

Working for the USGA



Elliott Dowling, USGA

Working for the USGA, specifically working national championships has been a career goal of mine since volunteering for the 2006 PGA Championship at Medinah Country Club. All of you must be thinking: hey stupid, that was a PGA Tour event, how does that relate to working for the USGA?

The thrill of tournament golf got under my skin during my week volunteering for Tom Lively. I knew then, I wanted to be a part of this...somehow.

Unfortunately for the USGA and the golf community, Stanley Zontek passed away August 2012. His passing created an opening with the USGA's Mid-Atlantic region. During site visits with USGA agronomists, I made my intentions clear; I want to work for the USGA Green Section someday. I was contacted by Dr. Kimberly Erusha, managing director of the USGA Green Section last February gauging my interest in applying for the position. I literally rushed home from work to get my information and accompanying documents to her as soon as possible. I could not have been more excited!

I started with the USGA on May 27th 2013. So far, it has been everything I expected, and more. Visiting 80-100 golf facilities, athletic fields, universities and speaking at conferences provides an interesting perspective on turf management. Having the opportunity to see multiple courses across a varied region maintain turf provides the USGA agronomists an insightful

advantage to each facility we visit.

I was concerned moving from Chicago, which is all cool season turf to the transition zone. Other than academic knowledge of warm season turf, I have no experience maintaining it. Actually, I felt during the application process I would not make the cut primarily due to lack of experience maintaining warm season turf. Much to my surprise, I was not asked about my warm season experience during the interview process. The major focus was: can I handle the travel requirements and work load? Following each visit, we provide a detailed report outlining the topics of discussion. Dictating, editing and including pictures in a report with a 10 day turnaround time to the facility is expected.

TAS visits are what we are primarily known for. Superintendents and golfers rely on our experiences to help their golf facility. My region includes Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and Delaware; there are few problems that occur during a season that we do not see. Additionally, we ask superintendents to call and send pictures of issues they experience on their course. This helps us know what is happening in our region; information we can pass along when the situation occurs at another facility.



Elliott making a course visit this past summer with Superintendent Corey Haney and Assistant Trevor Garabow at Washington Golf and Country Club.

In early July, the weather was very difficult for many across the Mid-Atlantic region. I was called on several "emergency" visits to courses that experienced turf loss and needed help. I knew how the superintendent felt standing there in front of a committee who wanted answers. Staying calm while I explained to the group (who were upset and not really interested in the answer) is difficult.

I continually find it amazing that I visit one course where the topic of conversation is eradication of bermudagrass, than drive a few miles away where Bermuda is being maintained. Philadelphia is no longer the northern edge of bermudagrass. Chances are, when visiting courses from central Pennsylvania through Virginia and Maryland, burmudagrass will be a topic of conversation in some regard.

Additionally, different weed, insect and disease challenges occur in the Mid-Atlantic region that do not in the Midwest. For instance, annual bluegrass weevil (ABW) is a major concern throughout the region. Unfortunately, ABW now feeds on bentgrass. Large scale damage can occur if the insect is left untreated. To date, ABW is not a problem in Chicago. Until I started with the USGA, I never dealt with ABW. This insect in particular required a lot of learning on my part. From June through October, this insect was discussed on many visits.

As I reflect back on the season, and my decision to join the USGA, I am filled with joy. What a great organization to work for! We are the face of golf in the United States. Having the opportunity to visit so many golf facilities and provide support makes me smile every time. My day is always enhanced when a course calls to tell me of the improvements/changes they are making as a result of my visit. I am fortunate to be in a region that holds golf in the highest regard. It is truly a way of life in the Mid-Atlantic region. Because of this, my region has one or two championships a year. It is a pleasure to realize my career goal of working for the organization that so many of us associate with championship golf. @

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