

**I**t bewilders Steve Mona that there are numerous people who work in the golf course maintenance industry who don't play the game themselves. Those folks hail from various walks, from employees of equipment and chemical suppliers to superintendents and their crews and, yes, even to media types.

Mona, the CEO of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, says he seldom attends industry meetings that don't broach the topic of playing golf.

"Almost, without exception, what you hear is people say, 'I'm so busy and working so hard and traveling so much that I'm playing less golf than I ever have,'" he says.

Mona says that thinking needs to change.

"My view is that we're the ones who ought to be playing a lot of golf, and we ought to be supporting it and talking up all the good things about it," he adds.

More industry people need to lead by example and become more engaged in growing the business — their own business, Mona stresses.

Phil Tralies, president and CEO of Augusta, Ga.-based Club Car, couldn't agree more. That's why Tralies implemented a program three years ago to offer employees free golf lessons. Tralies feels it's his responsibility to do his part to grow the game, especially in a market where new-player growth has been essentially flat the past few years.

"Without this industry, we have no company," Tralies says. "Without a company, we don't have jobs for people out on the line."

The free lessons, taught by the staff at The First Tee of Augusta, have been a hit, as employees will attest (sidebar page 34). The pro-



gram has attracted about 200 participants.

"To be honest, I was less than convinced that we would get the employees to do this," Tralies admits. "I thought they would say, 'You've got to be kidding us.' But, boy, they have embraced it."

Concerned that employees wouldn't have a place to play after the lessons and that they might lose interest in the game, Tralies struck a deal with a Club Car customer, Jones Creek Golf Club in nearby Evans, Ga., so the company's fledgling players can take their games to a real course.

Tralies realizes the program is only one golf ball among thousands on a driving range. But if other companies and organizations institute similar programs, then noticeable progress could be made in the growing-the-game department. Tralies, who insists the program is about benefitting the industry and not Club Car, also invites other

*Continued on page 34*

**Phil Tralies (right), president and CEO of Club Car, decided to offer his company's employees free golf lessons, which they have embraced.**

**[ABOUT THIS SERIES]** "Growing the Game," a four-part series appearing in *Golfdom* throughout 2007, focuses on how the golf industry can attract more new players to create more rounds. In addition to the third installment on what golf course maintenance suppliers and companies can do to grow the game, we've also reported on the impact that baby boomers could have on increasing play (February) and what golf course architects can do in their designs to make the game more friendly for beginner and average golfers (May). In the final installment of the series running in November, we'll single out some of the more creative golf courses in the country and discuss the marketing programs they've implemented to attract new golfers.

Visit our archives at [www.golfdom.com](http://www.golfdom.com) to view the 2006-2007 "Growing the Game" series.



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## Free Golf Lessons Help Grow the Game – And Then Some

By Larry Aylward

Even though she worked at one of the golf industry's major equipment suppliers, Madge Nelson never really thought about working on her golf game — until the leader of her company decided to offer free golf lessons to employees.

Nelson is employed by Club Car, the Augusta, Ga.-based manufacturer of golf cars, utility vehicles and other equipment. Thanks to the golf lessons, she's working on her game and loving it.

"I've played golf off and on for quite a few years," says Nelson, who has worked at Club Car for about 24 years. "I love to play. I could spend three days a week on the golf course."

That's just what Phil Tralies, Club Car's president and CEO, wants to hear. About three years ago, Tralies, disenchanted with golf's stagnant growth, decided to offer free golf lessons to the company's 850 Augusta employees to get them more involved in the sport and grow the game. As a representative of the industry, Tralies felt he owed it to the industry to do so.

The free lessons, offered by Club Car through the teaching staff at The First Tee of Augusta, have been a hit. The program has attracted about 200 participants. Nelson says most of those employees probably would have never picked up a golf club if not for the lessons, especially women.

"I always thought golf was a man's game," Nelson says. But now Nelson,

who recently purchased a new driver, plays the game often with her husband, Chuck.

Jennifer Murphy, Club Car's credit and collections manager, says she also didn't give golf much thought before Tralies introduced the program.

"But when I heard about it, I thought it was neat," she says. "I thought it was a great way to get employees more in tune with the industry. I was excited about it."

Eugene Smallwood, who works in Club Car's service parts shipping department, says he couldn't hit a ball across a golf course's green before taking the golf lessons.

"Now I can hit it about 200 yards," he states. "I've been having fun."

Smallwood, who is African American, says he previously believed that golf was a rich, white man's game. But since learning the game and playing it more, he dismisses that notion.

"I always wanted to take golf lessons," he says.

Tralies says the lessons, which span seven weeks, only cost about \$105 per employee. He's also not stopping with lessons. Concerned that employees wouldn't have a place to play after the lessons and might lose interest in the game, Tralies struck a deal with one of Club Car's customers, Jones Creek Golf Club, for Club Car's new players to take their games to a real course. The company subsidizes employee play at the course and recently started a league at the club.

"But you have to hit the ball straight at Jones Creek," Smallwood says, noting that there are houses on the sides of the fairways. "[Tralies] won't pay for broken windows."

While Tralies introduced the program to create new golfers within his own company, there have been ancillary benefits, which have improved the company's corporate culture. Employees are meeting each other for the first time at the golf lessons and on the course. Now they talk golf around the water cooler at work.

"[The lessons] have brought a big social benefit to the company," Nelson says.

The lessons have also improved company morale.

"We all have very busy jobs," Murphy says. "A lot of us work a lot of hours to make sure we meet the needs of our customers. I'm thankful that we have support from upper management that encourages us to do other things, to have fun and be more involved in the business that we take part in every day. If you ask anybody who has participated in the program, I think they would say the same." ■



(From left) Eugene Smallwood, Madge Nelson and Jennifer Murphy are grateful for the lessons.

*Continued from page 31*

companies, even competitors, to replicate Club Car's program. He says he would be happy to provide them a blueprint of the details.

"If everyone is pushing in the same direction, all of the sudden the needle starts moving," Tralies reasons.

Mona says the GCSAA is also aware that the people who work at its Lawrence, Kan., headquarters need to do their part to grow the game and their profession. About 10 years ago the association struck a deal with a local golf professional to provide a discounted rate for group lessons to interested employees. The GCSAA pays half the cost for each person's lesson.

"It's not completely free, but our view is you need to have a little skin in the game yourself," Mona says.

The lessons have spurred a lot of interest in the game, Mona says. When Mona joined the GCSAA nearly 14 years ago, he says only handful of people played. Now at least one-third of the association's 120 employees are teeing it up, including at a weekly summer golf league.

Other industry companies are cognizant of their growing-the-game duties.

The Toro Co. has formed employee golf leagues at manufacturing plants and other facilities throughout the country. In Bloomington, Minn., where the company is based, the Toro Employee Club sponsors two golf leagues from May through September. The Par 30 League, for new golfers and those working on their games, plays on an executive golf course. The Regulation League, on an 18-hole course, is for more-advanced players.

Toro believes "everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy the game of golf," according Sandra Donnelly, the company's commercial division spokesperson. That's why the company supports the game's growth through the Special Olympics, National Amputee Golf Association and the Sister Kenny Rehabilitation Institute.

"We have a very balanced approach to helping build interest in the game with youth and underserved populations," says Michael



## What Are You Doing to Grow the Game?

*Golfdom* was not able to contact all of the suppliers that represent the golf course maintenance industry for this story. However, we invite you to send your growing-the-game ideas to Larry Aylward at [larylward@questex.com](mailto:larylward@questex.com). We want to hear what your company is doing to grow the game so we can share your information with our readers.

Happe, Toro's managing director of commercial business.

Toro and other industry companies, including Bayer Environmental Science, also support The First Tee — a national, non-profit organization dedicated to growing the game among children by creating affordable and accessible golf facilities — to help grow the game. Mike Daly, the golf market lead at Bayer, says the company has donated money and products to The First Tee's cause.

Daly likes The First Tee's approach to growing the game. "The whole idea is to develop a new dedicated golfer by focusing on young kids who may not have an opportunity to play," he says.

David Pursell, who owns FarmLinks Golf Club in Sylacauga, Ala., is also a big believer in The First Tee, so much that he formed his own First Tee program in 2004 to help grow the game among kids. The First Tee at Pursell Farms functions as an after-school program four days a week for area children ages 7 to 17. More than 200 kids have participated in the program.

Pursell also aims to grow the game through his 18-hole course, which serves as a research and demonstration facility for various industry products, among other things. Every time he goes to another facility, be it Pebble Beach or a golf course down the road, Pursell studies what that facility is doing to improve the overall golf experience to grow the game. He takes mental notes from the time he drives into a club's parking to the time he departs it.

"I want to see what people are doing well," Pursell says. "Then I want to see if we can improve on those things or replicate them."

The game simply needs to be more fun for it to grow, Pursell stresses. "And you have to make it more fun than all the other options that people have to do, which is an uphill climb because of the time, expense and trouble of playing golf," he adds. "So the challenge then becomes making people's golf experience so good that they're willing to take the time, expense and trouble to play."

Those involved with growing-the-game programs say there are secondary benefits that come with creating more golfers.

At the GCSAA, Mona says the more employees who play the game, the more employees who understand the game and can use that knowledge to serve the association's members better.

Golf outside the association's walls has also helped build employee camaraderie within them, Mona says. "It has been terrific because people from different departments who don't really interact with each other on a daily basis are all of the sudden on the same team in a golf tournament," Mona says.

Not that employee morale at Club Car was in the dumps, but offering free golf lessons has only made it better.

Turf maintenance also has a lot to do with growing the game, company representatives agree. Karla Cuculi, Jacobsen's marketing director, notes that GCSAA research says the No. 1 reason golfers return to a course to play is because of its quality and condition. With that in mind, she says Jacobsen aims to manufacture high-performance equipment to create quality turf. No doubt other industry companies share the same philosophy.

Continued education of superinten-

*Continued on page 36*

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Continued education of superintendents  
*Continued on page 36*

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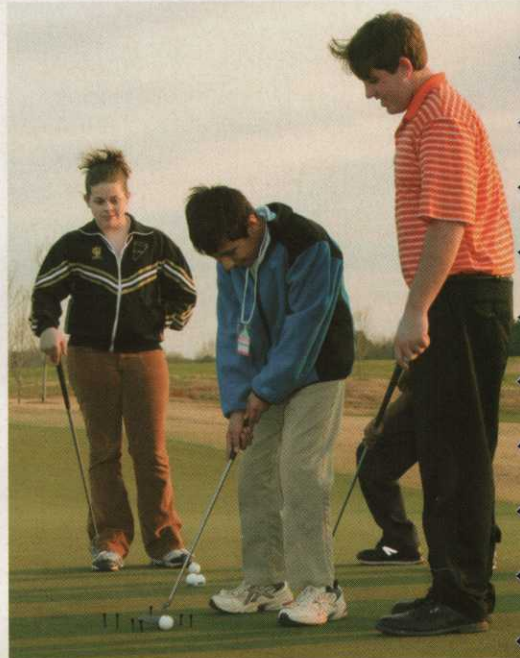
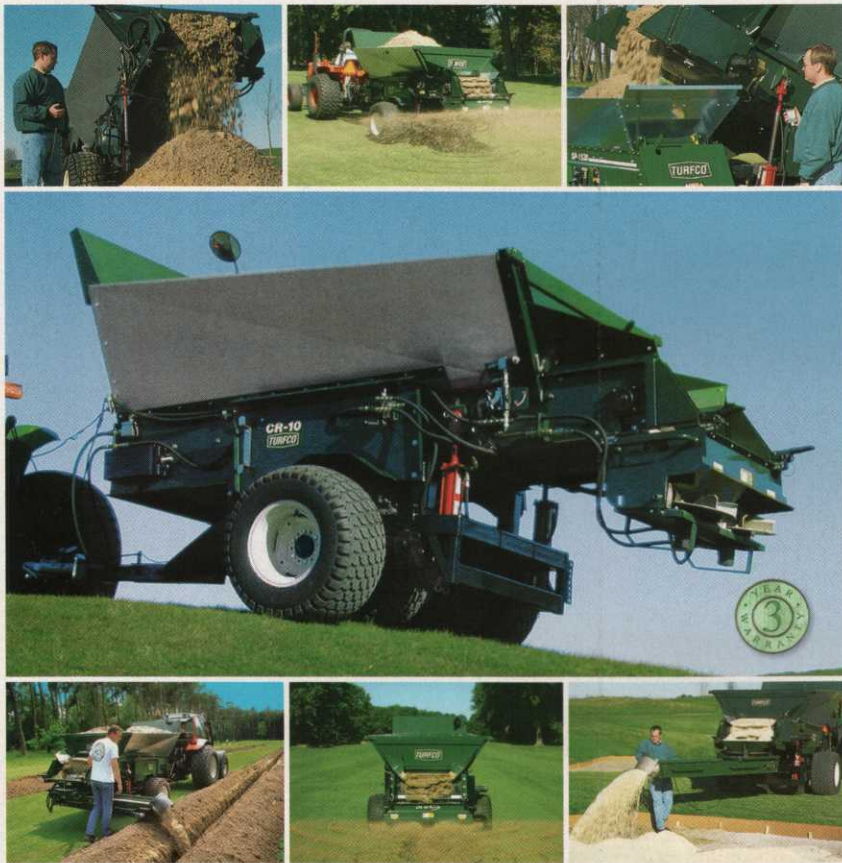


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dents is also vital when it comes to well-maintained turf. It's a reason why Pursell created his research and demonstration course for superintendents. It's also a reason why Bayer and John Deere teamed up last year to form the Green Start Academy, a two-day educational event for assistant superintendents to further their careers by learning about best-management practices and innovative products, meeting industry experts and networking with peers.

"The next generation of superintendents is something we shouldn't leave to chance," Daly says. "Having a high-quality golf course ... that people enjoy going out to play is integral to [growing the game]."

Tralies says any company in the golf business that's making money has an obligation to do something to grow the game. Mona says companies can help by simply placing signage, such as the Play Golf America logo, on their products. "Most industry companies sell products that come in packages," he adds.



More than 200 kids have participated in The First Tee at Pursell Farms. The program has done more than help grow the game; it has helped keep kids off the streets and out of trouble.

Tralies suggests the GCSAA put together a formal roll call highlighting industry companies that have implemented growing-the-game initiatives. If such a list is made public within the industry, Tralies points out, then more companies will feel the need to be on it.

Mona says Tralies' idea has merit.

"I do understand the notion of holding up for emulation the companies that are participating in a way that helps to drive interest and participation in the game," Mona says. "[Tralies' idea] deserves further exploration."

Tralies said the buck — or the golf ball in this case — stops with the industry's own people when it comes to golf's economic viability.

"They should all be motivated to see this game grow," he says. ■

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# TAKING UP THE CAUSE

Ample donation from Carolinas superintendents will help New Orleans golf course survive

**STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY AYLWARD**  
EDITOR IN CHIEF

It's hot enough on this June day in New Orleans to melt ice caps at the North Pole. But it still feels like Christmas to Peter Carew.

That's because Carew, the golf course superintendent of the city's Brechtel Memorial Park Golf Course, has awakened on this muggy morning to two 18-wheel trucks delivering thousands of dollars' worth of refurbished turf maintenance equipment to him and his crew. The equipment, sorely needed by Carew to keep his modest golf course in operation, has arrived courtesy of the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association. Carew lost most of his equipment to the wicked tag team of flooding and looting induced by Hurricane Katrina, which struck New Orleans and the Gulf states almost two years ago.

On hand to greet Carew with the equipment are Billy Lewis and Mitch Wilkerson, the pres-

ident and vice president of the Carolinas GCSA. They watch as Carew eyes the equipment like a kid would a new bicycle under a Douglas fir on Dec. 25.

An exuberant Carew says it's hard to believe what he sees, including two triplex greens mowers, a tractor, a gang mower, a utility vehicle and other equipment — all refurbished to the tune of about \$30,000. In addition, Lewis and Wilkerson present a check to Carew for \$2,500 on behalf of the association's members.

Quite simply, the gifts are Brechtel's saving grace. The course was close to its demise because it lacked functional equipment for turf maintenance.

"This course would have shut down," Carew says. "I don't know what I would have done. This makes me feel reborn."

The Carolinas GCSA learned of Carew's plight after he and two other Gulf-area superintendents spoke during the association's conference and trade show last November. The 52-year-old Carew, who has worked for the city of New Orleans for about 22 years, moved attendees with his poignant speech

For Peter Carew (second from right) and two crew members, Raymond Joseph (to his right) and David Donner (to his left), the equipment delivery was like Christmas. To Carew's far left is Timothy Lavelle, chief of operations for New Orleans' Department of Parks and Parkways. Next to him are Mitch Wilkerson and Billy Lewis of the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association.







The equipment arrived on two 18-wheel trucks on a steamy June day.



Superintendent Peter Carew is all smiles as he drives a greens mower off a truck.

about life and work after the hurricane.

Carew told attendees how he was able to reopen Brechtel, which had been submerged in 4 feet of water for two weeks, only three months after Katrina hit. Carew talked about how storm-weary golfers thanked him for reopening the course, even though they were putting on dirt greens. Carew also told attendees about the other city golf course he managed, the Joe Bartholomew Golf Club, which was destroyed and will cost \$11 million to repair.

After hearing Carew's talk, Randy Allen, director of golf course operations for The Burroughs and Chapin Co. in Myrtle Beach, S.C., told a group of people, "We're going to help him." Allen then rallied the association's members to the cause.

The Carolinas GCSA Board of Directors debated the matter. Trent Bouts, the association's public relations officer, said the board knew that other courses were damaged by the storm. "But they clearly felt that Carew's case was extreme and his determination in the face of enormous obstacles deserved all the support we could possibly muster," Bouts adds.

The Carolinas GCSA asked Charlotte-based Smith Turf & Irrigation to help with the cause. The distributor, in turn, picked up the donated equipment from various golf

courses, hauled it back to its building and refurbished it for below cost. Bob Bell, the distributor's vice president of commercial sales and operations, says the equipment received "extra-special" attention. Revels Tractor Co., a distributor in Fuquay-Varina, N.C., also helped with the equipment refurbishment.

"I hope the equipment lasts [Carew] four or five years," Bell says. "We're proud to be part of this."

It's obvious to Carew the equipment received extra-special attention. He has received other equipment donations, for which he's thankful, but much of it required repairs. Carew was able to fix some of the equipment, which he's using at Brechtel.

The Carolinas GCSA's donation couldn't have come at a better time. In fact, time was

*Continued on page 40*

### Rally the Troops

Billy Lewis, president of the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association, campaigns to reopen New Orleans course destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. See Larry Aylward's Pin High column on page 8.



## Taking up the Cause



**Mitch Wilkerson (left) and Billy Lewis (right), standing with Carew on the 18th green, are inspired by Carew's tenacity to persevere.**

*Continued from page 39*

running out on Carew, who says he told his superiors in April that the course's lone greens mower was near its demise. Carew was told there was no money to fix it and was asked to do everything he could to keep it running.

About a month later, Carew received a call from Chuck Borman, Carolinas GCSA's executive director, who told him the association wanted to make an equipment donation. Carew only hoped it was equipment that

could hit the ground running. He was tired of having to constantly improvise to keep the old equipment working. For instance, the reel on Brechtel's only-operating greens mower didn't spin forward. It did spin backward, however, and Carew reversed the hydraulic line so that when the mower was put in reverse, the reel would spin forward.

"That is how we've been cutting greens," he says.

Carew has always been one to make do with coat hangers and duct tape in his 35 years as a superintendent. But he has taken improvising to another level the past two years.

Carew hasn't had a choice to do otherwise, though. The city has no money to buy him any new equipment. The tax revenues from an again-viable Bourbon Street have gone to more important city initiatives, such as ambulance and fire services. While the city set aside about \$30,000 for maintenance at

*Continued on page 42*

## A Course And Its Superintendent Are Reborn By Larry Aylward

The Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association's donation of refurbished equipment and cash to Brechtel Memorial Park Golf Course will help keep the New Orleans facility in business. That's good news because business is booming at the course, says Peter Carew, Brechtel's superintendent.

While Brechtel is far from the condition Carew would like to have it in — it's still recovering from the damage inflicted by Hurricane Katrina two years ago — the course is flourishing with play. In May, the course recorded its most rounds since the hurricane.

"Before the storm we were doing between 40,000 to 50,000 rounds," Carew says. "Now we're back up around 32,000 rounds."

Brechtel is the only municipal course that's open in the city. Katrina destroyed the other city-operated course that Carew oversees, the Joe Bartholomew Golf Club, and there is no plan to reopen it. The City Park Bayou Oaks Golf Facility, which includes three golf courses operated by the state, is also closed, and its future is in doubt. Audubon Park Golf Course is the only other public course in New Orleans that is open.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) will provide Brechtel

\$980,000 and Bartholomew \$1.7 million to rebuild. Carew says Bartholomew sustained \$11 million in damage to the golf course and clubhouse. Brechtel endured about \$3 million in damage.

Carew says none of the golfers at Brechtel complain about the course's condition, although it has improved immensely since reopening. Most golfers realize they are fortunate to have a place to play at all — and for the bargain price of \$22 for 18 holes with a golf car.

Brechtel has also become a destination for quasi golfers, people who just want to walk the property because many of the city's parks are still shut down.

"They use it as a place for exercise," Carew says.

About 75 Canada geese have also become an attraction at the course. Brechtel has never had Canada geese living on the course before.

"Most superintendents want to get rid of Canada geese," Carew says. "We love them here."

That's because there hasn't been much wildlife at Brechtel in the past two years. Wild dogs left lurking after the storm killed

the wildlife that wasn't wiped out by the hurricane. Strange as it sounds, the geese represent hope.

"They are a small sign of our rebirth," Carew says.

Carew has also undergone a rebirth of sorts. The hurricane changed him, he says, for the better. Having gone weeks without a decent meal after the storm, Carew doesn't take for granted the small pleasures in life, like dining out at a fine restaurant or taking a ride on his Harley.

The weeks after Katrina were a trying time for him — more trying than people will ever know. "There are a lot of things I saw that I can't talk about to this day," Carew says. "But you have to move on."

According to the latest census figures, about 193,000 people have left New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina. But Carew never thought of leaving.

"It would have been easy to leave," he says. "It was harder to stay."

Carew says he stayed because he wants to be part of the city's renaissance. It will take many years, he admits, but it will happen.

"New Orleans is not going anywhere," he says. ■