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# GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

Eric Tuchols

Scott Dunbar

## SUPERS FROM THE START

Eric Tuchols and Scott Dunbar were both hired to grow in new Buffalo courses nearly 20 years ago. Neither has left their post. What keeps them along the Lake Erie shores?

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# SUPERS FROM THE START

Eric Tuchols and Scott Dunbar were both hired to grow in new Buffalo courses nearly 20 years ago. Neither has left their post. What keeps them along the Lake Erie shores?

12

## COLUMNS

### 11 GAME PLAN

Henry DeLozier: Measure twice, deal constantly

### 18 OUTSIDE THE ROPES

Tim Moraghan: Big questions for next year

### 44 GOLF THERAPY

Bradley S. Klein: How to ID club culture

### 50 TWO FOR THE ROAD

Delsandro and Corcoran: The turf loss barrel

## DEPARTMENTS

4 **TEERING OFF:** Notes from a golffonomist

6 **NOTEBOOK:** Caballero del campo

9 **WONDERFUL WOMEN:** Melissa Yeazell

10 **CONSERVATION:** Experience Montana's pull

48 **TRAVELS WITH TERRY:** Equipment ideas

49 **CLASSIFIEDS / INDEX**

## FEATURES

### Cover story

### 12 SUPERS FROM THE START

A pair of Buffalo superintendents steer their courses as only they can —because only they have.

### Maintenance

### 20 FESCUE: A ROADSIDE MEDITATION

A scenic drive home inspires a deep dive into incorporating fescue where you least expect it.

### Spotlight

### 26 THE REGION THAT LOVES BACK

The Philadelphia Association of Golf Course Superintendents shows how local chapters can provide for members, clubs —and the industry.

### Spotlight

### 32 CHARTING A NEW COURSE

A gruesome collision hobbled Pacific Northwest turf pro Matt Stenhouse. It also provided a turning point in his life.

### Spotlight

### 38 SKOL

There is plenty to cheer about at Windsong Farm, including new buildings and a stunning new course.

### Short course stories

### 46 RISKY DECISIONS

Park Mammoth Golf Club in Park City, Kentucky, is, ahem, more mammoth after expanding to 27 holes.

32



46



# GOLFONOMIST THOUGHTS

**I** strive to be a golfonomist.  
Why?

The overall golf economy affects agronomy. Serving golf maintenance professionals requires an understanding of macro golfonomics. The industry needs golfonomists who can convey what overarching numbers mean to agronomists. As both the general manager (publisher) overseeing the business and the superintendent (editor-in-chief) guiding the product of this publication, I embrace learning industry finances to help audiences and stakeholders grasp the how and why behind their jobs and businesses.

On a recent flight to Kansas City, I studied the latest New York Golf Economic & Environmental Impact Study. Golfonomists await reports like the New York effort like foodies anticipate the unveiling of fall brunch menus at their favorite cafés. The report, conducted by Radius Sports Group, in agreement with the New York Golf Course Foundation and the Empire State Golf Alliance, with additional collaboration from Cornell University, indicated the economic impact of the state's golf industry swelled from \$7.8 billion in 2007 to \$12.9 billion in 2023.

Six days later, during a morning workout, while listening to a podcast about a college football coach with a gaudy record being fired despite a nearly \$50 million contract buyout, I went into golfonomist mode and remembered the New York study. The money flowing into golf resembles the cash inundating college football: suddenly appearing and seemingly limitless. College football coaches and golf course superintendents face escalating expectations because of their respective industry's windfalls. More money means more oversight and scrutiny.

The golf industry now has five years of surge-related data and anecdotes to crunch. Every metric suggests golf represents a significant post-COVID economic winner. Rounds played in the United States will likely surpass last year's record, which surpassed the 2023 record, which surpassed the 2021 record. Golf economies in influential states such as New York continue to expand like a successful hedge fund manager's bank account. Private-club members, according to the National Golf Foundation, increased from 1.4 million in 2019 to 2.1 million in 2024. Waiting lists and unfathomable initiation fees are norms.

Is a roaring golf economy good for superintendents and other managers?

The average annual maintenance budget, according to *Golf Course Industry's* annual Numbers to Know report, increased from \$845,705 in 2019 to \$1.344 million in 2025. Steep budget increases should be an excellent trend for superintendents. But the rising cost of everything — try hiring an assistant superintendent or purchasing a new mower lately? — negates modest maintenance budget increases.

Also, when stakeholders expand a budget beyond inflation, thanks to increased revenue collected through accelerating green fees, dues and initiations, expectations escalate. A superintendent at a well-funded club resembles the college football coach whose program receives an infusion of capital through media revenue and NIL collectives. Moving backward, even when uncontrollable factors impact results, is trickier to justify. Sadly, superintendents don't receive seven- or eight-figure buyouts when conditions deteriorate and stakeholders demand change.

The renovation market also continues to hum, with the National Golf Foundation reporting that golf facilities spent more than \$3 billion on discretionary capital improvements in 2024. During our time in Kansas City, we visited Swope Memorial Golf Course, a municipal facility undergoing an \$8.5 million "sympathetic restoration" of its **A.W. Tillinghast** layout. Imagine the reactions if somebody told a golfonomist in 2019 that municipal courses would be the site of nearly-eight-figure renovations just six years later. And project costs are even more jarring in the private sector.

Receiving new irrigation, improved drainage, altered bunkers, recontoured and resurfaced greens, better cart paths, fewer trees and wider fairways should be a reason for a superintendent to rejoice. Renovations, though, come with enormous financial costs and incredible in-the-moment stress.

And what about after the project crosses the goal line? Work life becomes easier, right? Nope. Financiers expect agronomists to have the course looking and playing better than ever the moment ceremonial tee shots fly.

Consider this golfonomist sympathetic to the plight of agronomists. Golf's gargantuan post-COVID windfall beats the angst of the Great Recession, when clubs struggled to meet payroll and courses shuttered by the day. But record money entering golf brings new conundrums for agronomists. Cash is expected to overcome the myriad variables of maintaining a golf course. 🌱



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## GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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*To provide an independent,  
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## Caballero del campo

How many golf course superintendents deal with cattle on the course and work with a head wrangler? At least one.

**P**icture a golfer standing on a tee box in the middle of Arizona on a hot, sunny morning. An ice-cold drink in the cart, a picturesque view of the desert in sight. A few deep breaths, and it's time to swing the club. Suddenly, a group of cattle begins to run through the fairway.

Loose cattle on a fairway in Wickenburg, Arizona, is likely not an encounter to be expected. But for superintendent **Barry Nyquist**, this call wouldn't be the first time.

Nyquist works at the unique facility Rancho de los Caballeros, where he is the superintendent of Los Caballeros Golf Club, an 18-hole course designed by **Greg Nash** and **Jeff Hardin** and operated along-

By  
**Kelsie  
Horner**

side a dude ranch.

Rancho de los Caballeros opened in 1948 and operates as a horse and cattle ranch and resort. The

Spanish caballeros-themed resort offers horseback riding lessons and programs, rodeo activities, and houses cattle and 85 horses. The property is home to more than 20,000 acres of riding space, and the golf club operates as an amenity for ranch resort guests.

With views of the Bradshaw mountains, Los Caballeros Golf Club features an 18-hole, par-73 course with five par 5s, nine par 4s and four par 3s. The longest hole is No. 13, consisting of a long, straight 605-yard shot. Horses can be spotted from numerous locations on the course. One

of Nyquist's goals currently focuses on conservation, prioritizing saving water by removing out-of-play grass.

"It's just very unique," Nyquist says. "There's homes around the course, but you don't notice them, it's very quiet, even with a lot of play."

Despite working on a ranch, Nyquist hasn't embraced the wild west quite yet. The turf pro hasn't mounted a horse since being hired in December 2021.

"I'm getting teased quite a bit," Nyquist says. "That's a running joke here."

Nyquist has worked for a handful of golf courses over the last 36 years. Each one is a little different from the other, each marking a time of significance in his life. He worked as assistant superintendent of amenities at Desert Mountain Club in Arizona from 1989 to 1993, graduated from Rutgers University's two-year Turfgrass Management Program in 1994, and landed his first superintendent job at Verde Santa Fe Golf Course in 1996. He worked there for nearly a decade until moving to Wickenburg Country Club in



August 2005. Nyquist continued to spend several years at different Arizona courses and eventually made his way to his current role. “I’ve been very lucky to work for extremely talented people and good people,” Nyquist says.

But none of the courses have made as lasting an impression as Los Caballeros. Not because of the visits from cowboys or the wild west theme, but because of the people.

Nyquist operates alongside assistant superintendent **Dennis Lester**. “We couldn’t do all we do without him,” Nyquist says.

Nyquist also works closely with resort management. Head wrangler **Tony Thompson** is a friend and Nyquist describes the team as a “close group.”

“I was in a meeting here two weeks ago, and I was kind of looking around at everybody there, and there’s not one person that hasn’t helped me in a way when I started,” Nyquist says.

The club’s management is quick to respond to maintenance needs and problems, and the staff is supportive of the operation Nyquist runs. “They really listen to you. I mean, they really do,” he says. “We have a lot of support to make the place better.”

One reason the maintenance team is able to function so well is thanks to Nyquist’s communication tactics. Note-taking, organization and consistent meetings

help keep things in line. Each month, the superintendent asks his crew to make a list of three things they can do better. “If you can’t find three things, that isn’t good,” he says. He also consistently sends updates to the resort’s management team, highlighting goals, achievements and necessary updates. The consistent meetings and constant communication prevent errors, prepare the team for what to expect and encourage continuous improvements.

Nyquist’s tactics are inspired by his mentor, **Bill Rupert**. While Nyquist was working as Rupert’s assistant superintendent at Las Sendas Golf Club in Mesa, Arizona, in the mid 1990s, Rupert taught him the importance of organization. “I learned very well from a man that always has the time to teach and guide me,” Nyquist says. “He kind of helped me with some things. I think he taught me quite a bit. He was very good at talking to people.”

Rupert is now the superintendent at Bear Creek Golf Complex, a 36-hole facility in Chandler, Arizona.

One employee special to Nyquist’s heart is **Bill Green**. Green is nearly 91 years old and previously worked as a rancher and farmer. He isn’t ready to say goodbye to the outside work just yet and now mows the roughs at the course. “If he’s not here, we’re going to know it,” Nyquist says. “He is a blessing.”

While Nyquist hasn’t found his home riding the horses, he certainly has on the turf.

*Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry’s digital editor.*

# Tartan Talks 112

Navigating a wet golf course isn't fun.

"And," adds **Michael Beebe** on the *Tartan Talks* podcast, "the superintendent's job is that much more difficult if he's battling those types of conditions. He can control the amount of water he puts out, but he can't control how much comes down and comes on the areas he's supposed to maintain."

Fortunately, people like Beebe serve the industry. During a more than four-decade career as a golf course architect, Beebe has helped clients solve numerous infrastructure obstacles through a solid understanding of many disciplines related to course design including civil engineering. Along the way, he's designed and renovated numerous fun-focused layouts like Blue Cypress Golf Course, a Jacksonville, Florida, municipal facility that recently added three par 3s, giving patrons 6-, 9- and 12-hole play options.

"With our lifestyles today and the younger generations having so much going on, having something that you get out on and get around in less than a couple hours is very enticing to people, especially if you can do it as a family," Beebe says. "That's why we are seeing some of those alternative-type golf facilities."

Our fun conversation with Beebe can be found on the Superintendent Radio Network page of popular podcast distribution platforms.



## PEOPLE NEWS

Bernhard and Company founder **Stephen Bernhard** died in early October. He was 79. After founding his eponymous company in the 1980s, Bernhard helped develop turf technology and became deeply involved in industry education. ... **Algie M. Pulley Jr.**, ASGCA Fellow, died Sept. 21, near his home in Georgetown, Texas. He was age 85. A native of Petersburg, Virginia, Pulley worked nearly six decades in the golf industry. ... **Casey Anderson**, assistant golf course superintendent at City Park Nine Golf Course in Fort Collins, Colorado, and **Jeremy Lewis**, director of golf course maintenance at Kingwood Country Club in Texas, received GCSAA Grassroots Ambassador Leadership Awards. ... **Willie Negroni** joined Albaugh, LLC as its new North America region president. ... After more than 25 years with KemperSports, **Dave Groelle** is the company's new national agronomist. ... Sipcam Agro USA, Inc. appointed **Tim Riley** as national sales manager for the company's plant protection solutions. ... Eight assistant superintendents, all GCSAA members, will be part of the eighth class of the EXCEL Leadership Program: **Juan G. Amezcua Avalos** (Hop Meadow Country Club in Connecticut), **Jordan Diede** (City Park Nine Golf Course in Colorado), **Clinton Edger** (Common Ground Golf Course in Colorado), **Jonathan Kaschak** (Concord Country Club in Pennsylvania), **Cole Miedema** (The Club at Kuku'i'ula in Hawaii), **Elliott Pope** (Frederica Golf Club in Georgia), **Caleb Smith** (Eugene Country Club in Oregon) and **Hattie Spies** (Southern Hills Country Club in Oklahoma).



▲ Bernhard

## COURSE NEWS

McLemore, a 42-hole facility atop Lookout Mountain in northwest Georgia, opened The Keep on Oct. 1. **Bill Bergin** and **Rees Jones**

designed the cliff-edge course. ... Wild Dunes Resort in Isle of Palms, South Carolina, is almost finished with a \$9.5 million transformation of its **Tom Fazio**-designed Harbor Course. ...

Olympic View Golf Club in Langford, British Columbia, unveiled a new golf course architectural master plan focused on sustainability in collaboration with international design firm Lobb + Partners. ...

The Club at Eaglebrooke, a semi-private facility in Lakeland, Florida,

reopened its 18-hole course following a \$1 million-plus, multi-phase renovation. ... Shura Links, designed by architect **Brian Curley** and the first island golf course in Saudi Arabia, is open for play. ... Singapore Island Country Club is reopening all 18 holes of its Island Course following an extensive redevelopment. ... Pinnacle Golf Properties is now overseeing The Revival Golf Club at The Crescent in Salisbury, North Carolina. ... Troon is now managing Las Colinas Golf Club, a daily-fee facility in Queen Creek, Arizona, and Hunting Hills Country Club, a private club in Roanoke, Virginia.



## INDUSTRY BUZZ

AQUA-AID Solutions announced successful CE registration of its entire product lineup distributed throughout Europe, the Middle East and the United Kingdom via long-standing distribution partner Aqua Aid Europe. ... Envu launched its 2025 Envu Earnings Fall Solutions Program on Oct. 1. The program runs through Dec. 5. ... Albaugh, LLC released its 2024 Sustainability Report, *Our Future is Rooted in Action*, focusing on the company's progress across key sustainability pillars.

# Melissa Yeazell

TRI COUNTY GOLF RANCH AND NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY



One of my favorite parts of owning it is being able to go out there and cut greens or change cups, get my hands in the dirt and really have a close connection to what's going on [here on] the golf course."



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**T**he Tri County Golf Ranch offers something for every golfer, regardless of age, ability or experience level. Located in Cincinnati, it offers nine par-3 holes ranging in distance from 132 yards up to 175. There is also an expansive 10-hole putting green with its speed set to match the greens on the course, as well as a chipping green and sand bunker. The range features 20 covered hitting stalls with Trackman technology and an indoor simulator is also available.

The facility opened its doors in 2000. PGA professional **Melissa Yeazell** is right in the middle of it all. Yeazell has been affiliated with the Tri County Golf Ranch since 2015; today she is a co-owner along with fellow PGA professional **Larry King**, who had a disagreement with a previous business partner.

"They tried it for nine months and it wasn't working out between the two of them," Yeazell recalls. "Larry was trying to do it on his own and I clearly saw it was not a one-person job."

Yeazell started her tenure at the ranch focusing on computer work. But she told **Rick Woelfel** on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast that her perspective changed over time.

"I really fell in love with the land and with cutting grass, sitting on a mower and everything that goes into it," she says. "Every day is different. I never would have thought that this is what I wanted to do, but I absolutely love it."

The top priority for Yeazell and King was upgrading course conditions.

"The golf course was in horrible shape when my partner first bought it," she says. "The greens didn't have a lot of grass on them. The tee boxes had no grass on them. It was a mess. So, our first priority was to get grass on the greens, get grass on the tee boxes and then we spread out to the collars."

Although there is a superintendent on staff, Yeazell and King do a considerable amount of maintenance themselves.

"One of my favorite parts of owning it is being able to go out there and cut greens or change cups, get my hands in the dirt and

really have a close connection to what's going on [here on] the golf course," Yeazell says. "I teach a lot, I coach" — Yeazell is the associate women's golf coach at Northern Kentucky University — "and I'm traveling quite a bit so the mornings I get to cut grass are really special."

Today, the Tri County Golf Ranch is a busy place that serves a broad clientele. An assortment of high school and middle school teams practice and compete there.

"We provide short tees for beginners to start," Yeazell says. "We provide longer tees where people can practice hitting into regulation par-3 holes and then we've got the driving range. We feel like we're really relevant."

Yeazell's team at Northern Kentucky occasionally practices at the ranch. Yeazell, who played college golf at Xavier University, is in her third season as the associate head coach of the Norse, who compete in the Division I Horizon League. She is committed to helping her players mature as women as well as athletes.

"My college experience wasn't a great one," she says. "The education was, the golf wasn't. I had three different coaches in four years. I didn't have anyone to help me grow as a person. And I feel like that period of time in your life is so volatile."

"I have eight young women who are 18 to 22 and they're trying to figure out who they are, who they want to be, what they want to do with life. It's just such a great time of life and I get to be the one that's with them and help them make those decisions — but also teach them how to be better golfers and better people." 



the course earned certification, Petersen was working closely with former director of conservation **Whitney Tilt** on the initial paperwork and processes. Now Petersen works with **Peter Brown**, the current senior program officer of environment, through the AMB West Community Fund and the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation.

Nearly 100 birdhouses are scattered around the property, attracting species such as bluebirds and red-tail hawks. Monarch-attracting plants have also been placed throughout the property, in hopes of attracting the endangered species. Blank has made sustainability a high value of not just the golf course but the entire property. Recycling and water conservation are top priorities. "He has a huge passion for sustainability and conservation," Petersen says.

The course recently finished a bunker renovation project, using EcoBunker on sod walls, a product made of recycled field turf from soccer pitches in Europe.

Sticking to the trend of recycled materials, the course is finalizing approval to use TRUEGRID Pavers to replace cart paths. The product is made up of recycled HDPE plastic formed into two-by-two sections of honeycomb design. These pieces are locked together like Lego bricks, making for a durable and sustainable paving option. "It's another effort on our end to use something recycled as opposed to coming out here and blowing out 90,000 square feet of concrete," Petersen says.

The course is planning to build solar-powered self-contained equipment wash stations. Petersen also uses the Toro Lynx Central Control System to monitor water usage, ensuring areas aren't being over-irrigated.

Located amid Montana mountains and plains, Rising Sun Golf Course has ensured the property is treated with care with sustainability on the front line. For Petersen, his role is an opportunity. "I'm a firm believer: leave it better than you found it," Petersen says. "I think it's an amazing opportunity we have as construction guys and golf course superintendents to change the landscape and make sure we leave it better than we found it." 🌱

# Montana's one & only

Rising Sun Golf Course's **Mike Petersen** is working alongside staff to ensure sustainability is at the forefront of the property.

**R**ising Sun Golf Course superintendent **Mike Petersen** has been involved in the golf business for over 40 years. He began working on the turf as a ball picker when he was just 13 years old. After college, he moved over to maintenance before getting an opportunity to lead a course construction project at 28. Petersen fell in love with the construction and renovation process, moving from course to course, and continued this work.

Until he met Montana.

In 2010, Petersen joined **Johnny Miller** of Johnny Miller Design in southwest Montana for the construction of Rising Sun Golf Course. Following construction, Petersen joined the staff as superintendent. "I got bit by the Montana bug, and then decided to stay," Petersen says. "More than anything, we fell in love with Montana and the culture of the ranch.

It's an amazing opportunity, an amazing property and a very unique golf experience."

Owned by **Arthur Blank**, co-founder of Home Depot and owner of the Atlanta Falcons, Mountain Sky Guest Ranch is found in the Emigrant community of southwest Montana. It operates as an upscale ranch resort where guests visit for week-long stays, having access to horseback riding, hiking, golf, archery and other outdoor activities amid the Absaroka and Gallatin mountains. The ranch's Rising Sun Golf Course operates as a guest amenity.

Rising Sun Golf Course opened in 2011 as a 9-hole course and practice facility, designed by Miller. In 2016, following the purchase of more land, the course doubled to 18 holes.

The facility became the first and only Montana golf course to earn Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary certification from Audubon International in 2017. When



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



## MEASURE TWICE, DEAL CONSTANTLY

Once your 2026 budget is finalized and approved, two factors still loom that can determine its overall success and influence performance. As golf course operating budgets increase with what might seem to your owners and managers as unchecked control, superintendents must reckon with two often overlooked factors: 1) measuring and managing the work and, 2) dealing with ambiguity.

### Measuring and managing work is essential to your leadership role.

As budgets escalate and staff comes and goes, superintendents are under extreme pressure to deliver work that is accomplished on time and on budget. The only way to evaluate your team's performance and defend your results is through exhaustive measuring and managing.

Four factors determine your effectiveness:

**Clearly assigning responsibility.** See that each crew member knows what is expected. Show examples of the fitness and finish that you require. Don't assume that everyone knows how to do whatever task they have been assigned.

Instead, teach, demonstrate and explain. Doing so leads to happier and more satisfied crew members, a more visually appealing course and reduced stress.

**Setting clear performance objectives and measures.** Most superintendents closely monitor allotted time requirements for each job, knowing that time is money. Another important performance measure is the quality and appearance of the work relative to how the crew has been taught and your expectations. Because many of us

are visual learners, photographs or sketches are effective tools to show desired results.

**Monitoring process, progress and results.** "Management by walking around" is a leadership theory described by authors **Tom Peters and Robert Waterman** in their business best-seller *In Search of Excellence*. Let your staff see and interact with you while they are executing the work you have assigned. Your presence and involvement reassure them that what they're doing matters.

**Designing feedback loops or performance checking that work.** After the work is completed, and after you have evaluated the work and the workers, ask if your prep was helpful. And how could you have been more effective in coaching them? Closing the feedback loop is essential to great work results.

### Dealing with ambiguity is elemental to the job.

The job of the golf course superintendent is chock-full of ambiguity. You and your superintendent brethren are expected to deliver Augusta National conditions while maintaining — and hopefully reducing — expenses across the board.

Good luck with that, right?

How do you deal with ambiguous and sometimes contradictory expectations? Those who have cracked this code are adept in four areas:

**Coping effectively with change.** Recognizing that your work is redundant and yet ever changing makes it easier for you to respond to ambiguous expectations. Change is uncomfort-

able; addressing it openly and seeking and providing clarification when needed is a key.

**Shifting gears comfortably.** Staying flexible recognizes that one of the more important factors a superintendent manages is anxiety. You can manage it up or down depending on what results are needed.

**Making decisions and acting without all the facts.** Ambiguity can come in all shapes and sizes and rear its fuzzy head without warning. The weather is the most obvious example, but human factors come into play too. These situations are uncomfortable for those who prefer a more deliberate decision-making process. Acting outside our comfort zones is, by definition, uncomfortable, and the best workaround is experience and preemptive planning.

**Moving ahead before everything is finished.** Sometimes managers get tripped up when circumstances require action before a project is completed. While this circumstance is undesirable and uncomfortable, it is sometimes necessary.

When circumstances require moving ahead, make sure you have addressed safety and security matters and that the details for how the task will be completed are fully buttoned down.

Getting your 2026 budget to the finish line is not just a matter of your manager's and owner's approval of the numbers. In some ways, their approval is where your work begins. Measuring and managing your team's work while dealing with the ambiguity inherent in the job is a year-round process. 🏌️



**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.



# SUPERS FROM

Eric Tuchols and Scott Dunbar were both hired to grow in new Buffalo courses nearly 20 years ago. Neither has left their post. What keeps them along the Lake Erie shores?

By **Kelsie Horner**



# M THE START

“**A**re you going to spray again this year?” **Scott Dunbar** asks **Eric Tuchols** as

they stand casually in the maintenance building at Diamond Hawk Golf Course. While discussing plans following a hot summer, a long-term friendship is revealed. Conversations and inquiries happen frequently in this area of Buffalo, especially between Dunbar and Tuchols. The turf duo’s public

golf courses both opened in the mid-2000s, and they both have been the only superintendents to work for their respective facilities.

Diamond Hawk opened in 2006 in Cheektowaga following designs by **William A. Kerman** and the Hurdzan-Fry architecture firm. Dunbar, a Penn State University graduate, joined the staff as superintendent to grow in the 18-hole course. Prior to Diamond Hawk, he worked at numerous other facilities including Lockport Town

& Country Club, where he assisted in the grow-in of the western New York course.

Similarly, Tuchols joined Orchard Park’s Harvest Hill Golf Course in 2006 before the course opened in August 2007. Also designed by the Hurdzan-Fry firm but led by **David Whelchel**, Harvest Hill features an 18-hole course, a three-hole short game area and a driving range. **Ross Cellino** purchased the course in 2012 from a nonprofit.

Tuchols also joined the staff with prior construction experience, as he previously worked as assistant superintendent at Arrowhead Golf Club during its grow-in. “I had the grow-in experience over there at Arrowhead, so it was a good jump for me,” Tuchols says.

There are nearly 50 courses in or around Buffalo. Numerous other courses debuted around the same time as Diamond Hawk and Harvest Hill, including Arrowhead, which opened in 2004. The two courses are known to be high-end, high-quality public facilities.

“We put a lot more into it than

most other public golf courses,” Tuchols says. “It’s private club conditions but open to the public.”

**THE COURSES SHARE** numerous similarities. They were designed by the same firm, opened around the same time, and both are cared for by superintendents who have been there since the start. Despite the commonalities, the courses boast unique characteristics.

Diamond Hawk, located near Buffalo Niagara International Airport, features a parkland style front nine among the trees and lots of wildlife. Dunbar describes the back nine as “completely opposite the front.” It’s a more links-style range of holes, wide open with many ingoing and outgoing planes in sight. The clubhouse and a road divide the nines.

Greens are sand-based, which Dunbar says compares the public facility to private clubs. “I feel our greens really set us apart from other places,” he says. “We put a lot of time and effort into how we maintain our greens surfaces. I feel the putting speeds, trueness and overall turf quality is what separates us. The bentgrass we have and California-style sand greens play a big part in how we can maintain them. I’d put our greens up against anyone in our area.”

Since opening, minimal changes have been made to the course. Over the years, Dunbar and his team have continued to clear overgrown areas and remove trees as needed. “There’s a lot of dead ash trees,” he says.

The property features more than 75 bunkers, all original. Dunbar and his small team are in the process of redoing bunkers, digging out the old, contaminated sand and replacing it, as well as reshaping some. “I would say the bunkers are the biggest weakness here,” he says. Some bunkers will also be removed. Having a small staff with so many bunkers requires significant time spent manicuring them each day.



Located just nine miles south of Diamond Hawk, Harvest Hill spreads across 300 acres. The par-72 layout features five tee box options, measuring 7,021 total yards from the back tees and 4,583 yards from the front. Their scorecard reads: “A daily fee golf course with a personal touch,” offering players a fun but challenging course with 44 bunkers and numerous water hazards.

For Tuchols, this job is exactly what he dreamed of. “I was born and raised in Buffalo, so I really never wanted to leave Buffalo,” he says. “It’s what I always expected. This is the type of job I wanted. I’m really happy here.”

In 2020, the maintenance building was rebuilt, offering cleaner, secure space for the turf team. Smaller projects are completed each year, with the focus currently on expanding the men’s tees to accommodate for heavy play. Bunker work will be in the facility’s future too.

Different from nearby courses, the two facilities feature Declaration bentgrass. When deciding on a seed,



## Family business

When Diamond Hawk Golf Course was being built and grown in, superintendent **Scott Dunbar** would occasionally bring his daughters, **Kelsey**, left, and **Hailee**, right, to the course.

“They were just little, and they kind of grew up here,” Scott says.

The superintendent smiles as he remembers the times he let his daughters throw seeds on the ground and watch them run around and play. “There are scenarios they still talk about,” the father says.

Years later, Kelsey and Hailee became official employees of the course — working on the maintenance team. “I’m like, ‘If you want to work, you can come with me, but you’re going to work. I’m not going to favor you.’”

The girls would wake up each morning between 4 and 4:30, hop into the truck wrapped up in blankets and sleep while their father drove into work.

His daughters worked on set up and eventually operated mowers. “It was always good to keep [Kelsey] on greens because it was always done right,” Scott says. “It was just nice to have them there every day, to drive back and forth and talk about everything.”

Kelsey and Hailee now work in radiology, but their time spent on the maintenance team was invaluable.

— Kelsie Horner



Dunbar and his team spent lots of time researching with Rutgers University to make the best pick based on disease resistance and growing potential in the area. “We got it because of the disease resistance on dollar spot,” Dunbar says.

**BOTH COURSES OPERATE** with small full-time staffs in the offseason. At Diamond Hawk, Dunbar carries only three other staff members: mechanics **AJ Brodeur** and **Chris Kujwaski** and foreman/assistant **Bill Liberati**. During peak season, the maintenance crew climbs to 12. “Even though I don’t have a true assistant at the moment, Bill has been with me for several years and continues to want to learn more and I’ve given him more responsibility,” Dunbar says of Liberati. Dunbar does his best to help each crew member feel appreciated, valued and taken care of. “You’re only as good as your crew,” Dunbar says.

**Bob Folck**, another Diamond Hawk employee who focuses on morning set up and gardening on the

property, has been with the course almost as long as Dunbar. “He’s another right-hand man that can just be a set of eyes for me,” Dunbar says.

Tuchols’ crew also peaks around 13 or 14 crew members before dropping to three during the offseason with assistant superintendent **Pete Leising** and mechanics **Dave Hoellig** and **Scott Draught**. In the offseason, the mechanics spend mornings working on the course and their afternoons in the shop.

For Leising, working with Tuchols at Harvest Hill is a dream. “I’ve been here three years, and I can’t

even imagine being anywhere else,” he says. “I think I learn something new every week, whether it’s Eric getting down and teaching me about a disease, or just observing what he does every single day. If I’m ever a superintendent, I would pretty much use this exact template of how to run a course.”

Leising’s father actually helped Tuchols get his job at Harvest Hill. Tuchols repaid that favor in 2023 when he recruited Leising to fill the assistant role. “I’ve known him since he was a little kid, which is kind of neat,” Tuchols says.

As a bonus, Leising also gets to bring his dog, **Mable**, to the course each day. “As an assistant, some guys don’t allow that,” Leising says.

Despite small crews, the courses strive to provide private club conditions. Leising says they succeed in that and have for years. He has been playing there since he was a kid.

“The conditions have always been immaculate; it was always the No. 1 place,” Leising says. “It’s been consistent. I think not only is it consistent because he’s so good at his job, it’s also been the same guy

◀Diamond Hawk Golf Course opened in 2006 in Cheektowaga, New York.

▼The maintenance team at Harvest Hill Golf Course operates with three full-time staff members alongside superintendent Eric Tuchols.



## COVER STORY

for 20 years. There's no new person coming in and changing things up. He knows the golf course so well. He knows every single nook and cranny."

**WORKING AT THE** course for two decades gives Dunbar and Tuchols an advantage — they know their turf better than anyone. For Dunbar, having seen the course be designed and built helps him make decisions. It allows him to prepare accordingly and make proper choices with his plans.

"There is knowledge that I have gained that has been invaluable,"



Dunbar says. "Knowing how the course was built, where all the irrigation lines, valve boxes and wires are located, where all the drain lines run, where drain receivers are and how the system was designed to work. Knowing what greens, tees and fairways will show the first signs of stress during

certain times of the season, what areas of the course are the wettest after a rain event and how to deal with those areas and knowing what turf diseases will show up first and what areas of the course are more susceptible to that."

For Tuchols, knowing the course so well helps him stay ahead of the

“

I was born and raised in Buffalo, so I really never wanted to leave Buffalo. It's what I always expected. This is the type of job I wanted. I'm really happy here."

— Eric Tuchols





game. Well aware of where problematic areas lie, he can get out ahead of the issues. “Which greens dry out quicker? What areas stay wet longer? I guess you just kind of learn,” he says.

As the grass has matured at Harvest Hill, Tuchols says he has too.

He prioritizes continuing education through the GCSA of New York and the GCSAA, which has helped him improve his skills and stay current on industry trends. But his industry relationships, like his with Dunbar, have helped him most improve.

“I feel like the guys that have been here for a while, we are pretty close,” Tuchols says. “We have a tight-knit group of guys in the area.”

Superintendents in the region will often get together for a beer and conversation, inquiring about their peers’ decisions and recent findings.

Tuchols plays in a weekly league at Diamond Hawk, so the two will often find themselves chatting before play, or texting about life and the job.

Dunbar marked his 20th anniversary at the course in March, and Tuchols will celebrate his 20th in April 2026. According to the GCSAA, the average number of years a superintendent remains at one course or job is 9½ years. What has made this superintendent pair stick around their courses for so long? One reason is that management emphasizes support for the operation.

“It’s pretty laid back,” Tuchols says. “Our owners let us do our thing and manage it the way that it should be managed.” The Cellinos, who own the facility, give Tuchols and his team the tools they need to keep the course in the best condition.

Ownership also doesn’t place pressure on Dunbar. “I kind of do my own thing,” he says. The lack of pressure to make certain decisions allows the superintendent to make ideal decisions for the property while keeping golfers happy.

Above all else, the superintendents stay because they love what they do and where they do it.

“It’s a great layout. It’s a beautiful piece of property,” Tuchols says. “I like to work outside. I have a passion for golf. So, I like to see the final product. When you’re all done at the end of the day, you look back at it and you’re like, ‘Wow, that looks really nice.’”

Although the superintendents work on different properties, under different course names, their passions for their job, community and career do not differ. They are the superintendents from the start, and they don’t plan to end that any time soon. 🌲

Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry’s digital editor.



## Hunting season

Along with all their other similarities, Diamond Hawk superintendent **Scott Dunbar** and Harvest Hill superintendent **Eric Tuchols** both share a passion for hunting. When not on the golf course, they can often be found in the woods.

Dunbar started hunting when he was 12 years old. “Growing up in Pennsylvania and in the farming community that I’m from, you’re almost born into it,” Dunbar says. Before he was old enough to hunt himself, he often tagged along with his father, **Ronald**.

Once of age to take a hunting safety course, Dunbar’s godfather and his dad’s best friend, **Tom Firth**, had the honor of teaching him.

“I was able to take the classes at his house along with his daughter and another classmate,” Dunbar says. “Mr. Firth was and still is a great hunting mentor of mine.”

The superintendent now enjoys hunting white-tailed deer and spring turkey back on his home turf in Lander, Pennsylvania. “I know the woods extremely well from all the hours spent in them,” he says.

Dunbar’s father passed away eight years ago. Since then, the hobby hasn’t quite felt the same. “After his passing, there has always been a huge void,” Dunbar says. “I still return home for the opening day of white-tailed deer season to hunt with Mr. Firth. He is 86 now. We continue to talk about all our past hunts together and all the great times we had with my dad.”

Tuchols started a little earlier, around 8 years old, also accompanying his father, **Jack**. “I love being outside in nature and getting my mind away from normal life and stress,” he says.

The Buffalo native enjoys hunting white-tailed deer and canvasback ducks on his family’s land in Friendship, New York.

When asked about their favorite harvest, both said the same thing: it’s not about the harvest but about the memories made. “Being able spend time with your hunting partners and build on relationships gathered from hunting together,” Dunbar says, “as well as the traditions passed down.”



## QUESTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR

**O**K, altogether now: Big exhale! 2025 is (almost) over, so breathe a sigh of relief that you made it through one of the toughest years any of us can remember. Before you pat yourself on the back, it's time to look ahead. Whether or not this is your offseason, it's the "on-season" for evaluating what you learned about your course, your staff, your members/customers, your family and, most of all, yourself. Tough times demand tough individuals, and with golf participation expected to stay high for the time being, expect the pressure on superintendents to stay strong.

Self-examination isn't easy, so I'm going to help you get started with questions to ask yourself. They might not all apply, but I suggest you give each one at least a minute or two of honest reflection. The point is to be better prepared for the new year — and to get you feeling better about yourself. You've earned it.

OK. Another big exhale. Read on.

### THE COURSE

*Key question: Where did the course suffer this year?*

Putting greens and bunkers are the most important course features. What did you learn about yourself this year? What can you do to improve them next year regarding disease, insects, traffic and everyday wear and tear? Were you able to make your golfers treat them better? If not, are there new ideas to help protect them?

Teeing grounds are never big enough. Do you have the ability and resources to enlarge some select tees in the offseason?

Maintenance equipment is costly and not always easily procured. Do you have the funds in your budget to expand your inventory? Should you be sitting down with your GM or board to supplement your budget?

How are your relationships with vendors and suppliers? Are you

getting the best available prices for chemicals and fertilizer? Do you have a backup plan if those costs suddenly rise?

What's the condition of your maintenance facility? The state of your operations hub says a great deal about you and sets the tone for your team every day. Are there some quick and easy upgrades that would improve everyone's morale and feelings about coming to work? Or is a bigger offseason rehab necessary?

### PERSONNEL

*Key question: Are you staffed for success?*

Do you see your team as a group or as individuals? You need to understand and address their needs based on age, ability, knowledge and goals.

Are you doing enough to aid the professional development of your staff? Not just your top few people, but all the way down the line?

Have you considered bringing in outside professionals to train your people? What about sending select team members to regional or national conferences that will help expand their minds and networks?

How is your networking? Are you staying connected with friends and contacts in the business?

Same with your education. What about pursuing an advanced degree, say business management or finance? What are you doing to make yourself a better candidate for the next job?

### COMMUNICATIONS

*Key question: Are you visible enough?*

What sort of job did you do

this year, communicating with your members/customers, as well as management? What's your social media presence? Is the occasional newsletter article enough?

Have you planned out a regular series of communications to your various constituencies? Are you attending every board/management meeting you can?

What do you think next year's issues and complaints will be? What can you do to address them now?

Do you have a group of close members/customers to confide in, who tell you what's going on and who is complaining?

### FAMILY

*Key question: Is your course getting more love than the people at home?*

What are you doing to get back into the family swing of things? Is it time for a couple's getaway or a family vacation? How many of your kids' sporting events did you miss? How are your parents and grandparents?

Will you be around for the holidays?

### YOU

*Key question: How's your health — both mental and physical?*

How did you handle the pressure this year?

When was the last time you had a physical? Are you doing what the doctor prescribed?

How are you eating, sleeping, hydrating and exercising?

What was the last book — non-turf-related — you read?

What can you do in the offseason to take better care of yourself?

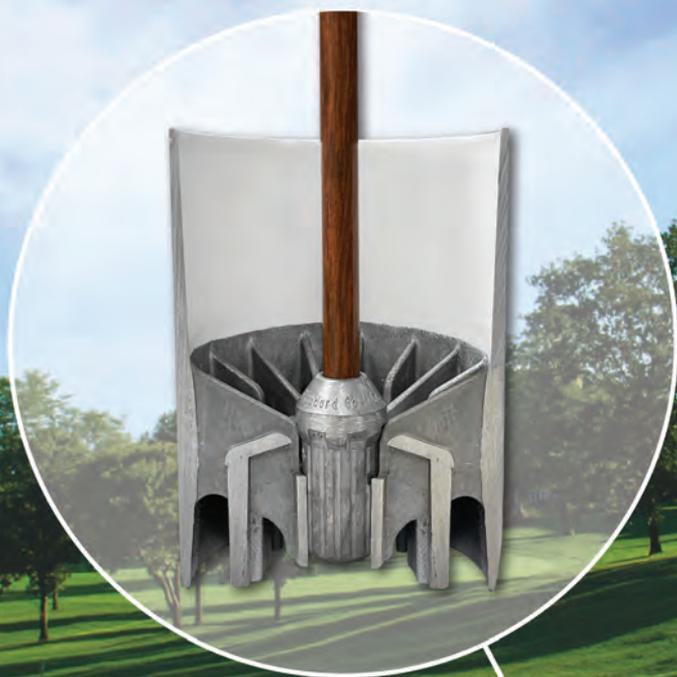
The golf course will still be there next year. Will you? 🏌️



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

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*They've been brining highways for years. That's what's creating a less-rich soil — and the fescues love that. We don't want it too thick either. In a parkland setting, we're often converting rough areas that had been fertilized for 100 years. All that fertilizer our predecessors put down ahead of us: It's still in the soil."*

**— Michael Broome**

## Fescue programs:

# A roadside meditation

Driving home from a dreamy golf excursion, author **Hal Phillips** noticed wispy grasses glistening alongside a newly widened stretch of a busy interstate. Their presence raised questions about the agronomics of incorporating a linky feature into inland settings.

Last summer, while driving home from a splendid golf weekend in New Jersey, my playing partner and I passed over the Piscataqua River Bridge, back into Vacationland, just as the Golden Hour began to spread its gauzy light and lengthening shadows across the Maine Turnpike.

On Sunday nights in the summer, most of the traffic on I-95 is heading south, back to more densely populous, recreationally desolate areas. But Michael and I were headed north and traffic was light. Newly widened to three lanes on either side, this southern portion of Interstate 95 had never looked quite so good—its jet-black corridor flanked by native grasses shimmering in the late-afternoon sun.

Just that morning the two of us had played the Lower Course at Baltusrol Golf Club, one of a growing number of parkland courses that has cultivated stands of fescues in outlying areas.

The day before, we had visited Hollywood Golf Club on the Jersey Shore, where equally colorful banks of fescues and little blue stem framed up the golfing space—even more convincingly, it could be argued, hard by the Atlantic Ocean.

With so much fescue on the brain, I ultimately bade Michael to pull over—to examine the varieties so warmly bordering these six lanes of highway. And to get some pictures in the soft light. Eager to get home, he refused. Later, in the fall (with no one in the car to refuse me), I pulled onto the shoulder just north of Portland, where the flaxen swards were still beautifully arrayed at Pikeside—but only from a distance. A bit closer up they revealed themselves to be thinner, as a proper patch of fescue should be. Getting back in the car, I resolved to find out what the Maine Turnpike Authority had specified for its particular fescue program, and whether these were the same varieties being cultivated



on so many inland, parkland tracks, where such a thing would never have been considered 25 years ago.

Then it occurred to me that course superintendents would be uniquely equipped to comment on those highway-grassing choices. So, I got ahold of those specs. Here they are:

- Red fescue, 50 percent
- Little Bluestem, 15 percent
- Indian Grass, 10 percent
- Red Top, 5 percent
- White Clover, 10 percent
- Annual Rye, 10 percent

Without revealing the application, the above information was then shared with **Michael Broome**, the aptly named superintendent at Hollywood Golf Club. My playful ruse lasted about 45 seconds on the phone. Broome quickly deduced exactly what he was looking at — which lessened his interest in this turnpike-swaddling fescue trend not one iota.

“They’ve been brining highways for years. That’s what’s creating a less-rich soil — and the fescues love that,” Broome says. “We don’t want it too thick either. In a parkland setting, we’re often converting rough areas that had been fertilized for 100 years. All that fertilizer our predecessors put down ahead of us: It’s still in the soil. A lot of the best fescue is found at seaside courses because the soil is just sand — no fertilizer left over and lots of salt. So, if you think about it, a perfect use on the roadside.

“The whole thing about fescue is you don’t have to water it. If you don’t water a plant, it will push roots deeper looking for water. But as they go deeper, they continue to mine nutrients that have been there for a hundred years. At seaside those nutrients aren’t there. And that’s the definition of links, right? Built on land you could not farm, would not farm, because there are no nutrients! That is why you put a golf course on there.”

This information cleared up another

links trope: Yes, the sheep might have grazed the land in St Andrews and made it easy for 18th-century Scots to find their featheries. And yes, where sheep burrowed into small hillocks to escape the wind in 1750, we may find bunkers today.

But the sheep were there because the land was not arable.

“Linksland wasn’t farmed because the soil has no nutrients in it,” Broome further explains. “Sand is a good growing medium, but that growth won’t last. Unless it’s something like a fescue. On a parkland golf course like this one (and that’s really what we are), we were fertilizing with manure for decades and that stuff is still down there. And these plants go and get it.”

I’ve been working in the golf business, writing about course maintenance and design, since 1992. When Sand Hills opened in 1995, then Bandon Dunes a couple years afterward, if you had told me that parkland golf courses in 2025 would be framing fairways with stands of fescue, I would have laughed you out of the room.

But such has been the impact of what I call the Sand & Scrub Era, a neo-classical, ostensibly links-inspired but largely inland movement that seeks to reinstate the primacy of seaside golfing qualities after decades of rampant parkland development — and irrigation, which, in the years following World War II, quickly turned what had been firm, fast inland courses into lush dart boards.

Some underpinnings of this modern sand-reliant movement are performance based. See sand-capping (something else we’d have largely dismissed, back in the early 1990s, as both impractical and agronomically unnecessary). But let’s be honest: Sandy soils also produce better turf. They produce better playing conditions such as the bounce and roll that linky features require to perform their functions.

Fescues are different. They per-

form no function that isn’t ornamental because, try as they might, modern designers and superintendents aren’t building and maintaining huge swaths of fescues that are regularly burned off to perform as actual rough areas. That’s a seaside thing, and it’s largely a U.K. thing.

In that way, the aesthetics at play in New Jersey and elsewhere are more stout proof of this relatively new way of thinking about how North American golf should look and play. The trend started slowly — with the odd, late-90s track that chose to create eyelashes on its tee-facing bunker edges. Today, any upscale parkland course worth its salt (pardon the pun) maintains a fescue program.

How broadly popular has this trend become? Well, they’re maintaining fescue programs along the Maine freakin’ Turnpike!

• • •

But here’s the thing: While fescue programs along interstate highways may seem faintly ridiculous, those collections of little blue stem and red top actually perform a function. On golf courses? Not so much and, to be clear, this trend does not inspire warm, fuzzy feelings among golf course superintendents.

Even so, superintendents generally agree that stands of fescue and other “native” grasses look pretty darned good. The color contrast alone, when set against verdant fairways, remains viscerally pleasing.

When I actually called Broome to chat about the Turnpike Seed Mix (yeah, that’s what we’ll be calling it — even if Maine Department of Transportation folk call it the “Method 2 Mix”), I was a bit worried the superintendent would question my sanity. He didn’t do so directly. Then he very much warmed to the task.

“You are really going down the rabbit hole with this,” he said, “but



it's funny to me that you notice these things on the roadside. I travel a lot, too, and I wonder myself, 'How does it look so perfect?' But if you slow down from 65 to zero, not so much. And that made perfect sense to me. The fescue that looks great — on a golf course — doesn't play great and vice versa.

"Fescues are popular now because golfers love a good, thick, homogeneous stand — it's that contrast they are responding to. But where you can't see your shoes or advance your ball? Thick isn't good for that. Fescues on bunker banks are common here. You're looking straight into it most times. To maintain playability, you need to have it thin — to play out of it. It's a balance, and the golfers are no help. Some guys are like, 'Oh, the fescue looks terrible,' but next group says it's playing perfect. Fescue is a fickle mistress."

And golfers are no better.

In reality, the Turnpike Mix is nothing like what Broome and his colleagues are seeking and maintaining on golf courses, not in our 21st-century High Fescue Period. Architect **Brian Silva**, who started out as a USGA agronomist, looked at the Turnpike Mix and confirmed this.

"The seed mix for the highway work is a bit different from many used on low-maintenance areas on courses with the red fescue, clover, red top, Indian grass inclusions, etc.," Silva says. "No doubt it's better for the application than the more wispy, fescue-centric mixes used on courses. Red top and annual rye are clearly 'nurse' grasses to help along the others in a non-irrigated situation."

Broome was also struck by that lack of fescues. "There's only one fescue listed there!" Whereas his Hollywood mix features four: hard, sheeps, red and chewings.

"Little blue stem is naturally

occurring here, so we have some of that," he adds. "Every once in a while, there's a plant about a foot higher than everything else. In August, it's green. We mow around it. It'll go dormant in September and stay there all winter. I've never introduced it to the property. It just showed up and it looks kind of neat in terms of context and texture."

"Looking at the Turnpike specs: If we used this amount of little blue stem — 15 percent by weight, I'm assuming — in the course of two to three years, it'd take over our whole property. In 2024, we probably had 500 plants on property and that's doubled in the last year."

The Turnpike Mix that I first noticed driving back from Hollywood was deployed to control erosion during highway widening. Still, it was fun to hear Broome riff on why exactly some were included, compared to others.

## MAINTENANCE

Red Top: “Same as creeping bentgrass but not playable at this length obviously. This is more of a ground-cover blend and Red Top grows stolons, then pops up. That stabilizes the ground. Makes sense.”

White clover: “We go out of our way to kill that because we consider it a weed. But it will grow in undesirable ground conditions where nothing else will. Could also be a salt-tolerant component in that mix.”

Annual rye: “The fastest to germinate. When they make seed application to bare ground, they want something to catch before it dies the first year and never comes back. It’s a sort of sacrificial lamb, but it’ll germinate immediately within five days. In a perfect world, it will germinate, root and protect

until the rest germinates and roots into the ground.”

Broome was frank: “Every superintendent with fescue will tell you they hate it. It’s a pain. It’s always too thin or too thick, and anywhere the sun can hit the soil, you have weeds. We spray two different pre-emergents, weed preventers, in the spring and late fall. We use selective herbicides throughout the year to weed out crabgrass, nutsedge, clover, goosegrass, even some Bermuda we get here.

“Seems clear to me they chose this [Turnpike] mix as a ground cover to stabilize that ground, hoping the blue stem and fescue would take over and give it an aesthetic quality... I was wondering about salt spray: Personally, I really want to get salts onto my fescues. It helps to thin

them out. Typically, I’d think the medians and the shoulders are designed to take all that surface water. So, those areas getting watered by [salty] runoff all the time.”

• • •

Turns out, golf industry professionals were applying a bit too much agronomy to the choice, makeup and deployment of the Turnpike Mix.

“What we call the Cottage Mix, or the Method 2 Mix, is standard in contract documents for DOT and the Maine Turnpike,” says **John Cannell**, director of main-

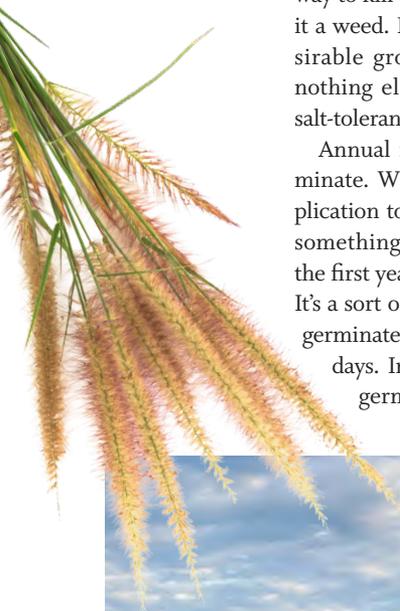
tenance for the Maine Turnpike Authority. “What we’re primarily trying to do is simple: stabilize the soil for erosion control before during and after construction. We’re trying to nail that soil down so we don’t get the rivulets eroding the soil and washing it off into the watershed.”

According to Cannell, the folks managing agronomic matters and erosion control at the Maine Turnpike Authority didn’t study at Penn State. They generally come to the table with certain skills and educations, whereupon they learn the rest on the job. Or defer to someone who knows more agronomy than they do. For example, Maine’s Method 2 Mix was developed by the aptly named **Bob Mooseman**, a longtime DOT employee who specialized in shrubbery.

Cannell himself is no agronomist, but he knows the Turnpike Mix “grows well in our climate, at roadside, and it’s easy to maintain... It wouldn’t surprise me if we threw something in there for salt tolerance, but I just don’t know.

“What I can tell you is that we’re judicious in the way we use salt, and this is my forte. We’re really careful about how we apply salt, at the right time and amount for the time of year. That means taking into account weather temps and road temps. Once we have that, we can calibrate pounds per lane mile. We have ways to make salt stick to the road and work faster — to make sure the road gets the salt, and the salt goes only where we want. Salt is exponentially more effective at higher temps. At lower temps, you have to use more salt but that’s not a linear relationship. It’s complicated.”

**Gustave Nothstein** is statewide vegetation manager for the Maine DOT. He’s a man of few words, and not a golfer (“Haven’t played for years”). But when I told him that golf media and course superintendents were interested in his fescues and other varietal choices related to the 2023 road widening, he perked right up.



“These are cold-weather grasses that do well in very poor soils. They’re salt tolerant. They’re fire resistant. A lot of them grow by rhizome, meaning they spread out and form new plants via the root systems. That’s a benefit for us because they form a nice thatch layer and some of those new areas won’t need to be seeded.

“The mix we use is designed to be good anywhere within the state — and we have vastly different conditions in the state. It must do well next to trees, in acidic soils, in salty conditions directly next to the road. Conditions can change greatly in a mile’s span. Go back just a bit further from the road and you have a whole new agronomic condition.”

Nothstein also explained that specs are specs. What was actually

specified to control roadside erosion during preconstruction bidding isn’t what actually got laid down starting in 2023.

“We use redtop in our mix. It does well for salt tolerance. Go along Interstate 95 and you’ll see it next to the road. But we’ve replaced it in our recent blend. Just a few years ago, there was massive drought where a lot of our seed was grown. (Ironically, they were supposed to do well in drought!) Red top was one of the ones we lost. Couldn’t get it for a while. Some of the fescues had an issue with supply, too.

“Little blue stem and Indian grass are no longer used specifically. We use the red fescue 35 percent and we use a hard fescue 35 percent, too. So, that’s really the formulation we

used for the widening [in 2023-24]. My predecessor was all about lawns; prior to his DOT work, he maintained lawns. So, the white clover and red top were his idea. Our soils are bad; clover is a nitrogen fixer. But we’ve reduced that percentage and we use a bit more annual rye these days.

“More or less, that’s our current mix. Extremely low maintenance. We mow ’em once a year. That’s it.” 🌱

*Hal Phillips, who believes that “Fescue Program” would make a great band name, is the former editor of Golf Course News, Golf Course Industry’s forebear. Bloomsbury will publish his second soccer book, Sibling Rivalry: How Mexico and the U.S. Built the Most Contentious, Co-Dependent Feud in World Soccer, in January.*



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# The region that loves back

Formed more than a century ago, the Philadelphia Association of Golf Course Superintendents provides the example for what local chapters can give members, clubs — and the industry.

By **Rick Woelfel**

**T**he year was 1925. America was a different place a century ago. The country was just seven years removed from World War I. The 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, had been ratified just five years earlier.

And greenkeepers, as they were known then, toiled in anonymity. But change permeated the air.

On Sept. 14, 1925, a group of 28 greenkeepers and four club officers gathered for dinner and a meeting at Whitemarsh Valley Country Club in Lafayette Hill, Pennsylvania, just north of downtown Philadelphia, and formed the Greenkeepers Association of the Philadelphia Greens Section.

It wasn't the first association of its kind. Superintendents in the Cleveland District of the USGA Greens Section founded a regional association in 1923 and a group of New England-based turf professionals did the same the following year. But the Golf Course Superintendents

Association of America wouldn't be founded until 1926 and the Philadelphia Association of Golf Course Superintendents (the present name was adopted in March 1926) became a key player in the turf industry as we know it.

Today, the association boasts a membership of 480, including superintendents, assistants and others with ties to the industry.

**Greg D'Antonio**, the head superintendent at Concord Country Club in West Chester is the organization's current president. He earned a bachelor's degree from Penn State and a master's degree from West Chester University. He's been at Concord since December 2010.

D'Antonio credits those who worked to get the regional and national associations off the ground a century ago.

"These organizations helped elevate our place at the table, so to speak, with the golf professionals and board members," he says, "and helped enhance the level of respect that we get."

That inaugural meeting set the tone for what the PAGCS was to become. The evening was highlighted by the election of a slate of officers: **Thomas Young** of Whitemarsh Valley was named the group's first president on the basis of being the most senior member in terms of years of service. **Joe Valentine** of Merion Golf Club was selected as vice president and **Mrs. Isabel K. Eddy** was selected as the secretary/treasurer.



Housekeeping chores included establishing annual dues of \$5 for head superintendents with the fiscal year to begin Sept. 1.

Assistant superintendents were eligible for membership at no charge.

Perhaps the most significant remarks of the evening were uttered by **H.K. Read**, the parliamentarian who offered the following words: "The day of secrecy is passed." They became words to live by for an organization that supports its members and—arguably more important—

encourages its members to support each other. It's that philosophy that makes the turf industry unique.

While golf facilities are theoretically competing for members and customers, superintendents will universally go the extra mile to assist a colleague in need, whether that involves offering suggestions on how best to confront a pest or disease problem, to thoughts about a new fungicide, to providing support when their colleague is hosting a major event.

On a certain level, it's akin to the chefs at competing restaurants exchanging recipes or the coaching staffs of the Philadelphia Eagles and Dallas Cowboys swapping playbooks. But that *We're all in this together* mind-

set is one of the industry's core values.

**Joe Owsik** has been the head superintendent at Hershey's Mill Golf Club in West Chester since 2020. A 45-year turf industry veteran, he was an avid golfer growing up and took a job at Merion because it provided opportunities to practice and play.

Owsik completed the two-year program at Penn State. He served as PAGCS president in 1998-99.

"The origins of [the PAGCS] are education and the sharing of ideas," he says. "Everybody's dealing with the same problems and trying to fix them."

**OTHER ATTENDEES** AT that initial meeting included Valentine's brother **Robert**, who was the greenkeeper at St. David's Golf Club in the Philadelphia suburb of Wayne, and **Howard Toomey**, who, with **William Flynn**, would form perhaps the greatest architectural tandem in history. Toomey was formally invited to join the association within a month.

Flynn is not listed among the attendees of that first meeting but he had a significant impact on the evolution of the profession in his adopted hometown well before the association was launched.

A Massachusetts native, Flynn came to Philadelphia to work as a greenkeeper at Merion's original site before **Hugh Wilson** named

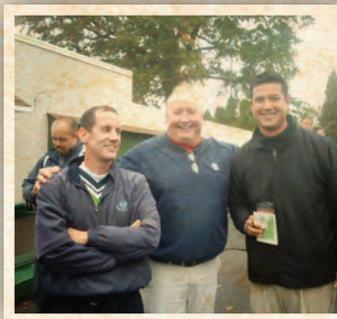
him the construction supervisor at Merion's East Course. Once the course opened for play

in September 1912, Flynn became a greenkeeper there.

He had an abiding love for turf and, in addition to writing frequently about the subject, was a lecturer at Penn State. Among the young men Flynn helped get started in the profession was Joe Valentine, who had also worked at Merion's original site.

Valentine was appointed greenkeeper at Merion in 1918 and would go on to serve the club and the turf industry for 54 years. At one point in the 1930s, he discovered a strain of turfgrass adjacent to the East Course's 17th tee that became known as Merion bluegrass.

Valentine's impact was felt throughout the industry and continues today, nearly six decades after his death in 1966. He played a key role in the launch of Penn State's Turfgrass Management Program in 1929. A year later, he helped form the Turfgrass Research Advisory Council and chaired that group until 1955. In 1932, Valentine and others convinced the Pennsylvania state legislature to pass legislation that allocated \$10,000 for Penn State to conduct turfgrass research. Today, the university's Joseph E. Valentine Turfgrass Research Center bears his name.



"What we've seen in chemical and breeding programs across the country, it's night and day. It's really like going from a Model T to a modern car. That's how far we've come."

— *Jerrod Golden*



**Paul B. Latshaw**, now in his second tour of duty in the top spot at Merion, cites Valentine's impact on the industry.

"The [Valentine Turfgrass Research Center] was all his doing," Latshaw says. "Back then, there were schools but there wasn't really research for these sorts of things. All these turf programs, throughout the United States and the world, they started with Joe Valentine and what he did for the industry."

From its earliest days, the PAGCS has been about informing and educating its members. Its regular monthly meetings, which customarily were held at area golf and country clubs, featured presentations on subjects unique to the industry. The topics might include brown patch control — apparently a common problem in the 1920s — grub control (carbon disulfide was the recommended treatment), how often and how high to cut greens, and, deep in the Blue Law era, whether greens should be cut on Sundays.

Almost immediately after the United States entered World War II, the PAGCS offered guidelines to superintendents prioritizing their maintenance efforts. They included:

- Advising superintendents to be careful filling in ponds and minimize the risks associated with the task
- Clearing leaves and branches out of wooded areas and burning them
- Cutting the rough as short as possible
- Stop maintaining bunkers (with the exception of washout areas) and turn the responsibility for removing footprints, etc. over to the golfers themselves

All this left the association's membership better informed.

Today, much of the information that early on was dispensed at association meetings or in a newsletter is now available through other means.

**JERROD GOLDEN IS** the director of



grounds and water quality at Hershey's Mill Golf Club. The Penn State graduate been in the industry for 50 years and at Hershey's Mill for 46. He served as president of the PAGCS in 1990-91.

"When I got out of Penn State, there was this transition from the old school, superintendents who just learned by doing," he says. "They came up in the era before we had college training. I was in the wave of guys replacing non-college-educated guys. Now every course has at least one and maybe two college-trained assistants. That's changed dramatically."

Golden adds that formal education is not as critical as it was early in his career. The internet provides increased access to information.

"When I first got in the association, we had a formal meeting with a speaker every meeting. It's not quite as necessary anymore because we can get that information in other ways. Through extensions, through university publications, through all sorts of other venues. You couldn't have gotten that information that way back then."

Owsik cites the impact of institutions like Penn State and Rutgers University on the turf industry. "The research that's been done at Penn State and Rutgers over the years," he says, "where they've looked at the problems people have on their golf courses, they've simulated the same

problem in their research and done all their trials with pesticides and fertility."

Owsik says this kind of research has led to finding solutions for longstanding problems. "Anthracnose used to be a big problem on putting greens. Rutgers did a study with just fertility. We were just starving the grass for green speeds. But in reality, it was creating the anthracnose problem."

Owsik notes that today's superintendents are working with equipment that is far superior to those of their predecessors.

"The technology is obviously coming on really strong now," he says. "You have GPS-equipped equipment. The chemical companies have continued to develop products that solved issues that were a problem 30 to 40 years ago."

Owsik recalls working the 1981 U.S. Open at Merion under then-superintendent **Richie Valentine**.

"We were running ground-driven reels on the fairways," he says. "The manufacturers loaned us hydraulically driven reels, which were just coming about at that time. We were literally running pull-behind cutting units on fairways. Now you're running green-spray stuff that is just amazing."

Golden notes that the start of his career coincided with a period when equipment manufacturers were earmarking more dollars for research.

"You had three different compa-

nies vying for your attention,” he recalls. “They all were throwing money into engineering. Equipment was improving dramatically. And then the chemical development! What we’ve

seen in chemical and breeding programs across the country, it’s night and day. It’s really like going from a Model T to a modern car. That’s how far we’ve come.”

Advances in equipment technology and the development of new plant protectants have led to advances in turf science.

“Because of grass selection and grass breeding, Penn State and all these universities have gotten so much better,” Latshaw says. “That’s because of the USGA and all the funding they do of research and plant development. They’re more disease-resistant, they’re more drought-tolerant, they’re finer texture.”

Latshaw points out that advances in turf science are ongoing.



“These organizations helped elevate our place at the table, so to speak, with the golf professionals and board members, and helped enhance the level of respect that we get.”

— Greg D’Antonio

“We rebuilt the whole East Course in 2018,” he says. “But if we were to do it tomorrow, I probably wouldn’t use the same grasses I did back then. Back then they were the latest and greatest, but there is so much development that has come out since then.”

Those advances in turf science have led to improved conditions at courses of all levels, from daily-fee facilities to private clubs. And golfers expect quality conditions wherever they choose to tee it up.

D’Antonio says

that’s due to turfgrass breeding.

“The newer grasses can take more stress and be mowed lower,” he says. “You think about where we mow greens now and it’s under a tenth of an inch compared to an eighth or 3/16ths 20 years ago. That’s because of the new grasses that have come out, as well as the technology of mowers. The technology with irrigation. The technology of moisture management. Now you’re seeing GPS sprayers that are 99.9 percent precise and take operator error out of things.

“All those things work together, but I think most important has been the development of the new grasses as well as the research at the university level and the USGA level: What you need to do to create those conditions? Whether it’s tree removal, whether it’s drainage, whether it’s air flow — all those things work together.”

It’s no secret that a sizeable number of golfers, particularly private club members, regard the speed of their club’s greens as a badge of honor.

“Ten on the Stimpmeter used to be acceptable,” D’Antonio said. “Now, it’s considered a slow speed, I think, at most private clubs.”

**THE PAGCS MARKED** its 100th anniversary with a celebratory dinner on Oct. 31 at Union League Liberty Hill, located just a short drive from Whitmarsh Valley, where the association was born.

The environment in which turf professionals ply their trade has evolved considerably since that first gathering, but some core principles still apply.

“Regardless of technology and evo-

lution, there’s always going to be four principles regardless of what you’re doing,” Latshaw says. “Air, light, soil, water. It all starts with that.”

The PAGCS has kept up with the changing times while continuing to fulfill its core mission, supporting its members and encouraging men and women who choose to enter a demanding but rewarding profession.

Golden derives considerable satisfaction from seeing newcomers enter the profession.

“I don’t think there’s anything better than that,” he says. “I think the association plays a strong role in getting people together and fostering that feeling of kinship and professionalism. I’ve had lots of guys come through here as interns or just as turf students, and to see them move on in their careers is fantastic.”

**Charlie Miller** has worked his entire 35-year turf career at The Springhaven Club in Wallingford and has regularly turned to the PAGCS.

“It gives you the opportunity to meet people that maybe are a little farther away and then create that network,” he says. “Then you’ve always got somebody you can call if you have a question.

“It’s the networking experience, it’s the contacts, it’s the people. Our association provides a really good platform for people to connect, to network, and become allies for one another.”

*Rick Woelfel is a Philadelphia-based writer and frequent Golf Course Industry contributor. He hosts the Wonderful Women of Golf podcast on Superintendent Radio Network.*





# COMPLEX GREENS

VALLEY HILL COUNTRY CLUB SUPERINTENDENT **JEFF LEE** WORKS THROUGH CHANGE ON AND OFF THE PUTTING SURFACES AT VALLEY HILL COUNTRY CLUB.

By **Matt LaWell**

**J**eff Lee has renovated greens twice during his 31 years at Valley Hill Country Club in Huntsville, Alabama. The first switch overhauled all 27 holes from Penncross bentgrass to A-1/A-4 bentgrass starting in 2000. The second, 19 years later and originally unplanned, updated them to AU Victory bentgrass.

The newer variety is perfect for a superintendent in the South — Lee says AU Victory has handled peak heat and humidity a little better than previous selections — especially one who also happens to be a proud

Auburn University alum and the father of three more alums.

“But I don’t care what kind of bentgrass you have,” he says. “When it’s humid and hot for an extended period, it can still be a little tough.”

Lee has faced challenges on and off greens this season. He hired a new second assistant superintendent in April, then lost his first assistant in September thanks to a family move north. More rain than normal has poured on Rocket City. And, of course, summer temps were about as high as ever.

Nothing he can’t handle, though. At 61, Lee has now worked more than half his life at Valley Hill.

Lee interned one summer and

worked five more at The Country Club of Birmingham, and when he arrived at Valley Hill on Oct. 4, 1994, “I was thinking this is going to be my stepping stone,” he says. “I’ll go somewhere bigger, possibly do a Tour event and all that good stuff.” Three sons and more than three decades later, he’s still here. “I loved the city,” he says, “and the club has just been very good to me.”

Lee says long tenures are not uncommon in the Yellowhammer State. He worked alongside **Lee McLemore** and **Tim Kocks**, now in their 39th season and 40th seasons, respectively, at The Country Club of Birmingham, and his spray technician, **Dan Trevino**, is closing in on

that number at Valley Hill. “Getting to 30-plus is probably a little bit of an outlier,” he says, “but I would call 15 to 20 years fairly common. ... Most of the guys just find a comfortable spot and they don’t want to leave.”

Family has helped keep Lee in one spot since **Terry Bowden** was still coaching the Tigers. So he has plenty of projects. He has renovated bunkers with Better Billy Bunker, and renovated all par-3 teeing areas and the driving range with Tahoma 31 Bermudagrass. He has not been able to snag new irrigation — he’s working with a 41-year-old single row system that was installed during a 1984 **John LaFoy** renovation — but remains hopeful he’ll work on that project before retirement. And, of course, those two greens renovations.

Lee keeps his greens sharp with a blend of products. He introduced SePRO Legacy plant growth regulator three years ago, applying at an eight-ounce rate in April and by growing degree days the rest of the season through October. The PGR, he says, “**has improved my greens in that I’m not getting flushes and I can be a little bit more consistent in getting the amount of clippings that I want to get. I’ve been very pleased with it.**”

“If I have to be a little late — like this summer my sprayer broke down for two weeks — the clipping volume will go up a little but it doesn’t go crazy. I just don’t have those big flushes if I’m late that I used to have.”

Lee’s PGR application season is just about finished. Before his next spray, he’ll celebrate his 31st work anniversary and watch the 90th Iron Bowl. Perhaps that game, scheduled for Nov. 29 at Jordan-Hare Stadium, will share at least one trait with Valley Hill’s greens: AU victory. ■

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*Editor's note: This story includes discussion of opioid use and thoughts of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, please call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.*

**M**att Stenhouse remembers turning the key in the ignition of his Toyota Tacoma pickup truck just after 5:50 the morning of Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2023. He remembers sliding his coffee mug into the cupholder. He remembers switching on the heated seat. He remembers the first three miles of his 22-mile drive into Waverley Country Club in Portland, Oregon, 35 minutes every morning before finally spotting the Willamette River, and an hour back home

every afternoon.

He does not, however, remember the Volkswagen Golf driving on the wrong side of Oregon Route 224. He doesn't remember the Golf's engine colliding with the lower left corner of his cab at 5:56. He doesn't remember slicing his right eyebrow, severing his right ear, breaking his left heel and nearly every bone across the top of his right foot, or fracturing three vertebrae in his back. He doesn't remember his Tacoma spinning across the narrow two-lane road and winding up in a ditch. He doesn't

remember emergency personnel removing him from the cab, or loading him into a Life Flight helicopter, or ferrying him over the City of Roses to Legacy Emanuel Medical Center. He doesn't remember his first week in a hospital bed.

He has read about all those things. He has made sense of most of them. He can discuss them all at length. But his memories of them are as vacant now as they were nearly three years ago.

What is certain for Stenhouse, after so much reflection, so much



# Charting a **NEW** **COURSE**

*A gruesome collision hobbled Pacific Northwest turf pro Matt Stenhouse. It also provided a turning point in his life.*

By Matt LaWell

reading, so many conversations — after so much pain — is that the morning he can't remember changed the rest of his life.

**PORTLAND IS FAMOUSLY** weird, but weird eluded the dividing line between Mount Scott and Happy Valley in the city's southeast corner where Stenhouse grew up. His father, **Rich**, retired in 2016 after 30 years with Portland Fire & Rescue. His mother, **Patty**, encouraged him and his two older sisters, **Emily** and **Brittany**, to pursue their passions. Golf grabbed

him early and never let go.

The summer he was 13, Stenhouse landed a volunteer position at nearby Glendoveer Golf Course, picking up golf balls in exchange for comped rounds. "My parents would drive me to the golf course and hand me \$10 for food," he says. "I would spend all day there." Free golf. Free range balls. "I thought I was being sneaky, but everybody was giving me the nod. I was the little kid running around. Everyone knew my name and took care of me."

The day he turned 15, the general

manager called to tell Stenhouse he had been added to the payroll. *Stop by the shop for your work schedule.* He worked there for the next three years, parking golf cars and cleaning bathrooms before being allowed to putt and chip "and do all the things you shouldn't be doing while you're getting paid," he says. "I'm living the dream."

The dream shifted slightly after a new management company took over and Stenhouse transferred to the maintenance department. He learned about irrigation. He helped

dig ditches and run pipe from one pumphouse to the next.

He played golf briefly at Warner Pacific University in Portland — during his short stint of higher education, he wrote a paper titled “Coffee and Diesel” — before deciding “college isn’t for me,” he says. “I don’t want to do this. I want to go down this golf course maintenance road and see where this can take me.”



I was really resentful. I was not happy with anybody or anything. God bless my wife, I’m thankful she didn’t leave me, because I was just rude, angry at everything. I was just pissed off all the time. How could this happen to me, you know? How in the world did this happen?”

— **Matt Stenhouse**

That led to two years at Sah-Hah-Lee Golf Course in Clackamas, learning under owners **Bud** and **Steve Lisac**, who also designed the course, and superintendent **Justin Hall**, who had worked for a decade and a half under **Bill Webster** at Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club in Portland.

“I want you to understand, Matt, you’re not going to make any money for a long time,” Bud told him one day. “I don’t care,” Stenhouse replied. “Put me to work. That’s all I need.”

The Lisacs steered him to Persimmon Country Club in Gresham, where he worked under superintendent **Mark Miller** and learned how to spray, then called him back after Hall moved on from Sah-Hah-Lee. “Do you want to be the superintendent here next summer?” Bud asked. How else would a 21-year-old golf nerd respond? “Heck, yeah,” Stenhouse replied. “I was cheap labor and willing to do it,” he adds.

Stenhouse returned in advance

of the season, “and burnt the place to the absolute ground,” he says. “I didn’t know what I was doing with the irrigation system or fertilizing. I had the keys to the whole place and besides some landscaping experience, that’s all I knew. I tried my best and it was a good, good time.” He and Bud ended the run the next season. Stenhouse moved on to Portland Golf Club, working under superintendent **Jason Dorn** and assistant **Mike Cortner**, attended Penn State World Campus Online, learned more about agronomy and the industry. “One day, Jason walks in and says, ‘Waverley’s hiring an assistant and you need to apply.’”

Billed as the second-oldest private golf course west of the Mississippi River, Waverley Country Club is filled with history. **Tiger Woods** won his final Junior Amateur there in 1993. **Juli Inkster** won the Women’s Amateur in 1981. **Lanny Wadkins** won the U.S. Amateur in 1970. The club started awarding green jackets in 1934, which *might* have inspired **Bobby Jones** to do something similar down in Georgia. Established in April 1896, it is 99 years and 11 months older than Stenhouse.

Stenhouse started at Waverley in July 2021, hired by longtime superintendent and two-time interim general manager **Brian Koffler** — “an incredible teacher,” Stenhouse says — and working alongside fellow assistant superintendent **Lucas Pfaller**. He describes his first years there as “a ride.”

The ride halted suddenly during that morning commute in January 2023.

**AMONG THE 37,654** fatal car crashes tallied by the National Safety Council in the United States in 2023, more occurred during the eight-hour window from 8 p.m. Saturday to 3:59 a.m. Sunday than any other block — 3,164, about 8.4 percent. Conversely, just 728, about 1.9 percent, occurred from 4 to 7:59 Wednesday morning.

Stenhouse survived the collision, but the Golf driver, a 22-year-old Washington man named **Miguel Adams**, did not. The road remained closed for four hours as Stenhouse was flown north of the city, passing almost directly over Waverley on his way to Lutheran Emanuel.

“I was out for a week,” he says. “I remember the night before, and then the next thing I remember is having to use the bathroom in the hospital. Apparently, I was angrier than cuss. Apparently, I cussed out my grandma. I was awake, but I don’t remember any of it. I have zero recollection of any of that.”

Stenhouse’s laundry list of injuries is more unsettling with more detail.

“My back was pretty screwed up,” he says, “so the lower three vertebrae, right above my tailbone, are all fused together. There was fracturing down there, and it was swelling. They had to take off some protective layers of my spine so I wouldn’t be paralyzed, because it was going to restrict my spinal cord.”

“Both my feet were obviously broken. Both feet were mangled. I broke the heel on my left foot. My right foot broke in half, every bone across my foot. I have a big scar right above my right eyebrow, and then it took my right ear off, a portion of it, but they were able to sew it back on. You can’t even really tell. You can see the scar.”

Over the next two years, he endured four surgeries on his right foot, two on his left foot and one on his back. “The back is, for sure, the scarier injury,” he says. “But the feet are what affect me the most.”

He remained in intensive care for two weeks, then headed home for five days before returning for two more weeks.

“People would come visit me,” he says. “My mom and dad would come visit me. My wife, **Stephanie**, would spend a lot of time with me. It was probably one of the better memories, as crazy as that sounds.”



After one nurse learned that Stenhouse worked at a golf course, he would bring a cane into the room and ask for swing advice. “He was always talking to me about golf and it was kind of the last thing I wanted to think about, because I wasn’t there,” Stenhouse says. “My whole life was ripped from me. I didn’t want to think about what I was missing out on.”

Pain seared through his body at all hours. Whatever medication Stenhouse asked for, he received. Oxycodone. Oxycodone. “One of the good things was the drugs,” he says. “It sounds horrible to say, but I mean, those things are powerful. Make you feel pretty darn good. Pretty crappy situation and the only thing that makes you feel better is some drugs and some camaraderie.”

More than once, Stenhouse screamed in pain, “and they brought out the big guns, a drug called Dilaudid”—a Schedule II controlled substance generically known as hydromorphone. “That was the best feeling in the world.” In a flash, Stenhouse understood drug addiction. “I had more pain than I’ve ever had in

my life and you gave me just a little bit of this substance and it’s like peaches and rainbows. I feel great.”

After heading home, he received a prescription for an Oxycodone every morning along with 15 milligrams of Oxycotin every three hours. Whenever his supply dipped, he “freaked out,” because he didn’t want the pain to return. But he realized he has an addictive personality — he calls it an excessive compulsive personality — gravitating over the years to golf, to work, to nicotine, to alcohol. “It was always something I could kind of reel in, but you hear about the drug addiction problems with opiates, and I was very aware of it,” he says. “They tell you what to watch out for. Those chemicals are powerful.”

Stenhouse feared the pain. He feared addiction more.

“I had to step it down, and step it down, and step it down to the point where I was off them completely,” he says. “My doctor called and said, ‘I can’t refill this. You have to cut it.’ That was two weeks of hell.”

During his last days on opioids, Stenhouse traveled with Stephanie and some friends to a beach house



▲ Oregon Route 224 remained closed for about four hours after the collision that sent Stenhouse to the ICU, a series of surgeries and a monthslong recovery.

rental in Pacific City, about 100 miles southwest of Portland, along the coast. He stared at the waves.

“You try to distract yourself as best you can,” he says. “I was really resentful. I was not happy with anybody or anything. God bless my wife, I’m thankful she didn’t leave me, because I was just rude, angry at everything. I was just pissed off all the time. In the hospital, I was happy-go-lucky. Anybody who visited me, I was respectful, I tried to put on a good front and have a positive attitude, but behind closed doors, it was hell. I was angry and self-reflecting, trying to have a relationship with the Lord but

at the same time pissed. How could this happen to me, you know? How in the world did this happen?”

Like about 44 percent of U.S. households, the Stenhouses own a handgun. At one point during those two weeks of hell, Stenhouse turned to Stephanie and told her to “hide it.”

“Those drugs basically shut off pain receptors and when you get off of them, those pain receptors are throbbing, saying, ‘Where’s that drug?’ It makes that pain worse. So I’m feeling more pain than if I had never taken them. That was just a really dark time — throwing stuff in the house, breaking bowls, just frustrated. I couldn’t go anywhere. I couldn’t get up. I couldn’t go outside. Everything had to be done for me. It’s such a crippling feeling. I didn’t sleep for four or five nights. I hated my house, because I couldn’t leave it. I would stare at the ceiling, this one corner, all night long, for eight hours of darkness. My wife would get up and go to work, and here I am alone. People would come visit me and, luckily, I have a good support system. My best friends would call me and I would talk with them for as long as possible.”

Before Stenhouse went in for his seventh and final surgery last January, he told everybody he wanted only Ibuprofen and Tylenol. “I’m proud of that,” he says. “I don’t think a lot of people would think that’s something to be proud of but I’m proud that I never took one this time around.”

**DURING HIS DARKEST** days alone at home, Stenhouse numbed his mind with Netflix or YouTube, not really watching whatever was on the screen, just in his own head, hurtling down “all the wrong rabbit holes.” Relegated to a wheelchair, he munched on Trix all day. Circling his Walk Date on the calendar — and planning his return to Waverley — helped lift his spirits. So did leaving a PGA Tour video game on all day, listening to the digital renderings of chipping golfers and

chirping birds.

And so did an old family friend named **James Lee**.

A realtor by trade, Lee helped Stenhouse’s parents purchase a home about 15 years ago. He helped Stenhouse and Stephanie purchase their home a few years ago, too.

And he did it all from a powerful robotic wheelchair.

Lee is almost totally paralyzed, the result of a swimming pool accident. In Stenhouse, he saw a man in need of support and some perspective.

“Don’t ever tell me that it doesn’t hurt, or it’s not bad, or you’re fine,” Lee told Sten-

house. “Tell me what you’re going through. People look at me and they think I have it worse than them so they’re not going to complain. That’s human reaction.”

One day, Lee dropped off his wheelchair ramps at Stenhouse’s home to help him get in and out. Another day, he took Stenhouse to a mall, where they drifted in robotic wheelchairs.

“When other people would share their pain, instead of saying, ‘You don’t know what real pain is,’ have some sympathy,” Stenhouse says. “Talk with them. How can you help them? James taught me that perspective. The worst thing in your life is the worst thing.”

The evening of March 24, a little more than 10 weeks after the collision, Stenhouse sent a text to Koffler that he describes as “a little cringey”: “Happy Friday! Hope your week at the course was a good one. Today I had an appointment for my feet.

They pulled the last pin and stitches. They said my feet look amazing. I’m going to start PT and swimming ASAP. April 25th, I’ll have my appointment to start walking again and will be able to move freely without a back brace then as well. We will see how quick I’m able to get integrated back into working, movement dependent. I’m giving my all to get back to work ASAP and it can’t come soon enough. I hope I can get to ‘normal’ physically so I can give you and the team everything. I plan not only to be back to normal but be better than before. I have learned a lot of my mental toughness through this time, which I hope is an asset to the team. Thanks for the support.”

Koffler replied early the next morning, telling Stenhouse he was glad to hear the good news and that no one was questioning his work ethic.

Stenhouse took his first steps on April 25 and returned to Waverley on May 16 — first with a walker, then a cane, then an inverted wedge.

But he never felt quite right.



► Throughout the worst moments, Stenhouse remained focused on working the 2023 U.S. Women’s Senior Open.

© COURTESY OF MATT STENHOUSE; BRIAN KOFFLER, OPPOSITE



**STENHOUSE WORKED THREE** days his first week back. The next week, he worked every day, always staying late, “because the last place I wanted to be was home.” He also wanted to be on the grounds for the 2023 U.S. Women’s Senior Open, the eighth USGA championship at Waverley since 1952.

He worked through the rest of the season with pain in his feet and his back rearing up again and again. “I was always the guy that people looked to for the grunt work,” he says. “But now I couldn’t do that anymore.” He focused on golf course logistics — moving people around the course, studying how long various jobs take, building a different skill set.

He still wanted the physical work. He felt he owed Waverley everything he could give in 2024, especially with Koffler’s season-long promotion to interim GM on April 9. He worked hard alongside Pfaller, dragged hose, added more and more physical work to his load. “And it hurt,” he says. “It was hard, and it was not sustainable.”

Stenhouse says on a scale of 0 to 10, 10 being the worst pain of his life — staring at the ceiling in the dark for eight hours, his feet screaming — the work throughout the summer of 2024

was about a 6. “In the morning, it would be decent, and then the pain would start in the afternoon. I have a hard time putting things on other people. ‘I should do it.’ It’s really setting the tone as a leader. They see me walk around with a limp and my foot all cockeyed to the right. We’re all capable of a lot more than we think we are. And all the guys were unbelievable.”

But even before the end of the summer, he remembers thinking, “I’ll do this for this year, but I need to have the surgery and find something that is sustainable.”

He planned a Thanksgiving week trip to Florida with Stephanie. She has family in the Sunshine State, including her brother, and her parents discussed moving there after they retired. Maybe they could all head across the country? Perhaps he could find a job in the industry that meshed with his newer skills?

They drove around the state, across the Panhandle, down to Tampa, stopping at courses everywhere. One night at a bookstore, he stumbled on “Wild at Heart” by **John Eldredge**—a Christian book about “a man’s journey through life” that he read faster than any other book. He has since gifted it to multiple friends.

He wrapped up his week with a visit to **John Reilly**, the director of agronomy at Longboat Key Club west of Sarasota and an online mentor. Reilly is always listening. His doors are always open.

Stenhouse mentioned the accident “many, many, many, many, many times,” he says. Reilly looked him

“straight in the face” and delivered unforgettable advice.

“Sounds like you need to get over it.”

“What?”

“You need to get over it. You’re fine. You’re better for it. It’s over with. Move on.”

**“YOU EVER HAVE** those moments where you get that out-of-body experience, where your only real emotion is just tears come to your eyes?” Stenhouse asks. “Your eyes immediately get swollen with tears because you’re just like, That’s exactly what I needed to hear?”

“At that time, that trip to Florida — Do I stay at Waverley? Do I have what it takes? — it was everything I needed to hear.”

Stenhouse walked away from daily golf course maintenance earlier this year. The revelations of the last three years were too strong—so many signs pointing him toward helping the industry in so many other ways.

“I felt like I couldn’t contribute the way that I could when I was an assistant superintendent, being an active guy, getting up, going and doing it. You have that imposter syndrome of, Can I do this? All those doubts running through my head. And then John told me that, and it’s so true. He’s right. I’ve proven I can do this job and can be successful in other ways. He was very influential.”

The Stenhouses still live outside Portland — no move to Florida yet — and he is busier than ever: He has carved a niche for himself in the Pacific Northwest with his company, Landscapes by NW Mowbotics, helping golf courses integrate robotic mowing, working with high-end properties on management and landscaping, and diving deeper into golf course construction, backflow and irrigation, and hardscaping.

“Whatever ego you think you have, you get everything ripped from you, it’s pretty amazing,” Stenhouse says. “Who cares? Who cares? I just had to get over it.” 🏌️

◀ Stenhouse returned to a full schedule by the end of his second week back at Waverley.

# WALK





Purchased by the Meyer family in 2012, there is a new course, buildings under construction, and plenty to cheer about at Windsong Farm. Meet the friendly team developing a soothing 36-hole Minnesota property.

**BY LEE CARR**

**T**he Minnesota Vikings, founded in 1960 as an expansion team in the National Football League, wear bold purple and gold uniforms and compete fiercely in the NFC North. Their logo is the profile view of a scowling Viking, and their fans show support by yelling “skol” following two strong drumbeats.

“Skol” is derived from the Scandinavian word “skål,” meaning “cheers.” It’s a myth that it was ever a Viking war chant; rather, it was a toast when sharing a bowl filled with liquid. One person would take a sip, pass the bowl and say “skål” to the next person, who would take a sip and pass it on. “Skål” is a statement of solidarity and a call to action, and a similar momentum is blowing through Windsong Farm, a private club 25 miles west of Minneapolis.

Opening in 2003, the South Course at Windsong Farm was designed by **John Fought** and **Tom Lehman**. The operation faced foreclosure in 2012 before being purchased by **David Meyer**, retired CEO and founder of Titan Machinery. Established in 1980, Titan Machinery is a Fargo, North Dakota-based retail farm and construction equipment company with store locations in the United States, Europe and Australia. Meyer and his family

have always been involved with golf.

Across the street from Windsong Farm is Pioneer Creek Golf Club, a public facility built by Meyer’s father. Meyer’s sister, **Marcia Kreklow**, runs this 18-hole layout, where her son, **Kyle**, is the superintendent.

Windsong Farm shares a mechanic with Pioneer Creek along with equipment when they need it, and Windsong Farm members receive playing privileges at the course.

The private club is definitely growing. The property has shifted from 18 holes to 36 with the opening of the North Course, the pro shop has been expanded and refurbished, and there are ongoing improvements and expansions happening with the clubhouse.

New guest houses are also being planned, to add to the Murphy House, where members and guests are welcome to stay. With multiple en suite bedrooms; a rustic, cozy-chic décor; and spectacular views of the South Course, it is constantly booked. The firepit and lighted putting green add to the Murphy House experience.

The clubhouse staff are attentive, and artifacts and memorabilia from Windsong Farm’s history are displayed. Meyer’s wife, **Kandi**, is knowledgeable in sharing that history, as the property was once a horse farm. With a background in fashion, Kandi has a

flair for merchandising, incorporating the new Windsong Farm logo that pays homage to that history. Make no mistake, though, this is purely a golf club.

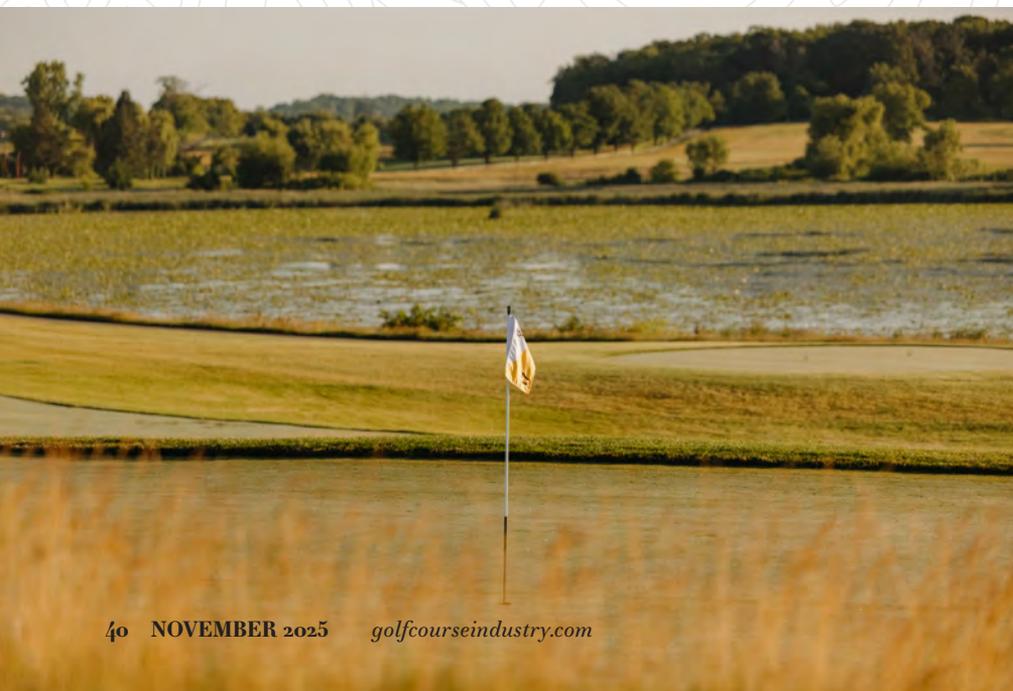
“I don’t think I have ever had more fun on a project where the team was working for one common goal,” Fought says of designing the North Course. “The team was committed and passionate about creating a new course that not only complemented the beautiful Minnesota landscape, but was also inspired by creating some of golf’s most treasured holes.”

The North Course is vastly different than the South. The South Course is a championship layout, overseen by superintendent **Austin Augspurger**. Stretching to over 7,500 yards, and home of the Gopher Invitational, hosted for more than a decade by the University of Minnesota, the course has wide fairways, strategic bunkering, and greens that roll true and fast.

The North Course, cared for by superintendent **Dylan Skattum**, is set on approximately 125 acres. There are several template holes, including a Biarritz, Redan and Cape. Nos. 13 and 16 share a double green. With a classical design, this par-70 layout can play up to 6,492 yards. The connections are tight; shot-making is favored over long drives.

These courses are maintained by one strong team, led by director of agronomy **Jon Dailing**, who is both a coach and the quarterback. He directs the plays, encourages his teammates and works hard beside them. Dailing has a propensity for numbers, easily sharing quantities, volumes, dates and costs for everything. It’s no doubt part of the reason that Meyer trusts him. He’s capable, confident, honest and has a great work ethic. Meyer gives Dailing a lot of autonomy.

“It’s great working with Jon,” Augspurger says. “He keeps it loose and fun while holding everyone accountable, and we couldn’t ask for a better





owner. He trusts us to do our thing, which is important.”

Rounding out the team leaders are three assistants, three mechanics and four crew foremen. The staff can swell to nearly 50 people in peak season, which is a little tight for morning meetings. With more staff and more equipment to provide for two courses, there are plans to renovate the maintenance facilities.

“The three assistants rotate,” Skatsum says. “We want them to get to know everything for both courses, what needs to be done and what to look for.” A property-wide mentality is prioritized over a narrow focus.

“I enjoy the strategic planning to develop and improve Windsong long-term,” Augspurger says, “and I really enjoy working with the staff and learning their strengths and weaknesses in an effort to build a cohesive team.” This paid dividends during construction of the North Course, as the crew demonstrated flexibility and depth.

#### NORTH COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Construction of the North Course was challenging, with an incredible result. Meyer empowered Dailing to work closely with Fought. “Dave let me work with John on the design and he let me make sure that the course would be very economic and maintenance-friendly,” Dailing says.

Windsong Farm decided to move forward with the North Course in 2021, and the permitting process began immediately. Fought, Dailing, **Ahren Habicht**, Midwest/national general manager for Duinick Construction, who executed the work, and **Rich Quisberg**, a shaper from Duinick, took a trip to the Chicago area to study Golden Age courses. This provided a great foundation for conversation and understanding about the potential and objectives for the North Course.

Dailing contacted **Derek Lash**, from Emmons & Olivier Resources (EOR), a water-resource-based engineering and environmental consult-

ing firm, to establish what they would need for permitting for wetland and stormwater management. Duinick and EOR both worked on the South Course, and it was helpful to have experience with key contributors.

Dailing’s least favorite part of the entire project was the permitting — and for good reason. Evening council meetings were tedious, and the process dragged. Construction was supposed to start in fall 2022, but the permitting process wasn’t complete.

Their luck changed when Duinick took a massive risk. “They brought all of their heavy equipment here in the last week of April of 2023, and we received permit approval three days later,” Dailing says. “The next two council meetings were cancelled so we wouldn’t have started until June. In a way we got lucky, but we were also four months behind. Thankfully, 2023 was dry and Duinick got us caught up.”

Duinick has its headquarters in Minnesota, not far from Windsong.



▲ Windsong Farm's North Course debuted this year.

"We have been a builder partner and friend to the club, ownership and staff for many years," Habicht says. "The construction activities took seven months and the weather was about perfect. The 2024 grow-in season was met with many untimely weather events that caused the repair of washouts many times over. Being a good partner, we kept a crew on from the last day of construction all the way through grow-in." **Matt Dufresne** was the Duinick superintendent, and he was a popular colleague throughout the project.

**Erik Christiansen** of EC Design planned the irrigation for the North Course. "He did a wonderful job,"

Skattum says. They have Toro irrigation with just under 1,000 new Infinity heads, and there is a Flowtronex pump station on each course. "It's actually kind of fun, when you can control each individual head," Skattum adds. "Our coverage is really good. We did bore a pipe so we can directionally connect the holding ponds. If one pump station goes down, we can pump water to the other course."

Toro was another contributor. "Toro did support us, like beyond tomorrow," Dailing says. "They knew we would need more equipment, and they were honest that it was going to be 14 months to get it. They loaned us equipment to grow in the new golf

course and that was a game changer for our mechanic. We had fairway mowers, enough to keep up, so that helped. It really did."

Windsong Farm had great partners, but it wasn't all luck. Great people (and a few dogs!) make a big difference. The members love the course hard and fast. "With our membership, we push the grass for the best playing conditions possible, and they are fully supportive of that," Dailing says. Some years the rough doesn't even get fertilized. The members prefer a brown aesthetic and about half prefer to walk.

Local and returning seasonal staff also helped the project run smoothly. "Our HR manager, **Carrie Klinkner**,

## TIMELINE OF DEVELOPMENT

<b>2003</b> Windsong Farm opens for play	<b>2012</b> The Meyer family purchases the property	<b>2013</b> The Murphy House is built	<b>2014</b> Property across the road is acquired and a tunnel is built underneath what is now the North Course	<b>2015</b> South Course renovations (reconstructing all bunkers, adding tees, realigning No. 12)	<b>2018</b> Practice facility reconstruction adds three acres of range tees and a short game area	<b>2021</b> Planning and permitting begins for the North Course	<b>2023</b> Construction begins	<b>2024</b> Grow-in	<b>2025</b> North Course opens, pro shop fully renovated
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is extremely good at her job,” Dailing says. “At a job fair this year we had almost 150 applicants show up for Windsong. She will go anywhere within 20 miles — gas stations, colleges, schools, McDonald’s, wherever, and hang fliers and ads.” Windsong is a great place to work.

“Our turnover has been low,” Dailing adds. “It helps that we hire 16-year-olds. Other courses have a minimum age of 18, but we believe there is plenty that 16-year-olds can handle. The hope is that they work for six years. By the time they start mowing, they know how to do everything. We abide by the rules, and we are honest with new hires about what they will be doing, but we are smart with our resources.” And they take care of the people they hire.

“I have been adamant,” Dailing says. “We make sure that the team is well compensated and has great working conditions. We have a safety-first culture and a focus on employee career paths. We train everyone the best we can and if they’re happy, why shouldn’t we keep them here? If they are looking for a job, I will do anything to help them get it. They know that. What I love is that we have had so many people work their way up. We have great camaraderie.”

Skattum and Augspurger both enjoy the team. “It’s really awesome. I do like working for Jon,” Skattum says. “He’s a great mentor, he’s taught me a lot. Jon’s really good about hands-on learning. He wants me to learn from my mistakes but he’s helpful with not letting me make them.”

Opening the North Course has been deliberately slow, with 20-minute tee times and cart restrictions. Both the South and North courses have bentgrass tees, greens and fairways. The rough on the North Course is bluegrass and turf type tall fescue, but the South has only bluegrass. The native on the South Course is blue-stem and Side Oats, a 50-50 blend, and the native on the North Course is 100 percent fine fescue.

Around the bunkers on the North Course the turf is 100 percent turf type tall fescue, selected for its irrigation and fertility requirements. The turf type tall fescue, with zero fertility, was much greener at the end of summer than the bluegrass, which had received a pound of nitrogen. The rough, all 20 acres of it, was sodded, and the bentgrass and fescue was all seeded.

There are around 40 bunkers on the North Course, many of them rectangular, evoking throwback simplicity. Best Sand, from Ohio, is kept to a depth of four inches.

#### WHAT’S HAPPENING NEXT?

Projects for the fall include addressing a muskrat issue. “They are invasive,” Dailing says. “On the South Course, we are going to completely strip two putting surfaces, the damage is that bad. It’s crazy. We can trap in the off-season, but we are also trying alternative deterrents.”

Windsong is moving forward with cultural practices. “We are hitting it hard with verticutting and heavy sand topdressing for our kind of puffy, thatchy areas,” Skattum says. “That’s totally normal on a grow-in and things are looking really good. We have a ways to go, but I’m happy.”

The crew is excited about the flexibility 36 holes offers. This year they closed the South Course for two weeks for annual aerification. Everyone noticed the huge improvement that comes with that kind of rest and recovery.

The courses close for the winter, usually in early November. The clubhouse operates with reduced hours, but it stays open for member dining and corporate functions during the holiday season. The Murphy House remains booked and the maintenance team ensures that the property is plowed, in addition to grooming trails for the members to enjoy cross-country skiing and snowshoeing on property.

“Windsong is a very special place,” Augspurger says. “It’s a what-you-see-

## DON'T LOOK AT IT

One challenge while growing in the Windsong Farm North Course was washouts due to heavy rain.

“We had to reseed a lot of the greens and the fairways,” director of agronomy **Jon Dailing** says. “We were very fortunate in that we were literally rotary spreading fertilizer every 10 days, but it sucked. Even those tires were sinking down an inch. Everyone was slipping. It was actually comical.”

As time passed, Dailing discussed an area that looked particularly thin with a fellow superintendent. “My friend said, ‘Just don’t even look at it, just don’t even look at it for like a week,’” Dailing says.

With two courses and plenty to do, Dailing distracted himself. “A week later, it was like, 10-4,” Dailing says. “Reseeding that area would have been a waste of time and resources. In a way, the less you look at some things, it’s almost better. Bentgrass can just do its thing. If really can.”

The lesson has been proved more than once. In the fall, the 17th fairway on the North Course was struggling. Dailing and owner **David Meyer** decided to let it go for a little while. After all, it was the fairway on a par 3 and it wasn’t in play.

“Honestly, I am not even kidding, I don’t think I even went on that complex of fairways until opening week,” Dailing says. “Then I was like, ‘What happened here?’ and it was fun. The fairway was looking better than some others and then, of course, I was like, ‘Now what’s going on over there?’”

It’s counterintuitive, but sometimes doing nothing is the best course of action.

— Lee Carr

is-what-you-get kind of course. I truly enjoy working here and growing with the property. And because we like each other’s company so much, we decided to form a bowling team four years ago, where Dylan, myself and the three assistants spend an additional four hours together on Thursday nights. It’s something I look forward to.”

Skol.

Born of camaraderie. It’s not originally a Viking war chant but the word is powerfully unifying whenever the Minnesota Vikings are playing. With a mix of good colleagues and friends, a common purpose can bring something special into existence that wasn’t there before. That’s what’s happening at Windsong Farm. 🏏

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



## MORE ABOUT CLUB CULTURE

A prominent consultant I know says that he can tell in advance if the membership at a private club is going to present problems about the maintenance program.

“If I see more than three yellow sports cars in the parking lot,” he says, “I know they’re going to be overly demanding and unreasonable. The cars are a giveaway that they have more money than common sense and think anything is possible.”

My own parking lot read is less nuanced than that. If I see what amounts to a split between expensive cars and budget models, I know the club is paralyzed on decision-making because half the membership is willing to spend and the other half can’t afford the cost. The club — and the golf course — ends up languishing in slow, steady decline.

It’s called “club culture.” That means the kind of place it is and what animates the majority of those who use the facility. Whatever that culture is, it infuses every cubic foot of the place and is a hint to the quality of decision-making, the professional acumen of the management, the sense of member entitlement and the self-esteem (or lack thereof) by the staff.

The surest sign of a vibrant club culture is not the condition of the golf course; it’s staff morale. If longevity is a hallmark of employment, that is usually because the club attends to the well-being and sense of professional pride among those who labor there. Everyone benefits in the process: employees, because they feel respected, and the club, because members continue to get top-notch service without having to go out each season and search for new employees. It’s more efficient and less expensive to keep paying a longtime employee than to have to recruit and train a new one.

Contrast that to a club where membership is free to express their boorish expectations to service people and excessive behavior goes unpunished by a benighted board. Equally insidious is the club so dominated in course management and tournament setup that mid- and high handicappers feel helpless to speak up, are ignored or are laughed at when they do, and end up suffering their golf games in quiet neglect, as if they were not full golf citizens with rights.

And then there is the club where life is focused entirely on the “clubhouse experience,” whether that means six days a week of valet parking with car detailing, or buffet lunches so lavish that there’s more food on the table at the end of service than at the beginning. All too often, that kind of mentality ends up encouraging some genius on the house committee to plan a \$3 million expansion of the bar overlooking the putting green rather than letting the club fix bunkers that have not been upgraded in 30 years.

That’s the mind of a club where the superintendent would rather take lunch in his office than wander into the clubhouse, unprotected and open to verbal assault by a member who just read an Instagram post about a new turf-grass. It’s also the kind of club where the golf pro is surreptitiously sniping at the greenkeeper and the general manager is no more than an aspiring sommelier.

Dysfunction knows many guises. Luckily, so does a healthy club culture. Like the facility where the general man-

ager, superintendent and PGA professional meet weekly to discuss the entirety of club matters. And the green chairman meets regularly with the superintendent in the maintenance area. For their part, greenkeepers ought to be welcome occasionally to address the board directly, and they should also be made welcome to take lunch in the clubhouse as well as to cultivate relations with the members by playing golf with them.

I’ve seen too many clubs run like extended family fiefdoms, or like little frat houses on the prairie. It takes a dedicated act of will for senior management to address the nature of club culture and, where necessary, to restructure it. Like the club where five solo carts in a group is de rigueur because a loophole in the HOA rules allows for personal transport to run unabated. Or the club that simply assumes that all golfers are riding rather than asking at the bag drop what your preference is.

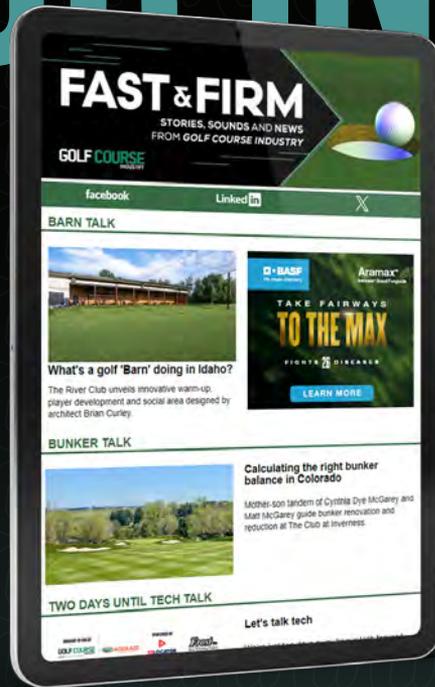
Sometimes the gains are small but symbolic. Like the club that confronts its members’ historic fascination with lush green grass by infiltrating some large areas of native fescue and bluestem in out-of-play areas. Or the club without caddies that bans pull carts as “unseemly” while deeming motorized golf carts as elegant and more appropriate.

The easy part of this is identifying a club’s culture. The hard work comes in trying to change it. Quality leadership knows the difference. The ability to make that change is what makes the golf pro, the GM and the superintendent truly valuable. 🏌️



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**GOLF COURSE**  
INDUSTRY



# Risky decisions

The design and success of The Little Mammoth in Park City, Kentucky, is thanks to multiple wagers from the facility and architect **Brian Ross**.

By  
**Kelsie  
Horner**

**O**n August 27, 2000, at Firestone Country Club in Akron, Ohio, **Tiger Woods** completed a shot that would go down in history. Known as “the shot in the dark,” the swing secured Woods’ win at the World Golf Championships-NEC Invitational. That shot isn’t remembered because of accuracy; it was not a tournament-winning stroke.

The “shot in the dark” became historic because visibility was low, hopes were high, and neither Woods nor his fans knew how it would end up. The shot landed just two feet from the pin.

Hiring **Brian Ross** to design Park Mammoth Golf Club in Park City, Kentucky, could be described as a Woodsian shot in the dark. Ross, a golf course architect, started his company in 2019. Based in Austin, Texas, he had no projects lined up when he pitched himself to the owners of Park Mammoth. Ross had spent large amounts of time searching websites and news articles for recently sold courses. When he discovered the property that would soon become Park Mammoth, he reached out to the developers, as he had done 30 or 40 times previously with other properties.

“I kind of just took a leap of faith,” he says.

That leap of faith led to not one, not two, but three different projects led by Ross at the Kentucky facility.

Park Mammoth is an hour and a half south of Louisville and opened in April 2022. Prior to opening, the public course underwent a major renovation and

redesign led by Ross starting in fall 2021. Ross guided the rerouting of several holes, added 20 new greens, 50 new tee boxes, 25 new bunkers and oversaw a new irrigation system installation. Soon after the course’s opening, Ross returned to the Kentucky site to design a driving range and practice area for golfers.

His designs produced an 18-hole, par-70 layout measuring 6,113 yards from the back tees and 4,692 yards from the front.

Following Ross’ successful designs, the owners decided it was time for something new. “We were looking for a way to not just get people to the course to play golf, but try to keep them there,” Ross says.

After considering options, management settled on building a short course — The Little Mammoth, de-



that occur in the area.”

From a landscape perspective, the short course provides players with conditions common to the area. Inspiration for the design came from Park Mammoth, aiming for a cohesive product with different aesthetics. Ross says projects like this allow architects to take more risks, building greens with “interesting” shapes and ramped up contours that allow change in play based on pin positions.

Ross’ careful designs and “risky” decisions resulted in a 9-hole, 960-yard, walking-only layout. Ross worked alongside superintendent **Austin Hines** to keep maintenance practices in mind through the design and execution process. After all, once Ross’ work was finished, it would be in the hands of Hines and his team.

“Brian Ross, he did the big course. I came in after all that was completed, but with his designs and myself working along with him, trying to work out some of the maintenance-friendly issues that we were going to have, it was awesome,” Hines says.

The shortest hole, No. 2, measures 88 yards. The longest, No. 4, measures 127 yards. As you stand atop the tee box on the fourth hole, the entire short course layout is visible. “The sunset, if we’re here late in the evenings, it’s magnificent,” Hines says. “It’s probably the best in the state from that view.”

The Little Mammoth was grown in by Hines, who celebrated three years at the course in September. Hines worked alongside Ross to execute a maintenance-friendly course.

Hines works with assistant superintendents **Jacob Thompson** and **Hayden Scroggy** to manage staff and maintain all 27 holes at the facility.

The staff who assisted in the building and grow-in of the course were excited to get their feet on the turf. “They couldn’t wait to play it. They kept talking about it,” Hines says.

Despite the course’s length differences, Hines maintains the short course to the same standard as the main one. “Everything is the same, and they maintain it with the same character,” general manager **Marc Eubanks** says.

The short course features 75,000 square feet of greens made up of 777 bentgrass. Tahoma seed makes up the fairways, tees and approaches. The course is often used for clinics and lessons alongside the practice facility. The course is also able to be played in multiple variations and orders, offering a unique opportunity for frequent players.

The par-3 course is enjoyed by customers and employees alike. “When the weather’s nice, we’ll go out and play two loops, 18 holes on the par 3, and they love it and can’t get enough of it,” Eubanks says.

Eubanks aims to provide each golfer with an experience. “We try to make them feel like a member for a day,” he says.

Eubanks used the example of a junior golfer who recently visited the course and requested to play the Little Mammoth. The course was supposed to be closed for a high school event. “I’m like, just go play,” Eubanks replied. “It’s all about relationships and the way that we treat people. And we try to say that the answer is yes, and we’ll figure out how later.”

The Little Mammoth offers something for everyone. Park Mammoth has developed from an 18-hole course to a 27-hole facility and practice range. Let this Kentucky course remind you that, sometimes, taking a “shot in the dark” can lead to something inspiring. 🏌️

*Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry’s digital editor.*

signed by none other than Ross.

“I just felt like that’s a great way for golfers to spend additional time at the club,” Ross says.

The course lies adjacent to the driving range among rolling valleys, clay and limestone. When designing the main course, Ross and the construction team did not use a lot of rock. “I thought one of the neat things we could do on this project would be to kind of highlight a little more of the natural limestone ledges



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.



## IRRIGATION PUMP STATION GENERATOR

**J**erred Golden has been director of grounds at Hershey's Mill Golf Club in West Chester, Pennsylvania, for more than 40 years. His team replaced the existing 45-year-old generator that was installed inside the irrigation pump house with a new MTU 200KV Generator that literally has a Rolls-Royce diesel engine. The new self-contained generator was placed outside for fire hazard safety; the 200-gallon diesel tank is placed underneath it and uses about 1 gallon/hour to operate it under a full load, and additional diesel fuel pumps are close by. The batteries are on a trickle charger and the generator starts up every Tuesday so the staff knows it is operating properly. The generator is large enough where a separate circuit breaker has already been installed to hook up to the maintenance building complex, which is a 24-hour operation during the snow/winter months. It also operates the development's sewage treatment plant and pumps, lift stations, alarms and blowers. It cost about \$64,000 for the generator and \$70,000 for installation. Superintendent **Joe Owsik**, assistant superintendents **Neal Andersen** and **Alex Gomez**, equipment manager **Darryl Elliott** and renovation architect **Brian Ault** work great together.



## ASPHALT CART PATH EDGER

**T**he edging of irregularly shaped edges on asphalt cart paths can be made easier using a Bensch Rotary Broom (Model RBHGX), which is hydraulically operated using a Honda engine, priced around \$5,300. Replacement of the high tensile strength all-steel bristle broom cost about \$477. This implement is also very good at cleaning the surfaces of asphalt and concrete cart paths. Stoneridge Country Club in Blanchard, Idaho, also has a motorcoach village that was having oil applied to its asphalt roadways and this implement was used to clean up the asphalt edges nicely. **D.J. Watton** is the superintendent and **Frank Burandt** is the renovation architect.



**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).

**NAMES INDEX**

**Miguel Adams** Neal Andersen **Casey Anderson**  
 Austin Augspurger **Brian Ault** Juan G. Amecua  
 Avalos **Michael Beebe** Bill Bergin **Stephen**  
**Bernhard** Arthur Blank **Terry Bowden** AJ Brodeur  
**Michael Broome** Peter Brown **Frank Burandt**  
 John Cannell **Ross Cellino** Erik Christiansen  
**Mike Cortner** Brian Curley **Jon Dailing** Greg  
 D'Antonio **Jordan Diede** Jason Dorn **Scott**  
**Draught** Matt Dufresne **Hailee Dunbar** Kelsey  
 Dunbar **Ronald Dunbar** Scott Dunbar **Emily Dye**  
 Isabel K. Eddy **Clinton Edger** John Eldredge  
**Darryl Elliott** Marc Eubanks **Tom Fazio** Tom Firth  
**Bob Folck** Brittany Forney **John Fought** William  
 Flynn **Jerrold Golden** Alex Gomez **Dave Groelle**  
 Ahren Habicht **Justin Hall** Jeff Hardin **Austin**  
**Hines** Dave Hoellig **Michael Hurdzan** Juli Inkster  
**Bobby Jones** Rees Jones **Jonathan Kaschak**  
 William A. Kerman **Larry King** Carrie Klinkner  
**Tim Kocks** Brian Koffler **Kyle Kreklow** Marcia  
 Kreklow **Chris Kujwaski** John LaFoy **Derek Lash**  
 James Lee **Jeff Lee** Tom Lehman **Pete Leising**  
 Jeremy Lewis **Bill Liberati** Bud Lisac **Steve Lisac**  
 Lee McLemore **David Meyer** Kandi Meyer **Cole**  
**Miedema** Charlie Miller **Johnny Miller** Mark  
 Miller **Bob Mooseman** Greg Nash **Willie Negroni**  
 Gustave Nothstein **Barry Nyquist** Joe Owsik **Tom**  
**Peters** Mike Petersen **Lucas Pfaller** Elliott Pope  
**Algie M. Pulley Jr.** Rich Quisberg **H.K. Read** John  
 Reilly **Tim Riley** Brian Ross **Bill Rupert** Hayden  
 Scroggy **Brian Silva** Dylan Skattum **Caleb Smith**  
 Hattie Spies **Matt Stenhouse** Patty Stenhouse  
**Rich Stenhouse** Stephanie Stenhouse **Jacob**  
**Thompson** Tony Thompson **A.W. Tillinghast**  
 Whitney Tilt **Howard Toomey** Dan Trevino **Eric**  
**Tuchols** Jack Tuchols **Joe Valentine** Ritchie  
 Valentine **Robert Valentine** Frank Vurandt  
**Lanny Wadkins** Robert Waterman **D.J. Watton**  
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Aquatrols	<a href="http://aquatrols.com">aquatrols.com</a>	2
Earthworks	<a href="http://earthworksturf.com">earthworksturf.com</a>	5
Envu	<a href="http://us.envu.com">us.envu.com</a>	52
Moghu USA, LLC	<a href="http://poacure.com/pages/about-us">poacure.com/pages/about-us</a>	belly tip
SePro Corporation	<a href="http://sepro.com/golf">sepro.com/golf</a>	31
Standard Golf Company	<a href="http://standardgolf.com">standardgolf.com</a>	19



## HANDLING THE TURF LOSS BARREL

In many regions of the country, 2025 was a brutal year that tested the mettle of even some of most battle worn, veteran superintendents. Mother Nature was certainly up to her old tricks, and her wrath seemed to leave few unscathed. Heavy rain, drought, intense heat and record humidity plagued superintendents, and the result, unfortunately, was turf loss in many situations.

There is an adage in our industry that states: “There are two kinds of superintendents: Those who have lost grass, and those who are going to.” There is truth to this statement. Even the best superintendents face challenging years that result in golf course conditions of which they are not proud. Poor conditions, slow greens and dead grass are embarrassing for superintendents who toil and grind damn near every day of the year. Let’s face it, being a superintendent can be humbling.

Anyone who grows grass for a living knows that adversity and challenge touches everyone sooner or later, but the differences in how people react to that adversity is what will ultimately separate them. There are those who hide in their office, avoid membership confrontations, and hope that the storm blows

over and the grass recovers. Then there are those who face the challenge head on, strap on their “big boy” pants, and deal with the tests that come along with the adversity.

I can tell you, univocally: be the latter type of superintendent. Confronting the issues on your golf course and taking responsibility for poor conditions might be the difference between keeping your job and looking for a new one.

In our experience, most memberships are generally understanding, especially for those superintendents who have a history of producing solid conditions year in and year out. Informing the membership via regular communications is key. Get ahead of the issue and control the narrative.

Membership gossip circles around the firepit after golf league can be terrible and full of misinformation. Beat them to the punch. Communicate clearly and effectively in as many formats as possible on what the problems are, why they were caused, and what actions are going to be taken to rectify the issues that

might be occurring on the golf course.

Be seen! Get out of your office and make a point to talk with people. Go to the clubhouse, be on the

practice green, be on the range tee, go to the golf shop, talk with people on the golf course, and get your message out to the membership.

People will gain respect for you and understand the challenges much better from you in person, even if they are frustrated with the current golf course conditions.

It’s difficult, frustrating and embarrassing to discuss with members why the golf course is not where it should be, but it’s part of the job to take accountability for your area of responsibility. This could also be the time to fight for what you need: more funds, more aeration, more staff, etc.

We understand that the turf loss might be due to underlying agronomic issues. But how are you ever going to get those underlying issues rectified if you are not out there communicating to the members?

It has been said that only two things happen fast in this industry: turf loss and job loss. We are calling BS on the second part of that statement. Job loss will only happen quickly if you don’t meet the adversity with accountability and communication.

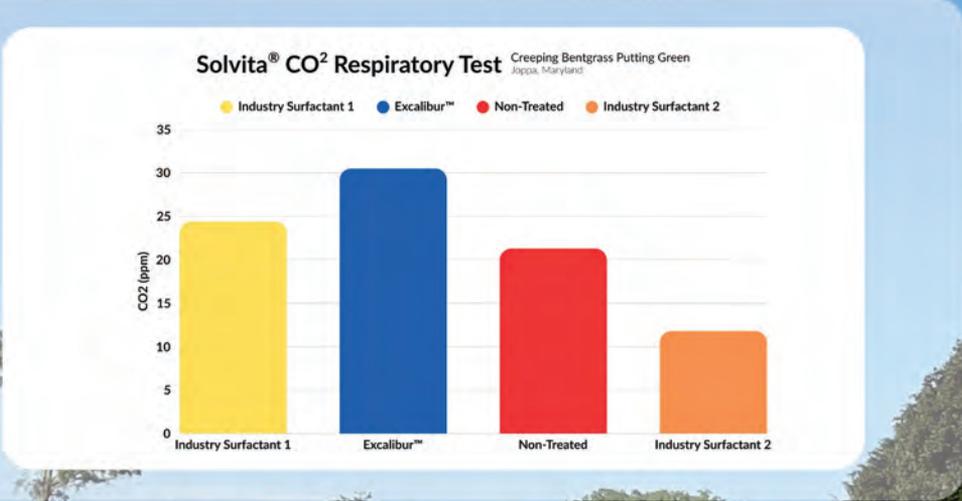
Possibly you’re reading this and you made it through 2025 unscathed. If so, we are truly happy for you. But remember: there might be a day going forward when it is your turn in the turf loss barrel. Think about how you will deal with adversity when it comes your way. 📌

“Confronting the issues on your golf course and taking responsibility for poor conditions might be the difference between keeping your job and looking for a new one.”



**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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