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Hole of the



■ No. 3

**The Straits Course at Whistling Straits
Haven, Wis.**

Month

A Touch of Ireland

Is this the British Isles? No, it's Wisconsin. But thanks to Pete Dye, there's a little bit of Ireland and Scotland on the shores of Lake Michigan in Haven, Wis. – and it's hard to tell the difference.

Welcome to Whistling Straits, home of the Straits Course and the Irish Course. The Straits Course, which opened in 1998, is already garnering legendary-like attention. It has made several best-course lists. More impressive, the Straits Course has already been picked to host a Major – the 2004 PGA Championship. Dye says the project was a “once in a lifetime thing.”

The Straits Course, including the No. 3 hole, features rolling dunes, pot bunkers, fescue grass fairways and a lot of water. Superintendent Dave Swift says the hole is a tough par 3 because of the south-west wind coming in off the lake and the severe undulating green.

The green is 8,300 square feet and one of Swift's toughest maintenance challenges because it's difficult to keep wet. “We're always hand watering it,” he says.

Golfdom's Hole of the Month is presented in partnership with:

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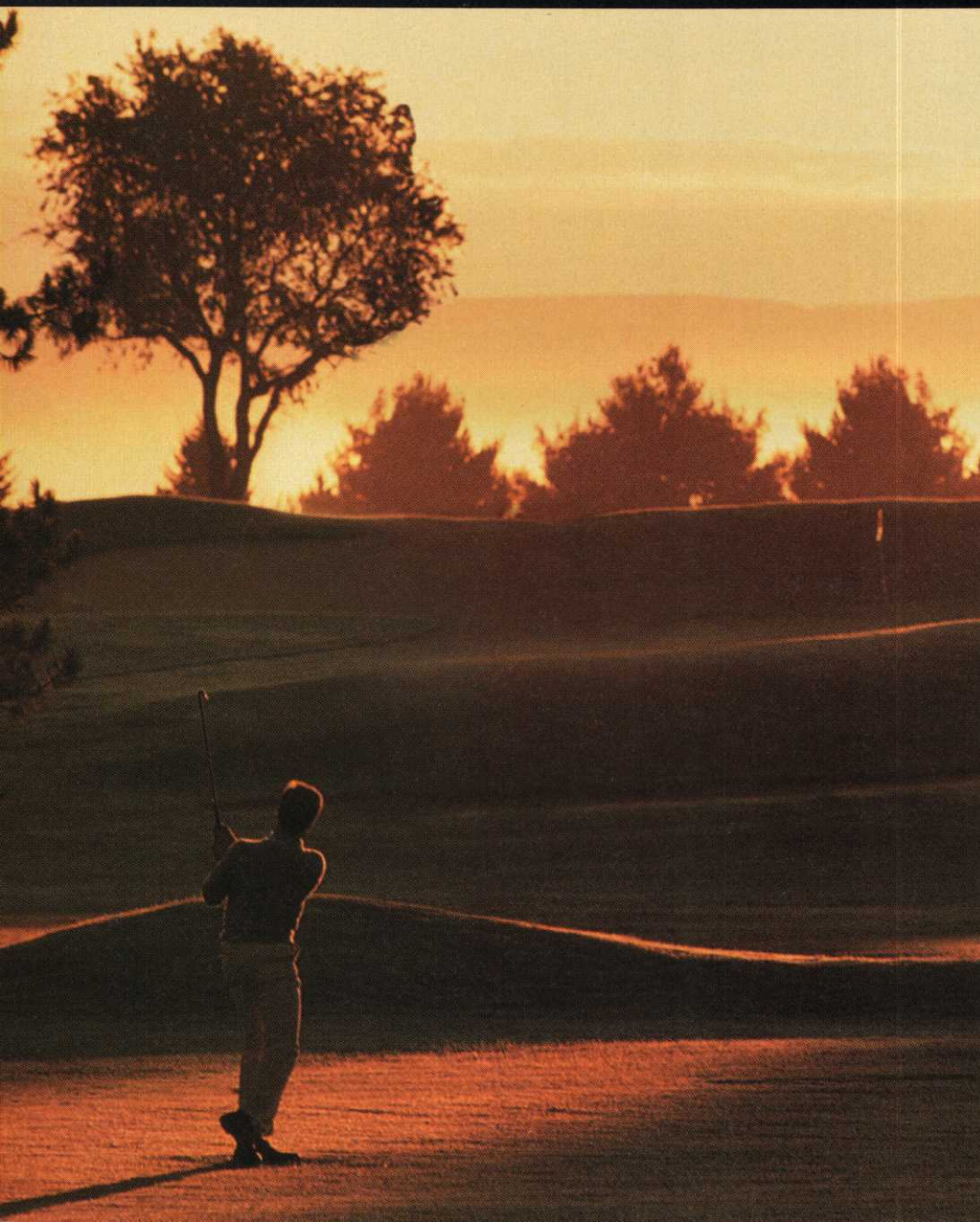
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According to few superintendents I talked to recently, their clubs won't pay for travel to the GCSAA Conference & Show because the owners say it's just an excuse to party.

I wonder if these same administrators are members of the PGA, Club Managers Association or National Golf Course Owners Associations? Maybe they party at those events (instead of making it a meaningful trip) and assume their superintendents will do the same.

Naturally, there are a few idiots that go overboard and give the GCSAA convention a bad name. They stay out too late, drink too much and fail to live up to their obligations while their clubs are picking up the tab.

Here's a little fatherly advice: You may be out of sight, but you are still on your club's clock, drawing a salary and having expenses paid. Consequently, you still owe your employer your best effort.

I get perturbed at superintendents who complain about some of the national and state conference venues because of the lack of convenient adult entertainment establishments. Pull in your horns for a few days, boys. You can be hungover and stupid on your own time with money that comes out of your own pocket.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with taking advantage of sightseeing, golfing and dining out after business is concluded. That's part of the reward for being organized and doing a good job: You can explore the host city and enjoy some well-deserved relaxation.

But that shouldn't be your primary motivation for coming to the conference. Fortunately, that admonition is reserved for the few. Most attendees don't need fatherly warnings because they do take advantage of what conference week has to offer.

Maybe I'm wrong, but when I first got the opportunity to start attending the GCSAA conferences back in 1985, I was thrilled and excited to be able to attend the premier event of our profession.

If I was able to go for the entire week, I

Conference Is Not Pay-to-Play Event

BY JOEL JACKSON



IT IS POSSIBLE
TO COMBINE
BUSINESS WITH
PLEASURE, BUT THE
OPERATIVE WORD
SHOULD ALWAYS BE
BUSINESS

filled Monday through Thursday with every seminar I could attend. I couldn't pass up such a golden opportunity to fill in the gaps of my expertise. For those trips that were only for the weekend, I made it a point to attend all the innovative superintendent and other general sessions put on by GCSAA and the USGA.

I give a big "atta boy" to several superintendents I know who work at multiple course facilities. They divide up the mammoth trade show, and each person concentrates on a specialty product or service to reconnoiter and report on the latest and greatest.

No one human being can tour the massive showroom floor without an organized plan of attack. If you don't have a plan, you'll end up wandering the aisles and wasting your time.

When I got home from the conference, I did one other thing besides turning in my expense report: I submitted a brief summary of my activities, including a list of the seminars I attended.

I even detailed the key points that I learned in each class that would help me do a better job for my club. This proved to my boss that there was, indeed, some value to spending over \$1,000 to send me to the conference.

Call me crazy, but I consider attending conferences a privilege rather than a guaranteed perk of the job. Accordingly, I always felt the obligation to act responsibly and deliver a beneficial return on my club's investment. It is possible to combine business with pleasure, but the operative word should always be business.

Joel Jackson, CGCS, retired from Disney's golf division in 1997 and is director of communications for the Florida GCSA.



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Circle No 114

Getting
Over
Getting

Fired

How to endure the trauma of losing your job
so you can move on with your life

BY LARRY AYLWARD
EDITOR

A despondent Marc Snyder sat in a chair and stared wide-eyed into space. It was a bleak winter afternoon, and the unemployed superintendent had nothing to do and no place to go.

Snyder held the day's opened mail in his hand — two more rejection letters from golf courses he contacted about possible employment — and he wondered if he would ever find work. He had received nearly 100 rejection letters since the spring, and each new one stung his spirit as much as the last.

It was December 1992, and Snyder had been unemployed for eight months. He was fired from his job as superintendent of The Boulders Golf Resort & Club in Carefree, Ariz., in April.

Only a few months before, Snyder was on top of the world. He held a high-profile job at the glamorous club and lived in a big, new

house. He was a successful superintendent and had many awards to prove it.

But Snyder, his wife and three children now lived in the 15-foot-by-20-foot family room of his mother-in-law's home in Bridgeman, Mich. They moved back to their home state a few months earlier because they were forced to sell their dream house in Arizona when they could no longer make monthly payments.

Snyder, who always held steady work and provided for his family, couldn't believe the tumultuous turn his life had taken.

"I was starting not to believe in myself," Snyder recalls. "I felt like a failure."

Snyder, who worked at The Boulders for three years, says his firing was the result of a political upheaval, not inadequate performance. Snyder is not the first superintendent to lose his job, nor will he be the last. In fact, many superintendents believe they're more prone to being fired these days because of the increased

MARK GALBREATH

scrutiny they're under to keep their courses in near-immaculate condition. And whether you're a superintendent with 30 years of experience or two, getting fired from your golf course is one of the most stressful things you can experience.

"Losing your job is like getting a divorce or having a death in the family," says certified superintendent Ted Woehrle, who was fired in 1991 from Oakland Hills GC in Bloomfield, Mich., after 24 years.

Superintendent Jim Wood says he felt like a piece of discarded trash when he was fired in 1998 from Oak Tree GC in Edmond, Okla., after more than 23 years.

"It brought me to my knees," Wood says. "I was devastated and lost."

The good news is that many superintendents are able to get over the trauma of getting fired and move on with their lives. But most will tell you the process is not easy and involves enduring a variety of normal but troubling emotions, ranging from anger to depression. But the key, they say, is to keep those emotions in check and not let them drag you down. Because when you do get over a firing and land a new job, there's a good chance you'll be a better and happier person.

"It's great, and I enjoy it," Woehrle says of his job at the Orchards GC, a public facility in Bloomfield, Mich., where he has been for nearly nine years. "I only have to answer to one person instead of a green committee and a general manager."

"Life couldn't be better," says Snyder, now the superintendent at Rio Verde CC in Rio Verde, Ariz.

Gain control

Stunned, bitter and embarrassed — that's how Snyder felt when he was fired. "There was a multitude of emotions running through my body," he says.

The emotions lingered for many months. Snyder was angry one day and depressed the next. While he felt like a failure, he didn't let himself get too low.

It's necessary and beneficial to grieve, says James P. Kell, an Austin, Texas-based career consultant and associate of Richard Bolles, author of the best-selling job-search book, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* It's also all right to be angry, depressed and stressed. But at some point, a fired superintendent must forge ahead.

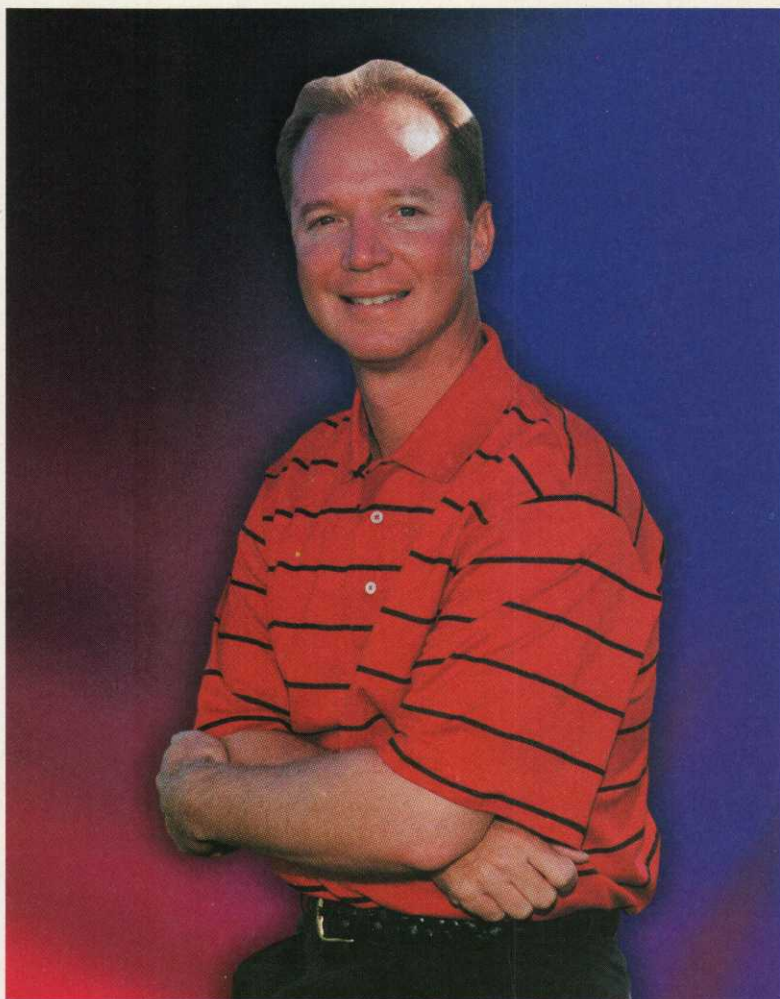


PHOTO BY RICHARD CARMER

"You accept the fact that you were fired, and you realize that it's possible to go on with your life," says Kell, noting that most firings occur because of work-place politics and downsizing. "But there's a delicate balance between grieving and moving forward, and no two people do it the same way."

Kell also says it's vital for fired superintendents to ask themselves philosophical questions to gain strength. Kell says they should ask themselves what they have learned about themselves during their troubled times. They should also ask themselves what they've learned about the world of work and the society in which they live.

A superintendent may ask certain questions about himself and discover he must change certain aspects of his character to get along with others. Or maybe a superintendent realizes he needs to work for people who are more like him and with similar goals.

Continued on page 30

"You reap what you sow. If you keep sowing anger, frustration and negativity, that's what you'll get back."

— Marc Snyder

Continued from page 29

"What happens to a lot of people is that they get run over by the Mack Truck of life, they're at the bottom of the valley, and they don't ask these questions," Kell says.

Woehrle focused on keeping his firing in perspective. He was frustrated and angry because he says he was never given a good reason for being fired. But he kept that frustration and anger in control by telling himself that he was a capable superintendent. "I knew I'd done a good job, and that made me feel a little better," Woehrle says.

If a fired superintendent doesn't reflect on his situation and try to grow beyond it constructively, he may be letting anger and depression get the best of him — and that can be hazardous to his health, Kell stresses.

"You're in terrible danger if you close down your heart, mind and soul and dwell too long on the wrong that has been done to you," says Kell, who advises those with difficulties controlling their depression and anger to seek professional help. "Depression can destroy a person who is overwhelmed by it. Anger, eventually, needs to be resolved."

Someone to talk to

It's crucial that fired superintendents have confidential friends or mentors to consult with about their circumstances, Kell says. They need to talk to trustworthy friends, including peers and clergy, about their anger, stress and depression. Those friends should be good listeners.

"I refer to this process as psychological vom-

Continued on page 32

Politics, Pressure and Pink Slips

So you were doing a great job at your golf course, but you were fired because of politics. Join the crowd.

"Usually, there's a certain amount of injustice in firings," says James P. Kell, an Austin, Texas-based career consultant.

People, including superintendents, do get fired because they're incompetent, but most job dismissals happen because of politics and downsizing, Kell says.

Political firings encompass a range of issues. Some superintendents say they've been fired because of politics, which are often tied to personality conflicts. If a superintendent doesn't get along with the course's general manager, there may be no common ground between the two. Hence, the chances of the superintendent getting fired are greater.

Superintendents who have worked at the same courses for most of their careers are also at a risk of losing their jobs, insists Randy Nichols, certified superintendent for Cherokee Town & CC in Dunwoody, Ga. The reason is simple: In 25 years at the same course, a superintendent can alienate a few members each year, some whom might end up on the green committee or board of directors, Nichols notes.

Nichols, who has worked at Cherokee Town for 26 years, says many superintendents are creatures of habit. "They get se-

cure in their jobs, and they don't want to leave," he adds. "It may be better for a superintendent to move to a different course after eight to 10 years. After a number of years at the same course, a superintendent is only compared to himself and not to previous superintendents."

Bill Black, who was fired from Congressional CC in 1993, says most successful superintendents work at courses for three to five years and move on. "They bring the courses up, and they get out of Dodge when they're on top," Black says.

Some blame age as a factor for getting fired. They say courses want to bring in younger and less-experienced superintendents so they can pay them less. But Bob Randquist, certified superintendent of Boca Rio GC in Boca Raton, Fla., says the age factor is overblown. "I've seen people get let go in their 50s, and they still came up with good jobs quickly," he says.

Randquist believes veteran superintendents who are fired from high-profile clubs can find jobs more easily than superintendents who are fired from low-profile clubs. "Clubs think those people had to be successful if they were at good places for a long time," Randquist adds.

Some superintendents compare the turbulence in their profession to that of Major League Baseball managers. A baseball

manager can win three World Series in a row, but he's only as good as his last season.

"You can have a lot of winning seasons, but you're going to have some major problems if you have a few losing seasons," Randquist says.

Nichols says superintendents are under more pressure and scrutiny than he has seen in his 30-plus year career.

"Many clubs desire perfect conditions every day," he says, adding that golfers sometimes have unrealistic expectations.

Interestingly, Nichols says the same clubs that didn't have the money to make certain course improvements five years ago are now coming up with the cash to raise maintenance standards.

"That puts even more pressure on superintendents because the margin of error for such projects is minimal," Nichols says. "Clubs used to say that they couldn't afford to walk mow greens and tees, but now they're giving us the money to do it. We must do it correctly and meet their expectations."

There is good news for superintendents: They're gaining more recognition from their peers at golf courses and receiving better pay for their efforts. But even those career gains might be detrimental if they're perceived as overvalued. "We're victims of our own success," Randquist says.

— Larry Aylward, Editor