

# Escaping Reality

It may be closer than you think

BY TODD VOSS

**A**t the end of one's life, no one ever says, "I wish I could've worked more." I believe golf turf managers may be an exception. In general, as grass growers, we love what we do. We thrive on challenges and the adventure that every day on the golf course brings. Even through hardships of weather, tight budgets, and high expectations, we press on undeterred to present the best possible golf course. Superintendents have passion and energy, which is not often seen in other professions. Through all the pressure and stress, there are concerns. How does one keep the passion? How do you keep your batteries charged? I firmly believe the saying "You have to know what you are working for."

Most call it "R and R." However, we all have different definitions of what rest and relaxation means. Time away from the golf course can be spent in many different ways. Everyone needs time away, and how you spend that time can help your job performance. Choices about what we do with our free time can be difficult, but I think we can all agree that family time should top the list.

Speaking of family, I am a second-generation golf course superintendent. I got into this crazy business because I went to work with my dad every day throughout the summer starting when I was six years old. From that point on, I was hooked on golf course maintenance. Bringing me to work was my dad's way of finding time to spend with me while balancing his hectic work schedule. Not everyone understands the demands of the industry, and I get asked all the time if it is worth it. It is a fair question, but I honestly don't know any other way of life. I am fortunate that my wife, Heidi, is part of the golf industry, so she understands the hours and stresses that accompany the job.

Being busy all the time at work has rubbed off on my personal life. I am



*An out-of-play area is a good habitat for bees. They are great pollinators and everyone enjoys the honey they produce.*



*Meet our dog, Lucia, who is always ready for some downtime in the vegetable garden.*





*My wife, Heidi, picking sweet corn from a golf cart with Lucia's help.*

one of those people who are happiest when working on a project. I must say, however, that living on golf course property gives me the space for some of my hobbies that would likely not be possible otherwise. My wife frequently asks, "What are you going to do when you no longer have golf course tools and equipment at your disposal?" It seems I typically have not one but many projects and hobbies going all the time. A few of these hobbies caught the attention of golfers as well as the USGA. To this end, I was asked by my Green Section agronomist to tell my story about how I escape the reality of the daily grind of being a golf course superintendent.

The hobby that surprises people the most is that I am a beekeeper. There is no better place to have bees than on a golf course. In fact, it was my late grandmother who always encouraged me to learn beekeeping because of all the wildflowers she observed when visiting the property. I promised her that someday I would, but it was not until we hired a retired beekeeper to mow greens that the promise turned into reality. Off the corner of our 14th tee we now have beehives. It is absolutely amazing how bees work; they literally work themselves to death.

We enjoy the honey they produce, which is also used in the golf course clubhouse for breakfast. Many golfers on the course are intrigued with the hives and often ask about them.

Beekeeping, my first hobby, sort of leads into and supports my next hobby — vegetable gardening. When I say that I garden, I mean that I plant two acres of sweet corn, 150 tomato plants, 200 pepper plants, beans, squash, cucumbers, cabbage, and a few other vegetables. All plants are started by seed in a small on-site greenhouse. Some of the produce is given to golfers and some is canned, but the majority is used to stock a neighborhood produce stand that we operate. We follow the theme "go big or go home."

The garden led to another hobby, which may actually be more of a passion. I am a self-proclaimed "chile head." I enjoy cooking, and one of the many things that I make is hot sauce. I once assembled over 300 bottles of hot sauce, and I have perfected 18

different recipes. In Columbus, Ohio, the Fiery Food Festival is held each winter. If I may brag just a little, I am a proud winner of the amateur hot sauce competition and the People's Choice for Chile. I just love to cook, which leads me to yet another hobby. Well, maybe not exactly a hobby, and I cannot do it alone, but we really enjoy entertaining. So it seems that all my hobbies are linked together.

To provide a little background information on the hobby of entertaining, we turn back the clock to 2007, when the golf course ran out of water. In response, the club decided to build a new reservoir to help supply the irrigation lake. As luck would have it, the best location for the reservoir was in my backyard. We designed the reservoir in-house, but I never dreamed of what it would come. In 2008, my wife was training for a sprint triathlon and was swimming in the new reservoir every day. She asked if we could put a little sand in the corner by our house so she could get in and out of the water without getting muddy. Who knew what a little bit of topdressing sand would turn into! That little bit of sand turned into a fire pit, which eventually turned into a full-fledged



*Hanging the metal roof on our beach bar one evening in 95° F heat. That is when you find out who your friends are!*

beach bar. Yes, a "beach bar" complete with palm and banana trees, hammocks, white sand, bar swings, a small kitchen with a grill, and enough island decor that you feel like you are someplace tropical. Of course, all of this was done under the watchful eye





*The beach bar project is finished, and now the fun and entertaining begin.*



*A view of the "beach" from the 14th hole at the Double Eagle Club. The flag is flying, which means we are open for business.*

of the club's owner, who personally supplied a lot of the lumber.

During the summer of 2010, we had trouble with some of the putting greens, which is when construction of the bar itself began. Timing was ideal because it gave me something to focus on besides declining greens. It was a much-needed escape. The construction of the bar was particularly enjoyable because family and friends were always present to help. The beach bar was no small undertaking, and it has taken on a life of its own. We have even incorporated the golfers into the beach bar by flying a Jolly Roger flag to let them know when the bar is open. It has allowed me to be at home and work at the same time. We can be entertaining one moment and, if I feel the need, available to check the course the next moment.

We can all agree how important friends and family are, and my hobbies have provided the opportunity to give back to people who mean the most to me. We all need to have, or do, things that help us escape rigors of daily life, reality, and stress. Heidi and I do not have children, so with just our two

dogs, Lucia and Nittany, we have more free time than most. Nonetheless, hopefully sharing my hobbies will inspire you to do something outside the golf industry that will make relaxing a little easier, while providing some well-deserved "R and R" to recharge

your batteries. Doing so will benefit you and everyone around you.

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*Hosting the Central Ohio Golf Course Superintendents Association and spouses at our beach bar.*