

# Calm, Co

Superintendent  
John Zimmers Jr.  
oversees demanding  
Oakmont CC with  
a level head



# ol, Collected

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

**T**hey are a fussy bunch, the members of Oakmont Country Club. They expect nothing but premium playing conditions on their exalted 104-year-old golf course, the site of this month's U.S. Open. And even though the golf

course maintenance staff provides an outstanding setting, the members still find things to fret about.

John Zimmers Jr., Oakmont's grounds superintendent, takes the members' criticism in stride. In fact, he welcomes their myriad opinions about the golf course he oversees.

The thick-skinned Zimmers, who's in his eighth season at the Pittsburgh club, realizes that dealing with the club's 400 members — considered the most demanding fraternity in golf — is an essential part of his job.

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Which brings us to the U.S. Open, whose preparations have also been a vital part of Zimmers' job the past five years. Now, if you're the superintendent of a U.S. Open host course, you're probably under more pressure during championship week than Jack Bauer during an episode of "24." Such tension comes with the territory of staging one of golf's greatest spectacles. Not only are the world's greatest players playing your course, the most hypercritical golf "experts" are scrutinizing its every grass blade.

But Zimmers might be an exception to the U.S. Open pressure cooker. That's not to say the 36-year-old isn't feeling the searing heat to stage a magnificent championship. It's just to say he's accustomed to facing the same loud music from his club's members — every day. So you won't see Zimmers pulling his closely cropped hair out if the world's greatest golfers complain that Oakmont's rough is too tough.

In fact, as absurd as it may sound, the U.S. Open may provide respite for Zimmers from his normal workweek.

"This is a really bizarre thing to tell you, but I actually think there's a little less demand associated with the championship

when I think of what the membership strives to do here every day," Zimmers says.

What exactly do the members strive to do at Oakmont? In short, they want Zimmers to make the course as grueling to play as possible. They want their course to be the ultimate test of golf. If someone shoots par, someone else says, "We can't have that here."

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Of course, the demand for difficult conditions can have Zimmers and his crew walking a tightrope when it comes to the turf's health. Take the greens, for instance, which the members want running at 13 feet on the Stimpmeter. And they want Zimmers and his crew to triple-cut the *Poa annua*-bentgrass greens almost daily and roll them several times a week to achieve their breakneck speed. And, yes, they expect Zimmers and his crew to keep the greens alive despite subjecting them to such stress.

"The members just embrace fast greens," Zimmers explains. "We're more on the extreme of speed versus any club out there."

The greens are so fast that the United States Golf Association plans to slow them down for the U.S. Open. (Is that a surprise?) So you can see why Zimmers might feel less anxiety during U.S. Open week.

But make no mistake: The U.S. Open won't provide a quick getaway to Margaritaville for Zimmers and his crew, who have been preparing fervently for the week of June 11 through June 17 for several years. They plan to make the club's members, the USGA and themselves proud.

"When you prepare a golf course at this level every day, you want to show it off to the world," Zimmers says.

One doesn't become the golf course superintendent at a place like Oakmont without having a passion for work. So it's no surprise that Zimmers comes from a family of hard workers. He grew up in Sinking Valley, Pa., a small town between State College and Altoona in the state's central region. Zimmers says his grandfather, also named John, was his biggest influence in regard to his work ethic.

"He was the hardest-working guy I've

**Their time is up.**  
Starts working in hours — even minutes.



ever met," Zimmers says of his grandfather, who worked for 43 years at a paper mill.

Zimmers' grandfather died last year. His framed black-and-white photograph sits on Zimmers' desk. It serves as a reminder to Zimmers that hard work can get you everywhere in life.

Zimmers' foray into the golf industry came after he answered a help-wanted ad in *The Altoona Mirror* when he was 18. Paul R. Latshaw, the then-superintendent of Wilmington Country Club in Delaware, placed the ad.

Zimmers rarely read the newspaper then, but he did on this day and saw the ad. Zimmers had recently graduated from high school and was working for a local landscaper. He figured he had nothing to lose by phoning Latshaw to find out more about the job.

Zimmers liked what he heard and took the job on Latshaw's crew. He worked for Latshaw, hailed as one of the top superintendents ever, for four years at Wilmington. Zimmers also decided to attend Rutgers University to study turf-grass management while he worked at Wilmington. He received a two-year turf-grass certificate in 1993. Later that year, he followed Latshaw to Congressional



Zimmers' family – including wife Tracey and dog Diamond – mean the world to him.

Country Club in Bethesda, Md., where he became Latshaw's first assistant. Zimmers stayed there for two years before taking the superintendent's position at Sand Ridge Golf Club, a new Tom Fazio design in Chardon, Ohio.

Zimmers says Latshaw taught him most everything he knows about the business. Zimmers says he's also grateful to Bill Conway, owner of Sand Ridge, for giving him his first job as a superintendent when he was only 25 and involving him in the construction and grow-in of one of the top clubs in northeast Ohio.

"I was really fortunate," Zimmers says. "I was able to do things there that I didn't get to do at other places."

But it's not just good fortune that has propelled Zimmers' career. Dedication to improving his craft has much to do with it.

"If you want to be better than anybody else, you have to be willing to put in the time," Zimmers says.

The amount of work he puts in is "mind-boggling," says his wife, Tracey, who is the office manager at Oakmont's maintenance complex. Zimmers is at work by 4:30 a.m. daily to begin his crew on their assignments. He also works weekends. Near-100-hour weeks are the norm.

Sometimes it might seem like John is married to the golf course and not her, says Tracey, his high-school sweetheart

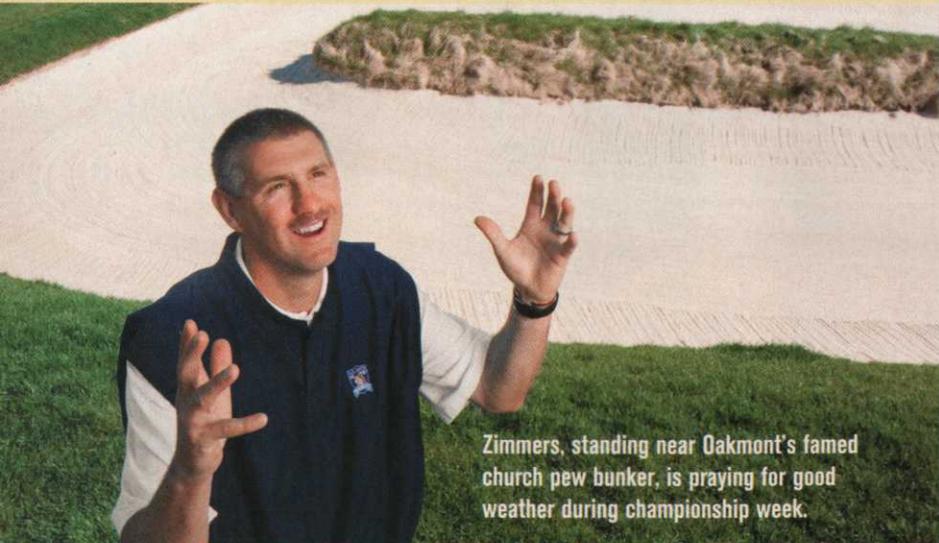
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PHOTO BY: LARRY RIPPEL

**They can crawl,  
but they can't hide.**

**No buffer zones to worry about.**





Zimmers, standing near Oakmont's famed church pew bunker, is praying for good weather during championship week.

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and wife of 17 years. But she understands the commitment John had to make when he became superintendent of Oakmont. The couple has no children.

"It's a way of life for him," she says.

But while his work consumes him, John has realized the importance of family, Tracey says. He is there when family members need him. He doesn't use work as an excuse to miss important family functions.

"Do you live to work or work to live?" Tracey asks. "Sometimes you have to find a balance, and John has. I'm proud of him for that."

With nearly eight years in at one of America's premier golf clubs at such a young age, some people wonder if Zimmers will ditch his pressure-packed job and move on after the U.S. Open.

But Zimmers says he's not going anywhere. Oakmont is the place for him, right now. Besides, the prestige of another Major tournament — the 2010 Women's U.S. Open — is on the horizon.

"It fits my niche of where I'm at in my life right now," he says.

But Zimmers, like any career-minded individual, thinks about his future and is keeping his options open. What

superintendent with a similar resume wouldn't?

But Oakmont's members won't prompt his departure. They have grown to appreciate the superintendent they have in Zimmers, says Tom Wallace, Oakmont's general manager.

"They recognize that he is one of the finest superintendents in the world," Wallace says.

Wallace enjoys telling Zimmers-at-work stories, which illustrate why Zimmers is so well regarded by the members. One summer day a few years ago, Wallace watched from his office window as Zimmers cut a small hole with his pocketknife in the turf on the ninth green. Zimmers then peeled back the cut turf, lowered his face to the exposed area and began to sniff it.

"I thought he was losing his mind," Wallace says.

Wallace left his office and walked down to the green to find out exactly what Zimmers was doing. When he asked him, Wallace got a quick lesson in agronomics.

The weather that summer had been extraordinarily hot and rainy. Zimmers explained to Wallace that rainwater, which

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PHOTO BY: LARRY RIPPEL

**They've never  
seen anything like it.**

New mode of action catches them off guard.





Construction equipment was a common sight on the course during the renovation.

# Oakmont Regains Its Grueling Image

BY LARRY AYLWARD

In preparing for this month's U.S. Open, John Zimmers Jr. helped oversee Oakmont Country Club's massive golf course restoration, which began before Zimmers arrived at the Pittsburgh-area course in 1999 and ended in late 2005.

Thanks to the restoration, which included the removal of more than 5,000 trees, Oakmont has regained its take-no-prisoners image. Of course, that's the image the late Henry C. Fownes sought when he designed his only golf course in 1903.

"He set out to make the hardest golf course in America, and I think he achieved what he wanted to do," Zimmers says.

Oakmont hired Fazio Golf Course Designers to engineer the restoration and builder McDonald & Sons to do the physical work. Zimmers and his staff assisted throughout.

The ambitious \$2.5-million restoration, aided largely by the use of old photographs of Oakmont in its heyday, touched about every part of the course and included a new irrigation system.

"They wanted to put the course back to the original design that Mr. Fownes had," Zimmers says of Oakmont's 400 members. "They have the utmost respect for Mr. Fownes."

There were few, if any, trees on the

course when Fownes designed it, but they accumulated over the next 90 years. Most of the trees were planted in the 1960s as part of a beautification program. But the course became so overgrown with trees that playability suffered and turf weakened because of poor air movement and shade.

Oakmont's grounds committee decided it was time to bring down the trees. Oakmont was designed as a links-style course, not a parkland course, they reasoned. Not surprisingly, the board's decision sparked controversy.

The tree-removal program began in 1995 under the direction of Mark Kuhns, who spent nine years at Oakmont and is now director of grounds at Baltusrol Golf Club. Zimmers inherited the project upon his arrival in 1999. Most of the work was done in-house and in the winter so tree-sentimental members wouldn't witness the severed lumber toppling to the ground.

Zimmers has fielded question after question from media members about the trees, especially in light of the U.S. Open. People, whether from the golf media or not, want to know why so many trees had to be cut down. It was part of the restoration, Zimmers tells them. And because there are fewer trees, "the turf is healthier and therefore we use less pesticides and fertilizer," he also says.

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had become trapped in the turf because it has nowhere to drain, was literally heating up and cooking the roots of the greens. Zimmers told Wallace he could smell dead roots, and that he would have to aerify the greens to rectify the problem.

"He knew it was the middle of the summer and that aerifying at that time would be controversial," Wallace says. "But he did it, and he saved the greens."

Under Zimmers' tenure, Oakmont has soared to another level, Wallace says.

"He has taken a very beautiful diamond and polished it even more," Wallace adds. "That's more difficult than taking a lump of coal and turning it into a diamond."

Zimmers believes he has earned the trust of Oakmont's members because he is honest and forthright with them.

"At no point has the support for John been any stronger than it is right now," Wallace says.

Zimmers doesn't duck the inquisitive members, either. He has learned that if you give those people face time, they are satisfied, even if they didn't get the answers they sought.

Zimmers also explains to members the nuances of certain agronomic procedures in terms they can understand.

"You know he knows more about grass than you ever will," Wallace says. "But he has a way that involves you. So the members don't walk away with their heads spinning."

Tim Moraghan, the United States Golf Association's director of championship agronomy, has known Zimmers since his days at Congressional. Moraghan has watched Zimmers grow into a superintendent who can handle the pressures that come with being superintendent at a top club. Zimmers doesn't get too high or too low, which is the best way to operate at a place like Oakmont.

"It is one of the all-time great courses in this country," Moraghan says. "And John survives it all very well."

Wallace is impressed that Zimmers sur-

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Tim Moraghan, the United States Golf Association's director of championship agronomy, describes the finished tree-removal program as "mind blowing."

"If you had seen the course before 1995 and seen it today, your jaw would hit the ground," Moraghan says.

Oakmont's turf will benefit from the tree removal, says Moraghan, who supported the endeavor.

"Are we there to play golf on quality turf-grass, or are we there to take a walk in the park and look at the birds in the trees?" Moraghan asked. "It's hard to convince people in the environmental community that taking down trees is beneficial. But were not taking down trees in a national park. Were taking down trees on a golf course."

Fazio's Tom Marzolf was the architectural anchorman for the restoration. Marzolf's first order of business upon arriving in 1999 was lengthening Oakmont from the tees. More than 200 yards was added to the course, which now plays about 7,255 yards. A new par-3 tee on No. 8 will make the hole 290 yards for the U.S. Open.

Oakmont's existing bunkers were also restored, and 10 bunkers were rebuilt. Fownes designed Oakmont with 300 bunkers, but many were removed to cut back on overall maintenance. There are about 200 bunkers on the course now.

The project included the refurbishing of the church pews bunker, one of the most famous bunkers in golf. Over the years, the church pews bunker floor had accumulated so much sand that it had become raised. The floor was lowered and the bunker's bottom was rebuilt. Two additional pews were also added to each end of the bunker.

Oakmont's other hazards — its ditches — also were repaired. Oakmont has no water hazards, but the ditches act as functional hazards and provide good drainage on the course.

Oakmont's push-up greens, which hadn't been disturbed in 102 years, also needed renewal. They were restored to their original size. Oakmont also installed the XGD, or Existing Greens Drainage, on all of its greens. Developed by T.D.I. International, XGD is a subsurface drainage system that removes surface water more rapidly and lowers the water table in the green, thereby improving turf drainage.

Zimmers has worked closely with Moraghan on course setup for the U.S. Open. "Hard and fair" is how Zimmers describes how the course will play.

Oakmont is known for its fast greens, which members prefer to run at 13 feet consistently on the Stimpmeter. The USGA plans to slow them down for the U.S. Open.

Oakmont's members, who love a tough test of golf, will take pride in that, Moraghan says. "They'll be boasting, 'We have to slow down the greens for [the pros]!'" Moraghan says.

Oakmont's members like to brag about their course. They have plenty to talk about considering that this year's U.S. Open marks the club's eighth national championship, more than any other establishment.

Usually, a course closes a few weeks before U.S. Open week so divots and ball marks can heal, and loose ends can be tied up. Oakmont's members are not giving up their course to the championship until a day before the first practice round.

"That tells you how passionate they are about their golf," Zimmers says. ■

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rounds himself with employees who are just as apt as he is when it comes to agronomics. Other superintendents might feel threatened by such employees.

Zimmers is the boss, but he doesn't bark instructions like a Paris Island drill sergeant. He's more like a coach with his crew, taking time to explain the details of a chore. Zimmers doesn't run the show from his comfortable office. He's on the golf course as much as he can be. He's not afraid to grab a shovel or a broom and get down and dirty with the others.

Zimmers' affinity to attract top talent for his staff is evident by the number of assistants he has lost during his tenure. Five of them have moved on to superintendent jobs at prestigious clubs, including Jason Hurwitz, who left Oakmont late last year to become superintendent of nearby Fox Chapel Golf Club.

"He is my only mentor," says Hurwitz, who worked under Zimmers for three years at Sand Ridge and for seven years at Oakmont. "I have always admired how focused and motivated he is."

It's too early in Zimmers' career to begin talk of how he will be remembered in the golf course maintenance profession. But some people are already talking about his legacy.

"John is a credit to his profession," Moraghan says. "He makes those around him better."

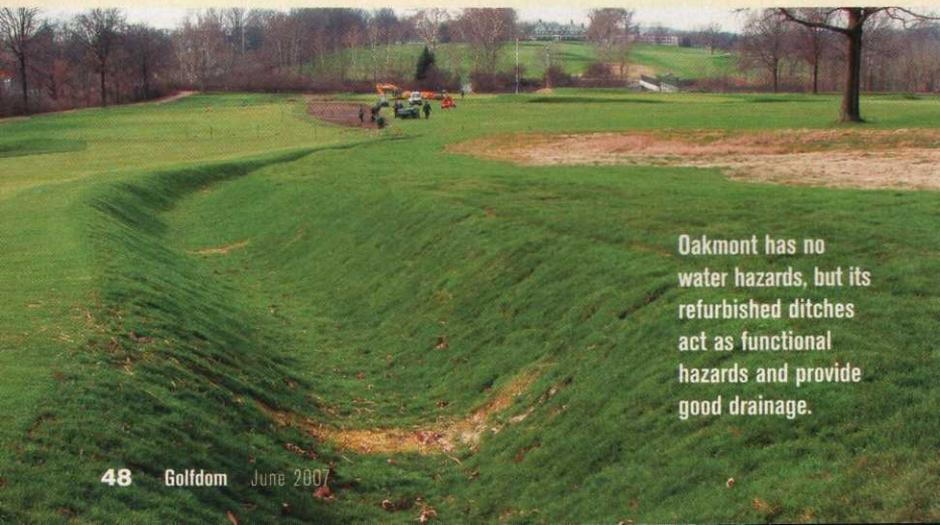
Oakmont member Bob Wagner, the club's former grounds chairman and president, calls Zimmers the nation's top superintendent.

When asked how he would like to be remembered, Zimmers talks more about being a team player than a team's star player.

"Somebody ... that if you were putting your team together, I hope I would get your call," he answers quietly.

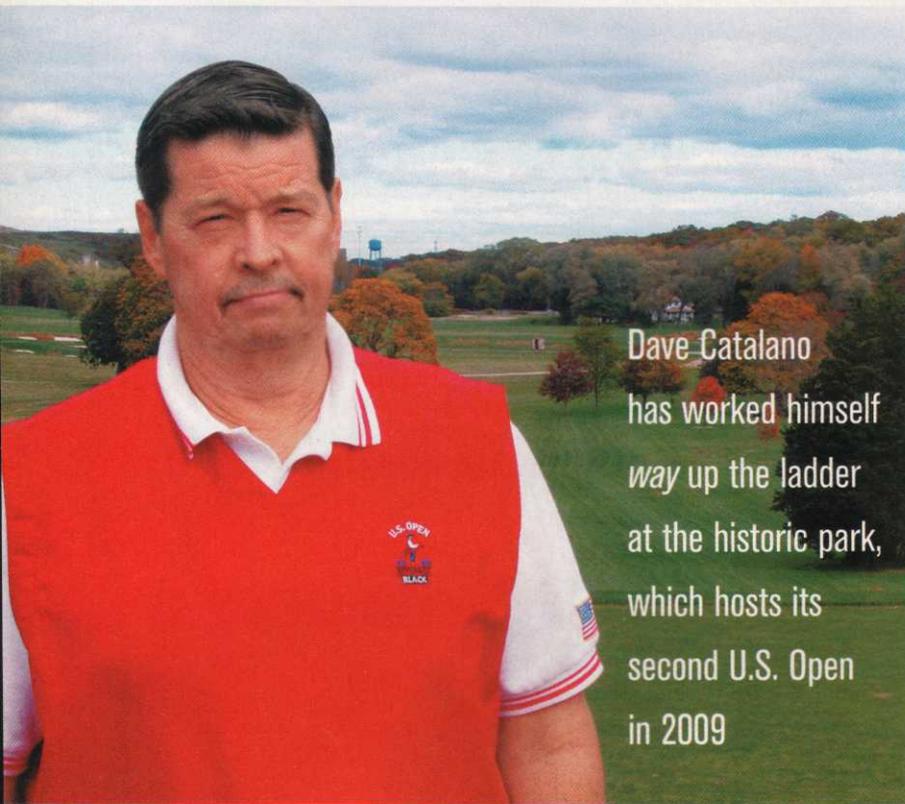
Oakmont's members are glad they called on Zimmers to be the club's superintendent. Zimmers has lived up to their demanding expectations.

And *that* is something he'll be remembered for. ■



Oakmont has no water hazards, but its refurbished ditches act as functional hazards and provide good drainage.

# Born for Bethpage



Dave Catalano  
has worked himself  
way up the ladder  
at the historic park,  
which hosts its  
second U.S. Open  
in 2009

BY LARRY AYLWARD

**A**bove Dave Catalano's office door is a sign that reads, "Golf Stories Told Here." It's an appropriate statement, considering Catalano's rags-to-riches story about his career at Bethpage State Park.

As the story goes, Catalano worked his way up from scrubbing toilets in the park's picnic-area restrooms to overseeing the staging of the U.S. Open on Bethpage's Black Course.

Talk about a rise to the top.

Catalano, the director of Bethpage State Park, worked hard to get where he is and says he caught a few breaks along the way to help him progress in his career. The 59-year-old is grateful to begin his 40th year working for the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation this summer.

"My career has been a blessing," he says.

Catalano has spent almost 20 of those years at Bethpage, best known for its five golf courses,

including the Black Course, which hosted the U.S. Open in 2002 and will host it again in 2009. Bethpage also offers picnic facilities, playing fields and other recreational endeavors.

Catalano's office is on the second floor of the golf complex's clubhouse, which sits amid the five courses, all named after colors — Red, Yellow, Blue and Green in addition to Black. His office is adorned with several photos and illustrations of the park's courses.

Bethpage is divided into two divisions, operations and maintenance, both of which Catalano oversees in addition to the pro shop and catering license operation. Bethpage employs six golf course supervisors, including Craig Currier, superintendent of the famed Black Course, who reports to Catalano.

Catalano grew up in the Bethpage area. His father and uncle worked at Bethpage. His great uncle helped build the complex in the 1930s. "I have a family history of working in the park," Catalano says.

He began working for Bethpage in the summer of 1967 when he returned home from his first year of college. Catalano worked for the park's west-side picnic area and cleaned toilets and picked up trash, among other duties. He was 19 and earned \$1.19 an hour.

"But that was good by me," he says of the pay.

The next summer Catalano began working for the Blue course's maintenance staff. He moved over to the Yellow course for the summer of '69.

Catalano decided to forgo the rest of college to work full time at the Yellow course in 1970. In 1976, he was named superintendent of Bethpage's Green course. He left the Green course in 1978 to become superintendent of New York's Caleb Smith State Park Preserve in Smithtown, N.Y., about 20 minutes from Bethpage.

Catalano left Caleb Smith in 1981 to be superintendent of Sunken Meadow State Park. He

was promoted to the state parks' regional headquarters in 1982. He stayed there 13 years and was promoted to director of operations.

"Then I had the opportunity to come back to Bethpage in '95, and I've been here since," Catalano says.

Catalano says he always fancied working outside, so he pursued a career in parks and recreation. He took civil service exams to gain promotions at the state level. But hard work also helped him climb the career ladder.

"He's one of the smartest guys I've ever met," Currier says. "He's the heartbeat of the park."

It's no surprise that Catalano lives in a house on the 14th hole of the Black course. He says his job consumes much of his time.

"This is not a five-days-a-week-and-40-hour-a-week job," he says. "You can't possibly consider working in that type of fashion and hope to be even remotely successful to deal with any of the problems you need to deal with that come up on a daily basis. So the job becomes a way of life."

Catalano patrols the park in his utility vehicle during the evening. He also fields work-related phone calls at night. Others might balk at having to work during their off hours. Not Catalano.

"I guess I've convinced myself that I was born for this place," he says.

Catalano likes conferring with the courses' agronomic experts, including Currier, who Catalano says is one of his best hires.

"He's as committed and dedicated as anybody I've ever known," Catalano says. "There's nobody I know who works harder, and there's nobody I know cares more about this park."

Earlier in his career, Catalano learned about turf maintenance mostly through "the experience of others."

"I have a broad general background on turfgrass, but I don't involve myself in the daily decisions on spraying and fertilizing," he says.

Catalano says he prefers to function as the park's resource person. "It's my job to provide my staff with the resources they need to accomplish their jobs," he says.

Currier says Catalano is the most "resourceful" person he has ever met. "He gets me everything I need to do my job — personnel, money, equipment, you name it," Currier says.

Currier says Catalano has an uncanny ability to cut through the red tape, which is a little thicker at a state-run operation than it would be at a private one.

Final decisions often rest with Catalano, but he prefers to get others involved in the decision-making process. "I spend a lot of time discussing things with my staff," he says. "I try to make decisions on a consensus basis. I don't go out there and tell people what to do."

Catalano marvels at what Bethpage has become. The place is always packed with golfers. Tee times have been sold out since 1958.

"There is a fluctuation in rounds, but that fluctuation is either driven by weather or operational schedules," Catalano says.

Catalano is thrilled that golfers from all walks of life can come to Bethpage and play the A.W. Tillinghast-designed Black course for a mere \$50 during the week and \$60 on weekends if they are state residents. Green fees at the other courses are even more affordable.

"It's the best bargain in the game of golf," Catalano says. "There's a lot of satisfaction in watching people come to this place, enjoy this place and recreate in this place."

When the Black Course hosted the U.S. Open in 2002, it was the first time a public course of its stature had hosted the tournament. Bethpage spent millions on the Black course and the clubhouse to ready it for the Open. It was such a success that the course was awarded another U.S. Open.

"Looks like I'm fortunate enough to have it twice in a lifetime," Catalano says.

So, what does a guy who says his job is "a way of life" do for fun? Occasionally, Catalano goes fishing or bowling. He also collects football cards. But his job is where his heart is.

"It's fun," he says of his work.

It's hard for Catalano to believe that so many years have gone by.

"I remember when I was the youngest guy on the staff," he says. "Now I'm the oldest."

Catalano has no desire to retire, but he's thinking about it. He turns 60 in September. The 2009 U.S. Open could be his swan song.

"I love this place," he says. "I'm fortunate to be here."

Bethpage is fortunate to have him. "He's an icon for this state park," Currier says. ■

"I love this place.  
I'm fortunate to  
be here."

— DAVE CATALANO



# Setting up for

These kids are good, but resist the temptation to trick up your golf course for tournaments

**BY DAVID FRABOTTA**  
SENIOR EDITOR

**Above, Nicole Schachner sends her drive down center fairway.**

**J**unior golf is growing up. About 400,000 new juniors picked up the game last year, according to a National Golf Foundation participation study released last month. Almost 5 million kids ages 6 to 17 play the game in the United States, and the number of junior golf tournaments at the local, state, regional and national levels have swelled in line with the heightened interest.

It's big business. And considering the popularity of growing-the-game initiatives, including Link up 2 Golf, The First Tee and Play Golf America, the niche is likely to flourish.

Subsequently, superintendents are likely to see more junior tournaments and outings. That begs the question: How should the golf course be set up? The answer is not much differently than that of everyday play. That is, resist the temptation to defend your golf course by growing out the rough too much or making the greens excessively slick.

"It's better to embarrass the course than the players," says Frank Jemsek, operator of Cog Hill Golf Club in Chicago. "So we do not change the course. Everyone wants to think that their course is not a pushover, but tournaments are supposed to be fun."

Jemsek started hosting junior tournaments at Cog Hill in the late 1980s. When an experienced tournament director helped him shorten nifty par-5s into 300-yard holes, Jemsek started thinking, "Gosh, some kids are liable to break par."

That's the natural mentality of any operator who is proud of his golf course. But Jemsek eventually understood that elite juniors play by a different set of rules at the national level. At the local level, most kids are playing for the experience.

"Once you're converted, you become a very strong proponent of trying to make it more like an outing than a tournament," he says.

The outing mentality means that Cog Hill uses the forward tees when possible. If the holes are too long to use the forward tees, then

# Kids' Play

the crew finds a flat spot in the fairway for the teeing area. The unusual setup requires excellent signage and sufficient course markers to avoid slow play.

"If you have prominent markers on the first tee, then the players will be accustomed to looking for them throughout the course," Jemsek says.

Difficult pin positions can contribute to a painful pace of play as well. If you're choosing your own pin positions, Jemsek says its tolerable to have a couple challenging ones, but "tough pin positions are the slowest days of the week, so I would lobby against really difficult placements."

If a tournament company or association is organizing the event, then they're likely to select pin positions for consistency between days and multiple sites.

The American Junior Golf Association (AJGA) is one of the tournament organizers that prefers to pick the pin positions for each day for consistency — typically six hard, six easy and six moderate locations each day.

And although many of the AJGA's players are scratch golfers in the upper ages, the association refrains from making the pin locations or green speed too challenging, partly to let the kids play against each other instead of the course and partly to preserve the turf at the 75 locations that host AJGA events each year.

AJGA typically requests greens speed of 9.5 to 11 on the Stimpmeter, again because the association doesn't want conditions to threaten the health of turf. "If they can safely get their green speed to 10, then that's great," says Mark Oskarson, director of operations

for AJGA. "We don't want to leave and have their greens burn up."

The AJGA tries to implement that low-impact philosophy throughout the management of its tournaments. Oskarson says he realizes that different golf courses have different capabilities with their staffs, so tournament directors will sit down with superintendents to talk about tee times, weather delays, mowing schedules and irrigation practices.

The maintenance coordination is the hardest part, considering some tournaments have a shotgun start at 8 a.m.

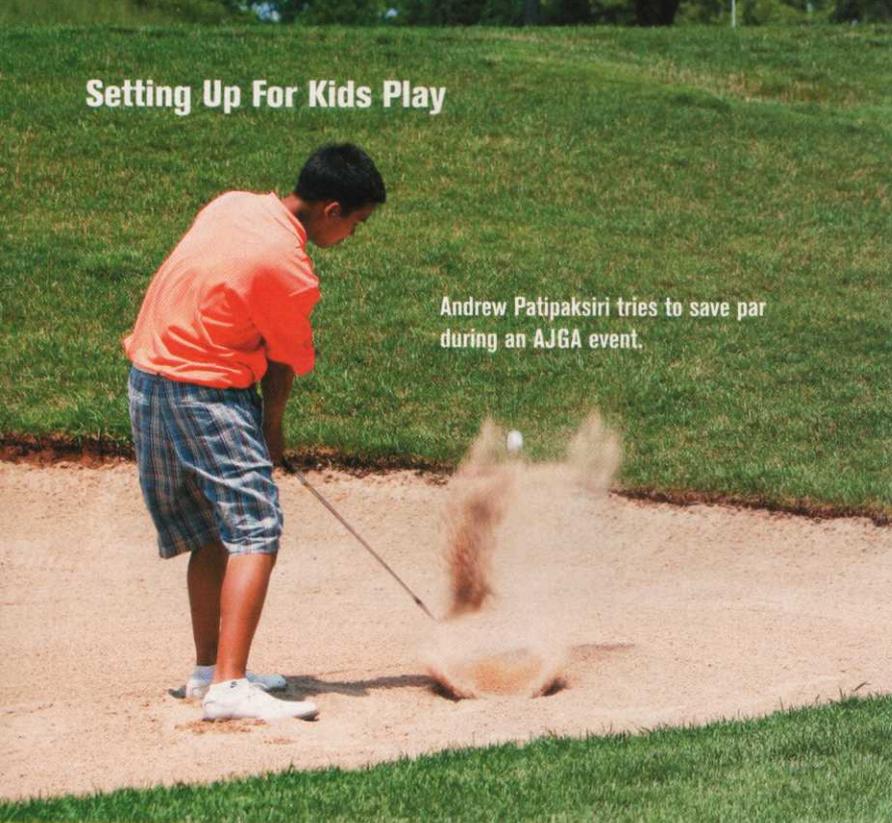
"Some staffs that we work with have the ability to mow tees, greens and fairways every day before play, but they might not have the budget for it," Oskarson says. "So perhaps we

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Lady juniors take a breather after a little bit of turf maintenance at Mission Hills Country Club as part of the Care Fore the Course initiative.

## Setting Up For Kids Play



Andrew Patipaksiri tries to save par during an AJGA event.

"It's truly the Junior PGA for the upper 25 percent. And for some, it's the highlight of their golfing careers."

**-MARK JORDAN**  
WESTFIELD COUNTRY CLUB

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might ask that greens and tees are mowed each day, but fairways might not get done until after play or only twice during the week."

The AJGA also consults with the superintendent and irrigation technician when marking teeing areas, placing signage throughout the course and marking pin locations with grass-deadening paint. And the organizers give the superintendent a radio so he or she can stay in the loop with last-minute changes or emergencies.

"After the tournament, we want the superintendent to say: 'Having the AJGA here made for the easiest tournament that we've ever had,'" Oskarson says. "We try to be as self-sufficient as we can, so we're going to take a lot of steps, like marking the golf course ourselves."

Some more sophisticated regional tournament organizers will help with course setup as well. The National Junior Golf Club, a tournament organizer in Belmont, N.C., works closely with superintendents to make sure the course is well marked for out of bounds, hazards and ground under repair, as well as intricate signage for teeing areas.

The National Junior Golf Club holds tournaments for children as young as 5 years old. The company has grown from a 12-tournament company in 1999 to hosting about 130 tournaments throughout the Southeast this year.

"We put the 5- to 7-year-olds about 125 yards out on the par 4s; we'll move them just over the hazard on the par 3s, and we'll move the par 5s to around 200 yards," says company founder Allen Wiggins. "We'll give them caddies and really try to let them have fun."

In contrast, AJGA members and The Junior PGA of America players are typically 12 to 18 years old, and they play from the tips.

The boys' setup plays about 6,800 yards to 7,100 yards, even stretching to 7,300 yards for some invitationals. The ladies play between 6,000 yards to 6,200 yards, which sometimes stretches longer than the member tees.

These kids are good.

"It's truly the Junior PGA for the upper 25 percent," says Mark Jordan, certified golf course superintendent at Westfield Country Club, which hosts the Westfield Junior PGA Championship for the seventh-consecutive year in July. "And for some, it's the highlight of their golfing careers. So we want to make it a life experience for everybody who plays."

Jordan says the club has tried to peak conditions for the tournament in the past by double cutting greens and fairways each day and growing out the rough. But there's a risk. Agronomically, turf stress can hinder conditions for the rest of the short Ohio playing season. But more worrisome, staff stress can burn out an already-weary crew.

That's why volunteers are crucial to any tournament, especially one that might qualify as a minor's Major. More than 300 club members, community residents and Westfield Insurance Co. employees volunteer to be everything from marshals to bunker rakers during the four-day event.

But volunteers aren't the only turf newbies on the course.

Many of the players cruise around to help repair turf after their competitive rounds thanks to a new initiative called Care Fore the Course.

A collaboration of the AJGA, PGA of America and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, players attend Care Fore the Course classes that teach players about etiquette, turfgrass maintenance and occupations in the golf industry.

After the tournament, players help replace divots, sand the driving range and repair

ball marks as part of the initiative, which also helps “leave the golf course as good or better than when we found it,” Oskarson says.

The superintendent plays a big part in the program by addressing players about conditions, golf course background, the grass types, the prevailing winds, the sand type, course layout, strategy and how all the conditions might affect play.

Superintendents also expose them to environmental benefits of green spaces for the community; environmental stewardship of lakes, streams and rivers; and preservation initiatives.

In the process, many kids are likely to recognize possible occupations in preservation, golf course architecture, landscaping and turf-grass maintenance.

“Not all of these kids are going on to the tour,” Oskarson says. “So it might trigger a light in someone’s head sitting in the crowd, and it could be a really neat way to stay involved in golf.”

In the end, junior tournaments serve several functions, including growing the game by creating an emotional bond with the sport and a host facility. And the playing conditions are an extension of the way kids remember a golf course, just like adult golfers.

#### Tournament To-Do List

Prior to play:

- Drag fairways in the event of heavy dew.
- Mow greens and tees.
- Position water or donated beverage on each hole.
- Relocate ball washers, benches, beverages and trash to appropriate teeing grounds.
- Remove ropes, stakes and directions signage so tournament director can re-mark the course to set specifications.
- Place rakes outside bunkers.
- Place extra trash receptacles in appropriate locations.
- Identify a place for a pairings box.
- Identify appropriate areas for scoring tent and administrative tents; secure extra tables and chairs for these areas.
- Provide maps of the course to players and administrators.
- Borrow or provide squeegees in the event of adverse weather.

Source: American Junior Golf Association

That’s why planning for the little touches — painting cups and benches, edging bunkers and planting or maintaining flowerbeds — can leave a lasting, positive impression with players and the gallery alike.

“There is not one set recipe to having a successful event,” Oskarson says. “Every event takes on the personality of the facility, and every event has the ability to be great.” ■

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