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17

COLUMNS

14 GAME PLAN

Henry DeLozier: You can if you plan

16 GOLF THERAPY

Bradley S. Klein: Thanks are in order

50 OUTSIDE THE ROPES

Tim Moraghan: Brewing your wake-up call

58 AMERICA'S GREENKEEPER

Matthew Wharton: Making cents of dollars

DEPARTMENTS

4 TEEING OFF: Learning from the kitchen

6 NOTEBOOK: Make time for yourself

12 WONDERFUL WOMEN: Shelby DuBois

56 TRAVELS WITH TERRY: Equipment ideas

57 CLASSIFIEDS / NAMES INDEX

FEATURES

Numbers to Know

17 HOW BIG IS THE JOB?

Our annual survey dives deep into the ways your role and responsibilities have evolved in recent years — and provides snapshots of turf pros in different situations handling change.

- Wilmington Municipal GC
- Crane Creek CC
- Nemaocolin
- Odyssey Park Foundation GC
- Ohio State University GC
- Coral Creek Club
- Iron Horse GC
- Poinciana GC
- How different was the job 20 years ago?

SPONSORED BY



Technology

38 MOVING FUNDAMENTALS FORWARD

The Big Data Era is coming for golf course maintenance. We promise it won't be as daunting as you think.

Maintenance

46 OLD, TRUSTED, USEFUL

Sometimes the most experienced equipment is what keeps the grounds (and the books) looking their best.



55

Spotlight

53 GOLF MEDIA: SHANKS AND SOLUTIONS

A veteran reporter shares his experience covering the industry and provides ideas for how to make the Fourth Estate work for you.



38

CLEAN TRUTH ABOUT LEARNING

Here's an unconventional way to handle the expanding rigors of a golf course maintenance job: Use 2024 to learn how high achievers outside the industry organize and execute their jobs.

We're not suggesting shunning colleagues. Still attend that reoccurring conference and show. When you have a chance to visit another golf course, grab a notepad and embrace the opportunity. Continue browsing industry publications and research. Especially keep reading *Golf Course Industry*!

As the theme of this issue suggests, the job continues to expand. More golfers. Less time to navigate around them. Cool- and warm-season facilities are utilized nearly every month. Good luck adding drainage or upgrading bunkers when hundreds of customers and members are filling "offseason" tee sheets.

Have you considered looking to other industries for help? We don't mean labor or equipment. We mean management styles and philosophies.

Chefs are the subject of "Work Clean," a terrific self-help book released in 2016. Writer **Dan Charnas** examined the work lives of successful chefs, using the kitchen concept of *mise-en-place* — a French phrase for "put in place" — as a relatable touchpoint for our own jobs and lives. On the surface, maintaining golf courses and preparing meals are contrasting endeavors. Superintendents endure varying weather; chefs work indoors. Mornings shape superintendents' careers; chefs' reputations hinge on evening performances. Acres separate superintendents and their employees; chefs physically rub elbows with co-workers.

Slice deeper, though, and commonalities emerge. Superintendents and chefs must attract reliable employees from a confounding labor pool. They then must quickly meld diverse teams to appease demanding customers with numerous spending options. The morning hustle facing superintendents closely resembles the evening rush greeting chefs. Every second matters, thus every action must be carefully plotted and extensively scrutinized.

Planning and organization represent the crux of a chef's schooling, according to anecdotes Charnas discovered through observing and interviewing chefs. The three values of *mise-en-place* — preparation, process and presence — guide culinary teaching. Charnas focuses chunks of the book on those values.

If we take a candid assessment of the golf industry, preparation, process and presence are frequently overlooked and underemphasized in formal and informal turfgrass education. But they are more important than ever because superintendents and their teams are more important than ever. Maintaining the golf surge will require producing quality products as efficiently as possible. Satisfying the demand means playing from ahead. Playing from ahead means tomorrow's preparations begin once the morning hustle concludes, similar to how chefs start the next day while juggling the tasks of the current day.

Processes must be implemented to get ahead and stay ahead. Superintendents are in positions to create and enhance processes and disperse knowledge to assistants and others on their respective teams. Processes are going to be more important as more technology and data (page 38) inundate the industry. Some of the art of greenkeeping will be lost with process- and system-based thinking. The tradeoff seems fair, considering the expanded efficiency means more time for the immersive and strategic parts of the job. Perhaps operating like a successful chef will yield more personal time, a precious resource superintendents strive to obtain.

Presence is tricky for any motivated professional. Many of the highest achievers are always thinking about work, but Charnas emphasizes how successful chefs focus on "staying there" instead of "getting there." Not every chef is successful. Charnas cites a 2005 study indicating 60 percent of restaurants fail in the first three years. Great chefs can find themselves in unappetizing positions. Tasty food won't overcome a poor location, lousy customer service, an unmotivated team and ineffective communication.

Fortunately, golf courses boast a significantly higher success rate. Great superintendents, like great chefs, find ways to deliver, elevating the finances, utilization and reach of the businesses they represent.

The more of everything entering the industry means superintendents and their teams will be forced to deliver at higher levels in 2024 and beyond. Stay open-minded. Study the methodologies of achievers in other realms. Their systems and stories can help shrink the enormity of the job. **GCI**



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*To provide an independent,
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IT'S OK TO MAKE TIME FOR YOU

Making the right decision isn't always easy, or even possible. **Mike Tollner** reflects on what that can do to your mind and body.

As superintendents, we often find ourselves making difficult decisions with the best interests of the golf course in mind. This can sometimes upset club members who don't understand the reasoning behind the decisions we are forced to make.

I was recently faced with a situation like this at our club and fell into a position where I felt like I was in a no-win situation. The outcome of this decision was bound to upset some of our members, but I felt it was in the best interest of the golf course. As it turns out, the person who ended up being most af-

ected by my decision was me.

Afterward, I spent many hours second-guessing myself and the decision I made when, deep down, I felt that I had made the right call. I also reacted emotionally during a phone call after a long afternoon of back-and-forth with the decision makers of the club. This situation became one that I took home with me and struggled with, long after the workday had ended.

As managers, we must make decisions with conviction and stand behind that decision once it is made. But it can be difficult to leave these things behind when we leave work, and we can't always make

the right decision every time. These types of situations can have a lasting impact on our mental health and can affect us in many ways. In addition, we face a multitude of issues and problems daily at our jobs. These can range from turf stress issues, an irrigation break or a disgruntled member of the staff.

On the other hand, we also face difficult decisions that affect our memberships, like when a 2-inch rainfall forces us to ground carts and a member has a tee time booked with three guests from out of town. All these situations require us to make quick, on-the-fly decisions that can influence us and our own well-being more than anyone else. And it is critical—and often difficult—to decide whether to pick up the sword and shield and head to the battlefield, or to park the cart and head home for the day, knowing that the course will still be there tomorrow.

Mental health in the golf industry has become a hot topic. At the 2023 GCSAA Conference and Trade Show, I was fortunate to attend a great session about mental health, “Emotional Wellness in the Turf Industry.” Judging by the fact that the session was standing room only, it quickly became clear that this is important to many of us. The ability to strike a balance between what is best for the golf course and what will make the membership happy can be a difficult and trying accomplishment. But it’s also critically important that we find the balance between our professional lives and our personal lives, and good mental health should be at the forefront of every superintendent’s list of goals.

Many of us are perfectionists, and we strive for perfect conditions every day because that is the standard we hope to achieve, even though it is impossible. We also face the difficult task of finding a good work-life balance, which can be nearly impossible at certain times of the year. Find-

ing that balance, in my opinion, is the key to strong mental health. It’s also something I’ve tried to focus on the past few years, and I am still trying to perfect how best to achieve it and what it means for me.

Whether you spend your time outside work at the gym, with your family, or speaking to a therapist is a choice you must make on your own. But whatever it is that brings you to the place where your life feels balanced, that should be as high up on the priority list as having the golf course in tournament condition.

Work-life balance is not always perfect. It takes dedication and the ability to be flexible—in both work and life. Sometimes you will need to dedicate those extra hours during a week that has a busy golf schedule, or during a construction project with a deadline. But, when possible, you should also try and dedicate extra time to being away from work and getting that painting project done at home, or making sure you can get to your child’s soccer

game or spend an extra hour hiking in the woods. The main goal of a healthy work-life balance should be to be successful as a superintendent, and to have a personal life that is both enjoyable and fulfilling.

One of the greatest things about life is that we can continue to learn about ourselves and grow over time. Finding a good work-life balance is an ongoing and dynamic process that may never be perfected, much like the game of golf.

Our job demands are difficult and stressful. Being a key decision maker is taxing, both mentally and physically. Figuring out what good mental health and work-life balance means is personal and may look very different to different people. The key is to set goals that work for you and to strive toward reaching them, no matter what.

Mike Tollner is the superintendent at Bellevue Country Club in Syracuse, New York. This is his second Golf Course Industry contribution.

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Tartan Talks No. 90

Michigan-based architect **Ray Hearn** never envisioned receiving another golf design project in the Detroit area as big as the one he executed at Saint John's Resort.

Patently being nurtured by superintendent **Kevin Peck** and team in anticipation of its spring 2024 public unveiling, "The Cardinal" at Saint John's Resort involved building a new 18-hole regulation course, a seven-hole par-3 course and a two-acre putting course on a site that once supported a 27-hole layout.

Big seems to be an operative word for Hearn and his peers as the golf surge extends into 2024. Hearn joined the *Tartan Talks* podcast to discuss the efforts at Saint John's

Resort and the methodology of going big in today's golf construction market.

"What is 'big'?" Hearn asks. "I usually use that 9-hole threshold and it includes all the bunkers, tee work, green work, cart paths, drainage, potentially new irrigation. Those big opportunities have been just dropping out of the sky at a crazy number the last three years. It's absolutely remarkable."

Big brings conundrums, though, and Hearn also explains in his podcast appearance how he balances dreamy with practical opportunities.

"What you want to avoid as a golf course architect — and I see this in



the industry, and it happens in every industry, and it happens with golf course contractors — you get too greedy and you're taking too much on," he says. "And then your quality control just becomes like the robot in that old sitcom *Lost in Space*. It gets out of control."

For more insight from Hearn, download the episode on the Superintendent Radio Network page of popular distribution platforms.

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COURSE NEWS

The double-loop T36 at Baytown opened last month in Baytown, Texas, near Houston. **Ric Buckton** designed the course, which sits on less than 65 acres of land and features double tee boxes and double green complexes played from a common fairway. The design utilizes about 40 percent less water than a typical 18-hole course. ... Grey Oaks Country Club in Naples, Florida, reopened its Pine Course following an **Andrew Green** renovation. The project focused on bunker placements, and green surrounds and expansion, among other areas. ... Bobby Jones Golf Club and Nature Park in Sarasota, Florida, reopened last month after a major renovation guided by **Richard Mandell**. Previously home to 45 holes, the club now features an 18-hole **Donald Ross** design, an adjustable 9-hole course and a 25-acre practice facility. ... The Seagate Golf Club in

Delray Beach, Florida, is open again after **Drew Rogers** guided a seven-month renovation of the **Joe Lee** design. ... 2010 Open winner **Louis Oosthuizen** and **Peter Matkovich** designed La Réserve Golf Links in Bel Ombre, Mauritius, which opened in December. ... Construction has started at Soleta Golf Club, a **Nick Price** design in Myakka City, Florida. The course is set to open this year. ... **Davis Love III**, **Mark Love** and **Scot Sherman** of Love Golf Design are working with The St. Joe Company on The Third, a new course at Watersound Club in Panama City Beach, Florida, that should open in 2025. ... **Greg Norman** is designing a new 10-hole, par-3 short course at Mandarin resort along Mexico's Pacific Coast. ... **Lee Singletary** will design the course at the new 1876 Country Club in Celina, Texas. The course is scheduled to open in November. ... **Scott Hoffman** and Landscapes Unlimited are working on Mapleton Golf Club just outside Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The course is expected to open in summer 2025. ... **Todd Quino** and **Nathan Crace** are working on a master plan and renovation options for Merit Club, which was originally designed by **Bob Lohmann** and is located just north of Chicago.

NAMES INDEX

Ray Adams David Allen **Chris Anderson** Oliver Anthony **Thomas Bastis** Bob Becker **Yogi Berra** Darin Bevard **Doug Borow** Dennis Bowsher **David Brandenburg** Brian Bressler **Rick Buckton** John Carlone **Ciaran Carr** Lee Carr **Dan Charnas** Steve Cook **Nathan Crace** Steve Cress **Tom DeGrandi** Dave Delsandro **Stever Dorer** Shelby DuBois **Pete Dye** Kimberly Erusha **Bob Farren** Tom Fazio **Joe Forden** Tony Frandria **Pete Garvey** Paul Granger **Andrew Green** Paul Grillo **Vincent Grillo Sr.** Vinnie Grillo **Mike Hainline** Andrew Hannah **Chris Hartwiger** Ray Hearn **Ernest Hemingway** Larry Hirsh **Scott Hoffman** Al Jamieson **James Juoni** J.J. Keegan **Mike Keiser** Jim Koppenhaver **Dr. Bill Kreuser** Joe Lee **Stuart Lindsay** Bob Lohman **Davis Love III** Mark Love **Alister MacKenzie** Richard Mandell **Peter Matkovich** Perry Maxwell **Adam Moore** Joe Moresco **John Murphy** Greg Norman **David Oatis** Pat O'Brien **Louis Oosthuizen** Wayne Otto **Bob Pang** Mark Parsinen **Michael Pascucci** Damian V. Pascuzzo **Kevin Peck** Mike Petit **Dick Phelps** Nick Price **Todd Quino** Scott Ramsay **C.J. Ricker** Chi Chi Rodriguez **Drew Rogers** Donald Ross **Steve Ross** Dr. Frank Rossi **Jeremy Ruplinger** Scot Sherman **Bodo Sieber** Lee Singletary **Pat Sisk** Matt Smith **Ron Smith** Kyle Squires **Bruce Springsteen** Paul Stead **Erin Stevens** Mike Tollner **Chris Tritabaugh** Curtis Tyrrell **Paul Vermeulen** Dan Warne **George Waters** Marty Wells **Matthew Wharton** Brad Wise **Rick Woelfel** Dick Youngscap **John Zimmers**

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Shelby DuBois

THE RESORT AT LONGBOAT KEY CLUB

Shelby DuBois has always had a thing for machines. Her fascination began at a young age. “Pretty much as far back as I can remember,” she says. “I always liked taking apart anything I could. Eventually, that graduated into working with my dad out in the garage a little bit on lawn mowers, minibikes and stuff like that.” DuBois started working on cars before landing a job as a groundskeeper at a golf course in her native Missouri. She went on to attend Rankin Technical College in St. Louis, where she was introduced to racing technology and worked in the racing industry for a time before finding her way back to golf.

Today, DuBois is the assistant equipment manager at The Resort at Longboat Key Club in Longboat Key, Florida, on the Gulf Coast, which features 45 golf holes. Prior to arriving at the resort last July, her travels had taken her to clubs in Missouri, Texas and Utah before her disdain for cold weather brought her to Florida. She served as the equipment manager at the **Chi Chi Rodriguez** Academy in Clearwater before assuming her present position.

She has been a member of the GCSAA since 2021 and has completed Level I of the Equipment Management Certificate Program.

Appearing on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast with host **Rick Woelfel**, DuBois stressed the importance of taking care of routine maintenance issues before they become major problems.

“It’s extremely important,” she says, “because things like hydraulic leaks, oil leaks or anything like that, they can go from just fine one day to, all of a sudden, we’ve got three greens completely ruined for the next three or four months. And if you have machines down or anything like that it really messes up everyone’s schedule and we’re not able to do what needs to be done for the club and the members.”

Over the course of her career, DuBois has taught herself to be alert to potential problems regardless of how insignificant they may seem. When a piece of equipment is scheduled for routine maintenance, she makes sure to give it a good, close look.

“That’s something I’m trying to help teach our mechanics about,” she says. “Not just doing an oil change or whatever. The machine’s here

now, just take five minutes and take a look around. If there are wires touching the exhaust manifold or anything like that, just make sure that everything is as good as it possibly can be.”

DuBois notes that it’s more important than ever for clubs to keep their machinery in good working order.

“Because these machines aren’t cheap these days,” she points out, “and even if you have all the money in the world, if you order a machine right now, you won’t get a new one for two years. Everyone is backed up right now. Money doesn’t solve all problems anymore unfortunately.”

DuBois points out there is also the issue of golfer expectations, particularly at a high-end club such as hers where members and guests expect pristine conditions whatever the circumstances.

“If you work at a low-end public course, you can get away with a lot more of ‘This machine is down’ or something like that and it’s no big deal,” she says. “But we have members that expect pretty much the very best. It’s kind of like working a tournament every day.”

DuBois, who worked the 2023 U.S. Women’s Open at Pebble Beach, has been a member of the GCSAA Equipment Manager Task Group since 2022.

“It’s nice to see that equipment managers are really starting to get the recognition,” she says, “especially as we come into this labor shortage. It’s more important than ever to have us right up there with superintendents as people that really run the show and make golf courses look the way that golf courses look.” **GCI**



Hydraulic leaks, oil leaks, anything like that, they can go from just fine one day to, all of a sudden, we’ve got three greens completely ruined for the next three or four months.”



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YOU CAN IF YOU PLAN

In “Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-free Productivity,” author **David Allen** doesn’t waste any time getting to the point of his business bestseller. He lays it out right there on the first page: “It’s possible for a person to have an overwhelming number of things to do and still function productively and with a clear head and a positive sense of relaxed control.”

That’s the kind of bold titillation that will get superintendents and club managers to turn the page. If we only had time to read the book, right? Contrary to what many have convinced themselves of, Allen asserts, a lack of time is *not* the major issue when it comes to getting things done and reducing stress. “The real problem is a lack of clarity about what a project really is, and what associated next-action steps are required.”

So how do we achieve the kind of clarity that brings a myriad of projects under control efficiently and restores balance to our lives? The man who has been called one of the world’s foremost thinkers on productivity and who has consulted with some of the world’s leading companies says it boils down to planning. “In my experience,” Allen writes, “when people do more planning, informally and naturally, they relieve a great deal of stress and obtain better results.”

As the new year gets underway, now is a good time to consider your approach. If you want better results in 2024, planning better and better plans are a good start.

Skilled planners are defined by their ability to accurately set strategic goals and objectives, breaking work into cost-effective process steps, developing tasks and schedules for the people executing the tasks, anticipating and adjusting for problems and roadblocks, and measuring and managing results. Pretty simple, right?

On the other hand, *unskilled* managers are the ones whose trouser legs are on fire from stomping out unexpected wild-fires and problems. Those who are most likely to reach more of their goals and weather the inevitable ups and downs of 2024 have plans in place for four important needs:

- **Facility.** National Golf Foundation research points to continued growth and popularity for golf in its various forms this year. Other than localized effects of weather, we should plan for a steady year of meeting and exceeding facility requirements, which include:
 - Thoughtful agronomic planning that addresses the course’s cultural needs.
 - Comprehensive review and budgeting for capital maintenance to keep the course in top condition.
- **People.** Golfers’ expectations are as high as their utilization of golf facilities. The broad and popular exposure of the game has informed most golfers of the excellent turf conditions that are possible.
- **Supply chain.** While supply inventories have improved significantly, turf professionals must anticipate volatility and uncertainty in procuring critical supplies and materials.
- **Other stakeholders.** The needs and interests of first-time players, youth and those returning to the game, as well as community leaders, must be addressed. What can you teach them about the course and its surroundings? What do health organizations and municipalities need to know about your environmental practices and use of fertilizers

and pesticides to be confident your course is a conscientious steward of the land it occupies? The answer lies in more effective communications.

Budget planning will continue to focus on the Big Three:

- **Labor.** Recruiting and retaining your team of workers will continue to be challenging in the new year. With labor costs now well above 60 percent of the normal golf course maintenance budget, labor will attract attention from general managers, owners and board members. The only factor that will be more concerning to these groups is staffing inadequacy that renders the superintendent ineffective.
- **Petroleum-related expenses.** While oil costs have moderated, the world is one step away from another oil crisis. How will you react if history repeats itself?
- **Chemicals.** The supply of basic chemicals is at risk for either availability or price increases ... and possibly both.

It must also be said that some highly diligent and effective managers can hold on too tight. Overusing your planning skills can result in rigidity and the inability to adjust when the almost-certain-to-change market changes.

It appears that 2024 will be a good year for most golf and turf managers with some twists and turns to be expected. Those whose goals include more checks on their to-do lists, along with more restful nights, might keep **Yogi Berra**’s sage advice in mind: “If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up somewhere else.”

Said another way, plan for a productive and stress-free 2024 and it might just happen. **GCI**



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

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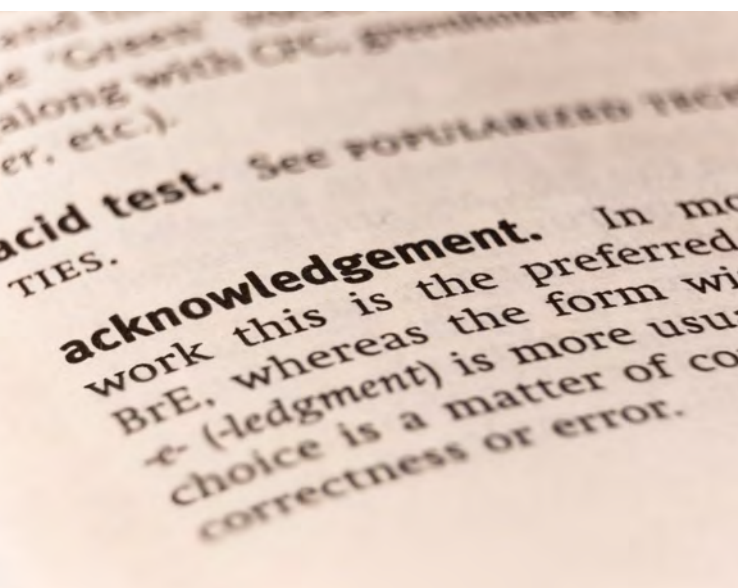


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Over the holidays I decided to start another book — this one a compilation of essays about golf design and maintenance. In a reversal of standard form, I began to write the acknowledgements first. That's when I came to realize (once again) how many people I have learned from over the years.

No other sport or industry is quite as much a “people business” as golf. The names of greenkeepers, architects, club managers, committee people, fellow writers, consultants and just keen avid golfers started pouring into my head. My mind filled with images and sounds of interactions over the years. In no particular order, and fully aware that I'll leave out some names for want of space here, it seems a good time to thank the people who have helped me to learn and appreciate golf for the complex field it is.

It all started at the Woodmere Club on Long Island in 1968, when as a 14-year-old newcomer to the caddie yard, I came under the wing of golf professional **Joe Moresco**. He was a master diplomat with the membership, and he helped me supplement my caddie money (\$6 a bag, no tipping) with an extra \$1.50 an hour hand-picking the range on weekend afternoons.

Over the decades, other PGA pros have embodied for me that same combination of wisdom, tact and golf intelligence: **Pete Garvey** at Idle Hour CC, **Bob Pang** at Big Canyon CC and the late **John Murphy** at the CC of Farmington immediately come to mind. Right here in my hometown of Bloomfield, Connecticut, Master PGA professional **Ciaran Carr** at Wintonbury GC is a recurring source of insight into golf management and swing science.

For someone who has no formal training in turfgrass management,

I have benefitted greatly from a delayed education courtesy of many patient superintendents, including: **Paul Stead** at Kennett Square G&CC, **John Carlone** at Meadow Brook Club, **Bob Becker** at Scioto CC, **Matthew Wharton** at Idle Hour CC, **John Zimmers** at Inverness Club, **Steve Cook** at Medinah CC, **Bob Faren** at Pinehurst Resort, **Andrew Hannah** at Rhode Island CC, **Chris Tritabaugh** of Hazeltine National, **Adam Moore** at Worcester CC, **Pat Sisk** from his days at both Milwaukee CC and Longmeadow CC, and, for 30 years, **Scott Ramsay** during his stints at The Orchards, Yale and CC of Farmington.

Turfgrass consultants have added immeasurably to my understanding. USGA director of championship agronomy **Darin Bevard** has been tireless during numerous major events in letting me follow him around. I'm grateful to many USGA Green Section staffers past and present for their patient explanations and kind editing: **Kimberly Erusha**, **Chris Hartwiger**, **David Oatis**, **Pat O'Brien** and **George Waters**. Equally informative have been two of their PGA Tour counterparts: **Paul Vermeulen** and **Thomas Bastis**.

When it comes to academic credit, no one has been more willing to help me than **Dr. Frank Rossi** at Cornell University. I have tried to reciprocate in terms of editing tips.

On the business side of golf, I have been lucky enough to have a small army of consultants readily available, often at awkward hours to answer texts and emails: irrigation guru **Paul Granger**, appraisal and real estate wiz **Lar-**

ry Hirsh, financial operations expert **J.J. Keegan**, market survey analysts **Jim Koppenhaver** and **Stuart Lindsay**, and the National Golf Foundation's **Dr. Joe Beditz** and **Greg Nathan**.

I won't even try here to name the architects I've learned from. That will take a full page in my impending book. But I would be remiss to identify a category of highly involved members who have managed to drive a successful renovation project, often incurring bruises along the way: **Al Jamieson** at Cal Club, **Mike Pettit** of Santa Ana CC and **Steve Cress** from Brookside CC in Canton, Ohio, spring to mind.

There is also the owner/developer, willing to invest time and money into seeing a project through. I've been blessed to benefit from their larger insights during extensive conversations, often during rounds of golf at the places they created: **Mike Keiser** of Bandon Dunes, **Michael Pascucci** of Sebonack on Long Island and now Apogee in South Florida with **Steve Ross**, and **Dick Youngscap** of both Firethorn GC and Sand Hills in Nebraska.

Among those I learned from, perhaps nobody better embodied the business and golf skills needed for success than the late **Mark Parsinen**, whose friendship and insight I reveled in during rounds at his three major developments: Granite Bay in Northern California, and both Kingsbarns and Castle Stuart in Scotland.

During a recent expert witness deposition, I was asked what my qualifications were. I told the attorney that despite having no formal training I learned from the best. **GCI**



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.

How **BIG** has the golf course superintendent job become? Our annual survey explores how the people holding the position view their expanding responsibilities.

2024 NUMBERS TO KNOW

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HAPPY NEW YEAR FROM NUFARM!

As your partner for growth, we hope that this State of the Industry report provides insights to help guide you through a successful 2024.

Throughout the year ahead, we will experience ups and downs, from labor challenges and increased competition to rising costs and weather concerns. However, by working together at events like National Golf Day on Capitol Hill, we can advocate together for positive changes to respond to these headwinds.

To continue bringing new and innovative products to you in 2024 and beyond, Nufarm has opened a new Morrisville, North Carolina, headquarters with state-of-the-art formulations, chemistry and testing facilities. This location will also serve as home to our North American portfolio, commercial solutions and marketing teams. These investments allow us to help you meet tomorrow's challenges head on.

It's been gratifying to meet with superintendents and their crews across the country and hear how they solve daily challenges on the course with Nufarm products like Anuew and Anuew EZ, Tourney EZ, Traction, Celero, Cheetah Pro, Millennium Ultra 2 and many others. Nufarm will continue to provide these solutions and with them the level of service and technical expertise you've come to expect and deserve.

Nufarm's daily commitment to you is what connects every aspect of our company. We are fond of saying we've served our customers for more than 100 years. We plan to be around at least another 100 years by continuing to bring you solutions to maintain beautiful, playable golf courses year-round.

Here's to a strong 2024!

Jeff Eldridge, CGCS
Golf Segment Lead for Nufarm Turf & Ornamental



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HOW BIG HAS THE JOB BECOME?

Play, more play and even more play. Less time to work around play. Numerous stakeholders to appease. Emails, texts and calls. New products and evolving technology to learn. Get the revised budget done yet?

Leading the maintenance of a golf course is a big responsibility.

As the golf surge enters its fourth full year — has it really lasted that long? — we decided to use our annual *Numbers to Know* survey and accompanying stories to examine how golf course superintendents view the totality of what their jobs entail. Numbers plus stories are a powerful combination.

This section also includes our annual glance at industry finances. Little suggests 2024 will provide a respite for golf maintenance teams.

How did we accumulate the numbers?

We collaborated with Signet Research, a New Jersey-based independent research company, to distribute a 33-question survey to an email list of print and/or digital subscribers who are superintendents, directors of agronomy, assistant superintendents, owners, general managers and directors of golf. Results are based on 247 responses with a 6.2 percent margin of error.

In addition to the survey, senior contributing writers **Lee Carr** and **Rick Woelfel** conducted phone interviews with superintendents at facilities with different ownership models for human stories accompanying the data.

An annual donation to the Wee One Foundation, a charitable organization established in 2004 in memory of **Wayne Otto**, CGCS, that helps superintendents and other turf professionals in need, is made in thanks for survey participation.

Consider the following pages a big section about a big job.

— **Guy Cipriano and Matt LaWell**



WHO ARE YOU?



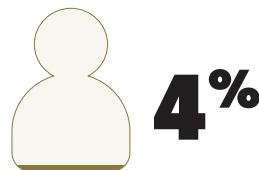
Superintendent, single golf course



Superintendent, multiple golf courses



Director of agronomy or equivalent



Assistant superintendent acting on behalf of boss

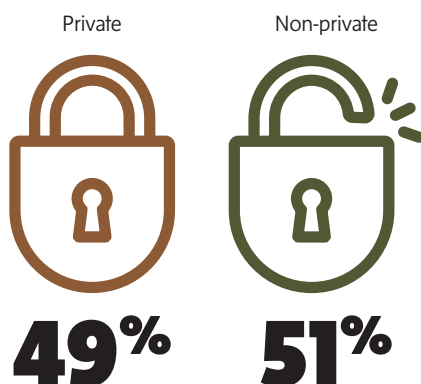


***Other**

Other responses included: Owner, general manager, director of golf, golf professional, retired superintendent



TYPE OF COURSE WHERE YOU WORK



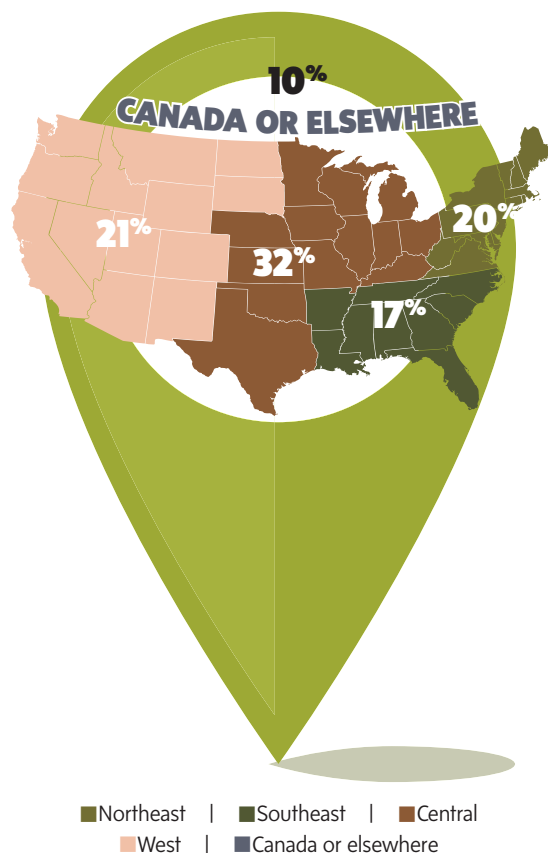
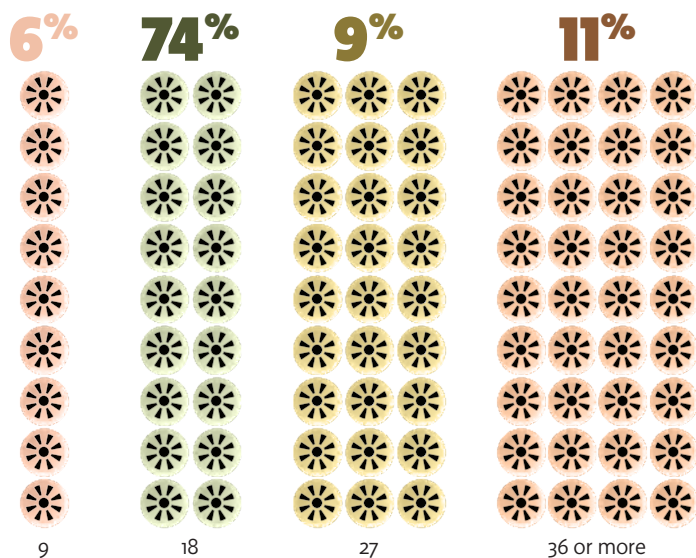
WHERE IS YOUR COURSE LOCATED?

WHO OWNS YOUR COURSE?

36%	24%	18%	10%	4%	4%	4%
Member equity	Single owner	Government	Management or investment company	Family	Resort	Other

*Other responses included: HOA, university, nonprofit

NUMBER OF HOLES AT YOUR FACILITY



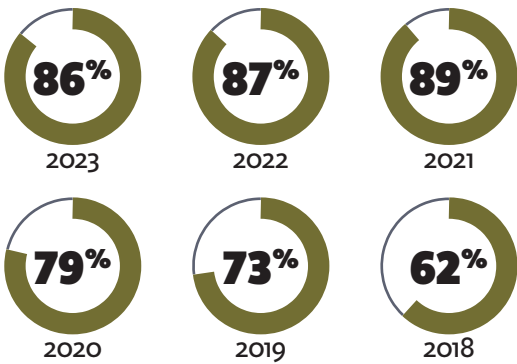
BUDGET



WAS YOUR COURSE PROFITABLE IN 2023?

	All	Non-private	Private	Northeast	Southeast	Central	West
Profitable	68%	76%	60%	77%	77%	62%	67%
Broke even	18%	11%	26%	19%	9%	23%	17%
Experienced a loss	10%	10%	9%	4%	9%	8%	14%
Don't know	4%	3%	5%	0%	5%	7%	2%

PERCENTAGE OF COURSES THAT WERE PROFITABLE OR BROKE EVEN OVER THE LAST SIX YEARS



AVERAGE NON-CAPITAL MAINTENANCE BUDGET

2024	\$1.137 million
2023	\$1.047 million
2022	\$907,821
2021	\$1.044 million
2020	\$987,488
2019	\$845,705
2018	\$911,705
2017	\$798,200
2016	\$750,000
2015	\$697,000
2014	N/A
2013	\$622,500
2012	\$651,392

PROJECTED 2024 NON-CAPITAL MAINTENANCE BUDGET BY COURSE TYPE



PROJECTED 2024 NON-CAPITAL MAINTENANCE BUDGET BY REGION

Northeast	Southeast	Central	West
\$1,104,028	\$1,369,375	\$896,049	\$1,533,472





PROJECTED COURSE IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT BUDGET

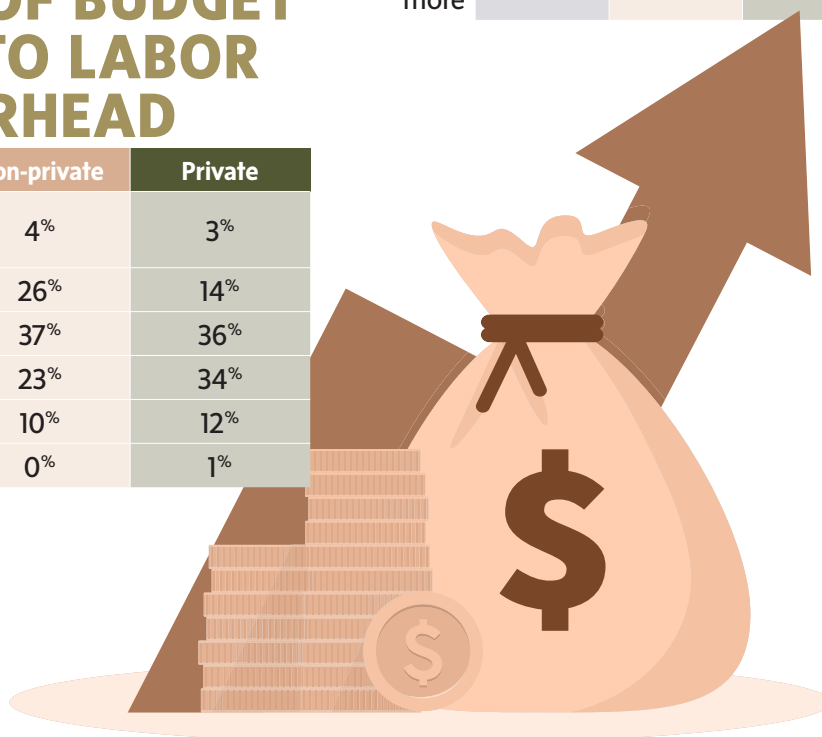
	2024	2023	2022
All	\$410,843	\$404,180	\$226,371
Non-private	\$316,850	\$199,688	\$136,379
Private	\$503,905	\$604,609	\$312,407
Northeast	\$275,784	\$533,731	\$312,407
Southeast	\$413,467	\$646,644	\$189,286
Central	\$360,927	\$236,583	\$167,339
West	\$625,184	\$443,044	\$308,375

MAINTENANCE BUDGET CHANGE COMPARED WITH 2023

	All	Non-private	Private
Increase 20% or more	6%	8%	5%
Increase 10% to 19%	20%	22%	17%
Increase 1% to 9%	59%	53%	65%
No change	14%	14%	13%
Decrease 1% to 9%	1%	3%	0%
Decrease 10% or more	0%	0%	0%

PERCENTAGE OF BUDGET DEDICATED TO LABOR AND OVERHEAD

	All	Non-private	Private
Less than 40%	3%	4%	3%
40% to 49%	20%	26%	14%
50% to 59%	37%	37%	36%
60% to 69%	28%	23%	34%
70% to 79%	11%	10%	12%
80% or more	1%	0%	1%





MORNINGS ON THE COURSE, AFTERNOONS FOR EVERYTHING ELSE

Matt Smith takes an old-school approach to his job. The numbers offer him little choice.

Smith is the superintendent at Wilmington (North Carolina) Municipal Golf Course. His full-time staff numbers seven, including himself, an assistant, and a mechanic. The club hosts 66,000 rounds each year.

"It's one of those things where if we want to produce a good product for our residents and the people that live here, the more hands on deck in the morning getting the golf course ready for our clientele, the better," he says.

Consequently, Smith spends considerable time on the golf course alongside his team.

"I kind of pitch in every morning," he says. "I do most of the spraying, so whether it be spraying greens or fairways or tees, if there's a need to spray something, I'll do spraying, but I'll also cut cups, mow greens, weed eat. I'll do anything to help out the crew. It's kind of a team effort."

During the peak golf season from April to October, Smith, who earned a two-year degree from Brunswick (North Carolina) Community College, typically works between 50 and 65 hours each week. He estimates 70 percent of those hours are spent on the golf course.

"I would say from 5:30 to 6 in the morning until 11, I'm on the golf course," he says. "At 11, when we're caught by play, there's not a whole lot else we're going to do because there's a group on every tee, fairway and green the rest of the day."

Working at a municipally owned facility, Smith has an assortment of administrative responsibilities. But in the mornings, the golf course comes first.

"I have to deal with that with our finance department," he says. "They'll be emailing me or calling me at 8 o'clock in the morning and stuff like that. I think now I've been here long enough that people realize (that I'm on the golf course in the morn-

ing). And the same thing with salespeople. Everybody knows, don't come by my place until 10:30 or 11 if you want to meet with me, because I'll be on the golf course."

Once the clock strikes 11, Smith's crew will focus on detail work in out-of-play areas while Smith himself puts on his administrator's hat.

"That's when I kind of go in the office and do payroll or invoicing or capital projects, long-term/short-term planning, all that kind of good stuff," he says. "I have a lot more freedom after about 11 and I just kind of prioritize on a day-to-day basis what needs to be done. If it's a week where payroll is due, I might get that done. If I've got performance evaluations to do, I might just need to grind it out and stay until 6 that night and get that done for the week. It kind of varies based on the time of year and what's coming up."

Smith sees himself resetting some of his priorities in the days ahead.

"We're getting ready to do a big capital project, a whole new irrigation system in the next year," he says. "I imagine once we get a little closer to that, administratively, I'm going to be tied up more with that as far as getting bids out, writing specs and all that good stuff."

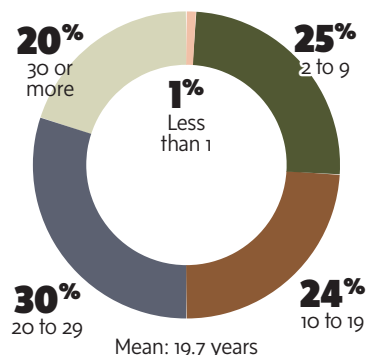
Even when he's not technically on duty, the job is rarely far from Smith's thoughts.

"I do a lot of research and learning at home when I'm not here," he says. "If I take off from work and I get home and I'm by myself, I find myself reading *Golf Course Industry* or something like that, learning something new, or looking at Twitter and a project somebody's done on a golf course. It's almost continuous, but that's how it is when it's a passion."

— Rick Woelfel



YEARS WORKED AS A GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENT





TEMPERING EXPECTATIONS

Charter members used a Cold War-era bomb shelter for socializing before Crane Creek Country Club opened in Boise, Idaho, in 1963. Since then, the club has been growing and expectations have been evolving. With an influx of new residents due to the pandemic, there is a clamor for tee times and a waitlist to join this private property.

The recruiting page on the Crane Creek website notes that the club is where employees “Make it Happen” and the work of superintendent **Tom DeGrandi** and the maintenance team he leads illustrates that. Minutes from downtown, this well-cared for 18-hole layout is a certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. Wildlife thrives around bentgrass fairways and greens. It’s a beautiful, natural setting.

While taking care of the turf and the course has been the primary responsibility, DeGrandi has noticed some changes to the profession during his tenure, including during his time at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut. Set to retire in early February, DeGrandi’s perspective is thoughtfully considered.

“Technology and equipment have made some aspects of being a superintendent much better,” DeGrandi says. “We are cutting greens at just over 1/16th of an inch. Mowing equipment can be set to the hundredths and we have excellent grinding and sharpening units.”

Finding labor is a challenge but “from a golfer’s perspective, conditions have improved over my 35 years,” DeGrandi says. “The way member and golfer expectations have

changed, that’s the biggest challenge that superintendents face.”

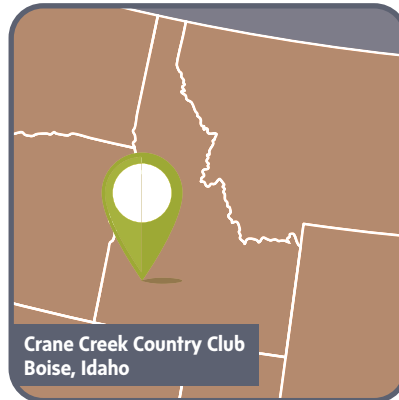
Golfers are more knowledgeable today but also highly influenced by what they see during professional events. “People want tournament conditions all the time and it’s not possible,” DeGrandi says. “It takes money, people,

time and often requires limiting rounds.

“There are practices we have to do to optimize the greens, such as verticutting or topdressing, and their initial impact slows things down. I would get comments,” he adds. “We’re not always striving for green speed. Some things we do because we are making the plant healthier. We are preparing the turf for what is coming and golfers aren’t enamored with that. They want consistent conditions every day.”

Communication can be easier because people frequently access their phones, checking for emails or texts, and the electronic tee sheet can be quickly updated. The problem is less about reaching people than it is capturing their attention because they are inundated.

“Superintendents have to communicate well, share information and tell the truth,” DeGrandi says. “Most superintendents are peo-



ple who get it done, especially if they have been in the business for a long time. I started working when I was 14 on a tobacco farm in Connecticut and I never stopped working. Now I am getting ready to retire and it’s just kind of weird. The biggest thing I am looking forward to is not working

weekends.”

Part-time work is in DeGrandi’s future.

“It’s work I love,” he says. “I love being a golf course superintendent. I really enjoy it. There are some challenges. Correcting employee performance can be a challenge at times, but I will miss the work and the camaraderie. I like the mornings and a cup of coffee on the golf course. I enjoy mowing and the instant gratification of finishing a fairway or raking a bunker and it looks great. I enjoy that aspect of it, I really do, and I will miss that.”

DeGrandi will also miss the club and some people, and he stresses the importance of listening while in meetings or while conversing with your crew.

“I try to be nice,” he says. “It gives you a vibe. Just be nice to everybody.”

— Lee Carr

DEMANDS OF THE JOB TODAY VS. WHEN YOU FIRST BECAME A SUPERINTENDENT

47%
Significantly greater

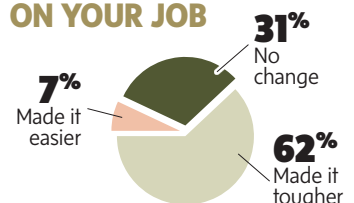
41%
Somewhat greater

10%
The same

1%
Somewhat less

1%
Significantly less

EFFECT OF GOLF SURGE FOLLOWING COVID-19 ON YOUR JOB





LEADING BY DOING

C.J. Ricker takes a hands-on approach to his job.

Ricker is director of turfgrass management at Nemacolin in Farmington, Pennsylvania, roughly an hour southeast of Pittsburgh. He started his post at the beginning of the 2023 season.

Ricker oversees a crew that at full strength numbers 30 and maintains both the Mystic Rock and Shepherd's Rock courses, a pair of **Pete Dye** designs. When he spoke with *Golf Course Industry* in November, the crew numbered just 25, including 16 H-2B visa workers from El Salvador.

Even when his team is at full strength, Ricker is typically on the course getting his hands dirty, whether that involves mowing fairways, mixing spray tanks or whatever else needs to be done.

"The way I like to manage guys, even our management staff are out there," he says. "We make the job board up and wherever it needs to be filled in I'll step in. Most of the time if we're spraying, I'll make sure I'm there mixing up the tanks,

helping out there. Some days I'll do setups. Just kind of filling in wherever I can, especially since we're shorthanded.

"If we have a big outing on one of the courses, I'll obviously help out there, rolling and doing stuff more often than in the afternoon. I'll then try to get out to the other course and make sure I see everything as much as I can."

Ricker developed his hands-on philosophy at Oakmont Country Club, where he worked for **Dave Delsandro**, and brought it with him when he arrived at Nemacolin in February 2020 to take charge of the Mystic Rock course under **Chris Anderson**, the previous director of turfgrass management who was named director of golf operations at the start of the 2023 season.

"I was working alongside Dave every day," Ricker recalls, "kind of picking his brain about, 'Why are we doing the things we're doing?' and I started to really understand the management part. When I got here it was the same thing.

"I wanted to come in and make

an impression on the guys, because they'd never met me. I met Chris volunteering at an event, so he'd only known me two weeks. I always saw Chris out there doing things, so it was always, 'Everyone out in the field.'"

Ricker notes how important it is that his crew understands his willingness to take on the same tasks he's asking them to do.

"I think especially with this crew with the H-2Bs, even with the full-time guys, I think it's really, really key," he says. "Because if they see me and our management staff are willing to go out there and lead by example and are out there getting our hands dirty, even if it's digging an irrigation hole or something like that, I think that's very key and it motivates our guys. Making sure we have a presence out there on the golf course is really key and it really helps our operation."

Ricker, who has a two-year

degree from Penn State, typically devotes 10 to 15 hours of a 60-to-65-hour work week to administrative functions. Nemacolin once employed a full-time office assistant on its turf staff that handled tasks like budget, payroll, and ordering. But when she moved on, the agronomic team decided to assume those responsibilities.

"We've been in here hammering down our sprays and stuff for next year and creating our agronomic plan," Ricker says. "I was able to dive deeper into the budget. I've been kind of learning on the fly."

— Rick Woelfel



THREE BIGGEST CHANGES SINCE YOU BECAME A SUPERINTENDENT



Other responses included: Equipment repair costs, finding employees, private equity management



SCRAPPING FOR DOLLARS

"Working for a non-profit, you have to fight for every dollar," **Tony Frandria** says.

Frandia is the superintendent at Odyssey Golf Foundation Golf Course, which is owned and operated by Odyssey Golf Foundation in Tinley Park, Illinois. At this public property, veterans and active-duty service members receive discounted rates, access to beneficial programs and free instruction. Better still, they are embraced by a supportive staff.

"Across the board, our employees believe in and consistently contribute to this worthy cause," says director of golf **Mike Hainline**, who works closely with Frandia to raise funds, adding another dimension to their responsibilities.

"Not-for-profit golf operations need individuals and groups who are willing to be supportive," Frandia says.

Hosting approximately 23,000 rounds in 2023, the staff strives to offer "golf for the greater good." Hainline's father, a Korean War veteran, passed away just as he was starting his work with Odyssey. "I regret that he wasn't able to see the course and what I do for our cause," Hainline says. "Tony and I have partnered to bring Odyssey to levels that I wasn't sure were possible. Not only for the course but with fundraising. Our positions are different than what most golf professionals and superintendents experience. Our operation is unique, including applying for grants and partnering with other foundations, such as Folds of Honor, to help keep us going."

For most people, Frandia feels "the fundamental role of a superintendent hasn't changed much. We still create the best playing surfaces we can. Environmental stewardship has become more visible and better understood so we use organic-based fertilizers and strive to reduce pesticides and water use."

Odyssey Golf Foundation exists to help people experience the physical and mental benefits of golf. "We have Purple Heart recipients and decorated soldiers who utilize our facility and programs therapeutically," Hainline says.

In addition to providing terrific conditions throughout the par-72 course and helping fundraise, Frandia's responsibilities include recruiting, training and retaining quality staff, developing plans for course and infrastructure improvements, and formulating a realistic budget.

Having experience as the general manager at a different non-profit property, Frandia has encouraging contacts. He knows some positions are more administrative than others and is grateful to spend time on the course. "I work alongside the turf team and I'm not buried in meetings," Frandia says. "I'd rather be hands-on. I love being out there with them."

Hainline and Frandia have found fulfillment in their careers. "At some places, you need a strong backbone because criticism is a major aspect of the job," Frandia says. "For those who take that road, on-the-job training at similar facilities is essential for survival once you are in charge. The pressure can be intense and sometimes overwhelming."

A countermeasure to that pressure is the confidence to recognize that a superintendent's responsibilities cannot be narrowly defined. For instance, in addition to maintaining the course, you may be a mentor. Frandia has two college students on his crew who are studying turf and a high school student interested in becoming a superintendent. "I'm fortunate to be a mentor," he says. "It's very rewarding."

You create an atmosphere where the team can thrive. People visit the property where you work so they can benefit physically and mentally, and the conditions on course help drive revenue. Believe in and value those truths.

People in the Odyssey Golf Foundation community are grateful. "The internet and social media have changed the perception of our position," Frandia says. "People can see what we do. I can't imagine myself doing anything else."

— *Lee Carr*



Odyssey Golf Foundation Golf Course
Tinley Park, Illinois

CAUSES OF WORK-RELATED STRESS

Finding and retaining labor	77%
Weather	51%
Member/customer expectations	49%
Internal expectations	38%
Finances	36%
Facility politics	34%
Customers/members	27%
Paperwork/busywork	25%
Government regulation	18%
Interactions with bosses	15%
Suppliers/vendors	8%
*Other	3%
Don't experience work-related stress	2%

Other responses included: Corporate management strategies, equipment delays, hours worked



COORDINATING VIA DELEGATING

Dennis Bowsher has seen a lot of changes during his 35 years in turf — including changes in his own job description.

Bowsher is the superintendent at Ohio State University Golf Club, with responsibility for both of its golf courses, appropriately named the Scarlet and the Gray. Both courses are the product of an **Alister MacKenzie/Perry Maxwell** collaboration and were completed in 1939.

An Ohio State graduate, Bowsher approaches the job a bit differently today than when he first assumed his post 17 years ago.

"I know I delegate more than I used to and some of my subordinates probably think, 'I wish he'd delegate more and not micromanage,'" he says. "I don't think that I am, but I know my hands are in everything. But I think that've evolved more into seeing the bigger picture instead of doing as much myself — looking at the operation overall and looking down the road more than just the next week and trying to put more of the daily stuff on my assistants."

Bowsher's crew includes 15 year-round full-timers including his assistants, but he has an expansive group of part-timers, consisting of retirees and Ohio State students. During big events, such as the Korn Ferry Tour's Nationwide Children's Hospital Championship, which he hosts on an annual basis, his crew might number 60.

"When we host that, then I try to get everybody here at once," Bowsher says, "and it's, 'Oh my gosh, there's a lot of people,' but it takes that to prepare the golf

course to PGA Tour standards, and that's when I need all those bodies at once on the same page, on the same golf course, getting it done."

During the peak of the golf season, Bowsher might spend 10 hours a week dealing with the hands-on aspects of turf maintenance.

"(During the fall), I'll grab the blower and I'll get in front of everybody so the guys can mow and things of that nature," he says. "And sometimes, we're just so shorthanded that everybody grabs whatever there is so we can get it done."

As the superintendent at a university-owned facility, Bowsher has more administrative tasks to deal with than he likely would in the private-club sector. "Here at the university, there's a few more hoops to jump through than when I was at a private club," he says. "At private clubs, there's a direct line. You've got your general manager, accounting, and boom, you're right there. There's more administrative/HR work that has to be done that requires a little bit more of my time than it ever did at a private club. Part of it is because I have such a big operation with these two courses."

Bowsher says applying himself to daily tasks and just being out on the course makes an impression on the crew. "It does have an effect, because I have my assistants doing the same thing they see us out there doing, and it's all very important for the younger guys, the students."

Bowsher's willingness to get his hands dirty makes a particular impression on the retirees on his team too.

"They'll talk all the time about, 'Hey, I can't believe how you coordinate all this stuff with all these people moving this way, that way, and yet you're still out there doing something,'" he says. "Well, it has to be done. You just do it and that's why I got into (the turf industry)."

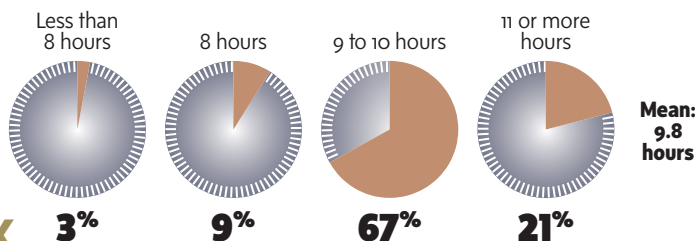
"I love doing that stuff."

— Rick Woelfel

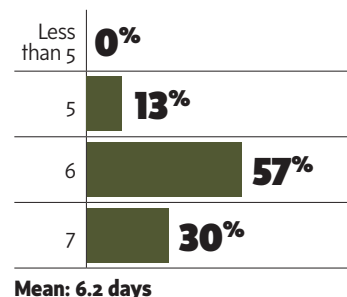


Ohio State University Golf Club
Upper Arlington, Ohio

TIME SPENT AT THE COURSE PER DAY DURING THE PEAK SEASON



DAYS WORKED PER WEEK DURING PEAK SEASON





STAYING ENGAGED IN ALL ASPECTS

Erin Stevens always must be aware of the big picture. That mindset comes with being the director of agronomy at the Coral Creek Club in Placida, Florida, on the Gulf Coast, one of the state's more renowned clubs. Even with his abundance of responsibilities, Stevens remains in close touch with what's happening on the ground.

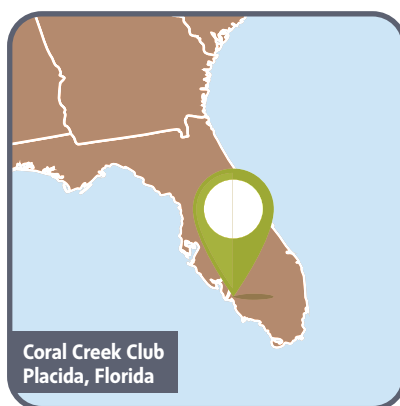
"I'm totally eyes-on on the golf course," he says. I'm very hands-on with all our spray operations and fertility. I'm putting out all the programs we put in place and how we're spraying them. So, basically, I delegate a lot of things out on the golf course but still have my eyes on them."

Stevens has been at Coral Creek four years and heads a staff of 24. Before arriving at Coral Creek, he spent nine years on Florida's East Coast and also worked as an owner's rep in the Caribbean.

In his own words, Stevens is "not out there running equipment anymore," but he keeps close tabs on those who are. "It's very hard for you to communicate to get out ahead of questions and everything

else if you're not keeping an eye on some of the things going on out on the golf course," he says. "And there's always times that you look and think, 'I don't like how the operators are mowing this,' and I can talk to my management staff and say, 'Hey, we need to tighten down on this. Let's try to improve this.' And they always know that I'm eyes on."

The golf season at Coral Creek runs from Oct. 1 through the Fourth of July. The golf course, a **Tom Fazio** design, is closed during summer months,



which Stevens utilizes to get a lot of work done.

"(During the summer), a lot of what I call the everyday seasonal business is non-existent for the most part," he says. "So, in the summertime, I'm out on the course 80-some percent (of my working hours), maybe more on some days. But once the season starts, then I've got to start reeling it back and I'm in the office more taking care of communications, emails, accounting, the day-to-day business of a seasonal operation."

Coral Creek is a club in

transition. It was a single-owner facility until a year ago when the club was purchased by its members. The sale was completed just prior to the arrival of Hurricane Ian in September 2022.

"There's more administrative stuff now as far as committee involvements, the reports and newsletters," Stevens says, "I would say there's a lot more detail with the administrative side of it. We hired a new CFO so they're kind of redoing the system of how we operate. I think in the beginning, it seemed like it could be more work and more time, but I think as these systems fall into place it will level out."

Stevens stresses the importance of communicating regularly with his roughly 275 members.

"I think it's super important," he says. "A lot of

times, when I get out and I communicate with the membership, I'll always do an agenda that recaps the past months and upcoming months. Things that we've done and that we're trying to accomplish.

"This year, I'm starting to do a new newsletter. I find a lot of times when (the members) are more informed, that takes away from a lot of questions."

Stevens makes it a point to be visible around the course on days the club is hosting a big event.

"Before tournaments or what I call the 'Men's Games' on certain days, I'm always up around the putting green and the driving range greeting our members. Day in and day out, I have a lot of contact and communication with our membership. It's really important because you're the political figure for our type of industry. You've got to be out there. You've got to be present."

— Rick Woelfel

DOES YOUR COMPENSATION ALIGN WITH THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE JOB?

	All	Non-private	Private	Northeast	Southeast	Central	West
Yes	37%	30%	44%	40%	31%	37%	44%
No	63%	70%	56%	60%	69%	63%	56%



CORPORATE SYNERGY

Nestled into North Richmond Hills, Texas, Iron Horse Golf Course is an 18-hole municipal property designed by **Dick Phelps** and managed by KemperSports. The course handled about 43,000 rounds in 2023.

"It serves as a gathering place," general manager **Doug Borow** says. "People visit to play golf, socialize, and participate in events. There is a sense of community and space to connect."

KemperSports manages more than 140 properties globally and "works to provide the operational efficiencies of a large company with the attentive customer service of a small one," Borow says. To help with this, Borow brought on **Brad Wise**, who has worked for KemperSports for more than 18 years, as the superintendent.

"There is a benefit in numbers when you work for a group of professionals that are like-minded," Wise says. "There is a large support network, a pool of knowledge and an executive team that is accessible. When each property is successful, then we will all be successful for our families, each other and ourselves. This naturally promotes teamwork and respect."

Wise says being part of a larger corporation means "being able to dedicate time to safety programs, promoting environmental stewardship, enjoying preferred vendors, great benefit packages, sales ideas, industry knowledge and press opportunities for your property." There is an understanding at a local and national level. The corporation, properties and teams evolve together.

Early on, **Joe Forden**, superintendent at Crooked Tree in Marana, Arizona, and Kemper-

Sports Management agronomist **Marty Wells** both made a positive impact on Wise and his career choices. He describes the responsibilities of a superintendent as maintaining the course, leading and developing the team, practicing environmental stewardship, providing a safe and healthy work environment, and administrative work that includes budgeting.

"If one of these elements is ignored, everything begins to suffer," Wise says. "Non-golfers need to be informed about how golf courses benefit their communities," particularly regarding water use. "Environmental stewardship and record keeping for water use has moved from being prevalent to being absolutely necessary."

"The role of a superintendent has shifted toward a more technologically advanced, environmentally conscious and community-oriented profession," Borow says. "The integration of data, adherence to regulations and a focus on sustainability are key components of successful course management."

Upcoming projects for Iron Horse include improving fairway conditioning by increasing aerifications and topdressing to alleviate the compacted areas and addressing erosion around a creek that winds through the



course. It will take a team effort.

"I am thankful for every crew I have worked with," Wise says. "The knowledge that individuals on your staff have will astound you. This knowledge, these strengths, qualities, skills and talents should be utilized for the success of your team."

Finding that team is challenging.

"There is a lot of competition for entry-level pay. This puts even more emphasis on the need to get to know your team," Wise says. "What are their goals? Career aspirations? Learning interests? Which of their strengths can help spearhead the operation? Leadership training is key to being successful and staying humble. I don't think any of us can have too much training in leadership, motivation and how to effectively communicate with others."

At Iron Horse, community is emphasized — for the players, the management and the maintenance team. "There is one superintendent and several crew members," Wise says. "Everyone is equal, so how much can one superintendent learn from their team versus what they can teach those team members? I would encourage any professional to consider this."

— Lee Carr

HOW MUCH DOES YOUR BOSS UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR JOB ENTAILS?



1 – No understanding	2	3	4	5 – Total understanding
7%	24%	35%	22%	12%



HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK CUSTOMERS/MEMBERS UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR JOB ENTAILS?

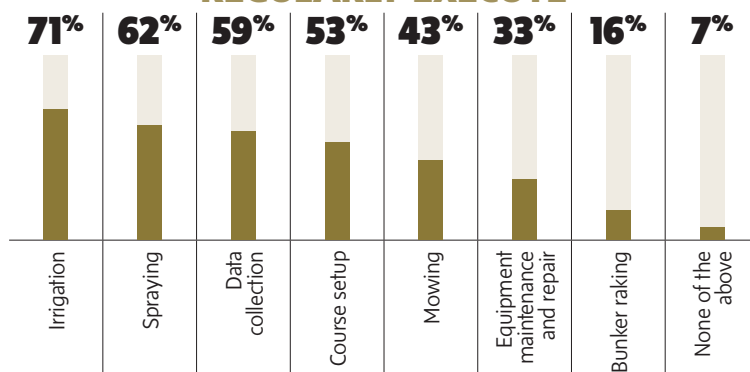


1 – No understanding	2	3	4	5 – Total understanding
19%	50%	26%	5%	0%

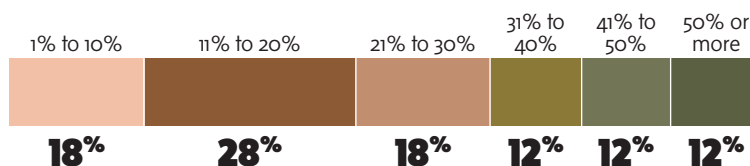
PERCENTAGE OF TIME DEVOTED TO TURF-RELATED TASKS

0%	1%
1% to 10%	2%
11% to 20%	9%
21% to 30%	11%
31% to 40%	10%
41% to 50%	12%
51% to 60%	11%
61% to 70%	9%
71% to 80%	24%
81% to 90%	10%
100%	1%

TURF-RELATED PARTS OF THE JOB YOU REGULARLY EXECUTE



PERCENTAGE OF TIME DEVOTED TO ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS



NON-TURF PARTS OF THE JOB YOU DEVOTE MORE TIME TO THAN YOU FEEL IS NECESSARY

47%	45%	43%	17%	14%	13%	13%	2%	24%
Human resources/paperwork	Responding to emails/texts	Meetings	Interviewing job candidates	Meeting with vendors/suppliers	Budgeting	Project planning	*Other	None of the above

*Other responses included: Building maintenance, corporate training, mechanical work



PERSONALITY MATCH

Paul and **Vinnie Grillo** are brothers who grew up in the golf industry. Their 91-year-old father, **Vincent Grillo Sr.**, a former golf professional, still greets players at their public, family-owned course almost daily. Together they run Poinciana Golf Club in Lake Worth, Florida.

Ray Adams, the superintendent, also grew up in the industry. He and his older brother worked at a municipal course where their dad was the mechanic. Adams has held positions at several family-owned properties and appreciates the personal communication.

"It's a direct relationship. It's tight-knit. There are no greens committee chairmen and general managers," Adams says. "At family-owned courses, I have always dealt directly with the family. They're often on course and see what is happening. They understand. Families are very hands-on, very personally invested."

Normally, the fewer people involved in a decision, the faster the decision gets made. Conversations with decision-makers facilitate productivity. The superintendent can address an issue and quickly move forward with other responsibilities.

Poinciana is a par-64 executive course that hosts approximately 30,000 rounds annually. Across 4,500 yards, there are eleven par-3s, four par-4s and three par-5s. Rates are reasonable. Multiple relatives help with everything from mowing to planting flowers and staffing the pro shop.

Adams is enjoying leading the maintenance team and has held assistant, superintendent and director of agronomy roles since 1993. As a director, he spent much of his time in the office. "There were lots of board meetings and phone calls, and I discovered this isn't quite for me," Adams says. "The job is definitely changing, especially at the high-end courses. The job requires more paperwork, administration, HR, PR, stuff like that. It's not as hands-on out on the golf course, out on the equipment, like it used to be 30 years ago."

Adams would happily keep records with pencil and paper, but regarding technology he feels that the invention of the internet has been one of the best changes.



"Going online to find articles and techniques shared by other superintendents, and to research equipment has all been useful," Adams says. "I can find out more about chemicals, diseases and weeds. When I started, we only communicated with other local superintendents or sales representatives. We can find a lot more information now."

"The superintendent is, hands down, the most important person in a successful golf operation and we are very lucky to have such a good one," Paul Grillo says. "Ray has elevated our conditions and we offer a product we are proud of. He is excellent at understanding our goals and working within the constraints of a small operation. Ray fits in with our family perfectly."

Expectations vary from property to property and superintendents have always needed to adapt to the weather, land and technological changes. Are superintendents adapting more than ever to the expectations of the people managing the facility? A black-and-white description doesn't cover the job. But is the door open to find the management team and property where you will thrive?

"Paul and Vinnie are real good people to work for and Poinciana is a good fit," Adams says. "It's what I was looking for and it's like when I could be on the course all the time. That work is why I got into the business."

— **Lee Carr**

TOP FIVE ASPECTS OF THE JOB YOU ENJOY THE MOST

Executing agronomic programs	70%
Projects	69%
Creating agronomic programs	55%
Interactions with co-workers in your department	54%
Interactions with industry peers	50%
Event preparation	46%
Interactions with customers/members	38%
Interactions with vendors/suppliers	30%
Budgeting	15%
Interactions with bosses	11%
Interactions with other department heads	9%
Hiring	3%
None of the above	1%

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SAME SPOT, EVOLVING RESPONSIBILITIES

Ron Furlong compares holding a superintendent position in the 2020s to the early 2000s.

As I head into my 23rd year as a golf course superintendent, it feels like a good time for some reflection. Specifically, how has my job changed from what it was when I took over as superintendent here at Avalon Golf Club in western Washington in 2002 to what it is entering 2024.

I should mention, we are asking a lot from my memory at this stage, but I will do my best. Here are five thoughts I came up with comparing the role of the superintendent in 2002 to 2024.

SIZE MATTERED

The first thought that entered my head when thinking about how things were for me 22 years ago as a new superintendent was how big things were. By big, I'm referring to that overall feeling of golf at the time. Everything just



seemed large. Now we pretty much all realize it was too large.

From the number of golf courses being built (overbuilt we now know), to the massive size of many of these new courses and, more specifically, the entities within the course. Oversized bunkers, massive tees, fairways stretching out as far as the eye could see, and wall-to-wall mowing and irrigation. Maintaining the vastness required oversized efforts.

I remember being so utterly overwhelmed my first year at Avalon trying to maintain this 236-acre property, 140 of which were 27 holes of maintained golf course open to the public. Enormous tees, gigantic, large-fingered bunkers, big, sweeping fairways, mowing every last blade of grass that could be mowed, and watering all that grass as well.

I battled trying to keep up with this vastness for several years before I realized it couldn't actually be done — at least not efficiently. Detailed work suffers when you are putting all your efforts into the "big."

What we slowly started doing back then (I'd say sometime in the late 2000s) was to try and decrease that "vastness," if you will. We began creating

no-mow zones, shrinking and actually eliminating bunkers and tee boxes. We also removed dozens of landscaped

beds that could not be properly maintained. This made the property more manageable and eventually allowed us to actually be able to present more of a detailed, pleasing product.

I think embracing the "small" is the biggest difference between the mindset of myself as a superintendent back then compared with today.

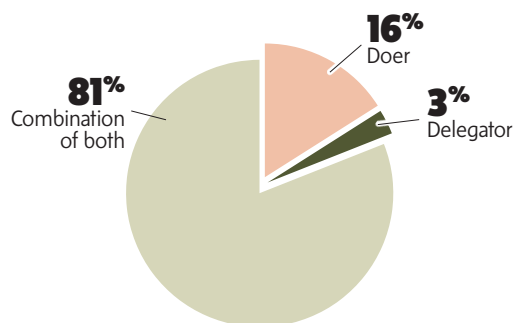
ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

At the turn of the century, we were all fixated on being — and calling ourselves — environmental stewards. Incorporating our acres and acres of finely manicured turf into what we liked to think of as environmentally sensitive properties. We tried our best to feel like we were a part of the environment instead of being a blight upon it, as many critics considered golf courses back then.

But looking back, I think it was more superficial than most of us wanted to admit. Sure, we were starting to get our golf courses certified as Audubon Sanctuaries and calling ourselves stewards. But for many (including myself), it was the same old. We were still overwatering, still mowing wall-to-wall, still using the same and not-so-wonderful pesticides like we were taught by superintendents who were, through no fault of their own, a product of the times and truly believed that was how things had to be done.

That was around that time (the early 2000s) when science and lots of industry-specific research started to slowly begin to show us we could do many things differently and better. And when I say better, I mean better for the environment.

DESCRIPTION OF YOUR MANAGEMENT STYLE



Superintendents began to realize during the first decade of the century that they were not tied to the old traditions the way they thought we were. There were new and better ways to do things, and many of them possessed the long-term health of the planet squarely in mind.

We are much more environmentally sensitive than we were 20 years ago, but we boast about it much less. It just comes with the territory now.

GREEN SPEED AND PLAYABILITY

It seems like green speed has been at the forefront of most superintendents' minds forever, though I can remember when I started working on golf courses back in the late 1980s it wasn't the huge factor it is today. The visual element seemed like the most important thing at the time. Green was the desired color. And not just green, but a deep,

“That need for communication between the maintenance end of the operation and the pro shop end also represents a big difference. The relationship between superintendent and golf pro has never been more important.”



lush green.

Green speed slowly started to creep into the mindset and vocabulary of most, if not all, superintendents throughout that first decade of the century. The demand for firm greens and a true, fast roll became the objective. Jobs were lost if you didn't keep up to speed (pun intended).

One big difference between superintendents circa 2002 and superintendents today is the use of rollers. Although rollers were not unheard of back then, they certainly were not the playability tools they are today. In fact, if you told a superintendent today that they would have to survive without a greens roller, it might get ugly. But if you said the same thing to a superintendent 20 years ago, they might have shrugged and said, "No problem."

ROUNDS AND ROUNDS

Although golf courses were busy 20-plus years ago, they were nothing like what we've seen the last few years. The golf boom for many of us hit with COVID-19, and it's still going strong in most cases.

Avalon opened to the public in 1991. After trying to just break even annually for three decades, the last three

years have been without a doubt the best years revenue-wise for the club's owner. People found the game during the first year of the pandemic, and many of those folks have stuck with it and have brought others into the game.

This boom in golf has obviously meant more bodies on the course and that has impacted how we accomplish — or in some cases can't accomplish — our maintenance and upkeep of the golf course. In the past, juggling daily maintenance jobs around golf was not the issue that it is today.

The modern superintendent has had to figure out how to get things done in play much more so than superintendents of the past. Tricky jobs like spraying greens or light topdressing and brushing now need more planning and coordination with the pro shop.

That need for communication between the maintenance end of the operation and the pro shop end also represents a big difference. The relationship between superintendent and golf pro has never been more important. I'd say, in the past, it was often an us versus them mentality. It is most certainly now more about us as a team.

IT'S LESS ABOUT THE TURF

The question, "How much of your job is just about turf?" comes up every now and then, and I think the answer

to that question for me has changed over the years.

In 2002, I'd probably have responded to that question with the short answer, "Most of it." That would not be my answer as we enter 2024. It's not as simple as it once was. It's definitely a bit more "layered." Although the job has always encompassed more than just maintaining turfgrass, it seems the modern superintendent needs to wear a heck of a lot more hats than those 20 years ago did.

There are the obvious, non-turfgrass things like budgeting, purchasing, hiring and managing a staff, maintaining equipment, and working with the pro shop. Superintendents of previous generations handled the same tasks. But today's superintendents have a bit more on their plate.



// We are much more environmentally sensitive than we were 20 years ago, but we boast about it much less. It just comes with the territory now."



WHAT WOULD MAKE YOUR JOB EASIER?

72% More employees	67% Better pay/benefits for employees	60% Increased budget	56% Improved course infrastructure	51% New equipment
46% Experienced assistant	43% Better pay/benefits for yourself	26% Less micromanagement from bosses / committees	3% *Other	1% None of the above

Other responses included: Administrative assistant, better water quality, higher quality employees, less play

POSITIONS EMPLOYED BY YOUR COURSE

Having a network of people in your field who you can

	All	Non-private	Private
First assistant superintendent	80%	69%	98%
Equipment manager	79%	67%	91%
Irrigation technician	40%	32%	48%
Second assistant superintendent	34%	20%	49%
Spray technician	32%	28%	36%
None of the above	7%	12%	2%

The environmental side of it, as we talked about, is huge today, much more so than it was in the past. This includes choosing and using safer plant protectants, regulating and conserving our water use, and purchasing equipment specifically designed to be more friendly to the environment.

In addition to wearing that environmental steward hat, there's the whole issue of education and keeping up with the newest trends out there. It seems vitally more important today to keep up with the ever-changing landscape of golf course management.

In conjunction with that, I'd say it is also more important today to have good, open communication with your peers and fellow superintendents in the area. They are dealing with the same issues you are. Things change fast.

turn to is imperative.

One final thought ...

The 2024 superintendents and 2002 superintendents have one very big thing in common: the desire to help produce the best product they possibly can within the means allotted to them. That has not changed. The way in which they do that may have changed considerably, but the overall goal, which led many of us to this industry in the first place, has not. Superintendents want nothing more than to produce a great golf course they can be proud of. That, I can safely say, has not changed. **GCI**

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

MO



WING

THE FUNDAMENTALS FORWARD

Golf course operations and maintenance might not fully enter the Big Data era in 2024. But it's coming — and we promise it won't be as daunting as you think.

By **Guy Cipriano**

The fundamentals will always matter. The seeing, touching, feeling and smelling of pleasant outdoor surfaces attracted somebody like **Curtis Tyrrell** to the golf maintenance industry. They likely attracted many of you to the industry too.

Understanding, executing and mastering the fundamentals separate the solid from the spectacular, the shaky from the stable. Tyrrell oversees something spectacular: the turf conditions at Desert Highlands Golf Club, a revered Scottsdale, Arizona, club at the base of Pinnacle Peak.

Tyrrell's role as director of agronomy involves leading a 38-worker team responsible for maintaining an 18-hole golf course, four grass tennis courts, four clay tennis courts, the grounds surrounding two clubhouses and common areas enjoyed by more than 550 members.

So much to do. So many decisions to make.

Fundamentals guide decisions. Supporting the hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual agronomic decisions at Desert Highlands are increasingly more numbers on screens.

Data enters nearly every aspect of Tyrrell's management programs. Soil temperatures. Soil moisture levels. Weather conditions within a two-square-mile radius. Equipment maintenance activity. Job assignments.

There's a number for all of the above.

"It's a totally different world from the old days," says Tyrrell, who started his career in the early 1990s and has led turf teams in all four contiguous U.S. time zones. "We have a lot more things at our fingertips. We're pretty efficient, we do more with less people than we did in the past. The quality of the product is reaching new heights. We can get to our goals efficiently. I couldn't imagine going backward and not having it."

Golf course maintenance hasn't fully embraced the Big Data era and Tyrrell concedes that Desert Highlands provides his team with significant resources.

But with superintendents and their teams bracing for another year of frantic on-course activity—too many golfers, too few employees, not enough time—2024 seems ripe for a numerical nudge.

Let the data conversation intensify!

WHAT IS DATA?

Unknowingly, many golf maintenance pros are already using data to support decisions.

“What we have to realize is what data is: It’s written-down observations,” says **Dr. Bill Kreuser**, the president and co-founder of GreenKeeper, a service offering science-based information, products and recommendations to turfgrass managers. “Superintendents are some of the most observant people and they keep track of what they are seeing. Turning it into data is the next step of writing it down or logging it somewhere so that you don’t live in the moment, and you can look for long-term trends.”

Bodo Sieber, the CEO of Tagmarshal, a system designed to help golf facilities navigate on-course traffic, compares a golf course to the human body. Data ensures operations are conducted at



peak efficiency.

“If you go for a health check and you know what your critical body KPIs are, you can make better decisions, and adjust your lifestyle,” Sieber says. “If you’re trying to run a marathon, trying to get fit, and if you don’t engage the science behind what your body needs, then you’re going to try, but you’re going to fail. It’s the same with a golf operation.”

Sieber adds that data comes in two forms: what’s happening in real-time and what has happened over time. Soil and air temperatures, golf cart and maintenance vehicle movement, and soil moisture levels are examples of real-time data being accumulated on golf courses. Clipping yields, Growing Degree Days, and spray and fertility records are examples of historic data.

HOW INTIMIDATING IS IT?

Tyrrell understands why some superintendents from his generation might be reluctant to try or adopt new technology. An emerging platform, after all, is one extra thing to incorporate into packed days. But Tyrrell’s experiences indicate effectively using data improves his work—and personal—life.

“It’s not that hard to use,” he says. “I would say give it a try. It’s helpful. It adds time back to my work-life balance. I would take that any day of the week.”

Kreuser recommends starting simple. This can involve writing green speed on a calendar or measuring clipping yield and inputting the volume into a software program. Transferring visual observations into writing represents an easy foray into data, according to Kreuser.

Not a numbers person? Numerous emerging platforms are automating data and presenting course information via charts and graphics. “Data needs to be presented well,” Sieber says, “and data is not just numbers.”

Still uneasy?

More formal education about collecting and interpreting data will be appearing at upcoming industry events, according to **Steve Dorer**, the head of digital platforms for Syngenta’s Professional Solutions Business. Industry companies also offer training programs and demonstrations.

“We’re trying to put ourselves in a position to help superintendents overcome that fear or really come to grips with an understanding of what this digital age means,” says Dorer, a former golf

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course superintendent. “We’re more than happy to help. It takes a step, but most superintendents would be surprised that they are already taking steps in that direction.”

HOW CAN DATA HELP?

In addition to conducting research and working with turf managers, Kreuser assists in the maintenance and management of Jim Ager Memorial Golf Course, a 9-hole, par-3 layout and learning center in Lincoln, Nebraska. Measuring clippings and tracking growth rates supports fertility decisions on Ager’s greens, while data provided via a sensor resulted in a steep fertility reduction on fairways, according to Kreuser.

“Having that consistent product is important and we have overall

doubled the amount of rounds at the par-3 at Lincoln Ager, because people know when they go there they can expect consistent, firm, fast putting greens and they can work on their short game,” Kreuser says. “Having consistency in the end product is important for the course.”

Using data collected via a traffic management platform can lead to a direct ROI. Studying historic and live traffic patterns can help operators adjust tee time and better position maintenance employees around play. Data on how long it takes golfers to play holes can be incorporated into course setup decisions to boost pace of play.

“Even if we can shave two minutes off these two holes, three minutes off that hole, one minute on this

hole and two minutes at the halfway house, we have shaved off 10 minutes,” Sieber says. “That means one additional tee time that we never had. One more tee time means four times \$80 the club never had.”

Sieber’s company recently worked with a course in Colorado to determine why one hole took nearly five minutes longer to complete than its projected time. The data they collected determined a medium-sized bush impeded play. The bush was removed. “It was a very low-cost exercise, and they never would have known that, because there are a lot of those bushes on the course,” Sieber says. “None were an issue besides this one.”

Sieber adds that effective data integration using automated pro-

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grams will clear time for the most important and often most enjoyable part of a golf job: cultivating relationships.

"Very often at a golf facility the staff needs to make things work while their hair is on fire, because they are short-staffed and there's always more to do," Sieber says. "The less time I have to run around and try to make things work at my golf course, col-

lect data points and use reams of paper to write down things so that I can stay ahead of things, the more time I have to build relationships and add to the experiences of the players I'm serving."

WHAT'S USABLE? WHAT'S USELESS?

Superintendents and their teams prioritize tasks every day. The same mindset must be demonstrated when incorporat-

A position for THAT?

Data and analytics have become so prevalent in professional sports that nearly every major franchise devotes full-time personnel to interpreting them.

Could a need for similar personnel and departments reach golf facilities? Full-time data analysts are unlikely — and unnecessary — in golf course management, according to Tagmarshal CEO **Bodo Sieber**. "That would be complete overkill," he says.

Instead of hiring a data analyst, Sieber recommends facilities identifying and developing a "champion" for prodding their property in a data-driven direction. Once that person is selected, they should receive opportunities to research how various platforms can help the course achieve its goals.

"You don't need to be a data scientist," Sieber says. "You need to play people to their strengths. If somebody is a little bit more technical and likes digging into data and systems, then make them the champion and empower them. Make it their mission. They can add a lot of value by teaching, training others, and answering their questions."

GreenKeeper president and co-founder **Dr. Bill Kreuser** also doesn't view a data manager position as a necessity for a golf facility because automation offered by emerging platforms will simplify numerical-based decisions.

"The old-school method might have been you hire a data analyst, and they dig and pull up databases and try to make connections," Kreuser says. "With how fast things are moving on the tech side, we will be able to get a lot of value through automation. These services are cheaper. Computer scientists make them, and we can apply them to all sorts of industries and sectors. We're just bringing it to the golf sector."



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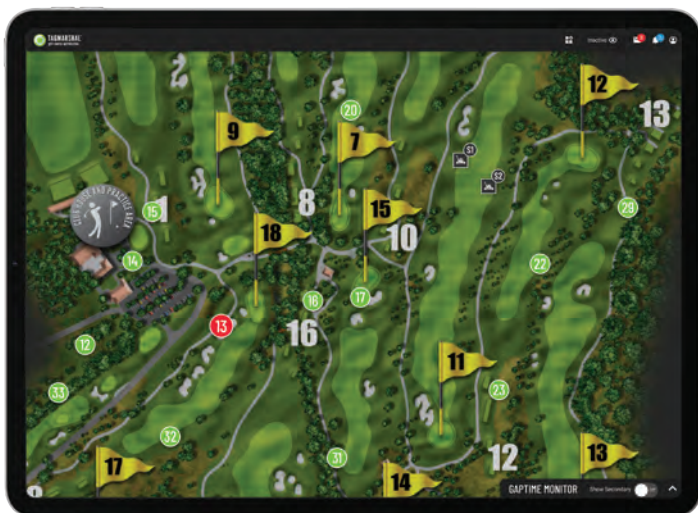
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ing data into decision making.

“With any data you are collecting, make sure there’s an actual actionable reason to do it,” Kreuser says. “Don’t collect data to collect data. That’s not helpful. You want to have a clear idea . . . *I’m doing this for this reason and I’m going to adjust my management as a result* . . . and then you want to make sure the data you are collecting is actually related to what you think it is. Correlation isn’t causation all the time.”

Tyrrell has learned to find practical balances at Desert Highlands.

“There’s a threshold and point of diminishing return for everything,” he says. “On an 18-hole course, do I need 30 or 40 soil sensors when I’m out there with two or three assistants with whatever I’m doing every single day? Heck no. I’m walking, feeling and touching the course myself. I don’t need 30 of those data points, but a dozen is good. I can get the hot spots, the areas that I know I would like to have that information.”

WILL DATA TAKE MY JOB?

Golf and golf course maintenance is big business. Any savvy business owner understands highly trained people capable of interpreting data must be employed to protect significant investments in equipment and infrastructure.

“I think the superintendent will become even more valuable,” Dorer says. “The skills they might need will change a little, but I think their value will only increase, because who else is going to manage all this automation designed for turf maintenance or golf course maintenance? It has to be a superintendent

who understands how to use it.”

WHAT’S NEXT?

Sieber admits that golf lags behind many other industries in collecting data besides basic financial information. He sees positives in the slow start.

“The good news is that it’s obviously easier to jump onto something that another industry has pioneered,” Sieber says. “They have done the hard part. If it took another industry 10 or 15 years to get to a certain point, you can hopefully get there in eight years or shorter.”

Dozens of effective apps and platforms have entered the golf maintenance

market over the past decade. And dozens more are coming.

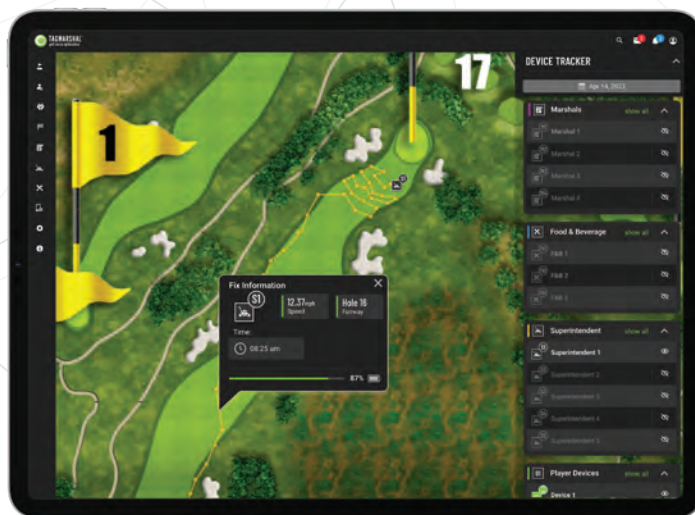
“The adoption curve will accelerate over the next three years and technology will continue to get better and improve,” Dorer says. “There was a day when the handheld soil monitoring devices weren’t on a golf course. Now pretty much everybody has one.

“What’s the next step? What do you do with that data? Right now, it’s helping maybe in daily operations, but I think where it’s going to help is in more planning and providing higher levels of predictability.”

Predicting exactly where, when and how superintendents will incorporate and utilize data might be as tricky as winning a March Madness office pool. Superintendents are a fundamentally imaginative group.

“The creativity and inventiveness in how to apply some of these tools by superintendents is really amazing and we’re actually counting on that,” Dorer says. “We know that we can’t think of all the different ways they can use data.” GCI

Guy Cipriano is Golf Course Industry’s editor-in-chief. He strives to combine the art and science of content creation to make fundamentally sound decisions for the magazine.





DEEP IN THE DESERT, GRAYHAWK GOLF CLUB'S ERNIE POCK TURNS TO FAMILY — AND SOME SCIENCE — TO HANDLE CHALLENGING TURF TRANSITIONS.

By **Matt LaWell**

There is no single definition for what makes a family. Blood? Friendship? Passion? Colleagues? Family is what you make it. Ernie Pock makes his just about everybody.

Pock is the longtime director of agronomy at Grayhawk Golf Club in Scottsdale, Arizona — he'll celebrate 24 years in March — and is part of a biological family that has a considerable footprint across the Valley: His great-grandfather, father, brother, second cousin and third cousin are all former golf course superintendents. His great-grandfather, Jay Woodward, helped build the second nine at Arizona Country

Club following World War II. His father, Mike Pock, helped build seven courses, including both Raptor and Talon at Grayhawk, and his brother Jay Pock was a superintendent for more than 20 years. His second cousin Mark Woodward is a former GCSAA president and CEO. Three family members are Arizona Golf Hall of Famers.

Pock considers so many people at the 36-hole Grayhawk to be family, too. Among his maintenance team of 50, about one-third have worked at the club for more than 15 years. Talon superintendent Victor Ramirez and second assistant Fernando Calzada have both worked on the property even longer than Pock. Equipment

manager Eduardo "Lalo" Ayala has logged more than 20 years. So have operators Marcos Antonio and Carlos Gregorio "Cholango" Arias.

So much of that stability started at the top: Grayhawk founders Gregg Tryhus and Del Cochran "allowed me to do my trade and my craft, and I passed that down to my team and let them run with it," Pock says. "They gave me the freedom to either kill or cure — I got that from my dad: Either we're going to kill it or we're going to cure it, but we're going to find something — and they allowed me to do a lot of research." Arcis Golf purchased Grayhawk last summer, marking a new chapter for the 30-year-old club. Pock expects the family feel — and the freedom to do whatever the courses need — to remain.

A big part of the research Pock has explored over the last quarter of a century has focused on the annual transition from ryegrass throughout the winter to Tifway 419 Bermudagrass fairways, tees and greens, and MiniVerde greens the rest of the year. Pock describes it as his biggest

agronomic challenge.

"It's an ebb and flow when we're trying to tip the scales on which grass to have perform better," Pock says. "It's tricky. You want to feed the Bermudagrass in the spring to get it to come through the rye, but once you do that the ryegrass blows out of the ground and you can't keep up with your mowing. It's a double-edged sword."

Pock uses a variety of products throughout that process, most frequently SePRO Legacy and Musketeer plant growth regulators. He normally applies Legacy four times throughout summer, about every 20 days, when Bermudagrass has grown in. He experimented with Musketeer last summer, "and it performed well too."

"We used to not have play in the summer months," Pock says. "No one was staying around because it was too hot. Now, we have to have some type of playing conditions, so we're trying to figure out ways to create the playing surface our customer will spend money on. It's a unique situation that we have. It's just the cost of doing business. If we don't have ryegrass and striped fairways at this time of year, we're not getting the revenue we need to get through the slow times of summer."

At the suggestion last summer of SePRO technical specialist Marc Snyder, a longtime superintendent around the Valley, Pock also applied what was initially planned as a trial of SePRO Cutless MEC plant growth regulator. "We started about August 1," Pock says. "About 10 days after applying it, I started twisting his arm to get more."

Anything to help ease that process, Pock says: "Our transitions are challenging enough from Bermuda to ryegrass, so whatever we can do to alleviate that Bermudagrass from being a little bit regulated, I try to do."

Because, just like the flexible definition of family, there is no one definition — no single solution — about how to handle turf. Pock has learned that from plenty of family. ■

OLD, TRUSTED AND USEFUL

MACHINES THAT ARE RELIABLE AND PRODUCTIVE ARE WHAT EVERY MAINTENANCE TEAM WANTS. VETERAN EQUIPMENT IN A FLEET CAN BE THE UNITS THAT KEEP THE GROUNDS — AND THE BOOKS — LOOKING THEIR BEST.

By Lee Carr

Pretend someone gave you cash to buy land, build a golf course and purchase all the cutting-edge equipment you need. Would your first move be checking the resale market for mowers? No. You would invest in modern equipment. Your visionary budget would include funds to replace items as necessary because new equipment is bought to become used.

Rolling Meadows is a 27-hole, daily-fee facility in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. The team is led by **David Brandenburg**, golf course manager and certified superintendent. He works closely with superintendent **James Juoni** and assistant superintendent and golf course mechanic **Jeremy Ruplinger** to maintain 240 acres.

“We have a big fleet with some new equipment,” Brandenburg says. “Our reel mowers are Jacobsen, our rotary mowers are Toro and we have some John Deere items. We mostly purchase our equipment, either outright or through lease-to-own programs, because we keep it so long.”

Lead times for new equipment can be up to 24 months. “You have to plan ahead,” Brandenburg says. “We feel comfortable with our older units, not as backups but used intermittently. There is no reason to replace them if they’re doing a good job.”

Companies have been helpful with parts supply and phone support but, with a shortage of qualified mechanics and equipment technicians, more superintendents and team members are filling the gaps. The moment you need something is not the ideal time for training, but it may be the only time. Embrace it! Mechanical skills give the staff depth, something new to learn and can create a more robust operation.

Financing philosophies vary and deciding to lease or own depends on the property, the piece and the

use. Some properties are struggling to finance the equipment they need, some have healthy budgets, and many exist in-between. Leasing frequently used equipment means it stays in the budget, is usually under warranty and can help with being technologically sharp. There’s no right way, but one perk of older equipment is that it usually comes with a story.

Brian Bressler, the equipment/shop manager at Medinah Country Club in suburban Chicago, recounts a time when he worked for Notre Dame University.

“We had a very old, pull-behind Toro aerifier,” he says. “We were almost done aerifying fairways when one of the gears broke in half. Believe it or not, we welded it back together and finished the job. We ordered a new gear box since this one was giving us such a time every year. To our surprise the gear box was made abroad — in Italy, I think — and to top it all off, it was no longer made. We contacted the original manufacturer and they agreed to dust off the print and make us some new gears. That was the most

in-depth I ever got into a piece of equipment.” That effort meant that the old equipment was able to finish the job and continue working.

At Medinah, one of the oldest pieces of equipment is a 2005 Flex 21 greens mower. “We use it to cut our greens on Course No. 1,” Bressler says. “It does fine but as it ages it’s spending more and more time in the shop. Parts will soon be obsolete.” With three courses, a sizeable staff and ongoing renovation, equipment management is as important as ever.

A 1954 Worthington tractor is the oldest piece of equipment at Rolling Meadows. Their rotation regularly sees a 2002 tee mower, a 2006 fairway mower and a sand trap rake from 1999. “As long as the frame is good, the engine is good and the drive is working, these pieces can all be used,” Brandenburg says. “We have small expenditures for annual maintenance and maybe tires or battery, but we’re not spending a lot of money on equipment just because it’s older.”

It’s the same for Medinah. “We pay attention to the amount of labor, parts and money we are spending on that piece of equipment,” Bressler says. “If it’s in repair more than it’s ready, we look at replacing it.”

Older equipment often has meaning for employees. “Jeremy enjoys that we can keep machines going,” Brandenburg says. “He appreciates the older stuff and he keeps it in great condition. We’re happy and proud to continue using those units.”

Having an equipment manager who is knowledgeable on everything from small engines to welding to



MILES AND HOURS

People are familiar with cars as a frame of reference when considering the life of an engine. Anything above 100,000 miles is grounds for conversation about the vehicle's longevity. Cars routinely travel 60 miles per hour so an easy comparative formula for converting engine hours to miles is:

$$60 \times \text{engine hours} = \text{miles covered}$$

For example, $60 \times 4,000$ engine hours = 240,000 miles. This is a good estimate for a conversation with decision-makers considering the life of turf maintenance equipment. That engine will need more attention or even be replaced. A more specific calculation uses the machine's average miles per hour, based on the description from the manufacturer. That formula is:

$$\text{total engine hours} \times \text{average miles per hour} = \text{total miles covered}$$

For example, a fairway mower with 4,000 engine hours \times 5 mph = 20,000 miles covered. This formula will be more exact for some kinds of equipment than others, and factors such as revolutions per minute (RPMs, how hard is the machine working?), terrain (is the machine utilized on level or hilly ground?) and maintenance conditions (was the machine regularly and thoughtfully cared for?) all affect how accurate hours-to-miles conversions are. Without an odometer, it's not possible to know how many miles the machine has covered. Even with that information, identical machines are going to function differently based on use, operator skills, storage and care.

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building and construction that seasonal staff enjoy learning from is also helpful.

Maintenance for modern equipment has different requirements. “The machines with computers on them require an extra step and extra equipment to diagnose problems,” Brandenburg says. “The more sensors you have, the more things that are going to go wrong, especially working in the wet, dirty environment that golf course mowers face.”

A 1972 Jacobsen tractor is the hands-down favorite at Rolling Meadows.

“We pull rollers, the topdresser, the sprayer and mowers behind it. It pulled the gang mower all the time,” Brandenburg says. That tractor was purchased when the course was built in 1972. “We haven’t invested large amounts of money in it. It has a gas engine and doesn’t run at high RPMs for the tasks we use it for. It’s always ready and it’s quiet. You don’t need earmuffs. With our farming backgrounds, we like our tractors.”

They also like their customers.

“We educate our people,” Brandenburg says. “They ask why our rates are going up and we explain that everything we do costs more, including replacing equipment. People have no idea that mowers range from \$35,000 to \$100,000. Customers and employees have no knowledge of that. Prices for everything have increased over the past five years. We are a mid-level golf course, we have mid-level rates and we try to provide above-average conditions. We do all we can.”

Rolling Meadows is as transparent as possible and the website references equipment costs and employee training. “We talk about it at orientation,” Brandenburg says. “We explain we have some older items and we have some newer items, and we tell them the costs.”

Employees are trained to look for anything visual, like low tires or leaking fluids. They are instructed to stop operating the machine and investigate if something sounds or feels different.

“It’s weird when we hire students and they use a mower that’s five years older than they are. Having been here for 28 years, it doesn’t seem that old to me,” Brandenburg says with a laugh. “Sometimes the students don’t understand and our retirees are

maybe more cautious but it’s better than ignoring any problem. We are lucky to have great, longtime employees and equipment. It’s a key difference for us.”

“Training, training, training,” Bressler says. “We train our team in how to use the equipment safely and properly. We also train on how to properly wash the equipment. We work on how to communicate about any issues or repairs. We also invest in technician training with manufacturer schools to keep up.” Employees and equipment go hand-in-glove. Gas in the tank. Gear in the gearbox. You get the idea. They need each other to be at their very best.

When it comes to tips for taking care of older equipment, Brandenburg knows, “If you treat it right, it will treat the operation right. Don’t abuse it and keep an eye on things.”

Bressler echoes those thoughts, sharing that “if you take care of it, it will take care of you.”

Some things never change — even if, one day, someone offers you the chance to acquire a whole new fleet. **GCI**

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



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WAKE-UP CALL?

As you might imagine, over four decades in this business, I've worked out of and visited hundreds of maintenance facilities. When evaluating them for a club or a fellow superintendent, I cover the usual essentials: space, cleanliness, organization, comfort, utility, redesign and efficiency. But there is one qualification I've never shared until now.

THE COFFEE.

Like fuel in the equipment, course maintenance can't happen without coffee. My first cup of coffee was from a maintenance building. Every day, my first order of business in the morning is to find a steaming cup of joe.

You agronomic javaphiles know what I'm talking about.

There is nothing better than a freshly brewed cup of maintenance coffee. And just like at Starbucks, there are distinctive types and brews — both regionally and even within your own facility — depending on different ways of preparing it, different tastes, varying ingredients. But maintenance coffee is always the best at the club, particularly since the people in the clubhouse come in late enough that they can stop on their way to work for their first cup, which means “clubhouse coffee” is their second (and third) cup. Sorry, it's just not as good as these super-special blends.

OFFICE ORIGINAL

Put it on the pot or pop in the pod. It's there, it's fresh, it's the perfect first cup. And yes, I'll have a second.

BREAKROOM BEST

A required stop on my tour, I'm hoping for fresh, hot and abundant. Usually, it's brewed in a hurry and the ingredients are strewn all over the counter. That's OK. And it's also OK if this is what I consider the “caramelized” version of coffee: that baked-on-the-inside-of-the-pot “local tank-mix” that fuels the crew.

MECHANICS' MAGIC

For the local specialty blend, find the technician. But do not pour without first asking permission. And don't ask what they put in there. If you're fortunate enough to be offered a cup, say thank you and enjoy.

As noted, my first cup of coffee was when I first worked on a crew. It was at Pinehurst, I was young, and it was early in the morning, so I made it palatable by adding milk and sugar. That's how I used to take it, and I can trace the trajectory of my turf career through the coffee I drank.

When I was on the crew at TPC Sawgrass, coffee detail was assigned to **Rags**, our irrigation tech. His job was to make sure there was coffee available through the day, dawn to dusk, and to make sure it was made with potable water!

I really started enjoying the coffee “experience” while at Las Colinas in Dallas. I was more senior, which made the coffee taste better, but it really was because the best time of day to ride your course is what **Bruce Springsteen** calls the “lonely cool before dawn.” Armed with my first cup of the day, driving the course in the dark, then watching the

sun come up over the fairways and greens was the perfect preparation for what was sure to be a busy, but rewarding, day.

Hands down, no argument, the best coffee of all was in Miami. Most of my crew were Cuban, and to them, coffee was a religion. A “demitasse” (think Dixie cup) of espresso — a single shot of Cuban coffee — was an inexplicable taste sensation. Even better, alongside one of the maintenance facilities was a small stand of sugar cane. We'd cut a stalk, stir it in the cup to sweeten the shot, then suck and savor the sharp mix of coffee and sweetness.

When I moved to the Northeast, it was coffee “regular” (it varies around the country, but I was back to milk and sugar), with a plain bagel and a schmear. I was never a big donut guy but appreciated the guys who stopped at Dunkin' to shock the system with a hot cup and a bomb of sugar.

Like water to a fish, crews can't live without coffee. What better fuel to handle the green committee meeting or prepare for the Senior Women's Weekly Four-Ball? And when there was a big tournament, I'd order a “Black Eye” — a cup of black coffee with two shots of espresso, sugar to taste. The effects wore off about the time we got the course back to normal.

To the aspiring young assistants out there, learn how to make and savor a good pot of coffee, and keep it coming all day long. To you bosses, it's part of your job to teach the newbies the secrets of your “barn's” specific brew.

Just don't let me catch you using my special mug. **GCI**



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GOLF + MEDIA: Shanks and Solutions

Veteran golf writer **Judd Spicer** details his experience covering the industry – and provides practical ideas for making the relationship work to your course's benefits.

"The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them." – Ernest Hemingway

The present-day rapport between domestic culture and the media is fickle at best.

As microcosm: Golf courses, (pro) golfers and the business of golf are, unfortunately, no exception.

Fueled in part by a politically charged American mistrust and distrust of media in recent years, the way one votes is but a piece of the strained puzzle.

In this Age of Aesthetic, this Era of Personal Branding, those on the opposite side of a recorder (i.e., story subjects) are oftentimes financially motivated to keep (or try to keep) a

hagiographic grip on controlling their own respective narratives. When combined with a generational zeitgeist of oversensitivity — "Wait, what, you're going to write or broadcast something that tells people I'm not perfect?" — the work of hand-holding a story or story subject, navigating gatekeepers and ensuring editorial independence is more delicate than ever.

Some of this, of course, we, the media, have broadly brought upon ourselves. A mushy grip and thirsty segue from traditional print media to online voices and social media presence over the past two decades does not a clean baton pass make. To wit: One only needs to review the

cacophony of postings and suspect reportage at the most recent Ryder Cup to basically walk away with no cemented sense of what is true and what is clickbait.

And, let's face it, as most of the print world has endured financial struggles across the new millenium, it's not like a scroll of Indeed.com reveals a rush of job postings for either copy editors or fact checkers; most outlets simply can't afford to keep and/or hire folks to perform those tasks anymore, which, in the broad, has undoubtedly and unfortunately resulted in more grammatically poor copy and sloppy syntax than ever before in the history of the printed word.

STORIES ABOUT TRYING TO TELL STORIES

That's the bad. Here's more bad.

I've been doing this a long damn time, nearly a quarter-century. And while I'll spare the details of the C.V., allow me to offer with confidence that I know what I know — and I know my trade.

Over the first two decades of my media work, it was with some occasion I'd be asked by a story subject to serve as blocking back, that I'd have to hurdle some encumbrance to get a story done or that I'd basically have to justify my worth, value, trustworthiness or existence to somebody or someplace that I was covering.

Now? Hell, in the past four or five years, it's with regularity that I'll personally experience (or hear from a colleague about their personally experiencing) some degree of blockade, skepticism, distrust or vetting with an assignment. Doesn't matter if it's a print or broadcast project. On a near-weekly basis, I'll either encounter (or hear about a colleague's encounter with) one of the following:

- Request for questions in advance
- Request to review my work before it goes to print
- Request to edit out something after a pre-recorded podcast interview
- List of suggestions (not always the worst thing, actually) for what a story subject or locale believes should be covered or highlighted in a piece.

Save for the latter — which I always review, and sometimes include — I generally if not always offer a polite declination. As I see it: I'm not writing copy. I do my job and you do your job, and for you to do my job is all but to take the pen out of my hand, make me irrelevant and to present a lesser final product than I'd construct on my own — basically making me an A.I. shill for the deified, shining aesthetic message that a story subject wants me to put out rather than the trained tradecraft

that I've busted my butt for nearly 25 years to try and perfect.

Too opaque?

Here are a few recent examples that have stuck under my skin:

About 15 months ago, I was part of a media trip to a great golf destination, one that I'd longed to visit and write about for some time. In the middle of the trip, as I'm wont to do, I used some downtime amid the itinerary to stroll off the beaten path. A close friend and colleague once advised, "When you're on these trips, go where the host tells you not to go."

Personally, I feel like I'm doing the reader a disservice when I neglect to include some sense of place away from a golf course, whether that portrays the destination for bitter or better. On this trip in question, what I observed away from the golf resort property disturbed me in ... let's say a social sense. Later that night, walking to dinner, I told our host (p.r. guy, and a good one, real vet of his trade) of what I saw, and that I intended — along with all the genuinely good things — to slide in a line about this particular impression of social concern in my article.

"You're going to mention that?" he fast responded, incredulously.

"Yeah, man," I replied, in this and subsequent conversations and emails. "What I saw had an impact on me, and I really think that visitors seeing the same will have the same reaction. To leave it out would be an oversight on my part. Don't worry — 95 percent of my article will be a glowing review of this place. But I think it's my job, my duty, to reserve a few lines of my work to paint a broader picture, the real picture." Sure, some of this dialogue is refined for these purposes, but you get the point. The point I got? Well, this p.r. guy has never invited me on another trip.

Here's another one. Different situation but in the same vein. This past spring, I was covering a sizable pro

sporting event, one with big postseason implications for the host team. A packed house, rabid fan base.

During a break in the action, I went to stretch the legs and as I returned to the dedicated workspace, a dude in front of me in the corridor donned a shirt lambasting the media. He was maybe 20 feet from our row of notebooks and recorders and cameras and laptops, and I don't think anybody else noticed him (or his shirt), just as I don't think he realized he was steps away from 20 people he (or his attire) was publicly slighting. Hell, it's a free country.

I was tempted to (calmly) stand up for myself and my fellow media members, but I just let it go. Although, obviously, I haven't really let it go. Guess I've always felt that my writing has presented a tone of brotherhood, of fellowship to the unknown, gentle reader. But now, more often than I'd like, it has entered my mind that, sometimes, if not often, I'm being read by foe, not friend.

Lastly, a specified reference to *Golf Course Industry*. Along a not dissimilar timeline to the above, I was writing a story for these very pages and working with a location here in my Coachella Valley home that I've prollly' written about 50 times since I moved here 13 years ago. Per much of the readership of this publication, I asked — on two or three occasions — to source the property's superintendent. Who did I get? The GM. Which was fine, I guess. I knew that, in the end, I was telling a good story — but not the best story, not the boots-on-the-ground story that was truly befitting the assignment.

This kind of gatekeeping is frustrating at best, but this GM ... he's an "on-message" guy who wants his property depicted in a very specific way. The superintendent? He's well known to be something of a wild card type, which, to me, says that he would have told me something far more interesting than what I ultimately got and what I eventually presented to you.

SOLUTIONS

As the same Go-Where-They-Tell-You-Not-To-Go Pal said, this learned fella' also instilled in me the value of not simply recognizing problems but also presenting solutions.

With that ethos in mind, may I please offer the following considerations for how golf properties and golf brass can re-galvanize a more fruitful, more productive, more trustworthy and more personal relationship with the media.

ALL GOLF IS LOCAL

Often is the awesome opportunity for golf media members to be invited to great destinations around the country, if not the world. Rare, however, is the media day held by your local course. And this is a shame for both sides.

For course owners, operators, head pros, GMs and superintendents, might I suggest reserving, say, an annual Tuesday afternoon in your offseason (or, really, whenever it may least affect your bottom line) to host your local media members to a round and a few post-play libations. Doesn't have to be anything formal or fancy, and, heck, for some markets, this might result in, like, a mere foursome or two. But it can be such a win-win. For the course, it's an opportunity to spend a handful of hours with folks who (if they're doing their jobs right) are always on the lookout for a good story, a chance for face-to-face connection, a way to create communal kinships and to let the world beyond your respective grounds know what you and your staff are all about.

DIGITAL SWING

Sure, many if not most golf properties can ill afford to have a dedicated person on-staff to constantly update a website or social media accounts. But know that even the slightest bit of presentation can go a long way for media either interested in or assigned to write about your property.

When I see a dead or dated social media account, it kinda vibes that the property lacks some attention to detail or might have a lotta turnover. Inversely, when I research a place that, say, has weekly postings—whatever the content may be—it's like an extension of the locale's heartbeat, as if it's active, engaged and breathing. And fear not, really, there's no need to hire somebody to take this on if your place can't afford it. Simply dedicate 15 minutes a week to getting *something* up there, even if you schedule all your posts in advance. Trust me on this, it gives the media a real sense of vibrancy to see fresh posts.

In kind, for your website, try and dedicate, say, one day every six months to update your website's "Press" page (and, if you don't have a Press page on your site, create one today). When I see such a page on a course I'm researching, it's not only a helpful way to get me better informed about your property, but it also shows me that you are enthused about the attention that media can bring and are engaged to have your course or courses written about even more.

CYCLICAL FORESIGHT

Yes, in this post-pandemic era, golf round counts across much of the union continue to flourish. And that's terrific, even if, for our media purposes, it may well mean that you don't need us quite as

much these days to help get your word out. But if we've learned anything about such stats, they're cyclical.

Over the past century-plus of American golf, history has proved that mythical names ranging from Ouimet to Woods can create surges in participation based on their accomplishments ... before said surges eventually abate, and the playing plane evens to the mean.

The non-diehards realize that golf is hard and takes time and can be expensive, and their respective clubs find cobwebs anew in the garage. Today, so says the National Golf Foundation, domestic golf rounds are up double digits when contrasted with the pre-COVID-19 averages of 2015-19. Of yesteryear, so says the National Recreation and Parks Association, an epilogue of the "Tiger Effect" from 2003 to 2018 saw a golfer decline of about 22 percent.

Point being: Eventually, this present surge (which, again, is wonderful and excellent and to be celebrated) will, at some stage, achieve its plateau and eventual regress.

And who can help you then? We can. The media. Trust me. **GCI**

Judd Spicer is a California-based writer and a senior Golf Course Industry contributor.

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



PROTECTIVE BRIDGE COVERINGS

There are 17 decorative bridges on the new and still-under-construction golf course and practice facility that navigate beautiful streams and ravines at the Wasatch Peaks Ranch in Morgan, Utah. The bridge floors were covered with $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch by 4-foot by 8-foot particle board plywood — placed end to end and secured with small wood screws, because the bridges were installed for access by the construction team's heavy equipment. This great idea is keeping the bridge floors brand new for when the course is unveiled for the membership. The contractor installed the protective plywood, and it only took a few minutes to install. **Kyle Squires** is the golf course superintendent. **Tom Fazio** and **Ron Smith** are the designers.

BACKORDERED IRRIGATION PARTS

This irrigation mainline blowout resulted in quick thinking by **Dan Warne**, superintendent at the Camarillo Springs Golf Course in Camarillo, California. Saddle repair clamps were backordered from China during the COVID-19 pandemic, so Warne's staff covered the open hole temporarily with a recycled 2005 E-Z-GO golf cart roof — the maintenance department has 12 in inventory after a new golf cart fleet was acquired. The roofs can also be placed vertically to protect the staff from errant golf balls while working in the middle of a fairway during irrigation repairs. The additional roofs are also placed vertically with signs attached to them to notify golfers of maintenance tasks being carried out, along with friendly suggestions to golfers. **Damian V. Pascuzzo** of Pascuzzo Pate Golf Design is the renovation architect.



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

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DOES ANY OF IT MAKE SENSE?

Despite veiled attempts to write off into the sunset, I'm back at the keyboard and on the back page for 2024. Wow, is it really 2024? Seems like 2020 was — and still is — yesterday. I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm finding my sense of time and space has been permanently altered by the global events formerly known as the pandemic.

Seems when I scroll through my phone to share that photo I took last month, I'm surprised to learn I captured the image in 2015! Will this phenomenon ever self-correct? Or is this the new normal? I guess time will tell.

Speaking of time, it's customary this time of year for folks to look ahead and predict what the year may hold in store. But I want to look ahead by first looking back. Do you remember when the previously unknown folk singer **Oliver Anthony** became an overnight sensation last summer with his song "Rich Men North of Richmond?"

His song became an anthem for a lot of hard-working individuals — you know, the type that makes up a large majority of our maintenance teams. Guys and gals who rise early, lace up their boots, and pour out their sweat in the midday sun working hard all day to keep turfgrass alive. All for a paycheck to make ends meet.

In the song, Anthony bellows, "I've been sellin' my soul, workin' all day. Overtime hours for bull---t pay." And this gem, "Cause your dollar ain't sh-t and it's taxed to no end. Cause of rich men north of Richmond."

Now, even if you never studied United States geography, I am certain you understand the premise of the song is directed to our esteemed lawmakers in Washington, D.C. But after that you are probably wondering how those lyrics could possibly relate to the golf course industry.

It's only in recent years that wages have finally started to grow for assistants and equipment managers. And deservedly so. These are the folks who truly were working overtime hours for bull---t pay. And the labor shortage created by the pandemic forced employers to raise hourly wages to more than double the federal minimum wage (again, long overdue) for entry-level employees.

This, in turn, forced employers to raise longer-tenured employees' salaries and wages because nobody who has put in 10 or more years wants to earn the same hourly pay as the new person who started last week standing in the corner of the breakroom.

So where does all this new money leave us? Well, if you've checked out from a grocery store lately, not in your pocket (see above: *dollar ain't sh-t*). Golf course maintenance budgets are on the rise, and labor is really on the rise.

I spoke with a colleague who told me their budget was going to be \$2.8 million for 2024 — and \$1.8 million was labor!

But is this sustainable? I was talking with a member

of our club last month about the impact inflation is having on our industry. Budgets have increased to levels many of us never thought possible decades ago, and others have increased to levels only once reserved for the high-end courses.

But the reality is that today's dollar doesn't buy you what yesterday's did. Despite strutting around because you manage a golf course with a \$2 million dollar budget, ask this question: Is the golf course really any better than it was when the budget was half that way back when?

I'm curious about the financial sustainability of this current path. The pandemic brought players back to the game and the boost it injected into the industry was much needed. But golf always has been — and will continue to be — a recreation based on disposable income.

When dues need to be increased to pay inflated wages and purchase fertilizer and plant protectants just to maintain the status quo, are folks going to sign the checks when they don't receive anything above and beyond in return?

There's something more nefarious at play in my opinion with the world as a whole and, honestly, I don't know how much longer everything will stay the way we remember it. Until then, all I know to do is make the golf course as good as we possibly can on any given day until we are told not to.

It's hard being an old soul in the new world. **GCI**



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

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