

Turf's Up in the Inland Empire

Spring 2025

Summer Outing, June 18, Horn Rapids Golf Course, Richland, WA.

Austin Attends Chapter Leadership Symposium

The Chapter Leaders/Executives Symposium held each March at GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence, Kan., offers an opportunity to network with other association leaders from around the country and share ideas as the annual event provides leadership training, development, and support to chapters.

Inland Empire GCSA Vice President, Brent Austin, LeGrande Country Club (above), represented our chapter and shared his experience, "The



symposium was an eye opener to the many programs and the effort GCSAA puts into them so that we can be successful as superintendents. Also, this training helped me to see where my strengths and weaknesses lie and



how to turn weaknesses into strengths. I hope to implement these strategies a bit at a time making me a better leader in my organization. I also want to thank our Inland Empire chapter for sending me to the symposium."

Crew Challenge Save the date! **August 13**

Jeff Blanc, CGCS Honored with Distinguished Service

Jeff Blanc, CGCS, was honored with the prestigious William Griffith Distinguished Service Award at the 2025 "Nearly" Spring Meeting. Coincidentally, the event was held at Walla Walla Country Club, the very place where Blanc serves as the superintendent. On behalf of the association, the award was presented by Mitch Larson, a former employee of Blanc and superintendent of Yakima Country Club.

Blanc has influenced so many students and turf professionals over the years, coming through his door as both a superintendent and a general manager, as well as instructing at Walla Walla Community College. Blanc holds a B.S. in agronomy from Washington State University, and since 1996 has been with Walla Walla Country Club.

Blanc worked for decades along with the award namesake, Bill Griffith, who recently passed away. It was our honor to have his wife, Pat Griffith, join the group for the presentation.

Larson shared with the group that when he graduated from Walla Walla Community College and was at a crossroads, several peers recommended he pursue education further. Both Blanc and Griffith encouraged Larson to go experience life and that school could come later. Larson heeded their advice to experience life!

Blanc appreciatively accepted the award with his wife, Lori, in attendance.



(Larson, Griffith and Jeff and Lori Blanc)



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Thoughts From a Fairway Mower - Part II

Ivan Gibbs, Leavenworth Golf
Club, Leavenworth, WA
IEGCSA President

Last spring when I read Mike Bednar's newsletter article with the same title, a lightbulb went on in my head. What a fantastic topic! Some of my best thoughts and ideas come from the seat of a fairway mower. I thought this article could use a part II. Like most of us, my time on a mower is limited. Still, I make it a point to mow fairways about five times a season, partially because I enjoy it so much, but also because of the perspective I get as an operator. It is great to set aside this time to let my mind drift to all the issues I see as I mow my way around the property. Some of the conclusions I come up with can be surprising in their obscurity. The following are some of my most recent thoughts coming out of winter.

I was thinking back to the Spring of 2020, as I frequently do, and the unique opportunity some of us had to maintain a golf course for five-six weeks with no golfers around. What a bizarre experience the pandemic created. Luckily, I was able to keep my four best guys employed, which was just enough to keep the course up with no play in the way. I remember punching fairways and letting the cores dry for four days before dragging, blowing

and sweeping the cores out of the way. During this stretch, due to limited staff, I had plenty of time in the operator's seat. Then the golfers came back, and our industry adapted to take full advantage of the boost in play. Pool noodles in the cup, no bunker rakes or ball washers, every golfer in their own cart. It was hard to watch four golf carts in every group, but we all got through it and are still enjoying the sustained growth of the game.

It seems that the persona of golf is shifting. It feels like the stigma is lifting a little bit each year. It is no longer just "an old man's game" played at a private club. I love to see the level of diversity increase in the golfers showing up at my course. It feels so much more inclusive. More and more, people realize that it is a wonderful way to spend time outside in a beautiful landscape. Golf is so much more than getting that stupid ball in the hole. For some people it might be the only time during the day when they have peace and quiet. I have come to realize that I don't know what is going on in people's lives when they show up to play golf. Some people really need their time on the golf course for their mental health. I feel good about being able to provide the peaceful setting part of that equation.

The winter in Leavenworth is long, typically with lots of snow, allowing for
Page 2 time off to recharge. By the time the turf starts to show again in



the spring, I am always revved up and ready for the season. The years that I attend the GCSAA CTS I am especially excited to start growing grass again. Now that our "Nearly" Spring Meeting is over, I am especially anxious for the snow to disappear. If I were at a course that plays golf all year round, I think I would burn out rather quickly. The cycle of the year and the changes that come with each season are what keep it interesting for me. I love having bookends to the golf season, providing consistently excellent conditions for seven months. Every year I challenge myself to improve upon the last. There are always things to change that can provide an improved playing experience. Even with a limited budget. I am certainly looking forward to the next time I hop on a fairway mower to see where my mind takes me, and what solutions I can dream up. (Randi and Ivan Gibbs pictured above.)



*Our sincere appreciation to all who donated!
Huge thanks to Mike Kingsley, and also to
Jim Ewing, Joe VanHoomissen,
Steve Gardner, and Ed Wetherell!*





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Nothing Changes If Nothing Changes

A journey in and out of the industry

Joe VanHoomissen, IEGCSA Assistant Superintendent Liaison
Kalispel Golf and Country Club, Spokane, Wash.

Nothing changes if nothing changes. Recently I was listening to a sports podcast and a statement from Rick Petino, St. John's head men's basketball coach, caught my attention. As he continued on in the interview, I began to draw comparisons from his basketball coaching and philosophy to my own philosophy and career. He described just coming to practice every day (work) is not going to make you a better basketball player (employee). You have to be willing to put in the extra time (continuing education) to learn your craft, just like early morning shooting drills and after-practice drills. He finished the interview with this, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it... Throw that out the window! If it ain't broke, make it better." This is my journey in and out of the industry, making changes to become a better employee and leader.

My love for the turfgrass industry began while I worked at Washington National Golf Club during summer breaks while in college. I was like a sponge, learning most aspects of golf course maintenance from operating equipment to troubleshooting irrigation. The three summers I spent there were the foundational building blocks for my future career. As a result, sixteen years ago I was offered the opportunity to be the irrigation tech at Washington National Golf Club and to start my pursuit of a career as a golf course superintendent. During my first full season at Washington National I was encouraged by the superintendent that if I was serious about a GCS career I would need some form of formal turfgrass education, Change #1.

I had just graduated from Whitworth University, earning a B.A. in Business Management and like most recently graduated students I had very strong feelings that I would not be going back to school anytime soon. However, to accomplish my goals to become a GCS I needed additional education. I enrolled in Penn State's World Campus Turfgrass Online Certificate program. Early in the certificate program, I concluded that experience was the key. That realization is what brought me back to Spokane to work for Jeff Gullikson at Spokane Country Club, Change #2.

I began at Spokane Country Club in July 2010, as the irrigation tech. Over the next three seasons I would complete both turfgrass certificate programs, earn my pesticide license, pass Toro's irrigation training programs and be promoted to second assistant. With all this formal training I knew I could become a great GCS, but something was missing. I needed the opportunity to lead and mentor. I still had several connections in the area, especially at Whitworth, so I offered to volunteer to coach on the track and field team which allowed me the opportunity to test my infant leadership skills and mentor collegiate athletes. I quickly became invested in this program, moving from volunteer throwing coach, to assistant throwing coach, to head throwing coach in the same three-year span while I was at SCC. This progression at both the club and at Whitworth led to an offer to be the assistant athletic director, overseeing game management and the athletic fields/courts and assistant head coach of the Whitworth Track and field/cross country team, Change #3.

This was a huge decision — a total shift from my chosen career to coach and work in athletic administration. Feeling that I had run my course at SCC, this right set of circumstances to make myself a better leader, mentor, businessman, and communicator could not be passed up. I spent the

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next ten years developing my skills, preparing myself to make a return to the golf industry. I met my wife in 2015. We were married in 2019 and had our first son in 2021. I went back to school again earning a Master's in business administration, knowing that this would benefit my career in the long run. In 2020 during COVID, I began to evaluate my career position knowing it was time for me to return to the golf industry and after a couple unsuccessful interviews I was discouraged and felt stuck without opportunity. Then at the Whitworth annual golf fundraising event for Whitworth, I was approached by Jeff Gullikson; we discussed a possible return to the club known as Kalispel Golf and Country Club, Change #4.

After a brief courtship and a few interviews, I accepted the position to be the assistant superintendent. I was returning to the

Changing Perspectives: Golf's Positive Impact on the Environment

David Phipps, GCSAA

Northwest Regional Field Staff Representative

This past week, I had two interesting conversations that highlighted a common misconception about golf: the belief that golf courses are harmful to the environment. These encounters reminded me how important it is to share the positive story of golf—its environmental, social, and financial benefits—with a broader audience. Here's a recap of those enlightening moments.

While waiting at the Salt Lake airport, I struck up a conversation with a young couple from Montana. As we chatted about our travel plans, the topic of golf came up. They expressed a belief that golf courses are major polluters, harming ecosystems and wasting water.

I saw this as an opportunity to share a different perspective. I explained that modern golf course management practices prioritize sustainability. Many courses use reclaimed water for irrigation, incorporate native plants to reduce water and pesticide use, and serve as havens for local wildlife. Golf courses also function as green spaces in urban areas, improving air quality and reducing the heat island effect.

As I shared these points, I could see their skepticism give way to curiosity. They were especially interested in learning about Audubon-certified golf courses that actively engage in conservation efforts. By the end of our conversation, they thanked me for the insights and expressed a desire to learn more about sustainable golf practices.

industry that I love with a strong foundation and framework to pursue my ultimate goal of being a golf course superintendent. The learning never stops and the pursuit of experiences continues. After three years, I now serve as the assistant liaison on the board of directors for the Inland Empire GCSA Chapter. I am in the process of completing my ASCS. My family has expanded with the addition of our second son in early February 2025. My journey in and out of the industry has exposed me to different learning and job opportunities. Having different experiences provides great opportunities to build a strong career portfolio. I am excited for what the future holds, and as Coach Petino said, "If it ain't broken make it better." Be willing to change, learn, embrace new experiences and remember "nothing changes if nothing changes."

Later in the week, my Lyft driver shared a similar perspective, mentioning that they had heard golf courses are detrimental to the environment. Once again, I had the chance to challenge this misconception.

I highlighted the broader benefits of golf, starting with its social impact. Golf courses are community hubs, hosting events, fundraisers, and educational programs like First Green, which introduces students to STEM concepts through hands-on experiences on the course. Financially, golf contributes significantly to local economies, creating jobs and driving tourism.

From an environmental standpoint, I emphasized how many golf courses are leaders in innovative water management and habitat preservation. For instance, many courses maintain buffer zones around water features, which filter runoff and protect aquatic ecosystems. This resonated with the driver, who mentioned a local course they'd heard about that doubles as a bird sanctuary.

By the end of the ride, the driver expressed a newfound appreciation for the industry and thanked me for broadening their perspective.

Both of these conversations reinforced not only how easily misconceptions can take root, but also how receptive people are to new information when it's presented in an engaging and relatable way. As someone passionate about the golf industry and its positive impacts, I see these interactions as opportunities to educate and inspire.

Golf's story is one of environmental stewardship, community connection, and economic vitality. The more we share this narrative, the more we can shift public perception and highlight the valuable role golf plays in creating a sustainable future.



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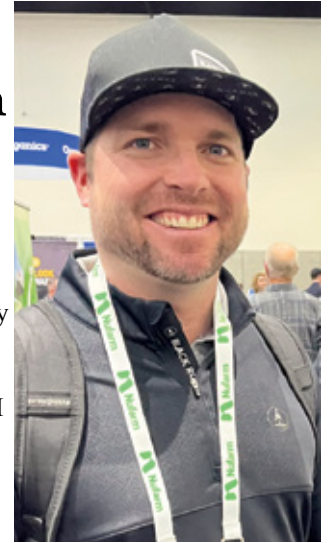
Taken from the great Yogi Berra, “Make your own luck” is a mantra I have followed since I was cut from the high school baseball team and worked my way back the next season to be a starter. Everyone always says never stop learning, growing, and adapting. I have been studying coaching for some time now and have always been a student of the great coaches, and if you come through our shop, you see quotes all over referencing John Wooden and Pete Carroll coaching-isms. Which when I see them now, reference back to “Infinite Growth.”

Infinite Growth is my philosophy on how I manage my program and help people become who they want to become. It is strongly based on Pete Carroll’s book Win Forever. Infinite Growth — I have boiled down to this — “The relentless effort to be successful with a passion for what you do, through building relationships, lofty goals, and positive affirmations.” He says you should be narrow-focused in what you are trying to do so that you can describe your philosophy in 25 words or less. It’s a difficult process and has taken 5 years or so to get it. Everything about it is defined and solidified in something that I believe in everything I do every day of my life.

We all know what we want and how we want to go about

everything. But if you can’t spell it out and have it written down, it allows for variance and inconsistency in your delivery, where you may unintentionally divert from your goals and vision. In my philosophy, I define six aspects that are critical to achieve Infinite Growth: Effort, Relationships, Passion, Feedback, Lofty Goals, Internal competition.

These are the things that are required in my opinion for someone to be successful in whatever someone wants to do. While I emphasize these towards my operation, it spans beyond what happens at my course. My hope is that I can have an impact on someone who works with me to gain an internal perspective on what it takes for themselves, different from anyone else, to be the best they can be in whatever life may put in front of them. So, I encourage you to start writing down your beliefs and philosophies into a physical form, and you will eventually find an underlying theme that will present itself into what you believe to be true to you.



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