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WHY MATT MATTERS

Every year, every industry magazine does a major championship prep story. If you've been around a while, you've probably read dozens of them. The stories are usually about the same. The host super is a great guy. The club leadership values him. He has a terrific team. They've planned for years and worked closely with the governing body. He has great support from his family and a border collie named Bogie. Yada, yada, yada...

I'm not saying those stories are bad. They're awesome because they show some love to someone who's made it to one of the pinnacles of the profession. They get the splashy cover story they can frame for their office wall. It's something to celebrate (assuming the event goes well) and it commemorates an important achievement.

The problem is most of those stories don't teach you jack about how to run your operation more effectively.

Let's face it: hosting a major championship bears almost no resemblance to the day-to-day management of a typical golf facility. It's Disneyland. Millions are spent in advance. Volunteers and suppliers flock in to help. Every imaginable product, widget or potion is available should it be needed. Each contingency is studied and accounted for. There are plans, back-up plans and double-secret-just-in-case plans if those fail. Mother Nature can still screw you, but if money, people or products can fix it, it's fixed.

So, why are we once again lionizing a major tournament host in the pages of GCI given what I just wrote?

Because it's Matt Friggin' Shaffer.

Don't get me wrong. I've had many amazing friends in the spotlight hosting Opens, PGA Championships and

Ryder Cups in the past. Ken Mangum is right at the top of that list of world-class guys who have recently set a new standard of professionalism.

But Matt is more than just a friend. He's the poster boy for doing things the right way.

The first time I ever spent any real time with him – back when he was at The Country Club here in Cleveland – he gleefully explained to me how

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he was using almost no fungicides in a microclimate that screams disease pressure. Instead of just throwing money and chemicals at a problem, he deconstructed the cause of the malady and solved it literally from the soil up. He didn't do it the easy or accepted way. He did it the right way.

A few years ago, Matt built a \$4 million maintenance facility at Merion. Did he personally have to have it? Nope, but he knew that Merion should have it to continue to produce the type of conditions the members wanted and to be a model for other operations nationwide in the future. Thinking of building a maintenance facility at your place? Go visit Matt's operation (and maybe Darren Davis's place) and you'll get all the insights you need. That amazing compound isn't a monument to Matt...it's a statement about doing things the right way.

Like his mentor, Paul Latshaw (the elder), Matt teaches every day. He never directs. He never gives step-by-step instructions. Instead, he teaches

his assistants and crew to learn how to learn by leaving a trail of breadcrumbs that help them find solutions on their own. He never gives them a fish when he can teach them how to catch a hundred fish. He comes from a culture of apprenticeship and careful consideration, thanks to Mr. Latshaw. Matt was once a Consigliore in the Latshaw Mafia. Now he is the Godfather of his own mob. Why? Because he does things the right way.

He's never too busy to help others. In the run-up to an Open, most of us would be too distracted to remember our kids' names and certainly too frenzied to pay attention to larger industry issues. Yet just weeks before an event he's been working towards for a decade, Matt left the course and went to D.C. for National Golf Day. He was a leader on the team that did a remarkable job of spreading the word about the economic, social and environmental benefits golf courses bring to the nation. Sometimes doing things the right way means being confident enough to let your team run things for while you do something that benefits everyone.

And Matt wasn't too busy to note the recent passing of a mutual friend, Stan George of Prairie Dunes GC. Stan was a kindred spirit; a superintendent who valued the fundamentals and who passed along his knowledge and his philosophies to many, many others. Matt was among the first to express his shock and grief when we learned of Stan's death. He was genuinely sad for what we had all lost when Stan left us.

So, why does Matt matter more in the scheme of the 100+ majors that have been held in my 25 years in the industry? Because he does things the right way. And he values others who do the same.

Good luck my friend. GCI