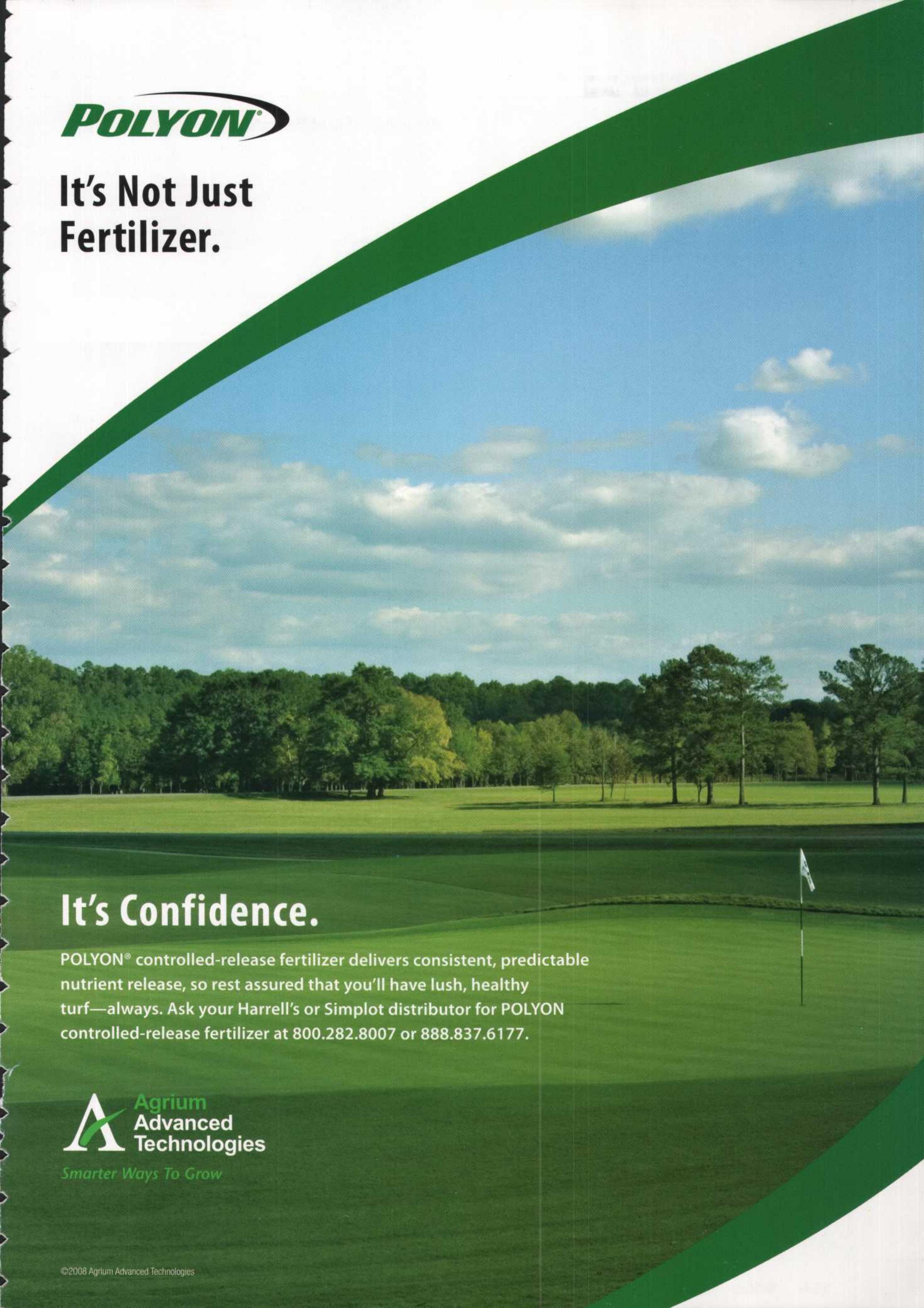
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## How Bad Will Housing Hamper Golf?

Purists often say housing ruins golf. These days, housing is hurting golf in a whole new way as the country reels from a foreclosure crisis and a significant slowing of new home sales.

More than 70 percent of new golf projects revolved around development last year, according to the National Golf Foundation. And long before the mortgage meltdowns of late monopolized the mainstream media, development projects played a significant role in financing new golf course construction and many renovation projects throughout the country.

2007 single-family home starts, a metric used by the National Association of Home Builders, are expected to be about 829,000, the lowest level since 1991. That's about 25 percent fewer than 2006, and it doesn't look like a rebound will come anytime soon. Building permits, an indicator of future home construction, fell almost 25 percent from November 2006 to November 2007.

Interestingly, the National Association of Home Builders says the ebbing market is good for the housing industry. David Seiders, the association's chief economist, told *Business Week* that builders can't reduce their inventories unless they slow production in line with demand. Production has ebbed since the beginning of this year, and Seiders says he wishes the slow would've started earlier.

That sentiment sounds incredibly familiar. Golf industry observers herald the diminishing golf course supply as a needed correction to better mirror demand for rounds. For the second-consecutive year, NGF expects golf course supply to shrink in 2007.

The Southeast has been hit hard with closings, largely because of so much new supply in Florida and the Carolinas replacing old, unkempt and outdated discount layouts. Florida was No. 1 for golf course closings in 2006, and it's in the top four for foreclosures today. California is in the top four on both lists, too, but economists attribute both states' woes to overgrowth and poor speculation versus local economic shortcomings.

But situations in much of the Midwest are a different story. Foreclosures in Ohio, Michigan and other rust-belt states are prompting a national emergency. And in 2006, Ohio lost eight golf courses (most of them public courses near Cleveland). Michigan tells the same tale, as does much of the Midwest. Public courses are closing in areas were local economies are trying to reinvent themselves. Judging by the mortgage crisis, they're not doing a very good job.

Golf has painstakingly tried to reverse its outdated image of a recreation for the rich. But will high-priced new layouts, housing woes and struggling local economies take the industry full circle?

*- David Frabotta, Senior Editor*

**Mitchell Wilkerson,**
Moss Creek Golf Club

**"Some of the courses on the plate for next year are going to get pushed back because people are not building homes."**

*Continued from page 12A*

Beditz says a bigger red flag for equipment and product suppliers is that some golf courses aren't investing in their property because they don't have the cash flow to do so. A course that only clears $100,000 a year isn't going to invest much of that back into the golf course.

"They're not investing in capital improvements, they're not replacing their equipment, and they're not fertilizing as much," Beditz says.

This problem is related directly to the low number of rounds at those courses, Beditz says.

What's on tap for new golf course construction in 2008?

Jeff Shelley, editorial director for Golfconstructionnews.com, says his tracking firm reports that North Carolina, Oregon, Washington, California, Texas and Tennessee were solid markets in 2007 and should continue to be in 2008. He says golf course development in Louisiana and Mississippi is also picking up.

Shelley expects closings to continue in areas such as Michigan and Ohio where economies are stagnant. "We'll see more of the same in 2008," he adds.

The NGF expected between 110 and 120 18-hole courses connected to housing developments to open in 2007. NGF said 70 percent of courses scheduled to open in 2007 were connected to housing developments.

"It's getting rare to see a stand-alone golf course being built, unless it's done by some public entity or it's a high-end development destination-type club, which is what we're seeing in Nebraska and South Dakota of all places," Shelley says.

It will be interesting to see what impact the housing slowdown will have on golf course construction tied to real estate in 2008.

Wilkerson expects the housing market to dictate golf course development in the Carolinas.

"Some of the courses on the plate for next year are going to be pushed back because people are not building homes," he says. "Golf courses are chump change when they're building these big developments." ■

# Image *Is* Everything

## As one superintendent found out, keeping a low profile can banish you to utter obscurity

BY RON FURLONG, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Someone once told me we always think things are better than they really are. This goes against the more common saying that things are always better than they appear.

The person who told me this, ironically, was the first superintendent for whom I ever worked. I always thought he was simply a pessimist, but now I think perhaps he knew more than I ever gave him credit for.

The golf club I work for sends out an annual survey

*Continued on page 16A*

PHOTO BY: MIKE KLEMME

*Continued from page 15A*

to the members. The survey asks questions in four different areas:

- the pro shop;
- the starters and marshals;
- the restaurant; and
- the condition of the golf course.

It is a golf club in the most literal sense. There are no tennis courts or pools, and no game rooms or spas. Members come here to golf. And, we hope, golf on a darn-nice golf course. Thus, the questions, though spread through the four different sections, tend to focus primarily on the golf course's condition.

## I knew something was wrong when members kept congratulating Brian and Eric — the golf pro and his assistant — on the condition of the golf course.

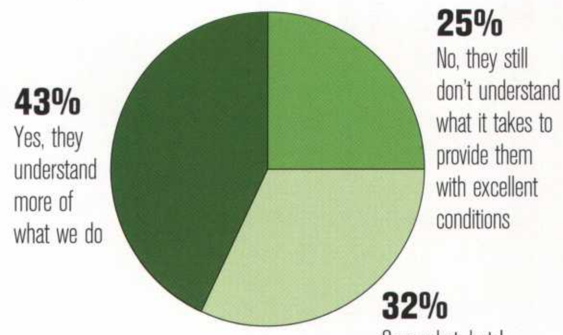
More than one-third of our membership responded to the survey. I would say about 98 percent of them were extremely happy with the condition of the golf course. The few complaints we received centered around not enough sand in the bunkers and the greens being a little too quick in mid-summer.

The thing that struck me about the survey wasn't the answers themselves, but to whom the members were directing their compliments. More than one respondent to the survey wrote in the comments section that the golf course was in fantastic shape, and that Brian and Eric should be congratulated. Brian and Eric, it should be noted, are the golf pro and the assistant pro. Another member suggested we hold an instructional sand and seed divot seminar for the members, and Brian or Eric could lead it. Another asked if Brian or Eric could give a talk some evening on course maintenance, and how we achieve the things we do.

Nothing against Brian or Eric, but something was wrong here. I had no idea how low my profile had become in the clubhouse.

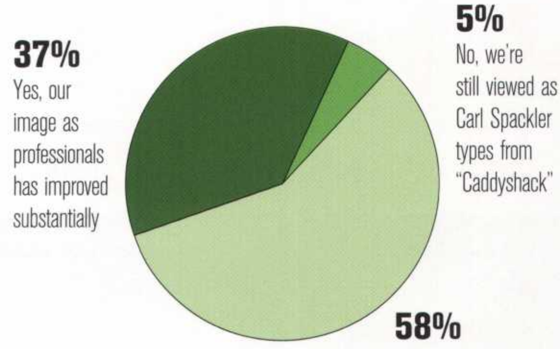
Granted, I do like to fly under the radar a bit, but this seemed a little too low, even for me. I suddenly realized that something had to be done

**Do you think golfers have a better appreciation for what you do compared to five years ago?** (639 responses)




*Source: Golfdom Survey*

**Do you think superintendents are viewed more professionally for what they do compared to five years ago?** (640 responses)




*Source: Golfdom Survey*

about the image I was projecting to the membership — and not just for myself, but the image of my staff as well.

Three things immediately came to mind when I put my brain into action. And all three were things I used to do, but no longer did.

The first was golfing with members. In general I simply don't golf as much as I used to. And when I do golf, it tends to be with friends or co-workers, or even by myself. I previously made a habit of golfing with members from time to time, either casually or in a scheduled management/membership golf outing. With a quick scan past the cobwebs in my brain, I realized it had been at least three years since either of these events had happened.

*Continued on page 18A*

*Continued from page 16A*

The second thing I no longer did was post a newsletter. This was a monthly occurrence. Again, about three years had passed since my last newsletter.

The third thing I had stopped doing was probably the hardest to admit to myself, but, in all honesty, I had to fess up to the fact that I really didn't make myself very accessible to members for small talk, maintenance condition talks or even home-yard advice. I guess I like to think the golf course speaks for itself, and that I really don't have to indulge in this time-wasting practice of idle chitchat.

So many times I'll steer the golf car down one path to avoid a possible conversation that could set me back 30 or 45 precious seconds. Or, to be completely honest here, to avoid a conversation with someone I would just as soon not converse with. But what exactly has been the cost of avoiding these idle conversations?

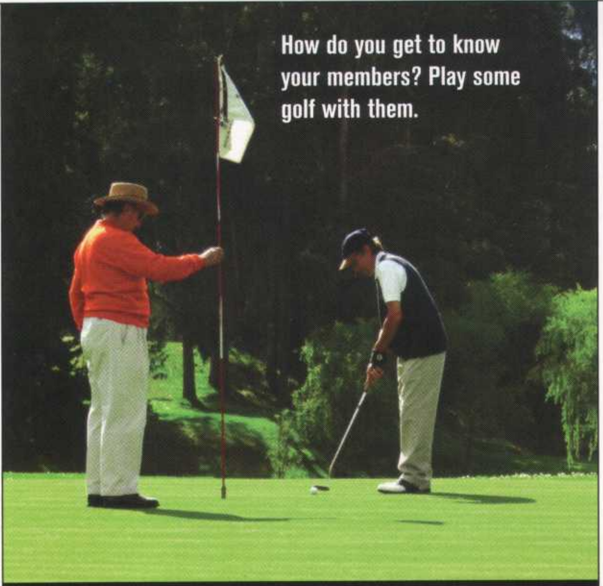
Well, I now know. The cost is that I have almost disappeared in the clubhouse. The cost is that the members are now praising the golf pro and his assistant for the great course conditions. The cost is I have more than likely missed out on some friendships with some really terrific people.

So, what to do? Well, first, I have to atone for the three sins I committed. Start golfing with members, start posting a newsletter again, and stop avoiding the conversations that have been so easy and so convenient to steer (literally) around.

## If an effort is taken, there is no reason the superintendent and his staff should have to take a backseat for any credit due to them.

But even after addressing those three scenarios, I was able to come up with a fairly impressive list of other things I could do to keep myself and the crew more visible and more in the member consciousness.

- Have my morning latte (when possible) in the clubhouse instead of on the course by myself.
- Take a crew photo (updated annually) and post it in the clubhouse.



How do you get to know your members? Play some golf with them.

PHOTO BY: MEDIO IMAGES

- Eat lunch more in the clubhouse restaurant.
- Enter more member tournaments.
- Post my office phone number and e-mail in the clubhouse.
- In the monthly newsletter (one of the three corrected sins), offer a monthly home lawn or garden tip.
- Have an annual tour of the maintenance shop for interested members.
- Have uniformed maintenance staff workers wear name tags.
- Post a maintenance employee of the month in the clubhouse and on the club's Web site.
- Taking the Web site idea further, have a page set up for "maintenance updates." (We have already done this, and it has been quite a success. I've even, for the most part, restrained myself from using it for my little political causes.)

I could actually go on with this list, but you get the idea. If an effort is taken, there is no reason the superintendent and his staff should have to take a backseat for any credit due to them. Step up, play the political game and bask in the accolades. Then, quit basking and get back to work already.

And to that first boss of mine who told me we always think things are better than they really are, I say, "You're right. And we should probably get out there and do something about it." ■

*Furlong, superintendent of Avalon Golf Club in Burlington, Wash., can be reached at rfurlong5@gmail.com. If he's not there, he's probably playing golf with a member.*

# Separate and Unequal

## Superintendents at private clubs are three times more likely to be satisfied with salaries than those at public courses

BY DAVID FRABOTTA, SENIOR EDITOR

Are public and private courses really that different? Of course, they have certain distinctions when it comes to service and amenities, but the job remains largely the same for superintendents. Sure, there might be a few extra dollars floating around a private facility, but the expectation for quality turf persists regardless of ownership structures.

But salary, job satisfaction, financial stability and other quality-of-life concerns appear to be contingent on the type of facility where a superintendent works.

It's no secret that exclusive clubs are willing to pay extra for the superintendents who host PGA Tour events or ones who maintain possible U.S. Open venues. And it appears that many of the thousands of other private clubs are cut from the same cloth.

The main disparity between public and private superintendents revolves around compensation. Superintendents at private 18-hole courses are almost three times as likely to say they make great money versus those who manage 18-hole public facilities, according to *Golfdom's* recent reader survey on the state of the profession and the industry (about the survey, page 20A). About 30 percent of all private club superintendents say they make "great money" compared to just 11 percent at public courses.

Conversely, just about 3 percent of all private club superintendents say "the pay stinks" versus 13 percent of all public golf course superintendents. Of the 9 percent of respondents who say "the pay stinks," the majority (56 percent) work for public 18-hole layouts, and only 9 percent work at private 18-hole clubs.

Interestingly, job tenure had no statistical corre-

*Continued on page 20A*

PHOTO BY: INDEX OPEN

*Continued from page 19A*

lation to salary satisfaction, indicating perhaps that entry-level jobs, mid-level jobs and initial salaries are in line with expectations.

Furthermore, we asked respondents about their biggest personal concern (chart, page 22). Although the ability to retire and lack of free time were the biggest concerns for all superintendents, those who manage public courses again were almost twice as likely as their private counterparts to say that "not enough pay" was their biggest concern.

But money can't buy you love. Our survey found that private club superintendents are slightly more likely (4 percent) to worry about their jobs than those at public courses. In addition, a few more private club superintendents say they have less free time and are more worried about their ability to retire than public course superintendents.

Superintendents also listed these two recurring concerns: "ability to leave the property for two or more days," and "raises not keeping up with healthcare and living expenses." Several superintendents reported that college tuition for their families is an increasingly stressful financial challenge, and, of course, balancing work with family is a tightrope for all superintendents.

But despite the disparities of some jobs, superintendents at 18-hole public courses were just as likely to say they would be superintendents again as their higher-paid, stressed-out counterparts. Fully 82 percent of all respondents said they would become superintendents again. The anomalies are turf managers at public nine-hole courses: 32 percent of them say they would choose a different profession the next time around. ■

*Continued on page 22A*

## About the Survey

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

The survey was conducted online in October and November, 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 and architects, also participated in the survey.

A total of 642 responses were recorded during a 38-day period, which produced a 6.1 percent response rate. Respondents were 97 percent men and 3 percent women. The majority of respondents (68 percent) work for either a public 18-hole course or a private 18-hole course (chart below). Just 14 percent of respondents have held their current position for more than 20 years; 26 percent have 10 to 20 years tenure; 26 percent have worked in their position for five to 10 years; 21 percent have three to five years tenure, and 12 percent have less than two years in their current position.

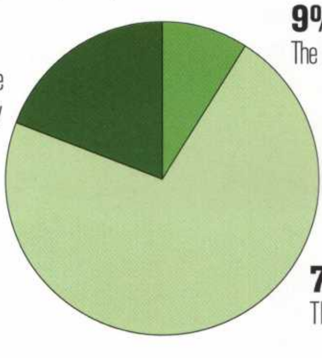
Not all questions were answered by all respondents; the number of respondents is indicated for each question. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.75. ■

**Facility Type** (640 responses)

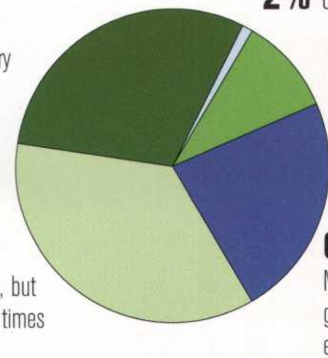
| | |
|---|---|
| Public 9 | 4% |
| Private 9 | 1% |
| Public 18 | 39% |
| Private 18 | 29% |
| Private 36 | 2% |
| Other* | 24% |

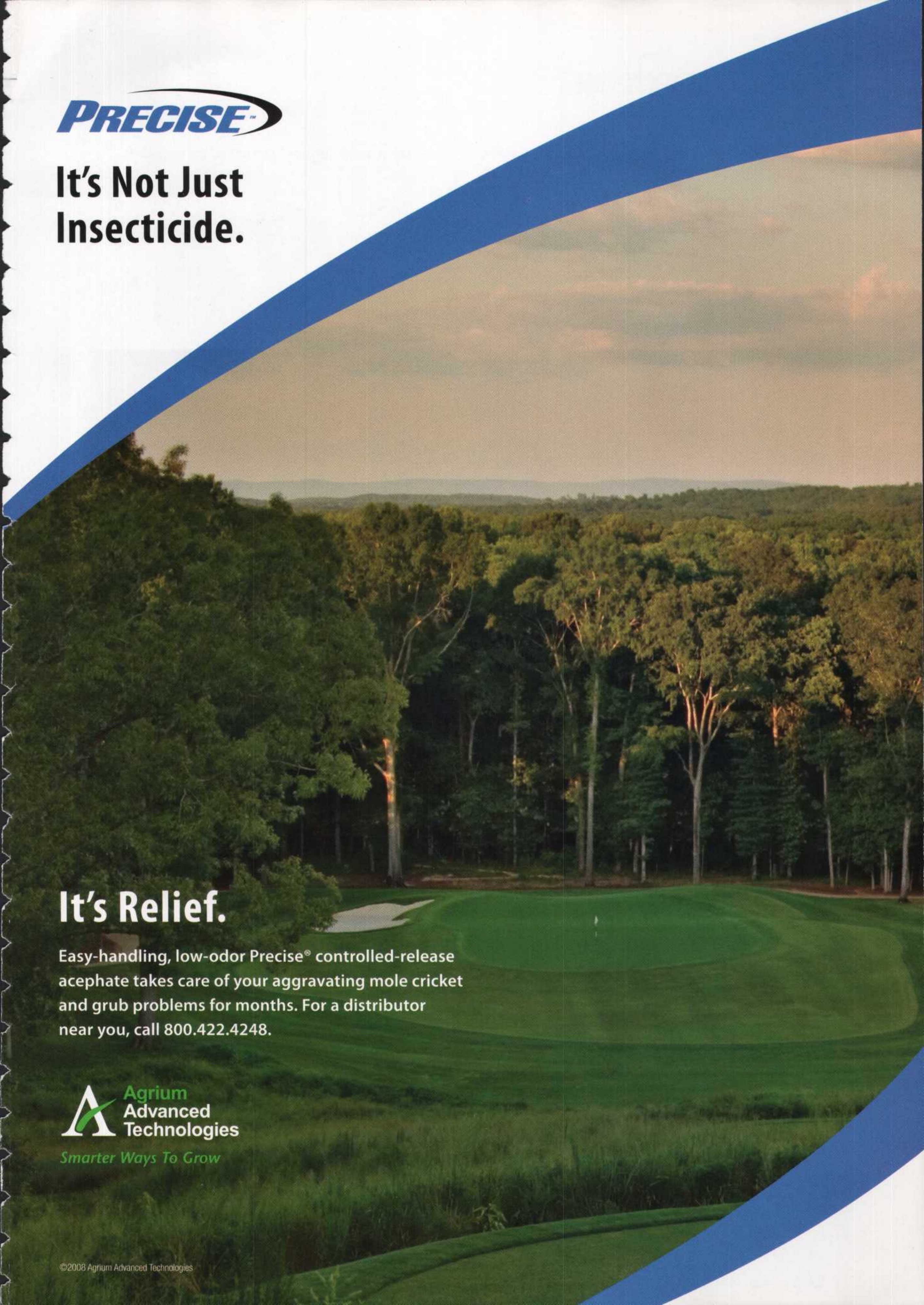
**Includes 50 27- to 36-hole public courses; 27 27- to 36-hole resorts or semi-private courses; 31 18-hole resort or semi-private courses; 24 courses with more than 36 holes; five military courses; and three semi-private nine-hole courses.*

**Do you think you are adequately paid for what you do?** (635 responses)




**Do you feel secure in your job?** (638 responses)

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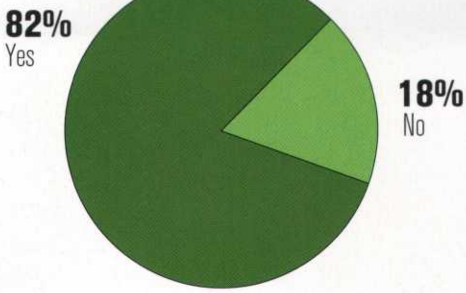
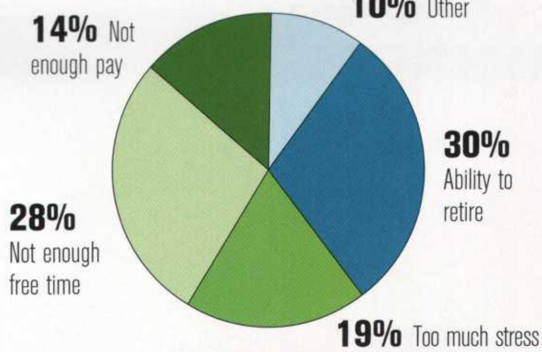
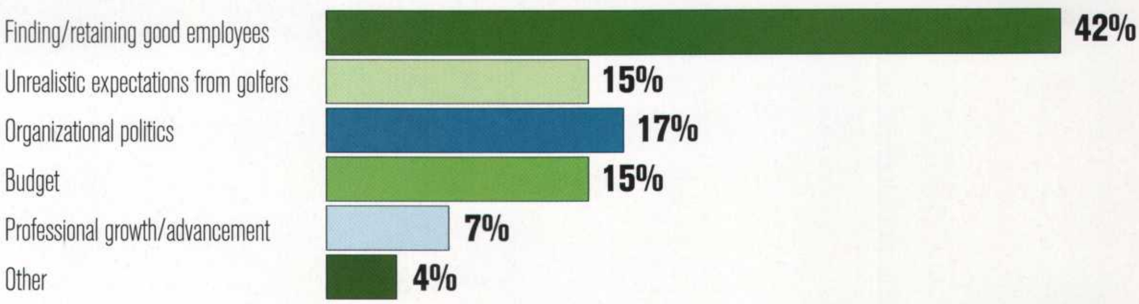
**Would you become a superintendent again?**
(628 responses)



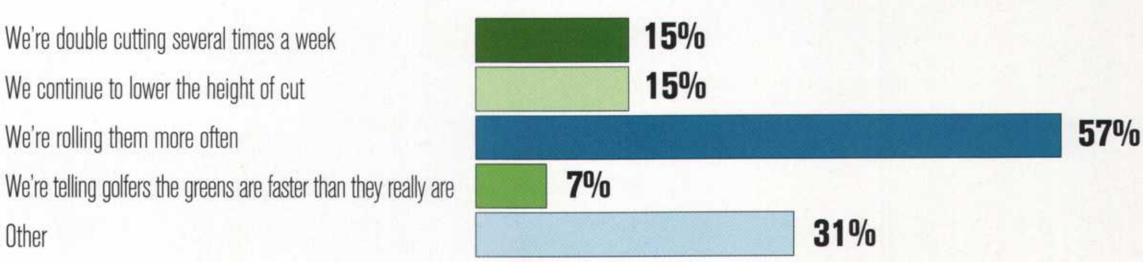

**What is your biggest personal concern?**
(635 responses)



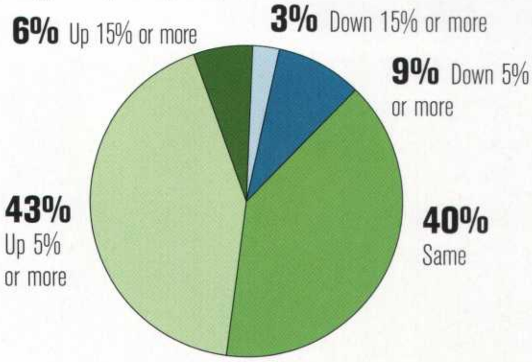

**What is your biggest professional concern?** (635 responses)




**How are you managing the demand for faster putting greens?** (Respondents could choose multiple answers)




**What's the status of your 2008 maintenance budget ...** (637 responses)




**What is the area of your budget you're most likely to cut if asked to do so?** (635 responses)