

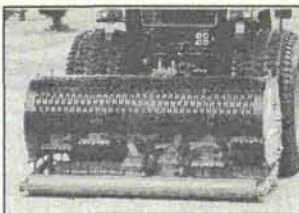
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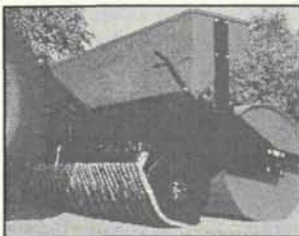
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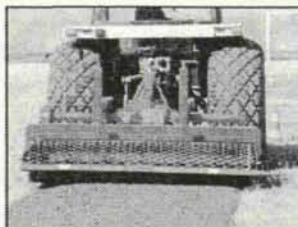
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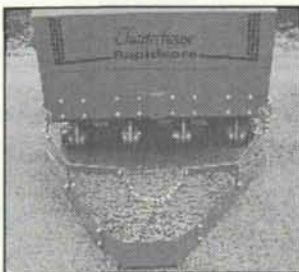
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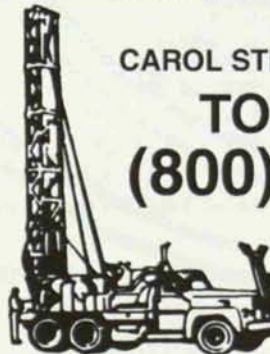
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to See the Future

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Okay, back to reality. But the time-travel metaphor is appropriate. History does dictate the future. As a relative newcomer to this industry, I thought I would venture back to the glory days of yesteryear to determine how and why our profession has changed, how it has remained the same and what this might mean for our future. Consider this an appetizer to further commentary on our past, present and future as the MAGCS and the GCSAA celebrate 75 years.

Remember, most of us, as youngsters, probably never thought consciously about being golf course superintendents. We started working on a golf course either because we were playing a lot of golf or hanging out on the links with our friends. Then we got the itch to see things from the superintendent's point of view until the curiosity grew to the point where we envisioned, potentially, a great career.

My virtual travel guides on this voyage were Bob Williams, Dudley Smith, Paul Voykin, Mike Bavier, Fred Opperman and James Meyer. Thanks to these elder statesmen for sharing their sentiments.

What significant changes have you witnessed in the golf industry over the last 30-50 years?

Dudley Smith notices a mounting lack of local student labor (kids today often receive large allowances from parents); an influx of Hispanic workers; and environmental precautions related to computerized spray equipment and decreased pesticide usage. He remarks upon the evolution from mowers pulled by tractors to self-propelled units. James Meyer shares Dudley's insights and also focuses on changes to aerification with deep coring, new methods of topdressing and the invention of hydraulics.

Mike Bavier remembers night-watering and the advent of automatic irrigation systems. He also feels that computers have made life easier, while lasers have changed grading and drainage installation. Bunker-raking, says

Mike, has come full circle from hand to machine back to hand. Pesticides have brought improved disease control.

Comments Paul Voykin, "The biggest change in the past 40 years since I have been a superintendent is the evolution of the golf course superintendent from one of the troika management team to the very top. The superintendent is now recognized, at least in North America, as the most important person in the golf course hierarchy. I am amazed at how smart the young superintendents are and how lucky I am to have some of them as friends."

Attire has changed, too, says Bob Williams, who went from overalls to a suit and tie. Bob also notes that business administration background is regarded and required these days; no longer are retired farmers or young fellows without college degrees passing

"The biggest change in the past 40 years since I have been a superintendent is the evolution of the golf course superintendent from one of the troika management team to the very top."

- Paul Voykin

muster. Today's superintendents have college degrees. Fred Opperman, echoing Bob's thoughts, adds that Hispanic workers have changed the green industry and targets increasing emphasis on height-of-cut on greens and evolution of fertilizers.

(continued on page 15)

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What problems did you have to deal with during your tenure as golf course superintendent?

Fred recalls having to educate the green chairmen and club managers, citing the USGA Green Section as a wonderful source of information. He also notes that working effectively with Hispanic employees meant overcoming language difficulties.

Dealing with dead turf and having no answers was difficult, remembers Bob, attributing such dilemmas to the lack of turf plots. Fortunately, in 1928, Albert Lascor established the USGA turf gardens in Lake Forest. Bob also recounts using mercury to control large brown patch and small brown patch (dollar spot) diseases, coping

Bob recalls the transition from hand greens-mower to motorized reel-mower during the late 1930s and early 1940s; he also used a three push-mower overgreen triplex that was about 12-15 feet wide, a duplex mower that cut two swaths with a mower gap in the middle and, in the 1950s, a three-nozzle boom for weeds in the rough.

with unprocessed sewer sludge, spreading manure and losing employees during the Great Depression and World War II.

Dudley and James talk about C-15 decline; Dudley had to resod 30 greens. They list contaminated water, flooding and drainage among the top challenges. Mike and Paul note that dealing with government regulations, educating crews about pesticides and navigating interpersonal issues have presented major challenges.

With what inventions or innovations were you personally involved?

Bob has been involved with some unique inventions during his incredible career. He recalls the transition from hand greens-mower to motorized reel-mower during the late 1930s and early 1940s; he also used a three push-mower overgreen triplex that was about 12-15 feet wide, a duplex mower that cut two swaths with a mower gap in the middle and, in the 1950s, a three-nozzle boom for weeds in the rough. Bob reminisces about Ray Gerber, a first-class mechanic, traveling from course to course in the late '30s to grind reels.


Dudley was one of the first to hire women at his course; in 1962, he boasted the first seeded Penn-cross greens in Chicago and in 1968, the first Jacobsen "Greens-king" triplex for mowing greens. In caring for the flora and fauna at his course, Paul wrote two books, pioneering promotion of environmental responsibility. Fred, meanwhile, used a helicopter to spray for Dutch elm disease, then implemented the same procedure to spray greens and fairways on a flooded course because ground vehicles could not access the diseased areas. In 1987, after visiting Australia, Fred brought back a roller for use on greens.

What are your insights for the future?

Mike foresees management companies, general managers and golf directors adding to our professional challenges; he suggests there is a good chance that you will work harder with and for these folks than you will work on your course. His advice: adjust your attitude and enjoy your surroundings.

Dudley's concerns include college graduates in turf management leaving the industry for more income and fewer hours, the infusion of management companies and declining job security. Fred, out sniffing that Montana air, sees increased use of Internet services for purchasing and major mergers reducing the number of chemical companies.

Paul has visions of the elite golf course superintendents making fabulous salaries as we all enjoy a higher level of success and competence. Paul suggests looking for stability, tenure and trust, and enjoying your job. Both Bob and James warn of the economy putting a crunch on budgets and foretell enhanced public awareness of our role, increased EPA involvement and a greater presence from unions and management companies.

All of the gentlemen who contributed to this article have experienced the green industry as insiders and have enjoyed their jobs as golf course superintendents. So heed their wisdom and take their advice—adjust your attitude, seek camaraderie with friends and colleagues and enjoy our profession! 

Why Do I Do This?!

When I sat down to write this, I reflected back on my last six years as an assistant golf course superintendent. I thought about the 3:30 a.m. alarm on a Saturday in July during our annual invitational tournament. I thought about the same 3:30 a.m. alarm in January when it was snowing 2" an hour and 200 people were coming for Sunday brunch later that morning! I thought about aerating fairways at 2:30 a.m. just so we wouldn't disturb the ladies too much on Tuesday morning. I thought about cleaning those same aeration cores the following afternoon when it was raining so hard you could barely see. I thought about hand-watering greens all day on a Sunday in August when you could actually see Poa annua wilting before your eyes. As I sit here and ponder those memories briefly, I must ask myself one simple question. "Why do I do this?!" I guess the only answer I can come up with is . . . because I love my job. Well, sometimes I do!

This is not a career one chooses to:

- 1) get rich;*
- 2) EVER sleep in more than one Sunday a month (even in the winter); and*
- 3) ever feel entirely appreciated by those we work for.*

So, I ask myself again, "Why do I do this?!"

Isn't this the reason why we are all a part of this business? Why else would we crawl out of bed two-three hours before most of the world to come to work, and more times than not stay at work two-three hours after the average person gets home from his or her eight-hour day? Is it because we really love our jobs, or are we just CRAZY?

Although I've been in this business by some other members' standards only a short time, I have realized that in order to be successful in this industry it takes a unique kind of person with an equally unique personality. We must also take into consideration the following. This is not a career one chooses to: 1) get rich; 2) EVER sleep in more than one Sunday a month (even in the winter); and 3) ever feel entirely appreciated by those we work for. So, I ask myself again, "Why do I do this?!"

Doesn't the position sound wonderful? Our friends tell us, "You've got it made!" "It must be great to be out on a golf course all day in the fresh air." The response I usually have is, "Well, it has its moments." Just as is the case with any profession, our industry has its ups and downs. The golfing public needs to realize that there is far more to maintaining quality golf courses than just mowing the grass. Turf management is nothing less than a science. If more people realized this, then perhaps we, as turfgrass managers, would finally get the recognition that we deserve.

(continued on page 29)

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Did I Learn Anything New Today?

Editor's Note: This column originally appeared in the December 2000 issue of The Green Breeze, the publication of the Greater Cincinnati Golf Course Superintendents Association.

I can remember coming home from school as a child and my mom always asking two questions: "How was school today?" and "Did you learn anything new today?" My reply to the first question, which to my mom's dismay was always "good," revealed a lot about my developing personality—I wasn't going to reveal my feelings unnecessarily. Over the years, my reply never changed. The answer to the second question, "Did you learn anything new today?" has stayed with me, and to this day I wonder at the end of the day if indeed I have learned anything new. If I can answer yes, I consider the day at least a partial success.

While involved in a conversation about the few superintendents who remain as active superintendents after age 50, the question "Did I learn anything new today?" began to roll around in my head. Sure, there are the issues of club politics, bad weather and numerous other reasons why superintendents leave by the age of 50; but maybe an additional factor is that after a certain age, we may no longer feel that it is important to answer the question "Did I learn anything new today?" in the affirmative.

Learning is what we do so well when we are young. Experts tell us if you want to learn a second language, you had better start by age 12; and if you have ever tried to learn a new skill, like golf or playing a musical instrument, you know only too well that younger people learn much more quickly. Something happens to our ability to learn as we acquire experience.


Frequently, when the discussion turns to superintendents leaving the profession, the parties involved bemoan the experience

that our profession is losing. This is a valid observation. Experience is what stops us from making the same mistakes over and over again, mistakes that can result in lost turf and repeated expenditures of large sums of money. Experience results in consistent playability and quality turf. Experience is the result of learning from our mistakes.

Experience and the ability to learn are frequently characterized as being at odds. The older superintendents see the younger ones as not having "common sense," the knowledge that everybody knows. Younger superintendents see older ones as being unwilling to try new things, to take risks. There is a truth in what each side states, but the fact of the matter is that the truth lies somewhere in between.

Common sense tells us those things that work and those that don't. Years of experience teach those willing to learn what is common sense. We acquire experience by learning, and by learning, we acquire experience. The two go hand in hand.

The conversation I was involved in was quite abstract; no one's job in particular was being discussed, rather trends from the GCSAA's latest survey of superintendents' compensation. Nevertheless, if one looks around our area, one does see many new faces that have come with all the new courses being built in the area. You can also see many older, familiar faces, faces that buck the national trend. Those are the faces of those still learning, still searching for the better way, still unwilling to accept what everyone assumes is "common sense." We can, I believe, be proud of our local superintendents that go against the trend.

When I finish my day, I ask my children, "How was school today?" My oldest responds, "Good." My youngest responds with an outpouring of everything that is on his mind. We're all different. When I ask, "Did you learn anything new today?" I hear my mom asking me again, and I wait for their answers. As youngsters, they are only too eager to learn, but I also ask myself, "Did I learn anything new today?" 



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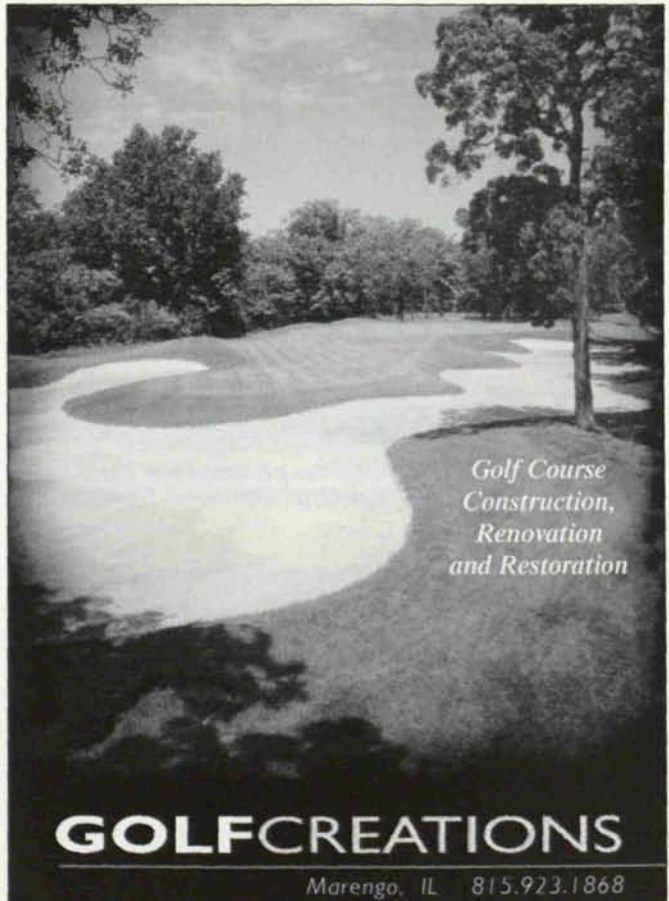
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HOLIDAY PARTY CIRCUIT

The second annual West Side Holiday Party was nearly a victim of the snows of December, but lightning-fast reflexes by organizer Dave Braasch resurrected it on January 3. The party, held at Dave & Buster's (who once worked for Dave at Hughes Creek), was well-attended and thoroughly enjoyed by all. Also attracting an enthusiastic crowd: Nels J. Johnson Tree Experts' holiday shindig.



Joel Purpur, CGCS, of River Forest C.C. with Kevin DeRoo of Bartlett Hills G.C. (who was so concerned about the food running out, he tried to block everyone behind him from entering the parking lot) and Erwin McKone, also of River Forest.



Dan Murray of Settler's Hill G.C. listens to Nick Hongisto of Schaumburg G.C. describe his new monitor while Kerry Anderson of Aventis/Chipco and Jim Burdett (Master of the Links, retired) seem to have their minds elsewhere.



Vince Dodge of Nordic Hills G.C. chats with mentor Gene Thompson of Indian Lakes Resort.



Mark Gilmour of J.W. Turf does his best Clint Eastwood to the amusement of Rick Uthe and Gene Thompson.



John Meyer of Simplot Partners (L) and Jim Burdett get a big hug from John Turner of Bayer.



L to R: Cindy & Al Pondel, CGCS (Deerfield G.C.) with Barb and Tom Robinson (Ravinia Green C.C.).



L to R: Bob Krohn (Ivanhoe chef), Brad Johnsen (Klein Creek G.C.), Joel Johnson (Nels J. Johnson Tree Experts).