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**F**rustrating, definitely. Maddening, without a doubt. Scary, of course. The end of the world, *not even close.*

I'm describing some of the emotions that superintendents go through when they lose their jobs at the most vulnerable time in their lives. Too many times lately I've received calls from friends in the industry who are in the latter part of their careers, telling me they've lost their jobs. They say they're looking to do something new. Granted, some of them still want to be superintendents. But many are tired of the grind and are ready for a change.

These can be very frightening times for superintendents, when careers are in jeopardy, retirement dreams are shattered and security is pulled right out from under them. The problem is, most of these life-altering changes are unexpected and totally out of their control.

In our parents' and grandparents' generations, one typically worked for 30 years and then left the workforce and tried to retire. In today's world, with longer life expectancies and improved health playing a huge role, most people in their 50s and 60s are still in good enough physical and mental condition to be valuable contributors on the job.

In some cases they need to continue working because of the economy. The sad part is, these are the people with the most experience and knowledge. And yet they are unceremoniously put out to pasture way too early.

I understand as well as anyone how drastically the tanking economy impacted our country. All businesses had to tighten their belts, and the golf course industry was no different. But even now, so many hard working, talented, experienced, educated and passionate individuals are losing their jobs and they're finding it difficult to replace them.

If I were an employer and described an employee as hard working, talented, experienced, educated and passionate, it would seem to me that this is exactly the description of an employee who I would like to have on my staff. Yet in many cases, businesses are letting go their best candidate, the incumbent.

## Don't Let Them Wear You Down

BY MARK WOODWARD



THAT'S WHAT'S  
FRUSTRATING —  
IT SEEMS OUR  
INDUSTRY IS ONE  
THAT SOMETIMES  
“EATS ITS OWN.”

I understand that we have to mentor the younger generation to eventually take our places, but in many cases it's happening way too early and for the wrong reasons. And that's what's frustrating. It seems our industry is one that sometimes “eats its own.”

My father once owned a ready-mix/construction company. The motto printed on all of the company's trucks was “*legitmati non carbarundum*,” Latin for “Don't let them wear you down.” This is actually the politically correct translation. My point is, prepare yourself. It can happen to anyone, at any time.

But as I said at the beginning of this article, losing your job is far from being the end of the world. Sure, in such situations we are forced to get out of our comfort zones. But doing so gives us a unique opportunity to search our souls for what would truly make us happy and successful.

As difficult as looking inward is, embrace that opportunity. Look at it as a chance to do something different, something you've wanted to do for many years yet were too busy to pursue.

As you find yourself “at the turn” in your life, my best advice is, prepare yourself mentally, emotionally and financially for your future. I can tell you from experience that there is life after being a superintendent. Look at this opportunity as a challenge. Pursue your dreams. Ask yourself, what job would I like if I weren't a superintendent?

Who knows, maybe you've always wanted to open a bed and breakfast in Colorado. Go for it. Take a leap of faith. Pursue your dreams.

Do what makes you happy.

---

*Mark Woodward is president of Mark Woodward and Associates, Principal of DaMarCo Golf, CEO of MasterStep Golf Management Group and a contributing editor for Golfdom.*

**T**here is no simple answer to the question of employment security in the golf course superintendent ranks. The golf industry is hard to study in broad terms. It's diverse. There are high-end private clubs, resorts, semi-private clubs, municipal courses and mom-and-pop 9-holers at RV parks.

Each sector has its own set of circumstances, which can determine the fate of the superintendent's position. It doesn't help that we are mired in a sluggish economy, and discretionary spending and course revenues vary by region.

I see a couple of "trends" emerging on both sides of the employment issue. They are not new, but they are perhaps accelerated, due to the nickel-and-dime hypersensitivity and ensuing pressures on job satisfaction. It seems that the practice of firing the older, experienced superintendent for no other reason than to reduce payroll costs is on an uptick.

Responsible for some of that increase is a recent surge in "boutique" and even established golf management companies taking over golf courses. Some courses might be struggling, and in some cases the owners or members just don't want to deal with it anymore. In other situations, it is the direction that boards of directors of private clubs take, where the course maintenance line item is always a favorite target.

Recently, one club I know of fired the superintendent and promoted the assistant. It then changed his title to "Supervisor of Maintenance." They are squeezing dollars till the eagles scream. Good luck with that. An already small, efficient crew is taking care of the golf course, clubhouse grounds and condo common areas. Crew morale must be great.

Cuts to maintenance budgets eliminate "perks" like superintendent dues, education, meetings and travel, and slash essentials such as labor, equipment, chemicals and fertilizers. Yet clubs still demand excellent conditions. This was reaffirmed by a recent survey conducted by this magazine, where numerous readers told us that despite the cuts to the maintenance budget, there have been no cuts to expectations.

It's no surprise that I'm hearing more and

## Job Insecurity for Superintendents

BY JOEL JACKSON



**THEY SHOULD  
WORK OUT A PLAN  
THAT REFLECTS  
REALITY — THAT  
COURSE CONDI-  
TIONS ARE THE  
RESULT OF FEWER  
WORKERS AND  
LESS SPENDING.**

more older superintendents talking about burnout and stress. In some cases, superintendents are choosing to get out of the profession they once loved. Some stay in related fields such as commercial sales or landscape services, but others are making complete breaks to follow new paths.

There always is the personality conflict factor that can cause many a superintendent to lose his or her job. This condition cuts across all golf course sectors. If someone has a beef with the superintendent, whether it's the club's general manager or an outspoken member, the outcome usually will not favor the superintendent. Most of the time we don't know all the facts in these cases, but we tend to give our brothers and sisters the benefit of the doubt.

The club should sit down with the superintendent. And together they should work out a maintenance plan that reflects reality — that course conditions today are the result of fewer workers and less club spending. If that conversation were to happen, then the need to lay off a knowledgeable, experienced veteran superintendent would be averted many times over. It may be hard to put a dollar value on knowledge and experience, but it does ultimately affect the bottom line.

Unfortunately, a superintendent's job security is haphazard in this day and age. It hangs on changing relationships with club leaders or members. While there is no guarantee out there, superintendents who are professional, who communicate clearly, who network and who know technology will have the best chance of surviving. And a word to clubs: It's not just business; it is personal!

---

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

**S**ummer conditions always bring out the best and worst in *Poa annua*. One of the most widely distributed plants in the world, *Poa annua* is well adapted to golf course conditions. The ability to tolerate low mowing heights and an upright growth habit results in a turf that provides an ideal surface for greens, tees and fairways. Conversely, *Poa annua* is associated with spring seedhead production and a shallow root system that predisposes the plant to summer stresses.

Whether you are managing it as a desirable turfgrass species or as a weed that needs to be eliminated, *Poa annua* always strikes an emotional chord with superintendents. Given our emotional attachment, which ranges from utter contempt to love, there is never a shortage of one-liners to describe our emotions towards it (even Johnny Miller chimed in recently, with a line about *Poa annua* not having a father to call on Father's Day.)

I have dusted off my book of favorite *Poa annua* quotes with the hope of using some of them during the upcoming summer stress season. You may not like them, but hopefully you can relate to one or two listed below.

**1** "If every chemical that was labeled to control *Poa annua* worked, *Poa annua* would be an endangered species."

**2** Observing a dead creeping bentgrass green, the club manager asked, "Do you think it will come back?" The superintendent responded, "I have only known three people to come back from the dead: Jesus, Lazarus and *Poa annua*."

**3** When one superintendent was fired for not being able to control *Poa annua*, he said, "If *Poa annua* were human it would be on Death Row."

**4** When a golfer observed that *Poa annua* was not natural on a golf course, the superintendent replied, "There is nothing natural about mowing at 3 mm."

## Poa Punchlines

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



GIVEN OUR  
EMOTIONAL  
ATTACHMENT,  
WHICH RANGES  
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TO LOVE, THERE  
IS NEVER A SHORT-  
AGE OF ONE-LINERS  
TO DESCRIBE  
OUR EMOTIONS.

**5** "When creeping bentgrass dies what fills in? *Poa annua*. When Kentucky bluegrass dies what fills in? *Poa annua*. When *Poa annua* dies, what fills in? *Poa annua*." — *Dr. Joseph Vargas Jr.*

**6** The club manager said, "It takes a lot of time, money and chemicals to maintain *Poa annua*." The superintendent replied, "It takes a lot of time, money, and chemicals to kill *Poa annua*."

**7** When a superintendent was told he should cut down on irrigation to eliminate *Poa annua*, he replied, "It has been found on all seven continents, including in the Arctic. I don't think eliminating a couple of showers is going to do much good."

**8** "That is *Poa annua*, a sort of outcast bluegrass. It drops its seed plentifully and spreads rapidly. Maybe it would be well to try a test bed of it and give the poor old bum a real chance. He may prove a gentleman after all." — *A. W. Tillinghast, written over 80 years ago*

I sometimes wonder what would be said if *Poa annua* were a woman — and not on Death Row! I can only imagine the pick-up lines she would hear in a bar.

I am sure there are many other of these jokes that are funnier or more insightful than these. If you have a favorite one-liner about *Poa annua* please e-mail it to me.

**Disclaimer:** Due to my age, I can't remember if some of these are originally mine or if I heard them from someone else.

---

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



# Around the Web

ALL JUST A CLICK AWAY



## UP, UP, UP!

Increase in rounds played from 2011 to 2012

January	+21.4%
February	+10.1%
March	+29.5%
April	+17.1%
<b>Year to date</b>	<b>+20%</b>

Source: National Golf Foundation/Golf Datatech



## TOP TWEETS

**Jason Hooper (@superjhooper, B.C., Canada):** Weed N Feed going down today... bummed to not have this product available after this season. #anothervaluabletoolgone-fromthe arsenal

**Chase Best (@chaserhb, Corydon, Ind.):**

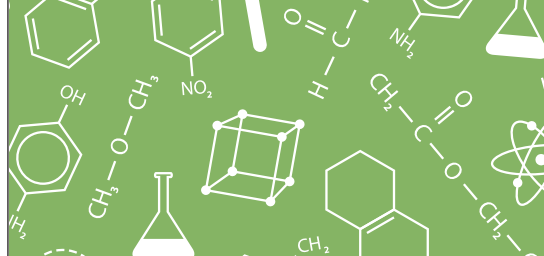
Called all of my salesmen and none of them sell rain.

#superintendentproblems

**Clifford Carpenter (@TheTurfDunedain, Citrus Heights, Calif.):**

Primo sprays on fairways today... my favorite Monday of the month. I live, I love, I spray and I am contentw.

#moviequotesforturf #conan



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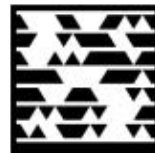
By Corbett Schnatmeyer | FMC

Today's market offers a wide range of pesticide options with various Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements. Fortunately, the Environmental Protection Agency requires that all pesticide product labels contain instructions regarding the necessary PPE to be worn when handling, preparing, mixing and applying pesticides. While pesticides can come into contact with the human body several different ways, most exposure comes via contact with the skin.



Wearing the proper PPE for each and every interaction with pesticides not only helps to guarantee individual safety and protection, it's required by law. At the end of each workday, ensure continued protection by discarding disposable gloves and washing PPE while verifying that it is in good condition.

Corbett Schnatmeyer is the Market Specialist for FMC Professional Solutions in Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming and Utah.



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## MUST SEE VIDEOS



### MOWING AT THE 2012 WELLS FARGO

Set to music, some great footage of the many fairway mowers in action at Quail Hollow Club, making short work of the fairways.

<http://tinyurl.com/cp4p5at>



### A TURFGRASS CONFERENCE FOR... YOU

Keith Krause, the president of the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation, tells his good friend – turf – about the conference they're holding in its honor.

<http://tinyurl.com/ceszna5>



### DALHAMER TALKS OPEN VS. TOUR EVENT

Golfdom TV caught up with CGCS Chris Dalhamer earlier this year to talk about the difference in hosting a major from a regular PGA Tour event.

<http://www.golfdom.com/golfdom-tv>



THE **5.9%**

AS THE AUTHOR, A FORMER  
SUPERINTENDENT, CAN ATTEST,  
**BEING A SUPERINTENDENT AT AGE 60 IS**  
***SO WHERE DO OLD SUPERINTENDENTS GO?***

*\* Only 5.9% of today's  
superintendents  
are 60 and over.*

EDITOR'S NOTE: *The author of this story was a superintendent in Kentucky for the last 30-plus years until losing his job last year. Since then he and another former superintendent, Mark Wilson, CGCS, have started Superintendent's Choice Sod in Louisville, Ky. (see sidebar, page 18.)*



# A TRICKY PROPOSITION.

BY JAY CHARNES

PHOTO BY: SETH JONES

**OLD SOLDIERS NEVER DIE, THEY JUST FADE AWAY.** General Douglas MacArthur spoke these words to a joint Senate and Congress meeting in 1951 as his military career ended.

Of recent notice to me, and many others, is the decline of the number of older, long-term superintendents. In my area of the country there has been a noteworthy decline in our numbers.

There are a host of reasons and possible explanations for why these superintendents, whose age, compensation and knowledge have grown over the years, are in decline. Taking a few moments to delve into this may shed some light on why a 60-year-old superintendent is as rare as an honest handicap.

First, a hard look at some numbers, courtesy of the GCSAA:

#### SUPERINTENDENTS' AGE

20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
2.5%	29.3%	34.4%	27.9%	5.9%

Mark Twain used a phrase attributed to British prime minister Benjamin Disraeli. It went, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies and statistics."

With that in mind, the above statistics show 5.9 percent of 4,023 superintendents who responded to the survey were over 60 in 2011. Granted, people generally retire in their 60s. But statistically this looks like a good many superintendents disappear as they reach their golden years.

If they are not retired or playing golf at the Pearly Gates Golf Club, where are they?

#### Personality and popularity versus performance

Do you suppose a conversation like this has ever taken place at a golf course?

7-handicapper lawyer Chuck: "Aren't you glad ol' Sam the superintendent aerated greens last week? That is going to make them better than ever in a few days."

*Continued on page 18*



# ONWARD AND UPWARD

By **Beth Geraci** Senior Editor

**J**ay Charnes may not be a superintendent anymore, but he's certainly not sitting still. In 2011, Charnes partnered with his good friend Mark Wilson, the former superintendent at Valhalla Golf Club, and together they launched a sod business called Superintendent's Choice Sod.

The pair is growing zoysia grass on a 35-acre plot in Louisville, Ky. they leased and revitalized last fall. And at a second, smaller location about 10 miles away, Charnes and Wilson are growing one acre of bentgrass and three acres of bluegrass. The partners were joined in March by Marc Messersmith, who was Wilson's assistant at Valhalla for 10 years. He now helps Charnes on the production side of the business.

Charnes and Wilson launched their business because they recognized a need



for a sod farm in their region.

"We're doing what nobody else does," Charnes said. "We're the only people in Louisville that have high-quality, low-mow sod."

Wilson and Charnes are selling their product directly to golf courses. The sod

would be ideal for superintendents who want to reconstruct their greens, Charnes explained. "The pipe dream would be that we could contract for a golf course that's planning a renovation and install it on their site," he added. "The other pipe dream is that zoysia for lawn grass would take off in this area."

*Continued from page 17*

**13-handicapper banker Felix:** "Damn straight, he does a great job!"

A good superintendent who does what he is supposed to do, in fact what he is hired to do, by the nature of his work is not a popular person. The superintendent aerates the course, closes the course in inclement weather and performs myriad other activities that do not make him or her a beloved person at the 19<sup>th</sup> hole.

Unfortunately, another item that can lead to a superintendent's loss of popularity is the inherent nature of the work environment and greens staff. If even once, it is too often, that the super is viewed as being a little lower class because he or she works in a barn and has a staff comprising a melting pot of people whose income and education level are viewed as subpar. Despite efforts to call the "barn" a "turf care center" and to give each person on the greens staff a proper title, the misconcep-

tions and prejudices still prevail.

All in all it becomes too much personality and popularity versus a performance system. In the performance area it is plain and simple that superintendents are like people who ride motorcycles: You have either been down or you are going down. With the variables that exist (weather, equipment, personnel, micro environments) every year is not going to be a 10. When I first entered the superintendent trade some 35 years ago, some of the then old timers used to say, "Be careful — you don't want to have too good a year because then they will expect it every time." This statement was a bit tongue-in-cheek, but a bit of biting truth hides within.

## The "180" rule

The natural progression of a superintendent's popularity is on a sliding scale, downwards. After 8, 10, 12 years those who were in leadership and played an integral part in the hiring of a superintendent are often less active in the club organiza-

tion, have moved on, or are teeing it up at the aforementioned Pearly Gates GC. Additionally, the compensation package of the super has grown, as was the case in the glory years of the '90s and early 2000s.

The whole dynamic changes over that span. New and younger club leadership, new club management personnel, and existing club personnel in management roles now defend their own ground and work to secure their own piece of the pie. The employment of the long-term superintendent, who is likely 50 or older, has become vulnerable.

The "half the age, half the wage" phenomenon comes into play. A superintendent who has worked 25 to 35 years in the profession, whose salary and benefits have grown, is easily replaced by an upstart superintendent or qualified assistant — approximately half the age and half the wage.

Perhaps the phenomenon should be called the "180" rule. Before the age of 60 you will likely be replaced by someone

*Continued on page 20*





Former superintendents Mark Wilson and Jay Charnes have embarked on a new journey, launching a sod farm outside of Louisville, Ky. Here, Wilson (right) walks the grounds with partner Marc Messersmith, and they're joined by a suspenders-clad Charnes (this page).

The men behind Superintendent's Choice Sod may be setting some big goals, but they're also putting themselves in position to meet them. Because zoysia grows well in Kentucky's climate, Wilson and Charnes are marketing the zoysia to golf courses within 100 miles of Louisville. They plan to market their bentgrass and

bluegrass over a broader area in the region, Charnes said.

Many people have expressed interest in their business so far, said Wilson, who's responsible for product promotion and sales. But he added their undertaking is not without challenges.

"It's kind of coming along," Wilson said, "but at the same time, it's sometimes

scary. The value of what you're doing is down the road. It's not immediate."

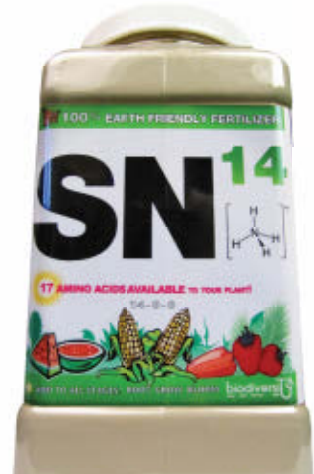
Wilson's looking forward to eventually having that value show itself. He and Charnes have invested a year's worth of labor, not to mention their own money, in the business.

The former supers' bentgrass and bluegrass will be ready to move onto the market this fall. "The real test will be in October," Charnes said. "It's all coming along, looking real good. The most labor intensive would be when we harvest it, ship it and sell it."

"The whole year is a learning curve," Wilson added. "The greatest lesson I've gotten so far is that you're trying to make the best use of your time. Without a doubt, it's easier on paper than in real life, like running a golf course."

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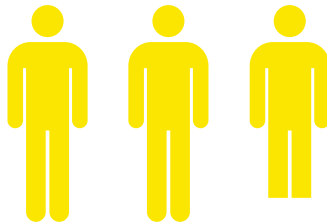
## 60 and Over

*Continued from page 18*

60 percent your age at 60 percent your wage making a 180-degree change in your circumstances. But that doesn't flow off the tongue as smoothly as "half the age, half the wage."

To add insult to injury the new super is touted as better qualified, having graduated from thus and so turf school and worked as an intern at thus and so hoity-toity golf clubs. The superintendent of 30-plus years has only spent that time learning on the job, attending professional conferences and seminars, and honing the skills necessary to be a top-notch turf man.

Put the old guy out to pasture and spin



replaced in the last quarter of his career is a devastating event.

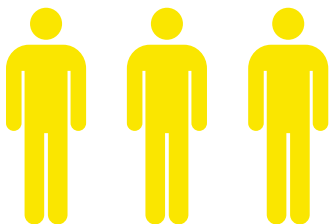
If the average salary of a superintendent is \$81,000, and if an ousted superintendent has approximately 10 years left until retirement age, that's \$810,000 of income lost. At a time when college expenses are over, the weddings are paid for, and the mortgage is gone, a person in this economic class now has a chance to prepare for retirement, long-term health care and the many needs of the last trimester of life.

practical defense is hard to come by.

When all is said and done, where does a superintendent go to find the last 10 years of employment? Current GCSAA statistics show 60 percent of superintendents feel secure in their job position. The average age of a non-certified superintendent is 45; the average age of a CGCS is 49. If 4 out of 10 do not feel secure, how many will find themselves looking for employment? Will they fall prey to the half the age, half the wage scenario? The 180 rule? Where are they going to land that last job when the time comes?

Clearly there are more questions than answers. The point to be taken home is be prepared. Be aware. Employers,

## IN THIS AGE OF SUSTAINABILITY, ARE GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENT POSITIONS SUSTAINABLE THROUGHOUT A 30- OR 40-YEAR CAREER?



it to where the new person looks to be a Cracker Jack superhero and while you're at it, provide a larger budget, more capital funds, and more resources overall — resources that were not made available to the former superintendent, who had learned to overcome the obstacles by clever management and cunning skills.

At this point let me make one thing perfectly clear: There is no stated or implied criticism of the newbie in the turf profession. The focus is to be on personnel management practices and the devalued worth of an experienced golf course superintendent.

### Sustainable profession?

Certainly no one owes anyone a living. But a scenario where a superintendent has served a club for 15 to 20 years and is

Assume this individual is fortunate enough to find a job at half the average superintendent wage. The net impact is still \$405,000 in lost income over 10 years.

Employers would do well to do some long and hard thinking before employment changes are made. Are there alternatives and compromises that would benefit both parties? Or are there alternatives and compromises that both parties can accept?

Mr. Creativity and Dr. Fairness need take the lead in addressing these questions. The likelihood of those two characters doing so are slim and none, and slim just left town. The likelihood of those two characters being players against finance chair Bill Budget, director Don Dollar and GM Mike Money are even less.

The onus clearly does not fall on just the employer. The superintendent must guard against the natural destiny that has been described. But when personality and popularity are strong factors in determining one's job security, not performance, a

stop and think through your personnel management decisions. Superintendent positions are few and far between. Superintendents not only deal with micro environments, they deal with micro employment potentials as well.

In this age of sustainability, are golf course superintendent positions sustainable throughout a 30- or 40-year career? Are you going to be one of the 5.9 percent still to have a job as a 60-year-old in a few years?

Old soldiers never die, they just fade away. But what becomes of old superintendents? Are they a discarded resource of no value like a triple-rinsed pesticide container? The situation has been presented. The resolution need be developed.

Or, it is what it is. Life goes on. ■

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*Charnes, a former golf course superintendent, is the co-owner of Superintendent's Choice Sod ([www.lifeisshortstodit.com](http://www.lifeisshortstodit.com)) in Louisville, Ky.*