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## TURFHEADS

# TAKE OVER

## ISSUE







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# TRACTOR-SIZED TALENT

**M**atthew Wharton let a writing colleague through the Carolina Golf Club gates. He politely greeted him and then hopped on a tractor to resume aggressively verticutting Bermudagrass fairways.

The writer walked the **Donald Ross**-designed course in solitude. He scribbled notes about how Ross strategically scattered slopes, knolls, contours, knobs, rises and falls within the urban Charlotte golf grounds. July in Charlotte is steamy. Sweat engulfed the writer's hat, shirt, shorts and socks.

On three occasions, Wharton stopped and asked the writer for his observations. On three occasions, Wharton quickly returned to work. Late afternoon turned to early evening. Wharton had arrived at the club before the writer embarked on his travel-filled day.

Finally, as the writer reached the back nine, he realized prolonged conversation and fraternizing were not part of the evening's plans. No joint BBQ dinner at nearby Mac's Speed Shop. No pints with a colleague and friend he rarely sees.

The writer was in Charlotte for a next-day assignment at a club on the other side of town. The assignment and trip came on short notice. Once a sponsor identifies and vets a story subject, immediate action must be taken. Deadlines are the most critical part of a writer's job.

Deadlines are also part of a superintendent's job—and the writer was visiting Wharton at an awful time. Carolina Golf Club was in the middle of its summer course maintenance closure. Like many clubs, Carolina Golf Club experienced a dramatic spike in memberships and rounds beginning in 2020. After superintendents and their teams meet morning deadlines, they receive few openings to execute non-routine tasks. Course closures are prized turf maintenance commodities. Nary a second could be wasted on the sunny mid-summer day.

Wharton eventually hopped off the tractor so the writer could hand him a Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association award for his "America's Greenkeeper" column. Yes, Wharton toppled a group of writers at their trained game. Wharton posed for a quick photo and went back to work. The writer headed to Mac's Speed Shop to sip sweet tea and eat brisket alone.

The writer recalled that July 2021 day when Wharton informed him that this month would mark his final regular "America's Greenkeeper" column (page 58). A total professional, Wharton gave the writer, who triples as a publisher and editor-in-chief, more than six months' notice to identify, recruit and secure this magazine's next backpage voices.

We'll unveil our new columnists next month. They bring a different perspective and tone to our pages. We're not trying to replace Wharton; we're using our editorial space and resources to provide readers with the best possible product. For six years as a monthly columnist, including five on the backpage, Wharton helped us achieve our mission.

Wharton epitomizes golf maintenance professionals. He's a dedicated, hands-on, savvy, golf-loving, solutions-finding grinder who places meeting and exceeding customer expectations ahead of schmoozing or socializing. He's at peace on a tractor when others are neither around nor looking in his direction. If his employer gives him time and space to work, he will toil from dawn to dusk.

Superintendents possess massive skill sets. Wharton is also a fabulous writer. His ability to connect with members via written communication contributed to him landing a coveted job at Idle Hour Country Club in early 2023. His writing talents inspire peers everywhere. Golfers who find his content obtain a better understanding of a superintendent's responsibilities.

Writing isn't as physically demanding as providing awesome Transition Zone playing surfaces. One bad story or awkward glance at a stakeholder doesn't cost a writer his or her job. Deadlines, though, never end. Finding material for the next column, article or profile becomes a mental tussle. Writers can work long hours for meager pay. Passion for the craft must be abundant. Sound familiar?

Wharton hit 72 straight "America's Greenkeeper" column deadlines. He demonstrated how thousands of words can deeply impact others.

A few peers he inspired through his column submitted articles for the issue you're holding. Wharton's writing legacy is enormous.

We'll have brisket and pints waiting for him whenever he decides to hop off the tractor. 🌿



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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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## Pennsylvania preservation

**Superintendent Rich Shilling is keeping Donald Ross's fingerprints all over Jeffersonville Golf Club.**

*By Rick Woelfel*

**J**effersonville Golf Club stands as an ongoing tribute to **Donald Ross**, who designed the layout and personally supervised its construction.

Located in West Norriton, Pennsylvania, just outside Philadelphia, the semi-private club opened in 1931. West Norriton Township assumed ownership of the property in 1972. And for 23 years now, Jeffersonville Golf Club has been **Rich Shilling's** professional home.

Shilling took over as the superintendent in January 2001, when architect and restoration specialist **Ron Prichard** was in the early stages of a renovation effort with the goal of restoring as much of Ross's original design as was practical. **William Gordon** repositioned several holes in 1964 in deference to the Continental Pipeline.

"To be honest with you, I was probably in over my head at 22, maintaining this golf course during a restoration," Shilling says. "But I learned a lot. Learned a lot from my mistakes and learned a lot from Ron as well. Ron is very knowledgeable; he really under-

stands and gets what Ross wanted here."

When Shilling, a graduate of the two-year program at Rutgers, assumed his post, Prichard had renovated two holes — today's 17th and 18th.

"I got here and we had the rest of the golf course to do," Shilling recalls. "And, of course, we did the restoration in the summer months and we were still open throughout the whole process."

The restoration included the construction of three new greens and, perhaps most important, the installation of a state-of-the-art irrigation system. Prior to that, only greens were irrigated.

When Shilling was hired, he was beset with challenges.

"We were maintaining a golf course with equipment that was probably 20 years too old," he says. "It was a drought summer. We were laying 10,000 square feet of sod every day and the irrigation system wasn't complete. We were watering with water tanks and trying to keep everything alive through that summer and maintain the golf course

as well."

Shilling sees his current role, in part, as something of a museum curator.

"Twenty-four years ago, I barely knew who Donald Ross was," he says. "And I didn't know anything really about the history of this golf course. I was just focused on turf. Now, it's about preserving the intent of the architect, the intent of Donald Ross, and bringing small details back into the golf course with the flagsticks and the tee markers and all of the furniture that is built by us. It's special for me to be involved with preserving this place."

Jeffersonville circa 2024 has an old-time feel.

"(Prichard) set us up here pretty well with the tees," Shilling says. "Any greens that were restored were restored with a pushup-style green, so everything is pretty similar."

Today, Shilling is supporting his assistant, **Brian Bralies**, who's been with him for 17 years, and mechanic **Bill Regar**, who's been at the course for 30 years.

"Those two guys are the most important



## Tartan Talks 101

**Garrett Wasson's** knees become sore whenever he carries his golf bag, especially while traversing hilly courses. There's an explanation behind the soreness.



▲ Garrett Wasson

Before he seriously developed his golf passion, Wasson played baseball. And he played the sport's most physically demanding positions at a high level: Wasson was a catcher at Cornell University. Besides competing at the NCAA Division I level, Wasson used his time at Cornell to study landscape architecture with the intention of designing recreation and sports facilities.

His academic work led him to studying turfgrass management. Learning about turfgrass under **Dr. Frank Rossi** eventually landed him an internship at Bethpage State Park, where he worked on the famed Black Course for then-superintendent **Craig Currier**. "When I left Bethpage," Wasson says on the *Tartan Talks* podcast, "I left there solely wanting to focus on golf course architecture."

Wasson has settled nicely into the profession. He established his own firm, Wasson Golf Design, in 2023 and he also continues collaborating on projects with fellow ASGCA members. Ending his baseball — and subsequent adult league softball — career has created even more time to enjoy a game he never envisioned becoming his career. "I have to give Bethpage and my experience there a ton of credit for really pushing me toward golf course design," he says.

To learn more about Wasson's work, download the episode on the Superintendent Radio Network page of any popular podcast distribution platform.



staff members you could have," Shilling says. "People you can leave and get away for a little bit and trust that, when you get back, things haven't changed too much."

Getting the day started with dispatch is an issue at a lot of clubs but especially at Jeffersonville, which hosts more than 50,000 annual rounds. Shilling takes several steps to promote healthy turf. The property features 2½ acres of greens, three acres of tees and 27 acres of fairways.

"The priorities are your high-value areas," Shilling says. "Greens, tees and fairways. Tees and divots have to get done every day with that amount of play. Even the par 4s and 5s, there are plenty of divots. Tees are important. The first impression is on the tee. And then the greens are very important. We want to be sure they're smooth and reasonably quick without being unreasonable. These are Donald Ross greens, so some of the pins can be pretty tricky."

The volume of play mandates that Shilling and his team take extra steps to protect their greens.

"We fertilize a little bit more," he says. "We're putting down foliar fertilizer pretty much every week. We water a little bit more than your typical country club because we can't get out there and hand water a lot. There are three groups on each hole every day, so chasing hot spots in the afternoons is not going to work for us."

"We water up in the mornings and we're moving cups every day. You can't leave a pin in the same spot for two days here because you'll have worn-out spots everywhere."

Shilling has maintained a tree-removal program since 2012. Some 400 trees,

most of them white pines, have been removed in the years since. "The removal of those trees allowed us to expand fairways and collection areas," he says. "It really gave the players more options."

**Billy Mullen** is Jeffersonville's head golf professional. He was introduced to the game at the club — his grandfather was a starter there, and he has a unique perspective on how the club has evolved. "The conditions are fantastic," he says. "On par, if not better, than some of the country clubs in this area."

"Playing a golf course that's in that good of a condition all the time is special, but I think the thing that impresses me the most is the yardage hasn't changed much," — the course checks in at 6,430 yards and par 70 from the back tees. "It hasn't gotten that much longer, but it's a much more difficult golf course because of the conditions. The greens are obviously faster even though it's not a long golf course. If you don't hit the ball in the right spot, you're going to make bogey."

For his part, Shilling is proud of what his team has accomplished at Jeffersonville and the golfer experience they're providing.

"I'm really proud of the staff that I've built, and they've bought into what the vision is here," he says. "Every day there's a group of golfers that comes through here and we want to exceed their expectations, so I want to surprise and delight them."

"The guys that play here every day expect that. But the guys that play here for the first time are very surprised."

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

## INDUSTRY BUZZ

Foley Company acquired SALSCO, Inc., a turf maintenance equipment stalwart. Based in Cheshire, Connecticut, SALSCO was founded in 1979 by **Sal Rizzo**. The company offers an extensive line of products that includes gas and electric greens rollers, core recovery vehicles, leaf vacuums, straw-blowers, wood and brush chippers, chipper shredder vacuums, shavings mills and re-sizers, slab chippers, curbing machines, pavement routers, side dump buckets, narrow-width asphalt pavers, bale wrappers, and grabbers. That portfolio complements Foley's existing offerings, positioning both companies for enhanced growth and innovation. ... Epoch Science, a Chicago-based specialty chemical and biotech company founded by former Precision Laboratories owner and president **Rick Wohlner**, recently launched its Plant Fitness product line. It's starting with a new product category, "Turf Performance Agents," comprised of biological enhancers, stress-mitigating solutions and plant performance technologies. The products are designed to optimize the fitness of fine turfgrass and increase stress tolerance and playability while regenerating resources in the root zone. ... The Aquatrols Company has launched a sports turf division that will focus on the specific needs of sports field management professionals.



## COURSE NEWS

Total Turf Golf Services, the Cobbs Creek Foundation, and architects **Gil Hanse** and **Jim Wagner** are collaborating to complete the Philadelphia project at Cobbs Creek Golf Course in three phases. ... Richland, the seventh golf course at Reynolds Lake Oconee in Georgia, officially opened for play. The new 18-hole layout was created by architect **Tom Fazio** by combining nine holes from his existing National course with nine new holes. ... Broomsedge Golf Club, designed by **Kyle Franz** and **Mike Koprowski**, in Rembert, South Carolina, opened for limited preview play. ... Landscapes Unlimited completed major irrigation work at Baltusrol Golf Club in Springfield, New Jersey, and Prairie Dunes Country Club in Hutchinson, Kansas. At Baltusrol, **Paul Roche** of Golf Water designed the irrigation system. At Prairie Dunes, the company installed a system designed by **Brian Keighin** of Irrigation Technologies.

## PEOPLE NEWS

Former Merion Golf Club director of golf course operations **Matt Shaffer** received the Eberhard Steiniger Award presented by the Philadelphia As-

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sociation of Golf Course Superintendents. The award is the association's highest honor. ... Longtime superintendent **Tim Busek** recently replaced retiring **Tenia Workman** as Georgia GCSA executive director. ... Baseball legend **Ozzie Smith** is the recipient of the GCSAA's 43rd Old Tom Morris Award. Since retiring from baseball, Smith has found a love for the game of golf both as an avid golfer and as someone devoted to introducing the game to children and young adults who may not have access to play. ... King-Collins Golf Course Design added a third partner, Canadian designer-shaper **Trevor Dormer**, creating a new company in the process — King Collins Dormer Golf Course Design. ... Toro announced that irrigation and lighting GM **John McPhee** will retire at the end of December, following 29 years of service with the company. McPhee will transition his leadership responsibilities to **Neville Mody**.

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# Renee Schmaltz

HIGHLANDS GOLF CLUB

**R**enee Schmaltz has never been one to shy away from a challenge. Schmaltz is the second assistant superintendent at Highlands Golf Club in Edmonton, Alberta. She assumed her position in October.

An Alberta native, Schmaltz grew up playing ice hockey. She had a long career as a goaltender and was good enough to play at the NCAA Division III level in the United States. For those unfamiliar with the sport, hockey goaltenders are a different breed.

Schmaltz's hockey background gave her a strong sense of the team concept, which she brought with her to Highlands. Appearing on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast with host **Rick Woelfel**, Schmaltz talked about finding her way in a new agronomic and work environment. Despite being a native of the province and having spent most of her career there, she had to rethink how she did some things after assuming her new post.

"I would say for me, I kind of take time not only to learn the layout of the golf course," she says. "Sometimes that can be a little bit tricky and you kind of get a little bit lost, and you move on."

"Another thing I find really tough sometimes is you don't know how you fit in with the rest of the team. You're just trying to kind of slowly find your way in and find how you work with everybody else. Nobody likes it when you kind of come in guns a-blazing. It can rub people the wrong way. So sometimes that can be kind of tough, to find where you fit in and how you work best with others."

Schmaltz came to Highlands with a degree in environmental sciences, natural resources and conservation from Morrisville State College in Morrisville, New York. She also has a turfgrass management diploma from the prestigious Olds College in Alberta. And she worked an internship at Interlachen Country Club in Edina, Minnesota.

What insights has Schmaltz absorbed from the head superintendents she's worked under?

"I see how important it is to have good communication, not just with your board and general manager, but with your entire turf team," she says. "If you're able to stay organized, it's easy to also effectively communicate with your team. We're all trying to accomplish a common goal at the end of the day, so it usually works well if you work together."

Schmaltz has also learned how to adjust to changing circumstances.

Your plan "has to be a little adaptable where you don't just have one plan, one way to do something," she says. "Things will change, people might change you, situations might change on

you, so it's important to be able to kind of adapt situationally to accomplish your goal. And it's important to understand the agronomical side of turfgrass management."

Schmaltz aspires to be a head superintendent. She has ideas for how she would construct a team from the ground up.

"I'm thinking about what I'm looking for, for my No. 1 senior assistant/assistant superintendent," she says. "What kind of values or what kind of personality traits I'm looking for that will either work together with me or contrast me, so I have a nice balance."

"From there, I think what I need from my team is probably a good mechanic, maybe another assistant depending on the type of golf course you're working at and your expectations," she adds. "From there, you probably want an intern or a foreman or someone in that role just to have a succession plan as people move on and up."

Schmaltz stresses the importance of superintendents involving their crews in the planning process.

"It helps your team understand the ultimate goal of what we're trying to produce," she says. "It also helps drive some passion into your team, whether that's individuals that are already passionate and it helps them stay passionate about their jobs, or just helping new individuals find their passion."

"Most of our teams don't stay within the turfgrass industry. Our seasonal employees are going to move on to other jobs or accomplish their dreams that they have in life. It's also important to involve them in part of your process so that they're developing team skills as they move on in their lives." 🌱



If you're able to stay organized, it's easy to also effectively communicate with your team. We're all trying to accomplish a common goal at the end of the day, so it usually works well if you work together."



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# THE SAN FRANCISCO FEAT

**J**im Urbina is redesigning the venerable Ocean Course at The Olympic Club near San Francisco. It's a dream project: Olympic is the oldest athletics club in the U.S., dating to 1860, and the Ocean Course recently marked its 100-year anniversary. The assignment is made more pleasurable and productive for the head of Jim Urbina Golf Design by the support of **Troy Flanagan**, the club's director of golf course maintenance. Troy will be at Jim's side every step of the way, adding design and construction assistance from a ground-up perspective.

Their partnership is a masterclass in how a designer and a superintendent complement each other's experiences and strengths to bring a vision to life. The success of the relationship is grounded in three characteristics and qualities they share.

## 1. HUMILITY

While Jim has worked alongside **Pete Dye** and comes to the club with endorsements galore, he was determined that his design authentically represented the club's time-honored spirit and culture. Jim and Troy emphasize that their work is motivated by members' wants and needs, not personal résumé building.

Troy says the Golf Course Architect Advisory Committee at Olympic Club liked Jim because "he wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty." The club also worked with **Gil Hanse** on the 2020 renovation of the Lake Course, which has hosted six U.S. Open championships. Jim worked his way up the architectural ladder, bringing with him an uncommon depth of intuitive knowledge.

When asked about making features at The Olympic Club resemble his popular work at Old Macdonald in Bandon, Oregon, Jim pro-

fesses his pride in "Old Mac," but is clear that "The Olympic Club is not Old Macdonald. We must create the golf course that fits its setting." That humble professionalism makes Jim and Troy a good team. Drawing from his Penn State turf background and stints at Cypress Point and Round Hill Country Club, Troy brings his own boots-on-the-ground approach for matching design, construction and club at the Ocean Course.

## 2. HISTORICAL APPRECIATION

Jim harkens to the club's storied past, as designed by **Sam Whiting** and **Willie Watson**, with the intention of restoring the basic design concepts, including enlarged greens and fewer sand bunkers. He notes that the club's greens committee of four men and one woman "has a very high golf IQ" and brings "great insight and wisdom" to the project.

Beyond the usual requirements for renovating irrigation and drainage, Troy will upgrade turf conditions and eliminate *Poa annua*. Jim's refocus is on shot-making requirements that allow golfers of various skill levels to bounce shots onto the enlarged greens. "These are the design characteristics that Whiting and Watson made core elements of the Ocean Course," Jim observes.

Understanding the historic features and playing characteristics of the course are points of emphasis for Jim. Troy sees his role to "create and sustain turf care consistent with the designer's vision." It's a satisfying ham-and-egg collaboration.

## 3. EFFICIENCY

"I sincerely believe the invest-

ment in the course in its entirety today will save us money in the long run, as we will avoid the piecemeal approach to future modifications," Troy says. The practicality derived from years of working as a shaper for Dye enables Jim to envision factors with which Troy and his team will reckon. Multifaceted projects such as the one underway at Olympic's Ocean Course bring with them layers of stakeholder expectations that stretch beyond the membership. For example, an important part of the permitting for the project is review and approval by the California Coastal Commission. This mission-critical review ensures the sustainable approach and outcomes desired by the club's members and staff.

In terms of understanding and accommodating the history of the club, Troy notes three important considerations that guide his and his course maintenance team's work:

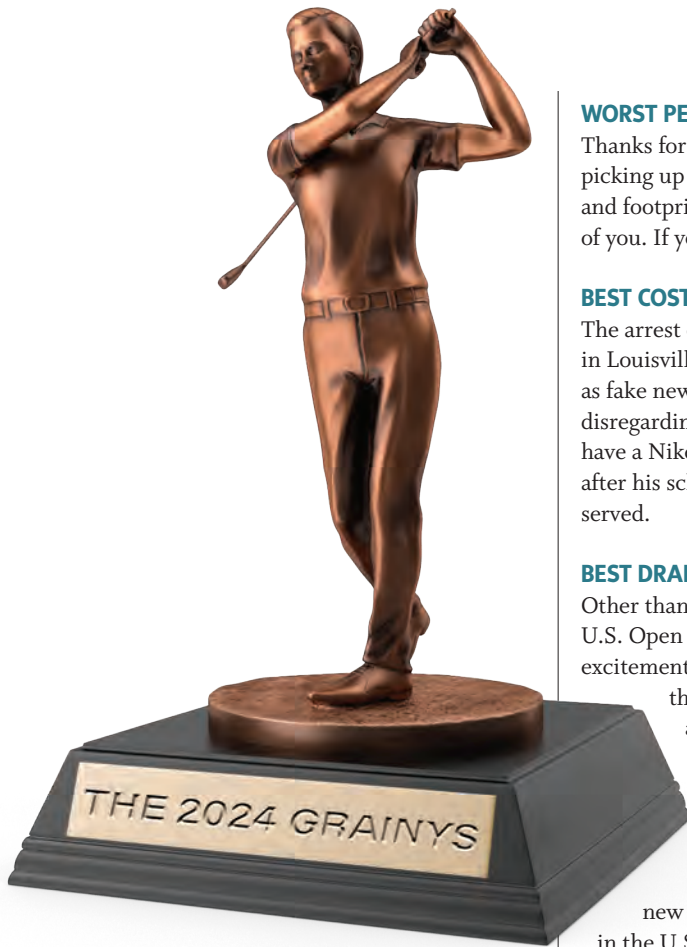
- "Integrating the naturalized areas, which some people consider to be native, is important to blend into the final design."
- "Creating dunes requires that we will need to harvest sand elsewhere on the site."
- "Reducing the number of bunkers enables golfers to appreciate the great topography on the Ocean Course — too many bunkers have been hiding the terrain."

Successful renovations that bring new energy and longevity to a course require more than talent and experience. As Jim and Troy are proving at The Olympic Club, they also rely on partnership and collaboration. 🌱



**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.





# THE 2024 GRAINYNS

**I**t's time to say goodbye, and thank you, to another year in golf. Along the way, the game boomed — the number of players has never been higher (but, strangely, more off the course than on!) — while there was less controversy than usual. Both outcomes have been good for all of you, my fellow golf course superintendents, especially if you like to work 24/7, nose to the grindstone, full-tilt boogie. So, in the spirit of a little hard work never hurt anyone (except maybe the PGA pros), the show must go on. And with that ... drumroll, please ... I present the 2024 Grainys.

## WORST PERFORMANCE BY LEADING ACTORS: ALL THOSE NEWBIES

Thanks for playing our game. Now learn, along with rules, etiquette and tips for picking up the pace of play. Golf's Golden Rules include fix your divots, pitch marks and footprints in the sand; keep carts on the path; and stay up with the group ahead of you. If you can't do that, the next movie you'll be starring in will be "Get Out."

## BEST COSTUME DESIGN: ORANGE IS THE NEW GREEN

The arrest of **Scottie Scheffler** during the PGA Championship at Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Kentucky, began as a documentary, turned into slapstick and ended as fake news. Detained on charges of second-degree assault, reckless driving and disregarding traffic signals, Scottie was booked, donned an orange suit (no, it didn't have a Nike swoosh on it), ate a sandwich, got sprung and teed off less than an hour after his scheduled time. He still managed to finish T-8 and win \$521,000 for time served.

## BEST DRAMA: SORRY, NO NOMINEES

Other than **Bryson DeChambeau's** final two shots on Sunday afternoon at the U.S. Open Championship on Pinehurst No. 2, there just wasn't much drama and excitement this year. Some guys took their shirts off in Phoenix (it does get hot there) and it looks as if the PGA Tour and the Saudis will work out a deal about the same time that **Will Smith** and **Chris Rock** co-star in a movie together. Let's hope we have nothing but drama-free sequels next year!

## BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN: REDESIGN

Not only did the number of golfers boom, so did the renovation, restoration, and transformation of existing courses, plus the building of new ones. There are presently 180 courses in some form of development just in the U.S. And who's going to have to take care of all those courses? Look in the mirror.

## BEST PRODUCTION DESIGN, PART II: SHOW US THE MONEY!

Turf schools need to attract more students, but to develop, educate and train more superintendents we need to demand higher pay. We're in charge of most clubs' most important and valuable asset, but our salaries are not commensurate with our level of responsibility.

## BEST SUPPORTING CAST: KIDS

There are 1,000 more high school girls' golf teams in America today than there were 10 years ago. The number of golf participants is almost up with soccer. Plus, with the changes to the rules of amateur status, teenagers are making NIL (name, image and likeness) deals that give them money to help defray tournament and playing expenses. You know that golf is doing OK when 15-year-olds playing in pro events are signing autographs for 12-year-olds. Talk about a red-carpet moment!

## BEST SET DESIGN: LESS IS MORE

Boy, do I miss the days of **Mike Davis** setting up U.S. Open courses — miserably. Congratulations to **John Bodenhamer**, the USGA's chief championship officer, for letting tournaments be played the way they were meant to be played: Fairly and with the ability to identify a fitting national champion.



**TIM MORAGHAN**, principal, ASPIRE Golf (tmoraghan@aspire-golf.com). Follow Tim online at, Golf Course Confidential at [www.aspire-golf.com](http://www.aspire-golf.com)/or on X at @TimMoraghan.



### SCARIEST SPECIAL EFFECTS: THE GS3 BALL

Originally conceived by the USGA for the U.S. Open and its other events, the GS3 Ball is supposed to provide superintendents with more than 15,000 data points about the roll, consistency, trueness and firmness of playing surfaces. While it's being touted as a "must-have tool for every golf course maintenance operation," may I remind you all that our business is also an art. Let's not lose that.

### WORST ORIGINAL SCORING: RATING GOLF COURSES

That's "scoring," not "score." I'm not sure what music would accompany the dozens of "best course" lists that the magazines and others turn out. Wait, I've got it: "Money Makes The World Go Round," as it seems that golfers can now buy their way onto the ratings panels. So maybe money can buy you love.

### MOST TALKED-ABOUT MAKEUP AND HAIR DESIGN: PHIL

Can't let a year go by without giving Mr. Mickelson some

props. Too bad it isn't for playing golf. His best finish on the LIV Tour was a T-6 in Saudi Arabia, and in the four majors he could manage only a T-43 at Augusta and a T-60 at Royal Troon, while missing the cut at the U.S. Open and PGA. But he can still make news, as he did with a haircut (or accidentally backing into a lawnmower) that looked as bad as his scorecards. As one person posted, Phil's hairstyle is "rapidly approaching Bond villain status with that look." LIV and Let Die?

### WORST RUNNING TIME: THE PGA VS. SLOW PLAY

Golf is welcoming all these new players, courses are more crowded than ever, and what does the PGA Tour do to set a good example? Adjust pace of play rules to give its players (supposedly the best in the world) more time to hit their shots while reducing the financial penalties for taking too long. So, the rich not only get richer, they get slower.

### WORST TICKET PRICES: PAYING MORE FOR MATINEES

Economists call it "supply and demand." Golf course owners call it "dynamic pricing." Golfers are calling it a rip-off. That's the policy many courses now employ of charging more for tee times at prime times, like weekend mornings. If you want to play early, open the wallet a little more.

### BEST PERFORMANCE BY A GOLFER: "THE SCHEFF"

It was Scheffler's year from start to finish. Not only did he win Bay Hill, The Players, The Masters, Harbour Town, The Memorial, The Travelers

and the TOUR Championship (pocketing a cool \$63 mil in the process), but he also won an Olympic gold medal and became a first-time dad, all while seeming to stay the same nice guy. Good job.

Just about the only thing Scottie didn't do was climb Mount Everest. That feat was accomplished by our own Rhett Evans, CEO of the GCSAA, who summited the world's tallest peak at 3:13 a.m. on May 23 as part of a 45-day journey. Just one more

example of Rhett taking superintendents to new heights.

Congratulations!

A serious note.

This is the time of year to give thanks for all we've been given by this great game and remember our fellow superintendents in Florida, the Carolinas and beyond who endured both professional and personal hardships during the recent hurricane season. If you know someone affected, reach out and help. If it's within your budget, consider making a contribution. We're all in this together. 🍷





TURFHEADS TAKE OVER

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# BIOLOGICAL SOIL MANAGEMENT

Joel Simmons

*President, EarthWorks*

**W**hat's the best way to manage turf? It's a question we've all pondered since we started maintaining sports turf for the pleasure of our guests. Much of the conversation has been focused primarily on what is best for the plant with little emphasis on the soil. The soil subject has too often been limited to pH and soil chemistry, but recently golf course superintendents and sports turf managers are asking more questions about soil biology. There are few fertilizer manufacturers today who have not introduced carbon amendments to their products, materials like humic acids, kelp meal or sugars. The reason for this change is that we are all discovering the importance of promoting beneficial micro-organisms in our soils. One of the fastest growing and most exciting agronomic concepts today is Biological Soil Management. This is a "Soil First" approach to turf management, and one that addresses soil chemistry through soil testing. This helps to open up the soil physically, allowing more air and water to move through the soil profile and creating an environment where microbes can proliferate. Along with soil balancing, we apply diverse forms of available carbon amendments to provide food energy for microbial populations. This allows soil microbiology to do what it does best: digest ligneous roots systems into humus. This process has been successful in helping manage water availability, improving nutrient flow, flocculating tight compacted soils, building better and deeper root systems, and reducing overall plant stress.

This approach follows the model of the three-legged stool, where soil chemistry affects soil physics which affects soil biology. However, it's the biological component that gets the least attention while providing the greatest benefits to the plant. There is an old adage that states, "Microbes eat at the table first." What this means is all

fertilizer molecules must go through microbial degradation in order to become available to the plant. Nitrogen molecules go through nitrification which breaks them down from a molecule to  $\text{NH}_4$  to  $\text{NO}_2$  and then to  $\text{NO}_3$ , the nitrate form of nitrogen, that is easily taken up by the plant so it can be utilized intra-cellularly. This process is done by microbes that need energy in the form of available carbon to function, and to provide the plant nitrogen in the form that it needs. When we continuously feed the soil a straight diet of synthetic nitrogen, we "burn out," or use up, the available carbon (humus) in the soil and weaken the nitrification process. We then need to apply more and more fertilizer to get the same results. Biological Soil Management does not exclude the need for synthetic nitrogen from time to time. It is simply focused on balancing the carbon to nitrogen ratio (C:N), which is the most critical agronomic function. This new trend of supplying carbon to the soil is about feeding microbes, not about feeding the plant as many have erroneously suggested. One of the greatest results of a Biological Soil Management program is reduced inputs, less thatch (which is directly related to the overuse of synthetic nitrogen and an imbalance of the soil's C:N ratio), and ultimately a healthier plant.

Biological Soil Management is a simple concept of balancing the soil chemically and feeding the soil with available carbon sources that allow microbes to grow in population and activity. For over 35 years, EarthWorks has been a pioneer and staunch advocate of Biological Soil Management in the turf industry. Naysayers argue that "organics" won't work until the soil warms up in the late spring, and then all that fertilizer kicks out all at once causing plant stress and disease. But superintendents wouldn't use anything that would do that! In fact, many of them have shared their success stories on the EarthWorks Podcast. ■





# VARIABLE DIRECT(OR)IONS

**Brent Downs, CGCS, MG**, defines and analyzes what it takes to succeed in a big-picture management role. Plus, **Cory Troyer** and **Mitchell Eickhoff** share why the director-superintendent dynamic is different than other turf relationships.

It's July, middle of an Indiana summer, and I'm walking through the Harrison Lake clubhouse to shake a few members' hands. Our owner, **Bob Haddad Jr.**, is speaking with a prospective member.

Bob: "Sir, I would like you to meet **Brent Downs**. He's our director of agronomy for here and across the city at Otter Creek."

Member: "So you are the ... super?"

Bob: "Well, not really. You see, he is the director of our maintenance operations ..."

*Darkness there and nothing more ...* (Literary nerd. Don't judge me, ha!)

I smile to myself, because this is not the first time —

and it will not be the last.

Has there ever been a position that has been *less* defined than director of maintenance operations?

Although this is not a new position, it only became prominent in the last five to 10 years with the advance of golf management companies, mergers and multi-play facilities.

However, like my friend at Harrison Lake said with his facial expression: What is it? And what does it take to be successful?

## WHAT IS A DIRECTOR?

At its core, the director is the head of the golf course main-

▲ From left:  
Harrison Lake  
superintendent  
Cory Troyer,  
Otter Creek  
superinten-  
dent Mitchell  
Eickhoff and  
director of  
agronomy  
Brent Downs.



tenance operation. They are the leader of any maintenance that occurs throughout the property. “I am responsible for everything that happens from one step outside the clubhouse to the edges of multiple properties,” says **John Reilly**, the director of agronomy at Longboat Key Club in Siesta Key, Florida.

That is a very broad definition, but one that turns out to be remarkably accurate in terms of interviews I did in preparation for my own role as well as for this article. It can have many faces, which can make it difficult to define. In a multi-course operation, they are responsible for all the courses. In a single 18-hole operation, they are responsible for the golf course, plus the grounds areas and landscaping. In a management company, they are responsible for a portfolio of properties.

### THESE POSITIONS COME WITH A RANGE OF TITLES

Words such as agronomy, grounds, maintenance, facilities and golf course operations can follow “director” in industry nomenclature. With that broad range of titles, you get a broad range of job descriptions.

On one end of the spectrum, in a standard 18-hole operation, the job description reads like a superintendent with an increased level of responsibility. On the other end, you have large multi-course operations, and that position looks more like a C-level executive than what a superintendent job description reads like today. This means a focus on meetings, organizational structure, logistics, ordering and a lot more operational management.



Confused yet?

That is very understandable. Instead of trying to put a fixed definition on the director position, it’s up to each individual and the club leadership to define the parameters and expectations. Taking that conceptual approach can link to one of the more special, intriguing and rewarding definitions of all: the director is whatever he or she *needs* to be to make that departmental operation successful!

### MY OWN JOURNEY

In 2022, Haddad, who already owned Harrison Lake Country Club, purchased Otter Creek Golf Course. As the two clubs evolved under the same ownership, it became apparent that first year that he was interested in linking the two operations. He offered me the director role in August 2023. After much prayer and deliber-

ation, I chose to accept.

The first phone calls I made in these types of situations went to the mentors, **Matt Weitz** and **Justin Sims**, whom I discussed at length in my December 2020 story, “Middle-age mentors.” Weitz is the director of agronomy at Vaquero Club in Westlake, Texas; Sims is the director of grounds and facilities at The Alotian Club in Roland, Arkansas.

As always, their advice proved invaluable in the transition. Like many director roles, mine has its unique challenges. We’re maintaining two separate properties 25 minutes apart. Otter Creek is 27 holes; Harrison Lake is 18 holes. There were many challenges and bumps along the way in Year 1, but that’s been part of the satisfaction of the improvement process. Failures are simply opportunities for future successes. I was fortunate to have

peers who coached me before, during and after the first year.

Given that context, I would like to share three concepts critical to success in any director role, especially in the early days.

## LEARN TO LET GO

This is NOT a natural skill for any superintendent. Many of us are very hands-on in our leadership style, but you **MUST** learn to let go. This becomes exponentially more true the larger your operation becomes. You can't be everywhere. If you try to do this, you will drive yourself and your team insane. **Rick Tegtmeier**, CGCS, MG, who recently retired as a director of grounds at Des Moines Golf & Country Club, says: "I used to tell them what I wanted done. Then I realized I needed to ask them what they wanted to do, and that is so critical. You have to begin to let go of some of your control and let them find their way."

To be successful, you must become less so your team can become more. Give your managers the responsibility and take accountability for yourself to let them take the reins of their management responsibilities.

## FOCUS ON THE OPERATION

Learning to let go allows you to do something you may not have been able to do before because of the "tyranny of the urgent."

Weitz says that in his role he spends a lot more time looking at structuring and procedures than he ever could as a superintendent. It allowed him to focus on the operational efficiency much more, and that is something he passed on to me. You have people you hired to manage the golf course. They're skilled. You are a director because you have — or are growing — skills extending off that and this is the perfect opportunity to use those.

Do you have proper training and expectation procedures for your operation? Has your budget been refined and are there areas where waste can be eliminated? Are there jobs you

can combine to become more efficient? If you have multiple facilities, are there ways you can tie together certain products, equipment or even team members

to make each department work as one for a greater good? Finding answers to these questions and communicating them to your teams and key stakeholders allows you to produce a better, more consistent product — often at a very reasonable cost based on expectations.

## IT'S THE PEOPLE, STUPID!

Finally, and most importantly, it's about the people on your team. There have been countless articles written on that very subject, but, in the director role, it's more critical than ever. All four directors I spoke with hit on that being a top priority.

Reilly: "I am a people person in a people business. We have a low turnover rate and I make it a point every day to let my team know how much I appreciate that."

Sims: "I make it a point to know my team away from work. Families, hobbies, etc. We connect on levels that just aren't about mowing grass."

Tegtmeier: "I will always have their back. We succeed as a team. If we fail, that's on me alone."

Weitz: "We are all in this together."

This will always be a relationship business, whether you are data-driven, feel-based, logistic-minded or efficiency-modeled. Because of this, I want to speak about my most important work relationships: the ones I have with our superintendents.

**Cory Troyer** and **Mitchell Eickhoff** are the first drivers of our success. They are my main points of contact. The way we work together and are learning to work together has driven both properties to their greatest successes in 2024. If we

## Three cheers to a director-mentor

By the time this is published, **Rick Tegtmeier** will have celebrated his retirement at Des Moines Golf & Country Club. On behalf of a grateful industry, I want to use this space to thank Rick for being a pioneer and a mentor of the industry. He was a pioneer of the director role and a mentor to many, but especially the American Master Greenkeepers (myself included). We, as in the industry, are very grateful to Rick for his service to the industry. Rick's a great superintendent/director — and an even better man. Thank you, Rick, for everything!

— Brent Downs

have a toxic working relationship, it will filter through the entire golf course maintenance operation. I'm very fortunate to work with two superintendents of their caliber.

Ironically, we are very different people. Mitchell is a rising performer, Cory is the accomplished veteran and I'm the generation in the middle. But amid those differences, we come together to find our biggest strengths. Instead of hearing that from me, I think it's far more beneficial for the reader to hear it from them.

## IN CORY'S WORDS

I have been in the turf industry for more than 25 years and working with a director of agronomy is a new experience for me. The biggest challenges have been letting go of responsibilities and different management styles. I've always been responsible for all aspects of the maintenance department; now I don't have to be. That takes some getting used to. It feels a little out of control when I don't have my hands in all aspects of the operation. But I also need to remember that our end goal is the same.

In my case, our management styles are different based on a little "old school" and a little "new school." Brent is more tech and data. I'm more whiteboard and feel. He is policy and procedures, and I'm, well, not. But that is OK. It allows for learning and growth. I have found that all those things are beneficial for the overall management of the golf course.

Despite the challenges, it's good to have a peer with as much industry experience and knowledge to bounce



ideas off and having a separate set of eyes touring the golf course is invaluable. If there is mutual respect and no hidden agendas, the partnership can make you both better. In turn, you can make the facility and the operation better. That is a win for the owner, membership and staff.

### IN MITCHELL'S WORDS

Becoming a superintendent seemed like an impossible task for me during my time at my previous employer. The main concern was experience. I would say to myself, "I don't have enough experience in budgeting," or "I don't have enough experience in people management." The list of concerns could go on and on.

An opportunity emerged for me to be a superintendent at Otter Creek Golf Course, with Brent directly overseeing the operation as the director. I think many others would say that having a director over them would be a hindrance, not allowing them to do what they want. For me, having a director helped boost confidence in my ability to be a superintendent. Brent and I have known each other for many years through our past work sites. Therefore, I had an understanding of the relationship Brent and I would have during our time together at Otter Creek.

At first, there was significant oversight. Brent had been at Otter Creek for four years, and I think it was difficult for him to transition some of the responsibilities over to me. Who can blame him based on the work he had put in? Over time, I began to take over the scheduling of the crew and managing the day-to-day operations, allowing Brent to spend more time on future planning, working with our vendors and contractors, and keeping



up communication with ownership. As he was able to focus more on those tasks, my confidence increased in my ability to plan out the short-term, daily maintenance, fertilizer and pesticide programs, and future cultivation.

Whenever I was unsure of myself or wanted to bounce some ideas around, Brent was available, and we could work together to produce the best solution or plan. I'm sure there are superintendents who are on their own and do not have anyone to filter ideas through or talk through decisions. However, much of the success that we experience comes down to our relationship and understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Brent is a communicator, more agronomically focused in golf course management, and an excellent planner. I'm more of a get-in-there-and-get-the-job-done guy, a little more golf-focused on my course management. I like to produce ideas and put them into play right away. By understanding each other, we can help each other out.

Our relationship has not always been perfect. There are things that we do not agree on, but what makes our relationship great is that we work through these differences together. He's always willing to listen to my point of view and not do what he thinks is best because he is the director. This has not only allowed me to grow as a leader, but I believe Brent has also matured as a leader.

Having Brent as a director has only aided my ability to become the

superintendent that I thought I could be. He has allowed me to grow and learn along the way while not being overbearing. If I were to ever move up to be a director, hopefully, I can allow those under me the ability and freedom to grow and mature in the same way I have.

### FINAL THOUGHTS FROM BRENT

Reading that, I can't help but feel very proud (and a touch of emotion) of the culture we are trying to build here.

It's not about me. It's about them. And for these two, they are not about themselves, but about the teams they manage. It keeps going like that throughout each level and it's maintaining that attitude that has allowed us to reach levels that seemed unattainable at some points. They are the stars, not me.

My view of my role is the producer behind the scenes who sets them up for success, and I take responsibility alone when some things invariably don't pan out. We succeed as a team, and I carry the failures alone. Listen to any good head coach at a press conference and you will see exactly what this looks like.

To Mitchell, I'm a mentor, an encourager, a checkpoint. To Cory, I'm a co-pilot, a second pair of eyes, an idea rebounder. But mostly, I hope they see me as a person who supports their success in whatever style fits.

So, what is a director? A leader who stays authentic to themselves — but one who also finds exactly who their teams need them to be. ■

*Brent Downs, CGCS, MG, is director of agronomy at Harrison Lake Country Club and Otter Creek Golf Course in Columbus, Indiana. This is his fourth Turfheads Take Over contribution. Cory Troyer is the superintendent at Harrison Lake. Mithcell Eichhoff is the superintendent at Otter Creek.*

# PEER REVIEW

Green Mountain State superintendent **Jesse Sutton** reflects on the big challenges — and bigger rewards — of hosting local chapter outings.

**A**s golf course superintendents, we all know the pressure of preparing the golf course for a big event, whether it's the annual member-guest, a corporate outing or just daily play on a Saturday. We are always pushing ourselves, our teams and our properties to be the best they can be. Now imagine preparing for the same event — except all the participants are experts in your field!

This is something I find unique to our industry, the opportunity to host your peers at your property to see your operation and the results it produces firsthand. I can't think of any other industry that is comparable in that regard. It's like Take Your Kid to Work Day, except your kid is 100 golf course superintendents! Just the thought of it may induce anxiety among some. However, I have found it to be extremely gratifying.

Throughout the last four years, I have hosted my local chapter for our trade show event. Despite the anxiety at first, it has become an event that I look forward to. Superintendents often say that "we're the only ones that notice" many things on the golf

course, and to prepare for an event where everyone is noticing those things certainly can put you in a vulnerable position. The challenge with hosting your peers is you can't hide behind anything. Your work is out in the open to be admired, judged and criticized.

But what you will find is contrary to that belief. In fact, most of the feedback I have received after our events are things I don't even think about that others noticed. We get so wrapped up in the little problems and blemishes on our properties that it can be difficult to see the big picture. There isn't any judgment because we all know what it takes to do what we do; we can all relate with our struggles and successes. Inviting your peers to your property shines a light on your team and tells them that you are proud of the product they produce. It can offer a glimpse into the camaraderie of our industry and inspire them. Nobody expects it to be perfect ... except maybe us!

These events are held to help support chapter initiatives, network with local peers and, most importantly, provide a day away from the

normal grind to enjoy someone else's hard work. It's a great opportunity to meet industry partners and other superintendents. As someone who is a bit introverted, I find it difficult to introduce myself, but I don't have to — other superintendents will go out of their way to introduce themselves, thank me for hosting or just talk shop. Those conversations are often thought-provoking and can provide unique perspective for the operation.

I've learned more about myself and my peers. Building relationships locally can be critical in your success as a superintendent. We all have similar problems and challenges. Having a strong local network can help you get through difficult times and celebrate successes.

Something often overlooked is how these events happen in the first place. They can't happen without the dedication of our local associations and their boards of directors. These positions are voluntary and often require time outside of work to plan and execute. Offering your property to your local chapter for a day is a great way to give back the industry and provide some respite from your daily routine.

I would encourage any superintendent — whether you're at a 9-hole municipal course or a top-100 private club — to inquire with your club about the possibility of hosting a superintendent event. It's beneficial to yourself, your club and this great industry we're all lucky to be a part of. 🍏

*Jesse Sutton, CGCS, is the golf course superintendent at Fox Run Golf Course in Ludlow, Vermont. This is his first Turfheads Take Over submission.*



# THE RUNAWAY TRACTOR

**Brian J. Roth** reflects on the day he forgot to set the parking brake — and the day he narrowly avoided disaster.

I started my career in golf course management in northern Utah at a 9-hole mom-and-pop course, Sherwood Hills, located in Sardine Canyon between Logan and Brigham City. It was a scenic course, flanked by towering cliffs above and heavily forested with native Gambel oak, Bigtooth maple and some aspen, interspersed with majestic, towering Douglas fir.

The course was built by the owner/operator in the early 1970s and was run by him, his wife and a daughter, along with some summer and seasonal help. The course was run very ... frugally, shall we say, as most courses of this nature are. I remember that none of the flagsticks were the same height. When one would break, we would just drill out the old ferrule and glue it back on the bottom of the stick. The flags were old and tattered, with different versions of the course logo, depending on the time of purchase.

During my second year, I was in charge of the seasonal staff and oversaw pretty much all of the daily maintenance activities, including mowing, bunker raking, changing holes and irrigation repair. I even did some mechanic/repair work, mostly on the old golf cart fleet that was way past its prime. The equipment was well-used: Toro 300s for greens and tees, and the standard three-wheel Cushman Truck with the shift stick on the steering column. We used tractors, an old Ford and a solid Massey Ferguson to pull gang mowers, a 7-gang for fairways and a 5-gang for roughs.

On this particular day, I was mowing the roughs on the Massey, with its large, wide turf tires, and the 5-gang. Mowing the rough usually took four to five hours, but I would try to finish it all before taking lunch. The course route was an out-and-back layout, with the first hole heading south from the clubhouse, continuing mostly south through the fifth hole. Starting with the sixth hole, the course headed back north

through the ninth hole, ending near the clubhouse. The first few starting holes and last couple of returning holes were constructed along a bench/side hill area, so the fairways tended to slope from right to left on the outbound and left to right on the inbound. Holes one and eight were adjacent to each other, separated by about 200 to 250 feet of sagebrush and native grasses, and about 30 feet of elevation between holes. We had a fairly flat spot on the right side of the first hole, up behind some trees and out of the way, where we would park the gang mowers for the night.

I finished mowing roughs, pulled the tractor and mower up on the hill to the “flat” area, and hopped off to pull the tow pin from the mower/tractor connection. After doing so, I decided to stretch my legs and take a short walk through the trees for a few minutes to look for wayward golf balls.

I took only 10 or 12 steps, and out of the corner of my eye saw something moving.

Abruptly and with some panic, I turned back to see the big tractor slowly creeping forward. I had neglected to set the park brake before getting off! I stumbled through the trees back toward the tractor. I had a short moment of relief, as I was gaining on it! I would be able to jump up into the seat and get control of the big yellow machine. I was getting close to the rear tire and, with just a couple more steps, I could grab on.

And that’s when the tractor started picking up speed.

The tractor had rolled through the flat spot and crested the slope above the fairway. It rolled down the hill and then started across the fairway as I ran behind, losing ground with every step. I ran as fast as I was able but could see that I was steadily falling behind. In my mind, everything seemed to be in slow motion, but not in the real-life episode I was experiencing. As the Massey reached the far side of the fairway, it paused

momentarily before renewing its journey down the next slope. It bounced and bounded down the sage-covered slope above the eighth green, gaining speed every second as I stumbled, resolute in my hopeless pursuit.

I glanced up past the bouncing tractor and, in alarm, saw a foursome putting on the eighth green, oblivious to the massive steel monster bearing down on them.

“Get out of the way!” I shouted. “GET OUT OF THE WAY!!!” I screamed again, almost hysterical, waving my arms in the air. “MOVE!!! MOVE!!!”

Floundering and staggering through the brush, I finally succumbed to the native tangle of sage and grass and sprawled to the ground. As I lay there, gasping for air, I could see below me the golfers scattering like ants on a recently disturbed anthill. It appeared the golfers would make it, as they sprinted off the front of the green. The tractor, though, continued, relentless, headed toward the back edge of the green, targeted right at a lone, innocent golf bag. I was envisioning a violent collision, with clubs, bag and other golf gear exploding into the air. The barreling beast turned slightly, following the slope as it approached the bag. It blew by, barely tickling one of the bag’s stand legs. The bag wobbled and fell slowly to the ground. Thump! Everything unscathed and intact. Except ...

The runaway tractor continued to bounce and careen through the native mountain landscape.

At that point, the last obstacle in sight was the four-lane highway below, a mile and a half down the mountain. I watched in despair, helpless, imagining a horrific end to the journey of the yellow beast.


About half of the way down the mountainside to the highway, the tractor curiously appeared to pause. Cautiously, I looked closer. “Is it

**“THE TRACTOR HAD ROLLED THROUGH THE FLAT SPOT AND CRESTED THE SLOPE ABOVE THE FAIRWAY. IT ROLLED DOWN THE HILL AND THEN STARTED ACROSS THE FAIRWAY AS I RAN BEHIND, LOSING GROUND WITH EVERY STEP. I RAN AS FAST AS I WAS ABLE BUT COULD SEE THAT I WAS STEADILY FALLING BEHIND.”**

slowing down?” I asked myself. “Is it still moving?” Maybe ... maybe ... I stood gingerly and slowly worked down the slope to where the machine was sitting. As I got closer, I could see that the tractor was definitely immobile, caught up and high-centered on a huge pile of logs and tree stumps. Above my racing, pounding heart was a soft, melodic sound. The low, gentle rumble of an idling motor. Put-put-put-put ...

To this day, I still get chills when I think about the runaway tractor and the multiple, grim possibilities avoided that day by chance or divine intervention. We all make mistakes and sometimes things just happen. Other than safety-related concerns or repeat offenders, I tend to give my staff the benefit of the doubt when slip-ups happen. It’s not like they are going out and thinking, “How can I really screw up today?!”

I recall an incident several years ago, fresh after an exasperated reminder during a morning staff meeting about making sure equipment is fueled up before going out on the golf course. A couple days later, I raced out of the shop early one morning, chasing down several stuck sprinkler heads. My mechanic received a humble phone call about 30 minutes later. With a quiet, embarrassed whisper, I asked, “Can you please bring me some gas?”

I can still hear the laughter. 

*Brian Roth is the golf course superintendent at Oquirrh Hills Golf Course in Tooele, Utah. This is his first Turfheads Take Over contribution.*





# DUELING THE DUAL ROLE

General manager/superintendent **Charlie Fultz** reflects on balancing a pair of demanding duties throughout the pandemic and beyond.

**B**eing a golf course superintendent has its own challenges in the Transition Zone. Being a general manager also has its own unique challenges as you oversee the entire facility and make decisions for the health of operations. What fool, in the right mind, would take on both roles willingly and expect successes to unfold?

Hi, I'm **Charlie Fultz**. I'm that fool.

In 2020, I re-entered the golf world as superintendent of Heri-

tage Oaks Golf Course, an 18-hole municipal facility in Harrisonburg, Virginia. (*Golf Course Industry* was nice enough to allow me to write about that journey the last couple of years). We were in the beginning stages of COVID-19 and I actually took the reins when the course was closed during the pandemic. The city had made the decision to close all recreational facilities — Heritage Oaks included, under the parks and rec umbrella — and we were shut down for 10 weeks before reopening in June. That break gave me some

time to familiarize myself with the course and begin to prep it for reopening, and for the 100 days of hell that is the Transition Zone growing season. As we reopened and the course began getting a ton of play, the general manager resigned her position. I offered to step into the interim GM role to help steady the course as we became fully operational again in October.

Accepting a GM position at Heritage Oaks was not without its own trials. The course had barely survived closure, with the 3-2 city council vote

to keep it open in our very recent past. The course had lost money every year of its 20-year existence and many locally were asking for it to be closed. Yes, I knew this going in, and, yes, I may lack crucial critical thinking skills needed to make such a decision, but I felt I could turn around the ship. I had more than 20 years in golf and I felt with what I had learned I could make a difference. And, oh yeah, also be the superintendent at the same time and make the conditions better.

I've been asked how one can operate in a dual role as GM and superintendent and not only survive but ultimately thrive. There's a simple and complex answer. Simply put, you HAVE to have the right team around you.

I'm blessed with one of the best PGA pros around in **Dave Johns**, who handles the pro shop staff and all tournaments. I may book some tournaments and outings as GM, but he is the brains behind their successes. Twenty-three years running and you'll not find one outside event that has ever complained about how their day was run or how they were treated. He is THAT good and our folks love him. He is the face of the place.

With the golf course pro shop under wraps, you also have to have a good assistant golf course superintendent in place to make it work. My assistant, **Bryce Miller**, handles the scheduling of the crew on a daily basis. I do mow quite a bit with our smallish crew, and I do the majority of the spraying because I love doing it, but Bryce is like Dave. He handles the dailies and allows me to float over both operations with minimal worry.

With two such employees and two great teams, it still is a LOAD. Not a bad load, but a load of work. In a day I can book a 100-person shotgun, spray liquid fertilizer, place orders for pro shop food or supplies, order golf maintenance pesticides, mow approaches, post about upcoming events on Facebook, and oh, go hand

water 16 green before I leave.

And that's just Tuesday.

Being full-blown ADHD, it actually helps fit my needs and keeps my mind in somewhat regular working order. But it's still a lot and I love doing it. My days usually start between 4:30 and 5 a.m. because I find the time I need to handle paperwork and similar administrative tasks when no one else is around. It's a relaxing time before the rush of the day begins.

The interim title was removed in July 2022 when I became the permanent general manager/golf course superintendent. With the task of taking on both roles the last four years, we have found some amazing successes. The course has been profitable every year, with record rounds, profits and revenues this past year. We were chosen in June 2021 by *GOLF* magazine as one of the top 25 underappreciated municipal courses in the United States. In a span of four years, we were able to tap nearby James Madison University and its student population for a wildly successful student season pass program. In 2020, we had 35 JMU season passes holders. This year, we had 272. That's right at 1 percent of the student population. I made it a point to go after this population because they are HERE nine months out of the year. At approximately \$600 per pass, you do the math. Yet we also improved the playability of the course by converting tees over to Bermudagrass from bentgrass and implementing a new process on greens management that drastically enhanced the golf course. The entire operation has grown together and each compliments the other beautifully.

This year, I battled the two-headed demon as we dealt with feast or famine year in terms of rain and weather. We either got 4 or 5 inches of rain in a matter of hours or it never rained and we suffered through the worst summer drought in the course's 23-year history. We almost ran out of water twice this summer. I was forced to make decisions that would

favor either the health of the golf course or revenue streams I needed to facilitate. I will admit, it was a 50/50 split and I cursed myself often. There were some days I pushed getting carts off the path to make money (upsetting the superintendent in me tremendously) and then some days the superintendent said we just can't get the course dried out and need to keep them on the path another day (really upsetting the GM in me). The same held true when the course became so hot and scorched that we put carts on the path to avoid burning the turf.

Those internal battles continued throughout the entire year. It's not a battle I enjoy, but it's a battle I have to have with myself. There isn't a right or wrong answer, just the answer that makes the most sense for the golf operation long term. Short-term wins are nice, but my mind and focus are always six months from today. Two questions – Will this decision benefit me now? Or down the road? – are always at the forefront of my mind. It's the only way I know how to operate.

What a great ride it's been helping turn Heritage Oaks into what I thought it always could be. The course has a great future and I'm proud to be at the helm. I'm really proud of the team here that has done all they could to make Heritage a little bit better each day under our kaizen philosophy. I still enjoy getting up and coming to the course every day because the excitement of what's still to come is not lost on me. I have a snack bar to finally open in 2025, which will add another dimension.

By the way, I am also a certified food safety manager. I'll oversee the snack bar, too. Did someone say ADHD ... squirrel!!!! 🐿️

*Charlie Fultz is the general manager and golf course superintendent at Heritage Oaks Golf Course in Harrisonburg, Virginia. This is his fifth Turfheads Take Over contribution.*



## Mentoring

OPEN LETTER TO  
OUR MENTORS

Virginia superintendent **Tyler Minamy** expresses profound gratitude for those willing to pass along guidance and support.

**M**y grandfather was an engineer who specialized in steel processing. He told a story about working in India building a process line. At a critical stage of the project, it was discovered there was not enough room to fit a large furnace section into its design location. It was blocked by supports with no access by the overhead crane.

The team of engineers began to argue about the solution. Some looked to place blame. While this took place, a local millwright left and returned with Ivory Soap Flakes. Spreading the flakes uniformly across the support stand, the construction crew positioned the multi-ton furnace section next to the opening with the crane and pushed it into position by hand.

This story and other experiences from my childhood gave me a lifelong respect for people who work hard. I mean *really* work hard—many times, mastering things never written in a book. People who learned things and accepted the responsibility of that knowledge and carried it forward to the next person, and that person then did the same.

The Merriam-Webster definition of a mentor is “a trusted counselor or guide.” A mentor does not have to fit into a particular box. Nor does being a mentor require some standing in a trade or profession. Superiors, peers and subordinates can wear the mentor hat. Everyone around you has the potential to enrich your knowledge base and your life.

In my view, the golf industry is very much like the skilled trades in that

you learn enough to get started and take the next step to be an apprentice. Begin to ply your trade like a plumber or a carpenter, learning under a master tradesperson. The source of much of what we apply in our chosen profession may have been described in a book, but the skills we rely on to implement that knowledge and be successful were likely taught to us by our mentors.

When I reflect on my formal education to the early years of my career, those memories are not of the technical information I learned but of the people who shared with me. Those who had accepted that responsibility as my mentors. Often a life lesson intertwined with a bit of knowledge.

During the time that I was involved in multi-course operations, I was gifted with the opportunity to work

with golf course superintendents across the country. A wide array of personalities and backgrounds. While working together to plan and problem solve, these men and women were my mentors. And the mentorship was reciprocal. I came away from these experiences with knowledge and the responsibility to pass it on.

In writing this, I began to think about some of the mentors who were the most important and impactful to me. I realized there is no way that I could acknowledge them all. Instead, I prefer to thank them all. They know who they are even though some may be too humble to admit it. From college professors to superiors, subordinates and peers, all the way to a group of grumpy mechanics. To all those who have accepted the responsibility as a mentor to share, teach and guide: THANK YOU!

To this day, I continue to be both an apprentice and master, always learning and continuing to share what I have learned. A trait no doubt learned ... from my mentors. ■

*Tyler Minamy is golf course superintendent at The Omni Homestead in Hot Springs, Virginia. This is his first Turfheads Take Over contribution.*



# HEATED BREAKDOWN

**Greg Brandriet** shares the obvious differences, unexpected challenges and nice little surprises in his transition from the Upper Midwest to the Arizona desert.

**W**ell, I made it through a year in the desert. Everyone said, “Wait ’til summer!” Well, yep, it was hot. But like any other warm-blooded vertebrate, I acclimated to the change in climate. I acclimated so much that when November rolled around and morning lows dipped below 50, I was coming to work wearing five shirts and wool socks.

Aside from my core temperature, the main differences between cool- and warm-season golf course management were external, and fairly obvious to comprehend on paper prior to my arrival in Arizona — turf types, water management, length of the playing season with seasonal preparations, and the differences in the labor force. Some of these are easy to understand. Others, well, I needed one or two hands-on trials (or tribulations) before seeing what I needed to find my flow.

## WATER

The first and most important topic in Southwest golf according to anyone and everyone is water management.

While superintendents are constantly striving for better conservation methods and sustainable sourcing, they face a myriad of restrictions, regulations, public sentiment and astronomical costs. Irrigation systems themselves must ensure adequate

supply while they operate year-round; therefore, maintenance costs increase while the lifespan decreases when compared to seasonal systems.

Now, contrary to my early conceptions, we do get rain in the desert. Throughout the winter, lighter rain showers will appear, some lingering for a few days. Water use in the winter is most definitely minimal, but still monitored closely for overwatering

or dryness. In the summer, monsoon rains are known for their grand entrances and generous deposits of moisture in short periods. If courses are lucky, some of this water can be captured on site and used for irrigation.

Considering the systems I had dealt with in South Dakota, I initially felt that the system we were operating was “overbuilt”. After one summer, the egg on my face was scrambled.

Where I was raised, a course is either located next to a lake or a river, or if free water isn’t above ground, a well is drilled and pumped into a pond on site. Yes, there are some permits and requirements for using certain sources of water, but essentially water sourcing is something that many northern superintendents take for granted. There is less prioritization overall for conservation and sustainable sourcing other than the usual BMPs most of us follow.





While some northern areas deal with dry, arid weather, much of the north receives adequate rainfall — or worse, heavy rains, flooding and increased disease pressure. It almost reaches the point where water becomes more foe than friend.

One thing I'm glad I didn't have to do in Arizona was winterize the system. Winterization presents a whole new set of challenges in both fall and spring. Timing is essential to beat the first snow, but not blow out too early in case of dry weather. One small pocket of water left behind can shred a 40-foot section of pipe when it freezes, making for a nice surprise on a cool April morning and a new project for your skeleton crew.

The potential problems water management issues in the North are mostly minor and surmountable, and maintenance is less frequent and less costly. Water management in the South is priority No. 1, and the time, effort and costs here show it.

### TURF AND TRANSITIONS

Another major difference is the

change in seasons ... not spring-fall-summer-winter, but from Bermudagrass season to ryegrass season and vice versa. Overall, maintenance practices simply revolve around supporting the health of each variety. For example, topdressing bentgrass in South Dakota is the same as topdressing Bermudagrass in Arizona, and so on. The timing and amounts simply vary based on the season. Southern superintendents are often managing both warm- and cool-season grasses, and the challenges that come with both. Let me boil it down by simply

stating that during both overseed and spring transition a balancing act bordering on insanity exists where superintendents are trying to kill one grass while coaxing another to life.

A year on the golf course looks much different. Northern superintendents experience an actual off-season, or at least some downtime between November and April, when activities on the course are minimal at best, and in many cases, covered in snow and ice. Most, or all, of the seasonal crew has gone away and the remaining staff keep busy with inside projects, grinding, tree work and anything else they can while constantly answering the question, "So, what do you do in the winter?"

From a personal health perspective, the winter downtime allows the superintendent to pull back the reins, sleep a little and have somewhat of a normal life compared to the grind of the summer months. It offers time to reset our bodies, both physically and mentally.

On the contrary, warm-season golf is business as usual year-round.

When the members and snowbirds head for the hills and our "off-season" begins, there is no ice, snow or sub-zero temperatures to prevent any work. Play subsides just enough to allow maintenance crews to tackle in-house renovations, aerifications and other slightly invasive activities that peak season doesn't allow for.

### LABOR FORCE

One aspect I hadn't really thought about too deeply was what the difference would be from managing a seasonal staff to a full-time staff. One thing I did consider was the language barrier, as I wasn't fluent in Spanish. A subscription to Babbel proved useful for the first weeks of introductions and learning names and common phrases in the turf world. Beyond that, the iPhone translator mostly assists conversations. I've also found that the *telenovelas* that play in the lunchroom have improved my pronunciation.

The primary difference between northern and southern crews is the seasonality of the North plays a huge role in the type, tenure and experience of available employees. If one isn't a mechanic, an assistant or a foreman, there isn't enough consistency in a golf maintenance career. Sure, we get returning seasonal employees, but often face every new season with a team of workers who are new to the facility — or to the job itself. The time in training and orientation alone takes weeks, and just when they're actually becoming productive, it's either back to school or regular jobs after just a couple of months' work. ■

*Greg Brandriet is an irrigation project manager at Heritage Links. He worked previously as the golf course superintendent at Camelback Marriott Golf Course in Paradise Valley, Arizona, after growing up, living and working in South Dakota. This is his first Turfheads Take Over contribution and second story in the magazine.*



# SURVIVAL GUIDE TO MAINTAINING A GOLF COURSE **WITHOUT AN ASSISTANT**

After struggling to find a true No. 2, **Ron Furlong** is trying out a different approach to building a management team.

I think it was around three months after my assistant gave his notice in August 2023 that it first dawned on me something may be “up” in our industry with hiring assistants. As the end of the year approached, I hadn’t received a single response to either our national or regional ad.

I chalked it up initially to tim-

ing. Most would-be applicants were probably waiting for the end of the “golf season” before embarking on a life-changing career move. Made sense. Most assistants aren’t quitting mid-season and changing industries like ours did. The labor pool surely had to be there like always, but those in it just weren’t ready yet. I figured résumés would begin pouring in during

winter, probably after the holidays.

But that “pouring in” never happened. I had a few bites, and I interviewed a few candidates. I even ended up hiring one of them. But, alas, our assistant search did not end there. The fellow I hired lasted only about a month before giving notice, telling me he had secured a superintendent job in another part of the country.



I refreshed both ads but had little confidence the search would end with an assistant in hand. I was right. I didn't receive a single response to either ad after my ill-fated hire.

What was "up?"

The salary and benefit package we were offering seemed competitive when I compared it to other assistant openings across the country. Our golf course here

in western Washington is a well-regarded 27-hole club thriving in the new golf boom. Add to that, I'm also only about seven or eight years from retirement. For a dedicated hard worker with a little patience, the assistant position could very possibly morph into the head job not that far down the road.

Talking with other superintendents, both in my region and across the country, I realized I wasn't alone in this situation.

Word came to me from near and far that assistant positions were becoming increasingly difficult to fill. Some, like mine, were seemingly impossible to fill.

I had an enlightening conversation with a local superintendent I respect immensely, and he informed me he had been looking for an assistant going on three years now. He still has not filled it. I should point out that he did tell me he could have filled the position, but just hadn't felt the right person had come through the door, and thus decided to look at his operation a bit differently.

Shortly after this conversation, I filled another open position that I'd been struggling to fill: irrigation technician.



After I hired this very experienced, hard-working irrigation tech in August (actually paying him a competitive wage for the position), ending a multi-year search trying to fill this position with someone who was not only competent but also not afraid of actual work, I woke up at 2 in the morning with an epiphany: What if I looked at this differently? What if this wasn't so much a case of how do I find a good assistant, but more of an opportunity to rewrite the playbook? To look outside the box?

What if — drumroll please — *I didn't hire an assistant?* How could that possibly look?

This was an opportunity, I suddenly realized lying in bed that night, to take back a little control. To make this actually work for me. That was the night the idea of restructuring the entire organizational tree occurred to me.

But before I talk about my restructuring plan, let's take a quick look at how we got here.

Perhaps the main reason we, as an industry, find ourselves in this predicament is because we haven't kept up with the Joneses. The Joneses are basically every other industry.

Golf course maintenance has always been an attractive career choice for certain people, like me, who love the game, love working outside, and love the chance to help mold and shape a property to show off while utilizing the land we've been put in charge of. But somewhere along the way this industry fell behind with wages. And I'm not just talking about assistant superintendent wages here. I'm talking about the entire operation. Superintendents, assistants, techs, and full-time and seasonal crew members.

And with that "falling behind," those young people who love the game and love working outside and want to be on a golf course suddenly found that despite that pull they may have felt toward the game and working on a course, they could make more money in almost any other field. Why go to school to pursue a field that ultimately will not pay as well as other careers?

In Washington, we have the highest minimum wage of any state in the country. In 2024, it was \$16.28 an hour, and in 2025 it will jump once again to \$16.66. I'm all for people making more money, but for smaller, family-owned businesses in this state,

it has been nothing shy of devastating. For our maintenance budgets over the last several years, the minimum wage hikes mean a struggle to pay long-timers a wage they deserve.

My problem of not being able to find an irrigation tech who stuck around longer than a few months was in direct correlation to not being able to pay a wage deserved for this position. An irrigation tech executes hard work, especially on a 27-hole golf course with a 30-plus-year-old irrigation system.

Irrigation techs, spray techs, equipment techs and longtime crew members — keeping these wages properly “gapped” from the minimum wage and what we’re paying high school kids with no work experience who we hire to fill out our seasonal positions has been challenging. In fact, because other industries can pay summer workers above minimum wage to start, I’ve had to do that as well, which further challenges us to pay a proper wage to our long-time employees. Keeping that “gap” where it should be becomes nearly impossible. When the fast-food joint or the superstore down the street can offer \$21 or \$22 an hour to workers with no experience, how does a family-owned business struggling to stay afloat compete with that?

So, let’s get to my restructuring epiphany. What if, I thought, I took the money we were offering for the open assistant position and instead paid techs and long-timers a more competitive wage, as well as created some new positions to share duties commonly held by a traditional assistant superintendent?

I sat down at the computer and started to see if I could make it all work. The first step was the new position, which I call a *lead*.

I identified three people on the crew who might not have been assistant candidates but were definitely people who could fit into this leadership role. I needed to utilize their strengths and find areas for each of them to help me. Without an assis-

tant, I’ve been a bit overwhelmed for more than a year. Having three people to take some of that pressure off me would not only be beneficial but actually pivotal to my physical and mental well-being.

Getting these three individuals more money and more responsibility would keep them here long-term. They want to be here and want to contribute. It’s just a matter of paying them a wage they deserved for what they have provided in the past and will continue to provide me and the operation going forward in their new roles.

One of the *leads* would be responsible for training new employees and act as a welcoming liaison to new hires. His strength also lies in cup cutting and tee setup, so he would oversee these areas. Another *lead* is strong in bunker maintenance, topdressing, hand watering and irrigation. The third is strong in all aspects of mowing, spraying, tree maintenance and landscaping.

One of our *leads* is also someone who, although in his 40s, seems a natural leader — he has managerial experience — and has expressed an interest in pursuing golf course management as a career. I got the OK from our owner to tell him we’d pay for his online education in securing a degree in golf course and turfgrass management.

Our owner does have a legitimate concern: without an assistant, I’m the only eyes on the property with any knowledge of certain areas that an educated assistant could spot and share. My ability to train this *lead* — in addition to his education — would be an important cog in this plan working without a traditionally educated, experienced assistant.

The next step in my restructuring would be simply paying all the techs a wage they should be making. That means obliterating that minimum wage gap so it would no longer be an issue. This started with hiring the irrigation tech at a proper wage this past summer. I have worked out a plan

to get the equipment tech, the spray tech and the landscape tech up to the same ballpark wage.

Another part of my restructuring involved creating the new position of shop manager. It’s different than a traditional equipment tech position, because the shop manager would work on the course in the morning and then be in the shop each afternoon, either assisting the equipment tech or actually assisting me with facility matters that regularly emerge. We’ve employed the shop manager for a few months, and he’s been invaluable to our team. The facility has never looked so good.

There are definite drawbacks to not having that traditional assistant, including me taking a week off in the summer and not worrying about the place falling apart and actually enjoying my time off perhaps being at the top of the list. But this is where a little faith comes in.

I admit, I’m a micromanager. This, I realize, must change. Micromanaging will not work with this restructuring plan. Letting go, trusting and, well, enjoying a little more time off are important facets to the new plan.

To be completely honest, this restructuring plan isn’t exactly going to fit into the 2025 budget. Although not hiring an assistant has provided more money to go around, it was not enough to fully implement this plan. That’s where the owner came in. Ownership understanding that we must look at things differently is key. We can’t keep paying below competitive wages to long-term, loyal individuals who love this golf course and want to stay here. We need to show them how important they are, not push them away.

Not being able to hire an assistant should not be a dire situation. Instead, why not consider it a chance to reinvent the wheel. ■

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



# COYOTES: PESKY PREDATORS OR COMPLEX CANINES?

North Carolina equipment manager **Justin King** explores his fascination with a misunderstood golf course critter.

**J**anuary 2020 marked the beginning of a very chaotic year many of us would like to forget. I was down on a creek bank checking my trail camera in hopes that I had gotten some footage for the capstone project I was working on to finalize my time at UNC Greensboro. Naturally, all kinds of wildlife pop up when you're in the middle of a 200-acre North Carolina preserve, including deer, foxes, raccoons, river otters and even minks. But what I was really hoping to catch was a coyote, and that cold January evening had produced a quality video of one right at the creek.

Alert, aware and cautious is how I would describe this particular canine. It caught a glimpse of the infrared flash and abruptly jumped back, slowly reapproaching to see what kind of strange entity was invading its space. I watched the clip over and over again as I sat near the water's edge, drawn in by its mannerisms. That moment marked the beginning of my fascination and deep dive into the rich and

ancient history of *canis latrans*.

Growing up in northeast Ohio and rural mid-Michigan, I had only known coyotes as a nuisance: mangy, up-to-no-good predators that everyone wanted dead. I bought in and never gave it much thought of my own, until I moved down to the Piedmont Triad area of North Carolina, where I started working part-time for the local county parks and recreation department. I would listen to their howls, follow their tracks and, on one occasion, I was tasked with cleaning up a kill site (that's a story for another day).

I learned that coyotes are actually extremely intelligent animals, and they had piqued enough of my interest that I wanted to hone in on them a little more, not fully knowing which direction it would go. The most impactful stop on my journey was reading the book *Coyote America: A Natural and Supernatural History* by historian **Dan Flores**. Flores takes you back to prehistoric times when coyotes (after splitting from a common

ancestor) evolved to survive alongside wolves, becoming what is known as a fission-fusion species. This means that coyotes can thrive by themselves or in packs as necessary, which partially explains how they are so well adapted to evading extirpation.

Another reason has to do with how they breed. Flores explains that coyotes communicate with each other through howls, and if they sense that nearby pack numbers are decreasing, a sort of biological trigger is set off and they begin to birth larger litters of pups to bring population numbers back up. Countless studies have shown that coyotes are very difficult, arguably impossible to get rid of due to their complex social structure and opportunistic nature. Here in North Carolina, they have become an apex predator since making themselves at home in the 1980s, filling in the spaces vacated by the extirpation of wolves and mountain lions. By definition, they are a keystone species that plays an important role in keeping other species' populations balanced, including rabbits, raccoons, rodents, foxes, feral cats and even the infamous Canada goose. Did you know that feral cats in the United States kill around 2.4 billion wild birds annually?

Admittedly, coyotes don't come without fault, especially on the golf course. Yes, sometimes they choose to dig in suboptimal locations or impose fear into some unfamiliar golfers, and rumor has it they even like to chew through ropes. But much like unfixed divots and hydraulic leaks, it's all just a part of the game. Coyotes have a spot at the table and provide an ecological service for the overall health of the system. As golf courses lean more into sustainability and acting as refuges for wildlife, maybe some focus can be shifted onto the positive things that coyotes have to offer. 🐾

*Justin King is the equipment manager at Jamestown Park Golf Course in Jamestown, North Carolina. This is his first Turfheads Take Over contribution.*



# NOTHING COLD ABOUT THIS EXPERIENCE



Superintendent **Gustavo Rodriguez** was initially tepid about accepting a job in North Dakota. He quickly discovered he loved the landscape and, more important, the people surrounding him.

**T**he Links of North Dakota proves that whatever assumptions you may have about winters in North Dakota are true.

Crafted by Mother Nature and architect **Stephen Kay**'s creative mind—only 7,000 cubic yards of soil were needed to construct the layout—the course rests off the shores of Lake Sakakawea. North Dakota, renowned for its unforgiving winters, presents significant challenges such as winterkill and desiccation. The bitter cold and biting winds can wreak havoc on turf, especially

greens that require extra care and protection. So why would my wife and I stay in North Dakota? One thing that keeps a young and hungry superintendent such as myself here is the people I work with.

In mid-November 2021, I originally told The Links of North Dakota ownership that I wouldn't be accepting the offer to become its superintendent. That was short-lived, because something was telling me to at least see the property. When I arrived and toured the course, I immediately fell in love with the layout. It didn't take long when I told **Tom Powers**,

"I'm your guy" and accepted the job. I then drove 11 hours back home and was ready to throw everything into the job—even in the dead of winter. I quickly learned the people around me were equally excited.

The culture and people of The Links had a significant impact on my approach to the job. What can I say? The ownership is unlike anything I've experienced. **Tom and Cheryl Powers** and **John Kazmer** are some of the most hard-working people I've met. They are always working inside and outside of the clubhouse, whether it's cleaning bathrooms or covering greens on the course.

The agronomy team I work with has been top-notch, and we only continue to improve. **Alfonso, Josue, Samuel** and **Alan** are some of the most talented guys who we've trained and watched grow. Entering





my second year, I recruited these guys to join our team. They had zero golf maintenance experience, but they arrived with a profound ambition to learn.

They've been trained to mow everything, change cups, roll greens, start and shut down the irrigation system, and everything in between. What truly sets Josue, Alfonso, Alan and Samuel apart is not just their individual skills, but their exceptional teamwork and camaraderie. They complement each other's strengths and work seamlessly together, fostering an environment of mutual respect and collaboration.

Their bond is evident in the way they approach their work. Whether it's brainstorming solutions to a challenging problem, celebrating a job well done, or simply sharing a laugh during a long day, their positive attitude and enthusiasm are infectious. This dynamic boosts morale, and enhances productivity and the quality of their work.

They have not shied away from learning a single thing. Plus, they are determined to learn more every day. The quartet makes my job fun throughout the day. The conversations, carne asadas, and their drive and dedication to make the course as perfect as possible inspires me every morning.

One member of our team, **Jack**,

has even earned the nickname MVP. Jack is an elderly man who is near and dear to me. He has taught me to be a better mechanic, and I have learned many other priceless things from him. Jack works just as hard as anyone else—if not harder. His ability to diagnose and repair complex mechanical issues keeps equipment running smoothly while also significantly enhancing the efficiency of the maintenance team.

Jack's methodical approach means that every machine he touches is fine-tuned to perfection, contributing to the overall health and aesthetic of the course. Whether it's a delicate adjustment or a major repair, Jack handles each task with precision, ensuring that everything functions flawlessly.

One of Jack's defining characteristics is his quiet demeanor. He's a man of few words, preferring to let his work speak for itself. This reserved nature might be seen as a stark contrast to the often vocal and dynamic personalities found in the world of sports and maintenance, but it's precisely this quiet confidence that makes Jack stand out.

In the clubhouse, our general manager/head pro **Zach McArthur** is the most talented professional I've ever worked with. His ability to see someone's swing and immediately have a game plan to adjust

it to make improvements is quite impressive. We both were hired around the same time, and I immediately recognized his work ethic, inside and outside of the clubhouse. Our first spring we had a rocky start with a late ice storm and loss of power, with no way to start the irrigation pumps. Zach jumped in and helped with tank-watering greens until power was restored. Last year, when the VFD drive went out, Zach and his intern, **Eli**, joined our crew in hand-watering greens from around 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. for a few weeks.

Even with the night shifts, we found a way to have fun working as a team, while also smoking some meat and maybe drinking a few beers. Likewise, during early fall, when staff is thin, our agronomy team helped clean carts after tournaments. All in all, the clubhouse staff and agronomy crew understand and appreciate that it will take us collaborating as a team to make The Links of North Dakota special.

While The Links stands out as a remarkable golf course with its breathtaking views and meticulous design, it is truly the people behind the scenes who make it exceptional. The dedication of individuals like Josue, Alfonso, Alan, Samuel, Jack and Zach brings the course to life, ensuring every detail is handled with care and expertise. Their collective passion and commitment transform the course into a pristine and inviting sanctuary for golfers.

It's the unique blend of their skills, hard work and unwavering enthusiasm that elevates The Links of North Dakota from a mere venue to a truly extraordinary golfing experience. The state of the course is a testament not just to its natural beauty but to the remarkable team that upholds its excellence every day. 🌿

*Gustavo Rodriguez is the superintendent at The Links of North Dakota in Ray, North Dakota. This is his first Turfheads Take Over contribution.*



# WHEN TO STAY? AND WHEN TO GO?

Industry career guru **Tyler Bloom** shares key things to consider when debating the logistics and emotions of a job change.

**C**areer transitions can evoke a swirl of emotions, especially for those in the turf industry. Like the lyrics of The Clash's song "Should I Stay or Should I Go?", the dilemma of whether to stay in a role or move on to new opportunities is a recurring theme for golf course superintendents and turf professionals.

The feeling of being at a career crossroads arises from a variety of circumstances ranging from uncertainty with current status, lack of upward mobility, personal and family obligations and, at times, the mounting pressures or instability of finances. Alternatively, the allure of new challenges and growth offer career inflection points bringing significant self-doubt, anxiety and indecision.

I not only personally dealt with this, but I also see numerous professionals struggling with this decision. I empathize when somebody reaches the proverbial fork in the road. With

the benefit of hindsight, and through our own research and better-informed decision making, here are some thoughts for you.

What are the consistent drivers and blockers not only to retain employment, but to be considered when seeking greener pastures?

## 1. The employer's financial health and longevity

- Clubs with steady financials, a stable member base and sound business practices generally offer more security.
- Annual budgets for course maintenance and improvements indicate the club's commitment to investing in quality conditions, which in turn supports job stability.

## 2. Leadership stability and vision

- Frequent turnover in upper management such as the general manager position and board members can lead to changes in priorities, budget cuts or reorganization.
- Clubs with a clear, long-term vision

for the course and facilities, and a defined investment plan, tend to support their superintendents in achieving consistent standards, making the job more secure.

## 3. Membership stability and satisfaction

- High turnover among members or fluctuating membership levels may indicate dissatisfaction or financial concerns, which could lead to budget cuts affecting course quality and staffing stability.
- Engaged, supportive members who appreciate course conditions and advocate for quality maintenance efforts help ensure stable job conditions for superintendents.

## 4. The superintendent's value to the club

- Superintendents with unique skills and talents bring added value and are often seen as indispensable assets to the club.
- Consequently, those skills need to be financially awarded and recognized.

Given golf's recent boom and forecasted growth, I envision today's top talent will continue to be pursued for their capabilities, accomplishments and visionary leadership. Salaries are increasing at rapid speed to the tune of 20 to 30 percent in many of our recruitment projects.

However, turf professionals need to weigh the risks of each choice and the impact on their long-term personal and professional goals.

Leaving a role might bring chal-



lenges and a renewed sense of career passion but, as I've personally experienced, the same problems you dealt with in your current role will carry with you to the next facility, role or golf course in a short time.

## ASSESS YOURSELF

Speaking from experience, developing a personal strategic plan to map out your goals over 10 years ahead gives you the freedom to dream big, unbound by current limitations.

Consider spending time self-reflecting on your current role. Have you really given yourself the space to appreciate your existing circumstances? Consider some of the following questions:

- How do my past achievements and challenges align with the person I want to become?
- How often do I celebrate my achievements, no matter how small?
- How do I balance working toward long-term goals with enjoying the process along the way?
- Is the environment providing a safe, healthy space for myself and stability for my family?
- Have I consistently been rewarded, recognized and challenged?

You'll begin to see patterns, notice recurring themes and uncover what truly matters to you. When you celebrate each achievement along the way, you acknowledge your progress and reinforce the commitment to your dreams.

Looking back, I did not take moments to appreciate growth in my own personal career journey, as well as the steps I took personally. I ruminated on things out of my control, projected circumstances that weren't based on facts but rather worst-case scenarios. It became a distraction to focusing on what I could control and all the good things happening personally and professionally.

I find many professionals create a narrative about why they need to move on to greener pastures thinking the external environment is going to generate happiness, balance and success. Often it is addressing the internal litigator that will change your attitude,

altitude and career satisfaction.

If you think the club or organization down the street with the shiny newness doesn't have the 10-percent group of naysayers, limited resources, governance problems and a whole lot of other baggage, think again!

Some considerations to increase your satisfaction with your current role:

- Don't let the profession define happiness. Find outside interests and hobbies.
- Build relationships within your team. Delegate and lead by example to promote a positive work culture.
- Develop soft skills, including adaptability, handling constructive criticism and emotional intelligence.
- Be willing to adapt to change and accept that some things are out of your control.
- Set realistic goals and work toward achieving them; take initiative in your career and relationships.
- Seek out professional development opportunities in areas that impact the overall business and strategy.

## RESEARCH, RESEARCH AND MORE RESEARCH

Seeking clarity can involve researching new roles, seeking advice from trusted mentors and other industry professionals about the inner workings of a prospective organization.

All too often, I find professionals seeking career opportunities purely based on name, recognition and a nice compensation package. It's also important to evaluate how specific challenges and time constraints will affect your career and trajectory to achieve goals.

For example, I conducted a director of agronomy search for a role that came with lofty dreams, high hopes and national attention. The position offered unparalleled resources — state-of-the-art equipment, exceptional products and the ability to attract top-tier talent and a who's who list of national and international members.

Despite these advantages, significant constraints arose because of the club's limited understanding of key operational elements and governance.

These included an unrealistic timeline for achieving goals, a poorly defined reporting structure and a lack of clarity around accountability. As a result, the director's time and autonomy were heavily impacted, limiting the potential for success.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

**1. Alignment of expectations:** Seeking a clear understanding and alignment of timelines for achieving goals is crucial to the success of any leadership role. Unrealistic expectations can hinder progress, regardless of the resources available.

**2. Defined reporting structure:** Ambiguities in reporting structures can create confusion and inefficiencies. Defining who the role reports to and the chain of communication is essential for effective leadership.

**3. Accountability drives autonomy:** Establishing clear accountability measures can empower leaders to operate with greater autonomy, which is critical for executing complex agronomic strategies.

**4. Resources are only part of the equation:** Even with top-notch resources, success depends on a cohesive strategy, effective communication and realistic goal setting.

**5. Organizational IQ matters:** An organization's understanding of agronomic operations and its commitment to strategic planning are foundational to supporting leadership roles effectively.

Again, no facility is remiss from similar issues, but you need to research the potential pitfalls at the leadership level and the downstream effects. Additionally, you need to self-evaluate if your experiences and skills align to the position requirements, or will you be jumping into a situation that you aren't entirely prepared for and will be overwhelmed from the outset. ■

*Tyler Bloom is the founder of the talent acquisition and workforce development firm Tyler Bloom Consulting and a former golf course superintendent. This is his fourth Turfheads Take Over contribution.*

# WHAT'S MY LINER?

Superintendent **Richard Green** learned plenty about bunker liners as a project manager. An in-house renovation led to him developing an option to help his peers.

I'm a lifelong turfhead and currently the golf course superintendent at Heritage Hills Golf Resort in York, Pennsylvania.

I started in golf course maintenance as a 14-year-old when my best friend's father bought the local golf course. I loved the peace and quiet of the golf course. I loved being there as the sun rose in the morning and I loved being there as the sun set in the evening. I knew at an early age it is where I wanted to be.

I spent a great deal of my career building and renovating golf courses as a project manager up and down the East Coast and through to the Carolinas. I worked on every type of golf course with every type of budget. I worked with some of the best architects in the world, and on other projects that were designed in the field.

One question every project has in common is, "What bunker liner are we going to use?" or, even more common, "What bunker liner can we afford to use?" Throughout my career I have worked with all types of liners. There are some great products out there, including poured in place, sprayed polymer and stapled fabric options. They all work wonderfully but can be cost prohibitive or require a certified crew to install. Some of the fabric liners require staples that can heave upward in freeze and thaw cycles; some fabric becomes snagged by the bunker rake.

I've taken all that I have learned over the years and considered several materials to develop my own bunker liner company. I wanted the liner to be durable, I wanted it to be easy to install and, most important, I wanted it to be budget friendly.

In some situations, the cost of bunker liners is driving design. Architects

are having to scale back the size of bunkers because of the square-foot-price of construction. The multi-step installation of some liners is part of the issue. It's not necessarily the cost of the material, but the cost of labor and equipment used to install it.

There are also conditions to consider before liners are installed: Can the equipment be driven out on the course without causing damage? Can these heavy materials be transported out to the bunker without causing damage to the course or the cart path? Can the polymer be used in this weather or is the stone too wet? Can the plant deliver consistent loads of concrete? Is the concrete too wet or dry? Do loads need to be rejected for being too wet or dry? Can staples be hammered into the rocky subsoil? Will the fabric get snagged by the bunker rake?

Then there is the question of injury and liability. Putting a solid rock surface under 4 or 6 inches of sand sounds good because no one is taking a 6-inch divot playing out of a sand bunker, right? That's right, but that sand is going to migrate in the bunker if it rains or if a worker inadvertently pulled it down off the face because they didn't take the time to push sand back up on the faces. Now that 6 inches of sand is 1 inch, and that member or patron could hurt themselves.

I had an opportunity several years ago to renovate bunkers on our course. It was a project done completely in-house. It was the perfect time to test my own bunker liner idea. I contacted the manufacturer, and they loved it. They produce this product for another purpose and were thrilled to introduce it to a new market. They are an international company 10 miles from me with the ability to ship all over the country. It's easily installed in-house



or by a contractor — simply measure, cut and place.

This is something I started this past August and I'm excited about how it can help others. I have used my golf course maintenance and construction skills to help fill a void between the expensive bunker liners many of you dream about using and the cheaper liners your budget dictates you use.

Developing a solution to help my peers has been rewarding. I encourage you to use your vast skills and creativity to help courses overcome maintenance and budget challenges. 🌱

*Richard Green is the superintendent at Heritage Hills Golf Resort in York, Pennsylvania, and developer of Performance Bunker Liner. This is his first Turfheads Take Over contribution.*



# VITAL ROLE OF ENGAGEMENT IN TURFGRASS RESEARCH

Working with academics can be incredibly important to maintenance success.

**Emily Brathwaite, Dr. Hannah Rivedal, Dr. Chas Schmid and Dr. Alec Kowalewski** explain.

Early morning sampling a golf course for the Oregon State University survey.

**G**olf course management is facing an increasingly complex set of challenges, whether from labor shortages, environmental changes or increased pest pressures that can threaten the quality of putting green surfaces. Historically, turfgrass managers have sought the expertise of university researchers to solve these complex issues. Recently, however, there seems to be a perception of disconnect between academic research and the practical needs of the industry. But engaging with industry members in the research process can help bridge this gap, ensuring that university studies address real-world problems and yield actionable results.

This article will explore the importance of research that directly aligns with superintendents' needs, highlighting an example of when involvement in a university-funded survey led to a rapid diagnosis of damage on a golf course putting green. By examining this collaboration, we can see how targeted research can drive meaningful improvements in turf management and overall course health. As the pressures on turfgrass managers continue, these partnerships will be essential for developing effective management solutions.

To understand the significance of industry involvement, it's essential to recognize the diverse roles that superintendents play in golf course

management. A superintendent is not just an agronomist and team leader, they're also accountants, human resources, on-call facilities maintenance and even trained counselors! Superintendents spend more time on the golf course than any other person and observe firsthand the challenges posed by pests, diseases, and environmental stressors. Their day-to-day experiences and observations can provide invaluable context that shapes the direction of research. By prioritizing direct engagement with industry members, university researchers can ensure that studies not only advance scientific knowledge but also translate into effective management strategies.

A prime example of this collabora-



tive approach can be shown through research efforts evaluating plant-parasitic nematode (PPN) damage in the Pacific Northwest. Nematodes are microscopic worms capable of parasitizing all parts of a plant. Feeding and damage to the root system causes physiological disruption of nutrient and water uptake. This leads to symptoms that are often mistaken for abiotic stresses, making accurate diagnosis quite difficult. For many years, PPN felt like a last-ditch effort to explain away some otherwise inexplicable symptoms on putting greens. Not responding to a fungicide or fertilizer application? Well, it's probably nematodes then. More recently, researchers at Oregon State University and the USDA Agricultural Research Service have been finding that PPN might actually be the culprits for damage caused on golf course putting greens.

The journey into PPN research began after the OSU Turfgrass Diagnostic Clinic received putting green samples from a coastal Oregon golf facility, which had symptoms that appeared fungal in nature, yet no pathogens could be isolated. We started extracting soil samples to check for nematodes and, to our surprise, we discovered high populations of spiral and root-knot nematode on the *Poa annua* putting greens. Recognizing the extent of the damage at this facility, and the lack of information available for the PNW, we felt compelled to lay the groundwork for a broader understanding of these pests.

With funding secured through the USGA, we launched a survey in 2023 of more than 300 putting greens across Oregon, Washington and California, sampling at four time points throughout the year to identify nematode community populations and densities that are present and contributing to damage symptoms. At least 15 unique genera of PPN have been identified across the more than 300 surveyed greens, with several occurring at extremely high densities.

The two most concerning nema-

todes were root-knot nematode and spiral nematode, being found in all three states and on *Poa annua*, *Festuca rubra* ssp., and *Agrostis stolonifera* greens. Peaks in populations in western Oregon were observed in the late fall and winter, with damage symptoms following a few weeks after that.

Fast forward a year, when a Washington superintendent who was involved in our nematode survey encountered an unexpected issue just as he was boarding the plane for the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show in February 2024. After approximately eight months of surveying his greens, which had shown low nematode densities, he received alarming photos from his assistants depicting distinct damage across multiple putting greens. The symptoms were puzzling — an unusual thinning of the canopy in distinct patches, particularly pronounced in low-lying areas where water collects. Both he and his regional agronomist, having ruled out other potential pathogen causes and abiotic stresses, started thinking about nematodes.

Up until being in our survey, the idea of nematodes causing damage on this golf course hadn't crossed his mind. In fact, he had never even previously made applications to target them. Because of his participation in the ongoing research, he was able to quickly reach out to OSU to arrange for samples to be analyzed.

The results were startling: incredibly high populations of root-knot nematodes were identified, averaging more than 16,000 infective stage juveniles per 100cc of soil — well above available actionable thresholds of 500 juveniles per 100cc recommended by University of Massachusetts researchers. This finding indicated that nematodes were a significant contributor to the damage observed, allowing the superintendent to take informed and immediate action to manage the problem effectively.

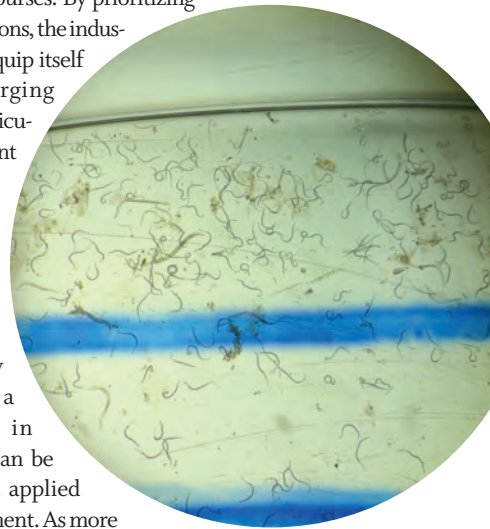
This case serves as a reminder of the potential that lies in fostering partner-

ships between researchers and practitioners. When research is conducted with a clear focus on industry needs, it can lead to actionable insights that directly enhance the management and quality of golf courses. By prioritizing these collaborations, the industry can better equip itself to tackle emerging challenges, particularly in the current climate.

Beyond the immediate benefits seen at the golf course in Washington, this case study underscores a broader shift in how research can be conducted and applied in turf management. As more superintendents recognize the value of participating in research initiatives, a feedback loop is created that improves both practical knowledge and scientific inquiry. This ongoing dialogue allows researchers to refine their methodologies and focus on the most pressing issues faced by turf managers, thereby encouraging more extensive participation across the industry.

In future studies at OSU, we will continue to seek practical management strategies for this emerging pest in our region. This winter, we plan to initiate trials to evaluate effective cultural and chemical management programs for nematodes, with the intention of developing a viable solution for those original turfgrass superintendents that reached out.

*Emily Braithwaite is a graduate research assistant at Oregon State University. Dr. Hannah Rivedal, Ph.D., is a research plant pathologist for the USDA Agricultural Research Service. Dr. Chas Schmid, Ph.D., is assistant professor, senior research, at Oregon State. Dr. Alec Kowalewski, Ph.D., is a professor at Oregon State.*



▲ Extracted nematodes from the green with high population densities of *Meloidogyne* root-knot nematode.





# APPEALING TO GOLF'S MOST MAJOR MINORS

Industry lifer **Ryan Kraushofer** carries the torch lit by his father, who helped introduce the game to thousands of youngsters.

**F**or golf courses to survive in the future, they need to be involved with local communities, schools, scouts, 4-H, FFA and have a junior golf program. That might sound like a lot, but today's junior will hopefully turn into our customers or employees in the future.

Working out of Westminster National Golf Course in Westminster, Maryland, my father and I have helped inspire more than 17,000 young golfers through pioneering a junior golf program along with hosting First Green STEAM learning programs. My dad, **Paul Kraushofer**, has been associated with golf for more than 60 years and has been a certified United States Golf Teachers Federation Level III Teaching Professional since 2001. He had a vision of starting a junior golf program back in 1994 at his local public golf course, Oakmont Green, in Hampstead, Maryland. Thirty years later, it is still running strong, averaging 50 to 60 juniors every Monday night during the summer break. We figure he has introduced golf to more than 16,000 juniors in this span.

I've been around golf since the age of 10, first attending my dad's junior golf programs, and working on the golf course since the age of 12. I'm passionate about building the future of the golf industry, too. I'm a CGCS and a past president of the Mid-Atlantic GCSAA. I also have a dual role as superintendent and general manager at Westminster National in northern Maryland. I have seen the challenges when it comes to hiring and retaining employees over the

years and felt like something had to be done. So, in 2016, I talked with my Mid-Atlantic GCSAA peers, and we took action by hosting the inaugural GCSAA First Green field trip.

First Green has proved to be an invaluable tool for golf course superintendents. Every golf course should start offering some sort of First Green field trip for their community. Having hosted approximately 18 field trips and roughly 1,700 students, I can say that hosting First Green field trips only takes a few hours out of my day but will make memories that will last a lifetime for the students attending. Our First Green programs typically involve fifth graders from local elementary schools, introducing them to all aspects of the job by rotating the students through six different stations learning about science, technology, engineering, art, math and golf, and how each is used in the golf course superintendent's profession.

My dad and I have so much passion for junior golf and our programs keep growing and getting better each year.

Where will our kids end up career-wise? Maybe one day one of the juniors becomes a golf course superintendent or a USGTF teaching professional. Whatever profession the junior golfer or field trip attendee chooses, let's hope that golf will still be part of their lives. ■

*Ryan Kraushofer is the golf course superintendent and general manager at Westminster National in Maryland. This is his first Turfheads Take Over contribution.*



# STUDYING GOLF'S ROOTS

Golf course architect **Colton Craig** toured the links of Scotland as part of the World 100 Architectural Fellowship. What did he learn from the memorable experience?

**T**he World 100 Architectural Fellowship, sponsored by the World 100 Club, provided me with an extraordinary opportunity to study the ancient art of links golf in Scotland for a full month. This fellowship was not just a professional milestone but, as my surname is Scottish, a deeply personal journey into the heart of golf's and my family's heritage. As an up-and-coming golf course architect, this experience transformed my understanding of the game and its creative expression.

If someone is an aspiring golf course architect, they will sometimes hear there are five requirements:

- Work previously in golf course construction
- Become a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects
- Secure a degree in landscape architecture from an accredited university

- Be an accomplished player or scratch golfer
- Visit Scotland and study links golf

Although I have gone more of the traditional route and achieved many of these "requirements," I have always pushed back strongly against these five prerequisites to be considered a true golf course architect. I have never liked gatekeeping or creating barriers to entry into an industry, especially a creative and artistic craft like golf course architecture.

At least until I visited Scotland.

After experiencing Scottish culture and its unbreakable connection to the origins of golf, I am willing to write that all golf course architects must visit Scotland if they want to have a full understanding of their art.

Inherently, the cultures of artisans and sportsmen conflict. However, golf perfectly harmonizes art and sport because the game's playing fields are undefined, thus the



need for a golf architect. "Nothing is worse than mediocrity," an art dealer and member at Muirfield said to me, encapsulating the spirit of excellence that drives both art and golf courses. The art dealer was making a point of saying life is too short to "play it safe."

When studying links golf, it is important to first define "links" golf. Although there are many opinions and definitions, for me it is quite simple: It must be on sandy soil and it must be near the sea. What is particularly great about sandy soils is that it is the best soil to create golf, yet is also the most affordable material to build in. I am not aware of any other design field where the best materials are also the most affordable.

### THE COURSES AND THEIR STORIES

Studying more than 50 links golf courses in Scotland was a completely consuming experience. Even though I ate and drank whatever I wanted in the evenings, I returned home a few pounds lighter because I walked 14

miles per day on average. Below is a description of a few of the courses that made a major impact on me as a designer.

**Old Course:** Often hailed as the "Home of Golf," the Old Course has influenced every subsequent course design either in direct inspiration or in deliberate contrast. Its layout, which seems organic and unplanned, teaches that the land should dictate the design, not the other way around. The

shared green complexes and short walks from green to tee make for a perfectly efficient golf course.

**Muirfield:** Known for its strategic design, Muirfield emphasizes the importance of thoughtful planning and the value of patience. The tradition of alternate shot play, and a swift pace of play make for a day of teamwork and competition. History oozes from this place. The clubhouse displays the original rules of golf and one of sport's oldest trophies. **Jack Nicklaus** once said the best course in Scotland is the second 18 at Muirfield that has not been built yet. The land he was discussing would make any golf architect salivate. The club formed a committee to determine what the best use of this land would be. After five years and countless meetings, their decision was to do nothing. I believe this is the correct decision, as nothing more needs to be done when you already have it all.

**Prestwick:** Home to the first Open Championship, the "loop," as the members call it, has dunes that sweep across the opening and closing holes making for some of the most interesting and unique golf holes ever conceived. Our host, who was a great player, made the comment about the Himalayas hole: "I still don't know how to play this hole after 40 years."

**Cruden Bay:** My personal favorite. With its dramatic scenery and challenging holes, Cruden Bay exemplifies the romanticism and beauty of true links golf. Its charm lies in its raw, natural landscape, offering a pure golfing experience that is both exhilarating and humbling. Cruden Bay is a nearly perfect golf course!

**North Berwick:** Often considered many architects' favorite. Perhaps the most charming golf course in the world. The course plays a traditional in-and-out routing from a beautiful resort town. The closing

### Travel favorites

**Favorite meal:** Muirfield lunch

**Favorite clubhouse experience:** Prestwick

**Favorite clubhouse view:** Cruden Bay

**Favorite entry drive/sense of arrival:** Kilspendie

**Favorite hotel/accommodations:** Old Course Hotel

stretch of holes is a crash course on amazing golf architecture.

**Covesea:** A course that was not on my list to visit, but I saw a sign between courses and decided to swing by. Covesea was the surprise of the trip. The term "hidden gem" is abused in the world of golf, but there is no better way to describe this place than just that. The owner and designer, **Andy Burnett**, lives on property in a single-wide trailer. He is golf's version of the "wise surfer dude." He gave me a tour of his wonderful 9-hole course and by the end of our walk, he was discussing Far Eastern philosophy with me. He is undoubtedly the most interesting person I have ever met.

### THE CULTURE OF GOLF IN SCOTLAND

Living in Scotland immersed me in a culture where golf is more than a sport — it's a way of life. **Athol Reid**, who resides by the iconic Road Hole at St. Andrews, served as the ultimate tour guide, providing insights that only a local could. I learned that golf in Scotland is about camaraderie, respect for history and a deep connection to the land.

### THE FUTURE OF GOLF COURSE DESIGN

The lessons from Scotland will shape my approach to future projects. Sensationalism and hyper-realistic designs have become the in-vogue style in this age of limitless possibility of construction methods. Since my visit to Scotland, I have a growing appreciation for the simplicity and efficacy found in traditional links courses. The balance of creativity and restraint, the respect for natural landscapes and the integration of

▼ Colton Craig visited Scotland as part of the the World 100 Architectural Fellowship.





cultural elements are all critical to creating courses. Sensationalism in design might attract attention, but minimalism ensures longevity and harmony.

A century ago, **Perry Maxwell** shared this viewpoint when writing about his trip to Scotland in the *American Golfer*: "Don't blame all of this on the architects; the guilt lies primarily with the influential misguided club members who take sadistic joy in torturing the good earth. As a result, the majority of American golf clubs are in the red, gore of the steam shovel, blood drawn by the mound-builders. We have learned nothing from Scotland or England where the ancient and honorable game can be enjoyed on marvelous links at one-tenth the

admission fees, dues, green fees, etc., that prevail in the land of the free."

The job of a golf course architect is 70 percent creative, 15 percent administrative and 15 percent managing egos — often including one's own. This trip reinforced my belief that great design is about letting the land speak for itself. My favorite courses, like my favorite people, are true to themselves and don't try to be something they are not.

The World 100 Architectural Fellowship was more than just an academic exercise; it was a journey into the soul of golf. From the timeless allure of the Old Course to the rugged beauty of Cruden Bay,



each course taught me invaluable lessons about design, culture and the enduring appeal of the game. As I move forward in my career, these experiences will guide my efforts to create golf courses that honor tradition, embrace simplicity, and inspire future generations.

In the words of a Muirfield member, "Nothing is worse than mediocrity." This trip has instilled in me a commitment to excellence, a passion for authenticity and a deep respect for the art and sport of golf. With these lessons in mind, I look forward to contributing to the rich history of golf course architecture, one inspired design at a time. ■

*Colton Craig is an Oklahoma-based golf course architect and principal design partner of Craig & Coyne. This is Craig's first Turfheads Take Over contribution.*

## Humor from Scotland

*"Work is a bit overrated, yea?"* — Retired member at Western Gails

*"For Fox Sake Slow Down"* — Street sign on an entry drive to a golf club.

*"It was not met with overwhelming support."* — In regards to cutting a "V" into the Himalayas hole at Prestwick in order to see the flag stick from the tee.

*"I will get out with a limp."* — Elderly gentlemen parking in handicap without a pass

*"Trump should stick to golf architecture."* — In regard to his two golf properties in Scotland





## OUT OF THE ASHES

**T**he acrid odor of smoldering embers was not the welcoming that **Dave Parson** was hoping for when he applied to be the superintendent at Wampanoag Country Club in West Hartford, Connecticut. But a few days after an initial conference call confirming he had been shortlisted for the job and would visit the course the following week, the club's 34,000-square-foot clubhouse burned to the ground.

His interview would be postponed by only a few days. Otherwise, he was free to make a site visit and gather the information needed to build a strong case. When he made his way from the club parking around the bend of the roped-off ruins to look out from the patio onto the golf course, the enormity of the moment struck him viscerally. And yet he was also encouraged by what he saw.

"On the one side was the awful sight and smell of the burned-out clubhouse," he recalls. "But I also realized the course was completely untouched and they'd soon be playing golf, and if I got the job, it would still be my responsibility to provide them with the best possible conditions under really difficult circumstances."

That was last April. Wampanoag, a 1924 design by **Donald Ross**, had just been through a multimillion-dollar restoration by architect **Tyler Rae** that had reopened to rave reviews the previous Memorial Day. Then early one Saturday morning, a fire started in a corner of the clubhouse, and while local firefighters thought they had it extinguished, it flared up surreptitiously and consumed the building the next night. A total loss.

Luckily, the maintenance area and equipment were spared. Following a short closure, the golf course reopened, with club services like food and beverage and pro shop staffing shifted to temporary

quarters. Meanwhile, Parson impressed the interview committee enough to land the job. Since starting on May 28, he's barely had a day off.

Parson, 39, is a native of Hibbing, Minnesota — home to **Bob Dylan** and the Greyhound Bus Museum. It's also where his dad has been the longtime superintendent of Mesaba Country Club. At the age of 4, when his playmates were pulling around red wagons, Parson was riding about on SandPros and triplexes. He played on his high school golf team and studied business at the University of Minnesota before getting hired at The Wilderness at Fortune Bay in Minnesota's Iron Range.

He worked his way up to assistant superintendent. The seasonal nature of employment proved limiting, so he headed east to The Apawamis Club in Westchester County, New York. He worked his way up to first assistant and earned his associate degree in turfgrass at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

After seven seasons at Apawamis, he became superintendent at The Orchards in western Massachusetts. He then went to Twin Hills Country Club in Longmeadow, Massachusetts, where his skill operating bulldozers, excavators and backhoes came in handy on in-house renovation projects.

Now at Wampanoag, Parson enjoys the company of his two white miniature Eskimo dogs, Shiya and Hadley. Back home, he and his wife, **Jillian**, have their hands full with two young boys. They've already relocated to a new house, and Parson has become active on the Connecticut Association of Golf Course

Superintendents board.

While Wampanoag club officials have been spending many hours dealing with the insurance claims, new clubhouse designs and financing, Parson and his crew are focusing on giving members the best possible golf experience. He pays particular attention to scientific data, relying on ISTRC testing of organic content in the soil profile to help him decide whether and when to undergo invasive aeration — rather than relying on a traditional calendar of punching greens at the same time every year. He's also focused on greens rolling to enhance smoothness rather than close mowing of Wampanoag's newer putting surfaces.

"Don't aerify unless you need to aerify," is Parson's motto. "We're in the consumer service business, not just turfgrass management," he adds. That's also why he spends a lot of time communicating to members the steps he's taking to upgrade conditions. He also plays the golf course a few times a month while walking and carrying his bag — something he says enables him "to see the course from a vantage point where I see things I'd miss if I were just driving by on a cart."

New plans have been approved to proceed with a replacement clubhouse. Parson knows that the anticipated year-plus of construction will entail considerable rerouting of maintenance traffic. If that's what it takes to get the club back to full operation, it's an inconvenience he can handle.

The initial shock of those embers has worn off. Wampanoag is rising from the ashes, and Parson is part of the recovery. 🌱



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



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By Trent Bouts

# Shock of it all

Hurricane Helene  
battered a  
mountainous region  
of the Carolinas.  
The industry  
professionals  
who call it home  
describe the  
devastation of what  
they encountered.





“It is as bad as you can possibly imagine, maybe even worse ...”

Those words from **Pete Gerdon**, coming three weeks after Hurricane Helene wrought havoc on the mountains of western North Carolina, conveyed more than a dozen words should be able to.

You see, Gerdon, from Grandfather Golf and Country Club in Linville, wasn't talking about his golf course.

Thankfully, most of us will never know just how bad “it” was, and still is, up there. Tragically, the unimaginable is what others, like Gerdon, are dealing with and still will for weeks, months and, yes, even years to come.

As much as golf courses enter the heart and soul of many superintendents who take care of them, in the worst-hit areas post-Helene, they are now only a tiny piece of a massive puzzle ahead, dwarfed by the staggering loss of homes, livelihoods and lives themselves.

“Once the storm ended, I shifted my guys straight into helping the community,” says **Bill Daniels** of Sugar Mountain Golf Course in Banner Elk. “The golf course just became an afterthought.” It would be two weeks before Daniels would set foot back on a fairway.

Across both Carolinas, at least 150 people perished. Some of those found were buried in several feet of silt blanketing most of the front nine at Asheville Municipal Golf Course. “I know they found a few on the east side of the course,” superintendent **Matthew Dierdorff** says. “Not sure about the west side yet.”

A month after the storm, dozens were still missing.

A few miles from Asheville Muni, **Steve Shand**, from The Cliffs at Walnut Cove, drove a rough-hewn track over a ridge to get out of his neighborhood rather than take a shorter, more conventional route. That way he didn't have to witness cadaver dogs still at work, day after day, across from his neighborhood where nearly 30 houses washed away.

Northwest of Asheville, in a part of the world where communities are so closely tied across generations, as family, neighbors and friends, no one was immune from loss of some kind. For instance, Gerdon has employees who lost relatives. **Allen Storie** from Hound Ears Club near Boone is another example. He counts himself lucky, though “an old school friend” was not.

“He barely got out with his 7-year-old, but his wife was still in the house when it washed away,” Storie says. “A neighbor to one of the guys I work with was found in a mudslide. He was alive when they found him. But he died that night.”

Sadly, you don't need to be close to someone to be affected by their hardship, or worse. Shand has neighbors who watched a man pleading for help from the rooftop of his house as it floated by. Daniels' brother-in-law lost his home “entirely,” as did two cousins. Another superintendent lost neighbors to mudslides. And then, as Shand says, there are some stories that “don't need to show up in print.”

Too many other Carolinas GCSA members have their own accounts of events that would be shocking enough in isolation. But when those horrors are scaled across the vast swath of the region that was impacted—one roughly half the size of Scotland—it becomes, as Modern Turf's **Buddy Smith** says, “hard to even try and wrap your head around.”

In that regard, **Jeremy Boone**, superintendent and general manager at Springdale Resort in Canton, west of Asheville, was almost grateful for having no power and therefore no eyes on the outside world—at least initially. Springdale lost trees and bridges that kept him busy.

“It was easy when we had tunnel vision for about three days,” Boone says of the immediate aftermath. “But when we got internet back and I opened up my field of vision, I did it for about 30 minutes. Then I thought, ‘That's enough. I don't need to see all this. I need to focus on who I can help and what I can do in my little circle.’”

Smith was among the earliest caravans of volunteers looking to help who they could, delivering supplies into the region. “It's crazy, man. I saw whole hillsides gone. I saw 40-foot steel beams wrapped around rocks in creeks,” he says. “And how do you rebuild when the actual land your house was on is now gone, when it's now river bottom?”

Fortunately, and almost incredibly, there were no reports of injury among Carolinas GCSA members or their crew members, though a small handful did suffer significant damage to their homes.

Of course, some of the damage is still to come. Post-traumatic stress, depression and other



## SPOTLIGHT

► A mass of downed trees obscures the golf course at Mountain Air Country Club.

mental health ramifications will be less visible but no less devastating internally. Their incidence is only likely to increase as adrenaline ebbs, along with the attention and help from the rest of the world.

One superintendent in the area admits to grappling with “survivor guilt.” He declined a phone interview but was poignant in a text: “A golf course and its infrastructure can be replaced — lives and generational property cannot. In this grand scheme of chaos, so many people lost things more precious and valuable ...”

At one point in western North Carolina, as many as 1,200 roads were closed, some because they simply no longer existed. The count of bridges lost might never be known but their disappearance left many people stranded in place, cut off from help unless it was dropped from the air.

In a single phone call, Caroli-

nas GCSA executive director **Tim Kreger** learned of one small community that lost 19 bridges with anything from one to 25 homes on the other side. “They couldn’t even run cables to these people,” Kreger says.

Storie literally spent weeks running his own small excavator far and wide, helping recover bridges and creating paths in and out for people otherwise stuck on the wrong side of a waterway. He would work a full shift at his badly damaged golf course, then head home at 4 p.m. and crank up his machine to help others in his community.

“You don’t have time to think about being tired,” Storie says. “You really don’t, because there are so many people who can’t get in and out

of their house. The primary thing is to help them be able to do that. Then we won’t have the need for all these volunteers because people can then provide for themselves.”

### MOST HURRICANES AFFECT

coastal areas, which are typically flat. The danger and damage stem mostly from winds, storm surge and rising waters.

Those impacts are often more predictable than in the mountains, where winds funnel between ranges, rains loosen earth creating landslides and floodwaters gather like a wall of bowling balls that race through the valleys below.

The worst damage ran in a band roughly 100 miles wide from west of Asheville to east of Rutherfordton and up into the mountains, where centers like Boone and Blowing Rock were on the cusp of the fall leaf season.

At Linville Ridge Golf Club, the highest course east of the Mississippi, it wasn’t just the leaves that were gone. “Across the whole development, if there is one tree down there are 10,000 trees down,” Linville Ridge development and operations director **Steve Sheets** says. “Some houses had so many trees on them, you couldn’t even see there was a house there.”

It took eight people with chainsaws and a backhoe four hours to clear a narrow, single lane from Sheets’ maintenance facility down to the nearest gate on Highway 105 — a drive that normally takes three minutes.

Of course, many other parts of the Carolinas were also affected, from Aiken through the Midlands to the South Carolina Upstate, where 21 people were killed across Anderson, Greenville and Spartanburg counties.

Near Clinton, just off I-26 south of Spartanburg, floodwaters from the Enoree River rose to within feet



▼ A scene captured during a delivery of supplies from the Carolinas GCSA office to the mountains of Western North Carolina.





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# Incredible resilience

One day, in the weeks after Hurricane Helene, **Allen Storie** from Hound Ears Club near Boone, North Carolina, was standing in a field at home checking on his cows — or at least those he had left. The storm killed two. Then Storie heard a noise that had become all too familiar, that of a helicopter flying in emergency supplies for people who had lost a lot more than their animals. Or so he thought.

The helicopter slowed and stopped overhead, dropping hay into the field before taking off. As it happened, Storie had plenty of feed for his stock but someone, a complete stranger, wanted to be sure. Storie has no idea who the aerial good Samaritan was, and likely never will. But, he says, that incident typifies a might of good — and resilience — that emerged in the wake of the storm.

"People are coming together. Spirits are good," he says. "Everybody is just a little bit more thankful and grateful for their lives and each other than they used to be. And that is a huge deal. That's one of the good things that has evolved from this."

Storie's take is echoed by Carolinas GCSA members across the storm zone, many of whom were involved in helping others in their respective communities. **Steve Shand's** superintendent skills quickly came to the fore when floodwaters blew out the only road in and out of his Asheville neighborhood of several hundred residents.

When it was clear no one was going anywhere for days, at least, Shand, from The Cliffs at Walnut Cove, helped organize twice daily resident meetings, to track people's needs and, just as important, see who could bring what to the table. One young couple, both doctors, set up "office hours" in their front yard.

"It was incredible to see how quickly everybody came together," Shand says. "Whatever anybody had that they didn't need soon belonged to someone else who did. We were cut off, but we were blessed, we were alive, and we had our homes."

Within days of the storm, the Carolinas GCSA had established close to a dozen dropoff points across both states to accept donations of critical supplies for hurricane survivors stranded without power, clean water and, in many cases, shelter. As soon as the scale of the devastation began to emerge, the association started fielding calls from members wanting to help.

"The calls were from members of all kinds — superintendents and a lot of industry partners," Carolinas GCSA executive director **Tim Kreger** says. "It all snowballed into the association serving as a central coordination point for an incredible outpouring of support. We've had industry partners driving semi-trucks to their competitors' warehouses to drop off pallets of food and water. There is no competition right now."

"Everyone has come together on the same team and that speaks volumes for the people in this association and this industry. We've got so many guys who work in our industry who are standing in fire stations right now handing out goods to their community, or who are on search and rescue teams. I could not be prouder of how our members have responded."

There is a similar sentiment at the facility level across the region. Superintendent after superintendent praises the willingness and determination of their crews to do whatever is required on any given day, on the golf course and away from it.

"Other than two guys who couldn't make it to work simply because there wasn't a road to get them here, I did not have one employee miss a single hour of work during this time," says **Bill Daniels**, from Sugar Mountain Golf Club in Banner Elk. "They are so dedicated. Just a wonderful group of guys. They manned the aid stations, used their trucks to deliver to outer areas, you name it."

In Asheville, **Rob Hamrick**, of Golf Agronomics, says "being grateful for what you have" was just one part of the silver lining to shine out of the dark heart of the storm. "You met a lot of neighbors you didn't know because everybody was out walking around," he says. "No one had power, didn't have water, couldn't get out. But everybody wanted to do what they could to help each other, at least they were trying to. I hope we hang on to that for a long time."

— Trent Bouts

of the clubhouse at Musgrove Mill Golf Club. The view from the back porch normally takes in as many as six holes, but all were under water.

Across the state line, foothills towns like Hendersonville and Morganton also took it hard.

In mid-October, one of Boone's employees at Springdale asked to reschedule his hours so he could volunteer during daylight in Asheville where he lives. After the recovery team he was working with found two bodies in as many days, he told Boone he wasn't sure he could keep doing it.

Asheville served as the drain for so much of what fell, in unfathomable amounts, on the mountains north of the city. About 60 miles away as the crow flies and 2,000 feet higher, Daniels measured 37.74 inches over three days. Sheets recorded 20 inches on the night of the storm itself.

Other than the clubhouse, not one inch of the course at Broadmoor Golf Links near Asheville Regional Airport was visible above water.

"They might even be worse than us," says Dierdorff at Asheville Muni, where he saw water nearly reaching transformers on power poles. A city surveyor told him that, judging by the debris line, water was 35 feet deep by the ninth tee. "We had white caps coming down the fairways," he says.

Only partly as a result of that torrent, it could be as late as "2026, maybe even 2027" before the front nine is rebuilt and reopen. The bigger factor now and for the foreseeable future is that the city is reserving that acreage as a secondary dump site for storm debris. And if you've seen even a glimpse of news coverage of the city or videos on social media, you'll get an idea of why Dierdorff's timeline is so far out.

"The words you read and the videos you see can't describe the devastation," Sheets says. "You have to see how it is in person. Without that, you can't grasp the enormity of it."

Enormity is defined as an extremely evil act or the quality of being extremely evil, according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*.

"Gosh almighty, man. It's so bad," says **Rob Hamrick**, of Golf Agronomics, who lives close to Shand and the neighborhood that lost so many homes. "They were gone. Just gone. But that was just one neighborhood. There were many others."

For two weeks, Hamrick drove to his mother's house in Shelby to shower, process work emails, stock up on drinking water and buy gas. "We still don't have Wi-Fi," he adds. "Of course, that's nothing compared to a lot of people who had it a whole lot worse."

Many of those were at higher elevations, which is why **Steve Neuliep**, superintendent of Neuliep Golf, who lives in Fairview outside Asheville, counted more than 100 helicopters, many of them U.S. Army Chinooks,

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► Stormwaters rage through Sugar Mountain Golf Course.

pass overhead on day two after the storm alone.

One of those who had it worse was **Ryan Wiebe**, who has served as a long-term acting superintendent at Mount Mitchell Golf Club outside Burnsville. The golf course itself reportedly lost multiple holes on the back nine along the South Toe River, which Wiebe also lived beside.

“He totally lost everything. He didn’t even have a pair of shoes on when he got out,” says **Shannon Peterson**, superintendent of Corbin Turf and Ornamental Supply, who lives in the area and has helped Wiebe as a consultant. But Wiebe’s mother-in-law, his sister-in-law, her husband and their middle-school-aged son did not survive.

“Ryan’s wife came out from Ukraine about 10 years ago and she worked hard to get her family here a couple of years ago after the fighting started over there,” Peterson says. “He set them up in a mobile home nearby and all four of them got swept away. It’s so heartbreaking, but it’s true.”

The Wiebe family’s story was reported in *USA Today* and on CNN. At press time, a GoFundMe page established to help them raised more than \$40,000. But as Peterson says, there are countless others who need help of all kinds. “There’s people living in tents by the side of the road up here now,” he says. “It’s pretty sad seeing how people are having to live.”

Two of Peterson’s cousins lost their homes. “And there’s nowhere left to build them back,” he says. His in-laws are now living with relatives in Tennessee and expect to be there for months. “They can’t even get to their house because the bridge is gone,” he says. “And they can’t get power back to their home until they build the road back so they can put up new power poles.”



**IF YOU WERE** a golf course superintendent in the storm zone, you had storm clean-up. It was just a question of how much and whether any of your repairs rose to the level of reconstruction. Some courses were closed for a few days, some for weeks, others still are aiming at next spring. And Peterson says he has heard of “three or four” that might never reopen.

At Mountain Air Country Club above Burnsville, **Scott Bradley** lost between 500 and 1,000 trees and counted 11 major landslides, including one that broke away just three feet from the edge of the first green. He counted 16 trees that fell on the 18th green. Miraculously, the first two were giants whose branches suspended the rest of their bulk and together they prevented the other 14 from crashing onto the putting surface.

Far more pressing was the work to open the one steep road winding in and out of the community. Emergency response coordinators soon identified Mountain Air’s own air strip as a site to bring in supplies. But those supplies weren’t going anywhere until the road reopened.

“We got it back in good shape so they could take the supplies down the mountain,” Bradley says. “Well, we got one lane back in good shape. The road is still technically closed except to the workers.”

A month after Helene, the golf course was still without power, like

so much of the region. “We got lit up pretty good,” Bradley says. “It’s devastation. You don’t really like to see your town on the national news and we’ve been on a lot of news programs here lately. But we’re hoping people don’t forget that there are a lot of people up here that are going to need help for a long time.”

On Oct. 24, Bradley obtained a generator and was able to “start putting some water out.” That mattered because his turf had seen no irrigation — mechanical or natural — since the storm on Sept. 27. That would normally cause superintendent angst. “But I’m thankful there’s been no rain, because for a lot of people, that’s the last thing they need right now,” Bradley says. “Keeping grass alive is superficial in the scheme of things.”

At Sugar Mountain, engineering consultants told Daniels that the repair bill on the course will reach at least \$1.5 million. That conversation came weeks after the storm. Until then, Daniels was not only busy with more important things, directing relief in his dual role as works director for the town: he had another reason for staying off the golf course.

“I’ve been the superintendent here for 27 years,” he says. “I just didn’t want to see it. It’s kind of heartbreaking.”

And there was enough heartbreak every else he turned.

“With each passing day, I was watching the weather and becoming more scared about what could happen,” he says of the lead up to the storm. “But no one could ever have imagined what did happen. I clocked in here about 5:30 Thursday morning and finally left for home about 6 o’clock Sunday night. In between, we were just clearing roads and creating access for people trapped in their homes here on the mountain.”

The night he did go home, Daniels

had to wade through a creek and hike about half a mile beyond that to get to his house because the road was “completely washed away.” “I was determined I was not going to sleep in my office chair one more night,” he says. “After four days out there, I was going home.”

A son, **Austin**, who still lives in the area and is a lineman for a power company, didn’t see his own house in daylight for 27 days and counting. “He leaves home at 6:30 a.m. and doesn’t get back until 10 or 11 at night,” Daniels says. “He’s part of the big group of heroes around here that’s doing all they can to try and get everybody back to where we were before the storm, or to what everybody says will be the new normal.

“I don’t know what to think about that, you know. It’s not going to be anything like normal for a long, long time.”

Storie remembers the shock that came with daylight breaking on Hound Ears. He’d actually been on the golf course property since about 4 a.m. Saturday. Not because the golf course was his first priority, but because sleep was impossible. He was so concerned about the welfare of his parents and other family members in neighboring Avery County.

With no phone service and roads blocked or gone, literally everyone in the hardest hit areas spent days worrying and wondering whether loved ones survived. So, with his own driveway “completely gone,” Storie hiked in darkness through woods crossing a big ridge to the golf course, then across the golf course to get to his shop.

“Then it became one of those moments when God was like, ‘You’re not going to Avery County. You’re going to stay right here at Hound Ears where I put you,’” he says. “It became absolutely clear to me that this was the only place I could go. I didn’t have any choice. It was total chaos. I mean, it’s crazy, right. You could not get anywhere. Nothing even looked the same.”

The only other souls on site were a security guard and Hound Ears general manager **Joe McGuire**, who was recovering from foot surgery. “He was hobbling around. There wasn’t a whole lot he could do,” Storie says. “But one thing he could do was drive an automatic pickup truck.”

So, McGuire got behind the wheel of a vehicle piled with chains, chainsaws, pry bars, water, “everything we could kind of get together,” Storie says. He climbed onto the club’s 420 Caterpillar backhoe, and off they set in the community of more 400 people, cutting away trees and pushing back mudslides.

“Between me and him, within about two days, we got everyone evacuated except for 16 people on top of the mountain,” Storie says. “So the next day, me and a coworker, we backpacked in supplies and water on foot, checking on those people.” Among those supplies were critical medications.

There was no bringing them down at that point. The terrain was too difficult and among the debris was a patchwork of live power lines. “We had to hike the mountain for two or three days to take them everything they needed,” Storie says. Only then did he make his way to Avery County and learn that his family was safe, albeit homebound because of missing bridges.

After recovering and resetting his parents’ bridge, he spent

the next two days doing the same for their neighbors up and down Highway 19E near Cranberry.

“I don’t think this part of the country will never look the same, whether it’s 10 years or 20 years,” he says. “There’s going to be remnants of this storm visible probably for our lifetimes.”

And then, as Boone says, there’s the stuff we won’t see. Springdale was not hit as badly as it was three years ago when Biblical flooding raged through the valley it sits in and multiple people were killed. But this flooding brought back that trauma.

“Western North Carolina will never be the same,” he says. “I feel for the kids that went through a flood, went through COVID, and now through another flood. They’re either going to be really tough, or really messed up.”

*Trent Bouts is a Greer, South Carolina-based writer and frequent Golf Course Industry contributor. This story first appeared in Carolinas Green.*



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## 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.



### FAIRWAY MOWER LIGHTBAR

A 20-inch-wide, 126-watt LED lightbar, manufactured by Nilight, Model 6000SC (about \$35.99 from Amazon) was installed on the ROPS on the 2019 Toro Reelmaster 5010-H Five-Plex Fairway Mower. The wiring was tied into the light switch for the OEM existing lights. The additional lighting was very helpful for employee

safety so the operator could plainly see everything that was ahead of the cutting units to avoid any obstructions such as tree branches, twigs and misplaced divots. The fairways are mowed during the morning hours before dawn and the added excellent visibility was much appreciated. It took about one hour to install and the lightbar angle can be

adjusted as required. **Gar McLamb** is the superintendent at the Hillendale Country Club in Phoenix, Maryland. **William** and **David Gordon** were the original golf course architects, with remodeling over the years by **George Fazio**, **Tom Clark** and **Bob Cupp**. **Joel Weiman** recently designed and built a new short-game practice area.



### SPRAYER LED LIGHTBAR

This 2012 Toro Multi Pro 5800-G Sprayer had a 52-inch-wide Nilight Model 15026C-A, LED 300 Watt Lightbar (around \$57 from Amazon) installed on top of the rollover protective structures. The lightbar faces the rear so the tank can be lit up well when tank mixing during the early morning or evening hours — and for the operator to view if there are any clogged nozzles and proper boom operations when spraying for two hours in the early-morning dark. A separate on/off switch was installed independent of the front headlights. The lightbar can be angled at the operator's choosing. It took about 1½ hours to install. Hillendale Country Club superintendent **Gar McLamb** and equipment manager **Dionisio Escobar** like making equipment even better.



**Terry Buchen, 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](mailto:terrybuchen@earthlink.net).

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CONTENT IN EVERY DIRECTION.







## ONE LAST TIME

**M**y name is **Matthew Wharton**, and I cannot tell you how excited I am for this wonderful opportunity I have been given today. I am going to be sitting down with none other than America's Greenkeeper.

AG informed our readers last month he is stepping away from his role as our monthly backpage columnist after more than six years of banging out his thoughts and opinions on a multitude of golf industry-related topics.

This is my chance to ask him about some of those memorable columns — plus hopefully gain some insight as to why he is stepping away now just when it feels to me like he is on top of his game.

**MW:** So, you are really going to stop writing full-time?

**AG:** Yes, you have been around me lately. Do not get me wrong, I enjoyed it immensely. You may recall I once asked **Pat Jones**, “When are you going to let me write for the magazine?” at the Carolinas GCSA Conference and Show. It was not until after Pat left *Golf Course Industry* and **Guy Cipriano** took over that I was blessed with this amazing opportunity.

**MW:** What made being the backpage columnist so special?

**AG:** For starters, I equate being the backpage columnist here to what **Rick Reilly** accomplished at *Sports Illustrated* — for everyone out there old enough to remember. Readers know exactly where to find you. There are people who turn straight to the back page. Two, it's only one page. There's no place to jump to if you write too much, so you must make a point in a concise format. Three, I entertained the idea of serving on the GCSAA board of directors several years ago. I believe had I chosen to pursue the election I would have been elected

“There's no place to jump to if you write too much, so you must make a point in a concise format.”

and served my industry peers. But someone very close to me, one of my mentors, mentioned that I may have actually reached more peers and made a bigger impact on others in this role compared to serving with GCSAA, because not everyone in the business is a GCSAA member and *Golf Course Industry* serves the industry in a broader capacity.

**MW:** Wow, I never thought of it that way. What are some of your favorite columns?

**AG:** Well, I will never forget my first contribution, and I mentioned last month my second was a rant I still can't believe got published. But once I began writing monthly, I think I made some excellent points. In 2019, I talked about the importance of learning social etiquette so you can represent yourself and your employer in certain settings without embarrassment. We got folks to ponder if they are still having fun on the job as the industry has gone through so much change from when my generation came up the ranks. And we pondered the labor struggle just prior to the pandemic.

**MW:** The pandemic, which was crazy. How did you manage to cope with all the chaos around?

**AG:** It was not easy, but I was fortunate to be working in a state that did not close golf, and I wrote about it in May 2020. Later that year, we made the case for folks to take the time and get away from work for a few days and recharge. We hope we made an impact when we wrote about becoming one

with your environment at work and being able to quickly notice when things are amiss to help guide you with what needs to be done to better manage your property.

**MW:** I remember those. That was some of your best work.

**AG:** I agree. Sometimes, those early days were easy as I had so much inside my head. The words just flowed out through my fingertips directly to the keyboard. As we continued to move forward, we had already shared so many ideas, and we had to find inspiration elsewhere. Like our letter to the USGA when we disagreed with the direction they were going in 2021, or sharing the importance of being humble shortly after **Bill Anderson** passed away and we recalled how my friendship with him developed after our awkward first meeting.

**MW:** And “Starting Over” was huge.

**AG:** Yes, we probably received more private feedback from that column than any other. We're also proud of our efforts to encourage folks to stop using the word “chemicals” in July 2021, and earlier this year we made the case “just because you can doesn't mean you should” when folks got in a tizzy at the number of push mowers at The Players Championship. And we stand by my message that it is only you holding you back from achieving more.

**MW:** Wow, in retrospect I guess you really did make an impact.

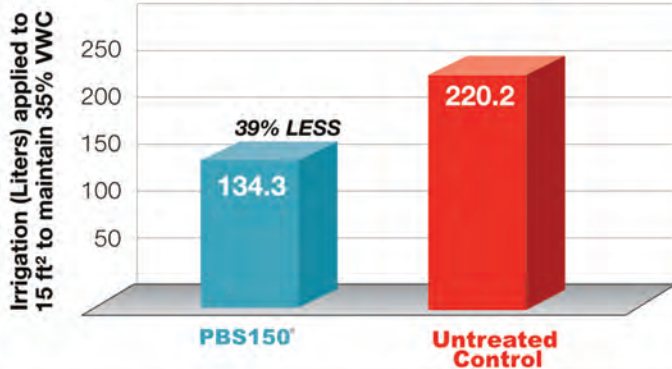
**AG:** We did, Matthew. We did. Thanks for all your help! And thank you all for reading and following along! 🍷



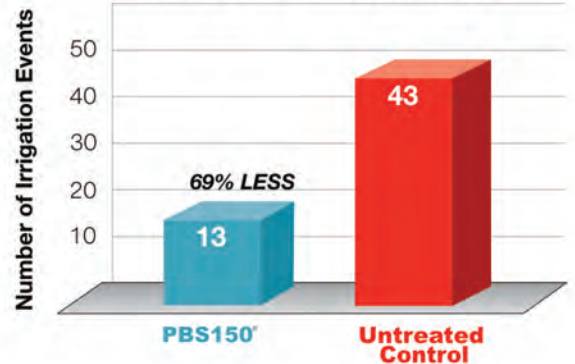
**MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG**, is the superintendent at Idle Hour Country Club in Lexington, Kentucky, and past president of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on X at @IHCCGreenkeeper.



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Nolan, G. and M. Fidanza. 2016. Penn State University

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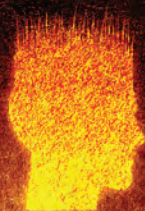
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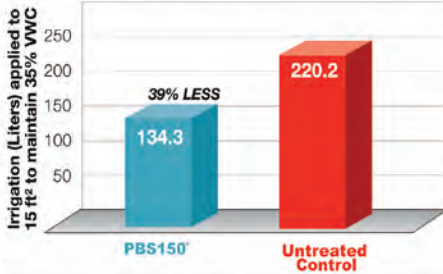
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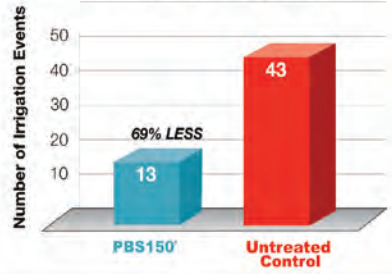




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# NOT YOUR MAMMA'S MEATLOAF

**Don Bloom**

*Durand Eastman Golf Course*



## INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup seasoned breadcrumbs
- 1 cup milk
- ½ onion, chopped
- ½ teaspoon ground sage
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 pounds ground beef
- ¼ pound sausage

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Combine all ingredients and form mixture into a loaf.
- Preheat the grill to 225 degrees.
- Transfer meatloaf to a wire rack and place on the grill.
- Cook for 2 to 3 hours until the internal temperature is 160.
- Glaze the meatloaf with your favorite BBQ sauce during the last 15 minutes.
- Let the meatloaf sit for 10 minutes before slicing.



# SMOKED PULLED PORK

**Brian Bonlender**

*West Bend Country Club*



## INGREDIENTS

- Large aluminum pan
- Aluminum foil
- Large pork shoulder roast, with bone if possible
- Yellow mustard
- Favorite BBQ seasonings
- Killer Hogs Barbecue BBQ Rub and Cherry Rub
- Kinders Woodfired Garlic and All-Purpose seasoning
- 8 ounces of Dr Pepper
- 6 to 8 ounces of pineapple juice
- 1 to 3 ounces of your favorite bourbon
- Half a stick of butter

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Spread yellow mustard liberally over entire pork shoulder.
- Season liberally with favorite BBQ seasonings.
- Smoke at 225 degrees on smoker grates until internal temperature is 165 degrees.
- In aluminum pan, add pineapple juice, bourbon and Dr Pepper, along with a few dashes of seasonings.
- Mix all together and add pork shoulder.
- Add butter, cut into pads and placed on top of roast. Seal pan with aluminum foil.
- Smoke at 250 degrees until internal temperature reaches 205 to 207 degrees, then pull off smoker, wrap pan in towel and set in cooler for 1 to 2 hours before shredding.
- Keep all juices and place shredded pork back into juice. Enjoy as a sandwich, over a baked potato or any other way you enjoy smoked shredded pork.

# ORANGE CHIPOTLE SMOKED SALMON/TROUT

**Clifford Carpenter**  
*Canyon Oaks Country Club*



## INGREDIENTS

- 1 quart water
- 1 cup white sugar
- ¼ teaspoon sea salt
- ¾ cup honey
- 1 cup pineapple juice
- 1 quart orange juice
- 3 cans (7 ounces) chipotle in adobo sauce
- Salmon or trout filets

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Heat water in a pot with sugar, salt and honey until dissolved. Set aside to cool.
- Put the peppers and sauce in a small bowl, crush all the peppers and add orange juice.
- Mix together all ingredients in a large bowl or container and add the fish filets.
- Soak for a minimum of 24 hours in the fridge. I've let it go 36 and 48 hours, and it gets a little more kick, but 24 hours has always seemed perfect to me.
- Use only cherry or apple wood.
- Smoke at 175 degrees for 1½ hours and then cold smoke for an additional hour. If you can't cold smoke, just smoke for 2 hours at 175 degrees.
- Vacuum seal and freeze. It should last about a year if frozen.



# BLOOMIN' PEACHES

**Brent Downs, CGCS, MG**

*Otter Creek Golf Course/Harrison Lake Country Club*



## INGREDIENTS

- 4 ripe yellow or white peaches, depending on the season
- ¼ cup honey
- 2 heaping tablespoons brown sugar
- 4 mint sprigs
- ¼ cup salted caramel
- ⅓ cup chopped walnuts
- 4 generous scoops of French vanilla ice cream
- Skewers to serve

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Using a sharp knife, cut off the top of a ripe peach. Utilizing a series of vertical paring cuts (but not cutting all the way through the bottom of the peach) pull these longitudinal sections away from the peach pit, resembling an opening blossom. Remove the pit.
- Combine the brown sugar and honey in a mixture. Using a silicone brush, brush the honey slurry all over the peaches.
- Heat a gas grill to 375 degrees or a charcoal grill to medium heat. Place the peaches cut side down on the grill for 1 to 2 minutes.
- Flip the peaches to the bottom, noncut side down on the grill for 5 to 6 minutes and cover. This is where the magic really begins to happen. Because of moisture in the peach as well as the heat of the grill, the peach “petals” will naturally open and form a pocket due to steam expansion. The aroma mixed with charcoal is amazing!
- Remove from grill and arrange on a serving platter.
- Place a large scoop of very frozen ice cream in the pocket and press over the top.
- Drizzle the peaches and ice cream with chopped nuts and caramel.
- Place a sprig of mint through the skewer and serve.

# CRY BABIES BBQ CHILI

**Chris Edmonds**  
*Garden City Country Club*



## INGREDIENTS

- 2 medium yellow onions
- 2 cubanelle peppers
- 1 green bell pepper
- 1 red bell pepper
- 2 jalapeños
- 1 long hot pepper
- 1 can chipotle peppers in adobo sauce
- 2 pounds 80% lean chopped meat
- 1 bottle of a nice amber ale
- 2 cans red kidney beans
- 1 can cannelloni beans
- 1 can beef consommé
- 2 large cans crushed tomatoes, plain, with no puree or seasoning
- 1 large can tomato sauce
- 1 medium can tomato paste
- 1½ tablespoon horseradish
- 1 to 2 tablespoons cumin
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 1 tablespoon cayenne powder

- 4 tablespoons chili powder
- 3 tablespoons liquid smoke
- 1 tablespoon black pepper
- Salt to taste

## OPTIONAL INGREDIENT

- 3 links smoked bratwurst cut into pieces and fried in pan to add to chili  
*(for best results use a 7 quart cast iron Dutch oven pot)*

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Chop 1½ yellow onions and 2 jalapeños and simmer in pot with olive oil until al dente on medium heat. Add chopped meat and break up mixing with onions and jalapeños. Add 1 can beef consommé, 2 chipotle peppers and 1 tablespoon adobo sauce. Add all seasons listed except the chili powder and add the liquid smoke. Cook

thoroughly. Add 1 bottle of good beer, bring to a boil and reduce for about an hour, adding 2 more chipotles and a tablespoon of the adobo sauce.

- Bring stove to a low heat and add 2 cans strained crushed tomatoes and half can sauce, mix well. Add chili powder and half a can of paste. Cook for about ½ hour and add beans strained. Add 2 more chipotles and 2 teaspoons adobo sauce along with horseradish and simmer for about 2 hours.
- After 2 hours simmering, put pot in smoker and let smoke at 250 degrees for 2 to 3 hours. Stir chili every 30 minutes to mix up the top that forms on the chili. This will incorporate the smoky flavor.
- Total cook time is roughly 5 hours — it's even better the next day!



# KIELBASA AND GRILLED TORTELLINI

**Katie Francis**

*Turf pro spouse*



## INGREDIENTS

- 2 bags of frozen tortellini
- Fresh basil
- Fresh mozzarella
- 2 sweet peppers, sliced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 onion, chunked
- 1 package of baby bella mushrooms
- 2 kielbasa, sliced
- Italian seasoning to taste

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Start with tortellini and kielbasa separate.
- Add onion, mush garlic, and sautee with kielbasa.
- Add peppers late to hold crunch.
- Add basil and mozzarella.
- Fold all together.
- Smash.

# MODIFIED MESQUITE BEER CAN CHICKEN

**Anthony Minniti**  
*Windham Mountain Club*



## INGREDIENTS FOR THE RUB

- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper

## INGREDIENTS FOR THE BRINE

- ½ cup kosher salt
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- ¼ medium yellow onion, chopped
- ½ bunch fresh flat leaf parsley, chopped
- ½ bunch fresh thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns
- 3 quarts water
- Refrigerate for 24 to 48 hours and strain before using

## INGREDIENTS FOR THE CHICKEN

- 2 whole chickens, 4 to 5 pounds, giblets removed
- 1 can of favorite beer
- 4 large chunks of hickory wood

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Prepare brine per recipe and soak chicken for 24 to 48 hours in fridge.
- Prepare Weber Smokey Mountain Charcoal smoker utilizing the minion method.
- Stabilize temperature of smoker at 230 degrees.
- Mix the rub ingredients in a small bowl.
- Once chicken is out of the brine, dry and coat with olive oil. Spread the rub evenly over both chickens.
- Open the two cans of beer and drink half or dump half out — poke two more holes in the top of the beer can. Place the chickens onto the beer cans.
- Check smoker temperature and place the hickory chunks onto the coals — set your bottom vents to maintain a temperature of 230 degrees.
- Place chickens on the top grate and close lid.
- Cook/smoke chicken until internal temperature reaches 160 degrees.
- Remove chicken from the smoker and let rest for 5 to 10 minutes as temperature will continue to rise.



# KOREAN-CUT SHORT RIBS WITH GRILLED ZUCCHINI AND SHISHITO PEPPERS

**Eric Morrison**

*Shennecossett Golf Course*



## INGREDIENTS

- Korean-cut short ribs
- Zucchini
- Shishito peppers
- Teriyaki sauce
- Worcestershire sauce
- Onion
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper

## INSTRUCTIONS

- Mix teriyaki sauce, Worcestershire sauce and chopped onion and marinate the short ribs for 2 to 3 hours before grilling.
- Slice up zucchini, add salt and pepper to taste. Skewer the zucchini, drizzle olive oil on the zucchini and the peppers.
- Grill short ribs over high heat for approximately 5 minutes a side – more or less depending on the thickness of the cut.
- Grill vegetables on top rack until seared.

# SMOKED QUESO

**Rob Uzar**

*Hammock Creek Golf Club*



## INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound of Velveeta
- 8 ounces of Fontina cheese
- 10-ounce can of Rotel canned tomatoes and green chilies
- 2 small cans of green chilies
- ½ pound of chorizo sausage
- Taco seasoning
- Foil pan

## INSTRUCTIONS

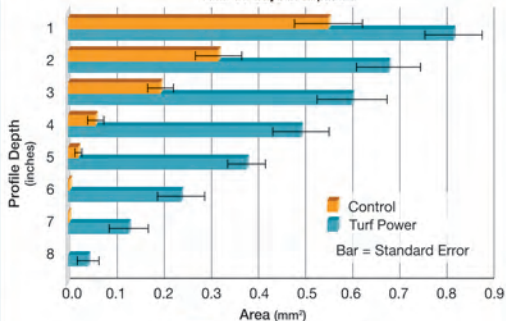
- Brown chorizo sausage in a pan, then set to the side to cool.
- Chop the Fontana and Velveeta into cubes about 1 inch wide.
- Add the cheese cubes to the bottom of a foil pan.
- Pour in Rotel and green chilies, then add the crumbled chorizo sausage.
- Season with taco seasoning.
- Smoke at 300 degrees for about an hour, then stir until well combined and smoke for 30 more minutes.
- Serve immediately alongside tortilla chips or crackers.



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