



Baria says what always trumps changing jobs is the financial responsibilities and obligations one has to a family, which doesn't allow one to leave a job whenever one wants. Photo Darren Higgins

Method with the help of Joe Harmon of Harmon Turf Services. The project was done out of necessity. (For more, see the article, "The international way," on page 13 of the May 2007 issue.) Reflecting on the project, Baria says it was one of his most successful communication efforts as a superintendent.

"We went from crisis management mode and morphed so quickly into project management mode," he says. "I worked with a great set of club leaders. The golf professional, Mike Welsh, and his staff and their confidence in me never wavered. We kept moving forward, and 12 weeks later, we were playing on 19 new greens."

Baria also implemented innovative strategies with labor, staffing and scheduling at Towson. He had a 26-person staff, and at the height of the program, 17 of those people were part-time retirees.

"It was the way I met a unique challenge, not that it hadn't been tried before, but I probably took it to the next level, where those retirees actually became the core of my crew," he says.

A BUDDING RELATIONSHIP

The birth of Baria's relationship with Valent started with his strategies to reduce *Poa* populations in the bentgrass fairways at Towson. He

was interested in the herbicide Velocity.

"Velocity was the first true herbicide that you could use in season with predictable results," he says. "The only other herbicide that was really available was ethofumesate, which was used at the end of the season. With ethofumesate, the efficacy of the product was pretty much at the mercy of how severe your winter was. The other products used to control *Poa* were growth regulators, which are effective tools to harness levels of infestation, but they're not herbicides."

When Baria arrived at Towson, the mid-Atlantic superintendents welcomed him to the area, enabling him to rapidly interface and exchange ideas with them. One such peer was Dean Graves, CGCS, at the Chevy Chase Club in Maryland. Graves was using Velocity as an experimental product on bentgrass fairways. Baria saw some of the results while Graves was using the product, so he had visual feedback and knew what to expect when he began using the product. Then he started working with the folks at Valent and experimented on his own to see what worked best at Towson. Eventually, Baria began working with the company as a cooperator to test Velocity.

"I was buying and using the product from year one, but I had a knowledge and experience



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base from basically observing Dean, who was gracious enough to let me do so," he says.

CAREER CHANGE

Dealing with members and committees is another aspect of the job Baria learned from his father. Though the GCSAA was helpful, too.

"We are able to take seminars about 'managing up,' which is a buzzword about educating the people and decision-makers above us," he says. "I tried to use all the resources at my disposal to make sure I continued to mature."

While "managing up," Baria was effective with certain people and less effective with others.

"That doesn't mean we shouldn't try to work harder when we see the feedback isn't what we hoped it would be," he says. "You have to learn to work with all types of people throughout various levels of the club, some more teachable and manageable than others. In all candor, I

grew a bit frustrated with my ineffectiveness and as a result became interested in opportunities with Valent."

In the spring of 2007, Baria asked himself how much longer he was going to be a golf course superintendent.

"I'd been going to a couple of retirement parties for superintendents," he says. "They were guys much like me who changed gears and went other ways. I was put on the spot by Rhys Arthur, GCGS. (He ran a 36-hole facility named Indian Spring in Rockville, Md. Course owners sold the land for development, and that was when he exited the business.) As I was exiting one of those get-togethers, he asked how long was it going to be before I hung it up. I said I didn't think I was finished yet. He looked me dead in the eye and said, 'You have no idea how much pressure you're under.' I said, 'I've got some idea.' He told me I'd like the sales side of the

business, and that put an indelible image in my brain. It caused me to think about it and have conversations with my wife, Theresa."

After the encounter with Arthur, Baria formulated an exit strategy from Towson, but he thought he wasn't finished growing grass just yet. At the same time, he was working closely with Valent, testing and using more of the company's new pesticides regularly. Jerry Bunting, a territory manager, called Baria to let him know the company was in need of more managers.

"I must admit, I wasn't initially attracted to the day-to-day calling on end-users, but the educational aspect of working with distributors was attractive," he says. "I probably wasn't going to see another opportunity like this in a long while."

Baria didn't openly tell Bunting he was looking for a career change, but he figured Bunting picked up on some of the frustration he was



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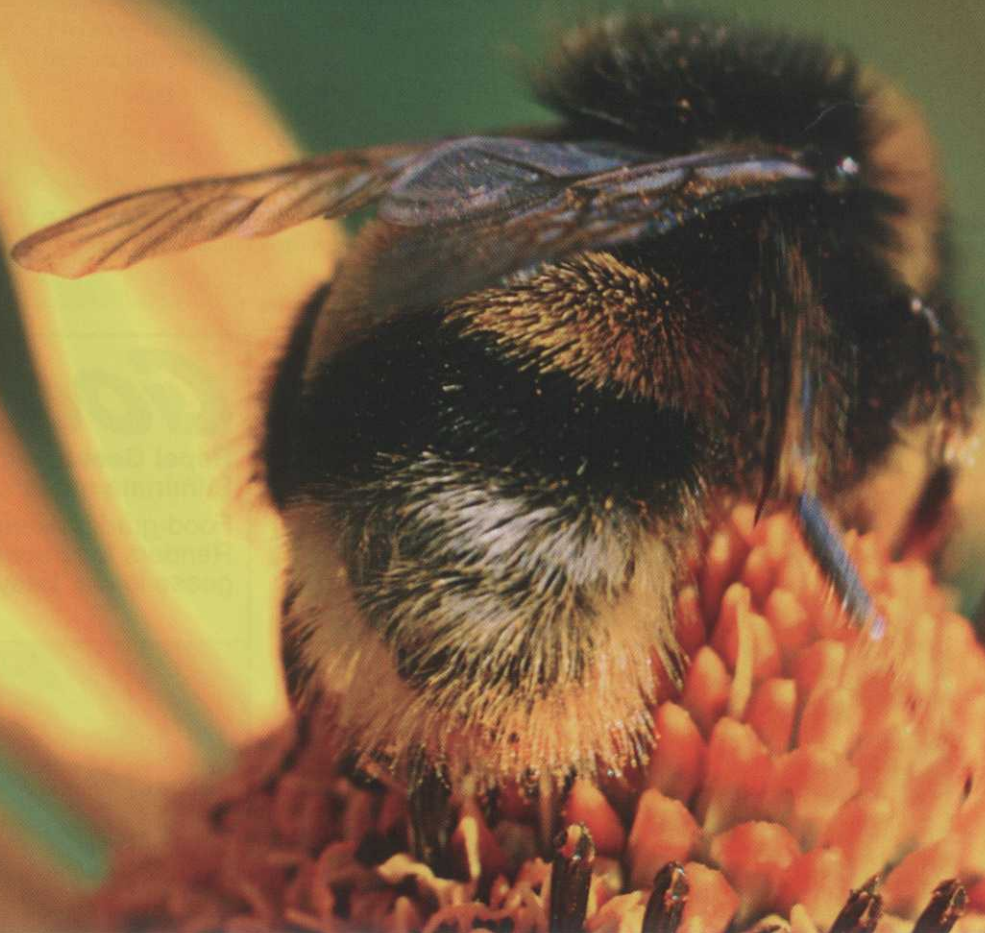


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dealing with: people on the green committee and underfunded expectations.

But shortly before Baria was about to make his move to Valent, he was fired from Towson.

"The club was unhappy with me," he says. "As a superintendent, you have a shelf life at a club. Relationships grow old and stale. With the rotations of green committee members and boards, you deal with people in charge you're not effective with."

"But what always trumps changing jobs is your financial responsibilities and obligations to your family, which doesn't allow you to just leave a job whenever you want," he adds. "You often have to put up with the low satisfaction of a job for a while."

Every job contract signed by a superintendent is signed under duress, Baria says. That's because if a superintendent doesn't sign a contract, he's on the sideline without income or a job, and

getting back in to the game from the sideline isn't a good position to be in.

"I had a contract with Towson, and there was a clause in it that stated either party can terminate it in 30 days at any time," he says. "But if you don't sign the contract, there are plenty of other superintendents or assistants right behind you who will sign it."

Before taking the Valent job, Baria consulted with Mark Merrick, CGCS, who formerly worked at The Elkridge Club in Baltimore. Merrick had made a similar move to Syngenta.

"I talked to him about the transition and conferred with him, which reinforced that I was making the right decision," Baria says.

MEETING NEEDS

Baria's first order of business with Valent was attending an annual sales meeting. Right away he could tell his new career in sales was going to

be far different from life as a superintendent.

"With the brainpower in the room – among the sales, field research, development, marketing and business administration teams – I quickly realized one of the challenges of my new job wasn't going to be the traditional 'managing up' I had done in previous positions but learning from my new resource group and turning their wealth of knowledge and experiences into my success."

Baria went through extensive presentation training for use at future sales meetings, as well as new employee, sales and technical training.

"Whether it's setting up a new distributor, fielding technical questions, sharing my experiences with superintendents or giving a training seminar to a distribution sales team, I'm thoroughly enjoying my new responsibilities," Baria says. "We're in the people business. Sales happen when you take care of people by meeting their needs." **GCI**

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TRY TO ACHIEVE *perfection*

Drainage is the key to maintaining consistent, playable bunkers.

By John Torsiello

Superintendents would like to hear golfers in the 19th hole chatting about the fine conditions of greens, fairways and tees. But when the discussion turns to bunkers, it's usually time to start worrying.

Like it or not, player expectations of bunker conditions might even exceed those demanded of greens – despite the fact that when a ball is hit into the sand it's supposed to be a penalty. That's why it's paramount for superintendents to maintain bunkers properly, at times renovating them, even though doing so is costly and time consuming.

"I get more complaints about bunkers than I do anything else," says Brad Sparta, golf course superintendent at Ballyowen Golf Club in Hamburg, N.J. "People tend to forget that a bunker is a hazard. Unless bunkers are maintained perfectly, you're going to get complaints. And even if they're maintained perfectly in your eyes, you're still going to get complaints."

Translation: It's a no-win situation.

"I say it tongue in cheek, but it's true: Taking care of your bunkers is like painting the Golden Gate Bridge," says Les Rutan, golf course superintendent at Crystal Tree Country Club in Orland



Bunkers are susceptible to contamination and heavy rainfall because they're often below the playing surface and sloped. Photo: BunkerBlaster

BUNKER MANAGEMENT

A bunker renovation at Guyan Golf and Country Club solved drainage and contamination problems. Photo: Guyan Golf and Country Club



Park, Ill. "Once you get done, you start all over again."

Paul Miller, CGCS, at Nashawtuc Country Club in Concord, Mass., site of the Bank of America Championship Champions Tour event, says the USGA defines a bunker as a hole in the ground, usually filled with sand, that serves as a penalty.

"It's very vague," Miller says. "But what we've determined in the industry from our members and the pros is that bunkers should receive almost as much, if not more, consideration than greens. It sounds crazy, but that's the way it is."

Miller is developing a master plan for Nashawtuc's renovation that will include considerable bunker work, which will take up 30 percent to 40 percent of a several-million-dollar price tag.

One of the difficulties of bunker management is the physical characteristics of the hazards. Because they're often below the playing surface and sloped as much as 30 degrees, bunkers are susceptible to contamination and damage from heavy rainfall and strong winds. Crews pumping water out of, and raking sand back into the face of, bunkers is a scene that brings

to mind the ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus, who was sentenced to rolling a boulder up a hill only to have it tumble down the other side, forcing him to begin the task all over again.

Another complicating aspect of bunker management is that golfers have different preferences. Skilled players usually like a firmer sand for better shot control, while less accomplished golfers prefer a softer sand that allows them to pick out the ball with greater ease.

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