

In terms of mentoring, I try to spend time with the students every Thursday. Primarily, I look for pride in their work, neatness and whether they're enjoying themselves. I challenge them with "story problems" to see how good they are at problem solving. They don't teach those skills much in school these days, and I don't want any kid who leaves here to not have those skills. Most of them do, some don't.

What's the current state of golf in Wisconsin?

I see the same thing here as everywhere else. There are more golf holes than golfers. We're overbuilt. We need more players and members across the board. Some storied old clubs now have initiation fees of \$1,000. Even I could afford to join. There was a lot of extravagance in golf, and that's part of what got us in trouble. Why were we mowing fairways seven days a week? We did it because we could, when things were fat and happy.

What part of your career has been most rewarding?

My wife says, "He never missed a paycheck." I say I never got fired or had to scramble to support my family. That's part of my farm background. If you talk in terms of the industry, I'm proud of my contributions to my alma mater. I owed it a lot and tried to give back. Many of our members are on the faculty, so that sort of participation was well received. The Wisconsin GCSA and the Wisconsin Turfgrass Foundation are helping pay salaries and benefits for university positions that wouldn't exist otherwise. The O.J. Noer Turfgrass Research and Education Facility has one of the best research laboratories in the country. I'm proud to be one of the strongest advocates for the golf course superintendent in Wisconsin.

What's the secret to staying at one club for so long?

Here's the short list:

- Use common sense. Some people don't.
- Work hard all the time, every day. People notice it and respect it.
- Set your ego aside. Everyone has a boss, and you're an employee. Do what you're told.
- Be honest to the extreme with your employers, employees, regulators, etc. Don't blow smoke.
- Set high goals. If you aim high and don't quite make it, you're still good.
- Listen. Understand what people are complaining about.
- Do no harm. It's like being a doctor and following the Hippocratic Oath.
- Remember nothing great was ever accomplished without enthusiasm. When I was growing up, my dad made sure the grass was always trimmed around the barn, the tractors were waxed, and things were neat. He wanted to create a good first impression.
- Look forward, not backward. If you try to live on what you did last year, you're screwed.
- Fix stuff now. Don't wait.
- Cultivate a good relationship with the pro and general manager. It's easy to tell them to go fly a kite, but don't succumb to that temptation.
- If you're going to last, you have to keep up with education. I've been to 36 national conferences in a row, and that has helped me tremendously.



No more guesswork.

Irrigating fairways, greens and tee boxes requires real intelligence and the world's most advanced soil moisture technology.

GolfLinx water management systems gives you the tools to understand the turf environment right through the soil profile.

No other soil moisture probe provides data at every 2 inch increment to a depth of 12 inches. GolfLinx gives you control to promote healthy turf while reducing water and energy consumption.

Competition level golf courses use GolfLinx to deliver these benefits while improving playability and fine tuning greens.

A modular, no maintenance design and an open and common platform enables plug and play connectivity. A growing distributor network means there are GolfLinx dealers located across the United States – and support is just a phone call away.

GolfLinx – Intelligence in every drop

For more information go to www.golflinx.net or call (714) 966 1975

golfLinx
Innovative turf water management

080501

What do you think about the current state of the GCSAA?

In my career, I've always been a Wisconsin chapter guy. That's where my focus and energy has always been. The only thing that bothered me was the mandate for changes to chapter affiliation a few years back. I hated it. It's like the federal government bullying states around. That said, the GCSAA offers great education and a great show. We made great strides under Steve Mona. He was a great guy. I met Mark Woodward once, and he seems OK.

What's your advice for students or young folks interested in a career in the profession these days?

No superintendent has ever had enough education. Get some experience on the course first before committing to the career – and I mean more than a season or two. Understand the impact the job is going to have on your family. It's

“Get some experience on the course first before committing to the career – and I mean more than a season or two.”

- MONROE MILLER

not an easy job, but anything that's worthwhile isn't easy. It's all about turning out a tremendous product. You get instant feedback and instant rewards. It's a great career, but it will sap a lot of your energy.

What happens come Jan. 1, 2009, when you suddenly wake up unemployed?

Blackhawk will be in the good hands of Chad Grimm. He's been with me 12 years and has been my assistant for the past nine. His successor as assistant is already here as well. They're both Wisconsin kids with farm backgrounds and solid university education, so that makes me feel

great about handing things off.

As far as retirement, I have a notebook of things I'm going to do. It's my "bucket list." There are a bunch of places I want to go wall-eye fishing. I'm definitely going to St. Andrews to see and enjoy the Old Course. Cheryl and I will travel around and make up for some of the lost time.

Final thoughts?

After 40 years, I can say with authority golf course management is the most continuously interesting work in the world. And it definitely beats the hell out of milking cows! GCI

IMPRESSIVE & AFFORDABLE!

WHAT SUPERINTENDENTS HAVE TO SAY...

Economical...

"Direct from the manufacturer meant we got the highest quality at the lowest price!"

Tim Muys - GCS
Pipers Heath Golf Links • Milton ON

People will notice...

"Our customers immediately noticed the improvements...and loved it!"

Jim Phelps - GCS
Gateway Golf & Country Club
Fort Myers FL

Samples...

"TTGCS provided virtual samples of our markers... upon request they made our Mira Vista wedges in each color for our greens committee"

Stephen Byrne - GCS
Mira Vista Golf & C.C. • El Cerrito CA



Nothing lasts like granite.



TTG Custom Signage, industry price leader, manufacturer, has committed to making a \$5 donation to your local Golf Association for every marker sold. "Growing the Game", designed to help support on-going programs that ensure the continued growth of golf within your region.

THINKING OF CHANGING YOUR TEE MARKERS? NOW IS A GOOD TIME!

CUSTOM SANDBLASTED GRANITE TEE MARKERS STARTING AT:

\$27.95



SANDBLASTED CUSTOM GRANITE YARDAGE MARKERS STARTING AT:

\$25.95



Medallions sold separately.

LARGE FORMAT FAIRWAY YARDAGE MARKERS

\$1,499.95*



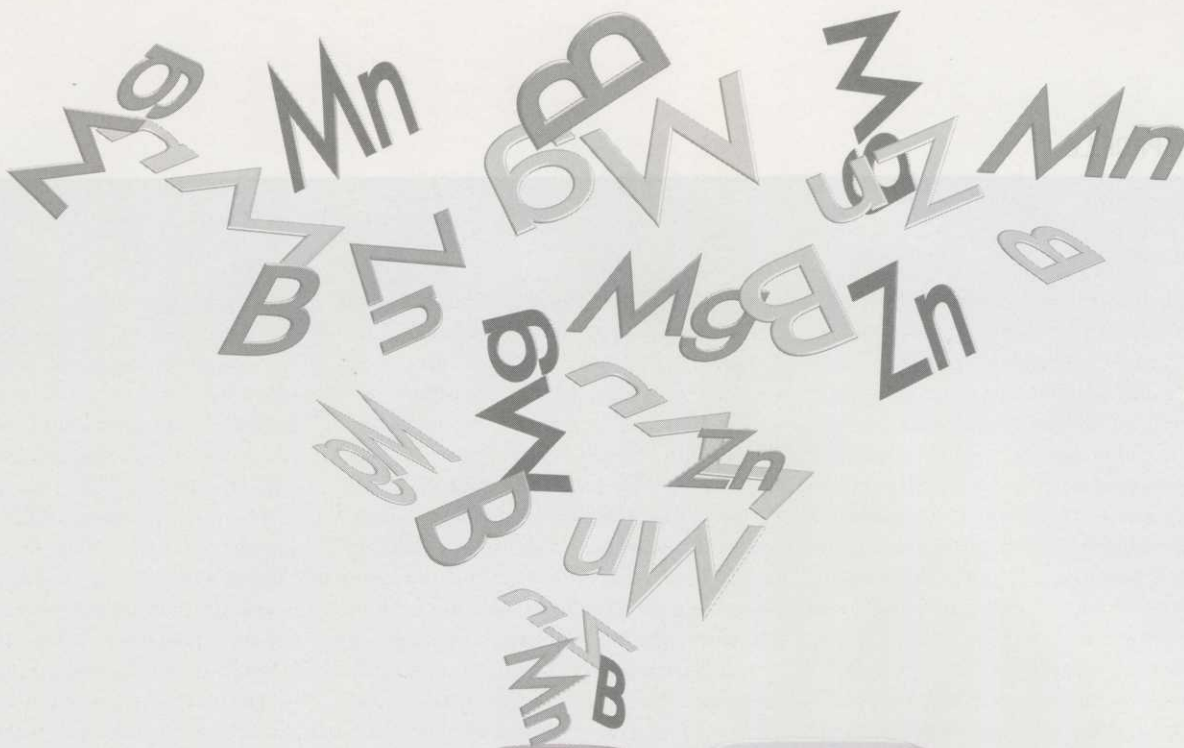
*Offer includes: 42 large plates. Custom design with logo available.

Call TTGCS today...

and get a virtual sample proof at no charge!



1-800-360-9959 • www.ttgcs.com



Green it up fast with *Original* **Ferromec**
 Keep it green with **Ferromec Micros**

pbigordon.com/ferromecmicros

- FULLY CHELATED IRON FORMULATION
- NON-STAINING
- TANK-MIX COMPATIBLE
- SUSTAINED AGRONOMIC BENEFITS
- HELPS CORRECT CHLOROSIS FROM MICRONUTRIENT DEFICIENCIES

Always read and follow label directions
 Ferromec® is a registered trademark of PBI/Gordon Corporation
 800-821-7925 | pbigordon.com

An Employee-Owned Company

www.golfcourseindustry.com/readerservice - #25

At 34, Jon Lobenstine has climbed the career ladder more quickly than most. As director of agronomy for the Montgomery County Revenue Authority in Maryland, he's refining the image of the public golf course. Lobenstine, who has about three years of experience as a golf course superintendent, oversees nine municipal golf courses and is making his mark in the golf course management profession.

MOVIN' ON UP

After starting his career as a grounds crew member and then second assistant at the Chevy Chase Club in Maryland for four years – under the tutelage of Dean Graves, CGCS – Lobenstine was hired as an assistant at Falls Road Golf Course in Potomac, Md., in 2003. When he arrived at Falls Road, a course renovation project was half complete. Lobenstine learned a lot from superintendent Bryan Bupp, who oversaw the renovation, which included rebuilding and tripling the number of bunkers, tripling the square footage of tees and rerouting five holes. Lobenstine was getting the construction experience he wanted. The MCRA, which operated five golf courses, invested more than a million dollars into the clubhouse before the course renovation, which was funded through a multimillion dollar bond. The MCRA is self supporting and receives no funding from the country government.

In the spring of 2006, the MCRA was approached by another agency, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, which used to operate four muni golf courses in the county. The M-NCPPC was losing money – close to a million dollars a year on the golf courses – and went to the board of the MCRA

to ask for help. The MCRA's staff took over the management of M-NCPPC courses, still owned by the M-NCPPC, in April 2006 and finalized a long-term agreement in November 2006.

Lobenstine was promoted to superintendent after two years at Falls Road, when Bryan Bupp left for Bretton Woods in Germantown, Md. Then, in October 2006, Lobenstine was promoted to become the first director of agronomy for the MCRA. In addition to his superintendent responsibilities at Falls Road, Lobenstine oversees all superintendents at the other eight facilities.

When Lobenstine was hired at Falls Road, he had no idea the director of agronomy position was in his future. The position was created by Keith Miller, the executive director of the MCRA who came from Arnold Palmer Golf shortly after it began to lease the four park golf courses.

"Keith came to visit Falls Road, which generates almost 60,000 rounds a year, and saw the

condition of the greens," Lobenstine says. "He was very impressed and opened the director of agronomy opportunity to all MCRA golf course superintendents as part of his focus to improve course conditions at all nine of our properties. Ultimately, three of us were interested, and I was chosen."

Miller says it was impossible to have all the superintendents and golf pros reporting to him. The superintendents needed another support position. He considered looking outside the operation but felt it was important and possible for someone within the organization to step up.

"He was aggressive with his agronomic practices, such as aerification and topdressing," Miller says about Lobenstine. "I liked the way his employees acted. His property was the busiest and the best conditioned of all our courses. His focus on safety was impeccable. These are items all superintendents intend to do, but he had a

Making His Mark

Jon Lobenstine changes the face of municipal courses in Maryland

by John Walsh

Jon Lobenstine and his dog Poa oversee nine municipal golf courses run by the Montgomery County Revenue Authority. Photo: Mike Olliver



focus on safety and was still getting everything done. It all added up to his ability to manage.”

TRANSITION TIME

It's rare for someone to move from a job at high-end private club to a job at a public golf course, and it even can be looked down upon, Lobenstine says. But he saw an opportunity to implement new ideas. He also wants to defy the stereotypical image of public courses: inefficient processes and mediocre conditions. He wants to change that perception.

“I felt I could bring a lot of that refinement from the private club to the public golf course,” he says. “We've done that. My crew wears collared shirts. I'm trying to make them feel like professionals and show them new ways to do jobs. Private club experience prepared me to raise the bar at a public golf course fairly easily.”

Adding director of agronomy to his title required Lobenstine to put the right support team in place at Falls Road.

“The support of good assistants and a good mechanic can give you great peace of mind,” he says. “My current responsibilities take me away from the golf course part of every day at the least. I need to have security here. It has taken me a few years to find the right assistants. I have a very qualified team in place, so I don't have to worry about much when I leave the property. I know things are taken care of. I set the table

each morning, and we plan our schedule days in advance. Of course situations come up and we do a good job changing gears when necessary, but having a good game plan in advance makes us successful.”

When Lobenstine transitioned to director of agronomy, he also went from peer to management among his eight fellow superintendents.

“There's a certain level of tension that comes with that move,” he says. “When I was at Chevy Chase, I was promoted to second assistant from the grounds crew. All of a sudden one day, I was their boss. Some people were bitter about it because they felt they should've gotten the job. In the case of the superintendents, it was much easier because I had a group of professionals who were happy for me. I've had the complete support of all of these guys as we work together to put new programs in place to improve our golf courses.”

Another challenge for Lobenstine has been time management.

“There are only so many hours of daylight, and I've got to manage one golf course and oversee the other courses' operations,” he says. “That's something I'm still working on.”

Delegation is part of Lobenstine's difficulty with time management. He's delegating much more now to his assistants, who are always willing to help.

“But I still feel like there are times when I have

to do certain things myself,” he says.

As director of agronomy, Lobenstine oversees the operations of nine courses, developing purchasing programs that will save money by reducing the number of vendors he deals with. He also makes sure the cultural, equipment maintenance and safety programs are in line, and is responsible for signing off on the hiring and firing of all of the employees that work for the golf courses.

“I'm making sure we're set up for success,” he says. “I'm trying to get the tools that provide the support we need to do the job properly.”

Lobenstine created an equipment program director position – one mechanic who oversees all other mechanics at the courses. Stanley Kapulka, the mechanic at Falls Road, is responsible for overseeing a new preventive maintenance program he developed. He works with the other mechanics to lengthen equipment life and maintain equipment records.

Lobenstine also oversees capital projects, approves and monitors golf course budgets and assists development of the MCRA's long-term planning strategies.

So far, Miller has been more than happy with Lobenstine's job performance.

“I just can't say enough about his progression,” he says. “It's beyond my expectations. His vision is getting through to all our courses. He's an incredible manager. His prioritizing, communication and organization skills are incredible.”

[Where it all started]

In December 1999, Jon Lobenstine started his turfgrass career on the grounds crew at the Chevy Chase Club in Maryland, working for Dean Graves, CGCS. Now, Lobenstine is the director of agronomy for the Montgomery County Revenue Authority in Maryland.

“He's a great motivator,” Lobenstine says about Graves. “He made me want to get into this industry, and I saw how enjoyable and fun it can be. He felt it was worth spending time to help me develop into a turf professional.”

About a year after Lobenstine started at Chevy Chase, he was promoted to second assistant superintendent. About that time, Lobenstine enrolled in online classes at Penn State University. He took one class at a time, applying each class to the golf course and doing as much as possible during the seasons. He completed the two-year program while at Chevy Chase.

“I continued to give him more responsibilities, and he was happy no matter what he did,” Graves says about Lobenstine, who speaks fluent Spanish. “I'd keep challenging him, and he'd keep rising to the occasion.”

As a second assistant, Lobenstine's primary responsibilities were irrigation and developing and overseeing a safety program, which he touts as one of his prouder moments at the club.

“There were many employees and quite a few minor incidents,” he says. “After implementing my program, we reduced the number of accidents by 35

percent. That was very satisfying.”

After four years at Chevy Chase, Graves agreed with Lobenstine that he should work at another facility to benefit his professional development. He learned as much as he could at Chevy Chase about being a course manager.

“It was time for me to move on to see a new facility and a new way of managing and dealing with different turfgrasses,” Lobenstine says. “I began looking for an assistant's job. Because of my development, rapid increase in responsibility and good performance, Dean felt I needed a different perspective to be the best I could be in the turf industry. I didn't necessarily have to go to a public facility to see a new way of managing things, a different crew size or a different budget. Just getting that different experience ultimately made me a better manager.”

Working at Chevy Chase, with its large staff and big budget, was valuable experience for Lobenstine before moving to the 18-hole Falls Road Golf Course in Potomac, Md., where he had a much smaller budget and staff.

“I was looking at two assistant jobs – one at a private club – but I just didn't feel the energy I felt at Falls Road,” he says.

Lobenstine is glad he joined the facility when he did.

“Falls Road was undergoing a renovation project and going through the rigors of construction, and that was a wonderful experience,” he says. **GCI**

BIG SAVINGS

Each MCRA course has its own operating budget: The nine-hole facility has an operating budget just less than \$350,000; the 18-hole course budgets range from \$550,000 to \$900,000; and the two 27-hole courses operate in the \$750,000 to \$850,000 range.

Because of the purchasing power of nine golf courses, Lobenstine is saving a considerable amount of money on chemicals and fertilizer.

His plan was to pick three or four vendors and seek aggressive price cuts. When he received chemical bids from 10 vendors, pricing of a gallon of herbicide ranged from \$335 to \$550. Looking at the low bids on a sheet of about 200 products, he found as much as a 30-percent variable in pricing.

Lobenstine chose four vendors that had the lowest bids on the bid sheet as his primary vendors, and he's conducting all of his chemical

business with them. He did the same thing for fertilizer in 2007. But he chose to do a separate fertilizer bid this year because some vendors were much more competitive with fertilizers than with chemicals.

"I'm getting some of those basic products for half the price I had been getting," he says. "With some of our common chemicals, such as chlorothalonil, we just chose four products we saved the most on and went from brand names to generics, and we're still getting the same control. After an analysis of these few products, we saved more than \$100,000 in one year as a company. Instead of spending all the money we save on fertilizer, I can spend more on my topdressing program to get smoother, faster greens, for example, as well as help offset some of the crazy price increases we've seen in fuel and utilities."

One of Lobenstine's goals is to have the best greens in Montgomery County – public or private.

"It's a lofty goal," he says. "I don't know if we can compete with the guys who have a \$3-million dollar budget, but we're going to try."

A BETTER OPERATION

On the equipment side of the operation, Lobenstine created a five-year equipment replacement program and has committed to getting better topdressers, rollers and aeration equipment to help meet the MCRA's goal of bettering the golf experience. He's also trying to replace much of the aging, run-down fleet of mowers, utility carts and sprayers so operational efficiency can be maximized, reducing downtime and equipment maintenance costs. Lobenstine is also seeing more price competition among preferred equipment vendors.


But to improve the success of the MCRA's municipal facilities, Lobenstine's top priority is improving course conditions, focusing on greens, fairways and tees.

"If I can get my greens, fairways and tees perfect, golfers will return because that's what they'll remember," he says. "They aren't going to remember their ball was in a thin area of the rough or if there were a few dandelions out there, but they're going to remember how the greens were. I've got guys coming to Falls Road from local private clubs, saying how nice our golf course is. It's a good feeling."


Among the nine courses, Falls Road is performing the best from a revenue standpoint. That's because of course conditioning and




Jon Lobenstine (front) and his team of superintendents (left to right, standing): Matt Burton, Little Bennett Golf Course; Marty Eader, Needwood Golf Course; Mike Hawley, Sligo Creek Golf Course; Chris Fernandes, Northwest Golf Course; Mike Twigg, Rattlewood Golf Course; Teddy Blauvelt, Hampshire Greens. Sitting (left to right): Jeff Vance, Laytonsville Golf Course and Dan Hofmeister, Poolesville Golf Course. Photo: Mike Olliver



Anteater (30,000 BC)




Frying pan (1847)




Blowtorch (1926)



Magnifying glass (1977)



Garden hose (1984)



Conventional fire ant formula (2005)

Within 72 hours, your fire ant problems will be history.

Welcome to the Age of Advion®

Meet the one and only fire ant product that combines unbeatable speed and total control. DuPont™ Advion® fire ant bait eliminates the entire colony and the queen within 24 to 72 hours, thanks to a new class of chemistry, powered by the MetaActive™ compound. DuPont™ Advion® also has excellent environmental and toxicological

profiles, and a reduced-risk rating from the EPA. So you can quickly achieve year-round fire ant control, with just one or two applications. Bring your fire ant control up to date. Call 1-888-6DuPont (1-888-638-7668) or visit us at proproducts.dupont.com. **DuPont™ Advion®. Unbeatable results.**



Advion® fire ant bait (2007)

DuPont Professional Products



The miracles of science™

Always read and follow all label directions and precautions for use. The DuPont Oval Logo, DuPont™, The miracles of science™, Advion® and MetaActive™ are trademarks or registered trademarks of DuPont or its affiliates. Copyright © 2008 E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company. All rights reserved.

The Montgomery County (Md.) Revenue Authority's nine golf courses

- Falls Road Golf Course in Potomac (18 holes)
- Hampshire Greens in Silver Spring (18 holes)
- Laytonsville Golf Course (18 holes)
- Little Bennett Golf Course in Clarksburg (18 holes)
- Needwood Golf Course in Rockville (27 holes)
- Northwest Golf Course in Silver Spring (27 holes)
- Poolesville Golf Course (18 holes)
- Rattlewood Golf Course in Mount Airy (18 holes)
- Sligo Creek Golf Course in Silver Spring (9 holes)

location, which is in the middle of an affluent neighborhood surrounded by private clubs, Lobenstine says.

"For these residents, an affordable, \$65 or \$70 round of golf at a place that offers a good golf experience is better than going to a private club sometimes," he says.

The courses struggling most, based on revenue, are Rattlewood Golf Course and Poolesville Golf Course. Location is part of the reason for the struggle. Poolesville is in a remote location in the far west part of the county where population density is low.

"There's a lot of farmland around there, and typically, anyone who wants to play there has to drive 20 miles," he says. "Because of that, our rate is around \$30 at peak."

Rattlewood is located in the far north part of the county, but one of its additional challenges is water – it doesn't have access to well or city water, just a small irrigation pond.

"Almost every summer, Rattlewood loses its fairways," Lobenstine says. "That's a challenge we're trying to find a solution to. We just upgraded the pump station with submersible pumps that allow access to more water in the pond. We'll also be investigating additional locations to drill wells this year."

The MCRA also is adjusting pricing to increase revenue.

"Instead of having one fixed green fee for each golf course, we've completely taken away our pricing board and are basically operating on supply-and-demand pricing," Lobenstine says. "You might call up for a tee time at 7:30 in the morning on the weekend and it's \$65. That same round at 10 o'clock might be \$49, and at three in the afternoon it might be \$29. Ultimately, because we're trying to fill our tee sheet, if we can't fill a 3 o'clock time slot at \$65 and can't fill it at \$45, then the golf pro is going to put \$35 out there and have a better chance to fill it."

The supply-and-demand pricing has been successful, Lobenstine says. The average rate has declined, but revenues have increased about 3.5 percent from 2006 to 2007, well ahead of national and regional averages. The MCRA also managed to increase rounds overall in their system by more than 8 percent last year.

The MCRA e-mails golf specials every week to its list of 20,000 golfers to attract them to the different golf courses, and the golf pros choose their pricing every week.

"The tee sheet can be described like an airplane," he says. "The airline doesn't fill all those seats for the same price. Depending on where you buy your ticket, you're getting it for \$250 or \$125, or you're getting the \$49 special, but they'll fill that airplane. We look at our golf courses the same way."

BEING FLEXIBLE

Lobenstine tries to visit each MCRA golf course



©2008 Caterpillar Inc. All rights reserved. CAT, CATERPILLAR, their respective logos, "Caterpillar Yellow" and the POWER EDGE trade dress, as well as corporate and product identity used herein, are trademarks of Caterpillar and may not be used without permission.

every two weeks or so. He says there's a very competent superintendent at each course, and because of that, he has a comfort level that allows him to take care of his home course and get to the other courses a couple times a month.

"I have a golf course to manage, too," he says about Falls Road. "The goal is to visit everybody every two weeks or so throughout the growing season. If issues arise, superintendents give me a shout."

With a few years under his belt, Lobenstine believes he will be in the role for another 10 years if he's fortunate.

"I love what I do and feel like I do a good job," he says. "It never gets boring. Every day, there's something new. Every day, I try to give my crew at Falls Road a different job if possible. I help prioritize different jobs for my crew and identify training needs. I'm helping my assistants get focused before I move on to things that need to be addressed at the other courses."

The director of agronomy has to be able to devote a lot of time to the job, as well as be flexible and change gears rapidly, Lobenstine says.

"You have to love being busy and have a lot of energy for change, while keeping your staff and superintendents motivated and feeling good about what they're doing," he says. "It's easy to be a nit-picker every time you visit a golf course, so it's important for me to have highly positive visits. Just like with your grounds crew, you can't keep giving people a difficult time for not doing what's expected of them. You have to motivate them, make them feel good and give them the confidence to keep going."

There are days where Lobenstine wishes he was only working on one golf course, but he's a self-described adrenaline junkie, so the crazier things get, the faster he moves.

"I'm always shuffling my priorities," he says. "Throughout the day, you might have 10 different No. 1 priorities that need to be addressed. You

keep changing gears and address everything you can in a timely manner."

Lobenstine also wishes he could spend more time with his supportive family, yet he says they understand he's in a new role and it's important to them that he's successful.

"I'm fortunate to have the right support team in place that allows me to have many weekends off," he says. Having a full day or two with my wife and two girls helps me recharge for the next week.

"That's why I'm up at 3:00 in the morning, so I can still get home reasonably close to dinner," he adds. "I've got so many things going on that if I don't get up that early then I'm going to be coming home at 8 or 9 o'clock at night. I much rather make the sacrifice first thing in the morning when everybody at home is still sleeping."

Lobenstine has a great balance between work and family, Graves says.

"Jon knows what's important in life," he says. **GCI**



It comes through loud and clear. The get-it-done attitude of legendary big Cat® machines is here in a **full line of Skid Steer and Multi-Terrain Loaders, Compact Wheel Loaders and Mini Hydraulic Excavators**. Whatever the landscape job, they're designed to give you industry-leading performance and exceptional operator comfort. And whether you buy or rent, you can count on Cat for the best in dealer support. **BE PART OF THE LEGACY.**

CAT.COM/LANDSCAPING | 1-800-RENT-CAT | 1-888-OWN-A-CAT

CATERPILLAR®
TODAY'S WORK. TOMORROW'S WORLD.™

A BALANCING ACT

Owners wrestle with operational wants and needs. By Doug Saunders

We all know prioritizing wants and needs can be difficult. Every business owner strives to meet the wants and needs of his customers while meeting the wants and needs of his operations. But as many golf course owners know, this balancing act can be tricky.

It has been said getting what you want makes you happy but getting what you need will help you get what you want. Defining what you truly need is the hardest part of the equation.

While all golf course operators might agree the easiest answer to this operational dilemma is to increase rounds at higher green fees while reducing expenditures, they also know that such a simplistic approach to an operation can be foolish. The best operators in the golf industry have learned how to define their wants and needs and use them as guidelines in their operational strategies.

CONDITIONING FIRST

John Shields, owner and operator of Glenn Dale (Md.) Golf Course, an 18-hole public facility, believes the first step of determining his wants and needs is to define his facility.

"I want to place myself as best as I can within my immediate market," Shields says. "I would call my course a 'gray-collar facility' with \$55 greens fees. I'm a notch above the lower-end courses, and I'm below the private courses and newer daily-fee courses that have opened in our region. I've put a lot of effort into understanding who comes to play at my course and why they come. By constantly monitoring my market, it's easier to determine where I need to direct my resources."



Shields' primary concern is the condition of the golf course. Maintenance expenditures take top priority because he believes the golf course conditions will be more memorable to his customers than anything else.

"I know what it takes to keep my course in good condition, and that need is always funded," he says. "I don't make long-term budget plans because our budget is determined by what kind of year we have. If I have a good year, then I can fund things on my want list. This year, we've been able to address one of those wants: We're making improvements around our bunkers by cleaning up the collars and improving the sand quality."

Defining who you are and how you fit in your market is a concept that has guided Lane Lewis, owner and operator of Old Brockway Golf Course in Lake Tahoe, Calif. Lewis's nine-hole course was built in 1927 and now competes with eight 18-hole championship courses within a 30-minute drive.

"We have a seven-month season, and in this a resort area, golf is just one choice of activity for vacationers," Lewis says. "I want to make my course known as a quality golf experience that can be enjoyed in two and a half hours. Addressing the time crunch people feel these days opens a door of opportunity for me as a nine-hole course."

To achieve that, Lewis sees course conditions as a priority. Located in a pristine alpine environment, Lewis has made a long-term commitment to an organic course maintenance approach and has seen the added benefit of golfers returning to his course because they appreciate his "green" methods.