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**The Mexican workers adhere to a sound teamwork concept. "They go along one hole after another and never stop," says superintendent Ken Flisek.**

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ride in his utility vehicle to perform an inspection. He was astonished to see they completed the work so quickly — and efficiently.

"That's when I realized that these guys were going to make us look pretty good in a hurry," Flisek says.

Chuck Foley, a longtime Nevillewood member who lives in a home on the course, says the Mexicans don't waste any time while working.

"You never, ever see them standing around," says Foley, who plays the course almost daily.

"Everyone speaks volumes about them."

Flisek believes the Mexicans' strong work ethic stems from their childhood. Because many of their families didn't own cars, Mexican children walked everywhere, and sometimes had to hike long distances to reach their destinations.

The Mexicans also adhere to a sound teamwork concept, which impresses Flisek. At any given time on the course during the day, there will be four of them pushing mowers and two of them lugging trimmers. "And they know exactly what each other guy is going to do," Flisek says. "They go along one hole after another and never stop."

Corral and Hernandez have helped Flisek recruit other Mexicans as seasonal laborers, including several members of their families. Only a few of the Mexican employees that Flisek has hired since 1997 haven't panned out.

Flisek admits it's not inexpensive to bring migrant workers to the course annually to work. The Club at Nevillewood typically hires a broker or immigration attorney to conduct the process and secure the paperwork of hiring Mexicans through the H-2B visa program. The fee is around \$4,000 to bring up to 20 workers to the course. Nevillewood usually brings about 10.

While his Mexican workers seem to favor manual labor, Flisek says he's careful not to make them the bottom workers on the maintenance crew's totem pole. He wants to show them respect by bestowing them with responsibility. That means teaching them to how to operate fairway mowers and triplex mowers.

Some of the Mexicans will work three months straight without taking off a day. It's not that Flisek doesn't give them time off, it's just that the Mexicans would rather work, even on weekends.

Before the Mexicans arrived, Flisek only had six-person crews working on Saturdays and Sundays. But those crews grew to about 15 on each day because of the Mexicans' willingness to work. More manpower meant the fairways and greens could be mowed, tasks that weren't usually performed on the weekend.

"The members were thrilled," Flisek says.

Despite their hard work ethic, the Mexicans have also had to endure other negative assumptions. They've been accused of taking jobs from able-bodied Americans. Flisek says



people have criticized him for hiring Mexicans over Americans.

But the critics, Flisek contends, are ignorant to the type of workers on the job market who are willing to perform manual labor, let alone get up at 5 a.m. to go to work on a golf course.

"They think I'm hiring these guys because they work cheaper," Flisek says. "I hire the people who are willing to do the job for me."

**F**lisek wasn't just looking to save his job by hiring the Mexicans. It was also about them and their livelihoods, he says.

Even though he couldn't pay them as much as he thought they were worth because of budgetary limitations, Flisek knew he could give the Mexicans a better opportunity than they could receive in their home country.

Flisek's four grandparents came to America from Slovenia about 90 years ago for the same reason. His grandfathers worked in western Pennsylvania's coal and steel mills. Many

of the immigrants who came to work on golf courses 80 years ago were from Italy, Flisek says. Mexicans are just the latest wave.

"My generation was the first one to go to college in the United States," Flisek says. "I'm sure that some of the kids of the guys working for me now will end up going to college, and they'll have more opportunities than their fathers had."

The Mexicans who work at Nevillewood aren't getting rich. Flisek says he pays the seasonal workers about \$8 an hour. With overtime, that translates into \$15,000 to \$17,000 in the eight months they work at the course. Employees who return the following season receive 25-cent-an-hour pay raises.

The Mexicans travel thousands of miles to Pittsburgh and other U.S. cities to work on golf courses because they can't make nearly that much money performing similar work at home. The average wage in Mexico is \$2 an hour, with agricultural workers making less than half that.

*Continued on page 34*

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Rakesh Kochhar, associate director of research for the Pew Hispanic Center, a non-partisan research group in Washington, says most of the people migrating from Mexico to work at U.S. golf courses are male and poorly educated.

"Most have not graduated from high school," Kochhar says. "They come from blue-collar backgrounds in agriculture and construction."

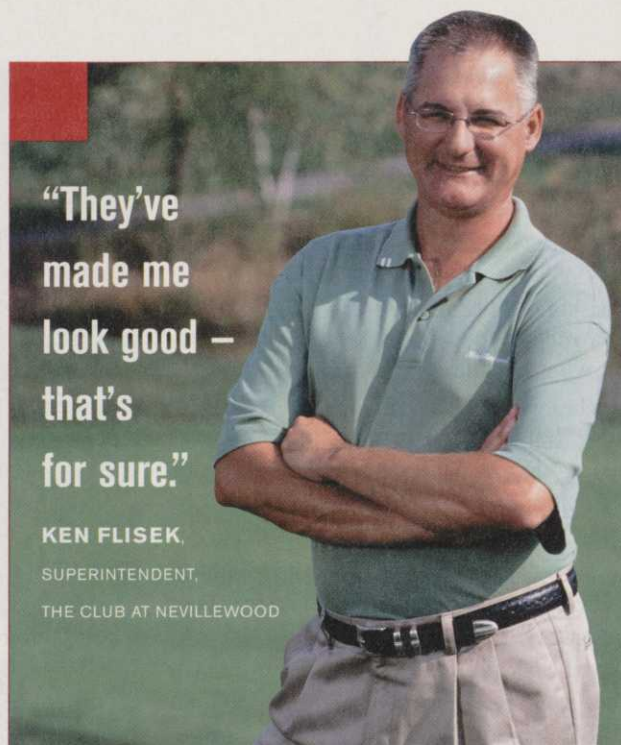
Many Mexican workers live together and share the rent while working in America. They send a good portion of their earnings back to their homes in Mexico to provide for their immediate and extended families.

"The cost of living in Mexico is lower," Kochhar says, noting that the Mexicans realize the American dollars they send home are worth more as Mexican pesos.

The 32-year-old Hernandez, who was 18 when he came to Pittsburgh from Acapulco, says he made the move to make more money. As full-time workers, he and Corral earn a few dollars more an hour than the seasonal staff.

The 33-year-old Corral, who's from a town about 60 miles southwest of Mexico City, says he felt like he needed to come to America to find a better life.

"I never expected to be working on a golf course," says Corral, who has been living in the United States since 1992.



**"They've  
made me  
look good —  
that's  
for sure."**

**KEN FLISEK,**  
SUPERINTENDENT,  
THE CLUB AT NEVILLEWOOD

"But then I got the opportunity to meet Ken."

Corral has been a full-time employee at Nevillewood for four years.

"Nobody has given me the confidence that Ken has given me," Corral says. "He also challenges me and pushes me to do things better. I'm thankful for him."

Corral has aspirations of becoming an assistant superintendent and eventually a superintendent. Flisek says he has the wherewithal to succeed.

"He's an important member of this crew," Flisek says. "He's a natural leader."

Flisek hopes all the Mexicans he hires can discover a better life in Pittsburgh, whether it's in golf course maintenance or another profession. In fact, three of Flisek's

former employees have left the course to begin their own businesses. Abraham Mendoza, a former Nevillewood greenkeeper, opened his own Mexican restaurant. Flisek and his crew frequent the Mendoza Express for lunch.

"It's refreshing to hear them say that they came here to live the American dream," Flisek says. "This is the land of opportunity. All they wanted was a chance."

Flisek has provided that chance at the Club at Nevillewood. And he's grateful to the Mexicans for giving him the chance to retain his job.

"They've made me look good — that's for sure," Flisek says. "When I receive compliments about the golf course from members, I always tell them that I'm only as good as the guys working for me." ■

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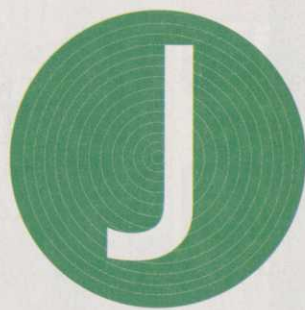
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# DOES THE TRUCK

Superintendents ponder the previously unthinkable — dumping their gas-guzzling 4x4's in exchange for more miles per gallon



By Thomas Skernivitz  
Managing Editor

Joe Boe likes to announce his presence with authority. So, too, does Todd Allen. At that point, the two superintendents reach a fork in the road.

Boe goes one way in a 2001 Dodge Ram pickup that, he boasts, has the “whole nine yards” — Magnum V-8 engine, supercharger headers, dual exhaust and a “monster” decal of a Florida Gator on the back window.

“You hear me coming about a mile before you see me,” he says with a laugh.

Allen, meanwhile, floors it in the opposite direction. The muscle is missing from his Toyota Prius hybrid, but the message roars, pipes or no pipes.

“Our license plate,” he proclaims, “says it all — USUKGAS.”

Despite their differing routes, both men reach their destinations quite content in how they got there.

Like much of America, superintendents

such as Boe and Allen are dealing with the ramifications of owning a gas-guzzling truck during times of unprecedented fuel prices. Practical or not, theirs is an automotive bond — Allen calls it “huge truck syndrome” — that’s not easily broken. Nor explainable sometimes.

“Unless you’re doing golf course construction ... how many of us nowadays actually go and pick up anything that you need to have the bed of a truck for?” Boe asks. “I mean, you might have to pick up a couple of cases of Roundup or something.”

That said, Boe, the assistant superintendent at Windermere (Fla.) Country Club, west of Orlando, is convinced he did the right thing when he bought his Dodge Ram in July, well after gas prices had started to increase. A resident of St. Cloud, along an inland lake loaded with bass, crappie and catfish, and 30 miles off the Atlantic coast, he owns a boat that needs to be hauled. And his previous truck, a 7-year-old, paid-off Nissan short-bed, had been totaled a month earlier.

“That was my little baby,” he says of the Nissan. “(But) it was like a toy truck up against regular-sized trucks. This (Dodge Ram) is more of a manly truck.”

Boe loves the new kid in his driveway despite its hellacious thirst. Whereas the Nissan got 27 miles to the gallon, the Dodge Ram gets 19, he says. Compounding matters, Boe switched to Windermere in September after serving in the same capacity at Eagle Creek Golf Club in Orlando. What was once a 6-mile roundtrip drive now measures 70 miles.



# STOP HERE



Which means that the “manly truck” is more often than not in the hands of the woman of the house, Boe’s wife, Shannon, who works at Eagle Creek.

“She loves driving it. ... She calls it a ‘hoo-hah’ truck,” says Boe, who in return, commutes in Shannon’s 2004 Hyundai Elantra. “That was a tough pill for me to swallow there.”

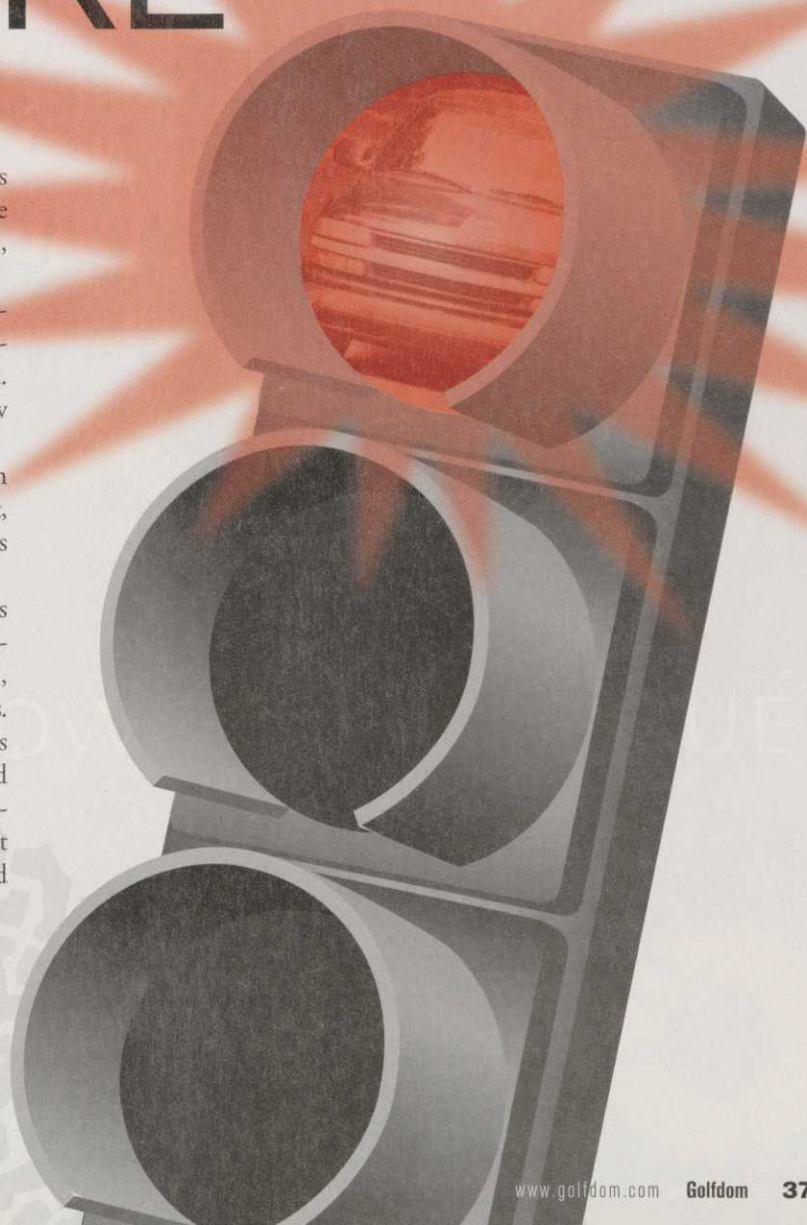
Of course, paybacks come when Shannon stops to fill the tank. “Her first time doing that, she had quite the shock,” Boe says. “It takes 60 bucks to fill it up.”

Allen knows the feeling. Such shock is exactly why the former superintendent at Trilogy Golf Club at Vistancia, in Peoria, Ariz., switched from a Ford F150 crew cab to his Prius.

“I’ve owned a few big gas-guzzling trucks since 1996,” he says. “Once gas prices started going up, my wife and I decided to stop spending \$500 to \$650 in gas every month just for me to get back and forth to work. I decided to break the superintendent mold.”

Just like that, Allen, who now works for Water Resource Management, a lake management company, went from 14 miles per gallon to 55 miles per gallon. “My second month of proudly owning our new purchase, I had the average up to 63 miles per

*Continued on page 38*





## Does the Truck Stop Here?

*Continued from page 37*

gallon, which exceeds Toyota's specs," he says. "This cut our gas bill almost to a third of what we had been spending, allowing my family to enjoy the fruits of my labor just a little bit more."

Much like Boe, Mark Lombardo, the assistant superintendent at Ridgewood Country Club, in Danbury Conn., recently had his daily commute change from two miles to 31

miles. He immediately thought about ditching his 1995 GMC pickup — the first truck that he had ever purchased — in favor of a Honda or some other economically viable option. But that's as far as he ever got.

"The numbers just didn't work for me," Lombardo says. "If I had sold my truck, I could only have gotten a few thousand for it. Then I would have had a monthly car payment, one that I haven't had since 2001, and I'd be paying more taxes because it's a newer car. So I don't think I could give up my truck, and if I had the chance to buy a new car, I would probably opt for another truck."

Mike Archer, on the other hand, took the road less traveled five years ago. The market development and distribution manager for Milorganite bought a 2001 Prius just a year after hybrids had been introduced in the states.

"Early on, we were definitely the anomaly," Archer says. "But we tend to be people who try things. We've had Internet access since the mid-1980s."

The Archer family's Prius now has more than 70,000 miles to its credit, including vacations from the family's home outside Milwaukee to destinations such as Montreal and the Badlands of South Dakota.


"We love it. It's a small car, but it can haul four people. And our idea of performance isn't zero to 60 in 4.5 seconds," Archer says. "When we replace our 1997 Honda minivan, it will be with a hybrid — a (Toyota) RAV4, Honda or something similar — because of the mileage."

Archer realizes with regret that the landscaper crowd cruises to the creed that the bigger the tire and bigger the hood, the better the vehicle. But he sees hope in superintendents.

"I think superintendents, when you see some of the e-mowers that are coming out and things along that line, they're already leaning toward environmental issues," Archer says. "They're managing their pesticide use, fertilizer use and water use, and they're setting up wildlife areas. So I think golf's going to be an easy catch."

Until that day arrives, a gathering of superintendents will remain a pretty conspicuous sight.

"You go to any superintendents meeting, and it's trucks or SUVs from one end of the parking lot to the other," Boe says. ■



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Hyundai Elantra	manual	27/34

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	automatic	21/26
Mazda B2300 2WD	manual	24/29
	automatic	21/26
Toyota Tacoma 2WD	automatic	21/26

#### SPORT UTILITY VEHICLES

Ford Escape Hybrid FWD	automatic	36/31
Ford Escape FWD	manual	24/29
Mazda Tribute 2WD	manual	24/29



### GAS-GUZZLIN' TRUCKS

#### STANDARD PICKUP TRUCKS 2WD

	TRANSMISSION TYPE	MPG CITY/HWY
Dodge Ram 1500 Pickup	automatic	9/12
Nissan Titan	automatic	14/18
Chevy C1500 Silverado	automatic	14/19
Ford F150 Pickup	automatic	14/19
GMC C1500 Sierra	automatic	14/19

#### SPORT UTILITY VEHICLES 2WD

Dodge Durango	automatic	12/15
Lincoln Navigator	automatic	13/18
Infiniti QX56	automatic	13/19
Nissan Armada	automatic	13/19
Chevy C1500 Avalanche	automatic	14/19
Cadillac Escalade	automatic	14/18
Ford Expedition	automatic	14/19
GMC C1500 Yukon XL	automatic	14/19

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Sources: U.S. Department of Energy; Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



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