



THE NEWSLETTER

March 2008

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

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Homegrown Cassidy Thrilled To Be a Part of the Revitalization of Ferncroft CC

By: Gary Trask

The road to becoming a head superintendent was hardly a smooth one for Mike Cassidy. But he would be the first to admit that he's quite fortunate to be where he is today.

Unlike a lot of people, Cassidy gets out of bed every day and enjoys going to work. He loves his profession, has the respect of his crew, and he's a huge fan of the men who sign his check each week.

"Not many people can say all of that," beams Cassidy, the head superintendent at the revived Ferncroft Country Club in Middleton, Mass. "I feel fortunate to be someone who loves what they do because there was a time that I had no idea what I'd end up doing for a living."

Like most sports-crazed boys growing up in the Boston area, Cassidy's dream was to play professional baseball. And because of his athleticism and sweet swing, he took that fantasy much further than most kids did. After graduating from Swampscott High School in 1979, Cassidy was signed by the Philadelphia Phillies. He reported to spring training in Florida and spent two seasons with the organization's Single A club in Helena, Montana.

"I remember seeing Mike Schmidt hit 10 home runs in a row during batting practice from the left side of the plate in spring training one year; and he was a right-handed hitter," laughs Cassidy, who switched from third base

to the outfield after high school. "That was the kind of talent I was up against. Eventually I realized that I just wasn't good enough to make it so I had to move on and try something else."

Cassidy spent the next few years trying to figure out what direction he wanted to go in. He moved back to the



Ferncroft Country Club's 12th hole
Photo Source: Ferncroft CC

North Shore and worked a few years in the advertising business and then moved on for a stint at General Electric, where his father worked. But one day a chance meeting with a new neighbor changed everything for Cassidy and put him on the path to the job that he is so thankful for today.

The fateful day came in late August of 1988. He was living in Salem when one day he got into a conversation with a man who had recently moved into the apartment upstairs. Cassidy's new acquaintance just so

happened to be Peter Hasak, the esteemed head superintendent at Tedesco Country Club, the course where as a youngster Cassidy used to sneak on at dusk from time to time and play a few holes.

"We started talking and he told me that if I wanted to work for him that winter he had a spot for me," Cassidy remembers. "Golf has always been in my blood. I was born in Scotland and spent the first five years of my life there. My father (Bob) was in the military and was a real good golfer and I played on the golf team in high school."

"I never really thought of the golf business as something I would do as an occupation, but once I got a taste of it that winter I just fell in love with it."

Cassidy became so passionate about the industry that in 1990 he decided to attend Essex Agricultural College to get his degree while working part-time on Hasak's crew. By 1993 he was Hasak's first assistant. He spent the next eight years at Tedesco honing his skills before accepting his first head job at the Ferncroft in 2001.

But little did he know that the roller-coaster ride of being a golf course superintendent was just beginning. To say the ownership at Ferncroft during that time

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PRESIDENT
 Russell E. Heller, CGCS
 41 Clifford Street, Melrose, MA. 02176-0140
 617-983-2786 Fax: 617-983-2786
 E-mail: Rheller@gcsane.org
 Franklin Park Golf Club

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 508-872-9790 Fax: 508-872-5393
 E-mail: Pat@framinghamcc.com
 Framingham Country Club

SECRETARY
 Jason S. Adams
 28 Pecunit Street, Canton, MA 02021
 781-828-6540
 E-mail: jadams@bluehillcc.com
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TREASURER
 Michael W. Stachowicz
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 781-326-7860 Fax: 781-326-0664
 E-mail: Mstach@dedhamclub.org
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 22 Sherborne Circle, Ashland, MA 01721
 978-342-6451 Fax: 978-342-0421
 E-mail: Grounds@oakhillcc.org
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 Peter Hasak
 154 Tedesco Street, Marblehead, MA 01945
 781-592-5764 Fax: 781-631-6530
 E-mail: PHasak@tedesco.org
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TRUSTEE
 Mark Gagne
 233 Baker Street, Walpole, MA 02081
 508-668-3859 Fax: 508-668-9969
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FINANCE CHAIRMAN
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 10 Griffin Road, Franklin, MA 02038
 508-520-3615 Fax: 508-528-1885
 E-mail: Mluccini@verizon.net
 Franklin Country Club

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 30 Western Avenue, Natick, MA 01760
 617-789-4631 Fax 617-789-4631
 E-mail: Newtonmaint@aol.com
 Newton Commonwealth Golf Club

EDUCATION CHAIRMAN
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 49 Green Street (Billing Box 214), Needham, MA 02492
 781-444-5548 Fax 781-444-4258
 E-mail: hood.timothyb@verizon.net
 Needham Golf Club

NEWSLETTER CHAIRMAN
 Richard Gagnon
 85 Gulliver Street
 Taunton, MA 02780
 508-823-0466 Fax 508-823-3915
 E-mail: sccturf@hotmail.com
 Segregansett Country Club

PAST PRESIDENT
 Michael J. Hermanson
 140 Ryan Street, Gardner, MA 01440-0145
 978-632-2713 Fax: 978-632-2713
 E-mail: herm068@hotmail.com
 Gardner Municipal Golf Course

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
 Sharon K. Brownell
 P.O. Box 566, Mattapoisett, MA 02739-0566
 508-758-6474 Fax: 508-758-3688
 E-mail: Sbrownell@verizon.net

GCSANE Headquarters
 300 Arnold Palmer Blvd., Norton, MA 02766
 Tel: (800) 833-4451 Fax: (508) 758-6474
 Web Site: www.gcsane.org

Newsletter Committee
 Rich Gagnon, Editor, Segregansett Country Club
 John Eggleston, Kernwood Country Club
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 Julie Heston, Business Manager
 Phone: (401) 934-3677 Email: jheston@verizon.net

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Cassidy - continued from page 1

was unstable would be a vast understatement. In his first four years at the club, Cassidy saw the ownership change hands three times and each new group promised the same things, but never followed through. The No. 1 priority for the owners was always the adjacent Sheraton hotel, with the golf course near the bottom of the priority list.

"It was frustrating on a lot of different levels," Cassidy says. "Most of all it was tough for my crew. The ownership never gave us the resources that we needed to keep the conditions up to what people expect from a top-notch private course."

Cassidy got the break he was looking for in 2006 when Virginia-based Affinity Management came in and took over the reigns of the club. Affinity became the first owner of the golf course to be completely independent from the hotel in decades. And it made its commitment evident immediately.

Affinity began spending what would total to be more than \$2 million in renovations to the course's drainage system, practice area and cart paths. It also built a brand new fitness center and refurbished the swimming pool interior and deck, tennis courts and restaurant. The stated goal was and

still is to get the course back to where it was in the glory days of the 1970s and 1980s, when it was highly regarded across New England and hosted numerous LPGA events.

Another one of the decisions the new management made was to retain Cassidy – as well as PGA Director of Golf Toby Ahern – as part of its staff.

"We were immediately comfortable with Michael," says David Swales, a managing director for Affinity – along with Damon DeVito – who is onsite at the club for the majority of the golf season. "He had a great attitude and seemed to be maintaining the golf course reasonably well with no resources whatsoever. We believed that with more resources and support he could do a stellar job."

That prediction has proven to be correct and prospective members have taken notice. Affinity began in February of 2006 with zero members and to date has more than 300 golf members and an overall membership of 450 strong.

"It's been an amazing transformation in both attitude and work ethic," says Cassidy, while noting that he and his in-season crew of about 18 people were the beneficiary of \$150,000 in new equipment within months of Affinity taking over. "I mean, we all worked hard under the previous ownerships and we made the effort to make things

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CALENDAR

April 23 *Please note date change	GCSANE Monthly Meeting Joint meeting with GCMACC Pinehills G.C. Host: Joe Felicetti, CGCS
May 29	GCSANE Monthly Meeting Easton Country Club Host: Matt Ponte
June 16	GCSANE Monthly Meeting Scholarship & Benevolence Tournament Tedesco C.C. Host: Peter Hasak

2008 GCSAA Delegate Trip to BIGGA Conference: What I learned about traditional links greenkeeping

By Michael Stachowicz

Every year Bernhard and Company, the makers of Dual Express Grinders, sponsor a ten person delegation from the GCSAA to attend the British and International Golf Greenkeeper's Association's Conference in Harrogate, England. While they have only been sponsoring this trip for two years, they have been sponsoring a like program for BIGGA members to go to the Golf Industry Show for ten years. I was fortunate enough to be chosen for the 2008 delegation to England.

This is an opportunity I would encourage all to look out for. It wasn't just the trip overseas or to the trade show (which isn't much bigger than the New England Regional Turf Conference) that made it worthwhile, it was the itinerary that Bernhard and Company put together. We were able to visit several golf courses and we were scheduled for many meaningful events that led to meeting some great people and learning from those meetings.

The conference in England pulled together some management questions I have been having for some time. My main goals were to learn as much as I could about traditional greenkeeping, get a sense of why American maintenance budgets can be three to four times as much as some of the best courses in the United Kingdom, and see how the Royal and Ancient's sustainability movement is being implemented and received.

The Greenkeepers I met were extremely knowledgeable and passionate about their courses and the environment. However, they are not as highly regarded as American Superintendents in their society...which I found interesting. I thought Greenkeeping was supposed to be one of the most



Royal Birkdale

Photo Credit: Michael Stachowicz

regarded and honorable professions in any town over there. My sense is that in the U.S. we have been very serious about our image as being the key to the success of the facility. We have also been able to demonstrate that the skill set of agronomy, finance, human resources, communication, dealing with government regulatory agencies, plumbing, electrical, and mechanics is unique and should be valued.

Traditional Greenkeeping

There are many who strongly believe in traditional greenkeeping. The first and most important goal in this is the promotion of the fine grasses (bents and fescues) and the discouragement of poa annua (over there they call it annual meadow grass). Poa annua requires the most money and effort to keep alive. Its normal life cycle is an annual, it has a weak root system, and is prone to disease and all these characteristics require chemicals, water, manpower, and fertilizer to keep alive. Keeping poa out is not only great traditional greenkeeping, but also a money saver and the start of a sustainable surface.

Traditional greenkeeping is doing as little as possible to the turf. Their fertilizer regimen is basically a couple of ammonium and iron sulfate applications. Their big disease worry is fusarium in the winter months which many only spray for once or twice. They wear their lack of inputs like a badge of honor, and they should.

We visited Royal Birkdale, the host of the 2008 Open, the turf stand was good, but not as good as at U.S. courses. Our courses provide a turf stand that is so tight and uniform it can be mistaken for a carpet. Their stand is mostly made up of fescues, mowed at .175", and the stand is thin. This is a perfectly fine surface to play off of, and some will argue that it is a superior surface to play off of, but it doesn't pass the American definition

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"Traditional greenkeeping is doing as little as possible to the turf. Their fertilizer regimen is basically a couple of ammonium and iron sulfate applications. Their big disease worry is fusarium in the winter months which many only spray for once or twice. They wear their lack of inputs like a badge of honor, and they should."

Michael Stachowicz

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as good as we could, but the commitment Damon and David have shown since Day 1 has been something totally different. It's been phenomenal."

Cassidy lives about 10 minutes from the Ferncroft. He doesn't get to golf as much as he would like, although he made sure to mention that he beat Ferncroft Head Pro Phil Leiss in a match last summer.

The little free time he does have is spent with his family, which includes his son Mike, 21, his wife, Kathleen, and their 6-year-old daughter Megan, as well as Kathleen's three children – Amy, 26, Courtney, 18, and Ashley, 12.

Cassidy's son Mike is a spitting image of his father and is a student at the College of Charleston who works on the Ferncroft grounds crew during the summer. Megan also spends plenty of hours at the club enjoying the pool with her mother and walking the course with her dad.

No, Cassidy isn't roaming the outfield for a Major League baseball team like he had always dreamed about, but he certainly isn't complaining about his

current lot in life.

"The staff at Ferncroft is like family and that's important because you spend so much time there that it becomes a second home," he says. "But to be a part of the resurrection of a club like this has really been an honor, especially for a guy like me who grew up in this area.

"The Ferncroft was once a gem and it got turned into a piece of coal. Now we're working hard to build it back up to diamond status. The idea is to keep improving the golf course every year. And thanks to the new ownership, that's exactly what we're doing."

"I remember seeing Mike Schmidt hit 10 home runs in a row during batting practice from the left side of the plate in spring training one year; and he was a right-handed hitter. That was the kind of talent I was up against."

Mike Cassidy

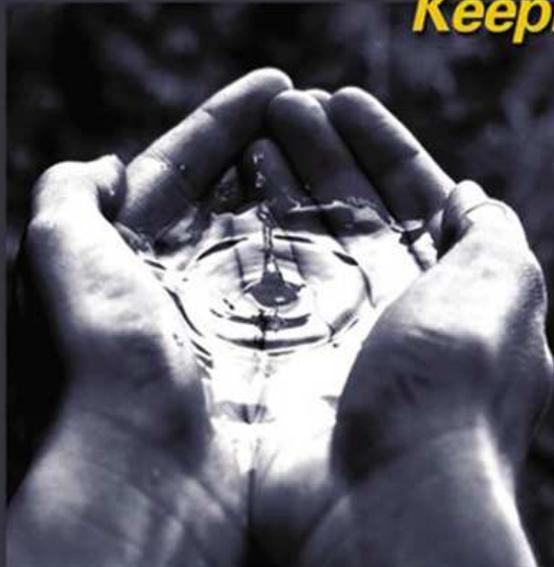


Ferncroft Country Club's 18th hole
Photo Source: Ferncroft CC

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of "pretty". British Greenkeepers would argue that our pretty surfaces are not functional in some cases...or functional like golf was intended to be played. While the greenkeepers are impressed with what they see their American counterparts doing with turf management, they do look at it as not keeping with the traditions of the game or in tune with the environment. The American style of golf course management is really looked down upon by many purists in the European Union. They view our courses as wet, thatchy, spongy, soft, courses with weak grasses that are on life support consisting of fertilizer, chemicals, and water.

The greens over there do play slower with the best courses stimping out at 8.5'. The firmness due to the semi dormant qualities of their greens provide the challenge that is different than what greenspeed offers in the states. They will briefly lower heights on greens to get speeds up to 10.5' for the Open. They don't want them faster than that because the wind would be blowing the balls off the greens at that

point. It is felt that heights can be lowered for a short period of time without damaging the fescue population.

An offshoot of traditional green-keeping is the disturbance theory. This basically promotes the idea that once thatch has been minimized, aeration should be implemented rarely and carefully. Aerating during poa germination time (April/May, September/October) is just making a perfect seed bed for poa infestation. Fescue and all bents except for creeping bent, prefer a non disturbed surface to hold its dominance. So alot of brushing is implemented rather than verticutting, spiking instead of solid tining, etc. Less is more is the central tenant to this program. Don't aerate or verticut just because it has always been done, look at the plant and playing surface to determine what needs to be done.

Another part of this theory suggests mowing high enough to allow the promotion of fescues and browntop bents. They raise the height of cut to the .160 - .175 range to accommodate the higher heights theses grasses require to survive. Even though this would not be acceptable in many

cases here in the states, there are lessons for us with our creeping bents and velvets. We could all take a lesson when it comes to the timing of aeration, water inputs, and fertility. Aerating when it is convenient to the golf schedule (early and/or late in the season) and applying fertilizer and water in the chase for green will only lead to more poa coming in.

Budget

I believe the cause of budget differentiation between the two countries is golfer (and our own) expectations. Golf is still a game over there, not a business. This has allowed courses to stay as informal playgrounds and they have not followed the hotel management model that Americans follow. It is the outdoors, the land is rugged, the land is what gives a course character, it isn't meant to be perfect, it is meant to be functional. In the U.S. we treat our courses like four star hotels that are perfectly maintained but that has forced them to become homogenized and they have lost their hominess. As a result of our

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battle against nature and the character of our land, budgets have exploded.

One of the main money savers for them is the lack of chemicals and fertilizers that their courses require. This saves labor as well. Irrigation is sparingly used, if at all, so all the labor, parts, water costs, electricity, and repairs are saved. The surfaces do not require as much care as a creeping bent or poa surface (verticutting, top-dressing, rolling, close and frequent cuttings) which are more labor savers. Their budgets are affordable and their agronomics are very close to 100% sustainable.

The Royal and Ancient's Sustainability Movement

The R&A's Best Course for Golf movement is based on the idea of traditional greenkeeping and sustainability. This is a great program to offer support to the greenkeeper who implements the traditional greenkeeping techniques by selling the idea to the golfer.

Here is a short video primer on the program <https://www.bestcourseforgolf.org/video>

The European Union is cutting back on the amount of pesticides, water, and fertilizer that is allowed and the R&A is trying to help clubs be proactive. There is a way for courses to survive this cutback in inputs, but planning has to occur and golfers expectations need to be managed.

All of the above has led me to believe that economical and sustainable golf course management can be achieved over here in varying degrees, but golfer's expectations would need to change. That change would have to start at the top with the PGA Tour. If they could showcase a facility that focused more on the playability of the surfaces rather than the color of the surfaces, golfer perceptions and expectations could change. It cannot start with the superintendent, we are hired to provide a specialized surface with all the tools available to us that the budget allows.

Businessmen Buy Massachusetts Golf Club

A company owned by two local businessmen, David Southworth, president and c.e.o. of Southworth Development, and Joseph Deitch has purchased the Renaissance Golf Club in Haverhill, Mass., from Fairway Renaissance of Milwaukee, Wis. The sale price was \$9 million.

"Our plan is to begin building a full-service clubhouse befitting the exceptional quality of this course as soon as possible and to have the club remain private," Southworth says. There are currently about 100 members at the club. In addition to maintaining Renaissance as a private club, both Southworth and Deitch expect the facility to complement their existing business.

"In business we have always focused on delivering the highest level of service possible while at the same time cultivating a community which supports and nourishes everyone involved," Deitch says. "At the end of the day our commitment to excellence and customer satisfaction is what makes us proud. Renaissance is a perfect platform for such an endeavor."

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Renaissance Golf Club
Photo Source: Renaissance GC

Hurtling a Language Barrier

By: Nick Welch

As an assistant superintendent, it is my job to teach the art of mowing tees, collars, and greens to newly hired employees of the club. But how do you approach this when dealing with employees that do not speak English? This past season at Oak Hill Country Club we brought three men over from Brazil through the H2B visa program, and we ran into this problem. Going into the season my one major concern was conquering the language barrier in a work environment where so many things need to be done on a daily basis and there is never enough time to get everything done. One of them could speak limited English and the other two spoke hardly any. So there was the problem, English on one side, Portuguese on the other, and a lot of learning to be done. There were several things I learned about how to communicate with them so that they understood what I expected from them and I felt comfortable that they understood me.

The first big challenge was training these workers. Rule number one, patience, patience, patience! As an assistant, training a worker that speaks English is of course easier, because you can get your point across with simple words and explain things with great detail. When dealing with Portuguese employees you need to speak slowly and teach key English words as you teach them to do the job. Start with

words like choke, gas, tee, green, flag, and eventually they will catch on. If you show body language to an employee that indicates frustration, your foreign worker may develop an attitude that will cause him to say he understands when he doesn't because he is afraid of bringing out your frustration and getting into trouble for not understanding. If this happens you are already heading in the wrong direction. Another way to communicate is with hand signals and body language, waving your hands to teach mowing directions on a tee for example. The person mowing greens from afar may be questioning your sanity, but it works.

Over the course of the season, it is not only important for the workers to learn English, but for you to learn their language, in my case it was Portuguese. An example of this is I learned how to say "a lot of water" in Portuguese and they learned "go shop" in English. When we had downpours and had to bring the crew to the shop due to lightning concerns, I would combine what I learned and what they learned and make a half English/half Portuguese sentence that they understood quickly. By both sides making a good effort to learn as much of the opposite language as possible, at the end of the season we could have simple conversations. Another useful tip that can be used in this situation is learning to count to 18 in their language; this will help you down the road to avoid the situation that drives every assistant nuts; employees going to the wrong holes and you having to chase them.

We also tried to keep the Brazilians working together as much as possible. By teaming all five of them together on a task like mowing bunker faces and bunker surrounds, they would work more efficiently because they could communicate with each other. Establishing a team leader in this situation was important, more of a group foreman that would make sure the job was done correctly. In our case, we had a Brazilian who had worked for us the previous year. He acted like a middle man in the communication process and in the end save



Nick Welch

Photo Source: Oak Hill CC

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us assistants a lot of time by our not having to chase them around the course because everyone was on the wrong hole. In the end they were some of the hardest and most loyal workers that I have ever worked with. Last season was a great success at Oak Hill but the first step was conquering the language barrier, and if we had not done that, the season would have surely been different.



Oak Hill Country Club's 17th hole

Photo Source: Oak Hill CC

RITURFGRASS FOUNDATION

The Rhode Island Turf Foundation (RITF) is being re-vitalized after several years of relative inactivity (the last function hosted by the RITF was Noel Jackson's retirement dinner). The defined purpose of the Foundation is to promote all aspects of the turfgrass industry by supporting current and pertinent research.

A luncheon was hosted for about 90 URI alumni and friends on Tuesday March 3rd at the NE Regional Turfgrass Conference. The luncheon event helped to re-introduce the group and generate new interest in membership participation within the foundation as well as highlight upcoming fundraising events. Two fundraising endeavors already planned for this year include a golf tournament at Stonington Country Club on April 21, 2008 and a turf calendar/raffle program. Contact Mike

Marino, CGCS or John LeClair, CGCS to sign up for or get further tournament details. The calendar should be available in April and Mike Kroian is coordinating the calendar sales efforts. Any other questions about the RITF can be forwarded to Vickie Wallace (vhwallace@cox.net) We also hope to host a post-URI field day gathering. Details of that event will follow at a later date.

Please help support the efforts of this group as we move forward. As turf professionals, we all benefit from sound turf research. Hope to see you at the Tournament!

Thank you,
Vickie Wallace

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**April Meeting Date Changed to
Wednesday, April 23rd at
Pinehills Golf Club, Host: Joe Felicetti, CGCS
Joint Meeting with GCMACC**

Schedule for the day:

- 10:30 am: Registration
- 11:15 am: Meeting/Speaker: Duane LaVangie, DEP, who will address the new regulations, meter calibration, emergency planning
- 12:00 pm: Lunch
- 12:45 pm: Shotgun Start

Format:

This is the 2nd BEAR CUP with 2 GCMACC players vs 2 GCSANE players playing in a Ryder Cup format. There will also be prizes for the best 2 man team scores as well as closest to the pin and long drive.

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DIVOT DRIFT... announcements ... educational seminars ... job opportunities ...tournament results...and miscellaneous items of interest to the membership.

MEMBERSHIP

Welcome New Members:

- Lawrence Cuoco**, Assistant, Marlborough C.C.
- Matthew E. Narey**, Assistant, Salem C.C.
- Richard P. McGovern**, Assistant, Sterling National G.C.
- Nicholas J. Spokis**, Superintendent, Tatnuck C.C.
- Mike Ford**, Superintendent, Mt. Hood G.C.
- Melissa Gugliotti**, Affiliate, Syngenta
- Michael Tanner**, Affiliate, DGM Systems
- Mayer Tree Service, Inc.**, Friend

Congratulations to Garrett and Kathy Whitney on the birth of their son Connor Liam who was born on March 18th.

Please help support the **Patrick Coulter Scholarship Fund** by attending the Providence Bruins game on **Saturday, March 29th**. For more information or to buy tickets, visit www.providencebruins.com or call 401-273-5000.

Our condolences go out to the Morgan family on the unexpected passing of Doug Morgan of the Winding Brook Turf Farm in late February.

Richard Benoit asked to inform members that he is no longer working for Tuckahoe Turf. Richard has started his own business.

Joe Farina is the new sales representative for Tuckahoe Turf covering the southeastern Mass, Cape Cod, the Islands and Rhode Island. He can be reached at (401) 524-5280 or jfarina@tuckahoeturf.com.

SAVE THE DATE

The RI Turfgrass Foundation is hosting a golf tournament on **April 21, 2008** at Stonington CC. Please contact Mike Marino (860) 535-9196 for more information.

The Univ. of Connecticut Field Day is **July 22, 2008** and for more information please visit: www.turf.uconn.edu/fieldday08.

The Univ. of Rhode Island Field Day is scheduled for **August 20, 2008** and pre-registration is now open. For more information, please Dr. Rebecca Brown (401) 874-2791.

The 2008 Joseph Troll Classic is set for Monday, **September 29, 2008** at Lyman Orchards Golf Club, honoring George B. Thompson. Additional details to follow and will soon be on the web site - www.alumniturfgroup.com

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Congratulations to Brian Giblin as he leaves TurfLinks Environmental Service to accept the sales representative position with Bayer Environmental Science.

Congratulations to Pat Lange as he leaves the assistant position at The Country Club to accept the superintendent position at Red Tail Golf Club.

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