

# CHANGING ROLES

Managers who fill the shoes of both superintendent and pro share their stories

By Marisa Palmieri

Old Tom Morris, modern golf's Renaissance Man, is known for his aptitude in many areas of the game, including club making, design, greenkeeping and play. He's a four-time winner of the British Open and is said to have been an excellent teacher, as evidenced by his son's success. Young Tom, called the Tiger Woods of his time, won four Opens in a row before his early death at age 24.

Such versatility among professionals in the golf industry is rare these days because of the commercialization and specialization of the game. Nowadays, superintendents typically have bachelor's degrees in turfgrass studies and PGA

professionals often have attended professional golf management programs.

The demanding nature of these specialized skill sets makes it notable that there are still some in the industry whose careers are a nod to Old Tom Morris' stake in maintenance and play. There are 29 superintendents who also hold PGA memberships, based on data from the GCSAA and the PGA. There are likely many more golf professionals who serve as superintendents but aren't members of the GCSAA.

The men who hold dual credentials typically downplay their roles as pro-superintendents, saying there are many owner-operators throughout

the country who do it all, including maintenance, instruction and general management. Bruce Gregory is one of those men who says many people do what he does.

"I'm not a whole lot different than a lot of mom-and-pop operators," says Gregory, PGA, CGCS, at Liberty (Ind.) Country Club.

While many folks may serve in the roles Gregory does as a golf instructor and head of course maintenance, statistics show not a lot have gone to the lengths he has to earn the credentials in each field. There are only about 1,900 certified golf course superintendents out of about 9,000 GCSAA members.





Gregory is one of three CGCSs who also hold PGA memberships.

Mark Woodward, c.e.o. of the GCSAA, says people who take on the initiative to earn their associations' credentials only make the industry better.

"Somebody who's gone through the process to earn the credentials in both the PGA and GCSAA definitely has an interest in continuing education, and I would applaud them for that effort," he says. "Neither is easy to do."

### SUPERINTENDENT FIRST

Gregory grew up working on a golf course in Indiana under the tutelage of pro-superintendent Jack Miller. While earning his two-year turf management certificate at Penn State, he started as a PGA apprentice. After graduating, he returned to his home course and served as the pro-superintendent for six years before moving to Liberty to be the golf professional. Ten years later, Liberty's superintendent died unexpectedly. Gregory stepped in and has fulfilled both roles for the past 12 years. Five years ago, he became a certified superintendent.

"The joy of my job is there's always something different going on," he says.

Gregory describes his club as anything but an exclusive place, adding that his business card says director of hot dog sales. On the maintenance side, he manages a seasonal staff of three full-time and six part-time employees. On the golf professional side, he has an assistant who teaches and oversees the junior program. Gregory also manages the pro shop, concession stand and the club's books.

"I act as the club manager, so my time is probably split 60/40 – 60 on the business end and 40 on the maintenance end," he says.

No one required Gregory to earn his CGCS designation, so why did he? Credibility, he says. By the time he took over superintendent duties at Liberty, he needed to brush up on his maintenance knowledge, so he attended any turf seminar he could.



Bruce Gregory, CGCS, PGA

"Because I was a golf pro, I was looking for a little credibility I might not have had and still might not have," he says. "I didn't want them to think, 'This guy's spending all his time

## Getting along

**T**he golf course industry is fraught with stories of head-butting between superintendents and PGA professionals. Though many say such strained relationships aren't as prevalent as they used to be, the tales are grounded in some truth because each staff member has his own agenda, and the two don't always converge. But that's definitely not the case at courses where the superintendents also are PGA professionals.

Brad Erickson, PGA, is the GCSAA Class A superintendent at Richland Country Club in Nashville, Tenn. Though he doesn't have daily golf professional duties, he says maintaining his PGA membership has been a benefit in disguise in terms of his relationships with the golf professionals at his club.

"I understand what they're going through, and I help them to see our issues," he says, adding that his dual experience helps him come up with compromises that work for both departments. "We have a busy membership, so there's the possibility for a strained relationship here, but I get more of the benefit of the doubt because they don't see me as someone trying to do something behind their back. It's not something we think about every day, but in the back of their minds, they know I'm a PGA pro just like them, so that adds some weight."

Mark Monahan, CGCS, PGA, at Paupack Hills Golf & Country Club in Greentown, Pa., is ribbed frequently by his peers at GCSAA meetings.

"They ask how I get along with the pro, and tell them I get along great with him," he says, laughing.

Monahan has been the superintendent at Paupack Hills for 25 years and obtained his PGA membership in 1990, though he ran the pro shop from the beginning of his tenure at the facility.

"The relationship between pros and superintendents used to be worse than it is now," he says. "People are finding they have to work together."

In addition to avoiding potential workplace friction, being the pro-superintendent sometimes has its side benefits. One of them is receiving compliments that otherwise would have gone unheard.

"All the members know I'm both the pro and the superintendent, but once in a while I'll meet a guest who will say something nice about the course and say, 'You must have a great superintendent,'" Monahan says. "I say, 'Yeah, he's really great.'"

behind the counter and saying he's a superintendent."

Other pro-superintendents settled into their dual roles by happenstance, too. Like Gregory, Mark Monahan, CGCS, PGA, at Paupack Hills Golf & Country Club in Greentown, Pa., worked on a golf course in high school and attended Penn State's turfgrass program. He graduated in 1970 and worked as a superintendent for 13 years, earning his certification in 1977.

Turns out, he also could play, and it didn't go unnoticed. One day he got a phone call from the president of Paupack Hills, asking him if he'd like the opportunity to run the facility's entire golf program – as the superintendent and golf



Nathan Migal, Imagen Photography

professional. He kept his amateur status for a year while running the pro shop before declaring professional and registering with the PGA program. Because he was a nonmember head professional, he earned only a half credit per month, so it took him three years to earn 36 credits and become a PGA member.

Day to day, Monahan splits his time almost equally between his pro-superintendent duties.

"On the weekends I'll be almost 100 percent a pro, and during the week, I'm about 70 percent a superintendent," he says.

On the golf professional side, Monahan has two assistants and manages an additional staff of four people, including his wife who works in



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## CAREER MANAGEMENT



Mark Monahan,  
CGCS, PGA

the pro shop. On the maintenance side, he's supported by one assistant superintendent and 10 to 12 crew members.

"I'm extremely happy with what I do," he says. "If I didn't do both, I'd be bored. It keeps me busy during the summers. I'm here seven days a week, but I get to goof off a bit in the winter."

It's difficult for Monahan to say which role he prefers, but he acknowledges that being the golf professional is more difficult than he thought it was when he was only a superintendent.

"I thought it was a lot easier before I started doing it," he says. "When you're the pro, you have to listen to members complain about what the superintendent is doing and many other things. The pro is the first person they usually see and complain to."

Asked whether he would recommend such a career path to students or younger superintendents, Monahan says he would, as long as they realize what they're getting into.

"It's difficult to find a job where someone would give you the opportunity to do both," he says. "I've met a lot of guys who've asked how I've gotten into it. The ones who want to do both are usually superintendents who are good golfers and want to grow into bigger positions. I've never met a pro who's said he'd also like to be a superintendent."

### PRO FIRST

But they're out there. Take Brad Erickson, PGA. He's a GCSAA Class A superintendent at Richland Country Club in Nashville, Tenn. Erickson doesn't have any daily golf professional duties, but that's what he studied, and he maintains his PGA membership. Thankfully, he says, the GCSAA and PGA honor the bulk of each other's continuing education credits, making it easier on him to maintain both designations.

Like many others in the industry, Erickson grew up working on a golf course. When he first enrolled at Michigan State University, he was unsure what career path to pursue. He soon realized he was drawn to the golf business, so he enrolled in MSU's turf program. Like many college students, Erickson took a break from school to reevaluate what he wanted to do for a living while he worked for the family business.

Soon enough, he was drawn back to the golf world and enrolled in Ferris State University's professional golf management program. In 1994, in pursuit of his four-year degree, Erickson took a PGM internship at Richland County Club, where he's employed presently. Halfway into his eight month co-op, the facility decided to regrass its fairways, essentially shutting down the course.

"I could've stayed and been a part of the process or gone back to school," he says. "I chose to stay, hit it off with the superintendent and essentially got to be like the project manager. It was a great experience."

In 1998, after Erickson finished school, he moved to the West Coast and took a job as an assistant golf professional. He was unsatisfied with his job, making little money and looking to get out of golf, when he got a phone call from Tim Taylor, the superintendent he bonded with at Richland.

"He was looking for an assistant and didn't have many good resumes, so he offered me the job," he says.

Erickson accepted, and hasn't looked back on his career as a golf professional. Taylor has since moved on, and Erickson was promoted to superintendent and is pursuing his CGCS.

"It's like I fell back into what I should have been doing all along," he says. "I came full circle, and my talents led me back to what I was good at."



Brad Erickson, PGA





Allen Parkes,  
CGCS, PGA

Though Erickson isn't itching to take on any golf pro duties, he maintains his PGA membership because he believes it allows him to see the course as a golfer does.

"I'm not interested in teaching, but it's important to the operation, how we're perceived by membership and how we can relate that to the course," he says.

Erickson's dual experience has laid the groundwork for higher management roles in the future.

"It shows I'm proficient in not just growing grass, but the other departments," he says. "It helps me look at the operation as more of a business, and that helps if I'd like to take a step in a different direction and have more flexibility in my career."

#### BIGGER AND BETTER

Allen Parkes, PGA, CGCS, at Traditions at Chevy Chase in Wheeling, Ill., agrees that maintaining both designations helps one's resume stand out. Parkes, another graduate of Ferris State's professional golf management program, has been a PGA professional for 18 years and a member of the GCSAA for 12, seven as a CGCS.

"As industry professionals, we're all products," he says. "The dual certification differentiates me from all the other brands on the shelf. With 20,000-plus PGA professionals and just as many superintendents, anything a person can do to differentiate themselves can only be positive."

Ray Shane, PGA, and a Class A member of the GCSAA, is an example of someone whose experience as a superintendent and PGA pro has led to a greater management position. He's the golf program supervisor for the city of Madison, Wis., which operates four golf facilities. Shane estimates that 80 percent of his job entails managing maintenance operations and the remainder is overseeing clubhouse operations, including four PGA professionals.

Before entering his current position 19 years ago, he served as the pro-superintendent at Portage (Wis.) Country Club for 12 years. At first he was only the golf professional, but the facility's board appointed him the interim superintendent after theirs quit.

"Long story short, they liked the job I did and never got a replacement," he says. "I'd get the maintenance crew going in the morning, and by 11:00, I'd end my maintenance duties, take a shower and be the golf pro until five or six at night."

Shane credits both experiences as the reason he has his current job.

"If I didn't have all the experiences from the pro side and the superintendent side, I probably wouldn't have been considered for the position I hold," he says.

Shane, like the others, loves being privy to both sides of the industry.

"I've had a great time and learned an awful lot," he says. "It's a whole new perspective for everyone in turf. I would love to have every golf course superintendent work in a pro shop for a month and vice versa – have every pro mow greens and change cups. Until you work on the other side, you have no idea what it takes."

You could bet Old Tom Morris would agree. **GCI**



Ray Shane, PGA

There are 29 members of the GCSAA who are PGA professionals – three are CGCSs, 15 are Class A members and 11 are superintendent members. For a complete list of these pro-superintendents, visit [www.golfcourseindustry.com/prosuper](http://www.golfcourseindustry.com/prosuper).



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