

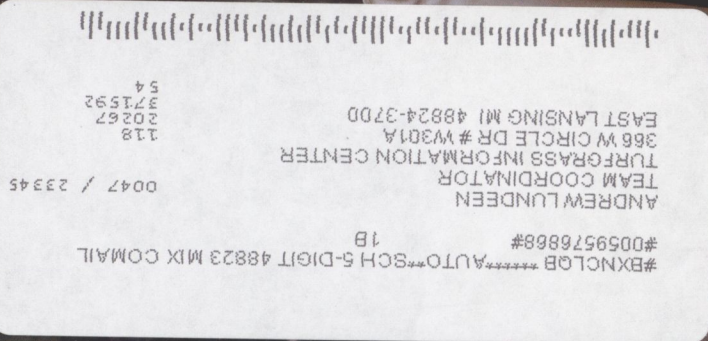
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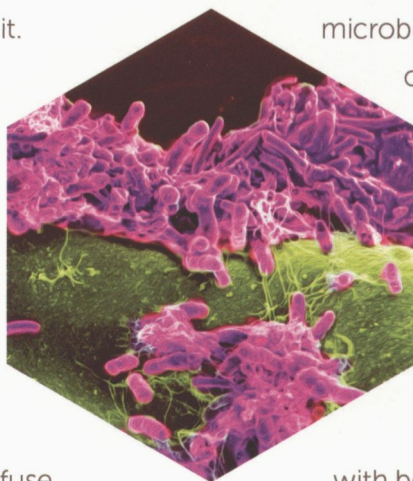


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A Deeper Respect

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YOU NEED STRANGERS IN YOUR CAREER

Life introvert. Work extrovert.

Trained psychologists likely have a term for this behavior. A Google search suggests this personality melding yields an ambivert. Instead of wading too deeply into behavioral science, I'm going to take an authoritative approach. It's my life, so if I want to declare myself an introvert and an extrovert, I'm not going to let a Ph.D. stop me.

Traveling alone to industry events forces you to engage with others. So, if you're going to drive more than 1,000 miles to attend an event such as Green Start Academy, you might as well conduct a few conversations along the way. *Golf Course Industry* wouldn't be an effective publication if we quietly hunkered inside our Northeast Ohio offices.

Driving to Raleigh, North Carolina, site of Green Start Academy, served multiple purpose, including a selfish one. Fall is the best time to drive through the Appalachians. After flying to Raleigh in August and September, I sought the serenity of seeing parts of Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina from highway level. Sticking to the highways also created an opportunity to visit and learn from a pair of inspiring leaders: The Greenbrier's Kelly Shumate and The Olde Farm's Josh Pope.

The assistant superintendents who attended Green Start Academy are striving to emulate the professional successes of Kelly and Josh, leaders at elite facilities and key figures in helping The Greenbrier rebuild its golf courses following the devastating West Virginia floods of 2016. Josh, coincidentally, is a Green Start Academy alum.

The four-hour drive from The Olde Farm to Raleigh helped me mentally prepare for my fourth Green Start Academy, an event co-sponsored by Bayer and John Deere. Like any good superintendent, an editor or writer must begin a task with a plan. Forty-four hours in Raleigh offered an opportunity to boost existing relationships, absorb lessons from panelists and conduct meaningful conversations with at least a half-dozen attendees. An introvert could easily handle the middle objective. But strengthening and cultivating relationships requires gregarious action.

Bayer's Mike Hirvela urged attendees in his opening reception remarks to sit next to strangers on bus rides. Great advice. I purposely lurked in the back third of lines to score seats beside unfamiliar faces.

First, I met Mississauga (Ontario) Golf Club's Paul Sullivan. Next, I met Montclair (New Jersey) Golf Club's Michael Sharpe. Finally, I tried to hold a conversation with Jefferson City (Missouri) Country Club's Adam Distler, although an outgoing attendee, with support from his peers, opted to blare folksy tunes such as "Take Me Home, Country Roads" and "Wagon Wheel," making communicating a bit tricky. At that point in the day, a rising turfgrass manager probably wanted to hear John Denver or Darius Rucker more than some dude who works for a magazine.

I asked the trio about where they work and their careers. I listened and learned — conversation, not interrogation — knowing assistant superintendents in contrasting places can help me better understand the plight of the modern assistant. Once the bus stopped, I handed them my card and dropped my go-to closing line, "If you're hearing or seeing any interesting stories your way, or ever want to contribute an article, my lines of communication are always open." Perhaps one of them will contact me in a few years. Or perhaps they left the bus disappointed a much cooler peer didn't pick the seat beside them.

Successful superintendents already know what assistants and the students profiled in our cover story "Turfgrass Tigers" (page 12) are learning: a career features circuitous routes to a resting destination. The trek becomes more interesting — and fulfilling — when you open yourself up to others.

And yes, country roads can take you home. **GCI**



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NOTEBOOK



ECHO Robotics is introducing an autonomous mower and range picker to the North American golf market.

ROBOTICS ON THE RANGE

An Illinois-based company known for handheld equipment prepares to unveil autonomous solutions to the North American golf market.

By Guy Cipriano

Trimmers, blowers, power washers, generators, spreaders and robots. ECHO Incorporated introduced a slew of new products during a media preview event Oct. 4 at its Lake Zurich, Illinois, headquarters. The products poised to spark the most interest in the golf market, though, stand out for what they don't require – an operator.

ECHO, under its ECHO Robotics division, will become the latest company offering autonomous solutions to the North American golf market when it releases the RP-1200 range picker this fall. The RP-1200 joins the TM-2000 autonomous mower, giving ECHO Robotics a duo directed toward helping golf facilities handle the increasing volume of practice range maintenance. The range could offer a gateway to automation for superintendents, a group curious about robotic possibilities yet still leery of im-



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Golf Course Industry asked superintendents in its 2019 State of the Industry whether they are utilizing autonomous mowers. None of the 155 superintendents who answered the question indicated they use the technology on their respective courses, although it should be noted a few North American facilities deploy Cub Cadet's RG3 on greens. A follow-up question asked how likely superintendents are to use autonomous mowers on greens, fairways and rough, with

velop autonomous mowers for both markets with Netherlands-based Precision Makers before the Golf Industry Show.

ECHO Robotics will make its GIS debut in 2020 in Orlando. ECHO handheld products can be found in maintenance facilities across the country, but the RP-1200 is believed to be the company's first golf-specific product. "It's definitely exciting and a new adventure for us," ECHO president Tim Dorsey says.

Vice president of robotics Joe Fahey and national robotics sales manager Jake Vollbeer are among the members of a team responsible for introducing the technology to superintendents and distributors. Demonstrations of the RP-1200 and TM-2000 working in tandem have commenced on select North American courses. Finding early adopters, Vollbeer adds, represents one of the company's biggest challenges as it wades into a new market.

"Our internal knowledge at ECHO has grown dramatically over the last six months," Vollbeer says.

"It's a continual educational process. We are trying to come up with different methodologies to educate the end user and the dealer, because things change very quick. The product that we have in front of us today isn't anything like it was a year ago. It was completely different."

The RP-1200 and TM-2000 were developed by Belgium-based robotics manufacturer Belrobotics, a company purchased by ECHO's parent company Yamabaiko. Both products are available to greenkeepers throughout Europe, where automated mowers on sports fields and university grounds are common sights.

"We really believe this is the future," Fahey says. "This has been proven in Eu-

rope. The Europeans are very much in tune with robotics. The number of robotic mowers sold in Europe is about ready to surpass traditional mowers. The market is huge there. North America is starting to figure it out."

ECHO Robotics officials showed a video at the media preview event describing how Naxhelet Golf Club in Belgium maintains its range. The course's system is fully automated, meaning balls are collected, cleaned and dispensed without human involvement. The video also illustrated how the TM-2000 works alongside the RP-1200, which holds around 280 balls. The TM-2000 features five blades, with height of cut capabilities ranging from $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch to 4 inches. The mower can maintain up to six acres. The current version, Fahey says, doesn't produce stripes.

"There are tradeoffs," Fahey adds. "When you start mowing robotically, you are making a commitment to change. We all like stripes. But how about your grass looking like it was just mowed every single day? Would you be willing to have that tradeoff?"

Charging stations power the range picker and mower, and employees can monitor and control units via a mobile device or laptop. Once charged, the RP-1200 and TM-2000 work in a variety of conditions, including at night. Sonars alert the units of obstacles. Creating the infrastructure to operate the units requires installing wiring 2½ to 3 inches below the surface around a range.

"It starts with site selection," Vollbeer says. "You go to the site and look for areas that we can't go, like near a water feature. It's then drawing a line in a plan, like an architectural plan where the wire is going to go, where the power is going to go, how do we get the power there. If the power is available and the site is good, it's an afternoon to do the install. A ball drop can take a little more time depending how in-depth and complicated you want that ball drop to work."

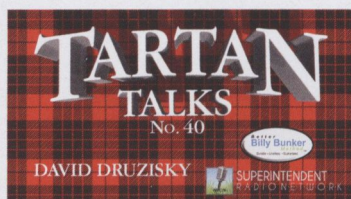
Guy Cipriano is GCI's editor.



▲ ECHO Robotics national sales manager Jake Vollbeer provides a demonstration of the TM-2000 at a media preview event last month.

57 percent answering "never" or "not likely" in all three areas.

The survey was distributed last December and didn't include a question about the likelihood of using automation on a driving range. Since the release of the survey, the labor crunch affecting golf facilities has intensified. The U.S. unemployment rate dipped to 3.5 percent in October and thousands of superintendents spent significant periods in 2019 without a fully staffed crew. Conversations about robotics in golf and sports turf expanded earlier this year after ECHO Robotics unveiled the TM-2000 at the Sports Turf Managers Association Conference and Expo and John Deere announced an agreement to de-



Tartan Talks No. 40

David Druzisky moved to Idaho before it became trendy, so he knows how to appreciate and utilize mountain views.



▲ Druzisky

"Just let it happen," he says. "Don't mess it up."

Druzisky joined the Tartan Talks podcast to describe his presence on an inland design island. Druzisky is the only ASGCA member based in Idaho. He moved to the Boise area in 2006 after beginning his career in Scottsdale, Arizona, another place where golf and majestic views intermingle.

The son of a golf course superintendent, Druzisky started his own firm in 1996. He was just 30 when he entered the ultra-competitive business. "I was probably too young and maybe naïve about it," he says. "And it was probably a good thing because I didn't realize the risk I was taking."

To learn more about Druzisky's background and work, enter bit.ly/DavidDruzisky into your web browser.



Remembering John Kinkead

John Kinkead Sr., the longtime head of Minneapolis-based Turfco Manufacturing and one of the golf course and turf management industry's great creators, died last month. He was 89.

Kinkead will be remembered by those in the industries he loved — notably golf and turf management — as an innovator and as a person whose perseverance set a tone for how Turfco continues to collaborate with its customers in products and services today.

It was in that innovative spirit that Kinkead, working closely with local golf superintendents in the Twin Cities, invented the first mechanized topdresser in 1961. Before then, topdressing in the industry consisted of slinging sand from shovels across greens and fairways. While still working at National Mower, the company founded in 1919 by his father, Robert, Kinkead spearheaded the introduction of numerous other turf innovations at Turfco. He also launched a company called Kinco.

Kinkead lived to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the family's continuous contribution and joy in working in the golf industry. He also raised the company to international prominence as an inventive manufacturer of commercial-grade maintenance products for golf clubs, parks, agriculture, sports and landscaping, and held many patents.

Two of John's sons, George and Scott, jointly operate Turfco.

"His legacy is with us every day," Scott says. "He made being a good and honorable man, a dependable friend and loving father and respected business owner look so easy."



▲ John Kinkead Sr. pictured with his son Scott Kinkead. John died last month after a long and innovative career leading Turfco. Scott and his brother George Kinkead are carrying on their father's legacy by jointly operating the company.



DOLLARS (NO CENTS)

Sin City's newest attraction boasts a big name (hello, Tom Fazio) and a bigger greens fee (\$550?!) a chip shot from the Strip.

By Matt LaWell

Most of the first round of headlines about the new Wynn Golf Club, which opened last month in Las Vegas, has focused on its peak \$550 greens fee, which, yes, sounds exorbitant compared to what most courses charge.

Consider, though, that the greens fee includes lithium battery-powered carts, caddies from a crew featuring more than a dozen current or former PGA pros, and four or five hours on the only course on the Strip—you can't even play a round of putt-putt this close to the casinos—and it starts to feel almost like a bargain.

"And if you keep somebody from gambling for four-and-a-half hours," says Brian Hawthorne, the executive director of golf operations, "we might be saving people money."

Hawthorne joined a conference call last month with Tom Fazio, who partnered with his son, Logan, to reimagine a course he first designed almost 15 years ago. Fazio was Fazio, quipping about how he might have fired Logan if not for their familial bond, the "budget" he worked with (but not whether he came in under whatever that number might have been), and the great exaggerations of his retirement.

"That's competition spreading rumors," Fazio says. "Why would you retire from the business of designing golf courses? It's easy, it's fun, people pay you a lot of money and you work in great, exciting places

for great people. Who would retire from that? Nobody. The only thing I retired from was going to meetings. I don't go to meetings anymore because I don't have enough time for meetings."

Fazio talked plenty about the course, of course.

"Most of the time we're trying to block the views of surrounding areas, we're trying to block the views of buildings," Fazio says. "But we're in Las Vegas, we're on the Strip, we have these magnificent structures all around us and this magnificent environment of buildings and fun and excitement. There's no way to hide them." So, he embraced the surroundings.

The new course succeeds the old Wynn Golf Club, which closed Dec. 17, 2017 after a dozen years. During an earnings call two months before he shuttered the course with plans to develop a Paradise Park—a luxury hotel and convention center partnered with beaches, boat rides, water skiing and ziplines—former Wynn Resorts chairman Steve Wynn said transitioning from golf to broader entertainment would result in "a tremendous uptick in the value of our surrounding real estate." What good is a 130-acre course that brings in a reported \$5 million in profit when every one of those acres is worth two or three times that amount? "I've got a billion and a half dollars of real estate under that golf course," Wynn said back in 2005.

But then Wynn resigned in February

2018 amid a flurry of sexual misconduct allegations and the executive team realized the financial benefits of a golf course. "Not only did we notice we lost 16,000 rounds of golf out there—70 percent of which were cash—but we lost probably \$10 million to \$15 million worth of domestic casino business," Wynn Resorts CEO Matt Maddox said on a 2018 earnings call.

The course might be key to future development, too. According to a recent profile of Wynn Resorts chairman Phil Satre published in *The Nevada Independent*, the company plans to develop on the 34-acre former New Frontier site it owns across the Strip from Wynn Las Vegas and Encore—and "getting the golf course back was critical to our positioning we have there," Satre said.

For now, at least, "The idea was to incorporate not only the challenge from vegetation, but also relief and contour and framing and definition, and also some excitement in the terrain," Fazio says. "We went from being a flat, narrow golf course to a rolling, elevated, framed setting."

The course features Dominator Bentgrass greens, with Tifway II Bermudagrass and a seasonal ryegrass overseed on the rest of the turf—all under the eye of superintendent Jason Morgan, who received praise from Fazio.

"Every day during those hot summer months, those 100-plus degree days," Morgan was "making sure the sprinklers were in the right position, making sure the spacing's right," Fazio says. "There's so much detail that went into that course in a short space of time and Jason was the guy in the field making it happen."

Oh, and about that \$550 greens fee? "If you put the economics of everything involved in that, it's really not a high price because of the value of that real estate, the value of what was spent to build it, the value to maintain it, the cost to maintain it in that location is extremely high," Fazio says. "It's shocking to me that a golf course exists in this location." **GCI**

Matt LaWell is GCI's managing editor.



A GOOD WALK

I recently returned from a wonderful trip to Ireland, where I walked 99 holes of golf over six consecutive days. I honestly cannot tell you when, if ever, I played golf for six consecutive days, let alone walked. It was heavenly.

My first taste of links golf came earlier this year at the home of golf, the Old Course at St Andrews. Walking across the sacred ground previously tread upon by the game's founders, legends and greats sent shivers up my spine and I've never felt more at peace or serene.

In Ireland, it didn't matter if it was pouring rain at 9-hole Spanish Point or if the wind was howling nearly 40 mph at Carne. All that mattered was we were in the moment. More than 3,000 miles from home, work and all the other distractions that come with day-to-day life in America seemed a distant memory, even if only for a short while.

I managed to play Lahinch with one ball, whilst losing several at both Carne and Rosapenna. It took me six attempts to extricate my ball from the deep, revetted bunker guarding the front left of Doonbeg's 18th hole. We all had a good laugh! And when my wife's caddie at Enniscrone shouted an expletive in his native accent across the adjacent fairway to another member in our trip, we nearly laughed ourselves to tears.

Guinness and thick, hearty vegetable soup with brown soda bread warmed my bones following each round. I'm happy to report I didn't gain one pound whilst away — the power of walking between eight to 10

miles each day over, between and around the dunes.

I recently listened to Episode 99 of "The State of the Game" podcast. Just before the seven-minute mark, Rod Morri references a comment made by Derek Duncan, who hosts the "Feed the Ball" podcast. Derek says, "When you play a golf course in a cart, you almost never approach the green from the front, from the fairway, cause you're always parking to the side to go and putt. When you walk the golf course, it's a completely different experience because you approach all the greens from the front."

I'm embarrassed to admit I've probably played greater than 80 percent of my lifetime rounds with a cart, and never thought about it in the context of Derek's comment. He's right and it makes me wonder if this plays a role in the number of unrepaired ball marks routinely seen on U.S. courses. If golfers are approaching from the sides of each green, do they fail to walk past where their ball first struck the putting surface?

Another thing that struck me about my experience in Ireland is how Americans in general are willing to accept the quirkiness

often found on old links courses (blind shots, severe slopes, pot bunkers, etc.), but are quick to chastise those features

when at home. I personally do not mind blind shots and find them to be thrilling, plus good friend Rick Tegtmeier, CGCS, MG, told me that Pete Dye always says, "they're only blind once."

My game isn't as sharp as it once was. My most recent GHIN update stated I'm now a 6.0 index. My personal best was 1.2 and the days of 2.0 are now a recent but distant memory. The self-imposed pressures of work continue to mount each season and Mother Nature continues to find new ways to frustrate me and prevent me from playing.

I resolve to do better. I fell in love with greenkeeping because I fell in love with golf first. I fell in love with my wife because we met on a golf course and love to play golf together. Ireland showed me despite our efforts to enjoy life we haven't made enough time for ourselves. We're not getting any younger and each year our skills and abilities deteriorate, but links golf is suited for all ages.

I don't know exactly when or where golf in America went too far astray from its roots in Great Britain and Ireland. After having experienced golf twice this year in the homeland, I believe it's something we need more of in the U.S., and I can't wait to return across the pond to experience it again. There is something to be said about a stroll across a links course, whether it's with your clubs on your back, pushing a trolley, or with a caddie by your side. It's a good walk! GCI

“If golfers are approaching from the sides of each green, do they fail to walk past where their ball first struck the putting surface?”



MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG, is the superintendent at Carolina Golf Club in Charlotte, N.C., and President of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on Twitter @CGCGreenkeeper.



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TURFGRASS TIGERS

A STUDENT-FOCUSED PROGRAM AT A VIRGINIA SCHOOL PROVIDES LABOR HOPE FOR AN INDUSTRY SEEKING AN INFUSION OF YOUNG TALENT.

BY LEE CARR

It's significant that a steely-eyed tiger peeking through the grass is the beloved logo of the Brentsville High School Turf Program. These teens are hungry to try it all and their ebullient leader, Drew Miller, is engaging support at every level to provide opportunities and expand the narrative of an industry-wide dilemma – how to attract skilled labor.

Turf students are mowing greens at Robert Trent Jones Golf Club, working on community fields, donating landscaping services for veterans, and tackling the daily weather and equipment challenges that come with a career in turf maintenance. Many of them have their hearts set on becoming golf course superintendents. Talking about turf careers and applying to the nation's top turf programs are part of the everyday chatter at Brentsville District High School.

BDHS is in a developing rural area of Virginia and it is part of Prince William

County Public Schools, a district with 12 high schools. In 2016, Katherine Meints, principal of BDHS, and some other PWCS leaders were exploring ways to renew the agricultural vocational program to meet industry needs. The discussion pointed to turf management. "However, we needed to find the right leader," Meints says.

The district interviewed several people. Nobody was a good fit. "Then, in walks Drew," Meints recalls with satisfaction. After doing seasonal work during his undergraduate years for the New York Mets, the Pittsburgh Pirates and the Pittsburgh Steelers, Miller's hiring journey can only be described as serendipitous. The combined efforts of PWCS, Meints and Miller are creating a program that is both productive and popular.

There are approximately 1,000 students at BDHS and 200 of them are now enrolled in the turf program. Forty percent of the turf students are female,

Drew Miller leads the turfgrass management program at Brentsville District High School in Prince William County, Virginia.

© CHRISTINE HALSEY

“SAFETY IS THE FIRST THING WE COVER. EVERYONE HAS TO UNDERSTAND THAT SAFETY IS A PRIORITY.”
—DREW MILLER

and the total number of turf students has more than doubled in just three years. “Miller and the turf kids are so welcoming that even students not involved in the program want to help with extra projects, just to be a part of it,” Meints says.

“We have two teachers for the program and we would happily find a third if there was more classroom space,” she adds. “There is literally nowhere in the building for them to go.” Despite the increasingly limited indoor space, Miller – who made time to get his masters in career and technical education (agriculture) in 2017 from Virginia Tech while teaching – has been finding ways to get things done from Day One.

LAUNCHING THE PROGRAM

On a Sunday in May 2016, Miller graduated from Virginia Tech with a bachelor’s degree in turf management. On Tuesday, he started at BDHS. With big ideas, he insisted on having the equipment he needed

to teach the kids in the strongest way possible.

“When I took the job, I told the administrators it was going to be hands-on,” Miller says. “The kids will learn that I trust them. They will know that I expect them, without any hand-holding, to get on the mower and make sure that they have mowed every blade of grass.”

With the blessing of and some financing from the athletic director, Miller was charged with taking care of the school fields, which have Bermudagrass, and he was determined that the kids would be doing the work. And he wants more work to do – he envisions the students designing and maintaining a five-hole par-3 course on the school grounds.

The department started with a John Deere 2653B Triplex Mower and a Toro Triplex 2500 Sidewinder before adding three Echo Weed Trimmers, a pair of edgers, a paint machine and drafting tables for winter landscaping classes. “We are

building as we go,” Miller says.

Budget is always an issue, but the county’s Career and Technical Education Department initially helped with the funding. All the equipment acquired is commercial grade. Miller wants students working on the same standard of equipment industry professionals utilize.

The tactile nature of the program and comfort with professional equipment has proved essential, as the students have been well-prepared for their summer work with five area golf courses: Stonewall Golf Club, Prince William Golf Course, Broad Run Golf & Practice Facility, Bristow Manor Golf Club and RTJ. The students have also worked at Audi Field — home pitch of MLS’s D.C. United — George Mason University, local nurseries and with Game Day Inc., where some students helped with a dormant sprigging trial.

Freshman year is for Horticulture, sophomores take Turf Management 1 (planning for and working on the





Brentsville District High School turf students make an annual visit to Virginia Tech.

athletic fields), juniors take Landscape 1 (including more in-depth instruction on the machines), and seniors can choose Landscape 2 or Turf Management 2. With so many students working for golf courses in the summer and aspiring to be superintendents, Turf Management 2 may soon incorporate maintaining greens.

For Turf Management 1, there is a safety unit in the beginning of the year and a written test that requires a 90 percent pass rate before the students can use the equipment. "Safety is the first thing we cover," Miller says. "Everyone has to understand that safety is a priority."

Once the written test is completed, students must pass a driving test on the mower before they can help maintain fields. They then spend the first quarter taking care of the football field, completing tasks such as painting, mowing, watering and filling divots.

The program emphasizes problem solving. For example, last year was wet and this year has been dry. When the water pump broke, students asked, "What do we do?" They thought of solutions and went to work.

"Someone came up with bucket brigade, so we were doing that," Miller says. "Someone suggested filling the tractor bucket up and dumping the water where it was most dry – we did that – and we had two hoses out and connected at the spigot to hand-water the football field for three days straight. We

couldn't get the pump parts for two days. Students learned you just have to find a way forward."

"Seeing the kids work together was awesome," adds Miller, who enforces the importance of working as a crew. That mentality results in the students receiving a group grade near the end of the first quarter. "This is not an industry of one, it's a crew," he says. "It's a grounds crew, not a grounds member. I can alter the grade based on whether an individual was working or not. The big thing is that they are actually seeing themselves being critiqued on 'how' they did, not 'what' they did. I want them to be concerned with the process of it."

TEAMING UP WITH RTJ

Coordinated effort and problem-solving cannot be emphasized enough and the summer work students complete is beneficial for everyone. Students use the season to practice their skills and determine if they might be interested in a future in turf, expanding their knowledge and bringing it back to BDHS. Local courses and businesses benefit from receiving skilled labor.

"I can't take them all, but I would if I could," RTJ superintendent Scott Furlong says. Furlong knows how pivotal seasonal work can be. He was initially destined to be a teacher, earning his bachelor's degree in education from Old Dominion University. Before he started teaching fulltime, Furlong worked a summer

at RTJ in 1994 when the club hosted the Presidents Cup.

"I have been at RTJ ever since," Furlong says. "The vistas are breathtaking. This is a great place, with a great membership. It is very easy to get up and go to work every day – it never gets old." Maybe that's why Furlong understands why so many students feel compelled to work in the turf industry – it's an attractive occupation, and the more you learn, it seems the more there is to know.

For instance, Furlong says, "the (Annual Bluegrass) Weevil problem across the Mid-Atlantic is something we have struggled with the last few years, and next summer I want our Syngenta rep (Sam Camuso) to meet with the high school and college interns for a 90-minute session so they start to understand one of the biggest pests to hit our industry. They have an eagerness to learn and it's our job to expose them."



Furlong and Miller are arranging a classroom visit later this year. Furlong will talk to students about college. "They don't need to rush into school or a four-year degree," Furlong says. "The two-year degree might be more manageable for some kids. There is a shortage of students, a shortage of assistants and a shortage of interns across the country. We have a nice little pocket here

▲ Students learn a variety of turfgrass maintenance skills by preparing Donald Lambert Field for games.

“WE HAVE TWO TEACHERS FOR THE PROGRAM AND WE WOULD HAPPILY FIND A THIRD IF THERE WAS MORE CLASSROOM SPACE. THERE IS LITERALLY NOWHERE IN THE BUILDING FOR THEM TO GO.”
 — KATHERINE MEINTS, BRENTSVILLE DISTRICT HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

to work with these kids, talk about placement and see where they can get a good experience.”

“RTJ has great internship programs – high school and college,” Furlong adds. “The college intern program includes working a tournament, attending an association meeting, and scholarship opportunities. All college interns spray, fertilize, calibrate, moisture manage, scout for disease, roll greens and do course set up – all the big stuff. The high school interns start with raking bunkers and pulling weeds, but our goal is to have every one of these kids trained on greens mowing before the end of the summer. If they go somewhere else, they are leaving more talented than when they arrived – there is a progression. If they come back next year, we get them trained in hand-watering and riding jobs.”

Riding jobs at RTJ are scarce, because the course requires a lot of walk mowing and hand work. The crew uses Toro walk and push mowers, and John Deere fairway units, which they try to get students on before college. “Many of the kids from BDHS have been very interested and worked very hard,” Furlong says. “Are they perfect? No. Are they close? Sometimes. They are kids and I expect them to be kids.” The mentality is encouraging to students. No matter how hard a young person tries, mistakes will be made. “It’s frustrating that we don’t have more college interns walking through the door because we truly do try to push people here,” Furlong adds.



▲ Principal Katherine Meints and Drew Miller have collaborated to develop a productive and popular turf program at Brentsville District High School.

Burnout is another industry problem. Workers sometimes don’t feel challenged as they sit in line and wait for a promotion. A recent RTJ recruiting advertisement reads, “Goals of becoming a superintendent within 2-4 years are a prerequisite.” Furlong is serious about advancing careers – from summer workers to top employees.

“I don’t want people to get complacent,” he says. “I want people who want to come in here and not be good but be great, make RTJ better for being here and then move on. Lots of assistants leave to become superintendents. It makes me happy to see them go out, be productive people in society, in their community, and wear their logo and be respected at their club.”

Furlong says that, in 2018, “we couldn’t find local, seasonal labor from April to November. I contacted landscape companies (who were having the same problem) and used people who had never worked on a golf course just to rake bunkers on tournament days. It was really, really difficult. Then a couple of high schoolers wanted summer jobs and I told them to get their friends because I need staff.” Then he “hired 20-some high school kids. And 17 of them [he] had coached – football, soccer, basketball or lacrosse, and some of them [he] had coached multiple years.” Through personal effort, by working with colleges and teaming up with the BDHS turf program, RTJ is finding the workers it needs. Furlong might have left

DONALD LAMBERT FIELD

In 1965, teaching physical education and coaching football in his first year at BDHS, Donald Lambert was fortunate to have a newly constructed field. However, he didn’t have enough players to scrimmage during practice, so he sent the guys to local houses and farms to recruit. He taught and coached until 1988, when the field was dedicated to him upon retirement and officially named “Donald Lambert Field.” Now, BDHS’s field is winning awards, including the Sports Turf Managers Association’s 2018 Field of the Year (a national selection out of more than 600 applicants); a National Field of Excellence designation from Pioneer Athletics (2018); and the 2019 Stars and Stripes Award for its field painting design, “Friday Night Lights in Small Town USA,” also from the STMA.



WHAT TEENS WANT ADULTS TO KNOW ...

- We are trying our best for the golf course (and the BDHS turf program).
- Adults are always in a hurry – be patient.
- Expose us to new things when you have the chance.
- We are learning, but we might not get it right on the first try.
- Don't get mad. Don't shout at us.
- Once I understand what you want me to do, then I can do it.

a career in teaching, but he's now teaching every day.

WORKING FOR THE FUTURE

Regular communication with students is a major part of Miller's philosophy. "If you give a kid five minutes of your time, see what he or she is thinking, and really talk about what's possible – that's a difference maker," he says. The approach empowers students, expanding their passion for turf and the program.

"This program wouldn't be where it is today without the kids who were in my cabinet last year," Miller says. "Our president, Cole Couch, literally did everything that was needed. Bronco Deeds is the president this year. They understand the importance of what they are doing and the impact they are making not just in the program but everywhere they are going. They have the mindset that 'this is what I want to do', and the more I learn now the easier it will be."

Deeds worked at RTJ. "I want to be a superintendent," he says. "I enjoyed it and it gave me a good view of the future. I understand what it will be like to work on a course and the responsibilities." He is applying to Virginia Tech and a few other schools to see what his options are.

"We actually do a lot of community work and work on the school fields," he says. "Students compliment our designs and everyone seems interested. People respect what we do and understand that the field takes a lot of work to maintain to be ready for game day." His favorite thing about the turf management program is "being able to learn and getting the experience I need to be able to have a job in this industry. The hardest thing is having everything ready on time."

John Carayiannis started working at RTJ as a sophomore and transferred into the turf program during his junior year, because he "kept hearing how fun that program was." He says, "there is a good balance between fun and learning new things. What I like most is being able to make the connections between my job at RTJ and the program because it's two different types of turf management, but you can see what they have in common."

Carayiannis has "learned a ton in these two years – for me to catch up and know as much or more than a lot of the people in the program is cool because I got so much experience in such little time. I worked in the bunkers and mowed the greens about half the time this summer. When the afternoon jobs were done, an assistant would take me out to go cut cups or plug out scalped cups." Carayiannis also hopes to become a superintendent. He plans to obtain more work experience and study turf in college.

Another top student in the program is Julie Kessler. She participates in equestrian activities and works at the barn where she rides. The enthusiasm surrounding the Brentsville program convinced her to give turf a try. "When Mr. Miller

started teaching, everyone really seemed to enjoy it, like getting the tape on the football field and designing and working on all of the athletic fields at the school," she says. "He has been talking to me about how turf management could be a career."

She plans on applying to college with turf management being an option. "It's nice that Mr. Miller doesn't really teach us like children – he teaches us like we are all part of a crew – everyone is equal to him," she adds. "Sometimes adults talk to us like we're kids, because we are, but Mr. Miller treats us all with respect. I mean the things he lets us do ... he trusts us! It's pretty great."

Miller is also proud of Collin Brady, treasurer for the turf program and also an intern at RTJ for the past two summers. Brady runs his own landscaping company – "to put in new beds, mow, mulch and weed."

He spent his first year at RTJ mulching, raking and weeding. "But as they trusted me more, I was mowing greens and the rough around the edges and stuff like that, cutting

... AND WHAT ADULTS WANT TEENS TO KNOW

- No. 1 rule: always be safe
- The quickest way to get fired is no-call, no-shows. Communicate with us.
- Be mindful of what you are hearing and what people are modeling for you.
- Be a sponge – learn everything you can before you assume you know it.
- If you don't understand or want more information, ask for it.
- We are trusting you – act responsibly.

holes – it was a lot of fun," he adds.

Brady eagerly anticipates getting into turf management. "The thing I enjoy most is being outside and learning new things all the time," he says. "I learn something new every day and I am having fun while I'm doing it. That's really cool to know that you are putting all this effort into one of the best sports fields in

► Robert Trent Jones Golf Club superintendent Scott Furlong has worked closely with numerous Brentsville District High School students, including John Carayiannis.

the nation and you helped make that happen. Mr. Miller is one of the best teachers. He doesn't get mad. He just tells you how to correct mistakes and then he tells you that you did a good job. Sometimes I think, 'I don't want to go to school today and then I'm like, I've got Landscaping Class.' It makes me want to keep coming back and keep learning. It's awesome."

To have a draw that powerful, to keep kids coming to school and be excited about learning as they are exposed to the great careers that are possible in the turf industry, is a wonderful thing. And students aren't the only ones better off, because college programs are noticing their talent, and the local community is benefiting too.

INVOLVING COLLEGES AND THE COMMUNITY

Students in the turf program make an annual visit to Virginia Tech. They have visited Penn State. And this year, sophomores will also be visiting the University of Maryland.

"Every year when we go there are a couple of kids who don't really think a four-year university is the place for them," Meints says. "By halfway through the day, they are asking me, 'What would I need to do to get into the two-year program at Virginia Tech? How can I finish out my junior/senior year to get in here?'"

Miller remembers Virginia Tech's Dr. Mike Goatley teaching him that you are creating more than just a field. Working in turf management, you are creating a place for memories for kids, a safe playing environment for athletes and something pleasing for spectators to observe. Turf is never just turf. It has a larger pur-



pose, for sports and the environment, and that's critical.

Fortunately, support is pouring in from every direction. The Prince William branch of the Farm Bureau Insurance Company donated \$20,000. This enabled the turf program to acquire a pair of mowers. The students maintain some of the community fields and they also work field jobs at other schools, such as baseball mound reconstruction or field edging. Sometimes they work for service hours, sometimes for pay. Any money made on these jobs is reinvested in the program.

The county is helping fund a new greenhouse at BDHS that will mainly be used for the horticulture class, but ideally also for cultivating grasses for turf identification. Virginia Tech and Penn State have sent letters supporting a grant, which Miller has applied for so that BDHS can build the first high school turfgrass research center in the United States. It will include a research lab, research putting green, maintenance facility, storage area and an area to house classes. The idea is that BDHS can help conduct research trials for both of those colleges – and much more.

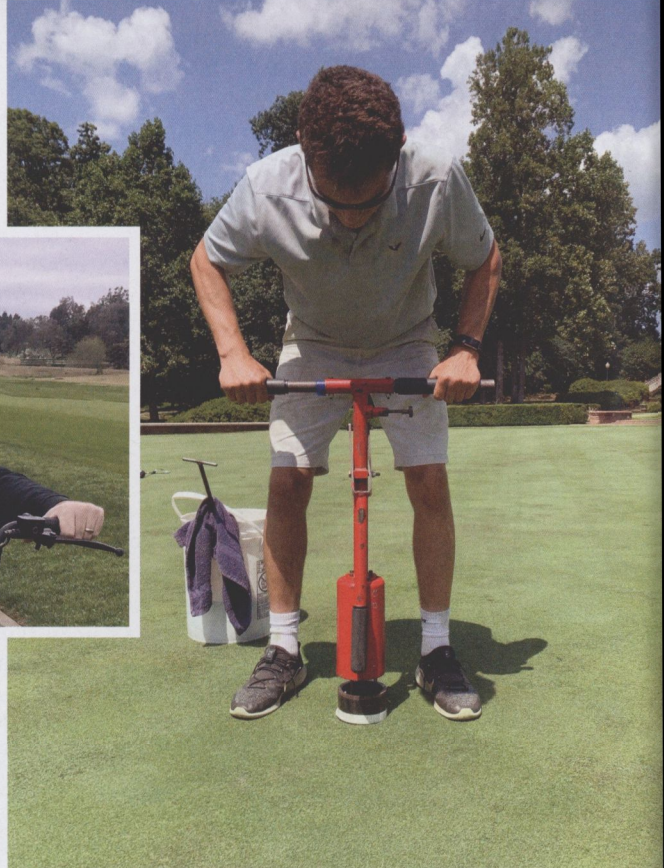
"There will be a workshop area so that the students can work on the engines, and a welding station ... everything we need to teach the kids

how to maintain equipment," Miller says. "Sports turf managers usually ship maintenance equipment out to be repaired, but that's less common for golf course managers. I want the kids to have a better understanding of the equipment so that when they are out there on the course, they know what is going wrong."

The new facility could allow the program to grow even more, solving the classroom issue. Partnerships with the community, universities, administrators and courses like RTJ are providing students with the skills they need. The influential approach of Furlong and Miller, to continually teach and show the students new things, is keeping their interest and helping solve the problem of bringing skilled labor to the industry.

Brentsville students are learning how to work together and that quality turf skills provide career opportunities. Though they have just started peeking through the grass, the students are thriving with a steely, tiger-like determination to make the most of what they see. **GCI**

Lee Carr is an Ohio-based writer and frequent GCI contributor.





SHOW ME THE MONEY

Negotiating, regardless of who you are, can be intimidating.

Knowing when to ask or for what to ask for is difficult, whether you are a successful golf course superintendent or a long-time club employee. If you are a dedicated, talented and trustworthy staff member who values your skills and job, requesting a raise may cause you to teeter on a fine line of standing firm on your abilities and accomplishments or facing the potential risk of changing jobs.

Why aren't you asking for more money more often? Shying away from going to the boss and asking for a raise occurs for several reasons:

- Appearing to be too bold
- Taking a risk
- Uprooting a secure situation in a delicate job market
- Undervaluing your contributions to the staff and operations or worse, NOT valuing YOUR contributions to the operation

We all know that golf course maintenance begins with planning and then execution. So, let's apply these principles to your negotiating tactics.

START WITH A CLEAN STORY. Ignore past salary or wage numbers. Often, previous hourly wages or a starting salary did not match the level of competency or services provided. What you started with should not be an indicator of what would be a fair wage or salary now. You have more experience and a better understanding of the operations than when you started.

BE PREPARED. Off-the-cuff conversations or spontaneity when asking for more money rarely prove successful. Always be prepared

to accurately support yourself and your credentials. Much like proper golf course product applications, set a discussion date far enough in advance to allow time to prepare.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOURSELF. This is creating your "I" statement so you can exude confidence in your abilities, knowledge, and accomplishments on the golf course and within your career. If you were responsible for the successful completion of a project, take ownership. Don't downplay your abilities. The "I" statement applies throughout the phases of your career — whether asking for a raise or interviewing for your next job. Get used to talking about yourself and taking ownership in YOU!

VISUALIZE A POSITIVE OUTCOME. Seems obvious but ... when the time comes, your preparation will provide positive energy and results. What you think about the results matters. If you are doubtful, then guess what? Create a positive mental scenario prior to your meeting. Picture the results you are seeking.

UNDERSTAND YOUR NUMBERS. Evaluate all the costs associated with your requested raise so you have a clear and defined "ballpark" number. Then convey these numbers with clarity. Remember, you are trying to sell yourself to those who already know you.

As a counterpoint, even the best-made plans can get thrown off by unexpected budget reductions, special equipment needs, decline in play or memberships, or some other

circumstantial change such as a new boss. As you consider what having additional resources might mean to your lifestyle or family, it is as crucial to consider your plan of action if you are declined a financial reward.

PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS.

Have a firm resolve not to be denied, regroup and tap into your personal strengths to review what may have gone wrong. Remember past wins that made you proud and confident — on or off the golf course.

CELEBRATE THE SMALL VICTORIES. Often, when a goal is not achieved, we become frustrated or assume the "I'll never get anywhere here" mentality. Don't let this happen. Reflect on your career and life plan. To move up another level remove this distraction and refocus on what made you successful.

HANDLING PROBLEMS. How you view and handle setbacks is what shapes us, our attitudes and how we rebound. This is life, get used to it. As Rocky Balboa once said, "It ain't how hard you can hit, it's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward."

See setbacks as opportunities to get better, because they happen to all of us. You can learn a lot about yourself by the way you handle adversity. Find and follow people who have turned problems into steppingstones.

Finally, as Gary Player once stated, "the more I practice, the luckier I get!" Practice (role play) for this opportunity with a friend, spouse or relative who can provide an honest assessment of your presentation or how to improve it. **GCI**




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MANAGING ISSUES **BEYOND TURF**
IS **PART OF THE GAME** FOR
LAS VEGAS SUPERINTENDENTS.

By **Judd Spicer**



For golf course superintendents in Las Vegas, the texture of turf is far from the only green that requires tending. In Sin City, the color of money, the emerald allure of tabletop felt and the legalized intake of a crystalized leafy bud all warrant regular attention for managing maintenance staffs.

Vices and distractions no doubt abound in a 24-hour town globally known for a good time, and the respective, omnipresent lures of gambling, drinking, drugs and sex aren't just there for tourists alone.

In concert with an agronomy labor pool continually dueling with casino and construction gigs that are oftentimes better-paying jobs, superintendents across Vegas need to be continually cognizant that employee lifestyles don't delve toward the sod.

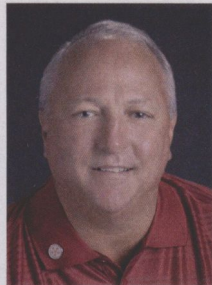
Las Vegas native Scott Sutton, director of agronomy at The Club at Sunrise, has been around the gambling world all his life.

"My father was in the gaming industry, and one thing that always sticks in my head that my dad told me is, 'The casinos don't keep getting bigger and bigger because they're giving money away,'" Sutton says. "I stay out of the casinos. If you live here, you either learn to stay away, or you don't live here very long."

A Vegas golf veteran of four decades — and the only man to carry the dual licenses of certified Golf Course and Landscape Irrigation Auditor in the state of Nevada — Sutton's experiences with employee vice grips is deep and very real.

"It's challenging. In my 40 years in the business, I've literally gone through hundreds of employees," he says. "We live in a 24-hour town with lots of vices. There's a reason you won't find windows or clocks at the casinos. We've got gambling, drinking, strip clubs, and drugs are always an issue."

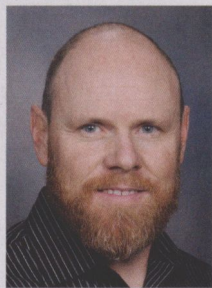
► Shadow Creek has a solid record of retaining employees in the distraction-filled Las Vegas market.



▲ Sutton



▲ Niendorf



▲ Shipley



▲ Lezon

ple in the past who would wait for payday, and they'd immediately get it cashed and start gambling," he says. "Those are serious problems, of course, and honestly, that's not a problem I've ever dealt with before. I've had people go waste their entire paycheck and then wonder where they're going to stay at night because they can't make rent."

In Sutton's time, he's seen no shortage of examples of those with a short shelf life for Vegas.

"You can see it in the morning, when they come in with bloodshot eyes and mouthwash heavy in the breath. I've had guys come in totally drunk, stoned on different kinds of drugs," Sutton says. "And I know lots of guys, superintendents, who came here from another town, and in less than a year, they're leaving, because they can't find that balance, can't handle all the nightlife."

And Sutton isn't alone in seeing both grounds staff and management personnel either burn out or bust out.

Pro Turf International manages four courses in town, including Siena Golf Club, where golf course superintendent Nathan Shipley, an eight-year Vegas resident, plies his trade. While Shipley feels fortunate to have nary a maintenance member on staff who brings rollover Vegas vices to the workplace (though he does acknowledge that there have been a few staff members who either work to gamble or work to drink), the superintendent has also seen those at the management level fall victim to the city's lures.

"They might come in, especially a younger, single guy, all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and enamored by the glitz of Vegas," Shipley says. "But after about six months, they'll get burned out on the party-

ing scene. Either that or, in one case, I know one guy just had to move away from here."

LABOR GAMBLES AND SUCCESSES

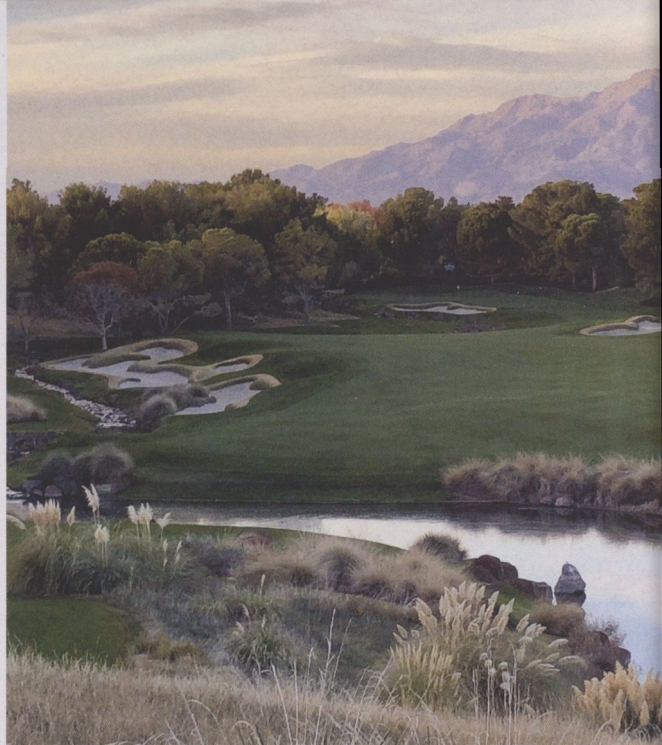
Akin to much of the nation, a shallow hiring pool and a competitive labor market don't always allow bosses to readily vet a new grounds employee.

"It's so hard to find employees," Sutton says. "The golf course labor force out here competes with tons of landscape companies, and they might start a guy at \$15 an hour. And, of course, we compete with all the casinos. You can get a job cleaning rooms at a casino for \$19 an hour, along with union benefits."

"As long as the guy doesn't give me a bad feeling, I'm happy to give somebody a chance," Shipley says. "And, sure, there have been occasions where that didn't work out, but, in truth, the labor market is so dry. If I can get a body in here to do some work, that's pretty much what I'm looking for."

Of course, akin to the dichotomy of the city's \$5 blackjack tables and high roller card rooms, the courses of Vegas run the spectrum of ownerships, and the resulting hierarchy therein.

Annually referred to as the top play in all of Nevada, Tom Fazio-designed Shadow Creek is part of the MGM Resorts International family, which, for employees, results in a prime opportunity one doesn't want to compromise. "We're in a unique situation, working with MGM Resorts," says Greg Niendorf, golf course superintendent at Shadow Creek and vice president of the Southern



Nevada chapter of the GCSAA.

With an average employee tenure at about 18 years, Niendorf experiences little turnover, save for the occasional retirement. "So, it's an older staff but, with that, we don't have issues with guys using drugs or having gambling problems," continues Niendorf, who has been in Vegas since 2008 and in his current post for two years. "And we're about nine miles from the Strip. So it's not as easy for our guys – even if they did have such problems – to get involved in that stuff."

Considering the premium pay working at Shadow Creek, proximity to the Strip would appear to have little bearing on employee choices and lifestyles.

"We just got through overseed and had an appreciation get-together to take the guys out for a few beers," Niendorf says. "And there were a number of them who didn't want to come, just because they don't want to take that chance of getting in trouble somewhere along the line. They know what they have. The pay is good, the benefits are good and, for some of them, it took a long time to get the job they have."

HANDLING DICEY SITUATIONS

Like tending the turf through tough times, Vegas superintendents — or



MY FATHER WAS IN THE GAMING INDUSTRY, AND ONE THING THAT ALWAYS STICKS IN MY HEAD THAT MY DAD TOLD ME IS, 'THE CASINOS DON'T KEEP GETTING BIGGER AND BIGGER BECAUSE THEY'RE GIVING MONEY AWAY.' I STAY OUT OF THE CASINOS. IF YOU LIVE HERE, YOU EITHER LEARN TO STAY AWAY, OR YOU DON'T LIVE HERE VERY LONG."

— SCOTT SUTTON,

their respective ownerships — find, or at least aim, for successfully aiding employee bloom with organization, patience and a solid game plan.

"I've put many employees through drug and alcohol programs or gambling programs over the years.

If it's somebody worth saving, you got to invest some time into them and help them work through their problems," Sutton says. "You just need to work with 'em, train 'em, or sometimes maybe you need to send 'em home, write 'em up, give them a couple days off to think about it. You give them a few chances, and then, if they're not willing to work through their problems, maybe you've got to cut 'em loose

and let them figure out their life for themselves."

Across the fairways of his career, Sutton says certain employers offer help with treatments via employee insurance plans. Before that step is taken, Sutton recommends performing due diligence and having contacts on-hand for treatment resources.

At Shadow Creek, the course's parent company provides the benefit of ensuring that premier course conditions are on par with staff members' wellness conditions. "MGM continually reaches out to us to make sure we're aware of the support we have,"

Niendorf says, "even to the extent of, say, personal trainers or incentives for quitting smoking."

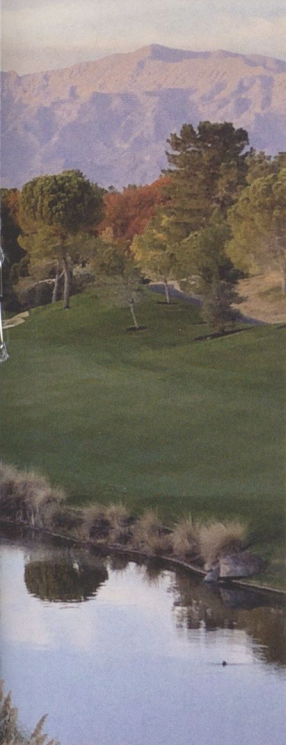
Lezon has researched a host of addiction and recovery resources, from churches to treatment groups. "But I don't like to come at somebody with that right away," he says. "Usually, it's, 'Hey, we need to talk.' I'm not one to fire somebody for a bad decision. But multiple bad decisions compound things. I had one employee that we tried really hard to work with, to make concessions for, and I tried to help them budget their money. And he couldn't do it.

Between the drinking and gambling, they were just kinda lost."

Ultimately, there are some people who are beyond saving, and Lezon says he has had to let a few employees go, whether the party town's grip extended to drinking and drug use on the job — and even, in one instance, selling drugs to golfers.

Breaking a gambler's creed: In the world of Sin City course work, the best bet is transparency. A winning hand finds course employees laying all cards on the table.

"All considered," Lezon concludes, "these addictions are much more prevalent than people want to admit." GCI





DON'T LET THEM IGNORE YOU

We all want to be recognized for our talents and efforts. In fact, in a world where we take more than 93 million selfies a day, being ignored is certainly one of life's biggest disappointments. One long-held suggestion to avoid being overlooked or taken for granted is this one: "Be so good they can't ignore you."

It's advice offered by comedian Steve Martin, author Cal Newport (in a book with the same title) and printed on T-shirts and wall posters that adorn corporate breakrooms across our country. No matter our objective – recognition that leads to a promotion or simply the satisfaction that comes from a boss's or colleague's "good job" – excellence that demands attention seems a logical and valuable strategy.

Here are five attributes that can make you so good that you cannot be ignored:

1. GREAT ATTITUDE is a key factor in your success and ability to be noticed, whether you're a golf course superintendent, golf professional or club manager. Savvy employers hire for attitude above other attributes. Stated in the negative, no one needs a grumpy or uncooperative manager leading today's work force. There is enough friction in getting operational teams to perform at the high end of their capabilities without someone with a negative attitude pulling us down.

According to author Emily Smykal, whose findings were part of a CareerBuilder study by Harris Poll, nearly three in four employees (72 percent) spoke to the power of a positive attitude. "Positivity leads to a more productive workday and creates a better environment for fellow employees," she writes. "Great employees consis-

tently stand out for their upbeat attitudes and earn positive reputations for themselves."

Building and keeping an attitude that leads others toward common goals requires a comprehensive understanding of the job's requirements and a willingness to teach others to work harder, better and smarter. What's more, great attitudes are contagious.

2. EAGER LEARNING keeps everyone involved sharp. Constant learners tend to be open, creative and receptive to new or different ideas – even if they're someone else's. Heather Huhman wrote on Glassdoor that an eagerness to learn shows openness to new ideas, willingness to think beyond today's facts and invaluable curiosity. Robert Half, a specialist in recruitment and employment services, recommends that every resume show an eagerness to learn. This trait adds value for the employer and expands the performance potential of the employee. When you're learning and growing, you are becoming a more valuable employee and one whose contributions are easily recognized.

3. TRUSTWORTHY TEAMMATES, especially in troubled times, are valued for their consistency, stability and integrity. Difficult and exigent circumstances reveal those who can stand tall and steady in crisis. One's day-to-day commitment to being a trusted and respected teammate is manifested in a thousand acts. Ensuring that

your actions match your words is an important trust-builder, as are genuine eye contact, thoughtful interactions, an openness to criticism, and the willingness to express oneself openly and with trust.

The world champion sprinter Carmelita Jeter breathlessly testified to the power of trusting teammates at the 2012 London Olympics when – after running the anchor leg on the women's 4x100-meter relay team, she said: "I knew they trusted me like I trusted them. And I would not let them down." Jeter and her trusting teammates bested a world record in the event that had stood for 27 years.

4. MENTAL TOUGHNESS is critical when we encounter adversity, in life and on the job. Are you resilient and persistent enough to overcome challenging circumstances? According to *Inc.* magazine, qualities that make you mentally tougher are patience, perspective, focus (on priorities) and the willingness to confront adversity. The mentally tough understand that criticism or adversity is often not of a personal nature and see it as an opportunity to keep pushing toward their goal.

5. CAREFUL PLANNING – Planning is critical to sustained success. Managers who take a focused approach to plans and planning outperform their club's budget. Advance planning reduces risk as managers identify potential threats and opportunities. Established, well-stated goals and objectives simplify and clarify your intentions. **GCI**



HENRY DELOZIER is a principal in the Global Golf Advisors consultancy. He is currently Chairman of the Board of Directors of Audubon International.

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SPOTLIGHT

The end was near, and Jason Stroehlein knew the end was near, his staff whittled thinner than any sensible size, his days obviously numbered, and still he worked.

He hopped on “some cheap rental equipment” for basic mows. He worked for months without water. *Just do what you can, he was told, to keep as much turf alive as possible.* When winter arrived, he sprayed what little snow mold preventative fungicide remained in his maintenance facility, steering clear of fairways and not indulging at all in any aerification, and winterized an irrigation system that carried an \$8 million price tag when it was installed less than a decade earlier. Blow it out. Shut it down.

“Two days later, they laid me off,” he says. “That was it.”

Stroehlein had worked for four glorious years as an assistant and later as the superintendent at Cornerstone Club, an incredible and ambitious course outside Montrose, Colorado — on the eastern edge of the Uncompahgre National Forest, about 30 miles north of Telluride and 300 miles west of Denver — laid out by Greg Norman Golf Course Design and bankrolled by Hunt Realty Investments. After opening back in 2008, Cornerstone was heralded as “the best new course in Colorado” by one magazine, “the best new private course in America” by another, and “easily the best high altitude course in the nation and quite possibly the world” by a third.

“We had a big checkbook,” Stroehlein says. “We had a ton of money and a promise that Hunt was going to develop other golf courses. We felt like we were a success and everything was great.”

And then everything wasn’t great. Not long after Hunt turned to KemperSports to manage the sprawling 6,000-plus-acre property, the dregs of the Great Recession seeped into Colorado and the rest of the Mountain West. Lot and membership sales had



A mountain miracle

Course closures have been abundant since the Great Recession. How did the Colorado gem Cornerstone Club come back to life after seven long years?

By **Matt LaWell**

DUSENBERY GOLF COURSE DESIGN



▲ Cornerstone Club is located on the eastern edge of the Uncompahgre National Forest.

bottomed out and the oil and gas business appeared far more lucrative for Hunt. The course changed hands in 2011, then again in 2012. Financial problems plagued both groups and the course shut down in June 2012, the staff trimmed from 27 to seven.

Stroehlein remained for another handful of months before that number dwindled to zero. The day he learned he was out of a dream job, he and his wife, Valerie, started to pack up their lives — their children were just 4 and 1 at the time — and wondered what was next.

“It was like having the rug pulled out from under us,” he says. “It was like, ‘Wow, what do you do?’ I was applying for jobs all over the Midwest and the Mountain West to try to find anything.” After heading back to southern Illinois, not far from home, Stroehlein worked for a couple local landscape companies before landing a position as a parks superintendent in suburban St. Louis. “We just decided it was time to get back closer to family and find something with some stability until the golf industry bounced back a little bit,” he says.

The course, meanwhile, spiraled into a legal miasma filled with lawsuits and court dates. It remained shuttered for the next seven years.

AROUND 200 COURSES SHUT DOWN every year around the United States, at least according to numbers released by the National Golf Foundation, just about all of them for one financial reason or another. Some

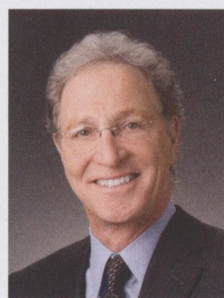
will be cleared for new suburbs full of homes. Some will grow over and become fields, the hint of a course peeking up from under the weeds.

“If you’ve been in the golf industry long enough — and certainly if you’ve been in the golf industry from the late ’90s through the 2000s to now — and you didn’t have a project that got closed somewhere along the way, you just weren’t very active,” says Matt Dusenberry, who launched his Dusenberry Golf Course Design in 2014 after 16

years with Greg Norman. What isn’t common, of course, is the reverse. “I think it’s rare,” Dusenberry says, “that a project comes back.”

Cornerstone Club is today a part of that far smaller number because of its Owners Association. Spurred by its longtime president, Bob Aisner, the group sued the club’s owners in March 2013 for a breach of contract related to breaking up the property and selling it in packages. The case ended in a settlement and the land was deeded back during the last quarter of 2015.

“We were really just focused on taking control back of the whole property,” says Aisner, who splits his time between the Dallas Metroplex and Cornerstone. “What was going to happen to the course was second to getting it back and under control



▲ Aisner



▲ Stroehlein

in one unified ownership with a long-term vision.”

After sifting through more paperwork, Aisner and the Cornerstone Owners Association dove into the details of renovating the course — which had now lay dormant longer than it had welcomed golfers — and they called Stroehlein first, bringing him back as a consultant for a revival project that would have been funded by a prospective ownership group out of North Carolina.

“It was almost surreal just to be back, and

it was just heartbreaking to see it in that condition after we had hit so many high peaks,” says Stroehlein, who walked the property for four days during that summer 2016 trip and then worked with Aisner for the next six to eight months to develop a revival plan. “All the fairways and roughs, all the bluegrass areas, were only about 6 inches tall and just very thin. That was surprising. We had a few weeds, dandelions and thistle, but nothing was overgrown or crazy. You couldn’t see fairway contours, but it was a golf course, wall to wall, right down to the edge of the grass limits. It took shape fairly quickly to determine what we were going to have to do.”

The financial end of the deal unraveled in early 2017 and the Owners Association opted to fund it



There were a few cracks from the years, but it was really all there, almost like it was preserved. Bizarre. It looked like you could darn near go play golf.”

— Architect Matt Dusenberry



internally. Again, Stroehlein received the first call — this time to revive not only the course but his old superintendent position.

“We were lucky Jason was willing to come back,” Aisner says. “He had always loved the course and there was nothing more important than getting him back. He had great relationships with contractors, subcontractors. There was never an issue.”

“Even as the assistant superintendent, I was involved in everything, not just the golf course,” Stroehlein says. “All the amenities, the real estate, everything.”

Dusenberry received the next call — almost a decade after he first arrived on the property to participate in the design of the course during his days with Norman. How often is an architect afforded an opportunity to

edit their work on such a scale?

“The only areas that were really in poor condition, which is amazing, were just the areas that had sand,” says Dusenberry, who worked on the project with his design partner James McKenna. “There’s a sand profile under the tees, there’s a sand profile under the approaches and greens, and those areas were all desiccated and had very limited turf on them. There were a few cracks from the years, but it was really all there, almost like it was preserved. Bizarre. Even the bluegrass — if you were to go to an overgrown course in the Midwest, the grass would all be a foot high. Here, it was like it had maintained itself. It looked like you could darn near go play golf.”

Perhaps the grass stunted because of a relative lack of water. Because

Cornerstone sits in essentially a high desert environment, the course enjoys what Stroehlein calls “even decent growing conditions” for no more than five months every year. Couple that with an irrigation system that had been turned off for almost five years and the recipe is right for short grasses rather than tall.

Oh, and about that irrigation system. When Stroehlein turned it back on, all but about 1 percent of the 3,200 or so Rain Bird heads worked perfectly. Thank that last blowout back in 2012.

“We didn’t know if we were going to be replacing three-fourths of the heads, or if plumbing was going to be blown up, or if pump stations were going to be completely shot,” Stroehlein says. “I walked in the first day and turned the pumps on and they lit up like I’d left them yesterday and we charged everything back up in three days. It was unbelievable.”

Instead of spending millions more, Stroehlein needed about \$50,000 to tune up an elaborate system of pipes and sprinkler heads.

“We got very lucky,” Aisner says. “If we had had to tear up all the fair-

▲ Despite being shut down almost seven years, Cornerstone Club never turned into a jungle of weeds.

SPOTLIGHT

► Cornerstone Club reopened for good on July 13 with new national members targeted as a potential growth area.

ways and start from scratch with an irrigation system, who knows what the result would have been.”

Aisner also called John McNeely, the founder of Diamond Creek Golf Club in Banner Elk, North Carolina, and managing partner at Congaree in Ridgeland, South Carolina, to help restart operations. He focused more on the macro than the micro, providing big-picture perspective. “We had a spectacular team,” Aisner says. “Nobody had an ego and the free flow of ideas was just terrific.”

CORNERSTONE OPENED IN SPURTS, WITH 21 acres filled with a practice facility and a short course opening June 1, 2018, the first eight holes of the course opening September 8, 2018, and the full course



opening for good July 13. A western drought last year helped the renovation wrap up on time, with work rolling on every day from April 13 through October 5. The elk that moved into the bunkers have been evicted back to an even more natural habitat and the primary avenue

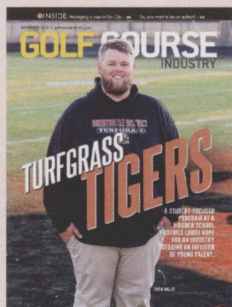
for growth is to bring in as many as 75 new national members, a number Aisner says “we think we can easily reach.”

Stroehlein is working with a bigger crew than before, 35 in the summer and 10 in the winter, with snow removal in the winter and summer

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lawn care maintenance for homeowners a part of the schedule.

"It's been a crazy two years and we're just killing it right now," he says. "Great year agronomically, great year with members. We feel like it's been a pretty amazing process."

The differences between then and now are stark, but not lost to memory.

"It gives you much more of a sense of purpose and you're much more grateful," Stroehlein says. "Not that we weren't grateful the first time around, but gosh, all the work that was put into it and then to have it closed down and then have an opportunity to come back. I looked at it as the ultimate opportunity. We get to tweak it until it's to where we think it's perfect."

"In 2012, I was pretty down about it. I could have just walked away. I could have not blown out the irrigation system. I pushed and fought hard

to spray fungicides and do all the things that we were trying to do, just in case. I saved records. I had all the information I needed in the event that the following year or two years later, if somebody wanted to get things back going again, I would have all that. I put myself in the best position if I was the guy coming back. You never know. Put it to bed as if you're going to open it next year.

"I couldn't imagine if I hadn't done all those things, coming back, what I'd be in for. If we had walked out there and the pump station was dead, if the pumps were all frozen up, if we had plumbing issues, they would have pulled the plug. They wouldn't have ever even gone through with it."

No story has a real beginning, or a middle, or an end. We all just pick random moments from our experience to look back — and to look ahead. **GCI**



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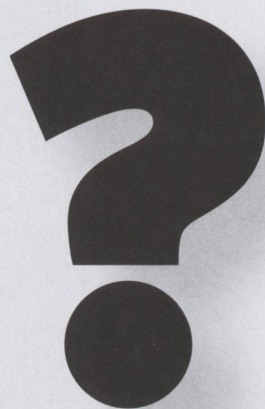
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Do you want to be an author

(while still holding down your day job)



Four multitaskers discuss balancing a major writing project with the rigors of their daily work.

By **Lee Carr**

F Louis L'Amour, an accomplished American short-story writer and novelist once said, "Start writing, no matter what. The water does not flow until the faucet is turned on." Well, you may have seen an irrigation system or two that didn't properly work this way, but you understand the point. To write a book, or an article or that lengthy email "to management," you simply have to get started.

Whether you are naturally a good writer, or it is a skill that you have to work at, writing is a critical communication tool, and more often than not, you should "get it in writing." Where there is a will there is a way, and where there is writing there is reading — and a way to make time for it all. We spoke with these respected industry figures about their journeys to become authors while managing their day-to-day responsibilities (and you can, too!).



ANTHONY L. WILLIAMS

THE ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP TOOLKIT: HOW TO BUILD, IMPLEMENT AND MAINTAIN AN ENVIRONMENTAL PLAN FOR GROUNDS AND GOLF COURSES (Wiley, 2012), *NOBLE HABITS* (Xulon Press, 2015)

To write *The Environmental Stewardship Toolkit: How to Build, Implement and Maintain an Environmental Plan for Grounds and Golf Courses*, Anthony L. Williams “woke up around 6 a.m., worked at the courses until 5 p.m. or so, headed home for dinner with the family, kept the dojo moving forward, then would sleep a couple of hours, get up around 11 p.m. and write for three hours or so before getting up and repeating the cycle.” And yet life was ... balanced.

Williams, CGCS, is a Shihan (Master) and a 9th Degree Black Belt in the National College of Martial Arts, the author of two books and dozens of articles, has endured 24 broken bones and heart surgery, and is currently director of golf course and landscape operations at Four Seasons Resort and Club Dallas at Las Colinas. Actually, he is a self-titled “vintage superintendent,” with a career spanning multiple decades.

The first manuscript Williams wrote was *Noble Habits*, a guide to living life fully and with choices prioritizing Christian values and a balanced life. It was by following

these principles that he was able to write *The Toolkit*. However, he didn’t publish *Noble Habits* until after *The Toolkit* was out. When *Noble Habits* did go to print, Williams realized, “writing doesn’t have to be perfect for it to be published, it is the best you can do in that moment.”

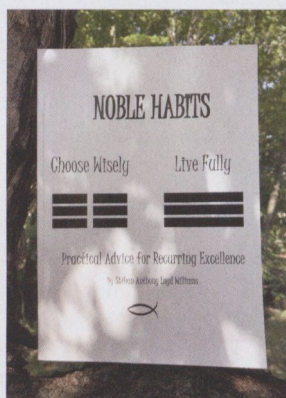
For *The Toolkit*, Williams was approached by an editor from Wiley when some of his articles caught her attention. They initially discussed a book about water conservation, but he wanted to write comprehensively about environmental stewardship and he crafted a proposal accordingly. It was accepted, and because of his schedule and projects at the course, he was determined to finish the copy in 18 months. He aimed to write “a very high-science book in common language,” and his accomplishment led to a satisfying trip to the Library of Congress, where he was able to call for the book he wrote.

Writing a book proved a new challenge, and Williams almost balked (there is always work to do!). However, a friend asked him, “Do you know how many people want to write a book?” and that was all the encouragement he needed. Williams had always loved to write, excelling at writing in high school and keeping detailed journals in college. His “writing started from a love of reading, which develops your own thoughts, and thoughts lead to a profession.”

Williams used much of the advance and proceeds from his books to support his interests by donating to rain-forest and other environmental charities, endowments, PBS, missionary causes, suicide prevention and more. “Sales have never been a primary goal,” but he absolutely wants to leave a legacy “of a better tomorrow.”

For his own writing, Williams “gets ideas all over the place, writes things by hand on a legal pad, and then does a strong draft at the computer.” There are many ways to write, but a professional tip is to negotiate an indexing service into your contract – it will save you a lot of time. He also likes to read trade journals and rereads works by Napoleon Hill and J. R. R. Tolkien – you always find something new.

In the acknowledgements of *The Toolkit*, Williams thanks his family for inspiring him to “undertake epic causes through everyday actions.” Williams lives by the credo of “take care of the land and the land will take care of you.” Superintendents have a clear directive to communicate well to further their environmental stewardship goals and further enhance the golf experience for everyone. Just start small, move in the right direction, and when you can, make it epic.





MIKE HURDZAN

GOLF AND LAW: GOLF COURSE SAFETY, SECURITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT (Hurdzan Golf, LLC Publication, 2018),

other titles include *GOLF GREENS: HISTORY, DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION*; *GOLF COURSE DESIGN*; *SELECTED GOLF COURSES*; *GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE: DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND RESTORATION*; *GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTURE: EVOLUTIONS IN DESIGN, CONSTRUCTION AND RESTORATION TECHNOLOGY*; *BUILDING A PRACTICAL GOLF FACILITY*

Mike Hurdzan believes it takes “a thick skin” to be an author. With several titles to his credit, including *Golf Course Architecture: Design, Construction and Restoration* – commonly referred to as “the modern bible of golf architecture” – he knows.

Surprisingly, writing did not come easily for Hurdzan. He had to wade through two remedial English classes (yes, two) before enrolling in college English. Later, when he was working in golf architecture, someone gave him two books written in the 1920s by noted golf course architects George Thomas Jr. and Robert Hunter.

He was inspired by what he learned from those books. “They are why I started writing and how I chose my topics,” Hurdzan says.

Hurdzan also wanted to “memorialize what he learned as a professional” and he appreciates books. Digital information is increasingly accessible, but the in-depth explorations of topics that books offer are critical. Books provide a historical and cultural value in a different way from any online platform.

In fact, Hurdzan is an avid collector of golf memorabilia and books, with more than 6,500 volumes in his renowned collection. It’s often referenced by professors, writers and Hurdzan himself, who discovers relevant information and useful ideas in books all the

time. He reads the papers daily and enjoys Bernard Darwin and the intriguing military novels of Frederick Forsyth – Hurdzan himself was a Colonel in the U.S. Army Special Forces.

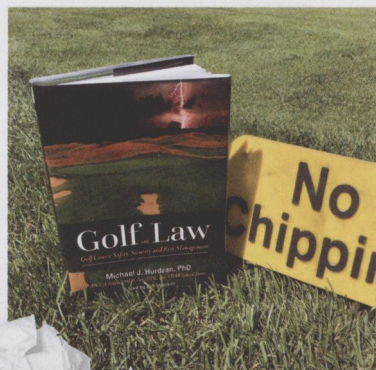
Despite his traditional publishing success, numerous awards and accolades, several publishers decided to pass on *Golf and Law: Golf Course Safety, Security and Risk Management*, Hurdzan’s most recent work. They weren’t sure it would sell in the volumes necessary to be profitable – publishing is notorious for its slim margins. Hurdzan felt it was important enough to self-publish and “didn’t write it to sell a million books but to address how ill-prepared the community is.”

Accidents happen, and lawsuits sometimes follow – Hurdzan “has been an expert witness at over 160 of them” – so with their costly nature, it makes sense to pay attention to how to make your course as safe as possible for your staff, players, spectators and the management responsible. He says, “most of the lawsuits could have been avoided through good safety management practices,” and his book addresses these shortcomings.

Besides his wonderful collection and the books he writes, books are part of the Hurdzan Golf logo, modeled on Rodin’s iconic *The Thinker*. “A lot of people feel golf architecture is a craft or an art form, but it’s far more than that,” Hurdzan says. “It’s a blending of science, soil and climate, and that’s the idea we had with *The Thinker*. We added the golf clubs and whether he’s looking at a scorecard or reading a golf book – we wanted to make that connection, as subtle as it is, between golf and the thoughtful nature of golf architecture.”

With a strong cup of coffee (Starbucks or Tim Hortons), and ideally a few successive mornings, the first draft of something new is written on a legal pad and typed into Microsoft Word. Online or printed copies suffice for editing and after just a draft or two, Hurdzan’s work is ready to be seen by a fellow expert for review.

“Writers and editors can polish your words,” he says, but the content has to be worthy – that’s how you capture the reader. Hurdzan knows that “anyone can learn to write by remembering that ‘brevity is the essence of clear thought.’” Once a superintendent and now well known as one of the co-designers of Erin Hills – home of the 2017 U.S. Open – Hurdzan is clearly a writer. Whether it’s emails, articles or books, what are you reading? Are you a writer too? Think about it.





NICK CHRISTIANS

FUNDAMENTALS OF TURFGRASS MANAGEMENT, 5TH EDITION, WITH AARON PATTON AND QUINCY LAW (Wiley, 2016), other titles include: THE MATHEMATICS OF TURFGRASS MAINTENANCE WITH MICHAEL AGNEW; SCOTT'S LAWNS: YOUR GUIDE TO A BEAUTIFUL YARD WITH SCOTT'S, MATHEMATICS FOR THE GREEN INDUSTRY WITH MICHAEL AGNEW, NANCY AGNEW AND ANN MARIE VANDERZANDEN

"Writing is something that I really like to do," Christians says. With more than 40 years of experience in teaching, researching, writing and publishing, he has authored over 1,200 articles, abstracts and research papers. He is a university professor of turfgrass management at Iowa State University and writing and publishing are part of his job. Plus, he adds, "for the first 10 years of my career, writing articles was also a good way to make some extra money."

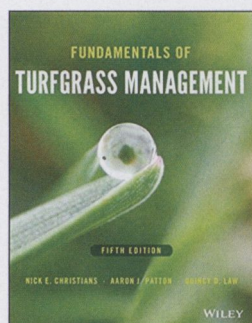
Christians has contributed to a few "Scotts books" – yard and

lawn care guides produced by the giant company – and those books have sold well – around 500,000 copies. But even where there is success, full-time employment has been supplemented or replaced by freelance work. Christians has witnessed a huge change in the publishing industry

and he "has talked to a lot of freelance folks and that is now a tough industry to be in."

Asked if he could see himself writing another book, Christians replies, "I don't

see a niche where I would work on a book," as the market for turf books is somewhat saturated. He "worked hard on books for 16 years" and his most widely



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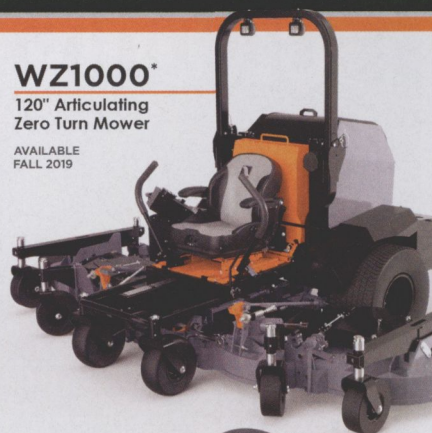
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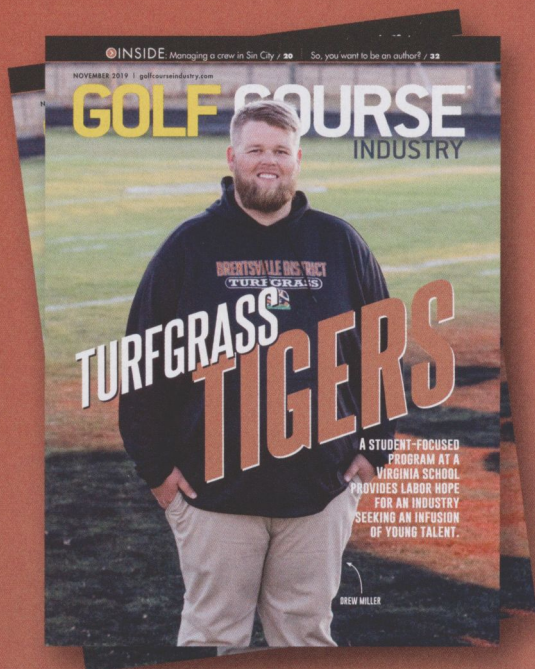


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CAREER

used book – *Fundamentals of Turfgrass Management* – has four main parts: Grasses, Turf Culture, Turf Pest Management and The Turf Industry. Christians has traveled extensively in Europe, Asia and North America giving seminars about these topics and he “gets letters from all over the country about that book,” underscoring what is now its fifth edition.

Christians invited two former students, Aaron Patton and Quincy Law, to help with it and to possibly “carry it forward.” The book edition was published in 2016. Christians says he is a few years from retirement and he sees the value of that book “continuing to the future.”

Though the publishing industry has changed, there is always room for research and academic publishing. With graduate students, “we work extensively on writing” but with the undergraduates, “not as much writing is happening as it should.”

Writing needs to flow easily, as “kids who write well have a huge advantage in school.” Christians outlines a lot of his work and outlining is a skill he encourages his students to develop. With your article or paper outlined, creating your work is straightforward – simply follow your trail of ideas.

“Without the outline, 75 to 80 percent of the

kids just ramble, with no idea what they are talking about.”

Christians credits one particular teacher in his small high school for shaping him into the writer that he is today. Because of her, in school, “everyone had to write a theme every two weeks, and if it was good enough, you didn’t have to rewrite it.” There was a valid incentive to write exceptionally well on the first try. Christians had to work at it, but eventually he no longer needed to revise his themes. That confidence and ease led to a clear, prolific writing style.

Most of his reading time has been spent on professional books and trade journals, noting that one of the best sources of written work about turf is the online and extensive Turfgrass Information Center, hosted by Michigan State University. Foreseeing more free time, Christians says he is “branching out.” He is finding more joy in “novels and other kinds of books” and he is currently reading the memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant.

“If you are telling people about writing, it is just plain hard work,” Christians observes.” It takes tenacity, you have got to sit down and do it, and procrastination is your biggest enemy. Don’t leave it until the last minute.”

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MIKE BAVIER

PRACTICAL GOLF COURSE MAINTENANCE: THE MAGIC OF GREENKEEPING, 3RD EDITION, WITH GORDON WITTEVEEN, (WILEY, 2013)

Partnerships abound in publishing and while many are obvious, more go unnoticed. Michael Bavier's and Gordon Witteveen's book *Practical Golf Course Maintenance: The Magic of Greenkeeping* is a testament to collaboration and multiple successful partnerships.

Bavier and Witteveen created the first edition of *Practical Golf Course Maintenance* in the late 1990s, based on information they would present at seminars in North America and Europe. "Any place we could get our foot in the door, we went," Bavier says. As they traveled, they saw the need for making the content accessible in a written format.

Witteveen worked with Sleeping Bear Press, a small publishing house in Michigan, to strike a deal for *Practical Golf Course Maintenance* and it was later acquired by Wiley. Witteveen has passed away, but Bavier has revised and produced the third edition with the effort and assistance of his wife, Mary – a lovely, lifelong partnership.

Bavier and Witteveen worked equally hard on the book, but Witteveen did more of the initial writing. In the beginning, chapters were traded through the mail. Witteveen would write them and Bavier would

offer revisions. There is a joyful freedom in partner-writing, with one person able to brazenly create content and the other able to see it with fresh eyes. Through trust and cooperation, the product is stronger.

Also, Witteveen "is Canadian and we knew the book would sell more copies in America," so Bavier helped with language nuances as well as technical details. Everyone involved wanted "the audience of the book to be as extensive as possible."

This is a practical book written by superintendents and its comprehensive nature – covering everything from topdressing to course traffic to job descriptions – resonated not only with superintendents but also with those who wanted to know more about daily course management. Chapter after chapter illustrates the range of responsibilities that a superintendent has, providing a basic understanding for discussing the bottom line.

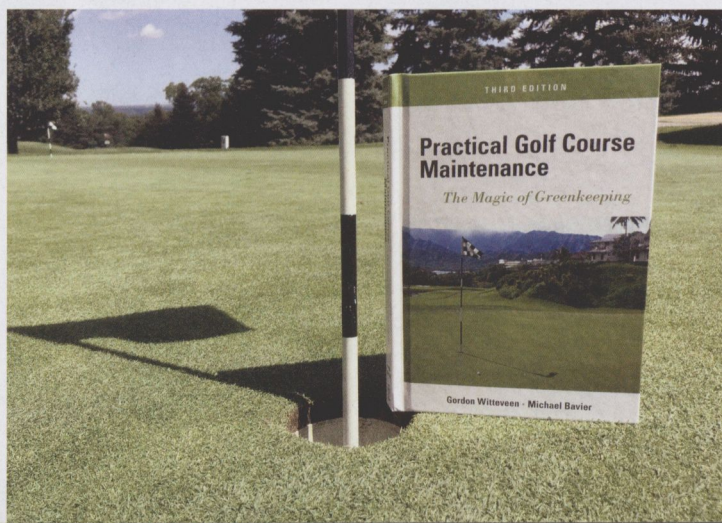
Beyond a writing partnership, and the supportive partnerships at home, other relationships include those of the editor and the author(s), the editor and the layout team, and work with printing, sales and rights before a book is even produced. The most important partnership, however, is the one between the author and his audience. This relationship comes naturally for Bavier.

Bavier connected with many people through presentations but he was also connecting with the people

at Inverness (Illinois) Golf Club at home, where he started working in 1969, became the superintendent and is a member today. Witteveen, who was the superintendent at the 45-hole Board of Trade Country Club in Toronto was close to retiring when the first book was being worked on, and Bavier was in the later stages of his career. "I would go to the club on the weekends not only to work but because I knew I needed to be in contact with the members," Bavier says. "I couldn't just be working in the maintenance shop."

Bavier's work as a superintendent and as an author has benefited from those natural connections. He likes to read newspapers and golf magazines and he follows all kinds of sports. Discussing slow play, he recalls something he and his teenage friends would say while putting, "miss it quick." Missing putts is one thing, but don't miss this third edition of *Practical Golf Course Maintenance*.

Superintendents always have numerous responsibilities and Bavier acknowledges that you "can't do this kind of book for the money." It's possible to be published, "but it's going to be a challenge. You can go to a small publisher who might take a chance." Whatever your choice, connect with your audience and know that every good partnership is worth the effort. **GC**



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Globetrotting consulting agronomist **Terry Buchen** visits many golf courses annually with his digital camera in hand. He shares helpful ideas relating to maintenance equipment from the golf course superintendents he visits — as well as a few ideas of his own — with timely photos and captions that explore the changing world of golf course management.

SPARE TIRE STORAGE RACK

At least one spare tire from every piece of equipment the Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples owns is stored in the 25-foot distance between the vertical beams of the Butler Building. Two-inch square tubing is welded the full length 10 inches away from the building's horizontal beam so that various tire sizes can be stored in harmony. Five pieces of 1½-inch by 10-inch pieces of angle iron connect the 2-inch square tubing to the horizontal beam by welds. Also, for further structural support, additional 2-inch square tubing bars are welded to 1½-inch angle iron that is bolted to the beam and to the floor, spaced 60 inches apart. There are also four additional 2-inch support bars used to store scrap metal. The spare tires are organized and stored very efficiently. It took about one half-day to build and about \$200 in materials. Guillermo Gomez, equipment manager, and Darren J. Davis, CGCS, are really good at what they do. Davis was the 82nd president of the GCSAA.



GRANULAR FERTILIZER SCREEN

This 2010 Lely Model W Fertilizer Spreader 3/8-inch mesh metal screen, with movable metal rod handle, is very effective for removing clumps of fertilizers and other bulk and bagged granular materials that can clog the aperture at the bottom of the hopper. One-inch angle iron framework is bolted to the sides of the hopper, which holds it in place, and the screen is easily removed when not needed. The materials were salvaged and already on-site and a former mechanic took about two hours to cut and mount the metal and screen. Former USGA senior agronomist Matt Nelson, co-owner, and Pat Borchard, co-owner, of Magic Valley Bentgrass/Magic Valley Turfgrass in Filer, Idaho, near Twin Falls, are very quality-oriented in everything they do. **GCI**



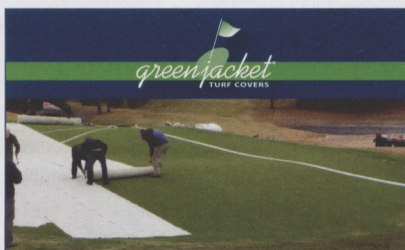
Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG, is president of Golf Agronomy International. He's a 41-year, life member of the GCSAA. He can be reached at 757-561-7777 or terrybuchen@earthlink.net.

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Non-retouched client photo: GreenJacket System coming off in the spring!

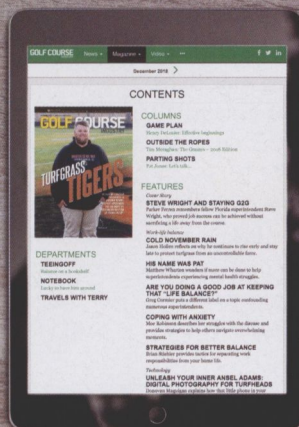
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Penultimate

I'm pretty sure that, over the course of writing 400 or so columns, I've never once used the word "penultimate." It's such a cool-sounding fancy word that has a very simple meaning: "next to last."

Well, kids, this is my penultimate column for *Golf Course Industry*.

After 15 years of filling up this back page with words, I'm going to write one more in December and then turn the space over to a new voice. I don't know who it will be and I'm not going to ask ... it's none of my business, really. We'll all find out together when the January 2020 issue hits the streets.

In the meantime, let's talk about some unfinished business.

I've tried to use this column over the years to shine a light on the good, the bad and (occasionally) the ugly of our happy little industry. And there is much that's good.

Overall, I'm heartened that life has improved for superintendents over the past couple of decades. Recognition of your value among core golfers has grown dramatically. We've made huge progress in advocacy and understanding among lawmakers. Sympathetic coverage in the golf media is light years ahead of where it was in the '90s. Fewer of y'all are dropping dead from overwork and lousy health habits, and more of you are achieving something akin to work-life balance. And we've built a culture of sustainability that will serve us well in the future.

But some stuff still sucks and there is work left to be done.

First, we haven't made much progress in terms of managing golfer expectations. Blame television, blame the Tour, blame Augusta National, blame whomever ... but it's really our own damned fault for being so good at creating fabulous fast and firm conditions at a wide range of facilities. Now we face a real challenge: How do

you meet those expectations — which are often based on detail and "little things" — when you simply can't hire enough bodies to do it?

Automation is, of course, the answer to that question. Yet the demand for something like autonomous fairway mowers is not being met by the manufacturing community for reasons I don't fully understand. Where are the damned robots?

We need to stop pretending that there is a one-size-fits-all business model for golf course maintenance. The days of having 800 newly minted turf school graduates annually flooding the market and providing cheap "apprentice" labor are over and they're never coming back. Stop bemoaning that and find a better way via technical schools, online education, and simple training and mentorship. Why can't we hire for passion and fundamental skills and teach them the rest?

We must pay assistants more. Period. The future depends on it.

We also generalize way much about the "golf market." I've been guilty as hell of this over the years. Too often we assume that all 14,800-ish facilities in the U.S. have access to resources and are managed by qualified supers. Not true today and never has been true.

Remember that less than half of facilities have a GCSAA member on staff and about a third of them have maintenance budgets under \$300,000 annually. A big chunk of smaller-budget courses don't even have a full-time superintendent.

There isn't one big golf market, there are at least a half-dozen smaller ones. Shouldn't we adapt education and training strategies accordingly?

I'm glad to see more attention being paid to mental health but can we acknowledge that the majority of the anxiety we feel is self-induced? Honestly — and I hate to be the guy who finally says this — this notion that being a superintendent is the most stressful occupation in the world is utter nonsense.

We always make it sound like external factors ("unrealistic expectations") are to blame when, in fact, the problem is this culture that we have perpetuated ourselves for a hundred years. This whole notion that turfheads are a society of mad monks who live and breathe every moment to produce perfect conditions needs to go away. Passion is great. Obsession? Not so much.

Here's my advice: if you feel overwhelmed, talk to someone, go for a walk or workout, try some mindfulness, get some anti-depressant medication ... DO SOMETHING instead of just bemoaning how tough it is.

Also, the idea that an article in *Golf Digest* somehow validates everything is bullshit. I love and respect Ron Whitten, but that piece did more harm than good.

So, there you have it ... my penultimate rant. There are a million more things I could bitch about, but it's a beautiful day and I'm going for a power walk. In next month's finale, I intend to share some love. Talk to you then. GCI



PAT JONES is the editor-at-large of *Golf Course Industry*. He can be reached at pjones@gie.net.

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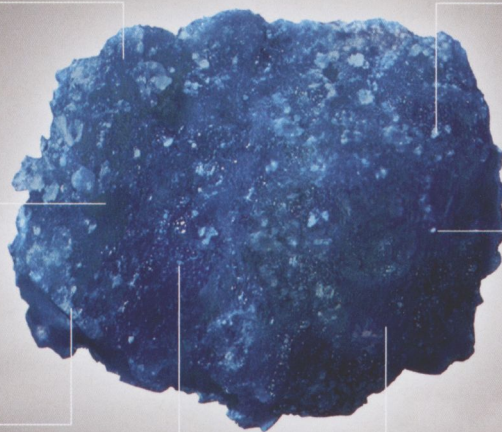
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