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MAY 2024 | golfcourseindustry.com

GOLF COURSE[®] INDUSTRY

PRESENTS

OUR BIG DAY

A stylized silhouette of a golfer in mid-swing, positioned centrally behind the main title. The golfer is dark brown, holding a club, and is set against a background of layered, wavy shapes in shades of green and yellow, suggesting a golf course landscape.

FROM OUTINGS RAISING
MONEY FOR EXTERNAL
CAUSES TO FIERCE
INTERNAL COMPETITIONS,
EVERY COURSE HOSTS
SHOWCASE EVENTS.
LET'S CELEBRATE THE
TEAMS AND COMMUNITIES
WHO MAKE THESE
TOURNAMENTS HAPPEN.



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EXPLORE OUR STORY

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OUR BIG DAY

21

FROM OUTINGS RAISING MONEY FOR EXTERNAL CAUSES TO FIERCE INTERNAL COMPETITIONS, EVERY COURSE HOSTS SHOWCASE EVENTS. LET'S CELEBRATE THE TEAMS AND COMMUNITIES WHO MAKE THESE TOURNAMENTS HAPPEN.

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From outings raising money for external causes to fierce internal competitions, every course hosts showcase events. That's a cause for celebration.

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The U.S. Women's Open is back at Lancaster Country Club for the first time in almost a decade and the course looks a little different.

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The Union League of Philadelphia is expanding—again—with an innovative and exciting product poised to change Pennsylvania's revered golf scene.



TURF TECH GAWKING

Want another reason to feel bullish about the future of golf course maintenance?

Ask a superintendent to show you their phone screen, computer desktop or digital job board. We promise you won't get removed from the club grounds! We also promise it will be as enlightening as studying hole strategy, mowing lines or disease pressure.

While I toured Augusta Country Club for this month's Enduring Greatness feature (page 34), the conversations with director of grounds **Josh Dunaway** and superintendent **Dillon Scheer** shifted to the digital platforms their team uses to produce elite playing surfaces in a Transition Zone growing environment. Dunaway and Scheer then enthusiastically showed me what a modern operation should resemble.

The Augusta Country Club turf management team uses digital maps and job boards to get employees to the right places, fleet management platforms to document the costs of operating expensive machines, and handheld soil moisture sensors and a software program to ensure no water is wasted. A different software program helps set hole locations, eliminating the angst of cutting a cup in the wrong spot. Organizing temperature readings and precipitation data into readable spreadsheets and charts educates members about what happens to playing conditions as warm-season turf species attempt to fully awaken.

Numbers resonate with the club's leaders, as the department has added the bodies, minds and equipment required to satisfy lofty expectations. Talented people operating modern tools elevate Augusta Country Club to levels Hill Course architect **Donald Ross** and the Georgia club's founders never envisioned.

"I think they would be shocked at the amount of money people spend on golf at this point," Dunaway jokes. "I would probably say when I'm dead and gone 150 years from now, I'll probably be equally as shocked."

The average American course is projected to spend \$1.137 million on non-capital maintenance in 2024, according to our annual Numbers to Know survey. The average was \$651,392 when we started collecting industry financial data in 2012.

Rising costs mean increased pressure to maximize every labor hour, equipment usage and product application. A superintendent might be a trained turf maintenance expert, but that doesn't mean owners, general managers, boards and committees will—and should—believe everything one tells them. Good luck selling stakeholders on the need for six-figure mowers without showing them why their current mowers are no longer worth the money and human hassle to keep them running. Technology helps superintendents concisely explain the cost of golf course maintenance.

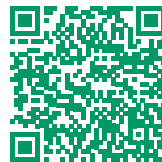
Integrating technology into an operation also means understanding what technology is available in the current marketplace. We're here to help with this task.

The second *Golf Course Industry Turf Technology Showcase* is Thursday, July 18. The event begins at 1 p.m. EDT and features eight 30-minute discussions featuring representatives from leading industry companies. Discussions will introduce and describe tech-focused solutions designed to help golf maintenance teams meet expectations and handle the demands of the heavy-play, tight-labor, exorbitant-cost era. The event is free and open to all. Scan the QR code on this page to register. Can't make the live broadcast? Replays will be available via our website, social media feeds and newsletters.

Technology doesn't discriminate by budget. In fact, superintendents leading operations with meager budgets might have the most to gain from viewing digital solutions with an open mind. Consider the device in your hand or pocket. Smartphones allow amateur photographers to capture images once unimaginable without spending tens of thousands on photo equipment. Technology makes daunting progress possible.

We're going to keep learning what's on superintendents' screens. We're going to keep helping them learn what should be on their screens next. **GCI**

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CHAIN REACTION

New York superintendent Adam Mis reflects on a wild three-year stretch of personnel moves.

As I sit here and put out another job posting for an assistant superintendent position at Transit Valley Country Club in East Amherst, New York, I thought it's time to recall the chain of events created by a decision made by a couple of people.

I entered a budget meeting at my previous club on Dec. 4, 2020, to meet with the general manager and greens chair to discuss the 2021 budget. The human resources professional walked in after we were situated. "Here we go," I said to myself. No reason for dismissal, just "We want to go in a new direction."

As I drove home, I called the wife to inform her of the situation. I thought about the whole COVID-19 year and how many times I asked God, "What am I doing here?" He knew I would not quit on

my own, and I would just keep grinding through all the challenges I faced at the club. So, he made the decision for me.

The next day, I was getting to my honey-do list and was under my wife's car changing the oil when the phone rang. A member from Transit Valley Country Club called me to see if I would be interested in the superintendent position and if I'd be available to work. I'll never forget the first line: "Hello, Adam? You do not know me, but I am a member at Transit Valley CC and seeing if you are available to be our superintendent?"

Knowing that one of my friends was the current superintendent, I said, "You already have a superintendent." After some back and forth, he said, "Are you available for work?" I responded, "As of 20 hours ago, yes."

I got off the phone and called the current

superintendent to let him know someone had contacted me. He was very gracious. We talked for a while about the situation and stayed connected throughout this process, which was not easy for either of us. On Feb. 1, 2021, I started as the new superintendent at Transit Valley Country Club.

Three years later, I see how one decision started a chain reaction in the region. I would say it has not been a seamless transition, more like a sports team at the grounds department. I have been fortunate to have great people on my crew for most of my career, but lately we have been moving people out as fast as we hired them. I have had nine assistants, with seven mechanics moving in or out in less than three years. It would be a long story behind each person's journey, but I can tell it has been "next person up" at Transit Valley Country Club.

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LISTEN



WATCH

The list

The ex-superintendent at Transit Valley: Received an excellent job as a buyer/salesperson at a local seed company

Assistant: Superintendent at Fox Valley Club

Assistant: Assistant at Fox Valley Club

Assistant: Superintendent at Shelridge Country Club

Second assistant: First assistant at East Aurora Country Club

Second assistant: First assistant at Harvest Hill Golf Course

Assistant: Erie County Sheriff

Assistant: Superintendent-in-training at Byrnclyff Golf Resort

Assistant: Dismissal.

Current first assistant: I hired him as my second assistant at my last club in 2020. He moved to Crag Burn Golf Club as a second assistant when I was no longer there, but then called me to come over to Transit Valley when my first assistant took a superintendent job.

Temporary hire: I also had a good friend/fellow superintendent who was dismissed from his club suddenly. I called to tell him he could work here during his transition to a new job if he would like. Knowing he was a great superintendent, I figured it would not be long before he was hired by another

course. He collaborated with us for a brief time and is now a superintendent at another club in the area. He's doing excellent.

Head mechanic: Moved to The Park Country Club of Buffalo.

Assistant mechanic: Retired.

New head mechanic: Hired and dismissed.

New assistant mechanic: Hired and dismissed.

Next mechanic: Came from Cloverbank Country Club for a season and then relocated to South Carolina with his family.

Current mechanic: Hired from another western New York golf course.

Current part-time mechanic: Retired engineer.

Assistant mechanic from my last club: Went to Shelridge Country Club as head mechanic for my other assistant.

My previous club hired someone from outside the area to become its new superintendent. He promoted two of my past employees to his assistants, so that was another positive. He also hired one of my past mechanics from another club to become his head mechanic.

All these changes I hope have been positive for all the people involved. If nothing else, it has filled many positions for western New York golf courses, and I have been blessed to be part

of the relationships forged along the way. My current staff has a retired 35-year superintendent from a local country club who works seasonally for us and a 40-year retired assistant who works part-time. I also have two assistants-in-training who I hope will fill multiple roles for me or someone else in the future.

Someone once asked me, "Aren't you concerned when hiring ex-superintendents and assistants that your job would be threatened?" I have always said, "Surround yourself with the best possible people and you will always succeed and so will they." I have always tried to do the right thing and help people get to the next level of their career aspirations. I believe I have influenced many people along the way to be their best.

Reflecting on the separation from my last club in December 2020, it was surprising to me at the time. But it turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to me and, I hope, the people affected. It just reaffirms that when a door closes, God sometimes opens a better one.

As far as the last three years are concerned, it has been a wild ride. In our profession, you must be able to adapt and overcome and not be afraid of change. Sometimes this profession is not for the fainthearted, but I would not want to be doing anything else.

Adam Mis is the superintendent at Transit Valley Country Club in East Amherst, New York. This is his first Golf Course Industry contribution.

Tartan Talks 94

Gene Bates witnessed hippos ravaging greens in Africa during a site visit early in his career. He will never witness a more destructive course critter.



▲ Bates

"They are like a bulldozer," Bates says on the *Tartan Talks* podcast. "They are built low to the ground, they had these stubby tree-trunk legs, and they just put their doggone head in the soil and bulldozed their way through it. I'm not sure if they were looking for roots or grubs, I don't know, but they do way more damage than an elk does."

After a transient start to his golf course architecture career, Bates established an American-based firm in the late 1980s. The decision allowed him to work in tamer surroundings and focus on designing courses for the masses. He opened the podcast with some fabulous wildlife stories before discussing nearly four decades of work in the public sector.

A large part of Bates' inspiration for designing golfer-friendly public courses ranging from Green Spring Golf Course in arid southwest Utah to Green Mountain National in forested Vermont stems from his wife, **Faye**, whose father, **Ron Kirby**, was a well-traveled golf course architect. Kirby is responsible for introducing Bates to the profession. "Whenever your wife makes a suggestion, you better listen," Bates says. "She was in my ear about not making things too difficult and looking after young people and getting them interested in the sport by managing the playability of a golf course."

Listen to the podcast on the Superintendent Radio Network page of popular distribution platforms.





No straightforward answer, yet subtle clues

Longtime superintendent Ron Furlong asks what he and his peers can do to attract more women to the industry. One honest conversation has altered his perspective.

There were a multitude of reasons I was interested in the “Ladies Leading Turf” presentation at the 2024 GCSAA Conference and Trade Show, but one nagging question attracted me to the event: How on earth can we draw more women into our industry?

I’m now in my 23rd year as superintendent at the same golf course. During all those years of posting open crew positions and hiring people to fill them, I’ve had a total of four women enter the shop in response to an ad. I hired all four.

I recently did the math and came up with a number in the neighborhood of 200 hires during my first 22 years on the job. Four out of 200 is 2 percent.

In fact, if I were to go back to every golf course I’ve worked at since entering the business in 1988 — six courses over 36 years — I can count on three hands (if I had three hands) the total number of women I have worked alongside on golf course maintenance crews.

Since becoming a superintendent and the sole person in charge of hiring, I’ve wondered if there was something I could or should be doing to attract more women to these open positions. I’ve been seeking some little piece of wisdom I was missing that could help me do more to spark some diversity at my own workplace.

There were three guest panelists at this

year’s Ladies Leading Turf presentation at the GCSAA show — and **Leah Withrow** stole the show for me. I think it might be because a lot of us in the audience could relate to her story: She’s the head groundskeeper at a baseball stadium in Reno, Nevada. She also has an ability to honestly share the struggles and frustrations that she has dealt with being a woman in such a male-dominated industry. Her insight was authentic and direct.

Leah’s baseball field, Greater Nevada Field, home of the Triple-A Reno Aces, recently won the prestigious Professional Baseball Field of the Year award given by the Sports Field Management Association. No small feat, as this honor encompasses all professional baseball fields, including major-league fields.

Although I left the presentation in Phoenix feeling better about women making more of an impact on our industry, and thinking the future is only going to get more diverse, I still had no answer to my big question: What could I do as a superintendent to get more women to apply to our open positions when we post them? That question, specifically, was the one I had wanted answered. And I left feeling I did not have that answer.

I felt like I needed to talk directly with Leah. She was kind enough to arrange a time to chat on the phone a few months

after the show.

“That’s the question everyone asks me: How do we get more women into the industry?” she says. “But to be honest, I don’t know where all the women are who don’t want to do it. But I do feel like there would be more women interested in getting into this field if it was marketed toward us. It’s just not.”

She continued this point by sharing just how hard it is for women not in the turf industry to see themselves in it.

“When I started researching this as a possible field I wanted to go into and make a career out of, it was all men in the magazines and books I looked up. When I went to college, it was all men in the classrooms. It was all men in the textbooks. When I started working in the field, it was all men I was working with.

“Even with ads, it was all men in the research ads, the fertilizer ads, the irrigation ads. And I get it. Companies are generally targeting their ads at the people who use their products. And for the most part those customers are men. But I think it helps to see companies using women more now. Just so that we can see somebody doing it who we can relate to.”

When I asked Leah if she had any advice for what I could personally do to facilitate more women coming through my door to answer a job posting, she again didn’t have a silver bullet answer. Which makes sense. If we knew exactly how to fix the lack of diversity in our industry, I’m pretty sure many of us would have done that by now. But it’s not simple. It’s complicated and it’s layered.

But then she said something that, for me at any rate, was a game-changer. I felt that she did leave me with something to consider for my own situation.

Leah talked about culture, and what our culture perhaps looks like to a woman interested in working on a golf course. That culture resides in the maintenance shop itself and within the most-likely-male-dominated crews we oversee.

“I’ve only been around a handful of golf maintenance crew,” she says, “but I have noticed some are better than others. Some of the cultures are just generally geared more toward keeping women out of the shop. You kind of feel that energy. You sense that energy. When guys are

standoffish and not accepting, that doesn't go unnoticed."

She told me an honest story about what this looked like to her.

"I remember getting my uniform once when I started a job, and our gameday polo we were required to wear, the only shirt they had for me was a men's medium," she says. "I wear a woman's extra small, so that was extremely large for me. Not only do I already stand out, now I'm wearing a shirt that's five sizes too big. Now I really stand out. I don't feel comfortable. I'm trying to tie and tuck so it's not just falling out of everything. I'm trying to do my job. I mean it can come down to something simple like that, or just having a locker room that I can go into and feel comfortable in. It takes such little effort on people's part and a lot of men just don't consider or realize the impact it has on a woman."

"I think the best thing you can do is making sure you run a shop that has a culture that's embracing of a woman coming in and not making her feel even more weird in the situation than she probably does already."

Changing the culture. This made so much sense. I don't know that I ever considered our shop and the culture of our shop before in regard to how it must look to a woman.

But I certainly will now.

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

COURSE NEWS

Atlanta Country Club recently concluded its major renovation, guided by **Beau Welling**. The project was highlighted by significant infrastructure updates, including the installation of the Hydronics temperature control systems beneath each green. Thirteen forward tees were also added



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throughout the course, numerous bunkers were adjusted, Bunker Solutions technology was added to improve drainage, and the practice area was redesigned to expand the driving range by about 40 percent. ...

Andy Staples has started renovation work on the largest and most extensive project in the 76-year history of Mesa Country Club in Arizona. All greens will be rebuilt to USGA standards, greenside bunkers will

be renovated and upper mesa holes will be redesigned. ... In nearby Maricopa, Ak-Chin Southern Dunes Golf Club recently opened its six-hole, 487-yard, lighted #miniDunes short course inside its practice range. ...

Trevor Dormer will soon start his first course design project: a total rebuild of the 9-hole Old Dane course in Dakota City, Nebraska. Dormer, who has worked regularly with **Bill Coore** and **Ben Crenshaw** and King-Collins

during recent years, has reimagined the land as a "quirky" 12-hole design with six-, 9- and 12-hole loops. ... **Chris Wilczynski** is overseeing the second year of renovation work at Killearn Club in Tallahassee, Florida, highlighted by the construction of the 9-hole Clover course. MacCurach Golf Construction is handling construction, while Aqua Turf International is handling irrigation. ... Just months after completing the renovation of its South course, Vineyards Country Club in Naples, Florida, has started construction for the redesign and renovation of its North course. **Kipp Schulties** is leading the project, which is expected to end in December. ... Elsewhere in Florida, the Seagate Golf Club in Palm Beach County is completely open again after a \$14.5 million renovation that lasted almost a year. **Drew Rogers** oversaw the renovation. ... Landscapes Unlimited will direct the redevelopment of the recently renamed TRA Lake Livingston Regional Public Golf Course in Coldspring, Texas — formerly known as Cape Royale Golf Course — with **Ty Butler** handling the design work. The course closed in 2018 and had been abandoned ever since. ... Tidewater Golf Club in North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, will start a two-phase bunker renovation in June. The first phase will run through August, with the second phase following in June 2025. Southeastern Golf Inc. will handle the project. ... Troon is now managing the University Club of Kentucky in Lexington and the Links at Perry Cabin in St. Michaels, Maryland. ... KemperSports will manage the forthcoming Tepetunka Club in New London, Minnesota. ... Bobby Jones Links is now managing Player's Ridge Golf Course in Hickory, North Carolina.



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INDUSTRY BUZZ

Do surfactants reduce irrigation water usage? AQUA-AID Solutions entered a research study with Penn State University to factually quantify the amount of water reduction end users observed on various programs and published the results in a report in the March edition of *Journal of Environmental Horticulture*. ... ZLine Products introduced its RANGeline synthetic bunkers, designed for practice ranges. ... Syngenta is accepting applications for its 2024 Syngenta Business Institute through Aug. 19.

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Carol Turner

BIGWIN ISLAND GOLF CLUB

As the superintendent at Bigwin Island Golf Club, **Carol Turner** faces some unique challenges.

Open to members and resort guests, the club is located in Baysville, Ontario, roughly a three-hour drive north from Toronto. Consequently, its golf season typically doesn't begin until mid-May and might extend until mid-November. Turner, who is now in her third season as the head superintendent after two years as an assistant, points out that when the golf course is ready each spring, her members will be waiting.

"It's a condensed season," she tells **Rick Woelfel** on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast. "I would say it's more intense. Normally, you have to hit the ground running. As soon as the snow is gone, you just try and get everything done. The members would want us to open earlier, but usually, because of our location, they kind of understand."

"But the thing is, when they do get there, because it is such a short season, the expectations are quite high."

Turner notes that many of her members are also members at other clubs closer to Toronto.

"They're used to easing into it (at their other clubs)," she says. "For us, they kind of want the big show when they get there, so we want to work really hard leading up and hopefully the weather allows that most years. And then on the flipside, in the fall it could snow basically any time. It's not uncommon to have a snowstorm on Halloween so it's getting your final sprays done, and irrigation, trying to get the course as clean as possible in case we have a late spring." The club is located on an island and is accessible only by boat.

"There is a little bit more of a challenge just to get things over to the island — including ourselves," Turner says. "I'm limited to who we can fit in our airboat. Think of an Everglades sand boat. That's what we have to use when the ice is coming out of the lake. We might be spraying or fertilizing at that time, but the ice might be sticking around later. We have very limited staffing when other people might be ramping up."

Turner's crew peaks at around 30 during the

season, including herself.

"I have my own boat," she says. "My assistant has his own boat, so we can kind of come and go as we please. There is staff housing on the island for nine, so they're over there, but then they have to go get their groceries and use our shuttle boats. The majority of the staff come over on the shuttle boat in the morning, so coordinating and relationships with other departments is important. I want everybody there for the morning meetings (at 5 a.m.). Other golf course superintendents don't even have to think about that."

"And the boat drivers are amazing, but every once in a while, they get the hiccups and I'm missing 50 percent of my staff and you have to send out the other staff and they're calling me and telling me, 'Something's wrong with the boat and we can't get over.' It's always interesting how you have to shift, but I know all superintendents have to shift at times. Jobs may be switched as to who is doing what just to get things going until they can get people over."

Turner stresses the importance of being on the golf course with her crew and working alongside them when and where she's needed.

"Obviously, the administrative stuff has to be done," she says, "but I do my best to communicate the importance of my eyes being on the golf course. If I'm not getting around the full golf course at least once a day — really looking at the golf course, not just driving around at full speed — I'm a little disappointed in myself."

"I've got a great team. I couldn't do it without them and I feel like I should be out there with them." **GCI**



There is a little bit more of a challenge just to get things over to the island — including ourselves. I'm limited to who we can fit in our airboat."



SUPERINTENDENT
R·A·D·I·O N·E·T·W·O·R·K





WHO DO YOU WANT ON THE BUS?

Labor is the big difference-maker these days. Successfully recruiting and retaining top performers and then blending their skills into great teams is a competitive difference for outstanding facilities and the superintendents who guide them.

It's a maxim that **Jim Collins**, one of the world's foremost business management consultants, preached in his mega bestseller "Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't." Collins said, "If we get the right people on the bus, the right people in the right seats, and the wrong people off the bus, then we'll figure out how to take it someplace great."

Thousands of business leaders have followed Collins's three simple truths when it comes to identifying the right people and putting them in positions to succeed.

And you can too.

1. EVALUATING PEOPLE

We often hear that someone "has a nose for talent." And sometimes that's an accurate appraisal. But successful talent acquisition demands more than a discerning sense of smell, and it starts with vision: You need to know what you're looking for. Reliance on a pre-determined set of needs and selection criteria is a common trait of top recruiters.

To enhance your recruitment results:

- Establish search criteria based on your needs.
- Search for a good "fit" of personality and skills into your existing team.
- State clearly what you want and expect from the recruit (and remember that they're sizing you up too).

2. HIRING AND STAFFING SKILLS

Armed with a needs-based list of criteria required of the job, seek out candidates who have a proven record of meeting similar needs in their previous positions. Think like a football coach or baseball manager who is drafting or trading for players with specific skill sets. Look for knowledge and expertise first. Also consider backgrounds and personality types to encourage a good blend of people, because camaraderie is essential. And while surface characteristics can be attractive, discipline yourself to stay focused on your needs to find the candidate who is the perfect fit.

If your hiring track record is spotty, review your process and the sources on which you rely for leads. Maybe you're fishing in the wrong pond, or your pond is too small. Don't be hesitant to expand your traditional search parameters.

3. MOTIVATING OTHERS

Once you've assembled what you consider your dream team, make every effort to keep them together by keeping them motivated. Focus on three keys:

- **Internal team leadership:**
In the U.S. military, sergeants and petty officers are the backbone of team leadership. They are the ones who seem to get things done. Organize your team to ensure that the mid-level managers and squad leaders fully know your objectives and understand the quality and standards to which

you aspire for your course. Ensure that your squad leaders foster team spirit and a tireless pursuit of a job well done.

- **Training:** The best in every endeavor train rigorously and with great intent. Your staff members want to know that you value and respect them enough to invest in their training to make them more valuable employees. Why would someone wish to leave your team if they are regularly learning and becoming more knowledgeable and more valuable?
- **Team:** Retention is a function of several factors, none of which is greater than the sense and spirit of team. In a tight labor market, where some facilities find themselves in a bidding war for top talent, successful employers and managers improve retention by showing respect in their day-to-day interactions with staff, constantly teaching and training, and openly recognizing desirable performance and behavior. In a tough labor market, it's critical that we build great teams. There are many factors that drive success in attracting and keeping a great team, all of which begin with a disciplined, purpose-driven approach to evaluating, hiring and motivating.
Once you get the right people on your bus and get them in the seats best suited for them and your needs, you're going to be in for one smooth ride. **GCI**



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



THE PERFECT GREEN CHAIR

In this era of AI, robotic mowers, GPS spray units and cell phone-controlled irrigation systems, wouldn't it be ideal if we could create the perfect green committee chairman?

What characteristics would this person exhibit? First and foremost, they would love the game, love their golf course and want to make both better. They would care about their fellow golfers and want to ensure everyone has a fun and fair experience. They would want to be fiscally responsible but not so cheap that they risk the condition of the course by counting every penny and wondering if that 20-year-old triplex can make it another year or two. And they would have both respect and admiration for the work you and your team do every day.

Yes, they're allowed to have an ego. But one that wants to hear plaudits from their buddies for keeping the course in great shape, not one that screams, "Look how smart I am!"

From my 35-plus years working with green committees and serving on one at my own club, I've learned two important lessons. First, no matter why they agreed to — or lobbied for — the job, they now know that having a seat at the table means being a target for every suggestion, criticism, inquiry and comment, good, bad or ludicrous.

Second, most who want the job know nothing about agronomy, what is needed to improve the golf course or how to achieve it. Why would they? Playing golf is a far cry from maintenance.

What other traits should the perfect chairperson have? A stiff

upper lip, the ability to leap in and out of golf carts gracefully, a sense of smell, adequate hearing (and an even better ability to listen), and a basic understanding of golf agronomy and architecture. And enough self-knowledge to know they're not the expert, you are.

Low or high handicap? Doesn't matter. But they should remember that one person's golf skills should not dictate course conditions or setup.

It would be nice if they brought some expertise appropriate and relevant to the committee: Financial acumen, construction experience, landscaping or environmental insights. Some HR experience would be good, too. Not for managing you and your staff, but to deal with members and golfers.

The head honcho also needs to have time. Chairing a committee is a major commitment. Properly running the green committee means regularly driving the course, listening to members, and interacting with you and your team.

Sometimes I think the perfect chairperson would be an amateur meteorologist, with a healthy respect for Mother Nature and an understanding of the damage rain, hail, snow and heat can do to turf.

Like a good CEO, you want a "big picture" person with the ability to get into the weeds. They should understand that ...

- Green speed and hole locations are important not to help someone's game but to help protect the golf course.
- Comparing your course to the fancy, over-budgeted club down the street isn't only un-

fair, it's unwise.

- An updated irrigation system is more valuable than bird boxes and flowers on the first and 10th tees.
- Quality turf requires sunlight penetration, which means trees planted in the 1960s probably need to be thinned out if not removed altogether.
- If you say, "we don't do that here," or "we can't do that here," they ask why and respect your answer (but properly challenge you when there's a reason to do so).
- There is nothing wrong — and a whole lot right — with admitting they don't know something. Asking questions is the best way to learn.
- Sometimes you must make unpopular decisions.
- The decisions made today may not affect them now but will impact future generations of golfers.

As to what you don't want?

- A multi-course member who doesn't understand why what works in Florida in January won't work in New York or Colorado in June.
- Someone whose barometer of good maintenance is their own backyard.
- The mid-handicapper who thinks their good enough to play in the U.S. Open, or that your course can host one.
- Someone who'll be quick to go behind your back.
- Anyone who thinks you can be easily replaced.

Mission possible? Maybe. Have faith and hope that your green chair has the same in you ... and your abilities. **GCI**



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

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CHAMPIONSHIP encore

U.S. Women's Open host **Lancaster Country Club** looks different than it did when it last welcomed the event.

By **Rick Woelfel**

Nine years ago, the U.S. Women's Open brought **William Flynn's** classic design at Lancaster Country Club before the eyes of the golf world.

With Memorial Day weekend nearing, the Women's Open returns to the central Pennsylvania club for its 79th playing May 28-June 2.

Josh Saunders is the club's director of agronomy. His team will handle the ultimate responsibility of preparing the stage on which world's best female golfers will perform. When he assumed his post in February 2019, the 2024 Women's Open was already on the calendar. The championship has been in his thoughts ever since.

"The first thing I really did is I started to take notes," he says. "I kept a journal. Each year, I started taking notes from around mid-February and would keep those notes all the way to what would be championship week. That way I could kind of see how I reacted to whatever Mother Nature gave me coming out of winter."

Saunders, who came to Lancaster Country Club from Longue Vue Club in suburban Pittsburgh, understood the weather was the wild card in his Women's Open preparations and planned accordingly. "Each winter is going to be different," he says, "and each spring is going to be different, especially with having A-1/A-4 greens, which typically are the last to wake up."

Saunders's normal approach at the start of each season is to let nature take its course and not accelerate the green-up process. This year, he's doing things a bit differently.

"I'm very much a believer in allowing the plant to wake up on its own and let the natural progression happen instead of trying to go out

and artificially create growth," he says. "(But) for the first time in my tenure, we did a dormant seed over the winter and that's really responding well. This year, we used Earthworks 8-2-2 and we also did seedhead sprays, which is something that traditionally I haven't done in the rough in the past."

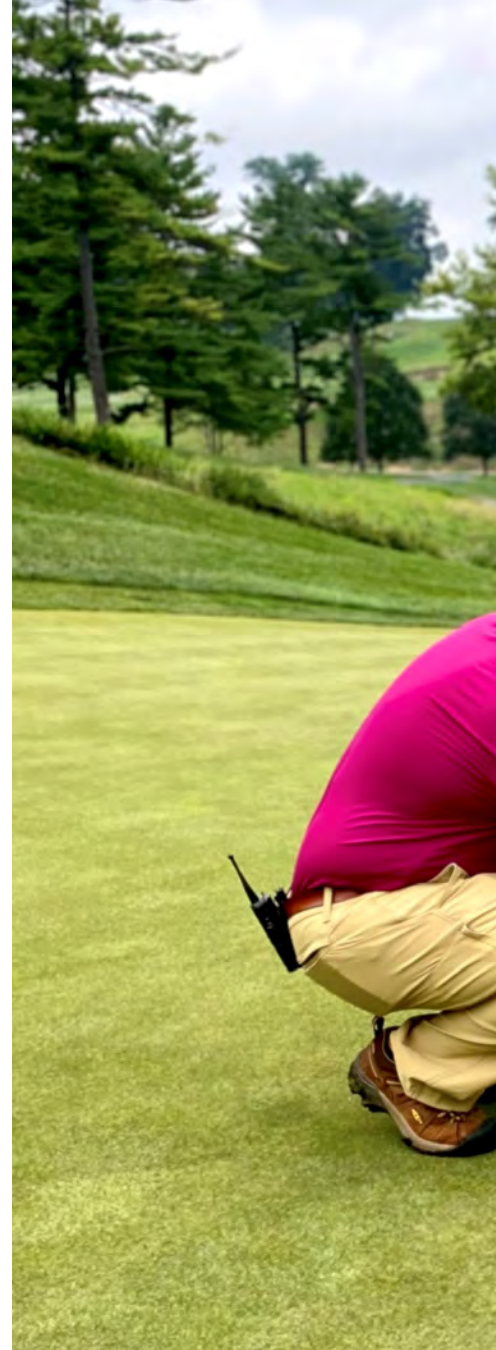
Those who competed in or attended the 2015 Women's Open will see some changes to the club's infrastructure, inside and outside the gallery ropes.

"We removed a lot of trees," Saunders says. "I know that's a touchy subject. But the great thing about this property and the way William Flynn used it was the topography. Not only is there a lot more light and a lot more air flow compared to 2015, which is going to aid in firmness, but we've created this amphitheater. If we have 13,500 patrons again this year, those roars are going to echo."

Saunders says the new amphitheater will add to the ambiance of the event.

"The No. 1 comment from all the players in 2015, outside of course conditions, was the atmosphere," he says. "So, creating this grand amphitheater and this grand stage, that's really going to showcase the property. And then there's other little things. We redid our practice facility. We built a 14,500-square-foot putting green that's now off the back of the clubhouse where the pool used to be."

The golf course the players will tackle this year is different than the one they saw in 2015. Architects **Jim Nagle** and **Ron Forse** have been tinkering with the course since 2004. A Lancaster County native, Nagle spent 25 years working alongside Forse before recently opening his own design firm, Nagle Design Works.



"Eleven holes have been altered on one way or another," says Nagle, a Flynn devotee. "That's not to say they've been fully renovated and things moved. The alterations in most instances consist of the addition of a bunker or a relocation of bunkers. And most importantly, the feel of the property, because it is much more exposed now."

Nagle notes that the tree-management program accompanying the renovation has provided a fresh look at the scope of the site. "You never really got a sense of how much elevation change there was on the property because of the layering effect of the trees up the



slopes that basically hid that elevation change,” he says. “Well, now that’s been exposed, and you really get a sense of the brawniness, for lack of a better term, of the property.”

Nagle says the tree-management effort combined with the updated bunkering introduces new strategic elements for the players.

“(The updated bunkering) creates that risk and reward,” he says, “and with the removal of the trees, those complement each other. If you can open up the lines of play by widening the corridors some more, as well as introducing additional bunkers, then you are introducing greater challenge

and greater intrigue throughout the golf course and greater engagement of the golfer throughout the golf course.”

Saunders says players will notice changes on the putting surfaces.

“I think the biggest difference they’re going to see from 2015 is in the greens,” he says. “They were phenomenal from everything I’ve heard, but they were four years old. All of us in the turf industry understand what four-year-old greens can be with lack of body, a lack of organic matter. They just didn’t have the structure yet that naturally comes with time. Now, they’re older with a lot of body, a lot of matter, and I think they’re going to be

a little firmer than they were in 2015. “That’s exciting, too, and, in return, I think it’s going to allow the same green speeds to showcase and highlight the Flynn greens.”

Matt Wolfe is the superintendent overseeing the daily maintenance of the course. He’s responsible for the Dogwood and Meadowcreek nines that comprise the Women’s Open course. There’s also a third nine, the Highlands. Wolfe, who accompanied Saunders to Lancaster Country Club from Longue Vue five years ago, is pleased with how the spring started.

“Everyone keeps saying the same thing,” he says. “They don’t understand

▲ Director of agronomy Josh Saunders, USGA Green Section agronomist Elliott Dowling and superintendent Matt Wolfe have collaborated closely to prepare Lancaster Country Club for the U.S. Women’s Open.

how we're weeks ahead of the other courses in the area, but I think that's due to what we did last fall and, obviously, when soil temperatures get up, that's when we can really start getting (more aggressive) with it."

Wolfe and his crew must strike a balance between keeping the course available for member play and preparing it for the Women's Open. With that in mind, the club instituted the mandatory use of mats last October and maintained that policy this spring.

"No divots are to be taken off any tees or fairways," Wolfe says. "Everyone will be taking an individualized artificial turf mat with them. That's also going to help the recovery process from late summer/early fall play" — the course traditionally closes the second weekend in November and reopens the first weekend in April — "and the membership has been completely supportive behind that."

Eco mats will also be utilized in certain roll-off and collection areas, and to protect tees on par-3 holes. The course will remain open for member play until two weeks prior to the championship. "Obviously, the USGA does not want to take the golf course away any more than they have to," Wolfe says. "The USGA has been very understanding. They know that we are very much a members' course. They know that

we're out in the middle of nowhere, we're not really in a metropolitan area, so this is kind of a retreat."

Wolfe praises **Shannon Rouillard**, the USGA's senior director of championships for the Women's Open and the Senior Women's Open, for the organization's understanding and work with the course.

"They're not allowing any practice rounds during advance week, so during advance week and the week prior, we're not going to have any play out there whatsoever," he says. "We're going to be able to get the golf course dialed in to tournament specifications before the USGA gets on property."

Saunders notes that having the Highlands nine available will ease the stress on the other two nines. "I have the ability to put Highlands in play if I need to give Dogwood or Meadowcreek a rest for a few days," he says.

Saunders and Wolfe will have an abundance of support during championship week. Their own crew will ideally number around 30 and more than 70 volunteers from other clubs are expected to be on hand to support the championship.

As the countdown continues, one of Saunders's nagging concerns is, unsurprisingly, the weather and the possibility of flooding on portions of the property.

"It's hard not to ignore Mother Nature, right?" he says. "That's the No. 1 monkey wrench in the room. With our property, flooding is always a

concern. We went two years without a flood heading into December of 2023. We've had five since then. That keeps me up at nights, obviously."

But Saunders has more than the Women's Open on his mind. Come June 3, when the championship departs, he and his team will be as committed as ever to providing a golfing oasis for members. For as enthusiastic as he and his team are about hosting the premier event in women's golf, Lancaster Country Club is a members' club.

"We obviously had this championship and future championships in mind," Saunders says, "but most importantly, what Jim Nagle, myself and the committee really worked on was providing a championship golf course that would test the best in the world but remain fair for all skill levels and our members and guests. And we achieved that. That was very important to us."

"We're never going to be in the realm of some of the courses that all of us who love golf and are fans of golf know. But are we a property that's going to be sprinkled in every few years (for championships)? Obviously. So, it was important to us to remember our biggest asset when we did the renovation, and that's our membership." **GCI**

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



▲ The 2024 U.S. Women's Open has been on director of agronomy Josh Saunders's radar since he arrived at the club in February 2019.

Home championship

The week of the 79th U.S. Women's Open promises to be a special one for architect **Jim Nagle**. Nagle has been fine-tuning **William Flynn's** original design at Lancaster Country Club for two decades. A resident of Lititz, Pennsylvania, located just eight miles and about a 20-minute drive north from the club, Nagle took

a moment to reflect on the championship's impact on the community and his own role in the evolution of the golf course:

"To have grown up in the area, and to have spent the largest portion of my life there, to be a part of that and see what it means, not just to the members, but to the community when

the Women's Open comes around, and to understand what that community is, and how they value certain things, that is what I take great joy in. But the designer side of me, to be able to say that I've been engaged in one capacity or another with Lancaster Country Club for 20 years, and to see the recognition

it has received and to have been a part of that, there's tremendous satisfaction in that as a designer.

"And the beautiful thing about it with Flynn having worked there for 25 years" — from the time the course opened in 1919 until his death in January 1944 — "and to see how he evolved as a designer. In

many ways, my career has paralleled that a little bit.

"Maybe I haven't worked out the kinks and bugs at Lancaster, but I myself as a designer have evolved in the 20 years that I've been engaged with Lancaster, and it's been a wonderful thing to see that course evolve as it has for the members."



OUR BIG DAY

FROM OUTINGS RAISING MONEY FOR EXTERNAL CAUSES TO FIERCE INTERNAL COMPETITIONS, EVERY COURSE HOSTS SHOWCASE EVENTS. LET'S CELEBRATE THE TEAMS AND COMMUNITIES WHO MAKE THESE TOURNAMENTS HAPPEN.

 **BASF**

We create chemistry



OUR BIG DAY

BASF

We create chemistry

Dear *Golf Course Industry* readers,

As we embark on the summer season, filled with the anticipation and excitement of golf tournaments, I am thrilled to share the unwavering support that BASF has for the golf industry, especially for the dedicated golf courses that serve as the backdrop for these memorable events.

We are proud to be sponsoring this special feature in *Golf Course Industry*, which delves into the heart of what makes tournaments so special, both for those who attend them and those who help bring them to life. From large charity outings to club invitationals and regional golf events, each tournament holds immense significance for the golf courses, their communities and the teams behind their maintenance and preparation.

At BASF, we recognize the tireless efforts of golf course superintendents and their teams who work diligently to ensure that every tournament is a success. Our support for golf goes beyond providing industry-leading chemistries; it stems from a shared commitment to delivering world-class playing conditions. We understand the passion and dedication it takes to achieve championship-level conditions, and we are proud to stand alongside these professionals in their pursuit of excellence with innovation solutions and support.

Our Intrinsic® brand fungicides are designed to create a foundation of healthy, tournament-ready turf with superior disease control and proven plant health benefits that enhance turfgrass growth efficiency and stress tolerance. In celebration of the 10th anniversary of our flagship Intrinsic product, Lexicon® Intrinsic brand fungicide, we continue to set the standard for excellence on greens, approaches and surrounds. Navicon® Intrinsic brand fungicide stands as the go-to disease control solution, offering versatility and efficacy on any turf, even on scorching summer days. Complemented by stalwarts like Honor® Intrinsic brand fungicide and Insignia® SC Intrinsic brand fungicide, our plant health fungicides ensure superior disease protection on all playing surfaces and reinforce our dedication to delivering championship-level conditions year-round.

This summer, we are excited to introduce our latest innovation for the golf industry, Aramax™ Intrinsic brand fungicide. Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide is our best-value fairway fungicide, offering a powerful, dual-active solution for disease management that controls up to 26 cool- and warm-season turf diseases, including snow mold, large patch, brown patch and dollar spot. Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide is powered by Intrinsic plant health benefits for healthier, more resilient fairways all season long.

I extend a heartfelt invitation for you to join us in honoring and celebrating the remarkable dedication and craftsmanship of those who bring these events to life. Golf tournaments are not just occasions; they are cherished traditions that enrich our lives with excitement, camaraderie and the timeless pursuit of excellence. Together, let us ensure that each tournament stands as a testament to the enduring passion and expertise that define the fabric of the golf industry.

Thank you for your continued support, and we look forward to sharing more about our commitment to tournament-ready conditions in the pages of *Golf Course Industry*.

Sincerely,

Jan Coetzer

Jan Coetzer
Turf Marketing Manager
BASF





THE SPIRIT

WHISPERING PINES GOLF CLUB TRINITY, TEXAS

Michael Dieckhoff will sometimes say that his wife, Nikki, knows when he needs to arrive at work, but she never knows when he will return home.

Well, that's not entirely true. For one week every other year, Dieckhoff *never* returns home. Now in his 21st season as the director of agronomy at Whispering Pines Golf Club, Dieckhoff helps oversee the biennial Sprit International Amateur Golf Championship, a weeklong tournament modeled after the Olympics that brings together the top two amateur men and women from 20 countries across six continents. Dieckhoff and his 38-person maintenance team work "daylight to dark" during the two weeks leading up to the tournament. But when Monday hits and the competition starts, he never leaves the property. "We stay either over at Camp (Olympia) or we have a couple houses outside," Dieckhoff says. "We stay on property and my head mechanic stays on property. That way we're here and if one of us wakes up, none of us are late."

Founded by **Corbin Robertson Jr.** — who was once estimated to control more coal reserves than anybody or anything in the United States besides the federal government — The Spirit is rooted in competition and philanthropy. Its major beneficiaries include the Houston Food Bank, The Immunization Partnership, Medical Bridges, Inc. and the Baylor College of Medicine Teen Health Clinic. Its list of alumni is even more impressive: Masters champions **Danny Willett**, **Jordan Spieth** and **Charl Swartzel**, longtime women's No. 1 **Lorena Ochoa**, and former men's No. 1 **Jason Day** have all competed in the event.

"The tournament dang near runs itself as far as players and all that good stuff," Dieckhoff says. "We just get in early, get out of the way, and give 'em the best course we can."

Dieckhoff learned about long hours and attention to detail during springs at the Masters — he



interned in 1995 and returned the next year, working 128-hour weeks both years — and brings that level of exactitude to The Spirit.

"The countdown clock is sitting up at the front of the breakroom and everything you do,

you take a little extra hop in your step to make sure that, OK, this is what we really want to do," he says. "You're a lot more aware of a mistake and what it can cost you at the end of the year. If we get a little too aggressive, do we have time to grow out of it? If we skip this fertilizer app, do we have enough behind it to keep us going?"

"A lot happens in the last two weeks: Putting a fresh edge on everything — bunkers, cart paths, that sort of thing — getting the water where you want it, getting the firmness where you want it, getting the speed on the greens where you want it."

After 14 long days of prep, Dieckhoff and his team — including Championship Course superintendent **Cody Fisseler**, The Needler superintendent **A.J. Pursley**, assistant superintendent **Ben Fischer** and equipment manager **Javier Alfaro** — arrive around 3 each morning of the tournament. The rest of the team will each work two of the six days on a three-day rotation.

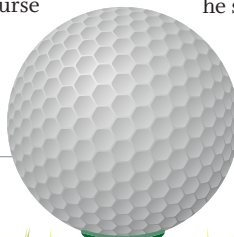
Once jobs are finished for the day, the team is free to walk the course and follow golfers. Because about 80 percent of the team is of Latino heritage, most are following the Mexican players. "The Mexican team normally comes down to the shop and talks with them afterward," Dieckhoff says. "They're just beaming. They get their flag signed, hats signed, shirts signed, players thank them, and they're grinning ear to ear for the next month."

After the last putt drops, Dieckhoff allows himself, quite literally, one day of rest.

"I go home, I kiss my wife, take a shower and go to bed," he says. "In that order."

"I think one year, I slept 14 hours."

— Matt LaWell

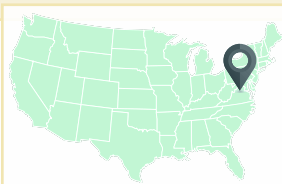




We create chemistry

BULL RUN OPEN

BULL RUN GOLF CLUB
HAYMARKET, VIRGINIA



Bull Run Golf Club splits its crew during weekends. Half of superintendent **Mike Wyant's**

team works one weekend. The other half works the following weekend.

The final Sunday of April represents an exception. Wyant gently asks the entire crew to help put the finishing polishes on the northern Virginia course before the 10 a.m. start of the annual Bull Run Open. "To a man," he says, "every single person helps out to make the day as good as we possibly can."

Busy days are the norm at Bull Run, a popular public facility in suburban Washington, D.C. But few days seek — and receive — the internal and external support like Bull Open Sunday.

The Bull Run Open benefits The Els for Autism Foundation, an effort established by World Golf Hall of Famer **Ernie Els**, his wife, **Liezl**, and **Marvin Shanken** in 2009. Els for Autism provides programs for families and individuals affected by the disorder. Golf outings are a major fundraiser for the foundation.

Bull Run created its fundraiser following a suggestion by Wyant, who was involved in a similar event at a previous course. The cause is personal for Wyant: his cousin **Lisa Janicke's** 16-year-old son, **Ray**, has autism.

"I thought it would be a great thing for us to support that foundation and make our donation on Ray's behalf," Wyant said, "and they absolutely loved the idea. It's something everybody across the property has really gotten on board with and has fully supported. I couldn't be more grateful for the response from our facility."

The Bull Run Open debuted in 2019 and the club's staff starts heavily promoting the event in January. Excitement builds as late-April approaches, with the 144-player field selling out in recent years. Wyant views the outing as a purpose-filled beginning to the intense part of the golf and

growing season. New course accessories make their debut on Bull Run Open Sunday, as Wyant's full crew mows and

rolls greens, rakes bunkers, blows debris from surfaces and executes other course conditioning details before the mid-morning start.

Bull Run rests in the Transition Zone and Wyant's team must keep bentgrass/*Poa annua* greens alive and thriving amid a busy outing and daily-play calendar. Fortunately, the Bull Open is contested six weeks after spring aerification and before the weather turns sultry.

"I love the fact that it's our first big event," Wyant says. "Starting the season with our own event just makes us put the exclamation point on starting the season right."

Golfer enthusiasm is palpable as Wyant begins the tournament with an announcement explaining the cause the event benefits. Wyant's family frequently visits from upstate New York to participate in the outing, and Lisa's family, including Ray, have attended previous Bull Run Opens. The event also receives participatory and financial support from area superintendent peers and industry companies.

"We started the event to show support for Ray and his family," Wyant says. "The fact that we are able to impact so many others is a humbling experience and being able to do something to benefit something bigger than ourselves adds a sense of pride to the event."

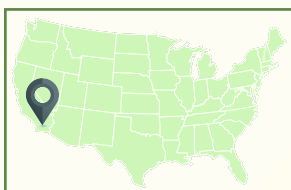
"It's very, very rewarding and it makes those connections a bit stronger. Knowing we are helping in some small way is a great feeling."

— Guy Cipriano



THE WARBURTON

DESERT WILLOW GOLF RESORT
PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA



As fans of “Seinfeld” well know: It’s never good to get behind the 8-ball with Puddy.

One of the world’s largest annual charity golf events, the **Patrick Warburton** Celebrity Golf Tournament—colloquially known as “The Warburton”—has raised more than \$26 million for St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital in its 13-year history,

including nearly \$5 million in 2023 alone.

The Puddy party brought to Palm Desert, California, proves a celebrity pairing of song and swing across a trio of area properties, with each locale on its toes for the popular actor’s altruistic mix of celebs, athletes and musicians.

The golf staff and agronomy team at Desert Willow Golf Resort, now in its third season as The Warburton co-host, sees the event as a unique opportunity to create the stage for celebs used to being in the spotlight.

“This place was built with the attitude, ‘Yeah, we’re a municipal, but let’s make it feel like a country club,’” superintendent **Christopher Bien** says. “So, my job is to have turf conditions as nice as we can on a daily basis, but yes, there are a few events that we ramp up for, and the Warburton is one of them. And not because it’s all these great players, but it is a very high-profile event with a lot of celebrities and a very worthy cause.”

The 36-hole property is a deserved magnet for volume gatherings, with 500 yearly events of 12 or more players. Come the desert’s winter peak-season, the prep for Puddy requires peak form of course and crew.

While Bien and team need to keep green speeds at 10.5 on a daily basis for pace-of-play considerations, for the Warburton, they’ll employ an extra roll of the greens and an additional mow. Special tournament amenities may also include the bunker stamping, Warburton-centric flags and a helicopter ball drop on the home hole of Desert Willow’s Firecliff Course.

“The F&B on the course is probably the biggest thing,” Bien says. “Maybe they want a grill on an event lawn, where we may need to make sure we’re putting something down before and after, so they don’t torch the grass. Or, it may be cleaning up after, whether it’s something as simple as seed and fertilizer to maybe having to sod a certain area if they spilled grease or something like that.”

In concert with prime course conditions, the staff needs to ensure prime timing.

“Maybe they want to bring out a taco truck on No. 17,” Bien says, “so we may need to get out there first before the truck gets there, so we’re not in their way and they’re not in our way.”

The 2024 Warburton celeb list included the diverse likes of **Jonathan Banks**,

Kim Alexis, **Alice Cooper**, **Don Felder**, **Brian Urlacher** and **Mardy Fish**. But the Desert Willow crew knows not to be distracted with a head in the stars.

And yet, once the work is done for a Big Day, some can’t resist a lil’ brush with fame.

“Yes, we do have a (celebrity guest) policy here, but that, I would say, is for everyday (play),” Bien says with a smile. “For the Warburton, yeah, they’re here to play golf, but they’re here as celebrities, so I think they’re a little more accessible and a bit more likely to enjoy the interaction. My guys, they know the policy and they’re really good about it. Now, as a huge sports fan and being from northeastern Ohio, ... I won’t say that I hunted down **Kenny Lofton**, ... but I wouldn’t say that I *did not* hunt out Kenny Lofton. Let’s just say that we had a chance meeting that was 100 percent not by chance.”

—Judd Spicer





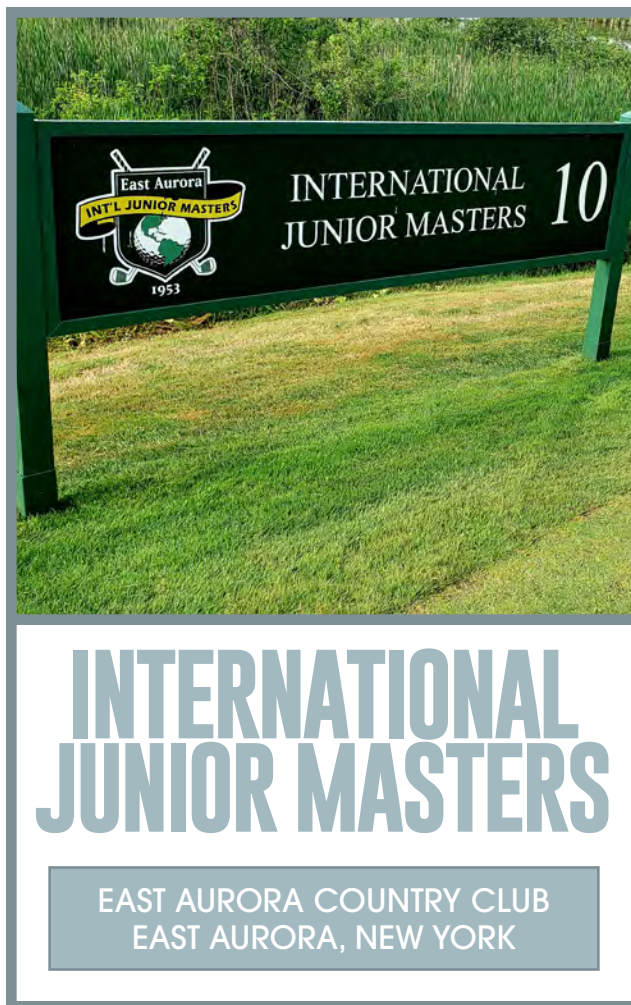
We create chemistry

Twenty summers ago, during his first June as the superintendent at East Aurora Country Club, **Drew Thompson** started planning for the International Junior Masters about a week before the opening tee shots.

"I knew it was here," he says. "But it wasn't portrayed like it was that big of a deal. It was nowhere near the level it is now. Back then, the kids came in and played, and there was a little hospitality room for volunteers. It wasn't the event that it's become."

How times have changed. Billed as the oldest international junior invitational in North America, the IJM gathers 84 top young golfers, including a dozen girls, for a week of medal and match play. Players arrive in the Buffalo suburb four or five days in advance of the first medal round — almost as early as Thompson started preparing for the event back in 2004 — to share matches and meals. Members welcome them every year, spending the week as course spotters, securing sponsors, even opening their homes. "It's about as close to a Tour event experience as a kid can get at that age," Thompson says.

Thompson and his maintenance team are a big part of the continued success of the IJM, which launched in 1953 — featuring players like **Jim Furyk**, **Trevor Immelman** and **Rory Sabbatini** before they were famous — and has been contested every year since besides 2020. Planning for the next year starts more than 11 months in advance, about two or three weeks after the last putt of the previous event, and Thompson really starts thinking about it



"as soon as the snow melts."

"Pretty much everything we do always has that event in mind, because we know it's a showcase event for the club," Thompson says. Thompson orchestrates test runs — "whether my staff knows it or not." The first of three big member tournaments, held right before Memorial Day, provide practice runs. Gardener **Kay Glosser** will tell Thompson if it feels like preparation is a little behind.

"When we get to the week of the event, it's early morn-



ings. We're not in here in the evenings mowing things because a number of days are 36-hole matches,

so we really can't be out there," Thompson says. "And we have long drive contests that go on after they're done playing. Everything we do has to be done in the morning."

Thompson learned over his first handful of IJMs that he needs a team of 17 people to operate smoothly. He has five full-timers, including first assistant superintendent **Adam Brueggeman** and equipment

technician **Cody Kegler**, then adds another seven or eight people by the end of May before filling out the staff in early June. "If we have one person who oversleeps — we start some of those days at 3:30 or 4 o'clock in the morning — we can still function and get everything done that we need to get done ahead of play," he says. "The maintenance team here takes it seriously — and they like the early-in, early-out." Thompson recognizes the team with a full page in the event program, highlighting them in a photo and explaining what they do.

If Thompson needs a little extra help, he knows he can ask golf professional **David Jones** and other club managers, but he prefers to let them manage rather than mow. His brother **Thad**, the superintendent at Terry Hills Golf Club in nearby Batavia (see page 30), meanwhile, will show up on the last day to swap flagsticks and return normal tee markers — "a huge help." Tournament director **Jeff Kamien** and player development lead **Paul O'Brien** strive to create spectacular and seamless action on the course.

One more thing that's changed since that first summer? Thompson has mellowed more than a little.

"I was a miserable prick 20 years ago," he says with a laugh. "I've changed my ways. I have! I love my staff and I love my club. Don't drive around, yelling and screaming at your guys. Coach 'em!"

— Matt LaWell

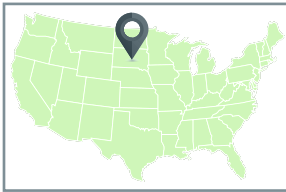


THE DESERT CLASSIC



HILLSVIEW GOLF COURSE
PIERRE, SOUTH DAKOTA

South Dakota's capital city, Pierre, is south of Lake Oahe along the Missouri River. Pierre's only public 18-hole championship layout is Hillsview Golf Course. It plays up to 6,735 yards, is a par 72, and has been owned and managed by the city since 1981. Opening in 1966 with a design by **Charles Maddox**, Hillsview's big tournament is the Desert Classic. This year marks the 55th edition.



The staff is motivated by and takes pride in the event, which attracts locals and visitors from out of state. "We know the format in advance and we save our tougher pin positions for the tournament," Tipton says. "We aim for maximum green speeds. It's not hard when it's hot and dry. We quit watering and do some extra rolling."

"We always host the event in August and it's always 100 degrees or more," laughs **Bryan Tipton**, former Hillsview superintendent and current director of Parks & Recreational Services. The event title is a joke about the heat, but bentgrass greens are no joke to maintain in that weather. The fairways are bluegrass and **Jordan Steiner**, the current superintendent, is doing a great job.

"We are semi-arid and average 42 days annually above 90 degrees," Tipton says. "The eastern and western parts of South Dakota don't have half as much. It's challenging. I have witnessed more than 30 days straight above 90 degrees and stuff is dying. We are 100 percent watered, but it's still brutal when you don't get rain or a break in the heat."

Held Friday through Sunday, the dates in August shift. The Sturgis Motorcycle Rally is around the same time and some of Hillsview's lean, full-time staff participate in that. The event also falls when seasonal staff are heading to school. "One year there was a kid who came in, mowed the greens and left straight for college. I was begging for him to spend one more night at home," Tipton jokes.

The format of the Desert Classic changes to keep it fresh and engaging. One of Tipton's favorite playing memories, years ago, was a horse-and-dog elimination competition, with a massive number of teams teeing off together. Alternate shot, match play and stroke play have all been enjoyed.

Supported by the Oahe Men's Golf Association, hundreds of golfers will play and there's a large meal during the weekend. It used to be a more formal affair but is now a casual barbeque. There are no grand trophies or celebrations. The focus is squarely on the camaraderie and the golf.

Both are as much appreciated now as they ever have been. In 2011, there was destructive flooding. Due to the combination of record-setting snowfall in the Rocky Mountains and heavy rain that spring, several dams were opened along the Missouri River. There was extensive flooding throughout the Midwest and Pierre was one of the many cities affected.

"The course was under three to six feet of water," Tipton says. "Unfortunately, there was no way to protect Hillsview. The flooding lasted for weeks. Ironically, the next year was extremely dry. The greens, tees and fairways were fine, but the rough was unacceptable."

Bringing the event back in 2013, there were more participants than expected—a full contingent for this cherished outing. The maintenance team looks forward to it. It's about celebrating a great course and the effort that goes into preparing for the event.

"It's near the end of summer and it's what we work towards," Tipton says. "That's the big tournament. It really is all about the people and the golf."

—Lee Carr





We create chemistry

BOULDER CREST FOUNDATION VIRGINIA GOLF TOURNAMENT

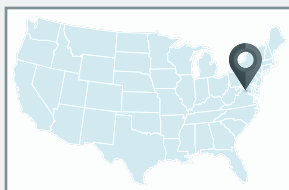
THE GOLF CLUB AT LANSDOWNE
LANSDOWNE, VIRGINIA



Marc Muniz and The Golf Club at Lansdowne team only need to look up on a mid-July morning to understand why the results of their hustle matter.

The Troon-managed facility hosts the annual Boulder Crest Foundation Virginia Golf Tournament. Preparing a mix of cool- and warm-season playing surfaces for outings is part of golf maintenance life at The Golf Club at Lansdowne. But only one event on the tournament calendar begins with a parachuter clutching an American flag entering the grounds from above and numbered golf balls dropping from a helicopter toward holes cut into the back of the practice range.

The Boulder Crest Foundation raises funds to support mental health pro-



gramming for combat veterans, first responders and their family members. Veterans and first responders are omnipresent in the lives of The Golf Club at Lansdowne employees.

"It really hits home for us because of the area we are in," Muniz says. "We're close to Washington, D.C., and with the volume of veterans and the volume of law enforcement and service workers that we have in this area, it's really important to us."

The Club at Lansdowne provides a massive canvas for one of Boulder Crest Foundation's key fundraisers. The 45-hole club sits on 465 acres along the Potomac River, and Muniz estimates more than 400 people are

on the grounds for the Monday event, including his nearly-50-worker maintenance crew.

"I came from an 18- and 27-hole operation, so a 45-hole operation is crazy," Muniz says. "And then when I first learned that we are doing a double-wide shotgun for outings, it's a ton of people and there are a lot of logistics."

Food and beverage vendors set up tents on the property; cars are gently placed on the course as hole-in-one prizes. Muniz's team is thorough with its par-3 measurements, because yardages must be exact for insurance purposes in case somebody makes an ace.

Muniz and his managers arrive at 5:15 a.m. to prepare for the day. The crew begins racing to assignments at 5:45, with the goal of being off the course by 9:45. They are main-



taining multiple turf species and varieties. The Club at Lansdowne features a 33-year-old **Robert Trent Jones II** design with zoysiagrass fairways and bentgrass/*Poa annua* greens, and a 19-year-old **Greg Norman** design with tee-to-green bentgrass. Both courses are fully booked for the Boulder Crest event.

Once the shotgun begins, the crew transitions to the 9-hole Shark Bite course, tidies the maintenance facility, parking lot and clubhouse surroundings, or participates in safety training. After the tournament, a few

turf managers will assess moisture needs on cool-season turf.

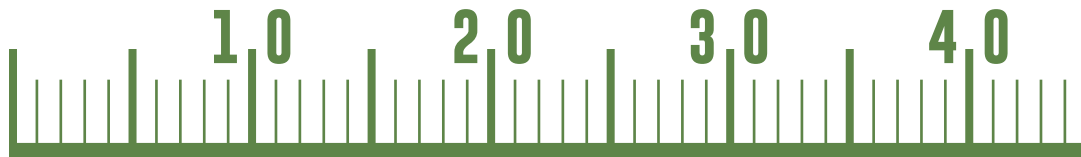
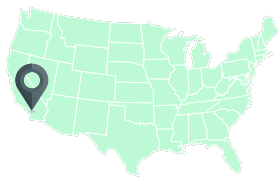
"Success is getting everybody out, allowing them to have a great time and then getting everybody back in order," Muniz says. "It's a massive amount of people moving around and getting through the golf course at one time."

"I'll poke my head up there a little bit later after everybody comes back in and there's usually rave reviews about the golf course, which is great because the staff works hard."

— Guy Cipriano

LOS ANGELES RAMS AND CHARGERS ALUMNI TOURNAMENTS

THE JOURNEY AT PECHANGA
TEMECULA, CALIFORNIA



A grand journey requires a perfect path — and a detailed playbook.

Sprawling and striking, the rolling, elevated terrain of The Journey at Pechanga in Temecula, California, was designed to make an impression. Begging bogeys aside, it's little wonder the master-crafted golf bounty on the ancestral land of the Pechanga Band of Luseño Indians is host to a regular calendar of VIP, charity and celebrity events.

Among the grounds' biggest days are the annual Los Angeles Rams and Chargers alumni tournaments. Pechanga Resort Casino, a leading sponsor partner with the two teams and their shared home of SoFi Stadium, doesn't gamble when it comes to the X's and O's of readying to host football legends.

"We'll do a little extra, more than normal," The Journey head superintendent **Mario Ramirez** says. "We'll tidy up some things, spraying (a PGR) two weeks ahead (of the events) to control growth of the rough, get it really tight for the true cut that we're mowing at. And then there are extra details, like cart path edging, bunker edging, making sure the

bunkers are nice and level with the sand, four inches on the bottom and two inches on the side. We just want everything very consistent throughout the course."

With added touches including an extra roll of greens, new cups, new flags and new towels on ball washers, Ramirez says the enhanced efforts come with some added reward should his own team ultimately find the assessment end zone.

"It's our time to shine, to show off the course and all the hard work the crew does throughout the year," Ramirez adds. "And the guys like to hear the feedback. If the event went well, they get really excited and we'll have a barbeque, a celebration on our side of the team."

Proper presentation for the big day begins before a ball is ever struck. "Even just how we set up our golf carts, with all the steering wheels straight down and all the windows consistently up or down, the rows and spacing of the carts," says **Scott Mallory**, director of golf at The Journey. "When guests walk to the staging area, we want it set up perfectly."

Mallory knows that teeing-to-please has

ripples across Pechanga's massive property and far-reaching operation.

"It stems from our relationship with the two teams, from a marketing standpoint," he says. "And these may not necessarily be our biggest tournaments by volume, but the efforts of our marketing team that go into the setup and to getting these football legends here, that's a big part of it."

The team further knows that once the likes of **Vince Ferragamo**, **Charlie Joiner** or **Marshall Faulk** begin their ... Journey, it's not selfie time for staff.

"The team here recognizes many of the individuals, as you can imagine," Mallory says, "but it's all business with these big events, and the guys are busy with their responsibilities. The guys realize they have a job to do."

Policy considered, famed players trading cleats for spikes isn't lost on the crew.

"The guys who are football fans, sure, they recognize some of the players," enthuses Ramirez, "and, yes, it is exciting to see them hit the ball."

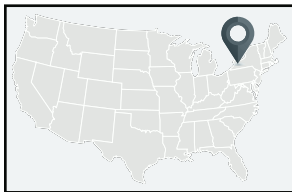
— Judd Spicer



We create chemistry

JIM KELLY CELEBRITY GOLF CLASSIC

TERRY HILLS GOLF COURSE
BATAVIA, NEW YORK



For one delightful, delirious and rather draining Monday every August, Terry Hills Golf Course feels about as close to a Bills Mafia tailgate as any golf club can.

Which is appropriate, because that day is the **Jim Kelly Celebrity Golf Classic**.

Now in its 18th year at Terry Hills, a 27-hole public facility in Batavia, New York, the Classic is an annual bash that pairs a memorable round with catered restaurant food, at least one DJ for every Super Bowl the Buffalo Bills have played in, a live band on the course, and familiar names like NFL commissioner **Roger Goodell**, longtime ESPN anchor **Chris Berman**, Shooter McGavin himself **Christopher McDonald**, and the Hall of Fame quarterback Kelly—to raise funds for the Kelly for Kids Foundation, which provides grants to disadvantaged and disabled youth around western New York.

“It’s actually a little more understated now than it was 15 years ago,” says superintendent **Thad Thompson**, who joined the fun starting with the 2008 Classic. “Everybody’s getting a little older.”

The Classic is a highlight on the Terry Hills calendar. For Thompson, it also provides a chance to showcase how he and his maintenance team maintain turf every day throughout the season. He starts planning months in

advance with general manager **Danielle Rotondo** and golf professional **Casey Brown**, as well as a trio of Kelly’s assistants — **Tricia Cavalier**, **Dennis Stupski** and **Ashley Lantz** — and he relishes in managing every detail. “You have to,” he says. “There’s so much that leads up to it.”

During his early Classics, Thompson says he “had notes upon notes upon notes—and I still have them all. That’s why we have a wrap-up meeting and why we start so early with our meetings: We don’t ever want to forget anything. Now it’s down to the little things, like do the Stoli girls check in as volunteers or vendors? We’re having discussions about that instead of, ‘Why are these people here?’”

Thompson is responsible for “making sure all the tents get set up, all the porta-johns are where they need to be, all the tables and chairs are where they need to be — on top of getting the course prepared.” Final maintenance starts at 5:30 the Sunday afternoon before Kelly and friends roll in. That shift lasts about four hours, and includes mowing fairways and posting more than 200 signs that

YOU NEVER KNOW WHO MIGHT BE YOUR FIFTH

In addition to loads of current and former Buffalo Bills players like **Andre Reed** and **Thurman Thomas**, coaches and execs, recent Kelly Classic celebs include:

Johnny Damon
Warren Sapp
Michael Irvin
Dan Marino
Kato Kaelin
Dennis Haskins — *Saved by the Bell*’s Mr. Belding

Thompson keeps under protective plastic in a backroom of the old barn that serves as the maintenance facility.

The next morning, the team is at the course around 4:30 and starting by 5. Vendors arrive by 9 and the shotgun start begins at 10. “We check in every vendor,” Thompson says. “They have to fill out forms for insurance and we physically lead them out to where they need to be. We don’t leave anything to chance.”

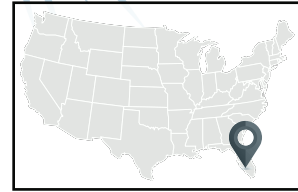
On Classic Day, 58 five-somes will fill the course, with a celebrity in every group, along with about 50 vendors

and 30 volunteers. Thompson’s brothers **Drew**, the superintendent and general manager at nearby East Aurora Country Club (see page 26), and **Stacey**, a former turf pro himself, are among them.

And for as wild as the day might become—and it is a party—there is one big difference between the Classic and a regular Bills Mafia get-together: At least so far, no golfer has ever gone through a table.

— Matt LaWell

CALUSA GCSA GOLF FOR THE CHILDREN CHRISTMAS CLASSIC



THE VERANDAH CLUB
FORT MYERS, FLORIDA

Golf led to The Verandah Club director of agronomy **Jake Wentz** delivering athletic shoes. Golf produced one of the most poignant moments of his career.

The Calusa GCSA Golf for Children Christmas Classic rotates annually between the Fort Myers, Florida, club's Old Orange and Whispering Oak layouts. Wentz does more than lead the team preparing playing surfaces for the 144-player outing featuring a field of superintendents and their corporate partners. He organizes behind-the-scenes logistics and handles front-facing aspects of the event, which partners with the Children's Network of Southwest Florida to provide holiday gifts and meals for area youth. Wentz becomes emotional when discussing one of his earliest memories of the event.

"We go and give one kid his box, he opens it up, goes crazy about his new Jordans and said, 'I've never had anything like this before,'" Wentz says. "I said, 'What do you mean you've never had anything like this before?' He said, 'I've never had a Christmas present.' He was 15 or 16. Talk about pulling your heartstrings right there."

Inspired by a similar event conducted by the nearby Everglades GCSA, the Calusa GCSA started its holiday outing a decade ago. The Verandah Club, a private community consuming more than 1,400 acres along the Orange River, became the regular host two years later. The classic is staged on a Friday in early December, meaning it coincides with the acceleration of the southwest Florida snowbird golf season. Wentz and the tournament board meet regularly beginning in October to discuss logistics such as raffle prizes and catering, but Wentz begins pondering the event much earlier. "The hard part is thinking about what we can do this year that we haven't done in the past," he says.

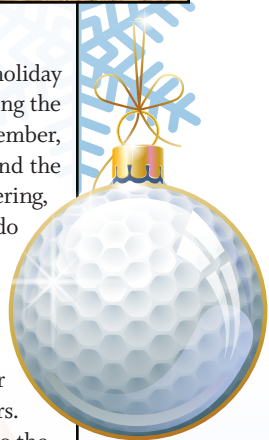
The first tournament raised enough money to provide holiday gifts and meals for 17 children. The 2023 classic helped 140 children receive holiday gifts and meals. One day of golf and a post-round raffle raises close to \$50,000 for the Children's Network of Southwest Florida, according to Wentz, who educates his 36-worker crew about what the day means to the community. Not many turf teams, after all, are helping provide holiday cheer for children while simultaneously entertaining their industry peers.

"You want to be shined up and looking good," Wentz says. "It's our time of the year, going right into the season and January. We need to be top-notch come the superintendent tournament. If we are that, we are going to roll right into the season and it's all going to be great."

Wentz participates in the event, although it's challenging to enjoy anything about the day until the first tee shots are struck. True fulfillment emerges when he and his peers meet the people they're helping.

"You're taking care of 140 kids in your area that wouldn't be able to celebrate Christmas if it wasn't for this," Wentz says. "Some of them don't have much to look forward to throughout the year. To be able to take care of them, step up for them and have them know the Calusa chapter is going to take care of them ... it's very, very rewarding."

— Guy Cipriano





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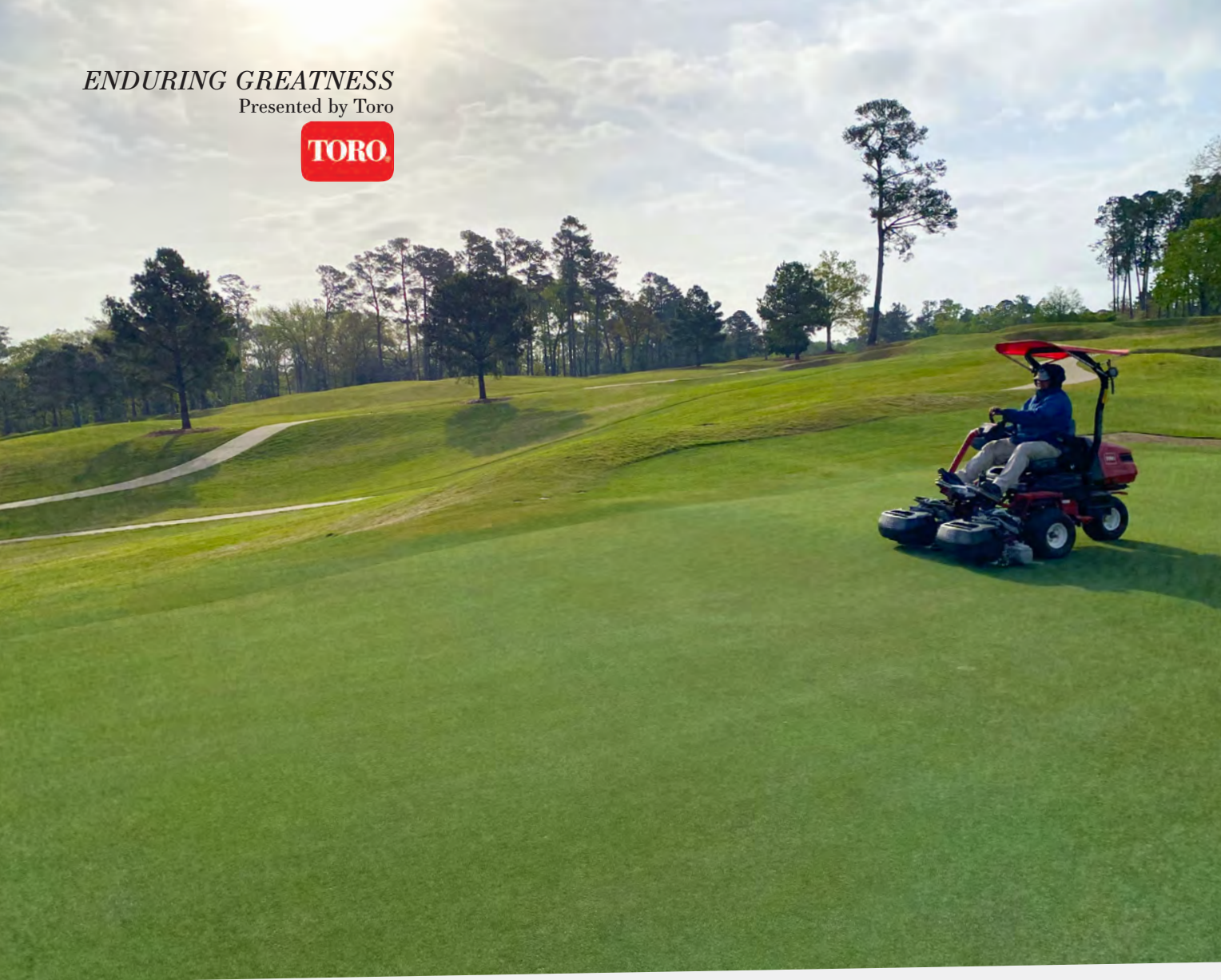
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ENDURING GREATNESS

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'It's God's playground'

Something doesn't last for 125 years without producing affection. From epic land to unyielding loyalty, **Augusta Country Club** continues to enthrall members and employees.

By **Guy Cipriano**



An Augusta, Georgia, club is celebrating its 125th anniversary in 2024. The club occupies joyous land crafted into a lasting golfscape by a Golden Age juggernaut. Holes drop and rise through pleasant pines and myriad deciduous trees. Rae's Creek, America's most well-known golf waterway, bisects the northeast corner of the property.

A plaque on the elongated 14th tee reminds members and guests that **Bobby Jones** aced the uphill par 3 on Jan. 13, 1932. Fellow Augusta golf visionaries **Fielding Wallace**, **Alfred Bourne** and **George Bourne** were in his foursome. Trophies, photographs, drawings and artifacts inside the clubhouse tout the achievements of local golf legends, female and male tour players, and visionaries whose activities at the club shaped their community's history.

Augusta Country Club is a locally and regionally prominent club supported, guided and preserved by Augusta, Georgia, denizens such as **Ben Barfield**. With the plaque honoring Jones's shot less than 20 yards away, Barfield stops operating a Toro Greensmaster eTriFlex 3360 for two minutes on a late-March Tuesday morning at the urging of director of grounds **Josh Dunaway** to discuss the place where he's worked for nearly three decades.

"It's God's playground," Barfield says.

Members sneaking in rounds before projected rain are approaching the ninth green, one of three putting surfaces visible from the 13th green. Little time for small talk. Working at Augusta Country Club means being surrounded by golf. But there's just enough time to learn how Barfield feels about where he works before he must complete mowing a green with an open and horizontal-shaped front. "I don't just like it here," he says, pausing to emphasize his next four words, "I love it here."

Affection comes in many forms

for a golf course and club. At Augusta Country Club, the strongest sign of affection comes from seeing the same people relishing their time roaming and honing heavenly land. Names on membership rosters and payrolls are recognizable, because familiarity and longevity yield deep connections.

"They treat us like family here," says head turf technician **Ron Magnuson**, a 29-year employee. "It's not like you're in a corporation and you're just a number." Magnuson and **Keith Campbell** started working at Augusta Country Club in 1995; Barfield joined the crew a year later. They have welcomed more people into their work family over the years.

"That's kind of something I pay attention to whenever I'm interviewing at a course — the staff that's there," says senior assistant superintendent

Ryan McGee, who joined the crew in August 2021. "Whenever you see long-tenured employees, that's a sign it's a good place to work because nobody is going to hang out somewhere that they don't enjoy being at and don't care about."

Augusta Country Club has scaled to levels none of its founders or veteran employees envisioned. Originally designed by member **Dr. William Harrison** and golf pro **David Ogilvie**, the club's Hill Course received a **Donald Ross**-guided transformation in 1926. A pair of downhill par 3s guarded by ponds and framed by pines and azaleas, an abundance of strategic approach bunkers, varied par 5s on the interior of the layout, and conditioning blending laborious grit with modern advancements make the Hill Course one of the most beloved layouts in Georgia. "The lay of the land just speaks for itself," superintendent **Dillon Scheer** says. "You don't need to say much else about it." At one point, the club had two courses, but the Bon Air Hotel sold the land occupying the **Seth Raynor**-renovated **Lake Course** in





Document, show, explain

Josh Dunaway minored in business at Eastern Kentucky University. His role as director of grounds at Augusta Country Club often means using business management practices to lead a golf maintenance operation.

Dunaway, for example, attended an equipment manager training program at the Toro headquarters in Bloomington, Minnesota, earlier this year. He scheduled the trip to learn more about the enormity of the task facing Augusta Country Club head turf technician **Ron Magnuson** and his industry peers.

"I have always viewed my role as a mini business owner for lack of a better term," says Dunaway, who majored in horticulture at Eastern Kentucky after earning an associate's degree in golf and sports turf management at Horry-Georgetown Technical College. "Part of my job is to hire people and give them the tools to succeed, but you need to know about every job to be able to do that. Is somebody blowing smoke when they say they need X, Y and Z? Part of my job is to be able to verify that. The other side of that is that it's hard to understand somebody's issues until you try to do it yourself."

Dunaway relies on Magnuson to give him metrics to explain equipment costs to general manager **Brett Ninness**. Magnuson uses myTurf Pro, a Toro equipment management software platform, to document and track usage, repair and maintenance activities for Augusta Country Club's fleet.

"I can tell Josh it costs this much money to run a certain piece of equipment for a year," Magnuson says. "That way — and he taught me this — we can go to the board and say, 'This is what it's costing us.'"

Dunaway also is a proponent of inviting stakeholders to visit the maintenance facility. Consistent documentation and communication allow Dunaway's team to secure the necessary tools to produce high-level conditions in a Transition Zone growing environment to satisfy golf-loving members.

"We're extremely fortunate to have the equipment that we have," he says. "But that also comes with the understanding that with high budgets and high levels of equipment comes high expectations. My job is to educate the club on how we are using it, why we are using it, why they are spending money on it, how it helps us do our job and how it makes us more efficient."

1942. A desirable neighborhood now sits atop the former Lake Course.

Ross routed the Hill Course on what Scheer, a digital map aficionado, considers an "L-shaped" plot. Scheer uses the alphabetical analogy to describe the overall shape of the land during a ground-level conversation to the left of an approach bunker on the 18th hole. Google Earth confirms Scheer's observation. Google Earth also confirms that Augusta Country Club's eighth and ninth holes about a famous golf neighbor co-founded by Jones.

Unlike the famous golf neighborhood, members play Augusta Country Club year-round — and they play the course plenty. Augusta Country Club supports more than 30,000 annual rounds, a hearty total for a venerable private club. "We might be the busiest high-end private club in the Southeast," says Dunaway, an Augusta native who returned to his hometown in January 2019 after superintendent stints at several Florida clubs, including the Ross-designed Country Club of Orlando.

Transitioning from sleepy — Magnuson says the club supported less than 15,000 annual rounds when he joined the crew in 1995 — to slammed means more of everything. A walk-and-talk inside Augusta Country Club's multi-building maintenance facility with Dunaway and Magnuson provides insight into the tools and tactics for meeting expectations at a flourishing club.

Most conversations at Augusta Country Club begin with people. Magnuson says the crew hovered around 10 employees in the mid-1990s. Weekend crews numbered four. The team Dunaway leads has more than 30 peak-season golf course and grounds employees, including Scheer, McGee, second assistant **Sean Muller** and landscape superintendent **Josh Devore**. A half-dozen other employees are earning turfgrass management degrees or certificates despite having academic or advanced technical training in other industries.



high-quality equipment produces a high-quality result on the course,” Dunaway says. “Everybody involved with Toro that I have worked with has done a great job.”

Managing water efficiently is another key component of the golf maintenance operation. Dunaway tactfully delegates leadership roles to his management team and McGee oversees irrigation programs. Seven handheld soil moisture sensors reside in the office McGee shares with Scheer and Muller. A Toro

“We’re fortunate,” Dunaway says. “We don’t have a staffing problem.”

Similar employee longevity and loyalty exists throughout the club.

“It starts at the top with our board and leadership giving us the tools by listening to the experts in their departments,” general manager/COO **Brett Ninness** says. “They’ll ask, ‘What do you all need to be successful?’ They have given us those tools, and then it’s just driving that culture.”

Equipment emerges as the next topic during the walk-and-talk.

Augusta Country Club has undergone a turfgrass metamorphosis, with zoysiagrass becoming the year-round hitting surface in 2018 and TifEagle Bermudagrass replacing bentgrass on greens in 2022. A large Toro equipment fleet is responsible for mowing, rolling, grooming, aerifying and verticutting more than 60 acres of short-cut zoysiagrass and more than three acres of Bermudagrass greens and surrounds.

Fairway acreage more than doubled during the fairway conversion, as the club previously overseeded around 25 acres of fairways. The fleet included two fairway mowing units when Magnuson joined the crew. The current fleet includes five Toro 5610-D Reelmaster units. “We have

at least twice as much equipment as we had not too long ago,” he says. “We have grown a lot.”

The crew shifts between mowing greens with Greensmaster 3360 eTriFlex riding units and Greensmaster Flex 1021 walking units. The Greensmaster 3360 eTriFlex offers Augusta Country Club an entry point into preparing surfaces using riding mowers with electrical components. Maintaining greens is an intricate task for Dunaway’s team, with double, triple and even circle cutting reoccurring summer practices using units with 14-blade reels. Bentgrass greens were mowed at .140 of an inch during the summer in the mid-1990s, according to Magnuson. The TifEagle greens have been mowed at under .100 of an inch during the summer.

Maintaining elite warm-season turf requires more than mowing or rolling. In a typical season, the course closes during one-week stretches in June and August for aggressive cultural practices. Tools such as three ProCore 1298 aerators for fairways and rough, three ProCore 648 aerators for greens and tees, and two Versa-Vac units for debris cleanup allow work to be executed in tight windows.

“It’s extremely useful to have that type of equipment and that type of

Lynx irrigation system installed in 2016 helps Dunaway’s team achieve its playability goals. “Firm and fast is our mentality as long as it doesn’t compromise turf health,” he says.

Augusta Country Club will host one of Georgia’s most significant golf events during what could be the bounciest part of the 2024 season as the Georgia Amateur Championship returns to the club for the first time since 1991. **Charlie Yates, Harvie Ward, Tommy Aaron, Brian Harman, Russell Henley, Harris English** and Jones are among the past champions. The 2024 tournament is scheduled for mid-July.

Championship golf remains a part of Augusta Country Club’s heritage. The club hosted a women’s major, the Titleholders Championship, from 1936 to 1966, as well as the 1971 U.S. Girls’ Junior Championship. And, perhaps, no American city embraces a big golf event like Augusta.

“Augusta is a golf-centric community,” Dunaway says. “With that comes high standards and high expectations. For a club like this to be around for 125 years, that tells you they know how to run things, they know how to survive, they know how to do things right and they know how to treat people.” **GCI**



LIFELONG APPEAL OF GOLF

A few reminders — lessons, really — of what I find so interesting about golf. These come courtesy of the 2024 Masters, which I got to watch for hours on end during a long weekend of recovery from what they call a medical “procedure.”

The more professional golf I watch, the less I’m interested in who won or how much money they “earned.” And there’s something very off-putting about the increasing emphasis upon betting odds and prop bets that have become such a steady supply of sports coverage on cable TV, radio and websites. My own interest is far more focused on the quality of shot making, the trajectory of the golf ball, and the intriguing bounces and roll out created by the unique lay of the land that makes these playing fields the most diverse in all of sports.

That’s what drew me to the game from the very moment I first stepped onto a golf course at age 12. I had never seen turf that closely cropped, so smooth and tight. And I watched with wonder as I saw a golf ball launched from a distant tee and followed it

agape as it butterflied down next to me. By the time it landed, I was in love with a feeling that I have never lost. It’s a feeling that I have been able to conjure up ever since, whether through my imagination while writing about golf or in my aspiration to play it better.

I’ve never been a good enough player to feel competitive, or even to enjoy the drama of “C-flight” matches. I played second on my high school varsity team, but this was in New York City when anyone who could break 50 for nine holes was good enough to make the team. A brief foray as a member of a country club saw me enter the occasional event but, frankly, I never enjoyed the ritual and soon withdrew from competitions.

My few memorable, if fleeting, experiences with success are what have kept me going and keep me hoping that even at my age I can get better — or at least stave off inevitable decline. At my best I was down to an 11 or 12 index, which is the handicap I carried when I played my career round at Sand Hills Golf Club in central Nebraska

15 years ago, a 74 that saw me hit 12 greens in regulation, not miss a fairway or get into a bunker, and make every putt inside six feet. Club founder **Dick Youngscap** played with me that round

and attested my scorecard — the only one I have kept framed in my study. OK, the day was unusually windless, but I still have that scorecard to look at as a reminder of what was once possible.

I keep at it. Two or three times a week in my driveway — or over the winter, in a nearby pro shop — I have hauled out my weighted, color-coded swing sticks in an effort to increase my swing speed. It appears to be working, having picked up eight miles an hour in the last few months. I enter the new golf season with renewed hopes of maintaining my distance, if not improving on my drives. I used to carry the ball a lot farther, but now I have become steadier, more consistent, and narrowed the range of my wayward shots. Whether I can get my index down below 16 is another matter. But I’m still enamored with the feel of the ball compressing against the clubface and generating a flight path that looks like one of those I saw this past weekend on TV.

Which is what makes golf really appealing. Not the prize money. Not the win totals or the career achievements. But the small, simple task of getting my body in sync adequately to launch a projectile to an intended target via a graceful ballistic arc.

That sense of empowerment is a lifelong sensibility. It is at the core of my golf world, and it will never lose its appeal. **GCI**

“My few memorable, if fleeting, experiences with success are what have kept me going and keep me hoping that even at my age I can get better, or at least stave off inevitable decline.”



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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GOLF'S snow leopards

Superintendents share characteristics and bonds based on the challenges associated with their work. Peer support helps the group handle what sometimes feels like a solitary effort.

By **Lee Carr**

Snow leopards are only found in rugged, mountainous terrain in central and southern Asia. They are strong, clever and thrive in harsh conditions. They adapt well to a variety of circumstances and situations as they battle the elements. Snow leopards spend a lot of time on their own, but they could not survive without a certain degree of companionship.

Superintendents are similar, except they enjoy a much broader geography.

At most courses, superintendents are one of one. When superintendents need help, they can turn to

nearby colleagues but problem-solving mostly happens with superintendents working elsewhere. **Dan Dinelli**, superintendent at North Shore Country Club in Glenview, Illinois, recognizes how special this is.

"People are shocked, especially from the business world, that superintendents are so open with their information-sharing," Dinelli says. "If you need a piece of equipment, maybe something breaks or you're in a bind, everyone is willing to pitch in and help the other person. It's a competitive business, but our tradition, our culture, has been to set competition aside and help the other person at the highest level possible.

People will go out of their way. That's what I have experienced."

Laurie Bland is the superintendent at Miami Springs Golf & Country Club, an 18-hole public course in Miami Springs, Florida, and she knows about that bond. "Superintendents share devotion, passion and drive," Bland says. "It's an understanding about what kind of job this is, and it doesn't matter where you work. That bond extends through superintendents from high-end facilities to municipalities."

Everyone is included. But *everyone* isn't actually a lot.

"The golf business is small," says **Rick Tegtmeier**, director of grounds

► Wonder what they discuss while riding Segways? National events provide opportunities for superintendents to interact with peers who can relate to what they experience.

at Des Moines Golf & Country Club in West Des Moines, Iowa, who recently announced his retirement. “We all know each other. It’s more of a fraternity. In the United States there are only about 16,000 of us. That’s not very many. We are all in this to do the same thing and to help each other. Now, social media plays a part in that with the sharing of ideas across platforms.”

There are comments and jokes online that only other superintendents

Greenkeeping globally

Superintendents have a lot in common no matter where in the world they work.

In Dornoch, Scotland, **Eoin Riddell** is the course manager at Royal Dornoch, overseeing both the Championship and Struie courses.

“Greenkeeping is worldwide,” Riddell says. “We may look after different grasses, but many issues that greenkeepers face are similar. We are a tight-knit community, and we are always willing to help if we can.”

Many greenkeepers will ask for a tour of Royal Dornoch if they are in the area, and Riddell always tries to meet with visitors. He lets others know when he is going to play their courses.

Greenkeepers, Riddell says, share “a passion for the work. It can be all-consuming so it’s better to enjoy it! A must-do attitude and a willingness to listen is helpful. With committees that lack experience, patience is a good characteristic to have.”

Riddell enjoys mentoring others and seeing them gain experience and knowledge that they in turn impart to other greenkeepers. “The friendships that I have made over the years span the globe,” he says. “We may have come from different backgrounds, but we have a common bond. There is always fun and jokes to be had when you get a group of greenkeepers together. It’s best if you can dish it out as well as take it. It’s always done in good humor and with respect.”

Slàinte mhath!



will understand. Sure, there are “in real life” jokes between superintendents, too, and more of them. Several superintendents have confessed that their best stories are not suitable for print, but Tegtmeier has a classic anecdote that he is happy to share.

“I had a very good friend named **Tim Westland**. He has passed away, but we used to talk every day. I was in Cedar Rapids at Elmcrest Country Club and Tim was at Thunder Hills Country Club in Peosta. Tim called me one day in the middle of winter about some new technology in irrigation systems, dual-tone multi-frequency codes. He said, ‘I’m going to give you a phone number. Dial it and push these buttons and when you hear a tone, hang up.’ I wrote it all down, did what he said and called him back. I asked, ‘What did that do?’ He said, ‘It worked! That starts the irrigation system on my tees!’ Neat. I threw the paper in the drawer of my desk. In August, I’m cleaning out my drawer and I find that paper. I thought, why not? I dialed the number and pushed the buttons. Guess what happened on Ladies Day at Thunder Hills? Tim said he knew instantly that it was me. No one was hurt but a few women did get wet. We had a good laugh—the ladies included!”

A sense of humor goes a long way in succeeding in this industry. Bland recalls a time when it felt like her entire local chapter was on the same flight home from the national convention. They joked that if their flight got stuck somewhere, it would spell trouble for a whole region of courses!

The priority of superintendents, though bonded through their challenges, is on relationships. “In some ways the work environment is wonderful and in others it’s just not an easy job. We respect and relate to each other on the pressures,” Dinelli says. “That sounds crazy because it’s just golf, but there is a lot of pride in our profession. Whenever you help someone or problem-solve with your peers, you feel good about that. To survive you have to care, and if you care, it takes a lot of effort to meet the standards that continue to rise.”

Pressures for playing conditions and resources have increased but the care for the work and the care for one another have not changed. That care is the foundation of the superintendent culture. You would let others know about unethical practices from product representatives or services in the area. “I’m pretty forward,” Tegtmeier says. “If I see someone wronging someone else, I definitely let people know that what they are doing is unethical. I think most people do.”

Another way to show that you care is communication regarding course visits. “I definitely reach out,” Bland says. “If I don’t contact the superintendent before my round, I will send a note to them or their staff afterwards.”

Tegtmeier agrees. “I call the superintendent to let them know that I will be playing their course. I don’t want a free pass, I do it as a professional courtesy. What if the superintendent sees me and wonders why I am there? It can be a shocker. Usually, the superintendent will stop

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and say hi. It's the right thing to do."

While communication about course visits is a longstanding tradition, expectations surrounding the dress code have shifted. There are more hats in the buildings and dress codes "have become pretty lax over the years," says Tegtmeier, who has been in golf maintenance since 1980 and earned his Master Greenkeeper designation in 2015. "You see everything under the sun now. I don't even worry about it."

Many organizations provide uniforms and personal protective equipment, possibly rain gear, and that is the focus. Rules vary from place to place about shorts and pants, and closed-toe shoes are the norm, whether boots or sneakers. There

might be conflicting feelings about hoodies, tattoos, joggers, facial hair and other choices in appearance. Every manager must be flexible with what works for their crew.

Flexibility helps with an age gap between leaders and younger, inexperienced workers because another special way that superintendents interact is mentoring new talent in the industry. "It is rewarding to see others contribute, to watch them grow and become successful," Bland says. "One of my favorite things about being a superintendent is the

multi-generational friendships that feel like family."

Superintendents reach out to young talent, and it's also common practice to welcome superintendents who are new to the area, informing them about professional organizations or industry events. Some of you reach out to a superintendent taking over a property that you are moving on from. Maybe you leave behind some important knowledge about tricky areas on course, or simply share your contact details with an invitation to ask questions. These helpful, humble gestures contribute to the generous nature and friendships in the industry.

"We had a gentleman who moved to Iowa in 1992, to the Wakonda Club" in Des Moines, Tegtmeier says. "I had just left Des Moines, so I called him up. His name was **Steve Cook**. I told him, 'If you need anything, call me.' He became an icon in this industry, and we have been great friends ever since that phone call."

Superintendents excel in a service industry due in no small part to their abilities to put other people and the work ahead of their own needs. You are able to reach out during your busy schedule to make someone else feel comfortable. Superintendents are very capable of balancing drive and unpleasant surprises with looking after their teams and managing how to work with a variety of personalities.

These abilities come more naturally for some people than others, but the culture is there as a longstanding reference. Everyone is welcome to learn and enjoy a support network that is readily shared. With common traits and a nurturing nature, superintendents, like snow leopards, are exceptional in many ways. **GCI**

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





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Industry companies emanate from warehouses, offices and outdoor plots in places such as Wayne, Martins Creek, Center City Philadelphia and Lebanon. In the middle of the state resides Penn State University, a turfgrass management talent development and research blueblood.

Neither **Chase McEvers** nor **Mark Harrison** are Pennsylvanians. Under the guidance of **Andrew Dooley**, a meticulous Pennsylvanian who attended Penn State, they devoted an entire season of their promising careers to bringing something unique to the state's revered golf scene.

McEvers and Harrison are part of The Union League of Philadelphia's expansive stable of turf talent. They spent last year shifting clay and then growing bentgrass and Bermudagrass atop the soupy subsurface to help build The Landing, a 9-hole, par-3 course at the Union League's Torresdale location in northeast Philadelphia. When The Landing opens this month, it will make Torresdale the first private club in Pennsylvania with an 18-hole regulation course and a 9-hole, par-3 layout.

Situated on 21 acres with 70 feet of elevation change adjacent to the club's **Donald Ross**-designed course, The Landing was routed by **Steve Weisser** to play both clockwise and counterclockwise. McEvers, an aspiring golf course architect from Georgia, joined the Union League team in 2022 as a project manager

Keystone project

The Union League of Philadelphia leaned on its versatile turf team to create an innovative product poised to alter Pennsylvania's revered golf scene.

By **Guy Cipriano**

A record 91 USGA championships and counting have rolled through Pennsylvania. The state's golf terrain ranges from soothing country landscapes outside Harrisburg, Lancaster and Allentown, sites with rocky underpinnings in and around Philadelphia, and steep hillsides in the

gritty southwest and northeast corners. One of golf's most charismatic champions, **Arnold Palmer**, learned the game and industry in Latrobe. A philosophical school of golf course architecture honors Philadelphia.

The state also wields enormous influence in the golf maintenance business. Legendary superintendents trees feature Pennsylvania roots.

and guided in-the-field decisions. Harrison spent 2023 at Torresdale on loan from his assistant superintendent role at Union League National Golf Club, the Union League's ballyhooed 27-hole, sand-supported course in southern New Jersey. McEvers (The Lido in Rome, Wisconsin) and Harrison (Union League National) were involved in mega-construction efforts before The Landing. "I have basically fallen into something you can't even dream of doing," Harrison says.

McEvers and Harrison, coincidentally, previously worked at Chicago Golf Club, although their time at the famed **C.B. Macdonald** design never overlapped. Union League director of agronomy **Scott Bordner** worked as Chicago Golf Club's superintendent before heading East to build what has quickly become a formidable turf department across three locations. Bordner strives to provide employees paths for professional growth, and constructing and growing in a new course like The Landing presented a huge résumé-boosting opportunity for the Union League team.

McEvers's and Harrison's presence eased the burden on Dooley, whose role as Torresdale's superintendent required bouncing between daily maintenance of the regulation course and The Landing in 2023. "I relied heavily on Chase and Mark," Dooley says. "Every day they were on this course overseeing the big details and the small details."

The project consumed more than 12,000 internal labor hours according to Dooley, with clearing debris from the site and grooming the subgrade to support golf turf presenting the most arduous assignments. The crew received external construction assistance from Mottin Golf, Middletown Sprinkler Company, Turf Equipment and Supply Company, and golf irrigation guru **Paul Roche**. "It has been a family affair," McEvers says. "Any way you could support each other, you did. You asked what my title is. ... It's whatever is not being done."

The team aspect of golf construc-

tion produces enduring memories and close bonds. The crew sodded its first green surround with Tahoma 31 Bermudagrass on May 10, 2023. The hole is No. 4 when playing the course clockwise and the green is shaped like ... well ... a pizza slice. The crew celebrated the occasion by ordering pizza from the nearby Brick House Bar & Grill. A day later, they seeded the green with a blend of L-93 XD, Piranha and Coho bentgrass.

The shaping, sodding and seeding of the green led to Harrison experiencing a revelation: a once-cluttered site was becoming a golf course. Harrison enthusiastically contacted Union League turf alum **Ryan Moore**, the director of agronomy at Hidden Creek (New Jersey) Golf Club, a week after the pizza party.

"When we had the first green shaped, you're thinking, 'Well, that's a green site,' and then there's grass on it," Harrison says. "I called Ryan, and I was like, 'Ryan we just seeded our first green. It's a week old!' We were then putting a fungicide on it to make sure it's damping off. It's like a recipe, it's awesome."

Crews hustled to seed one green per week. The surfaces average around 5,000 square feet and they are designed to accept shots from both directions originating from varying elevations. Holes will range from 100 to 125 yards for daily play. And holes can be played entirely on the ground. "There's an option to putt every one of those holes," McEvers says.

Shots will be trickling onto greens via a turf species not associated with Pennsylvania. The Landing features Tahoma 31 Bermudagrass fairways, tees and surrounds, meaning Dooley's team maintains warm- and cool-season fairways. The regulation course and practice facility has 31 acres of bentgrass/*Poa annua*/ryegrass fairway- and tee-height turf. Numerous Philadelphia-area courses have installed Bermudagrass on practice range tees, but The Landing is the first par-3 course in Pennsylvania with warm-season turf hitting surfaces.

Tahoma 31 sprigging commenced June 6, 2023, although a cold June raised concerns about obtaining the growth required to establish Bermudagrass within the project timeline. The final six acres were handled using a sod-to-sprig machine. A total of 8.86 acres of fairways and tees were sprigged, with another 1.84 acres of Tahoma 31 sod placed on surrounds. Establishing and maintaining Bermudagrass in a northern state offers tremendous learning opportunities for the Union League team.

"We developed a group of talking heads that all worked in Tahoma 31 and we're planning on doing annual developments where we all talk about things we have done, and what worked and what didn't work," McEvers says. "I'm looking forward to that stuff and being able to keep growing with how the turf is managed this far north. It's an opportunity more than anything."

Opportunities are the essence of par-3 courses. Union League officials view The Landing as a setting to introduce new players to the game while connecting generations in a fun, relaxed, creative environment. The course features an aeronautical-themed brand as windsocks are replacing flagsticks as aiming points. Northeast Philadelphia Airport borders Union League Torresdale, and members and staff frequently encounter small aircraft overhead.

What succeeds at one club is frequently emulated by others in markets oozing golf tradition like Pennsylvania. Don't be surprised if Bordner, Dooley, McEvers and Harrison field regular calls from turf neighbors seeking short course construction and turf establishment guidance.

"The whole purpose of this par-3 course is to get the younger generations who want to play or that social member who's on the fence of joining as full golf members hooked on a par-3 course and give them a chance to play the game from all perspectives and angles," Dooley says. "Hopefully we can then keep them for the next 50 years." **GCI**

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.



HOLE IN WHITE TOOL

Hole In White, the original Golf Cup Turf Whitener, has been a proven winner for many years to give the top 1 inch above the cup a bright white look as seen on television.

Two of the tools (about \$100 each) that the turf whitener can of paint fit into have been modified by adding extensions above the turf, so the paint and hair spray application are not affected by the wind. One tool was modified by adding a 7-inch outside diameter piece of solid ADS drainage pipe that was attached to the tool using painter's tape. The other tool had a piece of 5-inch outside diameter class 200 PVC irrigation pipe glued in place using PVC cement.

To help preserve and enhance the freshness of the turf whitener paint and to keep it from chipping all day long, All Weather Aqua Net Extra Super Hold Professional Hair Spray (\$40 for nine cans, including shipping) was applied after the paint had dried, which works great — the “purple” version is the only one that will not burn the turf. The PVC and ADS Pipes were already in inventory and installations took about 10 minutes each. Director of agronomy **Darren Gafford**, equipment manager **Tony Telesca**, and service crew members **Juan Gonzalez** and **Jose Ruiz** produce lots of great, practical ideas at The TwinEagles Club in Naples, Florida. **Jack Nicklaus**, **Jack Nicklaus II** and **Chad Goetz** are the Talon Course architects, and **Steve Smyers** designed the Eagle Course.



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

LIGHTBAR AND REAR-VIEW MIRROR

The TwinEagles Club's 36-hole golf maintenance staff starts early in Naples, Florida, especially during the winter golf season with short daylight hours. The 42-inch LED lightbar (\$110 — \$12 for the wiring harness, \$15 for the lightbar bracket, acquired locally from CA-RY Golf) idea came from 4WD pickup trucks, which the club has been using on turf vehicles for many years. They are used for early morning fly-mowing, bunker work, course and driving range setup, and other tasks, as their light beam travel is about 200 feet. There are four supervisor Club Cars, one Toro Workman, one shop mechanic's cart, one driving range setup cart and two course setup carts affixed with the lightbars. Depending on the vehicle type, the wiring to the battery and on/off switch (about one hour) is either ziptied along the framework, or is fed through the roof's tubing framework (about two hours). The gasoline carts that have pedal-starts draw down the engine battery in about 30 minutes, so the staff is reminded to drive around or to put the turf vehicle in neutral by holding the accelerator down for about 30 seconds to recharge the battery. On the Club Cars, a dash light rocker switch (\$13, Part #102869401) is installed that provides a professional installation appearance. The lightbars last about two to four years. Key-start vehicles idle to keep the engine battery charged. The 8-inch diameter, slightly convex rear-view mirror (about \$50) was acquired from WescoTurf, the local Toro distributor. The idea is another example of the innovative thinking deployed by director of agronomy **Darren Gafford** and equipment manager **Tony Telesca**.



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IT DOES HAPPEN TO YOU

I will never forget a day when I was on the fourth floor of Smyth Hall on the Virginia Tech University campus when **Dr. Marcus Alley** asked me what I was going to do after graduation. At the time I was debating options regarding assistant superintendent roles when I said, "I don't know, Dr. Alley, but what I do know is in 10 years you will hear **Johnny Miller** say my name on television and give kudos to me and my team for the wonderful conditions we presented at the United States Open."

That was 24 years ago, and there was not anything wrong with my goals and aspirations. But my life and career as a golf course superintendent took a different route.

When I arrived at Carolina Golf Club in 2005, we spent four years renovating and growing in the golf course. Needless to say, I didn't make it to many superintendent meetings and events during that period.

Once we reopened, I thought hosting a superintendent meeting would be a fantastic opportunity to display the changes to the golf course and our team's work while meeting my peers. I've been fortunate to host my peers on multiple occasions. The truth is those outings are more nerve-racking than a member-guest.

Of course, we want everything to look and play its best when the folks experiencing the golf course do what we do for a

living. I actually wrote about this several years ago (*Soap Box Derby*, December 2017) and complained about one particular aspect of course setup when it comes to hosting your peers. Please give it a read and take it to heart. We do not enjoy four-putting.

While at Carolina Golf Club, we hosted the North Carolina Amateur in 2014, which at that time was the largest event I had the privilege to be associated with. The North Carolina Amateur is conducted by the Carolinas Golf Association, and it was a lot of fun to collaborate closely with their team members to determine mowing heights and practices to test the best amateurs in the state.

Four years later, Carolina Golf Club co-hosted the 2018 United States Mid-Amateur. We worked closely with USGA agronomists for a couple of years to produce championship conditions for a national championship. It was a career moment I will forever cherish.

Pushing yourself and your team to go above and beyond to achieve results worthy of such acclaim produces dopamine that some people in this business thrive on. There are people in the industry who host high-profile events on an annual or rotational basis.

To be honest, one of the things that appealed to me about my recent job change involved Idle Hour Country Club hosting the 118th Southern Amateur Championship this year. Conducted by the Southern

Golf Association, which was founded in 1902, the Southern Amateur has been won by the likes of **Bobby Jones, Perry Adair and Watts Gunn**, along with **Billy Joe Patton, Vinnie Giles, Hubert Green, Lanny Wadkins and Ben Crenshaw**.

More recent past champions include **Justin Leonard, Webb Simpson and Harris English**. It's one of the oldest amateur championships in the United States and the world. Hosting an event with such a respected pedigree is by far the closest I will come to my student proclamation.

But it's not about me. It's the rising to the occasion of the challenges. It's watching your team take pride in their work and going the extra mile. It's the memories you make during the stressful times leading up to and during the week of these events that make it all worthwhile.

Perhaps you work at a facility that will never host a state, regional or national championship. Perhaps you will not even host a city tournament. There are multiple ways to circle one or more events on the calendar and treat it like your U.S. Open. Local tournaments, PGA chapter or section pro-ams, club championships, member-guests or even hosting next month's gathering of the turf care professionals can be your big day.

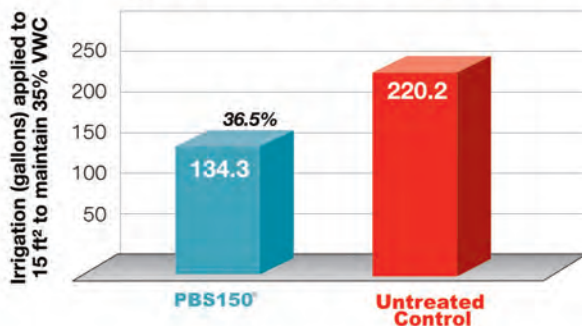
Whatever it is, embrace the challenge, remain calm under pressure, enjoy the moment, and sleep well knowing the course could not have been better. **GCI**



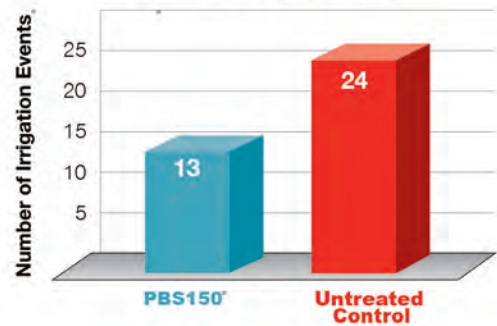
MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG, is the superintendent at Idle Hour Country Club in Lexington, Kentucky, and past president of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on X at @IHCCGreenkeeper.



PBS150 resulted in a **36.5%** reduction in irrigation water consumption



Irrigation events required to maintain 35% VWC



Evaluation of Two Soil Surfactants for Soil Water Management of Creeping Bentgrass on a Wettable Clay Loam Rootzone During a Dry-down Period

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

PBS150® is the **FIRST** surfactant in the turfgrass industry to have peer-reviewed, published research to prove and **quantify water savings**.

Penn State University research study showed that creeping bentgrass plots treated with **PBS150** resulted in a **36.5% reduction in irrigation water consumption** over a 63-day dry-down period versus plots only treated with irrigation water.

Turfgrass plots that were treated with 3 applications of **PBS150** prior to the 63-day dry-down period required **40% less irrigation events** versus untreated plots that only received irrigation with no soil surfactant.



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CHAMPIONSHIP SPOTLIGHT

RETURNS TO VALHALLA

John Ballard, CGCS, has a motivated team, new zoysiagrass fairways and ownership committed to showcasing the Bluegrass State at the 2024 PGA Championship. He also has an exciting new BASF chemistry product on the ground to help him manage disease.

By Pat Jones


John Ballard wants to talk about everyone but himself as he approaches a career milestone: hosting the PGA Championship at Valhalla Golf Course.

John spoke at length about the remarkable ownership team that's given him tremendous support, including a new agronomy center and the resources necessary to make sweeping improvements to the state's best-known course. He went on about every member of his team and how important each person is to the success of their operation. He's a humble guy. That's why, to start off, we're going to talk about John.

John Ballard is a homegrown Tennessean who set out to be an architect, changed his mind and then happened to notice a sign that said "Turf" his freshman year on the University of Tennessee campus. "I'd played a lot of junior golf as a kid and thought, 'This looks cool.'" That glimmer of interest turned into an internship under Frank Turner at Cherokee CC in Knoxville, and he was off to the races.

As he progressed, Louisville became home for John and his wife Christy as he landed first at the venerable Audubon CC. From there, he moved to the University of Louisville's newly acquired golf club in 2016. Just a few years later, his friend Roger Meier left Valhalla to build the new PGA Frisco courses. The PGA of America reached out about joining the Valhalla team, and he said, "Heck yes."

Since then, it's been a whirlwind that's included building a great staff and culture, helping the new owners "Kentuckyize" the property, switching to zoysiagrass fairways and prepping for the club's fourth PGA Championship. He clearly loves it, but he hopes to shine a spotlight on his owners, his people and his course. And, thanks in part to his partnership with BASF, that's exactly what he'll be doing before, during and after championship week in mid-May.



CHAMPIONSHIP COURSES ARE A

TEAM SPORT.

What made you want to do it forever when you did that first internship?

It was just the environment. Like a lot of guys, being outdoors and in that element was very appealing to me. My first internship was with my (now) good friend Frank Turner, and we laugh about it to this day. It wasn't what we did as much as the environment we did it in that was appealing.

Did you have a real career plan in mind?

Not at all. I did some extra internships through school. I went out to Colorado and worked at the Club at Cordillera and then went to Pinehurst. Postgrad, I had a lot of opportunities, but I struck up a good relationship with the then-super at Audubon, Steve Barber, and took a leap of faith.

What did you learn from Steve Barber?

He was probably the first guy who instilled in me what it means to have buy-in from your crew. That's often more important than the agronomic piece of it. He was a younger guy and he also really taught me a lot about how to manage older employees, which can be a tough thing to do.

So what's the secret?

I'm convinced when you invest in people – old or young – and know who they are and what they're doing, then the managing becomes sort of secondary. When you get to know them and find out about what their interests are, then maybe you'll understand more about what motivates them to get things done on the golf course.

How has that basic philosophy evolved over time?

We do a lot of collaboration here and it's not the John Ballard show, right? It would be easy to just tell everyone what to do. Instead, we talk a lot about things. We walk through stuff, so I feel like our team comes in every day, and they're well-equipped.

Tell us about your team.

Our staff will be 38, all in, for this year. For us, it all starts with Phil Vineyard, my lead assistant. He's another Tennessee guy, and he's had a lot of experience working other events, including three years at TPC Sawgrass and the Players. I lean on him quite a bit.

What sets the Valhalla team apart?

It's all about a team mentality. It's not a crew. It's a team. They don't work for me; they work with me. That's the philosophy from top to bottom.

— Phil Vineyard, *Lead Assistant Superintendent*

Next are my two assistants, Justin Wilt and Payton Hobby. Justin was an intern who really knocked it out of the park so he was my first call when we had a position open. Payton worked with Kasey Kauff down at Trinity Forest so he really understands zoysia and how to keep it firm and fast. That collaboration piece helps us out a lot. Also, we have six AITs, four interns and an experienced group of H2B guys.

Describe John Ballard for people who don't know him.

He really cares about his employees, I can tell you that. He wants to make sure we have everything we need to do our job and we're fully rested. I consider him a friend. It's nice to work for a guy you know has your back, and he does.

— Jason Newman, *Equipment Manager*

Last but not least, there's Jason Newman, our equipment manager, who's been here 30 years. He's the most fit, interesting guy you'll ever meet in your life. He's been there for all the tournaments, so that's a real comfort for me. When I start getting worked up about stuff, he reminds me that this too shall pass and calms me down.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE BEAUTY:

PREPARING VALHALLA FOR THE SPOTLIGHT.

What will people notice at Valhalla this year?

The new owners came in and wanted to make an immediate impact. They knew they had a good golf course, but they also wanted Valhalla to be a great club. They really wanted to 'theme' the property and give it an authentic Kentucky feel – horses, bourbon, limestone, etc. – so a lot of the changes were around the perimeter of the course instead of in-play.

Agronomically speaking, what are the big factors?

The biggest thing is the PGA invested in regrassing from bentgrass to Zeon zoysia on tees and fairways in 2021. That was a huge commitment. It's a great surface, and it also tells a very positive story about sustainability. But as good as that zoysia is, we've got to get it woke up and online.

You're getting a chance to try the new Aramax™ Intrinsic® brand fungicide from BASF on a pretty wide scale. Tell us about that.

We have a great relationship with Gary Myers, who'd been an assistant here at Valhalla way back when before he went to BASF. He brought the idea of trying Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide] to us and reviewed the chemistry. It's a new product, but it's still the same classes of chemistry we'd use for large patch, so we felt very comfortable using it.

We knew it also isn't only a stand-alone, so we're making a couple of apps of Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide] and a complementary product in the fall and a couple again in the spring. I tend to be pretty careful about stuff, but it became really clear that BASF had really positive intentions and would be there to support us. It was an easy decision.



Current Valhalla Superintendent John Ballard (right), with former Valhalla Superintendent Mark Wilson.

What's the trial format?

If you're dealing with zoysiagrass, you're tempted to say it's bulletproof. It can be, but the one thing that can really get you is large patch. Zoysia is notoriously slow for recovery from large patch damage. Staying in front of that is extremely important. So we're always watching soil temperatures and monitoring to make sure we make our applications in the right format.

When we partnered with BASF and Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide] this past fall, we put them at the front end of two applications – so they were the first of two apps about three weeks apart. In the spring, Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide] will be the last one to go out before the championship.

So far, the results have been great. We have seen – honestly – little to none in the way of large patch thus far. Springtime can be a little trickier because it's warmer and muggier. So far, I've been very pleased with what I've seen.

It's early March now. Once soil temps get up just a little more, we'll make that second app of Aramax [Intrinsic brand fungicide]. But so far, it has done an outstanding job. We are very clean, and when you think about 30 acres of zoysiagrass to cover and having no breakthrough, that says a lot.



How have you tailored your spray program to prep for the championship and the rest of your year?

We're thinking about this championship – no question – but this is also the beginning of the season. We've got to get through the entire season. We're going spray for take-all patch apps, early season DMIs for fairy ring and probably the number one thing will be PGRs. Regulating growth is going to be paramount to our success. We need recovery, but we don't want them blowing out of the ground. We've been working on a lot of models and sort of working the program backwards from the Sunday before championship week.

What else is in the spray mix for you?

Maxtima is an important part of our DMI rotation. We've also used Navicon, Lexicon and Xzemplar. When you choose what's going in the tank, you're looking for quality products and a result-driven approach. Also, for me, it's about the support. Price is important, but I know BASF will stand behind the products that we put out. And if there's an issue, they will fix it. That right there is enough.

What are your hopes for the championship experience this year?

Anyone who gives a dollar or volunteers their time, I want them to walk away feeling like it was a good experience. Hopefully, they think we run a pretty good ship and take good care of our people. Ultimately, we want to put on a good show, sell a lot of tickets and solidify the return of another major championship for our new owners. We hope the PGA looks favorably on Valhalla in the future.



SCAN HERE

to read an extended conversation with John plus two bonus interviews with Valhalla Lead Assistant Superintendent, Phil Vineyard and Equipment Manager, Jason Newman.

Always read and follow label directions.

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