

My wife, Amy, and I moved into a new neighborhood about one year ago. That's when it all began.

Like all people who move into a new home, you slowly begin meeting your neighbors, getting to know them and eventually the conversation gets around to what you do for a living. At this point in my career I begin the story by saying I'm a consultant and own a golf course renovation company. They generally find this interesting. As the conversation continues and they find out that I was a golf course superintendent who has prepared golf courses for major championships and tour events, things change and the pressure mounts.

I have found that the worst place to conduct a neighborly conversation is in front of your house on the sidewalk because of what is right behind you: your yard. As the neighbors are talking to you, you can see their eyes dart back and forth between you and your grass. And you can slowly but surely see the wheels start turning. In their minds, they are saying, "If this guy has prepared golf courses for major golf tournaments, how come his yard looks the way it does?"

I instinctively start trying to shift the conversation — and their attention — to other topics. But since they too have yards with grass, they want to know how the hot-shot turf manager can help them grow better turf at their homes.

I've tried diversionary tactics, joking about how the plumber is always the one with leaky faucets, or the mechanic the one with the jalopy in his garage. Such diversions never work.

Whether I like it or not, I am the resident expert in the neighborhood. I'm the one expected to solve all turf-related problems spanning several square blocks. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy sharing my knowledge with others. But when I do recommend something, my neighbors generally don't take my advice, because it's not the way their dad did it. My experience has shown me that the nurse next door, the retired accountant down the street or even the blind lady across the way know more than I do. They're just testing my knowledge. In the end, they're going to do it their way no matter what I say.

Talk About Pressure

BY MARK WOODWARD



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For example, the nurse and I were overseeding our yards one October day. He asked me if I wanted to borrow his drop spreader to spread steer manure over the ryegrass seed. I replied, "No, that's OK. The seed will germinate without it." One week later, his yard had an incredible stand of ryegrass and I was standing in a yard with spotty germination at best.

None of this bothered me too much, because I knew he had just had his irrigation system overhauled by a contractor. My system, on the other hand, needed some work. Besides, I was out of town for three days and unable to watch my watering cycles closely. I also knew the ryegrass would eventually germinate (which it did).

The problem was, while my grass seed was taking its sweet old time to germinate, the neighbors strolled by, stopping to chat on the sidewalk. I could tell they were comparing my yard with the nurse's. As a defense mechanism, I could have said that like a nurse, I know how to check blood pressure or take someone's temperature. But I was smart enough to keep my mouth shut.

What I did do was glance across the street. When I did, I saw that the blind lady was having her yard overseeded by a professional contractor. I breathed a sigh of relief. At least *she* couldn't blame me.

Throughout my career, I've held high-pressure positions and been under a great deal of stress to produce the best possible turf conditions for the greatest golfers in the world. But none of that pressure compares to my neighbors' expectations of the resident neighborhood turfgrass expert.

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