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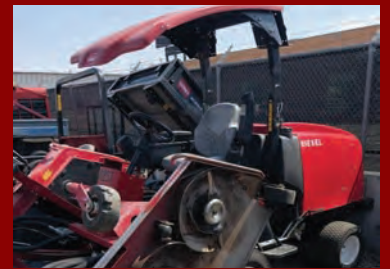
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What Will the Golf Course Industry Look Like in 2022?

by Linda Parker

When baseball legend Yogi Berra said, “The future ain’t what it used to be,” he wasn’t addressing the golf course industry. But Berra’s observation is a spot-on reflection of the state of golf as a business today. And for anyone connected to golf at any level, the news that the previously struggling golf industry re-energized and booming feels almost too good to be true. (Read: Welcome Home to the Golf Course)

CAN THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY EXHALE YET?

As the world first emerged from isolation and social distancing in 2020, quarantine-weary golfers found their way back to the golf course in near-record numbers. Despite new protocols for cart use, bunker rake, flag management and a host of other pandemic-related challenges, golf course operators, golf course superintendents, and hard-working course maintenance crews found ways to accommodate the welcomed surge of golfers. Until 2020, the golf industry, however, had experienced decades of course closings and dwindling rounds

of golf. With this memory still painfully fresh in the minds of many in the business, no one has been overly quick to declare that golf’s positive pandemic trends are the industry’s guaranteed new future.

The year ahead looks to be another strong year for golf, with the potential to sustain the levels of play reached in 2020 and surpassed at some venues in 2021. Golf course superintendents, however, won’t be taking anything for granted.

They are ordering ahead of schedule or buying locally in the face of the still unstable supply chain. They know that weather always brings risk, and that an inflationary economy is a potential ticking timebomb.

REALITY CHECK: THERE WILL ALWAYS BE GOLF COURSE CLOSINGS

Regardless of how much or for how long the game continues to enjoy its current resurgence, the truth is there will always be golf

course closings. Golf courses, like any other business type, can fail from bad management or poor decision making. Small and mid-size businesses of all types go under every day, and their collapse may have nothing to do with the pandemic or the demand for their service.

Another factor that contributes to a baseline number of golf course closings actually stems from positive circumstances for the course’s owners. Certain facilities, including many

that are well managed and successful, may simply afford the course’s ownership greater value and fewer headaches when sold as real estate. These golf courses are often built in

areas of high-density population where the land the course is built on becomes more valuable than the business it supports.

Nevertheless, the good news for the golf course industry is that golf course closings are

down significantly. Although the final numbers for 2021 were not available at the time this article went to print, the mid-year closings of 18-hole equivalent golf courses, reported by the National Golf Foundation, (NGF) were down 46 percent year-over-year from closings in 2020. While there were, as of July 2021, still 3,631 fewer courses operating in 2021 than in 2006, there were 2,025 more courses operating last July than there were in 1991, which indicates, the golf course industry might have been overbuilding for a number of years and is now simply finding its sweet spot.

GREENS FEES AND MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE LIKELY TO GO UP

Golf country club membership fees or the cost of a round of golf are likely to increase at many properties in 2022, if they haven’t already. Joe Beditz shared NGF data that more than one third of public golf courses increased their peak-season weekend green fees in 2021. The average amount of increase was 11 percent above the courses’ previous rates.

...the golf market is larger coming out of the pandemic than it was going in.

Inasmuch as no one is eager to greet the wave of new and returning golfers with price hikes, the cost of doing business may make this increase unavoidable. Projections regarding the Consumer Price Index for 2022 range from a 2 to a 6-plus percent increase, and many prognosticators feel these numbers are too conservative.

The need to increase membership fees at golf country clubs or daily fees at public play facilities in 2022 can also stem from decisions made in the past. Fearing they could drive their already dwindling business or membership away during the pre-pandemic years when rounds of golf were declining almost everywhere, many course managers avoided price increases they justifiably should have been making. Now, with rounds of golf increasing, these same decisionmakers have found that they cannot serve more golfers without also raising rates to cover their higher operational costs.

Consumers may be fighting their own battles with rising inflation, leaving course management hesitant to do anything that could potentially deter rejuvenated enthusiasm for the game. On the other hand, courses that don't raise fees could be forced to cut maintenance and labor costs. Golf course superintendents often already struggle to maintain optimal playing conditions in the face of inadequate budgets for chemicals, equipment and workforce, especially at small facilities.

THE BIGGER YOU ARE IN THE GOLF COURSE INDUSTRY, THE BRIGHTER THE FUTURE MAY SEEM

Last summer, CNBC TV interviewed Chip Brewer on "Closing Bell," a show devoted to day trading, money managers and investor news. Brewer has been President and CEO of Callaway Golf since 2012. Interviewer Morgan Brennan asked Brewer to go to his crystal ball and look at the near-

term future of the golf industry. Brewer spoke optimistically, pointing out that more people are joining golf courses, there are more new consumers and that Callaway as a company thought long-term trends would be attractive. One of his most profound takeaways was that the golf market is larger coming out of the pandemic than it was going in.

Brewer acknowledged that Callaway Golf Company benefits from multiple areas of business, including golf clubs, balls, and other equipment, sports apparel and the company's merger and exclusive ownership of sports entertainment giant, TopGolf. Describing a "shift in consumer spending from goods to services," Brewer identified the synergy of Callaway's distinctive business components by saying the elements of the business all work together. "We have the largest audience in golf now of any publicly-traded, available

competitor and the competitive advantage ... reaching all types of golfers from TopGolf golfers to people using a Toptracer Range to the company's legacy business in the golf equipment space.

"They all work together. And they also kind of support each other as TopGolf is going to be providing a great growth boost to the game in the future."

Big golf companies with a diversity of products and services to sell have every reason to approach 2022 with great enthusiasm. Equity markets have been strong. Even if the markets roller coaster in the short term, no one is predicting the kind of market plummet we saw between 2007 and 2009 in the Great Recession.

But the stock market and the economy don't move in tandem. While large organizations may continue to thrive, smaller businesses, golf country clubs and mom and pop golf courses or golf ranges may succeed, or they may struggle. Businesses

on the frontline of the economy, Main Street not Wall Street, will want to tread carefully as continuing inflation in the new year has the potential to impact both their cost of doing business and the discretionary spending of the market base on which they depend.

One big positive, however, prevails across the entire golf industry. The golf market is larger, with a higher percentage of new and returning golfers today than it has been in a long, long time. This fact alone justifies popping a champagne cork and celebrating a new year in which, thankfully, the future of golf "ain't" what it used to be."

Linda Parker has been writing professionally since the 1980s. With clients in finance, sports, technology, resorts and nonprofit global initiatives, Linda helps organizations communicate their stories in meaningful ways to the people they most want to reach. She has authored, ghostwritten or contributed to more than a dozen nonfiction books. Linda is a member of the Authors Guild and the Golf Writers Association of America. You can connect with her at linda@glindacreative.com

Big golf companies with a diversity of products and services to sell have every reason to approach 2022 with great enthusiasm



The Clubs of Kingwood, Marsh Course in Kingwood, TX
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Making the Rounds Part 17

by Jeff Shelley



This column features recollections of the author's 34 years as a golf writer. These installments stem from his many travels and experiences, which led to a gradual understanding that the game has many intriguing components, especially its people.

There's something gratifying about being invited to big parties. There's the impending excitement of meeting friends and forging new connections, all while schmoozing, dining, and drinking in the moment. For golf writers, such experiences are different in that you're often unknown to hosts who sense you might make their shindig a success.

Getting invited to various "parties" is one of the perks of being a working member of the golf media. Your reputation may stem from the attention you've previously brought to golf, and are being rewarded with a coveted press credential,

usually a badge attached to a lanyard.

As a semi-retiree, my felicitous days of being a hot invite are likely over. But I won't forget the experiences of being on someone's A-list. Over the years I've attended many "bashes," including tournaments large and small, grand openings of courses, and other events orbiting around the Royal & Ancient Game. Critics have called these "boondoggles." Smiling smugly, I respond, "Well someone has to do it."

Press passes provide a personal breadcrumb trail that helps re-trace former stops along my career path, such as the following.



In the mid-2000s, I – along with six other Seattle-area golf writers and reporters – was flown on a private plane to Coeur d'Alene Resort in

northern Idaho. The purpose was to play and write about the golf course (the one with the famous floating green), which had just completed a major remodel that, among other things, added 500 yards to its modest original length. Both the plane and resort were owned by Duane Hagedone, who passed way in April 2021 at the age of 88. Hagedone was a visionary who amassed a fortune in newspaper publishing and real-estate development. He astutely foresaw that a full-service resort – which debuted in 1991 on the northern shores of its eponymous lake – would draw folks to the Gem State's Panhandle.

Around 8:00 one morning, us ink-stained wretches met up

at Boeing Field just north of SeaTac Airport and boarded Hagedone's sleek jet. Less than an hour later (by car, the 312-mile trip takes six hours), we landed at the local airport and exited the craft in Hagedone's immaculately tended, personal hangar. Within minutes we were swept to the first tee, and along with forecaddies, played the revamped layout. After the round we received a fine lunch spread, info packets and speeches from executive staff. At 3:30 that afternoon we re-boarded the jet. I was back in my Seattle home at 5:00 p.m. Now that's the way to golf travel!



I covered the 2008 U.S. Open at Torrey Pines with fellow Cybergolf (and current Golf Course Trades) contributor, Jay Flemma. It was about an hour-plus-long bus ride (i.e., twice the duration of the Seattle-Coeur d'Alene flight) from our hotel to the remote course. But the trip went quickly as we chatted with writers from around the world, including two Golf Channel stalwarts, Jaime Diaz and Tim Rosaforte.

“Make way, make way,” and lifted the rope for me to walk into the lion's den.

The press center's scuttlebutt that year was Tiger Woods' damaged leg. Yet the ever-tight-lipped No. 1-ranked player in the world played it coy about any injury. (After completing four regulation rounds and 19 extra holes in defeating Rocco

Mediate to secure his 14th major title, Woods underwent knee surgery and missed the rest of that season.) This was a period when Woods and Phil Mickelson were at the height of their feud. Since the two were paired with Australia's Adam Scott on Friday, I ventured over to the driving range before their second round began to look for any signs of a gimpy Tiger.

When I arrived at the practice area it seemed like there were 15,000 people crammed in to watch the marquee threesome.

Frustrated and view-blocked by the horde, I firmly gripped my media badge and wove through the crowd to the roped-off entry area manned by beefy, stern-looking marshals. I revealed my magical credentials.

One of the marshals instructed the masses, "Make way, make way," and lifted the rope for me to walk into the lion's den. I sat down with my back against the grandstand for an unobstructed view of the drama. Tiger was at one end, Phil as far away as possible at the other, and Adam in the middle of the sprawling teeing area. It was just me, the players, and their caddies – and no one else in this sanctuary. The media indeed has its privileges.

[As a sidenote, when the threesome headed off to the first tee the gathered fans quickly evacuated the area and followed them out. Observing this exodus, PGA Tour veteran Jerry Kelly, playing in the next group, hollered as he walked onto the driving range, "What am I – chopped liver?!"]

In addition to the 2008 U.S. Open and other PGA, Senior

and LPGA tournaments, another "major" event I attended was the 2012 Ryder Cup at Medinah outside Chicago. That one was stress-free because I attended as a spectator with my wife and Al Rauckinas, the father-in-law of our niece, Lisa. Al, who was born in Lithuania (one of about

200,000 Lithuanians living in the Chicago area), was a serious golf fan but had never been to a big-time tournament.

And this one was right in his backyard. We happened to be in town visiting Lisa and family, so I bought three tickets. There's nothing like the color and patriotic fervor of a Ryder Cup. Though the Europeans stormed back on Sunday – winning eight of the 12 singles matches to retain the Cup in the "Massacre at Medinah" – it

was a special time because Al had such fun and was so thankful for being there.

Other events included more U.S. Opens and U.S. Amateurs – both men and women, as well as many Northwest and junior tournaments. I enjoyed them all but developed a particular affinity for college conference championships. There's something about the involvement of the coaches walking alongside golf-bag-packing players to boost their spirits, the excitement and disappointment of team play, and the sublime skills of players on the cusp of bigger and better things, whether on the golf course or not.

At the opposite end of this spectrum: While I was the media director of the two-day Fred Couples Invitational in



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the 1990s, John Daly promised Freddie he'd come to the 1992 tournament (the year after "Big John" came out of nowhere to win the PGA Championship). I used his appearance to hype the event at Inglewood Golf Club north of Seattle, and we sold nearly 20,000 advance tickets. But Daly – for unspecified reasons – pulled out less than 24 hours before the first round. Freddie and tournament director John Bracken were upset, and I had a lot of explaining to do with over 100 credentialed media. Daly later apologized and said he'd make it up to Couples the following year.

Again, we sold a ton of tickets for the 1993 event at Inglewood. It was clear that Daly was quite different from other Tour players, many of Freddie's PGA Tour friends (Mickelson, Palmer, Love, Feherty, Els, et al), who were friendly and easygoing. Daly had a "posse" of two guys who stood around the locker room smoking cigarettes and, like punks, glared at people, including the pros. It was weird.

The week before, Daly played in Peter Jacobsen's two-day Fred Meyer Challenge at Oregon Golf Club. During a clinic involving Daly and Jake, the Arkansan suddenly dropped a ball on the turf (not teed up), turned around to face the 5,000 spectators sitting close by in a tall, natural amphitheater, and hit the ball – with his driver! – over their heads. He missed the onlookers in the top rows by inches.

"I can't believe he did that," said Arnold Palmer, who regularly played in the event. "It was ridiculous. He could have killed someone." Daly was fined \$30,000 by the PGA Tour, the largest of the many penalties he incurred over his checkered career.

Daly entered the Inglewood media room after his first round and took a seat on the podium. Bob Robinson, the longtime golf writer for the (Portland) Oregonian, was there. "Robby," who was in his 60s and had covered over 30 majors over

a stellar career, pointedly asked Daly about his actions in Portland, which Bob had witnessed. Daly responded by standing up and screaming, "Don't you know who I am? I can get you banned from any PGA tournament!" Equally angry, Robinson arose from his chair and pressed ahead with his pointed questioning. The whole episode was surreal. I thought Robbie was either going to have a heart attack or I was going to have to break up a fist fight. Thankfully, Daly stormed out of the media room with his posse in tow.



I've attended around 100 grand openings of new golf courses. During the 1990s and early 2000s new tracks popped up around North America like crocuses in spring. And we folks in the media were asked to herald their arrivals. Besides the developer and new staff, local dignitaries and other poohbahs are usually in attendance at these gatherings.

"I can't believe he did that," said Arnold Palmer, who regularly played in the event.

These are generally cheery, uplifting affairs that usher in a new recreational outlet for the local community. There's excitement in the air and a sense of anticipation. Following months of physical transformation, a place for fun has now replaced what was once a barren chunk of ground. Most golf-course grand openings are celebratory – a fiesta for the hosts, attendees and even the media.

But not all are like this. One particularly memorable grand opening took place at Echo



Some of the Author's Tournament Badges

Falls in Woodinville, outside of Seattle. I'd estimate over 200 folks were assembled in the brand-new, spacious clubhouse. The event was emceed by Pat O'Dea, a legendary local disc jockey who created Concerts West, a national music-promotion company at the time. I grabbed a seat in the second row behind one of the co-developers (who I had previously walked the as yet unopened course with and interviewed) and his wife, along with the spouse of the other developer and the course's architect, who shall be nameless.

All was hunky dory until the final speaker, the architect, got up to say a few words. With a beet-red face, he stood in front of the crowd, slapping a folded newspaper angrily against his leg. Without uttering a word of welcome to the audience, he launched into a tirade about an article by a local newspaper reporter, who'd written a generally positive review of the course except for the need to take an

elevator up to a hill-perched tee. "Is that *\$%&# [reporter's name] here?!" he bellowed. I watched the people before me squirm, glance furtively at each other, and slowly slump in their chairs. That was one odd grand opening moment.



As you may have noted, I've been on both sides of the golf-media equation – both as a media director and a writer. I understand both areas quite well. One of the biggest parties of the year for our group is the Masters. Sadly, I never received an invite. Trust me, I tried over the years, but struck out every single time before finally throwing in the towel.

At its peak in the early 2000s, Cybergolf attracted over 2 million visitors a month, making it one of the largest golf-content websites in the world. I thought such a readership would make me a shoo-in for golf's first major of the year. Uh-huh. At the time there was an elderly Southern woman (let's call

her “Martha”) overseeing the issuance of all Masters’ press passes. The tournament was still very old-school at that time (certainly not so today – all 18 holes are televised AND the action is live-streamed on the web!). Traditions were then quite important to the green jackets and staff of Augusta National.

“Martha” was known for her loyalty to small-town newspapers and their reporters, guaranteeing each a treasured spot in a small media room that today is much more spacious. The internet was rather new then and it was up to me to justify my place at this hallowed press-room table.

Mario Parascenzo, a Cybergolf contributor after retiring from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette honored in 2008 with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the PGA of America, advised that I speak directly (and sweetly) to the lady in charge. I even dropped Mario’s name and those of other well-known golf writers with whom I knew and worked.

No soap. Her priorities were elsewhere. Rules are rules.



My press-pass breadcrumb trail took me on a journey with many stopovers along the way. Most were fun, some were gasp-inducing, but they always had compelling and intriguing people who made things interesting.

Jeff Shelley has written and published nine books as well as numerous articles for print and online media over his lengthy career. Among his titles are three editions of the book, “Golf Courses of the Pacific Northwest.” The Seattle resident was the editorial director of Cybergolf.com from 2000-15. He also co-founded the Northwest Golf Media Association in 1995. For seven years he served as the board president of First Green, an educational outreach program that is now part of the Golf Course Superintendents of America and Environmental Institute for Golf.



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Leatherstocking Golf Course – Golf Americana in All Its Glory

by Jay Flemma



In a perfect world nearly every golf course would be like Cooperstown, New York's Leatherstocking Golf Club.

Cooperstown isn't an ordinary town; it's a chakra. A confluence of our country's most iconic literature, history, and sports, all born in the formative years of our republic, if you want to see Americana in all its glory, joy, pride, and pomp, look no further than Cooperstown. American flags proudly wave on every porch front.

Their spirits buoyed by the idyllic beauty and incomparable history of the region as well as a powerful bond of community, the locals enjoy both a heart's ease to life and a sense of stewardship of all that patriotic Americans hold dear. The Leatherstocking Tales, the pinnacle of the frontier literature of that or any age, were written here by James Fenimore Cooper, son of the judge for whom the town is named.

Critical battles of the American Revolution were fought nearby, turning the tide of war in favor of the colonists. Overlooking idyllic Lake Otsego – "Glimmerglass" as its been called for centuries - the Glimmerglass Opera House is a bucket list experience for



BUNKERS PEPPER THE FOURTH FAIRWAY

any true music aficionado. And the Baseball Hall of Fame is Mecca to any and all sports fans.

Oh, and summer nights on the lake make time stand still, even if only for a moment.

With all that as antecedents, the local golf course has a lot to live up to. But Leatherstocking Golf Club is more than equal to the task.

Designed by quintessential Golden Age architect Devereux Emmet, Leatherstocking is also a chakra...a golf chakra: a perfect storm of phenomenal green complexes, murderous bunkers randomly peppering the fairways, a gorgeous edge (Lake Otsego), and reasonable length. What looks a pushover on the card (6,400 yards from

the tips) has consistently flummoxed and bamboozled politician, professional athlete, well-heeled resort guest, and grateful local for over 100 glorious years. Best of all, Leatherstocking is open to the general public. Coming to visit the BBHOF? In town for a romantic getaway at the stately hotel? Want to knock a former top-100 golf course off your bucket list? Walk on up, and tee off! And don't mind one bit if it feels as though you've stepped 100 years back in time.

Emmet built an original nine holes in 1909 and then returned for an encore in 1919. He had already cemented his reputation as one of the great designers of the Golden Age with his 1899 masterpiece at Garden City Golf Club. Just three years after opening, it hosted the 1902 U.S. Open. The 1908 U.S. Amateur followed.

But in 1910, Emmet joined forces with fellow quintessential Golden Age architect Charles Blair Macdonald to assist in the building of National Golf Links of America,

as golf historian and designer George Bahto (now deceased) confirmed in an earlier interview with Your Author. Stephen C. Clarke, whose descendants own and operate the Otesaga Hotel and Resort still to this day, was a member of National and a friend of both Macdonald and Emmet. It was he who brought Emmet to Cooperstown.

"After working with Macdonald, Emmet changed his style

"The routing makes the golf course play much longer..."

a bit to where he more frequently used some of the holes Macdonald designed at National,” Bahto explained the earlier interview. “And then Leonard or ‘Len’ Raynor stepped in and made some changes.

Raynor was for 36 years the head professional, head superintendent, all-around ambassador for the club, and a beloved local figure. He also rebuilt several of the green complexes as well as the island tee box of the par-5, Cape hole 18th. Set in the middle of Lake Otsego, and built atop 22 junked automobiles and 2000 cubic yards of cinder-topped rock, the 18th tee is easily one of the three most memorable moments of an already compelling round. (The

others are the drop shot par-3 12th and the summit of the seventh green, majestically overlooking so much of the golf course...)

As usual on an Emmet course, the par-5s are the sturdy backbone of the routing. The par-5 fourth features a blind, downhill tee shot along the stone wall

“The order of the day has always been to protect and preserve the course’s design, in both in how it looks and how it plays,”

that guards NY-80, but the fairway behind is peppered with deep bunkers with steep faces. Driving into one is, essentially, like hitting into a pond; it’s 50-50 that your lie costs you a full stroke. The second shot is downhill over more random

bunkering to the tiny green. Further complicating things, the



BUNKERS PEPPER THE FAIRWAY AT THE PAR-5 FOURTH

fairway first cants right to left off the tee, but then left to right into the green.

Similarly, at the 11th, the fairway swerves and cascades steeply from right to left before ending at verdant, hidden hollow. The 15th is completely side-hill, where hugging the high right side of the fairway leaves a good view and angle into a punchbowl green. Anything

center-line or left will force the golfer to carry a minefield of randomly placed deep bunkers. Finally, the boomerang 18th is grandest of crescendos.

Not to be outdone, Emmet routed the par-4s into the teeth of the mountainous hills on which the course is designed.

“The routing makes the golf course play much longer,”

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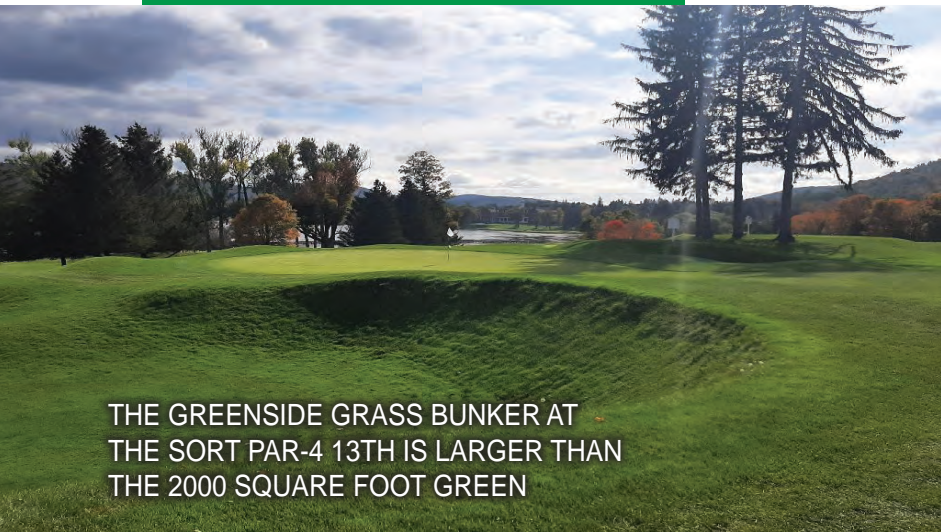
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explained head superintendent Mike O'Neill. "Each of the three longest par-4s – two, seven, and 10 - all play steeply uphill to dangerously fortified greens. Those green complexes are among the most extreme on the course: brutally deep bunkers, mountainous undulations, and false fronts and sides with steep drop-offs. You're hitting a long club into all of them, and you really have to plan and play the shot carefully."

As an aside, what a fantastic gig to get: a Golden Age masterpiece carefully preserved from its inception, set in one of the most historic and idyllic Colonial towns.

"The order of the day has always been to protect and preserve the course's design, in both in how it looks and how it plays," confirmed O'Neill, who along with his 14-year-old son has been here since 2018. Prior to Leatherstocking he was at nearby Syracuse's Bellevue Country Club, a 1914 Donald Ross design. And before that O'Neill served for many years at Pinehurst Resort's No. 8 course.

"My Uncle Tom taught me golf when I was seven or eight. I was growing up on a dairy farm outside Scranton, PA, and wanted to mix the outdoors with what I loved and studied turfgrass at Penn State," O'Neill recalled fondly.

It's clear he learned well. A mix of the older German bents and poa, the greens are Glimmerglass-true, bringing to life all of the fierce Emmet internal contours and greenside swales.

"I have squared off the front of the greens to get a few more pins. And most of all, I like it to play firm and fast," O'Neill states, and he succeeds. His own PGA Head Professional, Tim Quirk, putted from 40 yards off the fairway after nearly driving the first green en route to a kick-in birdie.

You can do that on any hole at Leatherstocking that features an open route to the green, as well as use the putter from any of the devilish Emmet greenside swales.

Far from an anachronism, though the course is short, its asymmetric 35-37=72 routing makes for a phenomenal match play golf course. Momentum at Leatherstocking is the next shot: the next sideways bounce, the next brutal lie, the next zany angle to a Glimmerglass green and a sucker pin: sheer delight from opening tee shot at one to watery grave at 18. Like the series of tales for which but's named, Leatherstocking plays like a book you can't put down and want to read over and over.

Now the dying embers of summer have turned every leaf in my beloved North Country aflame in a blaze of gold, russet,

and orange. On my way home, I pass a house where a kid is selling limeade at a roadside stand set up in his yard. It was so delicious, I bought two

glasses. Soon the snow will fall. The skis are waiting eagerly, standing sentinel like Beefeaters next to the front door. But until then the final stoke of the coals did what it was meant to accomplish in my golfing heart. From the ashes a fire had woken; a light from the darkness did spring.

When not reporting live from major sports championships or researching golf courses for design, value, and excitement, multiple award-winning sportswriter Jay Flemma is an entertainment, Internet, trademark, and banking lawyer from New York. His clients have been nominated for Grammy and Emmy awards, won a Sundance Film Festival Best Director award, performed on stage and screen, and designed pop art for museums and collectors. Twitter @ JayGolfUSA

Lake Otsego or "Glimmerglass"



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Engaged Employees

by Phillip M. Perry

"Hire motivated people who will help your business grow."

That popular mantra for creating a productive work force has always been easier said than done. And today the challenge is tougher than ever, thanks to slim pickings in the candidate pool. Many workers furloughed or exiled to home offices during the pandemic have been rethinking their personal goals. Do they really want to return to a workplace where they never felt engaged? Or join one that promises nothing but dull routine?

Today's tighter labor environment comes at a time when hiring errors and subpar performance can seriously impact the bottom line. As advances in technology have reinforced the need to exceed the competition's productivity levels, employers need workers who will perform at the highest levels possible.

"In this competitive environment, companies have downsized considerably," says Pete Tosh, Founder of The Focus Group, Macon, Georgia (thefocusgroup.biz). "As a result, they really need to accomplish more with fewer employees."

Understanding engagement

The good news is that businesses can take steps to attract and retain "A players." The process begins with an understanding of the forces that propel top achievers. "There is a difference between motivation and engagement," explains William J. Rothwell, Professor of Workforce Education and Development at Pennsylvania

State University. "Motivation is internal to people while engagement is a passion for what they do. Engagement requires a match between the person's passions and their daily work activities."

Employees who are both motivated and engaged contribute maximum value to their employers. Not only do they get more easily into the flow of their work, but they reduce costly turnover by sticking around longer. "A recent Gallup survey shows that engaged employees drive 12% more profit," says Tosh. "They are far more productive and lead to higher customer satisfaction."

Employees who are both motivated and engaged contribute maximum value to their employers.

Before taking steps to improve employee engagement, a business needs to assess how its staff currently feels about their work environment. "The most common misconception by employers is thinking people are engaged when they aren't," says Tosh.



A close look at employee attitude is likely to be eye opening. A recent Gallup report revealed that only 36% of employees at the typical business are fully engaged, which means giving their best efforts or working to their full potential. Fully 13% are "actively disengaged," which means they are miserable in their duties and spreading unhappiness to coworkers—and, presumably, customers. Perhaps as alarming was Gallup's finding that 51% of employees are "not engaged"—psychologically unattached and just "going through the motions." In other words, a majority of employees are not pulling their weight.

The best way to assess employee engagement is to speak with them one-on-one. "Periodic conversations with employees will reveal any issues about their working conditions," says Rothwell. "The business environment is one thing, but how people perceive it and feel about it is very often another."

Here the supervisor plays a key role. "Effective supervisors are catalysts," says Tosh. "They impact and utilize employee talents to achieve business goals." It's the frequent touch points of supervisor and employee, he

adds, that offers the greatest potential. "Each interaction, even momentary, is an opportunity to build the relationship, to coach, and to improve the employee's performance."

Unfortunately, too many supervisors see worker interactions as interruptions rather than opportunities. Other times, the personalities of supervisors clash with their charges. And that can be a major demotivator. "An employee's perception of their relationship with their manager is far more important than their perception of the organization as a whole," says Tosh.

Bonus tip: Engage the cynics. What to do with that subset of employees that always seem to have a negative interpretation of workplace events? Harness their energies. "Sometimes your cynics are your best critics," says Bob Verchota, senior consultant at RPVerchota & Associates, Minneapolis. "Make a focus group out of them. Then you can really work on removing barriers to efficient employee performance."

Top motivators

Supervisors can use motivational techniques to re-engage workers and keep everyone performing at an elevated level. But what techniques will work? While the common wisdom says throwing more money at people will stimulate performance, studies have shown that not to be true. "When people are paid more, their performance does increase temporarily, but then it goes right back down," says Jack Altschuler, president of Fully Alive Leadership, Northbrook, IL (fullyaliveleadership.com). "And they then view higher pay as an entitlement."

Money, then, does little to inspire great workers. But Altschuler offers three caveats. "For lower wage people in financial distress, more money does matter and can change their engagement level," he says. "Additionally, people who feel they're being underpaid will respond positively to increased financial reward." Finally, at the lower end of the wage distribution scale money can determine who applies for a job and who stays on once they're hired. "If somebody is paid \$7.25 an hour, and they can get \$12 someplace else, they're gone."



Those exceptions aside, what really motivates people is a nurturing workplace that meets their basic human needs. And to establish such an environment experts suggest supervisors do the following:

- Appreciate employee contributions. "The number one thing employers can do to drive employee engagement is show appreciation," says Altschuler. "Very often doing so is no more complicated than something

like this: 'Mary, thanks so much for staying late to finish the report that we needed this morning.'"

- Recognize achievements. "When we do something worthy of recognition we want to be recognized," says Altschuler. "Whether it's a celebratory Yahoo party or a plaque that someone can hang on their office wall, recognition creates a sense of personal pride."

While the common wisdom says throwing more money at people will stimulate performance, studies have shown that not to be true.

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QUIZ: Does Your Workplace Engage?

Does your workplace inspire employees to become engaged with your business mission? Find out by taking this quiz. Score 10 points for each “yes” answer. Then total your score and check your rating at the bottom of the chart.

Do your managers and supervisors:

1. **Convey appreciation for employee contributions?**
2. **Recognize employee achievements?**
3. **Provide autonomy to employees?**
4. **Encourage mastery of skills?**
5. **Reduce bureaucracy whenever possible?**
6. **Emphasize purpose in the company mission?**
7. **Interact productively with charges throughout the day?**
8. **Discuss engagement issues with charges weekly?**
9. **Identify hidden motivators for each employee?**
10. **Run periodic checks for Objectives and Key Results (OKRs)?**

What’s your score? 80 or more: Congratulations. You have gone a long way toward building a productive workplace. Between 60 and 80: It’s time to fine tune supervisor-employee relations. Below 60: Your business is at risk. Take action on the suggestions in the accompanying story.



- Provide autonomy. Anything a manager can do to cut back on stifling bureaucracy is a good thing. “People need some personal freedom in their work practices,” says Verchota. “They need to feel that achieving an outcome is important, but how they get there is something they get to decide.”
- Encourage new skills. “People need to feel they have become masters at some task,” says Verchota. Increasing the number of such tasks can make an employee feel great about the workplace.
- Cut checkpoints and paperwork. “Bureaucracy de-motivates people by creating obstacles to their job performance,” says Rothwell. “It makes people very angry if they need to sit around waiting for their boss’s approval to do routine and simple things.”
- Emphasize larger goals. “People need to feel a sense of purpose,” says Verchota. “They need to feel an emotional connection with their work and

that their duties align with their value set.”

Hidden motivators

As important as the top motivators are, one size does not fit all. “Not everyone is motivated by the same thing,” says Verchota. And the only way to discover what those idiosyncratic motivators are is to engage each employee in conversation.

Supervisors should ferret out each employee’s hidden motivators in brief weekly meetings. Discuss the individual’s attitude toward his or her work, and their happiness with their position. Rothwell suggests one particularly useful question: Can you tell me a story about a time when you felt

As important as the top motivators are, one size does not fit all. “Not everyone is motivated by the same thing,”

particularly motivated in the work that you were doing? What was happening, who was involved and most important, what made it so motivating to you? Then listen. “The story will come from inside the person,” he says, “And most of the time if they can’t come up with a story, there is something overwhelmingly bad in their work situation that needs addressed.”

Another tactic is to assure

the confluence of so-called Objectives and Key Results (OKRs). "If a boss thinks an employee should be doing one thing, and that person thinks they should be doing something else, there's going to be demotivation at some point," says Don Phin, a management consultant in Coronado, CA (donphin.com). He suggests having the employee write down the three most important tasks they do every day, then the three key results they expect. Then have the supervisor do the same for that employee. "It's surprising how often the two lists do not match," says Phin. "And no performance system will work if they don't."

A cousin to periodic engagement reviews are so-called pulse surveys. These are frequent, short questionnaires designed to spot trouble spots in a business environment. As the name implies, they take the pulse of the organization.

Creating profits

Companies that fail to improve employee motivation and engagement leave money on

the table that competitors are only too happy to collect. On the other hand, companies that make a concerted effort to inspire their personnel achieve the twin rewards of higher productivity and greater profitability. "Initiatives to bolster employee attitudes are proven to work," says Tosh. "Such efforts are practical, doable, and drive success in the organization."

The right program will retain the best people and attract new ones. "If we want to be an employer of choice, we must understand we are in a major competition globally for top talent," says Rothwell. "That means we need to create a great work environment where people can do their best and never want to leave."

Phillip M. Perry is an award-winning business journalist based in New York City. He covers management, employment law, finance, and marketing for scores of business magazines.



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How to Motivate the Disengaged Person

Dave has always been one of your best employees. Lately, though, he no longer goes the extra mile. Clearly, he is disengaged. **What can you do?**

We asked for an answer from Don Phin, a management consultant in Coronado, CA (donphin.com).

Phin suggests Dave's supervisor invite him to a conversation. An opening gambit may go something like this: Can I share with you a couple of things I've noticed? [The supervisor states specific observations.] It might just be me, but I get a sense you were more engaged and motivated last year than this.

"The trick here is to speak for oneself," says Phin. "Notice that there was no suggestion Dave was unmotivated, but only that the supervisor observed certain behaviors."

A follow-up question can invite Dave to share any hidden issues:

Is there anything going on here that's causing this change in behavior?

Dave may reveal a personal problem such as a health issue, a divorce, or some home event he normally would not share at work.

Expressing an understanding of how the problem could unsettle things might be all the supervisor needs to say for Dave to adjust his behavior. Perhaps he did not even realize his performance had deteriorated. And management might want to give him some slack until his personal issues are resolved.

Dave, however, may respond in a different way: He may state that something in the workplace is bothering him. If so, it is important to resolve the conflict.

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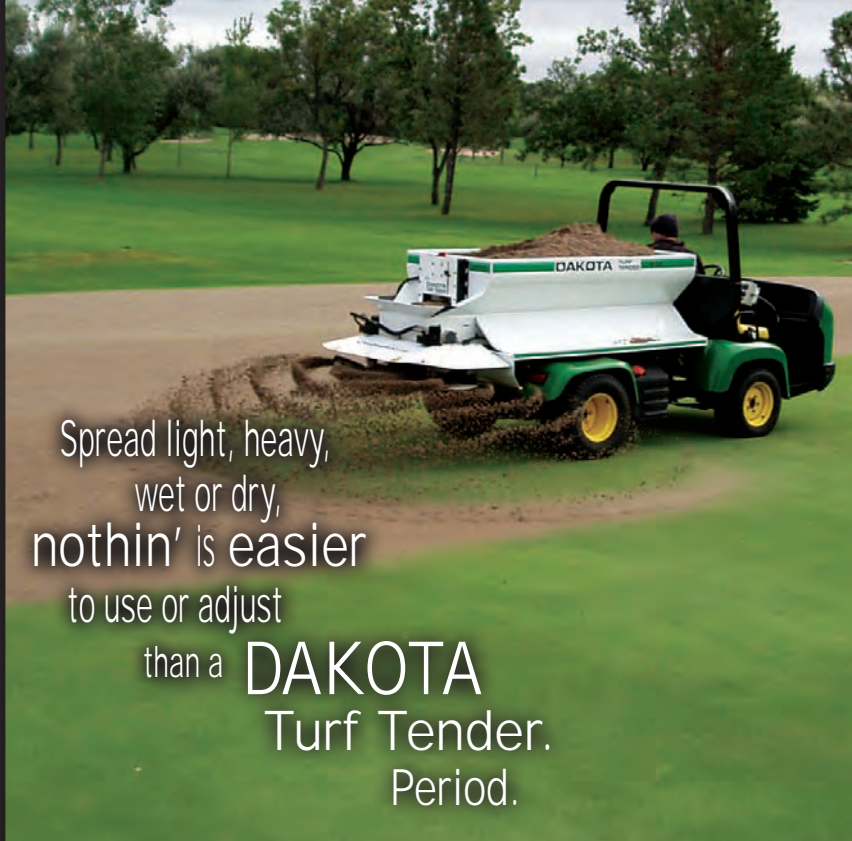


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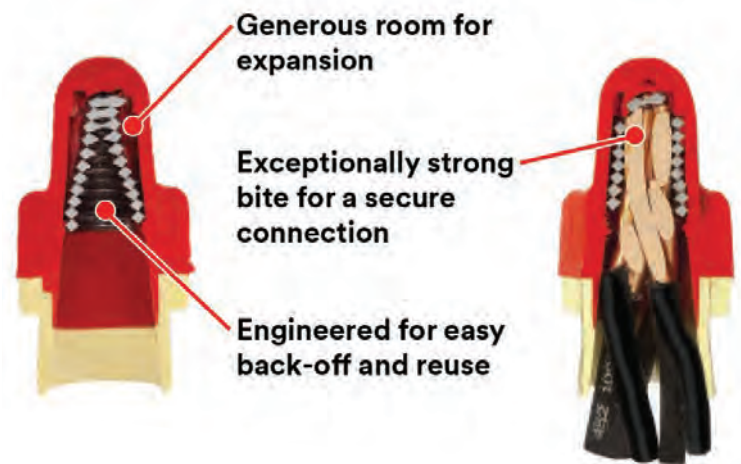
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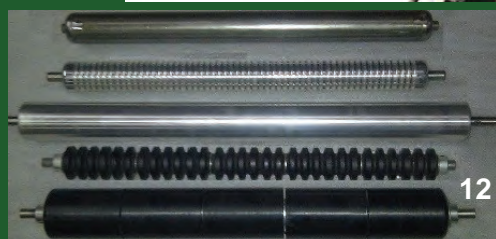
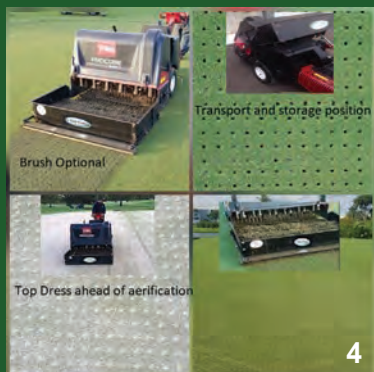
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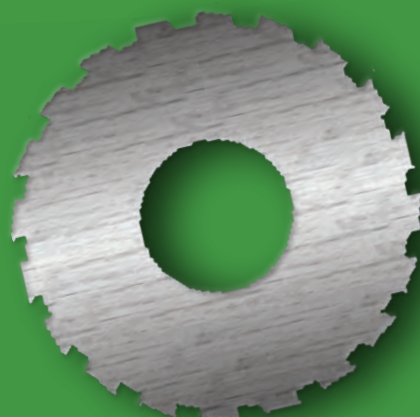
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