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2022

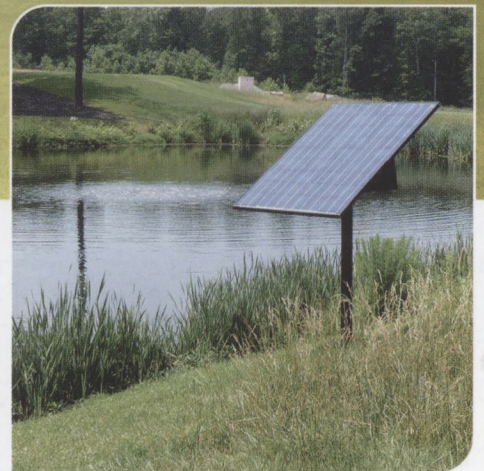
## NUMBERS TO KNOW

Who works on a golf course? And what will it take to keep them there?

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**ABOUT THE COVER:** Wisconsin-based artist Matthew Laznicka's colorful illustrations appear on our cover, this page and throughout our 20-page Numbers to Know package.

VOL. 34 NO. 1

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# COMMIT TO YOUR "CORE"

**G**olf begins 2022 in a stupendous position. But are the people responsible for maintaining the physical assets that are driving the surge themselves in a better spot?

Participation has reached a global-record 66.6 million, according to research released last month by The R&A and Sports Marketing Surveys. In the United States, when Golf Datatech and the National Golf Foundation unveil final 2021 numbers this month, we should learn that between 20 and 25 million more rounds were played in 2021 than 2020.

For back-of-the-napkin-math purposes, we'll use 22.5 million additional rounds for discussion. The National Golf Foundation distributed an infographic last year indicating the average 18-hole green fee is \$38. With those numbers, \$855 million of new money entered the industry on green fees alone in 2021. Sure, the numbers aren't airtight, especially because private-club rounds have dues structures. But we know enough to conclude more money — much more money — has circulated into the industry since 2019.

Moreover, our annual survey (which starts on page 15) reports 89 percent of facilities produced a profit or broke even in 2021, easily the highest total in our 11 years of collecting industrywide data. Seventy-seven percent of facilities were profitable in 2021. By comparison, just 62 percent were profitable or broke even in 2018.

The past two years proved what practical minds already understood: the 100-plus acres of green-space must be treated as the epicenter of a golf facility. Let's face it, the surge started because golf was permitted to play on during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Golf played on — and then became more profitable — because determined, loyal and savvy employees executed jobs they had been performing for years while continuing, in many cases, to receive below-market-value wages. The industry faced a precarious labor situation before the pandemic. Industrywide retention and hiring challenges expanded as the economy reopened.

The average tenure of a golf maintenance employee is 9.6 years, according to our survey. Nearly every facility has a group of "core" workers leading its crew. That number typically ranges from two to 10 employees depending on budget and scope of operation. In simple terms, the "core" knows how to get the job done regardless of the obstacles. The "core" finds the work fulfilling and enjoys being outdoors and around longtime co-workers. The "core" is reliable.

The "core" is also severely undervalued at many facilities and holds unprecedented leverage. The average hourly wage of a fulltime golf maintenance employee is \$16.96 per hour, according to our survey. Think of all the employers in your area offering a higher starting wage for comparable work or less demanding work. Think of what happens to your facility's greatest asset if half of the "core" quickly shifts jobs.

Good owners and operators will use what they unexpectedly earned in 2020 and 2021 to enhance or preserve the product they offer customers. Capital improvements are nice. Investing in people is the better short- and long-term play.

Instead of refurbishing patios, dining rooms, grills, bars, locker rooms and pools, it's time for owners and operators to get serious about boosting compensation of employees maintaining the asset that provides the highest ROI. Housing, groceries and gas cost significantly more than they did at the start of 2021. Workers across all industries, including golf, are wondering where \$16.96 per hour will take them in 2022. The conversations and decisions are never easy. Obtaining a better-paying job means giving up relationships and connections. The "Great Reset" could become the "Great Regret" for millions. Or the only regret might be that they didn't hit reset earlier.

Will golf facilities reluctant to reset employee compensation ultimately regret how they handled the windfall generated by the surge? The days of loyal employees accepting compensation discounts are fading. So are the days where golf can't be a profitable business. Pair the two thoughts and the "core" will be in the spot they deserve. **GCI**



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## GLOBAL GOLF'S GLORY DAYS?

New research revealed by The R&A and Sports Marketing Surveys shows that golf has enjoyed a significant increase in popularity worldwide since 2016 with more than five and a half million additional participants taking up the sport.

The number of total golfers globally has increased from 61 million to 66.6 million in a five-year growth period, surpassing the previous high mark of 61.6 million set in 2012. The measure

includes club members and non-member independent golfers playing nine or 18 holes and users of driving ranges in markets where course availability is limited.

The new figure reflects a positive trend in golf in which participation levels are now rising worldwide after a period of decline.

"Golf is enjoying a real boom in popularity at the moment and we are seeing substantial increases in participation in many parts of the world,

particularly in the last two years when the sport could be played safely outdoors during the COVID-19 pandemic," R&A chief development officer **Phil Anderton** said. "The new figures are very encouraging but we need to work together as a sport to make the most of this opportunity by retaining those people who have returned to golf or tried it for the first time."

SMS collected participation data reported by national federations in different regions around the world, using nationally representative studies and expert estimates to calculate the global number of total golfers.

Regions experiencing the largest rises include Asia (20.9 million to 23.3 million), Europe (7.9 million to 10.6 million — driven largely by Great Britain and Ireland, where the number increased from 3.6 million to 5.7 million), and North America (29.9 million to 30.6 million). In Great Britain, the number of adults playing a nine or 18-hole course began to gradually increase before the onset of COVID-19, rising from 2.5 million in 2017 to 2.8 million in 2018, then to 3 million in 2019, before surging to 5.2 million in 2020.

The research also outlined recommendations clubs can take to retain new players, including feeling welcome and valued; a friendly culture and relaxed atmosphere; participation options based on ability and experience; good customer service; having an efficient booking system; the quality and maintenance of the course; and, importantly, playing in an encouraging environment.

With The R&A governing the sport worldwide outside of the United States and Mexico, the data from the United States was taken from the 2020 National Golf Foundation Participation Report, where SMS completed the fieldwork for the NGF and was involved in producing the report.

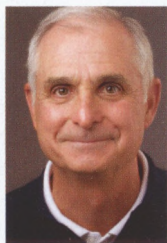


# STILL STUDYING FUNGICIDES

**Dr. Rick Latin releases second edition of book designed to help turf managers better understand the disease control products they are applying.**

By Guy Cipriano

**D**r. Rick Latin moved to Pinehurst, North Carolina, following a 38-year run on the faculty at Purdue University. He quickly learned he needed a pursuit beyond experiencing the region's splendid golf courses.



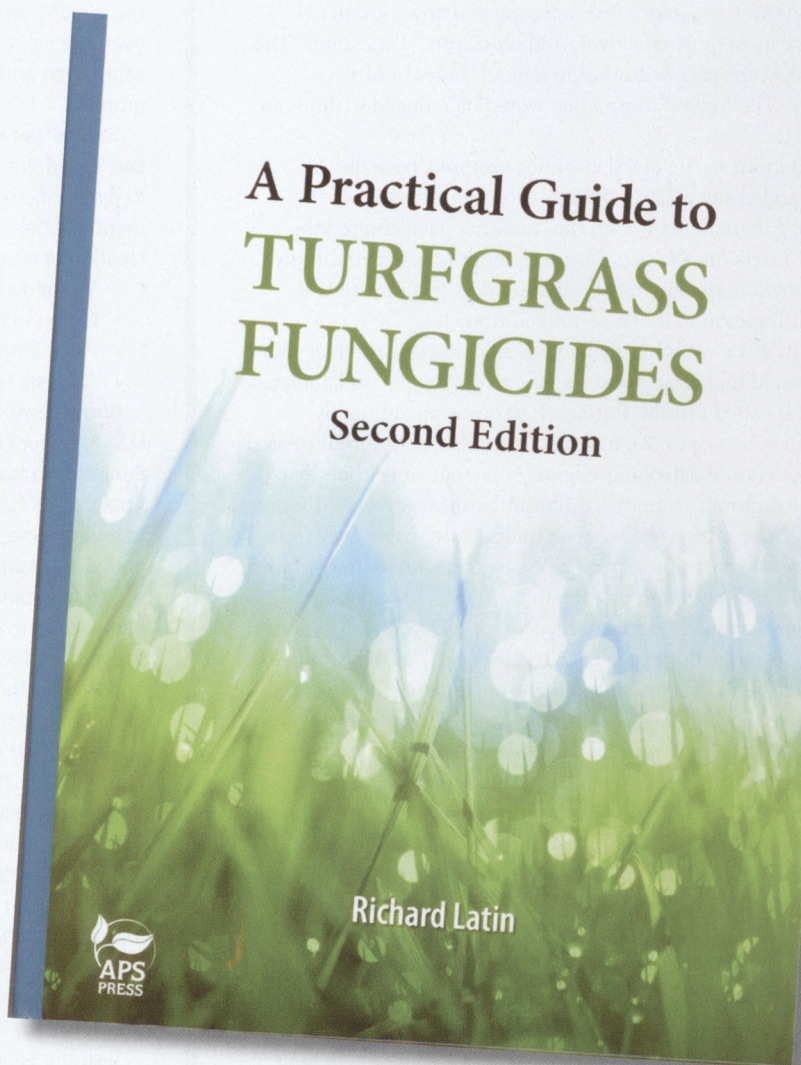
▲ Latin

"I have a lot of time on my hands, because I can't play golf seven days a week," he says.

Latin stays busy by remaining connected with the turf industry and plant pathology. He speaks at industry events, consults with courses, participates in select research trials, reads current literature, and is on a team developing a software program for superintendents interested in establishing site-specific fungicide programs.

"Basically, I'm doing my favorite parts of the job from working at a university for 38 years and don't have the administrative areas that I once had to deal with," Latin says. "I can do as much as I want. For those of us who have that option, it's a labor of love."

Increased work and personal flexibility allowed Latin to complete a project he started in 2017: updating "A Practical Guide to Turfgrass Fungicides." He



released the first edition in 2011 and numerous advancements convinced Latin a second edition was a worthwhile effort. The American Phytopathological Society Press published the book and sells it on its website (<https://my.apsnet.org/APSSStore>). The 353-page guide helps superintendents and turf managers better understand and utilize disease control products.

Sixty-three percent of United States golf courses spend \$30,000 or more annually on fungicides, according to a Golf Course Industry "Turf Reports" survey of 250 superintendents published last November. The same survey indicated 51 percent of courses are projected to increase their fungicide spending in 2022 compared to 2021 and 47 percent



indicated spending levels will remain the same.

Fungicides are critical parts of disease control programs. And there have been significant changes to the marketplace since 2011.

"The second edition was a result of new active ingredients being introduced into our industry, new information being revealed by my colleagues and myself, and new knowledge about how resistance is developing and how we can use these tools most effectively and efficiently," Latin says. "The book keeps pace with the current advances in turf science. The first edition's value would be reduced without an update."

Options in the SDHI class, for example, have quickly expanded since 2011. Latin details the intricacies of the active ingredients within the class that have entered the turf market in the past decade, including benzovindiflupyr, fluopyram, fluxapyroxad, isofetamid, pen thiopyrad and pydiflumetofen, in the second edition.

"In 2011, we basically had boscalid and one product called Emerald that was almost specific to dollar spot and a related SDHI called Prostar, flutolanil, that was just remotely related," he says. "We have had a number of different related products and active ingredients come out since then that have different strengths, different weaknesses and different advantages. It's a challenge to understand where they fit in terms of controlling specific diseases and where they fit into the overall agronomic program."

Fundamentals are introduced — or reintroduced depending on applicator experience levels — early in the book and Latin then shifts into investment-maximizing chapters on factors that influence performance and disease control scheduling. The potential audience ranges from students to proven superintendents. Anybody remotely connected to using, purchasing, selling and studying turfgrass fungicides will learn something from the words, images, charts, research and graphics Latin presents.

"Fungicides are great tools, but they don't always meet our expectations and there are many factors that affect fungicide performance," he says. "The more we know about these, the more we can manage diseases from an informed perspective and use the fungicides to their greatest advantage. Understanding the how and why — and the why not — will help superintendents use and benefit from these fungicides in the future."

Latin plans on attending the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show in San Diego next month and will be available to sign copies of the book. The GCSAA awarded Latin the Col. John Morley Distinguished Service Award in 2018.

"Writing a book is a long process," he says. "But it's a labor of love, because I enjoy writing, I enjoy learning and I enjoy translating research results into practical terms. At times, it's frustrating. At times, it's tedious. But I'm always interested in completing a project and making a contribution."

Guy Cipriano is Golf Course Industry's editor-in-chief.

## Tartan Talks No. 66

Marion Hollins will become the seventh golf developer inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame later this year. Her story might be the most captivating and overlooked of the group.



Jan Bel Jan and Forrest Richardson joined the Tartan Talks podcast

▲ Hollins to discuss how Hollins influenced golf course development and design. Hollins played a major role in the creation of four heavyweight courses:

- Women's National Golf & Tennis Club
- Cypress Point Club
- Pasatiempo Golf Club
- Augusta National Golf Club

Born in East Islip, New York, in 1892, Hollins, the 1921 U.S. Amateur Champion, moved to California's Monterey Peninsula in 1922 and established relationships with many notable golf figures, including Pebble Beach developer Samuel Morse, architect Alister Mackenzie and American golf's first megastar, Bobby Jones.

"What impressed me most, and I think what has influenced me the most, was that she was respected by the men and women with whom she played golf, and as importantly and maybe more importantly, the men who hired her and the men she hired," Bel Jan says.

Hollins died Aug. 27, 1944, in Pacific Grove, California. The WGHO selection is one of several recent decisions to bring more awareness to her vast contributions. The American Society of Golf Course Architects made Hollins an Honorary Member during a ceremony at Cypress Point in late 2021. An effort has been established to raise funds to build a memorial honoring her achievements close to her modest gravesite at Cementerio El Encinal in Monterey, California. Tax-deductible donations to building the memorial can be made at [www.marionhollins.org](http://www.marionhollins.org).

Visit the Superintendent Radio Network page on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and other popular podcast distributions platforms to learn more about Hollins through the thoughtful words of Bel Jan and Richardson, a pair of ASGCA past presidents.

"She crossed the socioeconomic divide," Bel Jan says.





# Take good care

By Lee Carr

Self-Care Day. Sounds fantastic even without further explanation, right?

"The idea was mine, but the concept reflects the mindset of the owner and manager," says **Greg Austin**, superintendent at Sunset Ranch Golf & Country Club. Located in Kelowna, British Columbia, and owned by the hands-on Jhaji Family, who "give 100 percent to their businesses," according to Austin.

Sunset Ranch demonstrates an excellent top-down work culture. **Jeff Richard**, the general manager, "gives me the freedom to make decisions. He provides the direction but how we get there is my call," Austin adds. Hard work, leading by example, trusting each other and caring for one another is a recipe for success and Self-Care Day is one ingredient.

With winter quickly approaching, the forecast filled with rain and the course closed, rather than send everyone home, Austin turned the time into Self-Care Day. With two mechanics leading the way, the maintenance crew worked together to maintain personal vehicles. Brakes were checked, headlights and taillights were aligned, oil was changed and snow tires were put on. At that time of year, "the staff is putting in long hours for the course. Fitting in car care is harder because personal time is limited," Austin says.

The offer was extended to and gratefully accepted by spouses and some other employees on property. Everyone covers their personal expenses for oil and parts, but the labor is donated. Taking it one step further, the mechanics became instructors if someone wanted to learn to do the work, cultivating capability. "Our hoist and the shop are always available as long as people leave it the way they found it," Austin says. "There's a risk to that," he adds, but they trust one another.

With vehicles cared for, people are more likely to be able to get to work when the weather turns nasty. With some of those personal errands checked off the to-do list, there is more time for rest or activities with family and friends. Self-Care Day helps ease

pressure on local garages, which are extremely busy at this time of year, helping the community. Word gets around and this aids retention and recruiting. Plus, working for and with each other is also good for team building and creating loyalty.

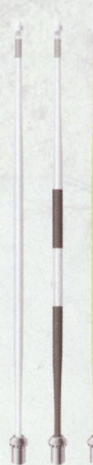
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# INDUSTRY buzz

**TPC Summerlin**, host of the PGA Tour's Shriners Children's Open, announced renovation plans that are set to begin April 15. Work involves converting greens to Dominator bentgrass and fairways to Bandera Bermudagrass. The suburban Las Vegas course is scheduled to reopen for the start of the Shriners Children's Open Oct. 3-9.

Rivermont Golf Club's **Mark Hoban** and Cateechee Golf Club's **Buck Workman** were inducted into the Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Hall of Fame.

**Albaugh** and **Rotam** have entered into an agreement under which Albaugh will acquire all outstanding shares in Rotam through a merger between the holding company of Rotam and an entity in the Albaugh group of companies. The combination of the businesses will create a global crop protection company with total sales exceeding \$2 billion.

**Tanto Irrigation** added **Chase Cameron** to its management team. Cameron was the superintendent at the Country Club of Waterbury in Connecticut for

the last 16 years and will oversee the service aspect of the business.

**Yamaha Golf-Car Company** unveiled its YGC Specialty Vehicle & Distribution Center-Palmetto. Located about 10 miles northeast of YGC's original facility — Yamaha Motor Manufacturing Corporation in Newnan, Georgia — the new location provides more opportunity for future business growth.

**Prime Source** announced EPA registration of new Bifen zEC Select and Bifen G/N zEC Select insecticides.



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WATCH



# Karen Stupples

FORMER LPGA PLAYER, GOLF CHANNEL ANALYST

**K**aren Stupples had an impressive career as a professional golfer. Today, she is one of the sport's more respected broadcasters, having spent nine years with Golf Channel as an analyst and on-course reporter on LPGA telecasts.

Stupples is also a turf enthusiast, an interest that grew out of necessity.

"(Partner **Jerry Foltz**) and I would travel and the guy who was supposed to take care of our garden didn't," she tells **Rick Woelfel** on the Wonderful Women of Golf podcast. "And so, we'd come back to knee-high grass. It used to drive me nuts that you couldn't cut it.

"I would go out there and mow and I'd be like, 'This is kind of fun.' Then after COVID hit, Jerry decided the little tractor mower wasn't really getting the job done enough so we got a zero-turn mower.

"Needless to say, the guy that cuts grass doesn't cut our grass anymore. I've taken control over all that. I need to delve a little deeper into the nuances a little better in terms of fertilizing it, of managing the grass and making sure it generates, and all the rest of that stuff. I'm just getting to grips with the cutting of it at the moment."

Over the course of a 16-year professional career, Stupples won two LPGA tournaments, including a major championship, the 2004 Women's Weetabix British Open. The Dover, England native also represented Great Britain and Ireland in the Curtis Cup on two occasions and competed for Europe in two Solheim Cups. Her experience as a player provides her with insights as to what tour-caliber players notice about a golf course.

"Obviously, the greens and the condition and the firmness of them," she says, "and how they roll when you're putting on them. And also, the grass on the fairways, too. Players love playing courses where the fairways kind of feel a bit like carpet and you can kind of brush the grass, brush the golf ball off of those surfaces or you can take perfect divots because it's just the right consistency.

"I grew up on links golf, so that's a very different type of grass and a very different type of soil underfoot, but there's a firmness to it that creates a nice consistent feel when you're playing, and I think you can get confidence in your game when you're hitting off of turf like that."

Stupples suffers from ADD. As a result, much of her knowledge is acquired through observation, including her knowledge of turf.

"I notice stuff," she says. "I see what the grass is doing. I like to look at where the grain is growing. A lot of courses have grain and that can affect

shots into the green so, when I'm talking about the grain, if it's a full shot, it can take as much as five yards off the distance for the player so you have to club up.

"And also, if you're playing down the grain, you can get more spin and more clubhead speed. How a golf course superintendent mows the fairway can make a huge difference in (playability). So, when I'm commentating on it, that makes a big difference in what I talk about when I'm talking about how a player will approach a shot while they're standing over it."

After spending most of her life around golf, Stupples marvels at what superintendents accomplish.

"First off, they have to deal with Mother Nature," she says. "They have no control over what Mother Nature will throw at them in any given year. So, they have to be very flexible with how they prepare the golf course. They have to have a plan in place.

"They know at certain times of the year they're going to have to take cores out. There's all kinds of maintenance issues they have to go through to keep everything in check.

"(But) the biggest thing for me is the Mother Nature factor. They've got to be so flexible with it. They've got to register and look at what's going on on the greens. They've got to know that they can't let anything slide.

"The best way I can describe it is, you know the people that juggle plates? They put the plates on top of poles, and they spin the plates. They will start off at one pole and spin the plate, then move along to the next plate and then keep having to run down the line to keep the plates from falling, because if you neglect one area, the plates will fall. That's what the greenskeepers do." **GCI**



Players love playing courses where the fairways kind of feel a bit like carpet and you can kind of brush the grass, brush the golf ball off of those surfaces or you can take perfect divots because it's just the right consistency."



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

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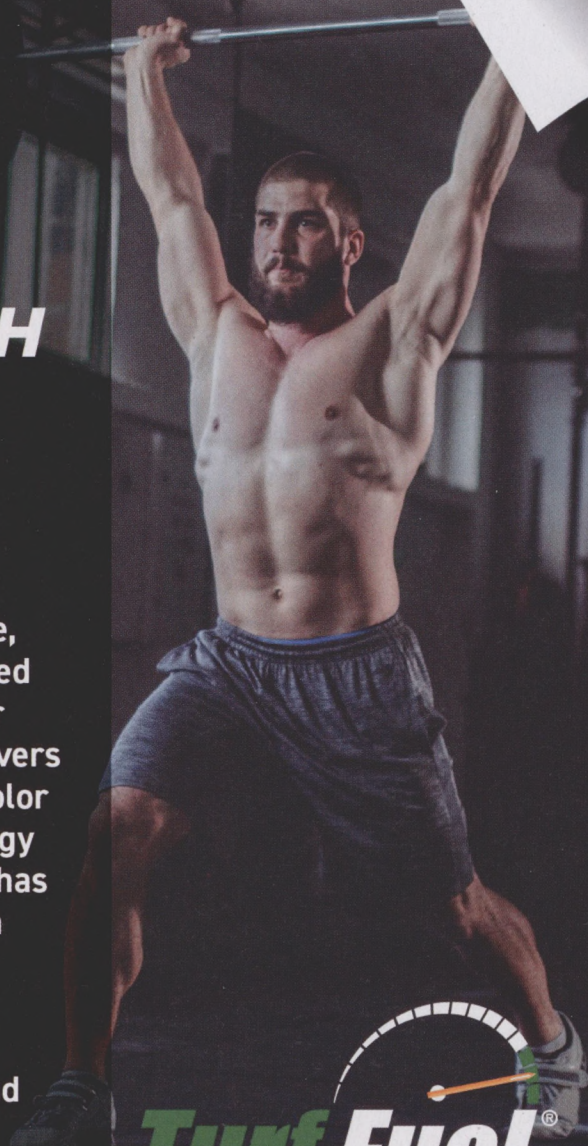
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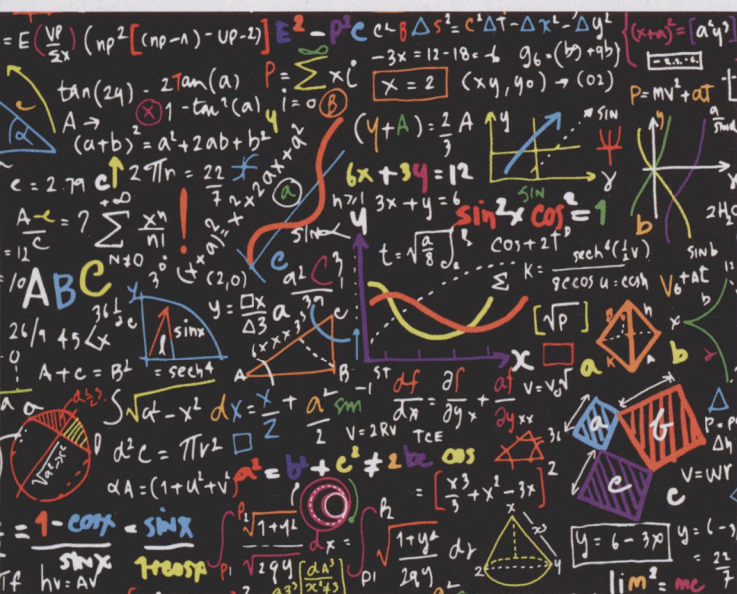
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## USING MATH FOR MAINTENANCE

It is always a helpful tool of the trade to use numbers creatively. I found this out recently while presenting a bunker renovation plan to a club membership that was about to vote on the project.

As an introduction to a PowerPoint giving a few examples of the proposed changes, I told the audience that the goal was to have fewer, but larger, bunkers, and that this would make them more conspicuous, in line with the original design. This would reduce overall maintenance because there would be less area to maintain and less sand to supply or replenish while being easier to groom with a mechanical rake instead of hand raking.

"We're going from 67 bunkers to 45," I said. "Total area will shrink from 60,902 square feet (1.40 acres) to 55,684 square feet (1.28 acres). That's an 8.5 percent reduction. But the average bunker size will go from 909 square feet to 1,237. That's a 36 percent expansion per bunker."

How about explaining to the crew or to your golfers why it's crucial to maintain the perimeter of the green when mowing? It is amazing how imperceptible, and yet how irreversible, it becomes as a putting surface shrinks. Take a standard green, which we will make perfectly round to fit the standard geometric formula for area of  $\pi r^2$ .

At a 44-foot radius, the green area measures 6,082 square feet. Now lose just 3 inches on the perimeter each year as the mower cheats so little that no one even recognizes it. At the end of the fourth year, your green is down to a 43-foot radius and an area of

5,809 square feet — 4 percent smaller. After 20 years, the perimeter is down to 39 feet and the green measures 4,778 square feet — a 21 percent reduction. After 40 years, the putting surface, now with a radius of only 34 feet, measures 3,632 square feet and you have lost 40 percent of its entire area. That is about a 1 percent loss per year, all from 3 inches a year on the edge.

One of my favorite points to make while playing golf is explaining why golfers tend to miss putts by overreading the break. Superintendents will make friends for life with golfers by showing this during a round. The inclination is to aim as far outside the hole as you expect the putt to curve on its path. But this overlooks the fact that the diameter of the hole, which is 4¼ inches across, includes the center point from which that break is measured. Technically then, the radius absorbs the first 2½ inches of break. So as not to get too geeky about it, we'll call it 2 inches. So, when the caddie tells you the putt breaks a foot and indicates a spot a foot outside the hole, remind him, politely, that "the first 2 inches of break are inside the hole" and adjust your alignment accordingly. It might not matter much on 20-footers, but you don't expect to make them anyway. On those all-crucial 5-footers, however, the minor adjustment could make a big difference.

How about the incessant demand for faster greens — most of the time by mid-handicap golfers who never finish putting out their 3-foot comebackers? One thing I have learned is

that rational explanation has its limits. Still, it's the superintendent's obligation to try. Which is why it is worth explaining with the help of one of those multi-colored slope analysis charts that graph a green's pitch from 0 to 10 percent, from safe green to fire engine red.

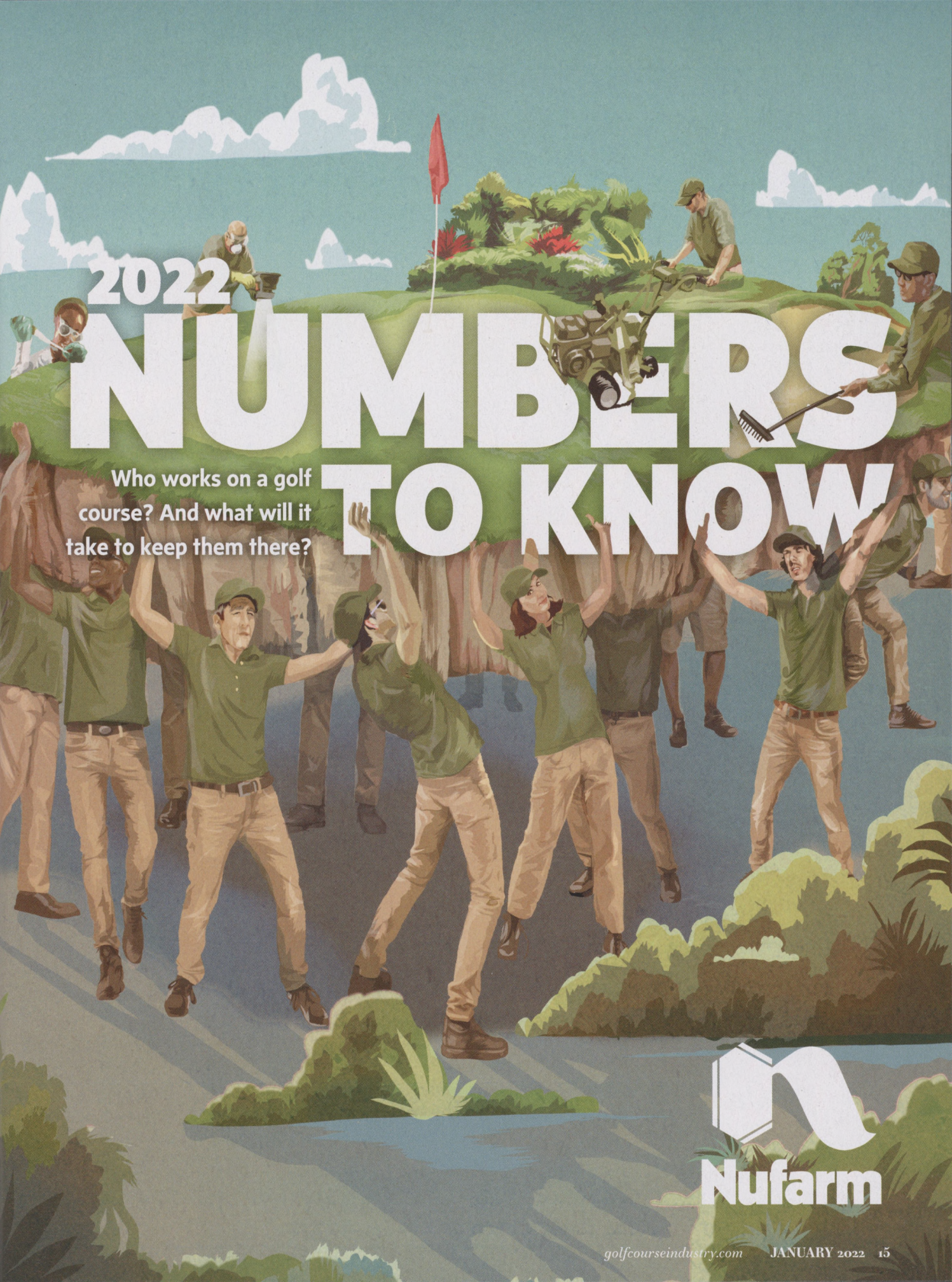
When only 20 percent of the entire putting surface of a vintage-age green is at 3 percent or less, finding cupping space becomes a delicate task, particularly at mowing heights approaching ⅓ of an inch when green speeds surpass 10 on the Stimpmeter. The simple point of geometry — or is it friction? — at that level is that the ball will not stop on a slope above 3 percent. That makes finding a fair (and level) spot to cut the hole a desperate search. It also produces worn out spots on the few areas of the green where cup-able space can be found. The result usually is a combination of limited setups, a feeling of unfairness when you get one of those unstoppable putts and frustration that ends up targeting the superintendent. Something must give. Since it's cheaper and easier to peel back on golfer expectations than to blow up the green and rebuild it, the most sensible thing is to limit green speeds — but only with the help of those flow charts.

The use of basic data presumes a willingness on the golfer's part to accept rational explanation. All a superintendent can do is make a reasonable case with the evidence at hand. In that sense, basic math is a useful tool. Though by no means a guarantee. **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).





2022

# NUMBERS TO KNOW

Who works on a golf course? And what will it take to keep them there?



Nufarm



2022

NUMBERS  
TO KNOW

A

nother year in the books! It's hard to say if things are getting back to normal or not – what does that mean anymore? One thing that's certain is that golf is thriving, with many clubs seeing more rounds and more revenue. In-person events are opening back up, including trade shows! We look forward to seeing you at the newly-renamed GCSAA Conference and Trade Show in San Diego this February.

Amidst the turmoil of changing health protocols and ongoing supply issues, Nufarm is still going strong and working to supply our customers with reliable solutions. We just closed out another successful fiscal year, and 2022 includes plans to launch Decide™ Fungicide, an important tool for the management of turf disease. Decide performed well against multiple challenging diseases in our trials this summer, showing exciting potential for the industry.

Anuew™ Plant Growth Regulator continues to prove its strength in supporting turf density and overall durability. Keep an eye out for new opportunities with Anuew in lawn care and sports turf.

The EXCEL Leadership Program has continued in partnership with the GCSAA, albeit with an adjusted schedule. We just welcomed a new class in October and are preparing to graduate a second. These men and women are the future of golf, and it's been a privilege to watch each class grow personally and professionally during their three years in the program.

We know that our customers continue to grow and improve, and we're committed to doing the same right there beside you. Thank you for trusting us to be a partner for growth in this industry that we all love. Happy New Year!

*Cam Copley*

Cam Copley  
Golf National Accounts Manager





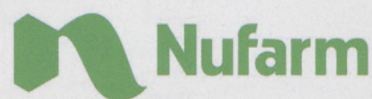
# PLAYABLE + NATURALIZED AREAS, GROWING HARMONY

Naturalized areas can be both beautiful as well as beneficial to your bottom line. However, it is important to remember that naturalized areas do require some level of maintenance to prevent takeover by undesirable weeds. Our line of herbicides will help you achieve optimum balance between naturalized, yet managed, landscape settings and our team of golf experts will guide you every step of the way.

ASK YOUR LOCAL NUFARM REP ABOUT OUR NATURALIZED AREAS PROGRAM

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**Nufarm**

Grow a better tomorrow



# 2022 NUMBERS TO KNOW

## It's all about the TEAM ... and finances

**D**o us – and yourself – a favor and share this section with a few confidants. Your owner. A board member. The general manager. Spouse. Young person. That grizzled neighbor.

Want somebody to understand the people and finances involved in producing the playing surfaces driving the current golf surge? Show them data. And we have the data. Plus, a few practical stories and ideas to accompany it.

For the first time in our 11

years of collecting industry-wide data, we examined the composition of golf course maintenance teams. The GCSAA does a commendable job of collecting data about its members. But much less is known about the hourly, part-time and seasonal workers required to maintain and protect a golf facility's greatest asset. Who are they? Where do they come from? How old are they? How much are they being paid? We start the process of answering those questions in this section. Per-

haps the numbers resemble the composition of your team. Or perhaps they will give you ideas about groups to target when assembling current and future teams.

The survey also features annual staples such as recent and historic budgetary data. Save the numbers. Use them to help make the case to get what your department deserves.

*Golf Course Industry* collaborates with Signet Research, a New Jersey-based independent research company, to produce this report by distributing

a 34-question survey to an email list of 4,317 print and/or digital subscribers who are superintendents or directors of agronomy. Results are based on 226 responses with a margin of error of +/- 6.5 percent.

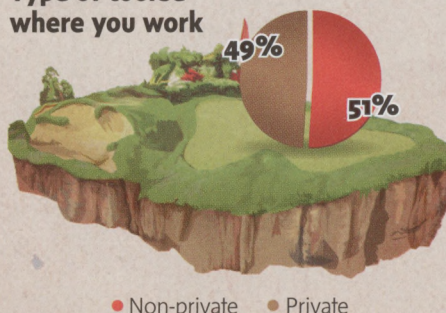
An annual donation to the Wee One Foundation, a charitable organization established in 2004 in memory of Wayne Otto, CGCS, that helps superintendents and other turf professionals in need, is made in thanks for survey participation.

*Guy Cipriano and Matt LaWell*

### Who are you?

Superintendent, single golf course	72%
Superintendent, multiple golf courses	8%
Director of agronomy or equivalent	9%
Assistant superintendent acting on behalf of boss	7%
Other	4%

### Type of course where you work



### Who owns your course?

Member equity	38%
Single owner	23%
Government	19%
Family	6%
Management or investment company	6%
Other	6%
Resort	2%

### Where is your course located?

Northeast  
28%

Southeast  
15%

Central  
40%

West  
17%





# THE COST OF LABOR



**Workers have more leverage than ever — and minimum wage increases are still coming. What extremes are turf pros taking to attract and retain staff? And what might work for you?**

**T**alk with enough golf course superintendents and a number of anecdotal trends become clear. Chief among them: The economics of most golf courses preclude superintendents from offering enough money to compete with almost every other employer. Forget construction or commercial and residential landscape work, turf pros are now being turned down by

teenagers who can make more filling bags at the end of a grocery store checkout lane or stocking brushes and paints at craft stores.

According to the results of our annual survey, the average hourly wage for full-time maintenance crew members is \$16.96, and less than 45 percent of respondents said the average at their facility topped that figure. The average for part-time and seasonal employees? Just \$13.22.

By Matt LaWell

## Was your course profitable in 2021?

	ALL	NON-PRIVATE	PRIVATE	NORTHEAST	SOUTHEAST	CENTRAL	WEST
Profitable	77%	77%	75%	78%	74%	77%	74%
Broke even	12%	9%	16%	10%	16%	11%	14%
Experienced a loss	7%	11%	3%	9%	0%	7%	12%
Don't know	4%	3%	6%	3%	10%	5%	0%



### Average non-capital maintenance budget

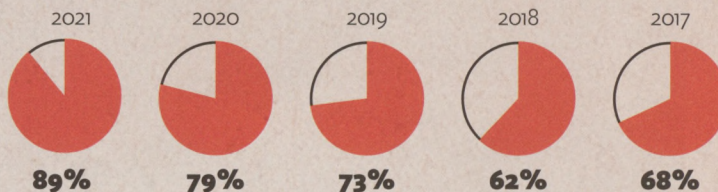
2022	<b>\$907,821</b>
2021	<b>\$1.044 million</b>
2020	<b>\$987,488</b>
2019	<b>\$845,705</b>
2018	<b>\$911,705</b>
2017	<b>\$798,200</b>
2016	<b>\$750,000</b>
2015	<b>\$697,000</b>
2014	<b>N/A</b>
2013	<b>\$622,500</b>
2012	<b>\$651,392</b>

Those figures feel enormous if you earned \$3 or \$4 an hour back in high school, but they can't even be called competitive these days. How can any maintenance building fill its jobs board with wages so low?

"With the state of golf and how busy we are, I think labor is going to be our biggest challenge moving forward," says **Brian Smoot**, the superintendent at the 27-hole Crosswinds Golf Club in Plymouth, Massachusetts. "Probably the most stressful part of my job is worrying about labor."

Finding good workers — or even just workers who show up longer than a week or two, much less the

### Percentage of courses that were profitable or broke even over the last five years



whole season — and carving enough out of the budget to pay them will likely provide plenty of stress for the foreseeable future. Inflation rocketed 6.8 percent from one November to the next, the biggest 12-month increase since June 1982, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the cost of just about everything increased in step. Equipment, fertilizer, seed ... and labor.

But where does labor fit into the budget equation when it's already the single largest line item? Seventy-five percent of survey respondents said that at least half of their maintenance budget is earmarked for labor and overhead, and 44 percent said that at least three-fifths of it goes to labor. (The average, for the record, is 57 percent.) And what can a superintendent do to both retain existing crew members and attract new ones?

#### REMAIN COMPETITIVE

Sounds simple, sure, but the easiest

way to keep your crew at capacity — and happy — is to pay them more.

Thirteen states — whose combined estimated population is almost 150 million people, about 45 percent of the country — have either implemented or scheduled mandated minimum wage increases to \$15 an hour within the next four years, if not sooner. (Those states? Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Washington, along with Washington, D.C.) That means \$15 will be the baseline. If other comparable jobs in your area pay more, your course will need to increase dues or rates to remain competitive.

"Some of it just comes down to the flexibility to increase pay," says **Eric David**, superintendent at the United States Naval Academy Golf Course in Annapolis, Maryland. "My boss (USNA athletics director

### Projected 2022 non-capital maintenance budget by course type

Non-private	<b>\$606,068</b>
Private	<b>\$1,184,429</b>

### What can you do without?

**L**ook at your golf course standards and adjust your maintenance practices so that you can adapt to this labor shortage without harming quality. Can you mow fairways one less time per week without impacting your golfers' expectations? Here, that is monitored by a metric called a Guest Satisfaction Survey, or GSS, and there was no impact. Still a great guest experience. You can change some maintenance routines and still maintain quality. This year, we're just going to keep an open mind toward adjusting our maintenance practices."

— **Scott Norton**, Ross Golf Center superintendent and Country Club of Boyne grounds manager in Boyne Falls, Michigan





## The art of the review

Still just 28 years old, **Nick Gmeinder** recently completed his 12th season in the industry — and his first as the Course One superintendent at Medinah Country Club in Chicagoland. Because of some personnel shuffles, he and fellow first-year course superintendent **Mitch Null** recently delivered their first reviews from the other side of the table, and they found the process less than perfect.

Gmeinder and Null planned for their first review for two full days. Gmeinder talked with *Golf Course Industry* managing editor **Matt LaWell** immediately following what wound up being a two-and-a-half hour conversation with a full-time crew member. These are some of his comments and thoughts about *The art of the review*.

Mitch and I spent 16 hours talking about why a review is a bad process.

You work with a guy for an entire year and then you sit down and you put him on the grading scale. You give him a number and tell him, 'This is how good you were.' (Director of ground operations) **Steve (Cook)** has said he doesn't love doing reviews because they're very black and white — you did well or you didn't do well — and I'm starting to understand why he doesn't like them. You get these questions about, say, being below expectations on your ability to spray or to manage a staff, and you get a grade on it. I understand Steve's side now. It's hard to grade a person on a numerical scale and judge them in a way that they're learning something and they're getting takeaways from it.

I feel like when you give somebody a number grade, most kids today don't take criticism that well. You say they're 4 of 10 on something, they'll get down on themselves and the review does the opposite of what you want it to do.

We had a grading scale, but we didn't mention it once. We just ignored it. I think it's useless. For some guys, if they're really grade-based, if they strive on positive grades, it could be useful, but nobody likes a bad grade, and if

you get one, you get down on yourself and you perform even worse.

The guys want to see their improvements and they want to know that you're thinking about it. They want to voice opinions about how they're doing so that they can get better. I think there's a better way to do it that's not a number scale. We're going to work on something over this next season about how we can change it so the review is just a conversation.

Your review process should be 12 months, not one day. It should be the conversations you have every day, the interactions you have every week with your advisors and your staff. Then when we get to the technical review process in December or January, there are no surprises. That makes it a lot easier for both parties. It makes it easier to accept what's talked about in the review process.

Younger guys need that positive reinforcement. They need that negative reinforcement, too. Sometimes you need to be stern, sometimes you need to give them that moral support. Both of those things are beneficial on the way to the review.

Mitch and I have been trying to re-word and revamp the process. The form that we received used a lot of terms like 'needs improvement,' and we didn't like 'needs improvement.' To be

honest, a 24-year-old guy in this industry doesn't have the education, doesn't have the experience, they haven't managed people enough, they haven't learned the things they need to learn, and the whole review is you saying, 'You need to improve on all this.' We want to get rid of all the buzzwords.

When I started out, when I was a grunt employee, it was pretty much positive stuff. The point of an evaluation when you're a 15-year-old kid, your boss is saying, 'Good job. We hope you come back next year. Here's a dollar raise.' They're in the business of recruiting you. When you're talking with somebody that young, you're not bashing them because you want them to come back.

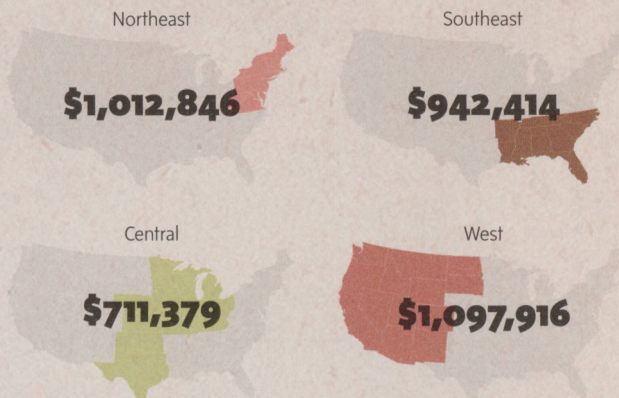
When I got to Lake Shore (Country Club in Glencoe, Illinois), my eyes opened. I was in the real world, I was an assistant, I was talking about budgets, I had deadlines. About half of my reviews with (superintendent) **Jeff (Frentz)** were, 'You're doing a good job, you interact with members well,' and half were, 'You need to learn a lot still. Believe it or not, you don't know anything yet. Next season, this is where you need to be.'

Over time, it evolves. When you're in your first year, no matter your job, the expectations aren't as high as they are in your 15th year.





## Projected 2022 non-capital maintenance budget by region



## Projected 2022 capital improvement and course enhancement budget

All	Non-private	Private	Northeast	Southeast	Central	West
\$226,371	\$136,379	\$312,407	\$258,529	\$189,286	\$167,339	\$308,375



## Are expectations in line with the budget?

**I** think a lot of people have to realize what it costs. The expectations are not matching expenses. Expectations are way too high for what is being spent. If they want Merion conditions, they're going to have to pay their greens mowers \$23 to \$25 an hour to compete with the warehouses. We had the glory days of golf when everything was cheap and easy. It's not that way anymore. You can't even get a permit to build a bridge without jumping through 15 hoops. Expectations just need to be dialed back a bit until we figure out how to make it work a little better."

— **Dan Brickley**, superintendent at Lebanon Country Club in Lebanon, Pennsylvania

Chet Gladchuk) has allowed us to do that and it gives us a better opportunity to hire people and pay them \$16, compared to last year, when I started them at \$13 and couldn't even compete with McDonald's."

**Drew Thompson**, the longtime superintendent at East Aurora Country Club in East Aurora, New York, has had similar experiences with his board.

"Minimum wage has gone up by huge percentages and dues have not followed that track," he says. "We have to work inside the dollars and cents that we're given. They are focused on having the very best staff that we can, so they're willing to compensate fairly. There aren't a lot of questions there, making sure people are paid what they're worth, and that helps me retain people."

"We did find enough people, but we did have to bring the wage up," says **Scott Norton**, Ross Golf Center superintendent and Country Club of Boyne grounds manager in



### Maintenance budget change compared with 2021

	All	Non-private	Private
Increase 20% or more	4%	6%	3%
Increase 10% to 19%	32%	24%	41%
Increase 1% to 9%	46%	46%	45%
No change	13%	17%	9%
Decrease 1% to 9%	3%	3%	2%
Decrease 10% or more	2%	4%	0%

### Percentage of operational budget devoted to labor and overhead

	All	Non-private	Private
Less than 40%	3%	4%	1%
40% to 49%	21%	27%	15%
50% to 59%	31%	30%	33%
60% to 69%	35%	31%	39%
70% to 79%	10%	8%	12%

Boyne Falls, Michigan, in northern Michigan. “Once you bring the entry wage up, you have to look at other wages within the organization so they don’t get slighted. We did that to stay competitive within the local market, because we have a lot of seasonal employers, especially summer seasonal employers, up here.”

But not every market is the same, and not every golf facility is in a position to match every starting wage in the area.

“We’re competing with the warehouse industry and they’re starting at \$23 an hour, going up to \$30,” says **Dan Brickley**, the superintendent at Lebanon Country Club in Lebanon, Pennsylvania. “We have Amazon, Dollar General, Ace Hardware, PetSmart, Chewy, Walmart ... Hershey Foods is right here. Ten years ago, we didn’t have this. A lot of our labor force is going out to the warehouses. We’re all fighting for the same laborer, and I don’t think there’s enough here to go around.”



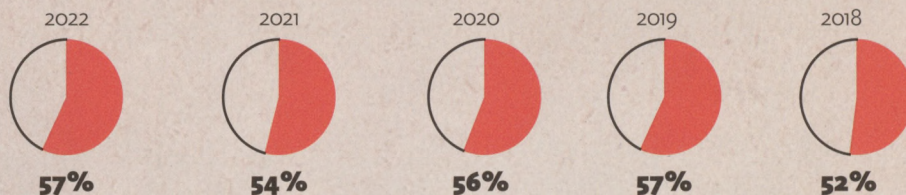
### Bridging the generational gap

**"M**aybe it's just that I'm getting more experience now — I'm going to be going into my fifth year — but I've started picking up more and more on that generational gap, how the generations talk, their mannerisms. I started noticing it last year at mid-season, and I need to manage more efficiently earlier on, because now I know what to look for. You don't have anybody on staff in those two middle generations, the Gen Xers and the millennials, you just have the wide ends of the spectrum, and when you come in as a new superintendent, you think, 'Oh, I'm just going to manage all these guys the same.' You can't do that."

— **Chris Michaelson**, superintendent at Oneka Ridge Golf Course in White Bear Lake, Minnesota



**Average percentage of operational budget devoted to labor and overhead last five years**



**RESTRUCTURE YOUR STAFF**

If your labor costs are inflexible, your next best bet might be to restructure your staff. At the USNA Golf Course, where regular maintenance work and special projects can last all winter, David carries 11 full-timers for a course that could find work for 18 people or more. That structure works for him because he has a “pretty high labor budget” and many of his full-timers have worked at the course even longer than he has.

“Besides making it easier for me during the spring to find seasonal and part-time staff, it just gives us the flexibility to do some winter stuff with a larger number of

people,” he says. “We’ve always approached it differently from some other clubs.”

Clear on the other coast, **Tim Powers** handles 80,000 or so annual rounds at the municipal Poplar Creek Golf Course in San Mateo, California, with a similar approach.

“According to the job notice for the general manager, we have 9.75 full-time equivalents,” he says. “There are five full-time and then everybody else is part-time. We manage. Everyone can do everything. I’ve been here four and a half years, one guy is at three years, and everyone else is over 20.”

Among the 12 other crew members, “some guys do eight hours a week, some guys do 20 a week. They just have to do under 1,000 hours a year” — a city rule in San Mateo. “It’s what they’re looking for and it’s fine. One guy only works Saturday and Sunday because he has another job during the week. One retired guy is **Tom Brady’s** high school baseball coach — still calls him Tommy — he retired from (Junipero) Serra (High School) after 35 years and he just wanted something to do and he’s having a great time with it.

“A lot of guys, that’s all they want. They want to be able to get out of the house, make a little bit of money, play golf and be with some people. And the wife doesn’t want them at home all of the time.”

Entering his fifth year as the superintendent at Oneka Ridge



**Full-time workers  
employed in 2021**

All  
**7.8**

Non-private  
**5.6**

Private  
**9.9**

Northeast  
**5.0**

Southeast  
**9.0**

Central  
**4.0**

West  
**10.1**





Golf Course in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, **Chris Michaelson** is considering doing more with less — and not just because that exact phrase is the title of an upcoming seminar he plans to attend.

“You might have to go with smaller staffs,” he says. “Your fertilizer costs are going through the roof, your seed costs are going through the roof. As you see those prices go up, yes, with minimum wage and other prices going up, I could see staff size taking a hit.

“If minimum wage hits \$15 an hour, do we need to start cutting our staff back? That’s the big question everywhere.”

#### NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE ALLURE OF FREE GOLF

There is no shortage of reasons why people want to work on a golf course. Breathing fresh air and communing with nature, contributing to environmental projects that benefit all sorts of birds and bugs, just riding a mower in the quiet dark of 5 in the morning, on and on.

And, at least at most clubs, plenty of free golf.

Not every club or course offers that perk. If yours doesn’t, it can be the quickest and easiest benefit to attract new workers. And if yours already does, perhaps adding another day or at least another

#### Part-time workers employed in 2021

All	3.5
Non-private	3.8
Private	3.2

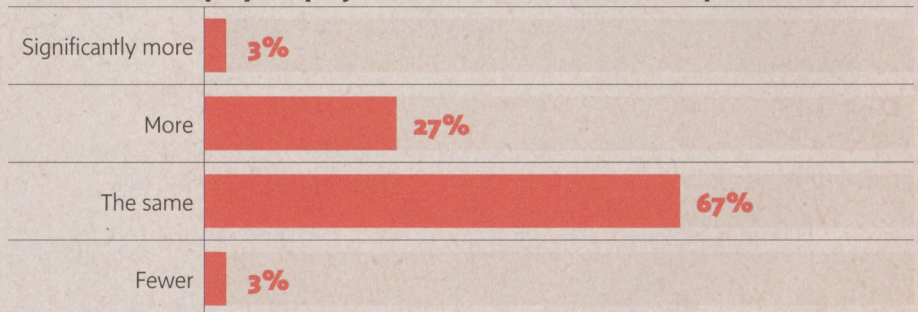
#### Seasonal workers employed in 2021

All	7.0
Non-private	5.0
Private	6.0

#### Total workers employed in 2021

All	18.3
Non-private	14.4
Private	19.1

#### Peak-season employees projected to be on 2022 crew compared with 2021



## The value of volunteering

“**N**ever stop learning. I like volunteering at tournaments. I always learn and I meet people, talking shop. I’ve been pretty lucky because I’ve been at it so long. I’ve done 20 majors — I’ve done 10 Masters, seven U.S. Opens, the PGA (Championship) at Harding, I did the (U.S. Women’s Open at The Olympic Club) with (director of golf maintenance) **Troy (Flanagan)** — and numerous other events. I’ve sent some of my guys to work events and they come back asking when they can do it again. It’s a good experience. They learn and they do a better job.”

— **Tim Powers**, superintendent at the municipal Poplar Creek Golf Course in San Mateo, California







## Hourly employee pay

	Full-time	Part-time/seasonal
\$10 or less	4%	13%
\$11 to \$13	12%	40%
\$14 to \$16	39%	39%
\$17 to \$19	24%	6%
\$20 to \$22	13%	2%
\$23 or more	8%	0%

## Average hourly wage breakdown

	Full-time	Part-time/seasonal
All	\$16.96	\$13.22
Non-private	\$16.92	\$12.67
Private	\$17.00	\$13.77
Northeast	\$18.62	\$14.55
Southeast	\$14.03	\$11.48
Central	\$16.58	\$12.27
West	\$17.94	\$14.61

window for crew to play might not be a bad idea.

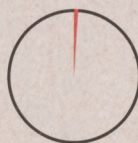
"We're a private club so they have always been able to play on Mondays," Brickley says. "We need to go to the board and ask them to let the guys play whenever it's not busy. Why else would you want to work here? You make nothing, you work yourself to the death, you don't get every weekend off, you're hand-watering when it's 100 degrees, you're raking bunkers. ... Nobody is working unless they can get some golf out of it."

"We just have to inform the rest of the membership to be a little bit patient if they see some guys playing out there." GCI

Matt LaWell is Golf Course Industry's managing editor.

## Hours per week employees are required to work to be eligible for benefits

Less than 31



1%

31 to 35



36%

36 to 39



16%

40 or more



20%

No employees are eligible



27%

Average

35.7



LABOR



# THE CHANGING **FACE** OF LABOR

Who is working on the golf course these days?  
And what is the industry doing to make  
everything work in this wild labor market?

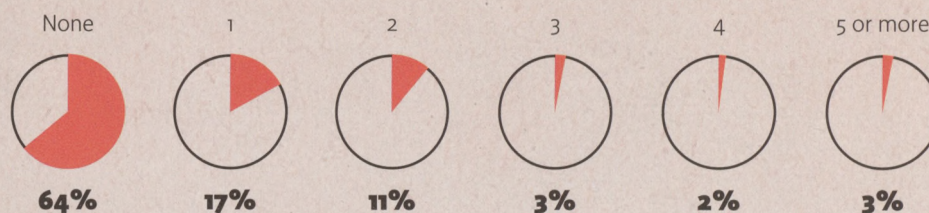
By **Matt LaWell**

**T**he United States, in general, and the golf course maintenance industry, in particular, have endured more labor challenges over the last year than a maternity ward filled with 12-pound newborns.

The COVID-19 restrictions that stretched through 2020 into early 2021 begat record numbers of rounds, which begat more wear and tear on the turf, which begat the need — and, at long last, perhaps



**Number of women  
(including yourself)  
on your crew**



the financial flexibility — for some extra hands. But those hands were hard to find. HELP WANTED signs remained in windows everywhere, even as the national unemployment rate plummeted from 14.8 percent in April 2020 to 4.2 percent last November, not much higher than it was before the start of the pandemic. Workers have more leverage than they have in generations, and employers — golf course maintenance departments among them — have reacted by offering more than ever before. Increased starting wages. More flexible schedules. Plenty of free golf, of course. Even team meals, sometimes grilled by the superintendents themselves.

“I’m doing everything I can,” says **Dan Brickley**, the superintendent at Lebanon Country Club in Lebanon, Pennsylvania, since 2002. “I’m

cooking for these guys, I’m coming in at 4 o’clock and smoking ribs so they have lunch, I’m taking them fishing, I’m taking them hunting, I’m taking them golfing, just trying to do everything I can other than money — because I’m locked there — and it’s exhausting.

“100 percent, this was the most challenging labor year, and it’s not even close.”

The news that labor is a challenge — a struggle at many courses — comes as no surprise. A year ago, 54 percent of respondents to our annual State of the Industry survey listed labor as *at least* one of their top three anticipated challenges for 2021. Thirty-nine percent listed COVID-19 adjustments and interruptions.

Labor remains the greatest challenge. The wrath of a now-yearslong global pandemic is second.

“Labor is at the core,” says **Scott Norton**, Ross Golf Center superintendent and Country Club of Boyne grounds manager in Boyne Falls, Michigan, in northern Michigan. “Managing grass is easier than managing people. Grass shows up every day and works hard every day. Motivating people is a much taller challenge.”

So is just *finding* people. Who works on a golf course these days? Where are Brickley, Norton, and so many other superintendents turning to find new folks? And what really worked in this wildest of labor years?

**THE AVERAGE CREW**

There is no *average* crew on any golf course anywhere. Multi-course mo-

saics and rustic resorts might have 100 or even 200 crew members. Nine-holers in Iowa or Vermont might have a single full-timer most of the year and a few part-timers or seasonal staffers when play picks up. And if you expand the definition of *average* from the size and makeup of a crew to include how that crew performs, probably every superintendent will tell you their crew is well above average.

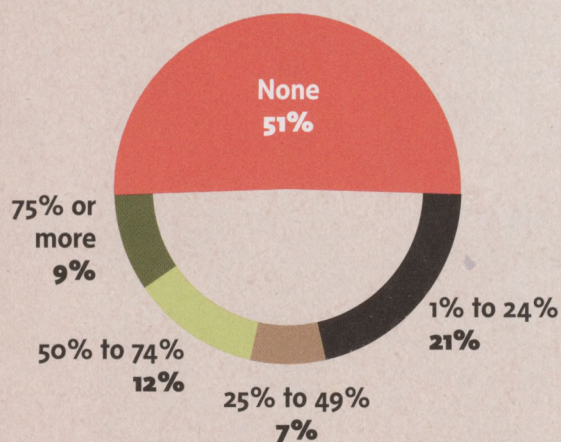
But the average crew, at least among the respondents to our annual survey — which focused more on labor this year after shining on a light on the response to the pandemic pickup in 2021 and the personal toll of turf life in 2020 — includes 7.80 full-timers, 3.48 part-timers, and 6.99 seasonal employees. (The medians are 5.00, 3.00 and 5.00, respectively.) The average tenure for a full-time crew member is an impressive 9.6 years.

The average crew included 3.2 students and 2.8 retirees last year — groups that, at least anecdotally, were well represented among part-time and seasonal employees. More than 38 percent of respondents said they hired more folks from those two groups last year compared to previous years.

Almost every survey respondent said they anticipate hiring at least as many seasonal employees in 2022 as they did in 2021. Thirty percent said they will hire more, and another 67 percent said they will hire about the same. Only 3 percent, the true outliers, said they anticipate hiring fewer this year.

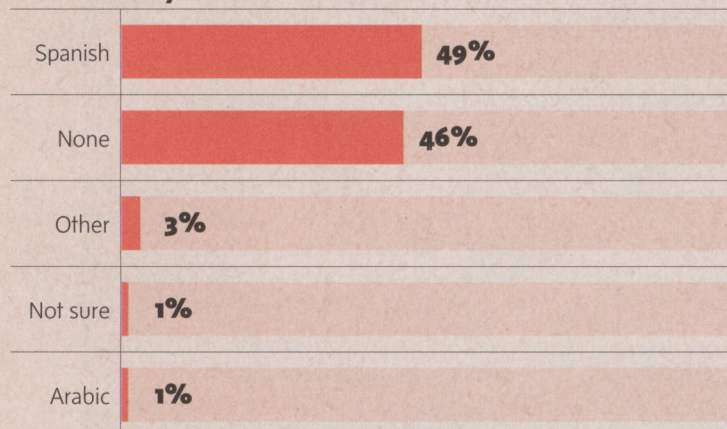
Nearly half of all respondents said that at least some of their crew

**Percentage of your crew that doesn't speak English as a primary language**





### Languages other than English spoken by members of your crew



does not speak English as their first language, with about 21 percent of all crew members in that bucket. As you might expect, Spanish is the top primary language among those folks. **Tim Powers**, the superintendent at municipal Poplar Creek Golf Course in San Mateo, California, counted among his crew Filipinos, Hispanics, Japanese and Punjabis. "I've had to learn some different languages," he says.

Perhaps not surprising but certainly disappointing: Only 36 percent of respondents have even one woman on their crew, with less than 6 percent counting at least three. The average number of women on a crew? 0.77.

Only 7 percent of respondents said any of their crew members are also members of and represented by a labor union.

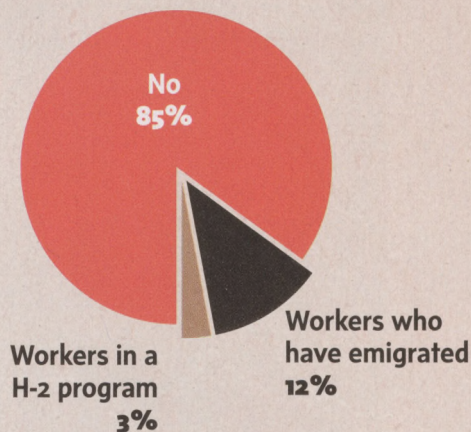
Does all that sound like your crew? Probably not, because there is no average crew.

Among the dozen superintendents and turf pros interviewed for this package — in addition to the 226 who responded to a series of emailed survey questions — some fill their crews almost exclusively with full-timers. Others rely more on seasonal employees. Among that latter group, some hired far more high schoolers. Others, either

because of the available labor pool, or local laws, or both, turned to retirees. Some love Indeed.com. At least one thinks it is a total waste. At least one other superintendent filled his part-time roster sheet before Tax Day. Most everybody else was scrambling into the summer.

There was one constant, though, when they discussed labor: Whenever they needed somebody new, word of mouth — and referrals from current crew members — almost always worked best. And while referral bonuses are not yet anecdotally common, they are starting to spread, and they seem to help. One course, not mentioned in this package because they requested anonymity, currently offers \$2,000 bonuses to current crew members whose referrals are

### Do you employ workers participating in H-2B program or who have emigrated to the U.S. from a foreign country?



hired and work 90 days.

"When I was up at Crystal Springs (Golf Course) and I needed more guys, I would just talk to my crew and they would bring a friend in," Powers says. "They were the screening process. One guy, he said, 'I have a friend who wants to come to work.' He came up to me an hour later and said, 'Nah, forget that. He won't work hard enough.' Because if it doesn't work out, then I'm going to be upset with them."

### TURNING OVER EVERY STONE

While there might be a best answer to the never-ending question about how to fill a crew, there is no wrong answer.

**Chris Michaelson** turned to the two neighborhoods that border

### Top three countries represented on courses using H-2B programs or employing workers who have emigrated to the U.S.



Mexico



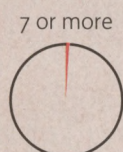
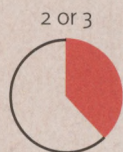
Guatemala



El Salvador



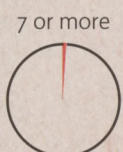
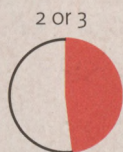
**Employees (including yourself) on your crew with a two- or four-year degree in turfgrass management or related field**



Average

**1.9**

**Employees (including yourself) on your crew who are active members of a national, regional, state or local professional association**



Average

**2.1**

Oneka Ridge Golf Course in White Bear Lake, Minnesota, and are filled with teenagers who can walk or ride their bikes to the course. When he was turning over his seasonal staff for the fourth time last season (yes, the fourth time — it was a rough year), Brickley turned to former crew members who were laid off after a local landscaper shut down.

And **Bryan Tipton**, the superintendent at Hillview Golf Course in Pierre, South Dakota, looked across the street — literally, just a few hundred yards west on SD-34 — to the South Dakota Women's Prison.

Tipton has worked either 26 or 27 years as a superintendent — he lost count somewhere along the way — and mixed in a nearly-decade-long stretch running the pesticide program for South Dakota. He noticed then that the state often turned to inmate labor and figured he would at least dive into some research.

"I run two to three inmates, and they work full-time," he says. The rest of the crew is more along the lines of what you might expect—a full-time assistant, mechanic and irrigation technician, more retirees now than college students among the part-timers and seasonal staffers, a couple teachers who work during the summer. One college student last summer left during the season. His new job? Tinting win-

dows. "It was air-conditioned," Tipton says. "He was tired of working in the heat." The inmates, though, are different.

They tend to work focused and diligently. The first year alone, the program trimmed about \$30,000 from the labor budget. "I have no problems with my labor budget anymore," Tipton says, "and we still have quality work out here."

The program was spotlighted in 2019 and 2020 by the GCSAA, a SiriusXM Radio program, even CBS Sports. "It was the lead-in to the PGA Championship," Tipton says. "A lot of people recognize me from that. They might not remember the person, but they remember the story." But it quietly faded away during much of the first year of the pandemic after the prison locked down because of COVID-19.

"It was a great year for me to catch up on podcasts because I was out on a mower about 90 percent of the time," Tipton says. "We lost them for almost the whole golf season. I got them back in December 2020 and I've had them back since then. They were pulled this year on October 27, right into our fall shut-down time — they had an outbreak at the prison — so it didn't hurt us. I lost them for the month of November, but they're back now.

"It was like heaven (to have them back). In 2020, we were hardly staying



**Are members of your crew part of a labor union?**



on schedule with them gone. I remember just being exhausted. If we didn't have the inmates this year, there's no way we would have been able to do what we did in 2020. My assistant (**Jordan Steiner**) was hand-watering every day this year, and he was a mower last year. It's just a miracle sometimes."

**STRIKING A BALANCE**

No matter what you might think or sometimes say about generational differences, the divide is probably not as stark as stereotypes might indicate. Every generation is represented on crews — among the crews of all survey respondents,

70 percent said theirs includes Gen Z'ers (born from 1997 to 2012), 73 percent includes millennials (1981 to 1996), 80 percent includes Gen X'ers (1965 to 1980) and 82 percent includes baby boomers (1946 to 1964). Eleven percent of crews still include at least one member of the silent generation, born from 1928 to 1945.

Retirement for the boomers is a boon to scheduling. So was virtual school for the millennials — at least for a while — with two superintendents saying that students sometimes even logged into class from the maintenance building between split shifts.

"When in-person classes were shut down during the spring and the fall of 2020, I did see a boost in the timeline of *when* (students) started," Michaelson says. "That year, heck, I was having kids come in the end of April, so I was getting almost an extra month and a half. Granted, it wasn't full days, but it was enough to get a lot of extra projects done earlier on — just the kind of stuff you're always rushing to do, like edging bunkers, summer prep stuff that normally takes extra time.

"We were able to do it a month earlier, before the play really got going, because we just had the staff that much earlier. And that freed up time later in the summer to push projects forward into a cooler time of the summer."

**Collin Romanick**, superintendent at Blythefield Country Club in Plainfield Township, Michigan, just northeast of Grand Rapids, "had a full staff this summer, but the majority were college-aged,

**High school and/or college students employed on your crew in 2021**

None	<b>24%</b>
1 to 3	<b>42%</b>
4 to 7	<b>25%</b>
8 to 10	<b>5%</b>
More than 10	<b>4%</b>

**Average: 3.2**

**Retirees employed on your crew in 2021**

None	<b>24%</b>
1 to 3	<b>46%</b>
4 to 7	<b>26%</b>
8 to 10	<b>2%</b>
More than 10	<b>2%</b>

**Average: 2.8**





## Average employee tenure on your crew

# 24%

1 to 5 years

# 37%

6 to 10 years

# 23%

11 to 15 years

# 12%

16 to 20 years

# 4%

More than 20 years

## Average: 9.6

some high school, and in our area, high schools go back before Labor Day now. Used to be after Labor Day and now it's three weeks earlier, so it stretches us pretty thin. And most of my kids are student-athletes so they have practice. They're just busy — kids are busy these days. Once school starts, they're pretty much gone. I do have a few that work on the weekends still, which is good."

That is the trade with students on the seasonal crew. They have more energy than anybody else on the course, they just leave a couple calendar flips earlier.

**Brian Smoot**, the superinten-

dent at the 27-hole Crosswinds Golf Club in Plymouth, Massachusetts, worked at a local golf course when he was in high school. He also played golf, basketball and baseball, and his athletic endeavors "placed a real strain on" his relationship with his boss.

"I'm still good friends with the person today," he says. But he definitely received some pushback when school sports ramped up and his hours on the course wound down.

"It bothered him," Smoot says. "And it bothers me. I would never be like that to anybody who works for me.

"I've always felt like a young person has the rest of their

life to work. Do the best you can for as many days as you can, and I'm happy with that. It was nothing for me to work six days a week, sometimes seven, and when you're a 15-year-old kid, that's not right. You need to have a life outside of work also. I tell my students this: 'You have no idea what giving me

## Did you employ more students and/or retirees in 2021 compared to previous years?

Yes, more students

# 16%

Yes, more retirees

# 9%

Yes, more of both

# 13%

No

# 62%







**Generations represented on your crew**



one weekend day means to me, how much it helps out. I'm fortunate."

**THE BOTTOM LINE?**

Who will work on a golf course in 2032? How about in 2042? 2052? 2082? 2122? Who knows? More women would be a great start. Maybe more full-timers and fewer seasonal workers, or more seasonal workers and fewer full-timers. Maybe the industry as a whole or at least a large percentage of facilities will adopt some sort of system — whatever replaces apps in 10, or 20, or 30, or 50, or 100 years — where vetted workers come in on their own time and work for however long they want. Hey, crazier things have worked out.

Whatever happens, wherever golf course maintenance is heading, there will always be optimists, and there will always be pessimists.

**Drew Thompson**, the longtime superintendent at East Aurora

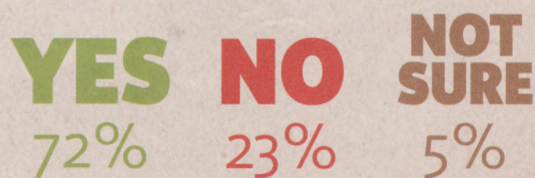
Country Club in East Aurora, New York, about 20 miles southeast of downtown Buffalo, is an optimist.

"I love to see where the golf industry is going," he says. "I hope it's not a bubble. I'm sure we'll back off a little bit, but I don't think it is a bubble. I'm going to start looking at getting high school kids involved more if I can. I think that's good on both ends." He says that a recent high school graduate with an interest in applying to turf school will be shadowing him soon. Thompson's son, **Brendan**, started turf school himself last fall. "I'm embracing that with open arms. I think that's important. And who knows? Maybe he can talk with a few of his friends and we can get a few more of them here."

Thompson is bullish about the industry. Not every superintendent is. Just like there is no average crew, there is no average superintendent.

"I have some guys who work for

**Do you have employees on your crew who work a job in addition to golf course maintenance?**



me who are still kicking around what to do with their lives," he says. "I've told them, 'It's a good business and it's wide open right now.' If you can really put the time in and become proficient, you can make a good living at this as a career."

Maybe even above average. **GCI**



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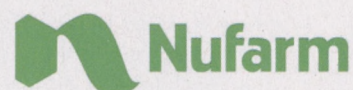
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# WATER-DRIVEN TURNAROUND

Returning a stunning New Mexico course to its lofty status started by correcting issues with wells, pipes and pumps.

By Judd Spicer

**T**he time has come to meet your mesa. All over again.

Nearing a 20-year anniversary since its celebrated debut, Black Mesa Golf Club in northern New Mexico is enjoying a rebirth after flooding and well issues saw the unique, attractive grounds hit a serious O.B. hook in both narrative and playing conditions.

Yet, amid the solitude of the scene's natural ledges, arroyos and desert landscape, the course is rising anew. New Mexico, a state with just over 2 million people — and flanked by golf-rich Arizona to its west and Texas to the east — is no doubt hoping for a rank rally. The state supports 76 golf facilities, according to the National Golf Foundation. Only six states have fewer.

Compliments of a reinvestment in the grounds from Santa Clara Pueblo tribal ownership, reworked irrigation logistics and an energized superintendent looking for a fresh test, Black Mesa is on the rebound. "It posed a challenge, but that's where I was at, what I was looking for in my career — a challenge with great potential," says Aaron Sunderlin,





▲ Aaron Sunderlin has led Black Mesa's turf team since 2017.

who accepted the superintendent gig at Black Mesa in 2017.

Upon Sunderlin's arrival, he received the challenge he was seeking, as Black Mesa's water issues had taken the course from Rising Star to Aging Afterthought in a mere decade-plus of existence.

"There were actually two separate water problems here," he says. "There was a considerable flood with the original well coming off the river, and that put the course behind. And then, the assumption was that the problem was solved with wells on the property, but those just didn't produce enough water. So that brought us full circle back to finding a good-quality water source down at the Rio Grande. That's where we stand today, and we work hard to make sure that water source is protected and cared for."

Originally, Black Mesa, located 25 miles outside the capital city of Santa Fe, used to have two seed ponds from the river. The course now irrigates via what are basically a pair of artesian wells — one a filter catch that feeds into the second, which

provides a fast enough recharge for the course.

A lone member of Black Mesa's original team remains, able to recall the grounds' tale of debut, descent and comeback.

"Our water lines come up from the Rio Grande through this dry arroyo; and the arroyo, through the years, didn't get enough rain and so it turns over," says **Tom Velarde**, head golf professional at Black Mesa, where he's worked since 2002. "And when it turns over, all the piping comes up and you have to get in there with an excavator and trench back in. So, when it happened the last time — even though it wasn't anything new or different — we found out that nobody had ever received permission to do that. That began a whole timetable of getting permits, which took well over a year. But, in that interim, we had an engineering firm come in to design a pipeline, and now we've got a stable water source."

Motivated and financed to stave off a "What was" label, Black Mesa regained footing, step by step.

"The original plan, it wasn't a bad plan. I think we have a similar design. But they just had the terrible flood down at the river, which wiped out everything," Sunderlin adds. "It was very traumatic, but the tribe has stepped up and put the proper resources in place. The first summer I was here, in 2018, we put in the new pump station on the golf course. Below the lake on No. 1, those are my irrigation lakes, which was a necessary irrigation update as a lot of the components of that (former) pump station were obsolete."

Sporting but 80 acres of turf, the agronomic comeback has worked in-swing with a reimagining of the original **Baxter Spann** design. Aptly considered — and marketed as — a "Monster" in its inception and maiden years, Black Mesa has come back with a more playable mindset.

To wit: Gone are approximately 130 bunkers that initially lined fairways. Though a pleasing photographic aesthetic with tall, wispy grass







framings, the bunker-laden routing also led to five-plus hour rounds for mid-handicappers.

"Its acres of bunkering we've removed," Sunderlin says of what now essentially play as grass bunkers. "The original design was incredibly beautiful and the architect did a great job, but as decades have passed, things change, philosophies change and I think the product we have now is fantastic. And with a lot of these bunker grow-ins, we had to put in new drainage in the bottom, as they were kind of a natural catch."

Peering quietly across the attractive terrain, Sunderlin highlights the changes on the top-handicapped, 603-yard par-5 third hole, which once had bunkering all along its right side.

"The original design, for the 20-handicapper ... this course was originally thought of as 'The New Mexico Monster.' That, of course, was when 'Tiger-Proofing' was around, and things were built

challenging and beautifully for the really good golfer," Sunderlin says. "But where we're at in golf right now, I think we just want people to come out, have fun, not spend the whole day playing from the trouble. We've improved both the speed of play and the playability of the course. And we still have a great test out here. Every hole still has multiple bunkers and there were some bunkers I added back in for depth, so the course still retains the original design concepts."

From sand to grass maintenance, the natural topography presents its inherent encumbrances.

"It's quite a challenge," Sunderlin details as the course rounds toward the turn. "Sitting here at No. 9 tee, we look at the plethora of nobs and mounds that used to be bunkers, and now we're expected to drive rough mowers over those areas and maintain what are now essentially grass bunker areas, not all of which may even have irrigation coverage because they were meant to be sand."

A portrait comparison of Black Mesa then and now presents contrasting images.

"I've seen past pictures of the course, and what we've got here now — it's fully recovered from any hardships," Sunderlin says. "I actually considered it a new course grow-in when I was growing in all these bunkers. I just took it at face value. Getting the greens right, getting the grow-in bunkers right, getting the fairways beautiful, and then get to work on the rough areas."

Of course, past or present, and whatever the degree of green acreage, a desert course is still a desert course.

"A lot of what we try to do here is, anything we apply, we try to acidify the soil," Sunderlin says. "I spray the fairways every three weeks, just to get the nutrients in the plant because they really have a hard time up-taking nutrients from the soil. It's a good amount of work, and I found after my first year that you throw granular fert at it and it just turns the place yellow. The turf kinda grows, but when it grows it doesn't pull any nutrients out. And, of course, there's the challenge of growing grass in the desert soil. The soil is very high in pH, very high in bicarbonates. The problem with the pH is that it doesn't allow the turf to pull the nutrients out of the ground, doesn't allow water to infiltrate very easily."

Now four years into the rehab, Sunderlin's work in the Black Mesa rally isn't yet complete. But with continued ownership backing and a steadied water supply, the remote canvas is primed and prepped to regain its once-lofty status.

"This is a very special property on a great location," Sunderlin says. "No matter where you're at on the course, you get great solitude. It's a very peaceful place, where you're at one with the land." **GCI**

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





# Hovering over healthier *Poa*



## What tools and technologies will ease the burden facing turf managers in cool-weather growing environments? **Ron Furlong** reveals a wish list for the not-so-distant future.

**W**hat if you could close your eyes and be granted a wish? Actually, close your eyes and be granted three or four wishes? Hang on now, there are a few stipulations. First, of course, the old “rub the lamp and make a wish to the genie rule” applies, which is, you are not allowed to wish for more wishes. And second, we’re closing our eyes specifically as golf course superintendents here—and, even more to the point, cool-weather golf course superintendents—meaning, sorry to say, world peace, \$6 billion in cash in small nontraceable bills or a cure for COVID-19 are not in the cards here.

**Guy Cipriano**, the editor-in-chief of the fine publication you are currently reading, tasked me with that very concept (or at least a limited variation of the make-a-wish concept), to close my eyes and imagine three or four innovations that could make my job as a cool-weather golf course superintendent easier.

It took me about 3.2 seconds to come up with the first one:

### **DISEASE-RESISTANT POA ANNUA**

For anyone managing turf in the northern climates where bentgrass struggles—like, for instance, my location in western Washington—*Poa annua* is, for better or worse, the card we have been dealt.

All types of golf course greens have their own nuances and intricacies that come with managing turfgrass at a high level. Bentgrass, Bermudagrass, *Poa* ... it doesn’t matter. When you are mowing at heights of .100 or even lower these days, challenges abound.

For those of us managing *Poa* greens, fungal pressure is definitely high on the list of challenges. And that pressure seems to be evolving with the ever-rising demands for better and better putting surfaces.

There was a time when major disease concerns for us here in the Pacific Northwest were limited to fusarium patch and anthracnose.

But over time, with those increased demands for daily high-level playability and, specifically, roll, those two common diseases are no longer the only fungal concerns in this region.

Now we deal annually with not just fusarium and anthracnose, but summer patch, take-all patch and, to a lesser extent, dollar patch and brown patch. Even *Pythium*, with the extreme heat we have seen in this part of the country the past few years, has become something we now have to at least consider as a possibility.

When I close my eyes and think of an easier future for northern golf course superintendents, I envision a resistant variety of *Poa* that could somehow make all of these pressures simply go away in a poof of magic pixie dust. I dream of a world where sprayers sit in the shop gathering dust, and the plant protectant line



item in the budget shrinks to almost nothing as we divert those funds and resources to other areas of the golf course. Is this asking too much?

## THE GREENS HOVER MOWER

As I'm sitting here writing this article in early December, a record rainfall is dumping outside my window. Our average November rainfall here at the golf course is 7 inches, our wettest month by far. We just turned the calendar to December and recorded 14 inches this past November. Safe to say, for a golf course that stays open year-round, it gets a little challenging to mow grass when it's this saturated.

One of the challenges of trying to mow greens in the saturated winter months is not so much mowing the greens themselves, which are sand-built and drain well, but often it's the green surrounds themselves that are the problem. Getting the mower up to the green can be next to impossible when it's this wet.

How about a greens mower that somehow can have a drone-like feature to get itself around? It could be fairly limited in its flight distance. Basically, just getting us from the cart path to the green, often no more than 40 or 50 feet — a little burst of hovering capability to get the mower where it needs to go.

## GOLFER ACCOUNTABILITY

This one is a little tough to explain. What I would love here is for there to be an invention that would educate the casual golfer to perhaps be a little more understanding to what we, the keepers of the course, would like from them. I have no idea what this invention would look like or how it would work, but I believe this is becoming a severe problem on courses across the country, especially recently with so many new people coming to our game in the last couple years.

This problem manifests itself in many different ways throughout a round of golf. Driving the golf cart,

raking bunkers, fixing ball marks, replacing or filling divots and understanding pace, just to name a few.

With each passing year, it seems like fewer people rake their bunkers, fill divots or even fix their ball marks. The 90-degree rule, as well as directional signs, are more and more regularly ignored. To me, it seems like we've welcomed all these new players to the game without really holding anyone accountable to the etiquette involved and expected when playing the game of golf.

Maybe this is an app that courses would require golfers to install on their phone that somehow, as they are playing their round, holds them accountable with reminders of golf course etiquette. A little chime or vibration from their phone telling them to rake the bunker they just stepped out of or veer their cart back to the cart path instead of heading down the middle of the fairway.

## SMART MOWERS

Along the lines of a smart phone, how about a smart mower? I'm not looking so much for a completely automated mower. I don't want to get rid of the human element just quite yet. But how about a mower that can direct and assist the operator a little bit more than they currently do?

What I'm thinking of specifically here again is our difficulty in mowing turf year-round because of winter rains and saturation. One of the most difficult things for my operators in



"When I close my eyes and think of an easier future for northern golf course superintendents, I envision a resistant variety of Poa that could somehow make all of these pressures simply go away in a poof of magic pixie dust."

the late fall, winter and early spring is trying to determine whether a particular area of turf is mowable. When mowing rough, specifically, they are constantly making that decision as they move through the golf course: "Can I mow that without doing damage or getting stuck?"

What if the mower could make that decision for them? Much like cars have the technology now to alert you if you are going over the center line, maybe the mower can do something similar, even taking it a step further to determine whether an area should be attempted or maybe skipped altogether.

This would lead to less damage to the course as well as the operator being more confident and comfortable going into areas that seemed borderline with the

naked eye.

I have a host of other ideas:

- Cup cutters that somehow solidify the edge of the cup as they cut into the green to keep it from breaking down throughout the day
- Bunker rake handles that don't break down in the sun
- Self-cleaning ball washers
- Something that could be applied to the turf around sprinkler heads, catch basins, valve boxes and yardage monuments that would eliminate the need for ever having to edge them. **GCI**

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



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# Quiet flexibility

**Anthony Williams** looks way ... way ... way ahead at potential innovations for golf maintenance professionals working in warm-weather growing environments

I started my agronomic career behind a mule and a plow, so I am familiar with terms such as *gee*, *haw*, *whoa* and *back*. I also started my golf maintenance career with center-row quick coupler irrigation and a Jacobsen F-10 rough mower.

I am also a child of the 1960s and a huge “Star Trek” fan. As such, I hold true to the notion that mankind should aspire to generational improvement. It is not lost on me that the phone in my pocket looks similar to the communicators wielded in that series.

Please follow me into the future where many of the problems faced by professional turf managers have been technologically and/or magically solved, allowing for maximized turf maintenance with minimal human frustration. It is also important to note that we are in a warm-weather growing environment—even in 2099 there are still weather realities.

## QUIET PLEASE BY WES

Vintage superintendents and history buffs speak of the early days of golf turf management, when many complaints were launched at turf maintenance machines and activities that made noise. After a century of research and development by the Quieter Maintenance Activities Coalition, our industry was gifted with a full series of maintenance equipment known as the “Whisper Equipment Series,” or WES for short. QMAC’s entire WES product line features alternative fuels (a combination of electric and solar power) and precision-integrated parts with FlexiCon O-rings that dropped the decibels generated during operation to literally a whisper.

Yes, sound is still measured in decibels. For comparison, a vintage turf mower sets off about 90 dB, a normal conversation registers about 60 dB. Complaints from homeowners near

golf courses start at about 40 dB depending on the time of year (about 30 dB during fall leaf season). A note for personal health, noises above 70 dB over a long period of time can cause hearing loss and loud noises such as a gunshot at 140 dB can cause immediate hearing damage. WES mowers, blowers and weed eaters never exceed 25 dB, have virtually eliminated noise complaints from modern turf maintenance operations, and have saved literally millions of trees by reducing the number of city noise ordinances filed and posted worldwide.

## WEATHERFLEX APPAREL

Golf course superintendents are masters of outdoor workplace survival. However, from the time of **Old Tom Morris**, the successful golf course superintendent must dress for success in all types of weather. Thank goodness for Weatherflex Apparel.





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logos to be available on demand, from your favorite turf vendor to sports teams to the Weatherflex logo. Once you are completely outfitted in Weatherflex gear, you can work in a Category 6 hurricane or 110-degree heat with a breathable comfort unimaginable to the founding fathers of turf. Weatherflex Apparel is a game changer for the golf course superintendent as we head into the 22nd century. Remember their slogan: “Wear Weatherflex gear, because the weatherman is a liar.”

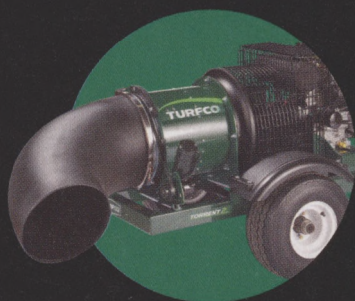
## **GALACTIC WONDERS SPRAYOMBA 2 INTEGRATED MIX AND SPRAY SYSTEM**

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rest. The Sprayomba 2 even files your application records and reorders products automatically. The only agitation is in your beryllium-lined spray tank. Skips, misses and a human operator are non-existent.

#### ZOOMERER MEETING AVATAR

By 2099, it will be hard to imagine a time when meetings were all in-person and there were huge office buildings that trapped workers and housed conference rooms. Zoom virtual meetings and conferences were great in the 2020s, as superintendents were able to stay connected and informed and still get out to handle on-course business. But the meetings multiplied, then they multiplied some more, and soon it was hard to get other work done because of all the virtual meet-

ings. Zoom, There seemed no end to the madness.

Then the celebrated genius and avid golfer/fly fisherman **Maples Morris** gave us the Zoomerer Meeting Avatar. It looks and responds exactly like you, but it tracks meetings and content and, most important, it has a complex filtering system that produces a full meeting report that only contains the items pertinent to you and your operations. No more complex analysis of the logarithm that tracks fashion trends within the golf glove markets in one-, three- and five-year congruent terms. It's one of the most appreciated technological advancements in the history of golf, allowing the superintendent to be in two places at once, gathering the critical information of all meetings in a fraction of the time and getting

back to the heart of greenkeeping, thus allowing him or her (women now fill more than two-thirds of all superintendent positions, by the way) to physically keep the greens with the added byproduct of improving work-life balance. The Zoomerer Meeting Avatar puts you back in your actual life where you can work, play or just relax.

#### CONCLUSION

The future is what we make it. Technologies we use today seemed impossible when I started my journey in turf. What do you think the future holds for our industry? **GCI**

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



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The 653 Accu-Master allows for quick touch-up spin grinding, as well as quick setup and automation for relief grinding which has the industry returning reels back to OEM specifications.

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- Hands-Free Relief Grind
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## AIR2G2-336

The Air2G2-336 Air Injection Machine uses 3-probes to laterally inject pressurized air at approximately 6-inches and up to 12-inches beneath the surface of the soil to fracture the compacted layers that form because of foot traffic, mechanical traffic and nature's daily wear and tear. These air injections loosen compacted soil immediately without any disruption to the turf surface or to the roots below. This relieves compaction, improves water absorption and your surface has no downtime. With frequent use, Air2G2-336 creates surfaces that are healthy, firm, and ready for play.

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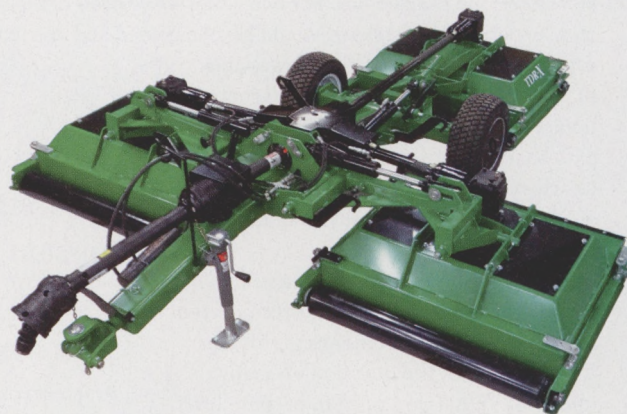
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# WE'RE NOT IN KNOWN TURF ANYMORE

**A**fter being knocked out and swept away from her farm by a tornado, young **Dorothy Gale** wakes up in Munchkin, in the Land of Oz, far from home. “**Toto**,” she says to her beloved terrier, “I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”

Maybe you can relate because where we are exactly is not clear either.

Like Dorothy, we’ve been caught up in a storm of unprecedented volume and proportions. For two years, we’ve been in the eye of an experience most never would have imagined and one that is persistent in its grip. Dorothy was able to follow the Yellow Brick Road to get back home, back to her normal. But what if our path back to some sense of normalcy isn’t as clearly marked, and we don’t have the help of a kindly Scarecrow, Tin Woodman and Cowardly Lion?

For club leaders and golf course superintendents, our response requires different solutions to new and emerging problems. As 2022 dawns, the question on many minds is: “What do I need to prepare for?” Or, as Dorothy might ask: “Which way to Kansas?”

In the immediate future — and as the new

year brings many in the golf business together at annual trade shows — macro issues such as an unpredictable labor market, kinks in the global supply chain and growing environmental sensitivity are primary concerns.

For superintendents and others, it’s a time to sharpen business skills that make us more attuned to current challenges, review communications tactics that direct messages more effectively and improve leadership behaviors that increase recruitment and retention results.

We do not control the conditions we confront, only our preparation and responses to the challenges they present.

## IMPROVE YOUR BUDGET IQ.

- Review and compare your previous year’s budget key cost centers and pay special attention to changes to irregularities in supply chain and mission-critical resources such as fuel, fertilizer and other inputs.
- Know your budget gatekeepers (managers who

have review and approval authority) and review with them management-directed changes to agronomic goals that affect

your budget plans.

- Review and/or distribute your agronomic plan and preliminary budget to all gatekeepers for feedback that can inform needed adjustments.

**Expand your communications skills and methods.** At the pace with which change happens these days, it’s essential that you keep management and your team informed. Clear and timely communication reduces their stress — and yours too. Consider the GCSAA your first source of guidance and content, and never forget the proven bromide. Tell them what you are going to do, update them regarding your progress and tell them what you’ve done.

**Improve your leadership capabilities.** Recruiting and retaining solid and stable employees is the first function of leadership. Build trust through clarity and consistency. Stay positive, especially in difficult times. Display grit and commitment to your mission and plan. Those around you will follow your lead when they’re convinced that you’re trustworthy, stable and resolute.

More than ever, superintendents are working in the eye of the storm, amid profound change and anxiety. Dorothy was able to get back home by tapping her ruby slippers three times. It would be comforting if today’s solutions were so easily accomplished. **GCI**

“Display grit and commitment to your mission and plan. Those around you will follow your lead when they’re convinced that you’re trustworthy, stable and resolute”



**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.





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# TUNE IN TO GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY'S PODCAST SERIES

## TARTAN TALKS

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

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## GOLF COURSE beyond the page

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

## GOLF COURSE OFF THE COURSE

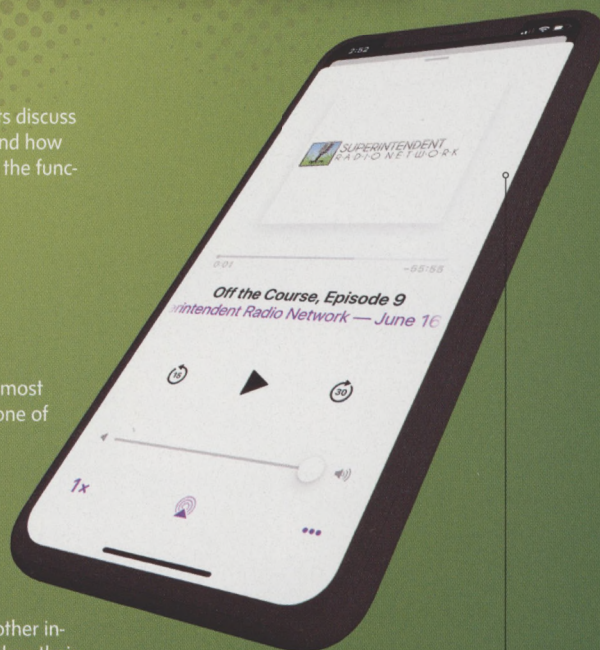
Candid conversations with superintendents, directors and other industry professionals about anything and everything other than their work. Episodes focus on physical and mental health, outside interests, family, and the constant pursuit of life-work balance among other topics.

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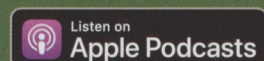


## GOLF COURSE GREENS WITH ENVY

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



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# Kers

**Guy Cipriano returns to the course where his zest for golf started and discovers the deeper meaning of a course enhancement project.**

**W**e romanticize the course where golf first enthralled us. For this Pittsburgh kid-turned-Cleveland man, that course is Chartiers Country

Club, a private facility with a timeless Tudor-style clubhouse and 18 holes routed on severe western Pennsylvania terrain.

A fun-loving person who called the club home was **Guy Cipriano Sr.**, a man affectionately known as “Pap” in family circles and “Cip” at the club. Our family joked that “Pap” spent more time at Chartiers than at his actual home, although he always seemed to be around and watching intently whenever I mowed less-than-lasers on his suburban Pittsburgh yard.

As a reward for a job done, “Pap” sometimes brought me to Chartiers to play a few holes. When I expressed a serious interest in golf after my father, **Guy Cipriano Jr.**, took me to the 1994 U.S. Open at Oakmont Country Club, “Pap” introduced me to a few Chartiers employees, and I joined the caddie ranks. I did everything I could to distance myself from “Pap” when I started caddying. I wanted to be selected and evaluated on merit rather than birth. “Pap” died in early 2000, the same year my caddie career ended. I relished everything about the job, especially the people and the course, but if I wanted to work in journalism, I needed to spend the summer of 2000 in a newsroom instead of on a golf course. I didn’t know when I would be back at Chartiers again.

On an early fall 2020 morning, memories of “Pap,” the club, my childhood and being raised in Pittsburgh flooded my mind when I turned off Baldwin Road and entered the club parking lot. I was in Pittsburgh to report on projects at Chartiers and Fox Chapel Golf Club, a pair of courses I had not seen in more than 20 years. Besides the softening of a few greens and missing clusters of trees—thankfully, on both accounts—Chartiers looked and felt almost exactly the same as it did two decades earlier. The people were even nicer than I remembered. I engaged in a laughter-filled conversation and a tour of the course with two-term club President **Ron Moehler**, COO and director of golf course operations **Bob Davis**, superintendent **Ben Hewitt**, architect **Steve Forrest**, and **Ronnie Adkins** and **Richard Hagy** of Aspen Corporation.

Moehler told me a few comical stories about “Cip,” and Davis, Hewitt, Forrest, Adkins and Hagy explained the dynamics and logistics of a recently commenced bunker renovation. I wish I could have stayed longer, but I needed to hustle across town to Fox Chapel, another Golden Age course where I caddied a few times as a teenager. Unlike “Pap” in his golden years, I couldn’t stop time and spend the bulk of a day at the club.

© GUY CIPRIANO



► The author, center, with architect Steve Forrest, left, and Chartiers Country Club superintendent Ben Hewitt.

Chartiers was my grandfather's club, yet it became obvious the club made the wise decision to invest in future generations. The bunker project represented a key step in its quest to remain viable in the Pittsburgh-area private club market.

I visited Chartiers in fall 2021 to see the results of the renovation and rekindle new friendships with Moehler, Davis, Hewitt and Forrest. Greens chairman **Steve Magdsick** joined our post-project conversation. Magdsick fondly remembered "Cip," who drove a big white Cadillac DeVille and rarely played two consecutive rounds with the same putter in the bag. Moehler and Magdsick have been Chartiers members since the 1980s. They radiate club pride, but they also understand realities facing private clubs. The pair can speak frankly about club politics, so I temporarily shifted from the affable progeny to an industry writer in a bid to glean information that can help others attempting to sell and execute capital improvement projects.

"A major part of our success was, one, we hired Steve Forrest to do the job," Moehler says. "Two, we respected Bobby and Ben's input, and we limited the number of people who could have input." The small group serving as the liaison between the membership and Forrest included Moehler, Magdsick and select golfers representing a cross-section of playing abilities. "It was a great marriage," Moehler adds. "Everything was consensus. When it was a tie, Steve Forrest won, because that's why hired him."

Forrest is a partner at Hills • Forrest • Smith, Golf Course Architects. The firm founded by **Arthur Hills**, who died in 2021, established a master plan for Chartiers in the early 1990s. Forrest knew the membership, the land and the history when the club contacted him in late 2019 to create a bunker enhancement plan. Forrest has helped hundreds of projects reach the finish line and witnessed strong leadership from Moehler as



he presented and pitched his plan to Chartiers in early 2020. The club approved the plan despite uncertainties surrounding the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Approving and completing the bulk of the work last year before the emergence of supply chain challenges facing golf and other industries saved the club significant money. Forrest estimates that if the project started in fall 2021 instead of 2020 it might have cost as much as 50 percent more for the same work and materials. The project involved rebuilding 60 bunkers using a Golden Age-inspired design and renovating the seventh and 13th greens. "You need some people who can make decisions," Forrest says. "The hardest thing in private clubs is getting them to make a decision and staying with it."

An ability to efficiently approve and execute a project resonates with members and employees. Davis, who was trained at nearby Oakmont Country Club, one of the industry's great placement systems, arrived at Chartiers in August 2010 and the club elevated him to a dual leadership role in 2017. On the surface, a bunker project might seem innocuous. But to a talented employee such as Davis, who has led teams deflated by grueling hours of bunker repairs following storms, continued investments are motivators. The club also has renovated indoor dining areas, added outdoor dining space on an expansive veranda overlooking the 18th green and has moved to replace an aging maintenance

equipment fleet.

"Prior to 2017, I didn't envision Chartiers ever being this good," Davis says. "I didn't think the club would put the money into it that needed to be put into it."

Maybe bunkers are indeed more than bunkers.

"I have always loved Chartiers," Magdsick says. "It's a fun course with a great membership, but we were always told soil conditions were horrible here and all these other things. I have told this to Ron a million times, 'Never in my wildest dreams did I think Chartiers would be in the shape it is right now.' This whole project capped it off. The course was getting better and better, and this just put it way up."

After conducting a group interview in the boardroom and eating a chicken avocado salad on the veranda—places a caddie never wandered—I played the course for the first time in 22 years. Forrest, his wife, **Teri**, and Hewitt comprised our fun group. I hit my approach shot on the first hole into a right greenside bunker. If you're going to write about new bunkers, you should play out of them, right?







"You need some people who can make decisions. The hardest thing in private clubs is getting them to make a decision and staying with it."

— Steve Forrest

**Willie Park Jr.** is the original architect and examples of the Scotsman's work guided the flat-bottomed, fescue-faced style implemented by Forrest. I now had to figure out how to exit one of the hazards. With Forrest and Hewitt intently watching, I blasted out to 7 feet and made the par putt. I joked to Hewitt that I couldn't recall making par on the 415-yard hole despite having a lower handicap and a more consistent game as a teenager. I played conservatively off the second tee ... and pushed a 4 iron out of bounds. I resorted to studying bunkers, turf and landforms as a way to rationalize the ensuing scoring disaster.

The bunkers add character and visual appeal to a course with no water hazards. The flat bottoms are playable

for golfers of all skill levels, and easier for Davis, Hewitt and an experienced team to maintain. Remnants of Hurricane Ida dumped 4½ inches of rain on the course in 24 hours last summer. "The next day," Hewitt says, "not only did we allow carts on the course, but the bunkers were back together before lunchtime. They were playable and we were able to do other things on the golf course."

The bunkers were well received in 2021 and they will get better as Davis and Hewitt learn the intricacies of fescue faces. With patience and regular sand capping, the faces should resemble something akin to what golfers experienced during Park's era.

"Pap" was 7 years old when Park died in 1925. Throughout my round,

I kept wondering what he would think about the current course and bunkers. It finally hit me as I played a wedge from the left rough into the 13th hole, a par-4 with a sloped fairway and cavernous left greenside bunker. My approach shot landed short into a firm approach, rolled past the front pin and halted on the back collar. I then three putted.

I'm certain "Pap" would have chided my putting and questioned the decision off No. 2 tee. I'm also certain he would be damn proud of the course and the people responsible for ensuring future generations can experience what he loved. **GCI**

*Guy Cipriano is Golf Course Industry's editor-in-chief. He misses his caddying days.*



# *Built* AND **SUCCESSFULLY** *operated* BY **NON-GOLFERS**

The family behind a New York course proves ingenuity and grit can overcome a lack of history playing the game.

By **Rick Woelfel**

**C**elebrated, yet understated.

That phrase perhaps best captures the legacy of the Conklin Players Club.

Situated just across the Pennsylvania border in New York State's Southern Tier, 50 miles north of Scranton, Pennsylvania and a 15-minute drive south and east of Binghamton, the daily-fee facility doesn't offer a lot of bells and whistles. But it has been offering a quality golf experience to visitors from as near as the surrounding community, and from as distant as Canada and southeast Pennsylvania for three decades now.

In some ways, Conklin is a throwback with a unique history. **Rick Rickard**, the man who envisioned the club, was not a golfer 30-plus years ago and is not a golfer now. But with the help of his brother-in-law **Rick Brown**, he designed and built the course that he and his wife, **Theresa**, own and manage today.

Around 1987, Rickard owned a body shop but was looking to change careers because of the physical demands of the job. He played softball for recreation and it was his softball teammates who planted in his head the idea to build a golf course.



"I played softball four nights a week," he says, "and all the guys did was sit in the dugout and talk about their golf games. And they couldn't get on any golf courses because they were all packed."

The Rickards spent no small amount of time deciding whether to take on all that was involved with not only designing and building a golf course, but also running it. They eventually decided to move forward and purchased a 400-acre site that in the years following World War II had been a thriving dairy farm but had become run down. Today, the Rickards live on a farm on the property.

When construction began in 1988, the Rickards hired an excavator "for a couple months," but, to save money, chose not to retain an architect or a shaper, or to work through the National Golf Foundation. "Most of your money is already gone and you haven't even turned over a shovelful of dirt yet," Rick Rickard says.

Instead of depending on outside parties, Rickard, with the help of brothers-in-law Rick and **Marty Brown**, designed and laid out the 18 holes. In 1991, after three years of hard work, Conklin Players Club opened for play and proved to be a popular destination from the start. "It was a lot of work," Rick Rickard says, "but we were young and into it. We did what it took."

Rick Brown came on board in 1989 to help build and grow in the golf course, and stayed on as the superintendent. He has never worked at another golf course and has no desire to go elsewhere.

From a turf professional's perspective, the Conklin Players Club might be the Elysian Fields, the paradise reserved for heroes in ancient Greek mythology. The site encompasses a bit more than 170 acres, including four acres of putting surfaces, 5½ acres of teeing grounds, and 30 acres of approaches and fairways,

all of which are bentgrass. The crew also mows 80 acres of bluegrass/fescue rough.

As part of a family-owned and -managed operation, Brown does not answer to a board of directors, a club president or a green chair. Nor does he have to concern himself with things like budget meetings.

"We don't have a budget at the beginning of the year," he says. "I haven't done a budget in 20 years. I know what my costs are, generally, on average. But (the figure) changes, just like it does for everyone. We put what is needed into the golf course. If it's needed, we do it. We have that luxury."

In fact, it's not uncommon for Brown and Rickard to amend the budget during an on-course discussion. Brown says that being part of a family business brings its own satisfactions, as well as a sense of responsibility. "Everybody knows it's our product. Everybody knows

who's responsible for the conditions," he says. "There's no entity other than us."

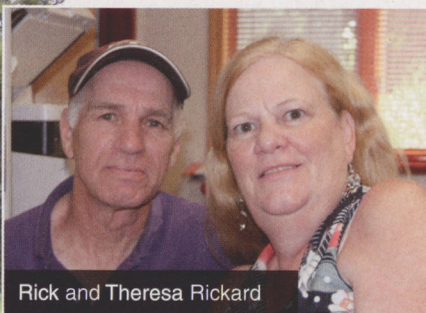
Brown's staff maxes out at 12 at the height of the season, including himself. Six are full-timers, the other six work 15 to 18 hours each week as mowers. The team has become more efficient with the passage of time. "We've learned a lot to be more efficient, to be able to mow all of this and be off the course by 9:30 in the morning," he says. "It takes a while to figure out how to do that."

Theresa Rickard had to learn how to oversee the inside operation and do it on the fly. The club didn't hire a golf professional, **Ryan Evans**, until October 2017. But she approached the task with a sense of resolve. "I didn't really know how to run this place," she recalls. "I'd never run a golf course but I'm the type of person, ... give me something, I'll do it, I'll get it done."

▲ Conklin Players Club is a family-owned and -operated course in New York's Southern Tier that opened in 1991.







Rick and Theresa Rickard

Over time, Theresa evolved into a combination of general manager, shop manager and travel agent, working with hotels and other cours-

es in the area to create stay-and-play packages. Conklin attracts golfers from a vast geographic footprint. Apart from the local play that predominates during the week, the club regularly attracts visitors from Albany, two and a half hours to the northeast; the Philadelphia area and

the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania, three to four hours due south; and, before the start of the pandemic, from Canada, as the border is roughly 160 miles to the north.

At the peak of the golf boom, the club hosted as many as 38,000 rounds each year. In that era, the tee sheet was full from 6 a.m. until 3 p.m. In recent years,

the figure has been closer to 25,000 rounds.

Brown says that size and makeup of the club's visitor/customer base speaks to how highly it is regarded not just in New York State, but elsewhere. "That's the reputation we've got and how much people enjoy it," he says. "That's what we're here

© RICK WOELFEL (3)

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most satisfaction from the way he's gone about it.

"I built something that's on the map," he says. "It's not like you just did a job and nobody cares about it. If I want to add a

for, to make sure people enjoy their round of golf. We get a lot of repeat players from a long ways away."

Rick Rickard is justifiably proud of what he and his family have accomplished. The golf course, which maxes out at 6,772 yards with a par of 72, has evolved, as golf courses

do. Green complexes have been reconfigured and rebuilt, trees have been removed.

Even after more than three decades, Rickard is likely to be found on the golf course mowing. As proud as he is of what he has created at Conklin, he arguably takes the

tee, I get my bulldozer out and I go build a tee. I don't ask anybody. I still have all the equipment I had when I built this place." **GCI**

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

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## SUSTAIN THE BOOM

**H**ere's a news flash: The game of golf is thriving. Here's another: Unless we're careful, we're going to screw it up.

If we want golf to stay healthy, all of us in the industry must be very smart about how we welcome the new golfers (while not alienating the old) and how we make the game fun as well as challenging. We must stop looking back at our fussy, old-fashioned ways and allow golf to evolve.

You may have read some of this before, but are you doing anything to sustain the boom?

Start by thinking about what the new golfers want: They want to play a game, have fun outdoors and be with their friends. So what if their shirts don't have collars, their sweatshirts have hoods and they like to listen to music on the golf course? (I like to listen to music on the golf course, too.)

The future of golf — if it's to have one — is being more casual and flexible. We need to adjust with the times and assess the needs of these new golfers. They're the next generation and we want to keep them.

I'm all for preserving golf's traditions and history, but the past is just that. Even what we think of as the stuffy, blue-blood private clubs are going to have to bend somewhat to the times if they want to survive. The smart ones already are.

Our new golfers are coming from every community, every diverse group, every social and economic class. That's great! Now it's our job to welcome them and help them learn what's important to enjoy this great game with passion and without prejudice. It starts with each of us and remember: A welcome and a thank you goes a long way.

Helping us should be golf's governing bodies, who have an opportunity to examine their missions and abilities and put them to work. Most important is the PGA of America, whose professionals need to teach more than swing mechanics. They need to explain everything from course etiquette to management, from playing the course to taking advantage of the unique social environment that a golf club, public or private, provides.

These same teachers — and us, the golf course superintendents — need to reinforce the simple things that veteran golfers are

supposed to know: replace or fill divots, pick up tees, repair ball marks, rake bunkers. Golf is the most social sport of all, and we need to remind people that

it rests on the Golden Rule: "Leave it better than you found it!" If you don't want to putt on pock-marked greens, start fixing your own ball marks!

Superintendents can contribute mightily to sustaining the boom.

- **Be mindful of golf course setup.** Especially on busy days, find accessible hole locations. Put the hole in the middle of the green, if you want. User-friendly golf makes for happy (and repeat) customers. And there's nothing wrong with a par or a good bogey.
- **Slow the greens.** Dial them back and people will enjoy their rounds more. Most players can't handle fast greens and we don't need the stress of trying to keep them artificially slick.
- **I repeat: Slow the greens.** Fast greens produce slow play. Nothing impedes new golfers more than over-the-top course conditions.
- **Check teeing grounds.** Align players toward the desired target. On a busy day, think about closing the championship or way-back tee. Consider moving the tees up. Besides quickening pace of play, you'll be doing most players a favor by getting them closer to where they should be teeing from anyway.
- **Be especially mindful of the first and 10th tees.** Getting golfers off to a good start makes them happy and speeds play.

**MORAGHAN** continues on 63

“Slow the greens. Dial them back and people will enjoy their rounds more. Fast greens produce slow play, and nothing impedes new golfers more than over-the-top course conditions.”



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



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# SEVEN HISTORIC ACRES

Supporters of a Louisiana course make a yet-to-be-refuted claim and demonstrate what can be preserved through strong connections.

By **Guy Cipriano**

**C**ould flat ground in central Louisiana inside the state's 10th-largest city be among the most significant seven acres in American participatory golf?

Established in the late 1920s, Bringhurst Golf Course provided a faster-to-play, easier-to-maintain option before golf innovators and developers realized the appeal of shorter courses. The country supported 659 par 3 courses in 2021, according to the National Golf Foundation. None are believed to be older than Bringhurst, a 9-hole, 793-yard facility owned by the City

of Alexandria, overseen by the non-profit Friends of Bringhurst, and maintained by the group responsible for managing the crosstown 18-hole Links on the Bayou.

"We are kind of playful and we call ourselves the 'Oldest Par 3 Course in America,'" says **Frank Brame**, a Bringhurst regular since the 1960s whose family helped revive the course. "Nobody has disproved us yet."

Short courses are now industry staples, with revered facilities such as Augusta National, Pine Valley, The Olympic Club, Pebble Beach, The Greenbrier and Pinehurst using compact courses within upscale

operations to entice members and guests. Municipalities in nearly every state offer fast and affordable golf to residents, and family-owned and -operated par 3 courses are common in rural communities. Only Bringhurst, though, displays the following four lines on an entrance sign:

*Welcome to  
Bringhurst  
Golf Course*

*"The Oldest Par 3 Golf Course in America"*

Bringhurst blends golf history with Americana. The facility gives Alexandria, a 45,000-resident city 190 miles north-



just seven urban acres. Numerous sights and sounds are uniquely Bringhurst. The Alexandria Zoological Park is behind the second green and noises from squeaking monkeys reverberate. Kramer Funeral Home sits across the street from the sixth tee and mourners watch tee shots fly as they wait for viewing hours. A fence encloses the course, but Bringhurst meshes with its surroundings. Expect to hear a siren or two in your backswing and prepare to wave to children riding the zoo train.

The Brink was twice on the serious brink of being shuttered permanently. Fortunately, determined loyalists saved it both times.

In the late 1950s, the city closed the course for financial reasons. **Francis Trotter**, who ran an electronics store, formed a non-profit to save the course and the city voted to lease the course to Trotter for a nominal fee. Trotter's son, **William "Bugs" Trotter**, operated the course from 1962 to 1990. William turned the course over to his nephew, **Jamie Trotter**, who also maintained the 9-hole course owned by LSU Alexandria. The run of Trotters operating Bringhurst ended in 2006 when Jamie opted against continuing the lease.

The city then closed the course again.

Led by **Scott Brame Sr.**, "Friends of Bringhurst" formed in 2008 and raised funds for needed capital improvements, including adding greens irrigation, installing new turf varieties, thinning clusters of live oak and pecan trees, building tee boxes, removing multiple bunkers, and restoring original architectural features. **Jerrett Watson**, then-superintendent and now director of operations at Links on the Bayou,

shaped greens using a mechanical bunker rake and oversaw the grow in.

"It was a pretty big undertaking taking care of another golf course and doing the project," Watson says. "Mr. Scotty wanted to leave it as close to the original design as possible."

The restored course reopened in 2010 and features uniquely Bringhurst operating hours and pricing structure: Thursday through Sunday, and free. Scott Brame died in 2019 at age 90. A pair of Brames, 73-year-old Frank and his 52-year-old cousin **Jack**, are on the five-member Friends of Bringhurst board of directors. Community members with strong Bringhurst ties keep the course viable. Friends of Bringhurst generated more than \$10,000 in its most recent fundraising effort despite aiming to obtain \$5,000, according to Frank Brame.

"The price is right. It's free for people to play," he jokes. "When we were doing the renovation, we just decided that we could do enough with donations to keep it up and that the trouble and responsibility of trying to keep up with money was just not worth it."

A paid marshal ensures play flows and golfers feel safe on open days. Once a drop-off-your-kids-and-let-them-roam environment, golfer demographics shifted around the turn of the century. Links on the Bayou professional and Alexandria native **Joey Wanciewicz** first played at Bringhurst as a 3-year-old and has hit thousands of shots on the course, including 25 holes-in-ones. Wanciewicz experienced 100-hole days at Bringhurst as a child.

"If you grew up in Alexandria, this was it," he says. "My generation was probably the last generation playing out here. I'm 38 and we didn't have an 18-hole course growing up. This was the cheapest babysitter in town. Fifty dollars a year in those days got you a membership." Retirees and "Bringhurst regulars" now outnumber children on most days, Frank Brame adds.

Two nearby 18-hole public facilities — Links on the Bayou and Oak Wing Golf Club — opened in 2002. The city has an agreement with Mitton Management to manage and maintain Links on the Bayou. The company also oversees the maintenance of Bringhurst. Playing conditions are significantly better than anything Bringhurst lifers remember.

"They had a walk mower and backpack sprayer, and that was about it," Wanciewicz says. "As far as the day-to-day, if you wanted bunkers raked out here, it was on us. If you wanted new pin locations, it was on us. This



west of New Orleans and 240 miles northeast of Houston, unmatched sights and experiences. Playgrounds, athletic fields, houses, a zoo, a funeral home, and a gas station surround the course. Affectionately referred to as "The Brink" by denizens, Bringhurst's footprint is





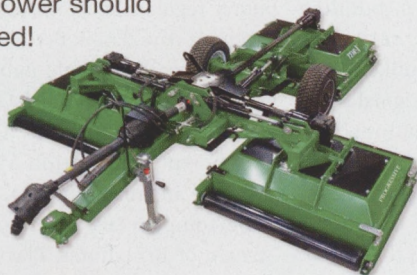
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## SHORT COURSE STORIES

was our sandlot.”

Watson estimates around 35 hours of formal maintenance per week is devoted to the course. Local firefighter and part-time golf maintenance professional **Addam Kelly** logs more hours than anybody preparing the course for play. His regular duties involve walk mowing 12,000 square feet of greens. The equipment fleet includes two walk-

ing greens mowers recently purchased from Squire Creek Country Club, a triplex mower, zero-turn mower and Gator utility vehicle. Sprayers and aerifiers are shared with Links on the Bayou and Watson serves as the primary plant protectant applicator. Frank Brame and his friend **Corky Yates** donate time to maintain landscape areas and trim overgrown vegetation.

Players begin holes from synthetic mats or Celebration Bermudagrass tees, a striking contrast to what Frank Brame and his friends experienced as children. The longest hole is the second at 124 yards, the shortest is the third at 51. The course has just four bunkers. Shade, nematodes and a municipal water source with high pH levels provide agronomic obstacles, according to Watson. But conditioning challenges decrease as Bringhurst ages.

“It’s night and day better now,” Frank Brame says. “It was really rough in the old days. We had a guy who was a one-man team. He hand-



Jerrett Watson, left, and Joey Wancewicz are among hundreds of Bringhurst regulars.

mowed the greens with a push mower. He watered the greens manually. We had a spigot near every green. We had no tee boxes. It was just bare ground between the tee boxes. The sand traps were pretty rugged.”

Helping preserve Bringhurst represents a career highlight for Watson, a native of Ferriday, Louisiana, a 3,500-resident town east of Alexandria. The LSU-schooled agronomist arrived at Links on the Bayou in 2002 and it took him a few years to realize the importance of Bringhurst to the community. A golf enthusiast with aces on the third and fourth holes, Watson frequently plays the course in his free time despite balancing a demanding job with family obligations. Those seven significant acres in the middle of the city have a way of becoming ingrained in lives.

“This is a very unique facility for Louisiana,” Watson says.

It’s also unique for America. GCI



MORAGHAN continued from 58

- **Educate them.** Even many experienced golfers don't understand aerification, topdressing, Frazee mowing, etc. You'll be doing them and yourself a favor if you give them a little knowledge. But it comes with an important lesson: sometimes if you want A you have to give up B. If you want to play all year long, the greens are going to be a little bumpy for a few weeks. Educate, explain, illuminate. (And for the record, it takes more than one tweet a week prior to the work.)

A few tips for course operators:

- **Be realistic.** Close the tee sheet at a reasonable time and don't accept more reservations when there isn't enough time to finish nine holes. Sell them nine when there's only time for four and they won't come back.
- **Exercise restraint.** No fivesomes.

Avoid single carts. Don't squeeze play intervals below 10 minutes.

- **Keep your regulars happy.** All this change can be tough, so find ways to keep your stalwarts happy (guaranteed prime tee times, longer advance-booking windows, etc.). Not only do you not want to lose them, you want them to help the newbies have a better time. Get creative (give a regular a free round if he or she plays with a bunch of new people) and you'll get results.
- **Why not six holes?** Another way to be creative is to offer shorter "rounds," like three, six or nine holes when the tee sheet allows. They're great ways for new golfers to ease into the on-course experience. So are clinics.

I give televised golf a hard time for making everyday golfers think their

course should look like Augusta National. Here's a way the TV folks can help: Do some taped segments that explain what really goes into course conditioning and why greens are sometimes punched, why grass is sometimes brown and why those little signs say "No Carts Beyond This Point." When can they run these segments? How about when yet another PGA Tour player rereads his 3-foot putt for the fourth time. And, by the way, tell the viewer there isn't enough time to take six practice swings, check yardage and back away from the shot when a bird chirps. None of us are as good as we think we are.

Golf is evolving, and whatever you think it was before, the new bywords are fun, friendship, diversity, exercise and satisfaction. They're the keys to a good walk *unspoiled* — and great ways to keeping the boom going. **GCI**

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

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## WILDFIRE BALLOONS CREATIVE THINKING

Whenever a wildfire is approaching, the US Forest Service fills up their helicopter water buckets from two specialized balloons positioned on the driving range at Seven Canyons in Sedona, Arizona, where **Jason Bazuin** is superintendent. The USFS notifies the gate house that they will be using the driving range filling stations and then the staff closes the range for them. All materials are owned by the USFS and they are stored permanently onsite in metal containers. A 2-inch diameter hose quick connect is hooked up to the irrigation system set underground in a valve box. Each balloon holds approximately 1,000 gallons. The water is filled automatically with a float system similar to a farming reservoir in a field. Once the water reaches a certain level, the float will rise and block the water flow. It takes about 30 minutes to refill both balloons and four helicopter bucketloads per hour are accomplished during daylight hours only. It cost about \$500 for the 2-inch hoses and fittings. The USFS does all the hookups and it takes them about one hour to get ready.



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



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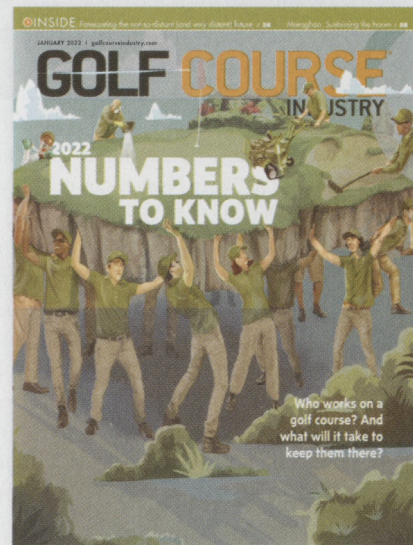
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## GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY





## TAKE A WALK

**J**ohn Feinstein's "A Good Walk Spoiled" was released in 1995. It was a behind-the-scenes look at life on the PGA Tour in the early 1990s, when players like **Greg Norman**, **Nick Price** and **Fred Couples** dominated the game, and **Tiger Woods** was still an amateur.

The title was harvested from a famous quote most often attributed to **Mark Twain**: "Golf is a good walk spoiled." Considering Twain died in 1910 and the quote did not first appear until 1948, the words leave you questioning their validity.

Last month, **Kyle Callahan**, director of golf course and grounds at Thornblade Club in Greenville, South Carolina, urged fellow superintendents, assistants and others to participate in a health challenge. With the help of **Tony Nysse**, director of golf course and grounds at Mountain Lake in Lake Wales, Florida, they managed to inspire 100 of our peers to sign up and support one another in their endeavors to eat healthier, lose weight, employ healthier lifestyle habits and achieve personal well-being.

One aspect to a healthier lifestyle is walking and it is no secret that **Chris Tritabaugh**, golf course superintendent of Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minnesota, has forgone his personal utility vehicle and walks the golf course daily. In fact, he recently shared with me how **Nelson Caron**, director of golf course operations at Seminole Golf Club in Juno Beach, Florida, had thanked him for the inspiration. Nelson now spends more time afoot.

When **Lee Strutt**, Master Greenkeeper, visited the United States in mid-November, his goal was to tour some of the best golf courses on the East Coast and study their architecture along with their presentation and agronomic operations. He accomplished this by meeting with the superintendents, walking the golf course

and having a chat.

I was fortunate to meet up with my friend in December when he finally made his way from Boston down to the Sandhills of North Carolina and we toured Tobacco Road Golf Club and Pinehurst No. 2 together. What a treat it was to spend the day walking all 18 holes of Tobacco Road with golf course superintendent **Morgan Stephenson**. Morgan has worked there since the early days of the course's construction and its opening in 1998. He shared with us details of the course's history and evolution of this popular yet polarizing design in the golf course architecture world.

The next day, we walked the venerable **Donald Ross**-designed Pinehurst No. 2 with course superintendent **John Jeffreys**. Talk about a history lesson as John showed us some old routings, lost holes and discussed the challenges of maintaining sandy waste areas opposed to traditional rough. Both visits were inspirational and made me think: Why don't we as American golf course superintendents do this more often?

Course walks are a way of earning education credits in BIGGA's Continuing Professional Development scheme. I am sure if you polled Morgan and John, they would tell you they got as much, if not more, out of our visits than their guests. Those two days really were two I will never forget.

A few days after Lee returned home to the United Kingdom, **Mitchell Driver**, a peer from Sydney, Australia,

posed a question on social media asking: "It would be amazing if golf courses did history/architecture course walks. ... Imagine Royal Melbourne doing a two-hour course tour in the late afternoon in summer ... Other historical sites around the world do tours. No reason why golf courses can't."

On the same day Mitchell posed this question, I had spent the morning walking Carolina Golf Club with two members, answering their questions about the course, conditioning, presentation and, most prevalently, the architectural evolution as it applied to our renovations and restoration over a decade ago. OK, I confess my walk with my members did involve golf clubs and all previously referenced walks did not. But I could easily see myself offering an opportunity to walk the course and discuss the strategy behind certain features, the maintenance and, more important, the evolution.

Time has its way with golf. No matter how carefully we maintain our courses, Mother Nature will always win out. Grasses not originally planted invade our greens, fairways, tees and native areas. Bunkers erode, change their shape, and sand becomes contaminated with stones, leaves and dust. Mowing patterns migrate, cart paths crack, trees grow and die. A course walk would be a fantastic opportunity to educate members, guests and patrons about these very things, share ideas with peers, and all the while burn a few extra calories and breathe some fresh air. **GCI**



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



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