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DECEMBER 2012 Volume 66 No. 8



The Midwest celebrates its 60th Annual Midwest Turf Clinic at Medinah Country Club. Dr. Derek Settle leads a panel discussion on recapping the summer that will always be remembered by those in the audience.

#### FRONT COVER

The new Midwest Board of Directors. Dave Groelle, CGCS, Dave Kohley, Chuck Barber, Bob Kohlstedt, Matt Kregel, Matt Harstad, Kris Kvelland, Jim Pedersen, and Nick Marfise. Not pictured: Justin Van Landuit and Ed Braunsky, CGCS, Photo credit: Luke Cella

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The Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents (MAGCS), founded December 24, 1926, is a professional organization whose goals include preservation and dissemination of scientific and practical knowledge pertaining to golf turf maintenance. We endeavor to increase efficiency and economic performance while improving and enhancing the individual and collective prestige of the members.

The MAGCS member is also an environmental steward. We strive to uphold and enhance our surroundings by promoting flora and fauna in every facet in a manner that is beneficial to the general public now and in the future.

All editorial and advertisement inquiries should be directed to Luke Cella, Publisher, *On Course*. 11855 Archer Avenue, Lemont, IL, 60439. (630) 243-7900 or visit [www.magcs.org](http://www.magcs.org) for rates and requirements. Statements of fact and opinion are the responsibility of the authors alone and do not imply an opinion on the part of the officers or members.

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## ON COURSE WITH THE PRESIDENT

Dave Groelle, CGCS, Royal Melbourne Country Club



# Transition and Accountability

*I would like to begin by thanking the Past Presidents for their hard work and dedication in making MAGCS what it is today. We would not be where we are without them. It is very humbling for me when I take a look at the names of those who came before me and think that my name will be on that list. So for that I thank you. I have some goals in mind that I would like to share with you for the year ahead.*

My first thought as I take office is that I would like to improve upon our publication. *On Course* is a vital part of our association. It has and will continue to be a leader in our industry. I think we can make it better. It begins with receiving the magazine. It needs to be more prompt. We will hold to tighter standards for delivery, starting with commitments from our authors and ending with the publication ending up in our mailbox. I believe getting the magazine in a timely fashion will greatly enhance its appeal to our members. I also believe we need to have better content. I am not trying to diminish what has been done thus far. I just believe it can get better. The only way that happens is with your help. We need our members to contribute. Write an article. Provide an idea for an article. Our Board will be actively seeking volunteers this year from our superintendents and from our educators. Why is this so important? For me it's value. Value to our superintendent members, and maybe more importantly value to our commercial members. After all, without their support a lot of what we do would not be possible. Therefore, if we create an improved *On Course* that people look forward to and want to read, it could make our commercial members more willing to advertise more. This of course supports our Association and allows us to create more value for our members. So please consider helping out. If you have any thoughts or ideas on this please let me know.

The second area I would like to work on is public perception. Now this is a tough one. I have to go back to the Ryder Cup to explain further. Like many of our members

I volunteered to work the maintenance crew for the event. What an incredible experience. As the event progressed what was overwhelming to all of us was how little the spectators knew about what we do. The Ryder Cup presents a situation different than most events in that course maintenance occurs in between the matches on Friday and Saturday. Therefore, we were out completing tasks in front of an audience! It was wild! What came from this was the fact that people who follow golf still don't know what we do!! Many of us who volunteered commented on the type of questions asked and comments heard by "expert" fans throughout the week. It was quite humorous but at the same time sad, sad that we still haven't reached the status that we deserve in this industry. I would like to work on this. I know this is a very difficult task but I have a few ideas and I think it is with a try. Our story needs to be told, and I think the golfing public will find it very interesting.

I realize those are some very daunting tasks, but you have to start somewhere. As President I will attempt to accomplish something. To do that you need goals, those are my goals. Will we achieve them? We'll see. I am going to work hard and I know the team of Board members that has been assembled will help me out along the way. If you would like to help or if you have any thoughts about anything I welcome them. Hopefully next year will bring average weather that will bring smiles to our faces. Thank you again for the opportunity. **-OC**



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FEATURE

Ryan Dunbar, Cress Creek Country Club

# Growth in the Transition Zone

## Turf isn't the only thing to struggle in gray area.

*One thing that originally drew me to pursuing a career in the turf grass industry was its approach to professional development. Our industry is one of the strongest examples of modern apprenticeship.*

Medieval apprenticeships were ostensibly contracts where a teenager was made to trade cheap labor for room, board, and an education—living and working with their master. The turf industries' "apprentices" are assistants, and its "masters" are superintendents. Though we do not live with them in the literal sense, working side-by-side with veterans who hold the very positions we are striving to achieve has few other equivalents. Assistants are not contracted for years to aid their superintendents and must eventually deal with a dilemma many traditional apprentices never had to face: the Transition Zone.

The term Transition Zone, as it refers to turf, is the area of the continental United States where weather conditions permit neither cool-season nor warm-season turf to thrive

year-round. However, I am speaking of a professional Transition Zone: The span of time where an assistant is as prepared as they can be to assume their first superintendence, but have not done so and must continue to function as an assistant. Simply put, when your assistant-sized pants start to chafe your superintendent-sized rear. Growth in the Transition Zone can be precarious.

Progression into the Transition Zone is not a bad thing. To the contrary, it should be the goal for most assistants. Our aim should be our continued education and professional growth. We should learn all we can at our current position and move onto a next level position when we feel our apex has been reached. Unfortunately, the job market does not always adhere to our plans, especially when the next level

*(continued on next page)*

*A few assistants and superintendents of MAGCS from past year's Dom Grotti Championship event.  
(L to R) Thom Irvin and Dave Schlagetter; Matt Leinen and Jerry Dinelli.*



is superintendent. Now you are in the Transition Zone.

So why is the Transition Zone precarious? The root cause of the problem lies with our ego, though I do not use the term with the staunch negative connotation it has often garnered. Ego lets you know you are valuable, skilled, and becoming more so with each passing season. A healthy amount of ego leads to confidence, and confidence is the muscle we flex when it's time to do the heavy lifting of leadership. Superintendents must be strong leaders.

Ego can be a good thing. Yet, unchecked ego will lead you down the wrong path when your Transition Zone moment comes. Sometimes the part of you that knows you're ready can make peace with the fact that preparation and opportunity can take a moment to align. Sometimes it throws a big, fat fit. I'm here to tell you as a fellow assistant, if you fall into the latter category you are not only in the wrong, it turns out you may not be in the Transition Zone at all.

I had a conversation recently with a golf professional who told me the story of an assistant he once had with whom he constantly butted heads. The pro explained the tension between them was caused by the assistant's frustration at being ready for, but unable to attain, his own head pro position. While this was not the first time I had heard a story like this in this industry or outside, this was my first time processing it as an assistant. I was dumbfounded.

I view being an assistant as doing everything I can to make the course and my superintendent shine while learning my trade. Often, a superintendent carries the responsibility of allowing their assistant a certain amount of autonomy and room to grow. Nevertheless, at the end of the day it's your superintendent's course. Their name is on the door, their reputation is on the line, and if a head is going to roll it's going to have their hair color. This in no way means that you, the assistant, should be a simple, silent sheep. If you are truly ready for the next level, you're buzzing with ideas.

Not all of us will have the good fortune of working for people we enjoy. I am grateful to have worked for men I was glad to emulate. Conversely, you don't have to like your boss to respect your boss, and you do not have to respect your boss to carry out their orders. For example, in a planning session after I have voiced my thoughts and arguments, when my superintendent gives an order I follow it. Even if I don't agree. I don't gripe to my co-workers or crew. I do not do it my way just to prove him wrong, or purposefully wrong to prove my point.

Should your super choose to work with and address you as a partner: embrace it! Just never forget they outrank you. Just as they should not forget their course's general manager and board outranks them.

Handled correctly, this intermediary point in your career can be a great opportunity. In a way, you are able to be in two places at once. You are witnessing and operating at a superintendent level, while having a veteran there to catch you should you fall. Many lessons we must learn can be experienced in this way, saving you from having to do so once you have advanced to the next level. Of course, this will not stop you from taking your lumps your first time as captain. To share a thought from a newly minted superintendent, "Nothing short of sitting in the chair, can prepare you for how much it all changes once you're sitting in the chair."

We are not guaranteed a seat at the table. The wait can be long for some of us, but becoming stagnant or growing bitter is not the answer. The last true test of our "apprenticeship" we face as we move through the Transition Zone: Never forget our place no matter how far we've come. We must think like supers, act like supers, work like supers, but function as assistants. If this is beyond your ability, than you are not ready to be a superintendent, and thus, are not truly in the Transition Zone. **-OC**



*Moe Sanchez and Justin VanLanduit*



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## MIDWEST BREEZES

Charles Anfield, CGCS, *Heritage Bluffs Golf Course*



### 2012 CDGA Public Golf Summit

Being a “public golf guy”, I decided to attend the 2012 CDGA Public Golf Summit to see what was up. Public golf has long been a large part of the golf industry, the majority of the courses within the Chicago District Golf Association are public. Our area is well known throughout the country for having many high quality public golf courses.

Representatives of golf facilities both privately and publically owned gathered together at the Midwest Golf House on October 25, 2012 to discuss common issues centered the business of golf. The format was a round table discussion featuring open dialogs moderated by CDGA representatives. Note cards were passed around to solicit topics for conversation. Most of the attendees were Golf Professionals, Club Managers, Owners and a couple of Golf Course Superintendents.

A summary of the topics discussed:

#### Reservations and the issue of “no shows”

- How do courses fill empty tee slots? Most operators were against the concept of discounting.
- How do courses enforce the “short show” issue of people booking times for 4 and showing up with 2? Difficult to enforce without losing customer service and the overall experience.
- On line reservations were discussed. Right now only a minority of times are internet booked. People are still calling on the telephone and speaking to a person to make their reservation. Many people have questions that only a person can answer.

#### Pace of Play

- The general consensus target time was four hours. This can be hard to enforce on more difficult courses and with lesser skilled players. “I paid my money and

I’m taking my time” is hard to argue with when the customer is always right.

- Do GPS and cell phones slow play? The players like the gadgets and many would not or could not play without being connected to the outside world.
- The reputation of a “slow playing course” can hurt player draw.
- Player Assistance programs are helpful if implemented politely. The challenge has been to staff these programs during times of budget cuts.
- High school coaches don’t seem to be helping the issue by enabling players with a sense of entitlement. Pre-shot routines have become too long, Professional golf is also not helping the issue.

#### Discounting and 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Providers

- Are we hurting each other by continuing to lower prices?
- The issue of quality versus quantity. Who is willing to pay for what?
- There are so many fee structures today that hardly anyone is paying “rack rate”.

#### Family Golf and Junior Golf

- This has become very popular at many courses that have evening programs.
- Children are likely to play more if parents play with them.
- Junior tees are very popular so that the children play a scale course. It also is helping pace of play.
- Promotions are being successfully run at schools.
- Junior leagues and tournaments are becoming more popular.

#### Marketing

- Courses are branding themselves for a specific niche player market.

(continued on page 9)



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- Digital marketing is growing via email blasts. The consensus ideal time frame to send email blasts was every 10-14 days with various promotions and newsworthy items. Email blasts can be segmented to target defectors and new acquisitions.
- The goal is to continue to grow the player data base.
- Print marketing is still used based on player demographics.
- Text messaging is an effective tool. Texting offers are being used for spontaneous openings. Surprising to learn this is not age restrictive.
- Who does the marketing at each facility?
- Is social media effective? Twitter, Facebook?
- With the last minute nature of booking, smartphone communication is growing.

### **Green Aerification**

- Everybody recognized this necessary process needs to be done.
- The best time and best technique will vary with each facility depending on playing schedules, fee structures and expectations. There is no USGA "cookie cutter" recipe.
- It is always better to inform people beforehand, so they won't be surprised and disappointed.

### **Outings**

- What do you do when an outing books for 130 and shows up with 60? Set a contract price with minimums,

- give options and reserve the right to fill in openings.
- Not for profit fundraisers have become very common. There are fewer overall outings today than 10 years ago.

### **2012 Golf Season**

- Was it good because of the good weather? = YES
- Was it good because Medinah hosted the Ryder Cup? = YES
- Was it good because demand was higher? = Not so much
- Most courses were looking to capitalize on potential favorable winter weather in 2013.

### **The Future of Public Golf**

- Most attendees felt positive about the future of the business of golf.
- Some people still felt there were too many courses and not enough players.

It was actually quite interesting to sit in and learn about the business of golf from the all the different perspectives of the attendees. I know sometimes we get "tunnel vision" on the turf and are not always exposed to the big picture. The round table discussions are lively and sometimes can be entertaining when conflicting view-points are discussed. After all, this group is competing against each other, but much like our Associations they see a value in sharing information for the betterment of the game. I encourage you to make plans for the 2013 Public Golf Summit. **-OC**







## THE BULL SHEET

John Gurke, CGCS, Associate Editor



# DECEMBER 2012

### DATES TO REMEMBER

December 3 – Annual South Side Superintendents Holiday Party at Chef Klaus' Bier Stube in Frankfort, IL.

December 11 – CAGCS Holiday Lunch at Pinstripes in Northbrook, IL.

December 13 – 14<sup>th</sup> Annual West Side Superintendents Holiday Party at Seven Bridges Golf Club in Woodridge, IL, **Don Ferreri** and **Dave Gelino** hosts.

January 8-9 – Turf Conference presented by ITF at the Hyatt Lodge on the campus of Hamburger University in Oak Brook, IL.

January 16-18 – Annual Mid-Am (Mid-American Horticultural Trade Show) at Navy Pier in Chicago, IL. Phone 800-300-6103 or go to [www.midam.org](http://www.midam.org).

January 21-24 – The 2013 Michigan Turfgrass Conference at the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center in East Lansing, MI. Go to [www.mtfconference.org](http://www.mtfconference.org) for details.

January 23-26 – 60<sup>th</sup> PGA Merchandise Show in Orlando, FL.

January 24 – MAGCS monthly meeting and Annual Wee One Fundraiser and Auction at Seven Bridges Golf Club, still in Woodridge, IL, and hosted by Don and Dave.

January 29-31 – 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Iowa Turfgrass & Trade Show at the Downtown Des Moines Marriott. Phone 515-232-8222 or go to [www.iowaturfgrass.org](http://www.iowaturfgrass.org).

February 3-5 – GCSAA National Championship and Golf Classic in San Diego, CA.

February 4-8 – GCSAA Education Conference in San Diego, CA.

February 6-7 – Golf Industry Show in San Diego, CA.

February 6 – MAGCS 2013 Hospitality Reception from 7 til 10 PM at the Hotel Solamar at 435 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue on the Rooftop Lounge.

Welcome to the following new members of the MAGCS family: Mr. Ryan Gilmore, Class SM, Joe Louis, "The Champ" Golf Course

Mr. **Brad Allen**, Class SM, Harrison Lake Country Club

Mr. **Brad Wagner**, Class C, Butler National Golf Club

Mr. **Brian Kalal**, Class C, Edgewood Valley Country Club

Mr. **Kellen Miller**, Class E, EZ-GO

Next month has several great opportunities to get smarter (and albeit lighter in the wallet) with the excellent educational offerings provided at the various events on the calendar. On the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation will hold the first-of-its-kind Turfgrass Conference at the Hyatt Lodge on the Hamburger University campus in Oak Brook. Unlike the IPTC and other past incarnations of the winter conference, this will be an education-first theme in a casual atmosphere, with opportunities to network and meet with vendors without the trade show aspect. The roster of presenters is impressive, and covers a wide variety of topics in all areas of turfgrass management. GCSAA credits have been approved for this event. If you've never been on the campus at Hamburger U, the McDonald's museum will take you back to your childhood.

Also in January is the Mid-American Horticultural trade Show at Navy Pier on the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> ([www.midam.org](http://www.midam.org)); followed by the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation Conference in East Lansing ([www.mtfconference.org](http://www.mtfconference.org)); next up is the MAGCS monthly meeting and Annual Wee One Fundraiser and Auction on the 24<sup>th</sup> at Seven Bridges; and finally the

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