Not Just Everyday

Integrity rules, as these golf industry folks attest

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF
With another year coming to a close, it's time to hand out some awards to recognize certain golf industry individuals for their achievements. But these awards are not for formal accomplishments, such as Best Golf Course Superintendent in the Universe. They're granted to those whose actions reflect integrity. And Lord knows the world can use more of that.

So let's get to it. Please hold your applause until all awards have been presented. And congratulations to this year's honorees.

He's Got Guts Award

Matt Shaffer
Golf Course Superintendent
Merion Golf Club,
Ardmore, PA.

Superintendents need someone like Matt Shaffer because he has the fortitude to discuss topics that others don't want to touch with a 10-foot bunker rake.

Take superintendents' salaries, for instance. A lot of superintendents know how they feel about the issue — that they should make more than some of their courses' equivalents — but they might not want to talk about how they feel in fear of repercussions, like the hammer coming down on them from their respective general managers.

But not Shaffer, who says superintendents wear more hats than pros and general managers. "Superintendents today are obviously better educated, and we are equal to or better than any other person on the property," Shaffer told Golfdom earlier this year. "We ought to be compensated accordingly, but I don't necessarily think that's the case."

Next time any of you superintendents see Shaffer, you can thank him for speaking up about your pay raises.

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Iron Man Award

STEVE MONA
CEO, GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Steve Mona was the kid who never missed a day of school. He has grown up to be the man who never misses a day of work.

Last month, Mona celebrated his 13th anniversary as GCSAA's chief. Mona hasn't missed a day of work in those 13 years.

Amazing.

He chalks it up to his healthy lifestyle. A famous Biblical verse states, "Your body is your temple, worship it." That's Mona's mantra. He has about as much fat on him as a skinless chicken breast.

Another neat thing about Mona is the respect he commands from others, from the association's members to the janitor at the GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence, Kan. They respect Mona because he respects them.

You never hear anybody bash Mona, which is astonishing considering that he's a CEO in America, and CEOs in America are supposed to get bashed.

It says a lot about the man.

Mega Modesty Award

DAVID BEATTIE
ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY GOLF CLUB, COLUMBUS, OHIO

David Beattie had been the assistant superintendent at Ohio State for 24 years. So when his boss Gary Rasor announced he was retiring in the spring after 36 years, the last 20 as superintendent, Beattie was primed for a promotion.

But it didn't happen.

Ohio State elected to hire Dennis Bowsher, a very capable superintendent with more than 20 years of experience at courses in several states. Bowsher, an OSU alum, longed to return to his home state. It was a good fit.

But what about Beattie? A lot of guys might have said "take this job and shove it" after being passed over at a place where they'd shed 24 years of blood, sweat and tears.

But not Beattie. One of the first things he did when he found out about who was hired as superintendent was contact Bowsher and congratulate him.

"He was the first one to call me," Bowsher said months later, still impressed.

"He was as genuine as a 14-carat gold ring."

"I welcomed [Bowsher] with open arms," the 46-year-old Beattie said. "The department made an excellent decision on whom to bring in."

In October Bowsher said: "Now that I've worked a full season with him, I have even a greater opinion of him."
Helping Hand Award

STEVE SARRO
GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENT
VAIL GOLF CLUB, COLO.

After Hurricane Katrina wrecked the Gulf Coast, we all wanted to jump in our cars, drive there and lend a helping hand. Few of us did.

But Steve Sarro went. And he took a crew of people with him. Last March, Sarro organized a group of 30 golf course management professionals from Colorado and Wyoming to travel to New Orleans to help four golf courses, two private and two municipal, recover from the hurricane’s damage.

Sarro and his assembly, including several superintendents and turf students, drove to New Orleans from Colorado Springs in a caravan of vans. They spent almost a week working at the Tournament Players Club of Louisiana, English Turn Golf & Country Club, the Golf Club at Audubon Park and Brechtel Memorial Park Municipal Golf Course.

“I’m just trying to help others,” Sarro said. “I’ve always heard that your time means more than your money.”

When the golf season ended in Colorado in 2005, Sarro began to visualize the trip. Others might have stopped there, too busy to chase it. But Sarro pursued it fervently. He got others on board to help make his vision become reality. They raised $30,000 for the trip, including substantial donations from Syngenta Professional Products and Ewing Irrigation.

“What we did may have seemed small in the beginning, but we left one hell of an impression down there,” Sarro said.

“It’s a blessing,” said Walker Sory, superintendent of the Golf Club at Audubon Park, where the volunteers worked cleaning up the course’s deteriorated bunkers. “They came at just the right time.”

No Spin Here Award

JEFF RUTHERFORD AND HIS EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM
LES CO, CLEVELAND, OHIO

Jeff Rutherford came right out and said that LESCO had screwed up. And in this WorldCom world of crooks, cooked books and blame storming over business deals gone wrong, Rutherford’s admission that LESCO made a mistake by dissolving the company’s direct sales force and increasing its mobile Stores On Wheels units in hope of maximizing operating profit percentage was admirable.

Rutherford could have consulted with the image consultants to put some kind of spin on the matter to soften LESCO’s culpability when the company announced in July that it expected to lose net $4 million in 2006.

But Rutherford didn’t. He admitted that LESCO messed up. He also didn’t throw former CEO Michael DiMino, whose decision it was to cut the sales force, under the bus.

Rutherford said LESCO was going back to its old way of doing business and rehiring the sales reps to try to right the ship. In doing so, Rutherford acknowledged that superintendents and LESCO’s other customers missed the one-on-one interaction that the company’s sales representatives provided.

“Our customers appreciated the time and attention the sales reps paid to them and to their turf-care needs,” Rutherford said. “Our customers want us to bring back the sales reps, and that’s what we’re going to do.”

Who knows how long it could take for LESCO to right itself. But give Rutherford credit for taking a forthright approach to the problem at hand.

Take This Job and Love It Award

BRUCE WILLIAMS
CERTIFIED SUPERINTENDENT
THE LOS ANGELES COUNTRY CLUB, CALIF.

You’ve heard the talk that we shouldn’t take our work so seriously. Our jobs and the stress they cause us can kill us.

Bullfeathers, says Bruce Williams.

What’s wrong with working for a living and loving it?

Williams adores what he does. I’d bet no superintendent loves his job more. Work is one of the most important things in Williams’ life.

But last year, after Williams underwent a seven-way bypass, it was easy to assume the stress brought on by his frenetic work pace had caught up with him. It was a wake-up call for Williams to stop and smell the freshly cut fairways.

Wrong, Williams said. Lying in that hospital bed recovering from his surgery, one of the things Williams missed most about his life was the stress of his job. “That’s because I thrive on stress,” he said. “I couldn’t wait to get back to the action.”

After his surgery, the doc told Williams that six weeks was the minimum time he should take off to recover. Six weeks later, Williams was back in his chair at the L.A. Country Club. And he was stressing out and loving it.
Bethpage is a beehive for golfers, about 50,000 of them a year. Dave Catalano, who has spent most of his career there, sees all types of golfers at Bethpage, which features five municipal courses, including the famed Black course.

"Kids, old people, men, women, black, white, Asian. You name it," Catalano said.

Catalano has seen enough golfers pass through Bethpage to realize that no golfer should be discriminated against playing on his course or any other facility. While that's not the case, unfortunately, Catalano continues to shoot down stereotypes that some golfers, including women, children and the disabled, play slowly and poorly.

"I don't know if there's any correlating evidence anywhere to support any of this nonsense," he says.

One time, when an old man disapproved of a junior tournament going on at Bethpage ("These kids have 50 more years to play golf. I'm an old man and I only have a few years," he groused), Catalano politely told him to take a hike.

"My response to him was, 'Have a nice day.' It wasn't a point we were going to debate," Catalano says.

More course personnel should pay heed to Catalano’s approach and welcome all golfers with open arms. They should also educate their repeat customers that slow play doesn't necessarily equate to certain categories of people.

"You have slow play because golfers play slow," Catalano says. "They don't abide by any of the sensible practices that have been recommended for years on how to encourage fast play."

That said, there are golfers who play poorly but get around quickly, Catalano noted.

"I happen to be one of them," he said.

Don't ever accuse Dan Lejeune of being part of golf's good ol' boy network. Lejeune is a man on a mission to get more women to play golf. Hey, women just want to play the game and have fun like their male counterparts. Is there something wrong with that?

Lejeune, who has been a real-estate developer for more than 35 years, built RiverCrest specifically to attract women to play. While the club honors the traditional country club atmosphere that attracts men, Lejeune says the club recognizes the importance of offering an inviting atmosphere to women, including three sets of tees for women, equal membership status and daily play with no restrictions.

Lejeune says he witnessed women at other private clubs being treated unfairly by men. Appalled, he decided to do something about it. Women and men are happy he did.

"I can't tell you how many male members have come up to me and said, 'Dan, my wife and I are playing golf together and we're having a marvelous time,'" Lejeune says.

You go, guy.

There was no trash talking. There was no yelling "MISS IT!" when each other putted. This wasn't Noonan and Denunzio going at it.

Even though superintendents Steve Jones and Ron Dobosz were playing for $10,000 cash and $10,000 worth of products from BASF for their respective golf courses and bragging rights, they weren't going to let anything spoil this splendid walk in the park — a round of golf on Pinehurst No. 8 in the Superintendent’s Cup held during the 2006 BASF People vs. the Pros tournament in Pinehurst, N.C.

The 54-year-old Jones and the 35-year-old Dobosz squared off on a muggy and buggy late-August day. Their collective game plan? "We just wanted to go out and have some fun," Jones said.

Jones, who received nine strokes from Dobosz in the match-play event, won the Cup, 10 grand in cash and turf products. Dobosz won $5,000.

But what showed most on the course, even more than some of Jones' booming drives, was the camaraderie the pair displayed as partners.

"We just loosened each other up," Jones said. "I wanted to beat him, and he wanted to beat me, but it's not a big deal. This isn't a cut-throat business."

Jones' and Dobosz's good sportsmanship reflects superintendents' respect for each as peers.
We love listening to what others have to say. Here are some of the more notable things we heard from industry people and others in the past year.

“For a good golf course, you need drainage and common sense. If you’re short on the latter, get more of the former.”
— Paul Rieke, professor emeritus of crop and soil science at Michigan State University.

“I can call you farmers, is that correct?”
— Rulon Gardner, the two-time Olympic medalist heavyweight wrestler, addressing the crowd of superintendents at the outset of his keynote speech at the Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show last December.

“Believe me, I lose a lot of sleep thinking about the health of our show because it’s our No. 1 asset and drives so much of what we do here.”
— Steve Mona, CEO of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, on the economic significance of the Golf Industry Show to the association.

“People think in terms of the instant mature look. We’re in an era of instant gratification.”
— Golf course architect Bill Coore on golfers wanting a great golf course NOW.

“It’s always something new and challenging. It’s never dull.”
— Mark Langner, director of agronomy and applied research at FarmLinks Golf Club, the research and demonstration golf course owned by Pursell Technologies in Sylacauga, Ala. Langner’s course is a guinea pig for new products.

“2005 was the toughest golf season I have experienced in 23 years as a superintendent. If 2006 resembles this season, I will consider a career change.”
— Paul Diegnau, certified superintendent, Keller Golf Course, St. Paul, Minn., on what it takes to be a superintendent these days. We plan to check back with Paul to talk about 2006.

“Those who attempt the ridiculous can achieve the impossible.”
— Col. John Blashford-Snell, the British adventurer and veteran expeditioner who was the keynote speaker at the British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association’s annual conference in January.

“It was one of the worst-kept secrets in the history of secrets.”
— David Pursell, CEO of Pursell Technologies Inc., on the long-rumored sale of his family-owned company to Agrium Inc.

“I've seen the after pictures of Hiroshima. That's what this looks like.”
— Peter Carew, long-time New Orleans golf course superintendent, while driving through the destroyed and desolated neighborhoods of his city seven months after Hurricane Katrina struck.

“We're going to lose our ash.”
— Dave Shetlar, professor of entomology at The Ohio State University, on the threat posed by the Emerald Ash Borer, an exotic beetle that's killing ash trees in Michigan, Indiana and Ohio.

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“I wish my gallery was this big when I was playing.”
— Ken Venturi, famed golfer and golf announcer, upon sizing up the crowd before his presentation at the Syngenta Professional Products Green Carpet Premiere during the Golf Industry Show.

“A lot of people might refer to us as gimps or cripples and ask what the hell we’re doing out there.”
— Bob Wilson, a below-knee amputee and executive director of the National Amputee Golf Association, on disabled people who play golf. Wilson sports a 13 handicap, by the way.

“You don’t need to trick up Winged Foot. It’s just a tough, tough golf course.”
— Eric Greytok, superintendent of Winged Foot Golf Club, who said this before his course hosted the 2006 U.S. Open, in which no golfer broke par.

“I haven’t checked yet, but it’s probably on eBay by now.”
— Chuck Calhoun, superintendent of John’s Island Club in Vero Beach, after witnessing a golf fan pick up John Daly’s discarded cigarette during a round at The Masters.

“Our products are vital to public health protection and property protection. And sometimes the American public tends to forget that.”
— Allen James, president of the Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment, on the importance of pesticides.

“I don’t want to discuss politics.”
— A clearly agitated Matthew Yount, superintendent of English Turn Golf & Country Club near New Orleans, when asked several months later how he thought President Bush handled the devastation brought by Hurricane Katrina.

“Technically, money isn’t an issue here.”
— Joe Voss, construction manager for Liberty National Golf Course, the $129-million track built by Reebok founder Paul Fireman in New York.

“It’s the culmination of everything I’ve ever wanted to do professionally.”
— Thomas Lively, the director of grounds for the Medinah (Ill.) Country Club, who hosted his first Major, the PGA Championship, in August.

“When someone mentioned that I looked like I was back in my ‘comfort zone,’ I asked him whether he meant my ‘buffet zone.’”
— David Duval, on his golf game and his weight. Duval has improved his game and regained some weight, about 25 pounds. (Golf Digest).

“Without them, we wouldn’t have good golf courses to play on. It’s a skillful job they do. It’s not just about cutting grass. You need to have a lot of knowledge about that grass.”
— Retief Goosen, pro golfer, on superintendents.

“Tiger would have kicked the hell out of us, too. This guy is the most amazing athlete in any sport, ever.”
— Lee Trevino on Tiger Woods’ game (Cleveland Plain Dealer).

“We don’t think it’s the sexiest topic in the world, but we think it’s pretty darn important.”
— Chad Ritterbusch, executive director of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, on growing the game.
On Second Thought

A commentary by Geoff Shackelford
Contributing Editor

Hey, this sounds familiar.

Tiger Woods dominated again, winning two of four Majors and six straight PGA Tour events. The men’s Majors were contested on well-conditioned layouts, with the hard work of crews and volunteers at Winged Foot Golf Club and Medinah Country Club singled out for heroic efforts despite tricky weather conditions.

On the women’s side, players like Annika Sorenstam, Karrie Webb, Lorena Ochoa and Michelle Wie helped the LPGA Tour continue its ascent despite a new commissioner who is alienating some of the tour’s long-time tournament directors.

The architecture world once again greeted highly anticipated layouts like Sebonack, Ballyneal, Erin Hills and a slew of other high-priced projects.

And the game’s powerbrokers continued to rake in big salaries while poo-pooing major issues like slow play, technology, water usage and the sport’s accessibility.

But some things did change. Sort of.

Early in the year, the buzz centered around young bombers J.B. Holmes, Bubba Watson and Camillo Villegas. Remember them?

Their secret to their long-hitting prowess?

“I just like to sleep,” Watson told ESPN.com. “I think Tiger and his caddie went out running yesterday. . . . You won’t see me doing that, and my caddie won’t be running, either.”

Holmes, who hit an eight-iron from 198 yards en route to victory in Scottsdale, Ariz., was asked if he was a “weights and/or conditioning guy.”

“No, not really,” he said. “I ride the bike a little bit or whatever. I’m not really big on the weights and stuff.”

Meanwhile, Tiger Woods told Golf Digest’s Jaime Diaz that he didn’t care for the demise of shot-making.

“I enjoy moving the ball and hitting different shots, and I think that’s the way golf should be played,” he said. “But the game has changed since I’ve been on tour. It’s hard to make the ball move. You look at the old guys who are or were true shot-makers, like when I played with Lee Trevino at Bighorn and he blew my mind with some of the shots he hit. Then you look on Tour and you ask, ‘Who’s a true shot-maker? Who actually maneuvers the ball or does something different with it?’ And there really aren’t that many, if any, out here anymore.”

Oddly, the early portion of 2006 included
Winged Foot Golf Club proved a formidable challenge for contestants of the 2006 U.S. Open.

Our intrepid architecture writer looks back on the highlights and lowlights of 2006

mea culpas from the governing bodies on the distance issue. They appeared to see its effects on both the pro and recreational games.

"The longest average drive has moved up about 20 yards in the last 10 years," conceded R&A secretary Peter Dawson to the press during the British Open. "The advent of the ProV1-type ball has most to do with it, along with the big-headed drivers. So do I think that the game at the top level — this elite few — would benefit from the ball being a little bit shorter? Yes, I do."

The United States Golf Association's (USGA) equipment testing guru Dick Rugge told The Asbury Park Press, "We are criticized, and probably rightfully so, for letting technology go too far over the past 10, 11 years or so."

Meanwhile, USGA Executive Committee member Jim Vernon told the group's annual gathering, "We know that the way the game is being played by accomplished players has changed dramatically in recent years. It is not just that driving distances have increased among elite players. What I am suggesting is that we need to reframe the discussion of how the game is being changed."

Then, mysteriously, the USGA unveiled a Rugge-authored press release explaining "distance myths" and later suggested that U-shaped grooves were the real problem in golf because they encourage long hitters to swing away, knowing they will be able to spin their ball out of 4-inch rough.

In 2007, look for the USGA to prove that such a situation actually occurs.

The other major topic in early 2006 involved the PGA Tour's new television contract, which signaled the game isn't as popular as it used to be. The Golf Channel was locked in for a stunning 15 years of early-round coverage, while CBS and NBC remained involved with weekend coverage.

Rex Hoggard in Golfweek wrote: "Fifteen years? That's not a TV contract, that's alimony."

"If we're trying to reach out to non-golf fans, how you leave out ESPN is beyond me," David Duval told the Associated Press.

Of course, PGA Commissioner Tim Finchem put his usual tortured spin on matters.

"The Golf Channel brings a lot," he said in a press conference. "The reason for 15 years is that it sets the table for us to protect our position in the long term as the television marketplace continues to evolve."

Former USGA Executive Director Frank Hannigan offered a more refreshing take on Golfobserver.com: "The PGA Tour's new television deal confirms the obvious — general interest in golf peaked years ago and is now in decline. Recreational golf has been flat or worse in terms of rounds played for many years. The two are interdependent. For the Tour to find and command a new audience would require a freakish event — like a hermaphrodite dwarf becoming leading money winner. And it would help if the dwarf's caddie could be Anna Nicole Smith."

The LPGA hired a new commissioner, and she made a splash in 2006, running off key staff members, upsetting the press with a ridiculous photo policy and angering several long-time tournament directors, leading to the demise of several events.

LPGA head Carolyn Bivens likes to talk down to everyone as if she's a CEO running a Fortune 500 company. And she showed real savvy in defending some of her initiatives to

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Tiger Woods dominated the Tour again. He also had plenty to say about the demise of shot-making.
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the Orlando Sentinel's Steve Elling: “We’re trying to open endorsement opportunities to women. We’re trying to raise purses. Isn’t that appalling? My, my, go back in the kitchen.”

The Masters arrived with a crashing sound, as former champions Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer were critical of the many design changes made under Augusta National Chairman Hootie Johnson, who retired and handed the reins to Billy Payne.

“They’ve totally eliminated what Bobby Jones tried to do in the game of golf,” Nicklaus said in Golf Digest. “Bobby Jones believed golf was primarily a second-shot game. He believed that you should have enough room to drive the ball onto the fairway, but if you put it on the correct side of the fairway, you had an advantage to put the ball toward the hole.”

The floodgates were opened, and several current players chimed in as well. Said Mike Weir in The Toronto Sun, “I’m sure if Bobby Jones was still around, it would be like, ‘What are you guys doing?’”

Word also leaked that the club is buying homes in a nearby neighborhood to possibly shift a road so the fifth hole can be lengthened.

Around the same time, word got out that the Ohio Golf Association would be playing its Champions Tournament with a limited-flight ball in order to study a possible rollback and other ramifications of impacting the distance chase that has so adversely affected courses like Augusta National.

The August event was far from a perfect example of how a rollback might work, but the player comments revealed that such a rollback might bring the desired effect of restoring at least one lost element to golf.

“The hardest part was adjusting to the release,” [Tournament winner Blake] Sattler said of the Volvik ball in an interview with Sports Illustrated. “It brought more strategy into the game.”

In another reaction to major changes in the game, Nicklaus' Memorial Tournament at Muirfield Village Golf Club introduced special furrowing rakes for bunkers. Nicklaus' reason behind the controversial concept? Bunkers are too easy, he said.
“Bunkers are really supposed to be a penalty,” he said in a press conference before the event. “[Tour officials] have been telling the guys all year that the honeymoon is over and the bunkers are going to be a penalty. I said, ‘We can start it right here if you want to.’ And they said, ‘Fine.’”

Naturally, the players complained.

Australian Geoff Ogilvy won the U.S. Open at Winged Foot despite not caring for the USGA’s ultra-narrow course setup or its “tiered rough” concept, which was greeted with mostly positive reviews. He’s already proved to be an eloquent spokesman for a return to sensible golfing values.

“Two important aspects of golf have gone in completely the wrong direction,” he told Golfobserver.com. “Most things are fine. Greens are generally better, for example. But the whole point of golf has been lost. Ben Hogan said it best. His thing was that you don’t measure a good drive by how far it goes; you analyze its quality by its position relative to the next target. That doesn’t exist in golf anymore.”

Highlighted by Phil Mickelson’s final-hole double bogey that started with an errant tee shot that hit a corporate tent, TV ratings for Saturday were the lowest since measuring began in 1982 and were down 12 percent on Sunday, making it the second-worst watched U.S. Open ever.

Then burned-out Hoylake hosted the British Open. Tiger Woods won despite only hitting one driver over four rounds on the fast and fiery turf.

And even though Hoylake was entirely brown but for a few areas on the putting surfaces, players loved it.

“I’d like to see more of these in the States, I really would. It’s so much fun to play,” Chris DiMarco told the press after the tournament.

After Tiger captured the PGA Championship at soft but well-conditioned Medinah, the U.S. team took another beating in the Ryder Cup contested at Ireland’s K Club, falling by the same nine-point margin as last time and causing many to wonder why American players are so inferior on a match-play stage.

The game lost legends Byron Nelson, Patty Berg and Herbert Warren Wind, while the PGA Tour killed the oldest professional tournament, the Western Open.

And in the fall, Bandon Dunes creator Mike Keiser announced that the fourth course at the Oregon resort would be named Old MacDonald, and it will feature a team-driven design process led by Pacific Dunes architect Tom Doak and his design partner Jim Urbina.

“I think I’m not employing Doak and Urbina as architects,” Keiser said. “I’m employing them to design as C.B. MacDonald and Seth Raynor, his apprentice and successor, would build it if they were alive today.”

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