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## Off The Fringe

# Jake Pledges Six Sigma

**BUSINESS STRATEGY HELPS  
COMPANY WITH QUALITY CONTROL**

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

**J**acobsen President Dan Wilkinson used a quote from Arnold Palmer to kick off a talk he gave to business magazine editors at the company's Charlotte, N.C., headquarters in October.

"The condition of the golf course is the battlefield upon which golf facilities will win or lose in today's ultra-competitive environment," Wilkinson quoted The King as saying.

Wilkinson is well aware that the golf course market is undergoing a stock market-like correction of sorts after overbuilding in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The net growth of 18-hole golf course openings in the United States in 2006 was minus 26.5.

"From our perspective, this isn't a good thing," Wilkinson said. "If we want to grow, we have to deliver a product that provides better performance to the customer."

That's why Wilkinson takes Palmer's

quote to heart ... and head. He knows he can't afford not to react to the market's situation. So Wilkinson decided to introduce Six Sigma, a modern management strategy, to the company's operations.

Six Sigma has gained popularity in the business world for its quality of control mechanisms. It may be gaining ground as a popular approach in the golf industry. Six Sigma is a set of practices originally developed by Motorola in 1986 to systematically improve processes by eliminating defects. Six Sigma stresses that manufacturing and business processes can be measured, analyzed, improved and controlled. Six Sigma at many organizations simply means a measure of quality that strives for near perfection.

When Wilkinson came to Jacobsen in 2005, he spent considerable time with other members of the senior leadership team discussing what the manufacturer of mowers, aerators and other golf course equipment needed to improve on to better serve its customers. They decided Six Sigma would play a role in that process.

At Jacobsen, Wilkinson says Six Sigma meets head on with customer

service. "It's a very defined process that gets us to what ultimately is a result that's customer driven," he says. "What we've done is [implement] our Six Sigma methodology into our product development process so we can really deliver the performance our customers are expecting."

Six Sigma plays a few different roles at Jacobsen, Wilkinson says. "One is the focus on lean — of taking cost and variation out of the manufacturing process," he says. "Another is what we call DMAIC, which is an acronym for Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve and Control. That's about taking a look at the existing process you have ... improving it and putting a control plan in place."

Six Sigma is also playing a role in Jacobsen's product development testing. In fact, Six Sigma has brought back an intensive approach to product development testing that has been missing from the company for several years, Wilkinson says, noting that company personnel realized that a mower produced in the southeast United States might not operate the same on turfgrass in southeast Europe.

"It used to be that we could design something and test it here in Charlotte or around the Southeast and then we'd send it out," Wilkinson says. "Now we're doing a lot more robust testing. ... We've begun testing our products around the globe. We're testing them on courses in Europe, Asia, Australia and North America."

It's no secret Jacobsen had some customer service issues before Wilkinson arrived, specifically with problems refilling part orders with its dealers. Basically, things were getting lost in the shuffle.

Six Sigma has also impacted this segment of Jacobsen's operations. John Whittington, Jacobsen's distribution center manager, provided a tour of the center and talked about the improvements ▶



Jacobsen's John Whittington talks about the improvements the company has made with its parts refilling

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# Business Tip of the Month

## Quotable

**"I can always tell when the Chase is about to start because of that awful feeling I get in the pit of my stomach. But playing golf definitely relaxed me. It really improved my state of mind."**

— *NASCAR driver Jimmie Johnson to Sports Illustrated on how he's learned to chill away from the race-track. (The "Chase" is the several races that combine the Nextel Cup series or the Chase for the Cup. Johnson won the Cup in November for the fourth straight year.)*

**"It would be unwise and illegitimate to say that we've achieved environmental success as an industry. A practical approach is to assess where you are and strive to get better every day."**

— *Greg Lyman, Director of Environmental Programs for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.*

Jacobsen has made in its parts refilling operation, which focus on efficiency and safety, among other things. That said, Wilkinson admits Jacobsen is still fighting a negative perception from superintendents on the parts-refilling front.

"It's a battle I fight every day," he said. "I take it very personal." ■

## Proactive About Pesticides

Superintendents can help themselves by educating the public

**G**olf course superintendents should expect public scrutiny to increase in coming years in regard to their use of pesticides on golf courses. Even though superintendents use pesticides responsibly, the current environment might require them to address questions concerning pesticide usage.

In fact, superintendents can help themselves and the industry they represent by being proactive and educating the public about how they use pesticides sensibly. The public needs to understand that many superintendents are formally educated, have many years of field experience with pesticide use, and understand the importance of using pesticides at the proper rates and not over using in order to maintain the reliability of the chemical.

Local superintendents could join together to make a formal presentation on golf course maintenance and how pesticides play a role in turf management at city council meetings. The Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) reports that there has been "a significant increase in localities attempting to 're-regulate' pesticides already thoroughly regulated by federal and state agencies." These localities should understand that golf course superintendents are professionals who want to maintain the integrity of their profession by being responsible to their employer, the course and their community.

Superintendents could also invite the local press — including newspaper and television reporters — to their respective golf courses to discuss the what, why, when and where of the maintenance staff's pesticide application program. Superintendents should make clear to the public that there's nothing to hide.

The bottom line: By stepping up and using their expertise, superintendents can educate the public and the press about the value of pesticides when used responsibly.

*The "Tip of the Month" is provided by Syngenta to support superintendents in their agronomic, business and professional development.*



PHOTO BY: MARY CORCORAN

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— Luke Strojny  
Poplar Creek Country Club  
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## Off The Fringe

# Investing in Tomorrow

BAYER, DEERE COURT THE NEXT GENERATION OF SUPERINTENDENTS

By David Frabotta, Senior Editor

Assistant superintendents think this school is cool. Almost twice as many of them visited Bayer Environmental Science's research facility in Clayton, N.C., this year for Green Start Academy, a continuing education and networking event, than attended the inaugural event held last year.

Education sessions for the event, held in October and geared specifically toward assistants, focused on golf course care and maintenance, professional development, industry regulations, turf science and recent research. Bayer and John Deere sponsored the event.

"Bayer and John Deere recognize the greater role assistants are playing in the day-to-day management of golf courses," said Michael Smith, assistant superintendent of Three Crowns Golf Club in Casper, Wyo. "The advances in science and technology require those of us in the turf business to constantly update our knowledge. A strong turf education goes a long way, but I have found that the experience gained in the work place, along with keeping up with the new products and techniques, is crucial in good management practices."

Irrigation was the topic for debut speaker Grady Miller, Ph.D., a professor at North Carolina State University. With the Southeast and Southwest now measuring droughts in decades, water seems to be on the mind of every golf course operator.

"We're experiencing one of the worst droughts that North Carolina has ever seen on record," Miller said.

Regarding water, Miller said growth rate, evapotranspiration rate, length of growing season, soil type, grass type, rain, intensity of cultural practices and available soil moisture all influence the amount of water needed on a golf course.



Assistant superintendents play Cornhole while waiting for an evening barbecue.

With water shortages now plaguing many parts of the country, effluent water use is becoming more common. But it's not always in the turf's best interest.

"You test soil all the time, but you had better test the water, too, because it has the ability to change the quality of your turf," Miller said.

USGA Green Section agronomist Dave Oatis, director of the Northeast Region, said water management provides an opportunity for burgeoning superintendents to differentiate themselves within the profession.

"Effective water management is always the key to long-term success," Oatis said. "There's a common thread among the best superintendents: They are the ones who spend the extra time and effort to properly manage water."

Attendees also heard and learned from: Dave Fearis, director of membership for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America; certified superintendent Bruce Williams, director of golf and grounds management at Los Angeles Country Club; certified superintendent Bob Farren, grounds and golf course manager at Pinehurst Resort; David Spak, biological development manager for Bayer Environmental Science; and Nick Hamon, director of development and technical services for Bayer Environmental Science. ■

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# Hole of the

▶ Hole No. 3 | The Harbor Club | Greensboro, Ga.



# Month

## Hole Stats

Distance: 425 yards

Par 4

## The Turf

Green: A1/A4 Bentgrass

Fairway: Bermudagrass

From the signature tartan pattern in its logo to its Scottish-links style, The Harbor Club course emulates the grand traditions of Scotland's St. Andrews Links, the birthplace of golf.

Located in Greensboro, Ga., The Harbor Club challenges golfers with heavy tree lines, native brush and numerous water hazards, including Lake Oconee and its streams on half of the holes on the golf course.

Hole No. 3 is a 435-yard par 4 and is rated as the course's most difficult. Golfers must negotiate the second

shot to avoid the stream on the right, tight tree line on the left and, most importantly, a large mound fronting the green that makes the green nearly impossible to see.

"You really need to plan your shot and trust your swing," explained J.R. McCroskey, the course's superintendent.

When McCroskey came to The Harbor Club two years ago, he inherited an outbreak of take-all patch on his greens. McCroskey's frustration rose as he searched for a treatment to successfully cure the epidemic. His search ended when he found Trinity™ fungicide.

"Trinity is the only thing that I've ever sprayed on take-all patch that truly makes a difference," he said.

After his initial application, McCroskey noticed improvement within three days.

"During the heat of summer, I still had about 21 days of control," he said.

McCroskey continues to spray preventively once a month at rate of 1 ounce per 1,000 square feet.

His maintenance practices have helped keep the Harbor Club looking its best – so much that any Scottish golfer would be proud.

To see past Holes of the Month, download a desktop image and more, visit [www.betterturf.com](http://www.betterturf.com).

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GOLFDOM'S HOLE OF THE MONTH IS MADE POSSIBLE BY:

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# Shades Of Green

OPINION

**I**t's was a warm fall this year at the Lake Omigosh Country Club here in central Florida. So warm in fact that Duffy McDuffy suggested to green committee members that they approve and support a decision to refrain from overseeding this year. Seems the local water management district is imposing extended watering restrictions because of the lack of rainfall, and further cutbacks might be coming.

It makes perfect sense to McDuffy. You can spend \$40,000 on seed, but if you don't have the water to help it germinate and establish, then you are just wasting money and precious water supplies. You could see the anguish on the committee members' faces as they thought of those dull brown and tan fairways without those luscious green stripes. There would be plenty of carping and complaining from the members as they left their brown or snow-covered Northern courses expecting to play the usual emerald-green oasis in Florida. Drought happens. Get over it.

Meanwhile, as McDuffy contemplates managing potentially dormant unoverseeded turf during the winter, he also faces budget shortages for pest-management programs, labor and the inherent challenge of ferreting out illegal immigrant paperwork, ongoing water restrictions and local noise and fertilizer-use ordinances. These are all things that affect the playing conditions of the golf course, the No. 1 asset of a golf club.

But Duffy would be selfish to think he is the only department head that is suffering from performance issues when it comes to customer satisfaction. Let's take a look at what's happening around the club.

After fast putting greens, the quickest way to a club member's heart is through his stomach. But head chef Francois Beauclaire is in a stew over the shortage of portobello and crimini mushrooms lately, which might force him to alter some of the menu's signature dishes. The *E. coli* scares in produce (green onions and spinach) were devastating for the light-lunch crowd. Beauclaire responded by paying more for imported veggies from Canada, although that source will freeze up this winter.

## Budget Woes Force Clubs To Prioritize

BY JOEL JACKSON



SHOULD ORIENTAL  
RUGS, TEAK ACCENTS  
AND ITALIAN GLASS  
OVERRULE GOLF  
MAINTENANCE?

Head pro Harvey Doyle and his staff are in a panic. Their supplier of the signature "Lake Omigosh Blue" golf shirts is no longer using the manufacturer in China for fear that the pigment contains lead. His new supplier of blue fabric (made in the U.S.A.) just isn't the same. It's more of a cornflower blue. For an extra charge, the color can be matched with special dyes. Since Lake Omigosh Blue is the official color of the shirts for the men's inter-club golf team, The Fighting Cormorants, the expense has been authorized.

Mary Hartwell, the food & beverage manager, nearly swooned when she found out that the crystal stemware pattern used since the club opened was being discontinued. Fortunately, Mary was able to contract with an Italian glass factory in Florence to keep those wineglasses coming even if they were double the old cost.

Club manager Alistair Caldwell reported that the imported Oriental rugs were on order and scheduled to arrive the week after the replacement of the 2-year-old carpet, and the new Brazilian teak paneling installation was completed in the clubhouse.

Back down in the golf maintenance office, McDuffy was reading a memo from the finance committee that said his line-item request in the budget for a continuing \$1,000 turf research donation to the Florida Golf Course Superintendents Association had been deleted to reduce the club's operating costs.

Sometimes it makes you wonder if folks who run golf clubs really do have their priorities in order once they leave the 18th green.

So long from Lake Omigosh where the superintendent is under budget, the crew is over worked, and many members are behind the times.

---

*Certified superintendent Joel Jackson is executive director for the Florida GCSA.*



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– Tessie, Superintendent  
Ryan Bancroft’s daily visitor



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**D**ear Santa,  
I know I'm a little old to be writing you letters, but there's something I need, and apparently you are my best hope for obtaining this gift.

You see, I've been good. I haven't written a single column poking fun at superintendents in years. I kinda miss the hate mail, but I'm coping. But I really, really appreciate what supers do for the game, and I cherish the opportunity to talk to them when I travel to golf courses all over the country.

But something very weird happened recently, and I'm really embarrassed about it. You see, there was this trip I was planning to visit this super-neat course to study its design and hear why this special layout is in such good condition all of the time.

Now most writers would call the head pro or the director of golf (or what they'll call those guys in the future: the chief lesson-giving officer (CLGO) to set up an appointment. You know, some nice person who is paid to deal with lowly people like me and who might even tell them to bring their clubs along.

So I pull out my Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's Membership Directory and Suppliers Guide, which the organization gave me after refusing me access to its online directory. Why won't this otherwise really nice organization let me have access to its Internet directory? I don't have a clue.

Anyway, I can find it with my eyes closed because it's the one that smells like an old SAT test booklet. So I pull it out and after a while searching around for the people listed at the course I wanted to visit, I believe I stumbled on the name of the superintendent at this really, really neat course.

So I called him in the middle of the day.

A not-very-happy woman answered the phone, and I think I woke her up. When I asked for the superintendent I was trying to reach, she said, "He doesn't live here anymore. Then she asked, "How did you get this number?" And she added, "Don't call this number again."

I felt kinda silly.

## All I Want for Christmas Is ...

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



... ACCESS TO  
THE GCSAA ONLINE  
DIRECTORY SO I CAN  
PHONE A FEW  
SUPERINTENDENTS

It turned out that the number I had found was no longer this superintendent's number. It was his ex-wife's phone, and he had moved on. Judging by her phone demeanor, I'd say he was probably in a better place.

Well, there is only so much time in the day, so I didn't bother to try and locate the superintendent. Instead, I looked up the pro shop number on the Internet and called it. The people there were very helpful in setting me up with a golf car to tour the course. They even told me to bring my clubs along, but I didn't have time to play.

So my point in all of this is that I was hoping you could get me access to the GCSAA online directory so this doesn't happen again. Now, I know there are like 10 people who write full time about the golf course design and maintenance industry, and they're all very suspicious characters. Giving us access to the online directory would mean lots of extra bandwidth for the GCSAA and 10 dark and sinister people accessing the phone numbers and e-mail addresses of superintendents with the possibility of quoting them and raising their profiles.

Still, I think it's worth taking a chance for the GCSAA to do, and I was hoping you could talk to them.

After all, I think they want these media people to be the ones calling their superintendent at courses across America instead of the COO, the CLGO, the CFO or some other C (fill in official-sounding initial) O.

Or maybe not?

So that's all I ask. Oh, and for peace and prosperity in the golf business in 2008.

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