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Multi-year Majesty

How do you execute long-range improvements without halting play or draining the budget? Greg D'Antonio and the Concord Country Club team are taking project management to the next level.

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Elevated play numbers, large critters and plenty of snow: How a pair of facilities in a mountainous Montana region fared during the 2020 golf season.



SPEAK UP NOW OR FOREVER HOLD YOUR LABOR PEACE

Sometimes you don't realize there's another way of completing a task until an outside force upends your process.

Think about the above statement in the context of 2020.

Begin the morning hustle without a breakroom meeting? It happened.

Reduce the mowing schedule without losing customers? Compare your course's YTD play numbers vs. 2019.

Attach a piece of colored foam to the bottom of the cup without the third foursome of the day ripping it out? Compare your course's pace of play vs. 2019.

An outside force — the COVID-19 pandemic — has affected short-term operating procedures at most facilities. The short-term measures will likely yield long-term changes.

Contributor Rick Woelfel addresses superintendent views toward practices and tactics implemented in 2020 out of necessity (*Stay or go?*, page 23). Rick's story wisely begins with labor reductions.

Crew sizes contracted in March and many never swelled to projected 2020 levels. Amazingly, thanks to the incredible people who maintain golf courses, conditions rarely suffered, especially in cool-weather regions that received favorable weather. In fact, I have recently visited multiple superintendents in these regions who consider 2020 the best turf year of their respective careers.

Still, widespread concerns exist about what a positive year in terms of play and conditions means for 2021 crew sizes. Successful leaders are often too good for their own good. They lose resources and personnel and — miraculously! — they produce a comparable if not better product despite fewer available labor hours. Keeping courses in tidy shape for an expanding customer base exerts an enormous personal and physical toll on the remaining workers.

Have the bosses recently asked how you and your crew are feeling physically and mentally? Have you answered the question honestly? If the course looks and plays great and the people maintaining it appear healthy and satisfied, the bosses are less inclined to replenish resources. Attempting to repeat the Herculean feats of 2020 represents a monumental challenge. Your bosses need to know this.

Owners, operators, managers and committees remain perplexed when creating a 2021 budget. Anybody who claims they can accurately project outings and event revenue, or play numbers, is either a genius or fibbing. Even golf's staunchest supporters and believers never imagined the huge usage spikes courses received this summer and fall. Managing editor Matt LaWell solicited superintendent-focused budget guidance from a trio of turf legends to help prepare readers for the financial unknown (*Budget 101*, page 6).

A general manager recently told me his philosophy involves "budgeting for the product you want to produce." Defined expectations are a key part of the budget process. But they don't solve an industrywide labor dilemma that actually expanded in 2020. Superintendents need bodies to produce that product.

Not sure how to explain this to your bosses or members? Tim Moraghan does the job for you in a column that doubles as a letter you can post in the pro shop, clubhouse or locker room (*Labor of love?*, page 22). The column demonstrates why Tim is one of the industry's more respected voices. He uses his enormous credibility to make a candid argument on behalf of superintendents. Tim is a highly-regarded consultant, recruiter, speaker and writer. He can present realities to owners, general managers and members without fear of losing his job.

Golf has experienced plenty of positives in 2020 and some of the changes implemented by necessity will make courses better recreational and work environments. That foam at the bottom of cups has increased pace of play and skipping a fairway mowing or two hasn't created undesirable conditions.

On days when cups are moved and playing surfaces are mowed, trained employees must be present. Having fewer of them around will create more problems in 2021 than your bosses might envision. GCI



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BUDGET 101

Turf legends Ken Mangum, Matt Shaffer and Roger Stewart share some priceless advice for budget season.

By Matt LaWell

The numbers are staggering. Between them, legendary turf pros Ken Mangum, Matt Shaffer and Roger Stewart prepared more than 100 budgets worth at least ... \$100 million? \$200 million? A quarter of a billion dollars? No matter what that exact number is, it certainly includes a couple commas.

The trio shared a trove of stories, tricks, tips and general advice about their budget seasons for the current generation of superintendents and agronomy directors, some of which is included on the next two pages. For far more wisdom (and some wit), search “Budget 101” on golfcourseindustry.com.

Ken Mangum

I had a great GM who said, “Don’t ever do something because you’re afraid of going over budget. Come and ask me.

Explain it. We’re not locked in on a number so much that we want to sacrifice something.” So we didn’t have to play the game quite as much. Because sometimes you would have a good summer, you would have years when you didn’t use everything, and you would roll that into next year, and you just have to explain that. And you have years when you get a lot of rain, a lot of heat, a lot of humidity, you get more disease, more weed pressure because of that, or you have a storm — we call those non-budgeted items. You can’t plan for things like that. You can’t budget for things like that.

I try to base things on standards. I want to ask, whether it’s the green committee or whatever, “What do you want the golf course to look like when you step on the first tee? What do you want to have done before you play golf?” Because that drives your whole budget.

The other question is, “Do you want to go off the No. 1 tee only? Or do you want to go off 10 as well — a two-tee start?” Because that complicates everything. If you tell me that you want the greens walk-mowed, the holes changed, the bunkers hand-raked, the fairways cut with a triplex mower, the intermediate rough cut, the cart paths blown, pinecones picked up, the ball-washers serviced, the drinking stations serviced — if you want all that done, I’ll show you the manpower and the equipment it takes to do that. And it’s really interesting when you pose that question to people, because they say they want it all done, and then you price it out and they go, “Hmm, maybe that’s not what I want.”

It all boils down to being able to communicate effectively. Whatever your budget is, you have to be able to

explain it and communicate to people. They have to understand what you're asking for and why you're asking for it.

You've got to be comfortable in front of people, explaining things and giving presentations. That's not the easiest thing.

You learn as you go along, because every club is a little different.

Matt Shaffer

I always say the best superintendents in America are the guys who don't have any money, because they can't afford to make a mistake. One spray mistake will chase their ass right down a whole budget cycle.

We don't really have our industry quantified very well. How much does it cost for every inch of green speed on bent, *Poa*, Bermuda? What are the repercussions financially to drop your fairways from three-quarters to a half-inch? A guy just starting a job probably doesn't know. My advice for a young guy just starting a job: find the oldest, crustiest, successful superintendent in the area and call him. "Mr. Williams, can I talk with you? I'm trying to do my first budget and it's critical. I need some insights." Buy him lunch, you'll learn a ton. That guy's had his shield up for 40 years. It's tough when you're young.

A superintendent ought to set up their staff like the clubhouse sets up theirs, and I don't think you'd ever lose this argument. They have a GM, you have a director of grounds. They have a clubhouse manager, you have a superintendent. They have an executive chef, you have an equipment manager. They have a maître d', you have an equipment tech. And just keep on going, and if they have a wait staff of 60, you can go one better and say, "I only have a crew of 30." But I don't think guys think that way.

Politics are impossible to teach.

Don't get emotional over this. Treat it as a business deal.

You have to treat that money like it's yours. You have to be able to man-

age the money, and I think it's particularly difficult when you're young. You just don't know what you're doing.

It's all about the money.

Roger Stewart

The best budget philosophy is one of transparency. I think if you're going to ask for a large sum of money, make sure you know exactly how that money is going to be used. Don't try to hide anything, thinking that you're going to get this approved and use it on something else later. That can backfire. Be as transparent as you can. Don't be afraid to explain how that money is going to impact your ability to provide the very best playing conditions, which in turn translates into potentially more revenue for the club. Stand up for what you believe. Make sure you've done your homework. Make sure you've put effort into those numbers in the budget so you feel comfortable going in and justifying it.

Just being prepared is a tactic.

Make sure you've done as much as you possibly can to justify, in your mind, why you're asking for what you're asking for. I wasn't always successful. It's not like I walked in, gave a 30-minute presentation and everybody said, "Done! Let's go home!" That did happen more than once but it wasn't that often.

It's not about who's on top at a club. That's not what it's about at all. What it's about is being able to be at the table, and being respected at the table — whether it's a budget presentation, or a meeting with the golf committee, or preparing for a member-guest.

What are you providing your crew members? Not just what are you paying them, but what are you providing them? Can they get good health insurance? Do you have any kind of retirement plan? And then you have to look at the pay scale. Do you want to be a minimum-wage employer? And what does that mean? Generally, being a minimum-wage employer is reflective of the caliber of applicants you're going to get to fill those jobs.

It's easy to look at a golf course just as an expense.



Tartan Talks No. 52

Tom Marzolf knows the inner workings of only one golf course architecture firm. It happens to be one of the more successful firms of all time. And, no, he's never seriously considered leaving his role as a senior design associate for Fazio Design to begin his own firm.



▲ Marzolf

"If you have something great going on in your life, and it's positive, and it's fun, and you're enjoying it, don't mess it up," Marzolf says. "Enjoy each day. Keep it going."

Marzolf reveals his zest for working alongside the team developed by the legendary Tom Fazio in a fast-paced Tartan Talks episode. Upon graduating from Virginia Tech, Marzolf went on a calculated job-hunting scavenger hunt, visiting 32 golf course architects in six weeks. He started his career drafting plans for Fazio and has worked on more than 80 courses in his nearly four decades with the firm. Marzolf discusses numerous projects on the podcast, including the recent restoration of Seth Raynor-designed Fox Chapel Golf Club in suburban Pittsburgh.

Enter bit.ly/TomMarzolf into your web browser or visit the Superintendent Radio Network page on Apple Podcasts and Spotify to hear the podcast.

IN THE FIGHT AGAINST SPRING DEAD SPOT AND DOLLAR SPOT...

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Course news

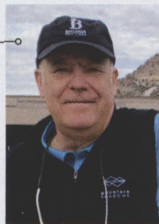
Whispering Pines Golf Club reopened after extensive construction led by Texas golf course architect Chet Williams. The course was entirely re-grassed with Zeon Zoysia in the fairways and rough and TifEagle Bermudagrass on the greens. All greens were completely rebuilt, including several that were totally redesigned, and all tee boxes were leveled with several new tees added. The course's bunkers were also rebuilt, with some eliminated and others added. ... PGA WEST restored more than 50,000 square feet of TifEagle greens at the 18-hole Jack Nicklaus Tournament Course. ... PGA National broke ground on a redesign of its Squire Course by Andy Staples. ... Rees Jones will oversee a redesign of Westchester Hills Golf Club in White Plains, New York. ... Firestone Country Club will remove 18 bunkers and renovate the remaining 51 on its renamed Fazio Course. ... Quicksands, the 14-hole Gamble Sands short course designed by David McLay Kidd, is growing in and is scheduled for a spring 2021 opening. ... Eisenhower Golf Course in Annapolis, Maryland, will also reopen in spring 2021 after an Andrew Green redesign. ... Part of a \$33 million renovation, the Dan Yates Putting Course opened at Bobby Jones Golf Course. The 9-hole reversible design features TifEagle Bermudagrass greens. ... Anchorage Golf Course will host the 2022 U.S. Senior Women's Amateur, the first time the USGA has taken one of its championships to Alaska.



INDUSTRY **buzz**



Forrest Richardson is the new president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects and will serve until the next annual meeting in October 2021. Richardson opened Forrest Richardson & Associates in 1988 and has worked around the world ever since. Richardson gained an interest in golf course architecture when he pedaled his bicycle to the offices of Arthur Jack Snyder, a former ASGCA president, at age 12. The two later worked together on Pointe Resort at South Mountain in Phoenix. Richardson has written five books, including "Routing the Golf Course" and "Bunkers, Pits & Other Hazards."



As part of the **Community Values of Golf Courses project**, researchers at the University of Minnesota and Michigan State University quantified the environmental benefits of 135 golf courses in the Twin Cities metropolitan area as compared with five other land uses: natural areas, city parks, suburban residential zones, urban residential zones and industrial parks. The USGA-funded research demonstrated that properly managed golf courses provide the greatest amount of cooling among land uses, are more supportive of pollinators than urban residential or industrial areas, and retain more nutrients from stormwater runoff than suburban or urban residential areas.

Correspondingly, the conversion of golf courses to residential or industrial use would sacrifice associated environmental value afforded to communities and could result in reduced biodiversity and increased temperatures and nutrient transport to surface and ground water. A summary of preliminary conclusions is available in the USGA Green Section Record.

Quarterly retail golf equipment sales topped \$1 billion in the third quarter — just the second time sales have hit the ten-digit mark, according to the independent market research firm Golf DataTech. The official figure, \$1.002 billion, trails only the second quarter of 2008, when sales hit \$1.013 billion. Golf equipment sales for the year were up 42 percent over the same period in 2019.

People news: Toro CEO and president **Rick Olson** is the chairman of the board of directors of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute for 2020-21. ... **Dr. Greg Armel** joins SePRO Corporation as vice president of research, regulatory and innovation. ... **Nick Strain** joins Primera as vice president of business development. The company also named **Rachel Boehm** director of cooperative services, **Cheryl Kuenzel** director of analytics and **Morgan Cothorn** cooperative services associate. ... **Patrick Collins** is the new director of finance operations for Bernhard Company. GCI

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CONGRESSIONAL REFORM

Goodness, has Congressional Country Club come a long way. The legendary 36-hole facility in Bethesda, Maryland, in a Beltway suburb 12 miles northwest of the U.S. Capitol Building, is undergoing a season-long makeover. It won't reopen until the spring of 2021, but based upon what I saw during a recent preview visit of the work in process it will emerge from its chrysalis totally transformed. It's not quite a restoration, nor a renovation. Let's just call it a complete transformation in place.

Credit the club, its board, general manager Jeffrey Kreaflé, director of golf Jason Epstein, and course superintendent Peter Wendt and his entire crew. Also kudos to Maryland-based golf course architect Andrew Green, whose meticulous commitment to historical documentation and on-site inspection ensured the details of an ambitious overhaul by golf course builder McDonald & Sons.

On a personal note, it has been fascinating to watch the transformation. I've been visiting Congressional since 1980, when I caddied in two Kemper Opens while looping summers on the PGA Tour. As a journalist, I had covered U.S. Opens there in 1997 and 2011. I should also add for purposes of full disclosure that at the invitation of the club in 2016, I returned for a day-long paid consulting visit during which I shared with them my sense of the course and its potential for improvement. But I've had no subsequent involvement with the club and had not the slightest inkling of how far they would take things until a visit in mid-October.

Congressional is a big place: 380 acres, with two 18-hole golf courses, the Gold Course and the championship venue Blue Course (home to the U.S. Open in 1964, 1997 and 2011, the PGA Championship in 1976 and 2031, and the Ryder Cup in 2036). The club

was founded in 1924 as the focal point for recreation among the nation's leaders in industry and politics on a non-partisan basis. It remains that way, a rarity in D.C. culture.

The Blue Course was something of a hybrid curiosity. An original 18-hole routing by Devereaux Emmet was split in half by Robert Trent Jones Sr., with the front nine rerouted and revised completely and a new back nine added. The original back nine was used to become the Gold Course in 1977.

The course underwent subsequent renovations in the run-up to its two most recent U.S. Opens, with Rees Jones adding his trademark mounding, variously tinkering with a new par 3 that was the 18th hole in 1997 and the 10th hole in 2011. In the process, Congressional-Blue became heavily tree-lined, with fairway bunkering left and right and play strictly aerial and down the middle. Notorious for its summer heat and humidity, Metro Washington made the place feel like a vegetable steamer, with no relief in the form of air movement. The turf showed the strain. The course provided little emotional engagement.

Enter Andrew Green, who by 2017 had made his mark with a major transformation of Inverness Club in Toledo, Ohio, and was slated next for restorations of Oak Hill-East Course in Rochester, New York, and Scio-to Country Club in Columbus, Ohio. Work at Congressional began in October 2019 with extensive tree work and reconstruction of every green, bunker and tee. Along the way, Green solved

a perennial routing problem by finding a new site for the 10th hole. The main achievement of the feature work was to make the elements fit in at grade level, provide ground game access to at least part of the greens, and bring the native areas and creek beds more into prominence while enhancing interior views across the site.

Fairways went from 25 acres to 46 — all of it sodded with a 50/50 mix of 007 and Match-play bentgrasses. The greens, newly planted in 007 (50 percent), Piranha (25 percent) and Coho (25 percent) got 16 percent larger, from 6,100 square feet on average to 7,200, with far more varied hole locations. Every bunker has been outfitted with Better Billy Bunker drainage and snuggled closer to the playing surface, with the leading edge into it mowed down to accentuate its impact on play. And the tree work has opened up the course to wind. It's as if somebody turned on a big fan.

The engineering work was not simple. In order to maximize erosion control, a series of acre-plus temporary holding ponds had to be built to collect any silt. They will be removed eventually, the areas established with native fescues to create a contrasting palette of plant material. The result overall will be a golf course that looks, feels and plays entirely differently than the old Blue Course.

Who said there were no prospects for Congressional reform? Amazing what happens when decision makers take a serious look and decide it's time for a major change. **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).

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Multi-year Majesty

By Rick Woelfel
Photos Parikha Mehta

*How do you execute long-range improvements without halting play or draining the budget? **Greg D'Antonio** and the Concord Country Club team are taking project management to the next level.*

Something special is happening at Concord Country Club. At the start of 2021, a renovation effort will resume. When it is finished, ideally by the beginning of April, the golf course will feature two completely new holes and three others will have been significantly revised to reflect the design philosophy of William Flynn, Concord's original architect.

The effort marks the final phase of a master plan approved in 2017.

What is particularly noteworthy is that Concord superintendent and facilities manager Greg D'Antonio and his team are doing virtually all the work themselves.

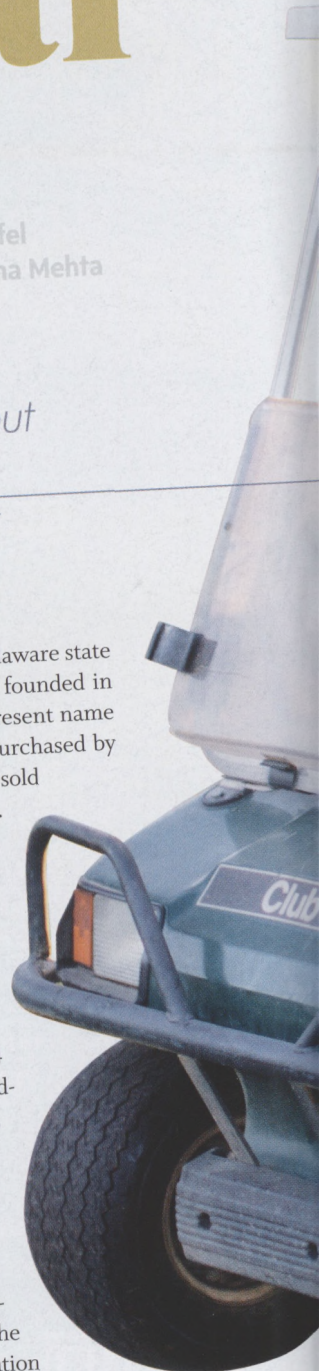
"We sold the master plan (with the assurance) it would be done with no assessment to the membership," D'Antonio says, "and we would not interrupt the golf season. So we're doing all this work with (scheduled) completion by April 1 when the handicap posting season begins. We had to spread the money out over three fiscal years as well and not reduce any revenue in season."

Concord is a club that out of necessity keeps a close eye on its bottom line. Located in West Ches-

ter, Pennsylvania, just north of the Delaware state line in suburban Philadelphia, it was founded in 1918 as the Brinton Lake Club; the present name was adopted in 1927. The club was purchased by Wilmington Country Club in 1945 and sold to Lammot du Pont Copeland in 1961. Following his death in 1983, the club passed to his son Gerret van Sweringen Copeland, who, in turn, sold it to the members in 1997.

The ongoing renovation effort began in 2017. The first two-thirds of the project saw the construction of two completely new holes, Nos. 14 and 15. The final phase will see the addition of a massive bunker at the 16, along with the removal of numerous trees from the 17th and 18th holes, trees that will be replaced by 21 fairway bunkers.

D'Antonio, a Penn State graduate who has been at Concord for a decade, is particularly excited about the changes on 16, including the restoration of a bunker designed to resemble Pine







▲ Left to right: Assistant superintendents Jake Lasco, Matt Mount and Nick Sujkowski.

Valley's Hell's Half Acre.

"It was taken out during the Great Depression," D'Antonio says. "We will be reintroducing that this winter with some modifications. We'll be shifting it off to the side a little bit to allow the high handicappers and the ladies to navigate around it. Something that will be really unique to Concord."

D'Antonio oversees a full-time crew of 18. The crew has done virtually all the nuts-and-bolts work of the renovation including laying sod, installing bunker sand, overhauling the irrigation system and removing trees.

Some 2,000 trees have been taken out over the course of the project. D'Antonio's crew has removed over

90 percent of them; the exceptions were trees larger than the crew was equipped to handle or those that were encroaching on putting greens or property lines.

D'Antonio sees keeping virtually the entire renovation effort in house as the wave of the future for most clubs. "Certainly at the mid-level private clubs," he says. "I think (an in-house renovation) is an opportunity to continually improve the members' experience, the playability of the golf course, keep up with maintenance and changes in technology, and change the course to adjust to technology on a budget without tackling more debt for the club and not shutting the club down in season."

Doing the renovation in house is saving D'Antonio's employers a considerable amount of money. It's estimated the project will cost the

“My philosophy has always been to help people achieve their goals. We bring them in, they get this experience and hopefully they move on to their own course or on to their next challenge in their career. They're having the experience of doing a renovation and being able to sell that to their next employer.”

— Greg D'Antonio



club approximately \$400,000. Had the work been contracted out, the sum would have been an estimated \$650,000.

D'Antonio says the renovation effort gives his team members a break from their regular routine and lets them recharge their batteries. "When you look to attract and retain labor, cutting cups, spraying and mowing gets monotonous," he said, "and I think people really enjoy seeing their hard work in a finished product. So (the renovation) has allowed us to attract talented people and keep them on. They're able to see the fruits of their labor and the improvements that we continually make to the club."

D'Antonio points out that working on the renovation has allowed members of his team to broaden their base of professional knowledge, experience and skills, thereby enhancing their value to a potential future employer.

"They can get a lot of experience they may not have had at other courses, working with machinery, working close with the architect"—Jim Nagle of Forse Design — "working closely with the shaping company (Mottin

Golf), as well as involvement at the committee level with the greens chairman from a budgeting perspective," D'Antonio says. "So really, it's just trying to use what we have going on to attract and retain great talent and people that are hungry to learn. My philosophy has always been to help people achieve their goals. We bring them in, they get this experience and hopefully they move on to their own course or on to their next challenge in their career. They're having the experience of doing a renovation and being able to sell that to their next employer."

D'Antonio gives much of the credit for the success of the project to Nagle, who has worked for Forse Design for more than two decades and is a William Flynn devotee. In fact, his detective work some years ago helped confirm that Flynn did indeed design Conord's golf course. Nagle and D'Antonio have a professional relationship dating back to the latter's days as an assistant superintendent at Chester Valley Golf Club outside Philadelphia.

"He works on a number of Flynn courses," D'Antonio says, "so essentially he designed these golf



holes almost from scratch, using characteristics from what Flynn would have done. He's kind of the creative mind. Where I try and come in is from a playability perspective, from an agronomic perspective, from being a player myself understanding what the members here will and will not like.

"We try and bring both our visions and both our ideas together and come up with a vision for not only the restoration, the renovation, but also the total golf course and how

In-house **wisdom** from the superintendent and architect

A glance into our crystal ball reveals that superintendents will be increasingly looking to handle renovation projects internally in the interest of controlling costs.

With that thought in mind, we reached out to superintendent Greg D'Antonio and architect Jim Nagle, who are collaborating on the ongoing renovation at Concord Country Club, for their thoughts on the subject.

From superintendent Greg D'Antonio:

1. **Know where to save money and where to outsource.** Know your level and your staff's skill set and where your expertise ends. Always be safe.
2. **Always use an architect.** Superintendents know agronomics, not design. This also helps take the bullseye off a superintendent.
3. **Don't sacrifice playability or member experience.** Do the work in the winter if applicable or around tournaments. Member experience and playability is always No. 1. Golfers don't want to play in a construction zone.

From architect Jim Nagle:

1. **Early preparation is critical when undertaking work in-house.** This means addressing any tree work and irrigation relocation (if possible) prior to beginning construction. Most clubs reduce their staffs during the offseason. If there are opportunities to address work prior to a reduction in staff, get it out of the way. This takes pressure off typical winter work plus the construction work to be completed.
2. **Communicate, communicate, communicate.** Greg is very active with social media and updates to his members. A contractor often has the flexibility to throw more labor at a project if weather impacts the timeline. Clubs may fall behind if the weather does not cooperate. If the superintendent is continually communicating with members and their boards, it helps when weather becomes a factor. This also goes back to the first point. The less prep work that needs to be done means the project can get off to a fast, efficient start.
3. **Communicate to members what they can expect at the beginning of the following playing season.** Don't get trapped into setting an unrealistic opening date. Be sure there is some flexibility on the club's part to allow the work areas to properly heal and grow-in.
4. **Involve the assistants as much as possible.** In-house projects are a perfect opportunity to allow assistants to gain greater experience and knowledge. Whether they assume a greater role in the offseason work or as a part of the construction, it's a great opportunity for them to grow.
5. **Be sure to fully understand the vision the architect has for the finished product.** It is our responsibility to properly communicate our vision to the team, but it's also important for the superintendent and staff to ask questions when necessary.

it presents itself. I can't say enough good things about him in terms of his knowledge in Flynn and his famous designs, but also his willingness to listen to others, and how it will play every day and how it will be received with the members."

Nagle believes that while some clubs, specifically those with vast financial sources, may be in a position to shut down for a season to do a major renovation or restoration, the vast majority will follow the Concord model—now and going forward.

"They're going to do stuff over

time," he says. "And that's the way a lot of our clients are. At Forse Design, we actually call our master plans long-range improvement plans because most clubs aren't looking at two to five years, they're looking at two to five, five to seven, or seven to 10, or even further. Because for them to take a master plan and just bite off on that from the get-go is too much.

"I think (in-house renovations) are the wave of the future. I think superintendents are becoming more hands on. Not that they were not in the past. But I think they have the

ability to take on more of this work. I think you're going to see more of that, going to see more of that team effort, where smaller contractors come in and do portions of the work and do it well and then the superintendent has the ability to come in and do the things that they can do in house."

Nagle adds that members should be aware that while a renovation or restoration is ongoing, their superintendent will be juggling added responsibilities.

"The membership always has to remember that the superintendent and his crew are there first and foremost to maintain the golf course," he says. "That's why Greg has done such a good job because he's been able to juggle maintaining the golf course along with also doing these projects."

Nagle cites D'Antonio's interest in golf course architecture and his inquisitiveness as keys to the success of the project at Concord.

"Greg has a really good eye as a superintendent," Nagle says. "He plays golf, he loves architecture, he loves his job as a superintendent, he's very good at it, and he loves history. For Ron Forse and I, what better to ask for out of a superintendent?"

Nagle notes that D'Antonio wants the best out of everyone involved in the project.

"He's not afraid to ask questions that need to be asked," Nagle adds. "And he has made me rethink things and kind of keeps me in check, in a good way. And I think that's why he and I have developed such a good relationship.

"He's going to get the most out of himself. He's going to get the most out of us. He's going to get the most out of his crew. Because when you're doing stuff in house like he does, he's going to get the best product for his membership." **GCI**

Rick Woelfel is a Philadelphia-based writer and frequent Golf Course Industry contributor.



CONSTANTLY THINKING ABOUT BUDGETS

With most 2021 budgets prepared and submitted, many golf course superintendents and their managers are reviewing and updating agronomic plans for the coming year. A sound agronomic plan is a living document that must anticipate upcoming conditions and respond to emerging circumstances. In volatile times, certain constants must be considered. Let's evaluate some of those constants in the context of today's conditions and challenges and see how they might affect budgets.

CONSTANTS

Certain irrevocable factors influence the proper care and upkeep of golf facilities with budgets leading the list. Your budget is the mathematical "North Star" on which you steer your performance. It's also a measure of your intentions. One superintendent summarized his budget by saying, "You can run but cannot hide from your budget, so you might as well pick it up and run with it." In other words, dig into the process and learn to deal with the variables.

For 2021, here are several budget guidelines to understand:

- **Flexibility.** Most planners expect a choppy year ahead. Set aside funds for the unexpected events that will emerge and keep your powder dry.
- **Expenses.** Plan for three categories of expense. Fixed expenses for such budget overhead requirements as utilities and equipment leases are unlikely to change, although careful budget managers ask for relief on such fixed costs through abatements

or forgiveness that may help to stretch budgeted resources. Second, labor costs will ebb and flow as impacts from COVID-19 and closures of club facilities will place irregular demands on labor dollars. Give yourself some room to maneuver. Third, discretionary needs will emerge as fellow managers and golfers seek new solutions to new problems. So be prepared.

- **Innovation.** New ideas and methods introduce new solutions for labor and overhead costs. Be alert and watch for new and innovative possibilities that make your work eventful and add purpose to your accomplishments.

- **Weather.** Changing weather patterns demand that golf course operators become better informed and more proactive in planning care and upkeep practices. While much of your work is influenced by changing weather conditions, superintendents know to rely on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for accurate weather pattern forecasts that help them more accurately plan and schedule their maintenance practices.

- **Expectations.** Golfers' expectations continue to escalate. You can count on golfers wanting "more and better," which means course managers are always searching for process and results improvements. For 2021, golfers' expectations include enhanced sanitation and clearing of on-course comfort stations, golf carts and practice range equipment. Next year will demand sustainable care and upkeep standards despite

irregular resources that may be interrupted by supply chain and budgetary limitations.

UPCOMING CONDITIONS

Course managers must anticipate changes being introduced for labor management and workers' expectations. Such changes as reducing the number of workers exposed to one another is requiring managers to divide crews and adjust shifts. Your team's protection is vital.

Changing climatic circumstances requires enhanced emergency preparations. Consider your clean-air, fire and immediate-notice evacuation plans for workers and affiliated departments. Your liability insurance carriers are a good starting point for collecting guidance, as are emergency preparedness agencies in your vicinity.

EMERGING CIRCUMSTANCES

Develop your short list of resources on which you will draw for new threats and opportunities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health are examples of resources on which you can rely. The coming year will reveal new problems, challenges and circumstances with which golf course managers must reckon.

Emergency services professionals, such as your local health care, water supply and cyber-security experts, are valuable resources on which you can call. Beyond your club's insurer, call on fire and police experts to provide guidance in planning ahead. **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.

A person wearing a blue cap and a light-colored long-sleeved shirt is operating a Toro riding lawn mower on a golf course. The scene is set at sunset, with a warm, golden glow in the sky and silhouettes of trees in the background. The mower is in the foreground, and the person is walking behind it, steering it.

Respect for the Titans

Finding — and keeping — the right people to maximize the performance of pricey equipment requires inside knowledge about what modern technicians are seeking.

By Lee Carr



The Titans, born of Sky and Earth, ruled the world until they were overthrown by the Olympian deities, led by Zeus with his powerful master thunderbolt. Technician titans still exist and, using all their talent, make the seemingly impossible possible. A worthy technician will save the day with exceptional ability and by contributing to a culture that is respectful and productive. Often caught in a stormy gray area between superintendents and assistants, the transformative powers of a leading technician are something every crew needs.

TALENT AND TEAMS

At Medinah Country Club in suburban Chicago, there are three courses (Nos. 1, 2 and 3). Course 3 has hosted three U.S. Opens, two PGA Championships and the 2012 Ryder Cup. Across the entire property they roll out \$1 million to \$2 million of inventory every day. “We have few if any breakdowns,” says Steve Cook, director of grounds operations. “We have a very good mechanic staff. They’re tuned into play and what the expectations are on the golf course. They know how preparing for play is important and how they’re a key part of that. They are *the* key part of it, actually.”

Brian Bressler, Medinah’s equipment/shop manager, leads a team of three fulltime technicians (one recently hired) and four seasonal staff, which includes two additional technicians and two shop stewards. One shop steward is responsible for everything inside and the other takes care of the yard. Seasonal employees are recruited in the same manner as turf interns and they come from mechanical schools across the country. Medinah employees are developing a good relationship with a nearby school and are actively working to establish a mechanical recruiting pipeline.

Cook spent more than 20 years at Oakland Hills Country Club in suburban Detroit before moving to Medinah in April 2018. He says there has been some turnover in the past 18 months, but things are going well. Cook is especially pleased with the progress in the shop. “Hopefully, it is something we can manage like the turf side,” he says. “We bring new people in, train them and help place them in their next role.” Working at this highly regarded venue is a key benefit of the job and they have already placed one mechanic in the Chicago area.

Robert Nichols, equipment manager and assistant superintendent at Willow Brook Country Club in Tyler, Texas, would agree that training is important, as is being appreciated. “One big issue with techs is that they get caught between assistant superintendent and superintendent,” he says. “Assistants come and go,

but techs can be long-term. I would encourage supers to keep their techs happy. Give your tech the raise and praise they deserve. Training is a big factor.”

Both Medinah and Willow Brook have a prestigious membership with high expectations, were established in the early 1920s and have a rich golf history. Willow Brook has a newly-renovated 18 holes, two putting greens, a practice hole, two driving range tees and a four-hole short course designed to teach children the game of golf.

There is plenty to care for and Nichols spends a “typical” week working Monday through Saturday from 5:30 a.m. until about 4 p.m. He stages equipment, checks the cut quality on turf and checks green speeds for consistency. He helps with verticut and aerification setup and operation, grinds reels as necessary, services and repairs equipment, and checks the course for damage. Saturdays are for picking up sticks, blowing pine needles and servicing greens mowers plus many, many other responsibilities.

Being a technician is busy and Cook and Nichols both note that low pay is problem. “What is affecting how many people are interested in the job is money,” Cook says. “We require techs and if you are recruiting from the construction industry, heavy equipment, auto, trucking or wherever, you have to be competitive if you want a good one.”

Techs can start with salaries in the low \$20,000s, but that will grow to six figures for the best. That’s a huge range and one recruiting tool is to show candidates a clear path to better pay, a promotion or both. Get recruits engaged and interested from the start whether you plan to retain them at your property or help them move up the ladder to receive a promotion elsewhere.

“The first thing I stress to young techs is that simple service is your best friend,” Nichols says. “Changing oil and greasing is paramount. Pull out and put away all equipment to make sure it starts, runs and is safe for use. Machines and buildings have issues from time to time, that is

Developing a solid working relationship with equipment technicians will maximize your team’s ability to work in all conditions, including darkness.

© ROBERT NICHOLS

Medinah CC has a team of technicians to support three 18-hole courses. Front row: Brian Bressler and Angel. Back row: Brandon Kortens, Kyle Craciunoiu, Tim Haefke, director of grounds operations Steve Cook, Pedro Gonzalez and Evan Bluhm.

a fact. Getting upset doesn't help and if it bothers you when things break, you're in the wrong profession. Be organized with your maintenance routines."

There must be a component of continuing education. "Tech, superintendent, turf and equipment sites all help do the job," says Nichols, and he also stays current with Environmental Protection Agency regulation changes. Learning about on-board diagnostics 1 & 2 are a must and emission controls are "here to stay." Nichols shares that the Willow Brook staff is fantastic and one of the best parts of his job is helping the staff exceed all expectations.



Tips for hiring technicians

Medinah Country Club's Brian Bressler was seeking a new technician with integrity, a desire to learn, mechanical knowledge and a willingness to work on various machines. Oddly, many applicants have no previous knowledge of the position and introducing the daily routine is eye-opening. Bressler's best expectations for new hires include:

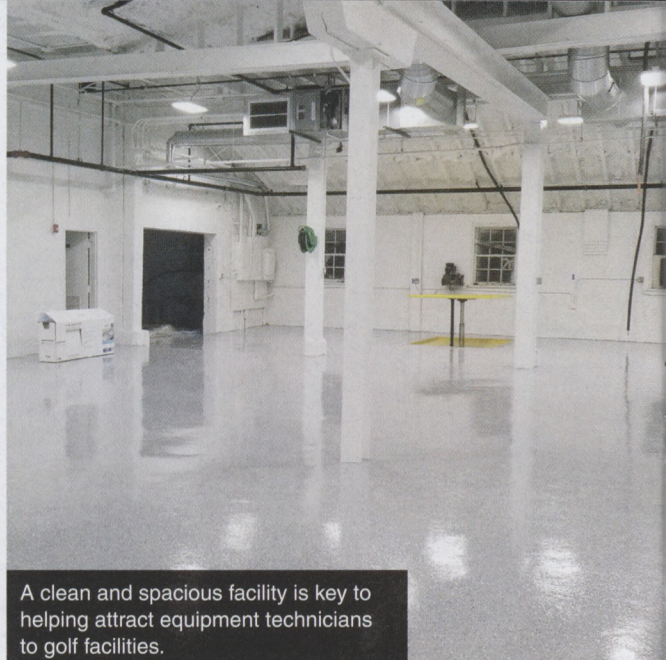
1. **Be safe.** Properly use the equipment. Broken equipment can be repaired. It takes somebody with a medical degree to repair people.
2. **Quality not quantity.** Do the job correctly the first time. Speed will come with knowledge.
3. **Ask questions.** If you aren't asking questions, then you can't understand what a supervisor is training you on.
4. **Ask for help.** Don't be afraid to ask for help. Asking doesn't imply incompetence.
5. **Be organized.** Organization will save time, money and frustration.
6. **Keep it clean.** Clean up after you're done with whatever you're working on (and this helps you stay organized).
7. **Have fun.** All work and no play is not good. Get your work done, but also have some fun.

CULTIVATING THE CULTURE

At work, exceeding the expectations of the members — and each other — is possible when employees understand those expectations and hold each other accountable. At Medinah, one expectation is for the equipment to be in great shape. If something needs to be fixed, it gets fixed. "The equipment and people in the shop are the most important part of any golf course operation," Cook says. "I can do what the assistant does, but I can't do what the technician does. It's the same for training."

With a little more than a year between starting in his new role and hosting the BMW Championship in August 2019, Cook says he "slowed everything down. We governed the equipment down, some of it to 1 mph, so the staff could understand the importance of respecting it. Staff get frustrated when the equipment isn't working and that can start a downward spiral of apathy. So we slowed down and started washing equipment routinely. People had to adjust to a culture of caring for an inventory of \$5 million of equipment that somebody else paid for. We are still driving tractors in first gear. After three seasons, we're ready to loosen up for greater productivity."

Medinah also put about \$300,000 into renovating the maintenance facility "to show respect to the technicians who occupy that space and to show the staff and members that equipment maintenance is important," Cook says. The staff are now more cognizant of the equipment and why it is important to get the culture right. The budget for fixing equipment isn't unlimited, but it's fluid. Equipment is required for the job.



A clean and spacious facility is key to helping attract equipment technicians to golf facilities.

Bressler notes that it's important to have good service from your distributor and the best way to keep staff up to speed is "training, training, training, everything from how to use it to what it is used for and how to keep it clean and maintained properly."

Of utmost importance is the quality of cut and the team is "pretty dialed in on that," Cook says. "One mechanic will go out on each golf course, each morning, and check all the mowers for quality of cut. They also check soil temperatures and surface temperatures. They are part of the mowing team to make sure that everything goes smoothly."

Alongside the morning mowing routine, Bressler has developed a maintenance system that works for Medinah. He has set up the shop to be as digital as possible. All the technicians have a 10-inch tablet and the operating manuals are on a Google Drive in a shared folder. The agronomy team can access these manuals from the course, and for everyone, being able to access manuals without traipsing to a central location saves a lot of time.

Google Drive also houses logs for repairs and servicing. Bressler has created Google forms and every piece of equipment has a QR Code. "When we're working on a piece of equipment, it has an ID tag on it that has the make, model, serial number, year and its QR Code," he says. "We scan the code and it takes us to the manual(s)

for that machine. We can troubleshoot quickly.” Another benefit to this system is that it’s free and there is plenty of storage space. Finding a reliable, easy-to-use system that works for your tech crew is paramount to implementing a respectful culture where everyone consistently knows what to expect.

Bressler participates in meetings and the maintenance staff is part of manufacturer demonstrations. The technicians will care for the equipment so they need to be part of the process from the start. Medinah hasn’t found any autonomous solutions that fit its needs, but they are open to anything new.

As you evaluate the efficiency of your program, what kinds of techs are ideal for your organization? There are many different types: irrigation, cart, spray, equipment, repair and the list of titles continues. Concentrate on the mix of techs who will work for you. Are language barriers causing a problem? Different terminology used among generations needs to be worked through, but if multiple languages are spoken in the shop, is it possible to have manuals accessible in multiple languages? Also, is all the equipment suitable for people of different sizes? For instance, can all of your machines be adjusted for the tall and the small? If not, is there a safe way to fix this, or a way to assign equipment in a way that everyone can work in the most ergonomic way possible? Considerate details make a difference.

Though the Titans faded out of popularity long ago, the technicians never will. It’s paramount they are respected in the way they should be, given the chance for raises and promotions, and can work their way through a career that is fulfilling. A powerful technician can transform your operation — and that’s not a myth.

“I have always put a big focus on the equipment repairs, on the shop and on the shop yard,” Cook says. “You have to take care of your house first and everything else will fall into line.” **GCI**

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

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LABOR OF LOVE?

MEMBER ALERT: Your golf course superintendent has been asked to post this story where you can see it as it addresses an important issue in course maintenance.

I recently sat in on a green committee meeting at a private club. At one point, a member criticized the superintendent for not being able to get things done, to the detriment of the course. It went something like this:

Committee Member: "Why aren't the bunkers in better shape and raked more often?"

Golf Course Superintendent: "We don't have enough labor and it's difficult to find good people to hire."

CM: "That can't be true. People are looking for work due to the high unemployment caused by the COVID-19 situation."

GCS: "Well, that's not exactly the reality."

CM: "I listen to the news, there is high unemployment — people should want to work here. Lack of labor is just an excuse. Why can't we get people to come to work here?"

Courses are struggling to fill positions at all levels. Every facility is asking for patience from golfers and to be tolerant of the postponement of some vital and meticulous maintenance practices.

But hiring for a maintenance crew is always difficult. Think about what it entails: physical labor, low pay, long hours and tough conditions. If your course is paying \$12 to \$13 per hour for the work described above, why wouldn't someone opt to earn \$15

an hour at the local grocery store — in air conditioning and heating, no less. Add in the trickle-down effects of COVID-19 and here's what's happening:

- A course missing four crew members loses at least 160 maintenance hours per week.
- That's a minimum of 640 hours per month.
- Due to the difficulties of acquiring labor or removing "non-essential" labor from the staff, the number of long-term employees drops, some of whom could transfer to the golf course staff.

And you wonder why things aren't done to your satisfaction?

Say you live in a "desirable" location that has even seen a recent influx from urban areas due to COVID-19. Yes, it may be a great place to live for working executives and retirees maintaining a certain economic level. Those less affluent, though — the potential labor force—probably won't find it as attractive or affordable. They'll probably face an extended commute to find affordable living. And they'll need enough money for gas, food and rent to come to work at your course.

This "desirable" area is also likely experiencing a boom in construction, which often seeks day laborers who are paid in cash, under the table. And the local big-box stores and grocery chains offer higher wages, indoor comfort, worker's comp, medical coverage, maybe even a 401(k).

Some other realities:

The Latino work force has

long been a staple on crews because they are hardworking, willing to put in long hours and share camaraderie. But in these politically-charged times, citizenship issues have thrown a wrench into their availability. Some of that labor is transient, following the work in summer, returning home for winter. Some is limited by the availability of a driver's license and vehicle: If one worker has a license and drives four others every day, fine. But if he contracts COVID-19 or loses his license, the superintendent may be down an additional four bodies for the duration.

Another barrier is the mandatory drug test. Once they see that in an ad, some don't bother to respond. Interns could be an option, but the same challenges arise, including affordable housing.

What's the solution? Superintendents continue to get creative by looking into unusual sources of labor like veterans, those on work-release programs or younger retirees.

The situation also demands flexibility in coordinating and scheduling labor. Consider shorter or stacked shifts and work-share programs.

You members can help, too. Put your business experience and contacts to work looking for possible employees.

More important, exercise patience and some degree of compromise. Give your superintendent a break: They don't want the golf course looking shabby, either. And they certainly don't want to disappoint you — the customer. **GCI**



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STAY OR GO?

The events of 2020 forced numerous tactical changes. Superintendents discuss the prospects of altered practices extending into 2021.

By Rick Woelfel

Golfers are doing a lot of things differently in 2020. So are golf course superintendents. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the creation of new policies and protocols in an effort to do what's necessary to protect the turf while also keeping golfers and employees safe.

Early on, golfers in many locales became adjusted to being denied access to the clubhouse or golf shop, and having to bring their own supplies, including water, Gatorade and, perhaps, scorecards and pencils. On the course, they became adept at social distancing and accustomed to leaving flagsticks in the cup.

Turf pro-

fessionals are adjusting to new realities as well, including often finding themselves with smaller crews available to perform necessary maintenance in fewer labor hours while trying to stretch their resources as far as possible in response to a surge in play.

The point to ponder: Will some of today's new protocols turn out to be anything more than a passing fancy? Or will they be fixtures going forward, particularly if the threat of COVID-19 remains?

Golf Course Industry contacted superintendents for their thoughts on an assortment of turf-related issues and protocols. We asked whether these trends would endure going forward; whether they would Stay or Go?

SMALLER CREWS

Some facilities were closed for play this spring because of the pandemic but were permitted to perform routine maintenance tasks, albeit with smaller crews working fewer hours. Will smaller crews be the wave of the future as well as the present?

Bob Farren, the vice president of golf course maintenance at the renowned Pinehurst Resort in Pinehurst, North Carolina, believes the do-more-with-less model will be standard operating procedure, at least for now.

"I think it goes without question that labor resources have been reduced at most clubs even though rounds have increased," he says. "The simple fact is that labor resources are a direct reflection of revenues and it is safe to say revenues compared to prior year will be down at most clubs."

Charlie Miller is the superintendent at The Springhaven Club in Wallingford, Pennsylvania, just outside Philadelphia. The idea of working with a smaller staff over the long term gives him pause.

"I hope smaller crews will not be the standard going forward," he says. "During shutdown, I had a crew of six total, including me. I currently have 13 total, three of which are part-time. It is not enough. We are solid 'down the middle' but struggling to keep up with the outskirt areas."

Andrew Dooley, who takes care of the turf at Berkshire Country Club in Reading, Pennsylvania, is of the same mindset. "We were down to three staff including me for about three weeks," he says. "We slowly grew our crew back to normal staffing week by week. With membership demand to play the course and their expectations for the course to be maintained the same as in previous years, we need normal staffing to achieve these expectations."

REDUCED MOWING

In recent years, some superintendents have limited mowing in roughs and other out-of-play areas. That

practice became more common in the wake of the pandemic. Will it remain going forward?

"While the concept of reduced acreage has been popular for a number of years, I am sure many clubs were faced with reducing the frequency of mowing and trimming out-of-play and cosmetic areas at least for a certain period of time this season," Farren says. "I would expect to see the return of maintaining these areas for 'housekeeping' reasons once expense budgets return to some sense of normalcy."

Dave Groelle, the superintendent at Royal Melbourne Country Club, a private facility in Long Grove, Illinois, about 35 miles northwest of Chicago, altered his mowing regimen only briefly.

"The only area that was reduced in mowing was the amount of times that we were able to completely mow the rough," he says. "Due to the high volume of play, we were only able to get around the course about once per week. Prior to COVID-19, we could easily mow all rough twice per week."

Tyler Bloom, of Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, provides consulting services to golf facilities on employment issues and had a successful career as a superintendent. He believes that clubs may well reduce their mowing frequency on a long-term basis. "Golf courses will continue to find ways to cut back, whether that is increased natural areas or limiting the amount of mowings by altering management practices such as fertility, water management, increasing PGRs or general reduction in frequency," he says.

Chad Taylor has been the superintendent at Cherokee Valley Golf Club, a private facility in Traveler's Rest, South Carolina, for 21 years and has worked in the golf industry for 35 years. He adjusted his mowing schedule based on the volume of play the club received.

"In the spring, when the coronavirus started, there were so many people that showed up to play golf," he says.

"Normally, at that time, I would only be mowing my (Bermuda) greens three, maybe four days a week. But there was so much foot traffic. I pretty much started mowing my greens every day just so the mower could help roll down all the foot traffic."

MORE TIME BETWEEN CHEMICAL APPLICATIONS

With some courses having to reduce staffing and labor hours during the pandemic, some tasks remain undone, or not done as often as is preferable. Which raises the question: Will superintendents increase the intervals between chemical applications?

Jim Nedrow, the director of agronomy at The Club at Indian Creek, a 27-hole upscale public facility in suburban Omaha, Nebraska, says that isn't an attractive option in his situation.

"We're a pretty high-volume event course, so our spray intervals are based on a few things, disease pressures, weather forecasts and event schedules," he says. "We don't have the ability to make those decisions on anything other than that. We try and stick to our 14- to 17- to 21-day intervals based on what we sprayed and what rates we sprayed and we also have to take into account if the course is busy tomorrow we're spraying today or vice versa, so I would say we were almost 100 percent unaffected by what was going on."

Jennifer Torres, the superintendent at Westlake Country Club in Jackson Township, New Jersey, doesn't see the pandemic affecting her application schedule. "This is weather-based, in my opinion," she says, "and Mother Nature is not cooperating."

Dooley has the same sentiments. "We have high standards and expectations, so our plant protectant program remained the same in 2020," he says. "The only application I wish we had more time for would have been spot spraying for weeds in rough areas."

Farren notes the necessity of

remaining alert to possible disease issues despite the pandemic. "It is important to remain vigilant on disease and weed control to maintain plant health and density," he says. "One can reduce labor costs for short periods of time without too many long-term consequences. This doesn't hold true for disease prevention and nutrition programs."

REMOVAL OF ON-COURSE ACCESSORIES


Some facilities have removed items such as water coolers, ball washers and trash cans from their courses. The response from the turf professionals we heard from was generally positive.

"Removal of course accessories has been a valuable time saver," Miller says. "We currently have no ball washers, only two bottled water stations, no bunker rakes, no divot mix boxes and no benches. Trash cans, unfortunately, are a must-have. The amount of time saved by simply not having to move or remove bunker rakes for mowing, spraying, etc. has been a bigger factor than I could have imagined."

With his members' support, Doolley removed virtually all the on-course accessories at Berkshire Country Club. "We obtained committee buy-in on removing and selling mostly all course accessories," he says. "We have eliminated all benches on par 3s, all 26 ball washers and reduced trash cans from 25 to six. It's been our best improvement since COVID began. We are still using coolers with bottled water. For the month of May, coolers were not on the course, but that changed once temperatures warmed up and membership requested water to drink on course."

When the pandemic hit in March, Nedrow and the team at The Club at Indian Creek removed everything from ball washers and bunker rakes to benches and most of the trash cans. "We wanted to remove all touch points," he says.

But with the approach of summer and the club preparing to host a Korn

 The only area that was reduced in mowing was the amount of times that we were able to completely mow the rough. Due to the high volume of play, we were only able to get around the course about once per week. Prior to COVID-19, we could easily mow all rough twice per week."

— Dave Groelle, Royal Melbourne Country Club

Ferry Tour event and a major amateur event, Nedrow had to vary his approach. "As we started to get into July and (the Korn Ferry Tour event) and our amateur event, we knew we were going to have to provide a tournament-ready facility, so we started implementing rakes one per bunker and we started rolling out a few other things," he says. "We still don't have ball washers on the golf course."

Farren says when ball washers were removed at Pinehurst there was little, if any, reaction. "We once had ball washers on every tee," he says, "and seldom did I see anyone use them. We have had very few comments regarding when they might return. I feel all facilities will be re-prioritizing amenities and will use resources to install benches and water/hydration stations in response to the increase in walkers."

LIMITED BUNKER MAINTENANCE (INCLUDING NO BUNKER RAKES ON THE COURSE)

Over the course of the season, golfers have become accustomed to doing without bunker rakes and smoothing the sand with their feet. Groelle says that trend has been popular with his members.

"Players enjoy the benefit that this change has created for the overall pace of play," he adds, "and they enjoy the local rule of a free drop in the bunker. More importantly, there are no rakes obstructing the team's daily maintenance routines."

Nedrow doesn't believe the con-

dition of The Club at Indian Creek's bunkers have suffered due to an absence of rakes. "I don't know that the bunkers are maintained any better with rakes than they were without rakes, to be honest, apart from a tournament setting," he says. "From a daily-fee standpoint, bunker rakes will probably not be missed."

Farren had concerns when bunker rakes were removed at Pinehurst, but the impact has been less detrimental than he anticipated. "We still have not put the rakes back out, though we are likely spending close to the same number of labor hours maintaining bunkers," he says. "We've had very few, if any, complaints." Farren believes complaints have been minimal in part because serious golfers understand the circumstances.

Circumstances vary, of course, from one facility to another. "We have done less bunker maintenance recently due to renovation," says Westlake Country Club's Torres. "Unlike many courses in New Jersey, we have not returned rakes to our bunkers as it is a 55-and-up community and our golfers see (rakes) as a risk."

Taylor removed rakes from bunkers at Cherokee Valley for about six months earlier this year before he was asked to return them in early October. Taylor would have been content to do without the rakes, but he says members are doing their part to maintain quality conditions. "My members are really good about maintaining the bunkers, raking the bunkers and providing a good condition for the person behind them," he adds. **GCI**



BUYER-SELLER RELATIONSHIP ADVICE

The golf industry has been tested in 2020 and found new ways to be relevant and successful. One thing that has stood out is the need to maintain highly functional relationships between buyers (superintendents and course managers) and sellers (vendors). There is a clear partnership within the golf industry that exists between those who sell products and services and those who buy and use them. When this relationship is nurtured, both parties win, especially in difficult times. Here are three ways to keep your vendor relationships strong.

1. FOLLOW THE GOLDEN RULE

Treat people (especially vendors) like you would want to be treated. Vendors all want a fair chance to earn your business and your reputation in the industry will be influenced by the way you treat vendors, even the ones you seldom purchase from. Remember to be courteous in person, on the phone or in a virtual format. Tell the facts of the situation. I am looking to buy Product X to solve Problem Y and I need it delivered by Date Z. Schedule meetings with the vendors that can supply your needs and be sure to post any rules or procedures that you use for appointments and property access. Keep contact information readily available either in your phone or in an old-school stack of business cards. Meet or speak with as many vendors as reasonable, telling them the parameters and hearing their recommendations.

When you decide to make a purchase, reach back to those not chosen with honest feedback investing time in future transactions.

Having been on both side of the desk, I know that you can really improve your network by supporting multiple vendors openly and consistently. This approach will create multiple streams of supply and build a network of vested experts who can help you find success in any situation.

2. COMMUNICATE OBLIGATIONS TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Make sure that every vendor transaction is clearly communicated to all stakeholders. This has multiple layers of responsibility. For example, the buyer expects that the seller will deliver the product or service in satisfactory condition at a specific time. The vendor expects that you will inspect and take delivery of the product or service and make financial restitution by the agreed upon date. You as the superintendent must function as the conduit that ensures all obligations are met and thus the transaction is completed. You should verify services rendered and confirm accounts are paid.

Every month when you review the financial statement you have an opportunity to be excellent. This critical step in building business relationships is often overlooked, but the most respected and successful superintendents make sure the product and services are as expected and that all invoices due are paid on time. If accounting has made an error or experienced a delay, take ownership and notify the vendor to work out a fair deal. It is just as important that you function as the financial steward for the property as well as the

agronomic steward. Vendors will appreciate the effort.

3. CREATE WIN-WIN SITUATIONS

Every successful business is measured by profitability, so do not expect your vendors to take a loss to improve your bottom line. Do your homework and find the best value in the market. Go beyond the base price and look at all factors such as service, convenience, rebates/reward programs, flexibility, previous history and industry support/sponsorships. Choose your vendors carefully and make sure that the partnership will be positive for both parties. Get to know your vendors beyond just product inquiries. Many vendors are former superintendents and are valuable resources as well as conduits for agronomic patterns in the area.

A sales visit is an opportunity to exchange information and literally build trust. Personally, I want our vendors to be just as successful as our club. The key is to constantly evaluate the results of earlier purchases, personalities and potential, ensuring that the results were as advertised. If you feel a vendor or product change is needed, do so quickly and professionally. People who are driven to succeed prefer to do business with like-minded people. You can often improve an operation by setting a professional/personal standard that guides vendor selection and expectation. Your goal should be to work together with your vendor partners to create synergy that improves both organizations. **GCI**



ANTHONY L. WILLIAMS, CGCS, CGM, is the director of golf course maintenance and landscaping at the Four Seasons Resort Club Dallas at Las Colinas in Irving, Texas.

BIG SKY

SHORT SEASON

Elevated play numbers, large critters and plenty of snow:
How a pair of facilities in a mountainous Montana region fared
during the 2020 golf season.

By **Judd Spicer**

When your golf season is maxed out at 150 days, every round counts.

As does every detail. From man to beast to blade.

In Big Sky, Montana, elevated expectations are literal, with courses situated amid a setting reaching 7,500 feet above sea level.

As COVID-19 passed from stages of initial alarm to mandated sequesters to measuring risk to pent-up needs for distanced expeditions, the social distancing of the Treasure

► The Reserve at Moonlight Basin experienced a spike in member activity throughout the 2020 golf season.

State saw an unexpected rise in both tourism and home sales.

“Rise” is actually putting it mildly. In the late summer and early autumn, the nation's fourth-largest geographic state — with more than 147,000 square miles of space — experienced a mountain-sized boon in bustle and business.

Echoing the country's ubiquitous, pandemic-driven ascent in round counts across the summer months, Montana, with just 116 courses inside its borders, is counted among a “Mountain Region” of states that saw a 11.2 percent year-over-year upturn in rounds played through September, according to Golf Datatech. The inflation of play tracks as the third largest for any region in the country.

Traditionally revered for its outdoorsmen's bounty of skiing, fly fishing, hiking, rafting, hunting and beyond, Big Sky's mesh of a mere four courses (three private, one public) may be minute in count, but that hasn't resulted in any abstention from the round rush, with folks coming in from all corners of the country.

Lone Mountain Land Co., owner of Big Sky member community clubs Spanish Peaks and The Reserve at Moonlight Basin, saw summer membership arriving from across the country, with folks seeking enhanced Montana time during the COVID-19 summer. “Most of our members are coming from bigger cities, whether that be Chicago, down South or coming from L.A.,” says Nick Berasi, head golf professional at The Reserve at Moonlight Basin.

And it's not just the regulars seeking more elbow room amid the times of pandemic.

“Hearing from my real estate colleagues, they anticipated a slow season — now, they're experiencing record sales,” Berasi says. “It's booming.”

More sales equaled more stay equaled more play equaled more expectations for Berasi and Moonlight's grounds team. The Jack Nick-

laus-designed beauty of a beast at 8,000 yards from the tips and situated across the elevated grandeur of better than 800 acres of mountain terrain is no task for the timid — whether playing or maintaining the turf.

“Mother Nature and elevation dictate our course practices,” Berasi says. “Getting ready for a long winter at over 7,200 feet, it limits the amount of time for our season. Even though the summers are beautiful, we are working with a compacted time frame.”

Such compact sees around three-and-a-half months of golf. Rare — if ever — is there a play day to spare.

“With a 100-day season, we can't close for a day of the week. I've worked at courses where, say, the course is closed on Mondays for the maintenance staff. Here, we can't close for that day,” says Berasi, adding that tee times are adjusted to begin at 10 a.m. twice per week, allowing crews opportunity to complete work ahead of play. “We're a destination, so if a member is out here for just one week, we can't take that day away from their trip.”

Of course, for Montana mountain enthusiasts, golfer care is paired with a thorough purview of the natural surrounds. To wit: Every player or employee cart at Moonlight is affixed with bear spray.

“There's a healthy black bear population out here,” Berasi adds. “Operationally, we can't have any outdoor trash receptacles, so we ask people keep trash in the cart and we'll handle it when golfers come back in. Bear aware. We have the bear spray in every cart. Nobody has had to use it, but we wouldn't let our members or guests or staff go out without that spray, just in case.”

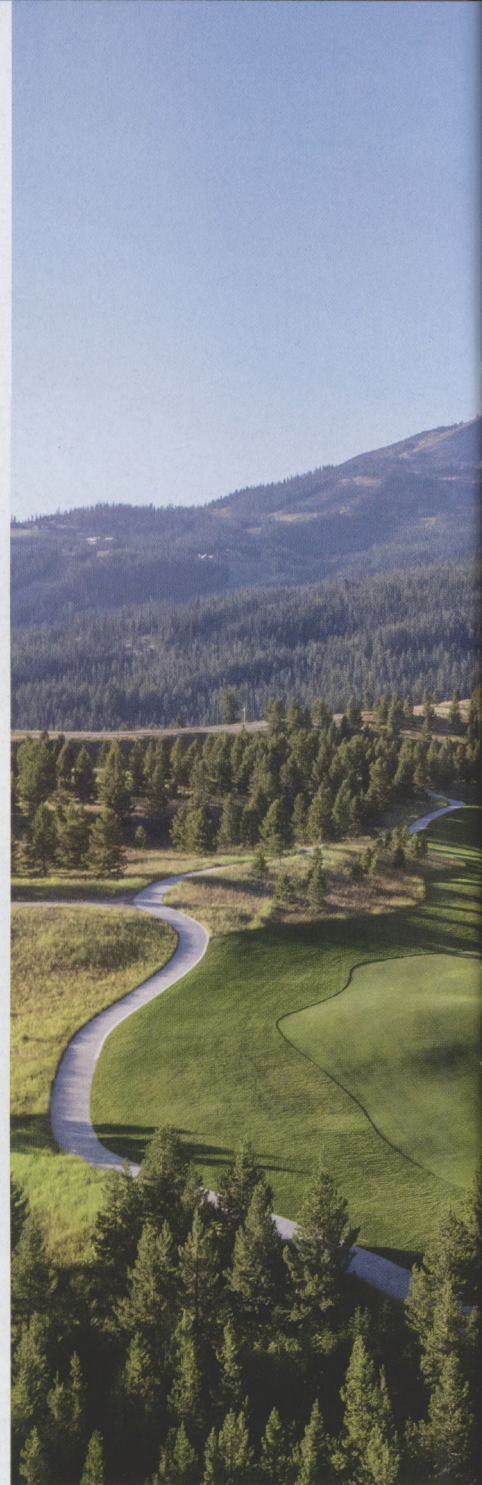
Of more enhanced agronomic concern is what moose and elk can do to pristine greens.

“There's also a high population of deer and elk,” Berasi says, “and a 700-pound elk can do some serious damage to greens. For some reason,

they're really attracted to the flags — either they love or hate those flags. I'm not sure if anybody truly knows. So we pull all the flags at night.”

As early fall marks the transition season, the Moonlight team readies for winter.

After applying applicant on bentgrass greens and tees to winterize surfaces and protect from snow mold, Moonlight's head superintendent Garrett Turner and crew prep for





snowfall.

"We put snow fencing all along the greens and tees, so we want to hold as much snow as we can, to keep that surface level from freezing," Berasi explains of Turner's tasks. "A good snow year for us — maybe six feet — is actually better for the course. Of course, the grass is dormant beneath that blanket, but it's still alive and it's protected from the winds."

Temps dictate success patterns.

"This past year, we had a lot of early-season snow, followed by super cold weather, then back to 50-degree days," Berasi says. "So, the snow melted and created ice at night—and that's a killer. We had a few ice burn patches."

High elevations are matched with high expectations for premier conditions.

"This season, you could initially see the signs of a hard winter, but

come July we had cross-seeded, tilling down into the soil. That worked very well, and those areas grew back nicely," Berasi adds. "Come spring, we were out there hand-shoveling all the greens and tees and getting some sunshine on those surfaces. By early May, we're mowing."

About 20 miles—and also around 1,200 feet—down the mountain, Big Sky Golf Course is part of the eponymous resort and has been operating

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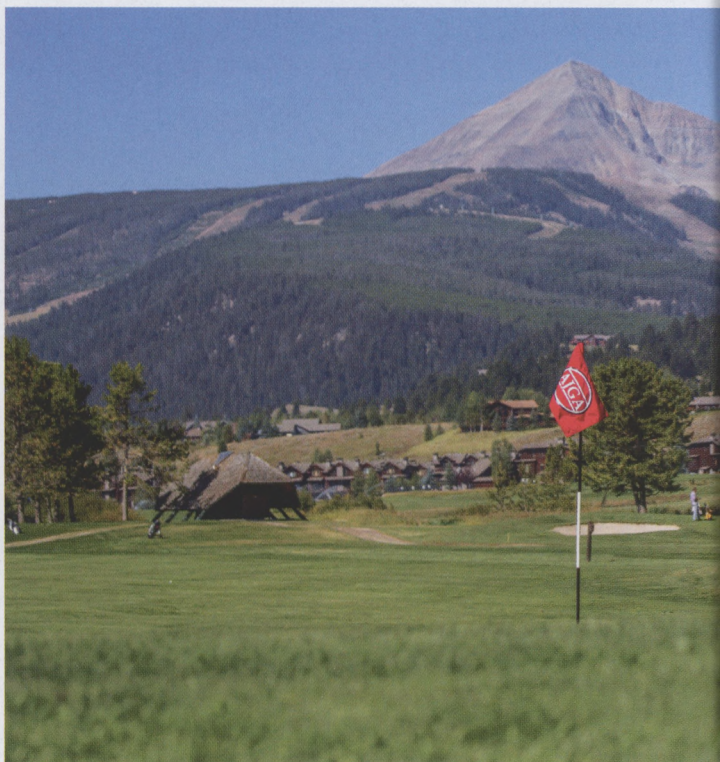
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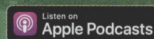
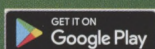
TARTAN TALKS

Guests from the American Society of Golf Course Architects discuss their career paths, current and past work, design trends, and how they work with superintendents and operators to improve the functionality, playability and marketability of golf courses.

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since 1973. One of the first Arnold Palmer designs when it initially opened as a 9-hole, the public grounds enjoy a season lasting about 140 days.

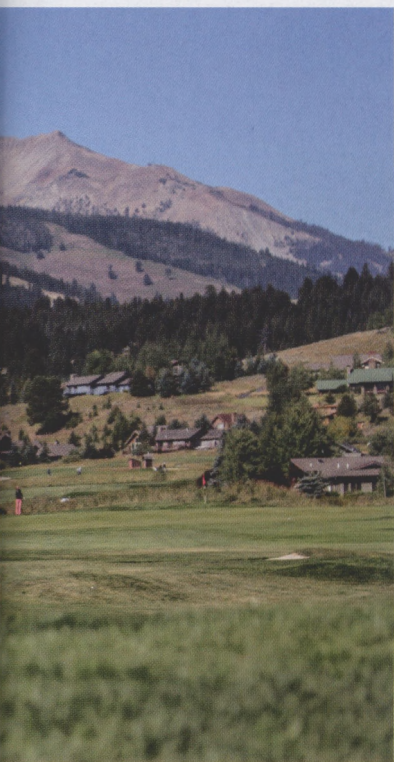
"We could stay open a bit longer, but because of the necessary cultural practices and managing expenses, we find it better to set a hard date," says Mark Wehrman, the course's head golf professional. "Some years you feel real smart for doing it, and other years, well, there's some hindsight, looking back and thinking maybe we could have stayed open a few more weeks."

Akin to its private play neighbor up the way, Big Sky seeks to maximize its compact season. As snow arrives and temps fall, Big Sky superintendent Sam Woodger and his staff aerate about two weeks before closing, followed by wall-to-wall course treatment and then blow-

ing-out irrigation.

"The healthier your turf-grass can be heading into winter — considering that this course sits under four feet of snow for five months — the healthier that turf can be going into the cold season and the better it will come out in spring," Wehrman says. "There's some juggle to get the greens aerated and picking the right cocktail of season-ending fungicide. We're always working to protect against the snow mold."

Ever aiming for ideal conditions amid the short season, Wehrman and Woodger have discussed solid-tining in fall, and then coming back in early May to core, all in an effort to be less invasive. "The thought process being that golfers don't expect perfect conditions on May 20, but they want 'em on September 15," Wehrman explains.



And while his public resort track is in a more populated area, the task of being constantly attuned to local wildlife sees no descent.

"The main challenges are with the elk. They move in herds and, come fall, when arrows and bullets start flying by their heads, they start seeking lower elevations," Wehrman says. "Sometimes, I'll see herds up to 300 of them. And when they get on the greens and in the bunkers, there can be some real damage. And, apparently, they really hate the flagstick, so they'll try and knock the pole out of the ground."

Like Moonlight, being bear aware is crucial on a daily basis.

"We've got to get every piece of trash off the course every night. If you've got any bear attractants out there, you'll show up in the morning and there's a

mess," Wehrman says. "We've got to do our part to make sure they're good bears."

For public and private grounds alike, seasonal splits between ski and swing seasons translate to seasonal gigs for employees. At Moonlight, a grounds team of 30 employees in-season goes to about 10 workers come winter.

"Once the course is set, they'll transition into our snow removal team, plowing residential driveways," Berasi says. "And a lot of the course equipment is multi-purpose and can be used for the snow removal work."

Big Sky Resort presents its golf staff with all manner of winter opportunities, while the course brass often trades TaylorMade for Rossignol. Woodger has a snow removal business in winter and the course's assistant head pro manages ski instructors at a resort. "Most of our staff goes to winter positions, whether it be ski instruction, rentals, patrol, lift, retail," says Wehrman, who has, on occasion, managed a ski rental shop.

Across a most atypical year, as the landscape turns from green to white, the bounty of Big Sky is a golf canvass graduating with the unlikely times.

"Initially, a lot of those folks came here for the ski attraction, but with COVID over the summer, the natural social distancing found people staying here," Berasi says. "Typically, we might see members and their families come out here for a few weeks in the summer. This season, it's been two months." **GCI**

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

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

NO SCALPED PLUGS

Dan Dingman, superintendent at Birmingham Country Club in Birmingham, Michigan, uses a narrow-tip screwdriver to blend the hole plug into the surrounding turf, followed by using an All-Star Umpire Brush (about \$10) to clean up any spilled greensmix, followed by applying water and then stepping on the plug to blend it in perfectly onto Pure Distinction greens. Each greens mower operator carries a used 64-ounce Ocean Spray plastic bottle filled with water, with a hole drilled in the cap, and they subsequently apply water to the old hole plugs every day. The procedure eliminates scalping and blemishes. The cup changer staff carries a 17-inch weather resistant Husky tool bag (\$30 at Home Depot) filled with a 64-ounce water bottle, two soil and seed bottles, greensmix container, narrow-tip screwdriver, cup hook, umpire brush, rattail file for sharpening the cutting shell, 2.5-inch-wide putty knife for leveling the bottom of the plug, scissors, towel, 2-inch by 8-inch PVC pipe for leveling the hole plug, etc., along with a Par Aide lever action hole cutter, with a scalloped inside edge, and cup setter.



HOMEMADE HYDROSEEDER

Gary Zagar, former director of golf maintenance at the Quail Hollow Country Club in Concord, Ohio, had fun with his equipment manager building a hydroseeder using a 300-gallon plastic sprayer tank mounted to a frame created by a welding school at a local career center, held down to an existing trailer with ratchet straps. A grinding circulating pump was installed in the bottom of the tank, a second 2-inch pump was installed in front of the tank powered by a 10 HP gasoline engine, with 2-inch valves and fittings, and using quick-connections for the 1½-inch applicator hose. The specialized nozzle was acquired online. The seed-starter mulch bales must be thoroughly soaked, broken up and then placed slowly into the tank. Zagar used a Kentucky bluegrass/perennial ryegrass seed blend along with a 20-20-20 granular soluble fertilizer, seed starter mulch and a tackifier. The design concept for the homemade hydroseeder was inspired similarly from a rental unit shown in the accompanying photos. Total cost was about \$1,000 using new and recycled parts in inventory. Labor time in-house took about a day; welding the tank framework took another day. Jeffrey Austin is the director of golf course maintenance.



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.

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A YEAR LATER

I received my bimonthly email from the Carolinas Golf Association containing my most recent GHIN update (5.9) on October 1. At the bottom of the email were the last 20 scores used for this revision. As I glanced over them, I realized two things. First, I have already played more rounds in 2020 than I did in 2019 — and I went on a golf trip to Ireland in 2019! I also noticed that my wife and I have played more rounds together in 2020 than in 2019 and 2018 combined.

You may recall it was in this column at this time last year that I wrote about that experience in Ireland. Despite my game not being what it once was, I realized I still love the game, I love playing golf with my wife and I resolved to do better. So earlier this year, I bought new clubs, hoping to find something resembling the game I once possessed.

Then came COVID-19. Suddenly everything was up in the air and there was uncertainty around every corner. Golf closed in some states and remained opened in others. Golf looked different due to restrictions and efforts taken on behalf of facilities to keep players safe. With many folks now working from home, golf courses that did not close found themselves busier than ever. Golf never closed here in North Carolina.

How did my wife and I manage to get out and experience golf together when many friends and colleagues were not permitting guest play? We would usually play late-afternoon rounds at nearby private courses. We're fortunate to have so many wonderful Donald Ross layouts in North Carolina and I have made many great superintendent friends during my tenure here.

If there is one good thing that has sprung from this COVID-19 situation, it is that golf is booming. Private courses are busier than ever and public courses are making a profit. I know many

resort facilities were affected early on without the ability to house guests during travel restrictions, but I can tell you a trip to Pinehurst one afternoon in late August revealed many people are ready to return to normal and experience life again. Hopefully, those facilities are catching up.

Our run started in April when we played Tobacco Road — a Mike Strantz-designed public course near Pinehurst — on a Sunday afternoon. I carried my clubs and she rode a solo. In the early stages of the pandemic, single-rider carts were mandatory in North Carolina, so I hoofed it.

We were back in the Pinehurst area a month later at Southern Pines, one of my favorite Donald Ross designs. I booked online, notified the superintendent of our planned arrival (a professional courtesy, takes only a few minutes) and we were welcomed upon arrival by the general manager. This was early May, and area courses were packed with locals and nearby residents the first half of the day. Without play from hotel and resort guests, the afternoons were available.

My birthday is in early June and things were just starting to reopen next door in Virginia, so we headed to Primland Resort in lovely and remote Meadows of Dan. I had previously played the Highland Course, but this was her first time there. The fine folks at Primland were genuinely happy to have us, as they had only been reopened a couple weeks. I don't think we could

have picked a better location than that lovely mountaintop to regain a taste of normalcy while being socially distant.

After an extended summer break, we resumed our day trips when weather permitted. We played rounds at Pine Needles, Mid-Pines and even enjoyed an overnight stay at Pinehurst Resort. I must admit things were starting to feel like the earlier days of our marriage before the self-imposed stresses of work and other distractions pulled us away from golf. I knew something good was happening when, after one recent golf excursion, she asked before bedtime where we were playing next.

So we've spent time together playing some new courses and some of our old favorites, but the best experience this year came in late September when we decided to visit the kids in Virginia before things got busy at work with club championships. We played Lynch Links on the grounds of Emory & Henry College outside Abingdon.

What makes Lynch Links so special is it is FREE to all. It consists of six par 3s and three short par 4s. On this day, my wife, her son and I walked the original six-hole loop three times, then scurried over so she could experience the other holes. Just a man and his wife, a mother and her son, walking, talking, enjoying the scenery and one another's company while playing an ancient game.

As it was meant to be played. **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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