

Off The Fringe

NEWS WITH A HOOK

Business briefs

Can you say, 'Correction'

They don't make 'em like they used to. We're talking about golf courses. They're just not building so many of them these days. According to the National Golf Foundation, only 124.5 golf courses (in 18-hole equivalents) opened in 2005, less than the 150.5 that opened in 2004. The number is substantially down from the all-time-high golf course opening number of 398.5 that occurred in 2000, according to NGF.

The last time so few golf courses opened as did in 2005 was in the mid-1980s, the association says.

The NGF also said there were 98 closures (in 18-hole equivalents) in 2005. That means the net addition the industry was only 26.5 18-hole courses. Several of those closings have occurred in Michigan, once the hot bed of golf course openings.

NGCOA recognizes courses

The National Golf Course Owners Association (NGCOA) awarded its Jemsek Award for Golf Course Excellence to the three courses at Bandon Dunes Golf Resort in Bandon, Ore. — Bandon Dunes, Pacific Dunes and Bandon Trails.

The NGCOA also recognized Poppy Hills Golf Course in Pebble Beach, Calif., as its Golf Course of the Year.

Among individuals, Walt Lankau, the owner of Stow Acres Country Club in Stow, Mass., was named the winner of the Don Rossi Award for significant and long-lasting service to the NGCOA. Lankau, 63, has been an advocate for golf course owners and operators for more than a decade and has served on the NGCOA board of directors for a number of years, including two years as president.

The High Hurdles

SUPERINTENDENTS SOUND OFF ABOUT THE DEMANDS THEY'RE FACING IN THEIR JOBS

Recently, we asked golf course superintendents to list the challenges they have been encountering. Here are their responses:

"2005 was the toughest golf season I have experienced in 23 years as a superintendent. If 2006 resembles this season, I will consider a career change." Paul Diegnau, certified superintendent, Keller Golf Course, St. Paul, Minn.

"As of now, we are keeping up. The future is not looking that good. People are spending their free time on other things." Kenneth Pester, owner, Pike Run Golf Club, Ottawa, Ohio

"There needs to be a huge effort in educating people that it is not possible or feasible to maintain a golf course at the level people see on television for the pro events." Brian Mohr, Spencer (Iowa) Municipal Golf Course

"Gas prices are a concern. Heating the shop for the winter is modified. We will work at 49 degrees instead of 55 degrees for this year. It should not be a big deal. (We'll) just add another layer." Tom Small, superintendent, Abenakee Club, Biddeford Pool, Maine

"With the tough economy, rising prices and intense competition for an apparent limited number of golfers, golf course management is quite a challenge. How-

ever, I'm always up for a challenge. If it was easy, anybody could be successful." Steven Storz, certified superintendent of PrairieView Golf Club, Byron, Ill.

"Golfers are ignorant to what we as professionals do on a daily basis to give them the playing conditions they so desire." Brian Ciotta, Seven Hills Country Club, Cleveland

"Old equipment, no mechanic, grubs and skunks." Tim O'Linn, superintendent, Cedar Glen Golf Club, New Baltimore, Mich.

"Demanding members that want dollar greens on a dime budget. Also, trying to stay focused on the health of the turf and not just the speed of the greens." Robert Stringer, certified superintendent, Germantown (Tenn.) Country Club

"A lot of times I feel out of touch with the crew because I have to do so much non-golf course stuff." Chad Morris, superintendent, Running Y Resort, Klamath Falls, Ore.

"Finding good employees who take pride in what they do. Very few employees take ownership in their jobs. They just punch that clock and talk about football and Tiger." Dean Wilson, general manager and co-owner of Beacon Lakes Golf Club and Hillcrest Golf Club in Texas



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Off The Fringe

It's Mine!

IT'S OK. YOU CAN REFER TO THE
COURSE WHERE YOU WORK AS YOURS

By Ron Furlong

Did you ever hear a fellow superintendent say something like, "Well, at my course we..." Or, "I've been at my course for more than..."

I'm referring to this "ownership" thing many of us tend to do when talking to someone about the golf courses where we work. As if we owned the darn thing. My course. Uggh! Used to drive me nuts. I say "used to." It doesn't any more, and I'd like to explain why.

Last year I attended a seminar at the Golf Industry Show that was by far and away the best I've ever attended, and I think the 30 guys who were there with me would say the same thing. It was titled "Conflict Resolution — Dealing with Member Conflict." The speaker was Robert Sexton. Incredible experience. Attendees were rewarded with some terrific and useful information. But I mention the seminar only to illustrate

one of my fellow attendees who stood up at one point and addressed the "my course" issue. At first his point made perfect sense to me, because I've felt the same way for years. His beef was that whenever he heard a superintendent refer to the golf course he was employed as at "my course," it drove him nuts. What right did he have to say it was his course? Did he own it? Was he a stockholder? A member? No. Taking ownership of something that isn't yours is a crucial mistake many of us make. If we think of it as our course we're headed for certain disaster. This was the point he made, in a nutshell.

It wasn't until a few weeks later that I sat back and considered the "my course" issue. I stopped to consider it because I had recently caught myself saying it a few times. "We spoon-feed the greens at my course." Whoops! "I mean at the course where I work." Or, "We've done a lot of drainage at my course

and..." Dohhh! "Sorry, I mean at the course for which I work."

It slowly began to dawn on me how stupid I sounded for correcting myself. And what a mouthful! "The golf course I work for?" Sounds like a programmed robot. What really was the harm in saying, "My golf course?"

Did I think I owned the course? No. Did I think everyone else, golfers and workers and all the cute little squirrels running about were trespassing on my sacred property? Of course not.

So why did I say it? What made me mouth the terrible words, "My golf course?"

Maybe because I actually felt some pride in working for it. I was expressing a certain level of respect for the course and the job I do here. I do work at the course. That is a fact. I don't work at the course down the street. Kind of like the bank where I have my checking account. I say "My bank," don't I? Don't you?

Saying "my golf course," it was becoming clear to me,

was a simple and effective way of stating my place of employment and at the same time showing pride in that place. I am lucky to be the superintendent at Avalon Golf Club. It is where I work. It is my golf course. It will be my golf course until the day I am no longer employed here. When that day comes it will cease to be my golf course. It's also the golf pro's course and the irrigation technician's course. If it isn't your golf course, maybe you're at the wrong golf course.

To the fellow at the seminar who stated how he cringed every time a superintendent said, "My golf course," I'd ask him this: If a superintendent went out next week and accidentally sprayed a nonselective herbicide on all his greens (sorry, I mean the greens on the golf course where he works), what do you think the powers-that-be at that golf course would do? Do you think the green committee would think they weren't the superintendent's greens? Do you think the superintendent could tell the green chairman or the owner, "Yeah, but they're not my greens. I just work here."

Somehow, I don't think that would fly. They are his greens, and it's his golf course. We all need to feel that way. We all need to look in the mirror and say, "My golf course."

It's OK. We're in this together. Let's take the first step.

Ron Furlong is the superintendent of Avalon Golf Club in Bellingham, Wash.

6 SIX QUICK QUESTIONS WITH Sean Hoolehan

NEW GCSAA PREZ IS A WHITE SOX FAN AND A PATIENT MAN

1 | Who has been the biggest influence on your career and why?

Ray Schei (a more than 40-year member of the GCSAA). I worked as his assistant for four seasons, and he taught me how to do it all. He would turn me loose and let me learn from my mistakes. It was not always fun, but it was never boring. When I think of my good old days in this business, those were them. I learned to respect "old school" from Ray.

2 | What was the defining moment in your professional life?

The day I learned to be more patient with my staff. I have been successful ever since.

3 | What's the greatest invention the industry has seen?

Computer-operated irrigation.

4 | Describe yourself in one word:

Whitesoxfan.

5 | If a movie were made about your life, what actor would play you?

John Travolta.

6 | It's your last day on Earth. What would you do?

Put on my favorite White Sox hat and T-shirt and visit a priest.



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"Manage a group of seasonal employees who are woefully underpaid." John Cooper, superintendent, Atwood Homestead Golf Course, Rockford, Ill.

"Golfers are uneducated, or maybe it's just the TV watchers who are the ones who know more than I do." Gene Scarborough, superintendent, Santee-Cooper Resort, Santee, S.C.

"Answering the question, 'What have you done for me lately?' before it gets asked." Mike Hulteen, certified superintendent, Salina (Kan.) Country Club

"By far, just keeping a qualified staff is the hardest part to my job. We constantly have new guys coming and going and that means you are always teaching the same things over and over again." Ryan Blair, certified superintendent, Holston Hills Country Club, Knoxville, Tenn.

"To quote an old superintendent, 'I should have been a mason. Bricks don't wilt.'" Mike Beall, superintendent, UGA Golf Course, Ga.



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Madden Chose Love

AND COLORADO SUPERINTENDENT HAS NO REGRETS

By Anthony Pioppi

John Madden was in the fast lane on his way to becoming a head superintendent at one of Westchester County's finest private golf courses. Then he gave it all up for the woman who would become his wife.

Oh, the things we do for love.

Madden elected to follow his fiancé west, back to her hometown of Boulder, Colo., so she could take a nursing position at Children's Hospital in Denver where she was once a patient.

For him that meant taking a couple of giant steps backward on the career path. But Madden's career is flourishing again. He's now the superintendent at Green Gables Country Club, which reopened last spring after a comprehensive renovation by architect Arthur Hills that included the rerouting of holes.

Madden earned a political science degree from St. Lawrence University, followed by a year and a half working in Albany, N.Y., in the advertising field. When it became apparent to Madden he was not made for that line of work, he moved on to golf course maintenance, a job he first worked during summer vacations. He eventually ended up on the crew at Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaroneck, N.Y., under the guidance of superintendent Bob Alonzi.

When he realized golf course work was for him, Madden attended UMass-Stockbridge, earning a two-year degree in agronomy while still working at Winged Foot for his first mentor. "He's a straight-forward guy," Madden said of Alonzi. "He taught me lessons about everything, lessons I teach my guys."

The grow-in of Centennial Country Club was Madden's next career stop. "I thought it would be good to get involved in the nuts and bolts of a golf course," he said.

He remained there for two years under the tutelage of superintendent William Heintz. "He showed me how you manage people, lead people and inspire people," Madden said.

Now firmly entrenched in the Westchester scene, Madden had the pedigree to get his own course, but that's not how it worked out. At a friend's wedding in 1998, Madden met Jennifer Raybin, then a graduate student in nursing at Yale. The romance was on. They married in 1999 and when she was offered a job in Denver at Children's Hospital, a position Madden knew she could not turn down,

his job search switched to Colorado.

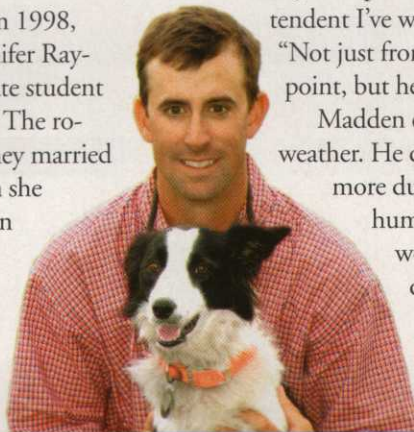
A native of Boulder, his wife had been a patient at the same hospital at the age of 9 when she had a cyst removed from her lung, an event that inspired her to choose nursing as a career. When a position as nurse practitioner in the oncology department was offered to her by the hospital that saved her life, she had no choice but to accept, a decision Madden supported.

Madden's first job in the Denver areas was as a crew member at Green Gables. He worked his way up to assistant for then-superintendent Brett Armstrong. When Armstrong left, Madden was offered the head spot on an interim basis.

When the renovation began in 2002, Madden had proved his mettle to the members and was rewarded with the permanent position. Green Gables golfers weren't the only ones impressed with Donahue's performance. Chris Wilczynski, the lead architect for Arthur Hills, also raves about Madden.

"John's probably the best superintendent I've worked with," he said. "Not just from an agronomic standpoint, but he's also a great guy."

Madden enjoys the Colorado weather. He doesn't lay awake anymore during those warm, humid summer nights worrying about turf disease. "I love the climate," he said of Denver's arid conditions.



Quotable

"Those who attempt the ridiculous can achieve the impossible."

— Col. John Blashford-Snell, the British adventurer and veteran expeditioner who was the keynote speaker at the recent

British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association's annual conference, on getting ahead

"People think in terms of the instant mature look. We're in an era of instant gratification."

— Architect Bill Coore, who has helped design some of the nation's top courses, on what golfers expect from new golf courses.