



Reach = Reward

Over time, I have learned to appreciate the tremendous variety of “experts and enthusiasts” right in my own backyard. As superintendents, we sometimes have the opportunity to harness the abilities of others, while helping support their passions. Sometimes just a little reaching out can pay back big rewards!

The best example I can think of is a story about my new friend Ray Feld. Late last summer, I walked into the office to check my voicemail. After sifting through a few messages, I finally got to a message from Ray, the “purple martin enthusiast.” Now **that** caught my attention. Upon returning Ray’s call, I was intrigued to learn that Ray thought I had an ideal habitat for purple martins. Huh . . . imagine that. After he continued to sweet talk me into purchasing a new martin motel, I installed the motel in accordance to Ray’s strict specifications, and waited . . . and waited . . . and waited. As it turns out, we were only advertising for **next year’s** martins. This is, of course, because martins tend to scout for suitable habitat during the fall as they prepare for their long migration. So Ray plugged all the entrance holes in the motel just before winter, cranked the motel to the down position (four feet off the ground) and left it for the winter.

Spring came around and I had to endure snide remarks like, “What do you got in there, mosquitoes?” I had to explain that Ray said the martins didn’t come around until late May or early June, if they were to come at all. I was just hoping that some martins had taken notice of my new motel last fall. As the spring progressed, Ray made some design modifications to the motel and decided it was time to crank up the motel and hope for the best. Before long we had sparrows and tree swallows attempting to move into this highly coveted piece of real estate. If other birds were to colonize the motel prior to the martins’ arrival, the martins would never move in. Ray responded quickly by cranking the motel down and plugging the entrance holes. He then installed two small, single birdhouses within 15 feet of the motel to encourage the tree swallows to nest there instead. Ray also set a number of sparrow traps to keep the sparrows from overrunning the motel. (Sparrows are an extremely aggressive and invasive non-native bird species that have contributed to the decimation of native songbird populations.)

Lo and behold, the tree swallows immediately moved into one of the small adjacent houses, and the pressure from nearby sparrows subsided. Ray then cranked up the motel yet again and opened up some of the nesting compartments for the martins. Not too long after that, I got a call on my cell phone, and it was Ray. We had our first pair of martins! This pair nested successfully, and raised one little martin. We call him Junior. Since then, we have seen many more martin visitors that may come back to join our first pair next year.

The whole point of my story of purple martins and my friend Ray Feld is that I have been enriched by reaching out and welcoming Ray to Cantigny so he could work his martin magic. Ray has an incredible wealth of bird knowledge, and is a tremendous part of our Audubon Sanctuary program—not to mention the fact that he’s just an all-around nice guy. I have thoroughly enjoyed learning about the art and science of raising martins. It is hard not to enjoy it when all I have to do is ask Ray.

As superintendents, we don’t always have the time to devote to projects like these. In this case, I felt like all I had to do was empower a man with

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Ray Feld, purple martin enthusiast, keeps a watchful eye on “Junior.”



Cantigny’s purple martins taking flight.

An Open . . . (continued from page 37)

In this industry, we (turf professionals and their families) live from golf season to golf season, looking forward to the downtime of winter but also looking forward to spring and the start of a new season. The focus is always about the turf and providing our members and guests the best conditions possible. But perhaps the industry's focus needs to be reevaluated a bit. Because when the final chapter of your life approaches, you're not going to say to yourself, "I wish I had worked more hours out on the course." More than likely, you will say, "I wish I had spent more time with my family. Where did the time go?"

Don't get caught up in the competition of what the other guy is doing at the other club. Don't get caught up in the quest to chase the big bucks at the big clubs. Don't lose sight of why you got into this business in the first place. Because in the end, when all is said and done, and you've mowed your last green, and changed your last cup . . . what you've worked so hard to accomplish and accumulate during your lifetime . . . the house, the cars, all the trappings of success . . . in the end, it's all just stuff, those material possessions.

And the grass will still be there . . . growing . . . as always.

Best regards,
Connie Dillner



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passion, and he ran with it. The trick is to be receptive and responsive to those around you who want to help enhance your facility. Prior to this summer, I didn't even know what a purple martin looked like. Now I can hear their song a hundred yards away, and know they are there. That's the reward. Thanks Ray. Keep 'em flying!

Learn more about purple martins at www.purplemartins.com

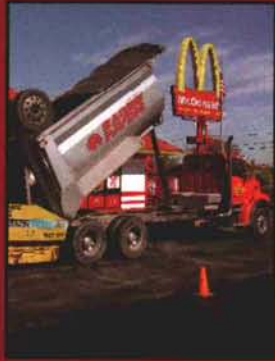


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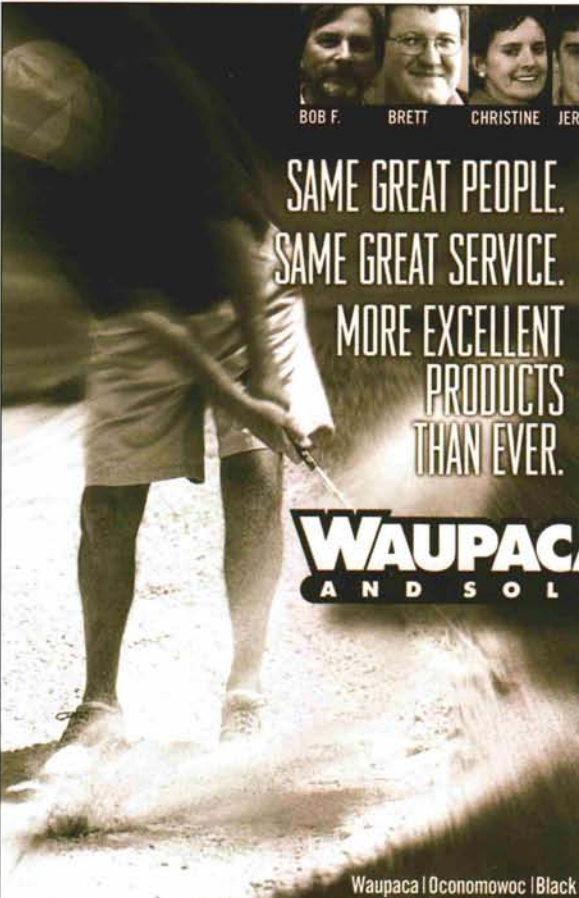
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