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CIRCLE NO. 112



IF THE SUPERINTENDENT

IS DOING HIS JOB

PROPERLY, I'M NOT SURE

HE SHOULD BE DOING

MANUAL LABOR AFTER 50."

JIM FITZROY, CGCS
PRESIDENT GC
NORTH QUINCY, MASS.

Continued from page 30

I've been in a long time. She says I'm like a different person. I'm looking at what I can do other than be a superintendent. In the long run, I think it will be better for me."

Not all superintendents are looking to leave the profession, however. Fifty-one-year-old Walt Owsiany, superintendent at The Vineyards in Naples, Fla., says he plans to stay active in golf course maintenance and can't imagine doing anything else.

"I still love getting up in the morning and coming to work," Owsiany says. "There aren't many other careers where you can see the fruits of your labor as soon as you're finished. I feel blessed to be in this business, and I plan to stick with it."

Retirement? What's that?

Eventually, however, even superintendents who love their work reach a point where they can't do it anymore. When they reach that stage in their careers, they often face uncertainty about how they will support themselves when they retire.

Owsiany says he started his own individual retirement account in 1978 so he could retire modestly, but interest rates fell precipitously. What little money he did manage to squirrel away hasn't grown as he'd hoped it would. He hasn't even saved \$200,000.

"Most people in this business try not to think about the inevitable time when they'll have to stop working, but they should,"

Owsiany says. "I'd love to see more clubs offer retirement plans for their superintendents, the way they do for the professionals."

Jim Fitzroy, certified superintendent at President GC in North Quincy, Mass., realizes how lucky he is. As a 54-year-old county employee, he has a pension plan that will allow him to retire in eight years at 80 percent of his salary.

"I was recently considered for another job that would have paid me a higher salary," Fitzroy says. "I turned it down because my accountant and I determined the retirement benefits here were so much better. I have such a wonderful employer that I know I will retire secure."

For nongovernmental courses, however, security isn't always available. Only 42 percent of clubs offer pension or retirement plans to superintendents, according to the GCSAA. Fitzroy says he hears the complaint often from older superintendents that their clubs don't help them with retirement.

Coronado's Hughes says he believes the GCSAA should be involved more in creating retirement plans for superintendents.

"We're paying a huge amount of dues," Hughes says. "You'd think [the GCSAA] would be able to come up with something better to help us with retirement in the last 25 years [since he's been a member], but it hasn't."

The GCSAA insists it has tried. The association created a cooperative program with the PGA and Club Managers Association of America, called Golf Retirement Plus, in 1999 (*see sidebar left*). But the program, which allows clubs and superintendents to create cooperative retirement accounts, hasn't captured the imaginations of superintendents, according to Chuck Borman, GCSAA's chief operating officer.

"We currently have 56 members in the plan," Borman says. "We've tried marketing it every way we can, but our members don't seem interested."

Borman says the plan is currently being re-evaluated because of a lack of participation.

"At some point, you have to ask yourself whether the program is serving the needs of your members," Borman says. "It's obvious we're not doing that, so we're reassessing what we're doing."

In his experience, superintendents don't rec-

Continued on page 34

Reaching Retirement

The GCSAA, the PGA and the Club Managers Association of America teamed in 1999 to create Golf Retirement Plus, a program designed to help clubs offer pros, managers and superintendents retirement plans.

Under the program, employees and employers make contributions to an individual account through a Golf Retirement Plus representative, who manages it based on assessments of individual needs. The accounts are managed by Topeka, Kan.-based Security Benefit Life Insurance Co.

The advantages provided by the plan include:

- deferred tax payments;
- portability (meaning that you won't lose your benefits if you change jobs);
- ease of transfer of money into the program from other funds;
- guaranteed death benefits; and
- guaranteed income options upon retirement.

SOURCE: GCSAA

Golfdom

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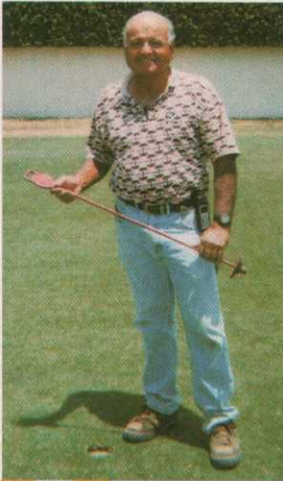
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Over the Hill



“WE DON'T WANT TO GIVE UP THE INDEPENDENCE OF WORK UNTIL WE'RE FORCED OUT!”

ABE HUGHES
SUPERINTENDENT
CORONADO GC
CHANDLER, ARIZ.

Continued from page 32

ognize the reality of retirement until they're over 50, Borman says. Then it's almost too late to start saving.

“We do our best to talk to them about the challenges they're going to face if they don't plan for their retirement,” Borman says. “I don't think superintendents are anymore unprepared than other segments of society, however. The United States is not a nation of savers.”

Borman says superintendents should start saving as early as possible, whether they use the GCSAA plan or start their own investment accounts. The one thing they shouldn't do is wait until the last minute.

That's not an easy thing for superintendents to learn, particularly since they're often active people who feel they'll never slow down, Hughes says.

“We don't want to give up the independence of work until we're forced out,” Hughes says. “I've personally known six or seven superintendents who were so afraid of retirement they actually stayed on the job until they died of heart attacks or suffered some other major health setback. It's tragic, but it happens.”

Happy ending depends on attitude

It doesn't have to end that way, however, if older superintendents accept their changing roles when they reach 50 and older. Owsiany, for one, relishes giving back to younger superin-

tendents through his local chapter.

“We do what we do out of love, and we can communicate that sense of devotion to the younger guys,” Owsiany says. “It's my job now, as my career winds down, to teach the younger kids all the stuff I learned over my career. It's my way of giving back to the industry that's given so much to me.”

Owsiany says he spends more time behind a desk than he'd like, but he appreciates the lighter schedule as he's grown older.

“I admit there are times you want to jump in and help with the heavy lifting part of the job because you're convinced no one can do it as fast or as well as you can,” Owsiany says. “That's when you have to step back and remind yourself you're not a kid anymore. It's your job to nurture the new guys.”

Some superintendents feel that sitting behind desks and supervising their crews makes them less important, Fitzroy says. That's foolish.

“If the superintendent is doing his job properly, I'm not sure he should be doing manual labor after 50,” Fitzroy says. “There's plenty to do in planning, supervision, paperwork and training the next generation. If a superintendent is over 50 and is still riding a mower, there's something wrong.”

Besides, getting older affords over-50 superintendents opportunities to change some attitudes they don't like in younger superintendents, Bob Alonzi says.

“Younger guys don't have as much exposure to the rigors of golf course maintenance,” Alonzi says. “We can teach them things about life as a superintendent that they'll never get in school — like how to deal with the politics and the importance of communication. We're not over the hill at all. We're valuable resources that can perpetuate the best this profession has to offer.

“I've had as great a career as I could have expected,” Alonzi continues. “It was because I met and listened to older superintendents when I first entered the industry. That's the role I want to play now, as a tribute to the people who mentored me.” ■

The 50-Year Milestone

Since you receive your first American Association of Retired People (AARP) mailing at 50, here are some statistics the organization has compiled about the worldwide population of older adults:

- By 2050, one in five people worldwide will be over 60.
- In every region except sub-Saharan Africa, the rate of population increase among the over-65s is higher than that for the under-14s. Even in sub-Saharan Africa, the number of older people is growing faster than the number of children.
- About 3.7 million older Americans were in the labor force (working or actively seeking work) in 1998, including 2.2 million men and 1.6 million women. They constituted 2.8 percent of the U.S. labor force.
- Limitations on activity because of chronic health conditions increase with age. In 1996, more than one-third (36.3 percent) of older persons reported they were limited by chronic conditions. Among all elderly, 10.5 percent were unable to carry on a major activity, such as working or exercise.

Golfdom

**Have you ever considered changing to a career in the lawn care industry?
See page 37.**

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are available when the plant requires them while "banking" some for later use.

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DISENCHANTED SUPERINTENDENTS MAY WANT TO CONSIDER A CAREER IN LAWN CARE

More than 20 years ago, I entered the green industry by accident. I began treating lawns because I needed a better job. At the time, I was certain it was a temporary thing. Now after growing my own business, selling it, consulting for other lawn care operators and joining Weed Man, the fastest-growing franchisor of lawn care anywhere, I find myself as an advocate for the industry.

Hopefully, you are one of the lucky superintendents who have found a satisfying and financially rewarding situation on the links. But in case you're a little stressed out, worried about your career or looking to grow your *own* thing, I hope what I say at least gets you thinking about the possibilities just over the industry fence.

Let me say that for my whole life — as a caddie, a golf course employee, a hacker and finally as a fellow green industry professional — I've admired the work of superintendents. I've worked with some of the best in the GCSAA on green industry committees and listened attentively at seminars to learn about things like *Poa annua* and how to control or not control it. Superintendents produce super-natural looking turf under extreme pressure with little appreciation and less loyalty from golfers.

It's amazing what you do, but even more amazing to me sometimes is why you do it. For as hard as you guys and gals work, one would think you own the place. Yet there is no security in many cases, let alone equity.

Which brings me to my question: Why do so many in the golf industry pass up the opportunity to control their own destiny, gain equity and have more of a life by working one lawn at a time? Look at the skills that would translate into green for you:

Salesmanship — How many times have you sold the greens committee on the right thing to do or the necessary investment for the future?



BY PHIL FOGARTY

Staffing — You pull together the best team possible every season and inspire them to do the impossible day after day.

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Technical know-how — Who knows more about growing grass than you?

The landscape industry is waking up *en masse* to the idea that lawn care service is the most profitable segment of the green industry and builds a resellable asset in the process. Superintendents seem interested but are a bit lukewarm to the idea.

My theory is that the home lawn might be a bit beneath you. After all, you didn't go to school to combat dandelions, and growing anything you cut at 2 inches or above is mere child's play. Everybody knows that 18 holes are far more sexy than 1,800 residential clients, right? Well, not necessarily. I've seen a lot of wealth created over the years, not to mention a lifestyle that allows people a chance to enjoy it.

Even if you looked down at the weed-and-feed guys of the world at one time, now may be a good time to stop overlooking the gold mine that exists just over the hedge from the No. 9 tee. With all the rollups, mergers and buyouts, a local lawn care company has a better opportunity than ever to gain ground and customers.

So as you are busy working greens and tees, think about your counterparts creating the neighborhood fairways — where life may seem a little greener, less complex and on par with your dreams. Take it from a guy looking for a part-time job: This is a great business to grow with.

Fogarty is one of the U.S. master franchise partners for Weed Man, the world's largest franchisor of lawn care services. He can be reached at pfogarty@stratos.net.

The Green Industry May Be Greener on the Other Side of the Fence

He's the Real Deal

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

You know what you get with Hazeltine National superintendent Jim Nicol

It's early June in Chaska, Minn., but it could easily be mistaken for November. It's a cruel 48 degrees, and a chilly rain falls steadily from the ashen sky. The dreariness of the day has Hazeltine National GC in its formidable grip.

At the course's turfgrass center, located

between the fourth and 13th holes, certified superintendent Jim Nicol can hear the rain dribbling outside his office door. The wacky, unseasonable weather is nothing new to him. Nicol leans back in his chair, throws his large hands behind his head, and announces that, thanks to an uncooperative Mother Nature, he and his crew are three weeks behind preparing for the 84th PGA Championship, set for Aug. 12-18 at the Robert Trent Jones Sr.-designed track.

"We haven't had any normal weather," Nicol says, going on about 90 degrees in early April and 40 degrees in mid-May. "This is the coldest spring in 50 years, and the weather hasn't been conducive to growing grass."

Other superintendents might be wiggling out about being so far behind. You would think Nicol would be angry and frustrated with the weather's unwillingness to help him and his crew prepare for the golf season's final Major. But the pragmatic Nicol, who turned 50 earlier this year, refuses to push the panic button.

"I'm not worried about it," he says in his thick Minnesota accent. "There's nothing we can do about it."

Well, that's not entirely true. Nicol is cool and composed about the matter, but

not James-Bond-in-the-middle-of-a-death-defying-stunt cool and composed. He confesses to a few sleepless nights. He's also trying to do *something* about it, like get a leg up on Mother Nature.

Maybe it was amid the tossing and turning in bed that Nicol came up with an idea last winter to protect his greens from desiccation. The Twin Cities area received little snow last winter, and Nicol was concerned that a few of the course's greens would be dried out because they were exposed to the cold, harsh wind. So Nicol and his crew collected snow from low-lying areas and spread it on the greens to protect them. They don't teach you that in school.

"I'm feeling a little heat, but most of it's self-induced," Nicol said in June, commenting on the pressure that comes with hosting a Major. "You worry about the weather, and you worry about the unknown."

While Nicol keeps everything in perspective, nobody wants the course to be in better shape for the tournament more than he. "Believe me," Nicol says, "*nobody* cares more about this than I do."

But Nicol stops short of saying that hosting the PGA will be his career highlight — he doesn't want to jinx himself.

Continued on page 40

Biography

Name: Jim Nicol

Age: 50

Education: Penn State University

Years as superintendent at Hazeltine

National GC: Six

Previous positions: Superintendent of Bunker Hills GC in Coon Rapids, Minn., from 1978-1996; assistant superintendent at the Playboy Resort in Lake Geneva, Wis., from 1974-1978.

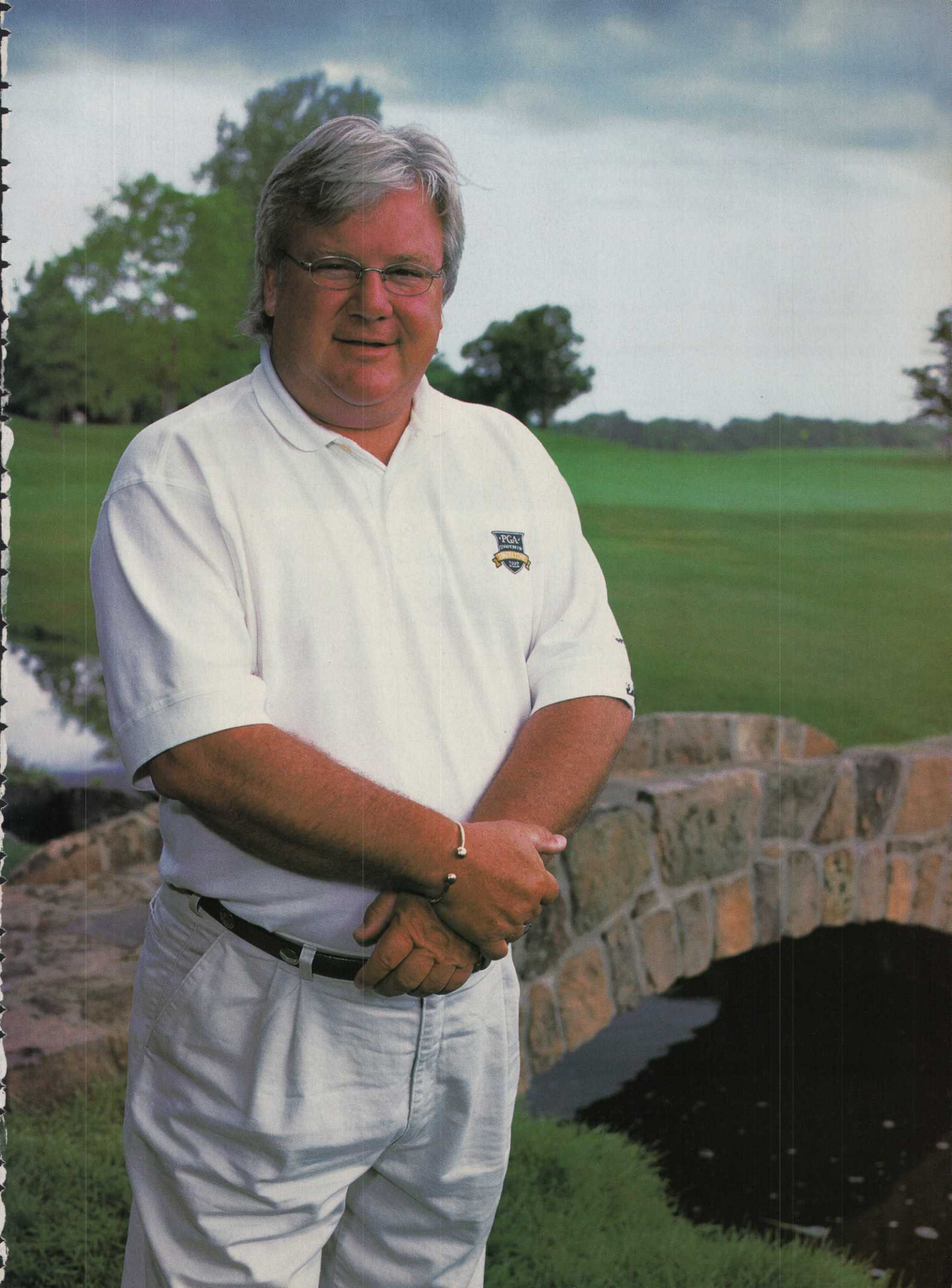
Tournament experience: Four Senior PGA Tour events, 16 State Opens and many local tournaments.

Career highlights: Certified in 1985; former board member of the Minnesota GCSA (served as president in 1999).

Wife: Barbara, married 15 years; no children.

Favorite sports movie: *Slap Shot*

Favorite recreational activity: Fishing



The Real Deal

Continued from page 38

"It could be a career lowlight," he insists. "One of my biggest fears is getting a big rainstorm and having the course flood. If we get 3 or 4 inches of rain, I'm not sure we're playing."

There's nothing phony about Nicol. He speaks his mind. He'll never tell you what you want to hear if he doesn't believe it himself.

Nicol, a member of *Golfdom's* editorial advisory board, has been called brash by his peers, but he's also humble. He's on one of golf's biggest stages, but he's not bragging about it. He doesn't wax poetic about how his career led him to Hazeltine. He doesn't go off about how he feels "his" course will tame Tiger.

His manner is the opposite. Nicol says there are better superintendents than him at nine-hole courses in places like Cowtown, S.D. He says he's thankful to

Course Conditions

Certified superintendent Jim Nicol says the heat was more severe in Minneapolis-St. Paul last year in mid-August than in areas of the Deep South, where the PGA Championship was held last Aug. 13-19 at the Atlanta Athletic Club.

People may think cold and snow when they hear Minnesota, but it can get as humid as . . . well . . . the Deep South in August. The heat and humidity, of course, will pose challenges to Nicol and his crew at Hazeltine National GC as they prepare the course for this month's PGA Championship.

Nicol plans to have the greens stimping at 11.5 to 12, but that isn't as easy as it sounds.

be surrounded by good people at Hazeltine, including Mark Storby, his first assistant and right-hand man.

"This is exciting for my friends and family," Nicol says of the tournament.

"It's a hard time of the year because of all the humidity," he says. "The leaf blades tend to get a little more succulent. We should be able to do it, though."

Tiger, Lefty and the others may find the rough difficult, especially later in the week.

"The rough will be cut at 4 inches the Saturday prior and then left alone," Nicol says. "It could be as long as 6 or 7 inches by the weekend."

The fairways will be cut at one-quarter inch.

"They'll be 'tournament championship brown,' as some people say," Nicol says.

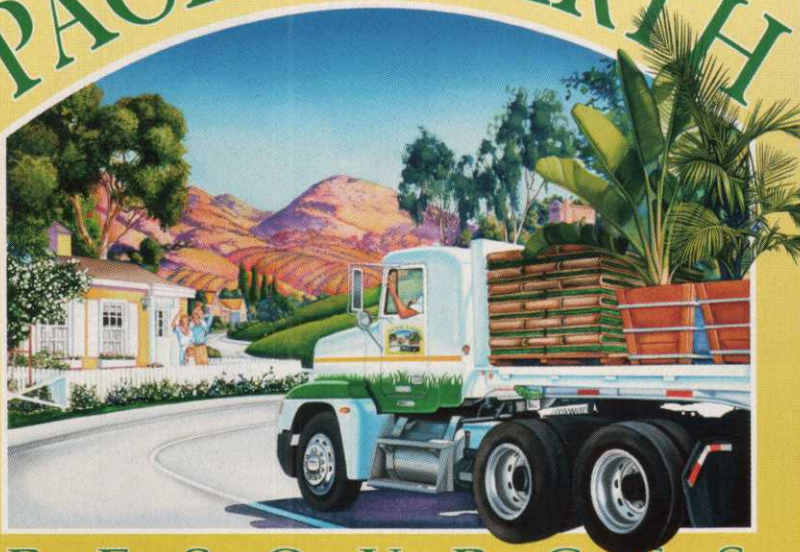
"We want the ball to bounce."

— Larry Aylward, Editor

"It's exciting for the staff and the membership. It's not just exciting for me."

Nicol is a Minnesota boy. He grew up in St. Cloud, about 75 miles northwest of the Twin Cities. He began his golf

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