As a youngster, Jim McPhilomy, 27, and his older brother spent summers and school vacations working for their father, who was head superintendent at Denver's Valley Country Club. "I spent a lot of time riding around the course with Dad, even in grade school," he remembered. Jim eventually graduated from Pennsylvania State University's two-year turf management program, spent a year as assistant at Glenmoor of Cherry Hills (Colo.) and became Riviera's head superintendent in 1989. His brother works for a Torrey distributor in Denver.

Things to look for: Eradicaded at Pebble Beach for last year's U.S. Open, kikuyugrass dominates tees, fairways and roughs at Riviera. "Kikuyu had taken over 50 percent of the course back in the 1940s, so members decided to encourage it," McPhilomy said. "It's very coarse with thick blades. It's great in the fairways, but questionable in the roughs. Until last year we were mowing it every day. But it was so thick, we scalped it a lot. Now we mow it three days a week in the spring and summer. Then we lightly verticut the fairways every other week and the aprons every week. That's reduced the scalping and we don't have to mow as often."

Made-for-TV preparations: During the season when the kikuyu is thick, McPhilomy cuts roughs at 1-3/4 inches. But during winter he lets the thinner blades reach 3-1/2 inches for the tournament while the grass is still semidormant. "We haven't mowed the rough since early November," he said. Greens are predominantly poa and will all be converted to bentgrass by next year's tournament. In the meantime, "we'll single cut them then roll them every day during advance week and double cut them during the tournament, if necessary," McPhilomy said. "We'll try to get the speeds up around 9-1/2 or 10. But we'll concentrate on smoothness ahead of speed. If it rains and the greens get bumpy, we'll keep speeds down. We want the players to have a chance to make some putts."

John Walter, 48, has been with the city of San Diego Recreation Department for 22 years, mostly involved with bullshit development and facility acquisition. He took over Torrey Pines 4-1/2 years ago on a temporary basis. As golf course manager, he oversees maintenance, pro shop and administration at the North and South courses as well as 27-hole Balboa Golf Course. His non-traditional turf background started with a bachelor's degree in history during the height of the Vietnam War followed by entrance to the Army's Officer Candidate School. A self-confessed 'golf rat' since first setting foot on a course at age 11, his familiarity with the game landed him his first golf assignment, course manager at Fort Polk, La.

Things to look for: "We've spent a lot of money the past four years. We redden all the bunkers in conjunction with architects Halsey Darby Golf Inc. The clubhouse is new. We installed cart paths and a new irrigation system on the South course that will reduce water use 25-30%.

Made-for-TV preparations: "The stripping is the most noticeable thing. We were doing just the greens four years ago. Now we do collars, aprons, fairways and steepcut into the rough. We started using smaller mowers before the tournament last year to give the striping more definition. We have a 25-person crew and put in about 1,600 hours of overtime the two months before the tournament. The two courses get about 200,000 rounds of public play a year, meaning we have to do a lot of repair work — filling in ruts, overseeding areas, encouraging players to replace divots and working the bunkers."

Tour of Duty

JOHN WALTER
Torrey Pines Golf Courses
San Diego, Calif.

Buick Invitational
Feb. 16-21, NBC

John Walter

STEVE KUHN
Doral Country Club (Blue Course)

Doral Ryder Open
March 6-7, CBS

Last Labor Day weekend was the toughest test for Steve Kuhn, 43, during his 1-1/2-year tenure at Doral. That's when Hurricane Andrew ripped through the resort, taking out half the trees on the 770-acre property. Five days later, 18 holes were ready for play. Within two weeks, all 81 kids rejoived. "If we were just going to do it three days a week in the spring and summer. Then we lightly verticut the fairways every other week and the aprons every week. That's reduced the scalping and we don't have to mow as often."

Made-for-TV preparations: The PGA requires an intermediate fairway strip extending from the edge of the rough 7 feet inward toward the middle of the fairway. Kuhn said. Fairways will be cut about 1/4-inch, intermediate strip 1-1/4 inches and rough 2 inches. "They don't like that harsh transition from fairway to rough," Kuhn explained. Doral also overseeds greens with bentgrass in November, slowly cutting them back to 1/8-inch by tournament time. "We've got the softest course in the country with bentgrass greens," Kuhn said. "Speeds never dropped below 12 during last year's event. Some players said they were the best putting surfaces they'd ever seen all year."

Editor's note: "Tour of Duty" is a regular feature this year in Golf Course News. It is designed to celebrate the PGA Tour's unsung, underpublicized hero: The superintendent.

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