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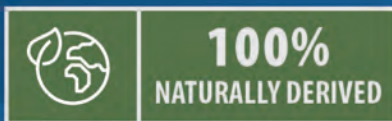
Steve Murphy

## The LAND of FOREVER JOBS

Longevity defines nearly everything surrounding the New England golf scene, including the tenures of the people responsible for maintaining its preserved courses.



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## MESSAGES MATTER

**E**ffective communicators enter presentations, formal conversations, hallway discussions and interviews prepared to deliver a calculated message. They anticipate follow-ups and adapt quickly when unexpected topics are introduced, yet they stealthily guide dialogue toward a purpose.

Using words to convey purpose helped **Brian Zimmerman** land one of the most desirable jobs in public recreation. Since becoming CEO of Cleveland Metroparks, a 24,000-acre, 800-employee operation in 2010, Zimmerman has controlled enough conversations to keep the job for 13 years as the beloved park system expands without wavering from its core goals, a word palette consisting of “conserve,” “connect,” “welcome,” “engage,” “sustain,” and “innovate.”

Quality and affordable golf fits the mission. Cleveland Metroparks will add a ninth course when the purchase of family-owned Ironwood Golf Course closes later this year. The transaction protects land supporting portions of the East Branch of the Rocky River from being converted into housing. Cleveland Metroparks also has purchased the defunct **Donald Ross**-designed Hawthorne Valley Country Club. Returning Hawthorne Valley to a playable condition would be costly, but Cleveland Metroparks will at least preserve the suburban site as recreational greenspace. Ironwood and the former Hawthorne Valley cost nearly \$7 million combined and increase the park district’s footprint by around 300 acres.

Purchases involving taxpayer money are complex. Transactions don’t reach the goal line with a leader who fumbles words like northeast Ohio’s NFL franchise drops footballs.

Zimmerman’s roots are in agriculture and golf course maintenance. He developed an ethic on a family-owned dairy in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, worked at Nakoma Country Club as a teenager, and studied turfgrass management at University of Wisconsin-Madison. He learned from influential superintendents and directed the golf and overall operations for Milwaukee County Parks before being recruited to lead Cleveland Metroparks. He shows the heights a turfhead can reach through honing a “soft” skill like speaking.

Earlier this summer, I met Zimmerman at Big Met Golf Course in Rocky River, Ohio, to record a podcast episode for *Superintendent Radio Network*. As a Northeast Ohio resident who enters Cleveland Metroparks-managed land hundreds of times annually to walk, run, bike, hike, paddle, swim, observe snow leopards and sloth bears, and, yes, play and practice golf, I was curious how the organization’s leader handled a recorded conversation. He confidently and rapidly answered my questions, showing no angst or confusion in 45 on-the-spot minutes. I left Big Met thinking Zimmerman possessed the credentials and polish to lead a major golf organization if he decided to reenter golf full-time, although earlier this year he agreed to a contract extension through Aug. 31, 2034.

Zimmerman arrived at Big Met clutching two sheets of paper with handwritten talking points. He wanted to discuss topics I never considered asking him about, including public and municipal courses disappearing from major championship rotations. Despite golf occupying a small part of his duties, Zimmerman speaks more representatively about public golf—which accounts for 74 percent of the U.S. golf supply—than leaders of industry associations.

“I say every four years that they have to rotate to a public golf course,” Zimmerman says. “I would also challenge the USGA and GCSAA to get together and invest in one of those properties and help bump the ecosystem up. That’s how you grow the game. You can tell you hit a nerve. I’m so passionate about that.”

Skilled communicators harness passion. Zimmerman conveyed his message without disparaging venues selected to host future major championships. Challenges can be issued without nettlesome criticism.

This month’s cover story (page 28) explores why New England is the industry’s “Land of forever jobs.” **Steve Murphy**, the co-owner Golf Facilities Management, Inc. who spent 40 years as the superintendent at Gannon Municipal Golf Course, says keeping a good job requires, “Knowing how to dance. It’s all about playing the game.” Somebody doesn’t keep the same job in a politically charged region like New England for four decades without being a proficient communicator.

Speaking with a purpose is a proven route to landing—and keeping—a leadership position. Unlike the weather, words can be controlled. Communication requires the same preparation as guiding turf through harsh conditions. Zimmerman and Murphy’s tremendous careers are examples of the possibilities when words aren’t fumbled. **GCI**



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# NOTEBOOK



The golf course maintenance team was honored during a ceremony last month at Grass Clippings at Rolling Hills in Tempe, Arizona.

## ONE GIANT ARIZONA CELEBRATION

**G**rass Clippings, a Phoenix-based golf brand celebrating greenskeepers founded in 2018, assumed operations of Tempe's Rolling Hills Golf Course and immediately revealed plans to create an energetic vibe on the site as part of a \$15 million renovation and revitalization project. Rebranded as the flagship location for Grass Clippings' vision, the course has become "Grass Clippings at Rolling Hills."

In March 2023, Grass Clippings agreed to a 30-year partnership with the City of Tempe to operate the city-owned golf course two miles from Arizona State University's Tempe campus. The property lease began on July 1. Grass Clippings and Troon will collaborate to transform the property, adding full-course lighting for night play, a lighted practice range, an activity lawn and video display, a hilltop bar, a patio bar and clubhouse, and an entertainment venue. Projects will be executed in phases with full completion targeted for fall 2024.

Scottsdale-based Casa Verde Golf is working alongside golf course architects



Jackson Kahn Design and Grass Clippings' director of agronomy **Scott Hebert** on the golf course renovations, which commenced last month. Initial enhancements will include an expanded putting green, installation of modern LED lighting on the 18-hole executive-length golf course and on the practice range, as well as a new irrigation system to improve turf quality. New tee boxes will also be added to allow the

course to be played from various lengths and angles, including a par-3-only option.

Originally designed by **Milton Coggins**, Rolling Hills features elevation change, desert landscape, and cheetahs on the third hole as the course neighbors the Phoenix Zoo. Once lighting is installed, the course will be open until midnight, allowing golfers to escape Phoenix's intense sun and heat.

© TOP: ALLAN HENRY  
BOTTOM: COURTESY OF GRASS CLIPPINGS

## Tartan Talks 85

Some golf course architects avoid municipal projects.

**Mark Mungeam** aggressively pursues them.



▲ Mungeam

"It's more work to get involved with a public municipal project than it would be with a public course or private course developer, so from that standpoint, it's bit of a challenge," he says. "There are golf architects that are really good at that and then there are golf architects who don't care to be involved in that process. I happen to enjoy working at municipal golf courses."

The New England-based Mungeam joined the *Tartan Talks* podcast to discuss municipal work from an experienced architect's perspective. Mungeam's quest to make golf better for the masses includes two decades of thoughtful work on the City of Boston's George Wright Golf Course and William J. Devine Golf Course at Franklin Park, a pair of once-neglected **Donald Ross** designs transformed into widely lauded and heavily played courses. The projects have resulted in Mungeam developing close relationships with George Wright superintendent **Len Curtin** and William J. Devine superintendent **Russell Heller**.

"They both really love both courses and have put a lot of time and effort into it to make sure they are the gems of the city," Mungeam says.

The podcast can be downloaded on the *Superintendent Radio Network* page of all popular distribution platforms.



## COURSE NEWS

Otter Creek Golf Course, a 27-hole public facility in Columbus, Indiana, selected former PGA Tour player **Tom Kite** and former Augusta National superintendent **Billy Fuller** to guide a major redesign and course enhancement project. Areas the project will address include an outdated irrigation system; use of new grasses developed since the course opened; bunker drainage, maintenance and playability; addition of forward tees to accommodate players of skill levels; how the course can continue to test elite players; and improved strategy through the placement of new tees. Kite and Fuller will work closely with Otter Creek director of agronomy **Brent Downs**, superintendent **Mitchell Eickhoff**, director of golf **Austin Wright** and head pro **Jimmy St. John** throughout the planning and execution phases of the project. ... The former Beacon Hill Golf Course, which included 27 holes designed on a 1,700-acre Virginia site, is being revived by architect **Tom Clark**. The course opened in 2003 and closed in 2006, sitting dormant and minimally preserved throughout the last 17 years. Purchased by Resort Development Partners and renamed The Preserve at Beacon Hill, a revamped 18-hole layout could open as early as 2024. ... Soleta Golf Club announced its entry into the Florida market with a recently approved private residential club community that will include a **Nick Price**-designed golf course and **David Leadbetter** practice and performance facility. Construction on the Florida site begins this fall with the course scheduled to open for play in late 2024. ... Bonita Bay Club in Bonita Springs, Florida, received board approval to begin multiple upgrades to the club's golf offerings, including the Sabal Course. The **Tom Fazio**-designed course will undergo a \$16.5 million renovation, touching all features on the course, from drainage to greens. Led by Fazio Design senior design associate **Tom Marzolf**, the Sabal renovation will take approximately 16 months to complete. ... The USGA selected The Riviera Country Club in Pacific Palisades, California, to host the 2031 U.S. Open. The club hosted the 1948 U.S. Open, won by **Ben Hogan**.



## PEOPLE NEWS

**Dr. Fred Yelverton** won the Carolinas GCSA Distinguished Service Award. The award is the highest bestowed by the association and comes as Yelverton concludes a career spanning nearly 30 years at NC State University. Yelverton will receive the award in November at the Carolinas GCSA Conference and Trade Show in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. ... The USGA awarded Pebble Beach superintendent **Bubba Wright** with the E.J. Marshall Platter at the conclusion of the 2023 U.S. Women's Open Championship. This marked the first time the platter had been awarded at the U.S. Women's Open. ... Atticus LLC hired **Dr. Rob Golembiewski** as its new director of technical services. ... Audubon International added ClubWorks president and COO **Henry Wallmeyer** and Century Golf Partners vice president of agronomy **Bryan Stromme** to its board of directors.

## INDUSTRY BUZZ

Troon acquired Invited's Management Services business with 18 managed and consulting services agreements moving to Troon's managed club portfolio. Troon also acquired New Jersey-based Applied Golf Management and assumes control of Applied Golf's 13 public and private golf facilities in New York, New Jersey and Florida. ... The GCSAA announced the debut of the Women's Leadership Academy Nov. 7-9 in Lawrence, Kansas. ... The FairWays Foundation received a record 48 applications for its fourth grant cycle. The program has awarded \$441,791 to conservation and stewardship projects since its inception in 2019. Grant recipients will be announced in October. ... Quali-Pro relaunched Nimitz Pro G granular nematocide for use on multiple sites, including golf course greens, fairways and tees.





# KNOWING WHEN TO CRITICIZE AND PRAISE

If you want to be known as a good boss, popular with your team, respected by the leaders in your sport and envied by your contemporaries, it's easy. Just do what baseball manager **Bobby Cox** did for 29 seasons while leading the Atlanta Braves to five National League pennants and a World Series title.

Cox wasn't much of a big-league player — he batted .225 in two seasons with the Yankees — but he flourished as a leader by working hard (he was often the first one at the ballpark for his 4,641 games as a manager), bringing out the best in his players, respecting everyone from his stars to the grounds crew and clubhouse guys, and representing his profession with passion and dignity.

But Cox's greatest respect from his players resulted from a philosophy and style that is easily emulated by leaders today in any profession. He eschewed public criticism of his players, even when they made boneheaded plays and decisions, in favor of praising their hustle, attitude and splendid play at every opportunity. He also famously defended them with umpires, a practice that got him ejected from games a record 162 times.

"He makes all the difference in the world to players who come in here," said **Terry Pendleton**, Cox's third baseman on several of his 14 consecutive division champions and later the team's hitting coach. "You'll go through times where you can't find the plate, or you can't hit the ball out of the infield. Bobby Cox makes you feel as if you're the most important player on the ballclub."

Of course, Cox was neither the first nor the most famous of those to embrace the praise-over-criticism leadership modus operandi.

"It's amazing what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets the credit" has been attributed to (most notably) presidents **Harry Truman** and **Ronald Reagan**, English journalist **Charles Edward Montague**, American author **Edward Everett Hale** and longtime Coca-Cola chief **Robert Woodruff**. In their seminal guidance for managerial excellence, "The One Minute Manager," published in 1982, authors **Ken Blanchard** and **Spencer Johnson** advise unequivocally: "Criticize in private and praise in public."

In fact, the most common criticism of many supervisors is that they too often take credit for the work done by others. A 2019 BambooHR study found that taking credit for employee's work was rated the worst managerial behavior by 63 percent of survey respondents.

At this time of year, with temperatures are on the rise and either too much or too little rainfall, criticism for turf professionals comes by the bale and bucketful while praise can be in short supply. Those seasonal pressures make it a great time to recognize your crew. When doing so, consider three important elements of effective praise:

**Make it personal.** "Steve gets in early, stays late and does his best to out-hustle those afternoon storms."

**Make it timely.** Even kind words can sound stale and disconnected when they're not delivered in a timely manner.

**Make it meaningful.** A dedicated parent appreciates a complimentary personal note written to his or her spouse or partner. Someone with a long com-

mute to and from work values a gift card for a tank of gas. A mom who normally cooks for her family after a long day loves a meal prepared and served by someone else in a nice restaurant.

Teacher, writer and blogger **Steve DeMaio** offers further guidance:

**Be specific.** "You did a great job re-sodding that ground-under-repair area on number 14" means a lot more than a casual "You're doing a great job."

**Don't confuse politeness with praise.** Daily courtesies should be a given in a professional work environment; praise for a job well done requires intention.

**Praise with action, not just words.** Back your compliments with actions — a bonus or an incremental benefit — that acknowledges top performers.

**Don't dilute praise with backhanded criticism.** "You did a nice job fixing that greens mower, but you forgot to sharpen the bedknife." How's that for a buzzkill?

Green Bay Packers offensive lineman **Jerry Kramer** tells of the quiet and powerful dressing-down he once received from his legendary coach, **Vince Lombardi**. After Lombardi's thorough criticism of his blocking technique, Kramer remembers Lombardi messing with his hair and telling him, "You're improving every day. I look forward to seeing you in the Hall of Fame."

Kramer took the praise to heart and spent the rest of his career helping to clear the way for the Packers' march to five NFL titles and two Super Bowls. He was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2018. **GC**



**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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# Amanda Fontaine

LEDGES GOLF CLUB

**E**arly in her turf career, **Amanda Fontaine** learned about the importance of a strong work ethic.

“Definitely,” she says. “You have to work harder than anyone else around you. Not only (because of) being a woman but being younger. Proving yourself through your actions rather than your words. So you’re definitely working harder than anyone else, doing the best work possible and presenting the best product possible.”

Fontaine is in her third season as the superintendent at Ledges Golf Club, a municipal course in South Hadley, Massachusetts. She’s a second-generation superintendent, following in the footsteps of her father, **Michael**, the course’s current general manager. “I just really like making a product that other people can use and appreciate,” she says.

Fontaine was among the 33 women who volunteered to support superintendent **Bubba Wright** and his crew at Pebble Beach during the recent U.S. Women’s Open. Her employers encouraged her to make the trip, which required being away from the Ledges for 10 days at the height of the golf season. “They said absolutely, no matter what, we’ll figure it out,” she says. “I had their support from the very beginning.”

Speaking with **Rick Woelfel** on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast, Fontaine related her first reaction to Pebble Beach upon arriving at the storied venue.

“I think the first place I actually walked on was the maintenance tent right on 10 fairway,” she says, “and I walked out of the van and literally said, ‘Wow.’ The TV and the camera crew does not even do it justice.

“It’s amazing, being right on the water like that, the elevation changes, the rock walls right on the ocean there. The camera doesn’t do it justice.”

Fontaine’s week at the Women’s Open featured early wakeup calls. By 3:15 each morning, she was in a van for the 10-minute ride to Pebble Beach. After a rundown of assignments and perhaps some coffee, the team was out on the golf course.

Fontaine was paired with **Miguel Rosado**, a 44-year veteran of the Pebble Beach crew who has worked six U.S. Opens. The tandem was

assigned to Pebble Beach’s front nine. “We were setting up the tees,” Fontaine says. “We got to see the entire front nine, from the clubhouse to the ninth green, every morning and afternoon.”

The assignment allowed Fontaine to spend time at Pebble Beach’s iconic par-3 seventh hole.

“It was actually a lot shorter than it looks on TV,” she says. “Here, at my golf course, we have a 70-yard par 3, and I thought, ‘Holy cow. I think mine is longer than this.’”

“For the practice rounds, they had it up really short, distance-wise. It was absolutely breathtaking to be right on the edge of the water. The wind howled. In my head, as a golfer, I was like, ‘How am I going to play this?’”

Following the morning setup and breakfast, the crew engaged in an assortment of workshops and educational activities, which covered topics ranging from environmental stewardship to how women are impacting the turf industry. Fontaine participated in a First Green program for LPGA\*USGA Girls Golf members from the area who wanted to know more about the turf industry and the science behind it.

“That was super cool to meet young women who wanted to learn more about it,” she says. “We were able to put on a little presentation for them and teach them a little bit more about what we do.”

Following an early dinner at 2 p.m., the crew returned to the course to begin preparations for the following day. Once the championship started on Thursday, the workdays got longer, particularly on Thursday and Friday, when 156 players occupied the course. Sleep was at a premium.

“We had to wait until that final group got a couple holes ahead of us, so we weren’t going out on the golf course until 6 or 7,” she says. “Then, we were staying on the golf course until almost 11 o’clock.” **GCI**



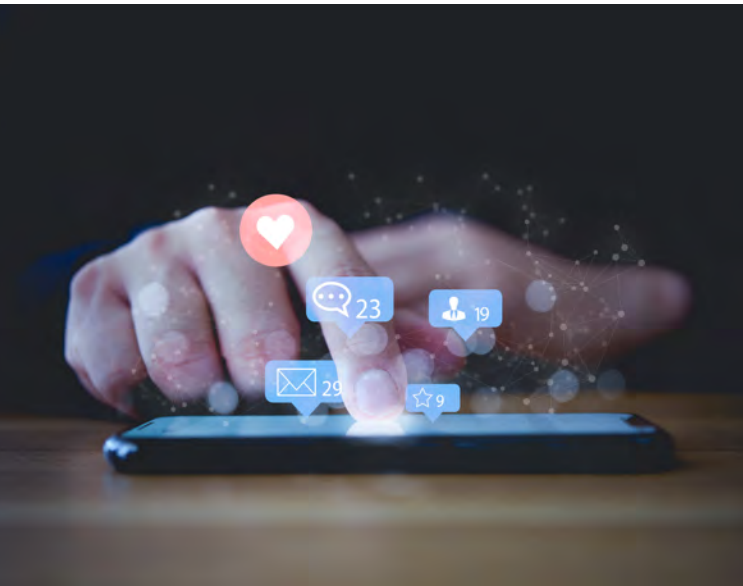
It was actually a lot shorter than it looks on TV. Here, at my golf course, we have a 70-yard par 3, and I thought ‘Holy cow. I think mine is longer than this.’”



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## SOCIAL? OR ANTI-SOCIAL?

Everywhere you look today, someone is blaming social media for something. For kids' problems in school, for short attention spans, for a lack of human connection, for the falling birth rate. (Think about that last one for a minute.)

Truth is, most of us are on social media, relying on it to keep up with friends, find new places to eat and laugh at funny golf videos. In our industry, it can be a valuable tool to learn what people are talking about, get updates on new products and research, and pick up ideas from other clubs and crews that might apply to our courses.

I'm not going to sit atop some mountain and boldly proclaim that I never look at Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and any number of other sites that connect me with people I may or may not know. In fact, I begin my mornings scrolling and reading, looking for interesting turf tips to start my day either laughing or cursing.

And no, I'm not going to blame social media for any great problems, human decline, spreading mediocrity or fungicide resistance. The problem isn't with the platform: It's with us — the users. Not *all* of you (or all of us), but enough in our business to make me seriously wonder if it's having a negative effect on who we are and what we do.

My problem is with those of us who compose a post or turn on the camera and immediately start to perform. These asocial outlets are an excuse for acting up — and acting out — by detailing every little thing they do.

Every circuit on a riding mower, smoothing of a bunker or cutting

a hole on the green becomes the key plot point of their real-life docudrama. It's bad enough that they record for posterity the most basic tasks; it's worse that they think doing the everyday parts of our job are worth filming, posting and commenting on.

"Wow, look at the great job I did pulling that weed!" No. Sorry. I don't care. And you shouldn't be wasting my time and yours with this documentary drivel.

Besides exposing the poster's ego, these silly expressions of self-satisfaction defy the true spirit of our industry. As I've written on numerous occasions — and tell anyone who will listen — superintendents and their crews are generally humble, hardworking and dedicated to our craft, not to personal promotion. Sure, it's one thing if you're aiming for a bigger job to cite your accomplishments and make the most of your experience. But to throw out this trivial twaddle day after day after day makes us all look bad.

The posters who push my buttons the hardest are the folks, even volunteers, involved with a major championship or one of the more prestigious tour events. Already the lucky ones, their patting their own backs further separates the haves from the have-nots.

I get it. You're on the big stage and want to share it with everyone. You probably have a lot to be proud of. So, if you're going to take to social media, use it constructively. Recognize crew members who've gone above and beyond. Thank the dozens of volunteers who've

given up time at their own clubs to make you look good. Thank the supplier who got you 40 fairway units or mowers when you needed them — making 40 other clubs wait another six months for theirs.

It isn't only those preparing for majors and the pros. Day after day, I see superintendents and crew members who should know better bragging about just doing their jobs. You aerified the greens? Mowed the rough? Well, good for you. Not only is that what you're paid to do, it's what your course requires: daily golf course maintenance.

Before you post next, ask yourself a few questions: Why are you posting? Who are you posting for? What do you expect from it? Then ask yourself another question: How much time am I spending each day telling the world that I'm doing exactly what's expected of me?

While you are performing, what's happening to your job performance?

Yes, I'm an old fart, I admit it. And I'm not saying don't post. I certainly do. Just post with a purpose, and don't make everything all about you. When there's something to celebrate, let us know. When one of your team deserves recognition, make them famous. When you have something really worth sharing with the golf community, please share it with me to educate me!

Social media can be a valuable tool for education and recognition. It can also lead to a severe case of narcissism. Whether your posts deserve an Oscar or a raspberry is up to you. **GCI**



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# The LAND of FOREVER JOBS

By **Guy Cipriano**





**Longevity defines nearly everything surrounding the New England golf scene, including the tenures of the people responsible for maintaining its preserved courses.**

© GUY CIPRIANO (5)

**S**teve Murphy is 72 years old and he's still rock scrambling on the job.

Murphy stops a cart between the 14th green and a Gannon Municipal Golf Course maintenance building on a brisk late-April afternoon. He walks uphill, through a thicket of scraggly pines, drops his fingers to balance on a rock and lunges toward his destination. A view of the 14th green and 15th fairway emerges.

"Punishment work," he says.

Murphy wasn't around when Works Progress Administration workers carved, blasted, and muscled through Lynn Woods Reservation during the Great Depression to build Gannon, an open-to-all facility in Boston's north suburbs. He has plenty of stories and theories. Murphy believes constructing the former tee hidden in the hillside represented an arduous task for disobedient laborers.

Tough, yet steady work attracted Murphy to golf course maintenance. Murphy started caddying as a 10-year-old at Framingham Country Club in Boston's west suburbs. When he turned 16, he asked the green chair about a maintenance position. His first job involved pushing a rotary mower. He wore ankle weights to help strengthen his lower body for the basketball season.

In 1976, the toughness helped Murphy wade through New England politics to become Gannon's superintendent. He was just 25 and a few years removed from studying turf management and science at the University of Massachusetts Amherst's Stockbridge School of Agriculture.

"Lynn is a very political town," Murphy says. "I went into the interview place and there were like 50 guys there. I thought I had no chance. I saw one guy waving and asking everybody how they were doing. He knew all these guys. I went in there and said, 'You guys have a beautiful place here and you

◀ John Eggleston has been the superintendent at Kernwood (Massachusetts) Country Club since 2004. Eggleston served as an intern at the course in 1986.



▶ Robert Searle, right, replaced his father, Greg, as Abenakee Club superintendent in 2012. A Searle has held a superintendent position in Maine every year since 1976.

don't know what you're doing.' They bought into my BS."

The job became Murphy's forever job. Technically, he's no longer Gannon's superintendent. **Kyle Levesque** holds the position and performs admirable work maintaining a course that receives around 60,000 annual "starts" per year, according to Murphy, the co-owner of Golf Facilities Management Inc., the company that operates Gannon for the City of Lynn. Murphy spends multiple days per week at each of the three suburban Boston municipal courses his company oversees — Hillview Golf Course in North Reading and Beverly Golf & Tennis Club in Beverly are the other two — and regularly jumps on equipment to help his superintendents and rock scrambles to scout turf conditions.

Asked what it takes to keep the same job for decades, Murphy, who ended his official 40-year run as Gannon's superintendent in 2016, immediately offers a witty response. "Knowing how to dance," he says. "It's all about playing the game."

Many of Murphy's New England peers are similarly adept at grasping the intricacies of obtaining and keeping a forever job. Superintendent tenures spanning decades are the norm throughout a region immersed in longevity and loyalty.

Essex County Club director of grounds **Eric Richardson** isn't a native New Englander. But he's lived in Massachusetts long enough to understand he's raising a family and holding a desirable job in a special spot. Richardson was in his 20s when he received the head turf job at Essex County Club, a North Shore club one mile from the Atlantic Ocean. Now in his 40s, Richardson has spent 17 years leading the maintenance of a course where **Donald Ross** worked and resided.

"I have lived across the country and my wife is from Michigan," he says. "We love it here. When you have a young family, the education



is unbelievable. It's second to none. Once the people embrace you, they pull you in. It takes a while for them to embrace you. They have that New England tough exterior, but they really are about family. The clubs want change, but they really don't want that much change."

Richardson is just the sixth turf leader in Essex County Club's 130-year history. Two of his predecessors, the father-son tandem of **Skip** and **Phil Wogan** held the job for nearly 90 years between them. "I don't know how they did it that long," Richardson says, "but they did it. You have to be committed. I can't believe I have been here for 17 years. It's gone by in a heartbeat. Everybody tells you it goes by faster as you get older, and it's true."

Continuity is a major reason for the club's success and Richardson's longevity. The group of members making decisions stays consistent and **Bruce Hepner** has been the

club's architect for more than two decades. Visions are aligned and the club empowers Richardson to make course enhancement and staffing decisions.

Richardson and Hepner have methodically worked to reintroduce elements of Ross's original design. Ross lived in a yellow house behind the 15th tee. The house remains in the same spot, a visual reminder Richardson is a preservationist elevating something bigger than his own career. The way Richardson sees it, keeping a destination job for 17 years requires unyielding discipline.

"You have to put new challenges in front of yourself to better your operation," he says. "You have to be self-motivated. The membership, the job or whatever will motivate you, but you have to have that drive. My standards are higher than any member here."

Performing on the course in New England can lead to a comfortable life off the course. Four New England





states are in the top 20 of U.S. News & World Report's education rankings. Massachusetts is No. 3 on the list. Four New England states also rank in the top 20 of median household income.

Favorable weather compared to other regions also prolongs superintendent tenures. The average summer temperature is below 70 degrees in all six New England states. The changing of seasons represents another allure of working and living in New England.

**John Eggleston** realizes he's landed somewhere good.

Eggleston's route to his current job at Kernwood Country Club, a Ross design along the Danvers River in Salem, Massachusetts, started when a high school classmate asked about his college plans. He told the classmate he intended to study turfgrass science and management at Stockbridge. **Heidi Robertson's** reaction surprised Eggleston. "She goes, 'Why don't you go work for my dad?'" he recalls nearly 40 years later. Heidi's father, **Dean Robertson**, was Kernwood Country Club's superintendent. Eggleston spent two memorable summers, including one as an intern in 1986, working on Robertson's crew.

A native of Rowley, 26 miles north of Boston, Eggleston left New England for nearly a decade, scurrying between projects as a construction superintendent for Wadsworth Golf Construction. He returned to Massachusetts in the early 2000s, spent two years as one of **Tom Brodeur's** TPC Boston assistants and became Robertson's successor at Kernwood in 2004. Eggleston is just the fourth superintendent in the club's 109-year history. "I worked here in 1985 and 1986," he says, "and there were members who remembered me. That's crazy.

"When I had my kids, you should have seen the gifts I was getting," he adds. "And it wasn't just when they were born. That whole summer, members would come up to me and say, 'I

You have to be committed. I can't believe I have been here for 17 years. It's gone by in a heartbeat. Everybody tells you it goes by faster as you get older, and it's true."

— *Eric Richardson*

ordered this and it finally came in for the kids.' I knew their faces, but I didn't know some of their names, and they were giving the kids gifts and cards.

The way they treat my wife and family is second to none."

The familial vibe motivates Eggleston, who has collaborated with New England-based architect **Robert McNeil** to reintroduce Ross features throughout a course with holes along and above the Danvers River. Away from the course, Eggleston purchased his parents' home. He's happily entrenched in the Kernwood and greater New England community. His 20th job anniversary is next year; he's

showing no signs of slowing.

"I feel very fortunate," he says. "You just see horror stories out there, and it's sad because some clubs don't treat their superintendent the way they should. I go to board meetings, and I'm always very active on the golf course. They like it when they see me out there working. I'm a working superintendent."

Work hard. Get treated like family. It's the New England way, which is the only way **Robert Searle** knows.

The superintendent at Abenakee Club, a secluded 9-hole course along the Atlantic Ocean in Biddeford Pool, Maine, Searle stops on the ninth fairway to chat with the only other person occupying the course on a sunny late-April morning. **Greg Searle** is Robert's father, his Abenakee Club predecessor, and his only co-worker until students provide

▼ Eric Richardson has led the golf course maintenance team at Essex (Massachusetts) County Club since 2007.



seasonal help later in the spring.

“Why wouldn’t you want to come to work here every day?” Greg says staring across the parallel ninth and first fairways toward Wood Island Lighthouse. “What

else are you going to do?”

Robert asks himself the same question. Still in his 30s and 11 years into his first superintendent position, he works alongside his father frequently and brings his 5-year-old

son to the course as he maintains 50 acres surrounded by blue water, marshes, native areas and stylish homes for a supportive membership. Mount Washington, the highest point in New England, is visible across Saco Bay on clear days. The New Hampshire peak towers just 80 miles from the course.

As Robert walks the eighth fairway later in the morning, he spots a member in his backyard and asks, “How was your trip? We’re starting our 125th season today if you want to play.” Besides the Searles, the 12½ acres of fescue fairways, which are only played via walking, remain empty.

“I wouldn’t say it’s all gravy here,” Robert says. “We certainly have issues here, too. But we don’t have a lot of issues. We come in every day, do our job, try to have fun and provide for the members. Not too many issues come with it.”

A Searle has been a golf course superintendent in Maine every year since 1976, when Greg received the job at Cape Arundel Golf Club, the Kennebunkport, Maine, course known for its connection with the Bush family. Greg spent 28 years at Cape Arundel before shifting 10 miles north to Abenakee Club. Greg and Robert, who has spent his entire career in Maine, have transformed Abenakee Club into one of America’s great 9-hole courses. Their ability to improve turf conditions while highlighting the club’s throwback charm has led to a two-decade (and counting) run at the course.

“Members have appreciated what we have done here,” Greg says. “They are so proud of it. When I got here, there were members who never played it. They didn’t want to play here. They are so proud of it now. It makes you feel good.”

Adds Robert, “When we started here, even on a good summer day, you might see six or seven groups. Now it’s all day, every day, people are out here enjoying it. People are bringing more guests out. People really appreciate this place and what we have done. It makes you feel good.”

Twenty-seven miles up the coast, **Rob Knott** scours the 160 acres he maintains and occasionally reflects on his career journey. A Mainer who left the state to attend NC State University before landing multiple post-college jobs in North Carolina, Knott returned to New England in 2008 for an assistant

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## WHAT I'VE LEARNED

**Steve Murphy** started working at Gannon Municipal Golf Course as superintendent in 1976 and hasn't left. He ended his 40-year run as the daily superintendent in 2016, but he still visits the course multiple times per week as co-owner of Golf Facilities Management Inc., the company that operates Gannon for the City of Lynn, Massachusetts. The 72-year-old Murphy shared thoughts about his run at Gannon and establishing longevity in the golf industry:

**It was great** for me coming into this job. The place was a dump. It only had one way to go. I looked like a superstar, even though I was a regular guy.

**The superintendents are all so competitive.** They all want to outdo each other. It's amazing. I have some thoughts on that. We're all doing such a good job, and everybody expects the conditions. It becomes, 'Do this. Do that. Get it better and better.' And the costs go up. Does that hurt the game? Maybe.

**I like to tell the young guys** when they are 16, do a good job now. Pay attention in school. You have another 45 years — and now it might be 50 — to work, so pay attention now and do a good job. We've had a lot of good kids working here over the years. Back when the mayor used to send us people, I'd get five or six from the

mayor. I'd fire one of them the first week and all the rest fell into line.

**The way I always looked at it,** everything out there was a direct reflection on you. If you do something and the place is a shithole, it's a direct reflection on you. You didn't do the job. If the

place is good, it's a reflection on you.

**To do the superintendent job right,** these guys can't start at 6 anymore. Today I waltzed into Beverly at 8. I like to work 8 to 4. I can't do 6 anymore. Imagine getting up early your whole life, and now I can't do it anymore.



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## NUMBERS TO KNOW

### Average employee tenure in the U.S.

|                                  |                  |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| All employees:                   | <b>4.1 years</b> |
| Men                              | <b>4.3 years</b> |
| Women                            | <b>3.9 years</b> |
| 65 years and over                | <b>9.9 years</b> |
| 55 to 64 years old               | <b>9.8 years</b> |
| 45 to 54 years old               | <b>6.9 years</b> |
| 35 to 44 years old               | <b>4.7 years</b> |
| 25 to 34 years old               | <b>2.8 years</b> |
| Leisure and hospitality industry | <b>2.0 years</b> |

Source: January 2022 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics study

superintendent position at Shelter Harbor Golf Club in Charlestown, Rhode Island. He moved closer to home in 2014 for the superintendent job at Purpoodock Club, a private course in Cape Elizabeth with nine holes built atop farmland in the 1920s and nine holes built on swampy and rocky terrain in the 1960s.

A nine-year superintendent tenure is meager by New England standards. But Knott knows he could be on his way to stacking years atop years at Purpoodock Club. The club has experienced boosts in membership, play and revenue over the past three years. For Knott, the fifth superintendent in the club's 101-year history, it feels like a work home close to his childhood home of Gorham, Maine, a small town 19

miles from Cape Elizabeth. Knott and his wife, **Joy**, have three children between the ages of 8 and 12.

"This was the opportunity where I thought I would go there for a little bit and just see how it worked out," he says. "My wife didn't really want to move to Maine, but she loves it here and I don't see us moving. Our kids are getting entrenched in school and sports and friends and all that stuff. It would be tough to move."

Knott was surrounded by loyalty and longevity as a child, although he didn't ponder the meaning of it until returning to Maine in his 30s.

"The loyalty is more of a New England thing — and it's probably even more a northern New England thing," he says. "My dad worked at the local paper mill for about 30 years.

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They always say people are going to have five different careers — or whatever that number is now — in their lifetime. That always baffled me, because I'm like, 'How do you have a totally different career?' That's part of the New England thing. You find something and you do it. I don't really see myself

having another career at this point. My parents did the same thing, and my grandparents did the same thing



their whole life. I'm sure there's good and bad to all of those things. I couldn't imagine trying to get into the insur-

ance business right now."

Down on Boston's North Shore, Murphy has only practiced one business — maintaining and managing golf courses. None of it has felt like "punishment work."

On the same April day he scrambled rocks at Gannon, he spent a few hours on a mini excavator, clearing trees in preparation to lay 10,000 square feet of sod. Beverly and Hillview are key parts of Murphy's business, but he'll always be linked with Gannon, a municipal course that never had a trained superintendent until his arrival.

"It's all a game," he says. "I like to say life is a game, you dance with what you got. This place has been fabulous for me, because every day you would make it better just by showing up. Now it's pretty good ... I think." GCI

◀ Rob Knott returned to his native Maine in 2014 to become superintendent at Purpoodock Club.

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## WEATHER OR NOT

I am neither a weatherman nor a climatologist. But I am a trained social scientist, and while my doctorate is not directly relevant to turfgrass, the years I spent studying cultural crisis and political upheaval occasionally come in handy when it comes to the golf industry.

The last few weeks have brought some hellacious weather — and with it thoughts on a growing challenge to golf in general and to superintendents in particular. In Connecticut, where I live, we have lately seen torrential rains, searing temperatures and haze, and smoke so thick from our Canadian neighbors to the northwest that it's dangerous simply to go outside and breathe.

Courses throughout Vermont, across western Massachusetts, and into the lower reaches of upstate New York saw flash floods and widespread closures thanks to 6 to 8 inches of rain in several hours.

Meanwhile, across the Southwest and well into the South, a heat wave has brought temperatures steadily into the triple digits. The heat wave has raised water temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico and on the Atlantic Ocean waters off Florida by 5 to 8 degrees above normal — potentially catastrophic for marine life.

It's gotten to the point where it's no longer clear what "normal" means. What an interesting math dilemma for The Weather Channel, for instance, when its correspondents must explain that a 100-year storm does not mean once every century; it means a 100-to-one chance of occurring in any given year — which is now every decade,

if not more often.

A few years ago, it became evident to me that the slow, inexorable creep of an altered climate was bringing new demands onto golf course managers. I saw this with the proliferation of renovation work at courses that focused simultaneously on drought management and storm water management. In other words, courses needed to adapt their infrastructure to handle more severe weather events at both ends of the water spectrum: protracted shortfalls of rainfall and a measurable increase in major rain events exceeding 2 to 3 inches in a day.

At the same time, across the cool-season regions of the East, Midwest and Pacific Northwest, the golf season has been getting longer. I grew up on Long Island, and during winters in the 1960s, we could often — not always — find frozen ponds to skate on. Good luck with that now.

The warming trend is discernible as well in the elongation of the golf calendar. It's not a uniformly steady trend; rather, one marked by fits and starts and all sorts of irregularities but nonetheless palpable in the long run, looking back, say, 30 to 40 years.

There is more early golf in late winter and early spring. At the other end of the calendar, there used to be an effective end to the golf season by early November. Now, golf can reliably be played well past Thanksgiving.

The longer golf season is a boon to the golf industry. But the heat of mid-season, what is sometimes termed "100 days of hell," now borders on scorched earth. It's not just a matter of courses as far north as Baltimore using Bermudagrass. Turfgrasses can

adapt, but golf course workers are another matter. As if the labor shortage in both trained and casual personnel were not already serious enough, the situation is going to get a lot worse because working outdoors these days is increasingly stressful, if not outright dangerous to one's health.

Any workers with skills involving tools, machinery, labor, and discipline are more likely to opt for work indoors rather than outdoors. This is going to make life very difficult for superintendents when it comes to recruiting a reliable labor force. It is also going to make the industry even more reliant on laborers coming from traditionally warmer climates — presuming labor immigration policy relaxes enough to allow that to occur. Given current impasses in Congress on everything else that is significant, there is no good reason to think progress on this front is likely.

All of which tells me that the job superintendents execute is getting tougher. All the training, the labor-saving technology, the scientific understanding of cultural practices — all of that comprises valuable tools.

The point of appreciating climate, as distinguished from mere transitory weather, is to understand the structural constraints in which one operates. Addressing that will take broader initiatives of national and international policy. Forward-thinking superintendents can help things if they started making allies to address climate on a broad, long-term basis. As I learned from my 14 years as a college professor, that process starts with thinking differently about one's place in the world. **GCI**



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





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Superintendent **Ron Furlong** asks veteran turf pros what motivates them after decades at the same spot — and examines what keeps him going after 21 years at his course.

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**Y**ou know how when you land a job and, in your head, you think you most likely will keep the new job for about four or five years until you move on to the next phase in your career? I did that about four times, sticking to the four- or five-year plan on each occasion, before I landed the superintendent position here at Avalon Golf Club in western Washington. This job too, in my grand career plan, was to be about a five-year stop for me.

Well, I just started Year 22 here at Avalon. How in the heck this happened I am not quite sure. Those two decades went by pretty much in a blur.

I can say with complete honesty and certainty that I have never once found this job boring or routine. I have been challenged here since Day One and continue to be to this day. I have never lost the motivation to succeed at this job, and to help make the golf course as good as it can possibly be.

How have I stayed motivated for so long? As I said, it's been a bit of a blur, so recently I took a few moments to reflect and see just what has kept me so interested in this particular job. How have I stayed motivated for 21 years?

There have been a few factors that have helped contribute to my sustained motivation here at Avalon:

First, **who I work for**. Having an owner (as in my case) or, for others, a green chairperson, or, for others still, a general manager, who understands and appreciates what we do and allows us to be creative is so vital. But also, just as important, someone who allows us to fail occasionally. No one is ever going to be perfect. And greatness, I believe, cannot be achieved without sometimes taking chances, pushing the envelope, or simply finding a new and better way to get something done.

I think I've done a pretty good job as the superintendent here over the years, but that isn't to say I haven't made some mistakes. Being able to fail and learn from those mistakes has been incredibly important in my success here, as well as keeping me motivated and invigorated to boldly go into the future.

Another motivational tool for me has been having **the ability to change things up** — from building new forward and back tees, to shrinking or eliminating bunkers, to clearing areas between holes for light and air movement, to completely reshaping the approaches

around each hole, to creating acres of no-mow zones. Having the general acceptance from the owner to use my judgment for many of these course renovations and improvements has been incredibly important for my staff and me.

Motivation has also been easy for me. I'm pretty much a sucker for nature and being outside in said nature. Avalon is built on a beautiful 236-acre plot of land overlooking the Skagit Valley, with the Cascade mountain range in view to our east and the Olympic range to the west. It's not hard to jump in the cart in the morning and get inspired as the sun rises over the Cascades.

Of all the regular struggles I may encounter on the golf course during any particular day, motivation is not usually (if ever) one of them.

I thought the topic of superintendents who have been at the same club for many years — and how they have stayed motivated — was worth pursuing. I spoke with veteran superintendents like myself, and compiled some pretty interesting feedback.

Ric Kehres has been in the business for 50 years, the last 32 as the superintendent at Louisville Country Club in Louisville, Kentucky. What has kept Ric going for five decades is a simple, yet exceedingly important factor vital to long-term contentment and success at one club: **Love what you do.**

“Loving what I do is my No. 1 motivation,” Ric tells me. “Providing great conditions on a daily basis to a really good membership that appreciates what we do is big plus also.”

Ric mentioned that teaching young assistants is also a big motivating factor, as well as renovations and projects, which help change the pace and keep things interesting.

“Seeing the rewards from the crew’s efforts at the end of the week is very satisfying as well,” Ric adds.

**Ralph Kepple** is director of agronomy at East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta and has been at the club since 1992. Although many factors have kept Ralph motivated throughout his years at the prestigious club, he credits the Tour Championship, which East Lake has hosted since 2004, as the top motivational tool.

“The tournament has created an opportunity to stay engaged in ways that many clubs don’t have the chance to provide,” Ralph says. “Hosting an annual event as large as the Tour Championship provides plenty of fresh engagement opportunities. **The tournament, and all that it encompasses, pre-**

**vents a degree of stagnation.”**

Beyond just hosting the Tour Championship each year, Ralph lists some other motivating factors that have played into keeping his job fresh for so many years.

“I very much enjoy searching for new ways to improve our product,” Ralph says. “Whether it is through new fertility products, pesticides, equipment improvements, cultural practices, etc. I enjoy that challenge.”

East Lake converted their greens from bentgrass to Miniverde ultradwarf Bermudagrass in 2008. “We are constantly searching for ways to improve the putting surface,” Ralph says, “and that conversion in ’08 gave me a chance to learn and develop new programs (fertility, pesticide, cultural, moisture, topdressing, ...) and learn how to push the ultradwarf during the summer instead of just trying to survive.”

Ralph says that East Lake is planning a full-scale renovation after this year’s tournament that will include rebuilding tees, fairways, greens and bunkers, as well as reshaping ponds and much more.

“We will be hosting the tournament again in 2024,” Ralph says, “so the project will be on an extremely tight timeframe, and that is a big challenge. But obviously this provides me with a great opportunity to stay engaged.”

**John Chassard** is the director of greens at Lehigh Country Club in Allentown, Pennsylvania. John has been at the club since 1987. For him, staying motivated and engaged is

made easier by the relationships he forges as part of his job.

“This business is about relationships — with your crew, your peers and the people you work for,” John says. **“Maximizing the opportunity to invest into those relationships goes a long way.”**

John also mentioned the importance of adapting. Self-change, if you will. “Staying relevant and reinventing yourself,” he says. “A peer told me long ago, ‘You are only as good as you are today.’ That has stuck with me. I have tried to live by that. Don’t get too comfortable. Yesterday really doesn’t matter once it’s gone. **Mick Jagger** got that one right!”

**Fred Gehrisch** is director of golf course operations at Highlands Falls Country Club in Highlands, North Carolina. Fred recently transitioned into the general manager role at Highlands Falls after a long run as the club’s superintendent. He has been at the club in some capacity for around a quarter century.

Fred mentioned several things that have kept him motivated over the years, including staying engaged with the other managers at the club and everyone occasionally brainstorming everyone else’s issues together. He also mentioned how he has stayed curious — curious about why we do the things we do and seeing if there is a way to do some things even better.

**B u t**  
one thing  
Fred said  
I found





particularly interesting: “I’ve always been very competitive,” Fred tells me. “I want to be the best. I just keep pushing myself to do better. Funny thing is, I never feel like I achieve anything. Only take another step closer.”

I think I share this last take of Fred’s. As a longtime golf course superintendent, I also feel like we never really get there. The course can be as good as it’s ever been, but it always seems like we are still striving to get to that perfect place—a place that, most likely, I now realize, may not actually exist for us. Perhaps that is a reason superintendents can stay motivated for many years at the same club, chasing that carrot that we never catch.

Fred also mentions the support of the golfers at Highlands Falls as motivational inspiration. “While there have been times I may have questioned if I wanted to stay at the club,” Fred confesses, “the membership has always been very supportive. The relationships I have been fortunate to have here at the club have been worth their weight in gold. ... The grass isn’t always greener somewhere else.”

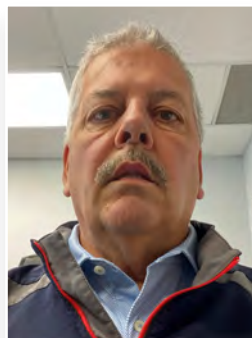
David Webner is the superintendent at Westwood Country Club in Rocky River, Ohio. He has been at



▲ John Chassard



▲ Fred Gehrisch



▲ Ric Kehres



▲ Ralph Kepple

the club since 2000. David summed up his motivation in one word: **Pride.**

“My pride pushes me,” he says. “The condition of the course is a reflection of my work and that of my team. Staying the same means moving backwards. This requires keeping up with new products, trends and technology.”

David says something else about his motivation that strikes true for me: “Although I know it’s the members’ club, I have always considered it my own course, and I treat it that way.”

That reminds me of an educational seminar I attended years ago at what was then still called the Golf Industry Show. I can’t remember exactly what the seminar was about, but I do remember a superintendent standing up during the class and saying that it was important to remember that the golf courses we work at are not our own courses. We are only employees. He thought a superintendent should never refer to the course they work

at as “their course.”

I remember totally disagreeing with this. I’m not much of a public speaker, but I actually stood up after him and rebutted this. I always refer to Avalon as my course. I think that is one of the things that keeps me motivated. Having that investment. That ownership.

**That ownership is exactly what keeps me motivated after all these years.** Sure, I could lose my job tomorrow and it would no longer be my course. But until that day, the day I’m no longer walking these grounds and making daily and long-term maintenance decisions, this will be my course. And, because of that, I will never lose my desire, commitment and vigor to help make this golf course as great as I can.

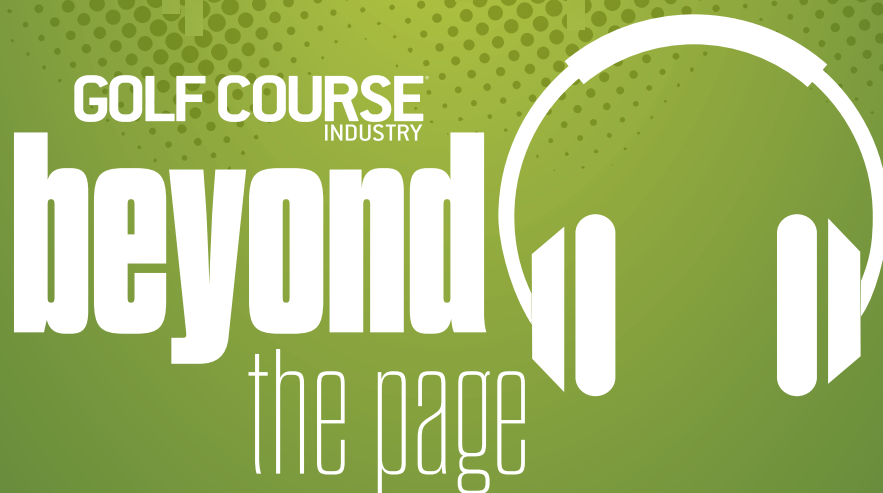
That is my motivation. **GCI**

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

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: RON FURLONG (AVALON GOLF CLUB); RALPH KEPPE (EAST LAKE GOLF CLUB); FRED GEHRISCH (HIGHLAND FALLS COUNTRY CLUB); JOHN CHASSARD (LEHIGH COUNTRY CLUB); DAVID WEBNER (WESTWOOD COUNTRY CLUB)



# DIVE A LITTLE DEEPER!



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

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# STILL SEVERE — *and often confounding*

▲ Snow mold control and research efforts such as the one above at University of Wisconsin continue to evolve.

Fickle winters are changing snow mold control as a new solution prepares to reach golf courses.

By **Guy Cipriano**

Courses in higher latitudes experienced the changing dynamics of snow mold during the winter of 2022-23.

University of Wisconsin associate professor Dr. Paul Koch observed divergent situations early in the season. Trial results in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and northern Wisconsin demonstrated fungicide breakdown because of snow melt or rain following snow mold control applications. The situation proved different in northern Minnesota, where the snow fell atop snow and products worked as intended. Koch views the latter as an anomaly these days.

"We know if we have a warmup event, or a rainfall event, or snow melt event, the snow mold product, the fungicide, degrades relatively quickly," he says.



“Most products stay persistent on the turf throughout the winter if there’s not a rainfall or snow melt event ... but there are very few locations where that happens anymore.”

Utah-based turfgrass researcher and consultant Adam Van Dyke encountered a contrasting scenario in the western Mountain states: snow arrived earlier than normal and never left. “Some courses got caught because they were unable to treat,” he says.

As winter becomes more unpredictable — January golf in Michigan, anyone? — tactics and solutions for controlling snow mold continue to evolve. Properly timing a snow mold application has become one of the most important late fall/early winter decisions facing a cool-weather superintendent. What somebody learned in school or on the job 30, 20 or even 10 years ago about application timing might not correlate to today’s conditions. “You just really have to go off historical record,” Van Dyke says, “but things have shifted somewhat since I started doing research. I think sprays are now a little bit later. For me, in my trials, it’s been right around Halloween the last 15 years. But this past year it was tight.”

Fall decisions impact the quality of playing surfaces in regions where golf

seasons are revenue sprints with little margin for playability and aesthetic error. Before applying any snow mold control product, an understanding of what customers, members and bosses are willing to tolerate must be reached.

“Lately our winters are so different, I’m not even sure what the normal winter is anymore,” says Midwest-based Syngenta technical services manager Matt Giese, whose responsibilities include studying winter disease. “Taking the chance of making that application or not making that application is probably not something most superintendents would be willing to risk. What would happen if you didn’t do it? It could be a pretty significant recovery time in the spring along with everything else that goes on in the spring in terms of prepping the golf course for play.”

From Koch’s perspective, the type of snow mold pestering golf courses is a major transformation affecting control philosophies. Parts of the gray snow mold belt have recently turned into pink snow mold hotbeds. The shift means a superintendent’s late fall, winter and early spring alertness must be heightened.

“Snow mold isn’t getting less se-

vere,” Koch says. “This past winter for a large part of the country was a great example of that, but what we are seeing is a shift toward more pink snow mold because it’s the more adaptable fungus to swings in conditions. Because it grows faster, it can adapt to a big warmup and a cooldown, where gray snow mold needs that consistent condition under the snow cover for a very long period of time.”

The shift also means superintendents must consider integrating multiple chemistries into control programs. Koch calls fludioxonil and iprodione “really strong chemistries against pink snow mold,” while DMIs demonstrate efficacy against gray snow mold. “That’s why it’s important to mix different chemistries together in your snow mold application, so you can fend off against multiple snow mold diseases,” he adds.

**CONTROL OPTIONS RECENTLY** expanded with the launch of a new versatile fungicide designed to control snow mold on golf courses: Tuque exoGEM from Syngenta. The combination includes fludioxonil and SOLATENOL technology (benzovindiflupyr). SOLATENOL is an SDHI found in Ascernity, a broad-spectrum fungicide launched in 2020. The new fungicide includes exoGEM, an advanced formulation offering greater uptake, distribution, rainfastness and retention.

Researchers in snow mold regions have tested and studied Tuque (*pronounced tu:k*) exoGEM under myriad conditions for multiple years.

“What we have learned about Tuque is that it’s a very strong pink snow mold product,” Koch says. “It has fludioxonil in there, which is probably the best single active in-

▼ How Tuque exoGEM performed (left) compared to an untreated plot (right) during a 2021-22 snow mold trial conducted under heavy pressure in Marquette, Michigan.





## SPONSORED CONTENT

### WHAT'S IN A guarantee?

Syngenta is introducing a snow mold guarantee for pink and gray snow mold protection on greens, tees and fairways to coincide with the launch of Tuque exoGEM fungicide.

The guarantee covers:

1. Instrata at 9.0 to 11.0 fluid ounces per 1,000 square feet for **up to 130 days of control** on greens and fairways
2. Posterity XT at 3 fluid ounces + Ascernity at 1.0 fluid ounce per 1,000 square feet for **up to 110 days of control** on tees and fairways
3. Tuque exoGEM at 2.87 fluid ounces per 1,000 square feet for **up to 90 days of control** on tees and fairways

"These are solutions that we feel very comfortable about with those days of cover," Syngenta technical services manager Matt Giese says. "Syngenta stands behind all of these options guaranteeing our customers are satisfied with whichever solution they might choose."



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gradient against pink snow mold on the market. It has the SOLALET-NOL in there that provides some control against gray snow mold as well. It has performed well in our trials over a number of years and over a number of sites. That's what's important for us as researchers. We want to see these products perform well across all of our locations over a number of years before we get comfortable making that recommendation. We have worked with Tuque long enough that we're comfortable making that recommendation."

The launch of Tuque exoGEM comes at an ideal time. The trifecta of heightened pink snow mold severity, restrictions on iprodione usage and increasing reports of fungicide resistance create a need for new solutions, according to Koch.

Van Dyke has conducted extensive work testing and observing Tuque exoGEM on cool-weather turf in the mountainous region he covers. "With different modes of action, this product will be important for superintendents to plug and play and learn which things work best for their course and the grasses that grow under the conditions that they have to deal with during winter," he says. "It gives flexibility to develop and change programs as superintendents deal with an ever-changing environment and the pathogen

environment that comes with it."

Syngenta is guaranteeing a 90-day option for snow mold control. Tuque exoGEM, according to its label, can be tank mixed with a fungicide from a different FRAC group for broader-spectrum activity and extended control.

"Tuque exoGEM by itself is going to be fantastic," Giese says. "We have seen very good levels of control with Tuque exoGEM as a sole application. And there's no reason you couldn't tank mix it if you're expecting more than 90 days of snow cover. You can tank mix it for longer levels of control with Banner Max II and Daconil brand fungicides. There are a lot of different tank mix combinations. For areas that have low-to-moderate snow cover, Tuque exoGEM is a really good option for snow mold applications."

Giese recommends using Tuque exoGEM at the high label rate of 2.87 fluid ounces per 1,000 square feet for the most effective snow mold control.

**TUQUE IS THE** Canadian word for a warm-knitted winter hat, and the fungicide is aptly named. **The solution has the potential to hold multiple "hats" for superintendents beyond controlling snow mold.**

"What's different about Tuque exoGEM is that there is a plethora of other diseases that fall under the Tuque exoGEM umbrella," says Giese, who

adds that combining SOLATENOL and Medallion fungicide provides a strong combination against anthracnose.

Other common cool-season diseases listed on the Tuque exoGEM label include **dollar spot, brown patch, summer patch** and various types of **leaf spot**. Koch has studied Tuque exoGEM against dollar spot, the most prominent summer disease in the region where he works, and he says the formulation provides a "very solid 14-day product in our dollar spot trials."

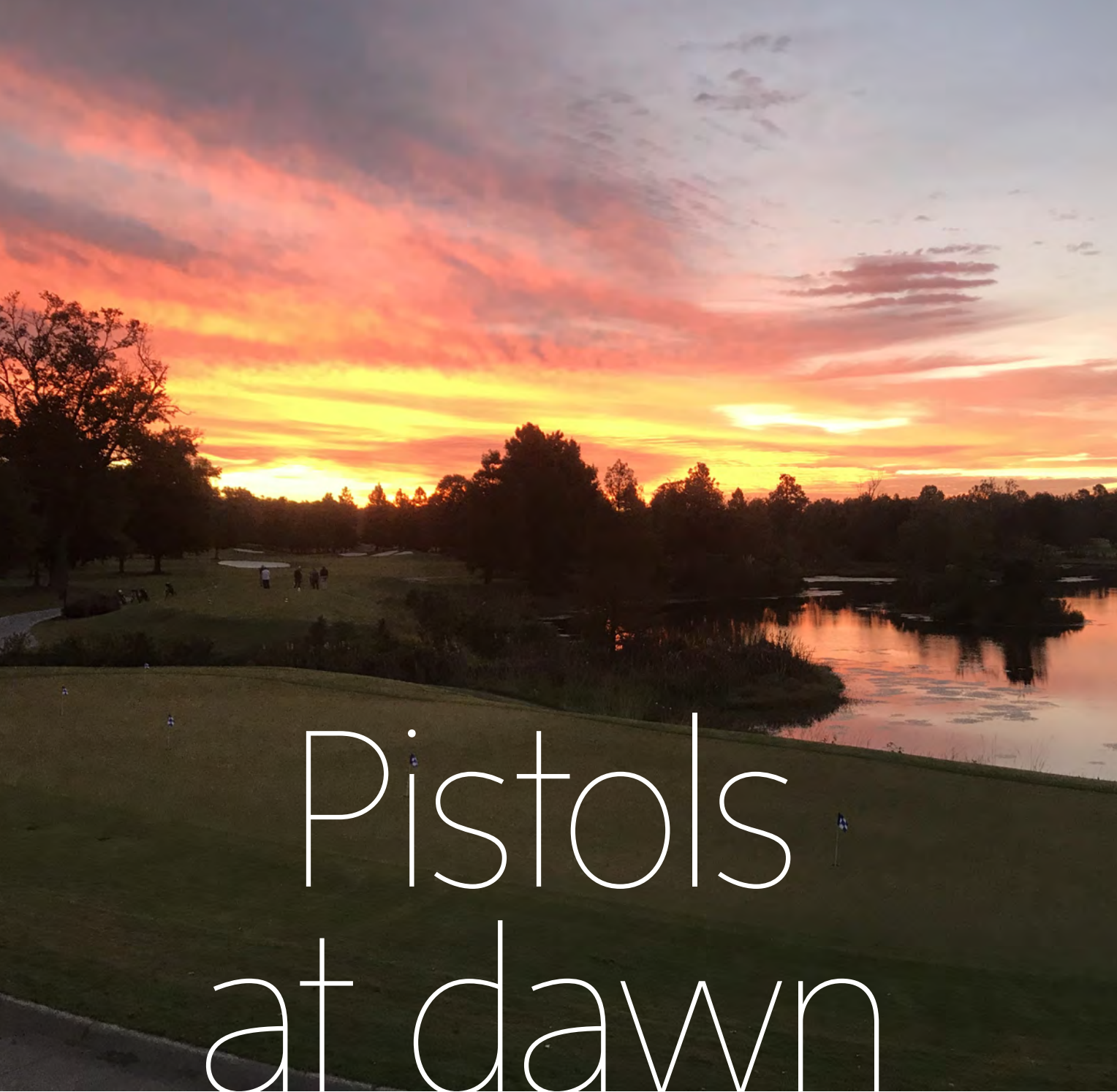
"Even when we have had a pretty high pressure, it's done quite well," Koch adds. "We have also tested it on bipolaris leaf spot and it performed well on our bipolaris leaf spot trial."

Van Dyke has tested Tuque exoGEM on summer disease, although his summer work with the fungicide hasn't been as abundant as his winter research. "This new product has shown excellent turf safety in the work that I have done on cool-season grasses," he says. "That's an important thing to know in the winter and warm summer."

The environments where Van Dyke lives and conducts trials present contrasting research situations. He's based in the Salt Lake City suburbs, where the elevation approaches 4,500 feet, yet the snow doesn't stick around long enough for significant snow mold trial work. Less than an hour from his home, he studied a few sites that approached 200 days of snow cover during the winter of 2022-23.

The whims of winter mean snow mold will continue to yield research opportunities and control conundrums.

"You have to do your homework, read articles, talk to people who do the research, lean on your extension agents, talk to industry folks, because you really do just get one shot," Van Dyke says. "If you're doing this year over year, you learn what products work and you refine your timing. But Mother Nature is always throwing curveballs. Every year is a little bit different." **GCI**



# Pistols at dawn

**Intentional morning routines are important because the early hours are demanding. Several superintendents share how they lead their teams through the best start possible.**

By **Lee Carr**





**Steve Rabideau**, director of golf courses at Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaroneck, New York, has a home gym. “I roll out of bed and work out. I shower, make my protein shake, and come to work,” Rabideau says. Breaking a sweat early gives him a few minutes to himself and time to think about the day ahead. When Rabideau arrives, he is mentally and physically prepared to lead.

Taking a more spiritual approach, **Patrick Murphy**, superintendent at The River Golf Club in North Augusta, South Carolina, feels like you “can’t go wrong with the Bible and a cup of coffee.” A 4:30 a.m. wake-up, K-Cup, 30-minute devotional and a six-minute commute is what has Murphy ready when he hits the grounds.

Morning routines vary as the daylight, seasons and maintenance demands shift. **Aaron Giordano**, director of grounds operations at the Country Club of Scranton in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, observes some of the property as he drives in. The assistants set up equipment and deliver morning assignments based off the previous evening’s leadership meeting. Interim changes are communicated via phone.

“Last fall, I made a commitment after the ‘busy season’ to wake up my kids for school and spend time with them before work, knowing I will likely be there late and not see them much in the evening,” Giordano says. “This enables my assistants to gain operational experience and further develops their leadership skills through handling routine day-to-day operations.”

At Sutton Bay in Agar, South Dakota, everyone arrives between 4:30 and 4:45 a.m. for a quick meeting led by superintendent **Kyle Rausch**. Preparations for the course begin before 5 a.m. There are no houses nearby and no noise ordinances.

First thing after the morning meeting, Rausch checks the pump station. Then he either mows or

changes cups to sense where the greens are regarding moisture and firmness. “Basic morning maintenance is usually wrapped up by 7 or 7:30 a.m.,” Rausch says. “The routine varies if there are strong winds for several days, which affects irrigation and creates the need for extra attention.”

**Justin Sudo** starts his day with an hour-long commute to work, driving from eastern Ohio to Erie, Pennsylvania, where he is the superintendent at The Kahkwa Club. Sudo uses his time for podcasts, planning, and protein — either a shake or some hard-boiled eggs. In season, this translates to a 3:30 a.m. wake-up call. The ride home is good for decompression.

“My assistant or I run the morning meeting,” Sudo says. “We have two different digital boards. One posts job assignments and upcoming events, run off of Google Docs, and the second board is purely for information.” Designed by **Donald Ross**, The Kahkwa Club has a large bunker project underway to modernize the course while also restoring some elements of the original design. There is plenty to think about and the long commute is put to good use.

#### LOOKING UP

Occasionally, something really unusual happens. Sudo once

### Bedroom divorce

With the goal of ensuring everyone gets a good night’s rest, a “sleep divorce” or “bedroom divorce” is exactly what it sounds like — when partners sleep as individuals. Imagine the possibilities. No more sneaking around to find your socks, no more restless stirring when someone comes to bed late, no more grumbling about early alarms. Not to mention an end to disagreements about sleeping temperatures, snoring, and blanket wars. Just sleeping.

Moving into a spare bedroom is ideal, but this arrangement is worth considering even if you have to rethink floor plans. A sleep divorce is in no way a comment on marital health; it’s just a way that some people get a better night’s rest. Many adults and maintenance industry employees can use more sleep as it is and a candid conversation with your partner may surprise you.

Even more good news ... no legal paperwork required.



Historically, when someone was challenged to a duel, “pistols at dawn” was the concise invitation. There were few certainties about what the morning would bring, and so it is for turf team leaders. There’s a good chance the morning won’t go as planned but the noble thing to do — one of the things you do best — is prepare, show up and make an effort.



found a car upside down in a pond. Not to worry, the driver was located, fine, and “only swerved to avoid a deer.” Rausch sees jackrabbits, large bullsnakes (over 5 feet long!) and rattlesnakes. Giordano has witnessed bald eagles carrying (and dropping) fish overhead. Murphy and his equipment technician found a body near the maintenance facility that had been murdered across state line. Rabideau has encountered vandalism from humans and extensive damage from several deer who frequent a large park nearby.

Thankfully, severe incidents are uncommon. In any job, your personal safety is paramount so don’t take unnecessary risks. Be especially alert when it’s dark. Be

wary of any unscheduled early visitors, including former or existing employees. It’s worth reviewing safety precautions and protocol for early emergencies, too, both with your employees and with the administration. Security systems and plans should be reviewed regularly.

Much more common are the beautiful sunrises that are such a sweet blessing for early risers. What complements that? For Sudo, “Having the golf course ready for the day or an event, the conditions being just right, having everyone show up on time, and nothing going wrong so that you can appreciate that sunrise.”

“Breakfast at our shop is pretty fun,” Rausch says. “The first person completing their morning work will cook. It’s almost always eggs, meat and tortillas on a skillet. Everyone pitches in and brings food to share.” With a team of 11 and 154 years of experience among them, Rausch says, “The crew is phenomenal.

They are good at diagnosing and fixing problems themselves.”

Like food for the soul, kind words go a long way. During morning meetings, “I will remind our team of established standards and deliver praise to those that make it happen,” Giordano says. “If planned operations need reshuffling due to staff shortages or weather challenges, I’ll guide my assistants towards achieving our operational goals.”



## Shake it up

Coffee is a popular staple when it comes to morning routines, but so are satisfying, muscle-building protein shakes. While some superintendents fast through the morning, others rely on a substantive beverage to get their day off to an energetic start. Easy to consume on the way to work or enjoy on course, nourishing shakes will help fill some of your daily nutritional requirements.

Store-bought shakes are a fun and healthy staff surprise, but it’s also easy to make your own. Simple shakes can be made using frozen fruit and vegetables, yogurt, seeds, nuts and much more. Peanut, almond and cashew butter are hearty additions, though the powdered versions typically contain less fat. Encourage variety with a selection of protein powders or choose a favorite. Add bananas, berries, honey or maple syrup for a little sweetness and swap your best recipes with some super friends.



I can count on one hand the number of times that everything fires on all cylinders.

We are calling an audible every day because someone doesn’t show up or something happens. What we do well as superintendents is adjust and adapt.”

— Steve Rabideau,  
Winged Foot Golf Club

With experience in the military as a munitions systems journeyman in the United States Air Force, “fundamentals engrained throughout basic training aid my abilities to adapt and overcome various obstacles, especially during periods of sleep deprivation,” Giordano says.

Habitually, Murphy arrives on property and heads straight to his office to grab his radio and AirPods. “I used to not allow headphones, but I can’t work unless I have them now,” Murphy says. They enable multitasking and the noise-cancelling feature serves as ear protection. The property has an interesting history as it was literally “an old city dump” and now has million-dollar homes adjacent to it on the banks of the Savannah River.

The area has been revitalized and the club continues to invest. A 19th hole was added with lights. The 18th fairway and green are being worked on and some tees are being ren-





is not only an invitation but the name of a rock band, and a cocktail that's made with bourbon and Ancho Reyes. Though irrigation troubles and staffing issues may feel like constants, times change. Dueling is no longer in vogue, but the sun is

◀ The Sulton Bay golf course maintenance team.

◀ Staff meetings are part of the morning routine at The Kahkwa Club.

ovated. "If you told people in the 1990s that there was going to be a beautiful course here, they wouldn't have believed it," Murphy says.

That's a valuable observation because morning routines can feel monotonous, particularly during mid- to late summer, but it's important to look up and see the big picture. Use those morning meetings to occasionally communicate where the property has been and where it's going, short- and long-term.

Whatever motivates your team, from providing an excellent recreational space, to supporting jobs and the economy, to accomplishing something together or developing talent, concatenating work with results is inspiring and energizing. It's positive leadership. Remind everyone how you are moving from strength to strength.

Face-to-face interactions with the staff are meaningful. Rabideau makes sure to be present with the team every morning, sharing not only what they are doing but also why. He spends time in the office after the meeting while people and equipment get moving, and then heads out with

his phone and radios.

Rabideau walks a route covering Winged Foot's East and West courses for more than two

hours every day, to check for pest and disease pressure, review clipping yields and get a feel for the player perspective. In 2023, each course supported more than 20,000 rounds.

"Listen, it's rare," Rabideau says.

"I can count on one hand the number of times that everything fires on all cylinders. We are calling an audible every day because someone doesn't show up or something happens. What we do well as superintendents is adjust and adapt."

Mornings are predictably unpredictable and management styles vary. "Pistols at dawn"

still rising every day.

As the daylight is growing short in summer, however you make it through your mornings, we hope some of the best ones are just ahead. Look up. And for the mornings that are less than ideal, Rabideau knows, "the day can only get better. If it gets better, we're moving in the right direction." GCI

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



© TOP: KYLE RAUSCH; MIDDLE: JUSTIN SUDO; BOTTOM: PATRICK MURPHY





# Are Shorter options worth it?

Offering more forward tees can help a course in myriad ways, according to the people responsible for maintaining them.

By Rick Woelfel





**F**or over a decade now, golf's movers and shakers have worked to increase active participation in the game. One approach has been to encourage golf facilities to install — and golfers to utilize — forward tee markers. The USGA and the PGA of America introduced a Tee it Forward initiative in 2011, and during the years since, clubs have placed forward tees at increasingly shorter distances, in some cases inside 5,000 yards.

But are enough golfers utilizing these tees to justify the cost in dollars and labor hours of constructing and maintaining them? The turf professionals we spoke with said, “yes.”

**Josh Saunders** is director of golf course operations at Lancaster Country Club in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which features six sets of tees. The club will host its second U.S. Women's Open next year after previously hosting the event in 2015.

A recently completed \$2.1 million renovation to the **William Flynn** design included the installation of new forward silver tees on seven holes, enabling play from 4,588 yards. The new configuration is rated for men and women. A third nine, designed by **Brian Silva**, also has silver tees that are rated for both genders.

“I wanted to have forward tees on every hole,” Saunders says. “When I started,” — his first full season at the club was 2020 — “we had seven holes with the forward tees actually in the

fairway, so they didn't have their own identity. I didn't like that they were in the fairways. They didn't have level lies, it wasn't a level tee box, and they didn't have their own identity. You didn't have a true tee box to play off of. So, one of the biggest things in our renovation was we built new forward tees on all seven of those holes to where the markers would now have their own presentation and their own tee boxes.”

Saunders says the benefits of having tees at that distance are worth the effort to maintain them. He notes the forward markers have enticed members to continue playing golf when they otherwise might have set their clubs aside.

“This is not an easy golf course,” he points out. “It is a championship golf course with

14 uphill second shots. For our senior players and higher handicappers, having the ability to shave off 350 yards overall by moving up a set of tees has prolonged their ability to play and their desire to play.” **Brook Maxwell** has been director of golf course operations at Pelican Marsh Golf Club, a private club in Naples, Florida, since 2009. The present version of the golf course, a **Robert von Hagge** design, was completed in 1996. It features no fewer than seven sets of tees, all of which are rated for both men and women. In 2016, architect **Jan Bel Jan** added additional forward tees to the layout. Today, the first two sets of markers play to 4,313 and 4,992 yards with a par of 72. By contrast, the deepest set of markers is listed at 7,050 yards. The tees are differentiated not by color but by Number I through VII on the scorecard.

The club hosts around 32,000 rounds each year. Approximately 2,000 of them, or just over 6 percent, are played from Tee VII, up front. Maxwell notes that the cost and effort to maintain the forward tees is minimal.

“It cost \$50,000 and a set

of tee markers to build them,” he says. “They're not big tees at all. They don't get a whole lot of traffic, so you don't have to build them too big.”

Maxwell says it's not a matter of how many rounds are played from the forward tees, but rather who utilizes them: “The kids and people who get a little older,” he says. “Nine-hole golfers. (Forward tees) have been a real hit.”

Bel Jan, whose design practice is based in Jupiter, Florida, is one of the industry's most vociferous proponents for what she calls — and has trademarked as — scoring tees. Her interest in the subject dates back some 15 years, to the mortgage crisis of 2008, when many clubs were struggling to keep their members and stay afloat.

Bel Jan says it's important to design forward tees with care to provide golfers with not just reduced yardages but also a total strategic experience.

“It does make a difference to make sure, with the target lines, that people can play from those,” says Bel Jan, who advocates for scoring tees from about 4,000 to about 4,400 yards. “And that, especially for those with slower clubhead

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▲ Jennifer Torres



▲ Josh Saunders

speeds, there's still strategy for those folks, but for those who choose to play (from forward tees) who are skilled players, single-digit handicappers, there is still strategy for them."

**Jennifer Torres** is the superintendent at Westlake Golf and Country Club, a private club in Jackson Township, New Jersey, that is part of a residential community. The golf course features five sets of tees. The forward set, at 4,406 yards, is rated for women only, but the second set, at 5,128, is rated for men as well.

"I think my forward tees are used more than my tees that are in the back," Torres says, "and we encourage that in order to get golfers through play, in order to encourage people into the game so they feel comfortable playing."

Torres adds the forward tees don't intrude on her team's maintenance efforts. "I don't see them as any hindrance to the playability of the course or my maintenance on my side. It's pretty much routine for us. We have some more forward tees we put out that are more like family tees; they are in our fairways.

"It might require some time for our fairway guys to get (out of the line of play) when they're mowing the fairways two or three times a week depending on the time of the year, but other than that, they're getting off, moving the tees out of the way, and putting them back when they're done. There's no extra maintenance for us."

TPC San Antonio supports two championship courses, each featuring

five sets of conventional tees plus family tees. Each set is rated for both men and women. The Oaks Course, a **Greg Norman** design, is the venue for the PGA Tour's Valero Texas Open and maxes out at 7,435 yards with a par of 72. The Canyons Course, a **Pete Dye** creation, plays to a maximum of 7,106 yards and a par of 72.

Adding in the family tees — 3,807 yards on the Oaks Course and 4,247 yards on the Canyons — and the separate course ratings that allow for combination tees gives golfers a vast assortment of options. But those options don't necessarily result in more work for the maintenance team.

**Andi Meadows** is an assistant superintendent at the club, assigned to the Canyons Course.

"We have larger tee boxes that we can fit more tees on," she says. "So it's just like the same tee box really; we can just move them forward. Each tee box is a little different. Sometimes we include the blues and the greens (the third and fourth set of tees) on one tee box.

"Our family tees are in our fairways. We cut those when we cut our fairways, so it doesn't add any additional time there."

Meadows's boss is **Logan Behrens**, the superintendent at TPC San Antonio who oversees both courses under director of golf course maintenance operations **Roby Robertson**.

"Most of (the family tees) are in the fairway," Behrens says. "On par 3s, we'll put them on the forward tees. As far as maintenance, there isn't anything added other than moving the markers out of the way."

Meadows notes that a segment of the course's members are quick to take advantage of the Canyon Course's forward tees, which are set at 5,053 yards.

"We have a large group of women

out there that play, and older gentlemen as well, so, yeah, I see them, not as much, but I would say it's enough to (justify) the thought and everything that goes into cutting them."

Looking down the road, the practice of multiple tee options is likely to become increasingly prevalent as a means of bringing new golfers into the game and to allow an aging population to continue to be actively involved in the sport.

**Steve Datwyler** is the superintendent at The Golf Club at Ravenna, a private, single-owner club in Littleton, Colorado. He and his team maintain six sets of tees. Five of the six are rated for men and women, the shortest of them at 5,258 yards. The sixth, at 4,330 yards, is rated for women only.

"We're finding as our membership ages, (the forward tees are) being used more and more, especially with the flex combinations," he says.

Saunders says making the effort to maintain forward tees — at Lancaster Country Club and at any course — is an important step in "continuing the game."

"I think that's probably the best (way) to look at it," he says. "I think when you look at specifically the forward tees, that could (include golfers) from a wide realm and a wide age gap, a wide demographic of individuals from juniors to seniors to males, to women, to high handicappers, to those that may play golf three times a year but simply want to come out and play nine holes with their significant other.

"That's how I view a forward tee. It's not just to grow the game, it's to continue the game for everyone." **GCI**

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



**Numbers to know**

Forward tees in the United States

MEDIAN FORWARD TEE YARDAGE PER 18-HOLE COURSE:  
**4,952 yards**

18-HOLE COURSES WITH TEES UNDER 4,200 YARDS:  
**2,126**

18-HOLE COURSES WITH NO TEES LESS THAN 5,400 YARDS:  
**1,153**

Source: 2021 USGA study



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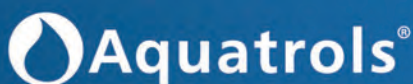
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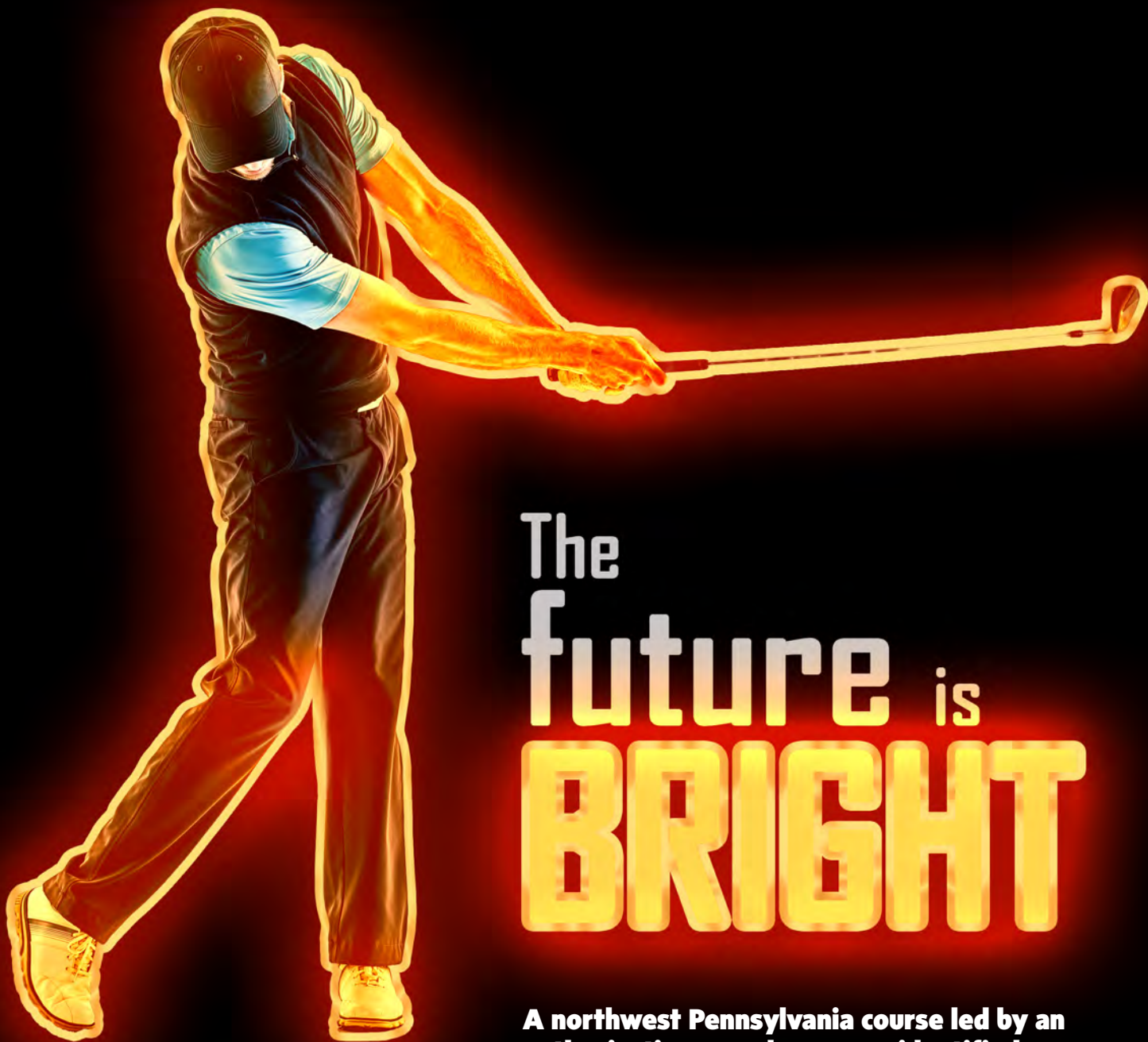


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future is  
**BRIGHT**

**A northwest Pennsylvania course led by an enthusiastic general manager identified a practical and illuminated way to increase revenue and boost community engagement.**

By **Jacob Hansen**



**W**hen a city is supportive of a golf course, good things happen. A community is developed, and courses become a part of that community and their lives. When new things are brought to the course, it can have a positive effect and be successful.

J.C. Martin Golf Course, an Erie, Pennsylvania, 9-holer opened in 1919, and used to be called Glenwood. It is a par-32 and 2,284 yards from the back tees, and a par-33 and up to 2,100 yards from the forward tees.

The course has no cart paths and no overhead lighting. Being a compact, walking-only course with no lighting created an opportunity to introduce a new idea — glow golf. The setup of the course makes it “a lot easier for us than it would be for some other courses because of what our setup is like during the day,” says director of golf learning and general manager **Ryan Bickel**.

Bickel joined the course three years ago but grew up playing at J.C. Martin. “I always say our slogan here at J.C. Martin is *Erie Golf Starts Here*, because it really does,” Bickel says. “That’s where everybody kind of cuts their teeth growing up.”

Golf didn’t attract Bickel immediately. He played football, basketball, and baseball before finding golf in his early teens. Then, during his senior year, his high school created a golf team. Bickel needed an alternative to football.

“I’m not the biggest guy in the world and my body had been taking a beating and I thought this is a good fit for me,” he says. “My younger brother was a golfer and was probably the best golfer in the family. He asked me to come out for the team. That’s where I kind of got the bug at that point. I was hooked. I really enjoyed my senior year, being able to be part of a golf team for the very first time.”

Not only does he work on the course, but he is a teacher and girls golf coach at McDowell High School.

The idea of adding glow golf came to mind while Bickel was on vacation in Myrtle Beach playing — you guessed it — golf.

“So, when we’re on vacation, golfing like we normally do, we checked out a course that was set up as a par 3,” he says, “but their golf at night there was overhead lighting, so you were hitting with kind of a lighted tee and green areas. It wasn’t a glow ball because of overhead lights.”

The course was looking for ways to raise revenue and increase opportunity. Bickel devised an idea to incorporate glow golf onto the course. He pitched the idea to **Charles Zysk**, the City of Erie’s director of public works, and assistant director of public works **A.J. Antolik**.

Like Bickel, Antolik grew up playing at J.C. Martin. Antolik met Bickel in January 2023 after restructuring golf under public works.

“We sat down, pragmatically, and we looked at the operations,” Antolik says. “What’s been successful, what hasn’t been successful, what can we do better? Where can we invest money? Where can we diversify our service, our product offering, to engage more customers? Essentially get more greens fees, build more revenue, make golf sustainable?”

Glow golf meshed with what they discussed in January. Bickel says with the shorter seasons and the weather in Erie, glow golf was one way to create additional playing opportunities. June, July, and August are the only months with average temperatures above 60 degrees. Snowfall can start in October and extend into April. Additional opportunities like glow golf are important for the course.

Not only was the city on board, but it “was very, very supportive right from Day One,” Bickel says.

Bickel began researching glow golf and the products to use. The course uses Premiere Glow for LED markers on the greens with 6½-foot lighted LED sticks. The LED stick stays in the entire time. Also on the

green are lights specifically designed for golf cups that shine up from the bottom of the cup.

The course also has 14-inch LED stakes with directional white stakes for golfers to follow, green stakes outlining the greens, and red stakes for the tee areas. “When you’re teeing off, not only do you see the flagstick and the cup, but you see the outline of the green so you can roughly make out how big the green is,” Bickel says. The flagsticks run on AA batteries, while the stakes run on non-rechargeable AG 130 batteries.

The glow ball is a Night Eagle glow ball — unique because of how it’s turned on and off: Golfer shine a smartphone camera light onto a little circle on the ball and the ball will light up. The ball travels 15 to 20 percent less than a normal ball, so clubbing up might be useful.

The equipment costs were “not quite as expensive as you would think,” Bickel says. The city invested just under \$2,000 for the nine holes. There are some additional maintenance fees such as devoting labor time to changing out batteries.

The course offers two pricing options for a round of glow golf: renting the glow ball for \$26 for nine holes, or purchasing the ball along with a round for \$29. Glow golf is open Thursdays through Saturdays and will run until the first weekend of September. When school starts, Bickel will cut back to Saturday only.

It takes about an hour to an hour and 10 minutes to set up the glow golf course. Bickel has two to three employees prepare the course, then disassemble it at the end of the night. The glow golf course is switched to an all par-3 course. The first tee time is 8:30 p.m., selling out nearly every night.



**J.C. MARTIN GOLF COURSE**  
Erie, Pennsylvania

## SPOTLIGHT



▲ Ryan Bickel, top right, has lit up J.C. Martin Golf Course in Erie, Pennsylvania, with glow golf weekends. His brightest goal? Attract new golfers and get them to stick around.

“We had 260 rounds played in our six nights,” Bickel says. “We were sold out Friday and Saturday night, both weeks. The very first Thursday, we had about 30 people play. We had just shy of 30 people the second Thursday night. So, we’ve got a good response from the community.”

Bickel adds, “It’s been a good partnership with the City of Erie and they’ve really supported it.”

Antolik receives play and financial numbers from Bickel. “He sends me the revenue numbers and we just can’t believe it,” he says. “\$2,000 a night, \$3,000 a night, \$6,000 weekends. I mean, it’s just remarkable to us what this has done. And Mayor (**Joe Schember**) bought into the idea as well and he supported public works and the changes that we wanted to proactively make in golf.”

Antolik has already observed what Bickel means to the course. “He has so many ideas and it’s refreshing to work with somebody like him where he believes in what he does,” Antolik says. “He has the city’s interests at heart. He has youth interest at heart, and he wants to grow the game. And he has great ideas, like glow golf.”

Bickel currently teaches American government at McDowell High School, the largest school district in northwest Pennsylvania, where he has taught for the past 18 years. He has coached the girls golf team for 13 years



and is “real proud of the effort that we put into that program and how it has grown through the years,” he says. “We’ve had multiple girls play college golf and we’ve been to the state final 11 times in the last 13 years.”

As a part of the course, Bickel sees kids grow up playing golf and loves it. “It’s kind of been a labor of love on the coaching side of things,” he says. “J.C. Martin has fit perfectly because this is a great course to have kids come and learn the game of golf and kind of expand their skillset.

“This is my third year, so I’ve had a lot of kids that are middle-school kids, sixth, seventh, eighth grade, that are now playing either for me or against me in the local high school scene, and it’s great to see those kids and how they progress and how we can be a small part of helping them get better.”

Introducing new ideas represents one way of keeping the course and youth vibrant at J.C. Martin. Bickel stresses the importance of bringing

new ideas to a course. “I just think sometimes we’re innovative in the technology and the equipment, but I think it’s important to be innovative in terms of the offerings that we give people,” he says. “It’s a chance to bring new people to the game of golf. They might start and get hooked on something that’s different, new, and they’re here for the novelty of the lights and they have fun. But what they might realize is that they really like golf, and we’re hopeful that not only do they come at night, but we get some of them back during the day.”

Despite working three jobs, Bickel loves what he does. His wife, **Tara**, has been very supportive and he “couldn’t do it without (her).”

“When you love something and you enjoy it,” Bickel says, “it really doesn’t feel like work.” **GCI**

*Jacob Hansen is a Kent State University senior participating in Golf Course Industry’s summer internship program.*



## NAMES INDEX

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## BREAKING THE ROUTINE

Oxford defines *routine* as a noun as “a sequence of actions regularly followed; a fixed program,” and as an adjective as “performed as part of a regular procedure rather than for a special reason.” Synonyms for *routine* include method, formula, system, regimen, customary, accustomed, typical and everyday, just to name a few.

Hopefully you have read all the great information in this issue about routines — unless your routine is to read America’s Greenkeeper first! If that is the case, then please go read all the content by our fabulous team of writers and contributors before returning to the back page.

I don’t know about you, but one of the things I find interesting and enjoyable about golf course maintenance is the routine nature of caring for a golf course. There are numerous tasks performed on a daily or near-daily basis, including changing cups, mowing or rolling greens and mowing rough. Other tasks are routinely performed certain days of the week such as mowing tees, approaches and/or fairways.

Routines often become mundane. It’s our job as golf course managers to lead and inspire our teams to perform routine tasks with enthusiasm. If we do not manage our teams wisely, their performance can decline as a result of burnout, so it’s important to ensure team members remain engaged and you avoid falling into a trap of keeping that talented operator on the same piece of equipment too many days without a break.

Despite the routine nature of golf course maintenance, it fre-

quently becomes anything but routine. Mother Nature is ultimately in control and any given day we can find ourselves leading our teams in unordinary circumstances.

Ironically, many emergency response plans require the team to follow a routine. Perhaps now is a good time to remind yourself of the importance of practicing those routines so if an emergency occurs, everyone on the team can follow the response plan in routine fashion.

Have you given any thought to yourself and your personal routines? Do you practice healthy habits or are you making poor choices? Workplace stress or anxiety can sometimes lead to poor choices, which can become habit forming. And these may even lead to additional poor choices. Be sure to take good care of yourself because your team depends on you.

Recently, my entire morning routine has been completely interrupted. My wife and I are continuing to settle into our new environment here in Lexington, Kentucky, and we are remodeling the house we purchased. I’m writing this column amid a full kitchen renovation. Our toaster is currently in the laundry room, the coffee maker is in the master bathroom (not a bad idea), and so is our kitchen table. We are currently sleeping in a spare bedroom upstairs.

Waking up each morning and coming downstairs to the current arrangement has taken some getting used to. And guess what? It has almost be-

come routine. Which can only mean we are getting close to project completion and things will once again return where they belong . . . well, maybe not the coffee maker. But again, my morning routine will become disrupted until the new routine becomes routine.

I want to wish all my fellow golf course managers the best of luck with the summer of 2023. It has been anything but routine for us in Kentucky. June was the coolest it has been in 20 years, and we went from moderate drought status to above average rainfall year-to-date in less than two weeks. But it’s that break in the routine that is refreshing and invigorating — or perhaps it’s the cool morning temperatures. Our brains are stimulated by trying to learn new things and solve new problems rather than repeating the same old steps of yesterday.

Hopefully, you are in a good routine right now and your team is firing on all cylinders. Hopefully, Mother Nature is giving you timely rains and you do not have to battle too hard. Get out there and seize the day and make your golf course better than the day before. Raise your standards, elevate team members and establish even better routines. Your members, owners, committees and boards will thank you! Golfers will, too.

And since we are improving routines, take the time to introduce something good for you and your family. They will thank you for it. In the end, your family are the ones that will be there when the golf course is not. **GC**



**MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG**, is the superintendent at Idle Hour Country Club in Lexington, Kentucky, and past president of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on Twitter @IHCCGreenkeeper.





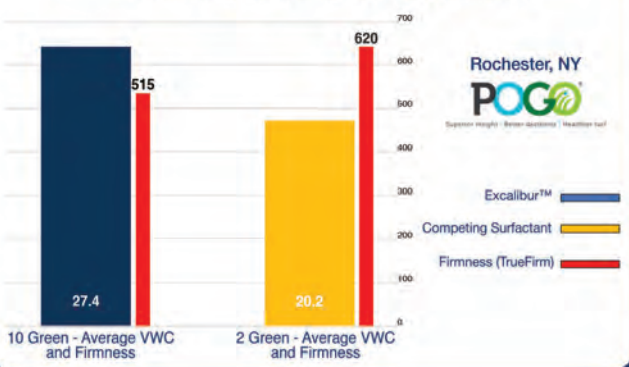
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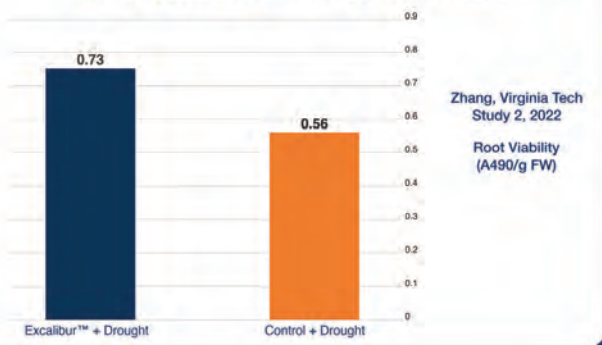
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