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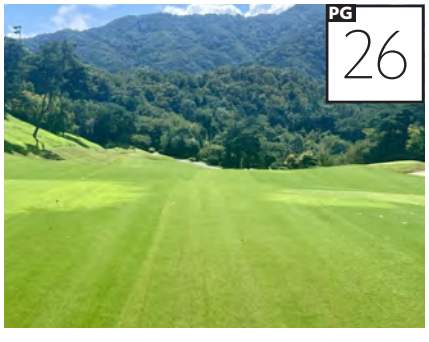

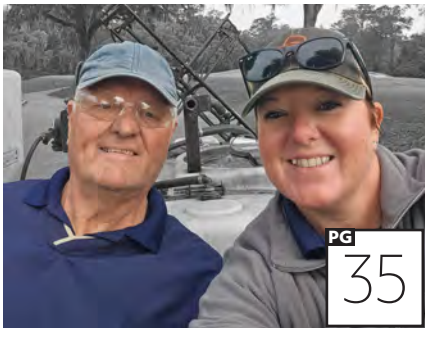

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STILL READY FOR THE CALL

Studied a course ranking list and noticed a trend.

It's not what you think. We solemnly swear we're not golf snobs. Our pleasant publication covers all segments of the golf course maintenance business, not just places with big budgets designed by famous architects buoyed by tenacious marketing efforts. Still, keyboards and eyes wander—all humans possess flaws—and we scour lists attempting to measure courses in an organized fashion.

Three thoughts materialize upon examining these lists:

1. Who paid who to obtain that ranking?!?!
2. Would many of these courses be "ranked" if they operated with pedestrian maintenance budgets?
3. Being a superintendent at a "ranked" venue is a demanding gig.

For our purposes, let's focus on No. 3, where we've noticed a trend since the pandemic.

Superintendents at revered courses are retiring or leaving daily golf maintenance in startling numbers following extended and exemplary careers. Many of these exits have been by choice, a sign of club leaders grasping a superintendent's role in preserving and protecting their treasures.

People separate the fledgling from the revered. Shinnecock Hills Golf Club lacks shine, the charm of Crystal Downs Country Club fades and the punishing pleasantness of Pine Valley Golf Club diminishes without managerial excellence and stability. Great ground and terrific architecture mean little if owners, boards and committees flip department heads faster than the New York Yankees changed managers from the late 1970s until hiring **Joe Torre** ahead of the 1996 season. The Yankees, winners of 27 World Series championships, failed to capture a title from 1979 through 1995, yet they employed 11 different "permanent" or interim managers during that stretch.

A group of talented and determined superintendents, molded and mentored by the recent retirees, are well-prepared to further elevate golf experiences throughout the United States. This generation brings different ideas and worldviews to leadership positions. Raised in the digital age, they will strategically accelerate the integration of emerging technology into golf course maintenance, a topic "Two for the Road" columnists **Dave Delsandro** and **Jeff Corcoran** dissect this month (page 50).

Delsandro and Corcoran left leadership positions at "ranked" courses to establish a consulting firm in 2024. Experience maintaining and now helping clubs with enormous expectations shapes their perspective.

And every superintendent needs some form of help to navigate the current golf market.

Optimism, opportunity and excitement abound as golf continues its steep participation, engagement and acceptance trajectory. Golf is flush with capital, something the industry lacked during the Great Recession.

Don't know much about the Great Recession? A recent retiree will tell you 2007-09 and the subsequent years represented a perilous period for the industry. Imagine grinding through the seasonal extremes not knowing whether your paycheck would clear.

With every superintendent retirement, the industry loses irreplaceable career, agronomic and life insight. Omnipresent one day, into the job shadows the next. But it doesn't need to be this way. A retired superintendent shouldn't be a forgotten professional.

Lee Carr explores the emotions and practicality of retirement this month through the experiences of industry stalwarts **Steve Cook**, **Rick Tegtmeier** and **Jack MacKenzie** (page 42). Their stories demonstrate the importance of entering retirement with a plan. Leaving the daily workforce brings life voids. Numerous superintendents, including **Bob Cook**, the subject of **Kelsie Horner**'s profile (page 35) have retired, only to almost immediately reenter the industry workforce in some capacity. Family and hobbies have kept Cook, Tegtmeier and MacKenzie fulfilled, occupied and ... retired.

The tones in retired superintendents' voices suggest that early mornings, scents of shaved turf, overcoming weather-induced obstacles and the camaraderie established through being a part of a team never fully escape one's life. Passion isn't easily shaken.

Retirees relish being remembered. Answering calls and responding to texts and emails remains a duty. The guidance comes with no caveats or costs. All sides win when retirees remain engaged in the industry conversation.

An individual doesn't require a course—or a ranking—associated with their name to offer an enduring service to the people responsible for making golf the greatest of all games.

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

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TURFHEADS TAKE OVER ISSUE

TURFHEADS TAKE OVER is just warming up

Our yearend special issue has featured more than 100 contributors over its first decade. We'd love for you to be a part of its second.

By Matt LaWell

At the end of every podcast episode I host over on Superintendent Radio Network, I remind listeners that, "We could not do what we do without you."

Because it's the truth.

So many golf course superintendents, assistant superintendents, maintenance team members, equipment managers and technicians, and other turf pros answer our phone calls and our questions. They fill out our surveys. They reply to social media posts and listen to podcast episodes and open email newsletters and, month after month, read the magazine. And, over the last 10 years, 130 of them have *written* for the magazine.

Turfheads Take Over is a decade old now. Over the last 10 December print issues, we have published 136 stories — plus another 45 recipes in the five-year-old Turfheads Guide to Grilling — by a truly astonishing 130 different turf pros. Among those 130, an impressive 33 have been published more than once.

No one has written more stories for Turfheads Take Over than **Charlie Fultz**, now the superintendent and general manager at Heritage Oaks Golf Course in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He has six bylines over the last decade. Will he land a seventh this December? Well, he is a little busier these days thanks to his new Superintendent Radio Network podcast, *Let Me Know!*, which has featured great conversations with **Paul Hurst**, **Jeremiah Mincey**, **Ralph Kepple** and **Dr. Mike Goatley** — none of whom have been published in Turfheads Take Over … yet.

Believe it or not, though, even with six stories, Charlie isn't the *combined* stories and recipes leader. **Brent Downs**, director of agronomy at Otter Creek Golf Course and Harrison Lake Country Club in Columbus, Indiana, has written four stories and three recipes, giving him seven total bylines. Helps a little when your niece is a chef! Oh, and he hosts *The LowDowns* podcast, which has nothing to do with

Turfheads Take Over but is highly entertaining.

Former golf course superintendent **Tyler Bloom** has written five Turfheads Take Over stories — and now produces far more to read and listen to as the founder of Bloom Golf Partners. Like Charlie and Brent, he *also* hosts a podcast, *Leadership on the Links*, which is more than 110 episodes old and is a great listen. (So many podcast hosts. I'm sensing a theme here.)

Avalon Golf Links superintendent **Ron Furlong** has written four Turfheads Take Over stories from his Burlington, Washington, retreat. One of them, *The richest man in the world*, is among the finest pieces of writing we have published in recent years. I teared up the first time I read it. And the second. It's a testament to the power of second chances and friendship and this industry.

Former Florence Country Club superintendent **Richard Brown**, Springdale Golf Club superintendent **Donovan Maguigan**, West Virginia cornerstone **Jason Hollen** and longtime Highlands Country Club superintendent **Brian Stiehler** have each written three stories over the years. So has Idle Hour Country Club superintendent **Matthew Wharton**, who parlayed his trio into a wonderful six-year run as a columnist for the magazine — the last five on the back page as America's Greenkeeper.

Elcona Country Club superintendent **Ryan Cummings** and Treasure Coast leader **Ty Robb** have also pressed send three times, Cummings twice for Grilling Guide recipes, Robb twice for Turfheads Take Over. Like Ryan and Ty, Boone, Downs, longtime agronomist **Kevin Hicks**, Iowa legend **Rick Tegtmeier** and Terry Hills Golf Course institution **Thad Thompson** have also all published both stories and recipes.

No one has been as prolific at the grill as **Don Bloom**, the supervisor of park and golf course at Durand Eastman Park in Rochester, New York, who is the only person published in all five Grilling Guides. FUN FACT: Don's brother, **Brian**, is a trained chef, but Don was the first in the family to publish a recipe.

There are so many wonderful communicators in this industry — and so many multi-talented people — and we're excited to see who has something to say this year. **Want to be a part of the 11th edition of Turfheads Take Over? Send in your story! Any industry topic you think is relevant and important is fair.** Just last year, we published stories about the long arc of a career, planning those last few years, a journey from Zimbabwe, never hosting a major, building a network, transitioning from a career in music to golf course maintenance, and the legacy of an industry legend.

All we ask is that your story be at least 600 words — enough to fill a single page of the magazine — and be your original work. If you have related photographs and imagery, send those along, too! And if you need help throughout the writing and editing process, we're here for you. Feel free to reach out to me at MLaWell@gie.net, publisher + editor-in-chief Guy Cipriano at GCipriano@gie.net or digital editor Kelsie Horner at KHorner@gie.net. The deadline is Friday, Oct. 30. With any luck, this year's Hundred Days of Hell will be well in the past by then, because we can't do what you without you — especially when it comes to our last issue of the year.

Matt LaWell is Golf Course Industry's senior editor.

TURFHEADS TAKEOVER and TURFHEADS GUIDE TO GRILLING: The First 10 Years

Brad Allen Chad Allen **Zach Anderson** Ian Andrew **Mark Bado** David Beanblossom **Don Bloom** Tyler Bloom **Brian Bonlender** Jeremy Boone **Greg Brandriet** Emily Brathwaite **Richard Brown** Kenton Brunson **John Carlone** Nelson Caron **Clifford Carpenter** Paul Carter **Sandy Clark** Greg Cormier **Nathan Crace** Colton Craig **Ryan Cummings** Darren Davis **John Dempsey** Sue de Zwart **Brent Downs** Chris Edmonds **Kennedy Ellis** Bryan Epland **Bob Farren** Larry Feller **Parker Ferren** Mike Fidanza **Scott Forrester** Dan Francis **Katie Francis** Charlie Fultz **Ron Furlong** Ian Gallagher **Adam Garr** Tim Gerrish **Matt Giese** Dean Graves **Richard Green** Gary Grigg **Kevin Hicks** Bob Hingston **Dan Hixson** Randy Hoffacker **Jason Hollen** John Holmes **Ted Horton** Dr. Brandon Horvath **Adam Ikamas** James Jackson **Mike Johnson** Morris Johnson **David Jones** Nate Jordan **Justin King** Kevin Kline **Mark Koepsell** Dr. Alec Kowalewski **Ryan Kraushofer** Scott Krout **Scott Laffin** Will Laine **Zachary LaPorte** Ronnie Leggett **Billy Lewis** Josh Lewis **Donovan Maguigan** Palmer Maples Jr. **Jeff Markow** Ana Martinez **Danny McConnell** Luke McGhee **Monroe Miller** Tyler Minamyer **Anthony Minniti** Andy Morris **"Old Tom Morris"** Eric Morrison **David Morrow** Ken Nice **Sean Novotny** Rich Obertots **Trevor Ploetz** Seth Rainier **John Reilly** Kelly Rensel **Dr. Hannah Rivedal** Nate Rivera **Gina Rizzi** Brian Rizzo **Tyler Robb** Moe Robinson **Gustavo Rodriguez** Jim Roney **Brian J. Roth** Mitch Savage **Jakob Scales** Dr. Chas Schmid **Leasha Schwab** Troy Seeton **Kelly Shumate** Patrick Sisk **Tizayi Tundu Sithole** Craig Sondergaard **Michael Stachowicz** Brian Stiehler **Andrzej Strzepek** Stacey Sumners **Jesse Sutton** Andra Swartz **David Swartzel** Tom Taylor **Rick Tegtmeier** Drew Thompson **Thad Thompson** Mike Tollner **Rob Uzar** Paul Van Buren **Chuck Wagmiller** Russ Warner **Matthew Wharton** Zack Wike **Ashley Wilkinson** Brian Zimmerman

Tributer Resort

COURSE NEWS

Tributer Resort, a golf and residential destination along the shores of Virginia's Lake Anna, announced plans for a new private, 18-hole championship golf course by **Tiger Woods'** TGR Design. … Escalante Golf started a multi-phase expansion at Kingsley Club, highlighted by a new golf course designed by **Bill Coore** and **Ben Crenshaw**. At the center of the northern Michigan project is construction of the club's second 18-hole golf course. … Stowe (Vermont) Country Club completed a multi-year, full-course redesign led by golf course design firm Beau Welling Design. … Led by Zinkand Golf Design, renovations at Big Foot (Wisconsin) Country Club are now complete. … Pizà Golf was selected by Invited to renovate Jupiter Country Club. Redesign of the Florida course will be overseen by **Agustin Pizá**, co-founder of the company. … Brooke Management Group, a New York-based golf operations company led by LPGA professional **Kelley Brooke**, is now managing Pine Ridge Golf Course in Coram, New York, on Long Island.

INDUSTRY BUZZ

Advanced Turf Solutions and The Aquatrols Company released HydroPak Percolate NextGen, a new soil surfactant that improves on the first-generation Percolate product. … Playbooks for Golf's Playbooks Coverage software has extended its connected capabilities with the John Deere Operations Center through the John Deere API services. … AQUA-AID Solutions launched a dedicated website tailored specifically to its Canadian distribution partners and end users. The platform was developed in partnership with OSC Turf — AQUA-AID Solutions' master distributor for the Canadian market. … ezLocator launched GEOEZ, a GPS-guided pin placement system that helps golf courses precisely execute hole locations while reducing daily setup time.

PEOPLE NEWS

Eric Davis is the new golf course superintendent at Split Rail Golf Club in Aledo, Texas. Davis will oversee maintenance of the 18-hole **Phil Lumsden**-designed course. … The Aquatrols Company hired **Michael Willadsen** as its new farm manager at Aura Farm, the company's 10-acre research and development facility in southern New Jersey. … Following the retirement of longtime territory manager **John Spaulding**, Syngenta named **Bryce Lyons** as territory manager for the Midwest turf region.

Tartan Talks 121

Seven million trail users annually pass Campus Commons Golf Course.

"It's right in the center of all the action" says CourseCo superintendent **Kurtis Wolford**, whose company manages the course for Sacramento County Regional Parks.

And Campus Commons is now getting more golf action, thanks to a significant renovation where Wolford and architect **Damian Pascuzzo** mastered the skill of collaboration. Besides collaborating with each other to renovate Campus Commons, the pair worked with a myriad of public agencies due to a snug Northern California location along the American River.

The result of careful planning and calculated communication is a vibrant and inviting 9-hole, par-3 layout in a high-traffic spot. Wolford says Campus Commons is "right smack in a giant urban area," while Pascuzzo, who owns a golf course architecture firm with former PGA Tour player **Steve Pate**, adds that the 17-acre site boasts "some unique characteristics that made it very attractive."

Early returns suggest plenty of golfers — and bikers and runners — are intrigued by Campus Commons, as player numbers swell to around 4,000 rounds in peak months. "It's growing quickly," Wolford says. "We have a lot of eyes on this property."

Wolford and Pascuzzo share insights from their experiences on a joint *Tartan Talks* podcast. The episode can be found on the Superintendent Radio Network page of popular podcast distribution platforms.

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Q&A

DANI McFADDEN

Product Manager, PBI-Gordon Corporation

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3 When is the best time to apply Atrimmec for growth regulation?

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4 Can Atrimmec be used for more than growth regulation?

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No. Atrimmec is designed to reduce the frequency of pruning—not eliminate it. Most users still perform an initial shaping, then apply Atrimmec to extend the time between maintenance visits. The result is plants that stay attractive longer, require fewer return trips and maintain a more consistent appearance throughout the season. Under ideal growing conditions or in regions with long growing seasons, a second application may be beneficial for continued growth regulation.

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Amanda Potter

ELIZABETHTON GOLF COURSE

One constant in the turf industry is that actual responsibilities take precedence over job descriptions or titles.

Amanda Potter is learning this as the interim superintendent at Elizabethton Golf Course, a municipally owned daily-fee facility in Elizabethton, Tennessee, in the northeastern part of the state, about two hours east of Knoxville.

She took a job at the club last May and assumed her present post last September when her boss, **Cameron Sells**, who had been the head superintendent, was named the general manager.

Potter has a varied background in turf. A University of Tennessee graduate who earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in Knoxville, Potter played a lot of softball growing up and was part of the grounds crew that maintained the soccer and softball fields while at UT. She also spent a summer working at a minor league soccer/softball stadium. After college, she became the softball stadium's head groundskeeper.

Appearing on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast with host **Rick Woelfel**, Potter compared maintaining golf courses and sports fields.

"A sports field is about one hole of an 18-hole golf course," she says. "Everything on that sports field has to be perfect every single time, right? You can't have one spot on that sports field that's not perfect because that could mean an injury to somebody.

"Getting into that kind of mindset and bringing it over to golf, there are a ton of golf courses that are perfect all the time. At this one, we're trying our best to get there."

Potter is "getting there" with a seven-person crew. So, how does she set her priorities?

"Obviously, the greens are the most important," she says. "Everyone here is going to step on every single green at some point. So, I'm going to start at the green and work out from there. Greens, fairways, tees, [places] where everyone is going to be, and then we kind of work out from there. A lot of our time is spent trying to keep the grass mowed, and keeping things fertilized and sprayed. Moisture management on the greens .... we have so much play, we can't keep the moisture at what we want for super firm and fast conditions. We have 150 people playing each day."

When Potter was initially hired, Sells was running a solo operation. He didn't have an assistant and Potter eventually assumed a wide range of responsibilities. But those responsibilities grew when Sells assumed his present position and Potter was named the interim superintendent.

"I was doing a lot of things as an assistant, I thought," she says, "but still, there are a lot of things that come with being the interim superintendent. Cameron is still here, so I can hop in his office and ask a question, which is nice to have and he's the one who has been here on property since the city took it over [in the fall of 2023]. But I'm the one making the decision and if I make the wrong one, it's my fault."

Potter attended the GCSAA Women's Leadership Academy last fall and found it to be a career-changing experience.

"They really dove into our personality types and how we use that to lead," she says. "I've been doing a lot of deep diving to see how I can change my leadership style a little bit to more accommodate everybody."

Potter was also part of the corps of female volunteers at Riviera Country Club for the 2026 U.S. Women's Open. It was her second consecutive Women's Open stint. She notes the volunteers, male and female, are there in a supportive role.

"You're there to help the Riviera staff," she says. "They've done all the legwork, right? You're just there to pick up leaves out of the rough, to make sure everything inside the ropes is perfect."

"I've been doing a lot of deep diving to see how I can change my leadership style a little bit to more accommodate everybody."

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Go together

Landseer Communications and Consulting founder **Delphine Tseng** is using coloring pages and educational books to spread the word about golf course's ecological benefits.

Delphine Tseng

When **Delphine Tseng** was attending college at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute for Science and Technology Studies, she needed to write a thesis. Her topic? Why golf courses are bad for the environment.

Her studies didn't go as planned.

"The more research I did, the more I found out there's not a lot of evidence that golf courses are inherently bad for the environment," Tseng says. "I actually found a lot of opposing evidence."

Tseng's initial thoughts were wrong. Golf courses do benefit the environment. Since then, she has worked to share that message with as many communities as she can.

"I cannot imagine how many people out there still think what I thought," Tseng says. "So, every book and story and educational material that we make, we make with this in mind. This is a communication tool for not just golfers, but for non-golfers alike."

After finishing her education, Tseng worked for Audubon International for four years. "That was where I started to understand how important it was to do community outreach and education for not just golfers, but almost more importantly for non-golfers, as well," she says.

Now president and founder of Landseer Communications and Consulting, Tseng and her team work with golf courses and resorts to create hardcover books and coloring books reflecting wildlife and nature scenes found on the property. Coloring books are aimed for 5- to 12-year-olds but can be enjoyed by anyone. Nonfiction books are written for older readers and families to enjoy together.

With a goal of informing communities of the environmental values of golf courses, Tseng opted to use animals. "Because that's the most eye-catching thing that you can use to draw attention from the public," she says. "You'd be hard-pressed to find someone who just says, like, I do not care about animals, I don't care about these subtly cute fuzzy things, so we use that to draw people's attention and to catch people's eyes and ears."

Most recently, Tseng published "Wild Hearts of The Ryder Cup," an illustrated nonfiction book exploring each living creature found on the Bethpage Black course. Featuring creatures from dragonflies to bats, the educational book was on sale at the 2025 Ryder Cup.

Writing a book for Bethpage and the Ryder Cup is something Tseng dreamed about for almost a decade. After lots of approval and perseverance, she started writing it in 2023. She credits Bethpage's dedicated staff, including **Victor Azzaretto**, **Alexa Roldos, Esther Sherry, Jim Jones** and **Yael B. Weiss,** for the book's success.

"I write all the fun facts and stories, but they're the ones who provide solid evidence that they do live there," Tseng says. "They have pictures, and they can tell me what nesting box is occupied by what bird, who's hatching now and what raptor nests are active with which pair."

Teaching the community about the wildlife present on the property is an effective educational tool. The presence of a variety of species is reflective of the health of the land.

"If you see raptors, that means that the ecology and the biodiversity here is healthy enough to support apex predators," Tseng explains.

Aside from being an author, Tseng speaks and teaches at seminars. Her lessons emphasize a key mentality: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

By bringing together golfers and non-golfers, Tseng believes communities can work collaboratively to protect the fauna and flora of the golf course. It's better to do it together than go at it alone.

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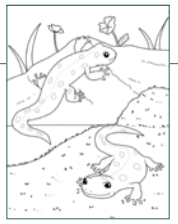

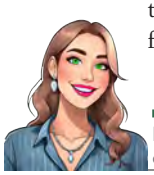

KELSIE HORNER is *Golf Course Industry's* digital editor. To submit ideas about conservation-focused programs or actions at your course, email her at khorner@gie.net.

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LOCAL BUSINESSES, GLOBAL CONCERNS

The war with Iran, which, at this writing, continues in fits and starts while hopefully heading toward a resolution, is the latest reminder that golf courses are affected by disruptions in global supply chains just as any other business might be … and sometimes moreso.

The open again/closed again status of the Strait of Hormuz has disrupted oil exports and led to increased energy prices. Superintendents, course owners and managers see the trickle-down effect of geopolitical tensions in the cost of fuel for maintenance vehicles and gas-powered golf cars.

Sanctions on Iran also have limited trade routes and access to markets, contributing to spikes in the price of fertilizers and pesticides, as well as shortages. A survey by the American Farm Bureau earlier this year found that fertilizer prices have jumped by 47 percent and that roughly 70 percent of American farmers said they were unable to afford their fertilizer needs.

The recent hostilities in the Middle East have underscored that businesses reliant on the efficient flow of products and materials should consider the following measures to mitigate risks to their operations:

Supply chain reliability

Superintendents need to become more knowledgeable about their own suppliers and supply chains. In addition to the Strait of Hormuz, numerous supply choke points, including the Suez Canal and the Panama Canal, also could disrupt trade as once-small players on the global stage make paper tigers of far more powerful nations. Supply shortages, interruptions and price surges likely will follow the pattern seen in recent months. Against this backdrop, many courses have put greater focus on alternative suppliers. It's a smart strategy.

Labor inconsistencies

Superintendents should become more knowledgeable about their own access to personnel, which can affect their labor budgets and workflow capability. The U.S. national unemployment rate was at 4.2 percent as of June. The broader U.S. unemployment rate (which includes underemployed and discouraged workers) sits at 7.9 percent. Obviously, access to capable and motivated workers who maintain course conditions is essential. Thus, golf course superintendents must understand their local workforce and focus on hiring and retaining the best among them. The consistent supply of staff enables one to optimize training effectiveness and operational efficiencies.

Finance

Superintendents need to understand how global conditions affect the cost of money. Superintendents are not moving billions of dollars across the globe, but many of their sources for equipment and materials are doing exactly that. The ebb and flow of world finance affects lease rates — especially when most leases have stipulations that allow for changes in price and other terms "in the event of war." Your budget relies on being current and accurate with your finance costs. Those who lease equipment should also be aware of timing issues that can affect borrowing costs and overall lease favorability.

Reading the room

Superintendents do well to better understand the national mood. Americans quickly soured on the Iran war when they became progressively inconvenienced. Similarly, golfers become dissatisfied and lose confidence in their superintendents when course conditions begin to decline. This is not to say that golf can change the national mood. It is to say that grumpy people often stop spending on luxuries, like golf and club memberships.

Uncertain times and shifting circumstances create stress and apprehension for everyone. Remember that the primary duties of a management leader are to manage resources — supplies, financial and human — as well as information and anxiety.

When you see something, say something. When superintendents begin to see evidence of supply chain disruptions — among their suppliers, in their staff and labor pool, and in their ability to track budgets accurately and on a timely basis — it's time to raise their hands. Speak up and ensure that your observations are known to the managers and owners at your facility.

Beyond being a primary responsibility, speaking up demonstrates the considerable value that knowledgeable and alert superintendents bring to their facilities.

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

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YES, IT STILL CAN BE DONE

You're more likely to encounter gigantic cattle and sprawling gas stations than bentgrass greens in Central Texas. But that doesn't mean they're extinct. Learn how a few determined superintendents keep cool-season turf thriving in a blast furnace.

By **Bill Bryant**

Among the things well-suited to Central Texas — Longhorn cattle, live oak trees, Buc-ee's and conservative-leaning politicians — you're not likely to find any mention of bentgrass.

That's because the conditions in which bentgrass flourishes, including moderate daytime and cool nighttime temperatures, low humidity and acidic soil packed with essential nutrients, are far more common in the Northeast, Midwest and Pacific Northwest than they are in Central Texas. The distinctive climate of this area is characterized by scorching summers, mild winters and rainfall patterns that run the gamut, from parching droughts to the unusually saturated conditions experienced this spring and early summer.

But Central Texas — south of Waco, north of San Antonio and west of Austin into the Hill Country — is exactly where a small group of diligent superintendents are growing healthy bentgrass and spreading what they believe is the veiled truth about what might be golf's most misunderstood turfgrass. As one veteran superintendent of the bentgrass wars puts it, "You can grow bentgrass here. You just have to know what you're doing."

> "YOU'RE ALWAYS WALKING A THIN LINE OF HOW FAR TO PUSH YOUR GREENS WITHOUT THEM DYING OUT TOO MUCH. THAT'S WHAT SEPARATES SUPERINTENDENTS, IN MY OPINION: HOW FAR ARE THEY WILLING TO GO?"
>
> — ALLEN HOPSON

And while it is considered a labor-intensive and often expensive choice for greens because of its watering, mowing, fertilization and pest-management requirements, bentgrass is also a gold standard by which other putting surfaces are measured. That goes for superintendents, competitive players, real estate developers and course owners, all of whom enjoy the bragging rights that come with bentgrass greens.

"I appreciate the fact that bentgrass tends to reward well-struck shots and good decision-making," says **Anthony Pragano**, a low handicapper who plays courses with both bentgrass and Bermudagrass greens throughout Central Texas. "It feels like the course is testing my skill rather than my ability to manage variables in the turf, and that's a challenge I enjoy."

Laurie Chapman, who co-owns Lakecliff Golf Club in Spicewood, about 30 miles northwest of Austin, with her husband, **Dave**, says the club's bentgrass greens are costly to maintain but worth the investment. "Our bentgrass greens are what make the club extraordinary for our members and their guests," she says. She also considers them "one of our greatest marketing tools."

It's for the praise of golfers like Pragano, owners like Chapman and their own satisfaction that superintendents continue to push the bentgrass envelope in the Lone Star State. And while they're at it, they're debunking myths and exposing the paradoxical nature of what might be golf's most misunderstood turfgrass.

'INSANITY' EXPLAINED

Jamie Kizer, a third-generation greenkeeper who has worked at several bentgrass courses in his four-decade career in Central Texas, calls bentgrass the "Rolls-Royce of putting surfaces." In the same breath, and with a wry smile, he also questions the wisdom of superintendents who try to grow it under such challenging conditions. "We're growing a cool-season grass in an arid environment," Kizer says. "It's kind of insanity, really."

Kizer is not the only superintendent who thinks it's a little crazy to try to rear the problem child of golf greens under such harsh conditions.

Asked where bentgrass would absolutely not be a wise choice for golf greens, **Allen Hopson**, the superintendent at Llano River Golf Course, about 75 miles northwest of Austin, considers the question before responding: "Uh, I don't know. I would say here."

And when Lakecliff superintendent **Haden Dillard** reels off his list of bentgrass success factors, he admits "Central Texas doesn't check any of those boxes."

After their dire assessments, each of those superintendents expels the self-satisfied laugh of an iconoclast: They've been told growing bentgrass here is risking their careers and harder than riding an ornery bucking bull named Buttercup. But fortified with ample parts Texas pride, resilience and independence, as well as some hard-earned experience, they're enjoying the ride while proving the naysayers wrong.

"A lot of people don't know that bentgrass can even live in this environment," says Dillard, 33, who is in his fifth year tending to some of the region's more envied bentgrass greens at Lakecliff.

Another misconception is that bentgrass requires extensive maintenance and continuous babysitting. "People think you have to be on bentgrass all the time, out there hand watering all day," Dillard adds. "That's a total lie."

Overall, Dillard describes his maintenance philosophy as "less is more."

He's found that less water and less fertilizer than many think is required for bentgrass produces more of the slender, densely packed blades that help a golf ball sit up a little higher and minimize the friction that causes putts to veer offline. It's a philosophy Dillard absorbed during his 10 years as an assistant at nearby Austin Golf Club under the late **Doug Petersan**. "Doug forgot more about growing bentgrass than most anybody will ever know about it," he says.

On a normal summer day, when it's not unusual for temperatures to climb past 100 degrees in Central Texas — in 2023, Austin recorded 45 straight days of 100 degrees or

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hotter — Dillard's routine is to saturate Lakecliff's A-1 and A-4 bentgrass greens from one foot into the collar to three feet into the green and touch up problem areas detected inside that boundary. That process occupies Dillard and a crew member from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. Around 1 p.m., they'll run a one- to two-minute cycle with irrigation heads, if needed. At 2 p.m., Dillard and his 10-person crew are heading home.

"It's really the nighttime temperatures that are more important than the highs during the day," Dillard says. "It can be 105 in the afternoon, but if it cools down at night, and as long as you have healthy root zones, bentgrass will survive and even thrive."

Dillard explains what might be considered another counterintuitive theory about maintaining a grass known to perform best in moist conditions.

"The drier you can keep the plants and not lose any turf, the stronger and deeper the roots will grow. Those roots are looking for someplace to go." Dillard says this while marveling at a cup he cut earlier in the day that showed 13 inches of root growth. "And if you're watering bentgrass after 3 o'clock in the afternoon here, you're asking for trouble."

Dillard is also a proponent of needle-tine aeration, along with PGRs and topdressing every other week. Mowing heights range from .100 in the spring, fall and winter to .120 from June through September. He knows he has Lakecliff's greens rolling to his satisfaction when an approach shot hits "like it's landing on a tabletop and rolls 10 feet past the hole."

Other cultural practices include putting down one-tenth of a pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet every two weeks during the growing season. They drop back to once every month from November to February, "when bentgrass is happiest." He also sticks to a strict fungicide routine and keeps a close eye on moisture readings and the buildup of organic matter in the soil profile.

It takes some determined and talented people to keep bentgrass thriving in Central Texas. Top and middle: Lakecliff Golf Club's Elizabeth Rodriguez, Gabe Okumura and Haden Dillard. Bottom: Texas turf veteran Scott Hamilton.

© TOP AND MIDDLE: COURTESY OF LAKECLIFF GOLF CLUB; BOTTOM: COURTESY OF SCOTT HAMILTON

'TOUGHER' THAN MANY THINK

Those only modestly familiar with bentgrass's reputation as the high thread count version of putting surfaces have been led to believe that it requires a hefty maintenance budget that only high-end private clubs would consider. Hopson is deflating that theory at Llano River, a city-owned and -maintained course

70 miles northwest of Austin. His crew varies between three and five (assuming he can get one of the guys in the pro shop to pitch in), and he manages a budget that some courses lose among the couch cushions in their elaborate clubhouses.

"I'm always here," says Hopson, who grew up near the course he now manages. "I do the actual spraying. I think a lot of supers spray their own greens because of how detrimental it can be if you make a mistake. You mix the wrong chemicals, and you come in the next day and your greens are dead, that's gonna get you fired."

More than mixing the wrong chemicals, even experienced superintendents worry about what they cannot control: Mother Nature.

Superintendents go on bentgrass patrol when the sun hides behind clouds for more than a few hot and humid days. Those are the conditions under which the bane of superintendents' existence, *Pythium* root rot, rears its destructive head. "I have a *Pythium* preventive fungicide out there at all times," Dillard says.

Ironically, one of the things that bentgrass greens like best — moisture — is also a threat to their livelihood if it comes at the wrong time and in combination with high humidity.

"Keeping your greens kind of dried out, that's the best thing for them," says Hopson, who has spent seven years introducing 007 and Pure Distinction cultivars during his run as a superintendent along the Llano River. "You're always walking a thin line of how far to push your greens without them dying out too much. That's what separates superintendents, in my opinion: How far are they willing to go?"

Scott Hamilton, the recently retired superintendent whose résumé includes stops at prestigious Escondido Golf and Lake Club in Horseshoe Bay, Barton Creek Lakeside in Spicewood and Spanish Oaks Golf Club in Bee Cave, explains: "Once it gets hot, too much rain raises the humidity and creates a situation where you have to stay on your toes, stay on top of your fungicide programs and really be careful about putting on more water than you have to cool them off. One-hundred-degree days with high humidity doubles the risk."

Along with the cautionary tales

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you'll hear from Central Texas superintendents about the precision and finesse required in growing bentgrass successfully, there's also a school of thought that might seem paradoxical. Turns out, it's another myth they're happy to deflate.

"Bent is a very tough grass if you let it be tough," Kizer says. "But most people, they baby that stuff. They overmanage it to where it really can't do anything on its own."

Hamilton, who commands rockstar status among his fellow superintendents for his body of work and the knowledge he shared during a decorated career, puts it another way: "You can't be scared of bentgrass," he says. "If you get scared, you can start running around thinking that bent is puny, and it's not supposed to be there because the climate is too tough. Bentgrass is tougher than you think."

But when Mother Nature decides she's been too soft on Central Texas this year, with all the rain and all those days in the 80s and low 90s, and she opens the blast furnace—like she did in late June—experienced superintendents know there's only one survival tactic for bentgrass greens.

"You just try to hang on and keep them alive," Hopson says. "And pray a little."

Bill Bryant is a Texas-based writer and Golf Course Industry contributor.

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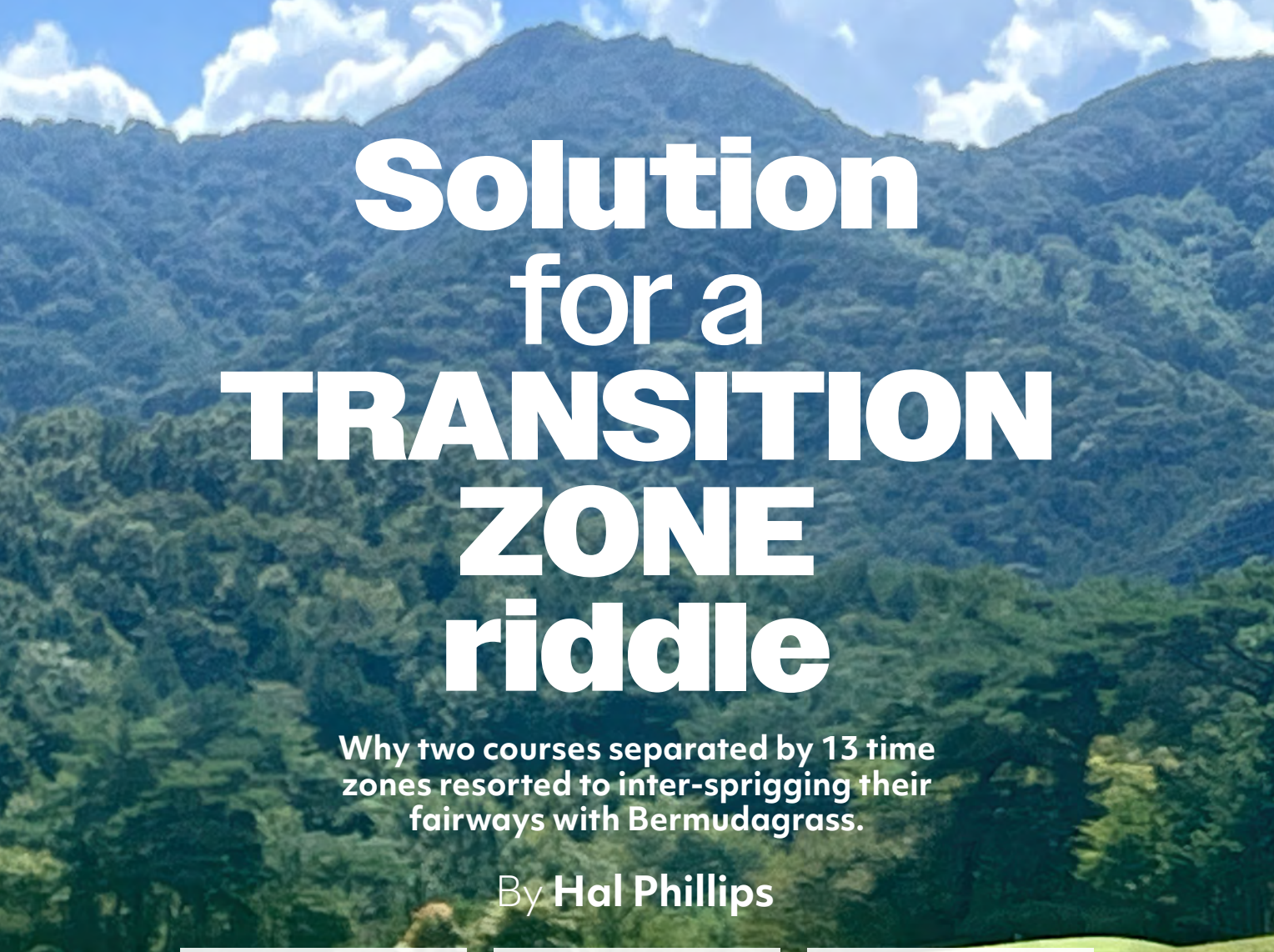

Solution for a TRANSITION ZONE riddle

Why two courses separated by 13 time zones resorted to inter-sprigging their fairways with Bermudagrass.

By **Hal Phillips**

GlenRiddle Golf Club superintendent **Butch Howard** has no political interest in the climate-change debate. All the Rutgers Turfgrass graduate knows is this: By 2021, the bentgrass fairways he maintained on his War Admiral course had become more trouble than they were worth.

Accordingly, over the July 4th weekend five years ago, he transitioned those fairways from bentgrass to Tahoma 31 Bermudagrass via a three-day inter-sprigging process. Howard reopened the Berlin, Maryland, course in late August 2021. From that point forward, his life has proved a lot simpler.

"With the weather, I don't want to push anyone's buttons, but our climate here on the Eastern Shore of Maryland is changing," Howard says. "Whether it's permanent or not, I can't say. But it's gotten warmer, wetter and hotter here and the bentgrass we had on the fairways had become impractical. The greens? That's only four acres of turf. Anyone can make that work.

"We felt one of the new Bermudas was the way to go. Going on five years post transition? No regrets."

The challenges of maintaining cool-season fairways in the northern Transition Zone — in a warming climate — aren't limited to the Mid-Atlantic United States. South Korean courses in the country's humid, subtropical south deal with precisely the same issues.

Back in summer 2024, the chairman of Golfzon — South Korea's largest course owner and operator, with more than 20 clubs under contract — demanded improvements at Suncheon Golf Club. Located at 34.57 degrees north of the equator, the Kentucky bluegrass fairways at Suncheon had been struggling for several years with the increasing heat and humidity, just like GlenRiddle had.

At 38.33 degrees latitude, GlenRiddle is a shade farther north than Suncheon.

Golfzon leadership contacted **Rob Glucksman** at Outfield Nursery Enterprises, Ltd. (ONE), the regional distributor for Tahoma 31 across most of East Asia. Glucksman is based in Hong Kong, but he was born and raised in Maryland. He'd heard about Howard's success at GlenRiddle.

"The first thing I did was reach out to **Chad Adcock**, who supplied the Tahoma to Butch Howard," says Glucksman, referring to the vice president of Charles City, Virginia-based Sod Production Services, the global license holder for Tahoma 31 from Oklahoma State University. "Chad was coming to

inspect Outfield's nursery in Danang, central Vietnam, as part of his annual Asia swing. We talked him into adding a stop in Korea so he could visit Golfzon's headquarters in Daejeon.

"GlenRiddle's inter-sprigging experience was not on the original agenda. But when Golfzon expressed their concern about how long such a conversion would close the course, Chad was ready — because of the GlenRiddle case study."

Six months later, Outfield delivered 54 tons of washed, refrigerated sprigs from Vietnam to Suncheon. The Golfzon team used a Bermuda King no-till row planter to inter-sprig all 18 holes in five days.

"Our team hadn't actually seen the inter-sprigging process done before, so we were apprehensive when we went back in late August, two months after the sprigging, for a site review," Glucksman says. "By the time we passed the second tee, we were practically giggling — it looked so good. We touched base with Golfzon again in November [2025]. We were all expecting to find Kentucky bluegrass popping up through the fall, but they found very little."

War Admiral is the private, members' layout at 36-hole GlenRiddle, which is named for the horse farm that once occupied this property. It wasn't just any horse farm: 1937 Triple Crown winner War Admiral and Man O' War — who won the 1920 Preakness and Belmont Stakes after his owner kept him out of that year's Kentucky Derby, and who shared athlete of the year honors with **Babe Ruth** — were both born and reared here. Hence the course names. The original barn houses the club's pro shop and restaurant.

Howard was already tending to Patriot Bermudagrass fairways on the public Man O' War layout. The 2021 fairway transition to Tahoma 31 on War Admiral simplified his life in that context, too. But the new variety has proved a step up in every respect.

"We're in the 90-90 club. It rarely gets above 95 out here in Ocean City because of the sea breezes, but we're regularly in the low 90s — temperature and humidity, all summer long," Howard says. "You wake up and the humidity is 80. We do spray for spring dead spot, but that's a fall application here. We typically spray for that in September and October — when it gets below 52 degrees — so it doesn't express itself in the spring."

After graduating from Rutgers with his turfgrass degree, Howard landed his first head superintendent position in 2000. He grew in The Links at Lighthouse Sound, a resort course in nearby Ocean City, then stayed on. From there he moved to River Downs Golf Club in Finksburg, Maryland, before settling in for 17 years at the private Bon Air Country Club in Shrewsbury, Pennsylvania. Working in southern Pennsylvania educated Howard about how traditional cool-season grasses behave these days in the northern reaches of a transition zone.

"Shortly after I arrived at Bon Air, we switched over to ryegrass fairways because the single-row irrigation could not support the bent," he says. "The spraying those bentgrass fairways required? It was not manageable, and it's a lot hotter these days. We did have one gray leaf spot summer, which made the club second-guess their decision to transition the fairways. They did move to double-row irrigation eventually, but they're ryegrass to this day."

Before he left Bon Air for GlenRiddle, Howard was already convinced that Bermudagrass was the better solution, a perfectly viable answer to annual increases in heat and humidity. Even though he'd never taken care of Bermudagrass fairways. Anywhere.

"I was gonna try it on my driving range tee at Bon Air before I left," he says. "My research found the Bermuda was great for divots; it heals up so much better in the summer. For any range tee in Maryland, I'd think that would be a no-brainer. But I do think southern Pennsylvania would be my limit. Anywhere north of York would be pushing it.

"The [climate] changes are so much more gradual and subtle. But when you've been around it long enough, the changes are obvious. I'd think almost anywhere in Maryland could have Bermuda fairways today."

An 18-hole fairway transition is no driving range conversion. Back in 2020, when Howard moved to GlenRiddle and started exploring the idea of inter-sprigging, he found that not a lot of Maryland clubs had undertaken such a process. Most of those who'd moved from bentgrass to Bermudagrass fairways had taken the slow road — a route that did not appeal to Howard or his owners. Just as it had not appealed to Golfzon, the owner and operator at Suncheon.

"Most of them were trying to turn it around in a year or two," Howard says. "They'd put the Bermuda in and just wait for it to take over. You gotta work your way up to something like that, and regardless, transitions are very site specific. Here, I never felt like the course was set up that well for bent anyway. A lot of treelined fairways. Bent likes the air to move.

"We started our 2021 transition with course aerification over the July 4th weekend, right after the member-guest, when heat and humidity here make it hard to keep the bent alive anyway."

Sprigging began July 6, 2021. It took Riverside Turf—the install division of Sod Production Services—three days to sprig 32 acres of fairways and four acres of tees. War Admiral reopened for play the last week of August.

"As you can see in some of the photos, the bentgrass in many areas completely melted away on account the mechanical sprigging process, the water and the fertilization in the heat of the summer," Howard says. "It probably took a year for all the bent to disappear. The inter-sprigging did what Roundup would have done. It just took a bit longer.

"If we did it over again, I'd go with a solid-tine aerification ahead of the transition. As it was, we cored it and left the cores on top, then sprigged into it. It got a little muddy out there. I think it would have been cleaner and might have got the same result if we solid-tined and loosened the soil up that way. Of course, summer is also the optimum time for the new Bermuda to grow. If we did not have the member-guest, maybe mid-to-late June would have been the very best time to transition—for us.

"But we originally targeted six weeks for the transition. We did it in seven. I tell people eight. We sprayed for invasive weeds, mostly kyllinga, in October of '21 and again in the spring of '22. But that's it."

Twelve thousand miles to the west, Glucksman and Golfzon remain similarly impressed. So much so that they're keen to explore the possibilities — and the limits — of Tahoma 31's staying powers.

"We're curious to see just how far north Tahoma 31 can be successful," Glucksman says. "Seoul is colder for longer than Suncheon. This past winter, Tahoma survived a week in southern Maryland and Virginia with highs of 25 [degrees Fahrenheit] and nighttime lows below 15, with virtually no kill. We know it's planted in Chicago and Kansas City with subsurface heat, but we're still testing just how low the temps can be, for how long, and still have the grass survive the winter.

"Of course, if areas do fail, another advantage of Tahoma is that, being Bermudagrass, it will grow back in quickly once the weather warms. It's not our area of expertise here at ONE, but we're told reseeding cool-season fairways after summer die-offs or winterkill is even slower than growing in zoysiagrass."

Independence Day 2026 marked the fifth anniversary of Howard's transition to Tahoma 31. Any change that substantial comes with pros and cons. But as to the latter, Howard can identify only one.

"American golfers like their green grass year-round, so I think that's the biggest con: Either you paint fairways for fall and spring, or you overseed. We have tried both and the owner prefers overseeding. This will limit your weed-control choices. You almost have to treat weed control as a cool-season exercise until the Bermuda gets going."

In Korea, where many zoysiagrass courses go brown during dormancy, the insistence on color is not so pronounced, Glucksman says. Tahoma 31 goes off color too, but he adds it will come out of dormancy earlier and faster than zoysiagrass.

Howard has observed similar color changes with Tahoma 31 in Maryland.

"But that's about it for downsides," Howard adds. "In August, these Tahoma fairways look great and, that time of year, we'd normally be chasing our tails trying to keep the bent fairways alive! This Bermuda lets me sleep at night. We have 36 holes of it now. I have 80 acres of fairway where I don't have to worry about crazy stuff that makes your stomach sink, like catastrophic *Pythium*—everywhere. And that allows us to concentrate on keeping the greens OK, because those are still bentgrass.

"The Patriot is more of an upright grower, so we regulate the growth a little more over there to reduce scalping in the summer months," he says. "I find the Tahoma maybe gets dollar spot every five to six weeks in the summer, but I spray for that once in June, July and August. You have to spray when you notice it—on a curative basis, not a preventative basis. It gives the appearance of merely being droughty. When you get that first look, maybe you move on because it presents so differently.

"On the second day it's, 'Oh, yeah, it's yellowing: dollar spot.' But when we first transitioned, we noticed it's not your typical shotgun blast-looking dollar spot. It's much more subtle on the Tahoma. The first time it happened, it took me a week or so to figure it out. In my mind, I guess I thought Bermuda can't get it. But you can—only very mild."

I spoke with Howard in early April 2026, when an unseasonable cold snap had settled over the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Five years down the road, he's still learning what the Tahoma will do, what his Patriot Bermuda will do and how much the climate is still changing.

"The last photo I sent you was taken this morning: It was 36 degrees outside," he says. "This past winter was the coldest it's been since I've been here. It got down into the single digits for a week. I don't see any winterkill at all.

"We do overseed with ryegrass for color, and we have a lot of spring play. I thought my ryegrass overseed from last October would have died, but it did pop finally. It germinated, but it's not root heavy. If the cold was gonna kill anything, it might have been the rye, which is sort of exposed. When that popped back, I was confident the Bermuda would be fine."

Hal Phillips is a Maine-based freelance writer, managing director of Mandarin Media, Inc., and former editor-in-chief of Golf Course News.

THE 'R WORD'

Let's get one thing out of the way now: I am not planning to retire any time soon! So, no one should come poking around asking when they can clean out my office, measure my desk or if they can have my soil probe.

But I've been doing some form of "this" for more than 47 years, which means the "R word" turns up increasingly often in conversation.

That has gotten me to wonder: When is the best time to retire? Some of us just know. For others, there's the worry that all the things we assume we'll be able to do — learn a new language, work on your golf game … nothing — are not only overrated but bad for us.

I mean, it's not as if our brains automatically start to decline at any particular chronological age. So, should a number mandate when we step away from the industry? And what if I still have knowledge, passion and a desire to keep working? To impart wisdom? To help others? To contribute?

I don't know of many superintendents who made a clean break. It's hard to go from full throttle to hard stop (except for sleeping past 4:30 a.m.; that's pretty easy to get used to). Instead, the exit ramp leads to consulting or a role with a turfgrass, equipment or irrigation company. Leaving the golf course doesn't have to mean leaving the industry. Turf gets under your fingernails and, apparently, into our bloodstreams.

As much as any other profession I know, the superintendent's identity is wrapped tightly around work: the early morning tour, the radio chatter, the weather radar, the spray window, the member comments (and complaints), the tournament deadline, the irrigation break that chooses Friday afternoon to reveal itself. For generations of us, the job wasn't something you did. It was who you were and how you lived.

Which is why I find myself looking at younger professionals — not just superintendents but across a wide range of industries — with a mix of curiosity, admiration, and, yes, a little envy. Gen Z and younger millennials are often described as wanting a work-life balance. Some think that indicates a lack of commitment. I am not so sure. I think they are being more honest — and more intelligent — about what a profession should ask of a person.

In my early days in the trenches, course care could feel like a dawn-to-dusk endurance contest. The superintendent who stayed the latest, worried the longest and sacrificed the most was considered the most dedicated. On the one hand, that mentality produced extraordinary golf courses and some remarkable careers. But it also led to burnout, missed family moments and accepting that exhaustion was simply part of the uniform.

Today's superintendent inherits a different landscape — literally. Expectations are higher, labor is tighter, weather is less predictable and every golfer has a high-definition camera in his pocket. At the same time, today's superintendent has tools many of us could only dream about: moisture meters, GPS sprayers, drone imagery, improved weather modeling, better cultivars, more sophisticated irrigation systems and data platforms that can turn observations into decisions. I'm not saying technology has made the job easy. But it has made it possible to be more precise, efficient and more predictable.

That last word, *predictable*, is important because if we want talented people to choose golf course management — and stay with it — we cannot sell them on passion and then pay them in stress. We need to offer them a more predictable life, both on the job and off.

This is where thinking about the "R word" can become more than just your personal reflection. The way experienced superintendents leave the profession can influence the way younger superintendents imagine staying in it. If retirement looks like an escape from a life that consumed everything, that sends one message. But if it looks like a meaningful transition — to mentoring, teaching, consulting, advocating for better workplaces and generously sharing knowledge — that sends another.

I don't expect our world to make a full change in one generation. But we can — I would argue ***we have to*** — start now. Those of us veterans still working in any capacity need to consider the concerns of the next generation when we're interviewing them, speaking at seminars, having an after-work beer or just telling them what to do about their aging irrigation system. We need to start finding the bridge between the dawn-to-dusk grind and a balanced, human existence.

For you young superintendents, part of your job is getting the most out of us while we're still here: ask questions about every part of the job, from maintenance practices to budgets, personnel management and handling members.

Just the fact that we're still here should tell you something.

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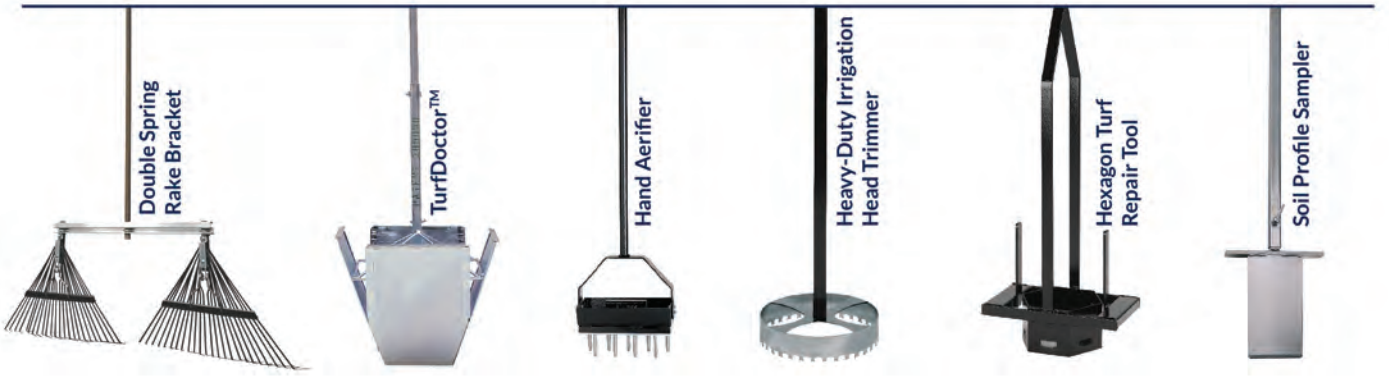

TWICE A YEAR, STAFF NUMBERS DECLINE AND WEATHER EXTREMES HIT, BUT COURSE USAGE REMAINS THE SAME. RON FURLONG SHARES EXPERIENCES AND ADVICE ON TACKLING THE MOST CHALLENGING PERIODS OF THE PLAYING SEASON

WRITTEN BY RON FURLONG | A *GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY* PRODUCTION

SHOULDERING A TREMENDOUS WORKLOAD

Of the many challenges I have encountered over the years in golf course management, one of the biggest obstacles is related to maintenance during shoulder seasons. This is somewhat geographic as the dilemma affects golf courses that actually have shoulder seasons in the late summer stretching into fall and then again in spring.

For those of us who manage courses in the areas of the country that experience changing seasons, shoulder-period maintenance presents unique difficulties compared with the maintenance of the course during the busy summer months or, on the flipside, the lack of maintenance in the winter.

During the summer months, most of us are staffed accordingly and ready for the annual fight that involves packed golf courses and seemingly endless days combined with (especially lately) very dry and very hot weather. Although summer can be the most challenging time of the year as far as sheer workload for the maintenance crew, most of us are prepared for it. With winter golf, you might be either closed completely or open but, like us in the Pacific Northwest, play has trickled to a low and quite manageable level. The downsized crew can usually handle whatever maintenance must be done.

It's in those darn shoulder seasons where things can get tricky.

Perhaps the greatest challenge presented by shoulder-season maintenance is deciding how to actually get some of the maintenance on the course accomplished and, to a certain degree, deciding what actually can and cannot get done. Prioritizing and decision making get amplified to a high degree during these periods. Things that were fairly simple to accomplish mid-summer when you had a fully stacked crew consisting of your full-time year-rounders and those part-time seasonal workers suddenly become extremely challenging with half the crew size.

To address this properly and in a somewhat organized manner, we should look at the two

shoulder seasons separately. They each present different challenges to superintendents.

Let's look first at the shoulder season that basically begins late summer. I consider this stretch around a two-month period ranging from late August through mid-October, when fall begins in full force and things finally start slowing down a bit in terms of both turf growth and the amount of daily play on the course.

From my perspective, this is the trickier of the two shoulder seasons. This trickiness stems from the loss of a good chunk of your seasonal staff. The high school and college students you hired as seasonal workers for the summer have now fully returned to school. Depending on how much you rely on these youngsters, this can be anywhere from slightly impactful to extremely impactful. For me, it's leaning toward the latter.

I say "leaning toward" because in addition to the high school and college students we hire each summer, we also mix in hiring several older retired folks who operate a lot of our larger riding equipment. One of the many benefits of hiring retired folks for these jobs is you aren't losing them at the end of August or early September like you are the students. It's certainly much less impactful to the operation when those young folks return to school if you've mixed in some seniors. There's a whole slew of other benefits to adding these retired folks, but I'll save that for a future article.

Although you might lose anywhere from a third to possibly even half your staff in late August, we all know business isn't slowing this time of the year. It's as busy as ever. Golfers don't care that you might not have the labor force you need to get the course ready for them. They are expecting pristine conditions whenever they come out to play.

As most of us are aware, golf courses had a big surge in rounds played during and after the pandemic. With that surge, although it seems to have leveled off now, golf has continued to be as popular as ever. We have gained enormous amounts of new golfers over the last half dozen years. Overcrowded golf courses, although great for revenue, have been nothing shy of a nightmare for the maintenance of our courses, especially in the shoulder seasons.

One thing that has helped me in recent years with this drop in our labor force is taking the time to prepare for it. This means executing the following tasks before losing workers:

- Edging bunkers
- Weeding bunkers
- Adding sand to bunkers
- Edging sprinkler heads, yardage markers, valve boxes and catch basins

One benefit we experience during late summer is a significant slowing in turf growth. With that reduction of growth comes less need for mowing frequency on areas like primary rough, secondary rough and even surrounds. Plant growth regulators can aid in this as well, just like wetting agents can help with crew members not having to water as much.

But even with preparation, some prioritizing decisions must be made daily. Perhaps a full rake of all your bunkers one day turns into a touch-up rake other days. Or, as in our case as a 27-hole course, we might decide to start changing cups on only 18 holes, skipping a fairway mow or letting the rough go a bit longer on days when we simply don't have the personnel.

This brings us to the other shoulder season, which I would consider — at least for us — to be early to mid-spring. Here in western Washington, I'd consider the bulk of the shoulder season to include April and May.

By May, golf courses are getting pretty darn busy, but most likely not yet fully staffed up with seasonal help. College students usually become available slightly before the high school kids, but neither can be counted on at this time of year.

For golf courses like ours that are open year-round but have significantly less play in the winter, those slower months offer time to complete numerous projects. We'll take down dying trees, plant new trees, reduce or remove bunkers, or possibly build a new forward tee. We're often still concluding these winter projects in April and May along with transitioning into busy play stretches.

That often crazy month of April includes the rather large maintenance task of aerifying and topdressing much of the golf course, including greens, tees and fairways, as well as charging up the irrigation system, which often includes having to make a few repairs. Plus, the grass is starting to grow again. Warming temps and April rains mean grass has reached "mutant" status almost growing before your very eyes.

It feels almost impossible to be staffed up enough in the first couple months of spring to get everything done. Again, prioritizing and making daily concessions is just part of the gig. Everything can't get done, no matter how hard you try. Often, it's best just to concede on a few things. An example would be with bunker maintenance in early spring. April can be a severely wet month in western Washington (as it is in many states and provinces) and devoting a ton of time to daily bunker maintenance sometimes seems fruitless.

Making hard decisions and communicating the reason for these decisions to the clubhouse is your best bet.

The importance of shoulder-season maintenance is often not given the recognition it deserves. This can be — and most likely is — a great challenge for many superintendents. Realizing that it is coming and preparing the best you can for it is pivotal in today's world of crowded golf courses with understaffed maintenance departments.

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

Wandering with a purpose

Bob Cook just retired for the third time after 16 turf maintenance jobs in six states. He reflects on longevity and providing for a family through pursuing a passion.

By **Kelsie Horner**

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Bob Cook has always been on the move. Born to **Robert** and **Pat**, he grew up as an Air Force brat. He and his brother, **Steve**, were born in England. His sister, **Sue**, was born in Chicago, and his other brother, **Gary**, was born in Germany. For as long as he can remember, his life has been an adventure. His childhood consisted of frequent moves and travel. England.

Bob Cook with his wife, Debbie, and their two daughters Jilian and Ashlee.

Germany. France. Turkey.

During his college days at Indiana University, he found himself working on the school's golf course while pursuing a degree in physical education. He had hoped to be a soccer coach.

"I talked to the people there at the golf course, and I said, 'So, how do I get to do what you do?'"

The superintendent's answer?

"You don't do it here."

After conversations about prominent turf schools, Bob and his wife, **Debbie**, moved to Texas with the hope of Bob enrolling in Texas A&M's turf program. This marked the couple's first of many moves. Debbie's family hailed from the Lone Star State. Because of his parents' profession, Bob didn't have a home state. To qualify for in-state tuition, he needed to live in Texas for at least one year.

As he waited to enroll in classes in 1974, Bob landed at Great Southwest Golf Club in Arlington, Texas. He joined the maintenance team and met then-assistant superintendent **Stan Wreyford**, who would become a lifelong friend.

"He had great rapport with the members," Wreyford says of Bob. "He was personable, dependable and a hard worker. I knew his strengths and weaknesses."

Through connections at Great Southwest, Bob was soon asked to join the staff at now-defunct Lake Country Golf Club in Saginaw, Texas. "With no superintendent experience, they hired me to be the acting superintendent," he says. "Basically, I learned how to be a superintendent in a real hurry."

Bob and Wreyford worked together on rebuilding the course, which had been closed for two years.

Bob never enrolled at Texas A&M. He now credits his career longevity to two things: hard work and opportunity.

He parlayed his success at Great Southwest into a job at Grapevine Golf Course, where he worked with architect **Joe Finger** and consultant **Byron Nelson**. Constructing a new course from start to finish with Nelson, one of the game's legendary figures, proved memorable.

"I spent over a year and a half with that fantastic gentleman, going through all the different things that he liked about golf courses and how they should play," Bob says. "And you start learning again. And it was an opportunity to see exactly how things are supposed to be."

Shortly after following construction, Bob gained a new title: father.

THE SUPERINTENDENT'S MVP

Bob Cook and his wife, **Debbie**, had only been married one year before moving from Indiana to Texas. Since then, the couple has moved more than 20 times. Their marriage, which has endured 51 years, is a lasting example of partnership and love.

Being the spouse of a superintendent requires sacrifice. Every good superintendent knows the real MVP is their spouse. Bob certainly knows this. But with dedication, trust and a bit of tolerance, the couple has powered through transitions with grace.

Trust is an essential factor in any marriage, especially when someone works a job that has unusual hours. The superintendent's job means sometimes calls will come in the evening, interrupting family dinners or celebrations.

"She understands the business is 24/7," Bob says.

Jilian, the Cooks' younger daughter, admires her mother's faith in their family. "She's a very devoted wife," she says. "There's a lot of women that would be like, 'I can't keep doing this.' But it was just their partnership, knowing they had to provide for the family. They did what they had to do."

Bob advises other superintendents to spend time with their spouse each day. "It's something that I still do to this day," he says. "When I first come home, we sit down and ask each other, 'How was your day?'"

He and Debbie welcomed their first daughter, **Ashlee**, in 1978. The family of three then headed to California to be near Bob's parents. "We moved to California kind of cold turkey thinking, 'Oh gosh, this is going to be good.' You can imagine what my wife was thinking," he says with a laugh.

But opportunity found him once again. From 1980 to 1987, Bob worked as superintendent at Valley Hi Country Club in Elk Grove, California. Bob and Debbie welcomed their second daughter, **Jilian**, in 1984.

Following a seven-year superintendent stint, Bob entered the landscaping business. A cattle farm bordered Valley Hi. "We used to have to chase the cows off the golf course from time to time," Bob says. A member purchased the land to build houses, and Bob was hired to landscape the neighborhood. He operated his own landscape company called Lawns of Distinction.

That role lasted a few years until the Cooks moved to Louisiana, where Bob worked first as an assistant superintendent at Country Club of Louisiana in Baton Rouge, then as superintendent at Shenandoah Country Club from 1995 to 1997. He soon started flipping through GCSAA catalogs in search of his next job.

Rick Barnett, then the director of maintenance for American Golf, helped Bob secure a job at Bentwater Yacht & Country Club in Montgomery, Texas. Nothing lasts forever, though. The owner reclaimed the property in 2001, and Bob was seeking opportunity again. He headed to McAllen Country Club, where he worked until 2003.

He earned his nickname — "Bob the Builder" — while at Stonebridge Golf & Country Club in Albany, Georgia. The **Robert C. Walker**-designed course was preparing to host stops on what were then called the Hooters Tour and the Senior PGA Tour. The club hired Bob to help improve playing conditions ahead of the events. Throughout Bob's career, he has assisted in building everything from full golf courses to irrigation systems. The Cook family stayed in Georgia until 2005.

Wreyford and Bob crossed paths again in 2010, when Bob took a job as superintendent at Walden on Lake Houston in Humble, Texas. He only held the position for five years before earning what he describes as his "ultimate job quest" — working at a Disney-owned golf course.

"It took me 15 years to get there," he says. "Every single time there was an opening, I would send a résumé. And then, again, of all people, Stan Wreyford was able to be there and give me that job."

Maintaining a Disney course is not a top goal for many superintendents. But for Bob it was "the cat's meow." He and his family made frequent visits to Walt Disney World, where he would occasionally play the courses. "I remember saying to myself, 'I would give anything to be the superintendent here.' It's just that environment of joy for family and people all over the world."

Bob was the superintendent at Magnolia and Oak Trail golf courses in Lake Buena Vista, Florida. Magnolia is an 18-hole, par-72 layout. The course was first designed in 1971 by architect **Joe Lee** and reimagined by **Ken Baker** in 2022. Oak Trail features nine walking holes.

Bob relished the role, but when he turned 65, he felt retirement was the right move. "I thought that 65 was the time to hang it up," he says. "I'd been doing it for 40-plus years at that time and I had reached the pinnacle of what I wanted to do."

In 2017, after receiving a retirement flag signed by coworkers and being honored on the Disney Wall of Fame, Bob stepped down from his dream role. Retirement yielded boredom, a condition Debbie recognized. "Debbie said, 'This is not working. You're just somebody that has to work. You need to,'" Bob recalls.

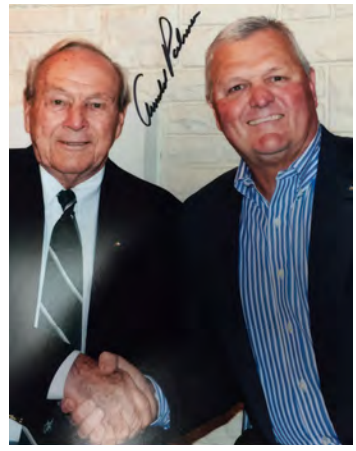
A return to the golf business was inevitable.

Seminole Legacy Golf Club, home to the Florida State University golf team, was preparing to complete a major renovation led by Nicklaus Design. The club hired Bob in 2020 as an ultra-experienced assistant. He worked daily to keep crews and tasks organized. The job concluded in 2021 — but Bob wasn't done with turf.

He headed to several local courses in and around Tallahassee to find a part-time job mowing greens and fairways. "He said, 'All I want to do is go out there and cut grass,'" Southwood Golf Club superintendent **Eddie Snipes** remembers. "And I said, 'Perfect.'"

Bob worked under Snipes for several years at the semi-private club. "He was a team player," Snipes says. "Regardless of what position he was in, he was going to contribute in more ways than one."

His leadership skills and team-first mentality made Bob a great crew member. But his faith made him stick out even more. When things became difficult, a trust in God grounded him. Snipes says younger superintendents with less



BOB COOK, THROUGH THE YEARS

1974: **Indiana University Championship Golf Course** (Bloomington, Indiana)

1976–78: **Great Southwest Golf Club** (Arlington, Texas)

1978: **Lake Country Golf Club** (Saginaw, Texas)

1978–79: **Grapevine Golf Course** (Grapevine, Texas)

1980–87: **Valley Hi Country Club** (Elk Grove, California)

1987–95: **Lawns of Distinction** (Elk Grove, California)

1995–97: **Country Club of Louisiana and Shenandoah Country Club** (Baton Rouge, Louisiana)

1997–2001: **Bentwater Yacht & Country Club** (Montgomery, Texas)

2001–03: **McAllen Country Club** (McAllen, Texas)

2003–05: **Stonebridge Golf & Country Club** (Albany, Georgia)

2005–08: **Timber Pines** (Spring Hill, Florida)

2008–09: **Athens Country Club** (Athens, Texas)

2010–15: **Walden on Lake Houston Golf & Country Club** (Humble, Texas)

2015–17: **Magnolia Golf Course and Oak Trail Golf Course** (Lake Buena Vista, Florida)

2020–21: **Seminole Legacy Golf Club** (Tallahassee, Florida)

2022–26: **Southwood Golf Club** (Tallahassee, Florida)

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IN BOB THEY TRUST

"You're not going to find a person with a bigger heart. He's such a giving person and he's very passionate and cares a lot about his team. His heart and his head are always in the right place." — ***Mike Abate***, *head pro, Southwood Golf Course*

"You always got 100 percent out of him every day. He was focused; he didn't get distracted. Whatever the job was that day, he was focused on that." — ***Eddie Snipes***, *former superintendent, Southwood Golf Course*

"He had great rapport with the members. He was personable, dependable and a hard worker. I knew his strengths and weaknesses." — ***Stan Wreyford***

"He really, truly from the bottom of his heart cares about the crew and what's going on, even in their personal lives and how that could be affecting stuff going on at work." — ***Jilian Brewer***

experience might fret when trouble comes around. Not Bob.

"A man of faith will speak the truth," Snipes adds, "let them know what's going on, remind them that God grows the grass and that things will eventually turn around."

"We follow the Lord's teachings and that faith has worked for generations of us," Bob adds. "When the staff follows the teachings of sound golf course agronomics, they have faith in all they do and achieve."

Turf and faith are just two things over which Snipes and Bob have bonded. Snipes retired in January 2023 after 22 years at the club. Their friendship endures.

Shortly after Snipes' retirement, Bob landed his final superintendent position. Southwood hired him, in part, for his professional experience. The "'three-for-one special," helped too, as former owner **Chip Channey** describes it: Joining Bob on staff was his daughter Jilian and her husband, **Kirk Brewer.**

Long before Jilian Brewer was working as her dad's assistant, she was following him around as he chased his dreams. She was born in California, where the Cooks lived until she was 10. She lived in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for two years before the family headed to Conroe, Texas.

At 15 years old, in Texas, Jilian started working on a golf course in a food-and-beverage role. "I wasn't obviously old enough to be on payroll, so they paid me in gift cards," she says. When she turned 16, she added hosting kids' camps and parties for the club to her duties. The Cooks stayed in Conroe until the summer of Jilian's junior year.

"That was the move that really devastated me, halfway through high school," she says. "I had all these established friends; we were talking about where we were going to college. That was a big step back for me."

The Cooks moved to McAllen for Bob's new role at McAllen Country Club. Jilian joined the food-and-beverage staff there but often found herself free in the mornings. Bob proposed the idea of coming to the course early to help with setup, moving tees and fixing divots. She accepted the offer.

"And then we moved again," Jilian says. "I was three months shy from graduating and we moved to Albany, Georgia. I graduated high school from there and I wasn't even in the yearbook."

Bob Cook, behind the wheel, Jilian Brewer, far right front row, and the Southwood Golf Club maintenance team.

A few days after graduation, Jilian was hired as a full-time maintenance team member working for her father at Stonebridge. She stayed until 2003, when she moved to Tallahassee. Jilian worked at Seminole Legacy for nearly 20 years before joining the Southwood staff in August 2023.

After spending her childhood moving from state to state, Jilian finds herself happy in one place. "I've been in Tallahassee for 23 years, and it's the longest place I've ever lived in," she says. "And I don't want to go anywhere."

Changing schools and homes was a struggle for Jilian, as it would be for most kids. She remembers frequently being asked if her dad was in the military. "No," she would say with a laugh. "He's in search for the perfect superintendent job."

As a teenager, she didn't understand. She remembers not wanting to hear an explanation from her father. She was only focused on the friends and memories she was leaving behind each time.

Today, she feels different. "It's definitely shaped me now," she says. "Now I understand as an adult, he was just following better opportunities."

When Jilian took the maintenance job at Stonebridge, she didn't envision a long turf career. Even when she started at Seminole Legacy, golf maintenance wasn't where she expected to end up. She was interested in becoming a teacher. With multiple colleges nearby, she expected to eventually make her way to the classroom.

"At first it was like, I'll just do it until I figure out what I want to do," she says of golf maintenance. "I just stayed. And then I started to get more responsibilities and learn more and started to enjoy it more and more."

She enjoyed having more responsibility, but she didn't want too much. Jilian had spent most of her career not wanting to be an assistant or superintendent. She was happy going to work, getting her job done, and leaving it at work.

Until one day she realized she *wasn't* leaving it at work. She often found herself discussing potential course plans on the weekends, thinking about agronomics and cultural practices. She had an epiphany: "I may have more of my dad in me than I thought."

Jilian officially started as assistant superintendent under her dad at the beginning of 2026. The father-daughter duo faced unique challenges with the new role.

Jilian, a woman in a field filled with men, works extra hard to earn respect. She wants to be treated the same as anybody else on the team, with no special treatment because she's a woman or the boss's daughter.

"I've always felt like I have to prove myself because I'm a woman working in this," Jilian says. "There really isn't a day that goes by that I don't feel like I have to make sure I'm

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on the same level, and I just want to be treated the same." That means forgetting about the familial relation shared by Bob and Jilian. Easier said than done for Bob. To him, Jilian is still his little girl.

"I kind of have to reel him back a little bit," Jilian laughs.

But Bob only looked at his daughter with pride. "She was somebody that wanted to soak it in as much as possible, a perfectionist and definitely an eye for detail," Bob says. "I tried to support that as much as possible."

The superintendent-assistant superintendent partnership lasted only a few months. After two prior retirements — and more than 50 years in the industry — Bob stepped down as superintendent in May.

Bob couldn't say goodbye to turf completely, though. He still works part-time for Southwood. After a career full of opportunities in maintenance, Bob has an opportunity to become more involved in playing the sport. He plans to get out on the golf course to focus more on his swing and his time with friends, and less on the agronomic practices.

"It's going to give me the opportunity to kind of have a semi-retirement normalcy of playing golf and doing things like that, where you're just not working 40 hours a week," Bob says.

While Bob is taking a step back, Jilian is doing the opposite. Southwood was recently sold to **Chuck** and **Katy Urban** and, after an extensive search, they hired **Troy Wetherington** as the new superintendent.

And Wetherington kept Jilian as his assistant.

She has an opportunity to learn from someone new.

"It's good to learn from different superintendents because they are all so different," she says. "I think any kind of learning that I can get from anybody would be helpful."

The golf industry could allow the Cook family to continue to build roots in Tallahassee. It may eventually take them elsewhere. Bob's career reveals a deep passion for turf and a love for his family, both of which he credits to hard work and opportunity. And now, Jilian's career is following in those footsteps.

Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry's digital editor.

BOB'S FAVORITES: DISNEY WORLD EDITION

Park: **Epcot**

Ride: **Splash Mountain**

Restaurant: **Nine Dragons**

Movie: **Avatar**

Character: **Mickey (of course)**

Quote: **"If you can dream it, you can do it"**

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MORE ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'm in the middle of rewriting and expanding a book I first published in 2001. It's the 25th anniversary edition of a design biography, "Discovering Donald Ross." Now that it has sold out and the secondary market has it going for considerably more than its listed retail price, I figure it's time to make it available again. Besides, the last two-plus decades have seen a massive expansion of golf restoration work, so there is plenty of new material to cover and update.

The problem is, it's proving to be way more work than I thought. Not just tracking stories of new course work but also changing the tenses of narratives written in the "present" that are now 25 years in the past. The logistical complexities of turning a manuscript inside out like this occasionally put me through an emotional roller coaster for which no prescribed meds are appropriate. It's yet another reminder, as I tell myself each time I do another book, that nobody knows how much work is involved. Nor should they care, because the work is taken up voluntarily. As long as it produces something worth reading — and therefore buying.

In this case, I could never have produced the story of **Donald Ross** and his designs without the cooperation of dozens of superintendents. More than anyone else, after all, they are the ones in touch on a daily basis with the legacy of his golf architecture.

Research for this biography started back in 1998-99, at the same time I began writing seriously about greenkeepers as founding editor of a bimonthly trade magazine devoted to the craft.

In fact, I have been at this long enough to the point where in some cases I am on my third generation of greenkeepers to thank for their help. At Wampanoag (Connecticut) Country Club, **Greg Stent**, **John Ruzbatsky** and **Dave Parson**. At Hartford (Connecticut) Golf Club, **Herb Watson**, **Jonathan Burke** and **Curtis D'Anna**. At Kennett Square (Pennsylvania) Golf & Country Club, **Bill Kelch**, **Paul Stead** and **Scott Musser**. At Longmeadow (Massachusetts) Country Club, **Richard Derby**, **Pat Sisk** and **Matt Santos**. At Oakland Hills (Michigan) Country Club, **Steve Glossinger**, **Steve Cook**, CGCS, and **Phil Cuffare**. At Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Country Club, **John Rhodes**, **Tom Feller**, CGCS, and his son **Tommy**. At Whitinsville (Massachusetts) Country Club, **David Johnson**, CGCS, **Michael Hughes** and **Shaun Mitchell**.

I'm very grateful to be working in an industry that gives so tirelessly of itself; where professionals are willing to help each other without being protective or defensive, and where trained experts are willing to communicate the basics of their trade to laymen like myself. Among those who come to mind who gave of their time, **Paul Jamrog** of The Orchards (Massachusetts) and Metacomet (Rhode Island) Country Club was one of my earliest sources. Much credit also goes to **Pat Kriksceonaitis** of Essex (Massachusetts) County Club, **Adam Moore** at Worcester (Massachusetts) Country Club, **Bob Becker**, CGCS, at Scioto (Ohio) Country Club, **Don Cross**, CGCS, at Skokie (lllinois) Country Club and **Nelson Caron**, CGCS, at Seminole (Florida) Golf Club. Before moving on from Northland (Minnesota) Country Club, **Chris Tritabaugh**, CGCS, was a very patient host at that unique Ross property overlooking Lake Superior. **Jeff Johnson**, CGCS, proved equally helpful at Minikahda (Minnesota) Club, as were **Kip Tyler** at Salem (Massachusetts) Country Club, **Chase Cameron** at Waterbury (Connecticut) Country Club, **John D. Carlone** at Meadow Brook (New York) Club, **John Szklinski** at Charlotte (North Carolina) Country Club, **Andrew Hannah** at Rhode Island Country Club, **Jeff Corcoran**, CGCS, at Oak Hill (New York) Country Club, **John Gosselin** at Aronimink (Pennsylvania) Golf Club, and Pat Sisk while at Country Club of Fairfield (Connecticut), Milwaukee Country Club and Longmeadow Country Club. **Matthew Wharton**, CGCS, MG, has been a consistent source of insight on Ross courses through his involvement in clubs that I have had the honor of advising, both Carolina (North Carolina) Golf Club and, more recently, Idle Hour (Kentucky) Country Club. And somehow, I have sustained a constructive working relationship with **Scott Ramsay**, CGCS, through the last four posts he held.

What has kept me in communication is my willingness to listen to people who know what they are talking about and who have the patience to break things down to their elements. My lawn still looks unkempt, but that's because having discovered what it really takes to keep a yard neat and lush, I've adopted a more naturalistic approach to native plant material. Besides, with all the fact checking and photo credits I have to arrange lately, who has time to tend to a lawn?

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

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Do you *really* know what's next?

Retirement can be many things, especially following a demanding career such as golf course maintenance. Inside the mindset it takes to ensure mental, physical and emotional well-being upon exiting the industry.

By **Lee Carr**

"Why more young people are taking mini-retirements," is the title of a Reuters.com article published earlier this year. The article explains how one man in his early 30s has stopped working twice, for multiple months at a time, and how he plans on taking a mini-retirement every four or five years. The writer, **Hani Richter**, shares that some affluent younger professionals are "treating retirement not as a single moment at the end of working life, but as a series of planned career breaks."

There are many questions. What did he do? He travelled. Did it hurt his career? He feels it did not. Can you imagine this working for turf maintenance? The phrase "100 Days" is flashing like a lighthouse beacon, as well as "savings," "bills," "benefits" and "job applications." Merriam-Webster might enter the chat about what retirement really means.

Retirement is a choice to step away from the working life that has warranted your attention for decades. It is associated with a sense of finality, and the complex spectrum of emotions involved in navigating to — and through — a different phase of life altogether.

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REMENT

Jack MacKenzie had been in the golf industry for more than 50 years before he retired. He started as a caddie and then worked nearly 27 years as the superintendent at North Oaks Golf Club in North Oaks, Minnesota. He later became the executive director of the Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents Association.

"My new vocation as a professional retiree is exceptionally busy with grandchildren, travel, wilderness canoe expeditions, boat building and wood working," Jack says. He has children (more on that in a minute or two, depending on your reading speed) and grandchildren living throughout the United States and, in good health, he is enjoying his time and not looking back. "Once you leave a job, you become irrelevant as change brings new perspectives to the position you are vacating. And, once the shock of being immaterial sets in, a retiree is suddenly free to pursue unanticipated opportunities without external constraints."

Fully retired for about two years, after tenures at famed Medinah Country Club and Oakland Hills Country Club, **Steve Cook** feels like he has been away from golf maintenance for much longer. "I am glad I retired when I did. It's better than I thought," Cook says. "There are certain things about my career that conjure up great memories, but I don't miss it."

To start retirement right, choose your moment carefully. "Don't let anybody pressure you into retiring," Cook says. "If you don't have a plan for purpose and meaning after work, it's going to be a problem. We spend four decades or longer trying to conquer something, work, or building a family, or rising to the top, whatever, and then there's not that anymore. You better find something to fill that void. For me, work was getting in the way of the things that I wanted to do physically. I like to ride my bike, be outside, be active, but the window on that closes eventually."

If there are activities you want more time to experience, retirement allows more freedom for pursuing those things. **Rick Tegtmeier** experienced plenty professionally, starting in the industry at age 13, becoming superintendent at 17, and retiring as a superintendent from Des Moines Golf & Country Club at 65 in 2024.

He prepared the course and crew for hosting the 2017 Solheim Cup and worked the Open Championship at St Andrews, among his many accomplishments. "Professionally, I had achieved more than I ever thought I would," Tegtmeier says. "When I got in this business, I wanted to be a 9-hole superintendent where I would work nine months out of the year, and I could hunt and fish all winter. Things change. I knew it was time to leave, but it was a hard decision."

Jack's son **Tyler**, 38 and not even considering retirement yet, is the superintendent at Hobbit's Glen Golf Club, in Columbia, Maryland, which is owned and operated by the Columbia Association, a non-profit services organization for this planned community. Yes, the course and the surrounding neighborhood are quaintly associated with **J. R. R. Tolkien**'s "The Hobbit" and "The

Jack and Tyler MacKenzie

© COURTESY OF JACK MACKENZIE

GENERATIONAL MENTORING

When a superintendent retires, they are less likely to be aware of the latest technological advancements and industry chemistries that will help with agronomic programs. That's completely fine because they won't want to be in charge of that. They retired for a reason, but that doesn't mean they don't want to give back to the industry.

What they will be great at — and one of the many reasons it is interesting to keep in touch — is because of everything they can teach younger workers about classic skills. Think of it as generational mentoring. For instance, older superintendents can provide career and life perspective by personally having more of it — several decades, in addition to what they have experienced through their industry friends and colleagues.

Retired superintendents are full of calm, hard-earned wisdom. They can steer younger generations in a good direction with finances and some of the soft skills that are required to excel, such as communication and diplomacy. Most superintendents model these ideals naturally, but having a retired superintendent who is willing to talk and work with your staff on these, and to be supportive in ways that aren't possible through daily operations, is truly valuable.

If you know someone retired from the industry, chances are they will be happy to hear from you. Whether you have a few questions for them, want to say hi, or have a good way for them to support one or several members of your staff, don't hesitate to connect.

> Once you leave a job, you become irrelevant as change brings new perspectives to the position you are vacating. And, once the shock of being immaterial sets in, a retiree is suddenly free to pursue unanticipated opportunities without external constraints."
>
> — *Jack MacKenzie*

Lord of the Rings" trilogy. Nearby street names include Rivendell Lane, Oakenshield Circle and Wood Elves Way. The 18-hole, semi-private, par-72 layout was designed by **Edmund Ault** in 1967.

Tyler grew up on the golf course where Jack was working. He interned at Oakmont Country Club between his turf years at Rutgers and worked at The Olympic Club. "Dad passed off his clubs to me, so he's done with golf, as goofy as that is to think about," Tyler says. "I wonder at times if I will feel the same way when I am done. I enjoy golf more for the agronomics of it, but the game is enjoyable, so I don't know. It's such a large part of my life. I love working on grass. I don't really know why, but I do."

Jack explains that accepting retirement means that you are not responsible for work when you leave. It's obvious, but understanding that — *feeling* that — is the catalyst for a very free, very different mindset. It's shocking. You can walk away from the game and the course completely. You can occupy an entirely different position in the life of your friends and family. More earnestly, you have freedom to think about what you choose to do. It can be overwhelming.

GOOD FOR EVERYONE

As father and son, the MacKenzies naturally still talk shop, but especially because Tyler is involved with advocacy work. He is on the board of directors for the Mid-Atlantic chapter of the GCSAA, and he participated in National Golf Day. What if you are not related to someone in the industry when you retire? Sure, you have friends and colleagues in the industry, but another decision that you have the privilege to make is whether you still want to be involved.

Active superintendents have a decision to make, too. The industry is leaking talent, and labor shortages continue to be a challenge. Is it possible that willing, retired superintendents can remain active through continued mentoring and dedicated time to help employees learn soft skills such as diplomacy, financial planning and communication? Maybe they are willing to take a few shifts on the mowers or helping elsewhere on the course. Staying current with available chemistries and technology will be more difficult if not working in the industry day-to-day, but there is a lot that can be done.

"Anyone who is retired, in whatever profession, wants to share what they know," Cook says, "especially because there is a void where they are not making a difference anymore — or not as much of a difference. You want to help someone else. For sure, there is a place for retired

READY, SET, INVEST

With daily life and expenses moving at a rapid pace, it's hard to think about adding to your savings. But you can continue to put yourself in a good financial position. A few solid moves can give you the confidence that you are doing the best you can — for yourself and your family — and you don't have to be a financial guru.

First of all, protect the assets you have. Take care of your house and vehicles. Make a budget and stick to it.

Second, check in with your work and make sure you are maximizing what your compensation package offers. That might be matching opportunities for a 401(k), Health Savings Accounts or using what you realistically can from your PTO. PTO is a great time to take care of your own health — work out, get some rest, catch up on your household "to-do" list and enjoy pouring into your personal relationships. It also gives staff time to be responsible and practice their leadership skills.

Third, learn more about investing and the markets. Read websites. Visit your financial advisor or your local bank to learn more about the products on offer and anything they might suggest. And don't be afraid to talk about finances and investing with colleagues. You don't have to share personal details, just chat about different ways that people take care of their wealth. You are bound to learn something — and model a healthy financial approach while working together.

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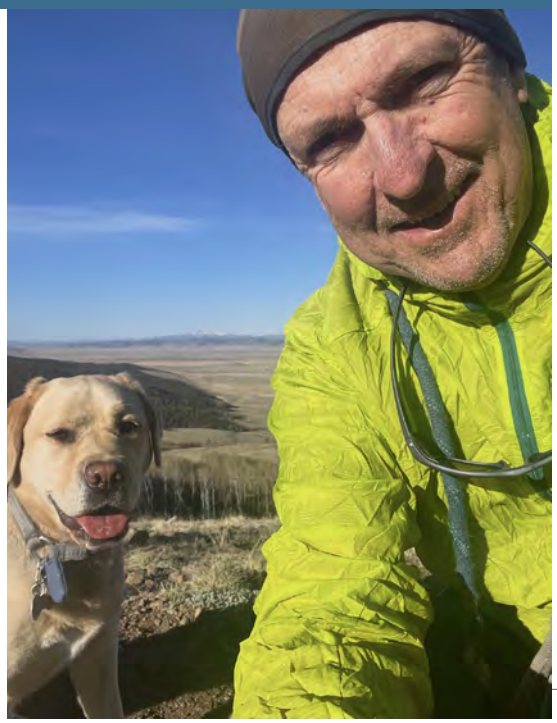

Rick Tegtmeier (left and middle), and Steve Cook with his dog, Ilsa (right).

superintendents because any time that you give back, it's a good thing."

Cook highlights that it's natural to not be thinking about retirement when you are younger. You are invested in any number of activities that demand your attention. How can everyone bridge the gap between active and retired superintendents? Or are people already sticking close with mentors and superintendents who aren't involved in the daily grind?

It's easier than ever to communicate through social media posts, texts, email, video platforms or phone calls, but the volume of those communications, ironically, can make communicating in those ways somewhat impersonal and ineffective. Relationships are still best nurtured through quality time, and you will stay close with the people you invest in.

"I am trying to be there for my assistants and my team," says Tyler, who is glad to have a strong, full crew for the season. "I would like to be a continued resource, and there are the friendships I have made along the way." Mentorship and camaraderie are strong in the industry, but do those relationships shift around retirement? If they slip, maybe there is a way to prevent that from happening.

"The first couple of months of retirement were emotionally difficult," Tegtmeier says. "You are going 100 miles an hour, you worked all your life, your career, you're the go-to guy at work, you have all of this responsibility and then, all of the sudden, it stops. I wasn't prepared for that. Your friends in the turf industry, who you used to call and email all the time and keep in touch with, those working relationships, they are dictated by time and need."

Is there a place for a formal network of retired superintendents, for them to be there for one another, as well as being a resource for busy crews? "Working with retired superintendents could be huge. *Here's how you can do this, or here's how you can approach this.* I think it could be great," Tyler says. Again, there are time and organizational constraints, and egos can interfere, but it's worth considering.

One of the first things Tegtmeier did when he retired was restore a 1972 Jacobsen G10 tractor. He takes it for rides in Iowa, and he is enjoying hunting, fishing, traveling and hosting large family dinners on Sundays. He meets up with a group of retired superintendents every few months.

"We get together and talk about making ourselves available to a younger crowd if they have questions," Tegtmeier says. "We try to stay involved in our associations. That's helpful. This next generation of superintendents are doing a better job with work-life balance. They know it will be there tomorrow, they're understanding that better. That's going to help them transition into retirement easier. I hate to say it, but sometimes I put work in front of my family. Now that I'm retired, I realize, family is everything."

IT'S ALL ABOUT PREPARATION

It's challenging to find the balance, but the exchange of perspectives is another way that turf leaders can help each other. Jack feels that Ty-

© RICK TEGTMEIER (2), STEVE COOK

ler's job is a vastly different job than what he experienced. Cultural and professional norms shift, but there are fundamental lessons and values that can be shared.

"Prepare for retirement early so you will have the economy, mental acuity and physical capabilities to enjoy your golden years," Jack says. "Care for your family and friends as the memories you create with them will carry you through. Early on, connect with a financial planner who will tell you how to save money and retire comfortably. Be mindful of your health so you can enjoy the fruits of your labor. Experience many hobbies in small doses so you know what you want to do when you're not chasing a paycheck. Work hard and diligently at your vocation. Time is of the essence so if you have a nasty compulsion, seek professional help. Life is grand and should be experienced unimpeded."

Cook keeps in touch with friends from the turf industry, colleagues and members, as well as former employees. He reads, draws, travels, hikes and spends time with his dog, **Ilsa**. "It's been good," Cook says. "I don't know what's next. That piece is exciting and I feel lucky to do that. It takes effort to realize that and a lot of people don't. It's natural to feel anxiety about what's next but, at some point, if you want to swim, you have to put your foot in the deep end."

He enjoys watching Ilsa scamper on the trails, carrying sticks and being full of energy. "There is something about watching a dog have fun," Cook says. "There is something really rewarding about watching another creature be happy. That's a pretty good life. As we get older, we have to live life with gratitude." Being grateful and thoughtful are healthy practices for everyone.

If you could preview your retirement, what would it look like? Maybe retired superintendents and active superintendents can reach out to help each other be happy and productive, continuing and extending their camaraderie even further. After all, working in the golf course maintenance industry is also a pretty good life.

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

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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.

BLOWER SHELVING MADE EASY

The Stihl BR600 Backpack Blower is transported on this Toro Greensmaster 3150-Q, placed on a Harbor Freight metal shelf where the width was slightly reduced. The shelf is bolted to the ROPS and further held in place with two recycled metal Toro Sprayer boom parts bolted to the ROPS and shelf. The blower is held in place during transport with two bungee cords. The goals and objectives were to make the mowing and blowing a one-person operation for cleaning debris and grass clippings before and after greens mowing. Three homemade push broom brushes, along with recycled flat steel brackets and a chain to hold them upright during transport, work nicely. The small PVC pipe on the right side holds a dew whipping pole and the large PVC pipe on the left side holds a ball mark repair tool and flagstick while mowing. The shelf cost less than $25 and took less than an hour to assemble. Director of agronomy **Tim Asselin**, superintendent **Chris Notestine**, equipment manager **Greg Wagman** and owner/operator **Mike Bylen** are a great team at Pine Trace Golf Club in Rochester Hills, Michigan.

LAKE PUMP WAGON

The Legend Course at the 36-hole Giants Ridge Ski & Golf Resort in Biwabik, Minnesota, uses a portable wagon to pump water from a large 25-plus-acre lake to a small 1-plus-acre irrigation lake. Two electric submersible pumps, each capable of approximately 500 GPM, are mounted to the pump wagon using angle iron welded together, with crossbeam angle iron holding the pumps in place. Each pump has a stainless steel screen, which is encased into a larger stainless steel screen to keep debris at bay. The wagon wheels are rolled flat steel, making it easy for a skid-steer loader to transport the wagon into and out of the lake. Electricity is permanently placed underground with easy access on the shore. The pumps are hooked up to a permanent piping flange and used from May to mid-October. The pump wagon has been in use since the 1994 grow-in prior to the course opening in 1997. Superintendent **Joe Marafioti**, original and 2027 renovation architect **Jeffrey D. Brauer**, assisting renovation architects **Kevin Norby** and **Joe Schmenk**, observing architect **David Hoekstra** and the State of Minnesota work well together.

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

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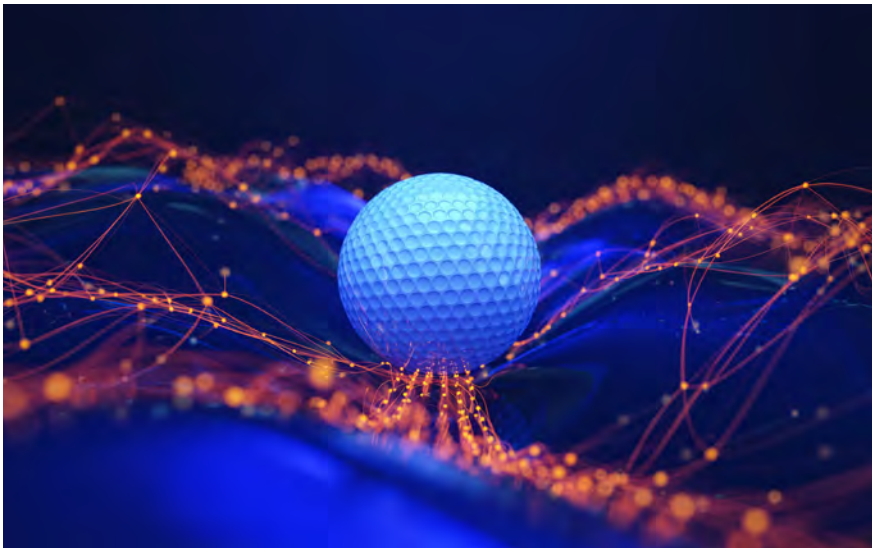
NAMES

Chad Adcock Tim Asselin **Edmund Ault** Victor Azzaretto **Ken Baker** Rick Barnett **Bob Becker** Brian Bloom **Don Bloom** Tyler Bloom **Jeffrey D. Brauer** Kirk Brewer **Kelly Brooke** Richard Brown **Jonathan Burke** Mike Bylen **Chase Cameron** John D. Carlone **Nelson Caron** Chip Channey **Dave Chapman** Laurie Chapman **Guy Cipriano** Ashlee Cook **Bob Cook** Debbie Cook **Gary Cook** Jilian Cook **Pat Cook** Robert Cook **Steve Cook** Sue Cook **Bill Coore** Jeff Corcoran **Ben Crenshaw** Don Cross **Phil Cuffare** Ryan Cummings **Curtis D'Anna** Eric Davis **Dave Delsandro** Richard Derby **Haden Dillard** Brent Downs **Tom Feller** Tommy Feller **Joe Finger** Charlie Fultz **Ron Furlong** Steve Glossinger **Rob Glucksman** Dr. Mike Goatley **John Gosselin** Scott Hamilton **Andrew Hannah** Kevin Hicks **David Hoekstra** Jason Hollen **Allen Hopson** Kelsie Horner **Butch Howard** Michael Hughes **Paul Hurst** Phil Jamrog **David Johnson** Jeff Johnson **Jim Jones** Bill Kelch **Ralph Kepple** Jamie Kizer **Pat Kriksceonaitis** Joe Lee **Phil Lumsden** Bryce Lyons **Jack MacKenzie** Tyler MacKenzie **Donovan Maguigan** Joe Marafioti **Jeremiah Mincey** Shaun Mitchell **Adam Moore** Scott Musser **Byron Nelson** Kevin Norby **Chris Notestine** Dave Parson **Damian Pascuzzo** Steve Pate **Doug Petersan** Agustin Pizá **Amanda Potter** Anthony Pragano **Scott Ramsay** John Rhodes **Hani Richter** Ty Robb **Alexa Roldos** Donald Ross **Babe Ruth** John Ruzbatsky **Matt Santos** Joe Schmenk **Cameron Sells** Esther Sherry **Pat Sisk** Eddie Snipes **John Spaulding** Paul Stead **Greg Stent** Brian Stiehler **John Szklinski** Rick Tegtmeier **Thad Thompson** J.R.R. Tolkien **Joe Torre** Chris Tritabaugh **Delphine Tseng** Kip Tyler **Chuck Urban** Katy Urban **Greg Wagman** Robert C. Walker **Herb Watson** Yael B. Weiss **Troy Wetherington** Matthew Wharton **Michael Willadsen** Rick Woelfel **Kurtis Wolford** Tiger Woods **Stan Wreyford**



TURF TECHNOLOGY

We are certain that technology will continue to revolutionize the turf industry — and our lives as we know them.

The greater news cycle is ripe with technology-related information, including artificial intelligence, data centers, supercomputing and other big concepts. In the turf world, the development and implementation of tech feels as if it is progressing at a pace we've never experienced.

From the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show to regional shows and conferences, to relational conversations with tech-based manufacturers, to visiting clients serving as beta test sites, we're lucky to experience and discuss emerging technology in our industry quite often.

Navigating this new frontier can be overwhelming. We're constantly learning what can improve turf performance and save labor and resources, as opposed to what is a fad or a blip on the tech radar that will be rendered obsolete by countless versions of advancement in the next year. Maneuvering this landscape is exciting … but it also has risks.

We view implementing new technology as a risk/benefit analysis. A thoughtful evaluation of initial investment, operational adoption, annual costs, realized benefits and sustainability in a market evolving at warp speed are all viable metrics that must be considered.

In addition, and perhaps most important: Is there a tangible benefit? Does tech-based equipment, data collection or an intuitive software platform improve operational efficiency and productivity? Can it improve turf performance and health? Is the risk of investment and adoption worth the potential benefit?

Unfortunately, in some instances, we've witnessed new technology provide a solution to a problem that doesn't exist. In other instances of unwarranted adoption, pressure from club governance to "be at the cutting edge" simply for the sake of being there has diverted time, attention and resources away from failing infrastructure, fundamental turf maintenance, and already underfunded operating and labor budgets. Distraction created by the shiny new object has, in different situations, deferred precious time and money away from necessary fundamental people and practices.

We've also seen new turf-related technologies be vetted and implemented flawlessly. Positive results have varied from measurable cost savings enabling reallocation of resources into other areas of the operation, minimizing member disruption, exponentially enhanced productivity and fulfilling the age-old adage of allowing insightful superintendents to do more with less.

All of us are riding on the tip of the spear toward major advancements in artificial intelligence, autonomous equipment and other rapid tech advancements. In our opinion, as an industry, we should adopt a deliberate, methodical approach. Consider opportunities to test and implement new technology as you would a new herbicide or fertilizer.

Identify new, persistent or other issues that plague your turf and/or operations and explore opportunities for specific solutions that can improve your situation and golf course. Develop a critical path and action plan. Communicate intentions, methods, pros, cons, risks, assumptions and costs with your stakeholders. Discuss with fellow superintendents how they are integrating or utilizing different forms of technology and whether they have experienced benefits.

Start slow, perform testing, evaluate results from a qualitative and analytical perspective. Expand processes, systems and techniques to slightly larger scales. Solicit feedback from any or all staff and management. Critically evaluate results and sustainability. Dig into manufacturing, maintenance, distribution and customer support capabilities.

Lastly, as all of us navigate the incoming age of technology in the turf industry, we believe that perhaps the most important factor in successful adoption and implementation will be each other. Our industry has always been — and always will be — defined by collaboration with our peers and fellow turf managers. Insights and feedback from colleagues will undoubtedly help to cut through the propaganda and identify sustainable technology that can elevate and improve our collective ability to succeed.

Whatever the future holds, one thing about the turf industry is certain: we will navigate it together.

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 and jeff@agro-advisors.com.

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MORE PLAYABILITY.

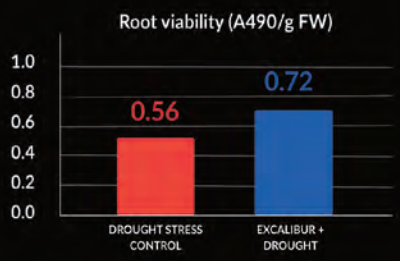
Claims are easy. *Proof isn't.*

When drought stress increases, turf performance depends on more than moisture alone. *Excalibur™* with Potentiated Hydrophobe Technology (PHT) helps optimize the rhizosphere environment, supporting healthier roots, improved plant-available moisture, and greater turf resilience under stress.

PROVEN INCREASE IN ROOT VIABILITY UNDER DROUGHT STRESS CONDITIONS

+29.6 %

GREATER ROOT VIABILITY UNDER DROUGHT STRESS 1.0+

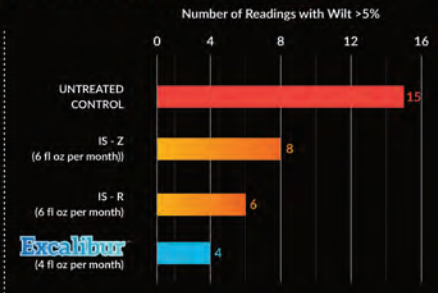


Plant Physiology Research, Zhang, Virginia Tech, Study 2, 2022

FEWER WILT EVENTS DURING DRY-DOWN CONDITIONS

70 %

FEWER READINGS WITH WILT >5% THAN UNTREATED TURF



Bigelow, Ph.D., Dry-Down Study, 2021

HEALTHIER ROOTS
Proven increase in root viability under drought stress

REDUCED WILT
Less drought stress during dry-down conditions

PLANT-AVAILABLE MOISTURE
Supports moisture retention in the rootzone

MORE CONSISTENT PERFORMANCE
Improved turf quality and playability

TRUSTED WORLDWIDE
Golf courses, sports fields, and high-value turf

Excalibur™ | AQUA·AID SOLUTIONS

INTRODUCING

SIGNATURE™ XTRA
Stressgard® Liquid

Healthier turf without the extra work

When every minute matters, simplicity makes all the difference.
Signature™ XTRA Stressgard® Liquid fungicide delivers proven plant health protection in a new, faster formulation. It's strength from within, now made easier.

Sign up to connect with an Envu® Rep about using the new liquid formulation.

ALWAYS READ AND FOLLOW LABEL INSTRUCTIONS. Environmental Science U.S. LLC, 5000 CentreGreen Way, Suite 400, Cary, NC 27513. For additional product information, call toll-free 1-800-331-2867. www.envu.com. Signature™ XTRA Stressgard® Liquid fungicide may not be available in all states, nor is it offered for sale. Available for purchase August 2026. Envu®, the Envu logo, Signature™ and Stressgard® are trademarks owned by Environmental Science U.S. LLC or one of its affiliates. ©2026 Environmental Science U.S. LLC. Gol-US-Sig-Si-052726-A-20-2

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