

BIDING THEIR

Time

Assistant
superintendents
wait for the job
market to improve to
get their chances to
climb career ladder

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

Call it the seven-year itch. Jeff Austin has been an assistant golf course superintendent for about that long, and he aches to become a superintendent. But Austin also knows the obstacles he's up against. Let him count the ways:

- a difficult (but improving) economy;
- a glut of assistants looking to take the same step he is;
- laid-off superintendents looking for new jobs; and
- a stagnant industry where more jobs aren't being created.

"It's a difficult process," says the 30-year-old Austin, the first assistant superintendent at Stonewater Golf Club in Highland Heights, Ohio. "I trust my skills and my ability, but the biggest challenge is getting my foot in the door and proving to someone that I know what I'm doing."

It's hard to say how many assistant superintendents are ready to move up the next rung of the career ladder, but there's no doubt there are more than less of them. For now, they have to be patient and bide their time.

Austin realizes as much. He has a good job at Stonewater and doesn't want to lose it. "There are guys 10 times more qualified than me who don't have jobs," Austin says. "That's the sad part of this."

Mike Mausolf, the 27-year-old second assistant at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., feels secure in his position, but he's also aiming to move up.

"I feel like I'm ready for a new challenge," Mausolf says.

Continued on page 36

Continued from page 34

Mausolf would like to stay in Michigan, but he realizes he's limiting his opportunities by doing so. "It's tough to find a job up here," he says. "I realize I have to look out of state."

What frustrates Mausolf is so many assistants apply for one superintendent job. He says applicants must really differentiate themselves these days.

"I know what I have to do," he says.

Veteran certified superintendent Bruce Williams, director of business development in the West for ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance, says opportunities for assistants could be abundant if they would consider working at public and private courses in regions that feature warm-season and cool-season grasses — including overseas destinations like China where golf is growing.

"If you want to work in Milwaukee, because that's where you're from and that's

where your family is from and you don't want to move from there, then your opportunities aren't [great]," Williams says.

Most assistant superintendents realize they must use their connections to find jobs. Ryan Loudenslager, assistant superintendent of the Black Course at Bethpage Black State Park in Farmingdale, N.Y., has worked on Long Island for several years and is using his connections there to try and move up the career ladder. But nobody knows better than the 31-year-old Loudenslager that it's a difficult economy and a tough time to find a job — any job. In fact, Loudenslager was laid off from a private club on Long Island last year and was

rehired at Bethpage where he'd previously worked.

"It's tough to get a job; it's tough to get a look," says Loudenslager, a graduate of Penn State University. "A job at a Cape Cod (Mass.) course opened up and they got 300 resumes. ... The pool is big to get such jobs. They're not building many new courses and the [turfgrass] schools just keep on pumping people out."

Loudenslager has a solid resume — including hosting two U.S. Opens at Bethpage — and he's optimistic, despite admitting he's also a bit frustrated about the stagnant marketplace

Some assistants, however, are in no rush to become superintendents, including Kyle Hahn, the assistant superintendent at Four Seasons Resort and Club Dallas at Las Colinas in Irving, Texas. The 22-year-old Hahn just began his post last May after graduating from Texas A&M University. The good news is that most of the turfgrass graduates in his class found jobs, Hahn adds.

But Hahn realizes it's a tough job market for assistants who want to move up.

"It's troublesome," he says. "I have friends who really want to find superintendents jobs, but there's nothing available."

Matt Holland, the assistant superintendent at Trump National Golf Club in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y., also just began his post in May, and the 24-year-old is in no hurry to become a superintendent, saying he has lots to learn. But Holland hopes the job picture improves just when he's ready to move up.

"There are a lot fewer jobs than there were five years ago," he says. "I know multiple people who want to move up and can't find the right opportunities."



Kyle
Hahn



Matt
Holland

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Mitch Davidson

Some of the American assistant superintendents might want to look to the Great White North to become superintendents. Mitch Davidson, assistant superintendent of Wascana Country Club in Regina, Saskatchewan, says there are opportunities there.

"Where I live in Western Canada, there are superintendent openings every winter," he says. "But this year could be different because there are fewer people moving around."

Although the 26-year-old Davidson is heading into his ninth season at Wascana, he's in no rush to move on.

"If the right opportunity comes up, and I feel like I'm ready for it, then, yes, I'm ready to move on," he says. "You always want your boss' job."

For now, Austin plans to keep his skills sharp so he's ready when the opportunity presents itself.

"This will turn around eventually," Austin says. "The ones who weather the storm are the ones who will be the most successful when we get out of this." ■

Editor's note: Larry Aylward researched this story during the Green Start Academy, an event for assistant superintendents held last October by Bayer Environmental Science and John Deere Golf.



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