

# PERCEPTION

# REALITY

Some people seem to have the perception that all biological products are a little like snake oil or just "bugs in a jug". And frankly, some of them are. We've tested them. We know.

In reality, we've tested ours as well, at over 25 major US universities\* and know that our products work and are worth your investment. At Roots®/Novozymes we are serious about research. We employ over 500 scientists world-wide and invest over \$130 million in research annually. So, when we say Roots products work, we mean it and back it up with documented university research and consistent product benefits like:

1. Overall better plant health
2. Low thatch accumulation
3. Reduced chemical fungicide use
4. Better stress tolerance
5. Better drought resistance

If you want significantly better turf color and quality\*\* during periods of stress compared to organic fertilizer at 3/4 lb N, it's time you give Roots a try.

### It's Time to Try ROOTS® Turf Food



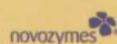
It's easy. Apply to greens, tees and fairways and see the difference. It's just that simple.

Contact your local Roots distributor today.

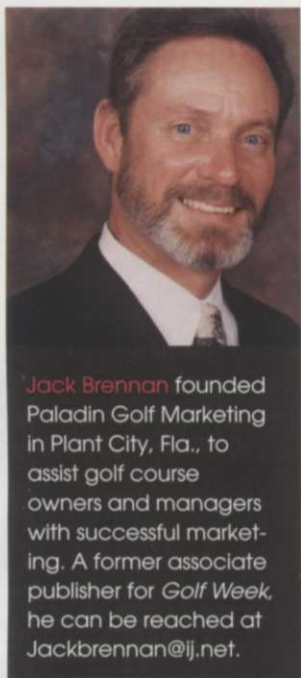
\* Rutgers, VA Tech, U of WI, MI State, Penn State and over 20 other major universities.

\*\* University of Wisconsin 1999 USGA Spec Bentgrass Turf Color Study.

**roots**® ... Our Name Says It All



Read and follow all label directions. The Novozymes logo and ROOTS are trademarks of Novozymes A/S. ©2005 Novozymes Biologicals, Inc.



Jack Brennan founded Paladin Golf Marketing in Plant City, Fla., to assist golf course owners and managers with successful marketing. A former associate publisher for *Golf Week*, he can be reached at Jackbrennan@ij.net.

## Seeing other views

In past columns, I've explained that marketing is important to golf course superintendents for a number of reasons. Your next job might depend on how well you market yourself to your employer. How much marketshare your golf course earns this year and the greens fees golfers are willing to pay depend largely on whether the course conditions you produce meet or exceed golfers' expectations. Being able to hire that great new employee depends on how well you market your course, yourself as the boss and the position. Getting a raise depends on how well you market your accomplishments to the owners or the board of directors.

Marketing isn't an element of the job description for most golf course superintendents, but like sales, it's really a part of everyone's job description ... or it should be.

If marketing is so important, what do marketers do that other people don't? The answer is simple, and because of that, is often missed. Superintendents who understand and effectively market themselves, their work and their course have learned not to use their own eyes and ears – they have learned to use other people's. That's it. The challenge is putting this principle into action.

A huge obstacle to see what others see is recognizing how much your own eyes can blind you. I've worked with and around many superintendents, and what an experienced superintendent sees on a course is amazing. For example, an experienced superintendent can tell how a green has been constructed and then accurately predicts many of the ongoing maintenance problems it will have.

But what does the golfer see? The average golfer sees things like approaches, sand traps, turf color and quality, and green speed. To the superintendent, green speed might not be an issue because he is already pushing conditions on that green to the limit, or it's being maintained to the course's specifications. Turf color also might be a temporary condition that will correct itself with an adjustment to irrigation or fertilization and a little time.

From a technical standpoint, the superintendent's perspective is valid. From a marketing perspective, golfers' perceptions also are valid and shouldn't

be dismissed too easily. If golfers are turned off enough about course conditions, they might choose to play another course next week.

Managing something as finicky as golfer perceptions always begins by being sensitive to what the other parties might see and feel. This isn't rocket science. Any superintendent who's married or who has been in a serious relationship with a significant other should have a clear understanding of this.

Another aspect of developing a marketing perspective is recognizing the numerous perspectives present. We've all heard the saying, "You can't see the forest through the trees." In marketing, you have to be able to see the trees and the forest. Marketing is intensely individualistic. Each golfer, visitor or neighbor has a perception of your course. Grouped with similar individuals, they make up a group with a common perception – the trees. All the groups together represent your total audience – the forest.

Being able to see what others think means being able to listen to every individual who tells you what he thinks. Most people won't tell you what they think. So those that do are valuable and usually represent a number of others who won't freely share their thoughts and perceptions with you. Individuals also provide information about what their special group thinks – senior golfers might view your course and the job you're doing differently than the junior ladies.

Try to be open when considering what other parties see and think. Try to see your course, your work and yourself through the eyes of the owners, the green committee, the board of directors, your employees and your community. A marketing person develops a natural sensitivity to what others are thinking. It's not about you and your agenda in marketing, it's about others.

As a marketing consultant, one of the primary benefits I bring is looking objectively at a course and a market area – even though I'm naturally subjective as an individual. However, anyone can become more objective with practice, and it all be-

gins by listening carefully and trying to see what the other person sees.

Gaining this perspective is invaluable to improve how you and the job you're doing are perceived. For example, your job requires that you sometimes must sacrifice course appearance or playing conditions in the short term for long-term health of the turf, such as when core aerating or trimming tree limbs. From an agronomic perspective, such trade-offs make perfect sense. But being sensitive to your golfers' views allows you to take extra steps to communicate the planned work and take every step possible to make it as painless as possible for your golfers.

Juggling agronomic responsibilities with marketing objectives is a rare but valuable skill for a superintendent to possess. It's a valuable skill because it helps make everyone happy. For example, there's a course in South Carolina that enjoys a great reputation and loyal clientele. The superintendent invests almost his entire budget manicuring the greens, fairway and tees – in that order. But the rough areas are awful and even have had washouts in them. But by focusing attention and work on the areas of the course that

golfers see and experience most, this superintendent is able to make golfers and course ownership happy because he creates a great golfing experience – from their perspective – with a reasonable budget.

Finally, the market mind means seeing with the eyes of the past and the future. Marketers must have a respect for the past and tradition, especially in golf, but equally must be about what's possible. Marketing by definition is about the future, and that's a shifting target because the needs and expectations of golfers constantly change.

There's much truth to the saying that perception is reality. A fundamental challenge for superintendents is to get in touch with others' perceptions. It's impossible to conduct too many player or member surveys or have too many conversations with your clients. The value of this depends on your ability to see things from their perspectives. GCN

A FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGE FOR SUPERINTENDENTS IS TO GET IN TOUCH WITH OTHERS' PERCEPTIONS.

# More on trees as hazards

Last month, I wrote about the historical background of how trees became such fixtures on American golf courses. But there's much more to say.

I'm in favor of removing of trees where necessary, but the trick is figuring out which trees must be removed, which often causes disagreements. A golf course superintendent might want a tree removed for agronomic reasons. But if he removes a tree, members of the club might treat the loss of that tree like a death in the family.

In this sensitive area, superintendents generally prefer an honest dialogue, even if a decision goes against their wishes. Only in rare circumstances would one emulate the superintendent who names his chain saw lightning so he could "honestly" tell members that lightning took down the tree. Other superintendents have staged occasional "construction accidents," often using employees who were leaving anyway as scapegoats. And some architects have made math "errors" on master plans, removing 243 trees instead of 143.

My favorite tree-removal story is the superintendent who was ordered to "save" a large tree. He later professed innocent confusion about the members' intent after stacking the logs neatly in the clubhouse fireplace.

I'm not recommending superintendents do any of this. It takes sales skill to demonstrate the benefits of removing long-loved trees. Typical common-sense approaches might include detailing the resources a superintendent would expend to resod, rope or spray areas that are too shady to grow turf – expenses that appeal to members' pocketbooks. A superintendent might demonstrate that other trees have been removed without ill effect. Few members could pass a test of where trees have been removed, assuming there are plenty left for backdrop or a superintendent didn't take one out where a member buried his dog years ago.

Superintendents might feel more comfortable making a potentially political

decision with the help of an independent expert. I've been called in to consult on only one tree. Playability, aesthetics and safety are considered when making a decision to keep or remove a tree. Relieving straight-line planting and recovering long-lost views are two good reasons to remove a few trees.

## Playability issues

The surest way for a superintendent to receive permission to cut down a tree is when he can claim it blocks a shot from the fairway or if it's a double hazard that blocks a direct shot at the green from a fairway bunker.

Throughout the years, golf courses have become fairer. One fairness doctrine asserts that a golfer should always have a chance to recover, which many players view as always being able to reach a green from a bunker. Others feel they should be able to aim at the pin from the hazard.

As a result, we deem architecture that requires the need to clear a bunker lip and stay under or go around a tree as a double hazard, and thus, unfair. Trees beyond bunkers is the most common example of the double-hazard concept, but some argue that any high lip on a fairway bunker or anything less than a firm, perfect bunker lie also is an unfair double hazard.

A smaller and diminishing minority of old-school players believe shots that are equally easy from the short grass or fairway bunker diminish the shot value of the hazard.

I generally agree with the premise that a good-to-spectacular recovery shot from a sand bunker makes for exciting golf. I like the concept of a half-stroke penalty (meaning, on average, a recovery shot will find the green about half the time, not that one could end up with a score of 4.5). So I usually design fairway bunkers with shallow depth and gentle slopes that allow this to happen. Allowing forward play is practical to ease maintenance and speed up play.

Golfers accept many of these hazards as part of the game. However, they might complain about a tree that has grown across the fairway far enough to block a

clear shot to the green. At one club, I was called in for a discussion about whether it's fair to be blocked from going for the green from any point in the fairway. In that case, the tree should be removed further toward the rough, given the large number of players it affected and because it was a short par-4.

I often save specimen trees just beyond normal landing areas to affect strategy. At Cowboys Golf Club near Dallas, there's a specimen tree about 350 yards off the tee on the 12th hole that's trimmed high because it can block the green from the far left of the fairway. A big hook or low-running shot is required to reach the open front green. Golfers learn the right side is preferred. And while golfers have an option to get to the green from the left, they must invent a shot. This creates the half-shot penalty.

I like not providing golfers road signs on every hole, telling them exactly what to avoid. Why is a low-running or big-curving shot less exciting than a recovery shot from a bunker when it's successfully pulled off?

I also like an occasional tree encroaching into the fairway to force a draw or fade from the tee. I'm always careful to leave enough room to find some part of the fairway with other shot patterns. These work best at about 180 to 210 yards from the tee because the ball reaches its vertical apex and maximum horizontal curve there.

Sometimes trees located close to tees make for better safety, but placing them too close to the landing areas creates another lateral hazard.

## Equal consideration

There are many perspectives to consider when trying to reverse the long-term results of continuous tree planting. A course's or club's consulting architect should help superintendents determine which trees should be saved or removed. Playability, safety and aesthetic aspects of any hole should be considered equally with a superintendent's agronomic needs.

Trees are beautiful and necessary on most golf courses and deserve careful consideration. Now I've put a lot of brain power into making decisions to remove trees, so pass the aspirin, and let's go look at the next tree. GCN



Jeffrey D. Brauer is a licensed golf course architect and president of GolfScapes, a golf course design firm in Arlington, Texas. Brauer, a past president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects, can be reached at [jeff@jeffreybrauer.com](mailto:jeff@jeffreybrauer.com).

PLAYABILITY, AESTHETICS AND SAFETY ARE CONSIDERED WHEN MAKING A DECISION TO KEEP OR REMOVE A TREE.



Jim McLoughlin is the founder of TMG Golf (www.TMGgolfcounsel.com), a golf course development and consulting firm and is a former executive director of the GCSAA. He can be reached at golfguide@adelphia.net. His previous columns can be found on www.golfcoursenews.com.

# A career check list

After more than 25 years of counseling employers as they seek to hire superintendents, coaching superintendents into jobs and stabilizing families when the superintendent of the house has lost a job, I see two clear patterns that, with hindsight, paint a definitive picture of two kinds of superintendents: career secure superintendents who succeed at their jobs and

realize a balanced life and superintendents who too often have to worry about their jobs and fail to realize the comforts of a balanced life.

Accordingly, I have prepared the following 42-item check list to help superintendents and assistants gain an objective perspective relative to their career and family planning effectiveness. A judicious left-to-

right, line-by-line reading of the two columns below presents a unique learning opportunity.

Should the number of boxes a superintendent or assistant checks on the right side add up to more than a handful or two, they and their families are risking not smelling the roses as they pass through life. Better career and family planning will remedy this situation effectively. Look to improve your test score each year and you will do well. GCN

## Career/life successful superintendents

## Career/life anxious superintendents

Commit to career planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Little career planning / react to situations
Ask: "Where do I want to be In five years?"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tend not to look ahead jobwise
Look to change jobs when appropriate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tend to stay too long in jobs
Develop own professional library	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do not develop own professional library
Spend own money to advance career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do not spend to advance career
Delegate effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Delegate too little early; too much late
Subscribe to USGA Turf Advisory Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hesitate to invite UGSA TAS
Develop tight budgets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Egos tend to drive budget growth
Consistently hire well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do not always hire well
Read because readers become leaders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Read little
Write because they have something to say ?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do not write
Sensitive to crew welfare	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less sensitive to crew welfare
Assistants find quality jobs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assistants left on their own
Develop effective crew training libraries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lack commitment to training libraries
Crews dress crisply / often wear uniforms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Crew dress not a priority
Job descriptions permeate work force	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Few job descriptions available
Take pride in record-keeping	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Record-keeping a burden and sketchy
Computer dedicated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Computers not essential
Generally, work 40-hour week	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Work 60-plus hour week / workaholic
Shun pure c.e.o. role	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Overplay c.e.o. role
Use free time and off-season effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Generally, waste free time and off-season
Do not bring work home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Generally, bring work home
See less stress and manage it well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	See more stress and do not manage it well
Take vacations during season	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Few take vacations during season
Spouse included in career planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Spouse rarely included in career planning
Balance life well / lower divorce rate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do not balance life / higher divorce rate
Good model for their children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Ineffective/bad model for their children
Clean office and maintenance facility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sloppy office and maintenance facility
Dress appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dress down too often
Continue education through career	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do not continue education
Reject glass ceiling job concept	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Default into glass ceiling jobs later in career
Remain vital in job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Get bored in job
Invited to more planning meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Invited to few planning meetings
Play/report minimum 20 rounds a year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Play less golf / tend to ignore handicap
Always Rules of Golf conscious	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less Rules of Golf sensitive
See job on "team" and "we" basis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Primarily see job on "I" and "me" basis
Able to see the big picture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	See the trees, but often not the forest
Earn reputations for good greens	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Green quality is often a concern
Seek written contracts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Generally, avoid issue of written contracts
Appreciate career quality of life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tend to complain about rigors of job
Pioneering use of career Web sites	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Years away from considering career Web sites
Feel job secure / hold jobs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Not job secure / lose jobs unnecessarily

# Supervision's potential

Spring is almost here. And for many of you, that means a new golf season. The fairways and greens will be perfectly groomed soon. Or will they?

As you welcome new members of the maintenance staff, the assembling team will battle the elements, pesticides and golfers' impacts. Will the team be a winner? Will the team create a course that exceeds golfers' expectations?

The determining factor will be your effectiveness as supervisor of team members. You're the Phil Jackson, Don Shula, Mike Krzyzewski or Joe Torre of the team.

Few supervisors fully appreciate the awesome responsibility and enormous potential of supervision. Responsibilities include:

- Determining the productivity and job-satisfaction level of each employee you supervise;
- Realizing the interpersonal relationship you have with the employees you supervise is – other than family and close friends – the most important interpersonal relationship in their lives; and
- Impacting their career through the training, development, coaching and role modeling you provide.

The enormous potential is:

- Eager employees who excel in their tasks and contribute to winning the battle;
- Employees who enjoy and cherish their job and whose enthusiasm is infectious with other employees and golfers;
- Employees with job experiences, successes and personal growth that contribute positively to their personal and family lives;
- Employees with successful careers at your course/club or somewhere else;
- A winning team; and
- Exceeding golfers' expectations.

Supervision isn't the only responsibility you have. It might not be the role that takes the most time, but it's the most important. Successful superintendents recognize that the best use of their time is supervising.

But what can you do to fulfill these responsibilities and reap the rewards of the potential? First, we must address a myth about work.

Our intuition and society tell us outstanding job productivity and extraordinary job satisfaction are at odds. But they're not. When productivity came primarily from hard physical work, attaining both was difficult. Today, however – with the changing nature of work and the development of

modern personnel management principles – the incompatibility of productivity and job satisfaction is a myth. Successful businesses and organizations are providing evidence that managers and employees can achieve superior performance and extraordinary job satisfactions. Such success doesn't happen by accident. Like any other success, it happens through focus, commitment, knowledge, learning, experimentation, patience and perseverance.

To excel as a supervisor, you must understand what creates superior productivity and extraordinary job satisfaction. Employee success needs can be divided into those provided primarily by the club or course and those provided primarily by the supervisor.

The primarily course-provided-success needs are:

- **Fair compensation.** The emphasis here is on "fair." Wages, benefits and working conditions (including hours) must be competitive with similar jobs in the community. You judge the fairness of your compensation compared with other golf course superintendents and others with positions of similar responsibility. Your employees judge fairness compared with similar jobs in the community.

- **A meaningful job.** Research about motivation verifies our intuition that all of us want to spend our work time accomplishing something meaningful. Two dimensions are critical. We need to see that what we do contributes directly to the success of the course (task significance) and what we do to contribute to our community, society and world (the vision of the course).

- **Opportunities for growth and advancement.** It's often said that every day a business or golf course doesn't grow, it falls behind. The same can be said for us as workers. Every day we don't learn, grow and develop, we fall behind in terms of opportunities for the remainder of our work life.

Many of you are frustrated because you don't have control of these success factors – especially compensation. There is, however, a lot you can do. First, you can become an advocate for your employees. On a recent

plane trip, I sat next to a gentleman who, six months ago, became the operations manager of a manufacturing plant. In his short tenure, plant productivity increased 20 percent. The employees hadn't had a pay increase in three years. So throughout the last month, he worked with his employees, and together they developed the case for an increase of employee compensation. Part of the case was that he wouldn't accept an increase until his employees did. Work with those you supervise because you are a member of the team as well as the supervisor.

You also must become a great communicator. Communicate that you value what workers do and value them as human beings. Communicate that what they do is critically important to the golfers, course and community.

In a superintendent's role as a supervisor, success needs to include:

- **Clear job and performance expectations.** Think about your frustration with unclear expectations from the green committee, pro or general manager. Employees feel that same frustration when work rules, job assignments and performance expectations are unclear. That frustration results in poor performance and low job satisfaction.

- **Know what's succeeding.** One reason most of us enjoy sports is because the scoreboard tells us who's winning. Similarly, in golf course maintenance, everyone needs to know whether they are "winning," by which winning

means successfully accomplishing expected performance outcomes. The supervisor must be the "scoreboard" by providing copious amounts of high-quality feedback.

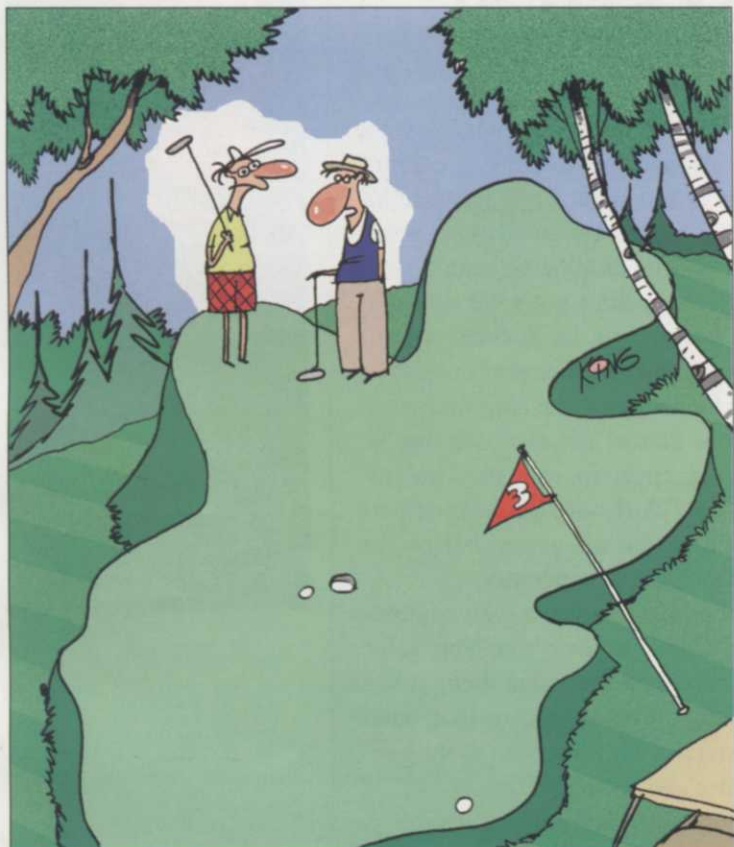
- **A trusting, respectful relationship with one's supervisor.** Other than the relationships with one's family and some close friends, an employee's relationship with his supervisor is their most important interpersonal relationship.

Embrace the challenge of supervision and work responsibilities to reap the potential of successful supervision. You can be a great supervisor, and successful employees can achieve superior performance and extraordinary job satisfaction. GCN



Robert A. Milligan, Ph.D., is professor emeritus from Cornell University and senior consultant with Madison, Wis.-based Dairy Strategies. He can be reached at 651-647-0495 or rmilligan@trsmith.com.

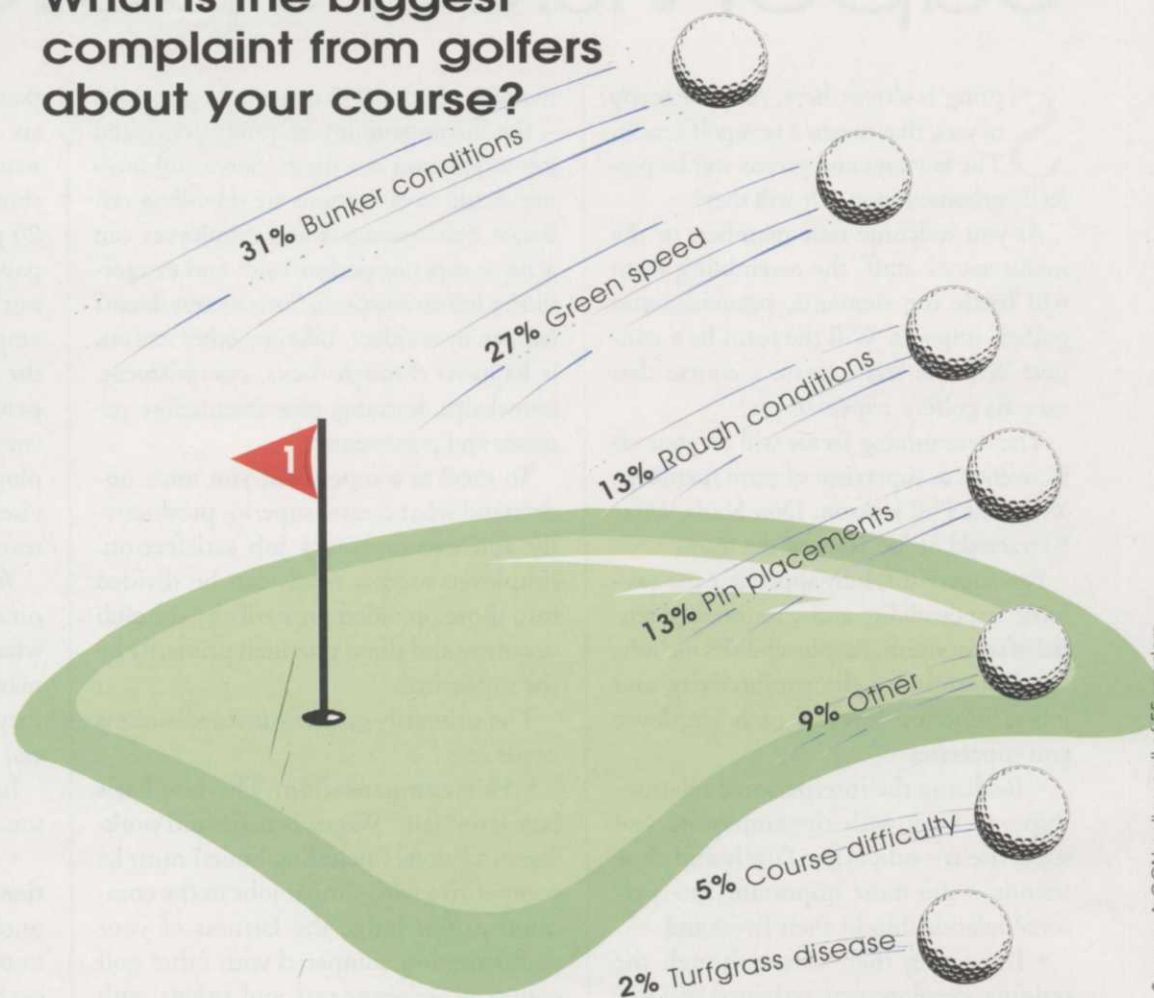
SUCCESSFUL SUPERINTENDENTS RECOGNIZE THAT THE BEST USE OF THEIR TIME IS SUPERVISING.



"I realize this is a tough green, but to have 68 putts is beyond belief."

Source: Jerry King

### What is the biggest complaint from golfers about your course?



Source: A GCN online poll of 55 readers

## BY THE NUMBERS

The number of countries golf is played in the world, according to a presentation by Karl Danneberger of Ohio State and Joe Dipaola of Syngenta **119**

The number of PGA professionals **2,000**

who are advancing their careers through an online business program, according to the PGA

The number of golfers in the world, according to a presentation by Karl Danneberger of Ohio State and Joe Dipaola of Syngenta

**56.8 million**

**30,730**

The number of golf courses in the world, according to a presentation by Karl Danneberger of Ohio State and Joe Dipaola of Syngenta

The amount of annual revenue generated by the golf industry in Florida, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics

**4.4 billion**

**7,200** The number of people the golf industry employs in Florida, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics

**2,406** The number of municipal golf facilities in the United States, according to NGF

The number of private golf facilities in the United States, according to NGF **4,367**

**9,284** The number of daily-fee facilities in the United States, according to NGF

## QUOTABLE

"It's the only golf community worldwide with six courses with such high standards. It's great to have this on our resume." — **Bob Steele**, president of SEMA Golf about the Desert Mountain golf facility in Scottsdale, Ariz. SEMA built the sixth and final course, The Outlaw, there.

"Golf course superintendents need to be businessmen, good communicators and people persons. They need to be more than good turf managers." — **Mark Woodward**, former GCSAA president and golf operations manager for the city of San Diego.

"In a society obsessed with speed (i.e., technology, cell phones, Blackberries) it's hard to imagine someone taking four hours to play golf. We need to fit golf into our changing society, and that's a challenge." — **Dan Carrothers**, vice president of Bayer Professional Products.

"Stand-alone golf courses are having a tough time finding funding. Banks are saying there needs to be lot sales to subsidize golf course development." — **Erik Larsen**, Florida-based golf course architect and member of the ASGCA.

# Rhizomatous Tall Fescue

Beautiful Self-Repairing Turf



With RTF Fun Doesn't Come at the Expense of Your Turf



## THE BARENBRUG ADVANTAGE

RTF is an advanced generation of the turf-type tall fescue that produces a thick rhizome based root system that supports unparalleled thick turf. Turf that actually repairs itself when damaged.

The Key is in the rhizomes.

The new RTF rhizome technology actually fills in damaged bare spots and produces a more attractive, uniform turf area.

If your goal is world class turf in an environment of divot prone golfers, cleat-first sliding soccer players or even over active children on a home lawn, RTF is the advanced solution that comes to the rescue.

If it's Rhizomatous Tall Fescue, it must be RTF. So unique it's recognized with a patent.

U.S. Patent No. 6,677,507

800-547-4101  
BARENBRUG USA

[www.barusa.com](http://www.barusa.com) • [info@barusa.com](mailto:info@barusa.com)

 **BARENBRUG**

Great in Grass®

USE READER SERVICE #16

# An eye for design

A YOUNG GOLF COURSE ARCHITECT STARTS HIS OWN FIRM TO MAKE HIS MARK AND CREATE UNIQUE GOLF COURSES

by  
JOHN  
WALSH

**Q** When did you know you wanted to become a golf course architect?

I grew up learning the game at a course called Pasatiempo in Santa Cruz, Calif. That's an old Alister MacKenzie gem. I was ignorant to its history and who he was, but it rubbed off, and I traveled around to see other courses and realized they didn't stack up. I tried to understand what made the course special and why everyone loved it. That spurred an interest in why the design was unique and what made it good.

I went on to play college golf, and around that time I figured I wasn't going to make the PGA Tour. I thought about what I was going to do and had an easy answer. I embellished on my interest in golf course architecture. I was intrigued to enter the profession and jumped right into it about half way through college.

**Q** What did it take to become a golf course architect?

I was going to UC Santa Barbara, on track to earn a pre-law degree, but that wasn't going to be the proper training tool. It was a liberal arts school and didn't have any other degrees that were applicable to what I wanted to do. I started getting feelers out and talking to architects and was surprised to see many architects write back and take the time to give me advice. The majority of what I heard was to get a degree in landscape architecture and some experience in the field in construction. After I fulfilled my degree from UC Santa Barbara and my college golf commitment, I transferred to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, which is a great technical school in Central California and went on to graduate with a degree in landscape architecture. Following that, I took the advice of my peers and worked in construction for a bit.

**Q** How did you make the transition from general architecture to the golf market?

I wasn't in construction long. I worked for Landscapes Unlimited briefly on a nice Tom Fazio project in Colorado. I wasn't there long enough to learn a tremendous amount in the field, but in part because I worked for them and they're such a reputable company, I received many design offers. About three months later, I went to work in Nashville, Tenn., for Gary Roger Baird, and that launched my career in design.

My fortunate background at Pasatiempo helped get my career started because I was able to talk about elements of its design and what I learned from it. The process I went through sounds almost formulaic because so many other architects took a similar route. But there also are architects who entered the profession from unusual backgrounds or unrelated fields. Many have some sort of design or construction-related experience.

**Q** At what point in your career did you want to become a member of the ASGCA?

As soon as I knew I was qualified. There's a qualification process that I was aware of, and as soon as I felt I had met the requirements, I pursued it. The ASGCA always interested me, as far back as when I was trying to get into the field, and it was one of my resources for understanding who the architects were and where they worked. The history of the association intrigued me – the founding members who were such quality architects, from Donald Ross to Mr. Trent Jones, Stanley Thompson, Perry Maxwell, Billy Bell Sr. and guys like that.

**Q** What are the qualifications?

Though I'm not an expert on the qualification process, it consists of eight years of experience in the profession where you're responsible for all facets of the design process, from formulating plans and specifications to construction supervision. Additionally, you must complete at least five golf courses during those eight years. If you're part of a large organization, you have to be the

lead project architect on those specific projects. Beyond that, there's an interview process, evaluation of your professional practices and a peer-review process in which members of the society review your five golf courses and make sure they're up to the high level of ASGCA standards.

**Q** You're an associate member. What's an associate member?

The two main distinctions are associate members, which is what everyone comes in as when you're initially accepted, and regular members. You have to be an associate member for three years, complete two more golf courses in that time, and be voted in by the general membership to become a regular member.

**Q** What are the benefits of being an ASGCA member?

There's a support system that's tremendous as far as gathering information and contacts and associated things you expect a large society to have. What's most enjoyable is the chance to meet fellow architects and mingle, particularly at our annual meeting and at different trade shows. The annual meetings are special. We generally convene at great golf destinations. This year we're in Monterey, Calif. Last year we were in Hilton Head, S.C. There's a great meeting of the minds, which is really something because all year long you go head to head with these guys whether you're friends or not. It's a competitive business, and you're always competing for jobs. At the annual meeting, you're able to put that aside and enjoy each other's company, meet families, pick each other's brains and see what different people are doing and how they're reacting to the changing industry. There also are many valuable educational sessions daily.

**Q** What's the relationship like between architects who are members and those who aren't?

Generally fine. There probably is some friction between certain people, but I can't say that I have any. You'll see architects whose

GOLF COURSE NEWS INTERVIEWS TODD ECKENRODE, GOLF COURSE ARCHITECT AND MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTS.





Photo: John Nelson



Photo: John Neilson

Architect Todd Eckenrode started his own firm because he wanted to create and implement his own design ideas.

qualifications might be suspect who aren't members of the ASGCA. On the flip side, there are a handful of architects who aren't in the ASGCA who are tremendously qualified – Tom Doak is a great example. There are a handful of talented architects practicing who aren't members, and hopefully someday, they'll be because the benefits of it for them and for the society would be mutual.

**Q Why did you start your own firm instead of going to work for a bigger, more well-known firm?**

I worked for Gary Roger Baird for a number of years and gained a lot of wonderful experience and knowledge from him about how the industry works and the natural progression of a project, from the beginning with the first plans to finishing the project in the field – all facets of how a design office works. It was a tremendous experience, but it was time to go out on my own. I had my own ideas and wanted to implement them and create unique golf courses around the world. The name of our firm is Todd Eckenrode Origins Golf Design. I have a partner – Charlie Davison, who's all you could ask for in a partner. I'm the lead designer, and Charlie runs the business end of the firm.

**Q Was going on your own difficult?**

It wasn't that difficult for me. It was a similar process to what I already had been doing. But there was more internal pressure to perform. When you have to go out and get your own business, there's another element to the game than being an employee. Running your own business has its upsides and drawbacks, but is best for me.

**Q Is there advice that you seek from the more experienced architects?**

Absolutely. I've made a point to try to meet some of the more experienced members of the society at our gatherings, from Pete Dye to Jay Moorish and Rees Jones. They've been extremely open and kind to sit and talk to me. They have some great stories. There are other guys in the society I've wanted to meet for their particular expertise, such as Bill Love and Mike Hurdzan for their stature in the industry on golf and the environment, and other guys who are doing tremendous work who I've gotten to know, such as Gil Hanse and Steve Smyers.

**Q Would you like to work with another architect on a project?**

Occasionally, you'll run into situations in which two architects collaborate. We've proposed it once or twice with fellow architects, but it never materialized. The reasons why using two architects might be preferable are different for each circumstance. I don't feel that it has to be my job only. If I can collaborate with another architect and get a client a better golf course for the money he's going spend, I would be open to it. You saw much more informal collaboration in the old days, and I hope that comes back. Pine Valley is a perfect example in which so many talented architects gave their design input. We try to work that way and invite other guys to see our projects while we're in the dirt and listen to what they have to say. Sometimes more minds are better than one.

**Q Have you worked with a pro?**

We haven't yet, but we have a project we're planning on doing with Fred Couples. It's a tremendous project in California. We're excited about it.

**Q How did you hook up with Fred Couples?**

Occasionally, we've run into situations where a developer asked us to partner with a PGA pro because they would love to have that kind of input on our course, and we've said sure. He's a guy that brings a lot to the industry from his playing background and experience on the greatest golf courses throughout the

world. He's also a guy who's respected and liked on tour. He's someone that would be a joy to work with, and our personalities are compatible.

**Q Environmentally, what are you doing when designing golf courses?**

There's so much that goes into building a golf course nowadays, especially in California, that golfers don't see. There are set-back issues that eat up acreage. There are mitigation measures, water quality standards in drainage ways that have to be met, and vegetative and species habitat controls. There are many levels of getting over these hurdles, and it takes a lot of diligence and creativity. You have to adjust because there will be hurdles you'll need to get over. It's not a simple process anymore. If you think your first routing plan is the one that's built, you're kidding yourself. Oftentimes it's the 20th routing plan that gets built. Trying to keep the 20th routing plan truly the best routing plan for the site is the challenge. But it's a fun ride. Fortunately, my design style, in working with the land and not against it, as well as our expertise in the environmental facets of the industry, enable us to achieve success as measured in the quality of the golf course and of the environment.

**Q What's your relationship with golf course builders?**

If you have a typical builder/architect relationship, it's important they work as a team. I've been on projects where there's a lot of head butting going on, and that isn't in the best interest of the client or getting the best golf course built. The best golf courses come out of a strong bond between the designer and the builder and when everyone is on the same page. We work hard to make sure that happens and try to limit our teams to contractors who feel the same way.

**Q How do you work on a project?**

It depends where the course is, but I'm out there at least once a week. I'm a detail freak and a huge field guy. I don't ever want to assume anything will be done exactly how we want it. We're constantly checking details, particularly greens and bunkers and a variety of specs, to make sure it's what we want. You can't miss a week's worth of construction and have that accomplished. So much of our design happens in the field. We design courses in the office to a certain extent, but the best courses come out of the dirt, and you have to invest a lot of time in the dirt to find all the natural features the land offers and to let the design evolve naturally.