

CONTROL

A generation ago, the only phone calls superintendents placed from a golf course were via a land line and probably to a distributor. While the Web forever altered how orders are now placed, the phone has arguably seen a greater revolution.

Rodney Crow, superintendent at Falconhead Golf Club in Austin, Texas, uses his iPhone for many different things, well beyond making calls.

"I have an app on the iPhone that allows me to log into my office computer and my irrigation computer to make changes, look up documents, etc.," he says. "I always like to be on the cutting edge of new things."

Crow, who has been in the golf course maintenance industry for 25 years – 16 as a superintendent – and at Falconhead since 2008, says there is less downtime in his day because of his iPhone.

"If I get a phone call from my boss asking about an invoice or a document, instead of driving all the way back to my office, I can look it up on the spot," he says. "This saves me countless hours of travel time."

While Crow admits there are several apps pre-loaded on his phone that he'd just as soon delete, but can't, there are quite a few he uses regularly.

"On any given day, I use a translator app, a calendar/appointment reminder app, a unit conversion app (like gallons to ounces, etc), a turf management app and of course, e-mail," he says. "I use the translator and calendar very frequently."

Though there are many useful apps available, Crow has

a few in mind he'd like to see offered.

"I would love to see an app that could help calculate calibrations on the fly," he says. "I'd love to be able to log into my pump station and look at all the pump numbers, gallons pumped since last reset, etc."

"I'd also like to see an app that would take a person through all the disease symptoms – a bit like a yes-or-no question tree where you answer questions until it pinpoints two or three possible diseases," he added. "Once it narrowed it down, it could then give you information on those two or three diseases so the superintendent could make a final decision as to which one he or she thinks it is."

According to Crow, it wouldn't take much to convince other superintendents that they should be using their phones for a great deal more than placing phone calls.

"I would show him or her how much more efficiently their time is being used when a smartphone is introduced into their day," he says. "Not having to constantly run back and forth to the office is a major time saver."

The iPhone isn't the only handy handheld device in Crow's arsenal. He also uses a Rainbird Freedom Radio, which allows his team to turn on any irrigation head on the golf course, regardless of their location.

"One of the advantages to handheld controls is the ability to multitask," he says. "For example, I can be on one golf hole doing a task while also running irrigation on other holes that are in eyesight. This





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— Rodney Crow,
Falconhead Golf Club

gives me that ability to complete tasks quicker and more efficiently."

Dan Sorg has been a superintendent for four years, currently concluding his first year at Little Mountain Country Club in Concord, Ohio, and has been around handhelds for 15 years. At Little Mountain, he's using Motorola Radius P1225 handhelds with Site Pro Toro software that control each individual station on the course, along with program capabilities without having to touch a computer.

"The main reason I like handhelds, besides convenience, is the fact that I can control irrigation and physically observe the system for problems very easily," he says. "Making sure zones are running and heads are performing properly is very important for the overall health of the turf.

"I would recommend them to anyone," he adds. "They are easy to use and convenient for a superintendent dealing with a large irrigation system."

Sorg says he will be upgrading from Site Pro to the newest version within in a year due to federal guidelines with airwave frequencies.

Bruce Burger, CGCS, has been at The Quarry Golf Club in San Antonio, Texas since it was built in 1983. Though he's never had a handheld irrigation controller, he knows the value.

"As a daily fee golf course, we do about 10,000 tournament rounds a year, in addition to just regular play," he says. "We only close on Christmas and Thanksgiving, so we have to water in fertilizer quickly and sometimes

between groups. I've often seen a green open with no players and wished I could just pop on the heads via radio, but I have to take the time to drive over to the controller and fire it up manually which, frankly, wastes time."

Though The Quarry may not utilize the latest and greatest in hand held technology, the course isn't operating in the Dark Ages. Burger and his staff take advantage of the Telvent weather service, an online subscription service based out of Omaha, Neb.

According to Burger, the company used to broadcast satellite feeds to each subscriber, but has moved online to meet today's needs. It's basically a new version of the old data transmission network system, he adds.

"The great thing about it is you select your site, as in The Quarry Golf Club, then it is pinpointed and all the forecasts revolve around that site," Burger says. "It gives you 10- and 30-mile warning rings around your site and will predict, down to the minute, when rain is going to occur.

"It gives lightning strikes and the distance from the site down to tenths of a mile," he continues. "It's very accurate and gives you an 'all clear' message when lightning is out of range. The good thing is that the messages come directly to my smartphone, as well, so I can see what's happening at all times. The weather graphics are really good and so is the long-range weather information."

Burger says the Telvent weather service has saved The Quarry quite a bit of money by being able to accurately forecast when rain is going to stop so they are able to get the tournaments in and not lose revenue. At the same time, he is able to schedule his crew efficiently around the rain and knows when to send them back out safely.

Like Burger, Crow takes advantage of software on a day-to-day basis, beyond the popular Microsoft Excel, Word and Outlook titles.

"I use quite a few programs," he says. "I use an AutoCAD program to update or print out my irrigation maps. Our irrigation computer uses the Rainbird Nimbus central control system, and to log into my computers, I use a program called 'Logmein.'"

His company also uses GoToMeeting.com to conduct meetings without having to travel, which Crow calls "a huge time and money saver."

While handheld controls may not be for everyone – like superintendents who prefer to manually do the task to make sure it is done correctly – and computers become limited when connection to the Internet is lost or

the occasional crash or virus pops up, there is no debate that today's superintendents have a wealth of high-tech options at their fingertips and many use all they can to their full advantage.

"The use of technology has not only made my day more productive, but has also allowed me to stay better organized," Crow says. "It has given me the ability to keep up to date on the latest trends, data and research. But most importantly, it has allowed me the ability to double-check systems that normally would increase the stress in my day, specifically my irrigation system during this record-setting drought we've had in Texas."

And he's not alone at Falconhead Golf Club.

"In addition to all [I do], my equipment manager uses a computer program called 'ManagerPlus,' which gives us the ability to schedule equipment service, track all parts inventory and costs, track all equipment repairs and their related costs and generate reports and documentation of every service or repair performed," Crow says.

In an industry where success and failure often hinge on the most minute detail, productivity and results are often enhanced by the availability of modern technology. **GCI**

Rob Thomas is a Cleveland-based freelance writer and frequent GCI contributor.



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— Bruce Burger,
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ROLL THE BALL BACK? WHY?

I recently spoke to two groups of superintendents – one in Minnesota, the other in Pennsylvania – and during the Q&A portion of both talks I was asked the same question: “What did you think about how far Bubba Watson drove the ball in Maui?”

The questions referred to the PGA Tour's season-opening event in Hawaii where Big Bubba drove the green of a par-four measuring around 450 yards. According to the Tour's stats, he averaged 298 yards per drive during the tournament, and he only used his driver a few times.

No surprise, those questions were followed by the inevitable next one: “Do you think the golf ball should be rolled back?”

Here's my short answer: No. I'm not saying we shouldn't consider steps to make the game more challenging for the pros who make an awful lot of money from it. But for the rest of us, the ball is not the problem. There are numerous reasons the pros hit the ball so well and so far — practice, conditioning, equipment, teachers, sports psychologists and so on. Or you could just agree, as I do, with the tagline that the PGA Tour used to use to describe its players: “These guys are good.”

Much has been said about rolling back the ball. But has anyone considered how the golf ball – and the fear that it goes too far – affects those of us who tend turfgrass for a living? Here are a few agroeconomic points to mull over if you think the ball is the problem.

WE'LL HAVE TO BUILD EXTRA-LONG COURSES. There's a group of players, architects and other worriers who say that unless something is done about how far the ball flies we will soon be forced to build courses 8,000 yards long. To which I say: For whom? Not for me, and probably not for you, either. I'm perfectly happy and challenged, on a 6,500-yard track. Why would I want to beat myself up any more than I have to?

Building excessively long courses is an irresponsible use of both land and money. All the extra costs – construction, earth-moving, irrigation, water, chemicals/pesticides, labor and probably another dozen you can easily come up with – will end up being passed along to the member/customer. This is ultimately bad for the game and bad for our livelihoods.

The average handicap index is a little over 15. Real golfers aren't asking for longer courses. An 8,000-

yard course should exist only for Tour pros and their events and be financed by the Tour pros and their events. The other 99.9 percent of golfers, like you and me, aren't interested.

ROLLING BACK THE BALL WILL REDUCE MAINTENANCE COSTS. Most plans I've heard for cutting back on distance talk about a reduction of about 10 percent. Will a 10 percent shorter golf course really cost less to maintain? I doubt it. Crews still have to be hired and paid; supplies need to be purchased and used; you'll still have to remove trees, keep equipment running,

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repair cart paths and keep the turf healthy. You'll still hear the same complaints about aerified greens, slow greens, unmown rough, wet fairways and unranked bunkers.

Unless your course is planning to shrink from 7,000 yards to 4,000 yards, I don't think the cost savings will be very much at all. However, I can think of one upside to a shorter ball: Your members might start blaming their equipment, rather than course conditions, for their poor play.

Yeah, right.

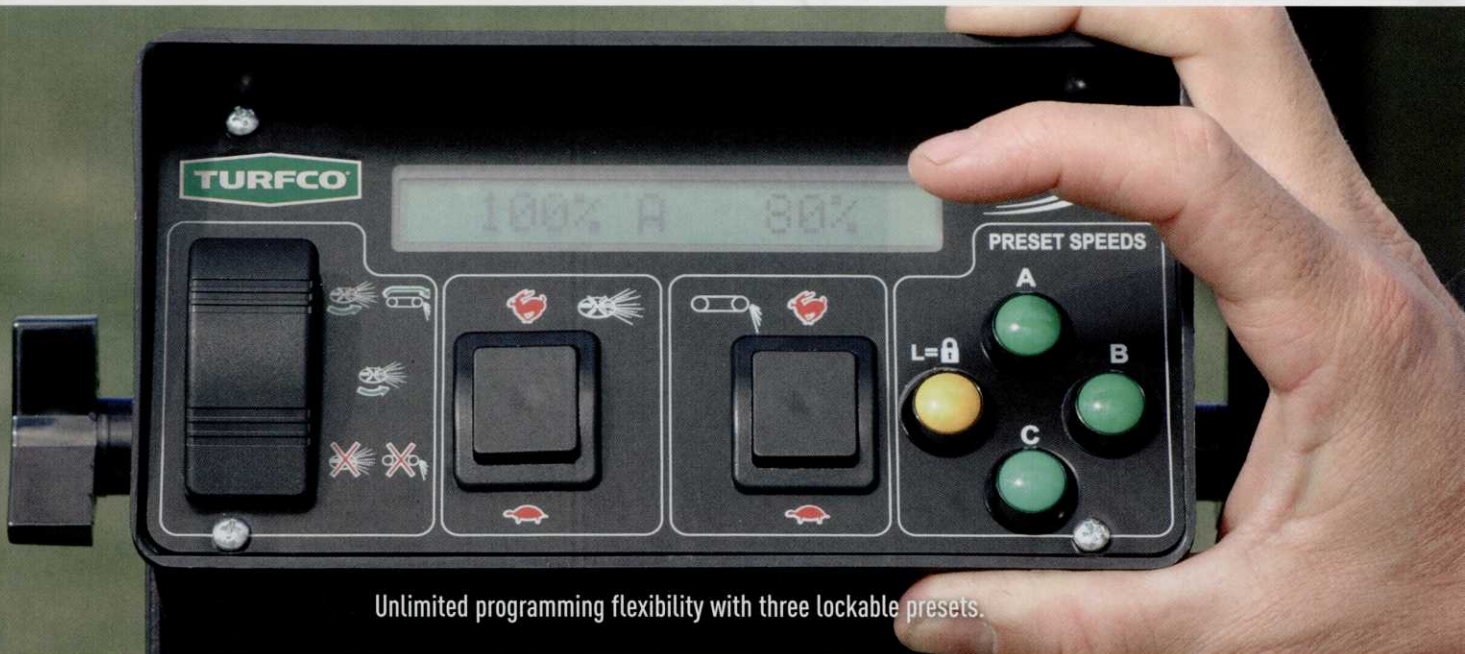
COURSE CONDITIONS ARE TOO GOOD. It isn't only improvements in golf equipment that are responsible for longer shots. We're partly to blame, as well. Within the last 25 years, many agronomic practices first used on putting surfaces have found their way onto fairways, resulting in better, faster conditions from tee to green. In fact, to everyone now promoting “firm and fast” conditions on America's courses I say, “What do you think we've been doing the last quarter century?”

Think the ball goes too far on its own? How about these advances:

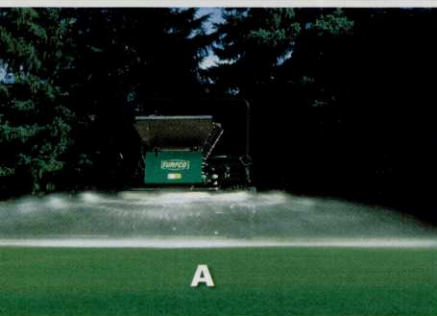
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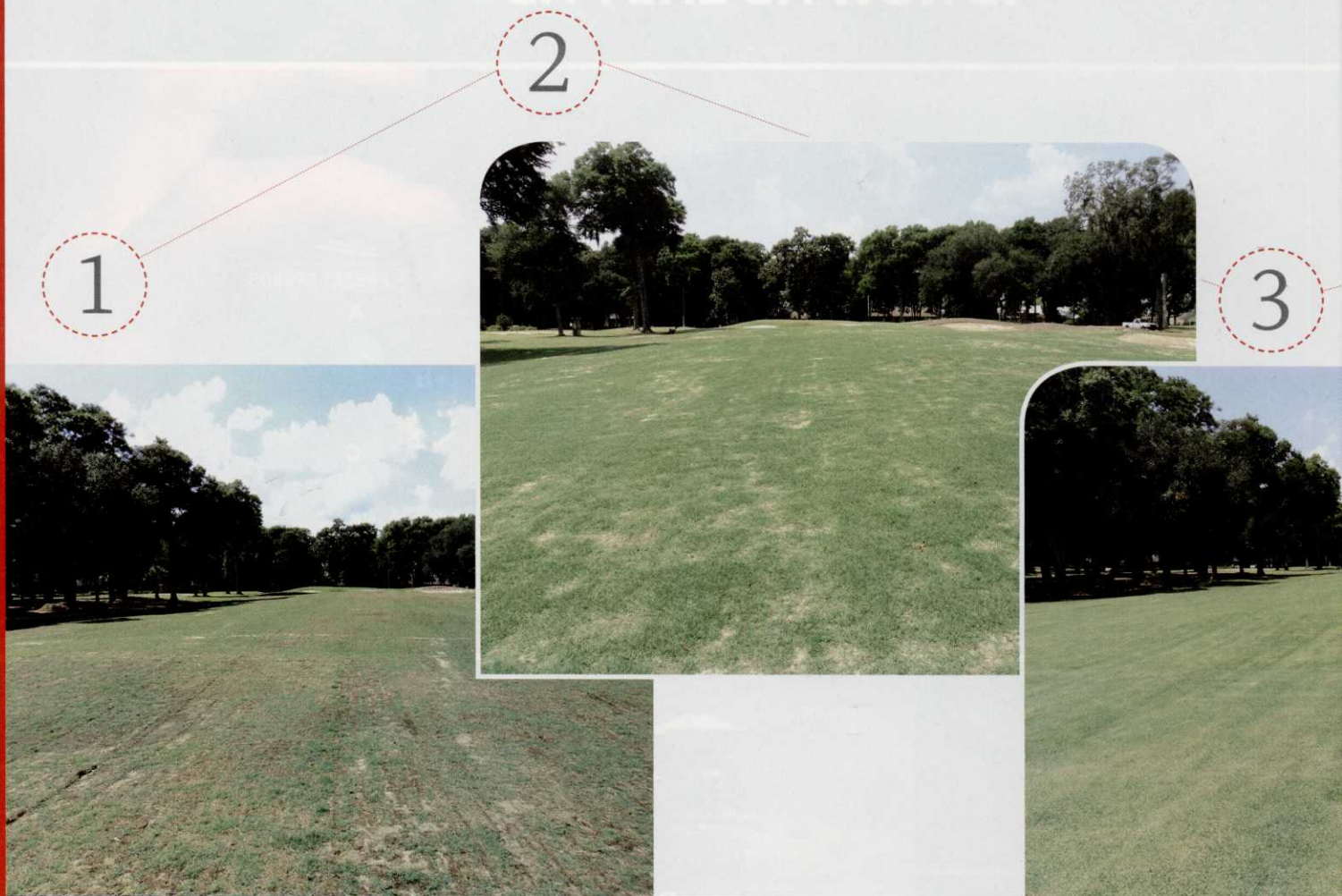
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Making fairways

One South Carolina superintendent proves converting from bentgrass to newer Bermuda varieties via a no-till system isn't just for greens.

By Brian Hollingsworth, CGCS

The development of the no-till system in recent years has helped many clubs across the country successfully convert their bentgrass or older Bermudagrass greens to newer ultradwarf Bermudagrass varieties. Observing the progress and success of this program on greens, I began to ask myself, "Why wouldn't this work on other parts of the golf course too, and save a lot of money in the process?"

Two years ago, here at Dataw Island Club in Beaufort, S.C., we were in the midst of preparing for a major golf course renovation which included re-grassing most of the playing surfaces including fairways and tees. Due

to unforeseen circumstances, that project had to be put on hold and over the next year we began considering other ways to improve the golf course at a reduced cost.

The more I thought about it, I felt strongly that no-till planting, or some variation of it, could be successfully done on fairways just as it is done with greens. The process would be less expensive than stripping or tilling all the fairways before planting. As it turns out I wasn't the only one with this idea.

Several clubs in Florida and some in the desert Southwest had been doing their own variations of no-till planting fairways for years. Additionally, Modern Turf, based in Rembert, S.C., had been fabricating their own

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no-till sprig planter for fairways in hopes of accomplishing the same goal. It was exciting to learn that other clubs had successfully converted their fairways to new grasses using no-till and that a local sod supplier was working on a machine to do it. Suddenly, it seemed like there was a real possibility that we could still get our fairways converted far more affordably.

In late summer of 2010, I was contacted by Modern Turf's Hank Kerfoot about a demonstration of their new no-till machine at Moss Creek Club in Bluffton, S.C. He explained they had been working on a machine planter capable of planting Bermudagrass sprigs directly into the existing turf canopy. Watching the new planter in action, along with several superintendents from the Hilton Head area, I have to say I came away less than impressed. The machine needed tweaking. There was little consistency in its ability to evenly apply the sprigs and in its ability to cut the sprigs in

properly through the existing turf.

Mitchell Wilkerson, CGCS of Moss Creek, agrees. "We were hopeful that we could cut in Celebration Bermuda directly into our test plots on the driving range at the demo," he says. "Unfortunately, I wasn't completely comfortable with the end product the new machine was producing."

As Modern Turf continued to work on their machine it turned out that the issues that held up the original project at Dataw Island Club had been resolved. At the same time, we were now revisiting each aspect of our renovation, as well as its cost and importance to the club, so a revised project could be formally approved for construction. I still strongly felt we needed to re-grass most, if not all, of our fairways on our Cotton Dike golf course. But we definitely needed to find the right price and process to get it done.

It was at that time that I began to speak with Modern Turf again, this time more

From left to right: a fairway on the Cotton Dike course makes the change to Celebration Bermudagrass using a no-till process. Each image shows the grow-in through an eight-week period.

seriously. They had addressed several issues with the no-till planter and had successfully performed a no-till project on an athletic field. They were ready to try the machine on a larger scale and needed the right place to do it. Modern Turf made a commitment to us that they would no-till plant our fairways with Celebration Bermudagrass and do whatever it took to get the job done, regardless of how the machine performed.

It was still a bit of a risk for me and the club but I was comfortable that Modern Turf would stand behind their word and their work.

This past April, we closed our Cotton Dike course to begin renovating our greens, bunkers, irrigation system and cart paths. The first question with regard to the no-till conversion of the fairways was how much prep work should be done in front of the planter to get the ground ready for the sprigs. Obviously, we had to kill the existing Bermudagrass. We applied two applications of

THE NUTS AND BOLTS

PRE-PLANT

- Roundup (one gal/A) + Fusilade (22 oz/A) was applied six weeks before sprig date, and three weeks before sprig date.
- Two days before sprig date we applied Roundup (one gal/A) + Ronstar FL (1.85 oz/1000).
- Applied 14-25-11 starter fertilizer at planting.

PLANTING DATES

- Our planting schedule was dependent upon our new irrigation installation progress.
- The first fairway planted was on June 30, the last fairway planted was on August 10.
- The planting progressed at about one to two fairways per day.

GROW-IN TIME

- Grow-in was very quick with the Celebration no-till.
- Based on my observation for a typical fairway, at four weeks coverage was 60 percent, at six weeks 90 percent, and by eight weeks 100 percent.

FERTILITY

- Fertility used was the initial starter supplying one pound of phosphorus, then three quarters of a pound of nitrogen per week from ammonium sulfate was applied for four weeks beginning at week three after planting.
- The fairways planted last were fertilized more to push slower growing areas at the end of the summer.

MOWING

- Fairways were mowed at one inch with a rotary rough unit for first two to three weeks.
- Height was then lowered to .650 of an inch and mowed with reel units about week four.
- Final height at the end of the summer was .550 of an inch.

TOPDRESSING

- Fairways were topdressed regularly throughout grow-in using the old greens mix and old bunker sand from our renovation.
- Most fairways had three quarters to one inch of topdressing sand in the turf canopy by completion.



No-tilling the new springs directly into the old surface ended up providing the smoothest operation, even over aerifying, verticle mowing and sweeping.

Roundup with Fusilade. Then just before planting, we made one application of Roundup with Ronstar FL.

Next, we needed to decide whether more loosening of the dead thatch and turf would be necessary to plant or would improve the planting process. After trying various methods of aerifying, vertical mowing and sweeping, on one test hole, we ran the no till machine over these areas on a dry test run. As it turned out, any of these additional steps alone or in conjunction with each other made the dead turf surface too loose for the no-till planter, and it tore them up as it cut. The easiest way turned out to be the best, and that was to just no-till the plant directly into the existing surface that had been killed with Roundup.

Now knowing what our plan would be, we were ready to begin. The fairways were sprayed out and we began to no-till plant Celebration. Needless to say, the first few fairways planted were a work in progress. Dustin Nemenz, Cotton Dike's superintendent, became concerned. "The first few fairways that we no-till planted were really a mess," he recalls. "The machine worked fine when tested earlier, but now that actual planting was underway it was really tearing up the existing turf surface. The old dead mat layer was being pulled up as the machine planted. Our sprig contact with the soil was impacted, not to mention that the fairways smoothness was being compromised."

Modern Turf adjusted the machine over the next few holes and rented a heavy duty roller to press out the damage. The process and the planting did get better as we went. Kerfoot and his team knew immediately the initial product wasn't satisfactory. "As we went along we found that the machine performed differently from hole to hole, soil type to soil type, and even



Brian Hollingsworth, CGCS, left, and Dustin Nemenz, right, on one of their no-till fairways at Dataw Island Club in Beaufort, S.C.

differently depending on the topography," he says. "We gained valuable insight as to what our machine did well and maybe some other things it didn't do so well."

Modern Turf even went so far as to hydro-sprig two fairways entirely that were severely sloped so as not to damage the mounding on those fairways. "Our machine may not be the best answer on severely sloping fairways," Kerfoot says. "However, we did learn that hand-spreading sprigs and hydro-mulching over the top works just fine."

Once planting was done and grow-in proceeded, I quickly began to realize we had a winner. The no-till process was going to work out and the new fairways looked really good. We had been fortunate that after a dry start to the summer, we had eight inches of rain in August to help with the grow-in. Recovery was further helped by the fact that there is so little traffic with the no-till method. With no sod and debris to remove from the golf course, there is none of the damage that you would normally associate with re-grassing fairways.

Of course, there is nowhere near the amount of labor involved either, and all told, I believe it's reasonable to expect that no-till fairway conversions could save as much as 50 percent compared with the cost of conventional methods.

Nemenz ended up being comfortable with the process as well. "I felt much better six weeks after the Celebration was planted and you could really start to see what the new fairways were going to look like," he says. "The grass covered very quickly and all the initial damage covered over. We used our old greens mix and old bunker sand to topdress the fairways too. Once we began doing that and pushing fertilizer to grow the grass in, the fairways really responded. They look great now."

Mitchell Wilkerson has kept a watchful eye on Dataw's fairway-planting process and progress too as Moss Creek begins serious planning to re-grass fairways as part of their upcoming renovation. "Seeing it through the entire process now and especially seeing the end result, I think that fairway no-till planting

has merit," he says. "Dataw's fairways turned out well and we have some better ideas and options now as to how we want to renovate our fairways."

As a result of our experience, I believe no-till operations on fairways will become more popular and prove to be an excellent and cost-effective way to improve fairways. We were able to replace our old mutated turfgrass that always transitioned poorly after overseeding with a newer variety in Celebration that is more aggressive and pure, too.

Most importantly, we were able to do this at a much lower cost than originally-projected while maintaining the quality end product we desired. As more sod companies look at the prospect of no-tilling fairways and more superintendents experiment with their own ideas of how to do it at their club, the process is certain to be refined. **GCI**

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article first appeared in the November/December edition of Carolinas Green. It is reprinted with permission.



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GOLF SHOULD BE FUN, DAMMIT!

It's time for New Year's resolutions, and here is mine: Golf should be fun, dammit!

The genesis of this is playing with my six-year-old grandson, and him reminding me of the pure joy of hitting a good golf shot. Or being outdoors on a perfect fall day rather than playing video games or watching TV. Yes, golf still has its magic appeal, even if many of us long-time players forget it, including me. However, not in 2012, no sir.

Of course, the devil is in the details, so here are specifics of how I'll make golf more fun in 2012. I resolve to:

- 1 Play more with the kids and grandkids.
- 2 Play with strangers whenever I have an opening in the group. You meet the nicest people that way.
- 3 Play with women. It's more fun than the stereotypes suggest. Women still debate whether to be flattered or insulted at being "one of the guys."
- 4 Retire my old jokes. My friends already know my wayward shots "couldn't be found by Lassie, even if wrapped in bacon," or that "When I swing, everything moves but my bowels." They know that sinking a long putt to save 8 is "akin to whip cream on a turd."
- 5 Get new golf jokes or tell none at all!
- 6 Go "old school" with golf etiquette, just because it's fun. Since I will be playing with my grandson, it will pass golf's (and formerly life's) grand tradition of civility to the next generation. Yes, teaching kids is fun for, or perhaps the definition of, "old farts" like me. That reminds me of a corollary to point No. 4: Stop the fart jokes. At age 57, it's time. Harder yet, stop the farts. Both work well with Point No. 3.
- 7 Stop swearing. In 2012, my strongest words will be "Oh, nubbins!"
- 8 Take golf lessons. Relates to point No. 7.
- 9 Insult a caddie. Turnabout is fair play...
- 10 Practice the short game rather than beating range balls. Low scores will result. Low scores are fun.
- 11 Make each round a work of art, as golfers like Ben Crenshaw and Tom Watson once told me they do. They start preparing the night before with good food and appropriate sleep, and on match day, stretch, practice well, follow etiquette, focus on every shot, and get the most out of every round, no matter what breaks come their way. Relating to point No. 4, when I three putt from 30 feet, I won't joke that "the first putt was like Watson in his prime, and the return was like Watson in later years!"
- 12 Complain less. Not fun for listeners, even if it meets some deep-seated need in me. In 2012, slow play is just an extended chance to enjoy the beautiful surroundings found only on a golf course.
- 13 Move up a tee. On some courses, I'll move up two tees, because it's fun to play short irons into greens. It's not a test of manhood, dammit.
- 14 Walk when they let me... but not with the grandkids. Kids love carts. I taught my son to play at age five by letting him drive the cart after three good shots in a row. He eventually got a golf scholarship and not paying tuition was fun.
- 15 Play more. What else could be more fun?
- 16 Play less, as in shortening rounds to 9 or 12 holes if my back hurts, or I am rushed.

My friends already know my wayward shots 'couldn't be found by Lassie, even if wrapped in bacon,' or that 'When I swing, everything moves but my bowels.'