



THE NEWSLETTER

October 2019

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

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GCSANE Presidents Message

Here's to another year in the golf season books. This year proved to be a great one for golf and growing turf in New England, but it does not make up for the extremely poor growing conditions of 2018. The dry and temperate weather has been in place for the entire month of September and the beginning of October. Turf plants are growing roots and cultural work and construction is well underway. As Superintendents, we all continue to work hard into the fall, preparing for 2020 and the unknown that will come our way.

As I am coming down the stretch as GCSANE President, I am thankful for the time I have devoted to our profession and association over the past ten years. Although my term is ending in January, I will continue to stay active and give back, as it is the most rewarding thing I have done in my professional life. If you are looking to learn more about our industry and peers, looking to build a network and looking to advance, you should volunteer and get involved in some way, it is up to you.

The winter meeting schedule will provide some great networking and learning opportunities. I hope to catch up with many of you in December, at the Warrior Ice Arena meeting as well as at our Annual Meeting in January at The Renaissance Hotel at Gillette.

All the best and enjoy the fall,

Dave Johnson, GCSANE President

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Thoughts From Your Executive Director *by Don Hearn*



from left: Kyle Franey, Connor Kuehl, Derek Mara, David Rice



from Left: Ben Pacific, Pat Simmons, Chris Hurley, Paul Thibeault



from left: Craig Sullivan, Eric McCrate, James Tyler David Mieth



from left: Chad Brown, Henry Guglietti, Andrew Travers, Anthony Cina



from left: Craig Olson, Cory Villano, Jamie Kohn, Scott Lynch



from left: Dan Richards, Sean Murray, Ryan Boudreau, Alex Foster

Thoughts From Your Executive Director *continued*



from left: Tim Crane, Mike Leahy, Alex Wallace, Joseph D'Ambrosia

It was a beautiful day with golf played on a magnificently conditioned course when Assistants played their annual event at the Cohasset Golf Club. The course, managed under the direction of Superintendent Glen Misiaszek and Assistant Superintendent Mike Leahy, was in superb condition and the weather couldn't have been better. Everyone had a good time at the event.

Thanks to the sponsors of the event - Harrell's, Helena Agri-Enterprises, Syngenta and Tom Irwin, Inc. for their generous support. Finch Services/John Deere Golf and Northeast Golf and Turf donated prizes for the raffle and a closest-to-the-hole contest.

The format was a team scramble.

Low Team Gross

Mike Leahy, Cohasset Golf Club

Alex Wallace, Cohasset Golf Club

Joe D'Ambrosia, Cohasset Golf Club

Tim Crane, Marlborough Country Club

Low team Net

Bradley Gale, The Country Club

Justin Trodella, The Country Club

Aidan O'Sullivan, The Country Club

Matt Deluca, The Country Club

Closest to the Hole

#2 Connor Kuehl, Kernwood Country Club,

#6 Mark Sheridan, Lexington Golf Club,

#12 Pat Simmons, Nashawtuc Country Club,

#15 Joe D'Ambrosia, Cohasset Golf Club



from left: Bradley Gale, Justin Trodella, Aidan O'Sullivan, Matt Deluca



from left: Bryce Fountain, Tim Cosgrove, Keith Daury, Mark Sheridan



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The Newsletter

Thoughts From Your Executive Director *continued*



From left: Tim Crane, Rene Vadeboncouer, Beth O'Kelly, Greg Farland

This year's NEPGA Pro-Superintendent Invitational was played at Marlborough Country Club. Ken Crimmings is the Superintendent and, as always, had the course in tip top condition. The teams from Strawberry Valley Golf Course and Marlborough Country Club tied for first place honors. Tim Crane and Greg Farland represented Marlborough. Rene Vadeboncouer and Beth O'Kelly represented Strawberry Valley. As an aside, Beth O'Kelly is the daughter of Mel O'Kelly who was the long time superintendent at Marshfield Country Club before his retirement to Life Member status of the Association.



From left: David Rice, Andy Ingham, Pete Jacobson, Joe Piana (holding the trophy), Ryan Emerich, Alex Martin, Mike Nagle

The New England Superintendent Championship was played at the Boothbay Harbor Country Club in Boothbay, Maine. The host superintendent at Boothbay is GCSA of New England member Rob Wyllie. Rob and his team had the course in excellent condition and the GCSA of New England team won this year's championship! The 2020 championship will be hosted by the GCSA of New England. The Maine GCSA made all feel welcome and had the event well organized. Our thanks to Maine GCSA president Rick Lewis and his committee for putting together the details that help make this an event that all look forward to playing.

The team standings: 1st New England 2nd Connecticut
3rd Rhode Island 4th New Hampshire 5th Vermont
6th Maine 7th Cape Cod



From left: The Marrone's - Anthony (Matt's son), Nick, Cara, Andrew (Matt's son), Matt, Pamela (Donnie's wife), Mike.

This year's Scholarship and Benevolence Tournament was held September 30, at Wachusett Country Club. We were hosted for the sixth time by the Marrone family. The day was beautiful with a course to match. Matt Marrone is the superintendent at Wachusett and had the course in

excellent condition. Nick Marrone is the Director of Golf and serves as the General Manager. Cara handles accounting and many other duties at the club. Mike is the superintendent at the family's other course, Kettle Brook, in Paxton, MA. The family was generous with what they offered and couldn't have been more accommodating.

All who played or supported this event with sponsorships and donations are thanked for their support. They fund scholarships for members' children and aid to those in need of a helping hand during hard times.

This year's memorial honoree was Donald J. "Donnie" Marrone. The family of Donnie accepted an engraved crystal vase to recognize his contributions to our Association and the Scholarship and Benevolence Fund. A donation from the Marrone family was made to Dave Johnson,

GCSA of New England President. Dave had worked for the Marrone family when breaking into the profession. His sister passed away earlier this year after a battle with cancer and Matt Marrone announced that a \$5000.00 donation was being made in memory of Dave's sister.

We thank the Marrone family for their support of the Scholarship and Research fund and their generous contributions to its success.

The New England team placed second in the Met Team Championship held at Morris County Golf Club. I'll have more about the event in the November issue.



GCSAA Update *by Kevin Doyle*



Whether good or bad, we find ourselves working in a relationship business. Many of us didn't sign up for the career with the knowledge that we would need to manage turf with the same vigor as personal interactions, but alas, here we are. I don't want to focus on turf, or even people — one of my favorite topics. I want to ask how you balance the one thing that we all rely on whether you are a superintendent or in sales. We

all depend on the sport of golf, and it depends on us.

The industry has seen a building boom, the Tiger craze, and the economic regression followed by course closures. Hundreds of Massachusetts facilities and thousands of employees were taken on that same ride, whether we wanted to or not.

Member expectations seemed to have missed any regression or corrections. As the turf speed limit continues to get pushed and demand for perfection continues to ramp up, pressure continues to escalate on all of us. Technological advances in products and devices that fostered new groundbreaking solutions that previously helped achieve the desired conditions while saving time, money, or labor, are now simply achieving the new normal.

With the industry continuing to dictate the cornerstone of our lives in a manner we simply can't seem to impact no matter what we do, how do you balance golf? Do you put in your time and maximize your effort on the job and leave it all behind when you "punch out," if that is possible? Do you golf often, watch golf on television, and take vacations to play in far off lands? There is no correct way to balance, and I have no intention of pontificating on how you should approach golf. We all develop an approach and hope-

fully manage the impact it has on us in a positive way, and often changes in our personal lives can affect change on our approach.

What I want to touch on is a word you just read and probably glossed over quickly: "positive." Above were challenges in our daily lives that are dictated to us, many beyond our control. There are many more negative items that can be added that we in the industry have no control over. Can a focus on some of the positives in our golf world help overcome some of the challenges?

Are rounds up this year? With added revenue might come a new piece of equipment, approval for a beneficial project, additional dollars to the labor budget; items that can help ease the burden on the work aspect of golf.

Did your staff complete a successful season; help you deliver a good product to your membership or customers? It is now cultural practices season, meaning the grind of another season is over. As you assess the impact of 2019, what positives came from it that you can build on in 2020?

Have you had the chance to play golf? An enjoyable round of golf with friends or colleagues can be a wonderful reminder of what makes the game so great. We depend on the positive impacts the sport has on all of our players to survive as an industry. Taking the time to play yourself should find its way on your to do list, even if it is a rare occasion.

The golf industry might seem like it has all the momentum, a freight train that dictates all. Our little individual piece of that industry may simply be a railroad tie connecting the rails and responsible for moving the industry forward. With every positive step we make personally, and impact our facility adds, can change the outlook for the entire industry. Collectively, we can impact the direction of the freight train our golf industry has become for the better. All aboard!

GCSAA Resources and Deadlines **you Get Cool Stuff from your Association Already**

Registration opens for 2020 Golf Industry Show in Orlando

GCSAA and presenting partners, the Golf Course Builders Association of America (GCBA) and American Society of Golf Course Architects (ASGCA), will offer a dynamic, progressive week of unparalleled networking opportunities and hands-on access to golf course and facility management solutions for golf industry professionals.

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GCSAA is offering show attendees the opportunity to reduce the cost of participating in the show by allowing GCSAA gift certificates to be redeemed for flight and hotel expense.

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Upcoming Webinars

Oct. 24 @ 10 a.m.

[GCSAA Government Affairs Regulatory Briefing - 2019 Overtime Pay Rule and Federal/State Minimum Wage Update](#)

Kerri S. Reisdorff

Oct. 30 @ 10 a.m.

[What About Wetting Agents?](#)

Doug Karcher, Ph.D.

Oct. 31 @ 10 a.m.

[Maximize Spring Quality of Your Bermudagrass Putting Greens presented by Syngenta](#)

Lane Tredway, Ph.D.

Nov. 6 @ 9 a.m.

[Cómo construir un equipo más fuerte utilizando el golf como una estrategia](#)

Jorge Croda, CGCS

Nov. 19 @ 10 a.m.

[Water Management BMPs](#)

J. Bryan Unruh, Ph.D.

Dec. 5 @ 10 a.m.

[How to Set Yourself Apart in the Golf Industry - The Art of Self Promotion](#)

Darren Davis, CGCS

Dec. 12 @ 10 a.m.

[Best Management Practices for the Turf Care Center](#)

Gary Bogdanski

Again, if I can be of any assistance, please feel free to contact me.

Kevin Doyle

GCSAA Field Staff

kdoyle@gcsaa.org

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The companies and donors listed above have generously donated their financial support to help make the Scholarship and Benevolence Trust an entity that can support scholarships for members' children and grandchildren and help support those in time of need. To all of them we offer a hearty thank you.

2019 Scholarship Recipients

Samuel Stowe, son of David Stowe, CGCS, Superintendent at Newton Commonwealth Golf Course. Samuel received the Thomas Schofield Memorial Scholarship.

Kaitlin McLeod, daughter of Scott McLeod, Sales Representative for Tuckahoe Turf Farms. Kaitlin received the David Comee Memorial Award.

Others who received awards:

Christopher Casey, son of Mark Casey, Sales Representative at Finch Services/John Deere Golf.

Ashley Cromack, daughter of Brian Cromack, Superintendent at Quidnessett Country Club.

Cara Cummins, daughter of Drew Cummins, Sales Representative at Nutrien Solutions.

Matthew D'Errico, son of Don D'Errico, Superintendent at KOHR Golf.

Lindsey Graham, daughter of Rich Gagnon, Superintendent at Meadow Brook Golf Club.

Olivia Juneau, daughter of Brian Juneau, Sales Representative at Turf Enhancement Enterprises.

The Growing Challenges Facing Golf Superintendents

By Ron Whitten

This article is being presented with the permission of Golf Digest and Ron Whitten, Senior Editor, Architecture, Golf Digest.

By any measure, Dave Wilber is an expert in turfgrass. He started working on golf courses when he was 15. At 21, he became a superintendent in Denver. At 24, he took a job in Northern California and instituted one of the first fully organic golf-course maintenance programs in the country at Lake Wildwood Country Club, a quiet second-home community at the base of Donner Pass. That was in 1990, half a decade before sustainable golf became an industry trend.

As a leader of the movement, Wilber began advising other superintendents, and in 1993 he left Lake Wildwood to work full time as a turfgrass consultant. He was quickly in demand and became an early presence on the Internet, first as a blogger, later as a columnist, most recently with podcasts.

Big, bulky and bearded, Wilber, now 53, is passionate about his profession. He calls himself the Turfgrass Zealot and has a stock speech about his successes.

“As an independent consultant,” he says, “I’ve built golf courses on six continents, I’ve played golf on seven continents, I’ve worked in over 80 countries, I worked on more than 45 of the world’s top-100 golf courses in some advisory capacity.” Those courses include Friar’s Head in New York, Kingsbarns in Scotland and Barnbougale Dunes in Australia.

Wilber is the last person you would think would try to take his life. Yet behind his gregarious façade was self-loathing. He feared not a failure, but success—as more clubs beckoned him to solve their problems, the more time he’d be away from home, slapping on his master showman smile each day, retreating each evening to the isolation of a crummy motel room. He was convinced that he wasn’t worthy of anything—not acclaim, not friendship, not love.

So in 2015, Wilber picked up a 90-day prescription, a beta-blocker for his heart rate, opened the bottle and swallowed its contents.

“I was thinking it would shut off my heart,” Wilber says. “All it did was make me super sick. I dozed off, then woke up vomiting it all up. I’m thinking, *God, I’m such a f—up I can’t even off myself. I can’t even get that job done.*”

Wilber drove himself to a local emergency room, seeking help. It wasn’t the first time he’d made such a drive.

Wilber is not the only one in the turfgrass business dealing with such an issue. Maintaining a golf course is a high-risk occupation and can put one’s physical well-being, personal relationships and mental health at risk. But revealing struggles with anxiety, depres-

sion or something worse is still considered taboo in this occupation, just as it is in many other lines of work.

Wilber admits his candor about his suicide attempt, which he revealed two years ago on the website Turfnet, might cost him his career. But he no longer cares. He believes it’s essential to bring these issues to the forefront because it might save someone.

“When I started writing about my struggles on Turfnet,” he says, “I got an inbox full of responses from golf-course superintendents—like 60 emails—mostly supportive. One said, ‘Don’t tell anybody, but I’ve dealt with depression, too.’ Another told me, ‘I wanted to kill myself, too.’ It was mind-numbing.

“We need to get this out in the open. Real people have real struggles, and they shouldn’t have to beat themselves to death for what they are or aren’t at work.”

A worst-case scenario in the industry has long been, Lose Your Greens, Lose Your Job. The concern of Wilber, as well as others going public with their mental illness, is a far more horrifying possibility: Lose Your Greens, Take Your Life.

Sobering Numbers

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention estimates that suicide is the 10th-leading cause of death in the United States. In 2017, the foundation estimates 47,173 Americans died by suicide, and there were 1.4 million attempts, though the numbers might well be under-reported.

In the past decade, there have been reports of superintendents ending their lives, most of them unconfirmed because loved ones wished to keep the information private. Perhaps the most prominent name associated with that fate is Stan George, the highly regarded, even beloved, superintendent of Prairie Dunes Country Club in Hutchinson, Kan. In his 30 years at Prairie Dunes, George had prepared the course for many prominent tournaments, including the 2002 U.S. Women’s Open and the 2006 U.S. Senior Open.

At George’s funeral in 2013, friends and acquaintances quietly but openly discussed the generally accepted conclusion that his death was a suicide, the official record being sealed. No one saw it coming. One friend thought George had found bliss in a cabin he had built about 20 miles from the golf course, a place where he could get away from the job. But that’s where his body was found.

Heady Highs to Incredible Lows

At 31, Kasey Kauff was head superintendent of the Highlands Course at Atlanta Athletic Club and prepared its state-of-the-art turfgrasses for the 2011 PGA Championship. The course was so flawless that Golf Digest proclaimed it the standard by which tournament golf in the Deep South would be judged.

After a short stint in Orlando, in 2014 Kauff moved to Dallas,



where he grew in the turf at the new Trinity Forest Golf Club, then prepared it for the PGA Tour's AT&T Byron Nelson the past two years. There, tour players faced a new strain of zoysia grass named for the club, which Kauff had tightly shaved everywhere to be firm, dry and springy. For his efforts, Golf Digest awarded the club its annual Green Star environmental award in 2018.

But Kauff considered himself a failure at his personal life. He bounced from incredible highs to days where he refused to leave the house, or even get out of bed. His inability to cope with his depression and anxiety led to a failed marriage and then a failed relationship. He refused to seek counseling at first, then was reluctant to confront his problems in counseling. His depression became so deep that he began thinking about how he might kill himself. The idea became so realistic, and so frightening, that Kauff took his shotgun, which he used for duck hunting, and put it in a storage locker, then stored the shotgun shells at another location.

Do not keep them together, he remembers thinking. It's too enticing.

Dealing with Stress

Jason Haines, 34, the superintendent at Sunshine Coast Golf & Country Club northwest of Vancouver, British Columbia, has felt the stress and anxiety of his profession for as long as he has been in the business. For him, it's a particularly seasonal phenomenon. For six months of the year, the weather is cool and rainy, and stress is low. But every July and August, when the temperature and humidity rise to critical levels, placing his greens in jeopardy, his anxiety also rises.

"It's something I've always battled," Haines says. "The more difficult the conditions are on the golf course, the harder you have to work, and more often than not, the worse the course looks. There's no positive feedback. You're grinding away, and the course looks like crap."

The pressure of the job came to a head one weekend a decade ago, when he was superintendent at nearby Pender Harbor Golf Course. Haines was on a backhoe, digging a trench to fix an irrigation break in the middle of a fairway about 100 yards off a tee box. He'd just let one group of golfers play through when another golfer appeared on the tee and hit a ball over him and into the group ahead. Then a second golfer teed off, and the ball hit the backhoe, just inches from Haines' head. Haines screamed at the golfer, jumped off the machine and charged at him. He ran the golfer off the course and into the parking lot, cursing at him to never come back. He actually made the guy cry.

"At the time, I had no idea why I completely lost it," Haines says. "I didn't hit him, but it was close. It was an overreaction, for sure. I shouldn't have screamed at him. But I still would have asked him to leave.

"That time of year everyone is pretty high-strung—even golfers," Haines says. "But hitting into the group ahead? What's with that? You come out on the golf course on the busiest weekend of the year and you expect to play a three-hour round? That's not realistic.

"That was the one time I let my emotions get the best of me. I learned from it."

Panic Attacks

Miranda Robinson, 34, goes by the nickname of Moe, a nickname her two brothers gave her in her youth, and by the turf-related variation of Mow on social media. She has been in the course-maintenance business since 2005. "I brought my anxiety with me when I joined the industry," she says, "although I didn't recognize in the beginning how stressful the job would be."

The history that Robinson recites is enough to give anyone pause. She says she grew up with an alcoholic father. One brother was epileptic, and she coached him through many seizures. Eventually he became addicted to drugs. With support from her family, both are now in recovery.

"I've always been the extrovert, the person everyone relied on," she says. "I still am. I tend to take on everyone's feelings, and I didn't fully realize how much it was affecting me."

Then one of Robinson's close friends, Trish, a high school valedictorian, prom queen and president of the athletic union, died from cancer at 20.

"She was the most incredible person I'd ever met," Robinson says. "She was destined to do the best things in life, and suddenly she was gone."

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“My whole life came crashing down on me. I was working nights at a General Motors assembly plant. I found out that my boyfriend had cheated on me with some girl, so we broke up. Then one day, my arms went numb and I couldn’t breathe. I thought I was having a heart attack and dying. I went to a hospital, and they told me I’d suffered a panic attack. That was the first time I’d ever heard of that.”

She went to a family doctor, who gave her an antidepressant. She took it for two months but suffered more panic attacks, so she quit the medication, deciding to research what caused such sensations and how to battle them. At the same time, she quit her General Motors job, which she hated, despite its \$32-per-hour wage, and joined a couple of girlfriends working for \$8 an hour on the summer maintenance crew at Oliver’s Nest Golf Club near Toronto.

“I thought it would be something to distract my brain,” she says. “I love being outside, being in nature. It really helped me at first. Then as I took on more management roles, I started to realize how much it was playing a part in my anxiety.”

She’d taken a full-time job at the course and rapidly moved up from staff member to assistant superintendent to head superintendent. In 2016, she became the superintendent at Summerlea Golf Club in Port Perry, Ontario.

“It’s an 18-hole executive course, a mom-and-pop place where I could be comfortable and not worry about my anxiety,” Robinson says. “The owner was younger than me and female. I went into my interview saying, ‘I have an anxiety disorder, and some days I’ll just need to either leave or not come in for a couple of hours, just to keep myself sane.’ And she was like, ‘Yep, I totally appreciate that.’ So she hired me, and it was perfect.”

Still, life has a way of sometimes tossing a brick into the most spotless of windshields. One day, Robinson was asked to check on an acquaintance who hadn’t answered the phone. She found the person unconscious in a bathroom, the result of swallowing a bottle of pills. Robinson made sure the person coughed up all the pills and urged an emergency-room visit.

Robinson also had a friend who had developed ALS. She’d visit him periodically, trying to stay upbeat for his sake, each time sobbing uncontrollably on the drive home.

She experienced more panic attacks, and after a bad break-up with her live-in boyfriend, she quit her job and moved as far away as she could, to British Columbia, taking an assistant superintendent’s position at Cordova Bay Golf Club. But her anxiety followed her. “It’s been more than 15 years,” she says, “and I’m just now getting a grasp on how to navigate through life with this.”

Support Group

What these four people have in common, besides their dedication to the craft and their struggles with mental-health issues, is that they know one another. In the past two years, they have met and corresponded, summoning the courage to talk about intimate details and listening attentively to the others. They’ve formed an

informal support group that’s willing to include and embrace others in the turfgrass industry who might be struggling in silence.

These four are quick to point out that their profession is not unique. Stress, anxiety and depression can be far greater among those who routinely deal in life-and-death situations: police officers, firefighters, airline pilots, air-traffic controllers, surgeons. But it’s not a contest about which job description is the most hazardous to one’s health. These four are focused on the turfgrass industry because they know from experience the unique tribulations that accompany their profession.

Every course superintendent, whether at a high-end private club or a low-budget nine-hole layout, faces expectations from the clientele that are often unreasonable. It can be like having 200 bosses. Superintendents try their best to meet or exceed expectations, but they can’t control the weather, and there are no universal antidotes. Each golf course is unique, and variables can confound the task of growing grass. It’s all solvable, but it depends on time, money and workers, three things nearly every superintendent lacks in some degree.

There’s no denying that the inherent pressures of the occupation can add to the inner struggles. If the demands become overwhelming, why not find a less-stressful occupation? “Because this is what I love to do,” Kauff says. “I’ve never done anything else. It’s what I’m good at.”

Good Stress Versus Bad Stress

Joseph LeFevre (pronounced la-fay) has a master’s in clinical psychology, and for the past 20 years he has practiced marriage and family therapy in San Jose. During that time, he has counseled hundreds on issues of stress, anxiety and depression, including some in the golf industry, and recently addressed a regional conference of superintendents on stress management.

Stress, LeFevre told them, is a normal part of human existence. It helps us grow and achieve. Some stress is good, because it teaches us how to develop coping skills. Starting a new job, getting married and buying a house are examples of good stress. But bad stress can lead to anxiety or depression. LeFevre defines anxiety as an exaggerated response to something that is troubling or unknown. Anxiety can range from panic attacks, which are normally a temporary condition, to severe anxiety disorders.

Depression is a bit different. LeFevre defines depression as a deepening response of sadness or hopelessness, often brought on by something troubling or unknown. It, too, has many classifications of severity, with the worst form usually associated with morbidity.

“There can be neurochemistry at work in both,” LeFevre says. “Our neurochemistry helps us rebound if we’re experiencing a high or a low. But if the neurotransmitters in our brain aren’t sufficient, we lose that healthy balance. The neurotransmitters can be adjusted by medication, exercise, diet, rest or a combination of those.”

But it’s not all biological, he says. Two people can have the same diet, exercise routine and amount of sleep and still experience

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totally different moods. This is where the stress of an occupation comes into play.

At one end, LeFevre says, are a tiny number of people who thrive on extreme stress, as if it's a constant adrenaline rush. At the other extreme are a tiny number who can't deal with stress at all and sometimes become suicidal. In between are the vast majority, who tolerate the stress of their work, or struggle with it, but learn to adapt. A few in the center might consider quitting their jobs to relieve the stress, but they would rarely think of quitting their lives. As for golf-course superintendents, LeFevre says, stress reduction can be as easy as lowering expectations. "Excellence is a worthy, achievable goal," he says. "Perfection is unattainable."

A similar message has been expressed by Paul MacCormack in his blog, *The Mindful Superintendent*. MacCormack, 45, is superintendent and general manager of Fox Meadows Golf Course in the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island. His friend Jason Haines considers him the pioneer of mental-health awareness among superintendents.

MacCormack has written his blog for the website Turfnet since late 2012. He bases many of his observations on his experiences, the 14-hour workdays that put his marriage in jeopardy, the burnout that caused him to leave the business for six months, the job offer he accepted only after promising his wife that things would be different. He credits his self-awareness to a book his wife gave

him, *After The Ecstasy, The Laundry*, by Jack Kornfield, a longtime proponent of Buddhist mindfulness. MacCormack is now training with Kornfield to become a certified mindfulness instructor. "I've learned better ways to manage my stress," MacCormack says. "My life is now better, and work is easier. I do far less now than I've ever done in my career, but I'm way better at what I do. Because I zero in on what needs to be done, and I don't fret about the stuff that we'll get to when we get to it."

In 2018, inspired by MacCormack's blog, Haines filmed a 20-minute video titled, *Why Am I So Stressed?* Within a day of posting it, he says, he received more than 100 messages from superintendents who told him they were feeling the same way. But he also got trolled. One respondent wrote in part, "Jason Haines is a snowflake superintendent. All snowflakes easily melt under the scrutiny of science, reason and sanity."

Haines was offended. "It's a slur implying we're delicate and weak," he says. "What's so bad about having emotions and sharing them?" His friend Wilber was also offended and came to his defense, tweeting, "Snowflake was a word the Nazis used to describe the Jews they were going to 'melt' in the ovens. You might want to think about a better choice of words. I doubt you'd speak this way to any of us if we were at the same table."

When Kasey Kauff revealed his mental-health issues on Twitter in late 2018, one respondent told him to "Put your big-boy pant-

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ies on.” Another said Kauff was simply “facing a case of the Blue Mondays,” though Kauff says club members have been very supportive.

Internalizing stress, anxiety or depression is never healthy, LeFevre says. Yet in most businesses today, there exists a culture of denial, especially among men, who refuse to expose their inner selves.

“It’s a matter of identity,” LeFevre says. “We tie our self-worth with our occupation. That becomes our identity, and we can’t deal with the possibility of losing our identity.

“It’s ingrained in our society. When we meet someone new, we never ask, ‘What do you do in your spare time?’ We always ask, ‘What do you do for a living?’”

Calling Haines a snowflake? In his spare time, Jason serves as a team leader on a 30-man search-and-rescue team in British Columbia. In July 2018, his team roped down a 300-foot cliff to rescue five climbers who’d become stuck halfway up. After Haines and his team completed that task, they were rushed to the scene of an airplane crash, where they retrieved three survivors.

For the past two years, MacCormack has jointly presented, with his friend Chris Tritabaugh, superintendent at Hazeltine National in Minnesota, a Mindful Superintendent seminar at the Golf Industry Show, the annual conference and trade fair conducted by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA). In 2019, the seminar was one of the few sessions that was sold out in advance, with a crowd in excess of the room capacity of 150. For the 2020 show, MacCormack proposed a session that would feature Haines, Wilber, Kauff and Robinson.

The GCSAA turned down the proposal.

“They told me they really liked the idea, but they had a few liability questions,” MacCormack says. “They felt if somebody in the audience really posed a difficult question on suicide, it would be more helpful to have a professional therapist on the panel to help field a question like that, because none of us are experts on the stuff. To tell you the truth, they’re totally right.”

But Kauff and Wilber were frustrated by the decision. Kauff wrote on his Twitter feed, “Maybe others would realize they aren’t alone and feel courage to seek help. You can live with this and be successful. That would be the message.” Wilbur tweeted, “I am indeed an expert on my own life. And that’s what I was asked to share.”

Shelia Finney, a former course superintendent now in her third year as GCSAA’s senior director of member programs, says the organization is dedicated to addressing the mental well-being of its membership. Finney says there will be five seminars at the 2020 Golf Industry Show devoted to various aspects of mental health, including MacCormack’s Mindful Superintendent. The others are tentatively titled Better Thoughts for Better Living, Emotional Intelligence for the Turf Professional, Managing Stress and Avoiding Burnout, and Demons of Greenkeeping.

Finney adds that a popular free education session, Lightning-round Learning, designed to cover many topics and engage audience participation, will feature a round on suicide prevention led by Lori A. Hoffner, a longtime suicide-intervention specialist from Denver.

“I applaud them,” MacCormack says. “If something said during this short talk illuminates something and saves a life, then it’s worth every penny.” MacCormack says he intends to again submit his proposed panel discussion for the 2021 conference, including a professional therapist.

‘Nothing Time’

Each person dealing with mental-health issues must develop his or her own coping mechanisms, ideally in consultation with a professional, LeFevre says. Robinson says she no longer sees a therapist but sets aside definite time for herself.

“I call it my Nothing Time,” she says. “It’s time when I do nothing at all, like just sitting in the yard and staring at the clouds. Or it’s time when Nothing Else Matters, except what I’m doing. I might be doing something artistic that day. Or I might climb a hill and stand at the summit. Or go on a long car ride to a place I’ve never been before.

“The point is, it’s time for myself, to have my personal thoughts and be at peace. That’s the time I regenerate my mental health.”

Jason Haines says he has learned to relax and meditate. His search-and-rescue training has helped, because it includes professional counseling. He is also more cognizant of anticipating problems to take preventive measures, with regard to his golf course and his health.

“I know August is the time of year when I’m going to feel stressed,” he says. “Last August, I knew it was coming, so I set aside some family time. It wasn’t perfect, but last August was the best I’ve felt in any August in years. I like to think what I’m doing is working.”

Dave Wilber, who has experienced nearly 30 years of depression, several panic attacks, a divorce, suicidal thoughts and two suicide attempts, figures that he’ll likely be on antidepressants for the rest of his life. He sees a therapist twice a month, tries to meditate daily and has simplified his life.

“My days of 245 nights a year on the road are over,” he says. “In the digital age, we can video things back and forth. I can attend greens-committee meetings via Skype. I can review irrigation data remotely.”

Kasey Kauff also takes an antidepressant and participates in yoga therapy.

“It’s intensive,” he says. “We’ll talk for 40 minutes about any anxious feelings I might have. Then we’ll apply yoga principles, breathing techniques, to ground myself, to resolve issues for myself.

“Most of my anxieties are ridiculous these days,” Kauff says. “I’m a huge Dave Matthews fan, and I recently traveled to Wisconsin

to attend a concert. When I got to the hotel room, I kept debating whether I should go to the concert or stay in the room. *Should I go? No, don't go! No, go! No, don't do it!* I finally forced myself to get up and go to the show, and I had a great time. But that's the sort of thing I face."

On his right wrist, Kauff has tattoos of three stars, because, he says, he's a dreamer. They're deliberately misaligned because he feels imperfections are beautiful. Last December, Kauff added another tattoo among the stars. It's a semicolon, symbolizing solidarity against suicide. The tattoo symbol was popularized by Amy Bleuel, who founded a suicide-prevention organization in Wisconsin and called it Project Semicolon because, as she told *People* magazine in 2015, "In literature, a semicolon is used when an author chooses not to end a sentence."

Bleuel died in 2017 at 31, a suspected suicide.

HOW TO GET HELP, AND WARNING SIGNS WHEN SOMEONE IS AT RISK

THE TOLL-FREE number for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, **1-800-273-8255**, provides free, confidential support for people in distress and is monitored 24/7. The number automatically transfers callers to a trained crisis worker in their area code. The organization's website, suicidepreventionlifeline.org, offers additional assistance, including these warning signs to help determine if someone is at risk:

- Talking of wanting to die.
- Talking of wanting to kill themselves.
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, like searching online or purchasing a weapon.
- Talking about feeling hopeless.
- Talking about having no reason to live.
- Talking about being a burden to others.
- An increase in the use of alcohol or drugs.
- Anxious or agitated behavior.
- Acting recklessly.
- Sleeping excessively.
- Getting too little sleep.
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves.
- Showing rage.
- Talking about seeking revenge.
- Extreme mood swings.



In just the past five years, our industry has seen some huge corporate changes. Mergers, acquisitions, downsizing, upsizing and even a few companies that exited the golf market entirely. While it's never fun for the people involved in that kind of turmoil, we tend to call it "business as usual" and not bat an eye. Some other company will come along and serve those needs, right?

But when another large organization in golf announced recently it was reducing its headcount through voluntary retirement incentives, it raised a lot of eyebrows. Why would the venerable United States Golf Association need to cut its staff just a few years after announcing a ginormous TV deal with Fox? Why do the cuts seem to hit hardest within the already diminished Green Section, where 11 senior folks were offered and accepted early retirements?

Allow me a few observations ...

The Green Section's mission had already been evolving over the past decade from dispensing agronomic expertise to superintendents to helping clubs with business, labor and communications challenges. Why? Quite simply, most private club superintendents don't need the turfgrass consulting services that were the original driving force behind the Green Section. Turfgrass science is now everywhere thanks to universities, industry, private consultants and Twitter. Consequently, the number of clubs willing to pay the annual fee for consulting also shrank.

We're also seeing the USGA take much the same route as universities — providing education and extension via social and digital media as the resources required to do face-to-face events and visits dry up. Adam Moeller and his team are doing an outstanding job of creating and disseminating focused, timely information via the weekly Green Section Record e-newsletter and an amazing catalog of short videos designed to educate golfers about the realities of agronomy.

Originally printed in the October issue of GCI Magazine

So why is this happening now? We asked Rand Jerris, the senior managing director of public services, and here's what he said: "Earlier this year, the USGA presented a strictly voluntary retirement incentive to more than 60 employees across the organization who were part of a pension plan that was offered to employees who joined the USGA prior to 2008. We made a decision to freeze the pension plan based on participation numbers. We opted to provide each person in the plan who was over the age of 55 a one-time option to receive additional years of eligibility and other benefits (such as continued healthcare) if they chose to retire early. Among those eligible, 49 accepted the offer — 11 of whom worked for the USGA Green Section."

It's seemingly all about money and a pension plan that got hammered by the recession. Half the companies in America have had the same problem. As that famed management guru Michael Corleone once said, "It's not personal. It's strictly business."

Unfortunately, there is a very personal side to all of this. I bet virtually all of you reading this know at least one of the eight Green Section veterans who have accepted the retirement offer. Some of you, like me, know all of them: Dave Oatis ... Jim Skorulski ... Patrick O'Brien ... Pat Gross ... Larry Gilhuly ... Bob Vavrek ... Dr. Mike Kenna ... Dr. Kimberly Erusha. Three admin employees also accepted retirements: Shelly Foy, Denise Covell and Karen White.

Let that sink in for a minute. As a friend pointed out on Twitter,

those individuals represent collectively 325 years of top-level experience. To paraphrase the late Ross Perot, that giant sucking sound you hear is three centuries of wisdom being removed from the Green Section.

But beyond experience, the USGA is jettisoning a far more valuable golf industry asset. In fact, it's the most valuable commodity in our entire community: relationships.

Each of these folks has hundreds of decades-long relationships with club leaders, superintendents, academics, architects, builders and even media who are critical to the USGA's mission. While I understand that it's only business, I also tend to think the folks in charge at Golf House don't fully realize what they are giving up in order to fix the pension plan and move on with the evolution of the Green Section.

So, things change and we move on. But this time can we all do one thing that we don't normally do when there's some kind of seismic corporate shuffle? Can we all just say thanks to these folks? Call them. Write them a thank-you note. Buy them a drink. Take them to dinner. Log on to Twitter or Facebook and express your gratitude. Let them know that you genuinely appreciate all they've done for us.

Or you could write them a column like this and just say "thank you."

Pat Jones is the editor-at-large of Golf Course Industry. He can be reached at pjones@gie.net.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

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