

# Tee To Green

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*The Covid Conundrum . . .  
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# Tee To Green



Cover: *Winged Foot Golf Club*

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Through Tough Times

# Executive Director's Message

## Surviving These Turbulent Times

# M

etGCSA superintendents, assistants, families, vendors, facilities, along with every other aspect of the world have had to adapt to situations that were inconceivable just six months ago. Dealing with both the professional and personal challenges this pandemic has presented has not been easy and has affected some more than others. To those who have suffered the most devastating consequence of this pandemic and lost a family member or friend to COVID-19, please accept my deepest sympathy. There is no doubt that we, as an industry, must continue to follow the best management practices related to virus protection and reducing transmission until this pandemic has been resolved.

As Charles Darwin once said, "It is not the strongest or the most intelligent who will survive but those who can best manage change." In our feature article, we cover the past five months and how superintendents adapted and managed the initial state executive orders closing all nonessential businesses; communicating with our members and partner associations; maintaining golf courses with minimum maintenance, reduced staffing, and budgets; developing safety protocols; and determining where we might go from here.

From an agronomic and project-management standpoint, no one may have had to adapt more than Winged Foot's Director of Golf Courses Stephen Rabideau. Having to prepare and manage two golf courses for a U.S. Open that has been rescheduled from June to September, while allowing member play through the season, has been stressful at best. Check out the article on page 8 that details the ups and downs the Winged Foot staff has ably managed to keep Winged Foot on course for the 2020 U.S. Open.

During uncertain times like these, it is difficult not to think about one's financial wellbeing, especially after witnessing a stock market (S&P 500) decline of 34 percent in



*Mike McCall, CGCS  
MetGCSA Executive Director*

just over a month's time. Making matters worse, some clubs, according to MetGCSA surveys, were instituting salary reductions. On page 11, you'll find a few tips for maximizing your investment returns through these turbulent times.

And finally, the MetGCSA has had to do some adapting of its own. Unfortunately, events have had to be canceled, but I am pleased to say that we have been able to schedule the Poa Annual Fundraiser this month at Anglebrook, and the Invitational on September 29 at Hudson National Golf Club. The Assistants Championship is also planned for October 28 at Essex Fells in New Jersey, so superintendents, please be sure to encourage your assistants to attend this always enjoyable event.

Before ending my message, I'd like to offer special thanks to our sponsors. Though we mention this in our sidebar piece on page 7, I want to say again, here, just how much our association appreciates the support our sponsors have given us even before knowing 100 percent whether the golf industry would thrive this year. We owe you a sincere debt of gratitude.

In addition to our upcoming golf events, we are hoping to have our Fall and Winter seminars but will keep you posted in the event of any changes. Check out our Upcoming Events section on page 10 for these and other industry events.

Be well and be safe!

*Mike McCall, CGCS  
MetGCSA Executive Director*



Feature

# 2020: A Truly Unprecedented Year

*Surviving Coronavirus . . .  
and Preparing for the  
Challenges Ahead*

*by Mike McCall, MetGCSA Executive Director*



## ***We generate fears while we sit. We overcome them by action.”***

**– Dr. Henry Link, business psychologist**



When I was an engineering officer aboard the aircraft carrier *USS Independence*, we had a sign prominently posted above the engineering watch station that read “WHAT IF?” It was meant to remind engineering officers to keep in mind a precise plan of action for every conceivable malfunction that could take place aboard the ship. It was essential.

“What if?” is a question that successful superintendents ask themselves every day. “What if my pump station goes down?” “What if my annual bluegrass weevil application wasn’t timed correctly?” “What if the state enacts a drought management plan tomorrow?”

But just a few months after the MetGCSA Winter Seminar at Westchester Country Club addressed these and other industry questions, we were hit with one question we—along with most of the rest of the world—failed to anticipate: “What if a dangerous human virus were to suddenly spread throughout the United States and threaten our wellbeing and livelihoods?”

At the time, things looked idyllic for golf in the Met area, with no winter injury and the first mild March in four years. Meanwhile, on the other side of the globe in Wuhan, China, an extremely contagious new strain of coronavirus was rapidly infecting people in that Chinese city of 11 million, slowly making its way around the world. No one knows the exact date it arrived in our area, but New York recorded its first death due to the virus on March 14.

Six days later, everything changed. Governor Cuomo signed an executive order closing all nonessential businesses and mandating that all employees of nonessential businesses stay home. New Jersey and Connecticut enacted similar executive orders. New Jersey shut down all golf course operations, except for maintenance, until May 2. On that date, only twosomes were permitted at 16-minute tee-time intervals.

Life since March hasn’t been smooth sailing for MetGCSA members. The good news is that most of us are adapting and, in fact, learning some important lessons—even new

skills. What follows are some “lessons learned” on how we might better prepare for future challenges.

### **1. Developing Government Relationships Pays Dividends.**

When the pandemic first hit, guidance from state governments was vague, resulting in confusion, stress, and countless hours of work trying to obtain clear directives to ensure that multi-million-dollar golf courses were not abandoned. A new relationship had to be forged with New York’s Empire State Development Corporation, as it was the agency that determined and published guidance on essential businesses and activities.

Never have the relationships developed with elected officials and government agencies proved so vital. Many of our previous contacts helped connect us to the right people in this department, enabling us to smooth the way for open communication and clarification on numerous issues. Industry organizations and individuals pulled together, sharing information with government officials and doing what was needed to ensure the viability of the golf course maintenance industry and, eventually, the game of golf itself.

The result? Golf course maintenance workers were designated as essential. Of course, these relationships did not develop overnight. They were nurtured through many years of working with state legislative bodies to deepen their understanding of our industry and its benefits to the environment and the economy. Attending such events as our New York State Turfgrass Advocacy Day in Albany, smaller but more frequent state advocacy meetings in New Jersey and Connecticut, and National Golf Day in Washington, D.C., were key to building the kind of relationships with assembly members and senators that have enabled us to successfully advocate for changes to—or the repeal of—laws and regulations that affect our industry and our clubs.

Now more than ever, it is clear that it’s in our industry’s best interest to develop strong, ongoing relationships with government agencies and legislators.

### **2. Communication Is Essential.**

In any basic crisis management course, you will learn that frequent and accurate communication is essential to successfully manage a crisis. In this regard, the tri-state area superintendent associations, as well as GCSAA, passed with flying colors, keeping members abreast of the most current developments. In addition, the MetGCSA, MetPGA, MGA, and MetCMAA held weekly phone conferences to discuss the various issues we faced and build a consensus on our messaging to the golfing community.

To open the lines of communication among members, the MetGCSA conducted several short surveys to uncover and compile information that our members were requesting. In the early stages of the pandemic, the surveys focused on general club operations: Is your club open or closed? Carts or no carts? Is your Pro Shop staff onsite? The surveys that followed focused on staffing and maintenance practices. All superintendents have their go-to buddies for “What’s your club doing?” but being able to present club officials with objective data from more than 50 similar-type clubs goes a long way toward supporting your case or even improving your position on a particular issue.

### **3. When Times Get Tough, the Tough Get Flexible.**

The surveys made it clear that every course was going to have to roll with a variety of cost-saving measures, from reduced staffing to barebones maintenance practices. With uncertainty looming, clubs had no choice but to be even more fiscally prudent than usual. The early surveys reflected these grim circumstances:

# Stewards of Golf's Greatest Assets

**H**ave you ever wondered what was meant when you read, “MetGCSA, Stewards of Golf’s Greatest Assets”?

If we were to start by defining the word “asset,” which is something regarded as having great value, we could surmise that the golf course is golf’s greatest asset because, let’s face it, without golf courses, there is no golf.

But of course, part of what makes golf courses attractive to golfers is how well they are groomed and maintained. It only follows, then, that when we talk about “stewards” of golf’s greatest assets, we are referring to golf course superintendents, the caretakers of some of the most cherished properties in the country.

But the meaning of this phrase goes much deeper, and the pandemic has certainly brought to our attention just how important an asset our golf courses and those involved in maintaining them are. During the pandemic:

- We have witnessed the immeasurable **recreational value** of both public and private golf courses as they quickly became one of the only recreational activities that people could do safely. Even players who had not picked up a club in years started playing daily. It is no wonder that all 50 states allowed golf to be played, very early on, in the pandemic.
- We have been reminded of the **financial value** of golf courses and, in turn, of maintaining them whether the gates are open or

not. Keeping this valuable asset in top form and ready for play, after all, is essential to sustaining memberships and cashflow when the course is open, a concept that is sometimes overlooked.

- Many have come to more fully appreciate the **environmental value** of golf courses, which we, as superintendents, have been touting for decades. As we well know, golf courses are the guardians of open space, water quality, and wildlife habitat. Providing a welcome environment during the pandemic has become more valuable than ever and all the more critical in heavily populated metropolitan areas where many of our courses are located.

- Worthy of note is the MetGCSA’s concentrated collection of member golf courses that are of **historical and architectural value**. In our midst is the oldest course in the country, St. Andrews Golf Club in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, and dozens of others that have been ranked by *Golf Digest* as among the top golf courses in the country. With our organization’s member courses among those with some of the most storied and distinguished histories, it is only fitting that the MetGCSA be associated with golf’s “greatest assets” and that our member superintendents be the “stewards” charged with maintaining their notable status.

Through good times and bad, the MetGCSA’s member superintendents are in every way, shape, and form “Stewards of Golf’s Greatest Assets.”

*We have witnessed the immeasurable recreational value of both public and private golf courses as they quickly became one of the only recreational activities that people could do safely.*

- On April 21, the 53 courses that responded collectively reported that well over 349 part-time employees had not been called back to work as they normally would have been.
- 52 percent of clubs had already instituted significant budget reductions.
- 25 percent had instituted various salary reductions.
- 3 courses had to lay off some of their full-time staff.
- 38 percent had to reduce the hours of part-time staff they had already rehired.

Commentary from survey respondents was equally bleak:

- “Any item that is not 100 percent essential is discussed with management for purchase approval.”
- “No purchasing unless absolutely necessary; no overtime allowed; staff not to come in during inclement weather.”
- “Other club employees will shift to the grounds staff since many other club operations are currently closed.”
- “We are looking into the Connecticut workshare program as this program reduces the amount the club has to pay the employee and the state picks up the remaining amount.”
- “Will be seven guys short until the Mexican border reopens as many of my staff members spend the winter there.”

Even though golf course maintenance workers were categorized as essential, courses were still required to minimize maintenance to reduce the number of onsite employees. Fortunately, when the restrictions were enforced, courses weren’t yet open. Nonetheless, the unseasonably mild March meant accelerated grass-growing and need for course maintenance.

Demonstrating adaptability, most area supers reported that by having their full-time employees mow less frequently, they were able to maintain the grounds. Many also reported that they were able to implement some of their necessary cultural practices to prepare the course for future summer conditions.

With each new survey, the numbers indicated that staffing continues to improve, but few golf course operations have reached 100 percent—even as rounds are at an all-time high. For example, on June 15, survey results indicated that the median staffing level was at 78 percent. Only one course was at 100 percent; the lowest, at 50 percent.

Mike Brunelle, director of grounds at Upper Montclair Country Club, a 27-hole private facility in northern New Jersey, noted that he is still operating with 77 percent of his normal staff even though the golf course saw more than an additional 1,500 rounds in both May and June. “Every day is Saturday,” he said, using the phrase that has become common among superintendents and golf pros this year.

Clearly, with these lower employment levels, something has to give in terms of maintenance expectations and practices.

At Fairview Country Club in Connecticut, Jim Pavonetti reports that he is short eight staff members and one assistant. With overtime restricted only to hand-watering, Jim has had to make some adjustments to his maintenance practices.

“I raised the height of cut on tees, approaches, and fairways to make it easier to manage water,” says Jim. “We are still doing everything, but just less frequently than normal. For instance, we are mowing fairways Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. We used to mow them on the weekends too, but we don’t have what we need in staff to do it anymore. We eliminated the step cut around the greens and fairways for now as well.”

These and other changes have certainly helped reduce some labor hours, but at what cost? According to Jim, the greatest setback for them has been the detail work, such as landscaping beds, edging sprinklers, mulching, and tree pruning. “We normally spend 156 hours in labor on beds per week,” he says. “We are down to less than 60 hours. It’s tough.”

Dave Oatis of David A. Oatis consulting acknowledges the difficult choices the pandemic has forced courses to make on where to focus their labor. “When push comes to shove, playability and turfgrass health must



be the top priority,” says Dave. “This is not good news for those who like to see lots of course accessories and ornamental plantings on their courses. But we have to consider that these divert considerable labor while contributing nothing to turf health or playability.”

#### 4. With Change Comes Opportunity.

With all the restrictions that have come down the pike, we’ve all had to modify our modes of operation in one way or another. Many of these changes challenged us to innovate and improve—and, as usual, we responded. Positive changes that quickly swept through Met-area courses and many countrywide involved:

- **Golf course accessories.** One welcome change that has become pretty much the norm nationwide has had to do with course setup. To limit touchpoints, we’ve eliminated ball washers (who needs those anyway?), benches, bunker rakes, and water coolers.
- **Flag sticks.** To eliminate another touchpoint, the flag stick, decisions had to be made regarding cup type. Options were to set the cup above the hole, use some type of shallow cup or foam insert, or use an E-Z Lyft, the touchless golf ball retrieval system. Once handicaps started to be recorded, the above-the-hole cup quickly went away, and the rest of the courses were split about 50/50 between the other two methods.
- **Golf course maintenance practices.** Maintenance practices have varied considerably among Met-area courses. With no true definition of minimum maintenance from a state’s perspective, our survey results reflected that virtually all courses were per-

forming more than what our industry would define as minimum maintenance but less than what their clubs would normally perform.

To help golf course superintendents sharpen their skills in managing their courses with less, Cornell’s Dr. Frank Rossi teamed up with industry professionals from around the country to host a weekly webcast during the initial stages of the pandemic. In addition, the GCSA of New Jersey teamed up with Rutgers University to produce an hour-long webinar titled *Turf Management During Covid-19: Keeping Your Maintenance Program Simple When Things Are Not*. Skyway Golf Course Superintendent Michael Tardogno gathered Rutgers researchers Drs. Bruce Clarke, James Murphy, Matthew Elmore, and Albrecht Koppenhöfer to discuss best practices for managing your course with minimal labor and reduced budgets. Highlights included taking advantage of the low- or no-play times to complete or increase cultural practices as this is a rare window of opportunity.

Among the researchers other recommended strategies:

- Delaying or reducing fertilization, particularly in rough areas, depending on the current health of the turf.
- Prioritizing weed control, throughout the course and on native areas, focusing on annuals, which are ultimately more invasive than perennials.
- Employing best management practices on greens by raising height of cut and top-dressing routinely to discourage certain pests and reduce chemical applications.
- Utilizing urea and ammonium sulfate as your primary nitrogen source.



## 5. To Survive and Thrive, Rise to the Challenge.

Pandemic-driven budget cuts and hiring freezes have put superintendents' management skills to the test. For many, turf school training suddenly felt inadequate, as they were challenged to manage not just their golf course operation, but also the health and welfare of their staff in ways they could never have imagined.

The first challenge was making dramatic staff cuts as a result of the reduced budgets. Workers who had perennially returned at the start of each season suddenly were not able to. It is one thing to terminate employees for poor performance; it is another very stressful thing to have to tell excellent employees with families that you cannot hire them back because of the virus.

After dealing with staff layoffs, the next challenge was managing morale. It became crucial to keep staff members up-to-date on plans for surviving the pandemic, reassuring them that things were under control and moving in a positive direction. Like a captain on a ship maneuvering through a storm, it was essential to project an upbeat, positive attitude to keep the crew calm, focused, and motivated. This reassurance is especially challenging—and important—when the staff's normal hours may have been reduced.

The third challenge was to protect the staff's wellbeing by establishing and implementing procedures to deal with the "new normal" by:

- Disinfecting breakrooms, bathrooms, and equipment
- Ensuring social distancing
- Developing new safety plans
- Creating split shifts to keep at least half the crew away from the other half in case one staff member became sick.

"When I was in turf school," says Rye Golf Club Superintendent Chip Lafferty, "I could never have imagined that worrying

- Limiting ABW applications to areas where adults or larvae have been seen during scouting or to areas that have a history of being problematic.

- Thoroughly evaluating and fine-tuning your irrigation system and watering practices since fewer staff may be available to hand-water later in the season.

Dr. Clarke seemed to sum it up best when he said that while this is most certainly a challenging time, it presents an opportunity for superintendents to experiment with some of their practices, particularly those superintendents who have been utilizing best management practices for the past several years. As the researchers noted, oftentimes, experimenting when there is low or no play simply involves forgoing, cutting back, or extending intervals on certain maintenance practices or pesticide applications.

According to our surveys, and as Dave Oatis mentioned in his recent MGA webinar, bunker maintenance is by far the number one area that superintendents targeted for maintenance reductions. Some of the other areas that have moved lower on the priority list are ornamental plantings, string trimming, divot repair, and intermediate rough.

"The intermediate rough," Dave notes, "was the product of championship golf conditions where primary rough is maintained at three inches or higher. Since most courses maintain primary rough at 2 or 2 ½ inches, the intermediate rough is a waste of time and resources."

In addition to finding ways to modify

maintenance practices, the pandemic has forced many to consider which practices can be eliminated—forever. In mid-May, USGA Agronomist John Daniels wrote an article titled "Nine Golf Course Practices I Hope Don't Come Back." Many of the practices he'd like to see nixed were listed earlier, but he also offers a few new ones, including creating uniformly emerald green turf, elaborate mowing patterns, unnatural "naturalized" areas, walk mowing greens exclusively, painting the hole, and providing bunker rakes and ball washers.

Dave Oatis points to another practice that should be considered a valuable labor-saving measure: triplex mowing. "Courses are switching exclusively, or at least on a limited basis, to triplex mowing on greens and approaches. New mower technology has improved," says Dave, "and careful use of triplexes can produce an excellent quality of cut at courses with green complexes that are suited to their use."

Mike Brunelle is one superintendent whose labor-saving measures have included triplexing greens, now 90 percent of the time. In addition, he is rolling greens more often and skipping mowings. He has also moved from walk mowing tees to triplexing them as well.

"It has worked out very well for us," says Mike. "I was moving in that direction to begin with, and the pandemic has just accelerated my progress. Being 27 holes, the biggest savior is that we have delayed the start time on one of the nines until 10 a.m. each day; otherwise there is no way I could keep up with the maintenance given the amount of play we are getting."

about my staff's wellbeing—other than training them in the proper use and handling of equipment and chemicals—would be part of my duties. Social distancing? Disinfecting common areas and equipment? That wasn't in any turf school textbook! But true to the profession, we're all learning and adapting, and we're making the best of it."

The lesson here is that no matter the quality of your education, it's rare to emerge from school with all the tools to handle every situation, particularly the unforeseen ones. But during times of crisis, it's our opportunity to rise to the challenge by turning to whatever resources we might have—mentors, other superintendents, or industry professionals. It's also essential to prepare yourself for future crises by committing to work on your own personal and professional development.

### Where Do We Go From Here?

Jamie Diamond, CEO of JPMorgan Chase & Co., while speaking about the world economy, said: "The word unprecedented is rarely used properly. This time, it's being used properly. It's unprecedented what's going on around the world. We simply don't know [what's going to happen]."

This uncertainty about what's next is as true for golf courses as it is for the world economy. But while we can't know for certain what's ahead, the current crisis can help us make a few educated guesses:

1. Golf courses are and will continue to be valuable assets (see sidebar, page 4) that must be maintained. They provide a significant economic impact, generating property and sales tax revenue, employment opportunities, and support to many local businesses—not to mention the mental and physical health benefits enjoyed by those who love the game.

2. Staffing, budgets, and maintenance levels may fluctuate depending on changes in state directives. The more restrictive they

are, the more they will affect the profitability of the golf course, food and beverage operations, and other club amenities. As a result, finding and retaining dependable, quality employees may prove more challenging—and essential—than it already is.

3. The surge in the number of people playing golf, or at least playing more frequently, will continue and perhaps even inspire more people to take up the game, something the industry has not seen in some time. In any case, increased play will force courses to review their maintenance programs. Clearly, increased traffic will require increased maintenance—and budgets.

4. Course accessories will become a thing of the past, and bunkers will not need to be maintained to the level of a lie in the fairway. This is a direction we, as an industry, will have to travel together to make it happen.

5. The need to foster and build our government relations at all levels, in good times and bad, will be more important than ever. The Met area has handled the business of golf

during the pandemic admirably, which is something we can communicate to government officials, making them aware of the lessons we have learned and how we are better equipped to manage another crisis should (or should we say *when*) one hits. Speaking of which, it pays to be prepared for whatever might come your way by regularly asking yourself the question, "What if?" and then creating a viable plan of action. What if there's a drought? ... a heavy rainfall season? ... a recession? ... a health emergency? ... and the list goes on.

The writer William Arthur Ward could well have been speaking of golf course superintendents when he said, "The pessimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails." Superintendents are realists. In the face of adversity, they maintain an even keel and adjust the sails accordingly. They have done this during this unprecedented crisis, and I am confident they will continue to do this in the years—and during the challenges—to come.

*Mike McCall, CGCS, is the executive director of the MetGCSA and managing member of the McCall Management Group, LLC.*

## Support Them as They Have Supported Us!

Just as clubs have been affected by the pandemic, so has our association. Unfortunately, we have had to cancel many of our golf and social events this year.

The Board of Directors and I would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the sponsors who continued their support for the association throughout the pandemic. I ask and encourage superintendent members to make every effort to purchase needed products or services from our sponsors so that they may receive a return on their investment for sticking with our association during these challenging times.

We would also like to thank the clubs that donated a round for our "Foursomes 4 the Foundation" initiative that supports our scholarship fund and annual donations to regional universities and the Tri-State Turf Research Foundation.

# Winged Foot Remains on Course for September 2020 U.S. Open

by Chip Lafferty

Well before the Covid crisis was even a notion, Winged Foot's Director of Golf Courses Stephen Rabideau and his crew were hard at work doing all that it takes to bring the nearly century-year-old Winged Foot up to snuff for the 2020 U.S. Open.

When Stephen assumed the reins as Winged Foot's superintendent in 2012, the club had completed a new practice facility project with Golf Course Architect Gil Hanse, who at the same time, was developing a 36-hole Master Restoration Plan. Designed to reclaim the course's lost contours and strategy, the plan took into consideration the membership's reluctance to disturb the greens that they insisted are what makes Winged Foot, Winged Foot. Working closely together, Hanse and Stephen executed the plan—all without changing a putt on the storied property.

By looking at old aerials and ground-level stills, Hanse was able to identify where the greens could be expanded to their original size while, at the same time, giving the existing bunkers old-time edges of stacked sod.

Work began in the fall of 2013 on the East Course, with the greens completed over two seasons. The first step was to scan the greens. Then using a process known as strip and flip, the existing sod was stripped and carefully placed alongside the green to be reused. The subbase was shelled out, drainage was added, a sand mix was installed, and the green pads were then enlarged using the old photos to recapture their original size. The greens were then scanned again, and that second scan, along with a surveying instrument called a Total Robotic Station, was used to rebuild the greens making sure their original contours weren't compromised. The Total Robotic Station allowed them to get within .006 of a surveying foot.

The membership, which held their original greens near and dear, was thoroughly impressed with how closely the rebuilt greens resembled the originals, though they performed far better with the new-and-improved uniform draining mix underneath.



*Winged Foot Turf Team readies for U.S. Open prep.*

The renovation work on the East was met with such success that the club decided to replicate the process on the West Course, this time with a bit of a twist. Stephen took the process one step further by varying the depth of the sand mix to allow better moisture management throughout each green.

Basically, more mix was used in the green's flat areas to help cupping areas dry out and improve the green's playability after rain events. And at the same time, less mix was added on the slopes to keep moisture closer to the surface and reduce the need for hand watering on those sloped areas. The product that they have produced will, no doubt, serve as a benchmark for future course construction in the Met.

In addition to rebuilding the greens, the club also added drainage where needed throughout the entire property, removed a significant number of trees to improve challenging growing environments, and sought additional water sources for irrigation to reduce reliance on city resources.

Beyond enhancing the playability of the

greens, the club invested in building an all-new state-of-the-art maintenance facility, the command center for keeping the course in top form. The club also built new employee housing in 2013 to provide pleasant accommodations for the club's key maintenance and other staff, recognizing its role in attracting and retaining quality employees before—and after—preparations for the 2020 Open.

## At the Dawn of the Virus

When news of the coronavirus's emergence in Wuhan, China, and throughout Europe first became public, the Open tournament preparations were underway and continued with the many infrastructure enhancements required to run this world-renowned event. While in the midst of getting ready to erect a structure in the middle of the East Course that was intended to be outfitted with a corporate kitchen, running water, electric, internet, and more, the U.S. and most of the world was placed on pause. It became abun-



*Winged Foot crew members ensure green's performance with rolling and moisture meter check.*

dantly clear that the world was embroiled in a full-blown pandemic, of which the New York Metro area was becoming the epicenter. The frenzy of activity that was taking place to prep the West Course for the original mid-June Open dates came to an almost screeching halt, as the golf world reconsidered how to handle every aspect of the event.

“We were going at full tilt with preparations in March, and then the week of St. Patrick’s Day, everything just stopped,” recalls Stephen. “At that point, it was unclear when or even if the championship could take place this year, let alone in June.

It was a surreal experience for my guys,” adds Stephen, noting that after the tireless hours of work that went into prepping the course and grounds for one of the largest events they will ever be a part of, it was difficult to accept that the championship might not happen.

“Maintaining crew morale was right up there with the agronomic concerns,” says Stephen. But thankfully when golf course maintenance workers were deemed essential, Stephen was able to rally his troops to continue plugging away at course maintenance with the hope that the championship would, in fact, go off.

“Fortunately,” says Stephen, “we had not progressed to the point of putting in the corporate hospitality tents or grandstands. If they sat in place for four months, that would have wreaked havoc on the turf.” As it is, matting for a staging area had been installed, and as Stephen notes, “The grass under those mats is most definitely dead.”

In addition to worrying about course maintenance, Stephen had to enforce state restrictions, requiring that the crew divide

and conquer with staggered start times; remain six feet apart from one another; sterilize work areas, equipment, and bathrooms on a regular basis; and follow all CDC guidelines.

When regular member play was allowed by the state, the club adhered to all state guidelines: no carts, caddies, bunker rakes, or course accessories like ball washers, water-coolers, and benches, and we all had to put foam plug inserts in the cups. “The restrictions on play actually worked in our favor,” says Stephen, noting that the no-cart rule helped preserve the turf, and removing accessories meant less time devoted to maintaining them.

### Preparations Change Course

Stephen admits it was a tremendous relief when the powers that be—the USGA, PGA Tour, and CDC, in conjunction with Winged Foot members—decided in early April that it would be safe to schedule the Open for mid-September.

Though Stephen and his staff were pleased that all their hard work would not go to waste, they’ve been faced with a new set of challenges. Hosting a U.S. Open in September rather than June means not only continuing to maintain the course in top form for both golfers and the upcoming Open, but also remaining especially vigilant for the onset of turfgrass pests and problems. “In June,” says Stephen, “the rough is at its prime, and few plant protectants are needed to keep it lush and competitive.”

As the summer progressed, however, Stephen has had to initiate an aggressive spray program to treat the course’s 70 acres of rough on a 10-day rotation to guard

against everything from summer patch and pythium to grey leaf spot and any other turfgrass ill that surfaces during the heat of the summer.

“The spray program along with diligent watering has allowed us to keep the rough extremely dense,” says Stephen, adding, “We are currently mowing the rough at 3 inches and the USGA plans on adding another 1 to 2 inches for the championship.”

During the first week of August, Stephen and his crew implemented a method for battling divots in the fairways by roping the hot spot areas and having players hit off mats.

Despite having the burden of added maintenance required for a September Open, there is a silver lining to postponing the event: “We think literally years ahead about what the weather will be the week of the event, hoping conditions will be perfect from a rain standpoint. This year, conditions haven’t been ideal,” says Stephen. “It’s been too dry, and we would have had to contend with serious damage from the crowds and rigors of the event.”

Golfers are also benefitting from a delayed U.S. Open since they have been able to play both the East and West courses all spring. This, of course, would not have been the case had the event taken place on the original dates in June. What’s more, the East Course is playable not just before the Open, but also immediately after since the course won’t be trampled by patrons and subject to the typical damage associated with tents, parking areas, and buses.

### Shifting Expectations

Another important part of the preparations for the Open includes planning for volunteer recruits, which the pandemic has complicated. Under normal circumstances, making plans to house, feed, and look after as many as 120 volunteers is challenging, but now, with Covid-19 lurking, extra precautions have to be taken. First and foremost, Winged Foot is forced to cut back on out-of-area or international volunteer recruits to avoid the potential spread of the virus. That has meant a reduction in the

## Upcoming Events

### MetGCSA's Upcoming Golf and Educational Events

*The MetGCSA and New Jersey Turfgrass Association have scheduled the following events with the hope that they will run as planned. With the pandemic still raising concerns, however, we suggest that you watch our association websites for any changes in schedule.*

number of volunteers from out of the area, so Stephen is focusing on local clubs to field a volunteer staff of about 70.

Just recently, the USGA announced that there will be no fans at the U.S. Open this fall at Winged Foot, which is in line with all of the other sporting events and the PGA Tour. This is yet another letdown for Stephen and his crew who have worked so hard for so many years to prepare the West Course with the promise of showcasing it to not just the 100 million fans who watch worldwide, but also to the diehard golf fans who are normally able to walk the hallowed grounds of Winged Foot.

No matter what the circumstances, Stephen credits his staff with pulling them through. "All the men are quality guys and bring something different to the table," says Stephen. "But Wes Neff and JR LaPan are veterans who have been with me for years—tolling through all the prep work for the Open from the start!"

### Looking Ahead to September

From all accounts, Stephen and his staff are in high spirits and ready for whatever comes their way in the final month leading up to this fast-approaching event. As he so aptly said in his interview with NBC's Golf Central, "Superintendents are used to juggling and switching things up based on whatever happens or whatever Mother Nature deals us. We are great adapters."

At this writing, the golf course is in top form, such top form, in fact, that the USGA has noted it could come into Winged Foot with two weeks' notice and be able to have an Open. A vote of confidence from an organization with extremely high standards!

So get ready to hunker down at the TV to watch this year's Open because it's going to happen, spectators or not!

*Chip Lafferty, co-chair of the Tee to Green Editorial Committee, is superintendent at Rye Golf Club in Rye, NY.*

#### Invitational Tournament

Tuesday, September 29  
Hudson National Golf Club  
Croton-on-Hudson, NY  
Host: Brett Scales

#### Met Area Team Championship

We regret to announce there will be no championship this fall due to the pandemic. We hope things will be back to normal for our event in 2021.

#### Assistants Championship

Wednesday, October 28  
Essex Fells Country Club  
Essex Fells, NJ  
Assistant Hosts: Chris Marr and Darwin Guerra  
Superintendent: Mark Miedler

#### MetGCSA/CAGCS Fall Seminar

Thursday, November 12  
The Patterson Club  
Fairfield, CT  
Host: Jason Meersman

#### MetGCSA Winter Seminar

Wednesday, January 13, 2021  
Westchester Country Club  
Rye, NY  
Host: David Dudones

#### Industry Events

#### 2020 Rutgers Turfgrass Research Golf Classic

Monday, October 5  
Fiddler's Elbow Country Club  
Bedminster, NJ

Join fellow industry professionals for a day of golf, education, networking, and fun. Your participation helps fund research grants, student scholarships, equipment, and special projects for the Turfgrass Research, Teaching, and Extension programs at the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences/Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

For further information, call 973-812-6467 or visit [www.njturfgrass.org](http://www.njturfgrass.org).

#### Rutgers Turfgrass Research VIRTUAL Field Day

Free Turf Videos Online Available Starting  
Wednesday, October 7

Due to the pandemic, the NJTA Board of Directors and the Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science have made the difficult decision to cancel the in-person 2020 Rutgers Turfgrass Research Field Day. It will now be presented as a series of videos highlighting cutting-edge research showcasing new advances in turfgrass breeding, management, physiology, and pest control.

These free videos will be posted on the NJTA ([www.njturfgrass.org](http://www.njturfgrass.org)) and Rutgers Center for Turfgrass Science ([www.turf.rutgers.edu](http://www.turf.rutgers.edu)) websites. You can view them anytime starting October 7.

Visit [www.njturfgrass.org](http://www.njturfgrass.org) or call 973-812-6467 for further information.

## Member News

#### Well Wishes

Wishing Centennial Golf Club Superintendent **Glen Dube** all the best on his road to recovery.

#### Condolences

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the passing of **Bob Phipps** on June 2.

Bob was a long-tenured MetGCSA

member, joining the association 44 years ago in 1976. He was Shorehaven's golf course superintendent from 1972 to 1994 when he retired after suffering a stroke. Showing Bob their appreciation for his 22 years of service, the shareholders of Shorehaven elected Bob an Honorary member on his retirement.

We would like to extend our sincere condolences to Bob's family.

# Financial Planning Do's and Don'ts

*Tips and Techniques for Maximizing Your Investment Returns Through Even the Worst of Times*

by Josh Weinerman and Northwestern Mutual

Managing your finances and working as a golf course superintendent can be surprisingly similar. Both areas deal in unpredictable environments with many variables that are out of your control and can change day to day. Both require you to be adaptable, using the lessons of the past to help you plan and execute for the future. In the golf world, weather, disease, pests, and regulations represent just a few of the many moving pieces that challenge a golf course superintendent daily. Navigating your own personal financial and retirement planning, particularly during these uncertain times, can be equally daunting. With that in mind, here are a few tips and techniques to help you sidestep costly investment mistakes and approach your financial planning with greater confidence.

## Five Tips to Help Minimize Emotion and Maximize Your Investment Returns

Do stock market moves keep you up at night? If so, you're not alone. Weathering market moves isn't easy, but successful investors know that a little patience can yield sizeable rewards. Maintaining emotional composure when it comes to your hard-earned money is often easier said than done. To help keep your emotions in check during these uncertain markets, consider the following five tips:

**1. Take advantage of market opportunities.** Stock prices fluctuate for various reasons. While past performance is not indicative of future performance, historically stocks have rebounded from setbacks. In fact, during market lows, you may have the opportunity to add to your portfolio with quality investments at attractive prices.

**2. Don't try to time the market.** For investors, trying to outguess the market is not only a stressful strategy, but it can also be an expensive one. By moving your portfolio to the sidelines, you might miss a market downturn, but you could also miss a rally. That's because most of the market's gains are



often clustered into very short time periods. To benefit from the market's long-term performance, you need to make a plan and stick with it through market ups and downs. Please remember that no investment strategy can guarantee a profit or protect against a loss.

**3. Don't lose sight of your goals.** Some investors believe they can soften the effects of a market decline by selling off their stocks and buying more conservative investments. This could prove a mistake, especially if you're investing for long-term financial goals like retirement. While stock market volatility can be unnerving, stocks historically have outperformed other major asset classes. Of course, past performance does not guarantee future results, and while stocks may have outperformed other asset classes, they also may be more volatile. Investors should carefully consider their goals and risk tolerance when selecting investments.

**4. Maintain your mix.** During difficult markets, it is inevitable that some of your investments will perform better than oth-

ers, shifting your portfolio from its original target allocation. That's why it's important to review your portfolio periodically and rebalance your holdings as needed to bring your asset allocation back in line with your goals, risk tolerance, and timeframe.

**5. When in doubt, seek the help of a professional.** A successful long-term investment strategy evolves as your needs and goals change over time. If you are short on time or lack the patience to delve into the "science" of investing and managing your money, you might consider consulting with a financial professional. An experienced financial advisor can help you take an objective, unemotional approach to investing and keep your overall performance and goals in sight, even in the face of fluctuating markets.

While there's no guaranteed formula for investing success, maintaining a sense of calm by focusing on your long-term goals versus minute-to-minute returns may help you sleep better at night—leading to better decision making in the long run.

# *Taking money from your retirement account is like borrowing from your future needs to pay for your present wants.*

## **Five Financial Planning Mistakes to Avoid**

We all have goals and dreams for the future. Whether you want to buy your first home or are planning to open your own business, money is probably one of your primary considerations. This is just one reason why you need to create and maintain a strong, yet flexible, financial plan. Your plan is a tool that helps you get from where you are now to where you want to be in the future. Plan to confidently achieve your goals by avoiding these five financial mistakes:

**1. Failing to budget.** Thinking that you have “enough,” or knowing you don’t, isn’t reason for not maintaining a budget. There are many online tools that make knowing what’s coming in and what’s going out easy and efficient. After budgeting for a few months, you may be surprised to learn how much you spend on your cable bill, lattes, and eating out. By maintaining a budget and making necessary changes, you may be able to sock away more for your financial goals.

If that’s not reason enough, job layoffs or other sudden expenses can happen when you least expect it. Maintaining and reviewing your budget can help ensure you set aside extra cash in the event of financial strain. The rule of thumb is to have three to six months of living expenses saved.

**2. Delaying Saving for Retirement.** Patience is not a virtue when it comes to starting your retirement savings. As quickly as you’re eligible, be sure to take advantage of any retirement plan offered by your employer, and contribute at least enough to earn the maximum match (if one is offered). The younger you are when you start, the more time your money will have to multiply.

If you’re self-employed or your company doesn’t offer a 401(k), make sure you’re still

saving for retirement by setting up an Individual Retirement Account (IRA). You won’t receive a matching contribution, but you’ll still enjoy tax benefits and possibly greater flexibility than the 401(k).

**3. Tapping your retirement savings for nonemergency needs.** Taking money from your retirement account is like borrowing from your future needs to pay for your present wants. Before the age of 59½, withdrawals from these accounts often have stiff penalties and tax costs. It’s best to avoid using these funds. Unfortunately, no matter how careful you are with your finances, job layoffs, hospital visits, and home repairs can happen when you least expect them. For those true emergencies, it’s important to build a financial safety net with an emergency fund. As mentioned previously, it’s a good idea to keep three to six months of living expenses in an emergency account to avoid tapping into your retirement savings.

**4. Not being properly insured.** What would happen to your income, assets, and loved ones in the event of disability or death? To protect yourself and your loved ones, it’s essential to make sure you’re insured against possible financial losses.

In addition to must-have health insurance coverage, there are three primary types of insurance you might want to consider: disability, life, and long-term care. Although you may not think you need insurance when you’re young and single, your age and likely good health may make it the best time to buy. If your debt is under control, and your emergency fund is established, it’s wise to investigate the pros and cons of these types of insurance offerings sooner rather than later.

**5. “Setting and forgetting” investments.** It’s important to take time to periodically review your investments for a few reasons. One, your risk tolerance for invest-

ments changes over your lifetime, usually being greater when you’re younger and smaller when you’re older. Two, as you advance in life, your goals, investments, and insurance needs should be updated to reflect changes such as raises, new jobs, moves, and new family members. To make sure you’re maximizing your earning potential and that your investments are accurately reflecting your goals and risk tolerance, be sure to review your portfolio before one of these milestones or at least annually.

## **End Note**

Financial planning is no easy task. So if your talents and interests lie elsewhere, keep in mind it’s never too late—or too early—to seek the counsel of a financial professional whose job it is to stay abreast of the investment world. With the proper guidance, you will be able to welcome the future with greater ease and far more confidence.

*This article was prepared by Northwestern Mutual with the cooperation of Josh Weinerman. Northwestern Mutual is the marketing name for The Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company (NM) (life and disability insurance, annuities, and life insurance with long-term care benefits), Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and its subsidiaries. Securities are offered through Northwestern Mutual Investment Services, LLC (NMIS), a subsidiary of NM, broker-dealer, registered investment adviser, member of FINRA and SIPC.*

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