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- Bob Farren, CGCS, Golf Course and Grounds Manager



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pictured from left to right:

Bob Farren, CGCS, Golf Course and Grounds Manager  
Paul Jett, CGCS, Superintendent Pinehurst No. 2

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Cover credit: Vasko Miokovic | iStock.com

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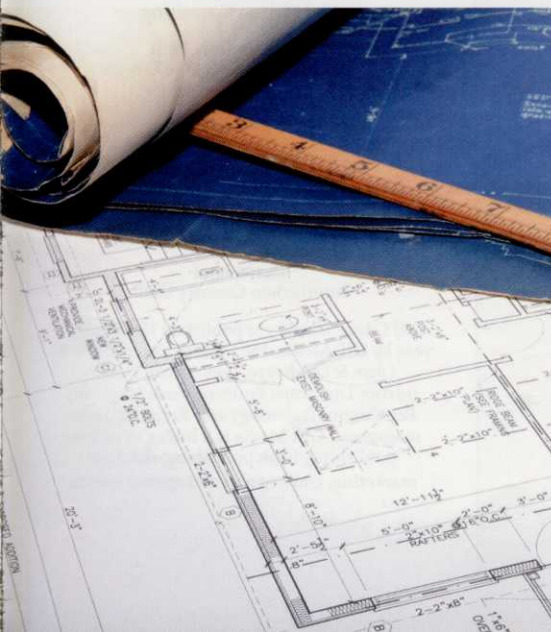
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### HOT IN THE HILLS

Southern Hills superintendent Russ Myers, CGCS, survived the heat during the PGA Championship in August.

### COLLECTIVE EFFORT

A group of Georgia superintendents received greater than 90-percent participation in a program that documents water conservation among golf courses in the state. Learn how they organized the program and download the template they sent to member superintendents to complete.

### ONLINE POLL: WRITTEN AGREEMENTS

As a golf course superintendent, do you work without a written agreement or contract? Visit the GCI home page to vote in this online poll.

### DIGITAL LIBRARY

You can view last year's digital issues of *Golf Course Industry* any time you want on DVD. The digital library contains all the 2006 issues on one disc. The DVD is available at the online bookstore – [www.golfcourseindustry.com/store](http://www.golfcourseindustry.com/store).

### EDITORIAL MISSION STATEMENT:

Golf Course Industry reports on and analyzes the business of maintaining golf courses, as well as the broader business of golf course management. This includes three main areas: agronomy, business management and career development as it relates to golf course superintendents and those managers responsible for maintaining a golf course as an important asset. Golf Course Industry shows superintendents what's possible, helps them understand why it's important and tells them how to take the next step.





**John Walsh**  
Editor

## NO DETAIL TOO SMALL

**F**lash back. I met Rich Gagnon a few years ago at a GCSAA seminar at the Golf Industry Show in Orlando. I asked about him and his career. He told me about his recent arrival at Segregansett Country Club in Taunton, Mass. We also chatted about industry trends including managing a maintenance budget.

These are how solid stories are unearthed and interesting ideas are publicized – that and carousing from bar to bar at the various conferences listening to attendees whisper, “Now, this is off the record of course,” with a pat on the back and a crooked smile. But I digress.

Fast forward. Earlier this month, I received a call from Rich, with whom I hadn’t spoken in quite some time. After recalling our first encounter, he proceeded to tell me about an unusual complaint from some club members. They wanted him to stop using “metal” flagsticks because balls bounce too hard off them and are less likely to fall into the hole. Rich was using three-quarter-inch tapered tournament flagsticks, but members wanted to return to using one-half-inch solid regulation fiberglass flagsticks.

Boy, I thought, how often is this actually happening that members would complain about it? Well, Rich said he thought the same thing when he first heard the complaint but then assured me of the number of consistently good golfers – damn near scratch – who belong to the club.

So, Rich decided to test three different flagsticks from the same manufacturer – a one-half-inch solid regulation fiberglass flagstick, a three-quarter-inch tapered tournament flagstick and a one-inch aluminum/fiberglass tournament flagstick. Well, lo and behold, the complaints were valid, but barely. Based on 5-percent difference in their favor, it appeared that for every 20 chip shots that hit the flagstick dead-on, one more fell into the cup with the one-half-inch flagstick compared to the three-quarter-inch tapered flagstick. It was a big enough difference to better a golfer score, and we all know how important that is. (For those wanting the name of the company who makes the flagsticks Rich tested, e-mail him at [scturf@hotmail.com](mailto:scturf@hotmail.com) because I don’t want to be accused of favoring or promoting one manufacturer over another.)

After hearing about Rich’s flagstick test, I was struck by the amount of time and consideration he put into something that I originally thought was just plain silly. So, in turn, I ask you to think about some of the member complaints at your club or course throughout the years. How many were a complete waste of time? How many actually turned out to be valid?

In this competitive industry, there are many capable superintendents who do above-average jobs. But it’s the little things, such as testing different flagsticks to see how balls react after hitting them, that separate you from the pack. It’s important for you to be receptive to new ideas at whatever stage you’re at in your career.

Now, I don’t know if Rich will get a raise because of this test or be appointed “superintendent for life,” but I bet members at Segregansett will remember Rich’s flagstick test for a while. As a result, I’m sure more of them will realize to what extent he will go to improve their golf experience.

This is one small example of the dedication to a job and a facility that many superintendents exhibit every day. It’s the kind of dedication that earns respect and gratitude from those members or golfers who you thought would never give it to you. **GCI**

We would like to hear from you. Please post any comments you have about this column on our message board, which is at [www.golfcourseindustry.com/messageboard](http://www.golfcourseindustry.com/messageboard).



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Jan. 31 - Feb. 1, 2008  
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Feb. 25 - 28, 2008  
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 Monroeville (Pa.) Expo Mart  
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Feb. 29 - March 4, 2008  
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Contact **Heather Wood**, Web editor, at [hwood@gie.net](mailto:hwood@gie.net),  
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## Flying high: success amid the summer heat



Circling Raven director of golf David Christenson shows off some of the pro shop's wares. Photo: Circling Raven Golf Club

**T**his year, summer weather has presented a challenge for golf course operators in many regions of the country. Rounds generally decline when temperatures rise close to triple digits. Circling Raven Golf Club in Worley, Idaho, was faced with this dilemma. During July, the temperature exceeded 100 degrees F for two weeks straight.

"Every day, play basically just cut off at noon," says David Christenson, director of golf at the 18-hole course, which is adjacent to the Coeur d'Alene Casino Resort Hotel. "We looked at all the cancelled reservations and said if we don't use these existing tee times, we won't come close to meeting budget."

Christenson found ways to make the course enticing, even in the sweltering heat. Those who still weren't buying it were drawn to deals in the clubhouse. At the end of July, the club was ahead of budget, making it 47 straight months the course's revenue has grown, and it was in

a good position for August.

"We're always exceeding the previous months' and year-to-date revenue numbers," Christenson says.

The club kept this streak alive during the heat wave by printing business cards with promotional opportunities to try to soothe the sting the heat caused. Deals included discounts in the pro shop and reduced green fees during certain days and times.

Christenson credits much of Circling Raven's success to its people. The staff, including starters and pro shop attendants, recently participated in a program to brush up on customer service skills. Due in part to some of these practices, the course exceeded its merchandising mark of last July, and by Aug. 1, the course had filled 85 percent of the month's tee times.

Christenson has been in the business since the early 1990s, when he worked at Indian Canyon Golf Course in Spokane, Wash., a 45-minute drive from Circling Raven. The golf industry was more robust at that time.

"There was no marketing," he says. "People just lined up and waited in the parking lot in the dark to play the course."

When he came to help open Circling Raven in 2003, the industry had taken a downward turn.

"Everything changed with recent events, especially Sept. 11," he says.

Those who continue to travel usually don't visit the same spot twice, Christenson says. Therefore, he focuses on attracting the customer base

that's closer to home. Even these golfers aren't coming out in the same numbers they used to, so courses have to be creative to boost the number of repeat visitors and golfers who are new to the game.

"We need to know our customers and tailor services to meet the needs of the people who are coming out," Christenson says. "People have less time, aren't spending as much money and don't want to commit to a five-hour game of golf. It seems like people are more family focused and have different recreational pursuits."

Because of this, golf course marketers have to be more innovative than before to increase the number of rounds. But before a course can cater to its customers, it has to be clear about its own identity.

"The first step is to figure out who you are and what makes you unique," Christenson says. "How are you different from the facility down the road?"

Christenson read dozens of library books about the course's owners, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, before coming up with the Circling Raven name. He named it after one of the tribe's first leaders. His reasoning was that it reflected the tribe and course well and drew attention as well.

Once golfers are drawn to the amenity, the relationship must be maintained to keep a steady customer base, Christenson says.

"For us, the successful operators moving forward, we're beyond the days in which golfers walk through doors and you didn't collect any information," he says. "My approach is almost