

**I**f I were in charge of programming for the Golf Industry Show, I would get Joe McCleary in front of the thousands of attendees during the opening session in February to talk about what he's doing to educate outsiders — the people who don't play golf, especially those who abhor it — that golf courses can be good for the environment.

The golf course maintenance industry needs more superintendents (and owners and general managers) to spread the gospel of good environmental practices. But the industry also needs a big church to house all the superintendents preaching to the choir about this issue. Superintendents talk to each other about their environmental endeavors, but they also complain to one another about the lack of respect from nongolfers for those efforts, like putting up birdhouses on courses, returning acreage to its natural state, and using pesticides and fertilizer responsibly.

Then there's McCleary, the certified golf course superintendent at Saddle Rock Golf Course in Aurora, Colo., who has gone on the offensive to promote golf courses as a friend, not a foe, of the environment. On a chilly, foggy morning in June, I went with McCleary while he gave a tour of his course to a gentleman named Mike from the Denver Botanic Gardens. 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 on the course.

It wasn't the first time McCleary conducted the tour for a person down on golf. He drove Mike in his golf car, making several stops along the 18-hole course to explore the flora and fauna, including yucca, New Jersey Tea, phlox and native thistle.

McCleary and his guest explored the mounded areas and engaged in native plant shoptalk for nearly an hour. At one point, McCleary plucked a leaf from a yucca plant and chewed on it. "It doesn't taste bad, but it would probably taste better in a salad," he said.

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.

## We Need More Joes Like Joe McCleary

BY LARRY AYLWARD



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McCleary doesn't duck the anti-golf crowd. He realizes running and hiding only makes them even more skeptical. In 2002, when a severe drought had seized the region, a reporter from a local anti-establishment magazine contacted McCleary about doing an article on golf course irrigation. McCleary, suspecting the reporter might take golf courses to the woodshed for their water use, still didn't deny the reporter.

The reporter met McCleary at the course at 5 a.m. McCleary gave him a tour of the course and explained to him the irrigation strategies at Saddle Rock and of golf courses in general.

"He wrote a great article," McCleary said. "I think he saw what we did and appreciated it."

I've heard talk in the industry about the people outside the industry who despise golf courses and will always hate them, no matter what anyone says to convince them otherwise. But after witnessing McCleary in action on that June morning, I'm not sure that's entirely true. Those with preconceived notions that golf courses are evil can be swayed — by the right people.

McCleary is one of those people. He's an excellent communicator. He looks you in the eye when he's talking. And although he's passionate about the subject of golf and the environment, he's not preachy. He's also willing to put in the time, which is crucial to this equation.

Like I said, I'd make McCleary front and center at the Golf Industry Show so he can share with his peers how he has gone about convincing outsiders that golf courses are good for the environment. The industry needs more people like McCleary to spread the word. And with the world's focus on going green, which could mean unneeded and unfair environmental regulations for golf courses, the industry needs them now.

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*Aylward can be reached at [laylward@questex.com](mailto:laylward@questex.com).*