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2. Increase root mass and depth.
3. Increase stress tolerance.
4. Reduce thatch accumulation.
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7. Reduce nutrient leaching.
8. Increase photosynthesis and photochemical efficiency.
9. Increase disease resistance.
10. Reduce potential for diseases associated with excess Nitrogen.

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Six weeks into his new job at the 18-hole Comanche Trail GC in Big Spring, Texas, Jack Birdwell trudged over to the trailer where he lived, sank down on its stoop and buried his head in his hands. He remembers thinking, "What in the world have I gotten myself into?"

Birdwell, Comanche's superintendent and pro shop operator, had left a good-paying job as superintendent at a course in Roswell, N.M., in 1997 to return to his Texas roots. In Roswell, he never worried about having enough employees or where the money would come from for maintenance. His \$400,000 budget amply met all his needs.

The city-owned Comanche, on the other hand, had a budget less than half that (\$168,000 his first year; it's now slightly more than \$253,000) and three employees. At the same time, West Texas hemorrhaged jobs during the economic downturn, reducing the number of people who could actually afford to play golf.

Still, Birdwell's optimistic outlook on his new job never wavered — until he arrived at the course. He was shocked and shaken by what he found there.

On his first day, Birdwell found an inoperable irrigation system, three pieces of 10-year-old turf equipment and fairways so dry the grass had died, leaving golfers to play on dirt. It would have been enough to break the spirit of Job.

"The first six months were a nightmare," Birdwell says. "There were times during that period when I thought I'd lost my mind in taking the job."

On top of everything else, the city refused to invest any money in the course. Desperately, Birdwell asked city council to guarantee it would invest whatever money the course made in his first year back into the golf course.

"They just laughed at me," Birdwell says. "Then they said, 'OK, and for every \$5,000 that you're over budget, you have to pay us back.' I agreed. What choice did I have?"

Undaunted, Birdwell worked to make a go of it. He saved money like a miser. When one of his three employees left for a better job,

## Perseverance Spurs a Revival

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.



BUT SIX WEEKS INTO HIS NEW JOB, JACK BIRDWELL REMEMBERS THINKING TO HIMSELF, "WHAT IN THE WORLD HAVE I GOTTEN INTO?"

Birdwell didn't replace him. He stopped fertilizing the fairways. He watered only greens (a process that took six hours every morning because his one well only pumped 250 gallons per minute).

But Birdwell must have done something right: At the end of the year, Comanche turned a \$12,000 profit. Per his agreement with the city council, the money went right back into the golf course — and Birdwell went on a spending spree.

"Well, not a spree exactly," Birdwell says, laughing. "I went to the bigger-budget courses and begged them to sell me some of their used equipment. The first time out, I bought two greens mowers and a spray rig. It was as if I'd won the lottery."

His predecessor had left him a two-year supply of chemicals, meaning Birdwell could spend the money on more pressing matters, like digging a second well (which freed him from paying the city for water and increased his irrigation-system capacity) and the equipment purchases. "Without the stockpile of chemicals, I don't know what I would have done," Birdwell says.

He also used inmate labor from the local prison to do manual labor like mowing rough and weed-eating, which freed up his staff to work on the irrigation system upgrade.

"I'm glad we explored that option when it was available," Birdwell says. "They helped us make significant improvements that are paying off now."

Birdwell's situation is hardly unusual. He says that in West Texas alone, there are 84 courses just like his, struggling to survive on a shoestring. But it's a tribute to the enduring spirit of the profession that Birdwell and all his low-budget course colleagues continue to press on, often making the best

*Continued on page 84*

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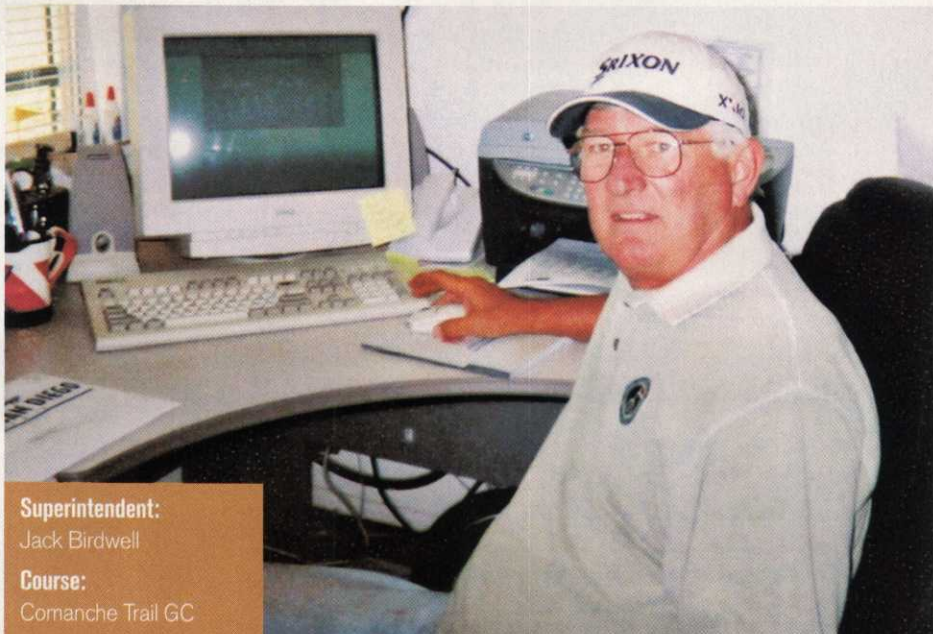
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## Down and Dirty

Continued from page 82 of a bad situation. And in many cases, unlikely triumphs result.

Seven years after his disastrous beginning, Birdwell is proud to announce that the course expects to do 40,000 rounds (up from 28,000 in his first year) and the club will turn a profit of \$60,000 for the city of Big Spring. He says there's a lot more work to be done, but he's happy with the way everything turned out. The feeling of despair that once engulfed him has disappeared.

"It was a long hard struggle to make it work, but we're on the road back," Birdwell says. "I'm looking forward to staying here for years to come."



**Superintendent:**

Jack Birdwell

**Course:**

Comanche Trail GC

**Location:**

Big Spring, Texas

**Maintenance budget:**

\$253,000

Though Jack Birdwell despaired when he first arrived at Comanche Trail GC in 1997, he now has hope that things are moving in the right direction. His new computerized irrigation system helped turn the course around.

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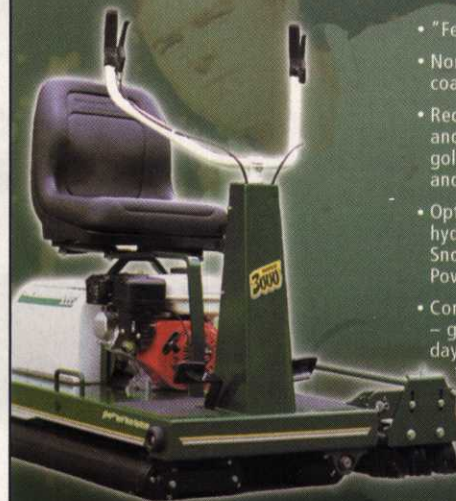
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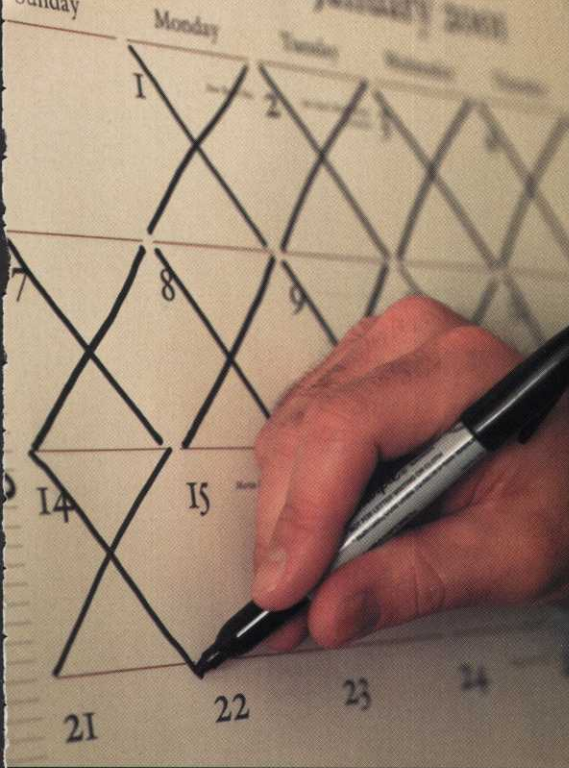
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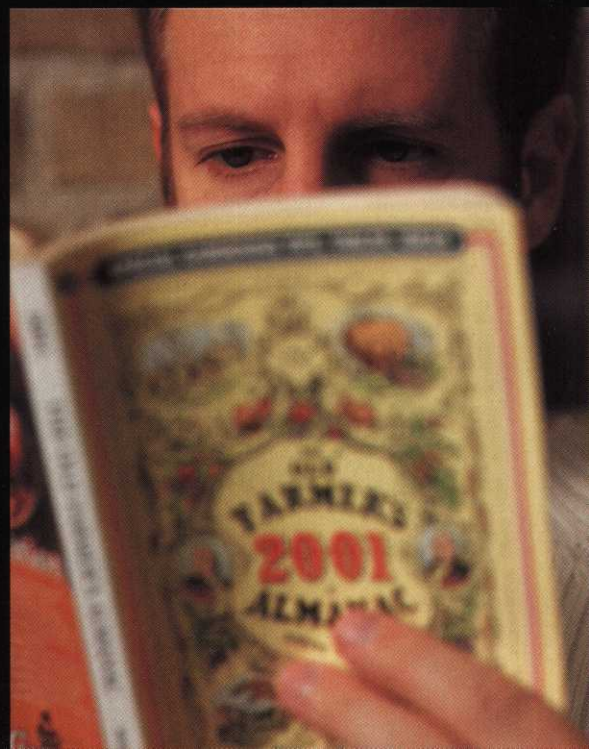
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# Twosomes in Turf

Married couples make careers out of golf course maintenance

BY PETER BLAIS

**W**hen the grass starts dying in central Pennsylvania, Wanda Fry doesn't just hear about it from her husband Jeff, the long-time certified superintendent at Lebanon CC. "I hear about it from 200 superintendents," says the executive secretary of the Central Pennsylvania GCSA.

The Frys are one of at least a half-dozen husband-and-wife teams with one spouse serving as a superintendent and the other as the chief administrator of a regional superintendents association. All agree that their marriages are positive situations, and they share their turf knowledge to help each other in their jobs. Here's a look at four married couples that fit the bill.

## WANDA AND JEFFREY FRY

Jeffrey has been a superintendent for 16 years and was recently promoted to general manager at Lebanon CC. The two married 13 years ago, and Wanda became executive secretary of the Central Pennsylvania GCSA two years later. In fact, the last three executive secretaries have been spouses of superintendents. Wanda worked in the mental health field until the couple had children.

"After being in the field I was in, you come to realize the importance of family," she says. "I work out of my home now, which is across the street from the golf course. The number of hours per week varies with the time of year. I edit the newsletter, manage the database, handle the



Jeffrey and Wanda Fry have a greater understanding for the pressures they both face because they're in the same field.

bills, assist the treasurer with the monthly statements and field all the phone calls."

The two better appreciate each other's job responsibilities because they're in the same field. "He understands what I go through waiting for the guys to send in newsletter articles because he knows how superintendents are," Wanda says. "And I appreciate how busy superintendents are because I see his schedule.

"Many wives don't understand or appreciate the field unless they've had an opportunity like this," she adds. "Superintendents work a lot of hours. And it's not always appreciated. Nothing is ever right. The greens aren't fast enough, or the rough is too high."

*Continued on page 88*



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### TENIA AND BUCK WORKMAN

Buck is certified superintendent at Cateechee GC in Hartwell, Ga. He has been a superintendent for the past 25 years, a member of the Georgia GCSA board of directors for 12 years and the association's immediate past president. Tenia took over as executive director of the 850-member GGCSA last spring, replacing Karen White. White moved to Texas, where husband Charles, also a former superintendent while she was GGCSA executive director, accepted a position as an agronomist for the USGA Green Section's Mid-Continent Region.

"With my husband being in the golf business for so long and our 15-year-old son John [a single-digit handicapper] being an avid golfer, this just felt like a perfect fit," Tenia says.

The GGCSA office is in downtown Hartwell, a town of roughly 4,200, located in northeast Georgia. Tenia's responsibilities run the gamut from public relations to financial administration, overseeing monthly meetings, conducting the association's educational seminars and golf tournaments, and working with the Allied Golf Group (AGG). AGG is a joint effort involving the Georgia PGA, Georgia State Golf Association, Club Managers Association and GGCSA that was formed to stay abreast of the uncertain water situation brought on by a drought that's plagued the state in recent years.

"We've been very busy contacting our legis-

lators and letting them know that superintendents are the good guys and are working hard to help out with the water situation," she says.

In fact, Buck has been actively involved in efforts to move courses toward the use of effluent since Cateechee, one of just 41 Audubon International Signature courses worldwide, was built as a way for the town to dispose of its treated wastewater.

Buck has been a major help to her in her first year on the job.

"If I have a question about something in a magazine article, I can ask him," Tenia says. "He gives me information about how the association has spent its research dollars in the past, and ideas about how to approach universities and technical schools regarding what we'd like to do in the future."

White, who was GGCSA executive director for 12 1/2 years before moving to Texas and is now her husband's administrative assistant with the USGA, said of their working relationship: "We could relate easily to each other. It was extremely helpful because we knew many of the same people, traveled in the same circles and both understood the turfgrass industry."

### LORI AND TOM RUSSELL

Lori has been executive director of both the Peaks and Prairies GCSA (encompassing primarily Montana and Wyoming) and Idaho GCSA for nearly 10 years. Husband Tom has been a superintendent for two decades and is certified superintendent at Marias Valley Golf and CC in Shelby, Mont., located 30 miles from the Canadian border.

"One of the biggest advantages [for Tom] is that I'm aware of the time and commitment his job takes," says Lori, who credits that understanding to her dealings with many superintendents.

She also benefits from his knowledge.

"If I'm reading or writing about a maintenance subject I don't fully understand or diseases that relate to our area, I can turn to him for help," Lori says. "He helps find subjects to feature in the newsletter. I'm on our associations' education committees, so if I run across something I'll ask him if it is pertinent to our area. He has saved me from some embarrassing moments."

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**"With my husband being in the golf business for so long and our 15-year-old son John being an avid golfer, this just felt like a perfect fit."**

TENIA WORKMAN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GGCSA



Tenia and Buck Workman took over from another dynamic duo where both spouses worked in turf – Karen and Charles White.



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