

## You are Invited to the Montana Golf Community Meeting

It was an honor to welcome representatives from the Montana State Golf Association (MSGA) to the “Almost” Spring Meeting! Joining the event were Nick Dietzen, Executive Director, and Tim Bakker, Tournament Director (below). It was a wonderful opportunity to interact with these gentlemen and any opportunity we have to show off our strong educational programs is a valuable opportunity. The support the MSGA has shown from year to year has been vital to our programs — including \$5,000 in 2022. Their support for the turf professionals in the region was demonstrated by asking how they can further assist our association and all entities of the Montana golf “family.”



As announced at the meeting, with the support of the USGA, the MSGA is convening a Montana Golf Community Meeting, April 20, at the Butte Country Club. Lunch will be provided from 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. and followed by presentations and breakout opportunities from 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. The purpose of this meeting is to provide education, discussion and collaboration opportunities across Montana from every chapter, organization and group that supports golf in Montana. You will be receiving a

save-the-date via email soon from Mike Sweeney of the USGA. Any and all members are encouraged to attend.

### **PPGCSA Upcoming Events:**

**PPGCSA Mont. Scholarship/Education Golf Events, May 16, 2023, Hilands Golf Club, Billings, Mont.**

**PPGCSA Wyo. Scholarship/Education Golf Events - TBA Fall Meeting & Trade Show - November 7-9, 2023, Billings Hotel & Convention Center, Billings, Mont.**

**Private Webcast, PPGCSA - January 2024 (TBA) Chapters of the Northwest Hospitality Room - Phoenix, Ariz., January 31, 2024 (tentative)**

**PPGCSA “Almost” Spring Meeting - March 4-5, 2024, DoubleTree by Hilton (downtown), Billings, Mont.**

## 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/donate-a-round> 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 Justin Bishop, 703-774-5189, The Powder Horn, or Lori at 406-273-0791.

## “We Made it Through 2022”

It’s been a while since we offered short bites of our own members’ experiences during our education events. At the “Almost “ Spring Meeting, five superintendents from across the region thoughtfully said yes when invited to share 10 minutes on a subject of their choice, under the umbrella of “We Made it Through 2022.” The results? A resounding thumbs-up from the entire group, with the suggestion to offer it again at a future meeting. The short amount of time doesn’t require a memorized speech or a lot of preparation. Toss up a few slides and chat with the group. It is that easy to participate and beneficial to all in the audience.

Thanks to Todd Lupkes, CGCS, Old Works Golf Course, Anaconda, Mont.; Pat Nowlen, City of Polson, Polson, Mont.; Jordan Hill, Canyon River Golf Club, Missoula, Mont.; Cody Schulke, Yellowstone Country Club, Billings, Mont.; and D.J. Woodruff, Purple Sage, Evanston, Wyo. (shown in order)



*“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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# President's Message

## Accept What you Can't Control

**Ryan Blechta**  
**Spanish Peaks Mountain Club**  
**Big Sky, Mont.**



As I sit here and type, I glance outside and see the most snow I have seen in Big Sky in years, and it's only February. This time of year I watch events like the Waste Management Open and realize that it will be a long time until things look like that around here. I live in an area that can see snow 11 months of the year. Yes, you read that correctly. At our course elevation of 7,500 ft, I have seen snow every month except August. People ask how I stay sane and stay in the golf industry with such a short season. Over my nearly 18 years in Big Sky, I have realized a few things — you have to like winter and you have to find ways to keep yourself busy. Over the years, I have picked up both Alpine and Nordic skiing and I am lucky that I can walk out my office door and in a few hundred feet, I can be on the ski trail or the cross-country trail. I have found that Nordic has become a great stress reliever for me and it is certainly a great work out. While we don't have turf to take care of in the winter, we do have many other responsibilities that create

stress, and finding ways to deal with stress is something that we all need to prioritize for our well-being. I have found cardio is my best stress release, so I try and make sure I spend time on the hill with Nordic or Alpine, or when it's too cold, I spend time on my Peloton. Whether it is work or personal, everyone has stress in their lives and no one manages it in the exact same way. Taking time to understand what works for you is worth the effort, because ultimately, it is how you manage your stress that makes all the difference. Whenever I feel stressed, I think of a quote from M.P. Neary, "One of the best ways to reduce stress is to accept the things that you cannot control." I have learned to accept things I cannot control.


I hope everyone can remember this quote and accept they cannot control everything that happens at their course.

It was great to see you all at the "Almost" Spring Meeting at Fairmont Hot Springs in March and let's hope Punxsutawney Phil is wrong on six more weeks of winter.

An advertisement for BASF Maxtima Fungicide. The background is a wide-angle photograph of a golf course with green fairways and brown, dry grass on the slopes under a clear blue sky. In the foreground, several golfers are visible on the course. The advertisement text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

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# What is Your Plan?

Brandon Barkley  
3 Creek Ranch, Jackson, Wyo.

By and large, we as turf professionals are creatures of habit. Countless hours are spent executing the same tasks while frequently pursuing the same goals. Occasionally our habits can even come to a fault. Do any of you have a hard time sleeping past 5:00 a.m.? As the demands of personal and professional responsibilities have grown for me, I have realized the benefits of having a good plan in place. My hope for this article is that you, too, can gain a few ideas about putting a plan in motion, and just maybe sleep past that 5:00 a.m. wake up time.

I have been on all spectrums of planning from a “let’s just wing it’ approach, to obsessing over every detail. While each has its own place, I have found it most beneficial to prioritize tasks by asking myself three questions.

1. What must get done?
2. What should get done.
3. What would be really nice to get done?

I understand those are open-ended questions that will largely

depend on your objectives and resources. However, breaking tasks down to three categories has helped me align my goals with my efforts.

Successfully execute in categories 1 and 2, and it will allow you the liberty to enter category 3.

Having a plan that performs may be an obvious objective, but how do you get there? Sometimes obsessing over every detail has its place. Allowing myself to think through daily practices and programs with an analytical approach lets me see the inner workings of what the team and I achieve. I find it best to put a plan on paper — be it an Excel sheet, or simply listing the steps for success. As I mentioned before, most of us are creatures of habit, and a repetitive plan can be great. However, t

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## What's Your Plan continued from page 4

there can also be a danger in continuously following a plan with a "that is the way it has always been done" it mindset. This method of thinking is referred to as the sacred cow approach. If you have a sacred cow living in your maintenance program, start asking it questions. Break your tasks down to the nuts and the bolts. You might find inefficiencies; however, you also might find areas where you are excelling. When breaking our programs down I find myself genuinely impressed with the steps the team and I take to accomplish our goals, and its easy to gain momentum when mining your strengths.

**Preach your plan!** After prioritizing the course of action and breaking it down to the nuts and bolts, it is time to communicate your plan. A good plan needs to live outside of your mind. Otherwise, your plan becomes an intention, and intentions never accomplish anything. I find it best to start with communicating the end goal and then work backwards through

the processes. A photograph paired with 5-10 bullet points is my go-to formula. Find what works to communicate with your team and deliver your objectives in a clear message. The effort you put in to communicating your plan will parallel the success you achieve.

Pause your plan and pass the ball. While the benefits of having a good plan in place can be great, I have also found it beneficial to hit the pause button and let things unfold organically. Knowing when to and how to include your team is one of the most challenging aspects of planning. A good plan helps you become a good leader, and a good leader knows when to recognize their plan could use something additional. The objective or standard should never change, but the path or the person navigating the path might.

Though completely anecdotal, I hope you have found something helpful in this article, and that you will find a way to have some peace of mind with the plans that you put in to place.



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# New and Improved GCSAA Programs and Offerings

David Phipps

GCSAA NW Regional Field Staff Representative

With another season in the books, I reflect on my first year as your GCSAA NW Regional Field Representative — back in 2012. What stands out to me is the increased value GCSAA has offered its members since I

joined. The value of a GCSAA membership has never been greater. As you read through my following comments, I think you will agree. I hope you will consider taking advantage of these GCSAA offerings and increasing your knowledge and value as a golf course superintendent, assistant superintendent, or equipment manager.

Not in any particular order, here is my list of new and improved GCSAA programs that I encourage you to take advantage of as they may apply to you:

### The First Green

The First Green began in Seattle, Washington, in 1997 as a program to increase the awareness of the golf course management profession and to provide opportunities for children to visit the golf course and learn STEM education. In 2018, GCSAA officially adopted the program and began promoting it across the country. I am so pleased that both Wyoming and Montana are now on the books and am looking forward to seeing more field trips added to the list! Last fall, Ryan Blechta, at Spanish Peaks held his first field trip and I'm sure he was more than happy to discuss the details with you at the recent "Almost" Spring Meeting.

### The Equipment Manager Membership

In my opinion, this by far has been one of GCSAA's most  
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## GCSAA Programs continued from page 8

valuable new offerings in the past ten years. For only \$95 a year the equipment manager will have access to all of GCSAA's educational offerings, including specialized EM-focused seminars. The Equipment Manager Certificate Program (EMCP) has been developed to challenge your equipment manager to obtain certificates that will test their knowledge and skills. Topping off the EMCP, GCSAA has implemented the Certified Turf Equipment Manager (CTEM). The CTEM designation is the highest recognition that can be achieved by a turf equipment management professional. Your peers developed this certification under the guidance of a professional psychometrician.

### The Assistant Superintendent Membership

Preparing the assistant superintendent for the next level has never been more important than today. GCSAA has developed the Assistant Superintendent Certificate Series (ASCS) to help fill that gap and prepare the assistant superintendent for their next step. The ASCS contains four competencies: agronomy, business, leadership and communication, as well as environmental stewardship. Upon completion of the ASCS, assistants will become eligible for a scholarship to the John Deere Green Start Academy! Also, by completing the ASCS, one of the requirements for the Certified Golf Course Superintendent (CGCS) will be satisfied!

### The Certified Golf Course Superintendent Program

The new, modernized CGCS program is here! GCSAA has kept the program's integrity while streamlining the process to fit today's hectic life. Gone is the laborious portfolio, replaced by a communication and leadership component as well as a more subjective golf course attesting process. Since the rollout in 2022, GCSAA has seen a marked increase in participation and completion. So why not go for it? The CGCS designation is the most widely recognized in the golf industry and the highest recognition that can be achieved by the golf course superintendent. For any of the certificates or certifications, please visit [GCSAA.org](http://GCSAA.org) and see Certifications & Exams under the Education tab.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you, the Peaks & Prairies membership, for making my job so enjoyable these past ten years. I can't say enough how much I appreciate all of you. It has truly been an honor getting to know you and serve you. As I look forward to future travels to the region, please do not hesitate to call me if you have any questions or concerns.




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# GCSAA Conference and Trade Show and Chapters of the Northwest Hospitality Room!

Congratulations to Abe Coulosey, Rochelle Ranch Golf Course! Coulosey was a recipient of the Envu Superintendent Grant to attend the 2023 CTS! Coulosey was thankful to take advantage of the educational opportunities, networking opportunities, and the chance to see the rocket launch (shown here below)!







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# The First Montana First Green Event!

Ryan Blechta

Spanish Peaks Mountain Club

Big Sky, Mont.



October 19, 2022, students from Big Sky’s Ophir School fifth grade class turned Spanish Peaks Mountain Club into an outdoor learning lab. Thanks to the collaboration with Yellowstone Club and Moonlight Basin, we were able to welcome 28 students to Spanish Peaks for Montana’s first First Green.



The First Green focuses on inspiring youth through advancing golf, strengthening futures, applying lessons, building community, and having fun.

When learning about the First Green

program and talking with Dave Phipps about how to bring it to Montana, I learned it was fairly easy to do. With a few clicks on <https://www.thefirstgreen.org/> and navigating through their website, I really learned how cool it could be. I met with Dave in Billings at the fall Peaks & Prairies event to discuss some cool lab ideas he recommended that had been a hit with other courses. I wanted to make sure the kids were able to apply their classroom knowledge in an outdoor setting and have fun doing it — finding inspiration in their schoolwork and potentially gain interest in pursuing a career in golf course management. I told

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## First Green in Montana continued from page 14

my staff that it's like early recruitment for future turf managers!

The students participated in five different 25-minute learning labs where they rotated through each lab. The focus is STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).

The stations we held were:

**Cool Tool on the Green**  
**Soil and Water**  
**Wildlife Management**  
**Math on the Course**  
**Golf Course Operations**

All stations were held at our practice facility since this was the easiest area to get the school bus in and out, and we also have all different surfaces represented in one location (greens, tees, rough, fairways and native). Seeing how much fun they had and seeing the course through their eyes reminded me of what it was like to start out in the industry with the same enthusiasm and eagerness to learn, which is something that will stay with me for my entire career.

### Cool Tool on the Green



This was one of my favorites to create. In this lab we focused on averages. We used tools like the Stimpmeter, the firmness meter, and the TDR. We had the kids on the green using these tools to collect averages. We even showed them how the TDR is used by pouring water in different locations on the green and having them find those areas with the TDR.



## Math on the Course



This was an easy one to create. We do math all day, every day, as part of our jobs. But, I wanted to make sure the kids were having fun while doing math. In this lab we had the kids use a measuring wheel to measure different areas on our driving range tee. The Moonlight team pre-set areas with pin flags and we had the kids measure these areas to get total square feet. Good thing we had a backup measuring wheel, the first one didn't make it.

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## First Green in Montana

Continued from page 16

### Soil and Water



In this lab, we utilized soil sifters and soil probes. We had three different soils on site ( sand, clay and loamy soil). The students learned each soil's characteristics and the differences in each's infiltration. We also taught the kids how we take soil

samples and had them take soil samples from different areas. I think next time we might make this lab into two as there was a lot to cover and not enough time.

### Wildlife Management



This lab, led by our director of security, Charles, was the most popular because of the materials he had brought in for the lab. The materials consisted of different animal horns, different animal claws and different animal scat. The kids learned how to



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identify the different wildlife we encounter on the golf course and what to do if they encounter such animals. We also taught the kids the importance of wildlife and how golf courses protect the wildlife and their habitat.

### Golf Course Operations



I wanted to do a lab where the kids learn about golf etiquette, but also can have some fun with golf. I reached out to our director of golf, DJ, and asked if he and some of his staff

would be willing to help with this. We utilized our chipping green area where the kids learned how to properly rake out their sand trap, how to properly repair a ball mark on the green, and also how to properly repair their divot. The kids had lots of fun doing this because they got to hit balls out of the sand and take some putts on the green.

GCSAA made it easy when it came to ideas and materials needed for each station. The hardest part for me was getting in contact with the school and making sure all parties agreed with taking the kids off property. I was fortunate enough that my daughter Ella is in 5th grade and I had a personal connection with her teacher, instead of an email. I was able to discuss the First Green with him in person, which I felt really made a difference in moving this along and getting all parties in agreement.

It was very rewarding for me to see all the excitement of the kids, and also the collaboration with our community courses that came together and helped. I would say this was one of my favorite days on the golf course. We got lucky with the weather because three days later we got 10" of snow. Our food and beverage team also helped out by preparing boxed lunches for the kids, and we also had snacks at each lab which helped keep them focused.

After the field trip, the fifth-grade teachers reached out and thanked me and the volunteers for putting this on. They want us to do this again and we hope to make this an annual field trip between the four golf courses in Big Sky and our local school.

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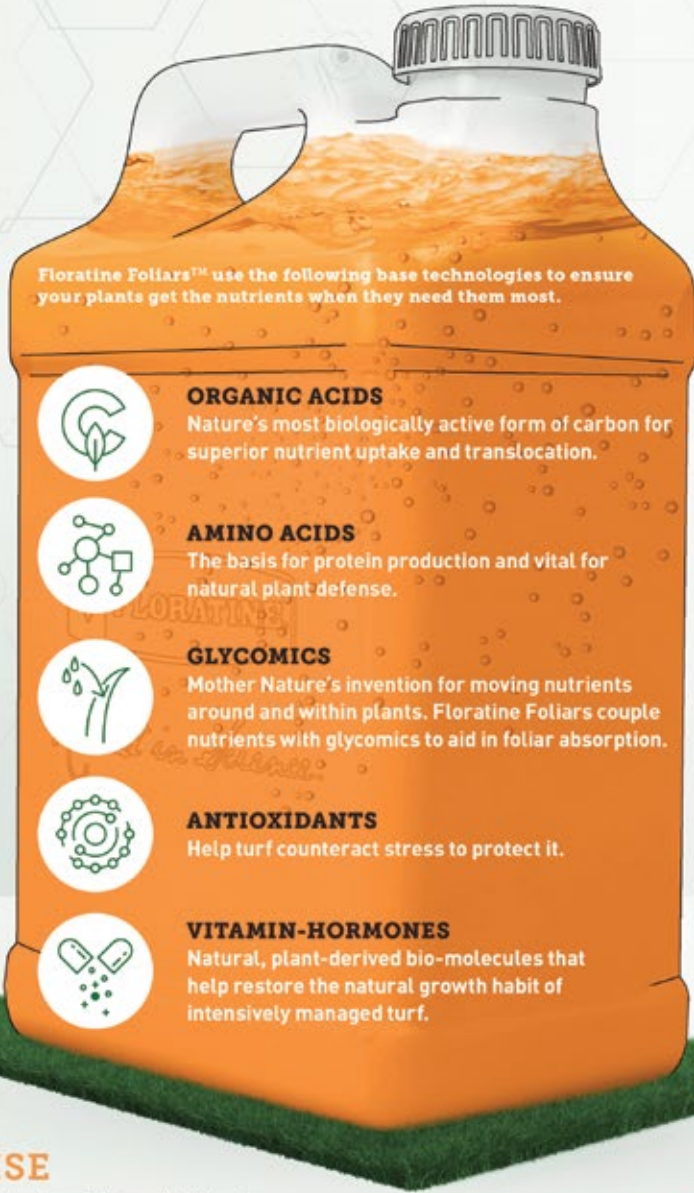
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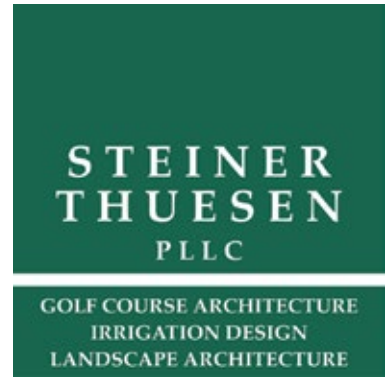




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