

Making the

It was a good choice to move into the house on the course.
And I'm glad I gave it some thought

BY JIM BLACK

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Editor's note: About a year ago, Jim Black, former superintendent of Twin Shields Golf Course in Dunkirk, Md., had the opportunity to move into a house on the course for a year. Black, who was superintendent at the course for eight years, sought the advice of his peers on what to do.

E HUMANS HAVE A GIFT that other animals don't. Animals act purely on instinct. They don't think for the most part; they just act.

We, on the other hand, have the gift of conscious thought. We get to think before we act. Lucky us. A situation is put before us and sometimes, instead of just acting or reacting or being proactive, we think and think ... and think. We choose, decide, contemplate, weigh our options and then maybe, *finally*, we act.

Last year I had a situation put before me that I had to sit and give some serious thought to: Should I move into the house on the course or not? The offer was made, and it was time to decide.

Round and round it went in my head — should I or shouldn't I? Most all of my friends said, "Go for it! What are you waiting for?"

But I had my doubts. I had to think about it. Questions swirled in my head.

Would I be on call 24/7?

Would a golf car boy be knocking on my door at 3 p.m. on a Sunday asking me to help change a flat?

Would the club owner expect me to work 14-hour days since I was already here?

The assumption machine was officially switched on. Unfortunately, it seems that when

you're caught in the assumption trap, you tend to lean toward the worst-case scenario.

Sure, I knew there would be positives of living on the course — no commute, an opportunity for quiet time on the course, financial pluses regarding rent and utilities, and more time on my hands to actually play golf.

But I sought the advice of my fellow superintendents to help me make a decision. Who better to get advice from than from people who have lived it?

Words from the wise

Larry Livingston, certified superintendent of Camp Creek Golf Club in Panama City Beach, Fla., reflected on his days of living on the course at River Hills Country Club in Valrico, Fla.

"When we moved to River Hills, I asked my wife where she wanted to live," Livingston said. "She said she would like to live in the development of River Hills, on one of the lots that bordered the course. I said, 'No way! I'm not going to get up on a morning that I'm off, look out a window and see something wrong on the course and worry about it all day.' But she won the battle, and we ended up building a house on the course."

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Move

A man, Jim Black, stands on a gravel path in front of a large red barn with a white roof. He is wearing a dark polo shirt over a light blue long-sleeved shirt, dark jeans, and dark shoes. He holds a black golf bag with red accents in his left hand. To his right, a medium-sized, shaggy-haired dog with tan and grey fur stands on the gravel path. The ground is partially covered with snow, and the background shows the red barn and some trees.

For Jim Black and his dog, home sweet home was on the golf course.

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"As it turned out, it was great," notes Livingston, adding that he had no problems with members bothering him on his days off. "There were a lot more advantages than disadvantages. If I had to go to the course at an odd time, it was a one-minute drive."



Deep down, I knew that living on the course would probably be a good thing, but I was worried about how it was possible to separate work time from home time.

Rod Johnson, certified superintendent of Pine Hills Country Club in Sheboygan, Wis., has lived on the grounds for 23 years. He says it's beneficial for himself and his employer, but he does feel like he's on constant duty. "Living on the course does make me the 24/7 go-to guy."

While he likes living on the course, Johnson does wonder where he will live when he retires, though.

Ken Williams, certified superintendent at the Stanford University Golf Course in Palo Alto, Calif., chimes in with the good, bad and ugly of living in "provided housing."

Williams warns that one needs to be careful in the negotiation stages when there is housing involved, as a future employer may feel like it doesn't need to pay as much as other

courses since it's providing a place to live.

"While 'free rent' sounds great, my reduced salary compounded over my career will not net me nearly as much as my peers," Williams says.

And what of the house itself? Williams lives in a circa 1877 farmhouse in need of improvements that aren't in the capital budget, so any updates needed to keep his family comfortable have to come out of his pocket.

It's not all bad, though. "I do like the convenience of being right on the course as running home is easy from work, and running back into the office is easy from home," he says.

Common themes

Still in thinking and deciding mode, I searched my peers' responses for a common thread — some sort of positive that would sway my decision. Being a single parent of two young daughters, I couldn't help but wonder how living on a golf course would affect them.

Deep down I knew that living on the course would probably be a good thing, but I was worried about how it was possible to separate work time from home time. Then finally, the common thread I was looking for wove its way through the responses and into my decision. It was: Make the time for your family no matter where you are.

Kevin Hicks, superintendent of Coeur d'Alene (Idaho) Golf Resort, says he has fond memories of a previous assignment at a high-end club in Arizona — and most involve his son.

"We lived on site for seven years and have some great memories of taking our son out on the golf course and looking at nature, watching the dog run around and seeing more than our share of beautiful sunsets," he says. "If I ever have the opportunity again, I'll take it in a heartbeat since we all cherish those peaceful night tours around our property."

Matt Strader, superintendent of Penn National Golf Club, shared his flashback of his five-year stint at Huntingdon Valley Country Club outside of Philadelphia, with his wife and four sons.

"I must say that it was an enjoyable experience for all of us," he says. "The house was secluded from the rest of the course, yet right next to the maintenance facility. We had lots of wildlife to enjoy during evening walks or just sitting on the front porch."

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"It was not a burden at all," Strader adds. "Sure there was an occasional fire to put out here or there, but it was a well-run course, and most of the time I had at least two of the kids in tow. They really liked to ride around the course in the evening."



My original inclination had been to accept the offer of living on the course because of the opportunity to have a 200-acre finely manicured 'yard' at my disposal.

Gordon Seliga, certified superintendent of Lake View Country Club in North East, Pa., likes to take his 5-year-old son on evening rides on the course. "Of course he brings his special putter that the assistant pro cut to length for him," Seliga says. "He enjoys it, and I'm able to plan for the next day or adjust the watering schedule based on my observations that evening."

Seliga has certainly had his share of phone calls when things go wrong — a member forgot his shoes in the pro shop or the range picker ran out of gas. But he says most of the inconveniences have been significantly reduced through good communication with other department heads.

Seliga says living on the golf course allows him to do more for the golf course and spend

more time at home. "During the summer months, a superintendent's job is demanding and requires long hours," he says. "I can't imagine having to drive several miles back and forth to work without significant disruption to the time you spend with your family."

Robert Mitchell, now retired after spending 25 years at The Greenbrier Sporting Club in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., began his career when he worked and lived at a public course operated by the Alton (Ill.) Recreation Department. Working long hours with a minimal crew and tiny budget, he still managed to finish school and start a family.

"My wife and I married, and we were very happy being close to the action," he says. "We did not have a car, and I drove the golf course's Worthington tractor the two miles to school for a one-hour course three days a week. I didn't make much money, but we were blissfully happy. I had two children while at the job."

Mitchell and his wife Dorcas had their third child while at the Sunset Country Club in St. Louis (Mo.) After two years at the Portage Country Club in Akron, Ohio, where the family lived off site, Mitchell went to The Greenbrier, accepting the cottage on the property. "It was extremely comfortable. It was great."

So now the scale was tipped heavily toward making the move. My original inclination had been to accept the offer of living on the course because of the opportunity to have a 200-acre finely manicured "yard" at my disposal. My kids were thrilled at the idea, too, but I had worried a little about the dangers of flying golf balls.

But thanks to my fellow keepers of the green, those worries are gone. The course owner and members are very respectful of my privacy, my 10-year-old is now an ace golf car operator and my 5-year-old loves roller-blading on the cart paths.

Like Tim Powers, certified superintendent of Crystal Springs Golf Course in Burlingame, Calif., says of living on the course — it's a wildlife refuge. The blue heron, wild turkeys and white-tailed deer are my new neighbors.

For me, my family and my current life situation, it was a good choice. And I'm glad I gave it some thought beforehand. ■

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