

If you aspire to be a general manager, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America can help. It has been developing an educational track to provide superintendents with the training necessary to become viable candidates for general manager positions at golf clubs.

But what if superintendents want to take it to the next level? What if they wanted to become golf course owners?

There are a handful of them out there already, so the idea isn't completely wacky. Getting the funds to purchase a golf course is likely the obvious challenge, but it is possible.

John DeMatteo, one such friend of mine who has joined the golf course owners' ranks, shared with me some tips, pointers and reality checks that he has learned along the way when I visited his Topsail Greens Golf Course in Hampstead, N.C., last year.

DeMatteo says the key to any successful business deal is to find suitable financial partners. Superintendent/owners will contribute sweat equity and the agronomic expertise to do the right thing for that site. Lenders look more favorably on loans for teams with a specialist on board, so having a good resume is a plus.

DeMatteo, in partnership with his brother, purchased the course in 2001 after he left the Celebration Golf Course and American Golf in Orlando. His resume reads like a coast-to-coast travelogue that includes construction, grow-ins and major tournament preparations. He even did a stint with Loft Seed. At every stop, John paid attention to the operations from top to bottom. He learned the business of golf. Fittingly, today's analysis of what the superintendent of tomorrow will look like is one who is a leader, a communicator and above all, a businessman.

DeMatteo learned to analyze golf courses and find those little low-cost, attention-to-detail improvements that could strengthen customer satisfaction without busting the budget. He says creating customer satisfaction and loyalty on a small budget is more meaningful than having every bell and whistle or deep pockets to bail you out. He wants to hire the guy who can get it done with less. Sound like an owner you know?

As a superintendent/owner, DeMatteo

Dare to Dream and Execute, Too

BY JOEL JACKSON



JOHN DEMATTEO,
A SUPERINTENDENT
AND AN OWNER,
SHARES TIPS ON HOW
TO THRIVE IN LOCAL
BUSINESS

knows full well the relationship of rounds, revenue and the maintenance budget's reality.

"You have to truly love this business to make the leap to ownership," he says. "It's not a cushy job where you just call the shots. Some of those shots are tough calls. You can't get fired, and you don't have to keep looking over your shoulder. But you do have to pay the electric bill, your suppliers and your employees first."

And successful owners must be comfortable being the face of the facility. DeMatteo joined the local chamber of commerce and has served as president. Volunteering is a good way to get known in the community, and rubbing shoulders with local leaders can lead to opportunities.

One such opportunity occurred when a local developer inquired about using the golf course as a spray field for effluent from its treatment plant. DeMatteo was interested but concerned the course couldn't handle the water without upgrades to the course infrastructure, including design changes, irrigation improvements and additional drainage. The developer agreed to invest in the renovation and also pay a monthly fee to the course for using the water.

To reciprocate for the investment, DeMatteo is offering a free one-year membership for residents, and he agreed to a name change from Topsail Greens to St. George's Reach to reflect the development's association with the course. Architect Ed Biedel began moving some greens and changing the green and tee complexes two weeks after my visit.

DeMatteo's dream was to own a profitable business that provides affordable golf. What's your dream?

Certified superintendent Joel Jackson is executive director of the Florida GCSA.