

New York Chapter

**GCSAA**

Golf Course Superintendents Association of America

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 1

# READING THE GREEN

WINTER 2023 EDITION

**THIS ISSUE INCLUDES:**

**MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD**

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

**COMMUNICATING OUT OF A  
QUANDARY- MIKE TOLLNER**

**BROTHERLY LOVE - DREW &  
THAD THOMPSON**

**LEADING WITH AGRONOMY-  
JOSH HENRY PH. D  
HELENA- AGRI**





Steve Kurta - President  
Tuscarora Golf Club  
2901 Howlett Hill Road  
Marcellus, NY 13108  
greensforged@gmail.com  
315-604-6298



Joe Lucas- Vice President  
Saratoga National Golf Club  
458 Union Avenue  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866  
jlucas@golfsaratoga.com  
518-583-2109



Nevin Hess- Treasurer  
Midvale Country Club  
2387 Baird Road  
Rochester, NY 14526  
nhess19@yahoo.com  
570-441-6962



Andy Eick- Director  
Mohawk Golf Club  
1849 Union Street  
Schenectady, NY 12309  
aeick@mohawkgolfclub.com  
774-210-0455



Matt Simon- Secretary  
Thendara Golf Course  
151 5th Street  
Thendara, NY 13472  
mattsimongcs@gmail.com  
207-595-0330



Scott Dodson, CGCS- Director  
Park Country Club  
4949 Sheridan Drive  
Williamsville, NY 14221  
scott@parkclub.org  
716-818-1126



Chris Richter- Director  
Wildwood Country Club  
1201 Rush West Rush Rd  
Rush, NY 14543  
crichter@golfwildwood.com  
585-208-6577



Michael Tollner- Director  
Bellevue Country Club  
1901 Glenwood Ave  
Syracuse, NY 13207  
mike@bellvuecountryclub.com  
315-475-1272



John Hoyle- Director  
Corning Country Club  
2501 Country Club Drive  
Corning, NY 14830  
john@corningcountryclub.com  
614-679-6133



Adam Mis - Director  
Transit Valley Country Club  
8920 Transit Road  
East Amherst, NY 14051  
amis@transitvalley.com  
716-480-3685



Rick Holfoth- Special Director- Past President  
Country Club of Rochester  
2935 East Avenue  
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716-512-4711  
jbaldwin@andreandson.com

DAN STANKIEWICZ - SOUTHERN TIER NY  
607-765-0997  
dstankiewicz@andreandson.com





# ***MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD***

**President- Steve Kurta,  
Tuscarora Golf Club**



## **Waiting on Winter**

**This winter season has allowed me to travel across our region starting in Buffalo for our annual meeting at Buffalo Riverworks where we hosted Drs McGraw and Kaminski with a great round table talk on winter injury moderated by Andy Eick and Mike Tollner. Last week I was able to visit Matt Simon at Thendara in Old Forge and although there was more snow than Syracuse, it was more by inches than feet. Besides our western region getting a couple of jaw dropping blizzard events that quickly melted off, temperatures have been middling around freezing with nothing abrupt to report. (knocks wood) Let's hope we sustain that with just a little more snow ahead of the Nor'Easter ski day on March 2nd at Killington Resort in Vermont.**

**The Golf Industry Show kicks off next week and for many of us it'll be the first show that's been attended since the pandemic. As our club decided to build a new facility this winter, I'll be especially interested in trade show offerings as they relate to the fit and finish of (new) maintenance departments. I hope to see many of our members there and meet up with other state and regional associations at the Nor'Easter event that the GCSANY will be co-sponsoring. It's the first time we've taken part in this event, and we hope to be a part of it for years to come. Hope to see you there.**

**Steve Kurta,  
President, GCSANY**



## **Exciting opportunity for the GCSANY membership**

The board of directors is offering current members the opportunity to send any member of their facility to the Great Lakes School of Turfgrass Science. This a great chance to build upon your, or your staffs current knowledge as a golfcourse manager.

The Great Lakes School of Turfgrass Science  
<https://www.mgcsa.org/resources/Documents/web%20insertGLTS%20Flyer%202021%20Cool-Season%20Golf.pdf>

is a 12 week online program that will make any turf manager better at their job. Use this offer to improve your skillset and add value to your professional credentials as well as become a greater asset to your employer.

With the current labor market it's getting harder to find qualified individuals to fill the rolls available on our crews. Giving that dedicated employee a shot at an education in turfgrass science while being able to promote from within is good for everyone in your organization. Empowering our members and affiliates to be the best they can be is part of our mission at the GCSANY and we feel this opportunity is consistent with that goal.

The GCSANY has committed the monetary resources to send up to 10 individuals, current members, or a sponsored member to attend the program. First come will be first served with this offer. You'll receive a fantastic education from some of the brightest minds in the business and all from the comfort of your own home.

If you have any questions about this program please contact Suzanne Mis or any other board member with the GCSANY.

Board of Directors  
GCSANY





**New York Chapter**

**GCSAA**

Golf Course Superintendents Association of America

**Contact Information:**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organization** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email** \_\_\_\_\_

**Applications and supporting documentation must be mailed to:**

**GCSA of NY**

**P.O. Box 295**

**North Tonawanda, NY 14120**

**Or email to [gcsaofny@gmail.com](mailto:gcsaofny@gmail.com)**



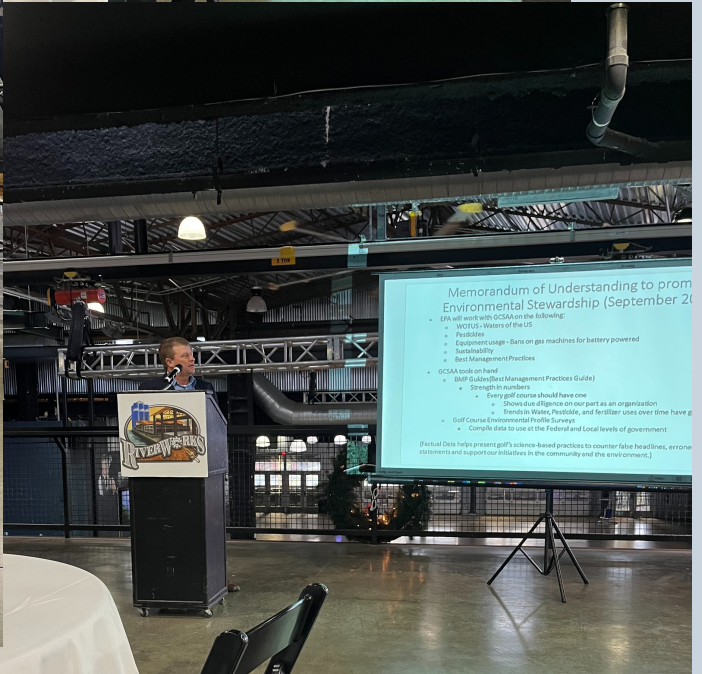
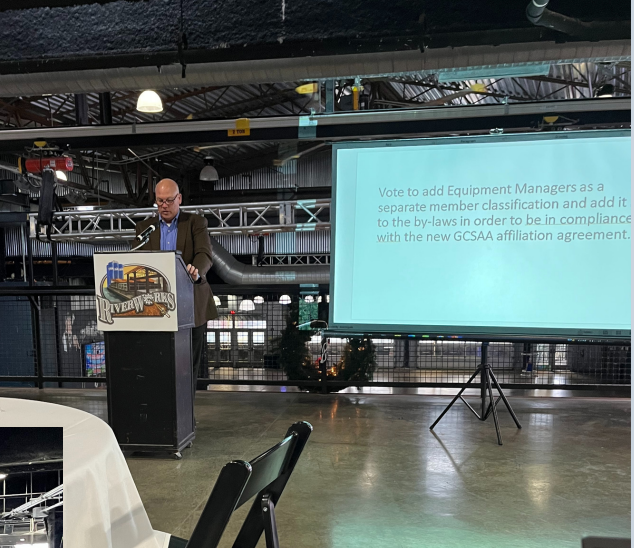


# *Annual Meeting & Education Day*

Thank you to everyone that contributed to making this event a success. Special thank you to Dr.'s Ben McGraw and John Kaminski for speaking about important topics, Eric Westervelt for a GCSAA update, Mike Tollner and Andy Eick for the roundtable discussion about 2022 and the new GCSA of NY Board of Directors. We hope everyone enjoyed the venue, food, education and association update.











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# **Chapter Administrator Update**

**SUZANNE MIS**

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I hope everyone has had a joyful and safe holiday season. 2022 ended with a bang or should I say blizzard! Where I live, in Western New York, our holiday season was interrupted by a snowstorm that kept people banished in their homes and spending Christmas shoveling drifts of snow so they could get out of their homes. I pray for the families that lost loved ones as a result and I hope all our members, friends and family are well.

I have started looking forward to planning the events for 2023.

The season will begin with the GCSAA National Conference in Orlando, Florida. Our association has joined with the MET, GCSA of New England, CAGCS, LIGCSA and several other associations for the Nor'Easter night on Wednesday February 8th from 7-10pm at the Blue Martini Lounge, which is on International Drive and within a short walk from the convention center. This event will include a call brand open bar, passed appetizers and food stations. It will be open to all GCSA of NY members for free. It gives you the opportunity to meet up with other superintendents in the area. Please consider attending this event while in Orlando.

Dr. Frank Rossi has so kindly offered to grace us with his wisdom with the Walk and Talk events again this year. They have been very popular and seem to work well with our members busy schedules. We plan on spreading the venues out, so hopefully everyone will have a chance to experience at least one. We also hope to add a shop tour and/or social golf event to a few of the dates scheduled. I will try to get the dates and venues published as soon as I can work out the details with all involved.

The POA event will take place at Turning Stone Resort & Casino on Tuesday August 29th. We had a terrific turnout despite the heavy rain last year. The tournament committee is working on the details, and we will get it out to you as soon as we can. Save the date for another fun golf tournament.

As you can see the association has been busy getting started on the upcoming events, because we know spring will be here soon. Enjoy the winter and I hope to see some of you in Orlando.



JOIN US FOR THE  
**2023 NOR'EASTER  
SOCIAL EVENT**

**Date:** Wednesday, February 8th 2023

**Time:** 7 pm - 10 pm

**Location:**



9101 International Drive Suite 1182, Orlando, FL 32819

**PARTICIPATING ASSOCIATIONS**

**MET GCSA - GCSA OF CAPE COD - GCSA OF NEW ENGLAND  
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GCSA OF NEW YORK - NORTHEASTERN GCSA**



2023

# **Walk and Talk events with Dr. Frank Rossi**



**Yahnundasis Golf Club-March**

**En-Joie Golf Club-May**

**East Aurora Country Club-May**

**Corning Country Club-July**

**Mohawk Golf Club-tbd**

**Tuscarora Golf Club-Sept/Oct**



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imacarthur@grasslandcorp.com  
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**Chris Pogge - Sales Rep. (Hudson)**  
cpogge@grasslandcorp.com  
518-857-0197 (cell)

**Jeff Joedicke - Irrigation Manager (Eastern NY & VT)**  
jjoedicke@grasslandcorp.com  
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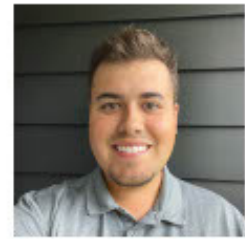


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# Leading with Agronomy

Josh Henry, PhD  
Specialty Division Agronomist  
Helena Agri-Enterprises  
HenryJ@helenaagri.com  
(614) 345-8656



The concept of plant health monitoring with soil, tissue, and water sampling has been around for many years, but as an industry, we have had limited information on how best to sample or implement management decisions from the analysis results. Historically, soil samples have been taken randomly to account for variability, but in reality, this methodology results in fertilizer recommendations that do not truly represent the needs of the turf or soils. With recent advances in technology, the tools we have available as an industry have changed significantly. At Helena, we strive to improve agronomic practices with data-driven decisions using some of the most advanced technology available.

Advanced soil sampling can be achieved with soil mapping technology. One such technology uses non-invasive sensors to rapidly map out areas of similar soil properties to create management zones. These zones tend to have similar electrical conductivity (EC), cation exchange capacity (CEC), and pH. Soil samples can be taken from each zone, and geospatial software creates custom nutrient maps that account for spatial variability in soil properties. The results can then be used to make site-specific lime and fertilizer applications, and can even be used to make variable rate applications if the technology is available to you. This enables you to apply your nutrients where and when it is needed the most. This ultimately leads to increased nutrient use efficiencies and maximizes the return on investment for lime and nutrient inputs. At Helena, we offer Accupoint soil mapping and testing services.

Water analysis can be used to help determine any water treatments, buffering, or conditioning that should be done to improve spray efficacy. The main factors affecting water quality are pH, EC, hardness, carbonates, bicarbonates, iron, sodium, and solids such as clay particles. Each of these factors individually and in conjunction impact the efficacy of irrigation and spray water. If these factors are not within acceptable ranges, sprays can be rendered ineffective, and irrigation water can become detrimental to plant health. AquaLenz advanced spray water analysis can be used to identify potential limitations in your water and provide potential solutions.

Plant tissue analysis helps you monitor foliar nutrient levels throughout the season. As weather and other factors affect growth throughout the season, tissue samples can provide information as to what the plant needs nutritionally at any time. Monitoring trends in foliar nutrient values over time also allows helps you to make changes in your fertility program as needed. This enables the right fertilizers to be used in the right place at the right time. Another benefit of tissue testing is the ability to diagnose nutritional deficiencies, toxicities, or other imbalances as they are observed. Extractor tissue sampling enables you to track trends in your foliar nutrient concentrations over time to measure the effects of your fertility program.

Frequent and consistent scouting allows you to provide timely product and management recommendations, and ultimately leads to healthier, higher quality turf. Early detection of weeds, pests, diseases, and nutritional issues is essential for making rapid management decisions and controlling problems before they get out of hand. Drones offer the capability to make maps demonstrating plant health (NDVI and other indices), greenness, density, and weed coverage. A major benefit of drone-based remote sensing is that the sensors can detect things outside the realm of what is visible to the human eye. This allows us to detect limitations in turf health and quality before visual differences appear. With Preveal, you can achieve season-long monitoring with conventional and advanced scouting techniques.

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*Dr. Josh Henry is the Specialty Division Agronomist at Helena Agri-Enterprises. He holds degrees in horticultural and crop sciences with a focus on plant health management, mineral nutrition, and advanced sensors for plant health diagnostics.*



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# Communicating out of a quandary

Mike Tollner and his team used a variety of calculated words in many different methods to overcome the angst caused by historic winter damage.

The author and presidential speech writer James Humes once said, “The art of communication is the language of leadership.” I have found this to be an extremely accurate statement when it comes to communicating with the membership at our club, and never more so than during the early part of this season.

The year started with a unique set of challenges that I had never faced in my nearly – yes, it’s hard to believe the following number – 30-year career. Where the time goes is another story.

After seeing a big increase in the number of members at the club since 2020, I knew something needed to be done to have adequate practice facilities. A driving force behind this project was making sure we had enough space on the range tee to be able to grow healthy turf throughout the season. Our golf course architect, Ron Forse of Forse Design, was brought in during 2021 to update the club’s long-range master plan. In doing so, he also revised the design of the practice facilities. In today’s competitive golf market, having top-notch practice facilities is a way to attract members as well as to keep the ones you already have.

After reviewing the architect’s plans, I was approached by our general manager and club president and asked if this was something we could handle in-house. I knew this type of project would test my skillset, but I also knew that we had the knowledge and the talent on our staff to pull it off. There would also be certain aspects of it that we would need executed by outside contractors, such as laser grading and dozer work, to have it completed correctly. So, we set off in January and early February to create a new and exciting portion of the club that members could enjoy when they returned to the club in the spring.



*Bellevue Country Club unveiled a new range tee in 2022.*



In addition, the club wanted a better space to hold outdoor weddings, a big revenue source. Tacked onto the practice facility renovations was creating an outdoor event space within close proximity to the clubhouse with the ability to hold a 300-person wedding tent.

The winter portion of this project included bringing in fill and using a bulldozer to remove the old practice bunkers, leveling the area where the new, 19,000-square-foot range tee would be located, and begin the leveling and grading for the event space. Our existing driving range tee was significantly undersized by today's standards at 7,000 square feet, and the chipping area was in desperate need of a new practice bunker. The plans also called for moving the green to create a larger and safer chipping area.

Nobody could foresee what happened next: Mother Nature delivered a blow to many golf courses in the Northeast and Syracuse, New York, area that hadn't been experienced for many years. As winter began to fade, it quickly became evident that not only did we have about three acres of a muddy construction site to deal with, but we also had 13 greens with significant winter damage. Needless to say, this was not how myself or any of our members wanted the 2022 golf season to begin.

As time went on, the extent of the winter damage became clear, and I knew we would need to do significant amounts of seeding as well as re-sodding portions of greens to get them playable in the shortest amount of time possible. I also knew that we would need to begin the season with some greens completely closed and utilize temporary greens, and some greens with portions of the greens closed to play. If there was a silver lining to any of this, it was that our existing chipping green consisted of the exact same 100-plus-year-old perennial biotypes of *Poa annua* that the greens on the golf course have. Luckily, we were able to strip the entire green and use the sod to replace some of the worst damaged areas on the course.

Due to the severe extent of the winter damage, and the massive undertaking of the construction project, we needed to quickly create a clear line of communication between myself, our board of directors and the membership. This was critical so that every one of our members understood the seriousness of the damage on the greens and how I planned to return the greens to the condition that is expected at a high-end club. We also needed a timeline for the completion of the construction project.

We started by bringing in the USGA for a site visit. If you haven't used their Course Consultation Service, I can't recommend it enough. USGA Green Section agronomists are highly skilled professionals, just like we are as superintendents. Having them on site helps to bridge a gap between golfer and superintendent. There's something about that logo that makes people want to listen to what they have to say.





*Severe winter damage tested the fortitude of the Bellevue Country Club maintenance team in 2022*

Once we had the agronomist's detailed report, we shared it with our membership. It was posted on the club's website immediately, and emails were distributed so members would know how to access it. We then began a weekly "Q&A Series with the Superintendent," which consisted of a list of questions drafted by our club's vice president that I answered each week as thoroughly as possible. This format made for an easy way for our members to understand every step we were taking to return the greens to full health and how the construction work was progressing.

One of the early decisions the club made based on USGA recommendations was to keep the golf course closed until May 1. This decision wasn't an easy one and it was deliberated for some time. We have short enough golf seasons here in Central New York, so telling our members it might be even shorter this year was a tough pill for some to swallow. Questions like "When the course opens on May 1, will our greens be back to normal?" and "How has the weather impacted your recovery program?" were critical to answer as honestly as possible so people could understand that conditions would not be what they were accustomed to seeing in a normal spring. As time went on, we updated the membership when greens that had been closed were ready to be opened for play. We also sent a number of emails with photos attached to show the progress that was made week after week.

By using a combination of email blasts and our "member text" program, we provided a constant communication stream to the entire club on a consistent basis. We began using the member text program a few years ago and it has been a huge success for all aspects of the club. It's a very easy and effective way to communicate to any members who opt in to receiving the texts. We also use it to relay information about frost delays or



receiving the texts. We also use it to relay information about frost delays or the need to ground carts due to bad weather. Other departments also take advantage of this modern method of communication for such things as announcing gameday food and drink specials in our tavern or sales in the golf shop.

These many methods of communication enabled me to keep everyone at the club on the same page throughout a busy and difficult time. Not only did this help to inform our members of everything I've mentioned, but it also prevented rumors and falsehoods from being spread due to a lack of accurate information. Unfortunately, living in the information age also sometimes means we are living in the misinformation age, so I think it is critically important to make sure we as superintendents are getting the right messages out to our memberships at all times.

I'm happy to say all 18 greens reopened by Memorial Day weekend. Although some areas that had severe damage struggled a bit during the hot summer months, with the help of my fantastic staff and solid turf management practices, the greens returned to full health, and we provided great playing conditions for the majority of the season. We also finished the range tee and opened it in mid-May. The short-game facility was completed and opened about a month later. These renovations have been extremely well-received and appreciated by the entire membership, and the club can proudly say that we have some of the best practice facilities in Central New York.





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# Brotherly Love

Longtime Western New York turf pros Thad Thompson and Drew Thompson still talk almost every day.

About agronomy.

About management.

About life.

The second and third of four brothers, they were born just 15 months apart and have worked on golf courses for decades. Thad is the superintendent at Terry Hills Golf Course, a 27-hole public facility in Batavia, and Drew is the superintendent and general manager at East Aurora Country Club, an 18-hole private club about 35 miles southwest in East Aurora.

They love the Bills, the business and, if it isn't obvious throughout this story, each other.

**THAD:** You very much have to develop a thick skin in our family. When we were young, we shoveled the pond off so we could play hockey and we were one person short, so our mother came down in her figure skates, dropped the puck and Drew runs her. She took her skates off and went back home.

**DREW:** Not one of my finer moments.



Thad Thompson and Danielle Rotondo



**THAD:** How did we get into golf courses? We grew up at a horse farm summer camp. That's what we did every summer, all summer. I got to be 18 and played my first nine-hole round of golf the day I got out of high school. Kind of fell in love with it that year. That was '88. The next year, I went to the local course, Turkey Run in Arcade, and asked the guy, 'Do you need any help?' It was nine holes, him and one other guy. He said, 'I'll get a hold of you.' The guy's name was Chuck Mayer and we turned out to be great, great, great friends. I worked there for two or three years, and he finally said, 'Why don't you go to college for this?' I kind of chuckled and said, 'You can go to college for this? That's ridiculous.' And he said, 'No, really.'



Drew Thompson, Brendan Thompson and Sam

Chuck passed away of a massive heart attack on the seventh green at Turkey Run on the Sunday of Labor Day weekend my second year of college. That's really where Drew and my younger brother, Stacey, come into the story. Stacey was working for me. He was the first person I ever fired. Drew was selling golf clubs at the time.

**DREW:** Yep. I thought I was going to be a golf professional. Might be the dumbest idea I ever had in my life. It's your fault I'm in this business.

**THAD:** I knew very little at the time, but this was before you knew anything.

**DREW:** Once you get a taste of it, it's easy to fall into it.

**THAD:** It turns into a lifestyle.

**DREW:** Lot of late nights, we discussed my transition into the turf business over about, I don't know, maybe 500 beers. We were drinking Coors Lights at the time, probably. I didn't want to do it because I didn't want people to think I was just doing the same thing you were. I guess I finally said, 'Screw it, let's give it a shot. I don't have anything else going on at the time.' The golf shop I was working at was failing. I applied for a bunch of assistant golf pro jobs and I wasn't getting any looks because you have to know somebody. I was running out of cash.

**THAD:** Before I even went to turf school, we roomed together in college at Jamestown Community College. We went for one year.

**DREW:** I got a 1.92 GPA.

**THAD:** Let's just say we sowed some of our wild oats. What were we? 19 years old? Long time ago.

**DREW:** It was terrible. I went back for part of the next year and it wasn't the same. We lived off of ramen noodles and egg salad.

**THAD:** Lot of smokeless tobacco and beer.

**DREW:** Think we regripped our golf clubs in the bathroom numerous times. And occasionally we went to class.

**THAD:** I had decent grades there. We got a lot of street learning in those couple of years.

**DREW:** It was an entirely different education.

**THAD:** We realized there was something beyond the summer camp.

**DREW:** First time we had cable TV!

**THAD:** You dropped out of Jamestown Community College and afterward stopped in to see Chuck. Told him, 'I'm dropping out now, but I'll go back,' and Chuck told you, 'No, you won't.' That really annoyed you, but it also made you want to prove Chuck wrong.

**DREW:** If he hadn't keeled over, I probably wouldn't have gone back to college. But after he died, what are you going to do?

**THAD:** You made a promise to Chuck!

I have two pictures of Chuck in my office to this day. He was a very profound influence on my career and a lot of how I look at the world. I went to SUNY Delhi for turf and graduated with a



3.85 in 15 months. Did it in a semester and a half. And I put my final report card in Chuck's shirt pocket before they closed the casket.

THAD: I finally got comfortable about 10 years ago — and I had been here about 15 years. I knew every stop before this one wouldn't be my last job because they weren't paying me enough. I loved my last job — loved it — but there was no money. My president took the pro, the clubhouse manager and me out to play golf, June 1, and he looked at us on the first tee and said, 'You know I love you guys. Find a new job after the season because we can't afford to pay you.' That was the kick in the ass I needed to get me to look for a job, even though I knew I needed to do it maybe three years earlier.

DREW: I work in private golf. I never feel comfortable. I enjoy my job. I feel like they want me here, but it's a balancing act. With the regime changes, you never know. I've gone from one of the youngest guys in the area to one of the oldest.



THAD: I never once felt comfortable working in private golf. That's the biggest difference between working for an individual owner or a family and working for a membership. I really don't have to worry about who likes me. It used to be a tightrope. We sell golf, not the country club experience, which has its advantages. I was really good at politics, but so much pressure is off me because I don't have to deal with that anymore.

When it comes down to staying at one place our whole career, or finishing where we want to, we're like football coaches: that isn't up to us. At some point, somebody is probably going to kick one or both of us out. That's just the way this business works. Would I be bitter? Yeah, probably, but you have to be realistic. That's what happens. We see it happen with our friends, guys who have been somewhere 20 years, 30 years.

DREW: The nice thing I see about public golf is you're making decisions with people who work in the golf business. When you work in private golf, you have committees and boards that turn over every single year. Your board chair, your green chair is different every single year, and they don't work in the golf business. And the majority of them realize that.

**THAD:** And just when you get them educated, they leave the board.

**DREW:** I hope I can finish my career where I'm sitting right now. My members are the best of any private club in the country. They seem to respect my input, they have enough faith in me to oversee their finances and manage the club. We all know the golf business is a roller coaster. Would I ever work public? Maybe if I owned the place.

**THAD:** I wouldn't want to own the place. Not me.

**DREW:** Our homes are about an hour apart. You don't want to live too close to work and you don't want to live too close to family.

**THAD:** An hour's it. If we lived any closer, we would be in major trouble together all the time.



**DREW:** We never wanted to work together.

**THAD:** Absolutely not. Not now, not in the past and not in the future. You have two Type A personalities who have been beating the shit out of each other their entire lives, and that would continue if we worked together. Now we're good.

**DREW:** We both have very strong personalities and are both very committed to our ideas, especially when it comes to golf course maintenance. We'd end up killing each other.

**THAD:** I'd be your assistant.

**DREW:** You'd have to work for me. There's no way around it. I've answered to you for 50 years. It's time for you to take your turn!

**DREW:** This is a good business. It really is. If you're good at it and you can give the club value, private or public, it can be fun. Yeah, there's stress, but there's stress in management in any



business. So what? You might as well be outdoors doing it. I get tired of hearing superintendents saying it's a terrible business.

THAD: I remember getting a job and a salesperson telling me, 'Keep your head down.' This job was notorious for going through superintendents every year and that never phased me. No matter the reputation of a job, it's up to you to change it. When I left that job, it was a desirable job because of what we did for a decade out there. It isn't what the club offers. It's what you make of it.

DREW: And if you want to work for a top 100 or 200 course, yeah, there's going to be higher levels of stress and scrutiny. But there's a lot of golf in this country, and there are a lot of golf holes to be maintained, and there are a lot of really, really good clubs, private and public, you can get into where you can make a fine living without destroying your work-life balance. I used to be an all-in guy. Now, when someone says they need a day off, I say OK. Because you know they're going to take it anyway, whether you approve it or not.

THAD: I'm convinced the only way you can be successful in this business is to have a very, very strong network. You have to have your family behind you, and you have to be considerate of your family, too. Some of us learn that a little later in life, I guess.

DREW: Some of us also met our wives after we got into this business.

THAD: Some of them knew what they were getting into!

DREW: I went through the whole dating process while I was an assistant. She was aware of what I did.

THAD: You have to have people you can talk with about this business, because if you just try to keep it all inside yourself, that's not how it works. I'm fortunate I have an ownership here I can vent to sometimes, my friends in the business, my family. You can't do it all on your own.

THAD: I think we're proud of each other. He's come a long way, I've come a long way. We've gone from kids to men in what seems like a few years, but it's been 30-plus years of doing this. I think we still rely on each other. There are very few people in the world I trust.

DREW: Yeah.

Thad Thompson is the superintendent at Terry Hills Golf Course in Batavia, New York. Drew Thompson is the superintendent and general manager at East Aurora Country Club in East Aurora, New York.



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