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Standing *the* Test *of* Time

Six veteran superintendents — each one distinguished — reflect on their experiences

They are the seasoned veterans — the “wise guys,” so to speak. They are the people who’ve tended turf for nearly 30 years and longer. Their lives are well-defined by their livelihoods. They adore what they do, and they are thankful they have jobs they love to go to every morning when they rise well before the sun.

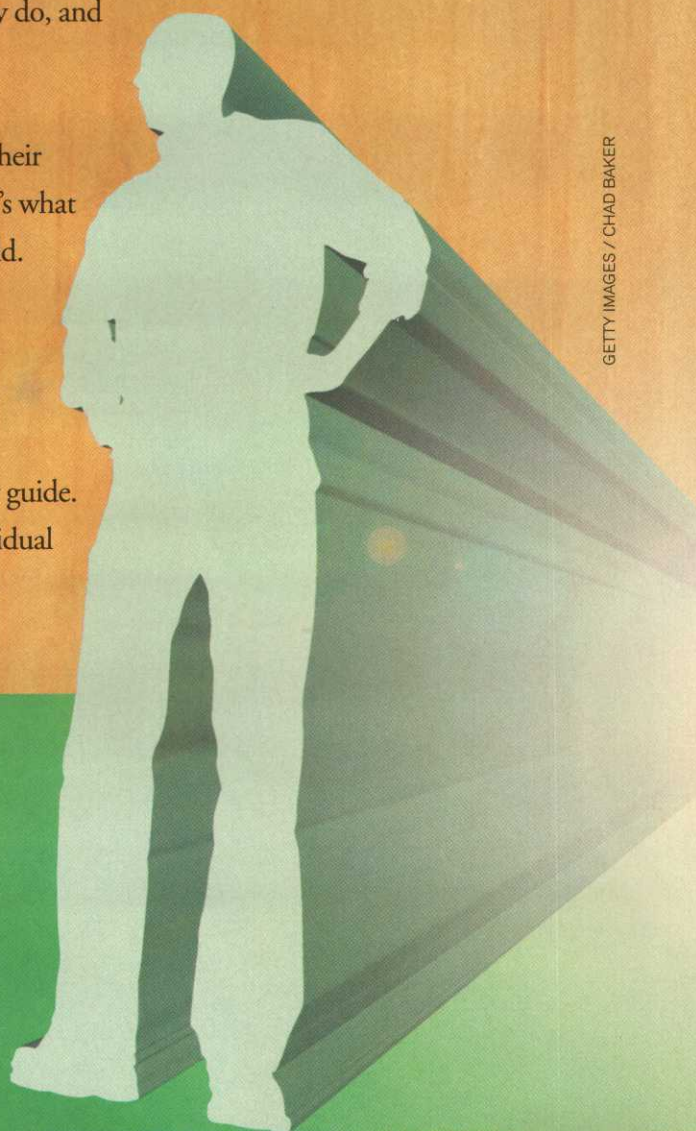
They’ve seen a lot, but they haven’t seen it all. Despite their experience, they continue to learn because they know that’s what it takes to survive in an ever-changing and competitive field.

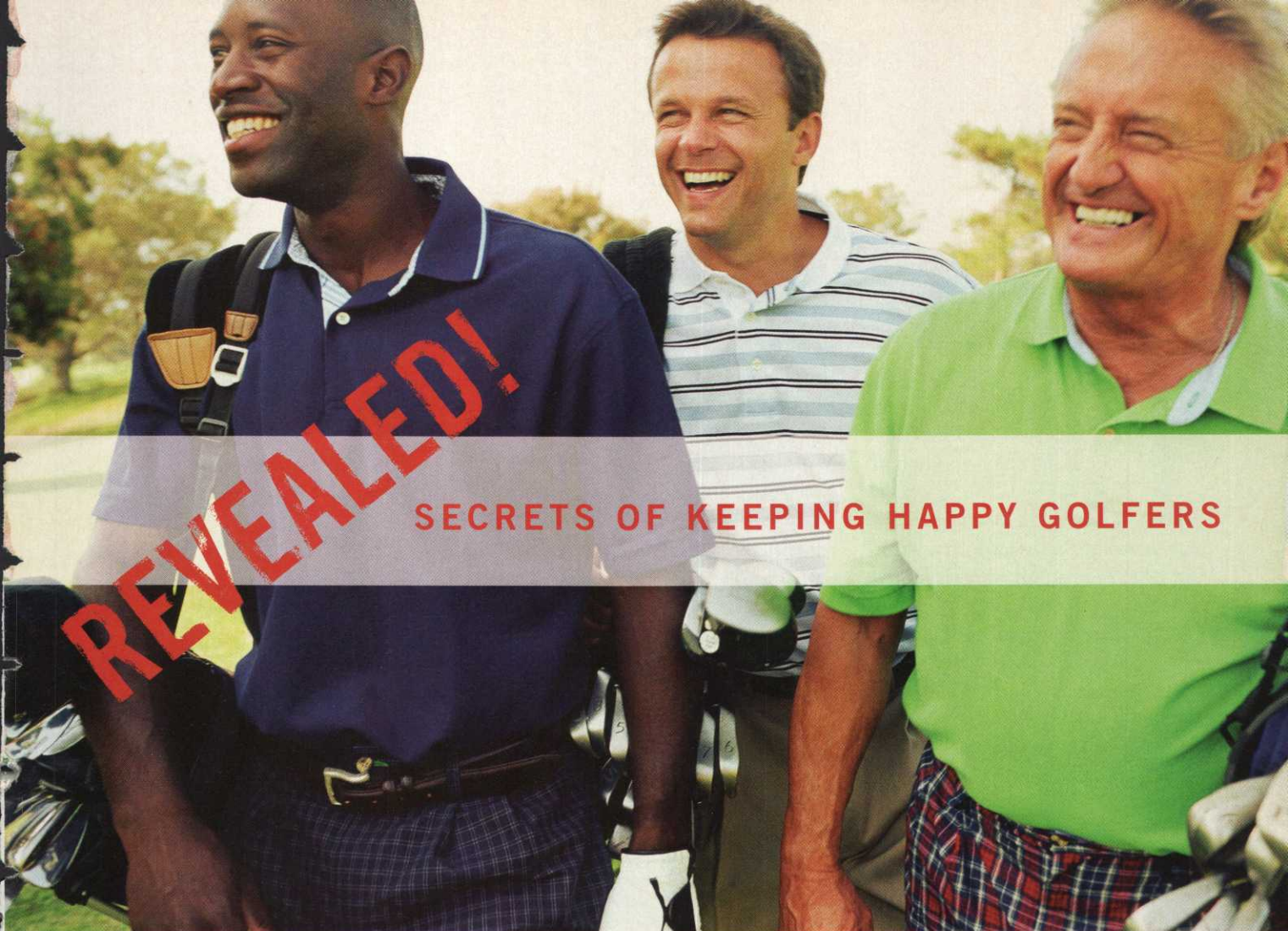
In this special section, *Golfdom* salutes six veteran superintendents — Tom Walker, Ron Kirkman, Clem Wolfrom, Ed Fischer, John Hadwick and Roger Kisch — who have made a distinct difference in the field. They’re respected by their peers and looked up to by the ones they guide.

You can learn more about these gentlemen in the individual question-and-answer profiles on the following pages.

COMPILED BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

GETTY IMAGES / CHAD BAKER





SECRETS OF KEEPING HAPPY GOLFERS

(use extraordinary Technology)

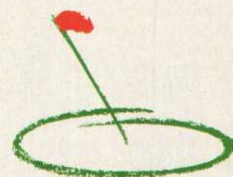
It's really no secret. To keep your golfers happy, all you need to do is maintain perfectly manicured, fast and true greens, plush fairways, immaculate tee boxes and lush roughs. And, by the way, you need to achieve those things whether or not you have Mother Nature on your side.

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Tom Walker

Superintendent *of the* Inverness Club

It seems Tom Walker is where he should be — as superintendent of the Inverness Club in Toledo, Ohio. The 53-year-old Walker has a solid history at the renowned course, which opened in 1903 and has hosted several top tournaments. Walker began working at the course raking bunkers in 1966. He worked there for 10 years under superintendent Wilbert Waters while attending high school and college.

In 1976, Walker became the superintendent of Kettering Golf Club in Defiance, Ohio. He left Kettering for Highland Meadows in Sylvania, Ohio, in 1979. He returned to Inverness in 1980. He's only the fourth superintendent the course has ever had.

Golfdom: What do you like most about your job?

The people. Hands down. Without people, a magnificent golf course is just grass.

Golfdom: How have you learned to deal with the pressures of your job?

I keep things in perspective. There is war and famine in the world, and when it comes down to it, golf is just a game played in a pleasant setting. On my worst day, I see people on the range tee at noon, stuffing their ties into their dress shirts to hit balls rather than eat

lunch. I always snicker and think how lucky I am that this is my office.

Exercise is also essential for me. I cycle back and forth to work and love to ride whenever I get a chance. Stress is relative to different people. It is what I make of it, and stress need not be an issue.

Golfdom: In 50 words or less, describe a good day at work.

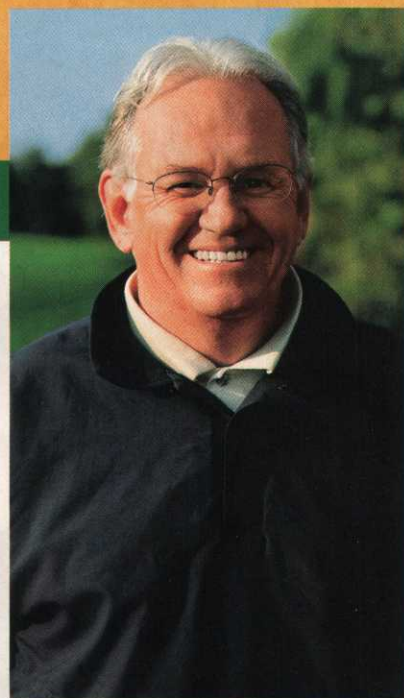
It's when I get to the course by 4 a.m., and the night is clear, the moon is full, and there's dew on the ground. Clear nights often mean sunny days. Also, a good day is when the staff is happier and the members seem to enjoy themselves more.

Golfdom: What is the most important issue facing superintendents today?

Moderation. We continue to push the envelope closer and closer to the edge. In my own mind I want to believe there is no edge as long as we have the necessary resources.

Golfdom: Finish this sentence: "The best thing that could happen to the golf course maintenance industry would be ..."

... for golf to continue to grow at the pace that it did in the mid-1990s. Unfortunately, that is not the case, and many clubs in the Midwest are struggling.



MIKE KLEMMER

Golfdom: What's the best advice anybody ever gave you?

A wise Zen Roshi once told me, "Just because you can, does not mean you should." Perhaps, at times we take green speed and course prep a bit too far, especially for major championships. Sadly, I did push it the last time, and I must admit I enjoyed myself.

Golfdom: What's the best advice you ever gave someone?

Plan ahead and prioritize. You can only do one thing at a time. A long successful career is nothing more than small steps taken one at a time.

Golfdom: Who are the three most influential people or groups in the golf course maintenance industry and why?

Joe Vargas of Michigan State University. His continued research in plant pathology and turfgrass cultivation includes bacterial wilt, black layer and the management of numerous turfgrass diseases. Vargas' work focuses on both cultural controls and the proper use of fungicides for the greatest efficacy and lasting control of disease.

Continued on page 50

"A wise Zen Roshi once told me, 'Just because you can, does not mean you should.'"



Sure Thing #1:

**SPRING
CAN'T BE
HURRIED.**



Ron Kirkman

Superintendent of the Needham Golf Club

They call him Captain Kirk, but Ron Kirkman isn't "out there," so to speak. He's just an upbeat guy who loves to live, laugh and tend turf. He's been doing the latter for 46 years — 42 years as the superintendent of Needham Golf Club in Needham, Mass., about 10 miles west of Boston.

Want a sample of Captain Kirk's wit? Just ask him his age.

"Old enough to know better, young enough to learn," he answers. "It's somewhere between 66 and 67. I forget."

Golfdom: What do you like most about your job?

Seeing the members and guests enjoy recreating and socializing on a well-conditioned golf course. I like the rhythms of the seasons from the rebirth of growth in the spring through the busy months of the summer growing season. Then there's the slowing in the fall season as nature prepares the golf course to go to sleep again for a few months in the winter. And of course every day brings new challenges. Most importantly, living on the premises, I'm always around for family and member needs.

Golfdom: How have you learned to deal with the pressures of your job?

By taking my job very seriously but not myself very seriously. I also take some time off during the season to play a little golf. I've also learned to listen to everyone's concerns, but I tune out their unproductive comments and criticisms. I focus on attending to their constructive comments and criticisms.

Golfdom: In 50 words or less, describe a good day at work.

Everyone shows up and on time. Learning another word in Portuguese. No equipment breakdowns. No physical injuries, poison ivy or bee stings. No drought. No turf disease. Being under budget but getting the work done. Having my working colleagues enjoy their job. Receiving positive and unsolicited comments from members.

Golfdom: What is the most important issue facing superintendents today?

One could say job security. However, green speed is always a problem. There has to be a tradeoff between green speed and the golfer. The potential for turf damage is substantial by cutting greens so short and rolled down tight, particularly in hot, humid weather.

Golfdom: Finish this sentence: "The best thing that could happen to the golf course maintenance industry would be ..."

... I would suspect to restore the old-time camaraderie of the superintendents when we had more time to share ideas and be better neighbors to each other. There's too much competitiveness and not as much cooperation as before.

Golfdom: What's the best advice anybody ever gave you?

Listen, listen, listen more than you talk, and treat everybody with dignity.

Golfdom: What's the best advice you ever gave someone?

Treat every member and golfer with respect and dignity. Keep the lines of communications open. Don't back



anyone into a corner — even your enemies. Kill them with kindness. Most importantly, remember it is not your golf course.

Golfdom: Who are the three most influential people or groups in the golf course maintenance industry and why?

I can only think of one and that would be Steve Mona, CEO of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. And you ask why? Just think of the president of the United States and how powerful he is. You might think the same thing of Mr. Mona in the golf course maintenance industry.

Golfdom: If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be and why?

Arnold Palmer. He grew up in a superintendent's family and went on to be one of the better players of all time. He made the game popular through television and his great personality.

Golfdom: What is your favorite movie(s)?

"Forrest Gump." He made the most of the talents God gave him and he was always optimistic.

Golfdom: What do you eat for breakfast?

I chew up my staff first thing every morning, and then I go to the clubhouse and have a decaf coffee to wind down. ■

PROFILES CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE

Sure Thing #2:

**THREE OF
A KIND BEATS
TWO PAIR.**



Clem Wolfrom

Superintendent of the Detroit Golf Club

You could say Clem Wolfrom was born to be a superintendent. He greeted the world on a cold February morning in 1934 in a room above the clubhouse at the Maple Lane Golf Club in suburban Detroit where his father Clarence was superintendent. The family lived there in the winters for nine years.

Today, Wolfrom is pushing 50 years as a superintendent. The 70-year-old has been the superintendent of the Detroit Golf Club since 1961. Before Detroit, Wolfrom spent six years as superintendent at the Dearborn (Mich.) Country Club.

Clem's father worked as a superintendent for 53 years in Michigan until his death in 1984. Clem and his younger brother Bruce, also a superintendent, designed and built White Pine National Golf Club in Spruce, Mich.

Golfdom: What do you like most about your job?

Satisfaction comes from seeing people enjoy what you and your crew are responsible for — a beautiful golf course.

Golfdom: How have you learned to deal with the pressures of your job?

Face your problems as they arise. Don't let them build up. Keep your critics

informed. Communication is key.

Golfdom: In 50 words or less, describe a good day at work.

Just you and your family waking up healthy is a good start. The 16-mile drive to work each morning gives me time to reflect on the coming day. You know that everything is not going to be perfect, so you must accept that reality — and you will be surprised how good things really are.

Golfdom: What is the most important issue facing superintendents today?

They must improve communication skills.

Golfdom: Finish this sentence: "The best thing that could happen to the golf course maintenance industry would be ..."

... to rid itself of the Stimpmeter.

Golfdom: What's the best advice anybody ever gave you?

My father had two sayings that have really stuck with me through the years. He said, "A job worth doing is a job worth doing well"; and, "Sometimes the harder you fall, the higher you bounce."

Golfdom: What's the best advice you ever gave someone?

Keep a positive attitude.



Golfdom: Who are the three most influential people or groups in the golf course maintenance industry and why?

Right or wrong, the PGA Tour players have a big influence on golf course maintenance. Everybody from green committee chairmen to the United States Golf Association (USGA) listens to their remarks about golf course maintenance. Another big influence is superintendents. Each one is trying to outdo the other. Competition is good, but we shouldn't get carried away with it — green speed at 12 feet, mowing fairways with walk mowers, etc. The third group combines the three golf organizations — the PGA, the USGA and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA). There needs to be more communication between the three associations. But it's getting better lately.

Golfdom: If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be and why?

President Bush. I would like to know how he approaches each day.

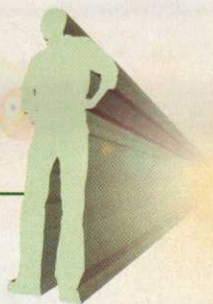
Golfdom: What is your favorite movie(s)?

The "Godfather" and all its sequels.

Golfdom: What do you eat for breakfast?

Full breakfast on the weekends, and coffee and fruit during the week. ■

"Sometimes the harder you fall,
the higher you bounce."



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YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT THEY'LL SAY NEXT. Superintendents say the dumbest things. Check out what [\[MORE\]](#)

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THE MONTH IN GOLFDOM

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STANDING THE TEST OF TIME: Tom Walker

Continued from page 44

Joe Duich, often called the co-father of Penn State University's turfgrass maintenance program with Burt Musser, is best known for his work in bentgrass breeding and developing new varieties. His research raised the bar in the turf industries for putting green bentgrass and stimulated competition within the industry for improved cultivars of turfgrass for use on greens.

Stan Zontec, agronomist of the United States Golf Association's Mid-Atlantic Region, has been the most devout steward of the industry. He is well-connected and speaks at international conferences. He is a favorite source of superintendents for information and consultation.

It is difficult not to mention Paul Rieke from Michigan State University for his work with sand topdressing and aeration/cultivation; and Jim Beard, the renowned scientist and author of "Turf Management for Golf Courses," for his pioneering efforts in turfgrass physiology.

Golfdom: If you could have dinner with anyone, who would it be and why?

William "Rocky" Rockefeller, the first

greenkeeper at Inverness Club. He was instrumental in the construction of the course and worked closely with Donald Ross, who designed it.

In the 1920s, Rocky designed many courses in the Great Lakes area. He was also the former Inverness Club Champion. He was well-educated and received a degree from The Julliard School in music. He was a proponent of formal education and enjoyed sharing his knowledge with fellow greenkeepers. He, along with Inverness Club directors, was instrumental in founding the USGA Green Section in 1920. Five years later he helped found the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America at a neighboring club, Sylvania Country Club.

It would be intriguing for me to tell Rocky how golf course management has evolved today, especially on the technology end.

Golfdom: What is your favorite movie(s)?
"Used Cars" and "Dogma."

Golfdom: What do you eat for breakfast?
Plain instant oatmeal and green tea with warm tap water — every day, without fail. ■

Who do you know who has Stood *the* Test of Time?

If there's a veteran superintendent who has made a difference in your life, we'd love to hear about him or her. Tell us how this particular superintendent has made an impression on you. What advice has this veteran superintendent given you to help you in your career or in dealings with life in general?

Send an e-mail to Golfdom's Larry Aylward at laylward@advanstar.com to share your story about this important superintendent. We'll print responses in an upcoming issue.

