

## The “Never Stop Learning” Award

**SHAWN EMERSON**  
DIRECTOR OF AGRONOMY  
DESERT MOUNTAIN GOLF CLUB

You might consider him an expert in his own right. He’s the director of agronomy for six championship-caliber, Jack Nicklaus-designed



golf courses with a crew of 180, including six superintendents and 12 assistant superintendents — a couple of whom are the sons of superintendents.

“You feel pretty good about what you are doing when other superintendents send you their sons,” says Shawn Emerson, the multi-tasking turfgrass guru of Desert Mountain Golf Club in Carefree, Ariz. He’s a son of a superintendent as well.

Emerson has probably grown more turfgrass than anyone in the country, considering he has overseeded about 70 golf courses and then transitioned them back to bermudagrass. He currently maintains 2,000 acres.

Despite his success, Emerson is never satisfied. He’s always looking for better answers to questions that arise at his golf course. So who does one of the most knowledgeable agronomists in the business turn to with his turfgrass questions? He uses the guy who wrote the book on turfgrass maintenance, of course.

Actually, longtime turfgrass professor and author James Beard has written a half-dozen books on turfgrass physiology, nutrition and management practices. His “Turf Management for Golf Courses” is commonly referred to as Beard’s Bible. Emerson also courts opinions from noted turfgrass professors Fred Yelverton and Rick Brandenburg of North Carolina State University.

The amazing part of the affiliation isn’t the combined credentials of his turfgrass consultants. The remarkable part of

the relationship is the constant collaboration that the agronomists share. Let’s face it: Emerson could sail this ship without quarterly visits from his Dream Team of turf consultants, but he wants to get better and excel in his profession.

## The “Ecology of Scale” Award

**CHRISTOPHER S. GRAY SR.**  
DIRECTOR OF GOLF OPERATIONS  
MARVEL GOLF CLUB

He was caring for the environment before hybrid cars and global warming became part of everyday dialogue. His story is a coup for the golf industry as it tries to reinvent its public image from polluting, resource-wasting monopolies of green space to sanctuaries for native plants, wildlife and serenity.

Golf course superintendents, like hunters and anglers, have been basking in nature for centuries — long before hippies set out for the Red Rocks of Colorado and Sedona, Ariz., and even before the transcendentalists went to the woods.

Christopher S. Gray Sr. follows in the tradition of Old Tom Morris and the many superintendents before and after him who cared for creation above the conditions of the golf course. The only difference is that now, technology enables superintendents to provide amazing conditions and still leave the world as unscathed as they found it.

In return for his stewardship, Gray, the general manager and director of golf operations at Marvel Golf Club in Benton, Ky., was recognized as the overall winner of the 2007 GCSAA/Golf Digest Environmental Leaders in Golf Award, and he’s the first superintendent to win the overall category twice (also in 2003).



His ecological hat-trick oc-

curred earlier this year when he was named the 2008 recipient of Rain Bird’s Intelligent Use of Water Award. This award is special because he competed against non-golf entities, including the Council on the Environment of New York City, a group that worked with more than 30 community garden groups in neighborhoods throughout metropolitan New York to construct rainwater-harvesting systems.

Gray also powers his diesel turf equipment with vegetable oil and discarded fryer oil, and an oil burner that burns recycled oil from equipment heats the maintenance shop in the winter.

His achievements, by the way, are earned on a budget of about \$225,000.

## The “Survivor” Award

**PAUL VOYKIN**  
RETIRED SUPERINTENDENT  
BRIARWOOD COUNTRY CLUB

The tribe has spoken, and Paul Voykin has been declared a survivor in this crazy world of golf course maintenance.

Voykin retired in September at age 77 after more than 47 years in the business at the same club, the Briarwood Country Club in Deerfield, Ill. That’s nearly half a century at a private club with 200 members and probably just as many opinions on how Voykin should have done his job.

Most superintendents aren’t supposed to last that long at private clubs, especially when one member tells you that the greens are perfect and another says they stink — on the same morning. Such superintendents often get “voted off,” as the saying goes.

How did Voykin manage to stay at the same place for so long, especially a private club? How did he not wear out his welcome? How did the members not



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