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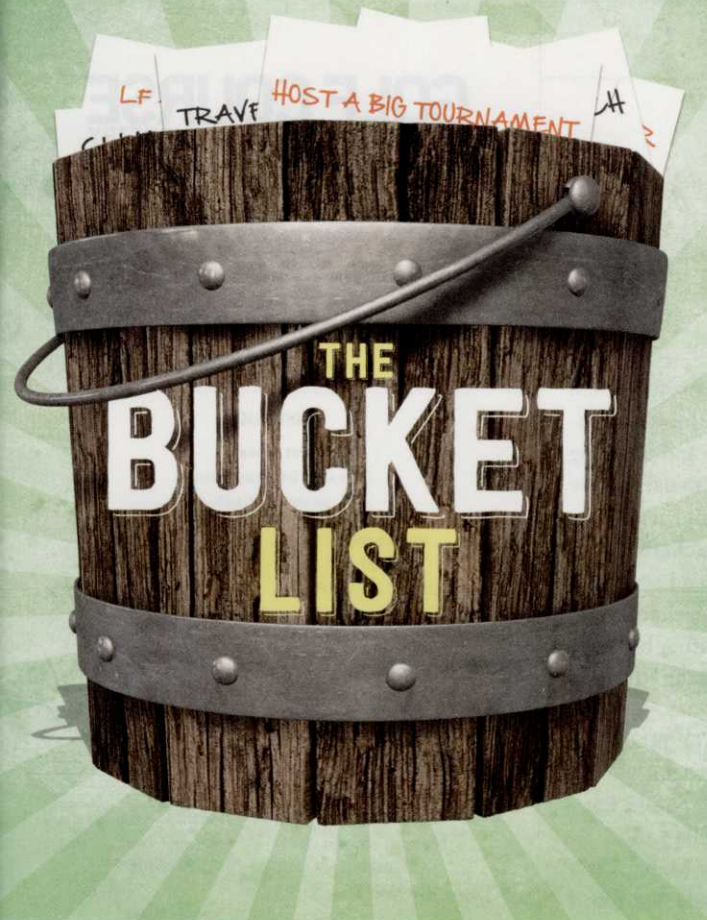
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## THE CULT OF GCI

A few weeks ago, in the middle of an otherwise routine sales meeting, I was startled to learn that I am a cult leader.

Allow me to explain...

We were talking about finding a new sales rep for a territory on Lawn & Landscape, GCI's sister publication, which happens to be the biggest, baddest magazine in the lawncare business. Someone suggested recruiting a salesperson from one of the other turf industry magazines and Russ Warner, my national accounts manager laughed and said, "I'm not sure he's cut out to be a member of the cult."

Huh?

"They (a competitor) tell advertisers that our group is like a cult where we've all drunk the GIE Media Kool-Aid," he said. "We all believe the same things, say the same things and are basically a bunch of zealots."

When I heard this astonishing bit of information, two things occurred to me:

1. We're apparently doing well if that's the only bad thing our competitors can find to say about us;

2. That's actually an amazing compliment.

I am, in fact, thoroughly delighted to be characterized as a cult leader. Why?

Because Nike's a cult. So is Apple. And Facebook.

In my book, being accused of being "culty" says a lot of good things about your organization. For example, it means your culture is so well-defined even your competitors see it...and are apparently envious of it. It also means that everyone has a clear, shared vision

of success. Everyone helps and protects each other. It suggests an organization that embraces doing things differently and breaking away from the pack. Mostly, it means you've created something enigmatic and attractive. It means your organization has charisma.

I look around the industry and see other successful groups with cult-like, charismatic traits. Here are a few along with a brief description of that "special something" that sets them apart:

The Augusta National maintenance team. "What happens on Magnolia Lane stays on Magnolia Lane."

The Latschaw Mafia. "You worked for Paul? Me too. I got your back."

The Toro Company. "Competitors? We have competitors?"

Penn State Alumni. "The password is "Nittany""

Grigg Brothers. "Hey... wanna see some science?"

Carolinas GCSA. "We're just another chapter...on steroids."

USGA Green Section. "We never talk about specific products...during work hours."

I kid because I love, but charismatic organizations like these can be very successful. I think that success usually starts with one person with a very clear vision who shares the same story with everyone he or she meets.

So the key to charismatic leadership – and reaping the rewards of culthood – is good communications. Can you tell your story, including what makes your operation unique, in a few sentences?

If you can, you too might be eligible for cult-leader status. **GCI**



**Pat Jones**  
Editorial director and publisher

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[ REPORTER'S NOTEBOOK ]

# GETTING IT JUST RIGHT

Oak Hill's Jeff Corcoran tells GCI's Bill Brown how he and his team worked closely with the engineers at John Deere Golf to tweak the JD 8000 in preparation for the PGA Championship.

I caught up with Jeff Corcoran, Oak Hill Country Club's director of golf and grounds, on the eve of the 2013 PGA Championship to talk about Oak Hill's fairway mower of choice -- the John Deere 8000 E-Cut Hybrid. During our discussion Jeff told me about his relationship and the support he receives from the team at John

Deere, which went far beyond Championship week.

For example, prior to the public release of the JD 8000 e-cut hybrid, Jeff worked closely with Tracy Lanier, John Deere Golf's product manager, to put the unit through its paces at Oak Hill.

So what were some of the changes Jeff wanted to see from the initial prototype? As Jeff and I looked over the JD 8000 e-cut hybrid, he pointed out the smooth tires with beveled edges along the outside.

"The initial tire that came with the prototype were more aggressive,"

Jeff says. With Oak Hill's height of cut between .325 to .350 they started seeing more wear than they were comfortable with. Jeff worked closely with Tracy Lanier and the team at Deere to get it just right. As a result, the tire you see today is a product of that close working relationship.

What does Jeff like most about the John Deere 8000 e-cut hybrid? Compared to a traditional four-tire, five-unit fairway mower, Oak Hill is seeing the same quality of cut that type of mower produces, but with less of a foot print. For example, the smooth, three-tire configuration of the JD 8000 e-cut hybrid provides a lighter pounds-per-square-inch footprint, while still maintaining enough down pressure on the cutting units to get a great cut.

With the typical topography of a Ross design, the JD 8000 e-cut hybrid's anti-scalp wheels on the individual cutting units allows the units to "land" softer on the undulated turf. This essentially eliminates any scalping as a mower pass is initiated. — **BILL BROWN**

## FOR MORE

Check out the app version of this story to read Bill's complete account and to view additional images from his time at the PGA Championship.



## Be a master...of invention

The next time you come up with a great idea, a product that would help make other superintendents' jobs easier, follow through on it. You never know what could happen. That's what Patrick Sisk, CGCS, superintendent at Milwaukee Country Club did, and now his idea is hitting the market.

Called the Green Sweep, his product is a simple attachment that fits onto virtually any push blower. According to the website ([greensweeptech.com](http://greensweeptech.com)), it "utilizes air redirection technology to move both heavy and light applications of topdressing material safely and efficiently into the canopy of your turf

— without the abrasion and turf stress caused by drag brushes or mats."

"So we're taking that abrasive [topdressing] material, and the standard corporation is to tag it in with a drag mat, or have an army of staff workers with push brooms, taking that abrasive material and pushing it across the surface of the turf," says Sisk. "We've come to accept the damage, because there's a benefit of the addition of sand, and we know how to promote turf growth to eventually have that seal."

Sisk's product will take away the damage.

"There've been a few attempts at

doing this with air," he says. "I'm not the first, but I am the first to take a vehicle off the green."

The best part about the Green Sweep is that it can be used in multiple ways, making it ideal to have on hand.

"I wanted to make a machine you could take on a putting green," Sisk says. "I love it on the putting greens, but I really, really love it on tees and approaches that are irregularly shaped and often difficult to incorporate the sand using the standard method of dragging. Often we have to send staff



Patrick Sisk

## From THE FEED



On the weekend of the club championship at The Country Club at Castle Pines Golf Course in Castle Rock, Colo., a hailstorm tore into the course, leaving greens beaten and scattering bunkers, and superintendent Sean McCue shared the results – and probably a little misery.



**Sean McCue@SKMQU**

Well this is nice! Haven't seen anything like this in 18 my years here.



† **Justin VanLanduit@TurfTank**

We are only a pawn in Mother Nature's game.



**Sean McCue@SKMQU**

It keeps getting better.

**Sean McCue@SKMQU**

On the positive side, my anthracnose is looking much better than yesterday.



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back behind the vehicle... With this device, I can do the clean up, I can get the sand in, and there's really no additional time."

Sisk says he has a friend who runs an asphalt sealing business and even he uses the Green Sweep to help.

For any superintendents with an idea, know that bringing it to life won't be easy, but it will be worth it.

"In the course of life, 10 years later you may look at a product and say 'man I thought of that, I should have done something with it,'" he says. "I don't want to be that guy."

"It's scary," Sisk goes on to say. "It's really scary...I guess there are two fears: fear of failure, so that keeps me plugging along, then also fear of success. I've got a lot on my plate right now, do I really want to put myself through all of this stress? The answer is yeah I do, because I'm having a blast."

## Bee motivated

If you think maintaining a 36-hole golf course is a tough job, imagine also maintaining 10 beehives. That's what Scott Witte, superintendent at Cantigny Golf, does every week.

"In the fall of 2011, Cantigny Golf partnered with the USDA to assist in developing Best Management Practices (BMP's) for honeybees by getting involved with the 'Bee Informed Project,'" says Witte. "In recent years, honey bee losses have been soaring due to Colony Collapse Disorder."

"At the end of the season, we input our hive management practices into the 'Bee Informed Project surveys' developed by the USDA. Over time, the power of this international consortium will help to pinpoint the best strategies for keeping honey bees healthy in our region."

The honey and beeswax produced by the bees are used in the candles sold at the club's gift shop. Some of the money from those sales was recently used to buy three bee suits and two smokers for a high school beekeeping club in Ghana.

"Marcus Hagberg (Project Manager for Education Development Projects Trust) is the son of Susan Hagberg, a personal friend, and owner/President of Wild Goose Chase/Migratory Bird Management. Since Susan Hagberg is well aware of our passion for bees and the environment at Cantigny Golf, she informed me about her son and the Awutu-Winton School's Bee Club. When I was approached by Susan and Marcus about this group of ambitious students in Ghana, it just clicked. It was extremely gratifying to see how our support for the Awutu-Winton High School was so well received.

"My hope...is that the students continue to gain positive experiences while being connected to others through common passions and goals. Though diverse in culture from place to place, when people with similar interests come together, great things can happen for the common good."

## GLOBAL SOIL SURVEY

Over the past few years, sustainability has become a popular word, and superintendents are looking at ways to keep their turf green, while also keeping their fertilizer and pesticide inputs at a minimum.

In response to these concerns, PACE Turf and the Asian Turfgrass Center have launched the Global Soil Survey, a research project created in the hopes of making a positive change in the way turf is fertilized.

For more on the Global Soil Survey, including how your course can get involved, check out our app edition.





## SEASON OF CHANGE

What should you do when it's time to move on?

There's a reason they call this season "the fall." It's not the leaves – it's often superintendents' jobs. Summer is over, in many parts of the country the prime playing season is winding down, and members'/golfers' frustrations are boiling over, and supers are taking the brunt of the criticism. Out with the old...

So there are many golf course superintendents losing jobs, seeking new opportunities, upgrading their current positions. Which is all well and good unless it's at the expense of someone else's misfortune. And this year is likely to be an especially busy game of musical chairs in employment thanks to the awful weather – hot, wet, or both – that blanketed the country almost coast to coast.

No surprise, my phone has been ringing off the hook with calls from supers who've been dismissed. Of course, without cause (or so they say). Right or wrong, the revolving door will be spinning faster than usual this year. If that door is hitting you in the rear end or offering you a chance to move up the ladder, a few words of wisdom and caution.

First, if you are actively searching for a new job, remember that your opportunity may be someone else's misfortune. There's nothing wrong with seeking out a new position, but before you get too deep into the hiring process, try to learn if the opening is because someone resigned, retired, or was let go. Just that little piece of information can tell you a great deal about the situation you'd be entering.

There's nothing wrong with trying to improve your employment situation, and there are lots of perfectly good reasons: a new opportunity, a new place to live, upward mobility, family concerns, etc. But every job has its good points and its bad points. And

every job will have its politics.

Here are some factors I'm hearing far too much about, and which you should be careful of crossing:

**LOCAL HIRING.** I live in New Jersey. Say a job opens up in the "Garden State." Is someone who studied at Rutgers University and worked at a Jersey golf course an "expert" at growing local turf grass? Possibly, yes. And with that local knowledge often comes a local network, local mentors, and local resources. But should that automatically preclude someone from another region applying for – and being seriously considered for – the position? Absolutely not. I don't like seeing qualified people not getting due consideration because of geography. It's wrong for local chapters to close ranks and try to shut out "outsiders." (It's true among club pros too, and is just as narrow-minded.) Courses and clubs should not only be more open-minded but remember that the main concern is who can do the best job. In fact, I can give you numerous examples when bringing in someone from "outside" was the smartest choice, not only for his talent but because the candidate was willing and able to bring new ideas with him.

**TAP THE TALENT POOL.** Just as misguided as blindly striving to stay local is when regional superintendent associations pressure a club to hire one of their own guys – someone involved in association politics or with "friends in high places" – rather than surveying the entire available talent pool. Again, going outside the easy and obvious buckets can be very good for a club, especially one that hasn't been well served in the past by the easy choice.

**PROPER PROTOCOL.** It makes sense of superintendents to visit other clubs,

talk to other supers, broaden their knowledge base and find friends and mentors in the business throughout the industry. However, sometimes these seemingly innocent visits are really opportunities to negatively review a fellow superintendent's work and spread nasty rumors in an effort to tout one's own knowledge, skills, and availability. Here's a simple response to that: Do unto others...

“First, if you are actively searching for a new job, remember that your opportunity may be someone else's misfortune.”

**REAL REFERENCES.** Search committees and others involved in hiring a new superintendent (or evaluating the present one) should be wary when an outside vendor or salesperson calls to suggest or recommend an applicant, apply pressure, or call attention to a candidate who will be mutually beneficial to both entities. If you're being considered for a new position, you'll have the chance to give a list of references: Be careful who you get to speak on your behalf, especially if it's someone who stands to benefit from you getting the job.

**PROMOTING FROM WITHIN.** There's nothing wrong with promoting the first assistant to the top job. Everyone needs that big break. But number one shouldn't be replaced by number two simply to give a club bragging rights, or worse, simply to save money.

Something else many superintendents tend to forget: Sometimes a

(MORAGHAN continues on page 64)

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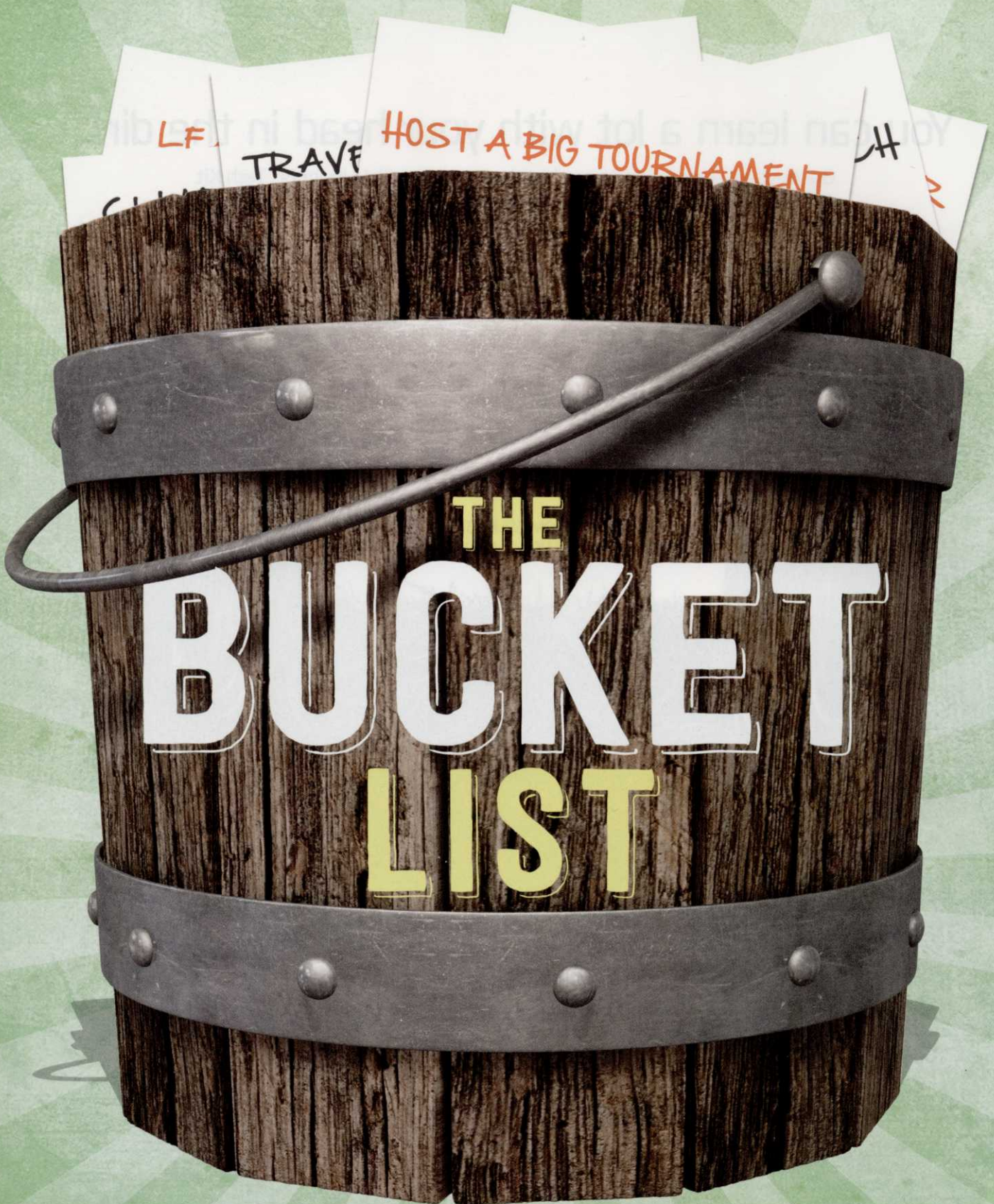
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# THE BUCKET LIST