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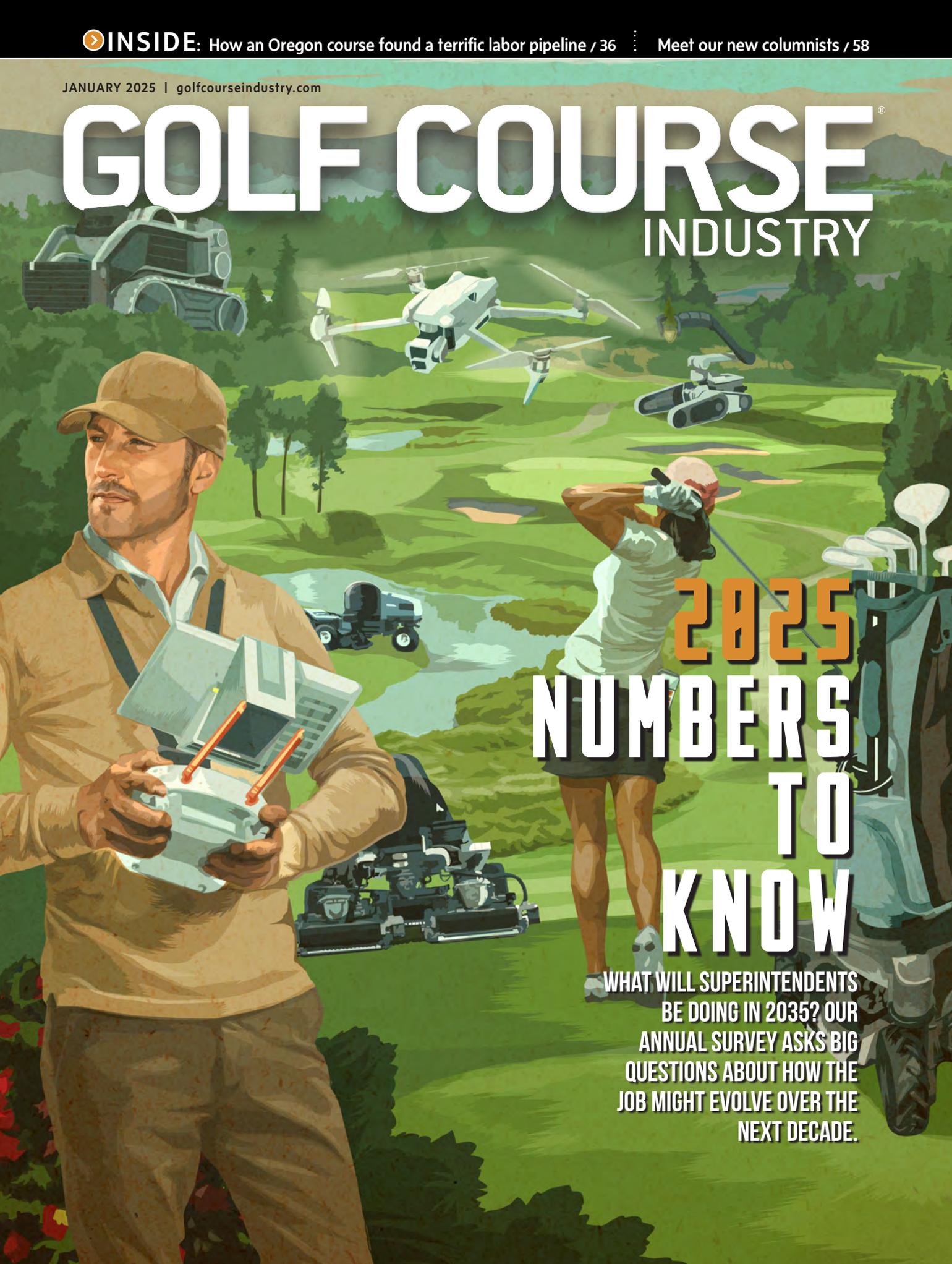
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# GOLF COURSE<sup>®</sup> INDUSTRY



## 2025 NUMBERS TO KNOW

WHAT WILL SUPERINTENDENTS  
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QUESTIONS ABOUT HOW THE  
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# NEW FOR 2025

In a late-2024 conversation with an industry sales professional, I asked what excites him as 2025 approached. His company merged with another well-known industry brand in 2024, and trepidation morphed into optimism by Early Order Program season. He responded by with infectious enthusiasm: “We have new products to sell. What salesperson doesn’t like that?”

A sales professional entering the next fiscal or calendar year without new products or services to sell must grind to turn prospects into users, significantly increase prices or pitch different uses for existing solutions to hit financial targets. The task isn’t for the meek. The sales professional’s answer convinced us to use this space to introduce a few of our 2025 additions.

We’re always driven to surpass what we accomplished the previous year. Here’s the rundown of how we are further engaging readers, listeners, followers and scrollers while connecting them with the companies supporting golf course maintenance efforts.

### New columnists

**Matthew Wharton** “retired” as our backpage columnist last month. Fortunately, he gave us six months’ notice of his intentions.

Providing candid, caring and creative content to audiences represents one of our mantras. The words guided the search for our next backpage columnists. Our search started and ended with **Dave Delsandro** and **Jeff Corcoran**.

The pair launched the consulting firm Agromonic Advisors in late 2023 and used 2024 to hone their business plan. Their experiences at Oakmont Country Club and Oak Hill Country Club, respectively, combined with what they’re observing and hearing in their third-party work makes them an ideal fit for the backpage slot.

Dave and Jeff left destination jobs in the prime of their careers because they are confident their skills will help peers in creative ways. They can relate to what you experience on and off the course, regardless of your budget, clientele or climate.

We’re confident you won’t entirely agree with everything they write—and that’s why we added them to our roster. Their words will force you to think about your course, career and the industry in provocative ways.

### Eco-minded energy

Every responsible superintendent strives to become a better steward of the land. But sometimes time, money and ideas impede eco progress. To continue advancing the industry’s environmental profile, we’re launching “Conservation Mindset,” a monthly feature with practical ideas for making your course a little better for customers, neighbors and critters. Think of it like “Travels with Terry,” focused on the environment.

Assistant editor **Kelsie Horner**, who joined our team in August after wrapping up an internship and graduating from Kent State University, will lead. It makes sense leaning on a newbie to begin something new, right?

### Spring Solutions Madness

Superintendents are curious and great ones find time to learn about emerging products and services. We’ve simplified the process by adding a second online gathering to complement the Turf Technology Showcase.

Our Spring Solutions Madness is scheduled for 1 p.m. EDT, Tuesday, March 11. Participating companies receive 30 minutes to educate both live and on-demand audiences about solutions designed to elevate operations, playing conditions and the golfer experience. Registrants receive access to the live event and recordings of every session will be sent to their email inboxes. Recordings are also available via the Fast & Firm newsletter and our social media feeds. Scan the QR code above to register for free.



Eight spots are available. Contact national sales manager **Russ Warner** (rwarner@gie.net) or account representative **Jimmy Clark** (jclark@gie.net) to reserve your spot.

Curious about the annual basketball tourney beginning the week following Spring Solutions Madness? Connecticut, Auburn, Houston and Oklahoma are potential bracket advancers.

### Follow us somewhere else

*Golf Course Industry* has the industry’s largest social media, but we still had a gap: While many of you were active on LinkedIn, we were idle on the platform. We corrected that by establishing a new LinkedIn page to share career- and business-oriented content. Scan here to follow us.



*Guy Cipriano*  
**Guy Cipriano**  
 Publisher + Editor-in-Chief  
 gcipriano@gie.net

# GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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

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

### GROUP PUBLISHER

**Dave Szy**  
 dszy@gie.net

### PUBLISHER + EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**Guy Cipriano**  
 gcipriano@gie.net

### EDITORIAL

**Matt LaWell**

Managing Editor • mlawell@gie.net

**Kelsie Horner**

Assistant Editor • khorner@gie.net

**Terry Buchen**

Senior Contributing Technical Editor

### GRAPHICS / PRODUCTION

**Jim Blayney**

Creative Director

**Kaitlin Sellers**

Advertising Production Coordinator

### SALES

**Russell Warner**

National Sales Manager  
 rwarner@gie.net • 216-393-0293

**Jimmy Clark**

Account Representative  
 jclark@gie.net • 216-393-0220

### CORPORATE

**Richard Foster**

Chairman

**Chris Foster**

President and CEO

**Dan Moreland**

Publisher Emeritus

**James R. Keefe**

Executive Vice President

**Kelly Antal**

Controller

**Christina Warner**

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**Maria Miller**

Director, Conferences and Events

**Irene Sweeney**

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## Robots on desert bentgrass *By Judd Spicer*

**L**uddites, beware: This future isn't coming. It's here. Echoing (for bitter or better) the automation of all domestic manner of industry, agriculture, food service, commerce, media and entertainment, the golf world is growing and mowing increasingly robotic.

To wit: At the PGA Tour's debut Black Desert Championship held at the eponymous resort in Ivins, Utah, the course and golfers weren't the only things breaking maiden. Rather, the fresh event further represented the first use of autonomous mowers at a PGA Tour stop.

The fleet of four all-electric, 100-inch wide, 5-gang reel AMPs (Autonomous Mowing Platforms) came compliments of Salt Lake City-based FireFly Automatix.

Black Desert superintendent **Ken Yates** got the idea of using the AMPs during a course demo day seven months before the tournament. In concert with Yates' purview, all involved parties saw how using robots played into the narra-

tive of a debut event and the PGA Tour's first Utah-based tournament in more than six decades.

Perfect plot aside, the concept still came with some initial skepticism.

"With anything new, you still don't know exactly how it's going to work, so I still had to have a backup plan," Yates says. "I still had to have fairway mowers to make the tournament work properly."

At first blush, autonomy came via a sprinkle of anxiety.

"There was a little bit of stress, but (FireFly) came out here six weeks ahead of time," Yates adds, "and once they started mowing and mapping — and they did have to remap a couple times, because the first time they didn't do it with the (gallery) ropes up — but by the time we were two weeks out, I was, like, 'Yeah — they got this.' And I wasn't worried about it at all anymore."

During the tourney window, Yates had robots mowing Black Desert's bentgrass fairways from 2 a.m. to 6 a.m.

"They performed very well, and the quality of cut was right on; couldn't have asked for anything better," he says. "And the Tour's agronomy team, they were like me: a little apprehensive at first because, of course, they'd never done it before either. And they did tell me to make sure I had that backup plan. Then they came out the week before the tournament to see them, and, like me, they felt comfortable with them pretty fast."

As both the superintendent and PGA Tour enjoyed robot performance, the AMP's father firm achieved edification through application.

"The group from FireFly came out with all their own people and all that, because this is something they hadn't done before either," Yates says. "To do something on this scale was all new for them, too. And they were getting a lot of valuable information from this. One of their reps told me that they got six months' worth of data from two weeks' time out here. All the practical use, improvements, ... the data

they got out here was incredible and will help make their products even better.”

Rather than finding intimidation in agronomy’s tech advance, Yates sees the robots as merely another tool in the shed.

“I’m pretty open to it,” he says while partially joking that equipment managers will soon basically become IT workers. “I mean, I’ve been doing this job for over 30 years, and been working in golf since 1989. Just look back over that time at how we run irrigation systems and sprayers now with automation. Things change and evolve. The mowers, it’s just a new thing, a new tool, a new technology. The practices remain the same, it’s just that they’re not being done in the exact same way.”

As for the turf being tended at Black Desert? That too proves a unicorn, as the course, which debuted in 2023, is one of two facilities in southern Utah playing on bentgrass fairways and greens.

“I knew that this (turf) would work out well, because of the low humidity and because of the variety of bentgrass,” Yates says. “I’m using Dominator on the fairways and 007XL on the greens. These, of course, are the new ‘Superbents.’ And, I mean,

the bents that I used back in the ’90s, they wouldn’t have lived in this environment. These Superbents, they remind me a lot of Bermudagrass at times, just how hearty they are. You can beat them up a little bit, and they like it. They recuperate so quickly.”

Grass aside, Yates refutes the Man vs. Machine idea that enhanced automated inclusion in golf will take over — or take away — jobs from human staff. Inversely, he firmly believes that robots afford grounds’ teams to be freed up for all manner of more finite tasks.

“You keep the same staff and then use the robots as an extra tool. It allows your team for the more detailed work,” Yates says. “We all have those jobs in the back of our heads that we’ll get to when there’s time to do it. But, with this stuff, we’re getting to those jobs faster.

“During the tournament, my guys never touched a fairway mower, so there was more time to be spent in bunkers, detail work. We would have gotten to that stuff anyway, but now we were freed up with more time to get to it right away.”

*Judd Spicer is a Palm Desert, California-based writer and senior Golf Course Industry contributor.*

## Tartan Talks 102

**Chad Goetz** lives in Florida. He has a major project in Arizona beginning this spring.



▲ Chad Goetz

He’s now helping design courses to be played on screens.

Goetz’s 25-year career as a golf course architect easily surpasses anything he envisioned when learning the game in Warrensburg, Missouri, a small college town in the middle of the state.

“It’s worked out really well,” Goetz says on the *Tartan Talks* podcast appearance. “What I really love about it is that no project is the same. Every piece of land, every golf course, every client, every superintendent is different. Every project requires a different approach. That always keeps it fresh.”

The diversity of work Goetz executes as a senior design associate at Nicklaus Design makes for fascinating *Tartan Talks* dialogue. The conversation begins with Goetz describing the upcoming work at Desert Highlands in Scottsdale, Arizona. At the end of the podcast, Goetz describes his role in creating a futuristic golf course.

The episode is available on the Superintendent Radio Network page of popular distribution platforms.



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Golf Course Industry and The Aquatrols Company are honoring winners of the 14th annual Super Social Media Awards as part of the 2025 Social Media Celebration beginning at 2:30 p.m. PT, Wednesday, Feb. 5, at GCSAA Conference and Trade Show booth #4025 inside the San Diego Convention Center. Drinks will be served during the event, with a happy hour and live music immediately following the celebration. Hosted by *Golf Course Industry* managing editor **Matt LaWell**, a veteran trivia game presenter in his spare time, the gathering provides a fabulous opportunity to reconnect with industry friends or meet peers you might recognize from your social media feeds. The event is free, open to all and requires no RSVP.

# Melissa Gugliotti

SYNGENTA

**M**elissa Gugliotti wears a variety of hats. As a territory sales manager for Syngenta covering most of New England, she serves as a liaison between the company and the distributors and superintendents it serves.

“My customer is technically the distributor,” Gugliotti says, “and I count on them to be able to make the actual sale. But at Syngenta, we believe it’s important to stay in touch with the superintendent, the end user, as well, so I do everything from sales to helping technical support to distribution. There are a lot of things that fall under the umbrella and then internally you talk about creating programs, how things internally are going to be presented to the end user. There are a lot of things throughout the year you get involved in.”

Gugliotti earned her bachelor’s degree from Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, and her master’s from the University of Connecticut, and has worked for Syngenta since 2007. She did not have a turf background when she joined the company, but she did have a lifelong interest in science and was already a recreational golfer.

Appearing on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast with host **Rick Woelfel**, Gugliotti spoke about building her credibility with the superintendents she works with.

“I actually think that being a woman got my foot in the door with a lot of superintendents maybe the first time,” she says. “But after you walk through that door, you have to back it up with something. My science background and my technical ability were able to bring something to the table.

“I was actually able to get them the answers they needed and talk intelligently about the science of things and what *could* be going on and help problem solve. That’s a huge part of our business and what my job is, is problem solving. Everything from delivery to product quality to turf diseases. *What’s going on? What am I seeing in other areas?* People choose distributors and manufacturers based on relationships but also on the knowledge that they can bring them.”

Gugliotti’s job requires flexibility and an ability and willingness to address her customers’ concerns — sometimes with little advance notice.

“The No. 1 key to being a good sales rep is being able to answer that call immediately,” she

says. “Be responsive, be reactive. You might not have the answer right away. They might ask you something you don’t know how to answer right away, but (it’s important) being there and showing empathy for them as well as getting out there as soon as you can, or at least having their distributor touch base with them as they can.

“I work superintendents’ hours. I’m up at 4:30 in the summer and sometimes you get that call at 4:30 in the morning. ‘What do I put in the tank?’ Or, ‘Does this go with that?’ Being able to be responsive and have them be your priority is critical.”

Gugliotti was part of the group of female volunteers who supported **Josh Saunders** and his team at Lancaster Country Club last spring during the U.S. Women’s Open.

“It was interesting because I’d never really volunteered for a whole week until this year when I volunteered at two different events,” she says. “The first one I participated in was not the same as the U.S. Women’s Open. It was still a good experience and I still got to network with other ladies in turf, but the U.S. Women’s Open was done in such a way that I can’t thank Josh and his team enough for making us all feel welcome, and needed, and important, and taken care of. It was a tremendous experience. It was a wonderful venue. We got great weather other than one day and that definitely helped. It was a well-run machine and the hospitality we received and the opportunity we received to network with people was unmatched. It was great.” 🌱



After you walk through that door, you have to back it up with something. My science background and my technical ability were able to bring something to the table.”



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# Birds, bees, butterflies and turtles

Georgia superintendent Harold Ammons shares five ways his team is promoting environmentalism at Flat Creek Country Club.

**H**arold Ammons, superintendent of Flat Creek Country Club in Peachtree City, Georgia, has spent 37 years working at the **Joe Lee**-designed course. After the Invited club was encouraged by ownership to achieve Audubon International certification in 2017, Ammons' passion for the environment skyrocketed.

As an Audubon-certified course, introducing new projects frequently is highly encouraged. Here are five things Ammons and his team are doing to promote environmentalism.

## BLUEBIRD BOXES

Throughout the 27-hole facility, golfers will find bluebird houses placed strategically, not facing the West to prevent overheating. With the help of a member, **Charlene Dekock**, the boxes are monitored weekly.

"She is my bluebird whisperer, that's for sure, and she loves to take care of my bluebirds," Ammons says. Eggs, babies, fledglings and full-grown birds are counted. After eggs are hatched and the birds depart from the nest, each box needs to be cleaned as bluebirds will not reuse nests. The course helps fledge 80 to 100 bluebirds each year.

## MONARCH BUTTERFLIES

As part of Audubon's Monarchs in the Rough program, Ammons and his crew planted milkweed and wildflowers throughout the course, providing a stop for the Monarch butterflies. Although the course is not in the direct path of migration for the creatures, a few will visit each year. Ammons says the number varies, some years bringing 25 to 30, others only four or five.

"One year, we had a whole flock in here, they were fluttering around everywhere for about two weeks," Ammons says.

The course's first monarch caterpillars were discovered last September.

## TURTLE HABITAT PROTECTION

The course is doing its part to save the turtles. On the ninth hole, a sandbar on the creek hosts a common egg-hatching spot for soft shell aquatic turtles. Once the eggs have been laid, the area is staked off, preventing disruption. The eggs take approximately 60 days to hatch. Once hatched, their trails can be seen in the sand and bunkers. Occasionally, a baby turtle will find itself stuck in a hole cup.

## HONEYBEE BOXES

The course's most recent project was adding honeybee hives last March. Ammons, who had little experience managing bees, found a member, **Andrey Nikitenko**, to assist with the project. "My dad had them when I was younger, but when you're younger, you're not too concerned with

stuff like that," Ammons says.

Honeybees are known to be sensitive to the environment, so for a golf course, they can be a telltale sign of your course's conditions and the impact of plant protectants. "With honeybees, if you are spraying stuff out that you shouldn't be or anything that you shouldn't be doing, honeybees can be affected very quickly with that," Ammons adds.

The boxes must be checked frequently. Occasionally, a new box will need to be added to prevent two queen

bees from taking over one box. The bees are fed with sugar water every two to three weeks when flowers are not in bloom, typically late fall to spring. Honey was first harvested in June 2024, with almost two gallons retrieved. Ammons fills jars and presents them to members as gifts.

## PURPLE MARTIN BIRD FEEDERS

The golf course plans to add Purple Martin bird feeders to the property this year. Ammons enjoys driving down the course and seeing the birds swoop in and catching bugs.

"We need to take care of our 160 acres and try to make an impact on the environment, and we can get along and have a place of enjoyment for golf, and at the same time we can be good to the environment," he adds. Ammons received the Georgia Environmental Leadership Award in recognition of his efforts and plans to create new projects each year to better the land around him. 🌱



*Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry's assistant editor. To submit ideas about conservation-focused programs or actions at your course, email her at [khomer@gie.net](mailto:khomer@gie.net).*

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# FUTURE GAZING AND CREATING

**C**rystal ball gazing, a favorite pastime at this time of year, became a lot trickier when **Donald Trump** was elected the 47th president of the United States.

In the days leading up to the president-elect taking office, many of those with a stake in global supply chains — which includes all of us — were taking their best guess at what the next four years would mean for the cost of goods and services on which their businesses rely.

As a candidate, Trump vowed to implement stiff tariffs on imports. If those promises hold, overseas manufacturers and U.S. retailers importing basic goods could face significantly higher costs. Sectors that figure heavily in a superintendent's business plan include gasoline and petroleum-based products — large amounts of crude oil are imported from western Canada and refined at U.S. facilities — fertilizer, maintenance vehicles and other equipment. Familiar issues concerning labor and finances rest at the foundation of what is shaping up to be a volatile 2025.

## LABOR

In a tight labor market, recruiting, retaining and inspiring your team will continue to demand managerial vigilance. Keys to assembling and retaining a top-performing team bring focus to several concerns:

- **Compensation and benefits:** As housing and transportation costs rise, workers need improved compensation to meet their needs. Your staff members want to see that you're looking out for them.
- **Training:** A primary concern gleaned from GGA Partners' 2024 Employee Perspectives Survey is workers' desire to get better at their jobs. Training remains one of the best investments you can make for your people's future and your facility's health.

- **Respect:** Being part of a winning team with the organization's respect is a top priority for your teammates. Show respect by making sure they understand their roles in achieving the club's and course's goals and expectations.

## FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Although owners and boards recognize the essential nature of the asset you manage, that doesn't mean they want to spend a dime more than is necessary to maintain it. Their conservative fiscal bias necessitates that superintendents become masters at advocating for primary and secondary spending needs well ahead of the budget cycle. The superintendents who prosper in 2025 will be alert to financial matters and provide ample background, support and coaching to those with budget-approval authority.

The coming year will demand a mixed bag of challenges for superintendents. Beyond trade and supply chain issues, three factors are likely to dominate: rising labor costs, supply-chain disruption and environmental impacts.

## ECONOMIC FACTORS

In addition to rising labor costs, projected in late 2024 by the Society for Human Resource Management to range from 3.5 percent to 3.8 percent, anything related to the cost of a barrel of oil will impact your budget. Beyond the slightly declining cost of fuel for mowers and rolling stock, 2025 budgets should allow for the volatility of global events. Dealing with the unpredictable will require an advanced cost-tracking capability to stay ahead of changing markets. The

best sources of this information are peers and your vendor and supplier network; keep your network open and active.

## GEO-POLITICAL DISRUPTIONS

During the pandemic, smart turf managers put themselves ahead of the supply chain by coordinating with vendors — sometimes competitors — to ensure they were supplied with critical goods. Given the current state of global conflict and the interdependency laid bare by the pandemic, savvy planners are monitoring this risk in real time. Converting data from a physical to a digital format is essential to real-time supply management. If you still rely on a folder of purchase orders, it's time to upgrade your approach.

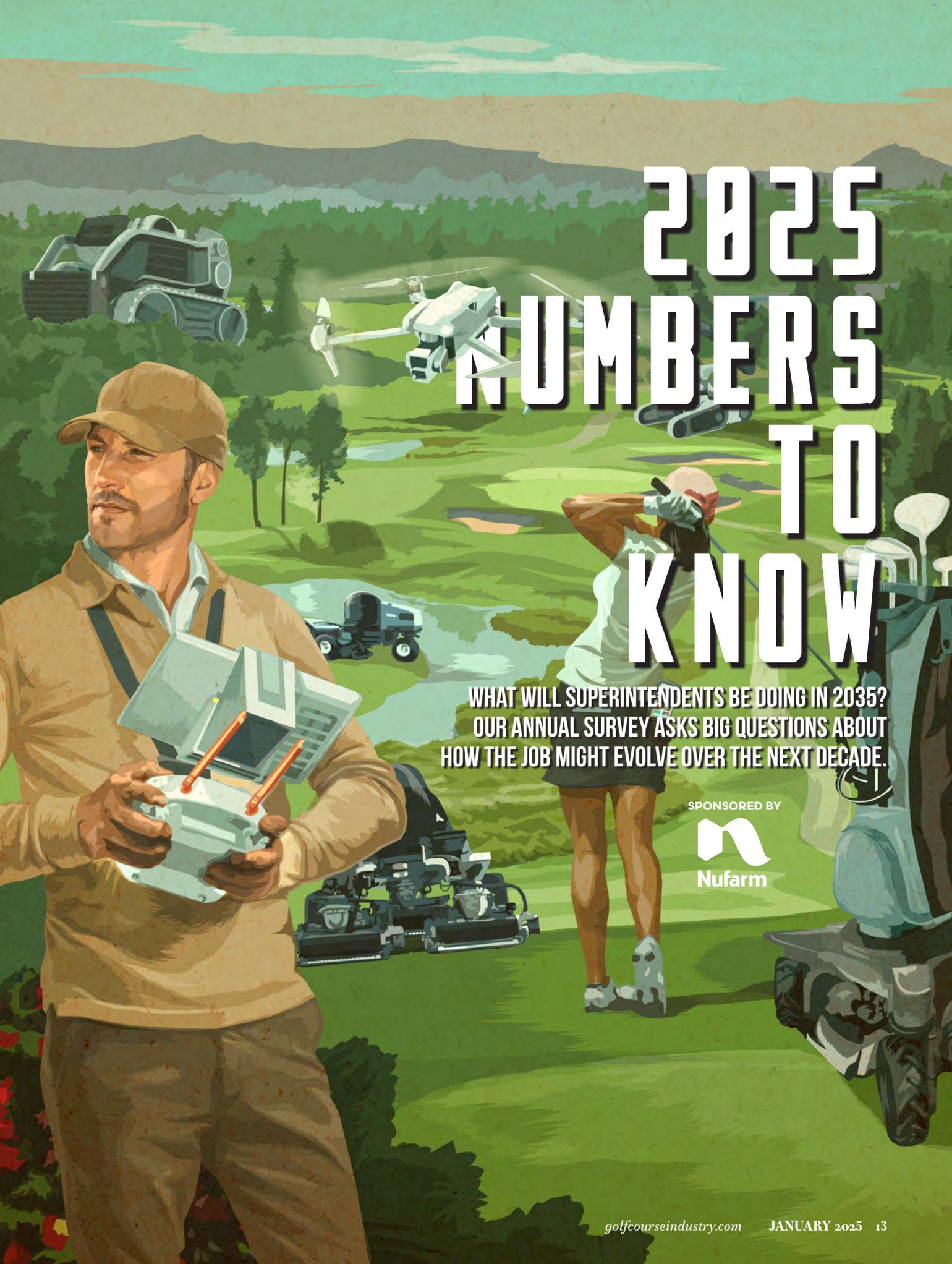
## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Superintendents are renowned environmental stewards. Pressure points converging on golf facilities start (but don't end) with water rights and limitations. These concerns are spreading progressively as climate change uncertainty, along with societal and governmental pressure, continues to paint golf facilities as wealthy indulgences. Informed stewardship and advocacy remain your best ally.

Predicting the future is an errand for fools and columnists. And there's no doubt looking into our crystal balls has become a lot murkier. As management guru **Peter Drucker** said, "The best way to predict the future is to create it." And when it comes to creating a future with golf's health as its mission, you wouldn't want to bet against the women and men who are the first ones at work every day. 🏌️



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



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## Many happy returns from the Nufarm family!

As your partner for growth, we hope that this State of the Industry report provides you helpful insights and guidance as you plan for 2025.

Throughout the years, Nufarm remains committed to our golf partners, through investments that support the industry, from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, the Nufarm EXCEL Leadership Program, Project EverGreen, as well as many, many local GCSA chapters across the country. These efforts help us bring industry professionals together to tackle tomorrow's challenges. By building on these valuable relationships, we listen to your needs and work on advancing your solutions.

Nufarm is an innovator in the industry, with a track record of providing next-generation solutions for golf turfgrass management professionals. All the while, we continue investing in our service and technical development to optimize our solutions and their application on golf courses across the country.

A new year is a new opportunity to take your golf course and the game of golf to the next level. We at Nufarm look forward to being your trusted partner throughout 2025 with game-changing solutions!

**Jeff Eldridge, CGCS**

*Golf Segment Lead for Nufarm Turf & Ornamental*



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MAINTAIN PRISTINE  
SURFACE CONDITIONS



FIND SAVINGS ON  
TIME & LABOR



APPLY WITH EASIER  
CONVENIENCE

## **Anuew EZ** PLANT GROWTH REGULATOR

Whether your sights are on playability, density or color – or the pressure is on to reduce time and labor – Anuew EZ is ready to respond. It's the PGR you rely on to achieve your #1 course priority in a new, easy liquid formulation.

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Now in a liquid formulation

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# SUPERINTENDENT OF THE FUTURE

**K**eeping our annual *Numbers to Know* package relevant and impactful requires developing fresh themes.

With a bevy of turf-related technology introduced in 2024 and headed toward widespread availability in 2025, we unequivocally believed gazing ahead at 2035 and providing a snapshot of the “Superintendent of the Future” represented the best route to providing enlightening, entertaining and essential content.

Big questions surrounding the adoption of artificial intelligence and automation, the skills required to flourish in turf maintenance, and how and where future superinten-

dents will be developed are poised to alter the industry — likely for the better — over the next decade. The late 2020s and early 2030s should be exciting times for industry professionals with growth mindsets.

The content on the following pages blends survey data with human predictions. The art portion of our job resulted in managing editor **Matt LaWell** and assistant editor **Kelsie Horner** conducting phone interviews with some of the industry’s brightest leaders about futuristic topics.

*Golf Course Industry* partnered with Signet Research, a New Jersey-based independent research

company, to distribute a 33-question survey to an email list of print and/or digital subscribers who are superintendents, directors of agronomy, assistant superintendents, owners, general managers and directors of golf. Results are based on 214 responses at a 95 percent confidence level.

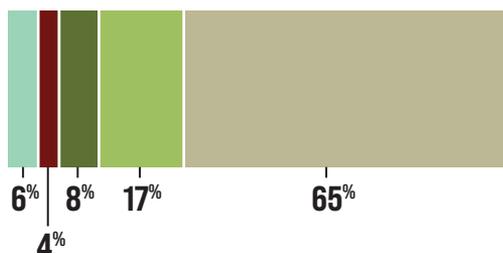
An annual donation to the Wee One Foundation — a charitable organization established in 2004 in memory of **Wayne Otto**, CGCS, that helps superintendents and other turf professionals in need — is made in thanks for survey participation.

Guy Cipriano



## WHO ARE YOU?

- Superintendent, single golf course
- Director of agronomy or equivalent
- Superintendent, multiple golf courses
- Assistant superintendent acting on behalf of boss
- Other\*

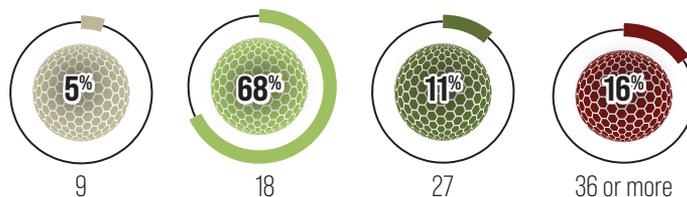


\*Other responses included: Owner, general manager, board of director, consultant

## TYPE OF COURSE WHERE YOU WORK



## NUMBER OF HOLES AT YOUR FACILITY?



SPONSORED BY



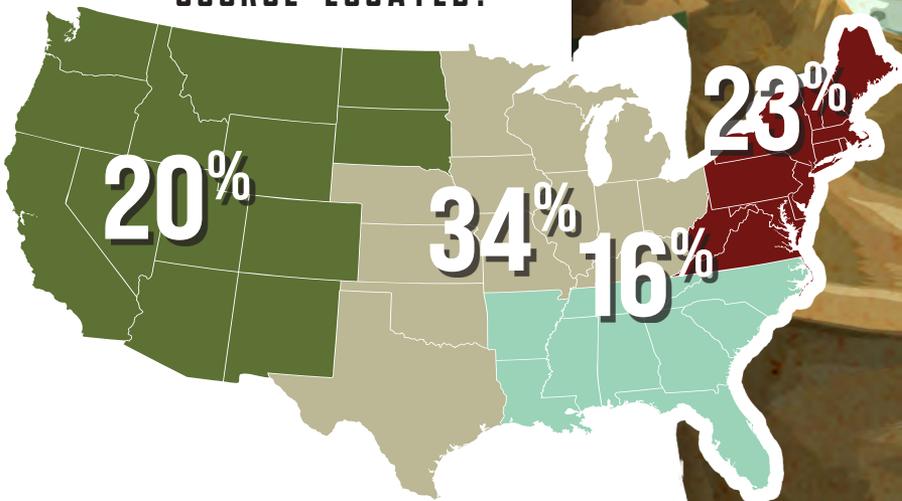
2025 NUMBERS TO KNOW:  
SUPERINTENDENT OF  
THE FUTURE

## WHO OWNS YOUR COURSE?

Member equity	38%
Single owner	24%
Government	15%
Management or investment company	9%
Family	5%
Resort	2%
Other*	7%

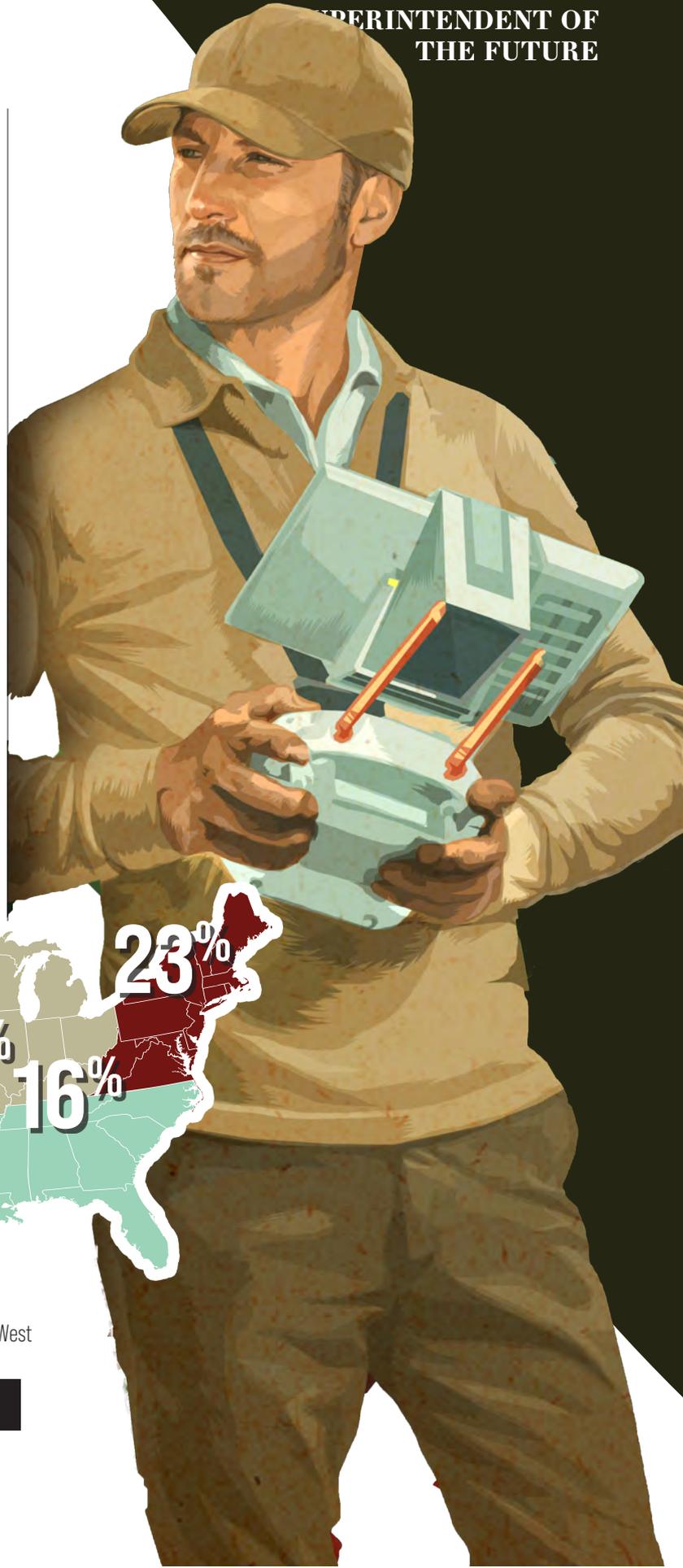
*\*Other responses included: HOA, limited partnership, society, board of directors, state golf association, corporation, Native American tribe*

## WHERE IS YOUR COURSE LOCATED?



■ Northeast ■ Southeast ■ Central ■ West

Canada or elsewhere 7%





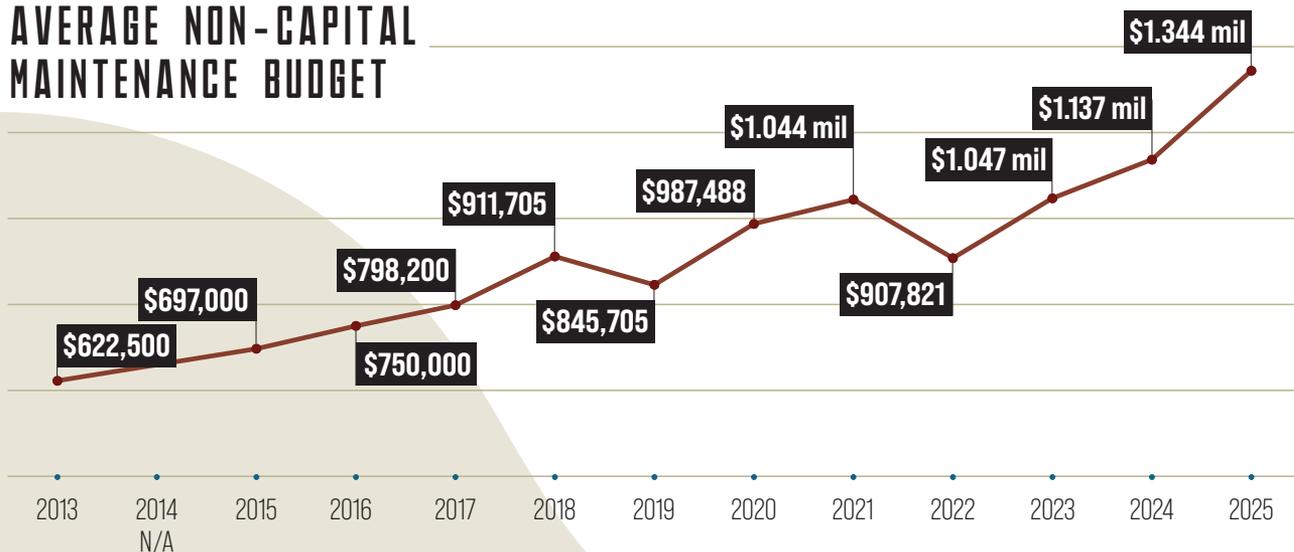
# BUDGET

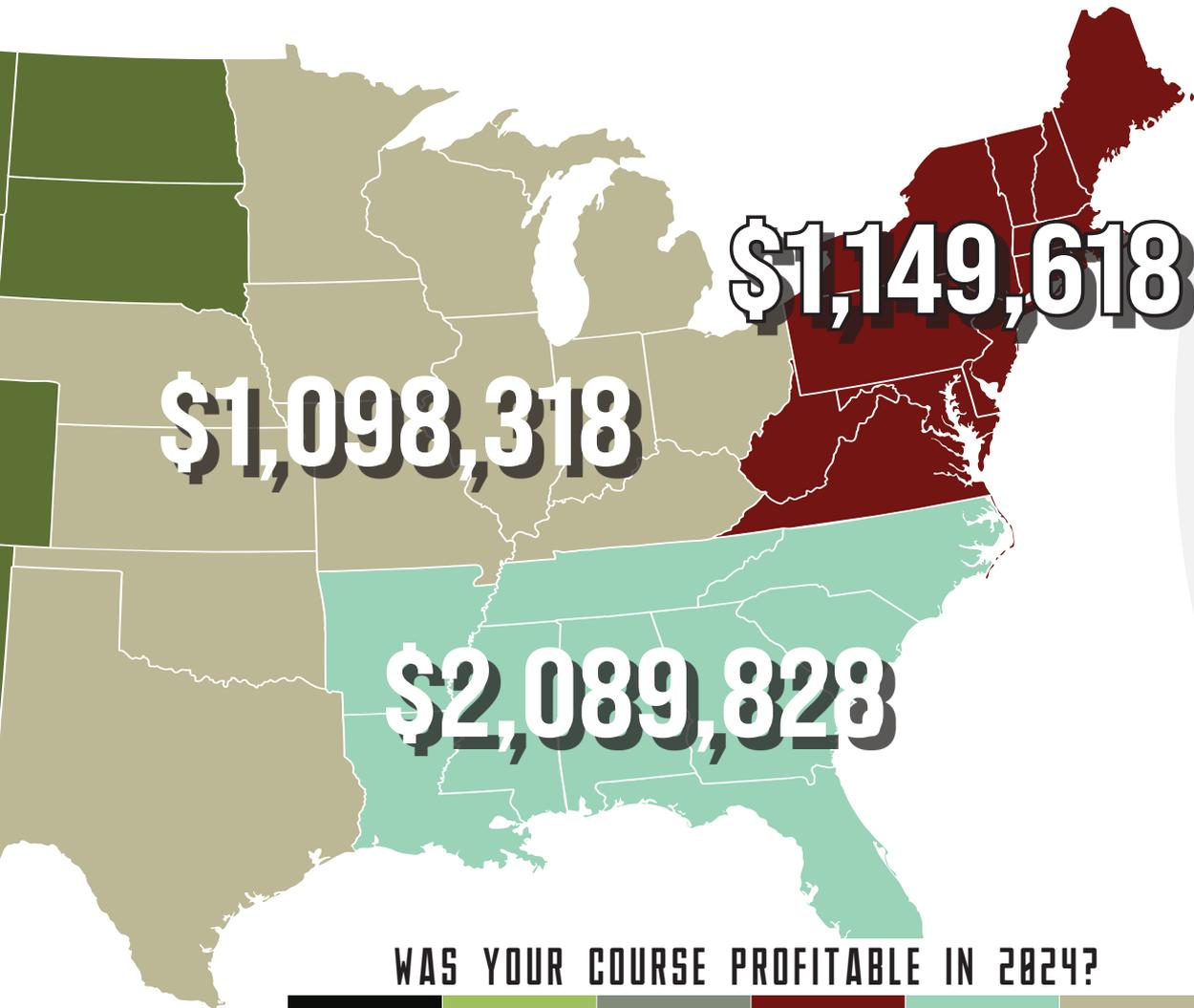
## PROJECTED 2025 NON-CAPITAL MAINTENANCE BUDGET BY REGION



■ Northeast ■ Southeast ■ Central ■ West

### AVERAGE NON-CAPITAL MAINTENANCE BUDGET





WAS YOUR COURSE PROFITABLE IN 2024?

	ALL	NON-PRIVATE	PRIVATE	NORTHEAST	SOUTHEAST	CENTRAL	WEST
PROFITABLE	74%	79%	68%	71%	47%	82%	74%
BROKE EVEN	14%	9%	19%	15%	34%	8%	12%
EXPERIENCED A LOSS	8%	7%	9%	6%	19%	6%	9%
DON'T KNOW	4%	5%	4%	8%	0%	4%	5%

PERCENTAGE OF COURSES THAT WERE PROFITABLE OR BROKE EVEN OVER THE LAST SEVEN YEARS





## PROJECTED 2025 NON-CAPITAL MAINTENANCE BUDGET BY COURSE TYPE



Non-private  
**\$843,756**



Private  
**\$1,737,040**

## PROJECTED COURSE IMPROVEMENT AND ENHANCEMENT BUDGET

	2025	2024	2023	2022
All	\$326,480	\$410,843	\$404,180	\$226,371
Non-private	\$171,744	\$316,850	\$199,688	\$136,379
Private	\$450,907	\$503,905	\$604,609	\$312,407
Northeast	\$305,769	\$275,784	\$533,731	\$312,407
Southeast	\$363,750	\$413,467	\$646,644	\$189,286
Central	\$295,250	\$360,927	\$236,583	\$167,339
West	\$405,658	\$625,184	\$443,044	\$308,375



# 88%

WERE PROFITABLE OR  
BROKE EVEN IN 2024

## PERCENTAGE OF BUDGET DEDICATED TO LABOR AND OVERHEAD

	ALL	NON-PRIVATE	PRIVATE
Less than 40%	3%	5%	2%
40% to 49%	23%	29%	16%
50% to 59%	34%	33%	37%
60% to 69%	33%	27%	38%
70% to 79%	6%	5%	7%
80% or more	1%	1%	0%
<b>Average</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>54%</b>

## MAINTENANCE BUDGET CHANGE COMPARED WITH 2024

	ALL	NON-PRIVATE	PRIVATE
Increase 20% or more	1%	0%	1%
Increase 10% to 19%	18%	18%	18%
Increase 1% to 9%	61%	51%	69%
No change	17%	27%	11%
Decrease 1% to 9%	1%	2%	0%
Decrease 10% or more	2%	2%	1%



# ADAPTING, UPDATING AND ROLLING WITH THE TIMES

What will 2035 look like for the average golf course superintendent? Hard to say. What will 2035 look like for longtime industry leader **Paul B. Latshaw**? Also, hard to say, but the Merion Golf Club director of grounds operations at least knows he wants to still be working in golf a decade from now “in some way, shape or form.”

Latshaw has worked in golf course maintenance for 36 years — the last 33 as a superintendent, manager or director — and his plan right now is to remain at Merion at least through the 2030 U.S. Open. “Past that, I don’t know,” he says. “Do I want to do the 2034 Women’s Open? I’ve never done a Women’s Open.”

“I don’t know what retirement would look like. I just don’t know anything else. I’ve been doing this so long and I still love it. I’d like to go as long as I possibly can.”

Latshaw has remained not just relevant but revered for so long in part because of his ability to adapt, update and roll with the times. “When I got into the business, there was a lot of feel,” he says. “And there’s still a lot of feel, but the amount of data points and metrics you have just makes it easier.”

Latshaw rattles off a dozen various agronomic and weather apps on his

phone, quickly adding that there are “probably a ton that I’m forgetting.” None of them existed when he was starting out. His cell phone didn’t exist when he was starting out.

“I think technology is going to continue to help make data-based decisions,” Latshaw says. “You look at the (USGA) GS3 (smart ball and Deacon app) and how that’s giving you quantitative data and allowing you to adjust your programs to make sure you get good playing surfaces. You start taking all that information with clipping yields, moisture meter readings, you continue to add information and data to your platform, you’re able to make data-based decisions.”

“Obviously, agronomy is a blend of art and science, but the data and the information is really helping make risk/reward decisions.”

After Latshaw returned to Merion at the start of the 2017 season, the board chairman — who is now the board president — told Latshaw that he wanted the agronomy team to employ more quantitative measurements. “We determined course standards, and every month that gets submitted to the board of governors,” Latshaw says. The numbers might swing a bit near the end of summer, but documenting those standards has helped tremendously. “You look

at the information, you look at your agronomic programs, and you make the best plan you can. It helps you get a big picture of all the data points.”

Latshaw remains high on autonomous mowers (“they’re going to be a part of the industry”) and social media (“it’s going to be critical”) and Zoom meetings (“it saves the people on the committee time”). He’s just as high on building a solid agronomic base, learning more about business, and teaching his young employees etiquette and life skills. Oh, and actual phone calls.

“Text messaging to me is not the most effective way of communication, because too much gets lost in translation and I think a lot of time people text instead of just picking up the phone and having a conversation,” he says. “Real effective communication is talking with someone on the phone or face to face.”

And he’s high on the industry in general.

“I don’t think there has ever been a better time to get into this side of the industry,” Latshaw says. “You look at how strong golf is, how many courses are being constructed, I think it’s a great opportunity for people to get into the industry. It’s demanding, but it’s a great way to make a living.”

Matt LaWell

## MOST IMPORTANT SKILLS TO A SUPERINTENDENT’S SUCCESS IN 2035



Turf maintenance skills  
**35%**



Communication skills  
**26%**



People skills  
**25%**



Technology skills  
**7%**



Business skills  
**7%**



# MAKING THE SHIFT

**B**riggs Ranch (Texas) director of agronomy **Bill Weller** has been around the game of golf his entire life.

He played in high school and college and has worked in golf maintenance since the beginning. Weller graduated from Rhodes College and attended law school. After passing the bar exam, his interests changed, and he returned to golf.

Similarly to how Weller's passions shifted, so will the golf maintenance industry shift from manual-driven to tech-driven labor.

Weller believes the industry will see advances in equipment, equipment monitoring, labor efficiencies, data and beyond. "That's going to be a big one with GPS monitoring, some of this other stuff, our labor should become more efficient," he says. "Tracking labor will be more efficient in finding ways to improve our day-to-day operations."

With technology, superintendents will be made aware of issues on the course before they see them with their own eyes. "Some of these new systems can tell you when something's going wrong before you've even visually seen something on the golf course," Weller adds.

One challenge associated with technology includes initial costs and learning.

"The upfront cost of multiple weather stations, satellite imaging, a lot of that stuff is very expensive," Weller says. "I think initially it's going to be kind of hard. It depends on how

it all shakes out. But some of this new equipment, some of this new more electrically based, more computer chips ... I think there is going to be a learning curve with that. So, I think, there will be challenges."

As technology evolves in the industry, Weller says he believes the ideal employee will change and staff numbers will drop 25 to 30 percent. "We're shifting more to finding the personalities that can be successful in your system, the way you run things, and trying to help them excel and move on," he says.

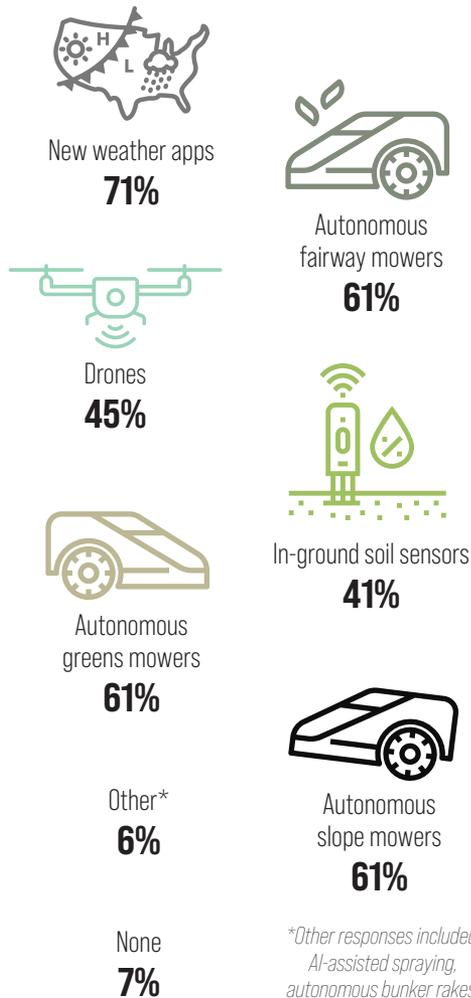
At the San Antonio-area course, Weller and his crew have performed demos with multiple autonomous mowing units. They plan to implement robot usage soon.

Weller is excited about the future. He spends his free time and winter months learning about trending technology to prepare himself.

"Do some classes," Weller suggests. "I'll check out research, usually in the winter when we're a little slower, I'll get a little bit more time to go through and do agronomic planning, do some research. When I get periodicals, I'll scan through them, and if there's something pertinent, I'll read it. I think the most important way is to stay in touch with your fellow superintendents, even if it's someone that has a totally different point of view than you. I think that's also important. You don't always want to hear the same opinion every single time." 📖

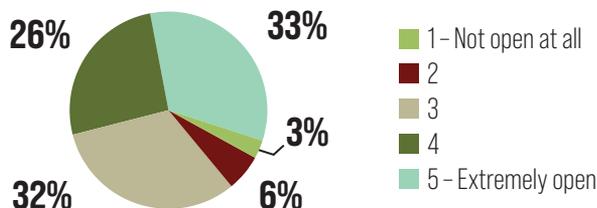
*Kelsie Horner*

## WHAT TECHNOLOGY ARE YOU NOT USING TODAY THAT YOU'LL BE USING IN 2035?



*\*Other responses included: AI-assisted spraying, autonomous bunker rakes, autonomous range pickers*

## OPENNESS TO USING NEW TECHNOLOGY TO REPLACE AND/OR ASSIST PHYSICAL LABOR





# GUESSING IS EXPENSIVE

The superintendent of the future won't make any guesses. At least that's what USGA customer service agronomist **Brian Powell** believes. Through data-collecting technology, superintendents will have the information necessary to use exact measurements.

Technology will provide knowledge on the exact locations to spray, what the expected weather will be, what needs water and more. With rising technology and the incorporation of AI into equipment, golf maintenance facilities will be able to know their budget and supplies aren't being wasted.

"Guessing these days is expensive," Powell says. "It's very expensive. If you guess and you're right, that's wonderful, but it's a luxury that top facilities can't afford, and golf courses in the future aren't going to be able to afford. If you guess and you're wrong, it's wasteful, or it delivers the quality level different than what you're after and that's just not something that we

can afford to do anymore, because it's wasting precious resources.

"Data is what gives you the ability to make decisions that are less likely to result in cost overruns, wasting of precious resources, wasting time and the chance to produce better results," he says. "Specifically, data gives you a chance to produce superior results more frequently."

Powell, who studied turfgrass management at NC State University and has worked as both a superintendent and a director of agronomy, believes the awareness of a superintendent's work will increase alongside technology use. "It used to be that golf course superintendents stayed in the back, in the shadows," Powell says. "Now, because people enjoy the details, that's changing. Now they want to know, What are some of the metrics that you're using to make decisions? What are the metrics themselves?"

Powell used the example of the NFL and fantasy football. "You have millions and millions of people that

enjoy going online and seeing stats. In golf, they want to see what ShotLink said about the average length hitting a golf ball, perhaps at a certain venue. Golf course maintenance and golf course superintendents, not only are they not immune to that, but they're also part of that wave."

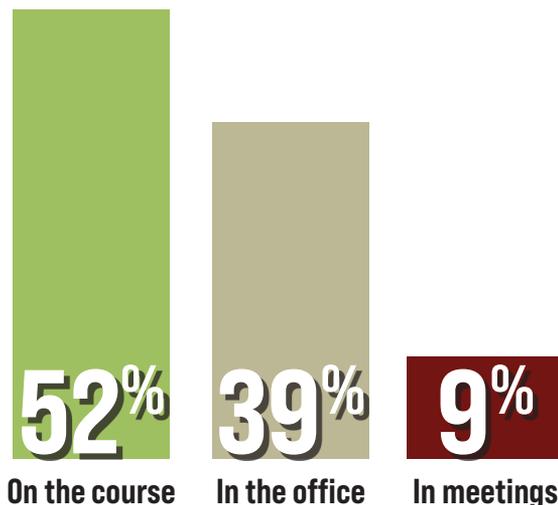
For Powell, the go-to tool for data is the USGA's GS3 smart golf ball. Released in February 2023, it collects data on green speed, firmness, smoothness and trueness. "Anyone that knows the USGA knows we're always looking to innovate," Powell says.

Thanks to technologies like the GS3, data-driven decisions can assist the turf industry in more ways than one. "All businesses these days, all *Fortune* 500 companies, make decisions by the use of data," Powell says. "Data-driven decision making is how they operate. And that's pervasive, and that is also filtered into the golf industry, and for good reason. In my opinion, future golf course superintendents will use data as much as they possibly can to make decisions.

"History has proven that the ones that are out there investigating new technologies, new devices, new methods, they're the ones that typically flourish, and their properties and golf clubs typically flourish as a result." 🏌️

*Kelsie Horner*

WHERE WILL  
SUPERINTENDENTS  
SPEND THE  
MAJORITY OF  
THEIR WORK TIME  
IN 2035?



HOW WILL GOLFERS VIEW  
THE SUPERINTENDENT ROLE  
IN 2035?



With more respect

25%

With the same level of respect

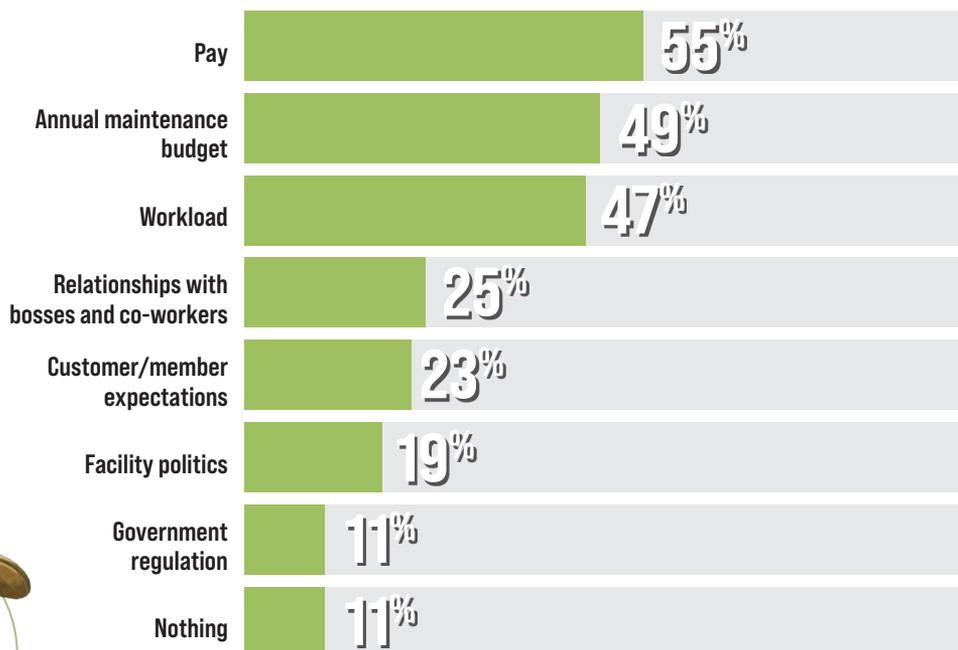
65%

With less respect

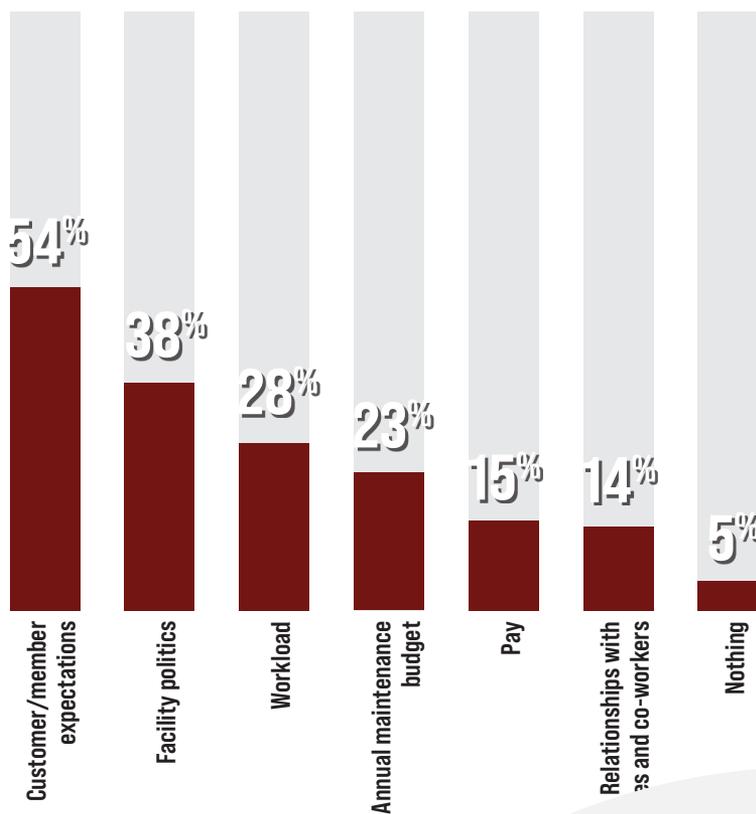
10%



WHAT WILL  
CHANGE FOR  
THE BETTER FOR  
SUPERINTENDENTS  
BY 2035?

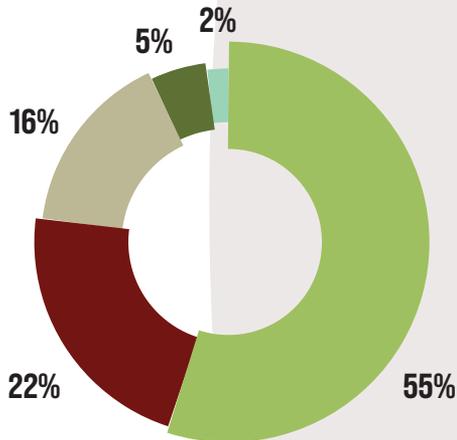


WHAT WILL CHANGE  
FOR THE WORSE FOR  
SUPERINTENDENTS BY 2035?





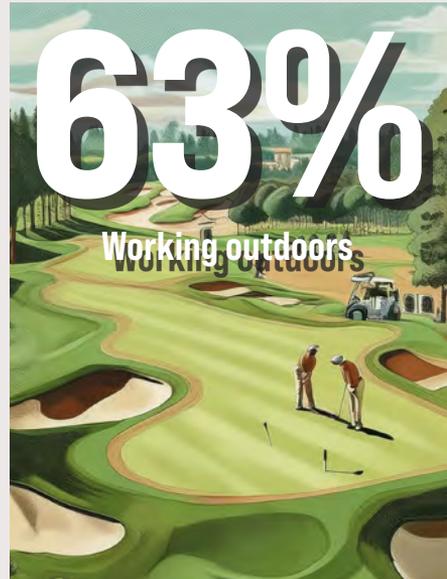
### BIGGEST CHANGE IN SUPERINTENDENT ROLE BY 2035 COMPARED TO 2025



- More tech-based decision making
- Fewer employees to manage
- More of an overall operations/business leader
- Less on-course work
- More on-course work



### WHAT WILL BE THE BEST THING ABOUT WORKING AS A SUPERINTENDENT IN 2035?



16%	13%	6%	2%
Technology used on the job	The people	The pay	Other*

\*Other responses included: Job security/less stress, nothing

### REGULAR MAINTENANCE TASKS THAT WILL BE EXECUTED AT YOUR COURSE BY AUTOMATION IN 2035



Fairway mowing	69%
Rough mowing	65%
Greens mowing	37%
Slope mowing	33%
Spraying	30%
Tee, approaches, surrounds mowing	30%
Water management	30%
Bunker raking	15%
Aerification and topdressing	5%
None	10%



# DATA-DRIVEN DUTY

**A**dvancing technology brings fear for the future — and excitement and potential.

Montgomery County Golf of Maryland director of agronomy **Jon Lobenstine** holds high hopes for the future of the big-picture turf position, especially regarding technology's assistance in data-driven operations.

Lobenstine has learned how to be efficient and organized, as his role is to oversee agronomic crews at 11 courses across nine separate facilities. He thinks the future of golf course maintenance will be boosted by emerging technology in numerous areas.

One area he forecasts will be impacted is pesticide and fertilizer formulations. "I think nanotechnology will be the norm, using dramatically lower-use rates, improved broad-spectrum efficacy and also better environmental fate, because we're using so much less product, and now that there's environmental issues in a big way, things have gotten so much better, especially in the last 20 years," Lobenstine says. "I think in 10 years, there's people studying this and using new, advanced tools.

I think that you can get closer to 100 percent understanding the soil microbiome in that whole world."

As technology advances, tools have been developed to measure DNA, RNA and gene-expressed proteins to study how plants respond to stressors. "If you have a plant that's undergoing drought stress or it's getting attacked by a disease or whatever, and there's certain defense mechanisms that the plants turn on, at what point are those triggered? Why are they triggered? How long do they last?" Lobenstine asks. "And to be able to monitor that stuff internally in the plant in real time as it's happening, especially in a laboratory setting, will allow us to have just unforeseen new insights into

plant health."

Having this information will also allow for future predictions for turf reactions and changes, and turf care can be adjusted accordingly.

With improvements in weather forecasting, Lobenstine believes nearly 100 percent accurate forecasting models will be available. "I think that will also allow us to again make much more educated decisions about exactly when a spray application needs to be made," he adds. "It will help us be able to better plan our weeks, as far as knowing that at 4 p.m. on Thursday, we're going to be getting rain, and I can try to plan my Wednesday with a little extra time to get some mowing done or stuff like that."

Lobenstine also expects

sensors to be implemented in equipment, collecting data for maintenance recommendations based on AI. "Potentially, you could have much smaller spray systems. They could even be mounted to the same maintenance equipment that's out there mowing that could be targeting the weeds as it's going out for the next mow. So, you could potentially see reducing the broadcast and widespread applications of certain products, and have a much more targeted, small system that's getting individual plants rather than thousands of square feet at a time."

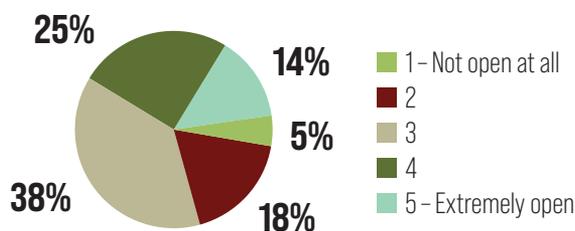
Although technology is growing, and information available is increasing, Lobenstine doesn't envision the need for a superintendent or director of agronomy changing.

"There's nothing that's ever going to replace the superintendent instincts," he says. "I think that's the most important thing in this whole conversation about technology, is that the superintendent is the most valuable person at the property, their collective experience. Especially after a few years at the property, you feel how the property is going to behave under certain conditions. You know your trouble spots, you know things that are going to start to experience some plant health challenges at different times a year. And there's just nothing that's going to replace that intuition."

For some, technology is a foe. For Lobenstine, it has become a friend. "I definitely love technology," he says. "I think that with everything, it's a balance. I'm trying to make the best use I can of what's at my fingertips." 

Kelsie Horner

## OPENNESS TO USING TECHNOLOGY TO REPLACE SOME AGRONOMIC AND PERSONNEL DECISIONS





# COMMUNICATION IS — AND WILL REMAIN — KEY

**A**fter discussing the future for the better part of an hour, longtime turf pro **Matt Gourlay** considered some specific things that might be happening in 2035.

“World War III?” he asks.

“I’m so bad at this,” he adds. “I read about Bitcoin back when it was a penny, and I should have done something then. I read about stuff, but I’m very slow to jump on the bandwagon.”

World War III would be earth-shattering for everybody. Bitcoin has been earth-shattering for some. A move across three states, 22 hours and nearly 1,300 miles was earth-shattering for Gourlay and his family. Earth-shatteringly positive.

Gourlay headed west and north with his family a little more than a year ago, from Colbert Hills Golf Course in Manhattan, Kansas — which his father, **David**, grew in, and where Gourlay worked for nearly 20 years, the last 17 as superintendent — to Hillcrest Country Club in Boise, Idaho. His wife, **Jenna**, and their son, **Payne**, had lived in Manhattan their entire lives. Gourlay had interned in three other states, but he only worked professionally at Colbert Hills. “Earth-shattering change can be good,” he says.

One thing that Gourlay hasn’t changed

around a new job, a new home and new agronomic challenges is his commitment to continuing education. He still attends local, regional and national sessions, still reads industry publications and scrolls through social media, searching for best practices. And he still implements new technology whenever he thinks it will help him, his team and the course.

High on his list of new tech? The USGA’s Deacon app and GS3 smart ball — its data helped him show Hillcrest members that, despite aerification holes still covering the course, trueness and smoothness on the greens had returned to pre-aerification levels within eight days — and turfRad soil moisture mapping, which he hopes will eventually pair with irrigation systems to automatically increase or decrease runtimes based on parameters.

Oh, and artificial intelligence. Gourlay is all in on AI.

“I’m toying around with ChatGPT, Grok, some other ones, and I’m trying to learn how to utilize those the best possible way for us, whether to become a better communicator to the membership, or to help create action plans and standard operating procedures. If we want to train staff, it’ll help with safety and training for them. The opportunities are endless.”

Gourlay already uses AI to help him write weekly and monthly newsletters to members — he lists the topics he wants to cover, then modifies what the tech produces — as well as a five-page report on tree maintenance. He even used it to write a response to an email that riled him. He still read it, still edited it, but the tech helped him remove the emotion. Who knew AI could be the 2020s equivalent of stepping away from the keyboard and counting to 10?

Gourlay still relies plenty on his assistant superintendents, **Ernesto Gamez** and **Robert Archbold**, who have worked at Hillcrest for 12 and seven years, respectively, as well as the rest of 12 year-round full-timers and his own decades of experience. He’s excited for the future, but he “doesn’t see a whole lot of change in 10 years.”

“Automation is going to change things — automation as in some sort of robotic mowers to help us maintain some areas so the people can focus on more of the detail work. We’ll figure out how to implement some of this AI for us,” he says. “Ten years just seems so far away, but I know it’ll go in an instant. My son just turned 7 and it went by in a flash.”

*Matt LaWell*

## WHERE DO YOU LEARN ABOUT EMERGING TECHNOLOGY IN THE GOLF INDUSTRY?

Conferences and trade shows	85%
Other superintendents	78%
Industry publications	77%
Social media	62%
Sales contacts	60%
Videos and podcasts	44%
Conversations with younger generations	20%
Nowhere	1%

## PARTS OF A SUPERINTENDENT’S JOB HANDLED BY SOME FORM OF AI IN 2035



**57%**  
Written communication

Water management	Creating agronomic programs	Administrative and human resources	Disease, pest and weed control	Course setup	Hiring employees	None
51%	45%	45%	40%	18%	18%	18%



# WATER, WATER ... NOWHERE

**A**sk just about any Arizonan what living and working in the Copper State is like and they will tell you something along the lines of “it is what everybody thinks it is.”

Those are the words of **Seth Miller**, who was raised in Racine, Wisconsin, next to Lake Michigan, and is now the golf course superintendent at Troon Country Club in Scottsdale. His blood has warmed. He is as used to the triple-digit temperatures as can be. And, working on turf every day, he is well aware of the state’s much-documented water challenges.

“Arizona is a place with limited water sources,” Miller says. “It’s also a place with a lot of innovative superintendents who are trying to deal with the reduction in water, especially as they realign the allocations in the Colorado River.”

Miller and his team of 27 have turned to technology to deal with those challenges — most notably with the recent installation of new HDPE pipe and a Rain Bird CIRRUSPro irrigation system that provides single-head control. He also uses moisture meters everywhere and has adopted evapotranspiration — “the best way to irrigate any golf course anywhere in the world,” he says — during which water moves from the surface into the atmosphere and allows for deficit irrigation. “You’re always using less water than what is lost in the turf,” he adds.

Miller also worked with the late **Tom Weiskopf** to remove about four of the course’s then-40 acres of turf doing a 2020 renovation — across tees, fairways, approaches and even some rough around greens. “And we will probably continue to focus on removing any unnecessary turf as we move forward,” Miller says. “You can exist with probably 45 to 50 acres of turf and still have a really playable golf course. That’s kind of what led us to having a reduced footprint and our continued effort to reduce turf overall. I think that’s kind of where we’re heading. Using other

technology like infrared or drone flyovers, to focus even more on daily irrigation, can get that dialed in and use as little water as possible.” Miller estimates that his team hand waters about eight to 12 labor hours per day throughout the summer and about four to six labor hours per day in the winter — all in an effort to reduce water usage.

Beyond water, Miller can see qualifications and requirements for superintendents changing over the next decade.

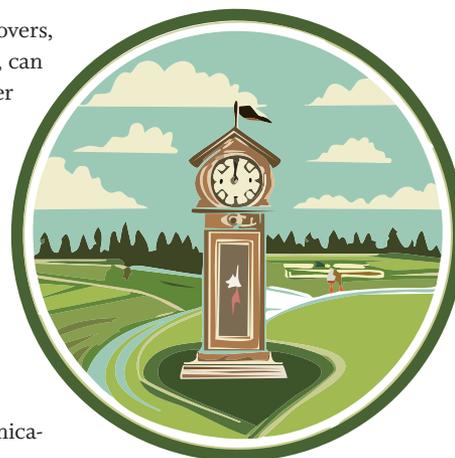
“You might have a degree in communication and not even have a turf degree, because you’re managing people 95 percent of the time,” he says. The improving technology could allow turf leaders to focus far more on people. “I think that the technology will assist almost anyone that can manage people, that can manage time, that can manage a budget, and they can still be successful in this industry.”

Potentially helpful degrees? Finance. Communications. English. “It starts with the individual and what their capabilities are,” Miller says. “I think being able to convey what’s happening on the golf course, what needs to happen on the golf course, projects, management, getting a billionaire to understand what you need to do, these are all things that need to be communicated well.”

Miller keeps up with the most current forms of communication thanks to his kids, who are 15, 13, 11 and 9.

“They use TikTok a lot to send stuff to friends and Snapchat. I’m not on either,” Miller says, adding that those apps distract him but that at least knowing about them could help him find and hire younger employees. “You have to stay relevant and understand what people are going through. The job depends on it.” 

*Matt LaWell*



**SUPERINTENDENT'S  
2035 WORKLOAD  
COMPARED TO 2025  
WORKLOAD**

**10%**  
Will work **MORE** HOURS

**67%**  
Will work the **SAME**  
NUMBER OF HOURS

**23%**  
Will work **FEWER** HOURS



Somewhere in Georgia, on the same geologic vein that stretches up to Pinehurst, North Carolina, and the barrens of New Jersey, **Bobby Wolverton** is busy tending to three golf courses so new that Google Maps hasn't yet scanned every hole.

Wolverton is the director of agronomy at The Fall Line in Mauk, a private and rather isolated resort almost equidistant between Atlanta and Montgomery, Alabama, with no easy route from either. He arrived in September 2022, finished his doctorate in entomology at the University of Georgia in May 2023, laid the first sod in September 2023, and laid the last sod last October.

These have been busy and fulfilling days.

These will be busy and fulfilling years.

"I'm thinking 10 years ahead when I'm installing an irrigation system," says Wolverton, who has previously worked at Augusta National, helped grow in Congaree Golf Club, and built Bayonne Golf Club and Hollow Brook Golf Club. "And I'm thinking 10 years ahead because I have a great crew in place, but I know that once the buzz happens, I'm going to lose who I have because they're going to be able to jump to other big

courses. And then who am I going to fill their shoes with?"

Like it is for most turf pros, labor is top of mind for Wolverton — and it will likely remain there throughout the next decade and beyond. He has a team of 68 for 46 holes — the 18-hole East and West courses and a 10-hole, 11-green short course. Twenty of them are women, whose increased participation in golf course maintenance he views as a major win for the industry. Plenty of them will be running maintenance teams of their own at other courses long before 2035. And he wants to do whatever he can to help fill future open positions at top clubs.

"Those that are really good, they're going to keep getting better," Wolverton says. "But I think there's going to be a real shortage in qualified individuals who can manage these really big, upper-level courses. I think the assistant shortage is going to make the industry look a little different in 10 years as far as people being able to come in manage these clubs."

Wolverton has a different perspective than many turf pros. Given the scope of his work, he needs to. But he also listens all the time to his wife, who works for a large bank, about the economy and

its swings.

"The ability to forecast new trends — in fertilizer pricing, in chemical company price increases — will be big," Wolverton says. "I have to print reports every month on how we're trending and forecast how we can save some dollars. You have to be able to look at different trends in society and figure out if it's going to affect your business or not. And you have to understand how the economy in general is going. You have to understand how your decision maker's business is going. Are people buying homes around some of these bigger estate courses? Are you going to be looking for a job? I think some people miss the boat because they're focused on grass so much. I know I do!" He laughs, and adds, "If I wasn't married to a banker ..."

No matter what changes over the next decade, though, Wolverton remains adamant that turf knowledge will remain paramount.

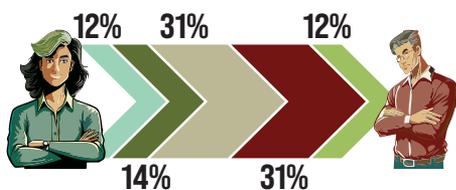
"The technology continues to get better and make our job easier," he says. "But when the power goes out, you got to know how to take care of the grass. If I need to go out there manually with a hose, I need to know what I'm doing." 🌱

*Matt LaWell*

# WHO WILL DO THE JOB?

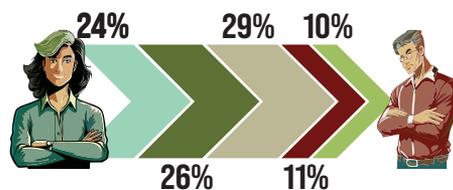


## CONFIDENCE THERE WILL BE ENOUGH QUALIFIED SUPERINTENDENTS AVAILABLE TO HIRE IN 2035



■ 1 - Not confident at all | ■ 2 | ■ 3 | ■ 4 | ■ 5 - Extremely confident

## CONFIDENCE YOUR COURSE WILL BE ABLE TO FILL A CREW IN 2035





# TECH IN TEACHING

As technology advances and is incorporated into the turfgrass industry, training and knowledge in these areas must grow as well. As technology evolves, so must education.

The USGA Greenkeeper Academy has recognized this need, and will continue implementing necessary training, says **Jordan Booth**, senior director for Course Consulting Services for the USGA Green Section.

“If we’re going to be using autonomous mowers and GPS-guided sprayers and oil sensors and all these things, maybe even drones, that sort of technology, we need more technically minded people with more skills,” Booth says. “We’ve identified that we need to combine the on-job training, where we learned so much in this business working on golf courses, with college-level education that we can provide at little to no charge.”

The USGA Greenkeeper Apprenticeship Program provides students with an educational opportunity different from a typical four-year bachelor’s program. Students take classes through Horry Georgetown Technical College or Sandhills Community

College, receiving an education while working full time on a golf course in the Carolinas and earning their degree in a shorter amount of time.

Technology training is implemented in both the classroom and through on-the-job training, preparing students for the future of golf maintenance.

“We focus on that every week, every month, in class,” Booth says. “We also provide a lot of additional learning experiences, whether it be at a GCSAA conference or local conferences. We work with our partner golf courses to promote the use of these technologies and make sure that we’re working with forward thinkers as mentors for our apprentices.

“Blending that technology in the classroom with technology on the job experience, giving our students access to these different things allows them to gain that experience, and, more importantly, gives them a little bit of a head start and advantage when they’re in the job market.”

Booth, who received his undergraduate degree at Clemson University in turfgrass management and science and earned his master’s degree under **Dr. David McCall** at Virginia Tech,

says the things he learned during his time in school are still just as applicable to the job now.

“Water management, soil science, fertility management, turfgrass selection, differences in turfgrass species, all those are still going to maintain the foundation of our education,” he says.

The Greenkeeper Apprenticeship Program also provides students with tools in people management. “You’re going to be managing people,” Booth says. “You’re going to be managing a lot of equipment, assets and resources. That’s one of the things we try to give our students is access to business management, development, budgeting, finance, communication and professional development.”

Education will remain focused on the same foundation, but modern technology will be more deeply rooted. “I was just using different equipment, and now our students are using a lot more modern technology to help their golf courses make better decisions. An example is a handheld moisture meter. When I was in school, that wasn’t even a thing yet in my undergraduate work, and now it’s pretty ubiquitous throughout the industry.”

As a superintendent, incorporating technology is inevitable and necessary. “If you’re not a lifelong learner, you’re not going to be successful,” Booth says. “Our best superintendents are problem solvers, lifelong learners, and they do that often by doing the work.”

*Kelsie Horner*

WHERE  
WILL THE  
SUPERINTENDENT  
OF 2035  
COME  
FROM?

**76%**  
Turf school

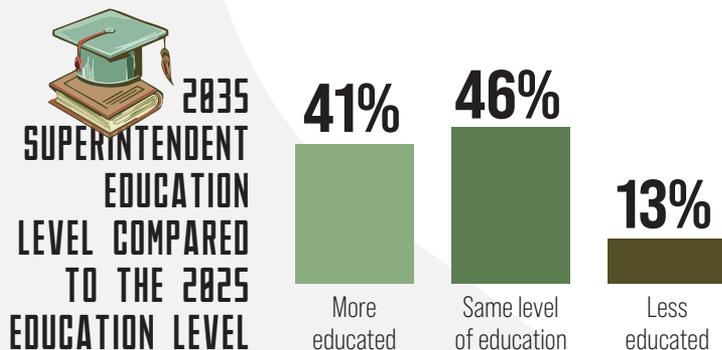
**36%**  
Your current  
crew

**23%**  
Other  
industries

**13%**  
Other  
segments  
of the golf  
business

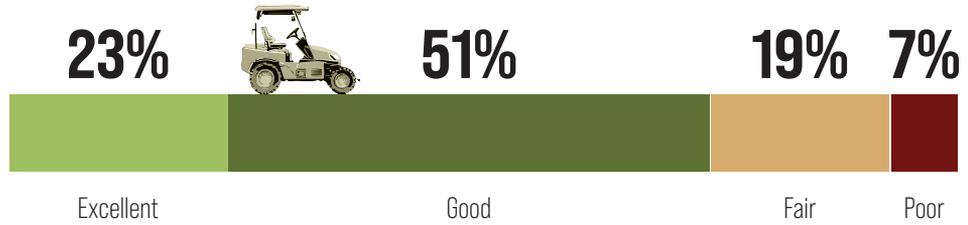
**2%**  
Other\*

*\*Other responses  
included: Golfers,  
tech fields*

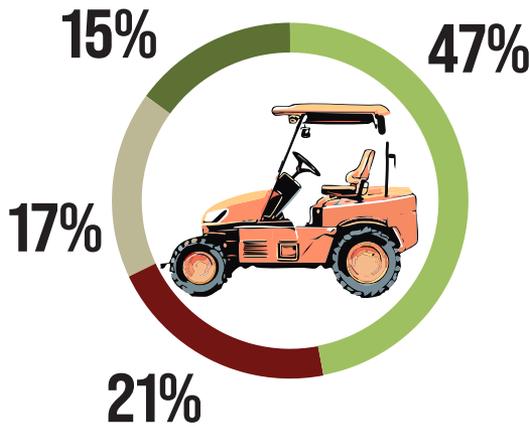




CONDITION OF  
YOUR GOLF  
COURSE'S  
MAINTENANCE  
EQUIPMENT  
FLEET



MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR WHEN  
PURCHASING EQUIPMENT



- Performance
- Cost
- Distributor/dealer support
- Availability/arrival time



HOW MANY EQUIPMENT  
MANAGERS DOES YOUR  
COURSE EMPLOY?

22%  
Two or more

68%  
One

10%  
None



TENURE  
OF YOUR  
EQUIPMENT  
MANAGER



Less than a  
year



1 to 4 years



5 to 9 years



10 years or  
more

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### NEW 3-YEAR TRANSITION PROGRAM

Velocity PM can effectively remove Poa in one season. But for optimal results, we've perfected a new multi-season program to ensure your turf always looks its best — and stays free of bare spots — throughout the transition.

1  
YEAR

#### Take Control

Repeated applications at lower rates are ideal for a steady decline of Poa while allowing the favored turf species a chance to fill bare spots.

RATE	INTERVAL	APPLICATIONS
<b>.75 fl oz/A</b>	<b>14-21 days</b>	<b>5</b>

2  
YEAR

#### See Results

With visibly less Poa, repeat the same program in the second year, and Poa should be almost undetectable.

RATE	INTERVAL	APPLICATIONS
<b>.75 fl oz/A</b>	<b>14-21 days</b>	<b>5</b>

3  
YEAR

#### Maintain Purer Turf

Now with less than 10% Poa remaining, maintain clean fairways with higher rates and fewer applications.

RATE	INTERVAL	APPLICATIONS
<b>2.25 fl oz/A</b>	<b>14-21 days</b>	<b>2-3</b>

### Advantages

Safe for most cool-season and dormant Bermudagrass (overseeded and non-overseeded)

Suppresses dollar spot

Suppresses seedhead production

Suppresses broadleaf weeds

Can be used before and/or after overseeding

### Keys to Success

Stick to the program — intervals and repetition are key

Apply to healthy, actively growing turf

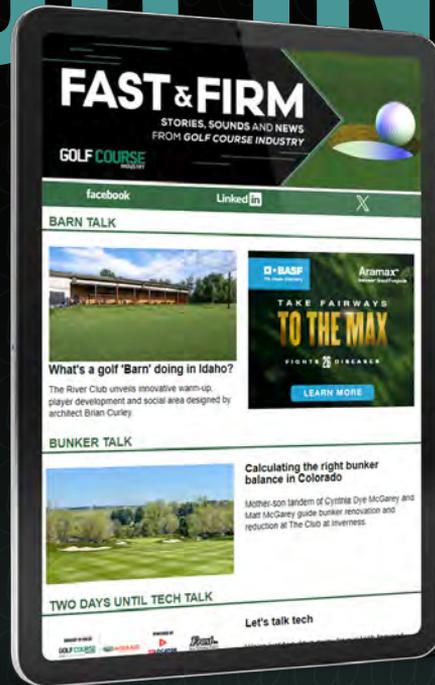
Apply at temperatures 60-90°F

Tank-mixes well with fertilizers, fungicides and PGRs

Do not tank-mix with wetting agents or surfactants

Avoid irrigation or mowing within 4 hours

# GREATNESS IN YOUR INBOX



**WHAT:** Fast & Firm newsletters



**WHO:** Superintendents, assistant superintendents, equipment managers, owners, general managers, pros and everybody else looking to learn to about the industry



**WHEN:** Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays



**WHERE:** Your inbox



SCAN HERE TO SIGN UP

**GOLF COURSE**  
INDUSTRY



## BACK TO THE FUTURE

When Guy Cipriano told me the focus of this issue, my mind went into full “Jetsons” mode, imagining the most futuristic, out-of-this-world inventions and techniques that could change our business. I came up with a few, which I’ll save for the end. Because our industry’s future isn’t all robot-controlled mowers and flying Gators. There are some serious issues to think about if we’re going to continue to lead the way.

It starts with education. Of course, future superintendents will take classes we can hardly imagine today. Whatever science comes up with next, we — or, more accurately, you and those who follow you — will study it. And while it’s possible there will be machines to do all the work spreading, spraying, and fine tuning, superintendents will still need to know what is being done and why.

Our future brethren will need to be educated in business management, from finance to human resources. Business savvy will be even more critical to running golf maintenance operations efficiently and effectively. Budgets will continue to be significant, and no one should be surprised if the cost of labor, plant protectants and equipment continues to increase. Superintendents are running their own small businesses and should approach every day as if it’s their own company. Many of you already take this attitude to your course, your inventory, your staff and your overhead; it will only become more important. And the respect we earn will continue to be tied to the value of what we are caring for and how we do it.

As for equipment, I love seeing riderless mowers and sprayers, the continued evolution of “smart” technology in irrigation, and, as something of a gadget-head, I’m excited about the potential in all areas of the maintenance operation. But I’m worried that we’ll

lose some of the art and skill of preparing a golf course. The innovations are great, but they’re ultimately just tools. Everything we do — everything in golf — is still about touch and feel.

I’m not sure what’s going to happen with labor. Maybe the problem goes away with remote-controlled equipment and drones that survey for problems from busted pipes to reckless cart drivers. (Watch out, marshals! Your jobs are next.) And while we may need fewer hands holding rakes and driving mowers, we’ll need more fingers writing code and typing commands. Perhaps the next crew members are in their parents’ basements — computer geeks who will manage the mowing, shaping, sweeping, raking, watering and other chores like a video game.

Something else sure to change is the superintendent’s personal image. We’ve already come a long way from being called dirt farmers, thank goodness. I don’t think it will be very long before technology allows us more time to manage our physical and mental fitness. We’ll likely be able to sleep later — and better — knowing the course is programmed to wake up each day in great shape. As for communicating with members, management and suppliers, that is done best by real people, so writing and speaking skills will continue to be vital. As will basic common courtesies. Actions speak louder than words, so take your hats off indoors, please.

Our responsibilities will continue to grow, along with our importance to our courses

and clubs. Therefore, our compensation needs to increase accordingly. Don’t laugh ... that’s what these “predictions” that follow are for.

In the future ...

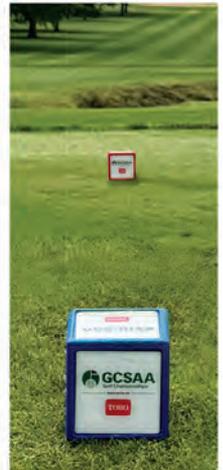
- Your border collie will run on a treadmill and chase geese on a projection screen.
- Your office will either have only a smartphone or it will look like Mission Control, with screens, keyboards, graphs, grids and camera views of every square foot of your course. And buttons. Lots of buttons.
- Use a joystick to fix alignment or move the tees out of the shade. If there is any shade in the future.
- Deluxe tee markers will be available that use super magnets or air compression so they can’t be pulled out of the ground and repositioned by golfers. Flagsticks will automatically jump back into the hole when a golfer forgets to replace them.
- The drone bunker rake! Before the course opens, it will hover over each hazard, lower a rake head to the sand, and use adjustable tines to make designated patterns. Change the setting according to the sand type or raking patterns based on weather, tournaments, or you’re just in a bad mood.
- Turf will need little water as new species developed by top research scientists and universities will thrive on just morning dew.
- The GCSAA becomes a union for our constituency. Stay alert: The future is coming faster than you think. 🚀



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

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# On course, and on track

Over the last five years, little Laurelwood Golf Course in Eugene, Oregon, has developed a string of talented young maintenance workers — almost half of them women.

By **Matt LaWell**

▲ Will Benson, far left, has hired, trained and come to rely on a group of young employees, including, from left, Olivia Grandberry, Savana Decker and Lexi Tunland.

**L**ike many golf courses around the world, Laurelwood Golf Course in Eugene, Oregon, blocked off its tee sheet in early March 2020, shuttered during the earliest and most uncertain days of the COVID-19 pandemic. And, like many golf courses around the world, it reopened a month or so later with that aforementioned tee sheet overflowing with names and tee times.

The golf boom was in full swing at a perfect 9-holer in TrackTown USA.

The only problem with all those golfers walking from hole to hole was that **Will Benson** couldn't keep up with them. Benson operates Laurelwood for the City of Eugene as a private contractor and has worked as the superintendent in some shape for more than 17 years. When the pandemic hit, he was tending to the course with just two other people. He needed more help. So, he called an old friend, **Heather Holte**, a star decades ago on the University of Oregon softball and golf teams, a for-

mer Laurelwood pro shop employee and, at the time, the softball coach at nearby Thurston High School.

"I don't even know why I called her, exactly," Benson says. "But I asked her, 'You got any employees?' 'I got one! I'll send her over.'"

That *her* turned out to be a high school softball player without any softball to play named **Olivia Jegtvig**. She worked hard and impressed Benson and, before long, he asked her, "You know anyone else?"

"My friend Savana got laid off from Old Navy," Benson remembers Jegtvig telling him.

"Let's call Savana!"

Savana was **Savana Decker**, a high school softball standout who weighed "about 82 pounds." Benson figured she would last five days at Laurelwood. She's going on five years. "And now she can run an



excavator, she can change heads, she can wire most anything out there, she can run all the sharpening equipment, she can do all that,” Benson says. “She’s grown to that from folding shirts at Old Navy.”

That first year, Olivia and Savana were followed by **Leila** and **Harmoney**, and **Luke** and **Deacon**, and **Eddie** and **Jenz** — many of them Thurston High School Colts. The next year, seven more teenagers found their way onto the maintenance crew — five of them women. In 2022, another six showed up, including three women — Decker’s little sister **Sadie** among them. In 2023, two of the seven new hires were women. And last year, three of the eight newbies were women. In all, 18 of the 38 Laurelwood maintenance team members over the last five years have been women. Eight of them were still

on the team last season.

In an industry open more to women with every passing day, Laurelwood provides a template for how to find the right people, how to teach them about the work and how to bring them back season after season.

**BENSON HAS WORKED** enough jobs over the years—and enough years on a golf course—to know how to teach.

Before the start of the pandemic, when attracting and hiring new team members provided more of a challenge, he would bring in just about anybody who applied. The folks who tended to last more than a week or two were those who grew up outdoors, chopping wood, operating tractors, maybe raising donkeys or showing lambs at the fair. But those folks were few. He gets more of them now, and he tends to avoid easing them in, preferring instead to throw them on equipment the first week and watching how they respond.

Case in point: “My second day,” Decker says, “I was on a fairway mower.”

“Me too!” says **Lexi Tuntland**, another former Thurston softball player who has earned her welding certificate and has almost wrapped up her diesel mechanic certificate during her four years at Laurelwood. “I remember my second day when Will put me on a fairway mower.”

“I was on a roller,” adds **Olivia Grandberry**, who played softball at Thurston, picked up golf when she started working at Laurelwood three years ago and is now a 6-handicapper who plays golf at Southwestern Oregon Community College. “I was like, ‘What am I doing out here?!’”

“You’re lucky,” Benson tells them. “People take three years to get to this position!”

Benson also tends to

avoid verbal lashings, opting instead to let his young team learn gently on the job. What better way to learn how to mow fairways and roll greens, how to sharpen reels — how to dive into irrigation and excavation work every season — than to actually hop on the machine and figure out how it works?

“He was so nice with our mistakes,” Decker says. “I would scalp the crap out of the rough, and he would be like, ‘It grows back.’”

“He was understanding,” Tuntland says. “He let us learn.”

“That’s probably what got me to stay, was just how kind he was,” Decker says.

“He let us learn,” Tuntland says. “He let us mess up and it was OK.”

After hearing for years about the Laurelwood experience from older teammates, Grandberry called Benson shortly after turning 16 and begged him to let her work. That first experience on a roller came during her third day on the job.

“I was comfortable rolling, but I had one of those days, I was kind of tired, didn’t put the pin in the hitch and I drove down the hill and the roller drove in the middle of the driving range,” she says. “I just sat down and started crying. I called Will. ‘The roller’s in the middle of the driving range. I’m really sorry.’ That was probably my worst day.”

He put her back on it the next day.

▼ Will Benson teaches new team members how to do things by having them actually do them. Mowers? Rollers? Those are first-week jobs.



## LABOR

► Laurelwood dives into majors projects nearly every season, and with a relatively small crew, everybody contributes.

Tuntland shares a similar story. “I got here in June of ’21, right after I graduated high school,” she says. “That fall, I was driving one of our service carts and I had our Buffalo blower behind us and I was coming down right through the trees between 1 and 9 and it started to get really wet. I remember, because Will told me he watched me from up top — ‘Be careful over there!’ — so naturally I went *over there*. I remember seeing the Buffalo blower come around this way and it whipped me, and I just jumped out of my cart. I didn’t want to roll. ‘You OK?’ ‘I’m OK.’”

“The best way to learn is to make mistakes,” Grandberry says. “If you don’t make mistakes out here, you’re not going to learn what not to do.”

**THE LAURELWOOD CULTURE** has developed over the last five seasons thanks in part to a string of Thurston Colts, some staying on for two or three years before heading off to college, and thanks in part to everything Benson has let them do.

In addition to just hopping on equipment and figuring it out, he

has knocked out a series of relatively major projects, one just about every year. The fourth green. The fifth green. Bunkers all around the third green. “We’ve redone almost all the greens,” Benson says. “All new irrigation on the greens. We’ve redone a lot of the tee boxes. We built this whole outdoor area.

“Once they were really pushing me,” he continues. “‘You don’t trust us to sharpen the machinery.’ ‘It’s not that I don’t trust you. You’ve never done it.’ ‘Well, we want to learn.’ ‘All right.’” And they learned.

Benson learned, too.

“When Olivia came, and then Savana came, and then Leila came, I kind of got bonded to them. I was friends with these young kids,” he says. “They go to college and send me Snapchats. And I really liked them.” Benson would listen to the opinions of current team members when interviewing new potential employees. **Tatum** the steeplechaser, **James**



the physicist, **Max** the soon-to-be-surely-famous composer — they all fit, and on a tight budget, to boot: Outside of Benson’s salary, the

annual maintenance budget is about \$250,000 to \$350,000.

“We take care of all of our carts,” Benson says. “We take care of the driving range ourselves.” The year they rebuilt the third green, Benson says he received a bid for \$43,000. He opted to keep the project in-house, rebuilt the third *and* seventh greens, *and* added a set of tees, all for less than \$30,000. When the team redid the fifth in 2023, the total just topped \$7,000.

“We trade out,” Benson says. “The guy who owns the excavator likes to eat here. If we write down the hours, the day’s rental fee just goes toward his tab.” Decker shaped that project. “She dug the trenches in the middle of winter and we did the grass bunkers and the drainage.”

Off the course, the team eats lunch

▼ Located just miles from the University of Oregon campus, Laurelwood is a neighborhood gem.



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## LABOR

together almost every day. Two summers ago, they all went to watch *Barbie* together. They have attended each other's weddings — one in 2023 and two more last year. Benson attended them all, normally skipping out just early enough that he

doesn't wind up on the dance floor.

Some of them plan to remain in the industry in some way. Decker has talked with at least one major company about golf course construction — "I



is workin' in the welding department for the Springfield School District. She wants to remain working around some combination of welding, diesel and golf courses. Benson has suggested she consider working for a major manufacturer, "because I

really like when we do projects," she says—and recently started a new position managing a park for Lane County.

Tuntland is on the brink of her second professional certificate and

understand the out-here part of it," she says, gesturing to the golf course, "and the equipment part of it."

Grandberry has no doubts about her future: Whenever her com-

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petitive golf career ends, she wants to study turfgrass and become a superintendent. Her goal? Succeed either **Ken Nice** as director of agronomy at Bandon Dunes — her current collegiate home course — or Benson at Laurelwood. “I really can’t see myself doing anything else,” she says. She plans to earn her pesticide license this summer during another season at Laurelwood and start Oregon State University’s Turfgrass



Management Certification Program. Whatever happens, Benson hopes more students keep filling the maintenance team. And why not? Plenty of golfers say the course has never

looked better. Fewer ask if the maintenance team is all women. And fewer still — but enough to count, unfortunately — ask Decker, Tuntland, Grandberry or one of the other young women out on the course if they’re the cart girl.

“I don’t know what that is,” they reply. 🇺🇸

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

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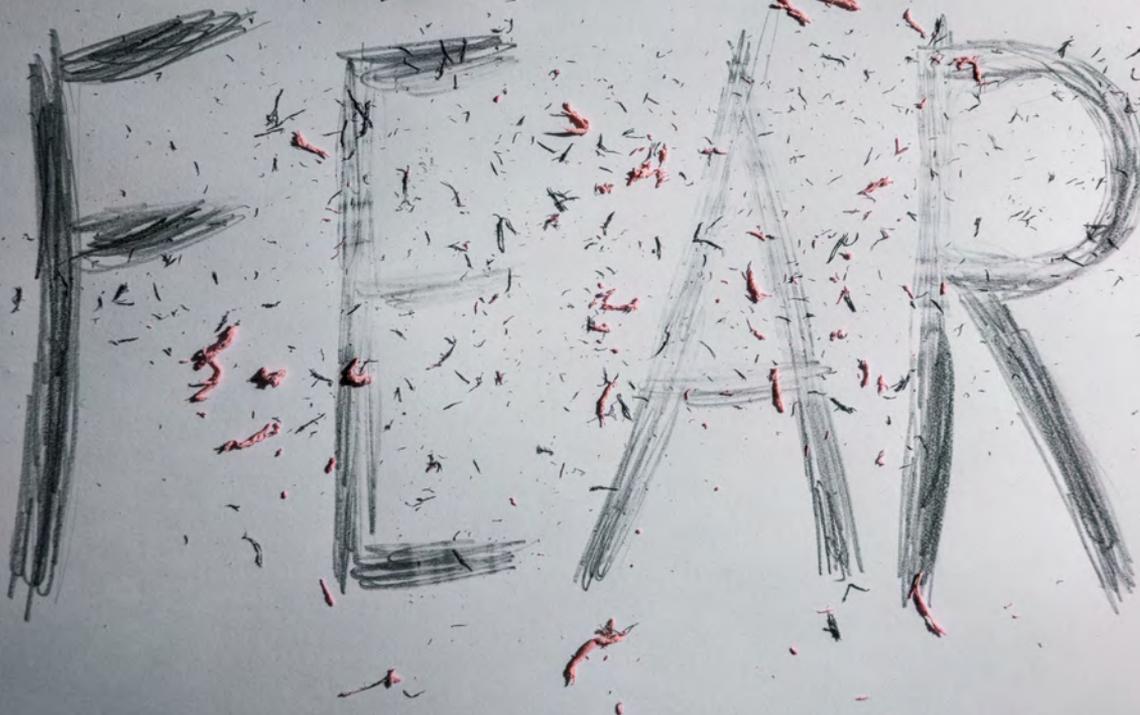
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# It's OK to have fears

Coping with worst-case scenarios is a part of any professional's career journey. Learn how some of your peers define and *overcome what scares them*.

By  
Lee  
Carr

It's not easy to talk about fears and there is an element of vulnerability in sharing them. It's like broadcasting your own personal kryptonite and hoping that no one exploits it. That said, there are a lot of similarities in the fears that people have, and these superintendents and maintenance crew members are recognizing and facing their fears in admirable ways.

Property names and hometowns are not included because fears move with us and change throughout our lives and careers. It's not about never being afraid. In fact, fears can be biologically instinctive. It's about how you deal with those fears. One thing is guaranteed: You are not alone.

"One of the most common fears among superintendents is losing their job, which is personal and professional," Micah Pennybaker says. "We are in a business where we are consistently judged by anyone who steps out there. If we have a tough summer and I lose my job, there goes my family's main income and health benefits. It impacts my whole life." This was mentioned in almost every conversation for this article.

"The older we get, the more responsibilities we have and that's when the fears can start to creep into your head," Pennybaker adds. "I may lose sleep over things like staffing levels or Pythium but that's part of the job. The thought of moving my

family scares me personally — we love the area we are in, the church, the community and the schools."

Health is another concern. "We all enjoy getting out there and working with our hands," Pennybaker says. "The older you get, the more your body tells you, 'You're not 20 anymore.' It's important to keep a positive attitude. Use your network, talk with your peers and don't be afraid to ask for advice."

Pennybaker also leans on his faith. "I believe in God and that He will always provide for my family. He will never throw a situation my way that He didn't think I could handle. You must have faith that things will work out for the best."

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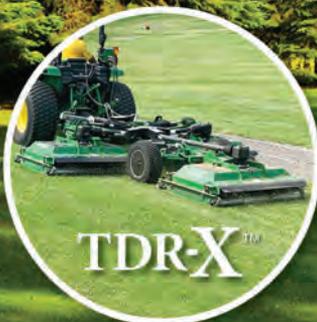
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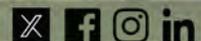
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## Fear of disappointing others

It feels cowardly to ask others to share their fears without sharing mine. Beyond pain and illness that I can't prevent or cure for my loved ones, I am afraid of disappointing people. I fear failing to serve others well, in the way that I am capable of, whether they are strangers or people who I adore. I face this fear by trying to pay attention, to see how I can make someone's life better. That's the best I can do. Fundamentally, I try to honor God. I fail often. I know this, but He loves me, and I'll keep trying.

Thank you to everyone who makes this industry what it is, to everyone involved in this article, those named and a few others who had some things to contribute through conversation but not for publication. Fears are only that — fears. And they are a part of life that we can move through.

— Lee Carr

**Sean Reehoorn** started working as a caddy when he was 9 and is now into his 40s. “With two little kids at home, ‘scared’ is totally different,” he says. “I would be scared of something that would come to harm or affect them.”

Professionally, he would be scared of being fired, but the status of the profession has been elevated. “Superintendents have done a better job of representing themselves,” Reehoorn says. “They dress up, play golf, are in the clubhouse, sharing who they are and talking about their team and staff. It is much harder to fire somebody who is a known professional.”

He combats the fear of being fired through positive interaction and he remembers a lesson from a friend who was defending his Ph.D. “You

are the smartest person in the whole room on that topic,” Reehoorn says. “Find ways to explain things to people so they trust you and understand that you are the most educated one about the course and that’s OK.”

Taking it further, Reehoorn remarks, “Being scared is the simple feeling. What is the deeper underlying emotion? Is it being scared to not be able to provide for your family or that you’re not enough? You are fearing failure. Getting fired doesn’t mean you failed your family. The fear of getting fired is that you let people down and you weren’t successful.” He expects a lot of himself but also relies on others.

“Counseling has helped,” Reehoorn says. “Talking to someone that cares about you just for you, not with judgement or an agenda.

Trusting peers and knowing who you can share with is important. Finding time for yourself helps. I also separate what I do for work from who I am.”

**Riley Forbes** is learning all about who she is. Settling into her new apartment a week before she graduated high school, she was excited to start her job on the crew. “I love being outside. On the golf course everyone is so happy and positive. I like using my hands and building things, so I tried course maintenance, and it grew from there.”

She was raised by her parents, two chefs, to be independent so relocating was easy. Forbes likes problem-solving and is not a fearful person. However, starting out she was “the only girl besides our assistant,” Forbes says. “Going into a male-dominant workforce was extremely terrifying. I feared being overlooked by guys and I feared not being able to keep up.”

She is keeping up and the director wants her to learn. “He gave me the opportunity to go out with all the guys and do the exact same thing as them,” Forbes says. She was put in charge of mowing a green during a big event and is enjoying her turf studies as a college freshman.

To conquer her fears, Forbes holds her head high. “I know what I want to do, and I am determined to prove myself,” she says. “I started the job when I was 18. I love being young and being able to grow with everyone.” Working and growing together is great at every age.

When asked the question, “What scares you?” **Dan Francis** replied: “Other people’s opinions — I don’t know how else to put it. Opinions of me, my work ethic, my approach to

## Defining fear

Merriam-Webster defines fear as “an unpleasant, often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger.” Other definitions include “anxious concern,” “profound reverence and awe especially toward God,” and “reason for alarm.” Though there are several definitions for fear there is no reason to let your fears define you, your work or your life. Listen to your peers and know that you have the confidence and courage to cope with whatever comes your way.

the golf course or my team.” When there is tension with superiors or the board lacks consensus, that can be scary.

“I value time with my family,” Francis says. “I don’t want my kids to grow up not knowing me. I don’t want my relationships compromised. I work hard and put in a lot of hours. The golf course always wins but there are fears. The fear of disappointing my family, the fear of disappointing members or the leadership. It is the fear of other people’s opinions.”

To cope, Francis invests in his relationships and is reading “The First Rule of Mastery: Stop Worrying About What People Think of You” by **Michael Gervais**, a performance psychologist. “If I am present in my workplace and I am present at home then I am fulfilled,” Francis says. “I trust my products and my management practices to work. If we have outbreaks there is a solution on the shelf and life goes on. If I miss soccer or volleyball or softball, I can’t grow that back. I can grow back the grass. I’m not trying to be profound but that works in my head.”

Francis enjoys people and promoting this industry, he enjoys problem solving, and he knows there are ways to improve, whatever you are doing. Striving to get better helps him work through the fear of other people’s opinions because he is all he needs to be but he sees value in continuing to grow and contribute. There is power in positively moving forward.

**Taylor Allbut** finds overseeding scary. “We just did our two-week seeding and let it grow in,” he says. “Just seed on the ground with nothing going on and just thinking about if we got our pre-emerge windows right. Is the irrigation working? It’s such a fundamental part of our season. If it doesn’t go well, it’s hard to fix. It just has to go well. That’s a terrifying period for me personally. Once the grass is up, we try to control Pythium on it because it can wipe it out overnight.

## Resources

If you feel like your fears are debilitating, excessive or that you can benefit from professional help, talk to your doctor or a trusted confidant. Physically, you can try to move through your fear by phoning a friend, grabbing a healthy snack, exercising, taking a few minutes to do something you love and when all else fails, get to bed and go to sleep. Books that can help include:

### “The Huge Bag of Worries”

By **Virginia Ironside** with **Frank Rodgers** illustrations

This picture book has been available for 25 years because it helps children learn and it helps adults remember how to cope with and dispense of ordinary, nagging fears.

### “Performing Under Pressure”

By **Hendrie Weisinger** and **J.P. Pawliw-Fry**

Weisinger’s and Pawliw-Fry’s work provides short- and long-term solutions for pressure management, helping you adapt to expectations and increase performance. It’s likely you are already employing some of these strategies.

### “The Penguin Book of Historic Speeches”

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That is also scary.”

Every year they find ways to improve, to make the turf as strong as possible as quickly as possible. That helps him cope with the uncertainty. “I appreciate my job a lot and feel very lucky to have it, so I have a fear of, Did I miss something? Is there something I haven’t got my eye on? There are so many things to be on top of. I couldn’t imagine losing my job. I love it.”

Several tour pros play where Allbut works. Fantastic conditions are expected all the time. He will hear about it if conditions aren’t what people think they should be. “It’s a lot of stress and pressure,” he says. Fear, though, can be mitigated by hearing about things going well.

“We have a member who is very appreciative of what we do,” Allbut says. “He is always saying, ‘I’ve never met a superintendent or anyone who works in this industry who goes out daily without the best intentions. Everything they do is because they want to make it better.’ Positivity and good intentions drive out fear.

“Personal fears outweigh professional fears by a wide margin for me,” **Ian Danner** says. “I have a deep confidence in my abilities to perform in my role. Ultimately, it’s just a job

but personal fears tend to follow me wherever I go.”

Professionally, Danner’s fear is very specific. “I fear not having the resources I need to execute my vision for the golf course. This could mean being short-staffed, facing budget cuts or encountering resistance from club management. Without the right tools or support it’s difficult to deliver the quality I strive for.”

With aging parents, and as a new father, Danner takes wellness seriously. “I fear not being able to maintain a healthy work-life balance,” he says. “This is an issue that many face and while it’s beginning to receive more attention, there’s a long way to go.”

Danner does see a way forward. “We address this through open communication with management and ongoing conversations within the industry. Mental and physical health are deeply connected. Exercising before work helps me clear my mind and sets a positive tone for the day, allowing me to manage stress with clarity and composure.” 

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

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## JUDGING A GOLF COURSE

Every golf course differs in certain respects. Length, width, setting, playing surface — all are variable. The only consistent, established by the sole rule addressing a golf course's structure, is that the hole to which you play must be four and one-quarter inches in diameter. Everything else is up for grabs, thus making for the most diverse playing field of any major sport.

I hear all kinds of explanations about what people look for in a golf course. The most common are “tests every club in the bag,” “memorable,” “beautiful” and “well-conditioned.” But these are slippery criteria. They suggest nothing about how various clubs are tested. Nor is “beauty” of much help given widely different aesthetic standards. Do we include beds of annual flowers or stands of perennial shrubbery as appropriate flora? And I can think of nightmarish courses I've played that I wish I could forget. Anyway, here goes: How, over the decades, I have come to evaluate golf courses.

### A DISTINCT SENSE OF PLACE

I love site-specific golf courses. You know where you are. It could be Whistling Straits in Wisconsin with many holes (and all the par 3s) along a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan. Or Elephant Rock in Williams, Arizona, where the original 1920s nine is organized around lava rocks that look like ... well, elephants. Or Astoria in Oregon, where holes are routed along massive linear furrows and around corduroy-like sand dunes. I like to feel I am somewhere distinct, where the golf enhances the native setting rather than fights it.

### SITTING IN THE LAND

That leads to the next criterion: a course whose shaping and configura-

tion is sitting in the land, embedded, rather than helicoptered in like a TPC or hammered in like so many of the courses manufactured from the 1960s through the 1990s. That's when construction companies took over from architects and determined the basic shape of golf holes. The classic era architects — Donald Ross, Alister MacKenzie — oversaw the sculpting of features (like A.W. Tillinghast's dolomites at Somerset Hills in New Jersey) that enhanced or exaggerated what was already there. They did not transform landscapes wholesale or create features that were not already suggested by the terrain, the rock and the elements.

Golf got boring. It got interesting again when it was imaginatively teased from existing elements, like Tobacco Road in Sanford, North Carolina, or Bandon Dunes in Oregon.

### WALKABLE

I detest courses where the attendants load your bag on a cart without asking — a signal to me of a wayward club culture and of a course that meanders randomly through too much real estate. At least allow the golfer to opt for walking, though it would help if the green-to-tee walks are proximate and obvious rather than strung out across a suburbia with road crossings that require extensive signage indicating where the next hole is.

### PLAYABLE AND ENJOYABLE BY A VARIETY OF PLAYERS

Most media discuss the game as if everyone were a near-scratch golfer and anyone above an 8-index is a hack. That's a disas-

trous business model. “Back-tee golf” is only 1 percent of play at most courses, whereas 90 percent is — or should be — in the range of 4,500 to 6,300 yards. The course is worthless if it beats you up and is not enjoyable for a wide variety of everyday golfers. The course has to be playable both in the air and along the ground for it to merit (by me) a label of good or better.

### MEMORABLE FEELINGS

Courses are memorable because they make an impression, and not just visually. What really counts is the visceral — the emotional sensibility of seeing something that implants itself in a transformative way. I felt that way when I stood on the second tee at Cabot Cliffs on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, to see Bill Coore's and Ben Crenshaw's work. I was viscerally overwhelmed, almost breathless in awe at what I beheld.

I've gotten that way elsewhere. The first tee at Prestwick in Scotland, the eighth hole (Postage Stamp) at Royal Troon in Scotland. The par-3 14th tee at Inwood Country Club on Long Island — just across the bay from JFK Airport. The eighth fairway of Prairie Dunes in Hutchinson, Kansas, playing a hole 30 years after I had read about it in my teens and finding it even better than I had imagined.

That's when golf course design becomes special. When you can feel down to your bones and your toes what it means for an art form to come alive and animate you thoroughly.

That's how I judge golf courses. I know it when I feel it. And when I feel it, I get rewired. 🏌️



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

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# LEADERSHIP *logistics*

What does the role of a GCSAA chapter executive director entail? And how is it evolving? Go inside modern local associations with the people responsible for overseeing their efforts.

By **Kelsie Horner**

**T**here are 93 GCSAA affiliated chapters in the United States and Canada, with more than 20,000 members in about 80 countries. Behind almost every chapter is an executive director. Who are they? And what do they do?

Although chapter leaders share the same title as executive director, very few took the same path to arrive there. One might assume the leaders were lifelong superintendents. But that's not the case for MetGCSA executive director

**Michael McCall.**

McCall attended Purdue University through the ROTC program and served as a Naval officer for six years. After realizing he did not want to raise a family while in the service, he headed out into the world to figure out what was next. He landed on the dream of owning a golf course. He went back to school, earned a two-year degree from Penn State and became a superintendent.

"I'm sure I had thoughts occasionally of looking to go to one of those top golf



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courses and host the U.S. Open, but that dream never really resonated with me, and it was all about ownership,” McCall says. He left the role of superintendent in 2012 and began his own golf course management company.

Serving as the executive director for the MetGCSA chapter — which includes northern New Jersey, the New York City suburbs, Long Island and parts of Connecticut — was not something he expected to do. “I went into the military thinking I’d be a lifer in the military,” he says.

Although Minnesota GCSA executive director **Chris Aumock** has worked in turf for more than a decade, his post-high school career began in art school. But with another superintendent in his family, and being surrounded by golf his whole life, the superintendent route was ultimately for him. “Golf just always has been a big part of my family and my life, and it seemed like a great career once I failed out of art school and college,” he says.

The GCSA of Northern California executive director **Marc Connerly** has never worked as a superintendent. His family, the owners of Connerly & Associates, a consulting management company, took on the management of the California Golf Course Owners Association in 2013. From there, the GCSA of Northern California hired the company in 2014, and because of his management experience, Connerly earned the title of executive director in 2019.

“I think it allows me to kind of look at it through a different lens,” he says. “People who have been in the industry their whole life, or worked as a superintendent their whole career, obviously have one perspective, but sometimes they can get lost.”

Other executive directors have

## Meet the exec



### Chris Aumock

**Favorite food:** Garlic bread

**Favorite movie:** Will Ferrell movies

**Favorite place to travel:** Scotland

**Favorite course to play:** Roseville Cedarholm Golf Course in Roseville, Minnesota

**A quote to live by:** “We cannot react emotionally; we must respond effectively.”

**Advice for young leaders:** Ensure time away from the property.



### Marc Connerly

**Favorite food:** Steak

**Favorite movie:** “As Good As It Gets”

**Favorite place to travel:** Venice

**Favorite course to play:** Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course in Stateline, Nevada

**A quote to live by:** “You can’t put a price on integrity.”

**Advice for young leaders:** Think outside the box and don’t be afraid to try big ideas.



### Michael McCall

**Favorite food:** Fettuccine alfredo

**Favorite movie:** “Mister Roberts”

**Favorite place to travel:** Somewhere new

**Favorite course to play:** Old Course at St. Andrews

**Advice for young leaders:** Do hard things and push yourself.



### Adam Ikamas

**Favorite food:** New York strip steak with sidecar shrimp

**Favorite place to travel:** Augusta, Georgia, for the Masters

**Favorite course to play:** Crystal Downs in Frankfort, Michigan

**A quote to live by:** “Failure is an option here. If things are not failing, you are not innovating enough.” — Elon Musk

been all about turf since Day 1. Michigan GCSA executive director **Adam Ikamas** can still remember grabbing the phone book and calling a local country club. Fresh out of high school, he asked if they were hiring any maintenance team members. “I haven’t done anything else since,” he says.

#### NEW DAY, NEW CHALLENGE

A day in the life of a GCSA leader is never the same. Each day, month and year brings different and new tasks. Often, this is what attracts people to the role. “That’s one of the things

I like, is that it’s always, constantly a new day, a new challenge, new duties,” Connerly says.

Day to day, the directors handle emails, work for member engagement and attend meetings as needed. Their jobs focus on the bigger picture with member event planning. “There’s that long-term planning for the association, along with our board members, just determining where we want to go and making sure that we are making the right steps to get to those goals,” Aumock says.

Event planning can begin more than a year out. Events led by GCSA

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chapters can range from golf outings to dinners to boot camps.

Some GCSA chapters produce a magazine, which can provide tasks for the day, month and quarter. “Either we just completed one, we’re now starting to plan for the next magazine, or we’re just starting one and getting ready to finish that in the next 30 to 60 days,” Connerly says. The GCSA of Northern California magazine, *Thru the Green*, is published quarterly.

Advocacy for golf maintenance workers is another important role for executive directors. Aumock works daily to educate others on the turf industry. “The perception of golf is rather outdated, and what people see it as is what it used to be and is not exactly what it is today,” Aumock says. “So, I think that that education is one of the biggest challenges externally, but that’s also internally making sure that our professionals within our association are understanding the challenges as a whole, that we can all kind of make sure we’re making efforts to be better and manage our properties in a better way.”

**COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATION**

No matter the location, two common qualities are needed for the GCSAA



chapter executive director to be successful: communication and organizational skills.

Depending on your location, members could be two minutes down the road or hours away. Using communication skills to connect with all members is a must. “To lead an organization of people like this, I’ve got to be a good communicator,” McCall says.

McCall’s members have the benefit of geographic proximity, but traffic in the New York metro area can delay travel. “We do have the benefit of being a tightly knit group, geographically,” he says. “We’ll have six golf events, two social events, two big

educational events.”

After Hurricane Helene brought disaster, communication was necessary for affected GCSA chapter leaders and members. “Now you’re seeing the associations that are dealing with the disaster relief, they’re stepping up to the plate and doing a fantastic job of communicating, not just with the members themselves, but to outside to get help,” McCall says. “We were certainly an organization that tried to do as much as we could to help from a fund standpoint.”

Leaders must also communicate effectively with members to encourage engagement and attendance for events, which can be a challenge. “That’s the biggest challenge, is getting the type of attendance numbers at events that really make the events worthwhile and make the events successful,” Connerly says.

Connerly and his team in California have made efforts to advertise events earlier, open registration earlier and even make direct contact with members encouraging attendance. “We’re trying to change up our strategies and be more proactive,” Connerly says. “And also surveying the members is something we’ve done. Find out what they’re looking for in events, where they want them to be held, how much they’re willing to pay, what topics or speakers are interesting to them.”

“My goal is to try to have every member have some sort of touchpoint with the chapter every day,” Ikamas says. That touchpoint could be a newsletter, wearing a logoed cap, advertising for an event or just sending a text.

**TRADITION VS. EVOLUTION**

As executive directors, a constant decision must be made: Do we keep it the same, or do we switch things up? Continuing tradition while also evolving can be difficult but necessary for the role.

“Golf is a game built on tradition,” Aumock says. “Just like any organization, tradition has its place, but I’ve



never been one that says, 'That's just the way we've done it, so we're going to keep doing it.' I don't think that's an acceptable kind of response. And there's always opportunities to improve. Even if something's working, let's try to make it better."

As an executive director, evolving and attracting the next generation of members is important. Carrying on tradition while improving awareness and education is needed.

"We naturally have to evolve," Aumock says. "And being a membership association, our job is to provide value and benefit and be a resource for the members. So, any membership group is trying to improve that and increase those values and provide more opportunities and that's our job. We just can't stagnate, so we have to continue to try and work to evolve."

Encouraging evolution isn't the challenge for Ikamas and the Michigan chapter. "Our tradition is evolution," he says. "For me, it's more about being flexible and malleable and making sure you're doing the right thing for your members, not getting boxed into bylaws or whatever else. If it makes sense, do the right thing for your members right now."

For McCall and the MetGCSA, a frequent compromise is with dress code.

"Similar to the issue that golf and country clubs face is balancing tradition and evolution," McCall says. "We're an association that has strong traditions. The whole jacket and tie versus (casualness), we've had to kind of ride that fine line, and we've made some accommodation for some of our events. Like after the event, it's not always a jacket afterwards, but for our big winter seminar, it's jacket and tie, and it's always going to be that way as far as I can see, and our members like that."

Connerly hopes to evolve Northern California's chapter with non-turf related resources. "Superintendents are not just superintendents," he says. "They have a life away from the course. I think I was just brainstorming, OK, how else can we be a benefit to them? How do we not just enhance their professional life, but also help them away from the course in their personal life?"

Connerly hopes to be able to provide resources such as marriage and family

counseling, and assistance with life skills.

"I want to create an organization that has as many resources and as many benefits to our members as we can possibly come up with," he says. "And that's kind of what

continuously drives me, is searching for ways to help our members be successful." 

Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry's assistant editor.



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## TRAVELS WITH TERRY

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



### TEE ALIGNMENT TOOLS

When the Amarillo (Texas) Country Club was renovated in 2012 by designers **Steve Wolfard** and **D.A. Weibring**, square-edge tees were spec'd. Four tee alignment tools were built in-house, using 1/8-inch thick by 2-inch high by 15-inch long flat steel placed at right angles, with 1/2-inch diameter by 4-inch

high spikes placed at each end on the bottom to hold them upright. 3/4-inch diameter rolled solid steel about 36 inches high was used for the handles. All welded together, 1/4-inch diameter nylon green and white standard golf course rope is placed at all four corners aimed properly. This practice is done a minimum of every spring

and fall. Metal-used railroad spikes, or metal rebar, will be placed in all four corners buried at least 6 inches deep in the future to also aid in locating them with a good quality metal detector. Superintendent **Dillan Jones** and assistant superintendent **Chad Scott** had fun designing them.



### GRASS CLIPPING SCALE

Grass clippings are weighed on the putting green and third green every day they are mowed at Amarillo (Texas) Country Club. The 30-gallon plastic drum originally contained liquid organic fertilizer. Slits were cut all the way around near the top, so the drum weighed exactly 10 pounds and can be lifted easily. The mower operator takes the drum out on the course and fills it with grass clippings each day they are mowed. The drum is then weighed by placing it on top of an Ohaus SD Series Scale, which costs up to \$300 depending on the model selected. When the grass clippings weigh more than 10 pounds, the greens are mowed the next day. If under five pounds, they are rolled instead of mowed. This great tool also helps to determine when fertilizers and growth retardants are required. Superintendent **Dillan Jones** and assistant superintendent **Chad Scott** are meticulous about everything they do. **Steve Wolfard** and **D.A. Weibring** are the restoration architects.



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

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# POWER OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

When **Guy Cipriano** asked Agronomic Advisors to contribute a column to *Golf Course Industry*, we couldn't say "yes!" fast enough. We immediately thought this was an excellent conduit to share experiences, philosophies on various topics and possibly even stimulate some debate. We look forward to our new tenure as monthly contributors.

So, who are Agronomic Advisors?

Agronomic Advisors is comprised of two former golf course superintendents at premier country clubs: **Dave Delsandro** and **Jeff Corcoran**. Dave spent the majority of his years as a superintendent at Oakmont Country Club, while Jeff spent his time as superintendent at Oak Hill Country Club.

We both had unique opportunities to acquire vast experience during our careers and had always been in contact with each other, discussing various aspects of the golf course industry. During one of those conversations, we realized that we were both at a crossroads in our careers and understood that we wanted to venture outside of being superintendents. This initial conversation planted the seed that ultimately grew into the creation of Agronomic Advisors.

Agronomic Advisors is a consulting company that assists and advises superintendents on every aspect of golf course management from daily agronomics and operational management to construction planning and supervision to team building and everything in between. In essence, Agronomic Advisors is the vehicle that will allow us to impart our acquired knowledge to other superintendents that was gained by managing golf courses at the highest level.

This monthly column is just another avenue for us to share it with fellow superintendents. Because this is our first article, we thought it appropriate to introduce ourselves first. However, because we have

just recently taken on an entrepreneurial endeavor and stepped away from our careers as superintendents, we recognize that there are many other superintendents at a crossroads in their own careers and that it would be a good time to recognize the Power of the Superintendent.

What do we mean by the Power of the Superintendent? Well, the superintendent of any golf facility is generally the most versatile employee, especially if he or she has been there for any period of time. During their duties, they have acquired a myriad of knowledge and experience. Superintendents have accounting skills, they are project managers, they are recruiters, trainers, agronomic experts, irrigation technicians, purchasers and estimators. The list is extensive and it represents the Power of the Superintendent — a multi-faceted skill set that is valued and transferable to many different career paths.

Many superintendents are also facing their own career crossroads. The long hours, stress, weekends and holidays spent working, demands of members and owners, and time away from family get people pondering whether they want to continue the path of being a superintendent.

What holds a superintendent back from taking their skillset to another undertaking? We think it's primarily fear. We know we had our own fears and trepidations when stepping away from being a superintendent. Fear of what? The fear comes in many ways, including fear of financial stability, fear of leaving the security of what you know, fear

of failure and fear of scrutiny by others.

The writer and director **Suzu Kassem** said, "Fear kills more dreams than failure ever will," and it's certainly true. Superintendents possess all the skills needed to be successful in almost any endeavor they choose. But the fear of the unknown inhibits us from taking the chance of betting on ourselves.

If you have put in your time as a superintendent and find yourself facing the crossroads in your career, bet on yourself. You have a vast array of skills that employers are seeking and the skills to pursue the entrepreneurial path. We have experienced the good fortune to meet many superintendents in our careers who have ventured out to do something different. To an individual, they have all been successful. It's overcoming that initial fear of leaving what they know, what they are good at, and utilizing their talents in a different application.

Are we encouraging people to leave the superintendent industry en masse? No, not at all. We're encouraging individuals who have worked hard to acquire valuable expertise to recognize what they have and to not sell themselves short when looking for a different career path. When we say a different career path, we're not even indicating they move outside the industry. There are so many non-superintendent careers within our own industry that need individuals who possess the skills that most superintendents possess.

Embrace fear, bet on yourself and enjoy your success. 🌱



**DAVE DELSANDRO** and **JEFF CORCORAN** are former superintendents and co-founders of Agronomic Advisors, a consulting firm that assists and advises industry professionals on every aspect of golf course management. Contact them at [dave@agro-advisors.com](mailto:dave@agro-advisors.com) and [jeff@agro-advisors.com](mailto:jeff@agro-advisors.com).

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