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FOR THE LOVE OF THE LAND

Great Gorge Golf Club superintendent **Dave Brubaker** is finally starting to wind down.

PLUS, WHAT KEEPS **JOHN CHASSARD** GOING AFTER FOUR DECADES AT LEHIGH COUNTRY CLUB? **PG 28**

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VOL. 38 NO. 5

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gie media incorporated

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REVERENCE AND RESTRAINT

Here come the YouTubers and influencers. They're filming content on one of the game's most fabled fairways — on the eve of the game's most celebrated event. Even worse, they're riding carts on overseeded ryegrass in the middle of a spring drought. At this alarming rate, they're probably toting cell phones.

Tik, tok, oh snap! Personal combustion elevated.

The internal anger ruins a pleasant conversation with a quartet of Alabamans taking their dream golf trip. On the way to Augusta National Golf Club, they happily hopped along The Frog Golf Club at a bargain green fee. They anticipated finding another delightful small-town southern course on the way home.

The foursome has spent a few hours watching golfers plotting tournament strategy on the 15th hole, a pivotal and picturesque par 5. They mention witnessing the burly Spainard **Jon Rahm** implode and explode earlier in the day.

Seeing carts on a fairway makes this observer want to act like Rahm. But being somewhere revered means demonstrating restraint.

The four-seaters turn right and traverse the second cut, stopping again near the green. The man sitting in the passenger seat of the lead vehicle is wearing a green jacket.

Oh, snap! That's **Jack Nicklaus**. Cart-traffic sins instantly absolved.

The carts park to the right of the green. Nicklaus walks into the treacherous bentgrass surface with his oldest son, **Jackie**, as the content team stands in the shaved ryegrass neck between the greenside bunker and pond.

The creators never step onto the green. Civility is restored, as Nicklaus and Jackie reflect on the 1986 Masters.

This is a moment to savor. Forty years after his most unlikely major championship triumph, Nicklaus is still sharing insight from the greatest of all golf careers. Patrons hover on the observation stands right of the green, hoping to secure soundwaves of the dialogue.

Thankfully, history permeates the game. We all have our 1986 Masters moment, a day when we experienced the unexpected or further strengthened a bond. Jackie caddied for his father in 1986. Perhaps somebody from Alabama hit the golf shot of his life at a course called The Frog on their way to the 2026 Masters.

Golf humbles and hardens everybody who has swung a club or been responsible for the condition of a green. Adoration for the game helps individuals overcome bad shots and wicked weather. The 86-year-old demonstrates the vigor of a 46-year-old when returning to the right spot. The long game matters in golf — and life.

Pondering the next few decades requires discipline, especially with revenue flowing into the industry like the golden locks of a younger Nicklaus. The tussle involving preserving the future, protecting the past and profiting from today affects facilities of all levels, placing consumers and employees in the crosshairs of rapidly evolving stakeholder desires. Expect courses that focus on the long game to fare the best whenever the next downturn commences.

As Nicklaus and Jackie stood on the 15th green, thousands of patrons gathered across the grounds for the Par 3 Contest. Celebrities carried bags, influencers collected content and distinctive merchandise scurried off shelves.

Noticing the admirers around the 15th, a twenty-something who wandered over from the Par 3 Contest entered the stands and started asking questions.

Who is that? Jack Nicklaus. *Which one is he?* The gentleman with the green jacket. *What did he do?* He's the greatest champion of all time. He won 18 majors, including this tournament six times.

Pause …

Wow. What a legend.

The twenty-something walked away as the dialogue between Nicklaus and Jackie continued.

Tik, tok, oh snap!

The YouTubers, influencers and the abundance of revenue have certainly changed golf.

How will this frenzied era be viewed in 40 years?

Guy Cipriano

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

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

GROUP PUBLISHER
Dave Szy
dszy@gie.net

PUBLISHER + EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Guy Cipriano
gcipriano@gie.net

EDITORIAL
Matt LaWell
Senior Editor • mlawell@gie.net
Kelsie Horner
Digital Editor • khorner@gie.net
Terry Buchen
Senior Contributing Technical Editor

GRAPHICS / PRODUCTION
Jim Blayney
Creative Director
Kaitlin Sellers
Advertising Production Coordinator

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

CORPORATE
Richard Foster
Chairman
Chris Foster
President and CEO
Dan Moreland
Publisher Emeritus
James R. Keefe
Executive Vice President
Kelly Antal
Chief Financial Officer
Christina Warner
Director of Data Acquistion
Michelle Wisniewski
Production Manager
Maria Miller
Director, Conferences and Events
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Marketing Specialist

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TSP GOLFDOM MAR23 R1_1-24

Pay your rent. Every single day.

Tyler Bloom offers assistant superintendents blunt honesty from the recruiter's chair.

Nick Saban said it best: *"You get up every day entitled to nothing. Nobody owes you nothing. You could have talent, but if you don't have discipline, you get nothing."*

I wish someone had handed me this earlier in my career. After thoughtful discussions with assistant superintendents throughout last winter's conference and education season, I thought I'd share some blunt honesty from the sidelines and the recruitment chair. So here it is.

The floor has moved. The modern member expects near-championship conditions every day regardless of weather, labor shortages, budgets or supply chain realities. More rounds, higher conditioning standards, skyrocketing operational costs. That's the environment you're walking into.

It's not always fair, and in many cases, it isn't sustainable. But those are the facts on the ground.

What that means for you is simple: showing up, working hard and waiting your turn still matters — but it's no longer enough on its own. The bar is higher, the pace is faster and the people rising quickly are the ones who understand that early.

Here's something nobody tells you clearly enough at the early stages: the market has already decided a lot about your career trajectory, yet it is giving you a more stable start than those before you.

Most graduates of turfgrass agronomy programs are entering the workforce with compensation packages worth at least $70,000 after nine months of internship experience.

The compensation conversation is real, and I won't pretend otherwise. Yes, the market has moved. Yes, starting packages are stronger than they were a decade ago. But there's a growing gap between what some assistants expect and what they've actually built the case for.

Compensation follows value; it doesn't precede it. I've seen assistants price

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themselves out of the right opportunities chasing a number at the wrong time, leaving roles where they were genuinely being invested in for a $5,000 bump somewhere that offered nothing else. Two years later, they're behind the peers they left. The number matters less than the trajectory you're on, the people who are helping you grow and the club standards that are shaping your career.

The opportunity is real. So is the competition. And so are the expectations that come attached to that number. You're not owed it. You're being given the chance to earn it. There's a difference — and the ones who confuse the two don't last long.

I've watched talented people stall — not because they lacked ability, but because they believed their potential was the same thing as their track record. It isn't.

If you want to become a superintendent — and not everyone does, and that's fine — understand the pathway looks different than it did 10 years ago. Running harder down the old road won't get you there faster.

One of the most common myths I see is the belief that a degree or a certification is the finish line. It isn't. It's the entry ticket. I've talked with assistants who completed their turfgrass programs, landed their first role and quietly waited for their superintendent to hand them a development plan.

When it didn't come on their timeline, frustration set in. But the truth is the best operators in this industry didn't wait to be developed. They showed up to GCSAA events on their own time. They read. They asked uncomfortable questions. They volunteered for the problems nobody else wanted to solve. A credential tells a hiring manager you can learn. Your initiative tells them whether you will.

Only one in roughly three dozen golf course superintendent searches over the last two and a half years has yielded a challenging position from an experienced greens chair surrounding education requirements, and the desire of advanced education through on-the-job training and networking.

The people advancing quickly aren't just mastering agronomy. They're learning how to lead up, how to communicate with club leadership, how to influence without authority, and how to walk into a boardroom or a green committee meeting and be taken seriously. That's not soft skill noise. That's the job. The sooner you start building those capabilities alongside your technical ones, the sooner the right doors open.

The rent for success isn't just due every day. It compounds with interest. Skip too many payments early and you'll spend years working twice as hard just to get back to even. I see many young assistants expecting a streamlined path to a superintendent position because of their years of experience versus their exposure and actual results on the ground.

Think of it like the world's worst adjustable-rate mortgage except instead of your house, it's your professional reputation on the line. Showing up three Mondays in a row isn't the bar.

Institutional knowledge, loyalty and hunger get noticed by the leaders worth impressing. Surface-level effort gets surface-level results.

The ones who rise are the ones who stay past normal hours, ask better questions and treat every season like it's building toward something. Because it is.

Despite everything that's changed, some things haven't. Hard work still matters. Pride in your craft still matters. Gratitude for the opportunity to be part of something worth building still matters. Professional etiquette and patience still matter.

The clubs and leaders that last are holding that line, and they're looking for people willing to hold it with them. You don't need a motivational slogan or an inflated title to move forward. You need discipline, consistency and the humility to understand that trust is built slowly and lost quickly.

I'm not telling you this because the path is easy. I'm telling you because I've walked it, made mistakes on it and watched others shortcut it. The ones who paid attention early are the ones leading great operations today.

You get up every day entitled to nothing. Nobody owes you nothing. Talent without discipline gets you nothing.

Pay your rent. Every single day.

Tyler Bloom is a workforce and leadership consultant and principal owner of Bloom Golf Partners.

Tartan Talks 118

Sometimes the trickiest task for a golf course architect involves making subtle alterations. Fortunately, **Brian Curley** has plenty of experience allowing a dramatic site to be a main attraction.

Curley joined the *Tartan Talks* podcast to discuss his work at Pelican Hill Golf Club, a popular 36-hole beauty along the Southern California coast. The project commenced last fall and will consume 50 weeks, with Curley and a crew from McDonald & Sons lightly touching every hole on the pair of early 1990s **Tom Fazio** designs. Twenty-seven holes will remain open throughout construction.

"The canvas, it's painted upon," Curley says. "Then you throw in all the attributes of the climate to play year-round golf and the big sweeping views over the water are incredible. It's pretty hard to beat that canvas. We're not changing much. We're giving it some new paint, new carpet and some touch-ups."

Motorists traveling the Pacific Coast Highway through Orange County pass Pelican Hill. Curley's words take listeners inside what will make future golf experiences even more memorable.

The episode can be found on the Superintendent Radio Network page of major podcast distribution platforms.

COURSE NEWS

Landscapes Unlimited is nearing completion of a major renovation of the championship golf course at Carolina Country Club, a private club in Raleigh, North Carolina. … The Ridge Course at The Els Club Desaru Coast reopened following a comprehensive 12-month enhancement program carried out entirely by the club's agronomy team. … Troon will manage Grande Oaks Golf Club, a private club in Davie, Florida. … Grand Geneva Resort & Spa in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, is opening its new 11-hole short course, Wee Nip, designed by Dusenberry Design. … Cowboys Golf Club reopened following a major transformation by Arcis Golf. Updates include a redesigned championship course, a Dallas Cowboys-themed high-tech driving range with game-used AT&T Stadium turf and an 18-hole putting course.

The Ridge Course at The Els Club Desaru Coast

Carolina Country Club

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TOP: COURTESY OF CAROLINA COUNTRY CLUB

INDUSTRY BUZZ

Concert Golf Partners will install FireFly Automatix robotic mowers at facilities within its portfolio. … John Deere and Major Leage Baseball are partnering for a new initiative**.** As the official tractor of MLB, the company's marketing assets across its media will highlight the work that goes into each season. … Envu released

the Fairway Protection Playbook, a free online resource offering guidance for managing diseases, insects and weeds in warm- and cool-season turfgrass. … The Carolinas GCSA surpassed the million-dollar mark in support of turfgrass research funded by the Rounds 4 Research online auction. The milestone came with recent pledges to Clemson and NC State universities to help create endowed golf-specific research faculty positions.

PEOPLE NEWS

Paul Jett, CGCS, will receive the Carolinas GCSA Distinguished Service Award. Jett hosted the 1999 and 2005 U.S. Opens at Pinehurst No. 2 and led the association as president in 2009. … **H. Scott Griffith**, CGCS, director of agronomy at the University of Georgia Golf Course, was appointed to the board of trustees for the GCSAA Foundation. … The Musser International Turfgrass Research Foundation selected **Elisabeth Kitchin** as the inaugural recipient of the H. Burton Musser Masters Scholarship. **Dr. Maureen Kahiu** was selected as the 2026 Award of Excellence recipient. … Profile Products announced that its board of directors appointed **Michael Ranchino** as CEO and a member of Profile Products' board. … Syngenta Professional Solutions North America head **Scott Reasons** will retire at the end of this month, concluding a 40-year career with Syngenta and its legacy companies. **Dave Ravel**, currently head of sales for SPS, will succeed him in that position. … NanoOxygen Systems added Florida superintendent **Jason Richter** as a golf industry sales representative.

NEW LISTEN ALERT!

Superintendent Radio Network has a new show. *Let Me Know! with Charlie Fultz* brings an entertaining perspective as the Heritage Oaks Golf Course superintendent and general manager sits down with some names you know — and many you don't.

The first episode features a wide-ranging conversation with GreensPro co-owner and industry stalwart **Paul Hurst**. The second spotlights **Jeremiah Mincey**, the talented Ranch Course superintendent at Black Diamond Ranch in Lecanto, Florida.

You can find every episode on the Superintendent Radio Network page of all major podcast platforms.

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Aurora Amend

THE FALL LINE

Aurora Amend is helping put The Fall Line on the map. The Wisconsin native is the second assistant superintendent on the central Georgia club's East Course.

In a little over 2½ years, Fall Line has attracted a lot of attention. The exclusive private club incorporates 1,500 acres and features two 18-hole championship courses and a 10-hole short course.

Amend has been at Fall Line since October 2024, when she was hired as an assistant in training for the short course, which was opening simultaneously with the 18-hole West Course. A few months later, she moved to the East Course, which opened in Fall 2023.

Immediately prior to coming to Georgia, Amend spent 2½ years as an AIT at Sand Valley in Wisconsin. While earning her degree at North Dakota State, she spent time at facilities in North Dakota and New Hampshire. Amend told *Wonderful Women of Golf* host **Rick Woelfel** that coming to Georgia introduced her to a new environment.

"Bermudagrass is way different than what I'd worked with, which was bentgrass" she says. "A little more temperamental sometimes. Switching from bentgrass and fescue to Bermuda and zoysia was definitely challenging. It was a good move for sure. The height of cut is different. On some of our Bermuda, it's only hundredths of an inch or thousandths of an inch. I'd never seen grass cut that short before here."

Amend credits her crew for easing the transition to warm-weather grasses.

"I have a great crew behind me," she says. "A lot of times they're pointing me in a different direction. Not because they think my direction is bad, but because they've been here longer than I [have] and they know what they're doing."

Fall Line gets less play than many other clubs, which simplifies the task of completing necessary jobs and allows the crew to get on to its "wish list."

"I've never seen so many things get done in a day," Amend says. "It's crazy how much more you can do when you don't have as much golf hindering your maintenance plan. If you want to dig up a [sprinkler head], you just dig up a head. You don't have to dodge golf balls."

Amend appreciates that over the course of her career, the people she has reported to have given her responsibilities that allowed her to grow professionally.

"It's built me as a person more, when I have the autonomy to think for myself and also have access to help the crew and decide what they're doing today," she says. "It's been a good opportunity to see what they can do and helping to provide access for some of our crew to do things they probably wouldn't have otherwise."

Amend volunteered in support of last year's U.S. Women's Open at Erin Hills. She described the experience of working and networking with other women turf professionals as "amazing."

"That's the best word I can use to describe it," she adds. "Surreal, maybe. Just seeing 30 women all together, raking bunkers, mowing greens, filling divots, whatever it may be, was really empowering and to say I got to do it in my home state was max level."

Amend recognizes the accomplishments of the women who preceded her into the turf industry and helped create a path for her and others to follow.

"It's been surreal," she says. "I really do look up to them. They obviously walked so the rest of us could run."

> "I've never seen so many things get done in a day. It's crazy how much more you can do when you don't have as much golf hindering your maintenance plan."

Everybody's duty

Bandon Dunes Golf Resort continues to give special coastal Oregon land the light touch.

There isn't one specific person in charge of environmental efforts at Bandon Dunes Golf Resort—it's a team job.

"Everyone works together," director of agronomy **Fred Yates** says succinctly.

The sprawling southwestern Oregon resort, home to seven courses, builds with environmentalism in mind. Bandon Dunes has been a certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for Golf since 2011.

"A typical golf course might come in and just wipe out everything and wipe out all the trees and wipe out all the animals and just make the golf course," superintendent **Lane Clow** says. "But when these courses were all built, they took all that into consideration. Every time they made a new one, it was still incorporated."

Clow oversees agronomy on both of Bandon Dunes' short courses: Shorty's and Bandon Preserve. Bandon Preserve's logo, a silvery phacelia, represents the environmental mindset on which the resort is built. Silvery phacealia, also known as sand dune phacelia, is a species native to southern Oregon and northern California. It's considered an endangered plant due to invasive species, and it resides at Bandon Dunes. To encourage growth of the species, numerous scrapes are on the courses. Scrapes are carved-out sections that feature no other vegetation to allow the silvery phacelia to grow.

When the resort began work on Shorty's, a par-3 course opened in 2024, the plant was found on the land. "We were certain they were just going to get covered up and buried and that'd be the end of it," Clow says. "But it didn't. It flourished."

Thanks to conservation work, silvery phacelia numbers have multiplied.

Proceeds from Bandon Dunes' short courses go straight to the Bandon Dunes Charitable Foundation, promoting conservation and positive community work. *(For more on Shorty's, see page 46.)*

Having fine fescue grass on all fairways and tees is a conservation bonus. Little input is needed, and fertilizing is light. Yates, who has been at Bandon Dunes for more than 14 years, says they haven't yet sprayed fairways for insects or disease. Environmentally sensitive areas are also marked on the property, offering mandatory relief for players at no penalty. This prevents golfers from damaging habitat. Also on property is a 250-acre conservation area known as the H.L. McKee Preserve.

The Bandon Dunes maintenance crew monitor all groundwater, especially any water that would be discharged in areas around the property creeks.

Bird and bat boxes are found throughout the resort, attracting numerous bird species. Deer, foxes, geese, coyotes and mink frequent the resort and, occasionally, bears or mountain lions can be spotted. Most wildlife just adds a naturalistic feel to the property. But the geese? "I would have to say that's our No. 1 problem," Yates says.

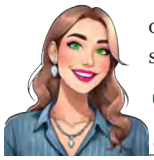
"There's just about everything out here at one time or another that's crossed these fairways," adds Yates, who took over as director of agronomy in 2024. "We're inundated with wildlife."

Conservation is happening off the course at Bandon Dunes too. Five arrays of solar panels have been installed on the property, decreasing energy usage. The club is also working to be lit 100 percent by LED. The maintenance team is steering away from two-stroke handheld power equipment, planning to replace the tools with battery-powered options.

At Bandon Dunes, Mother Nature and the maintenance team work together. Yates previously worked in Texas, where he helped build multiple courses. He later moved to PGA West in LaQuinta, California, where he says things in the golf environment tend to look more manicured.

But not at Bandon Dunes.

"It looks like you're driving into a major forest, and then you open up to the ocean," Yates says. "It's pretty impressive how they've incorporated natural stuff there. Nothing looks artificial or fake by any stretch."



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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TORO

The GreensPro® e1700

1. **Continuation of electrification.** Following the introduction of electric mowing solutions into golf course maintenance equipment fleets, the GreensPro® e1700 is Toro's first electric greens roller. The GreensPro e1700 is designed to improve every aspect of greens rolling.

2. **Quietly doing the job.** The GreensPro e1700 comes with two HyperCell® Lithium-ion batteries, delivering a range of around 180,000 square feet. Customers seeking to roll more than 18 greens or approaches on a single charge can expand capacity to three or four batteries.

3. **More electric convenience.** The HyperCell battery system intelligently uses batteries simultaneously to prolong lifespan with no manual switching required. An electric design means no hydraulics on greens, no longer having tension drive chains and minimal maintenance.

4. **Point-and-go control.** Instead of a steering wheel or tiller bars, the GreensPro e1700 utilizes an intuitive joystick control system. Point-and-go steering reduces the operator learning curve.

5. **No more clunky loading.** The SmartHitch™ integrated trailer connects the GreensPro e1700 to a transport vehicle without the operator exiting the machine to maneuver up separate trailers or position pull-over drawbars. The new system is faster, safer and allows the roller to be brought closer to greens.

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8. **Expanding the turf covered.** Meeting customer demand for a more productive, heavy-duty electric roller, the GreensPro e1700 features a three-roller configuration for a 69-inch rolling width.

9. **In control from the bottom.** Each drum is driven by an electric motor, allowing for precise control over each drum independently. The ability to adjust individual rollers during turns and stops prevents turf damage.

10. **Developmental diligence.** Toro's extensive voice-of-customer research and commitment to enhancing daily maintenance practices led to the 2026 launch of the GreensPro e1700. The roller will be available for purchase in mid-2026. Testing occurred on a myriad of turfgrass species across the world over the past three years.

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CRISIS & CONTROL

The evidence that we are living in chaotic times meets golf course superintendents, along with their managers and owners, at every turn. Near-historic fuel costs. Escalating fertilizer prices. Steadily rising labor costs. An uncertain supply chain.

It's enough to keep many of us awake at night, send our blood pressure soaring and make our hair fall out, assuming there was some hair left to lose.

In times of uncertainty, there are two maxims that offer comfort as well as guidance:

1. **Control what you can control and deal with the rest.** We can drive ourselves crazy trying to bring order to what is out of our control. That list includes the examples mentioned above, as well as our own personal list. What we *can* control are the decisions, behaviors and thinking that determine how we deal with chaos.

2. **Never waste a good crisis.** For those who keep their wits about them, a certain amount of chaos can be fertile ground for creativity, opportunity and team building. We've seen this truth play out time and again, in our lifetimes and before.

Here are five steps to put these principles to work in chaotic times:

> "Embrace chaos. Odds are you've dealt with something similar before in your career. You got through that. You'll get through this."

1. **Embrace chaos.** Amidst uncertainty, we should not be surprised by disruption, the out-of-left field surprises that poke holes in our best-laid plans. Embrace chaos by thinking of it as a challenge that you're going to meet and overcome. Odds are you've dealt with something similar before in your career. You got through that; you'll get through this.

2. **Communicate your vision and purpose**. Superintendents must communicate clearly, patiently and consistently the plan to meet the challenge at hand. Make sure your crew leaders understand what you expect and how you intend to tackle the problem. Then work alongside your team to show them the confidence you have in the plan and in their ability to execute it, even as the ground shifts and the world tilts.

3. **State your plan … then execute it.** Your plan for accomplishing the goals and objectives that define success for you and your team was (hopefully) set in place well in advance of any storm clouds building around your course. But all plans require adjustment, especially when a chaotic situation arises. Make the necessary adjustments, recalibrate as necessary and communicate the revised plan. Tell your team that the goals and objectives haven't changed, only the path to get where everyone was originally headed. Then get after it. Make your word your bond.

4. **Quality trumps price and problems.** Encourage constant improvement. Open the door that empowers your staff and teammates to introduce new solutions for unanticipated problems. Do not cut corners on quality. Make it the standard by which you and your team are known. Chaos liberates you from outdated practices and techniques, and presents opportunities for new and improved methods and better results. Because you know what is required better than anyone, you must lead the rethinking and re-engineering. Make "business as usual" a casualty of chaos with quality at the center of your plans

5. **Stand your ground**. Standing alone requires experience and self-assurance. Demonstrate that you can be counted on when times are tough. Be prepared to be the only champion for ideas, practices and techniques that you and your team develop, even when those things are questioned. Past mistakes prove themselves to have been great teachers during tough times. Be brave enough to draw on past lessons learned.

As every superintendent who has ever gotten their boots muddy knows, there are no two days alike in this profession. Each day is a challenge, with its own set of interruptions, setbacks and problems. Chaos is a baked-in component of the job. Surviving, even thriving, in those situations takes vision and guts. Control what you can control and never waste a good crisis.

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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FOR
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OVE OF THE LAND

Great Gorge Golf Club superintendent **Dave Brubaker** is finally starting to wind down.

By **Matt LaWell**

Dave Brubaker still arrived first at Great Gorge Golf Club when he was 60 years old. And when he was 61. And when he was 62. No big surprise, to be honest. Brubaker had arrived first at the New Jersey oasis most days since he landed there in his late 20s. Old farm boy. Old habits.

Brubaker would turn in off McAfee Greenwood Road and hang a right at the guard shack, long unattended. He would unlock the gate that swung open to the maintenance facility, an ancient train engine repair shop, now quieter than ever. He would walk the course, jotting down notes on just what it needed. It needed plenty.

He would mow, of course. Edge and rake. He had handled spraying here for decades, but there was no time or money for that anymore. The course, his professional home by then for 32 years, was closed. Would it ever reopen? Nobody could say for certain. But Brubaker loved the place too much to quit on it. He headed there after every shift at West Hills Country Club, crossing the state line from New York back home. He tried to keep his favorite spot looking at least a little like a golf course. He pulled phragmites tall as flagsticks from the bunkers. Sometimes, he would pop into his old office.

He would normally work until dark. He would normally work long past.

Brubaker maintained Great Gorge — and himself — for as long as he could. It was hard work, tending to a shuttered course after a full day almost an hour away. No one else to help. No extra pay pouring in on Fridays. He maintained it during those years because

he loved it — because he *still* loved it.

He tried to steer his mind toward positive thinking. He wasn't always successful. *This is never going to be a golf course again*, he remembers telling himself.

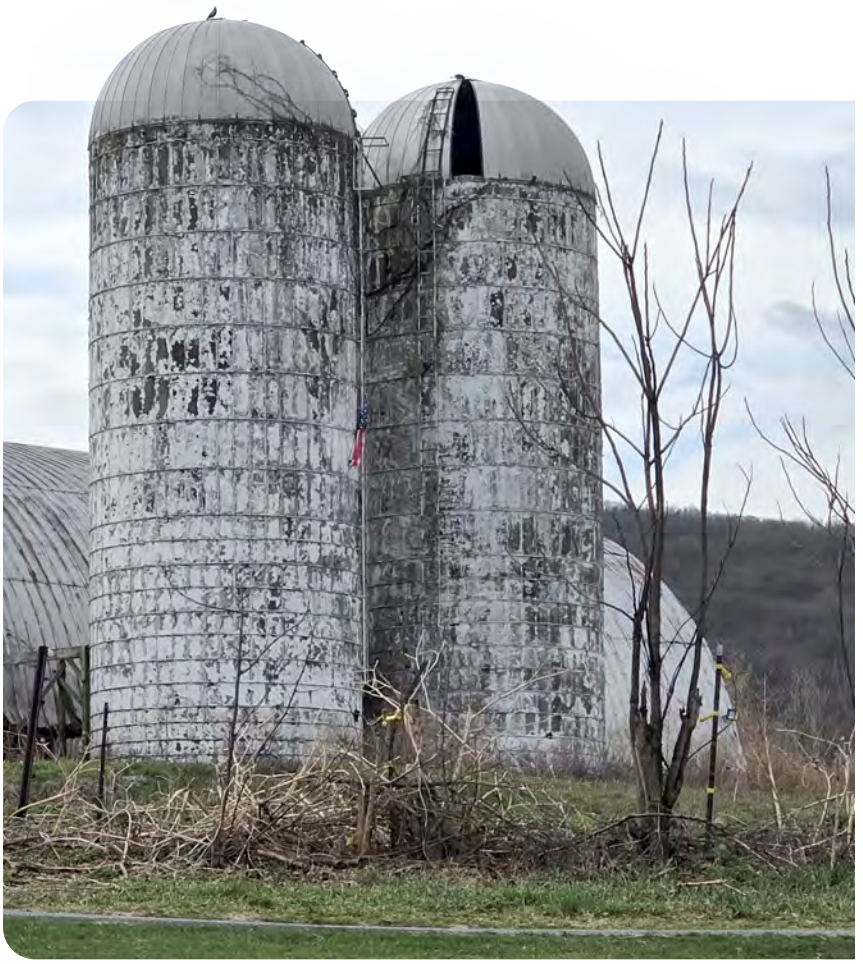
He maintained it for more than a year after it closed.

He maintained it never knowing whether it would be a golf course again, whether all his extra work would be seen by another pair of eyes.

He maintained it until it broke him. Until he could no longer drive in and walk around and look out without remembering what it had been.

He maintained it until, for his own health, like so many people before — golfers, maintenance folks, all sorts of managers, different ownership groups, a famous magazine publisher — he just had to walk away.

THIS IS ABOUT FRIENDSHIP and teaching and change and time and unexpected returns and more than a little love. Before any of those things, it's about a young man who didn't know exactly what he



Squint enough and you might spot Playboy's familiar bunny logos on silos overlooking the course (top). The old railroad track parts in a bunker near the third green of the aptly named Rail 9, one of then-24-year-old Tom Fazio's first design decisions, are more obvious.

wanted to do with his life until the moment that he did.

In 1974, Brubaker attended a church banquet with his father, **J. Robert Brubaker**. The details of the night are lost to memory, but the key moment is not: His father's cousin, **Dwight Brubaker**, spotted him in the men's room and, for some reason, tried to sell him then and there on joining the golf course maintenance team that summer.

Brubaker grew up on a crop farm. He worked every day as long as he can remember. "And I hated it when I was a kid," he says, "because all my buddies were at the local ball diamond or the swimming pool." He often retreated to the basketball court his father built inside the barn, and the genesis of a life playing the sport.

That night at the banquet, Brubaker was 20 and had started working as a mason, moving solid blocks for a living. Dwight was halfway through a 15-year run as the first superintendent at — and the first employee of — Host Farm Resort in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Along with **Kenny Dietrich** of Lancaster Country Club and later a young **Matt Shaffer** of Media Heights Golf Club, he was at the center of the local superintendent scene, organizing golf outings and softball leagues, the life of every party. The social scene spread far beyond chapter meetings. Shaffer served as a de factor softball commissioner and seemingly everybody played in a series of Screen Door Open golf tournaments — irreverent events where the golfer who plunked the most balls in the pond received the gift of a dozen waterlogged balls.

"I leaned on those guys," recalls Shaffer, who later became the director of golf course operations at Merion Golf Club. "Business was difficult — we didn't have the tools, irrigation was bad — and they helped a lot. If you weren't intimidated by them, you could really enjoy their sense of humor."

Brubaker was not intimidated by kin. When Dwight asked him, "'Why don't you come work for me at the golf

Growing the game?

Jeff Koffman is a dreamer.

During his brief ownership of Great Gorge Golf Club in Vernon, New Jersey, he asked general manager **David Killin** to purchase a hot air balloon and convert it into an aerial restaurant, diners' feet dangling high above the course. He requested a floating green, to be plopped in a pond behind the clubhouse, that will soon serve as a target for a $5,000-per-ace hole-in-one contest. And he road tripped with Killin up to Akron, New York, northeast of Buffalo, to play Destroyer Park Golf, home of the first park golf course in the United States.

Sometimes described as "miniature golf on steroids," park golf traces its origins to Japan in 1983 — one year *after* superintendent **Dave Brubaker** arrived at Great Gorge — and blends golf and croquet on a compact course. Every hole measures less than 100 meters. Every cup is oversized. So is the ball. And golfers use only one club. Koffman loved park golf at Destroyer and requested a course at Great Gorge. Appropriately enough, rather than call it Park Golf, Koffman opted to call the new course 1Club.

Construction started early last year on the old driving range and the course opened in June. With minimal advertising, Great Gorge racked up about 2,500 rounds. They logged another 1,300 in March.

"I think 1Club is going to be a huge addition," says Killin, whose HSK-MC firm purchased Great Gorge in 2016 and reopened it in 2017 after two shuttered seasons. "It's a great family opportunity."

The Great Gorge team installed lights on the 1Club course in March and plans to turn it into an "easy fun" attraction with music either piped in or live, updated digital scoreboards just off the course and a centrally located bar.

"Jeff has all these visions," Killin says. "His brother said to me, 'He's gonna think of 300 ideas a day and maybe one will be valid. You're going to have to figure out which one that is.' As a new employee, you want to please your boss, so I said, 'OK.'"

"Luckily," Koffman says, "I have people around me who take my big ideas and sometimes they say, 'No, that one won't work.'"

The hot air balloon restaurant, pun very much intended, never got off the ground. 1Club, though, just might.

— Matt LaWell

MATT LAWELL, PREVIOUS PAGE AND OPPOSITE; COURTESY OF GREAT GORGE GOLF CLUB, THIS PAGE

course?'" he jumped at the chance. "And I've been at a golf course ever since," he says. "I was just lucky to go into the bathroom at the same time he did."

Brubaker worked alongside Dwight for the next five years — fitting in a Penn State turf degree during the winters — before his cousin moved from maintenance to real estate. "I'd send him a picture of the golf course every now and then," Brubaker says. "I always appreciated him getting me into the business."

After three more years, he left Host Farm for the mountains of Vernon, New Jersey, and the 27 holes that shaped the rest of his career.

GREAT GORGE GOLF CLUB

was once a spoke in the wheel of a powerful publishing empire. Originally called Legends Resort & Country Club and designed by **George Fazio** — with assistance from his then-24-year-old nephew, **Tom** — the club was part of a mammoth Playboy Club when **Hugh Hefner** dominated the cultural conversation. An hour north of New York City, Vernon offered mountains for skiing, plenty of land for an 800-room hotel and events center, and hundreds of rolling acres perfect for golf.

> "It's a beautiful piece of property. I'm thinking it's never going to be a golf course again. I would come over and walk it and I couldn't do it after a while. It just blew up. It was in such rough shape."
>
> — *Dave Brubaker*

The 1970s feel less like a different time than like a different planet. Videos, photos, brochures and postcards depict a bustling retreat, with 90 Bunnies walking the floor, more than at any other Playboy Club. Entertainers like **Frank Sinatra** and **Bob Hope** and **Count Basie** (and also **Ann-Margaret** and **Gabe Kaplin** and **Charlie Callas**). So much polyester. So many mustaches. "If they opened a supper club like this in Manhattan, the newspapers would go crazy calling it the rebirth of the night club," a Dayton, Ohio, TV director named **Ken Hardin** is quoted as saying in the Spring 1972 issue of *VIP*, the official Playboy Club magazine. "Here, it's just part of a bright new world."

Brubaker just missed that world. By 1982, the state had dashed Hefner's dreams of an upstate casino, prompting the media mogul to sell the hotel and the course. The Bunny Hut remained within site of the maintenance facility and a pair of Playboy bunny logos painted on barn silos high on a hill loomed over the course.

"I never got up here when it was the Playboy Club," says Brubaker, who was then the father of young children. He does not sound disappointed.

Brubaker did work with at least one notable woman early in his Great Gorge tenure: **Joann Ward**. According to the April 1982 edition of *The Greenerside*, the official publication of the GCSA of New Jersey, she was likely the first woman assistant superintendent in the state.

Brubaker developed an aggressive agronomic plan for the course, often working 70 or 80 hours throughout the season. Elevation change provided a challenge. So did a manual irrigation system original to the 1970 construction. Nothing detracted from his love for the place. "This is the best property for a golf course in New Jersey," he says.

By the time Ward moved to a superintendent job of her own, Brubaker had figured out how to maintain — and how to staff — the course. He relied on a handful of full-time maintenance team members and then filled the roster with often dependable college kids home for the summer. Some lasted a season. Some, like **Brad Sparta**, **Chris Boyle** and **Scott McBane** returned summer after summer.

McBane is now in his 30th season at Galloway National Golf Club in Galloway, New Jersey, most of them as superintendent. After starting his career at Augusta National, Boyle has been the superintendent at Mendham Golf & Tennis Club in Mendham, New Jersey, since 1997. Sparta, meanwhile, shifted to golf course construction after decades as a superintendent.

"He gave college kids in the area a summer job and a place to learn skills," Boyle says. "And I'm sure a lot of the guys that just went on to other careers think back to those summers and some of the stuff that they learned."

Boyle and Sparta shared a kindergarten class. McBane was a year ahead of them in school. They all worked summers under Brubaker.

"I worked there probably three or four weeks and I was like, 'This golf course stuff is pretty cool,'" Sparta says. "Dave kind of took me under his wing and showed me everything, taught me anything I needed to know about turf."

Brubaker tasked them all with mowing fairways within weeks and, eventually, overnight irrigation. He worked them. He trusted them.

"I remember going to my grandfather and kind of complaining because I was working all the time," Sparta says. "And he said, 'You know what, Brad? If you're working on a farm and you have a team of horses working for you, you only whip the good ones, because no matter how much you whip the bad ones, they don't give you any more.' Dave quietly encouraged me by giving me additional responsibilities without ever saying, 'Hey, this is something I think you should do.'"

McBane worked just as hard and, much like Brubaker a couple decades earlier, didn't have a set plan after high school. "After a couple summers working for him, I was like, 'Wow, he's got the easiest job I've ever seen. Maybe I want to do this,'" McBane remembers. "Of course, only the good ones make it look easy. Dave was great to work for. He was always one of the

Assistant superintendent Bob Bowlby, left, will soon share the top job at Great Gorge with Derek Bishop, center, while mechanic Ryan Clark handles more work in the maintenance facility.

MATT LAWELL (2)

hardest-working guys there. If we were on a project, he was hard to keep up with. He definitely set the tone."

SUPERINTENDENTS CAN LOSE THEIR jobs for so many reasons far beyond their control. Weather, of course. A rogue member. A new green chair. In 2014, Brubaker found himself untethered from Great Gorge for the first time in more than 30 years because of the fourth ownership change during his time at the course — with some bank and loan complications mixed in — and ultimately a course closure.

Hundreds of courses were shutting down then, a correction to decades of aggressive construction. Most of them never reopened.

Brubaker did what he had done for so long: He kept working. "It's just what I've done," he says. "My whole life, I've always worked. Through up and down times in my life. Through a divorce." He landed an assistant superintendent position under Sparta at West Hills Country Club in Middletown, New York—and, after hours, he kept tending to Great Gorge.

"I knew he was going down there and doing things on the side," Sparta says. "He could not handle [what it had become]. He told me that. He said every time he'd go down there, he got to the point where he would get physically sick over it because of what it had turned into. He had to stop going down."

"I was sad," Brubaker says. "It's a beautiful piece of property. I'm thinking it's never going to be a golf course again. I would come over and walk it and I couldn't do it after a while. It just blew up. It was in such rough shape."

Uncertainty loomed over 2015 and into 2016 until, incredibly, the Koffman family, who helped develop the region starting in the 1970s, acquired the property — and wanted to keep it as a golf course. The Koffmans hired

What keeps you up at night?

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Weather.
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Sparta to help return the course from the land, and Sparta in turn hired Brubaker.

Sparta and a small team started work on the course in September 2016, aerifying greens twice, borrowing equipment from a dealer. "Very rarely do you see a change in a day," Sparta says. "We saw changes by the *hour*." Great Gorge reopened May 1, 2017, and, with no advertising, topped 1,000 rounds in a week by August.

"The routing and the holes are some of the best in the state," says Sparta, who moved over to Great Gorge general manager later in 2017. "And I don't say that just because it means a lot to me. There are just some really, really good golf holes out there. The vistas are amazing. It's stood the test of time since Fazio designed it. There's been very little modification in the 55 years it's been around. It's just a good golf course."

Good, but not perfect. Decades of wear, lack of consistent ownership and the mammoth hotel — blocked off and condemned after the last residents were evicted more than a decade ago, but still looming over the course — are all challenges. To hear Sparta say it, the course needs to replace its 56-year-old irrigation system, hire an architect to develop a master plan focusing on tees and bunkers, and resurface the cart paths. "That would elevate the course from an $80-to-$100-a-round course to a $150-a-round course," he says.

THERE IS PLENTY OF change these days at Great Gorge. Maybe not new irrigation or cart paths, but still … change.

The biggest change involves Brubaker. He plans to retire after this season. To be fair, Brubaker planned to retire after *last* season. And Sparta figured his first mentor was retiring so long ago that he penned a farewell ode to Brubaker for *The Greenerside* in *2014*. But this feels real. There is a plan in place. **Bob Bowlby**, the current assistant superintendent with decades of experience as a mechanic, and **Derek Bishop**, who recently wrapped up his turf studies at Rutgers University, will share duties starting next season. Bowlby recently hired **Ryan Clark**, a talented young mechanic, to spell him in the maintenance facility.

"I love Dave to death," Bowlby says. "I have total respect. I do think it's going to be hard for him. He's never going to be able to leave this property, and I totally respect that. He put his blood, sweat, tears, everything into this golf course for 40 years."

Beyond the course, Dwight Brubaker died last May. Brubaker attended his cousin's memorial service on May 23, then returned to Great Gorge and worked the next 151 days without a break.

"I was kind of thinking it would be my last year, then I'd step down," Brubaker says. "So I wanted to go out on a high note and leave things perfect."

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Brubaker is starting to arrive last most mornings. He is 72 now, but the change has far less to do with age than with self-care.

He started talking with a therapist earlier this year. He struggled for months to find one who would return his call. Everyone wanted his name, his number, his insurance information. Everyone said they would call back, and no one ever did.

An old Great Gorge employee told Brubaker that his wife had started to talk with a therapist. *Give **Kathryn** a call*, he said. Brubaker did. And she called back. Sometimes Brubaker calls Kathryn his therapist. Sometimes he calls her his shrink.

He wants to talk about therapy. He wants people to know that he is working on himself. He is working on paying more attention to his wife, **Leslie**, to actually listening to what she says at the end of the day, when his thoughts used to linger on some distant corner of the course. He is working on working less. He trusts Bowlby to open the gate and get the team going. He starts most days now with a more relaxed mug of coffee and *The New York Post*. "I've been slacking a little bit," he says. He will not work 151 consecutive days this season.

Great Gorge general manager **David Killin** started sketching a succession plan years ago, "but it was never going to be activated until Dave was ready," he says. "We were never going to step on his toes. It was on his timeline."

Last year, after Brubaker shared his retirement plans, Killin asked him whether he felt like he could have left five years ago.

"No," Brubaker said.

"Do you feel like you can leave now?" Killin asked.

"Yeah," Brubaker replied.

He still wants to mow and spray. He still plans to work 40 hours most weeks. He still needs to work on himself.

"Some things that the therapist tells me, I know these things," Brubaker says. "I've just been neglecting them. A little bit like on the farm: You're never done, you just have to walk away. I don't know if you know what I mean by that, but there's always something to do.

"At the end of the day, you kind of have to say, That's just going to have to wait until tomorrow."

Matt LaWell is Golf Course Industry's senior editor.

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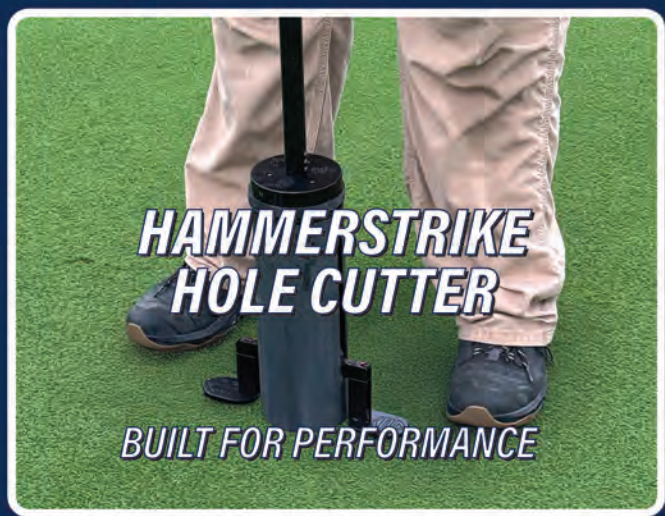

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FOR
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OVE F LEHIGH

John Chassard arrived at a classic eastern Pennsylvania club in 1983. Why he never left. And what keeps him going.

By **Rick Woelfel**

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Situated in Allentown, Pennsylvania, around 90 minutes north of Philadelphia, Lehigh Country Club offers an idyllic setting for golf. The golf course, which opened on Memorial Day in 1928, is a **William Flynn/Howard Toomey** collaboration and exemplifies understated excellence.

For the past 43 years, Lehigh Country Club has been **John Chassard**'s professional home. He arrived in April 1983 as an assistant superintendent, a product of the two-year program at Penn State, and never left. He's been the director of grounds since May 1987.

When he sat down with *Golf Course Industry*, Chassard spoke about the importance of keeping up with an ever-evolving industry.

"My mind is still very young," he says, "and I think it's just the fact that you need to think. You have to stay relevant. You can't be lackadaisical. You can't sit on what you did yesterday. It only matters in this business what you did today and then you worry about tomorrow to a certain degree.

"But it has a way, I guess, of keeping you mentally young. It seems like yesterday that I started. And to a certain degree it's a problem because when we talk about situations, or crew members that have come and gone, I'll say that was probably eight to 10 years ago when,

in reality, it was 18 to 20 years ago. So, time really has no relevance in my mind when I reflect on the golf course and my time here."

Chassard grew up at nearby storied Saucon Valley Country Club. His father, **Albert**, was the club's longtime racquets professional. John also engaged in racquet sports, but he soon focused on golf.

"I always enjoyed tennis and racquet sports," he says. "It was tough being the son of a pro because everybody expected my skill set to be really good. I did play high school tennis and stuff like that, but in my mind, I was never good enough to meet the expectations — not of my father, but other people. And I was fortunate enough to grow up at Saucon Valley with its three great golf courses."

In addition to those three championship courses, Saucon Valley offers a 6-hole course that became Chassard's second home.

"I just loved being out there," he says. "I used to play the 6-hole course a lot. I would beg my dad at night to go out and play one, or two, or three holes on one of the championship courses.

"He was comfortable enough that we could park the car in a certain area and walk a little loop and play three or four holes on the championship courses. I loved that."

When Chassard was 15, his father retired from his position at Saucon Valley and the family moved to Lancaster, where Albert became affiliated with what was is now called Four Seasons Golf Club in nearby Landisville. It was there that his son got his first taste of working on a golf course under superintendent **Scott Nissley**.

After high school, Chassard enrolled at Millersville State College (now Millersville University). At the time, he was considering a career in oceanography. But he lasted just a year at Millersville; the educational requirements — "I wasn't a huge fan of math," he says — and the prospect of spending long periods of time away from home led him to think about a career in turf.

At his father's encouragement, Chassard called **Dave Miller**, the superintendent and later the general manager at Saucon Valley. He worked there for a summer, then, with Miller's support, was accepted into the two-year program at Penn State, which was headed by the legendary **Dr. Joe Duich**. "A lot of times, if you applied you didn't get in your first year, so I was very fortunate to work with Mr. Miller and have him get me in that program," Chassard says.

One of the program requirements was an internship, and Chassard was scheduled to spend time at The Creek, a highly regarded private club on Long Island. Before he could start, the superintendent he was to work with took a job at another club. Chassard could have stayed at The Creek, but he received a call from Miller informing him the assistant superintendent at Lehigh was moving on and suggesting he arrange to finish his internship there and then, if all went well, become the assistant to **Marty Nadenichek**. By spring 1983, Chassard was the assistant superintendent at Lehigh.

Over the next four years, Chassard applied for jobs up and down the Eastern Seaboard and actually turned down two in-state offers to be a head superintendent. His ultimate ambition was to become the head superintendent at Saucon Valley. "I held Saucon Valley to a standard nothing could compete with," Chassard says today.

BECOMING LEHIGH'S TURF LEADER

Fate had something else in mind.

In May 1987, Nadenichek informed his crew that he was leaving to take a job at Burning Tree Club in Bethesda,

© COURTESY OF JOHN CHASSARD (2)

Maryland. At age 24, Chassard was named Lehigh's director of grounds. He has held that position ever since, charged with protecting and enhancing not only Lehigh's 18 holes but also the legacy of Flynn, which had faded over time.

"When I started working here, I started getting involved with an architect," Chassard says. "We started talking about doing some things. The previous ground chairs all left their marks out there. And I knew it just didn't seem right. We had a couple different architects in who just seemed like they were screwing the place up."

Chassard contacted **Dr. Michael Hurdzan** and took him on a tour of the golf course.

"I could tell he knew Flynn," Chassard says. "I knew we had something special here, but my membership didn't even know William Flynn. [Hurdzan] was going around and pointing out Flynn features. Among other things, he pointed out a classic Flynn design feature he called a deception bunker short of the ninth green. From the fairway, it looks like it is positioned greenside when in reality it is perhaps 30 yards short."

Chassard wanted to bring in Hurdzan to create a master plan; Hurdzan's commitments elsewhere would not allow it. So, he reached out to **Ron Forse**.

"When I told him I was calling from Lehigh Country Club, the first words out of his mouth were 'Toomey and Flynn,'" Chassard recalls. "Ron has been a dear friend ever since. We've been through three master plans together."

Over more than three decades since, those master plans have included an extensive tree-removal effort, improving greens drainage and a stream bank project launched in 2005 with the goal of intentionally creating a flood adjacent to a stream that runs through the property.

"Basically, we tried to encourage

Chatting with **Chassard**

A career in turf spanning more than four decades has provided Lehigh Country Club director of grounds **John Chassard** with a unique perspective on the business. He shared some of his insights with *Golf Course Industry*.

Advice he received from Dr. Joe Duich at Penn State …
One of the first things he said to us in class was, 'You have to educate yourself. You have to be up on current affairs. You have to understand what's going on politically. You have to understand what's going on in the world because it impacts everybody.'

So, if you need to work with people, you have to understand where they're coming from, emotionally, mentally and so on. And I always thought that was really good advice. I always held that near and dear.

On the importance of balancing work and family …
This business will suck everything out of you. There was a time in this business when you had to work 70 to 80 hours a week if you were going to be successful. That certainly is not true.

I have come to realize that there is always tomorrow and what doesn't get done today you can get done tomorrow. There are certain things you have to take care of today to make sure there is a tomorrow, but don't ever make this job more than what it is.

At the end of the day, you're out there cutting the grass for recreational enjoyment. It's not brain surgery, it's not life and death, it's supposed to be fun. Enjoy it, make the most of it to enjoy it, but then take care of yourself and take care of your family.

On knowing your audience …
You have to be able to drink beer with your crew, you've got to be able to drink Scotch with your grounds chair, and you have to be able to drink wine with the women. That's a metaphor for knowing how to deal with the different people you come in contact with.

I didn't set out with that [mindset]. I just think I've been very fortunate because it's kind of a natural thing for me. It's always been my desire to be liked by the people I'm interacting with.

On the importance of interacting with professional colleagues …
When you're having problems in the dead of summer, when at the end of July, you've got issues, you shut out the outside world. Nothing else exists but you and your problems.

And you have to come to realize that the guy down the street is having the same problems. Don't be afraid to talk to your colleagues. Don't be afraid to reach out to people and say, 'Hey, what are you seeing?' Don't be afraid to get help from other people.

The Lehigh Valley is kind of funny. It sits between [the] Philadelphia, Central Penn and Pocono [GCSAA chapters]. I was a member of all three and a past president of Central, and I kind of felt like a lot of the guys in the area weren't a member of any of them.

We kind of made an attempt to get together two times a year to bring the guys in the area together to know that we could build a network. You've got to get out with your peers, you've got to see other golf courses. Your property is not the only one that exists.

You can learn a lot by going to another property. Whether it's a public golf course, whether it's high-end private, there is always something to learn out there.

On receiving the 2024 George Hamilton Jr. Distinguished Service Award from the Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council …
It means an awful lot to me.

George was a dear friend back in the day. When he took over the two-year program [at Penn State] and I was on the council, we became very close friends. I was shocked and thrilled to receive that award. I don't think there was any other award that could have meant more to me.

areas along the stream to flood, so we could dictate where it would flood," Chassard says, "and then try to protect the golf course infrastructure where we didn't want it to flood."

As much as Chassard has left his mark on the golf course, his talent for working with people, be it members, the crew or others who cross his path, might be his greatest legacy. Talk with the people who have worked with and for him over the course of his career, and they'll all point to his people skills.

John Hayes has been a member at Lehigh Country Club for 40 years. At one point, he chaired the club's grounds committee for nine consecutive years under three different club presidents. Hayes cites Chassard's management style as instrumental to his success.

"His style is collaborative rather than dictatorial," Hayes says. "Many of the people that work for him have been there 35 to 40 years. He just had a couple guys retire that had been there 35 years plus. And he's got a couple that are still there after long tenures. He makes them feel valued as employees. He is in charge, but he doesn't make you feel like he's in charge. It's a more collaborative approach."

Chassard's in-season crew consists of 33 to 35 individuals, 25 to 30 of whom are on site on any given day. The full-time, year-round crew fluctuates between 12 and 14.

One of them is **Jared Buzinski**, who is starting his fourth season as the club's equipment manager. He appreciates the fact that his boss gives him the latitude he needs to do his job effectively.

"He gives me a lot of freedom, and he doesn't really give me a hard time," Buzinski says. "If I come up to him and tell him I need to order this part and the cost is $2,500, he trusts me to make that decision and get that part to get that equipment back up and running."

Buzinski grew up on a farm and had never worked in the golf industry before coming to Lehigh.

"Getting into the golf industry; it's a whole different animal," he says. "So, it's a little nerve-racking sometimes with the way equipment is evolving and stuff like that. It's really nice that he pretty much lets me do what I've got to do."

Chassard notes the importance of providing his team with positive reinforcement.

"Everybody wants to hear that," he points out. "Everybody wants to hear that they're doing a good job but it's certain things — the extra pat on the back, a little recognition, whatever. I think everybody responds positively to that.

"I've never been a yeller or a screamer. I never liked being yelled or screamed at. I never yell or scream at anyone. At key events, when you need to get them geared up, you give them a pep talk, buy them pizzas when the day is done. You give them some goal."

Chassard says the members of his team have a history of taking pride in their work.

"I've always been fortunate enough that I've had people that have really appreciated what they've accomplished on the golf course," he says. "And I think that's part of what's so rewarding on the golf course. It's instantaneous. You go out, you mow a green, you have nice straight lines and you can look at that green and say, 'Wow, I just did that.'

"So, to be able to encourage that, and to train people the right way to be able to get to that point [makes them] their own critics. They're the ones who will go out there and say, 'Hey boss, I screwed up No. 3, I got a little off line, I got some bananas,' or 'I scalped the collar a little. I didn't want you to see it and be angry.' So, I think just you develop that kind of culture over time."

John Chassard, left, with Tom Weinert, Greg Boring and Jim Lanza at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club.

POSITIONING OTHERS TO SUCCEED

When Chassard's assistants become head superintendents, they carry his influence with them.

Bill Brooks was an assistant superintendent at Lehigh from 1988 to 1992 before taking a head superintendent position at Corning (New York) Country Club, where he hosted an LPGA Tour event. Today, he's the superintendent at Hanover Country Club in Abbottstown, Pennsylvania. Brooks has worked more than three decades at Hanover and he says Chassard gave him respon-

sibilities that allowed him to grow professionally.

"He gave a lot of freedom for me to get a good experience. He kind of put a lot on me in the hot months for keeping things alive and pretty much allowed that as opposed to what I do now. I almost feel like I've got to get in there. Assistants need experience. John allowed me to kind of be a leader in my position at Lehigh."

Sean Gregson has experienced a long and varied career in turf that included coming to work as an assistant at Lehigh in the summer of 2020, early during the COVID-19 pandemic. He stayed for 5½ years until last April, when he took a job as the head superintendent at Bell Nob Golf Club in Gillette, Wyoming.

Gregson learned a lot from Chassard in his time at Lehigh, particularly about managing people.

"John was completely different than anyone I've ever worked for," Gregson says. "John gave me a lot of different insights on managing a crew. Every single person on that crew you have to manage or talk to a little differently."

Gregson adds that Chassard also taught him, by example, about patience.

"Everything that goes wrong isn't the end of the world," he says. "Everything can be fixed. There's 25,000 different ways we can accomplish what we're looking for, there's never any set-in-stone way of doing something. We were out there to do something and produce a really good product but how you got there might change from one day to the next."

Jim Lanza joined the team at Lehigh Country Club last April as the course superintendent. In that role, he has the day-to-day responsibility for maintaining the golf course and managing the crew.

A graduate of the two-year program at Rutgers, Lanza was the superintendent and general manager at Elmhurst Country Club in Moscow, Pennsylvania, in the Poconos, prior to coming to Lehigh. Chassard is preparing Lanza to hopefully succeed him one day. Working with Chassard last season proved to be a learning experience.

"It's been phenomenal to work alongside him and have another mentor as well," Lanza says. "Not many guys get that opportunity."

Chassard's adaptability impresses Lanza.

"Agronomically, a lot of the older guys in this business never really adapted to some of the philosophies some of the younger guys have as far as leaning out on fertility, producing firm and fast conditions, really pushing it as far as we can," Lanza says. "I think a lot of guys got complacent and what they learned and what they knew was just the way they were going to do things and it's hard to teach an old dog new tricks.

"But he's been very adaptive with that."

PROLONGING THE PASSION

Someday, Chassard will step away from his role at Lehigh. But not just yet. While he focuses on the administrative aspects of his job, he still makes it a point to get out on the golf course every day.

"I'll take my cart out and chip and putt," he says. "Playability is the most important thing to me, if I can hit shots into greens and see the firmness or the bounciness. If I feel good about the golf course, then I know everybody is going to have a good experience out there.

"I grab a hose once or twice a season and hand water a couple greens. I still see that as an art, to be able to hand water a green and give it just enough water without overwatering or under watering it."

Chassard is looking forward to Lehigh Country Club hosting a PGA Tour Champions event this fall. The 2026 Jefferson Lehigh Valley Classic marks the first year of a five-year commitment. Chassard has never hosted a Tour-level event, though he operates with a daily mindset of giving members tournament-caliber conditions.

Chassard notes that many private clubs set their agronomic programs around their member-guest events, which got him thinking, "Why can't we offer those conditions every day?"

"Now the club has to buy into it, because the club has to support it financially," he says. "So, we actually developed a booklet of standards with my committee, probably in the early 2000s."

The standards include:

- Bunkers raked three days every week
- Fairways mowed three days a week
- Tees mowed three days a week
- Greens mowed every day and rolled four days a week
- Cups changed five days a week

Green speed standards have evolved over the years.

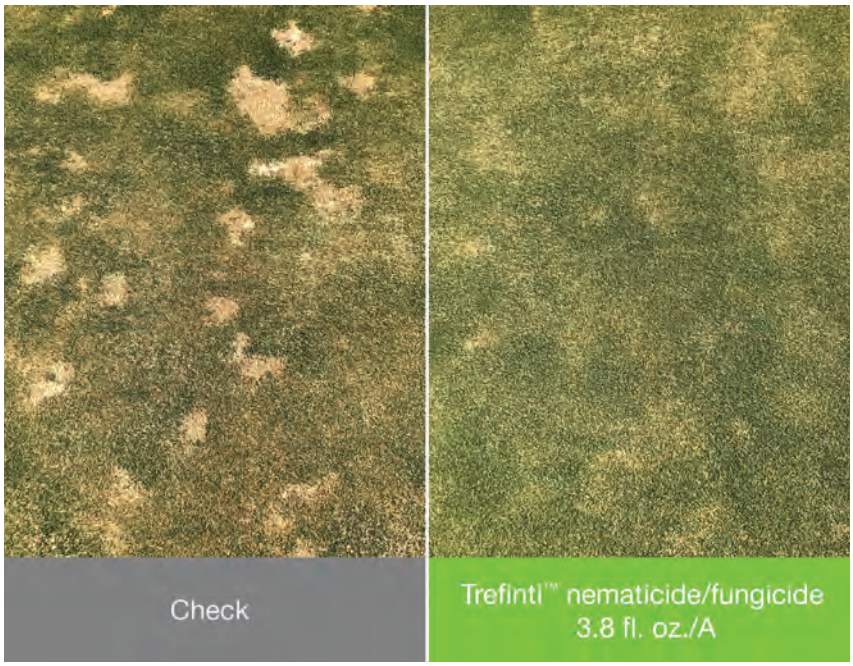
"We're going to try to maintain green speeds between 9½ and 10 feet," Chassard says. "Once we reached that standard, that changed quickly. Let's shoot for 10½, let' shoot for 11. So, every day, we were trying to get green speed to 11 feet."

After more than four decades at Lehigh, Chassard is as committed as ever to his members, especially when problems arise.

"But when things go bad, you have to be able to get in front of the membership," he says. "You definitely have to be there to answer questions. You definitely can't hide out [in the maintenance building]. You, as the professional and the guy out there, you always see the issues even before the crew does.

"You're the very first guy that's going to see something and know something's headed in the wrong direction."

Rick Woelfel is a Philadelphia-based writer and senior Golf Course Industry contributor.



Spring Dead Spot Control in 'Champion' Ultradwarf Bermudagrass
Source: Dr. Jim Kerns, NC State University, Raleigh, North Carolina. Trial conducted on 'Champion' ultradwarf bermudagrass maintained at 0.125" HOC. Application dates: Sept. 29 & Oct. 28, 2021. Photos taken April 28, 2022.

Stopping the spread

A new solution is primed to help superintendents control nematode populations with the added benefits of controlling key diseases.

More than 30 percent of Florida lives at an elevation within six feet of sea level. The entire population of Truckee, California, an outdoorsy community near Lake Tahoe, lives a mile above sea level.

Sandy soils lurk below Florida's warm-season turf. Varied, poorly draining soils sit below Truckee's cool-season turf.

Golf is played year-round in Florida. Truckee's ski season can last longer than its golf season.

High nematode populations in Florida? That's expected.

High nematode populations in Truckee? That's a new one for Dr. Jim Kerns, who has studied the turf-damaging pests for more than two decades.

From seas to now mountains—and plenty of points in between—the adaptation of nematodes to different environments and conditions continue to enthrall researchers and befuddle superintendents.

"When I was a student, nematodes were always an issue," says Kerns, hearkening to his days as an undergraduate in the late 1990s and early 2000s at NC State University, where he has been a plant pathology faculty member since 2012. "But it was predominantly east of I-95, where we have more sandy soils, native soils." I-95 separates the coastal third of the Carolinas from the rest of the golf-rich region. **"In the last five or six years,"** Kerns adds, **"we have definitely seen an increase in root-knot nematode pressure and lance nematode pressure."**

The Carolinas represent the research home for Kerns and his NC State peers. They also receive microscope-level glimpses of issues and false alarms elsewhere as part of their NC State Turf Diagnostics Lab duties.

Every ecosystem supports nematodes. "They're the most abundant animal on the planet," Kerns says. "It's just whether certain species get to a population density that's 'damaging.'" Damaging levels have been reported in Las Vegas, an emerging "hotbed" for root-knot nematodes, according to Kerns. **And they're not just a southern or western issue.** Kerns has seen turf samples with nematode damage hailing from multiple Canadian provinces, including Ontario and Alberta.

Not all nematode species act the same.

Sting nematodes migrate between plants, temporarily enter roots and feed before repeating the nomadic activity. Root-knot nematodes seek permanent homes, with juveniles entering roots to establish feeding sites. Lance nematodes act like hybrids, as they move between and within roots.

Nematodes don't immediately ravage significant swaths of turf. Instead, their populations methodically increase, causing constant stress by feeding off the host. Challenges stemming from controlling soilborne pathogens exacerbate population rises and subsequent damage.

"The best way I can describe it is that golf course superintendents are basically scratching their heads like, **'I am pretty sure I've delivered enough water. I think I've delivered proper fertility.** And these plants just aren't responding,'" Kerns says. **"That's what I always use as a simple metric."**

"And second, if you're still struggling with soilborne disease management like *Pythium* root rot or summer patch on

cool-season greens or you just can't get take-all root rot or mini ring under control on warm-season greens … you probably have an underlying nematode issue that needs to be addressed."

The introduction of what Kerns calls "softer" products following the EPA-directed phasing out of Nemacur have altered nematode control on golf courses. Nemacur, an organophosphate nematicide with fenamiphos as its active ingredient, was permanently banned for all uses in October 2017. The industry has struggled to find a nematicide capable of controlling sting, root-knot *and* lance nematodes since Nemacur's banishment. However, new advancements are offering improved options. "The products that the companies are producing are so good on those targeted pests," Kerns says, "but they're not affecting other organisms." Multiple products with active ingredients formulated to significantly suppress sting and root-knot nematodes have entered the market. But, until the recent release of a new active ingredient from Syngenta, superintendents lacked a solution also adept at handling lance nematodes.

"Most of the nematode biology work is done by our colleagues in field crops and vegetables," Kerns says, "and they really only focus on root-knot and cyst nematodes. With lance nematodes, there's a general lack of knowledge about their biology. But, I think, there are now some products that are going to be successful in suppressing the population."

One of those new products arrived in late 2025, when the EPA granted approval of **Trefinti™ nematicide/fungicide,** which is powered by TYMIRIUM® technology (*cyclobutrifluram*). Classified as an SDHI, Trefinti controls sting, root-knot, lance and *Anguina* nematodes, along with soilborne diseases such as take-all root rot, mini ring and spring dead spot.

Trefinti emerged from a screening process of around 6,000 compounds and earned "reduced risk" status in 2022. NC State, Clemson University, the University of Florida and University of California, Riverside are among the research collaborators that conducted Trefinti trials before its release.

"We've had it in almost every soilborne disease program we've done over that time," Kerns says. "You're hoping that it's going to make it to the market because you just don't know early on if something will. Fortunately, this one is going to see the light of day."

Research trials on warm- and cool-season turfgrass varieties confirmed the efficacy of Trefinti at controlling multiple conundrums superintendents face.

On warm-season turf, Kerns observed how a Trefinti program using the low label rate of 3.8 fluid ounces per acre at a maximum of four applications per year simultaneously controlled key diseases and suppressed nematode populations in fairways. **Kerns calls the performance against spring dead spot in NC State's trials "remarkable," adding that it provides "solid" control of take-all root rot.**

An intriguing development for warm-season superintendents is research demonstrating the effectiveness of Trefinti against mini ring on greens with early- or mid-summer applications. The earlier timing coincides with research suggesting fall, a popular time to spray for take-all root rot control, might be too late to begin a mini ring control program.

"I'm excited we can target different things at different times of the year," Kerns says. "With mini ring, **I'm almost convinced you can't have mini ring if you don't have an underlying nematode issue."**

Understanding which nematode species and diseases are targeted maximizes the benefits of Trefinti for warm-season turf. Kerns, though, cautions against overusing Trefinti and other SDHI solutions to ensure pests don't become resistant to an active ingredient. Divanem® nematicide, released by Syngenta in 2017, is among the compatible rotational partners with Trefinti to offer a different mode of action. "What's really cool is you have a lot of options now to manage nematodes and some of these soilborne diseases," Kerns says.

Optimizing the full benefits of Trefinti on cool-season turf also hinges on proper targeting of pests and diseases. For superintendents **targeting root-knot nematodes** on cool-season turf, NC State's research shows that using the **spot treatment label rate of 7.6 fluid ounces per 10,000 square feet beginning when soil temperatures reach 60 to 65 degrees provides "exceptional" control.** For superintendents **targeting lance nematodes,** Kerns adds that research conducted in the North Carolina mountains indicates control is **more effective when soil temperatures are around 75 degrees.**

Trefinti trials on cool-season turf demonstrate success in helping reduce soilborne pathogens. But Kerns urges superintendents to think nematode-first when incorporating nematicides into a program.

"If you have cool-season putting greens, it's really going to depend on what nematode you are trying to target," Kerns says, "And I always like to think of it as more of what are we trying to get for the nematode and then understanding that it does give you control of other diseases." ●

More on Trefinti

Scan the QR code to watch how the Dormie Club in the North Carolina Sandhills is incorporating Trefinti into its nematode and disease control programs.

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PASS IT ON

Earlier this year, I sat on a panel at this magazine's 2026 Excellence in Mentorship Awards, sponsored by The Aquatrols Company. That experience reinforced something I've long believed: turf careers are rarely built on one big break.

They're built on people, with the words they choose, the standards they set and the timely nudge they give that keeps you moving forward.

When I look back over five decades in this business, it's tempting to organize the journey by job titles, tournaments and destinations. But mine starts much earlier. With my father.

My father loved golf and had his own way of making sure I was part of it. He used me as a "practice target" while working on his short game. It sounds a little rough, and maybe it was, but it came with an unspoken invitation: pay attention. Watch how someone prepares, repeats the fundamentals and takes responsibility for the outcome.

He's been gone for 30 years, but those lessons are still fresh. He understood that golf rewards preparation, patience and character. In our house, the mantra was simple: If you want something, go out and earn it.

If I tried to list everyone who helped shape my path, we'd need more pages than this column allows. But a few key voices — starting with my father's — created a throughline that carried me from an unsure beginning to a career I'm proud of.

After college came the inevitable question: "Now what are you going to do?" My father didn't ask it as small talk but as a challenge, and then he followed it with action. He pushed me out of the nest.

His advice was direct. Get out of your comfort zone, go where the golfers are, and make it happen through focus and hard work. Looking back, that wasn't just career guidance, it was a mindset for life.

He guided me to his friend **Fred Meda** and trusted that relationship enough to send me to Myrtle Beach. That handoff taught me one of the first important truths about our industry: opportunity travels through people willing to vouch for you.

Fred, a recipient of the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association Distinguished Service Award, is known by many as the "Godfather of Myrtle Beach." For me, he was a leader who turned every day into a master class.

The first thing he said has stayed with me for 50 years: No matter who you are or where you come from, we're equals in the workplace. Titles don't make a crew; respect does. And rewards come to those who show up, work hard and do the right thing.

Fred also set up my first tour of Augusta National in 1978. Seeing it up close didn't just motivate my interest in the game, it clarified the standard. It showed me what happens when hard work meets relentless attention to detail, and it made me hungry to learn what it takes to be part of something excellent.

From there, the path kept moving: on-course superintendent roles teaching the realities of daily conditioning; Pinehurst, where tradition and expectation live in every acre; the PGA Tour, where performance windows are unforgiving; overseeing the construction of Las Colinas; a stint with management company American Golf; two decades in the championship department at the USGA; and now as an entrepreneur. Different missions, different pressures, but the same core requirement of delivering the best possible playing conditions with the resources you have and leading people well while doing it.

Fred used to say, "It's family," meaning if you take care of your team, your peers and the people coming up behind you, the industry will take care of itself. He'd help you, but you still had to make it on your own. That's what real mentoring looks like.

Always remember that your legacy isn't the turf you grow, it's the people you develop. That's why I always take calls from today's superintendents, whether it's a career decision or simply lending an ear.

Pick one person on your team and invest in them this season. Teach them why, not just how. Let them make the decision, then coach the outcome. Introduce them to your network.

My father taught me to earn it. Fred taught me to honor it. Fifty years later, here's my addition to the mantra: When you've earned it, pass it on.

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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FUELED FOR SUCCESS

Physical outdoor work can be exhausting. How proper nutrition and hydration can get you and your crew through the day.

By **Kelsie Horner**

LeBron James doesn't take the court without eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Kansas City Chiefs quarterback **Patrick Mahomes** eats eggs, steak and potatoes before games. His teammate **Travis Kelce** prefers French toast with strawberries. Harborside International Golf Center superintendent **Jake Ronchi** goes for a banana with a few scoops of cottage cheese, paired with a cup of coffee.

High achievers must find what fuels them and stick to that. What you put in your body matters, and properly fueling your system for a day full of hard work outdoors is essential to productivity and wellbeing.

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"We're all a little bit like cars," University of Akron professor **Michelle Boltz** says, "and cars need fuel to run properly, and so do we."

Boltz has dedicated her life to studying nutrition. She has worked as a dietitian for nearly 30 years, specializing in clinical dietetics and health and wellness dietetics. She is a certified specialist in sports dietetics and obesity and weight management. Boltz holds an undergraduate degree in dietetics and a graduate degree in exercise physiology, both from The University of Akron in northeast Ohio. She currently works at the university, where she is the director of the Dietetics Graduate Program Master of Public Health and director of the Nutrition Center on campus. She provides nutrition counseling to the campus and local community.

Boltz's experience in working with athletes applies to superintendents and maintenance teams who are working outdoors all day. Functioning outside presents its own stressors: heat, humidity, unexpected weather changes. As superintendents, proper nutrition ensures nobody suffers from dehydration, injury or overheating.

When planning meals, Boltz recommends having something from all the food groups. "Each food group provides specific nutrients that have jobs to do in the body," she says. "All food groups are important. All food groups can fit unless there's a medical reason somebody can't eat something."

Food groups can be divided into two categories: macronutrients and micronutrients. Macronutrients include proteins, fats and carbohydrates. They are needed in larger amounts for the human body to properly function. Macronutrients provide calories, which fuel the body and give energy.

"Everybody's got different calorie needs to cover their expenditure," Boltz says. "And the superintendents who are walking, lifting, operating equipment, constantly moving — they have certain energy needs. And these macronutrients are going to provide them with the energy or calories they need."

Carbohydrates are necessary for fuel. The grain group, veggie group and fruit group, and even yogurt and milk from the dairy group, all provide carbs. "Think about carbohydrates as the master fuel," Boltz says. "It's the preferred source of energy for the body. The brain wants carbs for fuel. If we think about that car analogy, a car needs fuel in order to run and carb is to a human like gasoline is to a car."

Many foods, including milk, double as a protein and carb. Protein is key for building muscle and muscle recovery. Eating adequate protein throughout the day aids in minimizing natural age-related loss of muscle mass.

Micronutrients are vitamins and minerals, which are needed in smaller amounts for proper function. When properly eating from all the food groups, you consume the necessary macro- and micronutrients the body needs. The micronutrients in fruits and vegetables provide antioxidants that prevent disease. Boltz recommends "painting a rainbow on your plate with the colorful fruits and veggies." Examples of other micronutrients include vitamin D, which helps absorb calcium and iron (a mineral) that is part of helthy red blood cells.

Healthy fats such as nuts, seeds, avocados and olive oil also provide the body with necessary fats and additional vitamins. Incorporating protein, carbs, healthy fats, fruits, vegetables and grains ensure you're consuming all the micro- and macronutrients needed. "The bottom line is, the food we eat from all food groups provides energy and nutrients that gives us power to do all of our jobs," Boltz says.

Some quick, healthy options for breakfast, lunch and snack time:

- Overnight oats
- Greek yogurt
- Cottage cheese
- Hardboiled eggs
- Sweet potatoes
- Peanut butter with a bagel or toast
- Trail mix
- Fruits such as apples, grapes and bananas
- Vegetables such as cucumbers, carrots and baby tomatoes
- Dried edamame
- Tuna packets with crackers
- Protein/granola bars

Without proper nutrition, you can face a lot of negative consequences. The first major consequence is lack of energy. Low energy can lead to feelings of fatigue, dizziness and weakness. "The less we eat throughout the day, we're going to run the risk of not maintaining our muscle," Boltz says.

Malnutrition and dehydration can also add headaches, confusion and increased heart rate. Sylvania (Ohio) Country Club superintendent **Steve Brown** has learned the importance of hydration throughout his career.

"I feel hydration is the most important part, especially as I've gotten older," Brown says. "When I fall behind on hydration, I start to

> Think about carbohydrates as the master fuel. It's the preferred source of energy for the body. The brain wants carbs for fuel. If we think about that car analogy, a car needs fuel in order to run and carb is to a human like gasoline is to a car."
>
> — *Michelle Boltz*

feel foggy and fatigued, particularly in the heat of the summer."

Boltz advises superintendents to approach energy drinks with caution. If someone consumes more than 400 milligrams of caffeine in a day, they can risk increased heart rate and blood pressure. There are about 95 milligrams of caffeine in an 8-ounce cup of coffee.

Energy drinks often contain added sugars as well. An original Monster Energy drink 16-ounce can contains 54 grams of added sugar, which is 150 percent of the recommended daily limit of sugar for men and 216 percent of the recommended daily limit of sugar for women. Men shouldn't consume more than 36 grams per day of added sugar and women shouldn't consume more than 25 grams per day of added sugar based on a 2,000 calorie-per-day diet. "Added sugar is inflammatory, so we want to minimize that," Boltz says.

If you're looking for a drink other than water, consider a sports beverage or electrolyte drink. For ideal hydration, Boltz has some recommendations: If outside for less than 60 minutes, water is most likely enough. If working for more than 60 minutes, opt for a drink with electrolytes for additional support.

"Those sports drinks are going to help us provide fuel to the body as we're using fuel when we're working," Boltz says. "The electrolytes in those sports drinks replace what we lose when we're doing work, especially outside in a hot, humid environment.

"The main electrolyte we're losing in the largest amounts is sodium. If I'm sweating out sodium, I need to put some sodium back in my body. If I'm only drinking water, then I could actually dilute my blood and get something in the more technical term called hyponatremia, which is a low serum sodium. And that can be very dangerous, even fatal."

Properly fueling your body is essential and leads to short-term and long-term benefits both mentally and physically. So, before you grab a fifth cup of coffee, or choose to skip lunch, think again and remember cars — or mowers — need fuel to run properly, and so do we.

Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry's digital editor.

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What's in my lunchbox?

Jake Ronchi
Superintendent, Harborside International (Illinois) Golf Center
Breakfast: Banana, cottage cheese
Caffeine: One cup of coffee in the morning
Lunch: Dinner leftovers or tuna/crackers
Snacks: Uncrustables. I try to save them for special occasions.
Drinks: Water and Diet Coke *(can only)* for a long afternoon

Eric Feldhusen
Director of agronomy, Glenwild (Utah) Golf Club
Breakfast: Macro Bar and banana
Caffeine: 20 to 28 ounces of coffee
Lunch: Provided by club
Snacks: Mixed granola or energy bar
Drinks: Sparkling water mixed with Powerade in the summer

Ken Kleinedler
Superintendent, Collier's Reserve (Florida)
Breakfast: Protein smoothie, eggs or a shot of espresso
Caffeine: Too much! Espresso in morning and one to two cups of coffee during the day
Lunch: Protein and rice
Snacks: Fruit, protein shakes
Drinks: Water and coffee

Steve Brown
Superintendent, Sylvania Country Club (Ohio)
Breakfast: Typically nothing
Caffeine: Start the day with a coffee and then will normally have one or two more cups at the club
Lunch: Lunch is provided by the club and is normally a good variety
Snacks: Energy or protein bar
Drinks: At least two Gatorades, water and normally a few waters with electrolytes. The total amount varies depending on the heat and humidity

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Q&A

CAMERON STEPHENS, PH.D.

Product Manager, PerformancePack®

What is PerformancePack?

PerformancePack is a complete line of specialty turf and horticulture products scientifically formulated to deliver impactful results on high-performance turf. The PerformancePack portfolio addresses the full range of agronomic needs required to produce elite playing surfaces — supporting exceptional playability, consistency, and visual quality.

Our team brings decades of hands-on industry experience and works as a connected and consultative extension of your operation. Backed by the global resources of a family-owned company, PerformancePack combines innovative science with practical, field-tested solutions you can trust.

How was PerformancePack formed?

As Simplot Turf & Horticulture grew, customers increasingly asked for specialty solutions that went beyond traditional chemistry, fertilizer, and seed offerings. PerformancePack was created to meet those needs — filling gaps where standard products fell short.

By developing a dedicated specialty portfolio, Simplot Turf & Horticulture created a platform where customer feedback could directly influence product development. The result is a focused lineup of solutions designed to solve real-world challenges — not generic, off-the-shelf products.

How does PerformancePack fit within Simplot Turf & Horticulture?

PerformancePack is exclusive to the Simplot Turf & Horticulture brand and backed by the Simplot Company — a privately held, family-owned agricultural and food production business with a long-term commitment to customers and product integrity.

Simplot Turf & Horticulture customers benefit from access to the latest science, emerging technologies, and dependable support from experienced turf advisors and the PerformancePack product management team. Our people and products are supported by the reputation and resources of the Simplot Company, giving customers confidence that PerformancePack stands behind every solution and is prepared to address challenges as they arise.

Who is on the PerformancePack team?

PerformancePack is led by a team of passionate professionals with deep educational backgrounds in agronomy, plant pathology, genetics, and plant physiology. Just as important, we are all passionate golfers who understand the daily demands of maintaining elite playing conditions.

Our team is well-versed in advanced chemistry and applied research, partnering with turfgrass researchers across the country to rigorously test and evaluate products before they reach the market.

John Doyle founded PerformancePack and brings 25 years of experience with Simplot Turf & Horticulture. Under his leadership, Jon Atkins (M.S.), Austin Grimshaw (Ph.D.), and Cameron Stephens (Ph.D.) joined to build the PerformancePack portfolio and provide technical expertise to both customers and turf and ornamental advisors. The newest team member, Michael Greene, adds years of granular fertilizer experience from Simplot's wholesale distribution group.

The PerformancePack team emphasizes in-person technical support and product education and remains readily available to customers.

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DOWN AND DIRTY

I figured it out. The problem with the day-to-day work routine of most superintendents is that they are surrounded by golfers who, for the most part, are averse to dirt.

That's it, in a nutshell. Dirt Guys vs. Clean Guys.

Most golfers want clean. They wear polished shoes. Brush off their pricey Italian micro-fiber pants after encountering any soil or grass. Take umbrage at the sight of any weeds or bare spots on the golf course. No wonder they avoid fixing divots; it would mean getting their hands in touch with earth.

> "Superintendents and architects revel in dirt, messiness and the feel of the soil. They love the racket made by tractors and excavators at work, and think nothing of traipsing through mud to get to a particularly revealing vantage point."

Likewise, the green chair whose idea of pristine conditioning includes holding committee meetings in the clubhouse boardroom rather than amidst the dirt, grime and din of the maintenance building. All you need to know about the people you are reporting to is their preference for a gathering space.

Superintendents, architects and true golf architecture mavens, by contrast, revel in dirt, messiness and the feel of the soil. They love the racket made by tractors and excavators at work, think nothing of traipsing through mud to get to a particularly revealing vantage point, are not afraid to get down to their hands and knees to inspect a turfgrass problem and wear well-worn footwear that showcases their willingness to take the dirt.

Of course, we all know "directors of agronomy" who show up for work in jacket and tie and answer the phone on first ring. And there's also the occasional architecture critic who carries a laundry brush in the car to clean up with after a course walk. But the basic dichotomy nevertheless holds.

I am reminded of one of the best days I ever spent on a golf course, walking a wonderful old 9-hole **Donald Ross**-designed course with an architect well known for his skill at restoration. It was a miserable late November day — cold, rainy, windy, and with three committee members in tow for the morning walk through, after which we stopped for lunch. The meal done, they asked us what we wanted to do. The architect and I looked at each other, agreeing without planning that we wanted to walk the course again, which we did in tandem without accompanying committee. It turned out to be one of the best conversations I've ever had in golf.

I am reminded of this after a course walk yesterday on a property in the American West that is semi-prairieland about to become golf ground. There were four of us, including the architect, the superintendent-to-be and the fellow who would become director of golf. We were still almost two years from opening but, for the first time after years of planning, the dirt was flying due to the start of a well drilling and some massive earth-moving machines creating real estate plats in the distance.

The golf course proper was still nothing but various colored pipes denoting tees, fairway turn points and green sites. But there was soil and heavy dust in the air under a very clear Mountain West sky. As we walked, we talked about golf strategy and turf cover on the handful of holes where construction would soon begin.

None of us had any trouble envisioning shots, playing strategy, optional routes and surface contours. It was as if we could all mentally Photoshop the image of brownish-gray prairie grass and soil into a lush, verdant playing surface. References flew: the 10th at Riviera, the 11th at Augusta National, the Biarritz green at North Berwick in Scotland or the long up-and-over par-5 8th hole at its neighbor along the North Sea coast, Dunbar. Like well-read academics citing standard scholarly literature, we stood there teasing out a future golf course from what most folks might consider little more than a big dirt field.

And that, after all, is exactly what this little corner of the golf industry is all about: Immersing yourself in the messiness and making sense of it for those who cannot or will not allow themselves to get down and dirty.

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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Salute to 'Shorty'

Bandon Dunes' latest par-3 course is in its third season of play. Go inside the effort to honor the legacy of the 19-hole layout's namesake.

By **Kelsie Horner**

Warren "Shorty" Dow dedicated countless years of his life to Bandon Dunes Golf Resort.

Known to some as "The Sheriff of Bandon Dunes," and to others as "governor" or "mayor," Dow is said to have been the first caretaker of the Oregon resort, and the first person to introduce owner **Mike Keiser** to the property. A little more than a decade after Dow's passing, superintendent **Lane Clow** is now caring for part of that land—a 19-hole par-3 course dedicated to Dow named Shorty's.

The course represents more than golf. It's dedication, loyalty and hard work. A logo with a bear holding a flagstick represents the course. The club even offers merchandise with the image. In Dow's honor, all proceeds from Shorty's and Bandon Preserve are donated to the Bandon Dunes Charitable Foundation, which focuses on conservation, community and economy on the south Oregon coast.

Designed by **Rod Whitman**, **Dave Axland** and **Keith Cutten**, Shorty's sits next to Bandon Preserve, one of the resort's other par-3 courses. An access road splits the two in half. Bandon Preserve, a 13-hole layout, was designed by **Bill Coore** and **Ben Crenshaw** and opened in 2012.

The decision to add another short course came as a need for more opportunity. A very busy public golf resort, Bandon Dunes wanted to give golfers even more opportunities to play. The new layout debuted in May 2024, 25 years after the resort opened.

The coastal land on the ocean coast features dramatic sand dunes, beach grasses and vari-

© COURTESY OF BANDON DUNES GOLF RESORT (2)

ous pine trees.

The newer course features shorter holes than Bandon Preserve. With three tee box options, total yardage measures 1,309 from the front tees and 1,997 from the back. The longest hole, No. 14, requires a 161-yard shot to the green. The course also features a putting tee box option for those wanting to work on their short game. The layout begins with a slight bending left 119-yard shot from the back tees, 80 yards from the front.

One unique factor of the course is its 19-hole layout. Architects don't often opt for the odd number of holes. Most commonly, the "19th hole" refers to a clubhouse or bar, or a unique par-3 challenge. Shorty's ends with a short left-shifted green, measuring only 57 yards from the back tee.

Construction began on the course in 2023 and went smoothly for the most part. Weather proved to be the main challenge. Once crews completed shaping, the land was at risk for damage from high winds.

"They had to come back and touch some of the stuff up before we got to hydroseed," Clow says. "Sometimes it's hard to adjust to the effects of Mother Nature. Once we started seeding, we just worked our way to the South. Sometimes we did have to wait for a day or two until the shapers got their final little touches on it. But it went well. It was really smooth and a good success."

Now in its third season of play, morning setup must be completed quickly so the crew doesn't interfere with golfers. Each short course has its own designated teams. Clow oversees Shorty's and Bandon Preserve as superintendent, with the help of assistant superintendent **Ty Vincent**. This allows for tasks to be completed on both courses before tee times. The two par-3 courses previously shared an irrigation tech and a spray technician, but the resort is now transitioning to a dual technician — one for each short course.

As many superintendents know, the influx of golfers is good for business but not the best for growing turf. Since Shorty's opening, Clow says the fescue tees and fairways have struggled due to golfers walking in the same places. A fescue blend makes up the course, but *Poa annua* is slowly creeping in.

The heavy foot traffic has caused continuous issues for the greens. Upon opening, the fourth green, got "hammered" with traffic, Clow says. The 80-yard hole plays straight, meaning walkers rarely disperse wear. The green had to be shut down for a period to allow for regrowth and maintenance. After some rest and recovery, "today it looks great."

Several holes followed in No. 4's footsteps, although no others required closing. Shaded areas only added to the heavy play damage. Thanks to some tree removal to aid in shade injury, occasional sod replacement, and heavy fertilizing and seeding, the beloved course is adjusting.

Maintaining Shorty's is more than just maintaining the turf — it's maintaining Dow's legacy.

Clow had the honor of meeting him several years ago, and working on a course with so much significance and honor makes Clow proud. "He was a really, really nice gentleman and very friendly, very outgoing," Clow says. "Him and his wife, they used to bring us doughnuts and pastries and stuff, just to feed the crew. He was quite a guy."

Prior to the unveiling of Shorty's in 2024, **David McLay Kidd** designed a course in Dow's honor at the resort's practice facility, which opened in 2000, also named "Shorty's." But in 2023, that layout changed names to "Charlotte's" in honor of Dow's wife, **Charlotte**, who died in February 2024. Charlotte's is free for guests to play and Bandon Dunes uses the 9-hole layout to introduce the game to juniors in surrounding communities.

Dow died in November 2015, and Clow and the Bandon Dunes team were sure to celebrate his life. "They had a big funeral for him up North of town here," Clow says. "A bunch of us went to that, and it was pretty special."

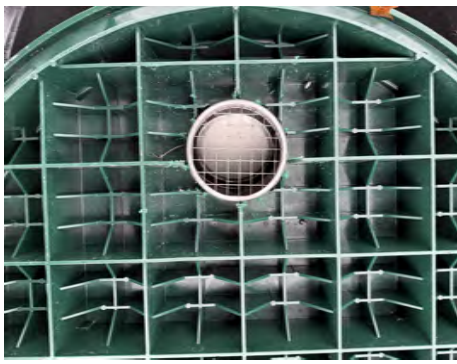
Dow's legacy continues to be honored through remembrance and ambitions on the par-3 course and beyond. Thanks to the Bandon Dunes team, Shorty Dow won't be forgotten.

Kelsie Horner is Golf Course Industry's digital editor.

"Aussie-Style" Bunker Face Roller Modification

The Noyac Golf Club, in Sag Harbor, New York, rakes its bunkers using the "Australian Method" where the floors are groomed to provide consistent lies. The faces are rolled to allow the ball to roll down to the floor without plugging. Moisture content is the main factor in how cleanly the bunker faces can be rolled. If the sand is too dry, it does not stay in place. If the sand is too wet, it sticks to the roller. The faces are rolled using a 36-inch wide, eight-pound Midwest Rake from Accuproducts ($220), where the new foam replacement roller attachment ($105) has McMaster 4-inch heat shrink ($50) wrap placed around it, then heated with a torch, to make the foam roller waterproof so no wet sand sticks to it. It took less than five minutes to install the shrink wrap, which can be seen on the right side of photo. The Noyac team of superintendent **Brian Goleski** and equipment manager **JR Wilson** have provided many great ideas over the years for this column. **William Mitchell** is the original designer, and **Ross Forbes** has been the renovation architect since 2003.

Plastic Drinking Water Bottle Replacement



Plastic drinking water bottles used by the members and guests at Noyac Golf Club in Sag Harbor, New York, have been replaced with new permanent underground water piping going to seven on-course drinking fountains. Each drinking water fountain has an electrically operated "chiller station" mechanism to cool the city water that is triple filtered and buried in a vault ($50) adjacent to them. The chiller gives off a lot of heat, which caused the drinking water to be too hot in the underground vaults being ejected to the drinking fountains. The staff researched solutions to replace propping open the vault cover so heat could escape. A small permanent electric fan ($44, 110 Amp, 250 CFM, 50 Watt) system was installed where the heat exited the chiller vault, and a vent ($9) was installed in the vault cover, allowing heat to exit easily and effectively outside the vault, producing cold drinking water. Superintendent **Brian Goleski**, equipment manager **JR Wilson** and renovation architect **Ross Forbes** work well together.

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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PROPER DIAGNOSTICS

In our travels and on our visits to golf courses, one thing consistently stands out: many turf challenges are not due to lack of effort but to a lack of complete information. Superintendents are making decisions every day under pressure to deliver consistent conditions, yet those decisions are often based on symptoms rather than a full diagnosis.

We've all seen it. Turf begins to thin, infiltration slows or surfaces become inconsistent. The response is to adjust fertility, increase aeration or try a new product. Sometimes that helps, but other times the issue lingers or returns. It's not unlike a patient going to a doctor and receiving treatment without any testing. In modern medicine, that would be unacceptable — yet it still happens in turf management.

From what we've observed on our visits, the most successful programs are built on understanding the system below the surface. Soil and water are dynamic and managing them effectively requires evaluating three key areas: soil physical properties, soil chemistry and water quality. Each tells part of the story.

Soil physical testing is often where the conversation begins. It reveals how water, air and roots move through the profile. When we walk properties, we frequently see issues that appear to be nutritional or disease-related but are actually physical in nature. Compaction, layering or poor pore structure can limit infiltration and reduce oxygen in the rootzone, leading to shallow roots and increased stress.

We often compare this to circulation in the human body. If blood flow is restricted, it doesn't matter how healthy the diet is, the system can't function properly. The same applies to soils. On several visits, we've seen well-designed fertility programs underperform simply because the physical environment prevented the plant from accessing what it needed. Once those limitations were addressed, turf performance improved significantly.

Soil chemistry is a more familiar topic, but it still holds important insights. In our travels, we regularly encounter soils that have been managed consistently for years yet testing reveals imbalances that aren't obvious on the surface. Nutrients might be present, but unavailable due to pH, or repeated applications might have created excesses that affect plant health over time.

This is where the blood test analogy fits best. A doctor measures what is actually in the system, not what the patient believes they've consumed. Soil testing does the same. It shows what is available to the plant, not just what has been applied. We've seen how small, data-driven adjustments can improve turf performance while also reducing unnecessary inputs.

Water quality, however, is often the missing piece. On many of our visits, irrigation water has never been tested, even though it is the most frequently applied input on the course. Water carries dissolved minerals that accumulate over time, influencing both soil chemistry and structure.

In several cases, persistent issues — rising pH, poor infiltration or inconsistent turf response — were ultimately tied to water quality. Elevated bicarbonates, sodium or salinity were quietly altering the soil environment. Once identified, these factors could be managed, but without testing, they remained hidden.

We often describe water as the daily diet of the turf system. Even if everything else is well managed, poor-quality inputs over time will create problems. Because irrigation is so consistent, its impact is gradual but significant.

What becomes clear, time and again, is that these factors do not operate independently. On our visits, we've seen infiltration issues influenced by sodium levels, and nutrient deficiencies caused not by lack of fertilizer but by pH conditions driven by irrigation water. Soil physical properties, chemistry and water quality are interconnected, and understanding one without the others only tells part of the story.

The role of the superintendent is not just to respond to symptoms but to diagnose causes. The most effective managers we've worked with treat their course much like a physician treats a patient — they gather data, track trends and make informed decisions over time. They recognize that lasting solutions come from understanding the system, not just reacting to it.

Testing, in this sense, is not an added cost, it's a tool for better decision-making. It reduces guesswork, improves efficiency and helps avoid unnecessary inputs. In an environment where expectations are high and margins are tight, that kind of clarity is invaluable.

Healthy turf begins below the surface, shaped by the interaction of soil and water. Understanding that interaction requires more than observation, it requires measurement and interpretation.

Because in both medicine and turf management, the principle remains the same: the best results come from proper diagnosis.

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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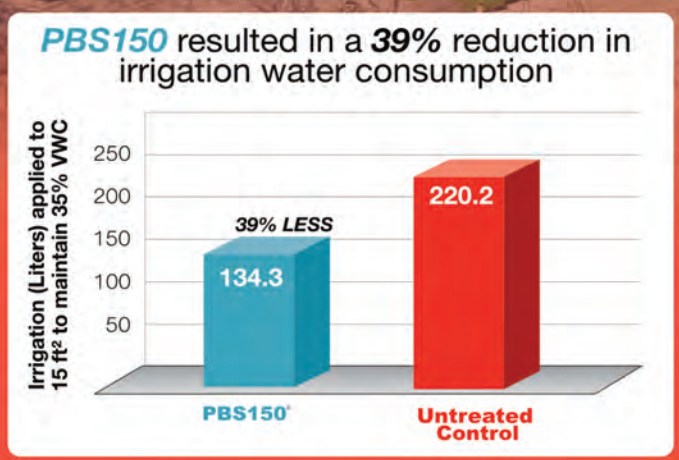

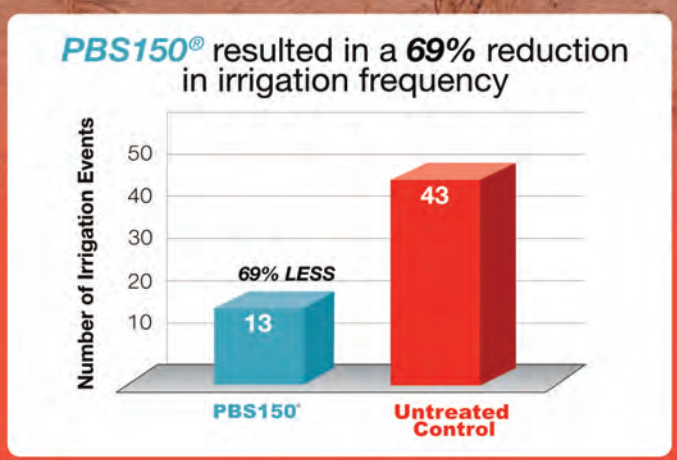

Evaluation of Two Soil Surfactants for Soil Water Management of Creeping Bentgrass on a Wettable Clay Loam Rootzone During a Dry-down Period

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

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