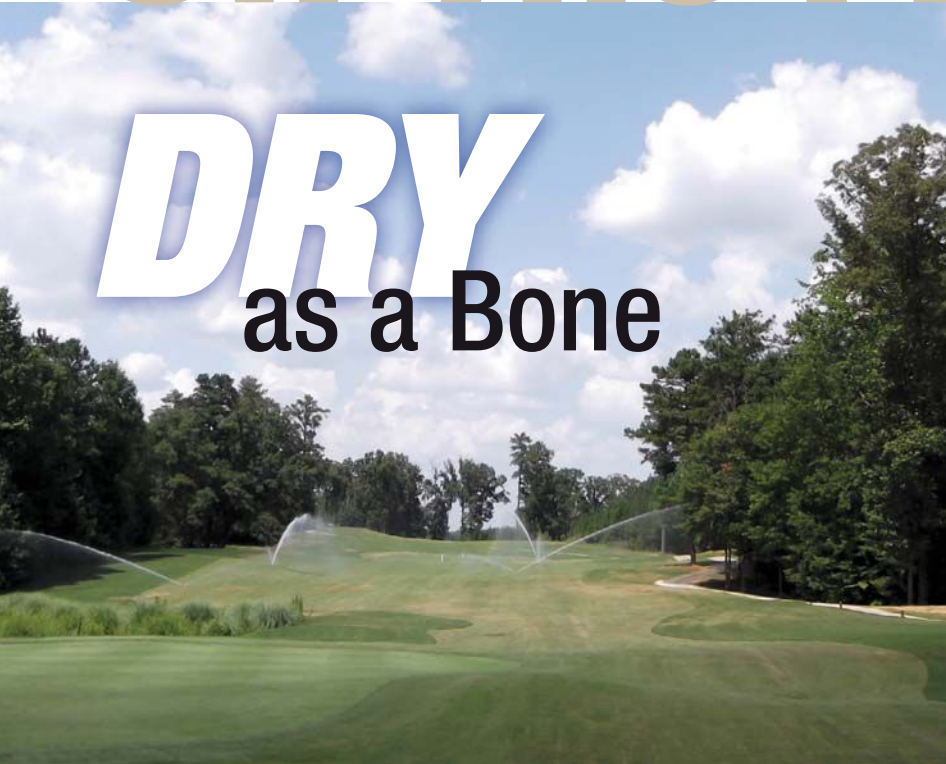


# Off The Fringe

## DRY as a Bone



intendent at Rochelle Ranch Golf Course, a public 18-holer in Rawlins, Wyo., which just experienced the driest June in its history. “I’ve had about six-tenths of an inch of rain in the last two-and-half months.”

Consequently, Rawlins is under mandatory city-enforced water restrictions. Befus is prohibited from watering the course between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m.

“I go out and hit my hot spots before 9,” he says. “We’ve got some areas that are hard — physically hard, because they didn’t put much topsoil down when they built the course in 2002. It’s not a problem in normal conditions, but it is now.”

To stay on top of things, Befus has raised mowing heights and reduced the amount of nitrogen he puts down.

And Befus is hardly alone. The

NOAA National Climatic Data Center’s July drought report says July 2012 was the hottest month ever recorded, with an average temp of 77.6 degrees. That makes June, the 14th warmest and 10th driest June on record, seem mild.

The most recent U.S. Drought Monitor data indicate that as of July’s end, 63 percent of the Lower 48 states were drought stricken. That’s “the highest such value for the U.S. Drought Monitor since its inception in 2000,” states the National Weather Service.

“It’s been rough,” says Kyle Allen, assistant superintendent at The Bridgewater Club in Carmel, Ind. Unlike Rawlins, Carmel is not facing water restrictions. The course is in fact quite wet, Allen says, thanks to the liberal watering they’ve been doing.

“In a normal summer we’re able to dry out the course a little bit more and get better playing conditions based on normal rainfall,” he says.

This summer, the guys at Bridgewater have been watering at night and hand watering in the morning. Afternoons are spent doing touch-ups on hot spots.

AS THE DROUGHT OF 2012 DRAGS ON, SUPERINTENDENTS ARE FEELING THE HEAT, IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

By **Beth Geraci** Senior Editor

**O**K, so it’s hot. *Really* hot. *Everywhere*. And judging from the way the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center puts it, there’s no end in sight.

“Dryness and drought, exacerbated by above-normal temperatures, have been increasing both in extent and intensity across much of the central and northern U.S.,” the center stated on its website at the end of July.

Just the word “exacerbate” seems to exacerbate the heat, does it not? And superintendents from the West Coast to the East are feeling it, both on their skin and on the job. We asked them how they’re coping.

“It’s pretty dry,” confirmed Dave Befus, super-



On the bright side, Allen observes, the Indiana summer has been less humid than others, causing less disease pressure. "We've had one of the driest summers ever — ever, humidity wise," he says. "So it feels cooler. The lack of humidity causes the grass to dry out faster and get hot, so you have to water more. But it also prevents disease."

Over in Georgia, courses finally are getting some much-needed rain. "Things really changed dramatically a couple weeks ago," says Mark Abrams, superintendent at Wolf Creek Golf Club in Senoia,

***"It's pretty dry. I've had about six-tenths of an inch of rain in the last two-and-half months."***

— **DAVE BEFUS**, SUPERINTENDENT AT  
ROCHELLE RANCH GOLF COURSE

Ga. "We couldn't get any rain. The bermudagrass on our fairways, we couldn't put enough water out. And keeping the rough going...now we're catching afternoon thunderstorms pretty much every day."

In Georgia, it was dry from mid-June to mid-July — "really dry," Abrams says. "Normally it's a little more humid in mid-June, but this year it was low humidity through June and no rain. It was just, appearance wise, the bermudagrass looked really dry — like we weren't watering it. You just couldn't keep up."

In Senoia, it got up to 107 degrees one day. Several other days were in the hundreds as well. "The parched areas, we have a few on the fairways and roughs. But those'll green up soon," Abrams says.

As hot and dry as the summer's been, sometimes you just have to call it a day. Because when it comes down to it, "there's not much I can do," Befus says. "I'm hoping for August and September to cool down and get some rain."

## Fire Destroys Maintenance Building, Kills Two Dogs

Sad news from my friend Chris Sorrell, who recently took the superintendent job at Boiling Springs Golf Course in Woodward, Okla.

A fire destroyed his maintenance facility, and most important to him, killed his two dogs, "Shooter," a 12-year-old schnauzer, and "Boswell," a 2-year-old border collie.

"It's totally awful. I couldn't get anywhere near the door... there was black smoke everywhere. (The dogs) were maybe eight or 10 feet away from me," Sorrell told me, sadness in his voice. "You know, the whole bloody thing could have burned down if my dogs were just out on the course with me, instead of being trapped inside the shop."

Nearby courses and the local John Deere distributor, PK Equipment, have already lent a hand, donating mowers and a cup cutter.

If Sorrell's name looks familiar, it's because he wrote the June 2011 *Golfdom* cover story, "Don't Be a Target," and he's written for the blog.

Sorrell was waiting for the insurance adjuster to arrive as I was talking to him. The fire department has told him the cause of the fire is unknown, calling it an accidental fire with an indeterminate origin. Among other difficulties, his irrigation system is down since his central computer was located inside the maintenance shop.

Regardless of all the bad news, Chris seemed like he understood that this was something he could overcome.

"Nobody was hurt, no one was in the building. The members are all being very supportive," Sorrell told me. "We'll make it through one way or another."



**A fire cost Boiling Springs GC all its equipment, records, irrigation controls and the lives of two beloved course dogs.**

# Off The Fringe



## » READER FEEDBACK

Thank you for addressing the plight of aging superintendents in your July 2012 edition of *Golfdom*. As a soon-to-be-member of the “5.9%” and a current superintendent for the past 35 years, the comments from Jay Charnes, Mark Woodward and Joel Jackson describe my feelings and concerns for my future as a golf course superintendent appropriately.



Like many of my contemporaries, I assumed I could perform my duties well beyond the normal retirement age but now wonder at what cost. I’m not so worried about a younger assistant undercutting my salary, as my salary and benefits have already been adjusted accordingly over the course of the economic downturn. Plus, no one knows the irrigation system around here like I do! Keep up the good work!

**Tom Brown, CGCS**

*Chesapeake Bay Golf Club  
Rising Sun, Md.*

The article on “The 5.9%” was a great read. During next year’s U.S. Open I will be part of that group.

I was talking this over with my young supervisory staff the other day, and you would think they wouldn’t care, but it concerns them, even though they are in their mid-20s to mid-30s.

I told them what my dad told me one time; as long as you stay proactive you are fine, when you become reactive it is only a matter of time.

I guess we will see if his philosophy works, to see how deep I get into my career.

Well written as always!

**Matt Shaffer**

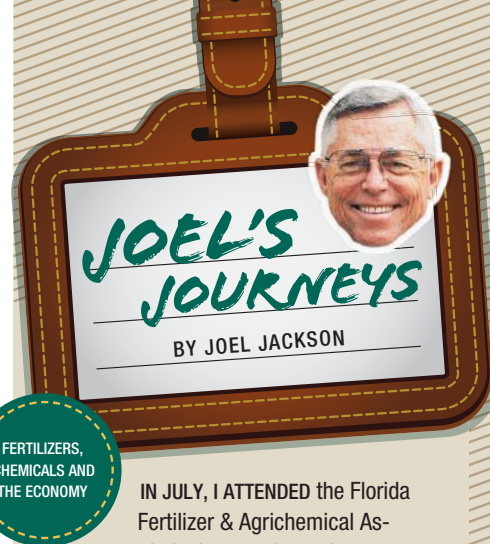
*Merion Golf Club  
Ardmore, Pa.*

Seth,  
I am pleased as to how accurately you and Beth did your work on my story, the 5.9%. Not an ounce of spin which I could see! That is rare and so pleasing to see. I guess there was some spin in that it sort of made me and Mary look too good. Hey, we were just doing what we do and it turned out to be we got associated with a couple of people who have that rare quality of being “straight up.”

The whole experience has been a charmed event. The way in which you handled it all was professional, kind and supportive. I am just corny enough to think it may make a difference as this “180 rule” thing continues to play out.

**Jay Charnes**

*Author, “The 5.9%”  
Co-owner, Superintendent’s Choice Sod*



FERTILIZERS,  
CHEMICALS AND  
THE ECONOMY

IN JULY, I ATTENDED the Florida Fertilizer & Agrichemical Association’s annual meeting.

I asked people how the economy has impacted companies within the Ag and Green Industries. Among those I interviewed were **Tim Orton**, southeastern sales representative for Agrium Advanced Technologies; **Gaylon Pfeiffer**, BASF value change specialist; and **Joe Hodges**, vice president, Southern Region, for The Andersons. Here’s what they said:

• **Tim Orton:** “Our biggest decline came in golf and wholesale nursery sales as courses adjusted maintenance budgets down and fewer housing starts affected nurseries. Oddly enough, lawn care companies and big box store sales remained stable or flat. We saw folks downgrade their use of slow-release materials from the highest-grade product to lesser grades, but they still valued the timed-release technology to give consistency of turf performance.”

• **Gaylon Pfeiffer:** “Certainly housing starts have had an impact on our T&O markets, especially in the sales of termiticides. But the number one impact on recent chemical sales in the golf and lawn care markets has been the growth of generic products. We are still constantly developing and introducing Ag and T&O products that meet grower needs with a serious dedicated emphasis on minimizing environmental impacts.”

• **Joe Hodges:** “We are seeing reductions in citrus acreage due to disease and pasture input cultural practices. Traditional agricultural supply companies are now looking to increase business to golf courses, horticulture and lawn care to offset those losses.

“We have seen an uptick in the use of specialty products that improve water quality as more courses use reclaimed water for irrigation purposes.”

## Deere Loses a Leader

Shortly before press time we learned of the passing of Gregg Breningmeyer, who was the Global Director of Sales and Marketing for John Deere Golf. He was 56.

We loved interviewing Breningmeyer because he always told it exactly like he saw it. From all of us at *Golfdom*, our condolences to the Breningmeyer family as well as the John Deere family, for their loss.

