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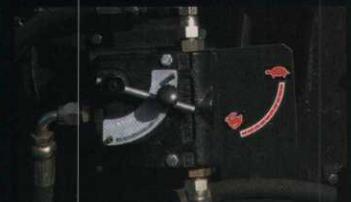
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CIRCLE NO. 129

# His Acute Attention to Detail Makes a Lasting Impression

BY MARK LESLIE

**W**hen Kirk Carls decided to make a midlife career change into turfgrass management, he was very fortunate. The Michigan State University professor he called for advice connected him to Kurt Thuemmel, certified superintendent of Walnut Hills CC in East Lansing, Mich., one of the country's foremost mentors of golf course assistant superintendents.

Seven years later, and now head superintendent at Spring Lake (Mich.) CC, Carls says: "Everything I have today is because of Kurt Thuemmel. He's been invaluable to me. You always have one guy who brought you along, gave you advice and helped you in time of need. He has been that guy for me."

"One of the things you immediately learn from Kurt is the importance of attention to detail, as well as keeping your nose to the grindstone and minding every detail on a daily basis," says seven-year Thuemmel assistant Curt Grost, now head superintendent at Willow Wood CC in Portland, Mich.

For his dedication, Thuemmel is a recipient of *Golfdom's* Keepers of the Green Award, sponsored by Floratine Products, for being one of the nation's best superintendents/mentors.

Carls and Grost are among at least 10 former Thuemmel assistants who are current head superintendents, according to Jim Johnson of Green & Grow, a Floratine distributor who nominated Thuemmel for the award.

"It's very rewarding (to mentor), especially when you get a phone call and they tell you they are doing some of the same practices as you, and they are very happy with the results," Thuemmel says. "You see yourself reflected in their work."

Proud of the success of his pupils, he says, "If a person does not move on and

become successful, you have to wonder if you have not contributed enough to his or her development."

A 1971 Michigan State University graduate and past president of the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation and West Michigan GCSA, Thuemmel lists "dedication to your employer" as the No. 1 priority he tries to instill. Also important, he adds, are "a good work ethic, integrity, being meticulous and responsible and being able to make decisions that aren't always necessarily popular but you believe are the right things to do. You take a stand."

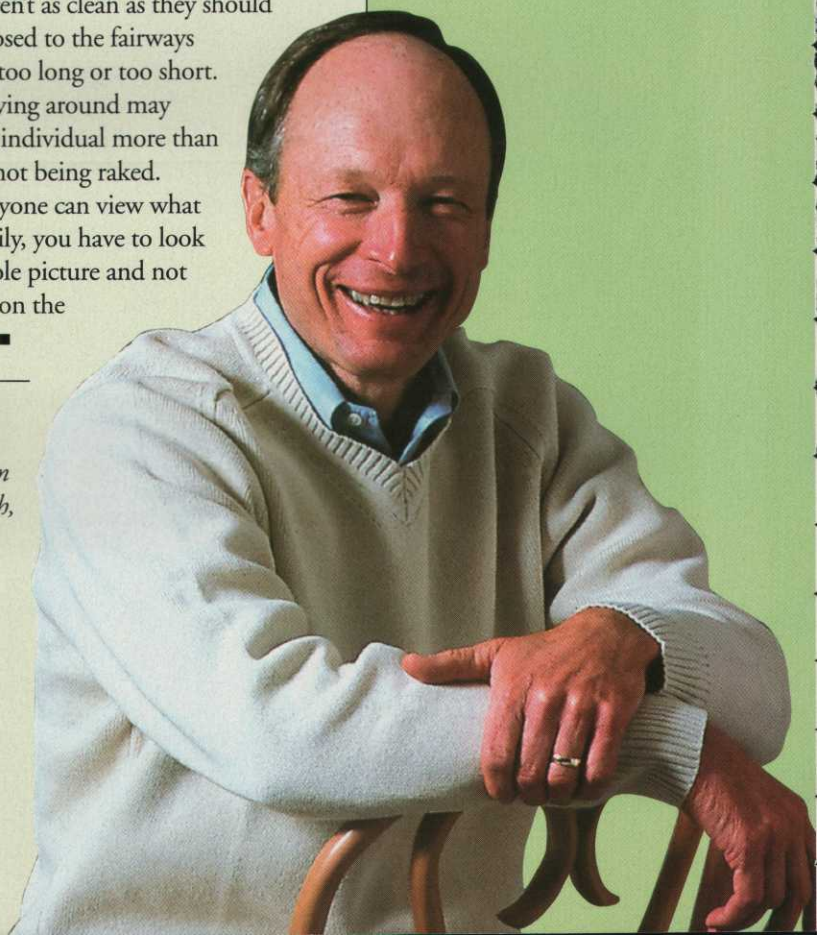
"Golfers judge your work on a daily basis," Thuemmel says. "I tell my assistants that what sets us apart from other golf courses is the fact that we pay attention to the little things, which are often the sources of negative feedback from the golfers. It could be the towels and ball washers aren't as clean as they should be as opposed to the fairways being cut too long or too short. Or trash lying around may bother an individual more than a bunker not being raked. Since everyone can view what you do daily, you have to look at the whole picture and not just focus on the obvious." ■

---

*Leslie is a free-lance writer from Monmouth, Maine.*

## **Kurt Thuemmel**

Certified superintendent of Walnut Hills CC in East Lansing, Mich.



# PURE SEED HAS SALT SURVIVORS



Plants pictured are survivors of extended salt bench testing at Pure Seed Testing near Hubbard, Oregon

As the availability of potable water is diminished to golf course superintendents, landscapers, sod producers and homeowners, choices for the best turf performance will center around drought and salt tolerance. Pure-Seed Testing Inc. in Oregon has been studying salt tolerance in several cool season species of turfgrass. In salt baths under greenhouse conditions with a synthetic ocean mix, Kentucky bluegrass cultivars were subjected to 10,000 ppm salinity level and perennial ryegrass cultivars to 17,000 ppm salinity level. For eight and nine weeks respectively, significant differences between cultivars were found based on percent survival within each cultivar and percent foliar leaf firing (damage) on a visual rating scale. 'North Star' Kentucky bluegrass and 'Brightstar SLT' perennial ryegrass were the top cultivars for salt tolerance in this study. Differences were observed in perennial ryegrass for salinity tolerance during germination versus vegetative growth stages. Three fine fescue cultivars were also tested for percent germination at 5,000 ppm, 10,000 ppm and 15,000 ppm. 'Seabreeze' slender creeping fescue maintained a high germination rate at 15,000 ppm.



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# He's Always Extending a Helping Hand

BY LARRY AYLWARD, Editor

**T**hey like Mike. The general manager, the director of golf, the greens committee chairman and just about everybody else at Cedar Ridge CC in Broken Arrow, Okla., have nothing but respect for Mike Wooten, who has been the superintendent of the golf course for 17 years. They're especially impressed with Wooten's ability to mentor.

"He's a real team player," says Buddy Phillips, director of golf at Cedar Ridge.

"Mike is always extending a helping hand, not only on the golf course but at the club as a whole," says Cleve Stubblefield, general manager at Cedar Ridge.

"In addition to the excellent job Mike has done for our club, he commands the respect of his peers in Oklahoma," says Weister O. Smith, the course's green committee chairman.

The 49-year-old Wooten, who graduated from Oklahoma State University with an agronomy degree in turf management in 1978, is a recipient of *Golfdom's* Keeper of the Green Award, sponsored by Floratine Products, for being one of the nation's best superintendent/mentors.

"You lead from the front, not the rear," says Wooten, describing his management style. "It's like when a general goes into battle with you. You want that general right out there in the battle with you."

David Nowland, who started True Turf, a Floratine distributorship in 1998 in Tulsa, Okla., nominated Wooten for the award. Nowland says he began True Turf without any background in turf management, and Wooten helped him learn the business.

"Mike was very generous with his time to answer my questions over that first year," Nowland says. "Now five years later, Mike is not only a great customer, but also a friend and mentor of sorts, even though I sit on the other side of the desk from him as a vendor."

Wooten, who has been a superinten-

dent for about 21 years, is also the mentor to 19 former assistant superintendents (and counting) who've gone on to become superintendents.

"It's nice to see some success out of those guys," Wooten says. "We talk often, and we remain good friends."

Will Clark, superintendent of Elks CC in Salina, Kan., worked as Wooten's assistant from 1987 to 1992.

"I have the highest respect for Mike, and I value his expertise," Clark says. "Mike's knowledge and guidance has helped me become the best superintendent I can be."

When Wooten hires an employee out of college, the first thing he says he teaches the employee is a strong work ethic.

"Working hard is a large part of this job," says Wooten, who has twice been the president of the Oklahoma GCSA.

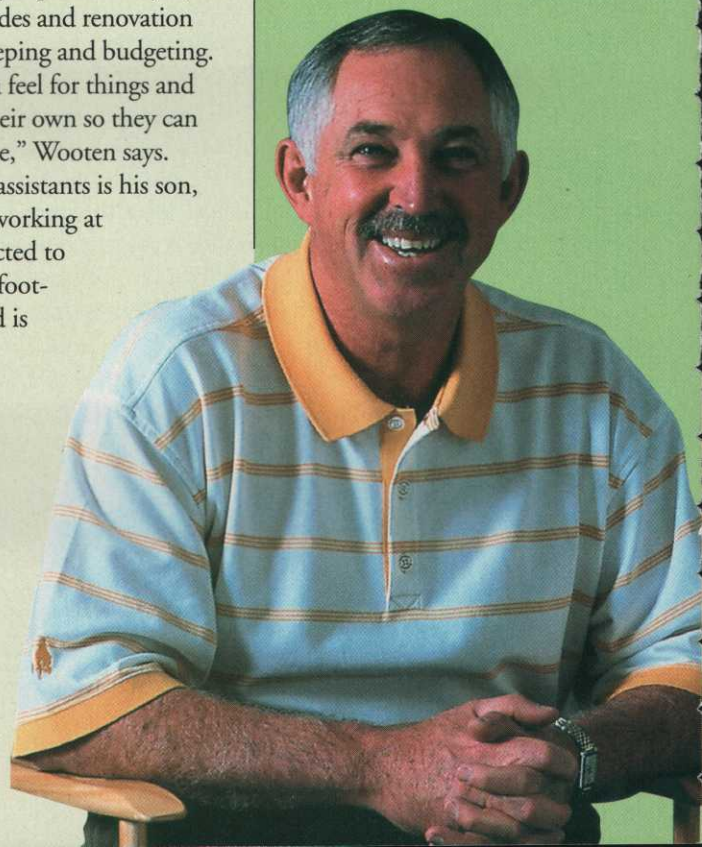
Wooten is also a big believer in hands-on experience. New employees are involved in almost every aspect of the job, from spraying pesticides and renovation projects to record-keeping and budgeting. "I want them to get a feel for things and make decisions on their own so they can build their confidence," Wooten says.

One of Wooten's assistants is his son, Jared, who grew up working at Cedar Ridge and elected to follow in his father's footsteps. He says his dad is his mentor.

"I had always dreamed of being an assistant for my father," Jared says. "Like so many who came before me, I wanted to work and learn from the best, and strive to make my dad proud." ■

## Mike Wooten

Certified superintendent of Cedar Ridge CC in Broken Arrow, Okla.



# Cruisin' with Pete Leuzinger

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## Personal:

Peter Leuzinger, CGCS,  
Ivanhoe Club, Ivanhoe, IL.  
Superintendent 28 years.  
Married 2 children,  
3 grandchildren.

## Favorite hobby:

"Golf. That's one of the reasons  
I got into this business.

## One desire before you die:

"Play the Old Course at  
St. Andrews."

## Favorite movie:

"You're going to laugh; it's  
Beauty and the Beast. I love the  
music, and the kids love it,  
and we watch it together."

## Favorite word:

"Pecuniary. It means, 'of, or  
relating to money.' It just rolls off  
my tongue-has a nice sound.  
And, I like money!"

## Best part of the day:

"The morning - I love the sunrise,  
particularly if I'm free to tour  
the course. It's my favorite time  
and I cherish that."

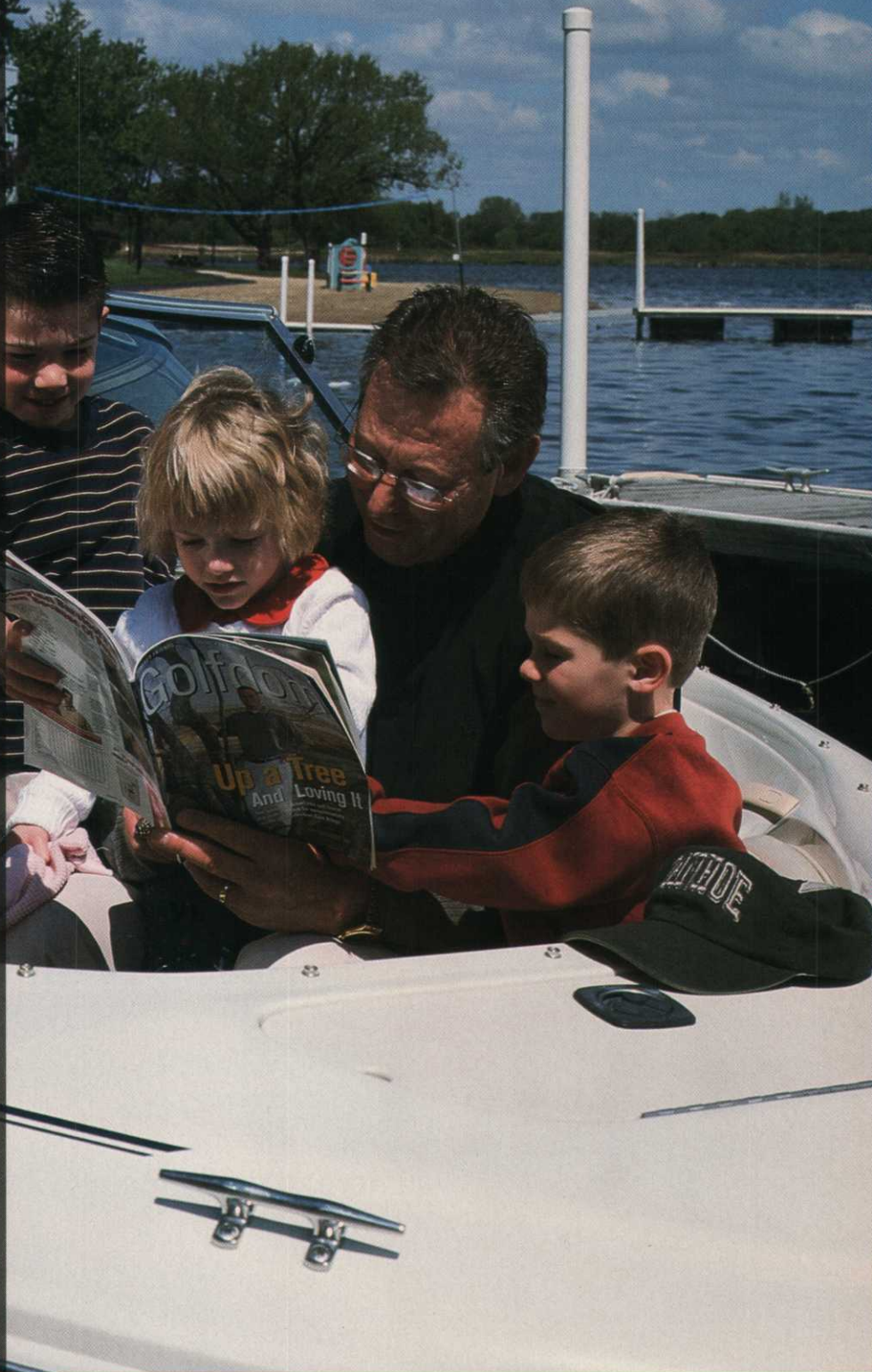
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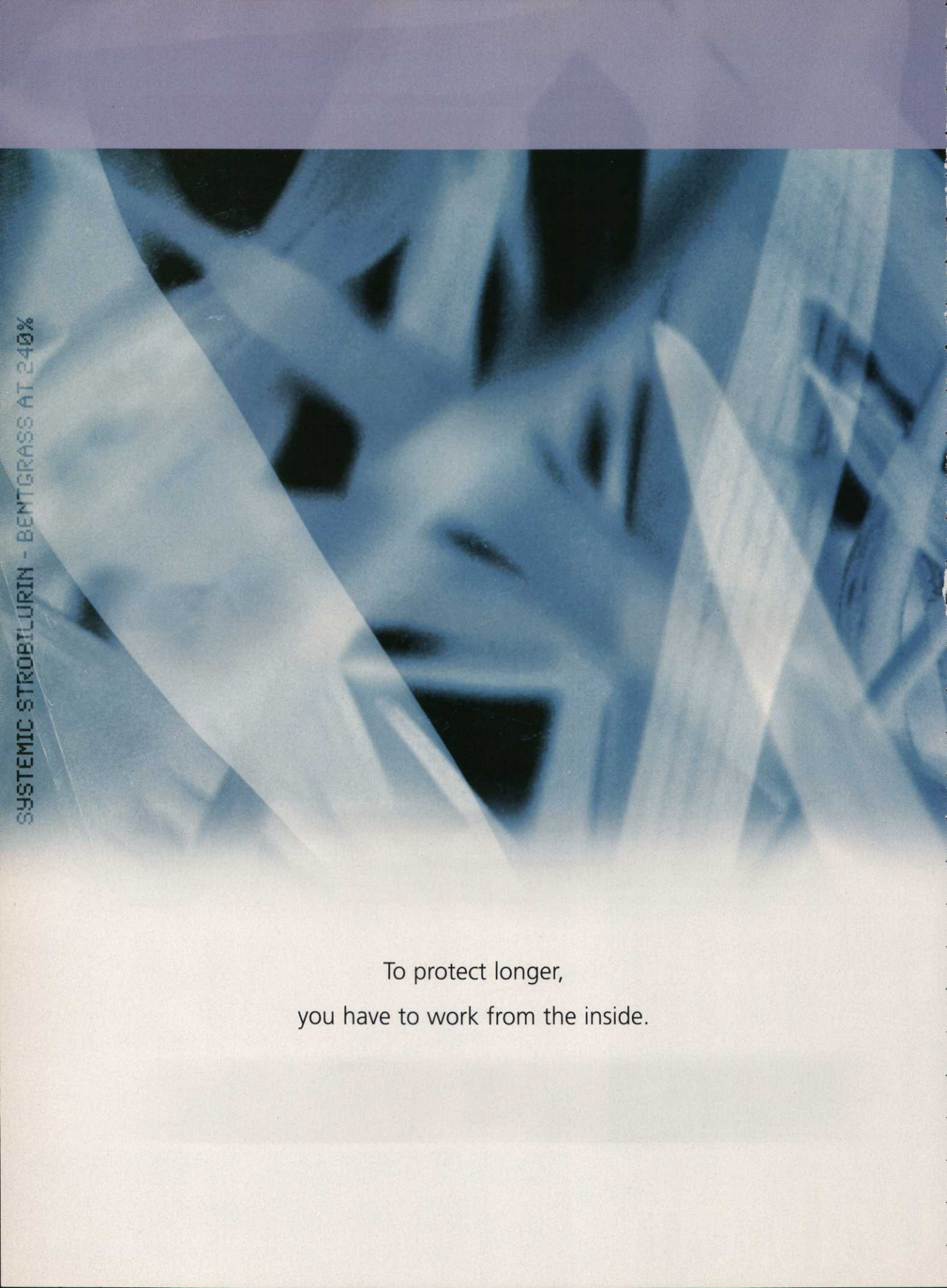
Pete Leuzinger with grandchildren  
Derek, 6 Jenna, 3 and Billy, 5 years  
old. Their Daddy is Jeffrey Leuzinger



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# Winged Foot Gets a Leg Up...with major irrigation upgrade

BY ANTHONY PIOPPI

**A**lthough he was just a few months into his tenure as superintendent of the 36-hole Winged Foot GC in Mamaroneck, N.Y., Eric Greytok came to a conclusion that the club's plan to upgrade the irrigation system should be discarded.

By June 2001, two months after he took over, Greytok realized the club needed to install an entirely new irrigation system. But Greytok could not have foreseen what his idea would unleash. Not only is Winged Foot installing a new system, but it is also changing the way other existing courses will handle their next system upgrades.

From the color of the wiring to the valve connections to the grounding of the satellite stations to the irrigation control systems, and most obviously, the way the bedrock is being carved up, Winged Foot is taking irrigation to new heights — or in this case, new depths.

Teaming with Greytok and his staff are Aqua Agronomic Solutions of Clifton, N.J., which designed the system, and Leibold Irrigation of East Dubuque, Ill., system installers.

"Once I became familiar with the [existing] system, I saw spending that money was a waste," Greytok said. "Just putting more pipe in the ground was not the answer."

Greytok knew an entirely new system was needed to replace the one that dates from the 1950s. He said the system had been upgraded and expanded over the last

**Winged Foot is using a 50,000-pound machine to blast through the course's hard granite.**

PHOTOS BY ANTHONY PIOPPI

### Problem

There are three generations comprising the current irrigation system at Winged Foot GC. With such a patchwork system, there are constant problems with it.

### Solution

Shortly after joining Winged Foot in April 2001, superintendent Eric Greytok realized the course needed a major and state-of-the-art irrigation upgrade. The course is undergoing that now.



50 years from a single-row to a triple-row system.

"But there are three generations of irrigation systems in here," he said, including transite pipe (made from a mixture of asbestos and cement) mainlines from the 1940s or 1950s, galvanized pipes around the greens from the 1960s, and PVC pipe installed in the 1990s.

Wires and mainlines are buried anywhere from a few inches to a foot below the ground, depending on the rock. In some cases, pipes sit above ground in the rough lines, just a few yards off the fairways.

"[The system] is just not big enough to carry the amount of water needed — never was," said Paul Granger, president of Aqua Agronomics. "It's amazing they (the maintenance staff) could keep the golf course in the condition they have with what they had to work with."

With the old system, Greytok said irrigating both courses takes between eight and 10 hours and can't be done in one night. The system pushes out 1,500 gallons per minute. The new system will be capable of 3,600 gallons per minute with both courses able to be watered in five to six hours.

Of course, with such a patchwork system there are constant problems with the current system. Two members of Greytok's staff are dedicated to daily repairs of the antiquated system. Up to 15 people are on constant syringing duty during the hot, dry months.

Although he came to Winged Foot in April 2001 after leaving the superintendent position at Pebble Beach Golf Links, Greytok's plan for a new system began to take shape soon after his arrival. With Winged Foot hosting the 2004 U.S. Amateur on both the East and West courses and the West Course as the site of the 2006 U.S. Open, work would have to begin in 2002 in order to be completed in time to have the layouts healed for the Amateur. If not, a new system could not be installed until after the Open.

Granger's firm came aboard later in



the summer and by November 2001 he had designed a new system to give the club an understanding of the financial commitment needed for the undertaking

In January 2002, a proposal for the project was approved by the green committee. Within a few weeks of that decision, three contractors came in to view the site. Their bid proposals were in Winged Foot's decision-makers' hands by March.

Greytok said the decision on what company would do the work was not based on money. "It came down to who the club felt comfortable with installing the system," he says.

Although intertwined, the plan by Leibold called for the courses to be worked on one at a time with the West finished in 2002 and the East completed the following year. That plan has since gone out the window. Completion of all 36 holes is expected by June.

Final overwhelming approval for the project from club members came with a vote last June. Once the go-ahead was given, things started to move. Pipe, wire and an irrigation system were ordered, and contracts were signed before July 1.

At this point, Granger convinced Greytok to have Paige Electric Co. based in Union, N.J., customize the color coating of the wiring. According to Granger, because so much work had been done to the old system over the years by a number of superintendents,

**Workers install the irrigation line behind the fourth green on the East Course.**

literally every coating color used by wire manufacturers was buried somewhere on the two courses. Fearing confusion down the road when repairs needed to be made, Granger suggested that all new wiring come striped and not solid. For instance, instead of white wire, which could be confused with the old white wire, the new wire is white with green bands. Granger said he intends to use striped wire on other jobs.

By the middle of July, Leibold was on site with a crew of five plotting the location of the pipes and wires of the existing system as well as selecting sites for the cement platform bases for the 140 irrigation control stations. Installation of the cement pads was the first work done on the course and began in August.

Actual digging did not begin until Sept. 3. As they excavated, workers had to avoid the old system that continued to perform irrigation duties until mid-November.

The project encountered its first problem even before ground was broken. In late August, John Leibold, president of Leibold Irrigation, noticed the pipe being delivered to the course was 2 years old. Although 60 percent of the order was already on the property, the pipe was rejected and returned. Greytok listened when Leibold made the

*Continued on page 80*

## Real Life Solutions: Winged Foot

*Continued from page 79*

suggestion to go with a new pipe company. "It was really early on in our relationship and I said, 'You know what you're doing.'" Greytok recalls.

A different manufacturer was found one that would make the pipe specifically for Winged Foot — and in one run and at one plant. The date of production stamped on the 21,500 feet of pipe reads Aug. 29, 2002 — just five days before digging began.

While the pipe problem was a surprise, the Winged Foot rock was not. Going in, all parties involved knew they would have to contend with the granite that ran throughout the golf course. Although the project would encounter the rock on about 20 percent of the course, the methods needed to break through the stone were extraordinary. One geologist who tested a sample reported the Winged Foot granite to be the hardest he had ever come across.

Leibold's solution was a track trencher from Vermeer Manufacturing Co. that would cause less disturbance than a conventional rock hammer method. When the original model proved to be ineffective, Leibold turned to a Vermeer 955, a 50,000-pound machine normally used for the installation of water or sewer lines.

Leibold says the boom was shortened since the maximum depth mainlines are buried about 50 inches, much shallower than normal sewer and water lines. The Vermeer was further customized when the boom was filled with lead to keep it from bouncing off the rock.

While this means of trenching may appear to be overkill, it is at times barely enough. When encountering some of the hardest granite, the trencher can only carve about 80 feet a week of the 48-inch wide, 50-inch deep trench. But no matter how hard the stone, the Leibold crew just keeps going.



**In some places, old pipe sits above the ground, just a few yards off the fairways.**

"I've never seen those guys discouraged," Greytok says. "We'll get 'er' — that's what they say all the time."

Going is easier with the softer granite with the Vermeer chewing up to 300 feet a day.

The mainline running out of the pumphouse is 20 inches and decreases in 2-inch increments as it get farther out onto the property.

A much smaller stone wheel is being used to cut in the 2 1/2-inch fairway laterals. Here, too, Winged Foot is like no other. Both Greytok and Leibold



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