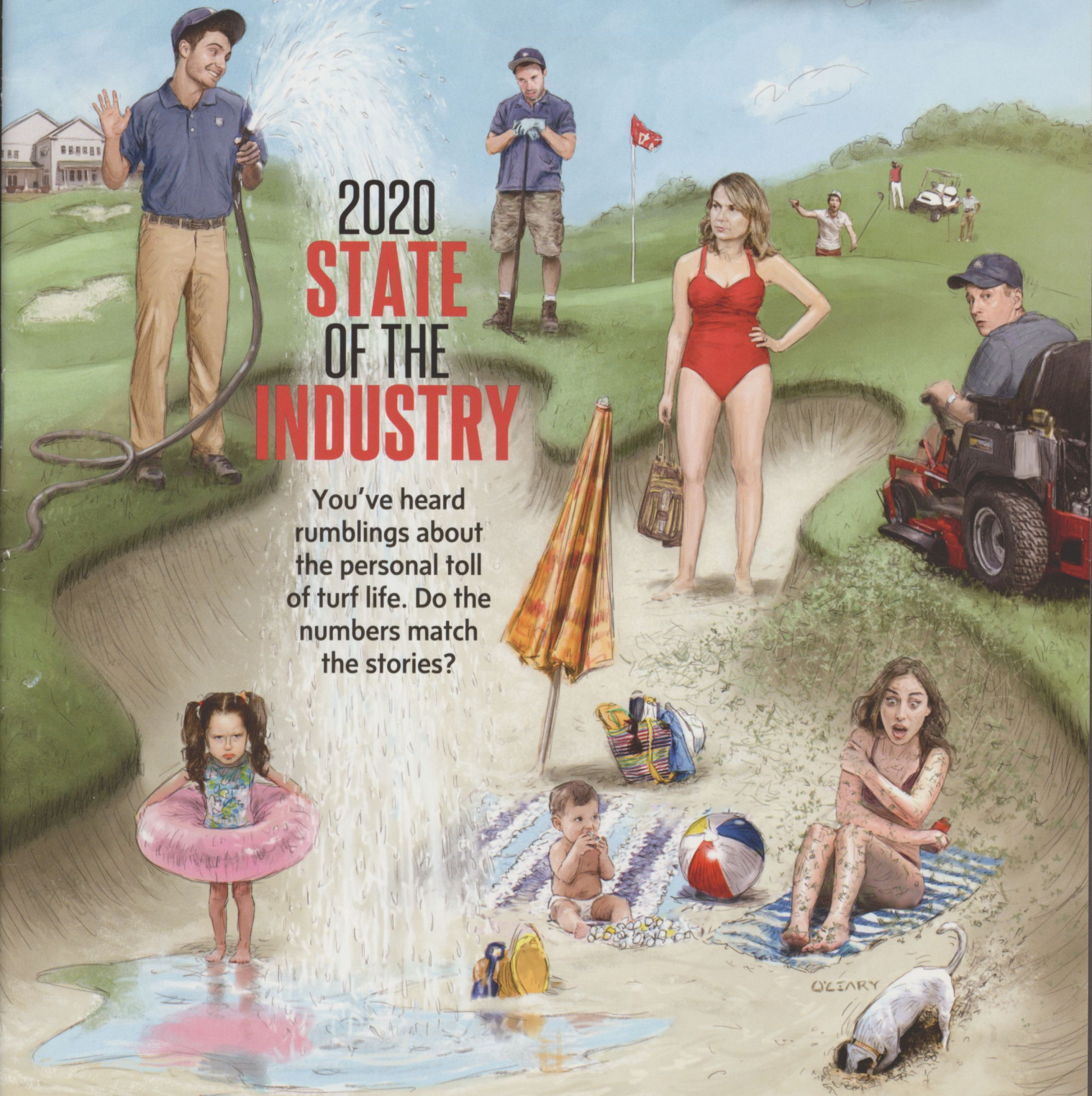


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# GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

## 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

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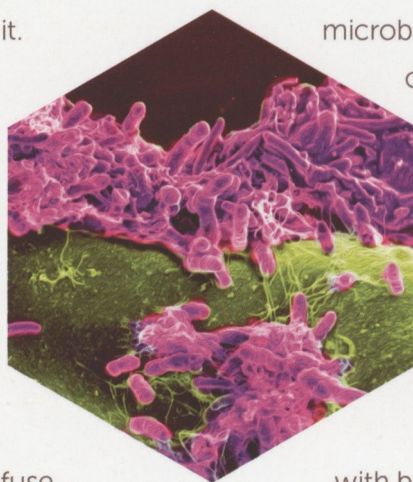


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VOL. 32 NO. 1

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# THE HUMAN SIDE

**G**olf course superintendents would rather watch their favorite team than attend a family reunion or play cards with their spouse and children.

Of all the discoveries in our 2020 State of the Industry survey – and when answers are tabulated by region and facility type, hundreds of data points emerge – none incited a bigger initial chuckle among our staff than the results of a question about hobbies away from the golf course (page 37). Watching sports outdistanced all pursuits, including family activities, by double-digit percentage points.

Does one answer in a 33-question survey provide a complete snapshot of a group? Of course not. Even if the data suggests otherwise, superintendents aren't choosing a few hours watching Trevor Lawrence or Tom Brady over attending a daughter's volleyball game or a son's parent-teacher conference. Watching sports is simply a release shared by nearly three-quarters of superintendents.

When creating this year's survey, we opted to explore the humans responsible for producing pleasing playing surfaces. How many hours do superintendents really work? Where does job-related pressure originate? What do they enjoy away from the course?

We all hear stories about overworked and underappreciated superintendents. But are they true? Answers depend on how one interprets data. The average superintendent works 55 hours per week, according to the survey. Some might think there's no reason to devote more than two full days per week to a job. Others might think it's reasonable to expect a high-level manager, in any field, to work at least 55 hours per week. Here's a secret from my sports writing days: the coach of your favorite team works more than 55 hours per week. And money doesn't buy him or her more time with the spouse or children. Consider this before your next halftime social media rant.

Data without context means little, so we asked superintendent contributors Anthony Williams (page 24) and Ron Furlong (page 28), to describe the human impact of their respective career choices. If somebody doesn't fully understand the profession, send them copies of Anthony's and Ron's highly personal articles. Matt LaWell's conversations with seven of the more than 200 superintendents willing to answer follow-up questions to survey responses offers a third account of the superintendent lifestyle (page 33).

The section adds reason to emotionally charged discussions about the personal toll of a golf course maintenance career, because it integrates numbers and voices, creating a comprehensive look at the humanity behind courses enjoyed by millions. Superintendents, after all, are humans. They have families and hobbies. Notice the order of the last sentence.

## Welcoming a golf therapist

The newest addition to our roster should excite anybody interested in golf course maintenance or architecture. We're beginning 2020 by introducing Bradley S. Klein as a monthly columnist (page 57). A graceful writer and engaging speaker, Klein will be providing guidance based upon decades working with superintendents, architects, committees, owners and municipalities. Klein possesses a Ph.D. in political science, so it's fitting his column is titled "Golf Therapy."

Adding somebody with Klein's pedigree represents a major triumph for a "trade" publication. Klein is one of the preeminent golf course architecture writers of all time and widely admired by golf enthusiasts and influential figures within the industry.

Klein's work, which includes wonderful books such as "Discovering Donald Ross," "Rough Meditations" and "Wide Open Fairways," inspires readers to think practically about golf courses. His columns will make our readers savvy managers and his presence on these pages should help us expand our reach.

Superintendents and their supporters represent an amazing audience. But it doesn't hurt the agronomic cause if customers become curious about the people and practices behind the surfaces they pay to roam. We're hoping more golfers follow our team in 2020. **GCI**



*Guy Cipriano*  
**Guy Cipriano**  
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## GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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# NOTEBOOK

# LISTEN UP



**Tee off on this new decade with our expanded roster of Superintendent Radio Network podcasts — with focuses both on and off the course.**

*By Matt LaWell*

At the turn of the last year, our Superintendent Radio Network featured a single podcast — a single *excellent* podcast in *Tartan Talks*, hosted so well by editor Guy Cipriano just about every month for almost four years now, but still just a single podcast.

At the turn of this new year — and the start of a new roaring '20s — SRN features four podcasts, a new one almost every week, with focuses spread across this great industry. The time seemed right to expand — I am a bit of a podcast evangelist who listens to ... a lot of different podcasts — with more than half of all Americans having listened to a podcast and almost a quarter of us listening to something every week, according to the most recent edition of the annual *Podcast Consumer* report from Edison Research. (And did you know more than half of us have listened to a podcast while driving? The study didn't differentiate between driving trucks, cars or, uh, mowers, so we're going to just assume mowers were considered.)

We hope you've already dived into some new episodes. In case you haven't, here's a quick primer on the roster:

*Off the Course* will open each month with one long conversation focused on anything on the life end of the ever-precarious life-work balance. Consider it an escape from the next task at hand. Our first episodes have featured TPC Deere Run's Alex Stuedemann

talking about his skin care regimen, Georgia Southern University's Patrick Reinhardt sharing the story of his son's ultra-rare kidney disorder and the support provided by the Wee One Foundation, and Panorama's Steve Gilley going back to his decade-plus trying to crack the PGA Tour. We hope this podcast adds to the excellent industry conversation about health, both physical and mental, and that it highlights life.

Guy and I visit a lot of golf courses (somewhere between five and six dozen between the two of us just last year, most of them by Guy) and we never seem to have enough time to write about all of them, which is why we launched *Greens with Envy*. Part travelogue, part buddy comedy, *Greens* is our opportunity to share our road stories and recap the best about what we've seen and heard—and sometimes even played. We've already covered courses in Arizona, Canada, Colorado, the Carolinas and West Virginia, which isn't even scratching the surface. There are so many more great courses we want to check out and talk about in 2020 and beyond.

*Beyond the Page* provides more context and more details about some of the stories included every month in the magazine—because sometimes even 3,000 or 4,000 words aren't enough to really go as deep as needed. It won't be an audio version of each issue but rather a com-



## SUPERINTENDENT R·A·D·I·O N·E·T·W·O·R·K



to go beyond the limitations of their single page.

And, of course, the SRN OG *Tartan Talks* is still running strong, wrapping up every month with a conversation with a member of the ASGCA.

New episodes will drop at noon Tuesdays (occasionally a little earlier or later) on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify and wherever else you listen to podcasts—and, always, on [golfcourseindustry.com](http://golfcourseindustry.com) (just click the *Media* tab). We're also planning to produce other topical- and event-driven podcasts throughout the year. Our commitment to the printed page remains as strong as ever. The magazine remains our sun, the life-giving globe around which everything else revolves. Our podcasts are like little stars, so bright and unknown, and full of promise.

Matt LaWell is *Golf Course Industry's* managing editor.

plement to columns, cover stories and other features that we hope stick with you long after you shelve (or, teardrop, pitch) your GCIs. November cover subject Drew Miller joined us for the first episode to talk more about building a great high school turf-grass program, Judd Spicer has shared more Las Vegas stories, and columnists Matthew Wharton and Tim Moraghan have picked up the phone



## Tartan Talks No. 42

Design, economics, coaching, content curation and cookies. A conversation with **Nathan Crace** includes numerous unpredictable moments.



▲ Crace returned to the Tartan Talks podcast to offer a golf course architect's perspective on the transition from the 2010s into the 2020s. Crace revealed how his Mississippi-based firm, Watermark Golf/Nathan Crace Design, endured numerous economic and design shifts within the golf industry from 2010-19.

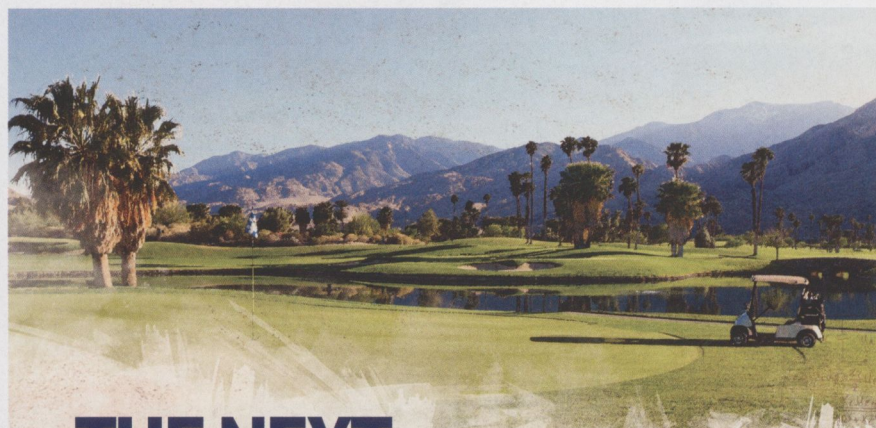
"Whether it's hairstyles, or music, or clothing, everything is like a pendulum," he says. "And that pendulum always tends to come back to somewhere around the middle. Golf course design and the golf industry is not immune to that either."

What will the next decade bring somebody in Crace's position? He's already engaged in conversations with a potential client about a bunker-free course. Enter [bitly.com/NathanCrace](http://bitly.com/NathanCrace) into your web browser to learn more.

# ALL BUSINESS

Course offerings expand to include work-life balance at 11th annual Syngenta Business Institute

By Matt LaWell



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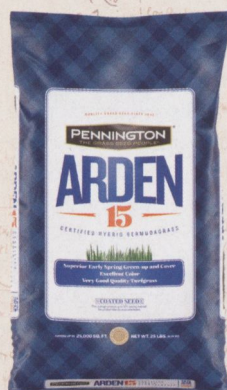
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**O**n the last night of the most recent Syngenta Business Institute, more than two dozen golf course superintendents and directors of agronomy huddled up for a trio of round-table discussions almost as valuable as the three days of education provided by Wake Forest University professors. Some opted to start with a session about recruiting and retaining employees, others with a session about all sorts of communications. The rest headed to the front porch for a conversation about how to manage and motivate their staff.

Ryan Segre of Shorehaven (Connecticut) Golf Club and Jason Zimmerman of Pelican's Nest (Florida) Golf Club both detailed how they provide lunch most days, from deli meats to even nicer fare. Ben McNair of Oak Park (Illinois) Country Club shared a story about how, during the most recent World Cup, he set up a screen for his crew to watch a Mexico match when they weren't working a busy tournament—and how he even donned an *El Tri* jersey for the occasion. Justin Mandon of Pasatiempo (California) Golf Club detailed how the board at his club dives in to serve the staff at an annual cookout. All help with morale, they said.

It was Scott Rettmann of Walnut Creek (Michigan) Country Club, though, who shared one of the far simpler and time-honored ways to keep your crew tight right now—and for years to come.

At the end of each summer, Rettmann sits down and pens a hand-written thank-you note to each of his seasonal



▲ The 11th annual Syngenta Business Institute offered interactive education for superintendents looking to improve financial and managerial skills.



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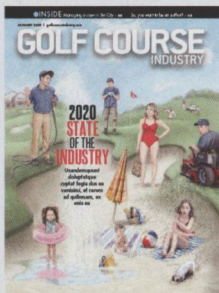
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## NOTEBOOK

crew members, most of whom are college students home for a few months. He tucks in a crew photo and a gift card — normally about \$25 to Amazon — and mails them off. “Goes a long way,” he says.

According to Rettmann, the number of college students who work on his summer crew has swelled from one to as many as eight in recent years, and he thinks the thank-yous are at least part of the reason. “Labor is a \$10 problem,” Jason Tharp of Glen Arven (Georgia) Country Club told Rettmann, leaning into the circle, “and you’re putting \$10 of effort into it.”

The financial reference was a callback to a session the previous day about life-work balance and the time-management tip of not spending a proverbial \$5 worth of time on a 25-cent problem. Lessons were already being applied nearly a full 24 hours before any of the flights home lifted off.

Now in its 11th year, Syngenta Business Institute aims to pack as much of an MBA education as possible into three days — about financial management and effective negotiations, about leading teams and individuals as well as across cultures and generations, and, new this year, about life-work balance. More than enough of the 260 or so previous attendees had expressed an interest in learning more about the topic that Syngenta worked with Wake Forest to add a couple hours this year.

The program is competitive, with an acceptance rate this year of about 33 percent — two attendees this year finally gained admission on their fifth and fourth applications — and the days are focused and intense.

“It’s important for us to listen to our customers and what their challenges are,” Syngenta turf market manager Stephanie Schwenke says. “They have a desire for personal growth, professional development and skill sets beyond agronomy — because when most of them went to school, this was the kind of education they never received, though many of them spend most of their days managing 10 to 50 people.”

“The more successful we can make them at their jobs and at setting expectations — with their customers, with their board, being able to be better communicators with their local board about things they do on their course and why they do them — the more successful the industry is going to be,” Syngenta communications manager Mark LaFleur says. “Investing in people is going to help everybody out.”

There is still work to do, even now, more than a decade after Ken Middaugh, the retired associate professor, associate dean and director of the Institute for Executive Education at Wake Forest, conceived and designed the program. LaFleur and Schwenke said they would like more women and minorities to apply — each of the 26 attendees this year was a white man, which is the case most years — and they want to help turfheads better tell their own stories. “How will this affect them personally? What unique experiences have they had that they can contribute in class? That is helpful to us,” LaFleur says. “You don’t have to be the best writer — we still want to hear what you have to say.”

So apply early for the 2020 program — and until then, maybe write some thank-you notes.

## ASGCA announces 2019 Design Excellence Recognition Program honorees

**Projects in five states and Mexico  
lauded for addressing design  
challenges.**

The American Society of Golf Course Architects honored six facilities as part of its eighth annual Design Excellence Recognition Program honorees, all included for their work with ASGCA members in addressing unique design challenges.

Reviewed by a panel of golf industry leaders, including representatives of the Club Managers Association of America, Golf Course Builders Association of America and Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, the recognized courses include:

**Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club and Lodge Short Game Area, Orlando, Florida/Thad Layton, ASGCA and Brandon Johnson, ASGCA**

Bay Hill's short game area was small for a large club that plays host to The Arnold Palmer Invitational. To make room for the desired new short game area, the ninth hole of the Charger Nine was shortened from 467 yards into a dynamic, driveable par four of 308 yards. This shift freed up two acres of prime ground adjacent to the clubhouse that was subsequently reshaped into a robust short game practice facility. As a bonus, the short game area is an experimental lab for director of grounds Chris Flynn to test different grass types and bunker liners for future use on the championship course

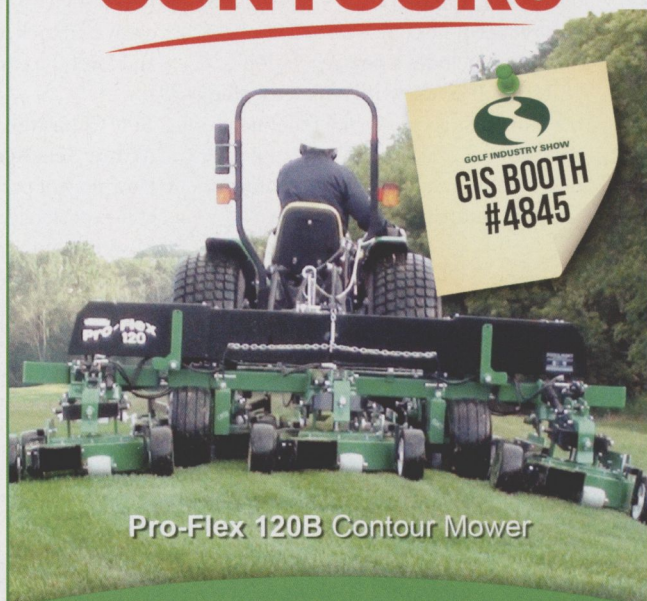
**The Dunes Putting Course at Diamante Cabo San Lucas, Mexico/Paul Cowley, ASGCA**

The course occupies three acres of turf that was formally the second half of the old 18th hole of the Dunes Course. It enjoys some of the best views and setting of the golf complex, and also serves as an event and activity lawn. The putting course has 15 holes consisting of three par 2s and 12 par 3s that vary in length from 14 to 64 yards. The course is 508 yards and is laid out in a continuous loop of grass cut at green height to create fairways and green areas. The surrounding turf is cut at fairway height. There is 25 feet of elevation change and the turf is Seaside Paspalum. Each of the 15 designated "green" areas are big enough for three to five pin locations. The course is designed to be played in reverse on alternate days.



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## Maple Lane Golf Club, Sterling Heights, Michigan/Raymond Hearn, ASGCA

The course owners desired a master plan that would best provide future economic, environmental and cultural sustainability while providing new golf and non-golf amenities to a diverse group of customers. A master plan was developed that reduced the course from 54 to 27 holes and includes a new regulation 18-hole golf course with a six-tee system, new turfgrass species, a lighted 9-hole par-3 course, and a storm water retention/detention network that maximizes rainfall capture for irrigation use.

## McLemore Club, Rising Fawn, Georgia/Bill Bergin, ASGCA and Rees Jones, ASGCA

Deciding to move the clubhouse to the site of the original 18th hole meant a new finishing hole had to be located and

designed east of the original routing on land considered ill-suited for golf. The new 18th hole was shifted east 400 feet and dropped down over 100 feet to the edge of practically a sheer drop above McLemore Cove. Access to the new hole was challenging, and all seven acres of timber had to be burned on site and a new bridge was placed by helicopter. All excavated rock was utilized to build up and level the eastern side of the fairway.

## TPC Colorado, Berthoud, Colorado/Arthur Schaupeter, ASGCA

How do you provide a fun, engaging golf experience for recreational players 51 weeks of the year, and a challenging PGA Tour-caliber track one week of the year? Solutions included providing seven tees setting course length from 4,157 to 7,991 yards, 55 acres of fairway to create fairway width space to play for recreational players, larger and

undulating greens, unique bunkering scheme with stacked sod wall bunkers and traditional bunkers, and a diversity of greenside influences to create more angles of approach, strategic variety and interest for all players.

## University Club of Milwaukee, Milwaukee/Andy Staples, ASGCA

By capitalizing on a 10-acre parcel of undeveloped forest terrain in the center of the property, modifying the tees of Nos. 13 and 16, as well as completely rebuilding No. 12, the grand vision for the new practice facility came to life. The *U. Club* now boasts a short, four-hole practice course, a competition wedge range, multiple shot options to include short and long sand and grass bunker practice, uneven lies in fairway and rough, high lobbs, low runs, up and downhill looks, as well as a consistently sloped putting green for practice. GCI



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## THINK BIG ENTERING A NEW DECADE

**G**olf no longer exists in a vacuum, separate and distinct from market forces that shape other mainstream businesses. Gone are the days when golf club and facility managers could operate without a sensitive finger on the pulse of social, environmental and political changes affecting their business. As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, here are four macro changes to be aware of and to use to your advantage.

**NEW SOLUTIONS TO LABOR SHORTAGES:** Traditionally, labor costs for golf courses have ranged from 52 to 56 percent of golf course maintenance budgets. With increases in minimum wages and the ripple effect throughout organizational charts, labor costs continue to escalate. Derek Johnston, a partner at Global Golf Advisors, says labor costs have jumped as much as 6 percent.

Operators managed the first wave of escalating labor costs by reducing head counts and outsourcing certain activities to third-party contractors. Now, they are being forced to get more creative to deal with what is by far the facility's single largest line item. Some have reacted by flattening their org charts, eliminating supervisory positions and restructuring responsibilities for some managers and staffers. As a result, staffing levels that ranged from 19 to 25 employees per 18-hole course are in significant decline.

Labor will remain a primary focus and concern for operators in 2020. Suggestions for managing rising costs are to re-evaluate all operational activities with an eye for possible benefits to be gained from outsourcing; take labor-intensive components of your operation and determine how the work could be accomplished more efficiently; and look at non-golf sectors for solutions being implemented in other fields such as hospitality and manufacturing.

**INCREASED ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS:** Golf courses throughout North America have embraced opportunities to increase their environmental stewardship. Beekeeping, which sustains the bee population and ensures ongoing pollination; bat houses, which address mosquito infestations; and habitat restoration for butterflies, especially monarchs, whose habitat supports pheasant, quail, waterfowl and many other species; have been introduced at many locales.

Making golf courses and their surrounding grounds environmental sanctuaries is resonating with key market influencers, including millennials and women, who are also prime targets for increasing play and membership. Audubon International CEO Christine Kane reports that clubs as sanctuary communities are on the rise nationwide: "Audubon-recognized sanctuary communities have increased more than 20 percent over the past five years," according to Kane.

Progressive superintendents and golf managers who expand the reach and impact of their environmental efforts will be viewed favorably by community leaders as well as current and prospective members and customers.

**EXPANDED REACH OF SOCIAL MEDIA:** Superintendents and facility managers have become important sources of content relevant to club members and consumers. Photographic images of flora and fauna on club grounds are of interest

to members who take pride in their clubs' beauty and connection to the environment.

Instagram and Twitter can be used to show images sourced by staff members — golf course workers, cooks, janitors, golf professionals — who are alert to opportunities to snap butterfly habitats, wildflowers and all sorts of wildlife that call the club home. Such images are often posted to the club website and distributed to club members and visitors as a means for extending brand engagement.

Gone are the days of the cut-and-paste guidance for how to repair a ball mark. The increased relevance and timeliness of today's news is attributed to the capability and proliferation of social media.

**COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING:** The growth of strategic planning (supported by specialized plans for marketing, communications, finance and membership) is another example of general business's influence on a more enlightened group of golf managers. Just as most any business relies on a strategic plan to guide its decision-making, golf is recognizing the importance of establishing a clear vision that serves to prioritize programming and investment. Top performers rely on data-based plans to distinguish their facilities not only in overcrowded markets, but also with consumers debating their leisure activities and spending. Those facilities that create market differentiation will prosper in 2020 and beyond. **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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# 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

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# 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

We got personal. You responded.

**A**fter hearing myriad superintendent stories about long hours, strained relationships, and demanding bosses and customers, we decided to compile numbers to complement the anecdotes.

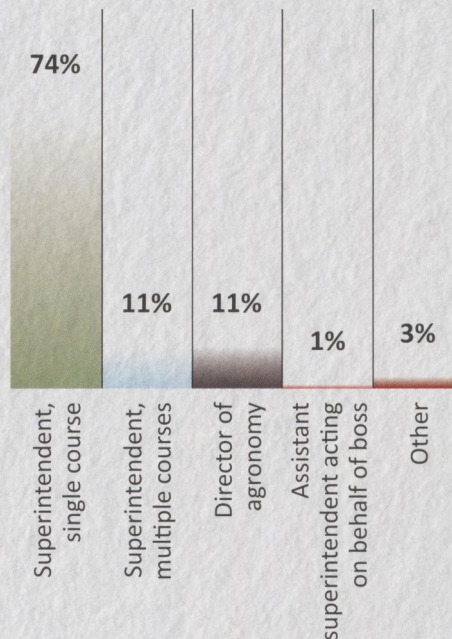
We continued asking multiple financial and industry health questions, but our 2020 State of the Industry survey is devoted to better understanding the lives of superintendents. Flip the pages to learn how many hours superintendents sleep, when they received their last physical exam and what they do when they aren't at the golf course. Yes, superintendents receive respites, according to the data.

Golf Course Industry partnered with Signet Research, Inc., an independent research company, to produce the 2020 report. A 33-question survey was distributed Oct. 24-Nov. 11, 2019 to an email list of 3,768 print and/or digital subscribers who are superintendents or directors of agronomy. Results are based on 579 responses and the margin of error is +/- 4.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

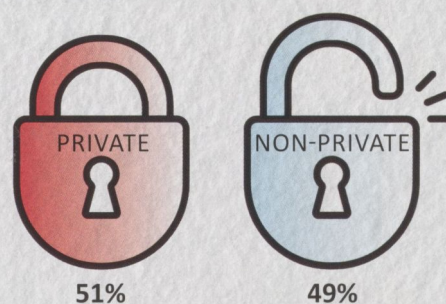
Golf Course Industry will make a donation to the Wee One Foundation in exchange for survey participation. Established in 2004, the Wee One Foundation is a charity group started in the memory of Wayne Otto, CGCS, that helps superintendents and other turf professionals in need.

~ Guy Cipriano

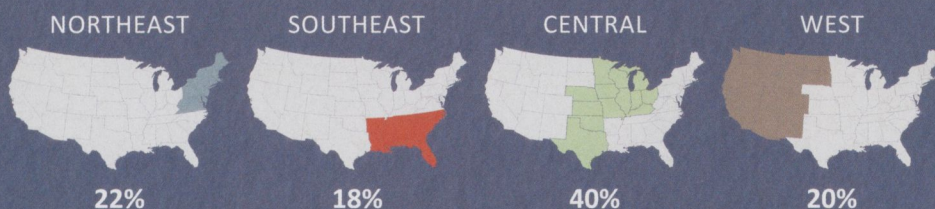
## WHO ARE YOU?



## TYPE OF COURSE WHERE YOU WORK



## WHERE IS YOUR FACILITY LOCATED?





## 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY



**H**appy New Year from all of us at Nufarm! As we close out another year and begin a new one, we wish you continued and greater success in 2020. For our part, our continued commitment to bringing new innovation to the marketplace is engineered to help you, our customers, reach your goals.

Our golf course solutions portfolio is stronger than ever. With new data on annual bluegrass seedhead suppression with Anuew™ PGR, dollar spot control with Traction™ and Pinpoint® fungicides – even SDHI-resistant strains – and unparalleled weed control with Millennium Ultra™ 2, we continue to provide reliable solutions to all of your golf course needs.

We are also focusing on naturalized areas in 2020. The ongoing issue of labor availability makes these areas a consistent asset on the course with their low maintenance requirements. They also provide a habitat to pollinators, increasing environmental sustainability.

Finally, we are welcoming the third class of the EXCEL Leadership program in collaboration with GCSAA. The three-year program offers assistant superintendents the chance to grow in leadership skills on their course, in their community, and in the industry as a whole. We can't wait to welcome the new class and learn what they have to contribute to the industry.

As always, we at Nufarm are here to help you with anything you may need on the course. Our team of technical, sales, and customer service experts stand ready to serve, as they have for over 100 years. Thank you for allowing us to join you in your success, and we look forward to another year of partnership.

*Cam Copley*

Cam Copley  
Golf National Accounts Manager



# PLAYABLE + NATURALIZED AREAS, GROWING HARMONY

Naturalized areas can be both beautiful as well as beneficial to your bottom line. However, it is important to remember that naturalized areas do require some level of maintenance to prevent takeover by undesirable weeds. Our line of herbicides will help you achieve optimum balance between naturalized, yet managed, landscape settings and our team of golf experts will guide you every step of the way.

ASK YOUR LOCAL NUFARM REP ABOUT OUR NATURALIZED AREAS PROGRAM



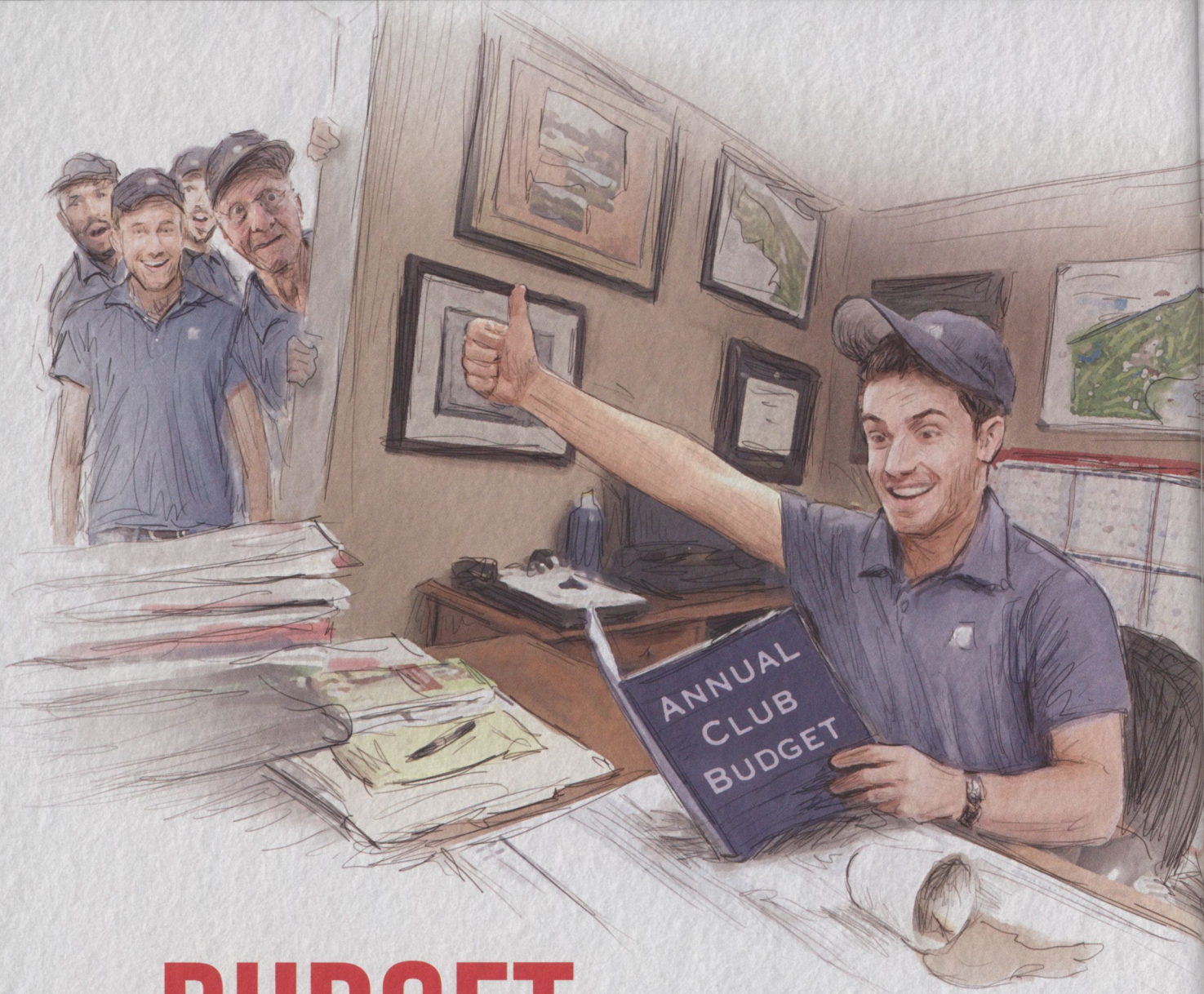
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# BUDGET & LABOR

Our breakdown of finances and personnel provides a glimpse at the resources available to courses in 2020.



**T**he new decade begins with encouraging economic signs and major budgetary disparities throughout the golf industry.

Less than a quarter (23 percent) of facilities experienced a financial loss in 2019. The situation contrasts 2018, when a woeful weather year consisting of record rainfall and natural disasters in multiple key golf markets resulted in 33 percent of respondents reporting that their facility lost money.

Better weather and continued economic confidence resulted in a solid financial year, with 49 percent of facilities turning a profit in 2019, the highest total in *Golf Course Industry's* eight years of collecting economic data. The economic outlook was especially sunny in the Southeast, where 58 percent of facilities were profitable and just 17 percent operated at a loss.

Widespread financial stability and increasing labor costs mean the average non-capital maintenance budget is creeping toward \$1 million. The average projected budget for 2020 is \$987,488, the highest in survey history, although it must be noted that 51 percent of respondents work at private facilities. The average maintenance budget was \$622,500 when *Golf Course Industry* debuted the State of the Industry survey in 2013.

The gap between private and non-private facilities will expand in 2020, with the average non-capital maintenance budget of a private course (\$1,304,730) more than double what a non-private course is projected to spend (\$552,202). The gap is significantly greater than in 2019, when private courses had a \$991,317 average budget, compared to \$677,472 for public courses.

Non-capital maintenance budgets exceeding \$1 million are the norm among private facilities, with 59.2 percent expected to reach that total. Only 10.1 percent of non-private courses have projected budgets exceeding \$1 million. More than half of public courses (54.3 percent) are projected to have budgets under \$500,000.

The number of full-time employees represents a significant difference between private and public courses. Private courses average 11 full-time maintenance employees; non-private courses average six. Labor accounts for 55.6 percent of a maintenance department's operational budget.

Modern superintendents are heavily involved in the business side of golf, with 22.2 percent reporting they are "completely knowledgeable" about their respective club's finances. Only 2.1 percent reported having no knowledge of their club's financial situation. No matter your club's financial situation, it pays to know about money.

## WAS YOUR COURSE PROFITABLE?

2019	ALL COURSES	PRIVATE	NON-PRIVATE	NORTHEAST	SOUTHEAST	CENTRAL	WEST
Profitable	49%	51%	48%	46%	58%	46%	50%
Broke even	24%	27%	22%	31%	22%	25%	19%
Experienced a loss	23%	19%	26%	19%	17%	24%	28%
Don't know	4%	3%	4%	4%	3%	5%	3%



# 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

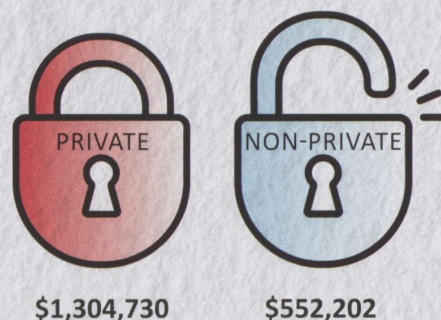
## AVERAGE NON-CAPITAL MAINTENANCE BUDGET THE LAST FIVE YEARS

YEAR	BUDGET
2020	\$987,488
2019	\$845,705
2018	\$911,705
2017	\$798,200
2016	\$750,000

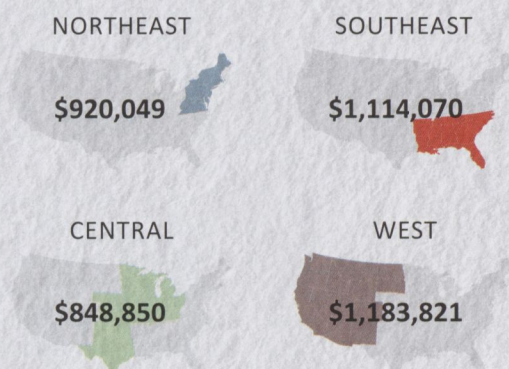
## MAINTENANCE BUDGET CHANGE COMPARED TO 2019

↑ Increase 20% or more	1%
↑ Increase 10% to 19%	7%
↑ Increase 1% to 9%	52%
— No change	33%
↓ Decrease 1% to 9%	6%
↓ Decrease 10% to 19%	2%
↓ Decrease 20% or more	0%

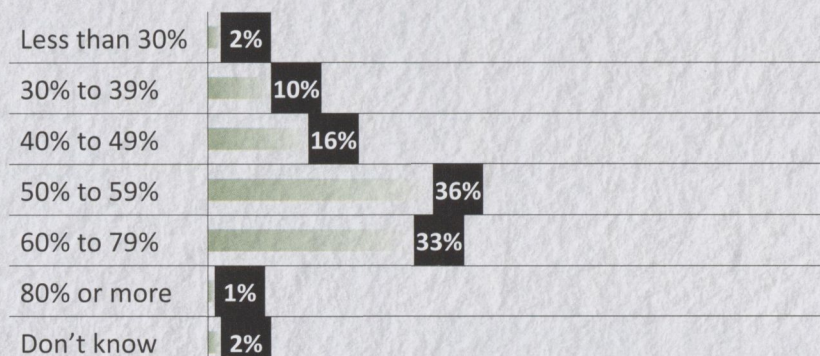
## PROJECTED 2020 NON-CAPITAL MAINTENANCE BUDGET BY COURSE TYPE



## PROJECTED 2020 NON-CAPITAL MAINTENANCE BUDGET BY REGION



## MAINTENANCE BUDGET DEVOTED TO LABOR & OVERHEAD



**55.6%** OF THE AVERAGE OPERATIONAL BUDGET DEVOTED TO LABOR AND OVERHEAD



## KNOWLEDGE OF COURSE FINANCES



NOT AT ALL KNOWLEDGEABLE

COMPLETELY KNOWLEDGEABLE

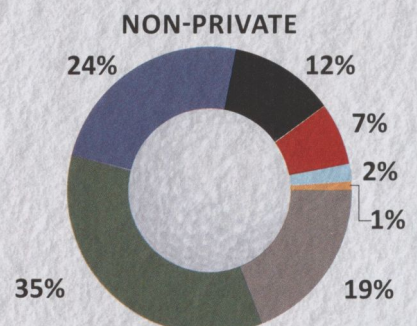
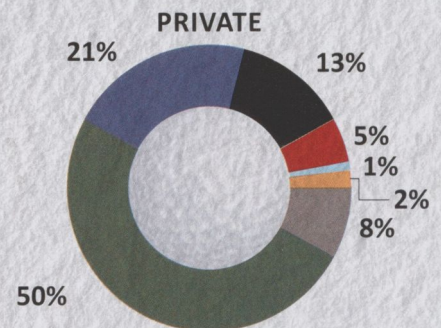
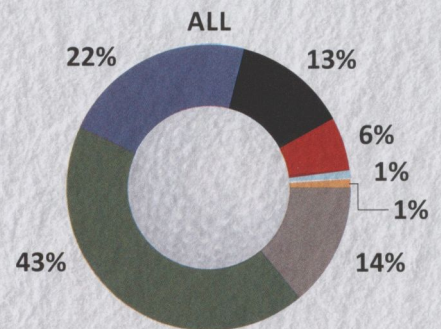
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2%	2%	3%	4%	8%	8%	17%	19%	15%	22%

## AVERAGE SIZE OF MAINTENANCE STAFF

COURSE TYPE	FULL-TIME	PART-TIME / SEASONAL	OTHER
All	9	16	3
Private	11	13	3
Non-Private	6	20	3

## EMPLOYEE RETENTION RATE OVER THE LAST 12 MONTHS

- 100% | 80% to 99%
- 60% to 79% | 40% to 59%
- 20% to 39% | Less than 20%
- Don't know/not sure



# \$987,488

## AVERAGE PROJECTED MAINTENANCE BUDGET IN 2020





## 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

A 'vintage' superintendent describes the human aspects needed to establish a long career in golf course maintenance.

# TIME, MONEY, HEALTH & HOBBIES



By **Anthony L. Williams, CGCS, MG**



will soon begin my fifth decade in the golf management profession. I am from Indian Creek, Georgia, a rural community east of Atlanta, where I was president of our Future Farmers of America chapter and had perfect attendance every year in school. Lewisville, Texas, is now home base. In golf, I have worked for 15 general managers, 12 directors of golf, eight management groups/owners and four properties. Along the way, I learned a lot about being a successful golf course superintendent, the toll it takes on the individual (and their family) and kept very accurate records to navigate my career path. If you are currently charting your course through the golf course superintendent profession, allow me to share some practical advice and numbers behind the price of success from a vintage superintendent.

## GOT TIME?

Time is the cornerstone of human pursuit. Throughout your journey as a superintendent you will be asked how many hours you work and what you accomplish during those hours. It is important to gain perspective and document how you invest your time each day – and if you feel it is a good or bad investment. We all get

24 hours each day, but it is how we embrace our use of time that leads to happiness or discontent.

You must develop a system of time management.

It does not matter if it's electronic or an old school notebook or Day-Timer, make a habit out of setting a schedule that is aligned with tasks, tracking your actual hours worked to complete the tasks required. This will give you an advantage mentally. It is always your choice whether to be on property and to what level or direction you will apply your craft while there. My rule is never be angry about the time required by your job, verify that your time to compensation ratio is a win-win. In short, can you do the job well with the resources extended?

The moment your property invades your personal time too much, it is time to move on. The pain and suf-

fering that results from a mismatch on the work time vs. personal time equation can be epic, creating serious mental and physical health issues. Everyone's work-life balance is different, and as you move through your career, it can and should change. On two occasions (major renovations), I worked 101 and then 126 days in a row without a day off, but I was at home to start and end every day. It was much more stressful for me (during my time as a salesman) to be away from home for several weeks at a time than to work so many days in a row. It comes down to perspective.

I have detailed hours worked records dating back to the early 1980s. I mix computer and hand-written notes to capture the data. The most hours I worked in a year was 3,701; the fewest was 2,352. The most hours I have ever worked in a week for years was in August 1989 at 93 hours until

May 2017, when I posted a 112-hour week. These two benchmarks coincided with televised tournaments held at both clubs.

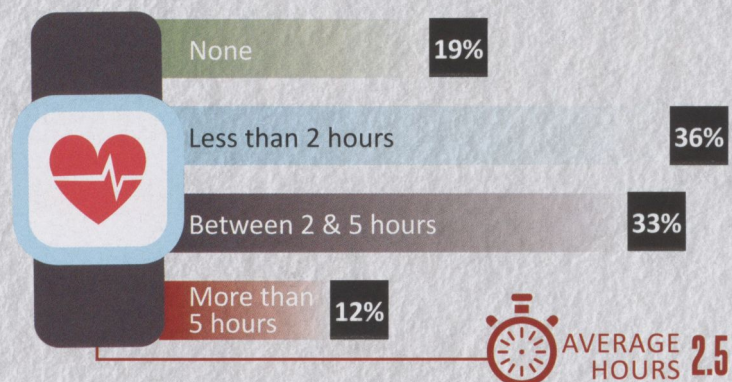
My secret is that I have really loved every golf job I have ever had and gladly traded the time invested for the opportunity. Take the time to quantify and record the time investment required for your current job and reaffirm if you are in the right place. You are the only expert qualified to complete this assessment. This process is one of my highest priorities and critical to my success.

## MONEY IS A TOOL

We tend to not talk openly about salaries and personal finance. The reason that I included this polarizing topic is to help every superintendent realize that money is a tool. Money can build up or tear down. Money magnifies your habits and emotions. Ever wonder why a multimillion-dollar athlete can be bankrupt a few years into retirement, but a janitor in a small town can retire in relative comfort for years? Have you ever asked yourself, How am I doing financially?

Over the years, I have heard general rules of thumb that I am happy to share, such as multiply your age times 1,000 and that or higher should be your annual salary. Your age times your annual salary divided by 10 should be your net worth at any point

## WEEKLY TIME DEVOTED TO FITNESS

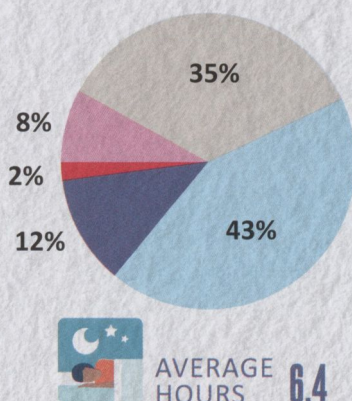




# 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

## AVERAGE SLEEP PER NIGHT

- Less than 5 hours
- About 5 hours
- About 6 hours
- About 7 hours
- About 8 hours



in life. I have also been advised that to retire well you need to be placing 15 percent of your income into your retirement accounts. That number was 10 percent 20 years ago. Here are a few money tips from a budget-centric superintendent.

- Pay yourself first and save something every week.
- Have three to six months of living expenses in reserve (bad times can find good people).
- Get the best insurance (health, dental, vision, car, home, disability). I have had 24 broken bones, five major surgeries (get short- and long-term disability), owned three houses and totaled one truck, so I have been there. Insurance kept our family going in tough times.
- Save as much as you can as early as you can. Maximize any company match to a 401(k).
- Cash is king. Avoid short-term, high-interest debt.
- Avoid student loan debt. I creatively paid my way and it moved me to

the head of the class.

- Negotiate everything, make every dollar count and barter.

## MASTER YOUR CRAFT

One of my early mentors was Jim Biggar Sr. He was the CEO of Nestle in the 1980s, when our property hosted the LPGA's Nestle World Championship of Women's Golf. I still keep a note from him in my Day-Timer. He taught me that to be the best in anything, you must commit to lifelong learning and a legacy of excellence.

Formal and/or informal education should fill your years in the golf industry. Certifications, licenses, degrees and seminars (live and online) must be embraced at the highest level possible. Being multilingual is another huge advantage. I have been a GCSAA Certified Golf Course Superintendent since 1998. I am also an International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist, but my first professional certification was in 1993, earning Certified Grounds

Manager Status with the Professional Grounds Management Society. It takes roughly 10,000 hours to master anything. Starting and staying the course is important.

Following this philosophy, I have won 37 industry awards, including seven GCSAA awards. I have served 18 years on GCSAA chapter boards of directors, serving as president of the Georgia chapter in 2010-11 and I am currently vice president of the North Texas GCSA. In 2018, I was inducted into the Georgia GCSA Golf Course Superintendents Hall of Fame for mastering my craft and sharing it with others.

I am most proud of the 21 superintendents and business owners who started their careers with us and are mastering their craft across the country. You all made me better. THANK YOU. Shout out to James Thomason (Mountain Man Beard Products), Ronny McFarland (Evergreen Landcare) and recently certified Cortland Winkle (TPC Four Seasons Dallas).

## MANAGE YOUR HEALTH. YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT

Your health is your greatest asset. Nothing can ruin plans to conquer the golf industry like a major health problem. I enjoyed excellent health most of my life. But I have experienced a few health adventures: a major wreck driving to work in 1986, a lost gallbladder in 1995, getting struck by lightning in 1999 and the discovery of a birth defect in my heart (prompting a ride in the life-flight



**“The moment your property invades your personal time too much, it is time to move on. The pain and suffering that results from a mismatch on the work time vs. personal time equation can be epic, creating serious mental and physical health issues.”**

helicopter) in 2014.

Now more than ever you need a health care team to make sure you live long and prosper. Your health care team should include a primary doctor, dentist and an array of specialists as needed. We as superintendents tend to over-do things. Watch what you eat and avoid alcohol, drugs and tobacco. Have annual physicals (and a trip to the dermatologist as well, sun lovers) and a colonoscopy for the 50 and over crowd. These screenings have saved my life (evidenced by three polyps and a heart valve) and may save yours.

I do not drink or smoke, but I sure enjoy food. I have learned a new word: moderation. I lost more than 60 pounds last year. I am a bit of an expert on sleep. I never slept much most of my life, which gave me more



## LAST PHYSICAL OR HEALTH CHECKUP

Within the last 12 months	62%
13 to 24 months	15%
25 to 36 months	11%
Longer than 36 months	12%

hours to chase my dreams. But sleep is critical to good health and superintendents just keep going no matter what. Eventually you crash. Take a sleep study if you have symptoms and follow the recommendations.

I have lost friends and family to depression and suicide. If you need help, reach out to someone. Remember you are wonderfully made and highly valuable. Superintendents are a family and we are in this together.

## HAVE A HOBBY THAT'S FUN

It is safe to say that if you have read this far, or have similar work or time commitments, you may think you do not have time for hobbies. However, if you have a stressful job and work long hours, you need a hobby to help you turn off the stress. Hobbies are the spice of life, so have fun. Hunt, fish, paint, cook, volunteer, read, golf or bowl ... find something to do because it makes you happy.

I have many hobbies, but the ones that stand out are martial arts, archery and writing. I helped pay for

my turf degree at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College by teaching martial arts from 1982 to '85. I have participated in hundreds of tournaments in traditional martial arts and archery. I have also published two books and dozens of articles.

You need a life beyond the golf course. It should be as big as your ability to dream. No excuses, no regrets. Just have fun.

Superintendents are complex creatures who magically blend art and science. Those rare superintendents who enjoy long tenure and sustained success have laid the foundations our industry is built upon. While not perfect, they strive for perfection in all they do. I hope by sharing some of my successes and struggles you will find useful strategies and inspiration. **GCI**

*Anthony L. Williams is the director of golf course maintenance and landscaping at the Four Seasons Resort Club Dallas at Las Colinas in Irving, Texas, and a frequent Golf Course Industry contributor.*



▲ Anthony Williams has experienced career success while establishing rewarding outlets away from the course.



# WHEN LIFE HAPPENS

Your younger, stress-free days might be over. But that doesn't mean the profession must be overwhelming.

By **Ron Furlong**

**W**hen I started working on my first golf course in the summer of 1988, I could hardly have envisioned that three decades later I'd be on my sixth course and closing in on 20 years as a superintendent.

That first course, an Arnold Palmer design in Melbourne, Florida, Suntree Country Club, was simply a blast for younger me. Every day, after work, a few of us would play golf – and sometimes fish as we played our afternoon

# RESULTS

## WORTH THE SWITCH



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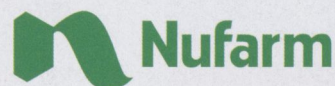
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# EXCEL

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# 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

round – until dark. Carefree, stress-free; living the American dream.

Reality set in eventually and I realized I needed to make a career decision. For me, it was easy. After a couple years at Suntree, there was simply no other place I wanted to be but working on a golf course. A degree in golf course/turfgrass man-

agement led me through a series of positions at several courses, until finally landing the superintendent job I've held since 2002.

Do I regret the decision to pursue this job in this industry? Not for a second. However, has it been easy? No. Has it come without some severe personal costs? Unfortunately,

the answer is again no.

For me, the eventual breakdown of my marriage was influenced by the stress I often felt at my job. The magic trick of being able to balance and separate the pressures of the job with the pressures of home life is not easy for anyone.

Do I think my decision to become a golf course superintendent eventually led to the end of my marriage? I would have to answer no. With the clarity one gets with the passing of time, and seeing things from a better perspective, my marriage would have ended had I been a superintendent, a dentist, a baseball radio announcer (a dream of mine as a kid) or any other profession I had decided to pursue. But did the stress I often brought home from the course accelerate and often intensify the stresses of marriage and raising young kids along with stuff like home ownership and money management? Most definitely.

I think the biggest challenge for a golf course superintendent is the hours he or she needs to be at the course. This differs for all of us, but it's safe to say there isn't a superintendent who at some point during the season finds it impossible to put in that typical 40-hour week.

I think that might be the thing that makes this profession a bit unique as compared to most. The varying of the hours needed to be put in, especially "in-season," the three or four months a year when working an eight-hour day is next to impossible. For those with a spouse and kids, this is hard on the family unit, especially when this might be the time of year the kids are off school and summer family getaways are planned and hoped for.

The "in-season" is for superintendents across the planet. For me in western Washington, the busy season is summer. Although we stay open in the winter, our rounds drop anywhere from 80 to 90 percent compared to midsummer. For cours-

## SOURCES OF JOB-RELATED PRESSURE

	ALL	PRIVATE	NON-PRIVATE
Customers/ members	68%	76%	60%
Yourself	68%	71%	64%
Employees	67%	74%	60%
Owner/board of directors	53%	56%	49%
None	4%	1%	6%

## PEOPLE WHO SUFFER BECAUSE OF THE AMOUNT OF TIME, EFFORT AND EMOTION YOU PUT INTO YOUR JOB

	ALL	PRIVATE	NON-PRIVATE
Spouse or partner	77%	82%	72%
Yourself	67%	68%	67%
Children	49%	54%	43%
Friends	25%	25%	25%
Other family	20%	22%	18%
None of the above	9%	7%	12%

## SATISFACTION WITH CURRENT JOB

	ALL	PRIVATE	NON-PRIVATE
Very satisfied	32%	35%	29%
Satisfied	43%	44%	42%
Somewhat satisfied	21%	19%	24%
Not satisfied	4%	2%	5%

## PRIMARY JOB-RELATED MOTIVATION

## 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY



	ALL	PRIVATE	NON-PRIVATE
Passion for golf or turf	45%	40%	51%
Satisfying members/customers	18%	20%	15%
Working outdoors	15%	14%	17%
Money	14%	17%	11%
Opportunity to innovate	5%	6%	3%
Other	3%	3%	3%

public track. Do I think the stress level was different at these levels of operations for the superintendent, because of the different type of operation? Perhaps. The stress one feels when trying to appease a new board of directors at a private club feels different than the stress one feels working for a single owner, which is my personal situation right now. But that isn't to say that just because the stress may feel different it isn't just as powerful a stress. Managing a golf course, no matter the

es in the Upper Midwest or Northeast that shut down in winter, there is little doubt when the "in-season" is. However, in states like Florida or Arizona, things are just heating up on the course when most northern superintendents are sipping margaritas on a beach somewhere. I've never sipped a margarita on a beach in my life, but I'm just saying!

And then there are Transition Zone superintendents. They stay just busy enough throughout the entire year that an actual legitimate "off-season" never occurs. I can't imagine working this job without a seasonal break, a time to regroup and recharge.

So, where do the stresses come from for golf course superinten-

dents? What makes this job so much harder to manage the stress compared to jobs in other industries? Answers vary from region to region, course to course and superintendent to superintendent. They also vary depending on the type of operation.

For instance, do superintendents at private clubs experience more stress than daily-fee superintendents? Or municipal course superintendents?

I like to think I've experienced a wide array of different golf course operations throughout my 32 years in the industry: three exclusive private clubs, two upscale daily fees (including the one I've been at for 18 years) and one 9-hole

budget, operation or ownership, comes with a set of factors that many jobs simply don't have.

Weather is the No. 1 factor. The unpredictability of what Mother Nature can deliver to us on any given day is not something most professions must deal with it. Heavy rain. Flooding. Saturated greens. Drought. High temps. Wind storms. Snow. Ice. Agh! Who among us doesn't check the seven-day forecast daily? Or keep a close eye on the Doppler when rain is on its way?

But it isn't just weather that keeps us on our toes. Diseases. Insects. Wildlife. Tree damage. Turfgrass health. Playability (more on that in the next paragraph). Tolerances. Green speed. Decreasing budgets. Environmental regulations becoming more and more stringent. Water restrictions (which are also becoming more and more stringent). Aging irrigation and pump systems. Aging equipment. Labor turnover from year to year. Safe to say that while this list isn't endless, it can, from time to time, certainly seem like it is.

A final word here on playability.



▲ Furlong

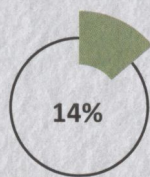
## ARE THE CAREER SACRIFICES WORTH IT?

YES, DEFINITELY	YES, SOMEWHAT	NO, NOT WORTH IT	DID NOT MAKE SACRIFICES
33%	57%	9%	1%

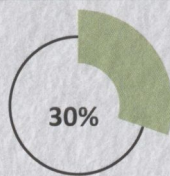


# 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

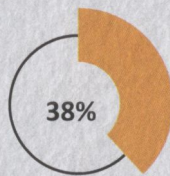
## LIKELIHOOD OF RECOMMENDING THE INDUSTRY TO A YOUNG PERSON



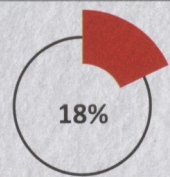
Very likely



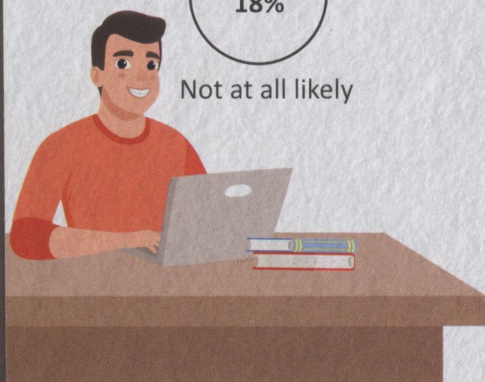
Likely



Somewhat likely



Not at all likely



Let's call it not just playability, but playability incorporated with expectations. Expectations of not just the golfer, but the owner, committee chair or general manager, people in positions to demand (and expect) a certain product from you and your staff despite those influencing factors mentioned above. Perhaps there is no greater cause of stress for the superintendent than those playability expectations. For me, one of the frustrating things I've witnessed in this industry in the last decade is the resistance of those in charge to lower expectations despite the hoops today's superintendent is expected to jump through.

More stringent water restrictions? "OK, but I still want it green." Pesticides being banned? "That's fine, but I don't want disease." Decreasing budgets despite everything costing more? "Right, but I still need it immaculate. You can do that, right?"

I'm lucky enough to work for an owner who sees the overall picture and understands concessions must occasionally be made. Weed

tolerances and decreased water use are two great examples.

But this isn't always the case. There are superintendents (many, many superintendents) working right this minute, worrying about how they are going to meet continued high expectations despite more restrictions being put on our industry and more challenges unique to their own situation.

Managing your stress level and keeping yourself fresh and enthusiastic, as well as committed to your profession and your golf course, can be challenging. My advice? Rejuvenate when you can. Remember what's ultimately most important to you.

The job of a golf course superintendent doesn't have to get in the way of a happy personal life. It can be — and should be — a conduit to that life you want. **GCI**

*Ron Furlong is the superintendent at Avalon Golf Links in Burlington, Washington, and a frequent Golf Course Industry contributor.*

## BIGGEST MISCONCEPTION FAMILY AND FRIENDS HAVE ABOUT THE PROFESSION



37%

It's just about turf



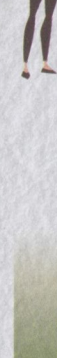
34%

We don't work in the winter



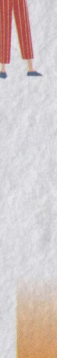
6%

Golfers are always happy



14%

Other



9%

None

### Other responses include:

- ☐ We just mow grass | ☐ We play golf all the time
- ☐ All you do is ride around in a golf cart | ☐ Hours the job requires
- ☐ No education is needed | ☐ We make good money



# SUPERINTENDENTS ARE HUMAN, TOO

By **Matt LaWell**

**A**ll the charts and numbers in this section tell one story — of an industry on the mend, of operations budgets increasing every year, of hours out on the course dropping just a little and hours back at home filling that gap. Of quality of life improving bit by bit.

But the words on this page and the five that follow tell another story.

Yes, those operations budgets are up again — the mean is



# 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

more than 16.7 percent greater across the board than last year and almost 41.7 percent greater than five years ago — but even with that figure far surpassing the 8.9 percent five-year inflation rate, it just feels like there is less and less money for ever-more-demanding owners and members.

Yes, the general consensus is that superintendents, directors of agronomy and other turfheads are working fewer hours than in years and decades past, taking more time for themselves and their families, but the course still looms at all hours. There is no escape from nature's Sisyphean cycle. The course

will still call. You will still miss key moments in life.

And yes, despite so much great conversation around the industry especially this last year about mental health, so much work remains. Depression and stress and other disorders are real. Burnout is a part of the job. There are more physically and mentally demanding professions, sure, but that does not negate the toll so many feel between the tees and the maintenance building.

What is the State of the Industry — the anecdotal and micro-state of the industry, far beyond the facts and figures, down to the individual

— as we turn the calendar to a new year and a new decade?

**FOR YEARS, DOUG** Palm allowed his job to define him. And why not? When you have so much fun on the job, even when you work 10-, 12-, 14-hour days every day all spring and summer and early fall, you might as well.

Palm is in his 28th year as the superintendent at Cattails Golf Club, a course with a meager budget in the western suburbs of Detroit. The club purchased a second course earlier this year, nearby Hilltop, which spread his already thin staff even thinner. "At Hilltop, I don't

## HOURS WORKED IN A TYPICAL WEEK

	ALL	PRIVATE	NON-PRIVATE	NORTHEAST	SOUTHEAST	CENTRAL	WEST
Less than 40	1%	0%	2%	0%	3%	1%	1%
40 to 54	53%	50%	55%	47%	65%	47%	57%
55 to 69	40%	45%	35%	43%	32%	43%	39%
70 or more	6%	5%	8%	10%	0%	9%	3%
Average hours	55	55	55	57	51	57	54

## LONGEST STRETCH IN 2019 WITHOUT TAKING A DAY OFF

	ALL	PRIVATE	NON-PRIVATE	NORTHEAST	SOUTHEAST	CENTRAL	WEST
Less than 5	1%	0%	1%	2%	0%	1%	0%
5 to 10	8%	5%	12%	12%	6%	6%	9%
11 to 20	27%	26%	28%	29%	26%	21%	36%
21 to 30	26%	29%	23%	18%	39%	27%	24%
31 to 45	19%	20%	18%	19%	15%	22%	16%
More than 45	19%	20%	18%	20%	14%	23%	15%
Average days	32	34	31	31	30	35	29



have a full-timer, and at Cattails we have two full-timers," he says. "It's good budget-wise, but it's tough to get part-timers to always come in." Because of the course acquisition, Palm worked 89 straight days last year, averaging far more than 70 hours per week, and he took less than a week's worth of vacation. "You may have guessed I'm kind of a workaholic," he says.

Even in a region filled with workaholics — among the almost 600 State of the Industry respondents, folks in the Midwest reported averaging 57 hours per week, with 52.1 percent averaging 55 or more and the average longest stretch without a day running more than five weeks — Palm stands out. But his new course demanded it.

"It had been neglected and it was short-staffed to start with," he says. "I was just involved a lot with working on the property — and learning the property, too. I had to learn the irrigation system, I had to learn the drainage patterns, just all of it. And we had one of the wettest springs we've ever had and there were days it was hard to even mow a golf course."

The new superintendent back on the original Cattails course, where he worked for so many years, provided Palm with plenty of help and might have provided a longer-term solution.

"He did a great job jumping in as a first-time superintendent, so I'm not going to have to spend as much time there," Palm says. And who is this first-timer who's saving Palm so much time? "Luke," Palm says. "He's, uh, actually my son, Luke Palm. He grew up on that golf course, but he's

really just started to get into the turf business the last few years. He had a head start, but he really doesn't have any formal turf education yet, just course work and lots of seminars."

Doug is 60, Luke is 27, and the younger Palm "likes everything about the industry, except for 'working the way my father works,'" Palm says. "His wife's a teacher and he wants to take some weekends off. Wants to spend some time with her during the summer."

The Palms managed a quick trip to North Carolina not long before Thanksgiving, a reward at the end of a long year. It was a golf trip, of course. Did you expect anything else? They played 36 holes every day.

**CHUCK ERMISCH LEARNED** as much as he could last year about a new course, too, but as Doug Palm was doing so while also managing an old course, Ermisch was doing so while just learning as much as he could about being a superintendent.

Ermisch is the new superintendent at Painted Hills Golf Course in Kansas City, Kansas, one of almost two dozen owned and operated by Great Life Golf, for whom Ermisch has worked for about four years. For decades, he had worked as a landscape architect who specialized in golf course architecture — his portfolio includes more than 50 projects — "but business dried up and I decided I loved the industry too much. I wanted to learn a little more on the agronomic end, so I jumped right in."

Ermisch, who recently turned 50, reached out to a nearby super-

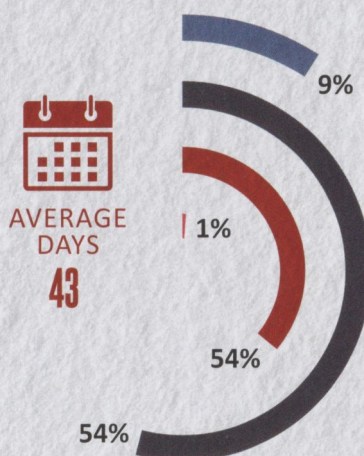
intendent, explaining that he was "no spring chicken anymore" and he needed "to make more than \$10 an hour." His experience landed him an assistant position filled with 12-hour days. Before long, he earned his applicator's license, learning about management and agronomy.

Great Life Golf moved him to Painted Hills early last year. "It had not had an active superintendent for two months," Ermisch says, "and was in a bit of a downward spiral."

He studied the course, studied his membership — plenty of 50-and-older men who love league play, not so many younger long drivers who play from the back tees — and embarked on a trio of impact projects: reestablishing intentionally overgrown bunkers to provide a visual change,

## WEEKEND DAYS WORKED PER YEAR

● None | ● 1 to 35  
● 36 to 70 | ● 71 or more



**"It seems like this year, a lot of people are realizing the potential for burnout. It seems like a lot of us are workaholics, or just afraid to leave our properties. I think that's hard for a lot of people."**

— Doug Palm, Cattails (Michigan) Golf Club



## 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

improving higher-trafficked areas on the cart paths, and cleaning up tree limbs to allow more light and improve turf quality.

"I kind of approach it by setting realistic goals," Ermisch says. "Like now that I know what I'm getting into, I'm setting very realistic goals. I know I can get this done. I'm not going to start something and then have it sit there for three years. My only other key for success is time management. I have so many hours per week. What can I accomplish?"

That would require hiring "a really, really reliable assistant," which is a top goal for 2020 and will allow Ermisch to step back a bit after a packed rookie year.

"You get so tied to the property that you feel everything is on your shoulders. You go home and you're like, Golly, I wanted to get this, this and this done today and I didn't do it, and you kind of beat yourself up."

Ermisch talked with some veterans, including Mel Waldron III, superintendent at Horton Smith Golf Course in Springfield, Missouri.

"I said, 'I'm just getting started. I don't want to burn myself out.'"

"You just have to know when to go home," Ermisch says Waldron told him. "The golf course will always be there. You have to be the guy who sets the tone."

"Next year, I would like to get to a position where I work 55 to 60 hours a week, doing the work and also teaching and training and having guys underneath me who want to learn. That's where I want to go. That's what I want to do."

**JOHN GURKE** IS similar in age to Chuck Ermisch — less than a decade older at 57 — but the veteran superintendent is on the other end of his career. On the brink of his 30th anniversary at Aurora Country Club in the western suburbs of Chicagoland, Gurke still carries out chainsaws to cut trees down, then cut them up. The difference from 1990, or 2000, or

even 2010, is that, "now I might ask someone else to haul the branches," Gurke says. "Back then, I was hauling the branches and running them through the chipper, too."

Gurke is a Chicagoland native who has lived and worked almost all of his life in about an hour's radius, depending on traffic. He knows his superintendent neighbors and will share equipment and sometimes crew if needed. He still writes a column for the local chapter magazine.

He also tries to limit the hours his crew spends on the course — and the hours he spends in his office.

"What we do, and this has been pretty standard for a long time here, is Monday eight hours, Tuesday seven, Wednesday six, Thursday eight, Friday seven. Then we split the crew on the weekends for three hours and my crew will have a 39-hour workweek. We do pay overtime, but we don't have a lot. I try to keep those same hours. I'm here doing administrative work before everybody gets here and after everybody leaves. But I've never understood a superintendent who tells you he works 80 hours a week. I don't think you need to. I think somebody who is doing that is misappropriating his time and not using it as efficiently as he should. I

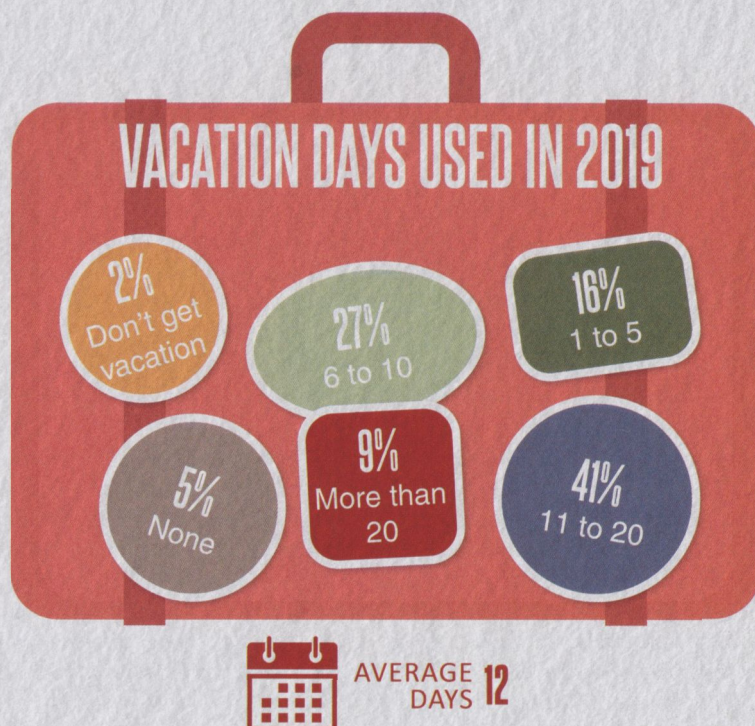
can still work seven days a week and they add up to 40 hours."

The institutional knowledge of working almost three full decades at the same club helps, as does the presence of a veteran assistant superintendent, Virgil Range, now in his second stint at Aurora County Club. "That's probably my No. 1 reason for still being here and doing this job at my place in life," Gurke says. "When I do take a vacation or I have to be away for whatever reason, to know he's there, that's money. I can't even tell you how big a thing that is. That's partially how I've evolved to where I am. ... Having a seasoned assistant who's basically already been a superintendent, that's just a luxury that I can't imagine being without."

**ON THE OTHER** side of the state, near the Mississippi River, Alex Stuedemann has a larger staff, a larger budget and a higher profile, all expected when you work as the director of golf course maintenance operations at TPC Deere Run and keep the course perfect for the PGA Tour's annual John Deere Classic.

He also has a similar approach to hours and balance.

"Even for our hourly staff, what we've done is we'll work four nine-





hour days Monday through Thursday and then a four-hour Friday, to kind of give them that two-and-a-half day weekend,” Stuedemann says. “I’ll usually take that Friday off. At the end of the year, I’ll try to use up some vacation days, I’ll take a week off and stop in the office to make sure the guys don’t need anything, then go back home and work around the house. You kind of make up for the time you give in July and August.”

Stuedemann is the proud father of two young daughters, one of whom recently started Girl Scouts. Guess who jumped at the opportunity to become a troop leader?

“I can plan a bunker renovation, I can dredge a pond, I can figure out a struggling green, but pulling together a lesson plan and entertainment for five 5-year-olds is quite challenging, I’m learning,” Stuedemann says. “She’s so excited about it, so there’s that added pressure. I was never a Boy Scout — I was a part of something similar when I was younger — but I did recognize that it was something that would give my daughters some perspective on real-life lessons and also empower them. The cookies are part of what they do, but they learn responsibility, decision-making, communicating. If it allows me to spend time with my daughters and see them grow as human beings, I’m all for it.”

**TIM CAMPBELL LIVES** in a different state and a different time zone, and works for a smaller course, but just like Alex Stuedemann, he understands the importance of a hobby off the course.

Three years ago, right around the time Campbell turned 50, his father suffered a heart attack that sparked everybody in the family to examine what they were doing on this mortal coil. “My parents told me, ‘You used to do all this athletic stuff. Why aren’t you doing it anymore?’ So Campbell, a 25-year industry veteran who has worked the last decade and a half as superintendent at Palm Beach Par 3

Golf Course, on the Atlantic Ocean, dived right back into the water ... and hit the ground running ... and hopped on his bike, fitting triathlons into everyday life.

Campbell and his crew end work at 3 most afternoons, “so I’ll usually ride after work three or four days a week, or on the weekends, and then I go to Masters swimming two or three days a week and I make the time to run.” Less than 12 percent of survey respondents said they devote more than five hours per week — less than 43 minutes per day — to fitness. For Campbell, “it was just about making it a priority. Though it does help that I’m single and my kids are all grown.

“I’m sore all the time and I do most of my running on a treadmill, which gets so old,” Campbell adds. “I have a bone spur in my right ankle, behind my Achilles, and I have a boot I wear sometimes at night, but if I’m running and stretching regularly, it doesn’t bother me as much.”

Still, the last three years of training have helped Campbell get rid of stress and become a sharper superintendent and manager — sharper even just in everyday life.

“Most of my other jobs have been six, seven days a week,” he says. “I think part of that is working for the town, too. I’m closer to 40 hours right now than I am to 54, and most of that is because I have a good staff, from my assistant and mechanic to my operators. We have all the tools we need.”

**RORY VAN POUCKE** sees more sun even than Tim Campbell, thanks to living in Arizona and working as superintendent at Apache Sun Golf Club, a nine-hole course outside Phoenix. Van Poucke owned and operated courses for decades with his father, Cliff, starting in Illinois in the 1970s before heading west in 1992. He owned Apache Sun until 2005 and is the lone full-time staffer today.

“For me, being an owner, when I owned it and was writing the checks,



## HOBBIES AWAY FROM THE GOLF COURSE

Watching sports	72%
Family activities	59%
Watching TV/movies	55%
Playing sports/fitness	53%
Home improvement projects	44%
Hunting/fishing/outdoors	43%
Listening to music	42%
Traveling	40%
Cooking	32%
Reading	29%
Volunteering	16%
Shopping	5%
Other	8%
None	1%

### Other responses include:

Coaching youth athletics , Woodworking , Motorcycles , Basketball officiating , Boating, Church, Home brewing, Eating, Camping, Partying , Gaming



# 2020 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

when your grass goes south and you get Pythium or root rot and you lose the greens, it's a lot of pressure," he says. "You have to come up with payroll, your name is on the bottom line and if you go bankrupt, you're the one who goes under with it. That's a lot of pressure. Running it for someone, there's pressure there, too."

There is pressure on everybody in and around Phoenix, of course, an incredibly competitive golf market where water is fast becoming the focal pressure point. By this time in his career, though, Van Poucke has tried to scale back. He has become more involved in the water conversation locally and nationally, and he closes the course a couple months each summer.

"I'm a little older too, but if I have to work 14 days or 21 days, I work 14 or 21 days because that's the nature of the beast," Van Poucke says. "If we have a disease problem, or when we're seeding, I may work 12-hour days, or go out at 2:30 and check the sprinkler system. That I don't have a problem with.

"I think there is a lot of pressure on superintendents because there's just not a lot of room for error anymore. I just try to balance it out along the way and not be married to the job too much. I make sure to take vacations, spend time with my family, maybe take an afternoon off and go play golf

with my friends. If you keep looking at the same thing every day, you get stale. You get stressed. You need a break. Communicate, don't bottle it up. Be transparent and upfront with people. It makes a big difference."

**RYAN CUMMINGS COMMUNICATED** and it has made a difference.

Just last month, Cummings published his essay *It's OK to Seek Help* — about how leaning on Tom Zimmerman as a friend and a mentor helped him find strength and stay in the industry — in the pages of *Golf Course Industry*.

"I still have a lot of bad days out here," says Cummings, superintendent at Elcona Country Club, just south of Interstate 90 in north-central Indiana. "But I try to find the little positives in each day and take some time for myself just to decompress before the start of the day and at the end of the day. I simplified my days, if that makes sense. I've tried not to take everything so serious."

Cummings still works long hours and long stretches — his peak run was 95 straight days while struggling to find folks who could work Sunday mornings — but he takes far more in stride than he did even just a year or two ago. "I wouldn't say my work-life balance is perfect — there are things that need worked on for sure — but I

think just getting out there are listening to other people tell their stories has helped," he says. "And it's not a stigma anymore. It's OK to have these conversations, as difficult as they are. It's good to get them out into the open.

"We talk about a lot of things — what's going on out on the golf course, agronomic issues — but it's OK to talk about our struggles, too. That's something I'm always going to continue to work on, is better work-life balance, to make this an industry I want to work in for the next 20, 25 years until I retire someday."

Cummings is 41 now, the father of two children, a 7-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son. They come out some Sunday afternoons to learn the game, all together on the course.

"My daughter, she gets about three holes and she's had enough," Cummings says. "My son will make it all the way through now. I think they don't care what we're doing as long as we're doing something together.

"My son has expressed some interest in working with me. I wouldn't discourage him from doing it, I would just make sure he has all the information to make a good decision for his future. Right now, it's just being with Dad." **GCI**

Matt LaWell is *Golf Course Industry's* managing editor.

## TOUGHEST TIME TO BE A SUPERINTENDENT

	ALL	NORTHEAST	SOUTHEAST	CENTRAL	WEST
Summer	67%	83%	60%	66%	61%
Spring	15%	11%	11%	16%	19%
Winter	9%	3%	19%	7%	11%
Fall	8%	3%	9%	10%	9%
None	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%

# GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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# SOOOOOO FAR SOOOOOO

**A PAIR OF SUPERINTENDENTS AT REMOTE CLUBS USED A FRIENDSHIP AND INGENUITY TO DESIGN A UNIQUE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM.**

By Lee Carr

Covering nearly a quarter of Nebraska, the sandhills rest on top of the massive Ogallala Aquifer. These plant-anchored dunes are ancient (from the Pleistocene epoch), ecologically diverse and astoundingly beautiful – even from space. Naturally, they are sparsely populated.

“You teach, you ranch, you work for the railroad or you work for us. That’s just the way it is out here,” says Kyle Hegland, superintendent since 2007 at Sand Hills Golf Club in Mullen, Nebraska. “The people here are world class and hard-working. The weather can be extreme and you can’t make it unless you have everybody

else. It’s one of the best benefits – calling this community home.”

Jared Kalina knows all about Sand Hills because he was among Hegland’s first group of interns in 2008. He worked as an assistant from 2012 to 2017 and then moved to Holyoke, Colorado, to become the director of grounds at Ballyneal Golf and Hunt Club, about three hours away.

Hegland was happy to see him take the position, but says, “I miss having Jared here – I just miss having my friend here every day.” To say Hegland and Kalina are close is an understatement – they talk most days, get together when they can, debate like brothers and compete

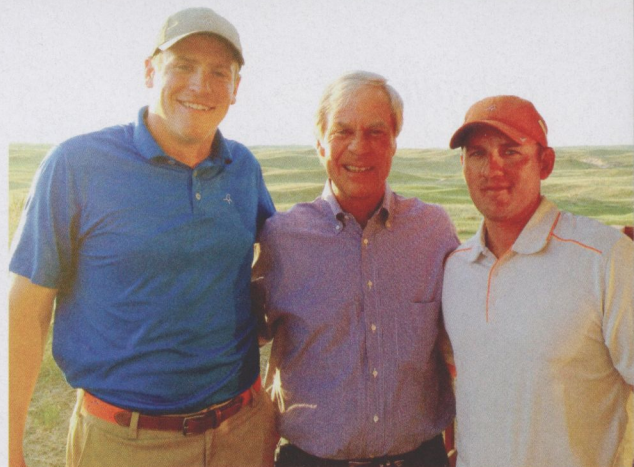
fiercely when they play golf. Hegland admits that Kalina wins more often, but quips, “Jared knows I’m coming for him!” Their closeness is part of the reason the dual internship being offered by their clubs works so well.

Before Kalina moved, he and Hegland talked about logistics. “Kyle is one of my best friends in the world and we were hoping that I could stay close enough where we could try this internship out,” Kalina says “There are just not as many people in turf programs as there used to be. Doing something outside the norm is essential to attract candidates – we need to compete. We thought since you have to come soooooo far to get to either club, if an intern can work both, what

# VALUABLE



Learning how to maintain courses impacted by high winds are part of the dual internship at Ballyneal (pictured above) and Sand Hills.



a cool opportunity that is.”

And soooooo far it's working. Hegland and Kalina have tapped personal contacts, social media and face-to-face events such as lectures and conferences to recruit students from Penn State, the University of Tennessee, Michigan State, Colorado State and some local talent from the University of Nebraska, too. They take four interns each year and rotate them through the courses, so everyone gets a chance to work together. Though they especially appreciate having people during their shoulder seasons, timing is flexible and Hegland and Kalina strive to ensure the experience is customized to what the intern needs and wants to learn.

## STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

The more convenient an internship is, the more attractive it is, so this dual internship is structured to include a fair wage, lodging in Mullen and Holyoke, and lunch at the course. Most important, interns learn about these two world-class properties, both built on sand, which share similar elevation and climate. Uniforms and playing privileges are also part of the compensation package and playing is required. “If someone doesn't come with golf clubs, they are not getting hired,” Kalina says. “It's imperative to play your course to know what's going on out there. Playing is required, not encouraged.”

Hegland concurs, “No one cares

if you're any good. They just care if you're slow. And we don't take carts, no chance. Let's go have a conversation.” Hegland and Kalina play often partially because they love to play and partially because playability is paramount at both courses. The aesthetics on these naturally created Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw (Sand Hills) and Tom Doak (Ballyneal) designs are stunning, but the grass does get dry and not everyone is used to that.

“We keep it drier than most courses in America because we have to — grass sees dormancy, grass goes yellow and you see footprints it is so bone dry at times,” Kalina says. “It's good for the interns to see that it can

▲ Ballyneal's Jared Kalina and Sand Hills' Kyle Hegland with course designer Ben Crenshaw.

be this dry and it's going to come back and play great. We can open some eyes when it comes to irrigation."

The members at Sand Hills and Ballyneal are astute golfers and expect perfection to the extent possible. "If it's playing right, nobody complains," Hegland says. "Nobody." On the rare occasion that it's not playing right, "Everyone is OK with a plan," he adds. "It's important to have those conversations with members – no one is OK with dead grass and no plan."

Alongside members, residents of the towns of Mullen and Holyoke can play their respective course at a reasonable local rate, which contributes to the sense of community at each club. Ballyneal sees about 12,000 rounds per summer – that's a lot of traffic considering the short season. Jonathan Worscheck can attest to the playability and management at Sand Hills and Ballyneal thanks to being an intern in 2019. He is now an assistant at Ballyneal.

With every internship, "the selfish goal is to be able to hire people as assistants who have already been on property," Hegland says. "We don't ever offer an internship for someone to just be another person on the crew," he adds. "We want a very specific situation where you are going to get a lot of time with me and a lot of time with Jared."

Worscheck reveals that "these guys do a crazy job with

a minimalistic approach – they don't spend near as much money. The playability they provide without the largest crews or budgets is crazy. At Ballyneal, we keep it so dry, firm and fast that 90 percent of the time we can't drive on the grass because it will streak. I was able to adapt."

Hegland notes that after a week or so, they ask interns an uncomfortable question: What do you not do well? Interns are reticent to share, but they want to know to "make sure you learn to do it well. We want to be considered a family. I will always do whatever I can for these young men and women whether they stay in the industry or not." That attitude, care and devotion contributes to the culture at Sand Hills and Ballyneal, making this internship different than those at more commercial enterprises.

Key to the success of the internship is that there are no secrets. "If someone would say that Ballyneal was the greatest-conditioned place in the world," Hegland says, "that would bring me more joy than it would Jared, and he would say the same thing if it was reversed." Hegland and Kalina lift up each other, their courses and everyone who is working around them.

At Sand Hills, Hegland says, "The members are great. Everyone is treated the same. We are not

'the help' and that is not lost on me." It's

not lost on the interns either, who are encouraged to develop more than maintenance skills.

The interns always must set goals, including a five-year goal and goals for the summer, and "they don't get a choice about that," Hegland adds. Interns also must develop their decision-making abilities. Due to weather, conditions and labor availability at Sand

Hills, decisions are made quickly and with authority. It's no different at Ballyneal.

"We have to be great decision-makers," Hegland says. "Decisions can be very difficult at times, particularly away from the golf season, so we want to show these kids how to make choices, and we don't think enough of these kids get that." From the leadership through the members to the staff, there is a culture of excellence, trust and togetherness at both properties that is proving to be a fertile environment for learning.

## LABOR AND MAINTENANCE

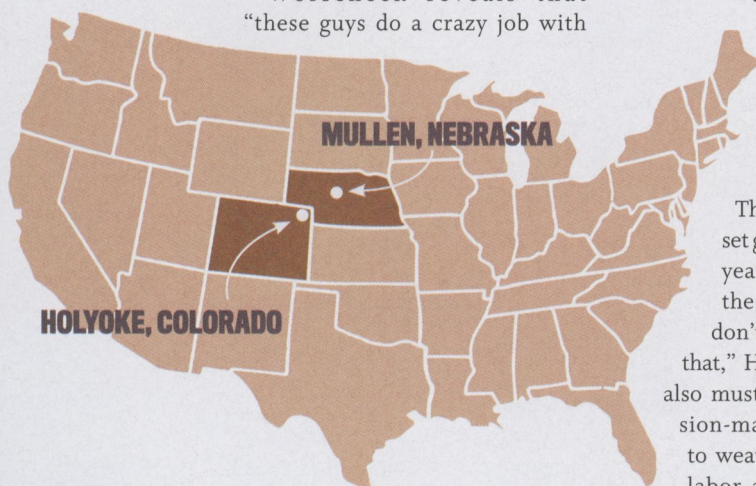
The staff at Sand Hills runs the spectrum from youth to retirees and the golf season is only four months – from mid-May to mid-September. Numerous employees are high school and college students, and college scholarships funded by the membership are a substantial perk at Sand Hills. The kids work hard for the scholarships and they are aware that this is a job, but it's a job at a world-class golf course. Another perk for the interns and staff is interacting – often on a first-name basis – with prestigious members and guests.

"We are very stable because of what we do," Hegland says. Sand Hills is uncompromising and "from when you walk in the door to when you get to the golf course, you know who we are."

The Mullen High School mascot is the Bronco, and when the boys' basketball team won the state championship in 2017, "a plaque was placed in the clubhouse because everyone, including the members, feels a part of it." Success is shared, and it makes it easy to care for what you are doing.

"At Sand Hills, it's a very pure golf experience," Hegland says. "We have always known who we are and that's good for any business. You have to make such a commitment to come out here. It's just not

Sand Hills and Ballyneal are separated by 170 miles.



worth your time to be any other way – we prefer you love it.”

For those who do, it's a family and will remain so, and that includes the interns. The atmosphere is fun, energized and full of smiles – Hegland and Kalina consciously keep it light. They feel the maintenance work can be learned by anyone. But living in a small town isn't for everyone.

The population in Holyoke is larger than Mullen but not by much, and the town is equally remote. Interns need to adjust to two different crews, with Sand Hills having multiple female workers and youth, and the labor at Ballyneal being more adult and primarily Hispanic. Hegland and Kalina both speak Spanish and though it's a benefit, it's not required for the internship. Hegland has several young women who work on his staff and he would like to see more in the industry. “The girls are meticulous and they are always on time,” he says.

In addition to the staffing differences, interns will work with two different irrigation systems. Ballyneal runs three-phase electrical power and Sand Hills uses diesel generators. In fact, the storms and wind are so severe at Sand Hills that often the entire property is powered by generators. Sand Hills draws its water from the Ogallala Aquifer and its water usage has been monitored for more than 10 years. Regardless, Sand Hills has always watered conservatively. “At the lowest part of Sand Hills, you can probably dig and hit water at 15 feet,” Hegland says. “We use more water than Ballyneal, but not much more, because they have more acreage.”

At Ballyneal, due to Colorado laws, there is a hard irrigation cap and the water is just enough. “We think about that cap every time we water – how much do we have left and what do we need going forward?” Kalina says.

Applying and releasing soil tackifier will be a new experience for many interns. The soiltac is a little tricky to administer (the sand needs to be just damp enough before starting) but,

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Managing out snow drifts is a winter management technique at Ballyneal.

forming a 1-inch crust it keeps bunker sand in place during the roaring winter winds. It's reliable, expensive and worth every penny for these all-natural blowouts. Bunkers without liners are another thing interns won't likely have experience with, but they're an important part of Coore's and Crenshaw's original routing of the course.

The high winds across the Great Plains affect more than the bunkers as wind is also a major factor when spraying. Spraying doesn't happen often as both courses operate under the idea that less input means better playability and, in every way, Hegland and Kalina have to optimize their resources.

"There were some things that surprised me – a lot of courses work

on a two-week fungicide or fertilizer application, but out here, they don't do that at all," says Worscheck, who also served as intern at The Broadmoor Golf Club in Colorado Springs. "They give the grass and turf what it needs. They spoon-feed their fertilizer applications so they save a lot of money and time. You have to be very adaptive out here with the winds – you can't just spray when you want to. That's pretty big. We use the Greenkeeper app. Its most significant utilization is the GDD (growing degree day) tracker of growth regulators. This essentially ensures total control of the plant's growth by seeing the peak activity of the PGR (plant growth regulator) in the plant. The Greenkeeper app supports their course philosophy. I had

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	Sand Hills	Ballyneal
Design	Bill Coore & Ben Crenshaw	Tom Doak
Year opened	1995	2006
Holes	18	18, 12-hole par-3 short course
Location	Mullen, Nebraska	Holyoke, Colorado
Town population	450+	2,200+
Full-time maintenance employees	4	6
Membership	150	250
Tees/fairways/greens	Fescue/Creeping Bentgrass	Fescue/Creeping Bentgrass
Cart Policy	Carts allowed, drive in fairway	No carts
Irrigation System	Diesel generator (regular piping)	3-phase electrical (HDPE piping)
Water Usage	Monitored, water sourced from Ogallala Aquifer	Hard irrigation cap by Colorado state law
Elevation	3,215 feet	3,737 feet
Annual Precipitation (Rain/Snow)	22 inches / 48 inches	18 inches / 31 inches

never heard of it before, but I wonder why every course isn't using it."

The natural, minimalist approach helps the course and the wildlife. Coyotes, deer, rabbits, bullsnakes and rattlesnakes are all spotted regularly. (The bullsnakes eat rattlesnakes, so they are the preferred sighting, in case you were wondering!) And at Ballyneal there are lots of wild turtles, in addition to the Turtle Bar and the "La Tortuga" tournament. The turtles sometimes slow the mowing, but they aren't in danger of cart traffic as carts aren't permitted at Ballyneal. They also won't be mistaken for tee markers as there are none, which encourages match play, and is another course dynamic for interns to consider and experience.

*continues on page 63*



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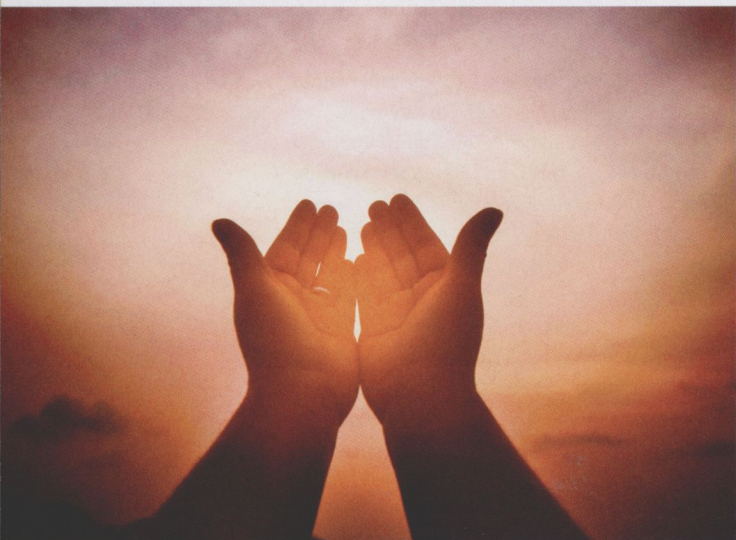
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## THANK YOU, PLEASE

**I**t's the time of year for resolutions big and small. Yeah, yeah—lose weight, cut back on drinking, swearing, smoking. But why not make, and keep, a resolution that truly will make you and others feel good?

Remember to say, “thank you.”

Not a big deal, right? But it obviously is, because I don't hear it being done enough these days.

In our industry, where we are all trying to get by and get ahead in a rather small circle, we must look after and appreciate one another's efforts. Whether you're a golf course superintendent, a general manager or a golf professional, we depend and rely on each other.

So, what's the price of a thank you?

While seemingly small, there could be big consequences for not doing so. There may be no “next time.” No more favors. Or me not thinking of you in the future. Why bother when there is no recognition for my having gone out of my way to help you?

As *Caddyshack*'s Carl Spackler said to the Dalai Lama, “Hey Lama, how about a little something, you know,

for the effort?”

In this small industry, word spreads quickly. Trust me. You do not want to become known as the person who never says thanks, who only takes but never gives back. Not even two little words.

There are no barriers or age limits to this lack of appreciation. Think about the people who help you on a regular basis:

- The salesman who gave you a discount on a product or made a special trip to your course to deliver something that would save your bacon.
- The golf pro who arranged a tee time for you and your dad during the holiday season when the course was packed.
- The guy who provided a reference when you were applying for a new job.

And, by the way, I'm not

talking about a thumbs-up emoji or the “THX” text. I need the real deal – verbal and said with sincerity.

I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times I've received a genuine “thank you” in recent times, whether I recommend-

ed someone for a position, gave a reference, suggested a different agronomic practice, connected two peers in similar circumstances. Call me old school, but I do not like that “take it for granted, entitled, you-owe-it-to-me” attitude. And if I don't, others don't, either. Just a “thank you” for the effort. Come on: How hard is that?

Sometimes, a hand-written note is both more appropriate and more rewarding. If I have to explain to you when, then we have a bigger problem. But thank-you notes seem to have become a lost art, going the way of the rotary dial phone and a television with rabbit ears. More than a call, a note is the perfect time to mix some humor with your sincerity. For example, I recently received a thank-you card with a message on the front that said, “This is not a text!”

And while I'm on my “OK Boomer” soapbox, here's something else I'd like others to know: Not returning phone calls, emails or texts is rude. Yes, we're all busy, but ignoring communication is inconsiderate. Even a “thanks but I have no interest at this time” response is better than ghosting or employing the dome of silence.

So, when should we say thank you? Every day. Make a positive impact on people, and let others know you care, have noticed and are appreciative.

Has anyone ever been hurt saying thanks? Not likely.

And, oh, by the way: Thank you for reading this column. **GCI**

“

In this small industry, word spreads quickly. Trust me. You do not want to become known as the person who never says thanks, who only takes but never gives back.”



**TIM MORAGHAN**, principal, ASPIRE Golf ([tmoraghan@aspire-golf.com](mailto:tmoraghan@aspire-golf.com)). Follow Tim's blog, Golf Course Confidential at [www.aspire-golf.com/buzz.html](http://www.aspire-golf.com/buzz.html) or on Twitter @TimMoraghan



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## MAKING EXTRAORDINARY YOUR NEW ORDINARY

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The Club at Indian Creek director of agronomy Jim Nedrow has established a strong relationship with Bayer's Tom Steigauf.



# BUSY CAN BE FUN

Offering elite conditions for thousands of Nebraskans – and golf's next wave of stars – provides year-round motivation for **Jim Nedrow** and **The Club at Indian Creek** team.

By Guy Cipriano

**G**reetings from Elkhorn, Nebraska. Haven't heard of the growing municipality 25 miles west of an increasingly prosperous Midwest city?

Let's turn to somebody proficient in maintaining pure playing surfaces for the masses. The Club at Indian Creek director of agronomy Jim Nedrow settled in suburban Omaha in 2005.

"When I moved to Omaha, Elkhorn was a little bit of a drive from what you would consider the main part of Omaha,"

he says. "Elkhorn and Omaha have basically become one. We are on the western edge of the Omaha metro area. It's unique because everything is moving toward us."

When Nedrow says everything, he means every imaginable Midwest convenience. "There's a Hy-Vee going in," Nedrow says in a Chamber of Commerce moment, "which is a big deal for Elkhorn."

Omaha golfers shopping for a place to spend time and whatever money remains following non-discretionary purchases such as groceries flock to where Nedrow works. Indian Creek owners Bill and Brett

## MAKING EXTRAORDINARY YOUR NEW ORDINARY

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Gottsch decided a decade ago to turn Indian Creek, a 27-hole facility with surprising elevation change, into a showpiece for a company whose holdings include numerous feed yards and ranches. The transformation occurred without straying from the greater purpose of offering quality and affordable golf to Nebraskans and visitors.

Even during peak play periods, green fees are less than \$65. Indian Creek hosts a PGA Tour-sanctioned event, the Korn Ferry Tour's Pinnacle Bank Championship, leaving an outsider to wonder how a course can provide tournament-caliber conditions and remain accessible to most customers.

Quality and quantity – Indian Creek averages around 40,000 rounds annually – coexist when talented, determined and prideful people receive and maximize ample resources, including personnel. The department Nedrow leads includes superintendent Shawn Tordrup and assistants Adam Dredge and Jeff Moeller. Equipment technician Tim Soppe and veteran full-timer Rich Lee are also key parts of Indian Creek's agronomic nucleus.

The department's objective is straightforward in definition, yet complex in execution: keeping T-1 bentgrass greens and ryegrass fairways and tees in elite condition despite unpredictable weather and abundant play. Challenges are exacerbated on weekends as tee times begin at 6:30 a.m. and 300 players roam the three nines before noon.

Summers in Omaha, where the Missouri River separates Nebraska and Iowa, are sneaky

sultry. "I wouldn't say a lot of people necessarily think of it, but they get that affect you would get in a place like St. Louis," says Bayer area sales manager Tom Steigauf, a former superintendent who works closely with Nedrow and other Omaha-area superintendents. "It's not just hot, but they are getting extended periods of high humidity and little moisture. It's real nasty, sticky, swampy weather, which we all know is conducive to growing turfgrass disease and pathogens." Crowded tee sheets and weather promoting the spread of devastating diseases, most notably Pythium, places Nedrow's team and Indian Creek's turf under extreme stress from early July through mid-August.

Controlling Pythium requires a diligent preventative spray program. Nedrow and his team treat 51 acres for the disease. Since the tournament's arrival, Nedrow has relied on proven products such as Bayer's Fiata Stressgard as part of the fairway management program. Designed to improve plant health and control

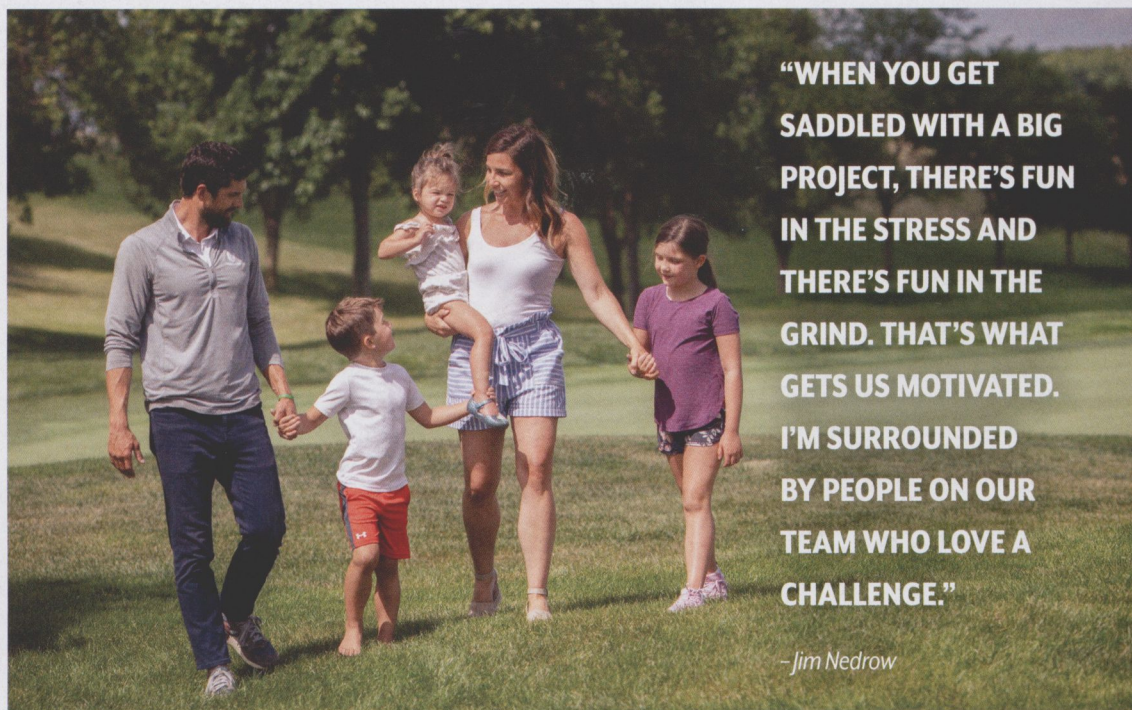
disease on fairways, Fiata Stressgard includes a combination consisting of Stressgard Formulation Technology, proprietary ingredients and an active ingredient (phosphorus acid) for disease activity. Nedrow has observed multiple turf enhancements since incorporating Fiata Stressgard into Indian Creek's program.

"Our turf color is better, our texture is better, the plant seems more prepared and better capable of handling stress ... traffic stress more than anything," he says. "The plant just seems better able to handle all of the stresses we face."

Mirage Stressgard and Chipco Signature are among the other staples applied to withstand summer stresses. Nedrow uses Mirage Stressgard on fairways and Chipco Signature on greens.

"I think there's a noticeable difference in what the golf course looks like on a Monday morning now that we have Stressgard in our program than before we had Stressgard in our program," Nedrow says. "I don't know

▼ Jim Nedrow and his wife, Katie, are raising their son, Everett, and daughters, Ruby and Sophie, in a friendly Midwest setting.



**"WHEN YOU GET SADDLED WITH A BIG PROJECT, THERE'S FUN IN THE STRESS AND THERE'S FUN IN THE GRIND. THAT'S WHAT GETS US MOTIVATED. I'M SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE ON OUR TEAM WHO LOVE A CHALLENGE."**

—Jim Nedrow

## MAKING EXTRAORDINARY YOUR NEW ORDINARY

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### From the field

Bayer area sales manager Tom Steigauf, who works with superintendents in multiple Midwest states, including Nebraska, explains how Stressgard helps courses where an abundance of golfer and cart traffic can affect turf quality:

"Stressgard comes into play with what we define as overall plant health," he says. "One analogy that a lot of people use is that as healthy as the plant is underneath, that's how healthy it will be on the top. If you have a good root base, you're going to have good top cover. A lot of that is interchangeable. You're going to get good root structure based on good photosynthetic breakdown and good breakdown within the plant. Stressgard helps with that, and combined with the active ingredient, it has proven to create better root mass and better root mass is going to create a better, healthier plant which, in turn, can better resist and handle higher wear and tear."

what that is. It's not like it's this super measurable thing. Being on the golf course for as long as I have, I drive out and my gut says, 'Yeah, we are a little bit better.'"

A new stress entered the mix when the PGA Tour brought its top feeder system, the Korn Ferry Tour, to Indian Creek for the first time in 2017. The Pinnacle Bank Championship is July 27-Aug. 2 this year. Instead of fretting about the presence of the biggest annual golf event contested in Nebraska during a perilous agronomic stretch, Nedrow embraces the tournament spotlight. "When you get saddled with a big project, there's fun in the stress and there's fun in the grind," he says. "That's what gets us motivated."

Pinnacle Bank Championship week, coincidentally, decreases traffic stress, because the field features 156

players on Thursday and Friday before being trimmed on the weekend. During tournament week, Nedrow and his assistants are plotting tactics for the return of public play. "Our goal is to be as good before and after the tournament for our paying customers as we are during the tournament," he says.

The last three years have demonstrated Nedrow and his team are doing the proper things such as diligent cultural practices, calculated hand watering and applying Stressgard products to prepare playing surfaces for the thousands of cart tracks and footprints produced by non-professionals. "If the plant is a percentage more capable of

fighting off that stress, it gives us that leg up," Nedrow says.

Steigauf quickly noticed the stresses Nedrow and his team face. On his first visit to the course, Steigauf joined Bayer colleagues Jimmy Johnson and Wes Kleffner behind a grill, cooking wings and brats for workers and volunteers preparing the course for the 2017 Pinnacle Bank Championship. Steigauf regretted not bringing more clothing to Elkhorn. He later learned to pack differently for summer visits to Nebraska. He also learned how much his company's support means to Nedrow and Indian Creek.

"I could have sweated through three shirts," Steigauf says of the 2017 tournament cookout. "It was so hot and sticky and nasty. Every time you turned around people were going out with hoses trying to keep things under control. To have Jim give Bayer credit with the Stressgard formulation and products, and hear how he feels they are game changer during a nasty time of the year, validates what we know at Bayer."

In addition to Steigauf and his grillmates, the support system Bayer offers Nedrow includes Green Solutions Team specialist Dr. Zac Reicher, who provides technical assistance to customers west of the Mississippi. Nedrow often participates in informative text message and email chains with Steigauf and Reicher during stressful periods. "I look at Tom and Zac as a team," Nedrow says. "I work with them all the time. They take an objective view of what we are talking about and what I'm dealing with and give me an answer that's best suited for our situation."

A curiosity in the relationship between golf and agronomics stems from Nedrow's experiences in Norfolk, a small town 120 miles northwest of Omaha. Nedrow spent a significant part of his high school years playing golf at Norfolk Country Club. Like many young Nebraskans, he headed to the state capital Lincoln

and enrolled at University of Nebraska. He planned on majoring in animal science and becoming a veterinarian. When he returned home after his freshman year, Nedrow landed a job on Norfolk Country Club superintendent Ryan Reifert's summer crew. That summer altered his academic direction.

He returned to Lincoln and flipped his major to turfgrass management. A presentation that The Country Club of Lincoln superintendent Charlie Hadwick made to the University of Nebraska turf club during Nedrow's sophomore year solidified his decision to change majors. "I really gravitated toward Charlie," he says. "He was quirky, eccentric and just so smart. He cared so much about people."

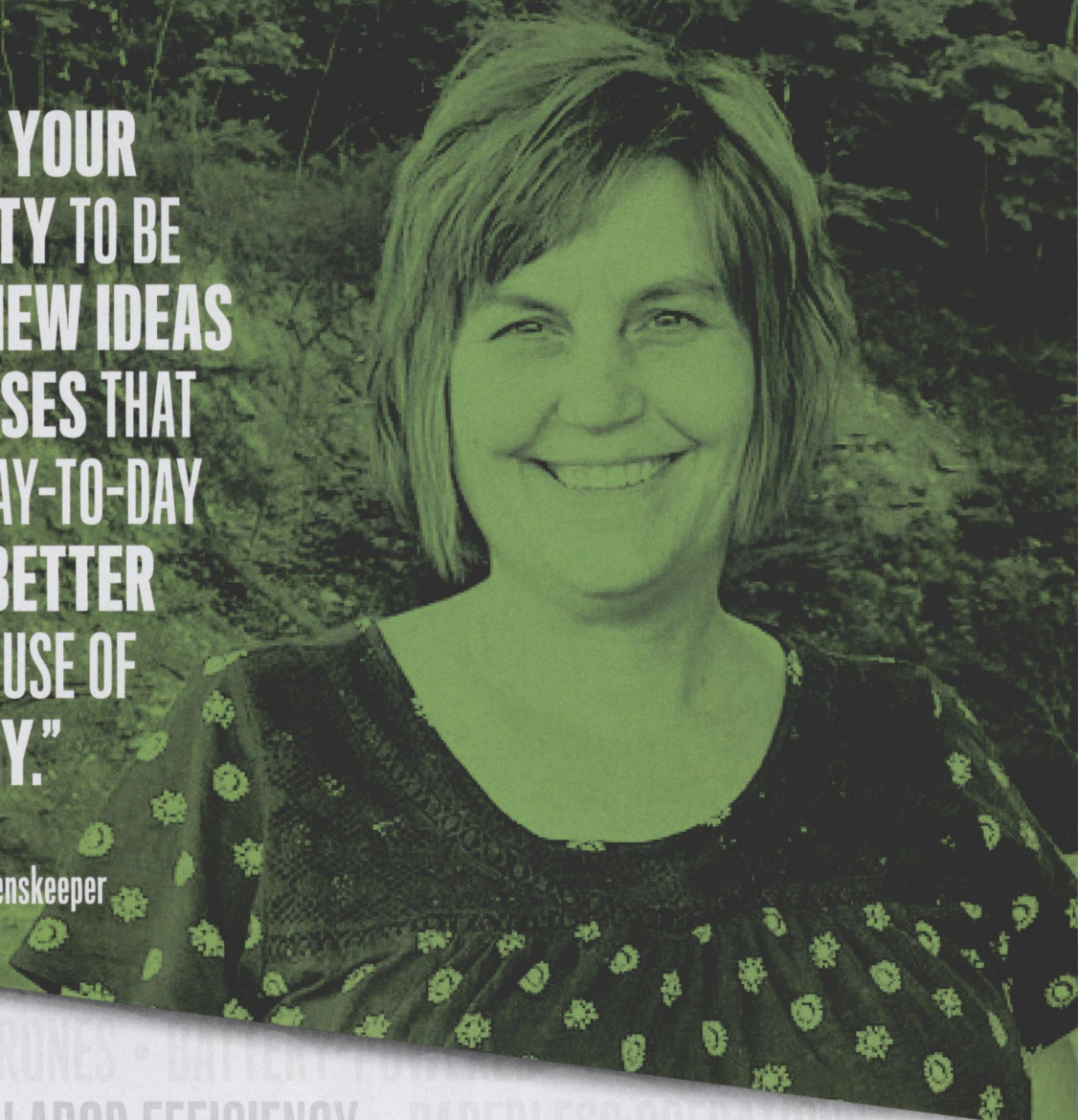
Nedrow decided in 2000 to pursue a turfgrass management career. He was leading Indian Creek's agronomy department by 2010. Nedrow credits former bosses for his quick rise and subsequent longevity. Reifert sparked passion for the profession; Hadwick emphasized the human aspects of the job. Happy Hollow Country Club's Scott Axon taught Nedrow never to waver from high expectations; Indian Creek's Bob Hall further reinforced why a superintendent must demonstrate humanity. "As I look back on it, I'm fortunate those are the people I got to work for, because it's precisely why I'm at where I'm at now," he says.

Nedrow and his family, which includes his wife, Katie, and their children, Sophie, Everett and Ruby, have found a home in Elkhorn. Away from the course, Nedrow and Katie, who hails from small-town South Dakota, enjoy raising children in a family-oriented community. On the course, Nedrow has accomplished numerous career goals working at a facility with supportive ownership. "How cool would it be to still be here in 25 years?" he says.

Perhaps Elkhorn will have multiple Hy-Vee locations by 2035. GCI

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# DISEASE IN A NEW DECADE



THE 2010S ENDED WITH MYRIAD PRESSURES AND ISSUES. WHAT ARE EXPERTS SEEING AND RECOMMENDING AS THE 2020S BEGIN?

By **Ron Furlong**

**F**or many golf courses, 2019 was an interesting year for disease pressure. Continued changes to weather, further restrictions on chemicals and seemingly no lessening of golfer playability expectations made disease control an even bigger issue for golf course superintendents this past year.

Despite technological advances allowing turfgrass managers to control traditional diseases better and more efficiently, those other factors mentioned above have continued to keep disease pressure at the forefront of most superintendents' radar.

We talked with researchers across the country about what they saw.

#### 2019: A REVIEW

Lee Butler is an extension coordinator in entomology and plant pathology at NC State University and his lab receives samples from across

# SEE

the country.

"Overall, the total number of samples we received in 2019 was about 3.25 percent above the 12-year average for our lab," Butler says. "So, actually a pretty typical year. 73 percent of the samples we receive are from golf course superintendents.

"As far as bentgrass samples sent in, it was a typical year where incoming samples spiked rapidly in May and declined sharply by late August. The top three diagnosed diseases were Pythium root rot, anthracnose and Pythium root dysfunction. Pythium root dysfunction bumped summer patch from the podium.

"With Bermudagrass," he adds, "the top three were take-all root rot, leaf and sheath blight (aka mini ring), and a tie for third between spring dead spot and Pythium blight/leaf spot complex. Mini ring was the biggest surprise this year since it hasn't been common in recent years."

We also spoke with Dr. Brandon

Horvath, an assistant professor at the University of Tennessee, about 2019 disease pressure in his region.

"I'd have to say the biggest thing I'm noticing out there – and it's really across the board in this region – is realizing the importance of the Pythium species that cause damage on turf," Horvath says. "Whether we're talking about foliar blight on bentgrass or Bermudagrass, or Pythium root rot, or root dysfunction ... all of these different species of Pythium that cause damage to turf. Either in the roots or on the foliage, I think we're getting a better handle on how to manage those things.

"And," he adds, "I think superintendents are starting to recognize that's it's just not the kind of thing where you can wait until you see a little bit of damage and then go after it. You really have to think ahead of time about what your management plan is going to be."

Horvath also considers the real problem that nematodes are presenting in correlation with disease pressure.

"We know that nematode activity increases the potential for Pythium species to invade root tissue," he says. "The threshold numbers that are published now are really nothing more than a rule of thumb. We don't have a good understanding of the biology and why nematodes feed when they do, and then stop feeding when they do. At this time, we only have a very rough idea, and that's because there's just not that many nematologists studying the problem in depth. But that is starting to change.

A number of pathologists, myself included, are starting to recognize how important this nematode problem is in relation to disease."

Joe Rimelspach and Todd Hicks are from the Turfgrass Pathology Program at Ohio State University. Both agreed that the environment was the leading force for serious disease pressure in 2019.

"The spring and early summer were very wet in Ohio," Rimelspach says, "and then the temperatures became very hot in July and many areas were dry. What we saw as a result was the emergence of two diseases: common leaf spots and dollar spot."

Although these diseases are far from unusual in this part of the country, the conditions of the wet spring and hot summer contributed to even higher disease pressure than normal.

"Leaf spots – the common types (*Bipolaris*, *Drechslera* and *Curvularia*) – were prevalent on many turf situations," Rimelspach says. "Often these leaf spots started in the spring and continued throughout the summer and into the fall. Perennial ryegrasses were especially infected and damaged by these types of leaf spots (though not gray leaf spot).

"Dollar spot," he adds, "was set up by nearly ideal environmental conditions early in the season and persisted over a long period. On high-cut turf like roughs and some fairways, it was the worst I have seen it in years."

Hicks agrees with his partner. "Turf managers in the northeast section of Ohio, who generally do not have a significant battle with dol-

lar spot, found themselves suffering the same long and drawn out battle as the rest of the state," he says.

Rimelspach and Hicks point out that after a terrible 2018 outbreak of gray leaf spot (on perennial ryegrass), 2019 was markedly better. "After the worst year ever in Ohio in 2018, it was very limited in 2019," he says. "In fact, no confirmed cases on golf courses in Ohio."

For an Upper Midwest perspective, we went to Dr. Paul Koch, an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin. Koch also lists dollar spot as the main culprit this past year.

"Dollar spot pressure was our major disease in the Great Lakes region in 2019," he says. "Pressure was moderate for the first part of the summer, but very high in August and September. Fall dollar spot has been increasingly problematic for superintendents. It was quite severe into the fall until cold temps in October finally shut it down."

Gray leaf spot also started causing problems in Koch's region. "Warmer summer temperatures in recent years have allowed this disease to move further north," he says, "and for the first time we detected gray leaf spot in Wisconsin. The farthest north we had observed it prior to this year was Chicago."

Dr. David McCall is an assistant professor at Virginia Tech. He considers 2019 a relatively calm disease year in the mountains of Virginia.

"Temperatures were above average in general," he says, "but we had fairly mild rainfall and it was well-timed when we did receive it. This

## PESTS & DISEASE

► The turf plots at NC State are used to research current and emerging diseases.

resulted in lower disease pressure on cool-season grasses during the summer months. However, it was much warmer than normal later into the fall, so we saw a lot of typical summer diseases in September and October. Our peak dollar spot flush is typically in August, but we didn't see a peak until mid-September. This ultimately goes back to not being able to rely on a calendar to make applications."

Finally, we spoke with a sales representative in the Pacific Northwest to get a feel for what disease pressure was like in that part of the country. Eric Thompson, who works for Simplot, is a former superintendent.

"Unusual, for us in western Washington, was the prevalence of dollar spot," Thompson says. "Summer patch outbreaks were also higher

than usual. The difficult thing with both of these pathogens is the fact that both develop in the spring with true symptoms showing in the summer."

### 2020: A PREVIEW

What advice can experts offer in anticipation of disease in 2020?

In the Midwest, Koch warned about the emergence of gray leaf spot becoming a factor. "While this

disease is not yet widespread in Wisconsin and other Great Lake states, continued warmer and more humid summers may cause it to become more severe and difficult to manage."

McCall wasn't too excited about looking into the crystal ball for disease pressure in the new year. "I don't think we can make too many predictions for 2020 based on what we saw in 2019 alone," he says. "The

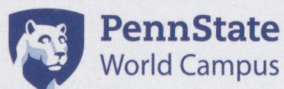


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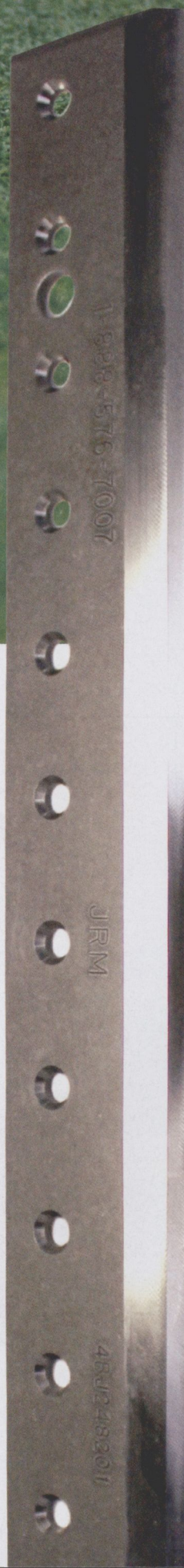
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## PESTS & DISEASE

► Students and researchers study a variety of turfgrass diseases on the plots at Virginia Tech.

disease we will see in the upcoming year will ultimately boil down to what the weather is like at the time. Have a good plan in place going into the season but be open for modifications.”

In the Pacific Northwest, Thompson believes that superintendents, with the relatively new emergence of dollar spot and summer patch, need to now be prepared to deal with these possible visitors. “Careful monitoring of both weather conditions and soil temps can help with the severity of both pathogens,” he says.

Horvath had some advice for all superintendents as we move into the new year: “Ask yourself, What are the bits of information you have to access that tell you about what’s going on at your facility?” he says. “Are you monitoring moisture and recording



it in some way? Are you monitoring soil and air temperatures? Be aware of how much precip you’re getting, and how much irrigation you’re putting down. And then look at all of those things to make an assessment about your environment and how conducive it is for a particular disease.

“Try to make your decisions before you see something happen,” he adds. “And be willing, even if you have a fungicide program in place, to make adjustments as you see changes to

your environment occur.”

Butler agrees with Horvath. “The best thing any superintendent can do is to be aware of the diseases they are most likely to encounter, understand the weather parameters that promote those diseases, and plan their fungicide program for preventive applications instead of basing it on a calendar system,” he says. “Relying on a combination of historical data, current weather data and short-term forecast are the way to go.” GCI

© PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. DAVID MCCALL

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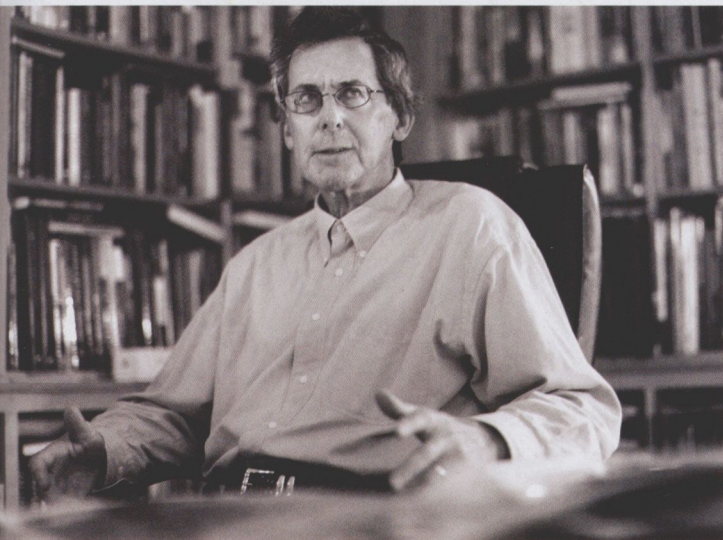
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## INTRODUCING GOLF THERAPY

I've been writing about golf courses for a very long time, and increasingly have come to appreciate the technical skill set, professionalism and collegiality of superintendents. I only wish the golfing public were equally as understanding.

My first golf course writing came in the early 1980s, for the Canadian golf magazine *SCORE*. Since then I have plied my hand in a succession of publications – *Golfweek*, *Superintendent News* (of which I was founding editor in 1999) and more recently, *Golf Channel/GolfAdvisor.com* – along with a wide range of freelance outlets, including *Links Magazine*, *Golf Digest*, *Sports Illustrated*, *USGA Golf Journal*, the *New York Times* and *MET (N.Y.) Golfer*. That's a lot of two-fingered typing. Eight books also followed – all of them explain the way in which maintenance and architecture combined to create the most compelling playing fields in all of sports.

Now with this monthly column in *Golf Course Industry*, I will be highlighting the many ways in which turfgrass professionals adapt their skills to a rapidly changing golf market.

Over the decades, starting in the mid-1980s, I have also spent a lot of time inside the golf business. That has entailed hundreds of site visits, talks with green committees, boards and memberships – as well as working hand in hand with architects to make sure their planning is sustainable over the long haul.

Whether in the form of course reviews, industry updates or extensive consulting with clubs considering master plans or renovations and restorations, I have been continually amazed and disappointed to find out how little of what superintendents actually do on a day-to-day basis ever really filters down to what golfers think about when they play.

At every facility there's a certain breed of self-appointed expert who thinks he knows what is best for the golf course. And too often I've met folks at clubs whose understanding of course conditions extends no further than the far end of a Stimpmeter – a device, as I like to say, whose use seems to be limited to shoving it up the butt of superintendents in an effort to get them to work harder.

Golfers who judge a course in terms solely of green speeds are like those who think that the criteria for greatness in a golf course are limited to length and difficulty. They miss the point of the game's beauty, complexity and emotional engagement and they are all too willing to press their agenda against the best interest of the majority of real golfers. And they do real damage to the morale and career path of superintendents as well.

I figure that about 90 percent of what it takes to make a golf course function well is hidden below the surface in the form of irrigation, drainage, soil composition, water chemistry and root structure. Golfers only see the surface resultant of all those factors. In other words, they see the consequences of the inputs without knowing what went into it. They also rarely see the labor process – the mowing, aeration, seeding and overseeding, raking, watering and drying.

Superintendents also suffer from underexposure. The golf pro has his or her office by the first tee. The first a person a golfer sees before and after a

round is usually someone from the pro shop. The greenkeeper, meanwhile, is housed far away – in at least one case I know of, Peachtree Golf Club in Atlanta, with an office in another area code from the clubhouse.

Superintendents are also, by nature, on the shy side, often reclusive. Most seem to prefer working directly with the land, with machinery and dirt, and with that small coterie of turf colleagues with whom they seem to share a private language. They are not, by nature, gregarious mixers. Nor is their comfort zone a corporate board where everyone else is dressed in jacket, tie and white shirt.

And who can blame superintendents for taking comfort in the world they know best? There's no greater office in the world than the solitude of a golf course as it emerges from early morning darkness into light. For this reason, I often think that superintendents meeting with boards, green committees and municipal boards should have their sessions in the maintenance yard or out on the golf course itself. It's called meeting on your home turf.

All of these traits and characteristics define the unique work life of superintendents. They are not liabilities, merely elements that have to be considered as superintendents plan their careers. In this column I'll take all of this into consideration as I explore ways that turfgrass managers can improve both their lot and the wellbeing of the facility where they ply their trade. **GCI**



**BRADLEY S. KLEIN, PH.D.** (political science), former PGA Tour caddie, is a veteran golf journalist, book author ("*Discovering Donald Ross*," among others) and golf course consultant. Follow him on Twitter (@BradleySKlein).



# SELLING GREEN

**A course owner in an unforgiving market insists customers are seeking one color – and his loyal superintendents are committed to producing it.**

**By Guy Cipriano**

▲ The Witch is one of three Mystical Golf-owned courses returning to wall-to-wall overseeding.

**T**he entrance road to The Witch Golf Club is a bit bumpy and reaching the first tee requires a cart ride over a heavily wooded swamp. The clubhouse and maintenance facility are the lone structures visible during a visitor's trek through the front nine.

The top of the clubhouse protrudes upward. Think ... well ... a witch hat. Unless somebody works on a golf course, they will miss the quick glimpse of a venerable maintenance facility.

Claude Pardue doesn't want customers noticing structures when traversing the property. He prefers they stare straight ahead, instead of left and right. Pardue, the owner and operator of Mystical Golf, a three-course enterprise consisting of Myrtle Beach mainstays The Witch, Man-O-War and The Wizard, shuns buildings along a golf course. "I have never built a house around

a golf course," he says.

On a pleasant mid-November afternoon, Pardue and loyal employees Bill Walton and Roy Holseberg hover on a clubhouse deck overlooking The Witch and conduct a roundtable chat about operating a golf course in Myrtle Beach, where the number of courses has dipped to 90. Mystical Golf once jostled with more than 100 competitors for business.

Walton and Holseberg defer to Pardue throughout the conversation, their attentive eyes drifting to overseeded turf, towering trees, Dan Maples-designed bunkers and enthusiastic golfers. Their candid boss explains the reason behind the aesthetics he expects the pair to produce. "Honestly, we give the customer what the customer wants,"

Pardue says, “not what we want to give them.”

Golfers who visit Myrtle Beach, especially during the busy stretch from mid-February to mid-May, when courses fetch triple-digit green fees, seek green turf, Pardue adds. Providing green requires slightly more fall hustle at The Witch — where Holseberg, a Mystical Golf employee since 2004, serves as superintendent — than at its sister courses. In addition to overseeding Bermudagrass fairways and tees with ryegrass, The Witch’s Tifdwarf greens are overseeded with *Poa trivialis*.

“We don’t believe in painting greens,” Pardue says. “Have you ever seen a green that was painted that is anything?” Later in the discussion, Pardue returns to the subject of painting greens. A few years ago, with the golf market staggering, painting generated significant curiosity throughout the Southeast. Pardue visited a few courses in the Carolinas implementing the practice. The tour, along with a few unseasonably cold winters, confirmed his disdain for painting Bermudagrass greens.

“I have never painted and never will paint,” he says. “I don’t get it. Have you ever seen a painted green that was pretty? I have never seen a painted green that looked worth a crap. So, no, I don’t paint. I think you might as well leave them brown.

Brown, at least, looks natural.”

An agronomic plan designed to get the Man-O-War and The Wizard greens to pop from mid-February to mid-May requires less deliberation. The courses are part of decaying Myrtle Beach stock. Man-O-War and The Wizard supported bentgrass greens when they opened in 1996 and superintendent Walton, a 20-year Mystical Golf employee, and team still maintain the variety despite the southern shift to ultradwarf Bermudagrass putting surfaces. Maybe it’s experience — or maybe it’s humble grit — but nurturing bentgrass greens in Myrtle Beach doesn’t fluster Walton, whose two-course crew includes 22 employees. “It’s all about routine and personnel,” Walton says. “You need everybody tuned in to what they are going to do ... how much water to put out and how fast to go.”

Overseeding fairways and tees represents a part of the fall routine at all three courses, although the process included a twist to prepare for this year’s money season: Mystical Golf also opted to overseed the rough on both courses. More than 300 acres were overseeded across the three courses.

“Just from working out around golfers,” Holseberg says, “we have come to know they want green grass. A couple of years ago, we experimented with leaving the rough

dormant and just overseeding tees, fairways and greens. Talking with some golfers who come back every year, they didn’t really like that too much. They like to see green grass. They come down South, they want to see green grass, and that’s what we are giving them.”

Mystical Golf executed annual wall-to-wall overseeds on all three courses until the Great Recession battered the Myrtle Beach market. In 1998, the heyday of Myrtle Beach golf, The Witch, Man-O-War and The Wizard each attracted more than 60,000 rounds, with packed tee sheets Wednesday-Sunday. “If you didn’t get something done by 9 o’clock,” says Walton, describing maintenance mornings during the boom years, “it wouldn’t get done until much later in the day.” The courses now average slightly more than 40,000 rounds per year. Pardue has seen enough positive signs in recent years to believe an enhanced product can increase play and revenue.

“I’d love to get them back up to 45,000 rounds each, which is what we are shooting for and one reason we are going back to overseeding everything with ryegrass and marketing it,” he says. “I don’t know if I would ever want to — I guess financially I would — get it back to 60,000 rounds, because it was tough to get out there and mow.”

Even in a less bustling golf era, executing work around play remains tricky. Pardue avoids closing courses for maintenance purposes — “We don’t take away any tee times,” he firmly says — leaving crews to perform the bulk of the overseed at night. Strong fall winds present overseed challenges, but Holseberg says Myrtle Beach gusts are tamer at night. While Walton’s team must maintain bentgrass greens in the summer, Holseberg’s crew encounters challenges with the transition from overseeded to Bermudagrass greens. The transition, fortunately, **continues on page 64**

◀ Mystical Golf superintendents Roy Holseberg (The Witch) and Bill Walton (Man-O-War and The Wizard).





# THE HIGH COST OF NOT INVESTING IN SAFETY

How much could you lose without proper training. Safety savant **Mickey McCord** breaks down the numbers.

talk to a lot of superintendents about safety programs and safety training, and they all say their crew's safety is important to them, they genuinely care about their staff, and they don't want anyone to get hurt on the job. But sometimes there is a disconnect between what you believe and how you act. Even if you know it's the right thing to do and you've decided you want to start or improve your safety training program, if the person controlling the funding in your organization won't approve the cost of getting started, what can you do?

When many golf courses are struggling to keep the doors open, it can be very tough to justify any expenditure that is not already "in the budget." So how do you convince your general manager — or whoever is making the financial decisions — that investing in a safety program is worth the cost?

"When improving safety for the merit of just having a safer workplace is not enough, it's often a very powerful argument with leadership to help explain the cost of safety by showing the economic benefits of safety," says Ken Kolosh, manager of statistics at the National Safety Council. In other words, you've got to speak their language — the language of money management.

Return on investment (ROI) and cost benefit analysis (CBA) are common tools businesses use when making decisions about resource allocation. There are many theories and formulas for determining ROI or running a CBA, but you don't have to have an MBA to put these numbers together. Knowledge of the costs to start and run the program and the costs associated with injuries are all you need to be able to make a convincing case.

Here are some approximate costs to start a safety program, based on an average crew size of 10:

**SAFETY TRAINING MATERIALS:** Most of the information you need to put together an effective safety training program is publicly available on the internet and in print media. If you are starting a new program, you might decide it makes more sense to buy training materials rather than spending your time sifting through a lot of published materials, including federal

and state policies and industry or association guidelines and recommendations. Streaming safety videos offers convenient, on-demand access. We recommend investing in a flat-screen TV, signage and possibly hiring a consultant to help with your training. Most insurance companies have resources to help you implement a safety program, so be sure to confer with your

club management about how your costs can be deferred. This approach ranges in cost from **about \$1,000 to more than \$5,000**.

**LOST LABOR:** There is a cost in lost labor dollars if your crew is sitting in a safety training session rather than mowing, setting up the golf course, raking bunkers or any of the other jobs you've budgeted labor hours for. Assuming a 10-person crew, average pay of \$15 per hour, and about 45 minutes per month on safety training, your annual cost can be calculated at **about \$1,350 per year**.

$\$15/\text{hour} \times .75 \text{ hours/month} = \$11.25 \text{ per crew member/month}$ , 10 crew members = \$112.50/month, \$112.50/month  $\times$  12 months = **\$1,350/year**

**PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE):** You are probably already spending money on PPE and may have it in your budget. Assuming a crew size of 10, your annual costs may look something like this:

Hearing protection: 2 cases (1,100 ear plugs)	\$200
Safety glasses: 25 @ \$15	\$375
Respirators: 2 @ \$35	\$70
Gloves: 25 pairs @ \$8	\$200
Spray suits: 2 cases of 20	\$200
Work boots: 14 @ \$100	\$1,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,445</b>

Combining the safety training materials cost, lost labor cost and PPE cost, your total cost is approximately \$3,795 to \$7,795.

Once you have established the cost of your safety program, you need to determine the benefits of the program to complete the comparison.

The benefits of implementing an employee health and safety program include increased employee morale and retention, higher productivity, and reduced accidents and possible litigation associated with employee injuries. You may be stuck wondering how to assign a value to these benefits. One way is to look at the potential cost of an accident and recognize any reduction in those costs as a financial gain – or income – attributed to the safety program.

**COSTS OF A WORKPLACE ACCIDENT:** The National Council on Compensation Insurance (NCCI) manages the nation's largest database of workers compensation insurance information. Using data, including direct and indirect costs, they have determined the average cost of lost time and workers compensation insurance claims, for the following common injuries:

- Amputation: \$186,881
- Contusion: \$58,071
- Concussion: \$109,452
- Heat prostration: \$53,589
- Sprain: \$64,675

If we use these as representative of the types of injuries commonly suffered by golf course maintenance workers, the average cost of a typical injury can be estimated at \$94,533.

One last piece of information is necessary to make our comparison: How does the investment in safety training affect workplace accidents?

Many studies show a significant decrease in workplace accidents when a company implements a safety program. Here are a few examples:

- Insurance Offices of America clients reduced the number of workplace accidents by 28 percent, after using an online safety training program for just one year. (1)
- A study of smaller employers in Ohio who worked with OSHA's SHARP program to adopt safety management principles found: (2)
  - 52 percent decrease in workers' compensation claims
  - 80 percent decrease in cost per claim
  - 87 percent decrease in average lost time per claim
- An OSHA review of the literature on the effectiveness of safety programs found companies can reduce injuries by 15 to 35 percent, compared to employers without these programs. (3)

Based on these and other studies, it is reasonable to expect your safety program to result in a 25 percent reduction in workplace accidents and injuries. If a typical workplace injury costs \$94,533, the resulting savings or benefit would be **\$23,633**.

Now you have the information you need to complete your ROI equation:  $\text{ROI} = (\text{net benefits}/\text{total costs})$ .

Cost to implement a safety program = about \$3,800 to \$7,800. Let's use **\$6,000** as an average.

Benefit/Savings from safety program = **\$23,633**  
 $(\$23,633 - \$6,000) \div \$6,000 = +2.9$ , or an almost 300 percent return on the investment.

Including an ROI like this with your request to start a safety program provides a compelling argument that it's not only the right thing to do, but also a smart business decision.

If your manager is still not convinced, do a Google search for "workplace accident jury settlements." You will find pages of cases with multimillion-dollar awards for injured employees. After a thorough analysis of the numbers, the real question isn't "can we afford to implement a safety program?" but "can we afford NOT to?" **GCI**

*Mickey McCord, a former superintendent, is the owner of McCord Golf Services and Safety.*

(1) <https://www.ioausa.com/risk-management-solutions/>

(2) [https://www.bmw.org/cms/file/02152016\\_160833\\_SHPM.pdf](https://www.bmw.org/cms/file/02152016_160833_SHPM.pdf)

(3) <https://www.osha.gov/dsg/topics/safetyhealth/OSHAwhite-paper-january2012sm.pdf>

## TRAVELS WITH TERRY

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.

### FRONT BUMPER PROTECTION

**E**xcellent fabricated front bumper cowling protection for Toro 2100 and MDX Turf Vehicles that do not come equipped with one. 1½-inch by 3-foot round steel tubing bent into shape on the vehicle's front end using a Harbor Freight tubing bender (\$100). 2-inch by 3-inch rectangular steel tubing welded into an angled "L" pattern, where 3 feet of tubing is needed with 1 foot making the leg of the "L" and 2 feet comprising the vertical portion. A 1½-inch hole was drilled through the top center of the "L" to accommodate the 1½-inch cross bar. The bar was then slid through the hole and welded into place. The bumper and frame were painted with black epoxy paint with blue-colored plastic end caps placed over the tubing before mounting. The entire bumper was then slid into the forward 2-inch by 2-inch existing receiver hitch, secured in place with a ¾-inch bolt and Nyloc nut. It took about 1½ hours of labor time and cost about \$30 for materials for each bumper. Michael J. Valiant, CGCS, director of agronomy, and Robert "Skip" Rose, equipment manager at the Glenwild Golf Club and Spa in Park City, Utah, like to modify equipment to make it better.



### SUN PROTECTION

**2**018 John Deere 2500E Triplex Greens Mower, with 11 blade cutting units with smooth rollers, mows excellent quality Pure Distinction and T-1 creeping bentgrass sod farm. The recycled top is from a 2002 E-Z-Go Freedom Electric Golf Cart to protect the operators from the hot sun. 1-inch homemade square tubing is bolted to the front mower frame and top with additional wind protection when the golf cart windshield is used. The rear of the top has two bolt holes on either side where hose clamps are threaded through and clamped onto the ROPS. Minimal costs and labor time with recycled parts and supplies. 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, do everything right.



**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](mailto:terrybuchen@earthlink.net).

*continued from page 45*

## CONTINUITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Kyle Lake, who has been selected as an intern for 2020, will be joining the clubs from Michigan State University, where he is in his first year of the two-year Golf Turf Management program. He found the internship on Twitter, applied and quickly accepted an offer. Every year, Hegland and Kalina rotate the responsibility of sourcing interns. This year, it's Hegland's turn.

Like Hegland and Kalina, Lake loves to golf and is interested in course architecture, so working at Sand Hills and Ballyneal is attractive. Lake is not concerned with the remote environment. He was raised in a small town on Michigan's Upper Peninsula and he wants to be a hands-on manager like Hegland and Kalina. Lake knows they are "working superintendents – they are out there with you." They are also laid back and Lake wants to "learn to manage different crews and focus on playability," so the internship is a great fit.

Kalina and Hegland gratefully work on the highly regarded properties, but they also want to see people find a position at whatever course is right for them, regardless of its rank. To be marketable, Hegland stresses developing strong people skills.

"In 10 years, communication is going to be the most critical skill," he says. "You must effectively and passionately share your plan. Say what you need to say in 30 seconds or less."

As an assistant, you can hide, but you have to communicate well as a superintendent. Hegland and Kalina work on communication with their interns by asking specific questions at lunch or discussing a selected topic. Everyone participates. Debate is encouraged and appreciated to create clear perspective and understanding of any issue and to evolve best practices.

Kalina believes in knowing who

## INTERNSHIP

SKILLS → DEVELOPMENT → PERSONAL GROWTH → TRAINING → SKILLS

### Other two-for-one internships

With fierce competition for applicants and the process starting earlier each year, is your internship attracting the candidates you want? Does your internship structure garner attention, offer something unique and provide candidates with the best experience possible? Here are two more examples of programs that offer something a little different.

**Trinity Forest Golf Club/ Baltimore Orioles** (contact Kasey Kauff/Nicole Sherry)  
Work a PGA event in May and then join the Orioles groundskeeping staff for a summer maintaining the baseball field. Care for zoysiagrass, Bermudagrass, and Kentucky Bluegrass during a six-month internship while also learning about the business side of turf management.

**Bent Tree Country Club/FC Dallas** (contact Blake Cain)  
Learn about golf course and soccer pitch setup and the responsibilities involved with both operations. Free housing is included for this 90-day internship. The facilities are located just 15 miles apart, making it easy to reach both places to learn about grow-in lights, heavy machinery, irrigation projects and more.

you are. "There are a lot of concerned moms that come to check out our town when they drop off their kids," he says. "It's a little different – it just is. And it takes someone a little different to enjoy living in a very small town. We have been able to get kids who are really, really interested. We aren't concerned with too much else." And it's working.

With Sand Hills and Ballyneal sharing exceptional designs, remote locations, considerate members, strong leaders and a laid-back atmosphere, interns are in the best position to focus on learning about

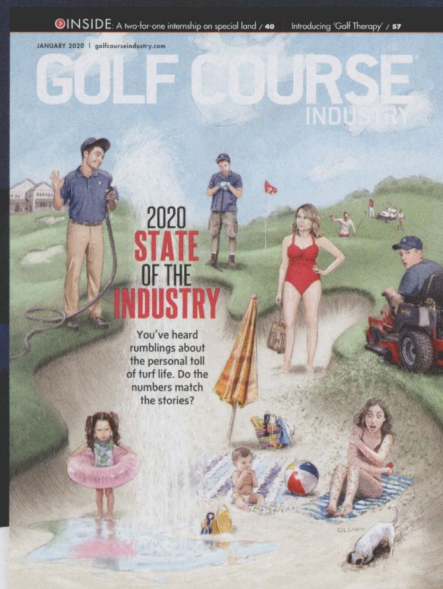
different maintenance tactics, management dynamics and a minimalist approach.

"It was a fantastic internship," Worscheck says. "I want to stress that Kyle and Jared are great leaders in the turf industry. They are a gold mine of information and they are willing to share everything with people who are willing to learn from them."

That's how family acts, and it's a powerful example of what an internship can be. **GCI**

*Lee Carr is an Ohio-based writer and a frequent Golf Course Industry contributor.*

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## SPOTLIGHT

*continued from page 59*

begins in late spring, when money season customers are playing golf near their northern homes.

Overseeding, transition, Bermudagrass and bentgrass have become familiar terms to Walton and Hulseberg's boss.

Pardue purchased his first golf course in Southern Pines, North Carolina, in 1984, and became enthralled with Myrtle Beach in the late 1980s, because he says the business acumen of Grand Strand course operators surpassed what he observed elsewhere. Pardue brought his lead agronomist, Andy Apple, from Southern Pines to Myrtle Beach and Apple ascended to a managerial position as Mystical Golf's director of golf course maintenance. Hulseberg's and Walton's roles expanded following

Apple's retirement. Lengthy stints working for Pardue — whose self-proclaimed passion is business, not golf — has increased Hulseberg's and Walton's awareness of Myrtle Beach golfonomics.

"They do a very good job of understanding the business side," Pardue says. "Roy and Bill understand that we make \$140 in green fees at the end of March and only \$36 in green fees at the end of July. All I have to do in July is give somebody a better experience than \$36. In April, I have to give them something better than \$140. It's very important that they understand the goals of our golf course so they can meet those goals and move around those goals." GCI

*Guy Cipriano is Golf Course Industry's editor.*

9<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL



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## SHAKE IT OFF

**T**aylor Swift was honored as “Artist of the Decade” by the American Music Awards late last year. It seems like only yesterday a young Taylor was introducing herself to the world along with her acoustic guitar, Tim McGraw and Faith Hill. Whether or not you like her or her music, she has swiftly grown into an iconic and influential pop artist.

Last year was incredible. I swear I packed a decade’s worth of experience into one year, both professionally and personally. It started with a trip to the United Kingdom and a chance to play the Old Course at St. Andrews and an opportunity to speak before my peers at the BIGGA Turf Management Exposition. Following the overseas trip, I received another speaking opportunity at the Golf Industry Show in sunny San Diego. Life was good.

Weather-wise, the rain never stopped last winter and life at the course was getting depressing. There really isn’t much worse than saturated, dormant Bermudagrass. Throw in the departures of three rising, young turf students, and suddenly our numbers were thin.

As the weather started to break and spring arrived, I was batting .000 for new hires. Then, the unthinkable happened. I lost a dear team member April 3 to a sudden heart attack. My assistant found him on the course, called 911 and initiated CPR. I was alerted and immediately vacated a meeting with the green committee to arrive on the scene, as did the paramedics. I’ve never seen a group of individuals work so hard to save someone’s life, but it was to no avail.

Most of the team, along with former employees, club members and our general manager attended the funeral for Cleother Young, Jr. Having both past employees and members from the

club in attendance really made the event special. We were so short-handed at that time, so there was nothing to do but work. We didn’t have time to mourn because we were so far behind.

I finally made a new hire on April 25. Four days later, I attended the Carolinas Golf Hall of Fame ceremony in Pinehurst to see Bob Farren, CGCS, become only the second golf course superintendent to be inducted, joining George Thompson, CGCS. *Donald Ross is also a member of the hall, but he wasn’t inducted for his greenkeeping skills.* And I traveled to our nation’s capital to participate in National Golf Day. I thought maybe the tide was turning.

Since 2011, I’ve managed my own blog page, The Greenkeeper ([www.carolinagreenkeeper.blogspot.com](http://www.carolinagreenkeeper.blogspot.com)), and prior to that I wrote monthly newsletter columns to keep club members informed about the course. Whether it’s explaining how the weather impacts course conditions, describing projects or just giving a heads up about agronomic practices and their potential disruptions, it’s a great way to get the word out. I have even sprinkled in the occasional personal item, whether it’s industry involvement and travels, or personal golf items of interest.

I honestly didn’t know there were folks who might view a blog page as excuses and pats on the back, but I do now. When I learned of this, I didn’t flinch. In fact, I felt nothing at all. Then, my assistant left,

granted with my blessing, because the opportunity was too good to pass up. And I’m proud of him. I promoted Eric to senior assistant, which is another story of grit and perseverance. But I digress.

I hired two additional young assistants and we refocused our efforts to attract and recruit more help. We had one dry month, May, and then the summer thunderstorms kept finding their way to us. We had more than 18.5 inches of rainfall from June through August, including five inches in one week! Hot and wet is not ideal for growing bentgrass in the Transition Zone.

The rain then stopped. For 50 consecutive days, nary a drop fell in the region and the heat cranked to even higher levels, topping out at 99 degrees on Oct. 2. Yes, Oct. 2. I wrapped up the year in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, passing the Carolinas GCSA presidential gavel to good friend Brian Stiehler, CGCS, MG. I’ve continued to support my team and provide them the environment to be successful.

Anyone who thinks they are going to please everyone at their golf facility every single day is kidding themselves. There is way too much beyond our control, plus this old saying: “You can please some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can’t please all of the people all of the time.” So, what sage advice do I have for you in 2020? It’s simple, just keep doing what you know is right and shake it off! **GCI**



**MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG**, is the superintendent at Carolina Golf Club in Charlotte, North Carolina and past president of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on Twitter @CGCGreenkeeper.



To Do

Monday - Topdress Greens  
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Tuesday - Write GCI Column

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Matthew,

Congratulations on your new role with Golf Course Industry. You and I have known each other for 25 plus years. We both have come a long way since our upbringing in small Southwest Virginia towns and graduation from Virginia Tech. I look forward to being able to read your column each month, as I am sure it will be filled with heartfelt comments and delivered with your passion and energy for the turfgrass industry.

Best of Luck!

GO HOKIES - Sam Green

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