

THRU THE GREEN

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of Northern California

January / February 2026



Bayonet and Black Horse Host to the 2026 GCSANC Assistant Superintendent Boot Camp

Inside This Issue

- Meet the 2026 President and Board of Directors
- Dealing with Golfer Complaints
- Creating a Culture of Care in Club Management

*Bayonet and Black Horse
in Seaside, California*

2026

GCSANC ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT BOOT CAMP



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ON THE COVER

Bayonet and Black Horse, Seaside, CA

Host of the 2026 Assistant Superintendent Boot Camp

NORCALENDAR

February 23-24 (Monday & Tuesday)
2026 GCSANC Assistant Superintendent
Boot Camp
Bayonet & Black Horse - Seaside, CA

April 21 (Tuesday)
2026 GCSANC USGA Regional Conference
Cinnabar Hills Golf Club - San Jose, CA

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Scholarship & Research Meeting
CordeValle Golf Club - San Martin, CA

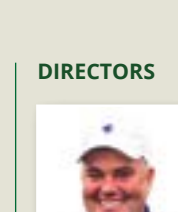
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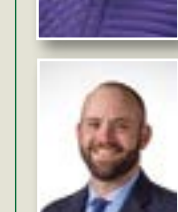
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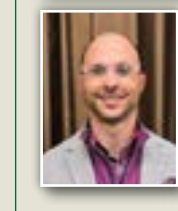
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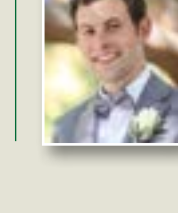
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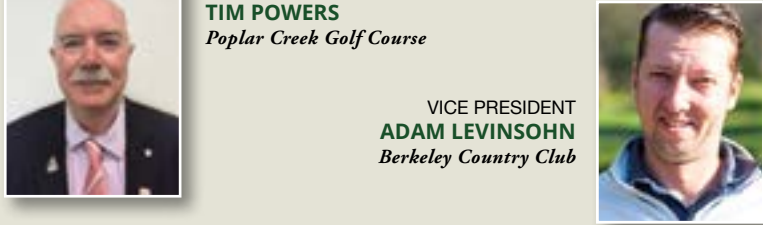
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President's Message

By **TIM POWERS**, *Poplar Creek Golf Course*

Merry New Year!! Thank you for the opportunity to be the 2026 President of GCSANC. This journey started years ago before a detour, but now I will finish it up. I started in the golf business in May, 1979, with a summer job mowing and weedeating around the clubhouse at Shorehaven Golf Club in Connecticut. Who knew I would still be at it now. I just wanted to work outdoors since my days in the Boy Scouts. I achieved the rank of Eagle Scout which is the equivalent of CGCS. I worked for two gentlemen in Connecticut whose courses were in similar settings, but they did things differently and presented outstanding conditions. That was eye-opening. There are several different ways of doing things, as long as you present the product. The expectations at facilities also vary. It is similar to the golf swing in that there are various swings that produce, as long as you are square at impact.

I have met many terrific people because of golf. I have been able to play and volunteer at some of the nicest landscaped properties in the world. I really enjoy the volunteer experience to learn about presentation and networking. I have worked 26 majors so far among 85 other events. I was amazed to work the 1999 U.S. Open at Pinehurst Resort with superintendents from Pebble Beach, Augusta National, and St. Andrews. They all host events and know what it takes to get the job done in a finite period of time. Every experience is different but always rewarding. Help out our friends just as we do every day.

If you ever get the chance to do construction, take advantage of it. I learned a great deal helping build four courses in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and Louisville, Kentucky, and that helps with our normal maintenance. You don't think about everything that is buried underground but it all matters. Golf course architects are brilliant people who can picture a course from woods and a pile of dirt.

I highly recommend that people attend the GCSAA Conference & Trade Show. The educational opportunities cover every subject. You get out of it what you put into it. I am really glad to have played in most GCSAA Golf Championships since 1990 in Orlando. You never know who you will get paired with and the connections that can lead to. A small group of us started having "safety meetings" in about 2003. It is a time to relax with fellow superintendents and talk shop or any subject people have questions about. It can be an introduction for young guys to meet seasoned veterans that may lead to an opportunity down the road. I try to get my staff to visit other golf courses as thanks for the work they do but more importantly to see other courses to see how it is presented.

Another excellent educational opportunity is presented at Cache Creek in early March. It always has a terrific lineup of speakers and a really special guest speaker during dinner. It is important to get to meetings to learn and get ideas. We hope everybody can help out with Rounds4Research from GCSAA because the money it raises helps the local chapter get funding for scholarships and research. We all benefit from university research to find better grasses and products. The USGA meeting will be in April at Cinnabar Hills thanks to Brian Boyer. We never stop learning.

Have a great day. Keep it in the short grass!

Tim Powers



Executive Director's Report

By MARC CONNERLY, GCSANC

Welcome to the first *Thru The Green* of 2026. I hope you have enjoyed a smooth start to the new year.

In this issue, I want to focus on the many opportunities that GCSANC presents for getting involved with the association. Whether you are a superintendent, assistant, equipment manager, or affiliate, there are various ways for you to engage and make a difference.

One way is to assist with Rounds4Research (R4R), the GCSAA program that raises money through the auction of donated rounds of golf and returns 80% of all funds raised to the chapters. This year's online auction runs April 20-26, so we have a little over two months to solicit rounds.

Northern California is rich with desirable golf courses, and although GCSANC's R4R revenues have increased in recent years (with a new high of just over \$11,000 raised in 2025), Northern California still lags behind several chapters in the country.

Volunteering to call on courses and solicit the donation of rounds would be a huge help as we continue working to grow R4R revenues to \$20,000 or more.

Another opportunity to get involved is by volunteering to host or help another superintendent host a First Green event. Gary Ingram leads the First Green Committee, and he welcomes individuals interested in helping with First Green events. We are planning a First Green Committee call in the next few weeks, so please email me and I will add you to that committee.

Equipment Manager (EM) is a very new membership category, and we have not established programming focused on training and educating equipment managers, so we would welcome one or two EMs to volunteer to help with the planning of an educational event aimed at Northern California EMs. We would also appreciate assistance from EMs with recruiting your peers to join GCSANC (membership is just \$50 per year).

Similarly, whether you are an assistant superintendent or superintendent, volunteering to help spread the word about GCSANC and recruit members is a great way to get involved and help without taking much of your time. Those interested in membership can apply to become a member at <https://membership-gcsanc.wildapricot.org/sys/website/?pageId=271412>, and if you are unsure of the benefits of membership, here is a quick summary of the most important reasons to join GCSANC:

- Access to scholarships and intern housing
- Dues help support scholarship and research funding
- Members receive discounts on event registration fees
- Bi-monthly magazine
- Informative email bulletins on a variety of topics, including California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) news, updates from the California Alliance for Golf, and more
- Free webinars, including access to webinar recordings

Of course, we always welcome those interested in serving as Board members as well. Board membership is another opportunity to participate and a great way to hone your leadership skills and shape the future of the organization and the superintendent profession in Northern California.

We hope you will get involved and help grow GCSANC. Please email me at mconnerly@connerlyandassociates.com if any of these opportunities are of interest to you.

Marc Connerly

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From the Field

By JEFF JENSEN, GCSAA Field Staff, Southwest Region

This column will find many of you freshly returned from the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show in Orlando. I hope you enjoyed the event this year, and seeing many of you at the California Room and on the show floor was great! We appreciate your participation and continued support.

I wanted to highlight a few educational opportunities that you may not be aware of. In the fall of 2025, we introduced the Greenkeeper Certificate. This entry-level program introduces the essential skills and knowledge needed for success in golf course maintenance. Through hands-on training, completion of a skills evaluation guide and online exam, and educational webinars, learners will gain a solid understanding of the daily responsibilities involved in maintaining healthy, high-performing playing surfaces.

It is ideal for those just entering the industry, and the program builds a solid foundation for future certificates and career growth. It also emphasizes the importance of teamwork, communication, and professionalism as key components of a successful golf course maintenance team. For more information on the Greenkeeper Certificate, visit <https://learn.gcsaa.org/learning-paths/greenkeeper-certificate>.

The Assistant Superintendent Certificate Series is a four-part series designed to enhance the careers of assistants and assist them on their way to becoming a superintendent. The series includes certificates on Principles of Golf Course Business, Principles of Golf Course Agronomy, Principles of Golf Course Leadership and Communication, and Principles of Golf

Course Environmental Stewardship. Each series is \$50 for GCSAA members (\$200 for all four) and includes pre-selected learning webinars as well as elective options. More information is available at <https://learn.gcsaa.org/pages/certificate>.

Lastly, most of you are aware of the GCSAA Video Training Series that was launched last spring. This set of Basic Crew Training videos introduces essential golf course tasks like cup cutting, greens mowing, and more. Whether you are onboarding new employees or reinforcing best practices, this series is a simple, effective tool to support your team's success. The 11-part series is available free of charge to members and is now available in Spanish. Additionally, we are planning to add two additional videos this spring. The videos are available at <https://learn.gcsaa.org/courses/basic-crew-training-1>.

I hope you and your crew benefit from these educational offerings and, if you need any assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at jjensen@gcsaa.org and follow me for industry updates on X at GCSAA_SW. I look forward to seeing you at upcoming GCSANC events!

Jeff Jensen

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From the Capitol

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



The deadline for submittal of bills in the 2026 session of the state legislature is February 20. The 2026 session is the second year of the two-year session, which means that the month of January is clogged with those bills carried over from 2025, all of which must pass through their committees of reference, survive their respective Appropriations Committees, and receive majority floor votes in their respective houses by January 31 in order to continue forward. This delays the filing of the new session's one-year bills; thus, expect a torrent of filings the first three weeks of February, a torrent likely to include the filing of the bill that the California Alliance for Golf (CAG) is sponsoring in 2026 – the “Blocking Illegitimate Reservations and Protecting Equitable Access to California’s Publicly Owned Golf Courses Act.” The author is confirmed. The language is all but set. Some of the key supporters have been identified and brought aboard.

But the deadline for submittal of this column was January 20, and that is all I can share in this first “From the Capitol” column about CAG’s bill and pretty much all I can share with any clarity or definition about any of the bills that CAG will be either supporting, opposing, supporting with amendments, opposing unless amended, or just tracking.

In lieu of a legislative report card, let me instead share thoughts about a subject that is more important, because it is the factor that most determines golf’s final grade in every legislative session – not just the one in Sacramento, but the ones in cities, counties, special districts, and commissions that are often more impactful than the legislative session in the State

Capitol – and certainly more impactful than the really big one in Washington, D.C.

It's the factor that Abraham Lincoln emphasized repeatedly – public opinion. Or as he more eloquently put it in his debate with Stephen Douglass in his 1858 losing effort to represent Illinois in the United States Senate:

“In this age, in this country, public sentiment is everything. With it, nothing can fail; against it, nothing can succeed. Whoever molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces judicial decisions.”

What you do as golf course superintendents at your golf facility and in your community, and how you communicate what you do beyond the confines of that facility will be more determinative of how golf fares in your local community and the state as a whole than all the grand strategies and focused efforts of your ostensible leaders in various commission rooms, city halls, halls of administration, administrative hearing rooms, and state legislatures. Indeed, what you do will either limit or expand what they can do.

As I tell many of my counterparts who advocate on behalf of other sectors, I am one lucky guy. While they often have to practice the arts of avoidance, obfuscation, and spinning, all I have to do is trumpet the unvarnished truth about what golf does and how it does it, and the game’s stock rises in the estimation of the general public. Better yet, trumpet that “unvarnished truth” to the game’s water providers and regulators, and the game’s stock rises in the estimation

of the disinterested experts whose credibility with the general public is infinitely higher than the credibility the public reposes in interested parties like golf course superintendents or those like yours truly whose job it is to advocate on behalf of golf. Their “job” is to scrutinize and regulate golf – to make sure that golf hits its conservation targets, applies non-organics per their labels, controls runoffs in accordance with local/state/federal permits, and hews to a whole host of environmental regulations that grow with each passing year.

When “they” trumpet golf’s record in those areas, their voice carries more weight than the rest of us combined. Case in point. During a California Department of Water Resources (DWR) statewide “stakeholder” call late last year, a meeting to discuss implementation of the new iteration of the California Model Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance (MWELO), Charles Bohlig, the Conservation Manager for East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EBMUD), one of the largest water providers in the state, reported that while EBMUD was disappointed in the performance of Alameda and Contra Costa’s residences and small businesses, the agency was thrilled with the performance of the 155 “Large Landscapes” the agency serves, the majority of which he pointed out were golf courses. While residents and small businesses were falling short of their marks, the golf courses were exceeding them by wide margins. The people listening to Mr. Bohlig’s high praise were water managers, regulators, academics, and consultants from all corners of California.

That “story” is the same story that has so often served the golf community well during droughts. I don’t have space here to share all the times that the game’s excellent record in water conservation has “saved” it during drought crises. Whether 2016 statewide or the 2022 crisis in Los Angeles and Ventura counties, it was ONLY because the game had earned the respect and trust of its regulators that it was able to withstand what was often a public cry for much more draconian restrictions than those regulators proposed to apply. I cannot tell you how many times I have been in the room when someone from an environmental organization singled out golf for criticism only to be contradicted by someone in government who “educates” them about the facts about golf. And as someone who considers that he has succeeded when the facts of the matter determine the matter, such education is music to my ears.

But it’s “music” that we will only hear if we get beyond preaching to each other. Golf needs to put on some big-boy pants and unabashedly preach to the 90% of the world that neither plays golf nor cares about golf that the game is doing much better than they think while humbly suggesting that while “better” is good, it is not good enough; golf strives to do even better.

Never forget that the message that golf “preaches” can only be effective if it preaches the truth about what golf does – a truth that while persons like me can preach a pretty good sermon about it, ONLY persons like you can deliver it. Never forget that either!

Craig

Continued on page 11

Tartan Corner

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



Photo by Gene Gallin Cmezsi/Unsplash

While the ongoing popularity of golf over the past several years has been good for nearly everybody in the golf industry, full tee sheets represent challenges for superintendents as they work hard to deliver enjoyable playing experiences for golfers.

The mission of the American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA) is to foster the design of courses that enhance these experiences, and our members can be your allies. Of course, architects are not involved in the day-to-day maintenance of your course. But they can work with you to look at ways to make your budget and operations more efficient through design changes.

Although they require an upfront cost, infrastructure upgrades can yield long-term benefits. In addition, design changes (bunkers, low-maintenance areas, tees, etc.) can spread out golfer traffic, reduce wear around certain parts of the course, and help prioritize resources to the areas that golfers use to determine the conditioning and evaluate the quality of the course.

Every study of golfer experience has shown that course conditioning is the biggest factor in customer satisfaction during a round of golf. But a close second is pace of play. While there are numerous factors that go into determining pace, including tee intervals, course policies

and golfer behavior, course design and conditioning are often overlooked.

Recently, ASGCA acquired the archives of Bill Yates, who pioneered the work in studying pace of play as a science and providing engineering solutions to improve this key component of golfer satisfaction. An analyst who studied systems such as factories and supply chains, Bill turned his attention to golf courses to solve the age-old problem of slow play.

Before the age of GPS, Bill could be seen on the course with multiple stopwatches and a clipboard, recording the movement of golfers around the course. His research yielded a couple of insights. One identified the fundamental source of pace when he said: “It is the golf course architect who sets the stage for how long a round will take—and how the pace will unfold.”

Second, he specifically defined which aspect of slow play had the biggest negative impact on golfer satisfaction. While most of us use round times as the way to measure pace, Bill concluded that bottlenecks or waits were more frustrating than the duration of the round.

To put it another way, let’s take two different rounds. Round one takes five hours, which is a slow round by traditional measure. Round two is four and a half hours, but there was

a significant wait on one tee. Due to this delay, the experience of the second round usually rates lower in golfer satisfaction surveys.

The good news is that it is possible to reduce waits with alterations in course design and setup. But sometimes, an effective change can seem counterintuitive. On the surface, it would seem that shortening a hole can improve pace. But if shortening waits is the goal, that is not always the case.

Bill worked with a resort course that had chronic backups on a tee midway through the round. To reduce the delay on this tee, Bill encouraged the

course to work with an architect to lengthen the previous hole. That slowed play coming into and off that green, in essence taking the time that had been spent waiting on the next tee and spreading it out over the play of the previous hole.

Using the foundation of Bill’s knowledge base, ASGCA is partnering with Tagmarshal to develop a program to provide pace education and resources for facility managers, including superintendents. I have been fortunate to get to know Bill, work with him, and learn from him before he passed away in 2018. It is an honor to continue his legacy and make a difference in helping golfers enjoy the game more. ■



Photo by Andy Wang/Unsplash

Continued on page 13

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GCSANC President's Profile

Tim Powers, Poplar Creek Golf Course

GCSANC President PROFILE

The new GCSANC President took office on January 1, 2026.

Where did you grow up?

I was born in New York City and lived on Long Island before moving to Connecticut in 1975. That is why I will always be an Islander, Mets, and Giants (NY football) fan for life, but I like all sports.

Was golf a big part of your life growing up?

I played all the other sports. The only time I was on a golf course was to go sleigh riding.

When did you make the decision to go into turf maintenance, and where did you get your education?

I wanted to work outdoors after being in the Boy Scouts. I went to the University of Maine at Orono for Forest Management. Then I got a summer job on a golf course doing rotary and weedeating, but that lasted two weeks until I got on a mower. I haven't left that summer job yet. I went to the Winter School in Turf Management at the University of Massachusetts - Amherst in 1987. I figured I needed a diploma to advance in the industry.

How has being a superintendent differed from your vision of the job prior to starting your career?

I didn't realize the passion it takes to last in the business. I was almost scared when I found myself doing scheduling while taking a shower. We are always thinking about the job and getting everything done and what is next. We have to think about how what we do affects others. We are always learning and trying to pass that knowledge along to members, staff, and other employees.

Who were the primary influencers in your career?

I worked for Bob Phipps for eight years at Shorehaven Golf Club in Norwalk, Connecticut. He passed along lots of information about the job and why we do certain



Tim Powers

tasks. He had a real passion for the job. Then I worked at Country Club of Fairfield for Ted Maddocks. It is a terrific Seth Raynor design. The course was in a similar setting near Long Island Sound, but he did things differently. They both presented outstanding conditions, so I learned that there are different ways of getting the job done. There were many outstanding superintendents in the Metropolitan Golf Course Superintendents Association (MetGCSA).

Tell us a bit about how you got into Board service and what motivated you to do so?

I started this journey when I was at Crystal Springs Golf Course. I knew that people have to get everything organized to help the membership. I have always been one to attend meetings and seminars to learn and build a network. This industry is unique in that we are all



Poplar Creek Golf Course

willing to help each other when needed. I don't think most industries would be like that. The golf world is very big, but very small when you have been in it for a while.

What are your priorities for GCSANC in 2026?

Trying to show the value of being part of the association. Teaching people to participate in what we offer. It is important for people to visit other courses and see how they present the course. Find ideas to improve your home track.

Do you have a favorite memory in golf or a favorite golf course?

I finally got to volunteer at The Masters in 2012. I was there with people from some of the top courses in the world because they host events and know what it takes to put on the big show. I have worked 26 majors and counting among 80 other tournaments. We all can help our friends and learn from the group.

Tell us about your hobbies and interests away from the golf course.

I enjoy jogging, photographing wildlife, playing golf, and collecting sports memorabilia. I have been lucky enough to visit some of the nicest landscaped lands in the world, turf study with clubs. A highlight was playing Auckland Golf Club in New Zealand because that is where my mother was born. I have played in Ireland which is heritage on my father's side. I have worked for the National Hockey League for 21 seasons as an off-ice official. It is great to get paid to watch hockey. They are the best athletes and nicest people to be around. And they really like golf!

Any personal goals you'd like to share?

Volunteer at more golf tournaments as long as I can. Meet new people. Live long enough to see the San Jose Sharks win the Stanley Cup. ■

Introduction to 2026 GCSANC
New Board Members

2026 Board Members

A new GCSANC Board took office on January 1, 2026.

Ongoing Board members in new positions are:



TIM POWERS
Poplar Creek Golf Course
President



ADAM LEVINSOHN
Berkeley Country Club
Vice President



DERICK MARA
Contra Costa Country Club
Secretary/Treasurer



JOE BUDINICH
Peninsula Golf & Country Club
Past President

In addition, we are pleased to welcome the following new GCSANC Board members:



DIRECTOR
MATT DACHOWSKI
Golf Course
Superintendent, Lake
Merced Golf Club

Matt grew up in Reading, Pennsylvania, and was introduced to golf at a young age. He graduated from Pennsylvania State University with a degree in turfgrass science. After graduating, he worked at two of this year's major championship venues, first at Aronimink Golf Club and then at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club. He then made the move to the West Coast and spent 8 years at the Los Angeles Country Club, before taking on his current role at Lake Merced 10 years ago. The love for golf also runs in his family, as his brother is also a superintendent at Shelter Harbor Golf Club in Rhode Island.

Matt completed a full course restoration in 2022, which he continues to perfect to this day. Shortly after the completion of the restoration, his twins were born and have taken away all his free time. When he schedules his free time with plenty of advance notice, he enjoys spending his days on the river fishing for trout in Northern California.



DIRECTOR
CONNER GALEA
Golf Course Superintendent,
Monterey Peninsula Country Club

Conner grew up in a family with a long history in golf throughout the Bay Area. Much of his youth was spent learning the game and helping prepare courses during school breaks alongside his father, Peter Galea, CGCS.

After high school, Conner began his career at Pebble Beach Golf Links. While at Pebble Beach, Conner volunteered at numerous tournaments, participated in many projects, and earned a degree in turfgrass management from Rutgers University in 2014.

Following graduation, Conner spent four years as Assistant Superintendent at San Francisco Golf Club. He then returned to the Monterey Peninsula to serve as an Assistant Superintendent at Spyglass Hill Golf Course. For the past five years, Conner has been at Monterey Peninsula Country Club, where he is the Golf Course Superintendent.

In his free time, Conner enjoys traveling and spending time outdoors hiking, playing golf, photography, biking, and skiing.



AFFILIATE DIRECTOR
RYAN JOHNSON
Golf Accessories Manager/Rain
Bird Irrigation Sales, Sierra Pacific
Turf Supply

Ryan has spent the last 16 years working in the golf course industry, supporting golf facilities throughout Northern California. Since 2009, he has been part of the team at Sierra Pacific Turf Supply, where he oversees the Golf Accessories division and works closely with courses to help meet their day-to-day needs.

In 2022, Ryan also took on the role of Rain Bird Golf Irrigation representative with Sierra Pacific Turf Supply for the Northern California Bay Area, partnering with superintendents and industry professionals to support their irrigation goals and long-term course success. He feels incredibly lucky to be part of such a great industry and to have worked with so many customers who have become close friends over the years.

Outside of work, he enjoys spending time with his wife and their two daughters. They love boating, traveling, and spending quality time with extended family.



Dealing with Golfer Complaints

By BRADLEY S. KLEIN, January 16, 2026

This article is re-published with permission from the USGA website, Green Section, Volume 64, Issue 01.



Superintendent John Carlone, recently retired after 40 years in the business, recalls the title of a GCSAA seminar he attended years ago that provided some of the most valuable lessons he ever encountered. It was called “Hold Your Tongue, Hold Your Job.” “The point of the class,” he said, “was to make sure you did not reveal what you actually thought about whatever they had to say.” Over the years, added Carlone, he learned never to argue with a golfer who presented an idea or complaint. “No matter how crazy or how absurd,” he said, “I tried to respond with something helpful that showed them I was listening and taking them seriously.”

That’s easier said than done given some of the feedback golfers come up with and the steady drumbeat of suggestions from armchair agronomists that bedevil a typical superintendent. Golfer complaints about course conditions can be nerve-racking at the least, and sometimes a real threat to a superintendent’s job security. Handling them effectively takes more than discipline and tact, you need to have a strategy and a larger analytical perspective on the nature of golf course operations.

Remember the 90/10 rule.

For starters, the old “90/10 rule” is relevant here. At most courses, the vast majority of golfers are reasonably happy, or at least quiet. Roughly 90 percent of the unrest emanates from about 10 percent of the golfers. This seems to be a consistent ratio for many businesses, with the additional proviso that golf contributes to the frustration level of its

participants like few other activities, and the unhappiness that comes from bad shots often gets directed outwardly rather than articulated as self-criticism. Someone is at fault for the failures encountered during a round. For many golfers, it might as well be the person responsible for setting up the playing field. It’s important for superintendents and golf facility leaders to keep the 90/10 ratio in mind so they don’t overreact to the loudly voiced grievances of a relatively small number of customers.

Roughly 90 percent of the unrest emanates from about 10 percent of the golfers.

Avoid reverse exposure.

Running a golf course is firmly planted in the hospitality and service industry. Like many other service businesses, the bulk of customer interactions don’t typically happen with department leaders who are best prepared to answer questions or receive angry complaints – it’s often whomever happens to be manning the counter at the golf shop or the first maintenance staff member that drives past an unhappy player. This creates an information gap where the initial concerns a golfer might have about course conditions do not get an appropriately informed response. The result can be misunderstanding and a perceived accountability vacuum.

Establishing well-known lines of communication for golfers to reach the superintendent can help alleviate this issue, and many superintendents are proactively making themselves visible and available on the course throughout the day so they can connect with golfers and answer any questions or concerns. Handling complaints on the fly might not necessarily be enjoyable, but it gives the superintendent an opportunity to better understand the issue and either explain it or assure the golfer that steps will be taken to address it. You can even hop in a cart and go check out the problem together. Defusing issues on the spot is much better than letting them get amplified over a few drinks in the bar after the round.

Present a unified front.

Handling complaints and questions about course conditions successfully requires a unified front across golf course departments. That means having the general manager,

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Dealing with Golfer Complaints

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golf professional and superintendent on the same page publicly. If golfers perceive any breach in that formal unity, there is sure to emerge the kind of subterranean grumbling that leads to dissension and unrest.

Well-run courses provide a unified message to the customer regardless of any differences of opinion that get expressed in department meetings. Weekly conferences among department leaders also help, ideally on a rotating basis in the respective offices of the main characters. It's great for the superintendent, golf professional and general manager to play golf together from time to time, or visit neighboring courses to see how they operate. This builds comfort, strengthens lines of communication and helps the leadership team handle problems smoothly. The goal is not for the general manager or the head professional to become an agronomic expert, or for the superintendent to become a sommelier, it's just to make sure everyone is on the same page. This is especially important when it comes to planning infrastructure upgrades or major renovations, because the disruption that comes with these projects is bound to produce more than the usual amount of grumbling.

Handling complaints and questions about course conditions successfully requires a unified front across golf course departments.

The leadership team needs to present a common front and share relevant information with customer-facing staff so that a clear, simple and affirmative message is conveyed consistently. Otherwise, chronic naysayers will exploit perceived gaps. The USGA Green Section did a podcast featuring the superintendent and head golf professional at Southern Hills Country Club in Oklahoma that covers the importance of a unified front in great detail.

You can't please everybody.

Everything from routine decisions about course maintenance to plans for much-needed infrastructure improvements can be derailed by a few negative voices – often it's the same voices again and again. It is up to the facility leadership to distinguish legitimate concerns from the kind of narrow-minded objections raised by people who find fault with everything or who have a personal agenda that doesn't match the long-term best interests of the course. Decision-makers often spend an immense

amount of time responding to the concerns of what can only be described as perpetual whiners. In the process, they can lose focus on sound planning and everyone suffers. It's important for people to be heard, but the priorities of long-term planning and daily decision-making can't be driven by the whims of a few grumps.

Decision-makers often spend an immense amount of time responding to the concerns of what can only be described as perpetual whiners.

Outreach is important.

When you get golfers in a room to discuss matters related to course maintenance or renovations, it can be striking how unfamiliar they are with some of the basic considerations. That usually applies to owners, boards and committees as well. Superintendents need to recognize this even if the golfers don't. Be proactive with your education efforts and keep them simple.

A membership forum or smaller focus group can be a very instructive venue for educating rank-and-file golfers about course conditions, maintenance practices, and the long-term needs of a facility. Including outside experts in these meetings helps reinforce important messages. The key is to prevent these sessions from getting hijacked. An open bar is never conducive to rational discourse, and it's good to have some supportive and influential golfers ready to pose questions that advance a productive discussion.

Listening carefully and taking concerns seriously is always the best approach – with the qualifying note that not all concerns merit an explanation of the same detail and nuance. Of course, there is always the approach taken at Crooked Stick Golf Club in Carmel, Indiana, where a suggestion box welcoming comments sits on a pole in the middle of the lake alongside the 18th hole.

One thing is for sure: The fine art of dealing with complaints is a far more sophisticated craft than simply pretending to listen.

Bradley S. Klein is a veteran golf writer, book author and design consultant. He regularly contributes articles to the USGA Green Section Record about course renovations, long-term golf facility planning, and many other topics. ■

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Creating a Culture of Care Supporting the Whole Club Family

By JENNIFER MCNALLY



The hospitality industry has long been revered for its relentless commitment to service—early mornings, late nights, and a drive to deliver excellence at every turn. But behind the smiles and seamless experiences, a quieter reality persists—one of unspoken stress, emotional fatigue, and mental health struggles that often extend beyond the workplace and into the homes of club professionals.

Hospitality workers often experience elevated levels of anxiety, burnout, and substance abuse—making it one of the most mentally vulnerable sectors post-COVID, according to the Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Management, 2022.

This complex web of personal and professional pressures took center stage during a groundbreaking session at the CMAA 2025 World Conference titled "Silent Struggle." The session offered raw and transparent insight into the mental health challenges faced by hospitality workers and shined a light on the ripple effects these struggles can have on spouses, children, and other loved ones—the extended "club family."

Two panelists from that session, Kelley Williams, CCM, and Rechelle Leal, Director of Youth and Family Programs at Houston Racquet Club in Houston, TX, spoke with us about their experiences and perspectives on how the industry can evolve to support not just employees, but their entire families. Their stories serve as both a call to action and a roadmap for building a more compassionate, holistic club culture.



Read more about mental health and substance abuse in the May/June 2022 issue of Club Management magazine.

"What really stayed with me was the sense of relief people felt just hearing the words spoken out loud. So many of us have carried these heavy emotions silently for years, thinking we were alone. That session cracked something open. People started sharing and feeling seen."

— Rechelle Leal, Director of Youth and Family Programs at Houston Racquet Club in Houston, TX



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GCSANC is committed to support the well-being of turf professionals by providing mental health resources from within the industry and related industries.

We appreciate permission from the Club Management Association of America to reprint from the May/June 2025 edition of their Club Management magazine.

Opening the Door to Real Conversation

For Williams, the most powerful part of the Silent Struggle session was watching vulnerability become a catalyst for connection.

"What resonated most with me was the willingness of attendees to openly share their stories and ask questions," she said. "It was truly eye-opening. Knowing that we created a safe and supportive space where others felt seen and heard—that was incredibly heartwarming."

Leal echoed the sentiment. "What really stayed with me was the sense of relief people felt just hearing the words spoken out loud," she shared. "So many of us have carried these heavy emotions silently for years, thinking we were alone. That session cracked something open. People started sharing and feeling seen."

The shared takeaway: silence is the true struggle. And breaking it—through honest conversation—is the first step toward healing.

The Ripple Effect at Home

One of the most under-discussed aspects of mental health in hospitality is how closely it intertwines with home life. While professionals may be taught to "leave it at the door," both Williams and Leal made it clear that such compartmentalization isn't realistic.

"We often tell ourselves to leave everything at the door—but the reality is, that's not reasonable," Williams explained. "Stress at home can bleed into work, and stress at work can follow us home. You can't compartmentalize stress, burnout, or mental illness forever. We might hide it for a while, but it always catches up—and when it does, it can become a serious breaking point."

Leal added, "When someone is struggling mentally, their family and friends feel it too. Sometimes the emotional weight we bring home after a long day creates a ripple effect. And often, the ones we love the most see the side of us that's the most exhausted."

The emotional cost is real. And in many cases, family members are the ones who provide the first sign that something's off—or the first opportunity to get back on track.

"It was difficult for me to open up to my brother and sister-in-law. With five kids and busy lives, I didn't want to burden them. But once I finally shared, it became so much easier to be open with them. Since then, we've had deep, meaningful conversations that brought us closer."

— Kelley Williams, CCM



When Family Becomes the Lifeline

Leal recalled a time when her own mental health challenges created distance in her personal life—until her husband gently intervened.

"I was so deep in stress, I didn't even realize how disconnected I was from my family," she said. "My husband pointed it out—not in a confrontational way, just with love. He reminded me I wasn't alone, and that I didn't have to carry it all by myself. That moment made me feel supported, heard, and seen. It was okay to not be okay."

Williams shared a similar experience. "It was difficult for me to open up to my brother and sister-in-law. With five kids and busy lives, I didn't want to burden them."

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Creating a Culture of Care

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But once I finally shared, it became so much easier to be open with them. Since then, we've had deep, meaningful conversations that brought us closer."

These stories highlight the critical role families play—not only in emotional recovery, but in establishing long-term mental well-being.

Wellness Beyond the Workplace

While family support is key, both Williams and Leal stress that employers—especially clubs—can and should do more to promote mental health and wellness on a broader scale.

"Having pillars of support is essential," Williams said. "I wouldn't be where I am today without the people in my life. For me, finding hobbies that bring joy—like painting rocks or refurbishing furniture—has been incredibly helpful. It's not about being an artist; it's about creating something to share. It grounds me."

In fact, 81 percent of workers say they will look for workplaces that support mental health when they seek future job opportunities, according to the APA 2022 Work and Well-being Survey.

Big Impact, Small Steps

When asked what club leaders can do—right now—to make a difference, both Williams and Leal offered simple, actionable ideas.

"Start with empathy," Leal said. "Just taking a moment to ask, 'How are you really doing?' and truly listening—it goes a long way. People remember those moments of care. And when leaders show up with compassion, it gives everyone else permission to do the same."

Williams agreed, stressing the importance of time and boundaries. "Making sure staff actually take their vacation time and set clear boundaries is essential. There should never be an attitude of 'I don't have time for that,' because we're not guaranteed tomorrow. Rest isn't a luxury—it's a necessity."

A Culture Shift for the Club Family

At its core, the wellness of club professionals is inseparable from the well-being of their families. When stress, burnout, or mental illness are left unacknowledged, the consequences are far-reaching. But when clubs choose to lead with empathy, support, and a broader vision of wellness, they create a ripple effect of healing that reaches far beyond the workplace.

"I wish more people in the club industry recognized how deeply connected personal well-being is to professional performance," Williams reflected. "Creating environments that acknowledge this reality is critical to supporting overall wellness."

She emphasized the importance of encouraging employees to explore these outlets as well. "Understanding what brings our team members joy outside of work—and finding ways to support or encourage that—plays a big role in fostering a truly positive environment."

Leal believes clubs are uniquely positioned to lead this change. "We're already in the business of creating community—what if we did the same for our teams?" she asked. "By checking in, offering real support, and making wellness a regular part of the conversation, we can create a culture where people feel valued beyond their job title."

"Understanding what brings our team members joy outside of work—and finding ways to support or encourage that—plays a big role in fostering a truly positive environment."

— Kelley Williams, CCM

She also praised clubs that have gone further, offering therapy benefits for employees and their families. "A colleague once shared that their club brought therapists on staff not only for team members but for their families. I still think it's one of the best ideas I've heard. It sends a clear message: mental health matters here."

Leal summed it up simply: "When we pour everything into others, we also have to remember to fill ourselves back up—and help others do the same. That's how we take care of the whole club family."

As the conversation around mental health continues to grow, so too does the opportunity for clubs to become champions of change—not just for the professionals who keep their operations running, but for every person touched by the joys and challenges of life in hospitality.

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Creating a Culture of Care
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Warning Signs for Mental Health Issues

Mental well-being is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle—not just for your members, but for club staff, leadership teams, and families. Just as we look out for physical signs of illness, it's vital to be aware of the red flags that might signal someone is struggling with their mental health.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), mental health conditions are common and treatable—but early detection is key. Recognizing the signs in ourselves or others can lead to faster support and better outcomes.

Emotional and Behavioral Warning Signs

- **Persistent Sadness or Irritability:** Unexplained mood changes, feeling down for more than two weeks, or displaying uncharacteristic irritability can all be signs of mental distress.
- **Withdrawal from Social Interaction:** Pulling away from friends, family, or usual social activities may indicate that someone is overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed.
- **Loss of Interest or Motivation:** A sudden lack of interest in activities once enjoyed—whether that's tennis, working out, or professional responsibilities—could signal a deeper emotional struggle.
- **Changes in Eating or Sleeping Habits:** Overeating, loss of appetite, insomnia, or excessive sleeping may be tied to conditions like depression or anxiety disorders.



Physical and Sensory Clues

- **Unexplained Aches and Pains:** Chronic headaches, stomach problems, or muscle aches without a clear medical cause can be linked to stress, depression, or anxiety.
- **Fatigue or Low Energy:** Feeling constantly tired or sluggish—despite rest—can be a symptom of several mental health conditions.



Cognitive and Workplace Indicators

- **Trouble Concentrating or Making Decisions:** Struggling with focus or experiencing memory lapses may affect job performance and day-to-day functioning.
- **Decreased Productivity or Increased Absenteeism:** Repeated missed shifts, dropping the ball on responsibilities, or showing up late can sometimes reflect deeper mental health challenges.



Verbal or Nonverbal Cues

- **Trouble Expressions of Hopelessness or Helplessness:** Statements like "What's the point?" or "Things will never get better" should always be taken seriously.
- **Talk of Death or Suicide:** Any mention of suicide, dying, or feeling like a burden must be treated as an urgent mental health concern.



A simple "I've noticed you haven't seemed like yourself lately—how are you doing?" can open the door to support.

Risk Behaviors

- **Increased Use of Alcohol or Substances:** Using drugs or alcohol to "cope" with stress or numb emotions is a serious warning sign that should never be ignored.
- **Engaging in Risky or Reckless Behavior:** This includes excessive gambling, unsafe driving, or sudden financial irresponsibility—behaviors that may be out of character for the individual.

What Can You Do?

Start a conversation. Listen without judgment. Encourage the person who may be struggling to speak to a mental health professional. For clubs, that might mean sharing Employee Assistance Program (EAP) resources, wellness benefits, or simply creating a culture where it's okay to not be okay.

As mentioned in the September/October 2025 issue of *Thru the Green*, GCSANC past president Steven Spatafore was selected for the 2026 GCSAA Emerging Leader Award. At right is a banner sign displayed during the 2026 GCSAA Conference & Trade Show in Orlando.

Congratulations, Steven!



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Naumann's NorCal News

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 keeping us updated on turf professional staffing changes throughout California.

Danny Fielder has left Dublin Ranch Golf Course and is the new Superintendent at Spring Creek Golf and Country Club in Ripon.

Nick Lopez has accepted the Superintendent position at Rio Vista Country Club. Nick had been the Assistant at Del Paso Country Club prior to his move.

Steve Agin is the new Superintendent at Canyon Lakes Golf Course & Brewery in San Ramon. Steve is replacing Mike Hosely, who moved to a Horticultural Position outside of golf in Northern California.

Matt Nisbett is making a move from Deep Cliff Golf Course in Cupertino to be the Superintendent at Boulder Ridge Country Club in San Jose. Matt is replacing Eric Green, who moved to Poppy Hills Golf Course as the Assistant Superintendent under Lupe Orozco.

Brian Palmer is the new Superintendent at Cypress Point Club in Pebble Beach. Brian was the Superintendent at Tara Iti Golf Club in New Zealand prior his return to the mainland. Brian is replacing retiring Superintendent Jeff Markow, who was the superintendent there for more than 33 years.



Spring Creek Golf and Country Club



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