



THE NEWSLETTER

July 2019

of the **Golf Course Superintendents Association of New England, Inc.**

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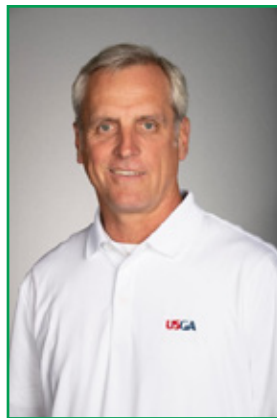
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Thoughts From Your Executive Director by Don Hearn



As you may know, Jim Skorulski, USGA Agronomist for the Northeast region retired last month. He had been with the USGA for 30 years. I believe he made over 3500 visits to courses in the northeast during his career with the USGA Green Section.

When I first met Jim I was impressed by his knowledge and friendly manner. Being an agronomist with the USGA brings with the title a level of respect and a bit of awe. When Jim would visit he also brought a warehouse full of knowledge. As the years passed I became impressed not only by his knowledge, but, many times, by his level of diplomacy. As we know, many times a consultant can be used as a broom to sweep out someone who no longer seems to have value to the course. Jim could tell when this was happening during these visits and was able to walk the fine line that separates objectivity and ulterior motive – not an easy task. Jim always made himself available to talk over practices, strategies, and ideas to help make a superintendent's life better.

Jim is a native of New Hartford, NY. He earned a BS degree in forest biology in 1984. Following graduation, he was employed as an arborist at the Yahnundasis Golf and Country Club in New Hartford, NY. He attended Cornell University in 1987 to pursue graduate studies in turfgrass management. There he earned a Master of Professional Studies degree.

During the scarce time off he had during his career he enjoyed fishing in different parts of the country. When I last spoke with Jim he wasn't sure what he might be doing in the future.

August is the month the Ouimet Marathon is played. The annual fundraiser where as many holes as a person can play is done with the intention of raising funds for Ouimet scholarships. Once again Kevin Corvino and his caddie Eric Doldt will be participating to help with fundraising while representing our Association. This will be the 9th year they have been doing this. Ouimet scholarships are for those who have worked in golf. If you would like to support Kevin, who was a recipient of a Ouimet scholarship, and donate to the fund please click [donate](#).

Thoughts From Your Executive Director *by Don Hearn*



From left: Dave Johnson, Dave Rice, Mark Casey, Len Curtin, Host Superintendent; Joe Leonard, Assistant Superintendent; Anthony Howard.

The June meeting was held at the George Wright Golf Course in Hyde Park (Boston). Host Superintendent Len Curtin and his team of turf experts had the course in great shape for the players. Unfortunately, most could play only twelve holes because of the heavy rain that made the course too wet for play. After golf, Karen Reardon representing RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) made a presentation on pesticide issues we should be aware of in our area. She also spoke about current national issues. She was followed by Steve Boksanski, legislative agent for the GIA (Green Industry Alliance) the group GCSA of New England is allied with. Steve spoke about the local legislative process and items we should be aware of at the state and local level. We plan to make June an annual Government Relations meeting to help keep members up to date with legislation that may influence what we do and how we do it at our courses.



Life Member Bert Frederick passed away July 4th. Bert was my friend of 50 years. He was an energetic person who, until recent years, was always on the go. We shared many hours, days and weeks together traveling and participating in activities of the GCSA of New England and GCSAA. He was a friendly, inquisitive person with a personality that some found intriguing. When I think of some of the time we spent together with others in our business I smile automatically. I remember some of the stories he would tell about his years as superintendent at Vesper Country Club. Some of those stories would bring laughter and a “you’ve got to be kidding me” response. To read more about Bert’s life and accomplishments please read his obituary [here](#).



This is a photo I took that appeared during a newscast I was watching. It’s of a sign attached to a fence where Little League baseball is played in Hopkinton, MA. While it doesn’t directly relate to what we do when we go to work each day, it certainly does relate to how some overbearing parents treat their children and the children of others. I hope you’re not a parent they had in mind when the sign was posted.

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NERTF Research Update

Let's Talk New England Turf Research

The New England Regional Turfgrass Foundation has been funding research now more than 20 years with more than \$2.5 Million in funds spent as of 2019. Currently, the foundation has 8 projects being funded for 2019 that amount to \$135,131.00. Since the start of this initiative, 86 projects have been funded by the foundation. Some are multi-year projects, and some are just for a one-year duration. Even though we are extremely proud of these numbers, it is by no means all the research that is ongoing at local universities. By making your way to a university field day, you will gain a greater understanding of the whole picture and what our New England schools mean to our industry. Here are some quick explanations of what is being funded by the foundation and researched during the growing season of 2019.

1. Solvita™ Soil Test Kits to Categorize Golf Course Fairway Responsiveness to N Fertilization. Dr. Karl Guillard of UConn has been working on this subject for the last 3 years and will soon be completed. This funding is partial funding of a larger project of the same name with the USGA focusing on fairway turf which is the largest part of a golf course's fertilization program. Using this method of testing could assist superintendents to adjust N-fertilization amounts depending on the response expected which can have positive benefits on their budgets and the environment.

2. Evaluation of Fairway Rolling Frequency, Rolling Start Time, and Thatch Accumulation for Control of Dollar Spot. Dr. Geunhwa Jung of UMass had conducted research to examine the potential of rolling for Dollar Spot control which resulted in a 40-60% reduction. This project is an expansion of that original research using rolling techniques to benefit Dollar Spot control efforts. This research will further evaluate rolling frequency, determine a seasonal start time and investigate the influence that rolling may have on thatch accumulation due to a compression effect. With all the money spent controlling Dollar Spot each year, looking outside the box and identifying steps that show reductions is a welcomed sight. This project is going beyond 2019 and data collection will be completed in the fall of 2020.

3. SDHI Resistance in Dollar Spot, Development of Management Strategies and Detection Testing. Dr. Jung had confirmed SDHI resistance of Dollar Spot in New England in 2017. This project will determine the extent of cross-resistance of SDHIs, determine practical recommendations to combat resistance, monitor changes in resistance and then to develop a diagnostic test to determine resistance type. The SDHI fungicide class is the largest class of fungicides on the market. Six of eight active ingredients are labeled for dollar spot, understanding the fate of an application and the potential resistance would be critical to a superintendent.

4. The Effect of Turfgrass Seed Mixtures, Seeding Rate and Mowing Timing on Weed Productions in Establishing Pesticide-Free Athletic Fields and Lawn Areas. Dr. Jason Henderson and Ms. Vickie Wallace of UConn are nearing the end of this 2-year project. Due to the growing number of restrictions on athletic fields associated with youth sports,

this project addresses the topics within establishment to reduce weeds on pesticide free athletic fields and home lawns. Determining factors like seed mixtures, seeding rates and mower timing all could affect an acceptable outcome and better conditions for youth to play on.

5. Evaluation of Wildflowers and Trap Nests to Increase Forage and Habitat for Bee's around New England Golf Courses. Dr. Steve Alm, URI recently submitted this project for three years. The long-term objective is to recruit golf courses into helping local bee populations recover from the recent declines in populations by creating available pollinator habitats, shelters and minimizing the negative effects of pesticides. Golf courses and especially those that have out of play areas will be encouraged to establish bee forage plantings, install trap nests to help bees establish colonies on the property, and evaluate insecticide choices to minimize adverse effects on populations. One of the outcomes Steve hopes to make available will be a seminar introducing beekeeping to golf courses.

6. Earthworm Species, Seasonal Phenology and Effect of Wetting Agents on Earthworm Castings and Abundance on New England Golf Courses. Dr. Olga Kostromystka, newly appointed professor at UMass submitted this project for funding for two years. Most superintendents recognize the goodness to the soil ecosystem and the nuisance to the playing surfaces of earthworm populations. More knowledge is needed to understand the habits of earthworms and the use of registered products with possible benefits that can help prevent worm castings on the surface. Wetting agents have shown some promise but more information is needed.

7. Exploring Methods to Enhance Biocontrol of Turfgrass Diseases. Dr. John Inguagiato of UConn submitted this proposal in 2019 for two years. The idea of expanding biocontrol management of turfgrass diseases would greatly benefit places such as schools where they have banned the use of pesticides. Sports turf also uses loads of Perennial Ryegrass which is susceptible to Gray Leaf Spot. It would be an objective to identify a product that could be used in this capacity and be permissible on restricted space. John is also communicating with Dr. Joseph Roberts at the University of Maryland.

8. Comparing Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Soil Microbial Populations from Turfgrass Fertilized with Slow-release Synthetic Fertilizer or an Organic Fertilizer. Dr. Karl Guillard, UConn, submitted this two-year study in 2019. There is much speculation and differences of opinion of benefits of organic versus slow release synthetic fertilizers to the environment. Questions concerning soil microbe populations and the status of greenhouse gas emissions will be measured to clear up this speculation.

These eight ongoing projects as well as the final chapter's preparation of the BMP project, which are expected to be finished this summer, may increase the total funding for 2019 to \$165,131.00. If you have any questions about any of the research being presently done, please feel free to communicate with these researchers. Two activities you can attend are the UMass Field Day on July 17 or the UConn "afterhours" event on July 23rd. There is much going on, and we compliment everyone involved for their hard work and dedication.

Thank you,
Gary J. Sykes, Executive Director



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BUILD A GREEN DAY AT THE LINKS AT MASS GOLF



Build A Green Day at The Links at Mass Golf was a successful undertaking made possible by the generous donations of our commercial members. A key member of this group was MAS Golf Construction and owner Matt Staffieri. Matt and his team devoted many hours of labor, machine time and talent to create the green for golfers at The Links to enjoy in the future. The event was a combination of education and fun for the youngsters at The Links. Everyone had the opportunity to hit shots, play a few holes and learn about the agronomic side of the game they love to play. While the project created a new practice green it also showed the extent our commercial sponsors will go to make a difference. The day included a First Green presentation by Kevin Doyle, GCSAA's Northeast Field Staff Representative. Kevin was assisted by Greg Cormier. Golf related activities were coordinated by Kyle Harris, Executive Director of The First Tee of Massachusetts. Chris Johnson, Superintendent of The Links and Pete Johnson, Golf Professional at The Links were involved in the day's activities and Chris was especially involved with the needs for the green construction. Jesse Menachem, Executive Director/CEO of Mass Golf was hearty with praise for the event and expressed the thanks of Mass Golf for the work done and the donations made.

Our thanks to the companies and people that participated and supported the event:

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July 1, 2019

Volume 20:8

Gazing in the Grass

Frank S. Rossi, Ph.D.

The summer stress period is upon most of the Northeast with temperature and humidity levels summing to over 150. This is a measurable method to gauge chronic stress that will challenge the stress tolerance of cool season turf stands from VA to ME. (See FORECAST Map

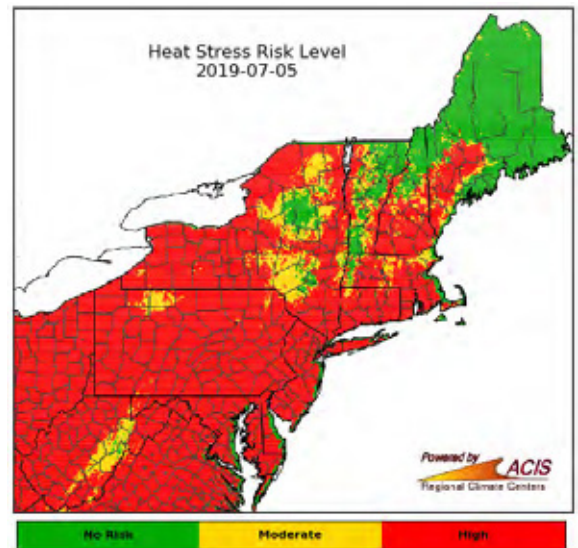
Image available at <http://turf.eas.cornell.edu/app/maps/threats/hstress>) Soil temperatures also warming rapidly at two inch depth from mid 60's to upper 70's. As drying persists in some areas expect soil temperature to rise quickly. Of course this is preferable to wet soils that when they heat up hold heat and stress longer!

Rainfall has been more sporadic across the region with some distinct drier areas in the last few weeks. This has lead to a rapid emergence of drought stressed turf. It seems after almost 12 months of record rainfall, the brief drying period with high solar radiation levels driving ET loss is exposing poor soil conditions, poor rooting depth, and creating stress that worsens summer patch, take-all patch and annual bluegrass weevil feeding damage.

It should be no surprise that in simple terms, plants in native soils that have moderate to poor drainage have adapted to persistent wet conditions. Over time these conditions promote shallow rooting that will not sustain top growth and as soil warm not likely create new roots. Intensely managed sand-based golf and sports systems have been performing nicely under very wet conditions if surface organic matter is properly managed. In fact, good drainage has allowed roots to follow water as nutrients and other compounds are drawn down in the soil profile, promoting deeper rooting, even among historically shallow annual bluegrass surfaces.



Early signs of moisture stress



Climate models that predict pest pressure and risk of damage are emerging as important tools. Turfgrass managers that have embraced the use of these models admit they don't rely solely on models such as the Smith-Kerns Dollar Spot model when deciding on making an pesticide application but rather use as a part of decision-making. Regardless of the model used, including models for Brown Patch and Pythium (also available on [FORECAST](#) website) it is clear that the conditions are conducive to widespread **high risk of foliar pathogen pressure**.



Interestingly besides the aforementioned pathogens, there has been an epidemic of Red Thread (*Laetisaria fuciformis*) this Spring, early Summer causing many turfgrass managers to make pesticide application to stop significant turf loss. Red thread occurs during humid periods when the air temperatures are between 16°C and 24°C (60°F and 75°F). The disease is especially severe on ALL types slow-growing turf. Fine-leaf fescues and some ryegrasses are particularly susceptible. **Again it is being observed on turf that has been regularly fertilized but maybe not actively growing enough** and since temperatures to date have been cooler conditions have remained conducive for many weeks. This persistent conducive environment has allowed an otherwise minor nuisance pathogen to become a a source of significant turf damage. Good curative recovery, not control, has been observed with chlorothalonil, flutolanil, iprodione, mancozeb and pyraclostrobin. In one test, a formulation of myclobutanil caused foliar discoloration and stand thinning to creeping red fescue when applied for red thread control.

Laetisaria fuciformis may produce spores for dispersal, however, the primary means of dispersal is the spread of infected tissue and bits of the "red thread" (sclerotia) to healthy areas of grass. This type of spread depends upon mowing, foot traffic, and other activities which occur on the diseased turf. Invasion by the fungus is quick, and leaves may begin to die two days after becoming infected. Fungal hyphae and dried pieces of the fragmented "red thread" enable the fungus to survive when conditions are not favorable for disease development (winter, mid-summer, etc.). **During dry conditions, the "threads" may be viable for up to 2 years.**

The increasing incidence of Red Thread over the last several years has enabled the fungal population to build, resulting in the epidemic levels of this pathogen. This is a harbinger of further foliar pathogen challenges that lie ahead with the amount of moisture in the system.

Long periods of wet leaves and wet soils creates ideal environments for fungal pathogens. Rich Buckley, the Director fo Diagnostic Services at Rutgers University often quotes the late Professor Noel Jackson when he says, "**Moisture is the fuel for disease, temperature is the throttle**". There is plenty of fuel in the tank so to speak, and now with increasing temperatures expect the pending high risk for warmer season diseases to *put the throttle down*; first dollar spot, then as temperatures rise Brown Patch and when temps rise further Pythium blight. Therefore, any ability to promote drying on high value turf will help suppress pathogens. It is wise to maintain active but not excessive growth as warmer pathogens are worsened with higher growth rates. ▲



Oak Hill's Michael Hughes has rendezvous with sport's history

by Bill Doyle Hartmann | Jun 03, 2019



Michael Hughes got into golf as a tribute to his late grandfather, and more than 20 years later, he's still involved in the industry as the new superintendent at Oak Hill Country Club in Fitchburg.

Hughes' grandfather, Valentine Murphy, was a member at Andover Country Club, and he died on March 29, 1995, at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston while he was reading Harvey Penick's "Little Red Book," the highest selling golf book of all-time. Hughes immediately began reading his grandfather's book, and that same week, Penick also passed away.

A day after serving as a pallbearer at Penick's funeral, Ben Crenshaw began playing in the Masters, and at age 43, he became the second oldest Masters champion. While receiving his green jacket, Crenshaw called Penick the 15th club in his bag.

"It was this whole week of moments," Hughes recalled, "and I said, 'I've got to get into golf to connect with my grandfather.'"

After each of Murphy's 14 grandchildren turned 13, he took him or her for lessons at Andover CC. Hughes had his lessons the summer before his grandfather died.

The year his grandfather passed away, Hughes began caddying in his hometown of Dedham at Dedham Country and Polo Club. The superintendent asked him to run the shack at the skeet shooting range, and that's what he did during the winter of his freshman year at Dedham High.

"I'd click the button when they said pull, and I'd keep score," he said. "It was every Sunday over the winter. It was crazy. These people were members at the club just for that. They didn't even play golf."

The following summer, he joined the grounds crew, and he has worked on golf courses ever since.

He helped the Dedham High golf team improve from 0-15 his freshman year to 15-0 and Bay State Conference champions his senior year. In 1999, he became a Francis Ouimet Scholar.

After graduating from UMass-Amherst in 2003 with a degree in plant and soil sciences, he worked on the grounds crew at Wellesley, Granite Links and Walpole before taking over as superintendent at Whitinsville Golf Club, a ninehole Donald Ross design, in March 2013.

During the 5½ years that Hughes worked at Whitinsville, he felt a renewed connection to Crenshaw, who used to play the course when he was in the area to play PGA Tour events at Pleasant Valley CC and referred it as a "hidden Ross gem."

"I've never met Ben Crenshaw," the Sutton resident said, "but I hope someday to write him a letter and tell him how his (Masters) win inspired me to go on this journey."

Hughes, 37, still has Harvey Penick's "Little Red Book" in his office, and its bookmark is still a Mass. General Hospital menu from when his grandfather passed away.

Hughes left Whitinsville at the end of last year to become superintendent at Oak Hill, but Whitinsville still means a lot to him.

Recently, he had lunch with Dave Johnson, another former Whitinsville super who works at The Country Club in Brookline now, and they reminisced about their time at Whitinsville.

"To a purist, it's inspiring," he said. "It's golf in its purest form, and it's untouched. You can see the history there. There's not a lot of land that was moved. A golf course like that was built 100 years ago without any machines, and it was done better than what we're doing today with all the technology that we have."

When Scott Lagana decided to leave Oak Hill as superintendent after 18 years, Hughes was hired because of his experience at private clubs and his work ethic from a pool of more than 40 applicants from as far away as Las Vegas, according to selection committee member Henry St. Cyr.

Oak Hill is an 18-hole course where Ross designed the back nine and rebuilt the greens on the front nine. "Whitinsville is more of a leisurely golf course," Hughes said. "You can get lost in the nature of Whitinsville. You kind of don't feel like you're on a golf course. Whereas Oak Hill is a test of golf. It's a competitive golf course to test yourself. It's to test your might against your competitor's. It's a difficult, difficult golf course."

Hughes is an 11-handicap, but he doesn't play as often as he once did. He spends time with his fiancée Erin Finn, and he's busy working with Tyler Rae, a Ross restorer, to expand the greens to

their original size in time for Oak Hill to host the Massachusetts Open in 2021 during the club's centennial year.

"They've shrunk big-time," Hughes said. "There's a lot of rough between the collars and the bunkers, creating a double hazard." Hughes estimated that at least half of the greens will be increased in size by 10 to 20 percent.

Hughes's experience with Ross courses began when he grew up playing at George Wright GC in Boston, and continued when he interned at Charles River CC in Newton while he attended UMass.

Whitinsville hired Shaun Mitchell, the senior assistant at Worcester CC, to replace Hughes and hired Mark Aldrich, the top assistant pro at Worcester CC, to replace Matt Griffith as head pro. Griffith is now the member day coordinator for Mass Golf. Oak Hill hosted a member day on Monday.

Hughes marvels at how far he's progressed in his career. "I'm lucky to be where I am," he said. "There's a lot of people in my industry who don't get an opportunity to showcase their skills. I'm fortunate that Whitinsville gave me an opportunity, and here I am meeting my goals, and it's humbling. I feel like I don't have enough adversity, and I should have more."

Shining Pioneers

John Pagano, a rising sophomore at St. John's, shot a 2-under 70 Tuesday to earn medalist honors in a Massachusetts Junior Amateur qualifier at Dudley High GC. The 15-year-old Worcester CC member birdied his last two holes to win the qualifier by a shot and lead five qualifiers for the 101st Mass. Junior Amateur Aug. 19-22 at Crumpin-Fox Club in Bernardston. Competitors will play 36 holes of stroke play and the top 16 will advance to match play for the final two days. The tournament is open to golfers with an active Mass Golf-GHIN Handicap Index and who are ages 14-18.

St. John's rising junior Raymond Dennehy IV, who plays out of Oak Hill CC, and Grafton High rising sophomore Tyler Dupuis, who plays out of Highfields Golf & CC in Grafton, shot even par 72s to grab the final two spots. St. John's rising sophomore Zachary

Colon of The Haven CC shot a 74 to earn an alternate spot. St. John's rising sophomore Liam Tenney carded a 75 to tie for eighth. So four Pioneers finished among the top nine.

Locals turn out

Six competitors from Central Mass. golf clubs will take part in the New England Women's Golf Association Amateur Championship on Monday at GreatHorse in Hampden: Brooke Barrett of Pleasant Valley, Joanne Catlin of Oak Hill, Grace Farland of Marlboro CC, Christine Gagner of Bedrock, Danielle Lee of the International, and Morgan Mitchell of Leicester CC.

Catlin is the last golfer from Central Mass. to win the event. In 2005, she defeated Juli Wightman on the third playoff hole at Lake of Isles in North Stonington, Connecticut CC.

The 54-hole individual stroke play event runs through Wednesday.

Thirty-six-hole U.S. Amateur qualifiers will be held Monday at Longmeadow CC and Wednesday at Andover CC. At stake Monday will be two qualifying spots and two alternates for the 119th U.S. Amateur Championship Aug. 12-18 at Pinehurst Resort and CC in Pinehurst, North Carolina. On Wednesday, three spots and two alternates will be determined.

Central Mass. golfers scheduled to tee off at Longmeadow are: Mark O'Sullivan and Connor Henderson of Southboro, Alan Smith of Winchendon, Chris Healy of Charlton, Owen Quinn of Holden, Tim Umphrey of Northboro, Jason Short of Marlboro, and Zachary Magarian of Worcester.

Former St. John's High teammates Brandon Parker, a Worcester CC member, and Kyle Tibbets will be among the Central Mass. golfers set to play at Andover. The others include: Ryan Tomaso of Milford, Matt Carville of Auburn, and Cameron Sheedy of Pepperell.

—Contact Bill Doyle at william.doyle@telegram.com.

Timing Golf Course Aerification by Steve McDonald

Is there a “perfect” time for aerification? With some tried and-true tips and a healthy dose of experience, turfgrass managers can make the best call.

July 2019 | Steven McDonald, M.S. Reprinted from GCM.com



Aerifying dormant greens in early spring when there is no leaf growth on trees can sometimes result in a longer recovery compared with waiting until the greens resume normal growth. It is entirely weather-dependent. Photo by Steven McDonald

As an independent turfgrass consultant and researcher, I get hundreds, if not thousands, of agronomic questions each year. I could easily write a monthly column about some of the most perplexing questions I get while visiting golf courses. Most of those visits take place along the I-95 corridor — from Richmond, Va., north to Boston — but my work does allow me to venture out of this region as well.

One of the most common questions I get no matter where I’m working is about aerification timing. Whether you complete the same practice at the same time each year or switch up practices (depths of impact, for example) and when those practices take place, everyone at some point makes some sort of hole or opening in greens, tees and, hopefully, fairways.

There are sound agronomic reasons for making holes in seemingly healthy playing surfaces. Aerification is one of the most important practices used on fine turf areas that receive heavy machine and foot traffic. Among the many documented benefits of aerification, two of the most important are:

- It enables root systems to grow deeper and more densely.
- It can improve playability and firmness, as well as dilute thatch.

Unfortunately, I am often invited to consult when even aerification can’t save the day — when greens are on the verge of death and I have to make suggestions to nurse them back to health. Sometimes the call has to be made to close greens to play while they recover. Other times I feel like a coroner when asked to explain the death of greens. The presence of green grass in old aerification holes often provides useful clues in an otherwise dead green. These holes show that there are significant benefits to aerification.

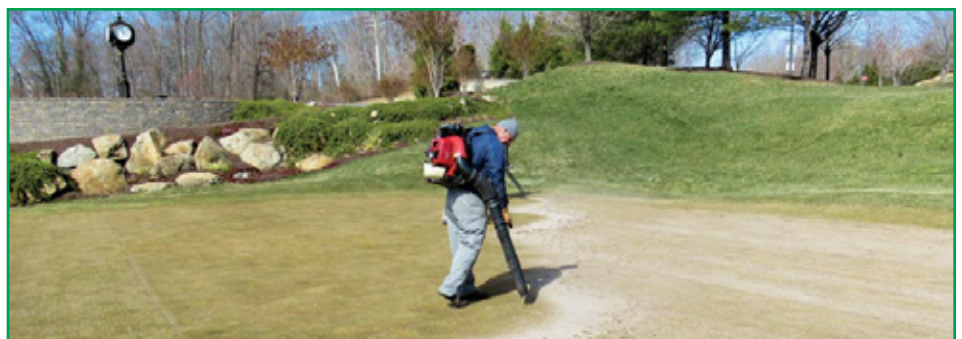
Balancing the stresses of aerification

Despite its documented benefits, aerification, without question, can be stressful on

turf when done under environmental pressures such as heat and shade, or when done to turf that is in poor health to begin with. In most parts of the country, all of those factors need to be considered during the most popular time for aerification, which is late summer and early fall.

Making that aerification hole — whether through solid tining or by removing a plug of soil/thatch/turf — incurs the risk of heaving the turf, meaning the roots separate from the soil. This is especially problematic in late summer, when root systems are weak. A heaved turf will take a few weeks to re-root and, in the meantime, will require more water, making the surface softer than it was before aerification.

Aerification is also stressful because of the sand commonly used to topdress the green and the cleanup required. Sand on greens in late summer can store a lot of heat, especially when it’s sunny and temperatures are higher than 88 degrees F. Think about walking barefoot on beach sand on an August day — the sand hurts your feet, so you wear sandals. However, on a putting green, the grass doesn’t get a reprieve from the heat of the sand, which can cause severe heat stress to the turf. Additionally, the sand must be worked into the holes to achieve the best benefits of core aerification. Sand is abrasive, and extreme care needs to be taken not to abrade the turf.



Blowing and dragging large amounts of sand on the surface of the turf is necessary to fill the holes, but if done during stressful weather or too aggressively, such practices can lead to abrasion and physical damage. Photo by Steven McDonald

The impact on green speeds must also be considered. More nitrogen is typically applied following aerification to get the holes to fill in quicker, which can reduce green speeds for three to five weeks or longer. Applying additional nitrogen to speed recovery might have an unintended negative impact too. For example, the stimulated grass may require more frequent mowing and rolling to obtain targeted speeds, but mechanical damage may result from that increase in maintenance, especially if there is a significant amount of sand in the leaf canopy.



A necessary evil: Aerification keeps turf healthy and playing well. GCM staff photo

Greens injured by late-summer aerification will likely remain in poor condition until late autumn. Lifting and other mechanical injuries may also result in slow recovery, and greens may remain weak until the following spring, sometimes until April or May.

In my career, which has included more than 1,500 golf course visits, I estimate I have seen more than 80 occurrences of greens hurt by late-summer aerification in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions. In years such as 2018, aerification in late August and September caused notable damage, regardless of which method (hollow tines vs. solid tines vs. aggressive spiking) was used.

Even waiting until early October is no guarantee for success: 2018 was unusually hot and wet, and those environmental stresses resulted in extremely slow recovery from aerification. Another consideration at that time of year is the shortening of daily sunlight, which can lead to frosts, which slow turf growth significantly.

In some years, August may be a great time to aerate, but it only takes one event of extreme turf stress to cause superintendents to rethink when and how they aerify. The injury from aerification in 2018 (and other years) varied among courses and from green to green on those courses. Many times, shaded greens or greens that lacked air movement were most severely damaged.

Recipes for aerification success

There is not a single recipe for successful aerification timing and methods that is applicable to every golf course. Some golf courses experience little golf from Halloween until late spring, for example, and these courses potentially have fewer issues with aerification timing because they have more flexibility. Some golf courses have a core group of 20 to 30 players who will play almost every day of the year, including in winter, as long as they can access the golf course.

Every course is unique in regard to golfing schedule, budget, labor, grass species and growing environments. For many, you can add seasonal concerns, a heavy tournament schedule, or the agendas of club professionals or owners to the mix. It's hard to say which of those factors is the most important, but it varies from course to course, and the superintendents on the ground at those facilities will know the landscape best and how to make an informed decision.

The most common time to aerify is late summer, and that's also widely thought to be the best time to aerate, agronomically speaking, because holes heal quickly, and greens have typically recovered before any late-summer or autumn golf tournaments. I agree that mid- to late August and early September do provide a good time for quick healing. However, if the weather is not ideal at the time of aerification, as well as over the next few weeks during recovery, greens will not heal as quickly as they would during favorable weather. Do you trust the

weather forecast? Keep in mind, if significant damage does occur, it could mean 30 to 60 days of additional stress on your greens.

Ideally, in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast, autumn greens aerification would occur in mid- to late September or early October, which would generally give 14 to 18 days of good growth prior to frost. Unfortunately for many clubs, this timing overlaps with the height of year-end golf events, at a time of year that typically provides outstanding weather for playing golf. After frost occurs in October/November, there will be a significant reduction in growth and recovery, so pushing aerification back later into autumn can sometimes lead to other issues.

Late-autumn aerification (late October/November/December) is the least stressful on the actual turf, and more aggressive practices can be performed during that time frame. The downside is that sunlight hours are short and nighttime temperatures are cool, so even if there are some warm days, the holes will typically not heal until spring. Additionally, if the turf has shade from the south, soil will usually take longer to dry out following aerification.

Despite all the factors superintendents must consider regarding late-fall aerification, I do have many clients aerifying with high levels of success after their closing-day events in October. When they are aggressive in late fall, it takes pressure off early-spring aerification, enabling them to do something less injurious in spring, followed by some small-tine openings of the surface in May/June (which heal in seven to 10 days). This regimen should allow superintendents to comfortably maintain putting greens in a healthier condition with little to no disruption from the middle of April until late October. I have never seen an increase in winterkill or any issues with late-autumn aerification, even when it has been highly aggressive.

If holes from aggressive late-autumn/winter aerification are still visible in the green in spring, a simple solid tine, smaller coring tine or less aggressive sand injection (or a combination of those) could be done in spring. This lowers the pressure to be aggressive during spring aerification if the greens are performing well and thatch is not excessive. It also reduces the dilemma of how aggressive to be, knowing spring weather is highly unpredictable.

Spring aerification

Spring is one of the most challenging times to aerify, especially for

sand-based bentgrass greens in the Mid-Atlantic, Northeast and Upper Midwest. No matter the timing, an aerification hole made from March 1 through May 1 will likely not heal fully until mid-May in most years.

So why is it that we want to run out and make holes as soon as possible in spring? For many, the golf schedule drives this train. If possible, consider waiting until the grass has resumed normal growth (May or early June). Coring when grass is actively growing will impact golfers for fewer days in spring. For example, if the hole is made on May 15, it will likely heal in 12 to 14 days. By comparison, a hole made on April 1 can take 30 to 40 days to heal fully.



Prevention of excessive organic matter accumulation requires aerification and sand topdressing. Photo by Steven McDonald

Further complicating matters is spring weather, which can be unpredictable, with cold soils and low sun angles. The numerous early spring golf events that most facilities host make timing spring aerifications even more difficult.

The other big factor driving aerification scheduling and timing, regardless of when superintendents are considering doing this work, is staffing. All of us in the green industry are well aware of the labor issues facing superintendents, and aerification is certainly a labor-intensive and time-consuming process. Many golf course managers feel they have more labor in August and September than they do in November, for example, and schedule aerification accordingly. But don't sleep in the off-season, when you can do four to six greens a day or take the course of two weeks to finish as the weather allows, given that the growth rate of the grass is slow and the golf course may not be as crowded. As with anything, this might not be possible at all golf courses.

Pick your poison

The dilemma of aerification timing is not going to change anytime soon. There is no ideal time to aerify putting greens, but there also isn't an ideal time to close them for four to six weeks because of poor turf health or turf loss from a lack of oxygen or excessive thatch.

My suggestion would be to try different timings and methods, see what works and what doesn't for your situation, and trust

your instincts. If your aerification program is working well both below the ground — you're keeping thatch in check, roots are deep and dense, etc. — and above it — you're getting good grass performance — then there is no need to consider changes to your aerification timing.

Otherwise, try some of the suggestions noted above, even if only on a practice green, to learn how timing the process impacts recovery. Regardless of when and how aggressive your aerifications are, there will be complaints. But for superintendents, that's just par for the course.

Poa annua and aerification timing

Many argue that aerifying in late autumn encourages *Poa annua* germination. *Poa* germination patterns can vary widely based on many factors. A field research study in Maryland found this to be partially true, but field observations I've made after visiting many of the same golf courses for more than 10 years have illustrated that if you aerate after the *Poa* germinates, you may naturally be able to mitigate this problem in late autumn.

Research at two golf courses in Maryland between late September and the middle of October found that the majority (50% to 70%) of *Poa* had germinated by that time, and most germination ended by early November (1). The research found that, on average, 24% of all *Poa* seedlings emerged between November and May. My field observations line up with this data, and I have seen significantly more *Poa* in greens aerated before Nov. 1 in most years in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions. I have also seeded *Poa* (collected seedheads in spring and cleaned and dried them for the following autumn) for research trials, and we have struggled to get it to germinate after the middle of October in fumigated soils with no competition.

Is there a higher risk of *Poa* invasion into greens when they are thin from aerification damage in August or September, given that 50% to 70% of the total *Poa* germinates in late September or October in Maryland? Or is there a higher risk of *Poa* encroachment with aerification late into the year? Although there is no exact research on this question, a lot of nearly pure creeping bentgrass greens are aerified in late autumn each year. Many other components besides aerification — use of plant growth regulators, shade, *Poa* seed bank, existing populations of bentgrass and *Poa* — also factor into this issue.

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Steve McDonald, M.S., is the president of Turfgrass Disease Solutions, located in Pottstown, Pa.

The most prominent – and successful – course superintendent in North Shore golf history soon will be stepping aside after a record-setting tenure at Salem Country Club.



Kip Tyler, who came to Salem from the famed Medinah No. 3 course outside Chicago in 1982 to prepare the club's grand Donald Ross-designed course for the 1984 U.S. Women's Open, is set to retire at the end of the 2019 season after 38 years as the man in charge of the course's grass, sand, trees and flowers.

His is, I believe, the longest term of a course superintendent among the North Shore's history-rich "Fab Five" courses -- Salem, Myopia, Essex, Tedesco and Kernwood -- dating back to the founding of the very first of these properties, Essex, in 1893.

We have already acknowledged the 41st and final season for Tedesco head professional Bob Green, an astounding achievement in its own right and a standard for the region's private club pros. The private club pro has his 300-plus bosses to contend with on a daily basis from April through October, sometimes longer.

A course superintendent is put to the test to an even greater degree, since they must deal with those same demanding members but also Mother Nature, every day of the year, let alone from early spring to late fall. Their job is measured on a daily basis by the players who traverse his tees, fairways and greens.

Commendably, Tyler has passed the acid test -- keeping his membership happy -- for

38 years. The Ohio native also has had his course not only championship-ready all those months for the people who pay his salary, but also for the United States Golf Association and the three national championships it has conducted at Salem: the 1984 Open as well as the 2001 and 2017 U.S. Senior Opens.

Toss in for good measure Tyler and Salem CC hosting one New England Amateur, one Massachusetts Open and one Massachusetts Women's Amateur, and the Newburyport resident can boast one amazing legacy when he departs at end of the season.

"When I came to Salem I had no idea how long I'd be here," Tyler, the 2001 National Superintendent of the Year as proclaimed by the Golf News, recalled. "I was hoping to stay as long as I wanted to; as long as I did the job the membership expected of me. I appreciate that the membership approved of my work, and that of my staff, all these years."

Tyler was an obvious raw talent anxious to move to the next level professionally when he left a prestigious job where he was in

charge of nationally ranked Medinah No. 3, site of various major championships and a recent Ryder Cup. Thus he came east and thrived at Salem, which in '84 hosted its first USGA Open in 30 years and its first USGA event in seven.

"I was on the search committee when we chose Kip to take over our grounds," said Oliver Cook, who served as Salem's liaison to the USGA for many years and was general chairman when the club hosted the USGA Senior Amateur in '77, the Women's Open in '84 and the Senior Open in 2001.

"As the years have proven, we made the right choice. For nearly 40 years Kip has excelled in preparing our classic course for the USGA, Mass Golf and New England Golf and the members. We owe Kip and his staff, including former superintendent Cliff Nunes, Richie Selvo and Ken Girard, a huge debt of gratitude for the job they and the rest of their team did for us year after year."

"I've enjoyed working for Salem all these years," said the 65-year-old Tyler, "with the leadership, the Green Committees and their chairmen. I enjoyed coming to work with



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my staff every day, keeping Salem in the best condition we could, no matter what time it was in the season.”

“Watching Kip work our beautiful property for many years,” Salem CC president Tom Bates said, “he has done one terrific job year after year. He’s kept the course in pristine condition, stayed within budget -- something I appreciated even more after serving as treasurer for 16 years -- and he was always professional, easy to work with. We were fortunate to have such a man dedicated to Salem for so many years.”

As Cook’s successor as general chairman and USGA liaison for the 2017 U.S. Senior Open, Bill Sheehan gained a fresh perspective on Tyler’s talents.

“I was well aware of the miracle Kip performed for the 2001 U.S. Senior Open after all the winter kills the course suffered leading into the 2001 season,” Sheehan recalled. “Kip transformed a moribund course after a brutal winter that killed a large percentage of fairway and greens turf into an absolute gem in just a few weeks.”

This observer remembers defending champ Hale Irwin muttering softly as we walked to his car following 2001 U.S. Senior Open Media Day (with no golf), “I don’t know how they’re going to

bring the course back in time for the Open.”

But Tyler, with assistance from fellow superintendents and his own determined staff, did in fact bring the course back to near-pristine condition, much to the delight of hard-to-please USGA officials.

“Kip was our star again in 2017, giving the USGA an excellent conditioned course for their second U.S. Senior Open here,” Sheehan said. “Everyone at the USGA sang his praise after Championship Week.

“On another level, Kip’s genius lay in his ability year after year to keep the course in top shape from the cool of early spring through the hottest days of June through August until the last leaves dropped from the trees in late fall. Kip will be missed, but never forgotten around here.”

Tyler avoided a near-disaster, though not his own doing, during the ‘84 Women’s Open (nationally televised, like the two Senior Opens), his big-time debut at Salem.

“The USGA let the greens get char-broiled on what was a hot and dry week,” he remembered. “We almost lost the greens (meaning the living green grass on the putting surfaces nearly turned dead)

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brown) for the weekend. But the USGA eventually allowed us to syringe the greens during both days. That was a close call.”

Tyler lauded the understanding membership during the pre-Senior Open weeks and months in 2001. “The turf suffered big time from winter-kill into late May,” he said. “We had to keep the course closed that season until the Senior Open started the last week in June. There was no secret potion; it was simply about applying the right combination of water and grass seed at the right time. Mother Nature cooperated, and the membership was great about dealing with the fact they couldn’t play their own course until July.”

The weather in winter and spring leading into the 2017 Senior Open was just fine. The course was near-perfect for Championship Week the end of June, but evening rain prior to the first round on Thursday softened up the course, especially the greens, and made the course defenseless for the best players over-50 in the world. That explained the record-setting low scores that identified a fine winner in Kenny Perry; the Kentuckian shot 16-under 264. The total number of strokes was a record, not the score in relation to par.

“I had no complaints with the scoring,” Tyler said. “We had the course in great shape.”



This article was written by Gary Larrabee, a prolific writer and noted golf historian. He is also a friend of golf course superintendents and has promoted them, their contributions to the game, the industry and the profession of golf course management.

The article was published in the Salem (MA) News.

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