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GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY

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Oil, politics, paspalum, family, grit and golf. Inside the revival of a beloved west Texas 9-holer off the industry grid.

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VOL. 38 NO. 6

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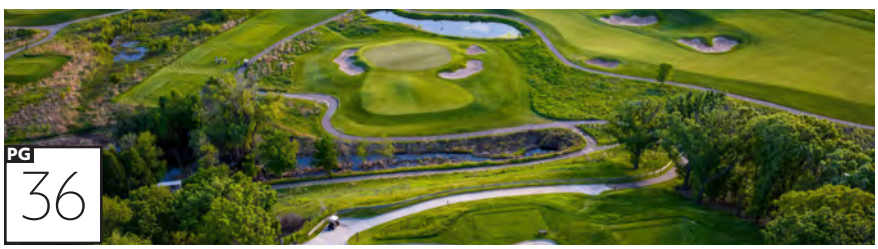

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WILL TRAVEL FOR QUALITY WORK

As a 22-year-old suburbanite who attended a Big Ten university, my future boss explained I would be passing through Jersey Shore to interview for an entry-level sports writing position in Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

These were the days before the bombastic MTV series "Jersey Shore" debuted. But I'm confident I acted as confused as **The Situation**, **Snooki** or **Pauly D** during the pre-interview phone conversation. *Jersey Shore*, I wondered. *Isn't that near the Atlantic Ocean? Isn't Williamsport in the middle of Pennsylvania? Why would somebody want a job candidate to embark on an East Coast scavenger hunt for an interview? Was this sports editor testing my intelligence? Was he a giant jerk?*

Instinct took over. I visited a local AAA branch, where an affable woman highlighted the route from my parents' suburban Pittsburgh home to Williamsport on a TripTik paper map. The journey meandered through Jersey Shore … Pennsylvania. Whew.

Near the geographic center of Pennsylvania exists a small town called Jersey Shore (population: 4,158). Writers know Jersey Shore as a place where **Hunter S. Thompson** briefly worked as a sports editor for *The Jersey Shore Herald*. Thompson despised the job and the region.

Fifteen splendid country miles separate Jersey Shore and Williamsport. Unlike Thompson, I treasured my time in small-town Pennsylvania. I've also avoided overdosing on mind-altering substances, and I've only published "Fear and Loathing Golf Holes with Water Left" in my mind.

Covering high school, college and minor-league sports in sparsely populated central Pennsylvania—a job in State College followed the one in Williamsport—for 11 years changed my life and perspective. Growing up in Pittsburgh and attending Indiana University offered no exposure to the soothing scenes, welcoming people and authenticity of small-town America. Thank goodness for TripTiks!

Most Americans will never experience a month, year, decade or lifetime away from the urban and suburban bustle. Finances or family—or both—make graduating college and spending a lifetime in a place like Jersey Shore impractical. America might be an even stronger nation if more people experienced the nuances of living within communities of various sizes and demographics.

In our dogged quest to make *Golf Course Industry* better, we encourage our internal and external teams to identify and pitch stories originating from overlooked spots.

This month's cover story (page 24) stems from a news release architect **Trey Kemp** sent us in April 2025 about Rankin Golf Course. That news release led to a 2025 *Tartan Talks* podcast episode with Kemp. That conversation led to senior editor **Matt LaWell** visiting Rankin (population: 715) earlier this year to report this month's cover story. Visiting Rankin helped Matt understand what the resurrected 9-holer means to the west Texas community. Seeing yields deeper meaning.

Our internal team possesses innate story-finding abilities and terrific relationships—but we can't possibly know the awesomeness of every golf course.

Enter our external team.

We view magazine and newsletter subscribers, Superintendent Radio Network listeners, website visitors and social media followers as part of our team. Our inboxes and ears stay open. We relish taking audiences to unfamiliar places. We know many of you work at or with a course like Rankin.

We realize many of you don't work near clusters of golf courses, which makes networking, job searching and association involvement challenging. Longtime superintendent **Rick Pagett** leads this month's notebook section by describing the pleasure and plight of establishing a consulting business in central Pennsylvania (page 6).

Decreasing populations and soaring operational costs are exerting the financial wherewithal of small-town courses and clubs. Pagett is hoping to build a sustainable business while continuing to live in a lovely region by developing practical solutions for owners and superintendents attempting to keep treasured community assets afloat.

Hustling to find clients in central Pennsylvania requires passing through Jersey Shore. There's nowhere to stop for a turf conversation or a quick 9 when he reaches the town.

The closest golf course, a former private club that opened to the public two decades ago to remain viable, is 15 miles away.

Guy Cipriano

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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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PGA TOUR OFFICIAL GOLF COURSE EQUIPMENT SUPPLIER

"Path to Success" through a lifetime in golf

Rick Pagett faced a career crossroads. He explains the challenges — and opportunities — of starting a consulting firm living in a humble region lacking a dense concentration of courses.

Golf has always been in my life since learning to play with a Wilson four-club set. It's only now that I realize how much it has shaped my life.

The game provided a career path with my degrees from Penn State. I met my wife, **Kim**, while working as an assistant superintendent at Oakmont Country Club. Golf has given me some of my closest friends: **Jex** and **Donna Wilson** from Tennessee and **Jon** and **Katie Urbanski** at Wilmington Country Club in Delaware. It brought me to my home in State College, Pennsylvania, where God blessed us with our twin children, **Davis** and **Mackenzie**.

I didn't know it then, but I see it now: golf has helped provide my "Path to Success."

I also never realized until later in life my backyard golf course, Shady Tree Golf Club, sparked my passion for golf course architecture. My younger brother, **Dave**, and I designed each hole after the course we walked and played as children, Oak Lake Golf Course in New Kensington, Pennsylvania. Dave also works in golf. He's the head professional at Whitemarsh Valley Country Club in suburban Philadelphia.

Our second cousins owned Oak Lake. My grandfather helped build it. My dad played there in leagues as a scratch golfer. Dave and I played Oak Lake on summer days until the crickets chirped.

I also passed youthful time as a caddie at Hillcrest Country Club in Lower Burrell, Pennsylvania. I passed my Eagle Scout banquet, where I met Fox Chapel Golf Club head professional **Mark Hessler**. I joined the shop staff at Fox Chapel and fell in love with **Seth Raynor** and golf course architecture.

I interned at famed Oakmont. I earned bachelor's and master's degrees in turfgrass science from Penn State. I landed my first superintendent job building a course in Tennessee. I spent 18 years as the director of turfgrass maintenance at the Penn State Golf Courses.

Those experiences shaped a recent career move: starting a company called Shady Tree Consulting LLC. I created Shady Tree Consulting to provide quality turfgrass conditions on a consistent basis for clients.

When my time at Penn State ended in 2024, I had to quickly determine what came next. Happy Valley only supported three other courses with established superintendents. Instead of moving, I started helping a central Pennsylvania course operating without a superintendent in the middle of the season. Drought and disease hindered

© LEFT: RICK PAGETT (3); RIGHT: ADOBE STOCK

the property. So did a lack of turf leadership. I'm a proven leader, so I met with the owner and general manager to show them how I could help guide them through one of the most difficult growing seasons in recent years, bring their golf course back from the edge and help create a "Path to Success."

A year later, I was still asking myself what was next. With encouragement from Kim, Mackenzie and Davis, I pursued consulting full time.

To be a successful consultant, you must secure clients. That's a daunting task in a beautiful, albeit golf-limited region. So, I hit the Pennsylvania roads, branching out to New York, Ohio and Virginia, stopping at facilities, offering services and leaving proposals.

The visits revealed a common thread. There are numerous courses lacking an educated turf leader and resources that struggle with maintaining quality playing surfaces, hiring and managing people, and keeping aging equipment functionable. Many of these courses operate under budgets well below industry norms. This reality represents a big slice of American golf.

Last year started with the same need to grow Shady Tree Consulting and expand my client list. I found myself working with a client in northeast Pennsylvania facing the same scenario as the one I encountered in central Pennsylvania in 2024: no superintendent, harsh summer conditions and a lack of direction. This course was seeking a "Path to Success," and it has become the model for my business.

One month into the northeast Pennsylvania gig, while making an irrigation repair on a 90-degree day, a cart rolled up and a golf shop staff employee asked, "What are you doing?" I explained the task, and he asked, "Do you need any help?" Always the teacher, I responded, "Yes," and he jumped into the hole and leant a hand. Day after day, the same employee was at the shop, following me around the course and asking questions. Thereafter, I would leave my weekly instructions with him to help carry out daily tasks between my visits.

A northeast Pennsylvania success story. A model for Shady Tree Consulting via the best possible client.

During the fall of 2025, ownership of the facility asked my thoughts on rebuilding a problem green and helping find a superintendent. I immediately said yes to the project and recommended my irrigation partner for the job. Ownership offered him the position this spring with the caveat that I would return to help guide him through his first season. Of course I accepted!

Now in my third season of owning the company, I face the same lingering questions: How can I grow my business, gain exposure and show the golf community Shady Tree Consulting is here to help? I'll continue to beat the unknown pavement, visiting clubs and speaking with owners and general managers. I'll leverage my love for the game, passion for the profession and abilities as a proven leader.

The only thing some courses need to realize their potential is a "Path to Success."

Rick Pagett is the owner Shady Tree Consulting LLC. He has worked more than 25 years in head superintendent roles in Pennsylvania and Tennessee.

Tartan Talks 119

Like any golf course architect, **Tim Gerrish** incorporates risk-reward components into his designs. Unlike many of his peers, Gerrish pursues a risky, yet liberating, activity away from the golf course.

The New England-based Gerrish is an avid rock climber. His passion for the outdoors — and especially rocks and golf — stems from a childhood in Maine, a state boasting rugged inland and coastal landscapes.

On a recent *Tartan Talks* podcast episode, Gerrish discussed the correlation between being in precarious outdoor spots and working as a golf architect.

"I don't have a problem with being focused," he says. "When I need to think about things, I've been in these situations, and I have already had sweaty palms. I've had that conversation with my daughters so many times. You have to learn to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. That's a life skill. So, if rock climbing helps that and engaging at a higher level, that makes work easier."

From seeking out **Geoffrey Cornish** early in his career to helping bring effluent water to a popular Cape Cod course, Gerrish has placed himself in numerous unfamiliar golf architecture situations. His penchant for finding innovative solutions has yielded longevity in the industry.

Learn more about his story by finding the episode on the Superintendent Radio Network page of popular podcast distribution platforms.

Letting nature *run a course*

A former historic golf property prepares for a new life by preserving land and tackling stormwater concerns.

By ***Adriana Gasiewski***

Rosemont Country Club in Fairlawn, Ohio, faced stormwater issues throughout its history due to residing near Schocalong Run, a lake handmade by farmers in the 1800s.

During the 1990s, stormwater would venture into the lake and create swells that flooded during heavy rain. In 2003, Fairlawn faced two 100-year storms within a week of each other, destroying numerous homes.

"The club itself lost a complete hole over time — it was actually hole No. 2," says **Ernie Staten**, Fairlawn's director of public service. "It was a 500-yard hole, and they lost 200 yards to water, so people couldn't even play that hole efficiently. I mean, they would just drop on the other side."

Having worked for the City of Fairlawn after graduating college, Staten understands how the lack of stormwater mitigation hurt the club's membership and that the lake needed more attention as well as preventative measures. He says the city would dredge the lake, building "a deeper bathtub" to hold the water; Schocalog Run spans over 12 miles and only has 11 inches of fall. Because of the limited fall, there's a large amount of asphalt in Montrose, a bordering community, causing rainfall to inundate that area.

After nearly 100 years, Rosemont Country Club closed in 2020. This gifted the city 62 acres of the **Tom Bendelow**-designed course, which was not conducive for constructing housing developments. Fairlawn is now addressing stormwater concerns and protecting nature with the creation of a nature preserve on the former golf site.

A century ago, there were two major country clubs in the Portage and Summit County area: Fairlawn Country Club and Portage Country Club. During that time, neither club allowed Jewish people to hold memberships, prompting seven Jewish families to create Rosemont as a Jewish-only club.

That slowly changed over the years, according to Staten. It started out as a 9-hole course on one side of Cleveland Massillon Road, before expanding to 18 holes. In the 1990s, a developer purchased part of the property on the 18th and constructed another three holes and a clubhouse on the west side of the road.

Now, Staten says, the city will remove the dam where the course's irrigation pond was located, lengthen the stream by meandering through the property, create multiple wetlands to clean the water and build a meadow that can take on flood water.

"It's 8.6 acre-feet of water, which is roughly six Olympic swimming pools full of water, that we can now store onsite and then slowly let back out into the creek," Staten says. "So, we're taking on the brunt of that in our build and not having homes take on the surge of stormwater."

Walkways will also be constructed along the property to create a "passive-use park — that's really what a preserve is. It will not have any plate equipment or anything like that. It's going to be about taking things back to nature," he adds.

The city will install cameras in the park to track animals, like eagles and fish, and to moderate weather. The cameras will also help monitor the water quality fol-

© ERNIE STATEN (2)

lowing rain and snow.

"We are building a lot of this for bird habitats, ospreys and eagles and that kind of stuff. We're hoping to get them on camera," Staten says. "We are going to have a couple of bird blinds so that when the sandhill cranes eventually come in, you'll be able to see them without scaring them."

People can watch these animals in the visitor center. These efforts will promote the preserve as a sanctuary for people and nature, as well as supporting reforestation efforts. They plan to save trees and tree roots for Beaver Dam Analogs, human-created beaver dams meant to repair streams, throughout the creek.

The project will also update signage and create areas like an amphitheater, similar to Blossom Music Center, an outdoor music amphitheater in nearby Cuyahoga Falls, for outdoor events.

"It's a super exciting project," Staten says. "It's going to handle a lot of issues that we had with all that stormwater and it's also, again, going to bring this sanctuary to the people here. We hope there's some ecotourism that comes out of it."

Construction for the preserve commenced in December 2025. The city received about $3.6 million in grants for the $7 million project. Tax increment financing was also utilized to direct a larger portion of property taxes, without increasing them, toward its creation.

In March, crews began construction of the kettle lakes, depressions left behind from melted ice blocks, and removing trees in poorer conditions from the site.

Staten anticipates the project concluding in December 2027, with half the property looking more glacial, consisting of mounds and wetlands, and the other half appearing reforested with meadows. Developer **Lance Osborne** from Osborne Capital aided in the community's efforts to preserve nature.

"Many country clubs that go under, they allow them to grow up to nature, and they try put a few things in that will eventually kind of take over the area to get the same goal that we are," Staten says. "We took the approach that we needed to reconstruct everything."

Adriana Gasiewski is a northeast Ohio-based writer.

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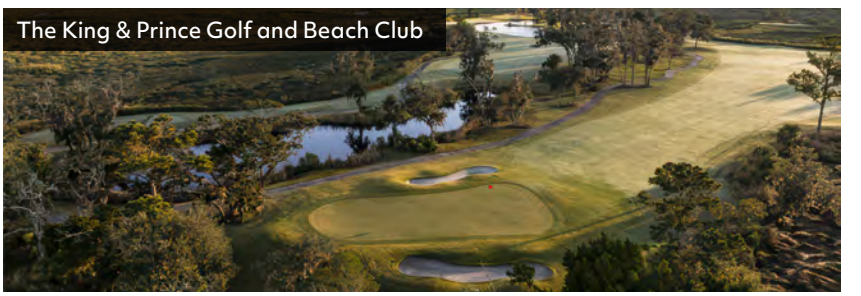
COURSE NEWS

The King & Prince Golf and Beach Club on St. Simon Island, Georgia, launched a $7 million transformation of the golf course and practice facilities, led by designer **Beau Welling**. The club is transitioning to a fully private model. … **Raymond Hearn**, ASGCA, was selected by Oakland University Golf and Learning Center in suburban Detroit to create a long-range master plan for its original Katke-Cousins course. … **Donald Ross**-designed Bradenton Country Club is working with architect **Brandon Johnson** to lead a restoration of the course, bringing it back to the layout's original vision. … Cedar Irons Golf Club in Tacoma, Washington, unveiled a fully renovated course following a nearly two-year, $7.5 million project led by Pacific Northwest golf course architect **Dan Hixson**. … SGL Golf announced a partnership with Suneagles Golf Club, naming the Eatontown, New Jersey-based course as an official U.S. Innovation Partner. The collaboration will focus on advancements through deployment and testing of SGL Golf's technology platform. … Escalante Golf acquired Hawks Ridge Golf Club in Ball Ground, Georgia. … KemperSports is now managing Broomsedge Golf Club in central South Carolina.

Studying the Katke-Cousins plan



The King & Prince Golf and Beach Club

PEOPLE NEWS

Syngenta Professional Solutions named **Todd Loecke** head of sales and **Gregg Wisniewski** head of key accounts. … Albaugh Specialty Products promoted **Justin Watts** to director as **Russ Mitchell** transitions to key account manager. … Bernhard and Company appointed **Casey Madden** as sales manager for Southeast North America. … Control Solutions Inc. appointed **Allan Fulcher** as head of business development and technical sales. … RISE announced the hiring of its next leader, **Scott Herndon**, who joins as executive director.

INDUSTRY BUZZ

Baroness USA continued expansion of its dealer network with the addition of four new partners: Turf Equipment Source, AgCon Equipment, Abell Turf & Tractor and Cal Turf Equipment Supply. … Albaugh received U.S. EPA registration for Colonel XTR, an algaecide designed to control a broad range of aqueous algae, including filamentous, planktonic and macrophytic species. … Envu announced that its 2026 Horizon Summer Golf Advantage promotion will run through July 31.

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Q&A

BRIAN AYNARDI PH.D.

Northeast Research Scientist • R&D Field Research

1. What are the symptoms of Pythium root disease?

Pythium root rot occurs on creeping bentgrass, mixed bentgrass/*Poa Annua*, and ultradwarf bermudagrass putting greens. Often found in push-up greens that hold a lot of moisture, Pythium root rot results in orange or bronze irregular patches, as well as brown, "sizzled," shortened roots that can't properly translocate water and nutrients.

Pythium root dysfunction occurs almost exclusively on newly established creeping bentgrass putting greens. Plants with Pythium root dysfunction lack root hairs but may otherwise appear somewhat healthy. Stand symptoms appear more as off-color circular patches.

2. How to control Pythium root diseases?

A preventive fungicide program is essential with any type of root-infecting pathogen, as these Pythium species damage roots before above ground symptoms manifest themselves. Initiate preventive applications when soil temperatures are ~60°F at the 2-inch depth and continue through the summer growing months.

Segway® Fungicide SC has been recognized as the industry gold standard for Pythium control for nearly a decade, and should be used in rotation with other products that control root Pythium pathogens. A 14-day alternating program of Segway (or Union® Fungicide SC, a premix product of cyazofamid + azoxystrobin) and Serata™ Fungicide, a new product from FMC, has demonstrated unparalleled Pythium root disease control in university research trials and on golf courses.

Fortunately, neither of these Pythium diseases typically result in death of a putting surface, and curative fungicide applications of Segway (cyazofamid) or Union (cyazofamid + azoxystrobin) fungicide result in recovery that is evident within 10-14 days after application.

3. What do Pythium blight symptoms look like?

Pythium blight is one of the most feared of all diseases in the turf industry, as it can kill large areas of turf quickly. Pythium blight often starts in small, dark patches about the size of a human hand, and is associated with aerial mycelia when the pathogen is active. Infected areas are bronze in color, and usually move in irregular patterns with topography due to the pathogen's affinity for water. Symptoms on bermudagrass include black lesions when the disease begins to develop. Scout for Pythium blight in areas where there is little to no air circulation when conducive environmental conditions exist.

4. How to control Pythium blight?

Preventive applications for Pythium blight are imperative, and Segway is the premier Pythium blight control product. Because Pythium blight affects the foliage, a carrier volume of 2 gal./1,000 sq. ft. is ideal. As with root Pythiums, control of foliar blight is best achieved on shorter intervals, such as 14-days.

Pythium blight occurs on cool-season grass when daytime temperatures exceed 85F, nighttime temperatures exceed 65F, and relative humidity is greater than 90% for 14 consecutive hours. Pythium blight does not require the same strict conditions to develop on bermudagrass.

On that host species, Pythium blight occurs when significant periods of rain, high humidity and clouds exist, especially during the shoulder seasons or during tropical storms, but does not require specific temperature parameters.

5. How to control Pythium damping off?

Damping-off is a disease of emerging or newly emerged seedlings. There are no specific environmental conditions associated with damping-off. However, due to the potential for seedlings to be killed, a preventive application at the time of seeding or at seedling emergence is critical. Apply Segway or Union fungicide in sufficient carrier volume (2 gal. carrier/1,000 sq. ft.) and repeat applications on newly emerged grass as needed.

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Brandi Merrick

USGA GREEN SECTION

Brandi Merrick has an abundance of enthusiasm for her job. As the manager of USGA Green Section Education, she has numerous responsibilities with the goal of providing accurate, up-to-date information to superintendents and others with a vested interest in turf.

On any given day, Merrick, who joined the USGA in 2023, might be editing articles, writing content or producing video for the *Green Section Record*, the USGA's semimonthly newsletter.

Her workday brings a lot of variety. "It's probably one of the things I love most about the job," she says.

An Iowa native, Merrick discovered turf as a career somewhat accidentally. When she enrolled at Iowa State, her ambition was to become a veterinarian. Merrick, though, sought a change and an advisor noted she had already completed many of the requirements for a degree in agricultural education. Needing to take an upper-level horticulture class, Merrick found the only one that fit her schedule was a turf-oriented class.

"I wound up absolutely loving it," she tells host **Rick Woelfel** on the *Wonderful Women of Golf* podcast. "It's one of my favorite classes of all time."

Merrick graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor's degree in agriculture science and a minor in horticulture. Following graduation she landed an internship at Pinehurst Resort — and her career took off.

She later earned a master's degree in plant pathology at NC State while working as a graduate assistant/teaching assistant. During her time in Raleigh, she worked with highly regarded turfgrass pathologist **Dr. Jim Kerns**.

"I literally can't say enough good things [about Dr. Kerns]," Merrick says. "I actually met him a few years before I started my master's program. I was absolutely fascinated by all of his thoughts. Being part of his program, you're really a part of a family. My wife and I still go to his Christmas party every year, and we still keep in touch."

Merrick worked as a maintenance foreman at Pinehurst Resort before spending two years as an assistant superintendent at the Omni Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina.

"There was not one single person on our team with a background like that," she says. "I think, in general, whether it's myself or anybody in the USGA Green Section talking to a superintendent, I hope they know that we've been there, we've been in their shoes. We have an idea of some of the things they're going through. Of course, everybody's situation is so, so different."

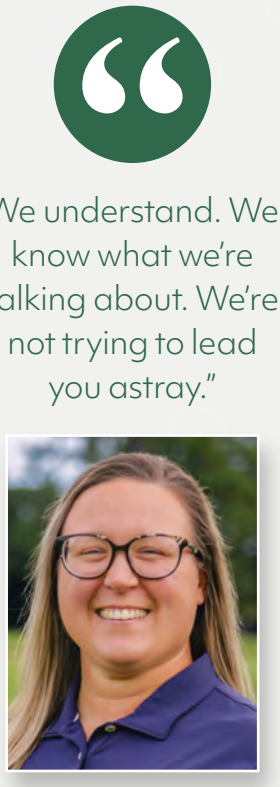
People are often surprised when they learn about Merrick's professional history.

"Sometimes people will see me on the golf course with the camera, or running the drone, or holding the sunshade, or I'm in front of the camera," she says. "You can always see that moment, that look of surprise, or that look of understanding when we're having a conversation with a superintendent or the assistant and I mention my path. It's kind of, 'Oh, OK, you get it. You understand, you've been there.

"I think that for me personally it really helps a lot, because I actually understand what they're going through. Whether they perceive that is another thing. But I think because of the reputation of the Green Section, most people we work with understand we've been there. We understand. We know what we're talking about. We're not trying to lead you astray."

Merrick delights in seeing the turf industry becoming more diverse. She was especially enthused when the USGA recently added former superintendent and two-time *Wonderful Women of Golf* guest **Heather Schapals** to the Green Section team as a West Region agronomist.

"The amount of joy fills my heart," she says. "Bringing her on board has been the most fun. Getting to work with her and getting to know her a little bit more … having somebody else who gets it is so huge."



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Enduring the long term

What is sustainable golf course architecture? Jeffrey Danner defines the term and explains why it's essential for the industry.

Jeffrey Danner was a golf course architect long before he earned his education and certifications. At age 11, he ran around his parents' backyard with a pen, paper, utility poles and a golf club, sketching out as many holes as he could. Now as co-founder of Pangaea Golf Architecture, Danner is living his dream. His designs go beyond creating a course. They focus on sustainable architecture. But what does that actually mean?

Danner shares his expertise.

How would you define sustainable golf course architecture?

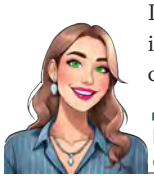
It's one of those terms that is very loosely defined, and I don't think most people fully understand what it means. The best way I've been able to define it is that sustainability, at its core, is a self-perpetuating existence. It's designing a golf course that can continue to function socially, economically and environmentally over the long term without constant intervention. I think many people focus almost entirely on the environmental side, but the social and economic components are just as critical. All three are interdependent and have to work together over time to create net positives in each of those areas. The challenge is that sustainability looks different for every property, different climates, cultures, constraints and budgets. It's really about making decisions that allow a course to endure within those realities. If a golf course can't sustain itself operationally and culturally, then it's not truly sustainable, regardless of how it performs environmentally.

Why is sustainable architecture such an important component for golf courses to incorporate?

I'd go a step further. It's not just important, it's essential, especially today. On the social side, participation is golf's lifeblood. It's not just about revenue; it's about relevance, accessibility and connection to the community. If people aren't playing, you don't have a viable operation. And without that foundation, it becomes very difficult to reinvest in the course to improve the experience, enhance environmental stewardship and support long-term viability. At the same time, we're dealing with water constraints, increasing regulation, rising costs and public perception. A relatively small percentage of the population plays golf, yet many projects go through public review processes where the majority of stakeholders are non-golfers. So being able to demonstrate value beyond the game itself is critical. I do think that perception is starting to improve. It's not about being 'green' for its own sake; it's about long-term survival. Courses that aren't designed with that in mind will eventually be forced to react instead of adapting by design, which is really the opposite of what sustainability is all about.

What do some of your own sustainable designs look like?

It's always very site-specific. One example that stands out is a project at Anchorage Golf Course in Alaska, where we were preparing for the USGA Senior Women's Amateur, the first USGA event held in the state. It's a rugged environment with a very short growing season, so the challenge wasn't just design; it was sourcing materials, finding labor and working within logistical constraints. We ended up using locally available materials, working with local contractors and coordinating with community partners to help execute the work. A landscaping company donated a bunch of sod and helped lay it. They got sand from an airport that's nearby that ended up being suitable for the purpose. That project is a good example of what sustainability really looks like in practice, using what's available, working within the realities of the site and aligning design decisions with those constraints. Ultimately, sustainability starts early, with site selection planning and design, and carries through construction, long-term maintenance and monitoring.



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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LINKS TO THE FUTURE

Venerable Ballybunion Golf Club is all in on new tech and data collection — including the USGA's GS3 smart ball and DEACON app.

By **Matt LaWell**

John Bambury spends much of his days looking for problems at Ballybunion Golf Club. **Matt Trousdale** spends much of his days recording data that might help fix whatever Bambury spots.

After more than seven years together on a gorgeous stretch of southwest Ireland green space, Bambury and Trousdale mesh as coworkers. Bambury arrived from Trump International Golf Links in September 2014 as the new course manager — the equivalent of a director of agronomy on this side of the Pond — for the 133-year-old, 36-hole club. He hired Trousdale about four years later as a greenkeeper — a maintenance team member — and promoted him over the years up to head of course data, training and health & safety. Trousdale now splits time between collecting data and working on the course. "If we're short of people to cut greens," Trousdale says, "I'll grab a greens mower and take all my data stuff with me, and I'll just be collecting stuff as I go around."

Trousdale has been carting a little more tech with him lately. He pitched Bambury on the USGA DEACON app and the GS3 smart ball and finally added both to Ballybunion's toolbox as soon as they became available in Ireland and across Europe before the 2025 season. A handful of the 80 or so maintenance team members are trained to use the GS3 — Trousdale, of course, among them. "We don't want too many people using it," he says. "If you have too many people using anything data-related, that's when things start going pear-shaped. You want four or five completely trained up who you can trust, who you know are going to use the equipment properly. We've got a good team using it."

Some days, Trousdale packs the smart ball along with his iPhone Pro Max, which is big enough for spreadsheets and dashboards, and tests fescue greens on the Old Course.

"We're probably a bit different to a lot of golf courses in that we try to get the speed on every green

© COURTESY OF BALLYBUNION GOLF CLUB (2)

every single day," Trousdale says. "I know a lot of golf courses don't do that. We've tried to integrate GS3 by doing five or six greens with it each day." The other greens are measured with a Stimpmeter by greenkeepers handling course setup. "And then we arrive at the end of the morning and see what we've got, both speeds combined. We try to keep the same greens for the GS3 so we can see the trends easier on DEACON."

Because Ballybunion is a links course, with many holes hugging the Atlantic, wind whips at all hours. No two days are the same and plenty of days feature all four seasons. "It's very rare we have a day without any wind," Trousdale says. Wind can affect Stimpmeter readings, but "we've seen the GS3 is a lot more consistent in collecting data in the wind. That's just been proven with how much we've used both ways, really. Traditional Stimpmeter, if you're trying to get speeds in strong wind, you can be getting anything. It could roll two feet one way and then 10 feet the other way, and you've gained nothing from that information. Whereas if you take the GS3 out and use it on the same spot, you can see the wind doesn't affect it anywhere near as much." Trousdale recognized the difference almost immediately. "It is a lot more consistent, no matter who's using it."

Trousdale, Bambury, assistant course manager **Ilse Smuts** and other team members check data on their phones in real time on DEACON, allowing for quicker decision-making, more efficient maintenance and more informed conversation with club management. "It saves a lot of conversations after we've finished the jobs," Trousdale says, "because John has the data already there. Everyone can see live data, rather than sitting down at the end of the day, discussing everything."

Speed and efficiency are especially key at Ballybunion, where the peak season lasts only about 26 weeks. "Growth doesn't properly kick in until mid-May," Bambury says, "and then it falls off a cliff in October. So you have a small window. That data is enormous for us."

Data collection, both Bambury and Trousdale say, is only as good as the frequency at which it is collected. Which is a big reason why Trousdale focuses on it at least 20 hours a week.

"I know there aren't too many places that have a role for someone such as Matt, but I think that's going to increase as the years go by, because we are increasingly in a data-driven environment," Bambury says. "If you look at other sectors of the economy that have been capturing data for years, they're very efficient businesses. And this is helping us be more efficient. More efficient with our water, more efficient with our cutting regimes, more efficient with our fertilizer and disease programs, and also more efficient with communication to our members."

"John now has numbers he can take to club management, whereas before he was just going back and telling them," Trousdale says. "He can show smoothness and trueness. We can monitor firmness levels of any area on the course."

Starting next month, the Ballybunion team will be able to monitor the same sort of data on the courses, plural. They recently finished a renovation of the Cashen Course — 91 years younger than the Old Course, the **Robert Trent Jones Sr.** design debuted in 1984 — and the club plans to open it to play in August.

"It's been a massive project," Trousdale says. "The first phase was a big experience for everybody, kind of opened everybody's eyes a bit with the amount of work and half the course being shuttered, diggers and dumpers coming in and out all the time. But we can see the benefits now and it's starting to look like a natural, proper golf course."

"For the next three or four years, we're focused on root depth and root quality, getting good density, getting the right grasses in place and making sure they're strong enough to compete against the grass that we do not want there," Bambury says. "Managing our footfall, managing our nutrition, and getting everything mature. Over time, we will bring a consistency across all the new surfaces. A links golf course takes five years from when you finish construction to saying it's complete." The technology, he says, "will allow us to build a picture of where we are seeing improvement across the different phases. We will then use that information to [determine] where can we tweak a little to try to marry everything a little closer together."

Soon enough — 2031, or perhaps 2032 — the Cashen Course will appear as aged as the Old Course. Every green speed will be identical thanks to data collected with the GS3 and analyzed on DEACON. And every round will be as special as ever.

"It is always someone's special day at Ballybunion," Bambury says. "For many people, Ballybunion is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. This is what drives our team's culture and the standards we set for the property. We believe that every North American with a passport and a set of golf clubs will be in Ballybunion someday. Some just don't know it yet."

Matt Trousdale, head of course data, training and health & safety at Ballybunion Golf Club in Ireland, collects raw data on the Old Course.

LEADERSHIP STARTS SMALL

Retired U.S. Navy Admiral **William H. McRaven**, who commanded special operations forces at every level of the military in his decorated career, says great leaders start their day by making their beds. He's so convinced of the wisdom in that simple exercise that he authored a book titled: "Make Your Bed: Little Things That Can Change Your Life… and Maybe the World."

McRaven's hypothesis behind the title is that small, daily accomplishments, like making your bed, build discipline, resilience and lay the foundation for achieving bigger goals.

"If you make your bed every morning, you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride and will encourage you to do another task and another and another," McRaven says. "Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter. If you can't do the little things right, you'll never be able to do the big things right."

Most of us will never have the weight and responsibility that Admiral McRaven carried on his shoulders while leading combat missions during Operation Desert Storm and both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. But we can be effective leaders whose actions move ourselves, our people and our organizations in positive ways. We offer the following suggestions as ways to start small, build leadership muscle and find success.

Hone your command skills. Many who envy leadership roles exaggerate their command opportunities by failing to develop their direct reports, showing themselves to be inwardly focused and withdrawn when others challenge their command. True leaders are sought out for their direction and guidance. In a crisis, all eyes turn to them. They are energized — not awed — by tough challenges.

Questions to ask yourself concerning your command skills:

- Are you knowledgeable enough about your work to earn trust and inspire confidence?
- Do you enjoy carrying the mantle of leadership for your team?

Get comfortable confronting direct reports. Those who are effective small-unit leaders don't allow problems to fester. They conduct timely discussions about performance and goals, deal directly with poor performers and step up to tough decisions. Overly eager, impatient managers might not invest the time required for adequate training. Some are simply uncomfortable with uncomfortable conversations, delaying the hard conversations they know need to happen.

Questions to ask about dealing with direct reports:

- Do I tend to procrastinate when important face-to-face conversations with my crew are needed?
- Am I afraid of making managerial mistakes?
- Do I understand the tasks well enough to establish fair and reasonable expectations?

Decide what kind of leader you want to be. What do you want your supervisory relationship to be with your crew? Rising managers who harbor doubts about their knowledge and leadership skills might be reluctant to take on the responsibilities of leadership. Others are too eager to be in charge and lack humility and empathy to lead others effectively.

The best managers relate well to crew members; they understand them and want to help them do great work. These top performers recognize their responsibility to provide steady leadership — especially in tough and challenging circumstances — and are comfortable teaching and learning from their subordinates.

Questions to ask about leadership style:

- Am I open to coaching and teaching, or do I assume others should already know what I want?
- Have I chosen great bosses to model?
- Do I continue to learn about leadership, or do I feel I already know all I need to know?

In developing leadership skills, managers at all levels of an organization must learn to deal with limited resources and information, while at the same time dealing with anxiety. Resources, whether human, economic or time-related, must be thoughtfully allocated and managed. The information we need to do our jobs effectively must be provided through training and on-the-job experience. Anxiety comes in many forms, and managers must know when to manage anxiety downward to help others relax and gain perspective. At other times, when your team needs to improve results significantly, anxiety or a sense of urgency must be managed upward.

In all these pursuits, we can find the reassurance and inspiration our jobs require in the 10 lessons Admiral McRaven says he learned from more than three decades in uniform, the most important of which is: "Never, ever quit. Refuse to give up, no matter how hard it gets."

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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THE GOOD STUFF

BASF
We create chemistry

For almost 15 years, the **Intrinsic® brand fungicides** have been foundational tools for disease management at thousands of courses. Here's why they continue to grow in value and importance in modern turf agronomy.

By Pat Jones

Intrinsic
Brand Fungicides

A few years ago, I was visiting a famed club that was weeks away from hosting a major championship, and the superintendent was briefing his team on the day's activities, including spraying Lexicon® Intrinsic brand fungicide. He told the team, *"Today, we put down the good stuff."*

I was reminded of that "wow" moment recently when I had the chance to interview BASF Turf's Senior Brand Product Manager, Jeff Vannoy about the past, present and future of their Intrinsic brands – including their flagship brand Lexicon. Here's our conversation.

Characterize the role of BASF in the golf business today.

We continue to be one of the leading manufacturers for the golf market, primarily developing fungicides, herbicides and a few insecticides. The fuel for our engine is, and always will be, innovation. We try to develop and introduce products that make a clear difference and provide discernible benefits to golf course superintendents. And, we don't invest much time into things that are already widely available. Our focus is on foundational products that give customers solutions they can trust for some of their biggest agronomic challenges.

How's business?

We've grown pretty well over the past 10 to 12 years. We believe that if we stay focused on customer needs and pay attention to changing trends, that we can always be on the cutting edge of developing products.

If you go back more than a decade ago when this run really started for BASF, it's clear that the Intrinsic brands were game-changers for us and a lot of turf professionals. We launched **Lexicon Intrinsic** and **Xzemplar® fungicide** in 2014. **Maxtima® fungicide** and **Navicon® Intrinsic brand fungicide,** a couple of transformational DMIs, came along in 2019.

We also launched an array of brands, including **Encartis® fungicide, Alucion® 35 WG insecticide, Finale® XL T&O herbicide** plus a few others. And then in 2024, we got into the snow mold market for the first time because we finally found a product in **Aramax® Intrinsic brand fungicide** that really had that discernible benefit to the superintendent. We've grown our portfolio but stayed true to the idea of innovation, which is a clear benefit to the superintendent, who is our livelihood.

Continue Reading

How does BASF determine when and how to innovate?

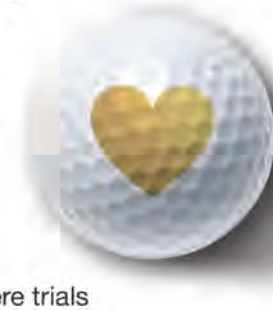
We actually have a cross-functional innovation team that helps generate new ideas. These are people from different parts of BASF, many of them customer-facing, who are out there every day listening to customers and seeing firsthand the challenges they face. Instead of innovation only being a thing that's done by R&D and marketing, we truly fan out and try to make sure we're getting ideas from a broad array of different voices within the organization; then we let the best ideas win.

We've also always been very forward-thinking in the area of market research, both from very small, quick studies to one that we recently completed on our Intrinsic brand portfolio that was the most comprehensive, largest study we've ever completed. I have a saying, *"300 superintendents giving their thoughts and ideas in research can't be wrong!"*

What were some key things you learned from that research?

We wanted to understand what the Intrinsic brand means to superintendents today. How much confidence do they have in the Intrinsic product and in the plant health benefits they provide? The critical thing, obviously, is providing outstanding disease control, but we also wanted to know how the message about Intrinsic plant health benefits resonates with our customers now.

Jeff Vannoy
Senior Brand Product Manager, BASF Turf



We learned that, overwhelmingly, today's customers get it. They trust the science behind plant health at a very high rate. We found that, in general, this market has matured a lot when it comes to their feelings and thoughts on plant health. So today, we have a robust group of customers that are big believers in our Intrinsic brand. Superintendents buy the products where trials consistently demonstrate excellent performance every time, regardless of the conditions.*

How did the introduction of "the good stuff" – Intrinsic fungicide brands like Lexicon and Navicon – change the way superintendents think about disease management programs?

The change started when we began thinking about which annual sprays the superintendent sees as "non-negotiable." In other words, what are foundational parts of the disease management program that require the best available product? In those early Lexicon ads, we used the headline: *"When failure is not an option, choose Lexicon."* And, that connected with superintendents because they have to meet such high standards all the time.

Navicon also became a foundational brand for a lot of golf courses, containing Maxtima + Insignia® Intrinsic brand fungicide. That's a product they could count on and have in the rotation when there was heavy pressure. Aramax is on that list now, too, for fairways. When we adopted that foundational mindset, it really changed how we approached the market.

Talk about why formulation matters so much in foundational chemistry.

A lot of folks don't think about how important formulations are to success of a product. I use this analogy. You can go out and buy two cars that both have four tires, disc brakes and a V6 engine. But one car is a Porsche, and it's got a twin turbo. It is really fast, fuel-efficient and very reliable. The other car is a basic Honda Accord. It's also got a V6, four tires and brakes. But those extra components make them perform very differently. Formulations make a huge difference, and customers see it in our brands every day.

Continue Reading

Why are the Intrinsic products so treasured by customers?

The product always performs the same. Whether the conditions are brutal or fair, it doesn't matter. The Intrinsic brand portfolio is built to operate under non-optimal conditions and to give that plant every advantage that it needs to be successful.*

What is the most important thing that they provide?

From a logical, practical level, it has to be very effective on the disease you're going after. Intrinsic brand fungicides give you the ability to go after 26 different diseases. And *"the good stuff"* gives you rock-solid confidence that it will work. But additionally, the customers often see that Intrinsic plant health difference in their greens and even fairways. Physiologically, that plant has more efficient respiration, and can better withstand stressors, like foot traffic, heat, humidity, cold and mechanical stress.

At the end of the day, a superintendent spends very little time thinking about chemistry. They have so many other things on their plate. So, the most important thing is the assurance that when they use one of the Intrinsic brand fungicides, they are going to work exactly as promised. It's peace of mind. It's an assurance that you're going to be okay through a big event or even a family vacation in the season.

How has the BASF Intrinsic Holiday Spray program been a difference-maker for customers?

When it all started in 2012, the Intrinsic Holiday Spray program was originally based around the Fourth of July spray. The thought was, how can we support superintendents on that weekend when there's going to be a lot of golf played? How can we help them ensure their greens are in the best possible condition? It's that foundational spray you build your program around. The program has since evolved beautifully from a one-shot thing to a regimen where – for cool-season turf – there are three or four greens apps of an Intrinsic brand from May into early September.

We didn't even have an Intrinsic Holiday Spray program for warm season in the beginning. Over the years, we have achieved that and, believe it or not, the program is actually even a little bit bigger in the south than it is in the north as far as the number of users.

Today, north and south, it's become a great planning tool that many customers find useful in preventing problems before they happen by using the *"good stuff."*

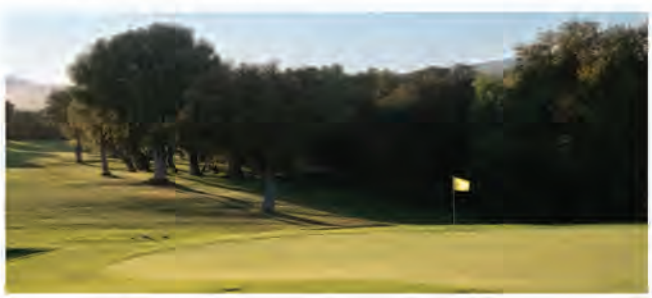
That's due to the reliable performance Intrinsic has delivered for nearly 15 years.

What else do you wish people understood about Intrinsic brands and what they mean to the market?

Over the years turf professionals have found that they are highly effective when they're doing grow-ins, whether that's with bermudagrass sprigs or bentgrass sod. Also, you can achieve much faster recovery from aerification when you pretreat using Intrinsic. Last but not least, there's the plant health impact that helps the turf withstand weather, traffic and other stressors with the added bonus of stronger roots.

What's the most important thing you want superintendents to know about BASF and the value the Intrinsic brands bring to the market?

In a few words, trust, partnership and a brand promise to always provide the same efficacy year after year, application after application.* We will continue to deliver "the good stuff" because it helps make everything easier.



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THE BASF INTRINSIC HOLIDAY SPRAY PROGRAM

WARM-SEASON TURF

HALLOWEEN TO FOURTH OF JULY

GREENS

October
Navicon® Intrinsic brand fungicide

November
Lexicon® Intrinsic brand fungicide

March
Navicon Intrinsic brand fungicide *or* **Lexicon Intrinsic** brand fungicide

May to July
Lexicon Intrinsic brand fungicide *or* **Navicon Intrinsic** brand fungicide pre-aerification

FAIRWAYS

October
Aramax® Intrinsic brand fungicide *or* **Navicon Intrinsic** brand fungicide

March
Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide

May to July
Insignia® SC Intrinsic brand fungicide *or* **Navicon Intrinsic** brand fungicide pre-aerification

Follow the program. Forget the guesswork.

The BASF Intrinsic® Holiday Spray Program is an easy-to-follow agronomic program designed to help your course thrive under the toughest conditions. Apply **Intrinsic brand fungicides** throughout the year to help protect your warm-season greens, fairways and tees from heavy disease pressure and winter stressors like reduced sunlight and cooler temperatures.

To learn more about the BASF Intrinsic Holiday Spray Program, contact your BASF representative or visit **betterturf.basf.us/holidayspray**

Intrinsic® Brand Fungicides

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THE BASF INTRINSIC HOLIDAY SPRAY PROGRAM

COOL-SEASON TURF
MEMORIAL DAY TO LABOR DAY

GREENS

Around Memorial Day
Lexicon® Intrinsic brand fungicide

Around Fourth of July
Lexicon Intrinsic brand fungicide

August
Navicon® Intrinsic brand fungicide

Around Labor Day
Lexicon Intrinsic brand fungicide

FAIRWAYS & TEES

During May
Aramax® Intrinsic brand fungicide

During July
Navicon Intrinsic brand fungicide *or* **Honor® Intrinsic** brand fungicide *or* **Insignia® SC Intrinsic** brand fungicide

Mid-August to Mid-September
Aramax Intrinsic brand fungicide *or* **Navicon Intrinsic** brand fungicide *or* **Insignia SC Intrinsic** brand fungicide

Follow the program. Forget the guesswork.

The BASF Intrinsic® Holiday Spray Program is an easy-to-follow agronomic program designed to help your course thrive under the toughest conditions. Apply **Intrinsic brand fungicides** around major summer holidays to help protect your cool-season greens, fairways and tees from heavy disease pressure and summer stressors like heat, humidity and heavy traffic.

To learn more about the BASF Intrinsic Holiday Spray Program, contact your BASF representative or visit **betterturf.basf.us/holidayspray**

Intrinsic® Brand Fungicides

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Trey Kemp

SMALL MIRACLE

Oil, politics, paspalum, family, grit and golf. Inside the revival of a beloved west Texas 9-holer off the industry grid.

By **Matt LaWell**

ALMOST NO ONE just stumbles into Rankin.

The west Texas city is small, for starters. Its population has dropped from 780 at the start of this decade to an estimated 715 earlier this year. There are just 36 roads inside the city limits. The whole place measures a little more than a square mile.

Rankin is also rather isolated. Even when you time your drive to avoid pickups pouring out of the oil fields and onto U.S. Highway 67 at the end of shifts, it's still an hour's drive from Odessa or Midland, which are both about five hours from Dallas. In Rankin, "you can get anywhere in five minutes," says **Branden Phillips**, who arrived two years ago and is now beloved by most of the 714 other residents. "And that's pushing it."

Phillips is the still-new superintendent at Rankin Golf Course, an understated 9-hole gem purchased by an oil money-rich school district after a 2022 ballot proposition and renovated as a gift for residents.

Phillips is a key figure in Rankin's story today, but his running mate at the course, head professional **Terry Lester**, was a key figure decades ago. Lester was born in Rankin in 1956, three years after the course opened, and lived there until leaving 18 years later to play golf at Midland College. He worked for a while at Midland Country Club, then hopped around mini-tours in Arizona and California. One year, he qualified for The Byron Nelson on the PGA Tour. Friends describe him as "a pretty good stick."

"When I left to go play college golf, I thought I was disadvantaged," Lester says. "But the further I get from home, Rankin was a wonderful place to grow up." He played 54 holes most summer days — six loops around the old course — "and you're not going to do that in Odessa. You're not going to have that kind of access, especially as a kid."

Lester lived "right off the truck route over there, which was by the old third tee box, close to where the sixth tee is now." As soon as daylight cracked, he and four friends, all dressed in T-shirts and blue jeans, teed off on 3, headed to 4, then stopped to see if the pro shop was open. "Most times, it wasn't," he says. After they putted out on 9, they would jump into the old pool, since filled in with cement. "You'd be dry by the time you got to 3 green."

Back then, the greens were bentgrass "and very small," Lester says. "Tiny. The fairways were pretty much caliche unless you had a wet spring. Hopefully, you had some weeds from about 50 yards in that you could clump your ball on around the greens. We called it turf, but I don't think it was. If it could be mowed and was green, it was turf."

Lester returned to Rankin not long after Phillips showed up. Phillips recruited him to come back. More on that later. Plenty has changed since he headed out as a teenager. Oil boomed again, then busted. Businesses opened, then shuttered. Today, there are two gas station convenience stores, including a new Allsup's, and a small hotel. An airport sits a mile outside downtown. It averages less than two takeoffs and landings per day. Most everything else is owned by the city or the school.

The golf course has changed, too. Entirely for the better.

"When I look out that window every morning and the sun comes up," Lester says from inside the clubhouse, "it's like a miracle, what I see. To you guys, it's just a nice course. But I remember the way it was. It's a lot different."

NOT LONG AGO, nearly every inch of Rankin Golf Course was dirt. The tees were dirt. The fairways were dirt. The greens were mostly green but even they had patches of dirt. The cart paths were dirt with a bit of gravel pointing toward the next hole.

The city sits near the eastern edge of the Chihuahuan Desert, which covers more than 200,000 square miles of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Mexico. Rankin is not quite a desert, but it can feel like it, especially during summers when average highs hover in the high 90s. Rain is measured in tenths — and sometimes hundredths — of an inch. Maybe 16 inches fall most years. Less than ideal for keeping turf alive on a golf course without an irrigation system.

Regardless of the conditions, the course was beloved, if unkempt. Wednesday scrambles provided a night out. Monthly memberships cost around $40. An honor box, still standing outside the clubhouse but no longer the preferred method of $5 payment for the day, warned:

PLAY AT YOUR OWN RISK
NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ACCIDENTS

"We decided to keep that up," Phillips says. "People like it."

The honor box survived where the dirt did not. That 2022 ballot proposition — part of $123 million in Rankin Independent School District bonds that cover

The warning sign and $5 honor box are a reminder of what Rankin Golf Course used to be. It's a little safer these days — and a little more expensive, though not much.

school building construction and renovation, infrastructure upgrades, new computers, new buses, teacher housing and, yes, buying the golf course from Upton County — passed 268-166. Not long after election day, **Sammy Wyatt**, then the Rankin ISD superintendent, called golf course architect **Trey Kemp** and asked for ballpark estimates to build a new 9-hole course.

"We could probably redo the greens and add a little irrigation for a couple million dollars," Kemp remembers telling Wyatt.

"'I don't think you understand,'" Kemp says Wyatt told him. "'I want the Cadillac of 9-hole golf courses.'"

"Sammy Wyatt was all in on making this big," Kemp says. "He had the grandest plans. My first few iterations, we had 10 or 12 cabins lining the course. As time went on, I think people got a little more realistic."

Realistic, but no less ambitious. Even after Wyatt resigned from his position in August 2023 — he was cited for "concerns regarding policy violations" unrelated to the golf course — Kemp kept on track. He sent out plans for bid during summer 2023 and started working that November with VM Golf Services of Houston on construction and with **Larry Rodgers** on irrigation. Rankin ISD also granted him full autonomy to write the job description for the new superintendent. Working with interim superintendent **Ralph Traynham**, who had come out of retirement for a spell but, according to Kemp, "was never going to stay on full time," Kemp pored over more than a dozen applications for the job. The choice could not have been more obvious.

When he applied, Phillips was seven years into a run as superintendent at Quicksand Golf Course in San Angelo, about two hours east of Rankin. He had worked 16 years at Quicksand after responding to a classified ad in the *San Angelo Standard-Times*. "I was there for so long, I didn't ever think I was going to leave," he says. He and his wife, **Tiffany**, had three children in San Angelo. "It's a perfect place to live, but I wanted to build my career a little bit."

He and his wife also wanted to return to smaller cities. San Angelo is home to almost 100,000 residents. Robert Lee, where Phillips grew up, is home to 1,027. Moran, where Tiffany grew up — "about 30 miles north of Baird," Phillips says — is home to 226. "It would be nice, getting into a little town, grow our kids up in a town like we were," Phillips remembers saying to his wife.

Still, Phillips did not apply immediately. Tiffany told him that if he didn't, she would send it in for him. His résumé and reputation impressed Traynham and Kemp, who visited Quicksand during the hiring process. Phillips had spearheaded the greens conversion there from Champion Bermudagrass to Platinum Paspalum, which Kemp was considering for Rankin. (For more on how the grass helped spur Rankin to hire Phillips, see *He knows his paspalum*, this page) "I really love the grass," Phillips says, "and I've got it down to an art on how to grow it and get it going."

Phillips and Tiffany considered the move. The position included a pay raise and, unknown at the time, quarterly bonuses "that make me blush even talking about it," Phillips says — along with a four-bedroom home provided by the school that's

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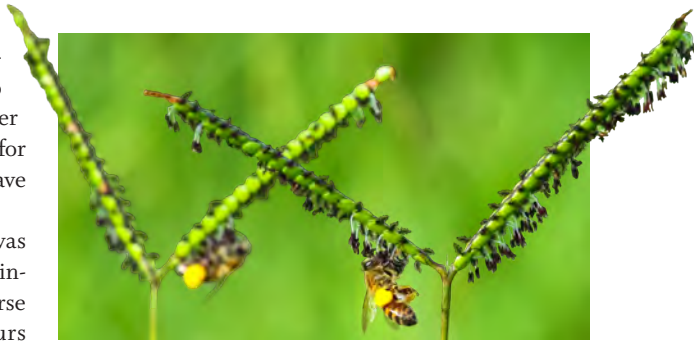

He knows his paspalum

How can you make your résumé stand out in a crowded application pool? Quality work experience is paramount. References help. And, more often than not, you need a little luck.

Trey Kemp loved everything he read after **Branden Phillips** applied to be the first superintendent of the recently renovated Rankin Golf Course in Rankin, Texas, including his 16 years at Quicksand Golf Course in nearby San Angelo. He also loved that Phillips helped convert Quicksand's greens in 2014 from Champion Bermudagrass to Platinum Paspalum.

Kemp, you see, was considering paspalum greens at Rankin.

Paspalum is becoming increasingly popular in tropical and arid regions. Texas is not tropical, but it's definitely arid.

"I reached out and went and saw him, knowing paspalum was a possibility here," says Kemp, who was hired by the Rankin Independent School District to overhaul the course and was later tasked with writing the superintendent's job description and finding the right person for the position. "I wanted to see the greens out there." After Kemp and Phillips "spent a couple hours driving around" Quicksand, Kemp was convinced.

"He's known in the area for growing paspalum greens," Kemp says. "So, I went out and looked at 'em, and I said, 'Oh, my gosh.'"

Paspalum greens and Phillips both belonged at Rankin.

"We were one of the first courses north of the [Gulf] Coast pretty much to have paspalum," Phillips says of his years at Quicksand, which is about four hours southwest of downtown Dallas. "We went with it for the salty water that we had over there and it just worked out perfect." When Kemp pitched Phillips on the turf, Phillips said, "'Man, paspalum over at Rankin sounds like a game changer to me.' I think it's definitely an ideal spot for paspalum. Around Midland, it's probably OK, but anywhere up a little north, I don't know."

As temperatures warm and climates shift every so slightly, could paspalum creep farther north? Could it make sense for more golf courses across the Southwest and even the South?

The heat could be on.

a two-minute drive in a golf cart — three, tops — from the course and an administrative position at the school for Tiffany. Then they presented it to their kids. **Gavin** and **Braylee**, now 16 and 5, respectively, were all in. But **Brooke**, now 10, wasn't convinced.

"They went to a church school over in Angelo, Trinity Lutheran," Phillips says, "and when we told them where we were moving and that the mascot was the Red Devils, she threw a fit. And when we toured the school, saw the mascot, she was freaking out. She didn't like it.

"And then we go into the elementary school and there's a two-story slide *inside* the school. And she said, 'OK, I think this is all right.' She's grown out of the fear of the Red Devil mascot."

GOLF COURSE CONSTRUCTION and golf course maintenance are two entirely different endeavors. Related, sure, but hardly complementary. Still, superintendents who can thrive with the latter can often handle the former.

Kemp wanted Phillips to start in December 2023, "just so he could be here from the start of construction," but the school district didn't officially hire him until February 2024 and he couldn't start until May. Phillips arrived more than a month before the rest of his family and worked the first seven weeks alongside **David Arteaga** and the VM Golf Services team, and Rodgers. He hired **Apolonio "Ap" Gonzales**, who had worked previously at McCamey Country Club, another 9-holer about 20 minutes west of Rankin, in July.

"When we started laying sod, I only had Ap with me. It was just us hand watering it, trying to get it to grow in," Phillips says. "It was an unreal experience, knowing that I'd left something that was *there*, and here I am growing in a brand-new golf course." Fourteen-hour days. Sixteen-hour days. Temps climbing into triple digits. "When there was no turf out here and it was just powdered dirt, you'd walk in and sink up to your ankles in dirt. It was a constant dust storm out here."

More than once, Phillips remembers thinking, *What am I doing? What did I get myself into?* "But it was very rewarding, seeing the outcome," he says. "What it is now to what it was, it still blows my mind."

Most afternoons, normally between 1:30 and 2, a small group of Rankin residents who had played on the course for decades would pull into the lot, unload folding chairs and sit behind the clubhouse, watching the expanse of work across the course's 70 acres.

"I would come up here and talk with them, then go do stuff," says Kemp, who was born in Amarillo, lives in the Dallas Metroplex and estimates he was on site about 50 days during construction. "Come back in an hour or two and they'd ask, 'What'd you do? What's going on?'

"'Guys,' Kemp told them, 'it's gonna look like dirt for, you know, the next six months.'"

Unlike Wyatt, the regulars requested only a handful of improvements. "They wanted a pond," Kemp says, "and a looped cart path. I'd never gotten that request anywhere." The cart path made sense, though. Without a superintendent or even a fulltime maintenance team member — without irrigation — grass was

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a luxury. Texas death to whomever dared steer a cart anywhere near living turf.

"They take pride in the golf course and want to stay on the cart path," Kemp says. "I think it's probably a little different now that they can see you can keep grass out there. The way it was before, they didn't want anybody touching the grass with anything but their feet and a golf club." Now, about 30 of the 70 acres on property are maintained turf — TifTuf Bermudagrass on tees, fairways and rough, and that paspalum on greens.

Phillips, meanwhile, contributed to the design of the new maintenance facility, located on the edges of the course and within sight of any hole. The number and height of bay doors. The addition of a lift. Spaces for grinders. A closed space for plant protectants and other products. "I thought they did a good job building this," he says. "The only thing I will complain about is when it's 105, 110 outside, it's probably 120 in here. Other than it being hotter than you know what, it's a really good maintenance barn."

Phillips also convinced Lester to move home to be an old pro.

"I had seen some construction videos and said, 'That's the strangest deal. Rankin's getting a nice course,'" Lester says. "Then I got a phone call from Branden and I didn't know what to think. So, I finished hitting a bucket of balls at the range."

After working at Midland Country Club and playing professionally, Lester returned to the Permian Basin and worked as the pro at Ranchland Hills Golf Course, which closed in September 2024 and will soon be the site of the new Midland High School. "My wife [Joann], grew up in Rankin, she graduated with me, and she goes, 'Well, what do you think?' 'I don't know what to think! I'm getting old! But that would sure be a neat deal to be involved in.'"

Lester said yes.

"You don't have to do it forever," says Lester, who's 69 and jokes that he "hopes to be" 70 soon. "Obviously. At my age."

EIGHTEEN MONTHS OF WORK concluded in April 2025, and the course has been relatively packed ever since.

Busy weekends and holidays bring in about $2,700 per day in green fees and cart rentals, Lester says. But while the school wants to break even financially, "it's not about making money on this place," Phillips says. The most expensive membership package is $1,100 annually for a family. Resident families pay $875 per year. Individual residents pay $475 per year. Resident seniors pay $360. Among the 101 members, 83 live in Rankin, and all 300 or so students at the schools have full access. That means nearly 12 percent of city residents are members and more than 53 percent can walk on any time they want.

"They just want it for the kids growing up here and the community," Phillips says. "It's a gift."

Phillips works with a maintenance budget of about $500,000 per year. He could use another hand or two. Ap suffered a heart attack on the course earlier this year — Phillips rushed him to the hospital across the street in five minutes — and he and maintenance team member **Tim Potter** have handled everything

throughout the spring. But there are no complaints. "If he wasn't here, this place would not be near where it is right now," Kemp says of Phillips.

"On the course, I think everything's good right now," Phillips says. "We just keep up with it—that's the main thing, keeping up with it—and keep getting the word out about this place."

Lots of dreams remain in the discussion. A new clubhouse, a new cart barn and a learning facility near the driving range, designed for students and complete with simulators and an indoor putting green. How else will the golf team—which currently numbers around 16 boys but only two girls — grow? And how else can they compete for state championships?

"They want the best for the kids," Phillips says. "The best athletic facilities, building something they'll remember forever."

Rankin is small, but mighty. The football team plays in a beautiful stadium near Main Street and advanced to the 1A Six-Man Division 1 state championship game last season. The school features a new gymnasium, a new basketball court, a new track and a separate field events area. The community pool is packed on summer days.

There is plenty still to do.

Phillips and Lester discuss plans on a recent spring day with **Kristin Reid**, a Rankin resident and a golf nut who moved in next to the course in 1989. She currently holds the women's course record, and she and her husband have both recorded aces on No. 2 this year.

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"Branden's not allowed to move," she says, with a laugh.

"I don't plan on it," Phillips says. "I'm here until you all kick me out."

"Well, we are not kicking you out," Reid says.

"Maybe when the kids graduate," Phillips says, peering more than a decade into the future.

"No!" Reid says. "You have to stay here till you're 80 years old."

"There'll be a senior center named after you," Lester says. "The Branden Phillips Memorial Senior Center."

It will be situated, almost certainly, two minutes behind the wheel of a golf cart — three, tops — from the course.

Matt LaWell is Golf Course Industry's senior editor.

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SHINNECOCK + REVOLUTION:

Jon Jennings battles wind and desiccation every day on one of the world's best courses…and he relies on a proven product from The Aquatrols Company to succeed.

By **Pat Jones**

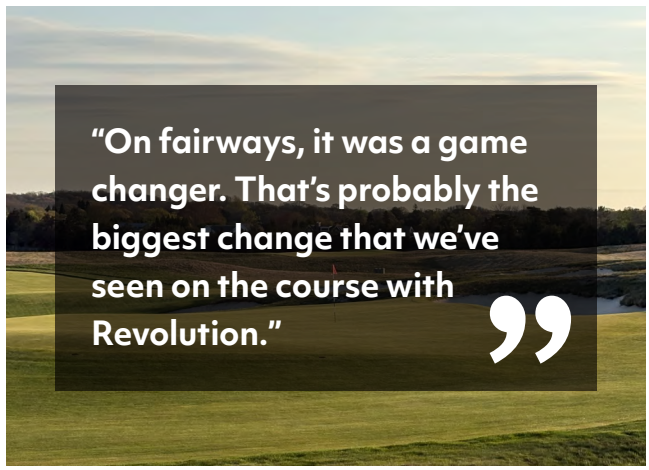
When you arrived at Shinnecock Hills GC in 2012, did you have a punch list of things you saw that you wanted to fix?
Nothing really massive needed to be changed but there were a lot of edges that needed to be tightened up: bunker edges, tee lines, mowing lines, bunker run-in areas … just little things. But when you put it all together, that's really what makes a good golf course great. It really makes it pop.

How prominent was moisture management in that process?
Moisture management is huge for us. We have strong winds most of the time, high UV levels, and high evapo-transpiration rates. And we're growing mostly *Poa* on playing surfaces so the grass is very susceptible to drying out

fast. Revolution has helped us manage that in a more predictable fashion. Instead of having a million hot spots pop up all over the place, we can manage a dry-down for special events without creating any detrimental effects to the playing surfaces long term.

Revolution also makes a big difference in using the moisture we have exactly the way we want. It helps us make sure that the water we apply ends up where it needs to be.

What was your experience with wetting agents before?
I'd always used them to get water down into the root system to make the water work more effectively and evenly in the soil profile. I'd primarily used them on greens and tees. But today, greens management practices have really extended beyond the putting surface into approaches, fairways and other important areas. That's what pushed us to expand our use of Revolution at Shinnecock beyond tees and greens.



So what's your program now?
We spray Revolution every 14 days, tee to green, at 3 ounces per thousand. We start applications early in the season [April] and we'll continue that through December when we cover greens.

We've found that even in the fall when it's cooler, it still keeps our moisture levels uniform. One of the last sprays we make is Revolution on the greens right before we cover just to keep the water moving through the soil and creating a uniform moisture layer throughout the green surface. We'll also spray bunker faces and approaches with Revolution using backpack sprayers to hit key spots. Overall, it's worked really well in maintaining that dry-down. You don't have that mottled look in the afternoon on a hot windy day. It dries down uniformly thanks to the Revolution.

When did you start the Revolution program?
We started using Revolution at Shinnecock in 2022. Again, we started small, mostly on putting surfaces. On greens, we saw a difference right away. We noticed that when you get to Day 12 or 13 you start to see that it's not quite as uniform. Then you spray Revolution again and it makes it a lot more even in terms of dew distribution in the morning and just getting water into the surfaces.

What else do you put in the tank?
Sometimes we include a fungicide, some fertilizer or a potassium product, but sometimes it's a standalone. We look at Revolution as an anchor product. It's the cornerstone of a lot of our sprays.

Tell us about the fairway program.
On fairways, it was a game changer. That's probably the biggest change that we've seen on the course with Revolution. It really made a huge difference.

What were you trying to do on fairways?
We wanted to manage the inconsistency and achieve better moisture retention. You'd look across the turf horizon in the late afternoon and see areas on fairways that were really hot and other areas that were fine. We wanted to manage that better and a little tighter and make sure we were drying down in a uniform fashion. Otherwise we were just constantly managing hot spots and that's not a great practice.

Adding fairways to your program was a big commitment.
We have more than 50 acres of short turf, not including greens. So, it's a commitment from a financial standpoint. Getting to know the people behind Aquatrols gave us a lot of confidence in the expanded approach to include fairways. After seeing those great results initially and learning how effective it was for us, we were convinced. We budgeted for it and we haven't looked back.

What have you learned along the way about maximizing the value of your Revolution program?
We normally spray greens every 14 days unless we have a big event. In that case we'll tighten up intervals to seven days and make sure we have a good uniform dry-down. We want the wetting agent to be fresh within the soil profile. We use TDRs on our *Poa* greens and, normally, we're starting about 15-20% and we'll dry down to 13-14% and syringe throughout the day. For special events, we'll go down to 8-11% and really dry them up for firmness. That extra Revolution application made a few days out allows us to do that with confidence. It makes a huge difference.

What's it like working with the Aquatrols Company team?
They've been around for a long time and it's a big company. But it feels almost like a mom-and-pop firm. You can reach out to anyone any time, get great information and feel good about it. It still feels like a family business. There's a true sense of caring about the customer and the outcomes of using their products.

What's the bottom line for you on Revolution?
The most important benefit is allowing us the ability to manage moisture despite the crazy environmental conditions of our site. You can get caught off-guard so quickly here. Thanks to Revolution, we can manage for that and achieve the consistency Shinnecock deserves.

JUST HANG UP!

Augusta National has the right idea: No cellphones on the grounds during the Masters.

Golf is meant to be an escape from the noise, urgency and distraction of the workaday world that the cellphone represents. You're well advised to turn your phone off or leave it in your locker when you're out on the course — unless you're a doctor, first responder or someone who truly needs to be reachable at a moment's notice.

But it isn't the telephone function that disturbs me as an advocate for superintendents. It's the camera. In the wrong hands — and that's just about every NARP (Non-Agronomic Real Person) in the world — the ability to take pictures of what is perceived to be inadequate course conditions, and then to post them on social media, is a major pain in the neck. Why should their lack of education and understanding negatively impact your job? It shouldn't, but based on what I've seen on Facebook, Instagram, X and so on, you'd think golfers are out to get us.

See a brown patch? Click. A scalped edge? Click. Even an overflowing trash can? Click.

Not to mention quick snaps of aerification holes, soil plugs, spray foam, color variation — routine, temporary and often intentional practices. But it's not the clicking that's the problem: It's publicly sharing the photos as evidence of your incompetence.

With some people, there's nothing you can do. Sometimes those with little expertise assume they have superior expertise or ability. This overestimation occurs because they don't have enough knowledge to know they don't have enough knowledge!

> "Within the confines of the club — through a newsletter or posting in the locker room, wherever members/golfers are sure to see it — encourage those who see something to say something. To you only."

These "internet agronomists" have an axe to grind or are just plain annoying. Posting their "gotcha" photos anonymously or without context strips away accountability while amplifying criticism. What could have been a private, productive conversation becomes a public spectacle.

What can you do? You probably have a pretty good idea already who the culprits are, and in some cases, you're just going to have to live with it.

But there is a way to turn this negative into a positive. Within the confines of the club — through a newsletter or posting in the locker room — encourage those who see something to say something. To you only. Ask them to be your eyes on the course and point out an abnormality they don't understand. To you first, then make it a teaching moment, explaining what they're looking at and why it is the way it is.

I don't have to tell you that most of their observations, while visually accurate, are agronomically meaningless without knowledge of weather conditions, chemical applications, equipment calibration, labor, turf species and a dozen other variables. A clogged sprayer nozzle or hydraulic hose break might look catastrophic to the untrained eye. But in reality, those are fixable issues and might have already been attended to long before a photo hits social channels.

Those photos also might be evidence of the lazy cart driver who speeds down the middle of the fairway and runs over a sprinkler or chews up the turf. You could post pictures on your own that show how small acts of discourtesy ruin both the aesthetic and playability features of the course.

The harm of someone else posting pictures without understanding what they're seeing isn't just reputational — it's relational. Public posts undermine trust, embarrass staff and create unnecessary tension between management and membership. On the other hand, most of us would welcome a message like, "I noticed something unusual on the course, and I don't know what it is. Can you explain?"

Because phones make instant sharing effortless, they can exacerbate friction between superintendents, committee members and golfers. Few people would publicly embarrass their playing partner in person, but online, the barriers vanish.

Golfers become documentarians rather than participants. Instead of walking, talking with friends, or appreciating the conditions, they hunt for irregularities worth posting to pump up their own egos. Rounds become feeds. What fun is that?

Worst of all, this kind of behavior erodes what makes golf distinctive: it's played outdoors. Nothing is perfect, and the spirit of the game is to adapt to the conditions. In protecting the game, everyone needs to remember that restraint — not technology — is what keeps golf great.

In short, when you tee it up, hang it up.

TIM MORAGHAN is principal at ASPIRE Golf (tmoraghan@aspire-golf.com). Follow Tim online at Golf Course Confidential at www.aspire-golf.com or on X @TimMoraghan.

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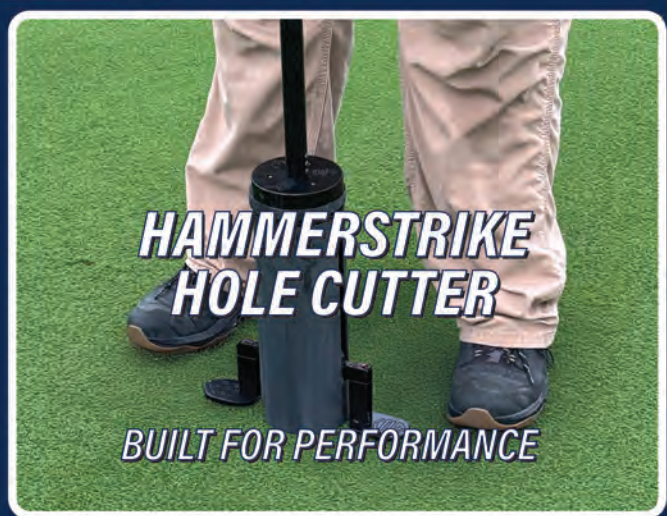

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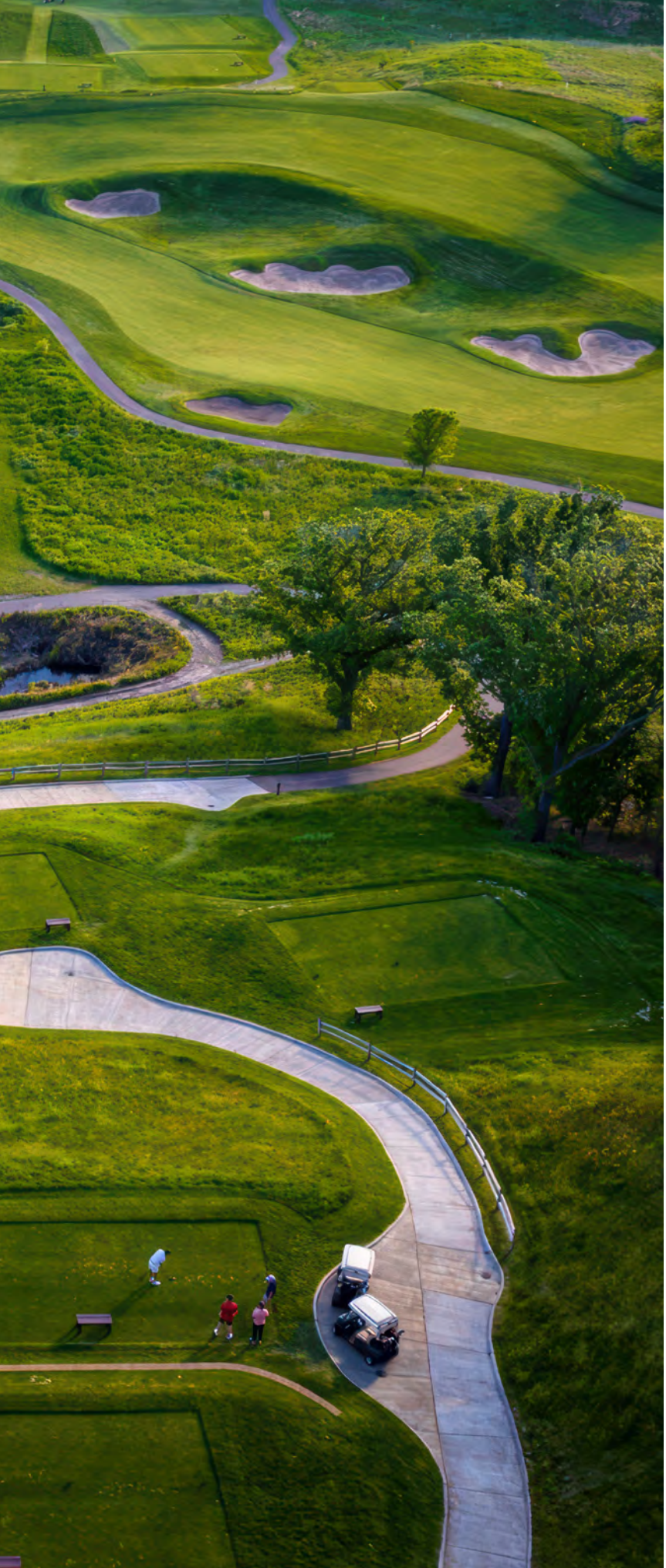
The BUSTLE of Braemar

A golf course. A short course. A double-decker dome. A waiting list for everything. And did you say 81,000 rounds?! A Twin Cities favorite is in full swing.

By **Judd Spicer**



At one buzzing Twin Cities muni, a purview of "seasonality" seems superfluous.

Situated a mere 20 minutes from downtown Minneapolis, Braemar Golf Course in Edina vibes a world away from the city din. Set amid 500 acres of eponymous park property, the golf grounds' coalescence of an 18-hole Championship track, Academy 9-holer, all-grass driving range and indoor Golf Dome have created a welcome calendar of cacophony for its city-run owners and operators.

A canvas of wetlands and ample acreage of oak savanna paint a golf sanctuary space for the property's burgeoning turnstile of visitors.

"We don't have houses that are right on the course, so it kind of sits inside its own treeline," general manager **Joseph Abood** says. "A great piece of property, a great golf course and a great location."

For a metro area that has more than doubled to over 3 million souls since Braemar's 1964 debut, the grounds' natural rampart of woods and wetlands serves as habitat for golfers and fauna alike.

"All the rolling terrain, … I mean, you could be at the far south end of the golf course and [Interstate] 494 is just about 400 yards away and you can't even tell," golf course superintendent **Jeff Mold** says. "You're in a bowl out here, with all the hills and trees basically bordering the entire course."

FROM BIG TO BIGGER

Long a Twin Cities muni mainstay, Braemar's modern-day boom can be attributed to good timing, good foresight, good stewardship, good partnerships and probably some good fortune.

In 2019, the course unveiled a two-plus-year reno/rebuild, reinventing its former 27-hole play to a more spacious and strategic 18-hole card. Considering the game's

post-pandemic rise in rounds, Braemar's "outdoor" season — running from approximately mid-April through a hard shutdown in late October/early November — has hit some serious stride.

"Our renovation, coming out of 2019," Abood says, "we just kind of hit it at the right time."

As evidence: In 2025, Braemar recorded more than 81,000 rounds, including nearly 51,000 on the Championship and more than 30,000 on the Academy 9. The eye-popping numbers represent an ascent from the property's 77,000 count in 2024.

"Prior to the renovation, the golf course was losing $300,000 or $400,000 a year," Abood adds. "Last year, we made around $875,000 after covering all our capital expenses."

In praise for his superintendent maintaining prime conditions, Abood says: "Jeff isn't a clipboard superintendent; he's a get-in-the-trenches superintendent."

From money to maintenance, Mold's 2018 hire came in concert with the new Championship 18's grow-in. Coming to Braemar from neighboring Edina Country Club provided a lesson in volume management.

"It is a factory here," Mold says. "Patrons after patrons, coming and going. We have a waiting list for our driving range. It's nonstop all summer long."

Such heft required an initial season of tempering.

"I came from a private golf course, which was busy, but the whole first year at Braemar was a learning curve," Mold recalls. "It was like, 'Oh my gosh, what did I get myself into?' But, since then, with some trial and error, we've found a groove and we've been smooth sailing ever since. At this point, I think I'd be bored if I worked at a place that does 10,000 rounds a year."

How does a course handle running more than 80,000 rounds across a window under seven months? It starts with careful planning.

"We're going off of Nos. 1 and 10, every day, so we need a team on the front side and the back, and then another team on the Academy 9," Mold says. "And a lot of people, if they see a sprayer on the golf course, they kinda get a little leery seeing the sprayer driving around.

"We had to figure out a routing where the patrons weren't seeing the sprayer all the time. First thing in the morning, we're jumping from doing the first three holes and then jumping to the back nine for three or four holes. And we've put the greens mowers on a certain route,

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Jonathan Jennings

Golf Course Superintendent
at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club

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RANGE ROVING AND DOME BANGING

For those lacking a Braemar tee time, practice opportunities on property aren't lacking.

In warm weather, the 114,000-square-foot grass range, which itself has a waiting list, requires some serious strategy to prep, starting with the required patience of hitting off mats.

"We don't let the general public hit off grass until Memorial Day weekend," superintendent **Jeff Mold** says. "If we have more than a dozen high schools out here practicing, they'd just tear up all the grass. Plus, it's not yet growing great in that time of season. We'll get a few complaints about that, but, it's like, 'If you guys want to hit off good turf throughout the summer, we're on the mats until that holiday weekend.'"

Come turf time, the range game is a moving mesh of divots and mix and shift.

"The low-mow bluegrass with some chewing fescue mix, it recovers very quick. It's the same mix that we use for tees and fairways on the courses," Mold says. "With all the play we get, I just love the low-mow blue. It's great for recovery."

Starting on the back end of the tee, by the mats, and then working forward, every three or four days staff will load up Workmans of divot mix and four or five team members will shovel and fill.

As for the beaver pelts?

"When we go to grass, yeah, that means a lot of divots to pick up and a lot of divots to fill every night," Mold continues. "We bought a couple yard sweepers, and those pick up and sweep up the divots nightly. They go off to the side in a pile, which we'll pick up the next morning and put 'em to our compost. And then, if it's dry out, we just take a cart with a drag mat, like you see dragging an infield on a baseball field, and then smooth all the divots out and fill 'em up."

Beginning Nov. 1, a hard open for Braemar's indoor Golf Dome sees swings go indoors through the close of April. Preceding Braemar's on-course avail of automation, the dual-level, 44-bay Dome has ridden profits by way of the tech train.

"It used to be a very busy indoor driving range; they used to do $350,000 in total revenue, but everything changed when we got Toptracer in 2019," general manager **Joseph Abood** says. "The operation is now about $1.7 million annually. It's been a massive game changer for us. Before, we still had over 400 customers a day, with people starting at a $5 small bucket. Now, we have people who stay there for two hours and spend $60."

Said bread finds balance between a dozen bays using a reservation system, which includes a premium charge, and the rest filled first come, first served. "With the reservations, there might be an hour between rentals," Abood says. "But with firstcome, first served, we're literally turning the bay over two minutes after somebody leaves."

too, where they're not necessarily going in order, but in a way where those first tee times aren't seeing them the whole time."

Seeing fewer maintenance members will soon result in seeing enhanced automation. After a successful 2025 season with one robot mower, Mold and his team will enjoy a full array of unmanned machinery for the summer ahead.

"I think the biggest complaint we've had is about the length of our rough, which has grown really fast in the past couple of wet summers," the superintendent details. "Usually, we've mowed on Monday, finishing on Tuesday or Wednesday and then, a lot of times, because of all the play and all the events, it's just that one mow a week, so by the time the weekend comes, that rough is well over three inches. And then by the time we mow again on Monday, just clippings everywhere. Very messy."

Braemar golfers can expect to see a full lineup of automated mowers in '26 — all of which will have names via a marketing push from the city.

"Last year, we bought one autonomous mower for the clubhouse and then also for the driving range area. And it was a huge success," Mold says. "So we went to the city and requested a purchase of 10 more, and they said, 'Absolutely.' In my calculations, we're saving $40,000 on diesel this coming year, and these mowers will mow about 85 percent of our rough."

Noting that the additions will free up more staff to work on the Academy 9, Mold eyes enhanced course continuity and playability. "Now, we'll be able to map it out with near-daily mows," he says, "and that'll give the height a lot more consistency and be much cleaner."

Approval for said mower purchases comes via a shared property vision with the City of Edina, and one that is symbiotic in both sustainability — Braemar has been a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary property for more than two decades — and profitability.

"Basically, it's about justification," Abood says of approaching the city. "And if I have given a justification of why I think something is a good idea or our staff thinks something is a good idea, the city has been extremely supportive."

Echoes Mold: "The city has been very receptive, very good to us. We've basically received everything we've asked for."

KEEPING EVERYBODY HAPPY ALL THE TIME

Recently recognized by the Minnesota Golf Association as its "Member Club of the Year," Braemar is undoubtedly keeping a whole lotta people happy.

But keeping everybody happy amid a condensed season?

Jeff Mold and Leroy

"A [lack of tee times] is a good problem to have," Abood says, "but it's still a problem."

While leagues can, of course, serve as a fulcrum of tee sheet consistency, managing overt league play amid a boom era might serve as a bottom-line lesson for other bustling munis or publics.

"We have 18 different leagues at Braemar," Abood says. "We've had to look closer at all the different groups that we have out here. Before, league play used to kind of dominate everything. The course was, I think, overrun by a lot of the leagues and outings. Now, we still have that play out here, but we got it a bit more under control. It's a balancing act."

Keeping scales intact isn't the most fun part of a GM's job.

"We took our lumps from a lot of the groups, who basically had a really good thing for a really long time," Abood says. "And they still have a good thing, but it's just a little bit scaled back and now we have more of a balance for all the different play we have out here."

Concurrently, Abood credits a diversity of play for Braemar's success. While overused "Growing the Game" phrasing no doubt vibes an understandable tenor of rhetoric in certain circles, Braemar's spikes-on-the-ground growth serves as literal evidence for its next generation of clientele.

Along with hosting the state's inaugural Minnesota Adaptive Open this past autumn (representing 30 years of adaptive golf at the property), Braemar recently charted in the top 10 nationally for Youth on Course round counts — more than 6,000 on its Academy 9 — a standing rather astounding for a cold-weather course.

"We're building programs and we start from the ground up," Abood says. "We've got about 2,500 kids in our junior program, one of the biggest PGA Jr. Leagues in the area, we host college events and about 14 different high schools that play out here."

As Braemar eyes a potential match or topping of its previous 81,000-round tally, turf, tech and tee sheet all appear primed for another season of staggering numbers.

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

© COURTESY OF JEFF MOLD (TOP), COURTESY OF BRAEMAR GC (BOTTOM)

Jesus Martinez, Jr.

DOWN THE ROAD

Fishing at Dunwoody, pushing the pace at Atlanta Athletic Club and a stint at Georgia's most famous course have all shaped the journey through turf — and life — for Jesus Martinez, Jr.

By **Lee Carr**

In Georgia, from the age of 7, **Jesus Martinez, Jr.** grew up on golf courses. He would rake bunkers or go fishing in the ponds because his father was in the industry, working mostly at Dunwoody Country Club in Atlanta, where he is the assistant. "I just liked being out on the course with my dad," says Martinez, superintendent of Atlanta Athletic Club in Johns Creek.

When he was old enough to get a job, he asked his dad if he could work for him. "He was hesitant, he didn't really want me to," Martinez laughs. "He knew me. Maybe he thought to himself, 'This kid, he's mischievous, he's not going to take a job seriously!' He didn't have a whole lot of faith that I would do a good job. He hired me but he warned me that I would

have to work hard. He didn't want to be the guy who hires his son and then takes it easy on him. He was extra hard on me to teach me what hard work really was."

Martinez hated the job for the first two summers. "Every day was full of monotonous manual labor — bunker work, sod jobs, shovel work and dragging hose being everyday tasks. I had to do most of the heavy lifting," Martinez says. "Eventually, the guys on the team started to feel bad for me so they started teaching me how to do different things. That's when I understood there's a lot more that goes on with a golf course."

Every person who knows Martinez will mention his incredible work ethic. He started to see that there is so much that you can learn in the golf industry, and that there is so much math and science — two subjects he enjoyed as a kid — and that grabbed his attention.

"My first superintendent, **Spencer Oliver**, who was at Dunwoody, I looked up to him a lot," Martinez says. "The way that he was the leader, everyone had respect for him, and I did, too. I just thought, I want to be like my dad and be like Spencer. If it wasn't for them being the leaders that they were, I don't think I would have ever pursued the turf industry."

Martinez also chose formal education. "My dad came to the U.S. from Mexico, and didn't get to go to college," Martinez says. "He is pretty limited for career advancement from that." Martinez knew college had to be part of the journey.

He did his research, learning that Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College offered a hands-on program where students learned through experience. This appealed to Martinez, and he graduated with an affordable, four-year environmental horticultural degree with a focus on turfgrass science.

Next door to the ABAC campus is the University of Georgia experiment station, where Martinez worked for several years. He helped with nematode research for the plant pathology department, and then switched to working with **Dr. Brian Schwartz**, learning about turfgrass breeding.

"It was a cool experience getting to see where it all starts, where all these grasses come from," Martinez says. "Just getting to hear Dr. Schwartz and the master's and Ph.D. staff, how they view turf, and seeing how they dive into the genetics of stuff and why grass is the way that it is, it was cool to see that side. Being on the golf course now, looking back sometimes, things click a little bit more from that experience. I stay connected with Dr. Schwartz. It's good to keep up with those guys."

Martinez gets it. He is interested in the research and academic aspects of turf development, he lives and works daily with the practical applications of fine turfgrass, and he understands the commercial aspects of the industry. In athletic terms, appropriate for Atlanta Athletic Club, he's a triple threat.

WORKING FOR FUN

Atlanta Athletic Club thrives on improvement and a mission to host championships, and this drive is fueling back-to-back construction projects. The Riverside Course renovation was completed in 2022 under the guidance of architect **Tripp Davis**. A full reimagination of the Highlands Course, guided by **Andrew Green**, will break ground in 2027. Martinez was an assistant superintendent during the changes to Riverside. This time he will have more responsibilities.

"I'm excited for such a big project and learning opportunity. I don't know that it can get much better than being a part of that," Martinez says. "With Riverside, I was boots on the ground and hands on, and I still will be, just with additional logistics to manage."

He has family in Atlanta — his parents, two younger sisters and a few cousins — but he has other family members scattered throughout the United States and Mexico. He is open to relocating, maybe in a few years, self-aware enough to know that he grows the most when he is out of his comfort zone. He is humble, but his ambition and drive are evident.

In addition to working with the University of Georgia Research team, Martinez worked in food and beverage at Horseshoe Bend Country Club in Roswell, Georgia, because he wanted to learn the hospitality side of

ATLANTA ATHLETIC CLUB OPERATION

Founded in 1898, Atlanta Athletic Club operates two golf courses, Highlands and Riverside. The Riverside Course, along the Chattahoochee River, reopened in 2022 after a renovation led by architect **Tripp Davis**, prior to hosting the 2025 U.S. Girls' Junior Championship. The Highlands Course is being reimagined by architect **Andrew Green** in advance of hosting the 2030 U.S. Amateur, 100 years after **Bobby Jones** won the grand slam. **Lukus Harvey** is the director of agronomy and **John Patterson**, who earned the 2025 Edwin Budding Award, is the equipment director. **Jesus Martinez, Jr.** is the superintendent and each course has a senior assistant and two additional assistants. The peak seasonal operation involves more than 80 staff members. Martinez handles everything affecting the scope of play while **Francisco Morales**, who has been with Atlanta Athletic Club for 27 years and is currently the grounds superintendent, handles the rest, including safety and equipment training. He also runs a 12-person detail crew that takes care of the pine straw beds and other detail work. The courses are covered in Zorro Zoysiagrass tees and fairways, TifEagle Bermudagrass on the greens and more Bermudagrass in the rough, which is kept neat by more than 40 Husqvarna autonomous mowing units. Harvey believes in developing people and promoting from within the organization whenever possible. Atlanta Athletic Club is well known for some of its outstanding amateur players, including **David Ford**, who won the Jack Nicklaus Award in 2025, as a senior playing for the University of North Carolina.

In 2022, Jesus Martinez hosted a group of international superintendents from Argentina.

© DR. BRIAN SCHWARTZ (2)

things. In conversations with a member, he shared that he was interested in a career in turf. The member knew **Lukus Harvey**, director of agronomy at Atlanta Athletic Club, and arranged a lunch meeting, which is how Martinez became an intern there.

At that lunch, it was Martinez, his father and Oliver. "Jesus and I had a great conversation. His father and Spencer spoke to his character," Harvey says.

With the lunch drawing to a close, "Jesus had already put his credit card down and paid for the meal. To see how he approached the meeting and went after an opportunity with planning and detailed accuracy was impressive." It was also a sign of things to come. Martinez is astute and perceptive, adding to his potential.

"I feel like everywhere I have been I have learned," Martinez says. "My first internship was here at AAC in 2019 and it was a different world compared to Dunwoody, where it felt pretty relaxed. At AAC I saw a whole different perspective and I liked it. I liked the constant push and the constant having to learn, and just the pace of everything. After that, I figured, what better place to go than right down the road to Augusta?"

Martinez's internship at Augusta National Golf Club started in January of 2020, a trying operational year for everyone. "Going there was really cool, to be surrounded by so many people with similar mindsets," Martinez says. "As an intern, and hearing that the tournament was cancelled, … it broke my heart, honestly."

He was only supposed to be in Augusta for six months, but when the Masters moved to the fall, he decided to stay for a full year. With the operational challenges, he was able to see and do things that interns don't always get to do, and the way everyone had to figure things out made a real impression on him. The standards at Augusta National weren't going to change, and when standards are high, wherever you are, the team has to adapt and perform.

"At AAC, the superintendent position is geared toward developing into the director of agronomy and moving up," Harvey says, "taking the job I have or moving into that position somewhere else. For Jesus, the sky is the limit. His ceiling is

easily the highest of any young manager I have had the privilege to mentor."

Harvey and Martinez rely on each other.

"We are mentor and mentee," Harvey says, "but many times the student becomes the teacher. He challenges me on agronomic programs routinely, to explore new technology and chemistries. We really do yin-and-yang it."

Harvey thinks it might be good for Martinez to practice public speaking and to try to take a break every now and again, but Martinez pushes everyone, leading in a great way. "Technically, he is awesome and he is trying to find that extra 10 percent everywhere, all the time," Harvey says. "Jesus brings constant respect and appreciation to the team, which becomes infectious" — and he pays attention to every detail.

"I love what I do, so I don't really see it as work," Martinez says with a laugh. "Some people I work with are like, 'Go have some fun, why are you always working?' But it doesn't bother me. It is fun." Harvey continues to help Martinez with learning about management.

"Dealing with different personalities and learning about different people, that's one of the most challenging things," Martinez says. "I think every superintendent will say that growing grass is the easy part and managing people is the hard part. It's understanding how to work with people's strengths and weaknesses. I want to create an environment where everyone enjoys their time here."

Martinez has known his lead assistants since his college days, and they are a young, tight-knit group that thrives on learning together. "My favorite part about it is planning stuff with them," Martinez says. "It's fun bouncing ideas back and forth and seeing what works. There is more than one way to do it and we all have the same level of passion."

Martinez's father has been working in the industry since 1989. Through all these years, **Jesus Martinez, Sr.** most enjoys learning how to make turf beautiful and seeing how people enjoy it. He knows he was hard on Jesus when he started, but says, "He has always been very respectful with our whole family. I really don't know what the most important thing I taught him was. Perhaps responsibility, and the importance of your work. I feel happy and proud that my son also finds enjoyment in the industry. When you enjoy what you do, you can do it better than most." Martinez, Sr., gets it too.

Maybe Martinez. Jr. is genetically gifted. Maybe it's his disposition and drive. How to know, now or down the road? He ensures the culture at Atlanta Athletic Club is fun and productive, and he's prepared for whatever the future holds. More than anything, moments of heartbreak aside, Martinez enjoys the work.

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

RESEARCH RELATIONSHIPS

Dr. Brian Schwartz met **Jesus Martinez, Jr.** when Martinez was a student at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College. He was recommended by one of the professors because some of the students work in the turfgrass breeding program at The University of Georgia, Tifton Campus. Martinez was dependable and quickly became a trusted student worker of Schwartz's lead technician, **Larry Baldree**. "His attention to detail and work ethic stood out to all of us," Schwartz says. "He worked for me the year I installed TifTuf and CitraBlue at my house. I remember him coming over after our UGA work was done and really helping me get the sod cut-in and looking great."

Schwartz has related to Martinez personally, academically and professionally throughout the years and believes there are several reasons that Martinez excels. "It's his work ethic, dedication to detail and patience," Schwartz says. "I've met many people with two of these traits, but it is rare to find someone with all three. He also can cut loose after a job is done, which makes him more relatable to us mere mortals that aren't as talented as he is!"

Martinez still enjoys his relationship with Schwartz, conducting research on his plots at home after he is finished with work at Atlanta Athletic Club. Schwartz shares that when Martinez was a student, he had a really cool car. "As his boss, I never asked to ride in it," Schwartz says, "although I really wanted to as I also love cars and trucks. When I recently visited Jesus, we went out to dinner after touring the course. Now that he is my peer, I didn't hesitate to ask him to drive. It was awesome!"

Schwartz, who has recently released Tif3D, is working toward improving Bermudagrass, zoysiagrass and centipedegrass for drought and shade tolerance, and he's trying to focus on developing a few new cultivars specifically for professional turfgrass managers.

"Our turfgrass breeding program could best serve the southern golf course industry by developing new, improved putting green surfaces," Schwartz says. "This is a very difficult endeavor, but we've built a testing network through the Georgia Golf Environmental Foundation and the Georgia GCSA that can help us validate these new grasses." Everyone has to work together.

"Jesus has stayed in touch with me and my crew ever since he graduated," Schwartz says. It is first and foremost a great friendship, but it is also helping the industry. It has been nice to bounce ideas off of him so that we make sure we stay in tune with the needs of superintendents."

LESSONS FROM CADDYING

I have long been convinced that golf has lost a lot with the demise of the traditional caddie. The industry-wide emptying of the caddie yards that followed the advent of the golf cart in the 1950s and '60s not only led to a loss of recruitment into the game; it contributed to a decline in a certain sophisticated presence on the golf course of those who understood the game's subtle timing, ethics and positioning.

The result has been stalled growth of the game, as well as slower play, and a decline in the basic spirit of golf.

Pardon me if I muse lyrically about a youth spent in the caddie yards. In addition to earning money outdoors, we acquired certain people skills hobnobbing with successful businessmen and people whom we would otherwise have never met. What I experienced parlayed on top of the more fundamental life lessons I acquired.

You learn how to read people's character fast — normally, in two holes. You can tell if they are confident, cocky, over-brimming or downright insecure. You can tell if they respect service people like yourself or are indifferent if not outright hostile. And you can tell how they perceive and treat their environment by little things like whether they fix divots and ball marks, how they enter and exit bunkers, and whether they make excuses or accept accountability for lousy shots.

You also learn that many golfers overestimate their ability, so you learn to discount accordingly. That's obvious when it comes to their clubbing themselves and their assumptions about how far they hit certain clubs on average — as opposed to how far they are trying to hit it this time. The valuable lesson here is to measure people against a standard or an average rather than taking them at their word or, worse yet, encouraging their own delusions. The trick is not to let them know that you are on to their little charade.

> "The beauty of caddying is that you are on call for four to five hours, under the pressure of needing to have information at hand to make decisions that, really, don't count for much."

The great skill cultivated in the process is a version of tact or diplomacy that turns out to be a valuable lifetime ability. The rule of thumb that I learned from caddying is "never to say no," thus to reserve your player's sense of self all while giving them the advice they need and are asking for. Case in point: If they have 170 yards over water to a green and, as a 14-handicap, they select a 7-iron for the task, instead of saying "No way," you suggest "don't hold back," or "front of green is fine." Only rarely (and delicately) do you overrule them entirely and suggest, instead, a different club — in this case, a fairway wood.

It's also a good thing not to undermine people just because they are wrong and you are right. I can think of plenty of times when my player, upon getting ready to play to a par-3 ninth hole, might make a comment that sounds informed, like "**Tillinghast** rarely planned a par-3 ninth hole." Instead of responding with a list of 14 Tillinghast courses with a par-3 ninth hole, the wise thing is to say nothing, or to say something innocent like "that's interesting." In caddying, as in life, it's more important to be effective than to be right.

The beauty of caddying is that you are on call for four to five hours, under the pressure of needing to have information at hand to make decisions that, really, don't count for much. At least when it comes to casual golf.

PGA Tour tournament golf is another matter. But, these days, I cringe at the deep conversations involving players and caddies. **Jordan Spieth** and his longtime looper, **Michael Greller**, are textbook examples of overkill and insecurity. It's a widespread phenomenon on Tour, promoted in part by caddies looking to oversell their value in the media, compounded by players who have never properly been trained to make smart decisions and instead over-rely on their coaches.

I'm convinced that experience caddying helps golfers when it comes to being in position to play. Such experienced golfers know where to walk, where to stand, where to exit a green and how to approach an area of play without intruding on other golfers. This geopositioning skill can't be taught. It can only be acquired through extensive experience.

The result is a unique choreography, one that makes the time on a golf course a pleasant tactical experience akin to a chess game where life skills are taught. It's a quiet part of golf I love. It defines the game in ways that make every other sport feel mundane.

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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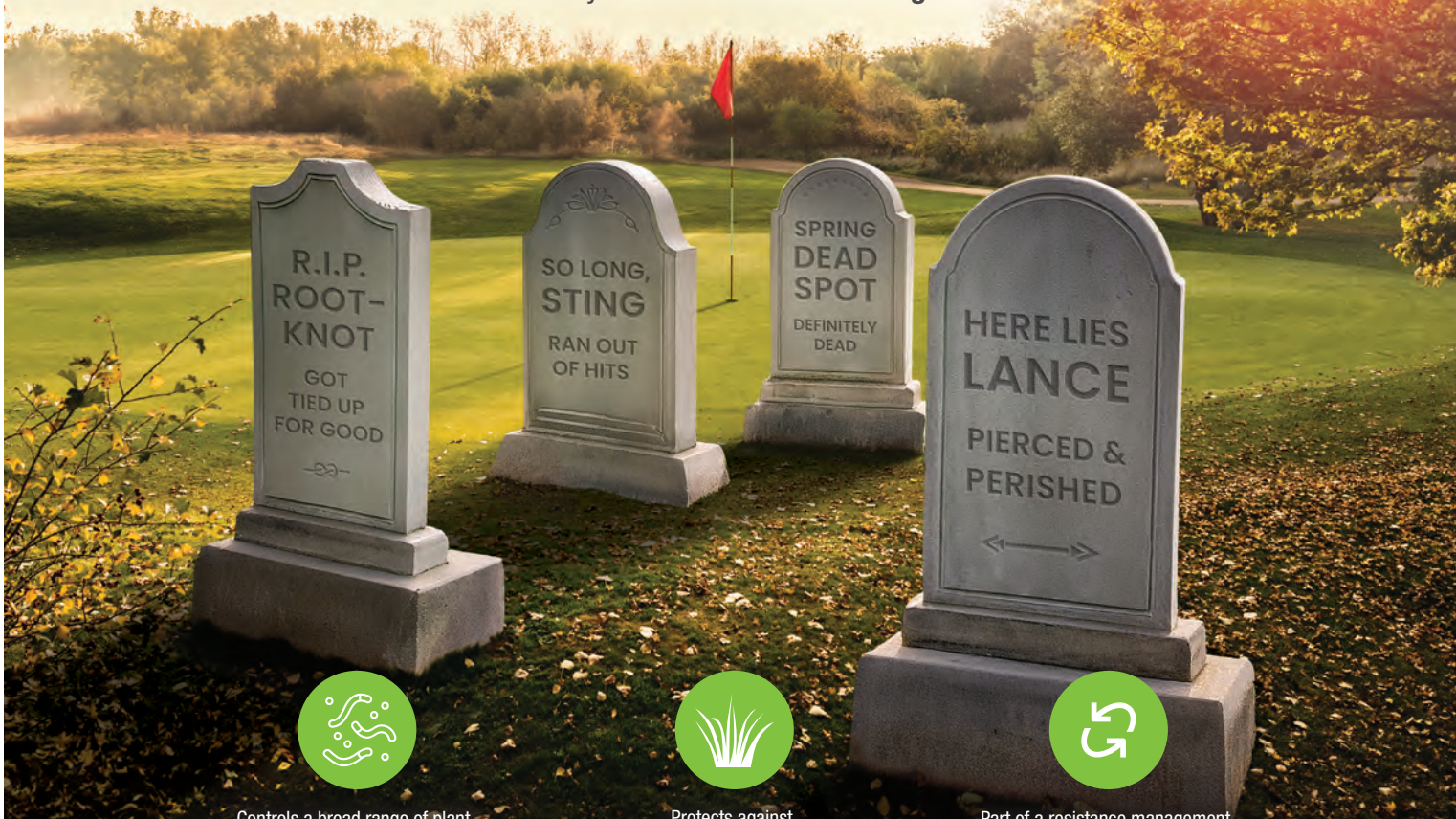

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Higher Purpose

Two instructors with contrasting industry backgrounds are helping rebuild the turfgrass management technology program at North Carolina's Guilford Technical Community College.

By **Kelsie Horner**

Jamestown Park Golf Course turf equipment technician **Justin King** started in the automotive industry.

"I worked on cars for a little while," he says, "and then decided the automotive side wasn't really for me."

While studying environmental science at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, King landed a job on a parks and recreation crew, working in landscaping and

athletic field maintenance. He soon missed fixing equipment, and a municipal golf course owned by the city of High Point hired him as a mechanic at Oak Hollow Golf Course. He fell in love with the role. "Like so many other golf course equipment managers we don't really know that it exists until it kind of falls into our lap," King says.

Despite his zest for the role, King wanted to do more. Through networking, social media and his peers, he was inspired to extend his reach beyond the golf course.

While working at Oak Hollow, **Johnathan Cox** was a big mentor for King. Cox worked as a mechanic at Blair Park Golf Course, High Point's other municipal course. "He taught me pretty much everything I know about grinding reels and working on the smaller stuff," King says.

Little did King know that Cox would have access to another way for him to do more in the industry. Cox taught at Guilford Technical Community College for several years and approached King about considering teaching. Giving back intrigued King.

Jody Stancil graduated from the program in 2008. While still in the program, he got hired at the North Carolina Zoo in Asheboro, where he worked for nearly 20 years. It was **Alan Milam**, one of his former instructors, who asked him to return. Milam worked as lead turfgrass instructor at the school for 22 years.

"I felt like it was a good chance for me to come full circle back and teach where I started," Stancil says.

Guilford Technical Community College is in Jamestown, North Carolina, 20 minutes southwest of Greensboro. With five campuses, the school's turfgrass management technology program operates out of the Greensboro location. The program started in 2001 and allows students to earn an associate's degree, a turfgrass maintenance certificate, or both.

When Stancil and King joined the instructional staff, enrollment numbers were low and the program was barely holding on. King started as an adjunct instructor for equipment management in Spring 2025. He had just one student. The teacher-student duo spent their time in the shop, learning and restoring a par-3 hole used for teaching.

An encouraging development has emerged: King now has 10 students. In the fall, he teaches equipment operation and maintenance. In the spring, he teaches equipment management.

Stancil joined GTCC full-time in August 2025 as the lead turfgrass management technology instructor. He had eight students. He hopes to see that number double this year. As lead instructor, he teaches multiple classes, including introduction to turfgrass cultivation, turfgrass calculations, plant materials, turfgrass computer applications and landscape construction.

King's work on the golf course stimulates classroom topics. Several students also work in the field, on golf courses, baseball fields and other turf playing surfaces, giving them relatable discussion points each day. "We talk about what's going on, what they're doing and what I've got going on too, and how what I'm doing relates to what they're doing," King says. "Going straight from a full day of work to the classroom, throughout the day I'll get ideas like, 'I'm doing this right now and I do this pretty often, it'd be a good thing to teach.'"

Stancil's experiences at the zoo also bring a unique aspect to the classroom. As curator of horticulture, he was responsible for 650 acres of forest, plants, trees, public/habitat turf and all exterior animal habitats, as well as seven off-site natural preserve properties. He also managed a turf crew, irrigation technicians and compost technicians.

The role expanded his skills in numerous areas of management. "I had a different set of traffic on my turf, but the way I manage turf is the same as you manage it anywhere else," Stancil says. "I had to do it at a different rate, a different way."

Stancil's wealth of knowledge made him a great candidate for a professor position. It was also an avenue for Stancil to demonstrate the diverse options available for students in the field.

Department chair **Chris Sizemore** says the rigor of the program has become harder, which benefits the students. In his role, Sizemore oversees construction trade programs. "The things that Justin and Jody are touching on go a little deeper," he says. "The more knowledge you have, the more powerful you are."

> "I would love to see it grow into a program that has not just one or two full classes but get to the point where we have to start hiring other instructors because our classes are full."
>
> *– Justin King*

The program's growth and success stems from multiple factors. King has made it a priority to promote the program, posting projects and updates on LinkedIn. "LinkedIn is a good tool that I've tried to start using more because there's a lot of superintendents on there," King says. "My thinking is that if I can reach them and they're close enough, they might send some of their guys to the program."

"Justin's got this driving wheel to go out and get more of the industry involved and get more people looking at it, especially because he's on golf courses all the time," Sizemore adds.

The program has also started hosting open houses, hoping to gain attention from people in the area.

GTCC recently went through an eight-week redesign, deciding which classes should remain on a standard 16-week schedule, and which could

© GTCC/CARRIE LILLY (3)

be restructured into eight-week classes. The turfgrass program was chosen to transition to an eight-week schedule. This allows students to complete necessary classes quicker. "My understanding was it was taking students a very long time to get through this particular program," Stancil says. "I'd like to see that speed up a little bit, and it not take six or seven years to get this associate degree and go out into the workforce."

The school is also doing its part to promote the program, using social media ads to gain attention.

"Over the past three years, turfgrass is one of the many programs that has benefited from the enrollment growth at GTCC," Sizemore says. "Our faculty add another layer of quality that enhances this program immensely, but the college has put a lot of attention to the program. By hiring expert instructors, the community is starting to reap the benefits."

The turfgrass teaching duo has high hopes for the program. Since their arrival, GTCC has experienced an enrollment spike — but King wants more.

"I would love to see it grow into a program that has not just one or two full classes but get to the point where we have to start hiring other instructors because our classes are full," King says.

Now the focus is on spreading the word.

"This program is back up and running and it's being supported by the college," Stancil says. "Justin and I are supporting it 100 percent as well. We want to see the program built to the max and be very successful, especially in our region here in the Greensboro area."

Outside of the classroom, Stancil and King are working on building internship opportunities for students. "We're trying to involve local courses and even local baseball teams in the area, trying to build a little network of opportunities for the students," King says.

The teaching duo is doing anything they can to educate and provide opportunities for their students. Thanks to their passion, the program is gaining traction and attention.

"I'm trying very hard and giving it everything that I've got," Stancil says. "I know Justin is as well."

Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry's digital editor.

More fine print than *anywhere*

Inside the tussle to understand and handle the myriad regulations associated with operating a golf course in California.

By **Judd Spicer**

The front of California's postcard offers, as always, the depiction of sun and sand, mountains and bounty. The back side of the card, however, is filled with a whole lotta fine print.

A state with the highest population and second most golf courses has become entangled in regulation. According to one recent study by the Mercatus Center at George Washington University, California combines its populace platter with more than 420,000 different regulations.

As evidence of the cost of doing business in the Golden State, all manner of colossal companies have sought less-regulated pastures in recent years, with the likes of Charles Schwab, Oracle, HP, John Paul Mitchell, Yamaha, Neutrogena, Chevron, Tesla, Public Storage and KB Home all relocating their respective headquarters to different states.

A golf course, though, can't be moved.

Regulations upon the golf industry prove onerous, and staying in continual compliance with enormous oversight proves a superintendents' task list extends far beyond the responsibility of growing grass.

INSPECTION CONNECTION

Across a myriad of agencies, a laundry list of acronyms, the threat of fines and a set of rules that changes and evolves seemingly every year, staying in compliance is a constant test for California course owners, operators and superintendents.

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"Definitely some of the most stringent regulations in the country, not only for golf, but agriculture and outdoor landscapes," says **Jeff Jensen**, Southwest Regional field staff representative for the GCSAA. "For us, it's obviously compliance with pesticides, fertilizers, clean air, water use regulations—and all of these require constant monitoring and administrative efforts."

Keeping tabs on oversight means ongoing observance beyond merely the state legislature.

"You have the state agencies, but you also have the regional and local agencies as well," Jensen adds, "and they oftentimes have overlapping or evolving rules, so this creates a lot of operational uncertainly for golf facilities."

While the GCSAA has a committed government affairs team, a manager of state affairs, a federal lobbyist in the nation's capital and a website flush with regulation resources, staying continually updated and compliant with California regulations is a virtual impossibility.

"It's a lot for a superintendent to know all of these regulations all the time; there's gonna be something that surprises even the best of them," Jensen says. "Some of the legislative rules aren't always properly shared with the golf facilities, so that makes it difficult to always know what's going on."

At Troon Golf, the world's largest golf and golf-related management company, hiring a new superintendent at one of the courses for the 39 properties across its California portfolio generally finds compliance familiarity has come via trial by fire.

"Typically, when I'm conducting an interview and I ask my OSHA" — Occupational Safety and Health Administration — "a question, when somebody has reasonably good understanding of OSHA compliance, it's always because they've been through a prior OSHA inspection," says **Brian Hampson**, Troon's senior VP of science and agronomy.

Though OSHA is a federal entity, California is among 26 states with its own OSHA department. And while worker safety is paramount, receipt of an A-plus inspection report is basically a scorecard canard. An OSHA inspection might expect uniquely documented and highly detailed background, curriculum and specified safety training paperwork for each grounds' staff employee on every piece of equipment, including dates, make, model and manufacturer information.

"To some extent, you can't pass an OSHA inspection; it's impossible," Hampson says. "But what you can do is work the 20 or 30 things that are most problematic for OSHA, which are the things that tend to create the most injuries."

For Hampson and Troon, the guidance is simple: greet an inspection with a handshake, not a headbutt.

"A piece of advice I always give superintendents is that when someone is inspecting your facility, the last thing you wanna do is push back," Hampson says. "This person is simply there to figure out whether or not we're compliant with a law or regulation. And the best option is to respond with, 'What do I need to do to reach compliance?'"

For those who ignore compliance measures and violations, stiff penalties potentially await.

"It's really easy to catch an OSHA fine from $50,000 to $100,000, and I've seen some fines that are seven figures," Hampson says. "I've seen a [California Environmental Reporting System] fine that was close to $2 million just because a superintendent ignored the notices that he received and the asks that were put on him. It was negotiated down to a much smaller number, but the reason that it was reduced substantially was because the response and the correction was full scale."

Broadly, a focus on fixes would seem to usurp the weight of fines.

"The agencies do their best to work with our golf facilities and give opportunities to correct issues," Jensen says. "They try and help us out as much as possible before hittin' us with the stick. I don't think the goal is to make it harsh on us. They just want the rules followed."

WHAT WE'VE GOT HERE IS A FAILURE TO . . .

What most burns those in the industry isn't the regulations. Instead, it's the lack of proper communication, a dearth of adequate time to adapt to changes and the grouping of golf with larger industries.

Staying in compliance with rules and regulations includes: air quality management, tracking hazardous materials, tire recycling, meeting emission standards, water purity, off-road engines and vehicles, fuel tank testing, worker safety and training, fire safety, signage, spill prevention, chemical inventories and building codes. And the list goes on … and on … and on.

As for malleability in laws? Some regulations prove more aesthetic than real-world application.

"A lot of the rules can be influenced by public perception rather than risk-based science," Jensen says. "A lot of times, I think effective tools are eliminated without presenting viable alternatives."

With turf and ornamental regulations lumped into those associated and/or intended for agriculture, a chance for golf to pivot and prepare swiftly can prove frustrating.

"A lot of these bills, they get put into place very, very quickly with no phase-in," Jensen says. "And it's difficult to give superintendents such short timeframes to work within new rules."

As reported in *Golf Course Industry* in January 2025, the California implementation of AB-1346, enacted at the onset of 2024, prohibited the in-state sale of small off-road engines (SOREs) at or below 25 horsepower. The ability to adapt to the regulation proved a rollout maelstrom of cost and confusion for countless courses.

While the industry has begun

catching up to SOREs and further adapted to electric alternatives, the regulation continues to see many golf operators a hole behind. "What we're seeing as an emerging problem is the electricity availability," Hampson says, "and the cost to facilities to bring electric to the building and then rewire the building for all this charging."

As equipment manufacturers have started to approach course maintenance needs for electric alternatives, golf continues to feel some brunt.

"I probably had more questions on SOREs than any regulation I've ever dealt with," Jensen says. "When it came out, there were a lot of pieces of equipment used that didn't have an electric alternative. It put our industry in a tough position."

Another example of further lumping golf maintenance with other industries goes from SOREs to DOORS, the off-road diesel reporting system under the purview of the California Air Resources Board.

"The DOORS program," Jensen explains, "requires, if available, to now use renewable diesel fuel, which is R99 or R100."

For those working with policy in lieu of P-wedge, one size doesn't fit all.

"It's hard to write 20 regulations for 20 different industries," Hampson says. "But DOORS was meant to primarily target large machines, where a diesel engine might be sitting somewhere and running for hours. As an initiative to clean up air quality, I support that. At the same time, a golf course that's running 50 horsepower diesel mowers … should that face the same level of oversight that's being applied to massive agriculture or construction industries?"

LOBBY THE LOB WEDGE

Between California regulations, good intentions and real-world applications, the golf industry doesn't simply sit back on its spikes.

"Golf had it good and had tailwinds for a long time and for a lot of reasons," says **Craig Kessler**, executive director of the California Alliance for Golf (CAG), a 501 (c)(6) missioned to protect and power the golf community. "It was the proverbial trust fund baby born on third base that thinks it hit a triple. That's why when things went against us, we didn't do very well. We didn't do as well as other industries that are used to tough times."

Navigating through tricky stretches requires the ability to speak a certain language. It's a legislative lexicon with which Kessler is well versed.

"Speaking a language that appeals to them, not a language which leaves them cold," Kessler says. "Our general stance is to try to get relationships with the key regulatory agencies and indicate to them that we want to get on the ground early with them. We always preach to them that the worst thing that can happen to a business is to get surprised."

When illuminating the golf industry of legislative language, Kessler is careful not to dismiss regulators as the enemy.

"They're not bad people, and they're not stupid people," says Kessler, offering examples of his presentations to golf audiences. "They're very smart people, and they have good arguments which deserve our respect."

SOREs serves as a prime example of CAG's ability to shift regulators to see golf's side of regulations.

Kessler explains: "We worked with the author of that legislation, who put in there that on an annual basis, they're supposed to ensure that when they make the equipment no longer able to be sold, that there is an electric, commercially available equivalent that is fit for intended use."

While golf continued to plug in, there are those who have unplugged. As echo of the exoduses of countless companies from California, the finances of doing business has many of the state's more than 900s courses balancing bottom lines in real time.

"Costs to run a golf facility have really skyrocketed, specifically in the last eight years," Jensen says. "And, basically, when there's any type of regulatory process put into place, it typically does raise the cost of doing business."

Adds Hampson: "I want to believe that these regulations are altruistic and for the benefit for everyone. OSHA is a good example, because I certainly don't want anybody getting hurt. In practice, what we've seen is that it's difficult to manage these things to the level that the regulations are written, and the only way to meet this level of compliance is additional costs to the business."

Though golf's robust tee sheets maintain post-pandemic health, most courses, like the commerce and communities surrounding them, are still subject to demand.

"Whether it's golf or anything, as we see ramp-up in the regulatory state, we hope the policies calculated are related to a better future. Sometimes they are, sometimes they aren't," Kessler says. "But the policies do add to the cost of doing business, which means you need an extraordinarily robust economy and a population that supports buying whatever you're selling."

Widely, if not uniformly, the golf industry backs environmental initiatives that make California a better place to live, work and play. But a concise line of communication from Sacramento to the state's fairways is needed to keep golf both successful and solvent.

"As golf course superintendents, we're not asking for fewer rules or different rules — we're asking for predictable, science-based rules that have some workable alternatives," Jensen says. "We support clean air, clean water, wildlife, our green spaces. We just ask for some time to be able to work with these [regulation] entities. The challenge with a lot of these regulations isn't the regulation itself, it's the rapid change and inconsistencies that don't present practical transitions moving forward."

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

Toro Sand Pro Modifications

This Toro Sand Pro Model 5040 ($45,000) was modified by adding a Lesco Commercial Plus Truckster Spreader with Extended Hopper ($1,500), and a recycled foam marker from an old spray rig. The spreader and foam marker tray were fabricated together and mounted to a Toro quick-attach mount ($500), easily attached to the Sand Pro. The Lesco Spreader's 12-volt rotary spreader motor, flow gate and foam marker are operated by a custom-made box with dedicated switches ($300). Smooth turf tires replaced the knobby OEM tires, meaning the modified mechanical rake can be driven on any turf surface, including greens, approaches, tees, fairways and lawn areas. It took about eight hours for the modification. Superintendent **Brian Goleski**, assistant superintendent **Jim Geiger**, equipment manager **JR Wilson** and renovation architect **Ross Forbes** form an innovative team at Noyac Golf Club in Sag Harbor, New York.

Sprayer Controller Modification

This Chem-Turf VS-160 SS 160-gallon stainless steel vehicle skid sprayer with an 8.5 HP Kohler engine fits most popular turf vehicles. The Raven GPS newer technology controller was modified by adding a master switch box ($600) with controls for the hydraulically operated booms and roof lights, just like the older spray rigs. The wiring was streamlined to significantly reduce the time needed to swap the sprayer to another turf vehicle. The new controls are more accessible for spray technicians, who are familiar with the interface of the older spray rigs. For supplementary sprays, such as non-GPS mapped new golf course construction, the controls are much simpler and more user-friendly. A master shut-off switch ($150) was also added to turn the 12-volt battery system on and off whenever it is required. It took about 36 labor hours for the modification. Superintendent **Brian Goleski**, assistant superintendent **Jim Geiger**, equipment manager **JR Wilson** and renovation architect **Ross Forbes** work well together to elevate Noyac Golf Club in Sag Harbor, New York.

TERRY BUCHEN, MG, is president of Golf Agronomy International. He's a 57-year, life member of the GCSAA. He can be reached at 757-561-7777 or terrybuchen@earthlink.net.

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ADDRESSING COMPENSATION

Superintendent positions are unique in countless ways.

Try to find another management or executive-level position that deals with daily operations of an insanely diverse staff regarding demographics, age levels, experience levels, employment types and industry-related education.

In the same breath, the superintendent who is responsible for and normally molecularly involved with daily operations is also tasked with developing, communicating and implementing department, and sometimes club-wide short- and long-term visions, missions, philosophies and financial modeling to a governing body.

Perhaps one of the more unique aspects of a superintendent's job, if not the most, is that he or she almost always reports to someone who has no experience as a superintendent. This wholly consequential nuance can often be the biggest hurdle that impedes not only progression in advancing agronomic plans, but also in advancing compensation and financial growth for any given superintendent. Typically, the supervisor in most professions is at least well-versed in your industry — and, in most cases, has proven success in the specific role that facilitated their ascension into a professional capacity above that role.

In addition, the superintendent is as vulnerable as ever with the expansion of the golf industry in general. Clubs have waitlists and demand is at an alltime high, creating an influx of new golfers/members, and oftentimes volatile, unanticipated governance turnover.

When it comes to superintendent compensation, salaries and associated benefits are trending in a positive direction. But the trend pales on a relative basis in comparison to the compensation trajectory of general managers, COOs, golf professionals and other turf/golf industry-related professions. From our experience, we have found that those positions are usually employed under a formal, written agreement or employment contract. The terms of those agreements or contracts are at worst fair and equitable and, in several cases, offer very favorable financial growth potential and protections for the professional.

We often get calls and find ourselves in conversations with superintendents discussing the best, most strategic ways to address their compensation and/or employment contract — or lack thereof — with their employer.

The decision whether to address the subject with the general manager/chairman usually consists of a projected chess match involving trying to gauge how the other side will perceive the request, react to the topic and how the process will unfold. In most of our experiences, the superintendent typically and rightly deserves a higher wage, additional forms of compensation, extended (or any) severance and, at minimum, some sort of employment agreement or contract.

If you go to the chairman or the board and bring up this topic, can it burn a bridge? Will your perception at the club be forever altered? Will you be spoken of differently behind closed doors? Will this even spell the beginning of the end for your tenure?

But can you keep plodding along, sacrificing immense time, effort and energy knowing you're not compensated equitably? Will the lingering perception that you're not appreciated or properly paid influence your decision making? Will you not take the extra step to ensure the next level of oversight, preparation or execution because you feel slighted? Whether these items are existent subconsciously or consciously, it can eat you alive and negatively impact your loyalty, performance and ultimate success.

Our recommendation when discussing this issue is always simple — but never easy: Methodically weigh the pros and cons, make a plan, and proceed in that manner without looking back or second-guessing. Be prepared for any outcome, have contingency plans, do your homework, present unbiased factual data, know what you want, communicate clearly and honestly, and hope for the best.

The previous paragraph was not meant to be filled with anecdotal, unspecific clichés. Although it might sound like that, we feel in our experience it is indeed the best path.

Any good or service is only worth what someone is willing to pay for it. Start now by positioning yourself as an invaluable asset to your club or course, build alliances and add a relational aspect to your employment. Prepare accordingly, take a deep breath and make the phone call.

Advocate for yourself. If you don't, no one else will.

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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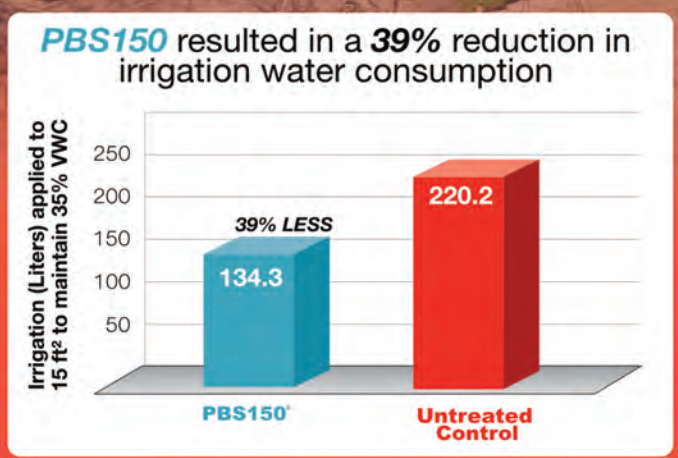

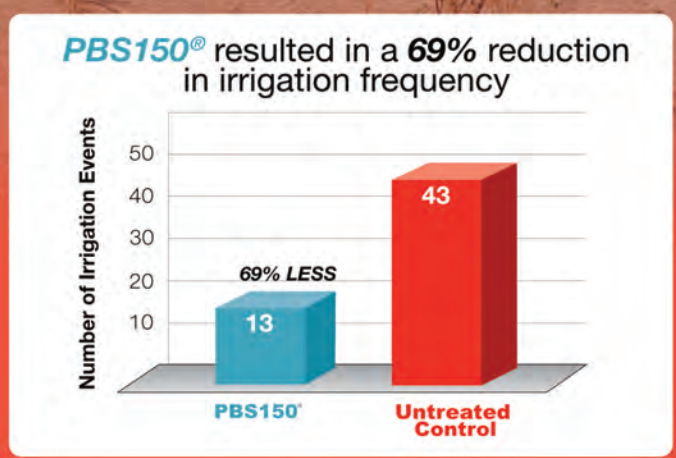

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Nolan, G. and M. Fidanza. 2016. Penn State University

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