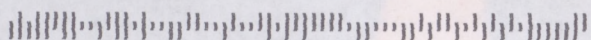


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A cross-country journey taken in imperfect circumstances provides an intimate glimpse at golf's place as a safe and unique recreational activity.

## DRIVING THROUGH



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# SUPPORT LOCAL GOLF COURSES

A business in your community likely needs help. There's a good chance a pleasant family providing jobs for neighbors oversees the finances and operations.

Some states are permitting these businesses to operate under strict restrictions this spring. Other states are forbidding customers from entering the premises but allowing a small team of determined people to maintain a multimillion-dollar asset covering large acreage.

The revenue they receive comes in a variety of forms: individuals seeking solitude, families, friends, competitors, after-work leagues and sizable gatherings scheduled months in advance. The latter two represent projectable revenue. Not even the brightest industry minds can now project what tomorrow will bring for these businesses.

Think of the times you have been urged to support a local business over the past two months. Think of the times you acted on that urge. The family-owned pizza place gets your business once a week. You still ordered a Mother's Day or a just-because gift from a local jeweler or florist, either online or via phone.

But what about your local golf course? If you live in a state where elected officials are permitting golf, have you played 18, or even 9, at a course likely suffering because leagues can't linger for a post-round drink or two and gatherings are being canceled?

You work in golf. Your dedication makes it a better game and business. Most of you, though, struggle to find the time or a reason to play more golf. We last asked about your golf habits in our 2016 State of the Industry survey. Only 41 percent of you play at least once per month.

The amount of time and effort you put into the job is a big barrier to playing more golf. That barrier will not be lifted this spring or summer. Away from work, your life might be different. The kids' organized activities are on pause. Your favorite team isn't playing. Your vacation could become a staycation.

Just maybe disruptions stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic are providing additional recreational hours. Just maybe those hours can be devoted to something you have been putting off for years ... such as playing more golf.

A golf course might be one of the few places you can take your children or meet your buddies as summer approaches. A golf course is safe and soothing. Spacing is easy on a golf course. Have you ever walked off a course and mumbled, "I wish I had stayed home?" Probably not. But have you stayed home and mumbled, "I should play more golf?"

Try playing somewhere different this spring and summer. Sure, you might have access to where you work, or maybe an industry contact is willing to secure you a tee time at an A-list private club. But supporting the golf economy in tricky times involves spending \$20 to walk 9 at a local public course. Your business will be appreciated. Your mind will feel better.

Municipal courses are subsidized; dues and initiation fees sustain private courses. Those two segments account for 6,223 of America's 14,613 golf facilities, according to the National Golf Foundation's 2019 Golf Facilities in the U.S. report. That means 8,390 courses fall under the "daily fee" category. Small businesses dominate this sector and help make the golf industry unique. Small businesses in nearly every industry are collecting fewer fees this spring.

Golf courses, like other small businesses, are community assets. Small acts of support can help the pleasant people who own and operate one close to your home endure the hardships of an unpleasant spring.

Think and act locally within your own industry. You might rediscover the joys of a healthy activity while boosting a business that needs support. **GCI**



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## GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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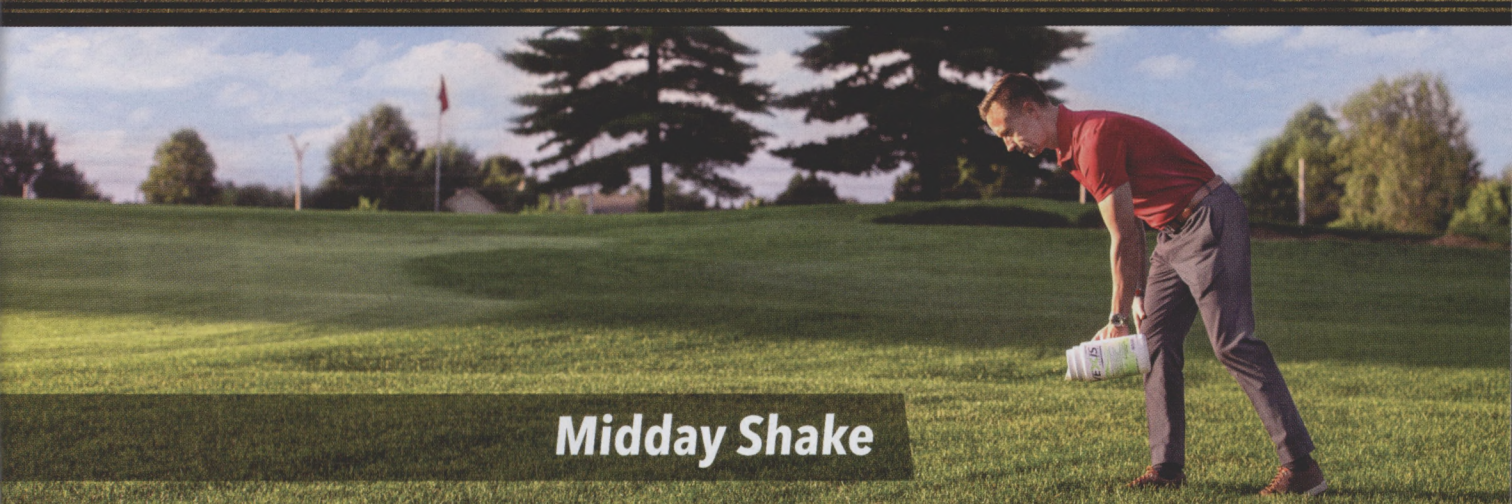
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# NOTEBOOK

## INDUSTRY COMPANIES, ASSOCIATIONS RAMP UP COVID-19 RELIEF EFFORTS

**J**ohn Deere, in collaboration with the UAW, the Iowa Department of Homeland Security and the Illinois Manufacturers' Association, is producing protective face shields at John Deere Seeding Group in Moline, Illinois. John Deere will initially produce 25,000 face shields to meet the immediate needs of health care workers in several of its U.S. manufacturing communities. Materials and supplies are on order to produce an additional 200,000 face shields. The company is using an open-source design from the University of Wisconsin-Madison for the project and leveraging expertise, skills and innovation of its employee base.

Toro is giving \$500,000 to assist families and communities worldwide that have been affected by the pandemic. Grant funding from the Toro Foundation will span all regions where Toro operates and will focus on providing food, health and humanitarian assistance to helping people adversely impacted. The contributions include com-



mitments to several global nonprofits that are assisting in the relief efforts, including the American Red Cross and the International Committee of the Red Cross, Feeding America, the World Food Program, the United Way Worldwide and United Way organizations in communities where Toro employees live and work.

The PGA of America pledged \$5 million and will match the first \$2.5 million of third-party donations to the Golf Emergency Relief Fund, established to provide short-term financial assistance to golf industry workers. The fund is supported by the GCSAA, PGA Tour, LPGA, USGA, NGCOA and the Association of Golf Merchandisers. Grants for basic needs will be distributed in two phases, first-come, first-served, with the first and quicker phase capped at \$500 for immediate help and the second phase capped at \$3,500.

The USGA has established an emergency relief fund for its 59 Allied Golf Association members with an investment of up to \$5 million. The funding will come in the form of grants to help ensure business continuity and staffing levels during this time of hardship. Individual AGAs may apply for as much as \$100,000 and additional financial assistance will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The application process will continue through the summer as needed.



## Tartan Talks No. 46

Sounds can be soothing in uncertain times, especially when they are filled with perspective shaped from decades in golf.

**Jan Bel Jan and Forrest Richardson** joined the Tartan Talks podcast to describe the adjustments that golf course architects must make in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Speaking from their respective home offices – Bel Jan lives in Jupiter, Florida, Richardson resides in Phoenix – the pair remained upbeat about their ability to serve clients despite disruptions caused by the pandemic. “All of our clients understand this won’t last forever,” Bel Jan says.



▲ Bel Jan



▲ Richardson

Richardson extolled the mental and physical benefits of golf throughout the podcast. “Golf has been a constant for 500 years to be a sanctuary where people can go and have fun and recreate,” he says. “And those values are things that we need to carry forward.”

Bel Jan and Richardson also shared tactical advice. Bel Jan, a registered landscape architect and certified arborist, described how to handle landscape areas and trees during periods of minimal maintenance. Richardson, who has represented the golf industry at numerous political gatherings, explained how to make the case for golf to lawmakers.

Instead of one extended podcast, we posted the episode in two parts. Enter [bit.ly/BelJanPart1](https://bit.ly/BelJanPart1) and [bit.ly/Richardson-Part2](https://bit.ly/Richardson-Part2) into your web browser to hear the conversations.



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# PLANNING FOR A CRISIS

**O**n March 4, 2015, a single-engine, World War II-era training plane crashed onto the Penmar Golf Course in Venice, California, shortly after takeoff from a nearby airport. The pilot, who sustained only minor injuries, was none other than Indiana Jones, aka Harrison Ford.

Coverage of the plane's crash and its famous pilot was extensive in local Southern California markets and across entertainment and mainstream media. A *New York Times* story the next day quoted spokespeople for the Los Angeles Police Department, the LA Fire Department and the Federal Aviation Administration – but not from the Penmar Golf Course. Public relations professionals would call that an opportunity squandered.

What if Indiana Jones landed on your golf course ... or your data system was breached and hundreds of members' credit card numbers were exposed or, heaven forbid, an employee died after being infected with COVID-19? Are you ready to deal with major media opportunities and crises professionally and in a way that, depending on the event, either enhances or protects the club's and the course's reputation and brand?

We like to say that you can't predict a crisis, but you can – and definitely *should* – plan for one. The same goes for an opportunity to shine your brand. Here are four important steps to do both:

**1. Designate a spokesperson.** Everyone on staff – especially at the management level – should know who has the authority to speak to media regarding these types of events. Usually there is only one person with this authority. Consolidating official comments and responses through one spokesperson – ideally

someone with media training – keeps messaging consistent, reduces the likelihood of inaccurate information being disseminated and clarifies sources for media. Everyone at the course and around the club should know to direct all media inquiries to the appointed spokesperson.

**2. Establish communications protocols.** The media react and report on their schedule, not yours. That means that you should have an established protocol that identifies and prioritizes what must be done, when it should be done and by whom. Having anticipated the media's needs – including their first and most logical questions and the steps you're taking to respond – puts you in control of the situation and keeps you from playing defense as the story unfolds. Other protocols include:

- Knowing which emergency responders should be notified. (Keep their contact information handy and updated.)
- Knowing who will notify the course owner, club president and board members.
- Knowing who will notify staff and what they will be told. (All employees must be notified of dangerous on-the-job conditions.)

**3. Prepare for the unexpected.** Plan your work and work your plan. Knowing that unforeseen events always seem obvious in retrospect, develop an after-action perspective to anticipate circumstances that

could arise:

- Request that your insurance provider conduct a risk assessment of the course, clubhouse and all club amenities. Conduct *what-if* evaluations with experienced professionals whose advice can be incorporated into your plans.
- Request a site review and evaluation from police and firefighters to anticipate problems that can be prevented or lessened.
- Assign key managers at your facility regular check-up actions to mitigate risks identified by the experts.

**4. Inform and educate staff.** Knowing what to do is critical. That's why the military calls it training. Assume direct responsibility for training your team; do not delegate this important duty. When you thoroughly educate team members, they'll understand that this is a mission-critical topic.

- Conduct department training meetings. Put the collective knowledge and intelligence of your team to work by asking line-level staff to identify any threats or risks.
- Rehearse the unexpected. Stage situational training during off-season or slow periods to help your team focus on preparedness.

What are the odds of Harrison Ford dropping unannounced onto your golf course? Or of a cyberattack or COVID-19 victim at your club? Not good, right? But is that a bet you want to take? **GCI**



**HENRY DELOZIER** is a partner at GGA Partners, trusted advisors and thought leaders. He is currently Chairman of the Board of Directors of Audubon International.



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## IN A CRISIS, COMMUNICATE

As the COVID-19 pandemic has proved, there's a big difference between real "news" and people just talking. Noise and distractions can blur what's important. As a result, critical information can get lost in a sea of chatter. Chances are, none of this comes as a surprise to you. But these are still key points to remember when you are called upon to communicate, whether about COVID-19 or anything else.

Cluttered, confusing messages to your staff or golfers will inhibit forward progress. With so much new information coming every day, it's crucial that you improve your communications methods: Your job should be to present the facts, clearly and completely, with an eye toward achieving the desired action or outcome.

COVID-19 is an example of our tendency to over-obsess about what we see on the news. It's also a good, if unfortunate, example that troubled times demand succinct, swift and coherent communication to our members, customers, clients and bosses.

What lessons did you take from the pandemic? How did you spend your time sheltering at home? Were you glued to the TV set wondering if your golf course would re-open? Or did you craft a revival plan as well as a meaningful message explaining what will need to be done? Here's what I learned:

### LESSON NO. 1: KEEP IT SIMPLE, KEEP IT REAL

At times like these, it's essential that you communicate efficiently and truthfully. Especially when people are being bombarded with endless and contradictory messages. To get your points across:

- No fluff. Don't over-explain, sugar-coat, or make jokes.
- Useless information wastes everyone's time, especially yours.

- Regular updates are important, but not too many. Don't talk just to hear yourself.
- Be honest: If labor is the issue, explain why your crew can't get to every little detail.

### LESSON NO. 2: TIMING IS EVERYTHING

- If the information is irrelevant by the time you're ready to use it, it's too late.
- If you have a long-range message regarding on-course activities to be conveyed over several months, daily updates are useless and a distraction.
- Do not waste time – yours and your members'. If you have something worthwhile to share, great; otherwise, keep quiet and do your job.
- Repeating the same message will annoy your audience. You'll be seen as the guy crying "the sky is falling" and you'll be ignored.

### LESSON NO. 3: AVOID HYPOTHETICALS

Don't say what *could be* rather than what is known to be true.

- Predictions are just that, and they will come back to hurt you. Bet on it.
- Assumptions and guesses can turn out to be wrong, even when there's some science behind them. Case in point? Weather forecasts.
- Be careful of confirmation bias, believing something to be true, then bending everything else to fit that belief.

Communicating during a crisis takes extra discipline and leadership. Natural disasters, stock market dives and other disease

outbreaks are learning experiences. And there's nothing wrong with admitting that you are learning just like everyone else. All the more reason to make your points clearly and get things done as you prepare for whatever comes next.

Whenever and however you are communicating, keep the following in mind:

**Have a goal.** Before you say or write anything, know what you want your audience to do with the information. Is action required, or are you trying to inform, educate or update?

#### What's the best way?

Should your message be written, appear on social media, be a video or photo? Will face-to-face work best? Make sure the medium fits the message.

**Be organized.** Start by creating an outline that includes your goal, main points and how you can illustrate them. Follow this plan and avoid "scope creep." Be the one who stands firm when the world is shaky.

**Be Persuasive.** Use facts, though tough times do often call for appealing to your emotion. (Just don't overdo it.)

**Less is More.** Be concise. Don't waste time with tidbits, repeated information or overly complicated scientific details.

**Keep it Simple.** Don't be a scientist. Use visuals to make or enhance your points.

**Listen. Good communication is a two-way street.** If you don't give your audience the chance to engage – and then listen to them – you won't connect. Encourage their feedback, listen to what they're saying, and address their concerns. **GCi**



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## #PartnersforPerformance: Annual bluegrass weevil control

Insects are difficult to spot at Winged Foot Golf Club because of a sophisticated agronomic program. When they are noticed, co-workers buzz Vincent Taylor's radio.

Entering his fifth season as an assistant superintendent at the club, Taylor brings entomological thinking to daily maintenance. "I'm a big bug guy," he says. "I quiz all the interns and show them the bugs. Any time somebody has a bug, they will find me and ask me what it is."

Taylor's numerous responsibilities include monitoring *Poa annua* playing surfaces for annual bluegrass weevil activity. No pest has potential to cause more damage to low-cut turf in the New York City Metropolitan area than ABW. Damage caused by the pest was first observed in 1931 and legendary UMass turf entomologist Dr. Pat Vittum spent four decades monitoring its activities at Winged Foot until her retirement in 2016.

"ABW and anthracnose are our two No. 1 potential problems on *Poa*," Winged Foot director of golf courses Stephen Rabideau says. "When I first got here, we were always calling Pat and she would help us. She loves Winged Foot. She's wealth of knowledge. It's a hard insect. It's a nightmare. It's crazy."

Winged Foot's tradition as an epicenter for ABW research continues with its participation as a monitoring site in Syngenta's WeevilTrak program, which alerts superintendents of activity. Beginning in March, Taylor performs soapy flushes for counting purposes on a small fairway sward and tracks Growing Degree Day numbers behind a green. He then inputs numbers into a spreadsheet and sends it to independent turfgrass consultant Steve McDonald. Data from Winged Foot and 31 other WeevilTrak monitoring sites help superintendents determine insecticide application timing.

"We know how important (WeevilTrak) is for the people in the area who might not have the budget that we do or don't have the resources that we have," Winged Foot U.S. Open superintendent Weston Neff says. "It's awesome to help others out."

Comprehensive scouting and a calculated spray program, including applications of Ference and Provaunt insecticide, limit ABW damage at Winged Foot.

"We empower Vinny with WeevilTrak," Rabideau says. "He gets everything to Steve (McDonald) and Steve shows us how to scout



▲ Tracking Growing Degree Days is part of the data collection process at Winged Foot Golf Club.

for it. And thankfully we have some good chemistry for controlling it. It's our No. 1 issue, but it's gotten better. Ference is a great chemistry and it's been the biggest addition to our program. We're counting for ABW, but you have to nail it."

Winged Foot's new turf care facility includes a designated area for pest and disease research. One of Taylor's favorite instruments — a microscope — rests behind a table built into the wall.

"I love working here," says Taylor, whose parents own, operate

and maintain a par-3 golf course in Bloomington, Indiana. "We're never complacent and that's what we have to learn as young superintendents and assistant superintendents. You can't go home at 2 o'clock every day and expect the golf course to be the quality that we give the members."

To learn more about ABW activity or to sign up for alerts or read the blog, visit [WeevilTrak.com](http://WeevilTrak.com) or follow the conversation on social media with #WeevilTrak.



▲ Left and middle: Winged Foot West Course assistant superintendent Vincent Taylor conducts soapy flushes in an effort to monitor ABW activity on *Poa annua* playing surfaces. Right: Video resources and scouting tips are available at [WeevilTrak.com](http://WeevilTrak.com).







# DRIVING THROUGH

A cross-country journey taken in imperfect circumstances provides an intimate glimpse at golf's place as a safe and unique recreational activity.

By **Guy Cipriano**

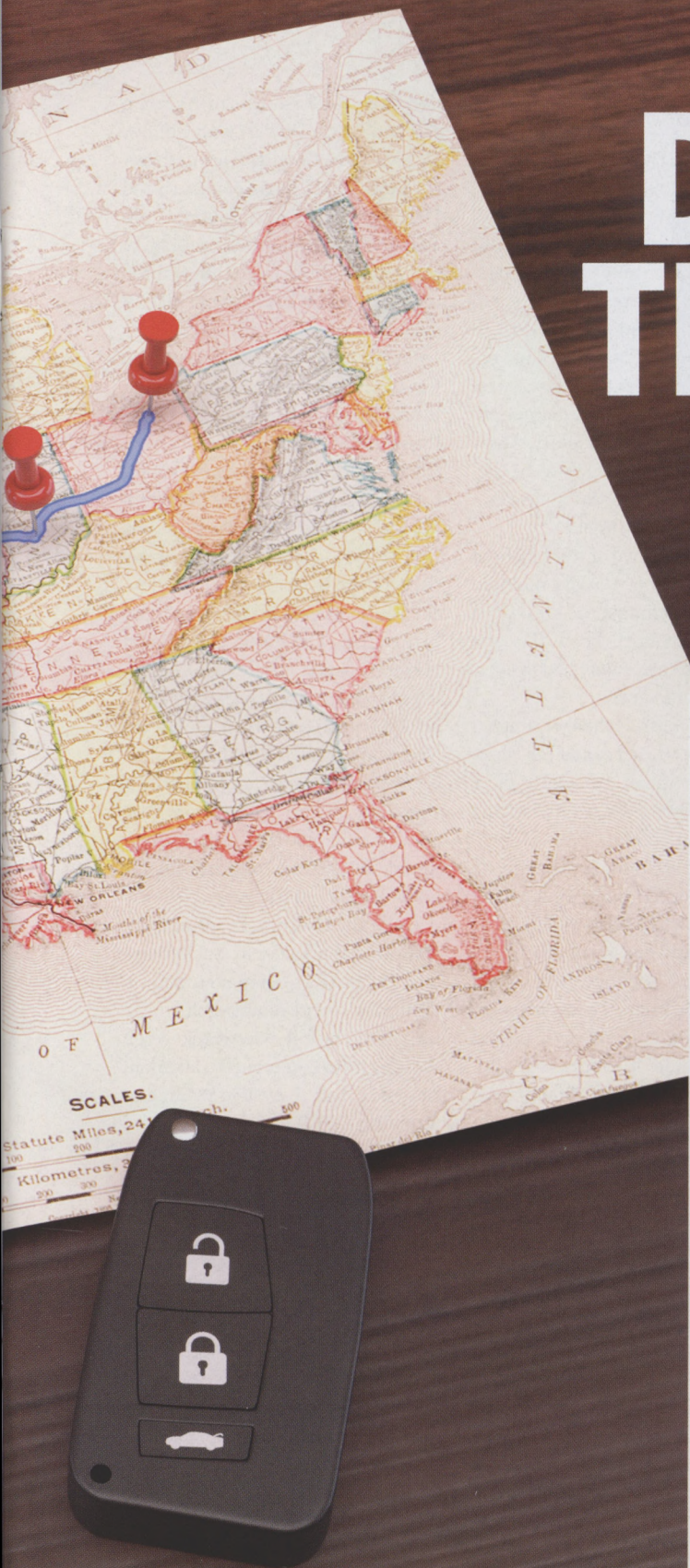
*"You ask me why I'm a hobo and why I sleep in the ditch. It's not because I'm lazy, no, I just don't want to be rich."*

— Carson Robison & His Pioneers,  
Hill Billy Medley, 1932

A large part of the country has stalled, yet the truckers and stragglers traveling Interstate 40 between Kingman and Flagstaff accelerate beneath the dark northern Arizona sky.

Empty ditches ... and gulches ... and washes ... and rivers ... are plentiful along the highway. Darkness separates eyes from geographic splendor. I am fortunate to be one of the stragglers, especially knowing a suite secured by redeeming points awaits in a nearly empty and modern Flagstaff hotel. I don't learn until the following morning that the suite has a view of snow-covered Humphreys Peak, the highest point in Arizona at 12,635 feet.

On the first night of April, to begin a month filled with unknowns, I consider myself something neither I nor Carson Robison aspired to become — rich. Robison sings the first of many medleys I consume on local radio during an unplanned, five-day, four-night, safety-induced, cross-country journey. Few stations resemble 100.9 KWLP-FM, an entity owned and operated by The Hualapai Nation emanating from Peach Springs, Arizona, population 1,090. Two days later, though, I discover 106.1 KTGX-FM, "The Twister," a Tulsa, Oklahoma-based station playing country tunes released 88







▲ Editor Guy Cipriano walked 18 holes at Rustic Canyon on March 17, two days before California's shelter-in-place order was issued.

years after Robison & His Pioneers traveled to the United Kingdom to record their medley.

The reason I'm listening to random songs and podcasts in random places involves a trip featuring a gigantic twist. I flew to Southern California on Tuesday, March 17 to see my sister, brother-in-law, niece and nephew for the first time in 13 months. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified in California – and elsewhere – early in a scheduled week in the isolated High Desert community of Ridgecrest. One week in the desert led to two as offices everywhere, including the one responsible for publishing this magazine, adapted to remote work models.

Staying an extra week allowed me to build a three-hole Lego golf course and play backyard golf on Bermudagrass with a pair of children being raised in a town where the only golf option sits behind the gates of a U.S. Navy research and development installation. I watched my niece turn 7 and foolishly tried sumitting a slippery 8,451-peak alone the following day. I also observed my sister and brother-in-law juggle full-time jobs with taming a 4-year-old boy and home-schooling a first-grader missing her classmates and teachers. The extended time in their home gave a new 40-year-old without children a glimpse at the anxieties facing millions of families.

After two memorable weeks, a

tricky decision had to be made. I live and work in Northeast Ohio, three time zones and more than 2,300 miles from Ridgecrest. Flying required a return to Los Angeles and potential close contact with numerous other travelers. Driving required a significant time commitment.

Fly or dive? Drive or fly? I labored over the decision. I asked multiple confidants, including the kids, what they thought. But I knew this was solely my call and safety had to override all other factors.

You lose control when you enter a major city, return a rental car, shuttle to the terminal, check bags, clear security and board a plane. Driving was the safer option.

So, at 12:21 p.m. local time on Tuesday, April 1, I slipped a pair of suitcases and a bag of golf clubs into the back of a silver Nissan Pathfinder and waved goodbye to my West Coast family. I wiped a few tears beneath my left eye and cued up the second episode of a multi-part podcast series about Alister MacKenzie. With yellow wildflowers blooming in a desert on my left and the towering peaks of the Sierra Nevadas on my right, I developed a singular focus: Can I make it to Arizona in time to find an open golf course?

Yes, I played golf on the drive home. Plenty of it.

Sometimes I felt guilty about it. But I only played alone. I only played 9 holes at each stop. I thoroughly washed my hands immediately after debit-card transactions. I only took a cart once and that was to squeeze a third nine into a dreary drive through Missouri. I never touched a flagstick or course accessories.

I discovered Cerbat Cliffs and Hid-

den Cove Golf Course in Arizona; Bill and Payne Stewart Golf Course, Oak Meadow Country Club and Pevelly Farms Golf Club in Missouri; and Hartley Hills Country Club in Indiana. Each course offered a sense of place and serenity, two things missing from many lives as COVID-19 curves escalated.

Earlier in the trip, before I realized I would be driving home, I walked 18 holes with a pair of strangers at packed Rustic Canyon, a trendy and bouncy Gil Hanse-designed course in suburban Los Angeles. That was on March 17. I also walked 9 holes at Trona Golf Course, a rugged, sand-fairway course outside Death Valley National Park, on March 23. Between those two rounds, California Gov. Gavin Newsom issued a statewide shelter-in-place order. A red coachwhip slithering beneath sagebrush represented the only other sign of life at Trona Golf Course, where a family membership costs \$85 per year, visitors drop \$5 into an honor box to begin their round, and average July and August highs exceed 100 degrees.

Once the iNaturalist community identified the snake as nonvenomous, my fears of being stranded on California's most remote golf course subsided. The following week, when the long drive commenced, I demonstrated no fear. I avoided reading or watching COVID-19 news. I flipped the radio station upon any mention of the virus. Somehow, I made it through Oklahoma without hearing Hanson, Garth Brooks or Blake Shelton – or any mention of COVID-19. Somehow, I made it through Oklahoma without playing golf either, because even crazy golfers seek warm ditches – or at least warm car seats – when spring wind speeds are higher than the temperature.

Drive. Arrive. Pay. Sanitize. Play. Sanitize. Drive a few hundred miles more.

I never felt safer than experiencing the joys of random golf courses on a random trip.





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APRIL 1

RIDGECREST, CALIFORNIA TO  
FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA

432 miles

Here's something else I avoided: keeping score. When you keep score, you should play the same tees every hole. When you don't keep score, you can play the forward or back tees on any hole, allowing you to save time or enjoy a spectacular view.

At Rustic Canyon, still wobbling from the flight into Los Angeles, I added 76 yards of challenge by playing the 14th hole, a long par 4 that can be shortened by carrying an environmentally sensitive area hugging the left side, from the blue tee. My ball landed in a waste bunker between the ESA and fairway. I stumbled to make, um, yeah, an eight on the hole. The locals in my group then suggested we play the par-4 16th from the back tee. Totally worth it. The view is 240 feet above the lowest point on the course and provides encompassing views of a thought-provoking course designed between canyons.

So, 15 days later, I ascended to the back tee on the fifth hole at Cerbat Cliffs. Carved into a terra cotta plateau, the elevated tee begins a 384-hole playing parallel to I-40 in northern Arizona. Trucks outnumbered passenger vehicles. Down in the fairway, around the 150-yard marker, a sign for Exit 51 entices drivers with logos for a half-dozen restaurant chains. Kingman, population 29,742 and growing, represented the largest city I had entered since leaving Moorpark, California, home of Rustic Canyon.

Established as a railroad town in

1882 and a popular stop along Historic Route 66, remnants of the old West and signs of Sun Belt progress converge in Kingman. Cerbat Cliffs symbolizes the city's transition. Golf was first played on sand greens in Kingman beginning in the 1920s, a 9-hole course supporting turf arrived in the 1970s and the current 18-hole course opened in the 1990s. The front nine features holes flanked by red cliffs and mesas, slender Mediterranean cypress, and par 3s over water and between rocks.

The sun was setting as I foamed out (welcome to non-contact golf) on the ninth hole. A trip-long theme emerged as I walked off the green. I didn't want the experience to end. Common sense prevailed over golf sense. I still had a 150-mile drive to Flagstaff. I made one more stop before returning to I-40. Kingman supports an In-N-Out Burger and the drive-thru was just five cars deep.

Order. Pay. Grab two cheeseburgers and a chocolate shake. Sanitize. Park. Eat.

I felt rich. Golf and gluttony costs just \$23.06 in Kingman. The Old West still exists.

APRIL 2

FLAGSTAFF, ARIZONA, TO  
AMARILLO, TEXAS

608 miles

Grand Canyon National Park: CLOSED.

Walnut Canyon National Monument: CLOSED.

Meteor Crater National Monument: CLOSED.

Petrified Forest National Park: CLOSED.

Let's begin revealing the awe-

someness of Hidden Cove Golf Course.

Arizona is perceived as a golf-rich state with terrific November-April weather. That's true if you live in, own a second home near or frequently visit the Phoenix-Scottsdale-Mesa and Tucson metropolitan areas. The two markets combine to support 4,779 of the state's 6,057 golf holes, according to the National Golf Foundation's 2019 Golf Facilities in the U.S. report.

Well, Arizona covers 113,988 square miles, meaning golf can be as tough to find as fresh water throughout most of the arid state. Only one golf option exists within five miles of I-40 between Flagstaff and the New Mexico border.

Hidden Cove possessed everything I sought: proximity to the interstate, distance from other humans, routing promoting brisk play, value and a sense of place that can't be replicated. The City of Holbrook, population 5,093, which "began as a town of railroaders and cattlemen, outlaws and rugged lawmen," according to its website, owns and operates the 9-hole course. A cattle guard separates a paved, red-dusted road from the gravel parking lot. The modest maintenance area occupies the same lot as customers.

I entered the barren lot at 10 a.m. I didn't want to bother a pair of employees mowing playing surfaces, so I knocked on the door of the two-level clubhouse. Silence. I knocked again. More silence. I turned the knob and noticed a locked box: *PLEASE PLACE FEES IN THE BOX*. A whiteboard describing course policies listed the rates at \$10 for 9 holes, \$20 for 18. I stuffed a \$20 into an envelope and stared at words I have never seen prominently displayed in a pro shop: *Remember: Gopher snakes eat gophers!! Please Don't kill them*. The same whiteboard reminds members to pay their \$30 monthly dues at city hall and lists a number to schedule a tour of Hopi



## RUMBLINGS FROM THE ROAD



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

Want the audio version of the story? Editor Guy Cipriano and managing editor Matt LaWell recorded Superintendent Radio Network episodes each night of the cross-country trip. Episodes can be downloaded via Apple Podcasts, Google Play, Spotify and numerous other platforms. You can also enter [bit.ly/SRNPpodcasts](http://bit.ly/SRNPpodcasts) into your web browser to visit our rapidly expanding podcast library.





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27 degrees. Winds exceeded 20 mph, which I later learn, are tame for the Great Plains. If the Amarillo Convention and Visitor Council were open, I'm envisioning somebody with an affable drawl urging me to, "Come back and see us when the gusts get to 40."

I simply wanted to warm the interior of the SUV to 40 degrees. I endured a 12-minute thaw cycle, sipping coffee and moping. You can still play golf using safe practices in many places during a global pan-

demic. You can't play golf when the ground is frozen.

A sense of urgency yielded to nomadic behavior. I drove into downtown Amarillo and walked around Hodgetown, a Minor League Baseball stadium that officially opened for play 359 days earlier. The occupants are called the Sod Poodles. Anybody in the golf business likes sod and prairie dogs seem cool. If the team shop were open, I'm envisioning myself dropping \$73 on Sod Poodles swag.

I drove 146 miles through howling winds and desolate, flat landscape to Elk City, Oklahoma. The bulk of my travel diet consisted of apple and strawberry Nutri-Grain bars, clementines, fruit snacks, peanut butter-filled pretzels, water and coffee. I noticed a billboard for a BBQ joint as I approached Elk City and placed my lone carry-out order of the trip. I devoured "Brisket N' Bird" with fried okra and a side salad while staring at a bronze elk.

I needed to exercise and found plenty of space in downtown Oklahoma City. I ran past empty buildings, including the 925-foot Dev-

on Energy Center, at 2 p.m. on a Friday. I was one of two people running along a canal in the trendy Bricktown district. I stopped at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, site of the horrific 1995 bombing. Before the government built a formal memorial, a chain-link fence protected the site and visitors left messages and mementos for the deceased on it. A chain-link fence still stands outside the memorial and visitors continue paying unsolicited tribute to the victims. Wind

▲ Cerbat Cliffs borders Interstate 40 in northern Arizona.

◀ Oak Meadow Country Club is the only 18-hole course in Rolla, Missouri.



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## COVER STORY

wasn't the only reason for eye moisture on this run.

Only 106 miles separate Oklahoma City and Tulsa, the state's second-largest city. Hopes of a twilight nine faded on Interstate 44. I spent a Friday evening running along the Arkansas River and through downtown Tulsa streets. No traffic, happy hours or baseball games. No golf weather on this day.

### APRIL 4

SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI TO  
BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

439 miles

While hiking a section of the Pacific Crest Trail in Southern California's rugged Owens Peak Wilderness, I listened to a TalkinGolf History podcast episode featuring Kevin Robbins, the author of "The Last Stand of Payne Stewart." The conversation added context to the life and behavior of Stewart, a two-time major champion who died in a 1999 plane crash.

Undecided if golf could be played on a dreary and damp Saturday morning two weeks later in the Ozarks, I searched for a golf course near my fourth different bed in four nights. The name of the closest course solidified the decision to play.

A life-sized cutout of the Springfield-born Stewart holding a Top-Flite bag and

wearing a Miami Dolphins shirt with aqua knickers greets customers in the Bill & Payne Stewart Golf Course pro shop. Even more than 20 years after his death, Stewart's personality – and wardrobe – fascinate. Whenever the PGA Tour resumes, it needs a Stewart-like figure to emerge.

My wardrobe proved boring. I donned black rain gear and clutched coffee as I marched down the first fairway. I had something every golfer should experience in front of me: an empty Perry and Press Maxwell-designed course. Unlike some of the Maxwell's other designs, including Southern Hills, a Tulsa course I nearly drove past the previous evening out of curiosity, the Bill & Payne Stewart Golf Course is open to all. The Springfield-Greene County Park Board owns and operates the course, along with three others, including one named after Horton Smith, the winner of the first and third Masters.

I had never played a Maxwell creation and the morning became magical on the second hole, a lengthy par 5 with just the right amount of elevation change and directional slurve. The coffee had served its warming purpose and it was apparent most of the Maxwell routing, which opened in 1947 as Grandview Municipi-

## TRIP METRICS

Days: 5

Nights: 4

Miles traveled: 2,372

States entered: 9

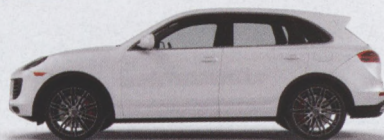
Holes played: 54

Total spent on golf: \$110.38

Lowest price paid for gas: \$1.09 in Elk City, Oklahoma

Highest price paid for gas: \$2.86 in Ridgecrest, California

Handicap after the trip: No score kept!



© ENVATO



pal, had been preserved. The color contrast offered by dormant and delightfully playable Bermudagrass fairways added to the charm. I desperately wanted to spend nine more holes with the Stewarts and Maxwells. But I glanced at the pro shop and waved goodbye to the Stewart cutout.

Needing to walk after ordering a cheeseburger and a salted caramel malt from a rural Missouri drive-thru, I stopped for nine at Oak Meadow Country Club, a 62-year-old semi-private course between Springfield and St. Louis. Walking Oak Meadow's hilly zoysiagrass fairways negated the midday gluttony.

Oak Meadow is the only 18-hole golf course in Rolla, population 20,293, and I marveled at the civic boosterism. Local businesses sponsored flags, tee markers and course signage. Names are carved into benches. The club's social calendar is listed on a sign attached to the front of the clubhouse. The second and third holes are par 3s with forced carries over the same lake. An engraved brick honors the lake's designer, Bill Bray, and urges golfers to "remember him fondly as your ball disappears." I carried the lake on the second hole and cursed Bray on the third.

I only had nice things to say to myself about Oak Meadow and Rolla as I proceeded to St. Louis. By that point, the weather reached the mid-40s and, perhaps, I thought, I could squeeze in another nine.

Enter Pevely Farms Golf Club.

The sprawling suburban St. Louis course didn't mesh

with my previous golf experiences. The Arthur Hill design opened in the late 1990s, when course owners/developers were devoting hundreds of acres to a single course. I pulled into the parking lot shortly after 5 p.m. and a dozen other vehicles occupied spaces. I didn't want to be *that Guy* who kept employees waiting for the last golfer to clear the course, so I decided to break a trip rule and take a cart. The decision proved wise as the course meanders across a former dairy-show farm. The neighborhood surrounding the course boasts gaudy, modern homes.

The front nine had variety and views of varied surroundings, including farmland beyond the sixth green. Despite the cart, the nine took 1 hour, 33 minutes to traverse, the longest round of the day. I returned the cart to a pair of enthusiastic young workers. They asked a few questions about my trip, but we kept the conversation brief. They had the ultra-important task of sanitizing carts; I had more than 250 miles to my next stop.

The Show Me State showed me plenty of terrific Transition Zone turf.

#### APRIL 5

BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA TO  
MIDDLEBURG HEIGHTS, OHIO

#### 350 miles

I skipped the most efficient route home and spent Saturday night and Sunday morning in Bloomington, home to Indiana University, where I studied four years to become, well, somebody who wrote about golf for a living. A 2002 graduate, I hadn't been on campus since covering a foot-

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## SAFE SIGHTS

Golf courses took immediate measures to limit touchpoints and gathering spots while continuing to provide safe recreation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven of the nine states I entered on my cross-country drive last month – California, Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Indiana and Ohio – had open courses.

Every course I played adapted the cup to prevent touching. The tactics differed from course to course and included:

- Foam placed at the bottom of the cup with the flagstick remaining in
- Upside-down cups with the flagstick remaining in
- Upside-down cups with a 4-inch section of a flagstick wrapped in fluorescent orange tape
- Raised cups and no flags

Bunker rakes and ballwashers were removed from every course I visited. Some courses removed trash cans.

Hand sanitizer was provided inside pro shops and restrooms. One course limited the number of people inside the pro shop at any given time to six. Longer intervals between tee times were common, although I played the bulk of my golf on poor weather days or at remote courses. One course used an honor box for cash transactions.

Carts were limited to one passenger. I saw an unusual, yet understandable, scene at one course: four carts with one passenger each parked adjacent to a tee. Carts were immediately washed and sanitized following rounds.

Food and beverage were only available via takeout. Modified policies in response to COVID-19 were prominently placed on doors, course signage and first tees. Multiple courses closed all practice facilities.

Family, friends, co-workers and industry contacts have asked repeatedly whether I felt safe playing golf and driving across the country during a pandemic. The response is swift and decisive: I came within 10 feet of more people during my first sidewalk run upon returning to my Northeast Ohio home than I did during the entire trip.

– Guy Cipriano



ball game involving Penn State and Indiana in 2007.

The first weekend of April should be filled with activity on a college campus, especially a large one celebrating its bicentennial. Instead, I spotted eight people during a two-hour Sunday morning run past where I once lived, worked, studied and recreated. The campus, for the most part, looked the same as I remembered with a major exception – the golf course has been improved. Officials set May 1 as the official opening of The Pfau Course at Indiana University. A new course and clubhouse were constructed on the same site as the old course. The project cost \$12 million. Some donor is very rich.

I pulled into the empty parking lot and wondered whether a self-guided tour of a public university's golf course can be considered trespassing. I resisted temptation and vowed to walk the nearly 8,000-yard course in a formal capacity by 2033.

Seeking an authentic and legal Indiana golf experience, I pulled into the parking lot of three courses between Bloomington and the Ohio border. The sun, an object I hadn't seen since New Mexico, emerged and all three courses appeared too busy for a quick solo nine. Finally, less than 25 miles from the Ohio border, I discovered the Heartland version of what I experienced at Hidden Cove.

Hartley Hills is a 9-hole course in Hagerstown, Indiana, home to 2,000 "Happy People," according to the sign on East Main Street. Hoosier-born architect Bill Diddel, a mentor to Hoosier-honed golf legend Pete Dye, designed Hartley Hills in 1928. The first four holes are hilly for central Indiana. A farm borders the flatter fifth and sixth holes. Views of grain silos rest beyond the eighth green. The ninth hole plays back to a clubhouse serving as the rural community's social hub.

Hartley Hills matters to Hagerstown. You can find advertisements for 18 main-street businesses on the scorecard. The official population has dwindled below 1,700, yet residents continue supporting their course.

The final approach shot of the trip missed the ninth green to the left. I noticed the same man who greeted me when I arrived sanitizing carts. I thanked him for his work and asked him to thank the superintendent for providing a product that helped shorten a long drive. He grinned and responded, "I am the superintendent."

The superintendent and pro and mechanic are the same person at Hartley Hills. I spent the next 45 minutes chatting with Bret Etchison, who charged me \$6 to walk nine and provided hand sanitizer when I arrived. We stood eight feet apart. His hospitality and ingenuity made a hobo heading home feel rich for having the safety of golf to keep him company. GCI

Guy Cipriano is Golf Course Industry's editor.





## HOW TO GET THROUGH THE NEXT FEW MONTHS

No matter where your course is located, the next few months are going to be demanding. As I write this in late April, about half of all United States courses are open for play. That number is likely to increase steadily by the end of spring.

The ability to reopen the economy locally or nationally will depend upon the development of a three-stage public health program that starts with comprehensive testing, includes antibody testing and monitoring, and ultimately produces a vaccine. Anything less than that and the reboot will be partial at best.

We're in it for the long haul. For superintendents, this will be a very trying time. Instead of thinking of it as the most difficult you have faced, consider it the most important. If you adjust and innovate, this should also be the most rewarding time of your career. Here are 10 things to do to help you adapt.

- 1** Get involved in facility finances, not just in budgeting your own department. That means learning about food and beverage budgets, dues, initiation fees and capital investment.
- 2** The smart clubs will not simply slash but use this time to rethink their entire operations. Moving forward will require some creative thinking about distance spacing in the restaurant and bar, and whether it really pays to rely on offering full-service sit-down meals that traditionally lose money on every cover served. Many facilities are discovering the value of take-out service: low labor costs, less food spoilage, more camaraderie among appreciative golfers and community residents. We are going to see a big shift in how facili-

ties structure their F&B.

**3** The same goes for dues. The smart clubs won't just slash fees because of cutbacks in clubhouse services. We'll see more creative financing of initiation fees. Clubs should also resist simple dues cutbacks and rely instead on rolling over a percentage of the monthly fees as credit for continued membership next year. That creates more of a sense of ownership in the club rather than a transactional, customer bargaining relationship with your members.

**4** Superintendents also need to plan for a new range of responsibilities. Who is going to police "social distancing" among golfers or cart use and traffic? All facilities will need to develop policies and protocols for handling these issues – scripted responses by staff, delineation of responsibility and hierarchies of authority for making tough calls. Superintendents need to be a part of that conversation because they and their staff will be on the frontline of any monitoring.

**5** For superintendents with smaller crews because of furloughs, make sure you communicate to your staff about what their concerns are and what their opportunities are for advancement. Encourage them to develop new skill sets and to become familiar with different machinery. Don't be afraid to learn from them. Make sure they understand the importance of the new morning rituals of sanitizing – and that they understand the need to protect each other as well as golfers.

**6** Leave some blank space on the whiteboard every morning.

Decide every day what you are not going to do. Golfers grateful to be playing at all will accept less than pristine conditions. Single cut the greens instead of double cut and roll. Rake bunkers every other day. Let the rough grow a little. Get used to less than perfect. It's going to be part of the new normal anyway.

**7** Use your newfound free time to reconnect with former colleagues, old professors, turf professionals you admire and friends you have not spent enough time with. The paycheck here is so-rich both emotionally and vocationally.

**8.** Keep in touch with former employees who have been let go. Let those you want back know you want them back. Given the generosity of the federal unemployment benefits supplement in many states, some of them will be making more now than they did when they were working. That won't last. Make sure you stay in their plans.

**9** Make use of educational resources. Spend time with what's being offered by the GCSAA, CMAA, USGA Green Section and various turf and facility consultants. Encourage your staff to participate. Include decision makers at your facility, whether they are board or green committee members or folks sitting on the municipal golf committee.

**10** This is a great time to get away from the facility. There's less pressure to perform and a lot more time and need to be home. Sure, your golf course needs you. But your family needs you more. And you need them more. **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).





## How to let it grow when fewer people are around to mow

**Washington superintendent Ron Furlong shares guidance from his own experiences and chats with industry experts about keeping turf healthy in a spring filled with unprecedented challenges.**

**W**hen I attended college almost 30 years ago, I don't remember any classes on how to manage a golf course without any golfers. And something tells me this type of class has not been added in the last three decades. My point? There is no rulebook for where we currently find ourselves. This is definitely uncharted territory.

As of late April, there are different situations across the country

regarding golf courses being open, closed, or open and restricted. I live in Washington, where golf courses were closed but minimal maintenance permitted.

Like everyone else managing a golf course in 2020, I have no experience with how to maintain turfgrass without golfers (or a significant reduction in golfers) or without the normal amount of money we're used to having in our budgets. This year's budget, for the most part, has been chucked out the window.

Less money to spend means a lot of things for golf course superintendents. Two big things have jumped out in our operation: significantly reduced labor hours and fewer dollars to spend on plant protectants.

I reached out to a few experts for some direction on how we can all proceed with turfgrass maintenance through this unique time in our lives.

"Everybody's in a different boat right now," says Matt Giese, a technical services representative for Syngenta. "I just talked to a superintendent who had to lay off his entire crew, so it's just him, alone, managing over 100 acres of turf, and this is just as he is coming into the peak growing season. I consider the mowing of golf course turfgrass an essential activity, so when you have a skeleton crew or it's just you, it's extremely challenging. When you have 35 to 40 acres of fairway turf alone, how do you it?"

Plant growth regulators are the first tool that occurred to me for superintendents in this situation. Giese agrees and says PGRs can not only



reduce mowing maintenance on greens, tees and fairways, but also rough and surrounds.

Along with a solid PGR plan, raising mowing heights can help superintendents endure staffing shortages. "It is the simplest thing a super can do to reduce the turf's growth rate, reduce stress and increase the plant's natural ability to compete against pest pressures," PBI-Gordon product manager Jim Goodrich says.

I also asked Goodrich if he thought plant health concessions will have to be made because of the obvious economic troubles many golf courses are dealing with through this period.

"I don't believe health concessions will need to be made," he says. "But I do think the approach to turfgrass management will have to be adjusted as the result of less play and less stress on the turf. Supers really need to utilize the fact that we have less golfers present to implement some cultural strategies that may have been prohibitive due to golfer expectations. Reduce mowing frequency, increase rolling frequency and increase verticutting frequency. Look at cultural practices you can do this time of year that normally would be next to impossible to accomplish in-season."

Although money might be tight for maintenance departments this spring, University of Wisconsin professor Dr. Doug Soldat agrees it's important to not neglect fertility needs.

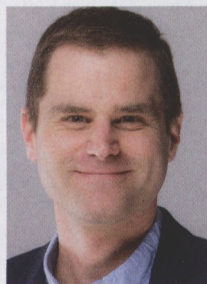
"From over a decade of doing fertilizer trials," he says, "I can tell you that low-cost products like urea and ammonium sulfate are two of the best products on the market, and they happen to be two of the lowest cost



▲ Giese



▲ Goodrich



▲ Soldat

products. This might be a good time to reevaluate your fertilizer sources. But it's not a good time to think about making plant health concessions related to fertilizer use."

I asked Soldat if he had any other advice for superintendents during this unique time.

"I think the primary function of a golf course superintendent is to grow grass at the right rate," he says. "That hasn't changed this spring. And there is an art to doing that. Regularly monitoring clipping yield from greens can help you achieve the right growth rate. Your fertilizer and PGR programs both alter grass growth in different directions. Sometimes it makes sense to be putting

down PGRs and nitrogen simultaneously, but if your growth rate is out of whack, you should be focusing on only one of those products."

Giese agrees that superintendents should be putting a little extra thought into their PGR program this season.

"I'm recommending, in various areas, to do kind of a myriad or a buffet of PGR options," he says. "Growing degree days is a way a lot of supers manage PGRs already. But even taking that to a different level this season is something to explore."

"Let's take Primo use as an example in

cool-season turf management. You're probably getting about 20 percent growth suppression range, and if you're looking at a certain interval, I think it's around a 200 growing degree day interval. You can actually do what we call stacking, which is where you come in and make an application, then when you've reached half of that growing degree day threshold come back with another application. That way you accumulate some of that PGR in the plant, and if you start with 20 percent, and then you've stacked another 20 percent on top of that it gives you about 40 percent suppression and you suddenly have the ability to have a little bit longer residual growth suppression rather than just hanging on to that original growing degree day interval."

Goodrich summarizes golf course management in 2020 this way: "Let's face it," he says, "no one is playing golf right now to improve their game. Anyone playing (if you can play) is doing so to get outside for self-care and to soak in some sun for that essential Vitamin D, as well as taking care of themselves mentally." **GCI**

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





# SPACE COAST SAVIORS

By Matt LaWell



IN THE SHADOW OF KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, A TALENTED TRIO AND NEW OWNERSHIP HAVE HELPED REVIVE LA CITA COUNTRY CLUB.

**T**he irrigation system is 38 years old. The greens are 10 years old. The thousands of trees scattered around the course provide so much shade that even with the most aggressive watering schedules, large patches of turf remain brown for months. The director of golf just wants to be able to drive home at the end of the day without some new problem popping up. The superintendent returned from a six-year sabbatical filled with teaching yoga and finding waves. The clubhouse manager is a former underwater welder who lives on the property and is so dedicated that the owner refers to him as “the coordinator of everything.” The owner, for the record, was dispatched by the bank to shut down



the course with a single signature.

Instead, she fell in love with the place and purchased it herself.

Welcome to La Cita Country Club in Titusville, Florida, where the Kennedy Space Center still drives the economy and the course is so packed with potential that calling it a rocket is not unfounded. After years of neglect, the right stewards for its revival have gravitated toward the Space Coast, first fixing up the clubhouse and now the course. They are almost two years into what they say will be probably a five-year turnaround. It has not and will not be easy, but it is far better than the alternative.

Unlike so many other courses across the country, up and down the state, even around the city, La Cita never shut down — saved instead by fate, or dumb luck, or love at first sight.

Back in the 1990s and early 2000s, during the height of the course development boom, La Cita was “almost perfect.” Those are the words of Brant Craddock, today the director of golf and back then a club professional who played rounds all over Florida.

“It was a really, really good golf course that was in really, really good shape year-round,” he says. “My buddies and I would make a point to play here at least a couple times during the summer. You knew the greens were going to be perfect, you knew the ball was going to sit in the fairway perfect, you didn’t have to roll it, you didn’t have to touch it.”

The club was still private then, packed with more than 1,000 members, about a third of them there for golf. That number dwindled from the hundreds to the dozens as the Ron Garl and Lee Trevino design withered under years of neglect—to the point where Craddock says the course was “unplayable” from 2014 to 2016. “The goosegrass and the tropical signalgrass weren’t mowed hardly at all,” he says. “Balls were lost in the middle of fairways, balls



were lost off the edges of greens, balls were lost in approaches and fringes.” Craddock was working at Walkabout Golf Club, about 11 miles north on Interstate 95 and today redubbed Indian River Preserve Golf Club, and he “wanted to see it with my own eyes.” He played nine holes. “It wasn’t being maintained,” he says. “It was basically an abandoned golf course.”

Craddock arrived at La Cita in June 2018, lured by the challenge of the revival. He knew what the course had been and what it could be, and he had good ideas about how to bring it back.

But first he needed a superintendent.

“The superintendent that was here, he quit the day before I started,” Craddock says. “So, I walked into no superintendent.”

He posted the opening and immediately received a resume and an email from a familiar name: Jason Gross, who had worked with Craddock at Walkabout from 2002

through 2005 before heading out for a renovation project at another area course. Gross had walked away from the industry in 2012 — the club where he worked no longer had “the money in the budget anymore for a superintendent,” he says, and opted to run maintenance as a family. Gross and his girlfriend already operated a yoga studio. He decided that night to shift gears and focus on yoga and surfing. The industry itch returned, as it almost always does, after six years.

“I think I was just ready to get back out and do something again,” says Gross, who received a call from Craddock almost immediately. He toured the club that weekend — showing up with a ponytail halfway down his back, “still yoga-ed out” — and every time Craddock asked him, “You sure you want to do this?” he responded with an emphatic “yes.” He started two weeks later, in the middle of July. The first aerification in who knows how long followed by Aug. 1, along

▲ The 10-year-old Champion Bermudagrass greens were so spongy that mowers would sink in and scalp the turf.



## SPOTLIGHT

► Designed by Ron Garl and Lee Trevino, the course at La Cita was neglected for years before Vivian Zumot Dumond purchased it in December 2017.

with topdressing every month.

"The greens were spongy," Gross says. "We would walk on the greens and turn around and see the imprint of our feet. We ended up having to set the mower at a higher height of cut because it was sinking into the turf and would scalp it. There was no power to the irrigation on the whole front nine when we got here. The assistant was spending her whole day, every day, just trying to turn water on to water fairways, tees, greens. There were a lot of issues in the boxes, which we still fight every day. This system is from the '80s. There have been upgrades through the years,

but the computer system, all the hydraulic tubing and piping is all since '82ish." Factor in some river salts, lots of coquina rock, serious bouts of fairy ring and *Pythium* root rot, and so much unwanted shade from so many unwanted trees and there was no shortage of challenges. Good thing Gross and Craddock are both workaholics.

"There are times I have to make him stay away," Craddock says. "In

the summer, he's in before 6, he's syringing greens at 2 in the afternoon because the canopies are in the mid to upper 90s and he's back at 6:30 or 7 to turn the pump system on, or it's a pre-emerge application time and he's here till 7:30 or 8 at night three or four days in a row. I tell him, 'Don't come in here,' and then the next morning, he's standing there having a cup of coffee. 'Dude, you're not even supposed to be here.' 'There were no



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waves.' 'There aren't going to be any waves in Florida in July or August. Go find something else to do.'"

"We try, but we do work nonstop," Gross says. "And the kid works non-stop, all day, every day."

"The kid" is Justin Belz, officially

a 28-year-old former member of the crew who arrived at La Cita from the commercial boat industry two months before Craddock and three months before Gross, and unofficially the coordinator of everything. He is everywhere and does everything

— handling the clubhouse renovations, working with Gross on course maintenance requirements, maintaining the website and promoting the course, even pouring drinks and serving food in the dining rooms. His Apple Watch step count tops  
(continues on page 40)

▼ Long private, La Cita shifted to semi-private in an effort to rebuild dropping membership numbers.



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# Dreamy Fairways & Fields

Professional baseball players and golfers of all ilk flock to Arizona each spring. A pair of turfgrass managers explain the dynamics behind contrasting splendor.

By **Judd Spicer**

Come February and March across Arizona agronomy, pitching is no longer limited to a wedge game and spikes meet the sod of multiple sporting surfaces.

As Spring Training season brings out the snowbirds – which in a typical year accounts for about 1.8 million fans – to watch 15 MLB teams train and play across the 10 parks of the Cactus League, the area's golf scene readies in-kind for its biggest months of the year.

And for those working the respective fields? Well, grass may be grass, yet the esoteric compare and contrast of prepping for golfers and ballplay-

ers each brings its own unique set of challenges. The baseball portion of this spring was interrupted when Major League Baseball suspended the Cactus League in mid-March because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For a quarter-century, Matt Black was a golf man, most recently working the grounds as superintendent at Scottsdale's highly respected, dual-course We-Ko-Pa Golf Club. Come 2020, Black transitioned his game from fairway to diamond, taking a job with the City of Scottsdale as head groundskeeper at Scottsdale Stadium, spring home of the San Francisco Giants.

"Expectations are the same for the quality of turf," Black says. "The big-





© COURTESY OF THE PHOENICIAN

The Phoenician is a popular resort course in Scottsdale, Arizona.

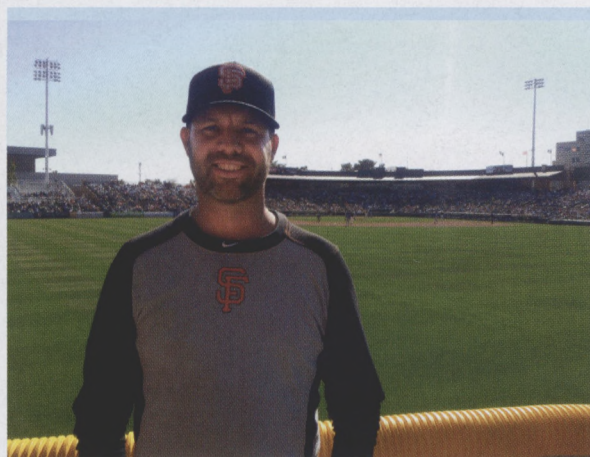


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▲ After a quarter of a century on the course, Matt Black moved to the diamond earlier this year.

gest adjustment for me was the dirt side of it, managing the infields, mounds and plate. That's taken me a bit to wrap my head around, but, at the same time, things like the moisture on the infield grass – I can relate that to a putting green, as far as how the ball rolls.”

A few months into the baseball biz, Black's gig involves managing the city's pair of ballpark facilities, which includes the Giants' minor-league park. Scottsdale Stadium, in the midst a renovation project, is also used for events, baseball fantasy camps, extended spring training and fall league pro ball in September and October. For Black, a thorough golf oeuvre served as sound founding for the baseball world.

“Being at We-Ko-Pa Golf – which is very high volume – that helped me for this job,” he says. “Here, it's not just a game facility, as the Giants do all their training here throughout the week and there are also scrimmages. So, golf taught me a lot about dealing with wear-patterns and creating high-quality, healthy turf

with all the traffic.”

Traffic between the two sports, however, comes in different forms. “Eliminating vehicle traffic from golf carts, that has been really nice in this work,” Black adds. “Though when the players do come out here, they work the heck out of the first-base lane along the outfield; two hours of work every single day, which requires some extra culturing and aerifying for specific areas to try and speed-up recovery. The average golf shoe and golf swing is so much less impactful than a pro baseball player with a set of steel spikes twisting and turning, and making repetitive throws from the same area of turf.”

Akin to golf's playing surfaces, Scottsdale Stadium sports 419 Bermudagrass, and is overseeded with ryegrass. Preparing and repairing areas of wear also sees golf-to-hardball crossover.

“Like golf, we actually do sand-and-seed some areas; it's amazing that, in a matter of days, guys can dig a literal hole just by warming up with those metal cleats in the same area again and again,”



## SPOTLIGHT

Black says. "In golf, the traffic is much more spread out, whereas, here, keeping the grass just a bit longer helps with the wear."



Further ▲ Rasmussen sporting correlation is found in turf maintenance. "It's similar equipment, similar rates on seed quantity. It's very much similar to a fairway," Black adds. "Now, it's a bit different height, as we mow the field to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch as opposed to a soft fairway height around  $\frac{1}{2}$  of an inch;. A lot of that goes back to vitality and recovery required for the field. But we keep it mowed tight. On game days, we're usually double-cutting, though that depends on the use of the day. Sometimes, it's cutting the day before or after."

The respective spheres or sport present a dichotomy in the work. A golf ball weighs 1.6 ounces; a baseball weighs a shade over 5 ounces

"I do like to watch batting practice and see how the ball reacts to the turf," Black says. "And I can say that where a golf ball leaves a mark, a baseball leaves a divot. So, it is interesting to see how the ball reacts, and observe how watering practices affect that."

Black's biggest point of transition has been the clock.

"I think that most golf course superintendents would walk in here and say, 'Your schedule is what!?' At least that's what I said at first," Black jokes. "The biggest eye-opener for me has been the hours and scheduling; it can get insane, in that we go through February and into March essentially without a day off. I've had doubleheader days going from around 6 a.m. to midnight. In golf, it's nice, you generally have those 5 a.m. to 2 p.m. days, especially during the busy season when the golfers flood the courses."

Preparing grounds around pro ball-players and their bosses presents further contrast with working around tee times.



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## SPOTLIGHT

► The San Francisco Giants have played spring training games at Scottsdale Stadium since 1984.

“Here, it’s really working around coaches, practices, workouts. With so many different coaches, guys take players to separate areas for drills, so they use every square inch of the facility,” Black adds. “And even though that can take place in a three-hour time frame, it really takes quite a bit of time in the morning to get everything set, then get out of the way when they’re practicing, and then get back to work for about three hours when they’re done and put everything to bed.”



### JUST DOWN THE FAIRWAY

Three miles from Black’s grass, the fairways are busting at The Phoenician in Scottsdale.

Just 15 months removed from a full-course renovation that took the grounds from 27 to 18 holes, the thorough rework – in concert with a \$90 million resort makeover – has Tyler Rasmussen at full attention.

The head golf superintendent at The Phoenician since January 2019, Rasmussen (a Colorado Rockies fan) has ample respect for the diamond turf across the area’s ballfields.

“The spring training fields out here look amazing, and they really make use of the prep time. In golf, most of our dates are set, sometimes years in advance – we’re opening

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this day and tee times are on the books," Rasmussen says.

The Phoenician superintendent further sees differences in tee times and first pitch.

"In golf, we get around three weeks for overseed because we need to be ready to get the players back out there," Rasmussen adds. "In baseball, they might have a bit more time in advance to get everything perfect."

Evidencing the pressures of primo turf conditions in the desert, Rasmussen points out the MLB ballpark just down the way from his resort grounds, where summer growing conditions are tricky.

"In baseball, you have the mix of synthetic fields, which presents a contrast," Rasmussen says. "Out here at Chase Field where the Diamondbacks play, they use an artificial surface now because they struggled for a long time with different types of grasses, bringing in heat lamps and then mixing games with events and concerts. In golf, you might just have a few artificial pads down at the driving range or something."

Empathy across hosting pro athletes extends from one field to another.

"With high-level athletes, the turf expectations do go up," Rasmussen says. "At a previous job, my course held a Korn Ferry event, which involved the PGA Tour agronomist coming in during prep to help fit conditions for that level of play and player. For baseball, I'm sure they're working with that same magnifying glass, because the professional players are so keen to conditions, and they know finite differences."

As for his current grounds, The Phoenician is no stranger to pro jocks come spring season. "It's pretty cool to see a lot of the players stay and play here, along with other athletes and executives out here leading into and during the Spring Training season; most of them use aliases for tee times," Rasmussen says.

And back at the ballpark: After a little time away from his former fairways, Black views his sporting transition as an impetus for getting back to the roots of game.

"As a golf superintendent, you're on your grounds every day and always noticing every little thing on your course," Black concludes. "I have a sneaking suspicion that I'll now be more interested in playing golf, not having spent all day at the course." **GCI**

*Judd Spicer is a Palm Desert, California-based writer and frequent Golf Course Industry contributor.*



The ninth hole at The Phoenician, one of numerous Arizona courses providing spring splendor for visitors.





# DEALING with disruption

By Zac Reicher, Ph.D., and Paul Giordano, Ph.D.

▲ Most damage from white grubs is indirect through animal foraging. An insecticide applied once adults are seen is the most effective control.

**W**hether it's a global pandemic, hurricanes, tornadoes or floods, disruption on the golf course is unfortunately becoming commonplace. Regardless of the cause of the disruption, there are some key practices to keep in mind when attempting to manage high-quality turf with limited resources. The following are some thoughts from an agronomic perspective.

As of this writing, golf course operations are highly varied across the country, from no golf and no maintenance, to no golf and limited maintenance, to open golf with limited maintenance. The one consistency is that staffs are typically limited in number of crew members. In addition, some crews consist of salaried staff from hospitality or the pro shop.

Thus, superintendents must be selective and intentional about prioritizing tasks based on the current staff. Mowing is usually the first major change in maintenance, increasing mowing heights and decreasing mowing frequency. Aggressive growth regulators and/or topdressing are then employed to further limit the mowing requirements.

"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" has never been truer than it is now. With major staffing concerns and unpredictable budget constraints, preventative pest control is even more critical than in a typical year. Timely, preventative applications made now could save tremendous la-

bor and money required to curatively control a biotic pest or worse yet, repair areas damaged by pests. Furthermore, most are relying heavily on growth regulators to manage mowing requirements, which could negatively impact damage recovery. Lastly, nobody can reasonably predict when play will fully resume with golfer expectations of mid-season conditioning.

Limiting root problems should be at the top of the priority list. Diseases like summer patch, fairy ring, *Pythium* root rot, mini ring, etc. are relatively easy to control when addressed preventatively. Delayed applications could allow infection levels to build, leading to irreversible root damage and eventual thinning turf. Applications of a labelled DMI fungicide (like Mirage® Stressgard®) at 2" soil temperatures of 55-65°F will control a multitude of root diseases like summer patch, take-



Paul Giordano



Zac Reicher





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▲ Annual bluegrass weevil is difficult to manage but are best controlled by a multi-pronged approach early in the season.

► Fairy ring can be problematic in all turf types but can be controlled preventatively with DMI fungicides early in the season.

all patch and fairy ring, plus this application will also control foliar/stem diseases like brown ring (*Waitea*) patch, anthracnose and dollar spot. Consider including a fungicide labelled for *Pythium* root rot (like Banol®, Signature® Xtra or Segway®) in this application to give added insurance against the always present oomycete pathogens that can wreak havoc

if left unchecked.

Plant parasitic nematodes are also best addressed at this time of the year when soil temps reach the critical temperature of 55-65°F. If nematodes have been a historic problem on your course, consider an effective nematocide (like Indemnify®) in this tank mix. Two or three applications of this tank mix on a 28-day interval could provide long-term control of the most problematic diseases and nematodes deep into the summer. This tank mix may seem very complex, but could save tremendous long-term time and labor.

Most insects are best controlled preventatively and if left uncontrolled, can cause significant direct damage or cause indirect damage from animal foraging. Adults of the annual bluegrass weevil should be targeted in the spring as they migrate into fairways as well as first generation larvae to limit future generations throughout the year. Early applications for annual bluegrass weevil are critical to avoid long-term damage. Larvae (white grubs)

are the damaging stage of many annual beetles, including Japanese beetles and masked chafers. Most effective and efficient insecticide applications are made when adults are first seen in June or July.

Mole crickets in the Southeast should be controlled early, during nymph hatch. A preventative, long-lasting insecticide (Chipco™ Choice™) application made by licensed contract applicators provides the most effective control of mole crickets. Curative "chase & spray" programs later in the year are difficult and can cause very unsightly conditions.

One of the best ways to stay ahead of problematic weeds is properly timed preemergence (PRE) herbicide applications. PRE herbicides applied in the spring when 4" soil temperatures reach 55°F effectively control annual grasses such as goosegrass, crabgrass and foxtails. In tougher climates, a second application is justified shortly after you start seeing weed seedlings in untreated hotspots. Being late or even missing PRE herbicide application requires more difficult rescue applications of postemergence (POST) herbicides and increases risk of turf injury. POST herbicides require accurate timing on juvenile weeds and possibly multiple applications for more mature plants. Goosegrass, in particular, is relatively easy to control with PRE herbicides (Ronstar® or Specticle®), but POST control is much more difficult. That being said, combinations of PRE/POST goosegrass products will

be important for managing resistance in more typical years.

Avoid the temptation to tank mix products that don't fit together in order to save time. Foliar fungicides or plant growth regulators should not be combined with wetting agents, nematocides or fungicides which are targeted to the root zone. Conversely, don't be afraid to include multiple modes of action for the same pests such as a PRE and POST herbicide for annual grasses or a contact fungicide, plus a systemic for diseases like dollar spot. Resistance management may not be the No. 1 priority right now, but it should always be considered when applying pesticides.

If possible, take advantage of no/limited play with lower expectations. Assuming adequate labor, this may be a great time to catch up on aerification, vertical mowing and/or topdressing you've been unable to do in past years. If you're in the Bermudagrass overseed market, a course closure may be an opportunity to transition ryegrass out early to maximize Bermudagrass growth and improve weak stands.

Please recognize that your manufacturers and distributors are keeping their distance during this time, but they are only a phone call, text or email away. Reach out if you have questions, need assistance or just want someone to bounce ideas around with. ●

*Zac Reicher, Ph.D., and Paul Giordano, Ph.D., are members of the Bayer Green Solutions Team.*





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.

## MODIFIED SPRAYER

**T**his 2010 Toro Multi Pro 1250 Spray Pro was donated to the River Bend Golf Club in Ormond Beach, Florida, and was turned into a flatbed hauler. The sprayer tank, booms and control wiring system were removed, the battery tray relocated, the angle iron cut to length, the uprights and stringers mig-welded, the plywood cut to fit and secured with hardware. It hauls fertilizer and grass seed bags with ease. It cost about \$100 for materials and took about eight hours total labor time. Scott Fabulich, golf course superintendent, and Steve Michalowski, equipment manager, showed off their many talents.



## CUSTOM TRAILER

**T**his lightweight and sturdy trailer's axles, wheels and tires were acquired from Northern Tool. The majority of the framework is built using 1½-inch square tubing with 2-inch by 4-inch square tubing at each end, all welded together. The floor, side boards, tailgate and shelf use ½-inch thick marine grade plywood screwed together in place. The hitch is made from 4-inch by 4-inch square tubing, with a telescoping jack stand with a conventional trailer ball hitch, hooked-up to a Kawasaki Mule 610 4WD vehicle. The five 6-inch diameter PVC vertical pipes are secured to the tubing with screws and they hold plenty of hand and pruning tools. Round metal rings are welded to each side so bungee cords can hold things in place. The shelf holds bathroom cleaning agents and irrigation parts and supplies. The Rubbermaid trash cans empty trash from the swimming pool and other recreational areas. The material and parts list includes: two 60-inch pieces of 2-inch iron for left and right sides, two 48-inch pieces of 2-inch angle iron for bottom brackets, four 14-inch pieces of 2-inch angle for upright posts, one 4-inch by 8-inch and ¾-inch thick marine grade plywood, and eight ¼-inch by 20 bolts and nuts. I spotted this custom-built trailer last summer in a housing community while visiting McCall, Idaho. **GCI**



**Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG**, is president of Golf Agronomy International. He's a 51-year, life member of the GCSAA. He can be reached at 757-561-7777 or [terrybuchen@earthlink.net](mailto:terrybuchen@earthlink.net).



► Brant Craddock, Jason Gross and Justin Belz arrived at La Cita within three months of each other and have sparked the turnaround.

(continued from page 29)

20,000 more days than not. “I spend maybe six to eight hours a week off the property,” he says. “I really like this. It’s the challenge. It’s just the challenge of fixing this.”

The first (and probably second and third) priority is that irrigation system, which is approaching the end of its fourth decade of use. Removing or at least pruning some trees and replacing those decade-old and no-longer-quite-so-spongy Champion Bermudagrass greens are on the list, too, but the irrigation system is at the top of the list.

“We need all new pipe,” Gross says. “We need to get rid of the old hydraulic system. All those little black tubings have been in the ground since ’82 and they’re brittle. A lot of times, if one breaks, you got to wait for it to show itself, because some of our pipe is waist-deep, some is head-deep. We don’t stay pressurized. If I turn the system on now, there are so many leaks that heads will be poppin’ all over the place. We have to strategically water. It’s been pretty tough. If you can’t control the water, manage the water ... believe me, we get stressed out.”

“If it doesn’t happen in ’20, then I don’t know how much more progress can be made,” says Craddock, noting that the new irrigation systems they’re looking at runs about \$850,000 — nearly \$300,000 more than the club’s current annual maintenance budget. “That’s the biggest issue right now with what we have. Other work that



can be done without the irrigation system being done is, I mean, we can start removing some trees and that will help. If no new irrigation system comes in, we’re going to have to start to remove some of these trees and get rid of some of this shade problem.”

As for the shade, “We have some old oak trees out here that haven’t been pruned — root pruned or top pruned, so there’s a lot of shade and root intrusion in the greens that we’re still working on addressing,” Gross says. “We always have dreams of removing them, but —”

“There are probably a few we’re not allowed to remove,” Craddock interjects.

“— And some are probably hundred-year-old oaks,” Gross says. “Some of them have trunks as big as a dining-room table. We don’t even have a saw to cut through them.”

Gross has rebuilt what was a depleted equipment roster, too, purchasing a fairway unit, a new spray rig, a bunker rake, a greens mower, a tractor and an aerifier the last two years. That has helped plenty. So has the decision Craddock made almost immediately after starting to shift the club from private to semi-private, a necessity thanks to the evolving space engineering industry.

And so has the presence of Vivian Zumot Dimond, the self-described “bad guy from the bank coming to shut it down” who fell in love with the property and rather than shutting the door purchased the whole thing

in December 2017.

“It was a neglected place, but it felt nice, it felt good,” she says. “I cannot express it. I cannot explain to you more than I was sent there to figure out what to do with it and I decided to buy it. I don’t golf, I don’t swim and I don’t play tennis. Don’t ask me why I bought the place.”

Dimond has worked in all sorts of industries, most recently and most notably South Florida real estate, but she does manage a 675-acre orange grove and knows about agriculture and, to some degree, agronomy. Along with her sisters Beatrice and Karoline, she also has tremendous faith in the property — and in Gross, Craddock and Belz. “I looked at pictures of what the place used to look like,” she says, “and I think they are magicians. I cannot be more thankful that La Cita has the three of them. It’s looking prettier every day.”

She knows the course needs a new irrigation system. She knows trees need to fall. She knows how far \$1.6 million can go on the real estate market and what another \$2 million is worth toward renovations. And she knows what the future should hold for La Cita.

“I would like to see a small hotel on the property,” she says. “With the Space Coast recovery and everything going on there, I think the area can handle it.”

Gross, Craddock and Belz certainly can. They just need to hold on tight to the rocket. **GCI**

**“THERE WAS NO POWER TO THE IRRIGATION ON THE WHOLE FRONT NINE WHEN WE GOT HERE. THE ASSISTANT WAS SPENDING HER WHOLE DAY, EVERY DAY, JUST TRYING TO TURN WATER ON TO WATER FAIRWAYS, TEES, GREENS. THERE WERE A LOT OF ISSUES IN THE BOXES, WHICH WE STILL FIGHT EVERY DAY.”**

**— Superintendent Jason Gross**



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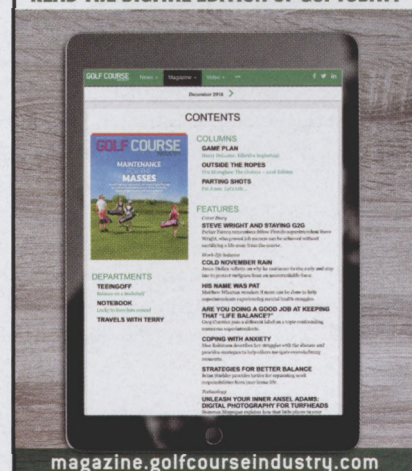
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## THE CASE FOR GOLF!

When the USGA and R&A released their key findings from the Distance Insights project on Feb. 4, I never imagined that just two months later I would be placing stakes six feet apart on the edge of all teeing grounds at our first hole as a visual reference assisting players to maintain a safe social distance.

I had heard of COVID-19 prior to the Golf Industry Show. I remember it was in the news, but mostly it was in China. As one of 12,000 attendees who spent time exploring the 500 exhibits spread over 450,000 square feet in the Orange County Convention Center, I washed my hands frequently to prevent catching a cold.

On March 11, my wife and I watched as the President addressed the nation in response to the World Health Organization's declaration of COVID-19 becoming a pandemic. We have faced West Nile Virus, SARS, bird flu, swine flu, Ebola and Zika over the last two decades, and now this. I never experienced serious fear during those other outbreaks. But this has been different, especially in the way the entire world reacted.

I have never witnessed anything like what is happening around us. A few days later, I addressed my team and said we would take new measures to observe the CDC's guidelines on social distancing. Only one person per utility vehicle. Enhanced sanitation and disinfecting of steering wheels, door handles, hand tools, etc. would occur daily. By the next morning, we took steps to limit the number of people in our employee meeting room to comply with even newer guidelines announced the evening before.

Daily announcements from the Governor's office coincided

with our changes. First, it was the closure of all restaurants and bars, which immediately impacted our food and beverage operation. A week later it was the closure of gyms, health clubs, yoga studios and other exercise facilities, leaving golf as the last holdout for recreational and physical activity, other than walking or hiking. I have played a few rounds since the March 11 address.

As the days slowly pass, I'm learning about the incredible behind-the-scenes effort to make the case for golf. A coalition of associations are working around the clock to plea with lawmakers that golf has a purpose and golfers can participate safely within the CDC's guidelines. Club managers, PGA professionals, superintendents, owners and state lobbyists are touting golf's economic impact and recreational benefits in the effort to keep courses open.

On March 26, Mecklenburg County in North Carolina, where I reside and work, issued a stay-at-home order. Playing golf was listed as an approved outdoor activity because of the coalition's effort. Four days later, the Governor issued a statewide stay-at-home order. He also included golf as an approved outdoor activity.

I wrestled up the courage to update my blog on March 31. I had been reluctant to do so because of the rapidly changing nature of the COVID-19 situation and I didn't want to recite something that became inaccurate or obsolete in less than 24 hours. I told my membership about the steps we had

taken, both within the facility to keep ourselves healthy and safe, and on the golf course to provide them an environment to play golf as safely possible – no carts, bunker rakes, coolers or sand divot bottles, and cups turned upside down to prevent putts from falling below the surface. Golf looks different, but the course does look good with less clutter.

Golf has been around for centuries and will survive this pandemic. I have believed golf has the potential to be a beacon of hope. I know my inbox was flooded with thank-you messages following the blog post.

But I know there are others who feel differently. Why should folks continue to have the luxury to play golf when everyone else is sacrificing? I know some golf-lovers won't play during the shutdowns out of guilt. Others are happy to tee it up each day.

I don't know whether playing is right or wrong. The health services director of Sacramento County, California, recently visited a busy golf course and declared what he witnessed as safe. But the director of the adjoining county health department said, "The question should not be whether something can be done with social distancing, but rather *must* something be done?"

All I can do is what is permitted in North Carolina. Our team is happy to continue serving members and we hope to keep providing folks an important outlet in the safest manner possible.

Stay safe, everyone! **GCI**

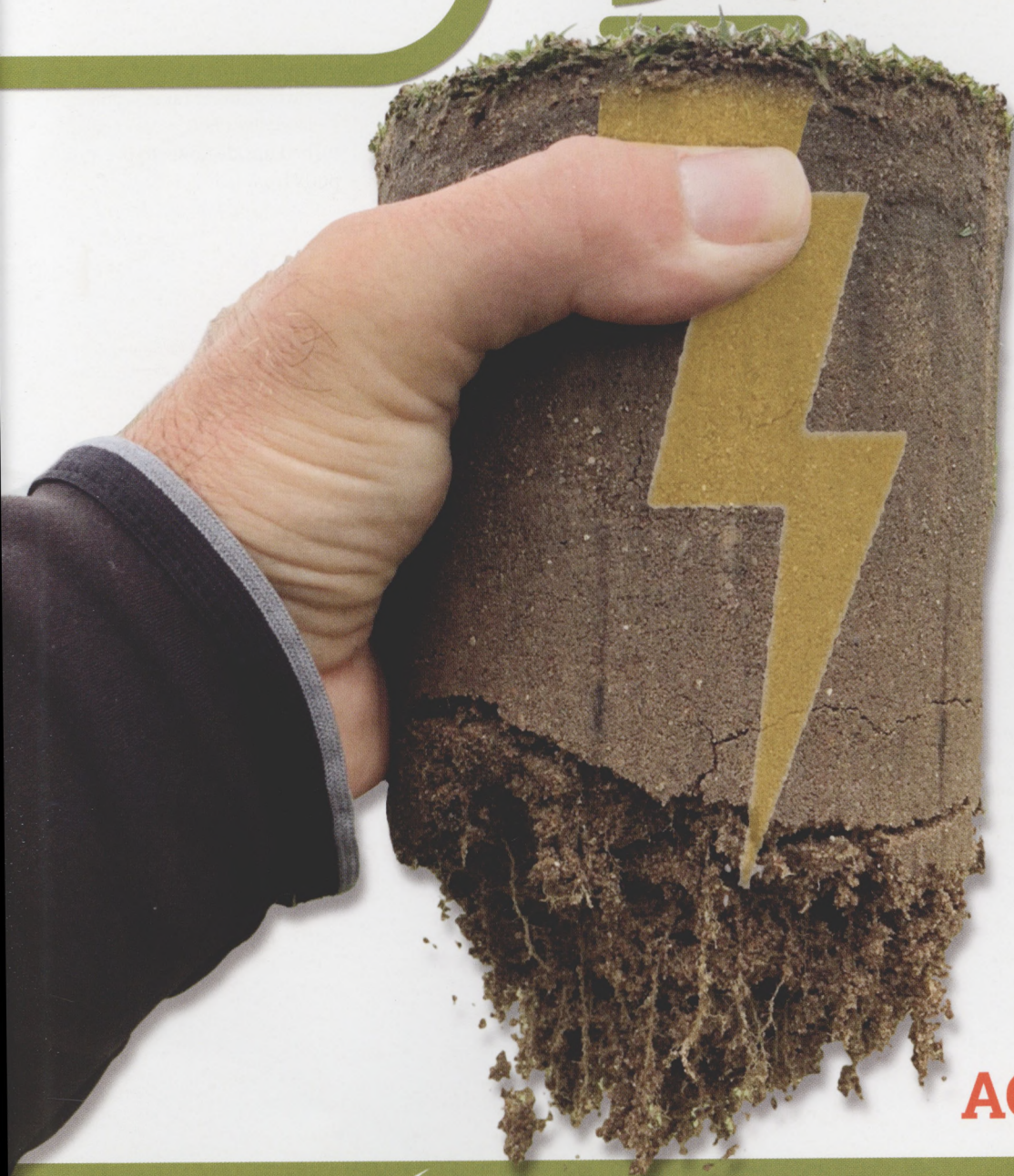


**MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG**, is the superintendent at Carolina Golf Club in Charlotte, North Carolina and past president of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on Twitter @CGCGreenkeeper.



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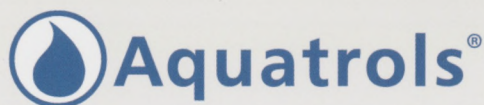
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