

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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get tired of him? The answer is simple: It was just a matter of being honest, kind and respectful to everyone, Voykin says. Of course, Voykin also had to be a very capable superintendent to last so long.

Here's to his perseverance and a happy retirement.

The "Boss of the Year" Award

MARY LOU FERRIER

CO-OWNER

WASHAKIE GOLF & RV RESORT

Mary Lou Ferrier is boss of all of the employees at Washakie Golf & RV Resort in North Branch, Mich. And the 80-year-old Ferrier, who operates Washakie with her son Brian, takes good care of her workers.

Every day, just as the clock strikes noon, Mary Lou feeds the Washakie work crew a hearty, home-cooked lunch. She can be seen daily darting around the kitchen of her home, located a short distance from the golf course, readying the



midday meal. One by one, the hungry workers file in the door of Mary Lou's small home and take their seats at the 6-foot-

long dining table adorned with a plastic, floral tablecloth. Mary Lou serves them the plates, and the employees dig in.

"I enjoy having them over," says Mary Lou, who has been cooking lunch for the staff since Washakie, located about 60 miles north of Detroit, opened 35 years ago. "I like listening to them yak. Otherwise, I wouldn't know what's going on around here."

It's a nice fringe benefit for the employees, who consist of the golf course superintendent and his four-man crew, and four women who work in the course's pro shop. But it's more than just a homemade meal for them. It's the

chance for the Washakie staff to convene and talk shop for an hour.

The crew does not take Mary Lou's free home-cooked daily meals for granted. They know they'd probably be eating something made fast and greasy if it wasn't for her.

Mary Lou knows there's nothing like a home-cooked meal to keep employees happy and working hard.

The "All in the Family" Award

FRANK GORE

RETIRED EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
CLUBCORP

Myriad task forces, think tanks and even formal entities have been devising marketing initiatives and ad campaigns to grow the game of golf, but the really big changes — like shaking the game of its traditional six-hour obligation — has been largely academic with the exception of a few golf courses.



Thus far, the industry has responded to America's virtual time poverty by building longer, tougher golf courses, which largely have cannibalized shorter, easier layouts. That trend has hampered rounds at public facilities. And private clubs are experiencing a shakeout, too. Fewer traditional country club members are willing to forgo weekends with family to golf as often as they did in the past.

That's a point that Frank Gore understands. Gore was ClubCorp's executive vice president of membership and sales until he retired from the company this year. But before he did, he shared this anecdote with *Golfdom*:

"My father was an avid golfer. I can't imagine the amount of laughter that would have taken place if I asked him to give up his weekend golf to watch me play soccer," he says. "Conversely, my daughter played soccer for six years without ever

scoring a goal, but I never missed a game. It's different now, and we saw a lot of this prioritizing of what's important after 9/11."

In response to the demand for more family recreation time and fewer hours on the golf course, more than 90 of ClubCorp's managed properties began offering a new set of forward tees last spring.

The company's FasTee Course places teeing grounds about 100 yards closer to the green than the previous forward tees, allowing dads to play in about an hour after work and still attend evening obligations or letting kids play along with their dads without holding up play.

The innovation isn't new, but kudos to Gore and other ClubCorp executives for creating a companywide mandate. These initiatives won't succeed without buy-in from the highest levels.

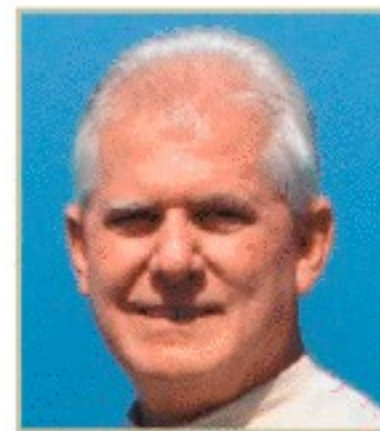
The "I Won't Back Down" Award

MARK WOODWARD

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
GCSAA

What if you worked at a public golf course that was so revered by its community that golfers threatened to kill you if you restricted their access or depreciated its conditions?

It happened to Mark Woodward, the new CEO of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. Earlier this year, he hosted the U.S. Open at Torrey Pines, where he spent three years prepping for the national championship as the club's director of golf operations.



When he first arrived at the San Diego treasure, he suggested the city should raise user fees to reflect the quality of the venue. San Diego residents can play the championship layouts for less than \$50.

Once Woodward's proposal hit the local media, an avid golfer told him: "If I had a