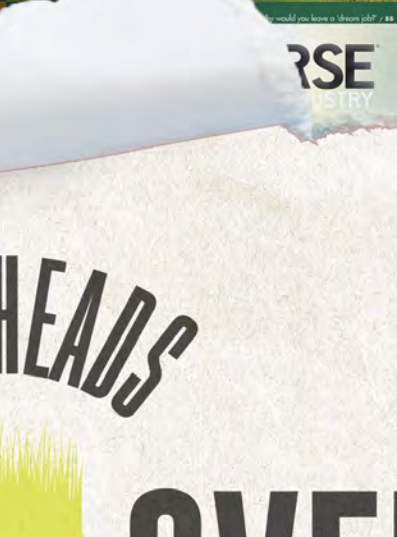
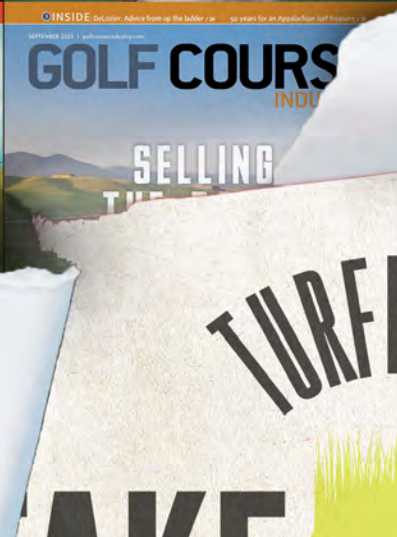


INSIDE: The tastiest section in turf returns! What recipes did your peers share for the "Turfheads Guide to Grilling?"

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GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY



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*Mission: Maintenance Critical***49 PART 4: WHAT'S NEXT?**

The prominence of the equipment manager position is accelerating. What do industry changes mean for the people who hold that title?

MISSION STATEMENT

To provide an independent, innovative and inclusive voice for today's — and tomorrow's — golf industry professionals.

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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 Blayney

Creative Director

Kaitlin Sellers

Advertising Production Coordinator

SALES

Russell Warner

National Sales Manager
 rwarner@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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ENVIABLE JOB PERK

I attended a turf conference last month. I ate lunch at a table with three superintendents and a sales professional who previously worked as an assistant superintendent.

I'm not one of them. As people in this industry are wont to do, they made me *feel* like one of them.

The quartet discussed the 2023 golf and growing season. They conveyed stories of no-show employees and unrealistic customer expectations. Three of the four admitted they needed to play more golf.

The sales professional never mentioned the products he sells. He occasionally shared stories from his golf course maintenance career.

I didn't say much. Listening yields more learning.

The superintendents worked at facilities in different parts of the state. Their facilities feature different ownership models and climates. The annual conference brought them together for a day of learning. They likely gleaned more from the informal lunch chat than from nearly six hours of formal education.

On the drive home, I reflected on the conversation. Receiving 45 unscripted minutes with superintendents when they are away from golfers and mowers added value to an already productive trip.

Superintendents hold difficult jobs. I'll never be one of them, because we aren't forced to work in the rain or strive to give somebody a \$150 product for \$50. If the job were easy, publications such as *Golf Course Industry* wouldn't exist.

An incredible perk, though, accompanies a golf maintenance professional's work. The industry offers an enviable professional network. Everybody receives opportunities to eat lunch with their peers. Everybody can call, text, email or DM a peer for guidance. Everybody can access free information to help them do their jobs, understand a confounding industry or elevate their careers.

Unfortunately, not everybody appreciates the gigantic knowledge share.

The quartet I joined for lunch had space at their table because many of their peers skipped the conference. The weather was nice and work rarely stops on a golf course. Labor remains tight and falls are warmer. Golfers expect tidy turf year-round, even during the "bonus golf" months on the cool-weather calendar. Perhaps some superintendents and industry professionals are too busy to support their local, state and regional events. Others figure they already possess a big enough professional network. A few might not want a professional network.

Even more troubling are the superintendents and industry professionals who reach what they consider a career pinnacle and curtail the sharing, learning and expanding. People in this group stop being one of them until they *need* one of them again, which usually happens following a job loss or when their course requires a product, service or extra body in a pinch. Almost always, that person receives the desired help regardless of how much they might have neglected their industry roots.

Help, at least in the golf industry, remains unconditional. Golf maintenance professionals are fortunate to have structured and unstructured support systems. Trust me when I tell you similar support infrastructure doesn't exist in most industries.

I work in the publishing/media business. Editors, writers and graphic designers rarely play golf, hunt, fish or eat lunch together. Neither computer nor paper companies are funding educational and networking events for us. We don't receive themed magazine issues filled with inspiring and informative articles crafted by our peers. I rarely sit at tables with four peers and learn how they keep newsletters and social media feeds fresh.

Chunks of a publishing/media professional's career journey occur in solitude. Remote work has resulted in physical solitude for many editors and writers. The impact of that solitude on mental health has yet to be determined. Fortunately, our parent company, GIE Media, remains committed to providing a physical workplace.

Golf maintenance professionals work long hours and constantly tussle with fickle weather and demanding people. They also receive abundant opportunities to sit across the table from somebody else working long hours and coping with fickle weather and demanding people.

Never take that perk for granted. **GCI**



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

NOTEBOOK



OWNING YOUR DREAMS

Working as a superintendent is one choice, owning a course is another. For an Ohio superintendent, doing both means a dream realized.

By Lee Carr

Reaching Chippewa Golf Club in Doylestown, Ohio, requires driving straight down Shank Road. It could be your straightest drive of the day. When you arrive, you'll find **Brad and Melanie Stewart** working hard as owners in their second full season. From the Bermuda Triangle to Finn Scooters to the Don Olney Memorial Golf Tournament, there is so much to like about this public 18-hole course, its operation and its motivated crew.

Brad became the superintendent 25 years ago, shortly after he and Melanie were married and when **Kevin Larizza**, then the owner, had the course renovated. Previously, Brad worked as an assistant at Brookside Country Club in nearby Canton. Larizza had a portfolio of northeast Ohio courses and clubs so at one time Brad was simultaneously the superintendent at Chippewa, Rosemont Country Club in Fairlawn, and The Fair-

ways of North Canton in North Canton. Brad can multi-task with the best of them! Larizza and Brad co-owned Chippewa for three years before the Stewarts purchased the property outright, closing on the paperwork in October 2021.

Brad started working in the golf industry as a 16-year-old at Brookside, a private club with a highly regarded **Donald Ross** design. "I'm not a desk kind of guy so being outside and having a job where I can use my skills and get results is perfect for me," he says. With Brad's tenure, he is well-versed in Chippewa's operations, as are Brad's and Melanie's two children, who both help when they are home from college. "Chippewa has always been like their big backyard," Melanie says. It's hard for the Stewarts to imagine life without the course.

Chippewa features four sets of tees: blue (6,756 yards), white (6,101), gold (5,389) and red (4,974). Greens, tees

and fairways are bentgrass. Nos. 14, 15, and 16 form a triangle at the far edge of the course across a series of ponds and they're also the most difficult holes, earning them the moniker of "The Bermuda Triangle." The phrase "Come play the Triangle," has become a digital and merchandising slogan, as the Triangle is a memorable section of the course.

Melanie has 18 years of experience with sales, marketing and events for clubs throughout northeast Ohio, including famed Firestone Country Club in Akron. She believes that building relationships is the secret to a successful business.

"We try and do this every day, taking time to listen to members and league members, touching base on a personal level with employees and establishing a rapport," she says. "That's what it's all about and we consider ourselves truly blessed to have some of the most



amazing people walk through our doors every day.” Melanie handles payroll, the books and daily operations. She and Brad collaborate on selecting merchandise for the pro shop.

The Stewarts joke that no two days are ever the same, but besides having a close-knit team, another fun dynamic at Chippewa is the fleet of single-rider Finn Scooters. “Golfers love them because they bring a new dimension to the game,” Brad says. “We like them because they reduce wear and tear on the golf course.”

It costs about \$10 extra per round to take the scooter and the process to rent one is handled through an app that the golfer uses to sign for liability, and pay for and release the scooter for use. For Chippewa, there is a little more maintenance and repair work required to keep the bikes functioning compared to carts. Finn Scooters’ parent company, Sun Mountain, has been quick about sending parts and frames when necessary. “It’s nice to see the excitement,” Brad says. “We have people coming daily just to ride the scooters.” That’s good for golf and for business — and, ultimately, the community that Chippewa draws and embraces.

Community strength

The strength of Chippewa’s community starts with Brad’s expertise and his consistently prioritizing the course. “I start my day on the grounds,” he says. “Most of my crew is gone by early afternoon so then I make my way into the clubhouse to work on the business and financial side of things.”

Melanie shares what most superintendents won’t say about themselves. “Brad is an amazing, driven, detail-oriented individual,” she says. “He’s here almost every single day during the season and he believes the condition of the course is a direct reflection of him and his abilities. It’s not unusual for Brad to call into the



pro shop and ask for golfer feedback. He has wanted to own his own course since the day I met him and I’m incredibly proud he has made this professional goal come true. He’s earned it.”

Everyone wins with that level of enthusiasm, joy and dedication. The course is home to the Chippewa High School boys’ golf team. **Don Olney, Jr.**, who was a former coach there and who worked as a golf professional at Chippewa for more than 20 years, is fondly remembered and celebrated at the club. Olney passed away in a tragic car accident in 2015 and was a valued colleague and friend.

Olney gave lessons to kids and adults. Teaching and coaching came naturally. Every October, the Don Olney Memorial Golf Tournament is a reverent event near the end of the northeast Ohio golf season to help honor and remember a great man. Proceeds from that event go toward a scholarship awarded to a Chippewa High School senior who was on the golf team and will be pursuing further education.

Another special annual community event is the Thanks & Giving Scramble. Started in November 2020, it’s another way Chippewa gives back as funds raised are donated to the Doylestown food pantry or local families battling cancer. On three-person teams, players 59 and under play the white tees and those 60 and over play the gold tees. Everyone enjoys gathering and helping others at the beginning of the holiday season.

Brad continues to live his dream of owning a course — and not just any course, but one that is special for his family and the Chippewa golf community. Being the superintendent and the owner is demanding but he is motivated by his family and the people he works with. “When I make changes to manage this business effectively, it allows me to finally give back to the people and community that support our course,” he says. “That’s a huge motivator for me.”

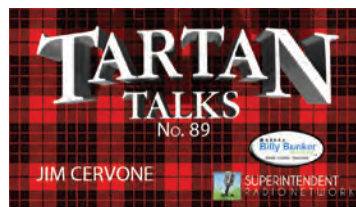
Lee Carr is a northeast Ohio-based writer and senior Golf Course Industry contributor.

Tartan Talks 89

Jim Cervone doesn't need approval from a board, committee or owner to make an architectural change at Venango Valley Inn & Golf Course.

Earlier this year, Cervone combined with his brother-in-law, **Michael Pero**,

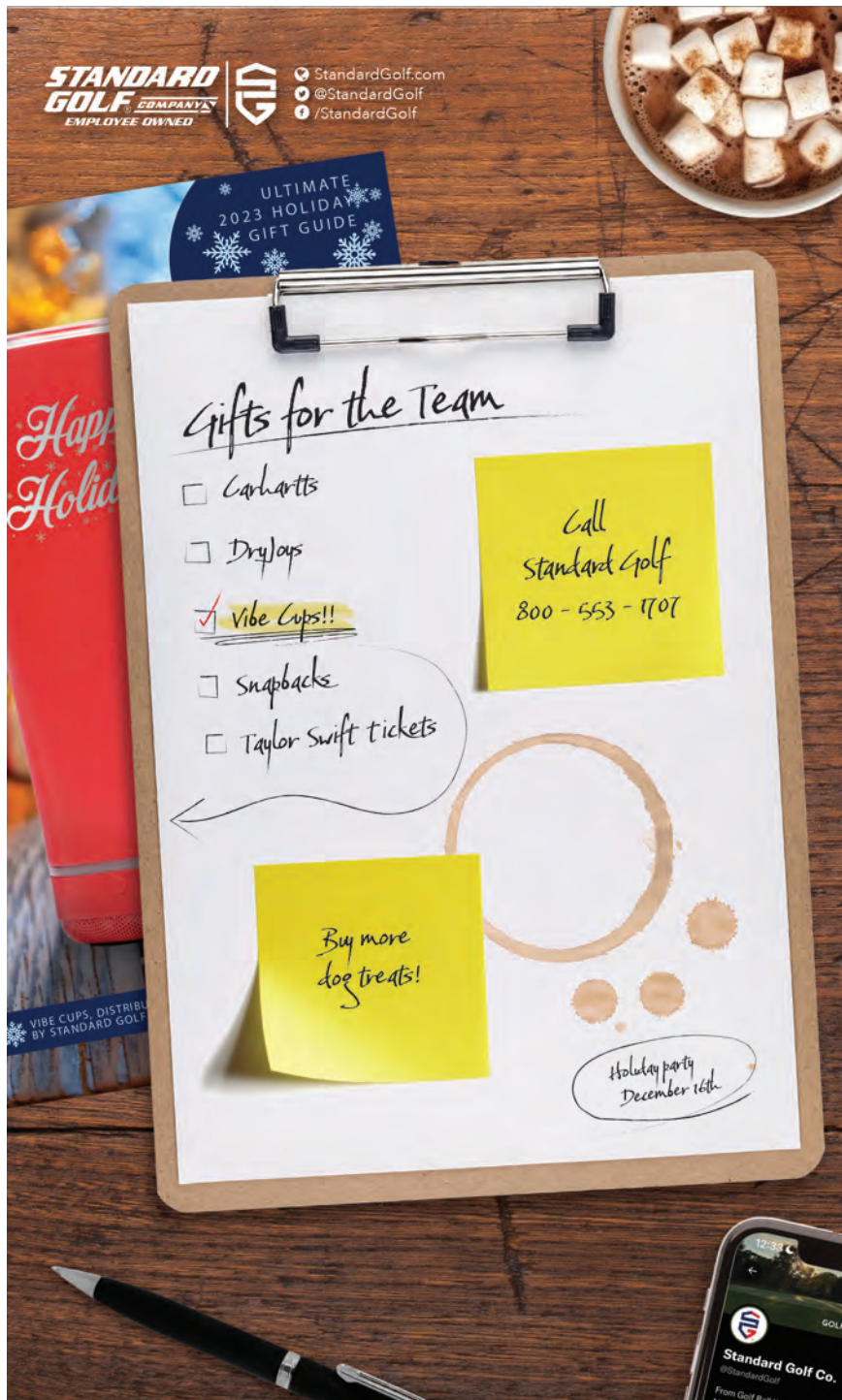
and **Tony Passilla** to purchase the charming northwest Pennsylvania course. The acquisition placed Cervone, the founder of western Pennsylvania-based Cervone Golf Design, into the rare category as an architect who also owns a golf course.



Venango Valley represents a special purchase for Cervone and his partners. The trio hails from Meadville, a small town 10 miles south of the course, and Cervone spent two decades working with previous owners **Durbin** and **Kim Loreno** to enhance the layout.

"This golf course has always been very impressive to me," Cervone says. "And in my line of work, I noticed from a public golf course standpoint this was one of the best. It's been very successful and very well-maintained. Along with it, you have a really wonderful restaurant where so many people in this area come to eat and they don't even play golf."

The purchase resulted in a busy 2023 for Cervone, who has no intention of curtailing his golf architecture work. Download the podcast on popular distribution platforms to learn how Cervone plans on co-owning a golf course while continuing his architecture business.



PEOPLE NEWS

The GCSAA announced their 2023 Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards: **H. Mitchell Wilkerson**, director of golf and grounds maintenance at Moss Creek Golf Club in Hilton Head, South Carolina, won the Communications and Outreach Award; **Matthew Gourlay**, the former director of golf course operations at Colbert Hills Golf Course in Manhattan, Kansas, who last month was named the superintendent at Hillcrest Country Club in Boise, Idaho, won the Healthy Land Stewardship Award; **Jim Pavonetti**, superintendent at Fairview Country Club in Greenwich, Connecticut, won the Innovative Conservation Award; and **Landon Lindsay**, superintendent at The Nelson Golf and Sports Club of Las Colinas in Irving, Texas, won the Natural Resource Conservation Award. All four will be recognized during the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show in Phoenix. ... Kansas State University graduate

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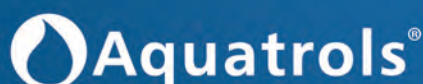
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student **Olayerni Ojeokun** is the 2023 winner of the **Larry Powell** Scholarship, which focuses on individuals from underserved populations who are or want to become a GCSAA member. Ojeokun earned her bachelor's degree in agronomy in 2021 from Osun State University in Osun, Nigeria, and is on track to earn her master's in horticulture science from KSU in December 2024. ... **Chip Halderman** is a new consultant for Turf & Soil Diagnostics. He worked most recently as the superintendent at The Orchards Golf Club in Lawrence, Kansas. ... Envu hired **T.J. Ashachik** as product manager for herbicides and **Brandon Ball** as area sales manager for central Florida. **Larry Barefield** was recently promoted to senior project manager for Landscapes Unlimited. Barefield has worked on projects in 29 states and three foreign countries during his almost 30-year career. ... Flomatic promoted **Jim Tucci** to become its new municipal and OEM sales manager.

and re-grassing them with TifEagle Bermudagrass. Tees, Fairways and roughs were re-grassed with TifTuf Bermudagrass. Bunkers were also restored. ... **Beau Wellington** Design recently started a renovation of The Peninsula Club, just outside Charlotte, North Carolina. Senior design associate **Chase Webb** will oversee the project, which will include re-grassing greens with TifEagle Bermudagrass and surrounds, fairways, rough and tees with Tahoma 31 Bermudagrass; a new irrigation system; upgraded drainage; new cart paths; strategic tree clearing; and a net reduction of bunker area. The project is scheduled for completion in October 2024. ... Elsewhere in the Carolinas, Wild Dunes Resort near Charleston, South Carolina, will start an \$8 million upgrade and enhancement to its **Tom Fazio**-designed Harbor and Links courses. That renovation is also scheduled to finish in October 2024. ... **Tripp Davis** and Associates completed a bunker project at Sonoma Golf Club in Sonoma,



COURSE NEWS

Bobby Weed Golf Design and MacCurrach Golf Construction completed a nine-month modernization of the Lagoon Course at Ponte Vedra Inn & Club in north Florida. The course features nine holes designed by **Robert Trent Jones** in 1961 and nine designed by **Joe Lee** in 1978. Director of agronomy **Joey Flinchbaugh** assisted with rebuilding all 20 greens to USGA standards

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California. DHR Construction worked with shaper **Jason Gold** and superintendent **Stacey Wallace** on the 16-week project, which is part of a larger master plan to enhance the course and practice facilities. ... Architect and restoration specialist **Ian Andrew** is leading a renovation of the **Gerard Lambert**-designed and **William Flynn**-revised Springdale Golf Club in Princeton, New Jersey. Work will focus on bunkers and surrounds, as well as the irrigation system, and conclude by the end of this year. **Donovan Maguigan** has been the course's superintendent since 2018. ... Astor Creek Golf & Country Club opened in Port St. Lucie, Florida. The course is the fourth that architect **Chris Wilczynski** has designed since 2010 for Kolter Homes, a resort-style development. RVI Planning & Landscape Design, Ryangolf, Thomas Engineering Group, Colleur & Hearing and irrigation consultant **Tony Altum** were all involved in the project. ... Florida's Treasure Coast will also soon be home to **Jim Furyk**'s first course design. The 17-time PGA Tour winner will be involved in the effort at Glynlea Country Club at Wylder. ... Grass Clippings, a Phoenix-based modern golf brand that celebrates greenskeepers, reopened Rolling Hills following a four-month renovation and ryegrass overseed. Architect **Jackson Kahn** Design and Grass Clipping director of agronomy **Scott Hebert** worked on the project, which included a new ninth hole, new tee boxes, a new irrigation system, and a new 15,000-square-foot practice putting green. ... Landscapes Unlimited helped with the groundbreaking for construction of Contentment Golf Club in Traphill, North Carolina. Located within two hours of Charlotte, Raleigh, Durham, Winston-Salem, Asheville and Greensboro, the focus of the property will be a **Lester George** 18-hole design set to open in September 2025. ... Troon is now managing the **Bill Johnston**-designed Hideout Golf Club & Resort in Brownwood, Texas, and the **Graham Marsh**

and **Vijay Singh**-designed Al Houara Golf Club in Tangier City, Morocco. ... Audubon International honored 40 courses that attained Audubon Certified Sanctuary Program for Golf status for 10, 20, or 30 years — including the Bay Course at Kapalua Resort on Maui, Hawaii, and Village Links of Glen Ellyn in Chicagoland, which both reached the 30-year mark.

INDUSTRY BUZZ

Husqvarna Group is entering the U.S. golf and sports field market with a dedicated sales team and dealer network. Aspen Outdoors, which focuses on much of the Midwest, is the company's first channel partner in the effort. ... DLF opened its new seed enhancement and operations facility in Albany, Oregon. The 141,000-square-foot facility includes 12 loading docks and 65,000 square feet of storage space, allowing the company to consolidate operations in the Beaver State. ... Spray Caddie Golf Cup Covers will now be available internationally. Thanks to a distribution deal between Back Nine Boys and Dint Golf Solutions, the products will be on the market in Australia and New Zealand, as well as much of Asia and the Pacific Islands.

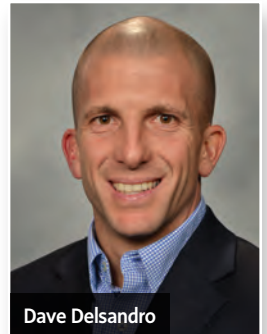
A for Advisors

How can veteran superintendents who have done just about everything during decades in the industry help others? **Dave Delsandro** and **Jeff Corcoran** think the answer is *any way you can imagine*.

After nearly 50 years combined in daily leadership positions—most recently at Oakmont Country Club and Oak Hill Country Club, respectively—the duo is partnering to launch Agronomic Advisors, a consulting firm focused on providing a diverse and comprehensive solutions set for the industry. Those solutions will include but are not limited to agronomy, operational management, project and construction prep and management, capital planning, tournament prep, hosting and restoration, and team building.

In a statement, Delsandro and Corcoran said that their new endeavor will be “the vehicle that will allow us to impart our acquired knowledge that was gained by managing golf courses at the highest level to other superintendents.”

Delsandro prepared for, hosted and restored venues for four national championships, including a pair of U.S. Opens. Corcoran has hosted two PGA Championships and two Senior PGA Championships at Oak Hill, where in 2019 he also worked with architect **Andrew Green** to renovate the East Course.



Dave Delsandro



Jeff Corcoran



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Kari Haug

GOLF COURSE ARCHITECT

Kari Haug approaches her work with the female golfer in mind. But her design philosophies also benefit the seniors and high-handicap amateurs, regardless of their gender or age.

An associate member of the European Institute of Golf Course Architects, Haug, who is based in Minneapolis, founded her own firm, Kari Haug Planning and Design, in 2005 with a focus on renovations and master plans.

She strives to create sustainable golf environments that are enjoyable for golfers of all ability levels.

Appearing on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast with host **Rick Woelfel**, Haug offered an overview of her approach to course design.

“There’s choice,” she says. “We want to make sure everybody has a choice of what tee they use, a choice of what pathway they play to the green. It’s not only about the aerial game, it’s also about the ground game.”

Haug relied on analytics to help her determine how to design a golf course that would be a good fit for women, a segment of the golf community that has sometimes been overlooked in the past in terms of course design.

“I did a study with Club Champions,” she says. “We found out exactly how far women golfers hit the ball and how high they hit it and what kind of rollout they have. I use that data in my designs. I also put a pretty big emphasis on inclusion.”

Haug’s approach to design also serves to make golf more enticing to new golfers, seniors and those with slow swing speeds who may not be possessed of great athletic skills but would still like to enjoy the game. Haug is a devoted follower of the LPGA and plays the game recreationally.

“I’m very interested in the women’s game,” she says. “But that doesn’t leave out the other groups you’ve mentioned. Slow swing speed comes with age. Senior men have a slower swing speed and, as they age, their games come back to almost equal to some of our longer-hitting female amateurs (to say nothing of senior men who *never* hit it as far as female amateurs).

We want choice on the tees. Not everybody hits the ball the same distance. Not all women hit the ball the same distance, and for so many years we’ve only had one forward tee to play off.

“Along came **Alice Dye**, recommending two forward tees that rarely got built. My design philosophy is, ‘We really need to give women a choice of tees. There’s a broad spectrum of how far women hit the ball. We need a choice on which tee to be able to hit off of.’”

Haug points out that setting up a golf course that is playable for all involves more than distance and yardage. Just as significant is the placement of hazards.

“It can be strategic,” Haug says. “It can be an aiming bunker. But if you can’t see it, you can’t aim at it. So, the elevation of the tee, not only where it’s located but the elevation. And then the ground game, all the way from the tee to the green. If we move the tee forward and we get the drive landing in an area that’s ahead of the landing area for the back tees, and the second shot into a green (on a par 4) is more equitable, that landing area has to be able to receive a shot.”

Haug is of the opinion that courses need to be shorter to accommodate shorter hitters, regardless of gender.

“The idea is you should be able to reach a green in regulation on a par 4,” she adds. “On a par 4, it shouldn’t be driver, then 3 wood or the longest fairway club in your bag, and then a chip onto the green. It should be able to be reached in regulation.” **GCI**



We found out exactly how far women golfers hit the ball and how high they hit it and what kind of rollout they have. I use that data in my designs. I also put a pretty big emphasis on inclusion.”



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THE 2023 GRAINY AWARDS

Huh, what? Is the year over? I fell asleep somewhere during the Texas swing. Did I miss anything? Not much, you say? Yeah, I didn't think so. Still, the selection committee was able to stay awake long enough to present the most prestigious awards in the world of golf agronomics. And the Grainys sleepingly go to ...

Best Overall Picture: *The Game of Golf*. Just a few years ago we were afraid this picture would bomb. But now we're dealing with record rounds, more people than ever on our courses, and money — money everywhere. Not that much of it is finding its way back to maintenance departments, which leads to the next award ...

Worst Set Design: *The Game of Golf, Part 2*. So, we all got what we said we wanted: The game is booming. Are you happy now? Probably not if you're a superintendent, as we're not being given enough resources or the labor to keep up with the rising demand. Course conditions around the country can be called "questionable," with the question being, "Why aren't they in better shape?" Too many golfers? Maybe. Owners and clubs trying to squeeze every cent out of the boom? Perhaps. Too much growth too fast? Hmmm. Forget closing the course for a full day for maintenance when there are tee times that could easily be sold. Forget regulating the amount of play. Don't be surprised if next year's Grainy for Worst Screenplay goes to "To Close or Not To Close."

Best Supporting Actor: Michael Block. The club professional from

Arroyo Trabuco Golf Club, a daily-fee course in Southern California, became a household name for his stunning performance at the PGA Championship. (Pop quiz: Which was held *where*? Oak Hill. An extra half-day course closure if you remember.) Block did a great deal to raise the profile of PGA professionals everywhere while giving a boost to the real backbone of the game: public golfers and public courses. Thanks for the warm and fuzzies, Mike, but remember, those 15 minutes of fame go fast!

Least Supported Actress: Courtney Myhrum. Why did the Mother Ship blame a USGA Rules official for making an "incorrect call" one week after it happened? When **Rory McIlroy** allegedly took improper relief during the final round of the U.S. Open, the USGA insisted that he'd done nothing wrong and instead blamed Ms. Myhrum days later for having chosen the wrong point from which to start measuring the one-club-length relief area.

"What the referee deems here is bigger than any other shot this week," said one writer.

"This is not luck," said **Nick Dougherty** on Sky Sports. "This is beyond luck."

Where were the rovers, rules chairman and support from the world's best officials? Talk about improper relief ...

Outstanding Cinematography: *U.S. Women's Open*

It's admittedly hard to screw up when Pebble Beach is the venue, but the stunning visuals plus an engaging champion brought

well-earned attention to this often-overlooked event, nominally the crowning achievement in women's golf.

Best, Worst, Most Overhyped and Most Monotonous Screenplay: *LIV Golf*

In this year of golf's unprecedented growth, the lead story week after week was about unprecedented greed. Say what you want about LIV. What golfers and the general public talked about each week wasn't who won their hard-to-follow tournaments, but the machinations, behind and in front of the scenes, as the various actors fought for attention and legitimacy. And the money? Even if you think the average pro golfer should earn 22 times what the average schoolteacher makes in this country, the amounts thrown at largely over-the-hill and under-the-radar pros "competing" for **Greg Norman** and the Saudis are obscene.

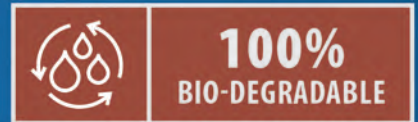
Best Unoriginal Story: Alan Shipnuck. This golf scribe's ongoing fascination with airing everyone's dirty laundry except his own has gone on longer than **Bernhard Langer's** career. After ripping the lid — and the scabs — off the **Phil Mickelson** story, Shipnuck dove into the mud pit that is LIV Golf with "LIV and Let Die: The Inside Story of the War Between the PGA Tour and LIV." Let die, please.

Worst Costume Design: *Joggers*. Last year it was hoodies. This year it's joggers — "pants" that look more like pajamas. What's next: cleats on bunny slippers?



TIM MORAGHAN, principal, ASPIRE Golf (tmoraghan@aspire-golf.com). Follow Tim online at Golf Course Confidential at www.aspire-golf.com/or on X at @TimMoraghan.

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OUTSIDE THE ROPES

Worst Sound Mixing: GCSAA Conference and Trade Show.

Are they not listening? Or is it just tone deafness? Either way, how can the GCSAA and its partners in the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show continue to justify taking our annual shindig to places most of us can't afford? A February "vacation" in the country's most desirable winter destinations — San Diego, Las Vegas, Phoenix — might be a nice expense-account boondoggle for vendors and past presidents, but for superintendents from munis and public links, it's probably a big chunk of their maintenance budget.

Most Needed Sound Editing: "Championship".

As in championship golf course. Every course, from the 9-hole course to the U.S. Open venue, hosts a number of "championships" every year for its dues-paying members or fee-paying customers. But that doesn't make it a "championship" golf course, especially before it is even opened. Use the word all you want in promoting your facility, but know this: It's meaningless until you host a national championship.

Cleverest Sound Editing:

Jay Monahan. When the PGA Tour commissioner and Governor of the Saudi Public Investment Fund announced the creation of a "new, yet-to-be-named for-profit company" that would end the Tour-LIV wars, they did so on CNBC. The official explanation was that it's a business story, but it really seemed to be a way to sneak the news by the majority of the golf world, which is tuned to Fox News daily. Just one problem: Like so many treatments that Hollywood picks up, there's no guarantee this one will ever hit the silver screen.

Worst Sequel: Phil Mickelson.

The way he flaps his gums, this might be "Jaws 4," which is another continuing feature we never want to see. Every time "The Man Who

Talked Too Much" opens "The Big Mouth," I want to "Scream" (1-6). Two words: "Get Out."

Most Need for Visual Effects: Superintendents as Photographers

"Get down and get close." That's what the late **Jim Snow**, director of the USGA's Green Section, used to say. Don't just point and shoot: Zoom in! Get as close as you can to take better photos of your course. My eyes are fading like my tee shots, and if you're trying to highlight an element don't stand 100 yards away.

Worst Short Subject:

Rickie Fowler. Short in stature, short putt, short sighted. Who concedes a 2½-foot putt to lose the Ryder Cup? You have to make him hole it, win or lose! Even if the outcome is determined. Do you think **Seve** would have conceded it?

Most Excruciating Long-Form Documentary: Ryder Cup Selection.

This isn't just about Fowler, but **Lucas Glover** and **Keegan Bradley** made a valid point: If we are going into battle, select 12 warriors at the top of their game at that moment. Of course, who makes the team is a sequel nearly 100 years old. Don't expect it to play out any time soon.

A True Lifetime Achievement Award.

Besides having to get the North Course at Los Angeles Country Club ready for the U.S. Open, **Chris Wilson**, director of golf course and grounds, planned a fitting tribute to a dear friend. A year earlier, **Jeremy Dobson** — Chris' friend since fourth grade and the course superintendent at The Patriot Club in Tulsa, Oklahoma — was killed in a tragic car accident. Wilson turned Championship Sunday into a tribute to Dobson, dressing the grounds staff and volunteers in purple in homage to Jeremy's beloved Wildcats and Kansas roots. The sea of purple painted a picture worth a thousand words. **GC**

TURFHEADS TAKE OVER



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BIOLOGICAL SOIL MANAGEMENT

Joel Simmons

President, EarthWorks

What's the best way to manage turf? A question that has been pondered since we started maintaining sports turf for the pleasure of our guests. Much of the conversation has been focused exclusively on what is best for the plant with little emphasis on the soil. The soil conversation has too often been limited to pH and soil chemistry, but recently golf course superintendents and sports turf managers are asking questions about soil biology. There are few fertilizer manufacturers today who have not introduced carbon amendments to their products, materials like humic acids, kelp meal or sugars. The reason for this change is that we are all discovering the importance of promoting beneficial micro-organisms in our soils.

One of the fastest growing and most exciting agronomic concepts today is Biological Soil Management. This is a "Soil First" approach to turf management and one that addresses soil chemistry through soil testing. This helps to open the soil physically, allowing more air and water to move through the soil profile creating an environment where soil microbes can proliferate. Along with soil balancing we apply diverse forms of available carbon amendments to provide food energy for soil microbial populations. This allows soil microbiology to do what they do best — digest ligneous roots systems into humus. This process has been successful in helping manage water availability, improving nutrient flow, flocculating tight compacted soils, building better and deeper root systems, and reducing overall plant stress.

The approach follows the theories of the three-legged stool where soil chemistry affects soil physics, which affects soil biology. However, it's the soil biology that gets the least attention while providing the greatest benefits to the plant. There is an old adage that states "microbes eat at the table first" that describes how all fertilizer

molecules must go through microbial degradation in order to become available to the plant. Nitrogen molecules go through nitrification, which breaks them down from a molecule to NH_4 to NO_2 and then to NO_3 , the nitrate form of nitrogen, that is easily taken up by the plant so it can be utilized intra-cellularly. This process is done by soil microbes that need energy in the form of available carbon to function and to get the plant nitrogen in the form that it needs. When we continuously feed the soil a straight diet of synthetic nitrogen, we "burn out", or use up, the available carbon (humus) in the soil and the nitrification process is weak. We then need to apply more and more fertilizer to get the same results.

Biological Soil Management does not exclude the need for synthetic nitrogen from time to time. It is simply focused on balancing the carbon to nitrogen ratio (C:N), which is the most critical agronomic function. This new trend of supplying carbon to the soil is about feeding soil microbes, not about feeding the plant as many have erroneously suggested. One of the greatest results of a Biological Soil Management program is reduced inputs, less thatch (which is directly related to the overuse of synthetic nitrogen and an imbalance of the soil's C:N ratio) and ultimately a healthier plant.

Biological Soil Management is a simple concept of balancing the soil chemically and feeding the soil with available carbon sources that allow microbes to grow in population and activity. For over 35 years, EarthWorks has been a pioneer and staunch advocate of Biological Soil Management in the turf industry. Naysayers argue that "organics" won't work until the soil warms up in the late spring and then all that fertilizer kicks out all at once causing plant stress and disease! But superintendents wouldn't use anything that would do that! In fact, many of them have shared their success stories on the EarthWorks Podcast.



TURFHEADS TAKE OVER



TOUCHING CARTS

A conversation between **Brent Downs**, **CGCS**, and his niece and restaurant manager Andra Swarts led to some proven tableside practices being successfully applied to the golf course.

It was February 2023 and I had missed the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show in Orlando due to contracting COVID-19. Yes, that was rough.

I tried to use the downtime for some educational study on my own and dream up ways to improve our operation. I will also apologize here to our golf course superintendent **Mitchell Eickhoff** and assistant superintendent **Tim Martin** for those times when I consider

▶ Andra Swarts is the successful restaurant manager who inspired the customer-focused mindset implemented at Otter Creek Golf Course.

new ideas, thus increasing their workload!

Two words continually popped into my brainstorming sessions: customer service. In the past, all those words really meant to me was the desk I returned a wrong-sized wrench to at The Home Depot (*insert bad joke rimshot drums here*).

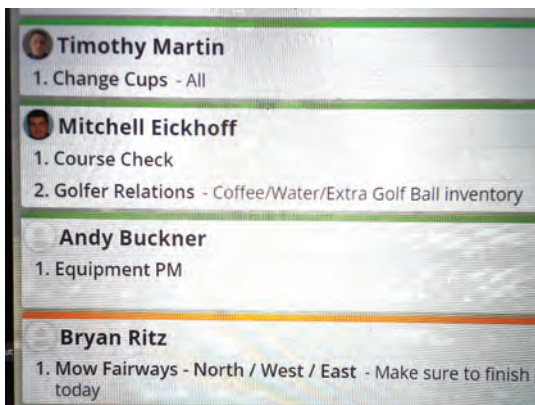
Later in my career, customer service meant providing a quality playing surface for the players. Sounds simple in theory, but we know it's far from simple. We are the production crew for the stage production. If we do our job correctly, everyone enjoys the performance. But nobody knows we are there.

We usually don't learn customer service in college. Few of us train for it once we enter the workforce. Customer service is the restaurant, outside services and golf shop team, but it's not us as golf maintenance employees. Our customer service is in the product we provide, not the interaction. We are at our best when nobody knows we are there — or so we were taught.

But is that true today?

Many things in our industry have changed in the last 10 years from mental health to “down with brown” and everything in between. I had this gut feeling that we could do more to provide customer service. At the time, though, it seemed like just a theory or a lingering thought. The concept resembled that person whose name is on the tip of your

▼ Golfer relations has become a job board task at Otter Creek Golf Course.



tongue. I knew there was more here, but I had no idea how to develop or quantify it. You reach a point where you put the thought away and decide to deal with it later.

Days later, I am on the phone with a world-renowned front-of-house restaurant manager named **Andra Swarts**. She is the absolute pinnacle of professionalism and one of the most sought-after restaurant professionals in the world. OK, maybe I am embellishing a bit here (but not much). I feel I'm allowed to.

Andra, after all, is also my niece.

I had caught her on her break, and I was just seeing how she was doing. She told me she was great, but she had to go soon. She was due up for her latest round of “touching tables.” That term is restaurant slang for checking in on guests. The lightbulb then hit. She promised to call me after her shift. I was now intrigued.

Me: *Tell me more about this “touching tables.”*

Her: *Uh-oh. Something's got that uncle brain turning ... it must hurt.*

Sadly, I have no one to blame but myself on that one. Sarcasm is my

first language as well!

Me: *Just get to the point, smart aleck.*

Her: *OK, every hour or two, depending on covers (the number of full tables), I head out to the dining room to touch tables. I stop by the table to see if they are enjoying themselves and their experience. I ask if there is anything we can do for them. I try and take a different path each time, and make sure at each point every table is “touched.”*

Me: *But isn't that handled by the wait team?*

Her: *Of course. And they are very good. But it's another layer of service. It's expected from the wait team. But for some, coming from a manager, it just means more ... more service, more knowledge, more responsibility.*

It just means more ...

Me: *But is that something everybody wants? Don't some folks just want to enjoy their meal in peace?*

Andra: *Of course. A little emotional intelligence goes a long way, Uncle Brent (oh, touché). Read the room. Their body language and responses dictate how long I am there. Some just want to enjoy their meal. They tell me it's good, and I am on to the next table. Some want*

to discuss spices, cooking styles, wine pairings, etc. Those I spend more time with. But ultimately, my goal is to give each table the service and attention they need. Some a lot, some not as much. It's not a perfect science, and we all misread sometimes. But the real key is they know I am there and that we care about their experience.

WE CARE ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE

How did I miss it? Consider it wisdom from a woman 10 years my junior.

After the conversation, it got me thinking about what we had been missing. We have access to the golfers throughout their round. The golf shop only has it on four holes: 1, 9, 10 and 18. As much as we are viewed as the product-oriented team and they are more service-oriented, golf course maintenance actually has far more contact points with the golfers. With that in mind, I started formulating a plan to attempt to access more golfers near the middle of the nines. This is an area where we can provide access that other departments don't receive.

Like most ideas, it had rudimentary beginnings. One member of my management team made it a point to check in with one group a day. Initially, the who, what, where, when and why didn't matter. We knew they would later, but early on this was a social experiment. It was tougher than we thought. It sounds so easy in theory until you get bogged down in the daily grind and putting out the unexpected fires. We stuck with it the best we could.

By the end of the season, we had not only refined the process, but we now have the best relationship with the playing public in our time here. We also developed three key points from the restaurant concept and applied it to golf courses.

SCHEDULE IT

We learned you can't just have this be a job you do in the process of another task. It's far too easy to be forgotten

or dropped in the grind. If you are going to say you want to make customer service a priority, then make it a routine scheduled and executed task.

We have a job board task titled "Golfer Relations," where the manager assigned takes an hour of their time to visit one or two groups. We have even developed a procedure of what sections of the course to visit (either 5-6 or 15-16) due to mid-round access.

Think about it. Most places have a task scheduled for greens mowing, right? If you value member service, make it a real value by having a schedule and procedure for it.

SUPPLY IT

This concept definitely evolved over time. What started as a check-in grew into a supply mission if needed.

I began to keep a couple of cold waters on hand if the day was warm and carried a coffee or two for my cold check-ins. It has even gotten to a place where I keep a few tees, divot tools and ball markers in my supply tray for these checks. I can't tell you the number of times we have heard, "I can't find my divot tool," or something analogous.

When you are able to fill that missing piece, it sheds an amazing light on your team and service, even for the simplest of things. Be prepared. You never know when a cold bottle of water could completely change someone's experience.

READ IT

My niece couldn't have been more correct when she said, "A little emotional intelligence goes a long way." Read the room, or in this case, the cart.

A group coming off multiple triple bogeys might want nothing to do with you. In those instances, their body language and your gut feeling should be telling you to make a quick and polite exit. That is OK. I remembered what my niece said: different people require different kinds of service. That is as true for golfers as it is for restaurant patrons.

The more you make yourself do it, the more you will be able to read the temperature of a group and can provide better service with each visit. Sometimes you're a barista delivering coffee. Sometimes you're a teacher explaining your cultural practices. Sometimes you're a motivator, telling them their next hole will be better than their last. And finally, yes, sometimes you will be an ear for them to vent their frustration.

It's not perfect. It never will be. But even in that, some of our best reviews have come from frustrated people who vented mid-round, allowing it to clear their system for the rest of their experience. Your service may pave the way for your best review yet. But you won't ever know that without "being there."

WE STILL HAVE a long way to go. Our early growth indicates to me we are on the right track. And hopefully, in some small way, these core concepts may help you improve relations at your course.

Take the core concepts and make them your own. This is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Like every golf course, the process is unique. It's about the idea of taking customer service and making it work for your golfers, in whatever direction that takes you. If you never plan it or improve it, it will continue to sit in the corner gathering dust next to **Matthew Wharton's** mashie niblick. (Sorry, Matthew!)

It looks different for every club, but I can promise you this: It will make you a better service team and earn you more respect in golfers' eyes. From touching tables to touching carts, it's a service industry for both businesses. My niece opened my eyes to that. In some way, I hope this helps you develop your plan, too. **GCI**

Brent Downs, CGCS, is the director of agronomy at Otter Creek Golf Course in Columbus, Indiana. This is his third Turfheads Take Over contribution.



YOU CAN'T HIDE BEHIND THE GRASS

The Cart Guy makes his return! Semi-retired CEO **Rich Obertots** chats with Kennsington Golf Club superintendent **Sean Novotny** about customer-focused practices.

For more than nine years, I have had the pleasure of knowing and working with **Sean Novotny**, the superintendent at Kennsington Golf Club in Canfield, Ohio. I first met Sean as a customer/golfer (all too often doing damage to his turf trying to strike my irons!). I then started working with him when I was a pro-shop attendant and most recently while enjoying my outdoor duties as a “Cart Guy.”

INSIGHTFUL, BUSINESS SAVVY AND CUSTOMER-FOCUSED

Throughout our conversations, I have always found Sean to be exceedingly insightful about the ecosystem and human dynamics of the Kennsington golf operation. He's savvy about business and marketing, and committed to customer focus and engagement.

“As a superintendent, you can't hide behind the grass,” he says. “Be out front for concerns or complaints expressed by customers.”

Here are some of Sean's insights and examples of his customer-focused practices as he expressed them to me on a recent 27-degree morning in November as our shift was commencing.

MAKE DIRECT CONTACT

What's Sean's process?

“When there's an issue, as an example, when Kennsington receives

an email from a disappointed golfer/customer, if they provided a phone number, I call them directly,” he says. “I'm not going to waste my time with an email back-and-forth because you can't distinguish a customer's tone through an email or text, right? So, when I call, I begin with, “This is Sean. I'm the superintendent at Kennsington Golf Club. Thank you for sharing your concern. What's going on?”

“Then, they explain. Then, I clarify, ‘Here's what happened and here is what I'm dealing with.’ I am not giving excuses; I am just giving you an *explanation*. I am aware of it, and I am going to fix it. I WANT YOU BACK AT KENNSINGTON. Most of the time the response I get is, “Thank you very much for making the phone call.”

VERBAL JUDO ON THE TURF (NOT A MAT)

Sean applies turf martial arts to dealing with customers.

“My wife, **Alexis**, made me read the book ‘Verbal Judo,’” he says. “It teaches you to listen to the customer's problem, you reiterate their problem, then you come up with a resolution, which is the gist of what the phenomenal book is all about. So, once I do that, usually the customer is pleased and often states, ‘I'm shocked that you even called me because I don't think that happens

a lot at golf courses.’ The customer may be thinking, ‘I can't believe the superintendent called me!’ You must take on these problems immediately and head on.”

GOLF BALLS AND YOUR CREW

It's common for golfers to encounter the groundskeeping staff during play. Sean's team deploys an effective technique to keep golfers contented and moving.

“Although we try to keep ahead of golfers while working, especially when we are at our afternoon activities, there are going to be times where there are golfer/crew encounters,” he says. “A practice we use to keep golfers moving is, if for instance one of our crew is stopped and waiting for a group or golfer to complete her or his shot, then the golfer hits their ball way off in the rough, woods, weeds or, during autumn, under a pile of leaves, ... rather than wait for them to find it, we'll ask, ‘What kind of ball are you playing?’ Then, from a bag of balls we have collected on the course, our guys will toss out one that could be the same brand or better. This way, the golfer doesn't lose the \$3 or \$4 they paid for the ball, the gesture is a positive interaction, and we help maintain pace of play.”

CUT THE GOSSIP CORD BEFORE THE CALLS MULTIPLY

There's much truth to the fact that one dissatisfied customer/golfer who might not understand the context of what is going on at the course *during their round* can multiply and communicate their perceived “problem” by

the thousands through social media or gossip at a bar. Sean expressed this frustration and what to do about it.

“How often does a group of golfers go to a bar and talk after their round? Somebody says, ‘How was your round?’ If their round wasn’t all that good, some golfers will begin their tirade of complaints, ‘Oh, I shot 72. The course is disgustingly trashed, greens are horrible, ball marks everywhere.’ So, the guy that’s across the bar hears this. Then he goes out somewhere and tells his four friends, ‘Oh, don’t go to that golf course! Ball marks everywhere. Bunkers aren’t raked.’

“Before you know it that story gets to 36 or 40 people by word of mouth. Add to that, social channels really multiply and amplify a perceived problem.

“Like the old telephone game, after several iterations and embellishments of what may have been one green that was a problem child *that day* after an outing, it turns into all the greens are terrible. You have to cut the cord whenever you can. That’s why when I am made aware of a complaint, I’m on it. I cut that cord. And we work hard

every day so that the telephone game doesn’t get started.”

SEASONAL FREQUENCY OF MANAGING CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

I asked Sean how many times each season he is making direct phone calls to respond to complaints picked up via social media, or through emails or voicemails. “I average five to six per season,” he says. “Where somebody is passionate or intense, I respect that and I tell the customer. I actually thank them. What’s so amazing is — I’ve never had a bad experience once we get to talking one-on-one. The most common reaction is, ‘I can’t believe you called me directly on this.’”

WE CAN FIX MOST CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AND FORTIFY OUR COURSE’S REPUTATION

Sean may have the answer to ending most golfer/customer disappointment issues.

“No matter what every golf course superintendent in the world does, customer complaints will occur,” he

says. “It’s a battle and it’s part of our job. We gotta creatively fix it. But you also must fix the golfer first, right? When some guy figures out there just looking for flaws to nitpick or when somebody invents a ball that doesn’t leave ball marks, he’ll be a billionaire.

“But in all seriousness, our reality is the reputation of the golf course is all we have. Yeah, we are committed

to the ideal that every person that walks in and out of this place has to say, ‘It was the greatest customer experience I’ve ever had. I love the greens, awesome tees. The fairways were like carpet,’ right? We must do that. We must strive. And like I tell my guys, ‘You’ll leave it better than when you found it every day. You gotta keep getting better every day.’ That’s every golf course, right? Gotta get better. And if that’s managing customers, complaints and the gossip, that’s part of the job now and always.”

ATTEST TO SEAN AND HIS COMPETENT CREW’S SUCCESS

As a “Cart Guy,” I am consistent about asking golfers after their rounds, “How were the conditions for you?” I can attest. It’s so gratifying to hear that most of the remarks are positive *if not glowing*. I try to often text Sean to share this with him and his competent team. Sean and his groundskeeping crew are succeeding in the complex and ever-dynamic challenges of managing the Kennsington Golf Club turf and the many thousands of customers playing on it. **GCI**

Sean Novotny earned a bachelor’s degree in turfgrass science at Ohio State University and further advanced at Ohio State ATI with work and studies in Ireland under Mike O’Keeffe. He has been the superintendent at Kennsington Golf Club in Canfield, Ohio, for 18 years. This is his first Turfheads Take Over contribution.

Rich Obertots is a fifth-year part-time employee at Kennsington Golf Club. He is presently working with Kennsington owner Chuck Whitman and Sean on a comprehensive culture crafting, training and development program. He has 43 years of experience in the Critical Medical Services field and his companies Think-ThroughTools, LLC, THE DAYBREAK DISPATCH of Daybreak Music and TDD Films remain active developing outreach, content marketing, training systems and software configurations. This is his second Turfheads Take Over contribution.

The AIR Protocol™ and golf operations

Incidents, problems, conflicts and deviations from our agreed Customer Focus Reflex process occur during our golf operations activities. You then get the call, text, tweet, email or see it on the nightly local TV, cable news or YouTube. The uniform method to manage these is to use the AIR Protocol™:

- 1. Accept responsibility** – ownership to take action
- 2. Investigate** and maintain consistent communication with all stakeholders
- 3. Reconcile** – to bring this to satisfactory loop closure

It’s vital to document all activities in your CRM (Customer Relationship Management) software platform. Or at minimum create a WORD document to get to superiors.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Accepting responsibility — ownership to **take action** — *does not mean immediately accepting blame!* Although there may be a fault, the primary intent is to clarify that **you will own this**, and you will be accountable to see it through.

Investigating requires that you engage the involved parties to gather and document facts. The key is that you establish with the individual(s) in conflict that you will keep in touch using a method and frequency **they** desire. Based on the intensity and urgency of the event be sure to clarify in writing and document in your CRM software how you will maintain communication and how often.

Reconciliation requires that at some point the process is concluded — ideally to mutual satisfaction. However, it may be the case that this is not achievable and may need to go to higher levels or litigation.

When all staff consistently implement the AIR Protocol™, you will amplify customer certainty, adhesion and trust.

IT'S CALLED KAIZEN

After survival by the slimmest of margins, **Charlie Fultz** outlines how Japanese ideas helped spark a Virginia course to achieve record revenue and play.

Change can sometimes be hard for anyone to accept, much less the golfers who play your facility. However, change brought about in an incremental, continuous process over time can make subtle but marked improvements to your facility. That kind of change is known as kaizen, a Japanese term that has been used at such companies as Toyota and Ariens to help make them among the most successful in the world. Before discussing kaizen, it's important to know how it entered my professional life almost 20 years ago.

Back in the mid-2000s, I was the section chair at the Virginia Turfgrass Councils Conference and Show. I was in charge of introducing the speakers in my section and one of those speakers was Mr. **Jim Paluch** of JP Horizons out of Ohio. Not one minute into his presentation he had the entire audience engaged with his passion and drive discussing builders and destroyers, creating teams and getting them engaged in the operation, and how lean could be used in the golf world to help streamline operations. I was mesmerized listening to Jim during his hour-long presentation and I was fired up, ready to take on the world.

As Jim finished, I went up, shook his hand and told him how much I enjoyed his presentation. After he walked off the stage, he called my name and asked, "If you liked that so much, why don't get started on your own journey?" He then threw his book, "Five Important Things," to me. I went home and read his book over the course of a few days, then reached out to him to let him know how much I enjoyed it. Little did I know Jim had a plan for me.

Jim and I spoke a few weeks later and he offered me his 52-week program, The Working Smarter Training Challenge, to try at my golf course, The Shenvalee Golf Resort in New Market, Virginia. We were going to be the first golf maintenance operation in the country to test it. I wasn't sure I could make it work with the motley crew I had — my team, not the band — but I took it on.

The Challenge was a challenge at times but we achieved some amazing results, all led and instigated by the crew: more efficient ways to get people out the door in the morning, better shop design to get equipment in and out faster, analyzing how to more efficiently aerify greens. I was hooked and Jim had more in store for me.

We spoke a few weeks later and he asked if I was willing to come to his company headquarters to talk about how lean and kaizen might be able to function in the golf maintenance

▲ Consistent cultural practices are aiding the turnaround at Heritage Oaks Golf Course.

world. I flew to Ohio and met Jim and his team, namely his wife, **Beth**, and **Jim Coulter**, one of his lead people at JP Horizons. We discussed my going around the country to speak at conferences about this program and offer it in a drawing to someone to try out. I agreed to take it on and created the presentation over a two-day power session at JP Horizons, using what we did at Shenvalee as the basis of my PowerPoint.

Over the course of the next 18 months, I spoke all over the country: Las Vegas; Ames, Iowa; Naples, Florida; Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; Helena, Montana; and Minneapolis-St. Paul were just some of the places where I was a featured speaker. While we created a nice buzz, with



▲ Jack-of-many-trades Charlie Fultz.

some articles showing up in some major magazines, it never really took off in golf maintenance. But for me, it became life and how I'd live it professionally and personally. And I was offered the opportunity a few years ago to put it all to use.

Golf Course Industry gave me the opportunity to talk about my return to golf after a 13-year absence and it's all well-documented. Thanks to **Guy** and **Matt** for allowing me the space to talk about it. Now that I was back in golf, kaizen came back to the forefront of the golf course. For us to survive and thrive, the course needed help.

MY COURSE BARELY survived getting shut down right before COVID-19 hit. We survived only by a 3-2 city council vote and I was tasked as the newly appointed (but still interim) general manager/golf course superintendent to find ways to cut money, operate smarter financially and be more efficient. Efficiency, lean management and improvements sounded a lot like kaizen.

Initially, I had to cut more than \$600,000 from the operating budget. It was a huge blow, but I felt we

could make it all work by being more stringent in our operations. We eliminated more than 30 acres of rough and allowed it to grow to a natural state. We instituted the regular use of growth regulators on greens, tees and fairways to where we only mowed fairways and tees once a week. Those two immediate and easy-to-implement changes paid dividends in gas and labor savings. We were on our way.

I began talking with our current golfers as well as with the people who had played here before about what they did and didn't like about Heritage Oaks and its daily playing conditions. No. 1 on the list were our bunkers, which had not been edged since their installation in 2001. Other comments focused on soggy, wet fairways, slow greens and inconsistent rough. Our customers presented us with a game plan and we began to change and improve.

We edged all the greenside bunkers and worked them up, instantly making them better but more noticeable as they looked "clean." The second year, we edged the fairway traps. In less than 18 months, the bunkers were addressed. Other changes were slower. We began seeding around the greens to improve the stand of turf there. We began changing how we watered the golf course and how it handled the water by implementing more effective ways to aerify. We added wetting agents to help us move water more efficiently. And we began to modify our reputation. We weren't executing massive changes, but people started to notice. Play started going up after COVID and we've not looked back.

In the pro shop, we began making changes as well. We acquired a new fleet of carts and offered new apparel (but not an overabundance of new apparel and with more focus on what the golfer *needs* to play, like balls, gloves, tees and towels). We had a smaller but more efficient staff in the pro shop with a focus on part-time retirees rather than full-time staff to

run the pro shop under the tutelage of our head professional, **Dave Johns**. We needed to gently nudge our rates as we were just priced too low for daily play and outside tournaments. We increased by \$4 to \$5.

We also made it a point to try to attract college students to play the golf course by offering a discounted student season pass. In 2021, we had 35 college passholders. The next year, we had 70. This year, we have 150. A fourfold increase in just two years. We simply used word of mouth to advertise this new rate and it exploded.

Word spread that Heritage Oaks was a different golf course. We were in better shape on the course, and we had a much more efficient, responsible staff that made the whole experience better. Play increased and in my second year the course was profitable for the first time in its 22-year existence. Fast forward to this year, my third, and the course doubled its profits and play is up over 20 percent from 2022.

The discussions of closing the course are now long past, and we have more in store for 2024 (an accidental rhyme there). We plan on finally opening the snack bar, which we will run in-house, and we are going to welcome back volunteers to help us run the golf course a little better. We need starters and rangers thanks to our increased play and I am hopeful that we can fill four or five volunteer spots.

None of our successes would have been possible without the lessons I learned from Jim Paluch, especially about lean management and kaizen. Our operation is focused on improvements that make it stand out and that offer value to the people who play here.

And, as evidenced by our third year of record play and revenue, it seems to be working. **GCI**

Charlie Fultz is the general manager and golf course superintendent at Heritage Oaks Golf Course in Harrisonburg, Virginia. This is his fourth Turfheads Take Over contribution.



HIRING CHALLENGES WHEN TRYING TO REPLACE ASSISTANTS

Ron Furlong has hired a pair of assistants over the last 20 years without much trouble. But the process has changed and, still searching after months, he's realizing the whole structure might be changing too.

The first time I had to replace my assistant superintendent was 2004. I had been superintendent here at Avalon Golf Club for a couple years when the assistant I had inherited moved on.

I posted the job locally in western Washington, as well as nationally through the GCSAA job board. As I recall, I got quite a few strong candidates, especially nationally, and hired an assistant from Montana who wanted to move out here with his wife to be close to his parents, who themselves had recently moved into the area. This fellow was with me 15 years before securing his own superintendent job at a nearby course late in 2019.

My second assistant search, at the end of 2019, nearly resembled the first one. Although I didn't receive as many responses, I ended up with a handful of strong candidates, ultimately hiring a local fellow from Seattle who had been

an assistant at a private club for a few years but wanted to get out of the city and move north. Avalon Golf Club, located in Burlington, Washington, is about 60 miles north of Seattle.

This hire was with me for about three and half years before he decided this past summer that he wanted to switch industries and go back to school. He'd had enough of golf course maintenance. Burned out with the amount of work he had to do combined with a salary that, frankly, is not as competitive as other industries.

In early August, off I went to my computer to post the job once again, both locally through the WWGCSA, and nationally again with the GCSAA.

To say the responses to the ads were a bit quiet would be an understatement. By late October, I had received a grand total of one interested party, and he fizzled out rather quickly.

I kept checking the job boards through August, September and into early October, and I took a rather shocked note of just how many open assistant jobs there were out there. It was a bit mind-boggling. My ad literally moved down the board into relative obscurity almost daily. Assistant job posting upon assistant job posting quickly buried my own ad.

I reconsidered my ad, seeing if there was perhaps a little editing I could do to make it stand out a bit. The wage seemed more than competitive to other similar postings. I should emphasize competitive *within the industry*. In fact, I found there was nothing much I could do to the ad itself, or the pay we were offering. The posting should have spoken for itself and drawn interest.

So, why hasn't it? Why has my open assistant position sat there like an unopened Snickers on the break-room table?

I don't think there's a simple answer. As I looked into it, I realized it's a bit of a complicated issue.

One of the things I did before posting my latest assistant opening was to make a phone call to a well-respected, long-tenured superintendent in the

area to get a feel for the salary I should post. Instead of just getting assistant salary ranges from him, we ended up in a full-blown discussion about the state of the industry itself in regard to young men and women entering our business — or, more to the point, the lack thereof.

Vance Much is superintendent at Semiahmoo Golf Club in northern Washington, a resort right up on the Washington/Canadian border. Vance has been at Semiahmoo even longer than I've been at Avalon, about 32 years now. "For a lot of reasons, mostly political within the ownership and structure of the club, I haven't had an assistant since 2008," he told me. "But a couple years ago I decided I was ready for an assistant and have been rather aggressively pursuing this ever since."

I must admit, hearing him say, "aggressively pursuing hiring an assistant for the *PAST COUPLE OF YEARS*," threw me for a bit of a loop. How could filling his assistant position be that difficult? Two years?

"I've seen the postings for assistant positions in our area out there too," Vance said. "It's unreal the very competitive salaries (industry com-

petitive) being posted at some of the private clubs in the Seattle area, and those jobs are seemingly either not getting filled, or taking forever to fill."

I wondered aloud to Vance that when our postings sit out there untouched, what exactly are we to do to try and fill the positions?

"I've wondered just that," Vance said. "I guess I could contact Oregon State, because Washington State doesn't have a program anymore, but then Oregon State is moving more toward research. There just isn't the ground floor education base for wannabe assistants like there used to be for us in this region."

And, based on the extreme amount of open assistant positions nationwide, this does not seem to be a regional problem. Perhaps we need to start thinking outside the box when faced with the challenge of not finding enough people to fill our open positions.

A couple of things come to mind:

- Hiring people outside the industry who we think just might be a workable fit somehow.
- Promoting someone currently on your crew who, even without the traditional turfgrass education, but with training, might be able to do the job.

As far as the first idea — hiring people perhaps educated and even experienced outside the industry — Vance suggested I contact another longtime superintendent in our area, **Dave Bocci** at Bellingham Country Club, who had a unique situation of his own with a possible non-traditional hire.

"I had a guy on the crew who was a chemistry major at Western Washington," Dave told me when I gave him a shout. "He worked for me for about three years part-time while going to college and loved working on the course. After he graduated, he hinted to me how much he was interested in my profession, despite his chemistry degree. He worked in a lab for about six months and hated it, and ended up coming back to the course and

is pretty much working full-time for me while taking the online turfgrass program at Penn State pursuing his master's."

Dave mentioned that although this fellow is not one of his assistants, he is kind of treating him like one, having him work under one of his assistants.

The other "outside the box" idea is promoting someone currently on the staff. Again, this will most likely mean hiring someone without a turf degree. The challenge I see here is how much time a superintendent will need to devote to training that individual — time that, most likely, an overworked superintendent without an assistant is not going to have. But maybe it is the only option in some instances. Combine this personalized training with online education and there might be, for some situations, at least, a solution? Vance agreed that maybe this is the direction superintendents are going to have to explore going forward.

"Maybe this is an avenue a lot of people have to approach now," he said. "Maybe they don't have to go to the four-year or two-year program and sit in a classroom. Maybe we have to treat the golf course as the classroom, with online education something they can do while working full-time."

In addition to his chemist who is now in training to become an assistant, Dave told me he's had a couple other guys on the crew going through the Penn State online program during the last few years.

It seems like this trend might be the way forward for many superintendents who, like me, experience difficulty filling an open assistant position the traditional way. Based on the response so far to my ads for an assistant, it looks like thinking outside the box is going to be necessary going forward for many of us. **GCI**

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





VAGABONDS AND MISCREANTS

Chad Allen asked himself a life-altering question. He then found a supportive, caring and engaged community in the golf industry.

I think we all have those moments in life where we think, “How did I get here?” Sometimes this thought comes during a tough stretch in our lives when we can’t figure out right from left, up from down. Other times it comes during

moments of pure joy and gratitude. Life is filled with these moments, but for the purpose of this article I’d like to talk about two of these scenarios that transformed my personal and professional life.

I had many jobs that I worked at

unsuccessfully before entering the turf industry. The majority of these failures were due to my inability to prioritize adult behaviors. I have always said that the turf industry is mostly comprised of people looking for a second chance: vagabonds and miscreants. I am one of those vagabonds. I am one of those miscreants.

My journey started with a rock bottom of my own undoing. I asked myself, “How did I get here?” and I was quickly given an answer. I got

there by only living for myself. I got to rock bottom by being selfish and self-centered. I knew that this wasn't me or my purpose in life. I prayed for guidance, and I received it. I started living with purpose and for something bigger than myself. It took a lot of time and a few more failures, but I eventually got out of my own way and started living for others.

This led to me returning to college and working in the field of substance abuse recovery. I could connect with this population because I had walked in their shoes. I worked as a case manager in a local nonprofit here in central Indiana. I helped disenfranchised men and women who were suffering from addiction and homelessness find a new way of life free from drugs and alcohol. This is a difficult, yet rewarding, job field to be part of. The successes were few and far between, but I knew there was hope, because I had achieved it.

After several years, I found myself becoming burned out and lacking empathy. During this time, I had gotten married and had my daughter. My attention was redirected toward my family, and I knew I needed a career change. My brother, **Brad Allen**, CGCS, is a lifelong turfer. He had given me opportunities in the past to work with him and he offered me a position to come and work with him until I figured out my next move.

I showed up to work on the golf course not looking to make it a career — and I never left. I fell in love with every aspect of this industry. It filled all my working needs. It had everything. Instant and delayed gratification, high expectations, working with my hands, and so much more. Most important, I found a community of people who came from a similar background and shared some of the same life experiences I had. With the support of my wife and brother, I went back to college — online this time — and got my advanced certificate from

Penn State. I was off and running, and nothing was going to stop me.

I'm sharing this because the turf industry and the community surrounding it has had a huge impact on my life, and I want others to know that. My desire is that someone reads this and doesn't lose hope. There is a place for you here in the turf industry. I'm not saying this field of work will fix all your problems. You must make sure to take care of yourself first and foremost. If you are like me, and if you're honest with faults and failures, you will find the bridges you build in this community will extend far beyond your wildest expectations. You will find people from top to bottom who share some of the same stories you have and know the value behind your life's journey.

You must step outside your comfort zone, be accountable, and sometimes work ridiculous hours. If you do that, others will see you for who you are, not what you were. Don't be scared to start over and find something new; you might like your new story better.

How did I get here? I experienced both sides of this coin. Each side has value. Maybe you are currently on the negative side of this situation. That's OK. Recognize this and make a commitment to change. It's worth it.

I now find myself on the other side of this coin, and I can't tell you how grateful I am every day to wake up and know that I get to work within a network of people who care about me and my personal well-being as much as the turf they manage. This is a community that welcomes we vagabonds and miscreants. Take advantage of this to better yourself and those around you. **GCI**

Chad Allen is the superintendent at The Club at Chatham Hills in Westfield, Indiana. This is his second Turfheads Take Over contribution and fifth Golf Course Industry contribution.

NAVIGATING CHANGE

Kenton Brunson applies practical leadership lessons (and utilizes a helpful matrix) to adapt to a new club in a new country.

In the world of golf maintenance, our career represents far more than just the grass and landscape; it symbolizes the paths we take in our professional journeys.

One year ago, the prospect of moving to a new country and embarking on a new job was undeniably exciting but also nerve-wracking. The unfamiliarity of the surroundings, the anticipation of cultural adjustments, and the challenges of a new journey all weighed heavily on my mind. Yet it was precisely this combination of trepidation and excitement that ultimately fueled my determination to take the leap into the unknown, ready to embrace the adventure and grow through the experience.

As I reflect on my first year at the Mid Ocean Club, located on the 21-square-mile island of Bermuda, I am reminded that the true test of leadership often lies not in mastering the job itself, but in embracing and inspiring cultural transformation. This article is not just about change; it's about the art of changing culture, and how it can be successful in all environments. Below are some key takeaways that have been relevant in my situation and can potentially be a guide for anyone looking to integrate change into their organization.

EMBRACING THE UNKNOWN

Moving to a foreign country, I quickly realized that success hinged on more than managerial skills; it depended on my ability to navigate the diverse tapestry of cultures comprising our dedicated teams. Having worked for some fantastic club professionals, I have always found that the best superintendents have a distinct ability of embracing the unknown. The most successful superintendents

have an evident competence to take calculated risks, learn from failures and surround themselves with a supportive network of friends and family. Remember that embracing the unknown is a good thing and it is OK to feel uncomfortable at times. Over time, you will become more resilient and experience significant growth!

RESPECT AND OPEN-MINDEDNESS

The journey of changing

culture begins with understanding. To break down the barriers of language and tradition, engaging in honest and open conversations with your team is essential. This includes immediate one-on-one meetings to create openness and transparency. Respect their unique backgrounds and perspectives, which will ignite trust and goodwill. As a leader, encouraging everyone to contribute their thoughts creates inclusivity. That allowed our collective vision to emerge. This is still a complete work in progress and does not happen overnight.

BUILD BRIDGES, NOT WALLS

In this continuously changing landscape, unity will always be your strongest asset. Creating an atmosphere to increase teamwork through various events — golf event outings, barbecues, bowling, holiday parties — will really help. This not only improves morale but also creates an environment where ideas flow freely and solutions emerge collaboratively.

GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE ON THE BUS

In his esteemed leadership book “Good to Great,” **Jim Collins** writes, “The executives who ignited the transformations from good to great did not first figure out where to drive the bus and then get people to take it there. No, they *first* got the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and *then* figured out where to drive it.” This is a critical reminder for new leaders assessing their new teams. Great vision without great people is irrelevant.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

One key to transforming culture is investing in your people. Recognizing the value of staff training and development, our leadership team met with each greenskeeper to establish a performance appraisal for the season. We worked together to create a self-graded skills matrix for every job in golf course maintenance. This

creates a Total Employee Capability percentage. The matrix is then used to track performance metrics for individuals and our collective team. The club has also been in full support of providing our team with state-of-the-art equipment and every tool to perform our jobs at a high level. Employees, in turn, feel more valued, which translates into better service and increased job satisfaction. Whatever tool it may be, create key performance indicators in your operation so you have measurable and actionable items to strive toward.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

As a leader, talking the talk is easy but walking the walk is essential, especially in the beginning. Joining your team in their daily duties will help overcome boundaries. Leading by example not only earns respect but showcases the dedication you expect from them and that you understand their daily routines. Be the first at the shop and the last to leave.

ADAPTATION AND FLEXIBILITY

In the golf industry, like in any other, change is inevitable. In the Kubler-Ross change model, there are multiple psychological stages that take place for your personnel. This includes shock, denial, frustration, depression, experiment, decision and integration. In our dynamic environments, some employees adapt more quickly than others. Individuals that continue to be in denial with new practices or mentalities recognize that this is completely normal but by continuing to foster an adaptable culture, your team will gradually learn to become more open to change. As you implement new strategies and technologies, make sure you celebrate small victories and learn from your setbacks. Recognizing this change model produces a much clearer picture in the grand scheme.

MEASURING SUCCESS

To track the success of our cultural transformation, we established

clear, achievable goals. KPIs were utilized to assess our progress, and we celebrate each milestone. The satisfaction of seeing your hard work translates into enhanced member experience and a successful operation.



CULMINATION OF CHANGE

As I reflect on this journey and our team, staffed with diverse backgrounds and perspectives, we are now better equipped to produce a greater product. This diverse, dynamic family has breathed new life into the golf course, making it not just a sporting destination but a cultural hub where every staff member feels at home. The old ways and the new ways have blended into a unique harmony that is the signature of our operation today.

Change in culture is no easy feat, but the results can be exhilarating. The journey of managing a club in a new country with diverse cultures has been a revelation, highlighting the beauty of adapting, learning and embracing change. The key takeaway is that to excel in any industry, one must excel in change management and cultural transformation. In golf, just as in life, it's not about the obstacles we face, but how we navigate this change that truly defines us.

As agronomy professionals, let us embrace the ever-evolving landscape of our sport, inspire transformation, and drive our clubs to excellence through a harmonious blend of cultures — for there lies the true essence of the game. **GCI**

Kenton Brunson is director of agronomy at Mid Ocean Club in Hamilton, Bermuda. This is his first Turfheads Take Over contribution.

▲ During his first year at Mid Ocean Club in Bermuda, Kenton Brunson has focused on change culture.



LET'S TALK COMPENSATION

Conversations about salaries and wages are never easy. **Tyler Bloom** outlines the process and mindset required to ensure all employees are treated fairly.

A few months ago, I was sitting in an executive meeting alongside a club president, a vice president and a general manager. We spoke candidly about the future of the industry, challenges within the workforce, sustainability obstacles, government

intervention, the changing landscape of careers and the subsequent business shifts that would be needed.

As we approached the conversation around salaries at different levels, I could sense the general manager becoming increasingly nervous to discuss the rapidly

changing landscape.

To put him at ease, I directed the conversation elsewhere, mentioning a host of other challenges. We later revisited salaries. At the core of the issue was the fact that the individual himself wasn't being compensated at industry standard;



it wasn't an area he was comfortable negotiating, not only for himself but ultimately for other employees as well.

Fair and competitive salaries continue to be one of the most consistent issues we heard about in 2023. We also heard a lot about the challenge of wage compression when there is minimal difference in pay between employees at different levels of an organization.

During the pandemic, employers faced pressure to raise wages for essential frontline workers, such as groundskeepers, servers, bussers and bag-room attendants. This sometimes led to wage compression, where entry-level and frontline workers saw significant pay increases, but the

gap between them and higher-level employees remained relatively small.

This must be done thoughtfully to ensure that existing team members' wages are not overlooked or left stagnant. A well-structured compensation strategy is crucial for attracting, retaining and motivating employees.

To create a fair and competitive compensation package, employers must consider various factors, including industry standards, local cost of living, experience, performance and skills.

CONDUCT A COMPENSATION REVIEW

Before making any changes to your compensation structure, it's essential to conduct a thorough review of your existing practices.

Begin by evaluating your current salary and compensation framework. Understand how different roles and experience levels are compensated

within your organization.

Compare your salary levels to industry standards and similar positions in your geographic area with similar demographic clubs and/or those to which you aspire to be compared. This benchmarking process will help you determine whether your salaries are competitive. Share the results from your local survey with participants.

Analyze your compensation data to identify any wage disparities within your organization.

Are there significant pay gaps between employees in similar roles or with similar experience levels?

IMPLEMENT A MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE

Setting a minimum wage that meets or exceeds local regulations is a crucial step in ensuring fair compensation.

Ensure that your organization complies with minimum wage laws and regulations in your area. Paying at or above the local minimum wage is essential to provide a fair base salary to all employees.

Pay particular attention to entry-level staff when implementing a minimum wage increase. These employees often have the most to gain from a higher base salary, and it can significantly improve their financial stability. Graduated pay scales allow employees to progress in their careers and earn higher wages as they gain experience and contribute more to the team.

Let's reveal ways to create them.

Develop pay scales or salary bands that consider factors like experience, tenure and performance. These scales should provide clear guidelines for wage progression.

Encourage and recognize outstanding contributions by offering promotions or salary increases to employees who consistently perform at a high level. Three common approaches are:

- Performance-based pay

- Skill-based pay
- Equity adjustments
- Regular compensation reviews

A well-designed compensation strategy is essential for fostering employee satisfaction, motivation and growth.

By conducting regular compensation reviews, implementing a minimum-wage increase, establishing graduated pay scales, and incorporating performance- and skill-based pay, organizations can create a compensation framework that not only attracts top talent but also supports the development and success of their existing workforce. This, in turn, contributes to the overall growth and prosperity of the organization.

Balancing entry-level staff wages with those of other team members is essential for creating a motivated and satisfied workforce.

Members' expectations have evolved significantly, necessitating broader and more diverse offerings from golf facilities. The demand for great services and facilities continues to climb, and ultimately needs to run parallel with the compensation of its employees.

Golf facilities are no longer the sole providers of leisure and entertainment. They now face stiff competition from alternative venues and experiences. To stand out and maintain their appeal, clubs must offer unique and distinctive offerings that capture the interest of potential employees from entry level to executives.

By implementing these strategies, employers can not only boost entry-level staff wages but also address the compensation needs of all team members effectively without feeling nervous or pressured. **GCI**

Tyler Bloom is the founder of the talent acquisition and workforce development firm Tyler Bloom Consulting and a former golf course superintendent. This is his fourth Turfheads Take Over contribution.



THE UNSEEN ART OF A FOREIGN GAME

How difficult could cricket turf management really be? Thrust into the job, veteran turf pro **Zachary LaPorte** gained a new appreciation — and racked up just a bit of self-loathing.

Being at the helm of a multi-sport facility, particularly one with natural grass, presents a unique set of challenges. While agronomic knowledge serves as a strong foundation for maintaining turfgrass, the intricacies of preparation and upkeep can be vastly different across various sports.

This revelation became apparent when I assumed the role of director of agronomy for Desert Springs Resort, where I oversee the maintenance of a diverse range of areas, including several gardens and public areas around the resort, a championship golf course, soccer installations and ICC-credited cricket installations. Desert Springs hosts a yearly DP World Tour event and several professional European soccer clubs train there during the off-season. For cricket, Desert Springs hosts several World Cup qualifier tournaments and professional club matches and training camps.

For the purposes of this article, let's delve into the world of turfgrass management, particularly cricket.

Initially, my confidence in handling golf and soccer led me to underestimate the nuances of cricket turf management. The maintenance of a soccer field, while demanding, is like maintaining a colossal tee. Yes, I know it is oversimplifying it. We all know how hard it is to maintain a golf course.

Cricket, on the other hand, is a whole different ball game

— pun intended. It's a niche job, often referred to as the "dark arts" in Britain, and for good reason. I take off my hat to the groundsmen who produce these incredible playing surfaces. They are truly a talented group and deserve more recognition for what they can achieve with turfgrass.

The outfield, while needing to be pretty, fast and firm, poses relatively few challenges. The real magic happens on the main square, where the wickets are situated. Let's simplify the process, albeit sarcastically, as I apologize in advance to the true groundsmen for any oversimplification.

First, transform the surface, which comprises 33 percent clay, into something as hard as asphalt using a three-ton roller. Do this for 20 to 30 minutes at a time, three to five times a day, for two weeks. Simultaneously reduce the ryegrass height from 12 millimeters down to 4 to 8 millimeters, brush the turf five to 10 times a day (yes, brush!), and lightly verticut frequently to eliminate all thatch.

The goal? Turn the grass *white*—essentially lifeless—and produce a rock-hard surface for adequate ball bounce. Once desired color and firmness are achieved, it's game time. Oh, and don't forget, you can't kill the grass entirely, as you'll need to recover the wicket for a quick turnaround for future matches. This all happens in scorching desert conditions with next to no water input that might ruin the playing surface. And getting it wrong can be dangerous to the players. A bad surface can create a bad bounce and players can get hit and injured by cricket balls speeding at 90 miles per hour or more. No wonder they call it the dark arts.

My path took an unexpected twist when, on the day before the cricket season started, our groundsman — to whom I was line manager and who had made it all look deceptively easy — accepted an offer for another position in England. The cricket world is small and, thanks to Brexit, finding a replacement for the season proved nearly impossible. In a moment of overconfidence, I decided to step in to save the day. Cue overconfident-sounding music and the superintendent's slow-motion entrance to save the day.

Then quickly cue the in-over-his-head panic music and the superintendent crying in a corner after the first three hours.

I quickly understood that I was in the deep end and only had a small rubber ducky to keep me afloat. I think I can safely say I quickly studied everything that the internet has about cricket wicket preparation. There is a guideline to follow and lots of the setup is standard. But what I consistently found was that everything focused on wicket prep for a match is all about feel and experience. Give a monkey (me) a two-week prep plan and it would get done, but the monkey (me again) wouldn't know if he was doing it right. And more times than I care to admit, I didn't.

I soon realized that while there are guidelines to follow, much of the process relies on intuition and experience. Imagine handing a cup cutter to someone who's never played golf, instructing them how to use the cup cutter, then saying, "All right, go ahead and change the positions of the

flags on the greens." The mental image that conjures is a comical chaos — flags up against the collars, positioned in the middle of severe slopes, flags sticking out of the ground at very interesting angles. It's a recipe for disaster.

This scenario perfectly illustrates the point I'm trying to make. Without a fundamental understanding of how golf is played and why flags are strategically placed, the person wielding the cup cutter becomes a hapless amateur, much like I was when I first took charge of a three-ton roller on the cricket field.

An experienced groundsman possesses an innate sense of when to ease off on rolling, when to brush more vigorously or precisely how much water to apply to the pitch. It's an intuitive understanding honed through years of hands-on experience. In much the same way, superintendents can step out in the morning, sense the moisture in the air and the slight rise in temperatures, and instinctively decide to apply a fungicide. This is the essence of experience in our field.

I owe much of my growth to the support and guidance of my peers and friends and, dare I say, "fellow" groundsmen. I've made mistakes, faced challenges, but also experienced moments of enjoyment and learned new things. For me, new experiences are the meaning of life.

Lessons learned

What's the takeaway from this rambling journey? Here are what I believe to be several key lessons:

1. Never underestimate the skill of your team members, as what they make look easy is often far from it.
2. When stepping into a new role, gather as much knowledge as possible *beforehand*.
3. The internet is a valuable resource, but nothing beats the advice and support of friends and peers.
4. Know your job from the ground up — it's the foundation of effective leadership.
5. Leave your ego at the door.
6. And finally, while cricket maintenance might be fascinating, I still don't get the sport. 😊

We now have a qualified groundsman on board who is performing wonderfully. After six months in this role, I now have a better understanding and appreciation of what it takes to be a groundsman for a top-tier cricket installation. But also equally important, if not moreso, is what is needed to safeguard against stress and burnout among the team — a severe problem in the industry.

My belief in understanding a job from the ground up has been reaffirmed, making me a better leader and manager. The cricket experience has enriched my skillset, allowing me to excel in my line management role while also deepening my appreciation for the intricacies of turfgrass management.

My journey in cricket turf management has been one of self-discovery and growth. It's a testament to the importance of embracing new challenges and continually learning in our professional lives. Who knows what the future holds, but I'm ready for whatever pitch comes my way. Again, pun intended! **GCI**

Zachary LaPorte has worked in the industry for more than 25 years and is currently resort superintendent at Desert Springs Resort in Almeria, Spain. This is his second Turfheads Take Over contribution.



GO WEST, YOUNG MAN

Just 19, **Jakob "Bobber" Scales** shifted his college plans at the last moment, bet on himself, and landed two new turf jobs in the Valley of the Sun.

In the 2022 edition of Turfheads Take Over, I wrote about my experiences as a high school senior working for both the Wichita Wind Surge — the Double-A affiliate of the Minnesota Twins — and Flint Hills National Golf Club. I was fresh off a wild summer grinding through a lot of 17-hour days, going on college visits and visiting with as many Major League Baseball grounds crews as possible. But so much has changed in so little time.

The seed that led me to where I am today was planted last March when my family took a spring break vacation to Phoenix for MLB spring training. I reached out to all the sports field managers at the venues we visited that week. I met with multiple crews in the Valley, including one of them at Surprise Sports Complex. Following my high school graduation in May, I had a plan in place to stay in Wichita for my first two years of college at the university where my father works before transferring to Kansas State University for turf classes. After be-

ing told by the university I would not be able to live at home to save money like I had planned, I frantically began searching for other options. Weeks with so much uncertainty about where I would be this fall dragged on until the end of June.

I stumbled upon Ottawa University in Surprise, Arizona, less than a mile from the Kansas City Royals and Texas Rangers spring training complex. And the best part, I would be on tuition remission, because Ottawa is a partner school with the university where my father is employed. Putting the pieces together, I texted **Eric Roberts**, the baseball superintendent at the Surprise complex, and asked to join his crew during the school year. Because of the rapport I built with him during our conversations the previous spring, he was all ears when I asked to join. The appeal of getting hands-on experience in what would be the winter, a dead period in Wichita, was too much to pass up.

The day had dreadfully come to wrap up my internship on **Ben Hartman's** crew with the Wind Surge. I left my family and friends behind to start a new journey multiple states away. Doubt began to set in while I was pulling out of the driveway and saw my mom and brother crying. I thought to myself, "Is this really what I want to do?" Although I only knew four people prior to moving, I was certain I would enjoy my time in Arizona, but the fear of the unknown was ever present.

A life principle I abide by is: If you want to be a unique person, you must do unique things. If you want to have an uncommon life, you must do uncommon things. If you act the way that 99 percent of people do, you will be in that 99 percent. You must do rare things to live a rare life. Nothing will change if you do nothing to change. Although moving so far from home was way out of my comfort zone, not taking this opportunity would have invalidated that principle.

I knew God had and has a plan for me, even though I couldn't see what

was in store at the time. His plan is never what you had expected for your life, but always the best. It is amazing to take a step back and see how God works. One spring break trip and one email changed the trajectory of my life.

I began classes in August and work at the Surprise complex in September. The first few weeks on the job felt so familiar to what I was used to in Wichita, but so foreign at the same time. It was an adjustment going from caring for one field to now splitting time between 15 fields. Considering that aspect, it resembled more of a golf course maintenance mindset. Learning infield skin and clay moisture management in the arid Arizona climate has been an adjustment as well. In early October, I read that **Andy Levy** with the Arizona Cardinals was hiring game-week field painting help. I had reached out previously to connect and had gotten no response, but that didn't deter me from reaching out again, this time about the job opening. I got the job and spent my 19th birthday working at an NFL stadium. Talk about one heck of a birthday present.

What should you take away from my story?

First, **make an extended effort to connect with anyone**, regardless of age, gender, job title and even what realm of the turf industry they're in. If I didn't make connections with industry professionals here in Phoenix, would I have ended up moving here? Probably not. You never know who you might run into or who you could potentially work alongside someday. Don't be afraid to reach out two and three times. If they don't respond after a third time, it might be best to give it a rest, but if I didn't reach out a third time to work for the Cardinals, I would have missed out on an incredible opportunity that will open many doors for my career endeavors.

Second, one of our biggest issues in the turf industry is that **the public really has no idea all that goes into**

being a successful turf manager. Inviting local FFA chapters, high school golf teams or elementary schools for site visits or field trips for an educational day at the golf course would not only shed light to what we do daily, it could expand the game of golf and potentially spark someone's passion to pursue a career in the turf industry. Our collective goal should be to leave the industry better than we found it, and increasing awareness and the number of incoming turf pros is how we accomplish that.

Third, **do not pigeonhole yourself to one specific realm of this industry.** I admit this is easy to say as a young professional with no full-time job obligation to fill, but I implore anyone to go to that conference, go on that site visit, go volunteer for a PGA tournament. Doing so will provide educational opportunities to learn how other facilities accomplish tasks, improve relationships with industry professionals and provide fulfilling experiences.

No one really knows what the future has in store. It is excellent to have a five- or 10-year plan both professionally and personally, but it should only be treated as a soft guideline. New opportunities will arise that you never thought would be possible. Constantly re-evaluating options and making sure that you are in the right position to achieve your aspirations is crucial.

I'll be searching for summer internships in MLB and the NFL the next few years, in addition to transferring to Kansas State after completing general education and elective courses at Ottawa. From there, the sky's the limit.

Enjoy the journey, because before you know it, it will be all said and done. **GCI**

Jakob "Bobber" Scales is a first-year student at Ottawa University in Surprise, Arizona. He has tended to turf for an elite golf course, a Double-A baseball team, two MLB teams and an NFL team. This is his second Turfheads Take Over contribution.



What a difference a couple years makes: Kelly Rensel, left, and Nate Rivera recently moved from baseball to golf and parks, among other changes.

TURF LASERER

Since meeting three years ago, **Nate Rivera** and **Kelly Rensel** have switched from baseball to golf – and they’ve changed who calls the shots, too.

Nate Rivera and Kelly Rensel have traveled paths both parallel and perpendicular during their turf careers.

Rivera fell into the industry over time, knocking on neighborhood doors and asking who might need their lawn mowed or, during

long Buffalo winters, their driveway shoveled. He learned about botany from his father, **Tom**, who managed a farm, then started working for landscape companies and Seneca Nation before landing at Nichols School, a prominent prep school. Only then did he really fall for grass.

“It was one of the few things that just stuck with me,” he says.

Rensel, on the other hand, hated yardwork when he was a kid. He loved baseball, though. Like so many kids, he wanted to play professionally and realized rather early that he would need to find another

path to the game. He studied sport management at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania — now PennWest Edinboro — and landed a stadium operations and grounds crew internship with the Mahoning Valley Scrappers, then a Single-A affiliate of the Cleveland Indians. That sparked him. “I remember waking up in my apartment after the first home-stand,” he says. “I was just exhausted, dead tired, and I absolutely loved it.”

They met years later, when the Triple-A Buffalo Bisons hired Rensel to tend to their field, and they still work together today — in a different part of the industry and in different roles: Rivera is the director of building and grounds for Hamburg, New York, about 15 miles south Buffalo, and Rensel is the head greenkeeper at 18 Mile Creek Golf Course, which is part of the vast tract of turf Rivera manages.

Let’s let them tell the story.

NATE: I was working at Nichols when I reached out to **Chad Laurie** of the Buffalo Bisons to ask if I could tour his facility and see how they did it at the professional level. He invited me over and he came to the campus. He gave me an overview to rebuilding a mound. When he went to the Buffalo Bills, his assistant,

Danny Keene, took over and offered me a position. I did a year on his crew and went up to assistant. That’s when Kelly came into the picture

KELLY: My turf background is the absolute School of Hard Knocks. I’ve learned by messing up and learning from mistakes, meeting some really good people along the way who have helped me out. I’ve gotten to pick their brains a bunch and ask a lot of questions about how to do things and what to do. That all prepared me for a move to Buffalo and Triple-A.

NATE: From the moment I met Kelly, I felt like we hit it off pretty good. I figured this guy was good to work with. Kelly gave me full autonomy over the field. It grew my confidence in everything I was doing, and the payoff was we won field of the year that year.

KELLY: When I met Nate, I told him, *I need you. I need you to show me the ropes, I need you to show me where things are in the stadium, all the little intricate things that I need to know, and I need you to handle some stuff while I deal with the Blue Jays* — (early during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Toronto Blue Jays were unable to play home games in Canada and moved their operations to Buffalo) — *the field renovation, Major League Baseball stuff. Everything I heard*

about you is great and I need you to take some things off my plate and run with it. And he did. He did great.

NATE: I would go into his office and ask, *What’s the plan today?* and he would tell me, *You know what to do. Just go do it. I would gather up the guys, we would get everything going.*

Kelly was doing his admin stuff and would be out there by the start of BP, checking on things. Everything was squared away and ready to go.

KELLY: It was about a week or two in when I knew he wasn’t just an assistant. Seeing him run the equipment, how he was leading the guys, I dumped more and more on him, let him run the gameday crew so I could do some bigger projects. I trusted him to go and just do his thing.

The Bisons worked with a surprisingly low number of full-time grounds crew members — at the time, they were one of just two Triple-A teams without a full-time assistant — and after the season Nate moved to Tri-County Country Club in nearby Forestville to work with superintendent **Peter Gilray**. Then Florida came calling: He received a job offer with Hillsborough County to run 84 of the 162 municipal parks in and around Tampa. He headed south but he never stopped talking with Kelly.

NATE: Even when I moved to Florida, I was working on Bermudagrass down there and that was a whole different animal, and I was picking Kelly’s brain about upkeep, different growing seasons. I would call him probably once a week. He was always responsive. Just because we weren’t working at the ballpark together didn’t mean we weren’t talking. He’s always been an asset for me, helping me grow my knowledge in turf.

Nate loved his work, but the Riveras and Florida weren’t a match: Family pulled them back to New York after less than a year down south. Nate weighed his options. He could return to Tri-County Country Club, maybe entertain another run with the Bisons — but he wanted to stick with parks.

NATE: We moved in the beginning of March and it’s kind of like we never

▼ Rivera was working for the Triple-A Buffalo Bisons when he met Rensel, who was hired as head groundskeeper in 2021.





left. All of our family is here, so it felt good to say, *Let's go to so-and-so's house for dinner*. The first thing I had to figure out was the golf course superintendent position. Because my shop is union, the current superintendent needed to be approved by Erie County Civil Service, and he was turned down. The town supervisor and I went back and forth on what we would do. We put a public post out and I reached out to Kelly. I told him about the opportunity and he said he was interested.

KELLY: At first, I was definitely struggling with the idea of going to golf. All I knew was baseball. I always knew there would be some kind of afterlife if I did move on from baseball, but I didn't know what it would look like or when it would be. Once Nate floated that idea to me, *OK, it's interesting, I'll open that door a little bit*. I definitely had a lot of trepidation. But in the end, it's a very similar job. Two weeks ago, we were aerating greens with the same 648 aerator and the same topdresser I used at the stadium. It's the same process, it's just in a completely different location with a lot more acres to deal with.

NATE: Bringing Kelly into the group, some people said, *He's baseball. What does he know about golf?* I hate say this but grass is grass. You're doing the same thing on a baseball field that you're doing on a golf course, you just have to plan and schedule differently. You don't have a week when the team is away and you can

do your cultural work. You have to shut down half the course and do it.

KELLY: I started July 18 and I went from a fishbowl to an ocean. I was downtown next to Buffalo's tallest building,

next to the 190 on-ramp, with all the front office windows looking down on the field. Here, I can get lost and no one would know where I am.

NATE: Kelly handles the day in and day out on 18 Mile Creek. He has his own budget, so if he ever needs anything from me, he lets me know. I'm just oversight. I'm very hands off. I deal with the projects that come up and that's about it. Kelly and his two assistants, **Jimmy Brand** and **Scott Vuich**, and their seasonal staff handle everything.

KELLY: He's my Dad when I need money.

NATE: Essentially, yeah.

KELLY: The equipment and the hands-on work has been easy. What was difficult was the hours. Getting up at 5 a.m. was a little different for me, but it's nicer getting out at 2 p.m. and having a little better work-life balance. I get to spend more time with my wife, I get eight hours of sleep, I'm not going home and going to bed already stressed out. I can go home and decompress for a while.

NATE: After the board approved Kelly, we were standing outside and I turned to his wife and asked her, *Are you ready to have your husband back?* And she just laughed.

KELLY: You need to prioritize. I go in, I do my work, and then I leave. I've learned a lot better already with this job to completely shut off that part of my brain. I'm not just on the go, go, go, go, go.

NATE: Baseball, you have lights and

can work on your field after dark. You work around the game. Golf, the sun goes down, you're either using a light on your mower or tractor, or you're off the course.

KELLY: It's a role reversal. I know how he communicates, I know how he leads — and I know he has a million things on his plate, so I don't bug him too much unless it's a pressing need. It's great to work for somebody I've already worked with. We have that rapport and things are just kind of easy. If we do need to have a hard conversation, it's not really going to be a hard conversation. It's just going to be two guys talking and working things out.

NATE: Working for the government, for a municipality, you have to account for everything, so for me to have a turf management background is very beneficial for Kel. Because I can go in front of the board and tell them, *This is what he's doing and this is why he's doing it*. I let him do what he needs to do, and if he needs anything from me, he knows he can always call me.

Kelly's always been a big supporter of me, helping me better myself. For me to help him like this, I finally feel like I'm paying him back. To be able to help his work-life balance, to help him stay in an area where he moved to for family, it's a payoff for all the support he's given to me to build my confidence. Moving forward, we're just going to continue to work well together, like we have since Day 1, support each other as best we can, and just keep kicking ass.

KELLY: You're bringing a tear to my eye, Nate. You're such a nice guy. **GCI**

Nate Rivera is the director of building and grounds for Hamburg, New York. This is his first Turfheads Take Over contribution.

Kelly Rensel is the head greenkeeper at 18 Mile Creek Golf Course in Hamburg. This is his second Turfheads Take Over contribution.

NURTURING NEW LIFE

Florida assistant superintendent **Tyler Robb** recently became a father. He describes balancing the rigors of parenting with what his job entails.

Becoming a new parent has been a life-changing experience filled with joy, challenges and constant learning. As an assistant superintendent, I find many of the same parallels. Both come with their own set of rewards and hurdles. Surprisingly, there are intriguing similarities between the two roles that offer valuable insights into balancing responsibilities, nurturing growth and embracing change.

Just as in parenting, the early stages of a golf course and its maintenance require careful nurturing. When my wife, **Claudia**, and I had our beautiful boy, **Cyrus**, he also needed constant attention, care and guidance. Feeding a bottle every hour in the middle of the night was not easy. It reminded me of the late nights, going back to the course to make sure irrigation was running in the fertilizer we applied earlier that day. On the course, we must oversee daily tasks such as mowing, irrigation and fertilizing to ensure the course thrives. Like a baby, the course needs time, patience, nurturing and care to reach its full potential.

Both parenthood and golf course maintenance require excellent problem-solving skills. Parents must find creative solutions to pacify a crying baby or address unexpected issues that arise. As an assistant superintendent, I'm often faced with challenges like managing unexpected turf diseases, irrigation system failures and blowouts or unpredictable weather conditions that might shut down the course. The ability to adapt and find solutions is essential in both roles.

Parenting and maintaining a golf course are both long-term commitments that require unwavering patience and perse-

verance. Our newborn can be demanding at bedtime. He has not slept much, so that means mama and I have not slept much either. This can make both of us cranky at times, but we need to be patient with each other and the baby. A golf course's maintenance and improvements are ongoing processes as well. Success in both roles comes from patience and a steadfast commitment to long-term goals and objectives.

Balancing the responsibilities of parenthood and golf course maintenance requires exceptional time management skills. As a new parent, I try to prioritize time, maxi-

mize efficiency and make the most of every moment. At the golf course managing the staff, scheduling maintenance tasks and ensuring the course's daily operations run smoothly requires a similar level of time management and organization as parenting.

Being an assistant superintendent and a new parent requires a ridiculous amount of adaptability. Babies grow and change rapidly, so parents must adapt to their evolving needs. If there is an irrigation blowout in the afternoon causing damage to the course, we must adapt our schedule to get there to take care of it. There have been instances where my baby has gotten sick, and I had to drop everything to get him the care he needed. Flexibility is crucial to success in both roles.

Teamwork is essential for success, too. Parents often rely on their support network, including partners, family and friends, to share the responsibilities of caring for their child. Golf course superintendents also collaborate with their team, including maintenance crews and other staff, to maintain the course's beauty and functionality. Teamwork and effective communication are keys to success in both realms. It's amazing to have such great support from my wife. Claudia is the best teammate I've ever had. It's also great to work at a place that understands the time required to take care of a family.

While both roles come with challenges, they are worthwhile experiences. We get to witness our child's growth and development, creating cherished memories along the way. There's nothing better than coming home after a long day at work to his smile and laughter. On the golf course, we see the fruits of our labor as the course transforms and thrives under our care. The pride associated with maintaining healthy, happy grass and a healthy, happy baby is immensely rewarding.

Skills and qualities such as nurturing, problem-solving, patience, adaptability, time management, teamwork and enduring commitment have helped me in both roles. Recognizing these parallels and finding balance should lead to success and fulfillment on both fronts. As much as I enjoy maintaining a golf course, nothing is more rewarding than being a father. **GCI**

Tyler Robb is the assistant superintendent at Grove XXIII Golf Club in Hobe Sound, Florida. This is his second Turfheads Take Over Contribution.



Mike Johnson has spent 30 years riding around in his truck and sleeping in hotels to see the industry from multiple angles. He reflects on what he has learned.

This month, I'm starting my 30th year wandering the roads, visiting turf managers, performing sales and consultation—which some call the dark side of the business. To me, it is the only side I have known since graduate school at Virginia Tech. Often, I reply to a question by asking more questions. The best answers usually come from better questions, and the answers are always changing.

The obstacles faced in turf management and the solutions to deal with them change as quickly as the weather because it's the primary driving force in turf playability. I was asked THE QUESTION a few years ago: What's the most difficult problem that I had encountered in my career?

My response? It's probably being a "Solutions Guy" for you and many others. If I'm here with you, I'm not there with *them*. For me, *them* is my family or other clients. A friend in need is a friend indeed!

I asked myself: What is your real job description? Where do you see your career going in the next five to

10 years? I wanted to create a career master plan for my future. Was I making a living, a life, a legacy, or some combination of them all? After giving this significant thought and prayer, I decided it was time for my third and final job change, opening Agrono-Lytics full time with one employee. That employee is me.

Managing employees and golfers can be difficult and unpredictable. For me, being responsible for others' livelihoods was difficult. Every action you or your company takes could impact the ability of others to earn a living.

In sales, I don't have the individual responsibility for turf quality or playability. But I do feel significant indirect pressure through obligation to clients with those responsibilities. Listening to the customer without any reply is often the best action. Many just want to verbalize their thoughts and feelings to a listening ear. Collections from slow payers and not being able to help someone in their times of need can give you some thick skin rather quickly and potentially ruffle relationships.



▲ The opportunity to support his family is a major reason why Mike Johnson started his own industry company.

Golf course superintendents work the grind of battling Mother Nature and meeting playability demands with incredible corner-office views. During the first half of my career, I worked on the manufacturing side, supporting distributors and turf managers and traveling most of the East Coast. The last half, I worked primarily with turf managers in the Carolinas, keeping me closer to home. By far the greatest stress in my job is the unpredictability of home life, just like anyone; however, I am a few hours or days away, not minutes.

Coping skills for maintaining health and stress levels are a must. The cumulative impacts witnessing the hardships confronted by all your customers will wear on anyone. Drinking isn't an option with all the driving I do in the evenings or wee morning hours.

Not everyone will have the same goals or visions that you do. Seas will get rough leaving your home harbor to go fishing in the big water. The bigger the catch most likely means the bigger the costs of doing business in time, money and drama. Helping some can be perceived as hurting others in their visions. You won't make everyone happy — just as golf course superintendents cannot please them all. Some people get out of bed to be the drain, not the fountain.

HELENA HIRED ME into sales during grad school. I moved to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina — the golf capital of the world, they said — not knowing a soul and having zero sales experience or training. Thanks to the Lord caller ID didn't exist back then; **Willie Pennington** and **Dr. Bruce**

Martin took my call. Riding with those two GOATS early set the tone. Most of the conversations they had with turf managers did not involve pesticides.

The competition ate lunch at 6 a.m. with half their day already done. You pulled all-nighters to keep up, learning

quickly if four guys needed product by 6 a.m. with an hour between them, you don't start at 5 a.m. I was fortunate to receive great sales training and agronomic updates from all three employers.

If I knew then what I know now, I would not change a thing, with every step of the journey being far more about learning and life experiences than successes or failures. Failures only happen when repeated without learning from them. Success is not final, and failures are not fatal.

I've been so blessed, never imagining attending college for turf would help me meet so many people and see so many places. My job is to make others look good and get their results, not mine. Yet it does provide so many incredible opportunities to earn a living and learn a life of memories.

The biggest change in my career and for others in a similar situation over the last 15 years was the 120 Days of Hell in the Cell from Memorial Day to Labor Day with bentgrass greens becoming the 245 days of Falls Count Anywhere with ultradwarf Bermudagrass greens. Same two holidays, but with eight months to tackle, not four. The shoulder season means not much rest, even on Christmas. They do provide great playing surfaces year-round with that being the name of the game for turf managers — safe and consistent playing surfaces, so make it happen captain.

I used to walk up and ID issues from the cart path. Now microscopes and specific testing methods are required. As Dr. Martin said, time to retire; symptoms are not diagnostic

anymore. The No. 1 lesson learned in grad school was to read materials and methods first. Most often it determines results and discussions.

I make far more 911-TURF calls now than ever before with a lot of them being nematode and water quality issues more than disease. My to-do list is done by sunrise, or I circle file it and start a new one.

From the start, I was raised in a congregation of turf professionals helping me grow so I could assist them and others to grow grass. Success No. 1 is the long-lasting relationships formed. I have talked with many of them more than my own family for decades, so they are my family as well.

Turf managers are solutions-based people. They will find the way or create it. Defining agronomic needs and determining the solutions to deal with them can be difficult with so many variables, especially with the significant variations in obstacles and objectives. What works for one won't work for everyone else.

I have learned the hard way to maximize results and minimize misses. I had to know more than I wanted about clients' programs — not just what they did with me — to give the best advice. There is no I in TEAM and there is nothing that acts alone without interacting with other materials or methods utilized in turf management program.

I started Agrono-Lytics, desiring limited clients and doing just consultation in return for more family time. I knew how much growth potential I had missed of the boys chasing the next turf dilemma or sale. In less than two months, I realized the main reason the issues I was finding existed at all was the lack of solutions for them in clients' programs. A problem will always exist until a solution is provided. Moreover, a solution for one problem often creates another one.

I was very fortunate to work in golf course construction during my college summers. My advisor

wanted me to intern with the big names, building my résumé and networking. During the school year, I worked at the VT Turfgrass Research Center and on the athletics fields. These experiences allowed me to see so many different soil and turf types, inputs and variations in demands.

I'm often asked what advice I'd give to people looking at this industry. What do I think provides the best quality of life and opportunity? The best thing in my career and schooling was, from the start, I did golf, sod farms, lawn care and sports turf, giving me variety. Something was always going well in downtimes.

My advice for prospects is to obtain as much cross-training experience as possible with grass types and industry segments. On the grass and input side, I'm not sure if anyone could do it today like I did, because so many of the inputs have changed. Most of my grad school synergism tank mix sprays in the early 1990s are now the modern-day premix brands at the ratio and MOAs in their jug.

Annual budgets and property values of facilities today can be more than the lifetime earnings for the people managing them.

I DELIVERED TODAY to a course that I have called on since I started dealing with five different great turf bosses. When you walk in the shop, you see a banner reading "Greatness Has a Home." When you drive in, you see and hear, "Greatness is Work in Progress being Constructed." High standards come with high demands in time and money for those getting it done. Driving out, I pondered how many have traveled this road for 30 years!

I often take food to crews or give away testing or product. It's my way of paying it forward for all the support I received from the start. Without question, that support with all three companies and now on my own is the only reason I am still

doing this 30 years later.

VT brings the *Ut Prosim* education — "That I May Serve" — that helps you learn to help others. I have an obligation to those who support me and have taught me past and present. Seven years of college and I learn far more daily observing others in so many different situations and techniques. College taught me the best ways to take in and process information. I learned how to learn, and I get educated daily.

For years, I debated going back to college to finish my Ph.D. that I quit when Helena hired me. I ultimately decided not to do it due to loss of income while in school along with the commitment to my employers and customers. I learned so much in the field with the abilities acquired in college to assimilate and analyze information.

I never went to school to get into sales and consulting or thought I would be living in the same town and doing this 30 years later, so I am blessed with the personal life due to my career, which brought me to the beach. I get verbal thanks numerous times a day and the boys have some extra Santas riding along with me, but the biggest thank you is being able to go to the bank for the last three decades and sleeping at night making a living and a life.

Everyone who is successful in this business grows far more people than they do plants. **GCI**

Mike Johnson is the father of twins and the owner of Agrono-Lytics Turf Consulting in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. This is his first Turfheads Take Over contribution.



The competition ate lunch at 6 a.m. with half their day already done. You pulled all-nighters to keep up, learning quickly if four guys needed product by 6 a.m. with an hour between them, you don't start at 5 a.m."



THE OTHER SIDE OF THE AISLE

Morris Johnson launched a second career as a sales pro after retiring from a superintendent position at a revered club. He describes what he has learned from two years on the road.

It's quite different being on the other side of the aisle.

When you're going from being at the national show for 30 years as a Class A superintendent to going as a vendor, it's a change, but I have really enjoyed it. That brotherhood of superintendents is just amazing. The golf world, while very large, is also very small. The contacts and the relationships from my 30-plus-year career as an agronomist are neat to experience now as a vendor. Being able to go in-person and see some of these awesome properties is just a treat.

It's neat to see other high-end clubs because that's the type of course I managed. The issues are the same. It doesn't make a difference if it's in Scottsdale, Arizona, or Jupiter, Florida, everybody deals with basically the same player- and member-driven issues, even if they are in totally different climates.

Dealing with the many talented people in the business is fun. There are so many different operations and maintenance facilities. Physically seeing operations in various parts of the country is eye-opening.

As a golf course superintendent, you're showcasing overall agronomy as your talent. Now I'm just purely a bunker specialist, which is cool. At every club in the country and beyond, it's basically sand. It can be different textures and consistencies and the quality of sand changes, but it's all sand. It doesn't matter if it's in Italy, Costa Rica or California, it's all just sand. What we are doing is so bunker specific, and everybody has the same issue. You can be in Scottsdale dealing with grasses that are totally different than the ones in South Florida, but bunkers are pretty much bunkers regardless of where you go.

I never thought I could make a post-retirement career in bunkers. The late 1990s were the infancy of bunker liners and who would have thought then that it would morph into the business that it is today? Now it's an industry within the industry. That goes along with the expectations for bunker quality and play. Clubs are paying \$275 per ton for bunker sand. When you're spending that kind of money for bunker sand, you want to protect that investment and get as much longevity out of that investment as possible. Bunker liners are playing a huge role in that now.

When you're at high-end private clubs, you are selling your abilities and yourself when each green committee changes. It's just a non-stop presentation of your skills and what you want to achieve on your golf course. Being able to communicate with a vast array of professionals to get your point across as a golf course superintendent is just a perfect segue into doing the same thing with other superintendents in sales. You're selling what you want to do on the golf course as a superintendent — yourself, your team and your programs — to the powers that be so they can give you what you need to be as much of a success as you can. You're trying to get as much money and capital as you can to achieve the goals of the club and yourself. Those skills translate greatly

into post-superintendent possibilities.

Not going to the golf course every day is different. It's weird not being weather-dependent. You go from watching the forecast three times per day to going, *it is what it is*. The daily or even the weekly weather conditions don't necessarily affect what I'm doing anymore. That was kind of different.

I absolutely love what I'm doing. It helps having been a tenured superintendent because other superintendents tend to appreciate your input or viewpoint a little bit more than if I was trying to do this having not been a superintendent. Being a superintendent at a high-end club has really helped, too.

I always respected the vendors who called on me who respected my time by making an appointment and showing up on time. Superintendents are so busy. Mondays are horrible for trying to make a sales call, because that's when superintendents are the busiest. Fridays are second-worst, because they are trying to wrap things up for the week. It's being very cognizant of a superintendent's time. Now that I'm a vendor, I try to do the same.

My first sales call was certainly different. Fortunately, I had 15 years of experience with the product I'm selling. Confidence and knowledge in what you're selling helps. Being the first one in the country to put in the Bunker Solution bunker lining system made me probably more knowledgeable about the product than anybody besides our company owner, **Kevin Clark**. I knew how the product performed, but I was a little nervous the first time I oversaw an installation.

The pressure is that you want customers to see your way of thinking. Some people have never heard of what you're selling and it's different trying to get superintendents to see the benefit of what I'm trying to provide. For me, particularly, as a vendor — and maybe it's different for others — the pressures are not

that extreme. That's where I feel so fortunate. We're getting more inquiries than I'm making cold calls. It's like riding a wave. When I started with Kevin, it was like jumping on a surfboard at a small wave. Now the wave is really, really tall, and we're rolling with it.

The future is bright in the golf market. Most contractors, especially in Florida, are already booked for 2024. If you want to do something, you better start locking up contractors for 2025 or you're not going to be doing anything until 2026. That's a wonderful thing. The golf boom that was reinvigorated during COVID is showing no signs of slowing down.

Superintendents must plan, research and talk with other superintendents who have been through recent renovations or projects, particularly in their region. They can give you the background. No matter how well-intentioned plans are, if you don't have a good contractor and a way to get those plans executed, the project is not going to be executed the way everybody wants. Use your fellow superintendents as resources. Research, research, research.

My workday is quite different. I'm in my home office every morning at 7. It's different than being in the office by 5:30 a.m. I was used to getting up so early. You're now handling bids throughout the day. I travel around a week a month. Other than flying and the airport aspect of travel — I have had so many flights delayed and spent countless hours in airports — once you get to the clubs you want to get to and finally get to your appointments, it's so worth it. Anybody who's a golf aficionado and likes golf courses couldn't ask for a better job.

I wasn't handed this on a silver platter. I had 30 years of work as a Class A superintendent with 30 years of contacts and relationships. That has massively helped what I'm doing now.

The timing couldn't have been better. It was during Hurricane Harvey in 2017 and we were 18 months

post-reopening from a massive **Tom Fazio** renovation that started in 2015. It massively changed the golf course from erosion along Buffalo Bayou. We had to bring the Fazio people back in, we had to move a green, we had to move cart paths and multiple bunkers.

I called Kevin and told him, *I need 40,000 square feet more of the Bunkers Solution*. I couldn't get a hold of him for three or four days. It kept saying: VOICEMAIL BOX IS FULL. I finally got a hold of him, and I said, *Kevin, you can't sell this stuff if you don't answer the phone*. He said, *Morris, I have gotten so busy*. He broached the subject of me helping him at some point. I told him I wanted to finish the bayou restoration project. When that was completed, it was right at my 20-year tenure mark at River Oaks. I thought that just might work out perfectly. We started talking more and more, and I got more and more excited.

Having the ability to leave a club of that stature on your own terms with the golf course being in great shape, the more I thought about it, the more I felt it was just perfect. In hindsight, it was probably the smartest thing I have ever done. I gave the club six months' notice right around my 20th anniversary. The club was so appreciative that I had given them so much notice to look for my replacement and there was an easy transition with the local knowledge of the golf course. They treated me incredibly well. They had retirement parties. It was a celebration of my time at River Oaks. I then transitioned to this job right after I left River Oaks. It has been awesome ever since. I feel very blessed with how things have worked out. **GCI**

Morris Johnson is the national sales director for Bunker Solution. He previously spent 20 years as the superintendent at River Oaks Country Club in Houston. This is his second Turfheads Take Over contribution.



LEARNING FROM A HOOPS LEGEND

Following the death last month of basketball coach **Bobby Knight**, remembrances from a legion of coaching peers and writers reminded us that leaders are an amalgam of styles and personalities. And, in the case of Knight, they sometimes come embodied in the same complicated, profoundly human soul.

In more than four decades as a head coach, Knight was boorish, abusive and obnoxious. He could be equally gracious, charming and charitable. In the paradoxical body of work from the coach known as the General, we see the good, the bad and sometimes the ugly sides of leadership. On reflection, we see traits to emulate and ones to avoid.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Knight sought out top performers and encouraged never-ending hustle and discipline. He also criticized players to the point of abuse.

As we enter a new year, the war for talent continues. Unemployment rates of less than 4 percent, the lowest level in two decades, suggest that the war will be hard fought on two fronts: hiring and retaining.

As has been the case in a post-pandemic labor market, superintendents are challenged to recruit and retain the best talent their budgets can support. Exacerbating the challenge, most course management professionals have previously tapped their traditional sources of capable workers.

The first step is identifying and hiring top people. If you are one of those managers with a nose for talent, you are among the blessed few. Most management professionals consider finding capable people one of their biggest challenges. The most skilled managers are known for assembling talented staffs. Managers who are weak at talent recruitment are often overly rigid in their hiring process; even less effective

managers have no hiring process at all.

STABILITY

Knight was committed to an unwavering style of hard-nosed defense and ever-moving offense. But that consistency was undermined by his volatile demeanor.

Despite a tough labor market, where job movement might be less challenging, stability is a key concern, especially for entry-level workers. According to Handshake, a networking platform serving more than 10 million college students, a survey of recent college grads shows a shift from jobs offering status to ones offering stability. In fact, 73 percent ranked stability as a top priority while fewer than half said a priority was to work for a known brand.

Managers also must offer talent an environment where they feel respected and rewarded, as well as the opportunity to add to their knowledge and experience.

PEOPLE-BUILDING

Knight was a master teacher and relentless motivator who drove players to the height of their potential. He also caused many to feel underappreciated.

Leaders who are most admired as coaches and developers of talent share a handful of skills. They are known as people-builders because they consistently:

- Provide challenging tasks and assignments that stretch their people beyond the job description.
- Conduct frequent training and feet-on-the-ground teaching and learning sessions.
- Are aware of each staff member's career goals and work needs.

- Construct personal and compelling development plans for each worker.

- Remind team members that they believe in their potential. On the other hand, poor people-builders:

- Seldom find time for one-on-one discussions and coaching, which can undermine a great start to the job.
- Are insincere in their compliments and encouragement, leading workers to feel manipulated and unappreciated.
- Play favorites and encourage quick learners at the expense of those who need more personal coaching.
- Don't express confidence that team members can meet the challenges of the job.
- Lack a systematic approach to follow-up coaching opportunities.

Those who accept the challenge of being top talent developers:

- Develop and use an intentional method of talent development with regularly scheduled coaching and follow-up meetings.
- Celebrate key milestones and achievements.
- Honestly evaluate workers, using constructive, on-point criticism that helps them learn and advance.
- Do not give up on team members. Instead, they keep coaching, encouraging and expecting great performances.

Despite his flaws, of which there were many, Knight will be remembered as a brilliant coach who sought the best from his team. As leaders who want the best from our team, we can learn a lot from the way he went about that goal. **GC**



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.

**PART 4**

WHAT'S NEXT

ALL SIGNS POINT TO THE PROMINENCE OF THE EQUIPMENT MANAGER POSITION ACCELERATING. WHAT DO INDUSTRY CHANGES MEAN TO THE PEOPLE HOLDING THE POSITION?

By **Guy Cipriano**

Uncertainty surrounding electronics, robotics, diagnostics, labor and turf equipment costs means the importance of the equipment manager position to a golf operation should accelerate over the next decade.

Consider the career of **Joe Moreira**. Earlier this year, Moreira switched equipment manager jobs, shifting from Lake Toxaway Country Club to 27-hole Etowah Valley



▲ Etowah Valley Golf Club & Lodge equipment manager Joe Moreira.

Golf Club & Lodge. Moreira received numerous opportunities to job hop during his six years at Lake Toxaway. Remaining in North Carolina while obtaining more responsibility appealed to him. His new job provides life flexibility and he's encouraged to grow professionally, as evidenced by his vice president position

in the Turf Equipment Technicians Association of the Carolinas.

Educational and networking opportunities matter for Moreira and his peers. Every emerging part or component inserted into turf equipment units — and every piece of equipment with a lifespan that must be extended — will test equipment managers in new ways. Knowing more is a proven way to combat the unknown. Equipment managers must know plenty to successfully navigate their days, weeks, months and years. Plenty of people even inside the industry, according to Moreira, still don't realize how much a modern equipment manager must know.

"They say, 'He's just a mechanic,'" he says. "Well, not really. I have a budget, I do accounting, I do risk management, I'm doing safety classes. I have to make sure everybody is safe using a chainsaw." Because of the versatility the job requires — and because a glut of unfilled equipment manager positions permeates the industry — Moreira is certain about one

part of his future. "I believe there's a huge demand for our skillset," he says. "I believe there's not enough of us. I'm not of the mindset that I'm going to train somebody to do what I do and then they will take my job. If I train somebody and they become better than me, that makes me better."

Mike Elliott has reached a career juncture where he's proactively identifying and training the next generation of equipment managers.

After a nearly 12-year stint as the equipment manager at acclaimed Pine Valley Golf Club in southern New Jersey, Elliott accepted an offer to lead The Union League of Philadelphia's equipment manager program.

Once exclusively a downtown social club, The Union League now supports three golf courses in three distinct Philadelphia-area locations: 27-hole Union League National in southern New Jersey, Torresdale in northeast Philadelphia and Liberty Hill in suburban Lafayette Hill. Elliott oversees a mechanical team consisting of an equipment manager and an assistant at each location. "We're always looking for the next 17-year-old kid

coming out of high school who wants to turn a wrench for a living, because it's definitely been changing in the last five years," he says.

Elliott can relate to a young person seeking a career fit. He started working on a golf course as a 14-year-old. Elliott moved from his native Maryland to Colorado in the late 1990s and transitioned from the grounds crew to an assistant equipment manager role at Boulder Country Club because the position provided year-round employment. Less than three years later, he landed the head equipment manager job at Coal Creek Golf Course.

The biggest differences since the early 2000s, according to Elliott, involve how equipment managers are treated. Salaries and wages are increasing; many work weeks are decreasing. Elliott expects both trends to continue, because "people are starting to realize how important this position really is and how hard it is to fill." Elliott tries to keep peak-season workdays for his staff in the eight- to 10-hour range.

Competitive wages and manageable hours can only take recruitment efforts so far. Developing a



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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 explores 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: November: Routines and relationships

PART 4: This month: What's next

capable equipment manager requires patience. The progression from assistant-in-training to assistant superintendent is common throughout the industry, and thousands of superintendents have sent protégés onto head jobs. Only 29 percent of golf courses employ an assistant equipment manager, according to a November 2023 @GCIMagazine X poll.

"If you get two or three interns or an assistant-in-training who has gone to school for agronomy, you can pop out superintendents every few years," Elliott says. "But if you take somebody who doesn't have the background as a mechanic and you're trying to teach them from scratch, it's a three-year pro-

cess before somebody is ready to take that step and set up a shop."

The equipment managers Elliott is developing are maintaining units that are getting "a little more intricate and advance with computer systems." The integration of computers, robotics and electronics into equipment maintenance could lure young people to the industry. It also could result in some veterans leaving the industry.

"Going to equipment with all these electronics and computers in them will make the job tougher," says **Tim Thurston**, the equipment manager at Ambassador Golf Club in Windsor, Ontario. "You have to get more training on things every time something new comes out. It's going to be harder to test and find faults. It's getting to the

point where you have to plug it into a computer like the automotive side does to find issues—and the price has increased because of it."

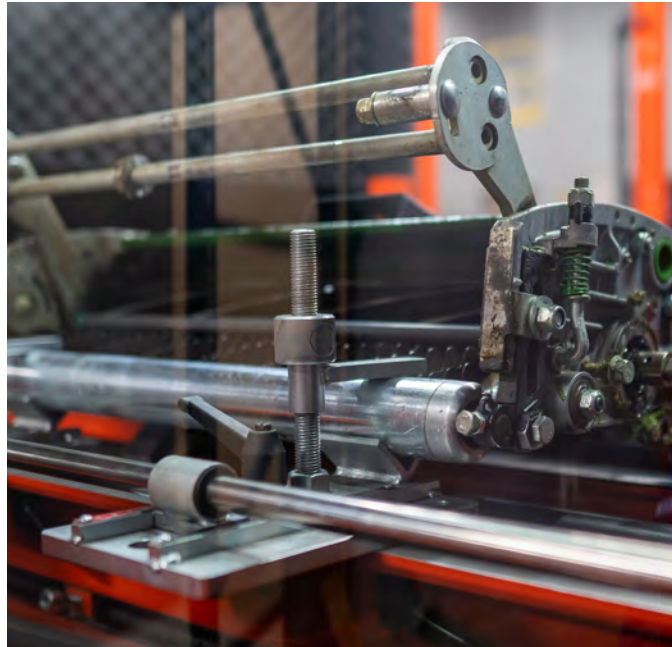
Trent Manning views the ongoing management adjustments and looming technological changes as an opportunity for the industry.

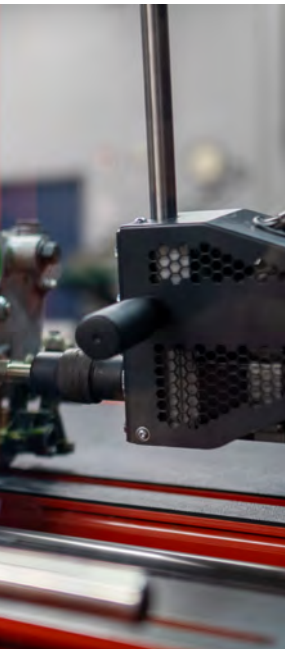
The equipment manager at Ansley Golf Club, a 27-hole, Atlanta-area facility with two locations, Manning has assumed a leadership position among equipment managers by creating the *Reel Turf Techs* podcast and WhatsApp group, a pair of beloved digital resources for hundreds of experienced and inexperienced colleagues.

The conversations on the podcast and app indicate that equipment managers will need evolving skillsets to flourish. "We're going to have to eventually learn how to code," Manning says. "And we're going to have to spend more time behind a computer."

Manning mentions a chainsaw produced by a major manufacturer as an example of where bigger units are headed. The chainsaw features a microprocessor and connects to a laptop.

"I think it will attract more people to the industry, because I do feel like





the younger generations are more tech-savvy,” Manning says. “Kids are now getting smartphones at whatever age. They are more familiar with that type of stuff. It even fascinates me to be able to plug a laptop into a chainsaw. That’s cool. In fact, it’s a lot cooler than the old tools that we used.”

Many equipment managers are relishing the

expanding ways they can meld a digital mindset into the tactical and organizational parts of the job.

Justin King, the equipment manager at Jamestown Park Golf Course, a municipal facility in North Carolina’s Piedmont region, relies on a digital job board program and Google Sheets to track orders, machine hours and grinding data. At Philadelphia Cricket Club, equipment manager **Shawn Bergey’s** team spent this past season observing and maintaining more than 30 autonomous units mowing rough and the club’s four acres of tennis courts. Conversations with the three major golf mowing manufacturers suggest to Moreira that future colleagues will possess mechatronics degrees. Mechatronics is a discipline combining engineering, electronics, robotics and computing.

Cool? Intimidating? Or both?

“I don’t think it’s going to necessarily change my job or how I do my job,” says Kenosha (Wisconsin) Country Club equipment manager **Justin Prescott**. “It’s going to change what I’m doing in my job. It’s a matter of adapting. If I have to use a computer to program a robotic mower, that’s just another tool I’m going to have in my toolbox. I have wrenches, I have sockets, I have



What’s next in training

Bernhard Academy is unveiling its new training facility at 2025 U.S. Open host site Oakmont Country Club in western Pennsylvania. Launching in mid-December, the academy marks the first Bernhard Academy venue in the United States and North America.

Oakmont represents a key customer for Bernhard and Company, and the academy represents the next step in the relationship, according to the company. The facility is a collaboration involving Oakmont’s agronomy department and maintenance setup. The academy will include technical and classroom-based workshops at Oakmont’s maintenance facility.

The expansion of the academy into North America follows a successful launch in the United Kingdom at the company’s Haverhill, England, headquarters. A bespoke training facility was also created at Moortown Golf Club in northern England.

The new program of educational courses falls under two categories: management or technical. Both categories will cover a range of essential topics to help achieve success in turf management.

computers in my toolbox now.”

Freedom to tinker is frequently cited as a joy of the job, and diagnosing problems via computer will alter work habits. But technology should put equipment managers in a position to tinker smarter.

“You have so many opportunities in this job to find creative solutions,” Elliott says. “It’s not just what’s wrong with an engine. We’re trying to accomplish something on a golf course. We are trying to get something from Point A to Point B. There are so many different levels where you can help people out. And everybody comes to the mechanic.”

Equipment managers are bracing to field more questions and requests, especially given the condition of the current golf market, where soaring equipment and labor costs are challenging facilities despite the play and revenue surges since 2020. Elliott cites the expense

of a fairway mower — some units now exceed \$100,000 — as one area that will place significant pressure on an equipment manager to extend the lifespan of their employer’s investment.

Long shipping delays on parts and new units will further test the ability of equipment managers to find imaginative solutions. More prominence always comes at a cost.

“Maybe that’s why we are more valuable now, because we’re being asked to repair stuff without being able to get parts on it, so you have to get creative sometimes in how you can make a repair without a part coming from the factory,” Manning says. “Then when you have a set equipment replacement schedule in place, and you’re not replacing that equipment, that leads to more repairs, more downtime and more stress for the equipment manager.” **GCI**



EIGHT CERTAINTIES OF GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT

To paraphrase the otherwise dense 20th century German philosopher **Theodor Adorno**, when it comes to social criticism, only the exaggerations are true. In that spirit, I present the findings of my four decades of research into the everyday life of golf course superintendents. I can't prove these hypotheses quantitatively. But I know they ring true.

1. THE 90/10 RULE: At every club I have ever seen, 90 percent of the noise, complaints and discontent comes from 10 percent of the members. Half of them express themselves through a fog of self-induced, liquid medication; the rest of them are perpetual depressives intent on making everyone else as miserable as they are. No matter what, they are unhappy. My advice to greenkeepers, pros and general managers is to stop listening to them and to engage the rest of the members, most of whom are reasonable and agreeable to thoughtful measures of everyday management.

2. THE 30/70 RULE: If you parse the operational budgets of most facilities, the golf course absorbs about one-third or less of the expenditure yet generates just under three-quarters of the revenue in terms of green fees, guest fees and share of initiation fees. Dollar for dollar, the golf course is a big moneymaker and subsidizes the rest of the facility's operations — including every meal served.

3. THE CLUBHOUSE IS A SINK-HOLE: Think of it as a variant of the Peter Principle (1969). What started as “people rise in a business hierarchy until they reach their level of incompetence” yielded “expenditures rise to meet income” and “junk expands to meet the capacity devised to store it.” In golf, the overhead costs of maintaining an enlarged clubhouse entail additional personnel, utilities and utilization such that you always end up falling behind. Whether it's added service labor, HVAC, food waste or security, that new wing or expanded bar ends up sinking the operational budget further behind and puts the club in a deeper fiscal hole, which only drains funds away from the prime facility at any country club or golf facility: the golf course.

4. COST PER SHOT, BUNKER MAINTENANCE IS A WASTE: More than 50 percent of all shots in a round are played onto, across or upon the putting surface. Meanwhile, your average golfer only plays three to four shots per round out of a bunker. From that standpoint, it is simply nuts that the cost for maintenance per square foot for bunkers is equivalent to that of greens. Economically, it makes no sense to groom meticulously what are supposed to serve as “hazards.”

5. FOCUSING ON GREENS, FAIRWAYS AND TEES GUARANTEES 90 PERCENT SUCCESS: Given the perceptions and concerns that the vast majority of golfers have, a focus on “maintenance down the middle” is a guaranteed winner. The gains

made by focusing on peripheral areas, especially the rough, flower beds and native areas, has what economists call diminishing marginal utility. In other words, it takes a lot of additional effort to make even very slight gains there. Start with the central lane of play and take care of that first.

6. ONLY 1 PERCENT OF PLAY IS FROM BACK TEES: Most of the play at a golf course is from 6,500, 6,000 or 5,000 yards. Those are the players who are paying the bills. The back tees get about 1 percent of play, and most of that is from “industry comps” like college kids, ex-pros or golf business insiders. If you think I'm kidding, just check the divot wear pattern on those back tees. There isn't any.

7. DEFENDING PAR IS EASY: At most clubs there's still too much emphasis on degree of difficulty or fixing a hole that is relatively easy. If you are really concerned about defending par, simply watch an average foursome play any hole. For the vast majority of golfers, the holes need to provide fun, variety and interest, not a masochistic obstacle course.

8. WHEN IT RAINS, THE PARKING LOT IS EMPTY: No matter how good the hamburger and onion rings, if weather conditions render the course unplayable for the day, the parking lot is empty. F&B consumption is a function of the golf. A modest menu and adequate service will thrive if the golf course is outstanding. If the golf course is lousy, the best steak in the world will go uneaten. **GC**



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 X at @BradleySKlein.

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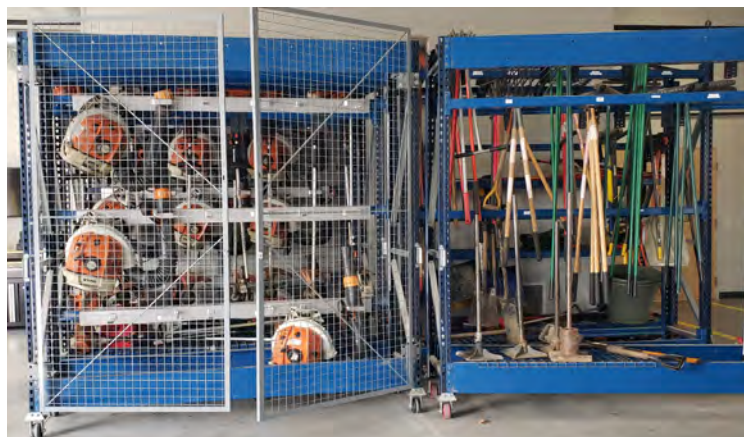
PROPERTY LINE DELINEATION

The 36-hole Fiddlesticks Country Club in Fort Myers, Florida, grows hybrid Bermudagrass on its golf courses. The surrounding HOA homeowners' lawns are St. Augustine. A decorative pine straw buffer zone separates the two turf types. To keep the buffer zone grasses from creeping into each other and free from weeds, glyphosate and pre-emergent herbicides are applied as needed using a prototype "spray wheel" designed and built by **Joseph McKenney**, PGA, superintendent of the Long Mean Course. A pressure washer wand, with a ¼-inch diameter pipe and original spray nozzle is attached with a rubber hose and clamps to a recycled aluminum rake handle. It also features 12.6-inch-diameter plexiglass wheels, recycled from a golf cart windshield, where holes were drilled to fit a threaded rod into bearings, washers and nuts so the wheels are adjustable for the desired spray width. The current spray nozzle operates at 20 PSI, while a traditional flat fan spray nozzle is planned. All the parts and materials were recycled, and it took less than three hours to build. **Gabe Gallo** is the director of agronomy and **Kipp Schulties** is the renovation architect.



ROLLING TOOL RACKS

While a new maintenance building was built recently at Muirfield Village Golf Club in Dublin, Ohio, rolling tool racks were designed by **Tom Wait** of TRW Global after thinktank input from **Chad A. Mark**, director of grounds operations, and **Eric Perkins**, irrigation and infrastructure assistant. There are three lockable power tool racks, one for string line trimmers and two for backpack blowers, as well as three hand-tool racks, one used exclusively by the horticulturist. Each tool rack locker measures approximately 2 feet by 8 feet by 8 feet. The tool racks are placed like library shelves next to each other to condense their storage space. They have fixed caster wheels, making them totally portable to move them next to the turf vehicles storage for easy loading and unloading. American Storage provided the hand tool hangers, and a local custom fabricator made the backpack hangers. Murray Material Handling supplied and installed the tool racks; it took about three to four hours total to assemble all six of them. The total cost was part of the new maintenance building costs. **Jack Nicklaus** and **Chris Cochran** are the architects.



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.

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NAILED IT

Guy Cipriano, the fearless leader of *Golf Course Industry*, shared a thought on social media about a month ago that might be the single best post he's ever created. Guy wrote on X, "One of the many, many, many beauties of the golf industry is everybody can be a consultant. Everybody can inspire, help and inform a peer. Everybody can call, text or email a peer for guidance. Not many industries boast this type of support network. Embrace it."

In today's fast-paced world, it may seem counterintuitive to write about a social media post. The concept of today's news really is an old-fashioned one because if you wait a few hours the next newsworthy thing will come along. And sometimes the wait only requires a few minutes before you are yesterday's news.

I submitted a piece to the first *Turfheads Take Over* issue in 2016 about the benefits of GCSAA membership. I wanted everyone in the business to understand we are stronger together, and although some may choose to go at it alone, life is just better when your friends and colleagues are along for the ride.

Guy's words were so poignant because annually this very issue of the magazine embodies that spirit perfectly. *Turfheads Take Over* provides a platform for industry folks to write about whatever they want. That alone is a powerful concept, but when your peers use that given platform to inform, motivate and inspire rather than

“*Turfheads Take Over* provides a platform for industry folks to write about whatever they want. That alone is a powerful concept, but when your peers use that given platform to inform, motivate and inspire rather than boast we all are motivated come each December.”

boast we all are motivated come each December.

Social media can be depressing with the volume of negativity, but if you know how to sift through the litter, you can learn and be inspired by numerous examples of the uplifting nature of this industry. In late October, a severe storm off the east coast of Scotland caused damage to golf courses. The hardest hit was Golspie, as it suffered coastal erosion and vast amounts of debris deposited on the course by the storm surge.

Did you know the day after the storm there was a massive cleanup effort? Yes, the members of the club came out to assist **Muir Ross** and his small greenkeeping team, but so did members of the local community. And so did other greenkeeping staff members from nearby courses Tain, Brora, Royal Dornoch, Skibo and even Durness. Folks willingly donated their time and pitched in to help a neighbor in need.

Or how about the devastation in Arizona caused by the javelina? I must admit I didn't know what a javelina was until I saw the horrific video shared on X by Seven Canyons Golf Club assistant superintendent **Emily Casey** on Oct. 22. The video had recorded over 33 MILLION views at the time I penned this column. Talk about going viral. And although the video did spark some debate about golf courses, land use, natu-

ral resources and habitats, there were other folks who reached out with ideas and assistance for the problem at hand.

Want more proof? How about the toy drive in memory of **Michael Breuer's** son **Grady**. What a tragic yet inspiring story and life lived by the young boy. #Gradystrong will continue to inspire long after social media is a distant memory. I know he continues to inspire me each day. When the day finally arrives that I get the chance to meet Michael, I have a big hug waiting for him.

What about *The Superintendent Network*? **Brian Laurent's** son was horrifically injured, and the network (pun intended) rallied in support. The Wee One Foundation has been supporting members of the golf course industry for nearly a decade, providing money for families and loved ones at a critical time in their lives.

I could go on, but I think by now you get the gist. We work in a unique industry where everyone across the nation and around the globe shares a common bond. And when a colleague has a need, the call to action is as natural a response as daily course setup procedures.

Keep grinding when the season requires and keep sharing. You are inspiring others and making a difference, even if you didn't know it.


Guy nailed it because that device we sometimes struggle to pull ourselves away from connects us all just like the soil under our boots. And in this period of giving to others, I wish everyone a safe, healthy and happiest of holidays. **GC**




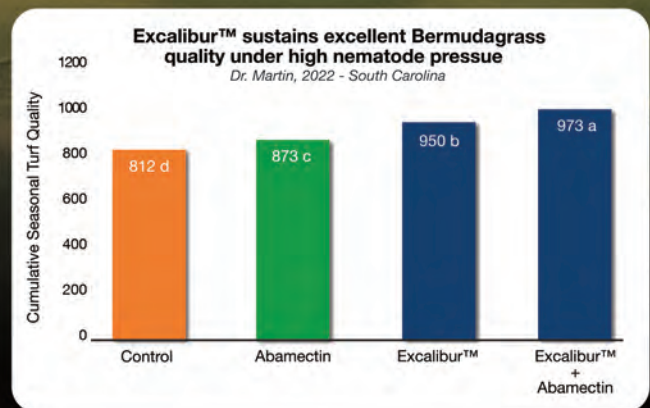
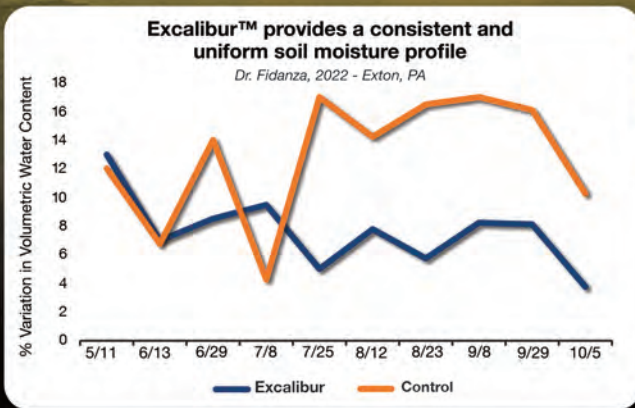
MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG, is the superintendent at Idle Hour Country Club in Lexington, Kentucky, and past president of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on X at @IHCCGreenkeeper.



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Prepping for Thanksgiving dinner seems to get easier every year. I think it may be because I'm getting older and simpler minded. I used to try and make all the dishes homemade just as my family did in yesteryear but now, I'm more into the prepared sides. For many years I deep fried my turkey, now I'm all about the slow smoked version of ol' Tom. I have a Traeger smoker so the "set it and forget it" mentality allows for less chance for a screw up, and puts my wife's mind at ease that all will be OK as we gather around the table to feast. The tradition of family, football, a cold cocktail in my hand and the smell of Traeger smoked turkey; it doesn't get any better!

Year 3 for Turfheads Grilling has again been a success with our partner Golf Course Industry. We started out with a "Cookout" at our booth in Orlando and have enjoyed the banter and recipes that followed throughout this year. We hope you take a moment over the next few months and try some of the great recipes found in this year's cookbook. It's nice to see how cooking and grilling has allowed for many new relationships to be formed over the past three years.

We hope everyone has a wonderful and safe holiday season. Take time to slow down and enjoy the moments with family. Please stop by and say hello to us at SFMA conference in Daytona booth 724 and the GCSAA Conference and Show in Phoenix booth 4954.

Happy Grilling!

SAM GREEN

President, AQUA:AID Solutions

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Don Bloom

Durand Eastman Golf Course

BABY BACK RIBS

INGREDIENTS

- 2½ pounds baby back ribs
- Your favorite BBQ rub (recommendation: Killer Hogs)
- Your favorite BBQ sauce (recommendation: Dinosaur Bar-B-Que Sensuous Slathering Sauce)
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter

INSTRUCTIONS

- Preheat smoker or oven to 250 degrees.
- Remove the membrane from the bottom of ribs and season generously with rub (a dry paper towel is easiest to grab and pull membrane off the bottom of the rack).
- Cook ribs for 2 hours.
- Remove the ribs and rub 2 tablespoons unsalted butter on ribs.
- Wrap ribs tightly with 2 pieces of foil and return to cook 2 more hours.
- Remove foil carefully, top with BBQ sauce, and cook for additional 30 minutes.



Brent Downs, CGCS, and Andra Swarts, CCC
Otter Creek Golf Course

SOBRINHA SKIRT STEAK WITH DEALER'S CHOICE CHIMICHURRI

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE STEAK

- 2 to 3 pounds skirt steak, trimmed of excess fat
- Salt and pepper to season
- Olive oil

FOR THE CHIMICHURRI

- 1 cup rough chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 1 cup rough chopped cilantro
- 8 garlic cloves
- 6 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1½ cup olive oil
- 2 sliced shallots
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon fresh ground pepper
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano

FOR LOW HEAT

- 1 coronado chili pepper, topped

FOR MEDIUM HEAT

- 1 tablespoon red chili flakes

FOR HIGH HEAT

- ½ rocoto chile, seeded and topped

INSTRUCTIONS

FOR THE CHIMICHURRI

- If you want to improve the depth of flavor on the chimichurri, roast the onions and fresh chiles (if using) on the grill first.
- Add all items to a food processor or chopper, except for olive oil.
- Start the processing at a slow speed, and slowly pour in the oil to give it a chance to combine properly.
- After 30 seconds of processing, pour the contents of the processor into a storage container, reserving ½ cup of the sauce for the steak marinade.

FOR THE STEAK

- Using the ½ cup of chimichurri, place the skirt steak in a sealable bag, pour the ½ cup of chimichurri over, toss to coat, press the air out of the bag and seal — allow to marinade from 2 to 8 hours in refrigerator.

- A half hour before grilling, pull steak out of marinade and discard marinade. Preheat the grill to 450 degrees, add olive oil and salt, and pepper the steaks.
- Place the steaks on the grill. If you have a grill-safe container, you can also heat up the remaining chimichurri sauce.
- After 3½ minutes, rotate the steak 90 degrees for grill marks. After 7 minutes, flip the steak. Rotate again on the other side after 3½ minutes.
- After 15 minutes, check for doneness. Skirt steak should be grilled to minimum 140 degrees for medium. Medium-rare or less will cause the steak to be tough and chewy.
- Allow steak to rest. Loosely tent with foil and allow to rest for 10 minutes. After steak has rested, slice the steak into thin strips perpendicular to the grain of the steak. Spoon warm chimichurri over steak slices and serve.



Bryan Epland
ArborLinks

BACON AND CREAM CHEESE STUFFED PORK LOIN

INGREDIENTS

- 2 pounds pork loin
- 16 ounces bacon
- 8 ounces chive and onion cream cheese
- Honey
- Seasoning of your choice (recommendation: Famous Dave's Rib Rub)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Preheat smoker to 225 degrees.
- While the smoker is preheating, fillet the pork loin so it lays flat. Be careful not to cut through.
- Fry the bacon, the crispier the better. After frying, cut or break the bacon into roughly half using half-inch pieces.
- Spread the chive and onion cream cheese onto the pork loin and season. I like to use Famous Dave's Rib Rub for this recipe.
- Spread the bacon pieces over top of the cream cheese and seasoning. Drizzle some honey over the bacon.
- Tightly wrap the pork loin back into its original shape and tie it tightly with some butcher's twine.
- Once smoker has reached 225, insert temperature probe and place pork loin onto the smoker.
- Smoke until the internal temperature reaches a minimum of 145 degrees.
- Remove from smoker and let it rest for 10 minutes before enjoying.



David Jones

The Club at Indian Springs

HAWAIIAN CHICKEN

INGREDIENTS

- 6 boneless chicken breasts
- 2 cups pineapple juice
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 ounces soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- Pineapple slices (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Mix ingredients, minus chicken.
- Put chicken in marinade for 24 hours.
- Grill.
- Add pineapple slice on top, if desired.



Trevor Ploetz
Concord Crest Golf Course

ASHLEY'S MILLION DOLLAR MAC-N-CHEESE

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound cellentani pasta
- 4 tablespoons butter
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- 3 cups milk
- 1 12-ounce can evaporated milk
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 tablespoon chicken bouillon
- 1 teaspoon each of onion powder, garlic powder, dried parsley and salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 4 cups freshly grated sharp cheddar cheese
- 6 to 8 slices of provolone cheese
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 cup freshly grated parmesan cheese

OPTIONAL PANKO TOPPING

- ¾ cup panko breadcrumbs
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil

INSTRUCTIONS

- Cook pasta to al dente. Strain and rinse with cold water.
- Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 9-inch by 13-inch baking dish and set aside.
- Melt butter in large skillet over medium heat then whisk in flour. Cook while stirring for 2 minutes. Turn heat to low and gradually whisk in milk.
- Whisk cornstarch into evaporated milk and gradually add to skillet followed by the Dijon and all the seasonings.
- Bring to a boil, whisking constantly. Reduce to medium and simmer while whisking occasionally until thickened (not too thick).

- Remove from heat and whisk in sharp cheese until melted. Add pasta and toss until coated.
- Pour half the macaroni and cheese into the baking dish. Layer the macaroni evenly with the provolone cheese then with an even layer of sour cream. Pour the remaining macaroni and cheese over the sour cream evenly. Sprinkle with parmesan cheese.

OPTIONAL PANKO TOPPING

- Melt butter in olive oil over medium heat in a medium skillet. Add panko and stir to coat. Continue cooking until golden brown. Evenly sprinkle over macaroni and cheese.
- Bake 25 to 30 minutes or until bubbly and the middle is melted. Cool 10 minutes before serving.



Tyler Robb
Grove XXIII Golf Club

CLUTCH RIBS

INGREDIENTS

- Pork spare ribs
- Salt
- Pepper
- Chili powder
- Paprika
- Cumin
- Onion powder
- Sauce of your preference (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Season ribs with rub containing salt, pepper, chili powder, paprika, cumin and onion powder.
- Make an aluminum foil boat and wrap with some butter.
- Cook at 225 degrees for 2½ hours.
- Unwrap the top and add sauces if you like. I used a Carolina gold on one side and sweet BBQ on the other, and left the middle naked.
- Increase heat to 350 degrees and return to the oven for an additional 15 to 30 minutes.



Craig Sondergaard
Racine Country Club

WISCONSIN BUTTER BURGERS

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound 80/20 fresh ground beef (for 4 burgers)
- Salt
- Pepper
- Salted butter
- Wisconsin cheddar
- 4 bakery quality burger buns
- Mayonnaise

INSTRUCTIONS

- Prep work is important as these burgers cook fast!
- Preheat gas flattop griddle over high heat. (An electric griddle will not get hot enough.)
- Slice buns and spread both top and bottom with thin layer of mayonnaise. Set aside.
- Divide beef into eight 2-ounce portions. Loosely pack into balls.
- Take all ingredients to grill. Again, these will cook fast, so have everything with you!
- Toast buns. Set aside.
- Place balls of beef on grill and smash with burger press. Patty should be roughly 6 inches in diameter and stick to grill.
- Season with salt and pepper.
- Flip when $\frac{3}{4}$ of top side of patty has turned brown.
- Immediately top each patty with a dollop of butter (about 1 teaspoon) then a slice of cheese.
- Once cheese is melted, stack 2 patties and place on toasted bun.
- Garnish as desired and enjoy!



Tom Taylor

Harbour Ridge Yacht and Country Club

BRAZILIAN SMOKED TRI-TIP

INGREDIENTS

- 2½-pound tri-tip

FOR THE MARINADE

- ¼ cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup white sugar
- 2 tablespoons black pepper
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 cloves garlic minced
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ cup lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- ½ cup vegetable oil

FOR THE RUB

- ¼ cup kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon pepper
- 1½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1½ teaspoon onion powder
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon thyme
- 1½ teaspoons cumin
- 1 pinch nutmeg

INSTRUCTIONS

FOR THE MARINADE

- Mix ingredients in a mixing bowl.
- Add ¼ cup brown sugar, ¼ cup white sugar, 2 tablespoons black pepper, 2 tablespoons kosher salt, 2 cloves garlic, ½ teaspoon onion powder, ½ cup lemon juice, 2 tablespoons soy sauce and ½ cup vegetable oil.
- Place in Ziploc bag or plastic container.

FOR THE RUB

- Place all ingredients in a mixing bowl or mason jar for storage.
- Add ¼ cup kosher salt, 2 tablespoons brown sugar, 1 tablespoon pepper, 1½ teaspoon garlic powder, 1½ teaspoon onion powder, 1 tablespoon chili powder, 1 tablespoon smoked paprika, 1 teaspoon thyme, 1½ teaspoons cumin and 1 pinch nutmeg.

- After mixing your marinade ingredients in a bowl, place the marinade and meat together in a Ziploc bag or plastic container. Let it marinate for 1 hour or up to overnight.
- When you are ready to begin cooking, remove your tri-tip from the fridge.
- Turn your Traeger to smoke (allow about 5 minutes).
- Remove the tri-tip from the marinade and lightly dust all sides of the tri-tip with your favorite rub.
- Turn the temperature to 225 degrees.
- Place tri-tip on Traeger until the internal temperature reaches 130 to 135 degrees, about 1½ to 2 hours.
- Remove tri-tip from grill and wrap in tin foil.
- Let it rest in the tin foil for 20 to 30 minutes.
- After it has rested, cut slices against the grain and enjoy.



Rob Uzar

Hammock Creek Golf Club

SMOKED PULLED PORK

INGREDIENTS

RUB

- 5 pounds pork butt or shoulder
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons of kosher salt
- 2 teaspoons black pepper
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- 2 teaspoons onion powder
- 2 teaspoons chili powder

BRINE

- 4 cups of water
- ½ cup salt
- ¼ cup of brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons of soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons of molasses

INSTRUCTIONS

- Bring water to a boil, add brine ingredients and stir. Boil for a minute or two to dissolve salt and sugar. Remove from heat and add ice to mixture to cool down quickly.
- After cooled, place pork butt into brine overnight. Add enough water to cover the roast. If you have an injector, you can inject some before placing in brine. Overnight the brine.
- Pull from the brine in the morning and let it come to room temperature.
- Put on smoker at 250 degrees and cook until temperature hits 160 degrees (usually 1 hour per pound). Wrap with foil or butcher paper and cook to 205 degrees then let rest for 20 to 30 minutes before pulling.



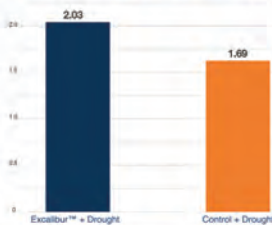
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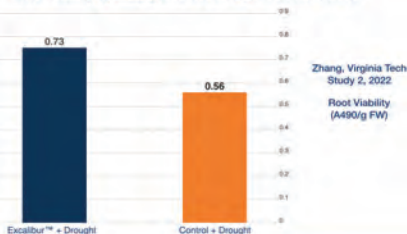
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