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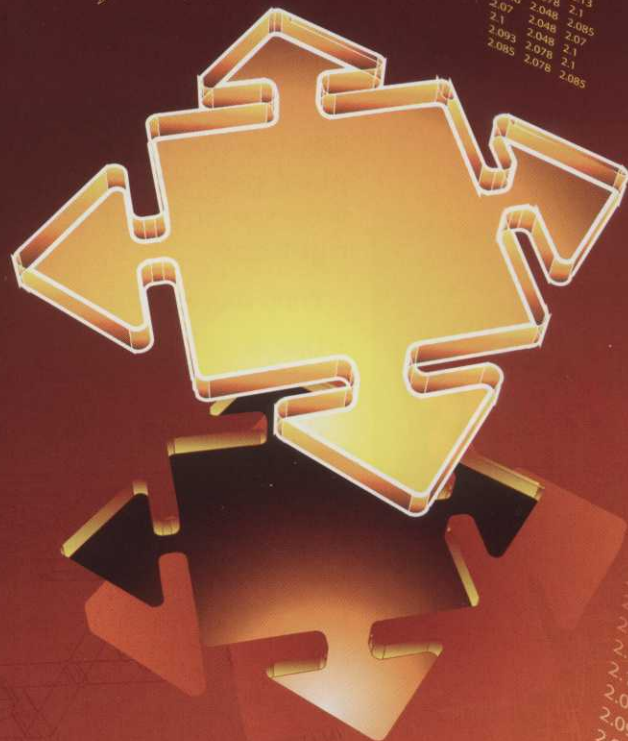


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Rethink Tomorrow



# Closing the KNOWLEDGE GAP

A detailed analysis pinpoints critical areas of improvement

By Michael Coleman

**O**n the surface, a subpar golf course will look pretty sometimes. But under stress, poor soil and drainage, and other fundamental flaws will always be evident. Similarly, golf course superintendents who polish the skills they need to improve can end up having a few more areas of expertise. By doing so, they become more marketable and valuable in the eyes of owners.

The GCSAA's Professional Development Resource ([www.gcsaa.org/pdr](http://www.gcsaa.org/pdr)) helps superintendents learn to improve those skills. The primary goal of the PDR tool is to help superintendents accurately assess their skills, determine what improvements they need and pinpoint educational opportunities to address them. The site makes it simple. Through a series of yes/no questions answered in a self-assessment, the program highlights knowledge gaps and recommends association training opportunities to help close those gaps. The analysis compares superintendents' skills with the base skills for a Class A and certified member.

Hannes Combest, director of educational programs at the GCSAA, leads the

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John Magnuson, CGCS: Self assessments lead to gap analyses, which lead to strengthening competencies. Photo: John Magnuson

Bruce Constable, CGCS, likes the development action plan the GCSAA's PDR tool creates. Photo: GCSAA

strategic push to improve members' skills. She says it took five years to develop the PDR, which was introduced in 2001 to assist superintendents by outlining key areas of expertise, known as competencies on the education front. The core competencies developed from the original skills GCSAA members believed strong superintendents should have. Those skills were defined in the PDR.

Aided by the skills gap analysis, Shawn Sheridan earned his certification within the past year. A GCSAA member for 19 years, Sheridan originally earned a degree in turfgrass management from The Ohio State University. He likes how the analysis helped focus his career.

"The process made me think hard about my skills and career," says the superintendent of Diamondback Golf Club in Haines City, Fla. "I felt I needed to answer honestly to get an accurate assessment of my abilities and to highlight areas that needed improvement."

The idea behind the skills-gap analysis is to shrink a superintendent's knowledge gap.

"It pointed out areas where I needed more depth," says Sheridan, who was impressed with the accuracy of the feedback in terms of the knowledge depth in each category.

Bruce Constable, CGCS, at Woodside Golf

Club in Airdrie, Alberta, Canada, likes the development action plan the PDR tool creates.

"The biggest benefit of using the Professional Development Resource is that you get to develop a plan that will help you to improve your skills in certain areas," Constable says.

The development action plan helps superintendents chart a course of learning through their weaker areas to progress toward certification. Sheridan believes the approach helps boost one's career.

"We need to take the time to evaluate ourselves, seek out our weaknesses, address them and become more valuable to our current or future employers, which I feel is the biggest benefit of the system," he says.

Strong, successful facilities are usually led by superintendents who are capable of identifying flaws – even in their own knowledge base.

"If you answer the self assessment questions honestly, you'll get an accurate gap analysis that will help lead you down a good study path," says John Magnuson, CGCS, at Murphy Creek Golf Course in Aurora, Colo. "The development action plan allows you to set your own practical plan for completing the learning phase of competencies that showed weak in the gap analysis."

Whether it's information about ornamentals

or EPA regulations, a pertinent course will be recommended to address the need.

"Financial management was one area in which I needed to make improvements, and the online course 'Developing Financial Savvy in the Golf Business' was valuable to me in that regard," Constable says. "It was narrated by Cleve Cleveland, CGCS, who made the material quite interesting."

Sheridan says his experience with the tool illuminated a need to learn more about governmental issues and record-keeping.

#### BENEFITING OWNERS

Fewer weaknesses mean better decision-making, better courses and happier owners – all good things for a superintendent's career. Henry DeLozier agrees wholeheartedly. As the vice president of golf for Pulte Homes, DeLozier believes the company's 20 golf properties benefit from the learning the GCSAA fosters among superintendents.

"I'm really a big fan of what the GCSAA is doing to help grow the intellectual capability of the golf course superintendent," he says. "The GCSAA seems to have its finger on the pulse of what golf course owners and operators need."

DeLozier refers to a symposium at this year's

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Golf Industry Show in Anaheim, Calif., as proof. The superintendents who used the PDR were better informed and knew what material owners were interested in, he says.

It's important for superintendents to remain current with the site's new information, says DeLozier, who believes the site provides an invitation for owners and superintendents to discuss key issues.

"It's a useful tool for owners and superintendents to find themselves working toward a common understanding," he says. "A lot of owners, especially those that are involved in the decision-making processes at their golf properties, find value in discussing topics covered on the site."

As a person responsible for leveraging golf properties to bring higher value to homeowners in a golf community – there are 30 new ones being planned – DeLozier understands the need for better communication with superintendents about many topics.

"Any time that we go on site together, it's stimulation for discussion," he says. "It fosters good, open discussion about strategic issues."

DeLozier recalls a situation in which a discussion about equipment replacement plans was sparked by something on the Web site.

"Everyone thought they were in agreement when it came to mower obsolescence, but after some talk about specifics and how each person

defined the term 'obsolete,' everyone had better knowledge of the others' perspectives," he says.

A discussion like that can help owners and superintendents understand each other better, DeLozier says. The Web site can help owners and even long-time superintendents come together in their approach on numerous topics.

While the tools on the Web site aren't marketed to owners, they still increase value for owners when superintendents use them, Combest says.

"It's a tool designed to help people map out programs to address their weaknesses and perform more successfully," she says.

Because superintendents appreciate their contribution to the success of a course as a business, helping owners understand what the superintendent adds to the business equation should be part of every member's mind-set, Combest says.

"It's been an education process on our part to try to help people understand that relating the skills and knowledge they have to the success of the facility is important," she says.

#### MORE USAGE

Because the PDR tool has the long-standing competencies at its foundation, it continues to strengthen the profession, Combest says.

"It's not just the PDR, it's having the competencies, and what that has done for this profession is make it a profession," she says. "It has

defined it."

Still, Combest hopes more members will use the tool.

"The PDR isn't used extensively, and that's one of the things we're trying to change," Combest says. "One of the most likely reasons it isn't used more, some superintendents say, is the time required to complete it and the recommended training."

One longtime professional, Terry Rodenberg, superintendent at St. Andrew's Golf Club in Overland Park, Kan., says he just wouldn't have enough time in the day to complete his work and go through the PDR and all the training needed to become certified. He acknowledges there's little reason at the upscale municipal course he works at to spend a lot of his own time on training for certification.

"I'm in my 25th year with my employer," Rodenberg says. "There's not an incentive to be certified."

Rodenberg says the city provides a lot of training opportunities for him and that keeps him current with the field.

Still, Combest encourages members to review the PDR analysis first, before beginning courses for the certification exam. She also notes that key information presented in training is marked as crucial for the certification exam.

"What we've realized is that we need to highlight that this is something you need to know for certification," she says.

Sheridan believes all facets of responsibility are represented in the analysis and must be cultivated to succeed in one's career.

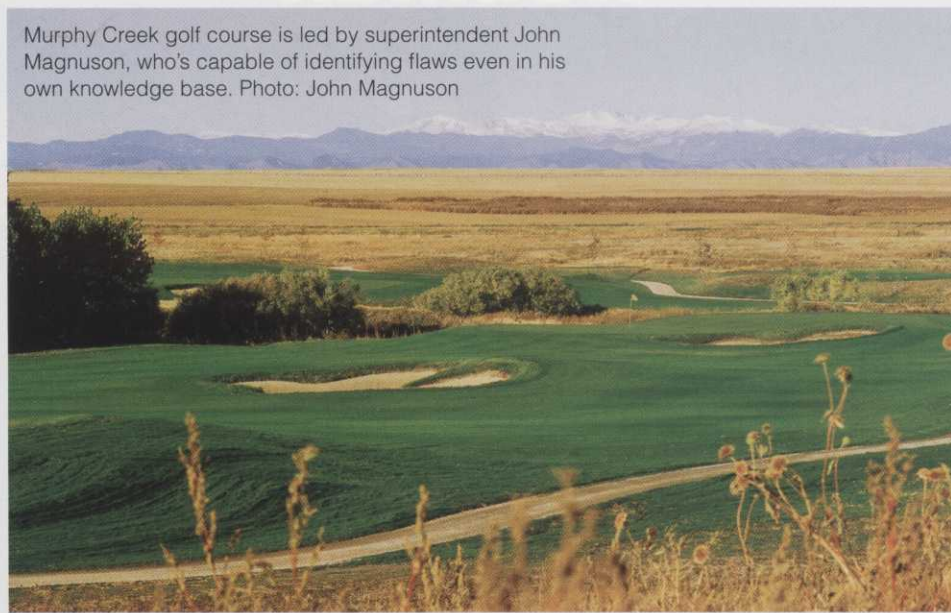
"I don't know everything, but this process has indicated areas that, to be the best I can be as a CGCS, need to be addressed and how to address them," he says.

Even after a superintendent reaches the pinnacle of becoming certified, learning doesn't stop. With all the changes in regulations and technology, it's too easy for superintendents to fall behind if they don't focus on keeping pace with them.

"I can continue to use my development action plan to plot the course for my future educational activities," Constable says. "I'm a lifelong learner and will continue to build my skill set using the resources the GCSAA has to offer." **GCI**



Combest



Murphy Creek golf course is led by superintendent John Magnuson, who's capable of identifying flaws even in his own knowledge base. Photo: John Magnuson

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# THE FRUITS OF *philanthropy*

A foundation funds improvements of a 40-year-old muni course

When the Moody Foundation, a philanthropic organization, became aware the city of Galveston had a municipal course it couldn't afford to maintain – and planned to bid a management contract publicly – the foundation tossed its hat in the ring, eventually winning the bid. Moody Gardens, which is a destination resort for the Houston market and the name of a company that operates the associated buildings, hotels and a convention center for the city of Galveston, agreed to manage the course and invest the money needed to make it a premier public facility. It was a deal city leaders couldn't pass up.

"It was basically a gift from the Moody Foundation to the people of Galveston and the state of Texas," says Buddy Herz, general counsel for the Moody Foundation and chairman of the Moody Gardens Golf Committee.

*By Peter Blais*

*Photos by carltonwade.com*

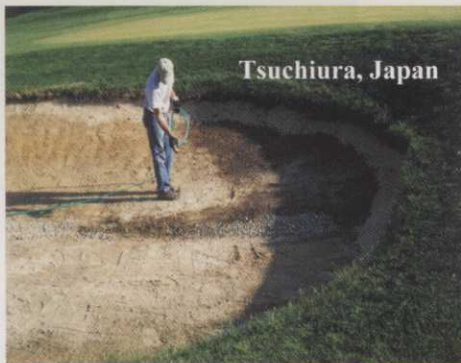


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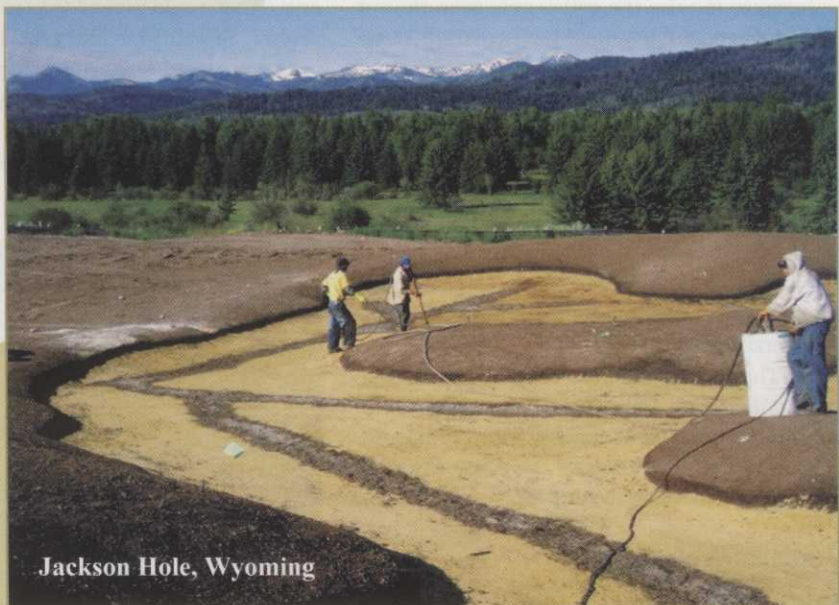
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*Arrowhead Country Club*

*Myrtle Beach, South Carolina June 2007*



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The Moody Foundation provided funding for the \$450-million Moody Gardens complex, which consists of an indoor aquarium, rain forest, space museum, white-sand beach, and a 425-room hotel and convention center that seats as many as 8,000 people within the 65,000-square-foot show center. Moody Gardens manages those facilities for the city without compensation and underwrites any deficits.

The foundation, the city of Galveston and Jacobsen Hardy Golf Course Design worked together to raise the golf course from the sea floor, literally. Galveston Municipal Golf Course – which has been renamed Moody Gardens Golf Course in recognition of the Moody Foundation’s funding of the \$15.5-million renovation project – is scheduled to reopen in June.

Jacobsen Hardy was the logical choice to renovate the existing 40-year-old course given the Houston-based design firm’s experience at nearby Galveston Country Club, of which Herz is a member, where it undertook a renovation several years ago.

“The firm is familiar with the challenges of building on Galveston Island, particularly involving the uses of effluent water, complying with the requirements of the Army Corps of Engineers and wetlands issues,” Herz says.

#### RESHAPING THE TERRAIN

What made the golf course potentially dramatic also is what made it difficult to rebuild. Located adjacent to the Gulf of Mexico and bisected by Sydnor Bayou, major tidal events would submerge portions of the course occasionally. Bermudagrass and saltwater were a poor mix. Turfgrass was slow to recover following coastal flooding, and the build-up of salts in the soil profile made it difficult to maintain a quality playing surface.

The No. 1 challenge, therefore, was reshaping the terrain and building the ground up and out of tidal areas where seawater occasionally inundated the land. Jacobsen Hardy’s grading and shaping plans concentrated on elevating those areas.

“We developed a balanced cut-and-fill plan that involved 175,000 cubic yards of dirt,” says Rex VanHoose, senior v.p. and managing architect of Jacobsen Hardy. “There was a tremendous amount of water already on the site. That presented a host of playability issues.

“We found an adjacent area and proposed

digging a new lake, providing us with significant amounts of fill,” he adds. “The landscape contractor would then dig deeper into a couple of existing lakes to acquire more dirt.”

Senior project executive Bob Walcott estimated his construction firm, Gilbane Building Co., unearthed 200,000 to 250,000 yards of dirt.

While acknowledging the ingenious nature of the lake excavations, Jim Hardy, principal of Jacobsen Hardy, found the humor in it.

“Off-site dirt sells for \$14 a cubic yard,” he says. “That would have added a major cost to the project. So we had to find a dirt fairy on site.”

The proposed finished product would be an optical illusion of sorts, Herz says. The greens would appear to be lowered, but in reality, the plan was to raise the entire course an additional two to five feet above the ocean.

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#### A CHANGED LAYOUT

With the elevation problem solved, the Jacobsen Hardy team was able to dive into the actual design. Laid out in the 1960s, the existing design

#### AT A GLANCE

##### Moody Gardens Golf Course

**Location:** Galveston, Texas

**Web site:** [www.moodygardensgolf.com](http://www.moodygardensgolf.com)

**Type of project:** Renovation

**Cost:** \$10 million

**Construction started:** March 2007

**Construction completed:** October 2007

**Architecture firm:** Jacobsen Hardy Golf

**Course Design**

**Builder:** Gilbane Building Co.

**Golf course superintendent:** Steve Yarotsky

**Owner:** City of Galveston

