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so he had an appreciation for the historical aspect of this Donald Ross course.”

He hasn't told anyone this before, but Jimmy also had a secret weapon: he had just picked up some tricks from one of the best in the business, fellow Penn State alumnus Mark Kuhns, CGCS at Baltusrol.

“(Kuhns) came to the turf club and did a presentation for the turf students on how he did his interview when he went to Baltusrol — things to think about, questions and some neat little tricks,” Rattigan recalls with a sly smile. “I paid attention to that and I actually implemented quite a few of them in my interview.”

It all added up to the opportunity of a lifetime. Rattigan was now a superintendent at age 24, before he had even graduated from Penn State. Once he graduated he moved back in with his parents, sleeping on their couch for the first six months while he again went “all-out” making as many improvements as quickly as he could to his home course.

★ ★ ★

### **Small club, small budget**

Just because he got a shot didn't mean he'd make it work. Once again, Hamilton helped.

“George, we sat down and had a real long meeting. I brought him in for a visit... he was the guy I leaned on. He helped me put together some programs,” Rattigan says. “Having a guy like that was a huge help. He was the biggest influence in me getting into the business and getting off on the right foot.”

According to Roy Heim, owner of Heim Construction and a member at Schuylkill since 1998, the conditions have gone from average to superb on Rattigan's watch.

“It's the closest thing to Pinehurst No. 2 I've ever played,” says Heim, comparing the course to a legendary Ross course and host of this year's men's and women's U.S. Opens. “I went to Pinehurst and the caddie was trying to give me reads. I told him, ‘I've got it.’ I putted well that day and the caddie said ‘Wow, I'm not used to seeing someone

## **TIPS AND TRICKS FROM JIMMY RATT**

Mark Kuhns gave Jim Rattigan some well-timed tips back in 2002, so it's only fair that Rattigan offers some tips of his own today. Here's a few from our 2014 Graffis Businessperson of the Year winner:

**The 70-percent rule:** “I found myself becoming a little bit overwhelmed trying to wear so many hats. I wasn't good at delegating things, I always felt like I had to do everything myself. In the last couple years I came to the conclusion that I have to learn to let go. In my head I'll look at something, and I'll say if someone can do this 70 percent as good as I can do it, I'm going to let them do it. In my head it was 70 percent, but in reality they did a lot better than I thought they could, so it's worked out well.”

**Three solutions:** “Everyone would come to me for every little issue or problem. My desk became a dumping ground. Because I liked to handle everything, I'd take care of it. But then I changed my philosophy: if you're coming to me with a problem, I don't want to hear a problem, I want to hear three solutions, and we'll talk about which one we're going to do. It's definitely changed the dynamics of the thought process around here, and how people look at things when something goes wrong. They don't say ‘Oh, that's got to get done Jim, just so you know.’ Now they say, ‘Here are three things we can do.’ It's changed the way people look at things, and I have less things come my way.”

**Play golf. (If possible, play it well.):** “I'm a scratch golfer, and I play often. Playing golf is something superintendents should definitely try to find time to do. It gives you a different perspective of your job. Especially if you can get some members in there. The relationships you can build, golfing with members, and just hearing their perspectives, and explaining things. I think it was a big part of me getting my job. The members were aware of who I was, and that gave me extra credibility, that I understand the game and I know what a golf course is supposed to play like.”

**Follow Jim on Twitter: @JimmyRATT**

read the greens this well.’ I told him, ‘We've got the same thing back home.’”

That's a bold statement considering Rattigan took over a course that, when he was hired, didn't own a grinder.

“When I walked into the door, there were some interesting challenges. We really were hurting on the equipment side,” Rattigan recalls. “When I was interning at Aronimink, I made good friends with the mechanic, Muhamed ‘Hamo’ Krkbesevic. He's a brilliant mechanic, and a really good guy. I had him come up, we went through all the equipment together, he helped me find some grinders, trained our guys how to use them, and that really took us to the next level.”

Will Schneider, assistant superintendent, has been at the course for 17 years, and says the equipment has never been better than it has these last five.

“It's the worst when you don't have good equipment, but Jim's been getting us better and newer equipment,” he says. “With the money situation, needing to keep costs down, we're doing pretty good. I wouldn't

still be here for 17 years if this wasn't a great place to work.”

The crew, which ranges from five to 15 depending on the season, gets it done with a maintenance budget of \$470,000.

“Walking into a smaller club with a smaller budget, there wasn't a lot of new equipment,” Rattigan says. “Those first four years were the toughest, trying to get everything here that we needed. Buying used equipment, three-year off-lease stuff... There are a lot of equipment dealers out there, we would pick and choose deals to get what we needed through the door. Now we have what we need, and a couple backups.”

★ ★ ★

### **Restoring Ross**

Also a concern: this Donald Ross course was losing its Ross characteristics.

Bringing back Ross' design elements was always a wish of Rattigan's, and now he was empowered to try to make it happen. He picked up the phone to reintro-

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duce himself to respected Ross historian and golf course architect Ron Prichard.

“Jim had heard about me, called me up and introduced himself over the phone. I only live about 60 miles away, so I traveled up to take a look at (the course),” Prichard recalls. “I spent time with Jim, and I was

particularly impressed by him. At the time the club was not well financed, so I told Jim I’d be happy to do it on a gratis basis, work with them as best I could.”

Prichard teamed up with Rattigan and the late Roger Hornberger, a longtime greens committee member who was a geologist with a passion for golf course ar-

chitecture. The team came up with a plan to remove trees, bring back lost bunkers and probably most important, rebuild a few greens.

“It was a case of a few of the original greens were so steeply pitched — which was justifiable years ago when greens were mowed at much higher heights — that it created a problem where they only had a handful of places they could put a pin from day to day,” Prichard says.

Or, as longtime member Joe Troy says, “We liked to joke that No. 4 was the shortest par 5 in America. The green was so sloped it was impossible to putt. They re-contoured it... now it’s still a difficult par 3, but it’s fair.”

Even more exciting to the fiscally minded, Rattigan did much of the work in-house.

“Jimmy would bring in interns from Penn State and make a bunker renovation their assignment. Sometimes we didn’t have the equipment so we’d have to contract outside help, but he’d always be careful,” Troy says. “Also important, a green would go under construction at the end of one season, and be reopened for play by the middle of the next.”

Greg Stewart, a civil engineer in Orwigsburg, Pa., and one of Schuylkill’s new members, says the restoration efforts have made what he calls a “hidden treasure” even more fun to play.

Well, most of the time.

“The tree program has been great and has opened up some spectacular views. Taking the greens back to the original design has been fantastic,” he says. “But they brought back one of Ross’ original green-side bunkers on No. 7. I hit in there the other day, I get in the bunker and I can’t even see the green! I took a photo with my phone and sent it to Jim with a ‘REALLY?!’ He texted back and said, ‘HAHA, you’re my first victim!’”

★★★

**Director of operations**

It is said that success breeds success, and

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the many improvements Rattigan had made on the course was about to be rewarded — and challenged — again.

It was the 4th of July, 2007, a mere six years into his tenure at Schuylkill when he was approached by the club president to take a ride on the course. During the ride, Rattigan was told a change was being made, and they'd need him to take over management of the entire club while they searched for a new general manager.

His staff went from seven to 50 — from managing the maintenance facility to managing the pro shop, restaurant, membership and events.

"I didn't know anything about running a restaurant and all that, but I looked at it from a customer's perspective — if I was walking through the door, what would I see? What would I like to have? That was basically the perspective I tried to

keep," Rattigan says.

Three months passed. Rattigan was learning more everyday. Promotions were made, along with a few difficult changes. By the time the end-of-the-year financials came in, it appeared 2007 was going to be a successful year for the club.

Following the October board meeting, Rattigan was asked to take the job on a permanent basis. His new title became director of operations/superintendent.

"It was very gutsy for him to take a position he was not trained to do. As a superintendent, he's knowledgeable and can out-work anyone," Heim says of Rattigan. "As a general manager, he understands that what he doesn't know, he can research, and he'll call every person in the world until he does know."

Since taking the new position, Rattigan has become an expert on making quick changes from golf casual to



Assistant superintendent Will Schneider, Rattigan, Bob Dohner and mechanic George Toback, photograph crew now are one of the best crews we've ever had

business professional.

"There are some really long days there between the two, trying to be both places when you need to be. In the summertime

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John Sanders, Kevin Peiffer, second assistant superintendent at Schuylkill Country Club, were photographed last month. "The guys we have on the course are the best," Schneider says. "It's a total team effort."

"I'll be out there pulling hoses, just like the rest of the guys. Then I do a quick change, come inside, walk around the restaurant," Rattigan says. "I'll go in at night and watch

the sprinklers, making sure everything is going on. Then I come in early and set up a spray. I'll be here in the night until 10 o'clock to lock up the doors after the restaurant closes."



### Hometown hero

Hard to believe that Rattigan, who turned 36 on Christmas Eve, has been working at the course for 22 years now.

"I never thought of it like that," Rattigan says, considering the years that have passed since he was the range picker. "I hardly golfed when I first started. I was just the kid who was always hanging around, so one day they gave me something to do."

Rattigan has grown up on this course. He went from the kid who was always hanging around to the director of operations/superintendent at Schuylkill Coun-

try Club. It's no stretch to say he's also the favorite son of Schuylkill Country Club.

"There's no more of a hometown hero than you can get than with Jim and Schuylkill," says Stewart. The two knew each other in high school, and both worked at the club growing up. "As soon as he could drive, he was always there. On weekends, he'd always be running over to water, to cut cups. He was always dedicated to that course. He was appointed superintendent right out of college, mainly because of his dedication. People who don't know him, who think he's just the general manager? He's actually paid his dues more than anybody out there."

"You just gravitate to people who are fun and nice," Rattigan says. "When I was a kid, the members would say, 'There's little Jimmy Rattigan!' and pat me on the head."

Jimmy the kid has grown up. And the boy's done good. 

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Rick Wehl, inventor of the Hurricane Blo-Vac, demonstrates what the ride on tool can do.

# Blown away

The 2013 *Golfdom* Summit knocked attendees off their feet, both literally (see: the Hurricane blower) and figuratively (witness: Annika Sorenstam's keynote address).

BY MOLLY GASE

**F**rom a blower that was strong enough to knock grown men off their feet to a stunning presentation by arguably the greatest female golfer of all time, the 2013 *Golfdom* Summit was full of breath-taking moments... and that's not even including the cigar roller.

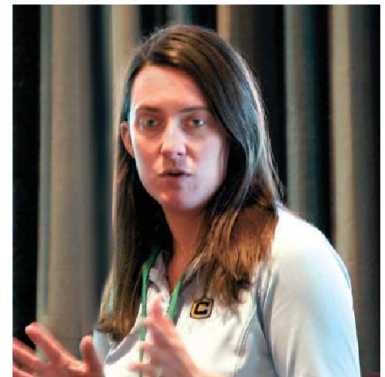
The *Golfdom* Summit, now going on its fourth year, takes the opportunity for superintendents to learn, network and have fun and combines it with a guarantee that sponsors will get sufficient time with their most desirable demographic. The 2013 Summit, held for the second straight year at Reunion Resort in Orlando,

hosted nearly 50 hand-picked superintendents from across the country and was sponsored by a benchmark 15 industry suppliers.

To attend the event, qualifying superintendents needed to apply (see sidebar, page 30) via *Golfdom.com*. Not every applying superintendent was selected, but those who were experienced firsthand arguably the most innovative event in the industry.

"This is absolutely, by far the best conference that I've ever attended, and I've been to many over my 24 years in the industry," Darin Pearson, (pictured above) superintendent at Eagle Bend GC in Lawrence, Kan., said of the event. "The one-on-one time





The *Golfdom* Summit included four guest speakers and presentations from 15 sponsoring vendors. Pictured left to right, top then bottom: Annika Sorenstam; Chuck Greif of Jacobsen; Steve Mona of the World Golf Foundation; Scott Kinkead of Turfco; Josh Huffman of Oregon Cordless Tool System; and Melissa Swart of Cushman.

with the vendors is priceless. And the facility is first class, you couldn't host it at a better place."

### Learning materials

Unique to the *Golfdom* Summit is the many one-on-one meetings that occur — almost 500 meetings take place between industry suppliers and the superintendents in attendance at the Summit. Sponsors also get the opportunity to present their products in a group demonstration.

The 15 sponsors of the 2013 *Golfdom* Summit included: Air-O-Lator Corporation; Cushman; FMC Professional Solutions; GenNext Biotech; Healthy Grow; Holganix; Hurricane Inc.; Jacobsen; John Deere Golf; Lebanon Turf; Oregon Cordless Tool System; Phoenix Brands by UPI; Quali-Pro; Smithco Inc. and Turfco.

It wasn't uncommon for mingling su-

perintendents to share notes about what caught their eye. Rick Weihl, inventor of Hurricane Blo-Vac, was happy to be on the receiving end of a lot of the chatter this year.

The stand-on riding blower he invented and brought to the Summit gives operators the ability to clear course paths, from leaves to small logs, on the go. In a short demonstration video, Hurricane showed its ability to not only direct air to the right, left and front, but also to literally knock someone's feet out from under them when hit with a blast. (To view the video, visit [hurricanedemo.com](http://hurricanedemo.com).)

"A lot of people say they've never seen anything like it before," Weihl said. Weihl worked in the landscape industry previously and had wished for a blower that could switch directions. As of press time he had sold 1,000 units.

"The biggest thing is to be able to blow three ways and be able to switch directions of air flow within two seconds," Weihl said.

One superintendent who was pleasantly surprised by the Hurricane Blo-Vac was Fred Gehrisch, Highlands Falls CC in Highlands, N.C. "The Hurricane Blo-Vac was one of those products that, at first I didn't think much of," Gehrisch said, "but after demoing it and going out with them, that's a great product for a golf course."

Throughout the sessions, superintendents saw everything from fertilizer produced on a chicken farm to a self-sharpening chainsaw that dramatically shot sparks across the room. Steve Coohon, CGCS at Heritage Hunt G&CC in Gainesville, Va., was most impressed by the new Cushman utility vehicle he saw at the Summit.

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“I like the electric (drivetrain) — I think that’s really a nice product,” said Cohoon.

After absorbing so much information, attendees were ready to get some fresh air and hit the course. The Summit golf tournament was played on Reunion’s Tom Watson course, the first Watson design in Florida. While it was best that most scores were soon forgotten, the day wrapped up with a more memorable outdoor barbecue dinner, live music and a cigar roller.

### Words of inspiration

The 2013 Summit featured four speakers who shared their wisdom with attendees.

Mark Woodward, senior vice president for OB Sports as well as principal of Damarco Golf, spoke as *Golfdom*’s featured columnist. Woodward centered his discussion on the reality of employment in the industry, which closely mirrored his monthly “At the Turn” column for the magazine. Woodward advised superintendents to plan ahead, thinking about which of their skills could be translated into another industry.

“I’m sure all of you know someone who has worked for 20 years in this industry and is now unemployed,” Woodward said. “The only thing constant in our industry is change.”

Wayne Kappleman, superintendent at Sharp Park GC in San Francisco, was the



The 2013 Summit was the second in a row to be held at the Reunion Resort near Orlando, Fla.

2013 Herb Graffis Businessperson of the Year winner. A truly humble guy, Kappleman began his lecture by saying how shocked he was to have been selected for the Graffis award. He then told the group about some of the challenges of his course.

“Some of the things we have to overcome are pretty special compared to situations at your typical golf course,” Kappleman said with a shrug.

One example? Frog delays.

Kappleman’s course is home to the threatened red-legged frog and the endangered San Francisco garter snake. Because of these tenants, he must think outside of the box and tread carefully — one of the reasons he was selected for *Golfdom*’s prestigious award.

“My No. 1 priority is the protection of these two species. Legally, if we kill one frog or snake, we could be shut down,” Kappleman said of his situation at Sharp Park. “I told the lawyers that I shooed a frog away and it became a 30-minute discussion on (if) shooing the frog was harassment... That’s how ridiculous it becomes,” Kappleman told the group, evoking both laughs and looks of disbelief.

Planning ahead as the golf industry changes was a main topic of discussion for Steve Mona in his “State of the Industry” speech. Mona, the CEO of the World Golf Foundation and a former CEO of GCSAA, advocated changing aspects of golf to match modern society.


“There’s always going to be a group of people who will play the game,” Mona said. But that group alone will not grow the game, he warned. Instead, women, children and minorities need to get involved. The changes of society, including the economic downturn, divorce and second families, run parallel to the game of golf. “We don’t operate in a bubble, so

these are things we have to consider,” Mona concluded.

Rounding out the roster of speakers was Annika Sorenstam, eight-time Rolex Player of the Year and 2003 World Golf Hall of Fame inductee. Sorenstam spoke with passion about getting more women and children involved in the game and making it more of a family activity.

Sorenstam reflected back on her time working at a golf course as a good experience that helped her understand what happens behind-the-scenes. “I worked with the greenskeeper for three months on my summer break. It was early mornings, so I know what you guys go through... I’d go out there and cut some greens, cut some fringes,” Sorenstam said.

Understanding her audience, Sorenstam spoke to their struggles in this ever-changing industry. “We heard numbers from (Mona) here, but you play a big part in (the industry). I’m sure things have changed. I’m sure regulations have changed. The expectations have changed and the way we build golf courses nowadays, the way we maintain golf courses nowadays... I’m sure you hear sustainability constantly,” said Sorenstam.

Recognizing the challenges of the changing nature of golf, she tipped her hat to the attending superintendents. “I applaud you guys for the efforts that you put in. You’re a big part of growth of the business.” 

### HOW TO QUALIFY FOR THE 2014 GOLFDOM SUMMIT

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