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THE BUSINESS-MINDED SUPERINTENDENT

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CAREER HEAT CHECK

It's still humid. Your mind and body are wilting. Your crew has given more to a job than any reasonable manager can expect. Your customers and bosses continue to expect more of everything for more golfers than ever.

Tournaments. Outings. Filled tee sheets. Make the greens faster. Keep the bunkers consistent. Two inches of rain in two hours followed by three weeks of nada. Shucks, the summer help must return to school! How did the "100 Days of Hell" suddenly become the "Four Months of Fright?"

A few friends have bolted for other jobs. A few others left the industry. They might now get an extended summer vacation. The vitality of turf mowed at .110 inches won't be dictating their Labor Day weekend.

Their lives now seem awesome. It has to be that way, because you noticed the fun photos they posted on social media over the weekend. You think your life can become equally awesome if you leave this job or this industry. The cons of staying the course through the summer to maintain a golf course suddenly appear to outweigh the pros — by a wide margin.

Social media skews reality. Leaving a job in its toughest moment might yield long-term regret.

Like turf, air and car engines, careers need heat checks. When best to conduct one represents a gigantic question.

Earlier this summer, an industry confidant sent me a text about the abundance of clubs losing assistants in the middle of summer.

Follow-up text from him: "Common theme: between member-guests and Fourth of July — no time off."

Me: "Where are these assistants going? Other clubs? Or leaving the maintenance side of the industry?" Him: "Both."

The increased frequency of peak-season job moves, especially in cool-weather climates, represents a shift within the industry and raises numerous questions.

Have summers become more physically and mentally taxing? Are supervisors still expecting key employees to work 10, 20 or 30 days in a row? Are crews still so short-staffed where key employees need to work 10, 20 or 30 days in a row to produce the product customers expect? Is September the new August? Would greens really fail to meet expectations if more superintendents and assistants took summer vacations? Can emerging technology relieve human dilemmas associated with the profession?

All of the above reads like a future *Golf Course Industry* cover story and research report. We'll get our team on it.


All of the above, though, doesn't address a major question: Is leaving a job and team in the middle of the toughest stretch a wise long-term career move?

Competition for elite jobs, in any industry, will always be fierce. High-paying jobs are high-paying jobs for a reason: they require an eclectic blend of leadership abilities and technical skills. Excellent hiring managers and search firms for these jobs dissect every line on a résumé.

Only the people leaving their courses and teams in the middle of the toughest stretches have the answers. Perhaps the reasons for leaving a job mid-summer are valid. But optics matter and seeing a July or August job change on a golf industry résumé could lead to uncomfortable questions about commitment and leadership ability. It also might result in a résumé being tossed in the trash folder.

There are two sides to every personnel move. If your course continually loses key employees when you need them the most, you might want to reconsider how you're treating them. Once a club obtains the "Employer to Avoid" label, managers become stressed, culture deteriorates, and product quality and customer service suffer. Good luck flourishing in the modern golf market with a staff comprised of "Employees to Avoid."

Summer will always be a season of sacrifice in the golf industry. The more sacrifices somebody makes for the long-term benefit of their career, the more desirable they become to future employers. The more sacrifices employers make for the long-term good of their people, the more likely they are to keep stalwarts around until the end of the summer.

Unless the job has become 100 percent intolerable, staying steady in the short term and then reflecting when heat and stress dissipate should provide the perspective to make the right long-term play. 



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To provide an independent, innovative and inclusive voice for today's — and tomorrow's — golf industry professionals.

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ENVU Acquires FMC Global Specialty Solutions

The industry received news of a major and unexpected acquisition when FMC Corporation announced on July 11 it has signed a definitive agreement to sell its Global Specialty Solutions business to Envu for a purchase price of \$350 million, subject to closing working capital adjustment.

In November 2023, FMC announced plans to explore strategic options for GSS, which includes a line of products that serve a diverse mix of non-crop markets such as golf courses, professional sports stadiums and pest control. As FMC concentrates on innovating products and services for the global crop protection market, GSS no longer has a clear, strategic role in the company's mid- or longer-term goals, according to a news release.

"Global Specialty Solutions is a profitable business with a strong history of

growth. We believe this agreement with Envu will provide the attention and resources it needs to continue thriving," FMC chairman and CEO **Pierre Brondeau** says. "With this divestment, FMC can focus solely on its core business."

Envu, which was acquired by international private equity firm Cinven in 2022, is solely dedicated to the environmental science sector and sees GSS as an opportunity to support its growth strategy while continuing to deliver powerful innovations for customers in professional pest management, turf & ornamentals and more.

"As a focused company that is dedicated to delivering forward-thinking solutions for our customers, we are excited by the prospect of joining forces with the GSS business," Envu CEO **Gilles Galliou** says. "We see significant synergies and potential for accelerated innovation from the

combination. In addition, as the successful outcome of a carveout transaction ourselves, we believe we are the ideal partner to help GSS through this transition and maximize our collective potential."

"We are delighted to bring together two highly respected, complementary businesses with a shared focus on delivering seamless customer service and product innovation in the attractive environmental science market," adds **Marco Strizzi**, senior principal at Cinven. "We see FMC GSS as a compelling addition to Envu strategically and financially and look forward to continuing to support the combined business' strong growth trajectory."

The transaction is expected to close by the end of 2024, subject to regulatory approval and other customary closing conditions. FMC intends to allocate all proceeds from the sale to debt reduction.

Tartan Talks 97

Dave Heatwole spent the first phase of his career helping build and design new golf courses during an 18-year stint with Nicklaus Design. For the past 22 years, he's sustained a golf course architecture business, Heatwole Golf Design, by helping clubs make steady progress.



▲ Heatwole

Following a discussion about his career journey, which included living in glitzy Monaco, Heatwole used an appearance on the *Tartan Talks* podcast to offer insight behind the architect's role as an impartial developer of a master plan.

"You need to help a club, or an owner, really determine and prioritize the difference between what you want and what you need," Heatwole says. "A lot of times what is needed, the infrastructure, the drainage, irrigation, isn't as exciting as a bunker renovation. But a lot of times you have to start from the ground up and do the underground work first, and a lot of times that takes patience because that's some of the most expensive parts of a renovation."

Being willing to work in phases is another necessity of master-plan work. The majority of the clubs Heatwole helps these days execute calculated enhancements during shoulder seasons, instead of closing the entire course for prolonged stretches. "My busiest season is October through December, once clubs stop having outings and play starts to back off a little bit," he says.

Fortunately, we caught Heatwole before his busiest months. Visit the Superintendent Radio Network page of popular podcast distribution platforms to hear our conversation.



INDUSTRY BUZZ

PBI-Gordon Companies hired **Dr. Jackie Applegate** as COO. Applegate will lead the company's three subsidiaries: PBI-Gordon Corporation, Pegasus Laboratories and PetAg ... **Nathan Kimmerle** has joined Albaugh as North American region vice president of technology. Kimmerle will oversee production and operations at the company's Missouri facility ... Coyote Rock LLC has added longtime superintendent **Scott Hickey** to the team as a Turf Materials regional sales manager for Alabama, Kentucky and Tennessee ... J.R. Simplot Company announced the expansion of its turf and horticulture services into the southwest Florida market. The move will include the opening of a Simplot Turf & Horticulture location in the greater Fort Myers area ... **Mark Darbon** has been appointed chief executive of The R&A and secretary of The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews. Darbon will succeed **Martin Slumbers** in the role leading the governing body and the organization, which runs The Open and AIG Women's Open with a global membership of more than 2,400 ... Otter Creek Golf Course's **Mitchell Eickhoff** was honored at the recent Circle K Junior Championship with the American Junior Golf Association's 2023 Superintendent of the Year Award. Eickhoff's recognition is one of two 2023 awards for the Circle K Junior Championship, as the event also won the Charitable Giving Award. The championship has earned seven tournament awards in its 12-year history ... Syngenta announced two new active ingredients pending EPA registration for use in its Professional Solutions markets. The solutions include Isocycloseram, a broad-spectrum insecticide active ingredient, which will be marketed as PLINAZOLIN technology, and cyclobutrifluram, a nematocide and fungicide AI to be marketed as TYMIRIUM technology. Syngenta also expanded its digital platforms team by hiring longtime turf pros **Sally Jones**, **Noel Popoli** and **Andrew Fike**. ... Target Specialty Products launched Turf Fuel MITIGATE, a stress-tolerance product featuring Templar technology.

Hudson National Golf Club

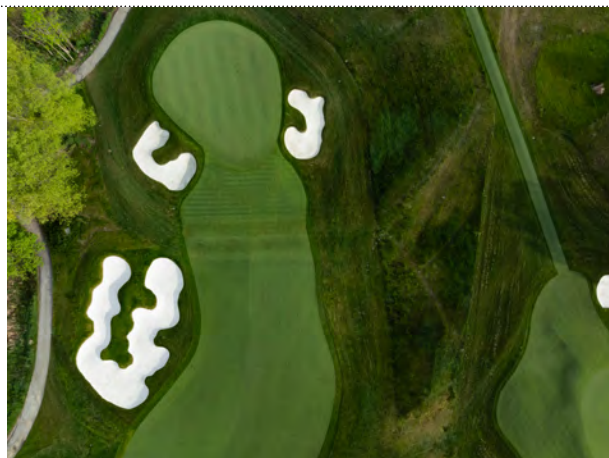


COURSE NEWS

Hudson National Golf Club unveiled its Fazio Design after a year-long closure for an extensive renovation. The renovation included significant improvements to all 18 greens, bunkers, new grasses and irrigation, and a greater reliance on strategic decision-making. ... The Evanston Wilmette Golf Course Association and KemperSports announced the re-brand of Canal Shores to The Evans at Canal Shores. The 100-year-old course will reopen in 2025 with a new 18-hole course. ... Audubon International is now the exclusive environmental stewardship partner for golf and resort developer The Cabot Collection. Through the partnership,



Hudson National Golf Club (2)



The Cabot Collection is the first multi-property brand to enroll every golf course and surrounding built environment into Audubon International's Platinum Signature Sanctuary certification program. ... Spanish Peaks Mountain Club opened its new Tom's 10 — the final golf course designed by World Golf Hall of Famer **Tom Weiskopf**. The 10-hole par-3 course pays homage to Weiskopf's favorite holes from around the world. ... Applebrook Golf Club in Malvern, Pennsylvania, unveiled its ecologically friendly Brecker Turf Care Center. The center fea-

tures innovative facilities and amenities designed to prioritize employee comfort, operational efficiency and resource conservation. ... Desert Highlands in Scottsdale, Arizona, will begin a \$10 million renovation guided by Nicklaus Design beginning in April 2025. The project will include six major components: design enhancements to several holes, greens reconstruction, tee reconstruction, bunker reconstruction, desert de- and re-vegetation, and restoration of the turf found on the tees, fairways and rough. ... Concert Golf Partners acquired TPC

Jasna Polana in Princeton, New Jersey, following a competitive bid process that included 20 interested parties. The purchase expands Concert Golf's portfolio to 34 clubs. ... The Dunas Course at Terras da Comporta in Portugal recently hosted the inaugural John Deere Trade Invitational, an event designed to showcase turf machinery to an audience of VIP clients from across Europe. Around 50 greenkeepers, superintendents and general managers from leading clubs and resorts visited the acclaimed course near Lisbon for the showcase.

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For bed knife grinding, the Foley 673 ACCU-Pro offers unparalleled simplicity with its electro-magnetic bed knife mounting system, speeding up setup and operation. The 673's precision hand wheel feeds the grinding head while it automatically traverses the bed knife. Pre-set programs further automate the process, allowing the user to handle other tasks as the grinder completes its work. The Foley 673 ensures the sharpest and easiest grind.

Studies show that dull edges cause mower injury, resulting in poor cut appearance and undue plant stress. As Greg Turner, Foley Company's Global Director of Sales,

states, "Investing \$60,000+ on a fairway mower means you've spent a tremendous amount to make five cutting heads cut grass. The cutting head does all the work, so maintaining these units is critical."

Regularly check reel cutting units for squareness and ensure they have a fresh grind (both spin and relief) consistent with OEM specifications. Each unit should be set so the distance between the reel and bed knife allows it to cut .005-inch paper cleanly without jagged edges. Grind as often as needed based on this paper test.

Before performing maintenance on a reel or bed knife, clean the cutting unit and remove any debris to reveal and correct any damage. Proper grinding is crucial to correct the coning (tapering) of the reel caused by the helical design of reel cutting units. This design moves processed grass and debris from one side of the reel to the other, causing inconsistent wear. If coning is not corrected, achieving the scissor effect between the reel and bed knife becomes difficult, leading to poor cut quality.

Greg Turner highlights the costs associated with poorly maintained cutting heads: "Improperly maintained heads can increase fuel consumption, cause more wear and tear on the engine and hydraulic systems, and lead to higher expenses for chemicals and water. These costs add up quickly."



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Kayla Kipp

NEMACOLIN

Kayla Kipp is in her third season now at Nemacolin, where she serves as the equipment manager for the resort's two golf courses, and she is starting to feel at home. "Things are more comfortable," she says. "That first year I was here was really just getting the shop together. There was a lot of 20-year-old stuff that was laying around that we didn't need. A lot of junk."

"So, my first year was a cleanup, learning where things are and how the crew operates. Learning the people. Now, in year three, it's a lot easier. There's new equipment coming in but now that you're in the cycle, it's a lot easier."

Located in Farmington, Pennsylvania, 70 miles south of Pittsburgh, Nemacolin features two **Pete Dye**-designed championship golf courses, one of which formerly hosted a PGA Tour stop.

Visitors expect first-rate conditions.

Kipp's job is to keep the maintenance equipment operating at a high level and anticipate the needs of the greens staff. Speaking with **Rick Woelfel** on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast, Kipp noted the importance of good communication with the team.

"What they need is what I'm here for," she says. "The more we can communicate, the better. I know a lot of times they're in and out the door saying, 'I need this for tomorrow,' or 'I need this in 10 minutes.' Sometimes, it's a little stressful but (things will work out) as long as we keep that communication channel open."

When Kipp first arrived at Nemacolin at the start of the 2022 season, she realized the importance of establishing a level of trust and establishing her credibility with the rest of the staff. She admits the task may have been more challenging, at least at first, because of her gender.

"Trust is a huge thing," she says. "And walking in the door three years ago, you have to prove yourself, woman or man. Sometimes I think walking into a maintenance shop as a man is probably a little easier transition than having a woman in there. I sometimes feel there is a little extra speculation as to skill level. I've always had to prove myself. At least, it felt that way and as I learn more and more stuff, it's pretty easy to do so."

"You come in and find an electrical issue, and someone says 'Oh, you know what you're

doing,' or 'All these reels look really good. You're teaching me about reels.'"

Kipp reports to **Chris Anderson**, who has served as Nemacolin's director of golf operations since the beginning of 2023. For four and a half years prior to that, he was the director of turfgrass management and briefly held both jobs simultaneously.

Kipp says having Anderson as her boss is "awesome."

"No. 1, he understands the time it takes to (complete a specific task)," she says. "For example, mow the driving range. Whenever he's trying to get those things done, he knows how long it's going to take, what equipment is going to be needed and how many people. He knows ahead what it's going to take to get, X, Y and Z done."

Kipp was part of the crew of volunteers who supported **John Jeffreys** and his team at Pinehurst during the 2024 U.S. Open. To say she was impressed by the scope of the Pinehurst operation is an understatement.

"Eleven golf courses," she says. "I have two. It blows my mind to think about 11. I was blown away. I loved it. The shop's incredible and well kept. It's a beautiful place. I love the history there. It was a phenomenal experience."

The week was also a learning experience for Kipp.

"I actually spent a lot of time learning about Bermudagrass," she says. "I'm not real familiar. Everybody was super willing to talk to me. One evening we took the road crews out to the front nine. John Jeffreys met me there on one green and we were looking around. We talked about Bermudagrass and agronomic practices down in the South, it was super helpful and educational." 🌱



"Trust is a huge thing. And walking in the door three years ago, you have to prove yourself, woman or man."



SUPERINTENDENT
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TIME TO THINK 2025 BUDGET

The wisdom of planning has been handed down through generations from a diverse range of voices. From philosophers (**Confucius**: “A man who does not plan long ahead will find trouble at his door.”) to religious leaders (**Richard Cushing**: “Always plan ahead. It wasn’t raining when Noah built the ark.”) to the general who became the president with a serious passion for golf (**Dwight Eisenhower**: “Plans are worthless, but planning is everything.”).

Readers of this column know that planning is one of our favorite themes and one we will return to as planning season for 2025 course operations and budgets kick off. The range of new and different challenges that will arise in the coming year will test the best of golf management professionals. Here are three that are foundational for planning for a successful year ahead.

DIESEL WILL COST MORE IN 2025

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, diesel prices are expected to rise from an average of \$3.90 to \$4 per gallon. This slight increase is less than was recently projected because of increased production. However, the increase also suggests a certain volatility. Superintendents planning for 2025 might expect diesel to climb back to the \$4.20 level previously forecast, given global threats to supply and supply chain. Volatility is the only constant when it comes to diesel supply, so hedge toward higher prices for budgeting purposes. Questions to ask ahead of the 2025 budget cycle:

- How much diesel will we need, and can our use of diesel be reduced?
- How can I commit to my 2024 volume of consumption if it buys

down 2025 pricing?

- What indicators should I monitor to keep ahead of this mission-critical budget impact?

WAGE INFLATION IS SLOWING

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a part of the U.S. Department of Labor, wage escalation is slowing. Wages and salaries increased 4.3 percent for the 12-month period ending in March 2024, down from the 5.1 percent increase reported in March 2023. Similarly, the cost of benefits increased 3.6 percent for the 12-month period ending in March 2024 following a 4.3 percent increase in March 2023.

While the trend is encouraging, for superintendent’s most critical and expensive budget line-item, labor, we continue to see overall wages rise. Experienced superintendents are watching these metrics carefully. They know they can ill afford to lose carefully trained talent. That’s why everyone needs answers to the following questions:

- What is important — personally and professionally — to each member of my crew? How can I help them achieve their goals?
- What can be done to commit my people even more fully to their jobs? And to our team?

WATER IS A GROWING CONCERN FOR SUPERINTENDENTS

Many *Golf Course Industry* readers are not obliged to pay directly for water; for them, it’s water-taking and management that present

the challenges. How golf courses and superintendents take and manage water is becoming an increasingly emphasized matter. Those who understand golf courses know that superintendents are extremely conscientious environmental stewards; those less informed see our beautiful green havens as an indulgence that extracts resources from other priorities, social as well as environmental.

Superintendents should address the following questions as part of their 2025 planning:

- How should I demonstrate my environmental commitment and knowledge to my staff and management?
- What are the potential benefits to our course through programs like the Audubon International sanctuary program?
- How can our course serve our community by setting an example of environmental stewardship?

As many of the most recognized figures throughout history have taught us, sound planning is a bedrock quality of effective and recognized leadership. We remember that after the war, President Eisenhower’s consistent and disciplined approach to planning led to a remarkable period of growth and stability in our nation.

And if planning needed an additional spokesperson, we need only be reminded of **Yogi Berra’s** feelings on the subject: “If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.” 🏌️



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

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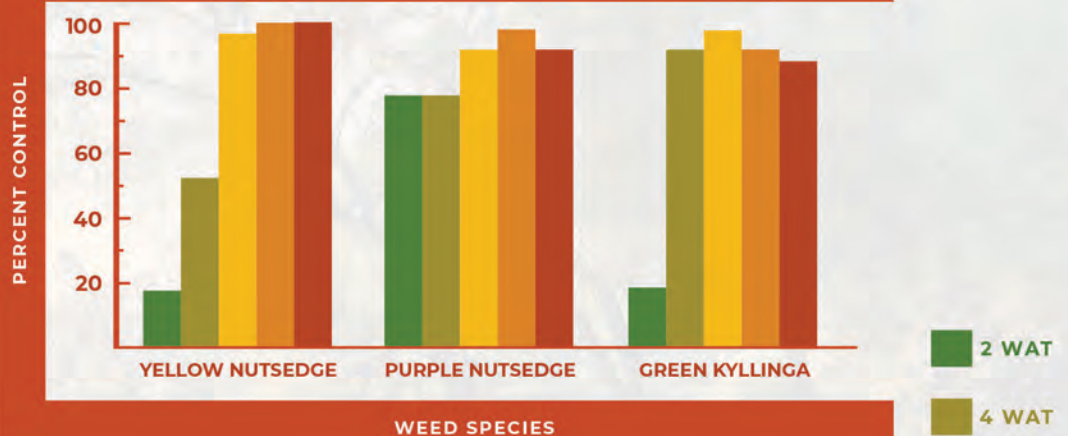
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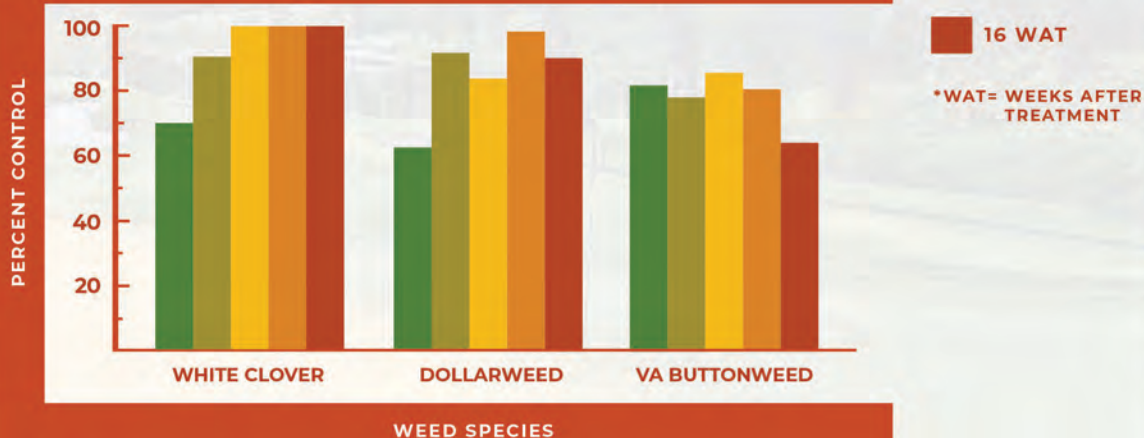
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THE BUSINESS-MAN SUPERINTENDENT

Financial acumen and boardroom negotiations aren't what inspired most people to enter the industry, but they're becoming as important as turf knowledge. How can you add to your skillset?

Carlos Arraya remembers walking up the stairs at Hawk's Nest Golf Club in Vero Beach, Florida, a binder stuffed with spreadsheets tucked under an arm. After four months in charge as the interim general manager, he had received word that club officials had decided on a more permanent hire and he was bringing his work straight to the top, handing it over to whomever his successor might be.

After Arraya placed the binder on a desk, one of those officials told him they were about to intro-

duce the new GM. Arraya waited, but nobody else entered the room.

"Where is he?" Arraya asked, confused.

"You're the guy," he was told. "We'd love for you to do it if you're interested."

Arraya was stunned. Just 30 years old at the time, he had filled the position out of necessity after his predecessor had departed near the start of the financial crisis that swelled into the Great Recession. Club members were leaving. The dues line was dropping. Expenses were still the same if not bumping up a bit. Hawk's Nest would soon

need to trim its budget by more than half a million dollars. The club ultimately survived — and later thrived — while so many others shuttered forever, but none of that was guaranteed when Arraya received the job offer. Was he ready?

What do you think?

"I don't think you're ever ready," says Arraya, who wound up learning more than enough to remain the general manager at Hawk's Nest for almost six years and today is the general manager and CEO at Bellerive Country Club just outside St. Louis. "I think you *think* you can

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UNDETERMINED

By **Matt LaWell**

do it—we all have ambitions—but I did not have the qualifications in 2008. I didn't think I was ready, but I also wasn't afraid of becoming uncomfortable and pushing the limits of what I could do."

Arraya is — at least stereotypically — a rarity in the golf course maintenance world: A turf pro who embraced the business side of the industry, becoming as comfortable in a suit as he once was in work pants, boots and the occasional round of rain gear. But he is not alone. Arraya shifted over initially out of necessity. Others have moved into the business of

the game, adding to their skillset and their résumé, because of curiosity, or ambition, or just to save some extra money on annual and quarterly taxes.

Business and finances beyond the annual maintenance budget might seem overwhelming. Arraya says the first time he looked over club finances, "I was so oblivious to it that I wasn't afraid of it." He didn't know what he didn't know. Even now, three years after his most recent promotion, he still doesn't know everything. Do you know what you don't know? And how can you make the move?

"It's just like turf," Arraya says. "You didn't know how to grow grass. You didn't know the difference between a systemic fungicide and a contact fungicide, but you studied it. Same thing with the financials. You take a label and you read. Financials are just numbers. If you don't understand something, you ask questions. The best grass growers, the best operators, the best leaders, ask questions. There are people around here who are tired of me asking questions. I ask questions even of the best members. Some of the best CEOs in St. Louis and

Assets	0.6%			
Budget Track				
Cross Profit Mar				
LOTX	Automobiles Components	87.46	18.46	8.2%+
FYMC	Banks	82.81	81.73	8.8%+
RTX	Capital Goods	42.78	36.54	8.8%+
TILK	Commercial Services	42.45	43.25	8.8%+
PFAF	Consumer Durables	72.48	29.24	8.8%+
HEJG	Diversified Financials	68.16	42.43	8.8%+
ENR	Energy	69.28	59.26	8.4%+
KRE	Food & Beverage	24.12	21.12	8.8%+
LEH	Health Care Equipment	64.19	28.55	8.6%+
AKO	Household Products	58.83	61.88	8.8%+
THJB	Insurance	44.78	78.41	8.4%+
KHDS	Media Entertainment	12.47	13.85	9.6%+
ODRU	Pharmaceuticals	28.66	34.58	8.2%+
ZHED	Real Estate	88.52	82.82	8.8%+
JNIF	Telecommunications	44.8	61.86	8.6%+
BFHY	Software Technology	41.37	59.38	8.6%+

the Midwest are here. You ask those questions, you learn a lot.

“There are just a lot of moving parts. When you’re in operations as a golf course super and then you have to become a strategic thinker and leader, it’s much different.”

Take results, for example. “There’s an immediacy to operations,” Arraya says. “Whether it’s food and beverage, rackets, or golf, you see the difference right away. When you’re running a business, you don’t see those numbers right away like when you’re on the operations side. It’s not till you’re either forecasting the change or you experience the change on your next financial statement.

“You never feel like you get anything done when you’re a CEO.”

PJ Salter isn’t a CEO — yet — but he has made a similar move at Riviera Country Club in Coral Gables, Florida, just south of downtown Miami, where he was director of agronomy and is now director of facilities and grounds maintenance. He still oversees golf course maintenance and is now in charge of building maintenance and housekeeping, too.

A precedent of sorts was set by **Eric von Hofen**, a former director of agronomy and clubhouse operations at Riviera who mentored Salter earlier in their careers. After the director of inside maintenance and engineering left the club, von Hofen tossed his hat in the proverbial ring and landed more responsibility. Years later, Salter wound up in weekly meetings focused on rebuilding the clubhouse, and “learned a ton about construction.” After the director of building maintenance left in 2022, Salter, like von Hofen before him, talked with general manager **Mark Snure** and applied for the open position. He then received the promotion.

“The early months were chaotic,” Salter says — but not because of any inexperience. “Within the first month, a typical August thunderstorm came through, the clubhouse took a direct shot of lightning, and it fried a bunch of the electrical systems. Internet, phone systems, connectivity were all down.” In addition to the turf — where he relies on superintendent **Drew Nottenkamper**, first assistant **Mike Smith** and second assistant **Mike Heinz**

— Salter was now responsible for repairing most of the club’s major tech systems. “We don’t have a full-time, in-house IT guy, so, effectively, I managed the IT and the company that we sub out some of that management to. It was a little bit stressful.”

Salter turned to a trio of indoor experts — chief engineer **Jose Diaz** and engineering managers **Ariel Milan** and **Nelson Tanquero** — and leaned on the skills he learned maintaining turf.

“I tried to retain competent people, give them the support they need to do their jobs, and stay out of the way,” he says. “A lot of superintendents — and I was this way up until this promotion — a lot of us sometimes think that our success is based on the fact that we are physically on the golf course 60 hours a week and we know where every inch of grass is. But when you have the chance to grow into a bigger role, in ways very humbling, you realize that’s only possible because you’re fortunate enough to have such great people in all departments, helping you execute the plan.”

Salter has always loved numbers — “I like problems that have exact

Maintenance budgeting: UNSOLVED MYSTERIES

Golf financial guru Larry Hirsh analyzes the finances of producing the product customers expect from a big-picture perspective.

The biggest expense a golf club often has is golf course maintenance. Because agronomy is a science, few of us who play the game, including green committees, chairpersons and even sometimes golf course owners, really understand the intricacies of golf course maintenance. It’s a somewhat mysterious process that evokes comparison from one club to the next and criticism (one way or the other) when things go sour, whether agronomically, economically or even climatologically.

Accordingly, maintenance budgeting is sometimes uninformed, and decisions are made that may not be in the best interests of the care and feeding of the golf course, or the economics of the operation. That said, many golfers see themselves as experts and love to brag about their course being the best, even if the cost is outrageous and the agronomics may not be sound.

Earlier this year, Penn State professor **Brad Jakubowski** reached out to me in preparation for a presentation on budgeting he made at the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show. We talked about the elements of a golf course maintenance budget and the dynamics that can occur to disrupt the process resulting in potentially inefficient maintenance programs and

TOP SECRET

answers,” he says — and he remembers faring quite well in Golf Course Budgeting for Superintendents while studying crop and soil sciences at Michigan State. Earlier in his career, he would work through math equations related to how much product to spray, study operating budgets, and eventually attend green committee meetings. Almost two decades into his career and two years into his new position, everything seems to have slowed down. He compares it a little to being a fifth-year quarterback. As a proud Spartan, Salter says, “I’m hoping I’m like **Kirk Cousins**” — who did, in fact, spend five seasons in East Lansing before his long run in the NFL.

And, of course, working with the right people is important.

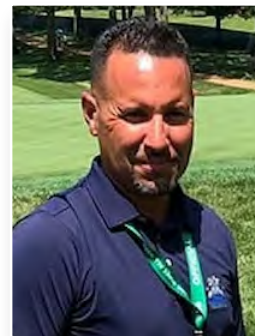
“A lot of times in the golf course management and club management world, you have a group of directors in different departments—a controller, a director of finance, a director of accounting — and they play a huge role in building budgets and managing expenditures across all the different departments so that the club is profitable, or at least breaking even. ... What Eric really showed



▲ Rohlfsen



▲ Salter



▲ Arraya

me is how to look at budgets and understand budgets, how to look at how you spend things one year, how fertilizer or pesticide management is going to change the next year, and then how you budget for that. You develop that skill that makes you more valuable to the organization.

Not every business-savvy superintendent works at private clubs, though. Take **Scott Rohlfsen**, for instance.

A superintendent for more than 20 years, Rohlfsen has worked almost exclusively at a variety of 9-hole golf courses across Iowa. He has worked at more than one course con-

stantly since 2007. He has worked for five courses since 2012. Rohlfsen once worked for each course, but in 2017 he formally launched Rohlfsen Golf, LLC, and now handles each course as an independent contractor.

“I’m the superintendent of the golf course, but I’m not an employee of the golf course. It’s just kind of a unique situation,” Rohlfsen says. “I had wanted to do it for a long time, but after talking to the golf courses where I worked, because I was just their employee, they could just pay me gross wages and not have to do employee taxes and stuff like that,” Rohlfsen says. “I have to pay my own liability insurance, which is really

funding. Sometimes clubs spend too little, sometimes too much, and sometimes they do things based on revenues rather than agronomics.

The maintenance budgeting process can have a profound impact on the financial success and market value of the club. In the simplest terms, if the maintenance budget can be reduced by \$50,000, the relevant capitalization rate is 10 percent and there’s no impact on revenue from the reduction, the market value would theoretically be increased by \$500,000.

What are the elements of a maintenance budget warranting attention?

First, we like to differentiate between operating expenses and capital expenses. Operating expenses are those that occur regularly (labor, water, materials, equipment maintenance, chemicals, etc.). Capital includes things like equipment, infrastructure, and the addition or renovation of facilities or elements. The most accurate method of developing a maintenance budget is to include an annualized cost of capital expenditures for the clearest picture of the true cost of maintaining the golf course.

There are numerous variables that exist, and an essential element of any maintenance budget process is having a

written golf course maintenance plan. Such a document becomes a “go to” common ground for both the superintendent and the committee/ownership that describes in detail how the golf course is to be maintained and presented. If ownership seeks to cut dollars from the budget, the superintendent can show options of how the plan might change and what would look different to the golfer. For example, if the goal is to cut expenses by a certain amount, the plan can be modified to show what components of the program will either be changed or eliminated. Conversely, the same plan can have elements added showing a corresponding cost should a club seek to enhance or expand the level of maintenance.

There are numerous elements included in a golf course maintenance plan. Cutting heights, frequency of mowing and bunker maintenance, aerification scheduling, and desired green speeds are among the most prominent. Not only are there agronomic considerations to each of these, but economic as well. For instance, agronomists recommend aerification twice per year, in full-growing season, yet sometimes courses will aerify earlier or later to maximize revenues and minimize disruption. Increased green speeds usually means higher cost, thus the balancing act.

I like to talk about the three Cs:

- Communication
- Consistency
- Culture

Communication between superintendent and club ownership/leadership is essential. In a constant balancing act between conditions and costs, the course

cheap, like \$300 a year, and, because I'm not an employee, I have to carry my own pesticide applicator's license."

Setting up his LLC cost Rohlfson about \$600. He made the move "mostly for tax purposes," he says. "It just made it easier to say I have this corporation, and then I could file tax write-offs on my mileage. It just got messy to be an employee of each course."

The logistics of managing five different courses with five different ownerships is complicated, but Rohlfson manages everything easily enough in his head. He works with a team of 33 this season — with none working on more than one course — most of whom handle one job per day. Rohlfson hired each of them himself, but all are technically employees of the course rather than Rohlfson. He sends out schedules for the week ahead on Sunday nights. He does all this, incredibly, without spreadsheets. "I don't do spreadsheets," he says. "I wish I did, I always liked spreadsheets, but I just don't have time."



Back to business: Perhaps the biggest professional perk for Rohlfson Golf, LLC, is trimming each of his five annual maintenance budgets by being able to purchase directly from suppliers at a discount. Buy more, save more—and even more by buying most of his product via EOPs.

Rohlfson has explored switching his LLC to an S corporation—LLCs, or limited liability corporations are better for maximizing flexibility in how businesses are run, while S corps are better for smaller corporations and allow only for a certain number of shareholders—but the move didn't make financial sense because he doesn't purchase large equipment. He uses and maintains

equipment owned by and housed at each of the five courses. "It's more involved and it just doesn't seem worth it," he says. "It might have saved me \$500. If I actually owned equipment, it would be a no-brainer."

Right now, Rohlfson has no plans to build out and bring in other employees, but "the framework is there for expansion if needed, if I want to. But everything's pretty cozy right now."

"Ultimately, it's just a good feeling to know I got my own company. It looks nice to say you have a company. It's not just Scott from Willow Run Country Club." 🏌️

Matt LaWell is Golf Course Industry's managing editor.

superintendent (just like the general manager and golf professional) needs to be able to "speak truth to power" and ownership/leadership needs to be able to listen. Not everyone has the personality to do this and not everyone is willing to listen. The simple concept of self-preservation (maintaining one's employment) often interferes with facts. This can also work in reverse, where the superintendent has the confidence of ownership/leadership and can take advantage by inflating the budget and costs beyond the most appropriate level for the conditions desired and as described in the plan.

Given that at most member-owned clubs green chairs and committee members have limited (if any) knowledge about agronomy, it's incumbent upon them to self-educate and retain independent consultants when necessary to monitor spending. The club's focus on either the best conditions or the most cost-effective program can often dictate how this all works out.

Consistency is important so golfers know what to expect on a regular basis. The culture of any club will dictate to some degree the level of conditioning based on the willingness of the membership or patrons to pay for it.

The superintendent's role is one of advocacy for the agronomic health of the golf course. Most consider themselves stewards of the land and course, and seek to be environmentally responsible. Ownership and leadership's role is to advocate for presenting the best product possible within appropriate and realistic budgetary criteria, hopefully while also considering the environment.

Capital improvements should be justified by evaluating their contribution to overall value, either market value for sale or value to the membership. The club's culture is essential to understand in order to match the level of desired conditions with the membership's (or patrons') willingness to pay for it. We've observed clubs where the cost of maintenance is more than \$300 per round! We've also seen

some where it's less than \$10 per round. The many variables that impact the development of golf course maintenance budgets include (but aren't limited to): climate, culture, ownership (members vs. investors), maintenance facilities and equipment, and infrastructure.

The three Cs, which should start with a written maintenance plan, are essential for sound budgeting. It's important for both ownership and management (superintendent) to "stay ahead of the airplane" and anticipate upcoming costs and events. If the irrigation system is 22 years old and still functioning, they should still be planning for its replacement within the next four to eight years.

The key is to get the best "bang for the buck." Playing conditions are the most important part of the golfer experience in most cases. It's an essential element of long-term financial success for any club, public or private. Playing conditions impact the entire operation. Like a speaker I once heard said, "If the greens are slow, the hamburger tastes bad." It's true. Developing an appropriate maintenance budget is a collaborative effort between all the stakeholders. Solicit their input and consider it seriously.

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.



Let words work for you

Solid written communication can make your texts, emails and newsletters effective ways to sell your department and yourself. Plus, it's useful for helping interpret numerical data. Here's how to use this classic job skill to your advantage.

By **Lee Carr**

Creating and presenting the budget. Check. Evaluating and placing EOP orders. Check. Working on writing skills. Eh, maybe not now.

Wait ...

Presenting the budget, placing EOP orders and everything else you do is easier when you share clear and concise information, inside and outside of the organization. Powerful writing is the most enduring,

consistent way to share your ideas.

With social media, you know if you write it and post it, someone is going to read it. If you write poorly and your words don't reflect your intentions, people might get the wrong idea. They may not like your opinion regardless. But don't let your writing get you into trouble. The more positive, direct and constructive your written communication skills are, the more effectively you will reach your goals.

Here are 10 ways to maximize your writing.



Teaching writing in turf

By David McPherson

"What we've got here is ... failure to communicate."

As a wordsmith who makes a living writing — and helping clients get their message right — I'm biased when talk turns to communications. No matter the organization or the job, effective communication is a valuable, transferable skill. As the oft-quoted line above, uttered by **Paul Newman**'s character in the 1967 film "Cool Hand Luke," a failure to communicate causes confusion and leads to bigger issues and larger fires to put out.

Just ask any seasoned superintendent. These keepers of the greens are multi-talented professionals who require a diverse toolkit: from agronomic knowledge to leading and motivating people. The most successful greenkeepers are also good communicators.

I saw this first-hand when I taught a college communications course for a few years to aspiring industry professionals. The course was a mandatory requirement to successfully complete the two-year associate diploma in the turfgrass management program at the University of Guelph — located in the same Ontario city as the renowned Guelph Turfgrass Institute.

Some students goofed off and/or never attended my class; they figured communications and writing had nothing to do with growing grass. Thankfully, they were the minority. Most of them arrived engaged. And, as the weeks passed, these students learned why they were in my class and how my teachings mattered and would help them in their careers.

Effective business writing is where most of the students struggled. I was surprised in an era of spellcheck how many careless errors these students still made in their assignments. Through in-class writing exercises and assignments, I instilled the importance of communicating effectively without errors.

My guest speakers — superintendents from top private clubs across the Greater Toronto area — validated these teachings. I'll never forget one veteran greenkeeper sharing with these future turfgrass professionals how, if he received a résumé that included even one spelling or grammar mistake, he tossed it in the trash — stressing something they might have perceived as a minor mistake reflects the candidate's attention

to detail and professionalism.

One of the annual assignments was creating a blog. Students were encouraged to get creative, include photos and other multimedia, and use this web-based communications platform to practice writing regularly and also to raise awareness and to offer opinions about industry issues.

The major project in this communications class was to organize and host a half-day turfgrass symposium for the industry. It was inspiring to witness how, in just a few short months, these students worked collaboratively to plan this free event by putting into practice such skills as writing sponsorship letters, contacting speakers and promoting and marketing the event using various media.

Water management and technology in turf were two of the themes of these symposiums and speakers included: **Thomas Bastis**, competition agronomist for the PGA Tour; **Rhod Trainor** (retired superintendent of Hamilton Golf & Country Club); **Robert Heggie**, director of grounds with Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment; and golf course architect **Jeff Mingay**.

Students in each class volunteered to take on various leadership roles and be a team lead. It's no surprise that all these years later, the ones who led their classmates then are now the ones leading turf teams at top public and private golf courses. What a joy it's been to follow the careers of some of these former students, among them **Denver Hart**, the head superintendent of the resort courses at PGA West in La Quinta, California; **Marco China**, director of turf operations at Deer Ridge Golf Club in Kitchener, Ontario; and **Ryan Campbell**, superintendent at Ambassador Golf Club in Windsor, Ontario.

Despite growing AI technologies that can draft your staff or member communications in minutes with a few key words and the push of a button, knowing how to craft the right message — and choosing the right words at the right time — are still valuable skills superintendents need and that no computer program can replace.

So don't fail to communicate. Write on! Your job depends on it.

David McPherson is a Waterloo, Ontario-based writer and Golf Course Industry contributor. Follow him @mcphersomm on X.

KNOW YOUR PURPOSE

Are you sharing an update where you need to list course maintenance tasks for the week? Are you sharing information about an upcoming project that requires a more nuanced, detailed explanation? Do you need approval for a financial expenditure or additional labor? Determine why you are writing so you know what content to include.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Are you writing for people familiar with the course and its agronomy practices or for people who will benefit from some education? Are there topical analogies that will help your audience, or will it work better to speak plainly? Understanding why you are writing and who you are writing for is the best way to get started.

USE SHORT SENTENCES

Be concise. Say what you need to directly. You don't have a lot of time for writing and your audience doesn't have a lot of time for reading. People are more focused with short sentences that are easy to absorb. Adjectives can be overrated and make your work sound less authentic and more like marketing. Delete unnecessary words.

AVOID MISSPELLED AND MISUSED WORDS

There is a difference between a word choice (like "regardless" or "irregardless," which mean the same thing) and actually using the wrong word, which can make you look foolish. Don't write "their" if you mean "there." Mistakes are distracting and, fair or not, people lose confidence in your communication if it's inaccurate. If you aren't sure, look it up. Pro tip: discover who on your staff has great writing skills and employ their help. Why struggle unnecessarily? Written work is often better with a second opinion.

BE PROFESSIONAL

Jokes are risky and jargon accomplishes nothing if it is misunderstood. Will profanity add to your message? Unlikely. Everyone has their own writing style. Witty remarks are great and can increase interest, but again, know your audience. If in doubt, leave it out.

REVIEW YOUR WORK

Reread your writing after your first draft is complete. If you can, read it aloud to yourself. Revisiting a draft after a few hours or even overnight will help your fresh eyes catch mistakes. Fun fact: your mind will continue to work on your writing even when it's not in front of you. When you come back to it, you can give it more depth or fill in any details you may have missed. Pay special attention to contractions. It helps to read them as separate words while proofreading. Also, make sure the words you select support your message. Reading books and articles regularly improves your vocabulary and helps you communicate purposefully.

PAY — ATTENTION!

To punctuation? Meanings of words and sentences change with incorrect punctuation. For instance, “Did you spray, Tyler?” is different than, “Did you spray Tyler?” Usage for punctuation is standardized for a reason — it helps with comprehension. For numerical information, use positive and negative signs with precision to avoid costly confusion.

USE CORRECT CAPITALIZATION

THIS IS SHOUTING — it is offensive to some people and of limited value in writing. Referencing individuals without capitalizing their names is considered disrespectful. Sentences should start with a capital and for headings and labels on graphs, make sure you pick a style and stick with it. Inconsistency with capitalization leads to distracting scrutiny.

FORMAT INTENTIONALLY

It's sometimes better to create bullet points for supplementary information than to write paragraphs. It can also be easier to reference more complicated issues visually by using a chart, table or graph. Likewise, if the bulk of the information you are sharing is numerical, frame it with a paragraph or two for people who want the bottom line without interpreting the numbers. Your ideas are more likely to be accepted when you introduce them clearly. Don't use fonts that are hard to read. Choose Arial, Calibri or something similar in a font



Commonly misused words

There are some words that are commonly confused. Mistaking these is distracting for the reader when you want them to have confidence in your work. With minimal effort, you will get these right every time.

- accept (to tolerate) — except (something different)
- cite (refer to a source) — site (place) — sight (see)
- desert (dry area) — dessert (sweet edible joy)
- its (belongs to) — it's (it is)
- lose (can't find) — loose (not tight)
- than (different) — then (next)
- they're (they are) — their (belongs to them) — there (place)
- too (also) — to (direction) — two (1+1)
- your (belongs to) — you're (you are)





Spreadsheets, charts and graphs

The best way to communicate some information is through a spreadsheet, chart or graph.

Budgets are better organized with headings like labor, materials and projects. Using columns for year-on-year comparisons can help show changes and give you a chance to show how inflation or increased costs are affecting the entire budget. Charts and graphs can be used multiple ways for greater visual impact of certain budget components.

How charts and graphs are labeled makes a difference and it's the same for spreadsheets. Consider questions such as, "Does your audience like a lot of details, or a few? Are they only interested in the bottom line? Is the information being presented, or circulated independently?"

It is critical to frame data with a paragraph — and maybe more — to explain changes to the budget, its key components or to enhance comprehension. While the numbers may matter more, clear statements that summarize those numbers will help.

that is manageable. Some people have trouble reading fonts with serifs. Bold, underline, highlight and italic effects can be useful, but don't overdo it.

MAKE A LASTING IMPRESSION


Your work should move from point-to-point in a sequence that is logical. Don't jump around. If you are sharing more than a few paragraphs, conclude by briefly restating the main ideas with a sentence or two. People can reread for details if necessary, so keep your conclusion short and sweet.

Ready for more? Check out the

book "Writing for Busy Readers: Communicate More Effectively in the Real World" by **Todd Rogers** and **Jessica Lasky-Fink**. Published in 2023, this book investigates why people read the way they do and how to write to reach them.

Another popular read is "Making Numbers Count: The Art and Science of Communicating Numbers" by **Chip Heath** and **Karla Starr**. The title says it all. External resources provide you with differing opinions but ultimately, it's your work, so write in the way that is comfortable for you. Authenticity will resonate with your audience

and is one of the most important elements of impactful writing.

Work on 10 ideas listed and keep improving. There is no substitute for quality when it comes to the written word. When communicating about budgets and financials, there is no substitute for thoughtful confidence. Anticipate and address questions from your audience, be prepared with the information you need and let your words work for you. 

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



TURFHEADS TAKE OVER /ISSUE

Nine reasons to contribute to Turfheads Take Over IX

We're again closing the print portion of the year by opening an issue to readers. Let's explore the whys and hows of the submission process.

By Guy Cipriano

We guarantee golf maintenance professionals write better than we reporters and editors can lead a turf team through weather whims. Our December archives prove our point.

We've concluded our past eight print years by offering readers, followers, scrollers and listeners the opportunity to contribute an article to an issue we affectionately call "Turfheads Take Over." We love all 12 of our annual print issues equally, but there's something special about helping people who hold demanding full-time jobs connect with a large peer audience via writing.

The premise of Turfheads Take Over involves filling what we in the magazine business call a "feature well" with reader contributions. All industry professionals are encouraged to write about any topic they deem fit. Submissions can range from 600 words (the minimum to fill a print page) to more than 2,000 words.

We're available to assist with every step of the writing process. Submissions must be received by Thursday, Oct. 31. Yes, deadlines are part of our business! See below with details on how to submit an article and applicable images.

Let's do our part to convince you to submit by revealing nine reasons why contributing to Turfheads Take Over IX represents a great use of your time.

Self-therapy

A golf maintenance job can be a grind. Temporarily stepping away for a creative pursuit provides a mental respite. Using a different part of your brain reinvigorates the mental focus required to execute tasks that pay the bills.

Stakeholders will appreciate you even more

People exude tremendous pride in their golf facilities. Seeing your name and thoughts in a respected national publication proves to owners, GMs, members and loyal customers that your expertise extends beyond presenting awesome playing conditions. Well-deserved course cred accompanies becoming a published writer.

Your résumé will get a boost

Despite a glut of open positions, landing one of the industry's most desirable jobs remains ultracompetitive. One more skill on a résumé, especially one used as frequently as writing, has never hurt somebody's case when applying for their next job.

Wise way to use a weather delay

Unfortunately, the weather isn't perfect everywhere. Waiting out storms will always be a part of a golf maintenance job. Crafting a few sentences and paragraphs, in a quiet office, during a downpour, can be a productive use of time before returning to the course.

Step toward certification

Writing an article for a local, regional or national publication is a requirement for earning some career certifications. But let's face it, writing might not be the requirement you're most stoked about fulfilling. Our team's pleasant demeanor and accessibility makes a seemingly painful part of the certification process pleasurable.

You can inspire others

Whether we publicly admit it or not, we all want to leave an indelible mark on others. When you share an idea, concept, thought or story with a mass audience, you're connecting with people you'll likely never meet. In turn, somebody might

parlay your calculated words into actions to help themselves, their businesses or the people around them. That's powerful stuff.

You can recognize your team

Perhaps your team recovered from a natural disaster. Or provided fabulous conditions during a nasty weather stretch. Or concocted practical ways to boost golfer satisfaction. Or played a huge role in generating new revenue for your facility. Or overcame a failure. A published story in a glossy magazine about what your team achieved is terrific breakroom, hallway or office artwork that will boost employee morale.

You can draw attention to your company

We dissuade overly commercial articles. But we welcome people who work for industry companies to share ideas and observations from their vast experiences. Every contributor receives a tagline at the bottom of their article. The taglines mention their name and where they work. Who knows? A qualified buyer might contact you about your products or services after reading your writing.

It can be fun

Let's revert to the beginning of this article. You're a better writer than you imagine. Punching a few keys, watching thoughts appear on a screen and sharing the results with others can be more enjoyable than imagined. You might also gain a fulfilling hobby or potential side hustle.

Guy Cipriano is Golf Course Industry's publisher + editor-in-chief. You can email submissions and applicable images to him at gcipriano@gie.net or managing editor Matt LaWell at mlawell@gie.net.



IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING?

A recent article in *Golf Digest* asked: How should a golfer voice their concerns, questions or feedback on course conditions to the superintendent?

It's certainly worth pondering and debating, but I was bothered by the responses, which came from only two superintendents, both at private-equity clubs in the Northeast. And only one of them really indicated a preference, which was to hear from the members by email or through the green committee.

Wait a minute. If I'm a member of a private club, I'm going to feel entitled to walk up to the superintendent any time I like, ask a question, and expect an answer on the spot.

As well the member should. And maybe because I'm old school, I think talking to someone face-to-face is much better than trying to understand and answer by email.

But I get it. If our job were nothing more than spending half-hour after half-hour talking to golfers, driving to the trouble spot, and explaining meteorology, biology and soil science, that would be great. You have a few other things to do today. And every day.

What is the best way to handle golfers' questions and comments? I can tell you what it is not: "I would talk to you, but you don't know what you're talking about."

Start by thinking about what's best for you. Do you like the one-on-one with members or golfers, taking a few minutes to communicate and educate? Can you spare the time? If you're at a private club, do you get the sense that's what is expected? Are you likely to lose your cool?

Are you already regularly communicating with members? Are they comfortable with you and you with them? Or do you drive the other way when you see someone approaching? What does the green committee, or other management, think is appropriate? Do they want to be the conduit between you and the people playing on your golf course? Is the club willing to institute a policy, or at least make it known that there is a best way to communicate with you?

I believe part of our job is communication. Your customers are never going to learn if you don't talk to them. Get in front of the members, explain what you're doing and why, and be prepared for questions.

Use that time to let them know the most effective way to reach you—email or face-to-face—and tell them that you'll respond as quickly as possible. Then do so.

Now that they know how to get to you, who are you going to hear from? See if any of these characters sound familiar.

CAPTAIN OBVIOUS

This is the helpful sort who feels the need to tell you things you already know. Such as, "The course is very soft because it rained last night," or "At the end of the day the bunker rakes are scattered all over the place."

Thanks for the bulletin. Oh,

by the way it should be obvious that if I'm standing in a ditch holding a shovel and up to my knees in water — "Fixing a water break?" — this probably isn't the best time to chat.

COMPARATIVE ANALYST

Think about this: A brain surgeon and a heart surgeon are both surgeons, but they operate on different body parts. Superintendents operate in different climates, on different grasses, and with different budgets.

As nicely as possible, ask the golfer what kind of grass is on his other course, how much rain do they get and when, what's the maintenance budget, and what time of year do they play there.

EDDIE HASKELL

For those of you too young to remember, he was the kiss-ass tattler on "Leave It to Beaver." This is the golfer who complains about the conditions to everyone else — other golfers, the pro, the GM — but never talks to you.

THE GHOUL

What I mean is that the previous superintendent just left — the body is still warm — and this complainer must tell the new superintendent all the bad things their predecessor did.

If you've made it clear to golfers that you will listen — when the time is right — you can carefully handle all these complainers you're sure to encounter. Pull back the curtain a little bit, show them you're just as enthusiastic about course conditioning as they are, and make sure they know that when there are real problems, you want to hear them. 🟩



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What should a superintendent do during their first week, month or season at a new club? A quartet of talented turf pros share their perspective.

By **Rick Woelfel**

Changing jobs can be daunting in any field. For a golf course superintendent, assuming a new position brings on challenges unique to the turf industry.

A new superintendent must build relationships with their new crew and the club's management team. They may have to deal with unfamiliar agronomic circumstances. Perhaps most important, they must earn the respect of an oftentimes-demanding membership.

So, what steps can an incoming

superintendent take to ease their transition? Are there things they should not do?

When **Hunter Salts** arrived at Vestavia (Alabama) Country Club late in 2021, he hit the ground running.

A University of Tennessee graduate, Salts spent four and a half years at Peachtree Golf Club in Atlanta before coming to Vestavia, a private club eight miles south of Birmingham.

The club completed a renovation in 2017, but there were some natural areas that had been overrun by

weeds and needed prompt attention. There were also drainage issues to contend with.

"Coming in, I definitely needed to have a good plan of action," Salts says. "How to tackle all those natural areas and finally get those established. I tried to come in hot, with a lot of fresh ideas, and a plan of action."

With the support of Vestavia's members and board of directors, Salts put his plan in motion.

"My first year here, we had a \$100,000 drainage project and we turned their three wettest fairways



the vision I have for the course and where we wanted to take it. They all bought in, and I think seeing results made them want to do everything.”

Salts made a point to learn from his crew, which includes nearly 30 employees.

“I kind of made the decision when I came in to kind of sit back and see how they ran things and develop a really strong relationship with the (three) assistants,” he says. “From there, I was able to squeak in and make some minor adjustments and also see their side of things. We kind of had a really easy transition with the assistants. Just being friendly with them, being on their level, getting ideas from them.”

“The crew took very well to it as well. They started seeing the results of all the projects we were doing. They take so much pride in the place and I think everybody was really excited about the direction we were taking it and kind of hopped on board pretty easily.”

Salts says that **William Shirley**, his boss at Peachtree, served as his example for how to relate to people.

“I think the biggest thing I learned in my time at Peachtree was just how to treat people,” Salts says. “(Shirley) just treats everybody with such respect. I kind of brought that same philosophy here — treat everybody with respect. I really value the crew. I’m very appreciative of them. I try to get on a personal level with all the crew guys, develop relationships with them. I think if you’re treating people the way they need to be treated, it’s very easy for everyone to follow your lead from there.”

Salts, who was named the Alabama GCSA Superintendent of the Year last year, strengthens his ties with members by joining them on the course.

“I love golf,” he says. “I play with groups of members out here at least once a week, which is a great opportunity to meet people, be with the members. I’ve been spending a lot of time with them and asking them

what direction they wanted the course to go, what they thought needed to be done. I think them seeing me as a golfer and a good player, it was easy for them to follow. I think they really appreciated someone coming in there that was assertive and actually told them the things they needed to do because they’re very passionate about the golf course.

“They love it, and they just want to see it in great condition. So, they took very well to me being assertive and kind of laying out a plan for their golf course.”

Stephen Stewart is in his second season as superintendent at Yahnundasis Golf Club in New Hartford, New York. The private club traces its history back to 1897. The golf course, a **Walter Travis** design, opened for play in 1924.

Before arriving at Yahnundasis, Stewart was an assistant at Somerset Hills Country Club in Bernardsville, New Jersey. His first priority was getting to know his crew, which numbered 12. The transition didn’t go smoothly at first.

“The crew was actually very experienced, very tight-knit, a very close group,” he says. “It was a tough transition from that point, where they know everybody. They’ve been set in their ways for many, many years.”

“And being a young super coming from a club like (Somerset Hills), I had the idea of coming in and I really wanted to change things quickly and get my program installed, and I learned very fast, ‘Don’t do that.’”

The experience taught Stewart the value of patience.

“You go in wanting to change things, but I started to learn very quickly: One day at a time. Don’t come in and change a program. Don’t change everything up overnight.

“You’ve got to adjust the crew. Just take one small success at a time and just really learn their respect. That was the biggest thing.”

Stewart stresses the need to in-

into their best fairways,” he says. “Next, we started killing out all the natural areas that were never established. Then we started coming back in with different blends of fescue.”

Salts cited the club’s membership and board of directors for their support.

“They kind of saw the vision starting to take place,” he says. “One thing after another they saw results. They were just very confident in the direction.

“I went in front of the board and gave them a presentation on kind of

form the crew why changes are being made.

“When I wanted to change something, I needed to be able to tell them why we’re changing it and the reasons behind it,” he says. “There’s always a reason behind wanting to change certain aspects of it.”

Stewart’s connection to his crew strengthened over time.

“It was a transition that took longer than expected,” he says. “Small wins at a time and earning their respect. Being diligent and telling them why I wanted to change certain things. And after they kind of saw the vision and saw why we were doing things and saw how the course actually played and the overall health of the turf — once they saw the results over time — it was more of a buy-in for them. It took a while, but we finally got there.”

It’s not uncommon for a superintendent changing jobs to find themselves dealing with agronomic circumstances they had not previously experienced.

When **Renee Geyer** took over as the superintendent at Canterwood Golf & Country Club in Gig Harbor, Washington, where she’s now in her third season, she found herself in what was for her an unfamiliar agronomic environment. The Ohio native had spent the previous 13 years as an assistant at Firestone Country Club.

“(Canterwood) is all *Poa*,” Geyer says. “Where I came from, my greens were all seeded bent, my fairways, my tees, everything was bent. There were 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 and understanding about 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.”

Geyer says the club staff and particularly her crew made her transition easier.

“My crew really has a lot of tenure,” she says. “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.”

When **Brandon Razo** assumed the superintendent’s post at Panther Creek Country Club in Springfield, Illinois, last year, he was succeeding the man who is now his boss.

“The previous superintendent, **Perry Greene**, was pulling double duty as both the GM and the superintendent,” Razo says. “He now is just the GM, and our relationship has been great.”

One of the first items on Razo’s to-do list was getting to know the members at Panther Creek, a private club that opened for play in 1992 and features a **Hale Irwin**-designed course.

“Right after I started, we had our annual meeting, so that was my first time being in front of membership,” Razo says. “I was able to do the normal meet and greet with members. The club also does a couple new member parties that I attend to meet new members. Most of the time, though, I have taken it upon myself to be visible and available on the course to membership. Either by hanging around the pro shop or range, or by just cruising the course and asking golfers how their day is going.”

Razo also made it a point to get to know his crew as people.

“After the initial introduction, I usually get to know my crew by talking to them on the course,” he says. “I enjoy getting to know about their life outside of the course and hearing about their families. The

first thing I instill in my crew is that family comes first, and I will always be flexible to help them out in situations.”


Razo proceeded methodically when he arrived at Panther Creek, taking time to observe and learn about how the turf department operated. He resisted the urge to make drastic changes.

“Whenever a superintendent starts at a new course, right away they are thinking of ways to improve the course or ways to change things quickly,” he says. “I took the opposite approach. I tried to keep everything the same right when I started. As I built more of a rapport with my crew and members, then I started to alter certain cultural practices and change up fertilization and pesticide programs.”

Razo, who came to Panther Creek from Cross Creek Golf Club, a 27-hole daily fee facility in his hometown of Decatur, Indiana, stresses the importance of the superintendent being visible.

“In our industry, it is more important now than before to be visible among the membership,” he says. “They need to see you being involved with the crew, and they need to see you engaging with members. You are the face of the golf course.”

“If the membership is seeing you and talking with you, then it becomes a lot easier for the superintendent to communicate the decisions being made on the course. This allows the membership to gain trust and helps make life easier for the superintendent.”

Just as every golf course features its own unique characteristics, every superintendent’s circumstances are unique. When changing jobs, there will be adjustments. But making those adjustments one at a time will likely make the transition to a new position less daunting. 

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



A SENIOR MOMENT

I am now at the age when I can join the seniors for their weekly golf event. Or, to be precise, of the state of mind that allows me to enjoy participating with them in their weekly 9-hole play at our local municipal course.

Technically, I reached that age a few years ago, but it took me a while to get used to it. Besides, this time around I had official reasons to join them. That's because as newly appointed chair of my town's municipal golf committee, I have a built-in political or administrative interest in how things are run at our local **Pete Dye**-designed Wintonbury Hills Golf Course in Bloomfield, Connecticut. We're now in our 20th year of operation. It is run quite admirably on behalf of the town by a division of Troon Golf called Indigo. They get an annual fee and a percentage of gross revenue above a contracted threshold as a bonus.

My unpaid job as chair is simply to serve as a liaison between the town and the management firm while ensuring the concerns of pass holders and daily-fee players are addressed. For two decades now, things have gone very well. We register 28,000 to 31,000 rounds annually, largely because the course is in magnificent shape, and we maintain a healthy pace of play of 4 hours, 15 minutes. General manager and Master PGA Professional **Ciaran Carr** has a keen business sense and a pleasant demeanor that serves everyone well. Our superintendent, **Dennis Petruzzelli**,

CGCS, manages with a minimal crew to present conditions comparable to the area's best private clubs at a budget no more than 60 percent of what they spend.

Our golf committee, which meets once a month on an advisory basis, recently was tasked with dealing with an issue of the senior golf group that has privileges every Tuesday morning. Turns out, they've been too successful, with average participation by men and women up by over 25 percent this year. We have 40 to 50 golfers signing in for the 9-hole events. The problem is, as seniors who run in ages from 65 to 98 and include both veteran players and complete novices, they were taking up a lot of time playing their half-rounds. In some cases, rounds took three hours.

That's a problem, because while they would be teeing off on one nine, fee-paying golfers, many of them from out-of-state and paying premium rates of \$80 to \$90 due to congestion pricing, were running into them when they made the turn, causing backups. It even led to some of those golfers staying away on Tuesday mornings, which cost us a lot of revenue.

After hearing about the issue, I decided to investigate by joining the seniors for a 9-hole event. And what I quickly discovered was that the backups and slowdowns were due to a few golfers having trouble tracking their golf ball, losing perspective when they advanced in their cart and not

having "marked" where their shot wound up. They were also slowed down by adhering to "playing in turn" rather than "ready golf," as well as taking too much time on the greens, especially over those testy come-backers — and the putt after that.

I brought this up to the committee, and after a few minutes of deliberation, we decided to institute a few basic adjustments. First, don't waste time looking for your golf ball. If you can't find it, drop another and play from there without penalty. We also suggested that golfers pick up on the green after their third putt. We also tried designating a "captain" in each foursome who would effectively function as a forecaddie and help expedite ball searching and pace of play. And, of course, play "ready golf."

I know, the suggestion to just drop another ball without penalty flies in the face of the official rules of golf. So what? Our job was to help folks enjoy their golf, not test whether they were playing by scout's honor in dutifully obeying a legalistic rule book. With apologies and respect to the USGA, I stick by the decision. Besides, it worked. The first week under the new guidelines we cut average time by 20 to 30 minutes, thus no backup at the crossover. We'll see if the rabbit pace holds up.

The point, as I wrote in a memo to the senior golfer who introduced the changes, was "to have fun out there, make friends, share memories and keep everyone fit so that we can all break 100 — years." 🍌



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.

SNOW MOLD HAS MET ITS MAX



BASF
We create chemistry

Aramax™ Intrinsic® brand fungicide, a new disease control solution from BASF, performed well in real-world trials last winter, and superintendents are buzzing about ease of use and the low rate. In short, Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide is here, and it's ready to help fight back against snow mold.

Aramax™
Intrinsic® Brand Fungicide

By Pat Jones

Aramax vs. Snow Mold

Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide is a new combination of pyraclostrobin (the active ingredient in Insignia® SC Intrinsic brand fungicide) and triticonazole (the active ingredient in Trinity® fungicide), two proven tools from the BASF turf products portfolio. The cool-season goal in introducing it now is to give superintendents an excellent snow mold weapon for fairways and greens as well as tees.

The Ph.D. Perspective

When Dr. Paul Koch of the University of Wisconsin talks about snow mold, superintendents up north stop and listen. I asked him to talk about how the product performed in his most recent trials.

"Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide] performed very well in our snow mold trials this past winter," said Koch. "Our Marquette, Mich., location had significant disease with the non-treated plots averaging over 70% pink snow mold, but Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide] reduced disease severity by 86% at this location."

Koch says Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide is particularly well-designed for gray snow mold. "So, when a fungicide like iprodione or fludioxonil was added specifically targeting pink snow mold to enhance the breadth of control, there was almost no disease present. Triticonazole is a really effective chemical against Typhula fungi."

Real-World Results

We talked to superintendents in some of the toughest snow mold regions who tried Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide last fall. Here's what they had to say.

Andrew Updegrave, Baker Hill Golf Club, New Hampshire

In just a couple of years at Baker Hill, Andrew Updegrave has learned that snow mold control is mission-critical in New Hampshire. He did his overall application, including test areas for Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide, in early November. What did he learn?

"We had absolutely zero breakthrough. I didn't see any adverse effects on rooting, and we had nice, even spring green-up. I was very impressed."

Updegrave also found it was easier to use. "The other thing I loved is the low rate. Typically for snow mold you're putting gallons of different stuff in the mix, you get kind of a foamy tank, and it's a mess. Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide] goes in at 1 oz/1000 sq ft so it's way easier to mix and use."

Brian Hawkes, Golf Club of New England, New Hampshire

"I was interested in trying Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide] because I'm always down for checking out new improvements and new products," says Brian Hawkes, who's overseen the Golf Club of New England in coastal New Hampshire for more than four years now. For this trial, Hawkes sprayed 2.5 gallons of Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide across four fairways. His winter was "mild but wet." Yet, snow mold was still prevalent.

"We didn't see any breakouts on those fairways, and they bounced back a little quicker than other fairways and greened up nicely," said Hawkes. "So, no disease problems and it came out pretty cleanly."

Now he's interested in trying more Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide under regular season conditions. "I do a lot of rotation and usually spray fairways every 21 days," says Hawkes. "I can definitely see this being part of my regular rotation."

Continued on next page

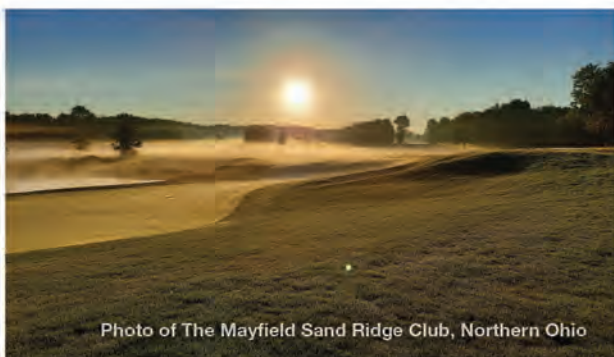


Photo of The Mayfield Sand Ridge Club, Northern Ohio

Ian Gallagher, The Mayfield Sand Ridge Club, Northern Ohio

When we asked Ian Gallagher how he felt about testing Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide, he was enthusiastic: “I welcomed it. I’d had experience with both Insignia SC [Intrinsic brand fungicide] and Trinity [fungicide] and thought, ‘This is a damn bazooka to put those two together.’”

Gallagher also said the timing is excellent. “I felt like it’s an interesting combination to have, and it’s good to have new options coming for snow mold because of regulatory pressure on PCNB, chlorothalonil and other traditional treatments.”

The simplicity of Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide is a big attraction for him. “The 1-ounce use rate is really nice versus five or six times that much for generics. There’s less product to deal with and the broad spectrum control you get from Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide] is really nice going into the next year.”

So how did it work for him in the trial? “I didn’t see any breakthrough with Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide]. It works. There’s no doubt it works.”



Photo of Nemadji Golf Course, Superior, Wisconsin

Vince Dodge, Nemadji Golf Course, Superior, Wisconsin

Snow mold is typically a big deal at Wisconsin’s Nemadji Golf Course, which lies at the western tip of Lake Superior. “The snow will stay around December through mid-March so there’s usually plenty of pressure.”

Like many up north, Dodge doesn’t have a standard go-to mix for fairways. “I’ll try a combination of at least four actives, usually one name brand product along with two or three generics depending on what I still have on the shelf,” he said. He also likes to add some pigment to the mix to encourage quick warm up and get some darker green color in and out of spring.

So, what do his decades of experience battling this problem tell him about the potential for the new BASF combo? “I think Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide] would actually be a very effective snow mold control up here.”



Untreated

Treated with Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide and PCNB

Craig Moore, Marquette Golf Club, Marquette, Michigan

“This was a mild winter...I never even put my snowshoes on,” says Craig Moore, a cold-weather veteran from Marquette Golf Club in northern Michigan. “But we did have seven weeks of snow cover, and we had some really good snow mold pressure on the course and on Dr. Koch’s snow mold plots here. The control plots were annihilated with pink snow mold!”

What was his testing approach? “I used one complete tank [of Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide] on fairways and juiced it up with some PCNB – because we need at least three actives to make it work – and it looked as good if not better than the fairways treated with five actives,” said Moore.

He also puts the low use rate into perspective. “The one thing is the low use rate. When you’re putting snow mold products out in winter, it’s not warm. Your hands are cold and if there are fewer jugs to handle and to clean out, it’s way, way better.” Moore says he normally needs to have a heater out to warm the jugs enough to even clean them. Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide makes those logistics much simpler.

The Final Word

Andy Morris, a veteran turf pro who now supports BASF customers and distributors throughout much of the central snow mold zone, was impressed with the results superintendents achieved during the trials.

“Superintendents who deal with snow mold know the challenges this pathogen creates,” said Morris. “Snow Mold may be one of the toughest diseases to time for application and the simplicity of this product should make that easier. Superintendents who tried it obviously like the low use rate and the effectiveness of this new formulation.”

Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide now has field-proven performance backed by BASF. “We have a snow mold assurance program to stand behind Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide] and give customers that much more confidence in the product,” said Morris.



Hear from more superintendents on their experiences with Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide.



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One river, many problems

Along Ohio's Black River resides multiple golf courses, causing similar and different problems for each.

By **Kelsie Horner**

Located 30 miles west of Cleveland, northeast Ohio's Black River can be described as both a friend and an enemy — at least that's how Forest Hills Golf Course superintendent **Joe Yourkeiwicz** defines it.

The river, which is divided into three branches, is a tributary to Lake Erie. Multiple golf courses reside along those three branches,

including Forest Hills, a municipal facility operated by Lorain County Metro Parks.

While the river can bring benefits to these courses, including providing a water source for Forest Hills, Valley of the Eagles and Elyria Country Club, the river also presents issues, most notably in the form of flooding. Weather near Lake Erie is unpredictable, and the river can crest at any moment.

"You just hope you don't have a bad flood, but you have no control," Yourkeiwicz says. "You don't know when it's coming, you just have to be prepared."

Valley of the Eagles, a Nicklaus Design daily-fee facility on the main branch of the river, has experienced its share of flooding and significant damage. July 2021 brought damage superintendent **Sean Brennan** had never encountered.

▲ The 13th hole at Elyria (Ohio) Country Club is one of multiple holes on the William Flynn-designed course bordering the Black River.



▲ The presence of the Black River adds beauty and strategy to multiple holes at Valley of the Eagles. It also causes challenges due to flooding.

After rainfall and minor flooding on July 17, Brennan arrived at work on July 18 to find the 14th hole island green gone. Numerous greens were completely underwater, and damage to the course was visible all along the river side.

“Your training kicks in,” he says. “All those guys that I worked for instilled certain things in me, and what they really instilled in me is how to identify what is most important at the place you’re working. And so, I identified here, the first thing when we have storms, because we have every cart path, is make sure the golfer is going to get through. The first thing you do is check the bridges, check the cart path. Next thing you do is worry about putting greens.”

Although the course has a drainage system that flows into the river, the river will sometimes flood back through the drains, making flood recovery more difficult. To counteract the water damage, Brennan focuses on developing strong turfgrass.

“The only thing that works, in my

opinion for the flowing problem, is a healthy fibrous root system of turfgrasses, perennial turfgrasses,” he says. “So anywhere that we have time to fully develop a stand of turf, that area generally will be OK.”

After 30 years of working with the river, Elyria Country Club superintendent **Patrick Rodgers** has mastered how it works. For him, patience is key.

Due to the location of multiple greens, when floods are minor, water avoids taking over the surfaces. Elyria Country Club has a formal drainage system, so Rodgers and his crew’s main goal is to let the system drain the water and then clean up the ensuing damage.

“Once the water goes up, there’s not much we can do,” he says. “You can just sit back and wait, wait for it to get ready, and then once the water goes away, you can get on it. You have at it and fix it.”

Although the courses are within 15 minutes of each other, the river impacts each in a different way.

Valley of the Eagles is impacted

by shale—a rock formed from mud. The shale proves to be the heaviest substance to move, making it the most difficult remnant the river leaves behind. Brennan and his team have learned to use the shale for the benefit of the course. They treat the shale as potting mix to grow the property’s flowers.

Forest Hills’ biggest issue is silt—a fine sand and clay sediment mixture. “Get rid of the silt,” Yourkeiwicz says. “That’s the biggest problem. You have to be ready once it recedes, to get rid of the silt, wash it off. It’s a big problem for us.”

Forest Hills had a drainage system before Yourkeiwicz joined the team. The system allows the water to be removed from the course quicker. The course’s cart paths sit six feet below their original height due to silt buildup, Yourkeiwicz says.

Designed by Golden Age architecture great **William Flynn**, Elyria Country Club, located just two minutes north of Forest Hills, also deals with silt issues. Elyria Country Club



and Forest Hills are on the east branch of the river. The silt Rodgers encounters is minor compared to other courses.

"I don't feel like we have a huge silt problem with the river," Rodgers says. "I've seen other courses like Kirtland Country Club (on Cleveland's East Side), when they were flooded with inches of mud. We typically don't get that. It's amazing looking back at the architecture from over 100 years ago when they built this place. Most of the time when we flood, the greens aren't underwater. Everything else is. But somehow, some way, the greens are in the right spot and don't end up underwater."

While the river presents maintenance challenges, it also offers benefits, none bigger than its role as a water source.

"We do not pay for water, which is obviously a big expense for some golf courses," Rodgers says.

"Right now, it's my friend," Yourkeiwicz adds. "There is a drought period, I pumped 4 million gallons of water

out of it to fill my pond up. I got plenty of water to do what I need to do."

The Black River also enhances aesthetics and golfer strategy at all three courses. The river hugs the east side of Elyria Country Club's property. It affects strategy — and offers serenity — along the 13th, 15th and 16th holes. "Beauty has its price," Rodgers says.

The river has a similar impact at Valley of the Eagles. When a golfer steps on the 13th and 14th tee boxes and looks left, the river dominates sight lines. Ducks may be floating nearby, and if lucky, a golfer might spot an eagle or an osprey. The river also affects strategy on the first and 18th holes, while the elevated second and 11th tees present terrific views of the waterway.



▲ Rodgers



▲ Brennan

"The river is a big draw for sure," Brennan says. "And when it's just right, when the river is flowing by 14 and is making an island out of 14 green, that's the best day. We all stand there and we're like, 'Man, why can't it just be like this all the time? Instead, it's got to be feast or famine, no water or way too much.'"

The river has allowed maintenance workers and superintendents who work along the river to learn to work together and form friendships. "We're going to start an organization: The Black River Superintendent

SPOTLIGHT

► Top: The 14th hole at Valley of the Eagles immediately after a major flood. Bottom: The hole following recovery work by superintendent Sean Brennan's team.

Organization" Brennan says.

The superintendents often message each other about the river height, incoming weather and more. "It's moral support more than anything. 'Hey, how you doing? What do you need? How's it going? How'd you manage this problem?'" Yourkeiwicz says. "Some guys do things differently, 'Did you vent the green? Did you vent the fairways?'"

Keeping a team motivated after consistent damage from flooding can be tough, but superintendents

have found ways to cope with the challenge. At Forest Hills, where the river abuts the fourth tee and can be spotted on multiple holes, the beauty of the course, when it's clear, motivates the crew, Yourkeiwicz says.

For Rodgers, helping his crew understand the river's activities are

out of their control helps keep them alert and ready to work.

"It's not your fault," he says. "There's nothing you can do about it. Your only job now is to clean it up. And we start dumping 15 tons of sand into a fairway because the river washes it out of a bunker. Yeah, that's

a lot of shoveling, and it definitely is challenging to keep seasonal guys, and guys who this really isn't their life motivation to clean it up, because it's a process." 🌱

Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry's assistant editor.

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MOTIVATED UNTIL SUMMER'S END

What happens when a huge event is at the conclusion of the toughest season in a brutal growing region? How past experiences are guiding turf decisions as Robert Trent Jones Golf Club prepares to host the Solheim Cup.

By **Rick
Woelfel**

The finest female golfers in the world are coming to Robert Trent Jones Golf Club in Gainesville, Virginia, on the final days of summer for the 19th playing of the Solheim Cup. The biennial matches are Sept. 13-15.

Scott Furlong and his team will be ready for them.

Furlong is Robert Trent Jones Golf Club's superintendent. He's worked at the club in one capacity or another for three decades and has been the head superintendent since 2000. He's no stranger to hosting big events.

Before assuming his present position, Furlong, a former teacher and coach, worked the Presidents Cup in 1994 and 1996 when it was staged at Robert Trent Jones Golf Club. As the head superintendent, he's hosted the Presidents Cup in 2000 and 2005, and the PGA Tour's Quicken Loans National in 2015.

Furlong's crew, which typically numbers 35 to 40 during the peak of the season, is spending the summer keeping the golf course primed for member play and protecting it from the Transition Zone summertime heat and humidity while simultaneously preparing it for the Solheim Cup.

Furlong's maintenance practices this season remain consistent with previous seasons despite an international event on the schedule.

"We have the resources to maintain at a certain level year-round," he says. "So, when it comes to an event like this, or other events, there's not a lot more effort that we need to put in. Obviously, the week of the event or the advance week before, there might be some, but as far as the products we're putting down, the labor, it's all about the same."

The club was named as the venue for the 2024 Solheim Cup two and

a half years ago. With that event in mind, Furlong made some adjustments to this year's maintenance schedule. "We moved some things around," he says. "We frontloaded all the tournaments in the spring."

Furlong also modified his aerification schedule, opting to aerify just once following Memorial Day.

"We did a little bit later aerification this year, and we did it with slightly bigger tines, knowing we're only going to do it once," he says. "We're not going to do one in August. We cannot risk that so we're only going to aerify once this year." Furlong adds that the course will be shut down for a brief stretch when the August aeration would normally be scheduled to give the turf a rest.

As the countdown continues toward the Solheim Cup, the weather is the wild card. From mid- to late-May to mid-September, Furlong and his team must be especially wary of the Washington, D.C., area's heat and humidity, and its effect on the course's bentgrass greens, tees and fairways.

"We have the old 1950s Pennncross still here, which still does great in the summer. It's still got its place," Furlong says. "We have two greens that are A-1/A-4 and we have two greens that are 007XL. Everything else, tees, fairways, greens are Pennncross. They do well. They look great."

Chase Garvey is Furlong's senior assistant superintendent.

He's in his fourth season at the club. Garvey notes that the key to success for any Mid-Atlantic superintendent is dealing effectively with moisture-management concerns.

"Whether it is finding isolated dry spots, wilt watching or making sure we do not increase disease pressure by allowing an area to become oversaturated, our lives revolve around moisture," Garvey says. "Our staff monitors moisture on the course throughout the day. We always strive to keep the turf as healthy

as possible while ensuring we don't interfere with the players on the course."

Garvey adds that modern technology helps the crew keep a close and constant eye on moisture levels. "We are constantly using soil probes, PO-GOs and TDRs to check the moisture level of our surfaces so we can keep the turf happy and healthy."

Robert Trent Jones Golf Club debuted a state-of-the-art Toro two-wire irrigation system in May 2023. The new system helped the team deal with drought conditions last summer and provides maximum flexibility when dealing with heat and humidity.

"If we want to make it rain, we can make it rain now," Furlong says. "It is a juggling act. We don't know what the summer is going to give us. No one does. It's a changing environment every day."

Garvey notes that no part of the property is immune to the impact of the summer weather.

"Everything is at risk," he says. "No part of the golf course is off limits when it comes to the stress of heat and disease pressure. With this in mind, our upgraded system helps us deal with the wide range of temperatures we see here."

Another challenge the team faces involves onsite rocks complicating the process of growing and maintaining healthy turf.

"We have so much rock underneath that it's hard to grow grass," Furlong says. "That's why the new (irrigation) system is such a blessing because we can water fairways by themselves, we can water rough by itself and we can isolate because we have wall-to-wall coverage now."

"We might be in a rock cropping where you walk through the rough and you can see rocks; you can't dig them out, we'd have to blast them out. They're part of the playing surface in a few areas, that is the most difficult thing we deal with."

Come the Solheim Cup, Furlong and his team will be supported by a corps of around 70 volunteers from 12 nations, many of whom worked at Robert Trent



Robert Trent Jones Golf Club
In Gainesville,
Virginia

Jones Golf Club at some point in their careers. Others will come from clubs where Furlong has sent members of his team to volunteer at events.

"There are a lot of great superintendents, locally and far away, who are hosting U.S. Opens or Ryder Cups or Wells Fargos, whatever it might be," Furlong says. "We always send them (volunteers) so it's really cool to have those guys send people back that we've been supporting. They've also supported us."

"But it's also the guys who have been



▲ Furlong

around for a while and have some of their guys come who used to work for me a long time ago or send their staff that are basically a cookie cutter of them. And then also having the people that have worked here or gone through here as an intern come back 'home' for that week, that's really exciting."

After all the preparation that goes

into hosting a major event, tournament week should bring a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

"That week is supposed to be an enjoyable week," Furlong says. "It's not sup-

posed to be a pull-your-hair-out. If you do all the work beforehand and you do all the stuff leading up to it, it's supposed to be the most reward-

ing week of your year or your life if it's the first televised event you have ever hosted.

"When you host a tournament, it goes by quick. It's amazing how there's so much leading up to the event and that week just goes away like the snap of a finger." 🏌️

Rick Woelfel is a Philadelphia-based writer, senior Golf Course Industry contributor and host of the Wonderful Women of Golf podcast.

TRAVELS WITH TERRY

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



CLUB NAME & LOGO EXTRAORDINAIRE

The Aspen (Colorado) Golf Club name and logo is prominently displayed behind the 16th green and to the left of the fourth green during special events throughout the season. Equipment operator **Gary LaCouter** came up with this great idea to use a Toro Sidewinder triplex rough mower, with the cutting units lowered with the

reels shut off, to compress the turf with the front and rear rollers to form the letters and the club's aspen-leaf logo. LaCouter forms other wording in this location, such as Skiers, Howdy, Elks (for the Elks Club) and logos, all for special events as directed by superintendent **Dominic Lanese III** and PGA general manager **Jim Pratt**. The wording

is refreshed with the mower one to two times per week. It takes less than one hour to complete each refresh. **Jim Sivess**, former superintendent at the Snowmass Club, is the president of the Aspen Golf Club Advisory Board; **Frank Hummel** designed the course and **Dick Phelps** and **Rick Phelps** have remodeled the course over the years.

BOULDER BENCHES

Two separate boulders were turned into decorative and functional tee benches three years ago on the par-3 eighth hole at the Aspen Golf Club as well. The City of Aspen's Parks & Open Space staff cut the benches out of the onsite boulders with concrete saw-type equipment at no cost to the club. The boulders are cool to the touch on warm summer days, and they offer commanding views of the four ski areas in Aspen and Snowmass and the well-conditioned golf course. Superintendent **Dominic Lanese III** and PGA general manager **Jim Pratt** work together quite well with lots of unique ideas. **Jim Sivess**, former superintendent at the Snowmass Club, is the president of the Aspen Golf Club Advisory Board. **Frank Hummel** was the original architect and **Dick Phelps** and **Rick Phelps** have been the remodeling architects over the years.



Terry Buchen, CGCS Retired, MG, is president of Golf Agronomy International. He's a 56-year, life member of the GCSAA. He can be reached at 757-561-7777 or terrybuchen@earthlink.net.

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CONTENT IN EVERY DIRECTION.



LEADERS LEAD

Our club hosted a major amateur golf championship last month. In the days leading up to the event, we were experiencing high heat and humidity coupled with insufficient rainfall. In other words, just what you would expect in the middle of July!

We had only one day when the course was closed for play to allow us the opportunity to perform many necessary tasks in advance of the event that began the following morning. It was during this day I received a text from our food and beverage manager requesting some bottled water.

It's my understanding that bottled water became the mainstay here during COVID-19 and the club has continued the practice. Sixty cases of water per pallet are delivered as needed to the golf maintenance facility where members of our agronomy team supply coolers on the course each day.

The golf professional staff also uses bottled water to supply the golf car fleet. Because the water is stored at golf maintenance, we transport multiple cases at a time to support the food and beverage operation at the clubhouse.

Needless to say, the timing of their request was not ideal. But to their credit, they did preface with "I know you're super busy, but ..." Honestly, I did not mind the request and simply headed to the shop to commandeer a larger utility vehicle and loaded up 15 cases of water.

I made three trips with the hand truck into the hallway of the basement level and enjoyed the reprieve from the heat supplied by the air conditioning. I was spotted on camera making my delivery and was asked why I was delivering the water. I sim-

ply said, "because the guys on the team have more important things to do."

It was not my intention to belittle their request, but merely illustrate what may appear as a simple job is not beneath someone of my place in the organization chart. And that is when I realized this simple act was no different than the story **Andrew Moses** tells on X about interning for a minor-league baseball team in 2004.

He was hoping to learn the business side of sports that summer, but instead "learned the business of life." He learned on his first day that everyone in the office — from the CEO to the new intern — had to be prepared to pull the tarp on and off the field in the event of rain.

Moses admits he was confused thinking this was the job of the grounds crew. But he quickly learned that minor-league teams typically employ smaller grounds crews than their major-league counterparts and even though the field is the same size, everyone pitches in, regardless of title, role or years of experience. Moses says pulling the tarp is a massive team effort requiring resilience, selflessness, coordination, communication and a positive attitude.

I spent three years in

graduate school at Virginia Tech and recall when we had to tarp the football field inside Lane Stadium. It required a small army of people on call from the university's physical

plant, and a stack of \$20 bills. Not sure how much that might take in today's economy.

This whole experience reminds me of my first boss. He would always chuckle when emptying the garbage from the golf course and say, "I'm just an overpaid garbage collector." I have used that line myself many times through the years as it epitomizes my philosophy that I share with all new hires.

That is, I will never ask you to do anything I have never done myself or am unwilling to do.

Simon Sinek authored the book "Leaders Eat Last." When I was a member of the Carolinas GCSA board of directors, we had a hashtag called #LeadersLEAD. The messages are all the same, no task is beneath anyone on the team, and as the leader of the team, you must lead by example.

Surely you have seen the meme depicting the differences between a boss and a leader. The boss sits high in the chair carried by his or her subordinates and points toward where they want the team to go. The leader is in front of the team pulling their own weight — or possibly the weight of more — helping the team reach its destination.

Everybody pulls the tarp. I know my peers in the Southeast know a thing or two about this.

And Marcus ...

If you ever need me to help pull a tarp at the University of Kentucky, please give me a call. But it will cost you cash. 🤔

PS: Marcus Elswick is the head sports turf manager at the University of Kentucky. 🏌️

“

The messages are all the same, no task is beneath anyone on the team, and as the leader of the team, you must lead by example.”



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.

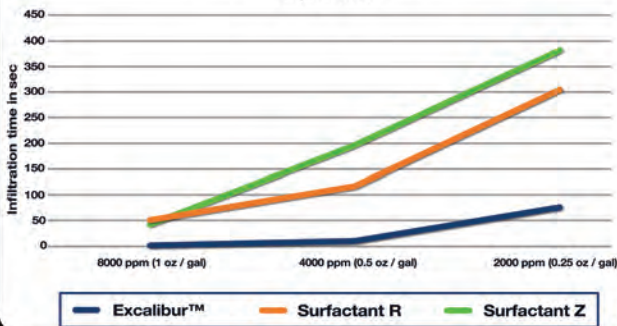


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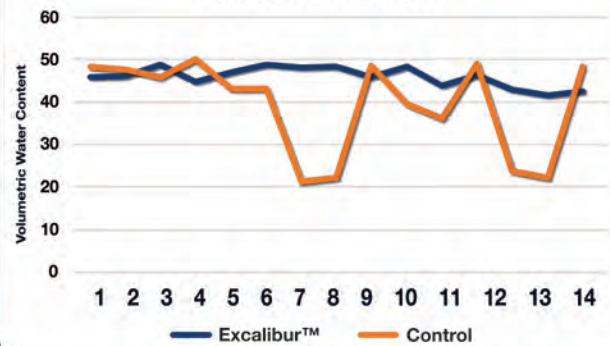


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


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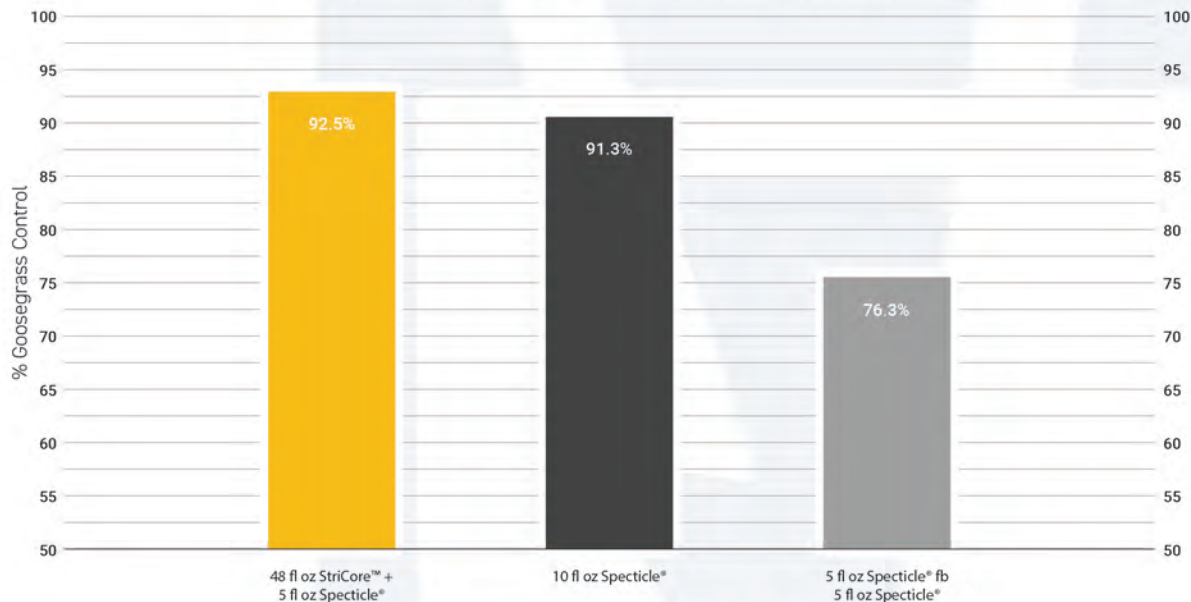
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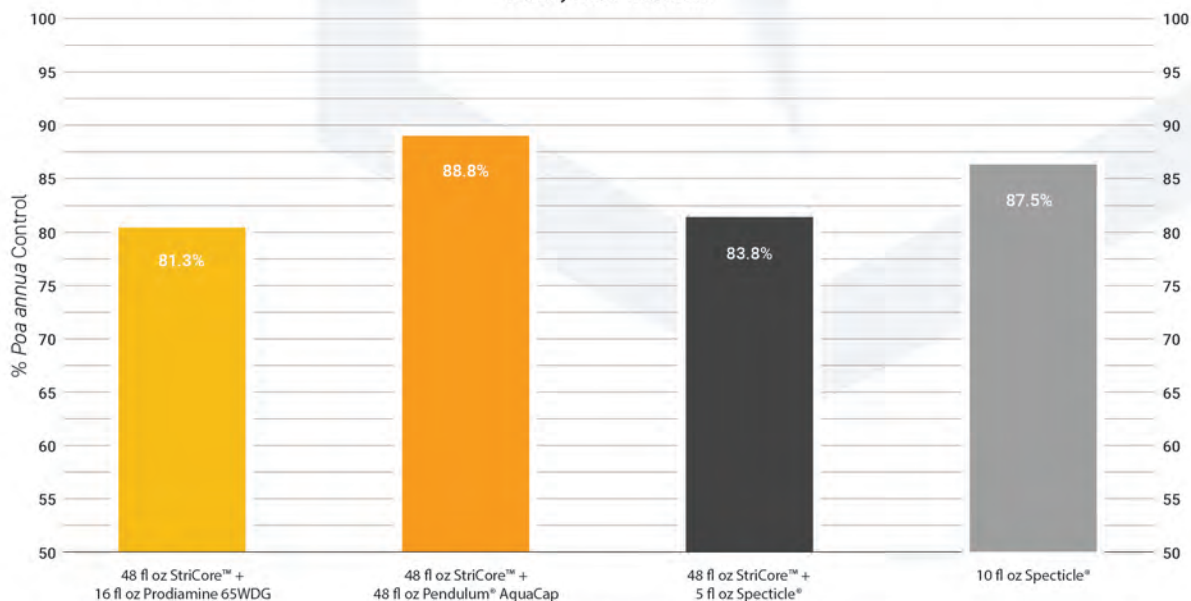
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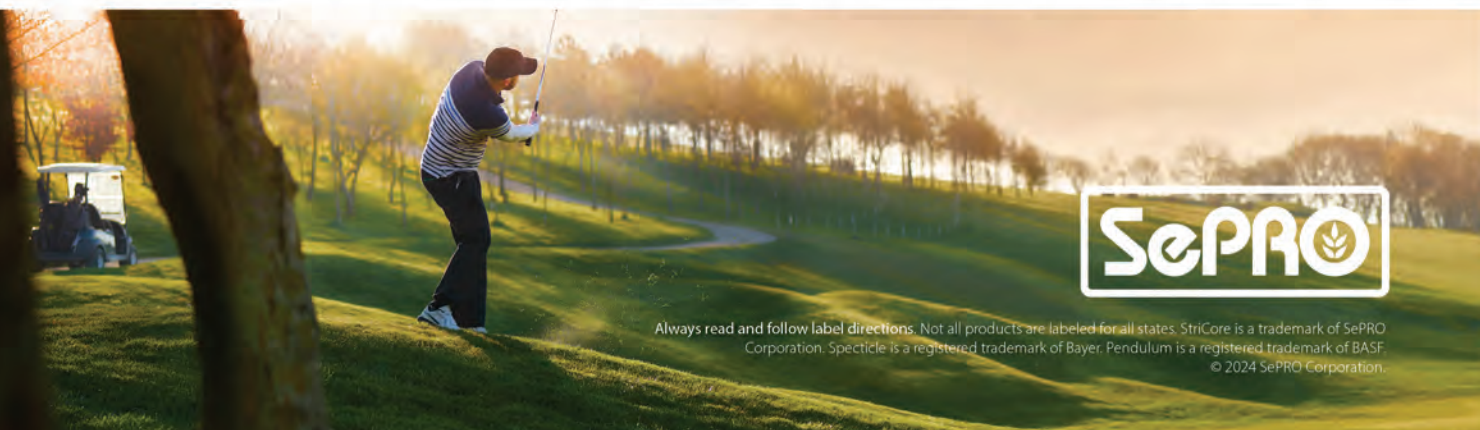
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