

Veteran superintendents such as Bruce Williams, CGCS, offer guidance and career advice to assistants. Photo: John Deere



Getting a head start

The road to becoming a superintendent these days usually involves much more than obtaining a degree and typing a resume. Assistant superintendents are looking to differentiate themselves from their peers, and that's where Green Start Academy comes in. The program, hosted by John Deere Golf & Turf and Bayer Environmental Science, was held recently in Clayton and Fuquay-Varina, N.C., for the second year and brought veterans to those who are still green in the industry.

Participant Adam Warring, assistant superintendent at The Links at Bodega Harbour in California, was looking for such an advantage. He was recommended by his superintendent, Brian Morris, and wrote an essay to gain acceptance into the program. Warring was one of about 80 attendees participating in the two-day program, which was

jam-packed with activities and information, he says.

The itinerary included a virtual tour of the Bayer research facility in Clayton, a tour of the John Deere Turf Care facility in Fuquay-Varina and sessions with professionals from the industry, including representatives from Bayer, John Deere, North Carolina State University, the USGA, the GCSAA and superintendents.

"It teaches assistant superintendents the new things going on in the industry," says Matt Armbrister marketing manager at John Deere's golf segment and one of the lead organizers of the program. "It's very dynamic; things are changing all the time. If they can learn more, they can manage their staff and resources better. They can learn a lot from meeting and talking to other people who are in the same boat."

The content of the program will be tweaked a little each year to keep the information relevant, Armbrister says. One of the sessions focused on water management, which is becoming more of an issue as that resource becomes more scarce. Throughout the program, none of the content was geared specifically to John Deere or Bayer products, Armbrister says.

The most valuable part of the program for Brett Ziegler, assistant superintendent at Knollwood Club in Lake Forest, Ill., was the opportunity to network and learn from industry veterans such as Bruce Williams, CGCS, of the Los Angeles Country Club and Bob Farren,

CGCS, of Pinehurst Resort in North Carolina.

While Warring says this type of program can help give assistant superintendents a competitive edge, he's frustrated by the seemingly impossible task of breaking into the superintendent realm.

"The information was good, but if anything, I would have liked to have gotten more advice as far as an assistant superintendent trying to move up to a superintendent position," he says.

Warring has searched for open superintendent positions but doesn't find it to be promising. "Typically, on 95 percent of the job postings for superintendents, line one says you must have previous superintendent experience," he says. "What the hell are you supposed to do?"

Ziegler, 24, concedes that it seems to be more difficult to become a superintendent than it used to be, but says it's attainable. His goal is to become a superintendent in the next five years. Programs like the Green Start Academy can help his chances, he says.

"I'm not going to say that if you went to this you're ready to become a superintendent, but at least it opened my eyes a little bit as far as the things I need to do to take that next step," Ziegler says.

The program will proceed next year based on survey responses from this year's participants, Armbrister says. — Heather Wood

A classroom setting allows assistant superintendents to discuss matters openly and to receive feedback from others. Photo: John Deere



Europeans consider pesticide regulations

Golf course superintendents in the U.S. soon might find their European counterparts have fewer maintenance tools in their arsenal for tending turf. This leaves some wondering if the proposed regulations could be headed across the ocean.

The European Union is considering legislation (Proposals for a Directive on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides) that would ban the use of plant protection products, or pesticides, in urban areas. The products could be considered a health risk.

"Parliament and the commission decided that placing pesticides on the market and

disposing of unused pesticides is well regulated, but they don't feel the actual use of registered products is adequately regulated," says Pat Kwiatkowski, Ph.D., head of global regulatory affairs for Bayer Environmental Science in Lyon, France. "This is the main purpose of the Framework Directive on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides."

The framework directive being considered proposes to halt pesticide use in areas including public parks, sports grounds and playgrounds, but it doesn't specifically mention golf courses, which probably are a gray area.

Pitchcare, a British magazine for greenkeepers, has been reporting the issue and expressed concern about the effect it could have on the care of public areas including golf courses.

"The issue goes way beyond the availability of tools to effectively

manage the superb golf courses and sports pitches the U.K. is famous for the world over," writes Paul Cawood in a recent commentary. "It affects how weeds will be controlled in the streets. It affects how vegetation will be controlled in areas where safety is a critical issue, such as the highways and railways and other industrial areas depending on how 'public and amenity area' is defined."

If the directive becomes law, the only legal alternative left for greenkeepers will be hand weeding, which is too costly and labor-intensive, Cawood says.

Austen Sutton, global business support manager, turf and ornamentals for Syngenta, recently spoke at a Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment meeting in New Orleans and highlighted the implications of the proposed pesticide restrictions within the directive. He detailed the potential consequences the ban might have on the turf and amenity industry and its customers, who could lose the option to apply pesticides as part of their management programs. Pesticide companies that have a presence in Europe are closely watching the proposed European Union directive, which might be approved during the next two years, and are working with advocacy groups in EU member states to remain informed about any introduction of new legislation, Sutton says.

"Syngenta is fully behind the industry activity and following the formal lobbying process," he says.

The industry lobbying is

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focused on avoiding a complete restriction of pesticides use in public places and amending a number of other components of the proposed directive, Sutton says.

The ECPA, the European pesticide industry

association based in Brussels, has been lobbying with members of the European parliament about the legislation during the past months.

Yet the European and U.S. regulatory

processes are different.

"In the U.S., decisions are based on risk assessment, which means comparing exposure to the toxicity of the product; it's a decision of safety based on a quantified method," Kwiatkowski says. "There's also a recognition and assessment of risk vs. benefit for a product. This aspect has gone away to a great extent in Europe in the past few years."

While the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency communicates regularly with its EU counterparts, the two bodies understand the differences between the regulation processes, Kwiatkowski says. She doesn't foresee the EPA looking at the EU's pesticide directive and following suit in the U.S. She bases this opinion on an EU water directive with respect to the risk of pesticides seeping into drinking water. That directive hasn't been considered in the U.S., and the EPA has no inclination to do so, she says.

Still, some fear antipesticide advocates in the U.S. will see the European directive as a viable option for the U.S.

"We have preemption at the state level here that would protect us to some degree, but the activist community has an agenda to overturn state and federal preemption," says Allen James, executive director of RISE.

Even if European restrictions aren't the impetus for U.S. regulations, bans and other rules have been put into place, and advocates will continue to push for further restrictions. U.S. pesticide users can help the cause by becoming more active in trade organizations and at the grassroots level, James says.

"Each company or golf course superintendent needs to take it upon himself to get involved," James says. "He shouldn't limit the focus just to his own segment. Harm to the lawn care industry, restrictions on road-care protection or failure to use pesticides properly on utility rights of way ultimately have adverse effects on golf courses because one area leads to another area being restricted."

An EU vote on the directive was expected Oct. 22. Kwiatkowski expects that sometime in the next three to six months there will be a finalized version, which will be publicized with a timeline for member states to follow.

"Now is the time for concerned industry advocates to express their concerns," she says.

- HW

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Catching a shark

Real-estate giant The St. Joe Co. recently sunk its teeth further into the golf industry. Shark's Tooth Golf Club in Lake Powell, Fla., is the newest course in the company's portfolio, joining Camp Creek, SouthWood, Victoria Hills Golf Clubs and St. John's Golf and Country Club and the Origins Course at WaterSound. As the club's staff becomes acquainted with its new owner, the benefits of being a part of a larger network become apparent.

The 18-hole, Greg Norman-designed course, which overlooks

Lake Powell, is an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Silver Signature Course that features more than 35 feet of natural elevation change and is home to 300-year-old live oak trees and a variety of wildlife and marine life.

"It has a very natural feel," says John Johnson, who has been general manager since the course opened in 2002. "It was designed with the player in mind and is enjoyable for players of all abilities."

The \$30-million deal was completed in August. While golfers won't notice much



change on the course as a result of the acquisition, the change of ownership offers the course a stronger network of support, Johnson says.

"We went from being a small club with ownership at a local level to part of a much bigger company with unlimited but greater resources," he says.

Shark's Tooth Golf Club in Lake Powell, Fla., is the newest golf property in The St. Joe Co.'s portfolio. Photo: Shark's Tooth Golf Club



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Shark's Tooth Golf Club intends to benefit from the marketing efforts of its new operator.



"There's a great information systems department, human resources department, strong accounting and a lot of energy focused on taking care of the membership of the club."

There are 260 members at Shark's Tooth. Besides members and their guests, guests of WaterColor and WaterSound luxury vacation rentals, including the WaterColor Inn & Resort, have access to the course. The 28-site Wild Heron housing community surrounds the course. The club offers different levels of membership, including full golf, corporate and social memberships.

Members, as well as course operators, can benefit from the St.

Joe arrangement, Johnson says. The courses have experimented with offering deals for golfing at more than one of the company's courses, says Will Hopkins, general manager of Camp Creek Golf Club in Watersound, Fla. Camp Creek is about 15 minutes from Shark's Tooth, so it would be feasible for golfers to go from one St. Joe course to another.

Beth Murphy, general manager of SouthWood Golf Club in Tallahassee, also sees the value of collaboration.

"We work within a broader goal than being simply bottom-line driven," Murphy says. "We're certainly here to run a business as practically and reasonably as we can, but we consider the

impact on the community and the overall goals. It's a diverse group of resources that we have to pull from."

Although SouthWood isn't a quick drive from the other St. Joe courses, it still benefits from being under the St. Joe umbrella with other courses, Murphy says. The company's marketing efforts serve SouthWood.

"Combining has been a win-win for us to do things jointly," she says. "The PR has helped us get recognition in publications, with our ratings and with getting golf tournaments out here."

Hopkins wouldn't be surprised

if St. Joe eventually buys more golf courses.

"The real estate market needs to catch up right now," he says, adding that even if the housing market is declining, the course will still benefit from the vacation traffic from WaterColor, which seems to be stable.

Johnson says his course should be able to benefit from the same traffic because of his new affiliation.

"Shark's Tooth was always maintained with a high standard, so we're excited that St. Joe will be able to continue with standard we've already established." – HW



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