



# COURSE

## Conditions

Issue #51 - Q2 2021

Quarterly Publication of the Michigan Golf Course Superintendents Association



### FEATURE SUPERINTENDENT

MiGCSA President  
Doug Ware  
City of Livonia

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FEATURE: Plan, Recruit and Hire: Staffing Strategies that Work

Industry Partner Profile: Rick Baker, Baker Vehicle Systems

Assistant Superintendent Profile: Nick Young, Birmingham Country Club

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# President's PERSPECTIVE



*Not sure how this spring has been for everyone, but here in the City of Livonia we hit the ground running when we opened our courses on March 9th. The golf boom we saw throughout 2020 has not gone anywhere and does not show signs of slowing down anytime soon. In normal seasons the pro shop is always hoping it will only rain overnight, now they pray for one day of rain to get a bit of a break. As of the time I am writing this our 3 Livonia courses have already had over 34,000 rounds. That is over double the rounds we had at this time in 2020 and we still set records last season.*

*I am certainly not going to complain about the popularity of golf being on the rise again, but with this amount of play so early in the year it does come at a price. The amount of divot and ball marks have been staggering. I am sure most courses will be struggling with catching up on divot repair this season, especially on the par 3 tees. Cart traffic is also at an all-time high. With this early season quite a few wear patterns have formed much earlier in the season than ever before. But we all know this is what we are all great at. Adapting to the ever-changing conditions that mother nature and this game of golf can throw at us.*

*I do also, hope this rise in play helps us all out in the long run. The last big boom of golf helped bring a nice influx of people into our industry and we are all in need of that again. Most superintendents I've talked with say that staffing has been at the top of the list of their challenges. Especially, finding educated people to fill our management and specialized positions. I am fortunate to have a 17-year-old son with friends who have all really picked up the game a golf in the last couple of years. So, working on the crew allows them access to free golf. With that perk they do not mind that I cannot pay them top end wages. The unfortunate thing is I must wait until school is out for the summer to get anything other than the day to day accomplished.*

*I cannot go any further without thanking our immediate Past President Rob Steger and our Executive Director Adam Ikamas for their outstanding work last year. The amount of time and effort they put in to keep us all informed of the daily changes and executive orders was above and beyond. They along with the rest of the Michigan Golf Alliance did an outstanding job of lobbying for our profession.*

*Now, with 2021 in full swing and things finally working their way back to being "normal" it is nice to have the MiGCSA calendar packed with great events this year. From Arcadia Bluffs and Orchard Lake CC to Treetops Resort and a tour of the amazing renovation of Oakland Hills South Course. There*





*is something for everyone to enjoy. I encourage you all to get out to and attend at least one. They are always a terrific time and a wonderful opportunity to network with our peers.*

*I want to leave you with this. I am humbled and proud to have been elected as the president of MiGCSA. When I started out as a 23-year-old superintendent at my hometown municipal course I would never even imagined this being a possibility. But once I settled in, I realized I wanted to get involved. I began making choices and meeting people that helped me in my quest to get engaged. I went to every meeting or event I could. I became less afraid of putting myself out there. Once you do that it does not matter what type of course of you work at or what school you attended. If you get yourself involved, you will not be turned away. During my time on the board, I have met a lot of great people and have learned a ton of new things. It is easily one of the best decisions I've ever made in my professional career.*

*Sincerely,*

**Douglas Ware**

GCS City of Livonia  
MiGCSA President

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# Plan, Recruit and Hire: Staffing Strategies that Work

BY MICHAEL MORRIS, CGCS

*Superintendent, Crystal Downs Country Club*

Golf course managers must be equipped to adapt to an ever-changing economic environment that results from commodity pricing, inflation, high interest rates, market booms or busts. Currently, the golf industry is facing a labor crunch created by the high demand of play (which is good) and a low supply of workers (which is bad). Even with relatively high unemployment rates, golf facilities are challenged to recruit, hire, and deploy good workers.

Some of you might enjoy the intellectual exercise of analyzing this economic situation, or complaining about it with colleagues over a beverage, or blaming it on “kids these days....” I would suggest that such exercises are fruitless. As managers we are tasked to provide the desired playing conditions expected by our clientele, and more than anything else this task requires hiring the right people to make that happen.

I was very fortunate to be working with a human resource expert at our facility in 2017 when the labor crunch began to hit. Our labor challenges were not just about finding good green and grounds staff, our food and beverage department and golf shop were searching for good people too. With the guidance of our in-house specialist, we formulated a plan specific to our needs for recruiting, hiring, and deploying a full roster of enthusiastic workers who would buy into the services and culture we offer our clientele.

With the realization that all operations and facilities are different, below I share some of the strategies and methods we used for hiring a great staff. Do not let excuse of insufficient resources become a non-starter for you. Managing turf requires time and commitment, and so does hiring an excellent team to care for the golf course. Agronomics and project management might be second nature to golf course managers, whereas human resources management may not as intuitive. If you put your mind to it, though, learning a few of these practices can pay-off big time.

## Intentional Staff Planning

You are a master at planning fertilizer and pesticide programs, aeration programs and construction projects. The same mastery needs to be true when it comes to securing your most important asset—your staff—even if “they” never taught you this in “turf school.”

Writing out the resources you currently have and listing the resources you need is a good starting point for generating a plan to hire the right people. The following questions should help.

What is the labor structure and budget at your facility? This is very basic. Your budget sets a monetary framework, but within that framework you have a whole palette of options for management. Headcount, positions, and hours are variables you can manipulate. An excellent manager will look for opportunities to exploit each of these variables. Perhaps there is an opportunity to retain only the best performers as full-time staff and to get more part time staff on board. Or maybe, in your market, people really want full time positions—it might be possible to cut your total headcount to get the right full timer, like a skilled technician, on board. Consider these needs for daily, weekly, and monthly schedules. Small changes in these numbers can translate into big changes in productivity.

What is the labor market in your area? For any open position, there will be competition from other facilities for the best people. Determine the going pay rates for the positions you intend to fill. You will have to be at, or slightly above, the average rate of pay to attract good candidates. In 2017, we found that our wages and salaries were not competitive. Knowing that we needed to be competitive, we adjusted everyone's wages as well as the starting wages many positions. We did this over a two-year period to spread out the impact of the sudden increase in labor costs. These adjustments not only improved our recruitment, but they also improved our employee retention. Of course, this sort of decision





*Staffing is critical for all departments at your facility. A key objective is finding enthusiastic people who create the culture and provide the service your clientele expects.*

must be made by the owner of a facility, but this very important adjustment may never happen if you do not bring the necessary information to the owner's attention.

Do you have clear position descriptions? A new employee will show up with many expectations and questions. You will send a clear message for your expectations if you have detailed position descriptions. You also will save precious time by deselecting unqualified candidates. Taking the time to outline the responsibilities, qualifications and abilities for each position also will help you accurately assess the candidate. Knowing this information on the front end of your recruiting and hiring process, as tedious as it may be, will pay off by finding the right fit for the open position.

What defines the best employees at your facility? You will want to hire a person that works the way you do and that delivers the service that your clientele expects. The best way to objectify this critical component is to talk to your current staff by using formal focus groups or simple one-on-one conversations. You will be able to gain valuable



*This new staffer likes his job—not just because he works outdoors—but because he made an extra \$600 by referring two of his friends for work at our facility.*

insights about why people like working at your facility, why your employees chose to work with you, how your facility draws people to work with you, and how people find out about working with you. What you discover in these conversations will be the keys to recruiting more good people. Use your strengths—it is the culture of your unique operation that attracts the very best people.

How are you recruiting new employees? There are many options to choose. You might use a broad net, like association advertising and internet sites. You might use a more direct route through your personal or professional network. In the focus groups we conducted, we discovered that our best employees were referred by existing employees, and this continues to be a key source of candidates for us. Discover what works best at your facility and put it into action. Be creative. Start a conversation with a lawncare worker or service person that you encounter by chance, and that demonstrates qualities you desire on your team. Who knows? Maybe that person is ready for a new job at the golf course.





## Strategic Recruiting

Once you have a plan and objectives in place for your staffing needs, you are ready to recruit. In a tight labor market, you will not have many good candidates walking in the door looking for jobs. And the people who show up at the door will not likely be the person that fits your budget or specific job needs. You want to get the best person for the job—the right fit for the task, for your culture, and for your operation.

Once you have defined specific needs for your staff, you can select people who meet those needs. Many disgruntled employees and employers are a product of their own making. They have put a hands-on technician in a personnel management role; they have put an equipment operator on the end of a push mower or trimmer; or they expect a Generation Z employee to work more than 20-40 hours per week. When you are recruiting, you are looking for the right person and the right fit. Get to know your candidate and set up everyone for success. This will not only improve staff harmony, but also workforce efficiency.

Recruiting requires action. If people are not coming to you, you need to go to the people. Recruiting is targeted. As I mentioned, we found that our best employees came from existing employee referrals. With this discovery, we decided to train existing employees in simple recruiting conversations and to incentivize successful recruitment with a monetary bonus. The training involved simple role playing with conversation starters like, “Have you ever considered working at...,” or “You have a great way with people, the course where I work is looking...” If an existing employee refers a candidate that proves to be good hire, the employee making the referral receives a bonus.

In our focus groups, we discovered other ways that people found their way to our staff.

For example, developing a good relationship with educational institutions and offering housing makes it possible to retain interns and summer help. Actively going to and searching for the people you want is always better than waiting or hoping for them to come to you. Talk to your best staff and discover an approach in your community that works best for your operation and your people.

Other active recruiting strategies include print and digital information. When reaching out to candidates it might be helpful to hand them a simple brochure that highlights the great work environment at your facility—something that piques their interest. Also, it is helpful to have digital information available on social media and websites. We post a video that includes on-the-job interviews with existing employees talking about their work experience. Do not assume that new candidates know what working at your facility is all about. Show them as much as you can and leave them with the impression that it would be “very cool” to work at your place.

## Hiring and On-Boarding

The last step in this process is hiring and on-boarding. Do not take this step for granted—make it official. Complete the process with all the required paperwork and orientation. By doing this well, you show your new employee the facility’s commitment to his or her success and safety. For many new hires, stepping into a new role with a new set of responsibilities can be daunting. You might consider this as an opportunity to make the new employee



*How will you optimize your staff and budget? Hire four part-timers? Hire an assistant, an irrigation technician, a spray technician, and an intern?*



feel comfortable, to address any unanswered questions, and to provide support and resources for questions and training that will eventually arise.

The required paperwork is truly a legal matter. Facilities must meet federal and state standards for everything from work permits to I-9 forms, and W-2's to direct deposit. It is very helpful for the candidate, if you inform them about the required identification and documents they must complete before they can begin working. This pre-notification will prevent any delay in hiring and any need to interrupt work due to follow-up meetings required to secure all documents.

A good Human Resources Administrator can assist with the required paperwork, with generating consistent job descriptions across departments, and with recruiting. Depending on the size of your operation, this may not be an option. However, the more you can do to facilitate hiring and transitioning a new person into your staff, the more successful your staffing and workforce will be.

## Key Takeaways

Every facility has differing resources and needs, so it is important that you clearly define an effective approach to staffing—especially in a challenging labor market. Cookie-cutter approaches like placing advertisements and hoping for the best, are not recipes for good results. Be creative with your staffing plan—try new ways to structure time and resources. Plan well. Be intentional and active in your recruiting. Send a message to your new hires that they are expertly chosen, valued, and are part of a successful and professional operation.

Finally, I must give credit to our Human Resources Administrator MacKenzie Wilkins, and our Personnel Chair Sandra O'Neal for their guidance and support in everything I have presented here. Not only did they bring new expertise and insights, but they also truly helped us secure a top-notch staff.

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# Retirement

## HALF CENTURY:

### Longtime Superintendent Dave Montgomery Retires

BY GREG JOHNSON

**D**ave Montgomery golfed as a youngster, became a self-described pretty good golfer and worked on the grounds crew at what is now Heather Highlands Golf Course in Holly where he grew up.

Then he served four years in the U.S. Air Force working as a mechanic primarily on F-4 Phantom fighter jets.

"I got out of the service in 1970 and went back to golf, the only thing I knew other than jets," he said.

Montgomery, a Fenton resident who will be 73 in May, stayed in golf and is retiring from his superintendent position for the City of Farmington, which owns Farmington Golf Club. He managed the golf course, driving range and personnel for the property for the last 16 years.

"I like throwing water," he said describing his favorite part of working on a golf course.

"I like working with irrigation as much as anything. I like mowing greens and fairways, too, but I just like to watch that water fly early in the morning. It's a beautiful time to be on a course and it's just something I always enjoyed doing."

Heather Highlands was called Holly Greens when he worked there before and after his military service, and then he became the superintendent for the City of Livonia maintaining three municipal golf courses for 15 years. Next came a seven-year stint at Tanglewood Golf Course in South Lyon, and then



he helped in the building process for the Links of Novi before taking the job with Farmington Hills.

Along the way he attended Oakland Community College and studied landscaping.

"I was just always a superintendent, even before I took a college class," he said. "Everywhere I went, that's what I did for almost 50 years even."

Montgomery and his wife, Cynthia, have been married 52 years, and their son Clay is continuing the family legacy in golf course and turfgrass maintenance, and in working for a municipality. He is the superintendent for Stony Creek Metropark Golf Course in Shelby Township.

"I told my son when he went to work at Stony Creek that the job might not have the ooh and aah of a job at Oakland Hills or some other big private club or a resort, but it can be a good, secure job and when you get done you will have a pension, medical benefits, those things," he said. "It can be worthwhile because you did a good job for a long time."

He has experienced a lot of good in 50 years, Montgomery said.

"Working for cities for over 35 of those years, I pretty much ran my own operation and did





what I wanted to do," he said. "I managed different types of courses and always enjoyed working at a public place. I met some great people over my career. At Farmington I had a lot of retirees that I worked with. They would work two or three days a week and we worked everybody in and out somehow. I have to say, every time I changed jobs and now that I'm retiring, the people who I have worked with made me a better person. I was always a better person when I left than when I got there."

The hardest part of the job for Montgomery also involved people, as in having to discipline workers and fire them.

"That's the thing I least enjoyed," he said. "Dealing with people and the problems that came from that sometimes was difficult. It's always hard to fire somebody and always hard to discipline somebody because they didn't do the things they were supposed to do."

In addition to working with a myriad of people over the years, Montgomery has also had a front seat in adapting to technological advances in the turfgrass industry.

"So many things have made the job easier, lightweight mowers, advances in irrigation systems, hey when I started we didn't even have weed eaters," he said. "You used a rotary mower or hand clippers. I bought the first weed-eater Livonia ever had in 1975. That was a big deal, an innovation that made things better."

He has lived some golf history, built what he calls a library of books on turfgrass management, and can tell stories about taking golf lessons from Michigan Golf Hall of Famer Emerick Kocsis and meeting his brother the Michigan golf legend Chuck Kocsis.

"I'm ready to retire I think, but in saying that, I know I might find retirement a bit boring," he said.

"I put in an application for part-time over at Warwick Hills and they are going to bring me on when they get going and need me a few days a week. I've never worked at a country club and they have a PGA tournament (The Ally Challenge presented by McLaren, PGA Tour Champions). I think it's going to be fun to work a little there and see what that is all about."

Montgomery said it might be hard to switch to a life without a job to head to each morning.

"I was in a structured environment for a lot of years, plus I'm going to miss the people and the camaraderie," he said.



Non-retouched client photo - GreenJacket system coming off in the spring



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Doug Ware, the current Michigan Golf Course Superintendents Association (MiGCSA) chapter president, said Steve Loveday, pulled him in.

# DOUG Ware

BY GREG JOHNSON

"He took the time to come in and meet me, introduced me and started me with attending meetings and getting to know everybody," he said. "I got involved doing things with the association and ended up being president."

Ware for 21 years has been the Superintendent for the city of Livonia overseeing three golf courses – Fox Creek Golf Course, Whispering Willows Golf Course and Idyl Wyld. He considers Loveday one of three people who have most influenced his career. The other two are Al Otto, his first boss when he was a seasonal employee on the grounds staff for the Livonia courses after graduating from high school, and Tom Welsh, a golf professional with the city of Livonia.

"Al showed me how to run a greens mower, change cups and got me interested in this job and going on to Michigan State for turfgrass,"

Ware said. "He shaped my career without a doubt. Tom Welsh took me in as a 22-year-old kid who was really green when he started as a superintendent. He's a nice guy and made it easy to be here. He even helped me move into my first house and has been a father-figure at work."

Ware, who with his wife Missy has two busy soccer playing children (Brenden, 17, Kelsey, 15) feels well-prepared to serve as president in 2021.

"I want to help guide us into new things, but I also know we have something really good and we don't need to change a bunch of stuff. If anything we can expand on some of our initiatives because we are healthy as an association and can maybe look to doing more. I don't feel we need to reinvent the wheel at all."







Almost everything with Ware leads back to Livonia. His family moved to town when he was in the third grade from Illinois. He graduated from Livonia Stevenson High, went to work at Whispering Willows and worked there each summer through the four years he attended Western Michigan University and earned a parks and recreation degree.

He did serve an internship during his MSU turfgrass studies at Baltimore Country Club in Maryland and worked for four months as an assistant at Blackheath Golf Course in Rochester Hills before the opportunity to be the superintendent in Livonia beckoned at age 22.

"I'm a Livonia guy," he said. "This is the town I grew up in and it has been my hometown for a long time. Since I have worked for a city the

last 21 years there is a little more freedom to manage family and work. I'm not here 80 hours a week like some supers you hear about. I get to go with my family to soccer games. I'm able to find a work-life balance, have great benefits, 401K, those things. It would be tough to get me to walk away from this. In 10 years, I will retire if I'm ready, but maybe I will be working here for buddies. Hopefully I'm still working on a golf course."

Ware calls being a superintendent a different challenge each day, which is the part he likes best about the job.

"I don't have to sit in cubicle staring at a computer, I get outside in the fresh air and this job changes every day," he said. "The hardest part about the job is crew management. We staff with a lot of part-time

younger kids, so you have to work around their schedules and it's not easy keeping track of four or five part-time guys, staying organized with the crew so we are staffed correctly. It takes work to schedule so your crew can have lives and at the same time get all the work done around the courses."

Over time the most valuable thing Ware has learned is patience and being able to adapt to various situations.

"When you have a crew with a lot of young kids they make mistakes, things break, and you have to learn to roll with the punches," he said. "If you can't do that you would never survive in this job. It changes every day and always brings new challenges."

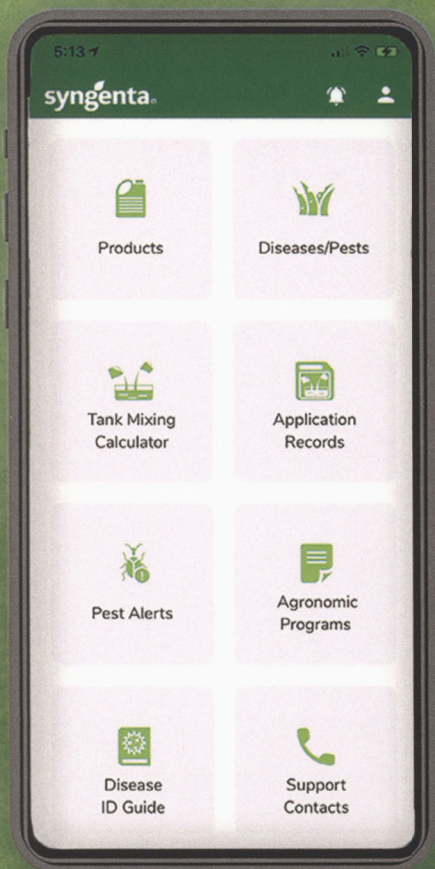


## 5 THINGS PEOPLE MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT ME

1. I was the lead in my high school musical – South Pacific.
2. I have a twin-sister named Martha.
3. I played trumpet in the marching band in high school (Livonia Stevenson) and for four years at Western Michigan University (WMU).
4. I was born in Moline, Ill.
5. I met my wife in my first of semester at WMU and we have been together ever since.



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He finds having assistant superintendents very important.

"They really have to be able to do 98 percent of my job," he said. "They also need to know every aspect so they can move on and become a super in the future, but on a day-to-day basis as busy as I am with my family, it is important I'm comfortable leaving the golf course in an assistant's hands. Over the years I've tried to give my assistants a chance to lead and run new projects. Those are things they are going to have to do eventually."

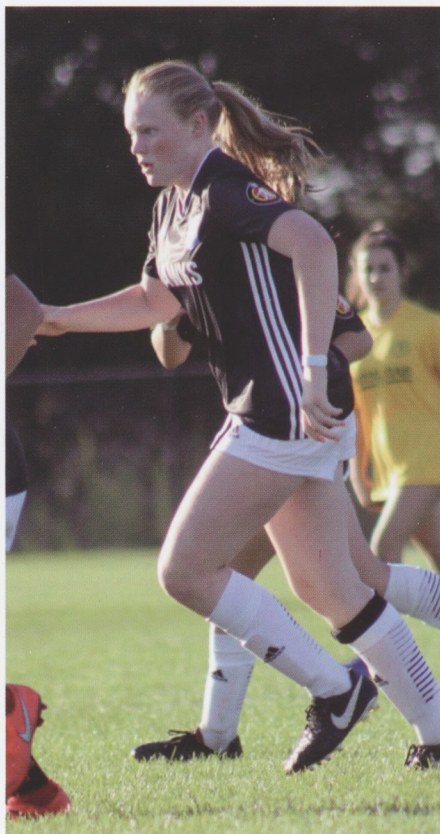
With 54 holes of golf to oversee, Ware has one mechanic and some older equipment.

"Our mechanic (Keith Agee) is immeasurably important," he said. "He makes sure we get through the days, weeks and months and he can make our lives a lot easier. His job is probably the hardest job in the company because the mechanic gets pulled in a bunch of different directions."

As for Ware's job, and his role this year as president of MiGCSA, he plans to dive in and help out.

He's always been that way.

"I was an assistant at Blackheath at the time and we had a really large rainstorm," he said. "It's a links style course and one of the drains plugged causing an eight-foot puddle. We knew somewhere in the middle of the puddle the drain was plugged by something and it needed to be moved. I dove in there, cleaned it off and popped out of there. Suddenly there was a big whirlpool and the puddle went away."





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# A Message From

BY CAREY MITCHELSON, MTF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



## New start

Like so many others I look forward to getting this year started and putting 2020 into the books. Despite some lingering issues the early spring has brought new life to our industry and I believe we all have a better appreciation for the small things that make up our lives. As summer reveals long days - appreciating others often provides more good will than you realize and should not be taken for granted. Appreciating is a conversation I recently had with Dr. Rieke. I feel fortunate to talk to Dr. Rieke on many occasions and come away with some bit of wisdom each time. The discussions vary. MSU Basketball - one of his favorites, charity work he is involved with, family, the MTF and its updates...almost any item you are willing to share. Listening is an important part of conversations. Pretending to listen while waiting to insert our own special wisdom is not really listening. I am as guilty as much as anyone and often regret not taking the time to listen properly. But a conversation with Paul Rieke is different. He often quotes others.... and those worth quoting often say more with less. When discussing all the problems of the past year he quoted Mark Twain.

It has certainly been difficult times. The seriousness of it real. But soon we will be moving forward and these tough times may feel like they never happened.

**"I am an old man  
and known a great  
many troubles, but  
most of them never  
happened."**

- Mark Twain

During the conversation while catching up Paul asked permission to share something nice that happened to him. And it felt nice to have a pleasant dialogue. Not letting a chance for him to change his mind I quickly asked for details. He told me that - unknown to him - Dr. Tom Nikolai had contacted the many Graduate Students, PhD's, Masters candidates that have had the pleasure of learning, working or being a part of the Turf Program linked to Dr. Rieke. Via Zoom Dr. Tom Nikolai coordinated all these individuals to a rendition of "Happy Birthday" that according to Dr. Tom Nikolai - will not be forgotten. Dr. Rieke was certainly touched and it must have been a great moment. Paul did mention that Dr. Tom Nikolai turned out better than he thought possible. I think we all agree.



Remembering those who impacted us in our lives – personally and professionally is important but often neglected. Everyday is busy and it can be hard to find time. But a small kind word to your family, friends and staff at the right moment can make a difference. Those in leadership positions sometimes overlook how even the smallest compliment can make someone remember you as a person who cares. Try it on for size, you'll be pleasantly surprised – you'll never know unless you try.

**“Whether you think you can or you think you can’t, you’re right.”**

- Henry Ford

Each edition of Course Conditions the Board of Directors of the MiGCSA allow the MTF to update items of interest and the Foundation appreciates the consideration. My original draft discussed our issues with Zoom calls, covid difficulties, and attempts being made to do the best with what we have. Perhaps the time has come to put those in the mirror and look forward to what is to come. New boards bring a view of their own and the current board will be taking on many items in the upcoming months and near future. Here are a few:

## **New News**

Our newly elected President – Curt Boak – has taken on reviving the communication tool used for so long by our organization -The MTF News Notes magazine. Yes - News Notes will return and this version is currently scheduled for twice a year. There will be Spring/Summer mailing and then again for Fall/

Winter. Each edition will include research updates from the MSU Turf Team, current activities by the MTF, information regarding events as well as new items of interest. We hope you enjoy our return to the magazine issues and will be offering a digital version for those who prefer that format. We look forward to presenting this to our membership and hope you enjoy the upcoming issue.

## **New Record**

Our TT4Turf online auction of golf this year had tremendous response from both donors and bidders. This year's version has exceeded our expectations and the results are credited to all of you who agreed to participate and support the MSU Turf Program. Michigan can be counted on as one of most dedicated group of superintendents to support Turf Research and the MTF thanks all of you who took the time and effort to support our Turf Team and Turf Program. TT4Turf Committee – Scott Rettmann and Eric Davey worked diligently and endlessly to recruit courses and their hard work paid off. This year's event exceeded expectations and we thank all courses who participated. At the conclusion, the Auction had a total of 187 items to bid on. 309 Bidders registered. Auction revenue at close was \$45,616.00. Complete reconciliation has not yet been performed, but it will clearly be our most successful event. Our first TT4Turf auction was accomplished with the hard work of our MSU Turf Team in 2010. The Turf Team coordinated this event during its infancy and we greatly appreciate the ground work they laid for what has become an important part of our fundraising efforts.





## New Initiative

At the May 3rd GAM Annual Meeting the MTF was able to introduce its Club Initiative to support the MSU Turf Program. This initiative was scheduled to begin last year and our catch phrase was to be 20 - 4 - 2020. The concept being to have 20 Clubs make individual donations to in the 2020 golf season. Covid restrictions prevented the GAM from hosting their Annual Meeting and with so much uncertainty at the time the initiative was postponed until 2021. In the upcoming week clubs will be receiving a letter that is the combined effort of MTF, MSU and the GAM appealing to clubs to consider the importance of the MSU Turf Program. The MTF will update course superintendents prior to the mailing to make them aware of the club mailing and will answer any questions that may arise from our effort.

## New Day

Finally, our Annual LaFontaine Golf gathering for Graduate Student Assistantships will be held on Wednesday June 23 at the Coyote Preserve Golf Club in Fenton. This event to support the Turf Team Graduate Assistantships is typically held on Thursday so please keep that in mind when registering. Registration is now open for both participants and those willing to support turf research via our various sponsorship opportunities. The 2021 version will have the same after golf gathering with words from our Turf Team and mingling during appetizer's. We look forward to seeing many of you there and hope that our new year can continue on its upward swing.

# 2021

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Boulder Creek Golf Club  
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Calderone Golf Club  
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Chandler Park Golf Course  
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Country Club of Jackson  
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 MGCA- Golden Passbook to Michigan Golf - NORTH  
 MGCA- Golden Passbook to Michigan Golf - WEST  
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 Grandview Golf Club  
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BY SHANE CONROY AND GCSAA STAFF

**A**s I'm writing this, we are three days into GCSAA's philanthropic arm, the Environmental Institute for Golf (EIFG) Rounds 4 Research (R4R) auction. Currently there is \$190,052 raised and over 3,400 total bids. It is always fun to see how the final few days of the R4R auction play out and where the final bids will land. A huge thank you to those of you who have donated rounds to R4R. As you know, 80% of funds raised through R4R go directly back to GCSAA affiliated chapters to use for turfgrass research, scholarships, education, and advocacy.



With 2020 in the rear-view mirror, it's great to see chapters across the region – including the MiGCSA – with a full slate of events scheduled in 2021. GCSAA is no different. With the 2021 GCSAA Golf Championships postponed, I am happy to announce the event has been revamped and rescheduled for October 11-12 in Palm Springs, Calif. Registration will open August 13 with a more limited number of slots available than in previous years.

The JW Marriott Desert Springs Resort is the host resort, with play taking place on its Valley Course. Other courses welcoming play include the Desert Willow Golf Resort Mountain View Course and Indian Wells Golf Resort Celebrity Course.



Shane Conroy

The championships include three different competitions over two days: National Championship, Golf Classic and Scramble. The GCSAA National Championship is limited to 72 GCSAA members with a 5.0 handicap index or lower. The Golf Classic is limited to 120 players and will use a point-quota scoring system with flights to be determined later this year. The three-person team scramble fun event will be limited to the first 36 teams or 108 players.

Golfers in any event receive service points and can earn education points through the First Green education session "First Green and You! Learn How to Host a Field Trip". Fellow field staffers Steve Randall and Jeff Jensen will prepare you to launch your own First Green field trip program during this session.

Switching gears, I would like to remind all off you about GCSAA's new mobile app, GCSAA Now. Along with providing GCSAA news and information, the app allows you to download documents, interact with fellow members, view events taking place in your area, as well as update your membership info to name a few.





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## Q&A

**JASON FAUSEY**  
T&O Technical Services  
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### Q: WHY DOES TRACTION HAVE ONLY ONE LABEL RATE?

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### Q: WHERE IS THE BEST PLACE TO FIT TRACTION INTO MY ROTATIONAL SPRAY SCHEDULE?

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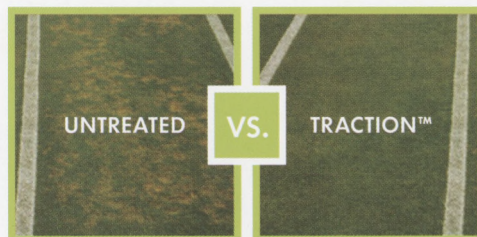
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As tee sheets continue to fill, I wish you all the best as we head into the peak of the season and I look forward to seeing you at your course or a MiGCSA event soon!



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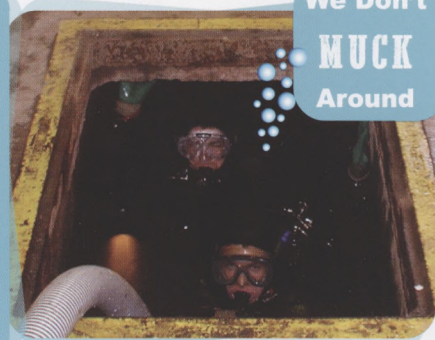
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## Sensors to Monitor Winter Conditions on

BY KEVIN W. FRANK



In the autumn of 2020, the MTF Founders Society funded the purchase of six sensor packages to monitor winter conditions on golf course putting greens in Michigan. The sensor package was developed by scientists at the University of Minnesota that we've been working with as part of a large multi-university grant proposal to study winterkill. Many superintendents have written letters of support for this grant and several participated in monitoring winter conditions on putting greens at their golf courses this past winter. We are submitting this grant to the United States Department of Agriculture Specialty Crops Research Initiative grant program again this spring with hopes that our 3rd time will be the charm. The full title of our proposal is "WinterTurf: A holistic approach to understanding the mechanisms and mitigating the effects of winter stress on turfgrasses in northern climates." The winterkill sensors we installed at 6 golf courses in Michigan last winter was part of the process of collecting preliminary data to support this grant. The sensor package included: soil temperature and moisture sensors at 3 depths, and oxygen and carbon dioxide sensors. Data collection from the sensors was powered by a solar panel and data was transmitted via real time via a cell signal. We are still in the process of downloading all the data from this past winter and troubleshooting issues with some of the sensor packages we installed.

### The objectives of this research are:

- 1) Determine if the sensors reliably record and transmit data throughout the winter
- 2) Develop a model that could notify superintendents when conditions are likely to cause winterkill. This could be from soil gas, temperature, moisture data or perhaps a combination of all. Ultimately to develop a model we will need to monitor conditions on putting greens when winterkill occurs. This didn't happen at



# Golf Courses

our locations in Michigan last winter but sensors were also installed in Minnesota and Norway. Our hope is that with enough locations over enough years we will find conditions that cause kill.

- 3) Make the sensor package commercially available to superintendents.

I would like to thank the following superintendents for hosting sensor packages this past winter.

Jeff Holmes, Egypt Valley CC  
Doug Hoeh, Treetops Resort  
Scott Pulaski, Walloon Lake CC  
Jim Bluck, Arcadia Bluffs  
Ryan Moore, Forest Lake CC  
Eric Davey, Prestwick Village Golf Club

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# RICK Baker

BY GREG JOHNSON

Rick Baker sold office equipment early in his career from a pickup truck that didn't have air conditioning.

"I can't believe I used to do that, especially in the heat...hauling copiers and fax machines in and out of office buildings in a suit and tie."

He's come a long way, eventually moving on from office equipment to joining the family business, Baker Vehicle Systems in 1994 and becoming the owner of the 81-year-old company by himself just last year. And his sales vehicles these days have air conditioning.

"I grew up with my dad in the business so I've been around the equipment business my whole life," he said. "Sales and equipment. It's what I know."

Baker Vehicle Systems is headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, with a branch office in Columbus. They expanded just over a year ago into Michigan, and just last fall into Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

He and his wife, Chris, have been married 29 years and have 3 grown children. They'll become first time grandparents this Fall with 2 on the way. He is a graduate of Mount Union College with a degree in Business and Communications.





When he started with Baker Vehicle Systems in '94, the company was an EZ-go golf car fleet dealer. As the company expanded and grew, he went through all the stages, territory sales rep, sales manager, Vice President and now President and Owner.

He admits he isn't a golfer but likes to hunt and fish. He considers his wife his greatest influence personally.

"She's pretty easy going and is very good at reminding me about what's really important. We regularly discuss the business and Chris is a great sounding board."

His father, Dick Baker, was the greatest influence in his professional life.

"My dad and his 2 brothers owned and operated the business from 1982 until 2020. Family businesses can be challenging at times. Often,

individual objectives don't always line up. Our family is very fortunate...we've been able to run a very successful business for many, many years and at the same time keep family relationships strong and intact. I think this is not only the greatest professional example that was set for me, but also a very strong personal one. There isn't anything more important than our relationships, especially within family."

"We are members of 10 or 12 industry associations, and most are local chapters," he said. "Michigan is different from some states. It has one association for the whole state and that is great for us. It gives our company a quick way to meet a larger group of people, be in front of them with our equipment and establish relationships. MIGCSA understands the need to provide value to its industry partners. We receive tangible benefits through our partnership with MIGCSA."





In addition to the golf course market, Baker's company also sells equipment to the municipal and industrial markets. In Ohio, out of the company's 2 branches, the company sells broadly to really anyone that has a need for high-end, professional turf care products. His focus in Michigan is more specific and he suggests to all his customers to be openminded.

"There's a lot of great equipment out there. We're fortunate to be able to represent some of the best. Be open minded and take a close look at all your options."

Baker's success is tied directly to his enjoyment in interacting with others, especially customers and suppliers.

"Relationships are so important in business. Solving a problem for a customer is rewarding, even if it is something as simple as providing good parts support to a new market. It's extremely gratifying when you know your solution has had a direct and positive impact on someone else's business and ultimately their success."

His biggest challenge: Thinking ahead. Identifying trends and new technology and timing it with the market can be a challenge. Fortunately, his company is loaded with experience and he leverages that experience daily to help make some of these decisions. "There's a lot on the horizon, and our employees are key to unlocking future opportunity for us and the market. I think a lot of the GPS technology found in today's spray rigs, which we've been instrumental in helping to advance in Ohio, will make its way into other types of equipment."

As a territory sales rep, Baker found himself on the road Mon - Fri and occasionally on a Saturday during the season. In his current role as President, he's in the office most of

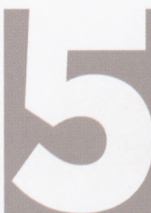
the time, but does enjoy meeting with customers and does still hit the road. "When you spend 25+ years on the road, it can be a difficult transition to full-time in the office. I really enjoy meeting new customers and seeing their facilities."

Jacobsen is one of the main suppliers to Baker's company. His favorite piece of equipment to sell is the Jacobsen Eclipse 322.

"There's nothing on the market that compares to it. When you know you have a product that's superior and others can't compete it breeds confidence to talk about it, demonstrate it and sell it. The 322 is now in it's 10th year. It's a proven product."

Baker has spent his working life in sales and laughed when he considered what might be his mulligan profession.

"If I had it to do over again? Maybe a school teacher? My wife is a teacher. I guess I've always been a little jealous when her school year winds down and she's off for the summer."



## THINGS PEOPLE MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT ME

1. Oldest son is a police officer
2. Daughter is a 5th grade math teacher
3. Youngest son sells a tractors and mowers for a different dealer in Ohio
4. First grandson is due in September, first granddaughter is due in November
5. Baker Vehicle Systems was originally started as a hardware store on the east side of Cleveland, in 1940, by HE Baker



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# Putter late than never

BY JENNE ROMANICK

**H**ow does Superintendent Collin Romanick spend his time off course? Well, back at work for the most part, but not so much having to do with soils, staff, and course renovations. Instead, we are taking on renovations of another kind. Life sure has a way of sneaking by quickly when your busy working and raising kids. And as Ben Hogan would say, “As you walk down the fairway of life you must smell the roses, for you only get to play one round.” Having a natural curiosity about the world we live in and wanting to give our kids experiences as they grow, we decided in November of 2020, to buy a mini bus! Yes, that is right! A small school bus. Bright yellow, fake leather seats, gum wrappers, sucker sticks, and old school paper love notes...the real deal. Welcome to the world Petite Petunia (named by our daughters). Our goal is to renovate the bus from frame up into our custom traveling





vehicle. Many may ask, why not just buy an RV? We decided that it is all about the experience...and the partnership in the research and the purchase, to the time spent together with the deconstruction and reconstruction of a bus. The communication with one another, the joint financial aspects of the build, the vision that comes together in reality, and the team effort by the entire family to make it all happen are the best parts so far.

**“A flute without holes, is not a flute. A donut without a hole, is a Danish”.**

**- Ty Webb, Caddyshack**

A northern bus isn't a northern bus without rust. The mini bus originally was a working school bus in Pennsylvania and the we bought it and drove it to its new home in Michigan. A 6.5 hour drive, but it was priority to find the combination

of the size and engine that this bus had. We have had the bus since November 2020 and for those that see it here or there, and those that ask where we are in the process, probably feel like we are moving slowly on it. But in reality, starting from a regular everyday school bus to even where we are today takes a LOT of time and elbow grease. The first couple of weekends were spent on the mechanics of the bus. Making sure the engine fluids were fresh and flowing properly, replacing the brake lines and batteries, and removing the seats. Then it was onto the floor. First up was a thick layer of industrial glued rubber. Next, we moved onto the plywood, and then the rusty metal floor. This is a full family affair. The rule is: if you want to travel in it, you need to help with it. From our littlest one helping to remove the stickers, to our middle cranking up the wood floor, to our oldest helping Collin with replacing

brake lines and metal flooring. Oh, and don't forget Summer, the pup. She is probably the most excited about the bus, as she promptly takes her spot in the driver's seat every chance she gets!

**Quit wasting time and puttering around**

Connecting with the “Skoolie” community through Facebook and Instagram has been part of the learning process. This is more of my (Jenne) domain







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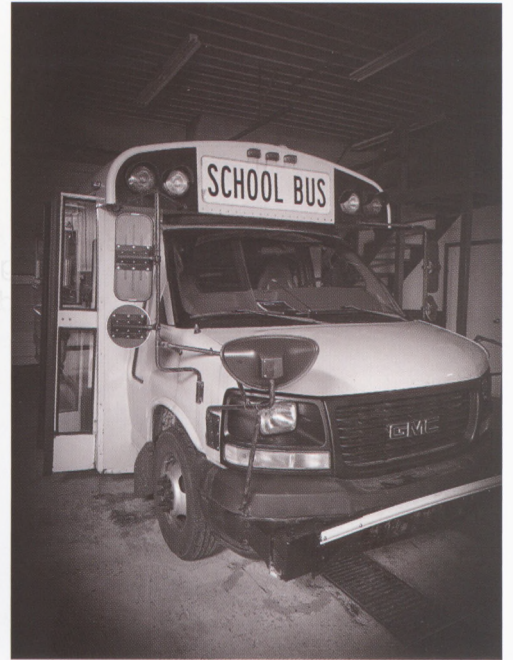
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though. When you involve yourself with this community online, you get to see the successes, the “I wish I would have” parts, and you then have an entire community to learn from during your own build. Watching their “how to” videos, it is obvious that as much time in a work session is spent on the tough physical labor as is the little moments of replacing batteries, fetching the cords, trial and error, standing there staring at what you just did, having a debate on what you need to do next, contemplating when to start and stop, and gathering the needed items from the nearest store on a quick run for lunch or dinner. No moment is wasted, well...maybe a few. That is part of the fun!

## Talk Birdie to me

Oh, the terms...not in the way of conditions, but in actual terms...verbiage and names. We have been together for just shy of 20 years. During this time, as many couples do, we’ve learned to decode what the other is saying. And of course, throughout this renovation so far, there have been handfuls of times when someone just can’t find the right word or name of a tool needed for the bus. So when I, driven to learn and extremely capable of using tools but unfamiliar with the proper descriptors (*and habitually breaks down words into simpler*

*terms as a Kindergarten teacher*) says that we need a “rust needler thing” or the “tall bar tool with a flat hook on the end that pumps up and is used on decks,” Collin interprets that into real world language of “needle scaler” and “indexing deck removal bull bar”. Then, off we go (again) to the store for the parts! There have been many laughs over the descriptions and names of tools and supplies needed for the bus, but the lighthearted fun keeps it entertaining through the long hours, clothing drenched in sweat, minor injuries, and sore muscles that the bus project requires. This project not only gives us time working together on something for the family, but also gives each of us a new appreciation for each other’s skills, talents, and desire to learn.

## Who’s your caddie?

It can be debatable each work session who is the lead and who is aiding the project. This is the beauty of teamwork. We are both talented in different areas of the build, with Collin having the knowledge and experience





regarding the mechanics of a vehicle, and myself having the aesthetic vision and the research base to foresee how it will all come together. It, without a doubt, takes a team.

## As Par as the eye can see

The goal is to have Petite Petunia finished and on the road for summer of 2022. Once complete, she will sleep 4-5, have a shower and composting toilet, a kitchen sink, stove, refrigerator, heating and cooling, TV, solar power for off grid camping, and a hook up for when at campgrounds. Collin will of course join when he can, and, he looks forward to pulling his snowmobile trailer behind her in the winter months to great destinations. But until the grass stops growing and the demands of the course slow down, Petite Petunia will be traveling around the USA showing the kids the wonders of the world in which we live. Where to go first? Maybe out west? East? Maybe to the "golf" coast?! We look forward to our future adventures, and this journey of building the bus from the frame up! This is going to be the best un"fore"gettable adventure in every way! Now, that's a hole in one!



Feel free to follow along with the progress at the **Instagram: My\_Petite\_Petunia**

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# NICK Young

BY GREG JOHNSON

Nick Young admits a few years ago while attending Central Michigan University he lost his way, but with guidance from his father, John, he turned a corner.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do at Central," he said. "I failed some classes. It was hard on me and my dad, but he encouraged me to go back to school at Michigan State for turfgrass and told me 'don't mess this one up.' I ended up graduating as one of the top in my class. My dad has driven me to be successful, and he still does today."

Young, 26, a Madison Heights resident with his girlfriend McKenzie, is an assistant superintendent at Birmingham Country Club. He started in January after previously being an assistant for two years at

Prestwick Village in Highland, where he had also worked on the grounds crew in summers during his college years.

His family lived in South Bend, Ind., until his senior year in high school and he grew up playing golf at Knollwood Country Club in Granger. Before going to college at Central Michigan he needed a summer job and ended up at Prestwick.

"I was a seasonal employee and then would go back to school for like seven summers," he said. "I really enjoyed it and I learned how to operate equipment and understand the other side of golf. I was a laborer instead of a golfer but I loved it and finally realized I was good at it. And that's when Eric (Davey, the superintendent at Prestwick Village) convinced me







to try the turf program at Michigan State.”

Young was no longer lost.

“I had let college at first get the best of me, didn’t resist the temptations of being on my own and they got the best of me,” he said. “That all changed when I went to Michigan State. I applied myself. Dr. (John) Trey Rogers at MSU was great, and I took a lot of pride in being a Tuck Tate Scholarship winner (C.E. “Tuck” Tate Outstanding Scholar Award).

Being a second assistant at Birmingham CC has moved Young into a job with responsibility.

“The way Dan (Dingman, superintendent) runs it, the assistants take the reins in the

day-to-day operation and have responsibilities like ordering chemicals and management duties,” he said. “That has been a big step for me and I’m excited to keep learning and take on more responsibility.”

One of the early things he has learned is that time management is a primary issue for assistant superintendents.

“At times you run around like your head is cut off, watering, doing the set-up, working with and checking on the crew, and it seems like you don’t have enough time in the day,” he said. “I’m soaking in ways to deal with that and learning how to get things done.”

Still, Young finds he is happy working in golf.

“The easiest thing, and the part I like best is being on a golf course each day,” he said. “I love the game of golf and I really couldn’t pick a better place to be.”

In 10 years, Young would like to be a superintendent and right now he is thinking in the south.

“Get out of these winters,” he said. “Have an adventure.”

Young feels wherever he is headed he owes a thank you to Davey for helping him find the turfgrass program and a career.

“He could tell I should be doing this I think,” he said. “I’m going to strive to be the best I can be and hope that pans out for me with a good job, family, kids. That’s what matters to me.”



# 5

## THINGS PEOPLE MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT ME

1. I was born in Louisville, Ky.
2. I swing golf clubs left-handed, but I putt right-handed.
3. I’ve never been fishing.
4. My favorite food is tacos – beef tacos.
5. I’ve never been out of the United States.



When Young is away from his work, he is a passionate Michigan State basketball fan, plays golf, likes to travel and hang out with family and friends. If he gets to pick the restaurant, it's B-Dubs (Buffalo Wild Wings).

He likes the idea of one day owing a Jeep Wrangler, "or whatever vehicle where you can take the doors off."

His dream scramble team: Jordan Spieth, Justin Thomas and Rickie Fowler.

"They are three of my favorite golfers, and it would be awesome to play with them," he said.





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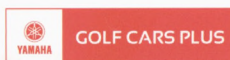
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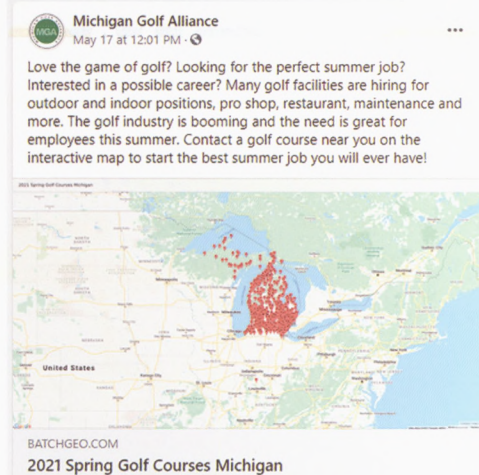


# The BIG ISSUE

I chat with a lot of Superintendent's; I would say I speak with an average of 5 to 10 different members who are active Superintendents every week and it is one of my favorite parts of the job. Selfishly I like to get some agronomic management insight to see how sharp my skills are for what is happening, where and when and to no one's surprise the sharpness for this has faded a good bit in the 10 years since I was actively doing the job. I also like to run ideas that are in their infant stages when having these phone calls, I am sure many of you reading this have been on the receiving end of a "hey what do you think about..." it helps me tremendously to get a cold view from a busy member perspective. If I get enough positive feedback on something from these conversations and from our board members there is a very good chance we will throw it at the wall and see if it sticks. Every throw does not, but a few have and are growing as the chapter and our members need are. So, thank you to all

who call me for a quick question or need and end up getting ideas thrown at you, it really is extremely helpful for guidance. If you have not been on the end of one of these please call me any time directly on my cell, 231-714-7365 and let me throw a few at you and I hope you do the same.

One thing these conversations have had in common for a few years and without fail in 2021 is the need for qualified employees. How do you find them, how do you keep them, how can you afford them? This question is almost universal for every member and every department at their facility. This is a tricky thing for an association to directly help with, how do we get more people interested in golf as a job or even as a career? A concept of a virtual job fair was shared with me and considered but we instead went the direction of a social media experiment to promote golf as an option for those searching for employment this summer. From this was born the Michigan Golf Alliance Employee Recruitment Campaign. The Michigan Golf Alliance joined together in a social media campaign on Facebook and Instagram to help our members find employees. The cost around this campaign was shared between the Golf Association of Michigan, The Michigan Golf Course Association, The Michigan Section PGA & Greater Michigan Chapter CMAA. The ad had this text "Love the game of golf? Looking for the perfect summer job? Interested in a possible career? Many golf facilities are hiring for outdoor and indoor positions, pro shop, restaurant, maintenance and



*more. The golf industry is booming, and the need is great for employees this summer. Contact a golf course near you on the interactive map to start the best summer job you will ever have!"* and had a link to an interactive map of every golf course in Michigan. The ad ran for two weeks and results were 40,727 Total Reach, 1,440 Organic Reach, 39,433 Paid Reach, 64,709 Total Impressions, 1,463 Organic Impressions and 63,246 Paid Impressions. We will be evaluating this concept for possible expansion or continuation across more social media networks with a more customized message depending on format. Please let us know directly if you have interest based on this post.

I can promise you that it is the top priority for the MiGCSA to help to get our members more options for employees. If you have any specific ideas on how you think we can best do that please give me a call, let's throw some ideas at the wall and see what sticks!

**Adam Ikamas, CGCS**  
MiGCSA Executive Director



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