

The Apple Doesn't Fall Far From The Tree

From the Greene family in North Carolina to the Pock family in Arizona, many industry clans have sprouted several generations of superintendents. Some believe golf course maintenance is in the genes

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

Mason Pock already knows what he wants to be when he grows up, and he's only 7 years old. Unlike a million other kids, Pock doesn't dream of flying into space or flying through the air with a basketball. He dreams of following in his father's footsteps and becoming a superintendent.

If Pock's dream becomes reality — and there's a good chance it will if you believe in the apple-doesn't-fall-from-the-tree-theory — he'd be the son of a son of a superintendent. Mason's dad, Ernie, is superintendent of Grayhawk GC in Scottsdale, Ariz., and his grandfather and Ernie's dad, Mike, is superintendent of Whisper Rock GC in Scottsdale.

The genealogy doesn't stop there. Mason's great-great grandfather and Mike's

grandfather, J.D. Woodward, was a well-known superintendent in the Phoenix area in the 1940s and '50s. Mason's Uncle Jay, his dad's younger brother, is superintendent of Anthem CC in Phoenix. The Pock's cousins, Mark Woodward and his son, Matt, are also in the business. In fact, Matt is Mike's assistant at Whisper Rock.

Needless to say, Mason reveres golf. He hangs out at his dad's course, hitting golf balls and helping with small tasks. Not surprisingly, Mason has developed a passion and proficiency for the profession. He can already identify different grass varieties. When people ask him what he wants to be when he grows up, Mason answers: "I'm going to do exactly what my daddy does. I'm going to be a superintendent."

The Pocks aren't the only family with a bloodline in golf course maintenance. From the Greene family in North Carolina to the Dinelli family in Chicago to the Hadwick family in Nebraska, superintendents and their offspring have made careers out of the profession, with some spanning four and five generations. The descendants don't seem to mind the negatives (longs hours, politics, etc.) that come with tending turf, even after watching their fathers endure such unpleasanties.

It's not uncommon for sons (and daughters) to follow in their fathers' footsteps in various professions. There's baseball's Bobby and Barry Bonds, and the presidency's George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush. But why do some sons and daugh-

Continued on page 36

DEAN STEVENSON



The Pocks have made golf course maintenance a family affair in the Phoenix area. From left: Ernie, Mason, Mike, Jay and Cody.



“I just evolved into the profession. I never knew anything else.”

RILEY STOTTERN
CGCS
S. HIGHLANDS GC

Continued from page 34

ters grow up wanting to be like their dads? Is it healthy for them to choose the same careers?

Also, do genetics have anything to do with following in dad's footsteps? Or does lineage originate with fathers who pressure their children to do what they do?

In the genes

On a cool fall day, Charles Hadwick sits in the tiny superintendent's office at The Country Club of Lincoln (Neb.) He's joined by his brother, John, certified superintendent of Grand Island Municipal GC in Grand Island, Neb., and John's son, Shane, second assistant superintendent at nearby Quarry Oaks GC. (Tom Hadwick, brother of Charles and John, works on Charles' crew; and the brothers' sister, Jean, works at the country club as a landscape architect. Another brother, Robert, was a superintendent for 19 years before becoming an industry salesman.)

Charles chats about a couple of former superintendents — his and John's late father, Joe, who was superintendent of The Country Club of Lincoln from 1952 through 1983; and their grandfather, Charlie, who was superintendent



▲ Wilford Harry Thome surveys ice damage at Broadmoor GC, where he worked for 32 years starting in 1921.



◀ John Lee Stottern inspects snow mold damage at Broadmoor, where he worked in the '40s and '50s.

COURTESY OF RILEY STOTTERN

at Jefferson City CC in Jefferson City, Mo., from 1912 to 1962. Charles and John remember their father coming home from work tired and angry, and asking himself why he became a superintendent. At other times, however, they recall him coming home happy and proud of the golf course's condition.

Charles and John, both veteran superintendents, have had similar days. They know the profession can be tremendously fulfilling and terribly frustrating — but they wouldn't want to do anything else.

Sons and daughters follow in their fathers' footsteps for several reasons and a big reason, strange as it seems, could be genetics.

Riley Stottern followed his father, John Lee, and his grandfather, Wilford Harry Thome, into the profession. Stottern, certified superintendent of Southern Highlands GC in Las Vegas, says he, his father and grandfather possess “driving” personalities, among other similar character traits. John Lee Stottern and Thome were both superintendents of Broadmoor GC in Colorado Springs, Colo., where Riley worked as a youth.

“It could be in the blood,” the 58-year-old

Continued on page 41

Talkin' Shop

Pock family get-togethers often turn into discussions about turf maintenance. Mike Pock and his sons Ernie and Jay, all superintendents in the Phoenix area, can't help but talk shop around the dinner table.

“Our poor wives know more about growing grass than my assistants do because that's all they hear about at family get-togethers,” Ernie says only half-jokingly.

“We have some good, heated conversations,” Mike says with a laugh.

Seriously, the Pocks seek each other for advice. Mike consults his sons, both graduates from Rutgers University, about new chemicals, something he

says he knows little about. Ernie and Jay consult their veteran father for his old-school wisdom.

Rosemary Augustine, a Denver-based career coach and author of *How to Live and Work Your Passion And Still Earn a Living*, says there's nothing unhealthy about talking shop during family events.

“What do we talk about in life? We talk shop,” she stresses. “People talk about their work — how much they love it or how much they hate it. There's nothing wrong with that”

Of course, the Pock wives might not like all the talk, but Ernie says the Pock husbands know when to give it a rest.

— L.A., Editor

The Apple Doesn't Fall ...

Continued from page 36

Stottern says of the profession, although his three younger brothers elected not to be superintendents. "I started my career as soon as I grew old enough to roam Broadmoor with my grandfather and father."

Jay Pock, 30, says there's no doubt that grass growing is in his family's genes. Jay says his father taught Ernie and him to "listen to the grass" to understand its needs. Not everyone can *listen* to the grass.

"It takes a special ear to hear what the grass is saying," Jay states in all seriousness. "I honestly believe that it's genetic."

John Greene's family tree sprouts with five generations of superintendents. His great-grandfather, John Forbes, used horses and mules to help clear the land for the Donald Ross-designed Linville (N.C.) GC in the 1920s. Forbes was superintendent of the course until he retired in 1942 and was replaced by his son-in-law, Arl Greene Sr., John's grandfather, who stayed at the course until 1968.

Greene Sr. had six sons, three of whom became superintendents, including Arl Greene Jr., John's father. Despite working for his father as a teenager, John was uncertain that he wanted to become a superintendent after graduating from high school. So he headed to Appalachian State University to study business. But after a year, a golf course maintenance career beckoned, and Greene transferred to North Carolina State to earn a turf degree. When he graduated in 1974, he took a job as superintendent at Brookwood Hills GC in Winston-Salem, N.C.

Today, the 48-year-old Greene is certified superintendent of Diamond Creek GC, a new Tom Fazio track being built in Banner Elk, N.C.

"I never went into the business with the intent of carrying on some family tradition," Greene says. "I don't know if anybody in my family did. It's just something we migrated toward and stuck with."

But it's possible there's something in the Greene family's blood that helped produce four generations of superintendents. Fathers can pass physical traits like big noses and bald heads, so it's possible they can impart intellectual traits that affect their kids' career choices.

If there's a character trait a superintendent can pass to his son, it's a love for the outdoors. According to Australian vocational psy-

chologists Robert Pryor and Neville Taylor, many superintendents fall into the "naturalist" personality type.

"Naturalists display characteristics of resourcefulness, are active, realistic, sensitive to their environment and often self-reliant," according to Pryor and Taylor, pointing out that naturalists also like to learn about plants and animals. "They love the outdoors, and they frequently comment that if they had to work in an office they would go crazy."

Ernie Pock says he and his brother became superintendents partly because they couldn't see themselves working in offices. "My brother and I are not the kind of people that like to sit inside and push papers," the 31-year-old says.

Neither was their dad, 55-year-old Mike Pock, who wanted to be a cowboy but settled on being a superintendent.

"I love the outdoors," Mike says. "I tried to make a living [raising] cows, but I never had any money. [Golf course maintenance] was the nearest thing to it that paid well."

Mark Woodward, superintendent of Dobson Ranch and Riverview golf courses in Mesa, Ariz., says working outside is what got him

Continued on page 42

The Hadwicks know the profession can be tremendously fulfilling and terribly frustrating – but they wouldn't want to do anything else.

Not Programmed for 'Normal' Hours

Long and wacky hours? Big deal. The doctor-like schedule of the job doesn't seem to bother most superintendents. Let's just say their clocks aren't programmed to work banker's hours.

"This isn't eight to five," says John Hadwick, certified superintendent of Grand Island Municipal GC in Grand Island, Neb., whose father Joe was a superintendent. "You have to live this, and you have to love it!"

John Greene, certified superintendent of Diamond Creek GC in Banner Elk, N.C., also grew up the son of a superintendent and remembers the nights when his dad, Arl, would get up and go to the course to check on the night watermen. He knew then that the profession didn't have "normal" hours.

Most superintendents also don't mind the hard and physical labor that comes with the turf. Greene didn't follow in his father's footsteps because he

thought his dad had an easy gig as a superintendent.

The first summer he worked for his dad, Greene recalls helping to enlarge a lake at Pine Needles GC in Southern Pines, N.C. His job was to cut the common bermudagrass sod and move it. It was backbreaking work for a 14-year-old, but it wasn't bad enough to dissuade him from the profession.

Greene also learned early in his turf maintenance career that early-rising superintendents need their rest. In the summers he labored for his dad, Greene and his buddies/co-workers would work from 5 a.m. to 2 p.m. and sometimes drive to Myrtle Beach nearly two hours away for some rest and relaxation. They'd stay there until two in the morning and drive back to Southern Pines in time for work. "We weren't worth much the next day," Greene admits.

– L.A., Editor



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JOHN GREENE
CGCS
DIAMOND CREEK GC

Continued from page 41

hooked on the business. "It was a chance to deal with Mother Nature," says Woodward, who like his cousin, Mike Pock, worked for his grandfather, J.D. Woodward, early in his career.

Greene credits his love for the outdoors as a reason for becoming a superintendent, but stresses that people skills are also an important attribute superintendents should possess. Greene says his father taught him to respect others, including a course's members and golfers, as well as the people who work for him.

"My dad was very easy to get along with," he says. "I've adopted that philosophy."

The pressure factor

There's nothing wrong with following in dad's footsteps — as long as dad is not pressuring his son to do so, says Rosemary Augustine, a Denver-based career coach and author of *How to Live and Work Your Passion And Still Earn a Living*. "Following in dad's footsteps can be wonderful, as long as a son wants to," she adds.

Ernie Pock beams with pride when he hears Mason say he wants to be a superintendent, but he vows not to pressure his son to pursue the profession when he gets older.

When Ernie and Jay were teenagers, their father advised them to steer away from the profession. The industry was too unstable, the pay too low and the politics too harsh, Mike

told his sons. "He said we were too bright to be growing grass for a living," Ernie recalls.

But Ernie and Jay didn't take their dad's words to heart. They wanted to become superintendents and attended Rutgers University to study turfgrass management. They worked for their father at Troon Golf and Troon North GC in Scottsdale during summers away from school. Now Mike admits, "I'm very proud they went into the business."

Stottern says his father never encouraged or discouraged his son from entering the profession. "I just evolved into the profession," he says. "I never knew anything else."

John Hadwick says his father never pressured him to become a superintendent to keep the family legacy alive.

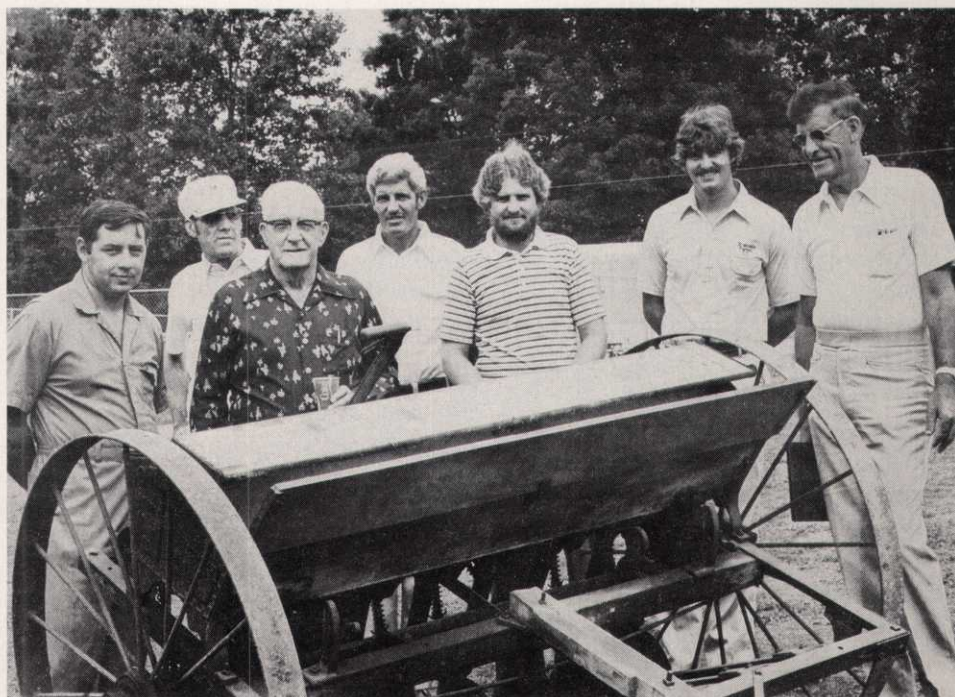
"But he gave me all the tools I needed when I told him it's what I wanted to do," John says. "He never discouraged me, and he never pushed me. I've done the same with Shane."

Augustine has advice for fathers/superintendents who wonder whether they should persuade their sons to follow them in the business — don't twist their arms. Coercion isn't healthy, especially when sons decide in their mid-20s or early-30s that they want to do something else and have nothing to fall back on.

If a superintendent's child is curious about following in his or her dad's footsteps, Au-

Continued on page 44

► All of the Greene family members in this 1977 photo made golf course maintenance their jobs at one time or another. From left: Randy, Julian, Arl Sr., Arl Jr., Steve, John and Bernard.



COURTESY OF JOHN GREENE

The Apple Doesn't Fall ...

Continued from page 42

gustine recommends the child shadow his or her dad for a week on the golf course and experience every aspect of the job, from its rewards to its hang-ups.

How do you know?

Greene remembers the nights his dad would get up to check on the night wa-

termen. He also recalls being awakened in the night by a ringing phone. It was someone from the golf course calling to tell his father the pump station was down.

At the time, Greene thought there was no way he would become a superintendent, what with the wacky hours and weighty responsibilities. "I saw the stress my father endured," he adds.

As Greene grew older and matured, however, he realized the profession was a near-perfect match for his character.

At this point in their lives, 11-year-old Zach and 14-year-old Ben Greene also have no intention of becoming superintendents, their father says. "Ben's favorite saying is, 'Dad, you work 24/7,'" John says.

However, Greene's sons love visiting the golf course. When he was superintendent at Blowing Rock (N.C.) Club, John had Zach, then 10, happily mowing greens. Recently, John took Ben on a business trip with him to Lexington, Ky., to look at sod for the roughs at Diamond Creek. Ben had a blast.

When he brings his boys to Diamond Creek, Greene can't help but notice how they're drawn to the wide-open space of the landscape. "That's the allure of it," John says, as if he knows a special secret.

Mason Pock is obviously enamored by the profession. While he might be on his way to tending turf for a living, his dad and granddad won't be disappointed if he changes his mind when it's time to decide on a career. The same goes for Cody, Jay's 7-month-old son.

It would be cool if Mason and Cody kept the family tradition alive, but it's more important for them to be happy in their chosen professions, say Ernie, Jay and Mike.

"We won't tell them what to be," Mike says. "We'll let them make their own decisions. If they want to be superintendents, that's fine. If they want to be jet pilots, they can do that."

Only time will tell how far these apples fall from the Pock family tree. ■

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