

Ron Kirkman

Superintendent of the Needham Golf Club

They call him Captain Kirk, but Ron Kirkman isn't "out there," so to speak. He's just an upbeat guy who loves to live, laugh and tend turf. He's been doing the latter for 46 years — 42 years as the superintendent of Needham Golf Club in Needham, Mass., about 10 miles west of Boston.

Want a sample of Captain Kirk's wit? Just ask him his age.

"Old enough to know better, young enough to learn," he answers. "It's somewhere between 66 and 67. I forget."

Golfdom: What do you like most about your job?

Seeing the members and guests enjoy recreating and socializing on a well-conditioned golf course. I like the rhythms of the seasons from the rebirth of growth in the spring through the busy months of the summer growing season. Then there's the slowing in the fall season as nature prepares the golf course to go to sleep again for a few months in the winter. And of course every day brings new challenges. Most importantly, living on the premises, I'm always around for family and member needs.

Golfdom: How have you learned to deal with the pressures of your job?

By taking my job very seriously but not myself very seriously. I also take some time off during the season to play a little golf. I've also learned to listen to everyone's concerns, but I tune out their unproductive comments and criticisms. I focus on attending to their constructive comments and criticisms.

Golfdom: In 50 words or less, describe a good day at work.

Everyone shows up and on time. Learning another word in Portuguese. No equipment breakdowns. No physical injuries, poison ivy or bee stings. No drought. No turf disease. Being under budget but getting the work done. Having my working colleagues enjoy their job. Receiving positive and unsolicited comments from members.

Golfdom: What is the most important issue facing superintendents today?

One could say job security. However, green speed is always a problem. There has to be a tradeoff between green speed and the golfer. The potential for turf damage is substantial by cutting greens so short and rolled down tight, particularly in hot, humid weather.

Golfdom: Finish this sentence: "The best thing that could happen to the golf course maintenance industry would be ..."

... I would suspect to restore the old-time camaraderie of the superintendents when we had more time to share ideas and be better neighbors to each other. There's too much competitiveness and not as much cooperation as before.

Golfdom: What's the best advice anybody ever gave you?

Listen, listen, listen more than you talk, and treat everybody with dignity.

Golfdom: What's the best advice you ever gave someone?

Treat every member and golfer with respect and dignity. Keep the lines of communications open. Don't back



anyone into a corner — even your enemies. Kill them with kindness. Most importantly, remember it is not your golf course.

Golfdom: Who are the three most influential people or groups in the golf course maintenance industry and why?

I can only think of one and that would be Steve Mona, CEO of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. And you ask why? Just think of the president of the United States and how powerful he is. You might think the same thing of Mr. Mona in the golf course maintenance industry.

Golfdom: If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be and why?

Arnold Palmer. He grew up in a superintendent's family and went on to be one of the better players of all time. He made the game popular through television and his great personality.

Golfdom: What is your favorite movie(s)?

"Forrest Gump." He made the most of the talents God gave him and he was always optimistic.

Golfdom: What do you eat for breakfast?

I chew up my staff first thing every morning, and then I go to the clubhouse and have a decaf coffee to wind down. ■

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