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GEN Z

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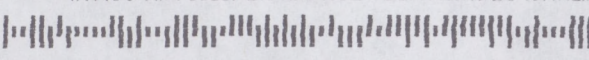


EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO UNDERSTAND AND PROPERLY DEVELOP MEMBERS OF GENERATION Z AS PART OF YOUR WORKFORCE.

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Z AS PART OF YOUR
WORKFORCE.

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FREE, EASY, VERSATILE EDUCATION

I'm listening to a podcast while editing a newsletter featuring four podcasts, including three hosted by our voice-of-God managing editor **Matt LaWell**. After writing this column about podcasts, I plan on incorporating a few best practices extracted from a podcast into our content strategies. Later today, I will take a break from writing and trudge through the snow-covered neighborhood surrounding our headquarters. The sounds of a podcast entering my ears will supplant the shivers through my body. And at some point, I will leave the office and drive home. The commute is 19 minutes, about half the time of the average podcast.

Did I mention I'm a podcast junkie? Golf, turf, media, marketing, business, management, college football. It doesn't matter. If I can learn while driving, walking, running, hiking, biking, lifting, stretching, reading, writing, mowing turf, shoveling snow, sitting in a plane, eating or cooking, I'm going for it.

I'm not even the biggest podcast junkie on our team. Matt listens to dozens of podcasts on varied topics. I often spot him inside his midsize SUV listening to the final minutes of a podcast consumed on his commute. Matt and his wife are raising a wonderful child. Podcasts help him squeeze following professional wrestling, Premier League soccer, golf, turf and media into a busy life. His 5-year-old daughter even listens to a podcast while getting ready in the morning!

Matt has built our Superintendent Radio Network into one of the best podcast networks in B2B publishing. We uploaded a record 75 episodes in 2022 and more than 13,600 of you listened. Hopefully you enjoyed what you heard and tell an industry friend or two about what we offer.

Podcasts are the fastest growing form of media. The number of monthly podcast listeners in America topped 120 million in 2021, according to Statista. Monthly listeners are projected to exceed 160 million by 2023. In 2013, that total was 23 million.

I feel bad for adults who aren't listening to podcasts. They are missing opportunities to become better spouses, parents, managers and employees without sacrificing anything in their lives. The podcasts produced by Matt and others have made me better at this job. Most podcasts, including every Superintendent Radio Network episode, are free. Who doesn't want debt-free education?

Our educational offerings are expanding in 2022, as we use SRN to increase awareness around two underrepresented groups in the industry: women and equipment managers.

Rick Woelfel, a Philadelphia-based *Golf Course Industry* contributor who has spent decades covering women's golf, debuted the "Wonderful Women of Golf" podcast series last year on our platforms. The series moved to a monthly format in 2022. The conversations provide a forum for women who make golf a better game to tell their stories in their own words and voices. Podcasts are powerful ways to introduce a male-dominated audience to women who find working on golf courses rewarding. Rick's guests share inspiring stories that provide insight into what a group the industry struggles to reach seeks in a career or job.

We're also adding a monthly "Reel Turf Techs" episode to Superintendent Radio Network. Hosted and produced by Ansley (Georgia) Golf Club equipment manager **Trent Manning**, the series debuted last spring and has become a hit among Trent's colleagues. Trent mixes human stories with technical chatter in each episode. Equipment technicians are key cogs in golf operations and, sadly, they are increasingly more difficult to find and retain. Sharing their stories with larger audiences will lead to a better understanding of the relationship between properly maintained equipment and fabulous golf course conditions.

"Wonderful Women of Golf" and "Reel Turf Techs" complement our existing monthly series: "Beyond the Page," "Greens with Envy," "Off the Course" and "Tartan Talks." Plus, our terrific partners are investing in topic-specific series and episodes. We'll likely exceed 80 episodes in 2022.

OK, it's time to take that walk. I just downloaded Matt's "Off the Course" episode with Reno Aces head groundskeeper **Leah Withrow**. GCI



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AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM TO CALL THEIR OWN

Guy Cipriano spends two days in suburban Philadelphia to observe how the country's fastest-growing private golf operation is taking employee development and growth to another level.

Scott Bordner received direct messages before the event even ended: His colleagues, peers, friends and former co-workers were already seeking to participate in the second edition of a career development and training program his massive club debuted earlier this month.

Bordner is the director of agronomy for The Union League of Philadelphia, a 160-year-old club that included zero golf courses less than a decade ago. A three-course operation today, the Union League is the country's fastest-growing private golf operation.

Supporting the rapid growth — the club purchased its third golf course last March and will unveil all 27 holes

at much-ballyhooed Union League National Golf Club in southern New Jersey this summer — requires talented and committed employees. Finding and retaining those employees in 2022 requires investing in people. Investing in people requires providing continuing education and career advancement opportunities.

Enter Union League University.

The two-day event brought more than 70 industry professionals to Union League Liberty Hill, a suburban Philadelphia lodge and conference center with an 18-hole golf course. Nearly half of the attendees were employees on the three turf teams Bordner oversees. Bordner handpicked outside

attendees, purposely trying to avoid overcrowding the room with industry professionals from similar clubs or backgrounds. Bordner urged attendees to sit next to different people during meals and educational sessions. Union League University represented a rare event where a horticulturist, assistant superintendent, equipment technician, vendor and established superintendent exchanged stories at same table.

And to think, Bordner didn't start the process of organizing the event until mid-December. Hectic might be a mild way of describing the Union League's current golf pace, thus the accelerated planning process.

"I knew what I wanted," Bordner says. "I knew the speakers that I wanted, I knew the differences in personalities I wanted, and I wanted all levels of clubs represented. I handpicked Year 1 and I had to text some of my friends to tell them, 'Don't be offended. You're on the invite list, just not for this year.' I want different perspectives each year and I want different bloodlines here. I didn't want all the superintendents I worked with at Merion here hanging out together because they hadn't seen each other. Go do that somewhere else.

"This was my social experiment to see who I can invite and how I can make sure there are enough vocal and loud people combined with those 'silent assassins,' the real quiet people who when they ask a question, it's a really good question. How can you mix that with the people who are more outgoing and make it all work?"

And ...

It worked beautifully.

Because the event wasn't affiliated with an association or a presenting sponsor, discussions were candid, with attendees receiving inside info and guidance from respected internal and external voices, including Union League CEO **Jeff McFadden** and director of golf **Sean Palmer**, Club Thinking



Partners president **Dan Denehy**, Manufacturers' Golf & Country Club green chairman **Jeff Jones**, former superintendent-turned-sales professional **Jamie Kapes**, and industry consultants **Steve McDonald** and **Tyler Bloom**. McFadden's and Palmer's macro-level presentations about the Union League and its golf operation combined with breakout sessions led by the club's three course superintendents — **Pat Haughey**, **John Canavan** and **Andrew Dooley** — localized the program for club employees.

Union League National irrigation technician **Herb Phillips** led one of the most engaging presentations, using practical concepts, hands-on visuals and a zest for his craft to describe the transition from PVC to HDPE pipe and satellite to 2-wire. Phillips, a former superintendent who temporarily worked as a carnival game operator before returning to the industry in 2019, interjected dry wit into descriptions, inciting laughter from all generations in attendance. "I tell everybody with irrigation that you have to use your 95 senses which you were born with," he deadpanned at one point.

Union League University resembled a turf retreat. Every educational session, meal and networking event was held at The Lodge at Liberty. Bordner quickly found companies to sponsor meals and an evening networking event. "I looked across our financials and said, 'Who do we spend the most money with?'" he says. "I went to the top five and they all said yes right away."

Massive scale and tremendous facilities make it difficult for most clubs to emulate Union League University. But as education needs evolve and the emphasis on employee well-being expands, it might be time to consider bringing structured programming and different personalities to your facility for a day or two.

It doesn't take 95 senses to understand the need for employee growth.

Tartan Talks 67

Big play and financial numbers at golf facilities are producing abundant opportunities for course architects.

Tripp Davis of Tripp Davis & Associates, **Tom Marzolf** of Fazio Design and **Bill Bergin** of Bergin Golf Designs joined the Tartan Talks podcast to provide a human perspective to complement the encouraging findings in the fourth annual "Golf Market Facility Market Trend Watch" report commissioned by the ASGCA and executed by the Sports & Leisure Research Group. The survey indicated 89 percent of architects expect renovation revenue to increase or remain even over the next 24 months.

"It's a super exciting time for the golf industry right now," Marzolf says. "We're in a growth spurt right now that might be generational growth. If you think about when things started slowing down in 2006, I think we are now at a point with the game where there's real growth and it could be an opportunity for a growth spurt like we haven't seen in our lifetimes yet."

Visit the Superintendent Radio Network page on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and other popular podcast distributions platforms to learn more about how Davis, Marzolf and Bergin are handling the increased demand for their services.



INDUSTRY buzz

The Michigan Turfgrass Foundation gifted \$1 million to the Michigan State University College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, launching a \$5 million campaign to endow the **Dr. Joe Vargas** Chair in Turfgrass Pathology. The endowment honors Vargas, who has dedicated his 51-year career to improving the quality of turf on six continents and is a member of the Michigan Golf Hall of Fame. ... The ASGCA has added past president **Jeff Brauer** to its staff as director of outreach. The new position is designed to advance the goals, benefits and positive impact of the ASGCA and its members, develop deeper partnerships with allied associations and others, organize educational events; and expand the influence of ASGCA in the golf world. ... The 1,800-member Carolinas GCSA awarded \$165,000 worth of grants to three projects using money raised in the annual Rounds 4 Research online auction. The grants to scientists at Clemson University and NC State University increase the association's cumulative giving from Rounds 4 Research to more than \$565,000. ... RISE joined more than 350 pesticide user organizations, sending a letter to all members of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives voicing support for the pesticide regulatory system currently in place under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act. ... Nufarm Americas recently announced a cooperation arrangement with Lier Chemical Company to supply glufosinate serving the turf and ornamental market.

Elevated standing for U.S. Women's Open

The U.S. Women's Open is operating on a higher level — figuratively and also quite literally — thanks to a new long-

term partnership between the USGA and ProMedica that includes presenting partner rights, a \$10 million purse, in-



creased charitable support and some of the country's more prominent courses opening their doors to host.

In an effort to retain and enhance the U.S. Women's Open's standing, the purse for the 2022 championship — June 2-5 at Pine Needles Lodge & Golf Club in Southern Pines, North Carolina — will nearly double from \$5.5 million to \$10 million, the highest in women's golf and among the leaders in all of women's sports. The USGA also announced a commitment to raise the Women's Open purse to \$11 million and then \$12 million over the next five years.

Key to the partnership is a joint commitment by the organizations to highlight the importance of addressing health inequities across the United States, which will include sharing the personal stories of golfers and USGA competitors nationwide who have used golf as a means to a healthier lifestyle.

ProMedica will also utilize the global stage the U.S. Women's Open provides to generate charitable dollars for its ProMedica Impact Fund, which will become the official charity of the U.S. Women's Open. The ProMedica Impact Fund is committed to raising more than \$1 billion over eight years to strategically invest in grants, impact investments, and research and learning activities.

The USGA also named five additional U.S. Women's Open host sites: The Riviera Country Club in Pacific Palisades, California (2026); Inverness Club in Toledo, Ohio (2027); Pinehurst Resort & Country Club in Village of Pinehurst, North Carolina (2029); Interlachen Country Club in Edina, Minnesota (2030); and Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (2031 and 2042).

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COURSE NEWS

The Tuxedo Club in Tuxedo Park, New York, recently launched a multimillion-dollar renovation of its **Robert Trent Jones Sr.**-designed golf course. Slated for completion in May, the project includes the creation of a new short game practice area, a new ninth hole, renovation of all fairway and greenside bunkers, and re-grassing of all necessary green surrounds. The club selected **Rees Jones** to lead the renovation. ... Terravita Golf & Country Club in Scottsdale, Arizona, will undergo a seven-month golf course renovation and enhancement project led by **Phil Smith**. The project will begin on April 1 and will be focused on the irrigation system, bunkers, green complexes and turf improvements on the 28-year-old course. ... Members at Ballen Isles Country Club in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, recently approved a multimillion-dollar renovation of the club's East Course and golf practice facility. Nicklaus Design was selected

last year for a strategic design partnership to lead the course enhancements. Construction is expected to start in April and be completed by December. Renovations will include modernization of the design, bunkering, greens complexes and strategy, a complete re-grassing of the course, and improvements of playing options. ... **Robert McNeil** recently completed the reintroduction of Donald Ross-designed features at Kernwood Country Club in Salem, Massachusetts. The work included recapturing and restoring the Ross bunker styling throughout the property, which involved constructing 44 new bunkers, removing a few, bringing back original grassing lines in the fairways, expanding green perim-



eters to their intended edges and introducing grass catchment and tightly mown pitch areas. More than 800 trees were removed to open sight lines through the property. ... KemperSports has been selected by the not-for-profit Evanston Wilmette Golf Course Association to manage the 100-plus-year-old Canal Shores Golf Course in Evanston, Illinois. Canal Shores, which winds along the Chicago River, was designed by **Tom Bendelow** and opened in 1919.

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Madison Rudsinski

ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT, PARADISE VALLEY COUNTRY CLUB

One day in the summer of 2020, **Madison Rudsinski** got in her car and headed west to seek her fortune. The Illinois native sought a job in a warmer climate, armed only with an associate degree in horticulture and her own ambition.

“Originally, I was going to be a floral designer,” she tells **Rick Woelfel** on the Wonderful Women of Golf podcast. “I started working at a shop in Rockford, Illinois, and I kind of figured out that I wanted to be outside. I didn’t like always being in the shop.”

Rudsinski’s turf career began with an internship at Prairie View Golf Club in Byron, Illinois, roughly 90 miles west of Chicago. She started in bedding plant design but moved into turf maintenance in the wake of COVID-19. “I realized, after getting on all the machines there that, ‘OK, this is kind of cool,’” she recalls. Her move to Arizona was admittedly on a whim. “I’m not a big snow lover,” she says, “and we get a lot of that in Illinois.”

Rudsinski’s original plan was to work at a golf course while also attending business school. But five hours into a 25-hour drive, she got a call from Paradise Valley Country Club just outside Phoenix. Because of her background in horticulture, Rudsinski was hired as a second assistant superintendent. She notes that the team took the time to see that she was properly trained.

“They kind of wired me for (the second assistant’s job),” Rudsinski says. “They were putting me on everything right away, getting me acquainted with the equipment and making sure I was adequate at using that before I could go train somebody. They were really patient with me and helped me learn really fast. They were good teachers.”

Rudsinski now fills a variety of roles depending on where she’s needed on a given day.

“It could be mowing, I could be on approaches, tees, greens, fairways, bunkers, anything like that,” she says. “Some days, I won’t have any job assignment and I’ll fill in if we have any no-calls or no-shows. If we have to spray greens, I typically do green sprayings every Thursday, that’s my main task. Otherwise, we get new guys coming in. I’ll be training them on something.”

Rudsinski was part of the group of female turf professionals who volunteered at the U.S. Women’s Open at the Olympic Club last June. For someone whose career was still in its early stages, the week was the equivalent of an educational seminar. “Everybody there was very admirable and inspiring,” she says. “They answered any questions I had. It was amazing.”

Rudsinski will be volunteering at the U.S. Open at The Country Club in Brookline, Mas-

sachusetts, this June. She has also been accepted into the Nufarm Excel Leadership Program and has made a three-year commitment to enhancing her career by attending educational seminars, taking classes and volunteering.

She views her U.S. Women’s Open experience as the jumping-off point for all this.

“I don’t think I would have even been considered for the Nufarm Excel Leadership Program without having that on my résumé,” she says. “I had joined as a Class C member of the GCSAA and I hadn’t really had any previous volunteer work with them through any of their programs, so that was kind of what catapulted me into the public eye with the GCSAA and made me more noticeable. That was what got me into these programs and now I’m super excited about going to Brookline. I’ve got that to look forward to. The Nufarm Excel week was super out of my comfort zone. I was definitely the youngest person there” —Rudsinski is 21— “by a good six years or so, but everyone’s just there to help each other.”

Rudsinski wants to become a head superintendent one day. Naturally enough, she embraces the idea of encouraging high school students to explore the idea of a career in turf. She participated in the Future Farmers of America program while she was in high school.

“What would be amazing would be for different (GCSAA) chapters to reach out to schools in their area and ask if there is an FFA program at that school,” she says. “FFA is a huge program and you’re going to get a lot of students that are interested in agriculture and biology. I think people should definitely start there if they’re looking for (high school students).” **GCI**



FFA is huge and you’re going to get a lot of students who are interested in agriculture and biology. I think people should definitely start there if they’re looking for (high school students).”



SUPERINTENDENT
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OFF-COURSE PLANNING

My great Aunt Margaret was a bank teller. When I was a little kid, she'd always say, "If you see a penny, pick it up and save it for a rainy day." Well, Aunt Margaret, I've been saving ever since and I'm glad to say my financial situation has always been pretty damn good.

Pennies might be meaningless today, but the sentiment is truer than ever. Smart, and often simple, financial principles will stand you in good stead your entire life.

OK, you may be thinking, "What is this old guy talking about?" If you're young and in your first or second job, having any money in your pocket might seem a reason to spend it. If you're a little older, with a family, a mortgage and other obligations, the idea of putting money away might seem very far away indeed. But trust me, no matter what stage of life or career you're in, it's never too early to start saving and planning for your future. No one knows better than you the value of meticulous planning: That's what you do for a living, carefully organizing and strategizing to ensure your course's agronomic health or the success of a special event. Apply it to your personal finances, too.

These simple truths should help you along the way:

1. SPEND LESS THAN YOU MAKE. This may sound obvious but remember the road to financial success is a marathon, not a sprint. It's what you

can save, not spend, that helps you build for your future. Set aside a small percentage of your earnings and vow to not spend it, especially not on things you really don't need.

2. THE 10 PERCENT RULE. Building on the above, vow to save a set percentage of your paycheck every week. Figure out how much you can comfortably put aside and then add a little more. My yearly goal was to save 5 percent of my annual income. Then, when you've accumulated a decent amount, look for ways to make it work for you, such as putting it into a retirement account.

2A. IRA IS YOUR FRIEND. Speaking of retirement accounts, if the club or company you work for offers any sort of retirement fund, and especially if they kick in to it, too, do it! Not only are IRAs and 401(k)s great ways to force you to save, but if someone is going to add a bit to help you out, you'd be foolish not to take advantage. Do some online research and you'll see how these accounts can build over the years.

3. INVEST FOR THE LONG

RUN. I'm more than 50 years past being a little kid, but I learned early that building your finances takes time. Here's another Old Fart thing to say, but trust me, you twenty- or thirtysome-

things will be looking at 60 before you know it. Your goal now should be to make it so you can retire comfortably. Any financial sacrifice made today will provide dividends for your future. Thirty-five years ago, my first broker trained me that the secret to building assets is making quality investments and sticking with them. Finding a financial advisor you trust is another good idea. Now.

4. BUY, DON'T RENT. Yes, this is easier said than done, especially since becoming a successful superintendent requires moving about the country and learning as much as you can along the way. This type of career progression makes renting simpler than buying. But over the long run, renters stay poor while owners build wealth. Owners have 40 times the net worth of renters. Over the long term, renting can cost up to a million dollars, and when all is said and done, you'll have no equity to show for it.

5. NEVER STOP SAVING. Life will occasionally kick you in the teeth. But as Rocky Balboa said, "It ain't about how hard you hit, it's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward!" Even if things get tight, keep saving. Yes, I realize you might not make all that much. Doesn't matter. Do the math: If at age 25 you start saving \$10 a day or \$300 a month and invest it to earn 3 to 8 percent annual growth, by age 65 you could have a potential nest egg of close to \$2 million. Start saving at age 35, and it's closer to \$600,000.

Aunt Margaret would be proud! **GCI**

“No one knows better than you the value of meticulous planning: That's what you do for a living, carefully organizing and strategizing to ensure your course's agronomic health or the success of a special event.”



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NICE TO MEET YOU

THE INDIVIDUALS OF GEN Z HAVE A LOT TO OFFER THE TURF INDUSTRY. UNDERSTANDING THE NUANCES OF THE RISING GENERATION WILL BE A BIG ADVANTAGE FOR EVERY ORGANIZATION MAKING THE EFFORT.

By **Lee Carr**

Producing golf balls and clubs in their family business in Scotland, a very young **Willie Park Jr.** served as an apprentice to his father, the prominent and accomplished **Willie Park Sr.** Then, at the age of 16, Park Jr. played in his first Open Championship. He won the title twice in his early 20s, in 1887 and 1889. He was a great player, a greenkeeper, a successful writer, a businessman and a prolific and respected golf course architect in Europe and America. Simply stated, Willie Park Jr. was bold and remarkably talented.

Born in 1996 or later, Generation Z can be described as people in their mid-twenties or younger. Like Park, Gen Z has been keen on learning from a very young age and they want to make their life and work significant.

Unlike Park, Gen Z is digitally connected in ways that are completely unprecedented.

Gen Z and Park vividly intersect at Pennsylvania State University, where a crew loaded with students helps maintain nine holes originally designed by Park in the 1920s. Superintendent **Rick Pagett** has led the main-

MEETING IN THE MIDDLE

Drew Miller, leader of the Brentsville District High School Turf Management Program in Nokesville, Virginia, is often surprised by his students. They surprise him when they find innovative ways to get things wrong but also when they (often) go above and beyond. One of the easy differences to spot among generations is the rise of technology, particularly social media, including TikTok.

Miller has a story to share about when he and his class were listening to music as they worked on the school fields:

"We have **Frank Sinatra** in the background singing 'New York, New York' and a few students want me to change it. One student says, 'No, wait, I know this song. Isn't this a TikTok artist?' In disbelief, I walked away thinking, 'How do we have such a generation gap between Gen Z and older generations to where they do not know Frank Sinatra?' But the moral of this story is that Gen Z workers are not just a bunch of kids who want to find the easy way out.

"Gen Z tries to make connections with their mentors and older peers. That is what we must be open to in this industry. Enabling that connection and supporting their opportunity to learn, even if it's from their mistakes. That is how we ignite the passion in these young individuals that will shape the future of the turf industry. I now have a great relationship with the student I mentioned, stemming from that one experience that broke the ice. That student just applied to college for turfgrass management. Be welcoming, kind and understanding with your younger workers. They will appreciate that and carry it with them for the rest of their lives."



tenance crew for the Blue and White courses for more than 15 years, and holes 6-14 on the White Course, Park's holes, become even more intriguing the more you learn about them.

It's the same for Gen Z.

GEN Z OUTLOOK

"We tell every one of our student-employees that they're here to be a student first. We're very flexible and work with class schedules," Pagett says. Pagett has graduated from Penn State twice, the first time in 1994 with a bachelor's degree in turfgrass and turfgrass management, the second in 2013 with a master's of professional studies in turfgrass science. And yes, for some of his classes he sat right next to the students working for him. He is serious about education, for himself and for the students on his crew, and though most people appreciate flexible work hours, it is a critical component of working with Gen Z.

Communication in the workplace is important to Gen Z, too. **Jason Dorsey**, co-author of "Zconomy" and president of The Center for Generational Kinetics, a generations research and strategy firm, explains that "providing consistent communication and communication options is key to effectively communicate among multiple generations," pertinent for almost every golf course maintenance team.

"Communication can include text messages or group messages, video if some members are virtual, in-person as needed, and email," Dorsey says. "The key is to make sure information is con-

sistently delivered. The younger the generation, the more frequency of information they need, but not necessarily more quantity. For example, members of Gen Z could use a 30-second check-in by text every week, but they don't need or expect lunch or coffee with their boss."

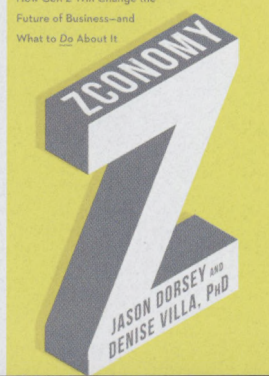
Technology has changed how people communicate and making a call is not usually the first option to broadcast weather conditions or shift changes. Older workers or retirees may be the exception. Younger workers "don't seem to respond to emails," Pagett says. "If you send them a text or a message through Facebook or Instagram, or even if you go the route of having them as a friend on Snapchat, you get an immediate response."

And in addition to their phones being used for communication, instant access to technology means that information is being spread and absorbed quickly. Gen Z is curious and loves to learn. "With the college students we have, and this technology, with them being connected — that's a strength," Pagett says. "They are really soaking in a lot of information." Try to guide them to information that is helpful for course maintenance — tech tutorials, agronomy videos and even motivational clips about how to excel as an employee. Presenting information in a way that Gen Z is comfortable absorbing it will help with workplace dynamics.

"Gen Z has come of age dependent on mobile devices for practically everything, from shopping, learning and banking, to dating, ordering food and arranging Ubers," Dorsey says. "They expect employers to better integrate mobile technology in their work experience. They also expect employers to actively support a social cause and provide greater transparency in feed-



How Gen Z Will Change the Future of Business—and What to Do About It



back and communication.” Where your organization can give back to or align with a worthy cause, that’s a bonus. Transparency is something that everyone should be working toward and Gen Z is demanding it.

Pagett’s management style naturally meshes with Gen Z not only through flexibility and ease of communication, but in that he is happy to consider new ideas. “I will most definitely listen to anyone with a suggestion,” he says. “I’ll say this is how I want you to do it. They come back and say, ‘What if we tried it this way?’, and I will absolutely try that. I think they’re getting that from being connected, I really do.”

Gen Z wants to make their workplace great and it is important to them that they feel like they’re contributing, immediately. Encourage Gen Z and show them how doing something well, even something small, can make a big difference on the property. Pagett has improved some of the Penn State maintenance practices by incorporating some of the new things he learned while studying for his master’s degree. Keeping up with new information and best practices is part of the job and, with some training, something Gen Z will excel at.

EXPECTATIONS ON COURSE

Not only is Gen Z filling labor roles, but with more people playing

golf in the past two years, Gen Z is also taking up the sport in record numbers. The KemperSports Golfer Insights Survey — which queried nearly 25,000 current, lapsed and new golfers — showed that 27 percent of new golfers are aged 18-34 and 33 percent of them are female. **Vince Juarez**, regional operations executive at KemperSports and PGA master professional, sees two segments of Gen Z, those aged 9-17 who are junior golfers learning the game and those aged 18-24 who are more social, newer golfers and potential employees for the golf industry.

Juarez is seeing the same things with Gen Z that Pagett and Dorsey are. “Gen Z employees seek opportunities where their personal values closely align with the values or purpose of the company,” Juarez says. “They are very purpose-driven. They’re motivated and looking for flexibility in their schedules, strong compensation packages and a fun place to work. We’ve also observed that this generation is planning for their future very deliberately and much earlier, during their high school years.” Explaining how someone can progress from their starting position will appeal to new workers and new golfers.

On the course, “Gen Z is consuming the game in non-traditional ways, which could include listening to a football game or playing music,”



Gen Z has come of age dependent on mobile devices for practically everything, from shopping, learning and banking, to dating, ordering food and arranging Ubers. They expect employers to better integrate mobile technology in their work experience.”

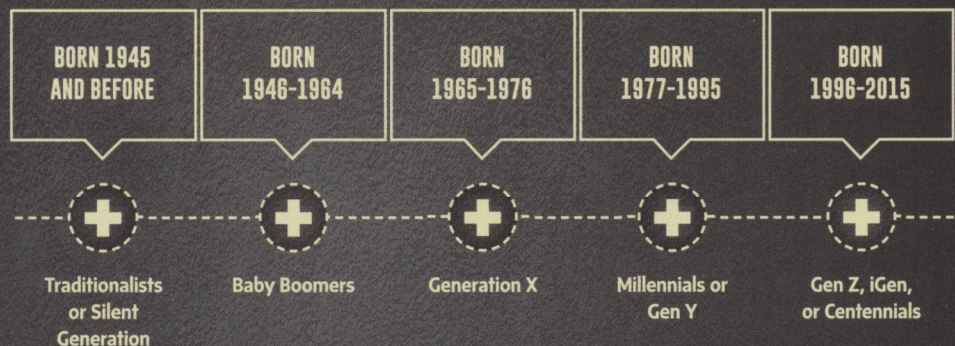
– **Jason Dorsey**

Juarez says. “They want to experience the game with friends and family. Instruction has changed. In addition to the fundamentals, instructors are teaching golf through gamification, using tennis balls and other non-traditional tools. These programs are focused on quick wins and enjoyable experiences.

“Parents will buy equipment,

GENERATIONS BY THE YEARS

When considering generations, birth years provide easy guidelines. The Center for Generational Kinetics (www.genhq.com) indicates that technology, economics and parenting are key components of how a generation is shaped and references the generations as follows:



clothing and accessories for their kids to get them interested and keep them interested in the game,” Juarez adds. “This generation is likely not tracking their scores in golf apps but they are posting their experiences on social media, Instagram and TikTok, but not Facebook.”

Properties are introducing more programming for people who don't have access to junior programs, aren't in a life position to pay a lot of money for golf and are new to the game. With this new, particularly social interest in golf, do conditions still matter? “The need for and importance of high-quality course conditions, pace of play and great service applies to all generations,” Juarez says. “Many of these players are familiar with good golf conditions because they have learned the game at facilities with great conditions.”

The social aspects of life used to be more uniform but with the constant digital connectedness of Gen Z, social skills are developing in a very different way. Younger people have always had more difficulty accurately reading facial expressions than more experienced adults, and there

GEN Z SNAPSHOT

Sean Cloutier
Brentsville District High School student
Birth year: 2004
Graduation year: 2022

Sean Cloutier has been playing golf for about five years and likes that it's always competitive, whether he's in a tournament or playing for fun. He wants to go to college and might choose a career in turf. He likes that “turfgrass maintenance is a process. It takes a lot of time and hard work to get results.” His friends and family value his love for golf and turf care but they don't know much about either so sometimes he has a lot to explain. To look for jobs, Cloutier uses Indeed, ZipRecruiter and other well-known marketplaces. His best round is an 89 shot at a course where he worked, Bristow Manor Golf Club in Bristow, Virginia. He is inspired by certain professional athletes and a beloved friend, sadly lost to brain cancer. “Being a huge Alabama football fan, I'm interested in the opportunity to work on the grounds crew there and further my abilities as a turf manager,” he says.



GEN Z SNAPSHOT

Barrett Butler
Brentsville District High School student
Birth year: 2004
Graduation year: 2022

Barrett Butler will be going to college and is looking forward to becoming a clinical psychiatrist. She has been playing golf as long as she can remember and it has taught her sportsmanship, humility, the value of a strong work ethic, honesty and optimism. “I've been lucky enough to be able to spend time with my family while playing, as golf is a huge part of who we are,” Butler says. Her dad grew up working on golf courses, her sister plays and her mom coaches the girl's high school golf team. Before Butler joined the turf program, she had never “been within three feet of a mower. Now I mow for homework.” She has learned mowing, weed eating and painting, and enjoys making a difference around her school and community with her new skills. “Everyone I've met in the turf industry has been so welcoming and focused on the future of the industry,” Butler says. She finds information on Instagram or by reading the news, will text classmates about stuff for school, and helps share information with the community by using the turf accounts on Instagram, Twitter and TikTok. Barrett is inspired by her parents, Weezer is one of her favorite bands, her favorite food is watermelon and she has a yellow English Labrador named Diesel who she wishes she could bring to school!



is an entire etiquette to digital communication that older generations did not grow up with. “Gen Z can become very loyal employees once they find an employer that is a fit for them,” Dorsey says. “They're also

very motivated to recommend to their friends to work at the same employer, too.” When they find a good thing, they share it, often instantly. Life is less compartmentalized for the members of Gen Z and friends are a big part of everything they do.

Willie Park Jr. was ready to share his talents with the world. He worked hard and was hungry

to succeed on his own terms. A century later, it's easy to marvel at all he achieved. Pagett values learning, is flexible with his crew, supports others and comfortably engages digitally. Gen Z strives to make everything they encounter the best it can possibly be and thrives in a digital, connected environment where learning and personal values are supported.

Park, Pagett and the members of Gen Z can all be described as forward-thinking with admirable traits and talents and though there are differences, generations are shaped in part simply due to the technology available. Valuing flexibility, transparent communication and a quality place to work is something most people have in common. Interacting with younger employees and actively perceiving how they view their job can lead to better understanding and helpful workplace adjustments. Getting to know each other is going to be time well spent for every organization. GCI

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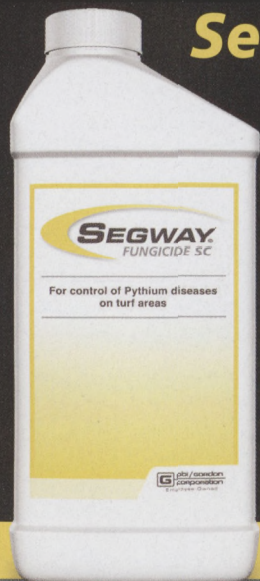


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WELCOME TO WORK

AS GEN Z MATURES AND BECOMES MORE EDUCATED, FORMALLY AND INFORMALLY, FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT AND CAREERS IN TURF BECOME PLAUSIBLE. BOLSTER THESE OPPORTUNITIES WITH AWARENESS TO MAXIMIZE EARLY-STAGE WORKPLACE POTENTIAL.

By **Lee Carr**

“GOOD GOLF BEGINS WITH A GOOD GRIP... Moreover, for most golfers the grip is the drabest part of the swing. There’s no glamour to it. They see it accomplishing nothing active, nothing decisive.”

– Chapter One of Ben Hogan’s “Five Lessons: The Modern Fundamentals of Golf,” written by Hogan with Herbert Warren Wind

Musing about Gen Z and thinking about the realities of your operation accomplishes nothing active. You won’t physically see the property improve by psychoanalyzing your workplace. There’s no glamour to it. However, **Tyler Bloom**, architect for sustainable talent solutions, believes that like the grip, awareness is where it begins.

“What is today’s employee looking for, whether it’s Gen Z or a boomer?” asks Bloom, the innovative founder of Tyler Bloom Consulting. “What are you doing to make sure you have created an environment that people want to be a part of? How is the employer using self-awareness to adapt to the workforce? That’s the starting point.”

With a significant portion of Gen Z being in college or their early years of full-time employment, it’s necessary to consider what their education and training has been so far. A professor of turf management at Delaware Valley University since 1996, **Dr. Douglas Linde** is also the coach for the men’s golf team.

“Gen Zs have fewer life experiences coming into college than generations before them: less work, less dating, fewer social skills, and

less experimenting with alcohol and sex,” Linde says. “It’s been said that today’s 18-year-old has the experiences and maturity of a 15-year-old from 20-plus years ago.” College freshmen are experiencing some things for the first time and, with their parents at a distance, professors and coaches support them through it. “A greater percentage of members of Gen Z need coping skills and resiliency,” Linde adds. “When things get tough or stressful, these students are ex-



COLLEGE BENEFITS

A degree is not essential, but college offers a wide variety of benefits for those who attend. College provides the opportunity to meet new people, be exposed to different ideas, spend time maturing away from home and try living in a completely new place. Athletes can continue to compete at a more advanced level or socially through clubs and intramural gatherings. The best reason of all for a college education is to learn from professors who are passionate about their area of expertise and who are diving into cutting-edge research. There are more scholarships and types of financial aid available than ever before and it's easy to find a program that offers in-person and virtual options. Older students are invited to apply and college turf management enrollment continues to bounce back. Encourage Gen Z in its love to learn.

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hibiting anxiety-related behaviors.”

Many students are as academically prepared as they have ever been. Students with work experience are excelling in turf classes and are readily able to connect concepts discussed in class with what they have learned on the job. “Most also do well with experiential and hands-on learning opportunities such as field trips, installing irrigation, seeding and fertilizing,” Linde says.

Linde is motivated by positively impacting a young person’s education and career and spends a lot of time with his students and athletes. DelVal’s students are doing well. They’re getting internships and full-time jobs at a wide range of course sizes and styles. Linde keeps in touch with his graduates when possible and there are 27 head superintendents among 130 turf-major graduates since 2000.

Formal education is a strong choice but attaining a degree is not the only way forward. “I don’t think the workforce, specifically Gen Z, is craving going to a two-year or four-year college,” Bloom says. Trying to provide them with education and learning experiences while they’re on the job is a differentiator.

“There are a lot of traditionalists who will say a degree is a requirement to become an assistant, but the majority of the industry is going to need a build-from-within mentality because the pipeline is not there,” Bloom says. “The volume of formally educated candidates with the credentials that most clubs are prioritizing doesn’t exist. There are a lot of crew members, given the right framework, who provide a viable solution to fill assistant roles. Properties need to develop that

► Dr. Doug Linde (second row, far right) works with members of Gen Z as a professor of turf management and men’s golf coach at Delaware Valley University in suburban Philadelphia.

trade mentality and that trade-type training.

“Leaders have got to recognize that formal education credentials aren’t as important to today’s future workforce,” Bloom adds. “That’s workforce development in a nutshell. You have to adjust constantly to the needs of the business and what employees are seeking.”

Properties are going to have to adapt more rapidly. “They’re going to get so far behind they’re never going to get caught up,” Bloom says. “The expectations of members haven’t changed. For years, they have run operations very cost-effectively, perhaps overly so, particularly regarding labor. Now they’re going to be forced to spend money. Where is that coming from? Getting that message to stakeholders and creating buy-in is where I see a lot of organizations struggling.”

Finding a way forward with Gen Z can help solve the problem.

Gen Z, like most generations of turf employees, want to work outside and be around sports. They want a decent salary with time off to enjoy it and they want a work-life balance. Reaping the healthy benefits

MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z

Why be savvy about workplace trends among different generations? Research compliments of **Dr. Douglas Linde** indicates it will help attract and retain employees, increase morale and productivity, and expand your chances of having a full crew. Noticeable differences between millennials and Gen Z included:

Y

Millennials:

Participation trophies (entitled, don’t expect to pay their dues); anticipate changing jobs and careers often; want predictable hours and time off; less willing to make sacrifices for their career; seek a life outside of work

Z

Gen Z:

Went outside less as children; maturing later (delaying driving, drinking, dating, sex, jobs); anxious (when stressed and away from their phones); digital natives; short attention spans; like instant gratification; cost conscious (including college); want predictable hours; entrepreneurial

that this perspective yields is something other generations can learn from Gen Z. A work-life balance is easier with predictable hours, which



Gen Z appreciates, and hopefully managers can support predictable schedules, particularly for positions with less responsibility.

Compensation and benefits are as important as predictability and flexibility. Gen Z can be very curious and interested in the craft. They can be innovative and transparent. They aren't going to hold anything back. Gen Z likes contributing to a greater purpose and they are positioned to come into a work environment where there are growth opportunities. After the financial crush of 2008, opportunities for growth weren't plentiful.

Now, due to labor shortages, there is an opportunity to advance rapidly and make more competitive wages. Show Gen Z that. Show them they're part of the team — post a picture on social media welcoming them to the crew, recognize birthdays and work anniversaries, acknowledge levelling up with skills, and let them know they matter.

Add some social experiences to training. Gen Z craves social relationships with co-workers and it can simultaneously boost their knowledge. Let new hires spend some time shadowing the different positions on property to introduce them to people and the organization. A morning with the equipment manager will lead to a better understanding of how to take care of the machines. An hour with the membership director, or in the pro shop, might help Gen Z connect the dots on how their wages are getting paid.

Early starts don't seem to bother Gen Z, but they do want flexibility with those hours. They want to get off early for a special event or to schedule a doctor's appointment in the middle of the day. They expect a summer vacation, which a lot of people in the industry never asked for or received in their young careers. It's different now.

As a former superintendent, Bloom understands how influential that position is, and knows how important it is to be great stewards of the industry. "Give Gen Z more ownership, with some parameters, to create the work environment that's desired," he says. Maybe it's as simple as putting a suggestion box in the break room. Maybe get their input for a team building exercise. Empower their good decisions to have a bigger impact.

A non-negotiable should be treating people with respect and showing genuine appreciation, regardless of position or career stage. "I do a role play where a student pretends to be a superintendent and has to verbally show me appreciation," Linde says. "It sparks a discussion of the importance of respect and appreciation and how it feels when you aren't



People who show appreciation are more respected, trusted, liked, and get more accomplished."

— Dr. Doug Linde

GEN Z SNAPSHOT

Robby Meredith
 Delaware Valley University student
 Birth year: 2001
 Graduation year: 2024

Robby Meredith's dad introduced him to golf at an early age and he started playing competitively in high school. Now studying turfgrass management, his favorite classes are land surveying, because it's a very hands-on class, and sustainability, because "the shift toward a sustainable future will impact the golf course maintenance world drastically." Meredith worked as an intern last summer at **Pikewood National Golf Club** in Morgantown, West Virginia, and enjoyed changing hole locations or mowing greens as the sun came up. He learned that "hard work pays off in the golf world" and he believes staffs deserve more credit for providing great conditions. Meredith loves being outside and aspires to be a superintendent. He's just starting to learn about some on-course technologies and finds "reading and watching videos about GPS sprayers super cool and interesting." Meredith feels like he is not like his friends in that he enjoys working "all day every day and doesn't need days off," but acknowledges that superintendents should understand that everyone doesn't want to work every day of the week. Meredith's friends enjoy golf because they like being outside and having fun. The friends who play recreationally are less interested in course conditions and are more attentive to the social aspects of golf. "The thing I enjoy most about the game is how unique it is," Meredith he says. "One day I could be hitting the ball great but can't putt. The next day it's switched. What draws me to the game is being able to go out, enjoy the course and try and beat it."



appreciated. People who show appreciation are more respected, trusted, liked and get more accomplished." Showing respect and appreciation should be a habit.

Knowing how Gen Z is thriving through education, internships and on-the-job training, and understanding their life experiences will foster a better workplace. Gen Z is in the midst of making some serious career decisions. Be respectful and show gratitude, expect the same from the members of Gen Z, and maintain a good grip on perspective. It may not actively improve the physical aspects of the property in the short run, or be the most glamorous part of the job, but a management team that's self-aware will attract and positively influence Gen Z. **GCI**



PICTURE PERFECT

PROGRESS

KEEPING THE CREW FULLY ENGAGED MEANS A DAILY COMMITMENT TO BUILDING AND MAINTAINING A WORKING CULTURE. A PAIR OF SUCCESSFUL TURF LEADERS EXPLAIN HOW OPERATIONS BENEFIT FROM SUPPORTING THE INDIVIDUALS OF GEN Z IN THEIR INTERESTS, WHETHER IN TURF OR SOMETHING DIFFERENT.

By **Lee Carr**

During the early 1900s, **Juan Montell** emigrated from Sicily, Italy, to settle in Augusta, Georgia. Interested in farming and photography, he took photos of the Berckmans' family business, Fruitland Nurseries, on land that would later belong to Augusta National Golf Club. Montell would hone his craft and continue to take pictures there. His nephew, **Frank Christian Sr.**, joined him in Augusta and became the club photographer, as did his son, **Frank Christian Jr.**, who also worked for decades as an official photographer for the PGA.

Matthew Gourlay, CGCS, MG, director of golf course operations for Colbert Hills in Manhattan, Kansas, credits his family with his interest in golf. His mother is a soil scientist, his uncle is a course shaper, there are several golf pros in the family, and his grandfather and father were superintendents. Their heritage can even be traced back to the manufacturing of early golf balls, when "a Gourlay" was a top-notch feathery.

The Christian and Gourlay families have more than golf in common; they have an enthusiasm for what they do. Just like a photo must be properly developed, so does Gen Z, and these families shared their ardor with others and developed a working culture where passion can thrive.

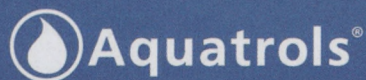
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Colbert Hills was designed by **Jeff Brauer** and former PGA player **Jim Colbert**. It's home to the Kansas State University men's and women's golf teams as well as the First Tee of Manhattan chapter. This 18-hole public course offers 7,525 yards of links-style golf and a par 3 course primarily used by the golf teams and the First Tee program.

Colbert Hills is a popular place, and 2021 was a banner year. There were 360 events, the first stay-and-play lodge was constructed and more than 34,500 rounds were played — topping 2020's rounds by 2,000 and setting a new record. Around 40 people help maintain the course, with five of them full-time employees and the remainder college students, one retiree and a few high school kids.

"For me, it's all about culture," says Gourlay. "How do you build the culture with the people you are working with? When we're interviewing people, we want to make sure they have a drive and a passion of working on something." The conversations determined what the candidates are enthusiastic about. For instance, there was a young lady who wanted to be a photographer and she would take early morning pictures. That was permitted and she got her work done. There was mutual respect. She graduated with an art degree but has stayed with

MINIMUM WAGE

Minimum wage is a simple idea but a complex topic. There are five states with no determined minimum wage, the federal minimum wage is \$7.25 and there are dozens of states set to increase their minimum wage in 2022. (See *The Cost of Labor*, January 2022.) Several states have passed legislation to implement a \$15 minimum wage in the next few years. The quick, successive changes are hard on every budget. Compare what you offer for compensation not only with local and regional properties but also heed what entry-level positions in other industries are offering. Workplace dynamics and culture can offset higher wages but there are limits. Stay on top of changes and try to get ahead of them. Evaluate each person's wages and compensation package when changes occur and consider work experience, loyalty and potential for development. Get help as soon as you need it, make projections and try to get a jump on boardroom discussions. It will take maximum effort to stay on top of minimum wage but start with knowing when the changes are coming for your property and take it one step at a time.

MINIMUM WAGE
INCREASE

AHEAD

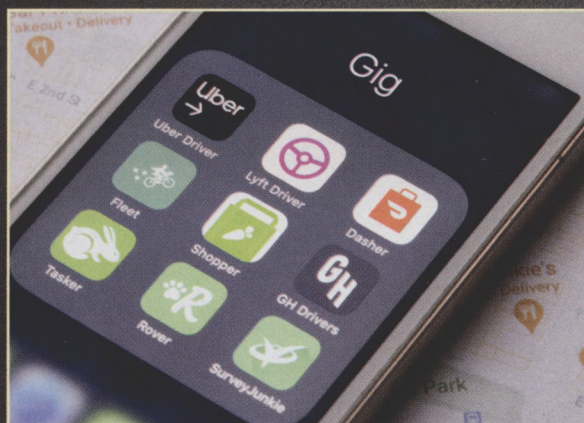
maintenance and works at a course close to where she lives.

At Colbert Hills, recruiting is everyone's job. The superintendent, **Shane Rengstorf**, helps with most of the hiring. Assistant superintendent **Derek Price** knew the lone retiree on the crew for a few years before "he saw him in a bar one day and started the conversation. The next week," Gourlay says, "our retiree started." **Chris Glover**, another assistant superintendent, brought in several people, and **Shane Pokorney**, the equipment manager, brought in people, too. Pokorney worked his way up, starting at Colbert Hills in college. He was hired because he had a friend

majoring in outdoor enterprise wildlife management who worked at the course. Their connection brought in 10 to 12 people. That can only happen when staff is proud of the culture and want to invite others to join it.

Gourlay and his team tell their staff to "plan accordingly for class, for study sessions, for time away and for doing cool, fun kid things, and then create a work schedule to meet those needs. We accommodate that as best we can," Gourlay says. The result is a content, full staff. No one shows up late. That tone is set from the top.

Jeff Reich, the director of golf course maintenance operations at



GIG ECONOMY

The gig economy is a space Gen Z happily inhabits. Being able to pick up their phones and quickly and easily locate tasks that provide some quick cash when they need it most or when they feel like working makes a lot of sense to them. Can your organization get creative and structure some gig economy work? Are there never-ending tasks on your property that can be accomplished with little training or instruction? What if you told your team, "I need someone for two hours tomorrow to help with _____ task? Anyone have an interested friend?" The answers here vary property to property, but gig economy tasks might get people through the door and provide leads for recruiting. It feels like there are some tiresome barriers — pay paperwork, liability issues, course protection and more, but the gig economy has benefits too. The gig economy is scalable, vast and gig workers make less than employees but are highly incentivized by same-day pay. Talk to your Gen Z connections and see if they have any ideas. Be sure to clear everything with relevant colleagues and the legal team.



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TPC River Highlands, in Cromwell, Connecticut, can attest to that. At this **Pete Dye** design (which was renovated by **Bobby Weed**) with 10 full-time and 20 seasonal staff, mostly under age 25, they are leaning into professional consideration. “We’re taking ownership in the young workers because we want them to be successful at school as well as work and we’re aware of what they want and need,” Reich says. “Whether it’s time for academics, their personal life, or whatever is important to them.”

As a result, current employees at TPC River Highlands kickstart the recruiting. They don’t need extended hiring sprees, ads or career fairs. “It’s a lot of word of mouth and that is due to us investing in them beyond just ‘make sure you’re here and doing a good job,’” Reich says.

Staff regularly clock out for virtual classes and then clock back in, or even schedule interviews for positions more aligned with their long-term goals. They can tell their

friends, “You can go to school and work here and it’s a fun place to be,” Reich says. From onboarding through performance reviews, be honest about what the expectations are and what you are after but be transparent with your support, too.

Being a first-rate property for its members is clearly the priority at TPC River Highlands, which is a popular PGA Tour stop. Work was recently completed to repair a hole nearly washed away by a 6-inch rainfall in two and a half hours (yikes!), a tee was added to No. 17 for the pros, and they have built a “19th hole” for flexibility during a major irrigation renovation project starting after the 2022 Travelers Championship.

Producing a culture that gives the workers the motivation they need is part of the winning equation, but compensation is another factor. “For almost any position, once we can get someone in the door, the pay isn’t as critical to them,” Reich says. Industrywide, it’s hard to keep up with landscaping wages and other

entry-level jobs but that’s where a positive culture gives you the edge.

Every individual has a spectrum of what’s acceptable for happiness and a spectrum for wages, and both need to be satisfied but one can balance the other. “You can have a great culture, but you still have to offer competitive pay or you won’t get the staff you need,” Gourlay says. Reich notes that his

staff are on a group chat often used outside work. Gen Z happily blends their work and social lives more seamlessly. That will filter back to your property, providing an opportunity for positive branding and dedicated teamwork.

Gourlay receives texts all day and usually communicates with his crew using GroupMe and Snapchat. Reich knows that Gen Z is not separating from their phones and he has embraced this, problem-solving with his workers over FaceTime while they’re out on the course. Sometimes it feels like the work ethic is not what it used to be or that it almost takes two people to do what one used to. It depends on the individual. Reich believes in the philosophy to “inspect what we expect.” Everyone should understand how a task needs to be done, and what the standards are. Communicate clearly, quickly and often. Repeat yourself as necessary.

“If we can raise the expectations of what we want staff to do, and then communicate that with them, they will raise their level or become unhappy. If they become unhappy, let’s try to figure out a different way to make them happy,” says Gourlay, who tries to train workers as much as possible, for individual success and for the good of the course.

Is it all roses then for working with the members of Gen Z? No. Nope. Definitely not. It’s not perfect for any generation, but by understanding the values, competencies and strengths of people, and by genuinely being encouraging, a lot of good things are going to happen. Staffs can be full and work will be fulfilling. Life is not picture-perfect, but Gen Z is developing toward its potential.

That’s progress. **GCI**

Lee Carr is a Northeast Ohio-based writer and a frequent Golf Course Industry contributor. She has three children who are members of Gen Z.

GEN Z SNAPSHOT

Jack Winckowski
Inverness Club
Birth year: 1999

After attending classes and working with a grounds department for three years, **Jack Winckowski** shifted to Inverness Club in Toledo, Ohio, and joined the summer maintenance crew, wanting to continue to work outside. His father loved the sport, so Winckowski was familiar with golf and after two summers with Inverness he has decided to pursue a career in turf management. He is eyeing a program starting in winter 2023 after talking with superintendent **John Zimmers**. Zimmers has enjoyed working with Winckowski and is excited about his prospects. Winckowski knows he will be better prepared than most for school, but there is always more to learn. Winckowski appreciates that Zimmers and the assistant superintendents, **Ryan Kaczor** and **Carlton Henry**, are family oriented, well-organized, plan ahead and execute based on that vision. Winckowski admires that “they aren’t going to ever put people in an uncomfortable position where they don’t know what they’re doing. They make everything as simple as possible and you always understand why you’re doing something. Most of the time right after we’re done with something we’re able to see it.” They work on the details and communicate mostly face-to-face, as well as try to grant people time off as requested. The management “are very one-on-one with all of us and they know each of us very well. It’s not a standard boss and employee-type relationship,” says Winckowski, who appreciates the opportunities at Inverness and the gratitude shown to the crew by members and staff. Early morning hours, with the sun coming up and seeing how the hard work and the course come together, are easy to look forward to nearly every day. Winckowski is grateful to be in a good place — at Inverness and in life.

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(NEAR) FUTURE THINKING ABOUT THE GOLF INDUSTRY

The golf industry's numbers are looking good, at least for the short run. Long term is another matter, more of speculation and trends than of any detailed predictions. What this all means for superintendents is perhaps the most important question to be asked as we move into the 2022 golf season.

Overall, the immediate indicators for the golf industry are remarkably strong — this coming out of two amazingly strong years registered in the face of considerable headwinds. Late winter/early spring 2020 (remember?) saw a dramatic slowdown, with closures in many states in early response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was followed by 18 months of labor shortages, supply-chain backups, rising costs for basic materials, and totally altered workplace interactions due to precautions and social distancing.

Superintendents got stressed and overworked as golfers flocked to the course, liberated by the prospects of healthy, safe outdoor recreation and more disposable free time now that they were released from office work and commuting. The activity continued through 2021.

That's the headline from the latest "State of the Industry" report by industry analysts **Jim Koppenhaver** of Pellucid and **Stuart Lindsay** of Edgehill Consulting. Their presentation, a can't-miss staple of the PGA Show since 2003, combines folksy humor, dart-like observations and the kind of data-geek PowerPoint overload that nerdy analysts crave. In the past, they've been criticized for being unduly pes-

simistic; this time around, they surprised even themselves with their upbeat message.

This is, after all, an industry that "lost" 85 million rounds in the U.S. since a high of 518 million in 2000, down to 433 million in 2019. And now, in the last two years, the industry has regained that exact total — all 85 million, according to Pellucid/Edgehill. The 518 million rounds registered in 2021 mark a 20 percent gain from 2019. That's two consecutive years of phenomenal growth: 14 percent in 2020 and another 5 percent in 2021.

More golfers means more playing equipment sold, more cart fees, more membership dues and greater utilization of the golf course. This perception of a busier golf course is confirmed by a revealing data point regarding tee time utilization — the golf industry equivalent to hotel occupancy rate. If you take the total number of available tee times, adjusting for weather and seasonality, and measure that against actual bookings, golf went from a utilization rate of 56.8 percent in 2019 to 67.3 percent in 2021. And this was not achieved by widespread discounting, according to Pellucid/Edgehill, but by facilities holding the line on pricing and consumers willing to pay more.

For years, industry's gradual slide has been explained as a function of the game being "too hard, too time consuming and too expensive." Yet what is most impressive is that these recent gains have been achieved without any demonstrable increase in pace of play or price discounting.

As for the notorious difficulty of golf and how that is contrary to

the behavioral wiring of millennials and Gen Xers, it turns out that consumers adapted by playing what Koppenhaver explained as "recreational golf." While golf association managers might fret about arcane issues like "bifurcation," everyday golfers, it turns out, are not worried in the least about legalisms and are simply out to have a good time.

"To heck with the USGA rules," to paraphrase Koppenhaver, in an expression that he instantly knew could get misinterpreted by certain folks. And yet that expresses a profound truth. It's one thing to play competitive golf and adhere to strict rules. It's quite another to go out, have a good time, try to hit golf shots, soak up a beer or three with friends and not worry about extricating a wayward tee shot from the crook of tree roots.

The enjoyment afforded by golf appears to be catching on, with golfers willing to pay for the privilege in a way that course owners and managers need to appreciate. It appears that golfers, including many newcomers to the game as well as those who have come back, are willing and able to pay more for golf and just chalk it up to inflation — much as they put up with rising consumer costs for food, gasoline and clothing.

One of the lessons of the hospitality industry has been that people are willing to pay for service, and especially for enhanced services. That holds an important lesson for superintendents and budget managers who face important planning decisions for 2022 and beyond. It pays to keep up course conditions and to improve on infrastructure. **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).

SHEDDING LIGHT ON PHOSPHORUS

IN AN EFFORT TO CLEAN UP A FAMOUS POND, BALTUSROL GOLF CLUB TURNED TO SEPRO'S NEW EUTROSORB FILTERS.

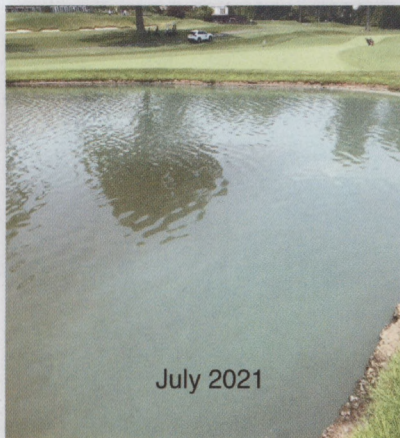
By **Matt LaWell**

Odds are good that when A.W. Tillinghast carved out one of the more prominent ponds in golf — the waterway that guards the green of The Famous Fourth on the Lower Course at Baltusrol Golf Club — he never considered phosphorus. Or algal blooms, which thrive off excess phosphorus. Or probably anything other than a perfect hazard.

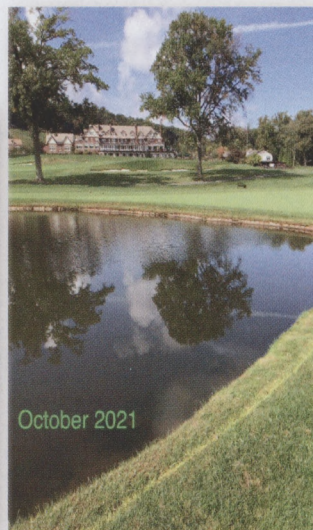
Same goes for Robert Trent Jones, who replaced a log wall with the more familiar rock wall inches from the green when he was commissioned to update and lengthen the layouts. There were enough structural specifics to consider that aquatic science was not top of mind.

More than seven decades after Jones renovated the course — and nearly a century after Tillinghast originally designed it — Jeff Reggio received precious little education about ponds and water health, either.

"In school, you're constantly taught the science behind the turf and how to manage a golf course," says Reggio, the Upper Course superintendent at Baltusrol since



July 2021



October 2021

January 2019. "Ponds are not a topic really discussed."

Reggio learned lots about turf during his four years at Penn State, but he has been expanding his aquatic knowledge ever since, sitting in on seminars and education sessions whenever he attends a conference.

"Ponds are the hardest thing," he says. "It feels like you're good one day, then you come in the next day and it's just, What just happened?"

Which is why Reggio pores over potential solutions for every pond problem. The pond on The Famous Fourth is a focal point for the course

— but thanks to increased rainfall the last few seasons, its surface has been covered during recent summers with algal blooms.

"We start off so clean and then we get to late July when it's hot and a lot of the rainfall releases phosphorus from the soil," Reggio says. "When it starts to get wet, that's when we see that explosion. We're trying to get away from those swings of the water quality and its aesthetics."

Reggio talked with SePRO technical specialist Joe Lynch, who works throughout the Northeast and who recommended EutroSORB, which is

designed to filter out phosphorus and improve water quality. Reggio and Lynch laid down half a dozen filters in early August and flipped them three weeks later. The water quality and clarity is better than it has been in years.

"With a lot of systems, the key management objective is aesthetics," says Dr. West Bishop, algae scientist and water quality research manager at SePRO, and part of the EutroSORB development team. "You don't want it to smell bad, you don't want the algal bloom to crash or cause fishkills. Some algae can be toxic, too, and you don't want anything toxic in there, but the overall quality of the water is important."

Although still gathering field data, anecdotal reports Bishop received from across the industry are encouraging:

I didn't have to use as much algacide because we didn't have as many blooms. ... I had increased clarity and more usable water. ... This was easier to manage.

"We're trying to solve key problems in the environment and we see this as a neat strategic way to do that," Bishop says. "We see a lot of golf courses have shifted to proactive management techniques, and that's what we're trying to do in the water."

Count Reggio among those who provided encouraging updates: He plans to install at least 18 filters in each of Baltusrol's four major ponds — at staggered dates to maximize phosphorus filtration efficiency.

"The great thing is that it's plug and play," Reggio says. "You don't have to worry about the labor aspect and constantly go out to retreat a pond. For some golf courses, this could be the perfect fit. I was very happy with the final product." ■



Miracle at Mallard

Relief for a tough-luck Louisiana community comes in the form of an accessible amenity rarely built these days — a new municipal golf course.

By **Guy Cipriano**



Robert Fray guided a modestly sized golf course maintenance team working out of storage containers while preparing a new golf course for play through four natural disasters in 8½ months. When it got cold — and it really got cold in Lake Charles, Louisiana, last February — his team tossed plywood into a barbecue smoker for heat.

An Army veteran, Fray doesn't bemoan the undesirable work conditions. Everybody in Lake Charles, Louisiana, experienced personal or professional hardship from the moment Hurricane Laura battered the city on Aug. 27, 2020, until water receded following what Mayor Nic Hunter calls a "1,000-year rain event" on May 17, 2021.

Blue tarps remain on damaged roofs and visitors walking downtown streets immediately notice boards covering high-rise windows. Recovering from one wicked weather event takes years. Recovering from four in nine months? That requires patience and persistence. Those who live in the 78,656-resident southwest Louisiana city own an abundance of both.

Two current sights outside the new maintenance facility where Fray's Mallard Golf Club team starts and ends its days suggest all the incredible misfortune is behind Lake Charles. Instead of operating as uncomfortable workspaces, the containers provide supplemental equipment and supply storage. Instead of being used as a heat source, the smoker is available for its intended use: feeding a team introducing a new municipal golf course to a community seeking places to clear minds and sharpen bodies.

Only 13 new 18-hole golf courses opened in the United States in 2021. Mallard Golf Club, owned by the City of Lake Charles, managed by Sterling Golf and designed by Jeff Blume, was one of them. "It was a relief that we could finally play golf," says Fray, the city's golf course superintendent since 2010.

A seldom-experienced development and construction journey brought Lake Charles a recreational amenity with few regional or national peers. "It's really a miracle that we are here," Blume says. The smoker rests 10 feet behind Blume as he recites a timeline of events surrounding the development, construction and unveiling of Mallard Golf Club. Later in the early December evening, standing in downtown Lake Charles, with

enthusiastic and affable residents ambling to and from busy restaurants, Blume reflects on a project that strayed from its timetable because of the unforeseen, yet achieved its purpose.

"There were a lot of obstacles to overcome — more obstacles than I had ever seen on any project — and we had to be creative to get there ... and we got there," he says. "When you open the course up, you sit there and go, 'Wow, how cool is this that we actually got it done?' And it turned out to be a great golf course, too."

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOGRAPHY

make Lake Charles vulnerable to natural disasters. The city sits 13 feet above sea level, with the Gulf of Mexico 30 miles to the south. During an afternoon tour of Mallard Golf Club, the wind whips hard enough to make hearing voices more than a few feet away difficult. Blume routed the course to resemble a Scottish links. No trees on the interior of the property aided the design ambition. The absence of trees helped Mallard Golf Club withstand Hurricane Laura better than surrounding tracts.

Unlike New Orleans, 200 miles to the east, Lake Charles missed the epicenter of Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. A month later, Hur-

Why quality recreation matters

Looking to promote the value of golf to skeptical politicians and residents? Consider making it a quality-of-life discussion. Here's how a pair of Lake Charles, Louisiana, leaders view what quality recreation means to a community.

Mayor Nic Hunter: "Top-notch recreational facilities and programming represent critical components of quality of life for any growing and thriving city. Parks, community centers and sports venues provide opportunities for families to gather together in a safe location to play, learn and grow. Additionally, tourism business brings added economic impact for the community. A municipal golf course, with a unique style of play such as Mallard Golf Club, offers an affordable experience for players of all levels."

City administrator John Cardone: "You can talk about economic development and diversity, but without quality of life, nothing else happens. You have to work hard at providing those amenities to your citizens. Whether it's a golf course, rec centers, parks, it's huge. When we had damage to the golf course, all of our rec centers were down, our civic center was down, everything was shut down. The quality of life, did it go down? Absolutely. Is it back up? Absolutely. We worked hard for that, because people need that. The golf course is a piece of that."

The City of Lake Charles unveiled Mallard Golf Club in October 2021.

ricane Rita made landfall in parts of southwest Louisiana, causing severe damage to multiple communities, including Lake Charles. The city then dodged the brunt of mega-storms for 14 straight hurricane seasons.

Lake Charles had economic momentum in early 2020, with the liquified natural gas, petrochemical and gaming industries driving development. "There were \$1 billion worth of projects on the books when

COVID hit," longtime city administrator **John Cardone** says. "That put a few things on the backburner."

Economic growth is the reason the city pursued a new golf course. The Chennault International Airport Authority approached city officials a few years ago about the possibility of acquiring Mallard Cove Golf Course, a municipal facility bordering the airport. The city understood why the airport needed to expand, but it pro-

ceeded in a manner that never neglected the communal benefits provided by an enjoyable golf course.

Receiving land for a new golf course required innovative thinking and a unique public-private partnership involving the city, Chennault and local developer MorganField. Chennault purchased Mallard Golf Club from the city and MorganField donated 165 acres bordering one of its real estate developments to the city for a new golf course. The city used funds from the sale of the old Mallard Cove Golf Course to pay for construction of the new Mallard Golf Club, which will eventually include a limited number of homes along the course.

"When we first started looking at the project, we wanted to make sure that the golf course that was going to replace our existing golf course was a top-notch golf course," Cardone says. The agreement, Cardone adds, required Chennault to build Lake Charles a course of "at least equal to or better than what we had."



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Robert Fray ▶ (middle) leads the turf team at Mallard Golf Club. Also pictured are pro Jonathan Jester (left) and architect Jeff Blume.

With the vision established and Blume engaged since 2017, construction commenced in fall 2018, shortly after the first surreal event in Mallard Golf Club's development: the death of MorganField president **Chad Thielen**. A driving force behind the public-private partnership involving contrasting parties, Thielen unexpectedly died on Sept. 17, 2018, a few hours following the signing of papers transferring the land from the developer to the city.

MorganField's interest in the course waned after Thielen's death, forcing the city to play a more active role in the project, according to Blume. "Things probably would have happened differently had Chad lived," he says. "The developer had a bunch of internal things to deal with, which meant the City of Lake Charles needed to pick up the ball. Whenever we needed something, they were there."

The original construction budget was \$5.5 million, but the city invested in multiple upgrades, including concrete cart paths instead of asphalt and the installation of the Better Billy Bunker system. The additions, which will reduce short- and long-term maintenance and improve course quality, increased the cost to \$6.3 mil-

lion. The city selected Houston-based Sterling Golf to manage the course.

"The city made a commitment early on," Sterling Golf CEO **Rene Rangel** says. "They made a commitment to Jeff Blume, they made a commitment to Sterling Golf and they made a commitment to the residents of Lake Charles that they were going to do this right."

Built on a former gas field and rice plantation intersected by a railroad, Blume's Mallard Golf Club design includes wide fairways inducing varied shot angles, large greens with a blend of bold and subtle contours, and five sets of tees ranging from 5,385 to 7,181 yards. The land and design contrast the city's previous course. Opened in the 1970s, Mallard Cove offered a tree-lined, parkland-style golf experience. As one of just 29 municipal courses in Louisiana, Mallard Cove had a loyal following and the city planned on keeping it open until Mallard Golf Club was ready for play. The turnkey transition never materialized.

"When we broke ground on Mallard Golf Club at the very end of 2018, we never could have imagined the devastation that our community would face in the years to come," says Hunter, the city's mayor since 2017.

RESIDENTS AND VISITORS observed unforgettable scenes following Hurricane Laura.

Fray: "You saw trees through sides of houses, not through the roof. That's one where you think, 'How does that happen?'"

Mallard Golf Club head pro **Jonathan Jester**: "I saw a house that was under construction that was pretty much almost done, and the roof collapsed on it. The roof was on top of the rubbish that came off the sides. It was like somebody had squished it down."

Sterling Golf director of agronomy **Nick Johnson**: "The first time I came over here from Houston it took forever because traffic was so bad on I-10. There was plenty of time to look around and you can just see the slow progression of how much stronger the winds got as you got closer to Lake Charles and how much more significant the damage was. There was an accident and I had to get off I-10. I went through a little town called Orange and it looked like this tiny little town had just been wiped off the face of the planet."

Hurricane Laura produced winds exceeding 150 mph and 5.54 inches of rain. Residents and businesses, including the in-play and in-progress golf courses, went weeks without power. Golf, rightfully, didn't occupy anybody's immediate thoughts.

"It's at the very bottom of the list," Fray says. "You're not worried about the golf course when you're trying to get your house and where people live in order." Fray's entire five-worker crew suffered personal losses. He eventually lost all five of those employees.

Once the shock of Hurricane Laura subsided, the city opted against trying to reopen Mallard Cove Golf Course. The storm destroyed 500 trees and the maintenance barn shifted off its supporting concrete slab. Fray and the city turned their attention to Mallard Golf Club, which experienced minimal damage because it lacked trees and large structures.

The barbecue ▼ smoker at Mallard Golf Club has returned to its intended purpose after serving as a heat source.



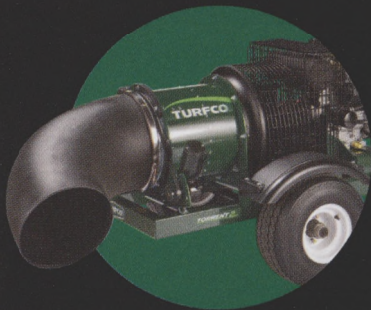


The course had entered an advanced portion of its grow-in. Finding a way to irrigate sprigs without power represented the biggest post-storm tactical challenge. Johnson first searched for an industrial-sized generator to power the pumphouse. “That’s not something you’re going

to get at Home Depot,” he says. “We couldn’t find one, and even if we did, it wasn’t cost-effective.” Demonstrating ingenuity that defines turf and construction teams, they located a pump they could integrate into the main line, allowing five to six irrigation heads to operate at a time.

Johnson works with superintendents and turf teams at seven Sterling Golf-managed properties. He lives in Houston and frequently makes the 150-mile trek to Lake Charles. A former South Florida resident, he has endured multiple hurricanes throughout his career. His visits to Mallard Golf Club following Hurricane Laura included bringing water, snacks, toiletries, generators to charge phones and electronics, and other essentials to Fray and his team. “You deal with people first,” Johnson says. Houston represented a popular destination for Lake Charles residents seeking food and other necessities. The round-trip journey between the cities takes five to six hours depending on traffic. Travel time doubled in the aftermath of Hurricane Laura.

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CONSTRUCTION

Rescue cat ▶ Mulligan is part of the Mallard Golf Club maintenance team.

Forty-three days after Hurricane Laura made landfall, Hurricane Delta hit the city, bringing winds exceeding 100 mph and nearly 10 inches of rain. The exacta of hurricanes resulted in more than 95 percent of the city's structures sustaining damage, according to Cardone.

"Many of them were complete demos," he says. "They were totaled. After Hurricane Laura, we had packages in place where we started picking up debris to help people out and there was still debris on the roadways. Six weeks later, Delta hits and you have to go back and reclean what you had been doing."

In mid-February 2021, temperatures dipped into the teens, causing pipes to freeze and affecting the drinking water supply. On May 17,



2021, 12.49 inches of rain fell in 12 hours. Lake Charles's misfortune — and the determination of its residents — attracted national media coverage.

"I don't even think being here through it all you realized how much we went through," says Katie Harrington, the city's publication information officer. "You move from thing to thing. You rise to the occasion

you're called to every time something happens. I remember telling a producer, 'This is a movie. If this wasn't real life for me, I'd be telling you this is an incredible story.' But we lived through it. This was real life for us."

THE COMPLETION OF Mallard Golf Club has earned a role in the recovery story.

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veloper and the natural disasters, the project presented huge challenges. The site's past life created what Blume calls a base of "gumbo soil," and trudging through it required knee-high boots. The rubber tracks on Morooka vehicles navigated swampy sections early in construction.

Crews from Eagle View Inc. and Duinick Golf installed seven miles of drainpipe, connecting every lake on the course. Blume routed the 13th hole around wetlands and designed 101 bunkers. Four underground gas lines factored into routing the 18th hole. The course is 18 feet above sea level, making it one of higher points in the city, but still a menacing number for design and infrastructure decisions. Lake Charles receives around 60 inches of annual rainfall.

That total swelled during construction, with the city averaging around 80 inches of annual rain the past five years, according to Fray.

"That was part of the construction problem," Fray says. "They would get an area shaped and you would get four days of rain. They then would have to drain it and pump it out before they would get a machine back into it to reshape."

Now covered with turf and sand, the shapes and surrounds are aesthetically pleasing and infuse the flat site with character. The TifEagle Bermudagrass greens maintained by Fray, assistant **Nick Sonnier** and team average 6,000 square feet. Celebration Bermudagrass covers the more than 30 acres of fairways. Tifway 419 Bermudagrass surrounds

bunkers and greens.

Yes, they are now talking turf around Mallard Golf Club.

They are also celebrating great shots. The city unveiled the course in early October 2021. An against-the-odds event occurred on opening day: two golfers, including a former member of Fray's crew, recorded holes-in-one. An avid and accomplished golfer, Fray relishes learning the intricacies of the course. From first shovel to first course setup, the project took 47 months. Because Fray and others remained committed to their community, Lake Charles, Louisiana, boasts a new golf course.

"I was staying no matter what," he says. "There's something to be said about being involved in something special like this." **GCI**

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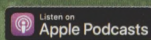
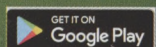
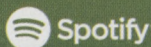
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LOVE AND NEWBIE RETENTION

At some courses they're known as "pandemic players." They're the ones who found their way to a golf course during the pandemic when there was nowhere else to go and because courses were considered safe havens in the face of a ravaging virus. Pandemic players are easy to spot. They're driving golf cars aimlessly through the parking lot trying to find their way to the range; they're taking a basket of practice balls to the practice putting green.

It's easy for golf traditionalists to look down their aristocratic noses at these players. But what we should be saying is this: Bless their hearts and keep 'em coming. They hold at least part of the solution to golf's continued growth in their still-uncalloused hands.

Golf enjoyed another banner year in 2021. Despite virus-related spring shutdowns that affected half the nation's courses in 2020, the National Golf Foundation predicted that once the final numbers are tallied, rounds played in 2021 will be up 4 to 5 percent compared to 2020, an incremental gain of 20 to 25 million rounds. This is in defiance of some pre-2021 forecasts from industry experts who hoped to hang on to half of the previous year's increase. It's also important to note that rounds played are up 18 to 19 percent over the three-year, pre-pandemic average of 2017, '18 and '19, according to NGF.

A surprisingly strong 2021 had a lot to do with the same factors

that led to 2020's resurgence:

- Flexible work schedules that allowed many people to slip away for a round of golf when they would normally be staring into a computer screen
- Weather that was nice to great in many parts of the country
- A lot of pandemic players hanging in there, still looking a little lost, but still sufficiently intrigued, maybe even hooked

There are plenty of reasons to be overjoyed about a second straight year of feel-good results, not the least of which is that so many in the golf business had struggled just to keep the lights on for so long. But once you peel back the explanation for the chart-topping results, there also are reasons not to get all giddy. As NGF president and CEO **Joe Beditz** pointed out, "The main reason rounds are going to finish up is that March (+40%) and April (+80%) crushed it relative to the previous year," when thousands of courses shut down during the height of the early pandemic.

Which brings us to a conclusion we've reached before and one that Beditz states bluntly: "Long-term growth depends on more golfers, not a virus or more rounds from current golfers, which is what has driven our recent growth."

All of which begs the question we all should be asking ourselves as the new year unfolds: How do we make

sure those pandemic players — and others — give golf a try and keep coming back?

The answers are not by trying to make the game a less expensive or time-consuming experience. After years of disdaining increases for fear of losing members and customers, a lot of courses are finally making well-deserved increases in their fees and prices. And with tee sheets at capacity in some places, and with courses populated with so many players new to the game, pace of play is probably not going to improve much, despite ongoing efforts.

So, what's left to improve retention and conversion rates? How about trying some love?

"For years, the research has said — above all else — that getting someone to feel accepted, comfortable and confident makes the biggest difference in whether they stay or go," says **David Lorentz**, NGF's chief research officer.

In other words, treat me nice, show me some respect, thank me for my business and I'll pay your jacked-up initiation fees and green fees and put up with 4-hour, 45-minute rounds. We're all aware of the never-ending task list at most courses and the difficulty hiring and keeping staff, but here are a few love-inspired ideas to attract and engage golfers new to the game and to your course:

1. **Help them feel welcome.**
Ask your IT folks if your tee



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.

time booking program can identify first-time players when they reserve their tee time. And ask your folks in the shop to ask one more question when they're reserving a time for a guest or checking in: Will this be your first time playing here? Those players should get a little special attention. Call them by name and thank them for their business. Tell them the starter's name and how to get to the range.

2. Get out on the course.

It's tough to find time to pull away from your desk, to leave the shop or even to get out of your utility vehicle for a few minutes. But golfers love it when a GM, head professional or superintendent pulls up beside their group and asks how their round is going and if there's anything they need to make their day more enjoyable.

3. Flip someone a ball you found in the rough.

(Just make sure it's still playable!)

4. The game is difficult — help make it a little easier.

Could one of your professionals spare a half hour once a day to chat it up with the folks on the range while dishing out a quick tip or two? Think about promoting a free clinic one morning or afternoon a week for newbies. You could also invite manufacturers' reps to set up on the

range for a few hours for fittings — and for sales.

5. Take an interest.

Learn which teams your members and regulars root for and the names of their kids. Ask how they're doing.

6. Add a few more rakes.

It's an easy way to lower the frustration level.

7. Keep them informed.

Is a big group outing coming up that's going to take over most of the course? Send an email, post the event details on the website and put a sign on the counter in the pro shop. No one likes to learn at the last minute that the only tee times next Friday are at 7:21 a.m.

8. Sit down for a Coke or cup of joe.

Once a week, wander into the grill area, ask if you can join a group of players and offer to buy them a beverage. Then take the opportunity to ask about things you could be doing differently to improve their club and course experience.

9. Recognize a good shot.

It's a nice practice when the maintenance crew stops work while a golfer prepares to hit a shot. And whenever that shot turns out to be a good one, give the player a big thumbs up, *Arnie* style.

10. Smile.

It's cheap and it doesn't take much effort.

GCI

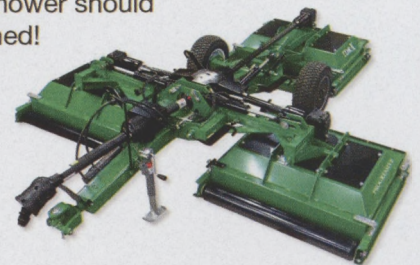


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
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SPOTLIGHT



golf evolution IN THE city

A well-named learning center, gritty maintenance staff and plans to modernize a quirky layout intersect at one of America's enduring urban golf sites.

By **Guy Cipriano**

◀ Golf has been played since 1897 on the urban Pittsburgh land where the Bob O'Connor Golf Course at Schenley Park sits.

the **Arnold Palmer** Learning Center becomes noticeable before the turf it overlooks.

Because the new facility occupies a very public part of Pittsburgh, a place that adopted Palmer as one of its own although his hometown of Latrobe is 40 miles outside city limits, the name attracts attention. Palmer died in 2016, yet his legacy still resonates in western Pennsylvania. The name helped the First Tee-Pittsburgh raise millions to build the 14,000-square foot clubhouse and learning center.

The building serves as the microchip for the First Tee chapter, which uses the golf facilities at Schenley Park, a 456-acre plot of urban greenspace, as its home. A version of golf has been played in the park since 1897, a full 32 years before Palmer's birth. Renamed the **Bob O'Connor** Golf Course at Schenley Park for a golf-loving mayor who died less than a year into his first term, the 55-acre, 4,620-yard course provides meaningful recreational space within an evolving city. Denizens and employees affectionately refer to the course as "The Bob." Views of soaring structures,

► The Arnold Palmer Learning Center features 14,000 square feet of teaching, learning and administrative space.

including the U.S. Steel Tower and Cathedral of Learning, are omnipresent from the hilly grounds.

Understanding where the city — and potentially the golf course — are headed requires stepping off the northern boundaries of the property and walking onto the Carnegie Mellon University campus, where research projects involving microchips will change the city, country and possibly the world. The University of Pittsburgh, world-class museums, a conservatory, and diverse streets, boulevards and alleyways are among The Bob's other neighbors. Combined, the recreational, cultural and academic offerings are endearing elements of a city and region "that punches above its weight," says **Eric Kulinna**, First Tee-Pittsburgh director of golf and player development. The Arnold Palmer Learning Center, which includes classrooms, offices, a 1,500-square-foot putting green, two simulators and Palmer memorabilia, demonstrates what's possible when those who care deeply about making an underdog rise collaborate. Lives will change because of lessons imparted in the building's classrooms and training spaces.

Now on to the turf ...

THE PRESENT

The same against-the-odds mentality describes what happens outdoors

Shorter, quicker options

First Tee-Pittsburgh moved toward providing options for faster play and beginner instruction programs by altering the traditional 18-hole configuration of the Bob O'Connor Golf Course on select days. First Tee-Pittsburgh director of operations **Paul Coultas** routed a 9-hole course exclusively on the section of land south of Schenley Drive. Referred to as the "Bob 9," the 2,400-yard, par-34 layout is available for play all day on Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and has proved to be quite popular. When the "Bob 9" is utilized, a three-hole layout called "The Palmer Loop" is offered on the portion of the course north of Schenley Park Drive. "The Palmer Loop" costs \$5 per hour to play, whenever it's not being utilized for adult or youth instructional programming.



at The Bob. Superintendent **Jeff Duxbury** leads a team that includes three regular and, at most, two part-time/seasonal employees. Duxbury, assistant superintendent **Wayne Bair** and **John Krista** are mainstays. Duxbury arrived more than two decades ago just as the First Tee-Pittsburgh, led by executive director **Bruce Stephen**, started assuming management and operation of the course from the city. Duxbury previously worked at Maplecrest, a now-defunct 9-hole course in nearby Monroeville and knows not all maintenance operations are funded the same.

"I came from a place with a small budget," says Duxbury, standing outside the maintenance facility on a sunny, 70-degree October morning, "but this was 18 holes. It was still the same challenges, because there was basically no crew, no equipment, no money. Back then, we sprayed greens only when we had to. We put down Daconil. That was it. We sprayed it because it was cheap and it worked."

Fairways and rough were maintained using a gang mower attachment propelled by an aging Ford tractor, which remains in the maintenance facility. Progress arrived in the form of a Jacobsen triplex mower.

Today the equipment is neither sterling nor primitive. Duxbury calls a fleet consisting of four riding mowers, including two triplexes for greens, "solid," and the current budget includes funds for fertilizer and biweekly plant protectant applications on greens.

Synergy among Duxbury, Bair and Krista keeps The Bob functioning and allows it to overcome an erratic irrigation system and the challenges of maintaining turf on a property with no drainage and bulky clay soils. The Neill Log House, the oldest existing structure in the city, represents a relic of the past above the turf. Relics of the past also remain below the surface. "Somebody told us underneath No. 11 there's actually cobblestone down there," Duxbury says.

Asked how his team gets everything accomplished, Duxbury responds, "I have no idea." He reflects for a few seconds. "What it is are three guys that have been here that long and everybody knows what to do. We come in, this guy starts here, this guy starts there. If we get a rain day, it becomes, 'OK, that just means you have to do more the next day.' None of us went to college. I have been in the industry the longest. I probably forget more stuff than I re-



cially, the more money it produces for programming. The number of rounds increased from 12,286 in 2019 to 18,799 in 2020, with 9-hole play accounting for around 65 percent of rounds both years, according to Kulinna. A new configuration debuted on select days in 2021 and The Bob supported 19,398 rounds, with 9-hole play accounting for more than 70 percent of the play. Green fees are modest: \$12 for 9 holes; \$18 for 18.

“Everybody here looks at that whole big picture and what their role

is in that big picture,” Kulinna says. “Jeff’s role is to keep the golf course in as good of shape as he can with the staff that he has and a shoestring budget. And he’s amazing at that.”

Duxbury and Bair are both in their 60s. The summer of 2020 demonstrated the fragility — and grittiness — of their maintenance operation. For a significant part of the golf season, Bair and Krista were working without a close

friend. While relaxing on the evening of July 25, 2020, at a property he owns along the Monongahela River with his wife, **Caroline**, Duxbury suffered a heart attack. Duxbury recalls just two details from the evening: being lifted over a railing in the house and seeing lights inside a helicopter. His awareness returned on Monday morning in a Morgantown, West Virginia, hospital room.

lence as he stood near a fence outside the house. “I can remember my wife kidding around, because I went like this,” says Duxbury, placing his right palm on his chest. “I said, ‘No, it’s just gas.’ She said, ‘You better not be having a heart attack.’” Here’s what Caroline and others later told him about the ensuing scene:

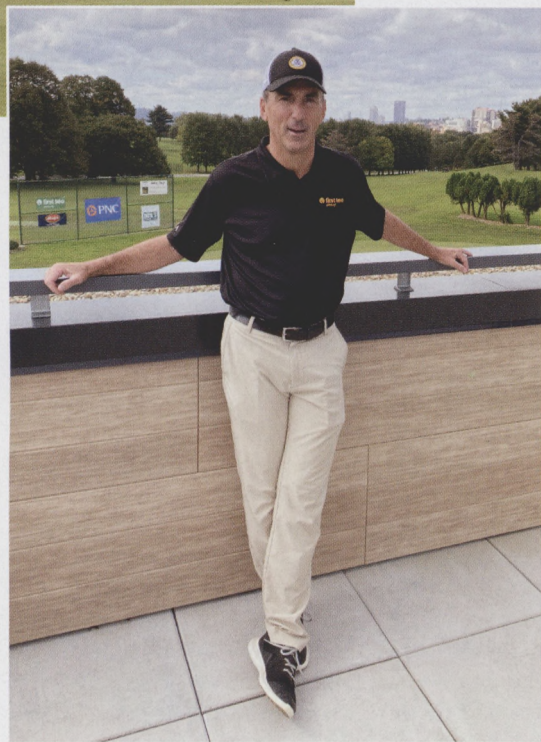
“We went inside and I started throwing up in the downstairs bathroom and then went upstairs,” Duxbury says. “I was throwing up upstairs and made a mess. We went downstairs to get stuff to clean up the mess that I made. My wife said, ‘You need to go to the hospital. We’re calling the ambulance. Finally, I was sitting on the top of the steps. She was on the phone with 911. They asked, ‘Well, is he breathing?’ She said, ‘I don’t know. He’s not yelling at me, so I’m thinking not. She came up and started CPR. The fire company was there and they came with the machine, and they hit me three times. Then, when the paramedics came, they hit me another time, I sat up and said, ‘I’m fine. Everybody can go home.’ The paramedic said, ‘No, you’re not.’”

What triggered the heart attack remains a mystery. “We don’t know what caused it,” Duxbury says. “Am I in great shape? No. But even after the heart attack, my wife will go, ‘You can outwalk me.’”

Bair and Krista, who are cousins, were among Duxbury’s first thoughts when he regained his senses. Duxbury wanted to return to work almost immediately. Medical orders required him to spend three months away from daily work, but he made an appearance at The Bob a week after he left the hospital to see Bair and Krista. Duxbury couldn’t drive, so Caroline gave him a ride to the course. “I told those guys, ‘I trust you. I’m not coming here to check up on you.’”

Duxbury communicated with the pair daily. Bair and Krista received help from members of the First Tee

◀ First Tee-Pittsburgh director of golf and player development Eric Kulinna has extensively studied the history of the Bob O’Connor Golf Course at Schenley Park.



member from being out on a course for all those years. When we didn’t have money, you couldn’t do half the stuff we do now. We think back and it’s like, ‘How did we do that?’” Bair is the veteran of the group, having arrived at The Bob six years before Duxbury.

The trio wields enormous respect for preserving a tough-to-maintain course with minimal resources. The First Tee introduces golf and life skills programming to children.

The better The Bob does finan-

friend.

The ordeal started when Duxbury thought he was experiencing flatu-

Pittsburgh operations and programming staff. “The biggest problem was that I wasn’t allowed to work and I knew everything was going to fall on Wayne and John now,” says Duxbury, with tears welling in his eyes because of the bond he shares with the pair. “Instead of the three of us, it was just them.”

Besides having a defibrillator placed in his chest, Duxbury’s life has been mostly normal since he returned to work late last year, and he spent the entire 2021 season alongside Bair and Krista. He’s trying to eat more vegetables and less red meat, but admits, “I’m never going to turn into a vegetarian,” and he sometimes struggles to find energy for post-work walks with Caroline on hot days. Now 61, Duxbury says the ordeal has changed his views on an eventual retirement, although he says he can envision working a few more years. “I still enjoy doing this,” he says. “I like being outside and I like cutting the grass.”

THE FUTURE

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kulinna, who returned to Pittsburgh after spending portions of his career in Arizona and Michigan, purchased a Newspapers.com subscription and plunged into studying The Bob’s history. The course sits on land donated to the people of Pittsburgh by Mary Schenley. In 1897, the private Pittsburgh Golf Club built the first formal golf course on the land, and maintained the site until the city assumed full control of the course in 1911. In the first two decades of the 20th century, members of Pittsburgh Golf Club sparked the creation of multiple private clubs in the area, including the famed Oakmont Country Club and Fox Chapel Golf Club. The Pittsburgh Golf Club still operates from the opulent clubhouse behind The Bob’s 17th green and 18th tee.

“You just go back to the relationships and how close golf is and you start looking back at that,” Kulinna

A race runs through it

If you like seeing old cars race through city streets, the Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix is one of the coolest events in America. If the course you maintain is responsible for the event’s infrastructure placement and spectator movement, you might have a different view of the event.

Bob O’Connor Golf Course at Schenley Park superintendent **Jeff Duxbury** has learned how to handle the annual July disruption of thousands of spectators and dozens of tents on the property maintained by his team. “What I tell people is that whether it’s a tent, car or person, the whole golf course is completely full,” he says.

Weather dictates the damage sustained by the course. Dry is better for Duxbury and his team, even if it’s in the middle of a month where rainfall can be limited. Greens are roped off before race weekend. “Stronger turf has definitely helped us and people are more aware of what they are doing,” he says.

Duxbury spends race weekend monitoring activity. He has missed one grand prix in his two-decade tenure as superintendent. And what happened during Duxbury’s one race weekend away from the course? A spectator entry point was shifted too close to a green. “After that year, I said, ‘I will never not be here,’” he says.

The lesson for turf managers? It might be wise to be present when the course is needed for a significant non-golf event.

says. “The people who grew the game that time here in Pittsburgh left an enormous legacy. If we can continue to do that kind of work, that’s what I see for us.”

Relationships and the name of the person most responsible for boosting golf in the region helped raise funds to construct a modern learning center. Can those relationships also help modernize the golf course? **George A. Ormiston**, a twentysomething stone contractor from Scotland, designed the nine original holes in 1898. Nine more holes were added in 1901. The routing hasn’t changed much. But life around the course has evolved.

Parts of seven holes play over a pair of paved roads that didn’t exist in 1901. Duxbury, Bair and Krista cross the roads anywhere from a half-dozen to 20 times each day while maintaining the course. Employees are the only people permitted to drive on a course where customers carry bags or use push carts. On some days, nobody can drive on the course. The city has more pavement and less places to move water than it did in the early 1900s. When it rains, The Bob often becomes The Bog.

A jockey pump inside the pump station hasn’t worked in almost a decade. Numerous irrigation heads surrounding greens are either fail-

ing or don’t work. The 18 holes are crammed into space comparable to land used for nine holes on the average 18-hole course. “Everything here is so tight,” Duxbury says. “It doesn’t matter where you are, a ball is always coming at you from some direction.” To his surprise, a ball has never hit Duxbury. “I always catch where they are coming from at the last second and duck,” he says.

The need for functioning course infrastructure coincides with changing golf habits. Quality 9-hole courses, short courses and community spaces such as expansive putting greens are helping municipalities introduce newcomers to the game while retaining time-crunched golf enthusiasts in places ranging from Winter Park, Florida, to Madison, Wisconsin. For some golf consumers, an hour or two on the course each week represents their full health and wellness program.

“Giving someone a place to learn and play, get comfortable, and be able to go out on a regular golf course





When we didn't have money, you couldn't do half the stuff we do now. We think back and it's like, 'How did we do that?'"

eventually is so important," says **Jim Cervone**, a western Pennsylvania-based golf course architect. "And, quite frankly, from a practice standpoint, not everybody has four, five, six hours to play golf."

Over the past two years, Cervone has collaborated with First Tee Pittsburgh officials on a plan to transform The Bob from an 18-hole course into a 9-hole, par-33 course on the south side of Schenley Park Drive, with a 9-hole reversible short course, a community putting green and a short-game practice area on the land around the learning center. The routing has been created within rigid confines, because of a directive to avoid tree clearing. The plan further boosts the environmental profile of The Bob, a certified participant in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf since 2012. Cervone's routing includes native/wildflower plots and a stormwater management pond with natural habitat and sanctuary areas. Cervone and First Tee-Pittsburgh officials have discussed moving away from using city water to irrigate the course and possibly incorporating a pump station and impoundment into the plan.

"You try to first figure out a sensible routing that's going to work," Cervone says. "We haven't really delved into Phase 2, which is figuring out all the mechanicals of the drainage issues and irrigation. To me, that's a huge part of it. I don't want to be involved in something that's not going to be sustainable. They're already in an Audubon partnership and I think we can push that even more to make it something where it becomes a jewel."

The project requires a massive fundraising effort and must appease numerous stakeholders ranging from city officials to course lifers who treasure playing at a place with a 125-year history. The building where Kulinna conducts his daily business and teaches indoor golf and life classes offers an example of what Pittsburghers can accomplish. The Arnold Palmer Learning Center replaced a clubhouse that originally opened in 1913. Individual donors and philanthropic foundations funded the majority of the \$6.5 million project.

"We have already run one race and gotten through the finish line," Kulinna says. "Now we have all that experience, we have all that training, we have all that know-how. We need to get ready to run the next race."

Duxbury epitomizes the perseverance and optimism permeating at The Bob. A self-taught superintendent who entered the industry when his brother, **Gary Duxbury**, informed him of openings on the Alcoma Country Club crew in the late 1970s, Duxbury endured his longest professional stretch away from a golf course in 2020. He missed working on urban land where hawks, turkeys, skunks, deer, runners, bikers, walkers, teenagers playing hacky sack, and golfers of all ages and skill levels can be observed on the same day. Most important, he missed being part of a maintenance trifecta, a small team responsible for keeping golf viable in the most inclusive of settings.

Discussions about modernizing The Bob excite Duxbury. "But," he says, "I'm getting old. Do I really want that responsibility? Going through a renovation isn't the bad part. It's what happens after it's there."

Whenever Duxbury decides to retire, he plans on living with Caroline at their river property, a slice of seclusion 45 miles from The Bob. "I can always get in my car and drive back," he says. **GCI**

◀ Superintendent Jeff Duxbury has been leading the maintenance efforts at the Bob O'Connor Golf Course at Schenley Park for more than two decades.



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.

MAINTENANCE BUILDING ELEVATOR

This elevator was installed in four days in the new maintenance building constructed in March 2016. It is located in the equipment manager's shop that goes upstairs to the 750-square-foot second-floor mezzanine area. It measures 46.6 inches deep by 49 inches wide, with a 1,000-pound capacity, and it takes 32 seconds going up, 55 seconds going down, with a fully loaded lift speed of 15-25 feet per minute. A pallet will fit inside the lift unit but not with a pallet jack. The upstairs mezzanine area is used for all parts inventory for equipment, products for equipment maintenance, inventory of aerifier tines and verticut blades, spare mower cutting units, and verticut attachments, and other heavier stuff. The manufacturer is Custom Industrial Products, Modular Straddle VRC (PM Series) model. The specific cost for the elevator was part of the total construction budget and was not broken out. Superintendent **Brendan Parkhurst**, equipment manager **Peter Rumery** and restoration architect **Bruce Hepner** at the Cape Arundel Golf Club in Kennebunkport, Maine, have it all dialed in.



YARDAGE MARKER INSTALLATION

Color-coded synthetic fairway yardage markers, measuring 50, 100, 150, 200 and 250 yards on the par 5s, are easily installed with this cutting tool made out of recycled bedknives, galvanized pipe and solid square steel stock. Each location is measured with a laser to the green and the operator stands on the tool to penetrate the Celebration Bermudagrass down to the soil line. A square shovel removes the outlined turf and the yardage marker is set in place with a nice crisp edge. Routine edging occurs, as needed, using large commercial grade scissors for a perfect edge. There was no cost for materials, and it took about an hour to build. Superintendent **Robert Jacks** at the Stonebridge Country Club in Boca Raton, Florida, and his staff provide great attention to detail. **Kipp Schulties** is the renovation architect.



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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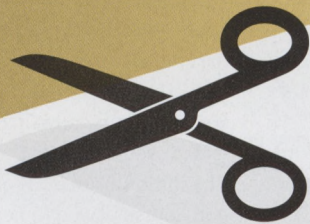
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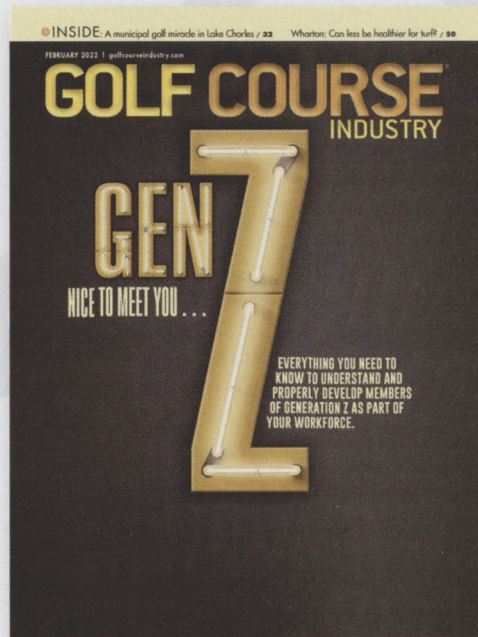


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CAN LESS BE HEALTHY?

It was a little over four years ago when **Adam Garr** penned “Wisdom from Both Sides of the Fairway” in the second edition of *Turfheads Take Over*. Adam is a former superintendent who now works as a territory manager for Syngenta, and he listed 15 bullet points sharing his experience from both sides of the desk. It was the fourth point — “Do Less with Less” — that created a good bit of conversation.

The phrase “do more with less” has been prevalent in our industry for several years as budget cuts were the norm for many facilities prior to the pandemic. Adam stated plainly you cannot do more with less, “you cannot spray more acres with less product, you cannot get more jobs accomplished with less staff and you cannot mow more grass with less mowers. Simply you will do less with less.” His message was a plea to peers to fight for the budget items they need.

A quick Twitter search for the hashtag #GrassCanTakeMore will reveal numerous posts of folks touting the ability of turf to withstand more. More traffic, more stress, more wear and tear. Granted, the majority of these posts the past few years have been made by our colleagues in the newly renamed Sports Field Managers Association. But you do find the occasional golf course-related post too.

It would be easy for one to misinterpret the hashtag and imply grass can take more inputs, but that is simply not the case. And according to one highly respected turfgrass consultant, grass can definitely take less.

Last month, a friend had the good fortune to attend a candid

educational event and shared with me a stirring presentation a consultant made to attendees about how the COVID-19 pandemic had revealed just how much we can do with less.

The increased play experienced nationwide by golf facilities the past two years — the final Golf Datatech numbers of 2021 will show an increase of 20-25 million rounds nationally compared to 2020, which was a busy year nearly everywhere — has created situations where golf course superintendents have had to quickly adapt. Adapt to busier tee sheets, thus interfering with maintenance schedules, meaning less time on the golf course to make fertilizer or topdressing applications. Adapt to an ever-changing work environment with fewer staff as the labor crisis continues meaning fewer people available to perform the work previously accomplished.

Yet, despite these situations of less, what has the consultant witnessed? He stated simply that he had received zero 911 calls over the past two years from any of his clients as a result of doing less. In fact, he is seeing healthier turf and superintendents adapting and discovering creative ways to really make do with less.

Is this the new normal as we move forward? Most likely, but time will tell. Superintendents are not just responsible to provide the best playing conditions possible. We must also provide the conditions and

aesthetics desired by our owners and members.

In other words, we must balance what is best for the turf with client desires. Hopefully the past two years have helped golfers open their minds and change their perceptions of quality playing surfaces. Hopefully, they have become more accepting of a little brown and scruff here and there. Besides, the larger our staffs and budgets, the more our attention is focused on the periphery when the game is still largely played down the middle.

I know I am excited to see how 2022 plays out. The rising cost of fertilizer caused by inflation and supply chain issues has me strategizing ways to make our budget work when we will purchase less than we did a year ago. I do know this: we experienced the best playing conditions in several years this past fall as a result of drought. After three consecutive years of above-average rainfall, October and November were the two driest months of 2021 and the golf course played to perfection.

Let us all hope 2022 is the year when the penny finally drops for golfers to understand that golf is played on a surface and not a color. What matters most is the quality of the surface and the way the ball reacts when struck or bounces and not how lush or verdant it may appear. And I hope each of you continues to find and share creative ways to provide the best possible playing conditions with less than before. If anyone can, it is golf course superintendents. **GCI**



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