

## A new opportunity to grow GCN

There are only a few times in life when an opportunity appears that is just too good to pass up. I was recently presented one, and as you can tell by the tenor of this lead, I did not let it slip away.



Michael Levans,  
editor

At the beginning of this month I hung up my editor's hat to become the Western Territory Manager for *Golf Course News* (GCN). The editorial helm is being placed in the more-than-capable hands of Mark Leslie, while Peter Blais — who just happens to be one of the best business news writers I've ever worked with — will be filling the role of managing editor.

Mark and Pete will remain the dominant news-writing team in the industry — as they have been for the past 10 years.

Filling the third slot as associate editor will be Andrew Overbeck, a young man who impressed me at first contact. Two years ago I received an e-mail out of the blue from Andrew that detailed an 18-month journey he was about to undertake throughout Asia, with stops at nearly every current golf course development project in the region. His well-written, first-hand dispatches became a running column in *GCN* and *Golf Course News International*. For close to two years. In that time he helped give the industry a firmer understanding of this hectic, sometime chaotic, business arena.

Andrew will be picking up my beat, Supplier Business, and will continue to use his massive database of Asian golf development and maintenance contacts as he works hand-in-hand with International Bureau Chief Trevor Ledger. We're lucky to have Andrew on board.

I've been a reporter and editor for more than 13 years and I believe I understand the ingredients of a sound news story as well as the artistic production of a reliable, readable, trustworthy newspaper. I'm about to round-off my publishing knowledge and take my career to a new level. Working with Publisher Charlie von Brecht, I'll be hitting the road, meeting new faces and maintaining old friendships in an effort to build on *GCN's* existing position as the best news source in the golf course industry. I'm sure our paths will cross soon.

•••

I spent my last week as editor (June 14-18) in North Carolina visiting the Turf-Seed Inc./Pure Seed Testing Inc. field day in Rolesville — which just happens to be about an hour and half from Pinehurst, where I managed to secure a U.S. Open practice day pass for Wednesday.

Walking back toward the clubhouse from the 5th hole, I

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## Witteveen retired? Naw!

Toronto Board of Trade superintendent Gordon Witteveen, a founding member of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association (CGSA) and Ontario Golf Course Superintendents Association (OGCSA), has retired. Then again, he has not really retired. It seems the great superintendents oftentimes don't truly retire; that is, leave the golf course or their work and never return to it. The Mel Lucases and Richie Valentines remain in this world of golf in one fashion or another.

And this is true of Witteveen who, with partner Michael Bavier, has traveled the world presenting The Magic of Greenkeeping seminars for superintendents... Who, with Bavier, wrote the hot-selling "Practical Golf Course Maintenance"... Who is continuing with the Board of Trade for two months as a consultant... Who, with brother Harry is overseeing their nine-hole Pleasant View Golf Course in Brant Ford, Ontario... Who, in his spare time, is writing a history of the OGCSA as well as a history of greenkeeping in Canada...

I can't imagine Witteveen and Bavier, a former president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA), will stop their travels now. They've spoken to superintendents in big cities and at places you and I have never heard of, presenting their mix of basic know-how and comic relief in a most entertaining way.

Does Gordon miss early-morning wakeups and work on the golf course?

"I don't miss unhappy golfers," he said. "And I'm getting caught up on a lot of work I had left undone. But it's a weird feeling."

Working at Pleasant View, he said is "a real culture shock. I've gone from a golf course with a \$1 million budget to a course with no budget."

"When I see a foursome come in I think, 'There is 10 bags of fertilizer.'"

I'd say we'll miss Gordon Witteveen's smiling face at the national GCSAA and CGSA conferences and his voice over the phone. But, I thank God instead that we will actually still be seeing him around. As a matter of fact, some 250 friends will be celebrating his retirement with him at the Board of Trade on July 26.

Enjoy your "retirement," Gordon.

•••

Speaking of retirement, the guy in the column to the left is retiring in another way. He's leaving journalism for sales. My world of journalism will be worse off for this move, but Mike remains unmoved by my persuasive powers — which apparently are diminishing. No, he says, his mind is made up.

But I must say this: Mike Levans jumped into the golf arena and grasped its many nuances — as well as gaining acquaintances from North America to Singapore — more quickly than anyone I have seen. He will be missed here, and not just for his long drives in Virginia Rules events.



Mark Leslie,  
managing editor

# GOLF COURSE NEWS

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GOLF COURSE NEWS

## Change — It's what it's all about, what makes life interesting

Here at *Golf Course News*, Mike Levans took a niblick to our collective heads and announced he was changing his editorial stripes for a set of pinstripes and heading over to sales. We know Mike will do a stellar job creating opportunities for our advertisers, just as he provided the opportunity for those of us who came under his wing to grow here in the editorial department. Our loss is our advertiser's gain. Good luck, Mike.

Mike's career change means some reshuffling here at the third-floor editorial offices of 106 Lafayette Street.

Ten-plus-year *Golf Course News* veteran Mark Leslie moves up from managing editor to editor. Mark preceded me by nine months here at *GCN* and I can honestly say he has forgotten more editorial tricks than most of us around here ever knew. I've

been fortunate enough to work with and learn from Mark for the past decade. I treasure both our friendship and his Rolo-dex, which would bring more than Mark McGwire's 70th home run ball if it were ever put on the golf industry auction block.

I'll be moving up to managing editor, which means I'll be approving checks for freelancers, trying my best to return photos to those of you kind enough to provide them, getting more involved in the maintenance and development sections of *GCN* (Mark's domain) and continuing to concentrate on the course management part of the golf industry.

My move created an associate editor's opening for Andy Overbeck, whose time and writing skills we had previously been sharing with our sister publications — *Home Medical Equipment News* and *Security*

*Systems News*. As I write this, Mike is lustily passing on his layout skills to young Mr. Overbeck, an apt pupil whose knowledge of the Asian golf market, where he first cut his editorial teeth with us as a Watson fellow, is the envy of our competitors.

The changes here at *GCN* are simply a reflection of the industry we cover. Witness a few of this month's stories:

- Golf participation rates have changed gears again. According to the latest National Golf Foundation figures (see story page 3), the fifth-gear growth in golfers and rounds we enjoyed in 1997 have downshifted to first, maybe even reverse, considering the slight decline in those numbers in 1998.

- Bandon Dunes superintendent Troy Russell (see story page 11) recently changed careers, giving up the farmer's life of an

Oregon vineyard owner for the course management duties at the heralded seaside links that opened recently along his native Southern Oregon coast.

- Developers of Forest Dunes (see story page 27), a private golf community featuring a Tom Weiskopf-designed course that opened recently at the gateway to Northern Michigan's golf resorts, is trying to change the perception of this golf Mecca as a strictly daily-fee golf course hotbed.

- MorningStar Golf (see story page 27) has changed its name (formerly Masters Golf) and direction as it seeks to grow from a minor operator of two courses in the Scottsdale, Ariz., market to a major management firm with courses nationwide.

Change. It's good. It's inevitable. It's golf.

— Peter Blais,  
associate editor



## Levans' farewell

Continued from page 8

reached the 1st green. It was late in the day, the last group was long gone, teeing off on 6 at this point. But there, standing alone leaning against a lean Carolina pine, was Dr. Joe Duich, turfgrass consultant for Tee-2-Green Corp. and the "grandfather" of the G-2 bentgrass used at Pinehurst No. 2.

I sidled up. "I think they're done for the day, Joe."

"Oh no," he said. "I'm waiting for

Paul Jett's crew to come down to cut to the cups for the first round. You see, this is when the real action starts."

•••

It's been a blast leading the GCN editorial charge over the past two years. I just want to take this final opportunity to thank Mark Leslie and Pete Blais for their assistance as I got my feet firmly under me.

I don't think there are two other people who know this industry and its players as well as they do. *Golf Course News* has been, and will remain, in good hands.

## Williams commentary

Continued from page 9

and abilities of superintendents;

- the advent of prescription soil profiles resulting from USGA and university research on greens construction;
- the cooperative efforts by manufacturers to produce and improve chemicals, machinery and processes; and
- perhaps, most importantly, the university researchers who have bred various grasses adaptable for situations in most any part of the country. Joe Duich of Penn State, Glen Barton of the University

of Georgia and Terry Riordan of the University of Nebraska come quickly to mind, along with many others. These men are the real catalysts for better turf for better golf.

Computers have become all-important in course maintenance. The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America tells us 90 percent of superintendents are now computer literate. With the sophistication of computer-operated irrigation systems and the ability to be in direct contact with research bases at universities, it is a prerequisite to know where to find information when needed.

The constant competition between clubs to keep pace with one another has been another major incentive for change. As the number of clubs has grown, so has the competition.

Accompanying this has been a rise in expenses and revenues.

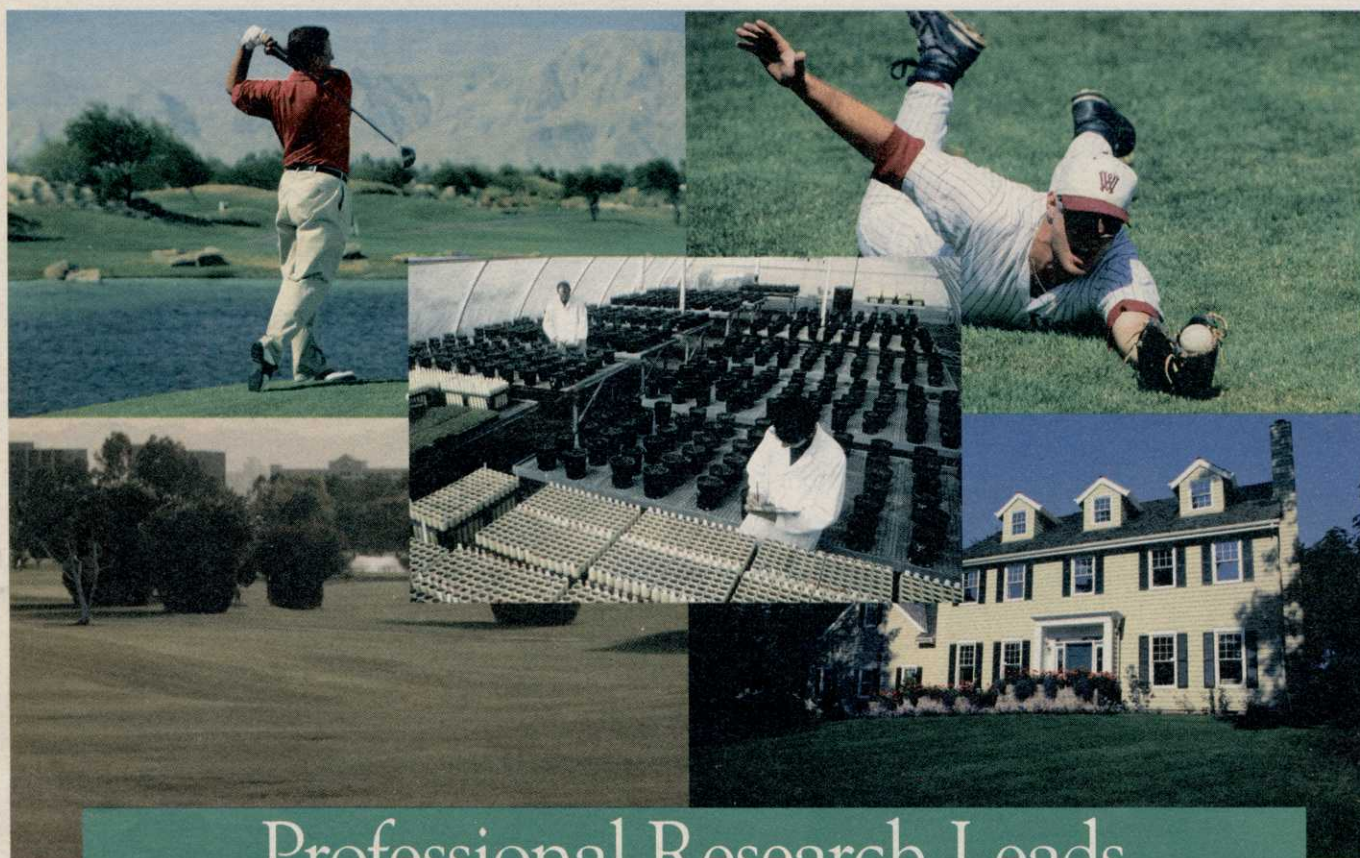
Construction costs have increased dramatically in the past century. A typical 18-hole course that cost \$50,000 to build in the early 1900s, costs several million dollars today.

Annual maintenance costs have skyrocketed from less than \$25,000 pre-World War II to \$1 million and more today.

By the same token, average green fees have leapt from less than \$5 in the 1930s to more than \$30 at just about any daily-fee course today. Golf cars, which didn't exist until the 1950s, add another \$15 to \$25 per person per round.

Wages have held steady at about 70 percent of the course maintenance budget. But the course worker who earned 25 to 50 cents per hour during the Depression makes \$5 to \$12 hourly today, not including health insurance and retirement benefits.

Superintendents have seen their annual salaries rise from \$2,400 to \$3,600 yearly to anywhere from \$50,000 to \$200,000. Superintendents have done their homework and are receiving their just rewards for the value and impact they have on their facilities.



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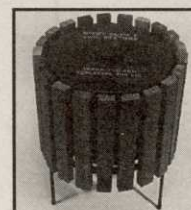
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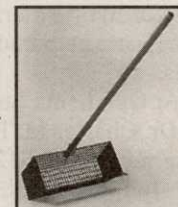
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