

## Transitions

*The following stories are those of Golf Course Superintendents in the Mid-Atlantic Region who have successfully moved into a different area of responsibility in the management of their golf facilities. Turfgrass Matters hopes to highlight more superintendents who have transitioned into other positions in upcoming issues. These stories highlight the versatility and varied opportunities within the profession of Golf Course Superintendent.*

### Golf Course Superintendent to General Manager

by Glenn Smickley, CGCS

It was the fall of 1999 and things at Robert Trent Jones Golf Club were beginning to wind down for the winter. We had a good turfgrass quality year and I was completing my 10th season at RTJ as the Golf Course Superintendent. I was really looking forward to the downtime of winter before we began our final preparation for the Presidents Cup in October 2000. I had just gone through two consecutive winters of major construction so I hadn't had any real down time in quite a few years. I knew that there had been some problems at the Clubhouse during the year but I didn't think that they were major.

Some of the Board members began approaching me about moving up to the clubhouse and taking over as General Manager, actually Chief Operating Officer was the official title. The club had been operating without a GM since 1997 and the club seemed to be

running smoothly, at least in my view. RTJGC had already gone through ten or eleven managers at the clubhouse and I really wanted to host one more Presidents Cup as the Superintendent. As their pursuit continued, I began asking questions and digging deeper into the clubhouse operation. I was beginning to realize that there did appear to be some minor problems.

It became very apparent to me that the Clubhouse needed some leadership and direction. I realized that I had a very difficult decision to make. There were a couple of things that played a large roll in making my final choice. One was that I had been contacted by two very good clubs in the prior year and after lengthy discussions with my wife had decided not to pursue either job. We had moved three times before and both agreed that Manassas finally felt like our real home. We have three children who are in elementary or middle school and we didn't want to move out of the area if possible. The final factor was the support that I had been given by our Board of Trustees. I had a couple of board members tell me that they supported me so much for the GM position that they would not allow me to fail. That was all I needed to hear and I accepted the position as Chief Operating Officer on December 1, 1999.

I was confident in my personnel and financial management abilities, but had no idea how long it would take for me to get my arms around the clubhouse operation and really understand it. Much to

*continued on page 5*

## T. A. TURNER

Construction Services, Inc.

### Golf Course Construction

- \* Complete course renovation
- \* Greens & tee construction
- \* Trap renovation
- \* Drainage
- \* Sand removal/installation
- \* Laser grading
- \* Pond construction
- \* Trenching
- \* Hydroseed/sod/grassing
- \* Root pruning

### General Contracting

- \* Design/build
- \* Clubhouse
- \* Construction & renovation
- \* Maintenance facilities
- \* Golf cart storage facilities
- \* Rain shelters
- \* Cart paths
- \* Concrete & stone work
- \* Equipment & cart bridges
- \* Pre-engineered buildings

### Environmental Services

- \* Equipment wash systems
- \* Concrete Wash Pads
- \* Oil & grit separators
- \* Pond dredging
- \* Pond overflow structures
- \* Wetlands restoration
- \* Stream bank stabilization
- \* Sediment/erosion control
- \* Temp/permanent seeding
- \* Tree/shrub planting

**"FROM DIRT TO DOOR KNOBS"**

8135 Snouffer School Rd. 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor \* Gaithersburg, Maryland 20879  
Tel: 301.519.9715 \* Fax: 301.519.9717

**Transitions**, *continued from page 4*

my surprise, I seemed to grasp it more quickly than I thought that I would have. I realized that common sense, hard work, and most importantly, active communication could go a long way in making the clubhouse operation successful.

The transition was more challenging than I anticipated. There was some resistance to my requests by the staff and I was beginning to sense a feeling of us against them kind of attitude by the clubhouse staff. I was not getting the same kind of respect from the staff that I had gotten on the golf course. This was a bit surprising to me because, although I hadn't directly managed any of them, I did know them pretty well from coming into the clubhouse regularly. I felt that the only way to get to the bottom of the problems and to begin getting the loyalty and respect of the staff was through aggressive communication. As I got deeper and deeper into the issues I found that a lot of minor problems had been allowed to mushroom into major issues. The fact that I

was willing to listen and showed sincere concern helped me to win over the staff almost immediately.

My management team was solid in three of five departments. Unfortunately the two weak departments needed immediate department head changes or I was fearful of the year being an absolute disaster. Through personnel changes, better communication and instilling a more positive attitude in my problem departments we started to make improvements. By the beginning of August I felt that we had made great strides; things were finally in place and we would be ready for the Presidents Cup in late October.

The Presidents Cup went extraordinarily well. Everything from the weather to the staff was absolutely perfect. Any concerns I had about personnel were put to rest during this week. I felt that the pressure that had been building for the entire season and the most difficult piece of the transition was complete.

Looking back one year later, I have a feeling of tremendous accomplishment. I had no idea that the problems in the clubhouse were so large but the challenge of solving them

has been, and will continue to be, exciting. We have accomplished a great deal during my first year as Chief Operating Officer. But I am not naïve about the fact that I have a lot more to learn in this new position. I have found that managing the entire facility does not have to be difficult. I strongly believe that the key is the people with whom you surround yourself. Most of my success has come through surrounding myself with people a lot smarter than myself. Managing personnel is the same whether it is at the maintenance facility or inside the clubhouse. Now that I have good people surrounding me, I believe that by communicating a clear defined direction I will be able to succeed. The club seems to be happy with this new arrangement as RTJGC and I recently agreed to a five-year contract in this new position. I am thoroughly enjoying this career transition and look forward to new and exciting challenges.

*continued on page 6*



Newsom Seed

## V.I.P. II RYEGRASS BLEND

- In Stock for Immediate Delivery
- Formulated for Better Grey Leaf Spot Resistance
  - Manhattan 3 - MD/VA Recommended
  - Laredo - MD/VA Recommended
  - Affinity - MD/VA Recommended
- Certified Mix
- Tournament Quality; Poa Free



**TO ORDER CALL: NEWSOM SEED**

Allen Bohrer 800-553-2719 Sam Kessel 888-282-5295 Dave Thomas 800-830-2501  
 Fax: 301-762-9544 Fax: 703-242-6430 Fax: 410-758-0798

## Transitions, *continued from page 5*

### Meeting The Challenges

by Bill Shirk, CGCS

After 28 years as a Golf Course Superintendent in the Mid-Atlantic region one word that best describes Golf Course Superintendents to me is--Challenges!

I started my professional career in the late 60's during high school at Sparrows Point Country Club (SPCC) under the guidance of Alex Watson CGCS, Dave Cammarota, and Bob Orazi CGCS. My first big challenge in this profession was to just survive that first summer. Hand raking traps for eight hours a day, five days week was not what I expected in this business. I had to ask myself many times, "Is this what I really want to do in life?" I did survive that summer thanks to my mom and dad who insisted I could not quit midway through a summer, and that if I started something I needed to finish the assignment. I often reflect on that summer and all the lessons and experiences I received from raking traps by hand. The following year, not long after the blisters had healed, I decided to go forward and accept more challenges in this profession. I continued to work at SPCC during the summers until I finished high school.

As we all know, the challenge of a college education can be overwhelming at times, but like all challenges that we complete, the rewards are very satisfying. I met that challenge and I am very proud of the fact that I graduated from Penn State in 1972 from their Turfgrass Management Program. After graduation I felt I was ready to take on any and all challenges the Golf Course Superintendent's profession could give me.

In May of 1972 I accepted a position as golf course superintendent at Seaford Golf & Country Club (SG&CC) in Seaford, Delaware. At that time the course was a 9-hole course with two flags in each green and two sets of tees to make it an 18-hole course. There were about 750 members at that time for a nine-hole course, quite a challenge. The next seven years really gave me strong experience in meeting challenges. This course would lose several greens each year in July or August. The fairways were below average at best. These were two huge challenges in overcoming these problems. After several years, the greens improved tremendously and were healthy all year round.

Ryegrass was becoming more common for fairway use. Thank God for Pennfine and Manhattan Ryegrass. These two varieties completely turned around the quality of those fairways. Being a Dupont course didn't hurt either. Chemicals such as Tersan SP, Tersan LSR, and 1991 were cheap for us and abundant to control all those diseases on ryegrass. Working at Seaford gave me the experience needed to deal with challenges and follow through with resolutions to completion.

In September of 1978, I was offered a position as golf course superintendent at Prospect Bay Country Club (PBCC). The challenge of finishing a new course that was under construction and moving to an 18-hole facility was all the enticement I needed to accept the position. Here again, were many challenges. The course was undeveloped for 3-4 years until a sewage plant could be built and there were greens that had Sweet Gum trees 10 to 12 feet tall. The sewage plant—what a challenge! This was built because the heavy clay soil wouldn't perk for the 322 homes to be constructed. The plan was for the sewage plant to treat the sewage from the homes and then use the reclaimed water on the course that had soil that didn't perk. Gerry Hasbargen has since solved that challenge. It was during my time at PBCC that I decided to take the challenge of becoming a certified golf course superintendent and accomplished that goal successfully.

The many challenges, small and large, I experienced at SPCC, SG&CC, and PBCC definitely prepared me for the greatest challenge of my superintendent's career. I was offered the position of golf course superintendent at Queenstown Harbor in August of 1990. The prospect of being involved in a project on a truly remarkable piece of property would be the challenge of a lifetime for me. The challenges have been tremendous at Queenstown. In short, being superintendent at Queenstown has been the experience I wish everyone could have in his or her career. After nine years as the superintendent at Queenstown I feel I left this profession at the top of my game and with great satisfaction knowing what I have accomplished in 28 years. It truly has been an honor and privilege to be the superintendent at Queenstown and to be able to continue working for the Birney family is the

best of all worlds. I have been fortunate to make some good career moves but meeting Lex and Charlie Birney was the greatest day of my career.

In November of 1999 I was approached by the Birneys and offered the position of Senior Vice-President for Atlantic Golf. The position empowered me to oversee the golf course maintenance operation for all three courses, Potomac Ridge, South River, and Queenstown Harbor. The three superintendents, John Stern, John Newcomb CGCS, and Tom Tokarski, would be my responsibility. At this time I felt I had accomplished and conquered all the challenges as a superintendent at Queenstown, as I had in the past twenty eight years as a superintendent. I felt this was an opportunity to accept new and different challenges.

In May of 2000 I was again approached by Lex and Charlie Birney and was asked if I would accept the position of President of Atlantic Golf. They felt it was time for them to spend more time in the office in DC; running the many other business aspects of their company Washington Brick & Terra Cotta. This would provide them the opportunity to have the time to devote to the operation of the company's other interests. This opportunity would offer me the challenge of running the complete business of Atlantic Golf. I knew I really wanted to accept this position and its many challenges, but certainly wanted to weigh all the options before accepting this position. I also knew this would draw my career of a golf course superintendent to a close. The timing was perfect. I felt the many years as a golf course superintendent were starting to affect me in ways I didn't realize until I left position, both in my health and spirit. The many years of challenges as a golf course superintendent have aided me tremendously in my new career as President of Atlantic Golf.

Being a superintendent is like no other profession with the many everyday challenges, large ones and small ones. Over the years we superintendents see endless challenges and they will probably never stop existing in this profession. Maybe that's what we are about in this profession-- Meeting the Challenges!