

Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

Most of my peers were born in the 1940s and '50s. Many of us proudly performed military service for our country, which might make us part of a vanishing breed. Does it mean we're over the hill as effective superintendents? Thankfully, the answer is no. After all, we still cling to the core values of that bygone era: hard work and loyalty.

Superintendents who fit this profile have managed golf courses through hurricanes and tornados, droughts and floods. We've weathered booms, bankruptcies, grow-ins and renovations — all the while adapting to rapid changes in technology. We've thrived under extensive regulation and increasingly diverse workforces. We learned that the my-way-or-the-highway approach is no way to build a productive team in modern times.

My generation has heard every lame excuse for being absent or late to work. I wish I had a nickel for every power outage that sabotaged an alarm clock. We have wet-nursed and supported husbands, wives and children going through divorces, separations, family tragedies and growing pains. We have mentored future superintendents while still learning each day from the old masters of the craft.

We have also been dogged over the decades by Rachel Carson and subsequent generations of environmental activists in search of an argument over a problem that exists only in their minds. Never mind that one good volcanic eruption would put all their nonsensical arguments about how much golf courses pollute the universe to an end. Meanwhile, as a result of their zealotry, we've been forced to jump through political hoops just to do our jobs.

Where does all this life experience get us? We may long for longevity and stability in our jobs but the average tenure for a superintendent at one location is about seven years, according to *Golfdom's* studies. If that's true and superintendents earn their first positions at age 25, that means they'll be searching for new jobs at age 46 or 53. By then, they are established veterans and hopefully wise in the ways of the golf world. A major question, however, still plagues these long-standing members of our

We Are Definitely Not Over the Hill

BY JOEL JACKSON



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profession: Is all this experience and training a bonus or baggage when you hit those ages?

The fact is that with a couple of thousand of turf-school graduates hitting the job market each year, there are lots of people in their late 20s and early 30s moving around in that seven-year cycle also looking for work.

And there are serious considerations we must face as we grow older. This is a stressful occupation, and the possibility of health problems increases. True or not, clubs may consider us damaged goods after a serious illness or major surgery. Some might conclude we don't have the energy to tackle the daily grind anymore merely because we have gray hair. While I don't think there is rampant ageism among owners, some clubs favor youth over experience for shortsighted, bottom-line reasons.

While some owners and club members may consider us over the hill, others of us are just tired of dealing with the vagaries of the profession. We have had enough after 30 years of baby-sitting Mother Nature's tantrums, beer budgets combined with champagne tastes, complaining golfers and carping employees, and misguided managers and obstinate owners.

That's not to say every day was a disaster or every club a living hell. We often left good people and good clubs to take on new challenges and better-paying jobs because it was time to take ourselves to the next level for a change.

Thankfully, most of us are still manning posts. Some of us have gone into sales to survive and revive. A few have even gone into club management and ownership. Here's hoping all of us will be able to stay engaged in the business we love until it's time to retire with dignity.

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