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Alex Stafford

IN THIS ISSUE

- Turfgrass research*
52 FOLLOW THE MONEY
 The industry relies on various sources to fund necessary agronomic research to protect turf.
- Turfgrass management*
60 EXPERIMENTING FOR SUCCESS
 Trial, error and ingenuity take a front seat in superintendents' PGR programs.
- Personnel management*
66 LOOK, LISTEN AND LEARN
 Proper training pays off with improved and consistent playing condition.
- Product update*
71 THE PESTICIDE PIPELINE
 A glimpse at the products chemical manufacturers have released recently and plan to bring to market during the next three years.
- Product focus:*
Handheld equipment
80 IT'S IN THEIR HANDS
 The maintenance staff at Great River Golf Club meets golfer expectations one piece of handheld equipment at a time.
- 83 HANDHELD HOMEWORK**
 Circling Raven Golf Club's equipment manager evaluates handheld equipment.

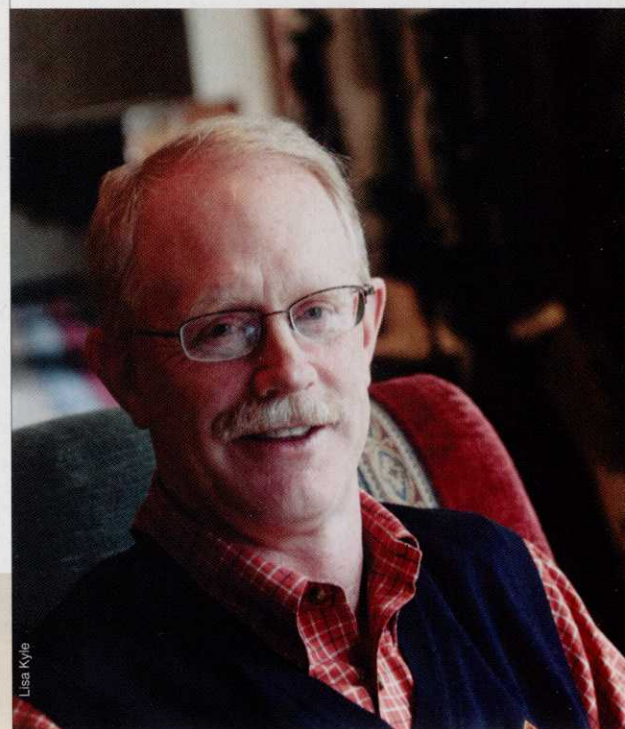


FEATURES

- Architect profile*
22 A FORSE TO BE RECKONED WITH
 Ron Forse and Jim Nagle have become synonymous with restoration projects that retain the flavor of great old facilities.
- COVER STORY:**
Course management
30 LESSONS IN LEAN
 Managers embrace the manufacturing world's concept of operating the least waste way.
- Facility development*
36 AROUND THE GLOBE
 Forward Management Group expands golf in China.
- Asset management*
46 FUNDING ITS FUTURE
 Protect your golf course by looking at long-range financial plans.

- 74 RESEARCH**
PESTICIDE AND NUTRIENT REMOVAL
 Study optimizes vegetative filterstrips for treating runoff from turf.

22



Lisa Kyle

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DEPARTMENTS

- 6 **Teeing off**
John Walsh:
Private problems
- 8 **Feedback**
- 20 **Consumer research**
- 85 **Travels with Terry**
Equipment ideas
- 88 **Classifieds**
- 89 **Ad index**

COLUMNS

- 10 **Assistant's view**
John Ekstrom: Using winter wisely
- 12 **Design concepts**
Jeffrey Brauer:
Noninvasive procedures
- 14 **Irrigation issues**
Erik Christiansen:
Room for improvement
- 16 **Guest column**
Terry Bonar:
Assistants' keys to success
- 18 **Equipment management**
Stephen Tucker:
The tech's view of the GIS
- 86 **Outside the ropes**
Tim Moraghan: Set yourself apart
- 90 **Parting shots**
Pat Jones: Plan C for the GCSAA

ON THE WEB – GOLFCOURSEINDUSTRY.COM

Look for these articles on our home page and in our e-newsletter this month.

SELLING ACCEPTANCE

Convincing the membership to greenlight a construction or renovation project can be a hurdle sometimes, but there are ways to make the process go more smoothly.

THE GREENSMOWER OF THE FUTURE – NOW

The day has come where machines are available to replace golf course maintenance staff.

TOOLS FOR TALLYING

The Golf Course Builders Association of America's new guide to cost estimating can help to keep those building or renovating a course on budget.

PODCAST: GET SCHOOLED ABOUT SOIL

Soil testing can be a useful tool for planning a course's pesticide program. Learn how to get the most out of it.

GIS COVERAGE

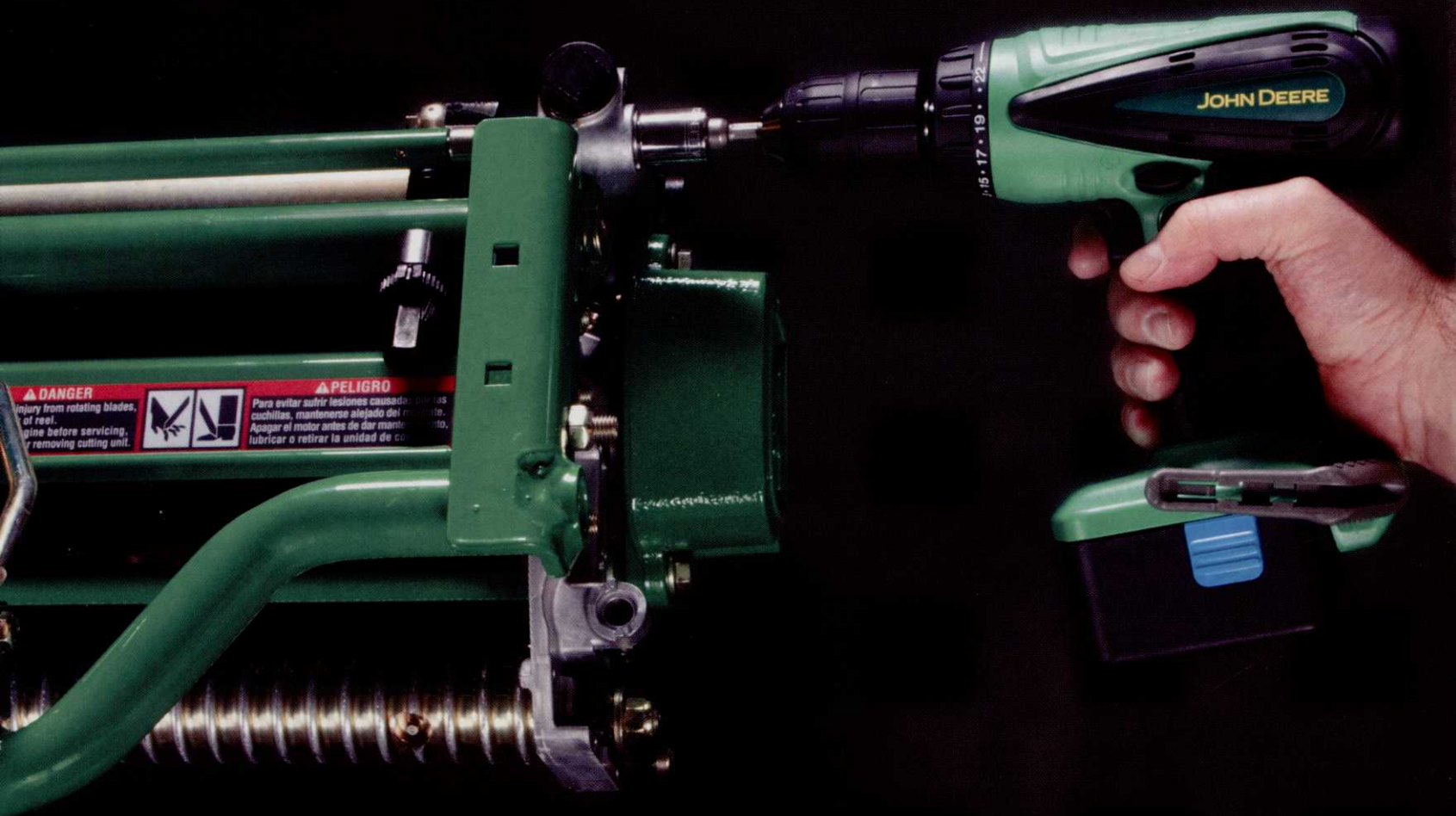
In the run up to the Golf Industry Show, which takes place Feb 5-7 in New Orleans, we feature several articles about the industry's biggest event. After the show, don't forget to view our video interviews from the show floor and read our coverage of the educational sessions.



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 professionals responsible for maintaining a golf course as an important asset.





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JOHN DEERE
GOLF

PRIVATE PROBLEMS

"He's not a member, grandma. He's a caddy." Ah, yes ... the whiny voice of the pubescent Spaulding Smails character in the movie *Caddyshack*. It brings a smile to the many golf/comedy enthusiasts who are familiar with the movie.

Spaulding reminds me that, during the next few years, there might be fewer places in America for the bratty rich kids to speak so eloquently of nonmembers and guests who play golf at private country clubs. That's because 10 to 15 percent of private clubs – equating to about 500 facilities – are in danger of extinction, according to the National Golf Foundation. An increasing number of private clubs are dealing with declining membership – 13 percent on average, according to NGF – and allowing outside play from non-members.

Furthermore, among at-risk clubs – defined as those reporting financial difficulties – the average membership decline is 29 percent, and 57 percent of them say they're operating at a loss, according to NGF. Reasons for declining membership include the financial downturn, job relocation, a desire for course variety, and work and family obligations. Private clubs are responding to membership decline by offering special membership arrangements, making capital improvements (if they have access to enough capital), expanding health-conscious offerings and targeting women and children.

But even implementing those revenue-generating ideas isn't going to save all the financially troubled private clubs. A more drastic change will take place for some: going public. But this is nothing new. It's been happening for years. Conversions have outnumbered closures 10 to one during the past 10 years, according to NGF. Between 1999 and 2008, 387 private clubs converted to public facilities, and 39 closed. However, it's likely the number of conversions will increase significantly during the next several years, propelled by the sagging economy and the need for a broader customer base. There will be closures, but the numbers won't be as significant as conversions.

To put the private club market into perspective, there are about 4,400 private golf clubs in America – about the same number as there was in 1929 – that support an estimated 2.1 million golfers, according to NGF. The number of private clubs peaked at 4,898 in 1998.

So, will the private golf club at which you work be-

come public in the near future? Has it been discussed? Is it unsettling to some? To you? A number of clubs won't be able to keep their doors closed to the public much longer. But it's not necessarily a bad thing for the industry as long as those facilities remain golf oriented and meet demand for rounds, lessons, apparel, etc.

It's more likely the older, more storied clubs (many with old money) will remain private, and the newer clubs that lack distinct history or reputation – and obviously financial stability and planning – will be the ones to convert to public facilities.

Conversions could be a double-edged sword for superintendents. They probably won't have as easy a time maintaining a public course compared to a private

one because of the increase of the number of tee times and outings and the variety of golfers. However, they'll probably have fewer headaches caused by those power-wielding members nagging them about every little detail on the course. Instead, it'll be all about the bottom line. Salaries could fluctuate, too, and budgets will be managed even tighter. All considered, they're different problems resulting in the same headaches.

Superintendents facing pending conversions should use their network to talk to peers who've been

in similar situations. After learning more about the transition, some superintendents might decide to spruce up their resume and seek a job change.

When the private-to-public conversion happens at vulnerable facilities, superintendents will have to adapt and manage the operation differently. Be prepared for that. Also recognize you may be better off as a result of public money's potential, albeit with fewer laughs caused by the Spaulding Smails of the world.

As for club members, they won't have to worry about the Al Czerviks of the world razing their beloved courses to build condos, office buildings or homes. They just might be booking tee times with the Danny Noonans and Tony D'Annunzios of the world. It might be that or shelling out a lot more dough to join the upper echelon of exclusive private clubs.



John Walsh Editor

John Walsh

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EDITORIAL

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FEEDBACK

We'd like to hear from you.

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with your thoughts
and opinions.

Working together

There's no more important relationship that contributes to the success of a facility than the one between a pro and superintendent. I've learned an incredible amount of information during the past five years from our superintendent about what he does, why and the challenges he faces. He spent a few years on my side of the business and has an appreciation of what my challenges are. I'm a better professional because of this understanding, and he's a better superintendent through his experience on the other side of the counter. I'd have a difficult time believing there's a pro and superintendent who work together better than we do. Our owners recognize that and give us more freedom to do our jobs.

Pat Jones' column that quotes Ben Franklin ("Different, yet the same," November issue, page 66) – "we must hang together, gentlemen, or surely we will hang separately," – applies to the different factions of the green industry, and on a grassroots level, to professionals and superintendents. The way things are now, if pros and superintendents can't work together for the betterment of the

course and their jobs, owners will use that as another reason to let one or the other go and find a cheaper alternative.

Todd Kueppers
PGA Professional
General manager
Chisago Lakes Golf Course
Lindstrom, Minn.

Multiple designations

"Changing roles" (November issue, page 30) is a great article. I have a question, though: How about those certified from the GCSAA and CMAA? I may be the only one. A goal of mine was to become certified with all three organizations (GCSAA, CMAA, PGA of America). Only one to go.

David Gourlay CGCS, CCM
Chief operating officer
Colbert Hills Golf Course
Manhattan, Kan.

Editor's note: We checked with the GCSAA about how many certified golf course superintendents are also certified club managers – and Gourlay is the only active CGCS/CCM the association

(continued on page 89)

MORE GOLF?

The most critical aspect of the golf industry is the declining number of rounds, which is affecting many areas. Capital purchases for golf maintenance are being postponed; new carts aren't being purchased; PGA members are being fired and their contracts are being reduced; superintendents are losing their jobs and being pressured to cut costs; golf equipment isn't being sold; and golf course owners and operators are struggling with less income.

For the past several years, I've watched the industry struggle with how to reverse this trend and have seen many programs developed to bring new people into the game with limited and marginal success. A lot of time and energy has been spent without asking the people who've provided our past success – current golfers – to participate in the process.

Instead of trying to convince someone to start playing the game, wouldn't it be easier to convince existing golfers to play more? Studies show most of the new golfers who stay with the game have been introduced to it by someone who plays already. So, by encouraging people to play more golf, we could achieve double the value of such a program.

I encourage industry leaders to start a "More golf?" campaign similar to the successful "Got milk?" campaign. Imagine the economic impact if we could encourage the existing 20 million golfers to play one more round of golf.

Jeff Hoag
Co-owner
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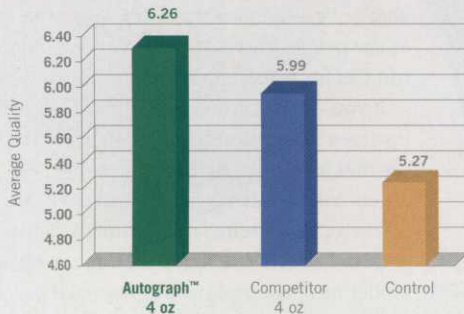
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John Ekstrom is an assistant golf course superintendent at Hinsdale Golf Club in Clarendon Hills, Ill. He can be reached at snapp79@aol.com or 815-922-0587.

USING WINTER WISELY

One of my favorite questions this time of year is, "What do golf course guys do in the winter?" I guarantee those of you employed at courses that close during the winter have been asked this before. After a poor attempt at being funny, I tell people what really happens. And after my answer about taking/teaching golf-related classes, overhauling equipment, writing articles, getting more involved with my association, etc., I generally get a surprised look from someone who seems impressed, and he responds, "Really?"

A wise man once said the off season is for improving and formulating your plans for the coming year. Meanwhile, the growing season is for implementing plans and programs you created during the off season. Others have said the off season is when we should look to improve ourselves professionally and personally, finding a balance between the two.

In November, I pondered how I could improve myself and the facility heading into 2009. I always need to improve and learn more about golf course maintenance, but on what should I concentrate? Worthwhile areas all professionals can delve into include:

- Taking or teaching classes;
- Working with a technician to maintain an equipment fleet;
- Discussing your future with the facility and beyond with your superintendent in your annual review; and
- Participating in the national and chapter associations.

SHOP SCHOOL

There are times when I think I know more about maintaining an equipment fleet than I do. Admittedly, I don't know much about diagnosing significant problems. My skills consist of these basic maintenance tasks:

- Fluid, spark plug and rim/tire changes;
- Grinding reels/bedknives; and
- Bearing/seal changes on cutting units.

These basic tasks are necessary to help

technicians if maintaining a large fleet with no other support. But by no means do my skills take the place of our technician. Consequently, I spend much of the winter with the technician, learning how to improve my skills in diagnosing these types of problems.

While talking to a group of technicians at a conference last year, we discussed how some new assistants who graduated recently lack basic skills. Among turf techs, the biggest concern was the lack of mechanical knowledge. Some turf programs offer technical courses, but practical experience is superior. We need to roll up our sleeves, get our hands dirty and learn from technicians.

I spend much of the winter with the technician, learning how to improve my skills in diagnosing these types of problems ... We need to roll up our sleeves, get our hands dirty and learn from technicians.

GIS

This year will be my third opportunity to attend the Golf Industry Show. I'm fortunate I'm afforded the chance, particularly considering economic hardships. Having been an assistant for eight years, there have been years in which I haven't been able to attend, so I understand and appreciate the opportunity. Take every chance you get to attend conferences and continuing education. It doesn't matter if it's locally or nationally, the experience is worthwhile. If you don't know what's available, ask your superintendent or others in your area what you can do and how much the club will be able to support your professional development.

I heard a disturbing story last year from

a local superintendent who asked his assistant if he wanted to attend the GIS, and his response was, "Let me check to see if my friends are going." Assistants shouldn't hesitate to take every chance they get to help themselves and their employer. The potential connections and meetings can be extremely valuable to your future.

ASSOCIATION INVOLVEMENT

Networking and relationships will always be the best asset of belonging to a professional organization. This off-season, talk to your superintendent or call your chapter office to find out about becoming involved. Association committees always need able bodies and minds – volunteer to join. Similar to attending GIS, serving on a chapter committee helps you build relationships with other professionals. In serving my chapter, the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents, I've met superintendents who've become mentors to me just as much as the people for whom I've worked. Opportunities for involvement are endless.

If you asked a group of moderately involved superintendents, they'd probably say that just by participating, they've benefited. Either through continuing education offerings, golf events, community service projects, article writing, public speaking/moderating and networking, association involvement gives you the tools for success in a competitive market.

For example, there was a position open at high-profile club being built in the Chicago area last year. Out of more than 200 applicants, the three finalists were highly engaged assistant superintendents who served on the MAGCS's assistant superintendent committee. That means the assistant committee is doing its job: preparing assistants to become superintendents.

What will this New Year bring for you? Hopefully, it will include a renewed understanding that opportunities to grow are all around you. Use your downtime to relax and become a better professional. Sometimes growth and change are difficult, but if you think about it and try, you might surprise yourself. **GCI**