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**ABOUT THE COVER:** Nile Young took all the stunning pictures of American Dunes found in this issue.

# COURSE FOR A CAUSE

★★★ FOR A ★★★

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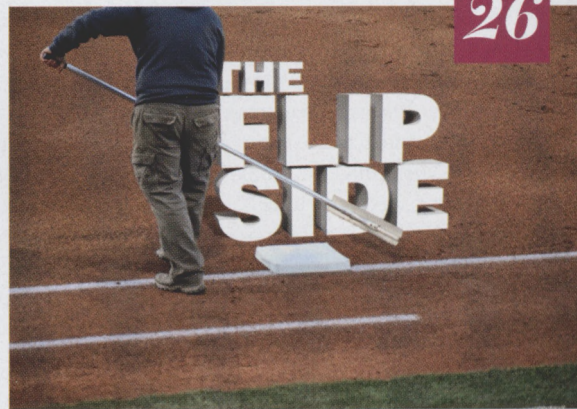
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## GET GRILLING

**B**risket or ribs? Chicken or pork? Burgers or brats? Summer brings heat-of-the-moment decisions and some of the most meaningful selections superintendents and their supporters make come away from the turf.

With a national labor situation where demand for goods and services (golf rounds and events) exceeds the capacity (workers) to meet that demand, soft benefits and work culture matter more than ever. Think about it. How many golf facilities are willing to go dollar-for-dollar with neighboring businesses?

This leaves the golf industry between a spatula and grate.

Getting and keeping the right people to do the work means recognizing the intrinsic value of camaraderie and a fun professional environment. Cookouts are a low-risk, low-cost tactic to keep employees happy. A solid grill plus meat and fixings for a few cookouts each month seems like a reasonable budgetary ask, especially considering the influx of golf revenue over the past year and the inability to find enough workers to reach projected labor expenses.

Every respected golf industry legend urges colleagues to use every available dollar in their budget. Remember that guidance when you're ordering a new grill and planning team-building events.

Sure, cookouts take time, the most valuable resource in any industry. But unless the course is closed, how much work can a crew complete during the middle of a busy golf day? Experienced employees are almost always more likely to complete tasks faster and better than a constant rotation of newbies — and that's assuming (wrongly) that new hires can be identified and hired. People are more apt to stay at their job if they like their co-workers. Positive interactions with co-workers give employees, including those who don't *have* to work, such as retirees and students, a reason to avoid the temptation of a higher-paying job.

The power of grilling represents the impetus for a campaign *Golf Course Industry* launched earlier this year in partnership with AQUA-AID Solutions. Started in late January, #TurfheadsGrilling has developed into a meaty weekend Twitter highlight reel on the @GCIMagazine and @Solutions4Turf feeds. The posts are receiving thousands of impressions and engagements, inspiring followers to expand their culinary creativity.

But ...

We know readers who avoid social are missing the idea and imagery exchange. The program, which includes a chance to receive swag and have a recipe published in the December *Turfheads Guide to Grilling*, is open to all. Enter [bit.ly/GrillingSwag](http://bit.ly/GrillingSwag) into your web browser to submit a recipe and images. A #TurfheadsGrilling pin will be sent your way and you'll be entered into drawings to win more swag. Avoiding social media means you're missing colleagues modeling #Turfheads-Grilling aprons. It's quite the timeline show!

Also, encourage others on your team to participate. Our recent readership study indicated 87 percent of print subscribers share their copies of *Golf Course Industry*. The hunch here is that every crew has a few grillmasters. Let them know a forum exists to showcase their grilled and smoked creations to an industrywide audience.

Even our team boasts a grillmaster. Once a Twitter observer, national sales manager **Russ Warner** has added to the social media highlight reel with regular posts (@GCIRWarner). Russ and his wife, **Christina**, GIE Media's audience development director, recently hosted our annual planning meeting at their secluded Chesterland, Ohio, home. Russ smoked fall-off-the-bone ribs and tender pulled pork. We're looking forward to more food, team-building and 2022 planning later this year.

Grilling won't solve your entire labor conundrum, but it's a tasty tool to consider.

Try giving your team the brisket, ribs, chicken, pork, burgers and brats this summer. You don't want to lose a worker or two who you can't afford to lose. **GCI**



*Guy Cipriano*

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## SHAKING UP MUIRFIELD

**Fast approaching its 50th anniversary, Muirfield Village Golf Club briskly completes a renovation while reloading its staff.**

*By Lee Carr*

**M**uirfield Village Golf Club is best known for its association with **Jack Nicklaus** and for annually hosting the Memorial Tournament, with the 2021 version showcasing the results of a major renovation completed on a tight schedule.

Following consecutive PGA Tour events last year, including one scheduled on late notice, the crew at MVGC was literally taking up turf as the Memorial Tournament finished on July 19. LaBar Golf Renovations, Leibold Irrigation and TRW set to work alongside the MVGC crew, led by director of grounds

**Chad Mark**, to fulfill Nicklaus's vision for significant changes to the course. "The team we had in place made the whole experience one I will always treasure," Mark says.

Mark's favorite memory from the renovation was when Nicklaus and the team drove the course, hole by hole, and discussed improvements one day in fall 2019. Later, in the clubhouse, Nicklaus "told everyone we were going to move forward with the renovation," Mark says. "A lot has happened, but I remember that day quite well." From that momentous decision, there would be many more.

Generally, changes include reconstruction of the greens, irrigation work and the addition of a PrecisionAire system. Fairway and greenside bunkers have been rebuilt, the course can play up to 100 yards longer and tees have been resurfaced. Specifically, tees and fairways are covered in T1/Alpha creeping bentgrass, greens have L-93 XD/T1/007 creeping bentgrass and the roughs sport Kentucky bluegrass.

"Only a handful of greens were replaced to match the scans completed prior to renovation," Mark says. "Many greens ended up moving or having major contour adjustments. There are some





respect COVID-19 protocols, maintain social distancing in the headquarters, create a manageable shuttle service and accommodate volunteers with separate hotel rooms.

“The over-

all challenge with the renovation was the condensed timeline to complete it,” Mark says. “We had to pivot off our plan. The worst day was Sunday of Labor Day weekend, the only day of weather that caused major damage. We had to lift sod that was undermined on the fourth and ninth greens and remove contaminated mix before recreating the surfaces from the scan and resodding. That was the first day I was glad we were sodding greens vs. the original plan to seed, as we would have had a lot of damage.”

Throughout the process, everyone had to roll with the challenges presented. A trademark quality of the best leaders in agronomy is maintaining perspective. Mark credits his family with helping. Even with all the demands at the course, Mark still found time for nearly every lacrosse and football game his kids played. One day, when work plans changed, Nicklaus and his wife, **Barbara**, both knew Mark had an important game to get to and they insisted he go. “They have a family focus, which makes them great to work for,” Mark says.

The renovation included plan changes, its own contours and demanding moments of cooperation, but the result is signature Nicklaus. And some things haven’t changed. Nicklaus is ensuring his vision is fully executed and Mark and his team are ensuring that MVGC is ready for the PGA Tour, club members and guests. The delicious milkshakes at Muirfield haven’t changed either, though maybe recent accomplishments make them even more satisfying.

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

## Tartan Talks No. 59

**Doug Carrick** is among the most prolific modern Canadian golf course architects. Like most of his peers, Carrick has transitioned from designing multiple new courses each year to renovating earlier work by architects, including some of his own.



▲ Carrick

“That’s probably evidence that I have maybe been in the business too long, when you start to go back and do renovation work on your own designs,” Carrick jokes on the Tartan Talks podcast. “That’s something I embrace and it’s great to have a mulligan and go back and make some improvements.”

Carrick hasn’t needed many mulligans. His portfolio includes more than 50 new course designs. He entered the business in 1981, started his own firm in 1985 and received numerous accolades following the unveiling of King Valley Golf Club in 1991. His work at King Valley led to desirable opportunities in his native Ontario and beyond. There’s even a course in Scotland named for him.

Visit the Superintendent Radio Network page on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and other popular distribution platforms to learn how Carrick established himself as a prominent golf course architect and his keys for sustaining success in the business.

dramatic changes that have made the overall experience even better. Mark adds that the goal was to improve the course, not to make it harder.

“Despite our veteran staff, we’re re-learning how to take care of this place,” he says. “The greens react differently to irrigation and fertility. We have new tools, such as the PrecisionAire, that are game-changers. Managing new cultivars and having state-of-the-art irrigation is going to help us become more sustainable.”

In addition to the changes on course, there have been changes on the team. “Our program is built to move our people into jobs of their own and we strive to have our replacements in house,” Mark says. **James Bryson** and **Adam Daroczy** moved into head superintendent positions at Bedens Brook Club in Skillman, New Jersey, and Beechmont Country Club in Beachwood, Ohio, respectively. **Nate McKinniss**, **Seamus Foley** and **Mitchell Cofer**, already employees of MVGC, were promoted into lead management roles. “The stress is finding young talent we can develop,” Mark says. “Luckily, we have some great interns and assistants-in-training contributing tremendous energy.”

Mark continues to hire high school athletes for seasonal positions. Flexible scheduling helps, and the athletes are committed and pay attention. Thanks to a local basketball coach allowing Mark to speak with his team in December, MVGC filled most of their seasonal positions by Feb. 1. That’s a winning situation for everyone.

Having the right help is critical and there are normally 35 to 40 agronomy volunteers at the Memorial Tournament. This year, there were only about 24 — to

**TARTAN TALKS**  
No. 59

**DOUG CARRICK**

**Billy Bunker**  
SUPERINTENDENT RADIO NETWORK





## REAL TALK WITH REAL TECHS

Trent Manning wants to highlight an overlooked aspect of the industry.

By Jack Gleckler

**Trent Manning** considers being an equipment manager a quiet line of work. Beyond coverage from industry-specific publications, those in his position aren't known to the average golfer. Manning wants to change that.

Manning has been in the grounds-keeping business since he was allowed to work. In 1995, at age 16, he began his first job as a groundskeeper at Ansley Golf Club in Atlanta, and he was promoted to equipment manager in 1999. He skipped out of Ansley for eight years to work elsewhere in the turf management industry, but returned in 2010 when he was rehired as Ansley's equipment manager.

He's a seasoned veteran of the golf industry. He also knows that due to the lack of coverage about the position, equipment technicians can feel isolated on their own course. There is a lack of horizontal communication between course technicians,



and many don't have a place to share their experiences in the golf industry.

Instead of biding his time and hoping turf maintenance would become a more communicative field, Manning elected to kickstart the communication himself. His

goal was to provide a media outlet for maintenance crews to realize the problems on their courses aren't isolated. In fact, there's a swath of technicians ready and willing to help them.

In early 2021, Manning recorded the first batch of episodes for *Reel Turf Techs*, a podcast dedicated to highlighting the work and sharing stories of equipment managers and turf technicians from around the golf industry. He had been planning to launch the podcast in 2020 but he wanted to learn how to properly create a podcast before he recorded one. If he was going to begin a show for the equipment manager community, he wanted to do it right.

"I didn't know anything about how

you podcast, so I started that the year prior and tried to get my ducks in a row," he says. "I'm not the end-all be-all but at least I could get my head above water before I launched the podcast."

Before the podcast premiered on streaming platforms, Manning recorded a backlog that could've held the show over until May. But that was according to his first schedule.

The reception from listeners was overwhelmingly positive. Manning joked that the demand for more caused him to speed up release dates. "Originally my plan was every other week," he says. "And after I released four or five (episodes) the audience was really enthusiastic. They were pushing me to do a once a week."

This isn't the first time a turf technician has started a podcast strictly for turf technicians, but Manning's show is the most consistently uploaded. Despite being the host, Manning doesn't consider *Reel Turf Techs* his podcast. Nor does he want it to be. He hosts it but he wants the podcast to be about the guests and their stories.

"The questions that I ask, I put together a survey and I sent it out to 75 equipment managers, and these were the questions that they wanted to hear," Manning says. "So that's the questions I've asked (the guests). I really am just the host. I'll be the brains behind the operation, but this is an equipment manager community that's pushing the podcast."

Manning figured the podcast has the potential to positively affect the industry. (Its Twitter account, @reelturftechs, already has more than 350 followers.) Equipment managers are humble about the work they do, but they are always willing to help each other.

"From my experience with equipment managers, they're open books. Anything they can help you with, they will," Manning says. "That's part of the idea behind the podcast, we all just want to help each other. You can get any little tip or trick or whatever out of the podcast and help your facility. That's why we're doing it."

*Jack Gleckler is an Ohio University senior participating in the Golf Course Industry summer internship program. This is his first story for the magazine.*





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# COURSE NEWS

**Pine Lakes Country Club** in Myrtle Beach will be closed through early July for a greens and bunker restoration project. Founders Group International, Pine Lakes' parent company, partnered with **Craig Schreiner**, ASGCA, ASLA, who spearheaded the

course's 2008-09 renovation, to lead the project.

New Sunday Bermudagrass greens will be installed, replacing paspalum. The greens will also be restored to their original size, expanding the total putting surface area from 103,000

square feet to 124,000 square feet.

**The Pulpit Club** in Caledon, Ontario, has built a new revetted bunker using the synthetic material EcoBunker. The bunker was constructed over six days by contractor KCM Construction and is now one of the tallest revetted bunkers in the world. The bunker is on the fourth hole of the Pulpit course and has a 12-foot-high back wall. It was supported using railroad ties for more than 30 years after its construction in 1990, but decay on the ties necessitated renovation. The course was originally designed by **Dr. Michael Hurdzan** and **Dana Fry**. Superintendent **Rob Wright** purchased a full container of EcoBunker, about 20 skids, for the project.

**Great Oaks Country Club** in Rochester Hills, Michigan, picked **Chris Wilczynski**, ASGCA, to develop and implement its first master plan in more than two decades. Nestled in the rolling hills of Oakland County and designed in the early 1970s by **Bill Newcomb**, the course has encountered challenges with drainage and an overall "sense of place."

"Drainage is an important part of the plan, but this is a family-oriented club, and we want to improve the overall experience," Wilczynski says. The master plan also calls for the removal of several of the course's trees and a lengthening and shortening of the golf course.

All nine greens and the practice green at The Charlie Yates Golf Course at **East Lake Golf Club** outside Georgia are being converted bentgrass to Prizm zoysiagrass. The renovation also includes several tee repairs, cart path refurbishment and a restoration of the practice tee on the north end of the practice range. The project is scheduled to wrap in early July.

Paul Miller Design is leading the next round of renovations at the music-themed **Montgomery National Golf Club** outside the Twin Cities. An expanded pond area will improve storm water drainage off the adjacent residential area while adding playability improvements that will include fairway, bunker and approach area reshaping on the downhill par 4 named "While My Guitar Gently Weeps." The improvements will flow around the new Olson Guitar bunker that frames the right side of the golf hole.

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# REMEMBERING ARTHUR HILLS



**Arthur Hills**, ASGCA fellow and past president, died May 18 in Toledo. He was 91.

A graduate of both Michigan State University (in science) and the University of Michigan (in landscape architecture), Hills excelled

as an MSU golfer. He formed his golf course architecture firm in the 1960s and today, more than half a century later, Hills • Forrest • Smith continues to “create golf course designs that stimulate the senses, display creativity and honor the hallowed traditions of the game as they relate to strategy, shot values and aesthetic character.”

Hills designed more than 200 new golf courses and renovated more than 150 other courses. His new designs include Bonita Bay, in Naples, Florida; The Golf Club of Georgia in Atlanta; Bighorn Golf Club in Palm Desert, California; Keene Trace Golf Club in Lexington, Kentucky; and Hyatt Hill Country Resort in San Antonio. Hills-designed courses have hosted many distinguished amateur and professional tournaments, including U.S. Opens and the Ryder Cup.

“Arthur became a father-like figure to me,” said ASGCA past president **Steve Forrest**, who worked with Hills for 42 years. “He was a mentor, an instructor, exhorter and admonisher while always trying to improve his own skills and increase his personal knowledge every day.”

An environmental pioneer, Hills designed the first Audubon Signature Sanctuary courses in the United States, Mexico and Europe. ASGCA past president **Pete Dye** called Hills “the Mayor of Naples” for the number of private country club courses that

he designed in and near that coastal Florida location.

An inductee of both the Ohio and Michigan Golf halls of fame, Hills received a lifetime achievement award

from the Michigan Golf Course Owners Association. He is survived by his wife, **Mary**. They have eight children, 24 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

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# Devon Carroll

TURFGRASS WEED SCIENCE DOCTORAL STUDENT AND GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT,  
UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

**D**evon Carroll is passionate about turf. And she'd like other women to share her passion.

Carroll calls herself a professional student. She has earned a bachelor's degree in turfgrass science and a master's degree in agronomy from Penn State, plus a second master's in agricultural leadership from the University of Tennessee with a focus on opportunities for women in the turf industry. She's currently working on her doctorate in turfgrass weed science from Tennessee.

As many superintendents are encountering difficulties finding enough staff to meet their needs, Carroll thinks it's time to expand the labor pool. "I just think we're not tapping into half the labor population," she tells Rick Woelfel in the latest episode of the Wonderful Women of Golf podcast. "We need to do a better job of recruiting women because right now that's an underutilized demographic."

A native of northeastern Pennsylvania, Carroll grew up playing golf with her father and played golf in high school. She didn't think about turf as a career until her cousin, a golf course superintendent, raised the possibility. "That was something that had not really crossed my mind before," Carroll recalls, "but he went to Penn State for turf and I thought 'You know what, he loves his job, and every day is unique and exciting for him, so I'd probably like it too.'"

Carroll enrolled at Penn State and encountered **Dr. Andrew McNitt**, who became one of her mentors. "Dr. McNitt teaches the intro to turf class" she says. "I remember taking a class with him and I wasn't really sure if I wanted to keep turf as my major. He just made turf so fun and exciting."

McNitt also helped arrange for Carroll to get some practical experience, as a member of the grounds crew for the State College Spikes, a professional baseball team that plays its home games on the Penn State campus. During summer breaks she worked for the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders, the Triple-A affiliate of the New York Yankees.

Carroll was also mentored by **Dr. John Kaminski**, another Penn State professor, who encouraged her to go to graduate school. "He really got me excited on that side of turfgrass," Carroll says. "He helped win a grant to actually do my own research project. I was looking at creeping bentgrass germination to help superintendents who may experience winterkill. It's been a really great experience since then to be able to do research. I feel like it's helping

superintendents; it's helping the industry."

Arriving at Tennessee with the intention of working on her doctorate, Carroll experienced an awakening of sorts. "I took an agricultural leadership class as an elective," she says, "and I really just loved it. The class was called Women in Leadership and the professor was **Dr. Carrie Stephens**. Her research area actually is women in leadership in agriculture. She was teaching us about how women in other agricultural industries are overcoming barriers and making it more normal for women to be in leadership roles."

Carroll approached Stephens about doing research on women in the turf industry. Her proposal was approved, allowing her to work toward obtaining a second master's degree while simultaneously working on her Ph.D.

"I interviewed 13 female leaders in the turfgrass industry from three different countries, including nine different U.S. states and three Canadian provinces," she says. "We talked about what kind of barriers they faced but also what kinds of opportunities they see for women."

Carroll believes it's important to reach out to high school students and encourage them to consider a career in the industry.

"We need to be talking to students," she says. "We need to be talking to them early. A lot of students choose in their sophomore or junior year what direction they want to head in college. If we're talking to them in their senior year, we're probably too late, so we need to start fostering that idea with students maybe in middle school or early high school." **GCI**



If we hadn't had those relationships prior to the pandemic hitting, I don't think our industry would have done as well as it did."



**SUPERINTENDENT  
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Hablas Español?

## CÓMO SE DICE (“HOW DO YOU SAY...?”)

**O**ur business has been supported by Latin labor for as long as I can remember, and that’s a long time. Many of the Latinos I’ve worked with have become dear friends and trusted colleagues. I’m sure one of the reasons for this is I’ve tried to understand my friends and their cultures.

Start with the Latin work ethic. All you must know is their backstories and how hard they toiled to get to the United States to earn a living to understand how dedicated they are.

As a superintendent in Miami during the 1980s, I saw people float across the Gulf of Mexico from Central America and Cuba, desperate to get to the United States. When I worked in golf course maintenance in Texas, helicopters with immigration officers landed on the course to round up my workers. It’s gut-wrenching to watch, but it taught me about the perseverance of the culture.

Courses throughout the country are facing a significant shortage of workers. I believe we should embrace Latin labor more now than ever. But if you’re going to do so, do yourself — and them — a favor and come to understand their needs, culture and language.

In researching this column, I

asked a number of my Latin friends what we can do to make them feel welcome and comfortable. First and foremost, I was told that we should be aware of what the Latin individual is looking for in employment — and in life.

Like everyone else, they want a job that pays fairly for the work done. Also, like everyone else, they want to be treated like human beings. That means being curious and attentive about who they are. Ask about their backgrounds and whether they have experience, on a golf course or in areas that are related, like agriculture, landscaping and construction.

It also means providing a welcoming workspace. Act like “el maestro” — the teacher — rather than “el jefe,” or the boss. Bosses simply put workers out on the course doing the same tasks day after day with no chance to learn, improve and get ahead. Teachers are interested in their workers’ welfare, their lives and their opportunities.

Start with communication. Learn Spanish. And not just “Como te llamas?” or “Cinco

de Mayo.” Learn as much grammar as you can, as well as some slang and the differences in dialects. And listen closely: You’ll quickly pick up the difference between formal speech and jargon, which may help you identify the more accomplished or skilled people.

I made language education a two-way street. I said, “When you speak to me, speak only in Spanish so I can learn. When I speak to you, I will speak in English so you can learn.” Saying “cómo se dice” (how do you say?) goes a long way in acquiring a better vocabulary, as well as earn trust.

If you have a jobs or assignment board, present the information in English and Spanish. Do the same with equipment manuals, job descriptions and course standards. Superintendents who’ve made a diligent effort to speak with their staff in their native tongue have been rewarded with a workforce that’s dependable, dedicated and stayed for decades.

Do all you can to learn the different Latin cultures, which vary from country to country. But some lessons are universal, starting with not raising your voice to Latin staff. This rarely works well with anyone but is particularly true in the Latin culture where embarrassing someone — especially publicly — will cause you to lose their respect and never regain it. If you need to make a point and don’t have the language skills to do so, find a trusted, bilingual staff member who can explain

**MORAGHAN** *continued on 46*

“

Act like ‘el maestro’ — the teacher — rather than ‘el jefe,’ or the boss. Bosses put workers out on the course doing the same tasks day after day with no chance to learn, improve and get ahead. Teachers are interested in their workers’ welfare, their lives and their opportunities.”



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





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presented by Simplot Turf &amp; Horticulture

# Part of the SAME TEAM

By Guy Cipriano

**T**he team Josh Lewis leads at Sharon Heights Golf & Country Club includes assistants, technicians and dedicated hourly employees.

Sounds like most turf departments, right?

Lewis tells anybody willing to listen that the team responsible for enhancing conditions at Sharon Heights is much bigger than the employees under his direct purview. That team includes Simplot Turf & Horticulture territory representative Akoni Ganir.

"I don't do this on my own," Lewis says. "I have trusted folks, whether they are superintendents, turf professors or vendors who, in all honesty, are coming to work with me every day. They are going to pick up the phone every time I call and Akoni is at the top of that list. I know he's going to answer the phone and have solid grounded advice on whatever I'm dealing with."

Lewis is in his third full season at Sharon Heights, a private club located in a stretch of the Bay Area known as "Venture Capital

## The sounds of synergy

Josh Lewis and Akoni Ganir joined Superintendent Radio Network to discuss their relationship and how superintendents can work with industry professionals to elevate golf courses. The conversation is available on popular podcast distribution platforms.



Akoni Ganir



Josh Lewis

Row." Tech and finance innovators and investors abound at Sharon Heights, creating what Lewis calls a "high-energy environment." The biggest turf challenges stem from a lack of rain. "Given our current drought conditions in Northern California, we've only received about 5 inches of rain over the last 12 months which makes it very challenging to consistently produce high-quality conditions on a year-round basis." Higher temperatures over the last few years are yielding an uptick in disease pressure as well.

By engaging a trusted network of turf professionals, Lewis positions Sharon Heights to stay ahead of potential problems. Ganir, for example, covers Northern California. The golf-rich region spans from the Monterey Bay to the Oregon border. After graduating from Oregon State, Ganir spent six years as an assistant superintendent at Cypress Point

Club. He then worked as a superintendent at Tokatee (Oregon) Golf Club and Winchester (California) Country Club before joining the expanding Simplot Turf & Horticulture team in 2016. Ganir brought an ideal mix of superintendent experience and built-in contacts to his role, which involves helping superintendents manage changing environments.

"It's a very satisfying part of this job to know that you're an extension of their team," Ganir says. "When I made the decision to go from being a superintendent to the sales side, it was a hard decision. I still wanted to be part of the industry and part of golf. This is where I found myself. I can still use my background, experience and knowledge to offer something to the industry."

Relationships such as the one he possesses with Ganir are critical to a superintendent's success, Lewis says. "To me, they are not salesmen," he adds. "They are educated, qualified, well-traveled turf professionals that are there to help."

Lewis and Ganir have traveled West Coast turf circles together. The pair met at an Oregon State alumni tournament in 2007 at Chambers Bay, the Pacific Northwest course where Lewis worked as superintendent for the 2015 U.S. Open. Fellow Oregon State alum and turf enthusiast Jason Oliver introduced the duo. Oliver, an assistant superintendent at Stanford University Golf Course, died tragically at age 25 in 2010. Lewis was working at Pasatiempo Golf Club and Ganir at Cypress Point at the time of Oliver's death.

"At that point, Akoni's and my friendship on a personal level really took off, because that both hit us really hard," Lewis says. "Even to this day, we have a lot of conversations. We will be sitting there at GIS or at an industry event or playing golf somewhere and out of nowhere one of us will say, 'Man, Jason would have loved this.'"

Lewis returned to Northern California following the 2015 U.S. Open to accept the superintendent job at Almaden Golf and Country Club in San Jose. A year later, Ganir helped Simplot Turf & Horticulture establish its presence in the region. Their relationship and success would have made Oliver proud.

"I look at it like we are all on the same side and trying to accomplish a goal," Ganir says. "The goal is to grow great turf and provide great conditions for golfers."





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# COURSE ★ ★ ★ FOR A ★ ★ ★ CAUSE

SOARING ON THE WINGS OF PROMISE, A 'CRAZY IDEA' TRANSFORMS A LONGTIME MICHIGAN GOLF LANDSCAPE INTO AMERICAN DUNES.

By **Lee Carr**

**L**t. Col. Dan Rooney had a “crazy idea” and managed to arrange a meeting in Florida with his boyhood hero Jack Nicklaus. Rooney’s first attempt to get there from Oklahoma resulted in a flight diverted to Augusta, Georgia. Like most golf enthusiasts, he would take that to be a positive sign. The second attempt resulted in a few hours of sunshine-blessed conversation on the back deck of The Bear’s Club. The meeting ended with an agreement for Nicklaus and Rooney to find some friends and go all in on an unprecedented mission. Amer-





Every penny of profit at American Dunes will fund the education of children and spouses of U.S. soldiers killed or injured in combat.



ican Dunes had launched.

Soaring on the wings of promise, American Dunes is structured to serve others: 100 percent of American Dunes' annual profit will be given to The Folds of Honor Foundation, a 501(c)(3) dedicated to helping fund education for the dependents of military soldiers killed or disabled in combat. Established by Rooney in 2007, the foundation honors their sacrifice by educating their spouses and children from kindergarten through college. And similar to providing an education at every level, American Dunes is designed for play at every level. Course plans evolved in some beautifully unexpected ways.

#### GROUNDWORK

Located in Grand Haven, Michigan, the site of American Dunes has been a golf property since 1965. Originally, it was The Grand Haven Golf Club, designed by **Bruce Matthews Jr.**, and recognized for years as one of America's finest public courses. In 2006, the Rooney family became owners and operators. The first Folds

of Honor fundraising event at Grand Haven hosted 67 golfers and raised \$8,500. Folds of Honor was on its way.

Like so many other properties, though, business started to decline following the Great Recession. Some tough choices had to be made

about the course, but the Rooney family was reluctant to abandon the home of Folds of Honor. **Joe VerDuin** was brought on as the superintendent in April 2018. Plans changed shortly after that.

"I was hired to work for the Grand Haven GC and it was the right time and right place for me," VerDuin says. "When I learned the redesign was going to take place, I committed to seeing it through." Nicklaus

## INSIDE AMERICAN DUNES

**Yards from back tees:** 7,213

**Bunkers:** 30

**Acres of dune complexes:**

50

**Greens:** 777 bentgrass

**Tees and fairways:**

Flagstick bentgrass

**Rough:** Kentucky bluegrass/  
ryegrass

**Native area blend:** Hard, creeping,

GRAND HAVEN,  
MICHIGAN



started planning, waived the standard \$3 million design fee and engaged **Chris Cochran**, senior designer at Nicklaus Design.

Due to the ethos of Folds of Honor and having previously met Rooney, Cochran looked forward to working with him. Upon the initial site visit, Cochran found a tightly tree-lined golf course. Preliminary designs were based on a low construction budget and the plan was to widen the

corridors, make minor routing changes and raise the holes that would flood every spring due to a high-water table. "Since all the greens were push-up, we would redesign the green complexes and regrass the course, but we had to preserve the majority of the irrigation system," Cochran says.

Cochran and Rooney toured the site after some of the initial clearing and Rooney thought







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▲ Summer rounds run \$150 at American Dunes, with deep discounts for veterans.

it looked great. However, with the site situated entirely on premium dune sand, he wondered if the course could be opened up and become more naturally exposed. Cochran explained it was possible, but more budget would be necessary to clear more trees, do more shaping and install a new irrigation system. Rooney found the necessary funds.

Rooney has written a bestseller “Fly into the Wind” (with a foreword by David Feherty). The book is about how your response to challenges can positively shape your life. This was one of those challenging moments and the choice to make everything as outstanding as possible to match the worthiness of the cause proved prescient. With their new marching orders, “Jack became even more excited,” Cochran says, “and that’s when the course really started to gain an identity we could run with.”

### TAKING FLIGHT

The varied terrain excited everyone involved with the project.

“There are dunescape holes and parkland holes,” VerDuin says. “The ride of being on the parkland holes and then heading through the dunes and back again is a golf experience unlike most. The surroundings complement each other.”

The course’s current form reflects changes in golf course architecture and player preferences.

“The old golf course was a great example of where golf was in the ‘60s,” Cochran says. “Heavily tree-lined with a penal design and an emphasis on hitting it straight. Preferences today favor more open, strategic design with an emphasis on visuals.”

Every bit of turf was excavated. Acres of pine, beech and oak trees were removed, which helps the course drain better. Clearing the trees allowed for much better wind movement and now sunshine blankets the grass. “Weed and disease pressure is greatly reduced, and improved turf quality makes the course much more fun to play and easier to manage,” Cochran says.

“The project got a lot bigger than any of us initially planned,” he adds. “Special thanks to (contractor) Superior Golf, (shaper) Doug Graham and VerDuin, who were so flexible in their thinking and attitude during construction that we could create what we did with so little money in such a short period of time.”

Rooney, an Air Force fighter pilot (call sign “Noonan”, the nickname bestowed on him by fellow pilots

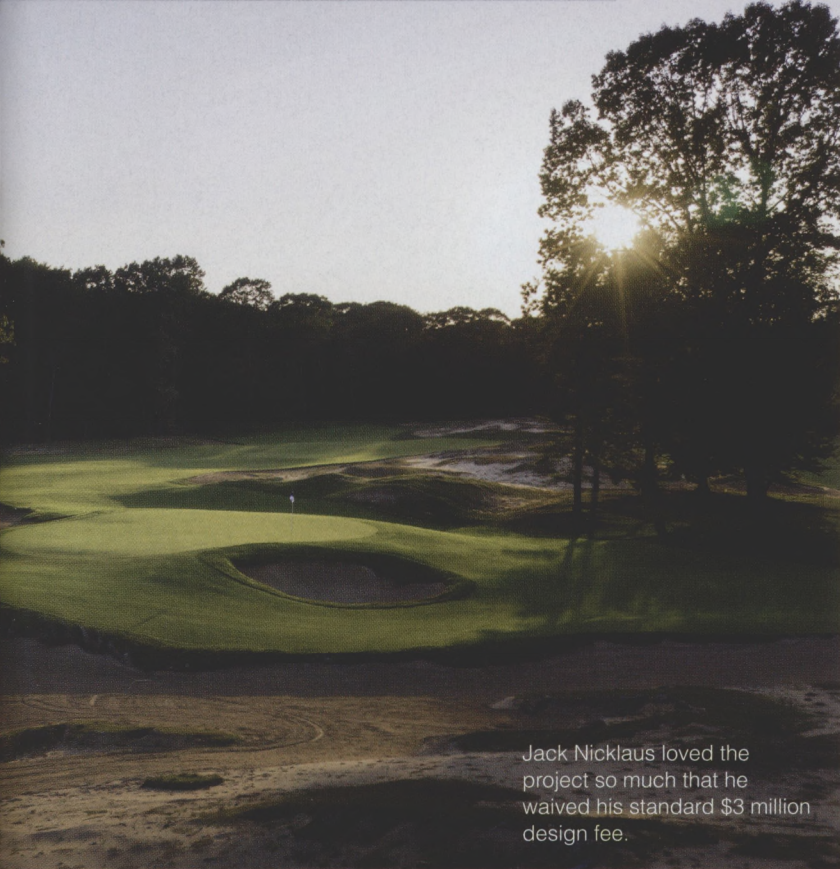
as he’s the only known PGA professional/fighter pilot, and yes, it’s a “Caddyshack” reference), will never forget an early onsite visit with Nicklaus. “Jack said to me, ‘You have no idea what you have here. It’s truly a magnificent site,’” Rooney says. “The whole place is reverent and we can’t wait for everyone to visit.” There was a lottery for tee times when the course opened in May and it is staying busy.

With Grand Haven being a popular Midwest vacation destination complete with quaint homes, a boardwalk and a beach, and with the course located just 500 yards from Lake Michigan, it’s an amazing course in a fun destination. Not everyone is on vacation, though: The maintenance crew is hard at work.

### ALL SYSTEMS GO

With 18 people, the maintenance team is fully staffed for the summer. That includes VerDuin, two assistants, an equipment manager, four full-time and five part-time seasonal workers, and five full-time summer workers. An internship program is expected to launch in 2022. “We always mentor future aspiring turf-





Jack Nicklaus loved the project so much that he waived his standard \$3 million design fee.

grass managers and two of our staff are pursuing careers in turf management,” VerDuin says.

American Dunes has roughly 150 acres of natural sand dunes, 43 acres of tees and fairways, and 3½ acres of greens. “Much of our focus goes into mowing, spraying and irrigating given the amount of bentgrass,” VerDuin says, “and a challenge is the way the grasses intermingle. We have areas where fescues meet bentgrass. There is a fescue island in the middle of a tee. The challenge comes with each of these grasses needing different amounts of water, fertilizer and herbicides.”

The dunes complexes cover another 50 acres. The challenges there are keeping the weeds out, determining what gets raked daily and what doesn’t, and watering just enough to keep the sand in place but the fescue playable. “Overall, we have a strategy, but it will change as the property evolves,” VerDuin says. “There’s no track record,” which makes this season both fun and challenging.

“Doing what I love, combined with the inspiring mission of American Dunes, brings purpose and passion together for me,” VerDuin says.

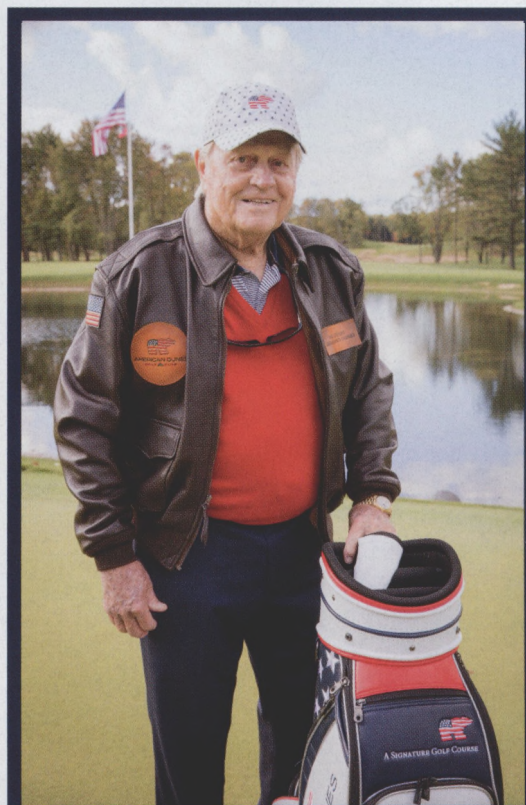
“This maintenance team is humbled to help introduce this experience to the nation.”

#### SERVING AND HONORING

The only clubhouse entrance and exit is through the Folds of Honor Memorial, a commanding open-air tunnel. Nestled securely in the ground are bronze boot prints of soldiers who have been killed in action. Their stories — and their families’ stories — cover the 8-foot concrete walls, flanking guests and encouraging them to learn more about these Folds of Honor recipients.

“We will immediately let people know why American Dunes exists — to raise awareness and raise funds for Folds of Honor. This is the most heroic round you will ever play,” Rooney says. Guests aren’t playing for themselves but for someone else. To date, more than \$145 million has been distributed by Folds of Honor to 29,000 recipients. “Once you are in the Folds family, we got you,” Rooney says.

The foundation checks in with recipients once a year to make sure the required GPA is being maintained but also, if someone is hurting, they

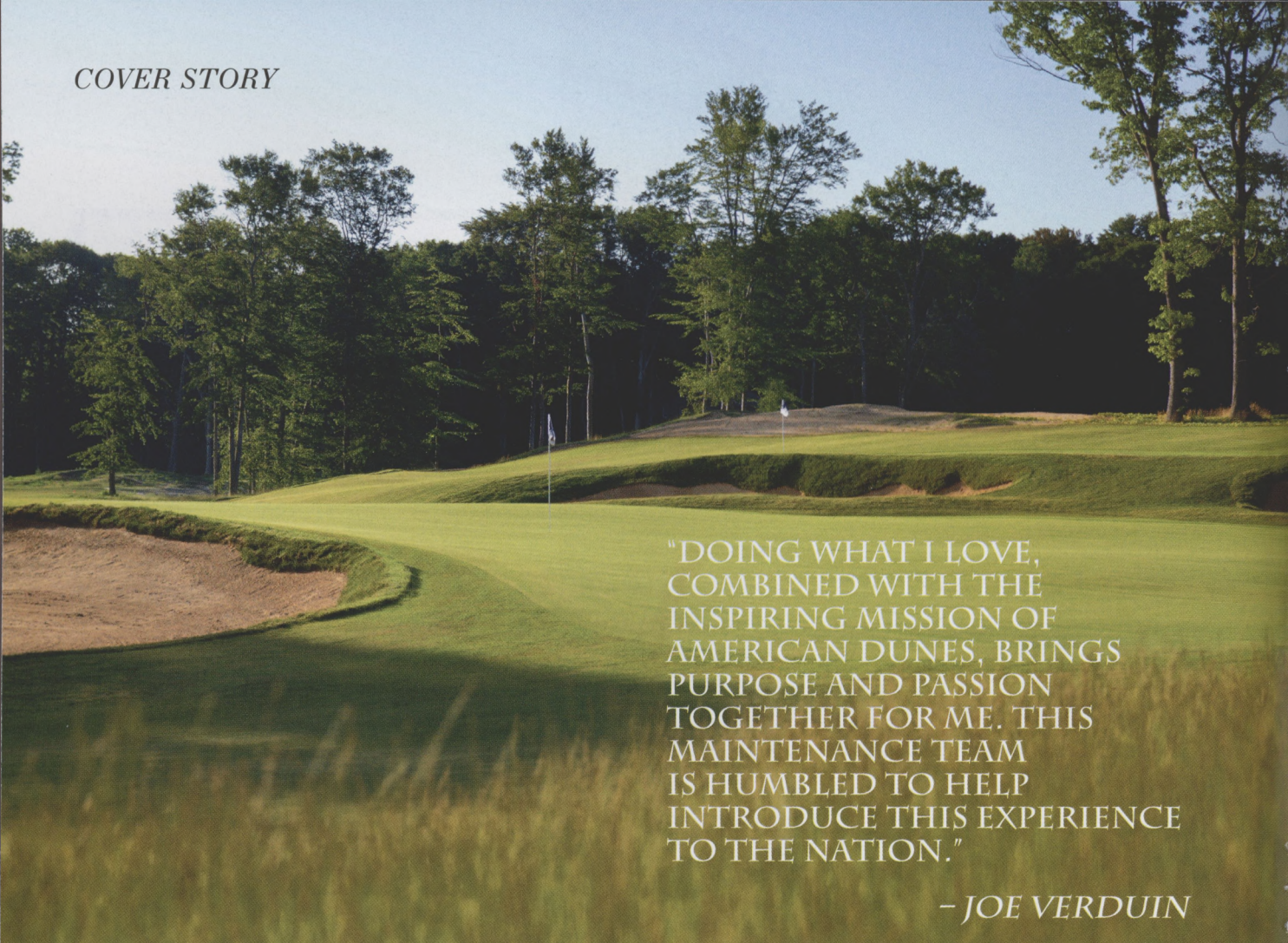


## PATRIOT GOLF DAYS

What is America’s largest nationwide golf fundraiser all about? Beginning as a grassroots initiative in 2007, Patriot Golf Days started raising money for Folds of Honor. In 2020, the PGA became a partner and these special events also started contributing to PGA HOPE to amplify the opportunity to help military families and veterans through the game. Courses can participate by creating awareness for the event, encouraging online donations, through running a round-up campaign, holding a golf marathon or by sponsoring a collection box. 2021 marks the first time the fundraiser was held over Memorial Day weekend. Visit [PatriotGolfDays.com](http://PatriotGolfDays.com)







"DOING WHAT I LOVE, COMBINED WITH THE INSPIRING MISSION OF AMERICAN DUNES, BRINGS PURPOSE AND PASSION TOGETHER FOR ME. THIS MAINTENANCE TEAM IS HUMBLLED TO HELP INTRODUCE THIS EXPERIENCE TO THE NATION."

— JOE VERDUIN

▲ Before Jack Nicklaus and Chris Cochran led the redesign, the course carried a 1965 Bruce Matthews layout.

can "intervene and get them the necessary support to keep students in school and moving forward," Rooney says. "Forty-one percent of the scholarships have been awarded to minorities. As we fight our way to better equality, education is the only lasting way to get there."

Every hole will display a plaque and the story of a Folds of Honor recipient. Also recognized at each hole will be one of Nicklaus's majors and the hole benefactor who contributed funds for construction. For instance, **Gary Woodland** sponsored the 13th hole, which is a massive par 5 playing 678 yards from the back tees.

A summer round runs \$150 with a deep discount for veterans. Accommodations will be available on site in 2022. The Squadron Bar is open now, serving cold Budweiser (Anheuser-Busch is a significant Folds of Honor contributor.) The beer taps are built into a hollowed

Aim-9 Sidewinder missile, often found under the wing of an F-16 fighter jet, one of the many types of aircraft Rooney expertly flies.

Folds of Honor's headquarters are at The Patriot Golf Club in Owasso, Oklahoma, designed by **Robert Trent Jones, Jr.**, where "Taps" is played daily at 1300 hours, as it is at American Dunes. The melody, stillness and gratitude are profound. American Dunes has a massive, resolute American flag in the center of the conjoining fairways of holes 9 and 10, with a local rule — it's an unmovable obstruction. There are so many ways American Dunes unabashedly delivers its message. It is glorious and gravely humbling.

"This project was extra special because of the cause and because so many people stepped up, sharing their enthusiasm and support for our armed services, our veterans and our country," Cochran says. "The donors

have been incredibly generous. People like **Jon Scott**, our retired corporate agronomist, who freely gave advice and negotiated preferred pricing from the vendors. His help was huge. **Doug Bell**, the GM, did a great job with project management and he was always a pleasure to work with. This was truly a team effort."

During that initial meeting at The Bear's Club, after Rooney presented the concept and mission of American Dunes, Nicklaus asked some hard questions, mostly operational and financial. Understandable, necessary. And now, Rooney and Nicklaus are making the most of blessed opportunities to better the lives of others. Cochran, Bell, VerDuin, the crew and many more have all contributed and continue to do so. **GCI**

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





## YOU'RE NOW THE LEADER

**T**imes have sure changed. Now you're the one whom young men and women — the ones who aspire to your position one day — look to for guidance and assurance. And it's in those hopeful faces, full of equal amounts of potential and self-doubt, that your biggest challenge and the most important aspect of your job lies.

It's called leadership. And in today's world, where technology and media and consumer demand are intersecting in a constant state of disruption, leadership starts with effectively understanding and dealing with change. Among the biggest changes for golf course superintendents in the last decade:

- **Agronomic knowledge has become “table stakes.”** Knowing the science of growing grass efficiently and effectively has gotten most superintendents into the game. The superintendent is often the best-educated member of the management staff in many facilities. There is no way to overstate the importance and reach of agronomic knowledge, and yet the job is so much more now.
- **Techniques have advanced.** Generations of superintendents schooled in the college of hard knocks have found new and innovative solutions to age-old problems. These solutions have resulted in more efficient usage of water, advanced and less damaging pesticide management, and improved playing conditions arising from healthier and denser turf.
- **Environmentalism is of top-tier importance.** If everyone was as diligent an environmental steward as golf course superintendents are, we would live in a better, safer world. Trained in the chemical sciences and well informed through professional

resources like GCSAA, new generations of superintendents have introduced planet-friendly solutions to fertility and water scarcity challenges.

- **Golfers' expectations have become more robust and detailed.** In their insistence on improved playing conditions, golfers — God love 'em — have continued to push for tournament-quality conditions daily. Their demands, not unlike the quality demands of consumers for any other product or service for which they pay a premium, add stress and push budgets across the country.

If those are some of the major changes currently affecting the superintendent's world, what might be over the horizon in terms of effective leadership qualities? From our perspective, it's retaining your best talent. Although job-hopping in many industries has slowed this year as economic uncertainties weigh on employees, the situation could change as the economy and job market continue to improve, especially if employees aren't feeling supported by their employer. It's a challenge shared by your peers in organizations across the board.

“Employees crave a rewarding and purposeful workplace atmosphere. Now is the time for organizations to evaluate what is working well for their people, and what's not resonating,” says **Laine Thomas Conway** of Aight Solutions, a global consulting firm. “When employees feel their employers are continually improving their offerings

and working to enhance the employee experience, they are likely to remain positive and committed to their organizations, and in turn, employers can better retain top talent.”

In other words, says **Tom Wilson**, the CEO of Allstate Insurance: treat employees like customers. “They don't pay you in dollars, but in hard work. That has led us to an employee choice model in the new world,” he says. Here are several tactical suggestions to help your team members:

- **Education grants for the children of your crew.** When the club or golf course funds educational support for the children of its workers, your crew will see you as the employer of choice.
- **Field days for employees' children.** Help families share in the workplace culture and pride with your team. Most children want to see where their parents work, and what cooler place is there than a golf course?
- **Regular feedback sessions.** Give employees the same feedback opportunities customers have with retailers and service providers.
- **All-team meetings.** Help crew members understand their place in the overall team effort, including other departments and functions at the club and course.

It's no longer enough to react to changes affecting our careers. To be an effective leader and to encourage your best players to remain part of the team, we must anticipate the next wave of change heading in our direction. **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.





Minor league baseball games disappeared for more than 600 days during the pandemic. Groundskeepers still managed the turf but many were asked to work solo or even take on more tasks.

**A group of highly trained turf managers experienced no play on the surfaces they maintain – and tremendous professional uncertainty – in 2020. How did they handle it?**

**By Matt LaWell**



IP  
DE

**R**emember those long weeks last spring, at the dawn of the pandemic, when tee sheets remained empty and courses echoed with quiet? Remember that ache of helplessness, perhaps on the back of a mower, perhaps all alone for the day, no clue that a boom and a record year were fast approaching?

Remember the fear of total uncertainty?

Golf course superintendents endured all that for a month or two. On the other side of the turf maintenance industry, minor league baseball groundskeepers ached all season.

They received furloughs and pay cuts, some of them banking just half their regular salary from last spring to this spring. They watched as their assistants, crews and colleagues were let go, skeleton staffs remaining in most front offices, folks filling in wherever they were needed and wherever they could. Some groundskeepers were ordered to return supplies and products that were already shelved in their equipment facility. Some picked up second and third jobs. Some worked solo for months.

All the while, they maintained the turf.

Major League Baseball sprinted through a blur of a 2020 regular season, just 60 games. Minor league baseball never played one. An industry that relies almost entirely on butts in seats tallied a total attendance of zero.

“I’m a very positive guy but I’m also a very realistic guy, and I was ready every day to get the call, to come into the office and know that that was it,” says **Ben Hartman**, who started the pandemic as the assistant groundskeeper for the Triple-A Round Rock Express in Austin, Texas and is now the head groundskeeper for the Triple-A Wichita Wind Surge in Kansas. “My wife, **Hannah**, kept telling me, ‘Quit being negative and be thankful that you have a job.’ I told her, ‘I’m not being negative, I’m just being realistic.’”

The minor leagues are up and running again—Triple-A teams opened their season in April, and Double-A, High-A and Low-A teams followed in May—but the institution looks very different than it did in 2019. Forty affiliated teams were scrapped, victims of MLB restructuring, all of their employees, turf pros included, scattered. Dozens of head and assistant groundskeeper positions remained open into the season, with low salaries and uncertain team finances the biggest concerns, according to current groundskeepers.



► Riverfront Stadium in Wichita, Kansas is one of four minor league baseball stadiums set to open in 2020 that finally hosted a game this season.



And with more MLB oversight over facility and field conditions, more groundskeepers anticipate that they will have to reveal their chemistries, the secrets that help their fields glow, to the powers that be.

What can golf course superintendents learn from a fallow year for minor league baseball groundskeepers? Plenty.

**REWIND TO MARCH 2020.** On St. Patrick's Day eve, Major League Baseball ceased all game activity for six to eight weeks. That shuttered the 30 MLB ballparks, of course. It also shuttered the then-159 affiliated minor league parks. High school and college teams had already stopped playing and now, just weeks from the start of another season, the schedule emptied out.

**Kel Rensel** remembers the details of that day. Then the head groundskeeper for the Great Lakes Loons in Midland, Michigan, he was talking with **Johnny Dukes**, the team's clubhouse manager, who was

in early to prepare for the season. "We were talking about how things were getting bad, this and that, and when I went into the clubhouse, at that moment, it got shut down," Rensel says. Rensel figured the season might pick up around the All-Star break in July, "and then we got shut down for the whole year, and it was just like, 'This sucks.'"

Rensel started asking himself questions almost immediately. "Is my pay gonna get cut? Am I gonna get furloughed? Am I just going to get let go? Are they going to bring in a landscape company to do this? They don't need to be paying me. They could just contract out." Like so many groundskeepers—and so many Americans in general last year—he pondered his professional future. "Do I go into golf? Do I go into parks and rec? Do I just walk away from the industry that I love and go be a gym teacher? It was always a little scary."

Rensel checked out a variety of job boards "but there wasn't really that much out there," he says, and

what jobs were posted were "just incredibly, incredibly low paying. For somebody like me, I have 13, 14 years. I'm not taking eight steps backwards."

Rensel avoided a furlough until November. Elsewhere in Michigan, **Mitch Hooten**, the head groundskeeper for the West Michigan Whitecaps, located just outside Grand Rapids, was not as fortunate. His hours and salary were cut in half starting in May. "And from there, I was working by myself all the way through the season, because there's no way I could justify having another guy getting paid hourly to be here when we don't have anything going on."

Hooten filled out his schedule by working for a local landscape company during the spring and summer, then shifted to plowing snow in the winter. But with three daughters ages 6 and younger, the sporadic hours drained him.

"I just hit a brick wall," he says. "I was exhausted. Crazy hours for removing snow. I call them fireman





Without five months of games, many groundskeepers worked on projects that would have otherwise waited until the offseason.

hours. You get a phone call, 'We're gonna go start pushing snow at 1.' I have to get my girls ready for daycare in the morning. I have to pick them up, so I ended up having to resign my position. Couldn't make it work." Hooten finally returned to a standard schedule at LMCU Ballpark and full pay in February after nine months of shuffled hours.

Hooten learned "what my field can and can't do over the course of a couple of weeks, how much stress it can take. Our irrigation went down during a stretch of 90-degree weather. Over the course of last year and moving forward to this year, I know the tipping point."

Ingenuity is a turf trademark, from individuals working wherever they can to teams filling their field with a patchworked schedule of events. Down in Texas, the Express provided a blueprint when they hosted a **Granger Smith** concert on July 4, the 11,631 seats at Dell Diamond empty in favor of 509 socially distanced squares on the field. "The Monday after, we got some phone calls from other teams," Hartman says. "That kind of got the ball rolling."

College and professional baseball games followed starting the next week, **Koe Wetzel** and other musical acts played concerts throughout the summer and the fall, and bull riding stomped in just

before Thanksgiving. After 500 tons of dirt were trucked in and out over the course of the week, "it was surreal," Hartman says, "to be sodding the infield in November."

Other minor league organizations remained afloat thanks to being selected as alternate training sites for players last summer and this spring. 121 Financial Ballpark in Jacksonville, Florida, home of the Triple-A Jumbo Shrimp, and Whataburger Field in Corpus Christi, Texas, home of the Double-A Hooks, were two of them.

"I felt like I had job security just for that fact," says **Christian Galen**, the longtime head groundskeeper for the Jumbo Shrimp, who recently moved up from Double-A. "It was one of those things where you could kind of see the writing on the wall, there was no way they weren't going to keep the facility in shape."

The practice squad, the uncertain start and the ultimate cancellation of the season provided "the gift of time," Galen says. "It gave us time to do things that we hadn't ever done. By the time you reach the offseason in September and October, the last thing you want to do is major projects, right? We just asked ourselves, 'What haven't we done? How can we do this better?' Because we weren't rushed, we weren't in a hurry."

"I think the taxi squad

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## 24 acres on a \$30,000 budget?

The various postponements and cancellations of professional and college sports received far more media attention throughout 2020 and early 2021, but high school sports pressed the pause button over this last year, too.

And as so many senior seasons disappeared, the grass continued to grow.

"We still gotta have everything ready," says **Michael Nicotra**, the groundskeeper at Woodstown High School in southern New Jersey. "Everything's still got to be cut and maintained."

Nicotra is a former minor league baseball groundskeeper and golf industry sales professional — he worked for the independent Camden River Sharks before moving over to Lesco and Helena — who opted for more nights at home with his wife and young son. When he was hired three years ago to tend the school's 24 acres, he says he told the school superintendent that it was his "forever job."

Alongside **Fred Mason**, a fellow groundskeeper who has worked at Woodstown for more than 40 years, Nicotra maintains a football field, a practice football field, four baseball fields, and various other fields for soccer, lacrosse and field hockey. He manages fescue, ryegrass and clover with a \$30,000 annual budget. "Tractor breaks down, it comes out of that money," he says. "Buy fertilizer, it comes out of that money. But the fields are green."

Because Nicotra and Mason are state employees and are represented by the local teachers' union, they maintained their full pay and benefits throughout the pandemic, though they were required to work alternating days for about four months last year.

When sports returned in September, "it was just weird," he says. "No fans, nobody in the stands, everybody had to wear masks. You could hear everything because there was no one around. But it was good, because the kids actually got to play again."

Nicotra will prepare the football field for a week's worth of banner events this month: the sports banquet, followed by graduations for the elementary, middle and high schools, all on consecutive days.

"We're all in the same boat," he says. "We're all just taking care of grass as best we can."

— *Matt LaWell*



helped solidify our jobs, because there were so many unknowns," says **Quince Landry**, who was hired as the head groundskeeper for the Hooks a few months before the pandemic started. "I think we would have potentially lost even more than what we did had the taxi squad not been here.

"I haven't put much thought into a whole lot of what-ifs. I don't really want to think about that. Sometimes people get lost in those dark places. If you can't mentally check yourself out, sometimes you find yourself lost in those dark places for an extended period and you end up battling with those every day, to try and get out."

**LABOR IS A** problem everywhere, with employers bleating about a lack of workers and potential employees looking out for themselves professionally and personally. HELP WANTED signs are a storefront staple.

Golf course and sports turf maintenance both compete with labor industries that can pay more. They might soon be competing a little more often with each other.

When he was still with the Loons, Rensel wondered whether he should apply to work on a golf course. He ultimately landed the head groundskeeper position in Buffalo, New York, where he is maintaining Sahlen Field for the displaced Toronto Blue Jays, but he is far from the only sports turf pro looking at the golf course.

**Tradd Jones** was the head groundskeeper for the-then Low-A Bowling Green Hot Rods in Kentucky when the pandemic started, and he maintains Russ Chandler Stadium, home of the Georgia Tech baseball team, today. In between, though, he worked nearly a year as the assistant superintendent at Thornblade Club, a private country club outside Greenville, South Carolina. He made the move from baseball to golf to be closer to home. He made the move back to baseball because the Yellow

Jackets have arguably the best field in college baseball.

Jones talked with industry friends and colleagues, to gauge opinion about jumping between the two disciplines. "It was somewhat surprising how many of them, probably three or four, kind of threw back that they were looking at possibly going back to golf at some point, too," he says.

"You can always learn something. What I wanted to learn (on the golf course) was how can you maintain several different types of grass and keep them under essentially the same umbrella, as far as a fertility program, a fungicide program. Being on a baseball field, you have one type of grass, two if you count when you overseed. Let's go learn in case I end up somewhere where it's a grass I'm not familiar with. That was my overall goal." The biggest difference between the two, he says, is moisture management.

Jones and Hartman both worked on golf courses and in ballparks simultaneously — Jones at a private course in Murrells Inlet, South Carolina and as an assistant groundskeeper for the Low-A Myrtle Beach Pelicans while he was a student at Horry Georgetown Technical College, Hartman as an assistant superintendent at a private 27-hole facility between Houston and Galveston, Texas, and on the Houston Astros game day grounds crew just out of school. Will more turf pros follow their lead? The needle will point more toward yes, at least as long as golf remains in a boom.

"If this happens again, we can't stick around," Hooten says. "The guys who got cut 50 percent, we stuck around because it was the right thing to do. We're not going to see our work just go away. We got families to look after, mouths to feed. If we go through what we went through last year, I'm going to have to do some soul searching. You just can't go through that again. Golf is wide open right now. That's where



the money's at."

**THIS LAST YEAR** is, paradoxically, one we would rather forget but will remember for the rest of our lives. The world packed a decade into a relatively isolated 10 months.

Galen will remember 2020 as the year he was finally able to join his family for a summer vacation, spending a week at a North Carolina cabin. "Having that time with my family," he says, "to just sit back and reflect on what we lost, was probably the best thing that happened."

Rensel will remember it as the year he and his wife, **Kristin**, tied the knot, then opted to honeymoon in the Upper Peninsula rather than Hawai'i. "It was nice to have a summer off," he says, "but I don't ever

want to do it again."

Hartman will remember it as "an insane excel year" when he was able to talk one on one with Express head groundskeeper **Nick Rozdilski** far more than he would have during a normal season. All those extra events — the concerts, the bull riding — even played a part in his landing the head position with the Wing Nuts.

Landry will remember it as the year that will forever lend perspective.

"The number of times I heard someone say, 'Oh, you've had a year off,'" Landry says. "It's not their fault, it's just that, in their mind, there was no baseball last year, so everyone that worked in baseball just had a full year off. No one's gonna know about this unless the people that lived through

it talk about it, whether it's dark or not. It's the facts. It's real.

"To see those smiles that are back on kids' faces when they get foul balls and back on families' faces when they can actually just go outside and get out of the confinement of their home, being able to see those expressions and know that we're playing a part in bringing some mental happiness back to people, I think that's probably the most rewarding part of all of this, just being able to play a small role. I think we all take it for granted, all the little stuff that we get to do. As we start to open back up, I think that people are realizing that they forgot how much they love this." **GCI**

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

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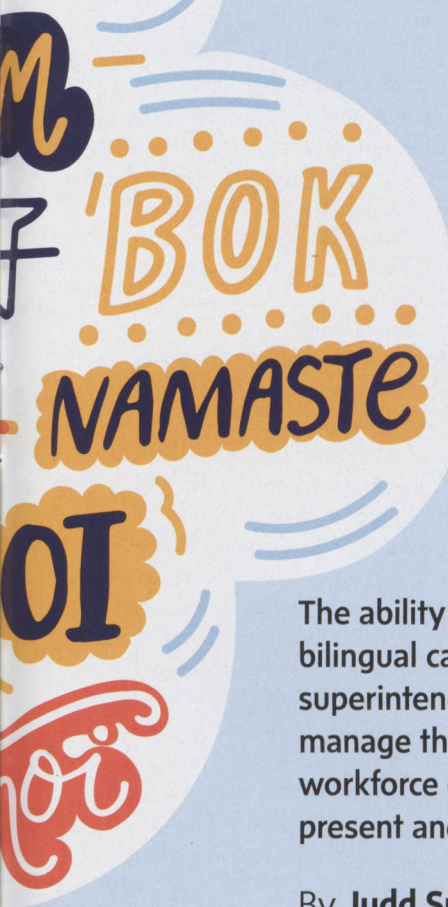






# LANGUAGE

## of the Grounds



The ability to be bilingual can help superintendents manage the workforce of the present and future.

By **Judd Spicer**

**A**mong players, the esoteric language of the game is known and rote, with golf's vernacular a dialect unto itself.

Yet, across the fairways, between greens, from clubhouse to rough to work shed, native languages vary among those manning the turf, with, namely, a balance of English- and Spanish-speaking staff aiming to communicate on common ground.

An ever-diversified domestic population is certain to narrate the next U.S. Census results and in America's most populous regions, golf's workplace roles remain highly uniform, with English speakers predominantly holding management positions and Latin-born employees accounting for a majority of the employees on many maintenance staffs.

For superintendents and club agronomists, working across workplace totems often requires a tool of the dual tongue: The ability of being somewhat — or fully — bilingual.

### TALKING THE TALK, RISING THE RUNGS

His career path referred to as an “American Dream,” the fairways of **Rafael Barajas**'s life have taken him from humble Los Angeles golf course beginnings to becoming the first Hispanic or Latino president of the GCSAA in 2019.

Born in Mexico, Barajas moved to California when he was 14 years old.

“And everything—from the people to the language to the culture — it was all foreign to me,” says Barajas, the director of golf course operations at Boca Grove Golf & Tennis Club in Boca Raton, Florida. “So, I had to integrate to the system and the customs. It took a while, but it happened.”

While Barajas learned English as a second language as a teen and later gave night school a shot (“To be honest, it was just boring as hell for me,” he laughs), his personal drive to climb the career rungs was best paired with abating a fear of language shame.

“It was namely communicating with people and not being afraid of making a mistake or being laughed at,” Barajas remembers. “I’d say things like, ‘bulb light’ instead of ‘lightbulb.’ But when I got corrected, I wouldn’t get upset with people, I’d thank them for the help. If I wanted to make progress, to adapt and evolve and be competitive, I didn’t have a choice. You have to play with the same tools as everybody else, otherwise you’re just not gonna win.”

Barajas credits honing his tools with rising to the zenith of his trade.

“I have taken advantage of being able to speak both English and Spanish,” he says. “When interviewing for jobs over the years, I’ve sold myself that way. It makes me more valuable.”



## COMMUNICATION TIPS

Seeking techniques on how to become bilingual or better communicate across languages with your staff? The superintendents say:



**Javier Campos:** “Back when I was assistant, we offered voluntary, complimentary English classes and we held it after guys had their lunch, about a 45-minute class. And I was surprised how many guys took part in it, about three-quarters of them.

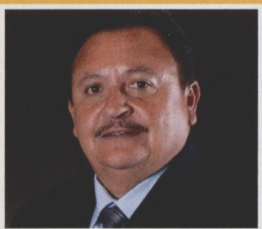
“In our morning meetings, we do English and Spanish. It feels like, initially, that can slow things down a bit. But over the course of a day, it proves much more effective and efficient. It saves time on questions and calls because everything should be clear from the get-go.



**Christopher Bien:** “At the annual GCSAA Conference, other than last year (due to COVID), there are classes offered I’ve partaken in and still have all the materials on hand, including Spanish for Golf Course Maintenance and Workplace Spanish for Golf Course Superintendents and Landscapers.”

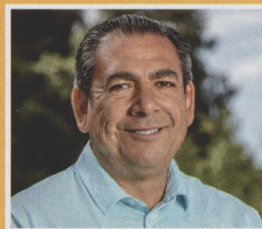


**Sarah Ryan:** “It’s pretty neat how one of the crew will step up to explain something in Spanish if I can’t do it. It’s something that’s come more and more over time, with trust and mutual respect. A lot of times, I don’t even need to ask somebody, they’ll just jump in to make sure we’re all on the same page.”



**Rafael Barajas:** “In our case here, we have all these different cultures: Americans, Cubans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, people from all over South America.

The best way to handle it is to be respectful of the people but establish the fact that we have a job to do. As long as people come willing to work, we don’t see the language as a barrier.”



**Mario Ramirez:** “There is a motivation for the Spanish-speaking staff to learn better English and many of the guys are better than they think, even though they have doubts about if they’re saying the right words. Sometimes they need a little help and they’ll come to me with question on certain things that they don’t understand in English, and I’m happy to help them out, help build their confidence.”



When you have a Spanish-speaking crew, you can save a lot of time in translation, maybe 20 percent of your time getting things done, which is gonna make the course and club more productive.”

Moving up from head superintendent jobs in Southern California to his current post on the opposite coast, Barajas earned his certificate in turfgrass management from the University of California, Riverside. Along the way, he practiced his preach.

“I’d challenge the Hispanic guys in the crew, tell them to get themselves educated, because one of the biggest complaints was that the white guys were getting the good jobs,” Barajas says. “And I would ask them if they had the same qualifications as the guy who got the job — and if they didn’t, then why were they complaining?”

A continued grasp of the labor-to-language ranks has proved a key component in creating opportunities for Hispanic superintendents.

“I’m extremely proud of the Hispanic community in our industry,” Barajas says. “Now, when I look at our (superintendent) directories, I see Hispanic supers across the country, doesn’t matter which state. And I also see it with assistant superintendents.”

A new school example of such diversity may be viewed in Northern California, where, back in 2017, then 30-year-old **Javier Campos** was named head superintendent at the California Golf Club of San Francisco (Cal Club), hallowed turf he had worked since starting at the entry level in 2004.

Born in Mexico before moving to the United States as an infant, Campos is fast to credit his bilingual skills as a tool for improving productivity across the grounds as well as for creating trust with his crew.

“Being bilingual, it’s huge. Probably 95 percent of my crew is Spanish-speaking as a first language, and I’ve seen the skill as crucial in the



efficiency of things,” says Campos, a graduate of the Rutgers Professional Golf Turf Management program. “When I was an assistant, my predecessor, **Thomas Bastis**, he spoke some Spanish. I’d have some fun with him, tell him it was, ‘Gringo Spanish,’ and I’d fill in the communication voids for him.” Campos now delegates any language gaps.

“My assistants speak very little Spanish, so I’m trying to teach them ‘Golf Course Spanish,’” he says. “On occasion, I’ll jot words down, so they can pick it up, little by little. You can imagine that, if you only spoke English and there was nobody to go between the languages, there’s a lot of efficiency lost.”

According to 2019 estimates from U.S. Census data, California’s population is 39 percent Hispanic, accounting for the Golden State’s largest demographic. Down the coast, the tenet of course-efficiency-via-communication remains in play.

“It’s very important in the golf industry and an advantage to me, being bilingual,” says Mexican-born **Mario Ramirez**, head golf course superintendent at The Journey at Pechanga in Temecula, California. “Having that extra tool when we’re trying to get things done makes my job easier, being able to communicate in Spanish with my staff. And it makes them feel more comfortable, especially with certain jobs we have on our course which are quite delicate.”

Ramirez sees a labor ladder akin to the views of Barajas. “Sometimes, guys won’t go for a higher position because they feel intimidated, not secure making that next step,” he adds. “Yes, having both languages does help move people up the ladder.”

Amid the common words comes common bonds. “There’s a trust that the guys have in me, understanding the culture, knowing the language,” Campos says. “That’s huge. We’re a union shop, and there are certain



“Being bilingual, it’s huge. Probably 95 percent of my crew speaks Spanish as a first language and I’ve seen the skill as crucial in the efficiency of things. When I was an assistant, my predecessor, Thomas Bastis, spoke some Spanish. I’d have some fun with him, tell him it was, ‘Gringo Spanish,’ and I’d fill in the voids for him.”

— JAVIER CAMPOS



situations where the guys will come to me with questions, and the trust factor is crucial.”

Being fluent in both languages creates pathways in lieu of barriers across interactions on course or club grounds.

“In my own experiences, I personally don’t think there’s anything more important than the aspect of communicating with members,” Campos says. “You have to have a good vocabulary. Dealing with members who are of the 1 percent, leaders of industry, you have to be able to speak well in English and carry yourself well.”

**“I’m extremely proud of the Hispanic community in our industry. Now, when I look at our (superintendent) directories, I see Hispanic supers across the country, doesn’t matter which state. And I also see it with assistant superintendents.” — RAFAEL BARAJAS**

#### NOT LOST IN TRANSLATION

From the vantage of English-speaking superintendents, an ability to communicate with Spanish-speaking staff proves a combo-tee scorecard of techniques.

“I’m not fluent, but I speak workplace ‘Golf Course Spanish,’ and there’s been work that’s gone into that over the years,” says **Christopher Bien**, the superintendent at Desert Willow Golf Resort in Palm Desert, California. “There is a language barrier but I don’t have a lot of trouble communicating what needs to be done. Sure, being bilingual would be helpful, but I don’t think it’s necessary because most of the crew and assistants are either bilingual or speak some degree of English.”

Age can also play a role in one’s bilingual abilities or desires. “When we do training, we’ll do it in Spanish and English, and there’s a good portion of the (Hispanic) crew members who would actually prefer it’s in English, though it certainly is somewhat age-dependent,” Bien says. “Some of the older people don’t have as much interest (learning English) and, even if they do, they’re not going to change their native language for me. So, it’s more incumbent on me to communicate to them.”

While Bien notes that visual aids can occasionally get the job done and says that he’s given a Rosetta Stone language course a try, he aptly observes that one’s upbringing has much to do with language skills.

“I’ve found that I wish I would have learned Spanish earlier, and taken it more seriously,” Bien says. “I was going to high school in Ohio and didn’t know anybody who spoke Spanish, so I didn’t take those studies all that seriously, just enough to get a B or something. And then

I forgot much of it. Whereas my daughter, she gets an A-plus in Spanish and understands the importance of it for doing business and growing up in California.”

Backdrop proves a common thread and factor in communication.

“Some of it is almost a form of charades,” says native Michigander **Sarah Ryan**, the superintendent at MountainGate Country Club in Los Angeles. Ryan relocated to Southern California in 2016. “At first, it was a little intimidating, because I couldn’t speak Spanish hardly at all.

I was doing baby talk Spanish, even though I can make fun of myself over it. But over time it’s gotten better.”

Going from English to Spanish drives the same road of crew member trust traveled by Spanish-to-Spanish communicators. “It helps the crew understand what I’m trying to get across but it also creates more camaraderie for me to communicate with them at a better level,” Ryan says. “I’ve always tried to be a manager who leads by example. So, by their

showing openness to educate me on Spanish, I’ve, in turn, tried to do the same. And it has all helped us bond more.”

Word by word, learning a new language doesn’t always need to be serious business. “A lot of times, I’ll ask for the Spanish words, and then they’ll quiz me on it later,” Ryan adds. “And I like that. The more you use a word, the better you get. And we play around with it. If we’re all doing work in a bunker, one of us will call out the name of a tool and get the translation in another language.”

For those at introductory levels of the agronomy world, or for assistants aiming to move up the food chain, the skill of being bilingual seems on par with the most important tools found in the maintenance facility.

“If I were sitting down with a younger person in this industry, I’d certainly tell them to learn Spanish,” Bien says. “It hasn’t been detrimental for me not to be fluent, but it would just be better for everybody involved. If I could go back and do it all again, I’d certainly learn Spanish.”

The language of the labor game also previews skills of the future.

“I never thought that speaking Spanish would be a huge thing as a superintendent, but, man, I’m so glad that I’m bilingual,” Campos says. “Any people out there who are assistants who don’t value their Spanish skills, they should definitely sharpen them. With the labor force shrinking in our industry, it’s gonna be a big deal being able to speak both languages.” **GCI**

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



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Summer patch

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Summer patch falls into a different category. There's rarely a mention of it within the pages of venerable turf textbooks.

Even people trained to study and subsequently suggest tactics to control turf disease had rarely fielded questions about summer patch until last year.

"Summer patch is a disease I didn't get many calls about before 2020," says BASF senior

technical representative Jen Browning, who works with golf courses in the Western United States. "I talked to a lot of superintendents who had a perennial program for summer patch. They would put it out and didn't think much about it. But then all year, I started getting a lot of calls about summer patch outbreaks, which I thought was interesting because nobody ever called me about the disease before."

So, yes, the time is right to delve more into summer patch. Patch diseases are frequently spotted on golf courses, but the differences between summer patch and others such as brown patch and take-all patch

are stark.

"With summer patch," Browning says, "by the time you see symptoms, the fungal activity associated with the pathogen happened weeks or months ago and you're just seeing expression from the disease being active in the past."

Summer patch has a crescent- or ring-shaped appearance and the disease can reoccur in the same spots over extended periods. Any state or region where cool-season grass is maintained on golf courses can be ripe for a potential summer patch outbreak. The disease can pose problems on *Poa annua*, Kentucky bluegrass, multiple fescue varieties and ... bentgrass.

"I have given talks on summer patch and people at the end ask, 'Does bentgrass get this? Are you sure bentgrass gets this?'" Browning says. "Bentgrass absolutely gets it. In the past, people assumed only *Poa* got it."

Like many diseases, increased stresses and demands on turf are forcing superintendents to be more diligent about summer patch control. Spots on the course that experience "sudden-dry down conditions," or where superintendents have taken corrective action to improve drainage can demonstrate increased susceptibility to summer patch, Browning says.

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pose of limiting summer patch isn't practical in most cases. But practices that superintendents are already implementing can help matters. Browning's thoughts on a few practices as they relate to summer patch:

- **Irrigation:** "One thing that will help is deep, infrequent irrigation and syringing on hot afternoons."
- **Fertility:** "Avoid nitrogen deficiency."
- **Soil pH:** "You are more susceptible if you are above 6, but I don't know a whole lot of superintendents who reported that they were trying to manage pH just with summer patch in mind."
- **Sunlight:** "Same thing with sunlight. I know a lot of supers do things to manage their tree population on the course, but it wasn't specifically about summer patch."
- **Mowing heights:** "Low mowing heights certainly exacerbate it, but I don't know that superintendents who are mowing for playability will necessarily raise the mowing height for summer patch unless they are experiencing symptoms later in the summer and are trying to push



Summer patch and anthracnose trials

roots; then they may choose to raise mowing heights a bit to try to recover."

When it's time to spray, don't be misled by the disease's name. Action must be taken well before summer. Soil temperatures of 65 degrees should spark the commencement of preventative programs.

"The sweet spot for disease activity in the transition zone and a little bit north is actually early June," Browning says. "That's when the disease is active and that means you need to have your fungicide applications out 28 days before that or maybe even earlier. Really monitor your soil temps and be prepared with your program ahead of time."

The spray programs Browning recommends involve rotating products with different FRAC codes and modes of ac-

tion. DMI, QoI and SDHI fungicides are the staples of those rotations. A pair of products BASF introduced in 2019 — Maxtima® fungicide and Navicon® Intrinsic® brand fungicide — expanded rotational options available for summer patch control. Navicon Intrinsic is a broad-spectrum DMI and strobilurin combination.

"Our program is based on foundational applications of our two newest introductions, which are Maxtima fungicide and Navicon Intrinsic brand fungicide, as well as Lexicon® Intrinsic brand fungicide," Browning says. "The two Intrinsic products are plant-health based and they will give you some resilience and stress management in addition to excellent disease protection. They help you get through tournament season and some of the stresses from heat, traffic and compaction. Those are some of the additional features we like to bring to the party when we are trying to build a program that helps turf respond to the dry-down events and the different things we put turf through during the tournament season and heavy-play season."

The peak golf season coincides with periods when summer patch begins appearing on playing surfaces. Once the disease is spotted, serious damage has already occurred, thus

Browning's emphasis on making summer patch part of a preventive spray program. Unfortunately, scant experience with the disease put some courses in the region she covers, which includes coastal California, Oregon and Washington, in peril last summer.

"It was mostly people who didn't have it on their radar because they didn't have to deal with it in the past," she says. "They had low to moderate pressure and they didn't have vigorous summer patch programs in place because they weren't overly worried about the disease. They didn't have the conditions in previous years to really get major summer patch outbreaks. It became a real discussion point for lots of people. I had gone back to superintendents who had perennial summer patch problems and they always put out applications the instant they hit the temperature point you need to begin making your preventive application. I have asked them, 'Why are you so careful about this disease?' They all said, 'Because I've been burned by it before, and it's very difficult to recover from.'" ■

*Always read and follow label directions.*

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**Note:** Any sales of the products after registration is obtained shall be solely on the basis of the EPA-approved label, and any claims regarding product safety and efficacy shall be addressed solely by the label.

***"WITH SUMMER PATCH, BY THE TIME YOU SEE SYMPTOMS, THE FUNGAL ACTIVITY ASSOCIATED WITH SUMMER PATCH HAPPENED WEEKS OR MONTHS AGO AND YOU'RE JUST SEEING EXPRESSION FROM THE DISEASE BEING ACTIVE IN THE PAST."***





WE  
ARE  
HIRING

## LABOR WOES

**I**t's amazing how easily conversations these days with superintendents turn into discussions of their labor woes. The topic is not one they welcome because it suggests factors beyond their immediate control that limit their ability to get their job done.

Professionals in any trade are more comfortable dealing with things they have some influence on: acquiring technical skills, getting comfortable with new equipment or chemistry, learning to improve their people skills, or simply adopting a more relaxed state of mind. The problem with the current labor shortage is that its origins — and most of its solutions — are part of larger social trends that are out of the hands of superintendents. Nonetheless, it helps to identify cause and effect if we are going to address the problem. As far as I can tell, there are four major cultural factors contributing to the labor shortage in golf.

### 1. THE CADDIE RANKS DISAPPEARED

The caddie yards were once the biggest source of junior golf recruitment into the game, both recreationally and vocationally. The skill set acquired was invaluable, not only for inculcating golf savvy but also for disciplining youth into behaviors that served them well in education and work life. The golf cart displaced all that, as did onerous youth labor laws.

For all the laudable efforts of caddie scholarship, the ranks of loopers have been lessened dramatically. The result has been a dilemma for the game, not only in attracting the next generation of golfers but also in gaining the early attention and interest of people who might be drawn into the game as a career.

### 2. TEEN WORK HAS WANED

It used to be commonplace among American middle-class kids to have a paper route they delivered from a bicycle, shovel snow, mow lawns, work as a department store clerk or wash pots and pans in a college cafeteria. Teenage work life has faded for all sorts of reasons: parents too scared to let their kids actually labor, a more restrictive regulatory climate, the lure of video games and computers as youth entertainment, the disappearance of many of those jobs due to increased professionalization by landscape companies, and the advent of big-box retailing that prefers to rely on low-paid adults.

There is little doubt that folks arrive in their 20s with less work experience than was the case three or four decades ago. That means less willingness to put up with the demanding, relatively low-paying work entailed on a golf course.

### 3. MINIMUM WAGE IS TOO LOW

Many states have raised minimum wage rates and most golf courses offer starting rates above that threshold. But the point for labor is that when pay is deemed so low as to not provide an adequate wage, disincentives set in and it becomes a rational economic decision to seek employment in industries that offer higher pay, less demanding physical work, more suitable hours and weekends off.

### 4. IMMIGRATION REFORM STALLED

It's no secret in physically demanding industries like agriculture, restaurants and hospitali-

ty that Americans are opting out of the ranks and leaving a labor vacuum that has to be filled by those more willing (or desperate) to put up with demanding, low-paying conditions. Historically, that has entailed a labor force from overseas — whose ranks have proved to be incredibly hard working, law abiding, tax paying and willing to sacrifice for their families. The political environment has made immigration reform difficult to achieve and many industries face severe labor shortages because of restrictions on who and how many foreigners are to be allowed in to fill those positions.

Where does this leave superintendents trying to recruit qualified labor? Luckily, there are a few tools still available worth deploying. Paying \$1 or \$2 more per hour is a starting point. Recruiting women into the applicant pool dramatically expands the likelihood of finding people willing and able. Enhancing the work environment to make it more appealing to people of diverse color, ethnicity and language goes a long way to promoting a welcoming place. I'd also suggest ancillary benefits like transportation vouchers and health care coverage. It also helps to offer the possibility of career advancement through training, workshops and intensive short-course programs in turf management.

Superintendents can't solve large social problems, but they can address those consequences on a case-by-case basis. The game's newfound popularity demands newfound management expertise. **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).



S O F T E N I N G S U M M E

H A Y M



Heat, humidity and solid guidance from proven professionals. What to consider when guiding turf through the most stressful part of the growing season.

By **Rick Woelfel**

**T**he arrival of summer and the accompanying heat and humidity means increased stress on golf courses and heightened concerns for those caring for them.

*Golf Course Industry* reached out to turf professionals for their insights on combating and overcoming summer stress issues.

**BUILD A GOOD FOUNDATION**

Having a sound agronomic program in place at, or even before, the start off the season will help minimize problems when the weather warms up.



R ' S

A K E R



**Elliott Dowling** is a USGA Green Section agronomist covering the Northeast Region. He stresses the importance of fortifying turf against summer heat and humidity, a process that ideally should begin months before the onset of warm weather.

“One of the many goals of the fall cultivation season is to recover grass from the summer stress it might have had,” he says, “and also get it as healthy as it can possibly be going into the winter where the grass, at least in the Northern states, will either go dormant or just virtually shut down growth. In the Southern states, it’s a little different. But when grass isn’t growing and not recovering, there isn’t anything you can do.”

Dowling notes that making a preemptive effort to strengthen the plant against the summer heat will minimize problems later. “The healthier the plants are going into the most stressful months, usually the better prepared they are,” he says. “Not that they’re immune or won’t have a disease outbreak eventually. But plant health going into and really through the duration (of the summer) is very important to outcompete some of the heat and humidity we’re going to see.”

**Troy Fink** is the director of agronomy at Blessings Golf Club outside Fayetteville, Arkansas. “Just have a good, sound agronomic program where your fertility is dialed in to grow healthy grass but still maintain playability,” he says.



“

I THINK MORE THAN ANYTHING WE LOOK AT TIGHTENING UP THOSE INTERVALS A LITTLE BIT. LET'S JUST SAY OUR INTERVAL MIGHT BE A TWO-WEEK, 14-DAY KIND OF THING; WE MIGHT ADJUST THAT AND GET AS TIGHT AS EVERY SEVEN DAYS. I THINK LIGHTER RATES, MORE FREQUENTLY DURING THE SUMMER, WHATEVER YOU'RE DOING, SEEM TO WORK WELL FOR US.”

- JOHN BALLARD



Fink has a preventative fungicide schedule in place. At trouble spots, specifically difficult green complexes, he and his team will utilize fans to increase air movement.

#### PRODUCT USAGE

Opinions varied among the experts *Golf Course Industry* spoke with as to whether to adjust intervals or application rates during the heat of the summer.

**John Ballard** is the superintendent at Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Kentucky. He's preparing to host the PGA Championship in 2024, which will be contested in May in a Transition Zone growing environment. Ballard has plenty of experience handling the region's turf stresses, having spent more than 20 years as a superintendent in the Louisville area.

"I think more than anything we look at tightening up those intervals a little bit," he says. "Let's just say our interval might be a two-week, 14-day kind of thing; we might adjust that and get as tight as every seven days. I think lighter rates, more frequently during the summer, whatever you're doing, seem to work well for us."

Fink utilizes a different approach at his club. "If the label says seven to 14 days, generally, we're going 14 days," he says. "But if it says the range is two to four ounces, we would go with the four-ounce rate (at 14 days). If the product says it will 21 to 28 days for the most part, we'll carry it out through the 28th day."

**Kyle Callahan** is in charge of caring for the turf at Thornblade Club, a private facility in Greer, South Carolina, less than 20 miles from Greenville. Callahan adjusts his rotation in deference to the hot summer weather.

"From past experience we tend to stay away from nitrates and nitrites," he says. "At some point, the nitrogen will convert over, but we do our best to read the labels and avoid those products. Typically, we use more raw materials so we can control exactly what we want in the tanks. Another area we adjust in the heat and humidity that has given us success is ensuring that our foliar tanks have aminos and phosphites in the tank along with fungicides that have technology for plant health. In our soil sprays, we try to ensure our tanks have a good food source for microorganisms and add products that will increase our microorganism population for a healthy root zone."

#### ROLLING VS. MOWING

Should superintendents roll or mow in hot, humid weather? The experts we spoke with say "Do both."

**Dr. Adam Thoms** is an assistant professor at Iowa State University with a specialty in commercial turfgrass management. "I'm a believer in mowing and rolling at least every other day," he says. "Or maybe, during the heat of the summer, skipping the mowing and just rolling that day. That kind of relieves some of that summer stress."

Callahan is of the same mindset. "We believe there needs to be a balance of both for consistent playing conditions and overall turf health," he says. "Some days, we will do both based on playability, events and turf health. Other days we will skip a mow or roll depending on how the turf is responding and the forecast."

Ballard also believes in both mowing and rolling but fine-tunes his approach in some circumstances—specifically, if he's preparing for a major event. "Let's say we're trying to achieve specific green speeds for events," he says. "(What we do) is a mow and just a target roll, just target-roll where the hole location is for the day.

"Instead of putting a little added stress on the entire green, we're just doing it on a third of that green and the golfer really can't really tell because it's that last foot or two that rolls out to the hole that matters, not 50 feet away."





## SOIL MANAGEMENT

When the topic is soil management, Ballard's thoughts turn to water management.

"I think water management is key," he says. "We're trying to make sure we're not keeping those profiles too saturated. And then we really try to do a lot of venting, is what a lot of guys will call it, (utilizing) little solid pencil tines. We're just trying to open things up a little bit, get some gas exchange and cool (the soil) down a little bit in that fashion."

Ballard embraces the concept of venting putting greens in hot, humid weather.

"We might start on the golf course late in the evening, around 6 or 7 at night and knock out six or seven holes," he says, "and then again first thing in the morning, starting around 6 a.m. and finishing the balance, so we're not (working) in the heat of the day. We've opened them up, we've let them breathe for a day and then kind of roll them back out."

## SOIL NUTRIENTS

As is the case with other products, the nutrient protocol at a particular facility may vary considerably from that of its neighbor down the street.

"We'll take our soil samples in the wintertime," Fink says, "and we'll look at the levels, especially phosphorous and potassium and look at those levels, the pH, and then if any adjustments need to be made. If something is getting low in phosphorus or low on potassium, we'll try to make those supplemental applications in the spring of the year so that the plant has the whole year to use it. And then the same thing along the lines of pH and any other nutrients that may look like they're out of balance. But generally, it would be the exception as far as having to do something."

Fink says he does not test regularly for the nitrogen level in the soil. "Its level in the soil and the plant can change," he says. "It can change in a short amount of

time. So, taking a soil test, you wouldn't be able to rely on that information. It changes too quickly."

Thoms points out there can be too much of a good thing. "You still need to keep your nutrition program, your greens fed," he says. "But you don't want to over-feed them by any means. You want to make sure that they are getting just the right amount of nutrition. Too much, obviously, is going to create succulent growth, so that's going to create conditions for disease. I like to say that they need to be a little lean going into the stress time."

## THE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY

How does today's technology aid turf professionals in their ongoing efforts to provide quality playing conditions?

Fink utilizes moisture meters at his facility but says the data they provide should be interpreted differently from one golf course to another. "You just kind of learn what's right for your greens," he says. "Say our greens here are at 15 percent. You go down the street, 15 percent may not mean the same thing in regards to whether (the greens) need water or not. A Stimpmeter is more transferrable from course to course."

Callahan notes that moisture meters, drones and digital technology have an upside. But he offers a caveat. "I think they play a role in our program," he says "and help our team communicate on an even playing field, i.e. sharing an average number on a moisture meter that will relate to someone across the course. For me, personally, I have found myself converting back a little bit to an "old school" approach of using a knife, soil probe and my eyes to manage the turfgrass. There is enough data and information out there to skew BMP for turfgrass." **GCI**

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



MORAGHAN *continued from 14*

on your behalf the importance of what you're saying.

Latins are hard workers and proud of what they do. Watch closely and many of them will impress you with their skills and leadership qualities. Offer to help them get more training and education. The rewards that come back to you will go far beyond the golf course.

Jobs are valuable to this labor pool, and they can recruit for you. It shouldn't be hard to identify "el/la lider" (leader) who can enlist new workers or supervise fellow

crew members.

Become familiar with the cultural needs and tastes of the Latin people. If there are televisions in the break area, tune them to "el partido de futbol," Telemundo or one of the other Spanish stations.

Latins pay close attention to job benefits as they feel strongly about providing for their families. If your course provides benefits — no matter how small — be consistent across the staff. Also be consistent with pay, offering a fair, competitive hourly rate

to everyone. If you're unfair with pay, word will spread like wildfire and you'll lose your workforce.

Learn which holidays and traditions are important and talk with your team before setting schedules. For example, Latins celebrate Christmas on December 24, also known as Nochebuena, which is a bigger deal to them than Christmas Day. Don't take it for granted that your Latin staff can be there, especially when you won't be. They'll have family plans just

like you have family plans.

Observing and respecting their culture will win their loyalty and will be repaid over time.

All Latins are a proud people who can contribute to your efforts. Golf represents an opportunity to earn a steady living. Embracing and welcoming the Latin population will help them and you. For many, working on a golf course is an important step toward a better life. Remember, we are all human beings (el ser humanos). ¡Gracias mis amigos! GCI



## INDUSTRY **buzz**

Two-time Masters champion **Ben Crenshaw** and **Bill Coore** will be honored as the 2021 recipients of the ASGCA Donald Ross Award, presented annually since 1976 to those making a significant contribution to the game of golf and the profession of golf course architecture. It will be presented in October as part of the 75th ASGCA Annual Meeting in Cleveland.



The average salary for golf course superintendents in the United States climbed to \$97,354, according to a GCSAA survey. The latest biennial Compensation and Benefits Report showed the average salary increased 4.5 percent since the 2019 report, continuing the trend of increases in every two-year period since the GCSAA began tracking the data in 1993. Superintendents' salaries have more than doubled in since that first report, when the average was \$44,500.

The 2021 Rounds 4 Research fundraising program to support

turfgrass studies, administered by the Environmental Institute for Golf, raised nearly \$336,500 for almost 1,100 rounds in its May online auction. More than 70 GCSAA affiliated chapters and turfgrass organizations assisted with the effort and will receive proceeds to support turfgrass research at the local level.

The GCBA Foundation will more than double its annual support for its signature Sticks for Kids program to \$200,000 next year and will make

similar gifts the next two years. The grant will provide more than 10,000 kid-friendly clubs to programs across the country.

The USGA recently hired former Virginia Tech research associate and Willow Oaks (Virginia) Country Club superintendent **Jordan Booth** as a Green Section agronomist for the Southeast Region. ... **Damian Cosby**, PGA, is the new director of golf operations for the Cleveland Metropolitan parks, where he will oversee eight

golf courses, including clubhouse operations, golf programs and course maintenance. The former chief of golf operations and park maintenance for Anne Arundel County in Maryland, he was involved in architect **Andrew Green's** recent redesign of Eisenhower Golf Course. ... **Sean Kinsley** is the new group director of agronomy across The Els Club Malaysia, including the Desaru Coast and Teluk Datai facilities, and **Steven Thielke** is the new general manager of The Els Club Desaru Coast. ... 36-year industry irrigation pro **Dean Chaltas** is the new sales and marketing director for AquaFuse by CMF Global. ... **Jonathan Albert** is the newest Canadian territory manager for Aquatrols. ... **Tony Whelan** returned to Rain Bird's Golf Division as its new international sales manager. Whelan previously worked for the company from 1997 to 2012. ... **Mark Donohue** is Rain Bird's new regional manager for the company's Southeast Asia market after five years as a regional manager in Canada.






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# TUNE IN

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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

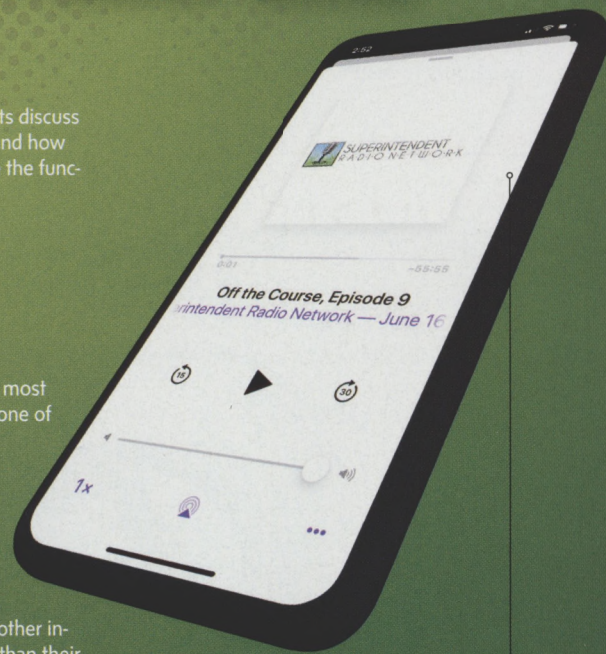
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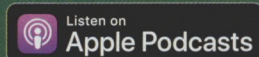
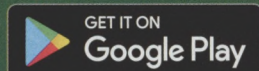
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Editors Guy Cipriano and Matt LaWell discuss the many (many, many, many) courses they've visited during the last month. Guy brings the decades of play and maintenance; Matt brings the fresh perspective of a hack golfer who appreciates the beauty of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



AVAILABLE ON:





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.

### SPRAYER BOOM PRESSURE GAUGES

**S**uperintendent **Stephen Killingsworth** and his staff at the Tempest Golf Club in Gladewater, Texas, like to monitor the operating pressure on all three booms on the John Deere HD 200 SelectSpray Sprayer. Three individual Equus Model 7244, Series-034-0148-0 Oil Pressure Gauges were installed on the dashboard. Each gauge (\$15) was hooked up to each respective spray boom using clear plastic drip irrigation-type tubing tied in to each ¼-inch mainline hose using an adapter, which was protected by a skid plate. It took less than two hours to install.



### BUNKER PUMPING QUICK & EASY

**T**his great idea pumps bunkers out during frequent summer heavy rainfall in southwest Florida. A portable, lightweight (3.8 pounds) very quiet Rule 2000 Non-Automatic Bilge Pump (\$180) 12 Volt DC 8.4 Amp is placed in the center of the surface water that is hooked up to a 25-foot long, 1-inch diameter hose (\$50). Twenty-five feet of number 12 gauge wire, with alligator clips (\$8) with a 15 amp fuse (\$10), is used so the 12 Volt Deep Cycle Battery (recycled) is placed outside the bunker to keep it dry. No priming is necessary and it does not get plugged up. The flow rate is 2,000 GPH. It took about 30 minutes to rig it up. **Jesse Metcalf**, superintendent at the Bonita National Golf & Country Club in Bonita Springs, Florida, and his team produced another great idea.



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



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## DEAR DAD

**J**une is here, marking the arrival of the warm, long days of summer. The end of school and time for trips with the family to the lake and the beach, camping, hiking and, hopefully, to the golf course. This month we celebrate Father's Day and one of the great traditions on Father's Day is the final round of the U.S. Open Championship. What an ideal way for fathers, daughters and sons to spend time together, nurturing their relationships with this great game.

Speaking of relationships, I joined the USGA in 1992 while a student at Virginia Tech. I remember receiving a welcome letter from Arnold Palmer and the first thing I did was call my grandfather to tell him I received a letter from the King. I truly hope that letter is in a box of my belongings in Mom's attic. I will be forever remiss if I failed to preserve it.

For more than 100 years, the USGA has watched over the game like an elder patriarch. And to some degree, a single parent. With "Mom" out of the picture, "Dad" has been there through good times and bad and always served as the stern disciplinarian. Dad established the rules and made sure we all abided, even when common sense made us think some of those rules were archaic.

So, for 29-plus years, my relationship has included everything from handicap cards, decisions, course ratings, Uncle Snoopy and even a Mid-Amateur event. The extended family has been awesome. Getting to meet folks like the late Stan Zontek and Keith Happ, and working closely with the recently retired legend Patrick O'Brien. Through the years, I have admired and respected you. But like any father-son relationship we have had our moments of disagreement.

Remember that time in Orlando when I stormed out of the room? We were together at the 2005 Golf Industry Show and you told me and a room full of my peers we were making greens too fast and we needed to instead be focused on making them smooth. Then there was the debacle over long putters. You and your older brother dragged your feet for decades before eventually settling on an anchoring ban. Considering some players still anchor the putter to their forearm, seems you failed to get this one quite right.

Despite those differences, I continued to be supportive. But recently something has happened and you have changed. First, it was your new partner. I know, you thought they were a fox. And before the breakup you softened.

I am sure the idea of relaxing hard rules seemed like a good idea. A modernization of their language and interpretation to help make the game more fun

and enjoyable sounds good on paper. But has it really been worth it to abolish hazards and create aquatic penalty areas? And dropping from knee height is still awkward.

In all honesty, you are trying way too hard to be the "cool dad." And some of these new friends of yours, these influencers? Really, Dad? You see, we all go through life with many friends who come and go but only one dad. OK, maybe two. And without your stern guidance, we are left to wander and possibly stray off course.

The other day there was a suggestion in the northeast for raising the height of cut on rough to 4 inches instead of the normal 2½ or 3 to reduce clippings in the early spring. Do you really think folks want to spend time searching for golf balls in 4-inch rough?

Never in my life have I thought you were this much out of touch with reality. What I am saying Dad is, I miss you. I miss the father that was always there to make sure I played every day by the rules. You held me accountable for my actions, on and off the course, and I believe that made me a better person.

So please, get off the barstool and back to work. Stop coddling a group of players coddled by everyone else. Do not worry about how much you are liked and make hazards great again. Besides, Uncle Ray will always be cooler than you simply because he lives at the Home of Golf.

But Dad, you have some cool things about you, too. Just please stop trying to be somebody else and be yourself. **GCI**



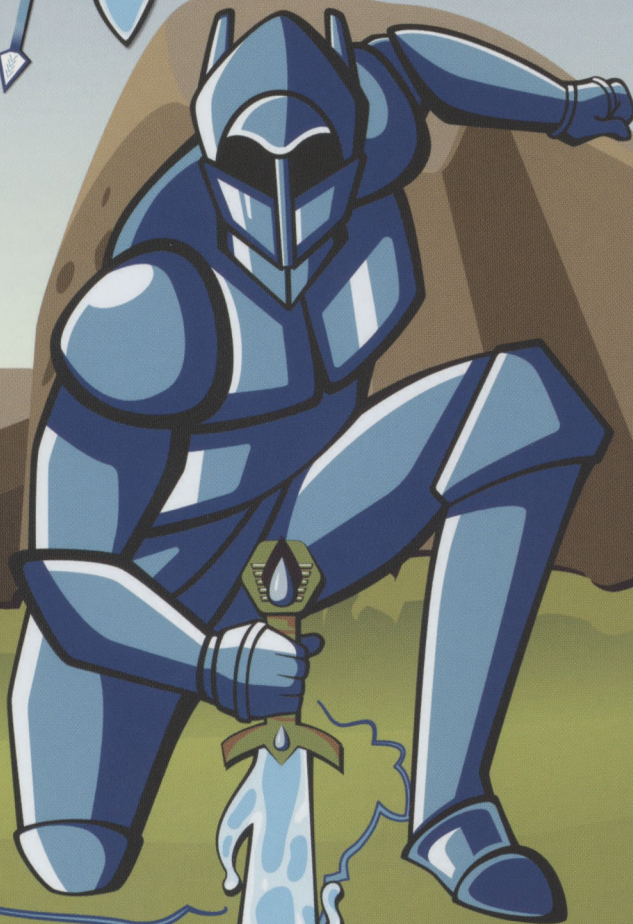
**MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG**, is the superintendent at Carolina Golf Club in Charlotte, North Carolina and past president of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on Twitter @CGCGreenkeeper.



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Learn how Tetrino can up your game against white grub and ABW at [es.bayer.us/Tetrino](https://es.bayer.us/Tetrino)

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