



**Pat Jones** is president of Flagstick LLC, a consulting firm that provides sales and marketing intelligence to green industry businesses. He can be reached at [psjhawk@cox.net](mailto:psjhawk@cox.net) or 440-478-4763.

## ALL IN THE FAMILY

**G**olf course maintenance always has been a family affair. I'd be stunned if almost everyone reading this doesn't know at least one second-generation superintendent. You can't swing a dead cat at a chapter meeting without hitting someone who grew up with cadmium or chlorothalnil flowing through his veins.

Many sons – and even the occasional very special daughter – seem to be compelled to follow in their fathers' footsteps down that well-worn dew path into this crazy business. It's rarer these days, but it's still not unusual to find a guy who's followed a dad who'd followed his dad into the profession. There are even a few fourth-generation guys out there whose great-grandfathers were applying bovine biostimulants with pitchforks and mule-drawn carts when Teddy Roosevelt was yelling "Fore!" on the links.

I doubt medical experts would agree, but part of me honestly believes that there might be a gene for greens. Some sort of double-helix for double-cutting, perhaps. More likely, it's simply a matter of fate – when you grow up riding the course with dad, chasing geese from the time you could walk and mowing your first green at the ripe old age of 10, you're likely to be bitten by the short-grass bug. Just think about Paul Latshaw, Dan Dinelli, Jerry Dearie, Bruce Williams and hundreds of other professional "legacies" and you'll quickly get the picture.

Yet, the various superintendent dynasties around the country aren't the only families that populate our happy little industry.

Take turf distributors, for example. When it comes to the independent companies who sell turf products locally, family firms tend to rule. These often relatively modest businesses are the vital links that supply courses with the chemicals, seed, equipment and the other necessities that keep golf, sports fields and lawn care

growing. More importantly, they also supply ideas, insights, expertise, education, camaraderie, diagnoses, condolences and the occasional lead on a new job.

Few distributors get rich and fewer still grow to become big businesses. It's a labor of love...and they're typically most successful when they adore their customers and their customers return the favor.

I spent a week recently with one such family-driven distributorship. In this case, it was Kip Connelly and his sons Patrick and Kevin who collectively manage Land-

---

I doubt medical experts would agree, but part of me honestly believes there might be a gene for greens. Some sort of double-helix for double-cutting, perhaps.

---

scape Supply Inc. in Virginia. Like many distribution firms in our business, it's a multi-generational management structure and Kip is in the process of handing it off to his boys. They also have an extended "family" consisting of a couple of dozen wonderful key employees. Many that I met had been with the company for a decade or more.

But LSI is ultimately a Connelly thing. You, as a customer, always know that you can go right to the top and call a Connelly if there's a problem. I literally was around Kip, Pat and Kevin for five days and I don't think I ever finished a single conversation with one of them. These are guys I've known for years and we'd be chatting away when, suddenly, one of their cell phones would ring in mid sentence and they'd hold up their hand and say, "Sorry Jonesy, it's a customer...hold that thought." Sound familiar? Is there a distributor like

that in your area? Betcha a pallet of fertilizer there is.

And here's why that really, really matters. At a time when there are more places to buy products than ever before and there's more fiscal pressure than any of us can remember, it's too damned easy to forget family in favor of finance. So, let me refresh your memory as to why it's important to remember what these distributors mean to your success.

Remember the time you had a billing problem and the boss fixed it instantly?

Remember when a distributor rep showed up just to help out with an event at your place or drop off some doughnuts for the crew?

Remember that morning your salesperson came out to look at that freaky patch on your 6th green...and finally figured out that some hacker had spilled a Mountain Dew and it was nothing to worry about?

Remember how that company never failed to help out when your chapter needed some cash for the scholarship fund?

Remember that many of those distributors – like LSI – provide great education events that allow you to get your pesticide or GCSAA points without driving halfway across the state?

Remember how your rep gave you a heads up about a new product that actually solved a job-killer agronomic problem?

Do you take those things for granted? Probably not. I'm sure you're always appreciative and you always say thanks.

The question is whether you remember all the things those distributors and their sales reps do for you when it's time to make your buying decisions. Sure, you might be able to save a few bucks with some other dude who lowballs them on price, but what's he done to invest in you, your profession and your business?

Do you support those who support you? You damn well should. It's only right. Those guys are family. **GCI**