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Renee Geyer launched a turf career at a famous club in her native Ohio. She bet big on herself and is thriving in the Pacific Northwest. How can you ditch your comfort zone, too?



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On the cover: Canterwood Golf & Country Club
superintendent Renee Geyer. Photograph by
Rick Dahms.

VOL. 36 NO. 11

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IS YOUR WORKPLACE A BIRDIE?

Golf boasts rankings for nearly everything. Best courses in every imaginable subset. Best players in every possible demographic. Best drivers for high-, mid- and low-handicappers. Best course hot dogs.

The lists are staples of consumer golfer media. They generate clicks, likes, engagements and views, and still sell magazines. Debates ensue when they are released. Getting ranked boosts facility and personal pride — and ego. Shrewd companies and courses use gaudy rankings to create competitive advantages.

One area of golf has remained relatively ranking-free over the years: industry workplaces.

We're changing this in 2025.

Golf Course Industry has forged a partnership with Best Companies Group to create a list of "Best Courses to Work" in the industry. Best Companies Group has extensive experience partnering with people-focused organizations and brands, including GIE Media's *Lawn & Landscape* and *Pest Control Technology*, to produce thousands of employee engagement lists, rankings and surveys.

Results and accompanying profiles of highly ranked courses will appear in our June 2025 issue. We're stoked about beginning this project. Great content producers are like great superintendents. The search for better ways to satisfy consumers never stops. Our team relishes integrating new content programs and storytelling tactics into our editorial playbook. Before we reach June, we need your course's help. Producing the rankings and subsequent stories requires industry participation.

Connections, schmoozing, reputation or bribes won't propel a facility to the top of our "Best Courses to Work" list. Participating in the program involves having your course's employees complete the Best Companies Group survey on the following areas: leadership; corporate culture and communications; role satisfaction; work environment; relationship with supervisor; training, development and resource; pay and benefits; and overall engagements. Companies landing must meet an overall score threshold to crack the rankings.

Registration opened Oct. 29 on *Golf Course Industry's* digital and social media channels. The easiest way to obtain the link is to subscribe to our newsletters. You can also email the address below and we'll send you the link. Registration closes Dec. 27.

The program is exclusively for golf courses. The rankings will not include suppliers, distributors, universities, industry associations, contractors, governments and others. Courses in the United States with at least 10 full- and part-time combined employees are eligible to participate. Once a course registers, Best Companies Group arranges to have their employees surveyed. Best Companies Group also distributes a human resources questionnaire that captures benefits, perks and programs that improve the employee experience.

We strongly recommend courses and clubs delegate ambassadors to coordinate the program. If you're a superintendent bracing for a busy winter, send the registration link to a human resources employee, general manager, company executive or club official with access to the entire workforce.

Why take time and effort to participate? Labor remains challenge No. 1a, 1b and 1c throughout the industry. Recognition on a national, metrics-based list as a "Best Course to Work" can help cut recruiting costs and time, and improve retention rates for current employees by 14 percent, according to Best Companies Group research. Instead of telling potential and existing employees you're an employer of choice, you can *show* them a glossy magazine with your course's name in it. Courses will have earned this honor because it demonstrates employees feel appreciated and valued.

We believe this has the potential to become the most impactful rankings in golf. People make golf the greatest game of all and developing a loyal team transforms a course into a must-play spot. A business invested in treating employees awesomely is cooler than a layout on desirable land with tasty hot dogs at the turn.

June 2025 can't arrive soon enough. 🏌️



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GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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

Vol. 56 No. 11

GIE Media, Inc.
5811 Canal Road
Valley View, Ohio 44125
Phone: 800-456-0707
Fax: 216-525-0515

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Golf Course Industry is a member of:

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Fundraising for the future

By Kelsie Horner

The Super-Scratch Foundation, founded in 2020, has created a way for amateur golfers and superintendents to come together for a bigger cause — the future of golf industry staff. The organization is a prime example of seeing an industry issue and taking a step to help solve it.

“If you put 100 superintendents in a room right now and ask them what the biggest hurdle in the industry is, I guarantee about 98 percent of them are going to say staffing and future staffing,” co-vice president **Timothy Zurybida** says.

The Super-Scratch Foundation is an organization founded by a variety of turf professionals who share a passion for the industry and its future — and that’s why they created an annual superintendent-amateur tournament fundraiser for student scholarships.

The foundation hosted its fifth annual superintendent-amateur tournament, the Super-Scratch Invitational, Oct. 17 at Huntingdon Valley Country Club in suburban Philadelphia.

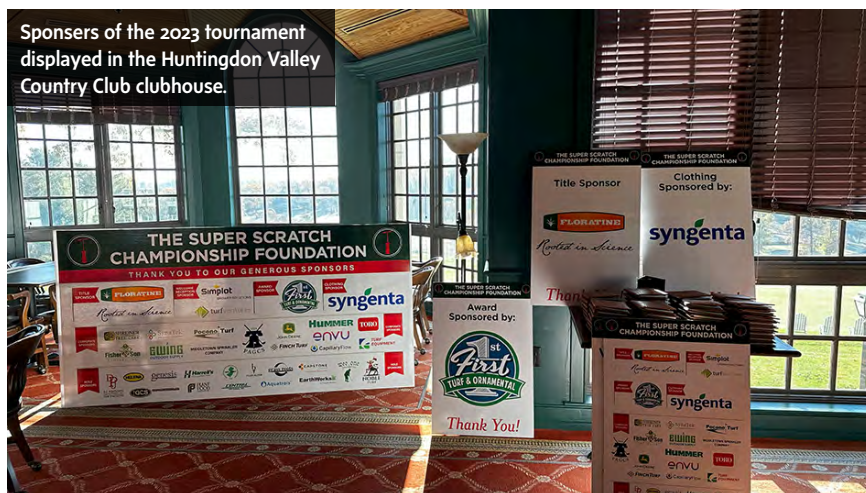
Huntingdon Valley was once home to the long-running Lynnewood Hall Challenge Cup, an amateur tournament. After the tournament was no longer held at the club, members had a desire to bring back an amateur tournament, says Zurybida, himself a club member. Planning began and each superintendent was paired with an amateur player. This year’s roster included a nationwide presence with teams joining from Florida, Maryland, Rhode Island, New York, Texas and beyond.

“I just love the camaraderie,” co-vice president **Scott Bordner** says. “There’s 40 teams coming in from all over the country with a member, and that is so unique that the superintendent is playing with

Collin Harvey and Stephen Dressel of St. David's Golf Club pose after winning the 2023 tournament.



Sponsors of the 2023 tournament displayed in the Huntingdon Valley Country Club clubhouse.



a scratch golfer from their club. Those are the people that can take that message in that camaraderie and say, ‘Hey, these people are all doing something that’s trying to help the industry and doing something selfless that’s for the next generation behind them.’”

The first tournament, held in 2020, featured 12 teams and raised \$1,500. Donations have doubled each year. Last year’s tournament raised \$32,500 and this year’s donations were expected to

reach \$90,000.

Andrew Mason, president of the non-profit, says the foundation is doing its best to encourage people to enter the industry. “It’s a great career,” he says. “More people need to get into it. And if we don’t push and do something, we’re not going to have the quality of golf courses we all want, and we’re certainly not going to have the amount of golf courses out there with those good conditions that we want, unless we get more people into it.”

Fifteen students are receiving scholarships and six universities — including Wisconsin, Penn State, Maryland, Rutgers, Delaware Valley and UMass Amherst — are receiving funds.

The tournament's title sponsor is Floratine, with gift sponsors of Syngenta and Toro, and reception sponsors of Turf Ventures and Simplot. The tournament now has more than 20 corporate sponsors and 15 hole sponsors.

Bordner, the director of agronomy for the Union League of Philadelphia, says people in the industry have been a key to the foundation's growth.

"It was just a regional event. Once we started spreading it more national, we had a lot of people that were just willing to jump on and give us a hand," he says. "That's what really gave the traction."

Mason, the winner of the 2013 Pennsylvania Open Championship and an avid golfer, says the foundation hopes to double or even triple donations next year. The organization's goal is to donate in some proportion to every single student enrolled in school to become a superintendent in the golf industry. "I think if we are able to get the right people involved and make the right strides, we can give to every single student, in some capacity, some type of scholarship value in the future," Mason says. "I think we're helping the next generation. I think we're helping memberships that don't really realize it yet."

Want to get involved? Donations can be made on the Super-Scratch Foundation website (www.superscratchfoundation.org) and you can request to be invited to attend the tournament. Super-Scratch will also host another superintendent-amateur event in March 2025 at the PGA West Stadium Course in La Quinta, California.

"The top five teams will probably come to Philly, all expenses paid to the event, next fall too," Mason says. "We're going to build these kind of mini-qualifiers so that we can raise money from different areas of the country."

Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry's assistant editor.

Tartan Talks 100

Golf talk permeated **Cynthia Dye McGarey's** childhood in Urbana, Ohio. That doesn't mean she was a tap-in to follow her father, **Roy Dye**, and uncle **Pete Dye** into the family business.

"It wasn't something that I aspired to," she says on episode No. 100 of the *Tartan Talks* podcast. "I was an athlete, and I liked to play sports. Going to dad's office wasn't something I desired."

Cynthia started her career as a landscape architect. In the late 1980s, the game and industry she spent her childhood around entered her life again as she joined cousin **Perry Dye's** golf design business as a consultant. By the early 2000s, she launched her own golf architecture firm, Dye Golf Designs.

Becoming a golf architect has allowed Cynthia to travel the world — and she often brought the five children she raised to sites. One of her sons, **Matt McGarey**, is continuing the family golf design legacy by executing projects alongside his mother.

"Our family has been in it for over 100 years," says Cynthia, whose grandfather **Paul F. Dye** designed the original nine holes at Urbana Country Club in 1922, "and we have the fourth generation coming on. The future's bright. I wish there were even more of us involved in it. It's not the biggest field in the world, but I think it will continue for us."

To hear more family stories from Cynthia, visit the Superintendent Radio Network page of popular podcast distribution platforms.



▲ Dye McGarey



PEOPLE NEWS

The GCSAA selected longtime turf, club management and industry association leader **Pat Finlen** as its 2025 Col. John Morley Award recipient. The association also announced PACE Turf founders **Dr. Wendy Gelemler** and **Dr. Larry Stowell** as its 2025 Outstanding Contribution Award recipients. ... Four superintendents were selected as recipients of the 2024 Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards by the GCSAA. **Mark Claburn** of Tierra Verde Golf Club in Arlington, Texas, received the Communications and Outreach Award. Healthy Land Stewardship Award was awarded to **Steven Tierney** of Golfpark Zurichsee in Wangen, Switzerland. The Innovative Conservation Award went to **Kevin Ackerman** of Royal Wood and Country Club in Naples, Florida, and the Natural Resource Conservation Award went to **Jim Pavonetti** of Fairview Country Club in Greenwich, Connecticut. ... Envu Turf & Ornamentals hired **Dr. Adam Gore** as a Green Solutions Team member and added **Karlee Kitchel** and **Dr. Lindsey Hoffman Chappell** as key account managers. ... Aquatrols hired **David Libby** as Northeast territory manager and **Kate Garassino** as marketing manager for the golf market and the company's new sports field marketing team. ... Bernhard and Company made two new senior hires with the appointment of **Lee Wade** as chief operating officer and **Vitor Gomes** as production manager. ... Ten GCSAA members were selected for the Bernhard Academy Links to Success United Kingdom 2025. They will attend the 2025 BTME conference in Harrogate, England, in January. The group includes **Brent Downs**, **Tyler Miget**, **Matt Gourlay**, **Cole Miedema**, **Matthew Overton**, **Emily Casey**, **Matt Earhart**, **Clay Payne**, **Ryan Franklin** and **Carol Turner**.

COURSE NEWS

A multi-million-dollar renovation of Ocean Point golf course at Fripp Island Golf & Beach Resort in South Carolina is finished. Dye Designs Group led the modernization of the original **George Cobb** layout. ... Legacy Golf Course at the 19 in Mason City, Iowa, completed a major renovation effort that started in 2022 following the purchase of the course by the Pritchard family. The Legacy, formerly Mason City Country Club, is a 1915 **Tom Bendelow** design. ... After two and a half years of course renovation, San Juan Oaks Golf Club in Hollister, California, reopened for daily-fee play. Developer Third Millennium Partners oversaw the project from start to finish, with insights from golf architect **Gene Bates**, who designed the original course in 1996 along with **Fred Couples**. ... Troon was selected to manage Sparrows Point Country Club, a private club in Baltimore, Maryland, as well as Le Triomphe Golf and Country Club, a private club in Broussard, Louisiana. ... Troon is also partnering with Tubac Golf Resort & Spa, Rancho Mañana Golf Club and Sedona Golf Resort. As part of this agreement, the three properties will benefit from Troon's services, including increased visibility through Troon's marketing platforms. ... After undergoing a comprehensive agronomic restoration, the King & Bear Golf Course at World Golf Village in St. Augustine, Florida, reopened last month. The five-month, \$2.5 million restoration, led by MacCurrah Golf, focused on improving the course's playability while preserving its original character. ... The Club at Eaglebrooke, a semi-private facility in Lakeland, Florida,

will undergo a golf course renovation led by Mondragon Golf beginning in April 2025. The project is expected to take six months and will focus on the course's greens, while replacing bridges and bulkheads throughout the property. ... The Cabot Collection announced its investment in Lofoten Links. The course is built into the rugged, seaside landscape of Norway's remote Lofoten Islands.

INDUSTRY BUZZ

Sipcam Agro launched ETQ FLEX, a proprietary complex blend that provides maximum protection against heat and drought stress on turf, and complements their Enhanced Turf Quality technology line of ETQ products. ... Albaugh released its 2023 Sustainability Report, "Our Journey is Rooted in Growth." The report focuses on the company's progress in its sustainability journey: improving safety, strengthening corporate governance, and driving innovation with sustainable solutions to boost crop yields. ... Spectrum Technologies recently introduced new measurement technology for direct soil measurement of pH & EC with a single probe. Spectrum's new glass-free sensor design provides easy and lab-accurate soil measurement via Bluetooth connection to mobile devices. ... Valley Green, an Advanced Turf Solutions company, will begin operating under the Advanced Turf Solutions name starting Jan. 1, 2025.

United States Postal Service

Statement of Ownership, Management and Circulation (Requester Publications Only)

1) Publication Title: Golf Course Industry		
2) Publication Number: 5836		
3) Filing Date: 45565		
4) Issue Frequency: Monthly		
5) Number of Issues Published Annually: 12		
6) Annual Subscription Price: Free to Qualified		
7) Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not printer): 5811 Canal Rd., Valley View, OH 44125		
8) Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publication (Not Printer): 5811 Canal Rd., Valley View, OH 44125		
9) Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor (Do not leave blank) - Publisher: Guy Cipriano, 5811 Canal Rd., Valley View, OH 44125; Editor: Guy Cipriano, 5811 Canal Rd., Valley View, OH 44125; Managing Editor: Matt LaWell, 5811 Canal Rd., Valley View, OH 44125		
10) Owner: Christopher Foster & Richard J.W. Foster, 5811 Canal Rd., Valley View, OH 44125		
11) Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: None		
12) Tax Status (For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates): N/A		
13) Publication Title: Golf Course Industry	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
14) Issue Date for Circulation Data Below: 45536	18,104	18,012
15) Extent and Nature of Circulation		
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)		
b. Legitimate Paid and/or Requested Distribution (By mail and outside the mail)		
(1) Outside County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541. (Include direct written request from recipient, telemarketing, and Internet requests from recipient, paid subscriptions including nominal rate subscriptions, employer requests, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies.)	14,213	14,347
(2) In-County Paid/Requested Mail Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541. (Include direct written request from recipient, telemarketing, and Internet requests from recipient, paid subscriptions including nominal rate subscriptions, employer requests, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies.)	0	0
(3) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid or Requested Distribution Outside USPS*	142	202
(4) Requested Copies Distributed by Other Mail Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)	0	0
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4))	14,355	14,549
d. Non-requested Distribution (By mail and outside the mail)		
(1) Outside County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541 (include sample copies, requests over 3 years old, requests induced by a premium, bulk sales and requests including association requests, names obtained from business directories, lists, and other sources)	3,225	3,039
(2) In-County Nonrequested Copies Stated on PS Form 3541 (include sample copies, requests over 3 years old, requests induced by a premium, bulk sales and requests including association requests, names obtained from business directories, lists, and other sources)	0	0
(3) Nonrequested Copies Distributed Through the USPS by Other Classes of Mail (e.g., First-Class Mail, nonrequestor copies mailed in excess of 10% limit mailed at Standard Mail® or Package Services rates)	0	0
(4) Nonrequested Copies Distributed Outside the Mail (include pickup stands, trade shows, showrooms, and other sources)	13	0
e. Total Nonrequested Distribution (Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3), and (4))	3,238	3,039
f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and e)	17,593	17,588
g. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4, (page #3))	511	424
h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)	18,104	18,012
i. i. Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (15c divided by 15f times 100)	81.60%	82.72%
16) Electronic Copy Circulation	Not Reported	
17) Publication of Statement of Ownership for a Requester Publication is required and will be printed in the November 2024 issue of this publication.		
18) Guy Cipriano, Publisher	Date:	9/30/2024

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DIVE A LITTLE DEEPER!

GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY
beyond the page

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

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LISTEN



WATCH

Lara Arias

TURFGRASS AGRONOMY & SERVICES

Lara Arias is one of the most respected figures in the turf industry. As superintendent at Marco Simone in Italy, she hosted three consecutive Italian Opens from 2021 to 2023 as well as the 2023 Ryder Cup—the latter while she was 32 weeks pregnant. Recently, she was part of the international corps of volunteers who supported the Solheim Cup at Robert Trent Jones Golf Club in Gainesville, Virginia.

She is also one of the busiest figures in her chosen profession. Now an agronomist and consultant for Turfgrass Agronomy & Services, which is headquartered in Spain, Arias spends plenty of time on the road. “I really like my job,” she says. “I find it very interesting to get to travel and work on different golf courses.”

This season saw Arias splitting time between Italy and France.

“This summer, we have converted cool-season fairways to Bermudagrass on a golf course in the south of France” she says, “and I was in charge of the process, so I’m working on different projects.”

Arias’s effort at the Solheim Cup was a homecoming of sorts. She spent part of 2016 at the club as an intern. She then completed internships at TPC Scottsdale and Quail Hollow, where she helped support the 2017 PGA Championship. All told, she spent 18 months in the United States.

Appearing on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast with host **Rick Woelfel**, Arias describes the time she spent in the country as “the best experience of my life.”

“I really had a great time over there,” she says. “It was really important to be on a golf course with cool-season grasses and another golf course with warm-season grasses.”

Arias did have to adapt to different ways of doing things, though. One of those adjustments involved the length of her workday, which her family in Spain found difficult to fathom.

“My family didn’t understand why people in the United States work ‘too many hours,’” she recalls. She told them: “Everything is unbelievable. I am having a great time. I am learning a lot. We are working very hard and many hours, but this is very important for my career. I am learning many things. You go over to the United States, you want to learn.”

Arias says traveling internationally has allowed her to grow personally as well as

professionally.

“Every time I go to another country, I’m learning a new language,” she says, noting that she speaks four languages. “For me, this experience in the industry is also about language and different cultures. How we can grow up in the industry and how we can grow up as a person in the world?”

When Arias arrived at Robert Trent Jones Golf Club the Tuesday of Solheim Cup week, it was something of a homecoming and a chance to reunite with superintendent **Scott Furlong**.

“We had a great time, a great week,” she says. “Everyone was doing a great job. The golf course was in really good condition. I was glad I was there.”

Arias spent much of the week on bunker duty.

“I was taking care of the golf course like my own golf course, because I wanted to see the golf course in its best condition,” she says.

As hard as the crew worked during the week, it was also a time for them to celebrate the turf industry.

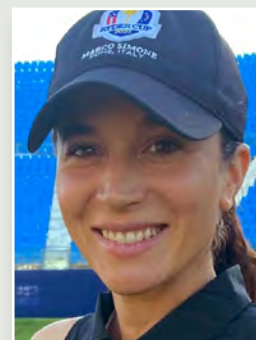
“Everyone had fun,” Arias says. “We had many people from the United States but also from Europe. Everyone, I think, enjoyed the week. I did.”

Now the mother of a daughter, Arias is committed to maintaining her career and inspiring other women in the industry.

“I love (my daughter),” she says, “but also I love my work, and I think for the industry it’s very important that I find a good balance between home and the baby and also keep working. I love my job, and I try to be better every day.” 🌱



Every time I go to another country, I’m learning a new language. For me, this experience in the industry is also about language and different cultures.”



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





GUT CHECK

When's the last time you had a serious conversation with your close friends about life? Your hopes and your fears? About what they don't know about you that's important to you? A talk in which you allowed yourself to travel outside your comfort zone to deal with real life issues of health, love and aging?

Heavy topics for a golf course superintendent, but it's part of the life we all live — or ought to, anyway, even if only occasionally. Which is why I come away from a recent gathering of golf friends impressed more than ever about the people I share this game with.

I've just returned from an annual three-day golf outing: 16 longtime friends, all of them folks I met through the golf world, when as architecture editor of *Golfweek* magazine I put together a national panel of volunteer course evaluators and we began taking organized, multi-day trips together for the ostensible purpose of learning how to “rate” courses for our various top-100 lists.

I thought I was building a team of course raters. In fact, I was — quite inadvertently — building a framework for lifelong bonds among fellow travelers. Golf was the immediate incentive, but it gradually became clearer that the relationships transcended a sport and became powerful ties of friendship.

Long after some of us left that magazine-sponsored ratings team, the relationships continued to blossom. Each year we renewed those bonds, deepened the friendships and broadened the scope of those ties through divorce, illness, family woes, financial hardship, retirement for some and whatever else life brings.

Still, I sensed something was missing. Guys can be funny about that. I've been in a men's book group for the past 17 years of

monthly gatherings. We started with a core of six, added a few as two of the original group left, and expanded out again. When one of our founders developed cancer and received treatment, we'd follow his cue of not talking about his health and simply kept to our routine. Then one meeting he didn't show up, and we found out the next day from his wife that he had died the week before.

That's when it dawned on me that we needed to break from our routine at each monthly meeting and take time to go around the room and let people know what was really going on with our lives; that we needed to let others know something about us that we were proud of, or had been quiet about but that was important to our own self.

At this latest gathering of golfers, out on the far end of Long Island, we set aside time one morning for a similar session. Suspicions or humoring of the occasion were quickly dissipated as soon as the first speaker started.

An hour and a half later, we were all kind of stunned and humbled with the range of emotions and feelings conveyed as we went around the room. One person detailed a family confrontation with autism. Others spoke about the lingering pain of divorce proceedings that had become public spectacles. Some talked about health scares, or the struggle to balance a commitment to work with the time required to embrace the family. Another spoke about the difficulty of ensuring a

stable financial future in the family business for offspring who were severely challenged emotionally and vocationally.

Things got very heavy when an attendee talked about the wasted years of a prolonged drug and alcohol addiction — which he had finally left behind and was able to keep behind him, in no small part due to the camaraderie of the group. Another fellow, whom we all knew to be reticent to discuss his personal life, opened up about his fear of aging alone and watching friends pass on while he had effectively isolated himself in circumstances that he was now starting to rethink.

Afterward, we all embraced. Ninety minutes of joking to ward off the tears had clearly made an impact on all of us. We were soon outside, ready to play more golf. But by then the game had receded in importance, or at least it was obvious to all that our friendships had deepened significantly in the aftermath of that morning's conversation. It was the kind of open talking that more men need to do more often. Expressing vulnerability provides a powerful moment of self-awareness and empathy with others.

In a way that is seldom discussed, golf provides occasion for guys to gather and talk about more than the game. Buddy trips need not be just about sports, drinking, carousing and playing 36 holes per day. They can also provide a setting for dealing with the tough, painful and important aspects of life. 🌱



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



ARE EVEN BRIGHTER DAYS STILL AHEAD?

For those who believe in silver linings and never wasting a crisis, golf can point to the COVID-19 pandemic as Exhibit A. The numbers, as tallied by the National Golf Foundation, tell a story of growth from what initially seemed to be devastation in the five years since the beginning of the pandemic. What they don't reveal is what happens next for superintendents.

First, the state of the union, as it were: "On a national level, year-to-date play continues to trend ahead of 2023, when there were more rounds played at U.S. golf courses than any other year in history," according to the National Golf Foundation in a recent report (*Does Golf Have a Capacity Problem?*).

The big question: Will it continue? The NGF sees encouraging signs, saying that total play is "at or close to record levels with no signs of declining demand."

The numbers paint a promising picture. Since 2022:

- There has been a 4 percent uptick in the youth category (ages 6 to 17)
- Women golfers are up 9 percent
- Golfers of color have increased their play by 8 percent
- Off-course participation has grown at a 4 percent pace

What's more, latent demand — which measures potential growth among those who say they are "very interested" in the sport — increased by 1.5 million to a total of 22.4 million, according to the NGF's 2024 Graffis Report. The keys are recruiting enthusiastic new golfers to play more and retaining

them at whatever level of skill they seek.

One should also overlay on this snapshot the fact that the number of golf courses across the United States continues to shrink, though at a slower pace than we've seen in the past, meaning that substantially more golfers are playing on fewer courses.

What do these trends suggest for superintendents? Five things for your planning:

1. The pipeline of turf-care professionals needed to sustain courses hosting a new generation of golfers needs to continue to grow. And that pipeline must continue the tradition of superintendents being some of the smartest and hardest-working members of any golf staff.

2. Turf care and maintenance capabilities, along with innovative operational tactics, advanced technologies and creative turf care alternatives, need to continue to expand to keep pace with increased demand. Newcomers to golf are being attracted to the game's most enduring attributes; most enticing is a friendly walk through a beautiful setting with good friends.

3. Progressive consideration and analysis of funding sources need to happen throughout a facility's entire organization. Each facility should develop and maintain a sources- and uses-of-funds analysis to ensure that the club's assets are replaced in a timely manner.

Baling wire and duct tape have always been a poor solution.

Courses and facilities that have caught up — in most cases — on long-deferred capital spending must use the COVID-induced reset to use a full array of funding sources from capital calls on members and owners to debt and planned giving programs.

4. Superintendents must update their capital reserve plans to ensure old and outdated equipment can be replaced on a timely and cost-effective schedule. Nothing turns enthusiastic new golfers away from any course faster than poor playing conditions. People who know nothing of turf care and agronomic science know immediately when the facility and its golf course maintenance and play equipment are in poor working order.

5. Superintendents must be intense and savvy recruiters of talent. Building a team that has the knowledge and experience to work faster and smarter requires advance planning and on-going coaching. Golf course superintendents can help themselves with enthusiastic and informed coaching of new crew members. To the new recruits, the superintendent is the keeper of the game.

After years of golf suffering through economic hardships and flagging participation, we now live in the sport's halcyon days. Let's hope that they continue. We can also dedicate ourselves to the work that ensures that they do. 🌱



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.

IN BLOOM

PART OF WHAT MAKES MUIRFIELD VILLAGE SO SUCCESSFUL IS A STEADY STREAM OF YOUNG TURF PROS TRAINED FROM INTERNS TO ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENTS.

By **Matt LaWell**



Some golf course maintenance teams might be hobbled after the departure of a veteran assistant superintendent. Not the talented team at Muirfield Village Golf Club in Dublin, Ohio.

Even before assistant superintendent **Sam Montgomery** headed to Kinsale Golf & Fitness Club in nearby Powell, where he is now director of agronomy, a trio of talented successors had developed a plan. **Drake Cleghorn**, **Seamus Foley** and **Connor Quigley** turned challenge into opportunity.

"There was a pretty big void to fill and we've all kind of stepped into that role," says Quigley, a former University of Dayton golfer now in his fifth season at Muirfield Village and his third as an assistant under director of grounds operation **Chad Mark**. "Not only do we manage the staff on a daily basis and the operation as a whole under Chad's direction, but we also all play a key role in managing our IPM operation. I think that's been probably the biggest story of the season for us."

"It was comforting that Sam had it handled so we honed in on the staff and the day-to-day operations," adds Cleghorn, who is in his sixth year at the club and his fifth as an assistant. "But with his departure, it was kind of a reality check. We had to see the bigger picture."

The trio are the latest in a line of interns hired on as assistants in training and promoted to assistant

superintendents. They will likely be the next MVGC assistants to move on and run their own agronomic show at other courses — a milestone marked with framed pin flags mailed back to the club and hung on the walls of the Legacy conference room inside the maintenance facility. There are 16 now.

"That's Chad's keen eye on seeing talent," Cleghorn says. "We always preach here: Find good individuals and we can teach them agronomics."

"The biggest thing is learning how to manage people, learning how people kind of tick," says Foley, who volunteered at the Memorial in 2017 while interning at Saucon Valley Country Club in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Mark hired him before he graduated from Penn State in 2018 and promot-

ed him from AIT in 2020. "We have some tenured staff that we can tell to go on a job and we know it's going to get done. And we have some newer staff who need some training. That's one of the biggest things I've learned from Chad — knowing how to manage people, and learning how to adjust."

Adjusting quickly, too. After adding those spray technician duties in April, they have focused more on products and applications. One of their favorites is SePRO's Cutless MEC plant growth regulator.

"It's a staple throughout the growing season," Quigley says. "We spray it on all tees, fairways and greens according to our growing degree days. It's great with other type-a growth regulators." The team has used it to suppress *Poa annua* — a goal of a 2020 renovation — without losing color.

They also use it throughout the build to the Memorial each spring. "We're trying to work texture and really starting to push turf to where we're cutting greens three or four times a day," Cleghorn says. "We had seen a little bit of collar decline, and I think that Cutless MEC gives us the flexibility if we're going for a little more growth and a little less regulation without seeing a negative effect."

The team also turns to SePRO to control the club's numerous water features — 14 of 18 holes are highlighted by some aquatic element — including Aquashade aquatic plant growth control.

"We've struggled with algae in our ponds, especially during the summertime," Quigley says. "A lot of that is because our ponds probably need to be a little bit deeper, but until we deal with that, Aquashade has done a great job of blocking all that light from reaching down to the bottom to prevent that algae from blooming."

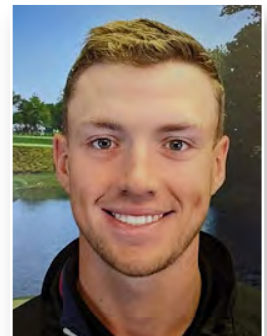
Cleghorn, Foley and Quigley are blooming — and they want to make sure the assistants behind them do, too. "Part of our job is building the assistants in training under us to take on our roles once we leave, to set Chad and Muirfield Village up for success," Foley says. "Learning from Chad has set us up for success for that next role." ■



▲ Cleghorn



▲ Foley



▲ Quigley



establishing NEW ROOTS

Renee Geyer launched a turf career at a famous club in her native Ohio. She bet big on herself and is thriving in the Pacific Northwest. How can you ditch your comfort zone, too?

By **Matt LaWell**

Renee Geyer was 7 years old and still in second grade the first time she performed alongside her sister at a wedding somewhere in southeast Ohio.

Geyer had prepared for this moment for years. Her parents had put a violin in her little hands when she was 3, had set her in front of a piano a couple years after that. She would later sing in two different choirs, study chorale music in college, a life in music and a career in music education almost certain. Her sister, **Renata**, three years older, was on a similar track. They shared a passion, a drive. They shared talent.

You better practice, she remembers. Practice, practice, practice, and just do it as perfectly as possible. Do it the way it's supposed to be.

Canterwood Golf & Country Club superintendent Renee Geyer, front, works closely with, left to right, irrigation technician Jeff Ellison, assistant superintendent Zachary Crawford and spray technician Dylan Knezvich.



► The Canterwood maintenance team keeps a light air around a season of hard work.

“We had this pressure,” she says. “And it wasn’t bad pressure, but we had this pressure of, this is somebody’s wedding, and you better practice and you better make sure it’s the best it can be.

“That’s what I lived with my entire childhood.”

RENEE GEYER, CGCS, is 40 years old and nearing the end of her third full season as the golf course superintendent at Canterwood Golf & Country Club in Gig Harbor, Washington. Her career arc is markedly different than what her parents, **Rick** and **Rita**, figured it might be decades ago. She has



Thinking about a move?

Not many turf pros will uproot their lives and move thousands of miles for their next job. But some will. Maybe you will. **Renee Geyer** has some practical advice for any job seeker — no matter how far or close the next stop might be:

“Have you weighed the pros and cons?” she asks. “How does this affect your family? Do you have a support system? How are you going to plug yourself in when you get to where you’re going?”

“And you can’t just think about work, right? If you do decide to move across the country, what else is there? What is beyond work? Do you have a family to go home to? Do you have friends? Neighbors? Do you have hobbies? There’s got to be something else besides coming to work.”

Geyer was largely alone for her first three months in the Pacific Northwest — her wife, **Emily**, moved later. A blessing, in hindsight.

“It was tough emotionally, but I think that it was probably good, because I was able to fully 100 percent focus on *this*,” Geyer says, slapping her palm on her desk. “I was able to go through papers and files and look at maps and delve into the financials and really understand where I needed to be and what my goals were. I sat here until 8 o’clock every night, just working, just figuring it out, relying on local resources.”

not performed at a wedding in years. She still sings, just not professionally.

A **Justin Timberlake** cardboard cut-out stands in the corner of her office. It wears her collection of industry show and event credentials.

“We’ve got a few things that have to happen as far as extras on the range today,” Geyer says. She is standing in front of the maintenance team, rattling off first jobs for an early morning ahead of the club’s Member-Guest Invitational — pressure of a different, but no less intense, variety. It is 4:30 a.m. She arrived more than an hour ago. She will be here for at least another 17. “After first shift, I’m pretty much gonna be able to handle those things. I may ask one or two of you if I think I’m gonna need a hand to help me with that.” Her delivery is almost musical.

“So today, everything is pulled out, OK? Except for drag carts. Everything else should be pulled out. **Jerry’s** in the shop. **Jeff** and **Zach**, irrigation. We’ll chat briefly. **Kevin**, can you please change cups? There is no pin sheet. No pin sheet today. Can you please also mark ground under repairs? As far as the ditches go, 18 and 2. I put a couple cans of paint in your cart. **Todd**, full tee service. All the blocks come off and stay off to the side. Everything comes off, but blues and whites will go back on after we’re done mowing. All the other horseshoes get set off to the side.”

Geyer is in a groove. “**Vinny**, please mow rough. Continue from where you were yesterday. **James**, No. 10. **Nora**, No. 11. **Gus**, No. 12. **Luis**, No. 13, hand mow. 12, 6, no cleanup. You have rakes in the back of your carts. Please hand

rake your greenside bunkers. **Joe**, can you please roll? You’re going to start on 10 and follow those guys. **Nacho**, can you please hand rake fairway bunkers? You’re going to start on 11. **Dylan**, can you please triplex blue and white tees?”

Geyer delivers all this in three minutes and sends the team out into the morning dark. It feels like she has been on the Canterwood property for three decades rather than three years.

All those childhood performances helped prepare her for this. So did her 13 years at Firestone Country Club in Akron, Ohio, where she started as an intern before nearly a decade as an assistant superintendent and a capstone run as Fazio Course superintendent.

Chorale music to turf.

Ohio to Washington.

Big changes.

Geyer stepped out of whatever comfort zone she had carved for herself—literally, lyrically, metaphorically, geographically—and bet big on herself for both. So much of what she knew would not apply.

“Coming out here just changed the whole understanding about what good agronomic programming is,” she says. “It was a pretty big pill to swallow, because practices that I was used to, or that I would have encouraged, they just don’t work here—because the type of grass, the collar, you’re wet for eight months out of the year, you’re dry for four months out of the year. You have to pick your battles.”

Beyond agronomics, Geyer had no idea how she would be received by a team filled with full-timers who have tended to the course since before the

◀ Jeff Ellison, left, has worked at Canterwood for more than 30 years. Geyer calls him simply "The Guy."



turn of the last century. Some of them have worked at Canterwood since the borders were staked back in 1988 — maybe even since before the architect **Robert Muir Graves** designed it with the aim of making it the most difficult course in western Washington.

"They've been here for 23 years, 33 years," she says. "We got a new one. How's this gonna go? Because I'm the fourth superintendent in the course's history, and, A, I'm not from the area; B, I'm a woman; C, I happen to be gay; and D, I am younger probably than 75 percent of my full-timers. There's four things that when I walked into the room the first time, I can only imagine the questions running through their head."

None of it mattered.

"Actions speak louder than words," says assistant superintendent **Zachary Crawford**, who arrived at Canterwood in April 2020 from Tacoma Country & Golf Club. "When I showed up, everyone was older than me. I wasn't going to just drive around and doing nothing. I will work with them on everything. She was like that, too."

GEYER WON OVER the Canterwood team with the same work ethic and personal touch she carried with her from childhood. She had been in Washington for less than a week, aerification was in full swing, and a team member was pulled away by a phone call.

"We were right in the middle of top-dressing and dragging, the whole nine yards," she says. "And he has a family emergency with one of his kids. I said, 'Go home.' He looked at me. 'What?' 'Go. Go take care of what you need to take care of. Go be with your family.' I give them that respect, and they give it back to me. They know that I'm not going to ask them to do something that I won't do myself, and it works. Family comes first, and just be kind to one another."

Geyer has not been alone on or off the course throughout her turf career. Professionally, she relies on Crawford, irrigation technician **Jeff Ellison**, foreman and equipment operator **Joe Brown**, spray tech **Dylan Knezvich** and so many other talented turf pros.

Away from work, she met her wife, **Emily**, when they were both still teenaged members of the All-Ohio State Fair Youth Choir under the direction of **Charles Snyder**. They dated throughout their 20s and wound up tying the knot at Firestone. Geyer's other major director, **Lisa Springer** of the Lancaster-Fairfield Youth Choir and Lancaster City Schools, officiated the ceremony.

"I tell her often, 'I can't do this job without you,'" Geyer says. "She sometimes balks at that, and I'm like, 'No, seriously.' She's so patient. She knows that my time commitment has to be large in order to make this work and she's awesome. She really gets it, the fact that when I have to be here, I have to be here, and I can't ask for anything more than that. She's wonderful."

Emily has been a part of almost every step of Geyer's turf journey, starting at Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute in Wooster, where Geyer studied under former turfgrass management program coordinator **Dave Willoughby** and associate pro-

fessor **Dr. Daniel Voltz**.

She was there, too, when Geyer started working at Wooster Country Club, where superintendent **Scott McLain** trusted Geyer enough to mow the step cut after class, then wash up and lock up for the night.

And she was there when Geyer landed her internship at Firestone in 2009. **Larry Napora**, the longtime director of golf course operations had arrived at Firestone the previous year after decade-plus runs at Treesdale Golf & Country Club in Pennsylvania and as a regional director of agronomy for ClubCorp. He remembers a 20something who was always smiling.

"You gotta smile," Napora says. "I don't care how bad your day is, you have to smile, because you come in here at 5:30, 6 o'clock in the morning, if you're in a bad mood then, they're in a bad mood. She just brightens up the room when she walks in."

When Napora and Geyer started at Firestone, a 54-hole operation, the maintenance department employed no assistant superintendents. Napora shifted the structure and, after one season, hired Geyer in the new role. She did everything over the next eight years, diving into whatever muck was needed. A promotion to Fazio Course superintendent followed.

"She never missed a beat," Napora says. "She went in there, didn't really

Football felines

Renee Geyer and her wife, **Emily**, adopted a pair of kittens shortly after their move to the Pacific Northwest — and gave them names that remind them of the Buckeye State: **Garrett** is named for Cleveland Browns defensive end **Myles Garrett** — Emily's favorite player — and **Kelce** is named for Kansas City Chiefs tight end **Travis Kelce**, who was raised in Cleveland Heights. "Trav has been my No. 1 draft pick in fantasy football for, like, the last eight years," Geyer says with a laugh.

change a whole lot, but tweaked it to her style. I worried about nothing. Her staff respected her and would do anything for her, because she got in the trenches with them. She was here early, she was here late, she was here both days on the weekends. When your staff sees you doing it, they respect you a whole lot."

Geyer helped lead a bunker renovation on the course in 2021. At the same time, she was itching to move. She had interviewed for other positions within Invited — Firestone and Canterwood are among the company formerly known as ClubCorp's more than 150 facilities — but hadn't found the right fit. When Canterwood opened, everything clicked. She finished the renovation and her last agricultural plan, then headed west.

"The construction helped sort of finalize that feeling of OK, I've gone through this experience now and maybe I am ready," Geyer says. "I remember having a conversation with Larry:

'Hey, I'm really considering this.' And he just looked me and he said, 'You're ready.' And getting a blessing like that from somebody like that, that made me feel better about it."

She started at Canterwood on her 37th birthday.

MOVING WEST WAS Geyer's second big gamble. Her first was shifting her professional focus from music to turf.

"My dad never said, 'You have to go into music.' But it wasn't *not* said," she says. "It was the expectation that was put forth from a young age, everybody just assumed. And I finally realized that I don't have to do something just because someone else thought it was a good idea. I had to live my life for me, and not through the lens of what someone else's ideas or hopes were. Do I still love music? I do. But did I love it enough to continue down a path I wasn't sure I'd be happy with?"

"I just had to step away and say no. I just didn't want to have any regrets."


She had mowed lawns throughout her childhood. She also learned the game of golf from her godfather, **Lew Wasem**. "Getting to the point where I was independent enough to make this choice for myself, this was the perfect marriage of me loving to be outside and the fine details of lawn care."

Her father, who passed away in 2013, never pushed her, just encouraged, directed. "I'll never be sorry about all of those experiences because they formulated who I am as a person in a lot of ways." Every time she speaks to the team. Every time she prepares the course for another day of golfers.

This is what she lives with her entire life. 🌿

▼ Assistant superintendent **Zachary Crawford**, right, has worked in Washington throughout his career and brings local knowledge.





G.O.A.T.

KNOWLEDGE

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POWER

BASF
We create chemistry

Phil Cuffare's journey to Oakland Hills CC and the opportunity to host multiple championships was shaped by some of the industry's greatest minds. Learn how he has taken their advice to new levels and achieved incredible agronomic results.

By Pat Jones

Photo credit: USGA

When Phil Cuffare came to Detroit six years ago to interview for the job of a lifetime – overseeing one of the best Donald Ross courses on the planet – he stood on the hillside overlooking the massive property, and a member of the hiring committee asked him what he saw. Cuffare said, “I see a U.S. Open.”

He was right, but that wasn't even the tip of the iceberg. Oakland Hills will host eight USGA championships over the next quarter century, including two U.S. Open Championships and two U.S. Women's Open Championships.

What could possibly prepare any turf pro for that kind of challenge? Working for and with some of the G.O.A.T.s of our industry, including Paul R. Latshaw, Paul B. Latshaw, John Zimmers and Jeff Corcoran. Much of what he knows was learned under Corcoran during his years at Oak Hill CC in Rochester. “Jeff isn't just a mentor, he's one of the smartest people I've ever met,” says Cuffare.

Cuffare has a staff of 50 overseeing 36 holes. The famed South Course was just redone a few years ago by Gil Hanse and Jim Wagner and it's spectacular. The North Course, another fine Ross design, will eventually get a makeover too.

He and his wife, Jen, work together every day. She's his administrative assistant and, presumably, one more voice telling him to be patient. Their two sons, Cash and Jordan, are a huge part of his life and visit the course often. We caught up with him this summer as his team was a wee bit busy with a few projects.

Why is Oakland Hills such an amazing place?

The South Course is a very special golf course. One of Donald Ross' best designs...some would argue it's his very best. It's also a unique piece of land. The championship history and list of past winners is incredibly special. Finally, I look at how amazing our members are and how Detroit has made a great comeback as a city and a sports town. We feel like we're part of that.

The USGA seems to agree.

We're fortunate to have a lot of championships coming here. I've always looked at our jobs as being stewards of the game of golf. That's part of the reason that USGA keeps coming back here to OHCC. Our job is to keep it a special place for the members and those events.

Looking back on everything that's happened since you came to Detroit, what lessons have you learned?

I've learned patience. It's become an asset to me where it probably wasn't before. Looking back over six years, I've tried to balance patience with making things happen or sometimes just letting things evolve on their own.

How important is that patience and how do you let go of the anxiety?

It's a balancing act, no question, because I'm wired pretty tight. Some things are just going to take time...like our clubhouse project. Also building a staff, building a culture, letting our South Course mature and getting our North Course into really good shape. And accepting that this stuff just doesn't happen overnight. I tell my staff, there's a time to press the gas and a time to pump the brakes. Knowing the difference all comes with experience.

I also believe in letting people grow around you. Not forcing them to grow but letting them grow and mature and develop. That takes time. I feel like I sound like my dad now. (Laughs)

Okay, who's on your list of G.O.A.T.s you've worked with?

First, Mr. Latshaw, then his son, Paul B., John Zimmers and, last but not least, Jeff Corcoran. I'm lucky to call all of them close friends.

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Photo credit: USGA

Tell us what you've learned about Jeff Corcoran over the years.

I've learned that Jeff is a natural leader who leads by example. That's it in a nutshell. He's always taught by example and leads you to some great places and ideas if you follow him.

I started learning from him in 1998 when I worked at Oak Hill and he was the East Course super. I was an intern on the dumb end of a squeegee and, even then, I wanted to be around him. Good things happen when you're around Jeff Corcoran.

What he's done is taught me how to be a leader. How to lead situations, people, my family, my membership. He's the best at it. No question in my mind.

Now he's consulting with us and it's the best thing ever. It's been absolutely phenomenal. I was nervous when he came to look at our program but game-planning with him and banging ideas off each other again has been fantastic.



With a million projects going on, how do you keep everything moving in the right direction?

I remember the Six P's: Proper Preparation Prevents Piss Poor Performance.

Also, you cannot procrastinate in a situation like this. If you put it off, you'll forget it. Time management is big. You need to be direct and tell people what you want. Big-picture thinking like how do you solve for X immediately and will it be the result you're looking for?

And like Nick Saban says, we get all the right people on the bus and all the wrong people off the bus and then we get the bus going in the right direction. When you surround yourself with great people who are working toward a common goal you're going to win.

Finally, you need positive people because it's really easy to be negative. The easy stuff in life is quitting, being negative and being lazy. The hard stuff is winning, being successful, being consistent and doing things the right way.

What are some of your leadership and management mantras?

Paul B Latshaw says, "The smallest of details lead to the biggest results."

Also, another Nick Saban: "Mediocre people don't like high achievers, and high achievers don't like mediocre people."

But my all-time favorite is Jeff Corcoran: "The harder you work, the luckier you get."

How does plant health matter to you?

The plant health benefits of those BASF products are through the roof. Insignia® [SC Intrinsic brand fungicide] makes turf look better, for sure. I look at vigor, color, turgidity and it just seems like nothing much hurts that treated plant. And when you look at the finished product, it's noticeably better for a longer period of time.

Sounds like those products have been foundational to your program.

Honestly, if I were at a public course somewhere with a limited budget, I'd still choose those products first. In fact, if you only gave me three sprays for the whole year, I'm putting all my money on BASF. I'd be all in with Insignia [SC Intrinsic brand fungicide], Lexicon [Intrinsic brand fungicide], Xzemplar® [fungicide]."

What's your advice for young people coming into the business today?

You want to find people who have your best interests at heart. Go work for them for 4-5 years. Trust them, listen to them and let them help you succeed. I don't think that part of that process has changed.

And it's not just name clubs. There are phenomenal superintendent mentors at every level. My message is you need to go places and learn a lot. If you're going someplace where things are easy, you're probably not going to learn that much.

For more information about BASF and its products, visit betterturf.basf.us.

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WHAT'S YOUR GOLF IQ?

In case you hadn't noticed, golf is booming. More than 26 million Americans played on a "traditional" course last year. It wouldn't surprise me if you've felt the impact of all these players on your course, probably by the condition in which it is left at the end of the day.

I know that you're more than capable of cleaning up after these hordes of newbies and wannabes. What I don't know is who is going to educate these golfers — and the millions who've been playing for a long time but don't show any more smarts — about how to conduct themselves on the course.

There are players out there right now who could learn a few things about what I'll call "self-maintenance." So, tack this up in the locker room, print it in the club newsletter, put copies on every cart or tattoo it on their foreheads. This is your chance to make the game better for everyone — yourself included.

A Letter To Golfers:

As the course superintendent, my job and that of my crew is to make sure the golf course is in the best possible shape. But we need your help. There are more golfers and more rounds being played than ever before, and how you treat the course affects every golfer who follows you.

The "Golden Rule" is simple: Leave the golf course better than you found it. If you do, not only will your game benefit but so will that of your fellow golfers. And the course will remain in good shape longer. Here's what you can do all around the course ...

Practice range. Whether you're fixing your swing flaws or just ingraining them, please keep your practice to a small space. It's like learning to dance: Make a box and keep it tight.

Teeing grounds. This is the only place on the course where you can create your own lie. Why do golfers, with the ability to place the ball however they want, still leave holes on the tees the size of a shovel?

When you take more than a little scrape of turf from the tee, fill it in and fix it. There's usually a bucket or box of sand by one of the tee markers. Shake some sand over the hole, step on it and smooth it out. This is especially helpful on par 3s, where there are likely to be more scrapes because players typically use irons. But it happens everywhere. Should you get to the tee and someone before you has left a small bomb crater, please fill it in for them and hope there's such a thing as conditioning karma.

Pick up your tee and any broken tees on your way off the teeing ground. Then throw them in the trash. It doesn't just look bad. Those broken pieces of wood and plastic can wreak havoc with our mowers. And please throw your water-soaked cigars and cigarette butts in the trash, too.

Fairways. When you make a scar, look for your divot and replace it. If there isn't a box or jar of sand on the cart, find the shrapnel from your divot and fill in the hole as best you can.

Bunkers. When you're done playing from the bunker, it should look as if you were never in it. It should only take a minute or two to rake the bunker level and smooth your footprints.

Watch the caddies on TV clean up after their pros. They know how to rake a bunker properly. True, you're not playing for a million dollars, but clean up a bunker half as well as they do and you'll be ahead of just about everyone else.

Putting greens. Fix ball marks. Yours, your buddy's and any others that you see on the green.

Once again, you can learn something by watching pro golf on TV: Note how the players and caddies look for ball marks and fix them as soon as they walk onto a green. If you don't know the right way to do it, ask your superintendent or pro. They'll be glad to show you.

Golf carts. If the golf course has a cart path, use it unless specifically told not to or that it's OK to drive elsewhere. Just because the fairway looks wide open doesn't mean there's not a broken sprinkler head, new sod, crushed drain line, intruding tree root or a hole waiting to snap an axle — or your ankle.

Obey the signs. When you arrive at the tee or green, leave the cart where it's supposed to go, usually on the path or a marked area. Every time you pull off the path to get closer to the green, you're impacting the turf, eventually wearing it down to the soil.

Everything above is common sense and backs up that one simple rule: Leave the course better than you found it. For all of us. 🏌️



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Personal note: I admire superintendents for the way you manage your responsibilities and aspirations. The leaders featured in this article care for you and this industry, so these insightful conversations were full of compassionate wisdom. With their blessings, the good stuff is shared here.

“Slowing down isn’t a problem,” muses **Matt Shaffer**. “I have always been at peace with myself. People ask me about retirement. I say what I used to do in a day I do in about three days, and I am figuring out how to turn that into a week!”

Steve Cook responds in a similar way. “Lee, I don’t know. We got back by 10 o’clock from our morning hike” — with his gorgeous dog, **Ilisa!** “I had an espresso at the coffee house. I came home, showered and had lunch. I have been reading a book and I don’t really know where the time goes. I’m OK with that.”

“I’m playing more golf and getting into pickleball,” says **Scott Dodson**. “I’m riding my bike more. It’s a whole different lifestyle. With my wife, **Brenda**, still working, I do some of the shopping. I have always done laundry. I do some cooking and keep the house tidy and it keeps her happy. Lee, I have become a domestic engineer. I am the CEO of our domicile.”

Brenda Dodson is the CFO of a healthcare company. “I get up with her and have coffee and whatnot around 7 a.m.,” Dodson says. “That’s a perfect time.”

Many days started earlier as Dodson grew up in the turf industry. He lived at Maple Downs Golf & Country Club, in Maple, Ontario, where his father was the superintendent. He started caddying at age 10 and worked the grounds by 14.

In 1993, Dodson went to Park Country Club, in Williamsville, New York, retiring from his superintendent position in 2024. This private club, designed by **Harry Colt** and **Charles Hugh Alison**, hosted the 1934 PGA Championship and has been cared for to a high standard. The leadership has maintained high standards as well, with **Jim Frey** being promoted.

“Six years ago, I told the board of directors, ‘The next superintendent is on the staff,’” Dodson says. “We signed some agreements and everything worked out well.” With the right circumstances and communication, it’s possible to forecast your retirement and put a succession plan in place.

At Medinah Country Club, where Cook retired as the director of grounds operations in early July, they also placed a successor on staff, **Ben McGargill**. McGargill was hired nearly two years ago and worked alongside Cook throughout the renovation of Course No. 3. Establishing continuous leadership helps operations adapt quickly through change and ensures consistent quality.

“Medinah was a great employer,” Cook says. “They were very accommodating. I was open and said, ‘Let’s figure out the exit strategy.’ Ben and I shared duties and had fun completing a successful project.”

Because they worked together, no one was working excessively. “I count my blessings that I was able to finish on a high note and essentially on my own terms,” Cook says. “A lot of superintendents aren’t that fortunate.”

“It was my time to walk away.”

Shaffer started his golf course maintenance career by working as a superintendent at a small facility. He then became **Paul R. Latshaw’s** assistant at Augusta National Golf Club, leaving there to eventually assume the lead agronomy role at Merion Golf Club.

“I retired as a superintendent in 2016 and started a company called Minimalistic Agronomic Techniques,” Shaffer says. “I became a spokesperson for companies and people bought our products. I did that until recently.”

“At the ripe old age of 71, I closed my company. I’ve been working since I was 12.”

WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO RETIRE?

Good question. How will you know? “At Merion, we had an incredibly successful U.S. Open in 2013,” Shaffer says. “After that they wanted to change the golf course. They wanted it firm, fast and green and that was never my mantra. It was the perfect opening.”

There were signs. “There had been a consistent group of gray-haired guys in the board room. After the U.S. Open, I was the only one with gray hair. When you’re the oldest guy, it’s probably time to retire. I never worried about aesthetics. I always worried about playability, so I told them they have two problems. I said, ‘You have a golf course built in 1896 that was designed to hold water because there was no irrigation. The other thing is that you have a superintendent that studied under one of the greatest old-time superintendents that didn’t really care about appearance but more about playability.’ They said, ‘What are our options?’ I said, ‘You need to rebuild the course and get a new superintendent.’

“The next board meeting they said, ‘We want you to be the guy.’ I said, ‘I can’t be the guy!’ The next guy will want to do it differently than me and it is going to be his responsibility to give you firm, fast and green so he has to be the guy.” Shaffer helped the club research candidates, and they hired **Paul B. Latshaw**.

“They are really happy,” Shaffer says. “It all worked out. I retired because times were changing, and I didn’t want to change.” It helps to think of retiring as an active, positive decision instead of something to default. Retiring is a natural part of your career and retirement is a phase of your life to celebrate.

Set a goal to retire comfortably and prepare for it. Building a career that you are proud of makes

Your terms

Hard work and steadfast dedication help superintendents build outstanding careers. Retirement may be a distant dream or a pending reality, but your career can finish on your terms.

By **Lee Carr**



Financial security



Retiring with financial security is more about attitude than a specific dollar amount. Will you ever feel like you have enough money? That depends. What plans do you have? Major expenses include housing, medical care, taxes and lifestyle choices. How much do you want to travel? Are there people or causes that you support? Will working with a financial advisor increase the yield of your investments? It can feel like a chore, but regularly analyzing your finances will ensure your money continues to work for you. Check your benefits and maximize whatever retirement vehicles you can. Teach dependents to be financially savvy because their independence will make things easier for you.

it easier to walk away. Earning and saving helps you make that decision too, especially if you regularly invest in your retirement. A few special people you meet, bond and grow with will also transition with you from your career into life afterward.

Dodson lives in an over-55 residential community and is involved with

different activity groups, including one for golf. “I have a friend in the neighborhood, **John Gall**, a former superintendent. We have known each other for 40 years. Can you imagine? He lives at the end of the street! It’s weird. We laugh and say isn’t it great that we don’t have to think about if the pumps came on last night?”

Previously needing a kidney transplant, Dodson is keenly aware of his health. “With that scare, I thought I better get to living and not work the rest of my life. I have heard of too many people not reaching retirement. That’s really sad. I was 67 so it was great timing.”

People say you’ll know. “I found myself getting a little short with people,” Dodson says. “It’s not just about growing grass. You have to be good at all the other stuff. Over the years those things weigh on you. You will know when it’s time to retire. You’ll feel it.”

The timing was clear for Cook too. “Retirement is a time to honor all the hard work, whatever that means, for each person,” he says. “For me it’s fishing, hiking, reading. Maybe a little nap in the afternoon.

Being with friends and family. As a superintendent, you’re making sacrifices with that stuff. I really want to commit to strengthening my relationships, old and new.”

Maybe there is never a perfect moment to retire but there will be a time that is good for you.

“A lot of people can’t retire, and I am very fortunate,” Cook says. “I didn’t feel like there was much more for me to accomplish. It was also my age. Most of my good friends have retired. They are doing stuff, and I wasn’t going to be able to do it being a superintendent. My mom is getting older, and I want to spend time with her. I didn’t want to hang around just to collect a paycheck.”

WILL YOU MISS IT?

Being a superintendent is wonderful but intense. Many people are dedicated to their careers, but different industries have different parameters to negotiate and superintendents are working with living turf, nature and a combination of elements unique to this industry. It’s understandable to wonder how easy it will be to walk away. The short answer? Don’t sweat it.

“I have been asked more than once about retirement,” Dodson says. “A lot of people are scared or apprehensive. They don’t know what they’re going to do.” People fear change, “but everything can change in a heartbeat. Life circumstances, your family, your health, all sorts

of things. We all have an expiration date, we just don’t know it.”

“It’s funny, my wife said, ‘You just don’t even miss it,’” Shaffer says. “I gave it everything I had and I had tremendous success, not by myself, certainly. I had people work for me that were far superior agronomists. But who is to say that’s not a smart move, to surround yourself with people who are more knowledgeable than you? Guess what? Everybody wins!”

No one can argue with that. “I was good at building teams and I was good at creating an atmosphere where people wanted to work. I was good at leading up to my superiors — showing them a vision. It helps telling stories and interjecting levity into the message, not making it boring and too businesslike, but I don’t miss any of it.”

“I miss the same things that everyone misses,” Cook says. “I miss the sunrise in the morning, being on the course, being out in nature. I miss the staff, the camaraderie and the fraternity that comes with working in golf and being a su-

► Retired superintendent Matt Shaffer with his wife, Renna.



© COURTESY OF MATT SHAFFER

perintendent. That was one of the highlights for me, the people. I miss the members. I miss all the good stuff, and 99 percent of it is good, but it's a book I've read and it's on my shelf. I don't need to reread it."

LESSONS LEARNED AND FACING FORWARD ...

If you're not looking back, what is ahead? Dodson has been to Europe and is looking forward to traveling more. He enjoys working in the yard regularly, as opposed to fitting it into his schedule. He plays euchre and does some consulting, helping mentor a young superintendent. "I miss people," he says. "I forged many great relationships over the years but we try to keep in touch."

Dodson encourages everyone to pay attention to quality of life. "If you are in this business, you must care a lot," he says. "It's taxing, it's rewarding. Carve out time for your family. I coached hockey and softball and went to presentations at school. Those things are important. Find a hobby. Take a break for three or four days. You have to get away from it."

When you are in it, you are in it. When you retire, relax. "I am living a different life and really enjoying it," Cook says. He still wakes up between 4:30 and 5:30 a.m. "I would say that 5:30 is a little late for me," he says with a laugh.

Cook is re-reading books that were meaningful to him, from childhood to the present. He belongs to several church groups that help him connect with his faith and oth-

er people. He splits time between his home in Colorado and visiting the Midwest, where significant friends and family live.

His ideas about retirement have changed through the years. "If someone has a great relationship with their employer and they are finding satisfaction and gratification, keep doing it. There is no reason to quit work if it's not work."

Cook also believes — and I love this — that "the adventure is in the mystery." Cook explains: "I had no bucket list, no definitive plans. I am open to the future. That's what I would tell someone who is retiring:



Hobbies

Enjoyable hobbies that don't require constant attention can help you bond with others, maintain perspective and offset some of the pressures of work. Exercise of some sort — pushups, weightlifting, stretching and planking offer huge benefits in just minutes. Trending hobbies are pickleball, reading memoirs and woodworking. Grilling is popular (try a new recipe!). Get involved with a charity that has flexible volunteer options and needs your skills. Whatever it is, whether playing the piano, photography, fantasy football — anything! — find something you really enjoy that you can continue when you retire.

be open and embrace it. Spend time with loved ones and don't take life too seriously. I let the day come to me, one day at a time."

Every day is new and we can learn from our shortcomings. "It's strange what people recall," he says. "If you knew what someone else would remember from what you said to them, you would choose your words more carefully. That's the only thing I wish I had done differently. I wish I was a little more

self-aware to recognize the impact of the words I used."

Shaffer can relate. "When I was working, I was painfully myopic. I didn't really pay attention. All I was concerned about was my wife and my job and I didn't worry about other people's scenarios, which isn't great." Shaffer cared in other ways. "I did make a concerted effort to promote the profession because I knew I had a big job. I had ears so I tried desperately to do as many interviews as I could, and I would expound about the talents of superintendents."

We all want to be wonderful humans, all the time. In retirement, there is more time for reflection coupled with greater life experience. "If you are really lucky,

◀ Retired superintendent Scott Dodson with his wife, Brenda, during a trip to Germany.



► Steve Cook has spent more time hiking with his dog, Ilsa, since retiring.

you are going to have a handful of people that want to spend time with you,” Cook says. “People that want you in their lives. People that are going to go out of their way to spend time with you. That circle is really small. Pay attention to those people. We all have lots of friends and acquaintances. Ten percent will say, ‘Hey, we are missing you.’ That’s what I am enjoying about retirement, the recognition by those people are getting fewer, but they are far more important. They are really meaningful and they are really special.”

Shaffer keeps in touch with friends and family and some people he has mentored, estimating those numbers to be at around 50 superintendents and more than 150 assistants. He maintains a blog called “Let’s Talk Turf and Life” full of useful information and stories, and he helps care for 48 acres of grounds at the Boal Estate when in Pennsylvania. He and his wife, **Renna**, are known to pick a direction and head out in their camper. They spend time at their home in Florida and enjoy bass fishing. Shaffer tinkers in his shop and garden and he reads voraciously.

“The blog will end too, and I will ease into the horizon,” Shaffer says. “It’s funny, it feels like we are going back to where we started. Our life was painfully simple when we got married and lived in the mountains,

and we camped and we fished and we didn’t have any money. That’s the only difference. When you have time you have no money, and when you have money, you have no time.”

When you retire you can, hopefully, have both.

Shaffer has generational wisdom.

“Don’t expect a generation to change for you. You have to change your style for the generation you are managing,” he says. “This current generation, which I really like, has been changing my thought process on life. My generation, what a bunch of dumbasses. We were all about earning money, saving it all, and seeing how we could live when we are all busted down and we can’t do the things we thought we would do. This generation wants to do things as they are living. That’s brilliant. They don’t have much money but if they can pull it off, kudos to them.”



the person who hired you, it’s you. There will be tremendous criticism and this generation has a hard time with that.

“They try to make everything work and sometimes it just doesn’t.”

Shaffer takes it further as we wrap up our conversation. “This is never a job that entertains complacency, ever. You have to be proactive every day and if you don’t love it, it’s easier to get going on a second career when you are young. For me, I am sitting here with deer in my backyard. I have had a good life and a lot of good support. And I’m going to water my flowers.”

Shaffer, Dodson, and Cook are making the most of retirement, enjoying activities and time with the people they love. Give it your best so when you are ready to retire you have a hobby, financial stability, friends and family who care for you, and a career that can end the way it should — on your terms. 🌱

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

Musical musings

Music adds so much to our lives — discovering new artists or hearing nostalgic favorites. Make a retirement-themed playlist full of hype songs or pieces that are meaningful to you when you need to “tune out.” Have fun with this variety of suggestions and get started: “Happy” (**Pharrell Williams**), “School’s Out” (**Alice Cooper**), “I Need a Dollar” (**Aloe Blacc**), “Take This Job and Shove It” (**Johnny Paycheck**), “No Shoes, No Shirt, No Problems” (**Kenny Chesney**), “All I Do Is Win” (**DJ Khaled**, featuring **T-Pain**, **Ludacris**, **Rick Ross** & **Snoop Dogg**), “Welcome to the Jungle” (**Guns N’ Roses**) and “Fire on Up” (**Paper Kings**). If you’re feeling great or in need of inspiration, a cool playlist will help you focus on your big goals — like retiring comfortably.



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UNLOCK A NEW ERA OF TURF ENHANCEMENT TECHNOLOGY



A is for apprenticeship

Industry insiders share how a growing career developmental approach has become one step in the right direction for filling talent shortages.

By **Kelsie Horner**

Heather Davis hasn't always worked in turf maintenance. Instead, she started a career in cosmetology and worked as a hairdresser for 20 years. She then moved to working in a preschool, which inspired her to get her bachelor's degree in elementary education.

Teachers will often find a summer job to work and earn extra money, and that's how Davis, 47, ended up working at North Carolina's Knollwood Fairways and Midland Country Club. Her superintendent noticed her curiosity and attention to detail, and suggested she look at apprenticeship programs.

"I kept asking him, 'What is this machine? And I want to drive that tractor, and I want to do this. What are you spraying? Can I come with you? And what's with this grass? And why is this grass like this?' Davis says. "He didn't have enough answers."

Not wanting to return to school for another four years, a turf maintenance apprenticeship program was a good fit for Davis. She can continue her education without draining her bank account or surrendering all her time.

Apprenticeships represent a growing trend in recruiting and maintaining staff for the golf industry, which remains an ongoing challenge. Programs are structured offerings that are typically shorter than a college degree program, and they focus on a specific trade or career. For programs like the USGA Greenkeeper Apprenticeship Program and The New York State Turfgrass Association's Registered Apprenticeship Program, a focus is placed on turfgrass and golf course management.

A typical apprenticeship program for turf management can range from one to two years. North Carolina's Sandhills Community College program, in partnership with the USGA, begins in January and ends in December. Course work consists of in-classroom units, hands-on work in the lab or on a course, and a checklist of tasks that need to be completed to earn a certification as a golf course technician. The program offers pathways to earn a level one and level two technician certification.

One difference between an apprenticeship program and a typical four-year degree is the level of information taught. For



Numbers *to know*



641,044

Active apprentices in the United States in 2023



92,620

Active female apprentices in 2023

Source: [apprenticeshipusa.com](https://www.apprenticeshipusa.com)

COURTESY OF CARSON LETOT

USGA Greenkeeper Apprenticeship Program coordinator Carson Letot, right, works with a student on the course.

programs at Sandhills, the units covered are snapshots of what would be taught in a university.

“When we cover soils, they would take that as a full class at the university, but with us, it’s just one month, and we’re not doing the deep dive, but we are doing the introduction and it gives them the working knowledge to at least ask better questions on the course, go and do their own research to supplement it,” says **Carson Letot**, USGA Greenkeeper Apprenticeship Program coordinator. “So, it’s kind of like a little appetizer.”

Apprenticeships can be a route taken by students at any life point. A college degree is not required for enrollment, and there is no age maximum.

FOR SANDHILLS COMMUNITY College’s program, most students are in their late 20s, but Letot says the standard deviation is massive.

“I have some students that are in their early 20s,” Letot says. “I have some that are in their late 50s. So, it’s really a big swath. But I definitely have a few that are parents. I even had one last year that was a grandparent.”

Apprenticeships can be an ideal route for those who have already attended college or for those who can’t afford it. The programs provide an opportunity for increased education for people on any route in life.

“For our students, the apprenticeship makes a lot of sense, because

they’re not coming into it with a tremendous amount of fiscal resources,” Letot says. “A lot of them have families already, so they don’t have a ton of time to go take a bunch of classes or pick up their families and move to one of the college towns, and they ultimately want a spark to move up in their career.”

Locksley Blanchard finished the apprenticeship at Sandhills last year. He didn’t start his career working in the turf maintenance industry, though. Blanchard, 43, had previously studied theater and history in college, and worked in the food and beverage industry and as a hotel manager in New York before moving back to North Carolina.

While looking for a part-time job, he landed a job as a greenskeeper at North Carolina’s Pinehurst Resort. It was there that he fell in love with the job and wanted to learn as much as he could.

“I enjoyed being outside, being able to be on my feet, and to be able to see your finished product every day is very fulfilling,” Blanchard says. “I really embraced it. And as a student of knowledge, I had heard about the GAP program, and had been recommended by my superintendent to take part in it, and the rest is history.”

The golf industry has been a male-dominated industry from the beginning. These programs are playing a role in getting more females into the mix. Davis, a student in this year’s cohort, will be Letot’s first female student in the program.

“My job is to keep my ears open and my eyes open, to keep looking for ways that I can work with those individuals,” Letot says. “We need to recruit people into the industry, but we also need to retain them. And I think we’ve not done a poor job. It’s just things are changing and we have a different generation that’s coming in, and they’re most certainly great people, but they’re just different and we have to evolve and change with them. We can’t be stubborn.”

“I think this apprenticeship model is going to be popular because it caters to those individuals who want to be making money, they want to have

hands-on training, and they want to have immediate results. But I think it’s going to only be one of the 45 different things we need to do. I think we do a good job at diversifying our cohorts, and we definitely see much more diverse cohorts, socioeconomically and racially and ethnically, but at the same time, we could be doing even better, right?”

Davis now works as a greenskeeper at Pinehurst. The program helped her understand the work she is doing, and how she can do better.

“Now I know what we’re doing and why,” she says. “So, I could do this job efficiently if I didn’t have this training, but I can do it a whole lot better to come up with solutions instead of following the manager because of this training.”

“It’s definitely worth the time to learn and to put towards learning your job. I think if you don’t consider yourself studious or not a reader — you’re more active — apprenticeship programs are the way to go. Not everyone can sit in a classroom, and there’s time for that. There really is. There has to be. But I really struggle sitting down, and never did good sitting in a classroom, so this apprenticeship program has been a great thing for me.”

THE NEW YORK STATE Turfgrass Association accepted its first official cohort of students in September. As president of the NYSTA, **Thomas Kaplun** has seen the industry struggle to hold employees and believes apprenticeships provide an education opportunity for many.

“You have the students that might not be able to afford formal education. You might have the workers that have the experience but might not be able to afford going to school full-time or have the resources to be able to do so,” says Kaplun, the superintendent at North Hempstead Country Club on Long Island. “And then you also have the people who have graduated from college with four-year degrees.”

The programs are built to provide students with the knowledge and resources to return to their maintenance jobs or to find a new job.

▼ Students in the University of Wisconsin-Madison Turfgrass Apprenticeship Program complete an outdoor activity.



"I think that what the apprenticeships have allowed is a formal pathway for laborers you might have on staff, qualified staff that take a liking and an interest and show a drive for this line of work, to be able to go get some sort of education, some sort of formalized certificate that allows for them to have the experience and the education to become assistants," Kaplun adds.

The NYSTA program includes 4,000 hours of on-the-job training over two years. Apprentices can earn up to 19 college credit hours through SUNI-Delhi, the program's partner university, which can be applied to an associate's degree if the student desires.

Tyler Bloom took an interest in apprenticeship programs after his own difficulty holding onto staff. As a previous superintendent at Maryland's Sparrows Point Country Club, Bloom struggled to find and retain key skilled-typed positions such as assistant superintendents and spray techs.

"I had a guidance counselor talk to me at the time about youth apprenticeship, which is huge in Maryland, and I just found it to be such a rewarding thing, very similar to when I was an intern, getting mentored and developed," Bloom says. "I found that to be just such a rewarding thing. And to take career job seekers and help them find their passion in this industry, I just really took to that."

Bloom assisted in creating a registered apprenticeship program at Sparrows Point, and now owns Tyler Bloom Consulting. As Bloom helps the NYSTA prepare for its first cohort, he is looking forward to supporting students and seeing his team's hard work pay off.

"They've got the employers that are supporting them on the job, academia, faculty that are going to support them and their growth and fuel their passion," Bloom says. "And then I think they have industry support, through someone like myself, the New York State Turfgrass Association. So, I think we're on the cusp of something pretty special in a really golf-focused state."

Although the apprenticeship programs are not an immediate solution to the industry's labor problems, many agree they are a big step in the right direction.

"Is this the end-all, be-all solution?" Bloom asks. "Probably not for every facility. But I think every facility should be instituting some level of on-the-job training for sure." 🌱

Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry's assistant editor.



TAPping new Badgers

The University of Wisconsin-Madison is preparing to welcome its third year of apprentices through the Turfgrass Apprenticeship Program.

The 12-week program started in early November. During the first six weeks, students complete courses in introduction to turfgrass management and introduction to turf soils. Classes pick up after the New Year for another six weeks, when students study nutrient management and integrated pest management. Each week consists of 12 hours of learning and the full TAP costs \$4,000 per student.

Outside of class lecture-style teaching, students get out of the classroom for "shop talks." Students can visit golf courses and turf facilities to talk with superintendents and others in the industry. **Dr. Paul Koch**, an associate professor in plant pathology, says the trips are the most effective among students. "We look for the sorts of things that would be better for going out and talking to the superintendent and the students love those."

After completing the in-class section of the program, students return to the golf courses where they work to complete a list of tasks to earn their certificates. The tasks were developed by the Wisconsin GCSA.

Koch says a large number of his students have previously attended college to pursue a degree in another career but ultimately didn't enjoy it. Now these students have found their way to a job on a golf course and are looking for a way to advance without spending a large amount of money and time. The university's apprenticeship program can provide just that.

"Given the struggle to attract skilled labor into the golf course industry, I think it's important to provide flexible means of education to meet the interested people where they are and provide people different options based on where they're at in their life," Koch says.

Students are given the resources and knowledge necessary for them to finish the program and leave prepared to become an assistant superintendent. "That's kind of the goal of where we want to be with their skill set," Koch adds. "These apprenticeship programs help golf course superintendents develop their own talent, rather than attract talent from outside, which is what the traditional model is."

Koch has seen the program impact students' lives in many positive ways, and class sizes continue to grow each year. "It's been fun to see the class grow," he says, "and the students gain confidence with their increased level of knowledge."





Point Hardy Golf Club at Cabot Saint Lucia opened in late 2023. Director of agronomy Damon DiGiorgio has led the maintenance of the course since arriving on the tiny island in February 2022.

HEY, YOU'RE SUPERINTENDENT NO. 1!

What connections and résumés does it take to land the rare job as the first turf leader at a new course? And what happens once the big vision becomes serious?

By **Guy Cipriano**

Stewart Naugler ended a superintendent job in Michigan on May 10. He flew to Austin, Texas, on May 12. He reported to work, at a golf course that's not a golf course yet, on May 13.

Hasty? Sure.

Heavenly? It's a move Naugler always desired — and one few of his peers will ever make.

Naugler is the director of agronomy at Loraloma, a new **David McLay Kidd**-designed course with ravines and river views in the Texas Hill Country. Resting 30 miles northeast of Austin, the Areté Collective development will support modern homes and Texas-themed amenities serving a roaring housing market.

The project evokes memories of an era before Naugler reached his turf prime: the golf construction rush of the late 1990s and early 2000s. A second-generation superintendent, Naugler started following the

frenzied era of golf development on GolfClubAtlas.com as a teenager. He always wanted to be superintendent No. 1 somewhere, anywhere. Like those who came of turf age following the Great Recession, Naugler wasn't sure if he owned a practical dream.

The number of new courses being built and planned is rising compared to the late 2010s and early 2020s, but annual totals remain in the dozens instead of reaching the hundreds like they did during the era that enthralled Naugler and many other aspiring superintendents. Only 33 new 18-hole equivalent golf courses are under construction in 2024 with another 31.6 in the planning phases, according to the National Golf Foundation. Texas leads the land of new opportunities as five courses are under construction and 4.7 more are in-planning phases.

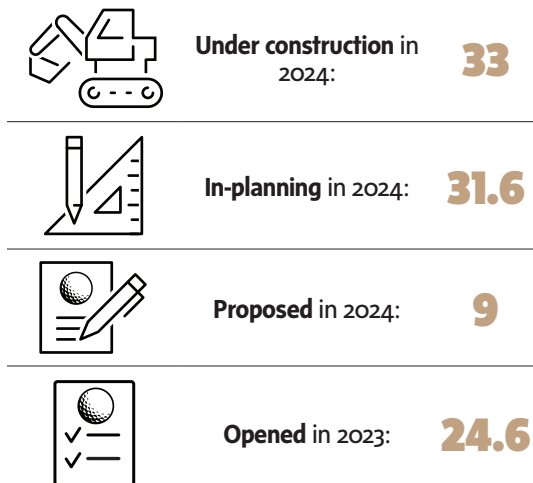
"Career-wise this was all I ever wanted," Naugler says. "This is going to be the pinnacle. It's not only the fact

that the development company is all in and wants something world-class, but the property is world-class. They gave us the best land on the property for golf. I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity."

With a rare opportunity comes a tremendous workload packed with deadlines, decisions and unique job pressures. There's no time to stall when memberships and homes must be sold. Vibrant turf makes a vision pop more than an artistic rendering. Grandiose plans hinge on a superintendent's ability to quickly and intimately understand a property better than anybody else.

That's why Naugler arrived in Texas before stuffing his possessions into PODS. His girlfriend was still completing her medical residency in Michigan when he left for Texas. "I had to leave before everything was done," he says, "because there's so much to do here."

NUMBERS TO KNOW: NEW GOLF COURSES IN THE U.S.



Source: National Golf Foundation; courses are 18-hole equivalents

THE PATH TO NO. 1

Shawn Fettig crossed just one state border to become superintendent No. 1 at Broomsedge, a private course designed by **Kyle Franz** and **Mike Koprowski** in the South Carolina sandhills. Fettig officially started at Broomsedge on Jan. 5. Unofficially, he made biweekly late-2023 visits to Broomsedge while finishing his duties as an assistant superintendent at Old Town Club in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Broomsedge and Old Town Club are separated by 165 miles.

Only 30, Fettig's career has taken him to five states: Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Florida, North Carolina and South Carolina. Broomsedge marks his first head superintendent job.

"I was officially offered the job, accepted the job and they wanted me to get here," Fettig says. "It was really a breakneck pace. That's kind of how superintendent moves are in this industry."

The pace accelerated immediately upon full-time arrival. On his first day, Fettig walked the entire 200-acre property. Learning the site's drainage topped his massive to-do list as he met shapers and the construction crew. The pace has never slowed as full-member

play approaches in early 2025.

Fettig's career rise has been rapid. He completed his first internship in summer 2015 at admired Lancaster Country Club in southeastern Pennsylvania. Working at a high-level club hosting the U.S. Women's Open inspired him to seek jobs at tournament-caliber facilities executing big projects. But his goals never included becoming superintendent No. 1 somewhere. "I wouldn't classify this as a dream," he says, "I would classify this as an opportunity."

Developing connections in the right network opens opportunities, and Broomsedge hired a turf leader from an esteemed superintendent lineage. Eagle Pointe Golf Club superintendent **Sean Anderson** and Southern Hills Country Club director of agronomy **Bryant Evans** are among Fettig's career influences. Anderson and Evans were mentored by **Russ Myers**, who joined Hanse Golf Course Design as director of agronomics in 2023 after a successful superintendent career at elite clubs. Myers was mentored by the legendary **Paul R. Latshaw**. "I think relationships and reputations are more valuable than any job you're going to have," Fettig says.

Naugler also has a gaudy résumé. He spent a summer as an intern for **Jeff Markow** at Cypress Point Club and worked as an assistant at Chicagoland classics Midlothian Country Club and Olympia Fields Country Club before returning to Michigan for his first superintendent position at The Heathers Club. He ascended to a golf maintenance supervisor position with the Huron Clinton-Metroparks, an eight-course municipal system near the Michigan community where he developed a zest for golf and turf observing his father, **Jim Naugler**, lead crews at Goodrich Country Club.

"Huron-Flint Metroparks are a huge operation," Naugler says.

"At one point, I thought that's where I would retire—and then this opportunity opened up. I always wanted to do a grow in, do everything from scratch, work with David McLay Kidd and be at a top-level facility again. So, this is a dream come true." Naugler is now a Spartan adjusting to the humidity and college football fervor in the land of Longhorns and Aggies.

Whether it's adapting to different weather or living among people with contrasting backgrounds, landing a superintendent gig at a new course likely means uprooting. Not many turf pros have new course developments in their neighborhoods.

The willingness to island hop resulted in **Damon DiGiorgio** becoming the first director of agronomy at Point Hardy Golf Club at Cabot Saint Lucia, a **Bill Coore** and **Ben Crenshaw** design on a surreal site with elevated views of the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea.

A Maryland native, DiGiorgio attended NC State University, completed internships at The Country Club of North Carolina and The Honors Course under industry icons **George Thompson** and **David Stone**, respectively. For his final internship, he joined the Landscapes Unlimited crew building the Greg Norman Course at PGA West.

After a few full-time positions in California, DiGiorgio moved to the Dominican Republic, where he became the first superintendent at **Nick Faldo**-designed Rocco Ki Golf Club. Rocco Ki was constructed on a fabulous site but shuttered during the Great Recession. DiGiorgio's adventurous side led him

back to the Dominican Republic in 2017 for the director of agronomy role at Playa Grande Golf & Ocean Club. He jumped islands again in early 2022 to accept the Cabot Saint Lucia job. Saint Lucia is a 238-square-mile nation with 180,000 residents.

"I'd say you have more than double the opportunities if you



▲ Stewart Naugler



can move,” DiGiorgio says. “I get it, people have families and kids at home. But if you’re limited to a relatively small geographic area, many of those opportunities aren’t going to open up, especially if you want to get into new golf course construction. You can start off as a construction superintendent and then move into the turf side of things. You’re going to have opportunities as long as you don’t jump around too much.”

THE DAYS AS NO. 1

DiGiorgio started at Cabot Saint Lucia in February 2022. He hired his first employee in May 2022. A few members of the Cabot Saint Lucia management team — the development includes a luxury housing component — were on the island when DiGiorgio arrived. Besides interactions with contractors, DiGiorgio spent most of his early days in Saint Lucia in solitude.

“You have to have that mental fortitude because you can’t say, ‘OK, when I’m having a bad day here, we have a whole team to rely on,’” he says. “At the beginning there’s nobody. You have to stay in that present moment and think ahead, knowing it will get better, and you’ll build your team.”

Assembling a crew might be the most challenging task facing superintendent No. 1. Cabot Saint Lucia is only the second 18-hole golf course on the island, so the labor pool consisted of candidates unfamiliar with the game. Initially, DiGiorgio relied on Cabot’s talent and culture team to conduct mass interviews and identify candidates fit for golf course maintenance roles. “But when you start building a team, not everybody works out,” DiGiorgio says. Word of mouth, he adds, is the most effective way to develop a team in places where golf isn’t prominent.

Cabot is constructing an agronomy village, an asset DiGiorgio believes will help recruit and retain key employees.

The population growth — and construction boom — in and around Austin could present labor challenges for Naugler at Loraloma. He says he’s projecting he’ll need five to 10 workers during the early stages of the grow in, with the staff potentially increasing to 35 to 40 employees once full play begins in 2025. His crew will be maintaining an agronomically unique golf course. Zoysiagrass will cover all short-cut playing surfaces, including greens. “One thing that we have to sell is that this is a David McLay Kidd design and first-class operation,” says Naugler.

Fettig experienced quick labor success at Broomsedge. He convinced assistant superintendent **Nate Brock** to move with him from North Carolina to South Carolina. The pair have worked together for the past six years. Fettig filled another assistant superintendent position with an industry veteran and hired an experienced equipment manager. But he’s also hired golf newcomers to fill hourly positions.

“It’s hard to get good people and it’s even harder to keep them,” Fettig says. “But if you can give them a good home base and keep a light culture while still being productive and providing a product, that’s what it’s all about.”

The empowerment to build a team and turf operation the way he deemed appropriate was a reason Fettig sought jobs as superintendent No. 1. “The way I saw these new builds, it was an opportunity to instill the culture I was raised under and build something the way you want to maintain it,” he says.

VISUALIZATION AS NO. 1

Superintendent No. 1 must stay in

the moment and see the future simultaneously.

During one of his early weeks at Loraloma, Naugler toured the property with the construction team. He saw shaped bunkers and defined green sites. He visualized shots over ravines and views of green swaths along the Pedernales River. He also returned to his temporary office — which is around 10 minutes from the construction site — drenched. The storm foreshadowed Texas’ volatile weather.

“It’s a beautiful site and it’s going to be spectacular when it’s done,” Naugler says. “But it’s also one of the hardest construction sites you can ask for.” Sturdy bedrock beneath what Naugler calls a “decent” layer of topsoil and highly acidic soils are among the construction and agronomic challenges he faces.

Multiple storms halted progress at Cabot Saint Lucia, and DiGiorgio calls a 5-inch flash flood in November 2022 the “low point” of construction. But he started visualizing a drier future standing on the sea-bordering 15th and 18th greens on a mid-January 2023 morning. Savoring ground covered with ripening paspalum along blue waters reaffirmed something special awaited.

“It really does feel surreal to me that I get to work in these beautiful places and get to watch the ocean every day,” DiGiorgio says. “I get to watch the sunrise over the Atlantic and the sunset over the Caribbean every day. How many people get to do that? But that doesn’t mean it’s easy.”

As Cabot Saint Lucia prepares for its one-year anniversary, DiGiorgio is managing a crew still learning golf and turf maintenance without its permanent work home. Turf evolves as it matures, and weather exposes unforeseen course infrastructure weaknesses.

Once play begins, superintendent No. 1 becomes like thousands of other turf managers. Reaching overarching deadlines means the beginning of new dilemmas requiring creative thinking.

“Just because there’s grass on the ground,” Fettig says, “doesn’t mean it’s done.” 🌱

◀ Cabot Saint Lucia director of agronomy Damon DiGiorgio.



Potential revived

An assistant superintendent with a vision and a motivated crew are bringing **Columbus Country Club's** par-3 course back to life.

By **Kelsie Horner**

▲ Columbus Country Club greens superintendent J.R. Lynn, left, and assistant superintendent Travis Russell.

When Travis Russell arrived at Columbus Country Club in 2021, the Ohio club's par-3 course existed in far from ideal condition.

"It was rough over there," says Russell, an assistant superintendent. But with an eye for potential and big plans, Russell works every day to bring that scene to life. "In my mind, I want it to be like Augusta, but in reality, we can do our best at it," he says. "We definitely try our best with what we have and what we're allotted with."

Columbus Country Club, the host of the 1964 PGA Championship, used the land as a parking lot for the event. Columbus Country Club also has hosted two PGA Tour events and five Ohio State Amateurs. With proceeds

from the PGA Championship, won by **Bobby Nichols**, members and friends took the funding, found a bulldozer, and plowed the land for the first par-3 course in central Ohio. The course was up and running in the 1970s and was in its prime in the 1980s and '90s.

"It was kind of in its heyday, it was really booming," greens superintendent **J.R. Lynn** says. "It was definitely a big part of the early or the middle years of what our club has been up to this point, but it's very unique. It was one of the first of its time."

After renovations to the club's original 18-hole championship course — which was designed first by **Tom Bendelow** and later by **Donald Ross** — began in 2015, the short course moved to the bottom of the priority list. An irrigation emergency forced the club to build a pond between the first and third holes of the short course. The club then reevaluated funding and ultimately focused on renovations to the main course. The par-3 course was unplayable for two years.

"It's about 30 acres of the club as you drive in, so it's a pretty focal point, and you don't necessarily notice how impactful it is until it becomes unsightly," Lynn says.

Regular mowing and maintenance has helped restore the par-3 course. But the property would not be in the condition it is in now without Russell, whom co-workers affectionately refer to as the "par-3 superintendent."

"We really try to manage it the same so that it's very much just in conjunction with what we're doing on the main course," Lynn says. "Travis has taken it to the next level to make sure we're actually staying true to that. It holds us all accountable in the end."

The par-3 course features nine holes with one set of tee boxes. The longest hole, No. 6, measures 172 yards, and the shortest, No. 2, measures 84 yards. Bentgrass covers the tees and greens, and a turf-type

tall fescue blend is found in the fairways. The irrigation system focuses on the main playing surfaces, so the roughs require grass that can withstand drought-like conditions. As the course is on land that was once a parking lot, the surface area is predominantly flat.

Although the course is open to member play, the layout is used for more than that. The course brings opportunities for kids and families to learn and play the game. “A big part of our mission statement and our foundation is that we are a family club, so it offers something for everybody,” Lynn says. “But it also offers the ability to come in and still enjoy what we’re all about with golf, but not something that has to take up an entire day.”

The crew will often bring their own families to enjoy the course. “It’s bringing the family out from our end too and being able to showcase what you’re doing while you’re spending the time enjoying it with your kids and trying to build that same foundation behind what it is,” Lynn adds.

With an increase in women’s golfers, the par-3 course can offer a less intimidating environment to learn the game. The course is



▲ Ryan Coll

utilized frequently for women’s lessons, kids’ lessons and youth clinics. “The main golf courses, it’s so intimidating to so many people, it’s just a great way for people to gain confidence in what they know,” director of golf **Ryan Coll** says. “They feel less pressure, because when you’re a beginner-level, even a middle-level golfer, the one thing you’re worried about is holding up the people behind you. And when you have an extra entity like this, you don’t have to worry about it.”

The course offers yet another purpose: team building. “That’s important for me, to see those guys having fun on the product that they’re taking care of,” Coll says. “The par 3 has been good for those guys, because they get to go over there and have fun and they get to play golf, too. I think that’s important for everybody that’s in this type of business because you got in it probably because you love the game. So not playing, that’s not any fun. It’s cool that they get to reap the rewards of all their hard work.”

For Lynn, an Ohio State graduate raised in Tallmadge, Ohio, having a solid team mentality is important. “To me, it’s building a cohesive team

that can come together when we need to, but also be able to focus on our individual responsibilities and how much that really affects what our members get to see.”

When the course is being enjoyed in more ways than one, full of golfers, families or co-workers, Russell says, “It fills my cup.”

The par-3 course is one of Russell’s work passions. He has taken a leadership role on the layout, making sure it is properly cared for, while helping improve its conditions. “He cares about everything,” Coll says. “Everyone knows it’s Travis’s baby.”

When Russell arrived, the course was mainly only used by a lifetime member who would play almost daily. From there, the daily-play average has increased annually. “Led by (Russell), they brought it back to better than what it’s ever been,” Coll says, “and I think it’s being utilized more this year than it ever has.”

The par-3 course now averages about 100 rounds a month; the main course is set to support 23,000 rounds this season.

A nursery is planned to eventually utilize part of the par-3 course’s eighth hole. The nursery will have potential for a future design concept involving integrating short grass from tee to green to provide on-the-ground playing options.

Russell’s hustle and the maintenance team’s work have reintroduced a valuable member amenity.

“We’re all here for one bigger goal, and that’s to provide an experience for our membership, right?” Lynn says. “We’ve seen our team specifically, especially in the management scenario, grow a lot over the last few years.

“We’ve seen that by being able to put some ownership behind some roles and being able to have people that can be dynamic and working together, that can really elevate what the end result is.” 🌱



Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry’s assistant editor.

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.



RAIN BIRD IPAD HOLDER

The Rain Bird CirrusPRO Central Control System operates on this 11-inch iPad Pro with 256GB storage that is mounted to an eSamcore Dashboard Tablet Holder for Car Suction Cup (\$22.99 list price on Amazon). The iPad can be tilted in portrait or landscape positions on the windshield of the 2024

Toro GTX Workman superintendent's turf vehicle. The suction cup is quite strong and stable when driving throughout the course. The Rain Bird CirrusPRO can also be operated on a smartphone and desktop computer. This great idea was from **Gar McLamb**, superintendent at the Hillendale Country Club in Phoenix, Maryland,

which was founded in 1923 and moved to its present location in 1954. Golf course architects **William Gordon** and **David Gordon** designed the course, and **George Fazio**, **Tom Clark** and **Bob Cupp** have remodeled it over the years. **Joel Weiman** recently designed and built a new short-game practice area.



GOODBYE RAP RAP

Charles Schwab founded the Stock Farm Club, in Hamilton, Montana, which celebrated its 25th anniversary in July. The many bridges on the course have the surface boards placed perpendicular to the direction of travel. To eliminate the “rap-rap” sound of the tires passing over the surface, 12 inch by 16 foot by 2 inch “cart runner” boards, produced by a local lumber mill, were installed. The boards were beveled on both ends of the bridge for a smooth egress and ingress. They were mounted using 4-inch decking screws where the boards were intentionally not glued in place so they could be easily replaced in later years. The boards were treated with Copper Green Wood Preservative, and Cabot Decking Stain is applied twice per year. The bridges were re-decked during the course's renovation in 2018-19, which took about one week; the cart runners were part of the cost. Bridge contractors many times are now placing the surface boards parallel with the line of travel. Director of agronomy **Ryan Knapp** and architects **Tom Fazio** and **Ron Smith** provided a very successful renovation and subsequent excellent playing conditioning standards.



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

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THE PENULTIMATE

There may be a handful of you who know, though I actually made the decision back in June: After five-plus years of being blessed with the opportunity to share my thoughts, experiences and opinions with you readers, I am stepping away as a regular columnist with *Golf Course Industry*. That is right, I am stepping down as America's Greenkeeper — but I am keeping the sash gifted to me by **Matthew Gourlay, CGCS, MG!**

First and foremost, I want to thank you all for reading. Thanks for sharing, commenting, interacting and helping facilitate conversations that resonated within our industry. As a writer, the hardest part is sometimes not knowing if the message is getting across. But your feedback — on social media or via a text or call from those who have my number — has always been appreciated.

And thank you for inspiring. So much of what I have written came from your experiences and our conversations. Many of you out there are doing a phenomenal job and you are inspiring others, even if you are not aware. Just keep doing it.

So why am I stepping away from my side hustle at this time? Similar to the column I penned last year about career changes, it is time. I cannot put into words how I know, but I just know it is time someone else receives the opportunity to express themselves like I was given.

Ironically, next month will be the anniversary of my first *Golf Course Industry* contribution. That is right: the annual Turfheads Take Over issue is how I got my start with the magazine. In 2016, I wrote a piece singing the praises of the GCSAA and talked about how my GCSAA membership, which started as a student at Virginia Tech in the late 1990s, helped me along my career journey that brought me to where I am today.

In 2017, I took to the keyboard again to voice my displeasure with my industry peers. I still do not understand why it is when we host our fellow superintendents during industry golf outings, we try to show off and set up the golf courses too hard, leading to long rounds and frustrated folks who were just excited to get away from their property for a few hours. I still think this was one of my best rants.

I remember looking forward to the December edition each year as it presented the opportunity to write about whatever you want and have it published. If you have never done so, I encourage you to contribute to Turfheads Take Over in the future. It truly is

your publication and the team at *Golf Course Industry* does a wonderful job each year making sure your voices are heard.

Turfheads Take Over is like a mini

superintendent meeting in your hand. When I served on the Carolinas GCSA board of directors, I recall **Danny Allen** saying that folks want to hear from other superintendents. All the seminars we produce with academic instructors and other industry leaders are great, but the best-attended classes and lectures are always the ones led by our peers.

So, I am stepping away from monthly contributions. Part of the reason is I think I have said about all I have to say. When I started my blog at my previous golf course, I noticed over the decade-plus of posts that the numbers declined. Part of that is trying to avoid being repetitive amid the seasonal nature of our business.

But part of it, too, I am certain, is just the nature of things. Will I ever find inspiration in someone or something and take to the keyboard? I am sure I will, and if I am inspired enough to actually bang something out on the keyboard, I will email it to **Guy Cipriano** before you can say Turfheads Take Over.

I don't know what is going to happen to the back page, but I do know I look forward to turning there straight away and see what the folks at *Golf Course Industry* have in mind. I am sure whatever or whoever occupies that space will be a great addition and this greenkeeper can just fade into the distance.

Thanks for letting me be a part of your day and thank you for your support.

Until next time. 🌱

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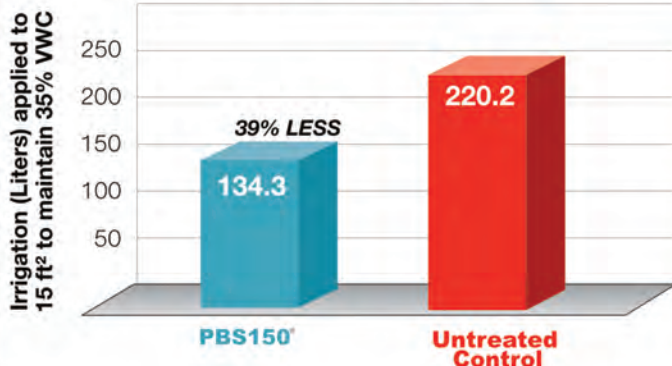
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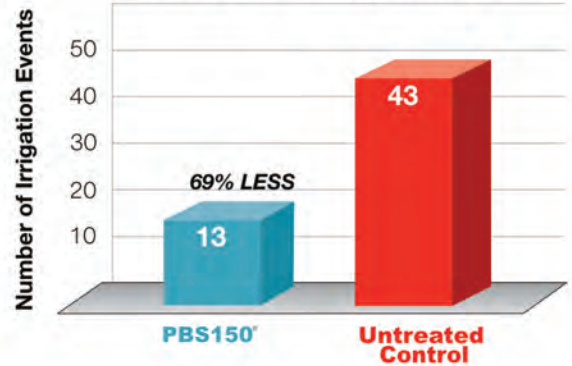
MATTHEW WHARTON, CGCS, MG, is the superintendent at Idle Hour Country Club in Lexington, Kentucky, and past president of the Carolinas GCSA. Follow him on X at @IHCCGreenkeeper.



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PBS150® resulted in a **69%** reduction in irrigation frequency



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 **39% 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 **69% less irrigation events** versus untreated plots that only received irrigation with no soil surfactant



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The Envu Golf logo, featuring the word "envu" in a stylized blue font and "Golf" in a smaller black font, positioned at the bottom of a circular graphic that frames a man standing on a golf course. The circular graphic has a green grassy border and a white center where the man is standing. The background of the entire advertisement is a dark, stormy sky with rain and lightning.

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