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# Golfdom

SINCE 1927—The Resource for Superintendents // [Golfdom.com](http://Golfdom.com)

SPRING 2024

## 2024 Tour Guide

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# Golfdom//TOUR GUIDE 2024

VOL. 80 // NO. 5

SINCE 1927—The Resource for Superintendents // Golfdom.com



A complete guide to every professional tournament and the superintendents responsible for those outstanding golf course conditions

## COLUMN

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*Jones previews our second-ever Tour Guide issue and shares his thoughts on the state of professional golf*

## TOUR GUIDE PULLOUT

**Complete list of every American and Canadian tournament**

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KORN FERRY TOUR					
Date	Tournament	Location	Superintendent	Years of Experience	College
April 1-4	Chick-fil-A Championship	The Landing Golf & Athletic Club, Savannah, Ga.	Frank Beaman	28	Kansas State University
April 18-21	Luxus Sevens Classic	Lakeview National Golf Club, Lakewood Beach, Calif.	David Ehrhart	12	Edison State Community College
April 22-26	Metrix Bank Championship	Nease Fungus Golf Club, Arlington, Texas	Eric Scott	22	Tulane State of Western Texas
May 16-19	AdamsWorld Championship	Blue Hills Country Club, Kansas City, Mo.	Logan Sandison	21	Kansas State University
May 23-26	Hall of Fame Open	Hawthorn Hills Country Club, Broward, Fla.	Kyle Ellis, OCS	26	University of Tennessee
May 28 - June 2	U.S. Health Championship	Strawberry Hill Country Club	Bill Cole	29	North Carolina State University
June 6-9	BNI Charity Pro-Am	Hambleton Club, Glen, S.C.	Jordan Strang	18	Herron-Groveson Tech
June 13-16	Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Wichita Open	Deeblee Country Club, Wichita, Kan.	Joel Reardon	23	Kansas State University
June 20-23	Comcast Solutions Championship	Wilshire Junior Golf Club, Norwalk, Conn.	Colby Carroll	27	Chatham State University
June 27-30	Wendover Health Championship	Puncher Creek Country Club, Springfield, Ill.	Brandon Reed	6	Penn State University
July 11-14	The Ascendant	TPC Colorado, Berthoud, Colo.	Kevin Mahay	15	University of Arizona
July 15-21	Pine Golf Charity Championship	Hoffland Swamp Country Club, Springfield, Mass.	Jon Phipps, OCS	16	State Technical College of Missouri
July 22-26	NIH Invitational	The Glen Club, Glenview, Ill.	Adam Wilson	12	Michigan State University
Aug. 1-4	State Championship	Chickadee Country Club, Farmington, N.H.	Wesley Vuk	23	UC Riverside
Aug. 8-11	Parade Bank Championship	The Club at Indian Creek, Omaha, Neb.	Jim Redman	19	University of Nebraska
Aug. 15-18	Majors Championship	Windermere National Golf Club, Indian Shores, Fla.	Andrew Mullin	18	Urbana Ashland
Aug. 20-26	Alcatraz Senior Open	Wilshire Country Club, Irvine, Calif.	Mark Owens, OCS, MS	18	Kansas State University
Sept. 13-16	Swiresen Bank Open for the Seaboard Foundation	The Green, Oakdale, Tenn.	Scott Cole	26	Penn State University
Sept. 19-22	Nationwide Children's Hospital Championship	Ohio State University Golf Club - South Course, Columbus, Ohio	Dennis Bowdoin	43	Ohio State University
Oct. 13-16	Bell-Evers Tour Championship	French Lick Golf Resort, French Lick, Ind.	Alan Apple	21	Purdue University

**Golfdom** Every American and Canadian tournament, with information regarding the course's superintendent, experience and education | compiled by THE GOLFDOM STAFF BROUGHT TO YOU BY: **The 2024 Complete Tour Guide Underhill**

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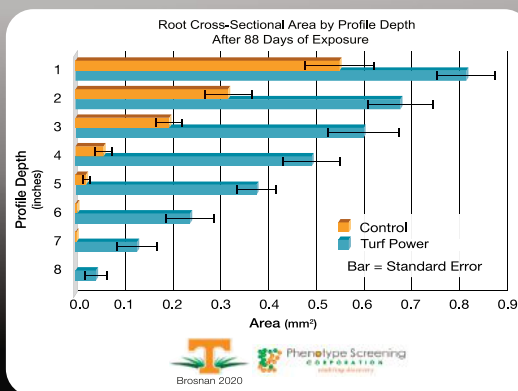
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“There are no excuses with the people profiled in this issue. There is only a date on the calendar when the course needs to be in peak condition — no questions asked.”

**SETH JONES**, *Editor-in-Chief & Associate Publisher*

# These courses are must-see TV

## Welcome to the second-ever *Golfdom* Tour Guide!

In this special issue, we change the entire format of the magazine to celebrate professional golf tournaments and the superintendents who host them. In this issue is a complete list of every professional tournament with the host superintendents, their education and years of experience in the industry — proudly sponsored by our friends at Underhill.

It also includes more than 20 interviews with these host superintendents. We talked to them about the challenges they must overcome to successfully host their tournaments, the workforce they assemble to make it come together and what advice they have for others in the business who aspire to reach the top of the profession.

This is certainly a strange time in professional golf. PGA Tour television ratings are down. The PGA Tour's final

groups have been filled with — let's call them *unfamiliar* — players. PGA Tour players and LIV golfers alike are placing the blame on the divide in the fields ... the game was better off with one field of players, which sadly, most weeks, is a thing of the past.

That's something none of us can control. The golf industry and golf fans must sit in the grandstands and see what plays out with the two entities and in turn, what can be done to inject some excitement back into the game after a few years of negativity.

One thing that can be controlled — that you (our readers) try to control, to the best of your abilities — is the conditions of the venues where these tournaments are contested. A quick flip through this issue shows some of the very best courses the game has to offer, places where golf fans dream of playing. For

those of us stuck dreaming, we can at least watch and see how these courses look on TV.

Pinehurst No. 2, Valhalla, Torrey Pines, PGA West, Harbor Shores, Detroit Golf Club — the list goes on. Collecting the dazzling photography for this issue alone was enough to get me excited for professional golf — I don't care whose name is on the leaderboard. But then as I got further into the issue and started reading the stories of the superintendents and the team supporting them... then I really got fired up.

There are commonalities among the turf professionals profiled in this issue, but above all else, it's clear that these superintendents, directors of maintenance, directors of agronomy — whatever title they go by — have a unique drive that sets them apart from others. They don't mind going toe-to-toe with

Mother Nature. A micro-burst, flooding, drought, a heat wave or a cruel winter ... there are no excuses with the people profiled in this issue. There is only a date on the calendar when the course needs to be in peak condition — no questions asked.

Which is more important? Jordan Spieth or Scottie Scheffler in the final group, or that the golf course looks amazing? I'm a Jordan Spieth fan from back when, but I'm a golf fan no matter who is on the tee.

I'm tuning in to see some drama play out in the tournament, but even if there is no drama, even if Scheffler is blowing away the field, I'm sticking around to see the golf course. I'm here to see the handiwork of the people profiled in this issue. That, to me, is must-see TV.

To the superintendents who took time away from their tournament preparations to talk shop with me and my team, thank you. To those of you in the industry striving to keep up with the conditions of TV golf, even though your workforce and your maintenance budget are a fraction of what they have, thank you, too. You're all cut from the same cloth, and we celebrate you, too.

Welcome to the 2024 Tour Guide. **G**

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# The Golfdom

## FILES

FROM THE ARCHIVE

What's it like to host a major? This story from the May 2006 issue of *Golfdom* sheds light on what it was like for Eddie Adams, former head greenkeeper at St. Andrews, during the week of the 2000 Open Championship on the Old Course. To read the full article, visit [Golfdom.com](http://Golfdom.com), and for more stories from tournament-hosting agronomists, turn the page and check out the Tour Guide.

## So you want to host a major tournament?

BY ANTHONY PIOPPPI // Contributing Editor

In the last six years, I've had the good fortune to be a volunteer staff member for four high-profile golf tournaments. If all goes as planned this year, I'll chalk up my fifth this summer as part of Bob Reynolds' crew at Newport Country Club for the U.S. Women's Open in June.

My first stint was with Eddie Adams at the 2000 Open Championship at the Old Course. I was back at the Old with Euan Grant, who was in charge for the 2005 Open. In between I worked a bit for Craig Currier at Bethpage Black for the 2002 U.S. Open. Last summer Jon Jennings was gracious enough to allow me to be part of his staff for the Walker Cup at Chicago Golf Club.

There are common threads that run through the successes each of these talented professionals was able to attain with their respective tournaments. Unlike superintendents who host tour events every year, these men were faced with new situations every day. Even at the Old Course, which hosts a European PGA Tour event, the rules are different for the Open.

The first fact I realized — and it is unequivocal — is that I would never



want to be the superintendent on whose course such tournaments are held. The amount of — how can I put this delicately — beetle droppings that comes with hosting such an event is amazing.

The tournaments, amateur or professional, garner an inordinate amount of attention from the media and golf fans around the world. Often, decisions are made by governing bodies in which the superintendent has no input and is left only to implement and defend.

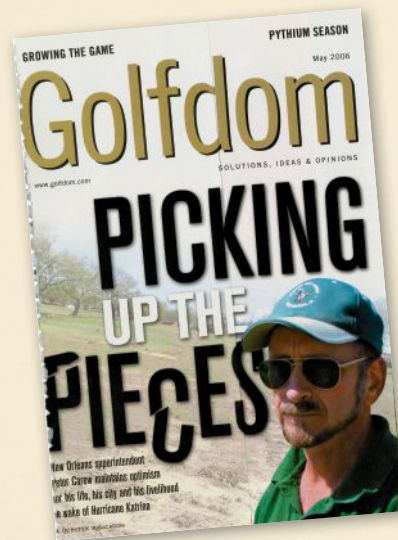
As an example, in 2000 on the

Wednesday morning of tournament week, the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews, which oversees the Open, decided to remove the crushed stone and cement pieces that covered the sidewalk behind the Road Hole green on No. 17.

As far back as anyone could remember the surface had always been that way, but the R&A came to the conclusion that if a ball ended up on the sidewalk players would be able to sweep away the stone and cement chips around the ball, classified as loose impediments, giving themselves a teed-up lie.

Even though Adams realized his crew could be better utilized elsewhere with the first tee time less than 24 hours away, he had the entire staff of 45-plus on site within minutes and in under an hour the sidewalk was clean.

As Adams said at the time, there was no reason to get worked up about such decisions. There was nothing he could do to change it, so why worry about it? **G**





# 2024 Tour Guide



## IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

<b>Farmers Insurance Open</b> .....	Jan. 24-27	<b>FedEx St. Jude Championship</b> .....	Aug. 15-18
<b>Rocket Mortgage Classic</b> .....	June 27-30	<b>Shaw Charity Classic</b> .....	Aug. 12-18
<b>KPMG Women's PGA Championship</b> .....	June 20-23	<b>The Ascendant</b> .....	July 11-14
<b>RSM Classic</b> .....	Nov. 18-24	<b>Principal Charity Classic</b> .....	May 31 - June 2
<b>U.S. Women's Open</b> .....	May 30 - June 2	<b>Memorial Health Championship</b> .....	June 27-30
<b>Magnit Championship</b> .....	Aug. 15-18	<b>BMW Charity Pro-Am</b> .....	June 6-9
<b>Price Cutter Charity Championship</b> .....	July 18-21	<b>Mitsubishi Electric Classic</b> .....	April 26-28
<b>Dick's Sporting Goods Open</b> .....	June 17-23	<b>U.S. Open</b> .....	June 13-16
<b>Regions Tradition</b> .....	May 8-12	<b>KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship</b> .....	May 23-26
<b>The American Express</b> .....	Jan. 18-21	<b>PGA Championship</b> .....	May 13-19
<b>BMW Championship</b> .....	Aug. 22-25	<b>Kroger Queen City Championship</b> .....	Sept. 19-22
<b>Travelers Championship</b> .....	June 17-23		





# Farmers Insurance Open



BY CHRIS LEWIS

**A**lthough La Jolla, Calif.'s Torrey Pines Golf Course doesn't encounter the extreme variations in temperatures that some other United States-based championship courses do, agronomy staff members face a variety of difficult challenges.

First, according to Devin Cullen, senior golf course superintendent, the property is predominantly kikuyugrass, while its tees and approaches are comprised of bermudagrass. As a result, during the winter months, growth tends to decline and off-coloring occurs.

In response, prior to hosting the PGA Tour's annual Farmers Insurance Open, staff members scalp out and overseed the entire property, except for the North and South Courses' greens. By doing so, they're able to offer PGA Tour professionals consistent and more predictable playing surfaces on both courses — after customers play nearly 160,000 rounds of golf on them between each Farmers Insurance Open.

Impressively, they complete these tasks in less than a week, as the North Course is completely scalped out and overseeded in three days, as is the South Course, roughly a month apart.

"We must bear in mind that each property has different main-

## FAST FACTS



**DATES:** Jan. 24-27

**SENIOR GOLF COURSE**

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Devin Cullen

**CLUB:** Torrey Pines Golf Course

**LOCATION:** La Jolla, Calif.

**TOUR:** PGA Tour

tenance requirements," Cullen says. "The putting greens alone require different agricultural practices, as the North Course has bentgrass greens, while the South Course has *Poa annua* greens."

Despite these differences, Cullen's staff strives to ensure every approach, fairway, green and tee box is as consistent as possible once the television cameras start rolling.

As Cullen has discovered over the past eight years, it's certainly no small task to ensure 36 holes will peak simultaneously, in order to guarantee that PGA Tour professionals have championship golf conditions. To do so, he must be surrounded by the right team members.

"A key part of our success is having the right people in the right position who can execute when needed, as needed," he says. "We are constantly doing everything we can to be proactive in every aspect of our facility. Although we'll have moments that force us to be reactive, by planning for the worst — and having an entire team that understands this key objective — we can get across the finish line each year."

**Opening doors, looking ahead to the future**

Alongside his full-time agronomy crew,



Torrey Pines' South Course has hosted a pair of majors, including Tiger Woods' last U.S. Open win in 2008 and John Rahm's first major victory in 2021.





In 2019, a Rees Jones-led renovation of Torrey Pines South Course extended the length of the course to up to 7,800 yards. Jones also helmed a renovation/redesign in 2001.

Cullen receives assistance from 26 agronomy volunteers prior to each Farmers Insurance Open. Typically, they aren't local either, as some are from countries like Canada, France, Morocco, Scotland and the United Kingdom, while others are employed at courses around the United States.

"Each year, we aim to create an agronomy program that provides individuals with educational and networking opportunities that open doors," Cullen stresses. "We hope to encourage people to find it within themselves to take the next step in their career and demonstrate how far our industry can take them."

To further inspire golf industry professionals, Torrey Pines has also been renovated in various ways the last few years. For instance, when Cullen joined the property as assistant superintendent in 2016, the North Course was being renovated. At the time, the City of San Diego, which owns and operates both courses, was focused on challenging the world's best golfers, while also offering amateurs playing opportunities they could enjoy, too.

Shortly after the North Course renovation was completed in December 2016, the South Course was restored from February to December 2019, in preparation for the 2021 U.S. Open.

"We updated the irrigation system and moved and re-shaped each bunker, while lining every single one with Capillary Concrete as well," Cullen states. "We also found and restored the original green shape."


He adds, "Finally, a few holes were altered to challenge players

and bring our canyons into play. This renovation was fun too, as we kept the course open throughout the project since we only worked on two holes at a time."

### The voice of a golf course

As Cullen reflects on the last eight years and his involvement with the Farmers Insurance Open, along with the 2021 U.S. Open, he believes that superintendents must truly understand their courses, especially as they prepare to host professional golf tournaments.

Although he recommends that superintendents talk to other superintendents and tournament hosts — in order to determine what worked or didn't work for them — they must fully know their particular courses. The primary reason? What may work for one superintendent, may not work for someone else, and vice versa.

"Understand your property and listen to it. At the end of the day, no one should know your course and how it responds to certain inputs better than you," Cullen emphasizes. "After all, we, as superintendents, are the voices that golf courses don't have." 

BROUGHT TO YOU BY







# Rocket Mortgage Classic

**ROCKET**  
Mortgage Classic

BY CHRIS LEWIS

**W**hen golf fans first visit Detroit Golf Club, they often discuss its charm, as it offers a step back in time. Although that tends to increase the club's appeal, leading to numerous patrons for the PGA Tour's annual Rocket Mortgage Classic — along with a wait list for membership — it does provide some challenges, too.

First off, the North Course is very flat with an old drainage system dating back to the 1920s. Consequently, whenever the Detroit area experiences heavy rains, the course has significant water overflow on its fairways and rough. Water has to be pumped from different areas of the course to others that drain more efficiently.

In addition, Sam Moynihan, superintendent, and his team have had to clean up the North Course after a microburst thunderstorm destroyed 15 trees in a matter of 20 minutes. Unfortunately, the damage occurred on a Sunday evening, just prior to the Monday practice round for the 2023 Rocket Mortgage Classic.

As a result of Moynihan's and his team's efficiency though, nine holes of the North Course were open for a practice round that Monday afternoon. And, by Tuesday, all 18 holes were open again, just in time for that day's practice round.

But that wasn't the worst challenge Moynihan has ever faced when leading into the Rocket Mortgage Classic. In May of last year, just one month into Moynihan's tenure as superintendent of the course, two of the course's greens were vandalized. Images of the damaged greens made the news, and on X (previously known as Twitter) the entire turf industry expressed its frustration with the vandals and its support of Moynihan and his team.

"(The vandalism) is the largest challenge I have faced while hosting the Rocket Mortgage Classic," Moynihan emphasizes. "Shortly after (the damage) we decided to strip the turf off of the green surfaces and sod them, in order to provide the best possible playing surfaces."

Within two days, Moynihan and his team stripped, floated and sodded the greens. The damage occurred six weeks prior to the tournament, which provided them just enough time to grow the sod.

"The greens performed well during the Rocket Mortgage Classic and through the rest of the year — a testament to my team members' work ethics and talents," he says.

## Preparing for the Rocket Mortgage Classic

Prior to his current role, Moynihan acquired extensive experience in hosting professional golf tournaments, as he worked at Muirfield Village Golf Club, the home of the annual Memorial Tournament and Caves Valley Golf Club, host of the 2021 BMW Championship. He has also volunteered at many professional golf tournaments, including USGA championships and PGA of America events.

During those tournaments he witnessed volunteers' positive impacts firsthand, preparing him to know what to look for when seeking volunteers for the Rocket Mortgage Classic. Without question, Moynihan has noticed the influence of volunteers even more so in 2023, as his volunteers assisted him and his team

*Continued on page 14*

### FAST FACTS



**DATES:** June 27-30

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Sam Moynihan

**CLUB:** Detroit Golf Club

**LOCATION:** Detroit, Mich.

**TOUR:** PGA Tour



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**LEAN ON US**



*Continued from page 12*

members with tree removal after the micro-burst thunderstorm hit the North Course.

"We divided everyone into different groups. Some were bucking limbs and logs, while others were hauling limbs and brush to strategically placed chippers," he says. "Others moved limbs and brush to log trucks, in order to be hauled away, while the rest of the volunteers piled up leaves and hauled them away."


A majority of the volunteers were superintendents from the Detroit area. That year, Moynihan had roughly 40 volunteers assist him, a goal he strives to maintain for future Rocket Mortgage Classics.

"I reach out to my professional network of superintendents and ask if they know anyone who would be interested in volunteering," he says. "We also use the reach of the Michigan Golf Course Superintendents Association (MIGCSA) and various social media outlets to help spread the word. We always make it a point to send out volunteers from our own staff to other professional events, in order to return the favor."

### Planning ahead

Some minor course renovation work has been completed in recent years, such as bunker enhancements, drainage improvements and tee box repairs. Detroit Golf Club is now working with golf architect Tyler Rae on developing a master plan that's focused on the North Course's restoration.

Aside from this restoration, Moynihan is focused on enhancing his team's plans for future Rocket Mortgage Classics even further. While doing so, he advises other superintendents to do the same as they implement other key goals.

"Careful planning and coordination are key, as they'll reduce superintendents' stress whenever they host events," he says. "Not to mention, by having the backing of membership while hosting events, superintendents' lives will be much easier whenever they have to put their courses back together after events have been completed." 



In 2023, vandals destroyed two Detroit GC greens a month before the Rocket Mortgage Classic. Days later, crews had the greens resodded in time for the tournament.

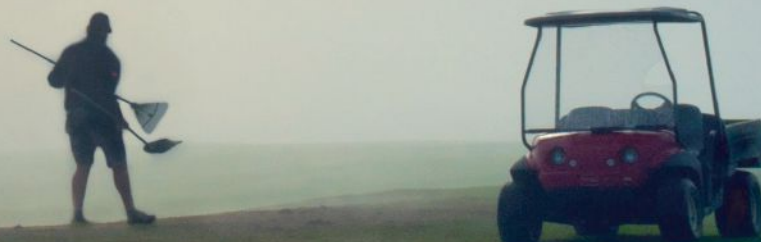
PHOTOS BY: SAM MOYNIHAN





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# KPMG Women's PGA Championship

BY CHRIS LEWIS

**W**ithout question hosting a major championship demands the very best from a golf course. And, in turn, the golf course requires the best of everyone involved in preparing its championship conditions.

Although Charlie Schauwecker, director of agronomy, takes pride in Sahalee Country Club's conditioning, he knows that his teams' expectations and standards must increase, in preparation for the LPGA Tour's KPMG Women's PGA Championship.

To prepare the Sammamish, Wash.-based course and his team for this rise in expectations, Schauwecker has a checklist of projects and issues, that must be addressed to ensure everyone is fully prepared.

"Fortunately, that checklist is now shrinking as we approach the tournament," Schauwecker says. "It's important to recognize that even though the Women's PGA Championship was the catalyst for much of this work, it will benefit members and guests at Sahalee for years to come."

## A family reunion

The Pacific Northwest region hasn't hosted many major championships in the past. This year, Sahalee will host the Women's PGA

**“One thing that really stands out to me is how many former Sahalee Country Club staff members get involved in events like this. It's almost like a family reunion when everyone comes in for the week.”**

## FAST FACTS



**DATES:** June 20-23

**DIRECTOR OF AGRONOMY:**  
Charlie Schauwecker

**CLUB:** Sahalee Country Club

**LOCATION:** Sammamish, Wash.

**TOUR:** LPGA Tour

Championship for the second time — it also hosted the championship in 2016. Outside of 2016, the club has only hosted two other majors in its history: the 1998 PGA Championship and the 2010 U.S. Senior Open.

Since major championships are so rare, the Pacific Northwest's golf and turf communities are supporting the Sahalee in as many ways as they possibly can. Schauwecker anticipates approximately 50 grounds volunteers will support Sahalee's 35 full-time agronomy staff members.

"One thing that really stands out to me is how many former Sahalee Country Club staff members get involved in events like this," he adds. "It's almost like a family reunion, when everyone comes in for the week."

## Recent renovations

Since joining Sahalee Country Club as an agronomy staff member, ahead of the 2016 Women's PGA Championship, Schauwecker has witnessed numerous improvements at the club's three nine-hole courses. Most of these improvements have supported Sahalee's tree management plan, which is a fundamental guide to the club's



management of 7,500 cedars, firs, hemlocks and maples.

"Sahalee's golf course architect, along with certified arborists and the USGA Green Section, gave advice about three key goals — how we can improve turf conditions, maintain healthy Pacific Northwestern forests and maximize a unique strategy, which trees present at Sahalee," Schauwecker says.

During the 2022/2023 offseason, the club also underwent a full bunker renovation. At the time, the courses' 87 bunkers were 25 years old and in poor condition with heavily-contaminated sand. As a result, they offered minimal functional drainage, if any at all.

Schauwecker — who was promoted to his current role just before the renovation began — chose to invest in several drainage and bunker liner technologies.

"The redesign has enhanced the courses' aesthetics and strategies, as they have more charismatic contouring and repositioning," Schauwecker adds. "Such contouring and repositioning will challenge modern-day golfers more, just in time for the professionals to encounter them at the Women's PGA Championship."




The 2024 Women's PGA Championship is Sahalee Country Club's fourth major and only the third major hosted in the Pacific Northwest this century.

### Opportunity knocks

Reflecting on his experiences with Sahalee, as it prepares to host its fourth major championship, Schauwecker advises superintendents — and other staff members — to build and maintain relationships with golf's governing bodies, as they consider hosting major championships, too.

"From there, opportunities will present themselves, while tournaments, which may be a good fit, will be identified as well," he says. "For us at Sahalee, the Women's PGA Championship is a perfect fit, and the PGA of America is a great partner."

As the tournament draws near, Schauwecker says he can't wait for area superintendent volunteers to witness the club's renovations. He's also particularly excited about watching the world's best female golfers display their skills.

"Our courses reward accurate tee shots and great ball striking, as golfers have to work it both ways to get around, under or over our trees," he stresses. "Undoubtedly, the PGA Championship will present a challenging, yet fair test for the world's best female golfers." 



The par-3 No. 8 on Sahalee CC's North Course gives golfers a challenge with a small lake separating the tee complex from the green.





# RSM Classic

BY SYDNEY FISCHER

**T**here aren't many professional tournaments held during the winter months of the year. The weather is unpredictable and it can be tricky to maintain the turf.

Ethan Jones, superintendent at Sea Island Golf Club in Saint Simons Island, Ga., says he has his fair share of challenges while hosting the RSM Classic in November.

"We have to fight with the weather a lot around that time," Jones says. "Especially with it still being hurricane season and being on the coast, we have to watch out for that."

With the end of the year being a battle with the weather for many courses, the coastal states typically experience an increase in rain during that time. Jones says their tournament in 2022 was especially rough when Hurricane Ian hit the East Coast.

"Our whole shop flooded a week before the tournament," Jones says. "It was a nightmare."

Jones says he's incredibly thankful to all the people who help during the tournament, including both crews from the Seaside Course and the Plantation Course, the staff and the volunteers.



A 1928 Walter Travis design, the Plantation Course is one of two courses at Sea Island Resort that play host to the PGA Tour's RSM Classic.

## FAST FACTS



**DATES:** Nov. 18-24

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Ethan Jones

**CLUB:** Sea Island Golf Course

**LOCATION:** Saint Simons Island, Ga.

**TOUR:** PGA Tour

In total, there are over 60 people who help get the course in tournament-ready shape.

There's no question that the week of a tournament is an all-hands-on-deck kind of event. The stakes are high and it can be an incredibly stressful time.

Jones says his dog, six-year-old Scout, acts as a morale-booster and helps keep the crew's spirits up on the job. He says she even gets an "all-access" pass for the week.

## It's in his blood

Before Jones found himself at Sea Island, there was a time when he almost took over his father's landscaping business. He grew up around grass and knew it was going to be a part of his life one way or another, though.

*Continued on page 20*

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Winter Park Golf  
Course Photo by:  
Mike Dague

# NIMITZ PRO G

## An Excellent Weapon Against Nematodes

**A**fter starting his career as a maintenance worker ten years ago, Mike Dague worked his way up to superintendent of the historic Winter Park Golf Course in Winter Park, Fla. Throughout his profession, he and his small but mighty team of four gained valuable experience through course renovations. Dague became familiar with what it took to build a golf course, but the responsibility of managing the course brought its fair share of complications.

One of the biggest challenges Dague faced were the tree-lined greens. About seven of the nine holes are roadside and shady. Located near traffic and shaded by oak trees, the sandy base attracted nematodes, damaging the turf. This was especially problematic on a specific green that received minimal sunlight.

Dague found a solution to the problem with Quali-Pro's Nimitz Pro G.

"I like that it is a granular product — and a smaller granular at that — which stays down in the fine turf

profile that we have on the greens," Dague says. "Normally when you have something to spray you have to



Mike Dague

chase it again in two weeks, but with Nimitz Pro G it's just one application per month for the three-month plan. If something can last for the entire month and show the results like it has, I would say that it is very effective. Just having that extra bit of protection with Nimitz Pro G has been night and day to cover those areas."

Dague credits his introduction to Nimitz Pro G to his close relationship with Quali-Pro Territory Manager Jeff Rampino. After attending a launch class and learning about the benefits, he decided to incorporate Nimitz Pro G into his green care routine.

"We saw results right away," Dague says. "The green has fully grown back in and thriving where there was


practically no grass in certain spots. It has definitely held up to what they showed us in the launch class and what you can expect from it."

Dague applies Nimitz on a three-month schedule. The Nimitz Pro G provided much-needed protection against nematodes, allowing the turf to recover without the need to re-sod the area.

"The greens are by far the best they've been in a while," Dague says.

He adds that he thinks it is important for superintendents to try new products. He also uses other Quali-Pro products like insecticides, fungicides and herbicides, all with success.

"When something pops up on the course, I'll send Jeff a picture and he'll respond with a helpful suggestion or a solution," Dague says. "It's great to have him as a resource."

Dague's advice for other superintendents is simple: "Just go try it! Nimitz Pro G has become a staple in my line-up and will stay that way for years to come." 





Davis Love III and Zach Johnson helped launch the RSM Classic (then called the McGladrey Classic) at Sea Island GC in 2010.

*Continued from page 18*

Once he entered college, he soon found a passion in the golf course maintenance world. He started at Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte, N.C., and worked his way up before getting an offer at Sea Island.

Despite claiming he's not very good at the game of golf, Jones says he fell in love with it and the work that goes into taking care of the courses.

"Every single day, I think, 'I love my job,'" Jones says. "I'm not too big on the waking up early part, but when you get out here and see the sunrise and the wildlife that springs up, it's life changing."

Jones says his favorite memory on the job so far was going through a full course renovation in 2019 with Davis Love III, Mark Love and Scot Sherman from Love Golf Design.

"Watching the course go from a golf course to nothing and then back to a state-of-the-art course was something I'll never forget," he says.

### **Golf never sleeps**


Throughout his career, Jones says there's one piece of advice that has stuck with him through the years.

"Our Tour Agronomist, Bland Cooper, told me, 'You can't let things slide. You have to stay on top of everything. If you see a disease, you spray there. If you see a blade out of sorts, you need to jump on it right then. You can't let things just ride out,'" Jones says.

Now, after being the superintendent at Sea Island GC for five years, Jones says the advice he has for supers who might want to maintain a tournament course one day is to "just be ready."

"Be ready for the ride because it's not like your normal golf course, especially at a resort course where play never sleeps," he says. "We don't get any breaks. With most tournament courses, you get a few weeks of preparation."

Jones says his crew only gets two days of prep time when the course is closed before the RSM Classic begins. The very next day after the tournament, he has events stacked up.

"It's nonstop," he says. "Golf never sleeps around here." 



The Seaside Course takes plenty of inspiration from St. Andrews thanks to its designer, Charles Alison.

PHOTOS BY: EVAN SCHILLER



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# 79th U.S. Women's Open

BY ROB DIFRANCO

**J**osh Saunders has spent more time than he can remember on the golf course. Growing up in southern Virginia, Saunders jokes that his local club doubled as a daycare for him during his teen years.

"I would spend the day playing 54 holes. I was never that kid that sat at the pool," he says.

Spending his summers on the course, Saunders remembers closely watching the club's three-person maintenance crew as they worked on maintaining the turf and performing irrigation repairs. From there, he was hooked.

"Three or four years later, I was sitting at the dinner table and told my parents that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a golf course superintendent and run a golf course," he says. "And honestly, since then, I've never steered away."

Now, Saunders, the superintendent at Lancaster (Pa.) Country Club, is nearing what he calls the culmination of years of hard work — hosting a major, the 2024 U.S. Women's Open.

## College years

After several years working at the same course that served as his second home, Saunders went to college at Virginia Tech, where he studied to become a superintendent.

During his time in Blacksburg, Saunders picked up a few internships at tournament-hosting courses, including Westchester Country Club in Rye, N.Y., which hosted the Buick Open — now known as the FedEx St. Jude Championship (read more on that



**FAST FACTS**  
**DATES:** May 30 - June 2  
**SUPERINTENDENT:** Josh Saunders  
**CLUB:** Lancaster CC  
**LOCATION:** Lancaster, Pa.  
**TOUR:** USGA Championship

tournament on page 44).

Saunders describes his hometown as a "one-stop-sign type town," so the move to Rye, about half an hour north of New York City, was an eye-opener.

"It was the first time I'd ever seen a walk mower and the first time I worked with a staff of that size with that many different cultures on it as well. Not to mention that it was a 36-hole property, for that matter. So, it was extremely eye-opening to me," he recalls.

While at Westchester, Saunders credits longtime Superintendent Joe Alonzi, CGCS, with encouraging him to climb the industry ladder.

## Augusta comes calling

Thanks to his relationship with Alonzi — and Alonzi's relationship with the agronomy team at Augusta National — Saunders got the opportunity of a lifetime in 2003.

"I came back home (to Virginia Tech) after finishing up my internship (at Westchester), walked into my house and my roommates were all waiting for me," he says.

"You could hear a pin drop until one of 'em

*Continued on page 24*



The 2015 U.S. Women's Open at Lancaster CC boasts the largest crowd in the event's history with 135,000 spectators. Superintendent Josh Saunders expects to break that record in 2024.

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PHOTO BY: JOSH SAUNDERS





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Lancaster CC Superintendent Josh Saunders believes his strong management team has been crucial to the course's success.

*Continued from page 22*

said, "Listen to the answering machine."

On the answering machine, Saunders had a message from Brad Owen, senior director of agronomy at Augusta National, with an internship offer. Saunders accepted and spent the spring semester of his junior year in Augusta, working through the summer.

After his year in Augusta, Saunders quickly found a job at Kinloch Golf Club in Manakin-Sabot, Va., under Peter Wendt. After spending several years at one of the top courses in his home state, Saunders took his first head superintendent position at Longue Vue Club in Pittsburgh, where he worked for seven years before moving to Lancaster CC in 2019.

### Lancaster's changes

In his five seasons at Lancaster, Saunders has gone through the wringer — nine months after he took the position, COVID-19 brought the world to a halt. After navigating his crew through the pandemic, the course embarked on a \$2.5 million renovation/restoration that saw the course remove dozens of trees and reinstate several bunkers.

While it was tedious, Saunders says the construction was a personal highlight for him as a fan of golf course architecture. Saunders worked closely with architect Jim Nagle on several projects, including restoring a long-lost bunker from the 1960s.

"There was an old berm between No. 2 and No. 9 and that's where the original No. 2 green was located," he says. "After some research, (Nagle and his team) identified that it was (a bunker) and put in a new fairway bunker that splits No. 2 and No. 9 utilizing that original greenside bunker."

In addition to the bunker projects, the Lancaster makeover cre-

ated several new tee complexes, added a 14,500 sq. ft. putting green that connects to the first tee and more than 11 acres of native plants.

### Teambuilding

Saunders' current crew at Lancaster is quite a bit larger than the three-person operation he worked on during his first years in the business.

"We have a great core group of full-timers here, that includes some past superintendents. A few of them have been here since 2015, so they've endured (the pandemic and the construction)," he says.

Over his five years at the club, Saunders has had the opportunity to develop a strong management team. Two of his team members started at Lancaster as high schoolers and have since earned their turf degrees and had internships at other courses. Saunders has added two others to this team during his tenure.

Saunders' right-hand man is Superintendent Matt Wolfe, a Purdue grad, who has been with Saunders for a long time.

"He interned for us at Kinloch. Then, he was an assistant for me at Longue Vue. After being with me for 12 years, he can finish my sentences which is a good thing and a bad thing. But he also knows how to keep me in line," Saunders laughs.

In addition to his current staff, Saunders will have reinforcements from the Women in Turf team, which has continued to grow over the last several U.S. Women's Opens.


"Right now, we have 15 total (women in turf volunteers)," Saunders says. "I also have a turf grad here on my staff as well who is female. So, there's definitely going to be a presence here and I'm excited about it. They've been great to work with."

### The final countdown

At the beginning of March, Saunders took one last getaway with his girlfriend before preparations for the tournament fully ramped up. Heading into that vacation, Saunders knew the tournament was creeping into view, but it hadn't fully hit him yet.

"We had some travel conflicts that delayed us getting back," he says. "So, I had to take a red eye to Philly and drove straight to the course for a meeting with the USGA as the flooring was being put down for the merchandising tent. When I got out of the Jeep, got in my cart and drove up there, that's when it hit me, that it's here."

Nearly a month later, Saunders says he and his crew are ready and roaring to put their hard work on display.

"Championship golf has always been a passion of mine. It's something I've always dreamt of and wanted to be a part of," he says. "I knew that, when I took this position, there was an opportunity to have that come to fruition. Five years later, I'm 60 days from hosting the U.S. Women's Open." 

PHOTOS BY: JOSH SAUNDERS





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*Craig Henderson  
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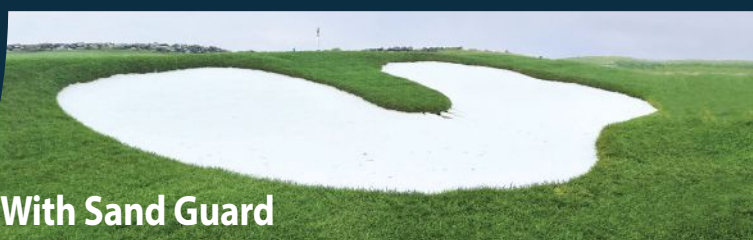
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*Stephen Hicks  
Golf Course Superintendent*



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# Magnit Championship



BY MIKE ZAWACKI

It's the Monday after St. Patrick's Day, the opening day at Metedeconk National Golf Course. This is a recent trend, considering the lackluster and unseasonable warm winters Jackson Township, N.J., and the rest of the East Coast have experienced in recent years.

As a result, the private club's members are chomping at the bit. "It's a warm spring, and everybody's itching to go," says Andrew Mallick, superintendent at Metedeconk for the last 11 years. "They were pretty much lined up ready to play this morning."

Metedeconk National is a challenging 27-hole masterpiece designed by the legendary Robert Trent Jones and his associate Roger Rulewich. This golfing gem, situated on 650 acres of rugged New Jersey wilderness, features three distinct nines that offer variety and strategic play. The first and third combine to form the championship course, which hosts the prestigious mid-August Magnit Championship.

With the unseasonable winter and early play, Mallick has taken a more conservative approach to maintaining tournament conditions on the course. His intent has been not to push the turf to its limits and get it to peak during tournament week.

This includes preparing for a worst-case scenario when it comes to the mid-to late-August weather — intense heat and drought or extreme precipitation.

"It's the weather's unpredictability that's a real challenge," Mallick says. "Last year, the Wednesday before (the Magnit), we got an inch and a half of rain. But in other years, it could be in the 90s during the day and the 70s at night. You just have to learn to adapt and adjust to what you're doing on the fly."

"We don't keep (the course) wet. We just ensure there's moisture in the ground," he adds. "I make sure our bi-weekly sprays



The 2023 Magnit Championship was the Korn Ferry Tour's first New Jersey event since the Laurel Creek Classic in 1997.

are on schedule, too. We want to make sure we have everything covered for the week of the event."

In addition, Mallick and his crew attempt to minimize wear-and-tear with solid rollers and a less invasive height of cut on their greens mowers, keep tee markers off the tournament tees and manage member expectations in the weeks leading up to this year's Magnit Championship.

Members maintain high expectations for course conditions at Metedeconk National throughout the playing season, and Mallick believes this benefits the grounds crew.

"A lot of our (tournament strategy) is pretty similar to our day-to-day operation," Mallick explains. "And our routine is pretty much dialed in by the time tournament week approaches."

Adaptability is paramount in the high-pressure world of tournament course maintenance. Course conditions will make or break a tournament, whether it's a prestigious Tour event or a club championship.

As a seasoned superintendent, Mallick understands this pressure all too well. His advice for first-timers is to build a strong support system. Surround yourself with reliable colleagues who appreciate the occasion's significance and can be counted on to execute the plan and perform under pressure.


"You really need to come up with a Plan A, B and C and keep them in your back pocket and ready to go," he says. "And you need the support of your peers, friends, and membership to succeed. You need a shoulder to lean on when you need help because you're not going to be able to do it all — even though you want to. So, you need to use all those resources at your disposal." 

PHOTO BY: ANDREW MALLICK

### FAST FACTS



- DATES:** Aug. 15-18
- SUPERINTENDENT:** Andrew Mallick
- CLUB:** Metedeconk National GC
- LOCATION:** Jackson Township, N.J.
- TOUR:** Korn Ferry Tour



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# Price Cutter Charity Championship

BY MIKE ZAWACKI

**H**ighland Springs Country Club has hosted the Price Cutter Charity Championship since 1990, solidifying its legacy as one of the Korn Ferry Tour's longest-running tournaments.

"No pressure," says Jonathan Prange, Highland Springs' superintendent since January 2022. Highland Springs is a Robert Trent Jones Jr.-designed par-72 championship course in the shadow of the Ozark Mountains about 60 miles south of Branson.

"At this point, we're pretty dialed into the event," he says

confidently, adding that, as spring approaches, his crew's main agronomic focus – aerification and preemergent control to get a handle on spring fairy ring — is creating quality playing conditions for the club's membership.

However, the longevity of the Price Cutter Charity Championship at Highland Springs creates certain high expectations and some unique challenges for the turf team. With this year's championship slated for July 18-21, successful event prep is all about timing, Prange says.

Highland Springs is located in Southern Missouri and well within the transition zone, so the course finds itself stuck between a rock and a hard place. Mid-July's brutal heat and humidity can hammer both cool-season and warm-season turf, Prange says.

"In late July, I'm trying to get fast-and-firm putting surfaces on (the course's A-1/A-4) bentgrass putting greens for the Tour players, which can be quite a challenge," he says. "And I want to come out of the Championship and still have healthy greens for my membership."

Highland Springs also features warm-season zoysiagrass on the fairways and tee boxes. Most turf managers will be aerating their zoysia by mid-July because it's actively growing. Prange says punching holes in the turf takes a back seat at Highland Springs until after the Price Cutter.

"We're in a tough spot because being located here in the transition zone, half the time it's smoking hot and the other half it's freezing cold," he says. "Throw a tour event in the middle of that, and any cultural practices must be healed and ready to go. Other courses (in the region) are raising the height of cuts, reducing mowing, putting on solid rollers and a host of other practices to get their bentgrass through the heat and humidity. I'm being asked to lower the height of cuts and do multiple mowings and



The Price Cutter Charity Championship is one of four original Korn Ferry events still on the tour's schedule in 2024.

PHOTO COURTESY: HIGHLAND SPRINGS CC



rollings per day to provide quality championship playing conditions when our turf is, frankly, quite stressed.”

Prange explains that getting through this challenge comes down to basic cultural practices.

For the warm-season zoysia, it starts back in the fall with preventative applications for patch diseases, and again in the spring.

“Right after the tournament, we do some aeration and verticutting on the zoysia and try to get it healed up before it stops growing,” Prange says, “In the spring, we do our preventative fungicides and herbicides and pretty much let our Meyer zoysia do what it does.”

Prange adds about a pound of slow-release wetting agents, as well, to ensure ample moisture to encourage the zoysia to kick in at the right time.

The cool-season bentgrass requires Prange and his crew to be more aggressive in the spring with verticutting, topdressing, organic matter management, using combination PGR products and meticulous growth data analysis to achieve the fast-and-firm conditions Tour players favor.

“To measure is to know,” Prange says. “We’re constantly measuring things — firmness, TDR (Time Domain Reflectometry) moisture and volumetric water content, Stimp meter readings — even before the Tour gets here. And then we continue those



**FAST FACTS**

**DATES:** July 18-21

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Jonathan Prange

**CLUB:** Highland Springs CC

**LOCATION:** Springfield, Mo.

**TOUR:** Korn Ferry

practices throughout the event.”

While green speed isn’t an issue, the challenge for Prange and his team is maintaining firmness. Heat and humidity wilt turf and push greens toward softness. However, the Highland Springs course is nearly perfect under the right conditions and with the right amount of moisture.

“The players are just throwing darts onto the greens because the Meyer zoysia is just meant for that time of year,” he says. “And with the right conditions, the greens are rolling between 12 and 14 that are true and smooth. They’re fast, but they’re receptive. I don’t see the tour backing me off except for very specific pin positions.”



Several high-profile names have won the Price Cutter Charity Championship at Highland Springs, including 2009 Open Championship winner Stewart Cink who won the tournament in 1996, a year before his PGA Tour debut.



# Dick's Sporting Goods Open



BY ROB DIFRANCO and BRIAN LOVE

**E**n-Joie Golf Club in Endicott, N.Y. is more than just a golf course for Superintendent Sullivan Murphy. Now in his second year in the head position, Murphy and the club go way back.

"I started working here in the summer of 2011 on the crew and I fell in love with it and decided to come back the following summer," he says. "It's kind of funny how it's worked out ... it's come full circle in a way. I started working here in high school, raking bunkers and mowing greens and stuff. And now I'm here sitting in the lead chair."

Murphy got his turf degree from SUNY Delhi and picked up several internships — including one at En-Joie — before taking his first assistant job at PGA Golf Club's Wannamaker Course. After a year as a second assistant at PGA GC in Port St. Lucie, Fla.,

**FAST FACTS**



**DATES:** June 17-23

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Sullivan Murphy

**CLUB:** En-Joie GC

**LOCATION:** Endicott, N.Y.

**TOUR:** Champions Tour

he moved an hour south to Quail Ridge CC in Boynton Beach — a course where he interned in college.

"In 2016 I moved to Florida once I got done with school and worked (at Quail Ridge) for the last six years. Then I moved back up here in the spring of 2022 to accept this position at En-Joie."

## Plenty of experience

En-Joie has a long history of hosting PGA Tour events, dating back to 1971 and the B.C. Open. The course hosted the B.C. Open annually — except for the 2005 tournament which was relocated due to a severe flood of the Susquehanna River — until 2006.

In 2007, the course hosted the first Dick's Sporting Goods Open — a Champions Tour event — and has been the tournament's home ever since. Knowing that there's always a tournament coming every year plays heavily into



Located on the Susquehanna River, the En-Joie GC crew regularly deals with parts of the course flooding during the early part of the season.

PHOTO COURTESY: EN-JOIE GC





En-Joie GC opened in 1927 with flat fairways, a handful of trees and no rough, so patrons wouldn't lose their ball during a round.

the strategy of Murphy and his crew.


"Everything we do is based on the timing of the event and what we want to see," he says. "Being in the floodplain that we are, we do have some type of flooding every year. (In 2023) we had minor flooding on several holes and that took about three days to recede. So, we kind of expect that at some point in the year, every year."

To combat the inevitable flooding, En-Joie has several pumps the crew can place throughout the property to help move water. Murphy says that, depending on the severity of the flooding, within a few days the area dries out, so his team can mow it, blow it and make it look brand new.

### Party time

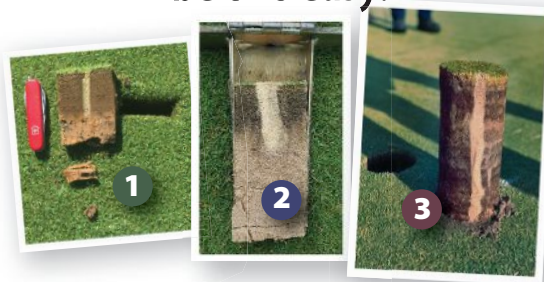
During tournament week, golfers aren't the only ones using En-Joie's 18th fairway. As part of the event, the club puts on a Friday night concert that draws a large turnout.

In 2023, Kenny Chesney performed for the crowd that sat scattered across several of Murphy's fairways.

"(The concert) is directly outside my shop and the stage itself is between the two large grandstands," he says. "You have a few thousand people scattered across the 18th fairway back into the ninth fairway adjacent to it. It's just nuts, to be honest." 



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# Regions Tradition



BY CHRIS LEWIS

**S**ince the Regions Tradition — one of the PGA Tour Champions' five major championships — is typically held in May, Greystone Golf & Country Club will likely encounter a potentially serious challenge this year: Mother Nature.

Due to the event's timing, Superintendent Travis Cook says the Birmingham, Ala.-based club is "at the mercy of Mother Nature."

"We hope she will send us good turf-growing weather early enough, so that the Founders Course, which has hosted the Regions Tradition since 2016, looks and plays well for the event," he says.

The Founders Course is one of two 18-hole championship courses on the property. More than 7,200 yards long from the back tees, the course provides PGA Tour Champions members a considerable challenge every year, as it has a 75.2 rating and a 143 slope.



Greystone G&CC hosted its first pro tournament, the Regions Charity Classic, just a year after it opened in 1991.

**FAST FACTS**



**DATES:** May 8-12

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Travis Cook

**CLUB:** Greystone Golf & Country Club

**LOCATION:** Birmingham, Ala.

**TOUR:** Champions Tour

The club's other 18-hole option, the Legacy Course, is challenging as well, as it measures approximately 7,100 yards from the back tees. Members, along with their guests, have plenty of sights to enjoy, as well as a considerable amount of daunting tasks to overcome.

"Play has increased over the last several years, as more and more golfers are learning about the beauty of both courses," Cook says. "I'm looking forward to more members and guests enjoying these amazing properties as much as possible."

## A full irrigation renovation

Last summer, Cook oversaw a complete irrigation renovation at the Founders Course. Originally, the project was estimated to be completed in nine months, via two phases, to accommodate the Regions Tradition. However, it was finished in only four months — during one phase — instead.

"Liebold Irrigation came in clutch by sending extra staff members, in order to make sure we completed the project before the fall," Cook says.

The course now has new HDPE plumbing, wire and heads.

*Continued on page 34*

PHOTO BY: TRAVIS COOK



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*Continued from page 32*

“Since we pulled in the pipe across the fairways, there was minor disruption to the turf (but) the scarring was minimal,” he says.

Along with this renovation, another key change has occurred at the club in recent years: cool-season rough has been added underneath various trees along the Founders Course’s property lines.

“These areas were previously pine straw or natural areas,” Cook says. “But, by adding cool-season rough, the Founders Course’s edges have additional color. Furthermore, they allow professionals and amateurs to have better playability — after hitting errant shots — than they would’ve had if the course’s natural woods remained.”

### Building relationships

Prior to accepting his current role in July 2021, Cook served as assistant superintendent at the Country Club of Birmingham. During his tenure from 2016 to 2021, he volunteered to work at the Regions Tradition, leading him to establish relationships with Greystone Golf & Country Club staff members.

Ultimately, Cook’s contacts notified him about the club’s available golf course superintendent job, an opportunity he “jumped at.” Since accepting the opportunity, his role has evolved quite a bit.

“When I first started, it was more about the daily grind of producing pristine conditions and being the ‘doer’ on the course,” he says. “Since then, we added an assistant superintendent to our team, leading to a total of two. Consequently, I’ve been able to move more into a leadership role, allowing me to not only advance course conditions, but my assistant superintendents’ careers, too.”


Now that Cook is the golf course superintendent, his relationships with volunteers continue to blossom, and in unique ways. For example, every year since 2021, his parents and brother have volunteered, helping the maintenance team with tasks like raking bunkers, collecting flags and tee markers.

“Their emotional support, along with my wife Kayla’s, helps me succeed throughout the week of the Regions Tradition,” he says. “It is rewarding to show my family members, who were skeptics when I first entered my career, what really goes into maintaining a golf course. Now they are big advocates of mine.”

Aside from his family, Cook also reconnects with his past teammates, including those who served as superintendents, staff members and interns. For example, last year, Thomas Gould, a former intern who currently works maintenance at Chicago Golf Club, volunteered all week long.

“A main highlight of working with volunteers is spending a week with people I’ve mentored and hearing how great their careers are now,” Cook says.

Usually, Cook has roughly 50 volunteers who work throughout the United States. Some have been discovered through social media, while others arrived through national networking opportunities. A majority of volunteers are local though, ranging from superintendents, to technicians, to vendors.

“We have tremendous support when it comes to industry partnerships, which help provide meals, equipment loaners and donations that allow us to offer an enjoyable environment to everyone involved,” he says. 



Travis Cook, superintendent at Greystone G&CC, says seeing former team members return as volunteers during the Regions Tradition is one of the highlights of tournament week.

PHOTO BY: TRAVIS COOK



# KORN FERRY TOUR

Date	Tournament	Location	Superintendent	Years of Experience	College
April 4-7	Club Car Championship	The Landings Golf & Athletic Club, Savannah, Ga.	Pace Anderson	20	Kansas State University
April 18-21	Lexcom Suncoast Classic	Lakewood National Golf Club, Lakewood Ranch, Fla.	Joel Ehrhart	12	Edison State Community College
April 25-28	Veritex Bank Championship	Texas Rangers Golf Club, Arlington, Texas	Brick Scott	22	Tarleton State / Western Texas
May 16-19	AdventHealth Championship	Blue Hills Country Club, Kansas City, Mo.	Logan Spurlock	21	Kansas State University
May 23-26	Visit Knoxville Open	Holston Hills Country Club, Knoxville, Tenn.	Ryan Blair, CGCS	28	University of Tennessee
May 30 - June 2	UNC Health Championship	Raleigh (N.C.) Country Club	Billy Cole	20	North Carolina State University
June 6-9	BMW Charity Pro-Am	Thornblade Club, Greer, S.C.	Jordan Strange	16	Horry-Georgetown Tech
June 13-16	Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Wichita Open	Crestview Country Club, Wichita, Kan.	Josh Troutman	23	Kansas State University
June 20-23	Compliance Solutions Championship	Jimmie Austin OU Golf Club, Norman, Okla.	Cody Elwood	27	Oklahoma State University
June 27-30	Memorial Health Championship	Panther Creek Country Club, Springfield, Ill.	Brandon Razo	9	Penn State University
July 11-14	The Ascendant	TPC Colorado, Berthoud, Colo.	Kevin Maloy	15	University of Arizona
July 18-21	Price Cutter Charity Championship	Highland Springs Country Club, Springfield, Mo.	Jon Prange, CGCS	18	State Technical College of Missouri
July 25-28	NV5 Invitational	The Glen Club, Glenview, Ill.	Adam Wiles	12	Michigan State University
Aug. 1-4	Utah Championship	Oakridge Country Club, Farmington, Utah	Wesley York	23	UC Riverside
Aug. 8-11	Pinnacle Bank Championship	The Club at Indian Creek, Omaha, Neb.	Jim Nedrow	19	University of Nebraska
Aug. 15-18	Magnit Championship	Metedeconk National Golf Club, Jackson Township, N.J.	Andrew Mallick	18	UMass-Amherst
Aug. 22-25	Albertsons Boise Open	Hillcrest Country Club, Boise, Idaho	Matt Gourlay, CGCS, MG	19	Kansas State University
Sept. 12-15	Simmons Bank Open for the Snedeker Foundation	The Grove, College Grove, Tenn.	Scott Cole	24	Penn State University
Sept. 19-22	Nationwide Children's Hospital Championship	Ohio State University Golf Club - Scarlet Course, Columbus, Ohio	Dennis Bowsher	45	Ohio State University
Oct. 3-6	Korn Ferry Tour Championship	French Lick Golf Resort, French Lick, Ind.	Russ Apple	25	Purdue University

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Date	Tournament	Location	Superintendent	Years of Experience	College
Jan. 4-7	The Sentry	Plantation Course at Kapalua (Maui, Hawaii)	Andrew Rebman	19	University of Arizona
Jan. 8-14	Sony Open	Waialae Country Club, Honolulu	Dave Nakama, CGCS	23	University of Hawaii
Jan. 15-21	The American Express	La Quinta (Calif.) Country Club	Tim Putnam	23	Pacific Lutheran University / Oregon State University
Jan. 15-21	The American Express	PGA West Pete Dye Stadium Course, La Quinta, Calif.	Michael Martic	13	Rutgers University
Jan. 15-21	The American Express	PGA West Jack Nicklaus Tournament Course, La Quinta, Calif.	Denner Hart	6	University of Guelph / Olds College of Agriculture & Technology
Jan. 22-27	Farmers Insurance Open	Torrey Pines GC (South Course), San Diego, Calif.	Devin Cullen	12	Penn State University
Jan. 29 - Feb. 4	AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am	Pebble Beach (Calif.) Golf Links	Pete Bachman, CGCS	8	Penn State University
Jan. 29 - Feb. 4	AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am	Spyglass Hill GC, Pebble Beach, Calif.	Robert Yeo	39	University of Hawaii
Feb. 5-11	WM Phoenix Open	TPC Scottsdale (At&T) Stadium Course	Brandon Reese	15	Texas Tech University
Feb. 12-18	The Genesis Invitational	The Riviera Country Club, Pacific Palisades, Calif.	Marshall Dick	11	Cal Poly Technical State University
Feb. 29 - March 3	Cognizant Classic in the Palm Beaches	PGA National Resort (The Champion), Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.	Andrew Wilson	13	University of Minnesota
March 4-10	Arnold Palmer Invitational	Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill Club & Lodge, Orlando, Fla.	Chris Flynn, CGCS	25	SUNY Cobleskill
March 11-17	The Players Championship	TPC Sawgrass (The Players Stadium Course), Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.	Jeff Plotts	30	University of Georgia
March 18-24	Valspar Championship	Innisbrook Resort (Copperhead Course), Palm Harbor, Fla.	Ryan Stewart	22	
March 25-31	Texas Children's Houston Open	Memorial Park Golf Course, Houston, Texas	Parker Henry	12	North Carolina State University
April 1-7	Valero Texas Open	TPC San Antonio (Texas) Oaks Course	Roby Robertson, CGCS	36	Kansas State University
April 8-14	The Masters	Augusta (Ga.) National Golf Club	Brad Owen	37	Penn State University
April 15-21	RBC Heritage	Harbour Town Golf Links, Hilton Head, S.C.	Jonathan Wright	28	University of Kentucky
April 22-28	Zurich Classic of New Orleans	TPC Louisiana, Avondale, La.	Tyler McCool	14	Mississippi State University
April 29 - May 5	AT&T Byron Nelson	TPC Craig Ranch, McKinney, Texas	Jim Osborne	24	Iowa State University
May 6-12	Wells Fargo Championship	Quail Hollow Club, Charlotte, N.C.	Keith Wood	22	University of South Carolina / Rutgers University
May 6-12	Myrtle Beach Classic	Dunes Golf and Beach Club, Myrtle Beach, S.C.	Steve Hamilton, CGCS	28	Virginia Tech University
May 13-19	PGA Championship	Valhalla Golf Club, Louisville, Ky.	John Ballard	22	University of Tennessee
May 20-26	Charles Schwab Challenge	Colonial Country Club, Fort Worth, Texas	Scott A. Ebers, CGCS	29	Texas A&M University
May 27 - June 2	RBC Canadian Open	Hamilton Golf and Country Club, Ancaster, Ontario	Jordan Kitchen, AGS	16	University of Guelph
June 3-9	The Memorial Tournament	Muirfield Village Golf Club, Dublin, Ohio	Chad Mark	8	Ohio State University
June 10-16	U.S. Open	Pinehurst Resort and Country Club (Course No. 2)	John Jeffreys	24	North Carolina State University
June 17-23	Travelers Championship	TPC River Highlands, Cromwell, Conn.	Jason Cannata	13	UConn
June 24-30	Rocket Mortgage Classic	Detroit (Mich.) Golf Club	Sam Moynihan	7	West Virginia University
July 1-7	John Deere Classic	TPC Deere Run, Silvis, Ill.	Jonathan Graham	16	University of Nebraska
July 15-21	Barracuda Championship	Tahoe Mountain Club (Old Greenwood), Truckee, Calif.	Joe Valente	13	St. Joseph's of Maine / UMass Amherst
July 22-28	3M Open	TPC Twin Cities, Blaine, Minn.	Joe Roistad	15	North Dakota State University
Aug. 5-11	Wyndham Championship	Sedgefield Country Club, Greensboro, N.C.	Chad Cromer	23	Appalachian State
Aug. 12-18	FedEx St. Jude Championship	TPC Southwind, Memphis, Tenn.	Nick Bisanz	21	Ogeechee Technical College
Aug. 19-25	BMW Championship	Castle Pines Golf Club, Castle Rock, Colo.	Scott Pavalko	24	Ohio State University / Kent State University
Aug. 26 - Sept. 1	Tour Championship	East Lake Golf Club, Atlanta, Ga.	Ralph Kepple, CGCS	41	Ohio State University





# CHAMPIONS

Date	Tournament	Location	Superintendent	Years of Experience	College
Jan. 15-20	Mitsubishi Electric Championship	Hualalai GC, Kaupulehu-Kona, Hawaii	Dan Husek	18	Southern Illinois University
Feb. 12-18	Chubb Classic	Thiuron Golf Club, Naples, Fla. (Black)	Grayson Grainger	21	Horry-Georgetown Tech
March 4-10	Cologuard Classic	La Paloma Country Club, Tucson, Ariz.	Daniel Mayfield	12	University of Arizona
March 18-24	Hoag Classic	Newport Beach (Calif.) Country Club	Scott Dey	13	Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
March 25-31	The Galleri Classic	Mission Hills Country Club, Rancho Mirage, Calif.	Jonas Conlan	23	Michigan State University
April 15-21	Invited Celebrity Classic	Las Colinas Country Club, Irving, Texas	Michael Moore	25	Western Texas College
April 22-28	Mitsubishi Electric Classic	TPC Sugarloaf, Duluth, Ga.	Kyle Worthy	14	Clemson University
April 29 - May 5	Inspire Invitational	The Woodlands (Texas) Country Club	Chris Hartman	24	Sam Houston State University
May 6-12	Regions Tradition	Greystone Golf & Country Club, Birmingham, Ala.	Travis Cook	13	Florida Gateway College
May 20-26	KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship	Harbor Shores Resort, Benton Harbor, Mich.	Matthew Vollrath	8	Rutgers University
May 27 - June 2	Principal Charity Classic	Wakonda Club, Des Moines, Iowa	Dane Wilson	19	Western Kentucky University
June 3-9	American Family Insurance Championship	University Ridge Golf Course, Madison, Wis.	Phil Davidson	30	Horry-Georgetown Tech
June 17-23	DICK'S Open	En-Jolie Golf Club, Endicott, N.Y.	Sullivan Murphy	10	SUNY Delhi
June 24-30	U.S. Senior Open Championship	Newport Country Club, Newport, R.I.	Chris Coen	19	UMass
July 8-14	Kaulig Companies Championship	Firestone Country Club, Akron, Ohio	Larry Napora	40	Penn State University
Aug. 5-11	Boeing Classic	The Club at Snoqualmie (Wash.) Ridge	Ryan Gordon	19	Oregon State University
Aug. 12-18	Shaw Charity Classic	Canyon Meadows Golf & Country Club, Calgary, Alberta, Canada	Ken MacKenzie	41	Fairview College
Aug. 19-25	The Ally Challenge	Warwick Hills Golf & Country Club, Grand Blanc, Mich.	Chris Kucienba	15	University of Michigan
Sept. 2-8	Ascension Charity Classic	Nowood Hills Country Club, St. Louis, Mo.	Michael Null	43	Iowa State University
Sept. 9-15	Sanford International	Minnehaha Country Club, Sioux Falls, S.D.	David Swift	33	Penn State University
Sept. 16-22	PURE Insurance Championship	Pebble Beach (Calif.) Golf Links	Pete Bachman, CGCS	8	Penn State University
Sept. 30 - Oct. 6	Constellation Fuyak & Friends	Timuquana Country Club, Jacksonville, Fla.	Alan Brown	23	University of Tennessee
Oct. 7-13	SAS Championship	Prestonwood Country Club, Cary, N.C.	Lee Hancock	27	Clemson University
Oct. 14-20	Dominion Energy Charity Classic	The Country Club of Virginia, Richmond, Va.	Christian Sain	34	North Carolina State University
Oct. 21-27	Simmons Bank Championship	Pleasant Valley Country Club, Little Rock, Ariz.	Don Armbrust	13	UMass
Nov. 4-10	Charles Schwab Cup Championship	Phoenix (Ariz.) Country Club	Craig Werline	31	Ohio State University
Dec. 9-15	World Champions Cup	The Concession Golf Club, Bradenton, Fla.	Tyler Casey	23	Michigan State University
Dec. 16-22	PNC Championship	Ritz-Carlton Golf Club, Orlando, Fla.	Joshua Kelley	18	Illinois State University

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Date	Tournament	Location	Superintendent	Years of Experience	College
Jan. 18-21	Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions	Lake Nona Golf & Country Club, Orlando, Fla.	Nick Dolimpo	8	Delaware Valley University
Jan. 25-28	LPGA Drive On Championship	Bradenton Country Club, Bradenton, Fla.	Jackson Edwards	12	Ohio State University
March 18-24	Fir Hills Sent Pak Championship	Paros Verdes Golf Club, Palos Verdes Estates, Calif.	Steve Manriquez	9	San Diego State University / Mt. San Antonio
March 28-31	Ford Championship	Seville Golf and Country Club, Gilbert, Ariz.	Zachary Hill	8	Penn State University
April 3-7	T-Mobile Match Play	Shadow Creek Golf Course, Las Vegas, Nev.	Greg Niendorf	19	Penn State University
April 18-21	The Chevron Championship	The Club at Carlton Woods, The Woodlands, Texas	Tim Huber, CGCS	22	Penn State University
April 22-28	JM Eagle LA Championship	Wilshire Country Club, Los Angeles, Calif.	Brian Sullivan, MG, CGCS	40	Michigan State University / Penn State University
May 8-14	Cognizant Founders Cup	Upper Montclair Country Club, Clifton, N.J.	Michael Brunelle, CGCS	34	University of Massachusetts
May 16-19	Mizuho Americas Open	Liberty National Golf Club, Jersey City, N.J.	Greg James	34	Penn State University
June 3-9	ShopRite LPGA Classic	Seaview A Doice Hotel (Bay Course), Galloway, N.J.	Michael Bair	27	Penn State University
June 10-16	Meijer LPGA Classic for Simply Give	Blythefield Country Club, Belmont, Mich.	Collin Romanick	26	Penn State University
June 20-23	KPMG Women's PGA Championship	Sahalee Country Club, Sammamish, Wash.	Charlie Schauwecker	8	University of Missouri
May 28 - June 2	U.S. Women's Open	Lancaster (Pa.) Country Club	Josh Saunders	22	Virginia Tech University
July 15-21	Dana Open	Highland Meadows Golf Club, Sylvania, Ohio	Greg Pattinson	21	Michigan State University
June 24-30	Dow Great Lakes Bay Invitational	Midland (Mich.) Country Club	Kevin Welp	31	Michigan State University
July 22-28	CPKC Women's Open	Earl Grey Golf Club, Calgary, Alberta	Terry Shinkewski		
Aug. 1-4	Portland Classic	Columbia Edgewater Country Club, Portland, Ore.	Jim Myers, CGCS	25	Ferris State / University of Georgia / Ohio State University
Aug. 29 - Sept. 1	FM Global Championship	TPC Boston, Norton, Mass.	Tom Brodeur	42	UMass
Sept. 10-15	Solheim Cup	Robert Trent Jones GC, Gainesville, Va.	Scott Furlong	45	University of Maryland
Sept. 19-22	Kroger Queen City Championship	TPC River's Bend, Maineville, Ohio	Ian Schlather	22	Penn State University
Sept. 27-29	Walmart NW Arkansas Championship	Pinnacle Country Club, Rogers, Ark.	Chase Turpin	10	University of Arkansas
Nov. 6-9	LOTTE Championship	Hoakalei Country Club, Ewa Beach, Hawaii	Ian Hunt	18	Oregon State University
Nov. 14-17	The Annika	Pelican Golf Club, Belleair, Fla.	Terry Kennelly	26	Michigan State University
Nov. 21-24	QME Group Tour Championship	Thiuron Golf Club, Naples, Fla. (Gold Course)	Grayson Granger	21	Horry-Georgetown Tech
Dec. 13-15	Grant Thornton Invitational	Thiuron Golf Club, Naples, Fla. (Gold Course)	Grayson Granger	21	Horry-Georgetown Tech

**Editor's note:** This list was compiled by the Golfdom staff using GCSAA Tournament Fact Sheets ([GCSAA.org/Media/Tournament-Fact-Sheets](https://www.gcsaa.org/Media/Tournament-Fact-Sheets)) as well as phone calls and emails to attempt to make the list as complete as possible. In some cases, we could not confirm information by press time. For corrections and updates for next year's list, email [Golfdom\\_Editor-in-Chief\\_Seth\\_Jones\\_sjones@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:Golfdom_Editor-in-Chief_Seth_Jones_sjones@northcoastmedia.net).

**Note regarding job titles:** Many of the people listed under the header of Superintendent go by various job titles, including Director of Agronomy, Director of Grounds and Director of Golf Course Maintenance, among others.



Date	Location	Superintendent	Years of Experience	College
Feb. 8-10	Las Vegas (Nev.) Country Club	Luis Pacheco		
April 5-7	Trump National Doral (Fla.) Golf Course	Rob Wagner	26	University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point
June 7-9	Golf Club of Houston (Texas)	John Freeman	52	Texas A&M University
June 21-23	The Grove, College Grove, Tenn.	Scott Cole	24	Penn State University
Aug. 16-18	The Old White at the Greenbrier, White Sulphur Springs, W.Va.	Kelly Shumate	25	Pfeiffer University



# The American Express

BY CHRIS LEWIS

**S**ince hosting the PGA Tour's The American Express in 2016, Head Superintendent Denver Hart and his team have encountered one challenge in particular: the short timeline between overseeding and tournament week.

After all, in the Coachella Valley — home to the tournament's hosts, La Quinta Country Club, PGA West Pete Dye Stadium Course and PGA West Nicklaus Tournament Course — overseeding tends to occur in mid-October. Each course is thoroughly renovated for roughly four weeks every year, prior to being reopened in mid-November. There is a two-month period between the courses' opening day and the start of The American Express.

"Because of the short window, the team works off of a very calculated weekly schedule, in order to enhance the golf courses' various details, adjust mowing heights and promote the playing surfaces' maturity," Hart says.

This short window is challenging in another way: unlike most professional golf tournaments that have one host course, The American Express has three, and they must be consistent, especially with regard to their




Home to six golf courses, PGA West sits at the base of Martinez Mountain, part of the 30-mile Santa Rosa mountain range.

playing surfaces. Hart oversees PGA West's Pete Dye Stadium Course's and Nicklaus Tournament Course's agronomy practices.

"We need a lot of time and resources to ensure 54 holes are consistent," Hart says. "We strive to provide competitors playing surfaces that have little to no variation in greens pace, smoothness, trueness and firmness. Working alongside the PGA Tour, we achieve this by dedicating multiple teams — in the weeks before and during the tournament — to collect morning and afternoon data across all three courses."

Hart adds that the courses utilize the latest in the industry's technologies — the GS3 ball, drones, robotic mowers and soil moisture scanners, to name a few.

"With data, we're able to make any necessary adjustments to our maintenance practices and provide PGA Tour members the consistency we're looking for," he says. 

## FAST FACTS



**DATES:** Jan. 18-21

**HEAD SUPERINTENDENT:**  
Denver Hart

**CLUB:** PGA West

**LOCATION:** La Quinta, Calif.

**TOUR:** PGA Tour

PHOTO COURTESY: PGA WEST





BMW  
CHAMPIONSHIP

# BMW Championship

BY MIKE ZAWACKI

**T**revor Meints is used to change. Every year since he arrived at Castle Pines Golf Club in 2015 as an assistant superintendent, the Nicklaus-designed course has undergone continuous renovations. For example:

- 2015: New greens installation.
- 2016: Renovation of ponds at No. 17 and No. 10.
- 2018: New HDPE irrigation system.
- 2019: New water features on No. 9 and No. 17.
- 2017-2021: Extensive bunker, tee surround and green surround renovations, including redoing the par-5 No. 8 going into the green, and the whole practice range.
- 2022-23: Green surrounds, restarting and reassigning fairway lines.

This year has been no different, as the course has begun addressing drainage issues on specific holes throughout Castle Pines. The course, renowned for its tight fairways and demanding approach shots, will host the BMW Championship this year from Aug. 22-25.

“We have a lot of drainage going in on some of our most trou-



ble some holes,” says Meints, superintendent of grounds and agronomics. He reports directly to Scott Valco, Castle Pines’ director of golf course and grounds. “We’ll do four this season – the practice, No. 2, 10 and 14. And then we’ll continue into next fall with more holes until they’re all done.”

**FAST FACTS**



**DATES:** Aug. 22-25

**SUPERINTENDENT OF GROUNDS AND AGRONOMICS:** Trevor Meints

**CLUB:** Castle Pines Golf Club

**LOCATION:** Castle Rock, Colo.

**TOUR:** PGA Tour

The 10th hole, a downhill par 4 already notorious for its difficulty, is poised to become a real test of nerve at this year’s BMW Championship. Thanks to the recent drainage work, balls will roll further down the slope, potentially flirting with the adjacent pond.

“Drying out (No. 10 green) will increase competition because more balls are going to roll further downhill,” Meints says. “And with the way (tournament players) are hitting the ball as far as they are now, that pond is going to come into play quite a bit. I foresee (No. 10) being a very difficult hole to get down the fairway, especially with us drying it out. The balls are going to roll out a lot longer, and if you can stay to the front before you get to the pond, it will be a big get for the players.”

Maintaining a championship-caliber course while undergoing renovations is no

PHOTO COURTESY: CASTLE PINES GC



easy feat, admits Meints. His team has faced the daunting task of relaying nearly 40 acres of bentgrass sod over the past five years – a monumental effort to get roots established with Colorado’s arid summer climate.

“Regrowing and re-establishing sod has been very difficult, especially in this type of dry climate throughout the summer and into late summer here in Colorado,” he says of the Castle Rock-based course, which is situated 30 miles south of Denver and 35 miles north of Colorado Springs. “We’re trying to keep (the new sod) watered and keep it growing and get it established really quickly.”

Meints tips his hat to the skills and collective agronomic know-how of his grounds crew, who he says deserves much of the credit for their sodding success.

“Many of the guys have been with us for five to seven years, and they really understand what’s going on (with the course) and what we need to do to get (the turf) to grow,” he says.

### The secret stuff

So, what are their sod secrets to get the course into championship-level playing condition?

First and foremost, minimizing foot traffic is paramount to allow the new turf to establish. Irrigation plays a vital role in this process, as well. Meints says this involves meticulous moisture monitoring and hand watering.

“The end of July is usually monsoon season for us. And then in August, it can get really dry, really quick. Two years ago, we went August, September and October with under a tenth of an inch of rain. But then last year, we did get a little bit of rain. So, managing that – especially heading into the late August BMW Championship – can be a big challenge for us.”

Nutrition is critical, as well, and it starts before the sod is even unrolled.

“We throw a little bit of fertilizer down underneath the sod to help it out and to keep it growing,” he says. “We have a special organic fertilizer that we bring in — it’s got a little bit of compost in it — helps the roots establish. We’ve learned getting some organics down early really helps out instead of placing (the sod) on bare ground.”



A series of renovations and improvements over the last decade have the Nicklaus-designed Castle Pines GC ready to host its first PGA Tour event since 2006.



Located 6,400 ft. above sea level, PGA Tour pros will get a little extra distance on their drives at Castle Pines.

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# Travelers Championship



BY CHRIS LEWIS

**E**ach year, Jason Cannata, superintendent at Cromwell, Conn.'s TPC River Highlands, challenges himself and his agronomy team members to exceed their prior achievements, as they prepare to host the annual Travelers Championship.

While reaching "for new heights," they tend to overcome one significant challenge more than any other: time.

"Our pursuit of perfection often leaves us racing against the clock," he says.

To achieve their lofty goals despite their time constraints, Cannata ensures he and his team members are focused on three particular aspects for consistent success — communication, organization and teamwork — regardless of how large or small a task may be.

"Amidst the endless lists of tasks, which are meticulously organized and prioritized on spreadsheets and job boards, we remain vigilant not to overlook the significance of the smaller details and their timing," Cannata says. "This, along with constant communication, oversight and coordination among team members, are essential throughout the progression of our tourna-

ment preparations."

Based on his past experiences, Cannata is certainly prepared for virtually any task. After all, he's been involved in 13 of the last 14 Travelers Championships, while serving in numerous capacities. He has also worked for other courses and clubs, which have prepared him for his current position, while transitioning between TPC River Highlands, The Golf Club of Avon and New Haven Country Club.

"Each opportunity has offered unique agronomic and management approaches that have contributed to the foundation of my career," he reflects.

This year, he will be involved with his second Travelers Championship as TPC River Highlands' superintendent, a role he acquired a few weeks before the 2023 edition of the tournament.

As Cannata prepares for yet another Travelers Championship, he is fully embracing the opportunity this time around, as he has had time to become more comfortable with — and confident in — his role. He is also thankful for each of his team members, whom he believes will assist him with many successful Travelers Championships down the road.

"I'm incredibly fortunate to lead an exceptional team, comprised of seasoned professionals in assistant superintendent roles," he says. "I also have promising newcomers who are eager to apply their classroom knowledge to their budding careers."

## A core group of volunteers

There is no doubt about it. Without the efforts of several volunteers, Cannata and his agronomy team simply wouldn't be able to achieve the level of success they've had in recent years. Renowned for their dedication to TPC River Highlands, the Travelers Championship and Cannata and his team, a "core group of volunteers," as Cannata calls them, have been available for over a decade.

### FAST FACTS



**DATES:** June 17-23

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Jason Cannata

**CLUB:** TPC River Highlands

**LOCATION:** Cromwell, Conn.

**TOUR:** PGA Tour

"Year after year, they return to support us," he says. "The longevity of this core group is remarkable."

Offering enthusiasm that is "infectious," Cannata adds that the volunteers are often so eager to be involved that they actually compete with each other, to see who can submit their volunteer applications back to TPC River Highlands first.

"Like most stops on the PGA Tour, our volunteer count typically lands in the 40 to 60 range, far less than the triple digit numbers a major championship may draw," he states. "However, the story is more about the commitment of our core volunteers than the sheer number of volunteers. Their unwavering support is crucial to our event's success."

As he looks ahead to the future, Cannata continues to welcome more volunteers. Simply put, the more, the better, as their influence is undeniable.

"Every year we strive to enhance our volunteer program to maintain local engagement and interest," he says. "The camaraderie and support within our volunteer community exemplify our industry's spirit and highlight our work's rewarding nature."

### Closer than ever

Along with his team members and core group of volunteers, Cannata collaborates with various PGA Tour and Travelers Championship employees. While collaborating with them, Cannata and other staff members began to enhance TPC River Highlands last fall, as they sought to elevate its overall playability and infrastructure.

"Through this joint initiative and several small adjustments, we have altered TPC River Highlands to challenge PGA Tour members more, especially when it comes to their accuracy," he says.



No. 13 at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Conn., made headlines in 2021 after a 75-foot-deep sinkhole opened in the aftermath of Hurricane Ida.



One of the course's more dangerous holes for golfers, the par-4 No. 15 at TPC River Highlands requires a careful approach.

Due to these alterations, fans will also be closer to the tournament's action than they've ever been before.

"These enhancements promise to inject an extra dose of excitement into the week," Cannata says, "while providing an improved fan experience, too." **G**





# FedEx St. Jude Championship

**FedEx** St. Jude  
CHAMPIONSHIP™

BY BRIAN LOVE

**N**ick Bisanz's journey to TPC Southwind in Memphis, Tenn., began in a unique place. Before he got his turf degree from Ogeechee Technical College in Statesboro, Ga., Bisanz worked in a greenhouse on the retail side of the operation.

"That was always my summer job," Bisanz says. "(But) I had always enjoyed being outside and playing golf."

While at Ogeechee, Bisanz studied horticulture before the school announced the launch of a turf management program. That turned out to be just what he needed to kickstart a career as a superintendent.

"(After graduation) I went right from there and did my internships at Atlanta Country Club," he says. "From there, some things fell into place and some people were moving on and I climbed the ladder to become an assistant."

Bisanz eventually moved on to TPC Scottsdale, where he worked as a senior assistant for nearly six years. In 2012, Bisanz landed his first head superintendent position at The Heritage Club in Mason, Ohio, before joining TPC Southwind — which has hosted the FedEx St. Jude Championship event since 1989 — five years later.

## New improvements

Southwind has seen several improvement projects over recent



The PGA Tour has a long history in Memphis, Tenn., with a tournament taking place in the city every year since 1958.

## FAST FACTS



**DATES:** Aug. 15-18

**DIRECTOR OF GOLF COURSE  
MAINTENANCE OPERATIONS:**

Nick Bisanz

**CLUB:** TPC Southwind

**LOCATION:** Memphis, Tenn.

**TOUR:** PGA Tour

years. In 2017, the course had extensive work done on several greens and fairways. Then, from 2019 through 2020, Bisanz and his team worked through a complete bunker renovation.

"We just finished the last five before last year's event. We finished the whole project in about two years," he says.

The changes will keep on coming, as Southwind will rebuild and resurface all 18 greens complexes, practice greens and tee boxes while also upgrading parts of its irrigation system starting in November.

## Community bonding

As time inches closer to the event, Bisanz and his crew have plenty of work to do, including a full-course aerification, taking place six weeks before the start of the championship.

"We're working on getting down to our desired heights of cut from that point on," he says. "It's a little scary getting out and being as aggressive as we are on the golf course mechanically six weeks before the event."

Despite that, Bisanz says his team is always ready for the challenge, especially with the tournament's long history being a point of pride for the surrounding community.


"It hits home for people here because a lot of people work for FedEx and everybody rallies behind St. Jude," he says. "A lot of the homes will put signs up in support. And, on top of that, you've got the 70 best golfers in the world coming out here to play. It's pretty exciting." 

PHOTO BY: NICK BISANZ



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# Shaw Charity Classic



BY MIKE ZAWACKI

**C**hris Nelson arrived at Canyon Meadows Golf & Country Club in mid-March, taking the helm as superintendent for one of Calgary's most prestigious private courses.

With the Shaw Charity Classic teeing off in just under six months (August 12-18), Nelson plays a crucial role in ensuring the course is in peak tournament condition for the Champions Tour event, which the club and its renowned parkland layout have proudly hosted for the past 13 years.

It's a scenario that could keep other novice turf managers up at night, but Nelson says he doesn't anticipate losing any sleep during tournament week.

"Is it bad to say nothing is going to bother me?" Nelson says. A question that could be mistaken for hubris when it's actually muscle memory. This isn't Nelson's first go at Canyon Meadows or the Shaw Charity Classic.

Nelson hails from Golden, BC, a small town about 160 miles west of Calgary. He intended to make a career as a golf pro, but an opportunity presented itself, and he gave turf management a shot for a year.



Canyon Meadows G&CC and the Shaw Charity Classic are the Champions Tour's only annual stop north of the border.

## FAST FACTS



**DATES:** Aug. 12-18

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Chris Nelson

**CLUB:** Canyon Meadows G&CC

**LOCATION:** Calgary, Alberta

**TOUR:** Champions Tour

"It took all of about three months to convince me that was the direction in golf that I wanted to go," he says. "Nothing against the pro world, but I just really enjoyed turf."

He moved on to Canyon Meadows for an internship, which evolved into a job as the club's senior assistant for 11 years under Superintendent Ken MacKenzie. Nelson left in 2017 to serve as the superintendent at Englewood Golf and Curling Club. Canyon Meadows brought him back in late January to replace the departing MacKenzie.

"I have a lot of experience with the Shaw (Charity Classic) because of my time as an assistant here," he says. "So, I have a pretty good grasp on what it's all about. You could say I've had some practice."

Nelson is eager to experience the tournament through the lens of a superintendent. He's quickly learning it will vastly differ from what he experienced as an assistant superintendent. His responsibilities will deal less directly with day-to-day agronomics and more with rules, tournament officials, working with the media covering the event and meetings. Lots of meetings.

While he's recalibrated his expectations and management style for the event, Nelson has realized the importance of trusting those around him.

"I've learned you need just to let them take the ball and run with it and just be there to help steer them and to answer their questions," he says. "Often, their method of doing things ends up

PHOTO COURTESY: CANYON MEADOWS G&CC



The 2024 Shaw Charity Classic will be Chris Nelson's first professional tournament as superintendent after returning to the course in January. Nelson previously served as an intern and senior assistant at Canyon Meadows for 11 years.

better than what you had initially thought of."

From a management perspective, Nelson's priority upon returning to Canyon Meadows as superintendent was to connect with his team, get them dialed in and prioritize the tasks that must be addressed as they prepare the course for the Shaw Charity Classic.

"Agronomically, the biggest challenge is the amount of freeze-thaw (events) we get here in Calgary, creating a lot of winter kill for us," Nelson says. "And it's been tricky for us this year because we had a lot of rain through winter, which doesn't go well on frozen ground."

To complicate matters, Canyon Meadows doesn't cover its bentgrass greens, making them susceptible to cold-temperature injury and desiccation when they ice over for extended periods.

"As crazy as it sounds, I find our winters to be way more stressful than our summers," he says. "You just don't have as much control. It's really hard to be confident that you're making the right decisions because the weather changes here on a dime (in the winter)."

Come mid-August, winter will be a distant memory, and the main challenge will be managing the unexpected.

"There's nothing about the tournament build-out, the expectations, or the people I'll be dealing with that I'm not very comfort-


able with," he says. It's just being able to react (effectively) to the things you can't plan for — sudden weather, drought, extreme heat — that'll keep us on our toes."

Nelson says they're fortunate that the club's championship occurs three weeks before the Shaw Charity Classic. So, course conditions will mimic what they anticipate will be expected for tournament week.

"I also have the luxury of having (Ken MacKenzie) here consulting," Nelson adds. "He's been my main mentor throughout my career. Without question, Ken will be the main person I'll lean on leading up to the event to work with the (Tour) agronomist, my senior assistant Mat Moulton and the rest of my crew to get things to where they need to be."

Agronomists with The Champions Tour have collected a lot of data about Canyon Meadows over the years, and there's an anomaly with the green at No. 10 that no one can figure out.

According to Nelson, the data indicates that the No. 10 green is the course's driest and firmest but also the slowest.

"It doesn't make any sense," he says. "It's treated the same as the other greens — mowed at the same height, rolled the same quantity. But why it's slower than the other (greens) is just one of those weird turf anomalies where it just doesn't quite make sense. It's a weird one," Nelson says. "Maybe one day we'll find out." 





# The Ascendant

BY MIKE ZAWACKI

**T**PC Colorado is more than meets the eye. Standing out from the typical Korn Ferry Tour stop, TPC Colorado carves a unique path through the Colorado landscape.

This 18-hole championship course, designed by Arthur Schaupeter and situated just 40 miles north of Denver, boasts breathtaking Rocky Mountain vistas as a dramatic backdrop. Opened less than a decade ago, TPC Colorado throws a curveball at golfers accustomed to the traditional parkland courses that dominate the Tour.

Instead, it presents a challenging links-style layout, more commonly found along the coasts.

"This is not a typical course for this area of the world," says Kevin Malloy, director of golf course maintenance at TPC Colorado, which hosts The Ascendant from July 11-14. "And it's not typical for the Korn Ferry Tour, which plays on a lot of old-school, parkland-style country clubs."

TPC Colorado's newness brings both challenges and advantages. While the surrounding area undergoes significant residential development, Malloy's team demonstrates remarkable flexibility in "buffing out" construction zones that might disrupt play on some holes.

Conversely, the course itself remains free of major renovation needs. Beyond standard maintenance like bunker repairs and tee box adjustments, TPC Colorado benefits from the modern infrastructure of a young course.

"It's fantastic to have a new facility because all of the infrastructure is new," he says. "There's very little chance of having a random mainline blowout on the irrigation system on Wednesday during the tournament."

One surprising element of TPC Colorado is the ability to play golf year-round, defying expectations of a mountainous climate. Malloy and his crew put in significant effort during the winter months.

"We spend a lot of time in the winter managing the turf and keeping it alive through its dormancy stage so that it's vibrant going into the spring," Malloy says.

While TPC Colorado boasts stunning scenery and a unique layout, the Berthoud climate constantly challenges Malloy and his team. The region has a mid-latitude steppe climate, which means TPC Colorado can experience scorching, arid summers and frigid, snowy winters with little rain. Historically, the forecast around mid-July's The Ascendant can be hot and dry.

TPC Colorado's sweeping vistas aren't just beautiful — they're strategically important. The course boasts 100 acres of native grasses that extend beyond the course's manicured playing areas. These seemingly decorative zones are, in fact, essential for maintaining a challenging and competitive course.

"They may not necessarily be in what you'd call the playing corridor, but they are wildly important for the success of the golf course," he says. "Without them flourishing, it becomes a pretty simple golf course."

While the concept of native grasses seemed ideal for TPC Colorado, their establishment proved to be a work in progress for Malloy and his team. "Northern Colorado is typically in your cool-season grass zone," he says. "And from day one, (the native grasses)

## FAST FACTS



**DATES:** July 11-14

**DIRECTOR OF GOLF COURSE MAINTENANCE:** Kevin Malloy

**CLUB:** TPC Colorado

**LOCATION:** Berthoud, Colo.

**TOUR:** Korn Ferry Tour

have always been a point that needed to be improved. We've spent a lot of time improving the biodiversity in the natives and looking at grasses that are a little bit more acclimated to the (region) to be self-sustainable."

The vision for TPC Colorado's native areas drew inspiration from the rolling hills of the Scottish Isles. Fine fescue, a grass blend known for its resilience, was chosen to create this aesthetic. However, this vision clashed with the harsh realities of Colorado's summer.


"As tough as fine fescue is, only a couple of the varieties in that blend survived the 110-degree summer days and 60 days with no rain," Malloy says.

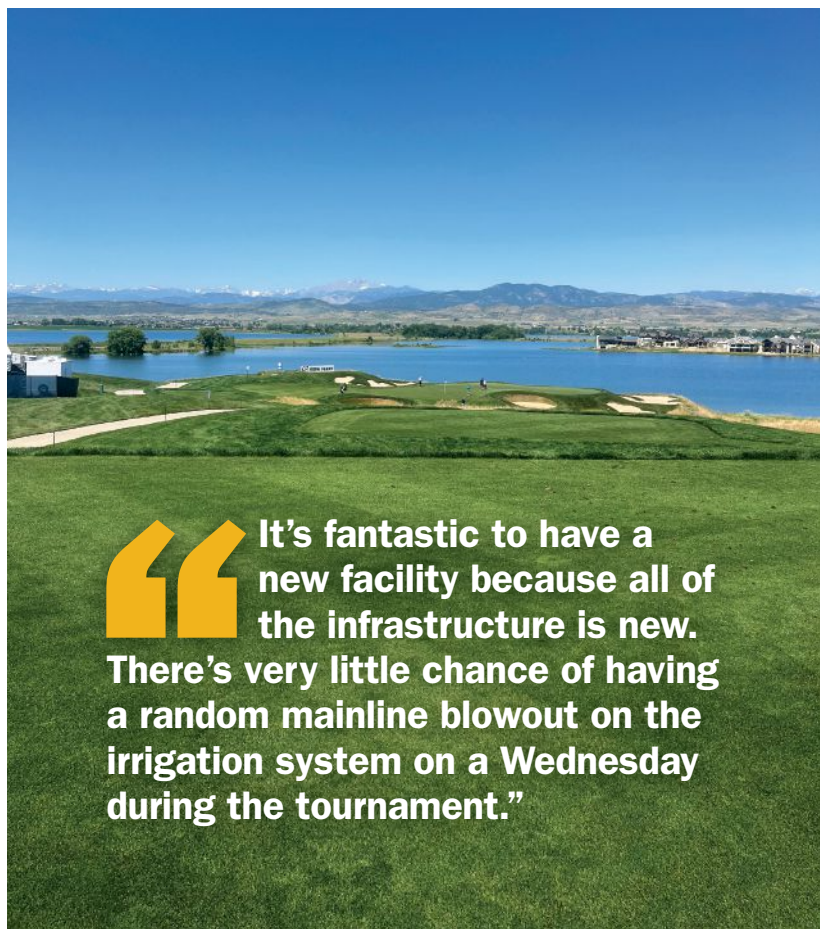
Malloy and his team went to work to find suitable native alternatives, exploring different pasture mixes and DOT roadside mixes. "Ultimately, we didn't want to have to pump a lot of water and nutrients into the natives over the long term," he says. "(The natives) had to be self-sustainable."

The search for a more suitable solution led Malloy and his team to a blend of native grasses better acclimated to the region. This new mix incorporated brome grass (*bromus inermis*), blue grama (*bouteloua gracilis*) and various bluestem varieties, all commonly found roughly 40 miles east of TPC Colorado.

"We were fortunate to get a lot of moisture (last summer) that helped us with seed establishment," he says. We've received a lot of good feedback from the tour players and from our membership, especially when we went through a hot, dry stretch and (the grasses) didn't shrink or fall back."

Beyond their ecological importance, the mature native grasses at TPC Colorado enhance the course's aesthetics with a touch of strategic beauty.

"We only have homes on one side of our holes," Malloy says. "So, having those native grasses really frames each hole—especially around Nos. 4, 11 and 13 — and really creates that frame for your eye to play that hole. They really give the course definition, and the fairway really pops — like Palm Springs in the spring." 



**“It’s fantastic to have a new facility because all of the infrastructure is new. There’s very little chance of having a random mainline blowout on the irrigation system on a Wednesday during the tournament.”**

The Ascendant at TPC Colorado is a two-time winner of the Korn Ferry's Tournament of the Year Award in 2021 and again in 2023.



As the only recurring PGA Tour-associated event in Colorado, The Ascendant has no shortage of volunteers.





# Principal Charity Classic



BY CHRIS LEWIS

Unfortunately, in recent years, spring has arrived at Des Moines, Iowa — the home of Wakonda Club, which has hosted the PGA Tour Champions' Principal Charity Classic every year since 2013 — later than it should.

As a result, Superintendent Dane Wilson has generally only had six weeks of reasonable growing weather while preparing the course for the tournament.

Not to mention, Wilson and his team members have worked on a variety of projects, primarily tree removal, during the last few winters. In turn, they've had to oversee significant course repairs in the spring, leading to even less time for tournament preparation.

## Fully restoring Wakonda Club

Aside from tree removal, Wilson also oversaw a \$7.4 million restoration project in 2023, along with golf course architect Tyler Rae. Focused on returning Wakonda Club's course to its original state (when it first opened in 1922) as much as possible, the project included various aspects.

For example, Midwest Irrigation installed a new irrigation system. To open several playing corridors, trees were removed, while

**FAST FACTS**



**DATES:** May 31-June 2  
**SUPERINTENDENT:** Dane Wilson  
**CLUB:** Wakonda Club  
**LOCATION:** Des Moines, Iowa  
**TOUR:** Champions Tour

five greens were rebuilt. Although the other 13 greens weren't rebuilt, they were expanded. To ensure the greens maintain their playability after heavy rains, Wilson and Rae installed turfslit drainage on each.

They re-built and re-grassed each tee box, re-grassed and expanded the fairways (from 24 to 34 acres), and restored all the original bunkers, leading to a rise in square footage, from 70,000 to 160,000.

"To achieve these goals, we began the main-line installation four weeks ahead of the 2023 Principal Charity Classic, as we completed roughly 60 percent of the main line in that time frame," Wilson says. "We then closed the golf course on June 21 and began work with Wadsworth Golf Construction."

Wilson's staff of 22 agronomy professionals offered him assistance, as they performed numerous tasks associated with the project — removing the old irrigation system, preparing and seeding fairways and removing and replacing sod for green expansions.

"Throughout the project, we continued to monitor progress and hit checkpoints, adjusting as necessary," he says. "All seeding was completed by September 25, and all contractors exited the property on October 7."



Wakonda Club recently completed a massive bunker project, led by Tyler Rae, which restored several grassed-over bunkers from the course's original 1922 design.

PHOTO COURTESY: WAKONDA CLUB





In addition to several bunker restorations, Wakonda Club will feature new greens on Nos. 2, 5, 9, 15 and 17, tee boxes and several expanded fairways.

Along with reseeding the entire course, Wilson is focused on implementing new ideas and technology that either assists or complements his agronomic practices. For instance, this year he's instituting Advanced Scoreboards' turfRad system, which measures fairways' soil moisture whenever his staff mows.

"This will enable us to be as cost effective as possible when we apply water throughout the property, as our irrigation is fed from the city municipality," he adds.

### Set up for success

In preparation for the 2024 Principal Charity Classic, Wilson will receive support from the Iowa Golf Course Superintendents Association (IGCSA), which is comprised of superintendents and vendors. Additionally, some of his friends and former co-workers (all superintendents) will volunteer, even though they live in states like Arizona, Kentucky, Michigan and Virginia.

"I'm humbled by this, as they're invested in my — and Wakonda Club's — success for the event every year," he says.

As Wilson focuses on his past experiences with PGA Tour Champions and Principal, who currently hosts the Principal Charity Classic, he advises other superintendents to establish a relationship with the host company.

"We (Principal and Wakonda Club) strive to work together to not only ensure the event is successful, but also have constructive conversations on how to maintain the golf course's integrity," he says. "In doing so, our tournament setup process is as seamless



Since 2007, the Principal Charity Classic has raised more than \$53.7 million for Iowa children.

as possible, and its impact on the golf course is minimal. I recommend that other superintendents follow suit."

Between Wakonda Club's working relationship with Principal and its course's recent renovations, Wilson believes this year's Principal Charity Classic will be the best one yet.

"We're looking forward to seeing how the renovation changes PGA Tour Champions members' strategies," he says. "We're excited about the impact it will have on our membership too, as we prepare for the future and Wakonda Club's next 100 years." **©**





# Memorial Health Championship



Presented by  LRS

BY CHRIS LEWIS

**E**ver since Springfield, Ill.'s Panther Creek Country Club started hosting the Korn Ferry Tour's Memorial Health Championship in 2016, it's faced one primary challenge: the tournament is hosted around the Fourth of July.

For Superintendent Brandon Razo, the timing is difficult because he's usually unable to find a large group of industry volunteers to assist him, as they're often celebrating the holiday with their friends and family.

Thankfully for him, an entirely different type of volunteer has stepped up to fill the void.

"We have a large group of industry sales representatives that always go out of their way to help us with the tournament," Razo says. "Not only do they help by providing meals and drinks, but they also help on the course with anything we may need, whether they're operating a mower or removing dew."

Thanks to their dedication, Razo can focus on the aspect of the week he relishes the most.

"I absolutely enjoy the tournament atmosphere when it comes to hosting a tournament, and that is what brought me to Panther Creek Country Club in the first place," he says.

During his career, Razo has volunteered for a handful of competitions and tournaments, including the Presidents Cup and the Tour Championship. Because of his experience at those events, he's longed to become involved with tournament golf.

"I enjoy the grind of tournament week," he states. "It's very exhausting, but well worth the sacrifice when you can sit back and realize you have some of the best players in the world playing at your course."

## Preparing for the future

To challenge golfers for years to come, Panther Creek has undergone several renovations in the time since the 2023 edition of the

## FAST FACTS



**DATES:** June 27-30

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Brandon Razo

**CLUB:** Panther Creek Country Club

**LOCATION:** Springfield, Ill.

**TOUR:** Korn Ferry Tour

Memorial Health Championship.

Last fall, Razo's agronomy team began its fairway reduction project. Thus far, his team members have completed the course's front nine holes and are set to continue the project this fall.

"Our fairways are noticeably big, and they have a lot of little nooks that add time to mowing and spraying," he says. "With this in mind, we took out around three acres of bentgrass throughout the front nine fairways, which will not only save us on labor but also reduce the costs that are associated with chemicals and fertilizer."

Furthermore, Razo and his team are building a new professional tee box on the par-three fifth hole (which will function as the 14th hole during the Memorial Health Championship). Consequently, the course will be longer for the Korn Ferry Tour competitors, while also enabling its members to have more room on the existing tees. Razo expects this project to be completed prior to the 2024 Tournament.

## Enjoy every moment


As Razo reflects on his experiences with the Korn Ferry Tour so



far, he advises other superintendents — particularly those who work at courses that host professional golf tournaments — to “take the time to enjoy it and not get too stressed out.”

“When it comes down to it, we’re doing everything we would normally be doing on the course,” he emphasizes. “We’re just doing more of it.”

Razo also stresses that superintendents must find time to be with their families during tournament week. For example, last year, his wife rode with him during evening shifts while he prepared for the following day’s activities. Additionally, his daughters were involved, as they ensured every crew member had drinks and snacks.

“It made the week even better having them here,” he says. “Remember that your family is always your number one priority.” 



The Panther Creek CC agronomy team gets help from all corners of the industry as volunteers during tournament week.



PHOTOS BY: BRANDON RAZO

“(Hosting the Memorial Health Championship) is an exciting opportunity and I hope it’s something that continues to happen here at Panther Creek,” says Superintendent Brandon Razo.





**BMW**  
CHARITY PRO-AM  
presented by TD SYNEX

# BMW Charity Pro-Am

BY CHRIS LEWIS

**A**fter years of serving as assistant superintendent at courses throughout South Carolina, Jordan Strange couldn't help but be drawn back to his hometown of Greer, S.C. He received that opportunity in May 2023, joining the agronomy team at Thornblade Club as superintendent.

Less than four months later, Strange received a promotion to director of golf course and grounds maintenance. Soon after Strange took the reins at Thornblade, the 18-hole course started work on two major projects.

First, he had to manage the reclamation of a creek bank along the fifth, eighth and ninth holes, as it controlled and prevented erosion. At the same time, his team renovated and relocated the fifth hole's tee box complex leading to a more challenging and lengthened par five.

"In my first year at Thornblade, it's been exciting to work with



The Tom Fazio-designed 18 at Thornblade Club have hosted the Korn Ferry Tour's BMW Charity Pro-Am since 2008.

my team to oversee and execute two major projects to improve the course," Strange says. "Now that both projects have been successfully completed, we continue to focus on our attention to detail, in order to provide excellent conditions for our members, along with our annual Korn Ferry Tour competitors."

## FAST FACTS



**DATES:** June 6-9

**DIRECTOR OF GOLF COURSE  
AND GROUNDS MAINTENANCE:**  
Jordan Strange

**CLUB:** Thornblade Club

**LOCATION:** Greer, S.C.

**TOUR:** Korn Ferry Tour

## Turf trials

The primary host of the Korn Ferry Tour's BMW Charity Pro-Am since 2008, Thornblade Club features an array of different turf types. Much of the course has 419 bermudagrass, while its greens are comprised of A-1/A-4 bentgrass. Due to the nature of South Carolina's hot and humid climate, Stange says his bentgrass requires constant attention.

"To maintain the fast, firm conditions that our golfers enjoy, we practice extensive hand watering strategies and follow a detailed plant health approach, to allow the course to thrive during

PHOTO COURTESY: THORNLADE CLUB

the summer season,” he says.

Aside from South Carolina’s heat and humidity, Thornblade’s agronomy team looks forward to the challenges associated with hosting the BMW Charity Pro-Am. Since the tournament is one of the Korn Ferry Tour’s most popular, the agronomy team strives to perfect various course details. It also facilitates tournament infrastructure installation, while supporting daily play from Thornblade’s active membership, leading up to the event, too.

“As our entire team sees the property transform into the setting of a professional golf tournament, they become very excited for the event,” Strange says. “However, to host the event properly, our team needs extensive preparation and continuous adaptability. The hard work is certainly well worth it, as we take immense pride in providing a course that’s in peak condition and broadcasted on Golf Channel nationwide.”

Of equal importance, the BMW Charity Pro-Am is a multi-site event that Thornblade Club shares with Spartanburg, S.C.’s Carolina Country Club. Unfortunately, South Carolina’s weather can be quite unpredictable in June, which can affect pairings and tee times at both courses. In turn, the grounds crews are required to always be on call.

Luckily, Strange and his team benefit from several volunteers who are paramount to the tournament’s success.

“Volunteers are essential to our operation because of the unpredictability of weather and tournament needs,” he says. “Since we have a staff of 25 full-time employees during peak summer hours, the addition of 15 turf professionals makes a huge difference in how we operate and what we’re able to accomplish.

“Without volunteers, we would not be able to complete as much critical detail work as we do every morning and night before the rounds,” he continues.

### Creating a culture

Looking ahead, Strange believes that — in addition to producing quality course conditions — he must maintain Thornblade Club’s positive team culture.

“Our agronomy team’s culture is vital to our success as a unit,” he says. “By operating in a team-first environment where respect for one another, along with a strong work ethic, are highly valued, we strive for perfection day in and day out.”

The bottom line? Strange says since the agronomy industry is constantly evolving, he and his team have to evolve at the same pace.

“As an agronomy team, we look forward to finding ways to adapt and improve, in order to produce a golf course that we, our Thornblade members and the Korn Ferry Tour can be proud of,” he says. **G**



PHOTO COURTESY: THORNBLEDE CLUB

Thornblade Club underwent a complete bunker renovation and redesign in 2019, led by Tom Fazio, which included improvements to drainage and new placements to provide a more challenging experience.





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# Mitsubishi Electric Classic

BY CHRIS LEWIS

**B**efore accepting a position as superintendent at TPC Sugarloaf in 2018, Kyle Worthy held assistant superintendent positions at TPC Sawgrass's The Players Stadium Course and Dye's Valley Course.

The roles prepared him for his present position — his first-ever role as a superintendent — along with the various challenges associated with it, especially as Worthy and his team plan for the PGA Tour Champions Mitsubishi Electric Classic.

Since TPC Sugarloaf in Duluth, Ga., began to host the tournament in 2013, agronomy team members have encountered one challenge more than any other: scheduling.

Each year, Worthy and his team have to begin their shifts early in the morning. From there, they'll work until mid-morning, before working again late in the afternoon and into the evening. If inclement weather occurs, their schedules become even more challenging, as they need to remain on the property longer, meaning they don't get very much time to rest.

## Increasing productivity

To enhance his team's efficiency throughout the week of the tournament, Worthy will usually bring on 10 to 20 volunteers. These volunteers are either turf professionals or students, bringing in

**“By converting our greens from a cool-season turf to a warm-season turf, our membership now has high-quality putting surfaces throughout the majority of the year.”**

## FAST FACTS



**DATES:** April 26-28

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Kyle Worthy

**CLUB:** TPC Sugarloaf

**LOCATION:** Duluth, Ga.

**TOUR:** Champions Tour

various skill sets and viewpoints that Worthy says are important to have during a tournament.

“The additional practices that my team and I can achieve, thanks to increasing our staff, lead to an enhancement in playing conditions, from acceptable to exceptional,” he says.

Once the tournament has concluded and volunteers return to their home courses, colleges or universities, Worthy and his team encounter another significant challenge: putting spectator areas back together as efficiently as possible.

“After the tournament venues have been torn down, plenty of clean up and turf recovery will need to occur,” Worthy says. “Patience is key, as the recovery process may last for several weeks.”

Aside from recovering from the tournament's aftermath, Worthy and his crew must also prepare for it well ahead of time.

Weather is a challenge before the tournament, as TPC Sugarloaf's warm-season turf varieties — on its greens and fairways — will emerge from dormancy to “tournament-ready” conditioning in a short period. The tournament is held in early May and spring doesn't typically begin in the Atlanta area until March. Consequently, there is a narrow window of time for Worthy and



Three separate Greg Norman-designed nine-hole courses make up the 27-hole layout at TPC Sugarloaf.

his team to recover divots and cultivate green surfaces, among many other tasks.

### Renovating for the future

Alongside these challenges, Worthy has also witnessed an extensive renovation project at TPC Sugarloaf's three nine-hole courses (The Stables, The Meadows and The Pines).

From 2017 to 2019, the club converted its greens from bentgrass to TifEagle bermudagrass, one course at a time. In addition, crews also converted all tees and fairways from GN-1 bermudagrass (which was overseeded every winter) to Zeon zoysiagrass.

"A new irrigation system was also installed, which included a new HDPE mainline and new HDPE laterals," Worthy says. "Furthermore, new Toro irrigation heads and controllers, along with a Network VP Lynx operating system, was installed as well."

The club also completely renovated bunkers during this time with EcoBunker walls, leading to a sustainable, "stacked sod" face that doesn't require as much maintenance as natural, sod-stacked walls.

"By converting our greens from a cool-season turf to a warm-season turf, our membership now has high-quality putting green

surfaces throughout the majority of the year," Worthy emphasizes. "And, by eliminating any need to overseed shortgrass, due to the conversion from bermudagrass to zoysiagrass, TPC Sugarloaf's fairways' playing conditions are better, while each course's turf coverage is healthier and more consistent than before."

Upon witnessing the extensive renovation project's steady results, TPC Sugarloaf's leadership decided to restore the stream that's located on The Stables course's fourth hole. For nearly a year, the stream's banks had become considerably eroded, to the point in which the hole's playable area had begun to diminish.

Within a matter of weeks, beginning in November 2022, a stream engineer and a Natural Channel Design-certified contractor were able to completely restore the stream banks that are nestled near the hole.

While reflecting on his career, Worthy has some advice to share with other superintendents.

"First, superintendents must remain focused on the specific goals they have for their properties — and not stray from them until they achieve them," he says. "And, at the same time, they need to be open to new ideas and innovative practices that can benefit their properties and team members, all while maintaining confidence in the agronomy programs they've developed." **G**

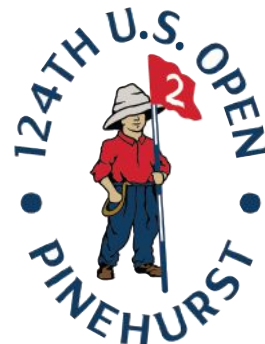


TPC Sugarloaf served as host site for the PGA Tour Canada's Local iQ Series Championship in 2020 due to complications with the COVID-19 pandemic.



# 2024 U.S. Open

BY SETH JONES



It was a decade ago that Pinehurst Resort's Course No. 2 hosted back-to-back U.S. Opens — first the men, then the women. Martin Kaymer ran away with an 8-stroke victory while Michelle Wie won her sole major by two strokes.

In the decade since, *a lot* has happened at Pinehurst Resort. Last month the resort celebrated the grand opening of Course No. 10, designed by Tom Doak. This month the Village of Pinehurst celebrates the opening of the United States Golf Association Golf House Pinehurst, a par five distance from Pinehurst Resort and Country Club's clubhouse.

A lot has also happened agronomically. In 2014 Kevin Robinson, CGCS, was the superintendent of Course No. 2. He has moved into a larger role as the golf course maintenance manager for Pinehurst's 10 courses. John Jeffreys, who has worked at Pinehurst since 2000, has taken the role of superintendent — a position he earned shortly after the completion of the back-to-back U.S. Opens.

Bob Farren, CGCS, director of golf course maintenance, remains a fixture at Pinehurst, having worked there since 1983. The only thing new with Farren is the hardware in his office — the USGA named him a winner of the Association's Green Section Award for his work as a leader in the industry in sustainable golf course maintenance practices.

And most exciting to the maintenance team at Pinehurst — this will be the first U.S. Open championship played on Champion ultradwarf bermudagrass greens. The conversion took place

in 2014 and will help Pinehurst have peak conditions in their busiest months.

"If you look at when we have our most play and the days are longer, we get really busy from May through September and even into October," Jeffreys says. "Add in that it's championship season, it matches the growth habit better of the greens, so we can provide conditioning levels that match what our guests expect."

## Make them better vs. keep them alive

Don't call the ultradwarf bermudagrass greens easier to maintain, though. There are still plenty of challenges, like frequent topdressing, vertical mowing and more frequent mowing. But with the conversion, the attitude of the agronomy team changed.

"It was our motto that with bentgrass (greens), we worked our butts off to keep it alive in the summer," Jeffreys says. "Now (with ultradwarf bermudagrass greens) we work our butts off to make them better."

"It's a lifestyle change for the manager, without any doubt," adds Farren. "The mental view is a lot less stress because we're focused on making conditions better as opposed to just keeping something alive."

Jeffreys says he consults the agronomy team's notes on the 2014 calendar daily to compare where the course was then, to where the course is today. The Pinehurst team is also armed with another advantage in the local support from the USGA and their new technologies, like Deacon and the GS3 golf ball. Pinehurst was one of the first places to have access to the system that measures firmness, green speed, trueness and smoothness via a Blue-tooth-enabled golf ball, a Stimpmeter and the smartphone app.

"I don't know the exact date it was released to the public, but

## FAST FACTS



Bob Farren

**DATES:** June 13-16

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Bob Farren, CGCS and John Jeffreys

**CLUB:** Course No. 2 at Pinehurst Resort and Country Club

**LOCATION:** Village of Pinehurst, N.C.

**TOUR:** USGA Championship

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In addition to the 2024 U.S. Open, Pinehurst will host the tournament again in 2029, 2035, 2041 and 2047. The resort will welcome back the U.S. Women's Open in 2029 — hosting the tournament for the second time.

we worked with it a good 18 months to two years before that,” Jeffreys says. “We worked hand-in-hand with the USGA in developing it. We can go back as far as 2016, 2017, with data collection on greens and how they performed during different weather events. We can use that information to help us make decisions to prepare for the upcoming U.S. Open championship.”

Jeffreys says it's always been a strong relationship between the USGA and Pinehurst, and it keeps getting stronger.

“They're the largest funder of turfgrass research in the world,

and they're all of 500 yards from where I'm sitting right now,” Jeffreys says. “They're not just advisors and colleagues, but they're dear friends. It's been such a good relationship.”

### A greener Pinehurst?

As the start of the 2024 U.S. Open nears, the crew at Pinehurst is anxiously looking forward to a reduction in play so they can focus on the fine details of hosting the U.S. Open. Play reduces on the week of May 20, and then closes on May 28.

Pinehurst is an anchor site for USGA championships, and with that came the benefit of investments into infrastructure and permanent power over generator power — which means less disruption to the courses.

The weather has been kind to Pinehurst so far, knock on wood. Over the winter they only covered greens once, for three days. Overnight frosts ended early, and it hasn't been nearly as dry as it was in 2014 — which will make for a big difference for TV viewers, Farren says.

“You'll see a greener course than what we had in 2014,” Farren says. “We were in a six-week period of time without any rain (in 2014.) There were a lot of edges of the fairways that were essentially dormant. You won't notice that this time.”



A Wendell, N.C., native and a graduate of NC State University, John Jeffreys, superintendent at course No. 2 at Pinehurst, is a North Carolina lifer.

PHOTOS COURTESY: USGA





# KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship

BY CHRIS LEWIS

**A** native of the Benton Harbor, Mich., area, Superintendent Matthew Vollrath has been employed at Harbor Shores Golf Club since he accepted an assistant superintendent position there in 2017. He was hired as superintendent during the fall of 2021, just in time for the club's preparation for the 2022 KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship.

Vollrath fully understands everything that's involved with successfully hosting a major championship, including hiring a reliable team of volunteers. While preparing for this year's tournament, he (along with Assistant Superintendent Tim Capps) reached out to colleagues throughout the golf industry. Ultimately, they acquired roughly 50 volunteers, each of whom is a superintendent.

"The amount of effort that goes into finding 50 volunteers from within the industry is substantial," he says. "Tim had to

**FAST FACTS**



**DATES:** May 23-26

**SUPERINTENDENT:** Matthew Vollrath

**CLUB:** Harbor Shores Golf Club

**LOCATION:** Benton Harbor, Mich.

**TOUR:** Champions Tour

secure housing and acquire uniforms for them, contact local restaurants for food donations and ensure there will be shuttles for any volunteers that are flying in. Additionally, he has to set up our volunteer tent and — before anything else — raise sponsorships and donations to fund all of it."

These are all aspects of a major championship that viewers and spectators are never exposed to and simply don't even realize occur. Nonetheless, despite the lack of notoriety, Capps has exceeded Vollrath's expectations.

"He's done a phenomenal job preparing for this year's championship," Vollrath says. "I don't know what I would've done without him."

## Enhancing everyday experiences

Since Harbor Shores is fairly new — it opened in 2010 — no major renovations occurred prior to the 2024 KitchenAid Senior PGA Championship. In fact, as a result of prior su-



The 2024 Senior PGA Championship will be the sixth hosted at Harbor Shores GC, making it the second most frequent stop for the tournament, behind PGA National.

PHOTO BY: MATTHEW VOLLRATH





Holes 14-18 at Harbor Shores GC sit on the Paw Paw River, which runs nearly 62 miles through southwest Michigan and eventually merges with the St. Joseph River before flowing into Lake Michigan.

perintendents' efforts, Vollrath inherited a course with enhanced drainage, sound agronomics and an updated infrastructure.

Vollrath is focused on improving guests' everyday experiences even more, as he's preparing to renovate bunkers in the near future, while also overseeing some larger-scale projects down the road.

"As a public course hosting an event like this, we strive to provide the same conditions for the greatest senior golfers, who are competing at the tournament, as we do during everyday play," he says. "And, thanks to all of my staff, we're able to do exactly that."

At the same time, he is striving to minimize inputs as much as possible.


"To do so, we continuously measure our growth, color, consistency and green speeds on a daily basis and make adjustments as needed, dictated by those factors and forecasted weather," Vollrath adds.

He's focused on being even more flexible this year than he was in 2022, with regard to tournament preparations.

"Due to the supply chain issues we faced during those early post-pandemic years, I couldn't always go to plan A, I often needed a plan B or C. At times, I even needed a plan Z," he says.



Harbor Shores GC is built on the former site of an industrial development that was left abandoned until 2008.

"Every host site is different as it presents its own unique set of challenges. But, by being prepared with plans B, C and Z beforehand — and being willing to adjust on the fly and pivot from Plan A — I'll be even more prepared this time around." 





# PGA Championship

BY SETH JONES

**A**s a college student, John Ballard, CGCS, had his sights set on a career in architecture. Thanks to the University of Tennessee — and its stringent requirements — he instead found a rewarding career in golf course maintenance. The 31-year turf pro now has his sights set on hosting a successful PGA Championship next month at Valhalla Golf Club, Louisville, Ky.

“(Tennessee) does a great job of weeding people out of architecture,” Ballard jokes. “I was that guy. Someone said, ‘You should go into landscape architecture.’ I went over to the agriculture campus and saw something about the turf business. I said, ‘Hey, I like to play golf ...’ I just fell into it.”

In college, Ballard had three successful internships, including stops at Cherokee CC in Knoxville, Tenn., Cordillera GC in Edwards, Colo., and another at Pinehurst National — now Pinehurst No. 9. Upon graduation, Ballard started working full-time

at Audubon. In only two-and-a-half years, he saw two superintendents depart for greener pastures, and at age 23 he found himself as a head superintendent.

“Was I ready? No. I don’t know that I’m ready now,” Ballard laughs. “It sort of drives you a bit to say, ‘I don’t know everything, but I’m going to continue to grind and learn.’ That’s the mantra I’ve had for my career, even today, is figuring out What do I need to do? And how do I get a little better at this?”

Ballard would remain at Audubon CC for 18 years before making the move to the University of Louisville GC, where he worked for almost four years. In November of 2019, with Roger Meier making the move from Valhalla to PGA Frisco (Texas), Ballard interviewed for and got the superintendent job at Valhalla GC.

## A more sustainable Valhalla in 2024

Valhalla is no stranger to the PGA Championship — this will be the fourth time the club has hosted the major. Mark Brooks won it in 1996; Tiger Woods hoisted the Wanamaker Trophy in 2000 and in 2014 Rory McIlroy staved off Phil Mickelson and Rickie Fowler when he won the major, his second, in near darkness. The course also hosted the 2008 Ryder Cup and the 2004 and 2011 KitchenAid Senior PGA Championships.

There are some major (pardon the pun) changes to Valhalla for this PGA Championship. First and foremost is the switch from bentgrass to zoysiagrass, a move made in 2020/2021. Ballard calls the change “fantastic” and “a home run” and adds that it has helped make the course more sustainable with less water,



After the 2011 Senior PGA Championship, Valhalla GC installed a SubAir system to aid with moisture control on its greens.

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PHOTO COURTESY: VALHALLA GC



chemistries and labor needed to maintain the course. Another change is, that the PGA of America sold the course to four business partners two years ago, and the new owners are infusing major capital into the course and club. One of the investments was in a new agronomy center for the maintenance team.

With the timing of the PGA Championship now in May, Ballard says his biggest challenge will be getting the zoysia to “wake up” in time for the arrival of the world’s best golfers.

“Last year we did a lot of things with pigments and paints that just kind of started to tickle (the grass) a little bit,” Ballard says. “The biggest thing is waking the course up early in the season. Then, after that, the challenge is going to be ... we still have a full year to go after (the PGA Championship) is over. Right after all the stands leave and all the hoopla is over, we still have our club championship and invitationals. So, getting the course to stay at a high level for the seasons is a real challenge for the team.”

Ballard feels strongly in that team. Phil Vineyard, lead assistant, spent three seasons at TPC Sawgrass, among other southeastern courses; Payton Hobby and Justin Wilt, both assistant superintendents, lead the crew. Valhalla also has six assistants-



**FAST FACTS**

**DATES:** May 13-19

**SUPERINTENDENT:** John Ballard, CGCS

**CLUB:** Valhalla Golf Club

**LOCATION:** Louisville, Ky.

**TOUR:** PGA of America

in-training in anticipation of the PGA Championship, the most Ballard has ever had.

“The staff that we’ve been able to build up around the assistants that we have, the AITs, the internship programs that we have ... it’s taken a while,” he says. “Really, it’s taken that four-and-a-half years since I arrived to really get us to where we’re at. And I think we’ve got probably the best team I’ve ever been around.” ©



PHOTO COURTESY: VALHALLA GC

Before taking the lead as head-designer of the course in 1983, Jack Nicklaus described the future site of Valhalla Golf Club as “a golf designer’s dream.”



# Kroger Queen City Championship

BY ROB DIFRANCO



**T**he Kroger Queen City Championship will have a temporary new home this year. One of the LPGA's newest events, previously hosted at Kenwood Country Club in Cincinnati, Ohio, is moving half an hour north on I-71 to TPC River's Bend in September.

For the agronomy crew at the Arnold Palmer-designed course in the small village of Maineville, Ohio, hosting a professional tournament is a welcome sight as it hasn't hosted a tour event since the Chiquita Classic in 2012.

It'll also be a bit of a challenge as the course will host the tournament on just about five months' notice.

"As a Tournament Players Club (TPC) we also try to keep our conditions at a high level," says Ian Schlather, director of golf course maintenance operations at TPC River's Bend. "Timing is sort of an issue, but we had initial visits with Arcis Golf and the LPGA early on to kind of gauge where we were at."


Schlather says that with the infrastructure currently in place at River's Bend — and support from Arcis — the course is in good shape ahead of the tournament in September. The only concern Schlather has is the unpredictability of an Ohio summer.

"There are a few things outside of the normal maintenance that we'll need to pay attention to, like step cuts, walk paths, that kind of stuff," he says. "The good news is the tournament isn't until September. So hopefully Mother Nature doesn't throw us too many curveballs through the summer. That's always the X factor in everything we do."

## Career change

Being a golf course superintendent wasn't always the plan for Schlather, who majored in accounting at Bowling Green State

**FAST FACTS**



**DATES:** Sept. 19-22

**DIRECTOR OF GOLF COURSE MAINTENANCE OPERATIONS:** Ian Schlather

**CLUB:** TPC River's Bend

**LOCATION:** Maineville, Ohio

**TOUR:** LPGA Tour

University. His career plans changed while working his summer job at Elyria (Ohio) Country Club under longtime superintendent Pat Rogers.

"I figured out in about my third year (at Bowling Green) that I didn't like working inside. I liked being outside and working with large equipment," he says.


While at Elyria, Schlather took online turfgrass science classes through Penn State University. After graduating from Bowling Green, Schlather — while still working on Rogers' Elyria CC staff — finished his degree on Penn State's main campus.

Schlather worked at Elyria CC for 12 years, including seven as an assistant before moving to the same position at River's Bend in 2014. Two years later, Schlather landed his first head superintendent job when Jeff Reich — former River's Bend super — became director of golf course maintenance at TPC River Highlands.

## First-timer

River's Bend has hosted several lower-level tournaments during Schlather's tenure as director of golf course maintenance operations, including the Epson Tour's Prasco Charity Championship in 2018, 19 and 21.

That said, the Queen City Championship will be the biggest tournament River's Bend has hosted with Schlather as the man in charge.

"There are definitely mixed emotions. It's a little nerve-wracking and you're also really excited," he says. 

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