

## Down and Dirty

DOING MORE WITH LESS

**P**at Blum learned his best tricks about protecting the environment on a tight budget from his father, Paul. With a maintenance budget of \$100,000 (including labor) in the mid-1980s, Paul tended Wayne Hills CC in Lock Berlin, N.Y., from 1962 to 1993.

He pioneered integrated pest management (IPM) before it became trendy. He built houses for purple martins around the course so they would roost and eat bugs. He nurtured relationships with local turf universities and allowed them to do research on his course. He used Milorganite for his fertilizer and Triploid Carp for pond management.

And through it all, Paul always managed to come in under budget.

The younger Blum internalized those environmental lessons by working alongside his father, his mother Helen (who mowed greens) and his sister Kim (who fixed ball marks and took out the pins so Mom could mow) at the course. So when he became the superintendent of Colonial Acres GC in Glenmont, N.Y., it was the start of his crusade to battle the prevailing wisdom that superintendents can only protect the environment if they have huge budgets.

"We have to be worried about our environment for our children's sake," says Blum, who is the proud father of two children, Samantha, 7, and Zachary, 2. "My children are a real driving force for me and inspired me to care for my golf course in the most environmentally responsible way possible."

The Colonial Acres job provides Blum with plenty of opportunities to practice what he preaches, particularly with a maintenance budget of only \$27,500 (which excludes labor because Blum's labor costs depend on whether the course makes a profit. During a down year last year, he worked the last two months of the season by himself). He scrimps and saves at every turn, and he relies

**Editor's Note:** *This month, Golfdom launches a new column, Down and Dirty, that will focus on the accomplishments of small-budget courses to get the most out of their limited maintenance budgets.*

# Protecting Nature Is Family Affair

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.



PAT BLUM LEARNED HOW TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT ON A BUDGET FROM HIS FATHER

on his father's remedies to solve some of those problems.

His first goal was to move the course away from inorganic pesticides, but he didn't have a long list of alternatives when he joined the course in 1994. The few natural organic products that were on the market were expensive, and Blum knew they weren't serious options with the money he had to spend. So he started with old standbys Sustane (which Blum says is essentially turkey manure) and Milorganite. He also developed relationships with organizations like Audubon International and local universities. Then he sat back and waited for the rest of the industry to catch up.

"I remember looking at what products were on the market when I first started and being disappointed," Blum says. "We could only take baby steps to turning the course into a 100-percent naturally organic operation, and we're still not there."

Slowly but surely, more research emerged in support of natural organic products, and companies jumped on the bandwagon with cheaper, more effective alternatives to traditional synthetic pesticides. Blum constantly does his own research as new products come to market. He uses corn-gluten meal as a pre-emergent herbicide and milky spore, a bacteria that causes diseases in grubs, as an insecticide. What synthetics he still uses fall into the Category 3 rating in New York, which indicates they have the lowest toxicity possible. Ultimately, he'd like to get away from synthetics entirely. He feels he's on the right track — he's achieved a 70-percent organic to 30-percent synthetic ratio in his pesticide applications.

"It's been a lot of trial and error until you find out what works," Blum says. "But for the costs, you can find a lot of successful products that are organic or have a low toxicity."





**Superintendent:**  
Pat Blum  
**Course:**  
Colonial Acres CC  
**Location:**  
Glenmont, N.Y.  
**Maintenance budget:**  
\$27,500  
(excluding labor)

HELEN BLUM

Blum says the environmentally friendly products are generally cheap, which help him stay within his budget. The challenge is that these cheaper alternatives occasionally require more effort to use than their high-technology counterparts. He believes that scares some superintendents who are enamored with advances in technology.

"We've seen such leaps in pesticide technologies that superintendents have become dependent on them," Blum says. "Some of my colleagues have forgotten how to think creatively about solving their problems. A budget-conscious environmental approach does take extra effort sometimes, but it's worth it."

Blum's shoestring environmental program caught the attention of New York state officials, and the governor's office has asked him to help devise a blueprint for cost-effective environmental management for golf courses around the state.

"It's good that the environmental aspects of golf course maintenance are receiving attention from people other than golfers," Blum says. "I care about the 78 percent of Americans who don't play golf and are worried about the future of the environment. Those are the

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**Pat Blum (far right), superintendent at Colonial Acres GC in Glenmont, N.Y., focuses on environmentalism partly for his family's sake (from left to right): wife Terri, son Zachary and daughter Samantha.**

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people we need to convince that our intentions are good.”

But Blum acknowledges that his example hasn't found many adherents among his peers. He says some people look on him as a heretic for his budget-conscious environmentalism.

“I've taken away one of the most popular excuses for not following through with an environmental plan — that it's too expensive,” Blum says. “If I can do it, anyone can.”

And then there are those family obligations. Blum says he loves it when his children visit the course and chase after the rabbits that dash across the fairways or watch with fascination as a group of purple martins chase flying insects.

He takes great satisfaction from his work on the environment because he believes he's protecting his children's future, even though he doesn't

have enormous amounts of money to do it. “When I read them books at night before they sleep, I can look into their eyes without being ashamed of what I do,” Blum says. “It's then that I think to myself, ‘I did all right today.’”

Blum may finally have disproved the old adage that environmental protection is costly and out of reach for most golf courses. Superintendents around the country, particularly in en-

vironmentally sensitive areas, could emulate his efforts.

But for those who know his background, it's no surprise at all. After all, Blum's just following in his father's footsteps.

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*Know of a course in your area that has a small budget and an interesting story to tell? Contact Frank H. Andorka Jr., managing editor of Golfdom, at 440-891-2708 or [fandorka@advanstar.com](mailto:fandorka@advanstar.com).*

TERRI BLUM



Pat Blum (right) has his father, Paul (left), to thank for his interest in environmental care on a budget.



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