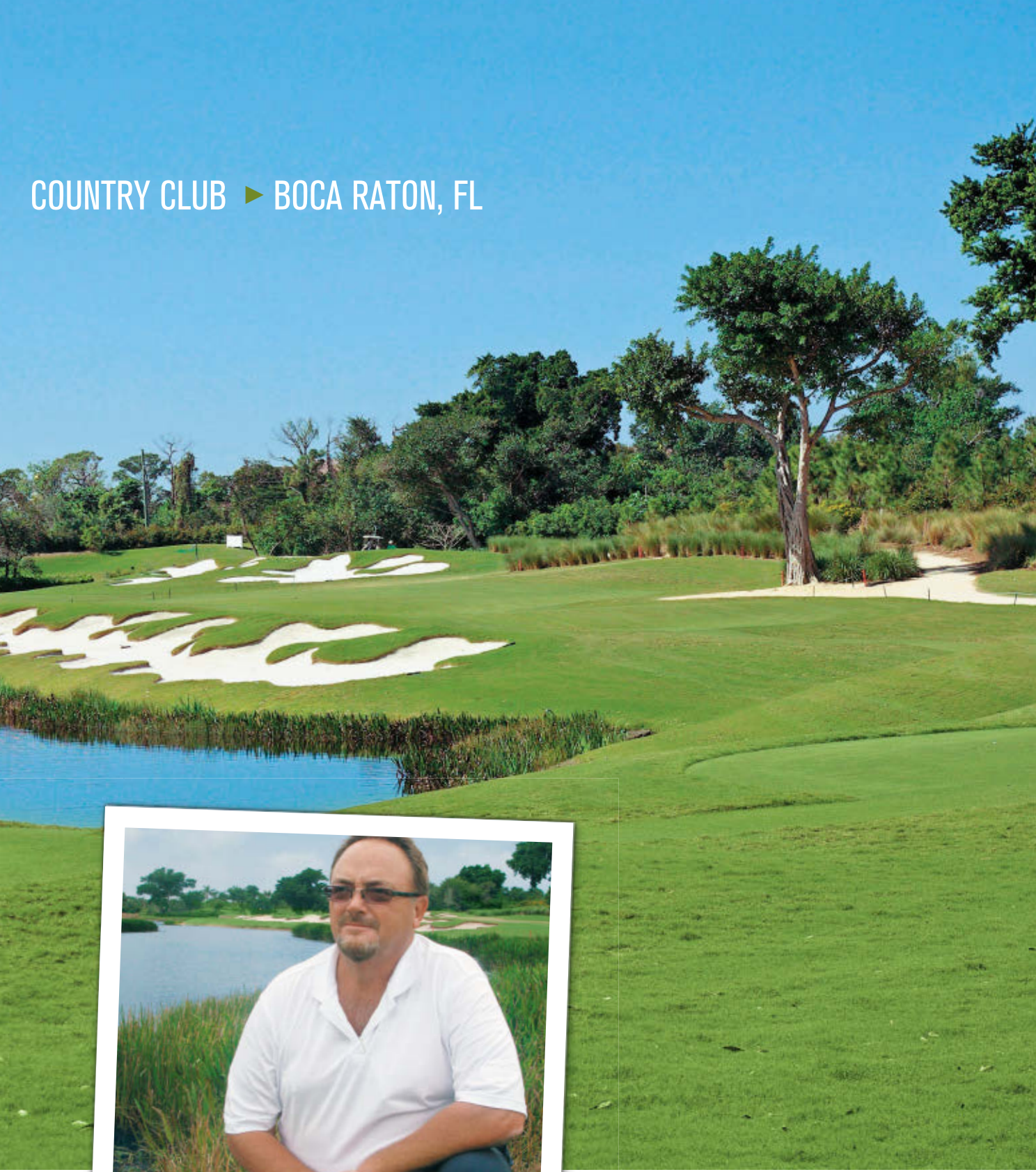


COUNTRY CLUB ► BOCA RATON, FL



Joe Hubbard, Director of Golf Course Operations

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



I've attended a few local chapter events around Florida the past few months and the predictions I'm hearing from superintendents and suppliers for a quick and healthy economic recovery for the golf industry aren't very rosy.

Five years or more seems to be a baseline figure. Maybe everyone is still adjusting to the downturn and slow glacial pace of finding the bottom of the gloomy recession and looking for better signs of some silver linings out there. Life goes on but most definitely with carefully measured steps.

Bargain basement initiation fees, dues and greens fees mean continued less revenue to operate the club and invest in maintenance equipment, products and improvement projects. The clubs that did draft maintenance standards to set priorities and had progressive capital equipment programs will weather the storm better because they were sound and proactive to begin with.

Clubs that cut corners and tried to drag out purchases and stall improvement projects are now hurting the worst. The epidemic of course closings is evidence that having a sound business plan and hiring key qualified people from the golf course superintendent to the technician does pay dividends. Of course, timing is everything and some folks got caught in the crunch when the bottom fell out and they already had projects in motion.

Along with some of the course closings and cutbacks, the stream of experienced superintendents being replaced by younger, less experienced persons is growing. I'm trying not to generalize or stereotype too much. Each case stands on its own merits, but perhaps rather than axing someone with local knowledge and a proven track record to trim expenses, negotiating a new salary structure would be more advantageous to the club.

When a less-experienced person takes over, the risks of having a miscue go up. Assistants deserve their chance to move up — that's the way of the business. Everyone needs to make sure the qualifications fit the expectations.

On the flip side, superintendents who may have grown too comfortable in their positions

## Are Good Ol' Days Gone Forever?

BY JOEL JACKSON



THEY WILL BE  
IF WE DON'T CHANGE  
THE OL' PARADIGM

need to challenge themselves to learn new skills to demonstrate they're still the best options for their courses. That's what membership and participation in associations can provide.

With apologies to Charles Darwin and those who scoff at his theory of evolution, the golf business has definitely evolved from its beginnings on the grassy seaside moors of Scotland. Course design, turf management knowledge, technology and those who play the game have all changed. The politics of the environment are paramount issues.

If we don't change how we approach the marketing and management of most golf facilities to include family-oriented programs that embrace new golfers of all ages and backgrounds, we'll be in a continuous spiral of declining participation that will kill the industry. In addition, golf course owners and managers must take all the steps necessary to insure their golf clubs can be touted as positive environmental and economic assets to their respective communities.

Golf maintenance facilities need to upgrade wherever needed to exceed compliance to the rules of the Environmental Protection Agency and Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The industry needs to utilize the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's baseline studies and Audubon International Sanctuary Programs to document and publicize these efforts.

Recent economic and political events have changed forever the way golf courses will operate and how the game is embraced. If we don't change the old paradigm, forget the good ol' days — it may just be the end of days.

---

*Certified Superintendent Joel Jackson is Executive Director of the Florida GCSA.*

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**When Performance Matters.™**

**G**erman scientists discovered the original strobilurin in 1977. Named strobilurin A initially, this fungal antibiotic was produced by the pine cone fungus *Strobilurus tenacellus*. It's believed this wood-rotting fungus and similar fungi produced strobilurin to help protect it from microbes present in the wood.

Over the years, researchers enhanced the natural strobilurin synthetically, leading to the class of fungicides known as strobilurins. Widely used in agriculture, it wasn't until 1997 when the first one, azoxystrobin, was registered for turf use. Since azoxystrobin, additional fungicides in this class have been released in the turfgrass market, including fluoxastrobin, pryaclastrobin, and trifloxystrobin.

Although these fungicides are commonly called strobilurins, they are more properly referred to as QoI fungicides. For those of you who may not be familiar with the QoI terminology, the Qo is part of the Q-cycle found in mitochondria respiration (cytochrome system where electron transport occurs. Qo is the binding site for ubiquinone, which acts as an electron acceptor in this process). These fungicides inhibit fungal respiration by attacking the site Qo in the cytochrome system of the mitochondria.

The QoI fungicides have a wide range of control against a number of turfgrass diseases. Although QoI fungicides have a similar mode of action, they differ in regard to the molecule itself, leaf absorption and transportation within the plant and diseases controlled. Due to the broad spectrum-control properties, high level of efficacy and the classification as reduced-risk pesticides, these fungicides have been well received and widely used by golf course superintendents. When applied correctly, they're extremely effective and an integral part of any fungicide program.

From a plant-health perspective, some of the QoI fungicides exhibit growth-enhancing effects separate from disease control (Vincelli, 2007). Although not as well-documented on turf, some of the effects include hormonal changes in the plant resulting in delayed

## Strobilurins in the Spotlight

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



SOME OF THE QOI  
FUNGICIDES EXHIBIT  
GROWTH-ENHANCING  
EFFECTS SEPARATE  
FROM DISEASE  
CONTROL

senescence and, in some cases, exhibiting reduced water loss by the plant.

The QoI fungicides' mode of action, however, is highly specific. For this reason, the potential is high for fungal resistance to occur. With the upcoming disease season almost upon us, it's important to be aware of the potential for resistance and know that certain rules need to be followed when incorporating QoI fungicides into a disease control program. The guidelines for reducing the likelihood of resistance to QoI fungicides as outlined by the Fungicide Resistance Action Group (FRAC) are summarized below:

**1)** Use integrated pest management and cultural practices to reduce disease pressure. If disease pressure is low, fewer applications are required and a rate more closely associated with the minimum labeled fungicide rate is more likely to be used.

**2)** Limit the number of QoI fungicide applications to no more than one-third of the total number of fungicide applications per season. For turf, this is generally in the range of two to four applications per year.

**3)** Every application should be rotated with a different fungicide from a class where the resistance risk is low to medium.

**4)** Use premixtures or tank mixtures of QoI fungicides with a different mode of action group. Generally, the minimum labeled rates of each fungicide in the tank mix should be used.

**5)** Make preventive applications to keep disease pressure low.

There. That should answer any of your questions about strobilurins.

---

*Karl Danneberger, Ph.D., Golfdom's science editor and a turfgrass professor from The Ohio State University, can be reached at danneberger.1@osu.edu.*



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# ROLLING WITH THE ECONOMIC PUNCHE\$

**T**he brutal but improving economy has been rough on many hard-working people in the golf course maintenance industry. So rough that some people are just happy to have a job, even if it means taking a pay cut.

From private and public golf facilities to large organizations such as the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America and various management companies, many operations aren't immune to reducing employees' wages. It's simply an occurrence that happens during difficult recessionary times.

Max Bowden, Tom Bolon and Fred Larned are examples of what many golf course superintendents are dealing with when it comes to salary reductions and furloughs. Here, the three share their stories.

## Riding out the storm

Max Bowden is superintendent of the 18-hole Cramer Mountain Country Club in Cramerton, N.C., a private club owned by an elderly gentleman in his 70s who made his money in commercial real estate. The course, which opened in 1986, is part of a gated community in which the majority of residents are doctors and lawyers.

"We also had people in the banking industry, but we lost considerable membership when that went south," Bowden says, citing a decline from 400 members 10 years ago to about 230 now. "It's slowly gone down hill for years."

Some superintendents are absorbing hits financially because they're taking furloughs and salary cuts to keep their golf operations from sinking deeper into the red

BY JOHN WALSH, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



THERE ARE  
A FEW **WINTER  
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TOO BADLY."

– MAX BOWDEN,  
Cramer Mountain  
Country Club

Cramer Mountain is up for sale. The owner offered the club to the members for purchase last November. They've made a couple of offers, which the owner has turned down.

Bowden says there's a good chance the club, which generated about 7,000 rounds last year, will sell. He also believes new owners could invest more money into the club. But even then, the new owners could also bring in their own people to manage the club, Bowden says.

"There's still uncertainty," he adds.

With that uncertain future in mind, Cramer Mountain employees took furloughs to lighten the club's economic

burden. Last fall, heading into the off-season, the kitchen staff took a furlough. Bowden and his crew are spreading out their furloughs, which started in the fourth quarter of 2009 and will continue through this winter. Bowden selected his two weeks around herbicide applications.

"The people that have been here the longest were able to pick the weeks they wanted first," Bowden explains of the furlough procedure. "We spread it out so there's not a total loss of manpower at one time.

"I'll come away OK. There are a few winter projects that we wanted to

*Continued on page 18*

PHOTO BY: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL, INC.



**THEY NEEDED TO PULL BACK THE PURSE STRINGS QUICKLY. THEY WANTED TO START IMMEDIATELY AND CONTINUE INTO 2010.”**

– TOM BOLON, Lake Forest Country Club

*Continued from page 17*

do that won't get done, but the golf course conditions won't suffer too badly.”

Bowden wasn't surprised the furloughs were implemented.

“In fact, there were several days when I thought, ‘How can we still be open,’” he says, citing the perfect-weather days when the parking lot was empty. “I'm sure the owner is supplementing the operation out of his own pocket. It has been, ‘Do more with less and cut where you can.’”

Bowden's furlough equals a 4-percent pay cut.

“The sad part is it affects the attitude of you and the crew,” he says. “But [crew members] also realize they still have jobs. There aren't a lot of jobs out there. Some crew members are looking for other jobs and have found there isn't much out there. There's 15-percent unemployment in Gaston County (N.C.).”

Fortunately for Bowden, he's better off financially than his crew members, some of whom used to work in now-defunct textile mills and are used to this type of situation. “We knew this was coming in the late summer, so you had to plan ahead,” Bowden says. “I told the crew to plan ahead as well.”

Despite the grim situation, Bowden says it's not as bad as it could get.

“They could shut the doors, and we'd all be out of a job – that would be as bad as it gets,” he says.

### **Hit with a pay cut**

Tom Bolon's situation is more stable than Bowden's, but it's not ideal. Bolon is the superintendent at the private, 18-hole Lake Forest Country Club in Hudson, Ohio. He has been there 11 years, the first two years as an assistant.

Bolon's maintenance budget of \$535,000 has been consistent for the past 10 years, but the budget has remained the same as expenses have increased. The staff (full-time and seasonal) has been reduced the past three years from 23 to 18.

“Lake Forest is the type of club to get 20 members and then lose 20 annually,” Bolon says, adding there are 150 equity members

*Continued on page 20*



# THE CHOICE OF CHAMPIONS



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*Chris Whittle, Course Manager  
Royal Birkdale Golf Club*

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**DESPITE THE FURLOUGH, FRED LARNED IS PROUD TO HAVE A JOB, CONSIDERING THE NATION'S 10-PERCENT UNEMPLOYMENT RATE.**

*Continued from page 18*

and 75 associate members. "During the past two years, there haven't been as many new full dues/equity paying members coming in. We're down 5 to 10 percent."

Bolon had been receiving a 4-percent annual pay increase for the past nine years. But when the executive committee reviewed the club's budget this past October, it was off substantially. To help recoup the deficit, all employees were asked to take a pay cut. Bolon and the club's two managers were asked to take a 10-percent pay cut for 2010.

"They needed to pull back the purse strings quickly," Bolon says. "They wanted to start immediately and continue into 2010. I told them I wouldn't take a 4-percent pay raise in 2010, and I suggested a two-week furlough without pay to meet them in the middle."

Bolon also hoped to get his contract, which ends December 2012, extended for another five years. Bolon, who's married with two kids and a wife who works, justifies his apprehensiveness about the pay cut.

"Our salary and health benefits are the only things we have," he says. "We have no 401k. That money is our savings. I've worked my way up to average compensation for this area, according to the GCSAA compensation study, so I'm trying to work out a compromise to such a large salary reduction."

Before the 10-percent managerial pay cuts, managers accepted all previous recommendations, including cutting 10 percent of all employees' hours.

"That would get them back to assessment numbers we had in 2007," Bolon

says. "Without these reductions, we're looking at more than double the 2007 assessment per member."

Partly prompting the pay cuts is Lake Forest's suffering business. Outings that once booked 120 to 140 players are now coming in at 70 and 80 players. Weddings and outside parties are scaling back, too.

"We're not getting the money per head we used to," Bolon says.

Still, Bolon says he expected the club, which will be debt free in April, was going to cut back after the golf season.

"The only place to save the kind of money needed is in labor," he says. "We could have done some cutting earlier in the year; however, that would have resulted in a reduction of course conditions. All year long my green chairman kept saying, 'Watch overtime, watch spending,' which is normal. I don't spend money just to spend it. I always pay attention to what's going on at the club. I was \$14,000 under budget for 2009 before the budget cuts going into 2010."

Lake Forest's fiscal year ends in February, but it should end in June because the club could write a more realistic budget then because it would know how many members have committed and how much business it has on the books for the year, Bolon says.

Bolon also saved the club about \$3,000 by not attending the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation's annual conference and show and the Golf Industry Show in San Diego. He was permitted to attend both events, according to his contract.

*Continued on page 22*

**Will you have to take a pay cut or furlough in 2010?**

**88%**  
NO

**12%**  
YES



**67%**  
NO

**Will you receive a pay raise in 2010?**

**33%**  
YES



*Golfdom Survey: Based on 575 responses*