

Gregg Breningmeyer,

John Deere

"Ten years ago, demand exceeded supply by a great margin, and that's what fueled the rampant building of golf courses. That was fine, but we just didn't put the brakes on it soon enough."



"That drives everything else in the game."

Mona points out that it's more vital to increase rounds among golfers who play about 15 rounds a year than to increase rounds among those who play once or twice a year.

"I'd rather have one golfer go from 15 rounds to 30 rounds than have three golfers go from one to three rounds," Mona says. "The latter doesn't spend much money, and they're really not connected to the game."

During a panel discussion on growing rounds and revenue at the Carolinas Golf Course Superintendents Association Conference & Trade Show in November, Joe Beditz, CEO of the NGF, said if courses want to increase rounds and revenue, they need to be more creative in their marketing approaches to attract more players.

"Our greatest competitor in golf is inertia," Beditz noted. "It's better to do something and be dead wrong than not do anything at all."

The industry has its share of innovators. For instance, there's Cyprian Keyes Golf Course in Boylston, Mass., which received a 2006 Player Development Award from the NGCOA. Friday nights at the course have turned into a social occasion for golfers of all ages and abilities. For just \$30, participants in the club's Nine & Dine league are treated to nine holes of golf with golf car, prizes and dinner. "We're averaging 40 to 45 people a week, and everyone is having a great time," says General Manager David Frem.

Lawren A. Just, owner of Persimmon Ridge Golf Club in Louisville, Ky., is another industry innovator who created temporary memberships at her club to fill openings. Just's plan bought in many new golfers as well as \$160,000 in cash for the course.

The key to growing the game is to convince owners and operators to implement formal programs at their courses to attract new players, Hughes says.

"We have to have a sense of urgency in doing this," he adds. "There's no mystery to it. We

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Are Golf Course Closings Hurting Job Opportunities for Superintendents, Others?

The golf course industry's leaders, including GCSAA CEO Steve Mona and NGCOA CEO Mike Hughes, agree that the last thing the golf industry needs is more holes of golf dotting the country. Hence, they believe that minus 26.5 net golf course openings in 2006 — the combination of course openings minus course closures — is healthy economic news for the industry.

But a question arises. Do fewer golf course openings — a trend for the past five years — mean there are less job opportunities for superintendents, assistant superintendents, club managers and other industry workers? On the surface, that's the way it appears, but Mona doesn't see it that way.

"People look at the industry and see that if 100 golf courses closed, that means 100 superintendents, club managers and pros must have lost their jobs," Mona says. "But I don't think that's the case necessarily."

Because a high percentage of the courses closing are not 18-hole facilities — most are alternative facilities, such as executive courses with pitch-and-putt venues that don't employ full-time superintendents — not as many full-time superintendents are losing their jobs as thought, Mona says. Also, most of the new course openings are 18-hole facilities that employ full-time superintendents.

"Having said that, if we have net zero growth for the next five years, I'd be the first to admit that wouldn't be good for our profession," Mona says.

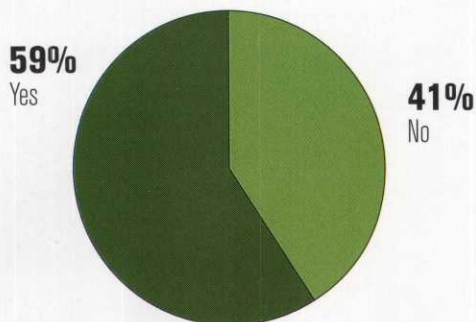
Charlie Fultz, superintendent of Shenvalee Golf Resort in New Market, Va., also doesn't think that less golf course openings mean less jobs for superintendents. He says available jobs are still proportionate to when there were 200 course openings a year.

Fultz attributes that to so many superintendents who are fired because they can't deliver the impeccable turf conditions demanded by owners and green committees. He also says there are more job openings for superintendents because many of them in their 50s are ditching the profession to work in other parts of the industry, such as sales.

- Larry Aylward

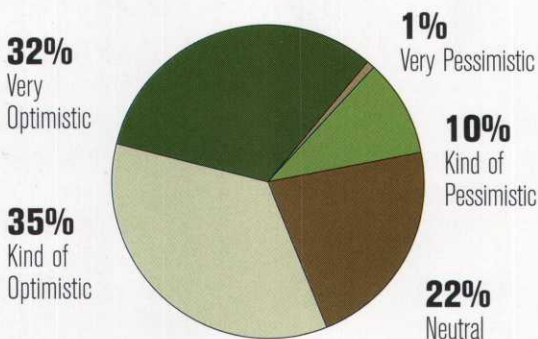
Did your course's revenue increase in 2006?

(613 responses)



Source: Golfdom Survey

How optimistic are you about the economic health of your facility? (618 responses)



Source: Golfdom Survey

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understand perfectly well how to put programs in place that are effective at this. It's just a matter of more courses implementing them."

Beditz also stressed the importance of continuing to nurture junior golf programs to attract new players. "Statistics show that some of our great gains in participation over the last decade have been with juniors," he added.

And quality maintenance programs are crucial if you want to keep golfers coming through your clubhouse doors, said Henry DeLozier, vice president of Pulte Homes, who spoke on the same panel with Beditz at the Carolinas GCSA show. DeLozier warned that cutting a golf course's maintenance budget will prove detrimental in the long run.

The best home builders view golf as an amenity that helps them sell homes, DeLozier stressed. Hence, the best home builders are committed to golf and invest in it. "We want to invest in [golf] and we want it to be well done," DeLozier said.

"The better done the golf course is ... the better we drive home sales."

One of the least-effective ways to increase play is to price cut, experts warn. But Jim Thompson, general manager of Angels Crossing Golf Course in Vicksburg, Mich., says that's just what area golf courses in southwest Michigan have been doing to try and increase business. Thompson says he doesn't understand why owners and operators believe price cutting can help their businesses.

"Changing your price doesn't directly affect the amount of play anybody gets for more than a week," he says. "And then you're right back where you were, and you've just devalued your product."

Hughes says price cutting at golf courses has decreased throughout most of the country, although it's still happening in some pockets of the country where local economies are struggling, like Michigan.

"They do what they need to do to keep going," Hughes says of golf courses in those areas. "But you have to be careful. When you start discounting, you can drive the price right to the bottom."

Thompson is also concerned that some golf courses are cheapening their green fees and making up for it by overcharging on other items.

"They'll give you a two-for-one coupon on your green fee, but they'll charge you \$30 for a golf car, \$6 for a tuna sandwich and \$20 for a six-pack of beer," he says.

It's risky business, Thompson adds.

"How long are we going to treat customers like they're stupid before they figure this out?" he asks. "Then they're going to resent not just the people who did it to them, but everybody in the business. It will be enough to get people to take up bowling again."

The future ...

Retiring baby boomers may be just what the golf industry needs to increase rounds and revenue. The NGF expects baby boomers to add between 75 million to 100 million incremental rounds by 2015.

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Toni Bucci, BASF

"We have to be constantly thinking about, not only what our competitors are doing, but about what new expectations our customers will have."



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What's With the Weird, Wacky Weather? But, What Else Is New?

The way-out weather played a number on the golf industry in 2006. Then again, when doesn't it?

In January 2006, golfers took to courses in the Midwest like it was June. Rounds were up 517 percent in the lower Midwest, and 443 percent in the upper Midwest when compared to January 2005, according to the National Golf Foundation (NGF). Rounds rose almost 30 percent nationally for the month.

At Shenvalee Golf Resort in New Market, Va., golf course superintendent Charlie Fultz says the resort did more rounds in January 2006 than it had done in that month the previous 15 years.

"For the first time in my career, we mowed fairways in January," Fultz says. "We mowed greens and tees, too."

But a funny thing happened to the golf industry on the way to having a good year for rounds played. Mother Nature decided to get nasty in the spring.

NGF reported rounds down 3.2 percent in May 2006 compared to May 2005, blaming it on well-above-normal rainfall in the Midwest and New England. Golf Datatech, another firm that tracks golf statistics, estimated rounds were down 2.7 percent across the nation in May.

At Angels Crossing Golf Club in Vicksburg, Mich., General Manager Jim Thompson says the course was ahead of its numbers for rounds through August when compared to 2005.

"Then the rains hit in September," Thompson says. "It rained 23 out of 30 days. I think a lot of people put their clubs away and didn't get them back out."

Thompson has a point. Golf Datatech estimated rounds fell 4.2 percent in October 2006 vs. October 2005. Rounds were off a whopping 23.9 percent in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin. NGF reported rounds down 6.7 percent in October.

"With drops of 20 percent to 26 percent (due in part to an average four fewer play days), the Midwest had the steepest declines in the nation," NGF stated. "Because the upper and lower Midwest combine for over 5,000 facilities, accounting for nearly a quarter of October rounds volume, the region was largely responsible for the overall 6.7 percent decrease."

- Larry Aylward

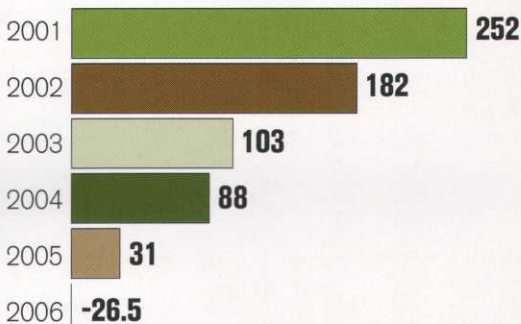
Charlie Fultz, Shenvalee Golf Resort

"[The golf industry] is positioned in the next five to 15 years to make as much money as it has ever made."



Golf Course Growth

Net growth of golf courses (openings minus closures in 18-hole equivalents) from 2001 through 2006



Source: National Golf Foundation

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When Charlie Fultz reads his crystal ball, the superintendent of Shenvalee Golf Resort in New Market, Va., sees that the golf industry is on the brink of a boon in the next five to 15 years. Fultz says the influx of retired baby boomers, many who will play more golf during that time, will fuel the growth.

"[The golf industry] is positioned in the next five to 15 years to make as much money as it has ever made," Fultz says.

Thompson would like to believe that, but he says costs associated with the game, including maintenance, need to decrease for the golf industry to remain viable.

"It can't continue to cost \$30,000 a year to maintain bunkers, especially when every bunker has a rake in it," he adds.

Mona and the superintendents his association represents would agree with Thompson's point. But that aside, if Mona were a stockbroker, he would advise his clients to "buy" golf.

"I'm bullish on it," Mona says. "Golf has a lot going for it." ■

In Search of Greener Grass

Disenchanted with the golf business, a superintendent seeks solace in the landscaping profession. But what he finds surprises him

BY JIM BLACK, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

I've never really trusted anyone who hasn't been fired at least once," my brother told me. "If you haven't been fired, you haven't been trying hard enough."

My brother passed this piece of wisdom on to me in an attempt to console me after my own unexpected dismissal from my job as a golf course superintendent.

Since that time almost four years ago, I've job-hunted my way through prospect after prospect. I made it to the elusive top-five finalists for some jobs. But for others, people didn't even acknowledge my application.

Eventually, I ended up settling for irrigation/spray tech positions and assistant superintendent positions. But let me tell you, having been the top dog before, this proved difficult.

So, totally frustrated, a thought began to creep into my mind: "What else can I do besides this?"

Eventually, an opportunity came about that answered this question. I was offered a position as a foreman for a landscaping company.

But another internal question emerged.

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"How can I leave the golf business for the landscaping business?" I asked myself. After all, golf is the business I love, the business I trained for, bled for and lost sleep over. How could I even think of leaving it?

The more I thought about my situation, the angrier I became. I began to feel as though the golf business was not treating me fairly, and I was being led down one rabbit hole after another.

I sat down and made up a list of the things I wouldn't miss if I were to leave the golf business:

- Irrigation breaks at 3 p.m. on a Friday.
- Having to work every holiday.
- Steamy mid-Atlantic summers.
- Irate golfers who blame you for their bad golf.
- Being enslaved to watching The Weather Channel.
- Worrying about the golf course when I'm home at night or on weekends.
- Feeling the need to drop by the course on my days off.
- Having to deal with crew members who don't care about what they do.

With all of those headaches, why not take a chance on landscaping, I thought. It's basically the same genre of work, I figured.

Certainly, I know enough about installing flowerbeds around clubhouses and tee boxes. Landscaping around homes couldn't be all that different, right? Why not give it a try?

I began to feel as though the golf business was not treating me fairly, and I was being led down one rabbit hole after another.

The job prospect was great — a relatively young brother-owned landscaping company in need of some professional direction and organization. The hourly money was better than my current salaried assistant superintendent position, but the hours were longer.

After my potential employer and I agreed on a handful of promises to each other — kind of a you-scratch-our-backs-and-we'll-scratch-your-back

Should I Stay Or Should I Go?

Jim Black left his job as a golf course superintendent for a few different reasons. Mainly, he was disenchanted with the golf course maintenance business and wanted to try something new. According to the Herman Group, a firm that specializes in workforce and workplace issues, these are the five main reasons people change jobs:

1. "It doesn't feel good around here." Workers are concerned with a company's reputation; the physical conditions of comfort, convenience, and safety; and the clarity of workplace's mission.
2. "They wouldn't miss me if I were gone." Leaders might value their employees, but they don't tell them often enough. If people don't feel important, they might leave.
3. "I don't get the support I need to get my job done." Contrary to opinions heard all-too-often from management, people really do want to do a good job.
4. "There's no opportunity for advancement." It's not about promotions, although many deserving people desire to move up. The issue here is learning. People want to learn and sharpen their skills.
5. "Compensation is the last reason people most leave." Workers want fair compensation, but they want the first four items on this list more. You know the saying, "You can't pay me enough to stay here." It's true, too.

situation" — I gave my two-weeks notice to the golf course.

The two weeks went by slowly, but finally the day came to switch jobs. Taking a deep breath, I jumped over the fence and into the truck with my new boss and some friendly amigos. We headed across town to a very big landscape job — installing pavers!

All the way around this house, we did paver patios, paver walkways, flagstone patios and flagstone steps.

And don't forget the fire pit. I have to admit, it was awesome by the time we finished. But my back was aching, and my fingers were bleeding from handling the concrete and mortar.

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Ironically, when it came time to actually landscape around the finished product with plant material, I was assigned to another job. The only chance I had to see the final results of our hard work was when I was instructed to go back and water the new plants and flowers when the homeowner went away on vacation.

I guess it goes to show that no matter what you think you might be getting into, the “greenness” of the other side is all relative.

That first job proved to be the precursor of things to come. First it was pavers, then it was tree work, then cleaning gutters and yard cleanup, and then siding removal. Finally, a landscaping job came around.

It was not at all what I expected from my new career in the landscaping industry.

But when September came, things got better. I was placed on aeration duty. I was provided one crew member and a trailer full of lawn aerating and seeding equipment. Except for the myriad obstacles you have to maneuver around at any given home, I enjoyed aerating and overseeding on such a small scale.

I was even able to share some of my insider aerating techniques, opening up my co-workers' eyes to new and more efficient aeration and seeding methods.

After one particular aeration job, my boss received a call from the homeowner who complained that we “didn't do the job right.” The homeowner said he couldn't see any holes in the grass and thought we forgot to put down any seed.

I had to explain about the magic drag mat (I pulled the mat by hand around his yard — no utility vehicles here) I used to break up aeration cores and drag the seed into the holes. I kindly told my boss to ask for the homeowner's patience with this matter and, needless to say, he ended up with no reason to call back.

When I finally came to enjoy doing different things at different places in my new job as a landscaper, I was struck by another notion that discouraged me. When a landscape job is over, I'm out

of there. I don't get to see a project grow. I don't get to nurture it or keep it beautiful.

When I'm done working on it, it's not mine anymore.

On the other hand, when you're the superintendent of a golf course, you have a sense of ownership. It's your golf course to see, nurture, maintain and keep beautiful.

I guess it just goes to show that no matter what you think you might be getting into, the “greenness” of the other side is all relative. After eight months with the landscaping company, I was able to count on one hand the number of actual flowerbeds I worked on.

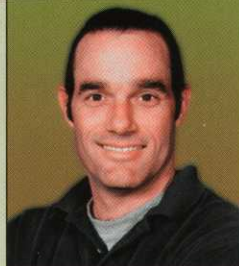
With all this said, I had to admit to myself that I was yearning for the links again. One night while I was sitting at my desk, I decided to jot down a list of the things I missed about being on a golf course:

- The satisfaction of conquering a tough irrigation break and getting the system up and running again.
- Preparing the course and making it extra beautiful for the holiday golfers.
- Hand-watering during steamy mid-Atlantic summers.
- Watching golfers having a great time playing great golf.
- Timing a seed, fertilizer or pesticide application perfectly with the weather.
- Having an “Aha!” moment at home that solves a big problem at the course.
- Dropping by the course on my day off for a quick look-see.
- Training and leading a crew that shows pride in the golf course they help create.

For those of you out there in the same situation as I was — wondering if the grass is really greener on the other side — I recommend you look very closely at your own shade of green.

I realize that there's nothing in the world like working on a golf course. ■

Jim Black is a frequent contributor to *Golfdom*. He can be reached at greenkeeperjim@yahoo.com.





Survey Shows

Superintendents Satisfied With Career *Would you do it over again?*

BY DAVID FRABOTTA, SENIOR EDITOR

More than four in five superintendents would become superintendents again, according to a recent in-depth survey by *Golfdom*. On the flip side, 18 percent would choose a different career if they could.

While that might appear to suggest a disgruntled profession, it's on par with many others.

A 2004 study by Arizona State University Career Services found about 75 percent of respondents in the overall workforce across all occupations are satisfied with their career choices.

More than 90 percent of medical doctors and veterinarians say they would choose their career again; 87 percent of librarians say the same, and 75 percent of research engineers would do it all over again, according to respective professional magazines.

Long hours, job stress, compensation, unreal-

istic golfer expectations and access to affordable healthcare all rank as reasons superintendents might become disenfranchised with their jobs.

One respondent of the *Golfdom* survey said, "I feel sorry for many of the young people getting into this profession. Another said, "The 'Would you become a superintendent again?' question took me by surprise. My answer even more so." He answered "no."

But for the most part, superintendents report liking their jobs. "I think most of the stress that superintendents feel is self-inflicted," one respondent wrote. "If you want to be a martyr, that's what you'll be. Get away from the course some time. It'll be there tomorrow."

For the second-consecutive year, superintendents say finding and retaining employees is their biggest professional concern (35 percent) followed by unrealistic golfer expectations (20 percent).

A new question this year focused on personal concerns: 36 percent report that their ability to re-

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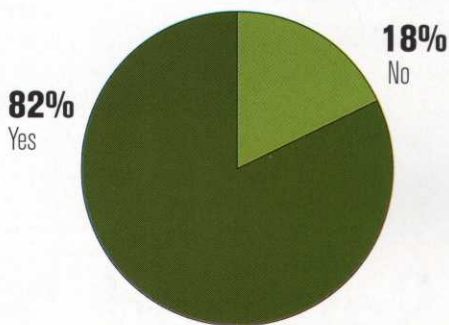
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tire troubles them most, while 29 percent said not enough free time. About half of respondents say they either have a little free time or no free time; the other half said they're busy, but they have a life outside of work.

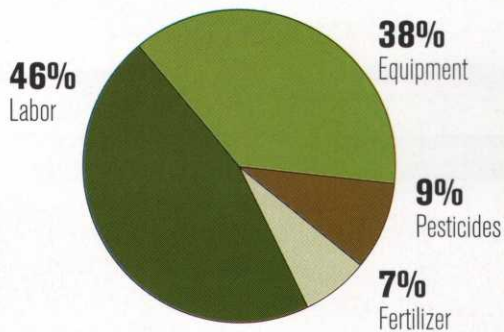
About half of superintendents say they should be the highest paid employee at a club, and just 20 percent say they make great money. ■

Would you become a superintendent again?

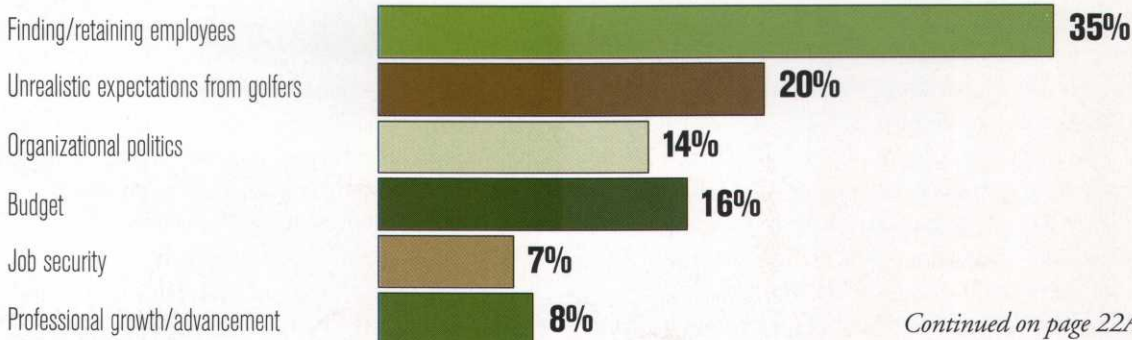
(598 responses)



What is the area of your budget you're most likely to cut if asked to do so? (614 responses)



What is your biggest professional concern? (619 responses)



About the Survey

Every year, *Golfdom* conducts its survey on the state of the profession to gauge superintendents' sentiments about their jobs and the golf industry.

The survey was conducted online in December, and a drawing to win either an iPod or home theater system was established to encourage participation. A small number of other golf employees, including general managers, also participated in the survey.

A total of 625 responses were recorded during a 28-day period, which produced a 5.4 percent response rate. Respondents are 98 percent men and 2 percent women. The majority of respondents (71 percent) work for either a public 18-hole course or a private 18-hole course (See chart below).

Just 14 percent of respondents have held their current position for more than 20 years; 23 percent have 10-20 years tenure; 24 percent have worked in their position for 5-10 years; 23 percent have 3-5 years tenure, and 16 percent have less than 2 years in their current position.

Not all questions were answered by all respondents; the number of respondents is indicated for each question. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.81. ■

Facility Type (625 responses)

Public 9	5%
Private 9	1%
Public 18	38%
Private 18	33%
Private 36	4%
Other	19%