

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. 2nd 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