"When you find yourself in a management position, you're almost thrown to the wolves if you're not ready for it."

Joe Boe

"I think I could be a stronger motivator," Phipps admits, adding that keeping crews energized — especially when the boss is not looking over their shoulders — is not easy.

While communication skills are handy in-house, the biggest challenge might come from the outside. Golfers and the general public make great demands on the course, and the role of public relations director often falls squarely on the superintendent.

"I think nowadays it's key that the superintendent be responsible to the members of the club, or in my case the golfing public," Osley says. "You can't be the guy behind the scenes anymore."

Superintendents don't just have to sell their budgets to the board, Osley notes. They must sell who they are and what they do to the public, and for that, Osley says a little training in psychology couldn't hurt.

Joe Boe, superintendent of Windermere Country Club near Orlando, agrees. Boe says he would like to better gauge where people are coming from and why they react the ways they do. For that, Boe would spend his hypothetical 30 days at school tackling psychology.

"We had a fella' who wanted the greens rolled for his events each Friday," Boe says. "I prefer a double-cut."

Here, Boe explains the things he's learned over the years, the nuances of body language and how a guy has a tendency to stop listening when someone tries to tell him something he doesn't want to hear. When Boe tried to explain to the golfer why he was going to double-cut instead, the guy began to close up. So Boe shifted strategies.

"I told him, 'Next week I'm going to roll nine holes, and I'm going to double-cut the other nine and I'm not going to tell you which,' " Boe says. The next week, the golfer finished his game, clearly preferring the nine Boe had double-cut.

"Because I had changed my tactic, he had the opportunity to be part of the solution," Boe says. "Now he's one of my biggest backers."

This is where psychology comes into play, Boe says, knowing how people think, how to avoid mental land mines and elude confrontation. By understanding people's reactions, a superintendent can save a lot of headaches on the course, he says.

"That's something that, when you're getting into this business, you don't get those interpersonal skills," Boe says. "When you find yourself in a management position, you're almost thrown to the wolves if you're not ready for it. You have to deal with people face to face. I've seen it sink quite a few people."

So what would superintendents study if they could go back to the classroom for 30 days? Perhaps they would study psychology, perhaps business or personnel management. But perhaps what they most need to learn simply cannot be taught. It must be learned.

"It's being able to relate to all the people around you," Osley says. "I don't know if you learn that in school. I think you just learn that each and every day as you live the days that are given to you." ■

Dillow is a freelance writer from Chicago.

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See how nice your rough can look without that bentgrass creeping in.

Russell Vandehey, superintendent of the Oregon Golf Club, plays a key role in monitoring bluebird activity.

On the Oregon Trail

Golf and the environment meet up in the great Northwest

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS
BY LARRY AYLWARD
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Allan Clemans took me on a road trip I'll never forget. The executive director of the Oregon Golf Course Superintendents Association escorted me on a two-day tour last August of four golf courses in Oregon, beginning in the Portland area and ending near Bend in the central part of the state.

Clemans took me to courses that are doing some cool environmental initiatives as part of their maintenance programs. We must have put 1,000 miles on Clemans' sports car during the adventure. Hence, I'm grateful to him for providing me with some outstanding stories to tell about golf and the environment in the great Northwest. So, here goes:

A bluebird special

They should call Russell Vandehey "the bird man." Make that — the "Western Bluebird man."

Vandehey, superintendent of the Oregon Golf Club in West Linn, is helping to revive the Western Bluebird population in the state's Northern Willamette Valley by participating in the state's Western Bluebird Habitat Improvement Project.

In 1993, representatives of the nonprofit Prescott Bluebird Recovery Project (PBRP) heard the Oregon Golf Club might be a perfect area for a nesting site. So they visited the club and surveyed the land.

"They liked the open meadow of the golf course and that it was a good feeding habitat," Vandehey says.

Vandehey also explains that Western Bluebirds prefer an elevation range between 600 feet and 900 feet. The Oregon Golf Club happens to fit that range perfectly.

PBRP representatives worked with the club to hang bluebird houses to attract the critters for nesting. The plan has worked splendidly. The birds came, mated and have stuck around for 15 years.

"We expanded the program to the point that we now have 35 bluebird houses out on the golf course," says Vandehey, who began at the club in 1995.

Bluebirds do not occupy most of the houses, however. Native swallows take up the majority. In fact, only about two houses are inhabited by Western Bluebirds. But that's enough to help revive the population.

According to the PBRP, the decline of the Western Bluebird in the Northern Willamette Valley is partly due to the loss of natural nesting cavities, including dead trees and snags. The Western Bluebird is listed as a "sensitive species" by the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife.

"[The bird] is a cavity dweller, and it likes to live in old tree stumps and snags," Vandehey says.

Hence, the Oregon Golf Club is dotted with dead trees and snags, which Vandehey has let stand for nesting purposes.

"I can show you all the trees that died 10 years ago," he says. "Now they're soft from the woodpeckers pecking at them, and there are cavity dwellers living in them."

Because the birdhouses require upkeeping, they have become part of the golf course maintenance program. The birdhouses are cleaned before each golf season. Vandehey and his crew also wax the ceilings inside the birdhouses, which keeps yellow jackets and wasps from invading them.

But the most time-consuming job facing Vandehey and the crew is monitoring the birdhouses. They do this in the spring when the bluebirds inhabit the houses and begin to mate.

"We have formal check-off sheets," Vandehey says. "We keep records of when nesting starts and when birds lay eggs."

At this point, Vandehey notifies the PBRP to report the activity. Then PBRP representatives monitor the hatchings and set up catch boxes to secure the adult birds.

"They check the bands on the adult birds' legs to see where the adults are from," Vandehey says. "They also band the baby birds' legs so they can track them throughout the state."

Vandehey, who talks about Western Bluebirds like an expert, has enjoyed playing a part to help revive the species.

"I didn't know much about bluebirds when I got here," he says, "but this sure has been fun."

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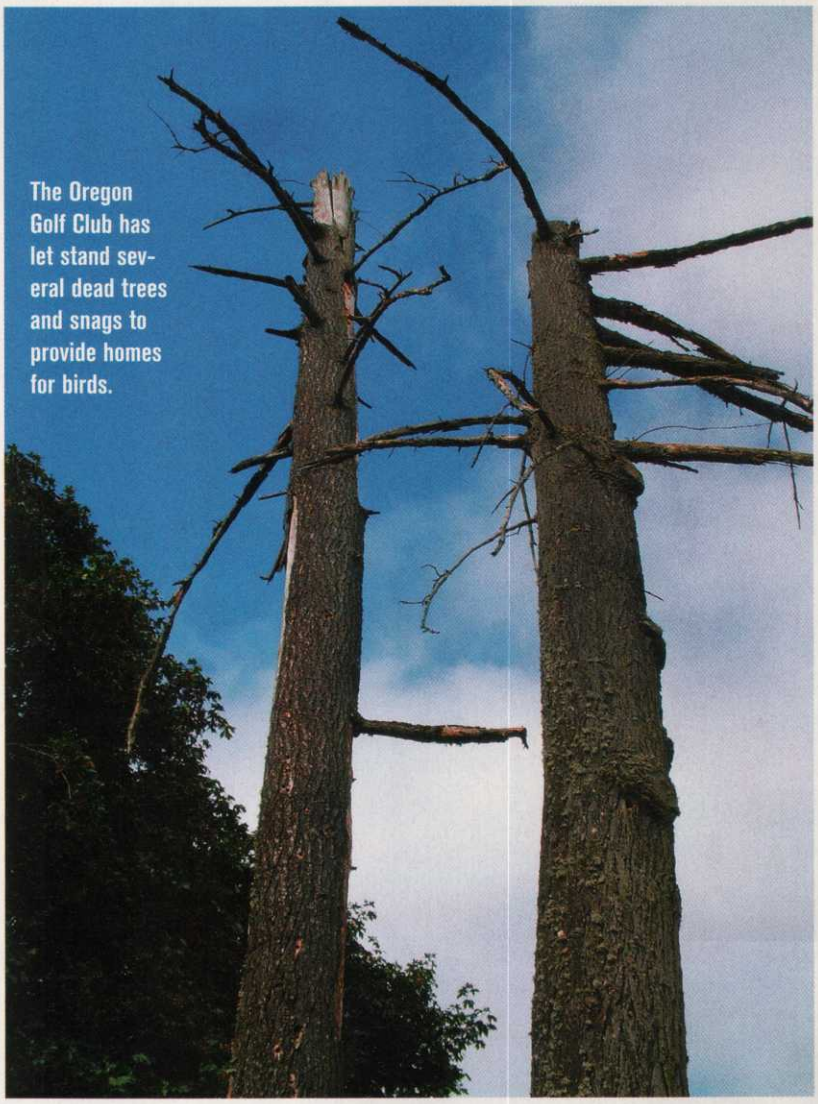
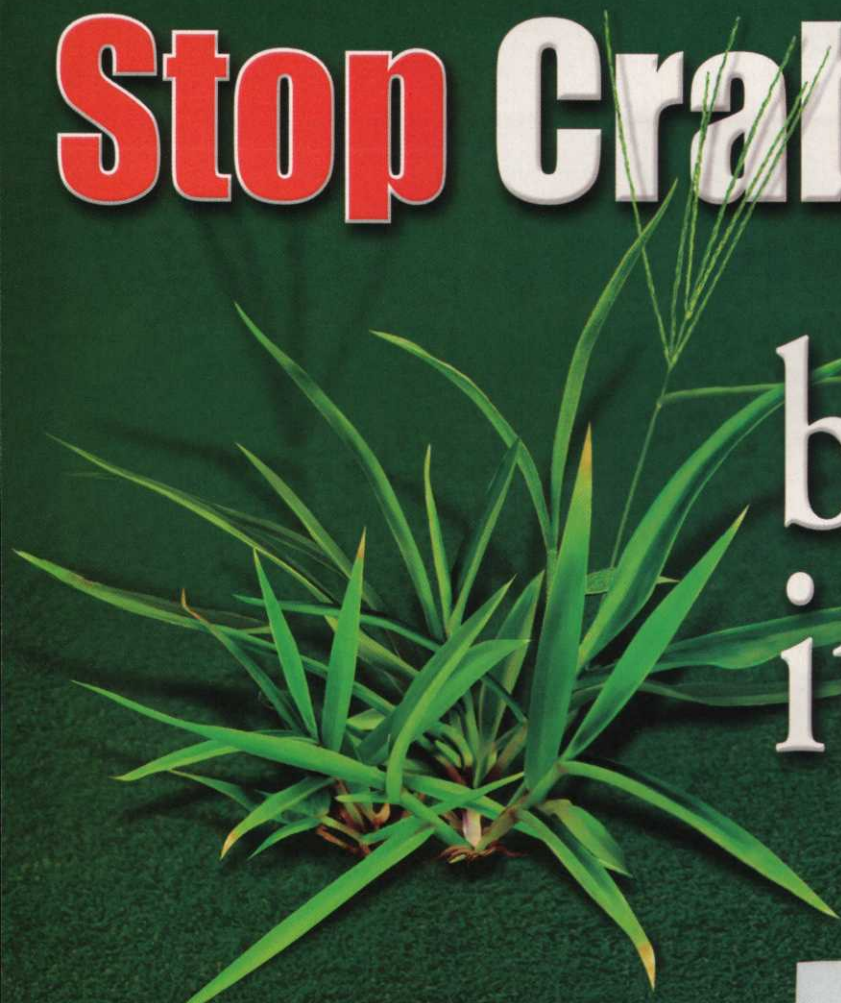


The Oregon Golf Club has let stand several dead trees and snags to provide homes for birds.

Stop Crabgrass before it starts



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Do Oregon Superintendents Face More Scrutiny?

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief
Oregon has majestic mountains, flush-green forests, a captivating coastline and tranquil streams.

Oh yeah, Oregon also has its share of environmentalists, each of whom would plant his right hiking boot in a person's behind if that person elected to befoul such a spectacular setting.

Hence, the feeling among golf course superintendents in Oregon and other parts of the Northwest is that it's more challenging to tend turf there than in other states, where the term "green" is not as ingrained in people's thinking as in the Beaver State.

Just ask Russell Vandehey, superintendent of the Oregon Golf Club in Portland, who says golf course superintendents are scrutinized more in Oregon because of its residents' intense environmental mindset.

"You do feel like you're being watched," says Vandehey, who has won several Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and its local affiliates in his 11-year career at the course. "And you're aware of it. You have to be on your toes all the time."

Vandehey says members often ask him and his crew members, "What are you spraying?"

Vandehey and his crew gladly answer the questions. Vandehey says he has a full-disclosure policy and doesn't want to hide anything from the club's 500 members. He lets them know results of water tests, among other things.

"We don't run and hide, and I think they appreciate that," he says.

Alan Nielson, certified superintendent of Royal Oaks Country Club, located near Portland across the Columbia River in Vancouver, Wash., says it makes sense that people who live in the Northwest are more environmentally conscious than in other regions of the country.

"It's why people live here ... because they appreciate that kind of thing," Nielson says.

Paying extra heed to salmon protection and water cleanliness is not a bad thing from a golf course maintenance perspective, Nielsen is quick to point out. However, it makes things more challenging for golf courses when it comes to applying pesticides and other chemicals.

"There have been more and more hoops for us to jump through," Nielson says. Tree removal, for example, is not the routine issue it would be at courses not located in such an environmentally sensitive area. Every time Nielson wants to cut down a tree, he has to secure a removal permit from the town's government. ■

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Bird watchin' ... on TV

Remember the monkey-cam from the "Late Night with David Letterman Show?" It was a live camera strapped to a chimp's back. It was innovative, and it was a hit.

The same can be said of the bird-cam in operation at Royal Oaks Country Club near Portland, just across the Columbia River in Vancouver, Wash. The club's members love it. The bird-cam has added a distinct element of nature to the club.

The bird-cam was the brainchild of a Royal Oaks member, who serves on the club's environmental committee, says Alan Nielsen, certified superintendent of the club. His idea was to put a small camera in a nesting box to record a bird's growth from hatching to fledgling.

The club purchased a wireless infrared camera, and Nielsen's crew installed it in the nesting box about 100 yards from the clubhouse. The camera is equipped with a transmitter and receiver, which was spliced into the irrigation system's electric line for power. Another receiver was plugged into the inlets on a 13-inch television monitor in the clubhouse near the lounge so members could watch the activity.

A pair of swallows arrived shortly after the camera was installed in the spring of 2005. It made for great reality TV until the

Continued on page 41

A staffer at the Royal Oaks Country Club performs a maintenance check on the bird-cam.

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