

By **BETH GERACI** Senior Editor



*A day with a third-generation Texas  
a rich family*



# THE *Kizer* TOUCH



IT'S 9 A.M. IN MARBLE FALLS, a quaint tourist town in the Texas Hill Country, about 50 miles west of Austin. Two construction workers are sipping coffee outside the Blue Bonnet Café. Otherwise, downtown is deserted.

Five blocks away is Jamie Kizer. The superintendent of Hidden Falls Golf Club is waiting in the maintenance shed, an obscure building marked only by three pickup trucks out front.

Hidden here at Hidden Falls is a superintendent with a proud superintendent lineage, a third-generation greenkeeper with strong roots in the industry, bold enough to create his own recipe for strong roots on his course.

*super and his father highlights*

*history and three very different paths.*

## ALL IN THE FAMILY

Inside the maintenance shed, an old TV is blaring. The walls are adorned with family photos, a mounted deer and GCSA plaques honoring Jamie and his father, who founded the Central Texas GCSA in 1974.

Jamie is a third-generation superintendent. It's a fraternity he grew up yearning to be part of, one he got an up close and personal view of while working alongside his father and grandfather as a boy.

His grandfather, Roy Kizer, was a longtime superintendent at Austin's Lions Municipal Golf Course. It was the stomping ground of nearly every renowned golfer to

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## All in the Family

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come out of central Texas — most famously Ben Crenshaw.

Roy died of heart failure in 1975, two years after his retirement. But his spirit still lives and breathes in the city he called home. And in no place is his spirit more alive than in the maintenance shed at Hidden Falls Golf Club.

“My grandfather was the kind of grandfather where when you saw him, you wanted to run and jump in his arms,” recalls Jamie. “He made you feel loved.”

Jamie’s adoration of his grandfather is evident even in silence. Hanging prominently on the wall is a bronzed plaque emblazoned with Roy’s image. In it, Roy’s working on a green, his pants tucked in to high black boots. The plaque reads:

**“Roy Kizer, Sr.**

*Greens Superintendent at ‘Old Munny’*

*April 1, 1937-Jan. 31, 1973.”*

“I struck that same pose in my Facebook profile picture,” Jamie says, pulling up the photo on his Droid. There it is, a nearly perfect re-enactment.

Also there is a photo of Jamie’s 11-year-old daughter, Ashley, riding a mower. “If she wanted to become a superintendent, I’d support her,” he says.

It’s proof that though he has Kizer DNA running through his veins, Jamie is his own man. “Dad told me not to be a superintendent,” Jamie recalls. “Because he knew how hard it is, and stressful and all that. But when he told me not to be a superintendent, I was like, ‘I’m going to do this.’”

Given the family’s rich golf history, Jamie was destined for a career on the course. His father was one of eight kids, three of whom went on to be head golf pros. One of them, Gib, spent the off-season playing on the PGA Tour.

Despite that heritage, having been a head greenkeeper for nearly 20 years, today Jamie laments that his dad was right.

“It’s not the glory I thought it was going to be,” he says wistfully. “It’s like being the coach of the football team. If you’re not winning, then everyone throws their jabs at you.”



### THE FORERUNNER

The door opens with a loud squeak. In walks Jamie’s dad, Edwin. At 81, Edwin’s tall and unassuming, with a small potbelly that hangs slightly over his waistline. The serious expression on his face veils the wry humor that simmers underneath.

“I was saying you told me not to become a superintendent,” Jamie tells him.

“Absolutely,” says Edwin, emphasizing every syllable. “The same thing Dad told me. He said, ‘Be a policeman, be a fireman, don’t do this.’”

Both men wanted more stable work for their sons. But like Jamie, Edwin ignored his father’s advice. His first superintendent job was at Morris Williams Golf Course, which he helped build for the city in 1962.

From there his career took him to Austin Country Club — where famed instructor Harvey Penick was then the head pro — and on to the Nicklaus-designed The Hills of Lakeway west of Austin. Edwin helped it evolve from an 18-hole course to a 54-hole facility. He managed it all.

*“When Dad told me not to become a superintendent,*

*I was like, I’m going to do this.” — Jamie Kizer*





**1.** Jamie shows his father the compost he uses to make compost tea. **2.** In the creation of compost tea, Jamie injects air into the liquid to extract microbes off the mixture. The foam seen here is gas formed by microbes as they multiply. **3.** Jamie proudly displays his massive root system, the result of fertilizing with compost tea.

“I liked being out there. I liked working the grass,” says Edwin, who gained esteem for his over-fertilized lush greens.

Edwin reflects on his unique upbringing with an unemotional bluntness. He nonchalantly recalls starting in the business as a 6-year-old soda jerk in the Lions pro shop; being forced to box with his fellow caddies on rainy days; and raking the ponds for errant golf balls every morning before school — so Roy could sell them in the clubhouse.

“He sold them for 10 cents each,” Jamie says. “It’s where grandpa made most of his money. And if he saw you taking one of those balls from the pond, he’d chase you.”

Edwin grew up in a drastically different world than the one his only son grew up in. It was a segregated world. But one day in 1951, something happened at Lions that changed golf there forever. Two black youths stepped onto the course and played a round of golf. Someone reported it to the clubhouse. The clubhouse said, “Let ‘em play.”

It was a heavy, historical moment. Edwin caddied with one of the young men. He tells the story slowly, weightily, as if he’s watching it unfold. The magnitude of the event is reflected in Edwin’s voice. It drops to a whisper as he says, “The end of segregation... on the golf course.”

## TEXAS TEA

In the shed behind the Hidden Falls maintenance building there’s a loud whirring noise. It sounds like someone’s running a vacuum.

There’s no vacuum here, though. That’s the sound of compost tea brewing. In a medium-sized cistern, the organic combination of compost, molasses, worm castings and other ingredients swirls, bubbles and foams. It’ll brew like that for 72 hours before it’s finished.

Jamie pours some of the brown liquid into a measuring cup and raises it to his nose. “When this is ready, this is going to smell like earth,” he shouts over the whirring. “This is not quite fully ready yet.”

Edwin’s standing behind Jamie, looking thoroughly perplexed. He’s seen his son’s concoction before. “It just confuses me,” he says.

Though these two men share a name, a passion and a profession, their styles of greenkeeping are drastically different. Edwin says he was good at driving around and pointing; Jamie works hands-on alongside his crew at a course where a \$330,000 budget requires it.

“This is a real low-budget place,” says Jamie. “Dad would say, ‘Fertilize this, do all this.’ Well, our budget won’t support the things he would want to do. What’s spurring my interest is this compost tea. I have the least amount of money, the least amount of resources, but I’m now growing the healthiest turf I’ve ever grown.”

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## All in the Family



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Jamie pulls out the Droid again, and brings up his Facebook page. He enlarges a photo of himself proudly displaying his root system. It's six inches long and intact as he lets it dangle from his fingertips.

"It's unbelievable," Edwin marvels. "My turf never would have done that." They may have had different styles, different technologies, but they both know what good turf looks like.

Jamie is such a proponent of compost tea, he and his business partner, Dale Wieweck, who turned him on to it, are set to launch their own mobile compost tea business. They'll peddle and apply their product everywhere from estates to golf courses. They recently acquired their first golf customer — Lions Municipal Golf Course. Yes, Grandpa's old course. Roy Kizer would surely approve.

Wieweck's inspiration for turning to compost tea was based on his years in the landscape maintenance business, where he felt pressure to get green-up quickly. "Our chemical budgets were going up every year," he says, "and I decided 'I don't like this.'"

His discomfort stemmed from the death of his father, a longtime dairy farmer who ultimately died of inoperable cancer.

"My dad passed away from chemicals," Wieweck says. "Back then, in the 1940s and '50s, it was nothing to go out and spray chemicals and get it on your boots and wear those same boots for three years."

Now Jamie's as sold on compost tea as Wieweck is, bragging, "I got roots this deep in the greens out here. I can walk away from them and they won't fall off."

**Jamie Kizer in his office, where the walls are adorned with plaque upon plaque honoring the family's years in turf.**

## Old friends from 'Old Muny'

When Jamie Kizer was a little boy and his parents wanted to go out to dinner, they called on Ben Crenshaw, who grew up with the family, to babysit.

"We used to chip and putt at Morris Williams Golf Course," Jamie recalls. "And if it got dark, he would pull his car around and turn on the headlights and we would chip and putt. It was just what you did. You'd just mill around and chip and putt."

Crenshaw gave Jamie the nickname "Scooter," thanks to the lad's penchant for driving golf carts as a 5-year-old. If 5 seems a little young to be driving golf carts, Jamie's father, Edwin, wasn't bothered by it.

"I had to take care of the golf course," he says, shrugging. By driving the golf cart, Jamie could retrieve things for him.

To this day, Crenshaw calls Jamie "Scooter" wherever their paths cross. "I saw him at Augusta one time at a practice round and he looked over and goes, 'Scooter, what are you doing here?'" Jamie remembers. "And I said, 'I came all the way over to watch you play this practice round.'"

Jamie smiles broadly at the memory. The TV blares behind him. Edwin's sitting at the table, with his arms tightly crossed, listening intently.

"Everybody knew he was going to be big," Jamie says.

"There was no question," says Edwin.

"He was an awesome golfer," Jamie adds. "When Ben played a course he'd walk into a pro shop and ask what the course record was. And they'd say, '68', and they knew from that point on he was going —"

"We knew, forget it, whatever that course record was, 64 or whatever, he'd beat it," says Edwin, finishing Jamie's thought. "His mind was set on that record." —BG

## 'CUED UP

The lunch crowd at Peete Mesquite Barbecue is tapering off. Jamie and Edwin are sitting at a picnic table enjoying beef brisket, reminiscing about the parties they threw in Lakeway.

"Dad would always say, 'Remember, it's only wrong if you get caught,'" Jamie laughs. "And if you get caught, don't call me."

Edwin retired in 1996 at age 65 and hasn't looked back. "It took me one day to get used to it," he says.

Jamie smiles. "One time I called Dad up about a year later and I said, 'Hey Dad, how you likin' that retirement?' And he goes, 'Man, it's wonderful. I got seven Saturdays in every week.'"

Today, the Kizers have come full circle. Edwin grew up watching his father; now he observes his son.

"I go riding around with him, he talks about what he's doing, dreaming and all that, I don't have to do nothing but listen," he says.

Edwin knows some of Jamie's plans won't work. Still, he keeps his thoughts to himself.

"Let him go," he says. "Let him do it. Me ridin' around, no pressure, man." ■