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# TEE TO GREEN

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Metropolitan Golf Course  
Superintendents Association

## President's Message

### Water Shortages Aren't All Bad

Every cloud has a silver lining. That's an old adage that, this season, has meant something to me and a lot of other superintendents in our area. Though record-breaking temperatures and water shortages have caused many of us more than a few sleepless nights, they've also helped drive home the critical importance of having adequate irrigation systems and on-site water supplies.

A number of superintendents, for instance, have won the automatic irrigation systems they've long petitioned for, and others have gotten the funding to expand ponds and wells.

At Darien, we have three wells and a holding pond on the property that we supplement with town water. By August 24, we had used 2.5 million gallons of the town's water—and about \$10,000 of my budget dollars. Pretty typical. What wasn't typical was that shortly after the 24th—as town water supplies began to dwindle—we were cut off and had to rely on our own resources.

This has forced us to reevaluate not only our on-site water supplies but also the efficiency of our pump house and irrigation system. As a result, this fall, we'll be deepening one of our three wells—from 200 to 500 feet. With that, we hope to be able to pump at least 60 gallons per minute, which would double the well's production. *(continued on page 2)*

## Special Feature

### Firing Squad: How to Give Someone the Boot Without Getting Kicked Back

We've all done it . . . hired someone who looked great on paper—or at first glance—and then after a short time on the job discovered they weren't going to cut the mustard. Unfortunately, it's a lot easier to hire bad apples than it is to weed them out.

In fact, owing to a growing body of law and an increasingly litigious work force, firing employees has become a complicated—and sometimes risky—business. Each year, companies spend millions of dollars defending lawsuits brought by former employees who feel they were fired unjustly.

If you think, "Ahhh, this kind of thing doesn't happen to superintendents," guess again. More than a few of your fellow colleagues have been called on the carpet for their firing practices. (No, we won't name names.)

So to help you and your club stay out of harm's way when you have to send an employee packing, here's a look at the law and some pointers on procedure.

#### Firing by the Book

Your first legal consideration in firing an employee is to be sure that the dismissal in no way constitutes discrimination based on race, color, creed, religion, national origin, age, sex, union membership or activity, and physical or mental handicap.

Beyond that, and in the absence of either a union or private employment contract, common law deems that most employees without a formal contract ("employees at will") can be fired at any time for any reason, with no legal recourse.

Now, however, the right of an employer to fire at will is facing a serious challenge. Under the concept of "wrongful discharge," the courts have established a new cause of action that permits lawsuits by employees who have not been discriminated against per se but feel they've been dumped unfairly.

Although the formal definition varies from state to state, many wrongful discharge cases are based on the presence of an "implied" *(continued on page 4)*

## Also in This Issue

- ② September Meeting Site and Host Revisited
- ③ Write Your Way to Fame and Fortune
- ④ Time-Tested Firing Tactics
- ⑤ Dual Educational Opportunity
- ⑦ Powelton Golf Results
- ⑦ Met Two-Ball Champs



## Water Shortages Aren't All Bad

Though the project will run us about \$10,000, a productive well will quickly pay for itself by alleviating our dependence on public water. What's more, it will allow us to continue to water the course when public water use is restricted.

At the same time, I'll be making plans to redesign our irrigation system to guarantee a more efficient and even distribution of water. I'm hoping to go from a single-row to a double-row system, since as you know, single large heads tend to overwater the middle areas and leave the outer reaches dry. In the same sweep, we'll be taking a look at our pump house. I've often said a pump station is the heart of a club's maintenance operation. If your pumps don't work, even the best irrigation system in the world won't pull you through.

All this said to drive home the point that it's in our best interest to become as self-sufficient, where water's concerned, as possible. If this season isn't enough to help your lobbying efforts, there are other advantages to expanding water resources and irrigation systems you might discuss with your Green Committee.

If you want to enlarge a pond, for

instance, you might suggest how it can improve the playability or aesthetics of one or two of your holes. If you'd like to dig a well, you might point out the cost savings—as I did—of not having to buy water from your town or city.

Similarly, if you'd like to go from a manual to an automatic irrigation system, you can always tally up the money you'll save in labor required to hand water your course—particularly through a heat wave. Even upgrading a system has its advantages, the prime one being a consistently greener and more playable course, but equally important is that the more efficient your system is, the better use you'll make of the water you have available.

No matter what you choose to do, seeking ways to better manage your course's water sends two important messages. To your Green Committee, it shows you're not only an effective manager, but also have the club's best interest at heart. To the public, it shows that superintendents and golf courses are not only sensitive to the environment, but also environmentally responsible.

TIM O'NEILL, CGCS  
President

### Spotlight

## Will Heintz and Hampshire Host September Meeting

**M**etGCSA members had the pleasure of spending September 20—the date of the season's second to last golf meeting and the final round of the Met Area Team Championship—on Hampshire Country Club links.

Designed in 1927 by the architectural team Devereaux Emmet and Al Tull, the course is a manageable 110 acres. Host Superintendent Will Heintz has been with the club nearly nine of those 66 years, and though like most superintendents he's undertaken numerous special projects in his tenure, he's reluctant to embellish on the fruits of

his labor. He humbly describes Hampshire as a "pretty little course" and "a very good job." The rest . . . well, we're sure you saw for yourself.

Will came to Hampshire after five seasons at Westchester Country Club under then Superintendent Ted Horton. "Ted was extremely hardworking and very fair," says Will. "I had the utmost respect for him." Though Will had held an assistant's position at Teugega Country Club in Rome, NY—and various other seasonal positions during his high school and then college years—when he came to Westchester, it was back to square one. "I started on

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## Write Your Way to Fame and Fortune

**G**CSAA Scholarship & Research is proud to announce its 1994 Student Essay Contest for those pursuing degrees in fields related to golf course management.

The goal is to promote environmental awareness among tomorrow's golf course management professionals. Essays, therefore, should focus on some aspect of environmentally responsible golf course management, such as wildlife on the golf course or efficient use of golf course irrigation.

The prize for the most compelling essay is \$1,000. Second place will earn you \$600 and third place \$400. What's more, winning essays may be published in *Golf Course Management* magazine.

Entries must be postmarked by December 1. For further information, contact the GCSAA's Development Department at 913-841-2240.

Good luck!

the divot crew," Will remembers.

But then, few things about Will's career path were typical. When he finished high school, he attended St. Lawrence University and graduated with a B.S. in biology. From there, he worked in a stone quarry, one of the major industries near his hometown Clinton, NY. "I knew I didn't want to spend all my time indoors doing scientific research," says Will about his decision to work at the quarry, "and I wanted to stay around my hometown."

But it didn't take Will long to see he was going nowhere—quickly. That's when he decided to pursue a career in turfgrass management.

"When I applied to UMass's Winter School, they were accepting only five applicants from out of state," says Will. "Fortunately, I was able to convince the dean then—Dean Denison—that I needed that degree from UMass. He let me in."

Will received his certificate in 1977, and after a two-year stint at Teugega, he and Linda, his wife of 17 years, relocated to Portchester, NY. The rest is history.

Will and Linda still have family ties in upstate New York, and they've kept an old stone schoolhouse, which they restored before leaving the area, as a home away from home. "We spend time up there during the winter," says Will, who among other things, has a passion for the simple life.

Two of Will's other after-hour interests are golf and music. After some prodding, he admitted to being a banjo player—accomplished enough to play a few "gigs" now and then. He fondly remembers making guest appearances when a friend's bluegrass band played in Greenwich Village.

Will's been a MetGCSA Board member for the past two years and is currently Chairman of the Education and Government Relations Committees.

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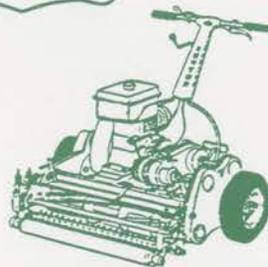
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## Firing Squad

contract" between an employer and employee. That might include a lengthy term of employment, a record of regular raises or promotions, and even such casual verbal assurances as, "You know, Joe, you've got a great future here at the club."

Even when such claims can't be substantiated, they can become evidence. And labor lawyers will tell you that if the case goes to trial, a jury's sympathy will more likely rest with the employee than with the employer.

### Your Line of Defense

The first step in protecting yourself from claims like these is to make sure that, before terminating an employee, you let him know there's a serious performance problem and give him ample warnings. In fact, communication and documentation should begin the moment you foresee trouble so the employee has a fair shot at correcting the problem. Many experts recommend what's called a

"progressive discipline" approach. In short, here's how it works:

- **Begin with a frank discussion** of the performance or conduct problem. Describe the appropriate corrective measures, and outline your personal expectations of the employee.

### Worth Noting . . .

*One study showed that the majority of all firings are the employer's—not the employee's—fault. The prime offenders: bad hiring due poor screening, interviewing, and reference checking; inadequate training; and shoddy supervision.*

Experts also advise that you use this meeting to express confidence in the person's ability to improve.

- **If this heart-to-heart talk has little effect**, the next step would be to put your

complaints in a memo that restates the original problem, the required solutions, and what you expect of the employee. It should also mention the previous conversation and when you expect to see results. This memo should make it clear that the employee's job is—or is about to be—on the line.

Labor attorneys also recommend that you have employees sign the memo, not to indicate agreement, but to prove that they've seen it so they can't deny it later. The same applies to any second or third "warning" memos you issue.

- **You should also be diligent about collecting or noting other evidence of incompetence.** For instance, if your assistant's record-keeping is sloppy or error-laden, retain a copy for your files. In addition, you should note all relevant incidences of misconduct, lateness, absenteeism, and other behavioral problems in your calendar or employee file. Also record the dates, general content, and outcome of any meetings or conversations you have with the employee.

- **Be aware not only of the content, but also the tone and volatility of your documentation.** Though you're not legally obligated to show your documentation to the employee, you may be asked to open your files if you're dragged into court. Any notations that are less-than-professional will surely work against you.

- **If your club has an employee manual, pay close attention to procedures for employee terminations.** If they're billed as "guidelines" or "recommendations," there are usually no legal ramifications if you decide not to follow them to the letter. But if the procedures can be construed as club policy, then employees who feel they haven't been fired "by the book" can turn around and claim wrongful discharge.

### Exit Lines

In the end, the more grounded you are in the legal and ethical rules of the road, the less likely it is that the next time you give someone the boot, you'll get kicked around in the process.

Source: Learning International, Inc., a sales and service training company in Stamford, CT.

## Happy Endings

**W**hen you fire someone, it's easy to get so caught up in the substance that you forget all about form. But fine-tuning your approach can make the whole process more humane—and prevent the kind of bad blood that leads to litigation. Here are a few tips from a well-known executive recruiter, Robert Half, and his book *Robert Half on Hiring*:

- **Do it yourself and in private.** Delegating a dismissal to your assistant is unfair all around. Not only do you lose control of how it's handled, but you also set a bad example for others on your staff.

- **Be prepared.** Have all the relevant paperwork ready: Pink slip, owed pay, memos detailing the amount of pension plans accruing, etc.

- **Don't beat around the bush about why you're firing the person.** And don't try to soften the blow by offering false hope of later reinstatement. What you "pro-

mise" in a moment of weakness may come back to haunt you.

- **Start strong.** Try leading into the crusher with a positive evaluation: "You're great with the crew, Joe. I just don't think this job was keyed to your strengths."

- **Be prepared for severe reactions.** Even though studies show that, except in rare cases, employees expect to be fired, the reality still hits hard. Be sympathetic; give the employee some time to accept the news; then focus on the next steps.

- **Be consistent.** Don't promise termination "fringes," like an extended stay in the club's employee quarters, unless you're prepared to offer the same to the next employee you fire.

- **Consider the ripple effect.** Handle other employees' questions and concerns with reasonable candor. And try passing out some reassuring positive feedback; others may be worried that they're next.

## MetGCSA Loses Longtime Member

It is with deep regret that we announce the death of Craig Wistrand September 2 after a brief illness.

Superintendent of the Round Hill Club for the past 15 years, Craig was a longtime member of the MetGCSA, who once helped steer the association from a seat on the Board of Directors.

Craig leaves behind his wife, Betty, and two children, Jason and Jill. Craig is also survived by a sister, Linda Hinchcliffe of Lexington, KY, and his father, John Wistrand, who is a Life

member of the Met and former partner in Metro Milorganite.

The Family Relations Committee is arranging a benefit tournament for October 25 at the Round Hill Club to assist Craig's wife and children. Watch for a mailing. We hope you'll participate in this worthwhile cause.

In the meantime, donations may be made in Craig's memory to Greenwich Hospital Hospice or to Cancer Care of Connecticut, 120 East Ave., Norwalk, CT 06850.

## A Thank You Long Overdue

The MetGCSA would like to personally thank the following commercial members for their generosity in funding the open bar on our July 21 Manhattan Skyline Dinner Cruise:

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## Dual Educational Opportunity

The MetGCSA and the MGA have joined forces in presenting the Professional Turfgrass Field Day and Green Chairman Educational Seminar on Tuesday, October 19 at Westchester Country Club in Rye, NY.

The educational seminar, from 9:30 - 11 a.m., will feature golf course architect Stephen Kay speaking on bunker restoration. Seminar participants can continue their education outdoors with manufacturer and supplier booths and ongoing equipment demos. Other field day attractions: a reel mower grinding clinic and athletic field maintenance seminar.

For further information, contact Jeff Scott, 914-967-2570, or Al Tretera, 800-243-4355.

### Meeting Reminder

#### Annual Meeting

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Meeting Host: Peter Rappoccio, CGCS



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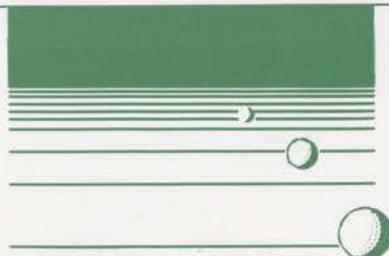
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## Scorebreakers at the July Powelton Meeting

Seventy-eight golfers teed it up at The Powelton Club in Newburgh, NY, July 26. The scorecard may have read only 6,037 yards—short by today's standards for courses—but the narrow fairways and tricky greens challenged even the best players in the Individual Best Ball Tourney. Here's the outcome:

### First Flight (0-11)

#### Low Gross Winners

- 75 Ron Shapiro, *Bruedan Corp.*  
76 Mark Millett, *Old Oaks CC*

#### Low Net Winners

- 68 Joe Cotone, *Briar Hall CC*  
69 Ken Clear, *Alpine, the Care of Trees*

### Second Flight (12-18)

#### Low Gross Winners

- 79 Wayne Remo, *Rock Spring Club*  
84 Ernie Steinhoffer, *Guest*

#### Low Net Winners

- 67 Bob Alonzi, *Winged Foot GC*  
67 Mike Cook, *Alpine, the Care of Trees*

### Third Flight (19-25)

#### Low Gross Winners

- 89 Bob Welch, *Rock Ridge CC*  
91 Jim DeLibero, *Landscape Supply*

#### Low Net Winners

- 74 Scott Schukraft, *Huntsville GC*  
74 Todd Polidor, *Heritage Hills*

### Fourth Flight (26 and Above)

#### Low Net Winners Only

- 70 Tom Tooley, *Mount Kisco CC*  
72 Dom DiMarzo, *Sunningdale CC*  
73 Jim McNally, *Greenrock Corp.*  
74 Mike Mullane, *Guest*

#### Closest to the Pin

- #7 Bob Welch, *Rock Ridge CC*  
#16 Chuck Martineau, *Whippoorwill*

#### Longest Drive

- #12 Mark Millett, *Old Oaks CC*

Host superintendent Bob DeMarco provided outstanding conditions—the greens, in particular, were simply superb. Great job, Bobby. Also deserving a round of applause are Golf Professional Bob Minicozzi, who was a great help in making the golf arrangements, and Manager Ted Hennes and his staff for the delicious food and sensational service.

As a golf chairman, a well-organized, efficient, and cooperative management team at a host club is your best friend. Setting up and running the meeting at Powelton was a pleasure.

JOHN CARLONE, CGCS  
Middle Bay Country Club

## Martineau-Scheyhing Take Met Two-Ball

In a hard-fought match over the championship layout of Old Oaks, Chuck Martineau and Fred Scheyhing prevailed over Tony Grasso and Greg Wojick 3 and 2 to win the Inaugural Met Two-Ball

Championship.

Tony and Greg held a slim, one-hole lead through number 10. Tony stiffed a long iron on the 10th hole, the number-one handicap hole. The tap-in was good for a birdie and the lead.

But as the match headed for the final seven holes, an already-bleak day worsened. The rain intensified and the temperature plummeted. Chuck and Fred kept their games steady and managed to come back and win four out of the next six holes. The match finished out on the 16th hole.

It's only fitting the match finished this way. If you remember, under more severe weather conditions at Fenway, Fred qualified on his own ball for the final spot in the tournament.

To reach the finals, both teams had scored impressive victories. Martineau-Scheyhing beat Mongon-O'Keefe 4 and 3 and Grasso-Wojick scored a similar victory over Leary-Savone.

Congratulations to everyone who participated, and thanks for your support and enthusiasm.

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