

Turf's Up in the Inland Empire

Winter 2019/2020

Interested in Saving Money or Improving Course Conditions?

It is nearly time to kickoff your season with the Spring Meeting packed with a wide variety of topics. **With just one small investment of your time**, and a fairly low registration fee, you can expect to take back to your facility that bit (or barrel) of information, which will make it all worthwhile.

Adam Thoms, PhD, has successfully pulled off what some have questioned even possible – the ability to offer a four-hour seminar on topdressing so interesting, time actually flies by and feels well spent. While we don't have that much time available, we are confident you will benefit from the abbreviated version concerning layered soils and top dressing programs. Thoms is an assistant professor in the department of horticulture at Iowa State University.

We know how much you appreciate regional presentations - and the rest of the conference is exactly that. Kevin White, CSFM, is the Athletic Field Manager for the University of Portland Athletics Department. White and his assistant are responsible for maintaining natural grass and artificial athletic fields for the University's NCAA Division 1 sports and visiting professional clubs. Also presenting will be Jeff Blanc, CGCS, Walla Walla Country Club. Everyone likes to hear how a peer solves a problem with an out-of-the-box solution. Rounding out the education will be four members taking seats on a panel to discuss how their experience as a superintendent helped transition them into other positions within the turf industry in the region.

We know you need time to network with your peers. Those critical conversations often end up taking place in a casual conversation. We have the perfect location to spend this crucial time - at Wine Valley Golf Course. Tyler Daniels is our host superintendent.

Join us March 8 & 9, 2020, at the Marcus Whiteman hotel for both our room block and the conference. Registration material will be available late January. Mark your calendar and watch for more information via email blasts.

Auction Rounds Needed!

Our silent auction for rounds plus carts (preferred), will take place at The Spokane Golf Show. We depend on high course participation to be successful – and every submission helps. Proceeds from this auction help fund our continuing education and research programs, and keeps our user fees from increasing at a rapid rate, as association expenses continue to rise.

PICTURES, PIN FLAGS and SCORECARDS. Please email a picture of your course to Kal Zaranec at kzaranec@cda-casino.com. Mail your rounds plus scorecards at this time to Jake Leiser at the address below. It would look great to also display our participating courses' pin flags. Please either donate a flag or lend a flag - getting it to Kal or Jake.

Please keep in mind a letter to support your request can be downloaded from the event calendar on the website and given to your facility.

Mail your certificates to: Jake Leiser, Simplot Partners
785 S. Manor Heights Dr., Post Falls, ID. 83854

Chapters of the Northwest Hospitality Room

Our 2020 Chapters of the Northwest Hospitality Room will be offered in a unique location! Enjoy the evening with your turf industry peers at our private event at the Tin Roof of Orlando, Wednesday, 6:30 - 9:30, January 29, 2020. This eclectic space offers indoor and outdoor options. Complimentary food and beverages will be offered thanks to the generosity of our allied partners. We are still soliciting sponsors at the time of this writing - but you can see our sponsor list on our email blasts.

2020 Summer Outing

Save the date, people! Prospector Golf Course, Suncadia, Cle Elum, Washington! June 10, 11:30 a.m.

Inland Empire Chapter



GCSAA

Golf Course Superintendents Association of America

A publication of the Inland Empire Golf Course Superintendents Association

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Lessons and Surprises of My Career as a Golf Course Superintendent



Tim Ansett, CGCS
Manito Golf & Country Club
Spokane, Washington

My first job working on a golf course was in 1974 (in Michigan) and every job I have held since has been in the turfgrass industry. That is 45 years since I first started walk-mowing greens, and yes, it is like riding a bike – a skill once learned and never forgotten. Although, the mowing lines get less straight if you aren't doing it regularly, and it has been a number of years since I have mowed more than a few passes.

My employment as a golf course superintendent began in 1984, working for the City of Portland, Oregon. I have been superintendent at Manito Golf & Country Club in Spokane, Washington since 1989. 2019 was my 31st season at Manito and my 35th season as a superintendent. I turned 67 in 2019, and the last few years I have been asking myself

and others have asked me, "When are you going to retire?" or, "Why are you still working?" I don't think I will be able to give an honest answer to those questions until I can decide for sure if I like being a golf course superintendent or if I am simply addicted to it.

So, that is my background and likely the reason I was asked to write this article. Perhaps the old guy, who was once the young guy, might have some words of wisdom to share with others. I agreed to write this, but, I need to preface it with telling you that the self-awareness I have, has informed me that I have the gift of stating the obvious, and most that if not all I write, you have probably already thought of yourself, or read or heard it from others. "There is nothing new under the Sun." (Ecclesiastes 1:9)

A few words of explanation; right away, I have referenced the Bible. I must, as its lessons have been validated by the lessons I have learned in my career. And, I don't believe I could have had the career longevity I have had without my relationship with God and the trust I have placed in the truth of His Word to guide my life. If this is offensive to you, as apparently it is to many in our culture, I encourage you to Google and listen to a song from The Eagles, and do as the song's title suggests – "Get Over It" and still read on.

1) I have learned to be willing to be a servant to my employer. Yes, I know more about maintaining a golf course than my employers (I work directly for the Board of Trustees and the club president who changes annually), but they are in charge. It is not my golf course. My employer's task is not to please me or feed my ego. My job is to make my employer look good by providing the playing conditions they want and managing the budget dollars they allocate to golf course maintenance efficiently. I should never try to deceive my employer in any way. I should make promises to them sparingly and keep them faithfully to the extent I am able. My credibility with my employer and the responsibility and freedom I have been given has increased over the years as I have faithfully served them. "Because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities." (Luke 19:17)

2) I have learned to become less defensive in responding to questions and criticisms. Golfers are passionate about golf, they are very interested in golf course conditions, and they generally do not have a great deal of knowledge about how good golf course conditions are produced. So, why should I be surprised that they have questions or comments which make evident their lack of knowledge? Or get upset about them? It is an opportunity to educate. Regardless of the questioner's tone, I must pause a moment to remain calm, and respond patiently and courteously. "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Proverbs 15:1) It also helps to have a golf course dog with you, as dogs seem to calm down even the most irate golfer.

3) I have learned that knowledge is far less important than the ability to implement, and you can implement very little without a good staff. Hiring the right people for key positions and seasonal ones seems to be getting more and more challenging. All other qualifications being similar, attitude and willingness to take initiative are the key, and they can even trump qualifications. A motivated staff is a joy to manage and direct and I am doubtful that a lack of motivation can be overcome by training. It can be encouraged however, and showing

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appreciation for my staff's work is an essential aspect of building a good "culture" for the maintenance staff. Being able to delegate is also essential and I have tried to give employees as much responsibility as they desire, once they have shown me the evidence that they are able to carry out a job successfully. (A helpful hint I have tried to adapt is, "If I think someone can do a task 70% as well as I can, I should delegate it." And they will likely come much closer to how well I would have done it. And I shouldn't be surprised when they do it better than I would have).


4) I have learned that my primary responsibility is not to grow grass, but is to provide a playing surface for the game of golf. Similar to many superintendents, I came into this profession through a love of golf. But my academic training is in agronomy and crop & soil science. This training is important and helpful, especially in dealing with turfgrass problems. But golfers don't care what my soil test levels of nutrients are and I could get carried away with the agronomics and put too much emphasis on that. Yes, I must keep the grass alive so that it can continue to provide a good playing surface in the future, but "my harvest, my crop yield" for today is what is left after mowing, not the clippings I return to the turf or take away in the basket. My emphasis is directed toward simple practices, what I would call the blocking and tackling of golf course maintenance – mowing frequently with sharp mowers, and maintaining surface firmness through sand topdressing and moisture control.

5) I have learned that adding new maintenance practices does not necessarily make golf course conditions better or make my job easier. The technological advancements that have happened over my career

have been incredible – specifically I would note improvements in irrigation coverage and control, advances in topdressing equipment, and the use of growth regulators. But, adding tools and practices can make my maintenance plan more complicated and more difficult to accomplish. An example of this is my decision to use growth regulators on greens only to limit Poa annua seedhead production and not to regulate leaf growth throughout the season. I could grow denser and thicker grass on our greens and provide a deeper green color if I applied more nitrogen and then applied growth regulator to limit leaf growth. But would that produce any better putting surface than simply limiting leaf growth by limiting my nitrogen applications? I only need enough daily growth so that when the greens are mowed the next day, it is a fresh putting surface. For me, adding more nitrogen and then limiting leaf growth by applying growth regulators makes it harder to produce a quality putting surface. I would be interfering with golfers more, due to additional spraying, and end up feeling like the hamster on the treadmill wheel treading faster and faster but not going anywhere. If what I am doing now is successful, what is my compelling reason to add a new maintenance practice? Especially one that increases our costs! As evidence that I am not a complete, I think they call it, Luddite; we are flying a drone daily at Manito during the playing season and using the aerial photos it takes to adjust irrigation times and identify problem areas.

On to some surprises -

6) I am not sure that this surprised me, but every day brings surprises and requires me to be flexible. How so? Where should I start? I like planning and believe it is an important and essential part of my responsibilities. The more elaborate my plans,



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the more I need to be willing to be flexible, and this can be hard for me as a planner. What are the typical daily surprises? You know them: the weather and what it is vs. what was predicted, staff members not reporting for work, play schedule changes of which we were not informed, equipment breakdowns, etc. How can I cope with this? What if the same thing happens tomorrow? Relax and remember: "Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (Matthew 6:34)

7) I was genuinely surprised, and almost astounded, that metal golf spikes went out of favor and are now banned at most golf courses. Why was I surprised? Golf is a very traditional game, although that seems



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to be changing. I thought that the sound of metal spikes on pavement was too sacred to be taken away from golfers. Of course, I am not sure that some of the newer non-metal spikes are much better than the metal ones at reducing damage to turf. There are also some surprises that I hope for in the future: bans on blaring music from golf carts, a resurgence of caddy use on golf courses, traffic control measures that might include fines for carts going too close to greens, and physically removing golfers from the course if they do not repair ball marks on greens.

8) I was surprised and ultimately amused when a seasonal staff member took my instructions very literally. This one was very hard for me to appreciate: We have an island green to which we try to limit traffic. We hand rake bunkers and would expect that staff members would walk onto the island and to the bunker. And there is no place on the course that would require driving between the green and a greenside bunker to get to the bunker and rake it. This is part of our normal training. So, imagine my surprise when I saw someone driving between the green and the greenside bunker on the island green. As is my learned habit, when I see something like this I choose to try to remain calm and to confront the issue later. I did this, later that day, giving the staff member instruction and the admonition, "You should never drive a cart between the green and a greenside bunker." Fast forward two weeks: I observe the same staff member following my instructions literally – He doesn't drive between the bunker and the green. He is driving the cart over the middle of the green. (Note: This was the last season of employment for this staff member.)

9) I have been surprised by how quickly time passes and thankful that I learned early in my career that it was not good for my life, my family, my employer, or my employees to have my career dominate my life in an all-consuming manner. When we first moved to Spokane in 1989, it was my wife Leslie, our daughter Margaret (not yet two years of age), and me. What has happened in the 30 years since - we have had three more children, our sons Joel, Spencer, and Eric. Leslie has survived breast cancer twice. We have been actively involved in our church. We were part of a group of parents that started a classical Christian school in 1996 where all our children graduated. It has over 300 students enrolled today. In hindsight, all this has happened very quickly.

I knew in pursuing this career it would at times be very demanding and stressful. But I did not want this or any career, to be the be-all and end-all of my life. Life "balance" has been important to me. So, I have consistently left the golf course each

2019 William Griffith Distinguished Service Award Recipient

Larry Gilhuly was honored as the recipient of the 2019 William Griffith Distinguished Service Award for his years of service to the turf industry. On behalf of the membership, the award was presented to Gilhuly by Jeff Gullikson, CGCS, Kalispel Golf & Country Club, during the Fall Meeting & Trade Show in November.



day with tasks not fully completed, as I am sure you must also, as the job is never finished, but at peace with that for the most part. I have taken annual family summer vacations, leaving the golf course in the capable hands of my staff, not considering myself indispensable to fulfilling the expectations of my employer. Several years ago, I traded salary for additional vacation time, and now have 8 weeks of vacation each year, which I actually take. This allows me to stay fresh and gives my staff an opportunity to take on more responsibility and grow their talents and skills.

From reading trade magazines that frequently mention all the sacrifices which superintendents and their families make for the sake of being successful in this industry, I wonder and marvel that it has been possible for me to please my employer and yet have balance in my life.

How has this been possible? I attribute it to the grace of God upon my life and that He has chosen to grant me favor in my employer's eyes, as he did for Daniel. "God gave Daniel favor in his superior's eyes." (Daniel 1:9)

When will I retire? I am not sure and am just taking it one season at a time.

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The Dark Side or the Other Side?

Kevin Hicks

EarthWorks, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

As a lifelong fan of the Star Wars series, every time I hear someone say, "Oh, you went to the dark side?," I think of Anakin Skywalker's tumultuous trip from Jedi apprentice to the most evil dark lord in the universe. I can guarantee you that my journey from superintendent to agronomist/salesman was nowhere nearly as dark as that of Darth Vader. After two years away from the golf course, traveling the west visiting countless golf courses, sports complexes and learning about the complexities of the lawn care industry, I can assure you that we all have the same goals in mind. Sure, the pressures are different with each facet of the 'green industry,' but the goals are the same; produce a quality product while preserving the environment and doing it in a cost-effective manner. I had my head down at my own property for many years, and, as a result, this career change has opened my eyes to a larger industry with varied (but oddly similar) challenges. Below are a few of my observations about the sales and consulting side of the business:

- Labor is the number one issue facing our industry – without exception. There are some solutions, but none are inexpensive or easy to implement. We're going to have to get creative to continue

delivering on the demands put upon us.

- As a result of the above challenge, among the litany of challenges facing turf managers, I will always have the utmost respect for those who continue to 'practice turf.'

- There's far more than one way to skin a cat. I've seen some incredibly creative problem solvers out there. Don't be afraid to do things a little differently, and don't let others tell you it won't work. They can't possibly know as much about your operation as you do.

As a superintendent, I responded to a certain type of salesperson. The hard sell, or, "Joe down the street uses my product," guy never resonated with me. I'm trying my best to emulate those who were the most helpful in my career. I truly believe that the best salespeople have walked a mile in your shoes, understand your challenges, and want to help you solve problems.

- Air travel, hotels, and eating on the road is nowhere near as glamorous as one might think. It's taxing on you and your family to be gone as much as we are.

- As a result of the travel, it's particularly difficult to deal with cancelled or missed meetings when we've traveled a great distance. If you set an appointment with someone from out of town, please keep it.

- I love to teach and pass on what I've learned in the past 25 years as a superintendent. It's the best way I can find to 'give back' to a business that has given me so much. My goal has always been to get people around me to think critically. There's always more to learn in life, but you have to make the effort.

- The biggest difference I've seen between the superintendent

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Other Side continued from page 6

and sales sides of the business is the lack of instant gratification from a particular project on the golf course. Whether it's a new mowing pattern, a completed renovation project or developing staff members, there's a lot of tangible reward associated with being a golf course superintendent (along with a lot of setbacks). As a manufacturer's rep, I'm often traveling with your local distributor sales rep. Where he or she may see you monthly or more often, I may only see you once or twice a year. It's hard to tell if our conversation or my recommendations ever bear fruit in your operation. A little feedback goes a long way in that regard.

- I constantly strived to learn something new every day as a superintendent. That hasn't changed as a sales consultant.
- There's a lot of stress in the green industry. It seems many times I'm better utilized as a sounding board or pseudo-counselor for turf managers struggling to keep their heads above water on a daily basis.

I have a lot of hope for the next generation of superintendents and their ability to create a more realistic work/life balance. To survive this industry, I offer the following advice to young superintendents and assistants;

- The job is never done. Ever. That's what's cool about it and what sucks at the same time. It's up to you to set (and keep) your schedule.
- Nobody cares more than you do, but don't let that consume you!
- Approach your job from a 30,000 ft view. You'll be a better decision maker and manager; traits that will make you far more valuable to your employers.
- FAMILY FIRST! Jobs come and go, family is forever. If you

get that flipped around, you're in trouble. Make time for them and the rest will fall in where it belongs.

Here's wishing all of you a great new year!

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