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“From an environmental sustainability point of view, it almost does sound like a ‘silver bullet’ solution. In the real world however, even silver needs polishing to keep it looking good.”

JOEL JACKSON, *Senior Contributing Editor*

Seashore paspalum Right plant for the right place

Seashore paspalum turfgrasses certainly offer a new option for golf course turf, but like all those that came before and those that will come after, there is no “silver bullet” turfgrass. The only places I know where “silver bullets” exist are in the Lone Ranger’s and werewolf hunters’ guns. In the world of golf and sports turf management, the best solution is “the right plant in the right place!”

The hard part is finding that “right plant” for your place. In the northern states, where cool to cold weather prevails, we have the bentgrasses, bluegrasses and fescues. In the southern states, bermudagrasses have generally prevailed over the years, with some zoysia varieties also in the mix.

Seashore paspalum offers another choice for warmer climates. Other attributes include: higher salt tolerance, better color retention, tolerance of low temperatures, less water and less nitrogen required and better tolerance to low-light conditions.

The modern varieties of seashore paspalum, released from 1999 to 2012, include

SeaIsle 1, SeaIsle 2000, SeaDwarf, Salam, SeaIsle Supreme, Platinum TE and Sea Star.

John Holmes, owner of Atlas Turf Co., says there are about 300 courses worldwide using seashore paspalum. “Because of the low-light tolerance of the paspalum grasses, they are most often chosen for use in Southeast Asia due to the lack of bright sunlight during the monsoon season.”

In the U.S., this turf is found most often in coastal locations from Texas to as far north as Virginia Beach.

Seashore paspalum is also salt tolerant. This allows the construction of courses in places where fresh water may not be available either physically or politically.

Courses in the Bahamas and Caribbean are natural locations for this grass. In Florida, some courses with paspalum use deep wells to pump brackish water from the Lower Hawthorne Formation.

From an environmental sustainability point of view, it almost does sound like a “silver bullet” solution. In the real world however, even silver needs polishing to keep it looking good. The same is true with seashore paspalum.

One exception in Florida is a higher potential for disease activity in paspalum varieties versus bermudagrass. Some courses will program more fungicide applications as part of a preventative program, not normally needed on ber-

mudagrass, except in cases of overseeding.

But generalized statements can always be contradicted. Tim Hiers, superintendent at the Old Collier GC in Naples, had discussed disease management with Jim Torba, from his time at the Wilderness GC in Naples, Fla. Torba said he never had to apply a fungicide on his SeaIsle 1000 turf.

One weakness of the paspalum turf that was verified by superintendents Ricky Reeves of the Miami Beach GC and Stuart Taylor of the Plantation G&CC in Fort Myers, was its tendency to thin out, especially on south-facing bunker slopes where there was poor moisture retention.

While that can be a general deficiency for all turf types, paspalum appears to be a little more sensitive. Hiers, who has consulted with both Reeves and Taylor about their paspalum issues, offered his explanation. “While it’s true that you can usually apply less water overall on a daily basis to paspalum, it needs a constant supply. The bermudagrasses are more drought tolerant overall. While the paspalum is quicker to ‘brown out,’ it is also quicker to green up when watered.”

As for appeal and playability, paspalum is noted for its uniform dense turf, giving it a visual “wow” factor. Developers, owners and members often put that “wow” factor on top of the decision making list when choosing which turf variety to install.

Joel Jackson, CGCS-Ret., is senior contributing editor for *Golfdom*. Email him at flrjn@aol.com.

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“I don’t know the answers to all these questions. I do know that (the field staff) program is a substantial hit to the GCSAA budget. In my opinion, the jury is still out as to whether this program will be successful.”

MARK WOODWARD, *Contributing Editor*

Tough but good questions

In my current role as Senior Vice President of a golf management company and one of the owners of a golf course renovation company, I get around to many golf courses in the Southwest region of the United States.

The best part about my job is that I have many opportunities to talk to a huge number of people in the golf industry from all types of golf courses. Those of you who have been in the business for a while fully understand that getting to know your fellow professionals in the industry and building lifelong relationships is by far one of the greatest blessings that we have.

Based on my longevity in the industry (that’s a politically correct way to say I’m old, before you do) and the variety of positions I’ve held in golf, these colleagues tell me how they feel about things and ask me tough questions.

Probably one of the toughest questions asked by superintendents, golf professionals

and general managers is: “In today’s ever changing golf industry, with technology and the economy and the fact that my club is struggling, what is the relevancy of being a member of a national golf association?” They tell me they can get almost anything they need to succeed in their jobs at the local level.

In this day and age I agree that in most cases the local associations are doing a great job of offering programs, services, education and growing membership. I remember when I was running for GCSAA’s board, a high-profile member asked me, “If you only had one choice and had to make a decision right now, which would you choose — your local association or the national?” This was in 1999

and it was a great question. By the way, I chose local when I answered because everything starts at our local levels.

After being a member of an association for over 36 years, I can clearly explain the value. You can get way more value than you pay in membership dues if you want.

I also hear questions about certain programs and services, particularly in the GCSAA, and members and non-members want to know how these programs are benefiting them personally. They comment about the role of the national association versus their local chapter association.

One of the programs offered by the GCSAA that I hear a lot about is the field staff program that is the


topic of the cover story of this issue. The program has grown substantially over the past couple of years.

Questions I’m asked include, “What is the Return on Investment (ROI) of this program? Is this program bringing in new members? Is it bringing in new revenues? What does the program cost the members? Is this program infringing on the responsibilities of the local chapters?”

Obviously, I don’t know the answers to all these questions, but they seem to be good questions that need to be answered. I do know that this program is a substantial hit to the GCSAA budget. In my opinion, the jury is still out as to whether this program will be successful.

My overriding point is that our associations still have some work to do if they expect to grow their number of members, revenues and services. With all the changes in the golf industry and in our society, we may be “at the turn” in terms of how people feel personally about these questions. There will always be people who question things and don’t fully understand the role and value of associations and their services, so I guess the more our industry changes, the more things stay the same.

Mark Woodward is a senior vice president for OB Sports, principal of Damarco Golf, president of Mark Woodward and Associates and a contributing editor for *Golfdom*. He can be reached at mwoodward@obsports.com.



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“I’m struck by the number of assistant, AIT and spray tech positions (on job boards.) In all my years in this business, I don’t ever recall seeing this many open positions.”

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

A story about exodus

This is my first installment in a series that will periodically appear throughout the year on Old Testament theology. ¶ *Just kidding!* Don’t turn the page. Not that there’s anything wrong with the Old Testament, but you know, the whole “time and place” thing.

The exodus I’m referring to is the one that seems to be currently occurring in this business. Looking at the industry job boards the past few months (which I have done pretty much every day for years), I’m struck by the number of available assistant, AIT and spray tech positions. In all my years in this business, I don’t ever recall seeing this many open positions and I’m sure I’m not the only one who has noticed. Even some high profile clubs that normally fill these types of positions from their stable of turf school grads on the crew seem to be feeling the effects.

More glaring to me is the number of these positions that are re-posted. While it’s likely that some of these re-posts may simply be an attempt to keep the job announcement near the top of the page, it’s just as likely that some are re-posted due to

lack of interest and/or suitable candidates. Clearly, the demand to fill these positions is now outpacing the supply of candidates.

As we are all fully aware of by this point — and if you need a reminder, just pick up literally any golf publication and I’ll bet you lunch there will be some mention of it — course closures have outpaced openings for the umpteenth consecutive year. The consequence of these closures, as it relates to the labor pool, is a reduction in available jobs.

The most obvious cause for the number of available jobs is long-time assistants getting fed up with the lack of advancement opportunities and deciding to leave the business. Who can blame them? Six to eight years as an assistant is now the norm. As the average assistant is now likely approaching or in their 30s and probably has a mortgage

and a family, the combination of the hours and the salary make it an untenable situation for some.

Where are the younger guys waiting to move up? On the surface, the lack of available candidates could be blamed on the reduced enrollment in many university turf programs, but that still doesn’t completely explain it. Given the relative stagnation of the job market in this business over the last six to eight years, there should presumably still be a logjam of talent waiting to move up. However, that doesn’t appear to be the case, at least to the extent it has been in the past.

Much has been said about the differing mentality and work ethic of younger employees, commonly referred to as Millennials or Generation Y. There are those who feel that Millennials have an especially infuriating combination of

entitlement and questionable work ethic that is generally considered to be incompatible with success in this industry. Likewise, others point to a lack of industry work experience prior to an internship, that would’ve allowed the individual to realize this was not the career for them.

While there is some truth to these points, I think it’s just as likely that many of them, having observed the struggles of those above them to advance, have decided to get out while they’re still young enough to build a career in another segment of the turf industry or in a different industry entirely.

It should also be noted that every generation has endured the hand-wringing of the previous generation in regards to their attitudes and work ethic, yet the world keeps turning when they’re eventually in charge. In other words, every preceding generation has figured it out and these guys will too.

Whatever the cause of this exodus, it’s tough to deny that it’s happening. It further highlights the role of employee retention in running a successful operation. Obviously, you’re not going to retain someone who flat-out doesn’t want to be there, but for those who have the talent and desire to stay in the business, finding ways to keep them engaged, be it occupationally or financially, will certainly pay off in the long run.

Matt Neff (mneff4@yahoo.com) is assistant superintendent at Wedgewood G&CC in Powell, Ohio.



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ROAD WARRIORS

BY SETH JONES

These nine men comprise the GCSAA's field staff program. Their mission: to help GCSAA chapters, big and small, across the nation. But can any program be everything to everyone?



(Left to right) Ron Wright, David Phipps, John Miller, Kevin Doyle, Steve Randall, Jeff Jensen, Ralph Dain, Chase Rogan and Brian Cloud make up GCSAA's field staff team, pictured in Lawrence, Kan., last month.

It's about a 600-mile trek from Dallas/Fort Worth to Lajitas, Texas.

"I drove it earlier this month. It's on the border of Texas and Mexico. That distance is probably my limit," says Brian Cloud, GCSAA's field staffer for the South Central region, which includes all of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Arkansas. "It took four days to do it (round-trip). I've got enough windshield time, if this ever falls through, I can be a truck driver."

David Phipps, field staff for the Pacific Northwest, is servicing an area that stretches as far northwest as Alaska, and as far southeast as Colorado. At this moment, he's driving home to Oregon City, Ore., after attending the Western Washington GCSA chapter meeting at Inglewood GC in Kenmore, Wash.

It's typically a three-hour drive. Unless he's stuck in traffic in Seattle, as he is now.

"People ask me if I mind (the travel). It's part of my job, it's what I signed up for," Phipps says over a crackling cell phone connection. "I wouldn't have taken the job if I wasn't comfortable with it."

It's an especially busy travel time of year for Phipps and his eight colleagues on the field staff team. Ask him where he's been in this prolonged winter and he starts rattling off the locations: there was the Golf Industry Show in Orlando; the Colorado Golf Summit; the Canadian Turfgrass Show; a visit to GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence, Kan.; Lewiston, Idaho; and a speaking engagement in San Diego.

Oh! And then there was Missoula. How could he forget beautiful Missoula, Mont.?

"Things fly," Phipps laughs.

Especially GCSAA's field staffers.

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PULSE OF THE NATION

We asked all nine GCSAA field staffers the same question: **What is the biggest concern at this moment for your region?** Here are a few of their answers.

"This winter has quite a few facilities nervous about the potential for winterkill in bermudagrass stands. Many courses have recently converted to bermudagrass on the greens and along comes the coldest winter in 30 years. I think most of the greens will be ok since many facilities cover their greens. What people aren't talking about are the fairways and rough, which do not get covered. A second slam from the winter is reduced revenue. One course I visited said that January 2014 was down 60 percent to the previous worst January in terms of revenue due to total club closure, power outages and a snow-covered course."

Ron Wright, CGCS, Southeast Region

"Access to reliable and affordable water sources. As has been stated by many, 'water is the new oil,' and the ability of courses to conserve water and absorb rising rates will be critical to the game's future success in the region. It's paramount that the entire

industry work together and proactively approach water agencies, municipalities and regulators to tell golf's side of the story.

Jeff Jensen, Southwest Region

"THE BIGGEST ISSUE IN FLORIDA RIGHT NOW IS THE PROLIFERATION OF LOCAL FERTILIZER ORDINANCES CALLING FOR MEASURES ABOVE AND BEYOND THE FDEP MODEL ORDINANCE. THESE MEASURES CALL FOR FERTILIZER BLACKOUT PERIODS EXTENDING FROM JUNE UNTIL OCTOBER. SO FAR THE GOLF BMP MANUAL HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN KEEPING GOLF EXEMPT, BUT THE COMMENT IS FREQUENTLY MADE BY OUR OPPOSITION THAT GOLF IS NEXT..."

Ralph Dain, Florida Region

"For the Great Lakes Region, the thought on most superintendents' minds is the winter and ice damage and for the public facilities, it is how the prolonged winter will affect the bottom line."

John Miller, CGCS, Great Lakes Region

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Accomplishing the 'we'

With the October 2013 hiring of Ron Wright, CGCS, as the field staffer for the Southeast region, the team is now complete. Nine field staff covering nine regions. Nine field staff to... do what, exactly?

According to GCSAA.org, the purpose of the field staff program is to "help chapters utilize GCSAA programs and services to a fuller extent."

"Ultimately we are working to accomplish the 'we' between chapters, GCSAA and allied organizations," says Steve Randall, associate director of chapter outreach for GCSAA and the leader of the field staff team. "We're trying to get rid of that 'us vs. them' (perception). I've enjoyed seeing a chapter come from bare-bones offerings and services to ultimately being very engaged with what GCSAA offers. We've been able to facilitate and provide tools to assist them to be successful. That is the essence of this program."

But what about the chapters that aren't 'bare-bones'? The chapters that are already fully engaged and familiar with what GCSAA has to offer?

"I like using the phrase that 'we're different things to different chapters,'" says Cloud. "Some chapters, we're helping them check in people and doing simple things, and for some chapters we're setting up a state golf day."

Kevin F. Doyle, a former superintendent and now field staffer

for the Northeast Region, says that trying to be different things to different chapters is his biggest professional challenge.

"I deal with 16 chapters and there are 16 individual and distinct cultures among those chapters. They require different resources, they have different strengths and weaknesses," he says. "For us to be able to deliver what they need and what they're looking for... takes a lot of time and effort."

Visa or MasterCard?

The field staff program has been well received by GCSAA members, says GCSAA President Keith Ihms, CGCS.

"As a whole, we've had positive feedback. We're trying to help chapters — I think we've done a pretty good job with that," Ihms says. "Information is going out from headquarters, but more importantly, our staff gets a lot more input from the local chapters."

"The field staff bring GCSAA closer to their members as another service tool," says Lori Russell, executive director of the Peaks & Prairies GCSA. "We are fortunate as our chapters already had a good relationship with GCSAA through active members and even GCSAA board members, but the field staff is an added bonus — it makes GCSAA present in a valuable way."

One chapter that counts the field staff among its best GCSAA member benefits is the Intermountain GCSA, which comprises Utah, southwest Wyoming and a small area of Nevada. Their membership is 220, with 120 superintendent members.

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