

Life on Linksland

Nature rules at Bandon Dunes and Pacific Dunes, where
superintendents face an ongoing battle with the elements

STORY AND PHOTOS

BY ANDREW PENNER

In 1936, the town of Bandon, Ore., burned to the ground. Fourteen people died and only 16 buildings were left standing. The fire, which ripped through the tinder-dry vegetation along the coast and attacked the town with incredible speed and force, was fueled by an invasive plant known as gorse.

Today, gorse is still a problem in Bandon, and especially so if you happen to be one of the two superintendents at the famed Bandon Dunes Golf Resort, home to America's finest links courses. But for superintendents Ken Nice of Pacific Dunes and Troy Russell of Bandon Dunes, gorse is just one of numerous challenges to face in an ongoing battle with the elements.

In the summer of 1999, just before ground was broken for Pacific Dunes — the incredible follow-up course to Bandon Dunes — another fire blazed through the area and actually scorched the site of the upcoming Tom Doak layout.

"Obviously, the fire in 1999 wasn't nearly as catastrophic as the 1936 blaze," says Pacific's laid-back superintendent Ken Nice. "But it was definitely a huge concern at the time. Flames reached 100 feet and we had to soak the holes on Bandon that were nearest the blaze to ensure they didn't get torched."

Interestingly, the fire actually did plenty of good when it came down to routing Doak's marvelous effort at the resort.

"The fire cleaned out the gorse and allowed us to see every contour that was hidden or disguised by vegetation," remembers Russell, who



initially hired Nice to work on Bandon Dunes back in 1999 before Nice was awarded the head job at Pacific in 2000. "The result was an opportunity to route a course with absolutely everything laid bare before us. Unquestionably, the fire allowed Doak to improve the route."

But for Nice and Russell, fire is not something they have to fight routinely. Gorse, however, definitely is. Their crews are in constant gorse control mode. Each of the two 20-man crews at Bandon Dunes are well-trained when it comes to spotting and destroying the invasive plants, which they need to be. Gorse grows quickly and unrelentingly.

"If we weren't on the stuff daily, it would be absolutely everywhere," Russell says.

The crews on both courses, which are split into teams of three or four with a section leader, will either yank the gorse out by hand if it's small

Continued on page 72

Troy Russell (left) of Bandon Dunes and Ken Nice of Pacific Dunes are the superintendents of America's finest links courses.



A steady 30 mph wind is the norm at Bandon Dunes Resort. During storms, winds can get up to 100 mph.

Continued from page 71

enough, dig it out or spot spray it with herbicide. In areas on the course where gorse is actually desired — for definition or as a hazard — it is sheared regularly.

Besides the constant battle with gorse, another daily concern at Bandon is the ever-present wind. In summer, the prevailing winds come from the north and in winter they do a 180-degree turn and howl out of the south. While a steady 30 mph wind in the afternoon is the norm, wind speeds can reach frightening levels when winter storms blow through. “On a typical year, we’ll have eight to 10 storms where winds reach 60 mph, and two major storms where winds can get to 100 mph,” Russell says.

For Nice and Russell, the wind presents a challenge in two major ways: shifting and blowing sand, and irrigating the golf course during the dry season.

Interestingly, the wind’s effect on the bunkering at Bandon varies from course to course. If you’ve been fortunate enough to play these courses, then you know that they are quite different in the way they play and are designed. Bandon Dunes, designed by David McKay Kidd, is longer, more open and features greens about one-third larger than Pacific’s (170,000 total square feet of greens on Bandon and 125,000 total square feet on Pacific). The bunkering is also different in nature. Bandon’s bunkers are small, deep, and sodded — fairly typical pot bunkers designed in the tradition of GlenEagles in Scotland.

Pacific Dunes’ bunkering is much more dramatic (similar to Royal County Down in Ireland) with natural sand blowouts and ragged edges lined with beachgrass and gorse. The bunkers are constantly evolving. When the winds come, it’s the bunkering at Pacific Dunes that sees the most change.

“It would be pointless to continually dump sand back in the bunkers,” Nice says. “So for the most part, we let Mother Nature take its course. For us, it comes down to making the natural soils and sand in the bunkers playable regardless of what stays and what blows out.”

The crew at Pacific Dunes uses a bunker raking machine weekly to maintain a playable texture of what remains. Shovels and brooms are the tools of choice when cleanup is needed on closely mowed areas of the course where too much sand has accumulated. Other than that, bunkers are raked by hand to keep uniformity. Or in the case of the exceptional 13th hole on Pacific Dunes, which features a massive, wind-sculpted dune on the right side, they are left completely untouched.

The climate in Bandon, which is divided into two distinct periods, is like clockwork. High pressure, clear skies and almost no rain is the norm from June through September. The course receives upwards of 60 inches of rain from October through May. For Nice and Russell, this means the watering program in the four dry months is vital to healthy turf, and it poses a challenge.

Continued on page 74



It's noon AND THE COURSE
SUPERINTENDENT'S WORKDAY IS *half over.*
Only 8 hours to go.

Our accessories are designed to require little attention
so you can devote your time to what really matters.
www.paraide.com





The turf is tight and thin because of the widespread use of fescues for the greens, fairways and tees.

Continued from page 72

In summer, Bandon's prevailing winds come out of the north — always. And in July and August, when the wind never stops, the situation becomes extremely tricky. "We've got to be really careful in the summer, or we'll have 'hot spots' all over the place," Nice says.

For Nice and Russell, it often comes down to hand-watering areas that just don't get coverage because of wind. They are also experimenting with low-angle nozzles.

Another reason why the turf remains tight and thin is the widespread use of fescues for greens, fairways and tees, which is standard for links golf. A unique combination of fescue and Colonial bentgrass was used on both courses. The low-fertility approach (it takes divots up to four months to grow back) means mowers aren't as busy as most typical North American courses. A rigorous vertidrainage program ensures that the turf stays healthy.

The greens, although mowed at nearly one-quarter inch throughout the year, keep a quicker-than-you-think pace and require more top-dressing applications to keep thatch at a minimum and to control *Poa annua*.

"The Pacific Northwest is a perfect environment for *Poa*," Nice says. "Right now on Pacific Dunes, we're winning the battle with it, but we remove it off the greens constantly."

The greens on Bandon, which are five years older, do contain some *Poa*.

People knowledgeable about links golf are aware of the fact that soft, lush, highly fertile turf just isn't part of the equation. Tight, thin, dry turf is what links golf is all about. For Nice

and Russell, this is a blessing in disguise.

"It takes some of the pressure off, but there's a fine line," Nice says. "We want the rough to be thin, dry, alive and playable, but we also need some fertility on the fairways. Many North American golfers aren't always familiar, used to or appreciative of the type of conditions we're trying to achieve. But unquestionably, this is the closest thing to 'the old world' as you'll find in the United States."

Many courses adopt the "links" label because they happen to be located near big bodies of water and because their designers included the ground game as a way to play the courses. But the clincher at Bandon Dunes Resort is the true links conditioning.

"Not just firm and fast, but hard and fast," Russell says. "We practice agronomy the old-fashioned way — few inputs, plenty of top-dressing and compost. Our nirvana is sustainable agronomy, and while we may never quite achieve it, that's our aim."

Walking down the eighth hole on Bandon, the wind hammering him head on, Russell stops 50 yards from the green by his ball. He looks down at a super-tight fairway full of thin, colorless areas. It's bumpy, appears burnt in spots and is probably running 10 or 11 on the Stimpmeter.

"A perfect fairway," he exclaims with a smile. Then he reaches into his bag, pulls out his putter and calmly strokes it to 10 feet. "Too bad not everyone sees it that way," he says. ■

Penner is a free-lance writer from Calgary, Alberta.

**WE'RE ROLLING OUT A NEW WAY
TO GROW GRASS THAT'S SO REVOLUTIONARY,
YOU COULD GET CARRIED AWAY.**



INTRODUCING BLUEYELLOW™ THE SMARTEST WAY TO GROW GRASS.

This amazing new engineered turf system contains a mixture of high quality grass seed and fertilizer in a lightweight biodegradable roll. Nothing works better to prevent seed migration - especially on slopes and steep surfaces. It even suppresses weed growth. The simple one-step application works for all types of grass seeds, providing precise seed and fertilizer distribution. No calibration or clean-up is required. We can even custom blend seed and fertilizer combinations, making BlueYellow™ ideal for new course construction or renovation projects. All you do is rake, roll, water, and relax. Just try not to get too carried away.

**COME BY BOOTH 1641
AT THE GCSAA SHOW ON FEB. 12 - 14
to see how this ingenious new turf technology works.
For more information, call 1-866-473-3602 or
visit us at www.blueyellowpro.com**



WELCOME TO

Boot Camp

Training program helps northern California assistants march forward in their careers

STORY & PHOTOS
BY LARRY AYLWARD

The Asilomar Conference Grounds in Pacific Grove, Calif., is not exactly Parris Island, S.C., the well-known site for U.S. Marine Corps boot camps. There are no marching troops chanting “hup, two, three, four.” And there are no barking drill sergeants dressing down crewcut-wearing privates. That said, Asilomar is the perfect place for the Northern California Golf Association (NCGA) to hold

its Assistant Superintendent Boot Camp, a three-day conference that gives assistants the opportunity to meet, to learn and to bond, among other things.

The NCGA held its third annual boot camp at Asilomar in September. Located on the Monterey Peninsula, Asilomar is comprised of 107 acres of flora and fauna fascination. Henry David Thoreau would adore this place.

The great thing about Asilomar is that it's quiet — *really* quiet. The lodges feature rooms without televisions and phones. From a room's balcony, one can hear the tranquilizing sound of the rippling Pacific surf surging to the shore.

“This is a refreshing removal from society,” says Mike McCullough, director of turfgrass services for the Northern California Golf Association and creator of the boot camp.

And that's just the way McCullough wants it. He began the boot camp three years ago because there was a need for an assistant superintendents educational conference in northern California. He developed the boot camp with input from several area assistants.

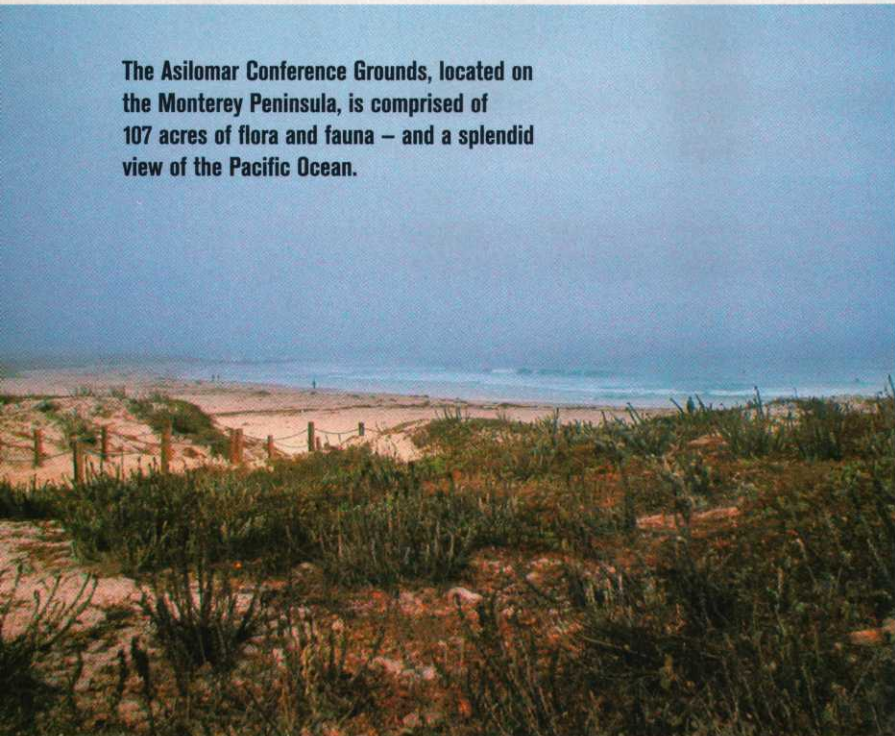
Often, it's assistants who oversee the agronomics of golf courses, McCullough says, but they often get overlooked when it comes to attending conferences or meetings. It's not intentional — that's just the way it is.

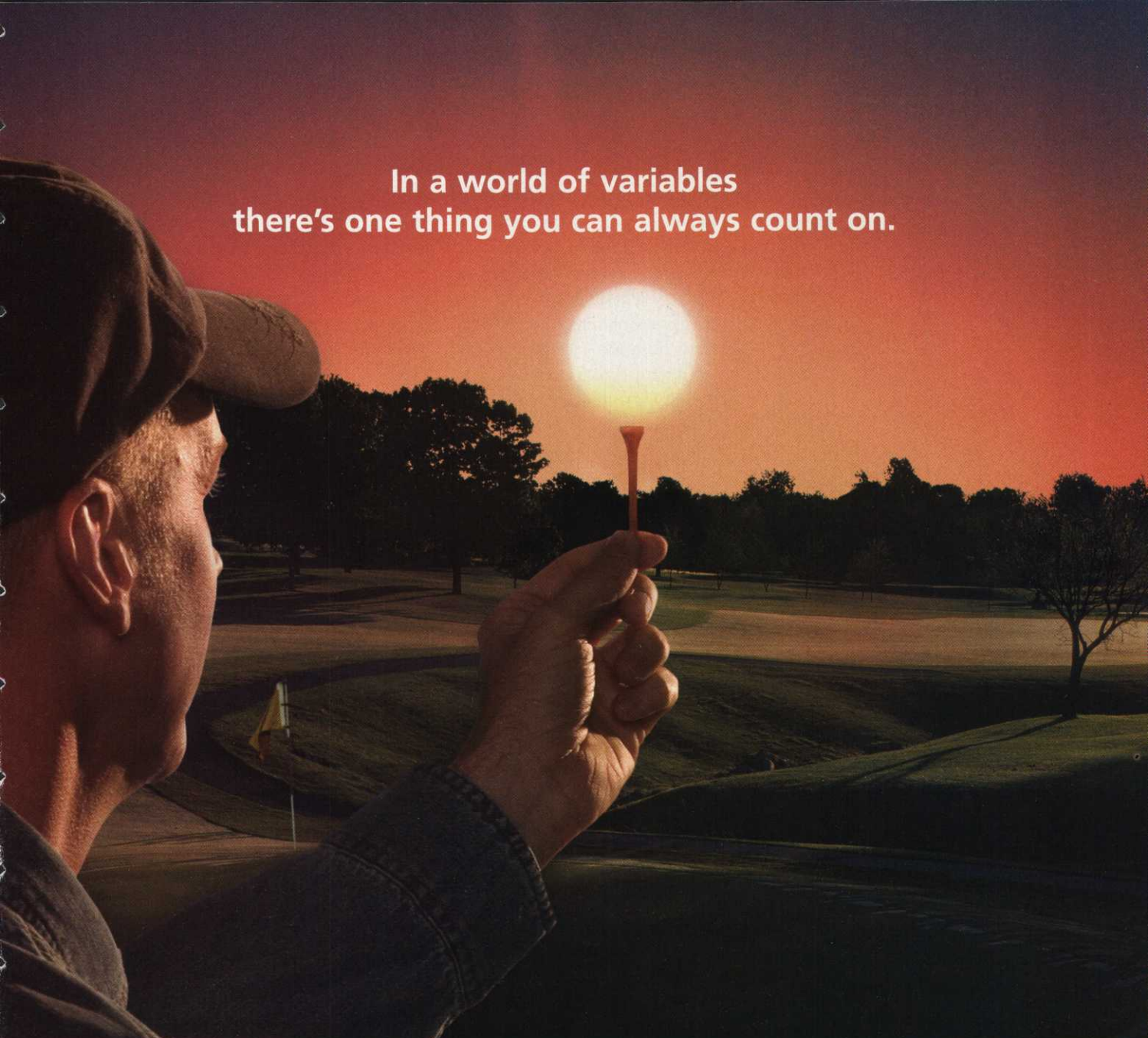
“Assistants are an integral part of the management team,” McCullough says. “But they never get the training to take the next step.”

Says Lonnie Stevens, assistant superintendent of Poppy Ridge Golf Course in Livermore, Calif., and one of the assistants who helped McCullough create the program: “Most superin-

Continued on page 78

The Asilomar Conference Grounds, located on the Monterey Peninsula, is comprised of 107 acres of flora and fauna — and a splendid view of the Pacific Ocean.





In a world of variables
there's one thing you can always count on.

As certain as the sun rises, you can count on Profile Golf's system of innovative technologies and consultation. They make turf establishment a sure thing, on-going maintenance less of a chore and soil erosion a thing of the past.

In the Ground

The agronomic benefits of Profile Porous Ceramics soil amendment have been reinforced on thousands of golf courses around the world. As part of a new greens mix or used in your top dressing program, Profile has proven to be more effective than peat or other inorganic amendments at resisting compaction, improving drainage and enhancing nutrient uptake without breaking down.

On the Ground

Through PECS™ (Profile Erosion Control Solutions) Profile offers site expertise and unsurpassed products including Futerra®

Revegetation Blankets and Flexterra™, the industry's only Flexible Growth Medium™, to make turf establishment as reliable as sod—for a fraction of the cost. Testing and experience prove they help seed germinate faster and more completely to hold soil in place, helping eliminate the threat of erosion.

By Your Side

Our turf specialists work directly with you to analyze your needs and provide turn-key service in reaching a solution. Our commitment to you is underscored through our participation in FarmLinks and ArborLinks, purpose-built facilities dedicated to product evaluation and hands-on superintendent education.

Profilegolf

www.profileproducts.com

For support that runs deep and covers a lot of ground, call us at 1-800-508-8681. We'll send you more details and an offer for FREE product trials.

Welcome to Boot Camp

Continued from page 76

tendents meetings are geared toward superintendents, and assistants generally get left behind to manage the store. A lot of assistants don't get a chance to go to the national conference, so this is kind of the next best thing."

While not really a boot camp, McCullough's program borrows from one. The whole idea of the event is get attendees to focus intently on why they're there — to learn and interact.

THE SERGEANT

Name: Mike McCullough

Rank: Director of Turfgrass Services for the Northern California Golf Association

What He Has to Say: "Assistants are an integral part of the management team. But they never get the training to take the next step."



THE ENLISTED

Name: Sheila McGrew

Rank: NCGA intern at the Meadow Club in Fairfax, Calif. The only woman attending boot camp.

What She Has to Say: "I'm a late bloomer, but I'm really enjoying my career so far."



THE ENLISTED

Name: Brian Thomas

Rank: Assistant superintendent of King's River Golf and Country Club in Kingsburg, Calif.

What He Has to Say: "I didn't even know there was anything like this for assistants. I think it's great!"



McCullough doesn't want attendees who are only interested in getting away from their courses for a few days so they can party. Two attendees are assigned to a room, and all attendees dine together in a nearby cafeteria.

McCullough limits the boot camp to about 40 participants to keep it intimate.

Jeff Steen, who joined Pebble Beach Golf Links as an assistant in the spring, says he came to Asilomar to learn,

"You've really got to put something into this to get something out of it," Steen says. "You just can't look at it as just a few days off from work."

It's shortly after 8 a.m. on a cool and foggy Monday morning. McCullough stands in front of the nondescript conference room and takes roll call for boot camp attendees.

"Griffing," McCullough barks.

"Here," Griffing answers.

"Thomas," McCullough bellows.

"Here," Thomas returns.

This will be a long day, packed full of field trips and educational sessions that will last until nearly 9 p.m. McCullough instructs attendees to be polite during the presentations — and turn off the cell phones, he warns.

Attendees heed McCullough's words. They realize, in a sense, that he's the sergeant of this boot camp.

Attendees range from throughout northern California and come in all shapes and sizes. The tallest and biggest attendee is the muscular and chiseled Greg Amsler, who looks more like a football player than an assistant superintendent. Well, that's because the 35-year-old was a football player — Amsler played running back for the University of Tennessee in the late 1980s and then spent two years in the National Football League. After retiring from football, Amsler, a former caddy at Baltusrol Golf Club in New Jersey where he grew up, decided to pursue golf course maintenance as a career. He's been the assistant superintendent at Cypress Point Club in Pebble Beach for almost two years.

Brad Griffing, 28, is the assistant superintendent at Ruby Hill Golf Club in Pleasanton, Calif. This is the second boot camp he's attended. A few years ago, Griffing told himself he wanted to be a superintendent by the

Continued on page 80

The Microbial BioFungicide That Controls Dollar Spot



DOLLAR SPOT PROGRAM at 3 disease levels		
Disease Level	Rate per 1000 sq. ft.	Application Interval
LOW when light disease symptoms are evident or when conditions suggest a likely occurrence	20 oz.	14 days
MODERATE when significant disease pressure becomes evident	20 oz.	7 days
HIGH when high disease pressure becomes evident	20 oz.	3 - 4 days

**University Research shows that EcoGuard
Effectively Controls Dollar Spot,
and aids in the Suppression of
Brown Patch and Anthracnose**



Novozymes Biologicals, Inc. www.novozymes.com
5400 Corporate Circle, Salem, VA 24153 1-800-342-6173

Welcome to Boot Camp

Continued from page 78

time he was 30. He's attending this boot camp to sharpen his skills so he can ready himself to take the next step.

Sheila McGrew, who's interning on behalf of the NCGA at the Meadow Club in Fairfax, Calif., is the only woman and one of the few nonassistant superintendents attending the boot camp. The 38-year-old spent four years in the Navy in the 1980s, and she didn't decide to pursue turf maintenance as a profession until 1999. She hopes to attain an assistant's position when she finishes her internship in June.

"I'm a late bloomer, but I'm really enjoying my career so far," she says.

The boot camp's serene environment is a topic of conversation. No television means there's no watching ESPN. But most agree that the bonus of such an environment is that it screams interaction, especially when two assistants share one room.

"It forces the attendees to get together and talk turf," says Rob Whitham, assistant at Napa Golf Course at Kennedy Park in

Yountville, Calif., and a first-time attendee.

"The no-TV thing surprised me," says Brian Thomas, assistant superintendent of King's River Golf and Country Club in Kingsburg, Calif. "But I've adjusted to it."

The night before, Thomas says he and his roommate talked shop until midnight before going to sleep.

"You can go back to your room after the day and reflect on the notes you've taken," Stevens says. "There are no distractions here."

This is the third boot camp that Stevens has attended.

"And it's my last," he says with a chuckle. "I hope I'll be unqualified to be a boot camp participant at this time next year."

The 39-year-old Stevens has been the assistant at Poppy Ridge for eight years and is itching to become a head superintendent. Stevens is attending his third boot camp because he realizes he still has plenty to learn. He also knows that boot camp gives him an opportunity to make new relationships that could help him land a superintendent's job.

Most everyone loves that aspect of the boot camp. It provides them the opportunity to assemble and network with their colleagues so they can discuss their needs and goals.

Thomas says he didn't know there was a program of such for assistants until his superintendent, Mike Kroeze, told him about it and asked him if he wanted to attend. "This is great," the 35-year-old says, stressing the need for such events for him and his peers.

Amsler says it's important to gain face time with your peers. "A lot of the learning isn't just taking place in the classroom, but it's through conversation with others," he says.

THE ENLISTED

Name: Jeff Steen

Rank: Assistant golf course superintendent of Pebble Beach (Calif.) Golf Links.

What He Has to Say: "You've really got to put something into this to get something out of it. You just can't look at it as just a few days off from work."



THE ENLISTED

Name: Greg Amsler

Rank: Assistant superintendent of Cypress Point Club in Pebble Beach, Calif.

What He Has to Say: "This is an opportunity for me to do a little networking. It's really important to stay active with other superintendents."



Bruce Williams, certified superintendent of the Los Angeles Country Club and a past president of the GCSAA, is one of the boot camp's top speakers. The straightforward Williams, who has helped train more than 100 people to become superintendents, is glad to be speaking at boot camp.

"I've always had a strong place in my heart for assistant superintendent programs and training," Williams says. "Unfortunately, I don't think we've done justice over the years to developing formalized programs to train

Continued on page 82