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ABOUT THE COVER: Jason Goss, Debbie Mancuso and Vineyards Golf Course in Fredonia, New York, are featured on Season 5 of *Small Business Revolution*. Photo: *Small Business Revolution*, by Deluxe.

VOL. 33 NO. 5

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Even without the normal schedule of industry conferences and events, longtime superintendents Mark Hoban and Dan Dinelli are still finding ways to advance the industry through curiosity and research.

MOTION ACTIVATION

I must be in motion to execute meaningful thought. Running, preferably at a steady pace. Hiking, preferably through hills or mountains. Walking, preferably on a golf course. Biking, preferably on a path. Paddling, preferably on flat water. Driving, preferably while listening to a podcast or country music.

Ideas for this magazine are often concocted while advancing toward or shifting away from sedentation. Movement inspires innovation and creativity, two pillars of successful operations.

On a dreary 460-mile return drive across Interstate 80, following a tremendous visit to Plainfield Country Club (pages 20-23), I received ample time to ponder why a club continues to endure and flourish. Easy answers are land and location. Plainfield's clubhouse rests atop the highest point in Middlesex County, New Jersey, and a spectacular ridge carved by a 21,000-year-old glacial terminal moraine intersects the property. The club hired Donald Ross to design a course on the site. Think Babe Ruth seeing an abdomen-high 86 mph fastball.

Plainfield revealed its Ross-designed course in 1921, a year when the New York Giants toppled Ruth and the crosstown New York Yankees in the World Series. Being 30 miles from a city big enough to support multiple franchises in the same sport—along with Ruth's gargantuan ego—certainly positioned Plainfield for prosperity. The course fits brilliantly into a densely populated region with enough individual and corporate wealth to support hundreds of private clubs.

American golf history, unfortunately, includes stories of failed or defunct clubs owning desirable land in prime locations. Even today, despite decades of research into what makes a successful golf facility, numerous clubs are teetering despite innate advantages.

The more I pondered Plainfield on the drive home, the less I thought about physical characteristics such as land and location. Land seemingly mattered less when I rolled into flat Ohio, the home state of Plainfield superintendent Travis Pauley. I remembered my insightful conversations with Pauley more than the severely sloped 11th green or a trio of holes added in the 1930s in a part of the course called "The Tunnel."

Pauley is Plainfield's third superintendent since 1951, having replaced Greg James in 2005. James had a 15-year run at Plainfield after replacing Red Wender, who had a nearly 40-year tenure as superintendent. We all know a few clubs that have burned through three superintendents in the last decade. CONTINUITY in critical positions, especially one responsible for protecting a club's top asset, is common among successful clubs I visit. Does great land matter without consistent agronomic and course enhancement programs?

Continuity becomes more attainable when a club has a DEFINED IDENTITY. Plainfield provides an awesome golf experience conducted as close to parameters established by Ross and the club's early leaders as modernly possible. The club has worked with architect Gil Hanse to implement a master plan established in 1999. Besides a few modifications to host PGA Tour playoff events in 2011 and 2015, showcasing what Ross crafted drives course-related decisions. Members know what they are receiving when they arrive. Employees know their mission when they join Pauley's staff.

Staying the course, in many cases, makes for special golf courses. Special golf courses, in most cases, separate great clubs from pedestrian facilities. Continuity and defined identity are challenging to establish within instant gratification frameworks. Time and money, a club's two most valuable resources, are required to retain members and key employees. But clubs that commit to both concepts usually prosper.

Bradley Klein has visited as many successful clubs as anybody in the industry. He reveals eight indicators of a well-run facility in this month's column (page 12). What would you add to Klein's list? Is relying on continuity and defined identity too simplistic of an approach?

Start moving and give it some thought. **GCI**



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NOTEBOOK



EXPERIENCES OF A DIFFERENT VARIETY

By Guy Cipriano

Jonathan Wright leads a team responsible for maintaining a golf course everybody wants to play in a community everybody wants to visit these days.

Tourists, locals and well-traveled golfers relish Harbour Town Golf Links, where Wright has worked since 1998, the past 12 years as superintendent, because of its quaint ambiance within The Sea Pines Resort on the south tip of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. One of Pete and Alice Dye's first mega-

designs (with an assist from a young Jack Nicklaus), Harbour Town plays between — and often under and over — live oaks and pines and through lagoons, bunkers and waste areas. The peaceful journey deposits at the Calibogue Sound, which separates Hilton Head Island from Daufuskie Island.

A Kentucky native, Wright has maintained golf courses on both islands, having worked at Haig Point on Daufuskie before moving with former boss Gary Snyder to Harbour Town, site

of the RBC Heritage, the PGA Tour's first post-Masters stop each spring. The RBC Heritage is played on hitting surfaces overseeded with ryegrass and greens overseeded with *Poa trivialis*. Warm-season course. Cool-season tournament turf. Wright and his team had deftly honed their tournament routine ... and then last year happened.

The Masters moved to the fall and the RBC Heritage suddenly became a warm-season turf tournament, plugging a June spot on a revamped PGA Tour calendar. The PGA Tour announced its shuffled schedule in mid-April. Harbour Town was closed at the time as resort and local officials determined how to handle the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Work continued as Wright and his team waited for golfers to return. Aerification. Tree pruning. Cart path resurfacing. Swapping sand inside bunkers and restoring turf around their edges. Staying busy lessened the initial jolt of deftly preparing turf for the PGA Tour's scheduled 2020 arrival and then learning it was moving to the toughest part of the growing season. "We were basically 100 percent prepared for the April event," Wright says. "All the stands were in place and the turf was right where we wanted it."

June seemed so close yet so distant, especially considering national events occurring outside their scenic island. "We tentatively started planning for this event, knowing the rug can be pulled out right from under our feet at any time," Wright says.

The PGA Tour returned in June at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas. The closed-off golf caravan made its way to Hilton Head Island the following week, with players competing on Celebration Bermudagrass hitting surfaces and TifEagle Bermudagrass greens. The previous three years, in Wright's words, were "blazing hot in May," so they started forcing a transition from cool-season to warm-season turf in late April.

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But parts of May 2020 required Wright and his team to begin workdays in stocking caps. The wrong May for unseasonably cold weather.

"The ryegrass made a huge comeback," Wright says. "It was extremely stressful, because we tried to get our Bermudagrass promoted on the greens

and we ended up getting the Poa triv healthier."

Wright's team persevered and the 2020 RBC Heritage was successfully contested June 18-21. "We accomplished what we had to accomplish, but it was pretty much a photo finish," Wright says. Add the unique challenges of keeping

staff safe with visitors flocking to Hilton Head Island as South Carolina started reopening commerce and "it was probably the most stressful tournament preparation we have ever had."

The dash has turned into an extended sprint. Harbour Town reopened for regular play following the tournament. Landing a tee time is tougher than making par on the 18th hole, which includes the Calibogue Sound on the left and a much-smaller-than-it-appears-on-TV green. Greens averaging just 3,700 square feet surrounded by oaks and pines are part of Harbour Town's charm. They also present Wright's team with major agronomic challenges.

Maintaining arboreal serenity while providing four seasons of upscale golf is a bit easier now than when Wright arrived thanks to two decades of selective tree removal and pruning. A few big storms, most notably Hurricane Matthew in 2016, further thinned corridors. But nothing suggests the zest for Harbour Town and memorable golf experiences will subside following this week's tournament.

"After the Heritage last year, I have never seen as many golfers come through here in such a short amount of time since I have been here," Wright says. "It has made us rethink things."

Reducing available tee times in non-growing months and cart-path-only policies in fall, winter and spring help create a balance between satisfying demand and producing elite conditions within the confines of a beloved design. Still, on a pleasant Tuesday afternoon, just 27 days from the start of another RBC Heritage week, golfers from seemingly everywhere east of the Mississippi packed the course, marveling at the compact layout. Their shots clanked trees and bulkheads. Their trek through a place where Wright has worked exhaustively for the past 23 years — and frantically for the past 13 months — yielded lifelong memories.

"We are all so extremely proud and honored to be at such a significant design," Wright says. "I feel like I have grown up with the place and I can't imagine myself anywhere else."



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Tartan Talks No. 58

Tom Clark celebrates his 50th year with the same golf course architecture firm this summer. He can thank a reliable "beat-up" Ford Falcon for getting him to a job interview with Ed Ault and an early adult negotiating tactic for ensuring his first post-college job paid the bills.



▲ Clark

Clark, a co-owner of Ault, Clark & Associates, joined the Tartan Talks podcast to discuss the adaptability and savvy required to establish longevity in the design business. For Clark, that longevity started with asking for a starting salary higher than what Ault had initially offered.

"I brought some sketches down to Ed

and was literally hired on the spot. I said first of all, 'How much are you going to pay me?' And he said, '\$6,000.' I said, 'Oh, I didn't go to school for five years for \$6,000.' And he said, 'Well, we'll make it \$9,000,'"

says Clark, who majored in landscape architecture at Penn State. "I said, 'When do we start? I want to take a little time off.' He said, 'The day after you graduate.' He handed me \$20 for gas money, and I thought I was a great negotiator and off I went."

Following a few years sketching plans in the Maryland office, Clark hit the road, helping the firm secure and execute domestic and international work while



expanding the business through a longtime partnership with Ault's son, Brian. Ault, Clark & Associates designed courses at a dizzying pace through multiple golf booms. At one point in 1999, the firm had 23 courses under construction. Clark remains active in the industry and recently completed Cutalong Golf Club in Lake Anna, Virginia.

Visit the Superintendent Radio Network page on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and other popular distribution platforms to hear Clark pack 50 years of stories and perspective into one hour.

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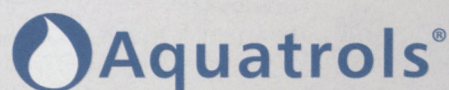
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SIGNS OF A WELL-RUN CLUB

One time during a site visit to a real estate golf course, I arrived at the gatehouse and told the guard that I was there to visit the golf pro. “He’s a real grump,” the guard said. “Doesn’t have a lot of friends.” Not a good sign — one that told me a lot about the place, namely that the atmosphere there was on the toxic side.

After 35 years of golf course reporting, I have finally figured out there are some telltale indicators of a well-run facility. Here are the most important of them.

1. KEY PERSONNEL ARE ON THE SAME PAGE. The general manager, director of golf and superintendent share the same basic commitments, meet regularly, confer on complex decisions, don’t back-bite one another to members and guests, and show respect for each other. Whatever differences of opinion they have are kept private and resolved behind the scenes. They present a common front.

2. SENIOR STAFF SHOWS RESPECT FOR SUBORDINATES. The management team members know their frontline personnel and take a genuine interest in their well-being, advancement and skillset. Hourly staff and junior employees are considered part of their team. Veteran employees are valued for their loyalty. Management defends the rights and well-being of the staff in the face of any perceived or alleged indiscretion, whether in the form of sexual or ethnic harassment or mistreatment by the membership.

3. MANAGEMENT IS ALWAYS LOOKING TO IMPROVE. They are open to suggestions and are willing to listen — even to crack-pot ideas — rather than being defensive. If they think an idea has potential merit, they will explore it. If they think an idea is not so well-conceived, they will explain why and how.

4. RULES ARE KEPT TO A MINIMUM, AND ONLY TO THOSE THAT ARE ENFORCEABLE.

There is nothing in golf more off-putting than walking up to the clubhouse door and seeing a long list of regulations telling you what is prohibited and what is allowed. Of course, a certain decorum is to be expected. But there are ways to go about it and ways that are excessive and obtrusive. And it’s particularly galling when enforcement of the rules is in the hands of subordinate staff members ill-equipped or hardly in a secure enough position of employment to tell longstanding members or their guests what they should or should not be doing.

5. RULES ARE KEPT SIMPLE.

The more detail and specificity to rules, the more oppressive and unwelcoming a place is. I’ve seen rules posted about which rooms in the clubhouse are appropriate for cell phone use, how long women’s skirts can be, what color of men’s socks are appropriate for shorts, when and where jeans are allowed, and who can wear hats indoors and how (not backwards!).

6. MEMBERS ARE CLIENTS, NOT OWNERS. Just because you buy a car doesn’t give you license to run the dealership. The same

goes for golf courses, even those that are equity membership. There’s a certain humility that needs to prevail in which the golfer acts out of respect for the institution and the traditions of the facility and there’s an awareness that a certain culture prevails. That entails respect for employees, the grounds and long-term sustainability of the place.

7. ALL OF THIS PERTAINS TO THE SUPERINTENDENT, AS WELL, WHEN IT COMES TO COURSE SETUP.

At a well-run facility, there is flexibility in the day-to-day presentation, owing to the mutability of weather, day-to-day usage or staffing. No reasonable club should specify rigidly in advance what the green speed or fairway firmness will be. There are times, such as major tournaments, when goals can be set as benchmarks. But promising in advance or seeking to meet extreme metrics in the face of unusual weather conditions is a formula for trouble.

8. A GREAT INDICATOR OF A WELL-RUN FACILITY IS A GENERAL MANAGER WHO PROTECTS THE GOLF COURSE.

That means not overloading the place with potentially lucrative outings if it prevents the crew from engaging in needed maintenance practices that require an empty golf course. It means backing up the superintendent if conditions require “cart path only” play or outright closure. It also entails coordinating long-term budget and Cap-X policy so that the club’s needs are being met rather than the golf course being forced to adjust downward because of bad planning. **GCI**



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

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LIGHTS, CAMERA ... THERE'S MUCH MORE TO THE STORY. A WESTERN NEW YORK COURSE REVEALS ITS SMALL-TOWN CHARM AS PART OF A TELEVISION SERIES.

By Guy Cipriano

Vineyards Golf Course in Fredonia, New York, is a main-street business, even if it's located on a rural road two miles from the commercial hub of the 10,303-resident community.

Debbie Mancuso owns the 18-hole public course. Jason Goss manages it. Mancuso and Goss are western New Yorkers by birth, upbringing and nature. On Sundays from September through December — and well into January this past season — they pause to watch the Buffalo Bills. Buffalo, the metropolis in their cold and cozy

region, is less than 50 miles from the clubhouse.

Mancuso and Goss are affable and loyal. Want a Labatt Blue or a Blue Light while playing the Vineyards? It costs \$2.50.

"We sell beer for that low and they still try to sneak it on," Mancuso says. "I tell them, 'Come on, guys, we can't sell it for much cheaper than that.'"

Mancuso knows beer and hospitality. She works as a manager and bartender at Dom Polski Club, a popular gathering spot in neighboring Dunkirk. She's a golf savior in her hometown, purchasing nine stable holes in 2017 and nine dysfunctional holes in 2018 owned



▲ A new sign above the Vineyards Golf Course clubhouse. The Deluxe and *Small Business Revolution* team worked with the course on marketing and branding.

by different people with contrasting intentions to reestablish an 18-hole option for the community. Originally called Hillview Golf Course, the former grape vineyard's golf history extends to 1936.

"It really hasn't sunk in that I own all of this to be honest with you," says Mancuso, sitting by a fireplace in the quaint, rustic, wood-paneled clubhouse on a mid-February afternoon. The clubhouse rests on the north side of Berry Road. The nine holes surrounding the structure required golf course CPR to get them back to playable again. "When I bought this side, one of the workers took me over to the pond, showed me something and I was looking around. He said, 'Do you realize you own this?' I said, 'No, it hasn't hit me. Wow, we have

Small Business Revolution. Host Amanda Brinkman combined with renovation personality Ty Pennington, the Deluxe team and business owners and managers to tell the story of an auto detailer, a hair salon, a floral studio, a pizza shop, a bakery, a volunteer agency, and a living, breathing—and, in 2020, unexpectedly booming—160 acres of greenspace.

The characters and personalities worked with owners and operators to boost marketing and branding while Pennington led a project to improve the physical space of each respective business. Legends (Minnesota) Golf Club general manager/director of golf Mike Luckraft assisted Mancuso and Goss as part of the show. The cast quickly learned that renovating or purchasing equipment

both sides now. We have an 18-hole golf course.' It still doesn't seem real."

A half-foot of snow covers the course, as Mancuso and Goss reflect on their journey, triumphs, obstacles ... and recent television appearance. Yes, Vineyards is made-for-TV material. Last year, during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Vineyards became one of seven Fredonia businesses featured on Season 5 of *Deluxe's*

for a golf course is costly compared to an indoor main-street business. But the show appearance resulted in Vineyards receiving help building a new pole barn to host events.

The cameras caught how Vineyards handled the pandemic (quite well after enduring New York's early spring golf shutdown), depicted part of the enormity involving golf course ownership and maintenance, and demonstrated Mancuso's and Goss's zest for satisfying customers who expect \$2.50 (or cheaper) beers when playing golf.

"Debbie's mission is really the democratization of golf," Brinkman says. "Golf can be intimidating from the outside. There's a lot of etiquette involved in the game and for her, as someone who joined the sport later in life, she just really wants to make the sport accessible and open to everyone. We just loved that mission."

There's plenty to relish about this small-town golf course transformation. And there's no way to fit everything into a 34-minute television episode — or a six-page magazine profile. But let's give it a shot.

SO, YOU OWN A 9-HOLE GOLF COURSE. NOW WHAT?

Mancuso answered that question by making a trip to Home Depot to hire Goss.

OK, it's a bit more nuanced.

For starters, why did Mancuso want to own a golf course? She developed an interest in the game as an adult through participation in the Dom Polski league at Hillview. She heard the previous owner Rich Mancuso (no relation) wanted to retire from the golf business and sell the nine holes he owned, which was called Vineyards. Unsure of the land's future as a recreational amenity for Fredonia, she offered to buy it. "The next thing I know we were at the lawyer's office signing the papers," she says.

She then went to Home Depot.

Goss managed the windows and doors department. Mancuso, who

"WE HAVEN'T HAD A NORMAL SEASON. WE GET ASKED, 'WHAT'S YOUR NORMAL SEASON LIKE?' WE HAVE NO CLUE."

— DEBBIE MANCUSO



The modern coursefront

Remember when a freshly painted sign and tidy driveway generated interest in a golf course?

Exterior appearance still matters. But a polished digital presence might matter more.

"Your online presence is your storefront for the foreseeable future," says Amanda Brinkman, the chief brand officer of Deluxe, a marketing and technology company that works with small businesses. "Let's say in the golf industry, if you're traveling to a town and want to go out and play 18, you're going to be searching GOLF COURSES NEAR ME. If you're not showing in that search or your website and the online experience isn't rewarding, you're going to miss out on those golfers."

Brinkman is the creator, producer and host of Deluxe's *Small Business Revolution* television series, which featured Vineyards Golf Course in Fredonia, New York, as part of its fifth season. Brinkman worked with Vineyards owner Debbie Mancuso and manager Jason Goss on using digital tools to market the course.

Operating a small business, especially one comprising vast acreage, can be overwhelming, yet Brinkman urges clients in every industry to take marketing seriously. "We often hear that from business owners, that they can't afford marketing, whether it's a time investment or a fiscal investment," she says. "We often say *you can't afford not to.*"

Three quality starting points, according to Brinkman, include:

- Optimizing a website to make it search-friendly
- Claiming your Google listing and ensuring hours and contact information are accurate
- Developing a social media presence on platforms familiar to current or potential customers

Employees who work outside are ideally positioned to contribute to a website or a social media feed. With encouragement from Brinkman, Vineyards started regularly updating its Facebook page. A website plug-in takes users directly to the Facebook feed, where Goss posts pictures and course updates. The account has attracted close to 700 followers.

"It's both using your employees to capture that imagery and also encouraging your customers to do it," Brinkman says. "As folks are out there, encourage them to post about their game, tagging your course, talking about how much fun they are having. Social media is the word of mouth. It's another vehicle to make sure you're using your customers as advocates for you."

And one final thing: Don't be afraid to put your course's story on the website and use it as part of a marketing plan. How good is the story behind Vineyards? Well, it's featured in a television series and now a magazine cover. Thousands of courses with dedicated owners and employees make the golf industry special. Make that story part of your modern storefront.

"You want to showcase the hard work that you have been doing," Brinkman says. "But, honestly, a great thing about great branding and a great website is that you can really talk about the story behind your business and the course as much as you can talk about the professional landscaping of it."

owns multiple rental properties, was a frequent customer.

Goss's golf-loving father, Randy, once worked as a Dom Polski bartender alongside Mancuso. Randy imparted a passion for golf into his son. Mancuso needed somebody with that passion for the game who knew the customers to oversee her new investment. She offered Goss a chance to become course manager, a position that required overseeing all aspects of the operation, including maintenance.

"Every time she saw me, she'd ask, 'Did you think about it? Did you think about it?,'" Goss says. "I would try to play it out and figure out the pros and cons of leaving one job for another. I walked up to her one day and said, 'I'm in!' She said, 'Really?' I said, 'I'm all in.'"

The Vineyards nine was well-managed and well-maintained. It featured a simple clubhouse, although it lacked a liquor license. No Labatt Blue or Blue Light ... at least initially. Mancuso developed a straightforward business plan: solidify the nine, put the owners across the street out of business and return the course to 18 holes.

Hillview was an 18-hole course operated by the Porter family until the early 2000s. A family dispute resulted in the property becoming disjointed, leaving nine holes with separate owners on each side of Berry Road. The nine on the north side, the one called Hillview, with the pond and the clubhouse with a liquor license, was operated by absentee owners and the course became neglected. By the end of the 2018 season, Mancuso owned both nines. She would call the course Vineyards because of her loyalty to Rich Mancuso.

Next came the hardest part of the process: returning the second nine to playable condition. Corridors were overgrown with knee-high grass. Instead of connected turf, moss and dirt covered multiple greens. Goss insists one short par 3 was so gnarly golfers couldn't identify the green from the tee box.

Nobody on the staff, which in-

▼ Returning the nine surrounding the Vineyards Golf Course clubhouse to playable condition required extensive work by employees and volunteers.

cludes Scott Hazelton, Warren Faulkner, Bobby Kozlowski and Tommy Rozomolski, possessed formal turf education or golf renovation experience. But they had grit and connections. Goss and the team received help thinning grass from friends Adam Woelfle, Jim Rozen, Larry Gregorski, Kurt Wolnick, Kyle Goss, Matt Doler and Ernie Smith, in exchange for golf, beer and cookouts. A local farmer used his tractor to bale trimmed grass. Hazelton, Faulkner, Kozlowski and Rozomolski would maintain the functioning nine and then help resuscitate the other nine.

"I have friends that liked to golf who are teachers and they have summers off, so they would come down to help," Goss says. "One guy who lost his job came down and said, 'I have the summer off. Want me to do anything?'

We gave them pitchforks. They pitchforked all the hay we were chopping down and put it into a trailer."

Seeing a determined team work exhaustively on the nine across the street sparked interest among customers. Goss drove them around the nine, explaining what they achieved and what they still needed to accomplish. Mancuso and Goss visited other courses in the region and because they are the only 18-hole public course in Fredonia, they found owners, general managers and superintendents receptive to providing guidance. Hazelton had befriended multiple superintendents through the years. Yes, golf courses are more congenial than giant home improvement warehouses. "Everybody is learning from everybody else around here and asking questions," Goss says.

Mancuso and Goss were also fielding questions, none more frequent than when were they planning to reopen the second nine. They decided in August 2019 to conduct a few 18-hole events, including the annual Randy Goss Memorial tournament, conducted in Randy's honor every summer since his death in 2000. The 5-foot-5 Randy drove a truck with golf stickers on the back, used oversized drivers and putters, and tinkered with clubs and techniques. "Dad was all about golf," Goss says.

Asked what Randy would think of him rebuilding and managing the hometown course, Goss says, "He'd be excited. But he'd also probably be yelling at me about something."

From Home Depot (and Walmart before that) to his father's home course, Goss is now one of thousands



“EVERYBODY THINKS WORKING ON A GOLF COURSE IS EASY. EVERYBODY WANTS TO WORK ON A GOLF COURSE AND MOW GRASS WHEN THEY RETIRE. THERE’S A LOT MORE TO IT THAN WHAT ANYBODY THINKS.”

- JASON GOSS

in the golf industry unearthing innovative ways to execute a complex job. How does operating a golf course compare to managing a retail department?

“Totally different,” he says. “Everybody thinks working on a golf course is easy. Everybody wants to work on a golf course and mow grass when they retire. There’s a lot more to it than what anybody thinks.”

SO, YOU NOW HAVE AN 18-HOLE COURSE. BRING ON THE TELEVISION CAMERAS!

Through five seasons, more than 30,000 towns have been nominated for *Small Business Revolution*.

Competition for selection is fierce, with incentives ranging from exposure for a town (the show streams on Hulu and Amazon Prime) to a \$500,000 revitalization from Deluxe for the community and its businesses. The field narrows to five and each town rallies to secure voter support. Nearly 1 million votes were cast for inclusion in the 2020 season, with Fredonia topping Benicia, California; Livingston, Montana; Spearfish, South Dakota; and The Dalles, Oregon.

“The entire western side of New York got behind them,” Brinkman says. “If that Buffalo area supports something, it’s going to happen.”

Employee Diane Edgerton nominated the course for *Small Business Revolution*. Show officials notified Goss and Mancuso via email of the selection and filming started in early March.

Remote conversations with Brinkman and her team became the norm over the next few months, as Deluxe scrambled to preserve the season. Mancuso and Goss were also scram-

bling to interpret state and county regulations for reopening golf courses last April while bracing for their first full season as an 18-hole operation.

After initial uneasiness, the show continued, with crews following strict testing and quarantine procedures during quick dashes into Fredonia to obtain footage to complement scenes filmed before the onset of COVID-19. The story surrounding Vineyards proved upbeat, as the course safely reopened and easily experienced its best year since Mancuso purchased it. An average 2020 peak season day consisted of 150 rounds, with busy days attracting as many as 250 players, according to Goss.

Brinkman and the Deluxe team collaborated with Mancuso and Goss on boosting their online presence, revamping the website, suggesting a system for online bookings and creating a new logo. Vineyards represented the first golf course featured on “Small Business Revolution,” creating new dilemmas for Brinkman and her team.

“From afar it appears that the golf industry, or running a course, is a very interesting challenge because it truly is four very different business models meshed into one, which we talked about in the episode,” Brinkman says. “But we really saw that up close working with Debbie at Vineyards. You’re running an event business, you’re running a course, which is entertainment, you’re running a food and beverage business, and you’re running a retail business.”

The entertainment part of the business has occupied most of Mancuso’s attention since purchasing the course. “This course looked like

a hayfield,” Mancuso says of the nine on the north side of Berry Road. “It didn’t look like a golf course. We haven’t had a normal season. We get asked, ‘What’s your normal season

like?’ We have no clue.”

The course remains Mancuso’s and Goss’s focus in 2021. The winter purchase of a 9-gang mower to maintain rough will reduce labor and fuel costs, allowing the crew to focus on other tasks such as completing the restoration of three original holes on the south side of the road. Old, clay irrigation pipe will continue to be replaced near greens. Fairway irrigation isn’t a technical issue, because neither side has it. As this year progresses, two nines with contrasting recent agronomic histories should further meld into one consistent layout.

Off the course, once the perils of COVID-19 pass, Mancuso wants Vineyards to become a community hub. Mancuso envisions customers purchasing fare from food trucks as they mingle on a porch illuminated by tiki torches. A long-term goal includes adding a golf simulator to make the course a year-round operation. Bills and brews, anyone?

Rebuilding projects offer few reflective opportunities. But Mancuso and Goss had a chance to celebrate their progress last fall, when the Vineyards course hosted a viewing party for the debut of the *Small Business Revolution* season featuring their community. It was a made-for-TV moment.

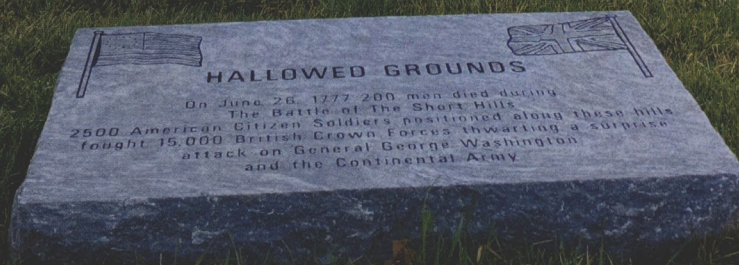
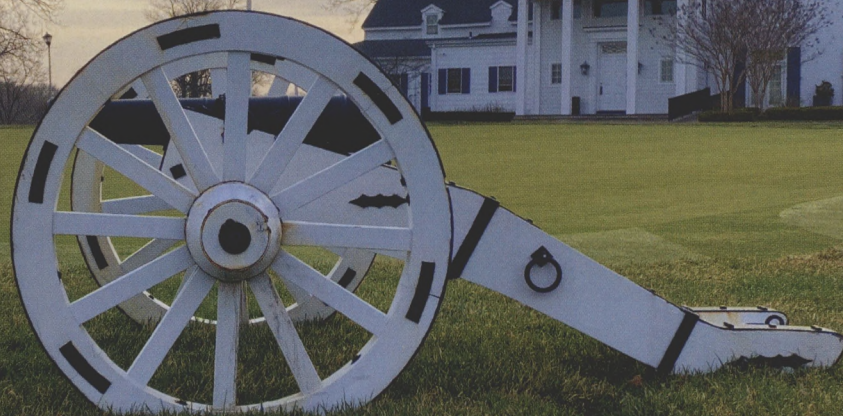
“I want the people to see that we are improving every year and giving them something better,” Mancuso says. “Ever since we had it, we are getting better and better. And hopefully we get to the point where people are talking about this course like crazy: ‘Hey, I want to go play Vineyards. You should see what they did with it.’” **GCI**

ENDURING GREATNESS

Presented by Toro

TORO

It just oozes history



Every turn provides a glimpse of a fascinating and well-protected past at Plainfield Country Club.

By **Guy Cipriano**



The paved path from the Plainfield Country Club maintenance facility to the first tee rises to 160 feet above sea level and measures around a quarter mile. As they ascend to their workspace, turf employees gaze right and see members practicing shots off a ryegrass tee, children learning the game on a 9-hole course and a distant mountain where George Washington observed British troops in 1777. A modest — at least by New Jersey private club standards — and perfectly-painted white clubhouse fronted by a pear-shaped green sit atop the hill.

Rough provides a buffer between the green and the pavement. A restored cannon declaring the site “Hallowed Grounds” occupies a corner spot next to the green. The same year Washington scouted for British troops from the nearby mountain, a Revolutionary War tussle called the Battle of Short Hills passed through the rolling ridges.

Employees continuing past the green and around a standalone pro shop with a plaque honoring Leighton Calkins, a former club president who devised the USGA handicap system, encounter a first tee surrounded by red brick and ornamentals. Now a descent into a delightfully preserved Donald Ross design begins.

Plainfield Country Club oozes history, although superintendent Travis Pauley and team are typically too busy preserving Ross to ponder what happened on the 18 varied holes before the Scottish architect’s arrival. Pauley’s team is responsible for maintaining 178 acres, including 140 on the “Ross” side of Old Raritan Road. The remaining 38 acres are allotted for Plainfield West, a semi-private, 9-hole course housing a First Tee chapter. Plainfield West represents the final remnants of a Tom Bendelow-designed course the club debuted in 1898.

Pauley and his team spend most of their time on what Ross called “these gently flowing hills where golf holes can roll across the property.” Ross started working at Plainfield Country Club in 1916. The private course opened in 1921 following a construction interruption because of World War I.

A well-used copy of a second master plan created by architect Gil Hanse in 2014 sits on Pauley’s desk. “It’s falling apart,” Pauley says, “and that’s a good sign because that means you are

using it.” Hanse created his first master plan for the club in 1999. The club’s decision to host a pair of PGA Tour playoff events — the 2011 and 2015 Barclays — altered what Pauley calls “Master Plan No. 1.” The final items on “Master Plan No. 2” are nearing completion, meaning Plainfield Country Club boasts a layout with striking similarities to the one Ross intended.

That intent becomes obvious upon completing the 432-yard descent from the first tee to the first green. Glimpses of nearly every hole emerge while standing on the green thanks to layers of tree removal. A property-defining

ridge flows through fairways, a blend of hazards, including cross and diagonal bunkers, wide approaches, and greens with dramatic slopes make for interesting golf and meticulous maintenance.

“All of the decisions are made in what Ross would have done,” Pauley says. “That’s as important as anything around here.”

Modern equipment helps Pauley’s team produce a golf experience reflective of Ross while satisfying the demands of members expecting elite conditions. The Toro fleet distributed by New York Metropolitan area-based Storr Tractor Company contrasts anything Ross used a century ago.

The low-cut turf requires unwavering attention, because Pauley, who first experienced links golf while touring the United Kingdom during a college internship at East Sussex National in Uckfield, England, strives to incorporate Ross’s ground-game philosophies into daily play by providing fast, firm and disease-free conditions. Integrating the Toro Multi-Pro 1750 with GeoLink GPS Sprayer into greens, approaches and tees treatment programs elevates the golfer experience.

◀ Before it was a revered golf course, the rolling land at Plainfield Country Club occupied a spot in early American history.

▼ Using the Toro Multi-Pro 1750 with GeoLink has enhanced spray applications and improved playability at Plainfield Country Club.



ENDURING GREATNESS

Presented by Toro

TORO



▲ The Donald Ross-designed course at Plainfield Country Club opened for play in 1921.

Before pitching the technology to club leaders, Pauley wanted to see how the sprayers handled Plainfield's terrain, so he coordinated an onsite demonstration with Toro representatives. Pauley had been reading about GPS-guided spraying in agriculture since his Ohio State University classes in the 1990s and 2000s. But feature-laden, compact sites such as golf courses include less acreage, and yet more variables, than vast and open crop fields.

"Expensive technology is much easier to justify when you have open fields and big acreage, because of economies of scale," Pauley says. "When you are spraying 40 acres of fine turf, it's harder to justify the expense, especially because it was more expensive when it first came out than today. The big thing was that

I had to know it worked. With Toro bringing the equipment out here and us doing a really thorough demo in areas that we had concerns about, I knew it was going to work when we bought it."

Plainfield Country Club has purchased three GPS-guided sprayers since 2018: a pair of Toro Multi-Pro 1750 with GeoLink and a 300-gallon Toro Multi-Pro 5800 with GeoLink for fairways. Mapping capabilities refined sprays on four acres of *Poa annua* greens and reduced the size of treated bentgrass fairways by nearly two acres. "It very quickly changed the way we spray," says Pauley, alluding to how eliminating overspraying keeps paclobutrazol, an active plant growth regulator ingredient, within mapped fairway boundaries and off greens.

"It's an efficiency thing, too," he adds. "We go from 30 acres to 28.2 of fairways. If we are using 1,800 total gallons of solution to spray fairways, and if you take 6 percent of that, it's 108 gallons. We're making less, so it

saves us time. These sprayers have an extra nozzle on them. A typical sprayer would have 11 nozzles: four, three and four. So you go to 12 nozzles and you're getting almost 10 percent extra on every pass. It's saving time, too. That's the one thing we aren't getting any more of in the mornings. Any metric that you can measure, it has helped—time, money, accuracy, playability."

Pauley considers his management philosophies a combination of data and feel. An increased understanding and tracking of Growing Degree Days led to leaner practices on fairways. "We were overregulating the fairways," he says. "We have gotten away from that. The turf looks better, it's healthier and it helps with wear." Pauley doesn't track clipping yield, because he's confident what he sees in a bucket tells the growth story, and he mixes Stimpmeter readings with ball roll observations to determine the quality of putting surfaces.

Prolonged soggy in a flat corner of the course consisting of holes 13-15 designed by Ross in 1930 called "The Tunnel" and a desire to expand the ground game convinced Pauley to begin topdressing 3½ acres of approaches following the 2011 Barclays. Using a GPS-guided sprayer allows Pauley to make approach-specific applications when needed. "They are as important as the greens to keeping the course firm and fast and how it's supposed to play," he says. "There's no question about that when you look at the design."

Continuity helps Plainfield Country Club's turf team operate within the framework of the Ross identity. The club has employed just three superintendents since 1951, with Pauley arriving as a talented 25-year-old in 2005 following an assistant superintendent stint at A.W. Tillinghast-designed Ridgewood Country Club, an hour north of Plainfield via the Garden State Parkway. A northwest Ohio native, Pauley developed a passion for golf and turf while working as a teenager at Ross-designed Mohawk Country Club



▲ Pauley



Abundant flexibility

Equipment flexibility helped Plainfield Country Club handle labor reductions caused by the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of walk mowing greens last spring, superintendent Travis Pauley examined the club's equipment fleet and deployed Toro Greensmaster 3250-D mowers on the Donald Ross-designed greens from the beginning of the 2020 growing season until late June.

"We always sprayed with drive-on sprayers, so I always knew the greens could handle the weight," Pauley says. "It was just a matter of turning the triplexes on the greens and whether that was going to create an issue. We were able to mitigate that with good operator usage and switching mowing patterns. We didn't really see any harmful effects of it until later in the summer. It wasn't so much on the greens, but the short grass around the greens."

Plainfield Country Club has four acres of greens and walk mowing the spectacularly sloped surfaces consumes around 15 labor hours. Using the Greensmaster 3250-D trims the task to around five hours.

Pauley was in a fortuitous spot because the club invests in quality equipment. Pauley has continued a practice implemented by his predecessor of using triplex mowers on fairways. The fleet includes 11 3250-Ds: five for fairways, two for approaches and tees, two for greens, one for practice areas and one for greens on semi-private Plainfield West. Plainfield Country Club also has a pair of 82-inch Toro Reelmaster 3550 mowers, which reduced labor time on fairways last spring and summer. Using Greensmaster 3250-Ds to mow tees yielded additional labor savings.

"The quantity and options we have built into the system helps us a lot," Pauley says. "Having bigger options on fairways rather than just the triplexes, you can mow with two instead of three employees. And the triplexes were huge last year. We never really triplexed tees in the past and we started doing that as well, so that was a huge time saver. We occasionally do that now. But we are walk mowing them. I don't know if we're at 50-50, but we'll probably end up there at some point. We probably lean walk mow, but we'll still triplex them on weekends and things like that."



in Tiffin, Ohio. As a student at Ohio State, he worked at Ross-designed Scioto Country Club in Columbus.

The other key cogs in Plainfield Country Club's turf team fully grasp the importance of keeping Ross intact. Senior assistant Mike Bowley was hired by Pauley following a 2005 internship, equipment manager Ian Brenly joined the staff in 2007 and second assistant Matt Daubert arrived in 2012. Pauley lauds Bowley for patiently waiting for the right head superintendent opportunity, Brenly for keeping a fleet consisting of more than 30 mowers in solid condition and Daubert for becoming a point person for implementing the GeoLink system into the spray program.

Pauley has embraced everything about holding a desirable job for 16 years and his office includes framed personal and Plainfield pictures, including a 1931 course aerial that Hanse uses to guide architectural decisions. Pauley realized during his first winter at Plainfield, which hosted the 1987 U.S. Women's Open and 1978 U.S. Amateur, that he was involved in something unique when the club gave him permission to remove non-native white pines from the property. Covering tree stumps required nine acres of sod, a worthwhile investment because clearing the trees revealed more of Ross's work than any active member or employee had ever seen.

Up the hill from Pauley's office and inside the clubhouse, Ross's enduring presence further permeates, as a plaque, bust and sketches add ambience to the club's Dornoch Grill, named in honor of the architect's hometown. The work of Pauley, Hanse and many others reintroduced a Dornoch-like feel on the revered New Jersey ground.

"We have been here a long time and we have been trusted as the caretakers of this really special place where a lot of things have happened and it's really important to a lot of people," Pauley says. "We don't want to screw this up." GCI

◀ Maintaining approaches to help promote Donald Ross design elements is factored into agronomic programs at Plainfield Country Club.



SAY THESE TWO WORDS TO BOOST EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

The *Staffing for Success* series continues with a review of the business bestseller “Leading with Gratitude: Eight Leadership Practices for Extraordinary Business Results.”

“**T**hank you.”

How does it make you feel when someone expresses their appreciation for a job well done? Pretty great, right? We can all remember the emotional high when a boss we respected told us how grateful he or she was for our contribution to a particularly meaningful project. As it turns out, beyond the personal boost gratitude provides, it’s also great for business. The multifaceted benefits of gratitude is the subject of Adrian Gostick’s and Chester Elton’s business bestseller “Leading with Gratitude: Eight Leadership Practices for Extraordinary Business Results.”

After surveying more than 1 million employees, Gostick and Elton found that expressing gratitude is the easiest, fastest and least expensive way for managers to improve employee performance and engagement. In that sense, showing gratitude is not only

about being nice — it’s about being smart because it could also uncover untapped employee potential and identify obstacles standing in the way of even better performance.

Maybe the best thing about practicing gratitude is that it’s easy. But that’s not to say that it comes naturally to all leaders or that it’s well understood as a business strategy. In many organizations, there exists a sizeable “gratitude gap” between the appreciation employees feel they deserve and what they receive.

This gap points to the consequences of an ungrateful work culture. The authors found that 81 percent of workers said they would work harder if their boss was more grateful for their work. And if you want to reduce turnover, start with gratitude. The No. 1 reason people leave a job, according to the U.S. Department of Labor: They don’t feel appreciated by their managers, even more of an issue with today’s younger workers.

Expressing gratitude effectively is an easily learned behavior, but it does require more, in the authors’ view, than “showing more thank-yous” on employees: “Developing genuine gratitude involves carefully observing what employees are do-

ing, developing greater empathy and sincerely trying to understand the challenges they face.”

Some leaders will insist they are “not wired” for gratitude, excusing their command-and-control style with increased performance, production and results. But the authors insist just the opposite: “Leaders who infuse fear into their work cultures undermine their objectives to increase performance and instead produce stress that can lead to burnout and other productivity-crushing effects.”

Former Ford CEO Alan Mulally is among the many executives who back up the authors’ claims. “Skills are one thing,” he says, “but to create a smart and healthy organization, void of politics, whose people don’t go after each other, that’s about respecting them, showing them the data and thanking them for what they’ve done.”

In his first meeting with Ford’s 4,000 dealers, Mulally began practicing what he preached. He asked Ford employees in the audience to stand, turn and face the dealers. “Now say ‘We love you,’” Mulally instructed. It took the employees three tries before Mulally was satisfied with their sincerity and enthusiasm, but the dealers were quickly convinced this was going to be a new Ford under Mulally’s leadership, one where their roles were valued.

“We aren’t saying every manager needs to offer praise to every employee every day,” Gostick and Elton conclude. “We are saying that most managers should be offering more of it, quite a bit more often.” GCI

“After surveying more than 1 million employees, Gostick and Elton found that expressing gratitude is the easiest, fastest and least expensive way for managers to improve employee performance and engagement.”



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.

TURF & ORNAMENTAL

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Beauty

CAN MAKE BUSINESS SENSE

It's not always all about the turf. Understanding landscapes, habitat, horticultural and special-use areas can separate your facility — and yourself — from competitors.

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

Are you making the most of your green assets? Beyond the traditional green “golf” assets such as greens, tees, fairways, roughs and bunkers, are you maximizing the potential of your property when it comes to landscapes, habitat, horticulture and special-use areas? There are opportunities to increase the beauty, functionality and financial results of your operation by adding a little horticulture and creative thinking to your processes. There are six areas of focus that will help you maximize your green assets: mastering your craft, identifying areas of impact, creating a positive growing environment, design and plant selection, integrated pest/plant management, and specialty gardens and features.

MASTERING YOUR CRAFT

I am often asked why I chose to pursue certifications in horticulture and arboriculture in addition to golf-specific credentials. The answer is simple. I wanted to master my craft and function as a high-level expert in multiple disciplines for our property. Regardless of your experience level as a golf course

superintendent, you can add considerable value to your personal and professional worth by adding a few extra green skills and certifications to your résumé. Ultimately, these skills should have a visible impact on your property. The quality of the tree and landscape assets of your property make a statement about you and your operation. When

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► Using landscape features to create areas of impact can help improve the customer experience. Pictured is the Copperhead Course at Innisbrook Resort in Palm Harbor, Florida.

you think of the Masters, you automatically think of Augusta National Golf Club and beautiful azaleas. The course is more than golf, and this is not an accident.

Your attention to detail and level of expertise in course accent areas should be consistently evolving and they should establish landscape-centric goals for you, your team and the property. For example, you could compete in an industry contest. The Professional Grounds Management Society, which was founded in 1911, offers an annual Green Star Contest, awarding Merit, Honor and Grand Awards in various categories of landscape excellence. PGMS also offers certification programs such as Certified Grounds Technician and Certified Grounds Manager. (I am Certified Grounds Manager #042.) If you are at a heavily wooded property or have high-value trees, you may consider an International Society of Arboriculture certification such as Certified Arborist or Board Certified Master Arborist to raise your level of management over your tree assets. The key is to be engaged and challenge yourself to become the local expert in these areas and commit to lifelong learning.

IDENTIFYING AREAS OF IMPACT

No matter how big or small your landscape budget is, you need to identify areas of impact and focus the best of your resources on these areas. In the old days, we referred to these as “Kodak” areas because guests/golfers were constantly taking pictures of these areas. In the time before cell phone cameras, Kodak was the king of cameras!

The first area of impact is always your primary entrance. This area establishes a sense of arrival and expectation. The plantings should be in good health, properly pruned and shaped, and generally should have a pop of seasonal color. It is also im-



portant to incorporate easy-to-read and appropriately-styled signage that is consistent throughout the property. You can also maximize your efforts by identifying areas of two-way traffic such as where two or more golf holes intersect. Take the time to see the course in both directions as this may influence your plant and design choices.

Do you have a courtyard or statue that is integral to your property? If so, this should receive a lot of your attention when it comes to landscape and hardscapes budgeting. Our property is built around a 9-foot-tall statue of Byron Nelson located between the first tee and the golf shop. It is a good idea to ask other managers, green committee members or any important stakeholders their thoughts on areas of impact and include these areas in your plans.

People love to see their suggestions literally in bloom. Taking the time to identify and prioritize areas of impact will also help you make budget decisions based on confirmed priorities.

CREATING A POSITIVE GROWING ENVIRONMENT

Once you have identified the areas that will serve as the focus of your beautification efforts, it is im-

portant that you create a positive growing environment. This area is where many golf course superintendents excel. They understand the need for quality soil, proper light requirements, supplemental irrigation and, of course, proper drainage. Soil sample tests and percolation tests of native soils will prove if amendments or other growing mediums are necessary and should be linked to design and plant selection. Be sure you are creating as many positives in these areas as possible. This includes the construction of retaining walls or other hardscapes that will ultimately impact the quality and longevity of the landscape.

Consider surface and sub-surface drainage. Also consider using the Sunseeker app to establish light requirements, remembering as trees and larger shrubs mature, they cast a larger shadow and may cause adjustments in plant selection as years go by.

By paying attention to the basic needs of plantings, you will save money on the maintenance of the area while maximizing the beauty — which is the highest aspiration of any professional horticulturalist.

These critical first steps will lead into the more formal design decisions and final plant selection process.



DESIGN AND PLANT SELECTION

When you know that you have created a positive, well-constructed growing environment, you can proceed to the design and plant selection process. The processes often intertwine, but in terms of

which comes first you can often choose plant material based on site specifics such as climate, sun exposure, height and width at maturity, water requirements, color, texture, and pest resistance or persistence.

Designing a beautiful landscape is a mix of art and science. There are many books and online resources available to assist in this area and you can always develop a network of proven local horticulturalists. I have been a certified master gardener since 1995 and gardening associations or extension programs

are great resources. Consider the synergy of elements in design and plant selection.

Plants can often accent hardscapes such as using Trailing Vinca (*Catharanthus roseus*) flowers to hang over a stacked brick retaining wall with 2-foot-tall upright Dragon wing begonia (*Begonia* hybrid “Dragon Wings”) in the middle section and a classic 4-foot shrub of Purple Loropetalum (*Loropetalum chinense* “Purple diamond”) in the upper bed space. Blending form, function and flowering (color) will add interest and value to any area of the course.

Finding quality plant material is critical to success. Partnering with a local nursery or grower is a great way to ensure you get high quality plant material that meets specific site requirements. Always inspect new arriving plant materials for overall health, pests and diseases before allowing them onto the property. This will ensure you are getting full value for all plant materials as well as protecting your existing green assets. Once they are planted, there’s a need for integrated pest/plant management, which is one of the best ways to protect

your green assets and add value to the property.

INTEGRATED PEST/PLANT MANAGEMENT

Integrated pest/plant management is an important part of any landscape. Minimizing inputs and maximizing beauty is the ultimate goal. We know how important it is to choose the right plant for the right location, but we must also be aware of any pests that may threaten our impact crops.

Everything from phytophthora to aphids could negatively impact the landscape. Set realistic thresholds for common pests. Keep accurate data of populations and the timing of their reproduction and historic season of threat. Mix methods of control from physical, biological, cultural and, lastly, chemical controls to give you the most effective control within all means available.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, so be sure to incorporate things like tool sanitation between tasks such as sterilizing pruning tools after each plant group to reduce the risk of spreading plant diseases on your tools as you move from planting to planting. Manage mulches

and leaf debris carefully to not create a place for pathogens to develop. Manage your water resources carefully. Do not overwater!

Your IPM programs and documentation should be a living document that grows in scope and detail each year. The key is to learn the rhythm of your landscape,

◀ A popular and well-maintained water feature at Four Seasons Resort Club Dallas at Las Colinas in Irving, Texas.



noting the last date of historic frost before planting summer annuals. Learn when Japanese beetles start showing up on crape myrtles at the entrances and take the necessary actions. These basic skills will give you an advantage in every phase of beautification from budgeting to stunning accent beds.

SPECIALTY GARDENS AND FEATURES

Once you have mastered the basics of landscape aesthetics and beatification, you can take your operation to the next level by creating specialty gardens and other unique landscape features. These include things like xeric (low-water use) gardens and habitat/pollinator (milkweed for monarch butterflies, native grasses or wildflowers for local wildlife) gardens.

There are many ways to accomplish this type of specialty work and together they often create synergy. You can start small with pots and containers, especially in courtyards and high-traffic areas. Those provide an affordable way to add color and contrast. This is also a great idea if you have soil issues.

Water features are also popular. They could be small, such as a bubbler in a pond or pot, or a huge recirculating water feature. The sound of moving water along with the calming effect that water adds is a natural extension of any landscape.

Also consider creative special-use areas. We added a wedding lawn and



No matter what stage of your career that you are in as a golf course superintendent you can add considerable value to your personal and professional worth by adding a few extra green skills and certifications to your résumé."

quarter-mile jogging trail and both have added huge value to our property and operation. You can go back to our agronomic roots and partner

with the culinary staff and establish an organic garden to support the food and beverage operation. We started our organic garden in 2017 and it has been hugely successful generating tons of public relations (we added it to our environmental tour of the property), having been featured in several magazines. The harvest has been amazing. We now grow more than 30 varieties of vegetables and herbs in our garden. If you have a love for growing things and construction, this is your chance to really make an impact, be creative and see how things develop.

Horticulture was my connection into

the golf course management industry and at every property I have served I took great pride in the quality of all our green assets. I came to realize the true value that these skills bring to light, that the landscape truly is the first thing people see when they arrive at the property. I hope I have given you some insights, tools and motivation to make your landscape an integral asset that generates value beyond its beauty by also making a financial impact. I believe there should be a harmony that exists between your golf assets (greens, tees, fairways, roughs, bunkers) and your other green assets (lakes, native areas, trees, landscape flower beds). The best and most renowned golf properties achieve this as part of their lore. Each spring we have a chance to start a new season and I hope this year you will maximize your green assets and take advantage of the horticultural and financial opportunities at your property. **GCI**

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



SHOULD HOSTING MAJOR EVENTS DEFINE A CAREER?

Major championship season is here and, as usual, those who care about such things are talking about how the “best” superintendents in the country are preparing their courses and enduring these trials by fire. For some reason, it is assumed that the superintendents who “host” these events are special and should be worshipped. Even more, it is assumed that every other course in America should do whatever it is these “experts” are doing to make their courses “perfect.”

No, no, and no. I’ve been around majors, tour events, international matches and just about every kind of significant tournament you can imagine. I agree that in many cases the superintendents responsible for these courses are special. But no more than many of you, even if the highlight of your year is the club championship. You’re both working hard to make your course the best it can be for an important event, you’re both putting in extra time and energy, you’re both thinking about how the course will stand up and how the players will react to it.

There are lots of reasons being chosen to host will not be the plum assignment you expect. For example:

- Once chosen, preparation can last for five or 10 years. Sites for U.S. Opens and PGA Championships have been announced well into the future. Trust me, however, those superintendents are already thinking about it.
- Host courses may choose — or be required — to close for member/regular golfer play for several weeks both before and after the

event. That makes lots of people unhappy.

- The cleanup and damage repair will require additional money and time, further annoying the everyday golfer (to say nothing of the committees, owners and others to whom you report who just don’t get it).
- Expect to give up plenty of personal and “off course” time. Sleep, too.

Unfortunately, just because your course doesn’t host a big event doesn’t mean you’re in the clear. The culprit is television. Members or owners see a course on television, or talked about on social media, and want to know why their course can’t look like that. This phenomenon has cost many a good superintendent their job, all that without the members/owners having any idea what it takes — and, more important, what it costs — financially, agronomically and personally to attain that level of maintenance. It isn’t only the old super, the one who got canned because they couldn’t provide Masters conditions on a municipal budget, who gets hurt. The next person comes in with a target on their back.

I’ve spoken to quite a few superintendents who’ve hosted national championships or other major events and some said they’d rather not do it again. From the Masters to the U.S. Open, state and regional golf association events, down to club championships, preparation of the playing surfaces is similar — it’s the process,

scope and scale that differs. And, in each case, the pressure.

Ironically, it’s sometimes easier to host the big events because they get the most resources: volunteer labor, extra budget, equipment loans and other outside technical support. Those courses close for weeks to get the demanded results. But the stakes are much higher and the scrutiny that much closer.

Even at the highest level, it’s grinding, stressful work. Consider Brad Owen, “The Man” at Augusta National Golf Club. He had to prepare for two Masters Tournaments within six months in two different seasons. And while he may have made it look easy, rest assured, there were challenges, disagreements with staff and membership, along with disaster and opportunities around every (Amen) corner.

Brad is excellent at what he does. Doing maintenance for “a tradition unlike any other” isn’t easy, no matter how good you are. Would you want to do it year after year after year?

Frankly, I think the pressure to perform is just as high at a non-tournament site where there’s a similar need for customer satisfaction and the budget is down to earth. All of you who do this year after year at private and public clubs, busting your butts to show your golfers a good time and make them feel important, deserve the lion’s share of praise and attention. If you’re a young superintendent just starting out, these are the heroes to model your career after. **GCI**



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



BIG MAINTENANCE, BIG CONTROL

EXPERIENCE, DATA AND LABOR NECESSITIES ARE HELPING
SUPERINTENDENTS ADAPT THEIR PGR USAGE TO ELEVATE
COURSE CONDITIONS.

By **Matt LaWell**

Brian Boyer loves Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. He loves the ability they grant him to plug numbers and formulas into cells, he loves how they provide him more options more quickly that he can present to the ownership at Cinnabar Hills Golf Course in San Jose, California, and he loves the visualization of a return on investment.

The superintendent at the 27-hole public Cinnabar Hills for nearly 16 years, Boyer has "pretty good" Excel spreadsheets for *Poa* and crabgrass, among other challenges. "Nothing fancy," he says. "But they work for me."

Big Data swallowed up manufacturing years ago and seems to be creeping ever closer to every facet of golf course maintenance. Boyer, who works near numerous Silicon Valley tech companies, uses data — of the big, little, advanced and everyday varieties — to his advantage whenever he can, even when introducing new plant growth regulator and aquatic control programs at the course. After all, you need to know not only what you're applying but also how it interacts with the turf, weather and other products. The variables are endless. Control what you can control.

PREACHING PATIENCE

Boyer introduced SePRO Cutless MEC PGR on the A4 bentgrass greens at Cinnabar Hills a few years ago, switching from another product that provided strong growth regulation but left him with other problems that outweighed the benefit.

The results — the return on investment — were far from immediate.

"That first season, I went every two weeks at 24.6 ounces, the high rate, and I wasn't happy with the lack of growth regulation," he says. "I didn't see a lot of *Poa* control and my growth was a little more than I would like."

The second season, he opted for more frequent applications, every week, at lower doses, "and it was great," he says. "I had some growth regulation and toward the middle of the second season, I started to see results. What I would see was a patch of *Poa* that's maybe two inches, three inches, and I would see bentgrass poking through."

And as for this season? More experimentation. "I'm back to every two weeks and I'm playing around a little more," he says, adding that he expanded his SePRO PGR suite last season to include Legacy and Musketeer.

"I know there are clubs out there that can do seven-day applications, but I can't, and I always figured I was never going to get growth regulation here at Cinnabar because I couldn't afford to do so," Boyer says. "I would stress patience. The guy I leaned on didn't see anything with Cutless for almost two years."

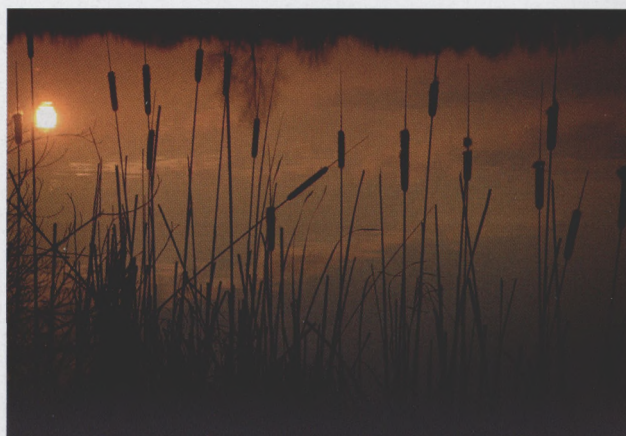
On the other coast, Curtis Harder enjoyed a far faster return on his PGR investment. Harder is the superintendent at Blue Bell Country Club, a private club in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania, about 25 miles northwest of downtown Philadelphia.

After a friend recommended Legacy, he tested the PGR on tees and fairways, "to limit how much growth we're seeing week to week," he says. "We needed something to carry us to 10, 12 days. Within the first two months of using Legacy, it was helping us minimize mowing frequency."

Two months, two years — what's the big-picture difference, really, especially if a product works in such measurable ways?

Harder asked around to superintendent friends at other Philadelphia courses and learned that most were mowing fairways three or four times every week.

"My first year here, we were trying to get out and mow three times a week," he says. "Every course is handcuffed on how many guys they have. Every year, I put



Cattail conundrum

Cattails are an incredibly versatile and useful flowering plant, whether as food for humans or animals, as part of the manufacturing process to make rafts, paper and even ethanol, or as tinder for fires. But on golf courses, the perennials can be an eyesore.

Curtis Harder has faced them throughout his almost five years as the superintendent at Blue Bell Country Club in suburban Philadelphia. "From the start of the development here back in 1992, we've had a few ponds get a large cattail problem," he says, adding that he uses SePRO Clearcast herbicide to manage areas that would otherwise be crammed with cattails. "We're not trying to eliminate them, because there are some benefits, but we don't want cattails to overtake the ponds."

Harder manages eight ponds and two watersheds on the property, each of them "a little bit different because of size or depth or water flow," he says. The cattail sweet spot, if there is one, is about 10 percent of the total acreage. "After that, it gets kind of difficult to manage. There are certain places on a pond edge where we can't have any cattails," because of aesthetics and agricultural management, "and there are other areas where we can have more."

The list of potential uses is almost as tall as the plant itself.





together a budget and it's difficult to meet what I'd like to see here." You almost never have "enough guys to go out and mow."

Being able to cut back one or two days of mowing every week for four months on what are basically 007 bentgrass fairways has allowed Harder to "really concentrate more on the details." On Fridays, for example, "we're able to prep the course a little more than if you had to send four guys out to mow. We're able to detail bunkers for the weekend or concentrate on ramping up green speeds."

TRUSTING YOURSELF

After almost five years at Blue Bell and

about 17 years total in the industry, Harder has figured out more and more to trust himself and his instincts.

"We're always trying to push the envelope to deliver the best conditions," he says, "but you have to be a strong enough superintendent to know when to do less. That's one thing I've learned over the years. If you can't get out and mow, maybe because it's too wet, know when to skip something."

"Knowing to do nothing is sometimes the best practice, because a lot of what we do is self-inflicted injury instead of letting things ride out. You'll be better on the back end."

Jon Cockerham trusts himself. He

trusts his education, experience and process, too. The longtime director of golf course maintenance at Suntree Country Club, a 36-hole private facility in Melbourne, Florida, is an educated tinkerer. He studied chemistry and microbiology at Mississippi State University and has fiddled toward fine-tuning products and processes ever since. A couple seasons ago, Cockerham applied Legacy to one of the club's two courses and a competing product on the other course — tank-mixing each with 3 percent iron.

"The visible difference was the maintenance of color," Cockerham says. "There was definitely growth suppression, but the color of the turf was outstanding." The competing product, meanwhile, always bronzed. "I wasn't getting any negative comments from golfers but to me it looked like I sprayed it with a light amount of Roundup or something, and it was suppressing the rough growth as well but it had those bronzed triangles."

Both courses, the Challenge and the Classic, feature Bermudagrass fairways, with the Challenge described as "a Heinz 57 of Bermudagrass mutations and contaminations" elsewhere atop Tifway 419 parent grass, and the Classic was recently regrassed with Celebration Bermudagrass.

"I don't have a huge budget here," Cockerham says. "I have a decent budget, but it's not unlimited. But if I did have an unlimited budget,

I would probably use Legacy all the time, be out spraying it every three weeks. We have 240 acres between two spray techs, so it's difficult even to stay on that schedule. There are other priorities, between weeds and mole crickets and army worms, and then mowing a lot."

Like so many clubs across the country, Cockerham has struggled to fill his crew of 28 full-timers and two part-timers this season and is down about 320 crew hours per week. He has relied extensively on his assistants, former golf pro Justin Wasson and recently-promoted-spray tech James Francis, and his spray techs, Ken Moss and Tico Waddington. He trusts them almost as much as he trusts himself.

He trusts PGRs and tinkering, too.

"PGRs are cost-efficient because of the results," he says. "During the growing season, if you have certain weather conditions, you're getting a lot of clippings, you're having to increase your mowing frequency, and then you have to send somebody to clean up those clippings. All that labor is saved if you stay on a relatively regular program throughout the growing season."

Cockerham sprays PGR every week, even as low as two ounces per acre in the winter. "Invest in them, use them, because they're economical and cost-effective."

Even in this digital world, Big Data is still dwarfed — out on the course, at least — by Big Maintenance. ■

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Keep <i>Poa annua</i> out	Musketeer PGR
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Weeds below the surface	Komeen Crystal
Floating and submersed weeds	SonarOne
Enhancing disease management program	Zio Fungicide
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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

GOLF COURSE
INDUSTRY

**OFF
THE
COURSE**

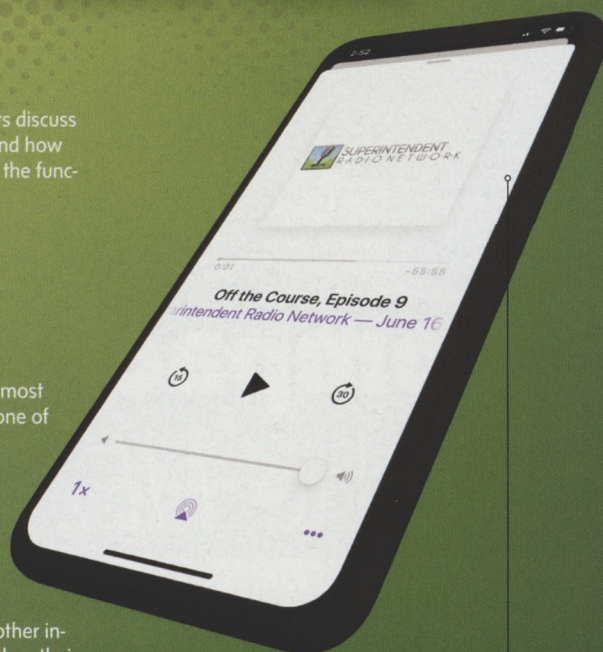
Candid conversations with superintendents, directors and other industry professionals about anything and everything other than their work. Episodes focus on physical and mental health, outside interests, family, and the constant pursuit of life-work balance among other topics.

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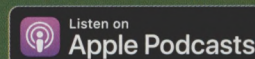


GOLF COURSE
INDUSTRY
**GREENS WITH
ENVY**

Editors Guy Cipriano and Matt LaWell discuss the 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:





Compact fun in the *HEARTLAND*

A Kansas City facility with an appropriate name features an increasingly popular 9-hole option maintained to the same standards as its lengthier neighbor.

By Rick Woelfel

The Heart of America Golf Course is aptly named. It's located in the nation's heartland, in Kansas City, Missouri.

And while its championship-length River Nine is a popular attraction, the facility's 9-hole short course, the Rock Nine, serves as a portal to the game for new golfers and, perhaps, a pleasant diversion for those with more experience and skill. That was especially the case in 2020 when the Rock Nine hosted more than 27,000 rounds.

PGA professional Craig Martin is the club's general manager. He works for Orion Management, which manages the facility for the Kansas City Department of Parks and Recreation. A Class A member of the PGA of America since 1989, he's been at Heart of America for 11 seasons.

Martin notes the facility was so overwhelmed with demands for tee times on the River Nine last year that it was forced to pair golfers who did not know each other. The Rock Nine offered an alternative for golfers who didn't feel comfortable doing that at a

9-hole rate of \$12, \$10 for seniors, and \$8 for juniors. Those who want to play a second nine pay only a \$2 turn fee.

"We were so busy on our other nine and we had to pair people up just to accommodate volume," Martin says. "We did not make people do that on the par-3 course. It just gave us a nice outlet for maybe the couple, where the husband is trying to teach the wife how to play or the dad is trying to teach the kid how to play, that type of thing. It made them feel more comfortable, having that ability not to be paired up with more advanced



golfers and people they didn't feel comfortable with."

Heart of America dates to sometime in the late 1930s or early 1940s, almost certainly prior to America's entry into World War II. Martin says it was a course designed "For the common man," those of modest economic means. It was also a place where Black golfers were welcome.

The Rock Nine was created when the entire

venue was redesigned in the early 1990s. It was designed by Richard Allen, a landscape architect by profession who worked in the Parks and Recreation Department. The nine par-3 holes range in length from 64 to 157 yards. Two holes offer front and back tees. An 18-hole trip maxes out at 1,102 yards.

Despite its length, the Rock Nine presents a test, even to experienced golfers. "It's a nice course," Martin says. "It's not an impossible course, but it gives you a challenge. It's great for people to work on their short games and their iron play."

Martin sees the Rock Nine as an ideal venue for newcomers to be introduced to the game, particularly ju-

niors. "It's just in ideal place to take them from not only learning how to swing the golf club but how to actually play the game," he says."

To that end, the Rock Nine is the venue for a First Tee program, as well as a junior program for youngsters in the Kansas City metro area and a series of golf camps. High school teams utilize the Rock Nine for practice sessions. At one time, it was the setting for an outing held in conjunction with the Korn Ferry Tour's annual visit to Kansas City, giving the tour players a chance to relax in an informal setting.

Superintendent Sam Marlin is responsible for the team maintaining both nines at Heart of America. Marlin played junior college golf and also worked at a golf course and as a superintendent before arriving at Heart of America in March 2017. He started as an assistant superintendent. Then, out of necessity, he was a mechanic before being named the head superintendent in September 2019. He accomplishes a lot with a small staff.

"I have a full-time assistant," he says. "(During the winter) it's just him and I. During our busy months, we usually have three or four full-time guys and four or five part-time guys that are older, retired guys that can come out and mow greens in the morning."

The Rock Nine is open year-round unless snow or frost becomes problematic. It features Meyer zoysia-grass fairways and tees with bent-grass greens. It was built to withstand Kansas City's brutally hot summers.

The course features a collection of ponds that come into play on four holes but no bunkers. Every bunker

was taken out in 2018 when it became clear that they needed to either be extensively renovated or removed altogether. When it comes to maintenance practices, Marlin and his team work to adhere to the same standards on the Rock Nine that they implement on the River Nine.

"Obviously, the majority of our focus goes to the River," he says, "but that doesn't mean that we just leave the Rock alone and completely forget about it. If we're spraying greens, for instance, we'll spray both sides the same way on the same chemical program and fertilization program. As far as general maintenance, we'll mow greens the same way. We actually alternate the two courses between mowing and rolling. We'll mow the River and roll the Rock on Monday and then flip-flop the next day and basically go back and forth like that.

"As far as mowing fairways and rough and tees and all that, I basically tell guys to start on the River Course just to get that done. It's a little easier getting that done before we get a bunch of play. Then, they'll come to the Rock. If they don't finish it that day, they can finish it the next morning. We try get the River taken care of first, but we still try and get the same stuff done on the Rock Course."

The Rock Nine at Heart of America was not intended to host a tour event or a USGA national championship. Short courses such as the Rock Nine, though, play a big role in sustaining the game. They offer settings where new golfers can be nurtured and encouraged. Viewed in that light, they are as important to the future of golf as any championship venue. **GCI**

◀ The Rock Nine at Kansas City's Heart of America Golf Course, which measures 1,102 yards, logged more than 27,000 rounds last year.

Type I fairy ring

UNIVERSAL ANSWERS

FAIRY RING CAN EMERGE ON WARM- AND COOL-SEASON TURF. FORTUNATELY, THERE ARE WELL-ROUNDED TACTICS TO FINDING SOLUTIONS FOR CONTROL.

Few turfgrass diseases disregard regional boundaries like fairy ring. Bermudagrass or bentgrass. Paspalum or *Poa annua*. Zoysiagrass or ryegrass. Consider this one case where the warm- and cool-season divide doesn't exist.

"We see them in all grasses," says Clemson University turfgrass pathology professor emeritus Dr. Bruce Martin. "Grasses are really less important than soil conditions and environment. We see them everywhere."

Finally, a disease story for everybody who manages golf turf! Seriously, though, fairy ring presents universal challenges for su-

perintendents and their teams.

Martin annually co-presented a national seminar with fellow turfgrass research legend Dr. Bruce Clarke of Rutgers University. The pair always surveyed attendees about their top five disease challenges. Fairy ring always made the list. And fairy ring frustrations aren't limited to one golf-abundant nation.

"They can occur everywhere, and they are a big problem worldwide," Martin says. "They would probably be in that top five anywhere you go around the world."

Now that we have established a far-reaching audience, let's delve into specifics.

WHAT CONDITIONS MAKE TURF SUSCEPTIBLE TO FAIRY RING?

When Martin has reviewed fairy ring literature published in the last 50 years, he frequently encounters two words: POOR SOILS. In the case of fairy ring, those poor soils can be confused with what many believe are optimal conditions for greens drainage and playability.

"Sandy soils are inherently low-fertility and they are more susceptible to drought stress," Martin says. "And part of the problem with fairy rings is the drought stress they induce in greens, in particular."

Martin adds that low-fertility,

sandy soils also make fairways and sports turf susceptible to fairy ring.

So, does this penchant for dry conditions associated with sand mean clay soils are fairy ring-free zones? Sorry, cultivators of turf atop clay. Your course might not be exempt from fairy ring.

"Generally, low-water holding capacity or proneness to drought stress would be a couple of common denominators," Martin says. "But we see them at times in heavy soils — heavy meaning soils that have clay and loam and all of that. It's not that they don't occur in those soils, but they are more frequent in those sandy soils and relatively more important and harder to manage in them."

WHEN CAN IT OCCUR?

Think short-sleeve weather.

"We usually see fairy ring pop up in spring and early summer, once soil temperatures are consistently above 55 degrees," says BASF technical representative Dr. Emma Lookabaugh. "Further south into places like Florida, we can see it pop up almost year-round."

WHAT SHOULD A SUPERINTENDENT BE SCOUTING FOR?

For starters, Martin recommends starting a mapping program for greens. Similar to spring dead spot (*What the Fungal*, September 2020), fairy ring can reappear at the same places, even if it had been successfully controlled the previous year.

Don't have your greens disease mapped? Then start looking for discolored green rings, which can be noticed as soon as early March in the transition zone.

"You might see a little bit of greening and you can see the



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green rings even in semi-dormant turf,” Martin says. “And you can see them in growing bentgrass also. That’s going to be a sure thing the fungus is there, especially if those green areas are growing in arcs or rings.”

WHAT CAN BE DONE BEFORE FUNGICIDES ARE USED?

Basics such as regular aerification and topdressing are part of any solid disease management program. Regular wetting agent usage is also critical to fairy ring control.

“One, they help drive your fungicides a little deeper,” Lookabaugh says. “But then they also help re-wet hydrophobic soil conditions or localized dry spots associated with fairy ring fungi.”

WHAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN ESTABLISHING A SPRAY PROGRAM?

Environmental conditions and site-specific disease history are benchmarks for establishing effective spray programs. With fairy ring, the line between preventive and curative control can be blurry.

“A lot of people tend to be more reactive when they have fairy ring and start treating when they see green rings and discolored turf,” Lookabaugh says. “If you wait to apply fungicides until after you see symptoms, it can take time and multiple fungicide applications to bring fairy ring back into check. This is especially true in situations with necrotic rings and dead turf, because at that point, you are in a recovery phase and are trying to stimulate turf to regrow.”

Staying ahead of fairy ring means closely monitoring soil temperatures. Spoiler: Get ready to see a familiar number.

Type II fairy ring



“We usually trigger preventive applications when soil temperatures are consistently above 55 degrees. For some areas, like south Florida, timing preventive applications can be tricky because temperatures rarely get low enough,” Lookabaugh says. “Make repeat applications on a 28-day interval as long as conditions favor disease development. In some cases, two to three well-timed fungicide applications can provide season long control but in other cases, additional applications are needed. In south Florida, you need to build in fairy ring prevention almost year-round.”

WHAT ABOUT FUNGICIDE SELECTION?

DMI fungicides have proven success against fairy ring, but historically turf safety concerns have limited their utility for summer fairy ring applications. Maxtima® fungicide and Navicon® Intrinsic® brand fungicide provide two new, summer-safe DMI entries into fairy ring fungicide rotation programs, Lookabaugh says.

“Maxtima fungicide and Navicon Intrinsic brand fungicide bring advanced turf safety to the table,” she adds. “Superintendents can feel confi-

dent using these products in the heat of summer, 95 degrees and up even with PGRs in the tank, and not worry about injuring or thinning turf.”

Insignia® SC Intrinsic® brand fungicide, Honor® Intrinsic® brand fungicide, Xzemplar® fungicide, and Lexicon® Intrinsic® brand fungicide are other BASF fungicides that provide effective control of fairy ring when used properly, Martin says.

“We demonstrated years ago those were great fairy ring products when they are tank mixed with a soil wetting agent,” he adds. “That combination of the cultural practices and the characteristics with the fungicides has led to some pretty nice programs. The other thing to remember: the fungicides don’t control just fairy ring, even though we are watering those in thoroughly for fairy ring. We’re also going to get activity for other diseases like take-all root rot and even dollar spot, because some of those are translocated back through the turf to control foliar disease.”

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FAIRY RING ISN’T PROPERLY CONTROLLED?

Falling behind on fairy ring control leads to a lengthy recovery

process.

“You’ll be looking at it for a long time,” Martin says. “Once they bust out on the greens, it’s a long road to get them under control. It usually takes a couple of months. Folks would put down an application of an effective fungicide and then call back after a week or two weeks and say, ‘Hey, nothing has changed.’ I’d say, ‘You’re not going to see anything change for a couple more weeks. Be patient.’ That’s why the preventive programs have been so popular, because they have by and large done a good job of putting fairy ring at least in a manageable light.” ■

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SAY WHAT NOW?

Even without the normal schedule of industry conferences and events, longtime superintendents **Mark Hoban** and **Dan Dinelli** are still finding ways to advance the industry through curiosity and research.

By **Lee Carr**

It's possible that pre-Colombian Amazonians worked with biochar (a.k.a. terra preta), a carbon-rich substance you might have heard about being capable of fostering healthier turf. Say what now? Dan Dinelli and Mark Hoban are not anthropologists. They are longtime superintendents who maintain excellent playability and share an enthusiasm for soil health and field trials that continue to advance the turf industry. Let's dig deep on some of their current passions: research, phytobiomes, biochar and nanotechnology. And let's learn why their current work can help others.

RESEARCH AND SHORTCUTS

"I love growing turf," says Hoban, who began working in the industry during high school. Hired in part to expand the natural aspects of Rivermont Golf

Club in Johns Creek, Georgia, Hoban has taken his environmental programs to a new level with the support of club owner Chris Cupit. Hoban has converted 31 acres from managed turf to native grasses; re-

duced 2.5 pounds of nitrogen applications down to less than half a pound annually; reduced fungicide applications; initiated the use of compost tea; and is exploring nanotechnology. "It's not just the turf," he



Mark Hoban



Dan Dinelli

says. “It’s this whole entity, this land that I’m in charge of. I can’t wait to find new ways to enhance what we’re doing.”

That enthusiasm connects Hoban and Dinelli, the superintendent at North Shore Country Club in Glenview, Illinois. Dinelli is equally eager to advance the turf industry through sustainable biological methods. “My parents always told me, ‘Dan, you ask too many questions,’” says Dinelli, a third-generation superintendent who replaced his father, Joe, at North Shore in 1995. “I’m good friends with researchers who exchange answers and questions with me. I offer them space at the course to set up trials and everyone wins. The researchers get realistic data, the club benefits

spurred each other on,” Hoban says. “I miss the conference education because it’s nice to expand who is in this small world. This last year kept me focused on research and I put in more time running studies.”

With the work in progress, it’s necessary to distinguish some differences. There are three basic types of research: outsourced, informal and formal.

- **Outsourced research** is letting scientists come in and use the property. For instance, Loyola University Chicago is conducting studies at North Shore on water quality, pollinators, bats and more to learn about green spaces.
- **Informal research** is what many superintendents are already doing: testing products and rates, evalu-

ating machinery, observing how things happen and determining what is useful.

- **Formal research** with turf requires replicated plots and testing with controls and variables. A specific question is being asked, there is an idea about what might happen and the answer is in the data. Results must be repeatable to be conclusive. That’s tricky with real-world turf because the number of variables is massive.

No two courses are identical, above ground or below, but below there are *really important* microbiomes that are better understood all the time. All golf courses basically function the same way just as all humans basically function the same way but we’re learning that the small differences can have a huge impact. Medical biological studies are more advanced than biological studies in turf, but they offer some good comparisons.

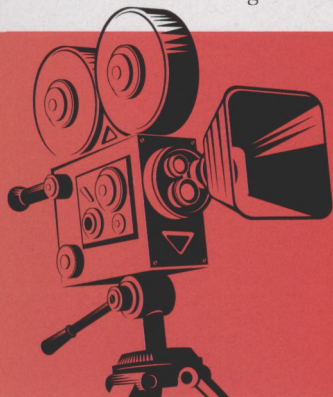
Before we jump ahead, you might be here for the shortcuts. There are none. Don’t be disappointed. Better than a shortcut is the opportunity to discover and optimize sustainable turf care methods that work as more than short-term solutions. Just like an antibiotic might treat an ear infection, a fungicide application might treat dollar spot, but what caused the infection and the dollar spot in the first place? Is there a way to boost the soil so that the dollar spot won’t occur again?

“There is so much that is not mainstream and trying to figure out how to create suppressive soils to pathogens vs conducive soils is the future of our industry and research efforts,” Hoban says.

Dinelli adds, “It’s not like we’re trying to convert superintendents into researchers, but every site is different and the further you drift from conventional inputs, the more important it is to explore alternatives on your site to see how they fit in with your environment and plant care program.” There are no one-size-fits-all solutions

Film it!

Short video tutorials designed for your guests, members and even staff can help explain elements of research or turf care maintenance programs. With topics from verticutting to trial plots to a new pollinator garden, people appreciate being able watch and learn about something different. Videos don’t need to be long or exceptionally well-produced but accessible clips can promote understanding, be shown at meetings or presentations, used as a benchmark for course conditioning and can be rewatched by those who are too shy to ask questions.





for humans or golf courses, but there is large-scale potential.

PHYTOBIOMES, BIOCHAR AND NANOTECHNOLOGY

You've heard of probiotics and how important they are for digestion. Probiotics and colonizing the soil with these beneficial bacteria and fungi makes turf more resilient. Healthier turf is more pathogen resistant. The phytobiome consists of the plant and the ecological space around it, including macro- and microorganisms, sun, soil, air, water, other plants and animals, and within the phytobiome is the microbiome. Research is showing that plant health is more a product of the microbiome than previously believed. Imagine the plant as the engine (which can be influenced by probiotics such as mycorrhizae, *Bacillus* and *Azospirillum*) that drives much of the microbiome with its exudates.

"All these things function together," Dinelli says. "No silver bullets. For example, turf growing in too much shade will always be weak and thin. No microbe or probiotic will 'fix' that."

But there are ways to introduce more of the good stuff to the soil and that is translating to healthier turf and firmer land that is more resistant to compaction. This means less irrigation, fewer inputs, more

stress-tolerant turf and more days with cart-friendly conditions.

There is always more that can be done. The short game practice area at North Shore is a site for evaluating 21 different bentgrass cultivars for putting green use and 20 rootzone cells testing various amendments. Dinelli topdresses fairways in the fall with homemade biologically-rich compost made from organic material full of nutrients the ground absorbs all winter. He treats seeds by bathing them in different bacteria and fungi to give seedlings better resistance and he also uses the irrigation system to distribute compost extracts/tea to give the course a boost. Also pre-treated with the "good guys" is the biochar that Dinelli is exploring as a soil amendment.

Biochar is created by heating organic matter in a very specific way, basically heating without oxygen (pyrolysis). The solid, carbon-rich result (biochar) is then added to the soil through topdressing and/or during construction. Biochar has the structure to retain water and water-soluble nutrients and the cavities also host healthy bacteria. The goal is to encourage healthy biologic properties in the soil to encourage plant growth and pathogen resistance. Biochar has an even greater impact on soil function if it's low in organic matter.

"Biochar has some chemical components and the ability to hold nutrients with the water and air," Dinelli says. "It also has protective niches for biology, bacteria and fungi so it can act as a great delivery tool when transplanting microbes."

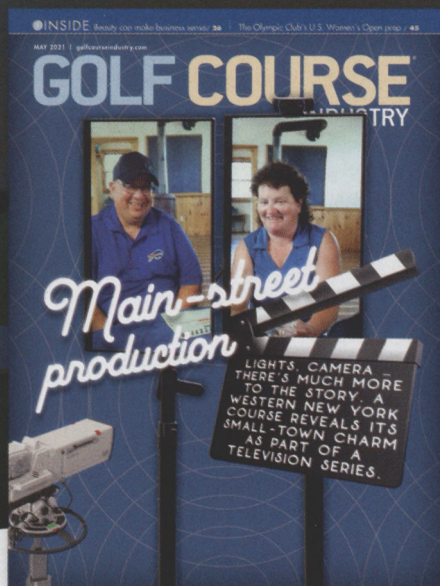
Additionally, biochar biodegrades more slowly than most organic matter, so it can be beneficial to the soil for a longer period of time. A soil amendment that helps retain air in the soil is one good way to increase the oxygen, but there is another way.

"The most limiting factor on turfgrass management is enough oxygen in our soils, due to poor water sources, traffic compaction, and poor soil structure," Hoban says. "Additional oxygen in the soil should create stronger roots, turfgrass vigor and benefit microbial and soil health."

Infusing water with oxygen nanobubbles is another potential tactic to boost oxygen in soil. Using nanotechnology to create nanobubbles in water is trending among fisheries that are seeing fish grow larger in the oxygenated water, drinking water is being infused with oxygen, nanobubble hydrotherapy is available for skin disease management and it's also available for irrigating golf courses. These nanobubbles are so tiny they can't be seen with the naked eye.

▲ A supportive ownership allows Mark Hoban to use parts of Rivermont Golf Club to research emerging turf maintenance practices.

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PEOPLE

Making oxygenated water

A Moleaer XTB machine puts air — or whatever you want (nitrogen, helium, etc.) — into the nanobubbles. Rivermont Golf Club superintendent Mark Hoban is using compressed oxygen, which produces nanobubbles that are about 93 percent oxygen as opposed to about 21 percent oxygen if you use air. Rivermont has a 50-gallon-a-minute unit and a 250-gallon tote, and Hoban cycles the water through multiple times until he can measure roughly 40 parts dissolved oxygen (drinking water is about eight parts).

Creating this amount of water takes 30 to 40 minutes and it's what Hoban is using in his course trials. The real benefit is that the nano oxygen bubbles stay in solution (Brownian movement) vs. rising to the surface and dissipating. In early in vitro trials, Dr. Bochra Amina Bahri of the University of Georgia has found up to an 18 percent reduction in dollar spot, but the results need to be confirmed in greenhouse/field trials, and more repetitions and other pathogens will be looked at to confirm one of the predicted benefits of this technology.

The future is trying to infuse oxygen into the water in one pass, straight from the pump, so the infused water is going directly onto the course even if the water has a lower volume of oxygen than what multiple passes create.

Think about a carbonated beverage. You see the bubbles drift to the top and effervesce but with nanobubbles, that doesn't happen. "Nanobubbles are 800 to 1,000 times smaller than a microbubble," Hoban says. "They are negatively charged and so tightly bound that they stay in solution. This has the value of keeping a much higher dissolved oxygen in the water for plant and microbial usage."

Oxygenated water is absorbed more quickly than normal water and that means reduced evapotranspiration. Big benefit, but the numbers are necessary. "Working with the researchers has forced me to do more data-driven work on their level because testimonials aren't good enough for our profession," Hoban says, "and they shouldn't be."

David Warwick, of Avondale Golf Club in Pymble, Australia, has been pioneering the use of nanowater on the course he maintains for years. "I visited him one summer and saw how well his bentgrass greens were doing," Hoban says. "I saw his research on a reduced need for

wetting agents, reduced fungicide usage and his increased root system."

Dr. Mike Richardson and the team at the University of Arkansas are working with the Australian nano unit on bentgrass trials. The Georgia GCSA has supplemented his research and afforded an additional trial grant to the University of Georgia research team under Dr. Mussie Habteselassie for Bermudagrass research in the field and inside a greenhouse, and looking at controlling cyanobacteria in ponds using nano oxygen. Hoban's work is part of that, running nanobubble water trials on an ultradwarf Bermudagrass green. The more superintendents who are willing to work with researchers, or who are open to sharing their courses for trials, the more can be accomplished.

"All this brings us to another level," Dinelli says. "We're never going to be done with this, and in many ways, we're just getting started. It boils down to the details but if you understand the principals that nature and biology follow, then you can apply them to turf." **GCI**

Gold-medal moment

The U.S. Women's Open tees off a momentous 12-year run for Troy Flanagan and The Olympic Club team.

By **Matt LaWell**

Who will win the 2021 U.S. Women's Open?

Perhaps defending champion A Lim Kim, who outlasted the field in December, will return to the top of the leaderboard and become the

eighth woman to win the tournament in consecutive years. Or perhaps Inbee Park, a two-time Open champion, will join legends like Babe Zaharias and Annika Sörenstam with a third victory. Or perhaps, with a prayer or 12 and plenty of luck, one of the 1,595 hopeful entrants, unknown for now, will become a little more familiar the first Sunday in June.

No matter who hoists the Harton S. Semple Trophy, every course manager and crew member and volunteer will remember the championship week at the Olympic Club. Just ask Troy Flanagan, the club's director of golf maintenance and a long-ago hand at a pair of major tournaments.

"I worked the '92 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach and then the '94 LPGA Championship at DuPont Country Club in Wilmington, Delaware,"



Flanagan says. “I still remember them so vividly. They’re just really ingrained in my head.

“And I’m 52 now.”

Tournament prep is in full swing and has been for months, with the event set to begin June 3. Rough is growing tall, extra ryegrass was seeded last fall, aeration and topdressing are forging ahead as scheduled. Flanagan has leaned on his team of young managers during the process, especially Lake Course superintendent Thom Irvin and Ocean Course superintendent Andrew Crawford, to oversee the team responsible for maintaining the 45-hole property between Lake Merced and the Pacific Ocean.

“What’s great about Thom and Andrew is they push their guys,” Flanagan says. “They push the other team members to be essentially superintendents on the course each day. Those guys have them running the crew, making decisions during aeration, and decisions on application rates. They’ve done a phenomenal job of getting these guys ready. It’s fun to watch Thom and Andrew really take over and push these guys to a different level they’ve

never seen.”

The Open will be an Olympic coda for Irvin: he will be the new superintendent at Claremont Country Club, about 20 miles east in Oakland, after the tournament.

“We have a good program that is helping to place people if they see that they want to move on and move up and they’re ready,” Flanagan says. “The opportunity’s pretty strong if you work here.”

Until then, Irvin and Crawford will continue to work with Lake Course assistant superintendents Kyle Moore and Zachary Erixon, and Ocean Course assistant superintendents Jared Kief and Kyle Wilker, preparing the Lake Course for four days of championship play. Equipment manager Phillip Gill, a former assistant superintendent under Flanagan, will manage a trio of union mechanics to keep an enormous fleet of John Deere machinery in peak working order.

“It’s as much a managerial position as it is getting in there and getting dirty — which Phil does — but I really need somebody to manage the operation, it’s so

big,” Flanagan says. “I need to make sure that the mechanics are getting their thing done as much as I need somebody that can come in and turn a wrench. He has been phenomenal — and the quality of cut has been awesome.”

The rest of the 48-person crew will be supported by 55 to 60 volunteers, at least half of whom will be women turf pros. Flanagan started to develop the program not long after the Olympic Club landed the Open in early 2016 but its roots trace back to 1995, when four women were among his fellow Penn State turfgrass program graduates, or even 1988, when he worked with a trio of women on the crew at Town & Country Club in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

The experience in this 2021 group ranges from at least one retired superintendent who worked decades for her club and was pulled back in for a memorable week to a promising teenager who will be less than a week



▲ Flanagan

removed from her high school graduation and just starting her on-course career.

“A lot of people have come in to really help out,” Flanagan says. “The excitement that they’ve shown, the appreciation

that we’re all doing this to help get them together to network, to learn.”

Flanagan plans to supplement the already-packed week with a series of educational and networking events featuring former LPGA Tour player and Golf Channel reporter Kay Cockerill, 2012 Curtis Cup captain Dr. Pat Cornett, and Olympic Club green chair Marissa Mar, all of whom are Olympic Club members.

“There’s no way this is not going to be an amazing experience for everybody,” Flanagan says.

The experience will also be amazing because the Lake Course will be at its absolute agronomic apex.

A CHAMPIONSHIP HISTORY

The Olympic Club has played host to a variety of significant events during its long history — with one scheduled at least every six years from 1981 through 2035.

1955: U.S. Open
1958: U.S. Amateur
1966: U.S. Open
1981: U.S. Amateur
1987: U.S. Open
1993: Tour Championship

1994: Tour Championship
1998: U.S. Open
2004: U.S. Junior Amateur
2007: U.S. Amateur
2012: U.S. Open
2015: U.S. Amateur Four-Ball

2021: U.S. Women’s Open
2025: U.S. Amateur
2028: PGA Championship
2033: Ryder Cup





The Olympic Club course management team includes, from left to right, equipment manager Phillip Gill, Lake second assistant Zachary Erixon, Ocean second assistant Kyle Wilker, Lake superintendent Thom Irvin, Ocean first assistant Jared Kief, Lake first assistant Kyle Moore, director of golf maintenance Troy Flanagan and Ocean superintendent Andrew Crawford.

“We really didn’t change any of the aeration or sand topdressing processes because they’re pretty intense already,” Flanagan says. “We did do a fair amount of extra seeding of ryegrass in various rough areas, especially around the greens, and then any areas just outside of the fairways that we felt we wanted to supplement. The rough is a really important part of the U.S. Open. You get in the rough, you pay a penalty.”

Flanagan has worked with Shannon Rouillard, the USGA’s senior director for the U.S. Women’s Open and the U.S. Senior Women’s Open, “and she’s the one deciding how the course plays and where the tees are, where the cup locations are. She’s preached the premium is putting the ball on the fairway, and if you’re going to miss a fairway, you’re going to pay a penalty. It won’t be as penal as a men’s Open, but in relative terms for a women’s championship, it will be very thick and very penal.”

Flanagan and Rouillard were still determining the final height

of cuts into late April, but Flanagan says there will be no intermediate cut from the fairway. “If your ball goes a foot into the rough, you’re going to be into somewhere around two-and-a-half to three inches of rough, right off the bat. And with the way our fairways are pitched, you might hit a ball in the middle of a fairway, that ball has a really good chance of rolling down into the rough on certain holes. It’s going to be a good test.”

Almost all of the maintenance will rely on a fleet of John Deere equipment. Flanagan recently signed a second equipment lease with the company and “99 percent” of everything on site is green and yellow.

“My favorites are the fairway mowers, the new 2750, which is their triplex, and probably my biggest excitement is the new GPS sprayers,” Flanagan says. “We have four GPS sprayers and they communicate with each other, so, for example, if one sprayer is on the No. 4 fairway and runs out of product, the other sprayer has finished on No. 3 can come

over to 4 and finish their spray. Within 30 seconds, all the information of each sprayer is shared seamlessly. It’s pretty amazing.”

According to his records, the GPS sprayers have already resulted in an 18-percent drop in product usage and frequently allow a three-sprayer team to handle all 18 tees, fairways and approaches in about three hours, down from about four and a half hours. “That allows these individuals to get back on the golf course faster to do other projects,” Flanagan says.

“We saved quite a bit of money on product, but the detail around the course is so amazing. If I’m spraying fairways, I’m only spraying fairways and if I’m spraying rough, I’m only spraying rough. So that fairway line is just perfect.”

The biggest challenge for anybody on the grounds might be the task of healing the Ocean Course, which will be a parking lot for the week because of COVID-19 restrictions. “We can’t shuttle anybody in, so we have to park everybody on site,”

Flanagan says. “That’s everybody from golfers to spectators, to volunteers, to USGA staff, to my volunteer staff.” Flanagan says other turf pros forced to turn courses over to cars have assured him the recovery won’t be nearly as onerous he thinks.

Flanagan might face similar challenges over the next decade and change: The Olympic Club is scheduled to play host to the 2025 U.S. Amateur, the 2028 PGA Championship and the 2033 Ryder Cup. Factor in a fast-approaching Gil Hanse master plan that “has the potential to be pretty amazing,” Flanagan says, and this U.S. Women’s Open might be just the start of the most momentous 12-year run at the storied club.

“These women are very good,” Flanagan says. “We’ve had a few out here practicing already and you know how that ball pops off their driver? It’s amazing. It’s amazing how many really good players there are and they hardly ever miss a fairway. It’s just crazy to watch. It’s really fun. We can’t wait to see it.” ■

TRAVELS WITH TERRY

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

WHITE BOARD CONFERENCE ROOM WALLS

Curtis Tyrrell, CGCS, MG, director of agronomy at the Desert Highlands Golf Club in Scottsdale, Arizona, has his management team meetings (superintendent, assistant, irrigation technician and equipment manager) in his conference room 15 minutes before the crew starts to discuss the game plan for the day. This room is also used as a think tank for various projects, plans and reviews. It is helpful to write their thoughts on the walls when developing ideas, checking math or simply conveying messages and reminders, as well as for small group training sessions. Green committee meetings are also held there once or twice per year. Rustoleum White Board Paint, which is writeable and erasable, was applied to all four walls in the 10-foot by 15-foot room (9-foot ceilings) that was added during a 2020 maintenance building renovation. A PowerPoint electronic job board was also added. Paint rollers/foam brushes applied two coats, totaling eight labor hours and it took about three days to cure, with 1½ boxes of paint required at \$300 per box. In Tyrrell's previous experience, it was never reapplied over an eight-year period. Dry erase cleaner is used as required.



LARGE PUMP FUEL TANK

This Multiquip 4-inch Trash Pump is used to pump supplemental irrigation water from a holding pond transfer line to the irrigation storage lake during a 12-hour period each night during July and August. A recycled 8-gallon Jacobsen Greens King fuel tank was mounted using a strap to hold it in place. The pump's small 8-quart fuel tank was disconnected and the fuel line was hooked up to the larger tank. It is refueled one additional time each night and approximately 125,000 gallons per night is pumped. It took about one hour to install at no cost for parts and materials. Stephen Killingsworth, superintendent at the Tempest Golf Club in Gladewater, Texas, and his staff like to tinker with maintenance equipment.



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

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PODMANIA!

My first introduction to a pod of any known kind was in 1977 when R2-D2 and C-3PO avoided capture from Darth Vader's Stormtroopers by jettisoning aboard an escape pod. Over 30 years later, Captain Paul Azinger utilized a pod system for his American players based on U.S. Navy Seal training to break the European stranglehold and win back the Ryder Cup at Valhalla.

The first iPod was invented by Apple and released in October of 2001. Seems the format of podcasting as it is known today caught hold in late 2004 and there are now more than 115,000 English-language podcasts available. A survey by Edison Research and Triton Digital indicated 55 percent of Americans listened to a podcast in 2020, up from 51 percent in 2019.

A little over two years ago, I had never listened to a podcast ... then Pullin' Weeds came along. Pullin' Weeds is the official podcast of the Carolinas GCSA and it is hosted by executive director Tim Kreger and Allen Knight of 421 Media.

The podcast was the idea of Rob Daniel III, who was president in 2018. He envisioned a way to highlight and interview folks from across the chapter that could be archived and consumed on your own timetable. Considering he passed the gavel to me in November of that year, I became the first guest in January 2019. As a result, I had to be instructed how to reinstall the purple Podcasts App on my iPhone just to give it a listen.

Less than 30 months later, I have 23 podcasts in my library. Rob, look what you have done! And those are just golf- or turf-related. I cannot imagine what a normal person is like with interests outside their work environment (nerd alert).

The world of golf, turf and golf course architecture alone offers so many choices one cannot possibly consume them all. And

how does one find the time to listen? Well, Rob was on to something. The daily ride to and from work is an easy way to catch up. And morning set-up is never lonely with a good podcast in my pocket.

Also, the ability to speed up the playback time is a real key to streamlining lengthy episodes. I find the 1.5 speed to be best suited for my ears, but I have heard of folks that can go above that. That is right, you can speed up the podcast so if you need help, just ask your 12-year-old.

The GCSAA has a podcast, so too does BIGGA. If you are into golf course architecture, there is The Fried Egg podcast with Andy Johnson and Garret Morrison, and the Feed the Ball podcast with *Golf Digest's* Derek Duncan.

The history nerd in me has loved the TalkinGolf History podcast hosted by Conner Lewis. It is a member of the TalkinGolf network of podcasts, which is where I learned about guys like Rod Morri and Adrian Logue from Australia, and their Good-Good Golf Podcast.

Rod also hosts a podcast for *Golf Australia* magazine called The Thing About Golf. The premise is in the name: what is the thing about golf for each guest? And those guests include everyone from touring professionals, architects, golf course owners, and more.

There was one episode that featured Richard Forsyth, course manager of Royal Melbourne, that I found fascinating. European golf writer John Huggan has recently shared

hosting duties and he has a couple of great episodes with guests Nick Price and Dame Laura Davies.

One of my favorite episodes was Rod's recent conversation with Tasmania's Mathew Goggin. Mat and his family have a home in Charlotte, and he frequently plays and practices at Carolina Golf Club. Mat is the most cerebral professional athlete I have ever come across and I always look forward to our chats.

Two folks on the other side of Ohio from the *Golf Course Industry* HQ, Kent Turner and Dan Francis, have started a podcast called Zoned Out Turf. They are only three episodes in, and I had a great time talking turf and life with them recently.

And recently the USGA Green Section launched a podcast, and their first guest was Jared Nemitz, director of golf course and grounds at The Ford Field & River Club in Richmond Hill, Georgia. The topic was the benefits of data collection in golf course maintenance.

So, there you have it, a little podcast info for anyone looking to find something new to tune in to. For starters, tune in to Superintendent Radio Network hosted by Matt LaWell so you can hear the best voice in podcast land. Kent Turner is a close second.

Now if you will excuse me, a new episode of The Plus Four podcast just dropped. The show highlights the personalities, passion and pursuit of hickory golf. I know — nerd alert! **GCI**

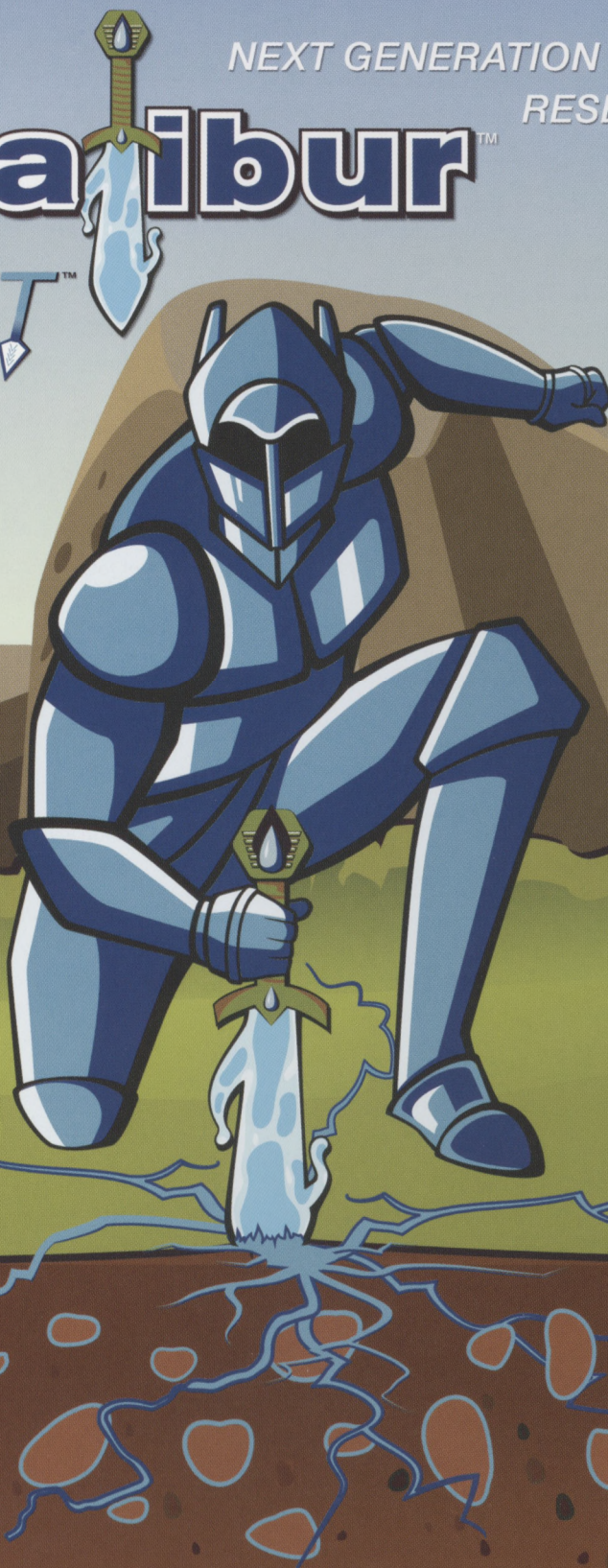


MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG, is the superintendent at Carolina Golf Club in Charlotte, North Carolina and past president of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on Twitter @CGCGreenkeeper.

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Start protecting your turf against the Frightful Five and visit es.bayer.us/Densicor

*Densicor recently received federal registration and will be available for purchase this summer.

**Dollar spot, brown patch, anthracnose, gray leaf spot and snow mold were the five most common diseases according to a national survey among golf course superintendents.

ALWAYS READ AND FOLLOW LABEL INSTRUCTIONS

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