebunkered the entire course in a fashion like Wilson's, eliminating much of the notable Ross characteristics. He also created a new par 3, located on higher ground just to the left of the original par 3 sitting in the depression leaving the original green abandoned.

In 2004, Idle Hour Country Club hired **Ron Prichard**, the godfather of golf course restoration, to return the golf course to its Ross roots. Ron did a phenomenal job of eliminating the modern style of bunkers and restoring them to bunkers full of Ross characteristics.

He also was able to use the original Ross drawing to restore and replace lost bunkers previously on the golf course. And Ron did something else, he restored the lower Ross green on the par 3. But Ron didn't eliminate the 1968 Simmons' green either. Rather, he created what is now the iconic Idle Hour double par 3 known throughout the region as Upper and Lower Two.

Now, all daily play is on Lower Two as that is the original Ross design. For certain tournaments with 54 or more holes or special events, we use Upper Two for certain stipulated rounds. By

and large, nearly all play is on Lower Two exclusively.

We recently completed a fairway bunker renovation. We executed the project without closing the golf course. In fact, we only closed one hole at a time and each day whichever hole was closed that flag was placed on Upper Two and groups were able to play that as a replacement hole for the one closed on that day.

Fortunately, Hole Two is conveniently located behind the 17th so everyone would play Lower Two during their round, then immediately following play of No. 17 they would play Upper Two before making a U-turn and heading back over to the tees of No. 18.

It's an interesting dynamic, but it works well for us because of how the course is routed. If we had an emergency or if there was any reason a hole needed to be closed for agronomic reasons, we have a bonus hole to utilize so folks can still manage to play a full 18-hole round.

Because the putting surface of Upper Two is managed daily the same as the rest of the golf course, it provides us with another layer of insurance should we ever require grass for unforeseen repairs. Granted, it would require something extraordinary. But the turf is there ready to go.

That's just one use of a "Bonus Hole." There are obviously many more as you have learned in this issue. So, next time you're playing golf somewhere that has an extra hole, see if you can learn how it came to exist and play it if you can. **GCI**



**MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG**, is the superintendent at Idle Hour Country Club in Lexington, Kentucky, and past president of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on Twitter @IHCCGreenkeeper.



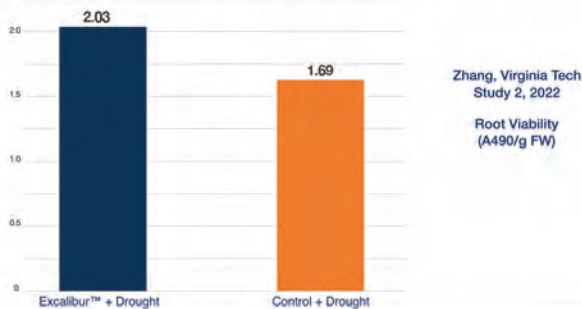
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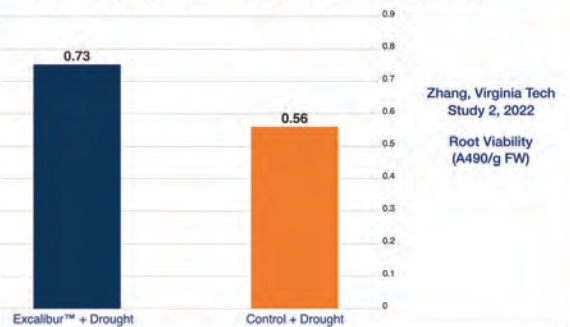
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