

# Green is Beautiful

Spring 2014

The Official Publication of Ontario Golf Superintendents' Association

## The Golf Course: Beyond the Green

### ALSO INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

**Communication is Key To Success**  
**Sustainable Turfgrass: Back to Basics**  
**The Perfect Storm**

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



by Phil Scully  
OGSA President

It was December 23rd when most superintendents in Ontario first began to realize that this winter would be different. A perfect storm, as some would call it, rolled through Ontario leaving behind upwards of three inches of solid ice. It was then that the clock started ticking. If this wasn't enough, January saw sub-zero temperatures attributed to a "polar vortex" and thunderous "frost quakes" woke many from an already uneasy sleep. Speculation ran rampant and by February, with no end to winter in sight, many superintendents began the momentous task of clearing snow and ice from their putting surfaces.

Although the outlook was bleak, few could have imagined the carnage that many were faced with when the snow and ice melted in early April. Superintendents across Ontario are now in the process of putting their respective properties back together and each one has his or her own plan in place. The OGSA took to Twitter recently to deliver a unified message to golfers and industry professionals alike. Education, communication and patience will be essential in the coming weeks and I am confident that we will emerge from this stronger than ever. It always astounds me how, during times of hardship at the hands of Mother Nature, superintendents rally together to share knowledge and resources and I am proud to be part of such a noble profession.

It's hard to imagine, but warmer weather is just around the corner and so are the OGSA's 2014 golf events. Golf and Events Chair Chad Vibert has put together a stellar lineup of golf venues this year, and we are introducing changes to the Presidents' Day format that will both honour the old traditions and respond to new challenges. I hope to see as many of you as possible throughout the summer at our events. ■



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### ON THE COVER

**Northern Saw-whet Owl**  
Photo courtesy:  
Matt Booth

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OGSA is committed to serving its members, advancing their profession, and enriching the quality of golf and its environment.

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by Justin Parsons,  
Engage Agro Corp.

The importance of good communication seems to be a theme that runs throughout this entire issue of *Green is Beautiful*. I think most people would tell you, no matter what their profession, that communication skills are chief among those which make an individual successful. Think about it, how many poor communicators do you know that have achieved a high level of success in their field?

If we look within the golf course setting alone, there are countless examples everyday where one's ability to communicate sets them up for success or failure. This is true whether you are the GM, the mechanic, or a server. For example, if the mechanic knows that parts are not going to arrive in time to fix a walk mower before the weekend and he gives the superintendent notice, the team can plan accordingly. If this information is realized on Saturday morning when the mower is discovered on the hoist, there is a problem. What about a situation where the server knows that the kitchen is busy and that the customer's meal may

take slightly longer than usual to arrive at their table. Would they not be better off sharing this information right from the start?

I know these are simple examples, but it's the little things that add up to be big things. I think a lot of it comes down to setting expectation levels appropriately and then delivering on those expectations – and it takes good communication to do this effectively. I think if any of us were to look at most of the issues we have had in the workplace in the last while, the root cause of the problem was an expectation level that was not met.

The key then is determining whether or not we could have done something differently to prevent the outcome. In the case of the mechanic and the walk mower, did the superintendent make it clear that he needed an answer by noon on Friday? Where we often get into trouble is when we assume that things are understood. Ask any turf manager out there and they will tell you, you can never assume. As you read through this issue you will find other articles that touch on the value of good communication and hopefully this helps as you make your way through the 2014 growing season. ■



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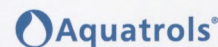


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# WHAT'S NEW

by Sally Ross, OGSA Executive Manager

## FROM THE OFFICE

We hope by the time our members receive our spring issue of *Green is Beautiful* that spring will have finally arrived.

The harsh winter experienced by all of us has taken its toll on many of our members and seems to have caused a ripple effect throughout the industry.

Our new board of directors for 2014 met this past February, welcomed Tim Muys (Piper's Heath Golf Club) and approved some changes to committees. These changes are listed under committees on our website. Also approved was a format change for the Presidents' Day Tournament and a change to make the Assistants Tournament an official OGSA event.

We are trying to incorporate some

of our directors activities related to the association in *Clippings* on a regular basis, so our members are aware of the contributions made by our board.

For our part, we have been working hard on compiling our membership directory and assuring we are as up to date as possible. Please note that you can do an online search on our website to find any OGSA member.

We welcomed Darlene Carr to the OGSA team in April. Darlene will be performing the accounting function and assisting with conference and trade show organization. She comes to the OGSA with a great deal of experience in both areas, gained in an association setting.

Surveys for public meetings are ongoing and can also be accessed through our homepage. The new survey is for meetings held to present your 2013 annual report.

OGSA has acquired a discount from Marks Work Warehouse (10%) for our members. The coupon can be printed from our website, but you must log in to access it.

## CONFERENCE 2015

We are working on Conference 2015, which is shaping up to be great. We have negotiated excellent pricing at the Marriott Gateway and have an awesome speaker line up according to many of our Twitter followers.

On opening night we will be taking over Planet Hollywood and having pub style food and an open bar. The Aaron Garner band has been booked. They are well known for bringing down the house at various pubs in the village at Blue Mountain.

Education sessions and the trade show

## Welcome to Our New Members

Sean Davey ..... Class C  
Redtail Golf Course

Dan Sliasas ..... Class C  
St. Catharines Golf & Country Club

Amanda Frend ..... Class F  
Ladies Golf Club of Toronto

Joel Henderson ..... Class C  
Sarnia Golf & Curling Club

Travis Sisson ..... Class C  
The Rock Golf Club

Shane Timms ..... Class Supt  
Sleepy Hollow Country Club

Geoff Griffin ..... Class F

Matt Shushack ..... Class S

Jim MacAlpine ..... Class F

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### UPCOMING 2014 OGSA Tournament & Events

#### Presidents' Day

Westmount Golf & Country Club  
Kitchener, Ontario  
Monday, July 28, 2014

#### Hugh Kirkpatrick Memorial Tournament

Otter Creek Golf Club  
Otterville, Ontario  
Tuesday, Sept. 16, 2014

#### Assistants Tournament

Cutten Fields  
Guelph, Ontario  
Monday, Sept. 22, 2014

#### Alex McClumpha Memorial Tournament

St. Thomas Golf & Country Club  
St. Thomas, Ontario  
Monday, Oct. 6, 2014

## OTRF GOLF TOURNAMENT MONDAY, AUGUST 18, 2014 CREDIT VALLEY GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB



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will be held at Scotiabank Convention Centre and we will once again be extending an invitation to all of our retirees with complimentary trade show passes.

Our conference committee this year, along with Conference Chairman John McLinden, includes superintendents, assistants and suppliers.

Conference pages are now live on our website and can be accessed from our homepage.

#### TWITTER Q & A

In order to assist our membership by getting the word out to the golfing public, media and any other interested parties, about the harsh winter and the widespread damage, the OGSA recently held a Twitter Q & A session, orchestrated by OGSA Director David Kuypers. Great results were realized with this initiative, which was sparked initially by the commissioning of an article written by Robert Thompson. The results were an increase of 30% in

Twitter followers, including media and the golfing public. Feedback to date has been exceptionally good.

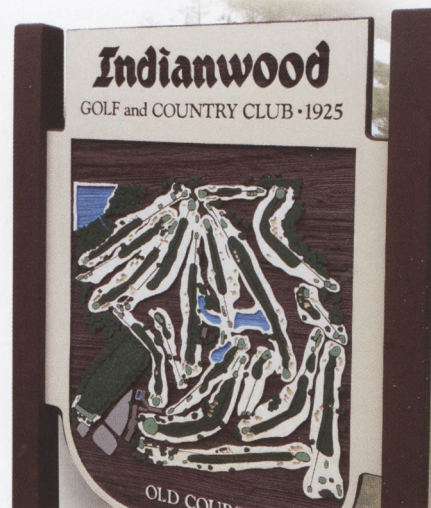
I encourage you to contact the office or any one of our directors if you have any questions or require information about any OGSA activities. From all of us in the office, have a great summer. ■

## Can/Am Challenge Recap

by Adam Ikamas, CGCS,  
MiGCSA Executive Director

The 38th annual Can/Am Challenge at Indianwood G&CC got off to a great start, but after about three holes the horn blew for lightning in the area. After a delay until close to 1 p.m., the groups headed back out to try to complete the matches, but were again thwarted by the spring thunderstorm.

The golf course was primed for the group by MiGCSA past president Greg Pattinson and crew, but Mother Nature had different plans. At 3 p.m. the buffet was served and everyone enjoyed the fantastic spread. Whenever a Can/Am has been cancelled in the past the cup went back to the previous year's winner, so the cup was retained by the OGSA for the second year in a row. Look out for plans now in the works for the 2015 matches. ■



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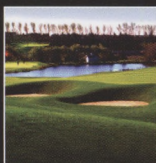
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# Sustainable Turfgrass: Back to Basics

by Katerina S. Jordan, PhD., University of Guelph and  
John Bladon, P.Ag., The Chimera Group

The word “sustainable” is becoming common place in everyday conversation. We discuss sustainable energy, sustainable businesses and sustainable agriculture, just to name a few. Sustainability is defined as “the quality of not being harmful to the environment or depleting natural resources, and thereby supporting long-term ecological balance” (Dictionary.com) and the pursuit of sustainability requires the reconciliation of social equity with environmental and economic demands. These are often referred to as the three pillars or three “Es” of sustainability. When we talk about turfgrass management, do we really know what it means to be sustainable? In order to maintain turfgrass to standards that end users have come to expect, a great deal of inputs are required and some might question the effect that intensive management has on the environment, not to mention whether the economics of these strategies can be justified. The purpose of this article is to discuss some of the problem areas that may prevent year-round successful turfgrass management and how a few small changes may help us strive toward a more sustainable system.

## Road Blocks to Sustainability

In light of the extensive damage that was experienced on numerous golf courses following this past winter season throughout much of Ontario (especially in the GTA), this may be a perfect time to review site characteristics and your management protocols, especially since many of you have been forced to resurface or renovate portions of or all of your greens to allow for play this season. In this issue of *Green is Beautiful*, Pam Charbonneau’s article “The Perfect Storm” on page 18 focuses on the injury we saw this season. This article will work off of Pam’s article but center around some of the factors that may have led to the damage and how to work around those factors over time through best management practices.

## Managing Annual Bluegrass (*Poa annua*)

From what we are seeing and have heard from superintendents in Ontario, there were multiple factors that led to winter injury following the harsh winter season. However, one of the common

threads was a high percentage of annual bluegrass (ABG) on greens and fairway sites. Unfortunately, managing ABG is just a reality in the golf course industry, especially on older golf courses. This species has an amazing capacity to invade bare areas and weakened turf and because it is such a prolific seeder, there is always a large source of ABG seed on a golf course. Not only does this lead to the high potential for winter injury, but it is very difficult to manage ABG sustainably even during the growing season.

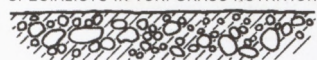
Annual bluegrass is a relatively weak species as the plant will allocate much of its energy and resources to seeding, especially if your course is dealing with an annual ecotype (a distinct form or race of an organism). The species does not root very deeply, making it susceptible to drought and reducing its stress tolerance in general. Additionally, there are a few diseases and insects that are specific to ABG, including anthracnose, summer patch and annual bluegrass weevil. This means that a higher proportion of pesticides will often be applied on a golf green, tee or fairway that is primarily ABG versus one that is creeping bentgrass (CBG). Water use efficiencies are also greatly reduced when managing ABG, as the shallow roots do not allow for extended periods between irrigation or rainfall events. This makes it very difficult to follow a deeper and less frequent irrigation program, typically recommended by most agronomists and scientists.

A more sustainable approach is to convert ABG putting green sites to CBG over time. However, it is important to understand why the ABG is there in the first place as changing the species on the surface will have little effect long-term if the conditions that led to its invasion are not dealt with as well. These would include shading, poor hydraulic conductivity or infiltration, and excess compaction. Essentially any conditions that weaken CBG growth can create an environment where ABG can easily invade. Another major factor that seems to lead to invasion by ABG over time is unrepaired ball marks. Each time that a ball mark is left on a green, a small section of CBG is left weakened. It is no coincidence that we find ABG invading in small, circular spots throughout putting greens. Therefore, ensuring that a pool of resources is allocated for ball mark repair is important.

Continued on page 11...

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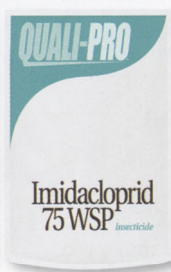


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Additionally, it is vital that turf managers develop successful communication strategies to educate golfers on the importance of fixing their marks properly.

If all of the above factors are reviewed and considered, CBG will stand a much better chance of remaining the dominant species. In turn, this should lead to fewer inputs to manage the system and put us on the path of sustainability.

### Growing Species Where They Belong

All too often we see turfgrass species in the wrong place throughout the golf course site. For example we may see Kentucky bluegrass grown in areas that are heavily shaded, or fine fescues grown on areas that receive a high amount of traffic. This is not taking advantage of the positive attributes of these species and will ultimately lead to ABG or other weed invasion and subsequently more inputs to manage these areas. Weakened grasses are also much more susceptible to certain diseases (e.g. red thread, rusts, summer patch) and to symptom development from insects such as grubs. Learn as much as you can about the ideal growing conditions of specific species and cultivars (through NTEP ratings—[www.ntep.org](http://www.ntep.org)) and try to incorporate the most appropriate species in specific areas of the golf course. Simply put, converting to species that are more suited to specific microclimates on your golf course can reduce inputs and create a more sustainable site over time.

### Promoting Good Soil Conditions

We could probably write an entire article just on this topic alone as it is one of the most important factors when striving toward sustainability on a specific site. We focus so much on what is seen above ground day in and day out that we often forget about the important foundation on which turf is grown. Whether dealing with a tee, fairway or putting green site, ensuring that you have a soil capable of providing the optimal characteristics for the desired species will be the most important thing that can be done to take a more sustainable approach. The optimal soil should contain the right proportions of air, water, and mineral and organic components. All of these characteristics can be examined through soil textural analysis, soil tests and hydraulic conductivity or infiltration. The latter will give you an idea of how quickly water will move through the soil profile. Barriers to proper water movement include: layering; excess thatch, poorly matched soils in the mix and compaction. To a degree, all of these can be managed through a regular cultivation program. Solid tine aeration can work well through the season to open pore spaces in the soil, but to reduce compaction and layering and to improve infiltration rates, pulling cores is the optimal approach. The core diameter and depth of your tines will depend on the extent of the problem and what your ultimate goal is for the soil. The best program will combine elements of regular core aeration with deep tine cultivation and may even include something more aggressive such as a drill and fill practice if problem areas are located. If thatch or organic matter volumes are the primary issue, vertical mowing (deep in the profile) and regular topdressing are excellent ways to dilute, reduce and prevent excess thatch. Although cultivation programs can be a difficult sell, they are essential when working toward a more sustainable approach.

### Managing End User Expectations

In the end, it is important to understand that turfgrass management is a service-based industry. Without end users that include golfers, athletes and homeowners, there is no reason to manage turfgrasses intensively. Although many of you likely got into this field because of your love of agronomy and turf culture, we have to remember that ultimately, we are out there every day to provide a stand of turfgrass for your end users to enjoy. This

means that we are always trying to balance the needs of the turf with those of the client, and unfortunately, the two are rarely in perfect alignment. A perfect example of this is looking for practices other than reduced mowing heights to increase ball roll distance. Consider incorporating more rolling into your program to give turf a chance to produce deep, healthy roots and allow it to tolerate more stress during the growing season.

The first step to achieving a balance between the needs of turfgrass and the needs of the client is focused communication. Choose to communicate with your clientele proactively and let them know what you are doing and why you are doing it. Educate them on the importance of sustainability's three pillars - society, economy and the environment – and that day in and day out you are trying to reconcile these elements.


Finally, we must be cautious not to let ego get in the way of maintaining turfgrass and losing our focus on sustainability. It may be a source of pride for some superintendents that they are able to mow below 0.100 of an inch (2.5 mm) and keep their greens alive, but remember to ask, "how sustainable is this?" If you find that your practices are not optimal for the species you are trying to promote, the predominant soil characteristics or are badly mismatched with end user expectations, consider altering some of your practices immediately or over time. ■



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# Dave Smith

DCS Agronomic Services

by Alan Dolick, Assistant Superintendent,  
Wildfire Golf Club

Many would agree that healthy soils are the foundation of any successful turf maintenance program, and according to Dave Smith of DCS Agronomic Services, mentors are the foundation of a successful career. Smith firmly believes that mentors have had a huge influence in his personal and professional life.

In the beginning, Smith, like so many others in this industry, fell into this business without even realizing it. Growing up on a farm in Bracebridge, Ontario he had spent many of his early years working on his family's land. Coming from a long line of men in his family that created their own livelihoods, Smith seemed destined to start up his own business, but in the early years of his career, that was anything but the case.

After his family sold the farm when Smith

was 13, and missing the farm life dearly, he got himself a job at the Bracebridge Golf Club. It was here that Smith met the first of several mentors that he believes has shaped his life today, Alan Pratt.

Pratt, took Dave under his wing and taught him just as much about life as he did about the golf course. When talking about Pratt, Smith says, "he left me with an attitude" towards life and work that he still leans on to this day. That attitude of never being afraid to be wrong and willing to learn new things through education or others has served him well.

Like any great mentor, Pratt realized that Smith was in need of a change to further his development. Pratt came to him one day and told him it was time to move on and helped him get an interview at the Cleavelands House Resort, a small nine-hole facility where he would be the one and only employee. It was at this time that Smith decided to go to the University of Guelph and study towards a diploma in turf management.

It was at this institution in 1977 where Smith met his next mentor, Bill Shea. Shea was the superintendent of the Muskoka Lakes Golf Club, and after spending time teasing Smith about the milk bag stuck to his cast to protect the cast from the snow, Shea offered him his first assistant's job. Smith looks back at those years with Shea as a very positive experience. Those years were vital in helping to propel Smith into his first superintendent's job.

1980 was a huge year for Smith. He married his wife Sharon and learned what it was like to be a superintendent. Smith's first year as superintendent at the Twenty Valley Golf Club in Vineland, Ontario was not all smooth sailing. Like many first time supers, he learned some hard lessons of managing staff, members and upper management. It was in these trying times that Smith leaned on his two mentors the most. "It's easy to find someone to agree with you all the time," says Dave, "but it's those that can put you in your place that really help you grow."

After two years at Twenty Valley and another two at the International Country Club of Niagara, Smith met yet another future mentor, Don Bauer. Bauer was



Dave Smith, DCS Agronomic Services

the greens committee chair at Muskoka Lakes Golf and Country Club and wanted Smith to come back to eventually become the superintendent at the place that he describes as "being very close to my heart."

Smith was the superintendent at Muskoka Lakes from 1985 to 1992. He spent a lot of time learning from Bauer, believing that he was the single biggest influence on his professional development.

In 1992, the City of Hamilton placed an ad in the newspaper looking for a foreman of outdoor sports facilities. Looking for a new challenge, Smith took the job. During his time with the City of Hamilton, Smith managed three golf courses, lawn bowling clubs, countless sports fields and Ivor Wynne Stadium.

After four years with the city, Smith was asked to consult on the fields for the World University Soccer Championships. This was the break he was looking for. Despite really enjoying his time with the city, he had always longed for an entrepreneurial lifestyle.

Finally, after years of learning from others, coupled with his own successes and challenges, Smith felt he was ready to go out on his own. In April of 1996, he and his wife Sharon, "who runs the place," formed DCS Agronomic Services. Since then, Smith has added mentors and become one to many more himself. Smith continues to evolve as a teacher, professional and as a person. "When you're young, you look up to those that are older and more wise, but as you age, you search out younger mentors, those that can teach you new things". A profound comment from a wonderfully insightful man. ■

## IN THE HOT SEAT

Q – Favourite piece of equipment  
A – I am a tractor buff – both new and old

Q – Favourite golf tournament  
A – Canadian Open

Q – Favourite course architect?  
A – I like working with all of them

Q – Lowest round and where?  
A – Never had one, anywhere

Q – Ultimate foursome?  
A – Phil Scully, Steve Mann, Willy Nelson and me

Q – Favourite all-time movie?  
A – Hoosiers starring Gene Hackman



# Smuggler's Glen Golf Course



409, 1000 Islands Parkway  
Gananoque, Ontario K7G 2T6  
Tel: 1-800-268-4536  
[www.smugglersglen.com](http://www.smugglersglen.com)

**Golf Course Superintendent:**  
Jason Boyce

**Equipment Manager:**  
Jeff Johnston

*Hole #13*

*Photo credit: Jason Boyce*

## COURSE PROFILE

### About the Course

Smuggler's Glen Golf Course is situated in the Thousand Islands area adjacent to the St. Lawrence River. The course represents an interesting blend of nature and design. The generous fairways and gently contoured greens set in a pristine forest environment are inviting and enjoyable.

**Established:** July 21, 2005

**Original Architect:** Boyd Barr

**Type of Club:** Semi-Private Resort

**Number of Holes:** 18

**Number of Rounds Annually:** 25,000

**Practice Facility:** Yes

## Biggest Maintenance Challenge

The property is heavily treed. We have started an extensive in-house tree removal program to improve sunlight and air movement to our turf.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### What You Need to Know

**Predominant Grass Type:**

Bentgrass greens and fairways; Dwarf bluegrass tees.

**Predominant Soil Type:** Silty Loam

**Type of Greens:** California

**Course Length:** 6,603 yards

**Size of Property:** 200 Acres

**Size of Greens:** 3.2 acres

**Size of Tees:** 3.2 acres

**Size of Fairways:** 22 acres

# DCS

**Agronomic Services**

**David C. Smith, P.Ag., C.G.C.S.**

Soil & Turfgrass Consultant

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# The Golf Course: Beyond the

by Justin Parsons, Engage Agro

**G**olf is a great game. We tend to lose sight of this from time to time. We tend to get bogged down in the politics and the bureaucracy of it all. It is nobody's fault really. It is a natural consequence of growth. As things evolve and expand, there is more at stake. Of course this means that there is more analyses, evaluation and scrutiny.

All too often as of late, golf, and in particular turf maintenance, has made headlines for the wrong reasons, so every once in a while it is nice to stop and remind ourselves of all the positives this game has to offer. Matthew Booth, Assistant Superintendent at the Oshawa Golf and Curling Club, recently submitted a collection of photos that help accomplish exactly that – his images remind us of one of the things that makes golf exceptional.

This is truly the only game that allows the participant to be immersed in nature. It is an escape. For a handful of hours the player has the opportunity to leave behind the trappings that accompany big city life and get lost in a landscape full of natural beauty. We must not forget that it is turf managers who nurture and care for this environment. Some are too busy finding faults in golf course operations that they don't stop and take the time to think about what the alternative is. Consider what would exist in place of that golf course around the corner? It is a safe bet that whatever the substitute, the land would not be cared for to quite the same extent.

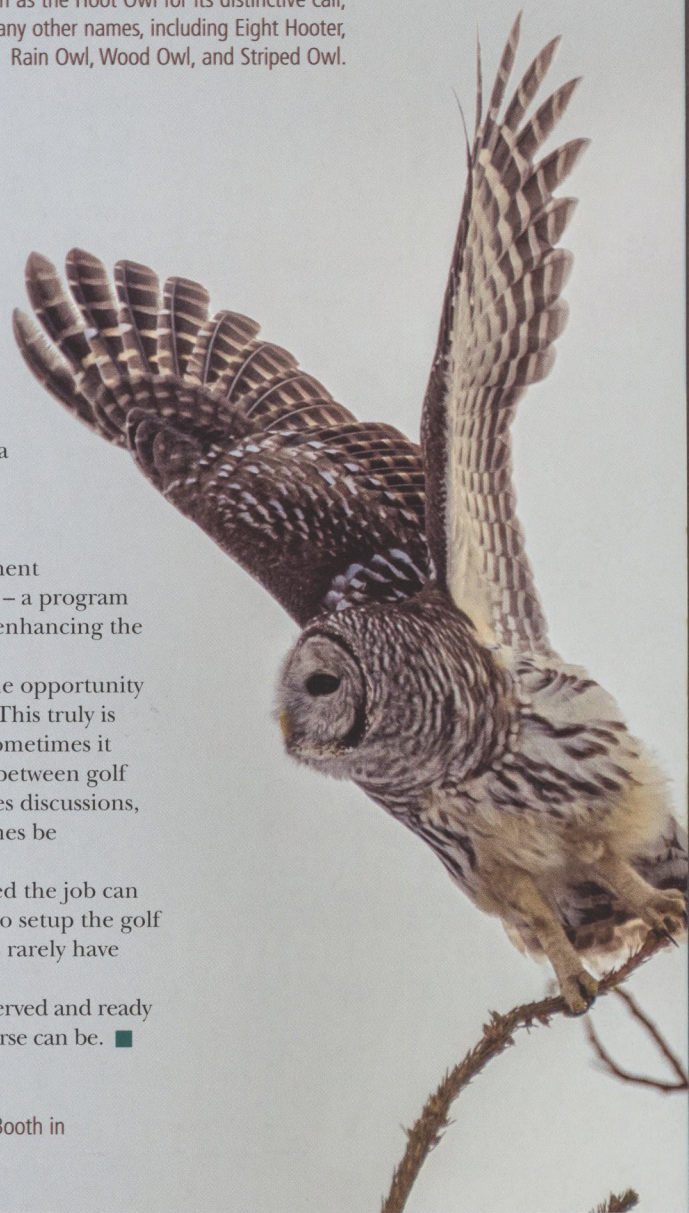
Left: A Snowy White Owl spotted near Carruthers Creek Golf & Country Club, Ajax; Below, left to right: Baby foxes at the Oshawa Golf & Curling Club, Oshawa; This Long-eared Owl, caught Booth off guard. "I turned a corner and it scared the heck out of me cause I wasn't expecting to see anything," recalls Booth of this shot.





# Green

The Barred Owl is a large owl native to North America. Best known as the Hoot Owl for its distinctive call, it goes by many other names, including Eight Hooter, Rain Owl, Wood Owl, and Striped Owl.



Along with the growth of society, has come an increased understanding of how our daily actions impact the natural world around us. This can be both positive and negative, although typically, there are few examples of growth having a positive impact on the environment. Golf would be a glowing exception to that trend.

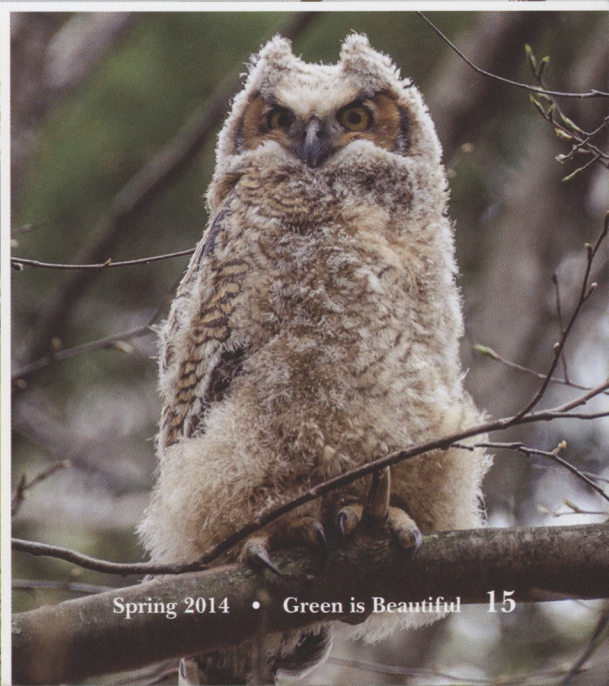
Superintendents are environmental stewards. They spend countless hours every year evaluating how their maintenance practices can have a positive impact on the ecosystem they manage. In many cases, this commitment extends to a full designation as a Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary – a program that helps golf courses protect the environment through education and by enhancing the natural areas and wildlife habitats that exist on their property.

Again, we must remind ourselves, what game other than golf affords us the opportunity to enhance the environment in the process of facilitating the activity itself? This truly is a remarkable aspect of our game and one that is not celebrated enough. Sometimes it takes images such as Booths' to remind us how exceptional the interaction between golf and nature really is. In a time when pace of play and greens speed dominates discussions, the inherent beauty of the game and extraordinary experience can sometimes be underappreciated.

Anyone who has worked on a turf maintenance team knows how fast-paced the job can be. From the second your workday starts in the pre-dawn hours, it is a race to setup the golf course for that days collection of players. It is no wonder that turf managers rarely have time to stop and try and capture the beauty that they help to cultivate.

Fortunately, thanks to Matthew Booth, we have some wonderful images preserved and ready to share with those who sometimes forget just how majestic a place the golf course can be. ■

Below, left to right: Oshawa Golf & Curling Club; A baby Great Horned Owl, captured by Booth in the GTA, is a large owl native to the Americas. It is also know as the Tiger Owl.





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# Communication is Key To Success

*Stuart Brindle, PGA of Canada  
General Manager and Director of Golf  
Magna Golf Club*

**L**ike many golf professionals, I have a tremendous appreciation for the role that superintendents play in our industry. A superintendent is made up of equal parts scientist and artist, with tremendous dedication to their golf course and trade. Both now and in the past, I consider myself fortunate to work with some of the best superintendents in the industry, and have had the pleasure of learning a great deal about turf maintenance.

I cannot say enough about the importance of communication when it comes to turf operations. Those of us that work in the industry arrive at the club everyday prepared to deal with our business and livelihood. The golfer arrives at the club to enjoy four to five hours of leisure time. The result is a group of people that formulate their own opinions of how things should be and why conditions are the way they are. In most cases, it is extremely difficult for a superintendent to personally explain course conditions to golfers. Instead, golfers will communicate their thoughts to the professional staff in the Proshop, or even the service staff in the restaurant – why not, they will listen. This is likely the reason why your servers know that all of the other courses in the GTA have greens that are running at 13 on the stimp meter every day.

In my experience, the efforts of a turf maintenance department are best supported by providing as much information to those in the rest of the operation as possible. All kidding aside, there are certainly golfers that have a respectable understanding of turf practices. However, there are others that have misunderstandings, and it is our responsibility to educate them, and, in turn, avoid unhappy golfers. The more information provided to the other departments of the club, the better the support can be. I have witnessed great results with the following practices:

## Monthly Newsletters

A newsletter provides a superintendent with the opportunity to convey upcoming projects, current conditions and reasoning, and explanations for certain cultural practices. Answering a question before it is asked reduces the chance that golfers will formulate their own opinions on a given item. Blogs and Twitter represent possible opportunities for communication, depending on the preferences of your membership/clientele.

## Regular Management Meetings

A great practice in general, especially since, as previously mentioned, golfers may speak to every department about their thoughts on the golf course. If the head professional and food and beverage manager know why we are aerifying greens next week, they are better armed with the answer when Mr. Smith asks, "Why are we ruining the greens now that they are finally in peak shape?" What's better than your bartender explaining to Mr. Smith that aerification is the reason why the greens are in such great shape in the first place, and they will be back to normal in less than a week?



## Tours of the Golf Course

One of the most enjoyable parts of my job is to spend time with the superintendent touring the golf course and learning. We are all busy and it is hard to find the time, but this is firsthand knowledge that can be passed along to members. There is nothing worse than being asked a question to which you don't have the answer. Touring the course on a regular basis provides you with valuable information that you can share in conversation with members. In turn, everyone will be on the same page when it comes to activity on the golf course and conditions.

## Information Sessions

Another valuable visit out on the course should take place any time there is a special process or project taking place. I always ask our superintendent to let me know when I can come and see the team aerifying a fairway, starting a bunker project, or simply verticutting. Not only does this make me a well-rounded manager, but once again, it provides me with the ability to speak knowledgeably to our members when they ask about what is happening on the golf course.

## Budgeting

It only makes sense that the superintendent has a solid grasp of budget preparation and financial tracking as the season progresses. To go one step further, it is extremely important that each department head has a good understanding of the budgets presented by their fellow managers. This allows the management team to make group decisions when it comes to those inevitable times where difficult budget cuts need to be made. This is a situation that most clubs have faced, and it won't be changing in the near future.

## Informal Discussions

The previous five items are quite formal in nature and can be scheduled and planned for somewhat easily. Some of the most valuable knowledge that I have gained has come from informal conversations that occur in the office or over a quick lunch. As I start my 26th season in the golf industry, I am still amazed at the wealth of knowledge possessed by the superintendents that I work with, both past and present. There is no shortage of information to be learned, and given the progressive nature of turfgrass professionals, this is sure to be the case moving forward.

We are very fortunate to work in an industry that provides the opportunity to be exposed to such a diversity of skills and areas of expertise. Like anything in life, unfamiliar territory can be intimidating. However, I have yet to meet a superintendent that is not willing to share their knowledge and experience, both with fellow 'supers' and the uninitiated such as myself. If you would like to know more about turf operations, just ask – I'm sure your superintendent is ready to get started. ■



## The Perfect Storm

Or was it a series of perfect storms? It all began on the weekend of December 21, 2013 with about 2.5 cm of ice accretion on everything. By the way, I didn't know what ice accretion was until I became addicted to the Weather Network. I have many new weather words in my vocabulary now. The weather leading up to this freezing rain event was heavy rain that saturated the non-frozen soil. The freezing rain followed by a sudden dip below -20°C in early January lead to ice encasement of turf. Apart from the mercury rising to the high single digits a week later, there were sustained low temperatures that kept that layer of ice in place. Luckily, the ice layer was covered with a generous layer of snow which was in place until mid to late March in southwestern Ontario and until mid to late April in more northerly areas.

### Snow Was Your Friend

It appears now that the greens in areas with more snow cover fared better. This is witnessed by reports of golf courses in the Muskoka and Ottawa region. In general, this is true even on older courses with lots of annual bluegrass. Golf courses with a lack of snow or a thin snow layer had more damage. In general, there was more winter injury in the Greater Toronto Area, Niagara region and anything south of the 401 corridor.

### What Killed the Annual Bluegrass?

I am not sure that anyone can unequivocally claim what exactly killed their annual bluegrass. Again, there was a series of a series of perfect storms. Here are some of the choices – pick your favourite:

- Greater than 90 days of ice cover
- Temperatures dipping to below -20°C at night in early January
- Temperatures dipping to below -20°C at night in mid to late March as turf is coming out of dormancy
- Freeze-thaw cycles in early April
- Winter desiccation of areas exposed to drying winds, or
- All of the above

### The Role of Covers

Many superintendents who used permeable covers felt that they didn't help. This could be explained by the fact



*Winter kill of Poa annua in shaded areas.*

that even the covers and the turf below the covers were encased in ice. It was like a giant ice cube. Here at the GTI, Dr. Tom Hsiang had skids and hoses on top of a pathology green that he was using to test fungicides against pink and gray snow mould. These were then covered with a permeable cover. There was just enough air space under the cover that it didn't turn into one big popsicle. There was no sign at all of any winter injury on this green. I should mention though that this green is mowed at 4 mm, so not exactly at greens height, but it is a mix of annual bluegrass and creeping bentgrass.

The greens that fared the best were those that had impermeable covers that were vented. This is a big commitment and isn't completely foolproof. This cover system worked as long as no water penetrated below the covers.

Permeable covers have their place in recovery efforts in the spring. There is no consensus on what colour is best. Darker colours absorb heat which helps to warm up the turf surface and the soil beneath the turf. Transparent covers let sunlight in. That will generate heat in a similar way as a greenhouse or a poly house will create a warmer environment for plants than the ambient outdoors. Keeping the tarps on at night helps keep the soil warm by preventing the heat accumulated during the day from being lost.

### Winter Injury as a Teachable Moment

There are so many good photos on Twitter and on blogs showing live creeping bentgrass next to dead Poa annua grown in the same environment. Pictured left are totally dead areas of Poa annua in shaded sections of a golf course. Superintendents know the issues with Poa annua; shade, traffic, poorly constructed greens and poorly designed irrigation systems, but often there isn't the budget or the will to address these issues. Many are calling this a "wake up call". Use this as a teachable moment for your golf course members, greens committees, etc. Many courses have opted for resodding all of the greens with creeping bentgrass sod. A good start, but it could be just a matter of time before you will be back to square one with Poa annua dominating your putting surfaces unless you get to the root of the problem. Ask yourself why the Poa annua is there in the first place and try to create an environment that favours creeping bentgrass.

Another teaching tool at your finger tips now is the contrast between live Poa annua on fairways versus the dead Poa annua on greens. Are you being forced to set your mowing heights lower than you are comfortable with? Show the decision makers these turf areas and explain to them some of the practices that may have contributed to one area of turf being alive and one that isn't. I am not advocating that you mow your greens at fairway height, but some of this competition among courses to have the fastest greens in the neighbourhood may be coming back to haunt you. This is a chance to adopt management practices that favour creeping bentgrass.

Check out #winterinjury – a Twitter feed initiated by the OGSa. Kudos to them for helping to get the word out. I propose we also start a #springrecovery Twitter feed to document how the turf spring recovery efforts are going. ■



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## ABOVE THE HOLE

### Facing Welcomed Adversity

It's hard to imagine, with all of this 'warm' weather we have been having, that we still have snow kicking around on our courses. Just one week removed from my final exam of the year at the University of Guelph, I return home to Muskoka to start my internship and I feel like I've just stepped back a month in time. It was just two years ago that I had already put in a half dozen rounds of golf at this point in the season, yet this year we have been somehow blessed with the gift of a seemingly never ending winter. I'm sure it won't be long after the snow is gone before we will have our members knocking on our doors wondering why our courses aren't open yet. It's never easy to please all of our members, but you can be certain that most golfers are getting anxious to tee it up after this lengthy winter wonderland. While most people, myself included, are cursing this prolonged winter, as an aspiring turf professional this is exactly the reason I fell I love with the industry.

Before everyone reacts and thinks I am crazy, it isn't the long winter per se that I am excited about. The reason I came into this industry was for the unpredictability that comes with it. I've done my share of factory work and the fact that I don't know what to expect day to day and season to season is the reason I chose turf as a career. We all remember the floods from two seasons ago and the challenges that arose from them. While we were much better off than some courses, we had our own set of challenges as we had two holes as well as our driving range that were almost completely under water for much of the spring. About seven years ago, we had that big wind storm which caused us to shut down the course for a day while we scrambled to restore playability. While these aren't situations we wish for, I think it makes our job feel more natural when it isn't as predictable. It is times like this that test our ability as turf professionals, as we react to these adversities that keep us on our toes.

I have always appreciated the fact that the turf industry gives us the chance to admire the work we have done, and it's that much more satisfying when we've done so with Mother Nature throwing everything she has at us. It's never easy to work around the unpredictability of the weather and it is sometimes tough to relay these challenges to your membership, but this is what ultimately strengthens both you and your crew. Good communication is paramount in assuring these relationships are kept in good standing, but it is these situations that make this industry so exciting.

Having said that, it's time for you to go winter. I'm ready to get my game face on. ■



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 www.deerhurstresort.com



# You Can Trust Your Local Sales Rep

A short while ago, I had the displeasure of listening to a presentation in which one of the speakers alluded to sales representatives in the golf industry rejoicing in the dismissals of course superintendents, as this would result in potential sales opportunities. Most unfortunate was that this comment was made, in large part, to an audience of young, impressionable people. In my opinion, there are so many reasons as to why this is utterly false, but more on that a little later.

Such comments serve only to perpetuate the classic perception of all salesman acting like a “used car salesman” who is out for himself only. In reality, this stereotype is no longer appropriate as it was derived from the information asymmetry that existed in the favour of the car dealer over the potential buyer. Nowadays, the amount of information accessible to the general public, due in large part to the internet, has helped balance the information playing field regardless of what a consumer is considering purchasing.

But what if there existed some way to measure altruism in salesman – customer transactions? According to research undertaken by economist John List, there is. List, who incidentally happened to be the lone economist in a U.S. delegation to help negotiate the Kyoto protocol, undertook some of his most interesting experiments at a baseball card show. List published his findings in a paper titled, *The Behaviorist Meets the Market: Measuring Social Preferences and Reputation Effects in Actual Transactions*.

In one experiment, customers and dealers were asked to step in a back room where the customer would state how much he was willing to pay for a card, choosing from five established prices. The dealer was asked to offer a card that was supposed to correspond to the offered price. When the customer had to name his price first, the dealer was in a position to cheat by offering a card worth less than the offer. The results of the experiment showed that on average, the customers made relatively high offers and the dealers

offered cards of commensurate value.

In another experiment, List had customers approach dealers on the actual trading floor, unbeknownst to them that they were being watched. The protocol consisted of the customer making the trader two offers: “Give me the best Frank Thomas card you can for \$20” or “give me the best Frank Thomas card you can for \$65.” What were the results? Unlike the previous experiment where dealers, who knew they were participating in an experiment, made fair offers, this time around, they were more prone to cheat. But List found an interesting split; the local dealers were much less likely to cheat due to wanting to maintain their reputation.

This brings me back to why I disagree with the speaker’s comments about salesmen in the turf industry. Firstly, some of these fine individuals happen to be in their current roles due to having lost their previous superintendents positions. Nobody rejoices in anyone losing their job. On the contrary, we are sympathetic and understanding to the outgoing superintendent. Secondly, fostering trust with a customer takes time. Quite honestly, it’s not in anyone’s best interest to start all over again. Thirdly, as List’s research shows, salesmen care about their reputations in their respective field. We want to be respected by our customers and want to be called on when help is needed. To allude to salesmen rejoicing in a superintendent being fired from their jobs runs countercurrent to the reputations we try to uphold. ■



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## HEALTH & SAFETY

# The MOL Is On The Hunt

Golf courses are in the sights of the Ministry of Labour (MOL). Some of you have probably received an email from Mark Hagen of Hyde Park Equipment Ltd. telling you that a couple of golf courses have been visited.

He has identified some issues that the inspectors are addressing when they arrive on site. All of these items are important. In particular, inspectors are looking for training documentation such as sign off sheets and training documents detailing the course content.

As Mark has stated, MOL inspectors are always looking for personal protective equipment (PPE) that is appropriate for the work being undertaken. Having the appropriate PPE is one thing, but ensuring that it is properly used in every required situation is imperative. And this means that anyone supervising a worker must ensure that they follow the rules. If your club has a rule that specifies the use of hearing protection while working with equipment, then the MOL inspector expects the supervisor to ensure that the worker is in fact using the specified hearing protection. If the workers are not using the specified hearing protection when the inspector is on site then a supervisor is likely to be charged with failure to enforce and a worker with failure to comply. If your club doesn't have such a rule and the inspector finds that the worker should be protected then this may also generate a charge under the Act.

Mark has stated in his email that the MOL is looking at shields and guards and working safety switches on equipment. Other issues that Mark has identified are proper training and supervision with both new and returning workers. Don't fall into the trap of believing that a returning worker doesn't need to be trained. I hear this all too often and sadly these workers are often the ones being injured. When you are bringing workers into the workforce it is your duty to ensure that they have not forgotten the rules from previous seasons. When workers are not doing a job for a period of time there is a tendency to forget some of the details. Make sure that all workers are provided with information that allows them to work in a safe manner.

It is my belief that virtually every golf course has a comprehensive pesticide

program in place. One thing some may not have is a written document detailing how their program works. I understand that this is often a case of having undertaken the process for a long time and you know what you are doing. While this is admirable, this is not how the MOL looks at things. The MOL wants written documentation detailing the procedures. The way the MOL looks at work processes is by thinking that the person doing the job has never done it before. So the MOL looks for a document that details how the work should be done and the document must also define how the organization should respond if something should go wrong. The MOL wants to ensure that the worker distributing the pesticide understands the consequences of improper procedures.

Just to make sure that your golf course is compliant, it is a very good idea to ensure that there are copies of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (the Act) and Regulations posted in your workplace. This should be an up to date document. I have toured some facilities where the Act and Regulations are out of date by more than five years. The MOL does not like to see this.

On a similar note, please ensure that your health and safety policy is current. Every year the senior person on site must sign and date the health and safety policy and it must be posted in the workplace where all workers may see the document. This is a one page statement concerning the organizations philosophy on health and safety.

As Mark said in his email, there is much more that might be addressed by the MOL, so if you need to talk please give me a call. If you need a copy of the Act I am willing to order a bunch and get them out to you. As the motto goes, "Be prepared!"

Have a great summer! ■



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# Gardeners Gold Revisited

Now that spring has arrived, horticulturists should be reviewing their list of priorities for the season. This includes evaluating budgets, managing their time, and assessing seasonal priorities.

One of the most important practices that has a tendency to be overlooked is amending or top dressing garden beds with compost or high quality garden soil. Perceived time and budget constraints are the most predominant reasons for omitting this practice.

The benefits of adding compost to your soils include moisture retention, increased micro- and macro-nutrient levels, added minerals that may not be present in fertilizers, increased air space, increased plant growth, as well as improved drainage. By spending time and resources amending soils with compost, we can realize significant savings during the growing season. Some of the downfalls that may occur if this practice is omitted include, additional watering during times of drought, increased need for fertilizer, visually stunted or unhealthy plants, as well as increased labour to manage each of the aforementioned issues.

With large amounts of garden space it may be difficult to topdress every garden every spring or fall. Keeping track of which gardens you are able to tend to and implementing a schedule whereby you rotate which beds are topdressed in each season and year will help to ensure that all the beds get a healthy layer of compost every two to three seasons. I recommend a minimum of three inches as a topdressing thickness. There are a variety of mixes available in a range of qualities and prices. If you are purchasing a garden mix or triple mix the best product to use is a sandy loam type soil that contains high amounts of visible organic matter. A way to test for a good garden soil consistency is to squeeze a small amount in the palm of your hand. If it stays as a solid ball then the soil is more on the clay side which means it will drain poorly. If it breaks apart easily it is on the sandy loam side.

The composting program at MLG&CC originally began with a collection of organic waste from the grounds, including grass clippings, chipped brush from tree removal, soil from renovated gardens as well as leaves, annuals, perennials, and grasses from spring and fall cleanup. For this to be a success it was merely a matter of directing staff where to discard the material, educating them about the compost process, what the goal is to be achieved and what products go in. The program evolved into the collection of all biodegradable products from the entire property which include clubhouse kitchen waste, biodegradable coffee cups, coffee grinds and paper towels. Growing the program to incorporate all departments successfully meant the way waste was handled had to become a part of the operations policy. Once the policy was written, a system was developed including the process of educating staff and labeling waste containers. A practice that is somewhat new for me is using cores from aerated greens and tees that were originally being discarded. This cuts back on waste, increases the amount of recyclable material and gives the end product greater drainage ability by adding that sandy material. By doing this I believe there is a good opportunity to create a divot mix on site.

The organic waste is taken to our compost area and dumped into the working piles. These specific piles are at different stages to avoid new waste going into usable product. Every three weeks, I will use a loader or skidsteer to mix the piles and maintain a tidy environment at the site. It takes approximately six months to one year to have a usable product depending on conditions



*Organic waste is separated into working piles.*

and maintenance of the compost piles. The turnover time could forceably be decreased with increased turning and watering of the compost. It is also important to note that to create a properly working compost you must maintain a carbon:nitrogen ratio of 30-50:1, add oxygen through mixing or turning, and keep the compost wet.

Last season, we produced approximately ninety cubic yards of compost. There is currently a stockpile of close to one hundred and fifty yards of useable material. The product doesn't have to be used specifically for gardens either. For operations that may not have much garden space on the property it can be used as a topdressing for turf areas around entrances, clubhouses, proshops, fractional ownership units, in planter boxes or could be amended to topsoil in preparation for new sod.

The program continues to be a great success. We have drastically reduced the cost of waste taken to landfill sites and have completely eliminated the purchase of garden soil for amending, topdressing and transplanting. This also gives us the ability to complete projects such as new landscape installations or existing garden renovations without soil being a part of the cost of a new project.

Having and maintaining a high quality soil is an essential part of growing, thus its importance shouldn't be overlooked. The rewards of preparing your own compost material are plentiful. I urge anyone who has a little space and the resources to consider implementing a composting program. The volume of organic waste already present at your course will astound you, plus the amount of money saved on waste disposal is significant. Waste should be as important to manage as every other component and this program is a great example of the benefits of doing so both financially and for the health of your gardens.

If you would like more detail on the annual numbers of material production, machine hours, man hours or any other details about the program, please feel free to contact me. ■



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# Fifteen Years Ago Today

In 1999, the Board of Directors of the OGSA were **Ian Bowen** (Pres), Oshawa, **Simon George** (Past), Oakville, **Keith Bartlett** (Vice), Thornhill, **John Gravett**, Granite Club, **Jim Flett**, Muskoka Lakes, **Rob Ackermann**, Markland Wood, **Dean Baker**, Glen Abbey, **Jeff Burgess**, Weston, **Dave Cours**, Erie Shores, **Bob Heron**, Beacon Hall, **Mark Piccolo**, Galt and **Paul Scenna**, Donalda.

**ON THE MOVE:** **Bob Brewster**, from The Toronto Golf Club, went to Mississauga and **Al Schwemler**, Assistant, took over. **John Gravett** moved to the new Granite Club from Credit Valley and his Assistant **Jeff Stauffer** took over. **Paul White** left Mississauga and went to the Briars. North Granite Ridge hired a new superintendent **Dan Weichers**. **Gordon Witteveen** retired from The Board of Trade. **Mark Scenna** started working for **Plant Products** as a Technical Sales Representative.

**MILESTONES:** The OGSA celebrated their 75th Anniversary and held a 75th Anniversary Golf Tournament at Twenty Valley hosted by **John Taylor**.

**EVENTS:** The OGSA curling event was held at North Halton hosted by **Al Beeney**. The winning team consisted of **Bruce Burger**, Lakeview, **Ray Murray**, Maple Farm Supply, **Leo Daigle**, Caledon and **Mike McClelland**, Glen Eagle.

A fundraiser tournament, sponsored by **McCracken Golf Supplies**, was held at Burford Golf Links for **Mark** and **Danielle McClure** on the arrival of triplets.

The Ontario Turfgrass Symposium was held at the Regal Constellation Conference Centre chaired by **Rhod Trainor**. Keynote speaker was **Brian Williams**. The Presidents Reception was a huge success and plaques were presented to new AA Life and 25 year members. Congratulations went to, **Bob Brewster**, **Richard Creed**, **Barry Endicott**, **Roy French**, **Bill Glashen**, **Blake McMaster**, **Bruce Summers** and **Ken**

**Wright**. Recipient of the Heritage Scholarship was **Melissa White** and the Turfgrass Scholarship went to **Lindsay Preston**.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:** Greenskeeping in Ontario and the History of the Ontario Golf Superintendents' Association was being written, beginning in 1875 through to and including our 75th anniversary year, 1999. The editorial committee consisted of **Ian Bowen**, **Keith Bartlett**, **Robert Heron**, **Mark Piccolo**, **Paul Dermott**, **Mark Schneider**, **Gordon Witteveen** and **James Wyllie** (chairman).

**Gordon Witteveen** was awarded the John B. Steel Award presented by the CGSA.

**David Kuypers** won the Merit Scholarship from the GCSAA.

**OTEC** announced that it had sold the Jacobsen Turf Equipment portion of its business to **G. C. Duke**.

**TOURNAMENTS:** The Border Cities Golf Challenge was hosted by **Chris Andrejicka** at Essex. The Canadians brought the trophy home with the best foursome gross: **Scott Gardner**, Echo Valley, 77, **Kelly Barnett**, Point West, 79, **Pat Hebert**, Roseland, 80 and **Scott Dyker**, Beverley, with an 80.

The Pro/Superintendent Tournament was held at the National Pines, hosted by **Chris Goodman**. The low team was from the National, **Norm Hitzroth** and **Chris Dew** with a 68 and second place from Tyandaga was **Jim Black** and **Gavin Kellogg** also with a 68, decided by retrogression.

The President, Green Chairman, Superintendent and Directors Golf Tournament was held at The Toronto Golf Club hosted by **Al Schwemler**. The winning team was from Glendale, **Mike Cote** and runner-up team was from The Granite Club, **John Gravett**.

The Alex McClumpha Golf Tournament was held at Markland Wood hosted by **Rob Ackermann**. **Hugh Kirkpatrick** was the winner of the George Darou Trophy for superintendents over 50. **Bob Heron**, Beacon Hall, was 1st low gross with a 76 and **Paul Scenna**, Donalda, was 2nd low gross with a 79.

**IN MEMORY:** **Fred Grightmire** passed away at the age of 95. Fred was the first superintendent at the Dundas Valley from 1929 until 1969 and a past president of the Western Ontario Greenskeepers Association. ■

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## Ice, Ice, Baby

by Doug Breen, Superintendent  
GolfNorth Properties

I didn't want to talk about ice. I tried to write about five other topics, but in the end, ice is all that I can think about. It's all I've been thinking about since December 28, 2013. Not the storm before Christmas that knocked branches off of half the trees in Ontario, and made my front lawn look like a frozen lumber yard for three months. Apart from a couple days without hydro, that storm wouldn't have hurt us at all. There was a thick layer of ice, but it was on top of a thick layer of snow (and fallen wood), so that ice would have been fine. Sure, we'd have needed an army of beavers and chainsaws to clean up the wood, but that wouldn't have kept me up at night. The bad day was the 28th. After a couple warm days of melting between Christmas and New Year's, the snow was gone, and the ice



Dec. 28/13

had migrated right down to the turf, and frozen solid – about four inches thick. On December 28th, I could have put on a pair of skates in Cambridge, and skated to four other golf courses without dulling my blades. I probably could have skated to three different Great Lakes and across them to four states.

So ice is all I've been able to think about since the end of December. And I was right to be worried about it – we all were. It was ugly out there when it finally melted. I don't want to theorize about why it was so much worse south of Highway 7, than north of it. I don't want to add to the debate with respect to why one green could have 75% winter injury (OK, let's call it death), while another green, a mere fifty feet away, could come out of the fray looking like June 15th. Others, wiser and more qualified than myself, will be writing for years about their findings from the spring of 2014. Why did it happen? What was the most effective path back to playability? To cover, or not to cover? I'll leave all of that to experts.

Rather, I want to discuss how superintendents were able to deal with the political side of the situation. Players, whether green fee or member, had to be dealt with. Owners, general managers, and boards of directors were all looking to us for explanations; and more importantly, solutions. How did we do?

In the electronic age, it's easier than ever to send out information. Most Ontario superintendents were blogging, tweeting, emailing, and newslettering all winter. I know for a fact, while the freezing rain was still falling, several of our fraternity were getting out the message that the greens could be in trouble. Many followed the axiom that if you give people the worst possible scenario first, then anything going forward will be good news. Others took the more reassuring

tack – letting golfers know that they should expect some damage, but that it would be localized and manageable, and talked about what they would do to repair any issues in the spring. Neither is better than the other, it just depends on your audience. What is clear, is that those who were communicating with their taskmasters in January, are a lot better off today than the ones who buried their head in the ice and hoped for the best.

Stephen Covey wrote years ago, about the emotional bank account that we have with other people. If we've made deposits along the way, when we need to make a withdrawal (like opening with four temporary greens) then the "credit" is there. If not, a winter like this could result in a debt from which one cannot recover. Superintendents who have gone the extra mile, or spent time communicating, or have a history of success, will have the credit in their accounts that they need.

That person behind the counter, or answering the phone, can bury you. Conversely, they can be your greatest ally. When John Random Golfer asks about the state of the ice damage – have you invested enough emotional credit in the rest of the golf course staff that they'll say, "Our superintendent is the best in the business, Mother Nature's a ditch pig, but he'll get us back on track. Thank goodness we've got him?" Or, are they saying, "I've got no idea what the heck he's doing?"

For many of us, our emotional bank account is pretty empty today, maybe even overdrawn. The golfers, staff, owners and boards will be watching you like never before. Make sure to take the time to build that account back up through your actions, your words, and your accomplishments. Best of luck in this trying time – as Hugh Kirkpatrick used to say, "We're all in this together." ■

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