

THRU THE GREEN

The Golf Course Superintendents Association of Northern California

March / April 2026



*2026 GCSANC USGA
Regional Conference
Tuesday, April 21, 2026
Cinnabar Hills Golf Club*

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*19th Annual Clifford & Myrtle Wagoner
Scholarship & Research Meeting
May 12, 2026
CordeValle Golf Club*

Inside This Issue

- Assistant Superintendent Boot Camp
- 2026 Photo Recap & Appreciating Its Origins
- The Myth of Work-Life Balance
- Looking Back with GCSANC President Tim Powers

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ON THE COVER

Cinnabar Hills Golf Club & CordeValle Golf Club - Hosts of upcoming GCSANC events.

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NORCALENDAR

April 21 (Tuesday)

2026 GCSANC USGA Regional Conference
Cinnabar Hills Golf Club - San Jose, CA

May 12 (Tuesday)

19th Annual Clifford & Myrtle Wagoner Scholarship & Research Meeting
CordeValle Golf Club - San Martin, CA

October 26-28 (Monday-Wednesday)

Western Golf & Sports Field Summit
Ontario Convention Center - Ontario, CA

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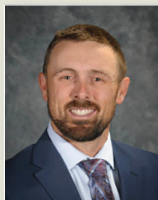


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President's Message

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

Spring has arrived early this season. We got some nice rains to get us about normal rainfall, but with the long breaks in between, many of us were hand watering. We usually don't expect to be firing up the irrigation systems this early, but we are. Hope we don't find too many leaks. It has been a bit warmer than normal. Aerification is upon us, and we will all be happy when this necessary evil is finished and healed. I always wonder how come putts only get knocked off-line, but never on-line. Good luck to everybody with staffing issues. We all rely on the people who get the job done for us.

I have had some ladies from the California Bluebird Recovery Program install some bird boxes at Poplar Creek. They contacted us last year to see if they could put some out. I had a young man do his Eagle Scout project by putting out 24 boxes, which were all used, but they are in need of repair, so the timing was perfect. This is the second season for them; one box produced 13 babies last year, so that was encouraging. They put the boxes out in March and come by to check them once a week. They have been very easy to work with. I can put anybody in touch with them if you want to help our bird population.

It is fun to take pictures of the wildlife that inhabit our courses. I try to have a camera ready as needed because you must be ready for that memorable moment. Speaking of nature, congratulations to Justin Brimley for winning an ELGA from GCSAA/Rainbird in the Natural Resource Conservation category. He is continuing the Crystal Springs tradition.

I trust that many of us had the opportunity to attend the GCSAA Conference and Trade Show in Orlando. Lots of information, education, and networking. I actually played in the golf championship despite the forecast of a 13-degree wind chill. I never played golf in ski pants and mittens before, but it wasn't that bad, and was a great time meeting new people. Again, I highly recommend playing in the tournament for a fun experience. They had a new high in attendance for the education seminars... We never stop learning.

Some recent and upcoming events news:

- Excellent job of organizing the 2026 Assistant Superintendent Boot Camp in Monterey last month by Derick Mara and company. It was well attended, and all reports were positive.
- We should see a good turnout at the 2026 GCSANC USGA Regional Conference on April 21 at Cinnabar Hills Golf Club, hosted and organized by Brian Boyer.
- Next up will be the 19th Annual Clifford & Myrtle Wagoner Scholarship & Research Meeting at CordeValle Golf Club on May 12. This is a big fundraiser to help us support research, which helps us all do a better job. Thanks to Brent Thornsberry and Luca for hosting us again.
- I hope people are aware of the Rounds4Research event that is going on through April. This is another fundraiser that helps the chapter facilitate research that supports our industry.
- I recently volunteered at Sharon Heights Golf and Country Club in Menlo Park for the Fortinet Founder's Cup. It is great to have the LPGA back in the Bay Area. Chad and his team have the course in really nice condition.
- I am off to work my 15th Masters in a few weeks. The volunteer experience is good for everybody and we get to network and help our friends stage their events. They even have a local lady from Crystal Springs Upland School, who is only a sophomore, who is playing on a sponsor invite. It will be a great experience for her to play with the pros and see how they manage playing the course and their preparation.

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

Tim Powers





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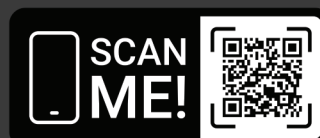
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Executive Director's Report

By MARC CONNERLY, GCSANC



In this Executive Director's Report, I will look back at the history of the Assistant Superintendent Boot Camp, as well as look ahead to the Western Golf & Sports Field Summit.

Brian Boyer recently shared two articles regarding the early efforts to welcome and encourage greater participation by assistant superintendents within GCSANC. The articles, found on page 21, are from 2001 and show the beginnings of what is now the Assistant Superintendent Boot Camp, in addition to the evolving role of assistants.

Twenty-five years later, GCSANC held the association's most successful Assistant Superintendent Boot Camp to date. We welcomed close to 90 attendees to this year's Boot Camp, filling the room at Bayonet & Black Horse to capacity, including representatives from Truckee, Oregon, and two from Southern California.

Much gratitude goes out to GCSANC Secretary/Treasurer Derick Mara, who arranged the speakers for the 2026 Boot Camp, including career expert Carol Rau, Tommy Witt of Witt Golf, and Shane Conroy from the Great Lakes GCSA.

Boot Camp had a strong career development focus, with mock interviews, professional resume reviews, and a suit fitting and complimentary neckties for all attendees.

Looking ahead, the Western Golf & Sports Field Summit will be held October 26-28, 2026, in Southern California at the Ontario Convention Center. The Summit is being co-hosted by the California Golf Course Owners Association (CGCOA) and Southern California PGA (SCPGA), with organizational support from the Arizona Alliance for Golf, American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA), GCSAA, GCSANC, National Links Trust (NLT), Northern California PGA (NCPGA), Northern California

Sports Field Management Association (NCSFMA), and Southern California Golf Association (SCGA).

The Summit will have more than 100 educational sessions geared towards superintendents, assistant superintendents, golf professionals, owners, general managers, and sports field managers, with invitations going out to more than 30 organizations across 13 western states plus Canada.

There are more than 50 sessions of interest to superintendents and assistants, including Emily Braithwaite ("Nematodes"), GCSAA's Rhett Evans ("National Perspective"), Pat Gross ("Environmental Disaster at the Maintenance Facility"), Dr. Zac Reicher ("Root Pathogens"), Dr. Mike Richardson ("Root Pathogens"), USGA's Matteo Serena ("Precision Irrigation"), Dr. Fred Yelverton ("Poa Control"), as well a session on AI in Turf Management, several presentations covering water issues, and multiple turf research presentations. DPR hours will also be available for many of the presentations.

The Western Golf & Sports Field Summit was born out of a lack of intensive educational and tradeshow opportunities on the West Coast for golf course personnel and sports field managers. The conference will have more than 100 exhibitor spaces, as well as a keynote address and multiple networking sessions.

Exhibitor and sponsorship opportunities are expected to open in April, with registration set to open in June.

We hope you will mark your calendars and join us in Ontario in October!

Marc Connerly



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From the Field

By JEFF JENSEN, GCSAA Field Staff, Southwest Region



I hope this finds all of our GCSANC members doing well and getting ready for a busy spring golf season.

First and foremost, thank you to all the members who made it to Orlando for the GCSAA Conference and Show. As part of GCSAA's Centennial Celebration, the show was an overwhelming success, with 12,824 individuals who attended the show and a record-breaking 8,074 education seats filled during the week. The trade show floor at the Orange County Convention Center featured 523 exhibitors (vs. 464 in 2025) and 178,600 square feet of exhibit space, an increase of 16% over 2025.

The highlight of the week was the Centennial Celebration held at ICON Park. The sold-out gathering of nearly 5,000 members provided members, vendors, and industry the opportunity to network, connect, and celebrate GCSAA's past, present, and future. It was an amazing night of food, drink, and entertainment.

We look forward to heading to the "Big Easy" for the 2027 GCSAA Conference and Show. Dates for next year's event have been moved up to January 18-21, so mark your calendars and join us in New Orleans!

Secondly, please do not forget to donate to Rounds4Research. The annual auction will take place April 20-26, and we are currently accepting donations at <https://www.gcsaa.org/what-we-do/foundation/rounds-4-research/r4r-online-donation-form>. Eighty percent of the funds raised in the online auction go back to the participating chapter in which they were solicited. The chapter can then use the funds to assist with research, education, advocacy, or scholarships. You can determine blackout dates, times, etc.,

as well as establish a minimum bid when you submit your donation. At the time of this article, we have received 34 foursomes from GCSANC facilities for the auction, marking a great start. Special thanks to Los Altos Golf and Country Club Superintendent Steven Spatafore for his assistance in soliciting the rounds. For more information on Rounds4Research, visit the website at <https://www.gcsaa.org/what-we-do/foundation/rounds-4-research>.

Lastly, applications for the GCSAA Environmental Leaders in Golf Awards (ELGA) are now open. The awards recognize golf course superintendents worldwide for exceptional environmental stewardship in water, energy, and land conservation. Numerous GCSANC members have received awards over the years, including Justin Brimley of Crystal Springs Golf Course and Rob Esposo of Pacific Grove Golf Links in 2025. The application process closes May 31, and more information is available at <https://www.gcsaa.org/who-we-are/about-us/awards/environmental-leaders-in-golf-awards>.

Thank you again for your support, and please do not hesitate to reach out to me at jjensen@gcsaa.org for any assistance. I look forward to seeing all of you at the GCSANC/USGA Regional Conference on April 21 at Cinnabar Hills.

Jeff Jensen

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From the Capitol

By **CRAIG KESSLER**, *Executive Director, California Alliance for Golf (CAG)*

ckessler@scga.org / www.calgolf.org

There are many reasons I inveigh against spending the game's limited (very limited!) resources on the production of economic analyses, one of them being the hard fact that the California golf industry represents 0.03% of the state's GDP. One of the other reasons? The hard fact that an industry that thinks it important to point out that it produces roughly \$7 billion in direct financial contribution to the state economy and roughly \$18 billion in indirect contribution spends so little on advocacy, direct or otherwise.

The California Alliance for Golf (CAG) may have defeated two runs of what we tagged the "Public Golf Endangerment Acts" of 2021 and 2022, which were sponsored in largest part by an organization called "Yes in My Backyard" (YIMBY), but it did so by mostly using the resources of only one of its partner organizations, the Southern California Golf Association (SCGA). For comparison purposes, CAG's 2026 budget, that part of it not otherwise funded by SCGA in its role as "managing partner," is roughly \$140,000, while Cal Matters is reporting this month that YIMBY spent \$56,000 in December sending four lawmakers on a fact-finding trip to New Zealand and Australia.

The same can be said about many of the other legislative and regulatory successes CAG has delivered on behalf of the industry in recent years – successes involving certain independent contracting exceptions, specific reference to golf's turf as "functional turf" in a bill to prohibit the use of potable water on "non-

functional" grass, excisions of proscriptions on the use of non-organics in California's Coastal Zone, preservation of the 1.0 evapotranspiration factor of turf in the Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance, the creation of multiple "golf and water task forces" that put the game and its water providers in regular communication with each other, various versions of "alternative means of complying" with drought restrictions, accommodation of "licensed" applications of neonics, and staving off the adoption of permanent standard time (okay, that one was a layup). The same can be said about the various successful "save" campaigns in the municipal sector, a veritable reversal of that particular "fortune" in the last few years.

There are other reasons I counsel strongly against the expenditure of resources on economic studies, among them the reality that what delivered all of the above successes and what holds promise of delivering more of them as pressures on the industry continue to ratchet up is the non-economic case for golf – the fact that golf courses offer the communities in which they are located benefits that raw commerce cannot provide: Open spaces, green spaces, tree canopies, heat relief, permeable surfaces, wise water management, sites for the generation of local charitable dollars, health, recreation, school team competitions, junior programs, and community centers. Those are the issues that win the day for golf because they are the "issues" that attract 3.3 million Californians to the game, and 3.3 million passionate lovers of anything make for a potent political force.

Continued on page 13



When higher and better economic use is the dispositive issue, it's golf that gets disposed of in favor of virtually any other commercial, industrial, retail, or residential use, all of which represent much higher and better economic uses that in addition remit considerably more in direct taxes to governments, all of which are in desperate search of the funds required to match their penchant for spending.

Effective this year, CAG has taken the next step in an evolution that one hopes might at some future date bring it into alignment with similarly sized and situated sectors in California. CAG has secured higher financial commitments from the nonprofit leadership organizations that form its guts and put the whole structure under the auspices of what we are now calling CAG's managing partner, the Southern California Golf Association, which is first among equals in the new arrangement in terms of support and staffing. The state's nonprofit sector has really stepped up its game, and while there are a couple of notable exceptions, for the most part the for-profit sector has not shown much inclination to similarly step up – at least not yet. With the new structure and the momentum created by CAG's sponsorship of a bill in the 2026 legislative session, many hold out hope that this may soon change.

Golf cannot and will not compete with some of the sectors that are financial behemoths in California – e.g., oil and gas, public employee unions, real estate/development, film/entertainment, high tech,

agriculture, trial lawyers. But it certainly can match the kind of advocacy funding that many others that constitute 0.03% of the state's GDP routinely spend in California. Can and really must, given what is increasingly at stake for the industry at various levels of California government, not just in the Capitol.

The industry may not have felt the need to make this spend over the course of much of its history. Indeed, I once likened the golf industry in a national publication to the proverbial trust fund baby born on third base thinking he/she hit a triple. Simply put, the stars, the fates, and even the government in the form of huge spends in the municipal golf sector aligned to push the game forward for most of its history in America.

The game had strong winds at its back. But those winds died down some 20 years ago and have been replaced by headwinds. The game knows this. Those who work in it know this. The businesses and organizations that live off the game know this. But before knowing can turn into effective doing, the knowers have to break from old patterns of thinking, one of which is thinking that the game can spend next to nothing on advocacy and continue to thrive.

Craig

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2026 Assistant Superintendent Boot Camp

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The 2026 Assistant Superintendent Boot Camp at Bayonet & Black Horse was attended by 87 participants, who learned from industry leaders and took part in breakout sessions, panel discussions, resume reviews, mock interviews, and networking with other assistant superintendents from throughout the western states.



This 25th anniversary Boot Camp has come a long way since its origins, similar to the profession and position itself. Read on for a look back at the event's inception and a historical perspective on the role of Assistant Superintendent.

Continued on page 21



Inaugural Assistant's Meeting at DeLaveaga

DeLaveaga GC and Don Paul, CGCS will host the first annual GCSANC Assistant Superintendent meeting Monday July 9th. Superintendents are encouraged to send their member and nonmember assistants. The meeting will address topics and issues relating to the Assistant Superintendent. Superintendents and Affiliates are also encouraged to attend the meeting and play golf.

The meeting will begin at 9:00 am and feature the

Olympic Club superintendent John Fleming and USGA Green Section Agronomist Patrick Gross. Lunch is scheduled for 11:30 and golf shotgun at 1:00 pm.

For further information, contact Jason Green at (408) 254-2795.



Jay Walkinshaw, Joel Ahern, John Pina, John Maltabano at Palo Alto Hills



Originally printed in the July 2001 issue of Thru the Green.

The Evolving Role of the Assistant Superintendent

By Gary K. Carls CGCS

As GCSANC prepares for its first Assistant Meeting, I thought I would take a look at the evolving role of the Assistant Superintendent. This role has changed and grown over the years to where we are in the present day. It is fairly safe to say that almost all of us who are currently superintendents, were at some point in our careers, Assistants.

In the early years of our profession, the assistant was probably more often than not, just a crewmember who showed a little more eagerness than the others to learn. Although there were a lot of different tasks to learn on the course, the superintendent in most cases was responsible for the more critical tasks such as fertilization, irrigation or chemical applications. The assistant in most cases was more of a foreman who was there to assure that the rest of the crew accomplished

their daily tasks. Although they may have possessed more formal education than the rest of the staff, they usually did not attend college. By fulfilling the role as an assistant, the opportunity was there to later advance to the position of superintendent through hard work and a willingness to learn.

The role of the modern assistant is in many ways the same, although the degree of sophistication has greatly advanced. In many cases the goal of the assistant is still to advance to the superintendent position through hard work and learning. Today the role of the assistant has evolved to include many responsibilities that in the past were those of the golf course superintendent. Ever expanding administrative tasks have taken the superintendent off the golf course and into the office or meetings. The assistant has more responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the golf

course than he has ever had.

The increased use of computer-controlled irrigation has required more computer skills to operate the course on a daily basis. In many cases this responsibility has fallen to the assistant. The assistant has also assumed responsibility for fertilizer and chemical applications at many courses. With the increasing demand for technical skills to operate the golf course, there has been increasing demand for college-educated assistants. There is still the situation that allows for someone to make their way through the ranks, but the increasing demands placed upon us by our players and employers have made that a tougher road than it may have been in the past. In most cases we have responsibility for the largest budget at our facility and are responsible for the greatest asset, the golf course.

Next time you are away at a

meeting or on vacation, consider the vital role your assistant plays in your absence. Also remember the mentors who have helped you advance in your career. I feel like I learned a lot from each superintendent I worked for or with. I was fortunate to work with several superintendents who really encouraged my career advancement. We all work in a profession that requires a lot of hard work and often requires sacrifice on the part of our families because of the time demands placed upon us. Show your assistant that you really appreciate their ability to make your job just a little more enjoyable. Please encourage your assistant to attend the upcoming meeting at DeLaveaga G.C. and meet some of his peers. It will be a great opportunity to become involved with GCSANC and get some great career insight from Mr. John Fleming of the Olympic Club and Mr. Pat Gross of the U.S.G.A. Hope every assistant gets the chance to attend.



Continued on page 24



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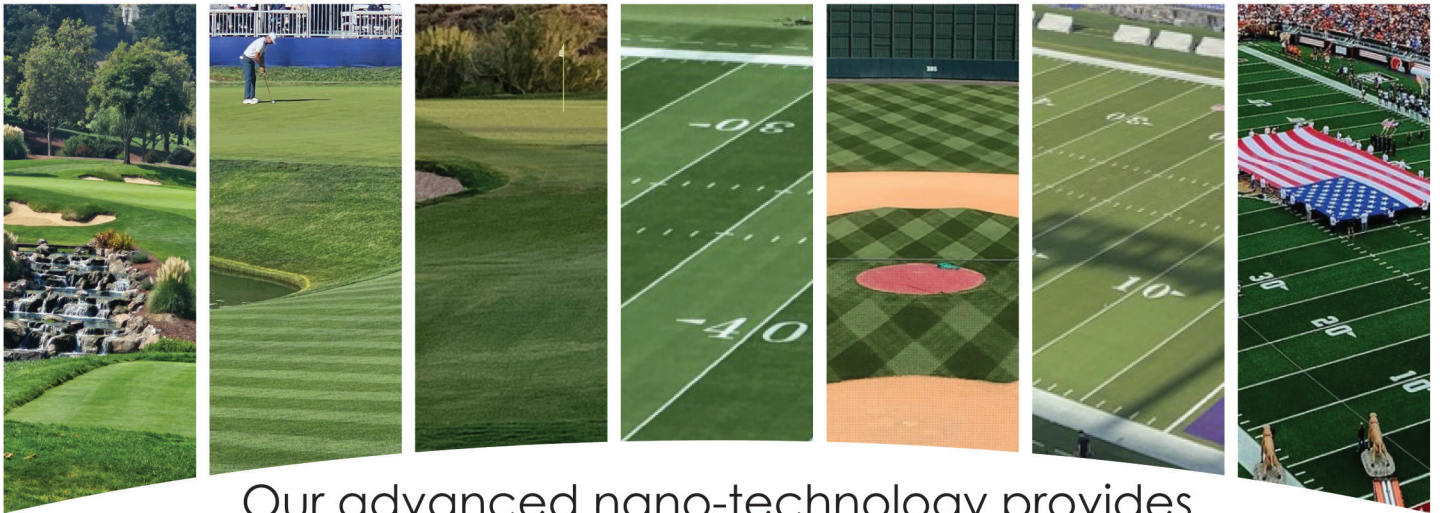
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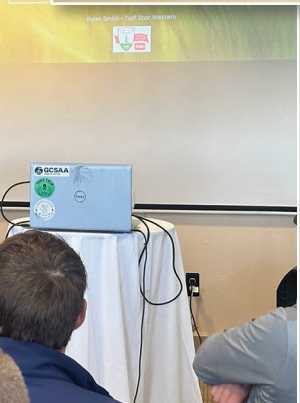
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The Myth of Work-Life Balance

By MAX S. HIRSH, *Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Scratch Counseling and Consulting, LLC*



Club industry leaders are challenged with recruiting and retaining a new generation of workers who are looking for careers with a healthy work-life balance.

However, many positions have too many variables to prioritize work-life balance. Shift demands restrict flexibility and downtime. Environmental factors and client expectations dictate waves of effort that are essential to the success of the job. Some positions allow for more flexibility without compromise, but the problem for employees isn't work-life balance, it's the overall experience of being at work.

The hospitality industry demands long hours, seasonal work, and public scrutiny and political influence from people who lack expertise. Club leaders are working against the cultural grain to recruit employees that are accepting of these environments. However, the goal for clubs shouldn't be to just offer better work-life balance, but to ensure a better workplace experience overall with effective communication, mutual respect, and a culture that fosters motivation. If a club can offer flexibility that promotes a stronger balance between work and personal life, that's great, but it's not the biggest determinant of decreasing burnout, high turnover, and performance issues.

The overall experience for workers depends on the relationships they have with their colleagues,

managers, and clients. Even with excellent employee benefits that support wellness and time off from work, they alone are not sufficient enough to empower employees to navigate incredibly challenging and stressful jobs happily and for many years when they've built strong connections with others while on the job. Clubs can focus on three key insights in order to really make a difference in their workers' experience:

Clubs that retain staff consistently do three things:

- Reduce uncertainty: Schedules are predictable. Expectations are explicit. People know what success looks like.
- Coach instead of correct: Feedback happens privately and early — not publicly and late.
- Protect dignity during increased stress: Busy Saturdays do not justify relational damage.

These behaviors matter because burnout is not simply fatigue. Burnout is sustained effort without psychological reward. When employees feel competent and respected, long hours feel purposeful. When they feel powerless and replaceable, even short shifts feel draining.

I believe it's possible to work through the myth of work-life balance, and find employees who value consistent, hard work, without experiencing the symptoms of burnout. Work-life balance is not the absence of work. It is the presence of meaning inside the work, and leadership can determine whether the same job becomes either a career — or a resignation letter.



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Looking Back with GCSANC President Tim Powers

This article is reprinted from the Thru the Green January/February 2014 edition.



I have worked as an Off-Ice Official in San Jose since the 2004-2005 hockey season. My duties have included Official Scorer, Penalty Box Attendant, Goal Judge, and occasional computer

entry. I grew up in New York when the New York Islanders were getting started. I used to skate on the ponds, which would freeze back then.

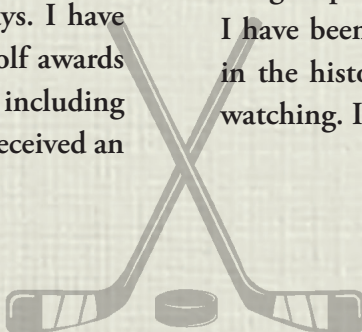
I was in the Boy Scouts and achieved the rank of Eagle Scout. This helped me gain a love for the outdoors and attend the University of Maine at Orono for Forest Management. I only missed two home games in four years at Alfond Arena and really loved watching the Black Bears compete. I have been able to follow careers from college through the pros in baseball and hockey. There is a Stanley Cup-winning coach who was a year ahead of me in Maine.

I got a summer job on a golf course in 1979 and haven't left yet. I now tell people that I cut small trees and am able to work and play on some of the nicest landscaped lands in the world. Environmental stewardship is really important these days. I have received 10 Environmental Leader in Golf awards from the GCSAA and Golf Digest, including National Public/Overall in 2011. I also received an

Excellence in Turfgrass Management Award in 2004 from the GCSA of Northern California. I became a Certified Golf Course Superintendent in 1995.

Over the years, I have met some really terrific people thanks to the golf business. I have worked in Connecticut, New York, the Carolinas, Kentucky, and California. The golf business is very big, but very small when you have been in it for over 34 years. I have developed a pretty decent network throughout the industry. I have been able to volunteer at many tournaments and get to meet people from around the world. We know what it takes to put on an event such as a U.S. Open or the Masters and we are all willing to help our friends. I have worked at five U.S. Opens and two Masters so far and over 25 other events. I have also attended many other tournaments and always run into somebody I know. Every golf tournament donates millions to local charities and it is nice to know that you are helping out. The PGA Tour has donated over two billion dollars to charity. I also help a friend who runs an event called Birdies for the Brave, which helps various military causes.

Hockey players are usually pretty good golfers, so both of my jobs are tied together. I know some that are golf pros and directors of golf after they retire. I have been able to see some of the greatest players in the history of the game and see guys I grew up watching. I am pretty lucky.



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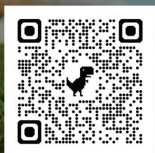
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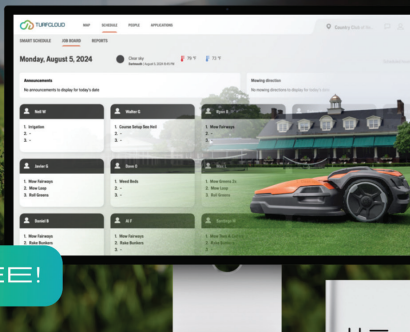
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