

Ryan Fisher shuddered when he saw the 69-year-old club member approaching him at The Woodstock Club's annual golf dinner last spring. Fisher replaced former superintendent George Lynn, who tended the course for 50 years, only a few months before.

Members loved the way Lynn cared for the course, and they didn't want radical changes.

As the member approached, Fisher's mind raced. Was he too aggressive? Did he ask too many questions? Was he angering influential members?

Finally, the club member, who has belonged to Woodstock since he was 8, reached Fisher. He examined the superintendent from head to toe. Then he grinned.

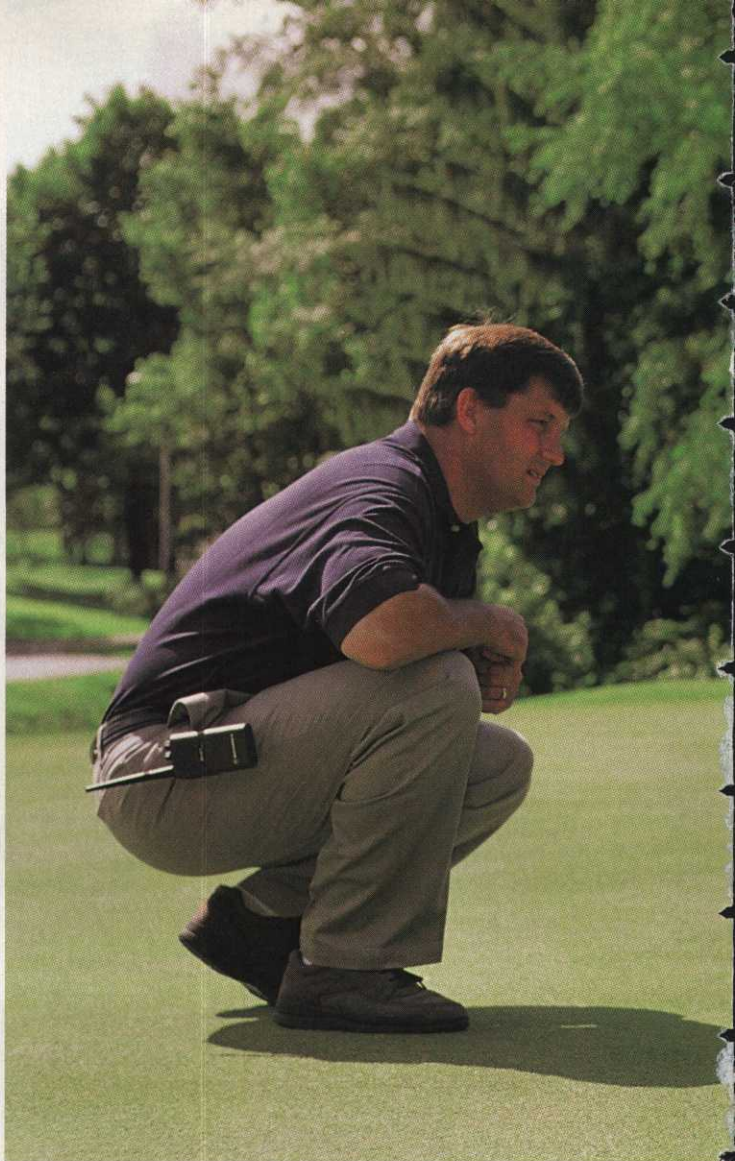
"I didn't think a young guy like you could take over for George," the man said. "But you're doing a great job."

Relief coursed through Fisher because following in the footsteps of a legend — whether the legend is national or local — is difficult. But preparation and planning can smooth the transition, as several superintendents have proved.

Keep an open mind

New superintendents are often so anxious to make their own names at courses, they forget to learn from their predecessors, Fisher says.

"You have to check your ego at the gate when you follow someone who's been there for years," Fisher says. "You

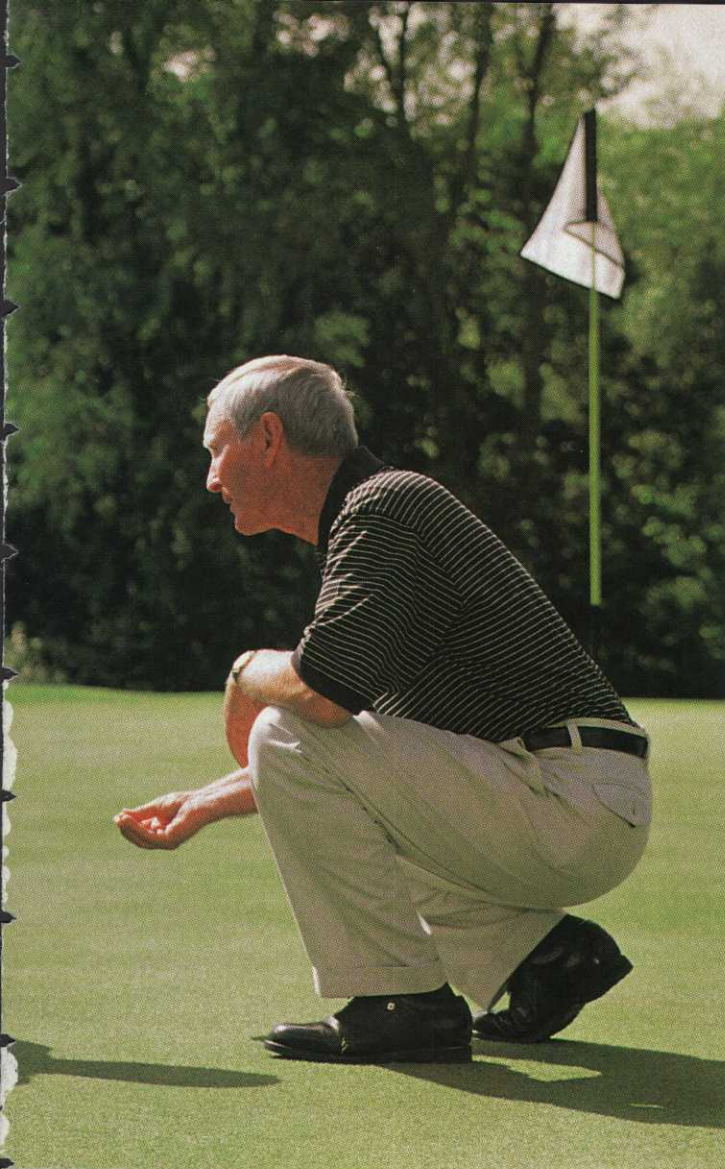


Ryan Fisher, superintendent at The Woodstock Club in Indianapolis, says the club's reputation for excellence drew him to the job.

Changing

Taking over management of a course from a legendary superintendent can be daunting. But preparation and planning can smooth the transition

**BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.,
ASSOCIATE EDITOR**



CASEY CRONIN

of the Guard

can find out what the previous superintendent has done well and what hasn't gone well."

Fisher doesn't have far to go when he wants Lynn's advice — Lynn still mows fairways at the nine-hole private club three days a week.

"Having him here to support me has been invaluable," Fisher says. "Why get rid of someone who might easily be your best resource?"

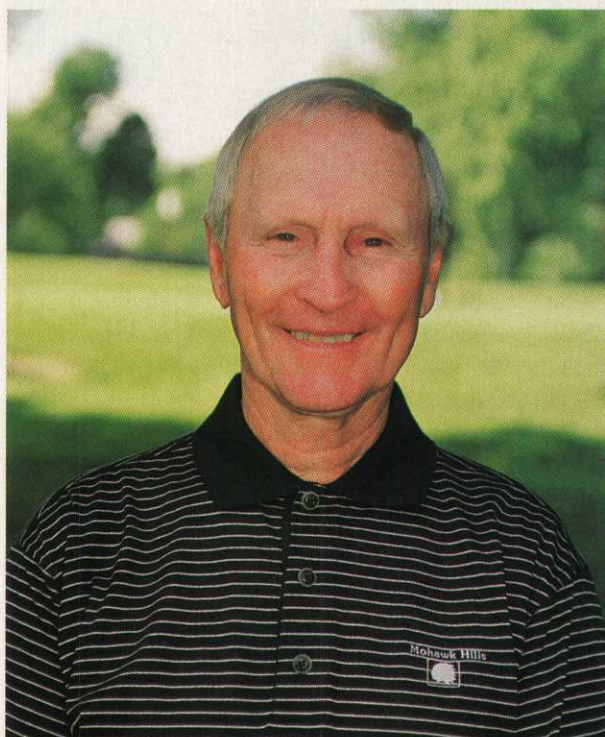
Fisher changed some agronomic practices, such as aerifying more frequently, watering more often to soften the greens and topdressing every three weeks. He knows members still make statements that begin with, "When George was here ...," but Fisher's willingness to call on Lynn's experience has helped make such statements less frequent.

Be accessible

Eric Greytok must love living on the edge. First he took over at Pebble Beach Golf Links five months before the 2000 U.S. Open. Then in April, he replaced a man whose name is still whispered in awe at superintendent conferences around the country — Paul R. Latshaw, who left Winged Foot GC in Mamaroneck, N.Y. in January to join an irrigation firm.

"I worked for Mr. Latshaw and was trained by both he and his son," Greytok says. "But I was a little worried [when I came to Winged Foot]. I didn't want to let my mentor down."

Continued on page 32



"The members here loved George (Lynn)," Ryan Fisher says. "They like the idea that I've kept him on the staff."

Changing of the Guard

Continued from page 31

But Greytok communicated with members from the moment he took the job and established a rapport with them. He addresses member concerns and complaints promptly.

"You always have to remember that you're working for everyone at the course," Greytok says. "It's important the members are part of the process. It adds to your credibility."

Do your homework

Tom Leahy wanted to replace Joe Camnaratto, who spent 40 years caring for Sleepy Hollow GC in Scarborough, N.Y. Leahy had worked as Camnaratto's assistant for four years when Camnaratto decided to retire in 1997. After Camnaratto announced his decision, Leahy expressed interest in the job. Camnaratto was thrilled. He told Leahy he always appreciated his work ethic and that he would recommend him to the members.

But Leahy's promotion ran into problems. Some club members demanded a national search and resented the idea that a successor had already been chosen. Camnaratto campaigned hard for his candidate, but Leahy knew he would have to overwhelm the members during the interview.

"This is an old club with a lot of tradition, and they didn't want to hand the job to anyone," Leahy says. "I worked for weeks preparing my presentation, and I was the first one they interviewed. It was important that my first shot be my best."

Leahy toured the course with Camnaratto and asked him questions to gather information he thought would help him in the interview. He practiced his presentation. Leahy did something right because he got the job.

Communicate with the crew

Chris Hague's reputation preceded him when he replaced Doug Petersan at Baltimore CC in Timonium, Md., because he had already hosted two U.S. Opens (the 1991 Men's at Hazeltine National GC in Chaska, Minn., and the 1993 Women's at Crooked Stick GC in Carmel, Ind.).

But his reputation didn't automatically win him the loyalty of the crew. For 90 days prior to Hague's arrival, no superintendent oversaw the course. That led to long lunches, crew members arriving late and leaving early, and other disciplinary issues that Hague felt he had to address.

Hague met with the entire crew (40 members in all) within 48 hours of his arrival to outline his management philosophy. In his first 60 days, he discussed concerns and complaints individually with each crew member. Hague says the one-on-one meetings proved invaluable.

"Everyone had a chance to have their say," Hague says. "It's critical to establish communication early."

Getting easier

Despite the pressure of replacing a legend, Fisher says he would still do so. He overcame his nervousness to establish

Rough Day at the Office

The prospect of starting a new job often fills employees with trepidation — even someone like Chris Hague, who has experienced his share of first days during his 28 years in the industry. But nothing prepared him for the stress he experienced when he took over for Doug Petersan at Baltimore CC in Timonium, Md.

Hague's first challenge was getting to Baltimore from Carmel, Indiana, where he worked at Crooked Stick GC. He arranged his trip to arrive the previous night to get a good night's sleep, but the airline had other plans for him. It delayed his flight for six hours, meaning the plane didn't touch down



Chris Hague, superintendent at Baltimore CC in Timonium, Md., says his first day reminded him to be humble.

until after midnight. Hague raced to the hotel, arriving after 1 a.m., determined to show up at the course later that morning at 6 a.m. after snatching a couple hours of sleep.

Mother Nature decided to challenge him before he ever arrived at the course. While he slept, a thunderstorm roared through Baltimore and dropped 2 inches of rain on the course in two hours. The rain washed out more than 200 bunkers and downed hundreds of trees, the remnants of which littered

the fairways. He arrived at the office to the frantic questions of golfers and crew members alike: What are you going to do?

"Everyone was on edge anyway with someone new coming on the job," Hague says. "I remember standing in the middle of the first fairway and asking myself, 'What have I gotten myself into?'"

With the help of assistants Mark Ross, Reid Mitchell and Doug Hall (veteran assistants from the Petersan days), Hague says he survived his frightening first day with good humor.

"It reminded me that no matter how good I think I am, there are going to be days when the Lord takes over and there's nothing you can do about it," Hague says. "It made a great story later, but while I went through it, I experienced a lot of stress."

— Frank H. Andorka Jr., Associate Editor

his own reputation for excellence. He'd like to emulate Lynn and stay at The Woodstock Club for 50 years himself — if the members would have him.

"No matter how good your predecessor's reputation is, you must take care of the course," Fisher says. "If you let the pressure of replacing a respected superintendent overwhelm you, you won't survive."

"I don't get caught up in being compared to someone else," he adds. "I can only go out there and give my best effort every day." ■