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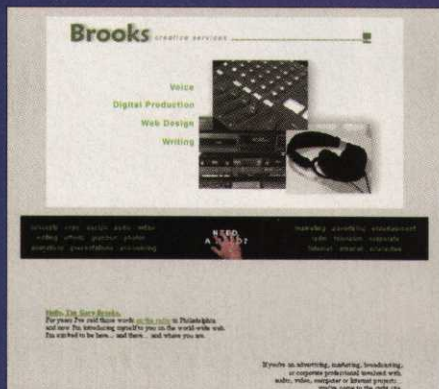


WEB WAVE

It started with a visit to a seminar at the National Golf Course Owners Association four years ago. John Gehman, superintendent/owner of the Butter Valley Golf Port in Bally, Pa., attended the meeting looking for an electronic tee sheet program for his computer. What he came away with, instead, was a vision for his course's place on the World Wide Web.

"The tee sheet seminar was a bit of a flop, but as I listened to other speakers at the conference talk about the future of the Web, I remember thinking they were on to something," Gehman says. "It's the wave of the future, and I wanted to be on the leading edge."

When he returned to Bally, Gehman called a friend who was doing Web design and asked him to construct a site for his 18-hole public course. About a year later, Butter Valley's golf instructor Gary Brooks said he could create a better site. Brooks runs a creative-services busi-



ness that does Web site design (www.gbrooks.com) in addition to his instruction duties at Butter Valley.

"Our first site was rudimentary, and I wanted to make it look a little more professional," Gehman says. "So I told Gary to go for it"

"We had so much to offer at the course that I really thought we had a good opportunity to sell the course on the Web," Brooks says. "I spent a lot of time trying to get it just right"

Brooks says the site took 270 hours to create, and the startup costs were nearly \$15,000. The site gets nearly 50 to 100 new viewers a day.

The current Web site (www.buttervalley.com) links golfers with weather conditions, all the events at the course for the year, as well as pictures of previous events. Gehman says the pictures — and the ability to post scores immediately while any of the course's tournaments are going on — build a sense of community among the golf course's patrons.

"I've received great feedback from our golfers on the site and the information it provides," Gehman says. "They're always looking for new information about the course on the site."

Gehman hopes to add features such as daily turf conditions, aeration schedules and other maintenance information. Since the site currently resides with an outside vendor, Gehman pays Brooks a fee for any updating that takes place.

"We're dealing with the birth pangs of the Internet," Gehman says. "What we will see in 10 years will be radically different. It's going to be the communication wave of the future."

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Becker says. "It's up to the superintendent to be as visible as possible to make sure golfers know who they are."

Becker suggests superintendents play golf with their clients when they can or hold lawn-care seminars for them. Anything that raises the profile of the superintendent is a good idea.

Mumper says he had an annual "Beat the Mump Day" at Ravisloe CC, where he worked until taking over at Park Ridge in December 1999. Mumper chose a par 3 hole and competed in a closest-to-pin contest with individual golfers for a day.

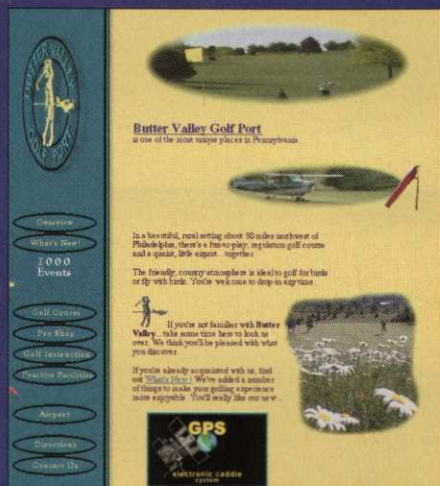
If Mumper won, the golfer donated \$50 that went toward a special projects fund. If the player won, he or she received a \$50 credit at the pro shop. "Beat the Mump Day" raised \$1,000, \$1,500 and \$2,500, respectively, for various course projects in the last three years. It always created a buzz at the course, Mumper says, and he plans to continue the tradition at Park Ridge.

To build on face-to-face relationships, superintendents must use other avenues to communicate with golfers. E-mail will increase in importance as a method for communicating with golfers, says Oscar Miles, superintendent of The Merit Club in Libertyville, Ill. The Merit Club is also working on creating its own Web site, where Miles says he'd like to post course condition information.

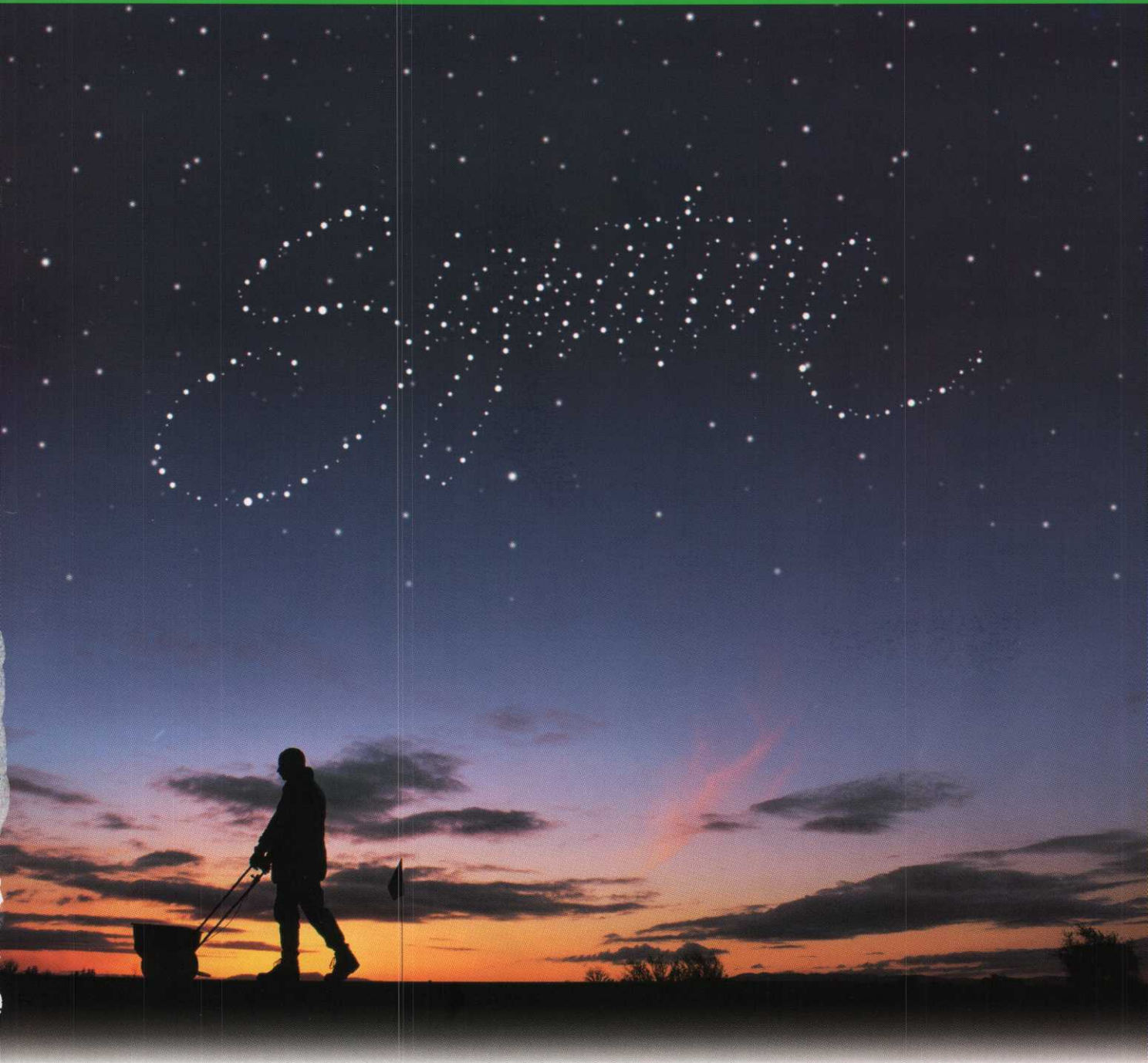
"I'm trying to collect addresses of our members so I can do a e-mail updates in the future," Miles says, adding that giving golfers as much information as possible helps the superintendent in the long run. Education is the most effective way to curb poor turf practices by players, he says.

Above all, Mumper says superintendents have to remain professional when they talk to golfers.

"Save your ridicule for the bar when you talk to fellow superintendents about a golfer who asks a particularly stupid question," Mumper suggests. "As it's happening, take a deep breath and discuss with the golfer whatever the issue is. Remember, that part of your job is communication, and it will benefit you in the long run." ■



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Circle No. 121

Give Peace a Chance

They're supposed to scorn each other, but these superintendents and pros strive to get along for the betterment of their careers and courses

BY LARRY AYLWARD,
MANAGING EDITOR

They're supposed to get along like Dennis Rodman and NBA referees or Kevin Costner and film critics. They're supposed to *loathe* each other.

But Cary Splane, golf pro at Gainesville Golf & CC, and Buddy Keene, the superintendent at the course, get along like baseball's best infield double-play combination.

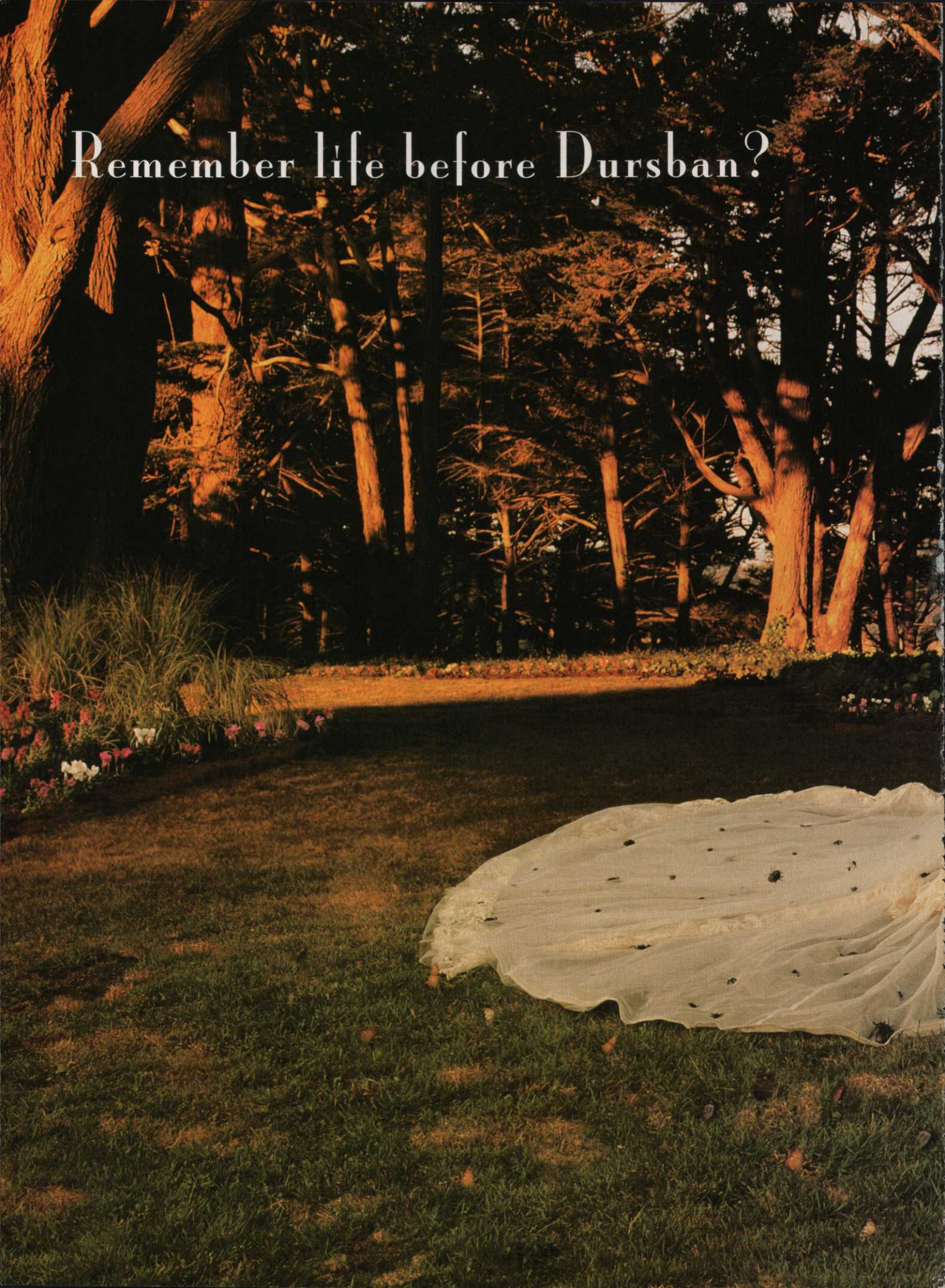
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Pro Cary Splane (left) and superintendent Buddy Keene are co-workers and comrades.



JON M. FLETCHER

Remember life before Dursban?





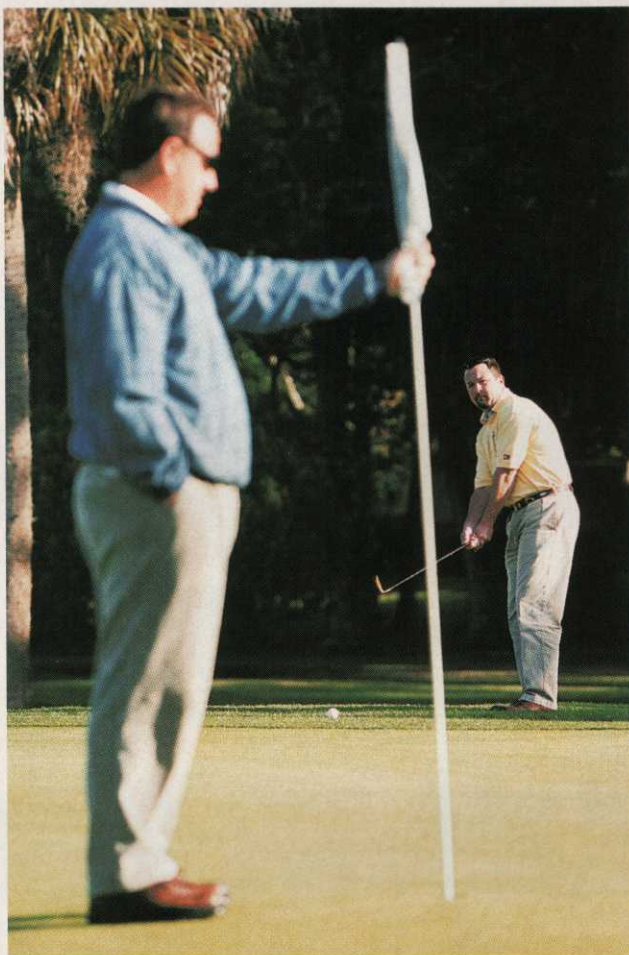
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Give Peace a Chance



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On the Florida course, they're in sync when there's work to be done and a business to be run. Off the course, they have beers and go fishing together when there's fun to be had.

It doesn't make sense, of course. A superintendent and a pro that are cronies *on* and *off* the course? Since when do such hot-blooded adversaries get along, for goodness sake?

But Splane and Keene will tell you that getting along is vital — for business sake. A good working relationship also makes their jobs that much more enjoyable.

The two will also tell you that it doesn't make sense to take an us-vs.-them attitude. Life — and careers — are too short for that balderdash.

So Splane and Keene have elected to mold a relationship based on give-and-take, trust, understanding and patience — like a rock-solid marriage.

"We're definitely on an even playing field," Splane says. "He's the grass expert, and I'm the golf expert."

"I communicate well with him, and he communicates well with me," Keene adds.

Splane and Keene — and other superintendents and pros who strive to be allies — realize they need each other if they're going to be successful in their careers. Woody Woodall, the pro at the Country Club of Mobile, will tell you he would be going around in circles if he didn't have the Alabama course's superintendent Ron Wright providing him direction. Vice versa, Wright would say.

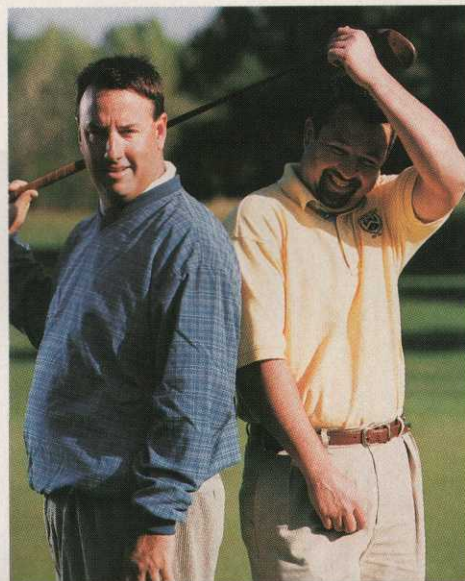
"It's essential that we have a good relationship," Woodall contends. "I'm going to get along with him — no matter what."

Woodall, who has been at the country club for 25 years, has seen and heard the stories of superintendents and pros who like each other about as much as Seinfeld and Newman.

"It's sad," Woodall admits, "but it's true. But the first thing you have to do to have a successful relationship is put your egos in a dark corner. There's plenty of credit to go around for everyone if you have a great operation."

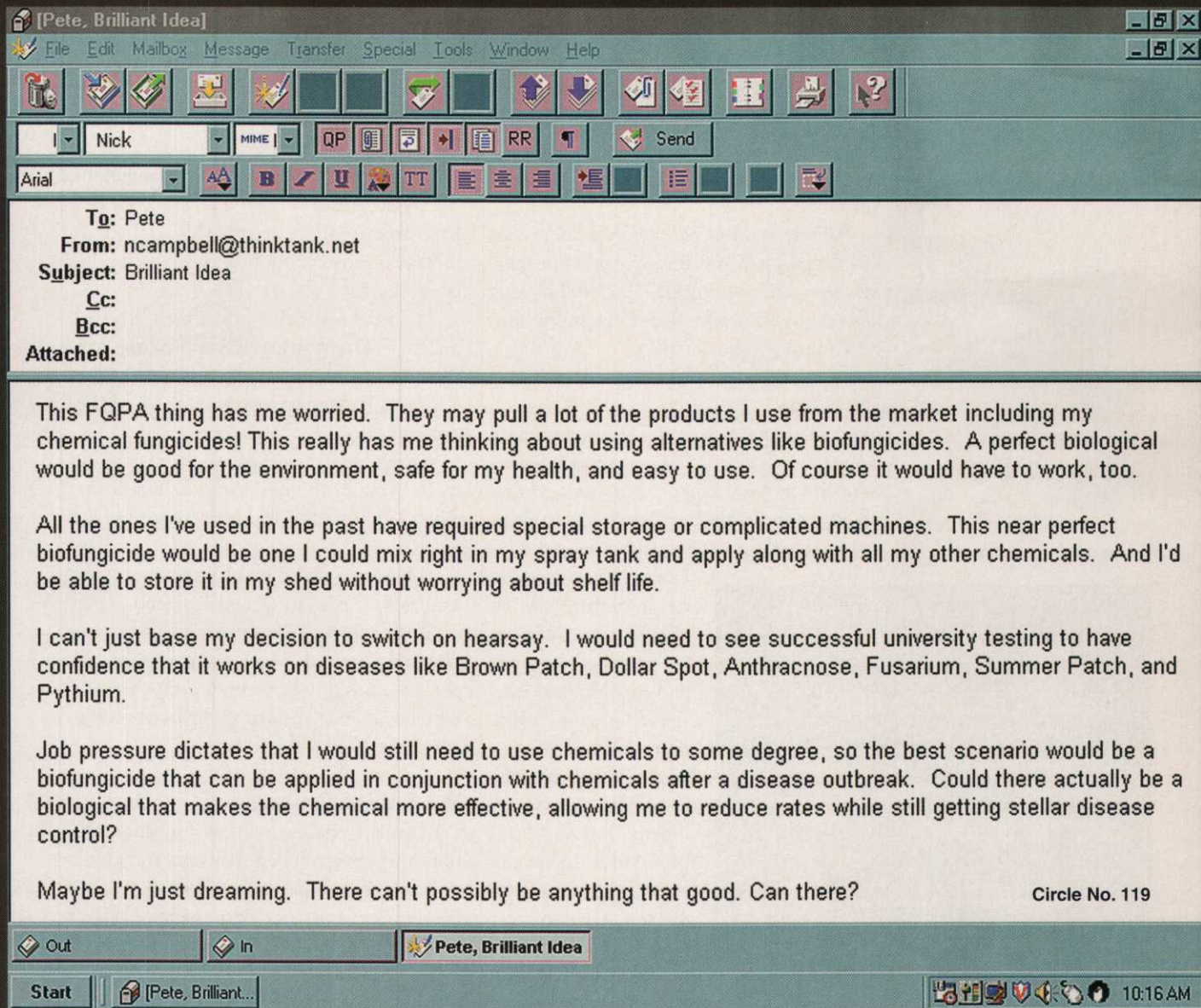
Maybe the best way to avoid potential pitfalls is to learn to laugh at the tension that's supposed to be in your relationship. Splane

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JON M. FLETCHER

Yes, that's Cary Splane, the golf pro, holding the pin for Buddy Keene, the superintendent (top). They get along *that* well. And what's so funny about peace, love and understanding between a pro and superintendent? Nothing, Splane and Keene will say, but they still like to clown around (bottom).



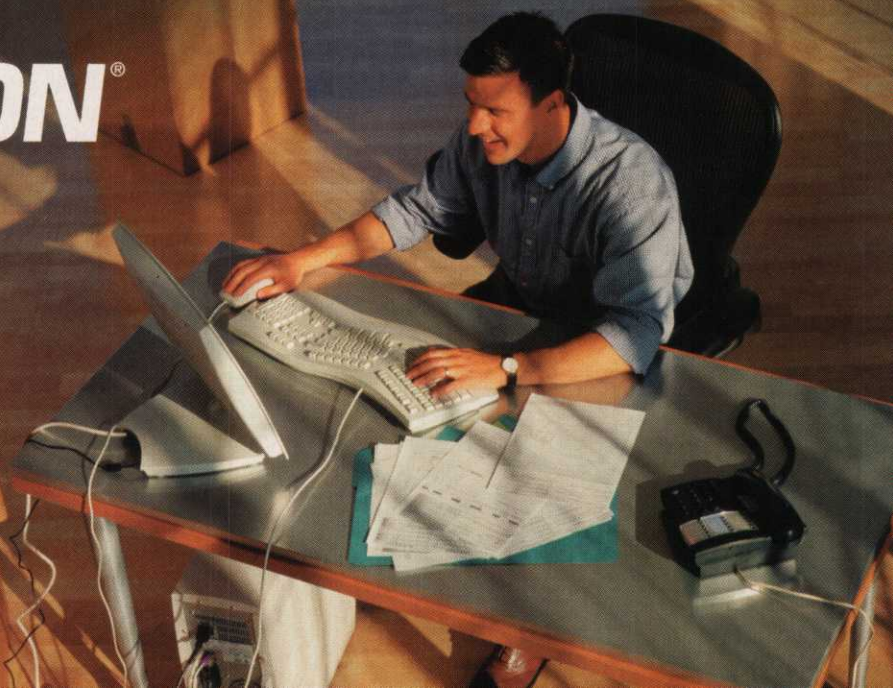
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and Keene don't take each other's titles too seriously.

"When we meet people, I tell them that I'm the golf pro and Buddy works for me," Splane says with a chuckle. "And he'll say that he's the superintendent, and I work for him. It's a running joke."

The issues

Don't think that Splane and Keene don't have issues to work through. Keene expects Splane to realize he has budget constraints and that playing conditions can't and won't always be impeccable. Splane expects Keene and his

crew to give the course extra attention when there's a tournament — to roll the greens and wipe the cups even if it means more man-hours.

At Pine Ridge CC, a public course in North Oxford, Mass., pro Mark Larrabee and superintendent Rob Larson strive to meet at a middle ground when it comes to the number of golfers playing the course and the maintenance schedule. "We understand we need to balance the maintenance of the course with getting people

through," Larson says.

"If Rob has to spray a few holes on the front nine in the morning," Larrabee says, "we're willing to close those holes and start on the back nine."

There are other issues that superintendents and pros must deal with, such as whether golf cars can be used during inclement weather. There's also the infamous who-should-be-in-control issue, which has led to many a power struggle.

One of the major issues between superintendents and pros doesn't have to do with the

course, but with money. That's no surprise; we've seen what money can do to relationships. But the superintendents and pros who say they have strong working relationships don't seem to be concerned about how much each other is earning.

"I don't have a clue how much Woodall makes," Wright insists. "And I'm not concerned. I hope he makes a ton of money. And if I wasn't making enough money, it's not because he is."

Keene believes superintendents should make as much or more than pros, but he says salary is a non-issue in his relationship with Splane.

"He knows what I make, and I know what he makes," Keene says. "I make a good salary."

Wright says a "professional" superintendent wouldn't care how much the pro makes. "A person needs to worry about his or her own business and not get wrapped up in what other people are doing," he adds.

You gotta understand

Perhaps the vital element in a healthy relationship between superintendents and pros is understanding what each other's roles are in the successful operation of the course. Perhaps even more important is *wanting* to understand.

At Pine Ridge, Larson and Larrabee get along because they want to understand each other's functions. Larson says that Larrabee, also the course's general manager, isn't just concerned with herding people through the course like cattle to get the cash register ringing. Larson says Larrabee understands that constant shotgun starts and double tees will soon catch up to a course's aesthetics and overworked maintenance staff.

On the other hand, Larson says he understands why Larrabee must schedule the occasional 120-person tourney — and why Larrabee must see dollar signs. It's spelled r-e-v-e-n-u-e.

"But that money will eventually go into capital improvements and equipment and allow us to do a better maintenance job," Larson adds.

It doesn't hurt if you have a superintendent and pro who not only understand each other's roles, but actually sympathize with each other's duties.

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"When it comes to what makes this place exist, it's the golf course. So our superintendent is the key element."

MARK LARRABEE

pro at Pine Ridge CC, on superintendent Rob Larson

