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“We can use this additional time as assistants to become even better at what we do, to ultimately become better superintendents when our time finally comes.”

**MATT NEFF**, *assistant superintendent, Wedgewood G&CC, Powell, Ohio*

## What you can control

**I**f it's true that when the going gets tough, the tough get going, then those of us in the golf course maintenance industry haven't stopped going for the past several years. With the country's economic woes having a dramatic effect on the golf industry, and the extreme weather conditions that have been seen in many parts of the country over the last few years, it has indeed been a difficult time to be in this business.

One of the often-mentioned consequences of the recession has been the loss of golf courses, and thus, job opportunities. As a result of these lost opportunities, many assistant golf course superintendents are struggling to take the next step in their careers.

We've all heard that we need to network, make our résumés stand out, create personal websites, etc. We should do some or all of these things, but we have no control over the end result of these efforts. It's all great advice, but doing these things

guarantees nothing except that we could end up spending a ton of time and money on networking opportunities, résumé services, and website design only to be in the exact same place three years from now, albeit with one fancy website that gets visited maybe a dozen times a year.

But there is one aspect of this career stalemate that we can control and even use to our advantage. We can use this additional time as assistant superintendents to become even better at what we do and ultimately become better superintendents when our time finally comes.

We have our routines down — as much as it's possible to

in this business. We know the course, the crew and our superintendent's expectations. And, now that we're no longer consumed with figuring out the basics, we have the opportunity to focus on the finer points of this profession.

We can concentrate more on the effects of agronomic programs and practices, management and budgeting skills, communication skills, and even learning more about how the other departments within the club function.

To take the next step, we are going to have to convince someone that we have most of the answers and know how to figure out the rest. This additional time provides us with an invaluable opportunity to become even better prepared for the day we become

superintendents. I've heard it said before that moving up to a superintendent can be a bit nerve-racking at first. Further honing our skills and knowledge can reduce the stress associated with the transition and the learning curve that comes with a new job and, likely, a new course.

Equally as important as focusing on how to better equip ourselves for future success is remembering that we presently have a job to do. Like me, you may have found yourself occasionally wondering if the frequently unrelenting schedule that we all keep is worth it, given the lack of advancement opportunities. But we need to be keenly aware that our superintendents are still counting on us to get the job done every day and to set an example for the crew. A bad attitude from a supervisor can spread like wildfire, especially when the days get long and everyone is tired.

While we may not always be happy with the rate at which our careers are progressing, we are still doing the job we love. Every day we have the opportunity to learn more and every day we are presented the challenge of being better than the day before.

That keeps me fired up and, if you're in a similar career situation, I hope it helps you, too.

**Matt Neff** is assistant superintendent at Wedgewood G&CC in Powell, Ohio, and *Golfdom's* newest columnist.



# THE GOLFDOM REPORT



**From feelings on the Obama administration to job satisfaction, *Golfdom's* readers share their thoughts and feelings on the state of their profession.**

BY SETH JONES AND BETH GERACI

Good news, bad news.

You still love your job, but you don't expect things to get any easier. Your rounds were up last year, but your pay isn't great. You're optimistic about 2013, but at the same time, you're worried about your future, especially retirement.

These are just some of the things we learned with our late-2012 survey of *Golfdom* readers. We received 659 responses to our 22-question survey. The results of that survey are in these pages, along with some opinions from your colleagues from around the country. We also included some historical results to compare how the mood of the industry may have changed over the last several years.

And even though we had the bias of this being our own survey, we were still thrilled to see that 45 percent of you chose *Golfdom* as the best magazine in the industry. The reason for our success? We have the best readers in the industry.

Read on to see how those readers feel about the current state of the industry.

COVER PHOTO: SHARPSHUTTER DREAMSTIME



# STILL SUPER AT 60?

When pondering the long-term future of a career, most superintendents seem positive, despite the numbers.

BY SETH JONES

In the July 2012 issue of *Golfdom* we published perhaps our most controversial story of the year, “The 5.9%,” by former superintendent Jay Charnes. In that story, Charnes pondered why so few superintendents — only 5.9 percent, according to GCSAA statistics — are age 60 and over.

“Granted, people generally retire in their 60s. But statistically this looks like a good many superintendents disappear as they reach their golden years,” Charnes wrote in the article. “If they are not retired or playing golf at the Pearly Gates Golf Club, where are they?”

Despite the statistical data that showed otherwise, 52 percent of readers felt strongly that they would still be working superintendents at age 60.

“I have thought about it, and I think that story got a lot of people thinking about it, wondering if they need to start looking over their shoulder more once they hit 50,” says Bethpage State Park Golf Course superintendent Andy Wilson. “Would I like to be a superintendent at age 60? Yes. But maybe at a sleepier place... a 9-hole public, or an 18-hole public, where the demands aren’t so tough.”

Jackson Reiswig, superintendent at the Coral Creek Club in Placida, Fla., was doubtful about his chances of being a superintendent at age 60. He feels he’s destined to be in the landscaping industry by then.

“(Landscaping) seems to be where everyone falls off to,” Reiswig says. “Being a superintendent is pretty limited to branch off from, which is unfortunate,

because our skills are vast.”

Reiswig, speaking frankly, feels that in 10 years, maybe he’ll be burned out.

“We are continually put under pressure to do more with less,” he says. “As this cycle continues, it puts a strain on the psyche. Ten years from now, I may not be so keen on dealing with the challenges. Plus, there’s always going to be that younger guy, wanting the challenge, willing to put in the ridiculous hours.”

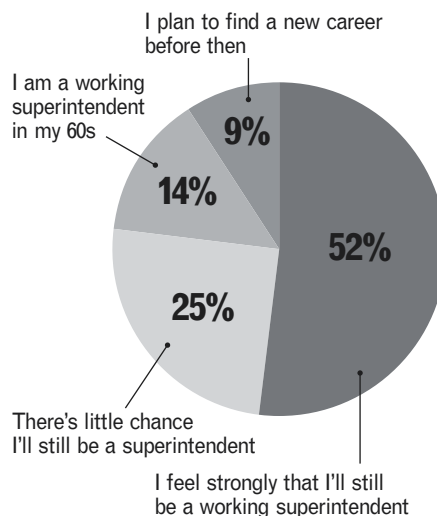
Reiswig says that the changing of the guard is happening before his eyes.

“We don’t think about it because we don’t want to,” he says. “Go to a chapter meeting and you see the changing of the guard. In 20, 30 years, that’s us.”

Steve Sarro, superintendent at Pinehurst Country Club in Denver, was conflicted when he first considered if he still wanted to be a superintendent for another 20-plus years.

“If I’m still a superintendent at age 60, that will mean I’m still outside, I’m still doing the things I like,” Sarro says. “The guys I know who are still superinten-

## DO YOU THINK YOU’LL STILL BE A SUPERINTENDENT AT AGE 60?



dents at that age, they do a good job and have a good program. So if I can make it that far... then yes, I do hope I’m still a superintendent at age 60.”

One thing he doesn’t want to do: become a consultant.

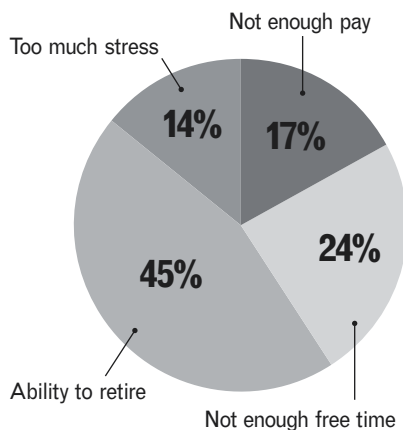
“I don’t know if I could be a consultant or sell turf equipment. Plus, who needs another consultant?” Sarro wonders. “If I’m not a superintendent, hopefully my butt is on a boat, sailing around the world.”

Wilson acknowledges that someday, someone younger will have his position at New York’s famed Bethpage Park. And he’s fine with that.

“Everyone who has come into this job, they have it in their bones. When you get to that age, you might want to get back to just cutting grass,” Wilson says. “At a place like Bethpage, I get bogged down with the administrative side of the job. I certainly want to be working at 60, but maybe let the young guns take over at a place like this. It would be ideal to be somewhere a little quieter, where I could ride my mower off into the sunset...”

“Or in our industry,” he laughs, “into the sunrise.”

## WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST PERSONAL CONCERN?



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# FOUR MORE YEARS

With the re-election of Barack Obama, readers are concerned that these next four years will be tough ones for the economy of golf.

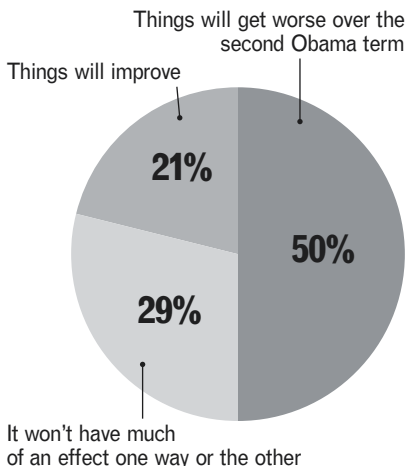
BY SETH JONES

"I look at these next four years about the same as I look at hitting a 230-yard 3-wood into high wind... it could turn out really good, but it probably isn't going to," laughs Anthony Williams, CGCS at the 36-hole Stone Mountain (Ga.) Golf Club.

*Golfdom's* readers seem to agree with the magazine's environmental editor. Half of those surveyed said they expected the next four years to be that 3-wood into the wind, while only 21 percent were feeling positive about the next four years.

"If we get good weather, we'll see more rounds played, but until everyone feels more comfortable about the economy and their personal situation, the golfers won't be as quick to get out here to play," Williams laments. "Ask the man on the street who is paying more in taxes; if he was a once-a-week golfer, he is now a once-a-month golfer."

## HOW WILL FOUR MORE YEARS OF THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION AFFECT THE GOLF ECONOMY?



Still, there are those who remain positive about these next four years. Conrad Broussard, CGCS at the 81-hole St. James Plantation in Southport, N.C., which is entirely Audubon Certified, feels there may be an opportunity for golf under the Obama administration.

"He seems to be investing in the green industry heavily, and I think golf is more and more being seen as a green business," Broussard says. "Hopefully we can somehow use that to our advantage."

Golf course architect Tom Marzolf appreciates the fact that Obama is well known as a player of the game.

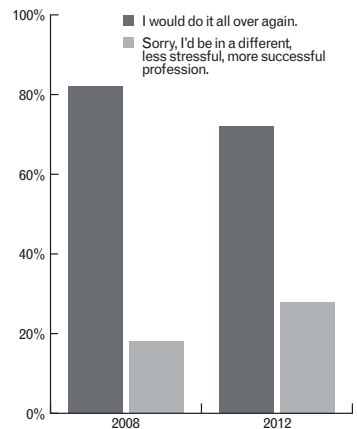
"My own perception is, he doesn't shy away from the game. He plays on vacation. I like the fact that he is not afraid to play the game and let it be a part of his life," he says. "I saw a show on the killing of Osama bin Laden — Obama played 9 holes on the day he told the team to go after (bin Laden) because he needed time to think. It's great that he utilizes the golf course as a place to make important decisions."

Almost 30 percent of readers surveyed said it doesn't make a difference who is in the White House. And you can bet most of that 30 percent expect these next four years to be tough ones. That's what Rhett Evans, CEO of the GCSAA, is preparing for.

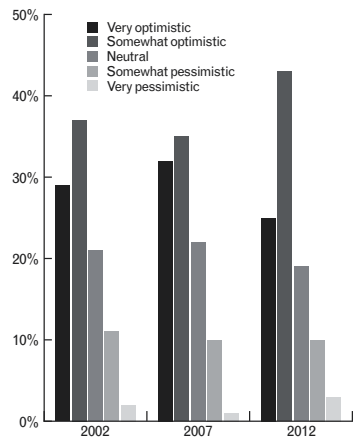
"I think the best way to sum it up is you're still going to see the status quo," Evans says. "With the democrats remaining in control, but the republicans in the House of Representatives, there will be a lot of debates, but they're just going to kick the can down the road with no real decisions."

Continued on page 28

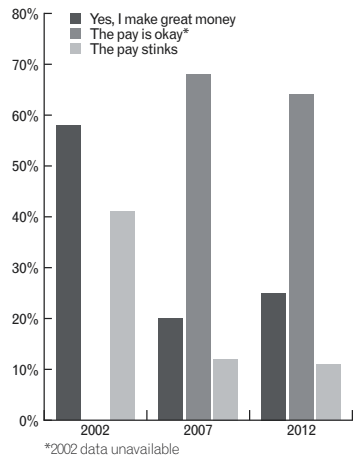
## KNOWING WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT THE INDUSTRY TODAY, WOULD YOU DO IT ALL OVER AGAIN?



## HOW OPTIMISTIC ARE YOU ABOUT THE ECONOMIC HEALTH OF YOUR FACILITY?



## ARE YOU FAIRLY PAID FOR THE WORK YOU DO?





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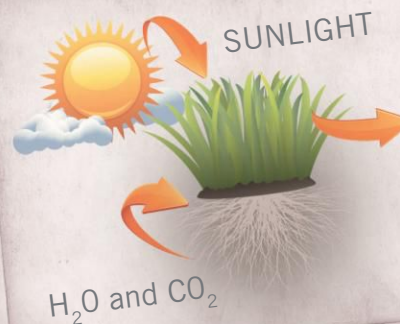
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# TURF SCHOOLED

With economic impacts still lingering in the golf industry, superintendents are gently dissuading their kids from following their lead.

BY BETH GERACI

**S**cott Ramsay, CGCS at Yale Golf Course in New Haven, Conn., is with his son, making the long drive to the University of South Carolina, where his son is a senior.

“What would I say? Good luck,” says Ramsay. “My optimism of the industry is a bit strained, but still strong.”

If it were the 1990s, it would be a different story, says Ramsay, who’s worked in greenkeeping for 30 years. But it’s not the ‘90s. And though his son, 23, was Ramsay’s intern on the course last summer, his degree won’t be in turf.

“It’s going to be pretty tough in this business for the next four or five years,” Ramsay says. “That being said, it’s like every industry.”

As Ramsay’s telling his son “Good luck,” Rob Daniel, CGCS at Rivertowne Country Club in Mt. Pleasant, S.C., is telling his kids, “Go to law school.” “No,” he adds, “I would support my kids in whatever they wanted to do. But I think it’s going to be increasingly difficult to break into the industry, because it’s a shrinking industry.”

Daniel, 34, is father to a 4-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son. When it comes time for them to enter the work force, Daniel will encourage them to pursue a field that offers a broader range of opportunities than golf course management does.

“As soon as they come out of college, it would be an extremely difficult road to get to the superintendent positions,” Daniel says. “There are exceptions to everything, but it’s just a difficult task. I wouldn’t want my kids to become stuck in an industry.”

Dave Davies, CGCS at TPC Stonebrae in Hayward, Calif., is right there with him.

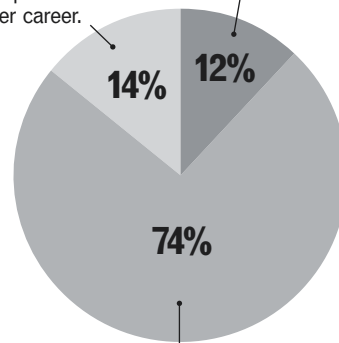
“I have advised all four of my kids to try to experience a wider range of disciplines,” says Davies, whose degree is in business administration, not in turf. “If something lights a fire for you, pursue it. But I think a broad-based education is so much more important, because you learn so many more skills, so many different talents.”

There is “a glut” of trained individuals in the 25 to 40 age bracket searching for superintendent positions, Davies says, and that means there are a lot of people

## YOUR SON SAYS HE WANTS TO GO TO TURF SCHOOL SO HE CAN BE JUST LIKE YOU. WHAT DO YOU SAY?

I tell him he's crazy and convince him to pursue another career. 14%

I advise him on which turf school to attend. 12%



I tell him that it's a tough gig, but if that's what he wants, he should pursue it.

with specialized skills who are competing for a limited number of jobs.

“How would I feel if I spent four years focusing on one area and then had to take a job as a spray tech out of college when my focus is on being a superintendent? Not good,” he says.

But Chris Vincent, superintendent at The Reserve at Lake Keowee in Sunset, S.C., sees ample opportunity in this business, even down the road for his two young girls.

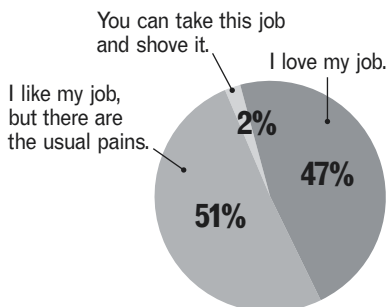
“If they wanted to follow in my footsteps, I would encourage them,” Vincent says. “The game of golf these days is continuing to advance, and I think women in the profession have an advantage, because... you tend to pay more attention to what they’re doing.”

With the business skills and product knowledge superintendents develop, Vincent asserts they definitely have job options in turf outside of greenkeeping, such as club general manager, sales and marketer.

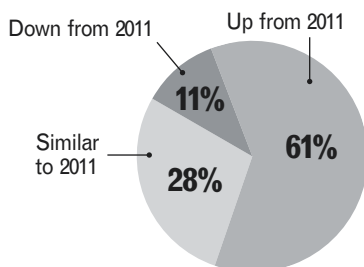
Vincent will support his daughters in whatever they decide to do. “As long as my kids are loving what they do, that’s all I care about it,” he says. “And if they enjoy being a superintendent, even better.”

*Continued on page 30*

### DO YOU LIKE YOUR JOB?



### WHAT WERE ROUNDS PLAYED LIKE AT YOUR COURSE IN 2012?







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# SOCIABLE SUPERS

In the heart of the Information Age, some superintendents are using blogs, Twitter and smart phones to get the word out.

BY BETH GERACI

**J**ohn Davis is excited. Today, the director of agronomy at Secession Golf Club in Beaufort, S.C., is finally launching his course blog. "I've been wanting to do this for a year but it was hard to find the time," he says.

Davis is one of 8.4 percent of superintendents who said they use blogs regularly to promote their clubs.

"I do love my blog," says the superintendent at Tacoma (Wash.) Country and Golf Club. He started his blog in May 2011 to communicate with members and his green committee.

Since then, the blog has garnered 37,000 hits. And because "a picture speaks a thousand words," Kachmarek ensures the blog is heavy on photos.

If course repairs need to be made, Kachmarek's photos help him easily get projects approved by members and the green committee. "The visual image tells the whole story," he says.

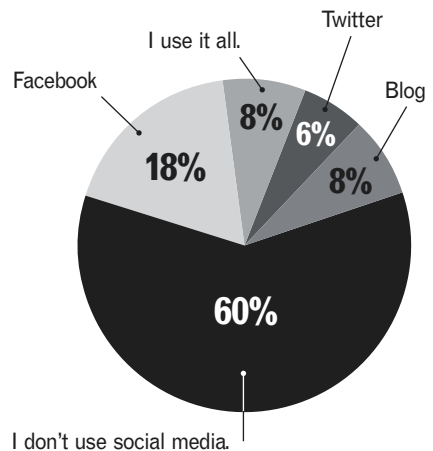
As for Davis, now that his own blog is up and running, he feels more empowered. "This is mine. I'm in the driver's seat," he says.

Secession is a national club, so its 700 members live all over the country. Given those logistics, Davis plans to use his blog to inform and establish a relationship with them.

"The issue I've had here is, the pro shop is the first point of contact," he says. "I've told members to contact me and they don't, so now I want to develop that relationship."

Davis also uses an iPad on the course and says it's the best thing he's ever

## WHAT FORMS OF SOCIAL MEDIA DO YOU USE FOR WORK?



bought in his life. He uses it mostly to do research on the course and keep track of his schedule.

"I love the convenience of it," he says. "You're carrying your personal computer around with you everywhere you go."

Kachmarek takes photos with his iPhone and iPad, then uploads them to his blog on the spot. He also uses the devices to determine weather conditions and control his irrigation system remotely from any point on the course.

Having seen his cyberspace following grow exponentially, Kachmarek knows how to take advantage of electronic media. Each has its place, he says. For him, Facebook is for friends and family, and Twitter is for communicating with fellow superintendents.

"I don't want to know that you just went to the bathroom," he says. "I'll tweet something that will stimulate conversation."

Most surprising to Myers is how far and fast word spreads through social media. "If you post," he says, "you'd be amazed how many people from all over the world see it and comment on it. That opened my eyes." ©

**“ I’VE TOLD MY MEMBERS TO CONTACT ME AND THEY DON’T, SO NOW I WANT TO DEVELOP THAT RELATIONSHIP.”**

**JOHN DAVIS**

Gary Myers, CGCS at The Sagamore Club in Noblesville, Ind., developed Sagamore's blog when he arrived there three years ago, when course blogs were just a blip on the radar.

He's one of just 7.8 percent of greenkeepers who said they use all forms of social media for work. He has linked his blog, Twitter and Facebook accounts, using them to inform his members of course projects, playing conditions and scheduled maintenance.

"We try to give them a heads up before they go out and play," he says.

Joel Kachmarek describes himself as someone who is "big into blogging."

