

# Looking for Work

## Unemployed superintendents face difficult challenges in a bad job market

By John Walsh

**U**nemployment during this economic recession reached 9.4 percent in May, the highest level in 25 years and 3.9 percentage points higher than a year earlier. About 14.5 million people have felt or are feeling the sting of job loss — some for the first time in their careers — since the recession began in December 2007. Job losses have been large and widespread throughout the major industry sectors.

The golf course maintenance industry is no exception. Whether the reasons are financial or political, more golf course superintendents are being laid off. They're sleeping in and spending more time with their families while looking for their next jobs.

Unemployed superintendents face difficult choices while trying to support their families: moving their families to take another job, taking a job that pays less than what they were making previously or taking another job in a related field. Jay Buccellato, Eric Cznarecki and Paul Mayes are a few superintendents facing those challenges.

### A need to save money

Buccellato was laid off in November as superintendent at the Alaqua Country Club, a high-end, private 18-hole facility in Longwood, Fla. He was there 3.5 years.

Alaqua, which opened in 1988, has endured difficult times. The original equity membership was returned to the bank and then a member bought the club with a partner. Buccellato worked for the new owner/member.

When Buccellato began at the club in 2005, the course was in such bad shape that he treated it like a grow-in. Less than 50

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## Things To Do

### PRIORITY

1. **GET HIRED**

2. \_\_\_\_\_

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4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_



## Looking for Work



## Job Search » If you're looking for a new job, here's a list of job-related Web sites to help your cause:

**Amiko** — Online resume generator.

**Bixee.com** — Search by keywords, location or browse by industry.

**Careerbuilder.com** — General job search site.

**Climber.com** — Fill out a survey about yourself and get matched to a job by your interests.

**Craigslist.com** — Select your city and search for jobs in your area.

**Cvwarehouse.com** — Lets you search for jobs in a confidential manner.

**Daylo.com** — Post yourself and list any specialized skills you could bring to a job.

**Eluta.com** — Job searches focusing on Canada.

**GiggedUp.com** — Post video resumes of

yourself for prospective employers to search.

**Job-a-matic.com** — Post job listings, and even add a job board to your existing site.

**Jobburner.com** — Focusing on technical jobs; post your resume and search for jobs.

**JobBoardReviews.com** — Reviews job boards and helps you pick the right one for you.

**JobDig.com** — Dedicated to the Midwest, focuses on employment, training and opportunities.

**Jobfox.com** — Fill out your profile, view your job matches and let people hunt for you.

**Jobneters.com** — Jobs from multiple countries; earn rewards for referring others.

**Jobpile.com** — Aggregates from numerous jobs boards so you can search all at once.

**Jobsandgigs.com** — Design and development jobs boards, features customized RSS feeds.

**Jobster.com** — Post your resume, get advice, join networks.

**Layoffspace.com** — A site for the

unemployed to gather, network and help each other find work.

**LinkUp.com** — Job aggregator that monitors thousands of employers' Web sites.

**Mapdango.com** — View classified job listing on a Google map, seeing what is in your area.

**Monster.com** — One of the best-known job search engines.

**PageBites.com** — Works for both employers and job seekers, searchable by jobs and regions.

**Recruit.net** — Millions of jobs from all around the world. Search by keywords and location.

**Resolio.com** — Create a professional-looking resume and publish it online.

**SimplyHired.com** — Millions of jobs harvested from numerous sources.

**WorkTree.com** — Job search engine with browsable categories, including government jobs and Fortune 1000 companies.

**Yahoo HotJobs** — Jobs board owned by one of the largest Web companies.

**YorZ.com** — Search for jobs or network with people inside your industry.

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percent of the greens had grass on them, and the detail work was neglected.

"The owner told me to do whatever I needed to do to restore the club and get it back to the high-end position it was once at," Buccellato says. "He let me alone as long as he saw results."

The club spent \$1 million improving and maintaining the 85-acre course in Buccellato's first year and \$900,000 in his second. The spending remained in that range until the middle of last year when the owner told Buccellato to save money.

"He was getting \$1,000 a month from members, but no new members were coming in," Buccellato says. "The competition is tough in Orlando, and there are three other golf clubs within two miles of Alaquá."

Despite the needed improvements, members loved the course and were excited to see things change. "It was *the* club in Orlando in the late 1980s," Buccellato says. "It had been 10 years since the members saw the golf course that good."

The owner wasn't running out of money, but he was forced to cut back when the stock market headed south and play declined, Buccellato says. Even though Buccellato was keeping things together with a Band-Aid — the 20-year-old

irrigation system needed renovation and the course needed new maintenance equipment — Buccellato still thought he would be around for a while because the owner had invested a lot of money in the course.

Buccellato was surprised when he was let go.

"We just overseeded the golf course, and we were heading into winter when the owner called me out of the blue and told me we needed to meet," Buccellato says. "I had a bad feeling. He said he appreciated everything I'd done for the club, but it was losing money, and I was the highest-paid employee."

Buccellato's assistant, who was making \$40,000 less than him, took over. After hearing the bad news from the owner, Buccellato got in his truck and left.

"I thought I'd be safe even though things weren't good financially because I did a good job," he says.

### Political downfall

Colliers Reserve Golf Club in Naples, Fla., wanted to raise its standards, and it hired Eric Cznarecki to do so.

"I felt we did that," Cznarecki says. "We turned the club around based on membership feedback.

"Detail work is what I brought to the table," Cznarecki



adds. "Turfgrass quality, detail work and the native areas were the three main areas of improvement."

Cznarecki, who was only the third superintendent at the club since it opened in 1993, says he worked well with the different boards and green chairmen, except the last one.

"The boards were advisory, and they knew they hired a professional in me," he says. "But the fourth green chairman I worked with had a personal agenda he thought was best for the club that was in conflict with what I had in place for five years. I had a good professional relationship with him, but we just disagreed at times."

During discussion about a course renovation, the green chairman said he felt uncomfortable going ahead with it because he felt the club needed more member input. Additionally, there were other renovations in line, but they were put on hold because of the economy.

Cznarecki recalls how he was let go: "The general manager called me two hours before a green committee meeting, and the green chairman was in the room. The GM told me he had to let me go. I had a great relationship with the GM, but I worked for the club."

His last day was March 19.

"The GM wanted me to save as much money as possible,

Jay Buccellato was surprised when his golf course's owner let him go to save money.



and the green chairman was asking me why these renovation projects weren't getting done," he says. "You're in a tough spot when the GM tells you one thing, and the green chairman tells you another."

The greens committee wasn't aware of Cznarecki's firing, he says, adding that several members e-mailed and called him after he was let go.

"I was caught off guard; I was blindsided," Cznarecki says.

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"It was just political. It wasn't financially motivated. But, overall, Colliers Reserve was extremely good to me."

Cznarecki says he has learned from his firing.

"I didn't address the finer details with the green committee," he says. "Next time, I'll relay all the information to the entire club — overall membership should know what's going on before a major project happens."

But Cznarecki, who says he hasn't been the most politically savvy person, thought he communicated well overall at Colliers Reserve. "How do I deal with someone on a power trip?" he says. "I can't put personal integrity on the line."

### A short stint

Paul Mayes was a superintendent with ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance at Industry Hills (Calif.) Golf Club, a 36-hole resort facility. But he worked there for only one year beginning in early 2008 after being "brought in to take it to the next level."

Mayes, who has worked previously for management companies, doesn't speak ill of ValleyCrest — things just didn't work out.

"I was surprised [to be let go], but I can't get into the

particulars," he says, acknowledging he received a week's severance, and sick and vacation pay. "All I can say is I was involuntarily dismissed."

Mayes' last day at Industry Hills was Jan. 16.

### Post job loss

Buccellato, who has been laid off before, enjoyed sleeping in for a few weeks after he was let go. He received two weeks of severance pay and two weeks of vacation pay after leaving.

Through networking, Buccellato took a job as a spray technician at the Country Club of Orlando in late May. He views the position at the 18-hole, private facility as temporary until he lands another head superintendent job. "It's a good job to have until a superintendent's position opens up," he says. Buccellato signed up with a headhunter to broaden his chances of finding a job.

The job hunt has been slow. Buccellato has heard of situations in which other superintendents have been let go, but the clubs either aren't replacing them or already found people to replace them.

Buccellato has been doing online self-study through the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. Although he hasn't been to a local association meeting since he

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## JULY THIS MONTH'S HEALTH TIP



Dogs and fireworks don't mix. Protect your dog during the July 4th holiday. The sound of fireworks can terrify your dog, and he might run away, perhaps into traffic. A dog's hearing is more sensitive than a human's hearing. Explosive noises can damage your dog's hearing, or a falling firecracker can injure the dog.

**Rusty.** His owner is Brian Kimbrough, golf course superintendent of River Forest Country Club in Elmhurst, Ill. (Photo by: Jeff Schenkel)



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**“I’m hoping something will pan out. I also hope there’s a bright side to all this. But at the moment, there’s not.”**

– PAUL MAYES

was let go, he keeps in contact with the same people by golfing with them.

Buccellato, who is recently married with no kids, believes the job market in the Southeast will pick up. Although he prefers to remain in Florida or the Southeast, he’ll move for a job if he must.

There’s one important thing Buccellato has learned about the industry and trying to find a job: It’s about who you know. “You have no chance of getting a job unless you know the right people,” he says. “Hopefully, that will work to my advantage when the right opportunities arise.”

Thinking back to when things were good at Alaqua, Buccellato says he realizes a superintendent is never really secure in his job.

Cznarecki spent a lot of time with family and making contacts. He said he was willing to move for another job, as far north as Myrtle Beach, but preferred to stay in Florida.

Cznarecki learned in late June he wouldn’t have to move because he was hired as the golf course and landscape operations manager at Timber Pines Country Club in Spring Hill, Fla. His contacts paid off.

“I was hired by the same general manager who originally hired me at Colliers Reserve,” he says.

Like Cznarecki and Buccellato, Mayes would like to stay close to where he lives, partly because his son has two more years of high school. However, there are potential opportunities overseas and in Mexico.

“The way the market is right now, I’d consider something in a related field or in sales,” he says. “I will keep my op-

tions open and keep my eyes and ears open. I’m not limiting myself. I’m hoping something will pan out. I also hope there’s a bright side to all this. But at the moment, there’s not.”

Mayes says he probably wouldn’t apply for a job in which he couldn’t support his family, but he may have to deal with making less than he was.

“I still plan to retire as a superintendent,” he says, adding that he’s about 10 years away from that time.

Mayes advises that even employed superintendents should keep their resumes updated because clubs are under financial restraints and are always looking to save money or cut costs.

“Be ready,” he says. “Stay in touch with as many people as you can in case something happens, and keep an open mind as far as your career path. Be prepared because there’s no job security anymore.” ■

*Walsh is a freelance writer from Cleveland.*



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