

"Trees in the wrong place are nothing more than weeds. They complicate turfgrass maintenance and add to the cost of the game." – MICHAEL HURDZAN, Ph.D.

"The expectation of putting surfaces today is way, way different than it was 20 years ago," McBride says. "The firmness, speed and amount of activity are much greater. They get worn out. If you can improve the situation by removing a few trees, that might be a possibility. It helps the turf withstand more stress."

That might be understandable to superintendents, however, golfers might not realize trees have a beginning, middle and end to their lifespan. Many times golfers don't know if trees were removed if it was done professionally.

Nonetheless, there's a lot of emotion involved with tree removal.

"Let's say there's a tree out there that's been there forever, and the members love it," McBride says. "It could be a strategic part of the hole or it could have been dedicated to someone, but the entire situation must be evaluated before you react. Maybe you can thin out or limb up instead of a mass exodus with a bunch of chain saws."

Sometimes superintendents need backing from agronomists. Commercial companies can arrive on site with computer models that identify shade and what trees will do as they grow and what will get worse. They can map out all the trees and make a presentation to boards or green committees with the help of technology.

Who does the deed?

Superintendents also need to decide who will actually do the tree work. Hurdzan advises subcontracting it.

"You don't have to think real long about whether you want to put a low-paid worker up in a tree with a chain saw," he says. "Every golf course superintendent should contract that out, unless you have special training. Otherwise you're courting danger."

An example: Insurance reasons force Chad Mathieu, golf course superintendent at the private Ramsey Golf & Country Club in Bergen County, N.J., to contract tree work,

which increases his tree maintenance line item, which he says is substantial.

Hurdzan recommends superintendents talk to their peers to decide how much to spend on tree work.

"They should be looking at \$50,000 annually for trees, maybe \$100,000 if you have an extensive amount," he says.

To take down a tree, clean up and remove a stump costs about \$2,500 to \$3,000 per tree, Hurdzan says. Lightning protection can cost \$1,500 per tree.

Loblolly pines, white oaks, sweetgums, willow oaks, sycamores and cypress trees abound at the private Country Club of

South Carolina in Florence, where golf course superintendent Rob Strobel is protecting his Tifeagle greens by clearing surrounding trees. Even though Strobel handles his tree program in-house, he still spends about \$40,000 a year.

"We have numerous pieces of equipment – dozers, trackhoes and center-point scoop buckets," he says. "We take down a 100-foot tree with no problem, and I have one person who's trained to run that sort of equipment."

Which ones can go

At Ramsey, Mathieu has to go through a



As part of a recent renovation at Scioto Country Club, trees were taken from green sites and out of areas where bunkers needed to be moved. Photo: T.R. Massey



Brian Zimmerman, director of golf for the Milwaukee County Parks system, is concerned about the negative effects of the Emerald Ash borer. Photo: Milwaukee County Parks

strict borough shade tree commission to take down trees.

"Five years ago, we had a lot of neglected trees," Mathieu says. "That winter, I came in and took down a bunch of trees, and the shade tree commission handcuffed me to six trees a year. The next year, I told them I had 15 trees that needed to go. They said six, so I brought an attorney in and told them if one of those nine trees hurts someone, I hold the town responsible."

Not every situation has to be so tense. Mathieu and his green committee take a tree tour each fall. They inspect trees for dead wood, look for ones that shade putting surfaces, and discuss pruning and topping

issues. Letting the members be a part of the program helps them understanding what needs to be done more.

"You've got to really keep on top of it," he says. "If you don't, you'll end up taking down thousands of trees. I know many superintendents who are handcuffed by members."

Twice Mathieu has invited the USGA Green Sections' Turf Advisory Service, which is available to almost any course in the country, for help explaining why some trees are in jeopardy.

"I'm for turf, not trees," he says. "In the end, with help from the USGA, the committee and I have been able to get together."

In Columbus, Ohio, Hurdzan recently was

involved with renovating Scioto Country Club's bunkering system and advised the club about which trees needed to be removed. Many were taken from green sites and out of areas where bunkers needed to be moved. Hundreds of trees were removed. Hundreds of trees also have been removed at Oakmont (Pa.) Country Club, Muirfield Village and the Scarlett Course at Ohio State.

"It's hardly noticeable," he says. "These aren't 'Eisenhower' trees at Augusta National. These are planted in the wrong place or the wrong variety."

At Brown Deer Park Golf Course in Milwaukee, tree roots were growing under a green because there was a silver maple tree five feet from the corner of it. Since 2002, when Zimmerman started, he has assessed each property's tree supply.

"At Brown Deer, we thinned out a lot of trees in the rough," he says. "Our forestry crew, which we're blessed with in Milwaukee County, came through and cut things back for us. We've got high lift trucks, multiple chipping trucks, stumping equipment and trained staff that can climb trees and cut certain limbs. Each property in our system is different, and we manage them as such. We don't have a greens committee. We make sound agronomic decisions based on what's best for the golf course." GCN

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Successful planting

Cutting down and trimming trees is just part of a tree management program. Planting trees is important as well. But planting trees without proper vision can lead to catastrophic results.

Michael Hurdzan, Ph.D., golf course architect with Columbus, Ohio-based Hurdzan/Fry Golf Course Design, says the 1930s Dust Bowl can be blamed, in part, on improper management of trees.

"Before World War II, we cut down lots of trees for various reasons," he says. "We planted trees willy-nilly after the war. Americans aren't patient, so we planted fast growing trees – silver maples, red maples, Chinese elms – and now they're at the end of their lives. All those trees planted carelessly are causing us to establish tree programs. Planting the right ones is what good forestry is all about."

Rob Strobel, golf course superintendent at the Country Club of South Carolina in Florence, is establishing a tree theme, similar to Augusta National, in

which each hole is populated with the same kind of tree.

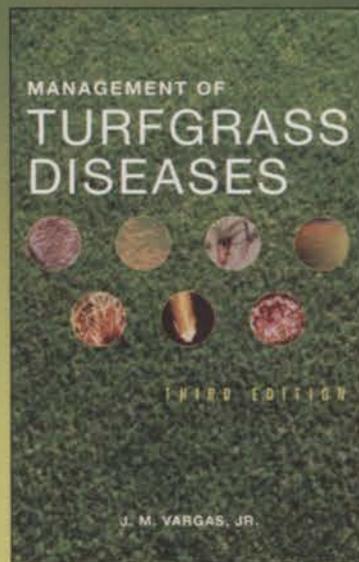
"We plant trees off to the side so they don't get in the line of play," Strobel says. "We go out into our woods and dig up a tree and plant it in the rough. When a limb encroaches on the playing surface, we take care of it, or it gets way out of hand. We transplant a lot of trees and put them in spots where they won't have to be cut down."

Lay people have difficulty understanding how big a tree's canopy will get, Hurdzan says. Because people want instant gratification, they plant trees too close to the play line and the canopy ends up over the fairway.

Brian Zimmerman, director of golf for the Milwaukee County Parks system, has an architect on the county staff who helps him decide where to plant new trees. There's always debate about where to put trees, he says.

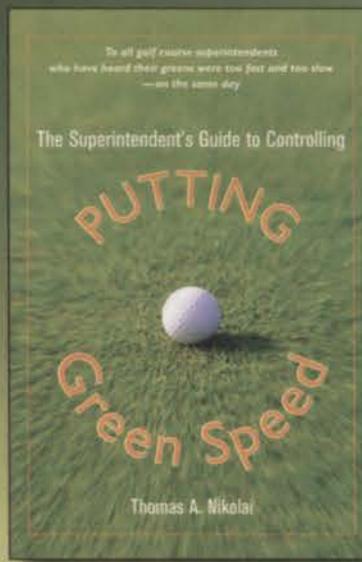
"Proper positioning of trees can save thousands of dollars in the future," Zimmerman says. "The goal is to plant the right amount of trees in the right area. You have pick the right trees for the right soil and look. It's extremely key to your success rates." GCN

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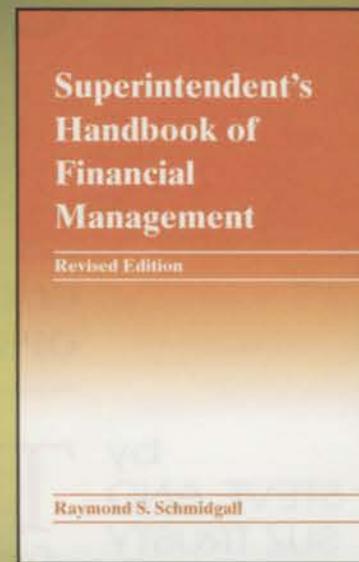
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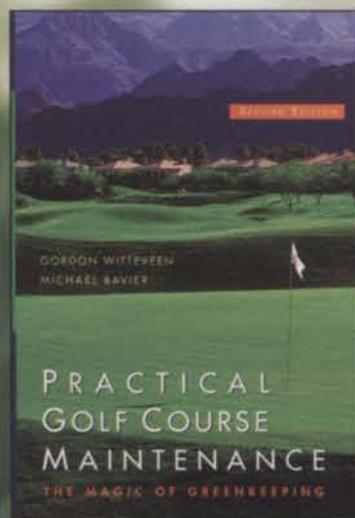
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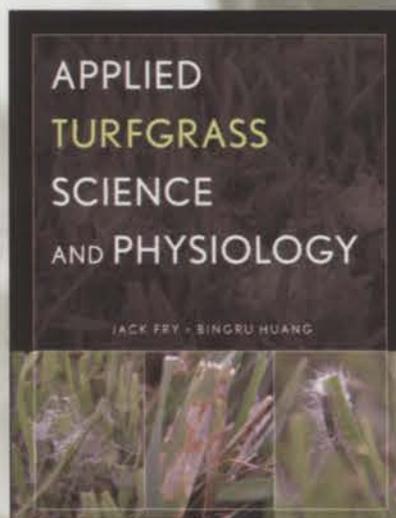
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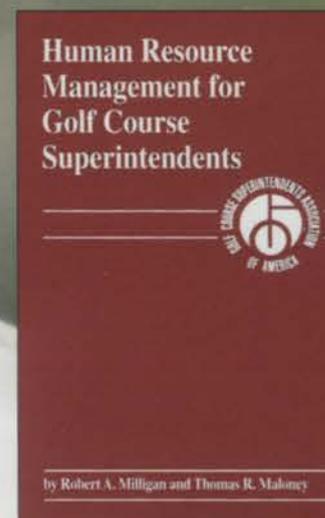
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The marketplace is tight, and golf course superintendents are feeling the pinch.

Corporate belt-tightening and recreational travel reductions have reduced the number of rounds played at many courses and, in turn, have put a greater focus on strategies to maintain profitability. Saturation of courses in key markets has stiffened the competition and put more strain on budgets. The gas-price hikes of 2005 and 2006 forced further examination of expenditures and exploration of methods to improve efficiency while holding the line on spending.

In view of all this, management of some

courses is finding ways to increase its equipment arsenal without boosting budgets.

Let's do it together

Finch Services is a John Deere distributor that has locations in Westminster, Md., Hanover, Pa., North Wales, Pa., and Huntington, Pa. President Ray Finch says he's seen a bit of joint purchasing throughout the years, most likely involving courses that have the same ownership. It's basically for specialty equipment that's used for short periods and can be moved between courses in a relatively close geographic area. A unit could be leased or purchased, whichever best

fits the overall equipment program.

A prime market for equipment sharing is courses owned by government agencies facing tightening budgets.

"I'm aware of a recent purchase of a deep-tine aerator by a Baltimore-area county that plans to share the unit between six golf courses," Finch says.

The state of Kentucky recently purchased a tractor and aerator to serve 22 courses, says Chris Bernauer, controller for John Deere distributor Xenia Power Equipment in Ohio. A government entity owns the equipment, which is used on government-owned courses and is in constant use, Bernauer says.

Bernauer doesn't know of a specific superintendent who jointly purchases equipment with a course owned by a different entity, but he's seeing more management companies bringing in specialty equipment to be shared among the courses they operate, especially in metro markets.

One superintendent working within such an arrangement is Rick Darby, golf course superintendent at Arizona National Golf Club in Tucson. The course is one of four in the Tucson area under the umbrella of the I.R.I. Golf Group. Two of the courses are about five miles apart at the north end of Tucson and two are about one mile apart in the Green Valley area. The equipment is leased through the I.R.I. Golf Group, and allocation is made to each specific course. The lease agreement for the two courses to the north – Arizona National and Forty-Niner Country Club – is one package that's rolling over into its third year. The equipment for the Green Valley courses – Canoa Hills Golf Club and San Ignacio Golf Club – also is part of one lease package, which is in its first year.

"By leasing, we always have the most current equipment," Darby says.



The state of Kentucky shares a tractor and aerator that serves 22 golf courses, according to a John Deere distributor. Photo: John Deere Golf & Turf

With this program, each course has all the day-to-day equipment on site. They also share other equipment.

"Typically, I have most of the shared equipment at my course, including the trenchers, wire locating equipment and a greens roller," Darby says. "If another course needs these items for an irrigation project, our crew will make sure they're ready to use. The other course will come here to get the equipment and bring it back in the same shape as it left here when they've finished with it."

With projects such as aerating, the maintenance staffs on each course might work as a team so they don't have to purchase, lease or rent additional equipment.

"We tend to schedule these projects a couple weeks apart so we can complete work on one of the properties and then transport the equipment to the next course," Darby says. "Occasionally, we'll also share the labor so we can double up to get the work done faster."

"We're saving money by sharing," he adds. "Sometimes it can be a hindrance if you want a specific unit and need to make arrangements to get it. That can set you back a day or two, but overall, it works out very well."

Sharing is caring

Despite I.R.I. Golf Group's purchasing habits, Josh Shull doesn't see courses working out joint buying or leasing arrangements through a sales representative or a distributor because each course has a pretty good assortment of equipment in its own maintenance shop. Shull is a sales representative with TurfWerks, a Jacobsen distributor with locations in Omaha, Neb., Sioux Falls, S.D., and Johnston, Iowa.

"But I am aware of quite a bit of borrowing or sharing of equipment if there's a breakdown with a specific unit or for special projects," he says. "It's more of a personal relationship than a formal agreement."

Speaking of sharing, John Temme and Chris Coen, who have known each other for 12 years and work 10 miles apart, are a good example. Temme, golf course superintendent of Wakonda Club in Des Moines, Iowa, and Coen, golf course superintendent of Glen Oaks Country Club in West Des Moines, say sharing equipment is a great way to extend their resources while keeping their budgets in check.

"We usually talk to each other daily and probably share something about once a



A Big John tree transplanter was shared among Chicago-area municipal courses in exchange for trees. Photo: Big John Tree Transplanter Mfg.

week," says Temme, who worked for Coen before accepting the position at Wakonda Club. "It's all based on a handshake agreement. We pick up equipment in good shape and return it in good shape. If it breaks on our property, we fix it. I even bought a trailer to facilitate the exchange."

The cooperation between the two has expanded into the aerification process.

"In the fall, my equipment and crew go over to help Chris aerify his greens, and his equipment and crew come here to help aerify ours," Temme says. "The host course provides lunch."

Typically, they'll exchange two greens aerifiers, blowers, drag mats, the sand topdresser and about 10 crew members, Coen says.

"We each pay our own crews no matter which course they're working on," he says. "Since our courses are similar, it all works out during the year."

Coen and Temme also share equipment with other Des Moines-area courses.

"We all look to each other's courses for the equipment we only use once or twice a year," Coen says. "It's just smart business."

When the annual capital budgets are being developed, the two check with each other and the other area courses because they don't want to buy duplicate equipment.

"If it's in our shop 90 percent of the time, we can share it," Temme says.

"We try to buy equipment no one else has so that, jointly, we have all the tools we need to maintain our courses," Coen says.

Timing also is important.

"I bought a big leaf sweeper that I use primarily in the fall because we have lots of large trees," Temme says. "Chris uses it during the

summer when dethatching fairways."

Although the two courses are competitors, the boards and membership of both back the cooperative relationship.

"They think it's great because we can finish big tasks such as aerification in half the time, and they get the course back sooner," Temme says. "They've seen the cost savings, too, and are very supportive of the arrangement."

Three facilities jointly own one item. The Hyperion Field Club in Johnston, Iowa, joined in for a three-way purchase of a concrete saw. Each pitched in \$500. It stays on the shelf in the shop of whichever course used it last until someone else needs it. Just like the rest of this cooperative arrangement, it's practical, logical and effective.

Consider this

For all the positives of jointly purchasing or sharing equipment, pitfalls need to be recognized and avoided. For courses in close enough proximity to share, regional agronomic needs generally happen at the same time, especially with aeration and seeding, says Scott Kinkead, executive vice president of Turfco.

"The challenge is to fit key equipment use within a pretty intense time schedule," Kinkead says. "They need clearly defined parameters and good synergy. Joint ownership would work better with equipment that wasn't as weather dependent and was used less frequently, such as a tree spade or backhoe."

If a joint-purchased or loaned unit was damaged, even if the one using it was going to pay for the repairs, it could be out of



A seeder is an example of a piece of equipment that's shared among maintenance staffs. Photo: Turfco

service for quite a while, Bernauer says.

"Not having it available for an extended period would be pretty tough to explain to a board," he says. "Basically, golf course boards change annually. So, even if a joint purchase or lease had been approved prior to the arrangement, another board might have an entirely different opinion about it. Also, joint ownership would likely need to be within noncompeting courses. As rounds are harder to gain, I don't see too many courses that aren't in competition with each other."

But superintendents consider all those factors before making a purchasing or sharing decision. Fred Behnke, certified golf course superintendent of Mount Prospect (Ill.) Golf Course is one.

"I discussed joint-purchase options with a group of superintendents during a mid-September meeting," Behnke says. "As we talked about it, the idea became less popular. We discussed the need for use at the same time, who would have the first use option, where the equipment would be stored, and how damage would be handled. The main questions were the feasibility of such an arrangement and how much capital money would be required from each participating course."

Behnke says course management ended up renting or contracting certain services because the course didn't have the specialized equipment.

"We figured if we had access to the equipment, we could do the job with a skilled staff operator for a third of the cost," he says. "It would be great to have a shared interest in a stump grinder or lift-bucket truck. Yet, while all the issues could be resolved, we would have to set up a system to make it work and get the right entities at all the different courses to agree on it."

"In the end, we decided borrowing and sharing equipment on a course-to-course basis as we had been doing was the best approach," he adds. "We do have an unofficial honor system. If equipment is damaged while in use by another course, the user covers the repairs. And we always return the machine in top shape, replacing the tines on a borrowed aerator for example, and filling it with fuel."

Behnke cites a past Chicago-area situation in which a park district course shared a Big John tree transplanter they purchased to move multiple large trees on its property. Other park district and municipal courses could use the machine in exchange for a tree. For every three trees the borrower moved, they'd dig one tree of equal size and take it to the owner's course to plant.

"It worked well for everyone until they ran out of room for more trees," Behnke says. "The window of opportunity closed due to lack of space."

Yet, because the benefits are appealing, superintendents continue to explore innovative options for sharing equipment. GCN

Steve and Suz Trusty are freelance writers based in Council Bluffs, Iowa. They can be reached at suz@trusty.bz.



Some of the equipment used at Glen Oaks Country Club (pictured) is shared with the Wakonda Club because the clubs' golf course superintendents are cooperative and the courses are 10 miles apart. Photo: Glen Oaks Country Club

travels with TERRY

Ride, not walk

Instead of transporting their walk-behind green and tee mowers using turf vehicles with tow-behind trailers, Mike Hulteen, CGCS, and then equipment mechanic Leland Davis of the Salina (Kan.) Country Club, designed and built sulkies as a low-cost alternative to transporting them around the course.

The sulkies were built using surplus materials left over from other projects and locally available supplies, which cost about \$50 for each sulky. It took as long as four hours to build each one.

The frames, supports, seat post and foot rests were built using 1.5-inch square metal tubing that was welded together. The seats and seat mounts (bolted to the seat and welded to the seat post square tubing) were recycled from old mowers. The tires and wheels, which were bought at a local hardware store, are replacements for wheelbarrows.

The sulkies are attached to the mowers with a U-shaped receiver hitch, which is made of one-quarter-inch-thick flat steel welded together and bolted to the walk-behind mower, and a single piece of one-quarter-inch-thick flat steel, which is welded to the bottom of the end of the sulky's tongue. A three-eighths-inch-diameter hole is drilled for a one-quarter-inch bolt used as a quick-and-easy way to join the hitch and receiver together. They were painted a similar color to match John Deere green.

Each walk-behind green and tee mower has held up well and hasn't had any mechanical problems when pulling the extra weight of the sulky and staff member.



Ride, part II

Another alternative to walking or using a trailer to transport a Toro Hydroject from green to green is using a sulky.

The same 1.5-inch square metal tubing (describe above) is used for the frame and supports. Three-eighths-inch-thick flat steel is used for the seat post, which is bolted and welded to the frame. The flat steel seat post is heated and bent in a near vertical position. A bracket is bolted to an old recycled mower seat and welded to the other end of the flat steel seat post, which has been heated and bent to the proper angle. The tires and wheels are replacements for wheelbarrows that were bought at a local hardware store.

A triangular-shaped piece of one-quarter-inch-thick flat steel bolted just above the drive wheel has a three-eighths-inch-diameter hole drilled into it for the sulky to be hooked up to it. The sulky has a U-shaped receiver welded to the tongue framework, which has two three-eighths-inch-diameter holes drilled into them that allow a one-quarter-inch bolt to hitch them together.

The cost for the materials, which were already in stock from other projects, was less than \$100. Materials included a tool box, hose reel, pressure regulator, replaceable water filter and housing, and manufacturer's metal bracket. The labor cost was as much as five hours of the equipment mechanic's time.

The Hydroject has held-up well and hasn't had any mechanical problems as a result of pulling the extra weight of the sulky and operator. GCN



Terry Buchen, CGCS, MG, is president of Golf Agronomy International. He's a 35-year member of the GCSAA and can be reached at terrybuchen@earthlink.net.

Globetrotting consulting agronomist Terry Buchen visits many golf courses annually with his digital camera in-hand. He will share helpful ideas relating to maintenance equipment from the golf course superintendents he visits – as well as a few ideas of his own – with timely photos and captions that explore the changing world of golf course management.

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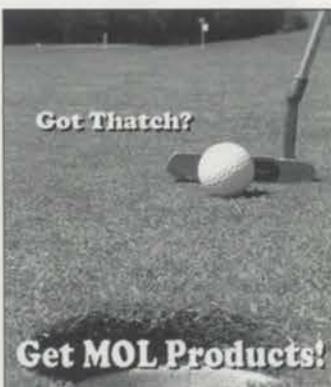
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www.arystalifescience.com			www.precisionlab.com		
Bayer Environmental Science	31*		Standard Golf Co.	23	21
www.bayer.com			www.standardgolf.com		
Bird-X	10	15	Tee-2-Green	2	10
www.bird-x.com/golf			www.tce-2-green.com		
Cleary Chemical	9	13	Turf-Seed	4	11
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www.exide.com			www.varmitgetter.com		
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www.lesco.com			www.zscreen.com		
Organic Growing Systems	13	19			
www.organicgrowingsystems.com					

* Denotes regional advertisement

Staying afloat

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"This time next year we'll know how good a destination golf course we'll be and if we're as good as the hype," he says.

Business is a little different for those courses that have been around for a number of years. In Texas, The Tribute, which opened in 2000, started to recover from the effects of Sept. 11 in 2003. It has experienced a steady increase in the number of rounds and green fees since 2003, according to general manager Jeff Kindred.

Kindred says he can't reveal the exact numbers, citing the policy of American Golf, which manages the facility. This year, the facility is on track to generate 40,000 rounds. In 2005, it generated less than that.

The Tribute is in the high end of the market, which includes six other courses in a 40-mile radius.

Kindred says being a stand-alone course isn't a hindrance for business.

"In a lot of ways, being a stand-alone course is a positive because the golfers that come here don't want houses lining the course," he says. "This gives us a unique feel. Golfers like the fact that they feel like they're out of town. Because we sit out on a peninsula, you have that destination feel, like you're getting away from the daily grind."

Residential homes are five miles away from the course, but because the ground is part of Army Corps of Engineers' land, homes won't be built on the course.

The Tribute draws golfers from Texas and out of the state. Most guests are local businessmen and about 30 percent of rounds are charity and corporate events. A lot of people

call wanting to try the facility, referencing the course's Golf Digest Top 100 ranking.

Business is also aided by the fact the clubhouse hosts weddings – more than 100 a year. And corporate meetings tie into its customer base.

The facility offers amenities a hotel can't, such as allowing those attending meetings to putt on the practice green or use the driving range during breaks. There also are eight guest suites that are part of the stay-and-play package offered by the facility. The suites are appointed with antique Scottish furniture.

Alone no more

For those stand-alone courses that have been struggling, owners have been looking at ways to make them more profitable, mainly adding real estate components as sources of revenue. Steele says owners are getting creative and selling parcels of land around stand-alone golf courses, building homes throughout the course.

"People are doing this to add revenue," he says. "I've even heard of re-routing some holes to include some houses."

In Catossa, Okla., the Cherokee Hills Golf Club, once called Indian Hills and Spunky Creek, was struggling because it had no real estate or municipality to underwrite it, Davis says. The Perry Maxwell design that was redesigned by Davis used to be a stand-alone course, but a Native American tribe bought it and built a casino and hotel on the property.

"We'll see stand-alones that will be redesigned or redeveloped so the golf course serves as an amenity to the primary revenue source," Davis says. GCN



A hotel and casino were added to Cherokee Hills Golf Club because it was struggling as a stand-alone course. Photo: Tripp Davis and Associates

news analysis

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and Collier's position will be filled by a TPC agronomist by the end of the year, according to Roth.

Within the structure, there are six agronomists reporting to the director position that has yet to be filled – and most likely will be filled by someone outside the PGA Tour – and two regional agronomists reporting to Collier. All 10 agronomists overlap and work together.

"What this will do is allow for the appropriate agronomic support for each tournament as well as the operational and agronomic support for PGA Tour golf course properties. This also frees up time for me to be at headquarters as needed," Roth says.

As the vice president of agronomy, Roth will work closely with the staff of each of the three tours the organization operates and the staff for golf course properties.

The new structure also frees up Roth to look at future sites for TPC facilities and their development. Currently, the PGA

Tour is developing a new golf course in Naples, Fla. – the TPC at Treviso Bay, which is scheduled to open late next year. There's another TPC course on the drawing board – a 36-hole resort property in San Antonio, although ground hasn't broken yet. There are also other sites for possible development of TPC clubs. In addition to continuing to directly support certain PGA Tour events, Roth also will be available to inspect future possible tournament sites.

Cooper, the newest PGA agronomist, says he wasn't looking to leave ValleyCrest, but an opportunity came about that he couldn't pass up because he always wanted to work with the PGA Tour. He started Sept. 5.

"I'm at an age when if I'm going to make a move, now is the time to do it," he says. "The only job I would have left ValleyCrest for is the PGA Tour. The guys at ValleyCrest are a class act. I made great friendships while at ValleyCrest. I feel bad for leaving. I wish the timing could have been a little better, but there's no one to blame but me. They'll find someone sharper and forget about

Bland Cooper. It was a tougher decision than you might think."

Cooper sees himself spending the rest of his career with the Tour.

"It's the insanity of tournament golf that's attractive to me," he says. "Tournament golf is almost like a drug. I always liked preparing a course for a tournament. It's the finality of a tournament – we have a deadline. It has to be right before the tournament. There's a satisfaction I get out of that."

Tournament preparation is one thing Cooper didn't experience at ValleyCrest. He says that's not necessarily bad, but it was a void he needed to fill.

As a director of agronomy with ValleyCrest, Cooper traveled 180 days a year. He will travel about the same amount with the Tour.

Cooper says he doesn't know exactly how many golf courses he'll visit throughout the year because the Tour is always adding and moving events, but each agronomist is involved with 12 to 16 events, so he'll visit at least that many courses. GCN



Roth



Cooper



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Best job in the business

A big part of my weird job is to keep tabs on what's going on in the wide world of golf, and, not surprisingly, the World Wide Web is an enormous resource for me. Every morning, I get up at O-Dark-Thirty, fix a pot of coffee, fire up a Marlboro and begin surfing to find a bunch of golf-related Web sites to catch up on news and opinions of the day.

One of the Web sites I visit regularly is *GolfClubAtlas.com*. It's an interesting discussion group that's largely populated by serious golf junkies who compare notes on great courses throughout the world. Although I respect the views of many GCA members when it comes to design and playability, I'm often bemused by the crap these folks post regarding turf species, mowing heights, green speed and other conditioning topics.

For example, most posters are big on "fast-and-firm" conditions without really understanding how they're achieved. I occasionally jump into the electronic debate to try to insert a note of agronomic or business reality, but they often don't want to hear it. They have their opinions and won't be swayed. It reminds me of the old-time reporter's axiom: Don't let the facts get in the way of a good story. Except in this case it's, "Don't let facts about turf health get in the way of my golf game."

But, despite its faults (or perhaps because of them), visiting the GCA discussion group is a great way for superintendents and owners to understand what the average low-handicapper, semicrazed golfer is thinking. It's like a focus group populated with the guys who tend to be the loudest, most insistent, insufferable members or players on your golf or green committees.

Recently, there was a discussion thread about the best superintendent's job in the nation. Predictably, from their somewhat warped perspectives, the focus was on famous old courses designed by one of the dead Scottish guys. Classics like Yale University Golf Course in New Haven, Conn., Augusta (Ga.) National and Cypress Point Club in Pebble Beach, Calif., were cited.

No doubt those are great jobs. But, it occurred to me that hundreds, if not thousands of superintendents believe they

have the best job in the business based on their own individual criteria.

So, what are the reasons a particular superintendent wants to stand on the 18th green and shout, "I love my job!" Here are a few possibilities, and some observations, about each:

Prestige. Want to be at a Top 100 club? Host a big televised event? The good news is you're the man. The bad news is ... you're the man. Prestige usually equals pressure to perform and sometimes ridiculous expectations. It also means dealing with the Tour, the USGA, a bunch of consultants and the boneheads from network TV. Ready for that?

Money. I'm making a wild guess, but I'll bet only around 2 percent of all head superintendent jobs garner more than \$150,000 a year. That's about 350 or so jobs out of 16,000-plus facilities. Let's be honest. About one-third of those jobs belong to guys who worked for Paul Latshaw earlier in their careers. Another third are guys who caught the eye of Bruce Williams, the industry's preeminent placement guy. The final third are people who worked their butts off, made good contacts and found themselves in the right place at the right time. Which route will you take? And, if you lose that job, how long will it take you to find another one in the same pay grade?

Outside opportunity. You might be thrilled to find yourself at a low-impact course that allows you to do other things. Maybe you want to consult, buy or manage a couple of other courses, or even run a little landscaping business on the side. With the right ownership, a good assistant and a creative approach, you could be in heaven. Then again, if you neglect your primary job or your world-class assistant moves on, you could be on the unemployment line.

Inside opportunity. As a kid, you loved to play in the dirt with your Tonka trucks. Now, your sandbox is a 150-acre golf course that's doing big construction jobs. Score! The facility has a couple of million dollars to spend on bunkers, greens reconstruction or irrigation, and you get to ride shotgun during the entire process. Pretty cool, but it can be perilous if things aren't done just right. You have to be confident enough to know what you can handle, but savvy enough to know when to turn things

over to the right architect, builder or irrigation consultant. Also, beware of catching "construction fever" and wandering the world for the next 20 years riding a D-6 Cat bulldozer and being a site gypsy.

Owner relationship. We probably all know one or maybe two superintendents who managed to hook up with a special owner (or one of those rare club presidents for life) with whom they miraculously agree on everything and who stay at the same facility for 30, 40 or 50 years. Think that happens often? During my 20 years in the industry, I can count the number of individuals who've lucked their way into one of these deals on 10 fingers and maybe a couple of toes. These happy accidents occur once in a blue moon. Always be on the lookout for one, but don't bet the farm on it. Also, remember that if your golden goose dies, the golden eggs stop too.

Stress level. So you've found a job that comes complete with an "assistant for life" who knows everything there is to know but doesn't want your title. Or, you've stumbled into one of those rare positions in which everyone that matters at the facility respects what you do and likes you. Your stress meter is pegged at zero most days. You could end up being one of those lucky fingers-and-toes guys I mentioned earlier for decades to come if you play your cards right. Just remember low stress doesn't mean low expectations and things can change in a heartbeat because of bad weather, bad luck, a change in ownership/management or a bad hire. One warning: As secure as things might be, beware the new general manager.

Other stuff. How about a chance at a sweat equity ownership share in the course? That could be a dream for someone who doesn't just want to collect a paycheck for life. Or, you find a job that allows you to stay close to family or friends. Maybe that's the deciding factor. Last, but not least, you're simply having a ball because of a combination of factors. When you wake up every morning knowing that your job is actually fun, your biggest problem is all the speeding tickets you get racing to work.

So, who really does have the best job in the business? I bet hundreds, if not thousands, of you reading this right now are saying, "I do!" But, seriously, the best job in the business ... sorry, I already have it. GCN

Don't forget to check out Pat's Digital Coffee Shop column that appears twice a month in GCN's weekly e-newsletter. To subscribe to the newsletter, visit the GCN home page and click on the "news" drop-down menu.

