

INSIGHT

One Superintendent's Perspective

(Editor's Note: The following interview of Justin Gufstafson, superintendent at Ely Golf Club, was conducted by Jack MacKenzie, CGCS. This is the second in a series of State Superintendent interviews.)

Built in 1989, Ely Golf Club is a Par 36, 3,268 yd. layout cut through the Superior National Forest. The course features tall White Pine, ledge rock, water and plenty of wildlife. It is a very fun and challenging golf course.

Ely is located in the Arrowhead of northeastern Minnesota.

Justin has been in the golf course industry for 10 years. He graduated from Anoka-Hennepin Technical College's Golf Course and Grounds Management program in 1998. Justin moved into the Superintendent's position at Ely G.C. at the age of 21.

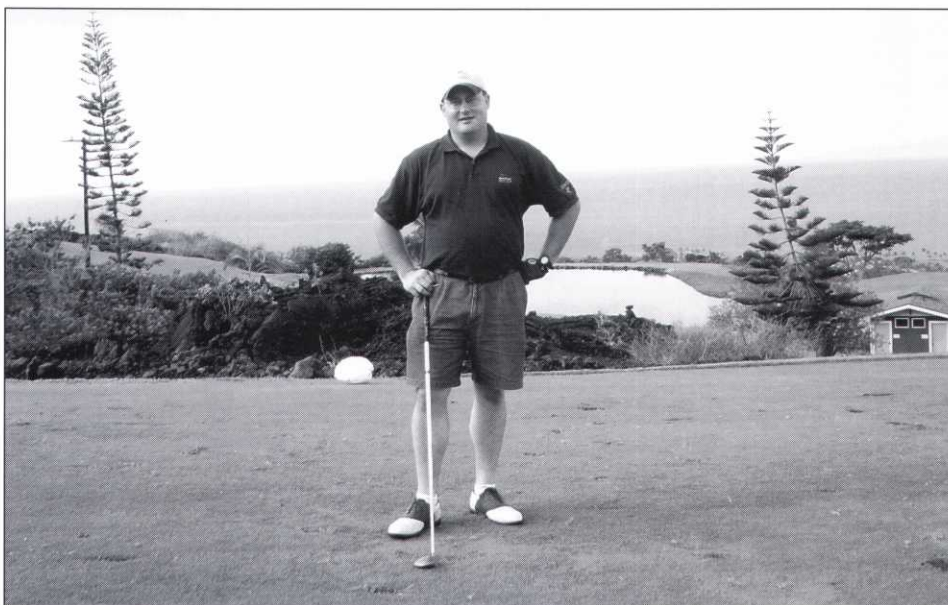
Why and/or how did you enter the turf management industry? I grew up next to the 9th tee at Swan Lake C.C. I spent a lot of time out there hawking balls and playing golf. My cousin, Jay Gustafson, was the superintendent at the time and he knew how hard I worked. He hired me for his crew that summer and my mind was made up by that fall what I was going to do.

Who was your professional mentor and why? My cousin Jay. He knew I was excited about the trade and passed his knowledge and expertise on to me. I guess it didn't hurt that we were blood relatives, but he trusted me to carry out any task that needed to be done. If some grass got toasted, he was never too mad and always let it become a lesson.

What has been the highest point in your career? Turning a very forgettable 9-hole golf course into a showpiece.

What has been your lowest point? The summer of 2001. Everything that could have possibly gone wrong did that year. Lightning destroyed a huge chunk of the irrigation system, 6,500 square feet of sod washed into the woods, drain tiles failed plus huge hydraulic leaks and vandalism. I felt like I was in a John Carpenter movie and couldn't wake up from a nightmare.

Are your greatest challenges political, agronomic or managerial? Explain. Political – no doubt about it. Trying to convince a board of directors why you need to spend thousands of dollars on a mower, or why they can't take their cart



Ely Golf Club Superintendent Justin Gufstafson enjoying some golf in Hawaii.

out after 2" of rain can be impossible at times. **What is the most difficult disease to manage on your course and how do you?** Snow Mold. The biggest challenge up here is timing your chemical application. Snow can stay from the middle of October until the first of May. You need to be prepared and not miss a single second of spraying opportunity when the time comes. Also, because the winter is so long up here, you need to have the turf hardened off and culturally sound if it is going to endure temperatures of -35 below.

Is it hard to find good help in your area of the state? Yes it is hard to find good help since this is a tourist driven economy up here. Resorts and outfitters tend to recruit young people at a young age and hold on to them until they have graduated from college. Fortunately, I have had an excellent returning crew the past few years and haven't had too many problems.

Do you have a dog on your crew? No, but we used to have a pet chipmunk who loved to eat Skittles.

Where will our industry be in ten years? I believe it will progress forward, there is no choice. Look at how far we have come in the last 10 years! I believe technology and innovation will push turf management further than we think is possible. My best guess is that it will come in

the form of better turf cultivars, disease control, growth regulation and equipment.

Where would you like to be in ten years? I'm not letting this question sound like a broken record at a job interview! Instead, I will say that I am happy where I am at for the time being. Everybody including myself has dreams of being the best at the best course. We are going to undergo some big renovations over the next 5 years and that will keep me focused and challenged. I love my job and the people I work for really appreciate what I do every day. That is what is important

What is your perspective of our state association and what would you change? I think our state association is great. Many of you who are reading this are my close friends. I believe the networking that goes on throughout our association is second to none. We must also not lose sight of who we are and what we really do. Take your job seriously, but yourself not at all.

Name your foursome, who would you play with and why. Clint Eastwood, Alice Cooper, and my father-in-law Pat Miller. I am out to have laughs, good conversation, and a few beers when I golf. I cannot take the game seriously when I play; however, I do enjoy taking my father-in-law to the cleaners.