

In the **M**inority

What are young professionals doing to land their first superintendent jobs? Sometimes it's a matter of taking advantage of a not-so-super opportunity **BY LUKE WAGNER**

The modest Windridge Country Club in Owensboro, Ky., workplace of 29-year-old Scott Stuckey, could be observed as a so-so job for a superintendent.

But not for Stuckey, who envisions nothing but opportunity with his mediocre budget and frequently flooded back nine.

Knowing he's in a minority category, Stuckey smiles and waves at member after member who call his name as he prunes the plants around the first tee at Windridge. Only 4 percent of superintendents in the United States are under 30. What is that 4 percent

doing right to gain the top jobs? Who better to ask than Stuckey and a couple of his peers separated by decades of experience.

Stuckey, a first-year superintendent, husband and father of two, believes the biggest reason under-30 assistants have trouble breaking into the industry is because they have their eyes on bigger prizes.

"But if you don't get the perfect layout or the huge budget, you can't look at that as a step back," Stuckey insists.

He stresses that with each new challenge comes a new opportunity to learn. Stuckey says that if a young superintendent can show what he can do with a \$250,000 budget and a less-than-perfect design, the ideal jobs that so many young turf professionals immediately seek will be waiting for them eventually.

In Stuckey's situation, he believes he would still be looking for a job had he not focused on the positive aspects of Windridge. And

while some claim the course lacks the character of a multimillion-dollar landscape, Stuckey has always dwelled on the club's positive traits, including its small maintenance barn built atop an ancient, fractured red and green tennis court.

When Stuckey interviewed for the job a year ago, he revealed his enthusiasm for the post. He inspected the course's mostly new equipment and met the course's dependable nucleus of workers. He says that kind of motivation is vital for young assistants looking to move up the ranks.

"Get yourself enthusiastic about some aspect or challenge," Stuckey advises. "Get yourself in the frame of mind to make the best of it."

These are the things young

Scott Stuckey says he's making the best of his chance as superintendent of Windridge Country Club.



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turf professionals must display to prospective employers in the early stages of their careers. And such enthusiasm goes hand in hand with making good contacts.

Rick Slattery, the veteran superintendent of Locust Hill Country Club in Fairport N.Y., says making solid contacts early in their careers is crucial for young professionals.

"It's vitally important that you network as much as you can," Slattery says. "You never know if a salesman or a member from a previous course could be a vital contact."

Stuckey points out the importance of contacts as a way to set oneself apart from the sea of identical resumes that boast two to four years of experience as assistants.

While building contacts can take time, Mat Dunmyer, the young superintendent of Sonoma Golf Club in Sonoma, Calif., points out that time is on the side of the younger generation. It's also important that young turf professionals

use their early years to learn. "You need to grow and recognize your weaknesses and strengths," Dunmyer says.

How important is it to build contacts? Consider Stuckey's plight. Less than a year ago, he was roaming the fairways and greens as a highly visible, hard-working assistant at a top-tier country club in southern Indiana. He later discovered that an important member contact at that course made a substantial contribution to his hiring just up the river.

But again, intertwined within this spider web of a getting-hired formula is the weighty personal interview itself. "You must market yourself like a product on the shelf at the grocery store," Slattery says of the interview process.

Stuckey and Dunmyer view the interview process differently. Knowing the X's and O's of turf management is crucial, Stuckey believes, but so is the ability for the interviewee to show that he or she can succeed at a certain course.

Also, Stuckey gives credit to his home life as a responsible father and husband as a selling point.

While not disagreeing, Dunmyer focuses on a more personal level during interviews. He says it's important to understand for whom you'll be working, and then market yourself as to how you can relate to that person's tendencies.

However, when sorting through all this information, one commonality sticks out like brown patch on a perfectly manicured zoysiagrass fairway: It's a process. Superintendent jobs don't just fall into 20-somethings laps.

"[The jobs] may come later, or they may come sooner," Slattery says. "But I don't know many people who worked hard, had patience, knowledge and a network of contacts that didn't end up being superintendents (eventually)." ■

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