

## A Spring Meeting that will Hit Vital Marks!

**H**ave you heard the news? The “Almost” Spring meeting is returning to Fairmont Hot Springs — a location that was a pretty big hit in 2020! The property worked so well for our outstanding educational event, and it offered plenty of time for networking... while enjoying the indoor and outdoor oversized Olympic swimming pools and mineral soaking pools fed by a virtually unlimited supply of 155-degree natural hot spring water (cooled to various temperatures for comfort and maximum enjoyment)! During that 2020 meeting, we noticed the hotel staff disinfecting all surfaces at regular intervals and we laughed if we should be shaking hands or hugging, as we shook hands and hugged. The world did turn upside down soon after.



Join us March 6 & 7, 2023, for another “can’t miss event” at Fairmont Hot Springs, Anaconda, Mont. Whether you bring your co-workers and/or your family, you will want to make this a priority to attend. The quality of education is what you expect it to be, Joining the slate — along with an association favorite, Brian Horgan, Ph.D. (left) — is

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## Election Results page 22

### *PPGCSA Upcoming Events:*

**Private Webcast, PPGCSA - January 23, 2023**

**Chapters of the Northwest Hospitality Room - February 8, 2023, Tin Roof, Orlando, Fla.**

**PPGCSA “Almost” Spring Meeting - March 6 & 7, 2023, Fairmont Hot Springs, Anaconda, Mont.**

**PPGCSA Scholarship/Education Golf Events - TBA**

**Fall Meeting & Trade Show - November 7-9, 2023, Billings Hotel & Convention Center, Billings, Mont.**

## “Another Year Around the Sun”

### A PPGCSA Private Webcast

The consequences of Covid 19 on both the supply chain and employee availability continued to have an effect in 2022. On Monday, January 23, 2023, during our chapter’s private webcast, moderated by Roch Gaussoin, Ph.D., we will talk about what was seen and what we can expect to see in 2023, in addition to other timely topics of interest. Whether you attend as an individual, or invite fellow courses in their area for the benefit of additional thoughtful discussion and comradery, it is a great way to connect virtually! Watch for more information to come.

## Rounds 4 Research Auction April 24 – April 30, 2023

The Rounds 4 Research program was designed to address a critical shortage in turfgrass research. To continue to grow this important cause and help fund our related programs, we need your participation with donated rounds/carts for two or four people. It is never too early to complete the online donation form. Visit <https://www.gcsaa.org/foundation/rounds-4-research/r4r-online-donation-form>

We are appreciative of all past and present donations made from the Peaks & Prairies GCSA region. For any questions or concerns, or for a little help on how to get started, please contact Jason Busch, 307-752-3579, The Powder Horn, or Lori at 406-273-0791.

## Chapters of the Northwest Hospitality Room

Of course we are returning to the Tin Roof for our 2023 Chapters of the Northwest Hospitality Room in Orlando! This unique venue was certainly a hit during our last Orlando visit — between the eclectic décor, great options for seating and networking, and the great location. Enjoy the evening with your turf industry peers at our private event at the Tin Roof of Orlando, Wednesday, February 8, 2023, 6:30 - 9:30 p.m. Complimentary food and beverages will be offered thanks to the generosity of our allied partners.



*“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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# President's Message

## 26 Years Ago, I was Hooked

Ryan Blechta

Spanish Peaks Mountain Club, Big Sky,

I am writing to you as your new board president and I am honored to serve in this role for our organization.

In October, I brought 34 fifth-graders to my course at Spanish Peaks to participate in the First Green program. After getting them into their first stations and seeing the excitement they brought with them, it got me thinking about my start in the industry, the choices I made, and the path it has taken me. I started working in this awesome industry when I was 16 years old at a private golf club in Minnetonka, Minn. I remember it like it was yesterday — waking up in the early mornings on the weekends, before anyone else was awake, to get to the course and also working after school every day I could. My boss at the time was a great mentor; I was inspired by him and knew right away that being a superintendent is the career I wanted to have. At sixteen my favorite things about it were working alongside my friends, dew removal on the fairways, and betting who could get the most air off the grass bunkers with the four-wheelers. I knew that I needed to work hard and I decided to go



to University of Minnesota Crookston (UMC) to pursue a turfgrass management degree.

As the students moved through their stations measuring greens, checking moisture and even getting some time to play golf, I thought about my time in college and beyond. I was working at a 9-hole public course that was used for the labs in UMC, which gave me my first experience running a course when I was chosen to be co-superintendent with another turf student. Then, I was fortunate enough to get a full-time job at Spring Hill Golf Club where my superintendent, Tim Johnson, mentored me throughout my time there. I began to learn about how to run a private course at Spring Hill. While I had moved up the ranks, I was looking for a change when in 2005 I accepted a job with Yellowstone Club in Big Sky. I had been to Montana one time as a kid and I originally planned on spending just a few years in the mountains. But then I met my wife, Sarah, a little less than a year after moving to Montana while she was back visiting from college. We were married in 2008 and with the uncertainty in the market and the industry, moving didn't make sense. We stayed in Big Sky and in 2012 we were blessed with our daughter, Ella Rose, whom I was lucky enough to be hosting at the First Green event. Not only was I hosting my daughter's class, it was the first time a First Green took place in Montana.

When the kids took their lunch break, I watched them sit on the grass, roll around, and look out onto the Spanish Peaks, on this unseasonably warm day. It brought back my memories of standing on the driving range for the first time as the superintendent at Spanish Peaks, in 2013. I had helped maintain the course during its bankruptcy, keeping it alive with minimal staff and having the opportunity to run the course after bankruptcy was just another turn on the path I couldn't have imagined. Watching the kids enjoy their time on the course before they loaded up on the bus, all I could hope for was that today we hooked at least one of these kids, the way I was hooked 26 years ago. This industry has given me so many memories; it changed my life path and brought me to my family. For all these things, I will always be thankful.



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# From a Collared Shirt to Coveralls

## Jake Wilson, Stock Farm Hamilton, Mont.

For those of you who do not know me, my name is Jake Wilson. I currently work at the Stock Farm Golf Club in Hamilton, Mont., and have worked there for ten years now. I have played many dif-

ferent roles and have done many different tasks during this time. For five of these ten years I have been the second assistant superintendent, and in three of those years I played a second role as an equipment technician. I have really enjoyed my time spent in the shop and have decided to pursue the career of becoming an equipment manager.

While making this transition into the shop, there have been subtle changes that seem to make the biggest difference in daily or yearly routine. An example is winter work. Every person working in the golf industry who experiences a cold winter

enjoys when the crew becomes smaller and the grass shuts down. It signifies the end of an eventful and busy summer, and the beginning of some much-needed down time. Equipment managers experience this same enjoyment, but it may not be to the same extent as everybody else. During this time of the year, we begin to shuttle equipment into the shop for multiple reasons. Reels are sharpened and prepared for the following season, preventative maintenance is performed, and larger projects are carried out. One of the projects that we have planned for the winter of 2022 is rebuilding the reels on one of our fairway mowers. Previous projects have included replacing cracked cylinder heads on some of our heavy duty carts. Preventative maintenance is an important practice that should be carried out on all equipment. It helps to avoid breakdowns during important events during the season. During times like large tournaments or aeration, stress levels are already high to make sure everything is perfect and done in a timely manner. Carrying out preventative maintenance practices can help to prevent

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**Wilson** continued from page 3

equipment malfunctions during these times.

There has been a lot that I have learned during the time that I have spent working in the shop repairing equipment and preparing it for projects on the course. From everything that I have learned thus far, two lessons stand out the most. The first one is to take time while repairing the equipment. There will always be times when mowers or other machinery needs to be

put back together quickly to be sent back out to finish the job. But, when the time can be spent on the machine to repair the issue once, instead of multiple times, it becomes less stressful for superintendents, operators, and mechanics. The second lesson is that it is important for the equipment manager to operate the equipment at the course. Being able to know the stress points and how the equipment should perform during each task helps with diagnosing the issue when the machine is brought into the shop.



## Pat Nowlen Attends GCSAA Chapter Delegates Meeting

Representing the Peaks & Prairies GCSA, Pat Nowlen, City of Polson/Polson Bay Golf Club, attended the event on Oct. 25-26, 2022 at GCSAA Headquarters in Lawrence, Kan., as well as the KCI Airport Hilton Hotel.

The annual meeting brings delegates together from GCSAA's 97 chapters to discuss initiatives, provide insight on moving the association forward and to begin discussions on electing board members and officers at the annual meeting.



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# The Evolution of Golf Through my Eyes

Sean Sullivan, CGCS

The Briarwood, Billings, Mont.

What follows are my recollections and impressions of golf and golf courses from the late 60s through to the present day. My experiences began in the delta of Louisiana

and are now here in Montana. I've never kept notes, but still remember both my overall impressions and my memories of golf experiences.

In the late 60s, I lived in Berwick, Morgan City, and New Orleans — all in Louisiana. My dad was a petroleum engineer and his first job with Gulf Oil was in the delta of Louisiana. He had a set of Wilson Sam Snead Blue Ridge golf clubs purchased with S&H Green Stamps. If you know S&H Green Stamps, you are probably old, as well. Included was a canvas bag and a pull cart. I can remember going to Patterson, La. with my dad, to walk along as he played the course. Of those memories, I'm sure I asked little boy questions as he explained club selection and course strategies. The course was basic. Nothing stood out about the tees, greens, fairways, or roughs. I don't recall if they even had bunkers and comparing with what I know today, they probably mowed everything with gang mowers. Don't ever recall my dad complaining about the course or conditions. Don't recall any jibber jabber about unrepaired ball marks, green speeds, drunken behavior or other such nonsense. He just played the course as it was! And I was just walking the course spending time with my dad.

Later while living in New Orleans, probably in the 12-14 age range, my brother and I started to play golf, as well. We learned to play at a course called Brechtel Park, a municipal course later becoming nationally known after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. I was one of the many superintendents who made

donations to help them restart operations. During the summers, my brother and I were dropped off at the course to play all day while our parents were working. I can remember playing 45-54 holes everyday while snacking on cheese and peanut butter crackers, with a soda to drink. Once again, the course was basic — nothing in the maintenance or setup suggested anything special. As a slicer and playing a lot of golf from the perimeters, I remember that the course must have been built on an old land-fill based on the broken glass and other debris. And if we found a Club Special that didn't have a smiley cut into it, life was great! Course conditions never bothered us, nor did we hear anyone complaining of the conditions. We played it as it lies! Later in my New Orleans years, I had my first opportunity to visit Lakewood Country Club, a private country club that played host to the Greater New Orleans. Lakewood was also the first time I saw tournament golf where I saw Palmer, Nicklaus, and Player. The private club's presentation was nicer and it had more flowers than the muni tracks, but nothing special compared to today's course. I had the sense that the private club members expected more, but never witnessed the abuse back then that I now witness daily.

During the early 70s, as a teenager, I started playing a public course called Treeline in Tomball Texas. This was the first time I was aware of a maintenance crew. Behind the first green was the maintenance barn (which was truly a barn), with the crew hanging out in the doorway during the hot summer days. There were just two or three guys, which was probably all that was needed. The course was nothing special; probably cut with a gang mower. I never noticed any issues with ball marks or other etiquette problems. I was playing my dad's Sam Snead clubs and still snacking on cheese and peanut butter crackers while washing it down with a soda. Also, we played the course as it lied — no complaining about course conditions.

During college, my time with the Forest Service, and later in the oil field (1975-1986), I didn't play much golf. It wasn't until I moved to Atlanta to build houses that I started to play golf again. Between the years 1986-1989, I was playing golf at a nearby public course. It was at this time that I noticed big changes in golf and in golf courses. It easily could have just been the difference between Texas and Georgia and a bigger population. The golfers used more carts and with the increase in carts also came the increase in drinking and bad behavior. The courses were better maintained and presented, presumably because the technology had improved. But, still nothing "stuck out" and the course was played as it lies.

In 1989, I took on a weekend job mowing greens at a

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## Through my Eyes

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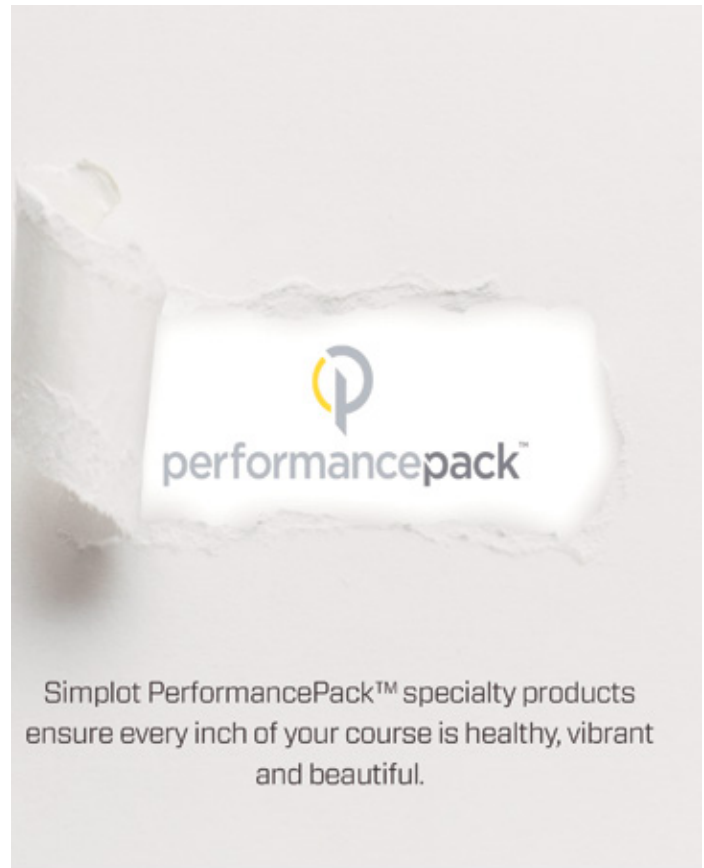
private country club to help fund a new child. This was the start of my maintenance career. How I looked at both golf courses and how people played golf was changed forever! Druid Hills had enough financial resources that we wanted for nothing. Whenever there was a new type of mower, sprayer, or aerator, we got one. We had one of the first three hydrojects, one of the first spray rigs with a raven controller, a Dakota topdresser, etc. While everything was kept to a high standard, my observations were entry level stuff and in hindsight, limited in scope.

After five years in the industry with no formalized training, I became a superintendent in 1994. It was at this time that my life and the industry really began evolving quickly. There were new chemicals being developed, a few of which I was lucky to trial even before they had names. Mower technology was advancing, slightly. Turf education was increasing both through chapter and national events, which was important for me as a self-taught superintendent. Grass cultivars were advancing as well, especially the bentgrasses. That was my impression, anyway, as trying to grow bentgrass in the transition zone was a challenge to say the least! At the same time, Tiger Woods was starting to dominate golf and the whole world was watching golf on TV. With that, a better presentation was being demanded from the maintenance staffs. The concept of smooth, speedy, and survivable greens was in its infancy.

In 2002, I moved my family to Billings, Mont., to fix The Briarwood. It seems my niche in the industry is as a fixer, not a fine tuner! I never really developed that skill set. During the last 20 years, chemistries seem to have accelerated in order to counteract resistance, aeration has changed from generic coring to solid tining, micro tining, cross tining, bayonet tining, to ninja tining, and not tining. We used to verti-cut to remove a problem; now we do it on a regular basis along with topdressing to manage organic matter. Green speeds have gotten faster beyond the skills of the modern golfers as a measure of a club's greatness, when it's really the maintenance staff's resourcefulness. Smoothness is what the golfers really crave and the advancements in roller technology is ever-increasing. After 2008, and the world's financial decline, golf really evolved for the worst! Golf courses with decent resources managed to stay afloat while others failed. As a result, golf courses feared failing, and as such, allowed members/golfers to do and act as they pleased in order to keep the cash flowing.

Almost all of golf's evolutions have been for the betterment of the game/industry. However, the fear that a golfer/member is going to stop playing golf started a trend that is still "snowballing." Clubs'/courses' allowance of bad behavior/poor etiquette has escalated to a new level of crazy. Then the pandemic golfers said, "Hold my seltzer and watch this," as they stepped it up even further into ridiculous levels of poor etiquette. Golf has survived a couple of world wars, the great depression, the 1917 world pandemic, and suddenly now, it's ok to act poorly on the course. Why is it ok now?

Of course, it could be me getting old, or maybe it's the evolution of the seltzer industry?



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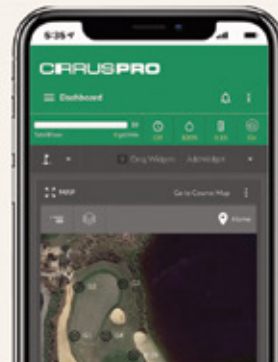
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# Putting Green Moisture Management

Ryan Meredith

The Club at SpurWing, Meridian, Idaho  
(*Grass Clippings*, Dec. 2021)

Typically when our Grass Clippings newsletter comes out, I'm excited to see what new articles are going to be in the issue. We always have some fun and interesting topics that our peers have written about and I seem to always get something useful from every one of them. Coming up with your own topic to write

about can be interesting because it feels like whatever you have to share, your fellow superintendents are most likely doing these things on a daily basis. Then I thought about it a little more. I realized we may do some of the same things differently, and, who knows, how we do it may be helpful to someone else.

This brings me to the topic of moisture management on putting greens. How I manage moisture has evolved over the years with the progression of technology.

When I started in this business, we

evaluated greens moisture by walking the green complex—visually looking around for wilt, feeling the firmness at our feet, and, if we had time, pulling out the soil probe and checking a couple of places to see if they were dry. We would typically target historically dry parts of the greens and if they “seemed” dry, we would water extra that night. If they showed wilt, we would water by hand.

I remember when wetting agents became a thing. At first it seemed like we were being sold some sort of voodoo magic trick to help keep our greens wet. They definitely did hold moisture, but maybe a little too much. Over the years, wetting agents have improved in so many ways and have become an integral part of my moisture management program. Other superintendents have come to me and asked what wetting agent I use



on my greens. I always tell them what I am using, but it turns into a conversation about what they are trying to achieve, the continued page time of year they are applying the wetting agents, and what kinds of soils they have. Here at SpurWing, we use a few different wetting agents. Our newer course has greens with way less organic matter content, so wetting agents that hold water a little more have been helpful in the summertime. For our mature greens with higher organic content, we use wetting agents in the spring and fall that will move water through the profile to help with firmness, and something in the summer that is in-between. Timing of the applications has changed for me over the years, as well. We used to apply the



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wetting agents monthly. I really didn't want to have to take the time to spray them, so monthly made sense. Over the years, I realized that spraying biweekly really helped keep the wetting agents working consistently and they wouldn't stop working toward the end of the application interval. It also helps that the newer wetting agent chemistries allow you to tank mix them with a lot of your fertilizer spray programs, making them easier to apply timely.

Soil moisture meters are another tool that has changed the game for me. I remember seeing one for the first time at a GIS class. It was one of those classes where we were able to go out onto a golf course and try out all the new gadgets. I was instantly intrigued and asked a lot of questions. Ultimately, I ended up purchasing one and now I'm not sure I could ever do my job without it. We currently use a TDR 350 and it is out taking moisture readings daily on every one of my greens. When you first get a moisture meter you spend a lot of time figuring out what the numbers mean and what to do with the information. Most importantly for me was to determine how low of a number I could get before I would see wilt when it's 95-plus degrees outside. This gave me a number for when to start hand watering. I found that before using the moisture meter we were overwatering several sections of all the greens, which makes sense because before, we were really only looking for dry spots and adjusting our irrigation from there. Now when we meter a

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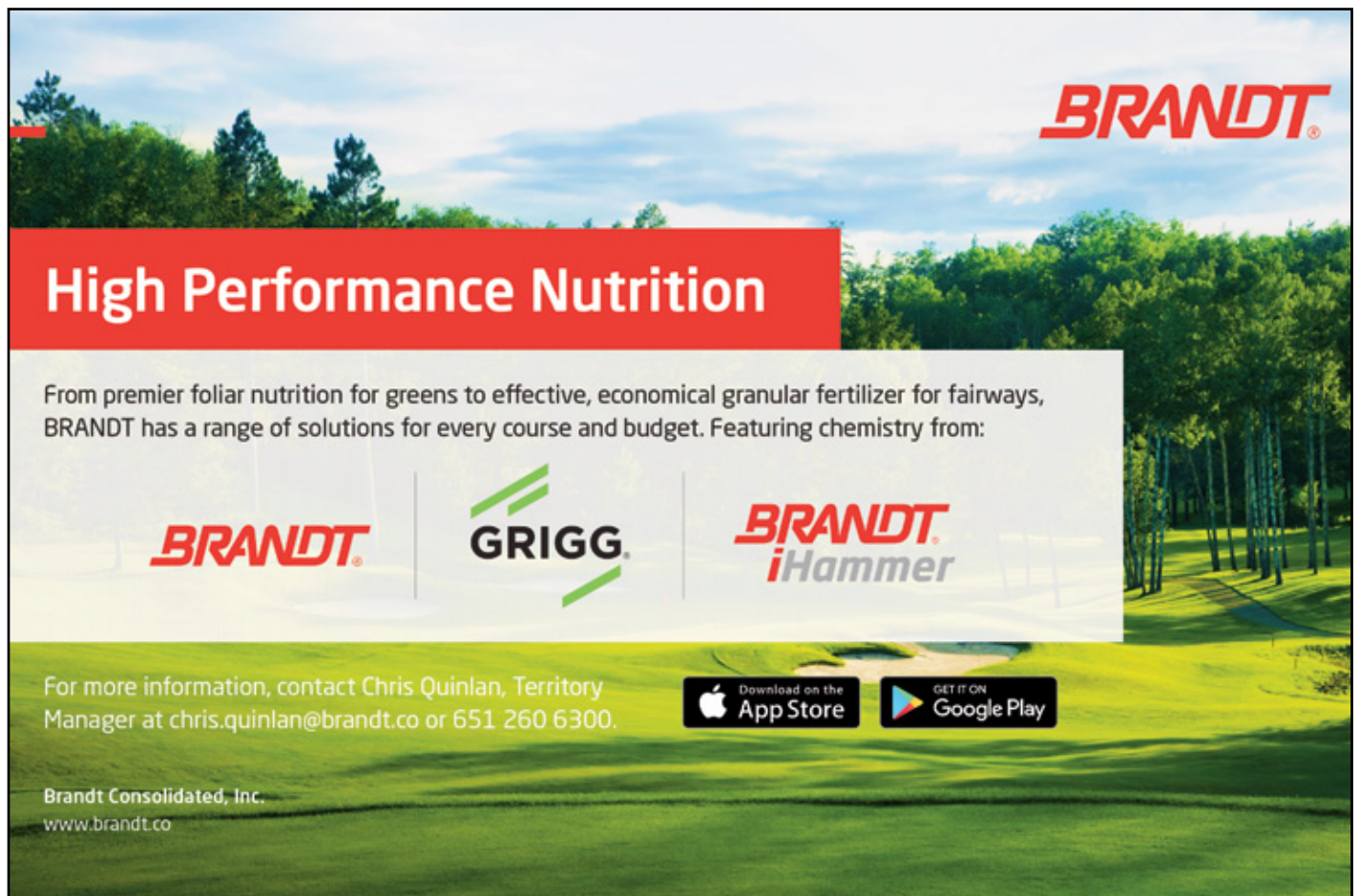
## Moisture Management

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green we walk it in a grid pattern and take easily 30 readings per green. We are looking at both wet and dry spots. The dry spots are located and marked with an irrigation flag. After all the dry spots are marked we hand water those sections. We can then monitor the rest of the green to determine when and how long to water with the overheads that night. This has kept the moisture much more uniform across each green and you can easily locate drier areas before they wilt. I have also been able to keep consistency with the moisture management, even if I have different people metering the greens each day. I hope to start messing around with in-ground moisture sensors that can

hopefully help streamline my moisture management practices in the future.

We all understand golfers want firm and fast greens in the middle of July. We all also understand what a huge undertaking it is and that we don't want to forgo turf health to achieve the results. Moisture management has really helped me get the best results in terms of turf health, which in turn gives golfers a great playing surface. Hopefully some of what I do to manage moisture on greens can be helpful to you!



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A page from our newsletter 14 years ago!  
See any familiar faces?

## OUR FRIENDS at the 2008 Fall Meeting & Trade Show



## “Almost” Spring Meeting

continued from page 1



Hector Velazquez (left) of Hector’s Shop. Velazquez enjoyed a long history as a golf course equipment manager and now operates a small engine repair shop while still helping EMs every day. Velazquez produces monthly "How To" videos for GCSAA that helps educate technicians within the industry.

Also, sharing his experiences of making a move from

assistant superintendent to superintendent will be Mark Lyon (right), Teton Pines Resort & Country Club, Jackson, Wyo. Lyon is part of a panel presenting on the subject at the GCSAA conference and show. So not only will we learn from his experiences, we will benefit from the knowledge he picked up from his peers, as well.

Okay, this time we really can help you wrap up your facility BMPs and hit that submit button with your completed version, while onsite. We



all understand the value and the history, so no additional discussions are needed. Dave Phipps will help you make it happen – period. Phipps has helped numerous people get it over that line easily and efficiently with no homework left. Bring a few course pictures and your laptop, and walk out with completed BMPs. Really.

We are in the process of finalizing the rest of the conference agenda and we look forward to sharing it by mid-January with our conference registration. In the meantime, all you have to do is plan to attend and protect the date.

## Bishop Joins Board of Directors

Congratulations to Justin Bishop, The Powder Horn, Sheridan, Wyo., who was recently elected to the Peaks & Prairies GCSA Board of Directors. Also re-elected as directors were incumbents Sean Sullivan, CGCS, The Briarwood, Billings, Mont.; and Brandon Barkley, Three Crowns, Jackson, Wyo.

Elected as president was Ryan Blechta, Spanish Peaks Mountain Club, Big Sky, Mont.; vice president is Garrett Turner, Moonlight Basin, Big Sky, Mont., and Ryan Knapp, Stock Farm, Hamilton, Mont., as secretary/treasurer.



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