

People of the Year

BY LARRY AYLWARD,
EDITOR IN CHIEF

This year's honorees have no shortage of integrity and character

It's time to pass out the awards for *Golfdom's* People of the Year. May I say, we have some solid individuals as honorees — people who are hard workers and humble servants. Thank goodness these people have embraced the golf course maintenance industry. Without them, our small world would be greatly diminished.

As in past years, *Golfdom's* People of the Year are recognized for actions that reflect integrity and character. So let's get to it. Please hold your applause until all awards have been presented.

Congratulations to this year's well-deserving honorees!



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The “Unpretentious As They Come” Award

TERRY BONAR CERTIFIED GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENT, CANTERBURY GOLF CLUB

Ben Franklin once said, “Humility makes great men twice honorable.” Franklin’s words could easily be directed at Terry Bonar, the longtime certified superintendent of Canterbury Golf Club in Cleveland, who’s retiring from the club this month after 49 years. I’m sure Bonar has some great stories about his wonderful work at Canterbury, including overseeing a plethora of PGA tournaments, but he prefers to keep such highlights close to his vest.

Earlier this year, Bonar told me of the many times he’d gaze at the course while driving out of the parking lot at the end of a day’s work and say to himself proudly, “Man, the course looks good!” But so often, Bonar says he learned that such pride can be short-lived. “I’d come back the next morning and say, ‘What happened here?’”

Bonar will tell you that Canterbury, which opened in 1922, is a historic club and that he was just passing through its illustrious annals. But Bonar has been part of those annals for nearly half a century.

Just as Franklin has a great quote about humility, so does Bonar, who lived by this statement as a reminder to keep his pride in check while managing the turfgrass at Canterbury.

“There’s a thin line between a hero and a goat,” Bonar said.

He’s right, but Bonar earns the hero moniker in our book. ■

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The “Money Where Your Mouth Is” Award

JOE MCCLEARY CERTIFIED GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENT, SADDLE ROCK GOLF COURSE

Joe McCleary will be the first to tell you superintendents need to educate nongolfers about environmental stewardship on golf courses. And then McCleary, certified superintendent of Saddle Rock Golf Course in Aurora, Colo., will be the first to go out and find some nongolfers to educate.

All of us can talk a good game, but many of us don't translate that talk to action. McCleary does. He has gone on the offensive to promote golf courses as a friend, not a foe, of the environment. Last summer, I went with McCleary while he gave a tour of his course to a guy named Mike from the Denver Botanic Gardens — and



someone definitely worth educating. McCleary invited Mike, who was not fond of golf courses and their role in the environment, to see the wildflowers and native vegetation in the out-of-play areas at Saddle Rock.

It wasn't the first time McCleary conducted the tour for a person down on golf. He drove Mike in his golf car, making stops along the 18-hole course to explore the flora and fauna. Early in the tour, Mike confessed that “golf courses make him shiver.” After the tour, I asked Mike if his negative perceptions had changed. “They have for this golf course,” he said.

Thanks to McCleary. ■

The “Giving Back” Award

TODD VOSS SUPERINTENDENT, DOUBLE EAGLE CLUB

At the time, they were the hottest college football game tickets around. If anybody had a ticket to the Ohio State-USC game in Columbus, Ohio, last September, you were going to one of the most anticipated games of the year.

Todd Voss, superintendent of the Double Eagle Club in Galena, Ohio, had two tickets. He received them from the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation (OTF) as a gift for the time he has spent on the organization's board of directors. Voss is



OTF's past president and donated much of his time to help the organization succeed and grow.

“Todd could've taken those tickets and gone to the game,” says Kevin Thompson,

OTF's executive director. “He could've sold them and walked away with \$1,000. They were his tickets to do whatever he wanted to do with them.”

Voss ended up raffling off the tickets, clearing hundreds of dollars. He donated the proceeds to OTF for turfgrass research. Talk about giving back to the profession. Not only that, Voss recognized that turfgrass research entities need all the money they can get these days because of declines in funding.

Voss sold his raffle tickets during a field day event in August at The Ohio State University. He sat at an outdoor table and peddled the raffle tickets like he was selling hot dogs at a ball game.

But Voss gave no inkling the tickets belonged to him. It wasn't his nature to get people to think it was cool of him to donate the tickets to raise money for turfgrass research. He just wanted to raise money for turfgrass research, his livelihood.

But we think it was very cool of Voss to do so. ■



The “Seed Bag Is Half Full” Award

BILL ROSE PRESIDENT, TEE-2-GREEN

It has been one tough year in the golf course seed business. With course construction at a standstill and renovation projects on hold because of the sour economy, seed growers and distributors have had to find ways to survive. It's easy for them to look at a partially used bag of seed and view it as half empty rather than half full.

But not Bill Rose. When *Golfdom* spoke with Rose last summer about the state of the seed industry, he was surprisingly upbeat. Rose prefers to dwell on when things get better, not on how they're bad.

“I'm always optimistic, and I'm generally right,” he says. “I think it will get going again in 2011.”

Rose, who has been involved with the seed business since 1951, says he has been studying it, and that drops in his business normally don't last long. Rose estimates his business is down 30 percent compared to 2007.

But rather than focus on how much business he has lost, Rose says he's focusing on business he could gain through other endeavors like interseeding.

“The key in the United States is interseeding,” Rose says. “We have to fix up the courses we have. The ones that are in good shape are the ones that will do well.”

The golf course industry — and the world, for that matter — needs a few optimists to get us through the economic doom and gloom. We salute Rose for doing just that. ■

The “Helping Hand” Award

TIM GRAVERT SUPERINTENDENT,
BETHPAGE BLACK GOLF COURSE

When Tim Gravert heard about Matt Henkel's plight, he wanted to do whatever he could to help him. Gravert wanted to make Henkel's day. He ended up making Henkel's week.

In 2008, Henkel, the assistant golf course superintendent at PrairieView Golf Club in Byron, Ill., watched the U.S. Open on TV from a hospital bed while undergoing presurgical tests to have a brain tumor removed. This past June, Henkel not only watched the U.S. Open live from Bethpage Black Golf Course, he worked on the grounds crew as a volunteer — thanks to an exclusive invite from Gravert, superintendent of the Black Course.

The 30-year-old Henkel was devastated when he was diagnosed with the brain tumor. But Henkel had a tre-

mendous support network, including people he didn't even know, like Gravert, who grew up in a town not far from Henkel's hometown.

“One of my buddies from back home met Matt through a guy he worked with,” Gravert says. “He told me about what Matt was going through.”

Gravert's buddy also told him about a benefit, featuring a silent auction, to raise money to help Henkel pay his medical bills. Gravert worked his United States Golf Association connections and came up with two tickets to the U.S. Open to be auctioned at the benefit.

“When Matt found out about that, he wanted to get in touch with me,” Gravert says. “We talked, and I asked him if he wanted to come out and volunteer for



Tim Gravert (left) helped make Matt Henkel's week.

the tournament.”

In June 2008, when he watched the U.S. Open from a hospital bed, Henkel never dreamed he'd be at the tournament a year later — and in the middle of the action, at that. Back then, Henkel just wanted to be alive come June 2009. But there he was at Bethpage, busting his tail for a week on little sleep and loving every minute of it.

“It was nice to help make a dream come true for him after he had been through something like that,” the 28-year-old Gravert says. “If there's ever anything I can do to help somebody out who has gone through something like that, I will do it.”

May a golf course-size of good karma come to Gravert. ■

The “Wonderful Work Ethic” Award

**KWAME KANKAM, NANA AMANKWAH,
SLAVIC GRECU AND IGOR TURCAN**
MAINTENANCE CREW MEMBERS, VINEYARD GOLF CLUB

At the Vineyard Golf Club on Martha's Vineyard, golf course superintendent Jeff Carlson can't use any pesticides to treat turfgrass disease, control insects or eradicate weeds. Carlson, with the help of several organic products and intense cultural practices, has succeeded in keeping turf disease and insects at bay. But weeds are another story.

Dandelions, crabgrass and other broadleaf weeds are

Carlson's toughest challenge, but there are no reliable herbicides to kill them. Carlson's best tool to control weeds is the four-member crew he employs to remove them manually. The team members — Kwame Kankam, Nana Amankwah, Slavic Grecu and Igor Turcan — work together in sections with large, fork-like tools in hands. They remove the weeds from the turf with precision and fill the barren areas with a soil and seed mix. They perform the task 40 to 50 hours a week during the golfing season. Kankam and Amankwah are from Ghana, and Grecu and Turcan are from the Republic of Mondova.

“The hard part about weeding is there's so little progress,” Carlson says. “It takes such a long time. It can become discouraging.”

That's why Carlson is so impressed with his crew, which he calls his “pre-emergent.” They go out and do the same tedious job every day and never complain. Carlson is wowed by their collective work ethic.

“It's a really important project they do,” Carlson says. “They play an important role.” ■



Nana Amankwah, Slavic Grecu, Kwame Kankam and Igor Turcan

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The “Superhero” Award

DOUG HIGGINS AND BRUCE NELSON SUPERINTENDENTS
REGATTA BAY GOLF CLUB AND FOX HOLLOW AT LAKEWOOD GOLF COURSE

It's a bird, it's a plane, it's super-superintendents!

The incredible stories of superintendents Doug Higgins, 48, and Bruce Nelson, 57, are those of comic-book superheroes.

Last April, Higgins, superintendent of Regatta Bay Golf Club in Destin, Fla., was making his morning rounds on the course when, while on the 16th hole, he heard tires squealing. Then Higgins saw a car sinking in one of his golf course's ponds. He called 911, took off his shoes and jumped in the pond to rescue a woman whose car was almost entirely submerged in the water.

Higgins swam to the car, which was in water over his head. He couldn't get the front door of the car open because it was submerged in water. He was able to get the back door open and pulled the woman to safety. The woman probably would've drowned if it weren't for Higgins because the fire department wouldn't have arrived in

time to save her.

“Your instincts take over in a situation like that,” Higgins says. “I wasn't scared. My adrenaline definitely took over.”

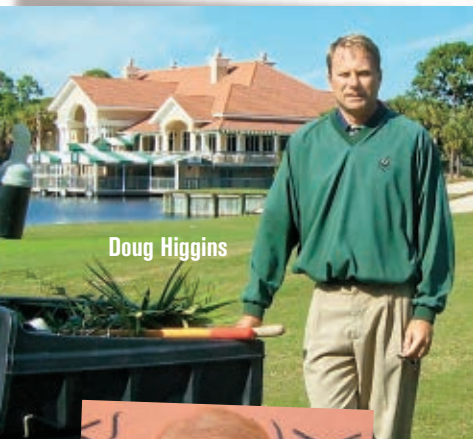
In January, Nelson, the certified superintendent at Fox Hollow at Lakewood (Colo.), was quietly fishing the South Platte River with his buddy when a woman yelling for help startled them. The woman had just watched someone slip on an icy bank of the river. After about 20 minutes, Nelson found the man, who was badly injured. The man was also pinned between the sloping ice and a boulder.

After Nelson risked life and limb to get to him, he and his buddy stabilized him, built a fire and waited until after nightfall when a search-and-rescue unit arrived to take the man away. The man, who suffered a broken left arm, a fractured pelvis, a fractured left hip and a punctured lung, has since recovered, and he and Nelson have kept in contact.

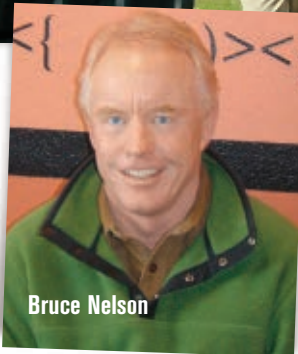
“He's really grateful,” Nelson says. “For me, it was really, really rewarding.”

Here's to Higgins and Nelson — they aren't only heroes, but also are super superintendents. ■

Editor's note: Contributing editors Geoff Shackelford and Anthony Pioppi also contributed to this report. For previous honorees of *Golfdom's People of the Year*, visit www.golfdom.com and type “people of the year” in the search command.



Doug Higgins



Bruce Nelson



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