

I'm not one of these stupid-intendents," said Dick Howe, a salesman for Reed Equipment, a John Deere distributor in Stockton, Calif. Howe made the remark to me while riding on a bus packed with superintendents during John Deere's annual Golf & Turf Feedback Program last summer. Howe was one of several distributors who attended the program.

Howe later remarked that being a superintendent is a thankless job. "It's similar to being a baseball manager," he said. "You could win the World Series and still lose your job."

With the disdain he displays on his sleeve, you probably think Howe has something against the golf course maintenance field. "Stupid-intendents" is about as ungracious of a label that someone can place on the profession.

On the contrary, Howe reveres superintendents like Cubs fans hail Sammy Sosa. Howe knows the barriers many superintendents must confront — and he's rooting for them.

Howe says what he says about the profession because he knows it well. He was a superintendent for 24 years before joining Reed Equipment about six years ago. Howe quit being a superintendent partly because he was stressed out. He was weary of a lot of things, from club politics to pump station problems.

"There are CGCSs with 20 years of experience, and they're being run around the loop by green chairmen who say they can do things better because they play a lot of golf," Howe says. "It's ridiculous. It's one of the reasons I got out."

When Howe was superintendent at Riverview Golf and CC in Redding, Calif., he watched his assistant and friend, 42-year-old Steve Flatt, die of a heart attack on the 18th green. Flatt had high blood pressure and smoked, Howe says, but his pressure-packed profession probably contributed to his ill health. "That," Howe says of the tragic event, "was an eye-opener." So was Howe's divorce to his first wife. Both episodes made him think about forsaking the profession.

Some stalwart superintendents who bleed green might think Howe couldn't cut it. Howe, however, makes no apologies and is not afraid to admit why he quit. Today, Howe enjoys week-long vacations in the summer with his second wife, as well as stress-free weekends at home. He

'Stupid-intendent' Reflects on Past

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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admits, however, he still feels nervous when the phone rings on Sunday. His mind takes him back to when he was a superintendent, and he's sure the person calling him is his assistant to report that the course's pump station is down.

Howe says he often reminds his customers — superintendents — to place their families before their greens. He recalls what his two kids told him what they remember about their father the superintendent — that they didn't get to see him much because he was always working.

Howe is quick to point out that being a salesman isn't an easy job. He admits he didn't have much respect for salesmen when he was a superintendent. "But now I have more respect for them than ever before."

Howe also says he has more respect for superintendents than before. Being a salesman for superintendents — and being on the other side of the negotiating table — helped him gain more perspective for both jobs.

Howe may make jokes — "stupid-intendents" — but they're more backhanded tributes to the profession than insults. What Howe means by the "stupid-intendents" remark is that one must be crazy to get into a field that's often embroiled in politics, among other things. He was.

But Howe also empathizes with the passion most superintendents possess. While he's glad he's not a superintendent anymore, Howe will be the first to tell you he misses the job, particularly those times when "you feel like an artist who has just finished a painting." That feeling usually occurred at sunset when Howe toured the empty course one final time before going home.

"You look at the course you've helped to create," he says. "It's almost like a spiritual experience."

There were some good things about being a "stupid-intendent."

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