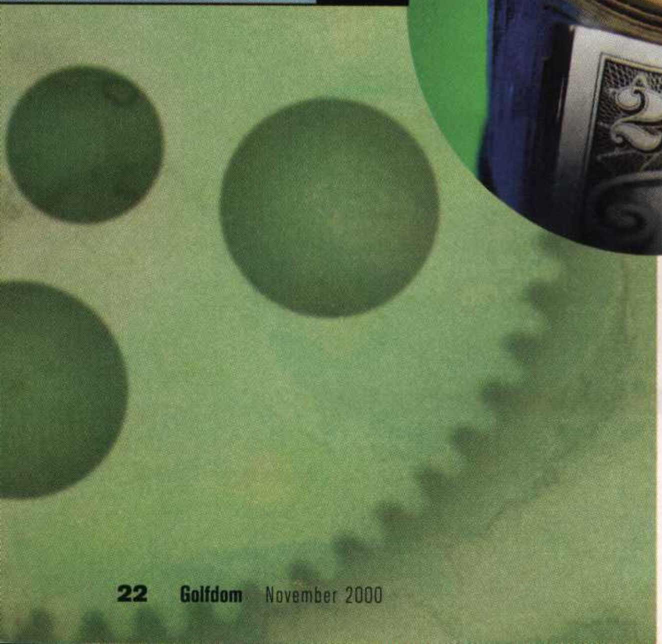
For What



Golf pros and superintendents must work together for a golf course to succeed. Jealousy, however, can easily scuttle their cooperation, and nothing spurs envy more than money.

Superintendents look at the extra revenues some pros get — range fees, lesson income, company cars and profit sharing, to name a few — and wonder where the money is for them.

"Superintendents aren't looking to be highway robbers," says Clark Rowles, superintendent at Nakoma GC in Madison, Wis. "We're just looking for compensation to be fair for everyone."

While older superintendents remember the days when pros lived the high life while superintendents toiled for pittance, today's numbers reflect a slightly different story. Most superintendents make more in base salary than pros and some of the traditional perks of pros have disappeared, according to the National Golf Foundation's 1999 U.S. Golf Facility Compensation Study. But pros still garner more additional income than superintendents, and the only way superintendents can narrow the gap further is to research what additional compensation pros receive and demand their fair share from owners, insiders say.

Troy Alderson, superintendent at Kah-Nee-Tah Resort GC in Warm Springs, Ore., says he wanted to educate his owners about what industry standards were for overall superintendent compensation. While his salary at the club was good, the benefits didn't match what Alderson knew others in the industry received. So he contacted the GCSAA and talked to other superintendents about what benefits he should expect. Armed with that information, he went to the owners to request what he felt he deserved.

"Club officials were behind the times," Alderson says. "They'd never been asked to do anything for the superintendent, so they never did. Sometimes, you just have to ask."

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You're Worth

Here's what superintendents must know if they want their compensation to measure up to the pros

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR., ASSOCIATE EDITOR

PRO VS. SUPERINTENDENT

Base Salaries (Median)

	Superintendent	Professional
Municipal (U.S.)	$44,500	$38,900
Daily Fee (U.S)	$43,300	$34,800
Private (U.S.)	$58,100	$42,200

INSURANCE BENEFITS

Insurance Paid By Facility (Percentage Receiving Coverage)

	Health	Life	Business	Dental
Municipal (U.S.)				
Pros	80.3%	64.5%	7.9%	61.2%
Superintendents	73.5%	59.7%	6.6%	58.2%
Daily Fee (U.S.)				
Pros	75.3%	39.4%	8.8%	32.7%
Superintendents	70.2%	37.5%	7.5%	30.2%
Private (U.S.)				
Pros	80.8%	54.7%	5.7%	40.6%
Superintendents	78.8%	54.6%	4.1%	38.9%

ADDITIONAL INCOME

	Lessons	Association Dues	Education Allowance	Percentage of Car Rental Fees	Percentage of Green/Guest Fees	Bonus
Municipal (U.S.)						
Pros	89.5%	59.2%	52.6%	17.1%	8.6%	21.7%
Superintendents	N/A	46.4%	46.4%	N/A	N/A	18.9%
Daily Fee (U.S.)						
Pros	86.2%	64.9%	55.9%	5.9%	3.5%	52.4%
Superintendents	1.3%	48.1%	39.0%	N/A	N/A	45.4%
Private (U.S.)						
Pros	93.1%	69.5%	61.9%	19.5%	12.3%	59.7%
Superintendents	N/A	56.5%	49.2%	N/A	N/A	51.1%

** Percentage of survey respondents who receive additional money from these sources. N/A = Not Applicable*

ALL CHARTS THIS PAGE ARE FROM THE NATIONAL GOLF FOUNDATION'S 1999 U.S. GOLF FACILITY EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION STUDY

OTHER BENEFITS

	Paid Vacation	Profit-Sharing	Annuity/Retirement	401K/Pension
Municipal (U.S.)				
Pros	70.4%	6.6%	48.7%	29.6%
Superintendents	69.9%	2.6%	44.9%	27.6%
Daily Fee (U.S.)				
Pros	71.8%	14.1%	12.5%	35.5%
Superintendents	69.2%	11.2%	10.2%	30.4%
Private (U.S.)				
Pros	77.4%	8.5%	15.1%	38.4%
Superintendents	78.8%	7.6%	15.5%	41.3%

SOURCE: NATIONAL GOLF FOUNDATION'S 1999 U.S. GOLF FACILITY EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION STUDY

Continued from page 22

Steve Rodgers, pro at The Quechee Club in Quechee, Vt., says that while superintendents should be compensated equally to pros, negotiating ability has a lot to do with how much superintendents receive.

"You may have a green thumb and be able to grow grass on concrete, but that won't matter if you don't know how to negotiate a good contract," Rodgers says. "Superintendents should be compensated the same way as pros, but superintendents have to know how to get what they want."

Upward trend

According to GCSAA, a survey of 3,527 of its members showed that superintendents' average salaries rose from $44,500 in 1993 to $57,057 this year. That's a significant increase, so squeezing extra pennies from owners for benefits like pensions and health insurance isn't easy.

Cathy Hut, senior manager of employee programs for GCSAA, says it's hard to generalize about compensation packages because they vary by region. Superintendents in Florida and California may command higher compensation than superintendents in other regions, she says. But most U.S. superintendents are seeing annual raises in the 3 percent to 4 percent range. "The golf course maintenance market has kept pace with overall national employment trends, in terms of pay raises, since 1995," Hut says.

Hut also advises superintendents to think creatively when negotiating compensation packages. Signing bonuses, housing allowances and company cars provide alternative compensation options. Hut says only 42 percent of superintendents had a pension or 401(k) plan for retirement in 1999. Setting up a 401(k) can be complicated, and many golf courses don't have the staff to manage them, she says.

To overcome this barrier, GCSAA joined the Club Managers Association of America and the

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Are Assistants Keeping Up?

Assistant superintendents' salaries have risen in tandem with superintendents' salaries. According to the GCSAA, assistant superintendents average base salary rose to $29,638 in 2000 from $27,981 in 1998, representing a 6 percent increase. In addition, 77 percent of assistants are now salaried instead of hourly.

But Lori Moser, assistant superintendent at Cherry Hills CC in Englewood, Colo., says she's concerned with the salary expectations of students coming out of school.

"There are a lot of people coming out of school who have completely unrealistic expectations of what they'll receive in their first jobs," Moser says. "A lot of students think they're going to be superintendents immediately."

Moser says turf schools have to do a better job of explaining what salaries students can expect in their first jobs. Doug Petersan, superintendent at Austin GC in Austin, Texas, agrees.


John Warner: Experience eventually pays

"There are a lot of kids coming out of school today who look at assistants jobs as glorified internships before they move on to more money as head superintendent," Petersan says, adding that students just out of school often take less money than an established superintendent would just to get the title.

John Warner, assistant superintendent at New Orleans CC in New Orleans, says students should be patient and learn as much as they can in their first job.

"Experience has a lot to do with what you will make in the future," Warner says. "I understood that was part of the deal when I got into this business. I'm looking forward to making more money in the future, but until then I'm going to learn all I can."

Continued from page 24

PGA to create a program called Golf Retirement Plus (see sidebar, page 28). The plan offers employers the opportunity to reward these employees with retirement benefits without breaking the bank.

"If you're a small business owner, it's not easy to offer benefits, but this program gives you the opportunity to reward the three key employees that make your course a success," Hut says. "Superintendents should let their employers know the program is available."

"You're duking it out with God every day. I don't begrudge [superintendents] any money they make because they earn every penny."

– ALYN STANTON, PRO, CLUB WEST GC, PHOENIX

Even playing field

Most superintendents acknowledge their base salaries are more than most pros, but they also know pros have more opportunities to supplement their incomes.

Greg McDaniel, superintendent at Sage Meadows GC in Jonesboro, Ark., says his base salary is 30 percent more than his pro's, but those differences are negligible because the pro gets lesson revenue and participates in profit-sharing. But McDaniel admits he wouldn't want the pro's job because of the added stress of dealing with owner expectations and demanding golfers. "Still, I'd like to have some of the [financial opportunities he as," McDaniel says.

Cary Splane, pro at Gainesville CC in Gainesville, Fla., says most pros' deals aren't as lucrative as they seem. Many of a pro's benefits are based on overall club performance. In Splane's experience, superintendents make a better base salary than most pros and their compensation doesn't fluctuate. If the club has a bad year, the superintendent gets paid the same as in a good year, he says. The pro doesn't have that kind of security.

"Contrary to popular belief, we don't make that much money," Splane says. "If there's a couple of months of bad weather and the club does poorly, a pro must adjust his expectations about the amount of money he's going to receive."

Alyn Stanton, pro at Club West GC in Phoenix, says superintendents operate under a lot of stress and should be compensated accordingly.

"Being a superintendent is one of the most ulcer-inducing jobs out there," Stanton says. "You're duking it out with God every day. I don't begrudge them any money they make because they earn every penny."

More face time

A higher profile at a club solidifies the bargaining position of a superintendent who wants ad-

Continued on page 28

Payback Time

Have you ever dreamed of structuring the compensation package of your course's pro? Wouldn't you love to have the pro's salary depend on whether he or she stays in *your* good graces? It's not a fantasy many superintendents get to experience, but for K. Clark Rowles, superintendent at Nakoma GC in Madison, Wis., it came true.

Rowles joined Nakoma in 1996 when the club, founded in 1944, upgraded its facilities. The club had recently finished a $4 million renovation to the clubhouse (including the pro shop) and was planning a $1.2 million renovation to the course. While Rowles enjoyed overseeing the course renovation, the other changes didn't sit well with the pro, who had been at the club for 35 years.

"He came to me and said, 'This is the way I've been doing things for 35 years, and if they don't like it, perhaps it's time for me to move on,' " Rowles says. "He was near retirement anyway, so the club worked out a severance package for him. Unfortunately, that left us without a pro."

With the old professional gone, the club reassessed how to pay its new pro, and Rowles wanted to be part of the process. Rowles pointed out to the general manager that the old contract awarded the pro money from the pro shop, driving range, car rentals, lessons and refurbished balls that the pro recovered from the club's lakes (the club bought them for range balls). The extra compensation totaled more than $150,000 per year without the salary.

"We agreed that when we brought in the new person, the club would control more of those revenues," Rowles says. "We would offer a salary comparable to other pros in the market, but without some of the extras."

When Nakoma advertised the position, 60 applicants interviewed for the job. Rowles participated in every step of the hire. When the day came to hire a pro, Rowles knew what the pro was making and how the package was structured.

Rowles advises superintendents to ask their general managers to sit in on interviews with prospective pros. That way, no one enters the process without a clear understanding of each other's goals.

"It's a two-way street," Rowles says. "I've had interviews where the pro sat in. Why shouldn't superintendents be accorded the same courtesy?"

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ditional compensation. Gale Hultquist, superintendent at Wanakah CC in Hamburg, N.Y., says pros are the first people that golfers see as they begin their rounds. In contrast, they rarely see superintendents. It's up to superintendents to make themselves available to the golfers, Hultquist says. He urges them to get involved in their communities as well as their clubs.

"Golfers want to be seen with people who are movers and shakers," Hultquist says. "The higher your profile, the higher your perceived value to the club."

Some superintendents say their colleagues shouldn't worry about what pros make. Michael Huey, superintendent at Waverly Woods CC in Ellicot City, Md.,

Gale Hultquist, superintendent at Wanakah CC in Hamburg, N.Y., says his peers must raise their profiles to improve their financial position.

says that instead of comparing salaries with the pro, superintendents should concentrate on being compensated equally with their peers.

"I don't know what my pro makes and I'm not concerned about it," Huey says. "I'm fairly compensated when I compare myself with other superintendents in the area, so I'm happy."

Walter Lankau, owner of Stow CC in Stow, Mass., agrees.

"Superintendents have to understand that they're not competing with pros," Lankau says. "I work hard to avoid any competition between the two because my business can't operate if they don't work together." ■

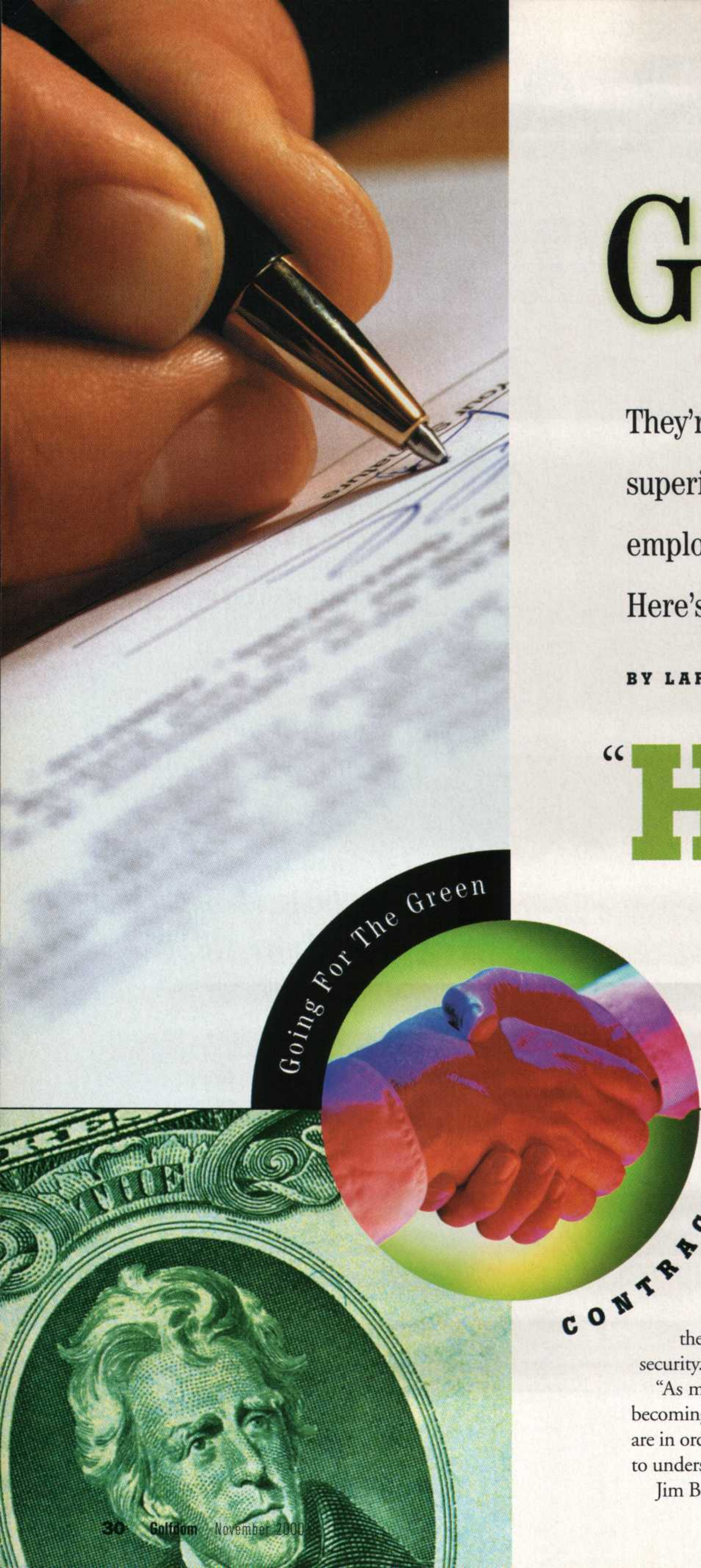
Reaching Retirement

The GCSAA, the PGA and the Club Managers Association of America teamed in 1999 to create Golf Retirement Plus, a program designed to help clubs offer pros, managers and superintendents retirement plans.

Under the program, employees and employers make contributions to an individual account through Golf Retirement Plus representatives, who manage it based on assessments of individual needs. The accounts are overseen by Topeka, Kan.-based Security Benefit Life Insurance Co. The advantages provided by the plan include:

- deferred tax payments;
- portability (meaning that you won't lose your benefits if you change jobs);
- ease of transfer of money into the program from other funds;
- guaranteed death benefits; and
- guaranteed income options upon retirement.

SOURCE: GCSAA



Get It In

They're not standard, but more superintendents are seeking employment contracts. Here's how to negotiate a fair deal

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

"Here I am. Signed, sealed, delivered. I'm yours," Stevie Wonder crooned in 1970. More superintendents are singing this song to their bosses when talk turns to employment contracts.

"We're in an occupation where there's a lot of musical chairs," says Paul R. Latshaw, superintendent of Winged Foot CC in Mamaroneck, N.Y. "A contract gives you assurance of where you're going to be."

Twenty years ago, a general manager or green committee chairman would have doubled over with laughter if a superintendent asked for a contract. But times are changing. About 25 percent of superintendents currently work under contracts, says Tommy Witt, CGCS and director of golf management for StillWaters Resort in Dadeville, Ala. Average length of these contracts is 24 months, according to GCSAA.

Many superintendents aren't looking to break the bank with lucrative contracts. Instead, they want them to gain a priceless intangible — job security.

"As more superintendents move into the realm of becoming business people, it makes sense that contracts are in order," Witt says. "More employers are beginning to understand that."

Jim Brewer, general manager of the Los Angeles CC,

Writing

says contracts are appropriate for superintendents. About three years ago, Brewer signed seasoned superintendent Bruce Williams to a five-year deal.

"I was all for it," Brewer says. "I would be surprised if contracts are not becoming more popular everywhere."

Let's make a deal

If you want a contract, you have to know the nuances of negotiating. You don't want to come across like a narrow-minded, show-me-the-money fool.

The first rule of thumb is to convince a course's head honchos that a contract for you will also be good for them, Witt says.

"Tell them how it will benefit the club by hiring you for the long term," Witt says, noting that most courses don't want to hire new superintendents every two years because it's too expensive. "Always approach the negotiation from a win-win position. Let your counterpart know that you're just seeking fairness in the negotiation."

In the interview process, Witt says it's important that superintendents explain what they will do to benefit an operation, such as:

- What they will do for golf course conditioning.
- How they will protect a course's assets.
- How they will work with mechanics to keep costs down.
- How they will encourage crew members to take better care of equipment.
- How they will negotiate purchases of equipment and pesticides to save money.

"If a club wants to hire the best superintendent it can find, why not tie that person to a long-term contract?" Witt says.

For justice

It's obvious why superintendents, especially those at private clubs headed by short-tenured green chairmen, list job security as the central issue in contracts.

"There are so many places where green chairmen change every year," Witt says. "And the new green chairmen have new agendas."

Say a superintendent has an unwritten employment agreement and a decent relationship with the green chairman who hired him. But the green chairman leaves the club after two years, and the new green chairman fires the old superintendent because he doesn't get along with him, even though the superintendent has performed to the standards outlined in his original agreement. Is this fair?

The good news is that more superintendents are reporting to fewer green chairmen. According to a recent study by the GCSAA and the National Golf Foundation, 26 percent of superintendents in 2000 report to green chairmen, green committees or boards of directors compared to 29 percent in 1995. Twenty-nine percent of superintendents in 2000 report to general managers, compared to 26 percent in 1998.

Brewer, who has been at the Los Angeles CC for 34 years, says more superintendents should be reporting to a course's top executives. "There's less turnover among general managers than green committee chairmen," he adds.

Of course, a club's top brass must protect their interests if they award a contract. They should have an out if the superintendent they hire ends up robbing banks on the side or fails at his job.

"It's like anything else: You monitor an individual's per-

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ABOUT EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS

Employment contracts are written agreements that outline the services and pay arrangements for employees. Make sure that:

- Job offers are made in writing.
- Any employment contract is in force before employment begins.
- Employment contracts are reviewed and updated regularly to reflect changes in an employee's position.

Provisions that should be included in the contract are:

- Length of employment/Provision for termination
- Duties of the employee
- Confidentiality
- Compensation and benefits
- Non-competition agreement

SOURCE: THE HR BOOK: HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT FOR BUSINESS, 1999, SELF COUNSEL PRESS

Continued from page 31
formance regardless of whether it's the superintendent, the pro or the executive chef," Brewer says. "If they're not performing, they're gone."

Witt notes that a contract keeps everyone in sync with each other's responsibilities.

"A contract protects a facility because it says a superintendent shouldn't be doing this and that," Witt adds. "A facility is always going to structure a contract that allows superintendents to be terminated for defined causes."

WHO'S THE BOSS?

What kind of contract and whether you get one has a lot to do with whom you're reporting to. Here's to whom superintendents have been reporting to recently:

	1995	1998	2000
General manager	28%	26%	29%
Green committee/Board of directors	29%	27%	26%
Owner	18%	16%	18%
Director of golf	7%	7%	7%
Director of parks and recreation	5%	5%	4%
President	3%	3%	3%
Regional superintendent/Agronomist	2%	2%	2%

Take what you can get

On the other hand, Witt believes superintendents should negotiate the best contracts possible. They should try to get what they can in salary, benefits and perks, especially if they're being wooed.

You might be surprised at what you can get, especially if you're wanted. CGCS Williams commanded a five-year contract with perks, including a $25,000 signing bonus, when he left Bob O'Link GC in Chicago for the Los Angeles CC more than three years ago.

Williams says the Los Angeles CC brass came after him while he was at Bob O'Link. "I was in the catbird's seat, and I made that apparent to them," Williams has said.

Brewer has no regrets of signing him to a long-term pact with a bonus.

"It certainly paid off for us," he says. "Whatever we did to entice Bruce to come here, we did the right thing."

"Tell them how it will benefit the club by hiring you for the long term."

–TOMMY WITT

Witt has a contract at StillWaters Resort that includes ownership of property on the 2,000-acre land. "I asked them to give it to me," he says.

Witt says there's nothing wrong with asking for such benefits to sweeten a deal. He says superintendents should ask for a share in golf car or driving range revenues if they're not offered a huge salary. Or they could ask for deferred payments to lessen the financial burden on the payer.

"About 11 percent of superintendents still get housing benefits," Witt notes. "I know a guy who gets an extra month of vacation in the winter."

Witt believes signing bonuses are warranted, especially if you're a superintendent like Williams who moved his family across the country to take a new job.

But remember this rule of thumb: Don't ask for the moon and know who you're dealing with before making such requests. If you ask for too much or are perceived as greedy, you might take yourself out of the running for a top job, experts say.

In perspective

Even with their incentives, contracts aren't for everyone. It often depends on where a superintendent is at in his or her career. One would think that the veteran Latshaw would be inked to a contract, but he's not.

"I've always had a contract, but I didn't ask for one when I came [to Winged Foot last year]," says the "60-something" Latshaw, who previously worked at Augusta National, Oakmont CC and Congressional CC.

"I'm at the point in my life where I don't want to be tied down," Latshaw adds, noting that he's thinking about retirement.

At the other end of the career spectrum, 34-year-old Mike Sosik is not interested in signing a contract from his current employer. Sosik, superintendent of Middleton GC in Middleton, Mass., is looking to move up in the profession.

"I'm year to year here," he says. "I like the job, but I have greater aspirations. So it wouldn't be smart for me to sign a contract here."

But down the road, if Sosik hooks up with a posh, private club, he'd be interested in a long-term deal.

Some veteran superintendents are in business situations that have never required contracts. Frank Dobie has been the superintendent at Sharon GC in Sharon Center, Ohio, for 37 years, and he has never had a contract. "It's an unusual situation because the man who hired me, the president of the club, is still in charge," Dobie says.

Dobie remembers asking the club president for a contract 37 years ago and being rejected. "He told me, 'If you do the job, I'll take care of you.' "

That was fine with Dobie. "His word was good enough, and his handshake was binding enough," he notes.

Dobie doesn't believe contracts should be standard.

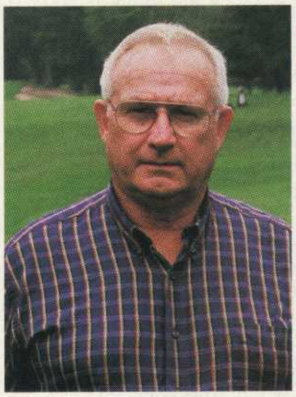
"I look at contracts as guarantees," Dobie says. "I don't think anyone can guarantee somebody else's future."

However, Dobie is all for a severance agreement, whether it's part of a contract or not. He told of a superintendent who was recently fired from his job after 25 years and received a lousy severance package.

"That's an area superintendents should negotiate with clubs," Dobie stresses. "Then they know what to expect if they're let go."

Nothing less

Although there's an increase in courses awarding contracts to superintendents, it's not commonplace in the industry. Witt argues that other professionals receive contracts, so why not superintendents?



"Compared to other professionals, we have a long way to go."

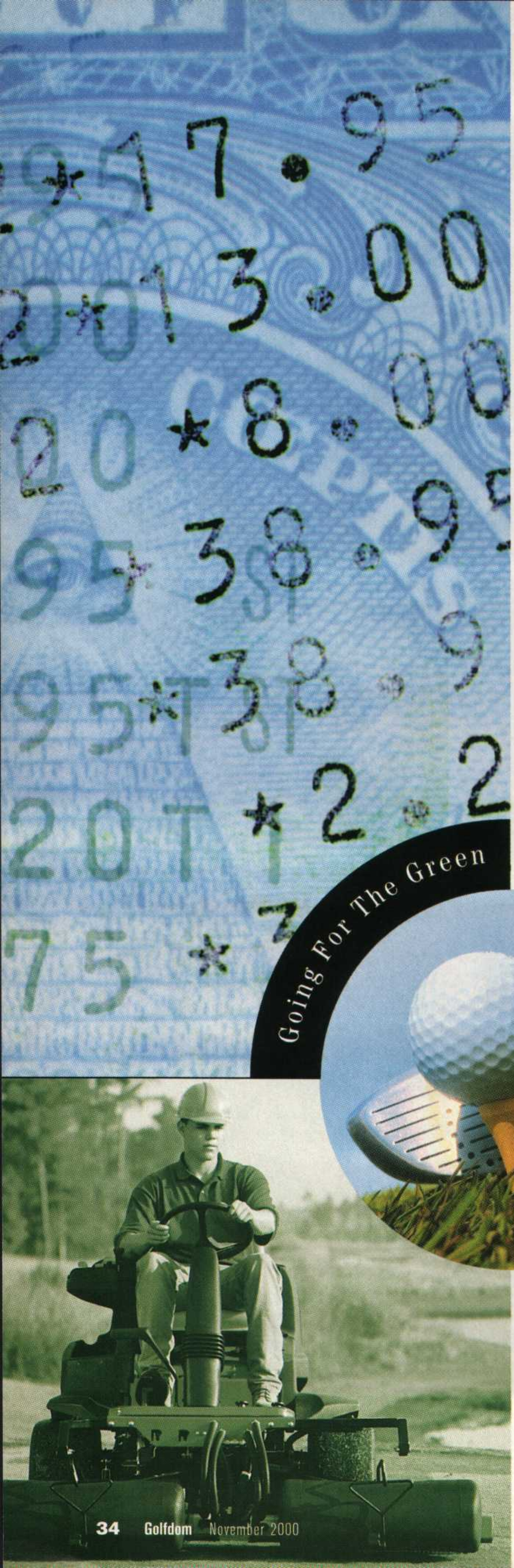
–PAUL R. LATSHAW

"A contract means I have to do what I say I'm going to do," Witt stresses. "It protects everyone involved."

Latshaw remembers asking a course's employers for an employment contract several years ago. "They thought I was crazy," he says.

But today, more courses are willing to discuss contract possibilities in interviews, Latshaw believes. He encourages superintendents to seek them out.

"Compared to other professionals, we have a long way to go," Latshaw states. "But we're making gains in that territory." ■



Going For The Green

OWNING A COURSE

On Your

It takes a load of money and a lot of work to purchase and operate a golf course — but it might be worth it for some superintendents

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

Poised with passion and determination, hard-working superintendent Patrick Norton pursued his American dream of buying and owning a golf course last year. But in the midst of chasing his romantic aspiration, Norton realized his dream was too expensive to come true.

Last year, Norton, CGCS of Nettle Creek CC in Morris, Ill., began negotiating to purchase a golf course with his friend, a pro golfer, in his home state of Wisconsin. But Norton soon bowed out in his quest because the pot to own the course proved too rich for him.

"I realized that it all boiled down to money," Norton says. "As my partner said after I dropped out, 'Cash is king.' "

It's safe to say that most superintendents who aspire to own golf courses are average people who make a decent living — but they don't have a million bucks in the bank. Therefore, they may never attain their goals of becoming owners.

Norton considers himself an average guy. The lesson he learned is that it's difficult to purchase a course — and nearly impossible to build one — if you're a person with an average income.

"I don't have the yearning to buy a course as strongly now because I know the ins and outs of the process," says Norton, adding that he and his partner needed to come

Own

up with about $600,000 cash to make the deal possible.

Ironically, superintendents are potential owners that lenders would love to fund, says Don Rhode, senior vice president of finance for the golf and marina division of Atlanta-based Bank of America. Lenders prefer superintendents because they know how to maintain and operate golf courses, unlike others that know little about the industry and buy for the thrill of it.

But that doesn't mean lenders will let superintendents slide on the financial side. Just like a rich businessman, a superintendent has to have the hefty down payment to buy a course.

Most loans for golf course purchases are more than $2 million, which means that in some cases a superintendent would have to raise nearly $1 million in cash for a down payment. "You must come up with 25 percent to 50 percent of the cash and get a loan for 50 percent to 75 percent," Rhodes says.

It's rare for superintendents to buy courses, Rhodes adds. "But I'd like to see it happen more often," he notes.

That's not to say there aren't superintendents succeeding as owners. But in many cases, these superintendents have acquired ownership of family businesses.

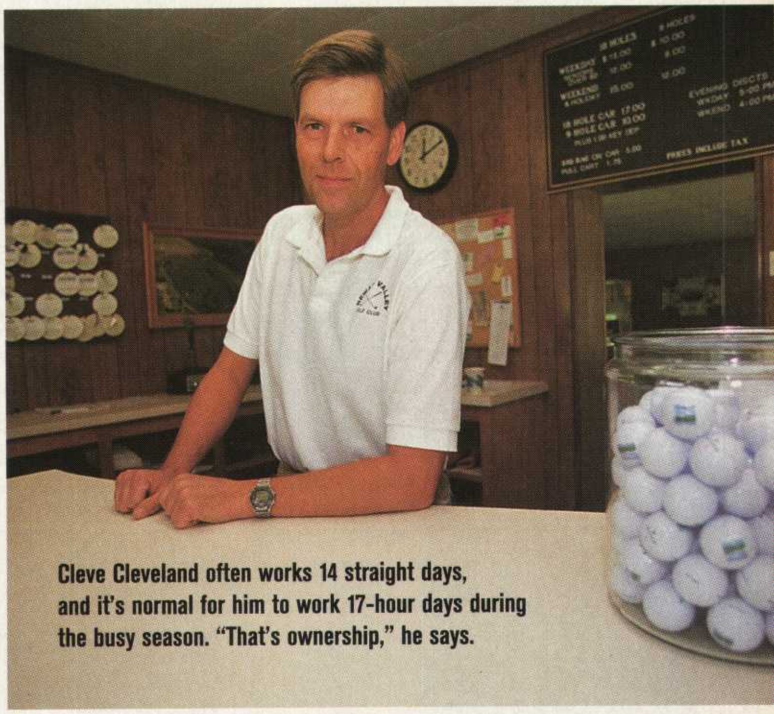
Earning it

Mark Seabrook, the former superintendent at the Canadian Golf and CC in Ashton, Ontario, is now co-owner and general manager of the course with his brother, Brett. Their father began the business in 1975. If you're a superintendent looking to buy a course because you want to play more golf and not answer to anybody, you're making a big mistake, Mark says.

"You have to answer to everybody, including the public and your bank," he adds. "Just because you're the owner, it doesn't change the rules — and you play a lot less golf."

Superintendent Cleve Cleveland took over ownership of Newark Valley GC in Newark Valley, N.Y, from his parents in 1980. "A lot of superintendents who are owners tend to be at mom-and-pop courses like mine," Cleveland says, noting that such facilities usually have low overhead and little debt.

Cleveland says he makes more money as an owner/superintendent than he ever would as just a superintendent. But don't get the idea he's not earning it. Remember that Cleveland is pulling double duty because the course can't afford to hire a full-time superintendent.



Cleve Cleveland often works 14 straight days, and it's normal for him to work 17-hour days during the busy season. "That's ownership," he says.

WILL WALDRON

"If I had to budget $50,000 for a superintendent, I wouldn't make enough money," Cleveland says. "I'm forced to be the superintendent."

Cleveland often works 14 straight days before taking one off, and it's normal for him to work 17-hour days during the busy season. In the summer, he's at the course daily at 4:30 a.m. to inspect the irrigation system. Then he's off to the maintenance facility to prep the mowers. Around 6 a.m., he's in the pro shop readying the cash register and waiting on the day's first golfers. Cleveland works the register until about 8 a.m., and then it's back on the course for mowing and spraying.

In the afternoon and evening, Cleveland performs myriad jobs. He's back in the pro shop at 5 p.m. to oversee evening play. When the course closes at 8:30 p.m., he again checks the irrigation system to make sure it's functioning properly. Cleveland gets home about 9:30 p.m. "That's ownership," he says.

Cleveland's working days also include the perennial pains

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in the neck. Sometimes, it seems like everything is going wrong at Newark Valley, and Cleveland is stuck in the middle.

Recently, Cleveland lamented about the irrigation system's main pump that was on the blink and a new fairway mower that wouldn't start. To top it off, an old duffer drove his golf car into a pond. "Every day it's something new," Cleveland moans.

Cleveland will be the first to tell wannabe owners that his livelihood is no walk on the beach, especially when you have to clean the facility's restrooms. "I have to clean them," Cleveland says, "because I can't find an employee to do it."

Finding employees for other jobs is also challenging. Recently, Cleveland had to ask his wife to work at the course for a day because he and his staff were shorthanded.

"I gave her a crash course in running the computer in the pro shop," Cleveland says. "She said she hopes she doesn't have to come back here again."

"You make your own decisions, and you don't have to answer to anybody."

–CLEVE CLEVELAND

WILL WALDRON

Cleveland performs many different jobs at the course because he can't afford to pay others. "People say, 'Why don't you hire someone?' But I can't hire people to do every little job," Cleveland says.

As an owner, Cleveland must also pay the bills for the broken-down equipment. Even though Newark Valley GC has low expenses, Cleveland must closely manage the money spent on course conditioning. "Only invest as much into the course as the revenue stream justifies," he says.

Cleveland did the opposite and learned his lesson. A few years ago, he invested in a double-row fairway irrigation system. That's fine if your green fees are $75 and you attract serious golfers. But Cleveland's course is one of the most inexpensive in the area, and his clientele consists of players who are interested in affordable golf, not lush green fairways.

"I don't think the irrigation system has brought me additional business," Cleveland says. "I didn't justify the cost."

Listening to Cleveland, why would any superintendent want to own a golf course? Norton's answer is simple.

"People work their buns off in this line of work," he says. "Why not work your buns off for yourself?"

Cleveland agrees that there's nothing like being your own boss. There are no green committee chairmen to answer to, and you can change your fertilization program without your general manager's consent.

"I can't imagine doing anything else," he says. "You make your own decisions, and you don't have to answer to anybody."

Norton, who hasn't ruled out purchasing a course in the future, says one major fringe benefit of being your own boss is that no one can fire you when you turn 50 or are making too much money.

Financial reward is another incentive to own your own course. "If you have a profitable course, you're going to make more money than you would as a superintendent," Cleveland says.

The financials of it

Of course, finding a profitable course is the key because buying a course is about taking on a lot of debt. If a superintendent borrows $2 million from a lender to purchase a course, he will have an annual debt service of $225,000 depending on interest rates, Rhodes notes. For good business reasons, the superintendent would want the course to have about a 30 percent leeway on top of the debt service, meaning the course would have to generate $300,000 to be in the clear.

Superintendents who want to be owners should know that lenders aren't throwing money around. They realize that courses have to make money if they're going to get paid, Rhodes says.

"Lenders want to know how they're going to get paid if deals don't work out," he adds. "They are more conservative than they were a few years ago."

Cleveland, who teaches a financial essentials seminar at GCSAA meetings, believes many superintendents, with the exception of those at high-end courses, want to own golf courses. Cleveland advises them to seek out mom-and-pop nine-hole facilities to get the best deals.

Rhodes advises superintendents who want to be owners to keep close tabs on economic reports. The current golf industry is healthy and prices for courses are high, but that could change in a recession. "That would mean more opportunity for the little guys," Rhodes says.

If you're a superintendent who attains the dream of ownership, Cleveland will tell you that you'll work your tail off from sunrise to sunset — but you'll love your job. Even with the daily dilemmas — an irrigation pump gone awry and a fairway mower on the fritz — Cleveland says life doesn't get much better than when you own a golf course.

"A much as I bitch and moan, sometimes I have to step back and be thankful that I'm able to do this," Cleveland admits. ■