

BY JOHN WALSH

A designation worthy of pursuit?

Some superintendents say it's a no-brainer to become certified; others question the value

If you're a certified golf course superintendent, you're in the minority among your peers. Of the 19,889 Golf Course Superintendents Association of America members, 1,895 (10 percent) are certified golf course superintendents, according to the association. Superintendents have mixed feelings about the value of being certified, but the association doesn't. Some members disagree about how much value the association portrays in being certified.

The GCSAA encourages its members to become certified because it's a way to help them substantiate their work and accomplishments through continuing education. The Certified Golf Course Superintendent program is designed to

recognize those accomplishments and members' expanding knowledge as they keep up to date with recent developments in the industry.

Some of the benefits of earning the CGCS designation, besides preparing members for the future demands of the superintendent profession, are:

- Better salaries and jobs, providing an edge in the job market with a proven commitment to producing the best playing conditions;
- Recognition and respect by peers and employers;
- Increased knowledge about the industry, association and profession; and
- A sense of accomplishment, from demonstrating proficiency to contributing to the improvement of the profession.

Completing the certification process also can benefit superintendents' employers because it:

- Is an effective, meaningful and objective measure to determine qualifications of potential employment candidates;
- Shows a willingness to not only commit to long-range self-improvement but long-range improvement of the profitability of the golf facility;
- Increases the chances of having con-

sistently superior course conditions;

- Provides knowledge to manage a golf course budget efficiently and still maintain top conditions;
- Shows leadership skills needed to develop a well-trained, well-managed staff resulting in strong team morale and reduced turnover; and
- Allows them to stay up-to-date in the latest golf course management techniques and products through continuing education.

Historically, golf facility leaders have supported their certified superintendents. Eighty-eight percent of employers support continuing education efforts, according to the GCSAA. Certified superintendents consistently have earned higher salaries in recognition of their advanced level of experience knowledge, skills and abilities. In 2003, the average salary of certified superintendents was 32.6 percent higher than that of non-certified superintendents, according to the GCSAA.

Allen Brissenden, CGCS, at the Dunedin Country Club in Tampa, Fla., has been in the industry since 1980, has been a superintendent since 1989 and became certified in 1994. When he was an assistant, he decided he wanted to become certified shortly after he joined

the GCSAA. When he prepared for certification, he says qualifications included:

- Being a golf course superintendent for five years;
- Meeting educational requirements, which meant a certain amount of GCSAA credits – more credits were needed without a degree or with a two-year degree than with a four-year degree;
- The GCSAA verifying your records once you applied;
- Passing a six-hour test that included knowledge of the certification program, pest control safety, financial and organizational management, the Rules of golf and an agronomy section.

“You had 12 months between the time you sent in your application and taking the test,” Brissenden says. “During that time, you also had to have two certified superintendents visit your course and send in written documents about three projects you completed on your course. Qualifications now are stricter than they used to be.”

Brissenden says it was challenging to prepare for certification.

“You have to be dedicated to be certified,” he says. “You really have to work at it. You have to set time aside to study. You can’t just blow it off.”

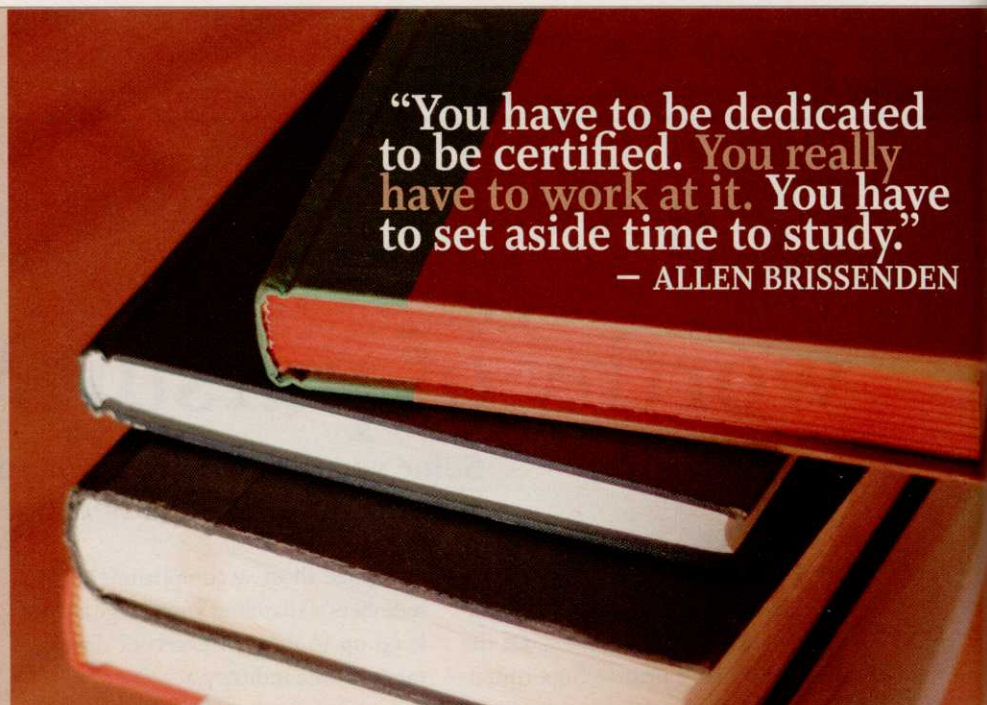
While studying, Brissenden says he learned much about organizational and financial management that he uses daily.

“I learned different ways courses are structured financially,” he says. “I learned how to structure a crew and be more efficient with time management.”

Brissenden says because superintendents work long hours, finding the time to become certified can be difficult. The exam is challenging, too, he says.

“I found that the Rules of golf was the hardest part of the test,” he says. “The turfgrass management part was the easiest. But I had to rewrite two of the six sections within the first year that I took the test before I passed and became certified,” he says. “There aren’t many who pass all six sections the first time.”

Certification is renewed every five years,



which means one has to keep up with continuing education.

Brissenden says his certification was a large part of getting his current job.

“Before this job, I worked for one owner for 12 years, and after he sold the course, I was out of a job,” he says. “There were 100 applicants for the job I have now. Certification really helped.”

Brissenden also says certification definitely helps with pay, citing that those who are certified earn 5 to 10 percent more than those who aren’t.

Tom Lavrenz, director of golf for the city of Cedar Rapids Golf Department in Iowa, is a GCSAA member who has a slightly different take on salaries. He says salaries and promotions are based on being certified in certain parts of the country, such as the East Coast and at some of the bigger, well-known clubs, but that’s not the case in Iowa.

“Experience counts more,” he says.

Brissenden says being certified has been a big plus with Dunedin’s membership, and he says he receives more respect from board that hired him.

“It puts you out as more of a leader in the industry,” he says. “Many certified guys are contacted first when it comes to surveys and things like that.”

PERCEIVED VALUE

Yet Brissenden says some superintendents don’t feel they need certification because they’ve been at a club for 20 years.

“But I say to them, ‘What if you get fired?’”

Darren Davis, director of golf at Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples, Fla., is an accomplished superintendent who isn’t certified. Davis, who was hired at Olde Florida in October of 1992, has been a superintendent for 14 years and a member of the GCSAA for 17 years. Before Olde Florida, he spent time as an assistant at the Loxahatchee Club in Jupiter, Fla., and some time at Augusta National in Georgia and Golden Eagle Country Club in Tallahassee, Fla.

“Although I’m not certified, that doesn’t mean I don’t see the value in it,” he says.

However, Davis says he’s an engaged member of the GCSAA nationally and locally, and he’s been published six times in Golf Course Management and has been on-air host for the Superintendents Video Magazine.

“I love the profession,” he says. “I dedicate double-digit hours to it aside from my job.”

Davis has been through the certification program twice, but hasn’t taken the test.

“At the time, I had other things I wanted to do, such as be active in the Florida chapter,”

he says. "I personally found the things I do more rewarding than being a CGCS. What I have gained from my involvement in the GCSAA has helped my career.

"My employer has never seen or expressed that value added if I were a CGCS," he adds. "My employer is unaware of the certified program, but it's not the fault of the GCSAA that he doesn't know. If I saw the value in it to my employer, I would do it."

Davis says if he were to leave his job, he most likely would become certified because he wouldn't want not being certified to be a factor in why he didn't get a job.

"It's not a matter of spite, I just never saw the value," he says. "If certification ever became an issue during an interview, I would dispel that. I'll get my foot in the door and sell myself. But if an owner wants me to be certified, I would make that a priority in the first six months [of a new job]. However, when you look at job ads, CGCS isn't required. You don't see that much."

Davis says being certified is a personal choice, and that at one point, eight out of 10 superintendents at the top 10 golf courses in the country weren't certified.

Still, Davis, who's a Class A superintendent, is happy about the GCSAA's promotion of the Class A designation.

"The GCSAA is showing the value of Class A to owners," he says. "It has promised the membership that the Class A designation sets them apart from their peers. The GCSAA doesn't say that about CGCS. Class A is the standard that all superintendents should aspire to be." (See related story about the Professional Development Initiative on page 72.)

Davis says he strives to improve himself daily and currently is working toward a bachelor of arts degree in communication.

PROFESSIONALISM

Lavrenz, a 12-year member of the GCSAA who's been with the city of Cedar Rapids for 29 years, has been a superintendent for 21 years. Being certified has crossed his mind several times during his career, but he says he never had the time to become certified.

"I did serve as a beta tester for the certification test, but I didn't study and missed passing it barely," he says. "I haven't been hindered because I'm not certified, but I won't allow myself to fail."

"Although certification wouldn't have meant a great deal to me, I would advance someone under me quicker if he's certified because that shows me he's willing to take that extra step," he adds.

At this point in his career, Lavrenz, who's a Class A member, has no intention of becoming certified. He has health issues and doesn't know how long he'll be with the city. At age 47 and having worked 30 years for the city, he says he can retire with a nice pension in about eight years.

"The GCSAA doesn't do enough to show members the value of being certified," he says. "If I had 10 years left in my career, I would get

I've never seen that kind of attitude in Iowa amongst my friends. But at the same time, 99 percent of the superintendents who feel they don't get the respect they deserve, don't walk the walk."

More important than certification is image, Lavrenz says.

"If you're not going to represent our profession professionally, certification doesn't matter," he says. "I have one CGCS working for me and another is in the process of getting certified, and it's great, but you better dress the part and carry yourself appropriately."

Two reasons Lavrenz says more superintendents aren't certified is that it takes a lot of time and the perceived lack of benefit of it.

"Superintendents haven't taken the time to promote themselves even though they are the most important person on the golf course," he says. "They undersell themselves. Certifica-

"Certification doesn't make or break a superintendent, but it's another added bonus to try and take the profession to a higher level."

— TOM LAVRENZ

certified, but it's not going to do me any good at this point. It's just like the college degree was years ago. It used to be that a four-year degree wasn't needed. Now you need one."

Being certified or not, Lavrenz says superintendents should be all about promoting themselves and being professional.

"Generally, if you're a CGCS, you tend to carry yourself with more professionalism that those who aren't, and that's too bad. You'll never see a CGCS attend a meeting not dressed up. Superintendents are perceived differently than members of the PGA because of that professional image."

On a national level, Lavrenz says some certified superintendents throw their designation around in a negative way, and it disturbs him.

"Not everyone does it," he says. "But just because they have a designated title, that doesn't mean they are automatically better.

tion tends to bring out a sellable quality in a person as it relates to his course. I believe in the process but wouldn't turn someone away because he wasn't certified. Titles are good, but image is everything."

Lavrenz says certification has merit but not as much as the way superintendents present themselves to customers.

"Certification doesn't make or break a superintendent, but it's another added bonus to try to take the profession to a higher level," he says. "It's a stepping stone I want to see this profession move toward. You don't have to be certified to be successful, but you need to carry yourself with the respect the profession deserves. As superintendents, we don't do that as a whole. We don't carry ourselves like the professionals we are." GCI

For more information about certification, visit www.gcsaa.org/mc/certification/default.asp.

NEAT AND CLEAN

KEEPING A TIDY AND ORGANIZED MAINTENANCE FACILITY IMPROVES EFFICIENCY

Maintenance facilities often are tucked away on a golf property and, for many, are usually out of site and out of mind. Some facilities are nice and tidy; others are slovenly. Maintenance budgets and a primary focus on golf course conditions impact maintenance building conditions. Yet some (perhaps many) golf course superintendents take pride in keeping a neat and clean office, and feel it reflects them and their maintenance operation.

At the private, 36-hole Palmas Del Mar Country Club, which sits on about 250 acres in Humacua, Puerto Rico, the maintenance facility includes a lunch room, locker room, full-size bath, irrigation department area, mechanic's area, the superintendent's office, the assistant's office and the secretary's office.

Maintenance crew members clean and take care of the shop at least three times a week, says golf course superintendent Osvaldo Cruz. The outside of the shop looks better than the inside, Cruz says.

"We planted gardens and pine trees around the facility," he says. "On the interior, we follow all (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) rules with chemical wash areas. We paint and check everything, and pick up trash – sometimes more often, sometimes less often."

Cruz says there are 21 golf course superintendents on the island of Puerto Rico, and they receive a lot of pressure from owners and golfers to keep their golf courses well conditioned, and many times they forget about the maintenance facility.

Additionally, many superintendents might not have the staff or the money to invest as much as they should in their maintenance facility. Cruz, whose staff consists of between 35 and 40 workers including the assistant superintendent, spends about \$2,500 to \$3,000 a year maintaining the maintenance facility at Palmas Del Mar.



BY JOHN WALSH

"If you spend time maintaining it regularly, you spend less every month doing so," he says.

BIGGER THAN MOST

At the private 54-hole DuPont Country Club in Wilmington, Del., the maintenance facility is located on the outskirts of one of the courses on the property, which has about 225 maintained acres. The 15-year-old facility, which is a model for others, was built with efficiency in mind, says general superintendent Tristan Engle.

"We're part of DuPont, so it was overengineered," she says. "We can put a fully loaded

stake truck in and raise it all the way up on a 5-ton lift. We have a paint booth that's big enough to fit a car. Most facilities don't have a paint area. We have a fertilizer room separate from the chemical building. There's also a well underneath it. It's all encapsulated."

The maintenance facility also includes 60 lockers, a high school locker room-size shower room and an elevator that goes up to the second floor. It's also big enough to park all the equipment – \$4 million worth of inventory – inside. Engle says the staff takes pride in the fact the facility is top-notch.

"We spruce everything up in the winter, including painting some of the equipment," she says. "Each course is assigned certain parts of the building to clean weekly or bi-weekly. Superintendents and assistants are held accountable for cleanliness. Even the outside has to be maintained. We have to maintain it at all times for safety and to keep our image. We have to keep resources like this polished like our own. It boils down to safety."

Engle, who has been at the corporate club for 12 years, says a clean and organized maintenance facility, in a small way, reflects a golf course's condition.

"With the focus on members and guests, we can't afford time looking for equipment and other items we use to maintain the courses," she says. "We need to find equipment right away. Everything is labeled and hung up properly. It's efficient. We have a five- to seven-minute meeting first thing in the morning, and then we're out on the courses. We don't

want to get out the door wrong in the morning because then we'll need to shift our focus."

MORE TOGETHER

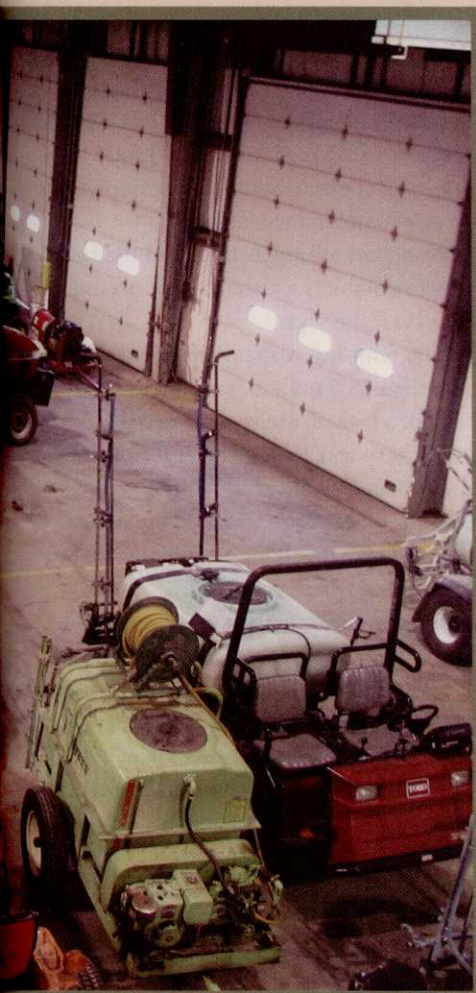
The golf courses at the newly opened 28-hole Kukio Beach Club in Kona, Hawaii, were finished in 2003, and the maintenance building was completed in September 2005. Golf course superintendent Scott Nair's predecessor provided input for the design of the building. Some changes needed to be made, such as adding more Cat 5 cable, tweaking the design of the equipment wash area and additions of air power to multiple locations.

The maintenance facility at Kukio Beach is quite different than most others. About 100 people work out of the maintenance facility, which includes:

- A housekeeping staff that cleans it daily;
- A shop attendant who, among other tasks, cleans the outside of the building, maintains uniform inventory, refills fuel tanks and washes storage areas;
- A 35-person landscape department;
- A lunch room with a kitchen steward; and
- A parking lot for 95 cars.

The maintenance facility footprint is five acres and the actual maintenance building is 12,000 square feet. Nair, who has been at Kukio Beach for two years and has a staff of 45 year-round, says Kukio is changing the concept of the maintenance facility. He says many in the industry look at maintenance as part of the back of the house, and the people who maintain the grounds are separated from other club employees into another facility.

"We have a different approach," he says. "Our building costs are expensive – \$1,000 to \$1,800 a square foot. Accounting, human resources, landscaping, engineering are all in the maintenance facility. This improves efficiency. When I have an accounting problem, I



The maintenance building at the DuPont Country Club, which is bigger than most, was built 15 years ago with efficiency in mind. Photo: DuPont Country Club

Tristan Engle, general superintendent at the DuPont Country Club, says it's up to her and her staff to educate the members about the importance of a safe maintenance facility. Photo: DuPont Country Club



go down the hall. I don't have to make phone calls. This keeps traffic away from the clubhouse and reduces building costs. It keeps all departments close together, and maintenance doesn't have the stigma of being separated. It helps create a more friendly teamwork atmosphere that is vital to the operation."

Nair and his staff keep the maintenance facility clean and organized because they're accountable and are entrusted with an asset, he says.

PHILOSOPHY

Cruz, Engle and Nair all share a similar philosophy in that they put significant importance on a neat and clean maintenance facility. Cruz, who's been at Palmas Del Mar for three years, says a maintenance facility has to be clean and organized like the course it's used to maintain. He says the extent of how nice a maintenance facility depends on the budget. He says superintendents need to have the facility presentable while realizing the golf course is more important, but at the same time realizing the maintenance facility is important, too.

"My motto is show that the maintenance facility is being taken care of," he says. "If you

work at a place and the maintenance facility is beautiful, then the staff will want to go out and make the course beautiful. If employees see a beautiful shop, they'll go the extra mile and won't let it run down. You have to have pride. It starts in the shop and is carried out to the course."

Cruz encourages superintendents not to procrastinate when it comes to shop maintenance.

"Have a checklist," he says. "If you see something wrong, don't wait. Get it done within a week. Treat the maintenance facility like a golf course, but not better than the golf course."

Engle, who has a staff of 60 during peak season and 15 in the off season, says organization is important, as well as getting employees the resources they need to do the job efficiently and effectively.

"Assistant superintendents have to be as organized as the laborers," she says. "Each course doesn't have it's own equipment. We share. We don't have the luxury of time to look for things. It all boils down to money. We can't afford to pay someone to look for something."

Engle says it's up to her and her staff to

educate the members – there are 2,500 golfing members of DuPont and 13,000 total members – and committees about the importance of a safe maintenance facility.

"Resources are important, and the facility you work out of is a resource that needs to be looked at," she says.

Nair, who has a maintenance budget of more than \$3.5 million, says uncleanliness is a sign of a lack of attention to detail.

"It's very sad to see the level of care of maintenance facilities out there," he says. "Some are very professional. Many are messy. It doesn't take much money to show that you are proud of where you work."

Nair says club members and course owners need to know the people they have entrusted respect their work space, and if members come into the maintenance facility, they should see their asset is being taken care of.

"Clutter creates safety hazards and contributes to laziness and bad attitudes," he says. "If everything is maintained well and respected, workers will do the same. Respect starts at the top. If managers don't respect the space, they are doing a disservice to the people who write the checks." GCI

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SUPERINTENDENT PROFILE

Bill Anderson has overseen many changes at Carmel Country Club, including the renovation of both of its courses. Photo: Carmel Country Club



DEEP ROOTS

After 34 years at Carmel Country Club in Charlotte, N.C., **BILL ANDERSON** hasn't found a good reason to leave.

These days, the chances of a golf course superintendent spending his entire career at one facility are about the same as a hole-in-one on a par 4. But at this point in his career, it looks like Bill Anderson might do exactly that. Anderson is the director of greens and grounds at Carmel Country Club in Charlotte, N.C.

In the mid-'60s at age 14, Anderson was caddying a Point O'Woods Country Club in Benton Harbor, Mich. After caddying for several years, he got a job at Point O'Woods working on the maintenance crew for Norm Kramer, who was an up-and-coming future president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. It was then that Anderson became interested in the golf course maintenance business. Anderson says Kramer was a great mentor who taught the crew a lot. Anderson worked on the crew through high school and college. In 1973, after receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in turfgrass science from Michigan State University, Anderson needed a job.

Down in Charlotte, Carmel was looking for an assistant golf course superintendent, so Anderson interviewed and was hired. Two years later, he was promoted to golf course superintendent, and he's been there ever since. Anderson says experience was the key to his quick promotion.

"I had more experience than most guys my age because I had been working at a golf course for so long

and had a couple of years to prove myself," he says. "So the people knew me, but I didn't know how long a rope I had. It could have been a 30-day rope."

Anderson says his 34-year career at Carmel is partly happenstance and partly luck. He says Carmel, which is considered one of the top 10 country clubs in the country, and his career grew on a parallel level throughout the years. During those years, Anderson says he never came that close to leaving the club even though there were other opportunities he could have pursued. And being at the same club for so many years hasn't bored Anderson or made him unhappy.

"It might be my nature," he says. "I've had more than my share of projects and big things happen. We've renovated both golf courses once, and we're getting ready to renovate the first one we renovated again. There's lots of stuff to do."

Not only is Anderson content at Carmel, he's also always enjoyed being involved with the Carolinas GCSA and the GCSAA.

"We have a local organization called the North-South Turfgrass Association," he says. "That's where I started. I moved up through the Carolinas GCSA onto the board of directors and eventually became president in 1992. I like being involved and meeting all the people inside and outside the business. It keeps you engaged."

Anderson has seen many changes during his lengthy career. The biggest one that amazes him every day is standards.

"What used to be good standards are now sub-standard," he says. "The bar has been raised. Some of it is superintendents pushing and pushing, saying, 'I can do more, and I can do it faster.' Some of it is

SUPERINTENDENT PROFILE

equipment allowing us to do it.”

Another significant change Anderson has seen is the increasing number of big budgets that exist now.

But changes didn't occur solely with golf facilities. Golfers have changed too, especially their expectations.

“It has slowly evolved, and you don't even realize when it's happening,” he says. “Their expectations are a little bit more, and someone keeps ramping it up. Now it's to the point where a 10-percent increase in quality costs a 50-percent increase in money. It appears to me that you can't make any big leaps now because of all that attention to detail – all that walk mowing or double mowing, for example.”

Maintenance equipment has improved and helps meet those high expectations, and there's more equipment available for superintendents.

“I hope some of us that have been in the business for awhile appreciate the manufacturers and their equipment,” he says. “No

doubt our jobs are easier. We are asked to do more, but it's certainly easier to get there than it's ever been.”

Even though the job is easier, there still are challenges facing Anderson, and managing and meeting member expectations is his biggest. He sits in committee meetings and has discussions with members to control their expectations.

“I try to control that demand,” he says. “You have to do it on the front end. For example, springs are difficult, and golf courses aren't going to look as good in the spring. You have to take the time to explain that some days you'll have to run trucks on the course to apply fertilizer.”

Like many other country clubs, expectations at Carmel vary because of different cliques and groups. Controlling those expectations is an ongoing fight, Anderson says. Superintendents have to do it every day and week.

“They say dogs have to be fed, so every day you have to feed that dog,” he says. “You have to interact with them, talk to them, explain for the 12th time that it's March and it hasn't been 80 degrees. Some people might get frustrated having to do it over and over again, but it's what we get paid to do.”

Anderson cites two groups at Carmel who have different expectations. One group is called the inner club in which other area clubs get together with their best golfers and play three or four days in a row, and their expectations include fast greens; tight, dry fairways; and perfectly raked bunkers. Another group is more social. It doesn't golf as competitively

as the inner club and isn't as concerned about green speeds.

Some challenges superintendents face are universal. Others are more regional. In the Carolinas, a big challenge for those with bentgrass greens is getting through the summer.

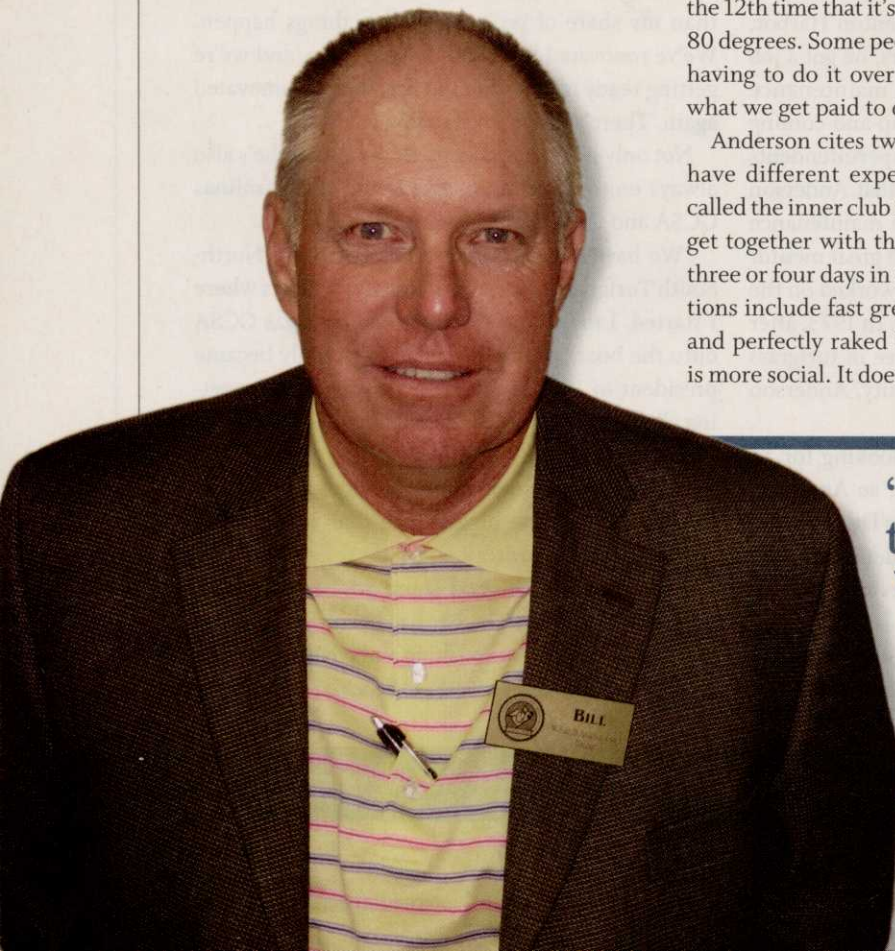
“That's kind of how we're judged,” Anderson says.

One trend often discussed in the transition zone is courses replacing bentgrass greens with ultradwarf Bermudagrass greens because the ultradwarfs have improved. Anderson says there's much more bentgrass in North Carolina down to Charlotte, and Myrtle Beach is still probably more bentgrass than Bermudagrass. However, there's more interest in Bermudagrass.

“That question keeps coming up,” he says. “I don't know if that's going to be answered right away. The basic concern is if we have a cold winter. We don't want to put all of our eggs into this new basket and then be disappointed. I don't know what the best choice is, but it has certainly been debated at every golf course.”

An overriding theme throughout the country is golf course superintendents becoming better stewards of the environment and using fewer inputs on the golf course, whether it be pressure from environmental groups or within the profession itself. Anderson says superintendents, in general, want to be good stewards.

“We try to use as little as we can, but sometimes we don't have a choice,” he says. “We try to use pesticides and fertilizers as safely



“I hope some of us that have been in this business for awhile appreciate the manufacturers and their equipment. No doubt our jobs are easier. We are asked to do more, but it's certainly easier to get there than it's ever been.”