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Golfdom

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Not at all. BlueYellow is just a new and inventive way to grow turf.

By Larry Aylward



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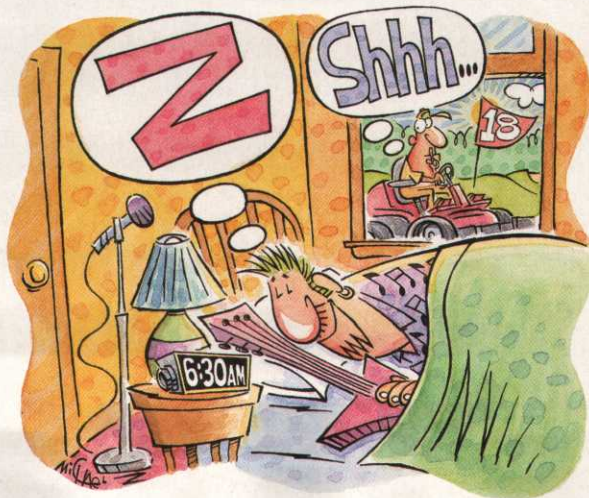
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... thanks to 'vrrummless' electric greens mower.

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cover story

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.

Whistling Straits put its faith in 27-year-old superintendent David Swift (red shirt), who accepted the challenge with confidence.

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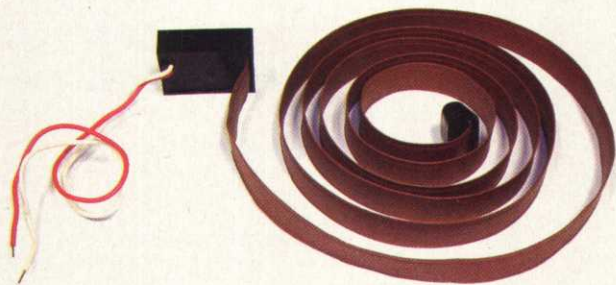
Photographer Glenn Thiesenhusen of Blue Moon Studio in Sheboygan, Wis., captured Dave Swift's youthful exuberance when he snapped the shot of the superintendent of Whistling Straits Golf Course.

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First, we have to tell you that daddy's office is not nearly as cool as we thought it would be. He always calls it "Golf-dom Global Headquarters," but that's a bunch of hooey. His office doesn't even have a ceiling.

One of the other people here told us it's called a "Cube Farm," but it doesn't look like any farm we've seen. The only thing they seem to grow here is big piles of paper.

Before daddy bolted off on his fishing trip, he told us to write about what we think of his job and the golf business. All we really know about dad's job is that he flies around the country going to "shows" where they give out mini-flashlights, key chains and other cool stuff he brings home to us.

That doesn't seem very tough, but he always claims to be "too tired" to help us with our geometry homework. Mom says he isn't really tired — just "math-challenged."

Superintendents, on the other hand, sound like they have really hard jobs. Daddy says they get up at "O-Dark-Thirty" — whatever that means — and spend all day making sure everything gets mowed and that the grass stays healthy. They also get to ride around on really cool little carts and tell the crew how to do stuff.

A couple of times when we've gone along with our dad to visit superintendents at their courses, they always seem to be in their offices working on their computers, signing bills or reading daddy's magazine. That looks boring to us.

They should get to spend all day outside on the golf course — getting dirty, running through those humongous sprinklers and having fun. But daddy says they have to manage a pretty big operation and that takes a lot of their time away from the good stuff. What a bummer.

Sometimes they get yelled at by golfers for silly things. "The grass is too long!" one golfer will say. Then, on the very same day, another golfer will say, "The grass is too short!"

This is goofy because the superintendent is the one who went to college and is the

A Kids-Eye View of the Golf World

BY PAT JONES' BOYS



Michael Jones



Ryan Jones

PAT JONES IS AWAY
AND COULD NOT
WRITE HIS
REGULAR COLUMN.
HIS YOUNG SONS,
MICHAEL AND RYAN,
ARE FILLING IN FOR
HIM THIS MONTH

expert on how long the grass should be. We just don't understand why golfers do this.

Superintendents also have to take care of the environment, which is neat. We learned that golf courses are living, breathing things. Because of this, we have promised to be very careful to not take big, nasty divots when we play. Courses are also home to many kinds of birds and other animals. Superintendents are heroes because they help the animals and still make the environment even prettier. We wish all kids understood this.

We did research for this column by talking to superintendents' kids. They said their favorite things about their dads' or moms' jobs were riding around the course with them or even helping out by chasing the geese with the goose dogs. Their least favorite thing is that their dads or moms spend too much time at the course, and they never get to take a summer vacation like the other kids.

So our conclusion (daddy said we should have one) is that we think all superintendents with kids should take them along to work more often, spend less time at the course and make sure to go on a summer vacation. OK?

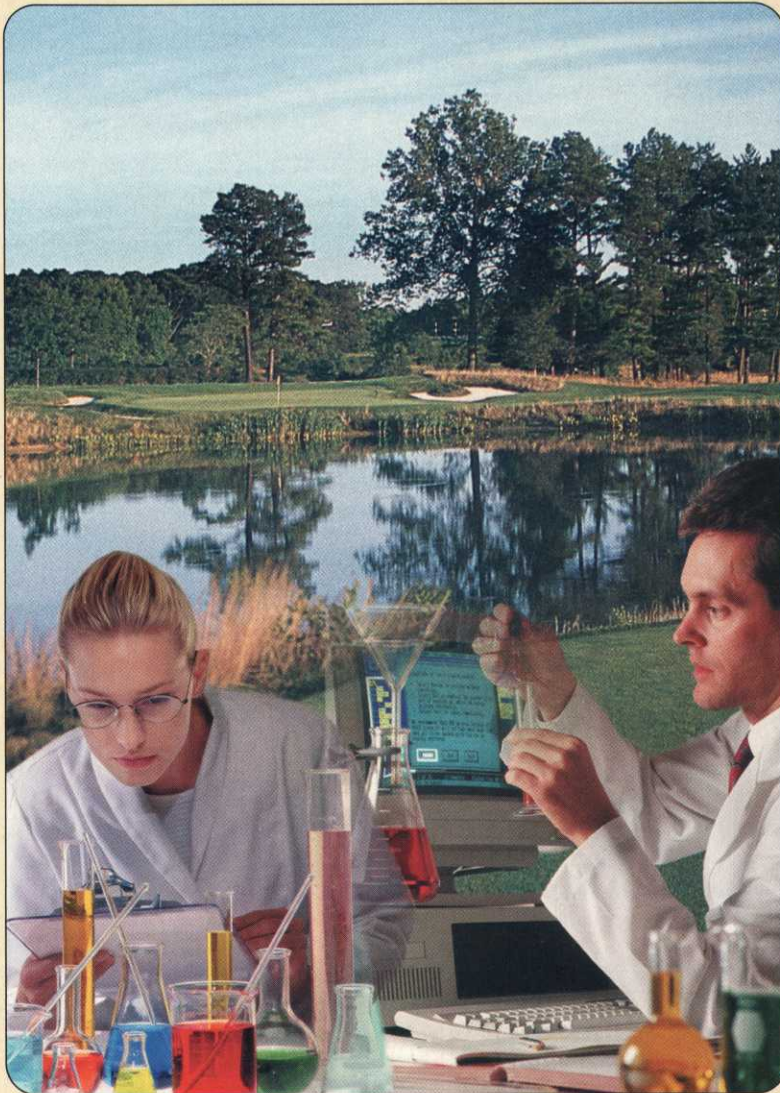
Now that our column is done, we have a few other things to do while daddy's gone. He said something about selling a bunch of ads, calling a whole list of people on the phone and then giving some speeches at chapter meetings. Sheesh. When we grow up, we're going to have real jobs ... just like superintendents.

Michael and Ryan Jones are the temporary junior assistant publishers of Golfdom. They can be reached via their dad's e-mail address, pjones@advanstar.com, assuming they didn't blow up his computer playing Super Mario Brothers while he was gone.

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*Take it easy, take it easy,
Don't let the sound of your own wheels
drive you crazy.*

You could say that *Take It Easy*, the Eagles' hit song from the mid-1970s, was superintendent Don Sutton's theme song when he grew in Kinsale Golf Club last year and the year before.

Yes, we did say last year *and* the year before. Sutton had that long to grow in Kinsale, located in the booming suburbia on the northern edge of Columbus, Ohio. Hence, there wasn't the sound of Sutton's own bustling wheels screeching in his head reminding him to hurry up and get the course grown in so it could open, and the new cash register could be broken in.

That's not to say the grow-in didn't come with pressure. But it was sure nice to have a lot of time to grow in the Arthur Hills design, Sutton says.

Now Sutton realizes that the golf business, like many facets of American commerce, is driven by the almighty dollar. It's expensive to build a golf course, so it's vital to open it quickly to start making money.

The Kinsale project, however, goes against the "time is money" motto. Sutton's philosophy — with which it is difficult to contend — states that taking one's time on a massive project, such as building a golf course, also equates directly to the issue of accruing legal tender.

Sutton seeded Kinsale in October 2002. A lot of courses seeded around that time of year are expected to open the following spring. Kinsale targeted late May of this year to open. The course's key decision makers, including Sutton, thought it best to let the course ripen like a full-grown tomato before opening.

In May, Sutton opened the course to area superintendents to play in a qualifying round for the BASF Professional Turf-sponsored People vs. The Pros event. One could tell Sutton was proud to have his peers over to his house. He was confident that they would be impressed, too. Sutton said that day he was 99 percent satisfied with the course's appearance.

The 35-year-old Sutton says the decision makers didn't want to open Kinsale in a rush and have players playing on thin turf and hitting second shots from bad lies. They knew that

Taking the Time for a Grow-In

BY LARRY AYLWARD



**SUTTON SAYS IT WAS
MORE IMPORTANT
FOR THE COURSE'S
BUSINESS TO MAKE
A SOLID FIRST
IMPRESSION THAN
TO OPEN EARLY**

would be akin to someone buying a new car, taking it out for a spin and discovering that the air conditioning didn't work. (So much for going back to that dealership.)

"Our goal was to open in perfect condition and have people in awe of what we were offering," says Sutton, who has political science and turf degrees from The Ohio State University.

Who can argue with that shoot-for-the-stars thinking? In mid-May, the course's turf looked healthy and mature. Yes, Kinsale looked like a new golf course, what with newly planted trees and shimmering new cart paths, but the turf looked like it had been there awhile.

Competition is tough in Kinsale's market, and many of the rivals are fantastic golf courses. The area has the reputation for having some of the best maintained courses in the country, Sutton points out. So it made sense that Kinsale's goal was for its turf to *look* like the other golf courses' turf when it opened.

Kinsale's course and clubhouse cost \$25 million. Not many owners can sit on the opening of a golf course with that kind of jack invested. But Sutton says it was more important for the course's business to make a solid first impression than to open early, earn some money and take the chance on not making a good first impression because the turf was still in its infancy.

It was long-sighted thinking, and it sure made sense. It took the pressure off Sutton, who had the time to think twice about making decisions related to the grow-in.

But it wasn't like Sutton didn't feel *any* pressure. Remember, this is the golf course maintenance business in 2004. "If you're given a year and a half to do a grow-in, the course had better be perfect when it opens," Sutton declares.

OK. So it wasn't *that* easy.

Editor Larry Aylward can be reached at 440-891-2770 or laylward@advanstar.com.