How do you MEASURE UP?

GCI's State of the Industry report gives you an exclusive benchmark for your maintenance operation. Plus, our columnists weigh in on the golf industry as they see it.

INSIDE:
Poa greens, p. 52
Tailoring tee boxes p. 64
New columnist John Kaminski p. 35
And if all that wasn’t enough, there’s always the constant threat of pathogens. New Daconil Action™ fungicide combines the power of Daconil® fungicide with a revolutionary Turf Protein Booster that helps turf activate its own natural production of PR proteins. The result is turf that is stronger, healthier and better able to defend itself against fungus. Learn more at DaconilAction.com.
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   It’s easy to get caught up in the shiny lights of GIS 2012 in Las Vegas, but don’t forget to check out these bright spots on the show floor.
At GE Capital, we're builders, not bankers. With unique insight into what's important to you, we provide floor planning to help you stock inventory and rapid, turnkey customer financing programs that help move inventory out the door. We also provide tools and services that help build success. From web-based application submittals to online account management, we bring knowledge and expertise to every relationship. So for quick decisions and more, step onto our turf. Stop just banking. And start building.

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I suspect that you, like many readers, may have heard me speak or attended a seminar I've done over the years. Since I know exactly bupkis about the science of turf management, I usually stick to non-agronomic topics like successful communications, using social media or, most commonly, "the state of the industry."

I've gotten to the point where I can do that speech in my sleep. Upon command, I could stand in front of a group of bored superintendents and recite it word-for-word with great authority. That is, until now. Here's my problem: I have to blow the old speech up and write a brand new one.

In this issue of Golf Course Industry, you will find an explosion of new data about the golf market, how superintendents are managing budgets, how we're all using technology and much, much more. This is, to my knowledge, the largest benchmarking study of its kind ever conducted. I've seen other organizations and magazines report statistics based on 200 or 300 completed surveys but nothing close to the nearly 750 of y'all who took the time to fill out a pretty lengthy online survey form last month. It is definitely the most robust market study I've been involved with in 25 years.

The cover story and the myriad charts, graphs and tables with it will give you a sense of proportion about the size of your operation compared to others. It is a new benchmark for you to use to measure what you're doing and how you're doing it vs. colleagues around the nation. It is also, most importantly, something GCI can replicate in future to take the temperature of the market and track trends.

That said, I have to admit we don't have a crack staff of social scientists and statiscians who do this stuff for us. We do it ourselves because we're pretty decent at it, we have the right technological tools at our disposal and — most notably — we're cheap. We'd rather throw money at other stuff like the staff planning retreat in Cancun than paying a gee-whiz research company to do it for us.

So, before anyone bets the farm on this data, consider the following:

This is NOT a perfect, scientifically validated study suitable for publishing in the Journal of Fancy-Schmancy Statistics. It is a poll. It reflects the answers of those who volunteered information to us. Right off the bat, you'll notice that about 40 percent of our responses came from private clubs even though truly private facilities only represent 25 percent of the market. Thus, I think the budget numbers reported are skewed high by some factor that we will try to determine in coming months.

Similarly, this was done online. We know for a fact that there are a group of you out there who are more digitally savvy and who tend to respond to surveys at a much higher rate than others. I suspect that folks out there struggling along trying to manage a 9-hole cornfield course do not have the same time or inclination to plug budget information into our survey software.

We think we asked the questions the right way and we shared them in advance with some smart superintendents out there who gave us input, but there are a zillion different ways that facilities slice their budgets. We believe that the sheer volume of responses helps to suppress the impact that a few off-target answers could have but, again, be advised that not everyone defines their "overhead costs" or "capital expenditures" the same way.

Now that you've been warned about the warts, let me tell you the beautiful part of this. It is an outstanding new resource for the entire industry to use and I'm proud of the way Mike Zawacki, our editor, conducted it. He made this happen while also juggling production and doing a million other things. Attaboy, Mike.

I'm also proud of the incentive we used to drive that unprecedented response. Instead of offering a longshot chance to win an iPad or a gift card, we decided to donate cash to our friends at the Wee One Foundation to support their mission of helping superintendents and assistants in times of need. And, thanks to all of you who responded, we'll be handing them a check for $2,500 soon.

In the long run, data and statistics are nice, but the amazing work that Wee One does in the memory of my old friend Wayne Otto is the best commentary on the state of our industry I can ever imagine. GC
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**3600 rpm. Engine Manufacturer Gross Power. Tested in accordance with SAE J1349. Engine horsepower is provided by engine manufacturer for comparison purposes only. Actual operating horsepower will be less. Refer to engine manufacturer’s website for additional information.

To learn more about the new ProGators, go to JohnDeere.com/Golf.
I t may not be on the other side of the globe, but the Great Lakes Trade Exposition at DeVoss Place in Grand Rapids, Mich., brought together an elaborate trade show for turf lovers. Brian DeVries, assistant superintendent at Cascade Hills Country Club, sent us a few notes on his trip to the show.

**Monday**

I dubbed Monday “education day.” A great take-away item for me was listening to Dr. Bruce Branham’s presentation, “Stealth Poa annua Control.” One thing I really liked was the way Dr. Branham talked about golf course superintendents removing Poa very rapidly and the unsightly void left in the turf and described it with a great quote: “The operation was a success, but the patient died.” Additionally, he had some great information on the safety of the new products vs. the safety of the currently available products.

**Tuesday**

Tuesday contained what I believe to be the biggest change since the last time I had attended the event in 2007: the Assistant Superintendent Symposium. I thought this was a great addition to the show, giving assistants the opportunity to hear firsthand some career advice in a two-hour segment designed just for us. The symposium included presentations from Jason Zalensky, golf course superintendent at Lochmoor Club in Grosse Pointe Woods, Mich., and Greg Wojick of Playbooks for Golf. Jason and I actually met at the 2010 Green Start Academy, so it was great to see a familiar face talking about his very quick transition from assistant to superintendent in his presentation, “Thrown into the Fire.”

**Wednesday**

Wednesday was “show day.” The morning started off with what I believe to be the most fun and exciting event of the GLTE: the Turf Grass Talk Show, hosted by Dr. Thom Nikolai. The set-up for this event was reminiscent of that of The Tonight Show, complete with a desk, a sofa for the guests and, yes, even music. USGA Senior Agronomist Bob Vavrek stole the show with his presentation packed with top-notch information and intermittent humor.

With the talk show over, the afternoon afforded me an opportunity to walk through the expansive trade show. Inside, I walked through aisle after aisle and saw seemingly countless vendors from the turfgrass, landscape and irrigation industries. It was a certainly a unique event that presented some vast opportunities to see some products from more than just the golf course industry, and demonstrated just how similar all of our trades really are.
Golf Course Industry Tweetup 2012

#gcitweetup2012

GCI is what’s trending at the GIS in Las Vegas this year. We’re inviting our Tweeps and other online friends to be a part of our golf/turf social media Tweetup.

The event will be from 5 to 7 p.m., Feb. 28, near the show itself, and will be a great opportunity to get together with others who know the importance of social media in the industry, as well as meet with several GCI staffers and columnists.

The winners of our first-ever Golf Course Industry Super Social Media Awards will also be announced at the Tweetup. The deadline for nominations was Feb. 10. Winners will be recognized in the following categories:

- Outstanding Social Media Leadership
- Best of the Blogs
- Innovative Use of Twitter
- Video & Multimedia Excellence

Want to be a part of the trend? Follow us on Twitter @GCImagazine or on Facebook. Set aside the time for the gathering of the top social media minds at GIS, and watch for the details to show up in our feed before the show!

Quantico’s Medal of Honor Golf course is dealing with an underground movement. But though they may upset the turf, they’re not a huge threat to national security - maybe more to an unaware golfer who might step in a hole.

The course has been dealing with an onslaught of groundhogs for several years, peaking back in 2006. Superintendent Mike Morgan has trapped more than 400 of them since then, he says.

“We’ve always had them,” he says, “but they just got really bad in 2004, 2005. With all the wildlife we have on the golf course, they create a problem with all the walkers.”

Morgan contacted the game warden and got some live traps to work with, putting in time researching the habits of the common groundhog. He and his crew discovered they had what they needed to tempt the nuisances all along: bananas.

“They love bananas, they love chrysanthemums,” says Morgan.

Once caught, the groundhogs aren’t interrogated - they’re simply taken across the bridge to the west side of the base.

“Quantico’s separated by [Interstate] 95,” says Morgan. “It’s really the right thing to do. They can eat just as well on the other side of 95 as they can on this side, and you don’t see many of them trying to cross the bridge to get back.”

Morgan has tried to take as many as he could across the bridge in the past fall, even though he knows that more will show up next season.

“For the most part, we try to flag the worst stuff, and the golfers have pretty much learned where the habitats are,” he says. “We’ve pretty much learned to live with them.”

A Private Round

Some guys will do anything to be able to spend a quiet day on the course. At the Shoop Park Golf Course in Wind Point, Wis., a couple golfers were taking advantage of the mild weather and tranquility of nature. The reason it was so quiet, however, was that the course was closed.

Police spotted the two men taking shots along the 7th hole, despite the many “Closed for the season” signs posted throughout the course. Not only did the party have a private round in play, they had caused about 30 divots around the tee box.

The two men were cited with trespassing at the course – and they fixed their divots.
The word "sustainability" gets used frequently in our new "green" world.

Given that there has only been a handful of new golf courses built within the U.S. during the last few years, it has been challenging to find much to talk about in this sector of our industry.

I recently learned about the Lodestone Golf Course facility in McHenry, Md., that fits sustainability to a perfect "T." Prior to Lodestone's 2010 opening, the property had been completely cleared by timber-harvesting operations. What was left was a site that was void of any significant vegetation, had damaged and poorly functioning wetlands and streams and an overall fractured environmental ecosystem.

It was a mess and a scar in the landscape.

In taking on the project, the architectural team at Design Workshop was charged with creating a tournament-caliber facility while holding to strict ecological criteria set forth by the Maryland Department of Environment (MDE). Through strategic hold placement, the designers incorporated the pre-existing environment — streams, vegetation and rocks — into the overall vision.

From a sustainability perspective -- as well as an environmental, social and economic perspective -- Lodestone Golf Course has turned many heads. As a result, the course received the designation of being the sixth-best new golf course in the world by Golfweek magazine, and it received a merit award for design from the American Society of Landscape Architects Colorado.

The Lodestone Golf Course project turned a scar in the landscape into a standard for new course development in Maryland. Its designers discuss the project with GCI.
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GCI and golf architects Todd Schoeder and Jeff Zimmermann, with the Denver-based Design Workshop, had a chance to discuss the Lodestone Golf Course and why the project has been so good for the golf industry.

GCI: The golf course property had been previously harvested for timber and the landscape pallet that you were given was void of mature vegetation. Many of the wetlands and streams were contaminated and fractured from the timber operations. Did Maryland fully support the project, given the opportunity to improve a degraded site, or were there obstacles and challenges with the approval of the golf course?

Design Workshop: Actually, yes, the State of Maryland and the Maryland Department of the Environment completely supported the project. We had worked with them on the renovation of the Wisp Resort Course and they saw how willing we were to work together and develop practices that benefited the environment and people. There were many agencies involved with the Lodestone permitting process and we met several times over a two-year period to collaborate and identify how we could transform the site and provide a functioning ecosystem again. In essence, the property and land has been sustainable. It once served the purpose of timber-harvesting and now we have transformed the property into a beautiful landscape that will provide benefit and enjoyment for people and the environment into the foreseeable future.

The Lodestone golf course has won many awards and been given many accolades since it has opened. The design of the course proved to be so beneficial that the Maryland Department of Environment set the sustainability metrics of Lodestone as the new standard for golf course development in the state. What did sustainability mean to you in this project and what practices did you use in building the golf course that motivated the MDE to set new standards for golf course development in Maryland?

Sustainability to us meant a “light touch” on the land. How could we use what existed and make it better?
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Design Works architects envisioned a landscape that was not only beautiful and viable as a course but sustainable.

ecosystem that could be incorporated into the golf course? Those were the questions we had to answer. The property sits adjacent to two to three major watersheds that feed to creeks or directly into Deep Creek Lake. We had an extensive and sediment erosion control system in place during construction. This system, believe it or not, is also the permanent erosion sediment control system. Most of the fairways are pitched to one edge of the hole. All drainage runoff is collected into natural drainage basins that were constructed along the perimeter of the golf course. The run-off flows through a daisy-like chain of swales, bio-filters and naturalized areas before it is released back into the environment. This extensive system, both pre- and post-construction, is what the state has adopted.

Being a golf course architect, I know that site-specific challenges can sometimes lead to golf holes where the playability or aesthetics are compromised. What was the most challenging aspect of building the golf course given the degraded site that you had to work with? Did these challenges compromise the course or improve it?

The most challenging aspect was dealing with a semi-mountainous site that was treeless. There were trees but it was scrub,
nothing significant or worthy of inclusion in the elements of the course architecture. So, instead of carving the golf holes through stately forests and framing the holes with beautiful mature vegetation, we had to find other ways to make the holes dramatic. Given the lack of trees we were able to discover these dramatic rock outcroppings and panoramic vistas of the Deep Creek Lake valley. In many instances the trees may have limited the viewing or use of these landscape elements. We were able to maximize them. The lack of mature trees also allowed us to create wide golf hole corridors. The width is great for playability and it also gave us the space to build the erosion and water quality control basins along the perimeter of the holes.

From a sustainability perspective it appears that the golf course is used for more than just playing golf. What other uses does the golf course support and how did you incorporate these uses into the design?

There are nature hiking trails throughout the course and the course is also used for cross-country skiing during the winter months. But the neatest non-golf use of the property is the wildlife corridors that meander throughout the course. We were required to create "connectivity" across the entire golf course for all kinds of flora and fauna. The permitting agencies wanted the flora and fauna to be able to cross and connect through the golf course unimpeded. Wildlife corridors existed prior to the timber-harvesting operations but were fractured and broken during the clearing of the property. We restored many of these areas and some of them came back on their own once we restored the hydrology. The cool thing about the wildlife corridors is that they are always open during play.

The golf course has been open for a few years now. Are there any ongoing course maintenance challenges given the site's former use and how badly the property was degraded?

There really aren't any ongoing problems or maintenance challenges. The property was in bad shape when we started. Two years later it is thriving and beautiful. The state has ongoing water quality testing measures in place. The erosion and sediment control measures are working great. The wildlife corridors are functioning and there is an abundance of diverse flora and fauna throughout the property. We believe that the success of all of this is in direct correlation to the collaborative process that we took during the development phase of the project. We worked together and developed systems and practices that benefited the environment and allowed our client to succeed. It is a balance, and both need to be cared for.

Chris Wilczynski, ASGCA, is the principal of C.W. Golf Architecture, and a frequent GCI contributor.

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Case Study
Bodega Harbor Country Club recently replaced its three carbon steel Filtomat (now owned by Amiad) filters with all Stainless Steel construction Orival Filters

Come see us at the Golf Industry Show in Las Vegas Booth #1906
2012: HEDGE YOUR BETS

As many in the golf industry head to Las Vegas this month for the Golf Industry Show, it's probably wise to recall the words of real estate developer, hotelier and gaming magnate Steve Wynn, who advises: "If you want to make money in a casino, own one." Similarly, in a fragile economy that teeters between promise and despair, golf facilities would be wise in 2012 to hedge their bets: equal money on revenue and expense management.

Prioritize and focus on revenue growth by following these suggestions:

**Personalize revenue-building programs.** Revenues are growing where facilities are personalizing programs for dues, access fees and services so customers and members feel recognized and valued. The success of customized club-fitting, special-order apparel and one-on-one instruction programs is proof this strategy works.

**Focus on revenues that directly influence the bottom-line.** Revenues attached to dues and access fees (such as green fees and range use) contribute more to the bottom line than revenues derived from retail merchandise and food and beverage, whose imputed costs of sales lessen the profit contribution.

**Reward loyalty with the greatest benefits.** Any number of affinity programs has taught us that loyalty points and preferred access influence consumers’ choices. They also make sense for the business owner or operator since loyalty rewards and recognition are less costly than up-front discounts. If you’re willing to discount rounds 25 percent, why not reward your best customers with that same discount after 10 rounds instead of advertising 25 percent off a player's first round.

**Invite them back for more.** Thank every golfer for his and her patronage and invite every player to come back and play your course again. Spend a few hours a week alongside the 18th green doing that, and watch retention go up.

Expense management will be tougher in 2012 because of the inflationary impact on petroleum products and overhead items. Here are several tactics that will help contain costs:

- **Ask for freight-free delivery.** When negotiating 2012 purchases, look for opportunities to eliminate freight charges by combining purchases and reducing the number of deliveries. Bulk buying also can lower costs if there’s adequate storage space, and you’re certain the entire purchase will be used before it spoils or otherwise loses value. When applying this strategy, calculate the bulk price value against the cost of deploying precious capital ahead of need.

- **Emphasize loyalty in procurement.** Be bold in asking for increased value and reciprocate by purchasing from vendors that provide the best and most reliable goods and services. The best customers – those who are consistent, informed and dependable – receive the best deals.

- **Identify offsets against expense growth.** Insurance premiums are up 18 to 20 percent over 2011’s. Evaluate deductibles, co-pays and other savings opportunities.

- **Calculate the price of preventative maintenance.** Know how much you’re paying for anything that runs on a motor and your mechanical systems such as HVAC and walk-in refrigeration. Compare that cost to the price to react to a potential breakdown. Hoping to make it through the 2012 season without problems is like whistling through the graveyard. You could get lucky and avoid a major scare, but knowing that you’re protected is more prudent – and it helps you sleep at night.

- **Hoping to make it through the 2012 season without problems is like whistling through the graveyard. You could get lucky and avoid a major scare, but knowing that you’re protected is more prudent – and it helps you sleep at night.**

Insurance premiums are up 18 to 20 percent over 2011’s. Evaluate deductibles, co-pays and other savings opportunities.

Henry DeLozier, a principal in the Global Golf Advisors consultancy. DeLozier joined Global Golf Advisors in 2008 after nine years as the vice president of golf of Pulte Homes. He is a past president of the National Golf Course Owners Association’s board of directors and serves on the PGA of America’s Employers Advisory Council.
2012, THE YEAR YOU FINALLY ELIMINATE POA ONCE AND FOR ALL.

COMING SOON
PENDING REGISTRATION
How do you measure up?

GCI’s State of the Industry report gives you an exclusive benchmark for your maintenance operation.

by Bruce Williams

The numbers are in, and the raw data speaks clearly. When it comes to interpretation of those numbers, I have used a combination of industry knowledge and communication with many in the industry to come up with my comments. While we all wish we had crystal balls that we could count on implicitly, guessing what the future will bring is difficult at best. By evaluating most of the responses of the survey, it was fairly easy to make comments based on those stats. Some of the questions reflected on where we have been and where we are going in the golf industry.

While the statistics may speak for themselves I have been asked to add some commentary to summarize the raw data that was received in the survey. With research of this depth and magnitude one could correlate the data endlessly. Since I don’t have that luxury – or editorial space – I’ll focus in on some of the research’s key topics.

I believe GCI readers will find that there are some interesting trends and certainly the business is changing. I like what I see and believe that this survey helps to make a case for slow and conservative recovery in the golf course maintenance side of the industry.

ARE WE MAKING ANY MONEY?
There is no doubt that we have been in a recession for the last few years. This may be the single largest factor attributing to a decrease in rounds of golf and a negative number of golf course openings. A reasonable barometer of the health of golf would be the trends of profitability. Understand that some golf facilities are not operated with the goal to make a profit when interpreting the statistics.

Overall, around a third of respondents indicated that their facilities made money last year, another third indicated that they broke even and a third indicated they lost money last year. I do believe that there is light at the end of the tunnel and brighter days lie ahead for the golf industry. More than half of golf facilities either broke even or made a profit. Of those that lost money, it is hard to tell if they were supported by assessments or possibly that they were facilities that use the golf course as a marketing tool for a real estate development. Seeing the number of golf courses for sale I would think that more than a few are upside down at this point but things are improving.

This survey may not show how we got there and what we plan for the future but some of the questions reflected on facilities becoming more economically viable in the next few years. I truly believe there is optimism out there for a number of reasons. Golf facilities have reacted to the lower income by adjusting their expense side of the budget. This has directly affected many golf course maintenance budgets. Superintendents have stepped up to the plate as a part of the solution rather than being a part of the problem. Innovative maintenance methods have been implemented at many facilities allowing superintendents to make adjustments to the “new economic norm.” Couple this with aggressive marketing for players and membership and the feeling is very optimistic.

The survey indicated more than half of the respondents felt that their facilities would be more economically viable three years from now. The most common response as to the optimism was a combination of the overall improving U.S. economy and budget adjustments to the current economic climate.

It is my hope that with bud-
Excluding water costs, what is your non-capital operations budget, including labor and overhead?

### 18-HOLE FACILITIES vs. 18-PLUS HOLE FACILITIES

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<td>Herbicides – Preemergent</td>
<td>$5,109</td>
<td>$7,603</td>
<td>$6,396</td>
<td>$11,854</td>
<td>$22,308</td>
<td>$15,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbicides – Postemergent</td>
<td>$3,613</td>
<td>$4,444</td>
<td>$3,869</td>
<td>$5,221</td>
<td>$10,577</td>
<td>$7,269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecticides</td>
<td>$3,694</td>
<td>$6,570</td>
<td>$5,141</td>
<td>$8,128</td>
<td>$14,883</td>
<td>$10,645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Granular fertilizers</td>
<td>$15,203</td>
<td>$20,244</td>
<td>$17,723</td>
<td>$31,472</td>
<td>$48,368</td>
<td>$37,587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liquid fertilizers/biostimulants/foliars</td>
<td>$3,129</td>
<td>$5,669</td>
<td>$4,399</td>
<td>$6,113</td>
<td>$7,854</td>
<td>$6,764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wetting agents</td>
<td>$4,309</td>
<td>$5,982</td>
<td>$5,151</td>
<td>$5,122</td>
<td>$12,005</td>
<td>$8,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant Growth Regulators (PGRs)</td>
<td>$4,127</td>
<td>$5,138</td>
<td>$4,620</td>
<td>$10,639</td>
<td>$10,637</td>
<td>$10,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed</td>
<td>$1,635</td>
<td>$2,145</td>
<td>$1,890</td>
<td>$2,754</td>
<td>$4,385</td>
<td>$3,370</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you've reduced your budget in the last 3 years, what have been the cost-cutting measures?

- **Seasonal labor reduction**: 70%
- **Full-time labor reduction**: 54%
- **Reduced equipment spending**: 53%
- **Reduced fertilizer spending**: 53%
- **Deferred capital spending**: 51%
- **Reduced chemical spending**: 47%
- **Rolling back conditioning standards**: 31%
- **Other**: 8%

What was your greatest 2012 budget challenge?

- **Rising fuel costs**: 25%
- **Labor costs**: 25%
- **Chemical spending**: 29%
- **Equipment replacement**: 26%
- **Regulatory compliance**: 25%
- **Energy/electricity costs**: 25%
- **Other**: 25%

Editor's note: "Other" included: irrigation repairs, improving turf conditions, weather, water issues, and a combination of all of the responses.
get reductions at so many golf courses, the golfers understand that budgets cuts will surely have an impact on maintenance standards at any facility. It would be prudent to align maintenance standards and golfer expectations with budget adjustments that have been made to keep the clubs in the black.

**BUDGET.** Several questions dealt with budgets and labor at the golf facilities. In most cases, the labor component of the golf course maintenance budget is the largest line item. It takes people to maintain a golf course.

Considering we have been in a recession, it is very positive that around a third of our golf courses saw an increase in budgets. If we combine those that had a flat budget then we saw almost two thirds of respondents had a flat or increasing budget versus budget decreases. While it may not be at all facilities, I do believe we may have hit the bottom and are on our way back up on a conservative trend.

Reducions in labor have helped to lean budgets. More than half of those surveyed have reduced full-time labor and nearly three-quarters have reduced their seasonal labor. While this survey does not indicate it, my travels have also shown me that various adjustments in the number of full-time versus part-time employees and scheduling for optimal productivity have been influential in operating in a much leaner manner.

Half of the respondents indicated that they deferred capital expenditures. This may be a reflection on the profitability of the facilities and also a reduction.

**METHODOLOGY**

During the first quarter of 2012, Golf Course Industry created a State of the Industry survey, administered online via SurveyMonkey, to gauge the overall fiscal condition of the turf maintenance side of the industry, to benchmark superintendents’ budgets and spending trends and to chart other industry-wide tendencies as they relate to the business of golf course maintenance.

GCI had 750 superintendents from around the U.S. take the survey. As an added incentive to complete the survey, GCI committed to make a substantial donation to the Wee One Foundation, a charity group started in memory of Wayne Otto, CGCS, that helps superintendents and other turf professionals in need. GCI is donating $1,000 to Wee One for every 300 completed surveys it received.

Lastly, in addition to periodic email reminders to take the survey, GCI provided access to the State of the Industry questionnaire via a concentrated social media campaign that involved not only the GCI website and weekly enewsletter, but also Facebook and Twitter.

For the purpose of this report, when analyzing the data GCI editors broke down the findings between all facilities, public facilities and private facilities. When appropriate – for example, when reporting on budgeting trends – the data was broken down further between 18-hole facilities and 18-plus-hole facilities to provide a more accurate and comprehensive financial picture.

MORE where it matters most.

From tee to green, trust Nufarm to give you more performance and value for your maintenance dollar.

MORE CONFIDENCE

Clover, thistle and hundreds of other tough weeds melt away with Millennium™ Ultra™.
Labor

For the majority of superintendents, the line item associated with labor (salaries, insurance, administrative, Workers' Comp) on budget can account anywhere from half to three-quarters of an operational budget. In light of the recent financial hardships that have plagued the economy and the golf industry, more than half of superintendents at both public and private reported having to cut their workforces. As a result, private facilities employ on average 10 full-time and 12 seasonal maintenance workers, while public courses have an average of six full-time and a dozen seasonal workers.

What percent of your operational budget is labor costs and non-turf overhead (insurance, administrative, workers compensation, etc)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>ALL</th>
<th>PRIVATE</th>
<th>PUBLIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 30 percent</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31% to 35%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36% to 40%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41% to 45%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46% to 50%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51% to 55%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56% to 60%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61% to 65%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66% to 70%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71% to 75%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 75%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How many people work for you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Seasonal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIVATE</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLIC</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How has this headcount changed in the last five years?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Up</th>
<th>Down</th>
<th>No change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIVATE</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLIC</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MORE VALUE
For above and below ground insect control use Mallet® and Menace®.

MORE EASE
Non-turf areas stay clean for months with one shot of ‘stay-put’ ProDeuce®

MORE CHOICE
Brown patch, dollar spot? Take your pick from our full line of fungicides.

MORE EFFECTIVE PROTECTION
Promote healthy turf all season long with TMIIP, T-Methyl and Propiconazole.

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in member initiation fees that are often used to fund capital projects.

More than half stated their facilities were spending less on equipment. It is always a challenge for superintendents to make their equipment last longer than a reasonable expectation established in a replacement schedule. Deferred equipment purchases can affect operations with increases in parts, repairs and hours spent on maintenance. In the upcoming years, I do believe we will see purchases made on critical needs and also backed up by a business plan for a true return on investment for major items.

Chemical and fertilizer application expenses were cut at about half the facilities. Once again, superintendents are very creative people, and have made appropriate adjustments at their facilities. Some of this may have been looking into alternative products and methods for plant health and also pest control.

Nearly a third indicated that their golf facilities had rolled back golf course conditioning standards. This may be the trend as some are doing less overseeding and irrigating and cutting out any unnecessary programs for maintenance. It is imperative these reductions be communicated effectively and agreed upon by management, ownership and golfers. If not, it could result in a feeling that the golf course superintendent is doing a poor job due to changing playing conditions and the potential inability to meet golfer expectations.

OPERATING EXPENSES. Responses were pretty standard for the division of operating expenses overall. Water is a large variable depending on the part of the country and the source of water. Similarly, there were regional variances depending on grass types and climate for items like seed, chemicals and fertilizers.

When asked what the greatest challenges were for superintendents in the year ahead there were three primary responses: rising fuel costs, labor costs and equipment replacement.

It is difficult to manage fuel costs as so much is dependent on things outside of the superintendent’s control. It is also not a major budget item for most. However, there are many new options out there for the electric-powered equipment and alternative fuel sources. Looking to the future, it may be cost-effective to pay for a higher-priced piece of equipment that has greater energy savings in the long run.

Deferred equipment purchases are making it more difficult to manage a golf course. Increased repair costs and additional downtime for equipment has a cost that should be considered. There are a number of viable options for funding equipment replacement which might include leasing, buying used equipment or financing.

As stated earlier, labor is the key to budget management. Doing more with less is the way to stay in business. However, you can only reduce manpower so much before it starts to have a long-term negative impact on the golf course and golfing experience. We should all have caution that you can cut the fat out of the budget but eventually you may start cutting into the bone.

CAPITAL EXPENDITURES. It would be difficult to have any conclusion regarding responses to the amount of capital expenditures. The numbers ran the gambit from no expenditures to significant golf course renovations. More important was the percentage of areas under consideration for spending capital dollars.

Less than a quarter indicated they would have course renovation as their primary focus while more than half indicated equipment projects cash flow to increase substantially in 2014 due to initiation fees becoming due in full and discounted monthly dues to end.

We asked those superintendents with optimistic outlooks why they felt this was. Here are some of their responses:

- I feel we will continue to attract new members and that is our life blood.
- We are receiving more interest in memberships.
- We budgeted to break even.
- We believe the industry will turn around, with price reductions clubs should attract new golfers, or old golfers who maybe stopped playing. Overall, I see courses making sacrifices to get more golfers through the doors, which should lead to an upswing in rounds per year.
- Better economy and our company is growing, which allows us to get better prices from vendors.
- Since I have been at this facility we have improved financially every year and I am confident we will continue to do so.
- Our net membership numbers have held constant or slightly increased in the last three years. Many members that were lost were not that active and have been replaced with younger members that are utilizing the club’s facilities and services. Also, our business model projects cash flow to increase substantially in 2014 due to initiation fees becoming due in full and discounted monthly dues to end.
- Lean times make you take a closer look at your operation which in turn requires you to make changes to streamline your operation thus producing the same product but at a lower cost.
- Positioning our financial picture for maximum performance with the least amount of expense.

In 2011, did your facility make money or lose money?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Made money</th>
<th>Broke even</th>
<th>Lost money</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you believe your facility will be more or less economically viable three years from now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More economically viable</th>
<th>The same</th>
<th>Less economically viable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Superintendents are nearly split about their preference between using name-brand formulation and generic products. While a preference for name-brand products won out with turf managers at private and public facilities, the margin between the two was not too great and never exceeded a 10 percent difference.

For the survey, we defined a “generic” product as an off-patent product sold as a less-expensive alternative to an original formula.

### Capital projects

At this time and heading into 2012, golf course facilities seem more willing to focus capital spending on replacing and or updating/upgrading turf equipment over other expenditures, such as course renovation, irrigation upgrades and infrastructure additions. Around 16 percent of all facilities indicated they would place a primary capital spending focus in the coming year on golf cart fleet upgrades, lake restoration and dredging, facility landscaping projects and the addition of driving ranges.

Overall, private facilities supporting more than 18 holes indicate they will be spending the most – an average of nearly $445,000, while public, 18-hole facilities would be spending the least - an average of around $70,400.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned 2012 capital projects/purchasing budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$160,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$191,148</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What is the primary focus of your capital spending in 2012?**

- Course renovation
- Equipment purchases
- Major irrigation upgrade
- Infrastructure/buildings
- Other

**More control.**

Clover, thistle and over 250 other broadleaf weeds disappear with one application of Millennium Ultra². With "meltdown" and residual control, it keeps turf clean and pristine for weeks, and can be applied virtually any time for maximum flexibility. That's how Nufarm brings you more control – and more confidence. Ask your distributor for Millennium Ultra².
Our focus is Bermudagrass Greens...

- Over 40 Years of Planting Bermudagrass Greens
- Installing Greens on Over 500 Courses in 16 States
- Breeders of CHAMPION Dwarf Bermudagrass Released in 1995
- Breeders of EMERALD Dwarf Bermudagrass Released in 2007
- Creators of the No-Till Renovation Process Used to Convert Over 300 Courses to CHAMPION
- Developing Numerous Innovations in Production and Planting Techniques

Nobody does it better...

- Guaranteed Purity
- Guaranteed Establishment
- Refrigerated Transportation Of Planting Stock
- Sprigs Treated With Fungicides Before Shipping
- The Fastest Grow-In Possible
- No Contamination During Installation
- No Nematodes In The Planting Stock
- No Weeds In Planting Stock
- No Soil In Planting Stock
- No Heavy Equipment On Your Greens
- We Are Always There In Person To Install Your Greens

Follow-up support after installation...

Because we are the breeders of the grasses we install, we will be there to ensure your success for the life of your greens. We make follow-up visits, take soil tests, and make agronomic recommendations for every set of greens we install.
TOUR EVENTS PLAYED ON
OUR GREENS IN 2011

Arnold Palmer Invitational
Bay Hill Club & Lodge
Orlando, Florida
March 24th-27th
Emerald greens planted 2009

Valero Texas Open
TPC San Antonio
San Antonio, Texas
April 14th-17th
CHAMPION greens planted 2009

Outback Steakhouse Pro-Am
TPC Tampa Bay
Lutz, Florida
April 15th-17th
CHAMPION greens planted 2009

St. Jude Classic
TPC Southwind
Memphis, Tennessee
June 9th-12th
CHAMPION greens planted 2004

Viking Classic
Annandale Golf Club
Madison, Mississippi
July 14th-17th
CHAMPION greens planted 2006

PGA Championship
Atlanta Athletic Club
Johns Creek, GA
August 11th-14th
CHAMPION greens planted 2009

Valero Texas Open
TPC San Antonio
San Antonio, Texas
April 14th-17th
CHAMPION greens planted 2009

Outback Steakhouse Pro-Am
TPC Tampa Bay
Lutz, Florida
April 15th-17th
CHAMPION greens planted 2009

St. Jude Classic
TPC Southwind
Memphis, Tennessee
June 9th-12th
CHAMPION greens planted 2004

Viking Classic
Annandale Golf Club
Madison, Mississippi
July 14th-17th
CHAMPION greens planted 2006

Navistar LPGA Classic
RTJ Golf Trail, Capitol Hill
Prattville, Alabama
September 15th-18th
CHAMPION greens planted 2011

Administaff Small Business Classic
Woodlands Country Club
Houston, Texas
October 7th-9th
CHAMPION greens planted 1996

AT&T Championship
TPC San Antonio
San Antonio, Texas
October 14th-16th
CHAMPION greens planted 2009

Sherwood LPGA Taiwan Championship
Sunrise Golf & Country Club
Taiwan, Republic of China
October 20th-23rd
CHAMPION greens planted 2001

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info@championturffarms.com
Most superintendents do not factor in overseeding into their overall seed budgets. In fact, around two-thirds keep overseeding costs as a separate budget item. So what’s the cost for overseeding? Turf managers at public facilities with greater than 18 holes budget the most at around $22,000. In contrast, private 18-hole facilities spend just under $6,000.

**OVERSEEDING**

If you overseed, how much do you budget?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRIVATE</th>
<th>PUBLIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All facilities</td>
<td>$9,491</td>
<td>$15,870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-hole facilities</td>
<td>$5,702</td>
<td>$8,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-plus-hole facilities</td>
<td>$19,057</td>
<td>$21,803</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Does your seed budget include overseeding costs?

- **Yes**
  - **ALL**: 24%
  - **PRIVATE**: 23%
  - **PUBLIC**: 25%

- **No**
  - **ALL**: 76%
  - **PRIVATE**: 77%
  - **PUBLIC**: 75%

---

**EQUIPMENT**

Planned equipment purchases in 2012?

- **Other**: 43%
- **Utility vehicle(s)**: 42%
- **Greensmower(s)**: 37%
- **Rotary mower(s)**: 31%
- **Deferred capital spending**: 12%
- **Vacuum/Blower(s)**: 11%
- **Top Dresser(s)**: 8%

Editor’s note: “Other” included equipment such as tractors, skid steers, loaders, lifts, etc.

Do you lease the majority of your mowing/cultivation equipment?

- **Yes**: 19%
- **No**: 81%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALL</th>
<th>PRIVATE</th>
<th>PUBLIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If so, what’s the annual cost to lease mowing/cultivation equipment?

- **ALL**: $143,553
- **PRIVATE**: $19,802
- **PUBLIC**: $96,051

Are you responsible for golf car fleet maintenance?

- **Yes**: 32%
- **No**: 68%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALL</th>
<th>PRIVATE</th>
<th>PUBLIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If so, what is the annual cost for golf car fleet maintenance?

- **ALL**: $7,569
- **PRIVATE**: $5,261
- **PUBLIC**: $6,415

---

Bruce Williams serves as principal for both Bruce Williams Golf Consulting and Executive Golf Search. He is a frequent GC1 contributor.
GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

The new year is the usual time for people to look around, look at themselves, and think seriously about the future. In the golf business, the year begins with the PGA Merchandise Show and the Golf Industry Show. I just came back from Orlando, and while that huge massing of the industry is about much more than just superintendents and others in our industry, what happens there affects us mightily.

Those at the top of the mountain feel that golf is turning around. I am down in the valley and I get a different view. Those breathing the rarefied air need to come down from their pedestals and get a reality check. What I see is disturbing, and it impacts us at the ground level.

There was a lot said and seen at the show sure to impact our jobs and lives in the months to come: some good, some not so good. On the good side, the USGA, PGA of America, PGA Tour and the rest of the industry’s leaders and its members/golfers that, too. Don't be afraid to ask the board to make sure everyone playing the course understands what has happened. You don't want to get too defensive, but you also want everyone to know that it isn’t your fault. And when the year is over and everyone says how pleased they were with the course conditions in the season just passed, find a way to tactfully remind them of the magic you did with a 15 percent smaller budget.

I'm over 50 so perhaps the following hurts me more than it hurts you. Still, it's penny-wise and pound-foolish for clubs to view hiring a younger superintendent as a cost-savings measure.

TIGER WOODS NEEDS TO START WINNING AGAIN. His presence at tournaments and his ability to play well generate excitement and enthusiasm at all levels. He stimulates interest and despite everything is good for the game. That said, a word of advice for the game's greatest golfer: Hey Tiger, please be a little friendlier out there. A bit of Arnie wouldn't hurt.

CHINA. I’ve been there, enjoyed the country and its hospitality, and am thrilled a country of 1.6 billion is excited about golf. But China is not going to save the game. How will it help golf here at home? How many people can we send to China for jobs? Giving work to a dozen American architects isn’t going to do much for our trade imbalance. We need to worry about our own backyard right now and less about China.

GOLF'S GOVERNING BODIES. I tend to be critical of the game’s leaders based on the progress I’ve seen during the past few years. What I’ve been hearing lately is about what I’ve come to expect. In short, there’s some good and some not-so-good. On the good side, the USGA, PGA of America, PGA Tour and the rest keep making announcements about programs and ideas to grow the game. I’m all for throwing as much against the wall as possible and hope something sticks.

That said, the PGA of America’s roll-out of Golf 2.0 told us once again what we already know: Golf is expensive, takes too much time, and the number of players is dwindling. There may be some successful ideas to come; only time will tell if any of the new programs and initiatives move the needle.

Most disturbing is the attitude of our industry's leaders, who remain unwilling to reach out to others in this time of real need. There’s too much talking to the same people, too much preaching to the choir. We need more action and fewer words. Leadership needs to come up with real solutions, and nowhere is that more important than in our corner of the industry. We need more ideas and more help for superintendents who are losing their jobs and budgets. So the rest of my thoughts look specifically at our world.

FINANCES AND DWINDLING MAINTENANCE BUDGETS. Those breathing the rarefied air need to come down from their pedestals and get a reality check. What I see is disturbing, and it impacts us at the ground level.

EXPECTATIONS. In this time of reduced expectations, in this time of reduced

(continued on page 80)
Sights and sounds are often giveaways to a place of business. From sparks and the smoke of stick welders in a machine shop to the clanging and rattling of stanchions and drinking cups in a dairy barn, the familiarity of either place couldn’t be mistaken.

So it is with a golf course shop – the smell of gas and diesel fuel, the unmistakable aroma of grass clippings and the sound of backlapping machines at work left no doubt about our places of business.

Maybe I should say, “was.” Stick welders are used, but less often than MIG and TIG welders, dairy barns are now usually free stalls with no stanchions or drinking cups and, as I have noticed in my travels around the Midwest, I
Getting to the root of the Plant Health story.

Stop fighting fungus, help prevent it.

CIVITAS™ is research proven to improve overall plant health by suppressing diseases and preventing them from taking over. CIVITAS is the only turf management solution that activates ISR (induced systemic resistance) and other systemic immune responses to turn on the natural defenses of the plant to fight off fungus.* This reduces the need for traditional chemicals; delivering effective fungus control, and enhancing plant growth and development.

Superintendents have seen typical downstream effects associated with ISR including:

- reduced amounts of water and nutrients required
- turf is better positioned to deal with drought
- quicker to recover from damage and wear
- quicker to green-up in the spring

When turf is at its healthiest it requires less inputs to keep it that way. So use CIVITAS as part of your season-long program.

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KPHITE 7LP Systemic Fungicide Bactericide

KPHITE 7LP Systemic Fungicide Bactericide is proven effective against pythium, dollar spot, brown patch and fungal diseases. KPHITE is EPA labeled, pH neutral and is uniquely formulated to increase plant health and vigor.

To find a distributor or learn more visit www.plantfoodsystems.com 800.543.7775

THE CLEAR CHOICE

EQUIPMENT

don't hear backlapping machines at work as often as I used to.
I always enjoyed the soothing sound of lapping compound on reel and knife, and was anxious to put really sharp mowers on our golf playing surfaces. Sometimes a stone would nick a reel or a buttress root would bend an edge of a bedknife, and the lapping machines came out for the repair. It started with a clickity-clack, but as the dinged-up reel or bedknife was matched, it became a rhythmic, almost harmonic sound. And it seemed backlapping was going on a couple days a week.

More than a few times I have wondered why backlapping seems less prevalent than I remember. I figured a lot of it out by thinking of the obvious. There was a time we mowed fairways with triplex greens mowers (we had the Jake GK 62s) and triplexes like the Ransomes Motor 180s. We had to use seven machines to get the job done -- and we mowed fairways on a daily basis with the grass catchers. Why we ever did that is the subject for another conversation! We always had a couple of triplexes in reserve as backups or for tournaments and simultees. Triplex mowers at that time also cut greens and tees -- four more machines. Roughs were nearly universally mowed with reel mowers -- we had 10 gangs dedicated to that.

No wonder we backlapped so much! We also had five National triplexes to cut green and tee surrounds, and another triplex cut the intermediate rough/fairway collar. As with nearly everyone else, triplex cutters were used for green collars and approaches, too. It added up to nearly 70 reels at work on a given day, and they all required at least some attention during the season. Granted, not all reels were backlapped every week or even each month, but enough of them required close enough attention that we went through buckets of lapping compound to keep cutting edges sharp. I recall hearing about big clubs in the Chicago area that backlapped their greens mowers every day -- it filled me with envy!

Let's face it, no superintendent plans carefully and dutifully to execute a turf management program that could be diminished by something as simple as a dull mower.

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"Let's face it, no superintendent plans carefully and dutifully to execute a turf management program that could be diminished by something as simple as a dull mower."
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Rolling of putting surfaces has eliminated the need for double cutting for many superintendents. The result is fewer machines and fewer hours on them. Financial constraints in the past five to seven years have had a huge impact on how we manage courses. Many practices we would like to use are done less frequently; count backlapping among them.

Prioritization puts it farther down the list of things to do.

Sand topdressing as a cultural practice really took off in the 1970s, and despite the many different techniques superintendents use to move the sand down to around the plant crowns, dull mowers were always part of it. So was backlapping to get a sharp edge back. Jeff Thomas, veteran equipment manager at Pine Hills CC, says it wasn’t for sand topdressing he could keep a sharp edge on today’s greens mowers most of the season with careful adjustment and an occasional, light face grind.

My instinct tells me that various practices like grooming, brooming and brushing also move sand to the surface and shorten the life of a sharp edge. It is the sand that causes the dull edge that creates the need to bring it back to sharp.

Almost everyone I talked to about this topic agreed that backlapping is used less than in years past. On a recent trip to the Twin Cities I stopped in at the Toro headquarters to get a manufacturer’s take on it. Scott Coffin, senior engineer of commercial products, pointed out that mower designers now use high-hardness materials – better steel for both reels and bedknives. “For some applications we are actually using tool steel because it holds an edge longer,” Scott says. To me, that spells less backlapping.

Not many have seen as much turf equipment as David Legg. He came to the U.S. from England to introduce Ransomes turf equipment to North America, spent years working from Jacobsen’s factory and now travels for a major Midwest Jake distributor. Legg echoes the significance of engineering improvements and adds that the sophistication and ease of on-board backlapping amplifies the notion we are backlapping less overall.

To Jeff Thomas’ point, we can see design improvements in cutting units that make it easier to adjust the reel and bedknife clearance, whether it’s light contact, 0.001-inch or 0.002-inch clearance. It takes less time, is more accurate and the units hold the adjustment better, resulting in a reduced need to backlap. Cliff Henning, the equipment manager at Kohler’s Whistling Straits, says newer and inexperienced turf equipment techs tend to backlap more until they acquire the feel and art of reel and bedknife adjustment. Toro’s Don Treu professes that “in a perfect world, there would be no backlapping.” But he quickly adds that there is no perfect world in our turf universe, and the cost of engineering such a feature would be prohibitive.

Even the individual blades of a reel have been milled to give a built-in relief to the blade so the land area (which contacts the bedknife) doesn’t get so wide, creating more friction and a shorter backlapping interval. Also, sometime notice how engineers have made it easier to remove a cutting unit from
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With advances in technology and materials, backlapping is taking up less time in the schedule for many crews. Not only has backlapping compound improved, high-hardness materials for reels and bedknives keep their edge longer.

"Almost everyone I talked to about this topic agreed that backlapping is used less than in years past."

its carriage frame for backlapping when it is required.

Anyone my age can testify at length about the improvement of lapping compounds themselves and how they have shortened the time requirement to backlap a cutting unit. These improvements are often overlooked and minimized, although they shouldn’t.

Whenever you talk about contemporary backlapping, the topic that cannot be avoided is spin grinding. There is a sense that many cutting units that in the past were backlapped to a sharp edge are now put in a spin grinder and actually sharpened to the leading edge. I was telling someone about my past envy of a course that could actually backlap greens mowers every day, and he said there are golf courses that now spin grind those mowers every day because it is so easy. In fact, Whistling Straits’ Henning believes it is a safe bet that courses owning spin grinders do less backlapping simply because of the ease of spin grinding.

Foley United’s vice president Jim Letourneau emphasizes, “backlapping as a grinding process is gone, but as a preventative process it is alive and well!” He adds that if a reel blade is worn and little relief remains, lapping is ineffective and time-consuming – it should take five minutes or so to backlap a cutting unit to a sharp edge. Any more than that should require a trip to the grinder.

Potentially, there are as many different ways to keep an edge on a cutting unit as there are golf courses. Some only spin grind, some only backlap and there is every combination in between. Toro’s Don Treu has observed that backlapping is close to religion in some shops, and any more changes will come slowly. Letourneau attributes that, to some extent, to what he calls “training by tradition.” It is natural for some equipment managers to instruct subordinates in methods and techniques that have been successful for years, which doesn’t fully account for changes in technology. It is always hard to argue against a successful practice.

But in the final analysis, superintendents and their equipment managers figure out the best way to keep their cutting units sharp. Fortunately, they have both history and technology working to help make those decisions. GCI

Monroe Miller is the author of “The Monroe Doctrine” and is a frequent GCI contributor.
THE MARK OF A TRUE PROFESSIONAL

I'm not sure if Golf Course Industry knows what they're getting into by giving me this column. For those of you that know me, I'm very opinionated, and it's usually not until you meet me for the third or fourth time that you come to accept or maybe even like that about me. In this and future columns, I plan to share with you my own thoughts on a range of topics from research to education to social media and other technology.

As I sit here trying to come up with the magical prose that will have everyone hooked on reading future articles, the only thing I can think about is "How do you write the words needed to describe a necessary moment of silence?"

You see, as a former student, a current faculty member and lifelong alum of Penn State, I am mourning the loss of arguably the greatest college football coach and mentor of all time. This morning (at the time I was writing this), Joe Paterno lost his battle with cancer. Looking back at his life from his first win to his 409th, it's incredible how things have changed during this period.

Thinking of the last hours of JoePa's life and the flurry of blog reports, tweets, misinformation and retractions spewing across cyberspace, I can't help to think how the world of communication has changed.

Most of you know that I am a huge fan of social media and think it has positively changed the way we communicate. The premature reporting of JoePa's death, however, was a prime example of the good and the bad that comes along with the inherent rapid-fire sharing of information. In the past, we would have waited for the morning newspapers or the evening news to provide us with the facts. In 2012, we simply turn to Twitter where we get the play-by-play coverage.

As we continue to figure out how to properly use social media, there's no doubt that it can be a powerful communication tool. Heck, even JoePa (who never had an email account) started Skyping with potential recruits towards the end of his career.

Now, just hours after JoePa's actual passing, I reminisce not only about the past but also about what the future has in store. Our industry has seen its fair share of downturn in the past decade. The days of booming construction, an abundance of jobs across all levels and longevity in a single position are long gone.

While I have come to accept the transient nature of the golf course maintenance industry, recent departures of prominent faculty from prestigious institutions have raised many questions about the state of academia as well.

Before anyone reads too much into this, I am very fortunate to hold a position that I love and think of more as a passion than a job. This is probably the main reason that working 80-plus hours per week has never felt like work for me.

The fact remains that the current economy continues to make it more difficult for academics to grow their programs. Competitive research funding within turf has either never existed or has diminished in recent years. If it wasn't for the continued support from a few associations and the private industry, many programs would (and still may) dry up completely.

So is the future of the turfgrass industry all doom and gloom and sporadic bits of useless information transmitted via social media? I would say absolutely not. We still need to adapt, however, to the fact that it's not always about everyone having everything.

Life is not always fair. To advance in this economy, we will all have to work harder to make ourselves, our company, our golf club or even our university stand out.

Getting to the top is going to be competitive for the younger generation, and holding onto a job may prove challenging for others. In looking at the big picture though, this competition will be the driving force behind the advancement not only of individuals, but also the industry as a whole.

"You have to perform at a consistently higher level than others. That's the mark of a true professional." — Joseph Vincent Paterno (December 21, 1926-January 22, 2012) GCI
Now is the time to make those improvements to your irrigation system. by Rob Thomas

To overhaul or not to overhaul? That is the question many superintendents have asked themselves about their failing irrigation systems. Are they throwing good money after bad or will minor repairs correct issues and save money?

For Eric Richardson, superintendent at Essex County Club in Manchester, Mass., the decision was a no-brainer: a new system was needed.

Entering his sixth season at Essex County Club, Richardson inherited a traditional single-row irrigation system with impact heads. It was the first automated system the club had ever installed.

“There may not have been an issue that the old system did not have, from faulty grounding, to a lack of pressure, poor pipe sizing, faulty pumps, faulty fittings (mostly galvanized), stuck heads, lack of coverage, etc.,” he says. “The club was spending $20,000 annually just to keep the system semi-operational.

“There were no improvements that could have made the system adequate,” he adds. “It desperately needed a complete overhaul.”

A triple-row system—with part circles on the perimeter and full circle heads down the middle—now graces the fairways. The part circles are used to water some of, but not all, the mowed rough, providing a sporadic pattern allowing the farther edges to fade out into the tall rough.

According to Richardson, the design gets really interesting around the greens. There is a total of seven acres of collar-height turf around the greens, with expansions to come. To meet the different watering needs, the system was designed with four watering segments around the greens—greens surfaces, collars, perimeter roughs and bunkers. Each green surface zone has around five valve in-head sprinklers (Toro 835S and 855S) while the other segments consist of multiple Hunter I-42s, Toro 590Gs and Toro 835Ss.

“This allowed us to effectively control every drop of water applied to the golf course and saved a large number of man hours by significantly decreasing the amount of hand watering we do on collars,” he says.

The irrigation system at Overbrook Golf Club in Villanova, Pa., was not considered old (16 years), but was outdated and beginning to break down, according to superintendent Tom Gosselin.

“The real reasons for the replacement are the changes in the philosophy of water usage and the technical advances in the systems themselves,” Gosselin says. “Our old system was standard for when it was installed.
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The real reasons for the replacement are the changes in the philosophy of water usage and the technical advances in the systems themselves.

— Tom Gosselin, Overbrook Golf Club

The new system is five rows through the fairways, ins and outs on the greens and has very good coverage in the rough.

“We adapted to the philosophy of more heads, less water,” Gosselin says. “This system gives us the capability to target-water our specific needs without wasting water. It also allows us to give more consistent playing conditions to our members.”

From a technical standpoint, the software breaks down a complex system to a simple and easy format so Gosselin’s team can take advantage of its capabilities, he adds.

Brian Vinchesi, president of Irrigation Consulting, has seen control and sprinkler technology greatly expand in the last five years, alone. With options such as soil moisture sensors and pump station monitors, these innovations have made systems more interactive. There are programs on the Internet that allow superintendents to monitor irrigation and pump stations, which can be controlled from a smartphone or iPad.

As for improvements on the horizon...

Essex Country Club was spending more than $20,000 annually to keep the irrigation system partially operational, says Richardson. and it had adequate coverage. The glaring fault was that it was not very ‘green’ when it came to water usage.”

Water usage is a major concern because Overbrook purchases a large portion of its water. Also, they were unable take advantage of many technical advances, being limited by the physical system in the ground.

To address its issues, Overbrook installed a Toro system equipped with Lynx software.

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"There are always improvements," Vinchesi says. "But with sprinklers, I’m not sure how much better they can get. They’ve gotten so good. When you think you’ve seen it all, something else comes out."

When discussing irrigation issues with superintendents, Vinchesi weighs the options between a total overhaul of the system versus specific improvements. Replacing worn fittings is expensive, so it may be cheaper to replace the entire system. Swapping out the controller, upgrading the pump station or replacing sprinklers are other possibilities.

"You can certainly look at improvements, but you’ve got to look at the long and short terms," he says. "Why spend a lot of money now if you’re going to replace the system in five years?"

Kevin Redfern, director of grounds at the Governor’s Club in Chapel Hill, N.C., brought in Vinchesi to take a look at the current irrigation system and to work with him on what’s needed in the future.

The main lines at the Governors Club are 20 years old and the epoxy-coated fittings have been depositing rust and debris, which leads to clogged heads. All the sprinkler heads were replaced in 2005, but something else is needed.

"At this point a total renovation would be the best," he says. "However, with the economy we have, large improvements are more visible for the near future. Infrastructure items are always the hardest sell for superintendents."

Considering system overhauls can easily be in the neighborhood of $2 million, going to the board with a request cannot be an easy task. For Richardson, the process took years, starting with a call to Vinchesi for an evaluation. With his report in hand, the board was approached.

"Once they read and comprehended the evaluation, it was obvious the need for a new system was there," Richardson says. "This started a process of countless meetings and conversations that eventually lead to them approving the project."

It took three years of work before any construction took place on the property and it ended up being the largest project in the club’s long history, which dates back to 1893.

Adding to some possible difficulties getting a new irrigation system approved is the fact that the money spent isn’t likely to be recouped. According to Vinchesi, based solely on water savings, the return on investment is not there — courses should do it for improved playing conditions. If better conditions sell more rounds, memberships or associated real estate, then the cost-benefit becomes much
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"Infrastructure items are always the hardest sell for superintendents."
— Kevin Redfern, Governor's Club

more clear.

Redfern offers advice to superintendents considering this undertaking.

"Do your homework, then do it again," he says. "Know your property and don't get extravagant, but keep up with the times. You may not get another chance to do this again."

He suggested showing your management dollars and how the course will save money by using a new system.

"My system had just been let go and there were way too many things to fix ... and at a very slow rate," he says. "We were spending in excess of $50,000 to $60,000 per year just in repairs trying to keep it together. With just the pump house renovations, heads replaced and a control system put in, I am spending $13,000 to $14,000, so you do the math on the payback. It works."

Richardson stresses the importance of keeping accurate and complete records.

"Document, document, document," he says. "Track all your irrigation expenses and, more importantly, track your labor. Make sure you have something tangible to show the board or owner."

"Make sure you track how many man hours you are spending on repairs and the man hours spent unnecessarily hand watering or setting up roller base sprinklers," he added. "Do not forget to track your own hours. A big selling point here was that my time was being monopolized by the irrigation system or lack thereof."

Richardson also suggested making a pile of the irrigation parts that have been replaced and taking a picture because "a visual aid is better than any words or document."

Furthermore, he recommended visiting golf courses in the area that are in the middle of an installation. He visited four different sites with the club president, greens chairman and other prominent members.

"They were all amazed by the process and reported back to the membership on how little disruption there was," he says. "This helped narrow the decision process into one that was solely financial."

Lastly, hire a consultant.

"Brian steered me in the correct direction on multiple occasions," Richardson says of Vinceschi. "Consultants have information that will be necessary to properly bid, permit and design the system. They can set realistic numbers and time tables."

While Overbrook's system was completed so late in the season that its membership really hasn't had an opportunity to experience the improved conditions, Richardson claims success.

"The new system has allowed us to provide a firmer golf course, while managing disease and stress more effectively," Richardson says. "According to the membership, the golf course has never looked or played better. The members were all amazed at the installation process, particularly with how small of a footprint the contractors, Leibold Irrigation Inc., had on the golf course and how clean and neat the installation process was in general."

Rob Thomas is a Cleveland-based freelance writer and a frequent GCI contributor.
IRRIGATION 2012

Certainly the lack of new golf course construction in the United States has affected the irrigation industry, but unlike golf courses, golf course irrigation systems wear out and do have to be replaced at some point. That necessity keeps the sales of irrigation equipment moving, but you are still seeing many systems that desperately need to be replaced not being replaced due to financial issues.

Clubs have anticipated the need for a new irrigation system and have been saving their money and budgeting accordingly. These budgeted systems account for some irrigation systems in this and the next few years. In the eastern U.S., there are more older courses, so the irrigation replacement market is a bit better. Once the system hits 40 years, it is difficult to keep it functioning. In the east, irrigation is also more supplemental in nature and therefore less expensive, which makes the installation cost of a new irrigation system more palatable from a cash flow standpoint.

Some courses are under pressure to save water. That requires irrigation system improvements, or they will suffer from a reduction in playing conditions. The more competitive nature of the golf market both in the public sector and also now in the private club sector is forcing some courses to perform irrigation system improvements in order to attract play. As always, there is still somewhat of a “keep-up-with-the-Jones” attitude. However, it’s now more out of necessity than pride. Many courses – both public and private – are looking for ways of improving irrigation without replacing their whole irrigation system. These types of improvements include sprinkler-only replacement, control system upgrades and complete new pump stations or upgraded pump station controls. You will see this trend continue in 2012 and beyond. Moisture sensors, inexpensive investments to save water, are also being added to existing systems to help better schedule irrigation events.

Although cost increases in materials are still occurring on a regular basis, irrigation installation costs are still well below their 2008 levels – as are the overall sales of irrigation equipment – but installation costs are climbing higher than they were in 2009 and 2010. Labor rates will probably rise slightly in 2012 but not very much. Irrigation system installation is still a good value, and this, along with a low interest rate, is motivating some sales from those courses that can afford it. Money will never be cheaper, so if you know a new irrigation system is needed why wait if the course can manage the cash flow?

In 2012, more courses will start planning for a new irrigation system and may go as far as bidding out the project. But as we have seen the last three years, just because the project goes to bid is not guarantee the project will move to the construction phase. The bid may be just to get an idea of what it will cost, or may be higher than anticipated or the club may put it off for an additional year or two. Many businesses – and golf is no different – are hesitant to make large investments until the results of the 2012 elections are known.

Irrigation sales overseas continue at a healthy pace and have played a significant role in last year’s irrigation sales, but are slowing down with the rest of the industry as building in China. Irrigation systems overseas do not have all of the features that are seen in more developed countries and therefore the overall materials package is lower-priced than an equivalent 18-hole golf course in the U.S. Additionally, the overseas market is extremely competitive and margins for manufacturers are not as good as they are in other markets.

2012 looks to be status quo for the irrigation market, no large jump in sales, but thankfully probably not large drop either. At this point status quo is probably not all bad.
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Topdressing greens in winter as an extra layer of protection might be as old school as “tastes great, less filling,” but it, along with the use of greens covers, is sometimes still a recommended practice. It was fairly common in the 1980s, but then greens covers came to the market and came to the rescue of greens that didn’t see enough snow and were vulnerable to desiccation from winter’s chilly winds.

Rick Tegtmeier, CGCS, director of grounds for Des Moines Golf and Country Club in Des Moines, Iowa, got downright nostalgic in mid-January when he resorted to topdressing a few of his target greens after not seeing the kind of snowfall he’s used to.

“We haven’t seen a winter like this since 1995,” Tegtmeier says. “This type of weather can really hurt turf if it’s not protected or if there isn’t enough moisture in the crown area of the plant. First, it’s very warm, and then the temperatures drop dramatically with blustery, dry winter winds. Across the state of Iowa, a lot of turf has gotten stressed out and lost. If guys weren’t out throwing some water down or trying to protect the crowns of the plant, they lost grass.”

Des Moines Golf and Country Club has 41 greens, and Tegtmeier says greens covers were installed on all of them. Still, he doesn’t have enough covers to protect some target greens that are part of three driving ranges on the property, two of which sit up in the wind. They’re the ones he went old school on by topdressing them with a heavy application of sand, hoping that it would protect the target greens for the duration of the cold and windy forecast.

“This was common practice many years ago before greens covers became popular,” says Tegtmeier. “I did that when I was a younger...

“It’s better than nothing, but it doesn’t entirely protect greens from winter desiccation...

Ultimately, you really need to get snow.”

— Brian Whitlark, USGA agronomist
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man and thought I should do it again because it was quick and easy and I had the sand here, so I just loaded it up in topdressers target greens prior to topdressing crew also watered some of the greens were very dry, so as a precaution they checked them all and watered all the high spots or knobs, trying to be proactive in getting them some much-needed moisture.

Tegtmeier says that a lot of superintendents still topdress for extra protection in winter when snow is slow in coming because they can’t afford greens covers and sand is cheap. In fact, it was recommended in a January bulletin by Zac Reicher, professor of turfgrass science at the University of Nebraska.

“In the short term, a wide variety of turf covers, from fabrics to snow fences to late-season topdressing, can help prevent desiccation,” Reicher said in the bulletin, aimed at courses in the North Central U.S. “As we stand now in January 2012, we would recommend heavy topdressing and/or irrigation if possible to help reduce potential damage on exposed greens, and perhaps on tees or other high-value turf like sports fields.”

There are some drawbacks to this practice. In the spring, you have to brush, drag or blow the sand off the greens, and with the turf so soft, you risk leaving tracks and damaging the turf.

“Plus, you would be mowing sand with reels that were freshly ground over wintertime,” says Tegtmeier. “You always had to keep one mower not sharpened to deal with that sand and then go in and sharpen that mower back up. It was just a pain in the rear. So when greens covers came out, it just made more sense to use them, and they offered more protection.”

Tegtmeier says while greens covers have been out for some time now, they’re still not cheap. He paid around $1,800 per cover this year, and he tries to replace six to seven covers per year. The process of installing them is labor-intensive, in his case taking 10 employees four solid days. Then, come spring, you have to roll them back up and store them in a dry place – which takes up quite a bit of space when you’re talking 41 covers.

“Still, it’s the best way to offer protection in a year like this when we have cold winter winds and no moisture at all,” Tegtmeier says.

Tegtmeier doesn’t recommend topdressing for insulation for every golf course, but he can’t disagree it helped him with the winter conditions he has faced this year.

“Every superintendent has to decide what’s best for him or her, factoring in budget, course and conditions,” he says. “I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t feel it was advanta-
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measure than in the north.

"In my region in Northern Arizona, it's a common practice for the courses to put a quarter-inch or one-eighth of an inch of sand down prior to the onset of winter to protect the crown of the plant and act as a method to deal with desiccation in the event there is no snow to provide a blanket of protection," says Whitlark. "Watering isn't an option because these courses have to blow out all the water from their irrigation systems."

Aside from topdressing in a mild winter to avoid desiccation in a drought situation, topdressing combined with aeration in summer improves the ability of soil to hold water, providing a more hospitable environment for the rootzone.

"The courses I deal with have very compacted soils, and superintendents have to apply more water to those areas more frequently, hand watering and setting out portable sprinklers," says Whitlark. "In this case, topdressing with aeration is an effective strategy for eliminating or reducing drought stress in localized areas. When you improve soil conditions through aeration and get three to four inches of sand built up on top of this field off the native soil, ultimately that soil environment becomes able to hold water and accept it so your runoff potential is severely reduced. You then get healthier turf that's less prone to drought stress."

As far as topdressing in winter, Whitlark cautions that it's only one strategy and far from a panacea to winter desiccation.

"It's better than nothing, but it doesn't entirely protect greens from winter desiccation," he says. "Ultimately, you really need to get snow."

Whitlark echoes Tegtmeier’s concerns about what to do with the sand come spring, which may make a superintendent wonder how much to put down.

"It’s a fine line," he says. "If you put a blanket down and get a nice snow pack, the snow tends to help the sand work its way down into the turf canopy. But if you don’t get any snow and you’re trying to expedite growth in spring, you’re sitting on your hands because you’re waiting for the turf to grow and you’re fertilizing like crazy but it’s not growing up through the sand, so you have to remove it. Sand is angular and abrasive, so in the process of removing it, if you have too much down you can injure the turf by creating a scouring effect."

“There are plenty of guys who are successful without putting any sand down because they go in and core aerate and hope for snow. If they don’t get it, then they find another means to get water on greens, whether it’s portable water trucks or whatever.” GCI

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The first thing we had to do is remove as much thatch as possible, creating some cavities for air and water to move through.

**KEY POINTS**

- Blue Hill Country Club had to address significant thatch issues and heavy soils.
- First, the maintenance team dethatched and aerated to encourage air and water movement through the soil.
- Next, they began to incorporate sand into the soil profile through drill-and-fill methods.
- As a result, the facilities problematic greens improved dramatically.
Dealing with Poa push-up greens

The turf team at Blue Hill Country Club troubleshoots the thatch and soil issues that were hampering their greens.

by Jason Adams

Four years ago I was hired at Blue Hill Country Club, a 27-hole facility that was constructed in 1925. The club was the host of the 1956 PGA Championship and hosted an LPGA event for several years.

After evaluating the property, I realized that there were some significant thatch issues on some of the greens, as well as some very heavy soils 4 inches below the surface. The combination of the two resulted in greens with severe isolated dry spots, inconsistent playing surfaces and poor drainage after high amounts of precipitation.

The first thing we had to do is remove as much thatch as possible, creating some cavities for air and water to move through. That first year we core aerated three times, twice with ¾-inch tines on a 2-inch by 2-inch spacing and a ¾-inch core aerating. We also performed a ¾-inch needle tine three times throughout the season and deep-tined with 10-inch deep ½-inch tines in the fall.

It was a drastic change in aeration than what the members were used to. In the past, they were only allowed to pull cores one to two times per year with varied deep tine in the fall. They relied more on the hydroject to fracture the soil profiles underneath.

After the third year of this program, the top six inches of the soil profile showed dramatic improvement, as well as the playable consistency of the greens. It was now time to attack the deeper depths of the soil profile.

During the early summer of 2009 – with record heat in the northeast and a July rainfall – several greens at Blue Hill CC became severely stressed with no place for the moisture in the root zone to go. The soil profile was saturated with 90- to 100-degree heat. The result was significant annual bluegrass loss on about seven greens on the course. They just couldn’t dry down.

The No. 9 green, which had has been notorious for being a problem green, suffered the worst that summer with a 60 percent loss in turf. The No. 9 is one of those greens that has poor drainage with heavy soils underneath, sits in a pocket on the property and was surrounded by trees.

During my second season, we had removed 20 large pine trees from behind the green and followed that up with removing six large oak trees on the southeast side of the green to encourage the morning sunlight.

Once we had recovered from the summer, it was time to sell the membership on modifying the lower 6 inches of our profiles.

The first thing I did was to compile a series of photos of the soil profiles from every green on the golf course. The photos were put into a PowerPoint presentation along with “drill-and-fill” photos from Norfolk Golf Club, my previous club. I described the importance of draining the greens and the incorporation of sand into the profiles.

It was decided by the green committee and the board of directors that this was an important step in the conditioning of Blue Hill Country Club. That fall we performed the drill-and-fill process on 10 of the 18 greens on the course.

The results this summer from our “problem greens” were dramatic. The greens rooted and drained better than they ever had in the four seasons I have served...
as superintendent of Blue Hill Country Club. It was decided that we would continue this process on all 19 greens on the main course for the next four seasons.

This fall we completed our second application of drill-and-fill on the greens. Approximately 40 tons of sand was drilled into 8,500 square feet of greens. We hired an outside company to perform the process, which cost the club $8,500. Blue Hill then provided the labor to keep the machine hoppers filled during the process.

This process is very labor-intensive because of the loading process and the height of the hoppers. It is also imperative that kiln-dried sand be used during the process for easy flow through the machines. We had a staff of 20 guys who all took turns loading 5-gallon buckets of sand, hauling them to the machines, loading carts and stationed on the machines filling the hoppers.

While it doesn’t sound like a difficult or taxing process to complete, after about the fourth or fifth green everyone’s shoulders and biceps start to get a little sore. That’s where you tag out and perform another duty for a while.

After each green is completed, we push off the remainder of sand and soil that is left behind, the greens are dragged with a broom and then blown off. The greens come out pretty clean and smooth after all is said and done.

Our PGA Golf Professional, Lou Katsos, played the following day and was surprised how well the greens rolled. Lou has been a huge part of the success in all of our practices by relaying the importance of what we are trying to accomplish to the members.

The positives of this process are that we are starting to modify the soils in the old push-up greens so they can perform up to the members’ expectations and have a fighting chance with Mother Nature. The negatives are that it is an expensive process – about $17,000 if you use bagged, dried sand. In addition, you have to have a lot of labor to complete the process efficiently.

Moving forward we will begin to incorporate the process of the dryject. This process will also help to introduce sand a deeper depths and fracture the lower levels almost helping to “mix” the soil profiles.

Jason Adams is superintendent at Blue Hill Country Club, Canton, Mass.
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While golf/turf management remains a male-dominated industry, women are succeeding as superintendents. Three female superintendents discuss how some of the old industry stereotypes are disappearing.

By Jim Miller
As a young superintendent going to local association meetings, I wasn't able to attend the ones held at all-male clubs. That was a challenge for me as a woman. But many of the stereotypes that existed when I began my career have since gone by the wayside, which is great.”
— Tracey Holliday, Sterling Farms Golf Course

According to Golf Course Superintendents Association of America statistics, there has been an occupy movement going on in the golf course maintenance industry. That is to say, the role of the golf course superintendent is occupied by men at the rate of 99-1, a trend basically unchanged for the past five years. Naturally, this begs the question, “Why aren’t there more women in the role of the golf course superintendent?”

“I think it’s partly due to the lack of exposure to the career opportunity,” says Tracey Holliday, superintendent of Sterling Farms Golf Course in Stamford, Conn. “If a woman has never played golf, caddied or been around people who expose them to the profession, then they won’t ever realize such a career path exists. Being a golf course superintendent requires tremendous dedication, time, physical and mental toughness. It’s not for everyone — male or female.”

Over on the West Coast, Patty Reedy, South Course superintendent at The Los Angeles Country Club, agrees with the hypothesis that through lack of exposure to the game, few women realize turf management is a viable career option. “Women, and people in general, aren’t typically drawn to this

The industry isn’t worse off for not having more female superintendents. It’s better for having some female superintendents.”
— Patty Reedy, The Los Angeles Country Club
sort of a career," says Reedy, who's been the top turf manager at Los Angeles CC for the last five years. "And like many, they probably don't even know it's a career possibility."

Given the odds, is the challenge for a woman to achieve superintendent status, not to mention at a top flight facility, insurmountable? Reedy says being a minority in any industry comes with challenges.

"I don't see that it's something one can't overcome with hard work, determination and an unapologetic attitude about being a minority," says Reedy, who earned her agronomy degree from Texas A&M University.

And perhaps a sign of more modern times, Reedy says her career path wasn't lined with naysayers offering discouraging advice about managing golf turf and achieving a superintendent's position.

"My experience has been overwhelmingly positive," Reedy says. "From my mentors and professors starting out in college to my current boss, Russ Myers, I have been encouraged, guided and supported. In fact, when my own self-confidence was lacking, it was these men who saw something I couldn't see and urged me on."

On Mackinac Island, Wawashkamo Golf Club is Michigan's longest continuously operated golf course and in 1996 was named by Golf Digest as one of "America's Historic Golf Landmarks."

Superintendent Karen O'Dell, a 1993 graduate of Michigan State University's turf program, says she hasn't received much flak about being a woman in a "man's profession."

"It's never been an issue one way or another," she says. "I've worked hard just as the guys have throughout my career and have never asked for any special treatment. The grass doesn't know that I'm a female and it gives me fits and good days just like everyone else.

"Most people think it's pretty cool when I tell them I'm a golf course superintendent," she says. "I get comments about how lucky I am to work on a golf course every day and get to enjoy Mother Nature. I have to agree with them."

Inside the clubhouse, players are often surprised that the role of the superintendent is being managed by a woman. Like the superintendent profession itself, memberships and clientele in general are predominantly men, so it can come as a bit of a surprise for some that the 'keeper of the green' is a lady.

On the island at Wawashkamo, which in Indian literally means "walk a crooked trail," O'Dell says, "Having such a small staff (we joke and say we are the "maintenance two" - not the maintenance crew - just me and my assistant Ron Morden), we love the club and the his-

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The Colorado summer weather usually brings bright sunshine with temperatures in the mid 80s to high 90s, (rainfall 3 to 4 inches total), and humidity in the single digits. A recent summer stretch included 24 straight days in the 90s, low humidity, and no precipitation. Surfside is an integral part of my maintenance programs to maintain optimum playing conditions during these difficult stretches and all season long.
Whitemarsh Valley CC just celebrated its 100th anniversary, and the greens are the same age - some just 3000 sq. ft. oldies with restored original bunkers. Bent grass and POA share the scene. The bulk of the soil profiles have never been renovated to modern particle size construction.

We use SURFSIDE 37 wetting agent to survive the Philadelphia summers and provide tournament conditions for the club membership. We inject SURFSIDE 37 into the irrigation system to maintain greens, tees, fairways, and roughs. On isolated dry spots we hand water with SURFSIDE PELLETS. For a hard-nosed LDS probe the area and drench with 6-oz SURFSIDE 37 in 5 gal. warm water.
tory behind it. The members treat us very well and appreciate our efforts. We even play in the Wednesday mixed couples, which gives me a chance to talk with the membership about the course and mention things they need to be doing to help out.”

However, it’s a different age for women in the turf profession. Some of the old stereotypes and professional biases are today relics of a bygone era, says Holliday, who studied turfgrass management at The Stockbridge School of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

“As a matter of fact, as a young superintendent going to local association meetings, I wasn’t able to attend the ones held at all-male clubs,” she says. “That was a challenge for me as a woman. But many of the stereotypes that existed when I began my career have since gone by the wayside, which is great.”

Over the past few years, golf course superintendents as a group have started to trend toward working until a certain age or a professional milestone has been reached, then to migrate into allied sales or some other type of associate role in the golf industry. For female superintendents, these career trends impact them the same as they do their male counterparts.

For most, Holliday says the ability to remain in golf course management and retire as a superintendent is a matter of choice.

“Some women may want to start a family and want a more balanced social life,” explains Holliday. “Some may want to work a regular work week and have weekends off, so some prefer the more social aspects of sales.

“Being a golf course superintendent can be extremely lonely at times — especially for women, because there are not that many of us to commiserate with,” she adds. “Absolutely, it is possible to retire as a superintendent if the circumstances align themselves.”

“As far as sales being an eventualty for me, I can say confidently that it’s a possibility — but so is moving to Africa and putting my agronomic knowledge to work for me,” says Reedy. “Truth is, I’m leaving myself open to anything with my primary goal being to siphon as much ‘life’ out of this short life as humanly possible.”

O’Dell has had the experience of having a career that has come full circle, going from tending turf, then into a sales position and finally back into golf course management with her position at Wawashkamo GC.

While more and more golf course superintendents are thrust into the spotlight as their community’s representative for responsible turf care, those critical of the industry could point that there aren’t enough women managing golf turf.

However, Holliday doesn’t believe the issue should be about filling quotas. Rather, the important question is whether the right person for the job is in the position and managing the turf.

“The industry only gets better when gender is not an issue and the right and dedicated people are put in place,” she says.

“The industry isn’t worse off for not having more female superintendents,” Reedy says. “It’s better for having some female superintendents.”

The disproportionate number of men to women in golf course management has less to do with closed doors or blocked career paths and more about women not entering into turf management.

“It seems particularly extreme in this industry,” Reedy adds. “But I think it has more to do with a general lack of women’s interest in this field rather than being purposefully singled out because they are women.”

Jim Black is assistant superintendent at Walden Country Club in Crofton, Md., and a frequent GCI contributor.
THE STRESS TEST OF 2011

If you count yourself as one of 2011's golf turf survivors, then I offer you sincere congratulations. In addition to stress, worry and economy-driven heart palpitations, many survivors suffered in their positions. We all worked with less and often worked for less.

Okay, that was the good news. Now here's the bad.

From my unique perch as a turf pro and a columnist, I would recommend upping dosage of your heart medicine for this dire prediction: 2012 could be more of the same, if not worse.

We start the year with unemployment at 8.5 percent, a minimal 0.6 percent improvement since last August. And this may be a misleading number because it doesn't include those who have stopped looking for work. Almost half of all Americans can now be classified as either in poverty or low income.

The bleak economic news doesn't make for a very good environment for our turf industry to expect significant improvement. To think otherwise will only lead to disappointment and frustration. We have to face reality.

Since I retired at the end of 2008, I have traveled my home state of Wisconsin extensively. I cannot think of a single course that doesn't need either more members or more players. It is difficult to see how that will improve this year. Golf is discretionary spending and there simply isn't as much entertainment money around as in previous years.

It is nearly impossible to increase revenues in this climate, so golf course budgets are met by expense reductions. There have been instances that insurance money from a disaster (hail, for example) has offered some financial relief. And then there are courses that suffered damage from Imprelis herbicide that are counting on payments for their damage to help better position their finances. A club in our town sold quite a few lifetime memberships and was able to relieve significant debt.

Cases like the above are few and far between, and the budget-cutting knife is drawn most often. This will continue in 2012, I fear. Golf course equipment is not being replaced like it should be, and a lot of it is getting really old. There is a point of diminishing returns – at some point repairs cost more than a machine is worth.

The bleak economic news doesn't make for a very good environment for our turf industry to expect significant improvement. To think otherwise will only lead to disappointment and frustration. We have to face reality.

I have seen golf course crews shrink. A golf course budget mostly is labor, so it is no surprise that is where the greatest reductions take place. We have seen veteran superintendents released and others leaving for other jobs with the certainty their position will be downgraded. Some accept the salary reduction and hope to stay until retirement.

Winter in our part of the country makes courses actually close shops during those months the courses are closed. They opt to send equipment out for repair or wait until breakdowns actually occur before making fixes. In doing this, some superintendent positions have actually become seasonal, part-time jobs. That could continue this year.

We have seen courses eliminate all overtime pay and even trim golf course summer jobs to something less than 40 hours a week. The toughest for me to see has been the willingness of some organizations, maybe out of necessity, to eliminate health insurance and retirement benefits.

I work on membership in our turfgrass association part-time, maintaining attendance at our events as well as seeking out sources for larger donations. It has been a daunting battle, just like the daily life for many superintendents. What may be most frustrating for my colleagues is there hasn't been a change in player expectation, the significant decreases in resources notwithstanding.

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A tee complex’s appearance can significantly impact golfer satisfaction and influence their opinion of overall course conditioning and playability. By Nathan Jordan
“Depending on the course design, tee boxes may not always be aligned in a linear fashion.”

You only get one chance to make a first impression in an interview, the board room and on the trade show floor. It isn’t any different on the golf course. Most often the first view a golfer has of the course is as he approaches the first tee. The appearance of not only the first tee complex, but throughout all holes, can significantly impact golfer satisfaction and influence their opinion of overall course conditioning and playability.

It is important that all crew members involved in course set-up utilize the same methods to ensure consistent placement of tee markers and associated course fixtures, appropriate clean-up of divots, broken tees or any other debris that may be found on or around the tee surface. This is only achieved through dedicated training and reinforcement of prescribed methods as outlined by your facility.

Hopefully the following will bring greater clarity to some suggested practices which may already be implemented by your staff.

**SET-UP.** Tee marker alignment appropriate to the drive zone is extremely critical for golfer stance and addressing the ball. If one has aligned the tee markers toward an object clearly out of bounds, the golfer is required to compensate, and as a result pace of play may be compromised. In addition, this conveys a lack of care by the maintenance staff to the golfer. The “tee tool” can be constructed very affordably and quickly to eliminate this potential for error.

In addition, when two sets of tee markers are placed on the same teeing surface, ensure the forward markers are set wider than those in the rear to eliminate any distraction in the golfer’s line of sight.

Now that the alignment and spacing of tees has been considered, one must consider the physical placement of markers on the teeing ground. If a multi-tiered tee exists, one should avoid setting tee markers immediately below, above, or on the slope itself. Use reasonable judgment when establishing these parameters.

The distance from which the markers are set in from the tee surrounds is always up for discussion. A one-foot distance typically provides an adequate buffer to prevent any contact between mowing equipment used in the surrounds and the tee marker.

The width of the teeing ground is not specifically defined, but markers should be placed widely enough for the golfer to comfortably place the tee at their desired location, keeping in mind that he may stand outside of the tee markers.

Depending on the course design, tee boxes may not always be aligned in a linear fashion. This introduces the challenge of ensuring that what is intended to be a more forward tee isn’t set to play a greater distance than what has been designated to be a longer tee, per course yardages (i.e. white tees playing longer than blue tees).

It’s important to rotate tee placement frequently, if not daily, during peak season. Similar to the movement of pin locations this will disperse traffic and provide time for recovery of divots, especially on Par 3 holes. Creating a chart with approximate locations for tee markers in helpful to ensure crew members completing course set-up are placing tee markers appropriately and helps keep the rotation...
consistent. This also gives you the opportunity to note areas to avoid on the teeing ground such as slopes.

DETAIL AND APPEARANCE. A messy, divot-covered tee is no more inviting than a dirty kitchen. While there are many different approaches to picking up, replacing and/or filling divots, some method must be implemented. While many golfers will take the time to fill divots with sand, given that it is provided, we certainly can’t expect each of them to get filled. There are several different methods that I’ve been involved with. One is that in course setup fill the divots; another is to send around a team in the afternoon to clean up and fill divots. The second method described has little interference with play and sets you ahead for the next day.

If not at every hole, it is most likely that ball washers and refuse containers exist throughout the course. A ball washer isn’t very effective without water. Ensure that they are checked daily as significant water loss can occur through use and evaporation. In addition, make sure the water is fresh and doesn’t take on an odor. Detergent tablets greatly help with this, and the ball washers should be fully drained and rinsed as needed. Tee towels typically go hand-in-hand with the ball washer. Make sure they are washed or replaced as needed. A soiled towel is not pleasant and once again conveys a lack of detail to the golfer. Trash containers can be an attractive nuisance for bees and wildlife.

Nathan Jordan is an assistant superintendent at Kennsington Golf Club, Canfield, Ohio, and a frequent GCI contributor.
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What is the state of the Golf Course Design field? The last few years have been – imagine the voice of, and with apologies to – Rodney Dangerfield, “Tough, I tell ya.”

How tough? We’ll see Haley’s Comet before another building boom... I pick up the phone a dozen times a day just to make sure it’s still working. With my free time, I joined a bridge club. I almost jumped last year. Everyone thinks golf course architects are suicide risks. Even my psychiatrist makes me pay in advance.

ASGCA has switched from Ross Tartan to Burlap! It’s that tough. However, more golf course architects than ever want membership in ASGCA. They’re desperate, I tell ya, desperate. How desperate? One candidate tried to use his wife’s boob job as a “remodel project” on his application to ASGCA. Now that’s a desperate housewife. But he had no shortage of members willing to review his project.

I tell ya, golf course architects get no respect, no respect at all. Architects are fighting for every job out there. Our annual ASGCA meetings look like “Fight Club.” Yet, more people than ever want to get into golf course architecture. We also lose design projects to recently laid-off golf critics, environmentalists and historians. It used to be minimum qualifications for a remodel project included writing at least five specification books to guide construction... now some people sell services based on reading three golf architecture history books. Cheech and Chong seem to be everywhere telling owners, “You don’t need no stinkin’ architect!”

Even those who sought work in booming China face new moratoriums on construction. For architects over there, this is the year of the “draggin’.”

Pricing is tough there and back home. Both Tiger and I get 10 million – him in dollars and me in pennies. I bid one job recently using the Domino’s Pizza strategy – three large courses for $15, and lost the job to a firm willing to throw in breadsticks!

Many golf course architects have a brand new perspective on spending $4 on a Starbucks: from behind the counter.

Our home life is tough, too. My girlfriend left me for the garbage man. She said she needed more financial stability. My kids don’t want me at career day anymore. My dog growls at me and the cat is more aloof than normal.

It’s hard for contractors, too. Winning bids have profit margins of (-15 percent). Bids are so low the GCBAA added a new category to their “certified builder” program – “Certified Insane.” And certified checks are the new gold standard. If ASGCA wears burlap, the contractors are wearing barrels.

I bid one job recently using the Domino’s Pizza strategy – three large courses for $15, and lost the job to a firm willing to throw in breadsticks!

It’s tough on supers, too. Budgets are so low that “pasture golf” is no longer just a cute expression. Environmentalists aren’t complaining about pesticide use any more.

At one course the superintendent’s crew was cut from 20 to 10... and five of those are sheep. At least that super has a job. Another course laid off the superintendent to save money, but kept the golf course dog. I called the shop to ask what the greens, tees and fairways looked like. They answered, “Ruff.”

Well, at least I’m smiling. My little business has always mirrored the economy, and even these slow years, and without going to China, I had one major project a year – not the glory days, but enough to stay in the middle class. I have signed up a big project and have another on the way, suggesting that 2012 will be the best year among the last five.

Maybe 2012 will make me sing the Beatles – “Here Comes The Sun.” It does seem like its years since it’s been here!
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I remember when the Internet first gained prominence and it became apparent that having a website was essential for any commercial enterprise. Back then, Web designers were not plentiful and few people thought to hire a professional to create a site. They felt that any Web presence was better than none at all and they found people they knew who were "into the whole Internet thing" to help them.

As a PR professional, when I saw a website that didn't represent people well or looked amateurish, I'd ask who created it. Invariably, I'd get answers like, "My nephew did it," or "I bought 'Web Design for Dummies' and did it myself," or "My son has a friend who just graduated with a degree in computer science." While those days have passed for Web sites, I'm afraid I am seeing the same thing happen with regard to social media.

As social media has become an integral element of all mainstream media, some people regard it the same way they used to regard websites - as a good addition to their marketing tactics, but not so essential that they need to approach it with a professional sensibility. As with any marketing outreach, social media done badly will actually set a person or organization back rather than move them forward.

Here are some tips to gauge whether they're taking the right approach or heading down the wrong path:

By Marsha Freidman
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As part of its State of the Industry Research – make sure you read this issue’s cover story – Golf Course Industry asked superintendents if they were using social media outlets – such as Twitter and Facebook – to distribute information and communicate with golfers or their club’s membership. Nearly 70 percent said they weren’t, according to the data.

Are you using Twitter, Facebook or other social media to distribute info or communicate?

70% No
30% Yes

Source: Golf Course Industry research

MY DAUGHTER DOES THAT FOR ME. If your daughter is a college graduate with a broad-based education that includes a degree in mass communications, I’d say you may be on the right track. However, if she’s 18 and her primary qualification is that she has Twitter and Facebook accounts, I’d say you need to reevaluate your choice of marketing personnel here. Just because she’s your daughter and can use Facebook and Twitter, doesn’t mean she has the skills necessary to market a business using social media.

I HIRED A COLLEGE INTERN. While college students may be part of the social media generation, it doesn’t automatically qualify them to do social media for you. Unlike traditional media, which is a communication to a broad audience, social media is one-to-one marketing outreach. You are communicating directly to individuals and anyone who has ever posted an opinion in an Internet forum knows the online audience is not to be trifled with. Understand that your reputation is on the line. A social media marketing professional is an astute communicator who ensures each time the right tone, caring and message is delivered for maximum return and keeps your audience engaged. This dynamic is crucial for the success of the program.

I GOT 11 NEW FOLLOWERS ON TWITTER THIS WEEK. Of course, building followers is important, but you’ll never make a social media campaign work with the onesy-twosy approach. For my self, my company and our social media clients, we have a monthly benchmark for building followers. Now, this benchmark is not a gross number, but a net figure after we have weeded out spammers, chronic friend adders and marriage proposals from men in foreign countries.

Done right, it can create a base of thousands of followers. Done wrong, it wastes time and energy and, most important, gives people the impression that social media marketing isn’t important. In fact, it has become one of the most critical and fundamental components for any marketing strategy, which every company needs to put in place. GCI

Marsha Friedman is a PR consultant and founder/CEO of EMSI Public Relations.

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An Insider’s Guide to
Las Vegas

Not a high roller? Want to get off The Strip? GCI’s Vegas beat writer, Helen M. Stone, provides the end-all, be-all of Sin City’s must-see sites and experiences. By Helen M. Stone

Vegas, baby! Well, first off, calling it “Vegas” is a sure sign that you are a tourist. Locals use the full name. And please don’t say “Nev-AH-da” — that’s a major cringe factor. It’s “Nev-AD-a,” thank you.

The Las Vegas strip is home to an incredible array of restaurants, shows and gaming. Wandering the Strip can be a great way to spend a few hours or a few days. People-watching is cheap and fun entertainment. Dining options range from a two-buck hot dog at Slots Of Fun to a meal that can top $200 a person at some of the "celebrity chef" establishments.

For dining options that the locals love, consider moving off the Strip for better value and a great selection. There are options that cater to every budget and taste.

Mexican food is a sure bet throughout the Southwest, and one of the best in town is Lindo Michoacan (www.lindomichoacan.com). They make their own tortillas moments before you get them, and the chips are as fresh as can be. Mucho spicy salsa, carnitas to die for and margaritas that will make you shout “Ole!” are all reasonably priced and artfully prepared.

In the mood for Asian? Lotus of Siam (www.saipinchutima.com) is considered by some to be the best Thai restaurant in the country. Don’t let its somewhat seedy surroundings fool you. Ask for the Northern Thai menu, but don’t miss the number 14 appetizer, Nam Kao Tod, a totally addictive crispy rice with sausage, herbs, peanuts and lime. They do amazing things with fish and seafood and the wine pairings are stellar.

Speaking of seafood, KJ’s Kitchen (www.yelp.com/biz/kj-kitchen-las-vegas) is one of the most authentic Chinese restaurants in Las Vegas and the fish couldn’t be fresher (some are swimming in tanks awaiting your order!). Did you know that Southern Nevada has a Chinatown? It’s all along Spring Mountain Road, just minutes west of the Strip. This is a spotlessly clean, white tablecloth (but not too expensive) place where non-Asians are a minority. But don’t worry, the menus have English translations and the servers are friendly.

With its reputed Mafia roots, you’d figure that Las Vegas would offer “killer” Italian food. Well, Casa di Amore (www.casadi amore.com) fits the bill. It’s a step back in time, with a charming brick building, cushy booths and even complimentary limo rides from your hotel. And the food… magnifico!

Okay, so you want an All-American bargain. Check out Ellis Island Casino and Brewery (www.ellisislandcasino.com) for amazing
deals on steak, prime rib and barbecue. It's nothing fancy, but how about a thick slab of succulent, perfectly roasted prime rib and a beer for less than $15?

No visit to Las Vegas is complete without taking in a show or two. The city has become a home away from home for Cirque de Soleil, and there are two outstanding choices. "Love" is a must for music lovers. The soundtrack is pure Beatles, with built-in speakers surrounding you in your seat while the incredible gymnasts and athletes defy gravity and take you on a journey through the Fab Four's genius you'll never forget.

As a total contrast, "Ka" offers epic battles and death-defying visual effects that will leave you clutching your armrests.

One of our own

A GCSAA member for more than 18 years, PJ McGuire is a past president of the Southern Nevada GCSA chapter and has been honored for his work as a founder and president of the Nevada Golf Industry Alliance. But PJ has a second calling – as a stand-up comic.

PJ's new career has taken off like gangbusters – he's worked with the likes of Andrew Dice Clay in dozens of venues in Las Vegas and beyond; and now GCSAA show attendees have a rare chance to see a special show tailored just for golf. PJ will be playing at Alexis Park Resort on February 28-March 2 for four GCSAA special shows at 9 p.m. Visit www.pjthecomic.com for details. Don't miss it!

PJ McGuire (left) is recognized for his work.

The stage is as dazzling as the performers, lifting and tilting and elevating.

For a total Tinsel Town treat, "Jubilee" has thrilled audiences for more than three decades and is the over-the-top, glitzy showgirl spectacular that you would associate with Old Vegas. This is the real thing, with gorgeous showgirls sporting huge headaddresses and skimpy sequin costumes (the late show is topless). The revue-style show offers everything from Samson and Delilah to the sinking of the Titanic.

Need a break and want to let off a little steam? How about 10,000 square feet of vintage pinball machines? The Pinball Hall of Fame (www.pinballmuseum.org) is a wonderland of all the games you remember and some that you have never seen. Admission is free and the authentic, restored pinball machines range from a quarter to 75 cents.

When the show is slow, get out of the city and visit the desert gardens of the 180-acre Springs Preserve.

Natural and other wonders.

Las Vegas may be famous for the Strip, but it is also central to a number of amazing recreational opportunities. You will need to rent a car, but most of these can be done in an afternoon.

First of all, if you have never seen Hoover Dam, this is a must. This amazing feat of engineering is truly one of the world's wonders (www.usbr.gov/lc/hooererdam). You can also walk across the newly constructed Pat Tillman Memorial Bridge, which is now the road to Arizona. The bridge is almost as dazzling as the dam itself and make this a destination you will kick yourself for missing.

The Springs Preserve is an even shorter drive from the convention area (or long cab ride) and offers a wealth of activities. The 180-acre site includes the Nevada State Museum, as well as miles of trails through the gardens. You can even rent a bicycle on weekends and take a spin on the 2.2 mile loop trail. The Springs Preserve is a true getaway in the heart of town.

You can go a bit further and in about 30 minutes be out in one of the most spectacular desert parks in the Southwest. Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area (www.redrockcanyon.org) has a 13-mile scenic loop drive that can give you a compressed geological extravaganza. But be sure to leave yourself an hour or so to take one of the many day hikes that are available. With any luck, the wildflowers will be popping.

If you have a bit more time, Mt. Charleston offers piney wood forests and if the weather holds up, you might be able to hit the slopes (www.skilasvegas.com). But even if there isn't any snow, Mt. Charleston offers miles of hiking trails to fit any timetable, plus a couple of decent restaurants/lounges to refuel after your mountain adventure. There is even lodging if you want to make a weekend out of it.

Finally, a great desert day trip might be the best way to put the icing on your Las Vegas cake. Start in Boulder City and fuel up with a from-scratch breakfast at the Southwest Diner (www.southwestdiner.com). Boulder City is a charming step back into history, and worth a visit on its own. You can also stop at one of the town's grocery stores or restaurants to pick up a picnic lunch, snacks and beverages for your road trip.

If you haven't seen the Hoover Dam, you need to start your desert adventure there. Then head to Lakeshore Road (National Park fee or pass required) and enjoy the views of Lake Mead. This will take you to Northshore Road, which leads you through incredible rock formations. You can stop at Redstone to get a close-up look.

Make sure to stop at Rogers Springs, where the Conservation
Corps built a catchment basin for the spring. A bit further on is Blue Point Spring, where you can spot relict (nearly extinct) leopard frogs frolicking in the reeds if you’re lucky.

Keep going until the cutoff to Valley of Fire. This Nevada state park also requires a small entry fee, but the dazzling rock formations are well worth the price of admission. Be sure to stop at “The Cabins” for a great example of the Conservation Corps work — the small abodes are hewn from the brilliant red rocks and boast incredible views.

Stop at the visitor center to learn about the geology, biology and history of the park, along with ideas on how to spend the remainder of your time. If you’ve made an early start, continue down the same road and take advantage of various hiking opportunities. You can marvel at an old movie set, experience an Indian fugitive’s hideout or squeeze through a slot canyon.

Down the road from the visitor’s center, you can climb a ladder to see genuine Indian petroglyphs or take a couple short loop drives to view more amazing rock formations. By now, your day will be ending and you can take a quick drive to the freeway and be back in the city in about 45 minutes. A long day, yes, but one that will let you see a side of Nevada that most tourists miss.

First Friday
First Friday has been a Las Vegas institution for the past eight years, and was recently kicked up a notch by new owners (www.firstfridaylasvegas.com). This art-centered, free event in rejuvenated downtown Las Vegas features great music, cool cocktails and the best in people-watching. Restaurants offer special deals, and newly added food trucks also fuel the fun. While you’re there, check out the domed light show on Fremont Street and make an evening of it.

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Travels With Terry

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

PAVING THE WAY

In an effort to spruce-up the course, Mark Pelkey, superintendent, and Senad Begovic, equipment technician, at the Lyman Orchards Golf Club in Middlefield, Conn., designed and built a template to make concrete pavers in-house. Scrap sheet metal was shaped and mig-welded into the template forms for a full-sized and half-sized paver measuring 6 feet by 9 feet and 4 1/2 feet by 9 feet, respectively. After the first forms were made, one bag of concrete was mixed with one ounce of dye to create an earth tone paver. They made more template forms after seeing the great results. It takes approximately 240 pounds of concrete to produce one-half pallet of pavers, for a total cost of $24. They are set up enough to remove from the forms and stackable the next day. Labor time is about 1 minute per paver regardless of the size and it takes about three hours to make a half pallet. Matt Fauerbach is director of agronomy, northeast region for Billy Casper Golf.

TWO BIRDS, ONE STONE

The greens and collars at the Navesink Country Club in Middletown, N.J., are sprayed with a Chem Turf Spray Hawk. The Spray Hawk used to be transported by the person who drags the hose on the back of a separate turf vehicle. Brett Scales, superintendent, and Jose Rodriguez, equipment technician, conceived and built a bracket to transport the Spray Hawk on the back of the 2010 Chem Turf 200-gallon sprayer which is mounted on a 2010 John Deere Pro Gator 2030. The Raven sprayer control panel was moved toward the driver so the hose dragger could ride “shotgun” on the spray rig, which eliminated the use of the turf vehicle. The steel plate that holds the Raven was cropped to allow more passenger leg room. In addition, a 2-inch by 4-inch by 12-inch rectangular square tubing was welded to the steel plate for the Raven to be moved and mounted to the center of the dashboard. The Raven is in a fixed position, but it can be moved back to its original position. To secure the Spray Hawk to the rear of the sprayer, U-shaped metal brackets were welded on the sprayer frame to support the Spray Hawk axle. A clevis pin was welded to the Spray Hawk and then secured to the sprayer with a 1/4-inch-thick steel bar 24 inches long bolted to the sprayer frame. The rubber tubing was also duct-taped to ensure the Spray Hawk fits snugly into the U-shaped brackets. GCi
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- New active ingredient for golf course turf, nursery and landscape ornamentals
- DMI fungicide technology controls disease by inhibiting processes related to fungal biosynthesis, which disrupts target pathogen growth
- Provides rapid plant uptake, preventative and curative control, low use rate, application flexibility and delayed resistance development
- Controls anthracnose, dollar spot, brown patch, pink and gray snow mold, gray leaf spot and other diseases in turf
- Controls southern blight, leaf spot, anthracnose, scab and powdery mildew in ornamentals
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- ISS can automatically set individual station run times based on changes in soil moisture
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ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATIONS ARE CHOKING OUR INDUSTRY. We must continue to raise the level of understanding about how golf courses can positively impact the environment and our communities. Local superintendents are trying to raise awareness, as is the industry’s lobbying effort. This must continue and we must all get involved. Remember: A healthy golf course is better than a neglected cornfield.

I’m over 50 so perhaps the following hurts me more than it hurts you. Still, it’s penny-wise and pound-foolish for clubs to view hiring a younger superintendent as a cost-savings measure. Nothing against the up-and-comers, but some top-flight supers with years of experience, knowledge and tenure are being dismissed or their positions eliminated for financial reasons. And I know from my perch as a consultant who helps clubs hire new supers that the options for us older guys are limited.

Technology. The gizmos and gadgets being introduced to the game are fun, but will they really help? Will apps engage more golfers or simply create more slow play? How much information can we absorb, and more important, how much will truly help how we play? Now contrast what’s happening technologically in the world around us with what’s happening at the governing bodies, which are considering putting more restrictions on equipment—shaft length, grooves, ball distance, belly putters, etc. How will less technology help the average golfer? How will that help bring new golfers to the game? If they see reasons to limit the power of the pros, I’m all for it; but not for the vast majority of golfers, the public.

As I said at the beginning, golf isn’t all doom and gloom. I’m encouraged by the international emergence of golf. I think it’s great that professional events are being won by golfers from all over the world. Golf in the Olympics could be a real boon to our business. At the PGA Show, architect Robert Trent Jones, Jr., said he was really excited to know that golfers from Latvia and Sweden will be competing against one another in Rio on a world stage. He’s right.

One element of the new Golf 2.0 campaign that impressed me was the addition of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America. That’s 4 million kids we can introduce to golf now and keep as golfers for their entire lives. If we can get a few of them to love the game the way we do the long-term outlook for golf will become much rosier.

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PARTING SHOTS

Pat Jones is editorial director and publisher of Golf Course Industry. He can be reached at pjones@gie.net or 216-236-5854.

OF TURF AND TULIPS

Allow me to tell you a tale of tulips to illustrate my take on the current state of the golf industry.

In the year 1637, there was a unique moment in history when the most valuable commodity on earth wasn’t gold or diamonds or Apple stock or five blissful minutes without seeing a Kardashian on television. For a brief time, tulip bulbs were as coveted as any object known to man. Go figure.

For reasons that elude most modern historians, people went briefly gaga for tulips and the Dutch — being smart sonsabitches — created an entire economy around them that boomed like crazy for short time.

Massive fortunes were made and then lost as interest waned, circumstances changed and tulips went back to forever being just something your teenager ran over when she backed the mini-van out of the driveway too fast.

Golf had its version of the tulip craze in the last couple of decades of the 20th century. Golf had grown along with the suburbanization of America and, in the mid 1980s, we stood at about 10,000 facilities. About half of those were traditional private clubs and the other half were a mix of mom-and-pop facilities, resorts and munis.

Then, along came a whole bunch of things that led us down the tulip-lined garden path. Developers became convinced that every subdivision needed a course as an anchor. The National Golf Foundation released a report suggesting there was enormous unmet demand for golf. Private and public entities decided to build courses as money-makers to keep up with the "endless" demand for corporate customer outings. Tiger came along and got us fist-pumping about the potential growth from minority participation.

Finally, futurists told us how the looming retirement of the baby boomers would line all of our pockets with gold as affluent oldsters headed to the Sun Belt to play golf all day, every day.

Our bubble quickly grew large. We added 5,000 new courses and dramatically increased expectations for conditioning and quality in just 20 years. We all had stars in our eyes as everyone threw money at the game. Only a handful of cynics noted that supply (courses) seemed to be growing faster than demand (rounds), but we ignored that gloom-and-doom stuff.

I also note that massive 1990s economic growth from minority participation. Giants emerged like AIG to make golf fun and provide our customers with the latest and greatest. Disaster hit the corporate market and golf’s bubble deflated slowly and in phases. First came the end of another fad; the Dotcom Boom that created much of the fake money that flowed into golf.

Then came 9/11 and a drop in travel and outings. Then came publicized reports about overbuilding in Myrtle Beach and elsewhere, political embarrassments like AIG hosting lavish golf outings with federal bailout money and a growing corporate perception that golf-based marketing was distasteful to shareholders who worried that their 401(k)s were funding playgrounds for the elite.

Combine those historical factors with ongoing cultural changes that make it harder for our traditional core customer — a guy in his 30s or 40s with disposable income — to allocate time and money for golf.

So, we find ourselves overbuilt, under-valued and facing a future that looks kind of crappy. Yet, there has been no crash and there probably won’t be. Rounds are only down about 10 percent overall from the high water mark a decade ago (revenues are a different story). And, for a whole bunch of reasons, even the 30 percent of facilities that are consistently unprofitable continue to operate. In short, the state of the industry today is "limping along in limbo." Compared to collapsing like the Dutch tulip market, that’s not such a bad thing.

In my opinion, golf will endure this self-inflicted, smoldering crisis. The core values that attract people

But unlike the Dutch example, the madness didn’t end suddenly with a loud, devastating "pop." Instead, our bubble deflated slowly and in phases. First came the end of another fad; the Dotcom Boom that created much of the fake money that flowed into golf.

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This is survival of the fittest time, folks. The smart will live and the dumb will die. And please God, let the dumb die soon for they hurt all of us through discounting, poor service and turning people away from the game by treating customers like crap.

So, my advice to those pondering the state of this business is to get smart or get out. Otherwise, a lot of us are going to be sitting around someday staring at a pile of worthless tulip bulbs disguised as the golf market.
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