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## Off The Fringe

Continued from page 16

In the book, Hunter is CEO of Col-inx, a small course management company in Colorado Springs. Described by his creator as a “jaded rascal,” he faces the inevitable showdown between his professional and personal lives, failing to strike an amenable balance between the relationships in his life and his passion for the game.

Despite some similarities between him and the often appealingly flawed Hunter, Simpson says his main character isn't necessarily his alter ego, but he admits he did draw upon personal experiences, not to mention those of others involved in the industry, while writing the novel.

“Hunter and other figures in the book are composites of folks I've met along life's path,” Hunter says, noting that he's added certain embellishments to play up the entertaining conflict he portrays.

“Stories are rampant in the industry,” he says. “You go to conferences and hear funny stories about spouses or significant others complaining. The faces of employees change, but the problems and issues don't change industry wise.”

**Is anything sacred in *Behind the #\$\$%\*& Green*?  
Probably not, Simpson admits.**

With ribald honesty, Simpson educates Hunter about many of life's and the profession's hazards — the love of, or perhaps obsession with, the game some call “Scottish Madness,” golf course design, modern technology, long hours, high turnover rates, entrepreneurship, marriage, and, yes, divorce.

While no concrete statistics reveal that the golf course industry has a staggeringly high divorce rate, many in the industry — Simpson included —

## Seed Market Defined by Strengthening Markets, Stable Prices, Expert Says

By Susan H. Samudio

Many of you noticed there was not enough seed of many of the elite cultivars to go around this year. By spring, you were hard pressed to get the varieties you wanted. This problem will continue until harvest of the 2004 crop as more cultivars become sold out.

Last year's market correction was drastic because seed field plow-outs were coupled with a drought situation in most production areas, and yields were off by an average of 5 percent to 25 percent depending on species. By early summer, most species no longer had carryover from past years, which had kept prices down. With the seed shortage, prices of most species increased somewhat but are nowhere near reaching historic highs.

Compared to last year, this summer's production is forecast to be higher, but not

as high as many are calling for. Most seed companies were able to place their desired acres with farmers. There is a lot of competition from crops like wheat and corn in placing acreage with farmers. Estimates are that grass seed acreage increased 10 percent to 20 percent over 2002-2003 levels, so more acres will be available for 2004 harvest.

Acreage for most species is still lower than it was several years ago. Yields this summer are expected to be “average” at most and possibly down 10 percent to 20 percent, especially on fields that did not fare well through the winter. Coupled with virtually no carryover of last year's crop, seed buyers can look to a season of strengthening markets and stable prices.

*Samudio is a plant breeder with J.R. Simplot/Jacklin Seed.*

believe the profession is a breeding ground for marital woes.

So far, Simpson says, the book has been well-received, and based on the reader comments posted on his publisher's Web site, [www.PublishAmerica.com](http://www.PublishAmerica.com), he's not kidding.

“Every superintendent in America needs to read this book and then send a copy to everyone they know,” writes Jack from Florida.

Despite a definite slant toward the male persuasion, the book even has gained some female fans.

“I couldn't care less about golf,” writes Judy from Arizona. “But after listening to my husband laugh hysterically for two days, several times actually in tears, I took his advice and read the book. The chapter where Hunter visits the urologist's office, along with the one when he takes his children miniature golfing ... might be the funniest pieces I've ever read, until I read the chapter about the wedding reception at one of Steve Hunter's golf courses.”

Is anything sacred in *Behind the #\$\$%\*& Green*? Probably not, Simpson admits.

“I was kind of an equal opportunity attacker,” he says, when asked about the broad spectrum of subject matter covered in the novel. “It's a profession that requires a well-developed sense of humor. That was the whole intent behind the book — to make folks in the industry laugh and wake up those outside the industry who think it's the most wonderful job in world. Certainly in some respects it is, but there are negative aspects that just make it a little short of heaven.”

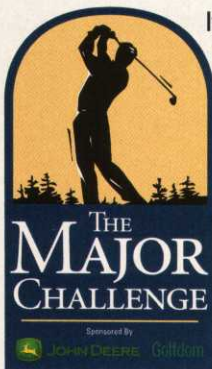
*Behind the #\$\$%\*& Green* (\$19.95) is available either in the stacks or by special order at most major bricks-and-mortar bookstore chains or online at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) or Barnes and Noble ([www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com)).

*Suttell is a freelance writer from Lakewood, Ohio.*

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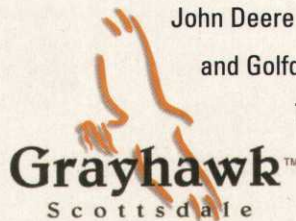


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Golfdom

# Hole of the

■ No. 5  
TPC at Deere Run  
Moline, Ill.

# Month

## Handle With Care

The 433-yard par-4 fifth hole at the TPC at Deere Run demands special care – not only from certified superintendent Chris Hague, but from golfers as well.

“The pros take the chance of driving the ball through the fairway into 5-inch rough in front of the green,” Hague says. “They don’t want to end up there because the green is shallow. They will leave themselves a difficult shot.”

The TPC at Deere Run hosts the John Deere Classic July 5-11, including the Superintendent Pro-Am.

Hague says the hole requires special maintenance because the air circulation and sunlight penetration are poor. The bunkers also wash out frequently with as little as a half-inch of rain.

“We’ve been hit hard with rain so far this year,” Hague says. “We’ve replaced the sand 11 times already!”

*Don't forget to play the John Deere Challenge at [www.majorchallenge.com](http://www.majorchallenge.com).*

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JOHN DEERE

**G**ertrude Stein once said, “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose.” Shakespeare wrote, “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” This column isn’t about roses, of course, but it’s about an issue just as thorny: a possible name change for the GCSAA.

The name of the association has changed four times already: National Association of Greenkeepers of America (1926); Greenkeeping Superintendents of America (1938); National Greenkeeping Superintendents Association (1948); and Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (1951).

The last change in 1951 was about the time Arnie started hitching up his pants and golf took on a new persona. We now have a TV channel devoted 24-7 to golf. When you consider the variety of individual job titles floating around the industry and the international nature of the membership, it’s understandable that there’s interest in finding a new name for the association to capture that diversity better than Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

I think the name change is up for debate again since we are in the midst of several changes in the association, including PDI requirements, the creation of the Environmental Institute for Golf, a new governance structure, relocation and next year’s Golf Industry Show.

There’s a river of change and an ocean of opportunity to be navigated, and visionaries want to be sure that “superintendent” is the right name for the future. If not, what alternatives make sense?

For the sake of discussion, two possible names have risen to the top of the list, Golf Course Management Association and Golf Course Managers Association. In both cases, the “of America” has been dropped because the international reach of the organization.

The Messaging and Branding Task Group under the Strategic Communications Committee will take the issue of a name change on the road and seek input and feedback. Nothing would see the light of day until at least 2006 after lots of debate.

## Name Game Heats Up Again

BY JOEL JACKSON



IT'S TIME WE HAD A  
CONVERSATION  
ABOUT POSSIBLY  
CHANGING WHAT  
WE CALL  
OUR PROFESSION  
AND OUR  
ASSOCIATION

Let’s face it: GCSAA is a mouthful to say in polite conversation and usually requires an explanation. So does the title and job description of a superintendent.

However, a 1999 survey conducted by GCSAA found a majority of member superintendents were happy to leave well enough alone, mainly because there is little agreement on what the best replacement name might be. GCSAA has been doing a pretty good job of getting recognition in the golf world, and many people feel a name change would cause more confusion than it would be worth.

What about all the local chapter names? Would they also have to change? That’s why we’re talking about all this now. It will take a two-thirds member majority vote to decide the issue, so don’t get all riled up. Just talk about it.

I think the term “manager” or “management” are more professional and descriptive of what a “superintendent” does overall, and are easier to identify by golfers and the public. But I see possible confusion with regard to the role of club manager or general manager.

The demographics of golf courses and the turf professionals who manage the operations and facilities are so varied that finding an all-inclusive name is a tough assignment.

Maybe having this conversation isn’t such a bad idea after all. Either we come up with a name that fits the diverse role of all those who oversee the most important asset at a golf course, or we strongly endorse the name superintendent and just move on with life.

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



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# CONFLICT Resolution

Fighting and frustration can actually be channeled into positive outcomes. It's just a matter of learning the proper skills

By Becky Mollenkamp

**C**onflict at a golf course is as common as the two-putt. Whether between employees, with a customer or among management, dealing with conflict is a routine part of a superintendent's job. And "it's not a fun part of the job," says Michael Nelson, superintendent of Dacotah Ridge Golf Course in Morton, Minn.

Believe it or not, fighting and frustration can actually be channeled into positive outcomes. All it takes is a good understanding of what conflict is, how it starts and how to address it. Unfortunately, many managers never learn the skills needed to handle negative situations properly.

"Most people think of conflict as a bad thing because they don't know how to [handle] it," says Barbara Pachter, author of *The Power of Positive Confrontation* (Marlowe & Company, 2001). "If you know what to do, you're bound to have a better outcome."

Simply put, conflict is an opposition of ideas: it can be constructive or destructive. In fact, the Chinese pictogram for conflict has two distinct elements — one meaning danger and the other meaning opportunity. The form conflict takes is up to the people involved.

Many managers succumb to the temptation to avoid conflict, including James Bade, superintendent of Somerset Country Club in St. Paul, Minn. A self-proclaimed "people

pleaser," Bade says dealing with drama is his least favorite part of the job.

"Can't we all just get along?" Bade jokes. "I often procrastinate when it comes to solving conflict. I try to avoid it, but that doesn't work. It can keep me awake at night. I tend to internalize conflict, which is not a very good thing. It gets pent up inside, waiting to explode."

As Bade has learned, unresolved conflict can lead to negative confrontation, including verbal or physical fights.

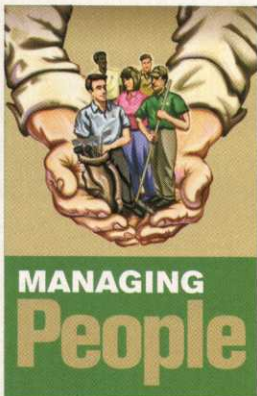
"Avoidance may seem easier initially until the situation gets so bad that it can't be avoided," Pachter says. "The biggest mistake managers make is not knowing there is an alternative to avoiding. They can avoid or confront aggressively or the third alternative is positive confrontation."

Instead of looking at conflict as a win-lose situation, managers need to learn how to create win-win solutions. To do that, managers must understand that conflict is not an obstacle to organizational progress; it is actually the key to moving forward.

"Progress is really a result of conflict resolution," says Robert Milligan, author of *Human Resource Management for Golf Course Superintendents* (GCSAA, 2002). "Can you have change without conflict? No. It's not hard to make a decision if you have only one option, but if you have more than one then there's conflict."

## When employees fight

The most common source of conflict for any business is squabbles among the staff. As every







superintendent knows, golf course crews can fight about anything and everything — language barriers that lead to miscommunication, debates over work ethic or job assignments, even allegations of tool theft.

This is one time when avoiding may be the best response to conflict. Minor problems should be left to the employees to hash out among themselves.

“Chances are, you shouldn’t intervene,” Pachter says. “Just keep throwing it back to them. If they really can’t resolve it, you may want to bring them together and help resolve it.”

When a manager must step in and guide conflict resolution, there are four methods (besides avoiding) he or she can use. “Tailor your response to the situation,” Milligan advises.

■ **Competing:** The most-assertive and least-cooperative style, competing means meeting one’s own needs at the expense of the other

party’s. Sounds awful? Actually, this method is a must when your way is the only correct solution, such as issues of safety or potential legal problems for the business.

■ **Accommodating:** At the opposite end of the spectrum from competing, accommodation means placing the other party’s needs above one’s own. This method can leave a manager feeling resentful, but it can be beneficial during a conflict with an employee because it helps build rapport and trust.

■ **Collaborating:** By being both cooperative and assertive, managers can collaborate to satisfy the needs of both parties in a dispute. This style takes time and energy, but it is the best style to use when it is essential that both parties agree on a resolution.

■ **Compromising:** When collaboration fails, managers may need to compromise to find a

*Continued on page 30*

**James Bade (right), superintendent of Somerset Country Club, confers with the golf course’s green chairman, Terry Glarner. It’s important to educate members and golfers about what you’re trying to accomplish, Bade says.**

COURTESY OF SOMERSET COUNTRY CLUB

**When a superintendent gets involved in an employee conflict, the most important first step is to listen.**

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*Continued from page 29*

solution that at least partially deals with both parties' concerns.

"Sometimes you have to use multiple styles," Milligan says. "You have to be assertive to get them to resolve the issue. Once they agree to do that, you become more collaborative or even accommodating to build goodwill for the next time there is conflict."

When a superintendent gets involved in an employee conflict, the most important first step is to listen. The dispute at hand is usually just a superficial symptom of a much deeper and long-standing problem. The manager's job is to play detective and uncover the root causes, Milligan says. Don't make the common mistake of responding only to the triggering event.

"The key is to listen to your employees and acknowledge their feelings," Nelson says. "Often, the offending employee is unaware of the conflict. By listening intently first and then talking, you are able to get to the root of the problem."

Be sensitive to language barriers. If you have non-English speakers, find helpful ways to address their conflict. Glenn Perry, certified superintendent at Rolling Hills Country Club in Wilton, Conn., has a mostly Spanish-speaking staff. He is not fluent in Spanish so he uses an interpreter to help him resolve employee disputes.

"To solve the conflict, I go to each party separately with a senior staff member to explain the situation to me," Perry says. "I talk it over with each party and come up with a solution. By continuing to work together, the conflict usually gets resolved."

### **You're the boss**

The dynamics of dispute change when the battle is between employer and employee. There is an unavoidable power struggle in these situations, so they must be handled delicately.

"You come with an unequal power play because you can say, 'No,'" Pachter says. "Rank has its privileges, and that's the way it should be. But if you want to be a good boss, you need to hear what your employees have to say and not assume you are always right."

Common sources of manager-employee conflict include employees who break company policy (absenteeism, tardiness, excessive breaks),

employee concerns about fairness (job scheduling, pay equity, favoritism), and communication problems between boss and employee.

When you have a problem with an employee, don't wait to address it. The longer it festers, the more frustrated you will get and the more strained your relationship with the employee becomes. Don't expect the employee to come to you or to even be aware there is a problem.

Pull the employee aside; don't confront him or her in front of others. Wait until you are calm and the employee is not in the middle of a task.

"Keep things professional, not personal," Milligan says. "Never use 'you' statements, like 'you are wrong' or 'you make me mad.' Keep the focus on the issue, not on the person."

Likewise, maintain an open-door policy for those times when an employee has a problem with you.

"I encourage my employees to come to me with any problems they encounter on the job," Nelson says. "If it involves me, I would like to hear about it. I'm not perfect, and I would like to listen to him if an employee feels he has a problem."

Nelson has it right — listening is the key. Do not get defensive, but do ask for clarification so you understand the complaint. Acknowledge the person's feelings and do your best to explain the situation or fix the problem.

Confrontation may be difficult and uncomfortable, but it can lead to good results, especially when handled with tact.

"Usually, it only affects the relationship in a positive way when the misunderstanding has been cleared up," Perry says. "It is not a good idea to harbor grudges because the employees are ultimately your best resource and control the outcome of the final product."

Giving employees the power of confrontation (even against you) is not the same as turning over your authority as the boss.

"Most of our intuition is that there is a limited amount of power," Milligan says. "If I give you some power, I have less. Managers have to get past that. Power is not limited. One thing that leads to immediate failure is too little self-confidence in your ability to deal with conflict. These are learnable skills. We can't all be Tiger Woods, but we can all be

*Continued on page 32*