

THRU THE GREEN

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of Northern California

November / December 2025



Wrapping Up 2025 with Awards & Events

Inside This Issue

- 2025 GCSANC Annual Awards
- Holiday Meeting Photo Recap
- Tartan Corner: New Column on Golf Course Design

*Ponderosa Golf Course
Truckee, California*

2026

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ON THE COVER

Ponderosa Golf Course, Truckee

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[Snow on Pine Trees at Ponderosa Golf Course in Truckee, California](#)

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February 24, 2026
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President's Message

By **JOE BUDINICH**, *Peninsula Golf and Country Club*

As I write this article, we have just finished our Annual Meeting and are anticipating another successful Holiday Meeting in a couple of weeks at the Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa. All of the events this year have been made possible by the support of our preferred partners and sponsors. We really can't thank you all enough.

As an association, I would consider this year very successful, as we have been able to engage our membership to attend more events and offer more services to our members, all while staying under budget. We generated additional "Thru the Green" articles to provide more value to our members and preferred partners and even had an issue about mental health in the workplace, which was led by our very own Director, Michael Knoll. Our premier event, the Scholarship and Research Tournament, was hosted at Blackhawk Country Club this year by Kevin Sullivan. Despite our attendance being low at 75 attendees, we were able to bring in an additional \$18,000 due to far more valuable auction items by our sponsors. Thank you to all who stepped up this year and donated; it made a huge difference.

We hosted our first Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) Test Preparatory course at Peninsula Golf & Country Club in November. The feedback we received from the 25 attendees was that the material presented was very helpful and everyone felt prepared to take the DPR test after the two-day event. It is our goal as an association to keep this prep course on our calendar in the years to come, so please have your assistants and crew members take advantage of it.

Lastly, I would like to thank the outgoing Board members: *Taylor Andersen, Andy Lindloff, Ryan Nichols* and *Steven Spatafore*. Your dedication, commitment and contribution to the association is appreciated and success over the past few years would not have been possible without you.

Happy holidays to you and your families. Now let's hope for a wet winter that sets us up for a successful 2026 season.

Sincerely,

Joe Budinich





Executive Director's Report

By MARC CONNERLY, GCSANC

As we close out another productive and inspiring year for our association, I'm pleased to reflect on the momentum we've built together and the bright path ahead. Below are just some of my thoughts as we close out 2025 and prepare for 2026.

Welcoming the 2026 Board of Directors

Our association is fortunate to be guided by committed leaders who understand both the immediate demands of the profession and the long-term vision that ensures golf course management remains strong in Northern California. The 2026 incoming Board members, who will officially take office January 1, include Matt Dachowski (Lake Merced Golf Club), Conner Galea (Monterey Peninsula Country Club) and Affiliate Director Ryan Johnson (Sierra Pacific Turf Supply). Derick Mara (Contra Costa Country Club) will ascend from the Assistant Superintendent Liaison role to Secretary/Treasurer on the Board, and Mitch Redfearn (Tilden Park Golf Course) will assume the role of Assistant Superintendent Liaison.

Please watch for profiles on each of our incoming Board members in the January/February issue of Thru the Green.

Honoring Excellence at the Annual Meeting

One of the most meaningful parts of our Annual Meeting is the opportunity to recognize the individuals who exemplify the best of our profession. This year's award recipients represent the highest standards of leadership, environmental stewardship, mentorship, and service. Their achievements remind us that

the success of this industry is built on dedication, collaboration, and a deep respect for the game and the landscapes we care for. Please take a moment to read about their accomplishments in the pages that follow and join me in congratulating them for their outstanding contributions.

Prioritizing Mental Health and Well-Being

Golf course management is a demanding profession—long hours, unpredictable stressors, and the pressure to deliver consistent excellence can take a toll. That's why we dedicated part of our last issue to mental health awareness and resources specifically tailored for superintendents and their teams, and why we will continue on a periodic basis to provide additional mental health resources. I encourage you to explore the tools highlighted in the [September/October issue](#), keep an eye out for upcoming articles on this topic, and share them with your staff and friends in the profession. We are at our best as an association when we support the whole individual—professionally and personally.

As we move forward into a new year, I'm grateful for the engagement, commitment, and professionalism of our members. Thank you for all you do to elevate this industry and strengthen our community.

Wishing you a very enjoyable holiday season.

Marc Connerly

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From the Field

By JEFF JENSEN, GCSAA Field Staff, Southwest Region

I hope this finds everyone enjoying the holiday season and getting to spend time with family and friends. It was great to see many of you at the GCSANC Annual Meeting recently and thank you for the invitation and opportunity to provide updates on GCSAA initiatives.

As we inch closer to a new year, please take the time to consider completing your facility Best Management Practices (BMP) guide. GCSAA worked over the summer to update the online tool, making the process quick and easy. You can finish your state guide in a matter of minutes and have a document on hand that reflects the many regulatory and environmental challenges we face in California.

BMPs help protect the availability of water, pesticides and nutrients and help strengthen golf's relationship with lawmakers at both the state and federal level.

You can access the online tool at www.gcsaa.org/bmp or click on the QR code located below. The tool is also mobile device-friendly, which makes it easier than ever to complete.

2026 will also provide you the opportunity to assist GCSANC in raising funds for research, education and advocacy through the Rounds4Research auction. The 2026 auction is slated for April 20-26. Golf facilities can support the effort by donating rounds of golf for two or four or "stay and play" packages and other items that will be auctioned online through the BiddingForGood platform. Eighty percent goes to the chapter with the remaining twenty percent going to GCSAA Foundation to assist with marketing and technical costs of running the national auction.

To date, the auction has raised nearly \$5 million nationally, and GCSANC raised more than \$11,000 last year. With the quality of facilities in Northern California, the program has a terrific opportunity to expand in the region. Our national goal for 2026 is \$832,000.

Facilities can donate online at www.rounds4research.com and you can set blackout dates and times to fit your facilities' needs. The entire process takes less than 10 minutes and you can send in your own certificate or GCSAA can create one for you.

Thank you for your continued support and I hope you have a great holiday season and a happy New Year! If I can be of assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me at jjensen@gcsaa.org and follow me on Twitter at GCSAA_SW for industry updates.

Jeff Jensen



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From the Capitol

By CRAIG KESSLER, *California Alliance for Golf (CAG)*
ckessler@scga.org / www.calgolf.org



Everyone has heard the tired expression – a rising tide lifts all boats. Expressions become tired when, as this one most vividly does, they paint a vivid picture of a phenomenon that in the hands of an economist would put you to sleep. In this case, the “expression” immediately conjures its opposite in the listener’s mind – an ebbing tide strands those boats closest to the shore. And that picture is more compelling, as we humans are wired more to avoid risk than to pursue opportunity.

You might now be wondering what this has to do with California’s Capitol, government affairs, public policy and/or golf course superintendents. And you might now be wondering why you are reading this.

Wonder no more.

The GCSAA has an admirable record among the nation’s golf organizations when it comes to advocacy. Because it dedicates resources and talent to the pursuit of “government affairs” at multiple levels – national, state, and chapter – the GCSAA has created a culture that understands the value of advocacy and actively attempts to engage its members in its practice.

All good, but here’s the rub. Because golf course superintendents are experts in all those things having to do with agronomy, resource management, and the

tools necessary to maintain a golf course that meets the increasingly finicky expectations of golfers, their “active” engagement in advocacy is directly related to how that aspect of the golf industry is affected by legislation and regulation. And there is a lot of “how” in that mix – pesticides, water management, neonics, endangered species protection, etc. A lot of “how” that is regulated and, in many cases, outright banned by legislatures and administrative agencies responding to a public that is increasingly concerned with a risk/utility calculus that finds golf to be too long on risk for the value it brings to California’s quality of life.

But while many, arguably a majority, of the game’s legislative and regulatory challenges are in the domain where the golf course superintendents, irrigation specialists, and agronomists are expert, they are not all in that domain. Issues such as independent contracting, permanent standard time, COVID, overtime thresholds, food/beverage gratuities, and third-party tee time brokering, are just a few outside that domain that have been focuses of my concern in recent years.

Indeed, as we roll into another fun-filled legislative session, while the California Alliance for Golf (CAG) has its eye on the many things in the golf course superintendents’ domain that are always in danger of coming into play in Sacramento, we are focused on

two things in particular that are outside that domain. One focus is of a reactive nature - our belief that we are likely to see another bill that would move the state to permanent standard time - and the other is of a proactive nature - an effort to run a bill that would do for a public golf sector bedeviled by illicit third-party tee time brokering what various iterations of what are called in roughly 15 states “Restaurant Reservation Anti-Piracy Acts,” by requiring all such third-party arrangements to be lawful only when entered into by a written agreement between the golf facility and third-party vendor.

Yes, advocacy isn’t just about swatting down bad bills and regulations or amending them to be more palatable; it’s also about promulgating laws and regulations that offer relief or otherwise provide value in some tangible way. That has very much been the case in Southern California in the last 15 years with respect to local land use, municipal golf, and water. CAG has matured to the point when the same proactive bent is now possible in the State Capitol. Indeed, we have been more than pleasantly surprised by the warm reception our early discussions of what we are calling the “*Blocking Illegitimate Reservations and Protecting Equitable Access to California’s Publicly Owned Golf Courses Act*” has gotten from legislative offices and committees.

More about that “Act” later when it has matured into an authored bill with number and title. Much more. But for now, let’s get back to that bromide about “a rising tide lifting all boats.” Governmental advocacy is not about any one aspect of an industry, issue, or sector; it’s about all aspects that go into the mix that determines whether that industry is growing, shrinking, or treading water in place. If you labor in the golf industry, supply the golf industry, or operate in a community that is enriched by the presence of golf, you benefit when golf is growing, and you suffer when it is shrinking. Hard stop!

Each of the game’s major organizations has its niche of specific interest along with the expertise therein that someone like me relies upon to make sure that he/she is sufficiently informed when he or she is called upon to secure positive results for the golf community in the public arena. But no one niche of the industry is more important than the other when the health of the overall industry that serves them all is at stake. Taken together, they form the proverbial tide that allows all to rise or condemns all to struggle when it ebbs.

Happy holidays to all! I hope to trek up north to enjoy one of your chapter meetings in 2026.

Craig

Continued on page 11

Assistant Superintendent Profile Grant Klebba, Lake Merced Golf Club



Grant Klebba

What made you decide to get into golf maintenance?

I started working on the maintenance team at Cherry Creek Golf Course in Shelby Township, Michigan, shortly after the pandemic started and quickly fell in love with the work I was doing.

What is your proudest accomplishment in the industry?

My proudest accomplishment in the industry is graduating from Michigan State University in 2023. I've only been in the industry for four years and Michigan State has helped get me to where I am today.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Shelby Township, Michigan.



Lake Merced Golf Club – Daly City, California

Continued on page 13

Assistant Superintendent PROFILE

Who would you consider your most influential mentor in the industry?

Right now that would be my current boss at Lake Merced Golf Club (LMGC), Matt Dachowski. He was my first Superintendent coming out of college and has taught me everything I know about maintaining a golf course.

Your best nicknames?

Most people call me "Grant" or "Klebba," but there are a few people out there who call me "G-rizzy."

If you could drive any vehicle, what would it be?

I've always wanted to drive a Nissan GT-R.

Curly fries or regular, and why?

Curly fries are overrated. Give me a regular fry any day.

What is the funniest thing you have ever seen on a golf course?

At my first golf course in Michigan, we had a guy on the crew that would string trim bunker edges shirtless. Watching him wince as he got pelted with debris always had me crying with laughter.

What is one thing that most people don't know about you?

I was in the Marine Corps for five years.

What was your lowest score playing golf, and where?

I shot an 82 at Lake Merced Golf Club.

What is your favorite manual labor job on the golf course and why?

I would have to say fertilizing with a walk spreader because you can get a lot of steps in.

Greatest piece of advice anyone has given you?

My dad always told me to be myself. He would say, "There's only one of you on the planet, so don't try to act like anybody else."

If you had to survive on a deserted island for one year, aside from food and water, what five items would you bring with you to occupy your time?

Rubik's Cube, dictionary, encyclopedia, football, and running shoes.

Favorite Beer?

Kirin Ichiban

If you had your choice, what would you do in retirement?

Golf at least one round every day.

Favorite sports teams?

THE Detroit Lions.

What's your favorite type of grass to manage as a putting surface and why?

Creeping bentgrass - because it is the only one that I've managed so far.

If you could have lunch with anyone, past or present, who would it be and why?

I'd like to sit down and have lunch with Alister Mackenzie so that I could pick his brain about golf course architecture.

What is your favorite golf maintenance-related quote?

"It's just grass." It's simple, but it helps put my job into perspective when I feel overwhelmed.

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Congratulations to the winners of our 2025 GCSANC Annual Awards!

Our GCSANC Award recipients have demonstrated remarkable dedication, hard work, and professionalism, serving as outstanding representatives of both our association and the industry. This year's winners:

**EXCELLENCE IN
TURFGRASS MANAGEMENT – PUBLIC**

This award is presented to a superintendent member who maintains his/her facility to a standard that reflects consistent, high quality playing conditions, while displaying exceptional agronomic and management skills. The resourcefulness of this individual is an important consideration in the selection criteria and may include factors such as budget, site restrictions, rounds of golf, staff size, weather, etc.

Blake Hertzog

Monterey Pines Golf Club



What his peers said about the winner:

“He continues to present an exceptional product despite limitations of budget, crew size and the red tape of government bureaucracy.”

“He is a talented superintendent who is dedicated to the advancement of our profession and is a well deserving candidate for this award.”

**EXCELLENCE IN
TURFGRASS MANAGEMENT – PRIVATE**

This award is presented to a superintendent member who maintains his/her private facility to a standard that reflects consistent, high quality playing conditions, while displaying exceptional agronomic and management skills. The resourcefulness of this individual is an important consideration in the selection criteria and may include factors such as budget, site restrictions, rounds of golf, staff size, weather, etc.

Chris Dalhamer, CGCS

Monterey Peninsula Country Club



What his peers said about the winner:

“He is a consummate professional who always presents his course in championship conditions.”

“His place is always dialed in.”

**BERT GRAVES
AFFILIATE MERIT AWARD**

This award is presented annually to the Affiliate representative who has made contributions resulting in the betterment of the GCSANC and its members.

Ryan Johnson

Sierra Pacific Turf Supply



What his peers said about the winner:

“He has been an excellent friend and supplier partner to all the supers in his territory.”

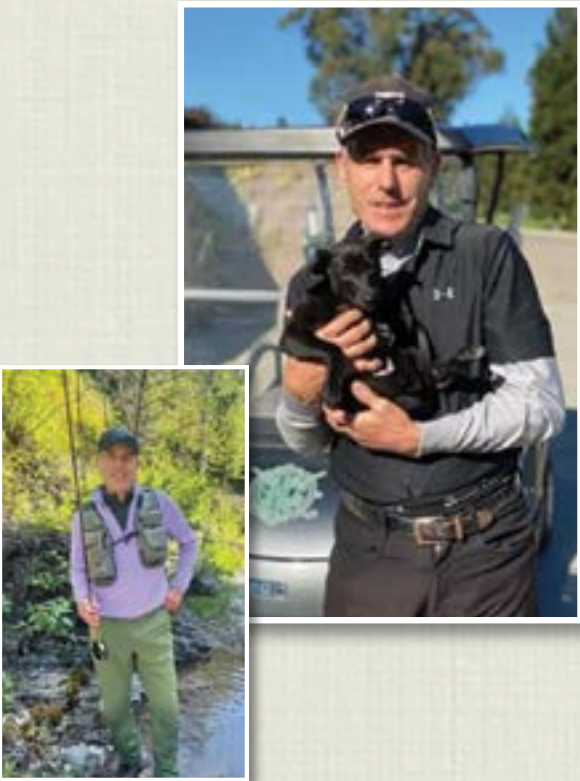
“He is always available, and he is there to answer any questions and guarantees timely deliveries as well as accurate bids.”

**GEORGE SANTANA
DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD**

This award is presented to an individual who has displayed the highest level of professionalism while demonstrating a long-standing commitment, dedication and contribution to the GCSANC and the turfgrass industry.

Walt Barret

Green Hills Country Club



What his peers said about the winner:

“In over three decades as superintendent, he has always maintained his course in an excellent condition.”

“He has had multiple assistant superintendents who have been trained by him and have gone on to become good superintendents.”

SUPERINTENDENT OF THE YEAR

This award is presented annually to a superintendent who has made contributions for the betterment of the GCSANC, its members and the golf course superintendent's profession. Evaluation criteria for this award includes local or national committee participation, community service that represents the industry in a positive light, or local association participation.

Jeff Markow, CGCS
Cypress Point Club



What his peers said about the winner:

“He has made a major impact in the Northern California golf superintendent profession since 1993.”

“He has always had a willingness to help young turf professionals become superintendents, help those around him when questions arise, and, of course, help the hundreds play one of the best golf courses in the world.”

“He will be missed when he retires.”

PRESIDENT'S AWARD

The President's Award is presented annually by the outgoing GCSANC President to the individual whom the President chooses to honor for their contributions to GCSANC and the Northern California superintendent profession.

Josh Lewis
Gradoville Hertzling Management Group



What his peers said about the winner:

“He brings a very diverse and well-rounded background in golf course maintenance, construction and tournament preparation, and an overwhelming desire to support the superintendent and club management communities.”

“He has worked on some of the most prestigious courses in the country, has been an exceptional leader to GCSANC and has tremendous knowledge about golf course construction and maintenance.”

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Peninsula Golf & Country Club
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Annual Meeting & Awards Ceremony

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2025 GCSANC Holiday Meeting
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Animals on the Green



Photos by Jeff Jensen, GCSAA



Photos by Tim Powers,
Poplar Creek Golf Course



President Joe Budinich's dog,
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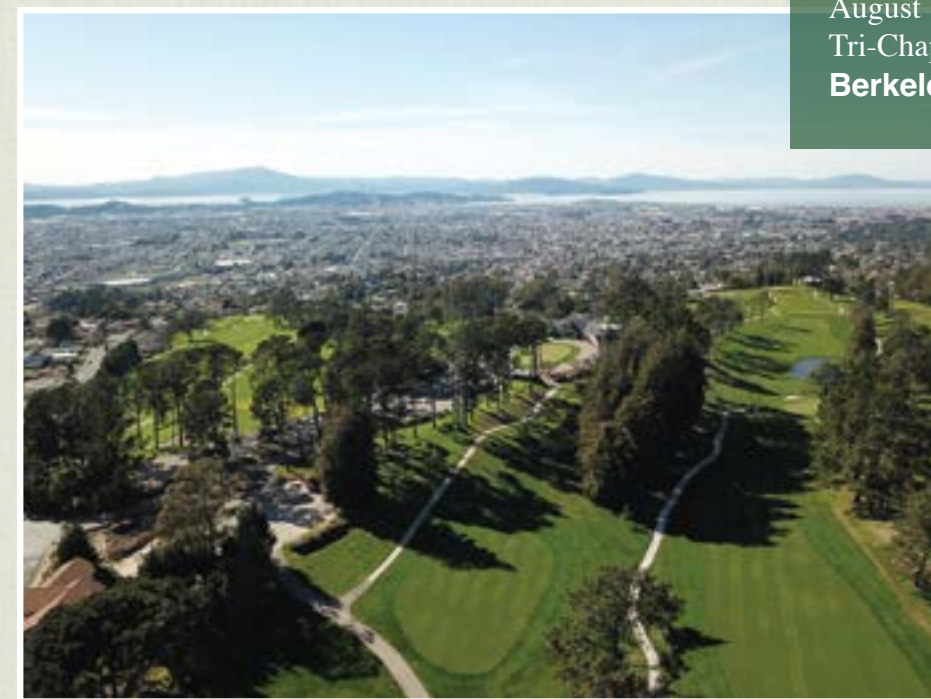
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& Research Meeting
Blackhawk Country Club – Falls Course



April 22
GCSANC USGA Regional Conference
Cinnabar Hills Golf Club



August 11
Tri-Chapter Meeting
Berkeley Country Club



April 1
GCSANC Affiliates Breakfast
Lake Merced Golf Club

April 3
GCSANC Field Day
Poppy Ridge Golf Course



November 17
GCSANC Annual Meeting & Awards Ceremony

November 13-14
DPR QAC/QAL Exam Preparation Training Event
Peninsula Golf & Country Club

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Tartan Corner

By HUNKI YUN, Executive Director, American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA)



ASGCA Annual Meeting

You probably recognize a member of the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) by the Ross Tartan jackets they wear. The pattern is a tribute to Donald Ross, who was born in Dornoch, Scotland, before coming to the United States, designing hundreds of courses and becoming one of the Society's founding members.

Now, our members continue the legacy started by Ross and the other founding members, and the Tartan represents experience, expertise, creativity and integrity. Our members design courses that provide great on-course experiences and enjoyment for golfers of all skill levels, from tour pros to beginners.

While architects engage with all the leaders at a facility—board members, general managers, pros, they work most closely with the superintendents, who maintain the courses designed

by architects. Whether it's a new construction, complete renovation or a master plan implemented in stages, superintendents have the largest voice in the process and play a crucial role in ensuring the success of the project, from conception to delivering great playing conditions that complement the design of the course.

Both as an organization and through individual members, ASGCA has had great relationships with superintendents. Not only do architects work closely with superintendents on projects, ASGCA has been a presenting partner of the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show for several years and will continue to support GCSAA and the conference for years to come.

In addition to working with GCSAA on the national level, we are focusing on building relationships with local chapters and contributing to their members' experience. We have a lot of members in Northern California—Brian Costello, David Ginkel, David Dale, Kevin Ramsey,

Robert Trent Jones Jr., Bruce Charlton, Mike Gorman, Damian Pascuzzo—reflecting the high quality of golf courses in the area.

But as much fun as it is to talk about the best courses in the world, we are focused on ensuring the supply of courses that provide enjoyable, everyday experiences for all golfers. Aspiration is important, but so is access.

Many of us learned the game and started playing in community courses that were affordable and allowed us to fall in love with golf. While golf is enjoying a participation boom of late, there are a lot of factors that are causing entry-level courses to close, and there are few plans to build new courses. The result is a net decrease of community courses

around the country, which can threaten the future health of the game.

We want to work with associations around the country to highlight the positive aspects of golf and golf courses: sustainability, green space in urban areas, health benefits for residents, and the ability to offer multi-use spaces for people in the neighborhood to gather. Accessible, affordable courses are important both for golf and for communities, and ASGCA is committed to advocating for, building and reimagining courses that help the game grow and thrive over the next several decades.

We look forward to working with GCSANC and its members to support the game we all love and fulfill this vision for golf's future.



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Don Naumann is President of *Sierra Pacific Turf Supply*, Superintendent of *Blackberry Farm Golf Course*, and Owner of *Canyon Lakes Golf Course and Brewery*. We appreciate Don's updates on golf course personnel movements throughout northern California and beyond.

Steve Showers has left *Brookside Country Club* in Stockton to become the new Superintendent at *Discovery Bay Golf and Country Club*. He is replacing **Rodney Muller**.

Guillermo Romero-Reyes is leaving *Rio Vista Country Club* to become the new Superintendent at *Brookside Country Club*. Guillermo had worked there previously as the assistant and is now only a seven-minute drive from his new job!



Discovery Bay Golf and Country Club – Discovery Bay



Brookside Country Club – Stockton



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