Ross Pudenz
It's not heaven — it's Eau Claire, Wis. But for Ross Pudenz, that may amount to the same thing.

"Everything I was hoping for happened," Pudenz says. "I couldn't have had things work out more perfectly if I'd scripted it myself. I was completely comfortable from the beginning."

Pudenz graduated from Iowa State University and took a job as an assistant superintendent at Mill Run GC in Eau Claire, a 36-hole facility (18 holes were added this summer after Pudenz joined the staff). He says the owners hope to have the new 18 holes — called Wild Ridge — listed as part of Golf Digest's new top 10 new upscale public courses in 2001. Pudenz says he learned a great deal partaking in the construction process.

"It was challenging, but they gave me as much responsibility as I could handle," he says. "They would tell me what they wanted done. Then I went out and did it."

Pudenz says he's planning on leaving Mill Run soon because he believes he's ready to take on the challenges of being a superintendent. His current superintendent, Barry Hines, knows he's looking and is helping him. "I want to leave Mill Run on good terms, and it appears that I will be able to do that," Pudenz says.

Pudenz says he would advise students entering the profession to pace themselves: It's a different world on a real golf course than it is in the classroom.

"The season is long, and you have to make sure you're putting out the same effort at the end of the season as you are in the beginning," Pudenz says. "You don't want to burn out, so just make sure you take it as it comes. Work hard, but it's not necessary to kill yourself."

Andy Thompson
We tried to track down Andy Thompson, the Penn State University student we profiled last year, but to no avail. Penn State's crack alumni staff listed him as working at Davenport CC in Davenport, Iowa, but a phone call to the course revealed that Thompson had left there for Madison, Wis. Attempts to find him there also failed.

Andy, call your mothers at Golfdom — we miss you. •

Editor's note: Golfdom will revisit these students periodically to examine their progress in the industry.
As a full-blooded Turfhead, I don't really like winter. However, I don't mind the beginning of the winter because it's a chance to catch up on important things — like sleep and food — of which the dog days of summer and the hustle of fall deprive us.

Although the warm-season gang doesn't get the same break that others do when winter arrives, the season presents a time for a lot of superintendents to catch up on things they put off during busy times. We might not like the cold weather, but winter is good for us — it's kind of like the "eating your veggies" of the business.

Turf managers' minds need to be fed, and winter is when you get all kinds of educational food. By now, everyone should know that staying abreast of developments in the field is essential to great golf course management. I'm glad to see all the education programs planned by various organizations — university, commercial or otherwise — and the effort that goes into getting information to superintendents.

While the GCSAA may think it has cornered the market on education, someone is going to do a seminar near you that will contain a few gems for you to use. You just have to show up.

Several groups of superintendents I know use the slower time to get together for breakfast once a week. When I was younger, the entree of choice was the Bloody Mary on Saturday mornings, but that was the extreme of winter boredom at work.

Certainly, there isn't time for organized weekly get-togethers in the season, but I'd like to see this kind of thing year-round. Informal turfgrass talk is good, and there's always something to be gained. It's not hard to pick up the phone and make camaraderie happen.

You know the old saying, "Failing to plan is ... blah, blah, blah." I must say I'm stunned at how many superintendents I see not getting their acts together until the last minute. Maybe it's because we've grown accustomed to so much changing of jobs and changing of management at golf facilities these days that planning ahead doesn't pay — but that might also just be a weak excuse. Budgeting, purchasing, staff training, equipment replacement and management and about a zillion other things that you don't want to do in the heat of battle should be easier this time of year.

From an agronomic standpoint, the weather may change your moves during the different seasons, but there's nothing wrong with sketching out the broad strokes and picking the colors of what your program is going to look like. This does not make you a cookbook-type grass grower; it makes you more efficient and prepared.

Now, for the most important part of Wilber's Winter Lesson: Your friends and family will always miss you as long as you stay in the golf business. They miss you in the summer, especially if you work on summer holidays. They miss you in the fall when you're busy setting up for a prosperous season next year.

But now the days are short, and there's no time like the present to make sure you include time away dedicated to your loved ones. A superintendent who missed his daughter's college graduation because of an event at his course in the spring told me that he didn't feel guilty about taking his daughter and wife on a nice vacation to the beach for Christmas. Sounds easy, but you would be surprised at how many people in our business miss those opportunities.

What will your winter bring? Even if you are like me and don't relish winter, the season can be your spinach — and you need your spinach. If you do some planning, it could bring you an incredible 2001.

Dave Wilber is a Sacramento, Calif.-based independent consulting agronomist who can be reached at dave@soil.com, even in the winter.
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Fertilizer Loss To Mower Pickup
(The Pennsylvania State University 1999)

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American Golf decided last year that two heads were better than one to lead the company. So in June, the Santa Monica, Calif.-based management company named David Pillsbury and Joe Guerra as co-CEOs. Both men have been at American Golf, which operates 320 courses and practice centers, since the late 1980s.

The 38-year-old Pillsbury and the 42-year-old Guerra, who met in 1986 while each was earning an MBA at the University of Southern California, have two things hanging over their heads when it comes to marketing initiatives: gaining more players and retaining current players.

"Our vision for the industry is that we ought to be able to add 1 million golfers a year," Pillsbury says in an optimistic tone.

That may not be as difficult as it sounds, Pillsbury adds, especially when one considers the statistics of golfers who enter the sport and later abandon it. Citing National Golf Foundation statistics, Pillsbury says about 3.5 million golfers join the game every year and about 3.5 million golfers leave it.

"All we have to do is keep one-half million from leaving and get another one-half million to join, and we'll have 1 million golfers," Pillsbury notes. "But that happens one customer at a time, and it happens at the grassroots level."

Pillsbury and Guerra realize that traditional barriers, such as the intimidation that comes with a 600-yard hole, must be broken to gain a million golfers. Also, a million more golfers won't help matters much if they don't play more than a couple of rounds a year. It's vital, Pillsbury and Guerra agree, to increase rounds to keep up with new course construction.

"We have a positive force working in our favor," Pillsbury says, noting NGF research that says there are 41 million people who want to join or rejoin the game.

The force may be working. According to a recent NGF report, the number of rounds played annually reached a record high of 564 million in 1999, up nearly 7 percent from 1998. The average number of rounds per player in 1999 was 21.3, up by 6.5 percent from 1998, while the number of players remained virtually unchanged at 26.4 million. It's good news, although some industry insiders contribute the increase to dry weather throughout the spring and summer in 1999.

The co-CEOs hope to flood the golfing world with new players — and hopefully more rounds — by increasing the number of Nike Golf Learning Centers that American Golf operates. "We have 40 learning centers up and running, and we plan to have 150 by the end of this year," Pillsbury says.

The learning centers are located at American Golf-operated courses and offer basic instruction as well as lessons in golf jargon and terminology, proper etiquette, pace of play, how to operate a golf car, how to reserve a tee time and how to move smoothly from the practice range environment to the 7,000-yard golf course environment. There are also programs for intermediate and advanced golfers. Each program cost about $150 for six hours of instruction.

"We create a professional environment for instruction by hiring PGA and LPGA pros," Pillsbury says. "We guarantee your satisfaction, or you get your money back."

Some critics contend that golf is too expensive, another reason the game is not bustling with new players. But Guerra disagrees.

"The reality is that many of the new properties need to charge high green fees..."
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Please send GOLFDOM to the following people at my organization:

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4. If you work for a golf course, how many holes are on your course?

| O A 9 | B 18 | C 27 | D 36+ | E Other (please specify) |

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<td>D 36+</td>
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3. What is your facility's annual maintenance budget?

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<td>09 90 Golf Course Builder</td>
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<td>10 105 University/College</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 100 Others Allied to the Field (please specify)</td>
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2. Which of the following best describes your title? (fill in ONE only)

| 12 10 Golf Course Superintendent |
| 13 15 Assistant Superintendent |
| 14 25 Owner/Management Company Executive |
| 15 30 General Manager |
| 16 35 Director of Golf |
| 17 70 Green Chairman |
| 18 45 Club President |
| 19 75 Builder/Developer |
| 20 55 Architect/Engineer |
| 21 60 Research Professional |
| 22 65 Other Titled Personnel (please specify) |

| 108 121 132 144 156 168 180 192 204 216 228 240 252 264 276 288 300 312 | 109 122 134 146 158 170 182 194 206 218 230 242 254 266 278 290 302 314 |

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105 117 129 141 153 165 177 189 201 213 225 237 249 261 273 285 297 309 | 104 116 128 140 152 164 176 188 200 212 224 236 248 260 272 284 296 308 |


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   - Semi-Private
   - Private
   - Resort
   - City/State/Municipal
   - Other Golf Courses (please specify)

2. Which of the following best describes your title? (fill in ONE only)
   - Golf Course Superintendent
   - Assistant Superintendent
   - General Manager
   - Club President
   - Owner/Management Company Executive
   - Architect/Engineer
   - Research Professional
   - Other Titled Personnel (please specify)

3. What is your facility's annual maintenance budget?
   - More than $2 Million
   - $1,000,001-$2 Million
   - $750,001-$1 Million
   - Less than $750,000

4. If you work for a golf course, how many holes are on your course?
   - 9
   - 18
   - 27
   - 36+
   - Other (please specify)

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to make the economics work," he says. "They're all chasing that high-end daily fee golfer that will pay $65 to $125 to play. But there's another huge base of customers that can't afford to pay that."

Those golfers are finding that there are quality golf courses that charge low green fees.

"We have a bunch of them, and we also have high-end courses," Guerra notes. "But when you blend them together, our average green fee is less than $21 and our average cart fee is $8."

Still, the entire industry needs to deliver more quality and service to retain golfers, Guerra adds.

"You just can't raise green fees and dues to achieve annual growth," he says.

The co-CEOs recognize that maintenance plays a major role in the game's marketing, and they sympathize with superintendents who are discouraged with etiquette-lacking golfers who don't repair ball marks and divots.

"I don't blame superintendents for being frustrated," Pillsbury says. "It's amazing to me how many beginning golfers don't know how to drive a golf car. And they don't understand that you don't drive a golf car on a tee box or the collar of a green. They haven't been educated."

Pillsbury says that pros and pro shop workers, as well as course marshalls, need to do a better job of educating golfers about the basics of course etiquette.

"In the service environment, we have to take responsibility for probing our guests," Pillsbury says. "We need to ask them how often they play and what their handicaps are. We need to tell them to fix ball marks, and that there's sand on the tee boxes to be used to replace divots."

Pillsbury and Guerra were on the road last fall visiting several of American Golf's 320 facilities, and talking with superintendents and general managers about their challenges. Finding reliable workers is the biggest challenge they're facing, Guerra notes, especially since some fast-food restaurants in major cities are paying $9.50 an hour and giving signing bonuses to new employees.

"We've had to step up and make sure we're keeping our existing workers happy," Guerra says. "We've had to get more competitive in recruiting new workers."

The CEOs agree that superintendents are integral to their operation, and they want to keep them happy in their roles.

"I view superintendents as being the true heroes of the organization," Guerra says. "They are invaluable to us." "Most superintendents I know [would say that] if you give them a choice between getting a raise or having an old mower replaced, they'll replace the mower," Pillsbury adds.
Real-Life Solutions

ARDSLEY CC, DOBBS FERRY, N.Y., AND THE LINKS AT ECHO SPRINGS, JOHNSTOWN, OHIO

Get Down

How can you get the green-up golfers demand while not damaging the long-term health of your turf?

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR., ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The demand to play golf early in the year has increased with the sport's popularity. Golfers figure they should be able to play as long as there isn't snow on the ground.

Even though they're playing before the winter chill has left the air, however, golfers demand turf as green in the spring as it is in midseason. But how can superintendents get the early green-up golfers demand without sacrificing the long-term nutritional needs of the turf?

The problem
The two types of fertilizer currently used in the industry — liquid foliars and slow-release granulars — each have advantages, but neither gives superintendents everything they need to meet golfers' expectations in the spring.

Slow-release granulars keep greens healthier for longer periods, but the green-up is delayed. In addition, granulars are more likely to be picked up by mowers.

In contrast, foliars provide immediate green-up and are less likely to be captured by mowers. But foliar fertilizers are labor intensive and need to be applied more frequently to receive the same long-term effects.

George Pierpoint III, superintendent at Ardsley CC in Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., says it's a conundrum he faces every year.

"You hate to sacrifice the long-term health of the turf for the short-term green-up," Pierpoint says. "But you obviously have to answer to golfers, so you have to find a balance."

Pierpoint heard about a new, small-particle granular fertilizer in February 2000 called Novex that seemed to combine the advantages of both. But because Cleveland-based Lesco didn't start mass production of the product until last fall, he couldn't find a batch to put down last spring, so he had to wait until July and August.

"I'd heard great things about what it was supposed to do," Pierpoint says. "It was supposed to be the best of both worlds, and I wanted..."