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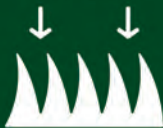
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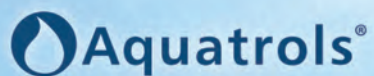
# GOLF COURSE<sup>®</sup> INDUSTRY

## Municipal golf's MOMENT

The busiest courses in the business are faring better than ever in the post-pandemic market. They are also better than ever thanks to committed people.





The Aquatrols logo features a stylized blue water droplet icon to the left of the word "Aquatrols" in a bold, sans-serif font, with a registered trademark symbol (®) to the upper right.The Precision Laboratories logo features a stylized green leaf icon to the left of the word "PRECISION" in a bold, sans-serif font, with "LABORATORIES" in a smaller font below it. A registered trademark symbol (™) is to the upper right of "PRECISION".

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Learn more at [www.AquatrolsCompany.com](http://www.AquatrolsCompany.com)



On the cover: The 14th hole at Francis A. Byrne Golf Course in West Orange, New Jersey. Photograph by Guy Cipriano.

VOL. 37 NO. 3

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# LET'S RELISH THIS MOMENT

**G**overnment and golf have never meshed better. This increasingly symbiotic relationship since the pandemic makes communities greener, drier, calmer, and mentally and physically stronger.

Our cities, boroughs, townships, counties and states become better places when they offer residents quality and affordable recreation. Golf enhances society by satisfying varied human and environmental needs.

People need safe social spaces. Neighborhoods need permeable plots. Salamanders need landscapes to slither. Owls need branches to roost. Foxes need spots to scurry. Municipalities need pleasing landscapes to attract and retain populations.

Policymakers at all levels concur their communities need golf. America's municipal golf supply has swelled to a record 2,939 courses, according to the National Golf Foundation. Nearly every anti-golf legislation introduced over the last four years has been thwarted like a meek approach shot hitting a false front.

Smart communities are using post-pandemic golf windfalls to protect beloved assets. Lincoln City Golf, a Nebraska municipal system featured in this month's cover story (page 17), released an updated 10-year Capital Improvement Plan in 2023. The plan includes upgrades at all five city-owned courses. Perhaps Lincoln City Golf's quintet eventually becomes a sextet. City officials project to add 105,000 residents by 2050. Good luck securing a tee time if the golf supply doesn't increase.

Imagine suggesting in spring 2020 that municipalities would be in the business of evolving and acquiring golf courses. The conversation surrounding municipal golf flipped faster than one of **Rory McIlroy's** stances on the professional game.

At least one friendly publication believed municipal golf possessed the elements to flourish amid global uncertainty. We planned our April 2020 issue before the world changed. We opted to forge forward with our "Maintenance for the masses" cover theme, profiling the logistics of municipal golf in four divergent regions: California's Coachella Valley, the Pacific Northwest, New Jersey and northeast Ohio.

We had practical reasons for keeping the issue intact: the lag between sending *Golf Course Industry* to the printers before it reaches mailboxes is around two weeks. Things were changing fast in spring 2020. Because of the lag, we risked sending pages with outdated information to readers. We strayed from speculating on golf's short- and long-term prospects and avoided chasing stories that risked being irrelevant the moment we hit send.

A printed magazine represents a forum for measured analysis. Fear and uncertainty permeated the early stages of the pandemic. Amplifying those sensations by presenting outdated coverage would have been irresponsible.

Symbolic reasons also existed for keeping the April 2020 issue of *Golf Course Industry* on its intended course. We realized people everywhere, and especially those living in tightly packed urban areas, were going to need escapes. And our readers specialize in providing tidy, safe, aesthetically dazzling escapes for millions.

Our April 2020 cover (pictured above) depicted a woman carrying a bag alongside three children. The quartet was approaching a pond with a defined buffer zone as they walked on a flat, open fairway.

The image foreshadowed golf's future. Women and children are responsible for the game's largest post-pandemic gains in America. The female golf population is at an all-time high of 7.9 million, a net increase of 2.3 million since the start of the pandemic, according to the NGE. Golfers ages 6 to 17 total 3.7 million, a 48 percent increase compared to 2019. Parents needed safe and affordable places to take children in 2020 — and they still need them in 2025. They will also need them in 2050.

Everybody in golf benefits when municipal golf flourishes. Grumbles about government-supported properties competing with privately owned and family facilities quickly subsided once courses became packed in 2020. Perspectives change when demand surpasses supply and money flowing into an industry resembles a theme-park waterslide in July.

Five years into golf's current era, America has more municipal courses than ever. Those courses are in better physical and financial condition than ever.

The longer municipal golf's moment lasts, the better golf and everything around it will become. 🌱



*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**

Director of Data Acquisition

**Michelle Wisniewski**

Production Manager

**Maria Miller**

Director, Conferences and Events

**Irene Sweeney**

Marketing Director

**Katie Star**

Marketing Specialist

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# NOTEBOOK

## Show season

Assistant editor Kelsie Horner describes her learning experience at the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show in San Diego.



I graduated from Kent State University less than a year ago, and one of the things I felt the loss of was the classroom setting. Call me a nerd, but school and education have been a key component of my life, and I wasn't ready to leave them behind.

When I began my role as assistant editor, I quickly realized I am still going to learn and better myself. I just have a different classroom. My textbooks became previous industry articles, my teachers became my interviewees and mentors.

Thanks to the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show, I revisited the classroom setting in San Diego. As a part of the show, educational sessions on trending topics are available for attendees and exhibitors.

At the conference, I had the opportunity to learn from numerous industry greats.

I listened to Iowa State's **Dr. Quincy Law** discuss all things soil organic matter. Law walked attendees through how soil organic matter impacts turfgrass, and how to determine what your soil is lacking.

**Gina Rizzi**, president of Radius Sports,

carried on the environmental conversation with the industry's 2025 trends and best management practices. Trends she mentioned that will impact the industry this year include:

- Regulation and corporate responsibilities
- Energy transition and fossil fuel dependency
- Urban sprawl and loss of biodiversity
- Water scarcity and management
- Plastic pollution and waste management

Rizzi didn't just introduce issues. She presented solutions and practices that courses and superintendents can research and implement for each trend, spawning an endless amount of story ideas for writers like me.

The "Turf Solutions" session covered an area I'm not as familiar with: soil, soil amendments, biosolids and topdressings. Inputs and its impact on irrigation and humic products had my mind running wild, but I ended the session with knowledge on what I need to study more.

After discussing inputs, **Dr. Gregg Munshaw**, director of agronomy at Pratum Seed Companies, discussed the pros and cons of not mowing roughs on the course. He discussed the benefits of letting your roughs grow in, and planting wildflowers in those areas. As shared in his lecture, pollinators are responsible for \$29 billion in crops — and every third bite of our food. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, due to native plants being replaced, pollinator habitats are shrinking. By planting wildflowers on your course, you can help reverse those statistics.

Munshaw described the best options for wildflower choices and how to create a seed mix that works for you. Outside of the environmental benefits of wildflowers, they are aesthetically appealing as well. And if I step on a course and see the flowers, I instantly enjoy the view.

My educational day ended with discussions on data and data-driven decisions. The industry is facing a major shift to technology in many ways. Artificial intel-



ligence, autonomous equipment, endless inventions and improvements. Thanks to technology, access to data and information on your course is at an all-time high. Former Desert Mountain Club turf leader **Shawn Emerson** discussed how his team processed that data, and how it impacted the course.

Emerson used a quote during his lecture: “The world is run by those who show up.”

The quote stood out to me and is now written on a sticky note on my desk. The idea can be applied to many aspects of your life. You show up for your family, your friends, yourself. It also applies to your career. Working in an industry I knew little about has showed me that if you show up, and put forth your best effort, the knowledge and relationships you can gain are infinite.

Showing up to the trade show and educational sessions allowed me to learn more about turfgrass and the golf industry. But more importantly, it allowed me to meet so many people who make this industry so great, who can only continue to teach me more.

*Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry's assistant editor.*

## Managing editor Matt LaWell walked around the PGA Show for the first time. What did he learn that can relate to everyone who works in golf?

**S**omewhere, there is a list of truths about trade shows — things you need to know to survive a day or two or four on the floor:

Pick up a map — preferably printed on paper and not just available on an app on your phone — before heading in.

Bring a notebook — and a cell phone charger — along with that stack of business cards.

Wear comfortable shoes.

Spend some time standing on the padded carpet.

Remember to eat.

And remember to drink. Drink what,

you ask? Morning coffee if you need it, an afternoon beer if some company or another is just giving them away, and water the rest of the day. Always water.

There is one truth that tends to be lesser known, because so many trade shows are in spots with favorable weather, and it is this: When the weather turns — and especially when the rain starts — everybody heads indoors and the show really starts to fill up.

The 2025 PGA Show was absolutely packed.

Rain had poured over Orlando for the first two days of the show, courses across a golf-crazed corner of the country were soaked, and so many people were walking around inside the Orange County Convention Center — hopefully in comfortable shoes. People in every direction, hawking clothes, selling simulators, showing off the latest tech, most dressed for an afternoon in the clubhouse. And most people were never walking at their own pace, always at the same speed as whoever was in front of them, and there was always someone in front of them. Turning left into some other aisle should have required a signal.

This PGA Show was the biggest since 2009 — the last to be booked before the Great Recession sparked financial collapse and the end of the Tiger Boom. More than 1,000 companies. More than 7,000 professionals. More than 30,000 attendees. More than — *ahem* — 1 million square feet

of show floor space. Heaven help anybody in there who lives with ADHD and forgot to pack their medication.

The floor was so big that the show felt like three or four shows all under one roof. Just like 1980s and '90s kids, you could choose your own adventure. *Golf Course Industry* publisher + editor-in-chief **Guy Cipriano** and I opted to spend most of our morning checking out simulators: Golfjoy. Golfzon. EZ Golf. Inrange Golf. Uneekor. SimBooth. Nvisage Technologies. Foresight Sports. Science & Motion Sports. Want to add or upgrade your indoor offerings for 2025 and beyond? No matter your budget, your physical space limitations, or your knowledge of the tech, there were hundreds of options that seemed perfect.

One simulator marketing manager told us that when he entered the space a decade and a half ago — around the time the PGA Show was last this big — you could count the simulator companies on the floor on one hand. Another told us that the simulator market is already worth more than \$1 billion and will likely hit \$3 billion in the next year or so. A third equated the simulator sub-industry to being not in its infancy but in its teenage years — in large thanks to the exposure that TGL has given the technology. “That alone,” he said, “has been enough to make people Google, ‘How much does a launch monitor cost?’”



And how much *does* a launch monitor cost? Depends how much you want to spend. Still another marketing manager compared some offerings to Honda Civics and others to Ferraris. (No surprise: he said the one he's selling is a Ferrari.) You can get in the game for less than \$10,000. If you want a new building full of bays designed to spike membership and give your club a year-round golf community, you can spend seven figures pretty quickly.

No matter your opinion about simulators, one thing that seems certain is that they're not going away: According to the National Golf Foundation's most recent Graffis Report, released in January and worth every second you spend reading it, among the 47.2 million Americans who played golf last year, only 11 million played exclusively on the course. Another 17.1 million split their time on and off the course. The remaining 19.1 million played only off course. And for at

least the second consecutive year, every age demographic under 50 is playing more golf off course than on.

How many of those 19.1 million off-course-exclusive golfers will ever play a round on grass? That is one of the more pressing questions — if not *the* most pressing — for the health of the game as the 2020s march forward. But what pros and superintendents alike can do is maximize every experience in the clubhouse and from the first tee.

Late during our day on the floor, Guy turned to me and said, "If I were running a golf course, I would send the superintendent and the professional, together, to the PGA Show one year and the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show the next."

Plenty of pros could absolutely stand to learn more about agronomy.



And plenty of superintendents could become better at what they do by stepping outside the tiny — and incredibly important — part of the industry they've mastered.

They just need some comfortable shoes for walking around.

I saw some flashy new pairs over on the far side of the floor.

*Matt LaWell is Golf Course Industry's managing editor. He walked 23,435 steps during his one day at the PGA Show.*



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**GOLF COURSE**  
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# Tartan Talks 104

Come for the golf course architecture discussion. Stay for the hiking recommendations.

A *Tartan Talks* episode with **Alex Hay** quickly develops into an audio journey.

Hay lives in Whistler, British Columbia, was raised in the United Kingdom, and has traveled the world through a passion for the outdoors and his work with Lobb + Partners Golf Course Architects. He melds golf and nature in his work — and through his words. When he needs design inspiration, Hay simply steps outside his home.

"I feel very fortunate to live in a place where you can walk out your front door and go on some incredible hikes," he says. "It's a great place to hike. If I'm slow at my desk, going on a trail run



▲ Hay

helps me gather some thoughts."

Hay shares plenty of thoughts about solving issues on urban courses, working with a 10-course operation, golfer safety, compact options, and global golf development on the episode. Like many of his peers, these represent busy times for an architect approaching the peak of his career.

"You look at where other ASGCA members are working and there are definitely some faraway, amazing places that probably wouldn't be considered for golf a few years ago," he says. "It wouldn't be a surprise to get a call from anywhere."

The audio journey can be found on the Superintendent Radio Network page of popular podcast distribution platforms.



▲When he's not renovating and designing golf courses, Alex Hay, left, enjoys spending time outdoors with his family.



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## INDUSTRY BUZZ

The USGA announced the launch of the USGA Moisture Meter. The tool is designed to provide superintendents precise data regarding soil moisture, salinity and temperature. The data instantly uploads into the USGA's DEACON technology platform, creating a digital record that can be used to manage water usage, plant health and golf course playability. ... Toro released its Intelliz60, a web-based digital toolkit available for golf course managers and superintendents. The platform simplifies golf course turf equipment management and gives superintendents access to extended data for decision making. Toro also introduced a new irrigation platform and two new autonomous units. Lynx Drive is a platform designed to meet specific irrigation management needs for golf course superintendents and their teams. The company also announced its Turf Pro mower and Range Pro golf ball picker. ... Tee-2-

Green is rolling out Elite Bentgrass Blend, a new mix of two of their highest performing bentgrass varieties. Elite combines the best characteristics of Crystal Bluelinks and Pure Select to create a new blend. ... FireFly Automatix unveiled a software update focused on starting points, boundaries and keep-out zones for the company's Autonomous Mowing Platform. ... Turf Materials announced partnerships with six sites located in Texas, Arkansas and Mississippi that will produce COMANDsand and COMANDdivot, expanding the product reach.

## COURSE NEWS

The Cabot Collection is opening Cabot Citrus Farms, a 1,200-acre sanctuary among Florida's picturesque Nature Coast. Marking the brand's U.S. debut, the property features two revitalized 18-hole golf courses, Karoo and Roost, and two unique shorter courses, The Squeeze and

The Wedge. The varied 57 holes are designed by **Kyle Franz, Mike Nuzzo, Ran Morrisett and Rod Whitman.** ... Boyne Golf in Northern Michigan is adding a new par-3 short course, Doon Brae, and a Himalayan-style putting course, the Back Yaird, both designed by **Ray Hearn** and scheduled to open this summer. The new short course will be Boyne Golf's 11th course. ... Construction started at Esplanade at St. Marys, a new resort lifestyle community located on the Georgia Coast, just north of Jacksonville, Florida. Esplanade at St. Marys is incorporating numerous amenities into the project, including an 18-hole championship golf course designed by **Chris Wilczynski.** ... Henderson Park, the international private equity real estate firm, acquired PGA National Resort in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, from a Brookfield Asset Management private real estate fund. Originally opened in 1981, PGA National features a Champion Course that since 2007 has hosted the PGA Tour event once known as the Jackie Gleason Inverrary Classic. ... Pizá Golf will design a 9-hole golf course based on its Wellness Golf concept at The Residences at The St. Regis Papagayo Resort in Costa Rica. 

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# Alexa Moncada

ASPIRING GOLF COURSE ARCHITECT

**I**s the ability to design golf courses a gift or an acquired talent? That question is open to debate but creating golf holes from the land certainly requires a passion for doing so.

Passion is something **Alexa Moncada** has in abundance.

Born in San Diego, Moncada grew up in Tijuana, Mexico, and started playing golf at age 7 with the encouragement of her father, a recreational golfer. She told **Rick Woelfel** on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast that by the time she was 10 she knew she wanted to make golf her career.

"I was telling people, 'I'm going to work in golf, I don't see myself doing anything else,'" Moncada recalls. "I ended up reading about and wanting to research golf course architecture, and wanting to know and see what that was. And ever since I can remember I was telling people that's what I was going to do."

Moncada played tournament golf until she was 15 but found she preferred being around the game and the people in it as opposed to the stresses of tournament competition. A wrist injury that kept her off the course for a year also impacted her decision to step away from that side of the game. But Moncada's passion for golf course architecture was unabated, especially after she picked up a copy of **Tom Doak's** book, "Anatomy of a Golf Course."

"That book became my bible" she says. "I read it through and through, probably about 10 times in one year."

Moncada eventually emailed Doak, who advised her to obtain experience working in golf course maintenance. She applied for an abundance of internships and landed a position at Pinehurst Country Club in Denver in the late spring of 2022. She calls the experience as her "first real job."

"I got there," she says, "and I didn't even know how to turn on a mower. They taught me everything from turning on mowers to mowing grass, growing in a green, cutting cups, fertilizing, everything. They really took their time to teach me all of that. It was supposed to be a three-month internship. I ended up staying for nine months."

When that internship ended, Moncada moved on to North Carolina, where she worked at Pinehurst Resort. She served as an intern under Doak and **Angela Moser**, the lead architect on Pinehurst No. 10. Moncada arrived in North

Carolina in January 2023.

"It was amazing," she says. "There were white stakes everywhere marking the tees, middle of the fairways, and the greens. The green stakes had a little green line on the top."

"I remember walking the property for the first time and it was all staked out. The trees were cleared for most of it. There were a few shapers doing a green here and there, but it was mostly property with stakes."

"I have pictures of all the stakes and pictures of the way it turned out and the way they can look at what are basically trees and say, 'This can be a par 5,' or 'This can be a par 3.' That kind of creativity is amazing."

Having the opportunity to learn from Moser made Moncada's time at Pinehurst especially rewarding.

"It made me feel very welcomed," she says. "It wasn't as intimidating. When I first got to Denver, I was very intimidated by, 'I'm the only woman there.' Going to Pinehurst and being able to live with Angela and just be around her, I was less intimidated, like, 'I'm not the only girl here.'"

"It was an amazing experience, and I have a lot to thank Angela for. She was amazing. She taught me so much, not just about golf course architecture but about the industry in general. Getting to know her and see how she works, it was an unbelievable opportunity."

Moncada remained at Pinehurst through August 2023. In April 2024, she moved on to an internship Spanish Bay, though she returned to Pinehurst to volunteer at the 2024 U.S. Open.

When she spoke with *Wonderful Women of Golf*, Moncada had completed her internship at Spanish Bay and was preparing for another assignment at a location she was not at liberty to disclose. 🌱



Angela was amazing. She taught me so much about golf course architecture and about the industry in general. Getting to know her and see how she works, it was an unbelievable opportunity."



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## You're the **pesticide expert**

RISE president **Megan Provost** shares advice for superintendents on the political environment of pesticides.

**T**he golf industry has been scrutinized for years when it comes to pesticide usage. **Megan Provost**, president of Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment, believes superintendents are great environmental stewards and can use their role to properly inform and advocate for pesticide usage.

RISE is a national trade association working with manufacturers, formulators and distributors of specialty pesticides and fertilizers. Provost shared advice on how superintendents can be educated and inform others on handling questions on input usage in golf course maintenance.

**How important is it for people working in the industry to keep up on issues dealing with the environment and environmental policy?**

I think it's really important,

staying involved really at all levels of government, from their local government, a county council, a city council, up to state governments and what their state legislatures are doing and how they're engaging, and the national government as well. We really encourage building those relationships with their elected officials, becoming a known resource so that if, for example, we see a bill introduced in a state that would negatively impact the golf course industry or the pesticide industry, those golf course superintendents have those relationships.

**What would you tell a golf industry professional to do if they are questioned about input usage?**

The advice that we always share is to be honest about it. Share your story. Talk about the benefits and why they do what they do. I think a lot of times folks can get intimidated by questions, but these guys know better than anyone what they're doing, how they're managing their golf courses, so they're the people that are best positioned to answer the question. So just be honest with folks. We found that in the pesticide industry, just being honest about who we are and what we're doing really goes a long way in developing trust and being able to have a relationship with folks. If we show any kind of hesitancy there, then it seems to make folks kind of draw back

and not want to engage in a conversation. I know a number of GCSAA members who have stepped up and volunteered to give tours for state regulators, or even EPA regulators, helping to educate our regulators, helping to educate the public, sharing their story of what they do as the folks on the front line using these products, who know these products better than almost anybody.

**Where can industry pros go to be more educated on policy issues and topics?**

I would say the GCSAA is a great place to start. GCSAA has some amazing resources. We work closely at RISE with the GCSAA staff and they do a great job trying to get information to their members. RISE is another one. I would point to us as a resource, specifically around pesticides and fertilizers. We try to share information, offer webinars, training, talking points and resources to folks who are on the front line and dealing with it. And then I think the third one I would point folks to is the EPA.

**What are some of the environmental issues that golf course industry workers should be aware of?**

Water quality is kind of a cornerstone of environmental responsibility on golf courses and golf course professionals have the ability to be able to speak on behalf of that on some of the fantastic innovative programs that they have in place to keep water clean on courses and in their communities. So being advocates for the work that they do there, it's really important. 🌱



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





# KEEPING SCORE ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

**A**re your employees proud of where they work? Do they take pride in the quality of the products, services and experiences they provide?

If they're like a growing percentage of Americans in a wide range of industries, the answer is no.

According to a recent Gallup study, the percentage of Americans who have pride in their work is at an all-time low, having dropped from about 35 percent to 28 percent in the last five years.

Every employer, manager and team leader, including golf course superintendents, general managers and department heads, should find this erosion of pride disturbing on multiple levels.

The first area of concern is employee engagement. Employees who are not proud of the work they do or the organization for which they do it become disconnected from the company's overall mission and objectives. Productivity and the quality of their work drop. Turnover rates balloon. Worse still, their lack of connection bleeds into their fellow workers and morale suffers. All of which can significantly affect the overall success of the organization.

The second place where we see a lack of pride manifest — and it's equally alarming — is in customer satisfaction. According to the Gallup research, "The decline in employee pride doesn't just affect productivity, it directly influences how organizations meet customer expectations, creating ripple effects on customer satisfaction."

Here are four steps every superintendent can take to keep their teams engaged, proud of the work they do and, in the process, boost customer satisfaction.

**1. Connect your team to golfer feedback.** The more employees know about how their work is perceived by members and customers, the greater their engagement. To make these perceptions clear, establish a golfer feedback mechanism — online surveys, in-person interviews and focus groups/listening sessions. Set the cadence — quarterly, semi-annually or annually — to add discipline to the process. Be prepared for a bumpy start while you're adjusting to receiving feedback — constructive and not-so-constructive. Be prepared for criticism and welcome the opportunity to improve the member and customer experience. As your golfers see your sincerity, professionalism and commitment, the feedback will become better, more actionable and more fulfilling.

**2. Use customer feedback to adjust cultural practices to address your golfers' concerns.** There's a major reason the most successful consumer companies regularly seek customer feedback and guidance. They know that if they don't ask, they're just guessing. Golfers appreciate being asked their opinions, and their answers will open your eyes to opportunities you may have dismissed or not considered.

Several years ago, the City of Los Angeles engaged our firm to survey more than 6,000 Angeleno golfers. Two remarkable and unexpected lessons were gleaned: **1.** Golfers would be willing to pay more for green fees if course conditions were improved. **2.** Golfers would support higher prices for golf if the city improved pace of play.

**3. Set conditioning standards for your course.** Everyone understands the frustration of having their knowledge and experience discounted or dismissed by their manager. Remember that great ideas and inspiration can come from any rung of the organizational ladder. So, make sure to include your staff when deciding on the standards that define your course.

Ask big, open-ended questions: *What should we do to improve our golf course? What would make you feel better about being part of this team?* Then go from *what* to *how*: *How do you suggest we put those ideas into action?*

And make sure to ask about their aspirations. *What are your greatest hopes for our course? For your career?* Aspiration is a powerful catalyst. The bigger the dream, the greater the accomplishment.

**4. Keep score.** Online surveys and other qualifiable data sources help measure improvement toward goals. Three important steps for keeping score:

- Establish a scorekeeping cadence so everyone can anticipate the next time the scores are posted.
- Make the scorekeeping constructive — not something to dread. Celebrate the wins and acknowledge the accomplishments within those victories.
- Make winning its own motivation.

Are you proactively taking steps to connect your team with your golfers? If you are, you're well on the way to helping your employees take greater pride in their work and improving member and customer satisfaction. 🏌️



**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.



Lincoln City Golf's team, from left, Matt Noble, Scott Kennedy, Casey Crittenden, Wade Foreman, Chad Giebelhaus and Zac Caudillo.



# Municipal golf's

# MOMENT

By **Guy Cipriano**

**The busiest courses in the business are faring better than ever in the post-pandemic market. They are also better than ever thanks to committed people.**

**U**nderstanding the reach, influence and advancement of municipal golf in a post-pandemic society requires beginning near the middle.

Lincoln, Nebraska, lies 165 miles northeast of the geographic center of the contiguous United

States. With 81 holes scattered across five contrasting courses, Lincoln City Golf is the largest municipal golf operation near the mainland's geographic nucleus.

Denizens of the growing Heartland city pack the system's courses. Avoiding flying Top Flites and Titleists requires rising early in the summer — golf course main-



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## COVER STORY

► Pioneers Golf Course is the oldest of Lincoln City Golf's five facilities.

tenance crews rev equipment at 5:30 a.m. to beat the golf barrage — or layering up during chillier months. “You want to give your retired guys a chance to have their coffee,” says **Chad Giebelhaus**, one of the city’s four head golf course superintendents, describing the peak-season morning hustle. “But it’s, ‘OK. You have to go. We have to go.’”

On an early December afternoon, with turf-grass still exuding robust-green tinges and temperatures warm enough to produce unfrozen playing surfaces, Pioneers Golf Course offers a venue for something uncommon from April through November: a quiet walk. Only a dozen golfers occupy the 95-year-old course surrounded by a nature preserve and 144-year-old brick factory. Seas of shaved prairie grasses dot the landscape’s interior.

Evidence of golfer wear is challenging to detect, a miraculous feat manufactured by superintendent **Matt Noble**’s team considering a warm and dry fall increased play volumes. Lincoln City Golf reported Pioneers, the

patriarch of the city’s municipal facilities, supported 51,774 rounds in 2024. The city’s other three 18-hole courses, Holmes, Highlands and Mahoney, also surpassed the 50,000-round mark. Add in the 30,525 rounds at Jim Ager, a beginner-friendly, par-3 course between ballfields and homes, and Lincoln City Golf supported 235,012

rounds and generated \$1,063,413 in profit last year.

Lincoln isn’t the only city where municipal golf is thriving. One hundred and thirty years after New York City introduced the concept of government-supported golf at Van Cortland Park Golf Course, America boasts a record 2,939 municipal courses, ac-





cording to the National Golf Foundation. In an era where course contractions outpace openings, the municipal golf supply has increased by 140 courses since 2004.

The finances are equally encouraging. Around 75 percent of municipal facilities collect enough revenue to cover onsite labor and maintenance expenses, according to the NGF. Empowering leaders turning to highly qualified professionals to oversee municipal facilities help golf stay affordable in many places. The average 18-hole municipal course green fee remains below \$40; the quality produced by superintendents and their teams far surpasses the meager green fees.

Observing activity on America's municipal golf grounds makes the numbers more convincing. Over the final five months of 2024, we visited people and places responsible for municipal golf's moment. The journey makes us bullish about how golf and government can cohabitate to uplift the game and communities.

**NEW JERSEY IS** home to renowned private clubs, heavily played municipal courses and the bluntest people in the golf business. Garden State golfers and agronomists aren't shy about sharing candid thoughts — even when job looking.

**Tim Christ** sought a position with stability and support during a 2009 job search. The only thing he saw while touring the Essex County-owned courses was dead grass. OK, he also noticed thriving crabgrass and goosegrass in key playing areas. "They took me around," Christ says, "and I wanted to throw up. I said to my wife, 'There's a 98 percent I'm *not* taking this job.'"

The open job involved overseeing the county's three courses: Francis A. Byrne, Hendricks Field and Weequahic. The courses featured a golf trifecta in Golden Age design roots. **Charles Banks** designed Francis A. Byrne and Hendricks Field. Former Baltusrol pro **George Low** plotted Weequahic. Years of neglect, though, upset Christ's strong stomach.

A starting offensive lineman at Rutgers University in the 1990s who launched his golf maintenance career and quickly ascended at revered private clubs, including Merion, Pine Valley and Hamilton Farm, Christ mulled cancelling an in-person interview with county officials. Christ ultimately kept his interview slot out of respect for **Stephen Kay**, the New Jersey-based architect who encouraged him to apply for the job. Architects can connect superintendents with potential opportunities, and Christ didn't want to sever a relationship.

Following a few tense exchanges, Christ told county officials what they needed to hear. "I said, 'You have some really cool bones out here, they are really cool Banks courses,'" Christ says. "But there's dead grass everywhere, you have nobody with a turf degree. I just started going through the litany. Everybody just shut up and let me talk.

I said, 'Your agronomy is terrible. I don't care how much money you throw into it, if you don't have guys who have degrees and can grow grass, none of it matters.'"

The bluntness combined with a terrific résumé landed Christ the job as the county's director of golf operations responsible for overseeing operations at the three courses. The county now employs seven managers with turfgrass degrees.

Under the leadership of longtime county executive **Joseph N. DiVincenzo Jr.**, Essex County has invested more than \$20 million to revitalize the three courses. Kay guided each project, with work concluding at Hendricks Field and Francis A. Byrne in 2021 and 2023, respectively. A massive renovation at Weequahic concludes this summer. "I kind of look at us like a mini-Bethpage, because Joe has put the money in," says Christ, referring to famed Bethpage State Park, the five-course municipal facility on Long Island set to host the 2025 Ryder Cup.

A tour of Francis A. Byrne with Christ last August illustrated what municipal golf has become in New Jersey's

▼ Essex County director of golf operations Tim Christ, left, and Francis A. Byrne Golf Course superintendent Chris Krno.



third-most-populated county.

For starters, the course is empty. A day following the tour, Francis A. Byrne hosted the New Jersey State Golf Association Public Links Championship. The county's desire to present tidy conditions to a statewide golf audience gave superintendent **Chris Krno's** team a golf-free maintenance block one day before the tournament.

Christ and Krno briefly reflected on the course's metamorphosis during a conversation to the left of the third green. The third hole is an uphill par 4, featuring a punchbowl green, a Golden Age template revived by Kay.

Krno was Christ's first major hire, leaving a position as a head assistant at a nearby private club to become Francis A. Byrne's superintendent. He's in his 16th season in the role. The job features a supportive boss who understands the value of preserving a Banks design. Nicknamed "Steam Shovel" because of a penchant for crafting bold features, including nearly upright bunker faces, Banks' legacy predominantly involves his work at exclusive clubs.

"You could tell this was cool," says Krno, recalling his first course tour with Christ in September 2009. "I kept telling myself if I was here long enough, we would get there."

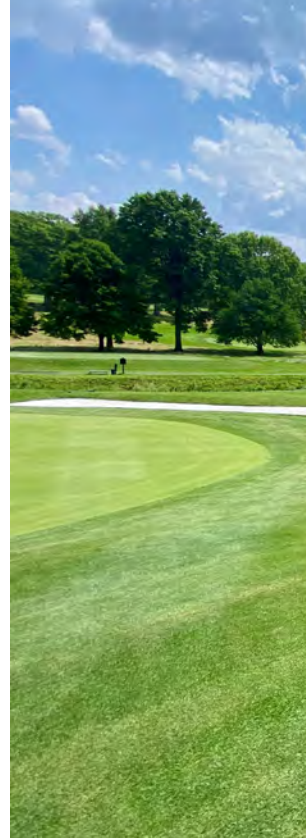
From the third green, a golfer trudges to the upper part of the course, which borders the private Essex County Club, another Banks design. Essex County acquired the course now known as Francis A. Byrne from the private club in 1978. The ninth hole connects the upper and lower portions of the course. The downhill par 4 includes cross and approach bunkers, a horseshoe-shaped green, and thumbprint inside the putting surfaces. The tee provides a fabulous view of the hole and the neighborhood surrounding the course. "This looks great in October with the fall color," says Kay, who joined the August course tour on the eighth tee.

The ninth hole looks great in the summer heat, too. "This whole design was a group effort," Kay adds. "I wasn't the dictator, nor was Tim, nor was the shaper. It was always a big team effort. We kept asking each

other: What do we think is going to look good and how can we maintain it?"

Christ and Kay hustle through the back nine in electric carts — they want to visit Hendricks Field before northern New Jersey traffic thickens — but stop at the 17th tee, which parallels the second hole. The 17th is a reverse redan; the second is a giant Biarritz. The par 3s provide enthralling on-the-ground possibilities, dynamic mowing lines, polished bunker complexes and carefully sculpted mounding. Golfers from Newark, the Oranges, Montclair and nearby municipalities once needed pricey private-club memberships to experience high-quality template holes.

► Francis A. Byrne Golf Course reopened in 2023 following a major renovation.







“How many places have done anything like this?” Christ asks.

**JEREMY PHILLIPS AND KEVIN LAFLAMME** experienced a similar transformation on a compact golf scale at Coonskin Park, a 1,000-acre green space operated by Kanawha County Parks and Recreation. With 173,746 residents, Kanawha County is West Virginia’s largest county and home to the capital city of Charleston.

Tucked in a valley along the Elk River beneath Interstate 79, Coonskin Park supports a pool, wedding garden, hiking trails, disc golf, picnic shelters, tennis courts, horseshoe pits, athletic fields, driving range and an awesome 9-hole, par-3 golf course. Phillips and LaFlamme lead a small team responsible for maintaining the course and the park’s other recreational amenities. In the summer, the crew swells to around eight employees. In the shoulder seasons and winter, only one other year-round grounds employee works alongside the duo.

Whoever arrives first — and spotting the park’s entrance can be tricky because dense morning fog frequently engulfs the valley — unlocks a gated bridge over the Elk River. The

unlocking signifies the beginning of the work and recreational day. “As soon as we open the gates,” LaFlamme says, “we’ll have joggers and walkers come into the park.”

On days warm and dry enough to play golf, the work hustle — like it does in Lincoln, Nebraska; Essex County, New Jersey; and thousands of other municipalities — immediately commences. Team meetings and social banter must be saved for another part of the municipal golf workday. “When you come in, there’s no, let’s grab a coffee, sit around and talk about what we’re going to,” LaFlamme adds. “It’s, let’s go.” Busy municipal golf courses hurt coffee industry sales.

Spending two decades as co-workers makes Phillips and LaFlamme equipped to navigate the frantic pace of a municipal maintenance morning. The pair developed as turf professionals together at Edgewood Country Club, one of Charleston’s two private clubs. Phillips started his career raking bunkers, took an interest in the industry, and steadily advanced through the club’s turf hierarchy. He left a position as Edgewood’s first assistant in 2020 to join LaFlamme at Coonskin Park. Leading a maintenance operation at

a park preparing for a big golf project intrigued the duo. Phillips oversees the daily efforts on the short course, while LaFlamme scurries between park amenities.

The Short Course at Coonskin debuted in May 2023. A thorough review of the park’s golf future stems from a devastating 2016 flood that ruined the back nine and irrigation system of what Kanawha County Parks and Recreation director **Jeff Hutchinson** described as a “very plain and vanilla” 18-hole executive course. Hutchinson’s department manages and maintains 3,000 acres across four locations with just 19 full-time employees. When Hutchinson arrived in 2002, Kanawha County owned and operated 54 holes. The Great Recession pinched the West Virginia economy, and the county has trimmed its golf volume to 27 holes: 18 regulation holes at Big Bend Golf Course and the 9 holes over 13 acres at Coonskin Park.

“We have had to be super creative,” Hutchinson says. “We sold a golf course and closed another one. That was hard on me. I’m a golf pro. But in the last two decades, we’ve done what’s best for everything here. We’ve asked ourselves: How can we still serve the public and still do something that’s really good for golf?”

Funding for Coonskin Park’s golf overhaul emerged when the Kanawha County Commissions approved using \$1.2 million from the county’s America Rescue Plan haul toward the project. West Virginia native **Kelly Shumate** designed an imaginative-to-play and efficient-to-maintain layout with Golden Age-inspired green complexes. **Todd Godwin** and his TGC Construction team built the course in about 50 working days.

The course Phillips and LaFlamme maintain represents a stark contrast to what they had been trying to keep playable. Before Phillips accepted a job at Coonskin Park, he fielded multiple

◀ Architect Stephen Kay, left, has collaborated with Tim Christ on multiple golf projects in Essex County, New Jersey.

## COVER STORY

► Kevin LaFlamme, left, and Jeremy Phillips oversee the maintenance of the Short Course at Coonskin in Kanawha County, West Virginia.

► Golden Age-inspired green complexes are part of the appeal at the Short Course at Coonskin.

calls from LaFlamme, including one where his friend compared the greens to paper plates resting on a table. Wilted and decaying turf covered the surfaces. “Kevin came over a few months before me and he sent some of these pictures and he was like, ‘Oh, man, I might have gotten in over my head,’” Phillips says. “I said, ‘No, this going to be a good opportunity, especially with the way they were talking about the new construction.’”

Vibrant bent-grass blends now cover greens, approaches and tees, as beginners learning the game and enthusiasts honing shots experience holes such as the ninth, a 102-yard teaser with a punchbowl green complex. Coincidentally, the ninth hole at The Greenbrier’s famed Old White Course also features a punchbowl green complex. Municipal layouts such as the Short Course at Coonskin make Golden Age experiences affordable for golfers who might never be able to drop \$500 to play their state’s prized resort course.

When they have time to look

around, Phillips and LaFlamme notice golfers wearing everything from polished Foot Joys to tattered sandals enjoying their versatile work. Ensuring awesome golf experiences for the Kanawha County, West Virginia, masses means the mechanic, irriga-

tion technician, spray technician and superintendent possess the same name. Jobs protecting beloved community assets induce frequent fatigue and abundant fulfillment.

“All in all,” Phillips says, “it’s been a pretty good little journey.”

**GENERALISTS PROLIFERATE MUNICIPAL** golf, including in Lincoln, where **Casey Crittenden** oversees four superintendents operating without mechanics and technicians. Crittenden is Lincoln City Golf’s maintenance coordinator. He joined the system in 2014, when play totals for the 18-hole courses settled in the low- to mid-40,000s depending on the weather. Generating enough revenue to cover annual expenses represented an operational win during the 2010s.

Before the pandemic, municipalities leaned on employee ingenuity to stay afloat. Following the pandemic, employee ingenuity helps municipalities increase golf windfalls. Lincoln City Golf’s 18-hole facilities handle robust play with crews consisting of







just three full-time turf employees. Municipal golf's moment is a people-driven triumph.

"We're an enterprise system," says Crittenden, referring to Lincoln City Golf's self-sufficient operating structure, "and it's all hands on deck. You really have to be a well-rounded individual to be a superintendent here for the City of Lincoln."

Giebelhaus begins mornings at Highlands by guiding a team of seasonal employees supplementing the meager full-time staff to the right spots on a 1990s links-style course with around 115 maintained acres. He then starts changing cups, a job that allows his trained eyes to see every green at least once per day. He will then help fix irrigation snafus or execute some other type of targeted digging before ending days with 30 minutes of office work.

Less than 10 miles east of where Giebelhaus digs, superintendent **Scott Kennedy** often grabs a rake and prepares Mahoney's two dozen bunkers ahead of play. "Honestly, bunkers are one of my favorite jobs," Kennedy says. "It plays into my OCD.

Casey will come visit and find me in a bunker somewhere. He must think I live there sometimes."

When Crittenden visits Pioneers, he never finds Noble in a bunker. Lincoln's oldest municipal course packs abundant charm due to varied topography, so a golfer might never realize they are playing a course devoid of bunkers. Noble views himself as an extreme generalist. "I like to be everywhere," he says. "I don't have a lot of younger help, so I try to jump in and help my guys do a lot of stuff, so that not everybody is doing the same job. The labor part is one of the parts of the job that I love."


Holmes' **Zac Caudillo** spends more time than his Lincoln City Golf superintendent peers repairing irrigation issues. But a redistribution of his personal labor looms. The 60-year-old course's irrigation system is scheduled to be replaced as part of a 10-year capital improvement plan revised in 2023. Modest surcharges, currently \$2.25 for 18-hole rounds and \$1.50 for 9-hole rounds, fund capital improvements, with Lincoln City Golf spending more than \$3.6 million on

upgrades since 2016. The system has used profits generated from 2020 and subsequent years to establish and expand a financial buffer in the form of a reserve now exceeding \$800,000, according to golf operations coordinator **Wade Foreman**.

Modest also describes Lincoln City Golf green fees: the highest, peak-season, busy-time green is under \$40 at all four 18-hole courses. "People might come from out of town or other places, and they see the green fees and they're like, 'They are really low. I don't know what I'm going to get,'" Kennedy says. "They then see the courses and they're like, 'Wow.' They are surprised by how good the courses are and what they pay to play." Similar affordability exists in Kanawha County, West Virginia, and Essex County, New Jersey. The Short Course at Coonskin costs \$20 to play, while the 18-hole green fee at Francis A. Byrne ranges from \$30 to \$80.

Affordable green fees and high-traffic locations yield little respite for superintendents and their teams: a municipal course receives 30 percent more play than a daily-fee facility, according to the NGF. A municipal course superintendent might not reflect when changing cups, fixing an irrigation leak, raking bunkers and compiling invoices on the same day, but their efforts create a mix of affordability and quality boosting the game's popularity.

Consider the masses fortunate.

"Cities that are growing and vibrant need to have different activities for different citizens," Foreman says. "Golf is an important piece of that anywhere in the country, and people need a place to play. We try to provide quality courses at an affordable rate for golfers and citizens in Lincoln." 

*Guy Cipriano is Golf Course Industry's publisher + editor-in-chief. The Cleveland Metroparks courses near the GIE Media headquarters are among his many home courses.*

◀ The architecture, maintenance and finances of America's municipal golf courses sit in a terrific position as the 2025 golf season intensifies.



The second hole at Spessard Holland in Brevard County, Florida.

# From *selling* to *striving*

By **Kelsie Horner**

How a community-minded organization and well-trained managerial talent reversed a Florida county's municipal golf fortunes.

Central Florida's Brevard County almost left the municipal golf business. Due to financial losses, the county's board settled on voting to either sell or close its three courses.

But retired newspaper editor and Brevard County resident **Stephen Proctor** didn't accept those options. After listening to **Tom Becker**, a

member of the county's Golf Advisory Committee, speak on the possibility of establishing a nonprofit to save two of the city's courses, Proctor was inspired.

Brevard County, with a population of nearly 700,000, is found on the Atlantic coast, east of Orlando and home to numerous public and private golf courses. The Habitat at Valkaria in Malabar first opened in



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▲ Bill Crudo, Gary Evans and Jim Roberts at Spessard Holland. Crudo and Roberts are current board members.

1991 and was designed by **Charles Ankrom**. It features a par-72, 18-hole course routed among wetlands and forest. The course is narrow and long, making for a more challenging round of golf.

Sitting between the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian River is Spessard Holland of Melbourne Beach, designed by **Arnold Palmer** in 1977. It is a par-67, 18-hole course featuring scenic views of the waterfront.

The third course, The Savannahs Golf Club in Merritt Island, was given back to the homeowner's association, as it was the least profitable of the three courses.

Proctor decided to take action to save the two courses he called home. He recruited a few CEO friends from the newspaper world for guidance and a few fellow golfers, and headed to talk with county officials.

"Obviously, I was extremely anxious about the outcome, because if it didn't work, I wasn't going to have any place to play golf," Proctor says. "I had a strong vested interest in it, as did almost every single person who was on the steering committee. All of the people on the steering committee, with the sole exception of the CEOs that I recruited, played their golf at one of these two golf courses."

After meeting and waiting for votes, the county granted the group

extension. It didn't take long for the group to reach their goals. Within a year and a half, the loan was paid off and Spessard Holland and The Habitat were in the black. The courses earned a 10-year contract in 2021.

## THE TURNAROUND

Two steps were taken to solve the financial issues facing the courses:

**1. Cancel GolfNow.** Proctor and the board decided to cancel the booking system due to its costs and non-user-friendly aspects. Being in the Sunshine State, the course's golfers were predominantly retired and didn't prefer to use their cell phones to book tee times and check in. In fact, less than 3 percent of their customers used the program to book tee times. The system was difficult for employees and golfers to use, and the system sold the courses' premium tee times for as low as \$10, devaluing the rounds and depriving the courses of revenue.

"Everyone called the golf

a \$399,000 loan and gave them a three-year contract to make The Habitat Golf Course and Spessard Holland Golf Course profitable. Golf Brevard was established.

If they were successful in making the courses profitable, they would be eligible for a 10-year extension.

course or turned up personally at the golf course to book tee times. They just didn't do it that way," Proctor says of GolfNow.

While working for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Proctor shared an office building with Square, a business operating platform. The board created its own check-in system through Square, which cost a fraction of the price and resulted in quicker, more efficient check-ins.

## 2. Hire their own greenkeepers.

While being run by the county, the maintenance crew was filled with contracted employees. This added 25 to 35 percent to the cost of labor, and the courses didn't receive "the tender, loving care that they should," Proctor says, due to their company maintaining numerous courses.

In July 2018, Golf Brevard hired **Mike Yurigan** as general manager and director of golf, marking one step toward turning around the courses. Yurigan's father, **Adam Yurigan**, worked in the industry, including as the superintendent of Rio Pinar in Orlando, home of the Florida Citrus Open throughout the 1960s and '70s. He also received the FGCSA's President's Award for Lifetime Achievement. Because of the relationships Adam and Mike

had built over the years, Mike received a call from **Steve Lamontagne**, who previously worked at Suntree Country Club, another course in Brevard County.

Lamontagne heard about the events in Brevard County, and thought Yurigan could be a good fit.

Soon after Yurigan started, he hired **Jamie Baker** as superintendent. Baker previously

It's been rewarding, fulfilling, whatever those words are, but it's been a lot of hard work. The staff has done a great job."

— Mike Yurigan



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## GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY



▲ Golfers putt on No. 2 green at The Habitat.

worked as an assistant superintendent at several other clubs, most recently Bent Pine Golf Club in Vero Beach. The position with Golf Brevard marked his first head superintendent role.

When Yurigan arrived at the courses, ready to start the work, he was shocked with the conditions. “I kind of had a talk with my wife, and I said, ‘Do I really want to do this? Am I biting off more than I can chew?’”

The crew faced a huge challenge, with around \$510,000 to do it. “That put me a little bit at ease, but not a lot,” Yurigan says.

As for the maintenance staff, most employees who were working on the course previously stuck around. Baker helped hire a mechanic and a few new staff members.

After devising a game plan, Baker and his staff began tackling the turnaround. They started by focusing on greens. The surfaces were thinning and weeds needed to be removed.

“That’s what people want,” Baker says. “They want good greens. And we needed to get those into the kind of condition where, when they left, they weren’t disappointed in them.”

Thanks to dedicated treatment, both courses are nearly 100 percent

weed-free now.

To get the course into ideal condition, an emphasis was held on redefining fairways. The areas between fairways and roughs were blended and, thanks to mowing and fertility treatments, were able to be redefined.

The Habitat now averages more than 60,000 rounds a year. Spessard Holland surpasses 50,000 rounds annually. Both courses have also seen major renovations in recent years.

As soon as Golf Brevard earned the 10-year contract, The Habitat received a new irrigation system, paid for entirely in cash from profits.

Spessard Holland closed last June and July to sod and introduce new Bermudagrass greens.

“It’s been rewarding, fulfilling, whatever those words are, but it’s been a lot of hard work. The staff has done a great job,” Yurigan says. “But if you asked me that question again, I don’t know if I can answer it in any other way. We started with not a lot, and now here we are moving forward into seven-plus years with no debt.”

Keeping the courses affordable remained a focus. Golfers can purchase a gold membership for \$3,400 a year, which includes unlimited

rounds of golf at either course and cart fees. “That’s the goal, to make that even possible, that you could build your life around one of our golf courses, and you can afford to do that,” Proctor says.

Affordability is one of Golf Brevard’s three benchmarks for success. The second is having well-maintained courses. The third is keeping customers satisfied. “Those are our only three criteria—be inexpensive, be beautifully groomed, and be a wonderful experience for golfers who think they get a great value every time they come,” Proctor adds.

Big plans and goals await The Habitat and Spessard Holland. The Habitat is planning for tee-box improvements on all 18 holes. The course was designed with five sets of tees. It was expected that the middle tees would see the most play. But that was not the case.

“Most of our play comes out the second set of tees back — not the forward, but the next set back,” Baker says. “And those tees, when they were originally designed, were tiny and there’s just way too much traffic on them now.” Fifteen to 20 of those tee boxes will be expanded for more surface area. Additional plans are in



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## SPOTLIGHT

development to improve greenside bunkers.

Golf Brevard also plans for Spessard Holland to receive a new irrigation system in 2026, with new greens for The Habitat in 2027.

Thanks to the organization, the community and the customers, municipal golf in Brevard County will continue to shine. “Everybody tells me thank you all the time,” Yurigan says. “I say, ‘Don’t thank me. Thank



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▲ A golfer tees off on No. 1 at The Habitat.

the staff and thank yourselves for believing in what we're doing and coming out and just playing golf and having a hot dog or a beer or a soda. Every dollar we make goes back into the golf courses, this facility itself.”

Yurigan reflects on the journey with the thoughts of his father. “I look back emotionally with that,” he says. “I know my dad would be pretty proud of what I've been able to do, putting the group of people together to make it great.”

When asked about his thoughts on the process, Proctor could only express pride. His love for the game and the golf courses kickstarted a journey they will never forget.

“This is the thing I'm most proud of in my entire life, other than the birth of my children and marriage to my wife,” Proctor says. “I've had the great fortune to edit two stories that won the Pulitzer Prize for journalism. I've had a lot of really good things happen to me in this world, but I'm not more proud of anything than I am with Golf Brevard because that's something that's way bigger than me or a newspaper story. That's all the golfers who play golf in Brevard County, Florida, and they'll still be playing on these golf courses long after I've stopped being the chairman of Golf Brevard.” 🌱

Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry's assistant editor.



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## ARE YOU GM MATERIAL?

**B**esides seeing old friends, looking at new equipment and gathering ideas for columns, one of my favorite activities at the winter industry shows is witnessing the “job watch.” Stand anywhere on a show floor and you’re sure to observe others with their eyes wide open, watching for their next employment opportunity.

If you’ve made it to the superintendent level, it’s not unusual to wonder at some point, “Is this all there is?” You feel bored, or stuck, or underpaid, or underappreciated, or just antsy for something else. And if you’re not interested in doing the same thing at another club — be it bigger, smaller, more prestigious, less taxing, or just different — you may very well fall into a common mindset among superintendents: I should be the GM!

This step up is also understandable. You’re already responsible for the most important, and expensive, asset at the club, so how hard can it be to add the dining room? The only other similarly important job is golf pro, but it demands a very different skill set. And you already know the club and the people, so it’s a natural move up, right?

Maybe right, but also maybe very wrong. The grass may look greener — along with a greener salary — behind a desk in the clubhouse. But before you think you’re a natural, make an honest self-evaluation and see if you possess (or can easily acquire) these five skill sets.

### FINANCIAL KNOWLEDGE

Yes, you know how to manage a golf course budget, but what do you know about the other departments the GM oversees —

including, but not limited to, culinary, clubhouse, amenities, capital expenditures and personnel? Each department head is an expert in their field, so if you’re going to be their boss, you need to be versed in their operational areas.

Plus, you’ll need an understanding of club income and debt to balance the budget while ensuring a cushion for emergencies. I’m not saying it’s unlearnable, but I don’t know many superintendents who went into agronomy for the chance to work on spreadsheets. So, if you don’t already love the money-management side of things, you may be in for a lot of headaches.

### AVAILABILITY

A club’s GM needs to be available to address any problem at any moment, day or night, in season or out. From marina to mahjong, fitness to filets, you’ll be dealing with meetings, committees, members, member groups, vendors, staff, municipal codes and, at every level, politics. You can’t hide on the golf course or in the maintenance facility. You need to always be visible and available, with a calm and steady hand on the tiller. No attitude, no temper, no outbursts.

### COMMUNICATION

I know many superintendents who love explaining themselves and what they’re doing to different constituents. Well, that only

gets harder at the GM level, where you need to speak several different languages — member, committee, staff, vendor, etc. Written and oral communication skills are necessary.

As superintendent, you could always hide behind science, explaining your actions as being “for the good of the course.” There’s no science that will explain to Mr. Smith why you’re out of his favorite bourbon.

### SITUATIONAL MANAGEMENT

You think every golfer is an expert on their golf course? They’re just as much of an “expert” on food, furniture, pool water conditioning, party planning, hiring and firing, brands of toilet paper, and everything else. Non-golfers, spouses, social members and guests, too. The GM is a walking “suggestion box,” with no issue too insignificant to get stuck in someone’s craw. And, again, that’s 24/7, 365 days a year.

Managing means educating, keeping members and players constantly informed about everything from wine pairings to hours of operation, course closures to maintenance issues. Plus, more and more of this is done online — email, text, website, social media — so you’re going to need to be on top of those skills, too.

### TIME MANAGEMENT

General managers don’t get to work under cover of darkness and leave in mid-afternoon.

**MORAGHAN** continues on 43



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





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# DARN GOOD FIREPIT ADVICE

Ask, listen and get out of the way. A trio of savvy leaders share calculated thoughts directed toward assistant superintendents and aspirational peers.

By **Guy Cipriano**

**G**ather at the firepit and plop onto an Adirondack chair. Toss a light jacket over a quarter zip or golf hoodie. A fabulous Golden Hour has concluded and it's getting chilly outside The Cradle Crossing, the soothing social spot along the eponymous Pinehurst Resort short course.

We're surrounded by two industry leaders. A third stalwart later joins the conversation. Gaze and listen intently as Inverness Club superintendent **John Zimmers** and Saucon Valley Country Club director of golf courses and grounds **Jim Roney** discuss leadership, mentorship and life.

The conversation stems from their presence in Pinehurst as mentors for the 19th Green Start Academy, an annual training program for assistant superintendents sponsored by Envu, John Deere and Rain Bird.

How Zimmers and Roney view the evolution of the assistant superintendent positions and what they once learned in the role produce must-listen early evening dialogue. Zimmers worked as an assistant for **Paul R. Latshaw**, arguably the greatest identifier and developer of talent in golf maintenance history. Roney worked as an assistant at Sand Ridge Golf Club on Cleveland's far east side for



the person sitting on the Adirondack chair to his right. Zimmers and Roney share memories from their Sand Ridge days by the firepit. They reminisce to offer insight pertinent to aspiring industry leaders.

Let's serve them a few career-driven questions and listen. Oakland Hills Country Club director of agronomy **Phil Cuffare** will join the conversation at the urging of Zimmers and Roney. The majors conducted at Pinehurst, after all, start with talented groups of three carefully grouped together.

### What type of opportunity do you see for a talented assistant these days?

**Roney:** There are so many options out there. There are so many great clubs that are understaffed and don't have the right talent. You know that old adage: the world is your oyster. In our industry, it truly is. Ten years ago, you could argue against that. Since COVID-19, clubs are looking to improve and reinvest in their primary infrastructure, which is their golf course. The opportunities are monumental. The key is to work for the right club and the right person. If a superintendent has a track record of placing successful superintendents, that's where you want to go because you need a return on your investment because it's expensive to go to school and pay off your student loans. That return on investment has to happen in a quick way in my mind. The important thing is going to the right club. **Zimmers:** He pretty much nailed that. The opportunity right now is unlimited. You need to work at the right place, for the right person, and know they are invested in you. You can make a lot of money right now doing this. You have to put it all together, too. We talk about work-life balance and all these things. I get it, those are important things and important decisions. You have to prioritize certain things and where you want to be. You have to have a passion to do this. As I remember Mr. Latshaw saying, "There isn't somebody every day telling you to get up. There isn't

somebody making a schedule for you. There isn't anybody doing those things for you.' You think about that, and we have a lot of controls that are right in front of us that we get to do daily. I think it's such a wonderful business and profession. You have to be able to do budgets, you have to be able to do math, you have to be able to speak, you have to be able to manage people ... you have to do all these things. It's such a unique profession.

### What was your first assistant superintendent job like?

**Zimmers:** My first true assistant job was at Congressional in 1993 when Mr. Latshaw left Wilmington and went there. It was really demanding, and I kind of told myself, 'Listen, if you are going to work for somebody that's the best, you have to try to be the best.' I sacrificed a lot. There were times it took a toll on my relationships with family and friends. But the key was you knew if you were going to do this and give that amount of time, you were going to get it back because you were working for somebody who was going to flip this script really quick. You wanted to try to learn as much as you possibly could. I have been blessed. I have interviewed for jobs, but not those big, big types of interviews. You are already kind of selected.

**Roney:** I had a pretty unique scenario where John worked for Mr. Latshaw, and I worked for **Paul B. Latshaw** at Merion. John left for Sand Ridge and was looking for an assistant. I was graduating from college and transferred, so I didn't have my degree yet. Paul gave me the title of AIT. I said, 'Thank you, but no thank you because AIT means nothing to me. I'm not training to be an assistant. I'm training to be a golf course superintendent.' I just wanted to do everything that needed to be done. Paul told me that John went to Sand Ridge, and it's a construction job. He said he had a job (at Merion) that I could slide into when I graduated—or I could go work for John. So, I flew to Cleveland and met John and his wife, **Tracey**. I stayed

with them and walked the golf course. It was during clearing, and we spent two days walking in the woods.

**Zimmers:** And I thought there was zero percent chance he was coming. The mud was like an ocean and the weather wasn't that great when he visited.

**Roney:** When I got back to Philly and Paul asked, 'What do you think?' I said, 'Paul, I can stay here and work at one of the top five courses in the world, and I know I can grow here. Or I can take myself out of my comfort zone and jump into something where I have no idea about things like surveying, land clearing, permitting and zoning meetings. I'm going to do that.' I went and did that. It was honestly the best decision of my life.

**Zimmers:** We worked so much. We never thought about work-life balance and all that stuff. Jim and I would be at dinner and a truck would come and we would have to unload it. There was so much to it. But it was fun. We were young, and we didn't think about it. All we thought about was this piece of land and what we were going to do with it. Jim, I don't know about you, but I don't have any regrets.

**Roney:** None. When you work for somebody like (Sand Ridge founder) **Bill Conway**, you wanted to produce for him. He's such an amazing person. When your alarm went off, you went to work. It's harder for me to wake up now with where I'm at in my career than it was then. You went to bed, woke up and were ready to go to work. You showered, grabbed your lunch and off you went.

### Do you see assistants now who worked like you did when you were assistants?

**Zimmers:** I have been blessed to have really, really good, dedicated people who work hard—and they probably would tell you it was hard or whatever. But I will tell you it changed their life. They went on to be very, very successful. You need to work hard to be different than the rest. You have to do something to be different.

**Cuffare:** And we don't work to just work. It's totally to accomplish the end goal.

**Zimmers:** I'm lucky, too. Sometimes on a Saturday night, as stupid as it is, Tracey and I get out in the cart and look at the course in the evening, and I feel better. I love it.

**Cuffare:** There are people who are envious of our jobs. All my friends outside of the golf industry who I grew up with think it's the greatest job.

**Zimmers:** Our stress comes from stuff that we generally can't control. That's the conversation you want to have with these young people.

**Cuffare:** We solve problems from the moment we wake up to the moment we go to bed and sometimes we go to bed late because those problems are still persisting. It's non-stop. We're problem solvers. Unfortunately, or

fortunately, we are really good at solving problems.

**Roney:** That's why it's frustrating because you might be in a meeting where somebody can't solve a problem and you're thinking, 'This is really easy.'

### What will separate assistants from their peers as their careers progress?

**Zimmers:** For me, if I'm sitting in that room, and I just went to school or whatever, why wouldn't I aspire to be the best? If you're going to do this, why not do it the best you can and be compensated the best you can?

**Roney:** It's hard to win, it's easy to lose, I'll pick up the leaves in the parking lot ... that's how you separate yourself. Also, don't be afraid to make a decision and take a chance on something. Because if you're going to rest on your

laurels and accept mediocrity or the ho-hum part of your job, you're not helping yourself or us, and you're not getting any better.

### What is the future of the superintendent and assistant superintendent positions?

**Roney:** The upside for a select group is going to be way more than what we had. There are going to be great clubs that are going to be looking for talented young people to run their clubs. That's attributed to the fact we had COVID and golf really became something that was prominent. That's one side of it. The other side of that is that if the individual really doesn't commit themselves, then they could put themselves in a situation where they are faced with what the norms are and the norms seem to now be not



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doing the extra part, not doing more to separate themselves. That's not how success is built or how winning is built. It's really in the eye of the beholder. How much you put in, that's what you'll get back 10 times.

**Zimmers:** The people at these clubs are trusting you to be around their parents, their family, their kids, the whole deal. When you're around clubs that are good, solid clubs, there's a value to that.

**Cuffare:** I get worried, but that's why I spend time with these guys because I want to bring this thing in closer. It's up to us to remold that future. Because if we let somebody else mold it, we're not going to like it.

**Zimmers:** Isn't that interesting how he said that he gets worried? We don't really have to care as much as we do, but we do, right? We want to pass it

along. We want people to know they can do well in this industry.

**Cuffare:** When I sat down at my table last night, I thought, 'I have a lot of work to do.' When I walked off the ninth green here, I felt my work was almost done. I asked them on the third hole, 'What do you want to be?' The good thing is I think everybody started figuring out what they wanted to be, but if you don't have a roadmap or know what you want to be ...

**Are you confident there are people out there who can carry this industry on and demonstrate the same passion you and your mentors have demonstrated?**


**Roney:** I think John should answer this.

**Zimmers:** No! You don't know what tomorrow is going to be. We're going

to be dealing with robotics and all kinds of different things. I say, no, because I can't answer that question. But yes, there are people out there.

**What can somebody do to get jobs like the jobs you have?**

**Roney:** You want to go work somewhere where there's a track record. My son works for Paul B. now. I told him, 'If you work somewhere where somebody has your best interest in mind, don't worry about where you fall in the pecking order. Be honest, work hard, take what is given to you. Allow your work to pay for itself.' If an opportunity like that is there for you—I don't care what club you're at—that's where that assistant needs to be.

**Cuffare:** I look at success rates. I don't gamble, I don't go to casinos. It's a sure thing if you go work for some guys. 

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# STAYING STEADY *amid leaks, breaks and fissures*

Feel like that outdated irrigation system increases your blood pressure and induces reoccurring stress? You're not alone. One of your peers shares his coping strategies.

By Ron Furlong

Imagine something in your life that causes severe stress. Not just something that worries you a little or is bothersome from time to time. I'm talking absolute pull-your-hair-out, on-the-verge-of-a-panic-attack, very-little-sleep-every-night stress.

Then, imagine being told that stress—the one thing that keeps you up at

night and keeps your blood pressure high and gives you permanent bags under your eyes—is not likely to leave any time soon. It's the type of stress where somebody whispers: "Sorry, bub, you'll just have to deal with it."

That would be a little difficult to take, right?

Although I'm being a little dramatic for effect, this is the boat a lot of

superintendents find themselves in with outdated irrigation systems. I'm in this boat as well, bailing out water at a slower rate than it's rushing in.

Of course, I'm not alone in the boat. There are a lot of us in this predicament. New irrigation systems and irrigation renovations can be extremely expensive, and it's hard to blame owners, general managers or





green committees when they table talks for a new or renovated system.

Most likely nothing on the course will ever cost as much as updating the irrigation system. It's not easy to stomach a \$1.5 million to \$2 million (or more!) investment into anything, let alone something that is going to be, for the most part, unseen.

Our course's owner reinvests all the

revenue the club generates. I know he understands our system is aging. But he also looks at it more from the current dollars-and-cents angle — which he must do in his role. It's his dollars and cents, after all. He also invested nearly \$1 million just a few years ago to comply with Ecology and increase our water storage. There are only so many million-dollar upgrades in the cards.

I get it. The new system must wait.

Having the ability to keep something in somewhat "working condition" well beyond its shelf life can often backfire on you. Band-Aiding an old irrigation system isn't impossible, although it can be time-consuming and frustrating. But, almost to the point of ridiculousness, it can be done.

For those of us in the Old Irrigation System Boat, bailing out the water with our little buckets, we do what we can. But I guess that leads to some questions. What *can* we do, exactly? How do we keep something working that really shouldn't still be relied upon? How do we get another 10 years on top of the 10 we've already borrowed? And can we do this while keeping that freaking stress level at a minimum each summer?

When our system was put in around 35 years ago, PVC had a usable life expectancy in ground of 20 to 30 years, depending who you talked with. We have exceeded even the most generous end of that estimate. What does that mean for us in terms of how the system works? Maybe more to the point, how much can we actually trust it?

I don't need to spend a lot of time explaining a golf course irrigation system to the readers of this magazine. I'll spare you the Irrigation 101 lesson.

Let's address the components in regard to aging. With the 20- to 30-year estimate I mentioned earlier, I was referring to the PVC itself, keeping in mind we're dealing with 1990 PVC. But other components are also aging, with sprinkler heads, valves, control boxes and wire chief among them.

And then there are the pumps, the pump panel and, for most of us, some kind of computerized central. For the sake of what we are talking about here, let's keep this to the things in the ground, mainly the pipe, heads and valves.

### THE PIPE

In my 23 years at this golf course, we've fixed a ton of pipe breaks. On average, we experience 10 to 15 mainline breaks per season, plus another five to

seven lateral line breaks. That's more than 400 repairs over the years.

I would estimate about 80 percent of those breaks, especially the main-line breaks, originate at the bell end of the pipe—the glue giving way sooner than the pipe. There are a few holes on the lower end of the course that have had every single mainline bell end repaired at some point over the years.

The original pipe, now in the ground for these 35 years, seems to be holding its own. In actuality, the pipe breaks, if anything, have lessened in recent years, which seems to defy logic. But also consider that we upgraded our pump station a half-dozen years ago with a new VFD system, which runs vastly smoother than the old system, yielding much less hammering on the pipes than had occurred

for decades when the pumps shut on and off abruptly.

With the pumps running smoother, the pipe, despite its age, has fared slightly better. But that doesn't minimize the time-consuming repairs we still execute on a regular basis.

There's very little proactive maintenance we can do on the pipe in the ground. All we can really do is hope for the best and, when we do get a break here and there, repair it and move on.

The only thing we've done to further extend the life of the old pipe in the ground is to do what we did a half-dozen years ago, and that was upgrading the pumps and the pump panel. That smoother running system was essential for the geriatric pipe in the ground. It's a little easier on those old brittle bones.

### THE SPRINKLER HEADS

Perhaps the only thing in our irrigation system we've had more problems with besides pipe breaks are 35-year-old sprinkler heads.

In fairness, there aren't that many of the original heads left on the course—which is a good thing. Thirty-five-year-old sprinkler heads might be even less reliable than 35-year-old pipe, although it's a coin toss.

For years, we only replaced heads as they failed, usually at a rate of about five or six per season. However, in just the last couple years, we've developed a replacement schedule, identifying the original heads and replacing them hole by hole. The old 900 Eagle heads, despite lasting much longer than they probably should have been asked to endure, must come out. We're



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working our way through the 27-hole course, getting rid of old heads and installing new ones.

Well, let me correct that. The heads aren't exactly new. With this mass sprinkler-head replacement, we opted to go with refurbished heads instead of buying brand new ones. Cost is the driving factor here. I can purchase a refurbished fairway head at about a quarter of the cost of a new head. Also, it's hard for me to justify paying full price for a new fairway head, because when we eventually do plan on upgrading the entire system — even though this may be five or 10 years away — it's hard to justify sticking so many new heads into an aging system.

Despite occasionally getting a refurbished head that's not quite what we hoped, we have, for the most part, had good success with these reduced-cost alternatives as we've started to install them throughout the course.

### THE VALVES

And then there are the darn valves! Although we've had more trouble over the years with pipe breaks and heads failing, we're starting to see the effect of aging valves rather suddenly.

We've been forced to replace several valves during the past year. If we're not fully replacing valves, almost all of them need some TLC. We've endured valve stems breaking, valve handles



snapping off no matter how carefully they're opened or closed, and packing nuts becoming loose or falling off.

Valve maintenance has suddenly become a priority. It's now our plan to go through each valve at the end of the season to access, repair or replace, as well as making sure each one is ready for yet another year of service.

### THE IRRIGATION TECH

Perhaps the biggest thing I haven't mentioned is having a competent, qualified irrigation technician. After years of struggling to find this individual, we finally added an experienced tech last summer who fits all the above criteria and more. He has been our best addition in years.

Employing someone who knows what they're doing and is willing to take on the challenge of maintaining

a system well past its expected life has been essential. Where most will — and have — balked at the hard work and dedication needed to maintain such a system, this fellow has embraced the challenge and met it head on.

Our 2025 plan involves getting a design for a new irrigation system, which is the first step in replacing it down the road. My guess is it may take anywhere from five to 10 years to go from design to installation, but at least it will be in the cards. This might at least help with keeping us all sane — and maybe keep that stress level a little lower, too! Until then, it's one day at a time with our system. 🌱

▲ How can any superintendent keep their sanity with a 35-year-old irrigation system in the ground? A steady plan and a qualified technician can help.

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

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# MANAGING A MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSE

**W**ho knew when I left academia in the late 1990s to pursue golf writing and consulting full-time that my Ph.D. in political science would come in handy? But here I am, nearly three decades later, in a volunteer capacity as chair of my town's Golf Advisory Committee and it's as if I never left the classroom.

That's because my town of Bloomfield, Connecticut, owns a municipal layout called Wintonbury Hills Golf Club. Day-to-day operations are in the hands of Indigo Sports, an arm of Troon Golf. They oversee golf operations, including maintenance, pro shop and range, as well as the food and beverage operation — which, against all odds, actually turns a modest profit each year. The town retains the right of approval on all policy matters and hires but invariably follows the recommendations of Indigo. In return, the management firm gets a monthly fee plus end-of-year bonus for achieving certain gross income thresholds, with that bonus not exceeding 35 percent of their base fee.

We turn a profit, which then goes into our long-term capital budget. The hope is to be financially self-reliant, which is no small challenge when our needs include maintenance equipment, repairs to the clubhouse and parking lot, cart path fixes, replacement of several wetlands bridges and, ultimately, a new irrigation system.

The course, opened in 2004, was designed by **Pete Dye** for the grand fee of \$1 after I threatened him with nasty reviews for

the rest of his life. Much of the day-to-day site work was implemented by Dye's longtime associate **Tim Liddy**. We have maintained relatively steady traffic of 28,000 to 31,000 rounds annually, with local residents getting a heavily discounted rate and out-of-town residents paying a premium for what is widely included on various course ranking lists as among the leading municipal layouts in the country.

**Ciaran Carr**, our resident golf professional and general manager, is one of only 450 master professionals among the country's 30,000 or so PGA professionals. Superintendent **Dennis Petruzzelli** has his status as CGCS, which makes him among the top 10 percent of his peers. He manages the course on an annual budget of only \$667,000 — way below most of our municipal competitors, and with bentgrass turf conditions comparable to the finer regional private clubs whose budgets are 50 to 80 percent higher.

As chair of the town's Golf Advisory Committee, my job is focused on communicating upward to the various town bodies about how our Enterprise Fund is functioning. Our little committee reports directly to the Parks, Recreation and Leisure Services Department, and from there to the town council, the town manager, the Finance Department and the Department of Purchasing and Risk Management. Most of that bureaucratic maneuvering

is handled by **Dave Melesko**, the head of Parks, Recreation and Leisure Services. It's his responsibility to make sure that all purchasing and contracting adheres to the town's strict rules.

Don't tell me about "munis." As soon as I hear the term, I know the speaker is dismissive of the serious management by which such golf properties are operated — or should be operated. I've seen too many examples elsewhere where day-to-day operations fall under a direct parks and rec model that treats the golf course as if it were nothing but a generic sports field. I've also seen towns rid themselves of responsibility for the well-being of golfers entirely by handing off responsibility to the cheapest firm, or to whoever offers to pay more money in a straight lease operation and simply siphon off all profit rather than reinvest. And I know of more than a few cases where the citizen golf committee comprises a solid bloc of annual passholders who play five times a week and are simply keen on keeping rates as low as possible.

As I explained to our town council just the other night, the operation of Wintonbury Hills simultaneously provides a discounted service to town residents while operating as a profitable business. It helps that Indigo structures tee times and green fees for "dynamic pricing" so that the prized times go for a premium. I'm also very proud that if you were to look at the first tee



**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.



each day and see who is playing, the golfers look as diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, gender and class as the demographic mix in our pluralistic town.

When you have serious people doing their job well, the golf part of municipal operations is not that complicated. The hard part is in dealing with the 90 percent of the population that does not play golf and wonders if towns should be in the golf business. That scrutiny is all the more warranted in an era of fiscal constraints marked by rising budgets, limited taxing options and financially stressed residents.

As chair of the committee, I spend much of my time

“

When you have serious people doing their job well, the golf part of municipal operations is not that complicated. The hard part is in dealing with the 90 percent of the population that does not play golf and wonders if towns should be in the golf business..”

trying to demonstrate the gains to the town of having such a golf property. That means emphasizing the 219-acre site as a nature preserve with status as a certified Audubon International Sanctuary. It also means encouraging programming designed to get kids involved in the game, and to get their

parents to visit the course and eat lunch or dinner. And it entails encouraging off-season walking tours of the grounds or using the land for science class observations.

Municipal courses with massive clubhouses, big parking lots and amenities like public skating, swimming, event space and

conference rooms have a big advantage in generating diverse revenue streams. We don't have room for that at Wintonbury. Our small clubhouse is landlocked, and the parking lot fills to capacity on busy golf days. We market ourselves as a traditional golf facility and have succeeded in drawing clients from a multi-state area. That is our identity and our key to success.

Just don't call it a “muni.” Such carefully maintained public businesses deserve more respect than that. 🌱

## OUTSIDE/THE ROPES

**MORAGHAN** *continued from 32*

In fact, there are days they don't go home until very late, if at all. They're there for mealtimes, special events, committee meetings and just about everything else. Holidays off? Not if the club is open. That means a lot less time with family.

If you're still interested in becoming a GM — and trust me, I'm not trying to talk you out of it, just being realistic — ask yourself these questions. I'll let you judge the answers yourself.

- Are you really just doing it for the money? Is it enough money to overhaul your lifestyle (to say nothing of your wardrobe)?
- Would you be comfortable doing all the above at

“

As superintendent, you could always hide behind science, explaining your actions as ‘for the good of the course.’ There's no science that will explain to Mr. Smith why you're out of his favorite bourbon.”

- another club? It's one thing to make the move up at a club you know among people you know. Want to take on all these new responsibilities and learn an entirely new membership?
- Are you really interested in other aspects of club management besides the golf course? Can you get as excited about ordering

linen? And do you want to give up being in charge of the club's most important asset? If you become GM and the club hires another superintendent, will you be able to stay out of their way?

- Are you comfortable saying “Yes, sir” and “Yes, ma'am” all day — and meaning it?
- How flexible and patient

are the members and board at the club you're talking to? Will they give you time to “learn on the job?” You're going to make mistakes. Are they going to tolerate them?

- Do you really want — and can you handle — the added responsibilities, stress and need to rely on others that comes with being a GM? And by the way, consider your family time as well.

I honestly don't think there is anyone at most clubs besides the superintendent who could successfully become the GM. But that doesn't mean it's a shoo-in — and that doesn't mean it's you. 🌱



# THE AQUATROLS COMPANY STORY

The soil surfactant leader starts a new chapter after adding Precision Laboratories to its portfolio.

By **Guy Cipriano**

**E**rick Koskinen and Greg Sinner lurked in the back of a crammed Glendale, Arizona, Hampton Inn conference room on Jan. 30, 2024, and cautiously watched as competitors-suddenly-turned-co-workers conducted a team meeting on the eve of the 2024 GCSAA Conference and Trade Show.

The duo studied body language. They listened intently to the dialogue. New impressions were formed, because it's human nature to view teammates differently than business foes.

The end of the meeting, which came less than a month after Lamberti SpA announced its intention to merge

Aquatrols and the turf division of Precision Laboratories to form The Aquatrols Company, marked the beginning of a new business journey for the 30 people in the room. The Aquatrols and Precision Laboratories teams were no longer selling against each other; they were working with each other.

Nearly a year later, Koskinen and Sinner describe the meeting on a Thursday morning Microsoft Teams conversation. A Precision Laboratories stalwart for 14 years following a stint as a golf course superintendent, Koskinen is now the general manager of The Aquatrols Company. Sinner, who joined Aquatrols in 2020, is the company's director of sports turf.

They have assumed leadership roles in bringing the companies together.

"The great thing about it was that our sales teams were always respectful competitors in the marketplace prior to this merger," Koskinen says. "It's not like we were tearing each other down."

Now in their first full calendar year of a new chapter, Koskinen and Sinner realize the professionalism displayed in Arizona will forever remain a key part of the company's business story. Open-mindedness supplanted awkwardness as the meeting progressed.

"When we got in there, everybody was sizing each other up and feeling each other out," Sinner says. "But the irony was how similar everybody was with our approaches, our products and our positioning. We realized, 'OK, this isn't going to be as much of an obstacle as the lead and integration team thought it was going to be.' We came out of there thinking we can capitalize on the positivity and excitement."

**THE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES**, according to Koskinen, Sinner and other Aquatrols officials, stem from



operating as a turf-focused company.

Based in Gallarate, Italy, Lamberti is a 125-year-old multinational company responsible for manufacturing specialty chemicals for myriad industries. Lamberti formed an agriculture-focused joint venture with Precision Laboratories in 2013. Founded in 1964, Precision Laboratories offered a portfolio of tank mix adjuvants, colorants, additives and surfactants to the turf industry.

Lamberti expanded its turfgrass industry presence by acquiring Aquatrols from a Chicago-based venture capital firm in January 2023. Established in 1954 and based in Paulsboro, New Jersey, Aquatrols methodically developed a strong presence in North American and European golf markets by refining surfactants designed to optimize water usage. The acquisition resulted in Lamberti consolidating the Precision Laboratories turf business into The Aquatrols Company.

The company's business segments and research efforts are based in Paulsboro, across the Delaware River from Philadelphia. Kenosha, Wisconsin, serves as the manufacturing hub.

"In a very short amount of time, we have taken two separate companies and put them together from a management and personnel standpoint, and combined our manufacturing into one," says **Wes Hamm**, the company's director of North American golf sales. "From all accounts on the organizational side, it has been very positive."

North American golf represents the combined company's biggest business segment. Hamm oversees a sales team consisting of 10 territory managers and a strategic account manager responsible for serving distributors and superintendents.

Coincidentally, the companies merged during a dry year. Late into fall 2024, large swaths of the country were classified as "abnormally dry," or in "moderate" or "severe" drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

By integrating Precision Laboratories products into its portfolio, Aquatrols is positioned to bring holistic management programs to help

superintendents with water quantity, quality and maximization challenges. The ability to offer diverse water management solutions to superintendents represents one of the biggest changes since Hamm joined the company as a territory manager in 2017. "We were a little bit of a spot-buy company then," Hamm says. "We were not as program-oriented as we are now."

Through efforts such as its Aquatrols Approach EOP, which extends to March 31, and marketing, the company will use 2025 to aggressively tell the story of its hydration, nutrition and enhancement capabilities, a contrast to the company's early days when it exclusively focused on hydration.

"It's creating awareness for not just how water performs in soil, but it's creating awareness for water quality and how it impacts everything in your spray tank," Koskinen says. "Every tank, every time, we should be impacting the performance and efficacy of water, because it has an effect on the performance and efficacy of everything that goes along with it."

Koskinen adds that the company's research pipeline, which includes access to Lamberti chemistries, will yield future golf water management innovation. **Dr. Matt Fleetwood**, who earned his doctorate from the University of Missouri before joining Precision Laboratories in 2022, is the company's research and development/technical services manager. Aquatrols also recently hired superintendent **Troy Noble** as golf technical services manager/research and development. Noble will help the company bring product trials to golf course situations.

"The turfgrass industry should look for new things coming from us on a regular basis," Hamm says. "New products, new ideas, new markets ... status quo is not going to be where we sit for very long. We have a very healthy line of products in the pipeline."

In addition to North America, the company also is increasing its golf presence in Europe, where course managers are coping with a wet 2024, inputs are heavily regulated

compared to the United States and industry dynamics vary by country. The backing of Lamberti, according to Aquatrols director of European business **Graham O'Connor**, has already helped move products through the Fertilising Products Regulation, which governs manufacturing, importing and labeling of products in the European Union.

"I honestly feel we have set ourselves for growth," says O'Connor, who joined Aquatrols in 2012. "Lamberti's pipeline is crucial to it. They really do have an exciting pipeline. Combine that with Precision's and Aquatrols' market-facing presence, and their innovation and their global reach, and we're in a really exciting place as we head into 2025."

**THE FORMAL ENTRY** into the North American and European sports turf markets represents another source of post-merger optimism. The company announced the launch of its sports turf plans in early November.

"We had to figure out how do we take our brand and expertise in golf and leverage that into adjacent spaces such as sports turf," says Sinner, who will oversee the efforts. "It was a very easy transition as far as product-wise. The challenge was how do we build a brand? How do we understand the market? How do we gain traction in a market that we are currently playing in but never put in resources and financial backing and headcount into that? This integration (with Precision Laboratories) created that opportunity because our portfolio is so broad."

Aquatrols will support the sports turf market with targeted research guided by **Dr. Christian Baldwin**, product development, and sales and marketing efforts, although Sinner adds that the company "will leverage the horsepower that we have," to grow the business. Adding sports turf to its business aligns with the company's "Turf at Heart" ethos.

"The exciting part — which gets us jazzed up — is that we are a company that's 100 percent focused on the turfgrass industry ... and that's empowering," Koskinen says. 🌱





# Just like the real thing?

Up in the Pacific Northwest, an audacious new 19-holer aims to expand what synthetic greens can offer.

By **Matt LaWell**

**S**hortland Golf Course is not the first outdoor track to install synthetic tees and greens. There have been others before. There will be others to come. But if the new Oregon project works out how its owner, architects and superintendent think it could, the 19-hole short course might develop a new niche and provide another blueprint for success in an expanding golf landscape.

Located south of downtown Portland, Oregon, plenty separates Shortland — which is scheduled to open

throughout this spring and summer, first the front nine holes, then the back 10, then a 19-hole chipping and putting course, and finally an 11,000-square-foot natural putting green—from other courses with synthetic tees and greens.

Let's start with its commitment to creative design. And with the man writing the checks.

Like so many golf course owners, **Mike Fritz** has loved the game since childhood. His dad, **Dennis**, passed down the basics to him and his younger brother, **Ben**, when they were in elementary school. They played in high school, won a couple team state championships, then Fritz drifted away while studying business at Oregon State University. He worked for Nike for a decade — the last three years for Nike Golf, where he focused on footwear development, and where he

started on the same August 1996 day **Tiger Woods** signed with the company. He left in 1999 to help his parents run their engineering automation business, D.W. Fritz. After his mother, **Susan**, died in 2007, he took over operations, and helped grow the business from 19 employees to 550. The family sold the company in 2021.

Fritz is a member at Portland Golf Club, but his golf inspirations range well beyond its fairways. Now with a little more cash on hand, he eyed the old Sandelie Golf Course in West Linn, with ideas about a renovation. Oregon favorites Bandon Dunes and Gearhart Golf Links provided some ideas. So did a more irreverent Québec private pitch-and-putt called Sunset Golf Links and The Gorge 9 at Skamania Lodge in Washington, which features synthetic tees and greens.



“They have huge greens and no bunkers,” Fritz says. “They were a lot faster and more consistent than I thought they would be. ... I was watching people hitting 195-yard 5 irons in and they would just bounce.”

Fritz reached out to **Weston Weber**, a synthetic golf turf pioneer who recently sold Celebrity Greens. Weber specializes more in synthetic backyard projects — he installed **Mark Wahlberg’s** backyard green in Idaho — and provided perspective and his foot-deep proprietary blend of rock, sand and padding. “He’s been crucial to understanding the technology,” Fritz says.

And tech is just as important for synthetic turf as it is for the real stuff. To hear Jackson Kahn design associate **Connor Dougherty** tell it, “Artificial turf progress, as far as R&D, is just getting there.” Dougherty is the best kind of golf nut. He rattles off four different types of synthetic material used on most Shortland holes, even providing a different reaction to balls landing from 80 or so yards away, then discusses the science below the surface.

“The greens get an 8-millimeter impact pad underneath and that really is just extra help with the receptiveness of the greens,” he says. “But it’s mostly happening in the sand. Instead of being angular, like in a greens mix or on a golf course, it’s very rounded, so it actually plays softer.”

And as far as maintenance: “There is maintenance,” Dougherty says. “You have to stay on top of brushing the sand out and making sure it’s consistent. If you get rain, it tends to wash to the low and that gets faster because the infill gets tighter. And you still have to spray for mold and fungus. But there are effectively no ball marks and the greens should run at 10 ½ consistently.”

“A lot of people keep saying, ‘Oh, you’re not going to have to do anything to the greens,’” says **Dustin Pokorny**, who worked 14 years at Portland Golf Club and is now in his second season as the Shortland superintendent. “Well,” he laughs, “I think there’s going to be a difference in what we’re doing to the



greens. Most of the guys doing this kind of install are more backyards, private homes. But a full golf course and what it’s going to take to keep greens in shape, I mean, they make it sound like it’s easy. I’m taking that with a grain of salt.”

Pokorny knows how to maintain turf. So does his assistant, 35-year industry veteran **Tony Henderson**. And so will the likely two other full-timers who will join their team this year. Learning how to maintain those greens has been a bit more of a process.

“Very educational,” Pokorny says. “A little overwhelming sometimes. But I’m excited, and I’m up for the challenge. It’s why I took the job.”

Synthetic turf has advanced considerably since Dougherty first worked on it: Back in the early 2000s, he watched his dad, **Brian**, add a 2,000-square-foot synthetic green in their East Bay backyard. “But nothing like this,” Dougherty says with a laugh. “You couldn’t even hit chip shots. My dad wanted to work on his putting.” So much so, in fact, that he later installed a similar green in two other backyards after family moves, with his son helping on each of them. “Now,” Dougherty says, “I’m trying to talk him into buying a simulator.”

Look around Shortland — rhymes with Portland, suggested by Fritz’s middle son, **Carson** — and there is a certain simulator ethos. Everything is real except the tees and greens, but you could easily imagine it all on a screen. Walks between holes are shorter and rounds are designed to last

two hours tops. Every hole measures 99 yards or less.

The timing for the grand opening is ideal: Simulators are everywhere, and the synthetic turf that accompanies them is top of mind. Even Woods and his TGL cohorts are playing on synthetic turf weeknights on ESPN. And the greens at Shortland are almost as wild as the rotating surface inside the SoFi Center in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

“We knew what we wanted to do out here,” Dougherty says. “I don’t think a lot of people involved realized how radical it was going to be until we actually started moving dirt. And that’s standard for any project. Once they saw the movement in the greens, it was, ‘Oh, wow.’ The potential in the site was always there. Everybody has that picture in their head. Actually seeing it was a different experience.”

And, big picture, if the round sand doesn’t clump, if the greens look as good after five years as they do after one, if water continues to limit green grass in certain parts of the country ... could there soon be more courses like Shortland?

“I’d be lying if I said (lead detail shaper) **Corey (Billings)** and I haven’t talked about it a little bit,” Dougherty says. “It’s all about if it functions. Being a big part of the future of golf, that’s really only the case if this actually works.”

“The Southwest is definitely the big spot, just because the water use is such a big issue. But theoretically, it could work anywhere.” 🌱

▲ Jackson Kahn design associate Connor Dougherty, left, and Shortland Golf Course superintendent Dustin Pokorny.

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.



## DRAINAGE PIPE STORAGE RACK

**B**rad Boyd, director of agronomy at Streamsong Golf Resort in Bowling Green, Florida, stresses a very high golf maintenance culture in everything he and his team accomplishes. The pipe storage rack was built from recycled bridge pilings from The Chain Course after it was built. The 12-inch to 14-inch diameter pressure-treated pilings at 14 feet tall are set 4 feet into the ground. Crossbeams with 2-inch by 6-inch planks and 2-inch by 4-inch lumber, also pressure treated, were placed horizontally to hold each pipe in place. Four-inch, 6-inch, 10-inch and 12-inch diameter perforated and non-perforated ADS drainage pipe is stored, while 18-inch and 24-inch pipe, all 20 feet in length, is also kept in stock. Single-wall rolled pipe is not used. The rack was built to accurately maintain inventory quantity, along with organizational and professional integrity, keeping supply-chain issues in mind. The pipes are strapped together during storms to keep them secure. **Alejandro Rivera**, foreman on the Streamsong Black Course, executed the work. It took four workers three days to build with no material costs. **David Clark, Rob Crisp and Rob Sicinski** are Streamsong's superintendents, while **Joe Stefanick** is the fleet manager. **Bill Coore, Ben Crenshaw, Tom Doak, Gil Hanse, Jim Wagner and David McLay Kidd** are the resort's golf course architects.

## COYOTE DECOYS

**W**idgeon Ducks, a migratory bird that frequents the Arizona desert at the 18-hole, par-3 Palm Creek Resort & Residences in Casa Grande during the winter months, like to injure the greens by digging into the roots, while also providing frequent bowel movements. Three coyote decoys (\$60 each on Amazon) are placed on the lake on No. 9, one on the No. 7 lake and two on the No. 18 lake, which do a good job of keeping the birds that don't like to fly much in the lakes. The Arizona Game & Fish Department has a relocation process for the Widgeons. The course has Tifdwarf greens and Bullseye Bermudagrass winter overseeded with perennial ryegrass. The rangers move the decoys around the ponds every week. Pro shop supervisor **Bill Ayotte** works with the landscape department, which maintains the course on this walking-only venue. The golf architect is unknown.



**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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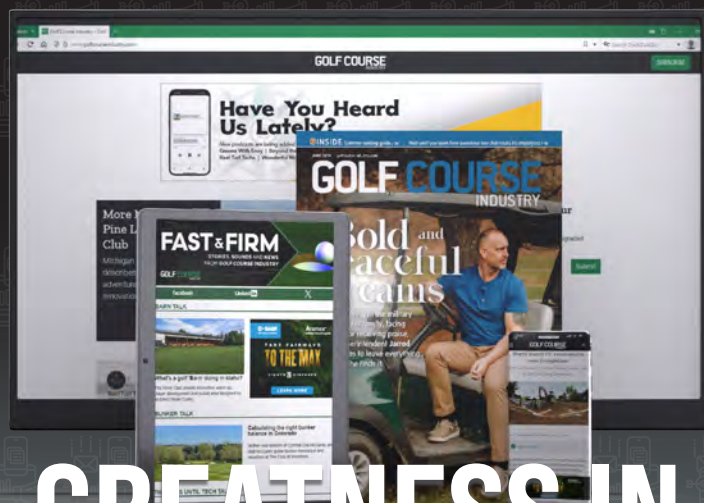
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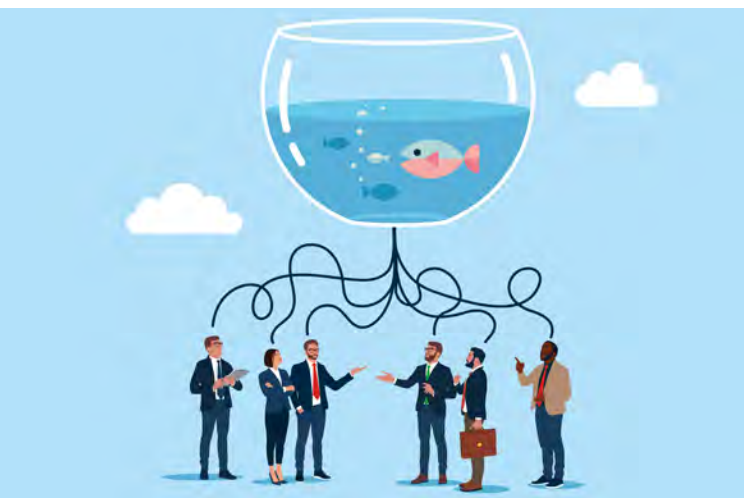


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# BEYOND THE FISHBOWL

**I**t's interesting and somewhat scary to think that as golf course superintendents, in many cases, we are hired and fired by people who have very little knowledge of what we do or how we do it.

Isn't that absurd?

People who are in control of our career destiny have no idea of the skill set or acumen required to maintain a golf course, yet they are the same individuals who can make a decision to end a superintendent's tenure because the greens weren't fast enough in July when temperatures topped 90 degrees for 17 days straight and the golf course received record rainfall. They still ask: Why are the greens slow today?

Those thoughts concerning how much knowledge members, owners or golfers have in general about the basic agronomic principles give us a moment of pause. To us it raises the question: Who is responsible for educating the members or committees that decide our fates? It's not a clear answer. We all realize that the individual superintendent must work hard on educating and re-educating members, committee members and board members. It's one of our most important jobs. We all spend copious amounts of time informing individuals on the various topics of aerification, topdressing, factors impacting green speed, bunker maintenance, labor hours, and how the weather influences maintenance and budget. The list is endless.

Over the years, the USGA has done an excellent job of putting good information and videos on its website to help educate golfers and decision makers. The information provided by the USGA is on a level so people without an agronomic background can understand,

and the videos generally discuss big topics such as aerification, topdressing and other necessary agronomic practices that affect golf or typically frustrate golfers. The articles produced by the regional agronomists are also very good and are usually timely based on current agronomic issues an area or region might be facing. All their content is great information and very helpful. But is it enough?

We must ask: Where is the GCSAA in all of this? Many feel that it's difficult to understand why superintendents' own professional organization isn't reaching out to the members, owners, board members and golfers to assist with disseminating the general agronomic information that they need to understand how difficult it can be to perform our job, or even basic information to provide an understanding that sometimes expectations are not met for the long-term health of the golf course. Shouldn't informing golfers about golf course maintenance be a top agenda for an organization representing those who perform golf course maintenance? We fully recognize that golf and environmental PR is important and agree that advocacy at the government level for plant protectants is vital.

However, if you surveyed superintendents, direct communication to the golfing world about our challenges, issues and impacts would be a valuable aspect to add to the agenda. This would have a direct impact on how our profession is viewed and understood. We realize it's a large task. But who

can better provide those communications than the GCSAA?

Because it's the superintendents' organization, countless superintendents we work with and speak to never understood why educating golfers, members and owners hasn't been a larger part — or perhaps even a priority — of the agenda. So many golfers know what the CMAA is, and many more know what the PGA of America is. But very few know what the GCSAA is — and that's a shame. Often, we only develop and disseminate powerful information within our own professional fishbowl. A more deliberate, strategic approach to target those who govern and employ superintendents may facilitate not only a greater understanding, but also a more supportive working environment.

Golf course superintendents are responsible for the maintenance of the No. 1 asset on their property. Our profession is complex, difficult and challenging, yet many times our fate falls into the hands of individuals with little to no depth of understanding of what we do.

We fully understand that this is a loaded topic, and some may view this opinion as throwing darts from the sidelines. Not at all. It's meant to be more reflective in nature — and to stimulate conversation about who can take the lead to help communicate our professional challenges to those who make decisions that impact the careers, livelihoods and professions of golf course superintendents. 🏌️

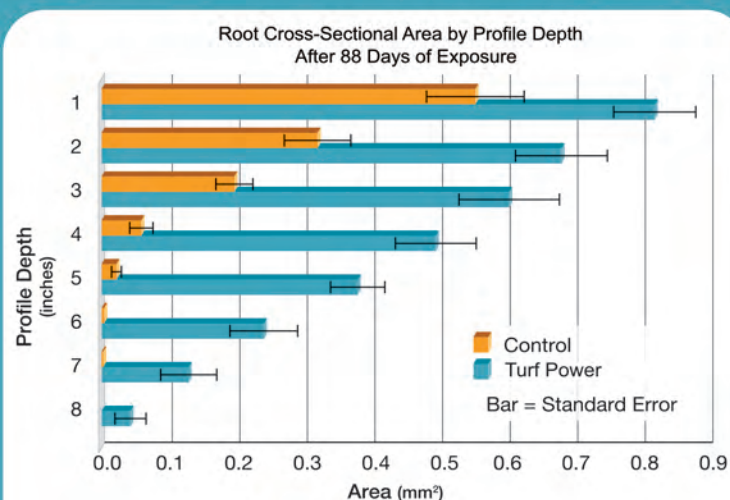


**DAVE DELSANDRO** and **JEFF CORCORAN** are former superintendents and co-founders of Agronomic Advisors, a consulting firm that assists and advises industry professionals on every aspect of golf course management. Contact them at [dave@agro-advisors.com](mailto:dave@agro-advisors.com) and [jeff@agro-advisors.com](mailto:jeff@agro-advisors.com).



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