

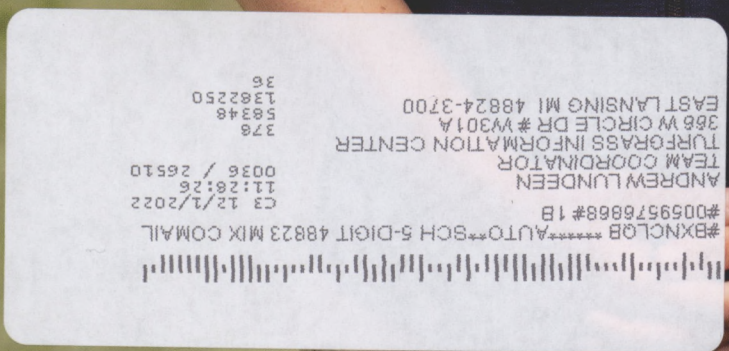
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PASSION *over* POSTCARDS

Would you leave a good job, your home continent and beautiful surroundings in the middle of your life to chase a career dream? **Vanja Drasler** did.



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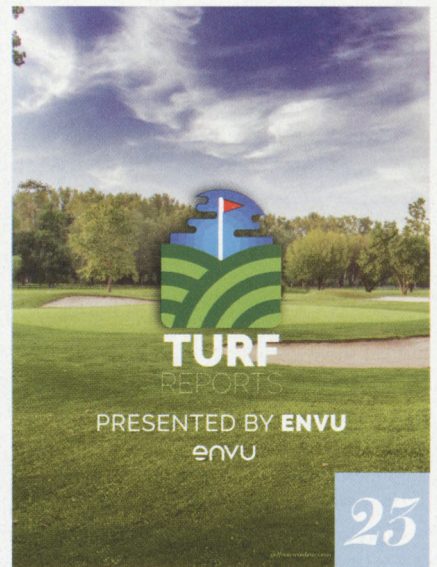
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Superintendent Lianne Larson switched career paths 35 years ago — and never looked back.



WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?

I live in Ohio, a middle-of-America state with a modest cost of living. On a mid-October day, I paid \$44.57 to fill a compact SUV and \$4.99 for a three-pack of romaine hearts. My wife and I have no kids. Our employers are people-focused. We work in industries that help people live better lives.

A few days after I purchased gas and groceries, the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced consumer prices rose 8.2 percent in the 12 months ending in September. I scoured industry job postings that evening. I felt myriad emotions upon seeing the salaries and wages being offered. Embarrassed. Angered. Befuddled. Add a few adjectives I can't use here.

Golf, fortunately, has thrived over the past 31 months. Many courses were never forced to close in March 2020. Courses that were forced to temporarily close quickly made up for revenue losses with historic play spikes. Few industries reliant on discretionary income have performed as well as golf in the COVID-19 era. Our 2022 "Numbers to Know" survey indicated 89 percent of golf facilities were profitable or broke even in 2021. That total will likely be above 80 percent again when we release the 2022 numbers in our January 2023 issue. In 2018, only 62 percent were profitable or broke even.

Yet many of your bosses still don't get it.

Full-time positions paying \$13 per hour. Assistant superintendent salaries below \$50,000 in expensive places lacking practical housing options. And good luck finding a qualified, or even entry-level, equipment technician willing to work for less than \$25 per hour.

Forget 2018. When it comes to pay, a huge part of the industry remains stuck in 1988.

The current system lacks a pipeline of workers willing to exchange immediate earnings potential for sunrises and serenity. Enduring the grind has never cost more. We're quickly approaching the moment in some parts of the country where being a head superintendent barely pays the bills. Imagine trying to make life work as an assistant superintendent or full-time crew member in those places. It's a twisted situation because upper-echelon clubs and courses are offering memberships and tee times for rates outpacing inflation. Are they increasing employee salaries at equal or above those rates? Sadly, some of the most expensive places to play are cheap when it comes to employee compensation.

What can superintendents do to improve employee pay? It's a delicate yet necessary conversation with an owner, general manager, committee chair or board. Above all else, great managers advocate for their people, making the conversation a necessary one for thousands of superintendents.

Proceed gently in all conversations. Raised voices and take-it-or-leave-it demands make matters worse. Speak in calm tones. Listen to their reasons for not taking a more aggressive approach with employee compensation.

Data will make a stronger case than anecdotes. Yes, this takes time to collect. And, yes, time isn't something superintendents have in abundance. But your current and future employees are worth the effort.

Make a few phone calls to learn what other area courses are paying and offering employees. Study compensation being offered in comparable industries. Study compensation in opposite industries. Create spreadsheets and charts comparing what you're paying and offering compared to other businesses. Contrasts appear starker in written numerical form.

Don't wait too long to get going. You can't afford to lose that employee struggling to afford gas, food and other necessities. According to the BLS, there were more than 10 million job openings at the end of August.

Workers have options. The industry doesn't. An employee exodus driven by — there's no other way to describe it — crappy pay will thwart gains facilities have made in the past 31 months.

Every unfilled position makes the job more demanding for remaining employees and threatens their quality of life. That doesn't require statistics to understand. **GCI**



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NOTEBOOK

START OF THE ENVU ERA



A new company with familiar people and products has been created following the sale of Bayer Environmental Science. What does it mean to the golf industry? And what's behind the name, logo and look?

By Guy Cipriano

Prepare to see fresh hues and hear a new name during industry events and conversations. The Envu era in the golf industry has officially started.

So, what's Envu? It's the company formerly known as Bayer Environmental Science.

A brief history on the events leading to the Envu era:

Feb. 24, 2021: Bayer announces its intention to sell its Environmental Science business division, which serves the golf, lawn and landscape, pest control, production ornamental and vegetation management markets. Bayer veteran **Gilles Galliou** is selected to lead the divestment and become CEO of the new company.

March 10, 2022: Bayer announces London-based private equity firm Cinven agreed to purchase the environmental science business division for \$2.6 billion.

Aug. 16: Envu is revealed as the new name of the standalone company.

Oct. 4: Bayer and Cinven announce the completion of the sale. Envu releases a multi-colored logo featuring red, blue and purple hues.

Galliou confirmed in an interview with *Golf Course Industry* that Envu has publicly launched in the United States markets. The new name and colors are on

the company's website (www.us.envu.com/) and golf Twitter feed (@EnvuGolfUS). Employees are calling the company Envu in conversations.

"Bayer Environmental Science has been a great ride with a great history," he says. "Envu is now the reference. This is who we are. From now on, we will be called Envu."

The company contrasts a startup despite a new owner, name, colors and logo. The people, products, distributor network and product pipelines that helped build Environmental Science into an industry stalwart remain intact. Envu will eventually replace Bayer

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on product labels, but customers will notice few differences besides people they know now wearing different colors.

"We will be branding our products with Envu, but something like a Specticle or Signature will remain a Specticle or Signature," Galliou says. "That's the base of who we are."

Envu's physical base is Cary, North Carolina. The company will support between 900 and 1,000 employees, and it currently generates \$700 million to \$800 million in annual revenue, according to Galliou. Envu features enough people, products and solutions to impact the markets it serves, yet it's significantly smaller than companies tied to behemoth industries such as agriculture and pharmaceuticals. The narrow focus could position the company to increase its support of the golf market beyond a diverse product portfolio and a respected team of technical and sales specialists.

"Golf is a very, very small part for a lot of companies," Galliou says. "It's a very, very big part of our business. It's essential to our business. As a company that will be totally focused on those markets, we have to become better partners. We have to spend more time with our customers, listen to them, and find the biggest pain points and find solutions for those."

Galliou has listened carefully to internal and external voices throughout the past 20 months. Ten-figure transactions are complex, and present myriad human, logistical and legal obstacles. They are even more complex when the result is the formation of a new company.

A process as innocuous as selecting a name can be exhausting. Pronounced "ehn-VIEW," the name derives from *environmental* and

vision, a pair of the company's core principles.

"What I'm amazed about is the number of names that are registered across the world," Galliou says. "From the top of your mind, you want to have names that really can be used. You go on your whiteboard, list them and put 100 of them on there that seem totally new to you, and then you Google them or look at legal ownership of names, and you'll kill almost 80 percent of them already. It's incredible to find the right name and right concept, and then make sure it's not being used or registered."

Envu's modern colors offer a different vibe for the golf industry — and the scheme was selected by calculated design. With dozens of companies selling products in the same categories, Galliou and team wanted an eye-catching presence.

"If you look at the color scheme of the competition that we have today, they are all very similar," he says. "We're a standalone company. We need to stand out. We couldn't choose a color scheme that was already half consumed by everybody else. Knowing that, we decided to take those warm, trendy colors. We totally own that willingness to be different."

How soon will the logo and colors be spotted? Galliou pointed to his Microsoft Teams backdrop when answering the question.

"It's important for us to be proud of the company we create and to make people understand it exists," he says. "We have to stand behind the logo. As you can see in the background, the first thing that we did was change my background and put an Envu logo here. It's important for us to show Envu to the world."

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

Tartan Talks 76

Richard Mandell returned to the Tartan Talks podcast to describe the methodology and execution behind his new book, "Principles of Golf Architecture." The idea for the book had



▲ Mandell

been racing through the Pinehurst, North Carolina-based architect's head for decades — but finding time to write it while handling a packed schedule of projects proved tricky.

Many of Mandell's New Year's resolutions involved dedicating Tuesday and Friday afternoons solely to writing. "By Martin Luther King Day, I realized that wasn't going to happen," he admits.

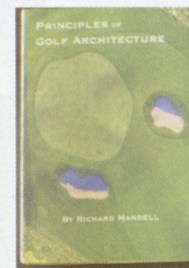
The book generated momentum over

the past two years, with Mandell writing in airports, clubhouses and his office. The result is one of the most consequential and practical modern golf architecture books. After eight chapters dedicated to elements

of design, Mandell reveals what he believes are 27 principles of golf architecture.

"I'm curious about design," he says. "I have been designing for decades, but I'm curious about what those things really mean and do I really think about the principles and elements of design in my design process. And I subconsciously do, but I needed to explore that. I thought, Let's explore what those things are and how they apply to golf course architecture. The whole book was really stream of consciousness."

The book is available on Mandell's website (www.golf-architecture.com) and the podcast can be found on the Superintendent Radio Network page of all popular distribution platforms.




COURSE NEWS

Landscapes Unlimited recently collaborated with architect **Kevin Atkinson**, ASGCA, to complete a major renovation project at the private Red Rocks Country Club in Morrison, Colorado, 25 minutes

southwest of Denver. The club rebuilt greens, tee boxes and bunkers, performed grassing, irrigation and cart path work, and added a 45,000-square-foot putting green near the clubhouse as part of a multi-component master plan. ... Construction is progressing on schedule at the new 18-hole Astor Creek Country Club in Port St. Lucie, Florida. Architect **Chris Wilczynski**, ASGCA, has been making weekly site visits to oversee the work with golf construction company Ryangolf, landscape designer

RVI, irrigation consultant **Tony Altum** and irrigation contractor Nutt Irrigation. Set to debut in spring 2023, Astor Creek is the first golf course community that Kolter Homes has developed from the ground up. ... The West Course at Belfair, a private community in Bluffton, South Carolina, recently reopened following a \$5.8 million, five-month golf course renovation guided by Fazio Design. The project included adding a new irrigation system, re-grassing greens and improving bunkers. Leibold Irrigation led the construction work. ... TPC Summerlin reopened for the PGA Tour's Shriners Children's Open following the conversion of its fairways from the originally planted 419 hybrid Bermudagrass to Bandera, a new Bermudagrass variety known for aggressive growth and early spring green up and fall color retention. Greens were re-grassed with Dominator bentgrass. ... KemperSports has been selected to manage four Columbus, Ohio-area public golf courses: The Golf Club of Dublin, New Albany Links, Bent Tree Golf Club and Royal American Links. The deals represent the company's first foray into Ohio. ... The Los Angeles Country Club will host the 2032 U.S. Women's Open and the 2039 U.S. Open on its North Course. The **George Thomas**-designed course is hosting its first U.S. Open in 2023.



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INDUSTRY BUZZ

Brit Stenson, ASGCA, was elected president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects at the organization's most recent annual meeting. An Illinois native and Ohio resident, Stenson was director of design for IMG for 25 years. His design portfolio includes the O'Meara Course at Grandview in Huntsville, Ontario; The Rock in Minett, Ontario; Tuhaye Ranch in Park City, Utah; Montgomerie Links in Danang, Vietnam; and Aux Cerfs in Mauritius. ... SePRO's Legacy Turf Plant Growth Regulator received registration in New York, the 49th state to do so. ... SePRO also recently promoted **Joe Lynch** and **Jeff Eldridge** to regional manager for turf and landscape, Lynch in the East and Eldridge in the West. ... KemperSports promoted **Jeremy Goldblatt** to COO and hired **Steve Goris** as SVP of Kemper Sports Venues. ... Planet Turf promoted **Jared Whitaker** to president. ... DLS Pickseed unified its brand and business under the name DLF. ... The FairWays Foundation completed its third grant cycle, awarding \$169,000 to a dozen projects this year. ... The USGA marked First Tee's 25th anniversary by awarding 25 grants worth about \$325,000 to chapters across the country. ... Reinders recently completed its acquisition of Spartan Distributors, a wholesale Toro distributor in Michigan. Reinders will retain all staff and the Spartan name.

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Georgia Clingerman

JENNINGS MILL COUNTRY CLUB

When she graduated from Emmanuel College with a degree in kinesiology, **Georgia Clingerman** seemed poised for a career as a physical therapist. Until she began her internship.

“I constantly kept catching myself sitting in the office just staring out the window, wanting to be outside,” she tells **Rick Woelfel** on the Wonderful Women of Golf podcast.

Clingerman worked at The Oaks Golf Course, a public facility in Covington, Georgia, during her breaks between semesters and basked in the environment. “You couldn’t get me away from the golf course,” she recalls.

Encouraged by her boss, **John Fields**, to pursue a career in turf, Clingerman enrolled in the certificate program at the University of Georgia. She also took a part-time job at Jennings Mill Country Club in Watkinsville, Georgia, outside of Athens, working under Fields, who had assumed the superintendent’s position there.

Over the course of two years, Clingerman worked her way up through the ranks. She’s now the assistant superintendent. She completed the requirements for her certificate in turfgrass management last February. As the assistant superintendent on a crew of just eight (five full-time, three part-time), Clingerman’s plate is full and her menu varied.

“I get the guys rolling and get them out on the golf course to accomplish some stuff in the morning,” she says. “Then, I’ll jump on a golf cart and I’ll go cut cups. Or I’ll jump on the sprayer and spray some greens or spray some fairways. Afternoons, I’ll work side by side with the guys, cleaning up trees, doing small detail stuff, just about anything around here. Irrigation fixes, drainage projects, all of it.”

Clingerman stresses the importance of doing the same things she and Fields ask of their crew.

“I think it makes it easier for them to want to get out there and go accomplish stuff during the day and get to work if you’re working with them,” she says. “They don’t think you’re sitting in the office all day just twiddling your thumbs. They want to see you working out there with them as well and I think they will respect you more if you’re out there busting your tail right alongside of them as well.”

Clingerman was one of the corps of female

volunteers who worked the 2022 U.S. Women’s Open at Pine Needles. Like so many of her peers, she found the experience inspiring. “Going into the golf world, I thought I was ‘one of one’ for the longest time,” she says.

Volunteering at the U.S. Women’s Open meant Clingerman would be taking time off from her full-time job in the middle of the golf season. But she had Fields’ full support.

“My superintendent was behind me 110 percent,” she says. “He wanted me to go, he wanted me to experience it. When I got there and walked in the room and saw 30 other women with the same interests that I do, doing the same thing that I do, it was awesome to see that. It’s hard to go out and see that on a daily basis on a golf course.”

The maintenance staff at Pine Needles, which was short-handed prior to the week of the championship, eagerly welcomed the volunteers.

“You could just see the sigh of relief that the guys at Pine Needles had once we all got there,” Clingerman recalls, “and these guys realized, ‘These girls actually know what they’re doing.’ By the end of the week, **David Fruchte** (Pine Needles’ director of golf course maintenance) was just telling people to ‘Follow the girls,’ because we had it down. We had the course under control.”

Clingerman says some of her most satisfying moments of the week were spent simply admiring how the golf course looked up close.

“The TV just didn’t do the course justice,” she says. “You’d go back out in the afternoon with the sun setting and you just had to stop on the mower and just take it all in. The golf course looked 10 times better in person than it ever will on TV.” **GCI**

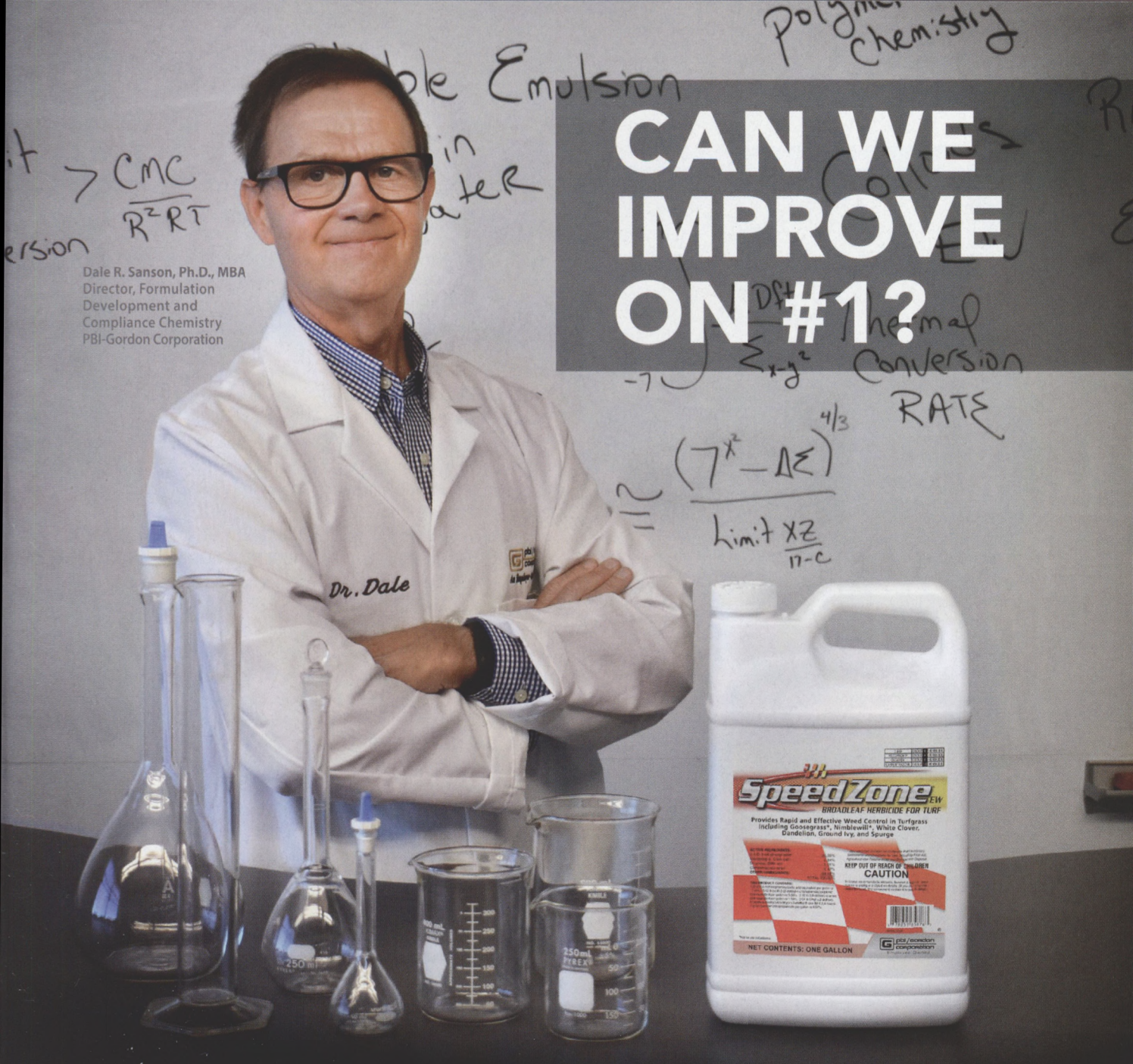


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LESSONS FROM MR. SAM

He was known simply as “Mr. Sam” and the business principles that **Sam Walton** enshrined at his chain of five-and-dime stores that became today’s retail giant were simple too. They’re known as the Ten Rules, and the company’s 2.2 million employees are expected to adhere to them in Walmart’s more than 10,000 stores in 24 countries on a daily basis.

Superintendents and club leaders can draw from those same principles, confident in the knowledge that while these are not ordinary times, the rules for delivering exemplary value and service are timeless. As you finalize plans for 2023, consider Mr. Sam’s advice.

COMMIT TO YOUR BUSINESS. Believe in it more than anybody else, Mr. Sam always said. Annual agronomic and business plans give you the opportunity to restate your commitment. Now’s the time to update those plans to make sure new labor- and expense-management tactics are in place, as well as safeguards for unpredictable supply-chain challenges.

SHARE YOUR PROFITS WITH YOUR ASSOCIATES. Money matters. But most employees put “being treated with respect” and “playing on a winning team” on equal footing with financial compensation. Generosity can take many forms, many of which carry a small price tag. Be generous and your associates will reciprocate in kind. “In turn, they will treat you as a partner, and together you will all perform beyond your wildest expectations,” Mr. Sam said.

MOTIVATE YOUR PARTNERS. Mr. Sam knew that motivating employees took more than money and even ownership. He advo-

cated setting ambitious goals, encouraging competition and keeping score. Make sure your team knows what’s expected and how they’re performing. Let them see your dedication to a job well done.

COMMUNICATE EVERYTHING YOU POSSIBLY CAN TO YOUR PARTNERS. Mr. Sam believed that “The more they know, the more they’ll understand. The more they understand, the more they’ll care. Once they care, there’s no stopping them.” Make sure everyone understands how their performance will be evaluated. Explain how the overall business of the club and facility is judged by your managers and owners — and how they fit into the bigger picture.

APPRECIATE EVERYTHING YOUR ASSOCIATES DO FOR THE BUSINESS. Showing appreciation for accomplishments is a demonstration of leadership values. “Nothing else can quite substitute for a few well-chosen, well-timed, sincere words of praise,” Mr. Sam said, noting that they are “absolutely free — and worth a fortune.”

CELEBRATE SUCCESS. Most hardworking people and organizations don’t take time to celebrate the accomplishments — large and small — that constitute a day. Mr. Sam believed in having fun and showing enthusiasm, which he said were “more important than you think.” Remember that recognizing birthdays and work anniversaries remind people that you care about them on a personal level.

LISTEN TO EVERYONE IN YOUR COMPANY. How often do you schedule listening sessions with your crew? How about one-on-one interviews? These are opportunities to uncover morale issues, suggestions for improved practices and to learn how team members are doing in their personal lives. Listening is a leader’s most valuable skill, and as Mr. Sam knew, it’s also the best way to get people talking.

EXCEED YOUR CUSTOMERS’ EXPECTATIONS. “Give them what they want — and a little more,” Mr. Sam said. Your customers and stakeholders have hopes and dreams of their own. Be sure you know what they are and then do everything in your power to meet and exceed them.

CONTROL YOUR EXPENSES BETTER THAN YOUR COMPETITION. Mr. Sam knew that this was where true competitive advantage was found. Labor and petroleum-based supplies are at record highs. Updating your peer network to know what comparable clubs and courses are spending and what they consider priorities is also a smart tactic.

SWIM UPSTREAM. Mr. Sam would not have become one of the world’s most successful business leaders if he had followed the crowd. Our teams should be encouraged to suggest new and unconventional ways of doing things. They get everyone thinking about what’s possible while empowering your teams to think in non-traditional and strategic ways. **GCI**



HENRY DELOZIER is a partner at GGA Partners, trusted advisors and thought leaders. He is currently Chairman of the Board of Directors of Audubon International.

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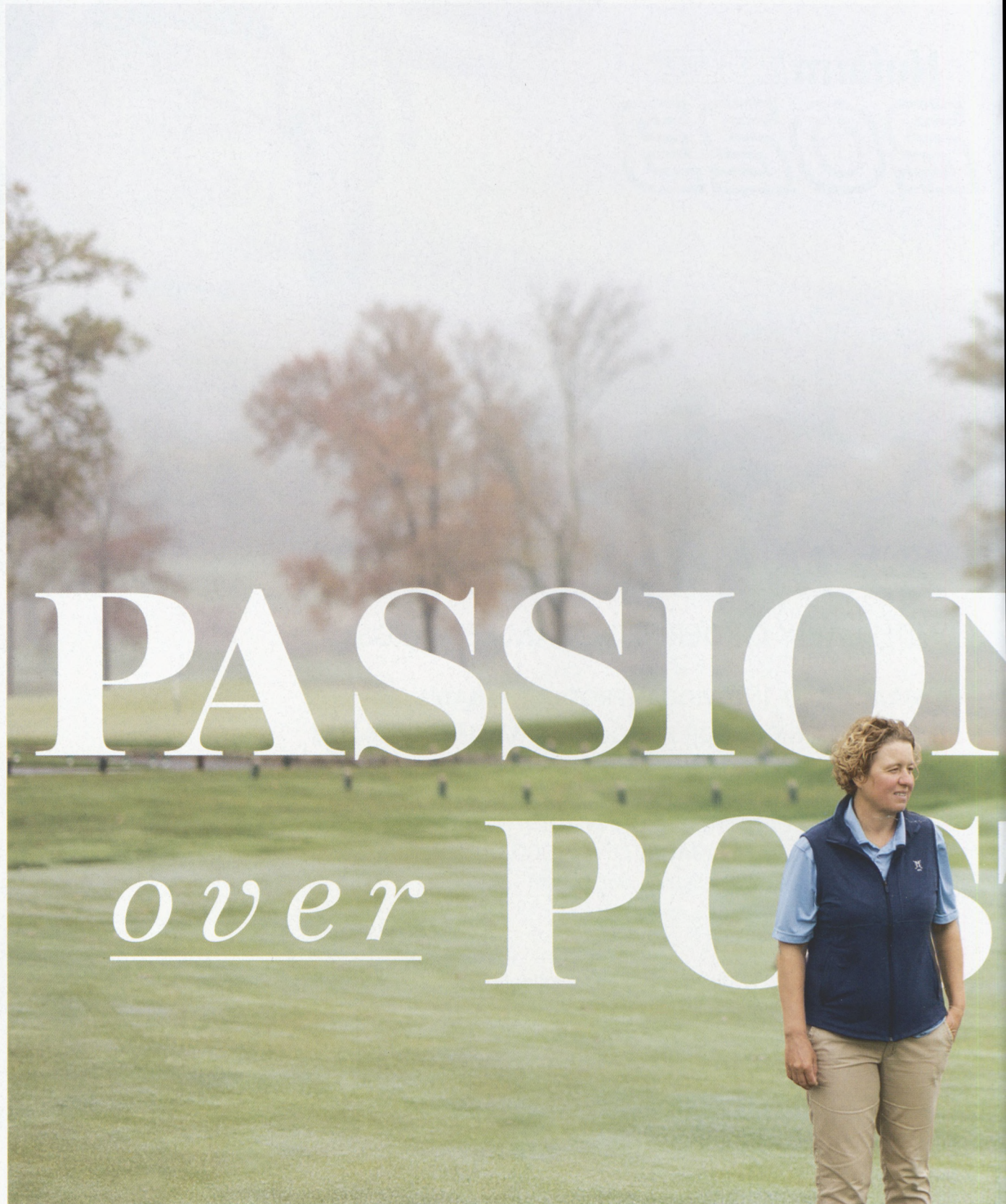
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WIN TTCARDS

Would you leave a good job, your home continent and beautiful surroundings in the middle of your life to chase a career dream? **Vanja Drasler** did.

By **Guy Cipriano**
Photo by Mark Jaworski

Unja Drasler paces on a green sitting atop venerable golf land less than 20 miles from the center of America's busiest city. A plane soars above the greenspace as co-workers scurry past the ninth green of Montclair Golf Club's third nine.

Somebody is always going somewhere in Drasler's new neighborhood. Car. Bus. Plane. Train. Bike. Ferry. Foot. Golf cart. Utility vehicle. Neither the activity outside the 36-hole club nor the work on its 300-acre grounds completely stops.

Montclair Golf Club rests on the New Jersey side of the New York City metropolitan area, the world's most demanding private golf market. Members live nearby; many workers, including Drasler, hail from distant places.

Drasler could be somewhere quieter on this late-July morning. A native of the small central European nation Slovenia, Drasler left a superintendent job at Attersee Golf Club in Austria for the sweat, stress and crowds of New Jersey. Mountains and clear waters occupy Slovenian and Austrian landscapes. "It's way, way different than your New Jersey," she says. "It's like your Colorado or something like that."

The way Drasler and those close to her describe it, her career reached an unscalable peak in Europe. Her home country has just 13 golf courses. The country where she spent seven years elevating a course in an elevated setting supports 204 courses. The Metropolitan Golf Association, which serves the three-state region surrounding New York City, includes more than 500 clubs and courses.

"She would say, 'Mel, where am I going in Europe? I'm working for these little clubs. I'm working for a management company. I'm not standing out in the crowd,'" says **Mel Lucas Jr.**, a retired Met-area superintendent and GCSAA past president who has known Drasler since 2009. "She knew she needed to get to America and work at a major club for a few years to make something happen."

Separating from the crowd required relocating to the crowd. On July 9, Drasler finished packing a sports bag, two large suitcases and her golf clubs. She departed Graz, Austria, connected in Frankfurt, Germany, and landed in Newark, New Jersey. Two days later, she started a job as a superintendent at Montclair Golf Club, a 129-year-old club with three nines designed by **Donald Ross** and a fourth cre-

ated by **Charles Banks**. The club recently restored two of the Ross-designed nines. Big things happen at Montclair.

Drasler left behind her mother, brother, dozens of friends, and hundreds of personal possessions because she craved the high-level, American private-club action. She chose passion over postcards — foreign over familiar — at age 44.

"It wasn't just money that I was dreaming for when I started dreaming about becoming a superintendent in America," she says. "To come from a country with 13 golf



Michael Sturdivant

courses all the way to New Jersey, and to be a superintendent at Montclair, which has a different language, different environment, different everything ...”

A pair of co-workers approach Drasler. She pauses and fervidly shouts in a deep accent, “Thank you, guys!” Gratitude represents a pillar of Drasler’s management philosophy. She’s thankful her co-workers are carefully trimming the high grass around trees on the third nine, because details matter to Drasler.

Gratitude,

attention to detail and respect are universal principles.

Drasler’s role at Montclair involves overseeing the third and fourth nines for director of golf course operations **Michael Campbell**. **Michael Sharpe** oversees the first and second nines.

Sharpe and Drasler lead morning meetings and constantly collaborate to ensure a peak-season crew that swells past 50 employees executes the right tasks, the right way, at the right time. Their presence allows Campbell—whom Drasler

fondly refers to as “Mr. Campbell” when he arrives to greet her on the approach fronting the third nine’s fourth green on the late-July morning—to focus on big-scale, private-club duties such as budgeting, hiring, project planning and management, and communicating with committees, chairs and members. “Greens departments have to get things done,” Campbell says. “We only have one opportunity to get it right.”

Of all the tasks facing somebody who leads a greens de-



Vanja Drasler



Sung Soun



Michael Sharpe

partment, hiring has become the most perplexing. Things don't get done, let alone correctly, without reliable and well-trained managers and employees.

A third-generation turf leader and New Jersey private club veteran, Campbell admits he has flubbed a few managerial hires. "There was definitely a level of frustration," he says. "I don't just hand them lists. They have to think, they have to contribute. I'm hiring their minds and their thoughts in addition to their physical work ethic."

Campbell's nucleus includes two superintendents, two assistants and an equipment manager. Plenty of thoughts,

ary director of grounds **Mark Kuhns** and his managers, handling enormous expectations in an unpredictable growing environment — enthralled her.

"I was a superintendent back home and then came here as an intern," she says. "Many people were surprised and thought I was crazy. They asked, 'Are you sure you would like to do that?'"

"It wasn't an easy decision," she adds. "But if I didn't do that at the time, I wouldn't be where I am now. I saw how they worked in America."

Drasler followed the Baltusrol experience with an internship maintaining warm-season turf at Harbour Town

Golf Links on Hilton Head, South Carolina. When her visa expired, she returned to Europe and spent a year as a sales manager for a Toro distributor. She then landed a position with Engelmann Turf Care, a German-based management company that oversees the maintenance of multiple courses, including Attersee. As she ascended Engelmann's turf hierarchy, she visited America annually to volunteer tournaments, visit superintendents and courses, and attend the Golf Industry Show. She paid her own way

late fall comprised her crew. The equipment fleet included three fairway mowers, two rough mowers and two triplexes for greens. Drasler observed four fairway mowers polish one hole on Montclair's third nine on the same July morning she recited Attersee's equipment list. Montclair disperses more topdressing sand in less than two months than Attersee applies in an entire year, according to Drasler. "It's hard to be on a golf course where you know you can do more," she says, "but you can't do more because of money."

Approaching her mid-40s, Drasler realized she needed to get to America. But securing the proper visa presented a time-consuming and often frustrating endeavor.

Drasler needed help. She needed people like Lucas and Campbell and a club like Montclair willing to help her wade through the complex visa-securing process. The parties worked diligently, with Drasler receiving more than 20 letters of recommendation from highly regarded turf professionals, all of whom she personally met during her off-season visits to America. "It's amazing to me the resource network she already has," Campbell says. "She knows the who's who here. She has done a tremendous job of meeting people, meeting the right people, and gaining their respect."

Earlier this year, Drasler learned she had obtained an O-1 nonimmigrant visa. The visas are approved and issued to individuals with "extraordinary ability or achievement." The visa permits Drasler to remain in America for up to three years. She plans on spending the three years at Montclair. "I want to show them they hired the right person," she says. Drasler and Montclair collaborated for nearly a year to secure the visa. "We were lucky," she says. "It was a long process."

Campbell considers Montclair lucky, too. Few greens departments are adding an experienced, detail-oriented, appreciative, thoughtful and enthusiastic leader in a tight golf course maintenance labor market.



▲ Montclair Golf Club director of golf course operations Michael Campbell added Vanja Drasler to his management team earlier this year.

plenty of ideas. Drasler received her first glimpse of wide-scale internal idea exchange when she left a job as head superintendent at Diners Golf & Country Club in Slovenia in early 2013 to begin an internship at famed Baltusrol Golf Club. She was 35 years old.

A 36-hole facility with a major-championship past and future, Baltusrol is 10 miles from Montclair. Drasler's presence at Montclair stems from her experiences at Baltusrol. Everything about the high-level American turf way — being surrounded by dozens of co-workers and expensive mowers, her interactions with legend-

each time.

Drasler enjoyed Attersee, a resort-style, semi-private course that attracts play from Vienna and Linz, two of Austria's three largest cities. The course overlooks Lake Attersee, an alpine lake featuring clear-blue water. Mountains and wooded hills are omnipresent. "If you spend seven years at one place, you must really like it," she says. "And I really liked it. The people were so nice and friendly."

A meager budget prevented Attersee from reaching what Drasler considers the course's potential. Five employees who worked from late winter until

“Any time anybody wants to come and work for us, I feel like I have a responsibility. With Vanja, I feel like I have more of a responsibility,” Campbell says. “She made a lot of big decisions and decisions that I would probably never make. I have to live up to this. I’m sure she comes

to work—knowing her the way that I do now—trying to make her indelible mark on the club.”

Before Montclair, Attersee or Baltusrol, there was an escalator and a door inside the Orange County Convention Center.

At the urging of Lucas, whom she met at the 2009 Slovenian Greenkeepers Association Conference, Drasler traveled to Orlando for the 2011 Golf Industry Show. She received an invitation to attend a reception with some of the industry’s biggest players. She rode an escalator three times until finding the fortitude to enter the reception. “I finally thought to myself, ‘I didn’t come all this way to do nothing.’” She was likely the only woman in the room who didn’t speak English as a first language. Drasler speaks Croatian and German in addition to Slovenian and English.

Her familiarity with the American golf industry has rapidly expanded since that anxiety-filled evening in Orlando. Lucas urged her to pursue formal turf training, so she attended the seven-week, in-person University of Massachusetts Winter School for Turf Managers. The program offered more than 200 hours of instruction and covered subjects ranging from entomology to plant physiology.

“I knew she had passion from the day I met her,” says UMass emeritus professor **Dr. Pat Vittum**, another industry icon whom Drasler considers a friend



and mentor. “She was worried about her English. She was always asking, ‘Is my English good enough?’ It absolutely was. In fact, she wrote better than some of our American students. But the passion for turf, ... she was a sponge. She wanted to learn and understand everything we had to offer.”

Vittum and Drasler have remained close since the program, with the now-retired professor visiting her former student’s native country multiple times to present at a conference. “She has gone way beyond what anybody I can think of has done to get herself to a position where she has the opportunity to reach her dream,” Vittum says. “She’s absolutely driven to be the best.”

Hailing from a country with scant golf infrastructure delayed the start of Drasler’s turf career, forcing her to cram an extraordinary amount of effort into the past 13 years.

Raised on the outskirts of Maribor—which is home to 94,370 residents and is bisected by the Drava River, and which is also Slovenia’s second-largest city—Drasler experienced an active and pleasant childhood. Her mother, **Nada**, and father, **Marjan**, who died in 2018 of a heart attack, emphasized to their two children a lesson Drasler uses wherever she works. “My parents taught me if you respect people, they will respect you,” she says. Nada and Marjan encouraged Drasler and her brother, **Aljosa**, to seek outdoor leisure. Drasler fondly recalls spending long hours biking, horseback

riding, playing tennis and basketball, hiking and skiing.

Drasler left Maribor to attend university in Ljubljana, where she studied agriculture/horticulture. She worked an administrative government job following graduation. The job offered manageable hours and stability. But it didn’t mesh with

Drasler’s personality—or ambition. “It was eight hours a day in an office,” she says. “You found out quickly that it would be hard to climb the ladder there, because there were some people who were there 10 and 15 years. There was nowhere to go.”

Only 12,000 of Slovenia’s 2.1 million residents play golf, according to the 2021 “European Golf Participation Report” released by the R&A and European Golf Association. Nobody in Drasler’s family played golf and she never heard much about the game until a friend mentioned knowing somebody who worked on a course. The combination of smelling fresh-cut grass, preparing a recreational playing surface and working outdoors intrigued Drasler. She performed a Google search and discovered her country had just 13 courses. Drasler continued searching for information about the industry and contacted a Slovenian Greenkeepers Association official. The official invited Drasler to attend the 2009 Slovenian Greenkeepers Association Conference. Lucas and the late USGA Green Section agronomist **Stanley Zontek** were among the presenters. Drasler was the superintendent at Diners Golf & Country Club less than two years later.

Lucas, who has served as a consultant for multiple European clubs over the past two decades, worked with Drasler to establish agronomic programs and help correct turf

◀ Montclair Golf Club is a revered 36-hole facility on the New Jersey side of the New York City metropolitan market.

issues caused through faulty course construction. Drasler and Diners Golf & Country Club successfully hosted the 2012 European Ladies' Amateur Championship, an event won by eventual European women's golf stalwart **Céline Boutier**. "She had the golf course absolutely primed and conditioned the best of almost any club I had seen in my years of being involved with golf courses in Europe," Lucas says. "She had it absolutely brilliant."

With more education and experience, Drasler has improved conditions everywhere she has worked, including Attersee. Lucas visited Drasler in Austria annually until the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and noticed fewer weeds in fairways (herbicide options are limited in Europe),

more bentgrass on greens, and tidier bunker conditions on each visit.

"The course is quite a little gem," says **Jernej Kocbek**, who followed Drasler as superintendent. "It's underrated. We have really high standards for the environment and the level of attention that it requires. We are on a tight budget. But for everybody who's coming here, I don't think they expect to see the standard that this golf course actually is. Everybody is happy with that experience."

Drasler was a beloved figure at Attersee, according to Kocbek. The crew she managed was split between Slovenians and Romanians. They worked as a cohesive unit despite the language barrier, and the team remained together for five years until Drasler's departure midway through this season. Kocbek, who met Drasler more than a decade

ago through a cousin, worked various lighting and construction jobs before settling at Attersee, which he calls, "the most chill job I've ever had in my life." Kocbek says he's passionate about greenkeeping, although he concedes Drasler's passion is on a different level.

"You have to be born with some kind of passion," he adds. "Of course, she passed some of it down to me. I like to believe I enjoy my work, but I wouldn't say I'm as passionate as her. If I didn't enjoy it, I would have left years ago. I enjoy learning stuff, I enjoy working."

"What she taught me was patience. I learned some of that on my own, but sometimes I'm a bit sloppy. She's detailed-oriented. She was always helping me. She was helping me take classes, she was helping me meet people. Of course, I'm my own person and a different character than Vanja is. But

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the majority of the stuff I'm bringing on now was because of her."

The ability to teach and guide diverse teams will be a huge asset for Drasler at Montclair. The team she worked with this past summer included veteran employees from multiple Latin American countries, rookies from local high schools and colleges, loyal seasonal workers and highly trained managers with turf degrees or certificates.

Observing Drasler interact with co-workers on a late-July day personified what makes her unique as a manager. Besides a 20-minute break to eat lunch in her office — which features a sign on the wall that reads DO EPIC SHIT — she spent the day outside alongside Montclair's team. Drasler waved, thanked, fist-bumped or acknowledged every co-worker she passed.

After the crew left, she checked moisture levels on greens. The day ended with Drasler, Sharpe and assistant superintendents **Michael Sturdivant** and **Sung Soun** joking about eating at White Castle, an American institution depicted in pop culture.

Chatter about a hamburger joint contrasts some discussions Drasler had with co-workers earlier in her career. Drasler recalls a story involving an employee from the former Republic of Macedonia on her first Diners Golf & Country Club team. The story demonstrates why she's prepared to handle New Jersey workers and members.

"We had three guys from Macedonia," she says. "One of them was making fun of me and said, 'You need to go back to the office.' But when I left that course, he was crying. You have to show them that you can do the job. When I

became superintendent and I was his boss, I could have made his life harder. But that's not me. It's the same thing here. I respect everybody. It doesn't matter if they are from the Dominican Republic, Mexico or America. I'm from Europe, I'm an immigrant, too."

Tears seemingly follow Drasler's departures from jobs. Her final scheduled day at Attersee was June 24, although she mowed greens with Kocbek ahead of a shotgun start the following morning because a co-worker wanted Saturday off to visit his family in Romania. As Drasler inspected the course for a final time, she encountered the club manager and his crying wife.

"I then started crying," she says. "After seven years, we were all together a lot. That's always going to be a special place for me, even if where I'm at now is 10 steps above it." **GCI**

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THANKS A LOT!

The price of turkey is out of sight, airfares to visit faraway relatives are even higher, and I think there’s another LIV Golf tournament (or is it an exhibition? Maybe a tea dance?) about to be played somewhere I’ll never go. That means it’s the season to reflect on what I am most thankful for in my life and in our profession. It’s certainly been an interesting year, and I’m thankful for ...

The golf boom. It’s good that COVID isn’t as dangerous as it was a year or two ago, and it’s also good that people are going back to the office so we can get our courses cleaned up. Before we had a chance to train the old golfers (assuming they’re trainable), we were hit with a tsunami of new, uneducated players who took out their pandemic frustrations by neglecting to rake bunkers, fix divots, lift their feet when they walk and seem to think the proper number of practice swings is 11.

Poa annua. It’s the jock itch of agronomy: It never goes away. But while it keeps us sod busters — as well as researchers and plant protectant companies — awake at night, it gives us something to complain about, and will continue to for a long, long time. It’s also given me something to talk about with friends like **Dr. Fred Yelverton**, **Dr. Bert McCarty** and scores of others. Unfortunately, most of those conversations aren’t fit for a G-rated audience.

Maintenance dogs. They’re irresistibly adorable, curious, frolic at the turn of an irrigation head and jump all over me after running through mud — just before the green committee meeting.

Our profession’s communication skills. With the world literally one thumb touch away, I am flummoxed by my fellow superintendents who don’t know how (or won’t) return a text, a phone

call or an email. C’mon, we’re better than this.

Fall golf season on television.

Watching professional golf in the fall bores me to death even faster than it does the rest of the year. And I’m obviously not the only one sleeping on the sofa on a Sunday afternoon because the ratings are lower than a nematode’s arse. This silly season allows me to focus on a real sport — ice hockey. Feel free to substitute football, pro or college, if you must.

Frivolous lawsuits.

The PGA Tour and LIV are going to throw away millions of dollars arguing over billions of dollars, making lawyers rich and the game better? For whom? Give me just a little bit of that money and we’ll build a labor pool, trim a few (thousand) trees and perhaps eradicate *Poa*!

Global warming.

It pushes our bentgrass green conversions to Bermudagrass, helps the nighttime temps rise and allows us to use more water. All while bringing snow in August.

Or maybe there’s no such thing as global warming?

In which case we can stop wearing hats and slathering on the sunscreen. Plus, dermatologist appointments, freeze-drying those little brown spots and melanoma become a thing of the past. I’d call that a head-scratcher, except if you do, you’ll likely bleed.

Labor shortages.

Being short-staffed allows us to spend more time away from our families, miss the kids’ sporting events,

neglect any hobbies we might have had and spend no weekends at home in the fall.

My green committee chairman.

With his internet agronomy degree, keen understanding of turf diseases and highly developed people skills, he keeps his committee meetings lively — and maintenance crews running in the opposite direction whenever they see him coming.

Golf course architects.

Because this was the year they finally understood that we can’t grow turfgrass in the shade nor can we drain water up a steep, unmowable slope — despite how much we love hand-mowing slopes around bunkers (especially with a depleted crew).

Daylight saving time.

It’s harder to get a sunburn if you’re working more hours in the dark, right?

Aerification.

There’s something nice about turning putting into pinball — and having an excuse to give your 20-handicap golf chair a couple of 3-footers now and again.

The readers of this column.

I’ll get serious for one second here (but only one). Besides having the utmost respect for all of my dirt-under-the-fingernails brethren, I am most thankful for those of you who keep what we do in perspective and appreciate the tongue-in-cheek nature of my columns. We do a hard job in less than perfect circumstances, so if you ever feel unappreciated where you work, know you are appreciated here. **GCI**



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



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DISEASE CONTROL: It's a regional thing

For the second straight year, *Golf Course Industry* partnered with Envu for a “Turf Reports” examining how the industry controls disease. For the second straight year, one region exceeds others in devoting

time and resources to thwart potential threats.

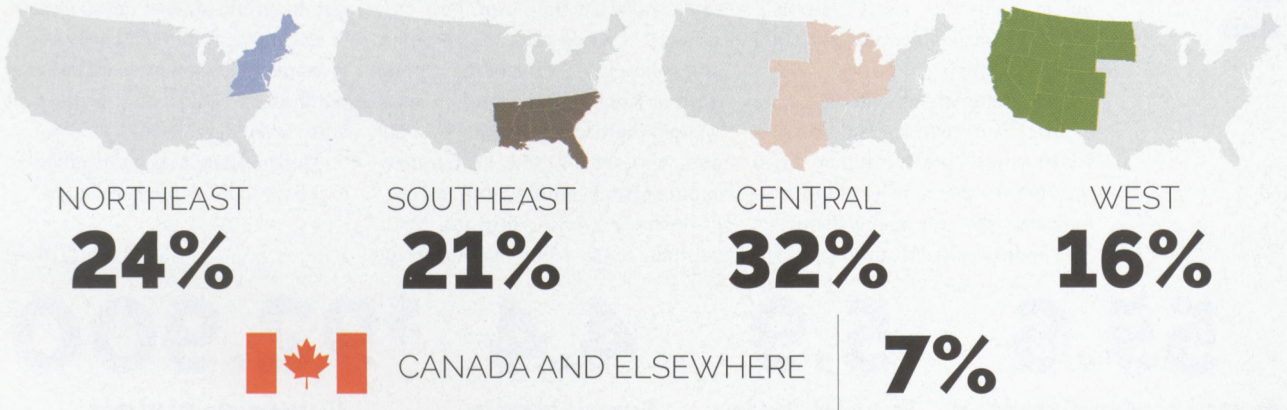
Superintendents in the Northeast spray and spend more to control disease, according to the numbers on the following pages.

How did we arrive at the numbers you're preparing to study?

Golf Course Industry collaborated with Signet Research, a New Jersey-based independent research firm, on a 20-question survey sent to a list of subscribers holding the title of superintendent, director of agronomy or assistant superintendent. The survey was distributed

three times from Sept. 7 to Sept. 22. Results are based on 274 completed returns with a confidence level of 95 percent and sampling tolerance of approximately +/- 5.9 percent. Envu also sponsored the insect control report in the September issue.

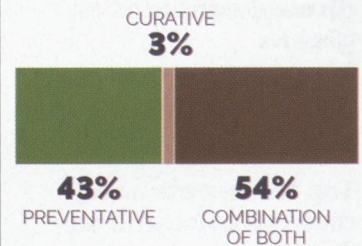
Where is your course located



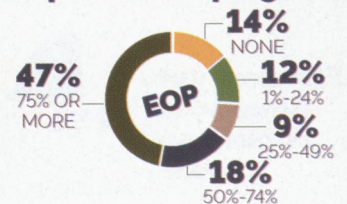
Disease pressure in your region

	ALL	NORTHEAST	SOUTHEAST	CENTRAL	WEST
1 (NONE)	1%	0%	0%	0%	7%
2	12%	1%	14%	8%	32%
3	56%	60%	47%	64%	50%
4	23%	31%	24%	24%	9%
5 (SEVERE)	8%	8%	15%	4%	2%

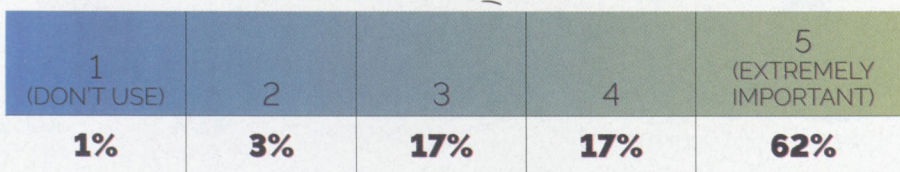
Description of disease control program



Percentage of fungicides purchased as part of EOP program



Importance of fungicides to controlling disease



NORTHEAST

FROM PRIVATE TO PUBLIC

At this time last year, Andy Fries was still tending to a 100-acre private course where annual rounds hovered around 15,000 to 20,000. He was almost a decade and a half into his run there, felt comfortable and recognized every rhythm. But his three daughters — the youngest 9, the oldest 17 — were worth more time at home, and he moved seven miles down the road to Tashua Knolls in Trumbull, Connecticut, a 27-hole public facility that covers more than 250 acres and handled almost 70,000 rounds last year.

As is so often the case among courses in close proximity, the growing environs are “pretty similar,” Fries says, but there are plenty of little differences, especially among diseases.

“I hadn’t dealt with anthracnose in

many years at my other place,” Fries says, “but it crept up on me once or twice, and by the time I dialed up the chemicals, I could keep it in check. I dealt with summer patch at my old place, and I didn’t see any out here, as bad as the weather was.”

Another difference is what Fries works with in the plant protectant shed. He used to opt for mostly post-patents, but was greeted with shelves of name-brand products early-ordered last year by his predecessor. “I just had to relearn the rates and what they were best on,” he says. “I relied a lot on salesmen and colleagues” — including a prior Tashua Knoll superintendent who worked there for more than 16 years and who shared how he handled summer patch, anthracnose and other diseases. “Moving forward, I will continue to use name-brand stuff on

my greens and tees. I have 30 acres of fairways — I used to have 12 — so I will use some post-patents. I’ve had no negative things with post-patents, I’ve always had good success with them. I just have a budget now that to be extra-safe, I can rotate stuff a lot better.”

And, of course, there is the challenge of all those golfers. Fries, who turned 52 this year, sprayed in the dark for the first time just this season. “The volume of play and the earlier tee times have totally changed my thought process in terms of what products I put down and at what rates,” he says. “I tend to spray at the higher rates. It gives me that window so if I can’t get out the next week, it buys me the next six to seven days.

“You just have to be more efficient. You have to think further ahead.”

— Matt LaWell

55.6

Acres of turf treated with fungicides

5.9

Fungicides in greens rotation

4.4

Fungicides in fairways rotation

\$92,900

Fungicide budget

Top three potential disease concerns on greens

1. DOLLAR SPOT
2. ANTHRACNOSE
3. *PYTHIUM* ROOT ROT

Top three potential disease concerns on fairways

1. DOLLAR SPOT
2. BROWN PATCH
3. *PYTHIUM* BLIGHT

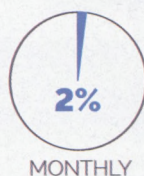
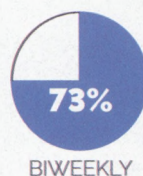
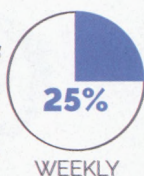
Areas of course treated with fungicides

GREENS	100%
TEES	94%
APPROACHES/ COLLARS	94%
FAIRWAYS	89%
BUNKER FACES	33%
ROUGH	30%

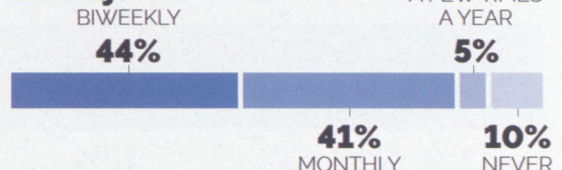
Months applying at least one fungicide

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL
2%	0%	28%	80%
MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST
98%	100%	100%	100%
SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
98%	89%	64%	41%

Frequency of fungicides applied on greens



Frequency of fungicides applied on fairways



SUNSHINE DISEASE

Half a century into his golf course maintenance career, John Lapikas still arrives by 4 a.m. most mornings. Yes, 4.

“Open up, make a couple pots of coffee, do the board,” says Lapikas, who started working in the industry in 1972 and at Mariner Sands Country Club in Stuart, Florida, in 2002. “My assistants come in and we have a couple cups of coffee and talk, and then we go from there.”

The early mornings provide Lapikas with time to drive the courses — Mariner Sands is home to a pair of 18-hole layouts designed by Tom Fazio and Frank Duane — and search for anything out of place, including disease. “You ride around every day, you can pretty much see if there’s something going wrong,” he says. “Seems to be our biggest problem lately has been Bermudagrass mites. Most of the diseases, with the temperature and the humidity and the cloud cover, you know when you’re going to get it so you either prevent it or you wait till you spot the first patch.”

Southeast Florida superintendents have plenty of diseases to combat. Lapikas normally has problems with *Rhizoctonia zae* during the summer and gray leaf spot the rest of the year.

“You get some dollar spot, but we can fertilize that out,” he says. “And it seems, on the greens, to be the patch diseases, brown patch. We have Celebration fairways so we seem to get a lot of gray leaf spot. ... It’s just kind of a year-round thing with the gray leaf spot. As soon as I see something, we spray all our fairways and tees.”

Lapikas and his team spray year-round for *Rhizoctonia zae* and fairy ring, and three times each year on those Celebration fairways. “We have 30 acres of fairways and 10 acres of tees on both courses, so spraying 80 acres takes a day and a half.”

Before returning to Florida 20 years ago, Lapikas worked 20 more years at a top course in Mississippi, where *Pythium* and brown patch were far more prominent — but the variety of diseases can’t touch what he sees in Florida.

— Matt LaWell

26.9

Acres of turf treated with fungicides

5.1

Fungicides in greens rotation

1.4 **\$48,900**

Fungicides in fairways rotation

Fungicide budget

Top three potential disease concerns on greens

1. *PYTHIUM* ROOT ROT
2. FAIRY RING
3. *PYTHIUM* BLIGHT

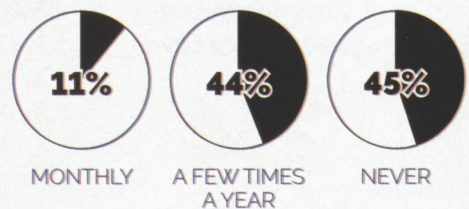
Top three potential disease concerns on fairways

1. DOLLAR SPOT
2. FAIRY RING
3. SPRING DEAD SPOT

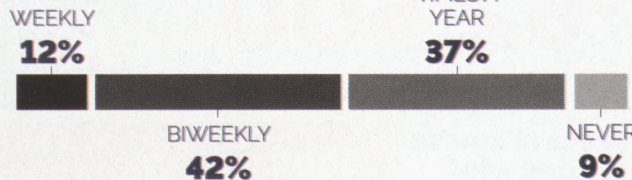
Areas of course treated with fungicides

GREENS	100%
TEES	67%
APPROACHES/ COLLARS	55%
FAIRWAYS	39%
BUNKER FACES	2%
ROUGH	3%

Frequency of fungicides applied on fairways



Frequency of fungicides applied on greens



Months applying at least one fungicide

JANUARY	52%	FEBRUARY	64%	MARCH	88%	APRIL	83%	MAY	74%	JUNE	74%
JULY	78%	AUGUST	81%	SEPTEMBER	83%	OCTOBER	86%	NOVEMBER	81%	DECEMBER	53%



CENTRAL

NUMBER CRUNCHER

For at least as long as humans are unable to control the weather, so much about golf course maintenance will still rely on feel and faith. But science is an increasingly bigger part of the job—and so are the statistics often produced by that science.

Chad Allen relies on those statistics, so much so that he reserves about 20 minutes every day to enter into one of his Excel spreadsheets “any type of measurable that would help me better make decisions when it comes to turf playability and turf health.” Allen is the golf course superintendent at The Club at Chatham Hills in Westfield, Indiana. He is very much a man of both faith in life and science on the course.

Allen has designed spreadsheets for clipping yield,

plant growth regulators, growth potential equation and volumetric water content for firmness and, of course, for a variety of diseases. At The Club at Chatham Hills, located about 25 miles north of downtown Indianapolis, Allen’s biggest and most prevalent challenge is dollar spot.

He says he has managed it thanks to moisture control and to just “getting out there and trying to knock the dew off certain areas, trying to not let the dew sit longer.”

“Dollar spot is very weather-dependent, but I’ve got some historical data on areas where we have seen *Pythium*—low areas, areas near catch basins,” says Allen, who uses the Smith-Kerns Dollar Spot Model. “Every day, I’ll input the highs and lows and humidity that happened during that day, and it’ll give me a percent probability using the Smith-Kerns Model. Using that information, we set a 20 percent threshold, so once we get above it, that is when I really start to look to apply preventatively. We do one application of early-season DMI, when soil temperatures reach 55 to 60 degrees for three consecutive days. It’s done wonders for us. It really knocks out any of that inoculum that’s carried over from last year that might be hiding down in the thatch or clippings that are still there.”

This season, Allen says, only one area of the course has endured any sort of dollar spot breakthrough—“and that was only because the irrigation heads got stuck on, so it did some extra watering over there. I really do attribute our ability to control dollar spot with that early-season DMI application.” And with charting all those numbers.

— Matt LaWell

28.7

Acreage of turf treated with fungicides

5.0

Fungicides in greens rotation

2.4

Fungicides in fairways rotation

\$62,500

Fungicide budget

Top three potential disease concerns on greens

1. DOLLAR SPOT
2. ANTHRACNOSE
3. BROWN PATCH

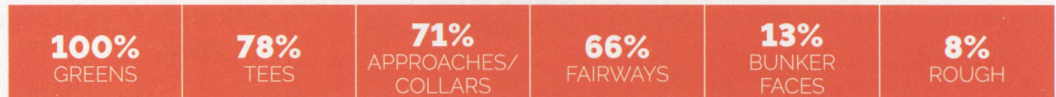
Top three potential disease concerns on fairways

1. DOLLAR SPOT
2. BROWN PATCH
3. PYTHIUM BLIGHT

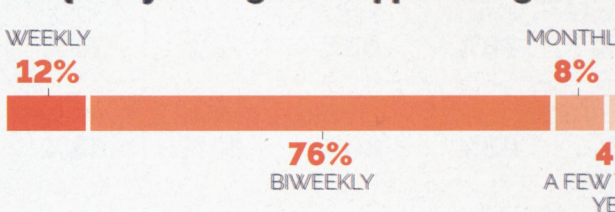
Months applying at least one fungicide

JANUARY 7%	FEBRUARY 13%	MARCH 29%	APRIL 75%	MAY 95%	JUNE 95%
JULY 93%	AUGUST 93%	SEPTEMBER 99%	OCTOBER 90%	NOVEMBER 63%	DECEMBER 15%

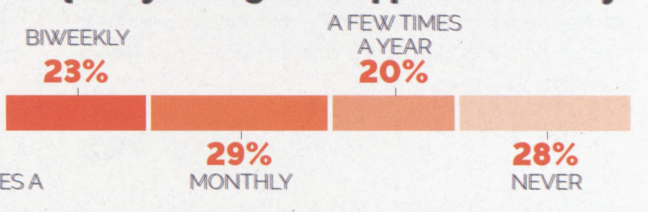
Areas of course treated with fungicides



Frequency of fungicides applied on greens



Frequency of fungicides applied on fairways





DIALING UP THE HEAT

Even in the desert, Kenton Brunson handles the normal variety of diseases.

Now in his second season as director of agronomy at Phoenix Country Club, Brunson says his biggest disease pressure is probably take-all root rot, and with 22-year-old greens he sees some fairy ring. His biggest problem, though?

“Just the heat,” he says. “The heat with humidity, smoking either bentgrass greens or Bermuda greens or ryegrass. Especially on greens, it’s not like a pathogen or anything, but when you have heat and humidity, it’s really tough to manage turf, because it gets puffy and the greens get slow. I’m not losing sleep over disease pressure. I’m losing sleep

over the heat.”

Brunson treats the heat and humidity like another disease — albeit one over which he has very little control. Brunson worked under Shawn Emerson at Desert Mountain and still remembers Emerson instilling the wisdom that, direct quote here, “Grass doesn’t know what day it is.”

“And that’s a fact,” Brunson says. “A lot of guys lose turf on the weekends because they want to go home at 10 a.m. We use POGO every day during the summers, especially to try to be as even as we can. Because the Bermuda here, if you get too dry, it starts to get thin, and then if you get too wet, it starts to get thin. It’s kind of a happy medium.”

Brunson says there isn’t any one disease “that just kicks our butt every

year,” and that, all things considered, “Phoenix is actually a great place to grow grass, because there isn’t really a lot of disease pressure and you can be strategic and regimented. The only issues are the heat and transition — transition is very difficult. You got to grow it in in October, and then when you kill the ryegrass in the spring you got to grow all your Bermuda back. That’s the toughest thing, it’s just go, go, go all the time.

“I know guys in the desert who all they do is work. Their product is good, but how long could you go? I don’t know. Eventually, I think, you get tired of it. ... I don’t feel like that. I want to be the best.”

The heat is on.

— Matt LaWell

29.1

Acres of turf treated with fungicides

3.9

Fungicides in greens rotation

1.3

Fungicides in fairways rotation

\$36,100

Fungicide budget

Top three potential disease concerns on greens

1. PINK SNOW MOLD
2. ANTHRACNOSE
3. DOLLAR SPOT

Top three potential disease concerns on fairways

1. DOLLAR SPOT
2. FAIRY RING
3. PINK SNOW MOLD

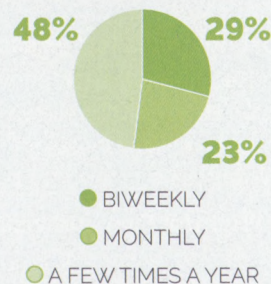
Months applying at least one fungicide

JANUARY 43%	FEBRUARY 41%	MARCH 39%	APRIL 52%
MAY 50%	JUNE 59%	JULY 57%	AUGUST 55%
SEPTEMBER 59%	OCTOBER 59%	NOVEMBER 66%	DECEMBER 34%

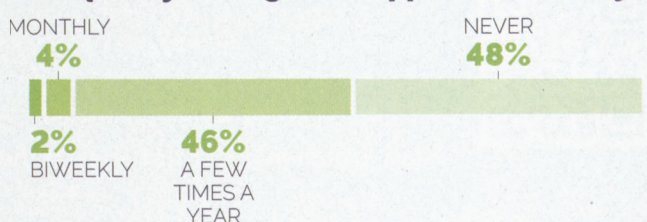
Areas of course treated with fungicides

GREENS	100%
TEES	55%
APPROACHES/ COLLARS	55%
FAIRWAYS	43%
BUNKER FACES	9%
ROUGH	7%

Frequency of fungicides applied on greens



Frequency of fungicides applied on fairways



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the Frightful Five.



Nick White
Golf Course Superintendent

Densicor® controls the fear of turf disease.

Dollar Spot

Brown Patch

Anthrachnose

Gray Leaf Spot

Snow Mold



Densicor®



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

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

ALWAYS READ AND FOLLOW LABEL INSTRUCTIONS.

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EFFICIENT FACILITIES

Stakeholders must understand that maintenance buildings house more than equipment. Obtaining indoor upgrades to maximize what a turf team can achieve requires a thoughtful blend of evaluation, investment and optimization.

By **Lee Carr**

“It’s operational, it’s functional and it’s so solid. It’s clean and it’s safe and that’s what matters,” says **Matt Delly**, superintendent at Monroe Golf Club in Pittsford, New York. Monroe invested in a brilliant new maintenance area and the process was educational.

For **Josh Pope**, superintendent at The Olde Farm in Bristol, Virginia, the design-and-build process also took several years. Both clubs now have thoughtfully planned facilities that better serve the crew and their operations.

WALLS, FLOORS AND OPEN DOORS

At The Olde Farm, there are two sayings on the facility walls. “I wanted to take care of the quotes as soon as we moved in to set the expectation

and the culture,” Pope says. On a wall in the break room is the statement “Better Than Yesterday,” which Pope borrowed from Ten Thousand, a fitness apparel company.

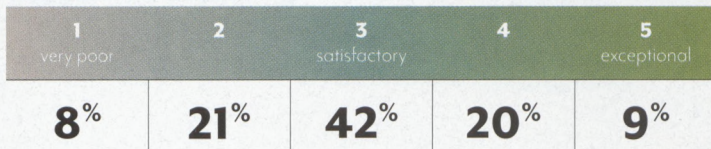
Pope and the crew try to be a

▲ Monroe Golf Club in Pittsford, New York, debuted its new maintenance facility in 2020.

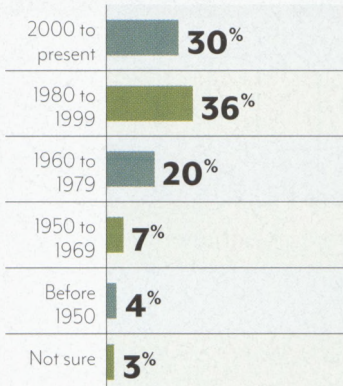
SPOTLIGHT

NUMBERS TO KNOW

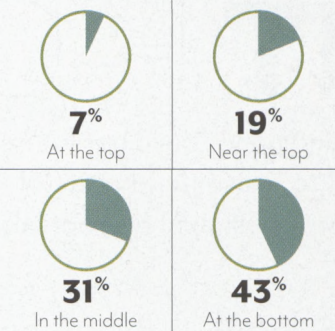
HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE CONDITION OF YOUR MAINTENANCE FACILITY?



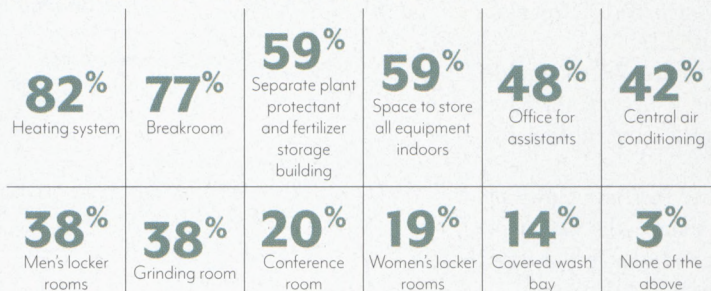
WHEN WAS YOUR MAINTENANCE FACILITY CONSTRUCTED?



WHERE DO MAINTENANCE FACILITY UPGRADES RANK ON YOUR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT WISH LIST?



WHAT DOES YOUR MAINTENANCE FACILITY HAVE?



little better every day. You never know who is going to be on property. The team's work shines across the championship course and the Orchard course, a 9-hole, par-3, cross-country romp. Both courses were designed by Bobby Weed and the property also boasts a one-acre farm; charming rows of blackberries; and apple, pear and peach trees.

Other common wall decorations are flags from significant tournaments and photos of the crew, the course, or both. Enlarged versions of drainage, irrigation and topography maps are helpful. Place them where people can reference them easily.

Floors should be clean and clutter-free. Wash them regularly and keep pathways open. Doors need to be open too, encouraging communication. The area by the time clock is great for fun announcements or holiday decorations. A little red paint can go a long way to indicate when electrical switches are on or off, particularly for switches being flipped at the start or end of the day. Trash and recycling bins should be emptied regularly.

RENOVATING OR CONSTRUCTING?

Evaluate what can be done internally to move things around by studying the workflow and where inefficiencies exist. Is the break room doubling as a meeting room or do offices serve that function? Who needs an office and how many hours per week is it really used? Can equipment be arranged differently? Over time, things are placed in certain places out of habit. Conscientiously review where everything is and why. Sometimes the most practical answer is a renovation or a wholesale change.

"In the last 10 years, the need for an upgrade in terms of footprint, safety, size, space, all the things that matter became more and more apparent," Delly says. "We were overdue."

With Monroe since 2006 and seeing the new facility open in 2020, he has witnessed the full transformation. The building project had a \$1.4-million cap and the construction manager was a member who was extremely dedicated to the job, completing the project in about nine months.

"In 2013, we discussed priorities and the five-to-seven-year outlook," Delly says. "The greens chairman was instrumental in saying 'How long can we kick this can down the road? We get what we need but you would be surprised if you saw the conditions of the existing facility.'"

He laid out the site and floor plans and described wants and needs. There are seven full-time staff and mid-season



Source: Signet Research (September 2022); Number of respondents: 279

the ranks swell to 30 to maintain an 18-hole regulation course, a four-hole short course, the driving range, and chipping and practice greens.

Not all plans made it. For instance, the community zoning regulations didn't allow onsite housing. The project did meet budget, even with increases in supply costs. "The most important part of this process wasn't erecting a new building but educating our membership about the conditions of the maintenance facility," Delly says.

He guided three open tours for more than 200 members and comments such as "this is embarrassing," "we had no idea" and multiple expletives resounded. He showed everyone the 3D renderings. When it came time to support the project financially, endearingly, 80 percent of members paid the assessment upfront to provide instant working

capital.

The site work for the new maintenance area was substantial. More than 100 pine trees were cleared to expand the footprint and comfortably be able to accommodate 18-wheelers. Course maintenance continued with trailers and storage units equipped with lights, heat and A/C. The equipment tech was set up in the old cold storage area.

The new building is 12,500 square feet with an additional 5,000 square feet of cold storage. "My favorite feature is the increased footprint of the entire space, beyond the building," Delly says. "Cables and wires that were in the way of deliveries are underground now, employee parking flows easily and our bulk storage is huge. We increased space in the locker room, upgraded and doubled the space and fixtures in the restrooms and added a mud room. The equipment technician space and parts room almost tripled and we doubled the space of our sharpening and grinding room. Our chemical

storage is away from employee areas. That's huge.

"We have challenges retaining employees and there were other clubs in the area making facility upgrades too — Oak Hill, Irondequoit and the Country Club of Rochester," Delly adds. "I will give up experience 100 percent of the time to hire someone who cares and is accountable," and to compete for those people, the facility has to offer comparable amenities. Employee morale and retention is up, and Delly is pleased. Most facilities will juggle wants and needs with financial resources, but it's always worth dreaming big and working to see what can happen.

FORESEEING THE FUTURE

Imagining a facility from the ground up yields more questions. Where is the most functional location for the facility? How big can it be? What's better: multiple buildings or everything under one roof? What is the optimal timeline?

"At The Olde Farm, I noticed facility needs during my first season," Pope says. "The facility was in a high-traffic area and the club's infrastructure and staff has grown in its 20 years. We were in the middle of it all. Where every delivery came. Where cart staging was. There were

▲ The break room inside The Olde Farm maintenance facility.

▲ The Olde Farm in Bristol, Virginia, debuted its new maintenance facility earlier this year.



"FOR THOSE OUT THERE TRYING TO GET A NEW MAINTENANCE FACILITY WHO HEAR 'NO,' FIND A DIFFERENT ANGLE. WE KNOW HOW BENEFICIAL THEY ARE. FIGURE OUT WHAT IS BEST FOR YOUR PROPERTY AND GO BACK AT IT."

—JOSH POPE

so many people and so much activity around the building that it wasn't efficient. We were outgrowing our space for equipment and had a lot sitting outside."

The general manager and other administrative personnel needed space, so Pope proposed that a new facility be built and the old one repurposed for offices. Plans were debated for a year before committing to separating the maintenance facility from other activity. The first building was 8,000 square feet. The new one is 22,000 square feet.

"The vision set forth by our owner has just grown bigger than ever imagined," Pope says. "We're a very

private, national golf club. We don't have that much play but the experience we provide requires the right staff. We had to make sure that we were preparing for the future." Construction costs jumped between the estimate and breaking ground and a few concessions had to be made but nothing that negatively impacted the operation.

The cost benefits of a new facility can't be overstated. If

workflow efficiency and labor retention improve, that saves time and money. If equipment is better protected and more easily serviced, that is effective asset management. "It's different with projects on course," Pope says. "There's instant gratification and members understand how it pays off because everyone

"THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THIS PROCESS WASN'T ERECTING A NEW BUILDING BUT EDUCATING OUR MEMBERSHIP ABOUT THE CONDITIONS OF THE MAINTENANCE FACILITY."

—MATT DELLY



ATTAINING BUY-IN

Finding the resources for improving, renovating or building a new maintenance facility will require powerful support.

Embrace your allies

Who in your membership or administration understands the maintenance operation and can visualize how investment will help the maintenance team thrive? Find those people, speak with them and move forward together.

Do the math

Nothing speaks like concrete numbers. Know the figures that represent cost savings from labor, asset management and efficiency.

Be transparent

Be willing to show people what the maintenance facilities are and then sell the vision. Open viewing of the turf operations will establish common ground for communication. Those who are better educated are more likely to be supportive.

Emphasize the benefits of crew care

A healthy, modern working environment is something an organization should be proud of from the maintenance facility through the front door. It's a selling point on multiple levels and will help with workplace culture and labor retention.

is talking about it. No one wants to come and see the maintenance facility." Any benefits need to be broadly communicated, multiple times.

Security systems can be an improvement. The new building has a keyless entry. Pope can access different areas with a ring he wears, a swipe card or a fob. It's quick and he doesn't need an extra key. The building is set to lock and unlock at certain times. If necessary, the IT department can reference the logs of who is on site. Staff clock in by swiping their fob.

The new facility has alleviated traffic jams. Staff morale is up, mostly due to increased space and better personal facilities. The break room is ample and has multiple refrigerators and microwaves. "I asked staff what they wanted and kept people in the loop," Pope says. "We viewed renderings and built the excitement."

The Olde Farm has two houses on the property for interns and they had eight this summer, six for the course and two horticulturalists to help with the farm. The maintenance



FACILITY EVALUATIONS

Take a macro view of your facility by considering these elements...

Square footage What land can you use and how big can you go? How many people, how much equipment and what materials need a roof during peak season?

Personal zones Showers, lockers and a mud room for wet gear are all great. What else do you need to keep people dry and comfortable? What spaces work for your organization regarding male and female staff? Consider unisex and ADA-compliant spaces for maximum flexibility.

Breakroom Microwaves, refrigerators, chairs and table space are pleasing for eating and meeting. Charging stations for phones and earbuds, a couch for lounging and industry publications will enhance this space for recharging. (See what I did there?)

Administrative areas Who needs an office? How many hours per week will someone spend there and for what function? Design accordingly.

Equipment management How many people need to be working on equipment simultaneously? Are their respective supplies in close proximity?

Equipment storage How can space be maximized with shelving, hooks, cabinets and drawers? Is there anything you need to part with, refurbish or purchase?

Architect Ask around. Contact other courses for references. Who has a vested interest in the project's success?

Visibility What does your maintenance area look like from the course? Does it need to be enhanced to mesh with the course aesthetics? Could the facility appear more professional to garner more respect for and from the staff?

Technology Are you equipped for screens, Wi-Fi, irrigation controls, training videos and all the systems and information processing devices that are relied upon daily? Do you have or need backup power?

Materials Would certain areas be better with reinforced concrete for heavy equipment and is high-density asphalt better for areas frequented by 18-wheelers? Can large trucks easily maneuver? For plant protectant storage, is it separated from staff areas and at code?

Communication Check with your employees. What features does everyone value? What is the best way to communicate with staff, players and administration throughout the process?

Security Is everything safe? Do cameras need to be installed, moved or adjusted? Do locks or access points need to be upgraded and will the insurance policy be affected?

Wash station Where is the equipment being cleaned and cared for? Is there a smart design in place for runoff?

Name it Refer to your facility consistently to reinforce respect for the work being executed. Choose a name that conveys that professionalism.

Intern housing Do you regularly hire interns and what are housing options like if you don't provide it? Are zoning laws in your community an obstacle?

Signs Would it be useful to post facility signs in more than one language?

SPOTLIGHT

► The size and layout of the plant protecant room is an important consideration when planning a new maintenance facility.

facility houses three offices, the break room and two locker rooms (men's and women's). At a "T" off that is equipment storage and the mechanic's shop. There is a separate building for chemicals and sprayers.

The project concluded at the start of the 2022 golf season. Pope and the crew went with their instincts about finalizing where everything was going to fit. They will re-evaluate this winter, as time allows. "For those out there trying to get a new maintenance facility who hear 'no,' find a different angle," Pope says. "We know how beneficial they are. Figure out what is best for your property and go back at it."

At The Olde Farm, they continue to be "Better Than Yesterday." The

second quote, found in one of the main hallways of the maintenance facility is, "In the end, I see the greater purpose of the game to be quite simply the notion of giving back," stated by **Jim McGlothlin**, the club's owner and founder. Pope wants to remind the crew how McGlothlin is inspired. The new facility and their work are because of his vision.

Golf cannot be played without a course. The course cannot be

properly maintained without the equipment and the crew. Take care of the people who take care of the equipment and the course. If the maintenance facility needs an upgrade or redesign, motivate the stakeholders who care enough to make those changes. **GCI**

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



ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS

Courses and facilities can benefit from sound environmental practices. Solar panels can provide energy. Skylights and energy-efficient windows can cut down on the need for additional lighting. Lights can be motion-activated and

use the longest-lasting bulbs available. Electrical sockets can be switched to "smart plugs" so that equipment isn't drawing unnecessary power. Low-water usage plumbing fixtures can be installed and touch-free faucets can save water,

too. Electrochromic glass, solar thermal cladding, bioswales and green walls or roofs are all technologies worth exploring. Even the products used to keep the facility clean should be environmentally friendly.



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Landscape ENHANCERS

A 36-hole facility in the California desert revamps its plant palette and irrigation system to satisfy modern water, labor, golf and homeowner realities.

By **Hal Phillips**

As renovation continues to sustain the North American course design and construction markets, water and labor shortages increasingly inform that work. Water restrictions have obliged clubs and properties to reduce turf acreage throughout California's golf-rich Coachella Valley and elsewhere. In concert, many clubs — like the 36-hole Hideaway Golf Club in La Quinta, California — have simultaneously addressed surrounding landscape beds, because it follows that every acre of eliminated turf is an acre that must still be managed somehow.

Hideaway director of agronomy and grounds **Gerry Tarsitano II**, CGCS, is approximately 25 percent finished with a turf-reduction project he's been tackling alongside the landscape architects at Pinnacle Design Company. Like many superintendents, however, especially those working in semi-arid environments, Tarsitano views the turf-reduction exercise as an excuse to address a range of issues in his outlying areas, from irrigation-efficiency to Bermuda-creep to seasonal-bloom cycles.

"We're slowly picking away at it, but it's coming along nicely," says Tarsitano, who has looked after the **Pete Dye** and **Clive Clark** courses since The Hideaway opened back in 2001. "Pinnacle provided us a design for the first five acres this past January. Within three and a half months, we had removed the turf, re-vegetated and converted that space over to drip (irrigation). We did another five acres from May to August.

"We've been slowly converting from an overhead to a drip system, alongside maybe six more acres of turf reduction over the last five years. But (Pinnacle Design Company founder and president) **Ken (Alperstein)** has stepped in to help us over the last 18 months. Basically, we first have to go in and prep the beds completely back down to bare dirt. Then we come in and lay out the new landscape design, install the drip

irrigation, plant and mulch."

Tarsitano's turf-reduction goals remain, of course. But the water and labor savings resulting from The Hideaway's new landscape reality, along with the aesthetic benefits, have proved their own rewards.

"I just love the new, enhanced landscape overall," he says. "The original design was a wildflower mix of gazanias, annuals, perennial and biannuals. The new look is just more aesthetically pleasing from both a golf and homeowner standpoint. And we've minimized our labor. The overhead (irrigation) would allow all sorts of Bermudagrass encroachment — just more weeds in general coming into play. The labor to keep those areas clean was pretty intense. It would take crews weeks to tidy them up, but then we'd go back to watering them and they would just come back. We could never get ahead of it.

"The drip system means we control water and weeds better. I'd estimate we've reduced weed encroachment by 95 percent in the converted areas. This is something Ken had brought up with me before, and he was right. The conversion was about water use, because of where we are and the amount we use. But what we've seen is lower water usage and labor for landscape purposes overall. Other clubs have converted from similar designs, going from overhead to drip. I wouldn't call what we're doing here 'cutting edge.' But for us, it is a big deal."

ALPERSTEIN KNOWS WHAT you're thinking. His firm, based in La Quinta, was there to create the original Hideaway landscape plan prior to opening in 2001. Now PDC is back to redesign it. What has changed?

"When we worked with the original developers at The Hideaway, they hired us to create the entire environment from scratch, as the golf course and surrounding community was a completely empty site with not a single living thing on it after mass grading,"

Alperstein says. “We were hired to provide the most stunning landscape and water features at a modest budget. At the time, in the early 2000s, water and labor were cheap. So, when we proposed a landscape palette of large wildflower beds with hand-planted shrubs and trees — and a second zone of grasslands beds — the client loved the idea because it was quite reasonable to install vs. large mass plantings of drip-irrigated, hand-planted shrubs. And the original look was beautiful.”

Warm-season bunchgrass varieties were chosen to populate the grasslands, according to Alperstein, so that during winter there would exist a stark, dormant contrast adjacent to the ryegrass fairways and the golden colors of weeping lovegrass on the hill-

sides. To complement the grasslands zones, Pinnacle introduced large areas featuring a mixture of seasonal wildflowers, a perennial groundcover that bloomed yellow and orange alongside hand-planted shrubs, trees and palms — “to give some vertical elements to the wildflower landscape beds,” Alperstein says.

“Well, for the first four to five years, the landscape was stunning. Then, around the economic crash of 2008, budgets were cut — as they were cut at so many clubs between 2008 and 2018 — and less attention was given to the landscape zones,”

he adds. “The first year, they had some weeds, which went to seed. The next year, they had 100 times the amount of weeds, and so on, until the weed/seed population just took over the wildflower landscape zones. In the grasslands zones, Bermudagrass

runners invaded. The club had tried to clear some of the wildflower beds in the beginning of the summer and re-seed the beds — but they were never successful. They never had enough time to kill the weed-seed population that was in the soil. From afar, the landscape beds and grasslands beds were still semi-acceptable for a high-end course, but up close, for residences that backed up to the landscape beds adjacent to the course, not so much. The landscape was not up to snuff, and definitely not what was originally designed.”

As the economy improved, and the homeowners purchased Hideaway Golf Club from the developer, the club hired Pinnacle to assess the landscape and water features. An irrigation specialist was subsequently retained to review the golf course system, and an agronomist to review the health of the golf course turf, drainage, bunkers and greens.

The consensus? Turf reduction, replacement of the wildflower and many of the grassland beds, and redesign of outlying plantings fed by drip irrigation and hand-planted shrubs to reduce water usage and the emergence of broadleaf weeds.

No landscape designer has done more high-profile work in the Coachella Valley than Pinnacle. The company’s portfolio in the region includes Madison Club, The Vintage Club, Tradition Golf Club, Eldorado Country Club, Sunnylands Golf Course and The Quarry at La Quinta. Pinnacle has completed more than 25 separate turf reduction projects paired with drip-irrigation-fed renovations since 2016. Alperstein agrees with Tarsitano that the approach is not new.

“And this is not only a desert phenomenon,” Alperstein says. “We just did a similar project at Hillcrest Country Club in Los Angeles where the perimeters were mainly spray-irrigated flower landscape beds. We’re currently working at The Valley Club in Montecito, Thornburgh Resort in



Bend, Oregon. I think this work is actually more applicable at parkland courses where Bermuda creep isn’t so rampant, but where there’s typically so much more wall-to-wall turf.

“On the Clive Clark course, Clive had us originally design lots of streams, lakes and waterfalls. We were using a more lush flowering palette there, too. On the Pete Dye course, we went with more ornamental grasses and less color, letting the golf be more of the feature there. It’s nice to have both, to have completely different landscape feels in the same development. Many folks refer to this work as turf reduction, and that’s a big part of it. But we at Pinnacle affectionately call these projects landscape enhancement projects.”

TARSITANO WASN'T BORN to the desert. He’s an Illinois native who moved with his family when he was 10 to lush, green Carmel Valley, where they settled into a house between the seventh and eighth tees

Well, for the first four to five years, the landscape was stunning. Then, around the economic crash of 2008, budgets were cut — as they were cut at so many clubs between 2008 and 2018 — and less attention was given to the landscape zones.”

— Ken Alperstein



at Quail Lodge. That's when he started playing the game. His maintenance career took root four years later, when Quail Lodge superintendent **Scott Jergensen** gave him a summer job removing filamentous algae from lakes — with a rake and pitchfork. In time, Jergensen suggested his young

charge explore college turf programs. After earning his turf management degree from Oregon State, Tarsitano landed a job with Landmark Land Co., as an assistant superintendent at Carmel Valley Ranch. Four years of apprenticeship and the Landmark connection led him to PGA WEST,

where soon he was looking after the Palmer Private and Nicklaus Private courses. He logged five years as a regional superintendent for Arnold Palmer Golf Management before returning to the Coachella Valley.

“Gerry and I started at The Hide-away at the same time,” Alperstein says.

“We’ve both been there since Day 1. Our job at Pinnacle is to make Gerry’s life as simple and straightforward as possible. But he and I both have to be responsive to the developers and to the members. Our goal is always to work with developers to meet their goals, and superintendents to meet theirs.”

Indeed, Tarsitano credits the members for one aspect of the changes now underway at The Hideaway.

“The original Pinnacle design here looked great — just beautiful when it was all in full bloom,” he says. “One problem was the labor cost associated with such a high level of maintenance. But another was purely aesthetic: the original landscape mix looked best in the springtime. Members arrived in the winter and there wasn’t a whole lot of color to be seen out there. As we moved through winter and spring rolled around, it would bloom and look spectacular — just as the members were all leaving. They remembered these beautiful blooms but didn’t see them when they returned. That was a letdown for members and a challenge for us.

“With these new landscape plantings, we’ll have year-round color. I really like the way it looks: attractive, easier to maintain and a consistent look. It’s really the best thing we could

be doing to enhance the landscape.”

Consistent?

“By that I mean the color aspect. You have a clean landscape look out there,” Tarsitano adds. “I’ve been places where one week you’re looking at some grass, flanked by some nice color, then a week later there’s a cluster of weeds and maybe it’s something else intruding as the season moves forward. So, just knowing that it’s going to have a nice clean, consistent look all year sure appeals to me as a superintendent.”

Year-round blooms are nice, but the roots of this renovation — the roots of so many turf-reduction and subsequent landscape enhancements — are rising water costs. These issues have traditionally been less acute in the Southern California desert, where access to an expansive aquifer meant golf course water bills might total \$120,000 annually, compared to \$800,000 to \$1.2 million over the mountains in Greater San Diego.

Not surprisingly, however, Tarsitano and Alperstein both report that the regulation climate is changing, even in the desert.

“Over the last four to six years, the CVWDB (Coachella Valley Water District Board) has asked us to reduce use by 20 percent,” says Tarsitano, who reckons the club will spend \$3 million

to \$5 million on turf reduction and conversion of all 100 acres. “So, we’re jumping on the bandwagon right now, trying to get ahead of the issue. We’re holding at right around 12 to 13 percent in our water savings. By converting, we’re going to get much closer to that 20 percent goal. That’s the biggest benefit of the landscape renovation, in my view.

“I haven’t put the numbers together on how much we’ll save in water cost. That’s always going to be a moving target going forward. But based on numbers from a couple years ago, we’ll be looking at up to 40 percent in water-use savings. Once we convert all 100 acres, then it goes over 50 percent. It’s hard to say how long it will take to get the \$3 to \$5 million back in water cost savings. But I think it’s a pretty good deal for us regardless.”

Turf reduction has indeed become something of a course-maintenance mantra nationwide, as water becomes more and more commodified. Alperstein is quick to advise clubs and superintendents to plan carefully around what exactly will be done with all this space created by reductions in turf cover. Which areas are eliminated is vital — as are long-term maintenance and sustainability of the formerly turfed space. But all factors must be considered in the context of scale.

“I always warn supers not to design those new landscaped areas like your grandmother’s front yard,” Alperstein says. “Any landscaped area must have enough scale to be believable. Proportion is so important. It has to be big enough to make people think, ‘Oh, they routed the golf course around that.’ Not, ‘They obviously just dropped that pod of landscaping beside an existing golf hole.’ It becomes natural looking, not necessarily when it’s been outfitted with the right plantings, but when it’s large enough to fit the space.” **GCI**

Hal Phillips is a Maine-based freelance writer, managing director of Mandarin Media, Inc., and former editor-in-chief of Golf Course News.





SOMEONE MUST DRIVE THE BUS

At every successful golf course renovation, someone must be in charge. Invariably, it's a club member. That becomes a thankless task, involving endless meetings, lost rounds of golf, too many conversations at the 19th hole and three or four strokes higher on one's index. Without someone driving, the project goes rudderless and the proposed renovation usually falls short — or more often, never even gets off the ground.

At the California Golf Club of San Francisco, it was, for 15 years, a gritty, no-nonsense ex-Marine named **Al Jamieson**, who refused to take “no” for an answer. Around the same time, at Brookside Country Club in Canton, Ohio, a spreadsheet-wizened businessman named **Steve Cress** drove the process forward while serving as club president. And at Santa Ana (California) Country Club, almost a decade ago, it took the late Senator **Bob Dole's** former legislative aid, **Mitchell Pettit**, to negotiate a hotbed of well-funded opposition by a group of recalcitrant members to drag the major overhaul through to completion.

This is not a job for superintendents. It cannot be up to a paid employee of the club, least of all someone whose full-time job is to keep members happy, the turf healthy and to put up with the normal stresses of the job.

One thing you learn about renovation that they never teach you in landscape architecture or turf school is the human side of the job. It takes arm-twisting, coalition building, and a tolerance for

endless idiocy and arrogance to knock down the barriers that members put in the way of even the most sensible infrastructure upgrade.

Most of the resistance at clubs, it must be said, comes from understandable inertia and ignorance of what it takes to keep a golf course in proper shape. The real problems requiring persistent leadership come in the face of opposition by those golfers, usually seniors and those who can barely afford to maintain their own dues payments, who think the golf course is great as it is or who refuse to budge because they fear added expenses or worry that course closure will impede their (over)use of the facility.

The strongest opposition comes from about 10 percent of the membership, whose vocal resistance is out of all proportion to their numbers when it comes to volume, intensity and willingness to misrepresent things. It doesn't help when the vocal minority cows the general manager, golf pro or superintendent into timidity. They can't lead the process, but they can certainly provide professional expertise. There is no better start to a successful renovation than a solid working alliance among these three major professional managers.

It's not required to be ruthless, just persistent, focused and flexible. Among the many fine arts of the craft are the ability to pretend to listen to nonsense while trusting the experts in agronomy, irrigation, engineering and course architecture. It also helps to be able to scrutinize a spreadsheet. Most of

all, you need to know what you don't know and how to rely on those who can fill those gaps. That's where the teamwork comes in.

All of which takes time: lots of meetings, endless phone conversations, emails, texts and back-channel communicating. It's also necessary to build a corps of 15 to 25 loyal allies whose avidity for golf and experience with fine design elsewhere enables them to spread the word subtly.

Best of all to make the case is the support of a few elder members who used to run the club and who can now openly fess up to the membership that they didn't really know what they were doing back then and just “winged it” and are now glad to see the professionals step in.

During all of this, the selfless leader of the process will face thanklessness, humiliation and the feeling that not only are they not getting paid for their time, they are actually paying monthly dues for the right to be involved. Such is the unique position of “paying to volunteer.” At the end, when all is done, the measure of success will be that half of those who voted against the plan will take credit for the outcome.

Let them. A real leader always gives more credit publicly to others than they deserve and always takes the high road in doing so. The important thing is that the golf course will be the better for it and the superintendent's burden a little less. Meanwhile, the person who led the process can get back to the important stuff — reclaiming the lost strokes of their golf game. **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).



Flounder *to* flo

How one Florida community saved a course from developers — and itself.

By **Cassidy Gladieux**



When you think of your classic golf comeback story, you may think of **Ben Hogan** or **Tiger Woods**. But golf courses have comeback stories too, and the one involving River Hills Country Club in Valrico, Florida, proves just what can happen when a community takes collective action.

TAKING ACTION

In 2018, the homeowners surrounding River Hills Country Club were approached by their elected HOA board of directors and asked to purchase the property. The owner at the time was selling and red flags were flying at the possibility that it could be sold to another developer and turned into something completely different.

The community chose to act.

“The community itself, having nothing to do with the golf course, is one of the prettiest and well-maintained communities in Florida,” River Hills general manager **Bob Swezey** says. “It’s like driving through Disneyland.”

Wanting to maintain the value of their homes and the aesthetic of the area, the homeowners voted in favor of purchasing River Hills.

“What could have been a very contentious practice or procedure, the overwhelming majority — far above what was needed — voted to buy the golf course,” Swezey says.

Choosing to not only preserve the course but also their community, they got to work. And there was a lot to do. The renovations and restorations that followed have proved a test of patience, will and community strength.

FROM THE GROUND UP

River Hills was built in the late 1980s as part of a development project and business was booming. Filled with high-profile members and host to championship tournaments, it was an extremely active facility and community. When the development filled its lots, the club was then sold in 2000. Maintenance started to become somewhat neglected.

“There was a massive amount of deferred maintenance to the golf course infrastructure, to the pump systems, to everything you can name,” Swezey says.

“The infrastructure was in disarray,” GCSAA Class A superintendent **Dave Patterson** agrees. “Nothing worked. If you had to do something or get something fixed, you had a challenge to meet a challenge.”

Patterson was hired in October 2019, immediately after the HOA took over.

“Our conditions are so much better now because the superintendent we hired had previous

experience in bringing golf courses back to life,” Swezey says. “He’s done an excellent job through an excellent pest management system, a really great agronomic plan, to the biggest part — the elimination of weeds.”

It was abundantly clear that Patterson faced a difficult task.

“It was from the ground up, it was a pretty extensive in-house renovation,” Patterson says. “The decision was made three years ago, ‘Do you just regrass and start over? Or do you try to fix what you got and look to renovate two or three years down the road?’”

River Hills decided to essentially start fresh. From installing a new pump station, upgrading the irrigation system, and just trying to keep the course alive, the ongoing process has taken nearly three years.

“We had to do some extensive work in the field to get things working but once we got the irrigation system kind of under control to keep things alive, at that point we started applying our fertilizers and chemicals, and aerifications were immediate,” Patterson says.

On top of the other challenges that Patterson was battling, COVID-19 hit months later.

“A myriad of projects were going on, and an overwhelming majority of those projects were happening in the first six months,” Swezey says. “And then COVID hit March of 2020. There were a lot of speed bumps that had to be overcome in terms of recruiting new members — the retention level on the past membership was very high because they understood the vision. Last year was employment levels. This year is inflation.”

“COVID was a big challenge,” Patterson adds. “We got down to a skeleton crew. We only had maybe sometimes five or six guys and that was the whole staff sometimes.”

ourish

Now, the course has made it out the other side — able to host more events, bring in new members, and feel the success of investing in the course and community.

“Initially, when I got there, the first three years, the membership would roll the ball around if they didn’t have a good lie,” Patterson says. “They would just roll the ball around and find a good lie on some grass, find a weed, find a way to tee it up so they could hit. That’s no longer needed. They’re playing the ball down as it lies now.”

THE OTHER SIDE

Not only have the course conditions improved greatly, but the overall club and membership has reaped the benefits of the HOA purchase.

“The first three years, we did not charge a joining fee or an initiation fee,” Swezey says. “Now, we are charging initiation fees. We don’t have any kind of wait-list or anything of that nature. However, we do have people paying those initiation fees, so just like everybody else, the opportunity is now knocking with improved conditions and our reputation in the market.”

Homeowners automatically became social members of the club.

“They pay \$45 a month to the HOA ... and that automatically gets them pool privileges, dining privileges, and 24-hour fitness privileges, and no food and beverage minimum,” Swezey says. “Through that, the club has invested the last three years approximately \$2.5 million dollars in additional capital over and above purchase price. What



“There are future plans to do more to the golf course in the next three, four years,” Swezey adds. “Which will be more extensive redressing, bringing the golf course back to life, eliminating a bunch of trees, new cart paths, clubhouse renovations. So far, the homeowners

have made a great decision.”

Aside from the visual upgrades, River Hills has also adopted a “family-centric” mentality.

“The whole idea is fun,” Swezey says. “Our kids programs are full. I don’t have enough instructors for all the kids. Our vision is to be inviting, distinctive and dynamic. Activity has increased dramatically in the use of the club to get away. It’s private, it’s safe, it’s clean and we have a management staff with over a century of experience.”

The homeowner’s patience has paid off in many ways — not least among them the increased value of their own homes and community.

“While market home prices have increased dramatically, like everywhere else, the homes inside of River Hills increased more than those,” Swezey says. “There’s a continual flow of new property owners throughout not just River Hills but the entire community where the percentage of golfers is going to increase, and therefore also the attractiveness of being somewhere that is private or semi-private.

“Being in a private facility where like-minded people all gather is going to be huge, especially for families and family golf where it includes the kids, includes the moms, includes the dads, includes everybody in the future.”

River Hills Country Club has come a long way from where it stood two decades ago.

“The brand that had deteriorated over the decades,” Swezey says, “is now again hosting and becoming a standard in the area for private clubs.” **GCI**

that means is a brand-new pump system and satellite boxes, new practice tee with the addition of artificial mats, a new parking lot, new landscaping, new lighting in the parking lot, a complete renovation of the interior of the clubhouse, a new playground, renovated tennis courts, installation of LED championship tennis lights, and equipment purchases.”

“The biggest thing here in the past couple months that I’ve been hearing is the amount of grass that’s out there,” Patterson says. “We have an enormous amount of grass, we have very thick grass, the ball sits up on the grass a lot better for them to hit it, so their lies are a lot better, their playing conditions are a lot safer, they’re enjoying the rounds of golf and their handicaps are coming down. So, they’re enjoying it.”

Golf isn’t the only thing there is to enjoy at River Hills. Member satisfaction proves that.

“The course and the grounds and clubhouse and the services have all gone beyond expectations in terms of the value and though the service and the quality,” Swezey says. “The club is now hosting a variety of high-profile events, state events, outings, weddings. Like everybody else in the golf industry over the last three years, we’ve had to learn to adapt and respond — and respond proactively and quickly.”

With as much work that has been done in three years, there’s still more planned for the next three to five years.

FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE

“We’re going to continue to make huge capital expenditures for the next probably five years,” Patterson says. “That would involve redressing the irrigation design, newer equipment and more staff.”



Cassidy Gladieux is a Kent State University senior and regular Golf Course Industry contributor.

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FOCUSED ON A MISSION

A Rhode Island course personifies the power of quality golf in urban settings.

By **Guy Cipriano**

▲Button Hole is a 26-acre urban Rhode Island golf facility opened in 2000 that operates as a non-profit.

John Rourke and Shane Drury are a superintendent and pro driven by a mission.

Button Hole, a 26-acre urban golf site in Providence and Johnston, Rhode Island, represents their work home. The 9-hole, par-3 course and practice facility personifies the power of golf.

Opened in 2000 and operated as a non-profit 501(c)(3), Button Hole has a defined mission:

To enrich the lives of young people by providing the facilities and programs that develop strong character, teach life values, and champion success through golf.

The mission attracted Rourke, whose résumé includes stints at multiple New England private clubs, to Button Hole. He's held the superintendent job since 2014 and can't imagine

working anywhere else at this point in his career.

"I'm not just preparing a course for some people to play a good game," Rourke says. "I'm here to provide the best possible surface for people and change their future."

Rourke was raised in nearby North Kingstown, earned a turfgrass management degree from nearby University of Rhode Island and previously worked as the assistant superintendent at nearby Agawam Hunt. When a state encompasses just 1,214 square miles, everything is nearby. But Rourke had never visited Button Hole until an April 2014 job interview.

"Beyond the game-growing end of it, there's a benefit on the superintendents' level there, too," he says. "The more golfers there are, the better the

job market becomes and there are more clubs that can come around. I liked that. It was a win on all sides. My overall impression was this is cool and there needs to be more places like this."

The pull of Button Hole — and the number of potential golfers nearby — has attracted Drury to the mission twice. He worked at Button Hole from 2001 to 2004 and returned in 2020. He's also the director of programming. More than 25,000 children of different backgrounds reside within five miles of Button Hole, according to Drury. Button Hole also offers programming for adults, making it perhaps the most accessible facility in a region filled with private clubs. On a Wednesday afternoon last month, Drury and his team provided group instruction for Special Olympians, veterans and the YMCA of

Greater Providence. “It’s super rewarding working here,” Drury says. “You can’t put a financial number on how rewarding it is.”

Button Hole is a communal effort. Green fees, range revenue, pro shop sales, donations and grants fund maintenance, operations and programming. The highest adult green fee is \$13, while Button Hole Kids play for \$1. Numerous Rhode Island private courses place “Button Hole Buckets” near their respective pro shops to gather ball donations. Donated clubs, balls, divot repair tools and tees are available in the Button Hole pro shop. The Rhode Island Golf Association, which has 54 member clubs, is based at the course.

Rourke and Button Hole have received support from the Rhode Island GCSA. The chapter has hosted demo days at the course, with companies donating hard or soft goods in exchange for the forum to showcase products and services. Members of the local turf community have donated their time to help with maintenance projects.

And Rourke can use the help. Like many courses, Button Hole has experienced significant play and practice increases since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Exact round totals are tough to calculate because programming occurs on the course. Drury describes the level of activity since spring 2020 as “non-stop.” Golfers arriving at 7:30 a.m. to begin playing or practicing when Button Hole opens at 8 a.m. are a common sight. Instructional programming is offered Monday through Saturday, making Sunday the quietest day of a typical week.

“It can’t possibly get any busier,” Drury says. “We set a record last year with green fees and range balls. The job John does with the amount of play we get is unbelievable.” Rourke relishes increases in activity because he understands how it advanced the mission. But a course packed with developing golfers yields maintenance and logistical challenges. For starters, Rourke is the lone full-time turf employee. In fact, he’s been the only full-time turf employee the past eight years. “I’m a jack of all trades,” he jokes. Three part-time workers assist Rourke during the peak season. Rourke has received encouraging news on the labor front: Button Hole is adding a full-time equipment manager.

Executing tasks around play—and avoiding unpredictable ball fights—on a compact site requires efficiency and alertness. Built atop an abandoned gravel pit, Button Hole measures 651 yards from the front tees and 972 yards from the tips. The second hole parallels the driving range, the Woonasquatucket River flows along the third, fourth and fifth holes, and the eighth tee plays over the entrance road.

“We have to be quite alert,” Rourke says. “That’s the deal when you’re dealing with beginners. Private golf is easy. When I worked in private golf, I knew who the guy was, how far he hits it and where his landing areas are. I knew whether I could cut in front and whether that would affect play or not. Here, many of the people hitting don’t know where the golf ball is going, so it can be a crapshoot at times.”



combined three acres of greens, tees, fairways and approaches, four acres of mowed rough, two acres of native areas, and 12 bunkers. Footsteps produced via 10,000 annual rounds are dispersed on greens totaling one acre. The longest shot is 142 yards, meaning the bulk of shots are struck with irons and wedges, meaning divots are abundant. “You can go out and do divots one day and completely scan every inch of a tee,” Rourke says, “and the next day it’s like you’re starting anew.”

Donations and grants have funded multiple infrastructure and accessibility upgrades. The practice range and practice green were shifted in the course’s early days. A grant from Wadsworth Golf Charities Foundation helped fund a project in 2013 guided by architect **David Johnson**, ASGCA to make the course and practice facility accessible for disabled golfers. Rourke has elevated Button Hole’s environmental profile by adding birdhouses, establishing native areas and conducting sprays late at night. A new well and renovated pumphouse allow him to overcome toasty summers such as 2022.


Besides being guided by a philanthropic mission, Button Hole provides expansive greenspace in a crowded spot. A heavily trafficked freeway, industrial sites and densely populated neighborhoods surround the property. The course’s name stems from the area’s industrial heritage. Refuse from a shoe factory where buttons were used as shoe fasteners once polluted the Woonasquatucket River. The buttons would gather in a swimming hole used by children.

The area has become less industrial over the years—and children are now playing golf along the revived river.

“Once they get out there, play and make their first par or birdie, they are hooked,” Drury says. “That’s what separates us from all the other youth programs in the region.” **GCI**

◀ Button Hole superintendent John Rourke and head golf professional Shane Drury.

Money isn't everything



White Cliffs Country Club superintendent **Lianne Larson** switched career paths 35 years ago and never looked back.

By
**Cassidy
Gladieux**

Lianne Larson starts nearly every work day as a golf course superintendent between 3 and 4 a.m. Depending on which house she stays at, she either has a 1-hour, 20-minute commute to work, or a two-minute commute after letting her dog out and making her own breakfast.

Arriving at 5 a.m. with her dog by her side, she will work tirelessly on the 18-hole private course that is White Cliffs Country Club in Plymouth, Massachusetts—the same course she has worked at for the last 26 years. Her evenings will vary, but she ends the day around 8 or 9 p.m. to ensure she gets enough sleep for the never-ending

job that is a superintendent.

This daily routine is a stark contrast to the one Larson had over 35 years ago as a financial analyst.

“It just wasn’t for me,” she says. “It was just too confined, and I didn’t like being in an office all day long.” After 10 months, Larson switched career paths, conveniently forgetting to mention it at the time to her mother.

“I actually didn’t tell anybody,” she says. “I just kind of did it and my mother drove by the course that I was working at and said, ‘Did I see you at St. Mark’s with a string trimmer in your hand?’ and I was like, ‘Oh, did I forget to tell ya?’”

Her journey to switching career

paths wasn’t a smooth transition, however. Her longtime friend and former colleague **Jeff Carlson** tells the story of how Larson faced discrimination when job hunting.

“She applied at various times for superintendent jobs, as we all do to move up the ladder,” he says. “Various what we would consider “higher-end” jobs came up — and she would send in her resume, she would answer questions, and oftentimes, she would get an interview.

“One of the ways she got an interview was how she filled out the application. She would fill out her name as ‘Lee A. Larson’ and I know for a fact, because she told me, that she went to an

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▲ Superintendent Lianne Larson and team are responsible for maintaining 18-hole White Cliffs Country Club in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

interview where she was positive that the entire committee thought she was going to be a man. Instead of getting really upset about it — disappointed? I'm sure she was. Upset and bitter? Nope. And I was really impressed with that. And I was really irritated because I always felt she was a superintendent who could have had some really interesting opportunities that just didn't pan out, and I think some of the reason is because she was a woman.

"But then she went to White Cliffs. She turned White Cliffs completely around. She was and still is holding a very high standard of maintenance on the courses that she oversees."

While Larson had to prove herself in more ways than one, her finance background continues to set her apart.

"She was an anomaly in our area because she could grow grass *and* she could manage, and manage really well," Carlson says. "She could take a budget and present it, she could figure it out, make it work, balance it, and present it really well to the board. A lot of us at the time, that wasn't considered our strongest suit. We were more or less judged on what kind of condition the golf course was in. Over the last 30 years, I'm not the only one who has gone on to not only admire

her but to lean on her for help in managing golf courses. She's really good at it.

"I know a lot of superintendents in the area kind of took advantage of that really. We're indebted to her for help in that area."

Larson has many notable achievements to back up these praises, such as being president of the GCSA of Cape Cod, but feels she is most fortunate to simply have a successful career in the industry. Throughout the years, her position has grown immensely in responsibility.

"The job has become far more professional than it was back then," Larson says. "We are maintaining turf at heights that, 35 years ago, I never would have thought possible. The invention of moisture meters and the computerized irrigation systems — there's so much that has taken place that makes this job more professional, more advanced. But also, expectations are higher than they were back then."

Larson continues to meet and exceed those expectations at White Cliffs.

"Her position has evolved from the superintendent to kind of — not general manager, they have one of those — but like a director of operations," Carlson says. "All the capital expense stuff goes through her now and she takes charge of that. Her job has expanded, and responsibilities have expanded at White Cliffs, and I know that they really rely on her. I would not want to be the superintendent that follows her when she decides to move on or retire.

"Any longtime members of White Cliffs would say the condition of the golf course, the condition of the operation, the professional way that it is operated, has gone way up in the time she has been there. I'm sure a lot of those people don't know anyone

else, so their expectations are high but anyone who has been there since before she got there, I'm sure, would have a lot to say about that."

Larson isn't the only one responsible for keeping the course in shape, though. Across all six departments she manages, she confidently leads a team of about 35 to 50 people through routines and obstacles that may arise.

"I'm very fortunate that my two golf course assistants, **Ross Riberdy** and **Mike Baptiste**, have been with me for a long time," she says. "They know the course, they understand that my job is always changing every day. They're really the backbone of my operation. And then I also have a landscape manager who once was a golf course superintendent, he's another big part. They keep the teams running so that I can keep it running from my end.

"I have great support within the club, my general manager is very supportive and understanding. The people that we have are good people, people who care and hardworking people."

One of the obstacles the team encountered came in 2017, when a major storm racked up millions of dollars' worth of damage. It wasn't the first or last storm the course would see, and Larson is known by other area superintendents as the "Duchess of Doom" for her weather forecasts.

"If you called up Lianne and it had been raining at your property, she will have had at least an inch more," Carlson says. "If it was dry, you wouldn't believe how much drier it was at White Cliffs. If it snowed that day and we had 6 inches of snow, she had at least a foot, if not more."

Showing no signs of slowing down, Larson walks nine holes at White Cliffs every morning with her golden retriever, taking in the sunrise and the breeze on the coastline.

"You have to be happy with what you do," she says, "or life isn't really what it should be." **GCI**

Cassidy Gladieux is a Kent State University senior and frequent Golf Course Industry contributor.



BLACKBERRY MOMENTS

LONGTIME TURF PRO ANDY EICK FOCUSES ON THE LITTLE THINGS THAT CAN MAKE LIFE EXTRAORDINARY.

This golf season has provided probably more interesting challenges for Andy Eick than any of the eight previous seasons he has worked at Mohawk Golf Club — or any of the 11 seasons that preceded his arrival at the Schenectady, New York, club.

The season opened with more winter damage than normal and 11 new members on a 22-person crew. It continued with the demolition of one of his team's three small maintenance facilities as part of a two-year project to more than triple the maintenance footprint from about 6,000 square feet to more than 19,000 square feet. All equipment has been parked ever since under a 40-by-30 circus tent.

"It's great," says Eick, who was promoted in January 2019 from superinten-

dent to director of facilities and agronomy, "because it gives you an opportunity to take a look at your standard operating procedures and your training processes, and reinvent the wheel a little bit. How can we do things better? How can we train people better? How can we onboard people better?"

"Managing a golf course is like making chili. There are so many different recipes, but it's all chili. Every property, you take what you like, you take what you don't like, and you kind of make your own batch when you get your chance to be behind the desk."

Eick has benefitted from some consistency this season at the 124-year-old club designed by Devereux Emmet, originally operated by General Electric, and recently purchased by a longtime member — most notably in superintendent Eric Westervelt

and assistant Joseph Perry. The pair are now in their fifth and third years, respectively, at the club.

Eick has also maintained the same PGR program for much of the last three years, anchored by SePRO's Musketeer. "There's something to it," he says. "The clipping yield you get from it, the regulation you get from it, it makes the leaf blade thinner, and you can maintain really good green speeds with a single cut and a roll. It does really well on my putting surfaces. It's performed very, very well. I'm all in on Musketeer."

Eick and his team had used a variety of other PGRs prior to switching to Musketeer in 2020, with none providing anything close to the current level of control. Their agronomic plan calls for introducing Musketeer on greens and approaches early

during the spring, then running with it through the whole season. "You can see how it works," he says. "And the bentgrass just loves it. It starts exploding and creeping over top."

Musketeer gives Eick one less challenge and worry, and allows him to appreciate the Blackberry Moments — a term coined by Ernie Johnson Jr., the longtime host of TNT's *Inside the NBA* studio show, to describe "those unscripted moments that make your life unpredictable and extraordinary."

Among Eick's many Blackberry Moments: Meeting his wife, Natalie, when they were both children, then starting to date after reconnecting at The Quechee Club in Vermont when he was a seasonal intern and she was running the kids camp ... bringing his two pups — Louie, a 4-year-old white-and-red lab he describes as a "goober," and Shelby, a 6-year-old charcoal lab who loops the property as soon as she arrives — to the course every morning ... and still relieving stress by spending some time with the daily maintenance tasks that filled days earlier in his career. He especially loves helping rake the 82 bunkers scattered across the grounds. The best are the 11 that surround the club's signature punchbowl 15th green.

"We have tunnel vision," Eick says. "We don't sit back and enjoy the moment around us. We don't take a deep breath and just enjoy the moment. Embrace the unpredictable moments in life. Being a golf course superintendent, it's constant problem-solving. It's unpredictability.

"Take a moment and just enjoy what's going on." ■

© COURTESY OF ANDY EICK

TRAVELS WITH TERRY

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



IRRIGATION TOOLBOX

The Arksen 48-inch by 15-inch by 15-inch irrigation technician's toolbox (\$300) has a 2-inch male hitch built in-house using scrap metal taking about two hours to build, weld in place and apply black spray paint. The 2-inch receiver hitch, mounted on the front of the 2016 John Deere XUV 825i Turf Vehicle, was factory installed. The 6-foot-long strap holds the toolbox in place for more stability. This nice idea frees up space in the bed for more irrigation tools, parts and supplies. Superintendent **Beau Backstrom**, irrigation technician **Robert Adamo** and director of grounds and mountain operations **Ryan Blechta** at the Spanish Peaks Mountain Club in Big Sky, Montana, have a lot of great ideas. **Tom Weiskopf** and **Phil Smith** designed the course.

FAIRWAY MOWER BLOWER

During the height of the COVID-19 labor shortage, **Tim Meyer**, superintendent at the Beacon Hill Country Club in Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, hooked up a Buffalo Blower to the back of a John Deere Five-Plex Fairway Mower. The club doesn't collect grass clippings on fairways, so the blower was used to disperse them and also to clear away deciduous tree leaves prior to mowing. Because the labor situation has improved, the tee setup person now tows the blower with a turf vehicle to accomplish the same goals on the fairways. A tow hitch and ball were attached to both implements. It took less than an hour to install. **Jim Nagle** is the restoration architect.



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

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WIN

I'm a two-time graduate of Virginia Tech University and I love my VT Hokies. I know things in Blacksburg have been bleak of late and especially this year. But whether or not you follow college football, you may have heard of VT's lunch pail, the symbol of the defense previously led by former defensive coordinator **Bud Foster**.

The lunch pail was symbolic of the blue-collar work ethic and was a tremendous source of pride for those selected to carry the pail each week. The word WIN was painted on the pail, and you may be surprised to learn it meant more than the obvious. WIN was an acronym for *What's Important Now*, and if you listened to episode 36 of the *Beyond the Page* podcast last month, you heard me talk about it.

I was on the podcast with **Matt LaWell** to discuss my two previous columns and during our conversation about October's column, Matt inquired why I think greenkeepers in the United Kingdom often achieve as much as superintendents in the United States with considerably smaller teams. If you didn't listen to the podcast, I will patiently wait for you to do so now.

Welcome back! Where was I? Oh, yeah, we were talking about how greenkeepers in the United States strive so hard to meet or exceed our members' expectations as well as our own, and sometimes we allow the noise of complaints to distract us from what's important now.

I recall seeing a photo of a novelty T-shirt once that read, "Golf Course Superintendent: I solve problems you don't even know you have by means which you don't understand." Clever, yes. But the more I think about it, the more this contributes to rising expectations.

We are definitely problem-solvers. It is our job to recognize a situation that might be developing and quickly react to correct the issue — hopefully before anyone notices.

If we are constantly working hard to recognize and eliminate issues before they manifest into larger problems, our employers are quite possibly not aware of the exact lengths we go through to maintain the illusion that everything is operating smoothly. In other words, are we creating the perception we can easily handle more and continue to produce above and beyond when the reality is we might be struggling just to make ends meet? Remain calm, all is well.

Don't get me wrong. I was taught early in my career the parable of the clover and how sometimes innocently pointing out minuscule thorns in our side can manifest into major headaches in this business. You don't know the parable of the clover, you say?

Here's the condensed version: Jim is the superintendent, and he is standing outside the clubhouse looking across the course when he's approached by Mrs. Smith. She says hello and compliments Jim and his staff on the overall condition and presentation of the course. Jim says, "thank you," but points out he's unhappy about the amount of clover present in the rough. Mrs. Smith asks him to explain, and Jim shows her the plants and briefly educates her on the weed and his recent struggle to eradicate it.

Later that evening, when Mrs. Smith returns home, her

husband asks about her golf game. She tells her husband about meeting Jim and his issues with the clover. The next day, Mr. Smith plays in his regular foursome and proceeds to point out to everyone the clover growing in the rough and how Jim struggles to manage it. One of the regulars in Mr. Smith's group is on the green committee and he phones the green chair after the round to inform him of this clover epidemic. The next thing you know, Jim gets called into an emergency meeting of the board to explain the situation.

I understand that might seem a bit extreme in today's world of agronomy and golf course maintenance practices, but I do believe it largely explains the slogan on the T-shirt. Where do we go from here? How do we strike the balance between keeping our course owners and/or members informed without bothering them with trivial nonsense?

With the 2022 growing season reaching its conclusion, hopefully you and your team can use this time to reflect on the triumphs and tragedies of the past spring, summer and early fall. Then meet with your owners and/or committees to identify what will be the WINS for 2023.

The answer lies in communication. It's about level-headed sharing in these meetings and everyone involved understanding where the hours and resources need to go in order to WIN.

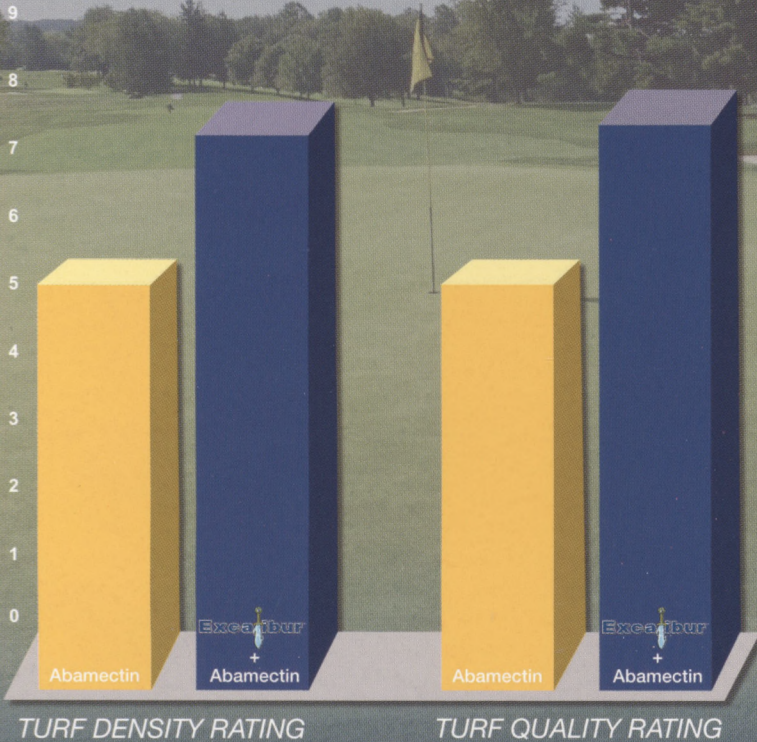
Until then, don't forget to spray the clover. **GCI**



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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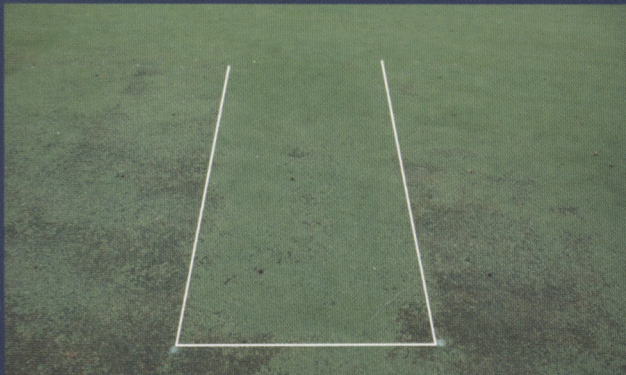


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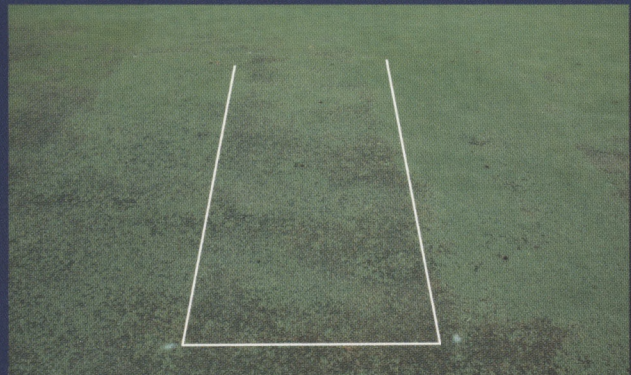


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