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**On the cover:** The Pulpit Club in Ontario, Canada.  
Photograph by Gabriella Best.

# Golf is green space

Golf courses provide recreation and escape. They also provide a perfect canvas for conservation efforts and keeping nature in full bloom in an ever-more-developed world.

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# GREEN, SPECIAL AND FILLED WITH MEANING

Instead of placing major championship venues, industry events or association presidents on the same monthly covers every year, we challenge our innovative team to identify topics resonating with readers working at golf courses of every level.

In January, we used our annual “Numbers to Know” survey to explore the expanding responsibilities of the modern golf course superintendent. In February, we profiled a beloved Pennsylvania course with a budget likely resembling the budget at your course. Last month we covered hiring. Next month we have something fun planned involving tournaments — but not the ones you see on television.

This month we’re confident we found a universal concept to showcase.

Everybody who works in the golf industry is responsible for managing green space. If you don’t view where you work as critical to the overall economic, societal and environmental well-being of your community, it’s time to find another career. No game dependent on discretionary income improves more lives and protects more green space than golf.

Ever occupy a window seat when flying over a metropolitan area? I did when cruising into coastal California for a visit to Santa Lucia Preserve (page 19). My gaze never shifted as the plane descended into San José Mineta International Airport. The only wide swaths of green space I spotted above Silicon Valley were golf courses.

Imagine the challenges if golf courses were eliminated from densely populated places. Where would people of all generations simultaneously recreate? Where would water flow during punishing storms? How much warmer would temperatures be due to thousands of acres of additional pavement? What would happen to thousands of good jobs? Stories about Bobby Jones Golf Club (page 16) and The Pulpit Club (page 24) demonstrate how golf courses help growing metropolitan areas solve problems associated with rapid development.

We turned to one of your peers, **Ron Furlong**, to reinforce why where you work matters (page 27). Sadly, many professionals who maintain golf courses view their workspaces from microlevels. Providing memorable experiences for others means focusing on the warts more than the wonders of a golf course.

It’s no different for a magazine editor. It’s always about the next issue, story, podcast, social media post, newsletter, video or web posting. It’s maddening. It’s motivating. It’s part of striving for excellence.

Furlong’s words rekindle magic many of you discovered when selecting golf course maintenance as a career. Where you work is inherently excellent and exceedingly important. I’m typing this column inside an office, under a highway bridge, in an industrial Midwest city. Editors and writers, unfortunately, don’t have relatable peers such as Furlong — the superintendent at a busy, 27-hole public facility in the Pacific Northwest — writing personal essays for a monthly magazine designed to help, inspire and motivate the publishing community.

When I need a midday reset, I drive five miles to Washington Golf Course, the largest plot of green space in a neighborhood bordering Cleveland’s industrial epicenter. Operated by Cleveland Metroparks and housing The First Tee of Cleveland, Washington is an Audubon International Certified Gold Signature Sanctuary featuring a par-29 course, driving range and practice putting green. The facility consumes 42 acres of 59-acre Washington Reservation, the most urban of the Metroparks’ 18 reservations. Wetlands frame multiple holes and signs educate golfers about the ecological importance of the green space.

We refer to Washington as *Golf Course Industry’s* home facility. We’ve spent thousands on green fees and range balls, never once regretting any of those investments. Washington excursions help invigorate our minds and tone the golf muscles. They also inspired some of the methodology used in devising the theme of this issue.

When we visit Washington, we see smoke rising from mills along the Cuyahoga River, the City of Cleveland’s skyline, affordable homes, children swinging clubs for the first time, people from all backgrounds honing their games and dedicated professionals tending to turf. We see golf as green space.

We hope you see golf as the same special thing. **GCI**



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## GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

**MISSION STATEMENT**  
*To provide an independent, innovative and inclusive voice for today’s — and tomorrow’s — golf industry professionals.*

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# NOTEBOOK

## RIVERMONT REELS

**When golfer Julie Vonn started observing the maintenance work at an Atlanta-area club, she took an interest. When she started posting about it on Instagram, everything started to click.**

By Lee Carr

Picking up golf during the pandemic, Julie “Jules” Vonn has quickly and fully embraced it. Considering she’s from Augusta, Georgia, perhaps it was just a matter of time.

In 2020, she started learning to play, set up a putting green in her Boston apartment and met her partner on a golf chat board. They now live in a townhouse overlooking the fourth hole at Rivermont Golf Club in Johns Creek, Georgia.

In addition to her passion for golf, Vonn enjoys creating content to post on Instagram (@GolfBooJules), TikTok (@GolfWithJules) and Facebook. With 14,000 followers on Instagram and more than 30,000 on TikTok, Vonn has many fans. When some of Rivermont’s regulars saw that she was posting videos of the crew at work early and a time-lapse of them covering the greens during a winter cold spell, they shared it with Mark Hoban, Rivermont’s longtime superintendent.

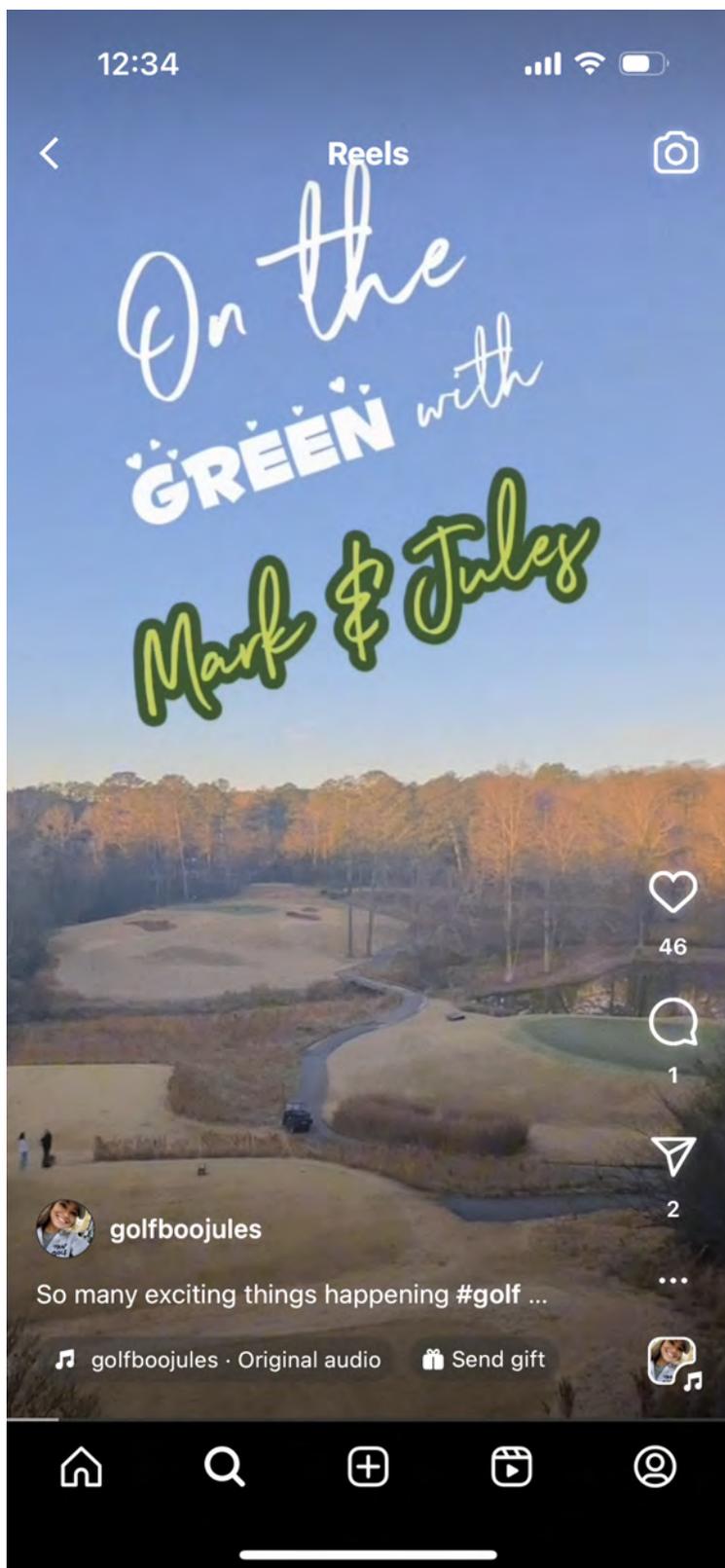
Hoban is no stranger to making videos, using them to describe maintenance prac-

tices and everything from the purpose of pollinator plots to compost creation. When Hoban discovered what Vonn was sharing, he invited her for a course tour, an idea fully supported by Rivermont owner Chris Cupit. Vonn accepted the offer.

Known for his work ethic, wisdom and sustainability efforts, Hoban has been a leader for decades. The work with Vonn is something new.

“This is a connection with the public,” Hoban says. “Our members get a peek of what is involved in managing the course. Not many people see that. Julie has the passion, talent and humor to produce next-generation high-quality content.”

“Mark and I started talking about how super excited we are and about how many great things are happening at Rivermont,” Vonn adds. “Everywhere I turn there is something new I want to learn about and share.” That’s why she got a message at 7:15 one morning when the team was headed out to ShockWave tees. And that’s why she threw on her coat and headed out to film it.



Rivermont's project list is heady. They are adding more pollinator gardens; making static compost with an in-house lactobacillus (milk bacteria) for topdressing tees and landscape work; continuing trial work with nanobubble technology; working with a new ultradwarf cultivar; and everyone would like to taste some honey from the onsite apiary come July.

"There is also some research in working with endophytes, which were bred from plants that were surviving at 140 degrees right next to a geyser at Yellowstone National Park," Hoban says. "The endophytes have done incredibly well in agriculture suffering from heat and drought stress, but no one has looked at it for C4 grasses." Rivermont has some research running for that, too.

"Living by a golf course I thought I had seen it all," Vonn says. "There is so much that happens to maintain it. I love golf and I love connecting with people. This is going to be a huge learning experience."

In addition to her social media accounts and her full-time job, Vonn's paperwork is nearly finalized for her 501(c)(3), The GBJ Foundation (thegbjfoundation.com). With the values of courage, community and development, the mission is to "transform lives through the game of golf by providing access, mentorship and resources to underprivileged youth and individuals struggling with mental health challenges." Transformative personal experiences for Vonn have encouraged her to connect with and care for others.

"The members and staff love the videos," Hoban says. "With Julie's sense of humor, they inform and entertain. Management is following her accounts and so are our members. It's very positive. Having someone take such an interest, to film, edit and make it snappy blew me away. Working with Jules makes me better. I have to plan ahead more and improve my communications. It has inspired me to give more talks and set up another field day."

Going forward, the Rivermont team will keep Vonn informed about daily operations. "We want to try to give her followers an educational and entertaining view of as many aspects of turfgrass management and tournament prep as we can,"

Hoban says. "The goal is to show people that a golf course is a good place to be. There are a lot of naysayers about what impact courses have on the environment. Let's show them what we're doing."

Hoban adds, "In life, I want to engage with people that are passionate about what they do. When that intersects with my interests, it's an extra blessing. I can't

do what Julie does well, so we are both excited. I have a story and Julie has the ability to tell it."

Their Instagram reels are titled On the Green with Mark and Jules. "I am so thankful for Rivermont and I am so excited to have Mark and Chris and the regulars support this," Vonn says. "Y'all just stay tuned. It's going to be awesome."



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# Tartan Talks 93

When **Jim Nagle** reflects on his career, 2024 should elicit strong memories.

Lancaster Country Club, a celebrated **William Flynn** design that Nagle and former partner **Ron Forse** have spent more than 20 years enhancing, will host its second U.S. Women's Open later this spring. Nagle was raised in Lancaster County,



Pennsylvania, and his affinity for the facility started as a participant in a youth swim meet at the club. "I remember standing on the blocks for the swim meet, warming up and deliberately looking over the fence to see the golf course," he recalls on the *Tartan Talks* podcast. The club, coincidentally, later moved the site of the pool as part of Nagle's and Forse's efforts to improve the golf course by reconfiguring a high-traffic part of its grounds.

Lancaster Country Club's return to the international stage is only part of

what has already been a monumental year for Nagle. The architect launched Nagle Design Works last month. The decision ended a successful 25-year run with Forse.

Why did Nagle view 2024 as the right time to take a huge career step? What did he learn from Forse? And how did somebody from the southeastern Pennsylvania countryside opt for a career in golf course architecture?

Thoughtful answers flow on the podcast episode, which can be found on the Superintendent Radio Network page of popular distribution platforms.

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## Q&A WITH ERIC REASOR, PH.D.

Southeast Research Scientist, PBI-Gordon Corporation

**Q.** PBI-Gordon has a new product that's really making a splash. Tell us about Arkon™ Herbicide Liquid.

**A.** As all of us in the professional turf management industry know, sedges and kyllingas can be a beast to control. We recognized the need for a truly innovative, truly effective new solution, and we went to work. The result is Arkon Herbicide Liquid – a liquid formulation of the PBI-Gordon proprietary active ingredient pyrimisulfan.

An HRAC (Herbicide Resistance Active Committee) Group 2 herbicide, pyrimisulfan is an acetolactate synthase (ALS) inhibitor offering selective, systemic weed control. It's labeled for control of purple, yellow, and annual nutsedge, plus annual, cockscomb, green, and false green kyllingas. It also controls path rush and 14 common broadleaf weeds, including chickweed, dollarweed, and henbit.

**Q.** How well does Arkon perform?

**A.** Excellent! PBI-Gordon worked with our university and industry partners to hold hundreds of field efficacy trials. The results are game changing.

The University of Georgia conducted greenhouse research on Arkon performance on purple and yellow nutsedge. Arkon was applied once or twice to mature nutsedge plants, and both purple and yellow nutsedge tuber counts were significantly reduced by Arkon. IN fact, purple nutsedge tuber viability was reduced by up to 99 percent.

PBI-Gordon also partnered with Rutgers University to research false green kyllinga rhizome regrowth from herbicide-treated plants. In the study, Arkon was applied once or twice to false-green kyllinga plants grown in greenhouse conditions. Rhizomes from those treated plants were harvested and replanted, and the number of aboveground shoots regrowing from the treated rhizomes was counted. The study showed Arkon had significantly reduced the number of shoots regrowing from rhizomes previously treated with herbicides.

**Q.** So the trials were extensive?

**A.** Absolutely. PBI-Gordon put years of testing into pyrimisulfan and Arkon before we launched the product, both proprietary and independent. In addition to our university part-

ners, we also partnered with more than 460 turf professionals from across the country, giving them access to Arkon before it hit the market. That demo program and the performance of Arkon blew-up the anticipation for the launch. It helped make Arkon the go-to post-emergent for nutsedge and kyllinga in 2024.

**Q.** What are some of the specs on Arkon? When can it be applied, what turf species is it labeled for, etc.?

**A.** Arkon can be applied year around – whenever weeds and turf are actively growing. It's labeled for use in all the most common warm- and cool-season turfgrasses, including Kentucky bluegrass, fine and tall fescues, perennial ryegrass, creeping bentgrass, bermudagrass, St. Augustinegrass, and more. Check the label for the entire list. And it's ideal for golf course greens, fairways, tees, roughs and aprons, as well as residential sites, parks, athletic fields, and more.

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# Renee Geyer

CANTERWOOD GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB

After 13 years filling various roles at Firestone Country Club, **Renee Geyer** headed West in search of new challenges.

Today, she is in her third full season as the head superintendent at Canterwood Golf and Country Club in Gig Harbor, Washington.

Compared to her peers, Geyer came to the turf industry later in life. The Ohio native attended Ohio State University and was planning on a career in vocal music until she decided to enroll in the two-year program at the school's Agricultural Technical Institute.

Upon graduation, she applied for a position at Firestone.

"That first summer there was one position left on the crew," she recalls. "There was one slot left and I said, 'I just want to work,' and the rest is history. A promotion after that, a second promotion after that one, and 13 beautiful, beautiful years of my life on that property."

Geyer reflected on her time at Firestone on the new episode of the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast with host **Rick Woelfel**.

"So many fond memories," she says, "and still, to this day, I talk to a lot of the guys and gals that I worked with and couldn't be more grateful. They're family — even though I'm 2,500 miles away.

"I count my blessings every day for everything I learned there, the people I met and the experience I was so fortunate to have."

Recognizing that she came into the turf industry later than many of her peers and faced a more protracted learning curve as a result, Geyer wanted to be sure she was prepared before seeking a head superintendent's position. She felt that moment had come when she was in charge of what is now the Fazio Course at Firestone and oversaw a renovation.

"That was a great learning experience," she says. "I think after that, I had that feeling of 'OK, I'm really ready now.'"

When she arrived at Canterwood in September of 2021, Geyer had to learn the agronomic nuances of her new environment. She found willing teachers on her new staff.

"Most of them have lived here their entire lives," she points out, "so, there's nothing new to them. A good example is something I call 'the torrential mist,' where the light switch

gets turned on from mid-November and it rains almost every single day. It's not like it was downpouring or thunderstorming like I was used to in Ohio. Just a torrential mist that just happens. And then about mid-May to the end of May, maybe the beginning of June, the light switch gets turned off and you don't see a drop from the sky until the light-switch change. That in itself was quite a shocker.

"My entire golf course is all *Poa*. It's in its happy place up here. Where I came from, my greens were all seeded bent, my fairways, my tees, everything was bent. The weather differences and the grass differences, and I'm realizing, 'Hey, we're maintaining greens all throughout the winter. We're spraying greens all throughout the winter.'"

Geyer says learning about and understanding the area's climate took time and required a concerted effort.

"You go through it and you learn," she says. "You grow, and you research, and you talk to people who you trust, and you can get yourself together to try and deal with those agronomic challenges.

"It's been a wild ride. But I'm so happy that I jumped at the opportunity."

Geyer says the club staff made her transition easier.

"They welcomed me with open arms," she says. "Not only my staff, but the staff in the clubhouse, and the golf shop, and the membership here. But my crew really has a lot of tenure. My foreman has been here since the grow in. The irrigation tech has been here for almost as long. My head equipment manager has at least 20 years under his belt on this property. So, there's a lot of local knowledge." **GCI**



I count my blessings every day for everything I learned at Firestone, the people I met and the experience I was so fortunate to have. To this day, I talk to a lot of the guys and gals that I worked with. They're family — even though I'm 2,500 miles away."



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# WISDOM FROM A WOMEN'S GOLF ICON

**B**efore Tiger Woods, Annika Sorenstam or Se Ri Pak, and before there was even such a thing as influencers setting trends across social media, there was **Mary Bea Porter-King** leading women and juniors to golf.

Porter-King was born in Everett, Washington, in 1949. She played four sports while attending Arizona State University. She joined the LPGA Tour after winning the 1973 qualifying school tournament and won her only tour event two years later. And then she *really* got busy.

She moved to Hawaii in 1989 and helped found the Hawaii State Junior Golf Association and currently serves as its president. She was inducted into the Hawaii Golf Hall of Fame in 2004. She captained the U.S. team for the 2019 Junior Solheim Cup and served on the USGA Executive Committee. As one of the country's most respected rules experts, she has officiated 14 U.S. Opens, 17 U.S. Women's Opens, 15 U.S. Amateurs and five Masters. She was recognized by the PGA of America in 2011 with its First Lady of Golf Award.

The National Golf Foundation cites two key forces helping to drive golf's recent boom times: women and juniors. Participation from those two groups increased in 2023 by 25 percent and 40 percent, respectively, from the previous year. There is no reference to Porter-King in

'Women and juniors have been key to golf's recent boom. Mary Bea Porter-King has been leading those folks to the game for decades.

the NGF's statistics, but her passion for junior golf has shined brightly throughout her lifetime, and her life lessons are enduring.

Here's some wisdom from Porter-King:

**"Encouragement can make all the difference. It did for me."**

Porter-King got her start in Southern California under the encouragement of **Betty Hicks**, an accomplished golfer, golf coach and teacher, aviator, and author. Hicks introduced Porter-King to some of golf's greats, including **Carol Mann**, **Kathy Whitworth** and **Mickey Wright**. As she remembers, "Betty Hicks, my first teacher at Los Coyotes Country Club in Buena Park, California, had an amazing junior program with strict rules. We needed to pass a written rules test to play on the course." She adds, "Part of me just feels that until the day I die, I'll be driven to give more young people opportunities to play golf."

**"It's the greatest game."**

Porter-King moved to Hawaii in 1989 and helped develop the Hawaii State Junior Golf Association. Using lessons she learned from Hicks and others, she prepared her juniors in a manner that every parent would approve. Preparations ranged from dress, rules, etiquette and pace of play to "how to win and how to lose, to be responsible for their own actions and results." She told *Global Golf Post's Sean Fairholm* a few years ago: "If more

people played golf in this world, I don't think there would be all these problems. The game has been so good to me, giving me friends and teaching me life lessons. I just want to see others have that same opportunity."

**"Women like golf for different reasons."**

"They play more for the company of other women and friends," Porter-King says. "Fun tournaments and teaching them the do's and don'ts are essential. Not being prepared turns women away. They want to know what to do and when to do it. They do not want to be embarrassed."

Remembering an experience at a course when she needed to rent clubs, she recalls, "It was assumed I was a beginner and needed ladies clubs and that this was my first time playing golf. When I told them I needed men's right-handed with tipped stiff shafts, they spoke to me differently."

**"There's more to life than saving par."**

During the 1988 Samaritan Turquoise Classic, Porter-King scaled a neighboring residential fence to rescue a child who was in trouble in a nearby swimming pool. The act exemplified a life that has been defined by helping others. "That little boy is 40 years old now and has four children of his own," she says proudly.

One of golf's most important challenges, if it is to sustain its positive momentum, is to continue to build on recent gains among juniors and women. Porter-King continues to do her part. **GCI**



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



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# ‘We are the green space’

With rapid development epitomizing life around a municipal golf facility, a Florida city found a way to ensure its prized plot benefits as many humans and critters as possible.

By **Guy Cipriano**

Sarasota barely makes the list of the 75 most populated cities in America’s third-most inhabited state. The Census Bureau estimates 57,376 people live in the southwest Florida city, up from 54,842 in 2020.

But in and especially around the city limits, contractors scurry between projects. Thirty-five new single-family homes here. A new hotel and convenience store there. Once a quiet enclave between Tampa and Naples, Sarasota County went from 202,251 residents dispersed across its 725 square miles in 1980 to 443,465 residents by 2020. More northerners are on their permanent way.



The City of Sarasota is nearly fully occupied for perhaps eternity, thanks to calculated long-range planning. The city, according to retired Parks & Recreation manager **Sue Martin**, must provide 10 acres of green space per 1,000 residents.

“We’re moving toward that 60,000 people, so that’s 600 acres,” says Martin, describing Sarasota’s green space dilemma while standing outside the temporary clubhouse of the reimagined Bobby Jones Golf Club. The municipal facility occupies 307 acres. The usual visuals of development—homes with screened porches, a Publix and a Starbucks, a private high school with a synthetic turf football field—surround the land. “This is more than 300 acres of our green space,” Martin adds. “If we were to do something with this, how would we make up for that with all the building going around? It works out just perfect.” When finding more green space seems implausible for a community, using golf land smarter becomes an option. Sarasota officials are confident they have found the right mix of golf and green space at Bobby Jones GC. Formerly a 45-hole facility, Bobby Jones GC features a restored 18-hole **Donald Ross** layout, a practice range that can accommodate 70 people, a 20,905-square-foot putting course and a 90-acre nature park. Those amenities opened in December 2023. A lighted, 9-hole par-3 course with adjustable routings is on the way.

By downsizing traditional golf, Sarasota has rightsized a plot mayor **Liz Alpert** affectionately calls “a giant Central Park in our city.” From hitting a quick bucket of balls on Celebration Bermudagrass surfaces to casually walking on maintained paths meandering wetlands, Bobby Jones GC provides diverse recreational options.

“I think it’s a great mix,” says Martin, who managed the previous version of Bobby Jones GC. “People who come to the nature park, might go, ‘I want to play golf there next week.’ Or people who are playing golf, might say, ‘I’m going to take my bike on the nature park.’”

A conservation easement means the land must be preserved as green space in perpetuity. Three hundred and seven acres in the middle of a bustling Florida county is worth tens of millions to developers. Sarasota officials placed the intrinsic purpose of the land above its financial value.

“We wanted to make sure that we kept this green space for this community,” Alpert says. “When you are designing a city, one of the important things is for the residents to have enough parks and green space. If you don’t have that, people start moving out because it’s not a desirable place to be.”

**TWO DAYS BEFORE** the course reopened for its first golf rounds in more than three years—Bobby Jones GC closed at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic for a reexamination of its future—superintendent **Ian Murphy** leads tours in a four-seat cart. A Tampa-area native who held various superintendent jobs at clubs in Georgia and South Carolina, Murphy returned to his native state in October 2022 to oversee his first grow in.

Fourteen months is a long time to work without seeing a golfer. Fourteen months without golfers means abundant solitude. The nature park lurks to his east as Murphy cruises the 11th fairway. At 530 yards from the back tees, which are designated using red markers, the par 5 is the longest hole on a course restored by architect **Richard Mandell**. Murphy faces 17th Street, a busy four-lane road, as he weaves between two approach bunkers designed to make golfers ponder

second-shot placement.

A 25-year industry veteran, Murphy understands his role extends beyond providing playing surfaces. His team, which includes assistant **Max Rudder**, occupies no formal role in the maintenance of the nature park. Troon-owned Indigo Sports manages Bobby Jones GC for the city. But Murphy, a Troon employee, embraces the symbiotic relationship between the course and nature park.

“Whether we’re at a resort or at a place with 65 acres, 100 acres, or somewhere like this with 300 acres, this is what we all do,” Murphy says. “We are the green space.”

Working in a city’s largest swath of green space comes with educational perks and calming scenes.

Early in his Bobby Jones GC tenure, Murphy discovered not every pink bird in Florida is a flamingo. Roseate Spoonbills, beefy pink birds with pronounced bills, inhabit the site. They have plenty of winged acquaintances above and on the Bermudagrass. The Sarasota Audubon Society identified 76 different bird species at Bobby Jones GC during a February 2024 count. “If you tell a birder about what’s here, they will say, ‘How can I get there?’” says **Jan Thornburg**, the City of Sarasota’s communications general manager.

▼ Bobby Jones Golf Club assistant superintendent Max Rudder and superintendent Ian Murphy.





## Golf is Green Space



▲ A weir next to the second hole at Bobby Jones Golf Club helps manage stormwater for the City of Sarasota.

Mammals, reptiles and amphibians share Bobby Jones GC with birds and humans. Coyote sightings are common, bobcats have been spotted and Murphy says he sees “every type of squirrel imaginable.” Alligators bask along a pond between the par-3 16th hole and the drivable par-4 17th hole.

“This is home for them,” Murphy says. “North of us is 17th Street, south of us is Fruitville Road. Fruitville has to be the busiest road in the city. We are that big, massive, open green space in the middle of a city that has absolutely exploded when it comes to construction and basically everything else.”

**FOR MODERN CITIES** to thrive, they need more than recreational opportunities and animal habitats. They need places to move water.

Mandell is a golf course architect by training. His Pinehurst, North Carolina-based firm has received one of restoration’s greatest prizes 11 times: the opportunity to work on a Ross design. Born in Scotland, Ross designed more than 400 courses in the United States, including 34 in Florida. He was in his design prime when the City of Sarasota hired him in the mid-1920s.

A Ross-designed course fit into the city’s strategy to use recreation and

**Jones** in 1927.

As Mandell studied the architect’s work at Bobby Jones GC — and he received abundant time, because his involvement in the project started in 2016 — he experienced a revelation about the architect’s work on the site.

“One of the attributes I love about this course — and you don’t see it in many Ross courses — is his use of mounding,” Mandell says. “The front nine, more than any place, used to flood a lot. He utilized mounding as hazards to replace sand bunkers. He had great foresight, knowing that on a low-lying property you don’t want to put sand bunkers out here because they will just flood.”

The restored course has 55 bunkers. Bobby Jones GC’s high point is 24 feet above sea level; the low point is 12 feet. Sarasota averages 53 inches of rain annually. Punishing downpours are the norm from June through September. Thousands of miles of impervious surfaces exist in 2024 that weren’t around in the 1920s.

Mandell drifts from the second fairway during a December tour and stops at a concrete structure that will go unnoticed by many golfers. The structure is a weir, a small dam built to control upstream water levels. Water racing through a canal called Phillippi Creek

tourism to attract residents, a philosophy developed in the late 1800s by six-term, golf-loving mayor **J. Hamilton Gillespie**. Neither Ross nor Gillespie would recognize Sarasota and the surrounding areas today. The county had fewer than 13,000 residents by the end of the 1920s. Gillespie died in 1923. The Ross design debuted and was named in honor of **Bobby**

Main B, which parallels Circus Boulevard, the road supporting the course’s entrance, will enter the property via the weir and be discharged into a drainage system consisting of 20 acres of wetlands. Residents and business owners who will never use the course or nature park will benefit from the highly engineered green space.

“We have created an emergency spillway situation,” Mandell says. “Instead of Phillippi Main B flooding and discharging too much water downstream, we’re slowing it down. We’re diverting water and allowing the golf course to react as retention for major rainstorms, hurricanes, floods and things like that.”

The stormwater management system will only affect golf in extreme circumstances, because playing surfaces, especially on the front nine, which borders Circus Boulevard and Fruitville Road, were raised during the project.

“For the golfers, all this drainage means you can get out there and play a lot quicker than you used to,” Mandell adds. “When it rained before, just a little bit, especially in the summers, that front nine was waterlogged and you’re done. You’re able to get out on the golf course quicker.”

The course and nature park filter stormwater for a 5,800-acre area, according to city officials. The installation of 14½ acres of native grasses and planting of 49,000 aquatic plants, including sawgrass, fire flag and pickerel weed, mean water leaving the property will be of higher quality than what entered the course and park. Filtered water flows into Roberts Bay, an intracoastal water body between Sarasota and Siesta Key. A \$1.5 million Southwest Florida Water Management District grant and a \$487,500 grant from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection helped fund water quality parts of the project.

“They fit like gloves, golf and the environment,” Mandell says. “For anyone who thinks they don’t, they aren’t thinking about the big picture.” **GCI**



# Giving it the light touch

By **Guy Cipriano**

Sometimes stunning places are accompanied by perplexing challenges. How one California club balances conservation with providing a secluded golf experience.

**R**edwood trees live in coastal pockets stretching from central California to southern Oregon. **Kyle Butler** sees the glorious trees whenever he faces the 11th hole of The Preserve Golf Club.

Tucked inside Santa Lucia Preserve, a private 20,000-acre com-

munity defined by biodiversity near golf-centric Carmel-by-the-Sea, California, The Preserve comprises 365 of the most secluded golf acres in America's most populated and environmentally scrutinized state. The operating model — Santa Lucia Preserve is limited to 297 homesites

with 142 being completed over the past 25 years — means Butler and his team receive abundant alone time with the redwoods.

Preserving The Preserve represents an enormous responsibility. Butler has his spots where he can reflect on that duty. The 11th hole represents a favorite, because it features redwoods in the background and strategic golf in the foreground. "You're out here a lot," Butler says, "and I don't want to ever stop appreciating the environment and how beautiful it is out here. It's an

▲ The Preserve Golf Club's diverse surroundings contrast other properties in golf-rich Monterey County, California.



## Golf is Green Space

► Santa Lucia Preserve COO and Santa Lucia Community Services District general manager Forrest Arthur (left) was The Preserve's first superintendent. Kyle Butler (right) is the current superintendent.

exceptional place to call work.”

The Preserve demonstrates that not all green space and efforts to protect it are equal. Looking forward and upward reminds Butler he works somewhere surreal. Looking downward reminds him conserving what allows The Preserve to exist is a daunting task.

Santa Ana Bermudagrass covers the fairway of the 11th and the club's other 17 fairways. The Preserve is more than 2,500 miles from the equator. The club possesses seven years of agronomic data and member anecdotes proving Bermudagrass can properly grow at 2,000 feet and satisfy lofty expectations in an environment where redwoods also thrive.

From Native Americans, to horse and cattle ranchers, to West Coast elites, to ultimately developers who established the Santa Lucia Preserve as a conservation-minded community in the 1990s, subtle usage of epic land has, for centuries, guided the decisions where Butler works. “Appreciating,” “respecting,” “natural,” “share,” “protecting” “maintaining,” “enhancing,” “natural resources” and “wildlife” are among the eco-motivated terms in the community's mission statement.

Some missions must be seen to be believed and multiple scenes enthrall during the 10-mile drive from Santa Lucia Preserve's gatehouse to The Preserve Golf Club. A well-traveled visitor notices characteristics of Wyoming ranchlands, the Texas Hill Country, mountainsides bordering California's largest cities and the Pacific Northwest. Valleys dotted with hulking oaks evoke the South Carolina



Lowcountry. Nothing about the setting resembles Pebble Beach Golf Links, Cypress Point Club, Spyglass Hill Golf Course or The Preserve's other famous Pacific Coast golf neighbors.

Raised in Colorado by travel and outdoor enthusiasts, Butler first experienced The Preserve when an industry friend invited him to play the course in 2008. He was working as an assistant superintendent at nearby Carmel Valley Ranch at the time. “I thought it was the most beautiful inland golf course I had ever seen,” he says. “It all starts with the drive in. We used to call it Jurassic Park. We'd say, ‘Oh, we're going to Jurassic Park.’

The gates open up and wildlife starts coming out. I was in awe of the property and the environment up here.”

Butler joined the club's staff as an assistant superintendent in 2016. He was elevated to superintendent in 2017. Instead of scurrying between holes in a cart or a traditional golf utility vehicle, Butler traverses The Preserve in a Polaris Ranger EV off-road vehicle. Stops to gawk at natural wonders are part of a job where animal sightings can be more common

than human interactions.

The number of wildlife species (more than 300) should always exceed the number of homes at Santa Lucia Preserve. Members and employees quickly open their phones to show visitors images and videos of what they have witnessed on the property.

“I have endless pictures that I don't know what I'm going to do with because I feel like there's always something beautiful,” director of sales and marketing **Jen Anello** says. “I'll stop and see a coyote run by, a bobcat stalking its meal, deer hanging out with the turkeys, and wild boar.” One of the biggest outings on the golf calendar is called The Boar Hunt, a tribute to the pesky four-legged animals.

**ON AN EARLY** January morning, Butler parks his EV on the upper portion of the fourth fairway. The par-5 features a downhill second shot and only one home borders the fairway. A wild turkey is trotting through the yard of a modern home gently tucked beneath the right side of the hole. Quail scurrying through the native lands left of the fairway produce the only noise.

“It can be so peaceful out here,” Butler says. “You can hear the bees at times buzzing off in a bush. It's so quiet ... so quiet.”

**Forrest Arthur** can relate to what Butler experiences.

Arthur arrived at Santa Lucia Preserve on Dec. 1, 1998, as a young superintendent bracing for the first major construction effort of his ca-



We used to call it Jurassic Park. We'd say, ‘Oh, we're going to Jurassic Park.’ The gates open up and wildlife starts coming out. I was in awe of the property and the environment up here.

— Kyle Butler



## Golf is Green Space



reer. Neither a completed home nor a playable golf hole existed on the property. To temporarily evade the hustle of construction, Arthur headed to the old-growth redwoods behind the 11th hole.

“When I just needed some quiet, I would take my lunch and go to the redwood grove and sit in these majestic hundreds-of-years-old redwoods,” Arthur says. “It was peaceful and tranquil. It’s cathedral-like.”

Designed by **Tom Fazio** and built by Wadsworth Golf Construction Company, The Preserve was completed during a tight window in 1999, because managing partner **Tom Gray** wanted the opening to coincide with the 2000 U.S. Open at Pebble Beach. Back then, according to Arthur, Monterey County only permitted golf construction from March 15 until Oct. 30. The sensitivity of Santa Lucia Preserve and its surrounding land resulted in numerous late-1990s golf construction anomalies such as installing black plastic beneath soil profiles on every green to prevent plant protectant runoff from entering streams where steelhead spawned. Fairways were sand-capped and a herringbone drainage was installed to create what Arthur calls “one big recycling center” for water entering the course.

“The Preserve was done in such a way that it was all about the environment,” he says. “This golf course back at that time was built in a very, very different way than almost any golf course that was being built in the United States.”

Arthur’s role and the environmental

complexities facing The Preserve have expanded over the past 25 years. As COO of Santa Lucia Preserve and general manager of the Santa Lucia Community Services District, Arthur works from an office inside a hidden yard where the fire department headquarters borders

structures filled with golf course maintenance equipment and supplies. No topic challenges the services district’s management team like balancing current and future water availability and demand with modern lifestyles. “We manage our own water system here, which is something I never anticipated I would be doing in a career,” says Arthur, who transitioned from golf course superintendent to a community-wide management position in 2001.

Anticipation is a major part of Santa Lucia Preserve’s water management strategy. Arthur must anticipate future home development inside a community with a rigid water allotment; Butler must anticipate weather extremes. Santa Lucia Preserve averages 26 inches of annual rainfall. The rainy season begins in October and ends in April. Precipitation is nearly non-existent during late spring, summer and early fall. Arid conditions are the summer norm. “Everything is more extreme up here than it is with golf course life on the coast,” Butler says. “The environment, the wildlife, the weather, it’s all more extreme here.”

**CONVERTING FROM COLONIAL** bentgrass to Santa Ana Bermudagrass fairways in 2016 started a series of projects conceived to methodically trim golf water usage amid extreme weather.

Rough is being constantly evaluated and native grasses are replacing ryegrass where it strategically makes sense. Changes to the playing periphery led to a reconfiguration of

the irrigation system to ensure plots previously supporting rough aren’t watered. The system allows Butler’s team to irrigate warm- and cool-season turf differently.

Bermudagrass again emerged as a water-saving solution when the club resurfaced five acres of its range. As crews performed the resurfacing project, they constructed a large basin toward the back of the range to capture additional storm water.

Captured storm water stays on property longer thanks to the installation of 1,178 floating solar panels and around 490,000 plastic hexagonal discs on two of the five retention ponds. Manufactured by Phoenix Plastics, the discs are designed to reduce evaporation. The discs are expected to prevent around three million gallons of water from evaporating from ponds while the floating solar panels, which were installed by Applied Solar Energy, will reduce energy costs. Arthur introduced the idea to The Preserve after learning how the technology helped a Northern California winery.

The Preserve used around 80 million gallons of water annually to irrigate the golf course in the mid-2000s, according to Arthur. The club used 53 million gallons on its 68 acres of irrigated golf turf in 2023.

“All of these things we are doing here are the feel-good things and kind of why I’m still here,” Arthur says. “From the early days, I loved the environmental principles of building a community and it’s not just the golf course, it’s the whole community.”

Arthur is professing his environmental admiration for The Preserve while standing by a retention pond covered with black discs. Neither the golf course nor a home is visible from the pond.

“This place isn’t about human beings,” he says. “It’s about the property. It’s about coming here and looking at something. It’s not the same as it was 100 years ago. You can’t develop something and keep it the same. It has a human touch to it, but how light that can be is the key.” **GCI**

## ACELEPRYN XTRA



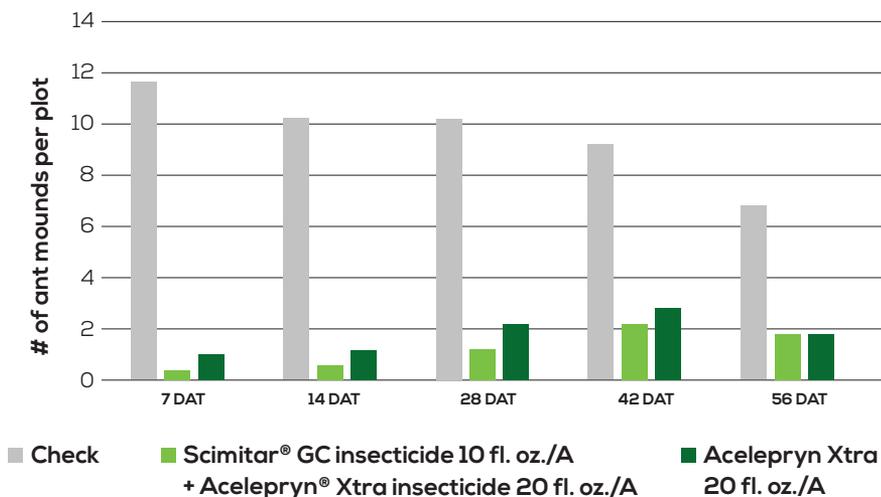
# Q&A

**Steve McDonald**, owner of Turfgrass Disease Solutions and **Lisa Beirn**, Ph.D., technical services manager for Syngenta

## 1. Compared to Acelepryn® insecticide, what additional insects can golf course superintendents expect to control with Acelepryn Xtra insecticide?

**McDonald:** In the Northeast and mid-Atlantic regions, one of the **significant benefits of Acelepryn Xtra is its excellent ant control.** Ants have increasingly become problematic in sand-based systems over the past decade or so. Currently, the leading insecticides used for annual bluegrass weevil (ABW) often have a narrower control spectrum. However, with Acelepryn Xtra, we have seen between **six to eight weeks of ant control** with significantly reduced ant mound formation. Outside of these regions, Acelepryn Xtra may result in mole cricket suppression, but the primary benefit is the extended duration of ant control.

### Efficacy against nuisance turfgrass ants



One application was made on July 14, 2023. Treatments were watered in with 0.1-inch irrigation within 24 hours. Source: Steve McDonald, Turfgrass Disease Solutions, 2023.

## 2. While Acelepryn Xtra and Acelepryn have some of the same insects on their labels, how does Acelepryn Xtra offer enhanced control of some of these insects?

**McDonald:** Acelepryn Xtra **significantly enhances chinch bug control** compared to Acelepryn, which is only labeled for suppres-

sion because of its limited activity against the pest. The active ingredient *thiamethoxam* in Acelepryn Xtra is a significant advancement in **controlling chinch bugs**, which can cause rapid and substantial damage to high-grass areas on golf courses. Superintendents have observed effective hairy chinch bug control for at least six weeks.

**Beirn:** With two active ingredients, Acelepryn Xtra provides exceptional control of white grubs. The inclusion of *thiamethoxam* **expands the window for early curative activity** against white grub larvae up to the second instar, offering potential for early curative applications in August if needed.

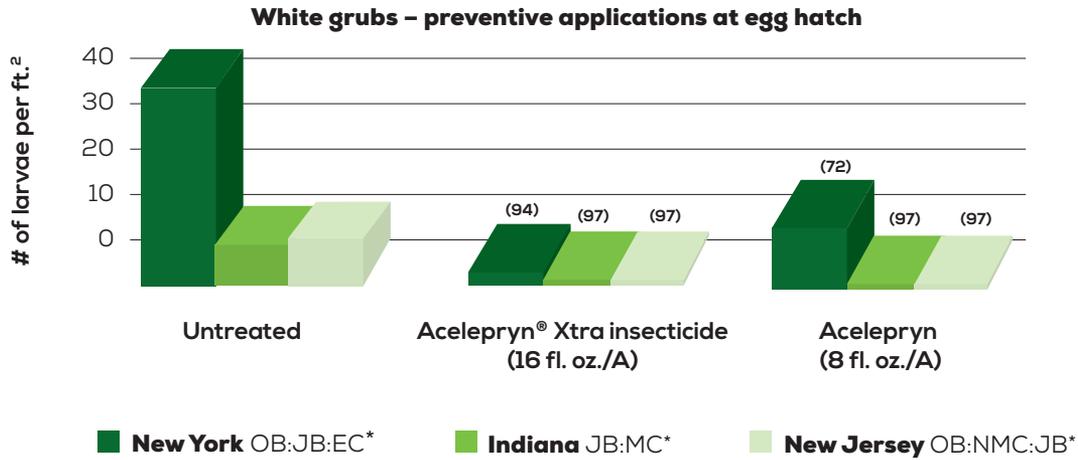
Acelepryn Xtra has demonstrated **highly effective activity against billbugs.** In areas with recurrent billbug problems, split applications can help provide enhanced control over Acelepryn alone. With its dual active ingredients, Acelepryn Xtra also shows promise in elevating control of crane flies, subject to ongoing assessments. Additionally, data suggests Acelepryn Xtra can provide up to 12 weeks of control against southern chinch bugs.

## 3. If superintendents use Acelepryn Xtra for grubs and caterpillars, will they get ABW control as well?

**Beirn:** Although Acelepryn Xtra is approved for ABW control, we continue to recommend Acelepryn for ABW control. While Acelepryn Xtra at the 20 fl. oz./A rate offers 10 fl. oz./A of *chlorantraniliprole* and 16.7 fl. oz./A of *thiamethoxam*, *thiamethoxam* is not labeled for ABW. Acelepryn Xtra can provide some control of ABW when timed correctly as part of targeted applications for white grubs and caterpillars. However, if you are primarily targeting ABW, Acelepryn at the 12 fl. oz./A rate remains the preferred choice.

## 4. How do the application windows differ between the products?

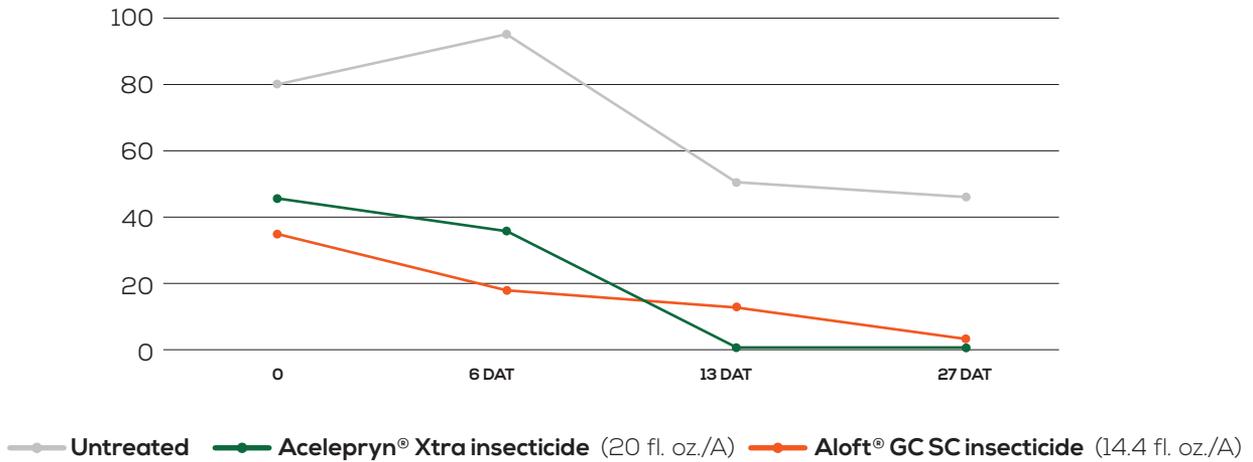
**McDonald:** For over 15 years, Acelepryn treatments have been highly effective when applied between April and May to target grubs and caterpillars for season-long control. This timing remains effective for Acelepryn Xtra. However, with the inclusion of *thiamethoxam* for early curative grub control and broader-spectrum insect control, Acelepryn Xtra applications have demonstrated excellent efficacy



While Acelepryn Xtra was applied at 16 fl. oz./A, the recommended rate of 20 fl. oz./A may result in greater control.

Source: Seaman, Richmond and Koppenhofer, New York, Indiana and New Jersey, 2020. Application dates were July 5, 2020 in New York; June 16, 2020 in Indiana; and June 24, 2020 in New Jersey. Values in parentheses indicate the percent of untreated control for each treatment at its respective location. \*OB = Oriental beetle. JB = Japanese beetle. EC = European chafer. MC = Masked chafer. NMC = Northern masked chafer.

### Southern chinch bug control in Raleigh St. Augustinegrass



Source: Rick Brandenburg, Holly Springs, North Carolina, 2019. Treatments applied once on July 26, 2019 and sprayed in 56 gallons of water per acre.

even when applied later, such as in June or July. This extended application window is advantageous as **applications made in June can control additional pests like ants and chinch bugs, which may not be as active in April and May.**

## 5. How can a superintendent effectively manage early caterpillar infestations while also targeting other pests with Acelepryn Xtra?

**Beirn:** A split application of Acelepryn Xtra can be effective for targeting early caterpillar control while addressing other pests like billbugs and white grubs. The optimal timing of this application may vary by location, but is typically at the end of May and again at the end of June. This approach can offer appropriate control of these pests. If

chinch bugs and ants are also a concern, one application in June or July is recommended.

For more information, visit [GreenCastOnline.com/AceleprynXtra](https://www.GreenCastOnline.com/AceleprynXtra). You can also easily determine which Acelepryn brand is right for your operation by visiting [GreenCastOnline.com/AceleprynBrands](https://www.GreenCastOnline.com/AceleprynBrands).

Performance assessments are based upon results or analysis of public information, field observations and/or internal Syngenta evaluations. Trials reflect treatment rates commonly recommended in the marketplace.

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# More reasons to escape

A two-course club on the fringes of an exploding metropolitan area established a modern operating model by promoting the connectedness of its land.

By **Guy  
Cipriano**

**T**he Pulpit opened in 1990. The first hole offers views of Toronto's skyline. The bustle of Canada's largest metropolitan area

seemed distant 34 years ago.

The Greater Toronto Area has developed into one of North America's most densely populated regions, sur-

passing 4 million residents in 1993, 5 million in 2005 and 6 million in 2017. Population estimates predict the GTA will surpass 7 million residents by the mid-2030s.

A horseshoe-shaped protected greenbelt prevents the GTA from sprawling into Caledon, where The Pulpit and The Paintbrush, which opened in 1993, combine to form The Pulpit Club. The Pulpit's opening hole sits 40 miles northwest of the CN Tower, the 1,815-foot-high centerpiece of the Toronto skyline.

Clubs such as The Pulpit Club exist to provide escapism. They are places where people who spend



large portions of their daily lives surrounded by pavement and glass can connect with green space. The concept of country clubs emerged in the early 20th century because the land they occupied rested comfortably away from crowded industrial hubs. The separation eroded following World War II and land formerly known as “country” is now congested in major metropolitan areas.

Longridge Partners, an investment firm founded by **Mackenzie Crawford** and **John Clark** that manages Canadian real estate holdings centered on natural features, purchased

The Pulpit Club from the Devil’s Pulpit Golf Association in 2020. The club was founded by **Chris Haney** and **Scott Abbott**, the pair responsible for creating the board game Trivial Pursuit.

The Pulpit Club’s physical assets, which include more than 450 acres at its two courses, fit what Longridge Partners seeks in real estate investments. Families, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, desire what made country clubs appealing in the early 20th century.

“One of the reasons why we invest in properties with superior natural features is that connectedness with

nature increases your environmental consciousness,” Crawford says. “With your environmental consciousness, you will have greater prioritization and greater appreciation for natural properties.”

The sale resulted in operating changes straying from established private club norms. Crawford took over as club president. The Pulpit Club no longer has committees, instead relying on the board and managers to shape the club’s future. “We just make decisions,” Crawford says. “What does management think? What does the board think? And we just act within our powers.”

**THE PULPIT CLUB** represents a modern example of how golf land in the country evolves. For starters, one of the club’s two courses, The Pulpit, isn’t viewed exclusively as golf land anymore. In Ontario, green space becomes white space in winter, yet the desire for escapism doesn’t halt when temperatures dip.

The manager most responsible for accentuating The Pulpit Club’s appeal as green space away from the city possesses a deep connection to the land. Superintendent **Rob Wright** grew up racing down hills on the first and 10th holes. Those races occurred when snow covered fairways and roughs. “I do recall snowboarding down that hill at one point and it didn’t end too well,” he jokes.

Wright also recalls playing golf and, more important, observing the maintenance of the club’s 36 holes. His father, **Ken Wright**, served as The Pulpit Club’s original superintendent. When Ken retired in 2015, Rob was prepared to lead the maintenance of two contrasting high-end courses designed by **Dr. Michael Hurdzan** and **Dana Fry**. The Pulpit is a parkland-style course where members entertain guests; The Paintbrush is an inland links where member play dominates the tee sheet.

Since Longridge Partners purchased the club, the parklike as-

pects of The Pulpit are entering the forefront, with club leaders shunning clubhouse and restaurant additions to invest in outdoor amenities. Rob’s team now maintains more than six acres of cross-country ski and showshoe trails plus a groomed toboggan run. Hiking and tractor rides are among the non-golf activities during the golf season. “We’re trying to integrate the beauty of this area and its proximity to the city,” Crawford says.

The club doesn’t have the same vibe it did throughout the 1990s and the first two decades of the 2000s. The average age of a club member has dropped by 10 years since the sale, according to Crawford, who touts removing a rigid dress code as one of his group’s bold moves. A reputation as an outdoor escape separates The Pulpit Club from other facilities in the competitive GTA private club market.

“We said what we probably could win at is being this destination for outdoor enthusiasts where you prioritize time spent outdoors and time spent with others,” Crawford says. “We can offer them more than golf while still offering excellent golf. That’s what we have definitely proved.”

Rob considers the evolution a major positive for the club and his team. “By having a vision and welcoming

## Golf is Green Space





## Golf is Green Space

not just golfers and golf enthusiasts but outdoor enthusiasts, bringing in family and kids, that's really the backbone to golf and that's how it's going to keep living and growing," he says.

Preparing and polishing landscapes for non-golf activities fits the superintendent ethos, which Rob Wright describes as "we're always innovators, we always like designing new things, we're never one to take the foot off the gas and stop."

Sharing The Pulpit's and the region's winter outdoor beauty with others invigorates the team Rob leads. Snowmobiling, hockey, skating and watching his children sled on the same hills he did as a child are among Rob's winter pastimes. Members of his team share similar passions.

"I'm a year-round individual," he says. "All of these things we're accustomed to doing, we're now getting to deliver it to our membership. That was an easy transition, and it's all hands on deck for us, which we are accustomed to being anyway."

**EVOLVING TO AN** outdoor-centric club produced a significant financial reward for The Pulpit Club.

Revamped membership models restocked coffers, infusing the club with more than \$15 million for infrastructure improvements, according to Crawford. Course enhancements include a completed bunker renovation and ongoing irrigation system overhaul on The Pulpit. Increased capital, Crawford adds, allows the club to reduce its environmental impact by investing in pricey equipment such as GPS-guided sprayers, hybrid mowers, electric car charging stations and an autonomous range picker.

"Something like electric car charging stations ... we don't need electric car charging stations," Crawford says. "But if we told people that we were going to be that type of club, we needed to get those stations. We didn't specifically say we were going to get them, but we said we were go-



ing to be that kind of club and that's what people signed up for — and we followed through on it."

A few endeavors that didn't require six- or seven-figure investments are further solidifying The Pulpit Club's status as an eco-motivated club while generating goodwill among the membership. The turf team identified 10 acres of non-golf green space to establish wildflower plots. The space supports 24 bee hives. Bees travel as far as three miles to pollinate at The Pulpit. The club sells locally sourced honey in the pro shop and the kitchen staff incorporates it into select menu items.

A bigger animal species creates a bigger stir at The Paintbrush. In the mid- to late-2000s, Rob, Ken and **Jayson Griffiths**, a former assistant and the current director of agronomy and grounds at The London Hunt and Country Club, determined The Paintbrush lacked two elements associated with a true links course: water-adjacent property and sheep. "We can't do one, but we knew we could do the other," Rob says.

Using sheep to help maintain wayward areas at The Paintbrush failed to resonate with the previous owners. Rob methodically and tactfully pitched the concept to Longridge Partners more for marketing than for environmental purposes. Sheep could expand the authenticity of The Paintbrush. After multiple rounds of careful pitching and plotting, Rob helped introduce a herd of sheep that graze on five acres at The Paintbrush and two acres at The Pulpit.

"The true idea wasn't to be environmentally conscious," Rob says.

"It was for aesthetics. It's what The Paintbrush is, so why not have sheep grazing off to the side like they would in Scotland or Ireland?"

Introducing sheep yielded a public relations bonanza. The club designed a black sheep logo as another option beside The Pulpit and The Paintbrush logos. "It's been the most-talked-about item," Rob says. "They can't keep it on the shelves and it's on everything from sweaters to head covers to bags." The sheep extends to event branding, with the club introducing a Black Sheep Tournament. The tournament sold out in less than five minutes last year.

The sheep are also producing unintended — and overwhelmingly positive — environmental and playability consequences.

"The areas they maintain receive no inputs from us," Rob says. "We don't fertilize them, we don't re-seed them, we don't spray anything in there, and all these areas come back rejuvenated beautifully. The fescue in these areas is wispy; they are perfect. We're trying to figure out ways to how we can expand this."

A year before his team introduced sheep to the club, Rob observed a less-domesticated animal scene on The Pulpit's eighth fairway that epitomizes golf's value as green space. First, Rob noticed a pack of coyote pups roaming the fairway. Then he saw the mother trailing her offspring.

"Watching them play makes you stop, look at it and realize this is a special place," Rob says. "Being in nature and observing that wouldn't happen if these green spaces weren't real." **GCI**



As cities and urban areas continue to grow and literally push their way methodically into what used to be rural areas, the green spaces we are left with become more and more important to all of us.

Although the term green space seems rather broadly (and often incorrectly) defined, we are essentially talking about publicly accessible green areas, an environment consisting of natural vegetation, grass, plants or trees within those growing urban areas. They are retreats for people wanting to escape for an afternoon. Or maybe just a lunch break. Or a day. Or even a weekend. It's about people wanting to find some semblance of nature within their urban confines.

But as urban areas continue their unrelenting growth, those green spaces become increasingly vital to us.

Green spaces can be constructed, managed areas, such as urban parks, trails and campgrounds, or they can be areas with minimal or no management, such as woods or nature preserves.

They can also be golf courses.

Golf offers a unique intrusion into the artificial, paved urban worlds we have created. Parks, cemeteries and golf courses tend to be the greenest of green spaces in these urban settings. The existence of a golf course in the middle of a city or a densely populated urban area is inviting to most people. We are drawn to the green, to the openness, to the entire recreational aspect of the golf course. Even non-golfers feel the pull of the green space. You can enjoy it without even utilizing it, like when you take a drive along a coast and you can appreciate a beach without stepping onto the sand. Sometimes the visual of the green space can be just as rejuvenating as running barefoot through the grass.

For many superintendents, realizing and appreciating their green space is not something we always do. It can get lost or forgotten in the



## Underappreciated and overly important

Superintendent **Ron Furlong** affectionately reflects on the green space his team manages and makes the case for why those working in the industry must savor their surroundings more.

daily bustle. I think the most we ever appreciate anything is the first few times we experience it.

I'm in my 23rd year as superintendent at my particular green space — Avalon Golf Links in Burlington, Washington — and I know firsthand I have not appreciated the beauty and tranquility of this location as much in later years as I did those first few.

But I'm working on that. You know the old expression, "Stop and

smell the roses?" That's a real thing we need to be doing. Stop. Look at them. Smell them. Touch them. Take them in. Maybe it's just me getting older, but I am beginning to again appreciate my workspace like I did those first couple years here.

Avalon, where I have been superintendent since 2002, is fortunate to have no houses or businesses anywhere surrounding the golf course. Wooded areas, open fields and a horse



## Golf is Green Space

ranch border the property. We are also nearly a mile off the turn-in road. Feeling secluded is definitely the vibe one gets when heading up our three-quarters-of-a-mile private road.

Driving to our clubhouse, you actually feel like you've left the hustle and have entered somewhat of a green haven. As mentioned, the course was built on a hill, which looks down on the scenic Skagit Valley and the Cascade Mountain range to the east. On a clear day, one can see the Olympic range when setting one's gaze out past the horse ranch to the west.

Although the 27-hole golf course comprises about 125 acres of managed green space, the actual property owned by the Hass family is 235 acres. That extra 110 acres is primarily untouched woods consisting of

alder, birch, cedar, fir and poplars.

In the more than two decades I've been here, we've had occasional cougar and bobcat sightings, to go along with the more common sightings of deer, coyotes, fox, beavers, herons, owls, geese and ducks. It's commonplace to spot soaring bald eagles and hawks hunting silently above the property, wings spread.

But, of course, even courses that are surrounded by houses, or roads, or businesses can also be havens of green space. Perhaps even more so.

Before I started working at Avalon, I was an assistant superintendent at a private club in Everett, Washington, just north of Seattle, which is certainly much more urban and densely populated than Avalon. Like many, many golf courses, Everett Golf and

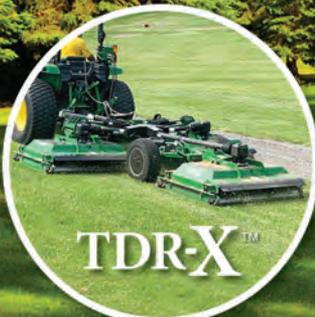
Country Club is literally surrounded on all four sides by either houses, businesses or pavement.

The appeal of green space in that tight urban area is no doubt even greater than my current space here up north. When Everett Golf and Country Club was built more than 100 years ago, the original members of the private club planted Douglas fir saplings completely around the outer edge of the roughly 100-acre rectangular property. Today those firs are at least 120 to 130 feet tall and tower above everything around them. That rectangular green space stands out in Everett from miles away. It draws you to it.

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urban spread stopping or even slowing, it's vital that those in charge of managing these all-important green spaces take care of them. We are stewards. Temporary stewards, of course, but nonetheless stewards. If we don't protect these green spaces, who will?

Part of every superintendent's job should be to not only be aware of the green space they have been entrusted with, but to do whatever they can to protect it. Replanting trees. Keeping buffers around water features. Providing no-mow zones. Using plant protectants wisely and, as we go forward, doing our best to use less of them.

Green spaces can do so much for us. All we have to do is provide them. They take care of all the good stuff themselves. They are rather self-sufficient. They just need a little TLC.

Here's a taste of the things green space can do for we humans:

- Provide habitat for animals, insects and other organisms
- Absorb pollutants (trees especially)
- Give off oxygen (again, trees especially)
- Absorb rainwater as well as prevent soil erosion
- Reduce noise pollution (like that wall of Douglas firs at Everett Golf and Country Club) when planted as a shield or a barrier
- Provide a recreational space
- Can be used for growing food
- Raise property values
- Be aesthetically pleasing
- Offer a community gathering place
- Cool us in the summer, heat us in the winter

- Introduce the natural world into the urban environment. This is especially important in densely populated inner cities, where encounters with nature, for many, are not as easy to achieve.

This list could go on for some time. The importance of our little green environments cannot be understated. If you are a superintendent, an assistant superintendent or a crew member on a golf course maintenance team, you are, in some capacity, a steward of your particular green space.

Protect it. Enjoy it. Appreciate it. Seems simple enough. **GCI**

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

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# Evaluating conservation easements

By **Larry Hirsh**

An effective tool exists for restricting future development of golf land. What is economically and legally feasible? And what are some potential pitfalls?

Open space conservation easements on golf courses have been a source of considerable debate for some time.

Conservation easements are interests in real estate that restrict the future development of property while preserving the land and its resources in perpetuity. It is a legal vehicle for monetizing the preservation of

open space that can, if all the ducks are in a row, be an opportunity for golf courses to continue operations and be paid for the incremental value sacrificed by not alternatively developing the land.

Golf course properties are often an excellent opportunity for conservation easements, in many cases legitimately. However, when the highest and best

use, sometimes, at least a partially subjective analysis, is fabricated as it is in some cases, a donation can be made to seem more than it really is. Both property owners and appraisers had better follow the rules. The Internal Revenue Service can make your life miserable, even if you don't try to fabricate a larger-than-allowable deduction.

Back in 2016, I read with great disappointment an article in the *Wall Street Journal* about a conservation easement denied by Federal Tax Court for St. James, a golf property in North Carolina. Having experience with these cases and seeing first-hand the havoc the IRS can bring, I question not the science of “native vegetation and wildlife” or the difference between “fairways and bird flyways,” but rather the fairness of the IRS denying deductions for clear reductions in property value as a result of sacrificing development rights. While there is no doubt that abuses have occurred, it is equally clear that preserving open space is a common goal, and that some form of compensation is appropriate.



Many golf courses and clubs sit on sites that could most certainly be put to “higher and better use.” Accordingly, in order to preserve these courses as open space, one option to make it economically feasible to do so is the granting of a conservation easement. I’m not sure the characterization of the benefit as a “tax break” is appropriate given that the owner is sacrificing significant flexibility and both present and future value by giving up his or her development rights. While there are potential alternatives for clubs to monetize the preservation of open space through local, regional and state programs, the conservation easement is perpetual and doesn’t require cash payments beyond the (not insignificant) costs of establishing the easement. In today’s golf economy, that’s a biggie.

The St. James case dealt a blow to the conservation community as well as the golf industry because it further squeezes the economic profile by taking away an option as golf courses struggle for profitability. As with most issues, this one will probably become politicized. However, I don’t see this as a Democratic/liberal or a Republican/conservative issue, but rather an issue of whether open space is important and how to incentivize potential donors of easements (especially in the golf industry) and make it affordable to do so. From my perspective, science is less important from an economic perspective. It simply comes down to the difference in market value between a site that can become a 400-unit housing development and one that remains a golf course. With many golf course properties trading for 1+/- times gross revenue, the owner is potentially devaluing the property by a significant amount.

It’s no secret that former President **Donald Trump** owns several golf course properties. One garnering particular attention relating to conservation easements is the Trump National Golf Club in Rancho Palos Verdes, California. Trump purchased the property in 2002 and planned luxury

housing adjacent to the course. A major obstacle to Trump’s plans occurred when city geologists denied clearance for development of 16 homes because of unstable soil underlying the course. After eight years of litigation, in 2014, the development plan was scrapped and Trump sought — and secured — an open space conservation easement on the site (11½ acres), which would allow him to continue using it as a practice area for the club. The resulting income tax deduction was reportedly \$25 million.

All that seems legit, right? There’s one catch. In order to benefit from donating a conservation easement, there has to be value *before* the donation that isn’t there *after* the donation. This method of valuation is known as the “Before and After” method of valuing an easement. The “highest and best” use of property must be a use that is reasonably probable in the foreseeable near future, though it need not be the current use or an intended use of the property. Highest and best use is that which meets the following four tests:

1. Physically possible
2. Legally permissible (zoning or restrictive covenants)
3. Financially feasible
4. Maximally productive

Whichever use meets each and all of those four tests is the property’s highest and best use. When the highest and best use changes, so does the value.

While Trump, his lawyers and appraisers apparently claim that the highest and best use went from being developed with 16 luxury homes to remaining as a golf practice facility, the question is whether those homes could ever really be developed. Without approvals, and with a questionable likelihood of getting those approvals, the highest and best use of the property is uncertain. Now, since I haven’t seen the appraisals and don’t know if the property’s highest and best use would’ve been for development were it not for the instability, or if the instability could

have been corrected for a cost and time period making the development feasible, I can’t be sure this is the case. I’m not opining on whether it was or wasn’t.

What this brings to light is the issue of highest and best use in conservation easements. You have to give up something to get the deduction. If the property could not have been approved for the “before” use, the highest and best use would’ve been the “after” use to begin with. Thus, there’d be nothing to “donate” and no right to a deduction. Qualified appraisers are (or should be) well-trained in the analysis of highest and best use.

Highest and best use is generally defined as “*that use which nets the property the highest present value.*” The four tests are quite logical and the process pretty straightforward. Unfortunately, there are investors — and appraisers willing to please them — who seek a “free lunch.” As a supporter of the theory of conservation easements, and a big fan of their use on golf course properties, I think it’s great that some golf courses can remain as golf courses in perpetuity even as real estate values evolve. However, as an appraiser dedicated to objective valuations with high levels of integrity, I support doing them the right way.

In 2020, a lawyer friend sent me the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decision in the case of Champions Retreat Golf Founders, LLC, Riverwood Land, LLC, Tax Matters Partner (CHAMPIONS) v. Commissioner of IRS (IRS). I’m no lawyer, but this decision seems significant for golf facilities seeking to benefit from the conservation easement process.

In short, a conservation easement, if placed on a property that could be otherwise developed and donated to an appropriately qualified third-party trust can provide income tax benefits to the donor in return for the amount of value lost by relinquishing those development rights. In this case, “*The appellant*



## Golf is Green Space

taxpayer claimed a charitable deduction for donating a conservation easement over property that included a private golf course and undeveloped land. The Commissioner of Internal Revenue disallowed the deduction, and the Tax Court upheld the decision. The deduction was proper if the donation was made for ‘the protection of a relatively natural habitat of fish, wildlife, or plants, or similar ecosystem,’ or was made for ‘the preservation of open space ... for the scenic enjoyment of the general public.’ I.R.C.”

What is particularly significant in this case is that the Appeals Court clearly viewed golf courses in a more favorable light (as compared to the IRS and Tax Court) with respect to the definition of a “natural habitat,” a key component of conservation easements, and reversed the Tax Court, in favor of the appellant. Reportedly, this is the first time that an Appellate Court has reversed the Tax Court on what constitutes the preservation of a “Natural Habitat,” a key element of conservation easement purposes and attributes. The Tax Court had rejected CHAMPIONS’ biologist expert testimony regarding threatened or endangered species of birds despite documenting more than 60 different species because:

- The names were not found on all the lists published for such species and they were located outside the boundaries of the golf course which comprised about 70 percent of the conservation easement property, and;
- The birds had to be seen by both the taxpayer’s experts even if the birds were also seen by the Commissioner’s expert in order to qualify.

The appeals court found otherwise. Preservation of significant vegetation is a key component for qualifying as a conservation easement and the CHAMPIONS property is home to the dense flower knotweed. The Tax Court had rejected the expert testimony regarding the importance of

preserving this plant, opting instead to conclude that commonly used chemicals for golf course maintenance would destroy it. The 11th Circuit Opinion observes that not only would development of the property destroy this species, but also that the recipient of the easement (the trust) had the right, under the easement to restrict or stop chemical use that would damage or destroy the plant.

Scenic enjoyment of a property for the public is also a legitimate element in assessing the bona fides of a conservation easement. The property is situated on the Savannah River, and on the opposite bank is a national forest. Someone kayaking on the Savannah River and the Little River, which runs through the easement, could see the site and that would be one of the attractions of kayaking on those waterways. The Tax Court, as it was in many cases before was so focused on the site’s use as a golf course making it seriously doubt whether the land was donated for “the protection of a relatively natural habitat of fish, wildlife, or plants, or similar ecosystem,” or for “the preservation of open space ... for the scenic enjoyment of the general public (that) will yield a significant public benefit.” The Appeals Court clearly cut through that prejudice, noting that, without the golf course, the deduction would have been allowed by the tax court. The Appeals Court approved the tax deduction despite less than 30 percent of the property containing the “Natural Habitat,” and the Scenic open space area covering a small portion of the 436-acre site.

Of particular interest to golf courses is that, “What matters under the Code and regulation is not so much whether **all the land** is natural, but whether the **habitat** is natural. Indeed, the regulation says it is **not disqualifying that the land has been altered**, so long as ‘the fish, wildlife, or plants continue to exist there in a relatively natural state.’ 26 C.F.R. § 1.170A-14(d)(3)(i). The commissioner’s expert noted nothing unnatural about these birds’ existence; they apparently

find the habitat quite suitable.”

This case should make it easier for golf course owners to donate conservation easements involving golf courses. There will continue to be the requirement that the highest and best use of the property be both legitimate and supported for an alternative use.

Even with the economic fortunes of golf courses having improved during the COVID-19 era, they still represent an inefficient use of land, and the current housing shortage that exists will continue to make golf course sites targets for residential developers — probably at higher prices than the golf facility or club can command in many cases. Thus, conservation easements and their attendant tax benefits can still be a much more viable options for those owners who seek to continue golf operations and preserve open space. The concept of open space preservation is one that often arises in conversation with my clients. Given the intense scrutiny from the IRS, substantial risk of being targeted, and cost of establishing conservation easements, I sometimes counsel them to seek alternatives, if available. Sometimes, there are state, regional and local programs available for funding the preservation of open space to consider. This may seem like the IRS is taking away rights, but with their unlimited resources and substantial powers, even if the taxpayer wins, he loses, after all the costs and time fighting them are added up. It’s unfortunate, but it may be the best business decision unless the benefit is significant. All of us in the golf industry support the concept of preserving open space, especially golf courses. Conservation easements are one tool to make it economically feasible to avoid development. However, it is not without challenges. **GCI**

Larry Hirsh is the president of Golf Property Analysts and has executed assignments on more than 3,000 courses in the United States and Canada. He is a certified general appraiser, licensed real estate broker and author.

# THE CHEMISTRY OF GREATNESS

*John Jeffreys has only had two employers – the tiny Wilmar GC when he was right out of school and then a place called Pinehurst Resort. He took over the famed No. 2 course in 2014 after they successfully did the seemingly impossible: hosting back-to-back men's and women's U.S. Open Championships. A decade later we talked with him about those early days, the amazing 10 years that have gone by since, and the elite chemistry that's necessary to maintain the Pinehurst standard of greatness.*

By Pat Jones

Images by John Gessner

## How has your life changed in the decade you've cared for one of the best golf courses on the planet?

We're in a constant mode of championship preparation from now until 2047. We are also building course No. 10 and hosting special events like the Adaptive Open on course No. 6 and the North/South Championship that's been at Pinehurst for 124 years now.

I tell our team members all the time that, yes, we're hosting the U.S. Open and the North/South, but we always have new guests coming to play here for the first time and they have expectations. I tell them that today is someone's U.S. Open. There are only a few places in the world where someone who loves the game can play a major championship venue. The memories that happen here just can't happen at other places.

## What are you particularly excited about for this upcoming championship?

We have a bunch of younger folks on our staff who weren't here in 2014 and...to be able to see them experience all this first-hand with fresh eyes is so great. It's challenging, but it's fun. Watching the people grow and learn is just awesome. I can't wait for them to have their championship experience. The good thing is, everyone here is dialed in and focused on the same goal.

## Who's been your G.O.A.T. in the turf business?

For me, the greatest of all turf are the people I get to work with every day. Not just people like Bob Farren or Kevin Robinson, but all the other superintendents who work here as well as folks on our team who are just the best at what they do and really like family. It's actually like we have a small association of our own. We have so much knowledge right here and then in the area.

There are also a lot of G.O.A.T.s at other clubs right here in the area. We can go to lunch, and it's basically like a seminar.

## Why has it been important to you to have a partner like BASF over the years?

BASF taught us a lot about how to develop and nurture our business relationships. It was a win/win because we learned to think, "what can we do better?" It gives you a better perspective on the people you're working with. It's been a really beneficial thing in my career. I got to meet thousands of golf course superintendents and learn a ton along the way. BASF made that happen.

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## HOW HAS THE AGRONOMIC PART OF YOUR PROGRAM EVOLVED?

It's like what Ray Lewis used to say when he was with the Ravens: "I play on Sundays for free. You pay me for practicing and everything else Monday-Saturday." I feel like I grow grass for free but get paid for all the people management and finance and everything else it takes to make the fun part – growing grass – happen.

Grass doesn't change much, but the technology does. I think expectations about daily conditions have changed. In some ways, it's easier because of the tools and technologies we have. But the challenge of managing your team has become more difficult because expectations have changed in the workforce. People have changed. Mowing grass is the same.

### Why does the plant health component matter to you?

I liken plant health to a human eating right, exercising, and doing everything they can to avoid a quadruple bypass. You can have a quadruple bypass to fix your clogged arteries, or you can take care of yourself and avoid a disaster. For me, plant health is the sum of all the small things you do all the time to avoid disaster.

### What's your general program today?

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Many leaders in turfgrass research have recently retired but the next generation of talent has learned from some of the best. Better still, they have already been contributing to industry solutions for years.

By **Lee Carr**

**T**urfgrass research covers a lot of ground and is a vibrant field where every facet of turfgrass management from soil structure to plant protectant inputs to testing new cultivars is considered. Critical to the work are the superintendents who engage regularly with university researchers across the nation.

Researchers need to hear what is happening on the course and what problems need ad-

ressing. Superintendents need the academic expertise of the researchers to assist with practical problems. Businesses are the third circle in this turfgrass management Venn diagram, helping fund academe and developing products to counter challenges.

A few years ago, after decades of work in turfgrass research, **Dr. Rick Latin** and **Dr. Bruce Martin** retired from Purdue University and Clemson University, respectively.

**Dr. Nick Christians** has retired, after obtaining his doctorate in 1979 from Ohio State and then writing several books and more than 1,100 articles. During his long tenure at Iowa State University, he worked with **Dr. Adam Thoms**.

“When Dr. Christians retired, he had been here for 43 years,” says Thoms, associate professor. “We are lucky because our administration supported us, we had viable candidates and we filled the position quickly. Several schools have eliminated positions when people retire.”

With fewer students enrolling in two- and four-year turf degree programs, it can be hard to justify the expense. Many schools are trying to recover their previous enrollment numbers. Some have closed their programs. At Iowa State, enrollment is trending up and is in the mid-30s, but in the early 2000s there were more than 150 students.

“It’s an interesting dynamic,” says **Dr. Alec Kowalewski**, associate professor at Oregon State University. “There is just as much turfgrass as there has always been, but there is less interest in it—less people working in it and less people becoming educated about it.” And yet, there is so much opportunity.

“We have had reduction in undergrad interest and enrollment and retraction in faculty but at the same time really high demands for employees,” Kowalewski adds. “This has led to many academic programs pivoting to establish certificate education. They serve people actively working at a golf course instead of undergraduate students with little interest in turf management.”

Many professors working with the students who are engaged are covering a wider range of work. Thoms is the state turfgrass extension specialist, with 70 percent extension, 20 percent research and 10 percent teaching responsibilities. He covers two classes: turfgrass irrigation and sports turf management. “That’s the

way it is right now. Everyone at the university level has to do multiple things,” Thoms says.

Kowalewski agrees. “There are more people covering all three areas. I teach five classes, have extension responsibilities and run a research program.” How is it all being managed? “I rely heavily on technicians, post-docs and grad students to do the research,” Kowalewski says. “There are plenty of master’s and Ph.D. candidates. People are getting undergraduate degrees in other subjects in agriculture and shifting to turfgrass because they see the opportunity.

“We need to endow turfgrass positions at universities. An endowment makes sure that a job lasts forever. **Dr. Bruce Clark** and **Dr. Joe Vargas** are retiring and their schools are endowing those appointments to make sure they don’t disappear.”

Clark retired from Rutgers University in 2022 and was internationally recognized for his work in turf pathology, particularly his advancements in understanding and controlling summer patch, anthracnose, gray leaf spot and dollar spot. Vargas is in the Michigan Golf Hall of Fame and is retiring after more than 50 years of service to the turfgrass industry while working at Michigan State University. His work also focused on turfgrass pathology.

Kowalewski studied art and landscape design at Michigan State. After working at the research center one summer, he changed his academic direction and went on to attain his master’s and a Ph.D. in crop and soil sciences. “At Oregon State, we are concentrating on managing diseases on annual bluegrass putting greens without fungicides because that’s one of the major economic inputs and environmental concerns in this region,” Kowalewski says.

In the Northwest, most courses are established as creeping bentgrass and perennial ryegrass. “Anything that is mowed at less than three-quarters of an inch turns into

annual bluegrass because the environment is so conducive,” Kowalewski says. “The plant naturally invades.”

Every year they conduct research at about 15 courses performing nematode analysis, disease trials, insect monitoring and studying winterkill. They also host roundtable discussions with superintendents as everyone continues to be excited about and make progress with the winterkill research.

Thoms and the Iowa State team are looking at tall fescue as a fairway grass for lower-budget, lower-irrigated cool-season fairways. They’re evaluating NTEP trials and more sustainable turfgrass varieties. “We’re doing some fertility work and learning about humic acids,” Thoms says. “We’re also working with hybrid turf, which is the mixture of



## Endowing faculty positions

How does endowing a faculty position work?

A large sum of money is donated, the principal is invested, and the amount generated from the investment of that principal is used for the salary, benefits and requirements for that position. The endowment ensures that funding is always available. An example would be the **Joe Vargas** Chair in Turfgrass Pathology, which is seeking to raise \$5 million to fully endow that position.

“Since 2015, I know of four universities that no longer have faculty in turfgrass,” **Dr. Alec Kowalewski** says. “We are raising funds to endow a new turfgrass specialist position at Oregon State University.”

No one wants to see their turfgrass program disappear, and whether funds come from private donors or industry sponsors, the importance of securing these turfgrass research positions is clear. Due to their security, endowed positions often attract high-quality candidates.



▲ Ben McGraw



▲ Adam Thoms

synthetic fibers in with natural grass to improve traffic tolerance.”

Both Thoms and Kowalewski work for land-grant institutions, which helps cover their salaries. They secure grants and donations from corporate, federal or private sources to support their work and the graduate students. For instance, Kowalewski’s summer responsibilities are covered by the N.B. & Jacqueline Giustina Professorship Endowment. Thoms has great support for his in-state extension travels from his state turfgrass association, which helps in part by hosting an annual golf fundraiser for Thoms.

Kowalewski enjoys some collaboration from international sources in Canada, Scandinavian countries and Denmark, and he says “federal funding has been pretty good. We also have great research support from state, regional and national associations.”

Due to the required fundraising and the diversity of responsibilities, there is an ongoing debate that working in corporate research is comparatively easier and more lucrative. What are the differences between the corporate and academic research worlds?

**RESEARCH CHOICES**

“A lot of students see corporate jobs as ‘better jobs,’ whether it be chemical or seed companies. I don’t know why they feel that way,” Thoms says. “We have a lot of academic freedom to research what we want, within reason, where in industry the work is on a set product.”

“We have lost good faculty to industry,” Kowalewski adds. “I think the major advantages can be substantially greater pay and substantially

less bureaucracy. Many university systems are complicated by the different management protocols, training, numerous tasks and numerous people to answer to. There might be more regular hours, but I don’t think so.”

**Dr. Ben McGraw**, associate professor of turfgrass science at Pennsylvania State University, moved from agricultural research and development into academics, an opposite direction than most people.

“I left industry to enter a graduate program around the same time the tech bubble burst in California,” McGraw says. “A lot of my co-workers were laid off. I witnessed very competent people lose their jobs because of sales-driven factors.”

McGraw’s appointment is 50 per-



**Course trials**

Making space on property to host trials is a valuable and engaging way to contribute to the turfgrass research and golf maintenance industries. There are lots of opportunities for this research and you can learn more by speaking with an extension specialist or enquiring about national trials. The benefits of offering to do research on course include specific results about what is being tested. Research also generates curiosity among the staff because they can see what is happening, feel included and develop agronomic critical thinking skills. Research is a teaching platform — use the trials being performed to review, emphasize or teach plant physiology, soil science and whatever else is good for your crew. Research options are flexible, from simply making space at your property for researchers to use to being totally hands-on and involved in the data collection.

Either way, you will see results.

cent teaching, 25 percent research and 25 percent extension. He has been at Penn State since 2014. “The significant contrasts with corporate work are academic freedom, diversity in tasks, the short-term ability to make differences in research, and



working with students,” McGraw says. “Ultimately, I appreciate that I have control over my own destiny.”

There is a concern working for a corporation that if the company is sold or the market changes it can be hard to find a job, especially if someone is older. In academics, the reverse is often true. The first few years are extremely hard because you are a graduate student and then working to be published and establish yourself. Being granted tenure at most universities takes less than 10 years.

Turf students are definitely thinking about job stability, and they are showing more interest in golf due to the jobs available. Several sports turf management students were affected by being unable to do their internships during the pandemic. They transitioned to golf course maintenance—and where more people are working, more research is happening.

“Parks and recreation is seeing increasing interest,” Kowalewski says. “Many students appreciate the opportunity for a stable job with moderate pay and good benefits but not the stress of a superintendent’s job. With research, the huge opportunity with turf is sustainability—reducing inputs and making turfgrass less impactful on the environment, as well as making maintenance less expensive.”

Working with students is a huge benefit. “I love watching students

## Research snapshot: HUMICS

There is a spectrum of beliefs about how humic substances can contribute to turf health.

“There’s a million claims out there, everything from improved drought tolerance to improved rooting and increased density,” **Dr. Adam Thoms** says, “What we have seen is some improvement in rooting, especially in roots becoming more branched. With more branching comes more mass and more points for absorbing nutrients and water. That increases a plant’s efficiency.”

They have also seen a big difference in the rates from product-to-product and the amount of humics involved. More testing is necessary to understand the different products, their rates and how to achieve the best response.

## Research snapshot: HYBRID TURF

What is hybrid turf?

The idea is to create a more resistant turf by burying synthetic fibers up to eight inches in length in the soil. The fibers strengthen the turf and “hold the ground so that less soil is disturbed. When the traffic is off it the rhizomes and grass can recover quickly. This turf is popular in Europe, especially for sporting fields,” **Dr. Adam Thoms** says.

With a canopy of 10 percent fibers and 90 percent grass, the hybrid turf could have applications for golf. “We have to learn how to manage it,” Thoms adds. “Cores and topdressing aren’t possible because the fibers would be damaged and buried. We are looking at length and spacing of fibers, verticutting and fraise mowing.”

develop a growing passion for the science and finding their career,” Kowalewski says. “They invite me to their golf courses, parks and athletic fields that they are managing. They want interns and they become part of the associations. They become board members and approve funding for more research. It’s like a family and it perpetuates.”

Thoms also enjoys extension work and helping students be successful. “Even when it’s not a superintendent’s best day it’s an enjoyable visit,”

Thoms says. “The superintendent might be focused on one tiny issue but the whole property is good. What makes me feel the best about my job is that I’m helping solve a problem. I love visiting with the superintendents. I wouldn’t trade it for the world.”

It’s hard to put a price on the ful-

fillment that Kowalewski and Thoms feel. “I have received industry offers and they have not approached my current level of compensation,” McGraw says. “I am absolutely shocked by how low some of these ‘higher-level’ industry offers are. The idea that corporate compensation is better has to be one of the biggest myths. There needs to be a detailed survey on this.”

Regarding tenure and job security, McGraw says: “I don’t think getting tenure, securing funds and the other responsibilities are that daunting for most people who get a tenure track job. The same people who seek tenure don’t change much after achieving it. They love the science and they think about work all the time. The demands on the job are increasing. Funding is always going to be a challenge. Universities are cumbersome bureaucratically speaking but so are large companies. Academic research is not for everyone, but I contend that on most days, I have the best job in turfgrass.” **GCI**

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

◀ Rooting tubes from a greenhouse trial at Iowa State University.





## APRIL FACTS

April is the cruelest month, said the poet, but for superintendents it's a time of mixed blessings. It's also time to separate the April fools from the April facts. Here, my friends, are the facts, hard truths that your members, green committees, boards of directors and customers need to know.

Feel free to post this article or reuse any parts of it that you like in any forum that will help you get these April facts across.

### 1. FACT

I, the golf course superintendent, am smarter than you are when it comes to the golf course. I am a highly trained professional and the most knowledgeable person when it comes to this piece of property and its care. I appreciate your gardening and landscaping abilities, but your lawn is not a golf course, so please trust and believe my knowledge.

### 2. FACT

You can't argue with data, and your superintendent has numerous resources and tools that provide invaluable information on how to save money, prepare the course, manage nutrients, save water and more. When we explain to you what's happening on the golf course, it's based on data.

### 3. FACT

Weather is an excuse. And a good one. When a superintendent says you can't do something due to rain, frost, humidity or heat,

we're not just saying it so we can have another cup of coffee. Climate is fluctuating, and we must be more diligent than ever in monitoring what's going on and acting to protect our turfgrass and other elements of the course. So, when we say the weather isn't cooperating, it would be nice if you would.

### 4. FACT

Corollary to the above: The weather is out of our control. Which is a good thing, because if we did control the weather, you would all be working for us!

### 5. FACT

A budget is a budget. We know that you only have so much money to devote to golf course conditioning and we really do try to stick to it. How would you feel if your company allocated \$X to your division but your boss or customer demanded results that required \$Y?

### 6. FACT

Golf is a game played outdoors, and if you go head-to-head with Mother Nature, you're always going to lose. That means you need to adjust to the golf course, not vice versa, especially when it comes to sticking points for most players — green speeds, firmness, rough height, bunker conditions, etc. Learn to adjust your game to the conditions and you'll have a much better experience. Outdoors.

### 7. FACT

Unless you're playing Augusta National, don't expect your

course to play — or look — like Augusta National. I don't care how much money the club spends, how many amenities are added, or how large the maintenance crew, it will never become Augusta National. They call the Masters "a tradition unlike any other" for a reason.

### 8. FACT

You like golf carts more than we do. But we'd like them a whole lot more if you knew how, and where, to drive them. Too much cart traffic is not good for dormant, wet, dry or stressed turf. When the sign reads "Cart Path Only," they're not decorations or targets.

### 9. FACT

Good golf course personnel do not grow on trees. Trained labor costs more but is well worth it. Far more than you could ever realize.

### 10. FACT

We love trees. But we know which ones don't belong on the golf course and why.

### 11. FACT

Standing on a tee waving your arms and pointing does not make you a golf course architect. You're entitled to your opinions on course design but leave the real work to the professionals.

There are no April fools here except those who don't realize the limit of their knowledge and abilities. Please don't insult me — and embarrass yourself — by thinking you know or care more about the golf course than I do. **GCI**



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# DON'T CALL THEM

# WILD HOGS

Grub-loving javelina popped up all over social media after a viral golf course video showed off their handiwork. What do you need to know about them?

By **Matt  
LaWell**

**J**avelina are not native to Arizona. Neither is **Le Luedeker**.

Most archaeological estimates place the Grand Canyon State arrival of the hairy ungulates about 200 or 300 years ago—long before they started feasting on the state's golf turf — after they had migrated north through the desert along with warmer temperatures and favored snacks that popped up among the vegetation. Luedeker's arrival, meanwhile, is more precise. He moved west from Texas in 1973, fresh out of college, shortly after landing a position with the Arizona Game and Fish Department. He has tended to, tussled with, tackled, treated and tamed the state's wildlife, javelina included, ever since. He was supposed to retire last December, "but there were some goals I wanted to accomplish yet," he says.

Javelina and Luedeker are both Arizonans now, though the longtime wildlife manager has done his best to keep the snorters from taking up residency too close to humans. Luedeker has, over the last 51 years, wriggled into too many crawl spaces to remember, puffing up his frame to appear larger and more intimidating to creatures that do their best to do the same but defer to others who do it better. He has hollered at them, chased after them, subdued them with a dart gun, pitched small rocks in their general direction — "behavior training," he calls it, not

too dissimilar from a spanking — and squirted them with diluted ammonia. He has been bitten, but just once, on the heel of his work boot, after releasing a javelina from the jaws of a snare trap. Somehow, its four-inch, self-sharpening canine teeth did not break his skin.

And despite their residency in New Mexico, Texas, and now parts of Oklahoma, Luedeker has only once spotted a javelina outside Arizona.

“Maybe 20 years ago, I was driving west to New Mexico and happened to have one run under the car,” Luedeker says. “That was surprising.” He pauses for a couple seconds, then says, “It didn’t cause any damage to the vehicle” — a 1970 Chevrolet Blazer still parked at the house, now with more than 300,000 miles on the odometer and the original engine still under the hood — “but it was lethal for the poor, old javelina.”

Luedeker was driving south from Sedona to Scottsdale not long ago with a baby javelina in the back seat — in his state vehicle, not the Blazer. It weighed about two pounds and was probably two days old, likely abandoned by its mother in favor of a stronger birth twin. He had picked it up outside city hall and was transporting it to Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center, a rescue and rehabilitation facility that will foster it and eventually re-release it into the wild as part of a herd. All in a day’s work for Luedeker, who estimates he responds to 40 or 50 javelina calls every year — “generally because of complaints from people who are incapable of cooperating with them,” he says.

**Andy Huber** and **Emily Casey** are quite capable of cooperating with javelina — and they have for years as the director of agronomy and the assistant superintendent, respectively, at The Club at Seven Canyons in Sedona, about two hours north of Phoenix and half an hour south of Flagstaff.

They would just prefer the golf course they tend to not be ripped apart again and again by hungry javelina.

For a couple weeks last fall, Casey

became the public face — or at least the public avatar — for javelina relocation after posting a video of the herds’ handiwork all around the course on her X account. Digging for grubs and other goodies, the javelina destroyed chunks of the course.

Unfortunately for Casey, “There are javelina haters and there are javelina lovers,” says Luedeker, who has worked closely with Huber, Casey and the rest of the Seven Canyons team to relocate dozens of the 150 to 200 javelina who roam the course’s 200 acres to a more natural area of the national forest that splits the region. “And very little in between.” The javelina lovers found her video and filled the replies. “I’m not going to lie, there were definitely some tears,” Casey says. “People got pretty mean.”

More than the heaps of abuse, though, Casey was fascinated with how an animal native to such a small pocket of the country could engender such strong reactions. “All of a sudden, people from states that have probably never heard of a javelina until they looked up a picture on Google are these huge javelina advocates,” she says. “It’s their favorite animal.”

So, what exactly is a javelina? (Helpful hint: not a hog.) And will you ever have to deal with one on your golf course? (Probably not, but you will deal with some sort of creatures. Best to have the state wildlife department saved in your contacts.)

First, the basics. Javelina, or colored peccary as they are more scientifically called, are herd animals that stand about two feet tall and weigh about 40 to 60 pounds — the largest Luedeker has ever seen was a 99-pound female — and live in parts of the Southwest United States, along with Mexico and Argentina. They are not pigs, but they are distant relatives of wild pigs and, believe it or not, hippopotamuses. Most research indicates they have poor eyesight and a heightened sense of smell — they can sniff humans and animals from about 300 yards out. They will attack dogs, likely a response to coyotes attacking

them. Oh, and they can run as fast as 35 mph.

They are also attracted to plants and water — which explains their love for Seven Canyons and other golf courses — as well as garbage. “A lot of people feed them” says **Marc Hammond**, co-owner of Animal Experts, a wildlife animal control company based in Tucson, Arizona, that receives about 400 javelina calls every year. “Those people are idiots!” The more comfortable javelina become around humans, the less fear they will have and the more likely they are to bed down in a neigh-

## Creatures of a different elk

Seven Canyons assistant superintendent **Emily Casey** isn’t the only turf pro in her household dealing with desert animals: Her fiancé **Lee Jarson** is busy with herds of elk at Pine Canyon Golf Club in Flagstaff, where he is the assistant superintendent.

As many as 150 elk will roam the course, at their worst in the spring and fall when the ground is moist.

“I could easily run dogs on them and chase them with carts,” Jarson says, “but if I did that, I would have all my members up in arms, calling the golf shop, calling the wildlife department, saying we’re harassing the elk, so we have to toe the line.” The most Jarson and the rest of the team will do is walk after the elk. “We never want them running, because then they’ll tear up the course, but if you can just get them walking the other direction you can get them into National Forest land.” Jarson normally works in a group of three or four, everybody with a radio, with two people herding the elk off the course and another person protecting the green.

“We grew in two new greens from seed,” Jarson says. “We put up 10-foot-tall fences and tarped them, but the elk jumped over the fence and when they run around a three- or four-week-old green they just tear it up, hoof prints six inches deep. So, we reseeded and fixed as best we could.”

Another big issue is urine patches, often as wide as 4½ feet in diameter. Increased nitrogen will kill the turf, “so we dig out all the sand and bring in new sand for the green, and try to match it to the other green sand as best we can,” Jarson says. Elk love running about bunkers, too, but that’s not a big deal. “You scoop out the poop and you rake the bunker. We are at their mercy. We’re not on the forefront of elk patrol, and we’re not trying to do anything with the elk. We’re just trying to hang on as they tear up the course and fix up after them.”





## Hoggywood

In 1963, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum in Tucson shipped three baby javelina to Monaco after **Prince Rainier III** — who seven years earlier had married Hollywood star **Grace Kelly** — requested one. Perhaps inspired by Kelly's former line of work, the *Arizona Daily Sun* reported that the little reds were named Olivia de Javelina, Gregory Peccary, and Zsa Zsa La Boar.

borhood or on a course. Hammond recommends, "Buying bulk cayenne pepper or chili powder and putting it in areas where they're knocking your garbage over, just sprinkling it around there, spraying a towel with commercial ammonia.

"As far as things like wolf urine, that doesn't work. We tried that a long time ago."

stink sac on the meat, you can't do anything with it. They're kind of like skunk pigs."

And javelina are hunted. Arizona issues tags to hunt javelina through a lottery system, one javelina per tag, with 575 tags reserved for the area that includes Seven Canyons. "I'm like a hunting guide now!" Casey says with a laugh. The tag allows for

hunters to use handguns, archery tools or muzzle loaders — HAM, for short. (Really. HAM.) New Mexico uses a similar lottery system.

Texans hunted and ate javelina throughout the Great Depression. "If you are lucky enough to get a young gilt," **Charles Jones** wrote in the McAllen (Texas) *Daily Monitor* back in 1934, "you will have some of the choicest meat possible, equal to any cut of pork and as a varied menu, better than venison."

Casey and the Seven Canyons team don't have javelina on their menu just yet. For now, they're happy to continue what Luedeker calls "by far the biggest capture and release project we've done."

"One day we got 18 and we were **JAVELINA** continues page 49

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# PEOPLE POWER

OUT DOOR COUNTRY CLUB HAS THRIVED AFTER SUPERINTENDENT **SCOTT GINGRICH** OVERHAULED HOW HE HIRES.

By **Matt LaWell**

**P**eople are the most important part of any golf course maintenance team. *Great* people are even more important.

With that truth in mind, **Scott Gingrich** worked with management at Out Door Country Club in York, Pennsylvania, where he is starting his sixth season as superintendent, to overhaul how he hires. Instead of laying off most of his team members as winter approaches, why not reduce the overall headcount and create more year-round positions? The move was designed to reward the best on the team, provide more consistency and community in the maintenance building, and reduce the time needed to recruit and train when

the weather warms every spring.

Gingrich received the green light — and was even able to increase pay. “It’s been a huge change from ‘Let’s try to get done what we can,’ to ‘Let’s see what else we can do,’” he says.

During his first winter at Out Door, Gingrich worked alongside two assistant superintendents and a mechanic. Last winter, he worked alongside 10 full-timers. “We’re undertaking some bigger projects now,” he says. “Rebuilding some tees, probably have some bunker work this year, just continuing to improve the property.”

Gingrich still hires seasonal workers — the team topped 20 at its peak last summer — but now, “instead of adding 15 guys in season, I’m

probably looking to add three or four to the staff that I have. It’s nice not walking into March asking, ‘Am I going to have enough people to get done what I have to get done?’”

Gingrich has leaned on assistant superintendent **Troy Aldinger**, who has worked at the club for 35 years and provides institutional knowledge and historical perspective, and mechanic **Terry Jeffcoat**, who arrived two years before Gingrich and has worked in the industry for a decade and a half. “I can put together the best plan in the world,” Gingrich says, “but without them ...”

His plan over the last five seasons has included plenty of improvement, including an ambitious approach to greens recovery. The course was in “decent shape” when Gingrich arrived in 2018 after 11 years at Saucon Valley Country Club in the Lehigh Valley and two years at Llanerch Country Club just outside Philadelphia, but maintenance needed to become more sustainable. “We needed good cultural practices, improving the harmony with the trees and shade issues on the golf course.” He was also asked to reduce

*Poa annua* and increase bentgrass on the putting greens — a practice implemented to help improve the course’s sustainability because of the *Poa annua*’s susceptibility to winter injury and damage history at the course.

Gingrich has relied on SePRO’s **Cutless MEC** plant growth regulator to rein in turf not just splotched with *Poa* but devoured by it. He introduced a soil spray every two weeks throughout summers, adjusting rates depending on tournaments and other events, normally around six ounces per acre, sometimes bumping it up as high as nine ounces per acre. The results have been stunning.

“We’ve gone from three greens that were probably 70 percent *Poa* to being at least 70 percent bentgrass now,” he says. “The rest of the golf course was probably 60 to 70 percent bentgrass and now we’re 85 to 95 percent bentgrass. To be able to get those kind of results without regrassing, with our cultural practices and spending some extra money on growth regulator, is a huge cost savings to the club.”

As Gingrich has gained more comfort and consistency on greens and fairways, he has spread those cultural practices to more of the course, including six ponds that dot the property. His first season, the ponds were so covered with green algae that one “looked like you could walk across it by the end of August.” After introducing SePRO’s **SeClear** aquatic algaecide, the water was no longer a walkway and Gingrich is now focusing on maximizing those natural resources. This season, he plans to introduce SePRO’s **EutroSORB** filters to intercept soluble reactive phosphorous from a connecting stream and add SePRO’s **Clearcast** aquatic herbicide to control cattails.

“It’s pretty incredible to see how much the course has improved in four years,” Gingrich says. With more of the right people in place — and most working year-round — how much more will it evolve? ■



## BEFORE AND AFTER, 30 YEARS APART

It's easier to show than to tell. Among the many things I have learned during my decades as a golf writer, architecture enthusiast and design consultant is that you can explain things all you want to folks, but nothing comes close to visual examples as evidence that progress is possible.

Case in point, and it is a personal one, concerns my involvement since the early 1990s with the **Donald Ross**-designed Wampanoag Country Club in West Hartford, Connecticut. It's in the next town over from where I live, eight miles away. I joined it back in 1993 as a full dues-paying member because I had always wanted to be part of a home course. Also, entirely by coincidence, Wampanoag has been home since 1988 to the Donald Ross Society, a group that had formed there in response to some ill-planned renovations to the layout.

It's a lovely setting for golf, with the course unfolding in butterfly fashion so that the two returning nines fan out elegantly in a kind of circular layout from the lookout that forms the clubhouse and patio. There's a mountain in the distant background — or at least what passes for a mountain in woodland Connecticut. But the place was hopelessly over-treed, and I lost little time in making my concerns known about the need to manage the overgrowth and restore the lost character of the layout. I even wrote about it in a chapter of my 2001 design biography, "Discovering Donald Ross."

There were a few sympathizers. But most dismissed me as fanciful and thought a restoration would ruin the place and make

play too easy. This latter objection, often from mid-handicappers who struggled to break 90, struck me as particularly laughable. By the time I left the club in 2002, I was more convinced than ever that a restoration was needed. But it would take a massive shift in the membership, management and culture to get to that point.

Fast forward 30 years. New management. New vision. Some money to invest. And by then everyone was ready to talk about restoration, whether of Ross (Pinehurst No. 2, Inverness, Scioto) or other dead architects. The club had the wisdom to hire two dedicated up-and-coming designers, **Tyler Rae** and **Kyle Frantz**, and they were kind enough to ask me to help them develop a restoration plan. Construction started in August 2022, with the course shut down for nine months to endure extensive drainage work, a complete overhaul of bunkers, green expansion, tree work, altered fairway lines and three completely rebuilt putting surfaces to replace the ones that had been clumsily installed in the late 1980s.

Construction work was undertaken by **Matt Staffieri's** MAS Golf, an experienced New England contractor. Wampanoag superintendent **John Ruzsbazsky** and crew were deployed to help absorb some of the labor tasks. I helped along the way by observing, mediating and suggesting. Most of the fine shaping was left to Rae after Frantz found himself entirely occupied with other design commitments.

The work came in on budget at \$3.7 million. We ended cutting out 17 bunkers from the plan to save money and future maintenance costs.

Greens surfaces expanded by about 15 percent to 20 percent. The area of bunkering nearly doubled from 70,000 square feet to 135,000. Fairways became wider. Forward tees were moved forward by 400 yards and the back tees were pushed back an equal amount. The course plays just over 7,000 yards. Enough tree work was undertaken to allow a return to original lines of play.

The course did not get easier. It's more diverse, more interesting, more fun, more strategic. It can now play vastly differently from day to day because of enhanced hole locations and a slight variance in teeing ground positions. And if the course is too much at one set of markers, there's always room to move up to the next set. Or back, if you dare.

The membership is now booming. There's a waiting list to get in, something the club had not seen in decades. The club was also wise enough to expand Ruzsbatzky's maintenance budget to accommodate the larger playing field — though the course would benefit from additional spending in that department.

And the members? They are thrilled. The course is more complex, more intriguing, more scenic, more beautiful and more worth spending their dues to play.

Before and after. The evidence is overwhelming. **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 X at @BradleySKlein.



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



## GREENS CUPS REFURBISHMENT

**T**he golf course maintenance staff at Birmingham (Michigan) Country Club changes out its cups four times each season. The club needs 18 cups for regulation greens and nine for the practice green, meaning it uses 108 cups total per season. Refurbishing regulation aluminum cups was chosen instead of buying new ones. To make the cups look new, they were sand blasted and powder coated

inside and out. To protect the bottom of the cups from being painted, a 1/8th-inch-thick round stamped metal plate “jig,” suitable for electrostatic painting, is held in place with a 1/2-inch diameter metal rod held in place with nuts and a large washer at the bottom of the cup. Fifty reusable jigs were built so 50 cups could be painted at one time. One-hundred-eight new cups cost approximately \$3,780 vs. \$1,620

per season using refurbished cups. The sandblasting and painting cost \$15 per cup, and the hardware and metal stamping cost \$200 one time. As the cup’s flagstick hole gets larger over time, the idea is to buy only one set of cups each year to rotate with the refurbished cups. **Daniel P. Dingman**, superintendent, and **Bruce Hepner**, restoration architect, are proud of their work.

## MODIFIED BEARING PULLER

**T**his OTC Bearing Puller (\$250), for removing bearings from Toro and John Deere fairway reel rollers, model TOR238900A, available from K-Line special tools and local Toro distributors, was modified by welding it to 1 1/2-inch square tubing on either side as mounting arms and then bolting it to the workbench. The nut is protruding the edge of the workbench so the box wrench can go around and around unobstructed. The end of the fairway mower roller is heated with an oxygen acetylene torch, while the equipment manager’s other hand operates the bearing puller at the same time. Spacers are also put on the mounting bolts to raise the square tubing to accommodate larger diameter rollers. It took about 30 minutes to modify the bearing puller. Equipment manager **Ted Austin** and superintendent **Eric McCormick** of the McCall (Idaho) Golf Club, along with renovation architect **David Druzisky** are very creative together.



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



**JAVELINA** continued from page 44

so excited,” Casey says. “And then we thought about it: 18 is one herd. There are nine more herds to go.”

Javelina tend to remain in the same three- to five-mile radius their whole life — they live about a decade in the wild—but their migration patterns seem to be changing. **Jim Goetze**, a retired professor of biology and former chair of the Natural Sciences Department of Laredo College, says, “There are a couple of verified reports on them from southern Tillman and Jefferson counties” in southwest Oklahoma. “I can’t imagine that the Red River is much of a barrier to them, and I would speculate that there would be at least some small herds of peccaries in appropriate locations in Oklahoma.”

And Luedeker says they have moved as far north as the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. “Their favored habitat is thorn-scrub, interior chaparral and Sonoran desert,” he says. “What we have in the Verde Valley is a little mix of thorn-scrub and quite a bit of chapparal. What they have

found attractive is mass crops that are produced by oak trees, mostly gamble oak and also pinyon pine, which produces an edible nut for them.”

No matter where javelina wind up, keeping them away from densely populated areas will remain important. Just ask Casey.

“I’m out here legitimately wrestling pigs,” she says. “Five years ago, I wore a dress and heels to work every day. Now I wear cowboy boots, jeans and a Carhartt. There has definitely been a lot of, ‘What am I doing?’ My dad thinks I’m absolutely crazy.” **GCI**

*Matt LaWell is Golf Course Industry’s managing editor.*

**In this corner!**

Decades before 1980s professional wrestling featured a menagerie of animals — remember the defanged pythons Damien and Lucifer, Frankie the parrot, and Matilda the British bulldog? — a pro wrestler named **Cecil Lloyd Murdoch** leaned hard into his Farmer Jones gimmick: For years, he entered the ring with a javelina named Trooper. Trooper lived in a nearby barn after Murdoch retired from the industry and his wife, according to The Waxahachie *Daily Light*, preferred Trooper to the wild hog Murdoch used to travel with. Trooper didn’t oink.

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## TO MOW OR NOT TO MOW

**I** find it ironic that I am sitting at my keyboard on the Ides of March, scrolling through social media posts from the previous evening about the army of push mowers at TPC Sawgrass and the PGA Tour's Players Championship.

The PGA Tour's social media account shared a brief video of a large number of tournament volunteers push mowing rough while in formation. I admit it looked impressive, and I know that event draws as many volunteers as any major championship, including a contingent from the United Kingdom. I know they were putting the extra workforce to effective use.

Several folks (industry and non-industry) commented about whether this was a "good look" for the industry in the name of sustainability. Others came to the defense of the agronomy team. And then I attempted to enter the chat and explain that I did not think the agronomy team was under attack, folks just did not like the Tour's account making us look bad. Sound familiar?

How does this make us look bad? For starters, it's important to remember our profession is in constant battle with public perception. These battles are decades old and revolve around water usage, chemic — excuse me, plant protectant usage and now carbon emissions (more on this last one later).

The GCSAA advocates on behalf of golf course superintendents as being good stewards of the environment, and golf courses helping the environment by filtering runoff, serving as carbon sinks,

and providing wildlife habitat and valuable green space within urban landscapes. But despite all those efforts, public perception sometimes trumps reality, and the simple-minded folks just do not know what they do not know.

They see acres and acres of lush, green grass while irrigation sprinklers turn in the sun. An army of volunteers equipped with hoses ensure that lush, green playing surface continues to look its absolute best. They see more people tending to one sand bunker than work on the entire maintenance staff at their home clubs.

One wise voice in the group of disapprovers stated it best in my opinion, "just because we can doesn't mean we should." It's hard to believe there's an entire generation of young superintendents and assistants that doesn't realize 27 years ago the fairways at Congressional Country Club were walk mowed for the U.S. Open. That's right, look it up. Not to be outdone, Winged Foot walk mowed fairways that year for the PGA Championship, but you never heard about that as much as we heard about who did it first.

I don't know if there was a secret meeting or backroom deal where superintendents agreed to never go down that path again. But now that an entire generation working within the industry is unaware of things in the past, perhaps, it's necessary to have a discussion.

I typed out what I figured was a very thoughtful reply to one person questioning the motives of the group in disagree-

ment with the video. By the time I finished, the post I was attempting to reply to was removed.

What I intended to say was we are living in a world where each day we are subjected to talk about climate change, carbon emissions and sustainability. And whether you agree or disagree with these topics and their origins is irrelevant. We merely live and work within this world while others hold positions of power, authority and establish policies for us to abide. In other words, an army of gasoline-powered push mowers is not the best optic for an industry priding itself on sustainability, regardless of the situation.

It's the same argument I made on these pages a few years ago when I asked you to stop posting pictures of your early order pallets. Yes, it's great your facility has the means to provide you and your team with the tools necessary to provide healthy playing surfaces. But you do not have to show the world.

It's also ironic this conversation was sparked by the same tournament that only completed one round in 2020 before cancelling the remainder of the event in the wake of the pandemic. The same pandemic brought players back to the game of golf and provided the industry with a much-needed boost.

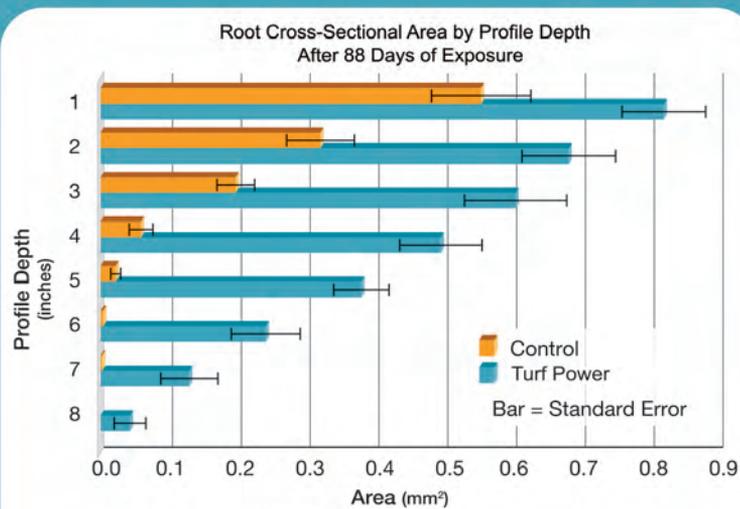
Hard to believe that four years later, we're still discussing how the public perceives us negatively and they do not know the truth, yet we somehow find a way to trip over our own feet. **GCI**



**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 X at @IHCCGreenkeeper.

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