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Economic Punches



Continued from page 20

Still, Bolon has tried to keep communication open between Lake Forest's board and himself.

"I'll sell myself and explain why I'm hesitant about that size of a pay cut," he says. "I could be shooting myself in the foot."

Bolon has suggested revisiting the proposed salary cuts in May.

"There's no time table right now," he says. "It's status quo."

Open to a furlough, and thankful for a job

Fred Larned, superintendent at the nine-hole Sycamore Creek Golf Course in Fort Worth, Texas, works for the city of Fort Worth, which was \$59 million in debt in 2008. Sycamore is one of six courses owned by the city.

Because of the debt, the city manager suggested a furlough for all city workers this past

summer. It was approved by a majority vote three months later.

"Everybody voted for the furlough," Larned says. "I took eight furlough days in 2009, which equals about a 3-percent pay cut."

In addition to the furlough, the city, which started a new fiscal year Oct. 1, eliminated citywide mowing, several youth activities and its graffiti abatement program. It also sold two libraries and closed the city pool.

"The city manager is trying to sell any unused buildings that are city owned," Larned says. "The city pretty much knocked out the debt."

To put things into perspective, Larned says the city of Fort Worth hasn't raised taxes in about 10 years.

Despite the furlough, Larned is proud to have a job, considering the nation's unemployment rate of 10 percent.

"I was willing to take the eight days of furlough and still have a job," he says. "I

Continued on page 24

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Economic Punches

Continued from page 22

personally would prefer to take the eight days than see a cut in the maintenance budget. Eight days equals about one paycheck. I can find work for those eight days.”

Larned, who has been improving course conditions since he arrived, scheduled his eight days at a differ-

ent time than most city workers, who took time off around the holidays. The city’s golf courses were busy around that time.

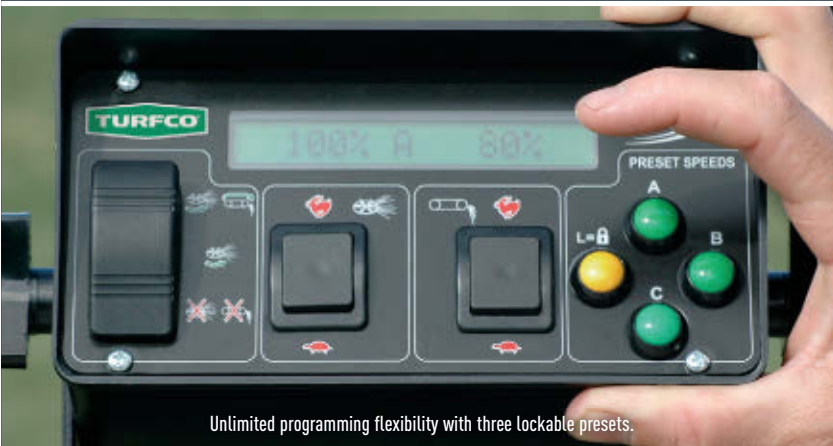
“We’re self sufficient,” says Larned, who has a two-man crew and maintains the executive par-3 course with a budget of \$268,000, which increased \$11,000 last year. “We were losing \$120,000 a



IT'S ONE OF THOSE THINGS... THE WAY THE ECONOMY IS. I'M HAPPY TO HAVE A JOB.”

— FRED LARNED,
Sycamore Creek
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year before I got here. We lost \$76,000 last year (ending September 2009).”

They’re not alone

Clearly, Bowden, Bolon and Larned aren’t the only superintendents dealing with pay cuts.

“I put a thread on the GCSAA Web site about salary reductions, and it got a ton of responses,” Bolon says. “People have been asked to do the same thing, or it has been handed to them.”

These troubling economic times have been difficult, especially for superintendents in their late 40s and early 50s.

“Many superintendents my age have been let go because clubs can’t afford their salaries,” Bowden says. “Then they just move up assistants [to take their spots].”

With all the talk about furloughs and salary reductions, the situation could be worse — superintendents could be losing their jobs.

“It’s one of those things ... the way the economy is,” Larned said about pay cuts. “I’m happy to have a job.”

Bowden, who has been a superintendent since 1982, has never seen an economic situation like this.

“But we’re not the only ones in this boat,” he says. “Others are doing the same thing.” ■

Walsh, a contributing editor to Golfdom, is based in Cleveland.

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Tweet . . . Tweet

Using Twitter can help superintendents on several fronts, most importantly increased communication

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD,
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



YOU WERE JUST GETTING THE

hang of Facebook — the complicated request dynamics, the mindless status updates and, most of all, the constant reminders that the aging process is cruel (as evidenced by old high-school friends requesting your friendship, only now with more hair on their ears than their scalps) — and now along comes Twitter.

It's the "micro-blogging" and "social networking" tool popularized by celebrities who post their profound inner thoughts on shopping, sports and other mindless vagaries in 140 characters or less. Twitter also appears poised to change the way everyone does business. Because unlike Facebook, Twitter has the potential to revolutionize how we receive and disseminate all forms of information.

There's a reason the tycoons at Facebook keep trying to buy Twitter: It's leaner, more user friendly and extraordinarily practical once you get it up and running. In a nutshell, Twitter takes all of the information on blogs, Web sites and our minds, and consolidates the information in an easy-to-follow way.

Are you overwhelmed by all of the Web sites you'd like to visit but just don't have the time to check into daily? Twitter lets you sign up for feeds from most of your favorite sites and delivers them to one easy-to-read page. Even better, there are several handy smart-phone applications that let you read "tweets" while standing in line at the post office or when the green chairman launches into a hole-by-hole replay of his round. (See sidebar on page 32 for best Twitter apps.)

Besides making the consumption of information simpler, Twitter is the future of communication with customers and employees. Whether you're a golf course superintendent updating your "following" golfers on a frost delay or the golf shop alerting customers to a sale on Callaway drivers, Twitter is the ultimate word-of-mouth tool. In addition to following friends and news sources, you'll find yourself signing up for Twitter feeds from your favorite local vendors for news about deals and new products.

Signing up is as simple as going to Twitter.com (<http://Twitter.com>) and registering with an e-mail address. If you anticipate attracting thousands of followers, you might want to use a back up e-mail address to register since Twitter sends you an e-mail each time someone becomes a "follower" of your "tweets." (To preserve egos, Twitter doesn't send out an e-mail letting you know when someone has unsubscribed from your feed.)

Do keep in mind this e-mail address is also where you'll be notified if someone sends you a "direct message," which happens infrequently these days but could become a more popular component of Twitter in the future.

Once you're registered, sending a tweet is as simple as logging into the Web site either on your computer or through your cell phone, then typing in your messages in 140 characters or less. Twitter also offers a simple search tool to look for other folks you'd like to "follow."

Following and tweeting

I follow those ranging from pure news to feeds devoted to my favorite sports teams, bands, writers and famous pro golfers. My own Web site blog feed goes out and I do post comments from time to time, particularly if I'm at a golf tournament and have thoughts or news that I want to share.

The portability of Twitter on today's smart phones — both reading and sending out messages — makes it a

Continued on page 31

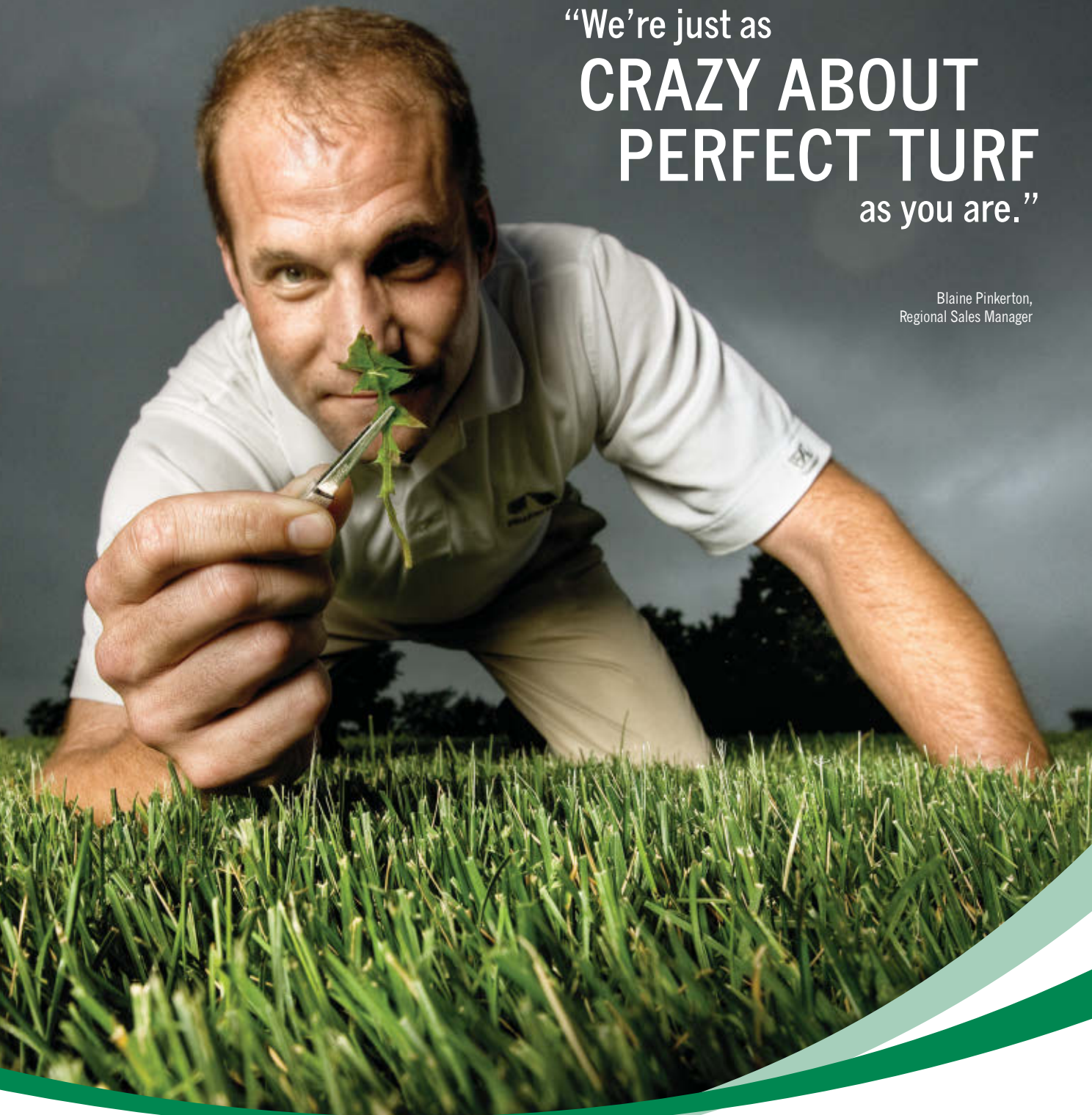


These Tweeters Are Tweeting Like Canaries

- http://twitter.com/RCC_Grounds — Solid, basic, need-to-know information about the status of the golf course from Todd Raisch, certified superintendent of the Ridgewood Country Club in Paramus, N.J. Also includes occasional links to blog content. A great model for superintendents.
- <http://twitter.com/GCSAAmedia> — Tweets from the home office about industry and show news posted by Bill Newton.
- <http://twitter.com/greensuper> — Certified Superintendent William Brown posts golf course updates and links to his blog posts, which were often sent previously from his phone. Twitter lets him post straight to Twitter.
- <http://twitter.com/nccturf> — Duluth, Minn.-based Northland Country Club superintendent Chris Tritabaugh keeps it informative and fun by posting plenty of photos.
- <http://twitter.com/fsr3> — Cornell University turf professor Frank Rossi offers a variety of thoughts and interacts with those who message him.
- <http://twitter.com/JohnKaminski> — If you can handle the Penn State University football updates, a very interactive Tweeter. Kaminski is also involved with the helpful <http://twitter.com/TurfDiseases>.
- <http://twitter.com/GlenEagleTurf> — Toronto's Glen Eagle Golf Club's turf maintenance department keeps followers updated on conditions via text and photos.
- <http://twitter.com/JustinRuizCGCS> — Justin Ruiz of The Rim Golf Club in Payson, Ariz., posts regularly (300-plus Tweets already) about all issues related to maintenance and also links back to his excellent blog, where maintenance practices are explained in greater detail and always in an educational tone.
- http://twitter.com/Tipton_CC — Mostly golf course updates, but also some club news interspersed into the Tweets for this Tipton, Iowa, golf course.
- <http://twitter.com/PSUTurf> — Penn State turfgrass programs are consolidated here with mostly news and notes.

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