

Monster Garage

(In Praise of Golf Course Mechanics)

Golf course mechanics have been said to be a different breed. Some believe that they aren't human or even related to primates at all. Their looks, irritable temper and grouchy personality are traits that are closely related to the cartoon character "Taz" (i.e., the Tasmanian Devil) and not humanlike at all.

Golf course mechanics aren't monsters, though; they are real, living, breathing beings. But if you look closely at the golf course mechanic, you'll notice that they are a breed apart. Their hands appear to be a swollen, horrific gore, as if they had been beaten with baseball bats. They sweat 10w30 and salt water, which gives off an oily, rainbowish hue in proper sunlight (similar to the wet asphalt on a recently used wash pad). This sort of complexion is a dermatologist's dream and nightmare at the same time! They can also produce unusual sounds from every orifice, yet all smell the same, like cigarettes and cheese. Golf course mechanics are food-driven animals, but you mainly see them wandering the maintenance facility grazing on tobacco, a black sludge they refer to as "coffee" and anything that has fallen on the floor less than five seconds ago (a.k.a. the five-second rule).

Where they came from and how they got here is a complete mystery, but one thing we do know is they are very good at fixing things! From fairway mowers to door locks, they can fix it all. Golf course mechanics, unlike any other type of mechanic, have an uncannily heightened sense of precision. The main thing most of us don't know about golf course mechanics is that they are creative as an ox. Does that make sense?

This leads us to our case study, Aurora Country Club's maintenance facility and head golf course mechanic, Mr. Nick Pavlovich.

Nick was born and raised in Yugoslavia, then moved to the States when he was 18 years old. He has a unique accent, a foreign sense of humor and a wonderful smile. Since he has been in the States he has worn many hats, but from what I understand, being a golf course mechanic is the best job he could ask for. Nick's number-one goal for John Gurke and Aurora C.C. is to save them money. Nick does this by rebuilding used parts with used parts, and engineering and fabricating his own equipment, right there in the "shop." He is a true expert at what he does.

Last winter, ACC bought a walk-behind blower from a large "expanding company" in the area. But this blower didn't come with a trailer.

"Well, how are we going to get this eight-horsepower 'Green Monster' around the course?" wondered John Gurke, CGCS.

"How 'bout we make a twailoo?" said Nick.

"A trailer is a great idea, Nick!" said John. "Go to it!"

One week later, Aurora Country Club had the coolest "Green Monster" trailer known to man. Looking at it, this trailer makes so much sense but there is not one out there on the market like this. Why not? It has a square frame, approximately 36"x36", and golf cart tires that give it excellent balance on steep slopes. It has a low-profile design and requires no ramp for loading and offloading the machine. What else can you ask for?

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The made-from-scratch blower trailer.



The trim trailer made from an old Dedoes drum aerator.

Nick is becoming a legend when it comes to making custom trailers. This past season he challenged himself to make another one. This time it was a trailer designated for the push-mowing crew.

At ACC, two workers are sent out once a week to push-mow around ponds, bunker banks and along the road outside the fence, so these guys move around quite a bit and the trailer they were using was getting old and starting to fall apart. ACC needed a new trailer, again. But what made it happen was when John Gurke was throwing away an old drum-type aerator. Nick had been licking his chops at that aerator for a long time, months maybe even years, just patiently stalking it like prey, knowing exactly what he was going to do with it when it was the right time to pounce. That seems to be the trend with him if there is something being thrown away or gotten rid of. Where he got the idea, I don't know, but the end result of this new trailer was a breathtaking work of art, a true masterpiece of steel and rubber. Nick used every part of that rusty old aerator (except the drum) and rebuilt it into something that made the staff's work more efficient and saved the club a lot of money.

Nick's design concept would knock a lawn-maintenance company off its feet. This trailer was designed to function and look the same as a lawn-care company's low-boy trailer, only miniature. The trailer has just enough space for two 21" push-mowers to sit side by side. Mounted on the side of the trailer is a rack for weed trimmers, and on the front is a steel box that fits five gallon gas cans and other miscellaneous items. Welded on the sides of the box are two pieces of steel tubing to hold leaf rakes. When loaded, this trailer looks like it means business. Even the staff seem impressed with themselves when people see them pulling this miniature lawn service around the course.

Trailers are not the only thing Nick can handle. What about Aurora Country Club's diesel "Turf Vac?" Ahh, the diesel "Turf Vac." The only one of its kind. Picking up millions of leaves in one fell swoop, leaving nothing behind. This machine deserves its



The diesel-powered Turf Vac.

own private shed. Each spring and fall, the diesel "Turf Vac" proudly parades around the course grabbing any stick, leaf and hand that may get in its way. There is nothing that can stop this beast and it knows it! It will intimidate any man. Just looking at the diesel "Turf Vac" gives you the chills, knowing that if you turn the key, you'll enter into a strange and exciting new world of overwhelming suction given to you by pure, manly, diesel power.

In the back of the shop sat an old Jacobson Tri-King with a perfect 16-horse Kubota diesel engine. This machine was retired by the golf course but Nick wasn't ready to give up on it. He knew he would need that diesel one day. Then the opportunity came. The 14-horse Koehler engine on the pull-behind "Turf Vac" decided to fail for the last time. Nick knew that this was it! He was going to have an opportunity to go where not many, if any, men had gone before. Then out it came . . .

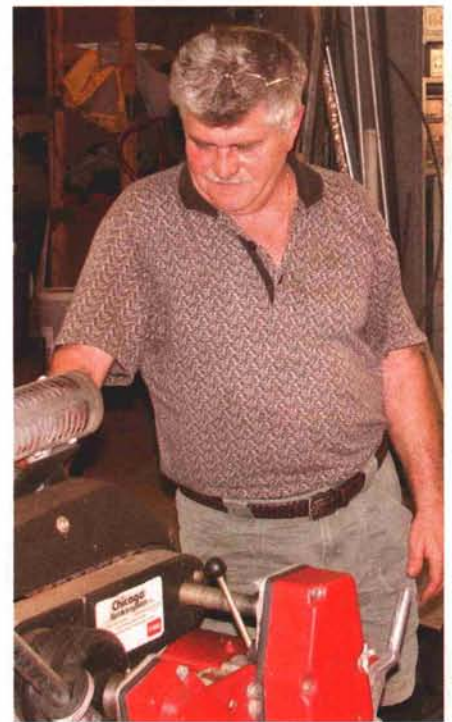
"We are going to have a diesel-powered vacuum!" said Nick.

John Gurke and his trusty assistant were in awe over this crazy yet intriguing proclamation.

"Are you sure we can do that?" said John. "What if it doesn't work?"

"Oh, it will work Mr. Gooky," said Nick.

Trusting Nick's confidence in this new venture, John told Nick to "get to it" and build the most glorious diesel vacuum known to man. And so, Nick effortlessly placed that



And the man(ia) behind them all—
Nick Pavlovich.

16-horse diesel engine on that "Turf Vac" as if that engine were meant to be there.

The engineering of Nick Pavlovich is endless. Every day, he is striving to find something to build to save John and the club money. His efforts deserve to be rewarded (or at least written about). The message for you golf course superintendents is to recognize that your mechanic is an expert at what he or she does and to never take him or her for granted. They mean more to you than your silly little assistants. And to all golf course mechanics who strive every day to better the course—all of you play a very important role in the maintenance of your golf course: thank you! You all are the real experts and superintendents couldn't do it without you.

So here's to you, the golf course mechanic. You angry, fuzzy, little weird creature! Thank you for fixing the golf course's stuff! You deserve a cigarette!



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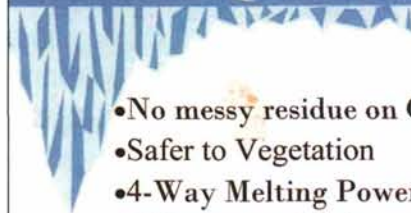
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