

STEADY EMPLOYMENT. Turnover is significantly lower with management companies. While superintendents may leave a specific course it is often due to an opportunity of advancement within the company. Most companies have a variety of golf courses including lower and higher budget facilities and everything in between. Superintendents can work their way up through the system and even into regional assignments over time. Most of the management companies hire from within and have good training programs and the ability to evaluate their personnel for future promotion.

The ability to move to other areas of the country is attractive with management companies. Often times we see cases of spouses being offered employment in other parts of the country or family needs requiring we move closer to our parents or other family members. A number of superintendents commented this was a huge plus with the management companies because they could still work for the same parent company while changing golf courses but not employers.

COMPENSATION. The average compensation for people working for management companies is comparable, or better, than the overall statistics for superintendents in general. Having spoken to management at several companies, they have indicated the market is competitive and they must keep pace with the industry to attract top talent. Competitive salary is also a sound strategy to retain these individuals, as well.

Typically, the compensation for superintendents at facilities run by management companies is reflective of the budget and condition of the golf course. Courses with higher budgets tend to have higher salaries for superintendents. Rarely do the salaries reach levels of the best golf courses in the country, but there are only a handful of those jobs to begin with. To move up into the upper 10 percent of compensation in the U.S. for all superintendents, it would normally require taking on multiple properties and regional superintendent assignments.

Most of the management companies employ agronomists who have come from the ranks of former superintendents. This is just one more example of room for advancement within these

organizations. Those positions are paid competitively with the better jobs in the country.

BENEFITS. The benefits provided by management companies are reported to be much better, on average, than those working for non-management company employers. The reason for this is fairly simple – management companies employ thousands of workers as compared to 30 to 150 at any one facility. There is power in numbers and the ability to negotiate health insurance and such is

Well over 1,000
superintendents
are employed
by management
companies and the
number is growing.

something that is attractive to employees of these companies.

Vacation pay is accrued over time and the total longevity of the employee will determine length of vacations. Since the average longevity of a superintendent is reported to be 6.5 years this normally means starting over again on the vacation ladder until you accrue enough time to maximize your vacation benefits. By working for a management company you may work at several different properties for that company but the benefits will be assigned for the period of time working for the company rather than the golf course.

Most of the management companies offered a variety of ancillary benefits including vehicles or vehicle allowance, association dues, attendance at local and national superintendent meetings, training, etc. Not all of the benefit packages were equal, but generally they were quite healthy as compared to the statistics in the GCSAA Employment and Compensation Survey.

RETIREMENT PROGRAMS. The people I interviewed indicated they were either pleased or extremely pleased with the retirement packages provided by the management companies. While the individual

companies differed in their offerings it was evident the programs were above average. Often there is a contribution of at least 2 percent of salary and there were also a variety of matching offers in which a superintendent could accrue a significant retirement portfolio over time.

the superintendents to meet the expectations of the facility and their employer.

Budget spreadsheets are developed professionally at the corporate level and analyzed to compare to industry standards for clubs with similar climate and standards. Processing of

people that I spoke to. It was not only the national company meetings but the connections via listserves, e-mail and phone were mentioned often.

CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS. Early on the management companies developed healthy business re-

get. Training programs are formalized. Reporting mechanisms are standardized and constantly tweaked to provide optimal communication.

Working through a corporate structure affords the superintendent a steady system of feedback with much better continuity than green committees and boards that change annually. Once again, the superintendent can spend more time on the golf course. It also allows for development, implementation and progress on a long-range plan that is not encumbered by pet projects of various volunteer leaders.

INTERNAL RECOGNITION. Many of the management companies recognize their team members for their success. There were a lot of fellows who were very proud to have been named "Superintendent of the Year" by their specific companies. Management companies do a lot to deservedly gain PR, both internally and externally, for their properties and the golf course superintendents. While golf course conditions are a large part of that recognition it can also entail the creation of efficiencies, safety programs, training initiatives and adherence to budget.

The trend in our industry is more facilities being managed by these companies. Logic dictates that it is an area to consider when looking for career opportunities. As always, superintendents should do their research when looking at any employment opportunities. Not all management companies are equal but there are a lot of similarities. Do your homework and check out the specific job offerings and corporate structure. Several thousand golf course superintendents working for these management companies appear to be pleased with their employer choices. **GCI**



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Not all employers in our industry provide retirement benefits. Some golf facilities only pay the superintendent \$2,000 per year regardless of their salary level. It is for reasons like this that superintendents are attracted to management companies and their retention rates are high.

BUSINESS APPROACH. Management companies are business oriented. They are accustomed to working in a corporate type scenario with a great understanding of the golf business. Providing value for the price is paramount to success for these companies. No stone is left unturned in developing strategies to do things more efficiently, effectively, at a better cost, etc. All of this takes a strong business approach.

With multiple facilities there are often templates that are used to standardize operations at facilities under the umbrella of the specific management company. Most companies develop written standards for each facility that are agreed to by the company, facility and superintendent. This is extremely helpful in allowing

invoices, billing, payroll and human resource are done through the corporate office with the input of the superintendent. This expedites the process and allows the superintendent more time on the golf course.

AGRONOMIC SUPPORT. When you work for a management company you are not alone. There is substantial support provided by the agronomic team of each company. This support may be from the regional superintendent, agronomist or peers that work within the organization. Problem solving is fast tracked and the team's many years of experience provides a wealth of knowledge for the superintendent. This is especially attractive for the younger superintendent.

PEER CAMARADERIE. When you work for a parent company you have a vast network of peers. You are all working for the same employer and want that employer to prosper. Bouncing ideas off of your peers and having a lot in common is an intangible that was mentioned by several of the

relationships with any and all companies that sell products in the golf turf maintenance business. Volume buying provides discounts. Some of the management companies have exclusive deals in which they direct a high percentage or all of their purchases to a specific company.

The discounts you receive when buying as much as a \$100 million worth of equipment can be significant and important to allow management companies to be very competitive in the bids for agreements with courses. Consider the amount of money spent annually on equipment, chemicals and parts and even a few percentage points of savings adds up to a lot of money for the management companies, which they can pass on to clients or aid in the corporate overhead.

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE. Management companies have a plethora of statistics in how to run operations efficiently. Time and motion studies are common with a thorough evaluation of the labor component which can be the biggest line item in any bud-

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NOT THAT MUCH HAS CHANGED

I just wrote a piece for Wisconsin Golfer magazine applauding the career of one of our long-term superintendents. Like others, I expected he'd continue for years to come, and viewed his retirement as another example of how circumstances change.

Financial markets and retirement planning are scary and the rules change rapidly. The climate is in flux, and physicists have some evidence of a particle – a neutrino – that moves faster than light, potentially making Einstein's theory obsolete. If confirmed, it would imply that a green could be cut before the mower leaves the shop. As the bumper sticker says, "What the heck is going on?"

Most of us have been a little scared by the changes of the past few years. We wonder when we will be comfortable with events again, events often out of our control. How do we make golf affordable and accessible when input costs are so high? What will environmentalists and regulators demand from us next? The list of concerns and worries and change goes on.

Near the end of *The Greater Journey*, David McCullough's narrative on the 1889 World's Fair in Paris, he describes the American display in the "Palais des Machines." American machinery and products of the day included 493 inventions and devices created by Thomas Edison, steam engines and pumps, typewriters, sewing machines and scores of other inventions. And it included lawnmowers.

That last one gave pause – lawnmowers? In 1889? A quick Google search revealed that at the gateway to the Machine Palace was an American lawnmower was the centerpiece, a Z-turn lawnmower at that.

Hmm, maybe not that much has changed. Likely it was a reel mower, not a sickle mower or a rotary mower. It was probably built on the basic de-

sign of Edwin Budding a few decades earlier. Americans created a new application to Budding's mechanical principle – home lawns. And a little later, lawnmowers replaced sheep and sickle mowers on courses.

Early in my career Dr. John Madison and other turf academics started looking at sand topdressing as a golf turf management practice. It seemed revolutionary, generating questions about nutrition and dull mowers and diseases, but a few supers took the lead and adopted it into their management plans. The rest of us followed, as did topdressing equipment manufacturers and sand suppliers.

Most of us working in golf have been a little scared by the changes we have experienced in the past few years. We wonder when we will be comfortable with events again, events often out of our control.

Do a little historical reading and you'll find Tom Morris of St. Andrews and his 1800s admonition to his assistant: "Mair sand, Honeymen." He spread it with a shovel while we use hydraulic dressers, but topdressing has a long history, a prime example that not much has changed in 150 years.

Sometimes comfort from today's worries comes from places important in our past. In my case, my hometown has grown a little and the trees are taller, but the water tower is still there, and the high school and football field look exactly the same as they did 50 years ago. The one-room school was sold as a home and moved, but the playground is the same. The sugar maple tree we tapped each spring remains healthy, and the hand pump that brought cold and fresh water is still there. Not that much has changed.

Or, better yet, walk or play the golf course that inspired your career. You may see changes – bunkers are built, remodeled or filled in, forward tees might have been added, greens have changed, trees have been removed and trees have been planted – along with any number of other improvements. But in my experience, the "trail" of the course remains the same. The route of holes you remember very likely will be where you remember them to be. In a sense, not that much has changed.

Other than big theoretical issues like the neutrino, change comes at the edges of basic principles. For superintendents, soil pH, water, pho-

tosynthesis and respiration, the liming equation and all we learned in college are fundamental. Changes come to us in politics and in society and in governmental regulation. Materials and machinery and technology are where we notice the real differences.

It is hard to argue against the old saw that nothing endures but change. We also know that times have always changed and our ancestors changed, too, just as we will. From my perspective, it is the pace of change that has quickened, and futurists have written that it is stressful when there is too much change in too short a time.

So when I feel a little uneasy about what is going on in golf, the economy or our country, I spend some time on the business end of a walking greensmower. It reminds me that not much has changed in my life.

It just seems like it. GCI

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NICE PACKAGE

Improvements in packaging have made the handling of turf chemicals safer and easier. By Jason Stahl

Glug-glug-glug. Most golf course superintendents are familiar with that sound... and no, it's not from the quaffing of an after-hours frosty beverage. Rather, it's the noise coming from a bottle of the liquid turf product of your choice as you pour it out. But it's not necessarily a good noise. After all, glug-glug-glug could result in splashback, and that's not good for anybody.

Advances in product design, not to mention labeling, have minimized "the glug" as well as provided many other benefits that make the use of these products safer, easier and more efficient.

Syngenta introduced a slant-neck 1-gallon bottle first in 2009 with Tenacity with the goal of making pouring easier, less fatiguing and safer.

"A lot of research went into that and figuring out how superintendents were using it," says Jason Monsees, global packaging engineer for Syngenta.

According to Monsees, the big, angled neck is more ergonomic and doesn't require the bottle to be turned over as far to be emptied.

With the 2-1/2-gallon bottle, a logo was added near the handle showing the proper way to hold it so as to eliminate plugging and splashback while pouring out the product. This is key, since Monsees says the research team found that turning the bottle upside down to get the product out was common among users.

Aside from the user benefits, coming out with such a product as this new bottle provides an ancillary benefit to Syngenta itself.

"It differentiates us in the marketplace," says Monsees. "No one else out there has a slant-neck bottle out there, so when a customer looks at it, they know it's a Syngenta product."

Package size is also an important advancement. Syngenta talks with customers to find out what package size is most appropriate for the way they use the product.

"In the golf market, smaller pack-

ages are more convenient at times, depending on the application," says Margaret Bell, senior marketing communications manager for Syngenta. "For example, there could be a spot treatment where you don't need a larger package size."

Becky Fong, packaging innovations manager for Valent USA Corporation, cites this "right sizing" of packaging – providing an appropriate unit dose to eliminate the need to measure, reseal and store opened packages – as a new trend.

"For example, water-soluble pouches that can be used one at a time as needed per application," says Fong. "Alternate palletization, meanwhile, helps to increase the stability and efficiency of pallet loads."

"Valent is constantly looking for new ways to make packaging easier and safer to use," says Fong. "That might mean adjusting the angle of a handle for greater ease of dispensing, improving label quality to ensure the label will stay with the product before, during and after use or adding a reseal mechanism to help avoid spills and promote easier and safer storage."

A color-coded cap system serves a purpose for Syngenta, with green for fungicide, red for growth inhibitor

and blue for herbicide.

"This helps the end user pull the right product off the shelf and not put an herbicide down when you want to put down a fungicide," says Monsees. "It's a small thing, but a big thing."

Proper storage is just as important as proper use. The biggest problem superintendent Justin Peloquin says exists in his region is heat.

"A storage container that houses the chemicals its basically just a metal shell sitting out there cooking in the heat," says Peloquin, who takes care of Tahquitz Creek Golf Resort in Palm Springs, CA. "If you don't have some type of ventilation inside of your bins, it gets too hot inside and you start having bottles explode. Even though we have ventilation, we're always going through containers and checking to make sure they aren't swelling or leaking."

Once a year, Peloquin conducts chemical training that covers handling, mixing, servicing equipment and first aid. He and his crew also follow the buddy system when it comes to the handling of these chemicals.

"When we have a guy mixing, we usually have a guy right around there with him to make sure things are getting mixed in the proper order and to

Storage facility

Mike Vogt, consultant with the McMahon Group, says they prefer to design chemical storage buildings with separate storage rooms for liquid and dry chemicals. They specify that they be constructed of concrete block, and that all floors and foundations have a water-stop installed.

"Also, we make a special effort to keep chemical storage buildings separate from the main building, at least 200 feet from other structures and at least 500 feet from the natural flow of drainage water across the site," says Vogt.

It's also a sound practice to install fire protection, and all lighting should be explosion-proof, Vogt adds.

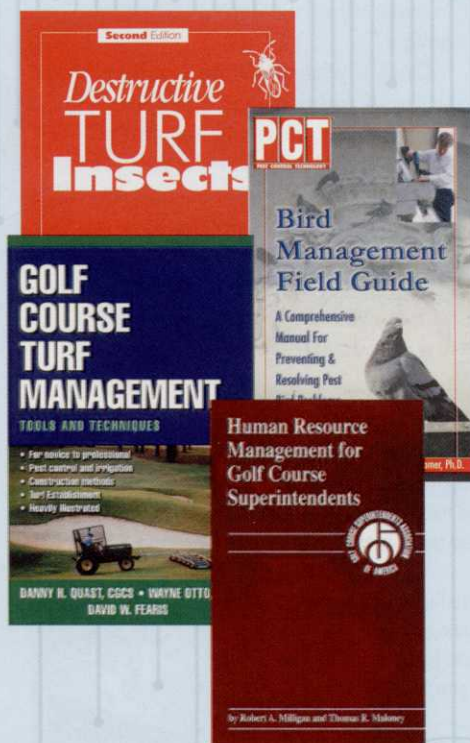


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OPERATIONS PROFILE

make sure there are no issues with the equipment,” says Peloquin. “We make sure safety-wise that everybody is covering one another.”

Tommy Witt, director of golf course operations for Northmoor Country Club in Highland Park, IL, recently upgraded his chemical storage room to avoid any potential problems.

“Several years ago, we constructed heavy duty ‘Home Depot’ type shelves, which provide us with the space to adequately and safely store our complete inventory of chemicals,” Witt says.

Lisa Clements, marketing manager of US Chemical Storage, says leaking is the most common problem when it comes to storing turf chemicals, which can lead to accidental contamination of grounds and groundwater.

“Our solution is a building that’s turn-key and enables golf course superintendents to house materials with spill containment built into the structure,” says Clements. “That way, when they’re storing and handling the materials, if something should spill or drip, it’s contained within the structure.”

The spill containment is an empty area below the floor, which is made of steel grating and is six inches above the bottom of the building. This area below the floor you stand on is sometimes called the “sump” area or “containment sump.”

Fong recommends that products be stored in a cool, dry place in their original containers – and that containers be kept closed when not in use.

“Also, resealable packaging helps eliminate spills and leaks in storage and is a factor that should be a consideration at the point of purchase,” she says. **GCI**

Jason Stahl is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

Tips for Safe Chemical Storage

Accidents from poor storage techniques of chemicals are 100 percent preventable. So why do they still happen? Many times it’s because workers in areas with many chemicals are tempted to store chemicals alphabetically by common name to make them easy to find – but this is a very dangerous practice.

Here are a few more tips for safe chemical storage:

- Always store minimum quantities, as specified by OSHA. Purchase chemicals in smallest quantities needed.
- Inventory chemicals at least once a year.
- Do not store chemicals on bench tops.
- Keep MSDSs on file and available.
- Keep chemicals in storage except when in use.
- Label all chemical containers – even those with only water.
- Develop procedures to prevent and contain spills.
- Encourage orderly and tidy work practices.
- Provide adequate security to prevent access of hazardous materials by unauthorized personnel. – enviro.blr.com





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By Adam Fletcher

OPERATION SCARECROW

The team at Oakfield Golf Club mounts a multi-prong attack to deal with its goose problems.

Because golf is an outdoor game, and it requires a fair amount of space to play, there will always be a conflict between the flora and fauna and playability.

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