

**W**e've heard that there is no such thing as a stupid question. Being journalists, we like to believe that is true... because we ask a lot of questions.

Rather than tackling one issue this month, we set out to have a little fun and answer 10 questions, ranging from serious (When will golf course closings level off?) to silly (Is there such a thing as a superintendent who doesn't drink coffee?). We even asked a tacky question (Which superintendent is making the most money, and what's he pulling down?). If you read that answer, we'll take that as you accepting our apology for being so crass.

We hope you enjoy our questions and answers... and if this just leads to more questions? Even better.



## ? When will these course closings finally level off?

Not that long ago, new golf courses were opening at a pretty steady clip. But last year, the equivalent of 19 courses opened while a record 157 closed down. It's a pretty staggering statistic and one often overlooked by the media when describing the economic fallout of recent years. And while many in the industry remain optimistic, citing new player and rounds played statistics, the truth is, courses are still closing and folks are still losing jobs. Surely the bleeding has to stop soon.

"I believe the majority of course closings are already behind us," says Jon Peterson, president of Peterson Economics, a Washington state-based real estate economics consulting firm. "But closings will likely continue to outnumber openings by a wide margin in the foreseeable future." Peterson notes factors such as the improvement of the real estate market, which is creating the incentive for developers to convert underperforming courses into home sites or other land uses.

Hilda Allen, who has overseen 400 golf course sale transactions through her real estate firm, puts it more simply. "[Golf course closings will level off] when the demand outruns the supply." *Economics 101.* —S.T.

## ? What one product really has superintendents talking?

It's the largest weed problem on golf courses, particularly in cool-season grasses: annual bluegrass. And there just isn't an easy fix.

But, according to researchers testing a new South Korean product not yet registered for the U.S., that's about to change.

PoaCure, with the active ingredient methiozolin, is an herbicide that gradually removes annual and perennial biotypes by postemergent applications (maximum about six times). But superintendents will have to wait to use the product, because U.S. registration isn't expected until 2015. Currently, there are about 160 superintendents nationwide testing the product on greens and fairways.

Suk-Jin Koo, Ph.D., a scientist who was trained in turf weed science at Cornell University, launched methiozolin, which is safe to use on almost all established turfgrasses, in April 2010 in South Korea. Koo discovered the herbicide and started Moghu Research Center to develop it worldwide. PoaCure is being sold in South Korea and is expected to be sold in Japan in 2014.

Moghu has tested the product in the U.S. for several years. Auburn University's Robert Walker, Ph.D., is the first professor to test methiozolin in the U.S. He tested it at Auburn University Turf Facility in the spring of 2009 and at Grand National Golf Club in Opelika, Ala. Extensive research also has been conducted in the Northeast by Virginia Tech's Shawn Askew, Ph.D., and out West by James Baird, Ph.D., at UC Riverside.

"This product is going to change the whole spectrum of *Poa* control in bentgrass greens," Walker says. "It provides near-perfect control in about four months. There's nothing I've ever seen like this. It's fantastic." —J.W.



ILLUSTRATION BY: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL, INC.; PHOTOS COURTESY: GOLFDOM STAFF (TOP); MOGHU RESEARCH CENTER

*Continued on page 22*

## Questions and Answers

Continued from page 21

### ? Which superintendent makes the most money, and what kind of coin is he pulling down?

There's nothing tackier than talking about how much money someone else makes, right?

So we hope that by reading on, that's your way of saying, "I forgive you."

To find the most loaded superintendent in the land, we started with a phone call to the GCSAA. The most recent compensation and benefits report was completed in 2011. Who reported the highest salary?

Sorry — that will remain anonymous, as is the policy of the report (which is a policy we totally agree with.) But Jeff Bollig, GCSAA's senior director of communications, could help us out at least this much: The top 1 percent reported earning a salary of at least \$220,000 a year.

We phoned our pal Joel Jackson, CGCS-Retired, executive director of the Florida GCSA. Maybe he has spotted the nicest set of wheels and can tell us who's driving it?

"Sorry, whoever it is, they're not in the Orlando area," Jackson says.

But he did have this juicy nugget for us — Jackson speculates that the highest-paid superintendents intentionally don't take GCSAA's "comp and ben" report, so they don't skew the numbers.

"I think there are some guys, probably in Naples (Fla.) or in the wealthier areas of New York, and they're making a lot more than anything you'll see in that report," Jackson says. "Of course for those guys, some of that is cost of living — it's so expensive to live in those areas, they have to make a lot of money just to be near the course."

Whoever it is, we're proud of you, and your secret is safe for now.

But now that we've asked the question, we wonder if more people might come forward to try to help us answer it...?

—S.J.

### ? Which super has it best — the superintendent at the municipal, public, private or resort course?

Much like doctors, who work in such diverse settings from Beverly Hills nose job clinics to battlefields in Afghanistan, superintendents also work in greatly different environments. From \$10 green fee munis to the most exclusive private courses, superintendents are charged with managing turf, and staff, under a wide variety of conditions. But the overwhelming majority of superintendents who have worked at all four course types claim the resort course provides the best work environment.

"I definitely feel the resort course superintendent has it best," says Jason Chennault, who has worked as superintendent at many different course types in locations as diverse as Russia, Mexico, Mongolia and L.A.

"Location of work is usually quite nice and the benefits tend to be higher due to the increased amenities," Chennault notes. Add this to the fact that most resort course superintendents aren't bound to the whims of greens committees or worse yet, local government commissioners, and it's easy to see why clocking in at a resort course is one of the best gigs a superintendent can get. —S.T.



### ? Which architect's courses are most superintendent friendly?

This question is always open for debate, but what we kept hearing was that Bill Love has been able to take at least an iota of stress out of the lives of superintendents, thanks to his preference for broad, open spaces. No course is all-out easy to maintain, of course, but superintendents say Love courses often require less maintenance than those designed by other architects.

Rick Owens, superintendent at Laurel Hill Golf Club in Fairfax County, Va., has managed the Love-designed golf course for eight years.

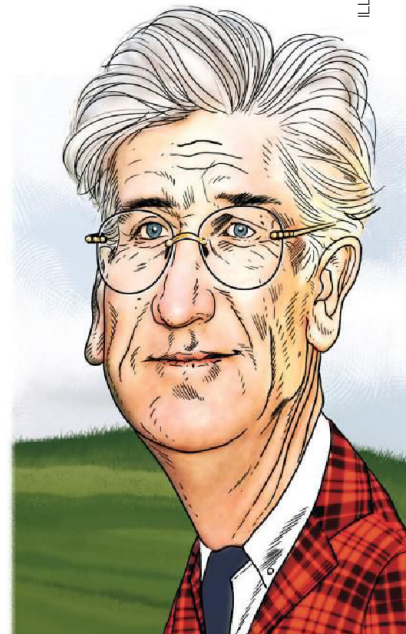
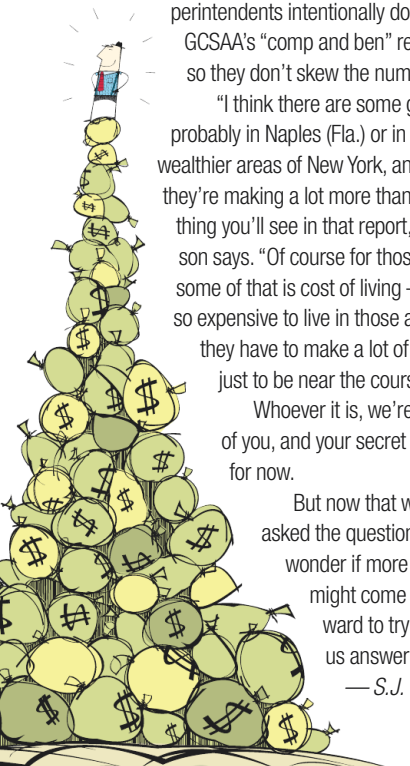
With its wide fairways and large greens, "on the whole, the style of the course is bigger, broader, gentler," Owens says. "That's something that Bill did that makes our job a little bit easier. He didn't leave us a lot of deep slopes, where it's difficult to mow."

Also lending to ease of management, Laurel Hill has few trees and is home to an abundance of native grasses that require little maintenance. And though Laurel Hill's primary Kentucky bluegrass roughs require regular management, its secondary hard fescue and blue grama roughs need mowing once or twice a year.

With 122 sand bunkers, bunker maintenance at Laurel Hill has posed the biggest challenge for Owens and his staff. But when the course invested in a new bunker system this summer, that challenge dissipated.

"A serious rain event used to cost us hundreds of man hours," Owens recalls. "It was really a struggle, pushing the sand up the hill. Now that has pretty much disappeared." —B.G.

Continued on page 24



# The Superintendents Have Spoken!

*Golfdom* is the Market's Clear Choice  
for Breaking News and Analysis



"*Golfdom* is always current. I like the way they have articles that are discussed amongst the superintendent community and, quite often, *Golfdom* is ahead of the information curve."

— *Dave Coote, Wood Ranch Golf Club, Simi Valley, Calif.*



"*Golfdom* does a wonderful job of covering the stories that no other publication covers. There is a lot of great information in *Golfdom* that you just cannot find in other magazines."

— *Jason Busch, Powder Horn Ranch Golf Course, Sheridan, Wyo.*



"The staff is fantastic, and in general it's a very good read—not just for superintendents, but for owners and GMs and board members, the information is relevant for all parties involved in a golf course."

— *Brian Anderson, Nemacolin Woodlands Resort, Ohio, Pa.*



"*Golfdom* is always on the cutting edge in research and has great articles that both turf scientists and groundworkers can read and understand."

— *Robert Carey, Spring Brook Country Club, Morristown, N.J.*



"The best thing about *Golfdom* is information we get on the political issues as well as the technical issues we are being faced with. Also, the State of the Industry Report is huge for us; we have to know where we are headed and what the future holds."

— *Mark Burchfield, Victoria Club, Riverside, Calif.*



"People don't realize the longevity, how many years *Golfdom* has been in operation. They're a little more cutting edge, they speak more of the truth from what you hear in other magazines. *Golfdom* tells it how it is and isn't afraid to cover the issues."

— *Joseph Hubbard, Broken Sound Club, Boca Raton, Fla.*

## Golfdom

## Questions and Answers

Continued from page 22

? Is there such a thing as a superintendent who doesn't drink coffee?

Considering the early (and long) hours they keep, every superintendent drinks coffee, right?

Wrong. We searched, and we found several who say no to Joe — so they do indeed exist.

Take it from David Brandenburg, one of our bold superintendents willing to go on the record and discuss his java-less existence.

The superintendent at Rolling Meadows GC in Fond du Lac, Wis., has worked as a superintendent for 24 years. Yet he's had only two cups 'o Joe in his life. Both times, his grandma made it. And when Grandma pours you coffee, you drink it.

"I drank it down to be polite, but I hated every second of it," Brandenburg recalls with a wince. "I don't care for the smell of it, I don't care for the taste of it. It just doesn't appeal to me."

The 46-year-old Brandenburg hasn't had a sip of coffee since he was 21. He clocks in every day at 5 a.m. and gets straight to work. But he doesn't shun caffeine entirely. He holds off on it until about 10 a.m., when time calls for a "midday pick-me-up."

"I take my caffeine cold and black," Brandenburg says of his preference for Diet Coke. "I don't have the desire to drop caffeine altogether. Sometimes it feels better just to have it."

Kind of like Grandma's coffee. —*B.G.*



? Which architect's courses are the most challenging to maintain?

Jack Nicklaus's designs have put more than a few superintendents to the test. Just ask Tom Egelhoff, who's managed one Nicklaus course or another for the past 20 years.

"If I had to think of one thing that characterizes Nicklaus courses, I'd say it's associated with bunkers," says Egelhoff, director of agronomy at The Club at Las Campanas in Santa Fe, N.M., home to two Nicklaus courses.

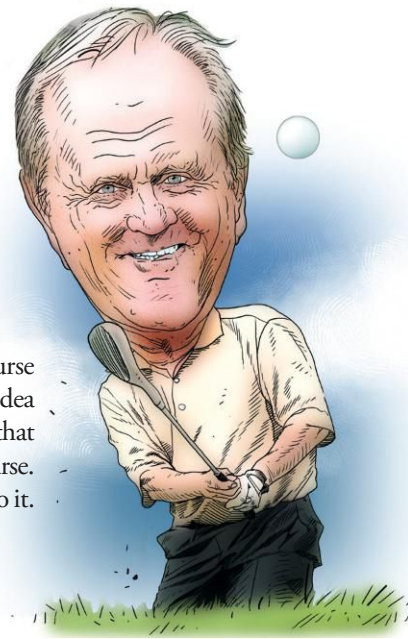
Bunker maintenance often is more laborious than mowing turf Egelhoff says, "because you have to do it by hand. It's more time consuming." And because Nicklaus bunkers often are on steep slopes, using a riding mower around them only leads to more maintenance, Egelhoff explains.

Around bunker faces, therefore, Egelhoff's crew uses fly mowers, which float.

Using fly mowers around bunker faces "requires some training," Egelhoff says. "You're on a slope, it can be wet, you have to be very careful."

But once you manage one Nicklaus course, it's easy to manage others, says Egelhoff, who first started working Nicklaus courses 20 years ago at Muirfield Village Golf Club.

"It's a pretty consistent feel from Nicklaus course to Nicklaus course," he says. "You kind of get an idea of what he's looking for, and it's really easy to take that knowledge and transfer it to another Nicklaus course. It takes a lot of labor, but I've grown accustomed to it. It's what I'm used to." —*B.G.*



? What snack stand torments its crew the most, thanks to its delicious food?



The ones at The Olympic Club in San Francisco. There are three — one on the Lake Course, one on the Ocean Course and one at the driving range — run by an outside contractor, the Parrish family. The burger dogs are extremely popular among members, and guests who've played there always ask for them when they return.

In 1950, Bill Parrish opened Hot Dog Bills, named after him and his wife, Billie. They set up a small trailer outside the club and sold burgers and dogs to golfers. To save money, Bill used hot dog buns for the burgers so he only needed one bun for everything on the menu. The golfers loved the burger dogs and eventually, the club invited Bill to set up a stand on the golf course.

Now, Bill's daughter Candy runs the renowned snack stands. The fresh ground meat is delivered daily, cooked between medium and medium rare, and seasoned with salt and pepper. Condiments include sweet relish and sour pickles.

Amazingly, even though Pat Finlen, CGCS, director of golf course maintenance operations, has been employed by the club 10 years, he's only eaten one burger dog.

"I had it the first month I worked here," Finlen says. "I loved the one I had but realized then the last thing I needed was to get hooked on eating burger dogs every day. Everyone on staff likes the burger dogs, but staff can't eat at the snack stands, so they typically aren't eating burger dogs."

So we encourage the staff to just sneak them. —*J.W.*

## ? Who is the most famous living superintendent?

There's nothing to divide a room like a popularity contest.

So for this one, we turned to our 1,000 Twitter followers and the thousands of recipients of our *Golfdom* Insider e-newsletter and asked. We simply asked the above question, sat back and watched.

We got many responses, all of them great superintendents from around the country. Just an example of some of the suggestions:

- ▶ Robert V. Mitchell, FarmLinks
- ▶ Bob Zoller, Monterey Peninsula CC
- ▶ Mark Michaud, Shinnecock Hills GC
- ▶ John Zimmers, Oakmont CC
- ▶ Matt Shaffer, Merion GC
- ▶ Bob Farren, Pinehurst Resort
- ▶ Fred Klauk, TPC Sawgrass (Retired)

- ▶ Ken Mangum, Atlanta Athletic Club
- ▶ Frank Dobie, Sharon GC
- ▶ Darren Davis, Olde Florida GC

Yet one name was mentioned more than any other: Paul R. Latshaw.

And for good reason. Though retired as a superintendent for years now, a look at his résumé is like a golfer's wishlist: Augusta National, Oakmont, Congressional and Winged Foot, to name a few. And all those majors, starting with the 1978 PGA... four years watching up close as the green jacket was awarded at the Masters... the year Ernie Els won the 1997 U.S. Open at Congressional was pretty special, too, eh?

Along the way, Latshaw has seen many of his former assistants move on to some of the most elite jobs in the industry. Nothing makes a person more famous than a legacy.

So our hat is off to Mr. Latshaw as we acknowledge him as the most famous living superintendent. Though retired, you are certainly not forgotten. —S.J.



## ? What is one thing you can start doing today to be a better environmental steward?

For this one, we went to our friend and environmental editor Anthony Williams, CGCS, MG, at the Stone Mountain Resort and author of "The Environmental Stewardship Toolkit," for his opinion. And this is what he told us:

"Benchmark! Benchmarking is the one thing that superintendents at any type of course or skill level can do to instantly impact their environmental stewardship.

Benchmarking is the gathering of critical data such as water use, chemical and fertilizer applications, fuel consumption, number/type of fledglings hatched in nest boxes (or number and type of nest boxes), water quality test results and hundreds of other measurable stewardship items. This data can then be researched to gather past history. These benchmarks will become the very cornerstones that your stewardship efforts will be measured by.

Benchmarking gives you definitive answers to questions such as, 'How much water did we save this year compared to last year?' and 'How much money did we save in chemicals by converting two acres into native grasses?'

Benchmarking today will allow you to make great environmental decisions in the future and prove the value of your environmental programs. You can compare similar items by year over year or other parameters or even use this data for environmental certifications and industry contests."

Thanks Anthony! While we had him on the horn, we also found out that he is another superintendent who doesn't drink coffee. But we didn't ask him if resort supers had it best — knowing Anthony's always-positive attitude, we knew he couldn't be trusted to give us a straight answer! ■

If you find some of our answers to be — putting it politely — a pile of fertilizer, tell us! (But please be nice. We're nice people, really. Except for Gary in I.T.) Shoot us an email or visit the *Golfdom* Daily, [www.golfdom.blogspot.com](http://www.golfdom.blogspot.com), and join the discussion! And if you have suggestions for questions to ask in the future, we want to hear them!

# WHAT'S **OLD** IS **NEW** AGAIN

MODERN TECHNOLOGY has done wonders for the care of golf courses. But no matter how advanced the tools become, Mother Nature finds a way to complicate things. Instead of finding a new solution, maybe it's better to return to an old method.

That's exactly what Chris Deariso did when he was faced with an aggressive thatch problem that was threatening the health of the greens at McArthur Golf Club in Hobe Sound, Fla. Deariso, the former superintendent at McArthur (he recently became the superintendent at Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte, N.C.), had a growing thatch problem on the course's TifEagle ultradwarf bermudagrass greens.

"That's a problem with those ultradwarfs," says Wayne Branthwaite, vice president of Nick Price Golf Course Design (Nick Price is a partner at McArthur). "They're inherently aggressive, more aggressive than the old dwarfs were."

Deariso spent three years learning how TifEagle responded to various treatments.

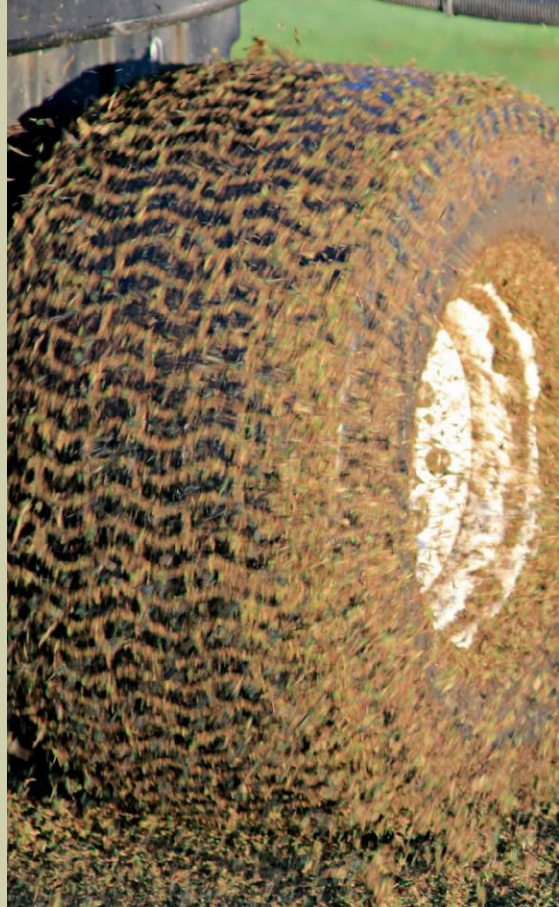
"The ultradwarfs are still a relatively new grass compared to the old dwarfs," Branthwaite says. "People are still learning about them. During the past 10 years, what Chris learned and what we've realized at McArthur is they're extremely aggressive. You have to be aggressive when treating them. If you don't, you'll pay the price."

Each year Deariso became more aggressive with verticutting, topdress-

*Continued on page 28*

Chris Deariso implements an aggressive program to combat a difficult thatch problem.

BY DAN JACOBS



ALL PHOTOS BY: WAYNE BRANTHWAITE



**1.** A close-up look at fairway mowers, outfitted with verticut blades, going to town on what many people considered some of the best greens in Florida. “(The members) couldn’t understand why we wanted to rip them up,” Branthwaite says, “because we’ve had such fantastic greens.”

**2.** Triplex mowers verticut the greens in two directions to lift and cut the remaining stems. “It’s a labor-intensive process, but we were still able to do our normal summer work,” Deariso, now the superintendent at Quail Hollow, says.

**3.** There was no green left on these greens upon completion of the de-thatching process.



## Thatch War

*Continued from page 26*

ing and core aeration. No matter how hard he battled, the thatch worsened.

“You lose ground every year in the battle to control thatch,” Deariso says. “After 10 years, we had an excessive layer of thatch. We thought we had to do something.”

It’s not that the greens were in bad shape or that McArthur’s members were complaining. It’s that the thatch was growing stems horizontally that were several inches long and tightly packed together.

“Over time, the grass becomes softer or more puffy,” Deariso says. “As it became more puffy, the mower blades were starting to dig in. When we were at extremely low mowing heights below .100, to .080, we’d scalp. Every year we’d have to raise our mowing heights a little bit higher to prevent the scalping.”

Deariso began with a heavy verticutting and topdressing program during the growing season.

“We were trying to do the best we could to control it, but because of the growth habits of these grasses, you lose ground from Day One,” he says.

That couldn’t go on forever, so Deariso sought an alternative. He wanted to avoid regrassing the greens, which would force the course to close for some time at a high cost. There was also a concern recently because three area courses were shipped contaminated sprigs, Branthwaite says.

“We were apprehensive to go out and buy grass from a supplier, because there is always that unknown of what you’re getting,” Deariso says.

That risk, coupled with the expense, led Deariso to a less expensive option. He intensified his aggressive dethatching program.

“It’s a labor-intensive process, but we were still able to do our normal summer work,” he says. (For full details see sidebar above).

“When we looked at what he was doing, a lot of people were cautious and fearful of what the results were going to be,” Branthwaite says. “I said, ‘Chris, I’ve seen it before. This is what used to happen.’”

Branthwaite might have seen something similar back in his early days as a certified superintendent in



(Top) A close-up of the soil profile, showing the thatch problem. (Middle) What the greens looked like after Step 1, the fairway mower verticut. (Bottom) A look at the green upon completion of the 9 steps.

## TAKING CONTROL

Chris Deariso, former superintendent at McArthur Golf Club, developed an aggressive dethatching process to fight aggressively growing TifEagle ultradwarf bermudagrass.

The process was as effective as it was difficult to explain to members who were happy with the quality of the greens.

“We had some of the top three or four greens in the country in the eight years Chris was there,” says Wayne Branthwaite, vice president of Nick Price Golf Course Design, and a former certified superintendent. “None of our members could understand it because we’ve had such fantastic greens. They couldn’t understand why we would want to rip them up. You can’t explain those things to members.

That’s one of the reasons we did the YouTube video. That’s the only way we could show and explain to them what needed to be done.”

### THE PROCESS

**Step 1.** It begins with a fairway mower, fitted with verticut blades. The knives are spaced

1 in. apart and 0.5 in. deep. The green is verticut in four different directions.

**Step 2.** A blower is hitched to a utility cart, and the material is blown into windrows so it can be picked up and removed from the green.

**Step 3.** A triplex verticuts the greens in two directions to lift and cut the remaining stems.

**Step 4.** A walk-behind mower cuts more stems raised from the verticutter. Buckets collect and remove material from the green.

**Step 5.** The greens are brushed again to lift the remaining stems, which are cut with a walk-behind mower.

**Steps 6-8.** The same process of verticutting, cutting, brushing and cutting is repeated another three times, removing the layers of thatch down to the soil.

**Step 9.** The final step is to hollow-tine the greens using a 5/8-in. coring tine. The cores are brushed back into the green, and the process is finished.

To see the process in action and hear Deariso explain it, view the video on YouTube at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uSt8b\\_ZEWs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uSt8b_ZEWs).

South Africa, but few others recalled seeing something like it, and Deariso and Branthwaite had to explain to McArthur’s members what was going on. In essence, they removed several layers of thatch down to the soil level.

The grass has returned since, and thatch is no longer an issue.

“We’ve given ourselves another couple of years by reducing the thatch and continuing to manage the thatch aggressively,” Branthwaite says.

Deariso believes the intense dethatching process won’t need to be done for several years, and it beats having to regrass every 10 years.

“We like to be on the cutting edge of some of the things we do — some of the practices and processes we go through,” Deariso says. “We didn’t know it was going to work. We practiced, and we felt confident. We did it, and it worked.” ■

*Dan Jacobs is a writer based in Cleveland, Ohio.*





BY SETH JONES

# GOLF Guilt-Free

**K**evin Sylvester is concerned for his fellow man. His concern? Men aren't getting as much time on the links as they deserve.

Sylvester (pictured above), author of the book "The Married Man's Guide to Golf," has created something of a golf manifesto, replete with a "golf pre-nup."

"I was thinking about how married guys can get out to play more golf and I thought, man, it would have been nice to have a pre-nuptial agreement where this was all addressed," Sylvester says. "Most married guys read this and say, 'Wow, I wish I would have had this thing signed!' Then there'd be no golf grief when you get home after four hours-plus of golfing."

The book (available as an e-book now at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com), and in print around the holidays) is a mix of humorous and serious thoughts on the challenges married men, especially those with children, have getting on the golf course these days. Sylvester is married with three children, and though he doesn't

Author of "The Married Man's Guide to Golf" offers help to get the married guys back out on the links.

have a signed golf pre-nup himself, he does golf more than any of his married friends. Though his book is humorous, he says guilt is a serious problem for golf.

"It's a problem for the future of golf, and the business of golf," Sylvester says. "We all know that golf enriches our lives, and it even teaches us values. The more we can play golf and get people playing golf, the better the game will be."

Sylvester says he's golfed with a few superintendents in his time, and he encourages them to get out on the links more as well.

"Get away from your own course and go play somewhere else. Go play with other superintendents at their courses, so you get the perspective of what he's doing and where (his course is) at," Sylvester says. "Because if you're at your course, you're still at work, people know who you

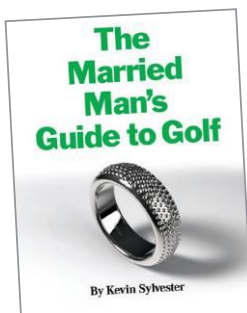
are, they can still reach you... it's not like you got away and you're out to relax."

Sylvester closes his book with 18 rules a married man should abide by when playing golf. Those rules include "never lie to play golf," "don't lie when you play golf" and "never let your wife know how much money you spend on golf."

"She wouldn't want you to know how much money she spent on shoes. There are some things you don't want to know," Sylvester says. "That's fine, live with it, and you can move on with her not knowing how much you spent on golf."

And lest Sylvester makes readers think he wants to keep women away from the course, there is his final recommendation.

"If all else fails, get your wife to take up the game," Sylvester says. "In our later years, our wives are going to be our golf partners, the one you can count on. It's a funny look at it, but it seriously is meant to get your spouse into the game." ■



# THE Fourth Wall

**T**o say Armand LeSage is a character doesn't describe him accurately. To say LeSage plays characters isn't quite accurate either. LeSage is best described as a gift to the frenetic and demanding world of golf course management. The irony is you can find him on the stage preparing for his next big role instead of on the course.

LeSage spent 43 years working seven days a week in the golf industry, and while the word "retire" may not exist in his vocabulary, he's spending his retirement years making up for lost time under the spotlight.

In 2010, LeSage was discovered by actor and director Chuck Marra. At the time, LeSage was working on a landscape project in Lake Arrowhead, Calif., which is in the San Bernadino Mountains, as part of LeSage Consulting.

Marra proposed LeSage be part of a play called "Light Up The Sky" by playwright Moss Hart. The role was a very drunken Shriner.

Armand LeSage trades in years as a golf course superintendent for a passion on the stage.

BY KATY IBSEN



LeSage recently caught up with some friends, but they didn't want to hear, speak or see the current state of his golf game.