

EARLY to RISE

Six young supers already are basking in success. And they're no older than 30.

BY BETH GERACI

You hear about them often — aspiring young greenkeepers fresh out of turf school. They're hungry. They're talented. They're eager to prove themselves as assistants.

They know the turnover rate for superintendents is low, and they're prepared to wait. Only, some don't have to.

At a time when only 5.9 percent of superintendents are working at age 60 (see our July 2012 cover story), the crop of superintendents slowly is getting younger. Here are some age 30 and under who are proving you don't have to be an elder statesman to be a talented super.

Austin Allison

AGE: 26

COURSE: Timberlake Golf Club, Clinton, N.C.

NUMBER OF HOLES: 18

BEEN A SUPERINTENDENT FOR: 2 years

How did you get into your position at such a young age? I was at the Country Club of Virginia at the time. I was ready to propose to my girlfriend, and I wanted to get closer to home. I talked to my college professor, who put out some feelers.

Biggest accomplishment: When I first saw the course, I knew it'd be easy to make an immediate impact here, but I didn't realize how bad it was until my first day. I remember being on the 17 green thinking, "I hope my girlfriend's worth it."

They completely lost the greens in 2010, and the irrigation system didn't really work because it wasn't properly installed. The first thing I did was straighten it out. Also, when I got here they had no budget, so I created one. My golf course maintenance budget last year was \$175,000, not including gas or utilities. I'm proud of the product we provide for the amount of money we put into it.

In February, I was also promoted to GM. I'm pretty proud of that. As GM, I'm creating a budget for all the club's other departments; they don't have one either.

Did you have insecurities about being so young? It was a good situation to walk into here. There was nowhere to go but up.

Where do you see yourself in 15 years? I'd still like to be in the industry. I'll never move away from this area. There's a lot to be said for being at a club like this. It's a little bit smaller, the employees are like a family here. The members know you, and they want to know you.

What advice do you have for aspiring superintendents? Spend the money at your club like it's your own. Other than that, learn as much as you can as an assistant.

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"I WAS ON THE 17 GREEN AND THOUGHT,
'I HOPE MY GIRLFRIEND'S WORTH IT.'"

Austin Allison

"I've been a superintendent for more than 20 years and we always seem to have dollar spot issues. I didn't have those issues this year while using Daconil Action, and I know others did. I'm definitely going to use Daconil Action again."

Kelly Kressler
Southmoore Golf Course, Bath, PA

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Josh Lewis

AGE: 30

COURSE: Chambers Bay, University Place, Wash.

NUMBER OF HOLES: 18

BEEN A SUPERINTENDENT FOR: 1 year

How did you get the job at such a young age? There was a certain amount of good fortune involved, but also hard work and dedication, trying to continually learn, and being taught by some very good mentors, like Chris Gaughan, Ken Nice and Paul Chojnacky.

I was the first assistant at Chambers Bay. When the superintendent position became available, General Manager Matt Allen told me, "Feel free to make the changes you feel are necessary and the chips are going to fall where they may."

What's your biggest accomplishment? One of the first things that comes to mind is the progress we've made with the staff at Chambers Bay. We've got a very strong group of people. I've seen a lot of growth in individuals and as a team in the last year, and that's as much their accomplishment as it is mine.

Did you have insecurities about being so young? I don't think it was a youth thing. There are going to be things you're not perfectly comfortable with right off the bat, like budgeting, but you have teaching and mentoring to rely on. It helps to have a trusted person in your speed dial.

Where do you see yourself in 15 years? I don't know for sure. It's yet to be determined if the U.S. Open (which



Chambers Bay is hosting in 2015) or other majors are things I can see myself being a part of perennially. I guess we'll know after June 2015. Right now we're super excited and enjoying the ride.

What advice do you have for aspiring superintendents? It really does come back to networking and staying involved. Go to meetings, go to association events and get to know people regionally and nationally. You're only as good as the people you surround yourself with.

Brian Palmer

AGE: 29

COURSE: Shoreacres, Lake Bluff, Ill.

NUMBER OF HOLES: 18

BEEN A SUPERINTENDENT FOR: 3 months

How did you get your job at such a young age? From working at a big club like Merion Golf Club, where I was the assistant before coming here, and working for a

superintendent like Matt (Shaffer). I heard about this job from a colleague of mine. I went through the interview process, and one month later I had the job.

What is your biggest accomplishment? Overseeing construction of the practice green on Merion's West Course and having a part in Merion's practice facility and U.S. Open preparations were big. But getting this job is my biggest accomplishment. It's a dream job, really. When I got it, the first thing I did was call my father. He was a superintendent in central New York for 25 years. He couldn't wait to scope out the piece of property I have.

Did you have insecurities about being so young? I really don't have any. Fortunately, I saw quite a bit in my time at Merion, and I'm ready to go. I've been groomed for this for a while now.

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**"I'M READY TO GO.
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FOR THIS FOR A WHILE NOW."**

Brian Palmer



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Where do you see yourself in 15 years?

I'd love to be a superintendent still, whether it's here or somewhere else. But I'm fortunate to be where I am right now, and if I'm able to be here in 15 or 20 years, that'd be great.

What advice do you have for aspiring superintendents? It's important to be well rounded. Get outside your comfort zone and you'll be better off for it. Keep learning, meet as many people as you can. Go work for the right people and set yourself up for the future.

Tyler Tang

AGE: 30

COURSE: Bermuda Dunes Country Club, Bermuda Dunes, Calif.

NUMBER OF HOLES: 27

BEEN A SUPERINTENDENT FOR: 2 years

How did you get your job at such a young age? By being an assistant at Eldorado Country Club for five years. My mentor, Eldorado Director of Agronomy Craig Ellis, is well known. The general manager at Bermuda Dunes asked Craig if he had a guy who would be interested in coming over. Being a hard worker, making a name for myself, that helped too.

What is your biggest accomplishment? By far it's bringing Bermuda Dunes back. I have members who have been here for 30 years who say the course has never looked better. I attribute that to my staff and teamwork and putting the right guys in the right jobs.

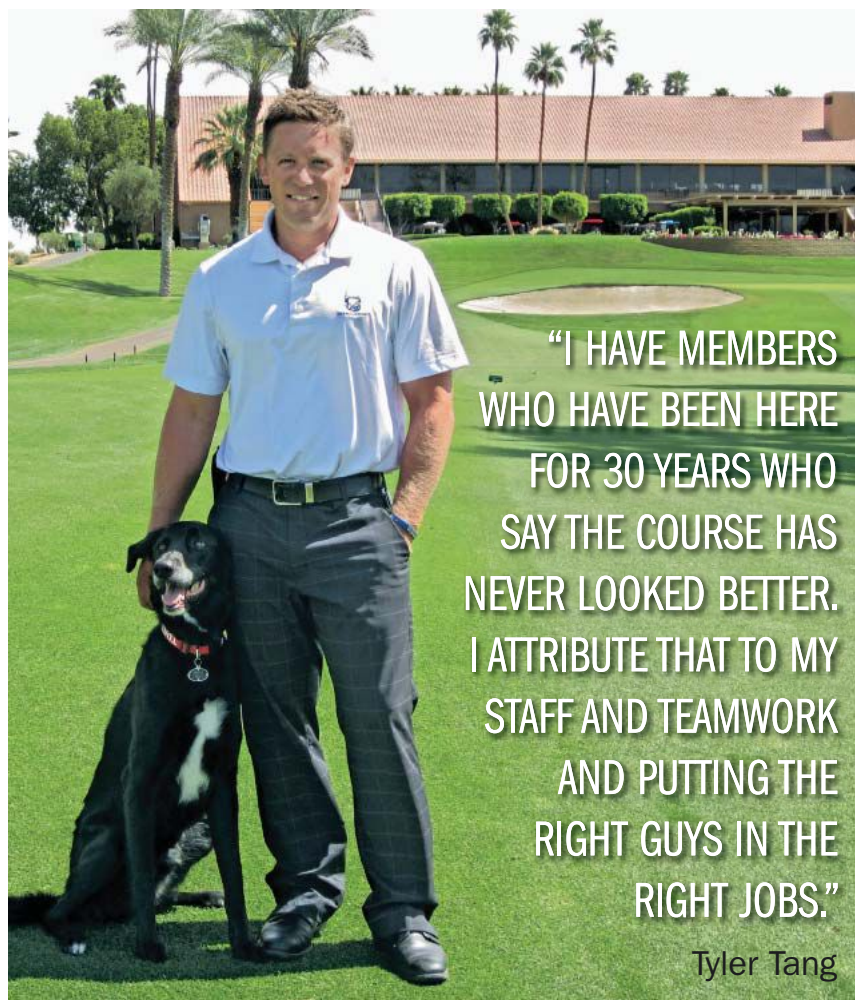
Bermuda Dunes had lost a little bit of its identity when I arrived here. The greens were let go. And my goal since I've been here is to bring back the identity of the club.

Did you have insecurities about being so young? I have no insecurities about

that, because I've always been the youngest in a leadership role. I've always been the youngest guy on the crew, and I've led guys who are old enough to be my father. I'm still the youngest here, except for the assistant I just brought on. He's 22 and knockin' it out of the park. I see myself in him — I've always had drive.

Where do you see yourself in 15 years? I'd like to be established. I'd like to be at a club with my certification, either at Bermuda Dunes or at another club that takes care of you and you take care of them.

What advice do you have for aspiring superintendents? It has a lot to do with your drive and listening to your membership, listening to your crew, listening to your surroundings. You don't know everything. Never be afraid to ask for help if you need it.



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Tyler Tang

PHOTOS COURTESY: BRIAN PALMER (TOP); TYLER TANG

Jason VanBuskirk

AGE: 29

COURSE: Stow Acres Country Club, Stow, Mass.

NUMBER OF HOLES: 36

BEEN A SUPERINTENDENT FOR: 6 years

How did you get your job at such a young age? The superintendent was a great mentor to me, and we kept in touch. When I was 22 and a year out of school, he hired me as his assistant. When he moved on in 2007, the GM and I had a Coke in the clubhouse. He stood up after an hour and said, "Congratulations, you just passed Round 1."

What is your biggest accomplishment? We played host to the Massachusetts Four Ball Championship last year. We had 288 of New England's best amateur golfers play our course. We had very few volunteers and had to have the course in shape a month earlier than usual — for a championship-caliber event. It was a fantastic event. We had a lot of high-caliber golfers that had great things to say about both courses.

Did you have insecurities about being so young? I did, and the general manager has told me to this day it was what sold him on me in this position — because I was honest. I told him that I would need to be coached on budgeting and people management. I asked him to give me time to figure it out, and he did.

Where do you see yourself in 15 years? I used to have my PGA tournament plan in place. Now that I have two kids, my life has changed pretty drastically. I work for a great owner. I work at a great club. So my goal is to be even more distinguished and accomplished than I am and give back to the local college kids.

What advice do you have for aspiring superintendents? Do your job with passion, and make sure you're working with the natural environment and your own life plan in mind. My dad always said, "Make sure you work for the company, and the company will work for you."

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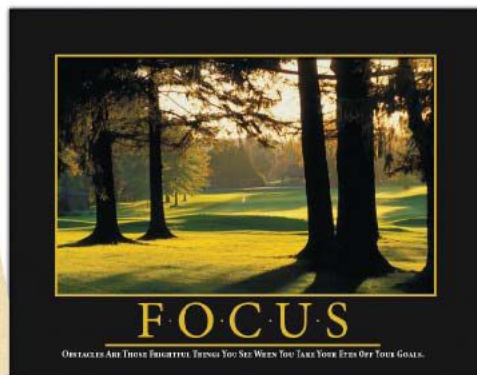
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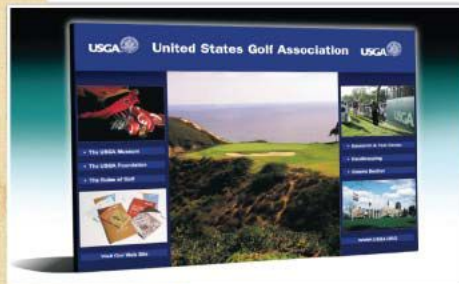
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Jason Baumeister

AGE: 30

COURSE: Craft Farms Golf Club, Gulf Shores, Ala.

NUMBER OF HOLES: 36

BEEN A SUPERINTENDENT FOR: 4 years

How did you get into your position at such a young age? I had worked here in years past as an assistant. Four years ago, I returned here to work as the assistant again. I just love this property. About the same time, management company Honours Golf came in, the superintendent left and the director of agronomy trusted me enough to let me move into the position.


What is your biggest accomplishment? Becoming a superintendent at such a young age. It put me in the spotlight, and I had to shine. It's set me apart from a lot of guys, and it helped me grow faster.

Did you have insecurities about being

so young? Never. That's one thing that's probably helped me — I'm confident. I also understand I'm young, and it's helped me in networking. Being familiar with the courses helped me, too.

Where do you see yourself in 15 years?

I would love to be a director of agronomy for several properties, to be working for a big enough management company where you still have enough properties to manage but not to where you lose the personal touch.

What advice do you have for aspiring superintendents? Don't be afraid to try something different, to try another process. Don't be afraid to challenge the status quo and ask, "Why do we do it this way?" 



WEB EXTRA BOX

To hear more from these rising stars, check out their words of wisdom at golfdom.com.

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"DON'T BE AFRAID TO CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO AND ASK, 'WHY DO WE DO IT THIS WAY?'"

Jason Baumeister

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