



YOU'VE GOT QUESTIONS

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WE'VE GOT ANSWERS

Our staff takes on
the industry's most
enticing questions.

We've heard that there is no such thing as a stupid question. Being journalists, we like to believe that is true... because we ask a lot of questions.

Rather than tackling one issue this month, we set out to have a little fun and answer 10 questions, ranging from serious (When will golf course closings level off?) to silly (Is there such a thing as a superintendent who doesn't drink coffee?). We even asked a tacky question (Which superintendent is making the most money, and what's he pulling down?). If you read that answer, we'll take that as you accepting our apology for being so crass.

We hope you enjoy our questions and answers... and if this just leads to more questions? Even better.



? When will these course closings finally level off?

Not that long ago, new golf courses were opening at a pretty steady clip. But last year, the equivalent of 19 courses opened while a record 157 closed down. It's a pretty staggering statistic and one often overlooked by the media when describing the economic fallout of recent years. And while many in the industry remain optimistic, citing new player and rounds played statistics, the truth is, courses are still closing and folks are still losing jobs. Surely the bleeding has to stop soon.

"I believe the majority of course closings are already behind us," says Jon Peterson, president of Peterson Economics, a Washington state-based real estate economics consulting firm. "But closings will likely continue to outnumber openings by a wide margin in the foreseeable future." Peterson notes factors such as the improvement of the real estate market, which is creating the incentive for developers to convert underperforming courses into home sites or other land uses.

Hilda Allen, who has overseen 400 golf course sale transactions through her real estate firm, puts it more simply. "[Golf course closings will level off] when the demand outruns the supply." Economics 101. —S.T.

? What one product really has superintendents talking?

It's the largest weed problem on golf courses, particularly in cool-season grasses: annual bluegrass. And there just isn't an easy fix.

But, according to researchers testing a new South Korean product not yet registered for the U.S., that's about to change.

PoaCure, with the active ingredient methiozolin, is an herbicide that gradually removes annual and perennial biotypes by postemergent applications (maximum about six times). But superintendents will have to wait to use the product, because U.S. registration isn't expected until 2015. Currently, there are about 160 superintendents nationwide testing the product on greens and fairways.

Suk-Jin Koo, Ph.D., a scientist who was trained in turf weed science at Cornell University, launched methiozolin, which is safe to use on almost all established turfgrasses, in April 2010 in South Korea. Koo discovered the herbicide and started Moghu Research Center to develop it worldwide. PoaCure is being sold in South Korea and is expected to be sold in Japan in 2014.

Moghu has tested the product in the U.S. for several years. Auburn University's Robert Walker, Ph.D., is the first professor to test methiozolin in the U.S. He tested it at Auburn University Turf Facility in the spring of 2009 and at Grand National Golf Club in Opelika, Ala. Extensive research also has been conducted in the Northeast by Virginia Tech's Shawn Askew, Ph.D., and out West by James Baird, Ph.D., at UC Riverside.

"This product is going to change the whole spectrum of *Poa* control in bentgrass greens," Walker says. "It provides near-perfect control in about four months. There's nothing I've ever seen like this. It's fantastic." —J.W.



Continued on page 22

Questions and Answers

Continued from page 21

? Which superintendent makes the most money, and what kind of coin is he pulling down?

There's nothing tackier than talking about how much money someone else makes, right?

So we hope that by reading on, that's your way of saying, "I forgive you."

To find the most loaded superintendent in the land, we started with a phone call to the GCSAA. The most recent compensation and benefits report was completed in 2011. Who reported the highest salary?

Sorry — that will remain anonymous, as is the policy of the report (which is a policy we totally agree with.) But Jeff Bollig, GCSAA's senior director of communications, could help us out at least this much: The top 1 percent reported earning a salary of at least \$220,000 a year.

We phoned our pal Joel Jackson, CGCS-Retired, executive director of the Florida GCSA. Maybe he has spotted the nicest set of wheels and can tell us who's driving it?

"Sorry, whoever it is, they're not in the Orlando area," Jackson says.

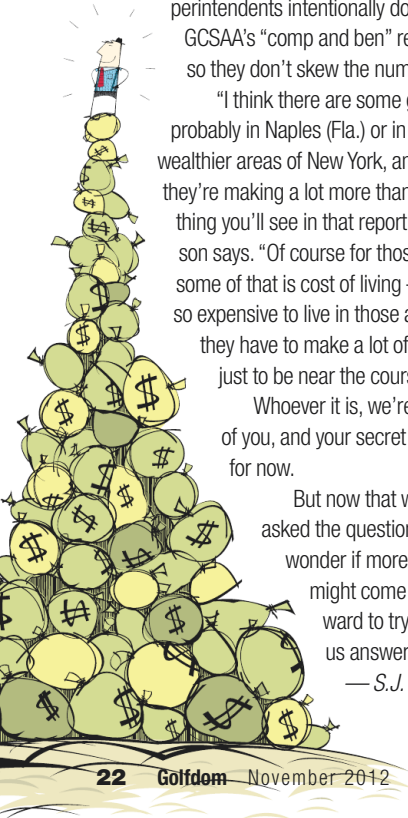
But he did have this juicy nugget for us — Jackson speculates that the highest-paid superintendents intentionally don't take GCSAA's "comp and ben" report, so they don't skew the numbers.

"I think there are some guys, probably in Naples (Fla.) or in the wealthier areas of New York, and they're making a lot more than anything you'll see in that report," Jackson says. "Of course for those guys, some of that is cost of living — it's so expensive to live in those areas, they have to make a lot of money just to be near the course."

Whoever it is, we're proud of you, and your secret is safe for now.

But now that we've asked the question, we wonder if more people might come forward to try to help us answer it...?

— S.J.



? Which super has it best — the superintendent at the municipal, public, private or resort course?

Much like doctors, who work in such diverse settings from Beverly Hills nose job clinics to battlefields in Afghanistan, superintendents also work in greatly different environments. From \$10 green fee munis to the most exclusive private courses, superintendents are charged with managing turf, and staff, under a wide variety of conditions. But the overwhelming majority of superintendents who have worked at all four course types claim the resort course provides the best work environment.

"I definitely feel the resort course superintendent has it best," says Jason Chennault, who has worked as superintendent at many different course types in locations as diverse as Russia, Mexico, Mongolia and L.A.

"Location of work is usually quite nice and the benefits tend to be higher due to the increased amenities," Chennault notes. Add this to the fact that most resort course superintendents aren't bound to the whims of greens committees or worse yet, local government commissioners, and it's easy to see why clocking in at a resort course is one of the best gigs a superintendent can get. —S.T.



? Which architect's courses are most superintendent friendly?

This question is always open for debate, but what we kept hearing was that Bill Love has been able to take at least an iota of stress out of the lives of superintendents, thanks to his preference for broad, open spaces. No course is all-out easy to maintain, of course, but, superintendents say Love courses often require less maintenance than those designed by other architects.

Rick Owens, superintendent at Laurel Hill Golf Club in Fairfax County, Va., has managed the Love-designed golf course for eight years.

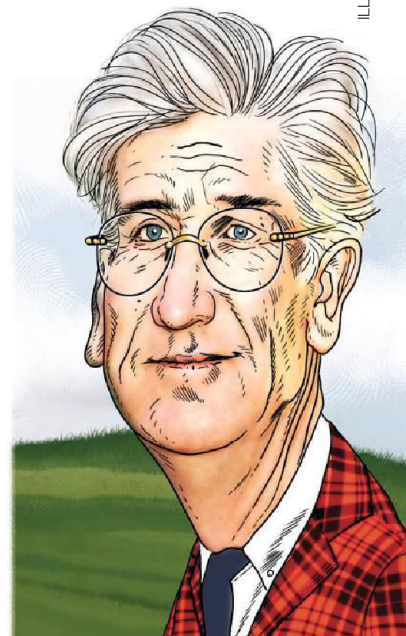
With its wide fairways and large greens, "on the whole, the style of the course is bigger, broader, gentler," Owens says. "That's something that Bill did that makes our job a little bit easier. He didn't leave us a lot of deep slopes, where it's difficult to mow."

Also lending to ease of management, Laurel Hill has few trees and is home to an abundance of native grasses that require little maintenance. And though Laurel Hill's primary Kentucky bluegrass roughs require regular management, its secondary hard fescue and blue grama roughs need mowing once or twice a year.

With 122 sand bunkers, bunker maintenance at Laurel Hill has posed the biggest challenge for Owens and his staff. But when the course invested in a new bunker system this summer, that challenge dissipated.

"A serious rain event used to cost us hundreds of man hours," Owens recalls. "It was really a struggle, pushing the sand up the hill. Now that has pretty much disappeared." —B.G.

Continued on page 24



Questions and Answers

Continued from page 22

? Is there such a thing as a superintendent who doesn't drink coffee?

Considering the early (and long) hours they keep, every superintendent drinks coffee, right?

Wrong. We searched, and we found several who say no to Joe — so they do indeed exist.

Take it from David Brandenburg, one of our bold superintendents willing to go on the record and discuss his java-less existence.

The superintendent at Rolling Meadows GC in Fond du Lac, Wis., has worked as a superintendent for 24 years. Yet he's had only two cups 'o Joe in his life. Both times, his grandma made it. And when Grandma pours you coffee, you drink it.

"I drank it down to be polite, but I hated every second of it," Brandenburg recalls with a wince. "I don't care for the smell of it, I don't care for the taste of it. It just doesn't appeal to me."

The 46-year-old Brandenburg hasn't had a sip of coffee since he was 21. He clocks in every day at 5 a.m. and gets straight to work. But he doesn't shun caffeine entirely. He holds off on it until about 10 a.m., when time calls for a "midday pick-me-up."

"I take my caffeine cold and black," Brandenburg says of his preference for Diet Coke. "I don't have the desire to drop caffeine altogether. Sometimes it feels better just to have it." Kind of like Grandma's coffee. —B.G.



? Which architect's courses are the most challenging to maintain?

Jack Nicklaus's designs have put more than a few superintendents to the test. Just ask Tom Egelhoff, who's managed one Nicklaus course or another for the past 20 years.

"If I had to think of one thing that characterizes Nicklaus courses, I'd say it's associated with bunkers," says Egelhoff, director of agronomy at The Club at Las Campanas in Santa Fe, N.M., home to two Nicklaus courses.

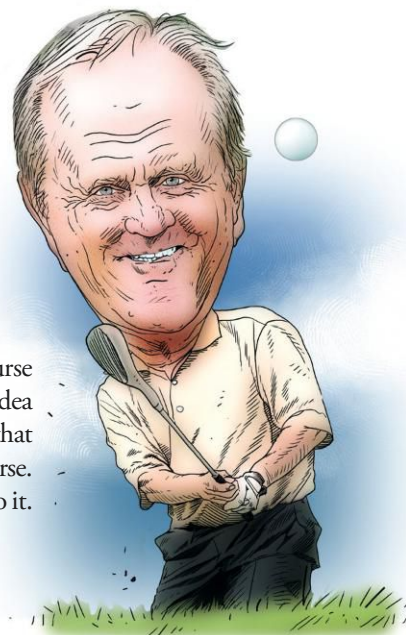
Bunker maintenance often is more laborious than mowing turf Egelhoff says, "because you have to do it by hand. It's more time consuming." And because Nicklaus bunkers often are on steep slopes, using a riding mower around them only leads to more maintenance, Egelhoff explains.

Around bunker faces, therefore, Egelhoff's crew uses fly mowers, which float.

Using fly mowers around bunker faces "requires some training," Egelhoff says. "You're on a slope, it can be wet, you have to be very careful."

But once you manage one Nicklaus course, it's easy to manage others, says Egelhoff, who first started working Nicklaus courses 20 years ago at Muirfield Village Golf Club.

"It's a pretty consistent feel from Nicklaus course to Nicklaus course," he says. "You kind of get an idea of what he's looking for, and it's really easy to take that knowledge and transfer it to another Nicklaus course. It takes a lot of labor, but I've grown accustomed to it. It's what I'm used to." —B.G.



? What snack stand torments its crew the most, thanks to its delicious food?



The ones at The Olympic Club in San Francisco. There are three — one on the Lake Course, one on the Ocean Course and one at the driving range — run by an outside contractor, the Parrish family. The burger dogs are extremely popular among members, and guests who've played there always ask for them when they return.

In 1950, Bill Parrish opened Hot Dog Bills, named after him and his wife, Billie. They set up a small trailer outside the club and sold burgers and dogs to golfers. To save money, Bill used hot dog buns for the burgers so he only needed one bun for everything on the menu. The golfers loved the burger dogs and eventually, the club invited Bill to set up a stand on the golf course.

Now, Bill's daughter Candy runs the renowned snack stands. The fresh ground meat is delivered daily, cooked between medium and medium rare, and seasoned with salt and pepper. Condiments include sweet relish and sour pickles.

Amazingly, even though Pat Finlen, CGCS, director of golf course maintenance operations, has been employed by the club 10 years, he's only eaten one burger dog.

"I had it the first month I worked here," Finlen says. "I loved the one I had but realized then the last thing I needed was to get hooked on eating burger dogs every day. Everyone on staff likes the burger dogs, but staff can't eat at the snack stands, so they typically aren't eating burger dogs."

So we encourage the staff to just sneak them. —J.W.

? Who is the most famous living superintendent?

There's nothing to divide a room like a popularity contest.

So for this one, we turned to our 1,000 Twitter followers and the thousands of recipients of our *Golfdom* Insider e-newsletter and asked. We simply asked the above question, sat back and watched.

We got many responses, all of them great superintendents from around the country. Just an example of some of the suggestions:

- ▶ Robert V. Mitchell, FarmLinks
- ▶ Bob Zoller, Monterey Peninsula CC
- ▶ Mark Michaud, Shinnecock Hills GC
- ▶ John Zimmers, Oakmont CC
- ▶ Matt Shaffer, Merion GC
- ▶ Bob Farren, Pinehurst Resort
- ▶ Fred Klauk, TPC Sawgrass (Retired)

- ▶ Ken Mangum, Atlanta Athletic Club
- ▶ Frank Dobie, Sharon GC
- ▶ Darren Davis, Olde Florida GC

Yet one name was mentioned more than any other: Paul R. Latshaw.

And for good reason. Though retired as a superintendent for years now, a look at his résumé is like a golfer's wishlist: Augusta National, Oakmont, Congressional and Winged Foot, to name a few. And all those majors, starting with the 1978 PGA... four years watching up close as the green jacket was awarded at the Masters... the year Ernie Els won the 1997 U.S. Open at Congressional was pretty special, too, eh?

Along the way, Latshaw has seen many of his former assistants move on to some of the most elite jobs in the industry. Nothing makes a person more famous than a legacy.

So our hat is off to Mr. Latshaw as we acknowledge him as the most famous living superintendent. Though retired, you are certainly not forgotten. —S.J.



? What is one thing you can start doing today to be a better environmental steward?

For this one, we went to our friend and environmental editor Anthony Williams, CGCS, MG, at the Stone Mountain Resort and author of "The Environmental Stewardship Toolkit," for his opinion. And this is what he told us:

"Benchmark! Benchmarking is the one thing that superintendents at any type of course or skill level can do to instantly impact their environmental stewardship.

Benchmarking is the gathering of critical data such as water use, chemical and fertilizer applications, fuel consumption, number/type of fledglings hatched in nest boxes (or number and type of nest boxes), water quality test results and hundreds of other measurable stewardship items. This data can then be researched to gather past history. These benchmarks will become the very cornerstones that your stewardship efforts will be measured by.

Benchmarking gives you definitive answers to questions such as, 'How much water did we save this year compared to last year?' and 'How much money did we save in chemicals by converting two acres into native grasses?'

Benchmarking today will allow you to make great environmental decisions in the future and prove the value of your environmental programs. You can compare similar items by year over year or other parameters or even use this data for environmental certifications and industry contests."

Thanks Anthony! While we had him on the horn, we also found out that he is another superintendent who doesn't drink coffee. But we didn't ask him if resort supers had it best — knowing Anthony's always-positive attitude, we knew he couldn't be trusted to give us a straight answer! ■

If you find some of our answers to be — putting it politely — a pile of fertilizer, tell us! (But please be nice. We're nice people, really. Except for Gary in I.T.) Shoot us an email or visit the *Golfdom* Daily, www.golfdom.blogspot.com, and join the discussion! And if you have suggestions for questions to ask in the future, we want to hear them!