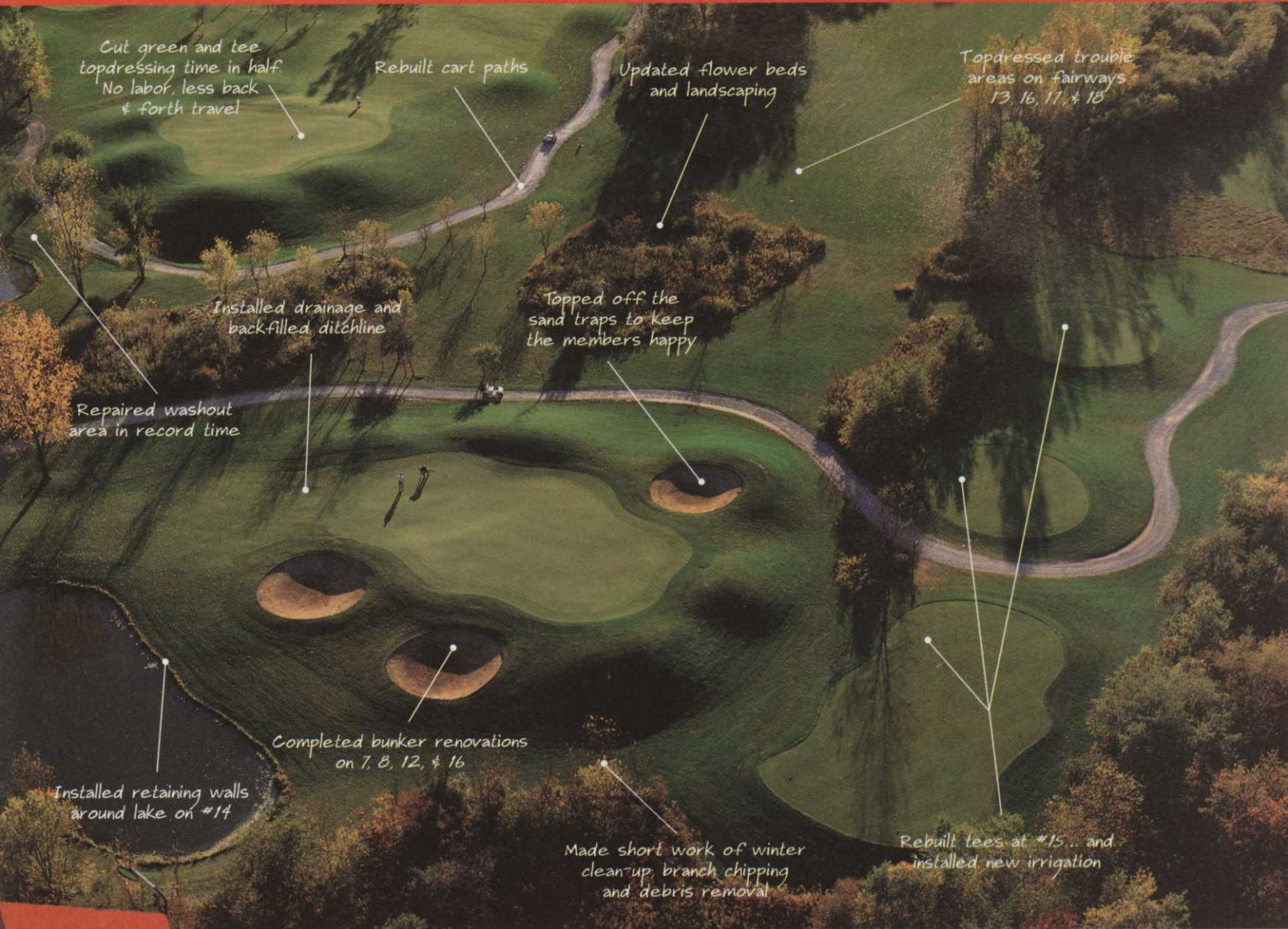


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Not until the second afternoon of the 99th U.S. Open did it become apparent that the golf gods — and probably course designer Donald Ross himself — were keeping a watchful eye on the event at Pinehurst.

Despite rave reviews from the players and officials all week, it wasn't until late in the second round that the message arrived indicating we were in for a very special weekend. A measly 4-foot putt took one look at the bottom of the 18th hole cup and made a dramatic 360-degree turn right back at that connoisseur of classic golf architecture himself, Scott Hoch.

That missed putt caused Scotland's second biggest admirer (Earl Woods now has the title) to miss the cut by a stroke, making it apparent that divine intervention was in town just in case Pinehurst needed a lift.

Thankfully, Pinehurst didn't need it.

What followed over the weekend was not only one of the great championships of all time, but a monumental victory for short grass as a hazard, the legacy of Donald Ross, the Pinehurst Resort and staff, strategic course design, Penn G-2, the art of recovery play and the USGA. And, before I forget, 1999 Open winner Payne Stewart, too.

Just when it seemed like our friends from Far Hills had set one too many disastrous examples by fostering various harmful trends, along came Pinehurst #2 and those entrusted to maintain it. In a year when the Masters took a step backward for fans of strategic design, the folks at Pinehurst showed us how a major championship golf course should be set up and maintained. Here's a look at the tournament's many winners:

Paul Jett, Brad Kocher, Bob Farren and the 125 members of the Pinehurst maintenance staff: You followed up the architecturally faultless green restoration project with a perfectly prepared course in an unusual growing season. Ross would have been thrilled to see his course looking so "natural" and playing so pure.

Tim Moraghan and the rest of the USGA staff: You kept the rough down throughout the week to encourage the lost art of recovery play (how on earth did you get that by the executive committee?). And you didn't panic after low first-round

Thanks Pinehurst, You Were Perfect

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



KUDOS TO THOSE
WHO SHOWED US
HOW A MAJOR
CHAMPIONSHIP
COURSE SHOULD
BE SET UP
AND MAINTAINED

scores and the unsightly but effective last-minute sod work around the greens. Thanks for not appeasing television or the green mentality by dusting off the green paint canisters or burying the new sod in garish emerald green sand.

David Fay: For his "don't try this at home warnings" during telecasts. He couldn't have said it better about course maintenance expectations and the labor involved in hosting an Open. Now, Mr. Fay, if we could just do something about the ball.

Donald Ross and strategy: If you weren't a household name, Mr. Ross, you are now. Too bad Pinehurst #2 is one of your few intact designs.

Short grass: The huge "chipping areas" surrounding each green complex proved that short grass may be the best hazard of all. Why? Because it presents the players with options, meaning they have to think, make decisions and display great skill. We all got to see what happens when PGA Tour pros were challenged to use their brains in a positive way. Some capitalized on it, others struggled, and John Daly lost his marbles.

Pinehurst #2's "crowned" G-2 greens and the ground game: We saw a masterful strategic design set up the way it should be. The G-2 presented firm, perfect bentgrass greens. And they were kept at a suitable pace, maintaining the design integrity. In a refreshing twist, the ground game played a defining role in the U.S. Open, although it's almost shocking how few tour players had the smarts to land a ball short of a green and run it up. Regardless, thanks to the setup, we all saw that you do not need 5-inch rough to separate the best in the world from the rest of the pack.

So thanks for a memorable Open. Pinehurst, you were perfect. Oh, I almost forgot, so were you, Payne.

Geoff Shackelford's latest book is The Golden Age of Golf Design. He can be reached at geoffshac@aol.com



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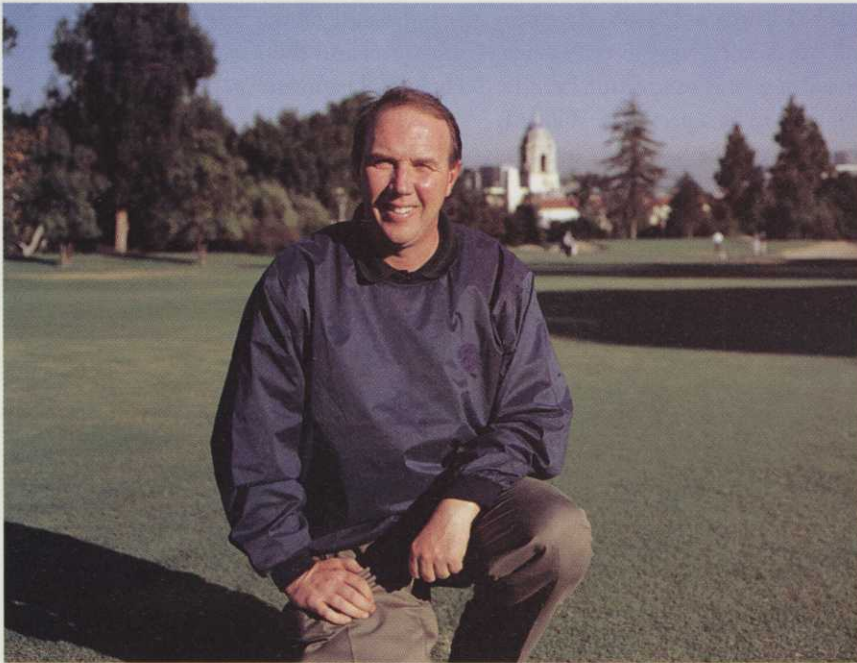


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He Loves L.A.

Lifelong Chicagoan Bruce Williams

is now enjoying life on the Left Coast

BY DON DALE

Bruce Williams felt like a pro athlete. It's not every day that a superintendent gets to negotiate a contract and request a signing bonus.

But that's what Williams did before joining Los Angeles CC as its superintendent more than two years ago. Williams knew that the Los Angeles CC wanted him badly, so he played hard to get. "I was in the catbird seat."

Williams was the superintendent at Highland Park, Ill.'s Bob O'Link GC when the LACC came calling. It was a good gig that Williams held for 21 years. But when the LACC agreed to offer him a five-year contract and a signing bonus, Williams couldn't say no.

The LACC is only Williams' second career stop, which is unusual in the job-juggling world of superintendents. The 49-year-old CGCS has lived a golf-

saturated life that parallels that of his father, Bob. They were consecutive superintendents at Bob O'Link and both served terms as GCSAA president, the only father and son to do so.

Growing up on golf

Williams says that moving his family 2,000 miles across the country was one of the most difficult challenges he has ever faced. But he adds that superintendents must be willing to embrace change because their profession often presents it.

"Change is inevitable in the life of every golf course superintendent, but it's never easy," Williams adds.

Furthermore, change should be as good for the golf courses as it is for the people who come and go from them, Williams says. "It's difficult to admit sometimes, but both the course you leave and course you go to should benefit from the fresh perspectives of new superintendents."

Williams' career developed naturally from living near golf courses and associating with superintendents. His father took the job at Bob O'Link when Williams was in the fifth grade. As a boy, Williams worked as a caddy, clubhouse helper and general landscape laborer. One of his early role models was Hubby Habjan, the golf pro at Onwentsia GC in Lake Forest, Ill. Later, Williams' mentor was Ken Payne, Ph.D., a turf professor at Michigan State University.

"They had tremendous work ethics," Williams says of the two men. "They communicated and worked well with other people."

Though he grew up on golf, Williams was more interested in the liberal arts as a young man. His first degree was in English and speech pathology from Baldwin-Wallace College in Berea, Ohio, and Williams says the training has come in handy.

"Good people skills make even an agronomist's job easier, especially when dealing with committees and governing boards," he says.

But after graduating from Baldwin-Wallace, Williams realized that his love for landscaping was more fervent than his love for the liberal arts. He enrolled in a two-year course in turfgrass science at Michigan State and received a certificate from its Institute of Agricultural Technology.

Alan Fierst, superintendent at the Oak Park CC in Rivergrove, Ill., met Williams at MSU and recalls that his friend was very focused.

"He kind of has his own set of requirements," Fierst says of Williams, who is known for his diligence.

Williams didn't have to look far for employment as a superintendent. He joined his father in 1977 as assistant superintendent at Bob O'Link. Working with

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He Loves L.A.

Continued from page 55

your father or any other family member is a challenge, Williams admits, but he says the two worked well together.

Williams says his father taught him to apply attention to detail and calls his dad “the ultimate manager of people, property and projects.”

Williams was promoted to superintendent at Bob O’Link when Bob retired in 1979. He became only the fourth superintendent in the club’s history.

Bob, aware that his son is a perfectionist, says Bruce is a chip off the old block. “It’s a birthright,” Bob says, adding that Bruce’s grandfather is the same way.

Movin’ on

Bob O’Link was one of *Golf Digest’s* top 100 courses in the nation under Williams, who was a fixture at the 18-hole club. But Williams admits that he and the governing board at Bob O’Link were taking one another for granted after 21 years together, and Williams felt stale.

And then LACC general manager Jim

Brewer called Williams with a job offer and a challenge. Brewer said the club was undertaking a massive greens renovation, and he wanted Williams to be a part of it. Williams was intrigued because he had never been involved in a construction project.

Williams realized that LACC was a rising star. If he took the job, Williams knew he would have to learn about new turf varieties, water quality issues, soil conditions and pests. But he viewed that as a positive.

Williams also liked the fact that the LACC has five times more membership and 18 more holes than Bob O’Link. Of course, the Southern California climate was appealing.

Williams wanted the job, but he wanted a contract. Although the LACC didn’t offer contracts, it made an exception for Williams. “I told them that I didn’t want to move my family 2,000 miles, buy a \$750,000 house and find out six months later they didn’t like me,” he says.

Williams made the stressful move to Los Angeles at the end of his demanding GCSAA presidency. But it was perfect timing, Williams

says, because he was operating at a high energy level and there was no time for a psychological letdown.

“All I could think about was getting the job done,” Williams says, noting the greens construction, in addition to work on more than 60 bunkers and several tees. “I can’t tell you why, but I like work at a high stress level.”

Williams admits that he may “drive people nuts,” but he says he gets along well with co-workers because he strives to be fair.

Williams says he’s enjoying his job. He’s receiving the backing and funding from management to get the job done his way.

And even the tenacious Williams enjoys the laid-back lifestyle of Southern California. But he’s not ruling out another change, which is always possible in the turbulent industry golf course industry. “If change is imminent, I’ll be ready for it.” ■

Don Dale is a freelance writer who lives in Hollywood, Calif. Larry Aylward, Golfdom’s managing editor, also contributed to this story.

Keeping It Green

Continued from page 46

Faubel, Steve Cadenelli, and, most notably, the Capitol Hill-savvy Bill Roberts. Thanks to their thoughtful and open approach, the agency began to understand that superintendents were among the best-educated and most responsible pesticide users.

By the early ’90s, things were beginning to stabilize. We weren’t losing ground anymore and a few brave souls in the media and at EPA were starting to talk about golf and the environment in positive terms.

It was then — just as we thought we might have dodged the environmental bullet — that we pulled out the big gun and shot ourselves squarely in the foot.

Mortally wounded

The now infamous 1994 GCSAA/University of Iowa Mortality Study was, in hindsight, a naive attempt to prove that if superintendents didn’t suffer ill effects from regular pesticide exposure, golfers and the public should have nothing to worry about. (For the full saga of the study, visit golfdom.com.) It was a perfect example of “canary in the coal mine” logic.

That logic, of course, backfired when the results seemed to indicate that the canaries had died at higher rates of “pesticide-linked” cancers than the general public. Despite the disclaimers about what conclusions could be drawn from this type of epidemiological study, the press had a field day and the worst round of golf-bashing yet descended on the industry. Paul Harvey, *The Wall Street Journal*, CBS — even Ranger Rick — they all piled on.

But from disaster came action. GCSAA, under the new and dynamic leadership style of Steve Mona, ended the longstanding “arm’s length” relationship with the chemical manufacturers and actually joined RISE. GCSAA also began to take an active leadership role on the issue among the Allied Associations in Golf. An informal committee of golf industry leaders began to communicate regularly about the issues. The industry came together to develop the “Environmental Principles.”

In short, because of the Iowa Study, the industry galvanized to protect its image and its financial health. A shot in the foot turned out to be the shot in the arm that unified the golf community.

The green revolution

As the golfing public became more environmentally aware, developers sensed a new market. Today, it’s hard to find a new facility that doesn’t bill itself as “eco-friendly.”

Superintendents, as we note in our cover story, discovered that environmentally responsible management was not only personally fulfilling, it was a great career move. All those eco-friendly courses need eco-superintendents, right?

Manufacturers discovered that superintendents were often willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products. Whole new markets for bio-controls and low-impact plant protectants emerged.

Don’t get me wrong. It’s not a perfect world and we still have a long way to go. But, looking back, when the green revolution hit golf, we rolled with the punch — and today, we are better off for it.

Pat Jones is the publisher/editor of Golfdom. He can be reached at 440-891-3126 or patrick.jones@advanstar.com

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It's a buyer's market for those hiring superintendents. Employers have never had so many choices in their search for talent. But if you're looking at career cultivation, some reality checking is in order.

Who's getting the good jobs? The answer is both easy and complicated. Those who have demonstrated incredible confidence, competence and ability usually get the best jobs. They have successfully worked hard enough to gain a strong recommendation from a current employer and a reputation in the business. Who you know and what you have done always makes an impression.

How are they getting the good jobs? Again, the answer is easy and complicated. But those who don't miss an opportunity to impress, and to meet and to exceed expectations are at the forefront.

Environmental thinkers and doers are winning good jobs, as well. Smoke-and-mirrors environmentalism (where the actions don't fit the cooperative words) might be popular, but the truth is an excellent divining rod. I can assure you that walking the ecological stewardship walk will show much better than talking the talk.

I've noticed that the last dozen or so superintendent positions that have been filled were never advertised. If you are searching employment Web sites or sitting by the mailbox waiting for an association-forged job notice to arrive announcing your dream job, you had better think again. A great job never advertised is a truth in most of the business world. Growing grass is no exception.

Our local and national associations have been churning various cultivars of job listings for years. In a way, it's a natural — especially when superintendents are looking for essential staff positions. But the system of listings, both local and national, tends to fail at bringing together those who would be searching for a superintendent and good candidates.

How's that? It's easy and complicated.

First, a superintendent who is doing well in his or her current position may not be reading the listings or even subscribing to them. There are many who find contentment, challenge and success by not changing jobs every three years.

Second, it stands to reason that if the first is

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BY DAVE WILBER



WELL-INFORMED
TALENT SEEKERS
WANT SCREEN
TESTS. THEY WANT
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true, then some of those actively reading the listings are either in trouble, unhappy or both. There exists a class of professional job changers, who may not be as desirable as they think, especially after move number five. It would be sticking your head in deep bunker sand to believe that those who are in positions to make hiring decisions are not starting to learn this.

Third, if you are management at a great club or course, do you really want a stack of resumes 300 deep on your desk? Think about it. The task of screening becomes overwhelming. Having had an opportunity to go through a stack of resumes garnered from a national job listing on several occasions, I can say it's nearly impossible to stand out of the crowd.

Several executive search firms are now specializing in placing superintendents in high-level positions. They are working to search for genius, screen candidates and conduct interviews with top people. What once was done on a fairly informal basis is now handled more along the lines of bigger business.

Superintendents competing for top-level jobs may even begin to use someone like an agent in order to make opportunities happen, express interest in a position and negotiate the terms of employment. Jerry McGuire come to mind?

Well-informed talent seekers want screen tests. They want recommendations from people they know and trust. They are not as interested in titles and certification as they are results. They want to meet the best of the best and compare. They want to know your ecological efforts.

That's what happens in a buyer's market.

Dave Wilbur, a Sacramento, Calif.-based independent agronomist, can be reached at dave@soil.com