

# Industry Buzz

What's going on with your golf course or company? E-mail [superpr@MooseRiverMedia.com](mailto:superpr@MooseRiverMedia.com) with your news.

## Putting Their Heads Together

Superintendents work collaboratively to solve common issues at Syngenta Business Institute

BY ROB MEYER / MANAGING EDITOR

It really is a brilliant idea. Take 25 golf course superintendents from 18 different states and bring them together at a luxurious and thought-provoking academic setting to discuss ways to improve their operations and be better at their jobs.

Who in the industry wouldn't want to attend such an event?

These 25 superintendents, chosen from a batch of about 80 applicants, engaged in the educational, informative and ultimately fulfilling sixth-annual Syngenta Business Institute (SBI) in December at the Graylyn International Conference Center on the campus of Wake Forest University (WFU) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

As a newcomer to the golf industry and to this magazine, I had no idea what to expect at this three-day event, but I heard nothing but great things about it.

It didn't disappoint. And that's an understatement. I felt smarter after attending this event. I would bet every attendee felt the same way. I know the ones I spoke to did.

What impacted me the most was how well this collaborative environment really worked. Also how it provoked and stimulated discussion. The amount of knowledge and insight presented was staggering.

When I left, I felt I could become a golf course superintendent! After all, I had just taken in an immense amount of knowledge, expertise and valuable insight over the three days. I thought to myself: "I could do a great job as a superintendent. Sign me up!"

That's a joke, of course.

I could never do what these guys do on a day-to-day basis. They worry about finding employees. They worry about finding good employees.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF SYNGENTA



Twenty five golf course superintendents spent three days learning from Wake Forest University business experts.

They worry about maintaining a pristine golf course every day. They worry about financial issues, making money for their clubs, satisfying all of the daily requirements that need to be met and handling problem employees. That's just the tip of the iceberg, I learned.

That's why SBI is such a unique event. It provided solutions to some of these problems.

"It's important to be able to discuss current affairs in the business with your peers," said Tim Huber, superintendent at The Club at Carlton Woods in The Woodlands, Texas. "This is a difficult business, and while it's competitive, it's important to be able to lean on your peers and know that there's a mutual respect in what we do. We get each other. We know what we're up against, and especially at an event like this, you meet guys and you can relate to issues they're facing. You talk it out, get different perspectives, and it helps out a lot."

Scot Dey, superintendent at Mission Viejo Country Club in Mission Viejo, California, echoed Huber's statements about the positives of discussing industry issues with peers in a collaborative setting like SBI.

"I find it very valuable when I'm around colleagues," Dey said. "There's so many experiences out there, that when you get into a setting like SBI, it offers that sharing of knowledge and guys are sharing ideas, talking about things. You get to see how other superintendents go about problem-solving techniques."

Regarding problem-solving, specifically of financial issues, Ken Middaugh, director of WFU's Institute for Executive Education and former associate dean and associate professor of management of WFU's School of Business, provided attendees with an overview of key financial statements that are used to assess the financial health and performance of organizations. Specifically, he focused on the financial metrics that are useful in evaluating the performance of golf and club operations.

Dr. Amy Wallis, professor of practice in organizational behavior at WFU's School of Business, led two fascinating and spirited sessions regarding managing employees: The first about the elements of cultural and generational diversity in how people go about doing their jobs, and the

*continued on page 10*

# INDUSTRY BUZZ

continued from page 8

second focused around leveraging and respecting the value of differences in each employee.

In talking with many of the superintendents, it was clear to me that managing employees and their differences is a key issue many face. Whether it's different generations, race or cultural background, attendees learned various ways to reach employees and relate to the issues they might have.

Dr. Bill Davis, professor of the practice of management at WFU's School of Business, gave a lecture on the power of negotiating and how it can be used to create the best possible

outcomes in finance, personnel and other aspects of course management.

Continuing with the collaborative theme I found so intriguing, attendees participated in negotiating sessions and discussed effective ways to negotiate things like equipment purchases and even course enhancements and upgrades. But, as Davis pointed out, "Some things are not negotiable issues, like values and identity," a sentiment all in attendance agreed upon.

Dr. Sherry Moss, professor of organizational studies at WFU's School of Business, provided attendees with fundamental tools and ideas to help manage employees. Working together and examining the scenarios they face daily with

problem employees provided the superintendents with invaluable knowledge to take back to their respective clubs.

"Looking at how you manage staff... being a good manager is about finding ways to get better," Dey said. "It's about people and how you develop people."

It is about people, and at SBI 2014, people collaborating with each other in productive ways is what made this event a fascinating, rich and rewarding experience for all in attendance. ▀

*Superintendent magazine's Rob Meyer can be reached at 440-891-3927, ext. 2519, or at [rmeyer@MooseRiverMedia.com](mailto:rmeyer@MooseRiverMedia.com)*

## A Course for All

### Button Hole caters to all walks, including people with disabilities

BY AMY LEONARDI

**A**t a time when many industry people are concerned with how to grow golf with new players, John Rourke, golf course superintendent of Button Hole Golf Course in Providence, Rhode Island, has become part of the solution.

Button Hole, a not-for-profit nine-hole golf course and driving range, was founded in 1999 with a simple vision: expose the game to underprivileged children and grow the game by catering to all walks of life.

"Button Hole was created as a means of expanding the game of golf by giving inner-city youths, individuals with disabilities and people with no golf skills the opportunity to play the game," Rourke said. "We even have scholarship programs to help those who are less fortunate."

The atmosphere at Button Hole is refreshing, Rourke noted.

"Everyone is always smiling, and it's like a breath of fresh air," he said. "On the turf maintenance side, my priorities are much different. For instance, green speed is never a concern. It's about giving people a pleasurable playing experience, especially since for most people it's their first time playing the game."

Last year Button Hole underwent an extensive construction project funded by a grant, which involved altering the grading of the turf in certain areas and reconstructing moundings and bunkers throughout the course. Now all areas of the property, including the bunkers, are accessible by wheelchair.

As a means of attracting children to the course, Button Hole offers a unique scholarship program where about 2,500 "Button Hole Kids" are awarded free golf lessons and access

organizations that host a variety of events

at the course each year. These events include a PGA drive, chip and putt qualifier, the Special Olympics, and an annual event hosted by PGA Pro and Golf Channel Analyst Brad Faxon, who is also on the board for Button Hole.

Though the majority of people that play the course are children, Button Hole also gets frequent visitors from the general public who are just looking to get in some short game practice. In addition, the property has year-round practice putting greens, which attract many visitors. Rourke only asks that everyone donate \$1 to help with funding.

The money they receive from use of the driving range and the putting greens constitutes their only regular funding outside of donations.

"Our biggest challenge on the course is getting things done without a cushion of money to fall back on. We survive mainly on donations, so I've learned to be pretty creative in finding ways to do things," Rourke explained.

The nine holes are all pitch and putt, with the shortest hole at 37 yards and the longest hole at 130 yards.

Charlotte, North Carolina-based Jacobsen has assisted Button Hole in the equipment area through local dealer Steven Willand Inc.

"They are always on the lookout for affordable equipment they know we need," Rourke says. ▀

*Leonardi is a marketing communication specialist for Jacobsen.*



John Rourke

P: 401-742-1177 F: 800-772-0255  
[www.kochek.com](http://www.kochek.com)  
An Employee Owned Company  
**KOCHEK CO. INC.**  
Water Movement Solutions

**Liquid Proportioner** APPLICATOR SYSTEM  
Eliminate Tank Mixing  
For Liquid Additives

IRPROP-AD1  
IRPROP-GAL  
Optional 1 gallon jug

**Big Water LIQUID WETTING AGENTS**  
Treat all types of turf

- Our "Big Water" Wetting Agents as a concentrate.
- Comes in **Standard** and **Extended** formulas.
- Available in **5 Gallons** and **55 Gallon Drums**.
- Helps improve soil, infield, & warning track drainage!!
- To be used with our **Liquid Proportioner**.

REVL12-4-14 **STMA Booth # 1123**