

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE  
**Leaving Gracefully** . . . . . 3

GAZING IN THE GRASS  
**Golf-One of Our Most Sustainable Human Activities** . . . . . 4

MISCELLANY  
**The Legend at Bristlecone Hosts The Wisconsin State Open** . . . . . 9

FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY  
**Going Brown, a Poor Message** . . . . . 14

BUSINESS OF GOLF  
**Customer Service** . . . . . 16

TDL  
**Plan Ahead to Control Snow Mold This Year** . . . . . 18

WISCONSIN PATHOLOGY REPORT  
**To Be or Not to Be Resistant** . . . . . 22

NOTES FROM THE NOER FACILITY  
**What a Treat This Will Be! 2010 WTA GOLF FUNDRAISER** . . . . . 25

BACK IN TIME  
**August - September 1979** . . . . . 29

MADTOWN MUSINGS  
**Rolling With the Changes** . . . . . 37

CHAPTER CONVERSATION  
**Seasons Rush By** . . . . . 39

THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK  
**Rainouts!** . . . . . 40

BADGER STATE TURF CLIPPINGS  
 . . . . . 48

## ABOUT THE COVER

Our cover artist Beverly Bergemann features Bristlecone Pines new waterfall feature that greets members at the front entry to the clubhouse.

*Every contact we have with a customer influences whether or not they'll come back. We have to be great every time or we'll lose them.*

- Kevin Stirtz

Customer service speaker and author

This quote by Mr. Stirtz reminds us of how important every contact we have with the golfer is to our success.

## THE GRASS ROOTS

THE GRASS ROOTS is a bi-monthly publication of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association. No part of THE GRASS ROOTS may be reprinted without expressed written permission by the editor.

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# Leaving Gracefully!

By **Brian Zimmerman**, Executive Director, Cleveland Metroparks, WGCSA President



What a time to be a sports fan in Cleveland. The Cleveland Cavaliers organization and the City of Cleveland were on edge until the decision was announced by the King himself on national television this past week. "I am taking my talents to South Beach." Now that "Lebron Gate" is in full swing here in Cleveland, I am reminded when Brett Farve left Green Bay after he

had long identified with the city and state.

I am wondering, how does this sports phenomena relate to the world we work in. When the decision is made to leave a current employer for "greener pastures" there is a proper and respectful way to accomplish this transition, and then there is the sports way of doing it. I thought to myself how I have handled this transition in my employment and how I have reacted being on the other side as a manager.

I think the topic of career moves is timely as the heat of the summer has kicked in, pump station and irrigation systems are being maxed out. Oh, and then there is the employees. Managing employees is an ever changing art. Here in Cleveland Metroparks I have 518 full time staff, 200 plus part time staff, and up to 800 seasonal

employees. I am blessed with a great Human Resources staff that handles 95 percent of the issues. Most golf courses unless they are part of a large cooperate environment have no true HR support. If you find yourself at a crossroads in your career here are a few tips that you may want to use as you are contemplating a career move.

One, you could compose a letter that could look like the following:

*Bill Smith Superintendent Slow Pace Golf Club  
July 13, 2010*

*Dear Mr. Harrison*

*Please accept this as formal notice of my resignation from the position of Superintendent with the Slow Pace Golf Club.*

*In accordance with my contract of employment I am happy to continue to work until a time that can be mutually agreed upon.*

*While I believe that I am moving on for good reasons, I am sorry to leave, and I thank you for your support during my time with the golf course, which I have found enjoyable and fulfilling.*

*Please let me know the arrangements for handing over outstanding work and responsibilities.*

*Yours Sincerely,*

*Joe Grassman*

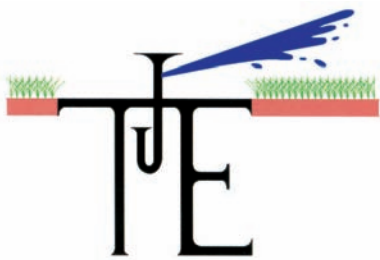
Two, make sure that your entire employee related benefits are in order. This could entail setting up a "cobra" insurance policy for you and your family, transfer of 401 K related saving plans, liquidating all available dollars in a flexible benefit account, maximizing vacation and sick leave payouts.

Three, work to schedule an exit interview with the employer. This can be a way to highlight some of the reasons for the transition.

Fourth, and maybe in my mind the most important there will other jobs that you will apply for in your lifetime, what is the lasting impression you have made on them.

I truly believe there is a process to go through as one gets ready to leave employment. Leaving a job can be a positive transition for everyone involved. You have the power to ensure that leaving your current employer strengthens your relationship and reputation rather than destroy it.

Best of Luck though the rest of the golf season! Hang in there the snow season is right around the corner. 🌱



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## Golf-One of Our Most Sustainable Human Activities

By Dr. John Stier, Department of Horticulture, University of Wisconsin-Madison

This spring semester one of our graduating students, a young man with extensive golf course management experience, visited with me about his idea for a report on sustainable golf courses. It seems he'd suggested the topic to a professor in a class focused on organic and sustainable agricultural production. The professor had scoffed at the idea of a sustainable golf course, implying the student needed to realize golf courses are inherently unsustainable. I encouraged the student to think back to what he knew of the history of golf course management, beginning in the 12th century, and how golf course management has evolved to today's practices.

Sustainability is unquestionably in society's mindset today. If we think about it, virtually nothing about our society is truly sustainable. We mine minerals from the ground, we burn fossil fuels, and we cover the land with buildings. Our row crop agriculture, arguably the foundation of our nation's power, often depletes non-replenishing fossil groundwater and causes massive loss of

irreplaceable topsoil.

Golf courses preserve soil with their complete and permanent vegetation. Golf courses also preserve land in urban environments which otherwise would be given over to buildings. We're just starting to realize the longer-term consequences of our construction process. Residents of New York City were victimized by toxic dust from New York City buildings destroyed during 9/11. Unusable wells exist on the east side of Madison, WI, contaminated from industrial pollutants. In Detroit, plans to utilize the vast acreage of vacant land in inner city Detroit for local food production, are thwarted by polluted soils as buildings sink into decay.

Starting at the beginning is the best place to think about what it means to have a sustainable golf course. The original courses were likely nothing more than holes in the ground (legend has it as rabbit burrows), perhaps with vegetation cropped by animals: one can't get more sustainable than that. Today's golf courses have morphed into architectural jewels of nature, care-

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fully shaped and maintained by rather minimal crews aided by modern technology. Table 1 summarizes the most common inputs for golf course maintenance while showing that sustainability is mostly a matter of degree rather than absolute all-or-nothing actions.

The greatest and least sustainable aspect of most golf courses is mowing with internal combustion engines which use fossil fuels. The most sustainable practice of course is to use grazing animals, or not mow at all, but this is unlikely to be acceptable to today's golfers. Hand mowing with a push reel-type mower is a close second but not likely to occur in today's society. A small number of courses have adopted electric mowers, which offer a range of sustainability based on how the electricity is generated. Most electricity is still generated from coal, but solar or wind power offer virtually sustainable power absent the cost of the infrastructure.

Water is the next greatest obstacle to achieve sustainability. In many regards, golf courses are ahead of much of the nation's agriculture west of the Mississippi, which relies on fossil water for crop production. Water used by golf courses comes from a variety of sources (Table 1). Some sources, such as on-site irrigation ponds filled by rainwater, are virtually sustainable. In many cases, golf course water use could be more sustainable than current practices if irrigation was based on evapotranspiration (ET) rates rather than by a preset routine or perceived needs. To a homeowner on a municipal supply line facing water restrictions, the only conceivable sustainable practice would be no irrigation.

Today's most commonly used fertilizers are synthesized using the Haber-Bosch process and rely on fossil fuels. In use for over 70 years, synthetic fertilizers such as IBDU and ammonia sulfate provide users with the ability to use small vol-

umes of fertilizers with variable properties to give turf managers a range of options for specific situations. Historically of course, fertilizers have depended on animal waste, if used at all. Most natural-based fertilizers such as plant or animal waste compost tend to require relatively high inputs of labor, machine-processing, and time before they are ready for use. In addition, natural-based fertilizers have generally been considered as slow-release forms of nutrients which limited their applicability. However, Dr. Soldat (Soils

Department at UW-Madison) has been researching various organic fertilizers and is finding that some indeed have a nice blend of water-soluble and slow-release characteristics which will open the door for additional uses. Currently we base nitrogen applications on a seasonal or "how the grass looks" basis. A more sustainable approach would be applying nitrogen only when and in the amounts needed by grass. As research shows differences in nitrogen requirements among grasses, and scientists work to develop a test for plant-available

Table 1. Sustainable golf course management is a sliding scale.

Least Sustainable				Most Sustainable			
Mowing type	Internal combustion using fossil-fuels	Internal combustion using biofuels	Electric <sup>1</sup>	Hydrogen		Solar or non-motorized reel	None/grazing animals (sheep)
<b>Mowing height</b>							
-Greens	≤ 0.125 inch	0.156 inch	0.25 inch				Any height
-Fairways/tees	≤ 0.4 inch	0.5 inch	0.75 inch	1 inch			Any height
-Roughs	Mowed > once weekly <sup>2</sup>	Once weekly	Monthly			Semi-annually	Not mowed
<b>Fertilizer source</b>	Synthetic, fossil-fuel based	Sewage sludge	Plant/animal compost				None or "At-will" from grazing animals
<b>-Amount and timing</b>	Calendar basis for optimum growth and quality		Based on soil availability and plant needs <sup>3</sup>				"At-will" from grazing animals
<b>Irrigation</b>	To point of runoff or leaching	ET-based <sup>4</sup>	Deficit irrigation				None
<b>-Source</b>	Fossil water <sup>5</sup>	Off-site lakes, streams or municipal	On-site ponds or shallow ground water				None
<b>Pesticides</b>	Synthetic, highly toxic general biocides	Natural, highly toxic general biocides	Biorational <sup>6</sup>		Bio-pesticides <sup>7</sup>		None
<b>Pest Management</b>	Calendar basis		IPM-high quality turf		IPM-low quality turf	Resistant grasses <sup>8</sup>	None
<b>Cultivation and topdressing<sup>9</sup></b>	Biweekly	Monthly		Annually <sup>10</sup>			None
<b>Golfer-Acceptability</b>	High				Low		Not likely acceptable
<b>Economics</b>	Typical	Better		Break-even			Failure likely

<sup>1</sup> Electric-powered mowers can be nearly completely sustainable depending on power source used for their operation, production, and transport to the golf facility.

<sup>2</sup> Assumes fossil-fuel based internal combustion engine.

<sup>3</sup> Not totally possible especially with nutrients like nitrogen.

<sup>4</sup> Assumes irrigation rate does not exceed soil infiltration rate.

<sup>5</sup> Fossil water is generally below bedrock and only replenished over thousands of years.

<sup>6</sup> Biorational pesticides are typically synthetic though may be based on naturally-occurring compounds, used at low rates, have low environmental/human toxicity, and rapid environmental degradation.

<sup>7</sup> Bio-pesticides are naturally-occurring biological compounds or organisms such as nematodes, bacteria, and fungi. They are generally not currently a viable option-most fail to provide a noticeable effect, others are too costly or illegal in the U.S. (e.g., Sarritor).

<sup>8</sup> Combined with other approaches, e.g., IPM, resistant grasses can greatly improve the desirability of virtually any management level

<sup>9</sup> Includes activities like vertical mowing and aeration.

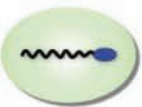
<sup>10</sup> Insufficient topdressing unlikely to provide desired effect for high quality golf courses.

# Putting on a white coat doesn't really make you an **EXPERT.**



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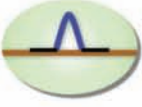
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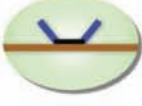
APG



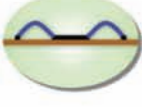
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nitrogen in the soil, we should be able to improve sustainability efforts in fertilization, too.


I know superintendents have many other ways they already employ sustainability in their operations. One cannot avoid being fairly sustainable if the goal is to have a profitable operation. Environmental and economic sustainability readily go hand-in-hand.

Golf courses also provide tremendous social sustainability. Golf courses provide jobs for multiple skill and age levels. A tremendous number of high school students get their first job experience on a golf course. They learn responsibility by getting up early in the morning, the value of hard work, and decision-making skills across a combination of biological and

mechanical systems. Many also learn personnel management skills along with customer relations. Employees include mid-career as well as highly skilled retirees, which further adds to the social network of a golf course.

Charitable organizations depend on golf for their sustainability. Look in the newspaper, or on your own schedules, to see the types of fundraising events at golf courses. Of the U.S. golf industry's annual \$76 billion economic impact, an estimated \$3 billion is for charity. Tim Votaw of the International Golf Foundation has stated that "No sport around the world contributes as much money to charity as golf" (<http://www.sportsfeatures.com/olympicsnews/story/44457/charity-begins-with-golf>). Even the dairy

science department at UW-Madison uses a golf outing to raise about \$30,000 annually for scholarships and departmental operations. Ultimately, of course, golf provides an important opportunity for recreation. Golf is one of the least discriminating forms of outdoor recreation in terms of gender, age, and some could argue (if they've seen me golf), ability. That's why nearly 29 million people in the U.S. play golf (NGF, 2010).

Ultimately golf may be one of the most sustainable types of operations we have going for us in terms of environmental, economic, and social sustainability. It's a good thing to keep in mind, given the pressures companies are feeling these days to show their sustainability to a questioning public. 



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# The Legend at Bristlecone Hosts The Wisconsin State Open

By David Brandenburg, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

Josh LePine a 15 year WGCSA member is charged with preparing The Legend at Bristlecone Golf Course for the 90th Wisconsin State Open August 23, 24, 25. Josh started in golf at Stoughton Country Club in Stoughton working in the clubhouse. Soon LePine was asked by Superintendent Andy Nelson to night water and work on the golf course.

Josh enjoyed his time on the golf course and went on to the University of Wisconsin Madison where he received his degree in Turfgrass Management. He was selected to intern at the 36 hole Winged Foot Golf Club for the summer of 1995. One of 8 interns that year Josh had an advantage over the others thanks to taking Spanish classes in high school and college. Being able to communicate fluently with the Hispanic staff on the large property was helpful to Josh as he learned the different

aspects of upscale private club management.

After returning to UW to graduate in December of 1995 Josh was offered the opportunity to join the staff at Winged Foot in part due to his success dealing with the staff as an intern. Josh jumped at the opportunity and was fortunate to be at Winged Foot for the 1997 PGA Championship.

LePine stayed at Winged Foot until the opportunity at Bristlecone opened up in 1998. Bristlecone Pines was designed by Scott Miller a former designer for Jack Nicklaus and plays to 7005 yards. The property started as 363 acres with 200 dedicated to the golf course. Malec Holdings was the original developer of the facility that featured 181 single family homes and 44 golf villa condominiums.

In 2009 the golf course was bought by The Legends Partners that also own and manage The

Legend at Brandybrook in Wales, and the Legend at Bergamont in Madison. An ownership change can be a nervous time for staff members but Josh has had many positives come out of the change. He is no longer tasked with maintaining properties in the subdivision or fixing lights in the clubhouse as a regular part of his day.



Joey, Josh, Matthew, Sonja and Naomi LePine



Bristlecones Par 3  
4th Hole plays 199  
yard from the  
Gold Tees



The property is surrounded by beautiful houses and it does offer agronomic challenges for Josh and the staff. One of the biggest challenges is maintaining good turf on the 17th green. It is a small par 3 green nestled in a low-land surrounded by hills and trees that receives no sunlight before 9:00 am and has limited air movement. Josh uses a portable Subair system to help remove extra water from the green and is in the process of thinning out the wooded hillsides by removing the buckthorn and other invasive underbrush to allow for some air movement.

Traveling the property can also be a challenge for the maintenance staff as the streets and houses limit cross traffic between holes adding time to every task.

When asked what the best fea-



The Par 3 sixth hole features Bristlecone and large waste sand areas.

tures of the Legend at Bristlecone were Le Pine was quick to point out the unique design in comparison to other Wisconsin Golf Courses.

Miller added massive sandy waste bunkers with rock outcroppings and ornamental grasses to give the facility an Arizona look. The

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