

BY JOHN WALSH

# Elevating the profession

**P**aul R. Latshaw's  
influence ripples throughout the industry

**H**e not only set the bar for the superintendent profession, he raised it – several times. For some, he raised it too high. The legendary Paul R. Latshaw, who retired as a golf course superintendent in 2001, remains active in the industry. His influence ripples through the business like a stone skipping across water. An inquisitive and humble man, Latshaw learns from others as much as others learn from him. Presently, he has a consulting business, but he's slowing down and plans to take things easier during the next few years.

During his illustrious 37-year superintendent career, Latshaw worked at some of the most prestigious clubs in America: Augusta National in Georgia; Oakmont Country Club in Pennsylvania; Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaroneck, N.Y.; Shaker Heights County Club in Ohio;

Congressional County Club in Bethesda, Md.; Wilmington (Del.) County Club; and Riviera Country Club in Pacific Palisades, Calif. His longest job, 11 years, was at Oakmont.

Latshaw, a 41-year member of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, is a veteran of hosting major golf tournaments. He has hosted more majors – nine – than any other superintendent: four Masters, one PGA Championship (his first major), two U.S. Opens and two Senior Opens. Two of his loves as a superintendent were hosting tournaments and solving problems.

“I love to push the grass to the peak and provide a challenging test for golfers,” he says. “Every one of the majors we hosted, except one, we reached a higher standard of maintenance than before. It started with the PGA Championship in 1978 at Oakmont in August with great





Latshaw is slowly consulting less and plans to spend more time on his farm in Pennsylvania.  
Photo: Marc Longwood

green conditions. The '83 Open at Oakmont had green speeds that were unheard of, and the rough was challenging – it was more than a foot high, which some people thought was unfair, but it was consistent.

“The only event I wasn’t proud of was the ’95 Senior Open at Congressional because we had average playing conditions,” he adds. “The membership was proud of the accomplishments, but conditions were mediocre for a champion-

ship. After that, I decided to change my method of fertilization to foliar feeding. The '97 Open at Congressional was my proudest because it was the best-conditioned golf course I ever produced and I was fortunate to have the best staff in my entire career.”

Of all the majors Latshaw hosted, the Senior Open at Riviera in 1998 was the biggest challenge for him because he was still working at Congressional.

## A model for others

**D**uring his career, Paul R. Latshaw positively affected many superintendents professionally. Although he’s now retired, his influence is still felt by many. Eric Greytok, former golf course superintendent at Winged Foot in Mamaroneck, N.Y.; Matt Shaffer, director of golf course operations at Merion Golf Club in Ardmore, Pa.; Mark Michaud, golf course superintendent at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club in Southampton N.Y.; and Jon Jennings, CGCS at the Chicago Golf Club are a few who worked for or with Latshaw.

Greytok worked as an assistant for Latshaw at Congressional and Riviera in 1998 and 1999 and always believed Latshaw taught him about the business side of the job.

“He was demanding of his employees, was a good leader and always challenged you,” he says. “But I never had any doubts about working for him.”

Greytok was aware of Latshaw’s stature before working for him.

“You worked hard to be in a position to be his assistant and learned why he was so successful,” he says. “You knew what you were getting into and knew about the time commitment. If you were honest with yourself, there were no surprises. He had a great outlook: work hard, play hard. He said at the end of the day that it’s just grass, but he always took his job seriously. He stressed not taking the easy way out and doing things the right way, which was the hard way.”

Greytok makes a habit of talking to Latshaw about every other month, but it’s more of a “Hey, how are you doing” type of conversation. However, he still calls Latshaw for advice. For example, Greytok says it was great having him at Winged Foot before the 2006 U.S. Open to give him a laundry list of things he missed.

“He volunteered his time, and I’m grateful for that,” he says.

Latshaw always has raised the bar for other superintendents.

“No’ was never an option, and second best was never an option,” Greytok says. “It always

got done. He has high expectations and brings that to the course everyday. He was always willing to try new things and solutions for problems. People respect him for that.”

Latshaw is still influential, if not more so now because he travels the country and the world, Greytok says.

“He was a good teacher and taught a lot of people in turf, and a lot of people sought him out to learn from him,” he says. “He always had fun at the end of the day. I had a good all-around experience working for him.”

Shaffer, too, worked as an assistant under Latshaw. He was at Augusta National for three years, though he wasn’t a typical assistant. He had been in the industry for 15 years and was 33 years old at the time.

“I couldn’t get into a big club, so I needed to do something dramatic,” Shaffer says. “I got lucky. Most guys were younger. I wanted Augusta National and his name on my resume.”

While Shaffer was at Augusta, he interviewed for the superintendent position at Burning Tree Club in Bethesda, Md.

tools in his bag. Championship golf has to be taught. It’s not learned, and you have to work with somebody who has a good recipe.

“Everyone has trouble growing grass,” he adds. “But you need to extricate yourself from the problem. Don’t overreact or hit the panic button. Sometimes when things go bad you have to go back to the basics.”

Shaffer says it’s amazing Latshaw is still there to help superintendents. He says that if he never sees you, you’re doing good, but if he sees you, you’re in trouble.

“He came for the U.S. Amateur (at Merion) last year and helped out,” he says. “High heat and rain created problems for the turf. We ended up smelling like a rose because we got into a heavy aeration program, seeding and germinating fairways. He told me to back off the grass.”

When Michaud was a superintendent at Pebble Beach in California earlier in his career, he volunteered to help Latshaw prep Congressional for the '97 U.S. Open.

“I volunteered at that one specifically to watch the master run a tournament,” Michaud

“He was always willing to try new things and solutions for problems. People respect him for that.” - ERIC GREY TOK

“I turned it down because I felt I didn’t know enough,” he says. “I was a sandwich chef before Augusta, and when I left, I was an executive chef. Before, I didn’t know how to put icing on the cake. It’s a total different mindset at the top of the profession.”

Latshaw helped Shaffer deal with job stress.

“The pressure is more significant at those high-end jobs,” he says. “He taught me how to balance stress, work and home life under adverse conditions. He’s unbelievable. He has so many

says. “Paul has tremendous organizational skills. There were about 70 volunteers. It was a perfectly run event. We walk-mowed the fairways. He’s famous for going where no other superintendent has gone before. His skills as a superintendent are unsurpassed with his history of hosting championships. I don’t think you’ll see anybody match that.

“You can maintain a golf course only so many ways, so I observed him on how to handle pressure and his staff. He finds what a person is



Those who've worked with or for Latshaw were impressed with the way he handled himself in high-pressure situations and his willingness to try new things. Photo: Marc Longwood

really good at and uses that to his advantage and develops their weaknesses.”

Like Michaud, Jennings helped Latshaw prep a course for a major, the Ocean Forest Golf Club in Seas Island, Ga., for the 2001 Walker Cup. Jennings has known Latshaw for a number of years and considers him a mentor.

“He has led the industry by example and has set goals for other superintendents to meet,” he says.

**Connections**

Latshaw’s influence has helped place many superintendents in the field.

“Clubs don’t want to look at 100 resumes, they want to look at 20 or 30,” Michaud says. “He cuts the fat. He knows where everybody is and their successes and failures. He recommends five or 10 guys and lets the club take it from there. These guys go to work at the tournaments to get a recommendation from somebody. It’s not a cake walk. You’re working 15 to 20 hours a day busting your butt. Additionally, many of these guys are on their cell phones making sure their own courses are being run properly. The guys who say it’s unfair are whiners and need to set themselves apart from 75 percent of the resumes by taking that extra step.”

Greytok doesn’t believe he had an edge over other superintendents because he worked for Latshaw, but he felt fortunate to work for him. Using the Latshaw name as a reference helped him advance his career.

“Both Latshaws (Paul R. and son Paul B.) were instrumental in me going from an assistant superintendent to a superintendent because they taught you the drive to succeed,” he says.

When superintendents who’ve worked for Latshaw see job opportunities, they call him for advice.

“Putting his name on a resume breaks down some doors, but he doesn’t do that for just anyone,” Shaffer says. “He has to know these guys. He always gets them the interview but left it up to them to get the job. Is it fair? No. But you have to play the game. Working for him changed my life.”

**Personality**

Jennings recalls the first time he met Latshaw – at a GCSAA educational seminar about fertility. Latshaw was at Congressional at the time, and Jennings talked to him about the bentgrass conversion he did.

“Here was someone who hosted the Masters

and other major tournaments and offered information to someone he didn’t know,” he says. “What inspires me is how he is driven, but he keeps it in a light manner. He has a neat presence while working along side him. When you talk to him, there’s no one else who he’s focused on. He makes you feel important. The most important thing about him is his personality and drive for perfection.”

The minute you get next to him, you have a deep respect for him, Michaud says.

“He’s a very humble person,” he says. “You’ll never hear him brag.”

Shaffer and Michaud say Latshaw is inquisitive, and if he hears you’re doing something new and different, he’ll ask you about it.

“The first time I rode with him around the golf course at Pebble Beach, he asked me more than a hundred question, and later that night when we were having dinner, I realized I didn’t learn anything from one of the greatest golf course superintendents in the world,” Michaud says.

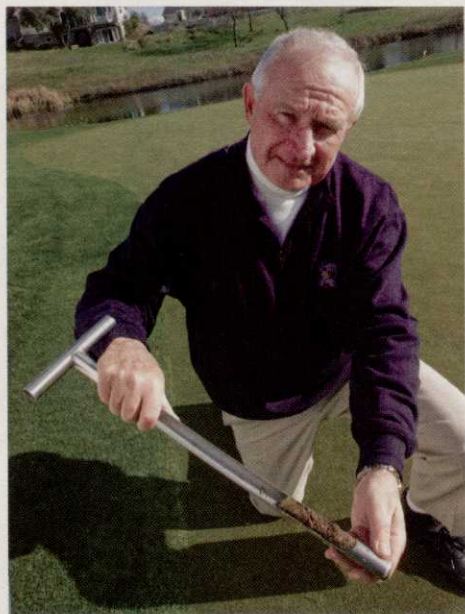
“What still impresses me about him is he never acts like he’s arrived,” Shaffer says. “He listens to everybody. It’s never gone to his head. He’s a very modest person, and that speaks volumes.” GCI

## SUPERINTENDENT PROFILE

"Riviera contacted me, but I couldn't go out there because I was under contract at Congressional," he says. "But they gave me a sabbatical that allowed me to prep Riviera. So I flew across the country every week for six months to prep the course."

Latshaw never lived in California while prepping Riviera. He stayed in the clubhouse. While he was on the West Coast, Rick Shriver and, later, Eric Greytok, took over at Congressional. This was an unusual situation that would be difficult to pull off even now.

"That was my salesmanship," he says. "That took a few board meetings to get done. I think Congressional liked it because it was their



superintendent preparing another course for a major."

At Riviera, Latshaw credits a few strong people, including Steve Thomas, Greytok and 12 interns, for a successful tournament preparation.

"I had great support," he says.

### THE CONSULTING BUSINESS

After retiring and leaving Winged Foot in 2001, Latshaw worked for Signature Controls and then started a partnership with Advanced Aer Systems. He worked for both companies at the same time, part time, while consulting. He did that for two years before easing out of working with Signature and Advanced Aer to work as a consultant full time. Latshaw says he worked for Signature because it came out with a new irrigation control system he believed had a strong future.

"I always believed in new technology," he says. "Signature had it, and Advanced Aer was getting it. But I'm more about the concept than the product."

Some might have seen a conflict of interest when Latshaw worked for Signature and Advanced Aer while working as a consultant. However, Latshaw says he tries to be fair and open.

"A consultant shouldn't be selling for somebody or pushing a product," he says. "But if I see a situation in which I used a product in the

past that works well, I won't hesitate to recommend it."

Throughout the years, Latshaw helped integrate new products into the market, including the laser leveling process used for building tees, the barrier used around greens to keep Bermudagrass from encroaching, subsurface aeration and video training tapes.

Latshaw is no stranger to visiting various golf courses throughout the country. At one point, he had about 60 clients, so he visited those clubs in addition to those with superintendents who had previously worked for or with him. During the summer when he's busiest, he visits three or four courses a week. In 2006, he logged 170,000 air miles alone.

"I kept U.S. Airways in business," he says jokingly.

Latshaw doesn't conduct half-day visits and usually spends one full day with a client. Sometimes he spends more than a day with a client if he feels the need. The cost for his visits varies from client to client, and the cost of his travel is built in to his fee.

Latshaw isn't taking on any more clients and will ease out of his consulting business starting next year, but he'll keep working in other ways.

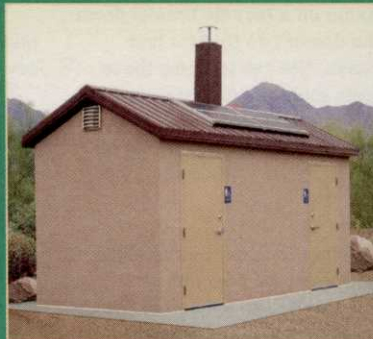
"I'll be involved in tournament prep, mostly with PGA Tour events," he says.

Also, Latshaw has been involved with New Knoxville, Ohio-based Brookside Laboratories and its soil and water testing. Latshaw says he'll continue to be involved at courses where his former employees are superintendents.

"I'll be involved with them until they get tired of me," he says.

Latshaw has been involved with Brookside Laboratories and its soil and water testing. Photo: Marc Longwood

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With another so-called retirement on the horizon, Latshaw has started to phase out his overseas travel. He used to go to Europe regularly and had clients in Asia and the Caribbean, but now he just has one account in England and one in Mexico.

"Travel is more difficult than it used to be," he says.

Like the superintendent profession, consulting has its pros and cons. One of Latshaw's biggest frustrations is when clients ask him to help solve a problem and he lays out an agronomic program they don't follow through with because of cost or board/committee approval. So when he goes back to the course, it's not what he expects to see. For example, tree removal is a controversial topic because many people can't see how a tree is the cause of a green's downfall.

A positive aspect about the consulting business is the improvements and changes Latshaw sees as a result of his suggestions.

"I enjoy what I do," he says. "It's a great profession. It's great to see all of the dedicated people in this profession. People in this industry are really enthusiastic about their jobs. You're always working with good people, and you make a lot of friends. Once it's in your system, it's hard to get out."

Now that Latshaw slowly will consult less, he'll spend more time on his farm in Pennsylvania. He's interested in alternative and organic food sources and different composts and teas for use on farms.

"More and more, people are realizing our food can be better," he says.

**INFLUENCE AND SUCCESS**

Latshaw's clout is recognized throughout the industry. If you're a superintendent who has him as a reference on your resume, you're often a step or two ahead of the rest when it comes to

*(continued on page 119)*

**More about the man**

A few questions for Paul R. Latshaw

**Q: What is something most people don't know about you?**

I'm a religious person.

**Q: After more than 30 years of seeing hundreds of golf courses, what strikes you the most?**

I've never seen a golf course that didn't interest me.

**Q: What are your thoughts about your son? (Paul B. is a golf course superintendent at Muirfield Village Golf Club in Columbus, Ohio.)**

He has done a great job. He is a leader in the industry, and I'm very proud of him.



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securing your next job.

"There's a demand for my guys, but during the past few years, it's been more difficult," he says. "The guys in our loop – I think it's down to four levels now – have strengths. I get criticized for having my guys get the good positions at various clubs, but they've proved themselves. At one point, superintendents at six of the top 10 golf courses in the country were former employees of mine. I helped develop their work ethic. I don't accept 'no' for an answer. Too many times we run into a problem and say it can't get done. That's when I say pull out all the stops."

Latshaw says he doesn't advertise the guys who worked for him. He receives calls from clubs looking to hire, and he puts in a good word for his former employees.

"They're like sons to me," he says.

Latshaw attributes his success partly to luck.

"I was in the right place at the right time and my career blossomed," he says. "Back in the 1970s, the PGA had a difficult time finding a course to host the Championship. I got a lot of press. I even made the front page of The Wall Street Journal. Once you get in the limelight, people seek you out. I never wanted to be in the limelight, but it just happened."

The key to a superintendent's success is to surround himself with good people, Latshaw says.

"I constantly recruited to find good people," he says. "Then when I got them to work for me, I pushed them to see if they really wanted to be in the business. I worked them, and they excelled. I always had people calling me."

A certain level of success can determine whether a superintendent is great or just average. To be great, Latshaw says one needs to have a goal and pursue it, be a good communicator, have a drive to excel and take a leadership role when dealing with people. Being a good salesman also is important.

"People always say, 'If I had that kind of a budget, I would be able to do X,'" he says. "You need to be a good salesman and convince people they need to put more money into their golf course. When that happens, the whole club does better."

"Most of the clubs I went into were struggling," he adds. "It all starts with a good golf course. It's easier said than done, and it requires

persistence. Slowly you can raise the budgets. Courses are realizing if they don't keep up with the Joneses they'll have more problems."

Latshaw really doesn't see himself as a teacher but rather a stickler for detail. He says every job can be done better.

"I pushed for perfection," he says. "I surrounded myself with good people. Those people did the training because they knew what I wanted. Training was set by example. I was in the Navy for four years and use its philosophy. When you're on a destroyer, you're forced to learn quickly."

Latshaw also has seen many changes throughout his career. For starters, he says superintendents have many more tools to work with today than they did in the '60s. Education is another considerable change.

"When I entered the industry, I was in the beginning group of guys who had a college education," he says. "Nowadays, almost every superintendent has a degree of some sort."

Superintendents also are working with better irrigation systems.

"During my career, I put in five new irrigation systems and each one was better," he says. "We're able to manage water better. I think that was the key to my success because I was stingy with water."

Latshaw definitely has left his mark on the golf course industry, and he hopes people think highly of him as a good person who has helped advance the profession. Throughout his career, he has gained the respect of superintendents and club members alike.

"I helped raise the income bracket for superintendents," he says. "I did it by example, not by preaching to the choir. In the 1960s, there wasn't much respect for the golf course superintendent. At that time, my wife (Phyllis, who passed away in 2004 at age 63) was a school teacher and was making more money than I did as a superintendent. My paycheck is my report card. Because my salary increased, others increased. I wasn't afraid to move or do better. I was fortunate that people paid me what I demanded. We've come a long way in this industry." **GCI**

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(NEWS ANALYSIS continued from page 21)

of the CMAA as a reason for the increase.

The addition of the CMAA brought together many golf course managers, owners and superintendents at the show for the first time.

"One golf course manager said to me, 'We joined the NGCOA when we found out you guys were working together,'" says Jim Singerling, c.e.o. of the CMAA, adding he's heard



From left, Steve Mona, Mike Hughes and Jim Singerling discuss the success of the Golf Industry Show. Photo: Heather Wood

other positive comments about golf course managers becoming closer with their owners and superintendents throughout the show.

"Teamwork is a financial imperative – it's not a luxury at all," Mona says. "There's no room for inefficiency at the facility level."

The GCSAA exceeded its expectations in the education conference, Mona says. Several of the sessions were filled to capacity.

"It's an ultimate indication of the health of the show," he says.

The three associations will regroup later this month to review what worked and what didn't and begin planning next year's show, which will be held in Orlando, Fla. Mona says he's excited for the event because the Orlando events traditionally have better turnouts than West Coast shows. – HW

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