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A Stimulus Plan that Will Pay Off

No one knows how the stimulus plan will turn out, but here's a plan we know works. To crowd out *Poa annua* and get dense, more diverse greens, interseed with the Penn bents. Superintendents say it's a small investment that pays big dividends, and who couldn't use that kind of confidence today? View success stories on our website: www.tee-2-green.com/interseeding.

**FREE** seed, 25lbs of Crystal BlueLinks plus 25lbs of any Tee-2-Green variety, with purchase of a T.I.P. seeder.
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There's a spot for a new controller on your course. How will you fill it?

Fact is, this used to be an easy answer. There were only a few choices in irrigation system controllers, and more or less they performed roughly the same. Well, that has changed quite a bit. The demand for increased water conservation, more flexibility, and better efficiency has led to dramatic breakthrough technologies, and many new options. So what used to be a routine decision isn't. (And, of course, irrigation controller technology isn't something most of us stay as up-to-date on as say who's at the top of the leaderboard at a PGA TOUR event, or who was just voted off the island last night.)

So where to go from here? That's the million-dollar question. Literally — the right controller system can have that much of an effect. First off, don't just consider the brand. Instead, look at capabilities too. If you do, you'll discover your choice is simpler than you might think. Because there are significant differences. For instance, there's a control system that can offer much greater precision (to the second instead of the minute) in setting rotor run times. Why is this important? Because shaving seconds of program run time can save hundreds of thousands of gallons of water over a year. Sometimes as much as 40% in total power and water costs. This same system also allows any controller to act as a central control for all the rest. Why does this matter? It's a huge time saver if you operate without a central, or during a renovation. Instead of having to visit each and every stand-alone controller on the course, you can just go to one. (Or simply hook one up to a maintenance radio and control them all. Or even better, connect one to the internet with a modem, and manage the whole irrigation system from anywhere you can access the internet, like the clubhouse—or perhaps the couch in front of your TV at home.) Then, there's the question of how easy the controller is to upgrade in the future—as more and more sensor and web-based technology comes online. Here again, the answer is simpler than you might expect. Only one control system is totally software-based. Which means upgrading is just a matter of connecting the controller to a laptop and taking only a few minutes to upload the latest software.

What is this advanced system? It's the John Deere Aurora Control Series. Sure it might not be the first name you consider in irrigation, but when you look at everything it offers, it might be just the right one to fill the position. Like to learn more? Call your local John Deere Golf distributor or visit www.JohnDeere.com/Aurora.
Opportunity to influence

I just finished reading Monroe Miller's article on mentoring (page 30, July). Excellent advice, as always. Often, I think we fail to realize what an impact (and opportunity) we may have on those people we interact with during our day-to-day lives. Whether it be a chance encounter with a student, a longer tenured intern or even coaching a kid's sport during our non-work hours, there's a chance to set an example.

Monroe delivered that message well and I shared it with the Green Section staff. We all need to remember the role we play with the students selected to participate in USGA Green Section's week-long internship program. It may not be long, but I believe we have a significant opportunity to demonstrate important lessons for their future.

Kimberly S. Erusha, Ph.D
Director of Education
USGA
Far Hills, N.J.

Correction

The parent company of Chariot Run Golf Club was misrepresented in the July issue (Smart Irrigation supplement, page S16). Harrah's Entertainment owns Chariot Run. The editors regret the error.
THE PYTHIUM WE CAN PROTECT YOU FROM. THE GOLFERS WE CAN'T.

WITH THE NEW CHEMISTRY OF FLUOPICOLIDE AND THE PROVEN POWER OF PROPAMOCARB COMBINED IN ONE PREMIX, STELLAR® FUNGICIDE PROTECTS YOUR COURSE WITH POWERFUL PYTHIUM CONTROL. AFTER ALL, YOUR TURF IS ALREADY UNDER ENOUGH ATTACK, ISN'T IT?

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SECRET SHOPPING

A s the publisher of Golf Course Industry and our sister publication, Lawn & Landscape, I'm occasionally "forced" to travel to events being held at nice resorts. Yes, it's a tough job, but I do my best to put up with it.

My most recent trip was to a well-known golf/conference facility in Georgia. It was a gorgeous place with a great course and I enjoyed some wonderful time with green industry colleagues. That said, a number of things - both good and bad - really struck me:

• Given the airlines' new restrictions on bags (e.g., charging $50 to take your golf clubs along), why wouldn't every course that does any level of travel-golf business do a better job of promoting rental sets? The cost of bringing your clubs has, as the author Malcolm Gladwell says, reached the "tipping point" vs. the cost of renting them on site.

• I'm guessing that 95 percent of the participants in our group (about 100 people) had never seen the course. Why not provide at least one yardage book per group as part of the event package? Just build it into the package price. Obviously, it's an extra cost but it may help you attract repeat business. After all, do you really want participants to walk away from the outing hating your course because they had no idea what was in front of them most of the time?

As someone who ends up being a "secret shopper" at corporate outings, I thought it might be helpful to pass these observations along. Though I was in Georgia as a golf traveler, these observations don't apply just to destination courses. Most golf facilities have private outings and other events they can turn into creative, revenue-generating opportunities.

As one who is intimately involved in the industry, I think it's also helpful to consider why these little things make a big difference. The bottom line is creativity: trying new things, listening to your customers and being willing to think differently about your facility and how you treat guests and drive revenue.

At what point will other services you provide reach that tipping point Gladwell talks about? Do you consistently seek to identify these opportunities? Does every employee across your organization know that his or her ideas are encouraged and welcomed? If so, we'd like to hear about your unique programs. Send them to us at gci@gie.net, and we'll print our favorites.
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A new golf course

Five years ago, the announcement of a new golf course usually got lost in the shuffle of 300 to 500 new golf courses being built. Now that the number of new U.S. course starts has dropped 99 percent to about three to five this year, the press release of a new golf course I'm designing in Mayetta, Kan., was big news, drawing inquiries from as far away as England. I can only be described as being a “happy camper” to have the chance to design this course. I will spend the next few months chronicling the ideas and techniques behind the process.

Of course, to design the golf course, we had to “sell the job” against incredible competition. The Prairie Band of Potawatomi decided to build a golf course almost as soon as it built its casino in 1998, but first it had to complete other important reservation facilities such as hospitals and schools. I actually visited with them around 2000 when working in the area.

By August of 2008, they were ready to go and issued an RFQ to 13 golf course architects who had expressed interest. They received twice that many proposals from others who heard about the process. However, during the process, they decided to switch to a design/build approach; because golf was new to them, some of their staff preferred this method, and other tribes had used that approach. They reissued the RFP as a design/build proposal.

Luckily for me, Native American pro golfer Notah Begay III lives in Dallas, knew me and was interested in designing golf courses for Native American tribes. He had completed one project as a consultant, but wanted to design his first signature course with a qualified golf course architect he could work well with, and we hit it off. He also had a relationship with an excellent golf course builder, Landscapes Unlimited, whom I also had used on previous projects.

We formed a team that probably was “the leader in the clubhouse” between Notah's star power and personal connection, the design/build experience of Landscapes Unlimited, especially in Native American courses, and my track record of already having designed the top two public courses in Kansas and a highly ranked Native American course in Minnesota, which happens to be the chairman’s favorite course. But we took nothing for granted. I think we won the commission not so much on past qualifications, but on our hard work in putting together our proposal and presentation.

Our proposal addressed their specific concerns. We prepared a routing and some before and after pictures of what their course would look like. We discussed pros and cons of different clubhouse and maintenance area locations. We reviewed existing water tests and sent soil samples for soil tests. We showed how our design/build team would provide more than architecture, by designing them a golf course Web site, developing preliminary youth golf and soccer programs (one of Notah’s passions) and showing Landscapes Unlimited’s comprehensive budget control program.

We took great care to understand the land that’s equally important in both Native American culture and golf course design. We discussed how their site had three unique site “zones” (agriculture, pasture and heavy woods) and how the design would take advantage of each. They knew that Notah and I had walked the land multiple times, in part because someone called security upon seeing strangers driving on the property. In once case, a council member helped tow my rental car from the mud. While nearly being arrested is not usually good business practice, in this case, I think it paid benefits in securing the job for our team. The decision came down just before Christmas 2008, which was a nice present.
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COMMISSIONING A GPS SURVEY

GPS mapping can be as complicated as the purchase of your first cell phone. It's not until you receive the first bill that you fully realize you didn't understand the program.

Not all GPS surveys are comparable. The end product that the course receives needs to be highly accurate, as that's the purpose of creating the map in the first place. GPS mapping options and levels of accuracy can be a bit overwhelming and just as confusing as that cell phone plan. Hopefully I can provide a few points to aid you in choosing a service, but first let's review just how the GPS collection and mapping process works.

WHAT IS IT?

GPS is a satellite-based navigation system made up of a network of 24 satellites operating in high orbit (18,000-28,000 km). Created by the Department of Defense, it was originally intended for military applications, but in the 1980s, it was made available for civilian use. GPS works in any weather condition, anywhere in the world, 24 hours a day.

HOW IT WORKS

GPS satellites circle the earth twice a day in a very precise orbit and transmit radio signals to earth. A GPS unit (receiver) obtains this information and uses triangulation to calculate its location. Basically, the GPS compares the time a signal is transmitted by a satellite and the time it was received (around .06 seconds). The difference tells the GPS how far away the satellite is from the unit. By using the same process with a few more satellites, the receiver triangulates its position. The GPS unit is connected to a datalogger that can store this position information and other data associated to it.

HOW ACCURATE IS IT?

There are a number of factors that affect the accuracy of a GPS receiver. Orbital errors, satellites positions, atmospheric delays, heavy tree canopies, buildings and timing errors are just a few. These errors are inherent in every GPS unit; what makes the real difference in the final accuracy the unit produces is the quality of the receiver, the method by which the error is differentially corrected and the way in which the equipment is used by the operator. This equipment is not available at your local sporting goods store. The numerous ways in which various GPS units deal with correcting these errors can be very complex and difficult to understand let alone explain. Adding insult to injury is the way in which the manufacturers themselves characterize accuracy. Have you ever heard the expression, “The devil is in the details?” Well that is especially true with GPS datasheets.

Here is a real example: “Accuracy (HRMS)# after differential correction” = 30 cm.”

The actual footnote for this example has almost 200 words that in extremely technical terms explain that this unit will only achieve the 30 cm level of accuracy 68 percent of the time even under perfect conditions, and that in reality this unit will have a sigma 3 accuracy level of somewhere around 2 to 5 meters, as much as 16 feet.

When it comes to units, you get what you pay for:
- Recreational unit – $100 to $500 = 5 to 15 meters;
- Mapping grade unit (handheld) – $3,000 to $5,000 = 2 to 5 meters;
- Mapping grade unit (with external antenna) – $8,000 to $15,000 = 1 to 3 meters;
- Survey grade GPG unit – $30,000 to $50,000-plus = sub-mm to sub-cm.

WHAT DOES YOUR CLUB NEED?

Most clubs are looking for a high level of accuracy. Sometimes it's nearly impossible to achieve high accuracy positions with GPS alone due to obstructions such as heavy tree canopy or buildings. In cases like this it's essential to use more conventional survey equipment that is designed to work seamlessly with the GPS. One such piece of equipment is a robotics optical total station. With this type of unit, the obstructed positions can be determined by establishing known positions in open areas with integrated GPS. These positions then can be used to establish a setup point and a bearing. With that information the unit will use a high accuracy laser to calculate the distance and bearing to the operator using a pole with a 360-degree prism mounted at the top. The unit can robotically track the operator continuously transmitting his position via a radio link between the units (even under canopy). As long as the operator has line of sight back to the unit, positions can be collected. These positions are not affected by the obstructed GPS signal and can maintain the high accuracy required.

Certainly it's very challenging to continually explain all the items that go into a quality mapping collection, but don't be fooled by claims that a map can be created to a high level of accuracy with unaccredited equipment. It's just not true. All you'll be left with is an inaccurate map that won't be an asset for the club.
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THE MONROE DOCTRINE

SOME GOOD NEWS FROM MICHIGAN

There isn’t much positive news coming out of Michigan these days. The economic crash hit the auto industry hard, and that means it hit Detroit and Michigan really hard. Nobody is cheering the misery caused by the bankruptcies of GM and Chrysler, but there isn’t a lot of sympathy, either. Years of incompetent and greedy management by auto execs, coupled with outrageous and excessive benefits and pay for the unions, got them to where they are today.

Detroit is a mess. The mayor was recently sent to jail, and the wife of U.S. Congressman John Conyers is also headed to jail for accepting cash bribes as a Detroit City Council member. Average homes are valued at a few thousand dollars, and crime is almost out of control. The only good things I can think of that I like in Detroit are John K. King Used and Rare Books and the farmers’ market. It seems doubtful I’ll ever visit either again.

But I am going to Michigan this summer to immerse myself in the places you aren’t reading about today. They all involve golf.

Golf has a rich heritage in Michigan. My wife, Cheryl, is from Frankfort, a quaint town on the Lake Michigan shore. Nearly everyone involved in golf knows about Frankfort; it’s the home of Crystal Downs, the Alister MacKenzie gem that is on everyone’s list of best classic golf courses in America. CDCC is also well known for its excellent golf course superintendent, Mike Morris. Mike is one of the best and is also a native of Frankfort.

Frankfort has a prominent place in Michigan golf history for other reasons. People my age are well aware of how important Tuck Tate was to golf turf. He has been gone a number of years now, but I still think of him frequently. Tuck owned the Frankfort Golf Club; he was a leader in the Northern Michigan Turf Managers Association and a strong supporter of turfgrass research at Michigan State University. Bill Bengeyfield, retired national director of the USGA Green Section, succeeded Tuck as owner of the Frankfort Golf Club, which he purchased from Tuck when he retired. Bengeyfield sold the course to a developer two years ago.

My in-laws live in Traverse City, and in the twilight of his career, one of my favorite golf characters spent most of his time in that part of Michigan. Walter Hagen owned a home on Long Lake before he bought one on Lake Cadillac. Two of my favorite golf books are about Hagen — “Sir Walter” By Tom Clavin and “The Walter Hagen Story” by the Haig himself. Hagen, of course, was one of the greatest professional golfers ever and captivated crowds on golf courses all over the world. He was a showman, as well, and was hired as the first club pro at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Hills.

A trip to Michigan would be incomplete without a visit to The Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum in Grand Rapids. There you’re reminded of President Ford’s love of golf and his erratic driving of the ball into crowds gathered to watch him play.

It’s a short run from Grand Rapids to East Lansing, home of Michigan State University. MSU has given us some of the best turfgrass researchers and instructors in the country. Think about Dr. Jim Beard, who started his career at MSU and spent many highly productive years there. Professor Joe Vargas will be long remembered for his contributions to pathology; his legacy will include outstanding grad students who filled turfgrass faculty positions elsewhere. Peter Cookingham has done a masterful job managing the Turfgrass Information Center at the MSU libraries. And then there’s Dr. Paul Reike, one of the brightest, most humble and dedicated men I have ever met.

Michigan has given so much to golf turf. Just think — during my career, five GCSAA presidents came out of Michigan – Ted Woehrle, James Timmerman, Gerald Faubel, William Roberts and Jon Maddern. The roster of GCSAA’s John Morley Award winners includes many Michiganders and the state is well represented on the USGA’s Green Section Award recipient list. The MTF and Gordon LaFontaine set a great example for the rest of us for years, and environmental stewardship had an early and strong foothold in Michigan.

Are you looking for a golf course architect? In Michigan you’ll find men like Tom Doak, Ray Hearn, Jerry Mathews, Paul Albanese and others. Michigan has hosted some of golf’s most important championships and tournaments, has more outstanding golf courses than I could name, and she has golf course superintendents the whole country knows about.

From a history that includes William Beal and Liberty Hyde Bailey, MSU continues with its important role today, despite an extremely depressed state economy. That said, I still hope Wisconsin rolls over them in football and basketball later this year!

From my home I can get to Michigan by plane or by car ferry. I can drive around the horn through Chicago, or I can cross the big Mac on the northern route. However I go, the last thing I’m thinking about is the bad news from the auto industry and Detroit. I’m thinking about golf and how much this state has given to all of us involved in the great game. That should make the entire state proud.

Monroe Miller is a retired golf course superintendent. He spent 36 years as superintendent at Blackhawk Country Club in Madison, Wis. Miller can be reached at groots@charter.net.

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Go to www.NameThatSuper.com/GCI for a chance to win $1,000 worth of products.
A glimpse of how golfers’ behavior affects the business of golf facility maintenance and management.

Tracking driver and ball buyers

Customer profiles can be an important tool to help drive revenue at any facility. The National Golf Foundation released its “Golf Consumer Buying Profiles” report in June 2009 based on a survey of 2,400 adult core golfers conducted in November 2008. Core golfers play eight or more rounds per year. A few highlights include:

**DRIVER BUYERS** (those who bought a new driver in the past year for at least $100):
- Who are male bought 84 percent of all drivers sold.
- In the 18-29 age range are 30 percent more likely to have bought a driver in the past year than total core golfers.
- With household incomes of $100,000-plus are responsible for purchasing 50 percent of all drivers sold, despite making up 38 percent of core golfers.
- Who score 80-89 make up 27 percent of core golfers, but purchase 45 percent of drivers sold.

**PREMIUM GOLF BALL BUYERS** (those who bought at least two dozen new golf balls in the past year for $24 or more per dozen):
- Who are female are 25 percent less likely to have bought premium balls than core golfers.
- With household income of $100,000-plus are responsible for purchasing 56 percent of all premium golf balls.
- Who score less than 80: 51 percent of them bought premium balls, compared to 32 percent of those who score 80-89, 23 percent of those who score 90-99 and 8 percent of those who score 100-plus.
- Who subscribe to golf magazines spend 69 percent of all dollars spent on premium golf balls. Those who watch golf on TV at least weekly spent 81 percent of all dollars spent on premium golf balls.

**NON-PREMIUM GOLF BALL BUYERS** (those who bought at least two dozen new golf balls in the past year for less than $24 per dozen):
- Who are female are 31 percent more likely to have bought non-premium balls than core golfers.
- Who are 40-49, despite making up only 20 percent of core golfers, are responsible for buying a quarter of non-premium golf balls.
- Who score 100-plus: 32 percent of them have bought non-premium balls in the last year, compared to only 8 percent of those scoring less than 80.
Emerald fungicide, dollar spot isn't one of them. A unique mode of action helps Emerald effectively control dollar spot that has developed a resistance to other fungicides — even at low use rates. So put Emerald in your rotation or tank mix. And don't worry. Be happy.

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When it comes to work/life balance, superintendents are often their own worst enemies.

BY MIKE ZAWACKI
Ten months ago Jeff Sweet’s world changed. A self-described workaholic, Sweet, CGCS, says his newborn daughter’s arrival made him more conscious about striking a balance between the 70-plus hours a week at Bucks Run Golf Club in Mt. Pleasant, Mich., and his new parental responsibilities.

“You want to make sure you don’t miss all of the intangibles that life brings you now,” he says. “You find yourself asking, ‘It’s 4:30 p.m. and why am I not at home?’

“You don’t want to look back 15 years from now with regret,” Sweet adds. “You won’t ever be saying to yourself, ‘Gosh, I wish I would have worked harder.’” Sweet’s predicament – establishing an acceptable balance between work and life – is a scenario familiar to superintendents, their assistants and their crews. No one enters the profession naive to the fact that it’s a physically, mentally and emotionally demanding vocation.

And for some, this devotion mirrors addiction.

“I just always felt the need to be at work and I wasn’t happy unless I was at work,” Sweet says. “I don’t know if I was wired wrong, but I wasn’t happy unless I was at work and making sure that everything was getting done properly.”

This shared perspective is part of the problem, says Bill Bieck, CGCS, Heritage Hills Golf Course, McCook, Neb. Superintendents have always sought the unattainable – course perfection.

“Many superintendents, especially us old-timers, are very dedicated to the profession and to the job,” says Bieck, who’s spent 34 years as a superintendent. “We strive for perfection and we know when things aren’t perfect. Unfortunately, we also know we can never reach perfection, but that doesn’t stop us from striving toward that goal.”

Throughout their careers, the scales in many superintendents’ lives skew toward work and the golf course. As a result, they make sacrifices. According to a Golf Course Industry survey, the majority of superintendents cancel appointments with family, friends or spouses due to work-related commitments. Few have the time or energy for leisure activities or hobbies. Likewise, their duties make it difficult to relax, leading to irritability and detachment while away from the facility. (See GCI’s Work/Life Balance Survey on page 23.)

“In this industry, it’s easy to become immersed in a whole myriad of challenges and issues within the job,” says Bob Hickam, director of golf, Tahoe Mountain Club, Truckee, Calif. “In a lot of cases, it’s a 12-hour day, 365-day a year operation that we manage. There are no breaks and there are no holidays because those days are our busiest times.”

Current economic conditions have only exacerbated the work/life challenge in most U.S. business sectors. According to a recent FedEx Office survey, 86 percent of full-time workers planned to pursue a better work/life balance this year. Likewise, 96 percent place greater importance on their work/life balance this year than they did in 2008.

But even before the recent economic downturn, professionals were focused on greater work/life balance. According to a 2007 Monster Worldwide study, 89 percent of employees believed work/life balance programs – such as flex and vacation time – were important when evaluating new jobs, yet only about half of human resources professionals considered work/life balance to be an important initiative for their companies.

Work/life balance always has been an issue in the American workplace, says Terrence Sember, a management consultant in Clarence, N.Y., and the author of “The Essential Supervisor’s Handbook.”

“Managers and employees both feel the pressure to survive or succeed at work and that’s what drives people out of balance,” Sember says. “It’s easier to say ‘no’ or ‘not now’ to family and friends because the repercussions are potentially less immediate and visible. At work, clients, bosses and coworkers may be less tolerant of choosing life versus work, and to avoid potential ramifications they can’t or don’t say no. Likewise, many people define themselves by their work. So a perceived failure there can shake someone to their core.”

**OWN WORST ENEMY**

The paradox, though, is most superintendents recognize the value in work/life harmony, and many have taken steps to facilitate balance, not only in their personal lives, but in the lives of their crews, as well.

Outside of the golf course industry, the average overextended U.S. worker is more apt to point the finger at job expectations and corporate culture for their work/life imbalance. This is not necessarily so in the golf course industry. Very few superintendents blame their club presidents or boards for an unbalanced life. In fact, more than half (see the chart on page 24) say their superiors are accommodating and sensitive to their family-related needs and responsibilities. Likewise, majority (54 percent) say they’re encouraged to strike a work/life balance, and more than half don’t believe they’re expected to put their jobs before their families.

So why is there personal conflict? Jeff Holiday, CGCS, has received nothing less than the full support of his superiors at Salisbury Country Club in Midlothian, Va., to maintain a work/life balance. Holiday’s sense of dedication – a trait he describes as being “hardwired into him early on as an assistant – is the
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overriding factor.

"I put more pressure on myself than my membership or my general manager just because I want everything to look good," Holiday says. "It's a part of me. I want my members to be satisfied and happy with the way things are going.

"For three months out of the year – June, July and August – it's hard to have balance," Holiday says. "Those are three months where my dedication is to the golf course. My family understands that."

While they may struggle with their own issues, many superintendents are particularly sensitive about work/life balance in their employees' lives. Some will go so far as to chew out a subordinate they catch neglecting their family duties.

“I've always had some single parents (on staff) and I've made it a point to say, 'Listen, your kids are No. 1. There's nothing that's life threatening on this golf course that you should neglect your children for,'” says Thom Martinek, superintendent at Oberlin Golf Club in Oberlin, Ohio. “I drive that point home enough to say that I'd dismiss them if I ever caught them neglecting their children to stay at work for an extra hour.”

Gregory Jack, assistant superintendent at The Old Collier Golf Club in Naples, Fla., is waiting for his opportunity to become a superintendent. In the meantime, there's pressure to test his mettle, which is often gauged by long hours and hard work.

“When you're working six days a week there's not a lot of time left over for personal things in your life,” Jack says. “My specialty is irrigation systems. We use brackish water and we have to flush the brackish water out with fresh water. We found out that the most efficient way of doing this was overnight. So that required me to work 24 to 28 hours straight. I'd go to work at 5:30 a.m. and leave at 8:30 a.m. the next morning.

"I guess you could say that's when you really start to feel the pressure," he adds.

While many superintendents say dedication and commitment are traits they seek in assistants, burnout is not.

“I remember one kid in particular who wanted to work all of the time,” says Tim Powers, CGCS, Crystal Springs Golf Course, Burlingame, Calif. “I said, 'You just can't do that. You need to go home.' We really are our own worst enemies.”

Bieck agrees. Many superintendents bring this problem on themselves. In his three decades as a superintendent, work/life balance has been a key issue and he's authored a number of articles over the years addressing the topic.

No superintendent intends to play favorites, but it’s no secret that the demands of a superintendent's job can swell and overwhelm life off the course. Despite Bieck's best intentions, there were instances in his own career when the demands of his golf course superseded those of his family. “I've really tried to guard myself against that and prevent that from happening,” Bieck says. “But sometimes there are emergencies that happen on the golf course and our families are forced to take a backseat.”

**TROUBLESHOOTING**

To an outsider, Powers has a no-win situation. He lives on the grounds of Crystal Springs Golf...
GCI'S WORK/LIFE BALANCE SURVEY

In June, Golf Course Industry magazine surveyed 374 superintendents and assistant superintendents via an online survey service. Here are some of the results.

Do you work too much?

YES 52%  NO 48%

Would your family, friends and/or spouse consider you a “workaholic?”

YES 62%  NO 38%

Which of the following would improve your work/life balance?

- 73% Additional staff
- 54% Less cost cutting
- 47% Better/new equipment
- 45% Better communication
- 36% Larger salary
- 34% Better planning
- 32% Clearer objectives and expectations
- 29% Less red tape
- 25% More vacation
- 23% Positive attitudes towards managing workloads
- 12% More control over workload

How frequently does this happen to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irritable at home because of work</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become detached at home because you are thinking about work</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancel appointments with family/friends due to work-related commitments</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have a lot of energy for leisure activities</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not have time for hobbies</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work obligations make it difficult to relax</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Course, and his home is about 195 yards from his office. While the temptation is to work all the time, Powers says 18 years as a superintendent has taught him how essential a few ground rules are for work/life balance.

"The most important thing is I go home at 1:30 every day," he says. "Sure, we could do stuff all day, but by saying I'm done at 1:30 makes me organize and prioritize more to get what needs to get done, done. You put things off and suddenly you have things stacked to the ceiling that need to get done and it'll drive you crazy."

Short of changing industries, how can superintendents better balance their lives? First, superintendents must lead by example. Since most superintendents don’t judge the hours they’re putting in as excessive, it becomes their

...
way of life, says Piscataway, N.J.-based business consultant Deb Bailey. They look around at their peers and everyone else is putting in those same hours, so they don’t seem out of the ordinary.

"Managers can encourage a work/life balance with their employees by having one for themselves," Bailey says. "That means placing more emphasis on the work performed and less on the hours one spends to complete it."

Next, superintendents need to trust in their crews and realize their job as supervisors is to manage workers, not babysit them.

"I trust my employees to do their jobs and I empower them to make decisions on their own," says Sweet about how he’s created more work/life balance. "That way I can feel comfortable about being away from the golf course."

"We’ve done cutbacks and we’re at the lowest (staff) level we’ve ever been at, but I’d have to say it’s my most efficient staff," he adds. "We kept on the strongest people and the most experienced and they’re able to do their jobs in a timely manner so that we all can get out of here on time."

In addition to better organization and coordination, Hickam says another key is communicating that a balanced work/life philosophy is a priority and a part of your shared culture at the course. "I make it clear to my team members that they need to find work/life balance," he says. "It provides an atmosphere for excellence. A fresh employee – a fresh professional who has that balance – is going to perform on a level that’s healthy and they’re going to enjoy their job. If you don’t have that then there’s no way you’re going to deliver on a standard of excellence." GCI

To what extent do you agree with the following statements in relation to the work/life balance afforded to you at your golf course?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My superiors are accommodating of my family-related needs</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management encourages sensitivity to employees’ family and personal needs</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management is sensitive toward employee child care responsibilities</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the event of a conflict, my superiors understand when I put family first</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am encouraged to strike a balance between my work and family lives</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult for me to leave during the workday to take care of personal or family matters</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To turn down a promotion for family-related reasons would seriously hurt my career</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get ahead, I am expected to work more than 40 hours a week</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am expected to put my job before my family</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boasting about my work/life imbalance demonstrates my commitment and my solid work ethic</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GCI Work/Life Balance Survey
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At Hermitage Country Club in Manakin Sabot, Va., superintendent Keith Fellenstein occasionally uses DMI fungicides to combat fairy ring. He cautions others to be careful about using DMIs in the heat and to conduct tests before making DMI applications in the summer.

Like a beware-of-the-dog sign alerting a mailman or unknowing visitors, superintendents have that same caution from researchers and peers when it comes to using DMI fungicides on bentgrass during the heat of summer when turf is stressed. Turf damage is what they're trying to prevent.

All DMI (demethylation inhibitor) fungicides have growth-regulating properties, says Lane Tredway, associate professor and extension specialist in the turfgrass pathology department at N.C. State University.

DMIs include Banner Maxx, Bayleton, Eagle, Rubigan, Tourney, Trinity and Triton. The later three are supposed to have less growth-regulating effects than the older products; nonetheless, they still have growth-regulating effects. DMI fungicides' main disease targets are dollar spot, brown patch and anthracnose.

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"Combine a DMI application, hot weather and severely stressed turf and the consequences can be disastrous," Tredway says.

Because DMIs have growth-regulating effects, turf can end up off color and off texture, says Megan Kennedy, assistant professor, extension and research, horticultural crops in the department of plant pathology at Kansas State University. DMIs can make turf lush and green, but they also can make some turf blueish in color. And they can cause the texture of a leaf blade to get thicker.

"The more common problem is undesirable color," Kennedy says. "It's a strange, blue color. You see it in putting greens."

The higher the rate, the more likely the growth-regulating effect will occur. Turf managers can lower the risk by using a low rate of DMI mixed with other fungicides. High-stress conditions play into the regulator effect, too.

"I don't recommend using DMIs in the heat of the summer," Kennedy says.

Contact fungicides such as chlorothalonil, boscalid, thiophanate and iprodione are suggested alternatives to DMI use.

SELECTION AND TIMELY USE
Jim Husting, CGCS, at Woodbridge (Calif.) Golf & Country Club, is in the know about avoiding DMI use when temperatures are high.

"I've never run into trouble with DMIs because I attend GCSAA seminars and have subscribed to PACE for years," he says, referring to the turf management information service. "I value what they have to say. When Larry (Stowed) says don't use DMIs in the heat of the summer, I don't. And if you use PGRs, that's a double whammy. I keep my nose to the books and absorb as much as possible. I knock off the DMIs before June and don't go back to them until after Labor Day."

Husting, who has been at Woodbridge for 24 summers, manages old push-up Poa annua greens, Poa/rye/bermuda fairways and rye tees with a $1.23-million budget, $82,000 of which is spent on fungicides.

"I've gotten burned one too many times trying to skip a fungicide application," he says. "This is a private club, so the margin of error is minimal."

Husting's big three diseases are summer patch, anthracnose and Southern blight. He sprays preventively and curatively, but strategically, meaning he sprays selected cool-season fairways regularly but not the predominately bermudagrass fairways, on which he applies only PGRs.

Husting's greens are on a strict preventive program – he sprays once a week, alternating systemic and contact fungicides from April through October. Tees are sprayed strategically in June, July and August. From mid-October to mid-April, he treats for snow mold preventively; from mid-February to mid-April, he treats for yellow patch.

Husting uses DMIs, mostly Banner Maxx, in the spring, fall and winter for suppressing anthracnose and summer patch.
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“DMIs are a nice, broad systemic fungicide you can use in nonstressful times,” he says. “But most people are cautionary. It’s going to be 103 and 105 degrees this week, and I don’t know anybody using DMIs right now.”

LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE AND OTHERS

Like Husting, Andy Fries has been burned before – to the point where he lost a job. “I had used DMIs with no regard as far as unwanted growth regulation, says Fries, CGCS, at Brownson Country Club in Huntington, Conn. “Years ago, I got into trouble on a golf course and was let go. Banner Maxx at a high rate was my style, but that was four years ago. A sales guy and message boards have helped, so I’ve tried to avoid DMIs. I don’t have a check plot. I’m just going off others’ experiences.”

Fries, in his second season at Brownson (last year he was an assistant) manages bent/Poa greens, rye/bent/Poa tees and fairways and rye/blue/fescue rough with a maintenance budget of $570,000 and a chemical budget of $82,000. The top two diseases Fries battles are anthra-

DMI fungicide use on creeping bentgrass during heat stress

Superintendents must use extreme caution when applying DMI fungicides (Banner, Bayleton, Eagle, Rubigan, Tournay, Trinity and Triton) to creeping bentgrass putting greens. These products can cause severe phytotoxicity, thinning and even death of creeping bentgrass if the turf is severely stressed from heat, drought or other factors. The potential for injury is much greater when high label rates are used and when high temperatures are consistently above 90° F. There are differences among the DMIs in their potential to cause injury – some are safer than others – but none of the currently available DMIs can be classified as safe on bentgrass during 90-plus degree weather. Additionally, there are few situations in which DMI applications are necessary or beneficial during the summer because safer chemistries are available for control of most summer diseases. The DMIs are most useful during the fall and spring to prevent diseases such as dollar spot, summer patch, take-all patch, fairy ring, snow mold, yellow patch, etc.

Anthracnose is the only disease that warrants DMI applications during the summer, but this is only a concern for superintendents managing older bentgrass varieties such as Penncross, Pennlinks, Dominant, Dominant Plus, L-93 and Crenshaw.

If a DMI application is necessary to control anthracnose during the summer, use low label rates and tank-mix with chlorothalonil to prevent algae infestations. The Penn A and G series bentgrasses are essentially immune to anthracnose in North Carolina, so this disease is not a concern for superintendents managing these grasses.

Tredway is an associate professor and extension specialist in the turfgrass pathology department at N.C. State University. He contributes to a blog about turf diseases at turf Diseases.blogspot.com.

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crose and summer patch. His spray program for greens is every 10 to 14 days with Banner, Daconil and Medallion; in fairways he sprays Curalan, Daconil and Banner every 14 days.

In July, Fries uses Headway on greens, tees and fairways, and is trying to get away from DMIs or go with lower rates or combo products.

"This year, I’m trying to avoid DMIs," he says. "The weather will dictate whether I will use DMIs or not. If it’s in the mid to low 70s, I might sneak in a high rate of a DMI. I won’t abandon DMIs altogether this year because I’m using the products we have in stock. Next year, I might get rid of the DMIs altogether. I’ll make the purchasing decisions for next year, and Triton, Tourney and Trinity are some DMIs I’ll look at."

OTHER CHOICES
Keith Fellenstein, superintendent of the Sabot Course at 36-hole Hermitage Country Club in Manakin Sabot, Va., manages L-93 bentgrass greens and Valmont bermudagrass rough, tees and fairways. Pythium root dysfunction, fairy ring and take-all patch are his top three diseases. On a preventive fungicide program, Fellenstein rotates Signature and Banol, getting as much as 28 days of control based on the weather. He also uses chlorothalonil, iprodione and thiophanate-methyl.

Fellenstein doesn’t have much dollar spot and brown patch, hence, not as strong of a need to use DMIs.

"I’m not sure if it’s because L-93 is more resistant to those diseases or it’s my fertility program," he says. "I’m not sure why."

However, because fairy ring is Fellenstein’s No. 2 disease, he uses Bayleton as a preventive application in the spring and ProStar as a curative one.

In the past, he has used Banner preventively for dollar spot control, but didn’t apply it this summer.

"There are so many other options for what I’m targeting, with the exception of fairy ring," he says. "I’d rather go with a less risky fungicide. If I’m going after dollar spot and brown patch, I’ll use chlorothalonil, fipronil and thiophanate-methyl most times. I get at least seven days of coverage and as many as 21 days."

Overall, Fellenstein recommends superintendents be careful about how much fungicide they apply and when. Fellenstein keeps a good rotation and periodically introduces a new product.

"The key is during high-stress periods that can set the bentgrass back," he says.

Academics and superintendents are the reasons Fellenstein knows about the growth-regulator effect of DMIs with PGR use.

"People growing Poa/bentgrass turf said DMIs were very harsh on the Poa—that’s where most of the cautionary tales came from," he says. "We work so hard to make it through the summer, we don’t like to take chances. There are so many options/alternatives for treatments. I don’t have a problem with DMIs, but I’d caution anyone using DMIs in the summer. Test before going out with any application." GC

John Walsh is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.
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Superintendents look to reduce maintenance labor when weighing bunker liner options. By Marisa Palmieri

Superintendents pursuing bunker renovations these days have much more of a selection when it comes to liners than did their counterparts of even a decade ago.

When they select liners — whether it’s synthetic fabric or sprayed-on liquid or concrete material — superintendents consider several factors. Bunker design, cost, longevity and future maintenance needs are at the top of their lists.

"No. 1 is what type of architecture you're dealing with," says Brian Anderson, CGCS, at Nemacolin Woodlands Resort in Farmington, Pa. "No. 2 is the sand and the base, like if you're trying to keep white sand from being contaminated by the base soil. But architecture will dictate a lot."

Sean Dyer, golf course maintenance director at Sherwood Country Club in Thousand Oaks, Calif., looks at lifespan, playing conditions and maintenance.

"How is it going to hold up over the years?" Dyer says. "How will it affect playability? How will it keep my contamination down, drain the water and keep my sand on the face?"

IN FAVOR OF FABRIC

Nine years ago Robert Stone opted for fabric liners for the 70-some greens bunkers at The Honors Course in Ooltewah, Tenn.

The renovation was done in-house for about $50,000, including liner sand and labor. It took about three months.

At the time, fabric liners were one of the only options, Stone says, noting he would have liked to renovate all of the bunkers using the Billy Bunker method (named for former Augusta National superintendent, Billy Fuller).

"That's the best way to do them, but it's
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When Performance Matters.
more labor intensive and costly," he says. "That's why a lot of these other products have come along."

Because Billy Bunkers weren't in Stone's budget, he chose Sand daM, which is made of non-biodegradable polyester and synthetic binders.

"Overall, it's done well," Stone says, adding that there have been some problems with fabric sticking up out of the sand.

"You have so many things to do and sometimes you get a little low on sand and someone may hit the fabric, so you'll see a piece that sticks up."

Stone's team rakes all bunkers by hand, so mechanical bunker rates don't cause problems—just golfers do. He tries to mitigate this problem by maintaining 3- to 4-inch sand depths.

"Checking your sand depths is as important as your other routine jobs," he says. "It's not a job that can get put on the back burner."

Stone expects the liners to make it to 20 years. "We're just under 10, and we should make it as long as we keep our sand depths."

**SPRAY-ON ADVOCATES**

Being a stop on the PGA Tour from 2003 to 2006, Nemacolin Woodlands agreed in 2002 to redo its 50-plus bunkers so they drained better and featured pure white sand with better playability.

Anderson led the project that included completely renovating 6.6 acres of bunkers—all new drainage, liners and sand. Aspen Corp. was the contractor on the $1 million project.

When it came to selecting a bunker liner, Anderson, who's dealing with a native clay soil, was focused installing a product that would keep contaminants from coming up and plugging the drainage, keep the filtration rate at its peak and maintain bright white sand. Washouts aren't a major concern at Nemacolin Woodlands because of the bunkers' flat bases.

Though washout cleanup wasn't a big concern for Anderson, maintenance was on his mind.

"I'd worked at a facility before where we had liners, and it was constant maintenance on them," he says. "The bunkers were highly flushed, so the sand would move, and we'd hit a staple or a golfer would hit a liner and/or a staple. We just didn't want to deal with that."

So after looking at several fabric options, Anderson chose Klingstone, which is a liquid-applied polyurethane-based barrier, despite its higher cost. Anderson estimates the liquid product was about double that of fabric options at the time.

"It was about 95 cents a square foot to purchase and install, he says. The installation costs were kept down thanks to Nemacolin's flat-bottomed bunkers, which required fewer men to install.

Seven years after installation, Anderson is pleased with his liner choice and expects the liner to hold up for at least another 11 years.

"In the long run, I believe it's helped us keep the bunker functioning like it was meant to when we constructed it. That is, draining properly and not contaminating the sand."

Sherwood's Dyer is fresh off completely renovating 51 bunkers. From February to April, contractor McDonald & Sons removed the old sand, installed new drainage, liner, new sand and subsurface drip irrigation from the bunker faces and resodded. Dyer chose Sportcrete's liquid silica stone liner, and the manufacturer did its own installation.

In addition to a quick installation, as Sherwood is home to the Tiger Woods-hosted Chevron World Challenge 2009 in early December, Dyer was looking for a liner that would save him labor.

"Before, we'd have at least 12 hours of work just to get the water out of the bunkers after a rain," he says. "We'd have every pump in the shop pumping out the bunkers and cleaning up the contamination."

When considering bunker liners, Dyer priced out fabric options but never really considered them.

"I've used them at two different construction projects and they both peeled up very easily within a year or two," he says. "The mechanical bunker rake always finds it, and it's kind of a nightmare."

The amount of staples needed were a concern...
for Dyer, too, because of their nature to pop up due to freeze/thaw cycles.

"Even in California, we frost four to five times a week in the wintertime," he says. Sherwood's bunker renovation cost about $585,000, and he says the liner was about $2 per square foot installed. The fabric options compared at about 40 cents to 50 cents a square foot installed. Dyer sold the Sportcrete by demonstrating what he'd save on labor.

"It's more expensive, but it pays for itself," he says. "It's guaranteed for five years, but considering just what it's saved me on labor in my small rain window, we'll see payback in that warranty period."

So far, Dyer's pleased. He saw his proof during installation after the first hole was complete and the course took on 3 inches of rain.

"We didn't have any sand displace and there was no water in the bunkers," he says. "By that point, I was still questioning like any superintendent would, but right there I had faith."

"I knew the drainage would work, but I was really surprised about how the liner kept the sand on the face," he says. "It sucks the water out quicker than the sand could move."

ON THE FENCE

Morristown, N.J.-based Morris Golf completed a $650,000 renovation of the 71 bunkers on Hamilton Farm Golf Club's championship golf course last March. Though it's a young golf course (construction began in 1999), it was time to renovate and bring in new sand for the steep-faced bunkers, which were originally lined with natural coco fiber liner, one of the only materials available a decade ago.

"Four or five years ago it deteriorated to just netting under the sand," says Patrick Husby, grounds superintendent for the Gladstone, N.J., club. "We have very steep-faced bunkers. With no liner, the sand washes straight down and erodes our native clay subgrade. The bunkers were contaminated to the point that it was nearly impossible to have a good hit out of them."

In addition to playability, maintenance was a concern.

"The washouts would be so bad previously that after an inch of rain over a one- or two-hour period I might have 15 to 20 men take an entire day to put the bunkers back together," he says. "It was nasty. That was part of the

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reason the sand deteriorated so badly. There was no option but to remove so much of that silted material."

When selecting a liner, Husby went with a fabric material despite not being a fan of using staples. At the time, he felt like there were few other options.

The price per square foot (installed) was about $1.75 for a SandMat product.

How’s it holding up?
Husby has experienced some problems with the staples popping up out of the ground.

"Hammering staples back in is a maintenance headache," he says, noting the course's thick, red clay soil makes matters worse. "It's physically hard to do. Many are three-quarters of the way in and then bent over the rest of the way."

Keeping track of the tens of thousands of staples is a difficult task for the maintenance staff. Husby worries a golf club could catch on one, so his five-man bunker crew spends about an hour or an hour and a half a day pounding staples back in when they hand rake bunkers.

The liner edges are also becoming an issue, Husby says. When the edges are exposed they start to fray, which requires dedicating labor for trimming them. He sends a three-man crew around once a week.

"That's adding up to some considerable time - eight to 16 man-hours per week," he says. "It's become something we have to do that we didn't have to do before."

What does he like about the fabric liner?
"My bunkers never wash out," he says. "I never really even have rivulets in the sand from rain coming down - and we probably had six inches of rain from May to the beginning of July this year."

As far as lifespan, Husby expects the liners to last five to seven years, which is what architects have told him to expect.

After Husby committed to fabric liners, he heard about Sportcrete from a peer who'd worked with the material overseas. Since he was already going to have all the bunkers shelled out, he decided to try Sportcrete on one of them.

"Even though we were already using fabric, we tried one to see how it would perform comparably," he says, noting he considered it a learning opportunity - Hamilton Farms also has an 18-hole executive course that may need liners down the line.

So Husby renovated one bunker with Sportcrete as an experiment for about $2 per square foot.

Like his fabric-lined bunkers, the Sportcrete bunker also never washes out.

"I believe it's performing the same as our fabric liners as far as drainage, but it doesn't have staples, so that's an obvious benefit," Husby says. "But had we done Sportcrete on a global scale, I don't know if our steep bunkers could handle it."

What's his recommendation for other superintendents?
"I'd investigate, ask, talk to everyone I know about any alternate ways to line bunkers," he says. "Do your due diligence and don't think any idea is too silly to protect the club's investment and your reputation in that you can provide what you said you could provide when it comes to maintenance. No method is 100 percent perfect."
IT PAYS TO PLAY

Many of us entered the golf maintenance profession for specific reasons: to work outdoors, to recognize a sense of accomplishment through hard work, to be part of a team or for the love of the game. Yet, I’d wager that many of you enjoy the outdoors and the pursuit of agronomic objectives, yet unfortunately, have put playing the game low on your priority list.

Instead of watching Tiger, Lorena and their fellow professional tour counterparts showcase their talents on the plasma screen, we should take the opportunity to play. I’m not advocating heading to the first tee each afternoon, but rather using the game to enhance your position within your club and among fellow professional staff and membership.

Consider these reasons you should take out your clubs, invest the time and go enjoy this great sport we strive to protect, promote and preserve.

1. Play to further the social and professional aspects of meeting with fellow golf course superintendents. Playing each week at one another’s golf courses, while discussing agronomic concerns, ideas and philosophies, is a great learning experience. When possible, rotate the venue.

2. Don’t be bashful or intimidated by playing with your green chairperson, golf professional or even the club president. Remember, you are the leader on the golf course. You should be informing them what’s best for the golf course; by playing the golf course, you become even more knowledgeable.

3. Whether your golf course is a new design or a timeless classic, playing the course provides first-hand knowledge of the architect’s original intentions. Armed with this perspective, you can better communicate the agenda for change, improvements or upgrades to the golf course.

4. Each time you play, play from a different teeing ground to gain the perspective of what players of different abilities, gender and age experience when they step onto your golf course. The game is for everyone, not solely for those with low handicaps.

5. Like it or not, your golf professional can be your greatest supporter or an adversary in the quest to deliver better playing conditions. Golf professionals can positively or negatively affect your agronomic agenda by explaining to members exactly what’s happening on the golf course or why you’re coring the greens again. Since golf professionals and their staffs are typically the first people members encounter when they arrive at the golf course, who better to have on your side?

6. When you play, walk! What better way to review the performance of your staff, equipment, irrigation and learn the various aspects, microclimates and environments of the property? In my mind, golf is a “touchy and feely” sport. You must touch the earth to understand what it’s communicating to you.

7. If possible when you do play, take time to arrive at the golf course as if you are a member or guest. Drive through the main entrance, ride through the parking lot, drop your clubs and head to the practice range. Remember, many golfers perfect their flaws on the range. Often, the range is also the first impression golfers get when they come to play.

8. Golf course maintenance is not limited to agronomics. Think like a golfer and take the time to see what they see. We spend too much time looking down at the ground. Take a 360-degree look around and notice what a non-agronomic person will see. What might not seem important to us may be very important to golfers at your course. Check the cart paths, the flower beds, the mulch, weeds, tee box accessories, water dispensers and other non-agronomic details.

9. When playing you can check the condition of each feature of the golf course. You can review green speed, putting trueness, consistency and surface firmness. You can evaluate the daily golf course set up by your staff to avoid questionable hole locations, rough depth and bunker playing conditions by hitting shots. Unfortunately, bunkers have become a primary issue among those who play and require constant upkeep to please golfers. A veteran superintendent once told me he could do anything the members wanted to the golf course, but he could not affect their inability to hit a golf shot.

10. When I ask golf course superintendents why they don’t play occasionally the standard reply is, “I can’t concentrate or enjoy myself because I see everything that’s wrong with the golf course.” This is one reason to play more. Remember, “Rome wasn’t built in a day,” and by seeing what’s needed, you will stay ahead of the curve, your membership, boards, owners and customers. Realize you won’t be able to fix everything all at once, but you get an idea of what’s important and truly needs repairing, rebuilding, restoring, replanting and renovating.
A Standard Golf Co. topdressing drag mat model 52000 hitch with two model 52050 extensions was modified so it could be hooked up to the Club Car Carry All II trailer hitch. This modification was designed and built by Jeff Brothers, head mechanic at the Bald Peak Colony Club in Melvin Village, N.H., where Todd Pollini is the superintendent. A 1/4-inch angle iron (1/4-inch thick) was bolted to the existing angle iron on the drag mat with one 1/2-inch diameter by 12-inch long bolt/lockwasher/nut on the back end and with two 1/2-inch diameter by 1/4-inch long bolts/lockwashers/nuts on the front end. The angle iron on the front end was cut into a V-shaped angle with a torch; it was then bent upwards into a 30-degree angle and welded in place. The black hitch that came with the drag mat was bolted to the end of the new angle iron with one 1/2-inch diameter by 12-inch long bolt/lockwasher/nut and then it was hooked up to the turf vehicle hitch with a hitch pin and clasp. The modification took about one hour and it cost about $50 in materials.

A CLEAN SWEEP

At the Butterfield Trails Golf Club in El Paso, Texas, head mechanic Joe Perez and assistant mechanic Nick Guillen designed and built a John Deere TC 125 Collection System that uses eight conventional-type street brooms. Instead of replacing the broom heads when the bristles wear down, a 1-inch by 1-inch thick piece of oak wood is bolted to the top end of the broom as a “spacer” to compensate for the wear of the bristles. This worthwhile practice allows a much longer life of the broom heads, which saves approximately $100 per set of four – $200 total in replacement costs. The reusable 1-inch by 1-inch “spacers” have two 3/8-inch diameter holes drilled in them and the 1/4-inch diameter existing bolts are replaced with bolts 1 1/2 inches longer. The materials cost about $15 and the total labor time was approximately one hour. GCI
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CALL ME BACK!

For the past quarter of a century, I’ve made my living largely by calling up you boneheads and asking you dumb questions. Weird way to earn a paycheck, huh?

The questions I attempt to ask you have progressed over the years as my level of industry knowledge has grown a bit. In my early days, it was “What kind of cup cutter do you use and why do you like it?” Then I moved on to, “Have you had any instances of fungicide resistance?” Next it was, “What job-related things keep you up at night?” These days it’s, “Why in the hell are you still doing this crazy job?”

So, the subject matter of the questions has evolved through the years. But, one thing has remained constant in my quest to ask you dumb things: You guys don’t call back very often.

Yes, I know that a few of you will occasionally return a phone call...sometimes, maybe, if you feel like it, after a couple of days...but you know as well as I do that many of you don’t. C’mon, admit it: The voicemail box at your place is a black hole, a giant sucking vortex with no exit.

If the caller isn’t a buddy from another course within 10 miles and who doesn’t have your mobile number, they might as well be leaving a message for Amelia Earhart or Jimmy Hoffa. God forbid they’re a salesperson.

The guys that do tend to return calls also tend to be the top guys in the business. Why? Because they’re the top guys in the business and they understand that it is a business. These are the people who are using their Blackberries and iPhones for more than just keeping track of their fantasy football teams. They understand that communication, networking and responsiveness are just as important as nitrogen, fungicides and cutting heights.

In short, it all comes down to external relations. You may do a great job of communicating with your internal team – directing your crew on maintenance activities, running projects, keeping the mechanic organized, etc. – but you’re not so great at getting your message out to the rest of the world. In my experience, that can be deadly. I’ve said it a million times: Way more superintendents have been fired for poor communications than poor turf.

For example, here are a few of the most common communications mistakes I’ve witnessed after 25 years of working with superintendents.

**Hiding in the barn.** Okay, you and I know that it’s not a “barn” and you’re not “hiding,” but unless you’re visible around the rest of the facility, that’s the way members and players perceive it. I’m stunned at how often I meet someone who’s a very active member at a club and, when I ask him who his superintendent is, he can’t name you. If you’re not doing regular visits in the grill room, dropping in the pro shop at peak times or otherwise making yourself a visible part of the organization, you’re nothing more than a ghost who cuts greens at some ungodly hour. Bottom line: if you don’t schmooze, you lose.

**Assuming you have nothing to do with marketing.** Guess what? Nobody ever joined a golf club or chose to play at a daily fee because the kitchen cranks out a great BLT. Conditioning, according to every no-duh study ever done, is the No. 1 reason golfers select a particular course. And that’s on you, pal. Talk to your players. Find out what they like and what they don’t like. Consider surveying to get the nasty opinions (you know they’re out there). The point is that you need to understand your customers’ perceptions of your work to do the best job possible. Don’t let the opinions of a few — or just your opinions — dictate your conditioning standards.

**Being a “Cool Hand Luke.”** Remember that Paul Newman movie where he’s a convict in a Southern prison farm? At one point when he’s ignored the rules, the warden says, “What we’ve got here is failure to communicate.” If you fail to communicate your practices to your customers, you fail. Period. If you don’t let golfers know when you’re aerifying, when you’re closing a hole for irrigation repair or whatever other disruptive practice you’re planning, you have failed to communicate. I’m not saying you’ll end up on the chain gang in a hellhole of a prison for this, but you may end up on the unemployment line.

**Forgetting to bang your own drum.** Do you have a personal marketing agent at your facility? Has the GM or owner got your back when it comes to complaints? Do you get the credit you deserve? I’m guessing not. You have to take responsibility for your own reputation at your course. Take advantage of the chance to write a quick item for the newsletter or the Web site. Make sure you’re there for big outings or member/guest events. Don’t assume that people will know that you — yes, you — are responsible for the conditions they’re enjoying that day.

**Avoiding the nasty stuff.** In all my years of interviewing and talking with successful superintendents, one trait comes shining through: honesty. If something is wrong, tell the boss. Don’t hide it, just get it on the table. The only thing worse than bad news is hiding bad news. Don’t do it.

**And, last but not least, calling people like me back.** I might just be an idiot columnist, but who knows, I might actually be nice to you and feature you in an article. Then again, you may not want to call me back for that very reason.
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