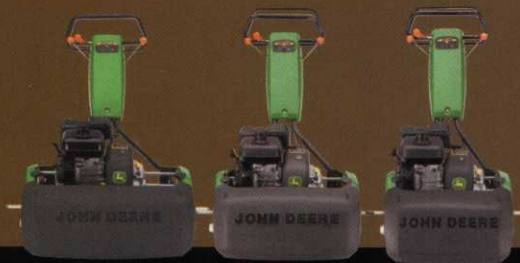


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Hole of the

■ No. 18
Marbella Club Golf Resort
Marbella, Spain

Month

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Sometimes, the golfers would rather look around them than in front of them when on the tees to hit their balls. That's what Marbella Club Golf Resort in Marbella, Spain, does to you. The course's beauty – its several 100-year-old olive trees, steep slopes and a waterfall – is breathtaking. The view from the 18th hole (pictured here) is of another continent – Africa – and one of the great natural wonders of the world – The Rock of Gibraltar. The course, which opened in 1999, was designed by Dave Thomas, architect of The Belfry in England. It was designed for the player with a high handicap in mind.

Marbella's head greenkeeper, Alberto Bustamante, says golfing is secondary for most people who play. "They just want to watch the view," he says.

The course is well-known for its A-4 greens, and Bustamante and his crew provide the surfaces with plenty of attention and care. They verticut and topdress the greens regularly. As a result, they're free of *Poa annua* and as smooth as the view is beautiful at Marbella.

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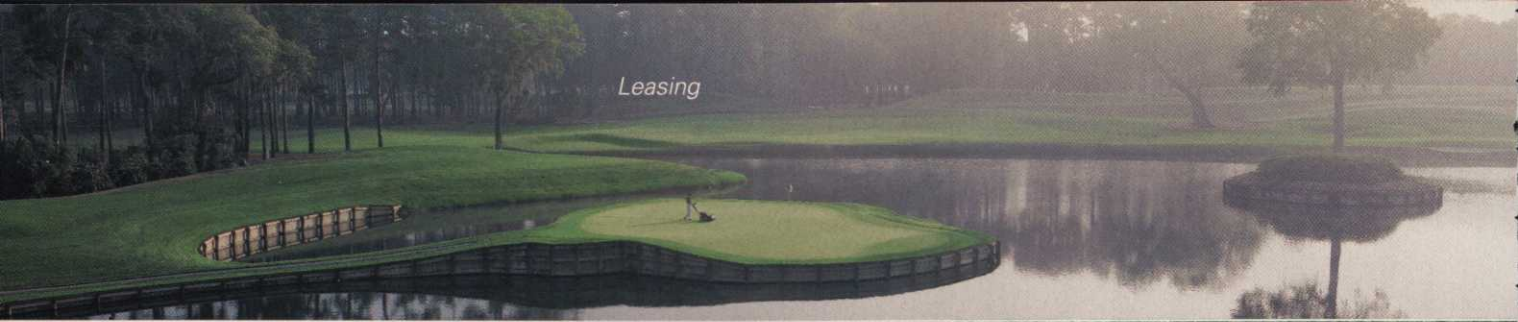
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Shades Of Green

■ OPINION

What do you do when the headline in the newspaper says, “Golf’s Toxic Fairways” or “Turfgrass is a Waste of Water” or “Overseeding Golf Courses is a Luxury We Can’t Afford” or “Treated Water Should be Put on Restrictions”?

These are all real headlines I’ve seen. I’m not making them up to scare readers. Heck, I couldn’t have made these up. The important question is how do you react to them when you see them.

Do you go “ho-hum” and turn to the funnies? Does your stomach knot up as you feel the cross hairs of the negative media bearing down on you and your livelihood? Do you complain about the misinformation and slanted reporting to your peers over beers after work?

We live in stressful times, with attacks from environmentalists on our industry coming at us full-throttle. I have one sure-fire therapy to relieve you of this stress — write a letter to the editor and carbon copy the reporter who wrote the offensive article. A newspaper generally puts an e-mail address of the reporter at the end of the article and lists its letters to the editor address in the editorial section.

There are two cardinal rules for these letter responses. The first rule is to be brief and to the point. The paper may or may not have a word-count limit published. The second rule is to be professional. You may want to vent and call the paper absolutely stupid, but it likely won’t print it. Then the real tragedy is that you won’t be able to get the facts presented to refute the misinformation in the original article.

Part of the therapeutic value of writing that letter to the editor is that you are not preaching to the choir. You are educating the media and the general public. You get to tell your side of the story and bring pertinent facts to light. The silent majority tends to be moderate in its actions, but it is the vocal minority that gets the action done in rule-making sessions.

Your letter may not get printed, but it may get filed under the topic in question, so the next time the media go off on a witch hunt, it

Be Part of the Vocal Majority

BY JOEL JACKSON



I HAVE ONE SURE-FIRE THERAPY FOR DEALING WITH THE STRESS OF MEDIA ATTACKS ON OUR INDUSTRY — WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

will be inclined to do more research based on your input. As much as it loves to use negative, attention-grabbing headlines, the media also has a vested interest in getting it right. When letters with documented facts keep coming in to challenge stories, the media’s credibility and jobs are at stake.

Do not remain a member of the silent majority and let another piece of misinformation go unchallenged. Silence allows the public perception of golf courses as toxic wastelands to fester. If you write a letter, the media will be given an opportunity to learn both sides of the issue and be better equipped to make decisions about coverage — and perhaps inform readers in the process.

Will your one letter change the opinion of the activists? No. Will your factual letter provide some balance to the issue? Absolutely. You can remain a member of the silent majority and be considered sheep to be led, or you can speak up calmly with facts on your side and give the rest of the flock a choice.

In recent dealings with the media and government officials, I have learned that they are generally grossly misinformed about turfgrass and golf. We have made headway with some reporters and regulators. For every one who now sees the big picture, there are 10 who only know the anti-environment pabulum they have been fed by years of unchallenged articles.

The pen can be as mighty as the sword, but you have to be willing to unsheathe it once in awhile and strike a blow for your own stress relief. It’s up to you to give the silent majority a goose every now and then.

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

Down

&

These head
superintendents
dig ditches,
mow greens, spray pesticides,
whack weeds, grind reels – and love it



"My philosophy is that nobody is going to jump in a hole unless you jump in one first," says Russel "Rusty" Tisdale, superintendent of Cobb's Glen CC.

Dirty

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

The dirty, crusty and worn gloves hang like a couple of trophy fish on the wall in John Monson's pint-sized office. They've seen better days. That's because they've seen thousands of days.

A handwritten note by Monson hangs on the wall below the retired and decrepit gloves. "Guess they are worn out," it says. "New in 1957. Have seen many ski tow ropes and golf course dirt. RIP. 1/03/02. J.M."

The gloves are a testament to Monson's hard work as the superintendent at Long Prairie CC, a semiprivate course in the small town of Long Prairie, Minn. If the gloves could talk, they would tell you Monson is more blue-collar than white-collar when it comes to the business of tending turf. You'll find him in a ditch wielding a beat-up shovel more often than sitting at his desk grasping a shiny ballpoint pen.

"I can still shovel as much dirt as the kids," the 61-year-old says proudly. "Sometimes I think I'm younger than I am."



Monson is part of a segment of superintendents that prefers to get down and dirty when it comes to golf course maintenance. They like to dig ditches to locate irrigation leaks. They like to mow fairways and roughs. They like to fire up weed eaters and whack the tall grass. They like to spray pesticides. They like to grind reels. Hence, these superintendents don't wear Hagar slacks, Nike golf shirts and \$80 FootJoys to work (not that there's anything wrong with that).

Of course, these rugged superintendents must like to get down and dirty because their job descriptions call for them to do so. Their courses don't sport big maintenance budgets, and their crews don't feature a slew of workers. But make no mistake: They are the type who feel it's their duty to work side by side with their crew members in two feet of muck.

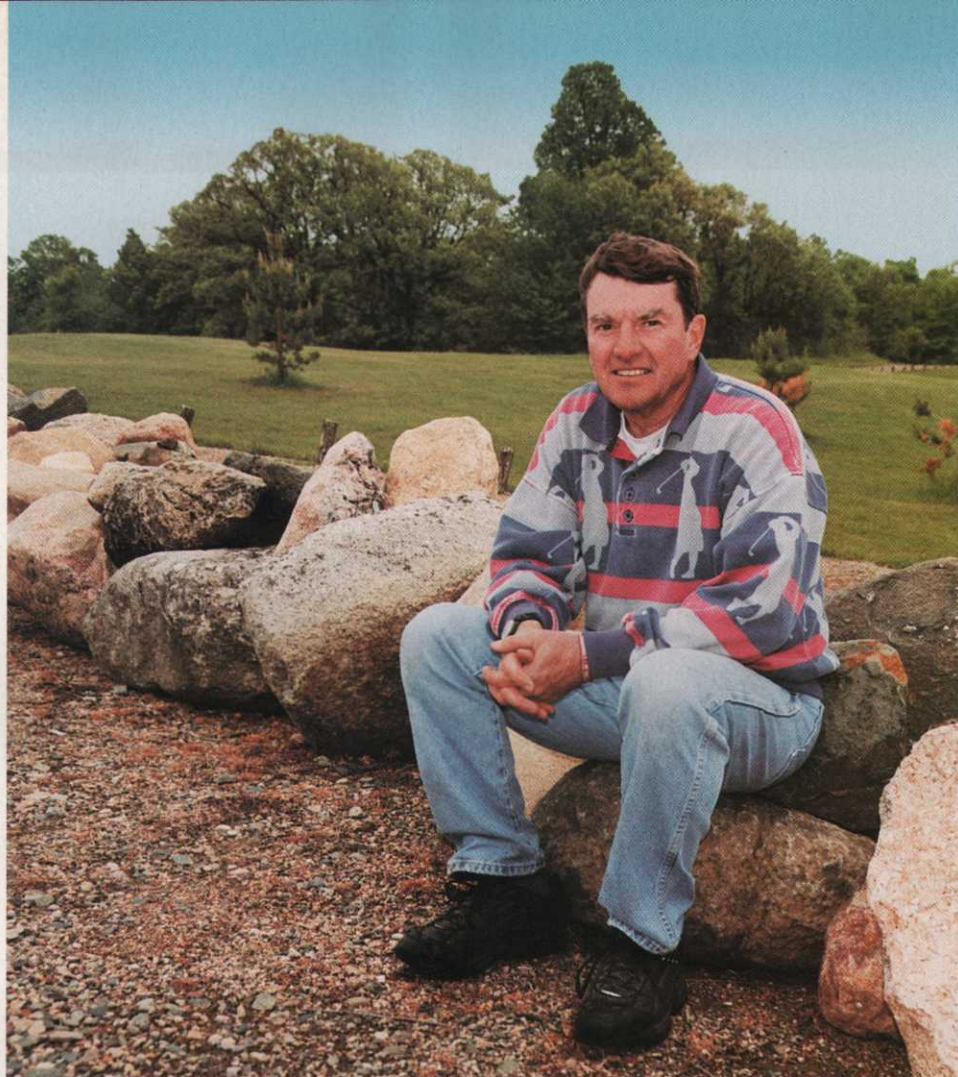
While some superintendents shoot for the stars in terms of money and glory (not that there's anything wrong with that), many of the down-and-dirty types don't care how much

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“ I can still shovel as much dirt as the kids. Sometimes I think I’m younger than I am.”

John Monson

SUPERINTENDENT
OF LONG PRAIRIE CC



LARRY AYLWARD

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they make and if their courses ever appear on any “best of” lists. But that’s not to say they don’t care how their courses look. They are just as passionate about good agronomy at their modest tracks as superintendents are at the big-name courses.

It’s hard to say how many down-and-dirty superintendents are scattered throughout the country. But it’s safe to say they’re well represented in every region and definitely not a dying breed.

“We don’t do surveys to see if you’re a coat-and-tie superintendent or a dirt-under-the-fingernails superintendent,” says Jeff Bollig, director of communications for the GCSAA. “But we know there are all types of superintendents.”

Love the mud

On this cool and cloudy afternoon, Monson is dressed in faded and dirty blue jeans, a long-sleeved shirt decorated with silhouettes of Payne Stewart swinging a golf club and black shoes with more mileage on them than a college kid’s 1982 Chevy. Monson, who has

worked at the course since 1968 and has been its superintendent since 1977, is 61 going on 35. He’s neither tall nor broad-shouldered, but he’s as tough as a pair of steeled-toed boots.

“You have spray technicians and irrigation technicians at the bigger courses,” Monson says. “But at places [like Long Prairie], you’re the jack of all trades and master of none. That’s what I like about it. I couldn’t just go around and not do anything physical.”

Dave Spotts, superintendent of Eagle Crossing GC in Carlisle, Pa., knows where Monson is coming from. He’s the spray tech, irrigation tech and certified ditch digger at the public course. Getting grubby is part of his day.

“I’m kind of like Pig Pen,” says Spotts, who wears a blue Dickies uniform to work. “Even if I’m not going out to dig a ditch, I still come back dirty.”

The 48-year-old admits that certain body parts hurt more than they used to, but he won’t let the aches and pain change his hands-on approach. “What am I going to do, sit in a rocking chair?” he says sarcastically.

If his name is on the course, Spotts says

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CIRCLE NO. 121

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it's his duty to be in the midst of its daily maintenance. "I have to be out there on top of it."

Leading by example

If there's a big ditch to be dug, Monson won't instruct his crew to do it. It's likely he'll say, "Let's dig it together."

"I don't expect any of my employees to do something I wouldn't do myself," Monson says. "If the job is too dirty or too hard for me

to do, I don't expect them to do it. I lead by example."

A superintendent is going to earn credibility and respect if he works shoulder to shoulder in the mud with a guy making seven bucks an hour.

"My philosophy is that nobody is going to jump in a hole unless you jump in one first," says Russel "Rusty" Tisdale, superintendent of Cobb's Glen CC, a semiprivate course in Anderson, S.C. "Leading by example is the easiest way to get people to do what you need to get done."

Joe Ondo, certified superintendent of Winter Pines GC in Winter Park, Fla., estimates that about 40 percent of superintendents are of the dirt-under-the-fingernails variety, like himself. Ondo has been at Winter Pines since 1979, and says he's been getting down and dirty since Day One.

"The guys who have worked for me appreciate that I'm not afraid to be right beside them," Ondo says. "If I have to get in there and hold a pipe wrench, I will."

Ted Cox, superintendent of Running Fox GC in Chillicothe, Ohio, says he doesn't view himself above performing any difficult task.

"If a crew member comes in from a tough job, I'll tell him to take a break and let me take over for awhile," Cox says. "He'll appreciate that."

Cox's philosophy is simple: If you lead by example, your crew will work harder for you.

While it's good to work close with the crew, Tisdale and others are careful not to get too chummy with workers. "Sometimes I might get too close, and someone might try to take advantage of me," Tisdale says.

For example, a worker might start showing up late because he feels he can get away with it since he and his boss are buds. But that thinking won't fly with Tisdale.

"[A worker] might think that I won't fire him because I'm his buddy," Tisdale says. "But I will."

"It's good to be one of the guys, but you have to watch it," Ondo adds. "Sometimes you have to crack down."

Nothin' fancy

Monson's 10-foot-by-10-foot office has no heat. But it does have a desk, which is more

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Jean-etic Makeup

You think Ted Turner's decision to colorize *It's a Wonderful Life* was controversial. In 1999, the GCSAA caused a stir when it colorized the blue jeans of a noteworthy superintendent in a back-page advertisement that appeared in the association's magazine, *Golf Course Management*.

Mark Wilson, certified superintendent of Valhalla GC in Louisville, Ky., was wearing blue jeans in the ad. But because some leaders of GCSAA viewed dressing in blue jeans as unprofessional, the GCSAA instructed its graphic design team to color the blue jeans brown for the ad.

"That was funny," says Ted Cox, superintendent of Running Fox GC in Chillicothe, Ohio, who wears jeans and boots to work almost every day. "Did [the GCSAA] really need to do that? I don't think so. I'm not going to change the way I dress just to conform to what the GCSAA says I should wear."

But Cox, a hands-on superintendent who's heavily involved with the maintenance of his course, knows when to don his good duds. If he's summoned to an important meeting, he'll wear a pair of khakis and a golf shirt. He doesn't want to look like a slob in a situation where he's supposed to appear professional.

Russel "Rusty" Tisdale, superintendent of Cobb's Glen CC in Anderson, S.C., says there are days when he wears holey and dirty jeans.

"But I dress up if I have to go to a meeting and present myself," he says. "I've got suits and ties in my closet as well as overalls."

There's an ongoing debate on how superintendents should dress. Some say superintendents should never dress like blue-collar workers. Others say superintendents have to dress like blue-collar workers because many of them perform blue-collar tasks.

But the key is that certain situations call for superintendents to appear professional, no matter what their collars, says Joel Jackson, *Golfdom's* contributing editor and a superintendent for more than 30 years. Jackson had his blue-collar and white-collar days. But if there was a chapter meeting or trade show to attend, he always wore clothes to befit the occasion. It's alright to jump in a hole and get dirty, Jackson says. Just make sure you have a change of clothes in your office in case you get called into a meeting.

Back to the ad in *Golf Course Management*. Jeff Bollig, GCSAA's director of communications, says it was the members' call, not CEO Steve Mona's, to colorize Wilson's jeans. He says the magazine's publication committee, comprised of superintendents, made the decision because they want their peers to appear professional in print.

But Bollig stresses that the GCSAA understands there are superintendents who get down and dirty and have to wear crummy clothes work.

"Just because we don't have superintendents who wear jeans in our magazine doesn't mean we're bypassing the superintendents who get down and dirty," he says. "It's all about positioning the superintendent as being professional."

— Larry Aylward, Editor