

## Tweet ... Tweet

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natural for the golf course industry. A few top superintendents are already using Twitter to keep their golfers informed, but so far it's been slow going for them in building an audience.

"I have 86 followers and a little more than a dozen of them are associated with the club," says Todd Raisch, certified superintendent of the Ridgewood Country Club in Paramus, N.J. "However, those who are followers and members of the club have commented favorably. It can be a bit disheartening at times that more people at the club are not following, but communication is so important in our business that there really isn't a good reason not to do it."

Raisch has found Twitter most practical in communicating with club staff.

"I can tweet that the course may be closed due to rain or that we have a frost delay," he says. "Then those working with the restaurant and golf shop receive the tweet via text message before they arrive. Based on that information, they have a better idea of what to expect when they get to the club in the morning and can plan accordingly."

Raisch envisions additional benefits where superintendents can help each other.

"If a [superintendent at the course] down the street saw some dollar spot or hyperodes on his course during his morning scouting tour and tweeted about it, [other superintendents in the area] would know to be on the lookout for similar problems," he says. "A good secondary reason to participate in Twitter is to hear what else is going on out in the world of golf course management. Researchers, including Frank Rossi of Cornell University and Lane Treadway of North Carolina State University, and several superintendents are all active tweeters and I've learned a lot by following them."

*"It's like a real-time question-and-answer session with other superintendents. It's pretty powerful when you think about it."*

— JUSTIN RUIZ

Justin Ruiz, superintendent of The Rim Golf Club in Payson, Ariz., quickly found his Twitter footing after suffering "tweeter's block" early on. Now he regularly posts updates, photos and has experienced the benefits of

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## Tweet ... Tweet

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interacting with fellow superintendents. But Ruiz especially finds the turfgrass university Tweets beneficial.

“Twitter also helps me document a majority of happenings on the course,” Ruiz says. “Not only can I look back at my previous tweets and see when an event took place, but I also can use Twitter as a way to air out some issues on the course and know that other people may have already had the same issues. It’s like a real-time question-and-answer session with other superintendents.

“It’s pretty powerful when you think about it.” ■

Follow Geoff Shackelford at

<http://twitter.com/GeoffShac> and follow

Golfdom at <http://twitter.com/Golfdom>.

## Apps to Make Twitter Easy to Follow



■ **For Blackberry Users:** TweetCaster is a stylish, feature-rich Twitter app for BlackBerry. Great for managing multiple Twitter accounts. TwitterBerry is for posting updates to Twitter that works over the data network, so you don’t need to use Short Message Service (SMS).

■ **For Windows Mobile Users:** moTweets lets you experience Twitter from your Windows Mobile device, including photo uploads that post your location. Quakk is another popular full-featured and attractive Windows Mobile Twitter app.

■ **For iPhone Users:** Tweetie for the Mac costs \$2.99 at the iTunes store and makes tweeting from the iPhone simple and fun. Tweet-Time supports multiple accounts, makes uploading pictures from camera and library easy and will also use the phone’s GPS to document your location.

■ **For Windows Users:** TweetDeck is a computer desktop app that allows you to sort tweets into columns: tweets, responses and direct messages.

■ **For Macintosh Users:** Tweetie for the Mac is a simple desktop app that functions beautifully and allows you to follow tweets. It’s free if you can tolerate the occasional advertisement, \$14.99 if you want an ad-free version.

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# BIDING THEIR

# Time

Assistant  
superintendents  
wait for the job  
market to improve to  
get their chances to  
climb career ladder

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

**C**all it the seven-year itch. Jeff Austin has been an assistant golf course superintendent for about that long, and he aches to become a superintendent. But Austin also knows the obstacles he's up against. Let him count the ways:

- a difficult (but improving) economy;
- a glut of assistants looking to take the same step he is;
- laid-off superintendents looking for new jobs; and
- a stagnant industry where more jobs aren't being created.

"It's a difficult process," says the 30-year-old Austin, the first assistant superintendent at Stonewater Golf Club in Highland Heights, Ohio. "I trust my skills and my ability, but the biggest challenge is getting my foot in the door and proving to someone that I know what I'm doing."

It's hard to say how many assistant superintendents are ready to move up the next rung of the career ladder, but there's no doubt there are more than less of them. For now, they have to be patient and bide their time.

Austin realizes as much. He has a good job at Stonewater and doesn't want to lose it. "There are guys 10 times more qualified than me who don't have jobs," Austin says. "That's the sad part of this."

Mike Mausolf, the 27-year-old second assistant at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Hills, Mich., feels secure in his position, but he's also aiming to move up.

"I feel like I'm ready for a new challenge," Mausolf says.

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Mausolf would like to stay in Michigan, but he realizes he's limiting his opportunities by doing so. "It's tough to find a job up here," he says. "I realize I have to look out of state."

What frustrates Mausolf is so many assistants apply for one superintendent job. He says applicants must really differentiate themselves these days.

"I know what I have to do," he says.

Veteran certified superintendent Bruce Williams, director of business development in the West for ValleyCrest Golf Course Maintenance, says opportunities for assistants could be abundant if they would consider working at public and private courses in regions that feature warm-season and cool-season grasses — including overseas destinations like China where golf is growing.

"If you want to work in Milwaukee, because that's where you're from and that's

where your family is from and you don't want to move from there, then your opportunities aren't [great]," Williams says.

Most assistant superintendents realize they must use their connections to find jobs. Ryan Loudenslager, assistant superintendent of the Black Course at Bethpage Black State Park in Farmingdale, N.Y., has worked on Long Island for several years and is using his connections there to try and move up the career ladder. But nobody knows better than the 31-year-old Loudenslager that it's a difficult economy and a tough time to find a job — any job. In fact, Loudenslager was laid off from a private club on Long Island last year and was



Kyle  
Hahn

rehired at Bethpage where he'd previously worked.

"It's tough to get a job; it's tough to get a look," says Loudenslager, a graduate of Penn State University. "A job at a Cape Cod (Mass.) course opened up and they got 300 resumes. ... The pool is big to get such jobs. They're not building many new courses and the [turfgrass] schools just keep on pumping people out."

Loudenslager has a solid resume — including hosting two U.S. Opens at Bethpage — and he's optimistic, despite admitting he's also a bit frustrated about the stagnant marketplace

Some assistants, however, are in no rush to become superintendents, including Kyle Hahn, the assistant superintendent at Four Seasons Resort and Club Dallas at Las Colinas in Irving, Texas. The 22-year-old Hahn just began his post last May after graduating from Texas A&M University. The good news is that most of the turfgrass graduates in his class found jobs, Hahn adds.

But Hahn realizes it's a tough job market for assistants who want to move up.

"It's troublesome," he says. "I have friends who really want to find superintendents jobs, but there's nothing available."

Matt Holland, the assistant superintendent at Trump National Golf Club in Briarcliff Manor, N.Y., also just began his post in May, and the 24-year-old is in no hurry to become a superintendent, saying he has lots to learn. But Holland hopes the job picture improves just when he's ready to move up.

"There are a lot fewer jobs than there were five years ago," he says. "I know multiple people who want to move up and can't find the right opportunities."



Matt  
Holland



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**Mitch Davidson**

Some of the American assistant superintendents might want to look to the Great White North to become superintendents. Mitch Davidson, assistant superintendent of Wascana Country Club in Regina, Saskatchewan, says there are opportunities there.

“Where I live in Western Canada, there are superintendent openings every winter,” he says. “But this year could be different because there are fewer people moving around.”

Although the 26-year-old Davidson is heading into his ninth season at Wascana, he’s in no rush to move on.

“If the right opportunity comes up, and I feel like I’m ready for it, then, yes, I’m ready to move on,” he says. “You always want your boss’ job.”

For now, Austin plans to keep his skills sharp so he’s ready when the opportunity presents itself.

“This will turn around eventually,” Austin says. “The ones who weather the storm are the ones who will be the most successful when we get out of this.” ■

*Editor’s note: Larry Aylward researched this story during the Green Start Academy, an event for assistant superintendents held last October by Bayer Environmental Science and John Deere Golf.*



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# HOW TOPDRESSING BECAME AN



Superintendents used to use wheelbarrows and shovels. How times have changed

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief



The Toro Co. purchased TV-CROP Manufacturing last year and now has a line of topdressers for golf.

TOPDRESSING HAS TRANSFORMED into an art in golf course maintenance circles. And one could say topdressers have assumed the distinctive role of artists in the process.

The machines have received major upgrades and enhancements over the years to help superintendents turn golf courses into the masterpieces they desire.

“Golfers’ expectations for excellent conditions and superintendents’ desires to give them those conditions have changed the process of topdressing dramatically,” says Scott Kinkead, executive vice president of Turfco Manufacturing in Minneapolis.

Tony L. Ferguson, senior business development manager for Bloomington, Minn.-based The Toro Co., says golfers want those excellent conditions — smoother surfaces, cleaner playing conditions, and better and truer rolls — to appear almost magically before their eyes.

“The catch is golfers want this without any disruptions, and without seeing any maintenance people or turf maintenance being performed,” Ferguson adds. “This





Superintendents are topdressing more frequently with lighter applications.

has led to topdressers that can perform the required task very quickly, and leave a result — evenness of spread — that requires little or no further work. That is — no dragging, no hand brushing, no uneven applications and no undue damage to the turf surface. The goal is to topdress, so golfers don't know you've done anything."

Randy Dufault, president of Grand Forks, N.D.-based Dakota Peat & Equipment, echoes Ferguson's thoughts, and says new topdressers must do much more than old topdressers, which just needed to put down sand.

"And it really didn't matter how well the old topdressers put down sand because [course workers] would brush it in and, in most cases, close the course down for the day to get it all done and cleaned up," Dufault adds.

As time passed, however, golfers' expectations for perfection grew, and light and frequent topdressing now plays a major role in golf course maintenance, Dufault says.

Bruce Carmichael, national sales manager for Warren, Mich.-based TurfEx, says traditional methods of core aeration and heavy topdressing applications typically required a course to be shut down for a period of time.

"But with the development of verticutting, superintendents can now follow up with lighter, more frequent topdressing applications that allow for virtually instant playability," he adds.

Kinthead says the drive for firmer and faster greens has led to more frequent topdressing every seven to 14 days to sustain greenspeed and control thatch.

Ferguson says today's topdressers can complete 18 greens and a practice green in a little more than an hour. "This is achieved by utilizing a smaller topdresser for the topdressing application and the material handler as a supply source for the topdressing material," he says. "This avoids multiple trips back to the sand pile, which decreases productivity."

Today, as high-end golf courses improve their topdressing practices, the next tier of golf courses must strive to equal the same conditions to compete with those courses, Ferguson says.

### Distinct changes

Back in the days of Old Tom Morris, circa 1890, "greenkeepers" used wheelbarrows and shovels for topdressing, Kinthead says. It wasn't until the early 1960s that Turfco manufactured the first mechanized topdresser with

a wooden hopper and wooden slots, he adds. Topdressers have undergone major changes since.

Dufault says today's topdressers are easy to use and adjust because they have to be. Topdressers are being used more often, so superintendents want reliable machines more than ever. Also, because maintenance crews are leaner from a labor standpoint, topdressers need to perform more functions.

Carmichael says TurfEx machines are equipped with an easy-to-use intuitive controller that allows the auger, spinner and gate to be independently adjusted from the towing vehicle.

"A digital readout shows the operator exactly how much material is being spread," he says. "The automatic startup and shutdown feature of the controller also eases operation by powering up the spinners before the feed system starts, and then shutting the spinners off a few seconds after the material flow stops."

The denser turfgrass varieties have caused manufacturers to change machinery so topdressing material can be integrated into the canopies more easily, Kinthead says. If material sits on top of turf, it can wear out mower reels faster and slow greenspeed.

"Superintendents need to topdress such varieties more frequently with lighter applications to keep pace with organic accumulation," Kinthead says.

Manufacturers have also concentrated on making topdressers easier to operate, Kinthead says. Much of this has been directed at application rates. "We focused on making the spinner design as simple as possible so you don't have to worry about making adjustments to go from a light to a medium spread to a narrower or wider spread," Kinthead says.

Ferguson says superintendents desire equipment settings that are easy to establish and repeat. Some current and previous models of topdressers required that the operator set up the unit, make a first pass, check the result

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Tony L. Ferguson

## Topdressing

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and then make needed adjustments to get the desired result.

“Topdressers available today have advanced technology that allow for easy to establish adjustments, so the operator can achieve the right application the first time,” Ferguson says.

Controllers are easier and better than ever in controlling belt and spinner speed, Ferguson adds. Wireless controllers can operate units from up to 150 yards away, allowing for a second person to watch the performance and make adjustments in real-time. These controllers can also store desired settings from one application to the next for repeatable, consistent topdressing results.

### What to look for?

If a superintendent is shopping for a new topdresser, what does he or she need to look for? First, that superintendent must know exactly how he or she plans to use the topdresser, Kinkead points out. “Is the person using it just for greens? Or is the person using it for greens, tees and approaches?” Kinkead asks.

Green size plays a role in topdresser selection.

“If you have small greens, you probably need a truck mount,” Kinkead adds. “A tow-behind is the best way to go for bigger greens.”

And if that superintendent plans to use the topdresser for fairways, he or she must purchase a larger machine that will also double as a material handler.

Topdressing frequency is also an issue. If the superintendent only topdresses four or five times a year, he or she probably doesn’t need a spinner topdresser, Kinkead says. A less-expensive ground-drive drop spreader would do just fine.

“You don’t have to spend the extra dollars if you’re only going to topdress a

handful of times a year,” Kinkead says.

A topdresser’s durability should also be considered, Kinkead adds. Considering it’s a six- to 10-year purchase, a superintendent doesn’t want to buy a piece of junk. Also, the superintendent should consider the machine’s warranty and resale value.

And a superintendent shouldn’t buy a topdresser without demonstrating it and all of its applications, Kinkead says. That means conducting light and heavy applications.

The superintendent should also look for a topdresser with a hopper that’s long enough for the loader bucket, Dufault says. Also, the topdresser should have a big enough gas tank to cover 18 holes on one route. Dufault says selecting the right hitch weight is vital on pull-type units. “Without the proper hitch weight, the pull vehicle spins the tires going up onto the greens and tears up the grass,” he says.

A superintendent should also keep maintenance in mind when selecting a topdresser. To address maintenance issues, TurfEx built a topdresser with a corrosion-resistant polyethylene hopper, which doesn’t need the frequent washings

or paint touch-ups that a steel-built unit does, Carmichael says. The company’s all-electric design has also eliminated many of the moving parts and other maintenance requirements associated with hydraulically powered machines, he adds.

If a superintendent is going to use the topdresser on greens, he should select

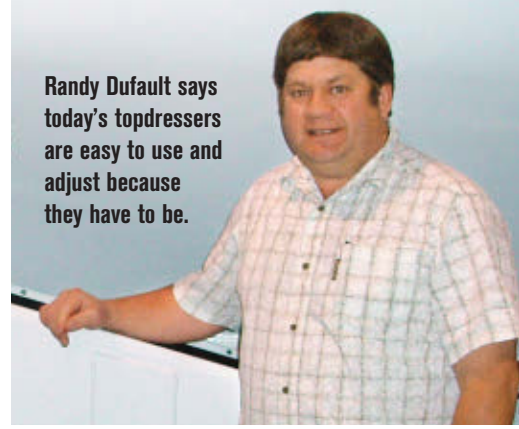
a model with a lightweight design, Carmichael says. “Look for hoppers made of lightweight materials, such as polyethylene, in order to keep that pressure rating to a minimum,” he adds.

Ferguson says the service and support of the topdresser distributor and manufacturer should also be high on the list of important things to consider.



Scott Kinkead

Randy Dufault says today’s topdressers are easy to use and adjust because they have to be.



“Support from your distributor and manufacturer will allow the superintendent to fine tune a course’s topdressing program as the needs, goals and expectations of the golfers change,” he says.

Ferguson also says superintendents shouldn’t change their topdressing programs to match a topdresser’s abilities. Superintendents also should consider a topdresser’s ease of setup and operation.

“A customer should buy the topdresser that provides the best performance and results: perfect application rate and spread pattern; easy operation; simple to maintain; and lightest footprint,” he says. ■

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