

Taking the next step

SUPERINTENDENTS CHANGE JOBS TO FIT WHERE THEY ARE IN THEIR CAREERS

by
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Golf course superintendents change jobs for different reasons, and some do it more than others. The average tenure of a golf course superintendent at a club or course is nine years, according to a 2004 *Golf Course News* subscriber profile survey, but that average is likely to decline in years ahead. The most common reason for a superintendent to change jobs is to advance his career. However, before making that move, there's much to consider.

Making the move

Tony Mancuso, CGCS, director of golf course operations at Cherokee Town & Country Club in Atlanta, made the move from Bellerive Country Club in St. Louis. While at Bellerive for six years, Mancuso hosted the 2004 Senior Open and had no intention of leaving. He says he had a wonderful relationship with the club's members.

However, the previous director of golf course operations at Cherokee, who knows Mancuso, gave a list of candidates for the job he was leaving to the club's c.o.o.

"I was on the short list," Mancuso says. "I got a call in 2004, a month after the Senior Open. The call came out of the blue. I had no thoughts of going anywhere."

Mancuso had to weigh a number of factors before deciding to make the move. His daughter had just graduated from high school and had been in a stable environment, and his wife was his administrative assistant at Bellerive, so there would be little adverse impact on the family if they moved.

"I'm turning 50 this summer, and if there was a time to make a move, this is the time because you're not as marketable at 55 as you are at 50," he says. "The c.o.o. of Cherokee was looking for a candidate who was about 50 years old and planned to remain at this job until retirement."



A month after hosting the 2004 Senior Open at Bellerive Country Club, Tony Mancuso received a phone call about a job at Cherokee Town & Country Club.

Photo: Ron Sherman

"It's a perfect fit at the perfect time," he says. "It was going to take that to pull me away from Bellerive."

Shortly before Mancuso left Bellerive, the club's general manager left to work for a golf club in South Florida. This also played into Mancuso's decision to leave.

On top of all that, Mancuso says he received an improved compensation package with the new job.

Unlike Mancuso, Glen Misiaszek moved from a public course to a private club. Misiaszek, golf course superintendent at the 18-hole Cohasset (Mass.) Golf Club, has been there since January 2004. He came from Shaker Hills Golf Club, an 18-hole, high-end daily-fee course, in Harvard, Mass.

Before Misiaszek took the job at the 110-year-old Cohasset course, he interviewed with two other clubs. He was selective and didn't want to take a job at a private course just because it was the type of course at which he wanted to work. He wanted to work for committed members, and his wife wanted to live near the coast.

"Cohasset had a master plan," he says. "They were building a maintenance facility. They had the funds. I clicked with the people I interviewed with, and they had a desire to put the course back to the way Donald Ross had originally designed it. We didn't even talk money when they called to offer me the job. It's an increase in pay, but because the cost of living is more expensive, it's a wash financially. Money didn't fill our pockets."

The move for Misiaszek had its challenges. Even though his wife had just finished graduate school, which worked out perfectly, she gave birth to their first child two weeks before they moved into their new house. That, along with buying one house and selling another, made the move more difficult, but everything worked out in the end, he says. However, being the new guy can be tough.

"I'm really confident on the job and am used to the business structure because I've done it before," Misiaszek says. "The personal changes were more stressful than the professional ones."

Unlike Mancuso and Misiaszek who left their old jobs by choice, Bryan Tipton, certified golf course superintendent at Eagle Ridge Golf Course in Williston, S.D., was terminated from his old job at Sutton Bay in Agar, S.D., last year.

"I was let go in June, but they didn't give me a reason," Tipton says. "I was offered the job at Sutton Bay in 2001, and in 2002, the course was built rapidly, and there was a

short grow-in period. We started seeding in August and September and opened in June the following year. Sutton Bay is in the dead center of the state. It endures three types of climates, and the weather is unpredictable. In the winter of 2003-2004, we had damage on the greens.

"I wasn't a supporter of putting covers on the greens," he adds. "On the greens where we used green covers, which was on all 18 greens of the championship course, we had damage in the spring. The greens we didn't cover, which are on the par-3 course, were perfect in the spring."

Last summer, Tipton applied for jobs, and a fertilizer sales representative friend told him of an opening that was the right fit for him. It was a nine-hole course where the owner was adding nine holes, similar to the course Tipton worked at before Sutton Bay. After being unemployed for about six months, Tipton was hired at Eagle Ridge.

Personally for Tipton, the move was more difficult than his last job change because he also was moving his wife and stepson, in addition to finding a house and acquiring a mortgage.

St. Louis to Atlanta

At Bellerive, an 18-hole private course designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr., Mancuso says the budget was between \$1.2 and \$1.3 million. The course has zoysiagrass tees, fairways and surrounds and Crenshaw bentgrass greens.

"St. Louis is the worst place to grow quality turf," he says. "The summer temperature is way hotter in St. Louis than in Atlanta, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association. St. Louis is at a 300-to-400-foot elevation, and it's right by two rivers. The humidity is stifling."

Mancuso says the St. Louis winters are



Photo: Cohasset Golf Club

One of the reasons Glen Misiaszek took the superintendent job at the Cohasset Golf Club is because of the members' support of the course.

feature Bermudagrass everywhere but greens because winterkill is less likely there.

"It's so much easier to maintain because it's all Bermudagrass," Mancuso says. "Guys in St. Louis are dependent on Mother Nature. When I was thinking about moving, I thought about having more control over a course in Atlanta than in St. Louis."

Another difference between the two courses, which Mancuso says are similar in prestige, is the workers. Mancuso says even though there are so many Hispanic workers in the industry, they're aren't many in St. Louis. There, he had Ethiopian staff members. In Atlanta, the staff is almost entirely Hispanic, which can create communications problems.

"I have a couple bilingual employees who help," Mancuso says. "I'm going to have to learn Spanish. Two superintendents and two assistants have been here four years,

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- TONY MANCUSO

so cold that Bermudagrass is risky to have because it's susceptible to winterkill.

"So we used zoysia and overseeded all the roughs with turf-type tall fescue," he says. "There are very oppressive conditions in St. Louis. I have the highest admiration for the group growing grass in St. Louis. The saying goes, 'You can go from St. Louis to anywhere and be successful.'"

In comparison, many courses in Atlanta

and they speak pretty good 'Spanglish.'"

Mancuso inherited everybody on staff and kept them. He has a staff of 60 in the summer and 35 during the winter.

"This was the next step up for me, partly because it's a larger operation," he says, adding that his budget is \$2.5 million. "Right now, I'm not doing anything at the town club, but I could be taking on the landscaping responsibilities there."

10 things superintendents should consider when changing jobs

1. Changing jobs too often can look bad on a resume.
2. If one has changed jobs often, justify the moves.
3. Don't take another job just because it pays more.
4. Factor in any cost of living change.
5. Look into the history and philosophy of the club/course.
6. Analyze the business side of the club/course.
7. Evaluate the staff, maintenance budget and equipment.
8. Show energy and commitment to the club/course during interviews.
9. Look at the benefits offered.
10. Look at the relationship between you, the g.m., green chairman and members.

Source: GCN research

For Mancuso, the transition has been smooth because he has roots in the South, attending college and beginning his career there.

"In my career, I personally wanted to host a major tournament, and I did; but now with this job, most likely I will not," he says. "I'd like to do it again, but if I don't, I feel good about what I've done."

Public to private

Before Cohasset, Misiaszek had been at Shaker Hills – a 13-year-old, 7,100-yard course that features bentgrass wall to wall

– for six years. He says the job was challenging because the staff pushed through 300 rounds a day and had double shotgun starts twice a week during the summer. Because of this, it was a challenge to get all the maintenance completed. However, Misiaszek enjoyed seeing new faces every day and dealing with one owner, which made for quick decisions.

"The job gave me the opportunity to be creative," he says. "However, the place was a factory. The amount of play was a disadvantage. There were some first-time golfers who did more damage to the course than those who golfed regularly. And the

negative side of having one owner is that if he decides to do something goofy, you're stuck with it."

The big difference between Shaker Hills and Cohasset is that Cohasset has more funds and more support from the membership, according to Misiaszek.

"At Shaker Hills, the budget was \$500,000, and with a budget of that size, in addition to the number of people coming through there daily, there weren't enough resources," he says. "At Cohasset, I have more time to work on the golf course."

At Cohasset, which generates between 19,000 and 20,000 rounds a year, the grass varieties include ryegrass, bluegrass, fescues and some bentgrass. And the soils are complex with 40 to 50 feet of peat bog. The budget to maintain the 6,200-yard 18-hole course is \$1 million.

"And the capital budget is much higher than when I was at Shaker Hills, where every equipment purchase had to be approved," Misiaszek says. "The amount of money I spent in 2004 at Cohasset on capital expenditures equaled that of what I spent the entire time I was at Shaker Hills."

Conditioning the course at Cohasset also is different than at Shaker Hills. For example, Misiaszek has the equipment to mow greens below one-tenth of an inch.

"The course is hard and fast," he says. "We can take the threshold and push the floor. We have the money to implement proper IPM programs."

Cohasset's staff of 23 is larger than Shaker Hills, which staffs 18 during the summer. Cohasset had 12 full-time maintenance workers, which Misiaszek thought was unnecessary.

"I laid six of them off and kept six and rehired the rest of the crew, which are mostly Brazilian," he says.

Downsizing

One of the things Tipton looks forward to most at Eagle Ridge is renovating the old fairways and interseeding the new low-mow bluegrasses he used at Sutton Bay.

"I have had a lot of superintendent friends at other courses comment on how well the new low-mow blues perform," he says. "A lot of courses could benefit from making the transition, but I don't hear of many trying to accomplish it."

One difference with Eagle Ridge compared to Sutton Bay is that the course is located farther from the banks of the Missouri River. Because of this, Tipton has to use wells for irrigation water.



Tony Mancuso is responsible for a larger operation at Cherokee Town & Country Club than his previous job.

Photo: Cherokee Town & Country Club

"The water is not as desirable as river water," he says. "I will be using a sulfur burner to treat the irrigation water to make it more usable. This should, in the long run, also correct some of the saline/sodic soil conditions at Eagle Ridge."

The biggest difference for Tipton with this new job is the proximity to the nearest town. The closest town to Sutton Bay was 30 miles away, so it was a 60-mile trip daily to the job and back. Tipton wanted to move to a less remote place and a stable community.

"Sutton Bay was a difficult course to maintain, partly because it was so remote and spread out," he says. "The distance from the clubhouse to the first hole is a mile and a half. The area we had to cover and the remoteness of the course was demanding. Getting supplies was difficult. There was no running into town for a spark plug. There was no room for error."

The budget at Sutton Bay was between \$250,000 and \$300,000 but should have been \$400,000, according to Tipton. Greens and tees were walk mowed, there was no local labor (it was all H2B workers), and there were 13 people on the crew.

"They ran a pretty tight ship," he says.

A sharp contrast to Sutton Bay – which has a lot of outside influences on how the course should be managed according to Tipton – Eagle Ridge is a semi-private



Photo: Cohasset Golf Club

The Cohasset Golf Club, a Donald Ross design, was a perfect fit for superintendent Glen Misiaszek.

"Some places won't interview you if you move too much because they view it as a negative," Tipton says. "But when you're terminated, you have no choice. I planned on staying at Sutton Bay. But I've got myself into the niche of grow-ins. It justifies the moving."

"Some places won't interview you if you move too much because they view it as a negative." - BRYAN TIPTON

course and has only one owner.

Tipton says it's hard to say what his budget will be at Eagle Ridge because the course is expanding to 18 holes, but he thinks it will be about \$200,000. Additionally, he will be able to hire most of his staff locally.

"It was a dream to go to Sutton Bay, but sometimes it drains you," he says. "Eagle Ridge is more of a fit. I had other opportunities at other places, but I like to do more than daily maintenance. I always want to improve a course. Some of these courses aren't the most desirable, but they need improvement and can boost my resume."

Words of advice

Even though superintendents change jobs for the better most times, they should think about changing jobs too often.

Misiaszek says as long as superintendents can justify their move, there's nothing bad with changing jobs often. However, if one moves just for money and shows no commitment to a club, it will resonate negatively on a resume. He also says that in the future, superintendents will change jobs more often because many of the older superintendents who stayed at clubs for 20 or 30 years are retiring.



Tipton

Misiaszek recommends superintendents consider the cost of living when looking into another job.

"That can take an increase in pay and make it a decrease," he says.

Misiaszek also suggests looking at the history and philosophy of a club, as well

as the business end of it.

"You don't want to jump to a sinking ship," he says. "Make sure the club is progressive. Evaluate everything – the staff, the budget of the past five years, the maintenance facility, the equipment – all that goes into making life happier."

Misiaszek says a superintendent needs to show a prospective club that he has the energy and commitment to take a course to the next level instead of being just the next superintendent.

A superintendent also has to assess much more than salary and benefits, but those have to be in line, Mancuso says.

"I know many people who've changed jobs for more money, but they ended up with a lot more headaches," he says.

"I work for the members, and the minute you think you're so important that you're indispensable, you'll be in trouble," he adds. "Three-quarters or more of the time jobs are lost is because of personality conflicts, and your ego gets the best of you and you think you're more important to the club than you are. Not many people are losing jobs because of agronomic problems. Superintendents have to get along with the club. Communication and relationships are everything. The longer I'm in this business, the more I cherish the relationships I have." GCN

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