

FEBRUARY 2021 | golfcourseindustry.com

GOLF COURSE[®] INDUSTRY

Under the water tower

You have seen it on TV. But how much do you really know about Firestone Country Club?

Learn what happens when cameras and golf greats aren't roaming the sprawling grounds.



#BXNCL0B *****AUTO**SCH 5-DIGIT 48823 MIX COMAIL
#00333645862#7A
PETE COOKINGHAM
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
366 W CIRCLE DR # W301A
EAST LANSING MI 48824-3700
144
28060
436502
34
0053 / 24645



Professionalism, in liquid form.

As a professional, you don't cut corners or make excuses. With Foliars+ liquid nutrients the same level of professionalism can be applied directly to your turf.

Your turf will respond favorably to the workmanship that went into Foliars+ sprays. They're made with the highest-quality nutrients and ingredients. And our comprehensive product line offers solutions for your thorniest turf challenges.

Powered by BioCharge, each Foliars+ product contains 75 trace materials and 20 amino acids. Our advanced fulvic and humic acid formulas are made strictly under HPTA guidelines. They open up your soil, allowing microbes to proliferate and promote the long-term health of your turf.

Made for the way you work.

Hard-working pros like you deserve the fast results that liquid nutrients offer, without sacrificing biological soil support. That's why Foliars+ sprays are different. Because we have a deeper respect for the work you do and the way you do it.



EarthWorks 

A Deeper Respect

ABOUT THE COVER: The 17th hole on the Firestone Country Club North Course. Courtesy: Firestone Country Club

VOL. 33 NO. 2

IN THIS ISSUE

Under the water tower

16

COLUMNS

- 14 OUTSIDE THE ROPES**
Tim Moraghan: I know a guy
- 30 GAME PLAN**
Henry DeLozier: Staffing for success
- 36 GOLF THERAPY**
Bradley S. Klein: Labor management rules
- 50 AMERICA'S GREENKEEPER**
Matthew Wharton: Inside the numbers

DEPARTMENTS

- 4 TEEING OFF:** Recruiting season
- 6 NOTEBOOK:** Time to get grilling
- 12 WONDERFUL WOMEN:** Sue Spahr
- 48 TRAVELS WITH TERRY:** Equipment ideas
- 49 CLASSIFIEDS / AD INDEX**

FEATURES

Cover Story

16 UNDER THE WATER TOWER

How much do you really know about Firestone Country Club? Learn what happens when TV cameras and golf greats aren't sprawling the grounds.

Labor

26 WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT STAFFING?

Superintendents shifted labor plans in 2020. What new practices might stick around in 2021?

Labor

32 A BRIGHTER, GREENER FUTURE

By helping two dedicated employees further their respective education, a Texas club provides a model for developing turfgrass talent.

Management

38 MAINTENANCE MULTIPLIED

How does the work get done at multi-course facilities? A trio of experienced leaders share their philosophies behind handling an abundance of moving parts.

Agronomy

42 HEY, THE TURF LOOKS GREAT

Course closures, determined workers and, yes, the weather all contributed to a surprisingly strong year for playing conditions.

32



38



gie
media
incorporated

GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY (ISSN 1054-0644) is published monthly. Copyright 2021 GIE Media Inc., 5811 Canal Road, Valley View, OH 44125. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted by any means without permission from the publisher. For quality article reprints of 100 or more, call GIE Media, Inc. at 800/456-0707 and ask for the Reprint Department. Subscriptions and classified advertising should be addressed to the Valley View office. Periodicals postage paid at Cleveland, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY* 5811 Canal Road, Valley View, OH 44125. Canada Post: Publications Mail Agreement #40612608 Canada Returns to be sent to The Mail Group, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2

RECRUITING SEASON

In a different writing life, I covered the people who competed atop manicured turf. A significant part of that job, especially the college football beat, involved speaking with coaches.

The public words and actions of successful coaches serve multiple purposes, ranging from appeasing fans and boosters to motivating players. Beneath every word and deed, they are attempting to reach the group most responsible for their long-term success: recruits.

The Dabos, Nicks and Jimbos spend more time thinking about how 16- and 17-year-olds interpret their words and behavior than how they are perceived by the adults who sign their checks. Connect with the right teenagers and the wins, job security and gigantic checks will follow. Recruiting is a nonstop, cutthroat part of the major college football business. It can rip the zest from film and formation junkies. Integrated with proper development, recruiting can separate good from great.

Nice stuff, Mr. Former Football Writer. But two quickies: Why aren't you covering football anymore? And how does any of this relate to golf course maintenance in 2021?

We'll tackle the second question first.

Anybody responsible for the well-being of a golf facility must recruit. You have something terrific to sell potential employees. Don't believe it? Then you might not be in the right industry. You work outdoors providing a soothing product. The overwhelming majority of your co-workers and customers are pleasant people. On most days, the product looks and feels better than when you started your day. Vast acreage promotes more work variety than a confined cubicle or space behind a counter. As Firestone Country Club director of golf course operations Larry Napora says in our cover story (*Under the water tower*, page 16), "You just never get bored in this business."

Napora's ability to communicate the joys of golf course maintenance to others is a big reason why he has spent more than 30 years in high-level positions. He knows how to recruit, retain and develop quality employees.

Recruiting will be the most important thing you do in 2021 ... and 2022 ... and 2032. No matter how much you know about plant physiology, Golden Age architecture or irrigation cycles, you will never succeed in this industry simply through knowledge. You need the help of others. Good luck trying to achieve what Jim Roney, Lee Hancock and Ryan Semritc (*Maintenance multiplied*, page 38) accomplish on grand scales without constant recruiting and development.

Solid employees are becoming tougher to find, so you must be thinking about recruiting nearly everywhere you wander. The Club at Carlton Woods director of agronomy Tim Huber found an aspiring turf professional in a grocery store parking lot. Huber's forward-thinking employer is currently helping a pair of young and determined workers, including the one Huber met at a Houston-area H-E-B, advance their education (*A brighter, greener future*, page 32).

Unfortunately, the golf industry struggles recruiting women. Perhaps that will change if more people take the time to listen to Sue Spahr, the first guest on Rick Woelfel's Wonderful Women of Golf podcast series. You can read about Spahr this month (page 12) and we also suggest downloading the podcast on the Superintendent Radio Network. Her voice tells the story of somebody who found the ideal career fit. Success stories are often the best recruiting tools we possess. Sharing the podcast with others might inspire a young woman—and a few of her friends—to consider working on a golf course.

Relentless and enthusiastic recruiting produces a multiplier effect. Imagine a situation where the time and energy you invest into recruiting this year creates a long-term employee pipeline, giving you one less thing to fret over each season.

OK, Mr. Former Football Writer. We get it. So, why aren't you covering football anymore?

Because the success stories in this industry are more fascinating than anything that happens on a playing field—and because great turf recruiters, unlike so many of their gridiron counterparts, are actually willing to share ideas and knowledge with others. GC



Guy Cipriano
Guy Cipriano
Editor-in-Chief
gcipriano@gie.net

GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

Vol. 55 No. 2

GIE Media, Inc.
5811 Canal Road
Valley View, Ohio 44125
Phone: 800-456-0707
Fax: 216-525-0515

PUBLISHER

Dave Szy
dszy@gie.net

EDITORIAL

Guy Cipriano
Editor-in-Chief gcipriano@gie.net

Matt LaWell
Managing Editor mlawell@gie.net

Terry Buchen
Technical Editor at-large

GRAPHICS / PRODUCTION

Jim Blayney
Creative Director

Caitlin McCoy
Advertising Production Coordinator

SALES

Russell Warner
National Sales Manager
rwarner@gie.net • 216-393-0293

Andrew Hatfield
Account Manager
ahatfield@gie.net • 216-393-0291

CORPORATE

Richard Foster
Chairman

Chris Foster
President and CEO

Dan Moreland
Executive Vice President

James R. Keefe
Executive Vice President

Kelly Antal
Controller

Christina Warner
Audience Development Director

Michelle Wisniewski
Production Manager

Maria Miller
Director, Conferences and Events

Irene Sweeney
Marketing Director

Nick Adams
Director, Digital
Audience Engagement

Kevin Gilbride
Business Manager, GIE Ventures

Golf Course Industry is a member of:
Golf Course Superintendents
Association of America
National Golf Foundation
Golf Course Builders Association of America
The Irrigation Association
Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment



STAY IN COMMAND OF YOUR COURSE

with All-New **Pilot® Command Center** Software
and High-Efficiency **TTS-800** Series Rotors



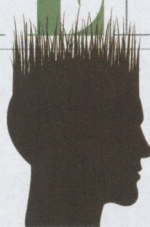
**PILOT COMMAND CENTER &
TTS-800 SERIES ROTORS**

When it comes to ensuring playability, we believe that irrigation and time savings go hand-in-hand. That's why professionals around the world have relied on us to eliminate the obstacles of day-to-day irrigation management for more than three decades. From highly intuitive and agile Pilot Command Center software to the most robust and reliable rotors in the industry, it's our mission to provide innovative solutions that help you maintain beautiful, playable courses in any setting.

GOLF IRRIGATION | *Built on Innovation®*
Learn more at hunterindustries.com/golf

Hunter®

NOTEBOOK



TURFHEADS GUIDE TO GRILLING

GOLF COURSE
INDUSTRY



AQUA-AID
SOLUTIONS

est. 2021

INTRODUCING THE TURFHEADS GUIDE TO GRILLING

Golf Course Industry, AQUA-AID Solutions
celebrating the art and science of outdoor cooking
among golf maintenance professionals.

Golf Course Industry and AQUA-AID Solutions are cooking up a flavor-filled, hunger-satisfying and engaging program for golf maintenance professionals.

To honor the connectivity and creativity demonstrated through grilling, smoking and barbecuing, we're introducing the "Turfheads Guide to Grilling." The program started in late January and is designed to inspire turfheads to celebrate the camaraderie outdoor cooking provides.

We're encouraging industry professionals everywhere to share glamour shots of food on a grill or serving plates, cooking videos, team-bonding imag-

es, recipes, and tips. Participating in the program is easy. Use #TurfheadsGrilling and tag @GCIMagazine and @Solutions4Turf on social media posts. If social media isn't your thing, you can email images, recipes and tips to *Golf Course Industry* editor-in-chief Guy Cipriano (gcipriano@gie.net), managing editor Matt LaWell (mlawell@gie.net) or national sales manager Russ Warner (rwarn@gie.net).

Materials will be collected throughout the year and shared in a printed "Turfheads Guide to Grilling" insert in the December Turfheads Take Over issue of *Golf Course Industry*. Industry professionals whose materials are chosen for the

printed guide will be eligible to win a team cookout in 2022.

"AQUA-AID Solutions is proud to partner with *Golf Course Industry* on the Turfhead Grilling campaign," AQUA-AID Solutions president Sam Green says.

"During 2020 we all valued cooking and family dinners more than ever. A unique set of circumstances allowed us to have time to be more creative, and cooking and sharing these experiences seemed to allow a sense of normalcy. I know with my own family we had a lot of fun creating new meals. The turf world is closely connected and the cookbook allows turf managers around the globe to come together in a relaxed fun-filled platform. I, for one, am looking forward to the banter back and forth between turfies during this campaign."

Look for more grilling-themed conversation throughout the year on the Off the Course podcast, *Golf Course Industry* and AQUA-AID Solutions websites, Fast & Firm newsletter, and Twitter and Facebook using #TurfheadsGrilling.

"We're absolutely pumped to begin this program with our friends at AQUA-

AID Solutions,” Cipriano says. “It’s no secret turfheads enjoy the process and results of grilling. Creating a team-first culture has never been more important in the golf industry and cookouts are an important part of building that culture. We’re encouraging our audience to share the details of this program with everybody on their team. The goal is to get a far-reaching collection of recipes and ideas from various parts of the United States and beyond. Who knows? Maybe you’ll gain an idea or two to add zing to your team or family meals.”

Tartan Talks No. 55



▲ Charlton

Longevity sometimes means an abundance of activity.

Forty years ago, **Bruce Charlton** joined Robert Trent Jones Jr.’s design firm as a young associate and immediately started traveling to nearly every imaginable corner of the world. Charlton’s responsibilities quickly expanded — he’s now the chief design officer of Robert Trent Jones II Golf Course Architects — but the pace has never subsided.

Fortunately, we got Charlton to pause for close to an hour to join the Tartan Talks podcast. An avid runner whose home route in Northern California includes the neighborhood surrounding famed Pasatiempo Golf Club, Charlton raced through a number of subjects, including his early days working for Jones Jr., the lessons he absorbed from his boss’s legendary father, Robert Trent Jones Sr., how the son of a third-generation attorney became a golf course architect and the experience of working at 2015 U.S. Open site Chambers Bay.

Like many of his colleagues, Charlton started working on a golf course as a teenager, rising to assistant superintendent at 9-hole Manchester (Iowa) Country Club before graduating high school. The crew consisted of two people: a retired farmer who mowed greens and Charlton. “It was a great job,” Charlton says.

That job remains etched in Charlton’s mind, especially when he reflects on how agronomic advances since the 1970s have affected golf course architecture. “The mowing equipment is so precise now,” he says. “It really changes the way the ball behaves on greens.”

Enter bit.ly/BruceCharlton into your web browser or visit the Superintendent Radio Network on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and other popular distribution platforms to hear the podcast.



Troon acquires former Billy Casper Golf

Troon opened the year with a major announcement: the acquisition of Indigo Golf Partners, the company formerly known as Billy Casper Golf.

Indigo Golf Partners is one of the larger golf course management companies in the United States. Headquartered in Reston, Virginia, with regional offices and teams across the nation, the company owns and operates more than 160 golf courses, country clubs and resorts in 29 states.

“Leaving the industry better than we found it has been a guiding principle of Indigo Golf Partners, and Bob Morris and I hope to have achieved that in our over-30-year history,” says Peter Hill, co-founder, chairman and CEO of Indigo Golf Partners. “Troon aligns with our commitment to quality service and has a complementary course portfolio making it the right company for us to join. We are confident in growth ahead for Indigo and appreciate the dedication and commitment of all team members and partners who have made our great company what it is today.”

Current plans call for the Reston office to remain open and for full support of managed clubs throughout all Troon brands, including Troon Golf, Troon Privé, Honours Golf and OB Sports. In addition to its global headquarters in Scottsdale, Arizona, Troon now has offices in Reston; Birmingham, Alabama; Chicago; Irvine, California; Jacksonville, Florida; New Braunfels, Texas; Newton, Massachusetts; Palm Beach Gardens, Florida; Seattle; and Dubai, United

Arab Emirates.

“Peter Hill and I have been good friends for many years,” Troon founder and executive chairman Dana Garmany says. “While we have been friendly competitors over time, we’ve always shared a mutual admiration for each other’s company. We share common values and a similar approach to putting our client’s interests first, and working to impact the golf industry in a positive fashion.”

“We are thrilled to be combining two incredible companies and look forward to the future opportunities this acquisition presents our respective clients, associates, members and guests,” Troon president and CEO Tim Schantz said. “This transaction supports our continued growth and reach in the industry, while bringing additional support, expertise and resources to associates as well as current and prospective clients.”

Troon’s purchase of Indigo Golf Partners follows its acquisition of Green Golf Partners in May 2019; OB Sports Golf Management in April 2019; RealFood Hospitality, Strategy and Design in February 2019; and Cliff Drysdale Management, the nation’s largest tennis management company, in July 2018.

Already the world’s largest golf management company, Troon substantially increases its portfolio of facilities with the acquisition of Indigo Golf Partners — the company now provides managed services at about 585 locations around the world, including managing more than 630 18-hole equivalent golf courses.

A year when **golf numbers soared**

The numbers are startling.

According to Golf Datatech and its 2020 National Golf Performance Report, a first-of-its kind annual report analyzing rounds played and retail equipment sales in the U.S.,

2020 rounds increased by 13.9 percent and equipment sales increased by 10.1 percent over 2019.

The increase in rounds is the largest total year increase since Golf Datatech began collecting and projecting rounds

played in 1998, topping the previous largest increase of 5.7 percent in 2012. The 10.1 percent improvement in retail sales surpassed the previous all-time high percentage gain of 10 percent in 2005.

Fueled by a combination of avid players, newcomers and infrequent golfers, 2020 demand for all things golf surged during the second half of the year. The 2020 spending reached near-record levels, as overall golf equipment sales eclipsed \$2.81 billion, the third-highest annual total, trailing only 2008 (\$2.91 billion) and 2007 (\$2.87 billion).

December rounds played soared 37 percent higher than a year ago, led by a strong showing in warm-weather markets, which are the primary driver of golf during the winter months, along with some incremental increases in markets that would typically have minimal activity due to cold weather.

"We've never seen an annual increase remotely close to this, as the previous record increase occurred in 2012, a year when we had nearly perfect weather across much of the United States and rounds played grew by 5.7 percent," Golf Datatech partner John Krzynowek says. "While there is no doubt that the pandemic provided a positive jolt of energy to the golf business in 2020, a warmer and drier climate across broad swaths of the U.S. also generated more potential tee times, which the golf community passionately consumed ... and continued to ask for more."

States that experienced the biggest year-over-year increase included:

- Iowa-Missouri, 24.6 percent
- North Dakota-South Dakota, 24.4 percent
- Oklahoma, 24.3 percent
- Minnesota, 23.6 percent
- Indiana, 23.5 percent

Hawaii (negative-32.7 percent), Nevada (negative-3.6 percent) and South Carolina (negative-0.2 percent) were the only states that experienced a year-over-year decrease. **GCI**



STANDARD GOLF COMPANY
EMPLOYEE OWNED

866.743.9773 StandardGolf.com
© 2021 Standard Golf Company. All rights reserved.
Setting the Standard in Golf Course Accessories since 1910.

BRAND YOUR COURSE
AND GAIN THE
**HOME
FIELD
ADVANTAGE**
custom domed resin decals



**REMOVE
SIGHT LINES,
NOT
ACCESSORIES**
in-ground trash can



**ADAPT TO THE
CHANGING
ENVIRONMENT**
WITH NO-TOUCH ACCESSORIES
no-touch ball elevator



Keeping your ponds clean is always in season.

Whether your course is covered in snow or basking in year-round sun, keeping your ponds clean and healthy is essential. PondHawk, the revolutionary, solar-powered subsurface aeration system, keeps ponds healthy and odor-free all year long—in all weather conditions. And with no chemicals or electricity required, it cuts expenses, too. No matter what your winter looks like, it's PondHawk season.



Visit PondHawk.com or call
(888) 755-1950 to learn more.


PondHawk
by LINNE INDUSTRIES

COURSE NEWS

Duininck Golf and Bergin Golf Designs recently completed a \$3.5 million renovation of the historic 98-year-old private **Dalton Golf & Country Club** in far north Georgia. Following detailed plans developed by golf architect Bill Bergin, Duininck completed the project on schedule in eight months. The scope of improvements included complete renovation of the golf course and irrigation system.

Greenside and fairway bunkers were rebuilt with 41,500 square feet of Better Billy Bunker liner and Tour Angle sand installed to improve maintainability and playability. Several putting green complexes

were relocated and others rebuilt to USGA standards to enhance shot-making and maintainability. Greens were sprigged with TifEagle Bermuda. New laser-graded tees were added throughout the course to add a new dimension of playability and shot-making opportunities. All fairways were graded to improve surface drainage and re-planted with TifTuf Bermuda.

Members of Chicagoland's **Olympia Fields Country Club** voted overwhelmingly to endorse a comprehensive restoration and upgrade of the club's historic South Course. Developed by golf

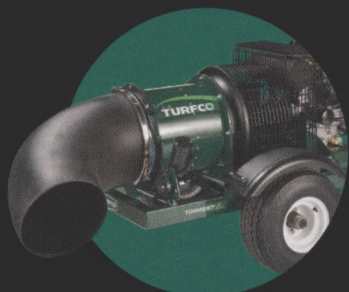
course architect Andy Staples, ASGCA, the plan includes drainage improvement, bunker renovation, fairway expansion, tree work, more naturalized areas of native rough and more short grass surrounds by greens. Teeing grounds will also be reconfigured to provide more equity to accommodate the full range of golfers, from elite championship players to beginners and families. The work is budgeted at \$4 million and the master plan will be implemented in two phases, starting in fall 2021 and picking up again in fall 2022.

The legendary **Lido Golf Club** will be restored, but not on or anywhere near its original Long Island locale. Michael and Chris Keiser have hired Tom Doak and

Renaissance Golf to restore C.B. Macdonald's Lido in the sand dunes of central Wisconsin.

Golf historian Peter Flory is also involved in the project. The Lido will include the original 18-hole design and will operate as a small private golf club contiguous to Sand Valley in Rome, Wisconsin. The majority of the land will be restored to its original sand barren landscape. Rough grading on the site is underway and grassing will begin in the spring. The restoration is expected to be completed in 2022 with a course opening in 2023. The original Lido Golf Course was designed by Macdonald in 1914. Considered one of the greatest golf courses ever created, it was demolished by the U.S. Navy during World War II.

Ready. Preset. Go.



Torrent2™ Debris Blower

MagnaPoint™ Technology lets you lock-in your optimal nozzle angles, gaining up to 2 hours per day in extra productivity. Take debris cleanup to a whole new level with the fastest, most efficient blower available.



WideSpin™ 1550 Topdresser

Calculates your preferred topdressing rates and saves your settings for exceptional greens, tees and approaches. See the most comprehensive line of spinner and drop-style topdressers on the market.



TriWave™ 45 Overseeder

Features easy hook up and patented floating heads that follow the contours, keeping seed depth consistent. The seed system delivers a 30% better germination rate with less waste.

Schedule your demo today at www.turfco.com or call 800.679.8201

TURFCO



GameOn[®]

Arylex™ active

SPECIALTY HERBICIDE

Winning against tough weeds.

There's a new champion in the fight against tough weeds: GameOn[®] specialty herbicide. Win it all with brand-new chemistry that offers fast-acting control of more than 100 broadleaf weeds. The game just changed forever. Get in the game at GameOnFacts.com.



*® Trademarks of Corteva Agriscience and its affiliated companies. Arylex is a registered active ingredient. GameOn is not registered for sale or use in all states. Contact your state pesticide regulatory agency to determine if a product is registered for sale or use in your state. Always read and follow label directions. © 2020 Corteva. T38-434-002 (11/20) BR CATO9TURF065

Sue Spahr

SUPERINTENDENT, SWANHILLS GOLF COURSE, BELVIDERE, ILLINOIS

Sue Spahr arrived at the Swanhills Golf Course 26 years ago to handle the grow in. The daily-fee club has been her professional home ever since.

"When I first came to this course, I intended it to be a stepping stone, just to get started and then to move on to bigger and better things," she says. "But then I realized that this was kind of my niche, this kind of course. It's a public golf course, we're a very low-budget course. And I think I found that I kind of enjoy that. I enjoy being at a course that tries to make (golf) affordable, that tries to give as many people exposure to the game as they can."

Spahr was Rick Woelfel's guest on the inaugural edition of the Wonderful Women of Golf podcast. During their conversation, she reflected on the experience of seeing the course mature over the past quarter-century. "It was farmland before we built the golf course, so there weren't a lot of existing trees," she says. "So, the majority of foliage we brought in ourselves and I planted 26 years ago.

"Unfortunately, the majority of those trees were ash trees and emerald ash borer is killing all those trees. So all of those trees, 290 ash trees, we're cutting all those down and replanting from a nursery I started years ago."

Spahr lacks the personnel that superintendents at larger-budget facilities enjoy. She and her mechanic are the only year-round turf employees. In season, the staff includes two additional full-time employees, plus approximately 10 part-timers.

"During the week, we're able to arrive at 6 and get ahead of the golfers," she says. "We don't have a great deal of early-morning play during the week. Weekends, they are out there (early) so we need to be there to get in front of them. On weekends, we just cut greens, cut holes and rake bunkers, so we're able to get out and get that done before the golfers get there."

When it comes to maintenance, Spahr says it's important to set priorities.

"You have to get through every day with blinders on, because you can't possibly do everything that you think needs to be done," she adds. "You have to figure out what the golfer sees and wants. You really have to know the clientele you're catering to and, in our case, being a public course, you have a wide variety of people, but talking to people and knowing what your clientele wants is really important."

"For me, like most golf courses, you should concentrate your efforts on the greens and the green surrounds. We have a lot of drainage issues. I spend a lot of time trying to firm up

the approaches. Not just the green but the approaches, the greenside bunkers, the cart paths, all the edging and trimming. We really want to make all that look as good as possible. Fortunately, I don't have as much pressure as some guys in the industry have as far as green speeds. I don't have to keep them lightning fast."

When asked what challenges she faces that one of her peers at a private club would not, Spahr immediately mentions equipment.

"Our equipment is very old," she says. "It's really used. It's what other people are getting rid of because it no longer functions properly for them. That's our new stuff. So the equipment itself makes jobs take even longer and when you don't have much of a staff in the first place, making any jobs longer and taking more time is a big issue. Equipment and lack of staff are probably the two biggest things."

Spahr believes that golfers have become more appreciative of the superintendent's role.

"Certainly, since I started, golfers have become much more understanding of superintendents' practices and what maintenance needs to be done on the golf course," she says. "I think a lot of things have contributed to that. The PGA, for one, has contributed greatly to that."

"The (Golf Course Superintendents Association of America) is phenomenal. I got involved as soon as I became a superintendent and I can't say enough about the GCSAA. They have helped a great deal in terms of improving the image (of the profession) and making golfers more aware." **GCI**



I always say you have to get through every day with blinders on, because you can't possibly do everything that you think needs to be done."



**SUPERINTENDENT
RADIO NETWORK**

To hear the full interview, visit the Superintendent Radio Network page on the Golf Course Industry website, Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

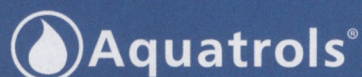
WAKE UP YOUR TURF THIS SPRING



Breakout of the winter doldrums and get your turf going with our spring rooting program.



Only **Aquatrols** has the **Spring Rooting Program** powered by **Redox TurfRx** and **Industry Leading Surfactants**. See the difference in overall turf quality when you implement our products on your greens or fairways this season.



WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT **AQUATROLS & REDOX PRODUCTS** FOR YOUR COURSE?
Contact Your Local Aquatrols Distributor or Visit: **Aquatrols.com/SPRING**



I KNOW A GUY

In New Jersey, where I used to live, we all “know a guy.” Unfortunately, golf course superintendents all know similar guys, the ones who come play your courses and make your lives much more, uh, interesting. See if you know these guys, too.

Green Speed Guy. This guy carries a 16-plus handicap yet the greens are never fast enough for him ... not to four-putt. Not surprisingly, he also carries a knockoff Stimp meter and pulls it out at a moment’s notice, usually rolling balls both up and downhill on your most undulating putting greens.

Wannabe Architect Guy. You’ve seen him out there, standing in the woods, waving his arms trying to get you to understand how much better this hole would be if only you built a tee here, moved the bunkers there and lowered the green surface for his bladed 3-metal rocket approach shots from 150 yards. He regularly participates and comments “intelligently” in design and architecture chat rooms.

“At My Other Club” Guy. When they see this guy, superintendents up the throttle on their carts to get away. He’s constantly trying to chase you down to explain what “HIS” other superintendent is doing at “HIS” other club. Of course, his other club is in Florida and you are in Montana.

Wrong Hole Guy. There is no reasoning with this knucklehead, who feels he can start wherever he wants and swears he won’t bother any of your workers. He is closely related to **Course Closed Guy**, who feels because it’s after quitting time he can go out and play the closed course, saying, “Really, I won’t bother anyone!”

What I Saw on TV Guy. This guy always has that faraway look in his eyes — usually from watching too many Masters reruns. He searches you out to tell you what he saw, and wouldn’t it be great to

do it on your course. His rants often begin with, “Did you know at Augusta National they do ...” and end with, “Why can’t we do that here?”

Financial Guy. Because he runs his company’s finance department, this chucklehead knows how you should spend, or even save, money in your department. Doesn’t help any that his foursome usually includes friends who think maintenance costs are the same today as when they joined the club ... in 1974!

Apples to Oranges Guy. This guy is a regular at the club where I belong. He surfaces when two clubs with different operating budgets (among other differences) are neighbors. He has friends at the other club, where he regularly mooches for play. He then appears on the hottest day of the summer to tell you how much better turf conditions are over there.

Internet Agronomy Guy. A keen hunter. He comes across as calm and kind, seeking friendship so you won’t be offended by his vast “agronomic knowledge.” His opening salvo usually begins, “I was surfing the net for a new set of clubs when I stumbled across this *Poa annua* stuff.” Followed “innocently” by, “Have you ever tried ... ?” Hopefully, Big Tech will cancel his account. Soon.

Member-Guest Guy. An easily agitated guy who seeks you out after playing in the member-guest at the elite club down the street where the billionaire owner chooses the members, only 5,000 annual rounds are played and everything is done for the member except (ahem)

washing their balls. He’ll accost you like an angry White House reporter, demanding to know why your course can’t be in similar condition because “We’re only two miles away! It’s the same grass, water and climate!”

Thinks He’s Better Than He Is Guy. Maybe my favorite member, this guy is in complete denial of how bad he really is. And he’s bad. He annoys the GHIN System by posting a vanity handicap while blaming the course, turf conditions and your maintenance for his inability to hit a good shot. Among his regular mutterings: “No way these greens are 11 feet! If they were, I wouldn’t have missed so many footers!” and, “There’s no damn sand in this bunker. No wonder I skulled my shot!”

Tree Hugger Guy, regular partner of **Granola Guy.** They’re out there wearing sandals with golf spikes and cargo shorts, carrying an old leather golf bag stuffed with a sack of homemade granola and distilled water. They can be seen traipsing in your freshly-planted native areas communing with the butterflies and bees. They wrap themselves around that dead oak next to the fourth green trying to preserve the habitat for the Rump Spotted Humming Thrush.

NASCAR Guy. Last but not least, my favorite. He uses the COVID-19 single-cart rule as an excuse to turn your course into the Daytona 500. He and his buddies line up like Chase Elliott and Jimmie Johnson and come flying out of turn two like a freight train, boldly going where no carts have gone before. **GCI**



TIM MORAGHAN, principal, ASPIRE Golf (tmoraghan@aspire-golf.com). Follow Tim’s blog, Golf Course Confidential at www.aspire-golf.com/buzz.html or on Twitter @TimMoraghan

GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

Get two weeks' worth of the industry news that matters, cutting-edge and plenty of opinions when you sign up for our Fast & Firm e-newsletter. Everything you need to know in one quick scan on your phone, PC or tablet.

FAST, FIRM AND FREE!



GCI is THE independent voice for superintendents in print, on the web and on social media.



Under the water tower

You have seen it on TV. But how much do you really know about Firestone Country Club? Learn what happens when cameras and golf greats aren't roaming the sprawling grounds.

By **Guy Cipriano**



Two courses surround the 18 holes everybody knows from TV. They are equally charming — and more congenial on scorecards — and provide totality to the golfer and turf employee experience at Firestone Country Club in Akron, Ohio.

Perhaps no golf course north of Augusta, Georgia, deserves more credit than Firestone South for launching professional golf into the television era. The Bert Way design toughened by Robert Trent Jones Sr. might be the pound-for-pound champion of archived televised golf inventory. The club has hosted touring professionals every year since 1954, when combustible Tommy Bolt won the Rubber City Open. Three PGA Championships were contested on Firestone South from 1960 to 1975. The course's tree-lined fairways, steep bunkers and slick greens received more airtime than Mary Tyler Moore in 1974, hosting the NEC World Series of Golf, American Golf Classic and CBS Golf Championship.

Televised tournaments remain part of the Firestone Country Club brand. Stars who propelled the South Course onto the global stage now visit Akron each summer for the

Bridgestone SENIOR Players Championship.

But understanding Firestone requires spending time on the 600-acre grounds when cameras and major champions aren't around. It requires stepping off the South Course and observing the volume of activity on the North and Fazio courses. Anywhere else, the lakes and strategic trees of the North Course and the wide playing corridors and panoramic views of the Fazio Course earn starring roles.

At Firestone, they are akin to the producer and director: vitally important to the overarching goals of a large-scale operation.

Firestone is the largest golf facility in Ohio, a state responsible for Jack Nicklaus, the Powell family, the GCSAA and Pete Dye, the centerpiece of the Club-Corp portfolio, and a scenic slice of rubber innovator Harvey Firestone's

About that water tower

The most well-known feature of Firestone Country Club doesn't rest on any of its 18-hole golf courses. The club constructed a 125-foot water tower in 1959, one year after a fire destroyed the original clubhouse. The lack of a nearby water source was a major reason the clubhouse couldn't be saved.

The tower held 50,000 gallons of water before being drained in the 1990s. Possessing vivid red and white paint, the tower no longer operates, although it remains an omnipresent part of the club and can be seen from various parts of the South, North and Fazio courses.



Firestone Country Club

Where: Akron, Ohio

Holes: 63

Director of golf course operations: Larry Napora

South Course superintendent: Tim Gruber

North Course superintendent: Scott Traphagen

Fazio Course superintendent: Renee Geyer

General manager: Jay Walkinshaw

Director of golf: Tommy Moore

Tournaments hosted: PGA Championship 1960, 1966, 1975; Rubber City Open 1954-59; American Golf Classic 1961-74, 1976; NEC World Series of Golf 1962-70, 1972-1998; CBS Golf Classic 1967-1974; NEC Invitational 1999-2001, 2003-05; Senior PGA Championship 2002; WGC-Bridgestone Invitational 2006-18; Bridgestone SENIOR Players Championship 2019-current.

legacy. The staff responsible for grounds and operations also oversees the Raymond C. Firestone Public 9, making Firestone a 63-hole facility supporting private, corporate, overnight package, international tournament and everybody-is-welcome play. Translation: Firestone is a busy place.

"You just never get bored in this business," director of golf course operations Larry Napora says. "I think the superintendents who get complacent are the ones who get in trouble. It will never be that way here."

Before an inspection of the Fazio Course bunker renovation on a Tuesday afternoon last October, Napora recites what awaits the following day. "Look at what we have going on right now," he says. "Tomorrow morning we are going to have a

company in doing drainage, we have a company in doing bunkers, we have a company coming in for tree maintenance and we have a company coming in for asphalt. And we host the second round of the Ohio Cup. And it's payroll day. How can you get bored?"

One recreational pursuit spurs the endless supply of tasks and projects. Firestone doesn't have a pool, fitness center, bocce ball courts or trendy driving range and bar (yet). The club has three 18-hole courses unveiled in different eras — the South in 1929, the North in 1969, the Fazio in 2002 — and they must meet the standard set by what has appeared on television for decades.

Elite course conditions are the durable rubber to the Firestone Country Club tire. The business model



for, especially the South Course, is having championship conditions all the time.”

Tim Gruber thought he fully understood championship course conditioning. Gruber spent 18 years as a superintendent in Northeast Ohio. He prepared courses to peak for member-guests and other summer events. Then, in 2017, he accepted a job as Firestone’s South Course superintendent. Firestone South hosted its final World Golf Championship-Bridgestone Invitational in his first summer on the job. The course hosted its first Bridgestone SENIOR Players Championship in Gruber’s second summer. But he learned more about Firestone during the weeks and months surrounding the television appearances.

“Everybody looks at their member-guest—and I always did—and you fall into that trap of let’s get the course as good as it can be for that weekend,” Gruber says. “Here it’s a different story. You have to have it like that all the time.”

Besides two or three inches of additional rough and a few extra rolls and mows on greens required to test touring professionals, Firestone South is a Hollywood rarity. From April to October, and now even stretching into part of Ohio’s increasingly warmer Novembers,

the course presents an as-seen-on-TV appearance, thanks to a coordinated effort replicated throughout the property.

The Firestone team shares a central maintenance facility equidistant to the 18th hole of each course. Napora, who worked as the superintendent at venerable clubs on opposite sides of Pennsylvania—Oakmont Country Club and Philadelphia Country Club—supervised the agronomic development of 27-hole Treesdale Golf & Country Club in suburban Pittsburgh, and served as a ClubCorp regional director of agronomy, has overseen Firestone’s golf course operations since 2008. His biggest triumph involves getting a team averaging 66 employees, many of them with decades of Firestone experience, to efficiently operate as one unit.

The turf management structure is lean. Firestone has a superintendent for each course: Gruber, Scott Traphagen (North) and Renee Geyer (Fazio). Tom Keeling was the lone assistant superintendent in 2020. The department is looking to add two assistant superintendents. Unlike other globally-recognized clubs, Firestone doesn’t employ a cadre of assistants and assistants-in-training, yet it’s continually lauded for producing tournament-like conditions.

“Those in the business will get it,” says director of golf Tommy Moore, an energetic front-facing presence who arrived last year. “When you get to a multi-course facility, there’s always, more or less, a course that shows it’s the third in ranking. There’s always a dog in the bunch. There’s not a dog here. You take the North, South or Fazio out of here, put it anywhere else as a standalone golf course, and you would have a waiting list to join a country club.

“What I’m amazed at as a golf professional is that the care and conditioning of each of these golf

◀ Renee Geyer (Fazio Course), Tim Gruber (South Course), Scott Traphagen (North Course), Tom Keeling (assistant superintendent) and Larry Napora (director of golf course operations) oversee the maintenance of Firestone Country Club’s 63 holes.

flops without them. “It’s the primary driver of everything that goes on,” general manager Jay Walkinshaw says. “People are here for the golf experience. What Firestone is known

◀ The North Course at Firestone Country Club is a Robert Trent Jones, Sr. design across the street from the famed South Course.





Lessons from Larry

Firestone Country Club director of golf course operations Larry Napora became the head superintendent at famed Oakmont Country Club early in his career and has never stopped leading large-scale agronomic efforts.

Napora's unique blend of business acumen — he received a business administration degree at Westminister (Pennsylvania) College before obtaining a turfgrass management certificate from Penn State — and agronomic savvy have allowed him to flourish in nearly 30 years of management roles within ClubCorp, the nation's second-largest golf management company. Acquired by ClubCorp in 1981, Firestone represents a centerpiece of the company's portfolio. Napora left his native Pennsylvania in 2008 for the top turf job at Firestone. He oversees a department of close to 70 employees responsible for 63 holes and brings numerous lessons from an ultra-successful career to his daily work.

Stress the we. "Have you ever been in sports? It's always a team effort and you have to get along for it to work. You need to give praise when it's due. People might say, 'Larry, you did a great job.' I tell them, 'I didn't do a great job. There are 600 acres here and our people did a great job.'"

Don't skimp on spraying. "Our spray programs are solid. I think in this business they need to be solid all year long. People who are trying to get 21 or 28 days of control because of money are the ones getting into trouble."

Develop a passion for the job. "I like working outdoors. When I met my wife, she asked, 'What do you do?' I said, 'I manipulate nature.' She said, 'What a line!' That's what I do for a living. I think golf courses are absolutely beautiful at night before sunset. You see the shadows and you can walk around and say, 'We did this.'"

courses is the same level. It's so consistent. You might rank them and say, yes, this is my No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 in the order that you like to play them, but you will never ever be able to rank them via conditioning or say one is better conditioned than the others."

Traphagen relishes the praise, savors his daily surroundings and might be Firestone's fiercest advocate. The longest tenured of the four course superintendents — "Scott is our poster child for Firestone," Napora says — Traphagen has observed everything from golf greats to country music stars performing at nearby Blossom Music Center in his two decades at Firestone. When a new employee joins the team, he drives them around the parking lot, pointing out luxury cars, states on license plates and the joy on golfers' faces.

"The first week I was here, Mr. Firestone put me in the proper mindset to realize, you have no idea who that guest is coming down that fairway," says Geyer, referring to Traphagen. "They might have flown in from Europe to be here or they might have come from California and you want to make sure you give them the best possible experience you can, and you want to make sure it's the exact way you'd want to play it or experience it."

Traphagen and Geyer are now part of a management team sharing office space, equipment, personnel, turf knowledge and plenty of laughs, all in hopes of getting courses constructed in three different eras with contrasting infrastructure, soils, grasses and golf settings to play at a similarly high level.

The South Course has undergone numerous renovations and tweaks, but visiting agronomists are always stunned upon learning championship *Poa annua* greens are produced using an irrigation system without individual head



Turf & Soil Diagnostics

"supporting the golf course industry from the roots up"

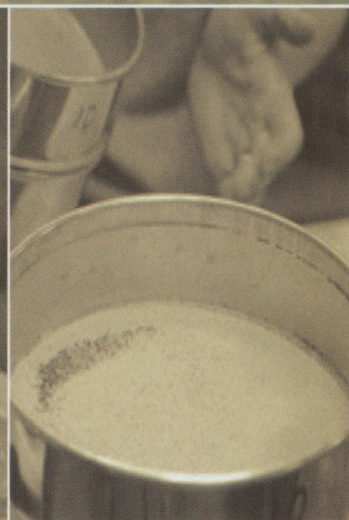
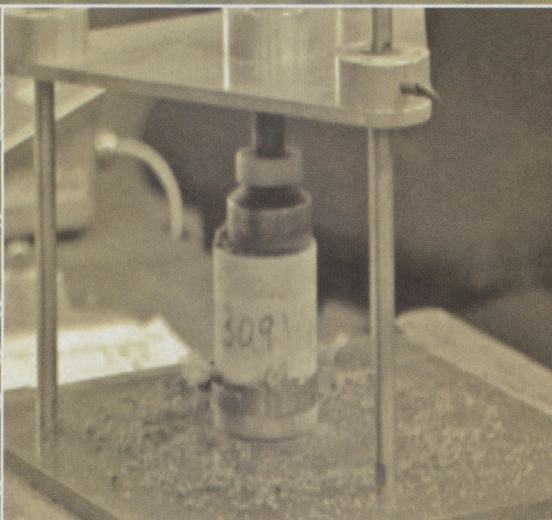
Soil and aggregate physical properties affect drainage, putting green firmness, bunker ball lie and many more critical performance characteristics.

Get to know your golf course better with our informative test packages for:

bunker sand performance
putting green profile analyses
rootzone mix design and testing
topdress sand evaluation
water release testing
capping depth recommendations
sand/gravel bridging
and much more



Informed superintendents are successful superintendents!



Turf & Soil Diagnostics

Contact us at 855-769-4231 or
Visit our website at www.turfdiag.com

COVER STORY

► The newly renamed Fazio Course is the youngest of Firestone Country Club's three 18-hole layouts.

control. The Fazio Course, which surrounds the South Course, possesses a modern and precise irrigation system controlling the amount of water dispersed on bentgrass greens, fairways and tees. The 15th green on the Fazio Course represents the highest point on the property and offers unencumbered views of the club's famous (and no longer in use) 125-foot water tower and the North Course. Designed by Robert Trent Jones Sr., the North Course features soothing and strategic water hazards at eye level and abundant sand and gravel below the surface. "It's like these three golf courses could be in different states," Geyer says.

Napora allows the superinten-



dents to manage the courses as they deem fit, although some uniform practices such as the walk mowing

of greens are executed throughout the property. Communication among the superintendents about


XR700 132" Flex Deck Pull Behind Mower

The XR700 delivers the highest quality cut available for any PTO driven rotary mower. It offers an 132" (335.28 cm) cut in one pass with seven 21" (533.4 mm) flex decks. Budget minded customers who own a tractor can pay a fraction compared to self contained options. Also, the addition of the drawbar mounting option on the XR700T makes maneuverability and operation a breeze.

Also available:
XR500 96" Flex Deck Pull Behind Mower
Starting at \$13,500



855.425.7141

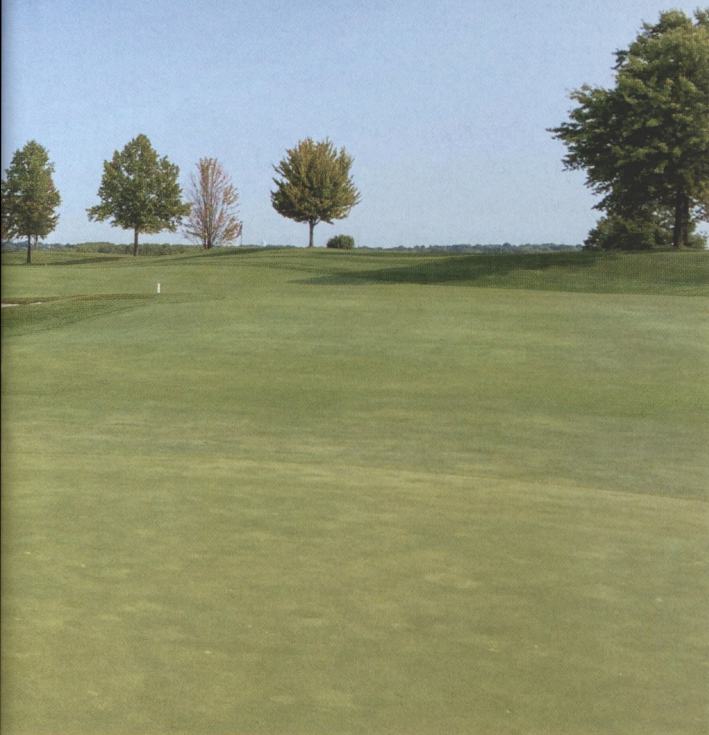
 lastec.com



MODEL XR700
132" WIDTH OF CUT
Starting at \$19,500

BUILT IN THE USA

**SEVEN 21" FLEX DECKS ■ HUGS ROLLING TERRAIN
MINIMIZES SCALPING ■ PUSH MOWER ACCURACY**



chemical and fertility programs, staff allocations and assignments, and equipment needs is constant. "There are 600 acres here," Napora says. "One person can't do it, five of us can't do it, it's a whole team effort. If you give ownership, then there's pride and then you get quality work out of it."

Fall represents the most hectic time of year at Firestone, as September and early October often bring fuller tee sheets than spring and summer months. Late-season golfer activity must be balanced with agronomic needs such as fall aerification. For the first time in Napora's tenure, club management extended the golf season to Thanksgiving weekend in 2020. A renovation designed to reduce the square footage and improve the drainage of the Fazio Course bunkers commenced this past October. Firestone also expanded the marketing efforts around its stay-and-play packages in the second half of 2020, exposing new guests to the course they know from TV

and the two pleasant layouts surrounding it. "When we talk about the repositioning of Firestone," says Walkinshaw, the club's general manager since 2019, "we are truly opening it up to the world."

On top of everything else, the club increases utilization potential by offering morning, mid-afternoon and late-afternoon starting waves off the first and 10th tees of the South and North courses, which stay open on Mondays during the peak season. Keeping ahead of morning play on four nines? Daunting to some. Just another boredom-avoiding day at Firestone.

"I have been here for a total of 20 years," says Trap-hagen, who moved to South Carolina in the early 2000s before returning to the Ohio land that he loves. "We really need 90 or 100 people, but we run with 66. To get everything done on a daily basis and then to pull off a tournament every year ... I'm truly amazed by what we do every day and every week here." **GCI**



The Better Built Choice.™

FOR GOLF, WE KNOW CONTOURS



Pro-Flex 120B Contour Mower
10 foot cut - 5 independent decks

SEE WHAT'S NEW IN CONTOUR ROLLER MOWERS

TDR-X



For over 30 years, professionals worldwide have relied on Progressive mowers. Find out why a Progressive mower is ...
The Better Built Choice.™

(800) 668-8873 • (519) 527-1080
info@progressiveturfequip.com
progressiveturfequip.com



**Like us on
Facebook**

/progressiveturfequip

PBI-GORDON: A FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

Success can be found in the right combination of opportunity and innovation. When you see an opportunity, you need to capitalize on it. And when you have an idea, you need to develop it. It's a formula that has helped PBI-Gordon grow in the professional turf care industry for more than 70 years.

It began in 1947, when the post-war economy brought new needs and new opportunities to American entrepreneurs. Five men recognized those opportunities and founded Private Brands, Inc., an organization that helped pesticide companies create solutions for an agriculture industry that would soon need to feed the baby boom.

Over the next decade, Private Brands, Inc. found success based on a foundation of service and integrity. Recognizing the need to grow, and seeing opportunities to take the next step toward industry leadership, Company owners acquired the Johnston Chemical Company and the Geo. C. Gordon Chemical Company. PBI-Gordon Corporation was born.



The company grew by developing strong relationships with industry partners. That service and integrity became a vital part of the PBI-Gordon brand. The Company soon recognized another opportunity for growth: the professional turf care industry began to boom.

That opportunity was Trimec®.

In 1968, PBI-Gordon held exclusive U.S. patent rights to the formulation of 2,4-D, MCPP, and Dicamba that would become Trimec. It gave golf course superintendents a single effective tool for controlling more than 250 broadleaf weeds.

"As one of the first products engineered specifically for professional turf care, Trimec changed everything," said Neil Cleveland, Vice President and General Manager of PBI-Gordon Corporation. "PBI-Gordon has developed more than 80 variations of Trimec since its launch 50 years ago, and that first formulation is still an industry leader."

While Trimec had the most transformative impact on the industry, broadleaf weeds were only one of many the challenges golf course superintendents and other turf care professionals faced at the time. One of those challenges: color television.

As more American homeowners purchased color TVs, people noticed something: those televisions



didn't do justice to the beautiful turf that golf course superintendents and their crews had worked so hard to create. The turf just wasn't green enough.

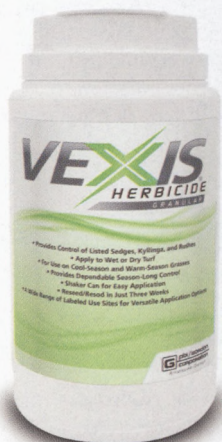
The solution: FeRROMEc® AC Liquid Iron 15-0-0 from PBI-Gordon. FeRROMEc gave golf course superintendents, as well as professional baseball and football field managers a way to quickly green-up their turf without unwanted growth.

Trimec Classic and FeRROMEc, along with products such as Bensumec™ 4LF Pre-Emergent Grass & Weed

Herbicide and TransFilm® Anti-Transpirant are part of the PBI-Gordon line-up of legacy products, and they are still important to the success of the industry.

Those legacy products, like the PBI-Gordon products that came before and after them, were born of the same commitment to opportunity and innovation. The Company partners with leading turf pros from golf courses, universities, and lawn care

operators to identify their needs and develop solutions.



Among the most recent innovations from PBI-Gordon are Vexis® Herbicide Granular, which uses the proprietary active ingredient pyrimisulfan to deliver exceptional control of sedge and kyllinga species, plus listed broadleaf weeds. And Union™ Fungicide SC, combining two powerful active ingredients to control 17 tough diseases, including brown patch,

anthracnose, and all four Pythium diseases.

These products came from listening to turf care professionals, identifying the opportunities, and innovating solutions. But opportunity is sometimes found where you might not expect it. When speed and performance made original SpeedZone® the #1 speed herbicide, it would have been easy to sit back and watch it work. But the minds at PBI-Gordon set out to make it even better.



The result is SpeedZone® EW Broadleaf Herbicide for Turf. Developed over seven years of research, SpeedZone EW features an advanced emulsion-in-water (EW) formulation that delivers more complete coverage of the weed surface than original SpeedZone for rapid control of more than 90 broadleaf

weeds, plus goosegrass and nimblewill. It offers a lower odor profile, a lower Volatile Organic Content (VOC), and SpeedZone EW is engineered for use in low-volume and conventional sprayers.

Like its predecessors, SpeedZone EW is the result of PBI-Gordon seeking out the right combination of opportunity and innovation.

"From its founding in 1947, PBI-Gordon's greatest strength has always been its creativity," said Don Chew, PBI-Gordon Companies Executive Chairman of the Board and former President and CEO. "We listen to what our industry partners and customers need, then explore, invent, and formulate solutions meet and exceed market needs."

It's a formula that has worked for more than 70 decades, and the employee-owners of PBI-Gordon will tell you: they're just getting started.

PBIGordonTurf.com

pbi / Gordon
CORPORATION
Employee-Owned


Always read and follow label directions. Bensumec™ and Union™ are trademarks and Checkered Flag®, Ferromec®, SpeedZone®, Trimec®, and Vexis® are registered trademarks of PBI-Gordon Corporation. 01/21 06045



So, what did we learn about staffing



Ron Furlong reflects on how superintendents altered labor plans in 2020 and looks ahead at what might stick in 2021.



Of the many, many things that got messed up or turned upside down in 2020, one of the more frustrating aspects for golf course superintendents was trying to stay on track with the labor budget. Whether it was a course with nobody on it early in the season or one of the busiest seasons any of us have ever seen from late spring on — or, in many instances, some combination of the two — labor budgets were tossed out the window by early summer. I'm pretty confident

nobody could possibly have nailed their 2020 labor budget.

But, because we were given a pass in the crazy year that was 2020, that does not mean we shouldn't try to accurately predict and stay on a labor budget for 2021. Of course, most of us have already put those numbers into our budgets. Although not easy to determine those labor numbers, that was, relatively speaking, the simple past. The hard part? How do we possibly stay on budget in 2021 with so many unknowns?

Consider some of the 2021 mystery:

- How will the ultimate vaccination of a majority of the population affect day-to-day life and, therefore, the revenue of things like golf courses?
- If life returns to some sort of normalcy, will the golf numbers that skyrocketed a year ago dwindle again?
- If life does not return to normalcy, will golf continue to be a retreat for many who found the game for the first time — or found the game again — last year?
- Will a continuation of the pandemic finally result in less money



being able to be spent on escapes like golf?

- What kind of labor pool will there be to draw from?

The major difference I see in comparing 2020 to 2021 is that we have advanced knowledge now. We are pandemic savvy. When sitting down to do the 2020 budget in late fall 2019, we obviously had no idea what was in store for us. It was business as usual. That wasn't the case last fall when we tried to put our best guess on what golf will look like in 2021.

Although 2020 will always be the year we were dealt the incredible, forceful blow of COVID-19, 2021 appears to be every bit the same business animal. So, what have we

learned from 2020? How can we use that knowledge to better prepare for sticking to a labor budget in another very uncertain year?

For my own course in western Washington, Avalon Golf Club in Burlington, we were cautiously optimistic on our guess for what we think will be the total rounds played in 2021. The numbers were so high in 2020 that one would be foolish to try and assume the same golf-crazy escapism will hit us again. But one would also be foolish not to expect at least some of the same, because we are by no means out of the woods yet. Golf still offers one of the few fairly safe, outdoor escapes that people are needing during the pandemic. As I

write this article in early 2021, we are already seeing numbers up from our traditional slow January play.

I'm still left with some questions. Should we staff up earlier than normal this year? What kind of labor pool will there be during late winter and early spring? How competitive will it be just among golf courses in the same area to find the best people? Finding trained workers ready to jump into the fray of very crowded golf courses is essential. Maintenance crew staff, more than ever before, must know how to hit the ground running. Assistant superintendents are stretched now more than ever. Limiting their time spent on the training of completely



What did your facility do to fill open positions in 2020?

	All	Non-Private	Private	Northeast	Southwest	Central	West
Increase starting wage	55%	44%	68%	50%	57%	57%	51%
Flexible scheduling	43%	40%	47%	32%	29%	53%	48%
Temporary employment services	10%	6%	14%	4%	26%	7%	10%
Improved benefits package	6%	4%	8%	4%	6%	6%	8%
Apprenticeship programs	5%	4%	6%	4%	6%	7%	0%
None of the above	26%	36%	14%	38%	26%	22%	25%

Source: 2021 Golf Course Industry State of the Industry survey

untrained personnel is vital.

I don't have all the answers. Nobody does. But I thought it couldn't hurt to check in with a couple other superintendents to get their feel on what happened in 2020, and how they are prepping labor-wise for 2021.

Doug Larson is superintendent at The Shore Club in Cape May County, New Jersey. Like most superintendents, 2020 was a down and up year for the resort club.

"When we first closed in March, there was so much uncertainty," Larson told me. "For a few weeks, it was just my equipment manager and myself working. We spent most of our time mowing grass. Once we reopened, I was just hoping someone was going to show up. Much to my surprise, everyone showed up. Our play, like many, was way up for the season."

Doug said that 2020 rounds played ended up being up almost 20 percent higher than 2019, and this includes zero play for six weeks in the spring. The Shore Club was a favorite course of Arnold Palmer in the early 1950s when he was at the nearby Coast Guard Training Center. Although Doug said his crew size didn't increase greatly in 2020, they did have a few challenges with

a normal-sized crew.

"Staff did have to work extra hours to prepare for some bigger club events," he says. "Luckily, I had my seasonal staff all ready to return for the year when we did reopen."

Joey Franco is the director of agronomy at Daniel Island Club in Charleston, South Carolina. I asked Joey to try and summarize 2020 as best he could. Joey first went to the challenges of keeping his staff safe once they brought everyone on last year.

"Daniel Island Club is a multi-faceted golf course with a staff of 65 to 70 people," he says. "Keeping staff spread apart during meetings was a particular challenge. We met outside as much as possible (and still do) and spread out with masks. Anyone who comes into the breakroom, bathrooms or offices must have a mask on."

Here at Avalon Golf Club, we have also moved our morning meetings outside—or, when it's raining,

Percentage of Staff Laid Off or Furloughed in 2020 Because of COVID-19

All	14%
Non-Private	17%
Private	11%
Northeast	22%
Southeast	7%
Central	13%
West	17%

Source: 2021 Golf Course Industry State of the Industry survey

inside our large equipment storage area. One of the challenges for me as superintendent, because I'm normally soft spoken, is raising my voice enough outside to be heard by all. Wearing a mask, naturally talking quietly and having my crew spread out a fair distance around the shop yard is not easy for me. But we adapt.

I also asked Joey about rounds played in 2020.

"We were the busiest we have ever been," he says. "There was a stretch when we were averaging 300 to 350 rounds per day from March through August. Many of our members from the Northeast go home during the summer season, but not last year. Also, many of our members travel for work, but they



were able to work from home and play much more golf.”

Because of the enormous amount of play — rounds at Daniel Island were up 47 percent from 2019 — Joey implemented gap mowing on the two championship courses at Daniel Island, alternating between courses each day during the season. One of the two private clubs at Daniel Island, Beresford Creek, was designed by Tom Fazio. The other, Ralston Creek Course, by Rees Jones.

“We couldn’t keep up with maintenance with the nonstop tee times,” Joey told me. “So, we instituted a program from my previous clubs which consisted of ‘gap mowing.’ This provided us an opportunity to maintain the golf courses with a maintenance gap between tee times. The gap would be from 10:30 a.m. to noon. We take lunch from 10:30 to 11, so once we’re done with lunch, we squeeze between tee times and ride the gap. It improved our efficiency greatly.”

I asked Doug, who works 720 miles up the Atlantic Coast from the course Joey maintains, his strategies for

securing labor in 2021. He cited the starting wage as a main way to draw potential new hires.

“Clubs need to decide if they want a revolving door of new hires or if they want to spend a little extra to cut down on that potential,” Doug says. “I’ve tapped the part-time market as a gap filler the last few years, and have been quite satisfied with that.”

At Daniel Island, Joey says they didn’t staff up more than normal in 2020, nor do they plan on having to in 2021. He thinks the “gap mowing” contributes to this as well as the unique situation of having two clubs on the property.

“There were times when staff from one course assisted the other and vice-versa,” he says. “Overall, labor did not affect our operation with regards to increased play and we maintained adequate staffing levels. This is why we instituted the ‘gap mowing.’”

At my club in Washington, despite the heavy rounds, we didn’t staff up much more than normal, either. We simply got a little more creative with how we maintained the course around so much play. This included a lot of afternoon/evening mowing, creating much less secondary rough mowing by eliminating a lot of mow areas, and using more wetting agents and plant growth regulators. We also started our day a half-hour earlier in years past. That extra half-hour of working before golf started was — and still is — so vital to managing the course with so much golf.

I have budgeted a similar plan this year. We’re not greatly increasing the labor budget; we’re trying to use labor more creatively.

Although accurately predicting what golf maintenance will look like in 2021 is challenging to say the least, I think it’s possible to keep close to your labor numbers by learning from what we did in 2020 when we had no preparation

Sampling of State Hourly Minimum Wage Laws



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, January 2021

at all for what was coming. It’s not all about learning from what we did right. We also learn from what we did wrong. **GC**

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

2020 Unemployment Rate by Month

January	3.6%
February	3.5%
March	4.4%
April	14.7%
May	13.3%
June	11.1%
July	10.2%
August	8.4%
September	7.8%
October	6.9%
November	6.7%
December	6.7%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics



STAFFING FOR SUCCESS: PART 1

This month, Game Plan kicks off a three-part series on staffing for success. First in the series is a look at how the pandemic has changed staffing needs and why superintendents and managers should consider reorganizing their teams and redefining job descriptions. In parts two and three, we will look at finding, hiring and retaining the right team members and creating the culture that inspires and motivates top performers.

“Never let a good crisis go to waste” is a quote often attributed to Winston Churchill in the days following World War II. Scholars question whether Churchill ever spoke those exact words, but as we make tentative steps to emerge from a pandemic-induced crisis of our own time, the lesson it implies — finding opportunity amidst great difficulty and challenge — rings as timely and as relevant as it would have in Churchill’s day.

In the still-churning wake of the global health pandemic of 2020, maybe the first place we should look for opportunity is with our own staffs. As COVID-19 raced through communities across America, thousands of golf clubs and facilities found themselves on either side of a dilemma. For those places where golf was booming, stretching tee sheets, golf car fleets and maintenance staffs to their limits and beyond, the question was whether to staff up to handle the surge or stay with current staff levels, figuring the wave would eventually crest and return to some semblance of normal. For places the boom never reached, the questions were How long can we manage to keep our current team intact before payroll takes too

much of a bite from dwindling revenues? And among those eventually let go, who will we bring back and who no longer has a place on our team?

By now, many of those calculations and decisions have been made and the ramifications felt. But the lessons they taught should not only endure, but also inform future staffing plans. In the heat of crisis, owners and managers learned who on their teams could take on more responsibility, who had leadership potential and who had reached their ceiling. They learned where they needed additional resources and where resources might be redeployed for better coverage and results. Now it’s time to put those lessons to work with redesigned organization charts and job descriptions.

One thing is for sure: a dynamic job market has changed even more in the last 12 months with continued disruption on the horizon. “The fallout will fundamentally change recruiting and hiring practices long after the pandemic has passed,” recruiting strategist Jack Whatley recently told Forbes.com.

Another certainty is that the war for talent will continue to escalate. Top performers will be in even greater demand because as businesses reshape themselves into leaner, more efficient operations, those top performers are the best value money can buy.

“Twenty years ago, all interns had mechanical skills and no computer knowledge. Now it is just the opposite. They all

know how to operate computers, but they can’t change a spark plug,” says Rick Tegtmeyer, the long-tenured and highly respected golf course superintendent at Des Moines Golf & Country Club. “It sure doesn’t hurt someone to work at a lesser-budget golf course operation and learn more of the skills that help you become a more rounded superintendent.”

There will never be a better time to take all the names off your org chart and rethink the needs of the club and course, the time and talent required of each of those needs, and the right names to place in those roles. As you go through that exercise, be aware that the pandemic and its economic reverberations have also changed employees’ perspectives.

Workers have had a lot of time recently to reevaluate their careers and question their next moves. Am I in the right job in the right industry? Where could I find more happiness and greater security for me and my family? Is this a stable environment and can I count on a stable paycheck? Where will I be exposed if (or when) another crisis emerges?

“Safety and job stability are at the top of mind for the job seeker now — and that changes what they want in a job,” Whatley says. “Businesses will have to become employee-centric as well as customer-centric.”

Hopefully, you and your facility have weathered this crisis without too much damage. Now’s the time to take advantage of an opportunity it has afforded. **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.



The FairWays Foundation

OVER \$100,000 GRANTED,

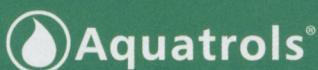
and we are just getting started.

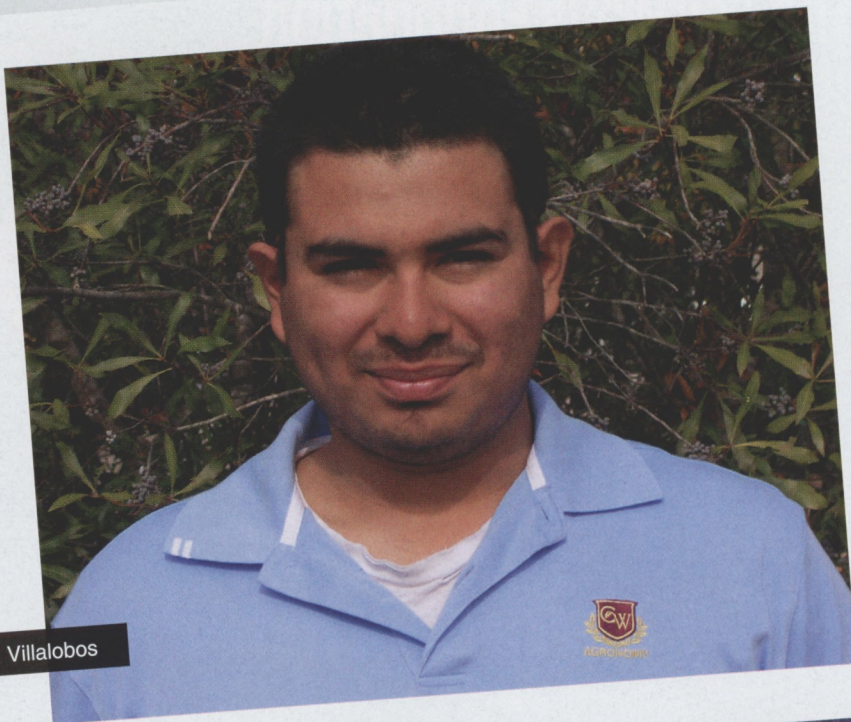


In Our Inaugural Year, The FairWays Foundation Granted Over \$100,000 to Golf Courses and Conservation Projects Around the World

Aquatrols established The Fairways Foundation with the purpose of funding local and global projects that advance the conservation of our natural resources. These projects will help to preserve the environment we live and work in while encouraging education and stewardship not only within our own industry but also within wider communities.

Grants accepted starting **March 1st**. If you are considering environmentally conscious projects visit TheFairWaysFoundation.com for more details.





A brighter, greener future

By helping two dedicated employees further their respective education, a Texas club provides a model for developing turfgrass talent.

By **Cale Reneau**

There are numerous examples throughout modern history of individuals who have accomplished much without the advantages that a higher education provides. Countless Americans, from John D. Rockefeller to Michael Dell, have built businesses and successful lives for themselves through hard work and dedication. But for many fields, a higher education is still necessary for growth and advancement.

For Mark Schulze and Edgar Villalobos, two employees at The Club at Carlton Woods in The Woodlands, Texas, currently attending the Rutgers Professional Golf Turf Management School, advancement in the golf course management field is finally within reach. The story of their

educational journey started several years ago with a discussion between Carlton Woods general manager/COO Steve Salzman and director of agronomy Tim Huber.

"Tim and I started discussing the ability to develop bench strength in the agronomy department so that an employee could go from hourly, to foreman, assistant and, ultimately, director of agronomy. How do we move people up through the organization?" Salzman says. "Courses are like people. They all have different nuances and health problems. A person might have one elbow that always gives them trouble, and we have one green that always gives us problems. Having that knowledge come through the organization and stay with us for a number of years is very beneficial."

As a result of that meeting, Huber and Salzman were able to identify high-caliber employees who showed an interest in continuing their profession and education as well as a school that would provide them with the skills and knowledge necessary to progress in the industry.

The Rutgers Professional Golf Turf Management School is a two-year certificate program that provides education from industry experts, hands-on learning and in-depth studies turfgrass science. Over the course of two 10-week sessions, students take multiple classes on a wide-ranging number of topics.

"I'm doing so many classes right now," Schulze says. "It ranges from plant identification, disease identification, to plant pathology and even the technology of the mowers. Things that our mechanics do, they have classes on that that. There are also classes on public speaking, resume building and professional leadership. It covers everything—the science, the technology, and the professional aspects."

For Schulze and Villalobos, all the classes and the extra work school entails is nothing compared to the separate journeys that led them to this moment.

Villalobos started at Carlton Woods in 2008 at the age of 18. He was introduced to the 36-hole club by his uncle, who works as an irrigation technician. Having worked in restaurants while attending high school, Villalobos was eager for a change of pace. "When I came here, it was a whole new world to me," he says. "I fell in love with it because I love being outside. Working restaurants, it was always crowded in a small space. So, I loved the freedom of the outdoors."

While Huber was not yet with Carlton Woods in 2008, he's always seen something special in Villalobos. "Since he got here, he's really just taken an interest in it and flourished," Huber says. "As hard working as he is, [I told him] he should consider making it a career."

Villalobos, who moved to the United States at age 8, didn't originally have the reassurance of permanent residency in the country. This made the commitment and investment to a higher education an uncertain proposition. "Even though he's bilingual and a smart guy, he just didn't have that security," Huber says. But after receiving his permanent residency and beginning his work toward citizenship, Huber believed that the time was right for Villalobos to take the next step in his career.

Villalobos' newfound education has provided him with a new outlook whenever he's on the course. "Right now, I have so many years of hands-on experience," he says. "But school is learning the science behind everything. It's really good because you're learning why you're doing certain things on the course. You learn to question yourself and then provide your own answers. Like, 'Why do we spray certain chemicals at certain times?' And now I know the scientific answer to that question. It makes me approach my job differently because now I know how different practices can affect the turf in different ways."

Upon receiving his certificate from Rutgers, Villalobos will be positioned to rise through the turf ranks. "I think Edgar has a really good opportunity to be an asset to the Club for years as an assistant manager," Huber says. "And hopefully the day will come when he spreads his wings and goes out on his own. He's done all the hard work. We're lucky to have him."

One might suspect that Schulze's journey to the Carlton Woods agronomy team began when he played golf at The Woodlands High School, or even in 2009 during his brief stint as a caddie at the Carlton Woods. But, in

**CURATED
CONTENT
FOR YOUR
BUSINESS,
RIGHT TO YOUR
INBOX.**



GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

SIGN UP FOR *GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY* NEWSLETTERS
AND ELIMINATE THE SEARCH FOR INDUSTRY
TIPS, NEWS AND REPORTS.

GOLFCOURSEINDUSTRY.COM/FORM/NEWSLETTERS

LABOR

The Club at Carlton Woods has invested in developing and supporting internal talent to keep its golf courses in terrific condition.



fact, it began roughly eight years later in the parking lot of a nearby supermarket. “I was working at H-E-B and I met Tim in the parking lot,” Schulze says. “He just came up to me and asked if I knew anyone who needed a job. So, I said, ‘Yeah, I do. I need a job.’”

Huber continues, “When I asked him if he’d be interested in working at a golf course, his eyes lit up. ‘I would love it,’ he said to me.”

“Before I worked here, I had no direction in life,” Schulze adds. “I mean, I worked at Target, H.E.B., all these little jobs, and I really had no plan until I came here and took a liking to it. It’s the best job I’ve ever had. I love it. I like working outdoors, I like the technical aspect to it—operating heavy machinery—and also the science to it. Seeing such beautiful facilities here at the Club, it’s an honor. I feel grateful to be working here.”

Like Villalobos, Schulze has

found that his studies have already helped him better understand the day-to-day practices on the course. But he also adds that his years of experience at Carlton Woods help him in class. “I have all this hands-on knowledge,” he says. “So even if it’s a difficult scientific talk about plant disease, I’ve seen it and can make all these correlations. That makes things a little bit easier for me.”

Huber is confident that Schulze’s education, passion and drive will serve him well in the industry. “I think he’s got a really good runway here at the Club and he’ll be a great success story,” he says.

For Salzman, Schulze and Villalobos are the first steps in what will hopefully be a continual investment in the strength of the agronomy team at Carlton Woods. But more than that, he views it as a defining trait of the club.

“I would hope that every employee partner here knows that the Club is here to invest



in them personally,” Salzman says. “Their professional development obviously pays benefits to the Club, but it will also stick with them forever. The gift of education and knowledge is, I think, the greatest gift.”

“I’m very thankful because this is a great opportunity,” Villalobos says. “And they believe in me even though I haven’t always believed in myself. That little push from Tim, saying, ‘You can do more,’ really helped me.”

Schulze shares the sentiment. “It means a lot to me,” he says. “Having people believe in me is a big deal, and it’s not really something I’m used to. I’m really grateful and honored. I feel a great responsibility to do well and put this club in a good light based on my effort.”

While neither Villalobos nor Shulze have plans to pursue a career outside Carlton Woods in the near future, they both acknowledge and show appreciation for the fact that

their future path is now a little bit wider. To Salzman, that was always part of the plan.

“We do not think that either of these individuals are going to retire from Carlton Woods,” Salzman says. “Because of the steps that we’ve put in place for them, they will be able to excel and elevate themselves in the private club or golf industry well beyond Carlton Woods.”

“We have given them something that is mobile, that they can take with them. And I think when you’re willing to invest in people, you’re giving them opportunity, whether it’s to provide better for their families or themselves. It’s the opportunity to be a more productive employee for the Club and ultimately the industry. I think all of that is good. I think it’s great.” **GCI**

Cale Reneau is the director of communications at The Club at Carlton Woods in The Woodlands, Texas.

Perfect spread, every time.

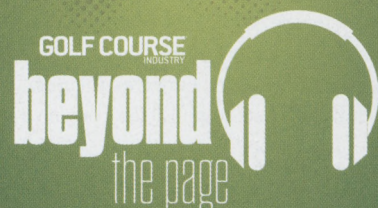
WideSpin™1550 Broadcast Topdresser

Turfco redefines how maintenance equipment can save time while improving results. With edge-to-edge coverage, the WideSpin Topdresser could save up to 720 greens passes per year. Plus, the savable presets ensure your preferred application every time.



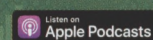
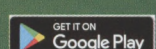
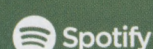
See the difference. Schedule your demo today at www.turfco.com or call 800.679.8201

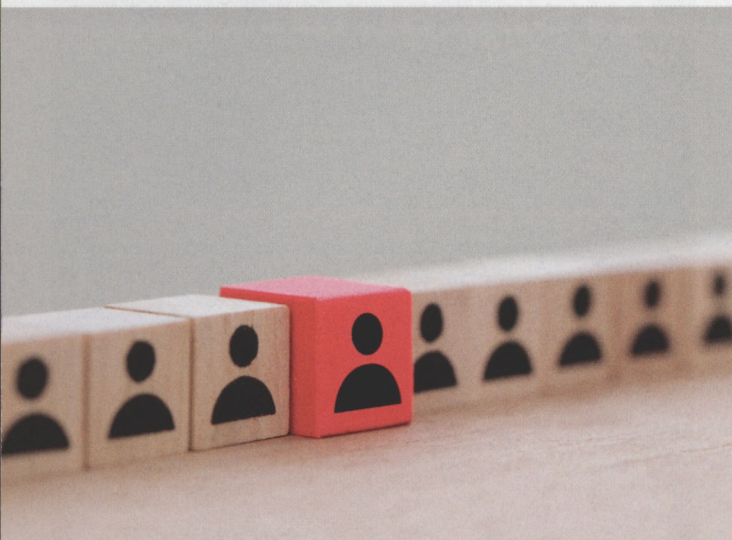
DIVE A LITTLE DEEPER!



A conversation that expands the scope of a story from the most recent issue of *Golf Course Industry*, including a chat with one of our columnists on their latest work.

AVAILABLE ON:





SIX RULES FOR LABOR MANAGEMENT

I remember the moment I became attuned to issues of labor management. It was late on a Saturday afternoon on the North Side of Chicago and I was visiting a distinguished private club to speak at a dinner. We were touring the course after a rain shower and my host was telling me about how hard their veteran superintendent worked. Then we spotted him, alone and ankle deep in a water-filled bunker, shovel in hand with a drain hose nearby. “You see, there he is,” my host said. “He’s totally devoted to this place, never stops working.”

I politely acknowledged the comment while thinking to myself, “Here’s a superintendent who is completely disorganized and doesn’t know how to delegate.”

Labor management is all about organizing talent and allocating work efficiently and with respect. A person who takes on everything shows a disregard for themselves and is set for failure through exhaustion. It’s also not best for the golf facility, because different people have different talents and one cannot be equally skilled at everything.

Superintendents owe it to themselves, their families, their employees and the club to allocate responsibility, organize tasks, mentor their crew and hire smart people who can learn. Among the telltale traits of a bad superintendent is hiring folks who are less than ideal so they can look good and excel only by comparison.

It’s complicated given the dearth of talent out there, declining turf school enrollments, and the general lack of experience and work ethic that many teens and twentiesomethings have to laboring in a business hierarchy. There’s a strong temptation to want to do everything oneself, but I recommend some alternative steps for success.

1. KNOW YOUR OWN STRENGTHS

You can’t manage others unless you know yourself well. Every superintendent must have one core competence. It doesn’t matter if it’s turfgrass pathology, water chemistry, operating construction equipment or digital graphic skills. Always have a go-to skill you can build from and share with others. That sets a great example for others while providing a skill set you can fall back on in difficult times.

2. HIRE SMART PEOPLE

The most successful executives surround themselves with folks who are smarter than they are and are not afraid to learn from them. By contrast, insecure leaders are afraid to be outshone and surround themselves with incompetents so they’ll look stronger by comparison but build nothing of value in the process.

3. MENTOR

Set an example so that you instill in your subordinates the skill and confidence they will need to move up and out. Hire assistants you feel will be able to move into a head position after five to six years rather than keeping them for 20 years to cover for your deficiencies. This entails what’s known as “defensible authority,” meaning you provide a model so that one-time subordinates can ultimately gain necessary ability and skills. Turf school might provide technical expertise but it never teaches the tact and diplomacy required in a business where you answer to people who think that because they are

wealthy and powerful they are also knowledgeable — when they are completely ignorant.

4. DELEGATE

Let others learn, which also entails the risk that they might fail. There’s no other way to acquire the specific skills they will need — including cultivating their core competence. Take time to learn your employees’ hopes and aspirations and encourage them to acquire what it takes to achieve that while making it clear to them the golf course must be prepped on a daily basis.

5. HIRE WOMEN

Recruit women, which automatically increases the potential employee pool. Forget the old canards about women not being physically up to the challenge or being distracted by other things. Given the competition for qualified help, expanding the applicant pool will provide you with a new coterie of folks eager to learn and prove themselves.

6. CONVEY RESPECT

It is hard to pay people what they are really worth. Wages count, but there are other methods that go a long way to building loyalty and longevity. Keep in mind your crew’s cultural backgrounds, their various holidays and family traditions. If they need time off, be considerate. And when you need to defend against harassment — racial, sexual, religious — be scrupulous. That includes coming to employees’ defense against any discrimination by members and golfers. A zero-tolerance will go a long way toward conveying the respect employees deserve. **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).



INNOVATIVE TURF TECHNOLOGY



USA MANUFACTURER

**Lighting up the Industry
with Innovative Technology**



Featuring:

**JRM INFINITY® Samurai Tine™
and JRM Vulcan Grinding Wheelz**



**Worldwide Manufacturer of Turfgrass Maintenance Products:
Bedknives • Tines • INFINITY Reels • Grinding Wheels • Mower Blades**

www.jrmonline.com

Email: sales@jrmonline.com • USA Toll Free (888) 576-7007

International (336) 354-1243 • Fax: (336) 764-8311



maintenance multiplied

How does the work get done when the golf footprint is much bigger than 18 holes? A trio of experienced leaders share their philosophies behind handling an abundance of moving parts.

By **Rick Woelfel**



Any successful golf course superintendent appreciates the joys and challenges that come with the job. But the task of overseeing a facility with more than one golf course brings additional issues.

Those issues go beyond maintaining a more sizable amount of land with multiple varieties of turf. They include scheduling and logistics, budgeting and, most important, staffing—having the right people in the right places, seeing to it that they are trained properly and then giving them enough latitude to carry out their responsibilities.

Jim Roney is the director of golf courses and grounds at Saucon Valley Country Club in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The 850-acre site features three 18-hole championship courses—the Old, the Grace and the Weyhill, plus a six-hole short course.

In his almost 17 years at Saucon Valley, Roney has hosted two USGA championships, the 2009 U.S. Women's Open on the Old Course and the 2014 U.S. Mid-Amateur on the Old and the Weyhill. During the season, Roney utilizes a full-time staff of 70 plus 30 to 40 part-timers. The year-round staff numbers 45.

The three courses are similar agronomically in some ways, different in others. The Old Course, which was completed in 1921, has pushup greens that were regrassed with A1-A4 bentgrass in 2006.

The Grace Course, which welcomed nine holes in 1953 and nine more in 1958, features *Poa* greens, while Weyhill, completed in 1968, has had USGA bentgrass greens

since 2010.

What's important to Roney is taking the same approach to managing all three. "They're all managed at a championship condition on a daily basis," he says. "At Saucon, you're going to get the same experience from a quality perspective on all three of the golf courses."

A superintendent is in charge of each course. They are regarded as superintendents, not as assistants. "These superintendents do way more than an assistant superintendent would do," Roney says.

Each superintendent has a team under him. That team stays intact save for special circumstances, such as an aerification or a chemical application, when assistants assigned to all three courses will team up.

Roney gives his course superintendents considerable autonomy. "When it comes to writing the fertility schedule on the calendar for any agronomic or cultural practices, I'm writing all that stuff," he says. "All the spray applications, all the fertility, all those specific things I do, but then I'll pull in the superintendents and kind of review the calendar on where we're able to make those applications and give a window and then I let them kind of run with it.

"When it comes to preparing the golf course each day, I have parameters that I set out but let (the superintendents) schedule that stuff. Things like green speeds or firmness, moisture levels in the greens or in the fairways, water cycles, things like that, those are all parameters that I set out, or I establish, but then there is some flexibility with each of those superintendents to make some adjustments. And that's important, because I have two shops and I'm only one person, so I can't really do all the morning meetings. So, I try to bounce around as much as I can."

Roney stresses that effective communication is essential to the success

of his operation.

"We do a lot of communicating with radios and text messages, cell phones, e-mails," he says. "I'll make notes throughout the day and then I'll share those notes with the superintendent and the assistants and then mandate, quite honestly, that they are communicating amongst themselves."

From his notes and observations, Roney will make decisions about where to focus his attention and where and how to coach his assistants.

"It's important for my notes to get disseminated properly," he says, "so if I see one of the assistants I'm going to say 'OK, this is your time to shine. These are the four things I want you guys to work into the schedule for tomorrow. Make sure you speak to Gavin or Frank or Kevin or Doug.'

"And that meeting will occur prior to the end of the day where a schedule will be put together and then that schedule will be e-mailed to me. I'll review that schedule and then if there are some tweaks that need to be done to that then we'll make those tweaks at that point.

"And then in the morning I know exactly where I need to go and which golf course I need to go to. There's just too much work for one person so I have to manage the superintendents and assistant superintendents and kind of coach them to make the right decisions."

Roney is in the midst of preparations for the 2022 U.S. Senior Open, which will be played over the Old Course next June.

"I want to make sure my whole team is able to experience that," he says. "So everybody is going to have a responsibility with regard to the Senior Open. Certainly, the team that is on the Old Course right now, they're going to have a significant impact on the success of that championship, but everybody is going to be exposed to some aspect of it."

+ Big facilities BY THE NUMBER

Total facilities with 45 or more holes:

101

Public facilities with 45 or more holes:

68

Private facilities with 45 or more holes:

33

Source: National Golf Foundation

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Ryan Semritc is the superintendent at the Willows Run Golf Complex, a public facility in Redmond, Washington, that features two 18-hole layouts plus a nine-hole course. He tends to 49 greens in all.

Semritc, who arrived at Willows Run five years ago, oversees a year-round staff of 12 that swells to 30 to 35 during the peak golf season, May 1 to Oct. 1. During that time, the tee sheet is full: the club hosts approximately 100,000 rounds each year.

To make it all work, Semritc manages and maintains the three courses as if they were one. "In my mind we're all working together," he says. "I just treat it as one golf course instead of three golf courses.

Instead of sending one triplex out to mow greens, we just send three triplexes out to mow greens."

Semritc has three assistant superintendents working under him. The assistants could find themselves spending their workday anywhere on the complex.

"We don't have one designated for each course," Semritc says. "We just designate each day, one assistant has to check that course out; one of the assistants every day sees each golf course. Every day, an assistant is in charge of seeing every single hole on a certain golf course, basically as cover when I don't."

Semritc believes the one-course approach helps his team do their jobs more efficiently.

"We have one maintenance shop and the golf courses are all together," he says. "You could see across one course's holes and one hole is next

to a hole on a different golf course. It's all really close. Separating it isn't as efficient as treating it like one big 54-hole golf course."

To supplement his full-time/in-season work force, Semritc utilizes a corps of retirees and semi-retirees who were largely recruited via notices in the locker room.

"Over the last five years we've built a stable of about 16 semi-retired employees who have come back every year," Semritc says. "They work through the season. Some of them are either semi-retired or just retired. They work two to four days a week."

Semritc says his part-timers bring with them a strong work ethic and a professional mindset.

"Usually they're guys who were pretty accomplished in other professional fields," he says. "There's no doubt that they're here on time. They're not running late, they don't have an excuse for this, an excuse for that."

"I did the high school and college kid thing for a long time. The biggest problem with the college kids and the high school kinds is they don't get out of school until June and then they've got to go back September 1st. That misses a big window of our season. So finding the retired guys

was huge. It allowed us to go from having 20 full-time employees in the summer to having 35 people here in the morning, but 16 or more of them leave at 11 o'clock."

Semritc says there are often occasions when he relies on his part-timers for their professional expertise in other fields.

"One of them was the safety manager for a national construction company," he recalls. "So when we have (an OSHA inspection) coming and I have to prepare for an OSHA thing, I have the guy who can say, 'Let's sit down and take care of that,' or he brings up, 'Hey, you really need to change this,' or 'You need to do this differently.' Because he's an expert in that."

"These guys have a wealth of knowledge that may be from a different field, but on a weekly basis we end up applying it."

CAROLINAS COORDINATION

Lee Hancock is the director of golf course maintenance at Prestonwood Country Club in Cary, North Carolina, where he's spent the last six years. The 500-acre site includes three golf courses.

The Meadows Course, which opened in August 1988, and the Highlands Course, January 1993,



feature Bermudagrass greens. Nine holes from each course are utilized every fall for the SAS Championship, a PGA Tour Champions event.

The Fairways Course, which opened in January 1995, features bentgrass greens. In a normal year, the club will host approximately 85,000 rounds but that total exceeded 110,000 last year, a club record.

Hancock's staff includes three superintendents and six assistants, as well as a landscape manager, an equipment superintendent and an irrigation superintendent. During the growing season, the staff numbers more than 70. That number drops to 40 to 45 in the offseason.

Hancock strives for consistency in his maintenance practices. "The Meadows and Highlands programs are identical," he says. "The date of applications may vary a day or two (but) cultural practices are performed as simultaneously as possible. During the summer, I aerify the Fairways Course in early June, wait three weeks to aerify the Meadows Course in late June, then we wait three weeks for it to heal and then we do Highlands Course. This ensures a great playing surface for the membership year-round."

When it comes to allocating labor resources, Hancock seeks to strike a balance. "We all work out of one facility," he says. "The teams predominantly manage their own respective areas but during special events, tournaments and aerification weeks, we always help one another out. We all chip in to help pull greens covers on the two Bermudagrass courses."

"The equipment is shared at times, but we have a large enough fleet to mow out all 54 holes. Sometimes the guys on one course might finish mowing their course and jump over to help another course finish out so everyone can be in for lunch on time. We try to manage as a team and be unified, but obviously the competitive spirit comes out in everyone and the guys want to be the best course

on property."

Hancock spends much of his workdays interacting with his superintendents, his general manager, the golf staff and the club's administrative staff. He stresses the importance of thinking ahead.

"Trying to circulate 500 acres is a tall task," he says. "I am usually thinking about the next day or week — whatever is happening today was already thought about yesterday or last week or even last year in some cases. When things are going right, I try to stay out of their way so the 'machine' can keep on rolling."

Hancock believes that hiring the right people and training them properly is essential to a successful operation.

"Like any business, having the right people on board is imperative," he says. "We need people who want to succeed and are willing to go the extra mile at times to ensure success. I am big on accountability. I hope to give the guys the information they need to do their job, give them the tools to be successful, give them the opportunity to succeed with a good agronomic schedule, help manage and watch weather patterns and give insight on long-range planning and projects. I expect the superintendents to be able to manage the day-to-day operations on their own."

"My superintendents are smart guys and I always want them to be able to be the best version of themselves at work. I am a huge believer in 'individuality' and want the staff to feel empowered to make

decisions and be creative in their work. I often say that it is up to us to make this a good place to work, for ourselves and our team members. I trust my guys. We communicate all the time and we have fun at this job when we can."

Roney, Semritc and Hancock all face challenges unique to their individual facilities, as does any other turf manager. But they all embrace the concept of teamwork and the importance of empowering their team.

That's a model for anyone managing a business, but one that is especially applicable in the turf industry.

Semritc, who was the superintendent at two other facilities before arriving at Willows Run, learned quickly about the importance of delegating.

"At an 18-hole golf course, especially one with a smaller budget, you end up doing a lot by yourself for good and for worse," he says. "That gets built into you. The downside is you start to think, 'I can do a lot of this by myself.'"

"Well, when you come to 54 holes, you learn really fast you can't do it all by yourself." GCI



Hey, the turf looks great

Course closures, determined workers and, yes, the weather all contributed to a surprisingly strong year for playing conditions.

By Matt LaWell

A strange thing happened out on so many golf courses last year. As rounds increased month after month after month, as golfers new and lapsed and forever dedi-

cated flocked for tee times — and as all those golfers zoomed around on more carts than ever before — the star of the show looked incredible.

More golfers and more carts should have sparked more problems for golf course superintendents, but respondents to our annual State of

the Industry survey indicated the opposite. Chalk it up as another surprise during an historic year filled with them.

Among the 318 turf professionals who completed our survey, 49 percent said their course conditions were better in 2020 than in 2019, and another 36 percent said conditions were the same. And there was little variation from one region or course classification to another: From the Golden State to the Green Mountain State, from the Goober State out to the Gateway to the West,



the turf was healthier than it has been in years — and maybe decades.

According to the results of our survey — for which we partnered with Signet Research, an independent research company, and which has a confidence level of 95 percent — 52 percent of superintendents at private facilities and 46 percent at non-private facilities cited improved conditions. So did 54 percent of superintendents in the Central, 53 percent in the Southeast and 46 percent in the West. The only region that seemed to struggle was the North-

east, where 33 percent said course conditions improved in 2020. Only 16 percent of respondents said course conditions were worse during what sure seemed like the longest year.

Reasons range from course to course, but trends emerged in both scientific survey results and more anecdotal conversations with superintendents.

Course closures, either full or partial, certainly helped, though even courses that remained open throughout the pandemic said their conditions improved last year. Crew

members riding alone and almost always working in bubbles helped, too. And then there's the weather, the ultimate wild card and a fickle forecaster for professional failure or success.

Consider Big Canoe, a 27-hole course in Jasper, Georgia, about an hour north of Atlanta. The larger Mountain Course is divided into a trio of 9-hole loops — the Choctaw, Cherokee and Creek — with every hole typically open for play every day. That changed during the spring.

“Because of cart restrictions, we

don't have the fleet to operate those 27 holes as we normally do," superintendent Lydell Mack says. "So, we restricted it to an 18-hole course every day." Each nine was closed for a week at a time, on a rough-

ly three-week rotation. That allowed Mack and the crew to focus on maintenance of nine holes at a time, every day, with an emphasis on "detail and conditioning, because we don't normally have the time to do that."

By the end of the year, more rounds had been played on 18 holes than had been predicted at the start of the year on 27. Customer satisfaction increased, too, as members and crew seldom crossed paths during the day. No loud mowers for golfers to endure. No slow play for crew to wait out.

John P. Larkin Country Club is a public 9-hole in Windsor, Vermont — almost within sight of the New Hampshire border and the country's longest covered bridge — and

Compare your 2020 course conditions with 2019 conditions

	All	Non-private	Private
Significantly better	11%	14%	8%
Better	38%	32%	44%
The same	35%	33%	38%
Worse	15%	20%	8%
Significantly worse	1%	1%	2%

incredibly different from Big Canoe. But a delayed start there helped superintendent Bob Hingston and his teenage crew just as much as a partial closure helped Mack and the Big Canoe crew.

"Because our ground clears really quickly, we have a lot of people clamoring to come to our place because other courses that are wetter don't open as early," says Hingston, a retired high school athletic director in his second year in charge of the course. "Many times, we're open around April 1. Of course, the turf hasn't warmed up then, but people are hankering to get out there and the turf can take a beating, and our board always wants to get those early green fees to fill the coffers. We're a small 9-hole course and we really rely on greens fees to get our cash flow going."

Those early weeks of the pandemic, when more courses across the country were closed than opened, helped preserve the turf for the rest of the season.

"We were really lucky that we had that time for the ground to heal," Hingston says. "Not opening for five weeks, the tees weren't getting banged and banged — because a 9-hole course, guys come and play 18, they go around twice, and some of our tees are kind of small."

Out west, Redlands Country Club in Redlands, California, closed for five weeks, too. Superintendent Mike Gracie, who arrived at the club in late 2019 after seven years at Des-

ert Mountain in Scottsdale, Arizona, had been on the ground for only four months when the shutdown started but never panicked about what to do. "We focus on details," he says, "trying to take care of the little things, and overall your property looks better when you focus on details."

Free rein over the course allowed his crew — which has increased from eight when Gracie started to 13 today and might increase again to 15 or 16 later this year — to spend more time on work that really allows the course to shine.

It also allowed Gracie an opportunity to better learn the course and its land.

"The biggest struggle we have at Redlands is really poor soils," says Gracie, who worked closely with his assistant, Audifaz Rivera, who has been at the club for decades and started as a dishwasher, as well as general manager Ken Halligan and head professional Paul Dietsche. "We have no drainage on the golf course. There's a lot of movement on the course, the land moves a lot, a lot of water surface drains really well but it surface drains to the bottoms of all the fairways, and we're always wet in the fairways. We inherently have those issues where we can't get rid of water. It's high-clay soil. It's called Redlands for a reason."

Mel Waldron, CGCS, of Horton Smith Golf Course in Springfield, Missouri, also focused on crew members throughout the year. Waldron was able to hire both a designated

Did any of the following areas of your course suffer because of COVID-19

Bunkers	43%
Rough	18%
Tees	14%
Greens	10%
Fairways	9%
Other	12%
Nothing suffered	43%

Other responses included: Trimming, edging and detail work, landscape and ornamental areas, practice areas, native and out-of-play areas.

assistant for the first time in years and a new mechanic in February, just before the start of the pandemic. A municipal hiring freeze starting the next month pushed back any planned projects but also afforded Waldron and the rest of his four-person crew time to really dive into cultural practices like venting and topdressing.

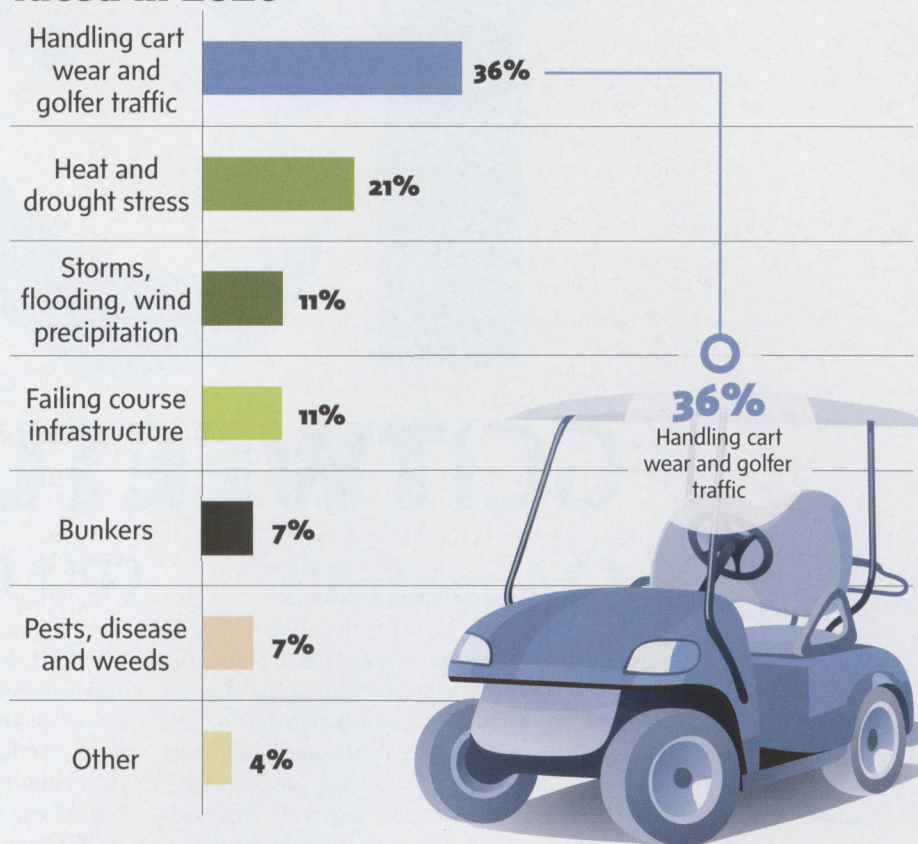
"Missouri was one of those states where the governor pushed all the decisions to local leaders," Waldron says. A mask mandate went into effect fairly early, but a full shutdown never followed, just guidelines. "The GCSAA got involved, the PGA (of America) Sections got involved, the Missouri Golf Association really helped, and by getting all this information together and getting it out, we could promote safe distancing. We never really did close."

Unique among the superintendents interviewed for this story — all of whom cited "better" or "significantly better" course conditions in their survey responses — Waldron and Horton Smith remained completely open all year.

There was change, though. That new assistant, Josh Wells, left in January to run a tree farm for the local Public Works Department, but "hopefully, we get that position filled pretty quickly now that they've seen the benefit of having that position," Waldron says. "It was a great help having him." The mechanic, Brian Lesmeister, is still around and provides help on and off the course. Because he still has good relations with the private club where he worked through last year, he was able to procure equipment and parts for "pennies on the dollar" for Horton Smith, including vibratory rollers that "played a part in keeping things smooth," Waldron says. "We didn't have to mow every day."

The weather provided more help than harm, too. Waldron described the Missouri summer as being "on the dry side" and not particularly brutal (which is sort of like saying

Biggest agronomic challenge your crew faced in 2020



the last few miles of a marathon are not particularly brutal). Gracie said the Southern California sun provided only five weeks all year ideal for growing Bermudagrass, which sparked trying to hold on to ryegrass. Those five weeks without golfers early on left the course far drier than normal for Hingston. And Mack described the Georgia weather as "the best I've been associated with" during his more than two decades in the industry.

Everybody mentioned the importance of their crew and other course or club employees.

"Something we all know but something that really pushed hard on me over this last year is showing the staff how much you care for them and really trying to do the little things to take care of them," Gracie says. "At the end of the day, no matter

how good or bad we are as superintendents, we can't do anything without them, and making sure they know we're there for them, trying to build that sense of a team, has made us more successful than anything else we've done on the golf course.

"We're going to keep good people by showing them that we care for them."


All things considered, a pretty good year.

"Other than the obvious COVID issues, I think 2020 will be a banner year for us, both from an agronomic standpoint and a revenue standpoint," Mack says. "It was a great year for golf."

"We're fortunate that we're one of the industries that, in some weird way, benefitted from all the chaos." **GCI**



#GCITWEETUP21

 **Aquatrols®**

GOLF COURSE
INDUSTRY

Consider this the ideal event for a virtual format.

Golf Course Industry (@GCIMagazine) and Aquatrols (@Aquatrols) have announced plans for #GCITweetUp21 and the 2021 Super Social Media Awards. Hint: It's being conducted via social media and digital platforms!

The nomination process is open through Feb. 25 and the celebration concludes at 3 p.m. EST Wednesday, March 31 with #GCITweetUp21, an educational and interactive meetup event conducted on Zoom.

In between, we're unveiling some unique

twists. Super Social Media Awards winners will be announced via videos on weekdays beginning Monday, March 22 at 3 p.m. EST on Golf Course Industry's Twitter and Facebook feeds. The crowning of winners will conclude with the John Kaminski Award for Social Media Leadership presentation at #GCITweetUp21.

Everybody is invited to attend the 10th annual #GCITweetUp21. Hosted by veteran trivia game show host and *Golf Course Industry* managing editor Matt LaWell, #GCITweetUp21 will feature informative and candid discussions with some of the industry's best communicators, interactive contests and

polls, and opportunities to interact with your peers. Further details will be announced in the coming weeks. Registering for the free event takes less time than producing a tweet. Enter bit.ly/GCITweetUp21 into your web browser to register.

Unveiled in 2012, the Super Social Media Awards honor industry professionals who use social media to demonstrate leadership, inspire co-workers and colleagues, share operational enhancement ideas, provide updates on course conditions, creatively communicate messages to intended audiences and positively tell the golf industry's story.

Winners will be honored in the following categories: John Kaminski Award for Social Media Leadership, Best Overall Use of Social Media, Best Twitter Feed, Best Use of Video, Best Idea Shared on Social Media and Conservation Award. But don't feel locked into submitting nominations that fit solely into those six categories. We have room for some fun and new categories based on the nominations we receive. Maybe we honor a social media rookie ... or a recurring feature on somebody's feed ... or somebody who has used social media to connect colleagues in a virtual world. The industry professionals who benefit from using social media

for work purposes will determine the direction of some awards.

Judging will be conducted by the Golf Course Industry editorial staff and a panel of industry experts and educators. Readers, followers and listeners are encouraged to nominate others or nominate themselves. Multiple nominations in the same or different categories are acceptable. Please include the category and appropriate links to editor-in-chief Guy Cipriano at gcipriano@gie.net or @GCIMagazineGuy or managing editor Matt LaWell at mlawell@gie.net or @MattLaWell. Email, tweet or call Cipriano at 216-393-0230 with questions. **GCI**



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

TUNE IN TO GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY'S PODCAST SERIES

**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.

Sponsored by



GOLF COURSE
beyond
the page



A conversation that expands the scope of a story from the most recent issue of *Golf Course Industry*, including a chat with one of our columnists on their latest work

GOLF COURSE
INDUSTRY

**OFF
THE
COURSE**

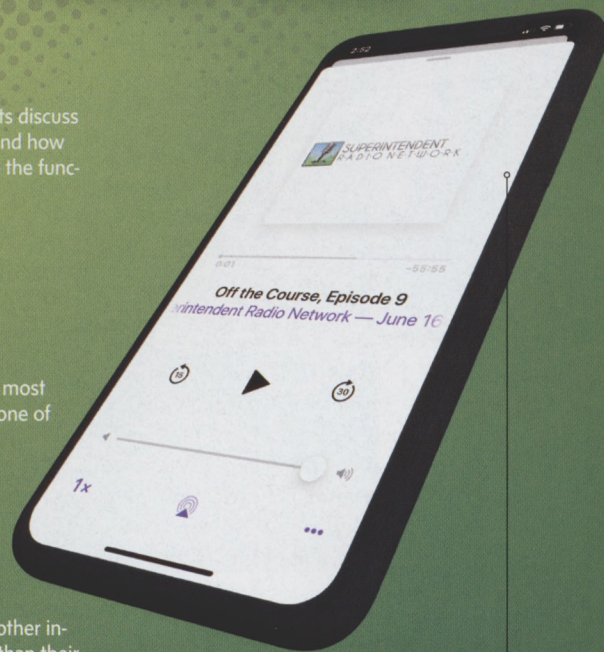
Candid conversations with superintendents, directors and other industry professionals about anything and everything other than their work. Episodes focus on physical and mental health, outside interests, family, and the constant pursuit of life-work balance among other topics.

Sponsored by

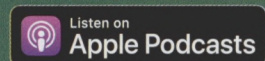
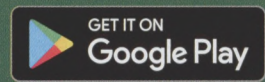


GOLF COURSE
INDUSTRY
**GREENS WITH
ENVY**

Editors Guy Cipriano and Matt LaWell discuss the many (many, many, many) courses they've visited during the last month. Guy brings the decades of play and maintenance; Matt brings the fresh perspective of a hack golfer who appreciates the beauty of courses and the work required.



AVAILABLE ON:



TRAVELS WITH TERRY

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



BUNKER RAKE HOLDER

The Lough Erne Resort in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, Northern Ireland, has 36 holes, including one course designed by Sir Nick Faldo. Sean Donohue, greenkeeper, had his equipment manager weld an 18-inch long, 2-inch square metal tubing to two 3/4th-inch diameter bolts that were screwed into the nuts and welded to the front wheel framework. A traditional short-tooth wooden maintenance bunker rake's handle easily fits into the square tubing for transport. The bolts, nuts and square tubing were in inventory and a red enamel paint (5 pounds sterling, equivalent to about \$6.84) was applied matching the Toro red color scheme. Labor time was about one hour.



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.



CONCRETE CART PATH CLEANING

Concrete cart paths and sidewalks, especially those in climatic areas where they can become discolored, can be routinely cleaned with a One Pass Mold Blaster. This totally self-contained implement has either a 4-foot- or 5-foot-wide front-mounted surface cleaning deck. The deck can be removed and a standard equipment 5 turbo-tip curb attachment can be used to clean concrete cart path curbing. It is powered by two Kohler engines along with a 535-gallon poly water tank. A support vehicle tows a Turfco Torrent 2 Debris Blower directly behind to dry the cart path surface. The One Pass Mold Blaster costs up to \$45,000 depending on the options. I spotted this implement at a housing development in Naples, Florida. **GCI**



FOR SALE

**Discount
Small Engines & Parts**

Small engines & parts
from Briggs & Stratton, Kohler,
Tecumseh, Robin and more.

www.smallenginesuppliers.com

Also, look up your own parts
and buy online at
www.smallenginepartssuppliers.com

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

**MILLER MANAGEMENT
ASSOCIATES**

WE NEED COURSES FOR SALE,
WE HAVE BUYERS LOOKING TO
INVEST IN GOLF.

www.mmagolf.com
brett@mmagolf.com
828-775-7765

SEEDS

NATIVE SEEDS

Largest producer of native seeds
in the Eastern U.S. Hundreds of
species of grass and wildflower
seeds for upland to wetland sites.
Bioengineering material for riparian
areas and erosion control.

Contact **ERNST SEEDS** today.
www.ernstseed.com – 800/873-3321

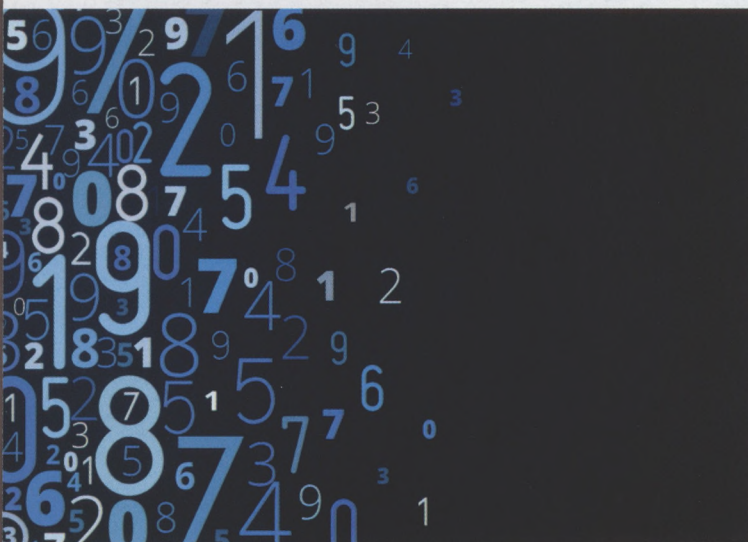
**MAXIMIZE
YOUR
ADVERTISING
DOLLARS**

Place a GCI Classified Ad

Contact Steven Webb
at 800-456-0707
swebb@gie.net.

GOLF COURSE
INDUSTRY

ADVERTISER	WEBSITE	PAGE
Aqua-Aid Solutions	aquaaidolutions.com	51
Aquatrols	aquatrols.com	13, 52
Corteva Agrosciences	corteva.com	11
Earthworks	earthworksturf.com	2
Fairways Foundation, The	thefairwaysfoundation.com	31
Hunter Industries	hunterindustries.coim/hpc	5
JR Simplot Co	simplot.com	INSERT
JRM, Inc.	jrmonline.com	37
Lastec, Inc	lastec.com	22
Moghu USA, LLC	poacure.com/pages/about-us	COVER
PBI-Gordon Corp.	pbigordonturf.com	24-25
Pond Hawk	linneindustries.com/pondhawk-overview	9
Progressive Turf Equipment, Inc.	progressiveturfequip.com	23
Standard Golf Company	standardgolf.com	8
Turf & Soil Diagnostics	turfdiag.com	21
Turfco MFG, Inc.	turfco.com	10, 35



INSIDE THE NUMBERS

I think it is safe to say the State of the Industry survey following 2020 is more meaningful than it has been in years prior. I know I found the statistics from our facility to be eye-opening and hopefully I will learn from and use them to guide and shape future turf management decisions. Also, I hope the shot in the arm golf received from the pandemic continues to boost our beloved game as 2021 moves into spring.

Last year, rounds were up at our facility more than 27 percent compared to 2019. Our busiest month was April when we hosted 3,406 rounds. That was a 73.4 percent increase over April 2019. What makes those numbers even more outstanding is there were zero guest rounds and zero cart rounds. That's right, April 2020 was walking only!

On top of that, April 2020 was our second-wettest month, with 7.24 inches of rainfall. Probably a good thing we were not permitting carts then as they all would have been stuck on the paths anyway. For the record, our walking rounds for the year were up 193 percent compared to 2019. The agronomy numbers from the State of the Industry shared this month show 36 percent of respondents stated handling cart wear and golfer traffic represented their biggest agronomic challenge, yet only 16 percent thought their course conditions were worse than in 2019.

We received numerous positive remarks about course conditions as the year progressed, and I always politely thanked folks for their sentiments even though I may have thought differently. When we allowed carts to return to the course in May, it was single-rider only and it stayed that way for the remainder of the year.

This brought numerous challenges to our head golf professional

and his staff as the demand for play sometimes overwhelmed the supply of golf carts. As for how our course handled the traffic, the biggest thing I noticed was fairway definition was negatively impacted and reduced on the cart-path side of the hole vs. the other. Exit points did not require much mowing all year.

Forty-three percent of survey respondents rated bunkers as the No. 1 area that most suffered because of COVID-19 reductions, while a separate 43 percent said nothing suffered. I know at our facility the removal of bunker rakes meant there was more work for us to do each morning preparing the bunkers for daily play, but I did not hear much grumbling from players regarding the bunkers over the course of last year.

Only 11 percent of survey respondents said storms, flooding, wind or precipitation were their biggest agronomic challenge. I stated earlier that our busiest month was also one of our wettest. In fact, 2020 was the wettest year in my tenure and the wettest in Charlotte since 2003. We received just shy of 60 inches of rainfall in 2020 (59.71 inches) and the Queen City only averages about 42 inches!

This was the third consecutive year with more than 57 inches of rainfall and the yearly total is rising due to the increased number of large rain events, defined as more than one inch. It is not uncommon to find ourselves in the paths of tropical systems, but the

past three years we have seen an increase in their frequency and magnitude. But it does not always have to be a tropical or named system to wreak havoc. In November, we had the third-largest single-day storm total in my tenure when more than four inches fell one morning due to an approaching cold front.

Back to our survey, the biggest challenge my crew faced last year was ... the crew! With COVID-19, there was always an apprehension about bringing someone new into our environment, but as spring turned into summer, the needs of the golf course won out. Locating, interviewing, hiring, training and retaining has become an industrywide challenge. Accomplishing those in a pandemic is the most difficult thing I have done in my career.

So, the year we all could not wait to end is in the rearview mirror and 2021 is no different in its early stages. We still do not have bunker rakes on the course and pool noodles still rest in the cups. Golf carts remain single-rider only and I am still trying desperately to keep my team safe.

But we now possess the experience from one year ago, and if we learned anything, I think it is that the turf can handle more than we previously thought. With a renewed sense of appreciation by our players for the game and the outdoor recreation it provides, maybe we can reduce some of that self-imposed pressure for perfection, because, after all, it's just grass. **GCI**

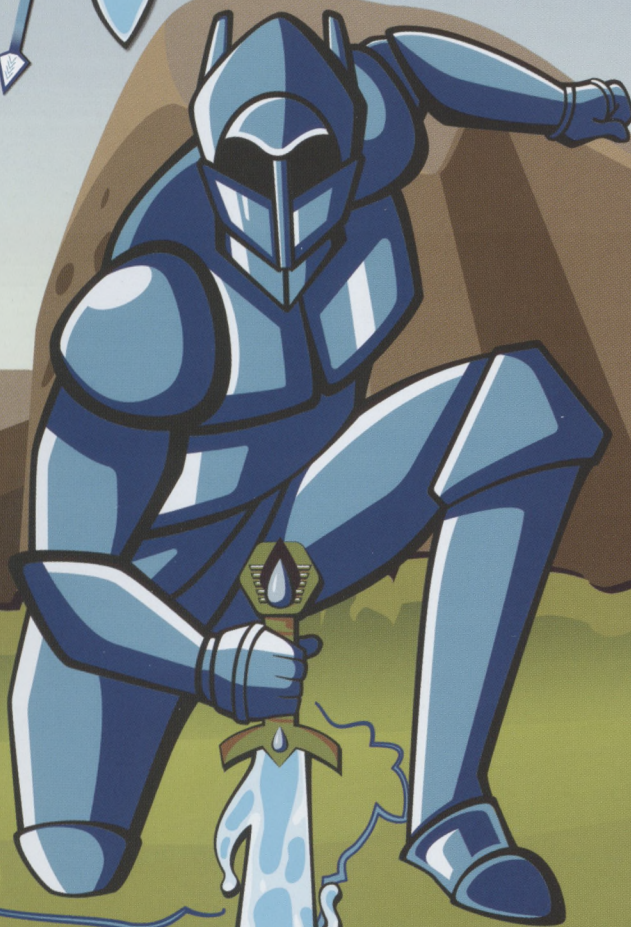


MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG, is the superintendent at Carolina Golf Club in Charlotte, North Carolina and past president of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on Twitter @CGCGreenkeeper.

NEXT GENERATION • POTENTIATED
RESEARCH BACKED

Excaibur™

Powered By:



- Rapid response soil surfactant that delivers **rapid infiltration** and consistent dry-down.
- Unique **infiltration-rehydration** characteristics will provide unparalleled soil moisture responsiveness.



AQUA-AID
SOLUTIONS

THOSE THAT KNOW

REVOLUTION. TRUSTED ON GOLF COURSES AROUND THE WORLD.

Revolution® users demand the best and don't settle for anything less. For more than a decade and in over 40 countries, Revolution has been the standard by which all other soil surfactants are measured against.



WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT **REVOLUTION®** FOR YOUR COURSE?
Contact Your Local Aquatrols Distributor or Visit: Aquatrols.com/ONLY-REVO