

Members Act Quickly on Anti-Golf Tax Legislation

Thanks to a heads up from the GCSAA government relations team, members of the PPGCSA, along with other golf related entities, worked quickly to rally and oppose Montana HB-130. The bill proposed changing

Montana's tax code for golf courses, which in many cases would have doubled the commercial property tax.

Several PPGCSA members provided written testimony and a small (but mighty) contingency of superintendents and owners, along with a golf course general manager, attended in person to oppose the proposed bill. Dane Gamble, Bridger Creek Golf Course, was well-versed on the subject and offered insightful history of the tax structure for golf courses. Testimony varied, from examples of how communities would be negatively or unfairly affected, to the impact on the actual facilities, to local employment opportunities, and to

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PPGCSA Events:

Northwest GCSA Turfgrass Expo October 11-12, 2021, Coeur d'Alene Resort, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho
 For event information, visit ppgcsa.org
PPGCSA "Almost" Spring Meeting March 7 & 8, 2022, GranTree Hotel, Bozeman, MT

Sites (Really) Needed

We are in need of a Montana and a Wyoming site to host our annual Scholarship/Education tournaments benefiting the continuing education and scholarship programs of the association.

Once we have locations and dates, we will share this information through email blasts. If you are interested in hosting an event, contact Ryan Blechta, Spanish Peaks for Montana, or Danny Renz, Douglas Community Golf Course for the Wyoming site.

We will be seeking hole sponsors for each of these events. If you are interested in a sponsorship, please contact either Lori or the host superintendent.

Rounds4Research Auction April 26 - May 2, 2021

We need your donated rounds! To complete the online donation form, please visit <https://www.eifg.org/research/rounds-4-research/donate-a-round/online-form>.

Without bidders, this event will not be a success. Please take the time to discuss the event with your pro shop and golfers. Materials to help you promote the event can be found on the EIFG.org website, and on links shared on our PPGCSA email blasts.

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“Peaks & Prairies Golf Course Superintendents Association is dedicated to furthering the education of our members for the betterment of golf and its environment.”

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Peaks & Prairies Golf Course Superintendents Association

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THE PERFECT LIE is published quarterly by Peaks & Prairies GCSA, and is edited by Lori Russell. Our newsletter is not copyrighted, but we would appreciate credit being given when original material is reprinted. Advertising and article deadlines are the 10th of February, April, July, and October.

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President's Message

Help Me Help You

Mike Kitchen, CGCS

Teton Pines Resort & Country Club, Jackson, Wyo.

One of my favorite movies is the Tom Cruise classic, *Jerry Maguire*. For you youngsters out there who are unfamiliar with the movie, Cruise plays a sports agent who loses all but one of his clients. During this slide from prominence, he relearns the importance of relationships in business. He realizes supporting your clients in tough times, as well as good times, is essential to strong business relationships.

I think we can all say this past year qualifies as "tough times." Traditionally, our association has been lucky to have strong allied support. Frankly, without our allied support, we would not be nearly as successful. With that in mind, I urge you to support those who support us. I can say from personal experience that about ten years ago I switched from a vendor out of Salt Lake who did not support our association to an extremely supportive vendor out of Billings. This switch has been beneficial for both parties. I now have significantly better service and they have earned at least \$125,000 of our business. I would call that a win for both parties — a win that would not have happened if the vendor did not support our association.

As you all know by now, COVID-19 has forced the cancellation of the "Almost" Spring Meeting. This cancellation has resulted in some financial challenges for the association: We

lost the revenue from our auction (traditionally around \$5,000) and we were assessed cancellation fees at the hotel (\$2,500). In addition, presumably because of COVID-19, we have lost some long-time allied support. Those businesses who pulled their support certainly had the right to do so, however, I urge you (as always) to make a concerted effort to support those businesses who continue to support you in these tough times. As Jerry Maguire says, "Help us help you!"



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local charities using the facilities, just to name a few of the impacts discussed that day. Most included a common thread that the land use does not require the same city and county services as a commercial business with the same footprint. COVID-19 was a strong reminder of the healthy opportunities golf safely offers.

Joining in opposition were other entities such as the retail and food and beverage associations, and the MT Taxpayers Association. In addition, a member of the Montana House of Representatives spoke in appreciation of the golf courses in her community.

Several facilities and members rallied from afar, and we thank you. Also in attendance and standing behind the camera was James Gamble. James assisted with the entire process, but actually remained behind the scene.



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Rex Easton

Dane Gamble, Bridger Creek Golf Course,
Bozeman, Mont.

Rex Easton, co-founder and long-time member of Peaks & Prairies GCSA, passed away at home January 3, 2021 following a long struggle with cancer.

It was 45 years ago this late winter that Rex and several others returned with a vision, from the 1976 "National," as GIS was then known. Energized by their exposure and experience at the event in Minneapolis, Rex, along with Don Tolson, and a couple others, decided to, "get this thing going." We now know "this thing" as Peaks & Prairies GCSA. Reaching out to golf courses across Montana and Wyoming, they were able to bring together over 30 superintendents for an organizational meeting March 28, 1976, at the Hilands Club in Billings. With education the focus of this new

endeavor, Rex was immediately appointed to the Executive Committee.

From the association's inception, and for the next 10 years, Rex served as an officer or director, as well as co-editor of "Turf Talk," as our newsletter was then known. In a column celebrating the association's first five years, Rex, as always, stayed true to the mission. He celebrated our educational programs and stressed the value of the relationships that are developed in participating in all association events.

In the late 1980s, Rex left his successful tenure as superintendent at Riverside Country Club in Bozeman to



*Rex Easton, Dane Gamble, Joe Brinkel
Picture taken circa 1983*

pursue his goal of bringing high-quality, affordable, public golf to Gallatin County. Not wanting to forever diminish valuable agricultural lands in outlying areas, Rex located the project, Bridger Creek Golf Course, where the course and associated residential development could
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be annexed into the city and access city services. With the patience of Job and the determination of a man on a mission, Bridger Creek hosted its first round of golf in July 1994. At that time, Rex turned his attention to the challenge of successfully developing and marketing the project's three phases of development. Whether it was taking it from bare ground through infrastructure construction, sales of developed lots, or, in some cases, helping guide residential construction and sales, Rex had the pulse of the project through all the ups and downs of economic cycles and the vagaries of politics in City Hall. Armed with his experience from Bridger Creek, Rex also spearheaded the development of Manley Meadows, a large lot subdivision located, coincidentally, between Bridger Creek and Riverside Country Club.

While masterfully juggling all the balls of a "developer," Rex always maintained a strong tie to turf. He came back to Bridger Creek for several years as a keen-eyed partner in the maintenance and on-going development of the golf course. His demeanor, reflecting his foundational belief that we would all do a better job if we educated and shared experience with each other, harkened back to his outlook following that 1976 return from the "National." His energy and vision did, indeed, "get this thing going," that is Peaks & Prairies GCSA. Thanks, Rex, now rest and know that we'll keep it going strong.



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An Incredible Project — The Indoor Golf Learning Center

**Pat Nowlen, Director of Parks and Recreation
Polson Bay Golf Club, Polson, Mont.**



This past year at Polson Bay Golf Course, we added two indoor golf simulators in a 1,200 sq. ft. addition to the restaurant. Many other golf courses have recently done something similar, so why should I write about it? I have two reasons — it didn't cost us anything and we cut down trees to make it happen!

There are two parts to this story and I will be brief on the first part because I believe the second part is what will peak the interests of golf course superintendents. However, it is all a good story and it is important to the game of golf. And, importantly, some of you may be able to take what we have done and use it as a model to accomplish great things at your facility.

Part 1: Getting an addition to the clubhouse with two golf simulators for free.

While we have been operating a great junior golf program for years, we took it to an unbelievable new level this year. My head golf professional, Cameron Milton, won the national PGA 2018 Youth Player Development Award for the work that he has done in growing the game of golf in the Mission Valley. The junior golf program includes a free four-day junior camp, a

school golf program, and a PGA Junior League consisting of 72 players (just in Polson). Each part of the junior golf program is a great story and it has been an honor to be identified as the best in the nation. We estimate that our junior golf program touches the lives of 450 juniors every year. We had previously created a 501(c)3 called the Mission Valley Junior Golf Association (MVJGA) to handle the donations to the junior golf program.

In 2019, we decided to ride the tidal wave of support generated by this award to create a permanent funding source for the MVJGA. This funding source was to take the form of the Junior Golf Indoor Learning Center. We then went on a huge fundraising campaign! Our goal was to raise \$190,000 to construct a building and purchase a golf simulator. It seemed like a lofty

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Learning Center

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goal at the time. In the end, we far exceeded our goals and plans changed. The indoor learning center became an addition to the restaurant, with two top-of-the-line Full Swing 16' golf simulators.

The community of Polson stepped up to the plate and hit a home run! Individuals, businesses, contractors, and nonprofits came out of the woodwork to help in any way they could. From cash donations, to materials, to sweat equity; if we asked, it was provided. The MVJGA collected the money, hired the contractor, ran the project, and donated the facility to the City of Polson and Polson Bay Golf Course. I estimate that the total value of the building, simulators, and the business is worth \$425,000. After operational and capital expenses are met, the remaining profit goes directly to the MVJGA as a permanent funding source for continuing growth of our junior golf programs.

Part 2: How removing trees from the golf course helped make it happen.

The cost to the golf course was minimal and was mostly labor for preparation of the site for construction. The maintenance department wasn't allowed to help with the actual construction of the facility because they are city employees and the area was under contractor control. Legally, they just couldn't do it. However, they were able to prep the site, which included

“Their work saved tens of thousands of dollars in the scope of the whole project.”

stripping the asphalt from the construction site and hauling it away. Also, they were able to strip the siding off the exterior wall of the clubhouse and replace the deck stairs. Their work saved tens of thousands of dollars in the scope of the whole project. The majority of our labor force still wasn't able to really participate in the project and wouldn't have a significant emotional tie to the project, and I wanted to find a way to rectify that situation.

How do the trees come into play? In the two years prior to the clubhouse addition, we completed an irrigation replacement
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Learning Center

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project of the oldest nine of the golf course. In the design of the irrigation system, it was determined a few trees had to come out to make way for new mainlines. Also, a few trees caused head spacing issues. Decisions needed to be made to either remove the trees or keep these trees and add additional heads to water around the trees. I made the call to remove four trees to facilitate proper installation of the irrigation system and to keep the project within budget. Removal of one of the trees was very easy to justify because a six-inch mainline would need four additional fittings to go around it, and the area was overplanted and out of play. The other three were a different story. They were all planted in 1936 or 1937. All were larger than three feet in diameter. All could be kept if an additional head was added to the project. Now, keep in mind that in total seven trees were in question and only four were removed. I had to take other factors into consideration. Were they integral to play? Were they in an area that was overplanted? Were they damaged? Could they be replaced with a new tree? There was also a financial side to the decision. When the project went out to bid, it was an itemized bid. We were paying an amount per head, swing joint, foot of pipe, foot of wire, etc., installed. This meant that if the irrigation heads were removed from the project, then we could save \$1,300 per head on average. I made the decision to remove three additional trees and save \$5,000.

The irrigation system was completed and the maintenance crew removed the trees in 12' to 14' long sections and placed them at the top of the golf course, next to Highway 93. As always, when a tree gets cut down, there is a political price to pay. I spent the next year defending the fact that I had killed four 80-year-old ponderosa pines and telling people that they couldn't come cut them up for firewood because, "I have a plan!"

I convinced Hans Lund, the contractor for the Junior Indoor Learning Center, that we should use the trees in some way to contribute to the project. He convinced Dupuis Lumber to mill the trees into

three-inch slabs and tongue and groove. Hans then convinced a local cabinet company to plane, sand, and finish the tongue and groove. Employees of Traditional Home, owned by Hans,

installed the tongue and groove on the walls, and the slabs became the countertops, doors, and stair treads. The entire room has been finished in ponderosa pine and is truly a sight to behold. All companies involved have kids in the junior golf program. A statement about the trees used on the project will be put on a sign made from the trees. It will read like this: "100% of the wood to finish this room came from four eighty-three-year-old trees removed from the Olde 9 to make way for a new irrigation system." To me, it is the ultimate statement of sustainability and use of natural resources that we could have accomplished.

The Indoor Learning Center is up and running. Kids get to use it for free,

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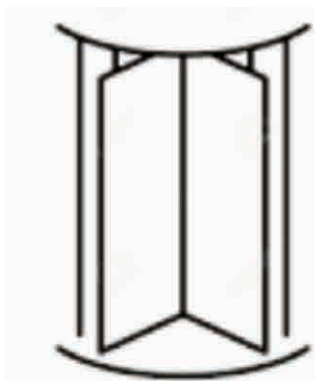
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for golf activities. Adults pay \$35 per hour. You can rent the space for parties and sporting events for around \$250 to \$500 and watch football games on a 16' screen while golfing Firestone CC on the other simulator. We have started our Winter League and have 64 people. Our food and beverage operations have become year-round. I no longer have to explain why the trees needed to be removed. One more tree has fallen down in a windstorm and will be sent to the lumber mill to make new interior trim for the rest of the clubhouse. Another important contribution from the maintenance crew will become an integral part of the project.



The Revolving Door

Do you ever feel like a doorman at a vintage hotel with the old revolving door, simply greeting employees as they enter and depart? Sitting in my office, I have been looking at pictures and memorabilia of my past career. This started me thinking—a terrible pastime, I know. What is my role as superintendent? I know all of you remember my masterpiece article written, what is now years ago, about every hat a superintendent wears. That is not what is tickling my cerebral cortex currently. What is perplexing me is, what is my role to my employees? Is it boss, dictator,



friend, teacher, therapist or something more? I think the answer to that really depends on where you are in your career and what part of the country you are located.

When I first began my career at the University Golf Course in Missoula, Montana, I was simply a crew member that worked into an assistant. I learned

by watching those around me. Kevin Verlanic was my immediate teacher. The crew normally consisted of college students. Keeping in mind its northern location, this was a very seasonal college crew. The course was normally open for about seven months each year. The crew was 18- to 24ish-year-olds. They had college career paths laid out, and we were usually a source of income to cover their needs. That's not to say they did not care about the job. They were great people, wonderful friends and good

Jason Lamb
Sidney Country Club
Sidney, Mont.



employees; but they were, let's say, transient. They were there for three or four seasons before they moved further down their professional career paths. In the almost six years there, I was fine with that. Kevin taught me a love of the job. He taught me many things that I still carry with me to this day. He seemed to favor the college atmosphere; he said it kept him young and on his toes. The crew was an interesting mix of people from many different walks of life, simply passing through the course. The college atmosphere brought with it a questioning mindset that was great for new perspective. It kept you questioning how things are done. The crews that I encountered in my time at Missoula had to have consisted of more than 50 people in those precious few years. I struggle to remember the names of even half of those wonderful souls. I am still in contact with Kevin occasionally, not nearly as much as I should be. Some have continued in the turf field, fueled by the love that was nurtured there.

Next, I had a short stint at Montana State University where I was surrounded by turf students. We were of one mind: learn to grow turf. There was more than 30 of us clustered together in the 2 ½ years there. Now we are spread all over the country and even the world.

Unfortunately, like my previous stint, I can only
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remember a few of their names and whereabouts. But once again I had a few mentors there, most notably Dr. Rob Golembiewski, Dr. Robert Gough and Dr. David Baumbauer. These gentlemen taught me to further embrace change and the ever-revolving door of people through my life. I mean, can you imagine the number of lives these lifelong educators have touched?

For me it was off to brighter shores, literally. California called my name. I worked at Sunset Whitney Country Club in Rocklin, California, for Mike Kaveney and his family. Now, California brings on a different kind of crew. Since we were year-round, the crew was more stable. In the eight years I was there, 75% of the crew remained the same. We had a few guys that moved through, but for the most part, we became a family. Mike and his family treated me like a brother and a son. Mike felt his job as a boss was to impart as much knowledge and passion for my career as possible before I inevitably moved on to new challenges. This philosophy was seen in the other full-time employees, also. The mechanic, Gary Glissman; tree guy, Paul Stefancik; and irrigation tech, Greg Bullard, all took the time to teach the new college graduate more than just theories about the golf world. Gary took my limited mechanical skills and turned them

into above par. Paul taught me more about trees, shrubs and ornamentals than any book ever could. Greg showed me the nuances of keeping an aging irrigation system running as smooth as possible. They all gave of their knowledge without hesitation, all to make me better.

Eventually, the time came for me to do the same for others. Now I am the mentor. I have been at Sidney Country Club in Sidney, Montana, for 12 years now, starting as superintendent, and eventually adding the general manager title. The crew mix here is again different. Due to our very northern climate, we are seasonal. But, our workforce is a combination of previous crews. I have a mechanic three days a week, Jim Sundheim, who has been here one month longer than me. He is a retired farm mechanic with great skills. He has kept our aging fleet of equipment running way past expectations. He continues to expand my mechanical skills. A retired school teacher, Kevin Wood, and his cohort, a retired lineman, Terry Wilkinson, work on my irrigation. I also have numerous volunteers who help with smaller projects. Up until a few months ago, I had a promising young assistant, Zac Leader, who took the step through the door to become his own doorman. The main bulk of my staff in the summer is made of 16- to 24-year-olds. For many of them, this is their first job. The good thing about getting them that young is I may get to keep them for five or six seasons before they go down permanent career paths. Another positive is that I get to teach them how to work and perform in the workforce. The way I look at it right now, my job is to help my crew grow and flourish. If I can help them find a career path they enjoy, great; I have done my job, and down the road they go.

The way I see it, we are the doormen on the revolving door of our profession. We let people into our way of life; we train and equip them. Then, we send them out into the world to do the same. I can only hope I can do this task for others remotely as well as those who did it for me. I will stand my post for as long as God is willing; and until then, my door will always be open.



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Taking First Green Virtually to the Classroom

David Phipps

GCSAA Northwest Field Staff Blog - Dec. 20

First Green field trips came to a screeching halt once this pandemic became a reality in February. I believe that after our field trip at the Golf Industry Show in Orlando, there were perhaps two, maybe three, others that were held throughout the year. With schools closing to in-person learning and going virtual, teachers were scrambling to set up their new classrooms. Our industry was also in the scrambling mode. We were focusing on keeping our facilities open and how to manage our staff and keep them safe, while in turn keeping our facilities open for play. I look back on those months and realize how far we've come. We've adapted and we have delivered one of the most successful golf seasons in recent years.

Technology has played a significant role in our operations, especially on how we are communicating. We've had access to video conferencing for some time now, but it's something that was rarely used until this year. In my world, video conferencing is now used over regular conference calls in most of my meetings.

So, you're probably wondering where I'm going with this talk about video conferencing and how it relates to First Green. With what we have learned these past ten months, we can take this video technology to our learning labs and bring our lessons into the classroom virtually. As I investigate this, I'm realizing that this is a relatively simple process. Since most schools have gone to a virtual platform, it would be so simple for them to insert a First Green learning lab into their curriculum. All we need to do is create the content, deliver it, and watch them learn.

This all came to my mind as I watched my chapters adapt their educational formats to meet their members' needs. One chapter in particular was the Western Washington GCSA. In December they normally host their Washington Turf and Landscape Show, which is their big annual educational conference.

This year, going virtual became a necessity. They had to do some investigating to see how they could closely mirror the existing platform of the WTLS and deliver quality education.

They settled on a virtual/on-demand format in which they utilized two separate technologies to create the event. To make it on-demand, they needed to have their presenters pre-record their sessions so they could then be inserted into a delivery platform that could also verify attendance to satisfy the Washington State Department of Ag. The platform, in which they used to record the sessions, is called Screencast-O-Matic. There is a free version, but for less than \$50 a year, you can have all the bells and whistles. This software allows you to create a presentation and present it from your computer while capturing your screen. A webcam records you while making the presentation. You can also play videos from your screen and narrate alongside. The free version allows you to make 15-minute presentations, which fit perfectly in line with a First Green learning lab!

Simply assemble a presentation like you normally would, start the Screencast-O-Matic software, and record your presentation. Subjects can replicate any of the learning labs that are found on the First Green Website. If you can produce videos, it will provide an even more dramatic presentation.

I would be crazy to expect every superintendent to go out and start recording learning labs. I will admit, this is a stretch for me but I'm game to give it a try or to at least work with superintendents to help them do it. Perhaps for those who have already hosted a field trip and have an established relationship with a teacher will find this tempting. It's as simple as connect-



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ing with your teacher and offering them a few virtual learning labs in which they can offer their classes virtually.

Part 2 - Downsizing Your First Green Field Trip

Referring to my previous blog post on hosting a First Green event during this pandemic, we must get creative on how to host a field trip while keeping safe distancing in place. My last blog described how to use technology by recording your learning lab from your computer and then delivering it through the schools remote learning platform. In this blog, I would like to highlight a couple First Green events that took place “in person” here in the Northwest.

In October, I met with Jeff Gullikson, CGCS at Kalispel Golf & Country Club in Spokane, Wash. We were originally going to video Jeff doing a learning lab without the presence of students. He took it a step further and coordinated a downsized event with a local school that had previously participated in First Green field trips.

To reduce the exposure, there were only two learning labs - one was taught by himself and the other was taught by the teacher, who also works as Jeff’s horticulturist during the summer. The golfing activity was not included this time around. Masks were required at all times by all of the individuals, as well as cleaning stations for frequent hand sanitizing. Two labs

were taught and the field trip was completed in 30 minutes.

The other First Green event was hosted by Kyle Watt of Awbrey Glen Golf Club in Bend, Ore. Kyle took my idea of the learning pod and combined it with their club’s Junior Explorer Series program. Kyle had just five kids attend so it was pretty easy to maintain distancing.

Kyle had a full agenda which started with the history of the golf club, as well as a facility tour. He explained the different features of the property his crew maintains and then pointed out all of the wildlife that inhabits the golf course. Kyle then covered the science that goes into maintaining the grass and he talked about the necessary nutrients required for healthy grass. Using a soil probe and a hole cutter, he could demonstrate right in front of the kids what a soil profile was and how water moved through it. Irrigation was a topic, as well as the types of mowers that were used.

Kyle was able to pack a lot of information in a pretty short period. This was Kyle’s first time hosting a First Green event and was the perfect way to get his feet wet. He’s now looking forward to hosting another event this spring!

We can make these field trips as simple or complex as we feel comfortable. The common line here is that the kids had a blast and were able to come out to the golf course. I’ll be looking forward to assisting Kyle on some more field trips in the near future!

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