

The Reporter

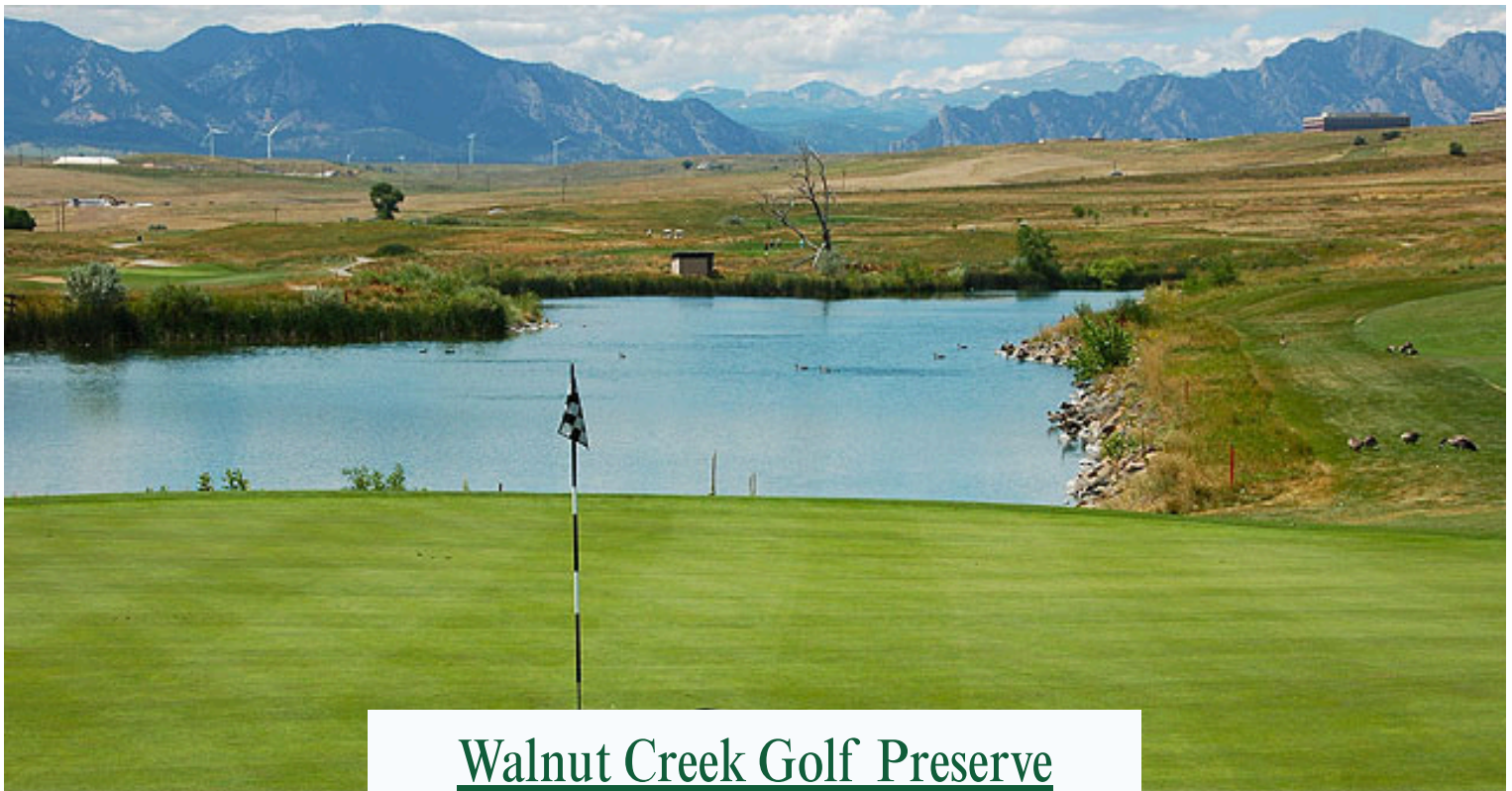
From the Rocky Mountain Chapter of GCSAA
Growing Green Since 1936



The Club at Ravenna

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Walnut Creek Golf Preserve

President's Message

Joe Kunze, CGCS, City of Arvada, RMGCSA President

As this issue of The Reporter is published to our members, the days will be getting shorter. We can once again start to reflect on another successful season where we have perfect turf conditions, deep roots and happy customers. Right? Not so much this year....

The industry we work in can be incredibly demanding, especially in a year like this one. We continue to face rising customer expectations, increasing costs for goods and services, and deferred maintenance projects that many of us are still trying to catch up on.

What makes 2026 particularly challenging is that many facilities are experiencing record rounds and unprecedented customer demand. More golfers on the course means more traffic, more wear, and higher expectations for playing conditions. At the same time, much of our region is dealing with drought conditions and water restrictions that limit our ability to maintain turf exactly as we would like. We are being asked to produce exceptional conditions while using fewer resources, and that balancing act can create significant stress.

Some courses are also working to recover from a warm, dry winter that left turf damaged by traffic and desiccation. Add the pressure of conserving water during another challenging growing season, and it is easy to see how the demands can begin to pile up.

This is the time of year when we should all take a moment to ask a couple of simple questions: "How's it going?" "How are you?"

The pressures of our profession can sometimes feel overwhelming. Long hours, staffing challenges, weather events, budget concerns, member expectations, and the responsibility of maintaining playing conditions can create stress that extends well beyond the golf course. While a certain amount of pressure comes with the job, there is no benefit in carrying those burdens alone.

Do you need to vent about something? Could you benefit from a few days away from the golf course? Are there opportunities to recharge and return with a fresh perspective? Just as we monitor the health of our turf every day, it is equally important to pay attention to our own well-being and that of the people around us.

Mental health is just as important as physical health. If you find yourself feeling persistently overwhelmed, anxious, exhausted, or disconnected from the things you normally enjoy, consider reaching out to someone you trust. A conversation with a colleague, friend, family member, counselor, or healthcare professional can make a meaningful difference.

President's Message

Joe Kunze, CGCS, City of Arvada, RMGCSA President

One of the greatest strengths of the members of the RMGCSA has always been its willingness to help others. Check in on your peers. Ask how they are doing and take the time to listen. Sometimes a simple phone call, a cup of coffee, or a conversation after a meeting can make all the difference.

While 2026 has presented challenges unlike any of us have experienced before, it is also providing opportunities to learn and grow. Every drought, water restriction, staffing challenge, and difficult turf decision teaches us something. The lessons we learn today will help us make better decisions the next time these conditions occur.

It is easy to focus on what went wrong or what could have been done differently. Instead, try to focus on what you have learned, what your team has accomplished, and what can be applied moving forward. The golf course may not be perfect every day, but if we are learning and adapting, we are making progress.

As difficult as some days can be, it is important to maintain a positive outlook for tomorrow. Tomorrow brings another opportunity to improve conditions, support our teams, communicate with our golfers, and continue building our knowledge as turfgrass professionals. The challenges we face today are helping shape the superintendents we will become and are training for tomorrow.

Years from now, when we look back on the drought of 2026, the water restrictions, and the pressures that came with record rounds and unprecedented demand, we may find that some of our most valuable professional lessons came from this season. Those experiences will better prepare us for whatever challenges lie ahead.

Take care of yourselves, check in on your peers, and remember that none of us has to navigate these challenges alone.

Joe Kunze, CGCS

President, City of Arvada



Superintendent Spotlight

By Brandon Wollesen, Class A, Greeley Country Club

Describe Your Facility

The Greeley Country Club was founded in 1925 and was originally a 9-hole golf course designed by the famed architect Tom Bendelow. In the 1960's, the golf course was renovated and expanded to 18 holes by another prominent architect, Press Maxwell. To this day, six of the original Bendelow greens are still in use.

What aspects of your facility make it unique?

A prominent feature most people remember after playing the golf course is that most of the holes are lined with mature trees. While the scorecard yardage is short by today's standards, the presence of the trees, small undulating greens, and subtle elevation changes make for a fun and challenging round.

What is the most significant challenge you encounter at your facility?

A significant challenge we face daily is our aging irrigation system. It was installed in the early 1980s and originally had full-circle heads around the greens, single-row on the tees, and double-row on the fairways. We still have full-circle heads around the greens, but over the years, many rough heads have been installed. Other challenges we face include the presence of white grubs and elevated disease pressure.

How many years have you worked in the golf industry, and how did you enter the profession?

I've been working in this industry for about 24 years, all in Colorado. My first job at the Fort Collins Country Club started while I was attending Colorado State University. At the time, I was a summer seasonal, but I really loved it, so I kept pushing for more and eventually worked my way up to Assistant Superintendent. It was also during this time that I received my turf education at Rutgers.

Who has served as a mentor to you, or in what way did you first become involved in the industry?

I have had the privilege of working with and developing relationships with so many excellent professionals in this industry; it would be difficult to name them all. A few names that come to mind are individuals who were instrumental in my development as a professional and turf manager: Scott Hallam, Doug Brooks, and Scott Pavalko.

How do you prefer to spend your time away from work?

My answer to this question used to be fly fishing or camping. But I have a young family, so most of my time away from work is spent with my wife, Sara and girls, Kendall and Emery. I am cherishing every moment with them as they grow, and hopefully we'll circle back to fly fishing and camping!

Superintendent Spotlight

By Brandon Wollesen, Class A, Greeley Country Club

What is your favorite restaurant?

If I had to pick one, it would be Angelos Taverna in Capitol Hill.

Which tool in your cart do you consider indispensable?

I can't stress the importance of the moisture meter enough, but I always have a soil probe in my cart.

Do you prefer to wear shorts or pants while working?

I understand the importance of perception and the professionalism of wearing pants, but I am a shorts guy and always have been.

Which sports team do you support?

I am a homer and support all Colorado teams, even the Rockies, begrudgingly, but I live and die with the Broncos.



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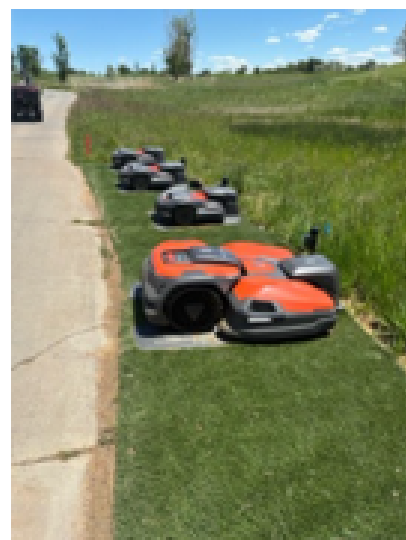
Embracing the Future: Our Journey into Autonomous Range Operations and Mowing

By Rob Flemming, Class A, Saddleback Golf Club

Our transition to autonomous range picking and mowing began as part of a much larger capital improvement project. In 2025, we constructed a new teaching professional building adjacent to our driving range. During the planning process, we wanted to incorporate the capability to fully automate range ball collection and handling. After extensive research, we selected the Vault System from Automated Outdoor Systems in conjunction with Echo Robotics autonomous range pickers and mowers.

Initially, our plan was to purchase the Echo picker and mower, spend a season fine-tuning operations, and then install the Vault System later. However, ownership ultimately decided to move forward with the entire project while the building was under construction. During the foundation and slab installation, a 6-inch PVC sleeve was incorporated into the ball washroom to accommodate all utilities required for the future Vault System.

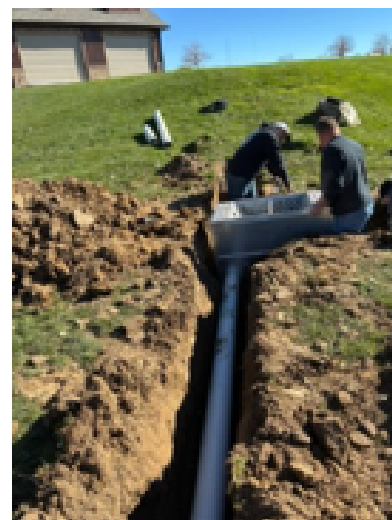
Our first step was to build a ramp that allowed the Echo picker to dump golf balls into the system. While this provided moderate efficiencies, it did not significantly reduce labor requirements. Once the Vault System was fully installed in October, the operation became far more efficient. One of the greatest advantages is that the system not only collects range balls but also automatically delivers them directly to the Range Servant ball machine without any manual handling.



Embracing the Future: Our Journey into Autonomous Range Operations and Mowing

By Rob Flemming, Class A, Saddleback Golf Club

As with most new technologies, there have been challenges. We have already determined that a second picker will be necessary, as weekend traffic exceeds the capacity of a single unit. Despite the learning curve and installation challenges, the system is now operating smoothly and has become an important part of our daily operation.



Expanding Automation to the Golf Course

Following the completion of the range project, we began evaluating autonomous mowing for the golf course. At the time, both our fairway and rough mowing fleets were nearing the end of their service life. When we compared the costs of replacing those units with conventional equipment, autonomous mowing emerged as the more economical long-term solution.

Historically, we have not purchased brand new mowing equipment, but even quality used equipment has become increasingly expensive. After evaluating acquisition costs, operating expenses, and maintenance requirements, autonomous mowers appeared to offer a compelling alternative.

One significant advantage is reduced maintenance. Autonomous mowers eliminate many traditional wear items, including reels and bedknives, while also removing hydraulic systems from the equation. This greatly reduces the potential for hydraulic leaks and expensive repairs. Blade replacements are inexpensive, readily available, and easy to perform, reducing the workload on our mechanic.

We evaluated several autonomous mower manufacturers before ultimately selecting Husqvarna. Because the cost difference between leasing and purchasing was minimal, we chose to purchase the equipment outright. Our fleet now consists of seven Ceora units and ten 580 units, providing enough capacity to mow all fairways, roughs, and tees on the golf course.

While we selected Husqvarna, I believe several manufacturers are producing quality autonomous equipment, and the technology across the industry will continue to improve rapidly over the next five years.

Embracing the Future: Our Journey into Autonomous Range Operations and Mowing

By Rob Flemming, Class A, Saddleback Golf Club

Powering the System

One of the largest hurdles was providing power to the fleet. At the time, there was no electrical infrastructure throughout the golf course. We evaluated solar-power charging options, but the cost of installing electrical service was comparable. Additionally, a fully solar-powered system would have required numerous solar panel installations throughout native areas of the golf course. Today, we do successfully operate one Ceora and one 580 unit on solar power, but the majority of the fleet utilizes electrical service. To support the charging network, we installed approximately 4,000 feet of aluminum wire throughout the property at a total cost of approximately \$45,000. We were fortunate to experience a mild winter, as the entire offseason was needed to complete the electrical installation.

Charging stations were then constructed throughout the course. Each station includes weatherproof electrical outlets, a compacted road base surface, and artificial turf where the mowers park and recharge. The artificial turf has proven particularly beneficial, eliminating the need for string trimming around charging areas.

Mapping and Implementation

Beginning in March, Husqvarna and Colorado Golf & Turf worked alongside our staff to map all mowing areas. We started with fairways, which were the easiest areas to automate and represented our highest priority. Rough mowing presented additional challenges, but both Husqvarna and Colorado Golf & Turf were extremely supportive throughout the process and helped troubleshoot issues as they arose.

Initially, five reference stations were installed throughout the property to support mower communication and navigation. Early communication challenges prompted us to expand the network to nine stations, eliminating dead zones where mowers could lose connectivity. Since completing those upgrades, communication issues have largely been resolved. Future upgrades to 4G-based communication systems should further improve reliability.

Embracing the Future: Our Journey into Autonomous Range Operations and Mowing

By Rob Flemming, Class A, Saddleback Golf Club

The Importance of Staff Buy-In

One of the most critical factors in successfully implementing autonomous mowing is having a staff that supports the transition. We have been fortunate to have both a mechanic and management team that fully embraced the technology.

The shift has significantly changed our mechanic's daily responsibilities. Rather than focusing primarily on traditional mower maintenance, much of the role now involves monitoring mower performance, cleaning units, and managing a routine blade replacement schedule. The transition has required adaptability, but it has also created opportunities to focus labor and expertise in new ways.

Challenges Encountered

Like any emerging technology, autonomous mowing is not without its challenges.

- Early communication issues between reference stations required additional infrastructure and troubleshooting.
- Low irrigation heads, valve boxes, and drainage structures can occasionally cause mowers to become stuck, emphasizing the need for proper leveling and site preparation.
- Irrigation repairs require temporary "stay-out" zones whenever open holes are left overnight.
- Proper scheduling is essential. If mowing schedules are not configured correctly, turf areas may not receive adequate coverage. Since the mowers operate around the clock, programming and monitoring become critical components of success.

Embracing the Future: Our Journey into Autonomous Range Operations and Mowing

By Rob Flemming, Class A, Saddleback Golf Club

Benefits Realized

Despite the challenges, the benefits have been substantial.

- Mowers operate continuously, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- The elimination of hydraulic systems reduces maintenance requirements and minimizes the risk of leaks.
- Staff members can be reassigned to other priorities across the golf course, improving operational flexibility.
- While we have not yet experienced significant labor savings, we have seen meaningful gains in efficiency and resource allocation.
- The quality of cut has been excellent, and the striping produced by the autonomous fleet has received numerous positive comments from golfers.

Looking Ahead

Autonomous technology continues to evolve rapidly, and we are still learning new ways to maximize its potential. While the transition required substantial planning, infrastructure investment, and patience, the results have been encouraging. From automated range ball collection to around-the-clock mowing operations, we have already seen how these technologies can enhance efficiency, improve flexibility, and position our golf course for the future.

As adoption grows across the industry, autonomous equipment will likely become an increasingly common part of golf course maintenance operations. Based on our experience, the technology is not perfect, but it is improving quickly and it is certainly here to stay.



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Assistant Spotlight

By Austin Martinez, Class C, Bella Ridge Golf Club

Describe your Facility?

Bella Ridge Golf Club is a brand-new golf course here in Johnstown, the course is laid out on a previous dairy farm where the golf course consists of around 100 acres including our range across the road. Our current shops and maintenance facilities are based out of the old dairy shops that have been here for years, along with a house that is on property that we now use for office space and breakrooms for staff.

What makes your facility unique?

What makes our facility so unique is the past use of the buildings and the age as they have been here for many generations. Having to transition from dairy shops to making it into our own maintenance facility and needing to work with what we have and the space we have. It has been a process over the last year, but we have succeeded in transitioning the spaces into beneficial use for the years to come.



Austin Martinez

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Assistant Spotlight

By Austin Martinez, Class C, Bella Ridge Golf Club

What do you enjoy most about your team?

What I enjoy most about the team is creating lifelong friendships and learning about everybody who works with us. A lot of the people who we brought on had little to no golf course maintenance experience, so being able to teach them everything there is to maintain a high-end golf course as well as growing in a new golf course is a great learning experience for myself and others.

What advice would you give someone interested in a career in golf course management?

My advice would be to learn the game of golf if you have not already, then when you go to play at your home course or any other course, inspect different areas around the course. See how different courses are run, how they are set up, what their facilities look like, or how crews operate on a daily basis. To the younger generation it is all about making yourself applicable and taking a step towards something new, I threw myself into the golf course maintenance side in my home town when I was in high school, I found it very interesting and enjoyed being outside and learning new things everyday about what it takes to run a golf course.

How many years have you worked in golf, and how did you get started in the industry?

I have been in the golf industry for 8-9 years now, I started in my hometown, Montrose, CO at Black Canyon Golf Course. My first year was in the cart barn and pro shop, then the year after I was offered work on the maintenance crew and I was all for it. From there I loved getting to work early in the mornings and began learning the basics of maintaining a golf course, even though it was a small city course there was much more to the work than I thought. After two years doing maintenance there, I then went to study Environmental Horticulture and Turf Management at Colorado State University. While there I learned more about the science behind maintaining turf and soils as well as growing my knowledge of horticulture. During my years at CSU, I also took on many internships over summers to gain credits and begin seeing different courses and how they were run. I did internships at TPC Colorado, The Broadmoor Golf Club, Edgewood Tahoe, and Cherry Hills Country Club, being able to learn from various directors, head supers and other assistants was helpful as I was able to take in a great amount of knowledge which would support me in future jobs and at different courses.

Assistant Spotlight

By Austin Martinez, Class C, Bella Ridge Golf Club

Who has been a mentor to you, or how did you get into the business?

I have had many mentors throughout school and in my career, but these specific people have had confidence in me, led me in the right direction for my future, and have paved a path to follow in their footsteps to succeeding in the industry. All these guys were my past head supers and assistant supers throughout the courses I have worked at. The one who got me into the industry was Tom Young, he was the previous pro at Black Canyon Golf Course and the one who got me into maintenance. He convinced me that I would be great in the industry and then talked me into attending CSU to study turf. I am forever grateful for him for talking me into taking his advice, I believe I have succeeded so far in the time I have been in this industry with only more to learn and grow for the future.

Tom Young, Mitch Bryden, Mike Cooper, Michael Satori, Brad Wunderlich, Josh Hester, Brogan Meyers

What is your favorite hole on your course, and why?

This is a tough one, my first thought and favorite was hole 18, being the longest hole on the course and a tough finishing hole. Having water left and trees and native right, your tee shot must be perfect and straight, if you stripe one you can hit the speed slot and be set up for a perfect second shot and possibly close out the round with a birdie. If I could have another favorite, it would be 1 or 14, hole 1 is a beautiful par 4 with amazing mountain views that get you started for your round, and hole 14 is a fun but tricky short par 4, the shortest on the course. You can play it safe up the fairway and have a blind second shot, or you can send it straight at the green from the tee and have a good chance of a good score.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not at work?

I enjoy spending time with friends or going back home to see family and enjoying time in the mountains in my hometown. Love cooking/grilling, golfing, playing basketball, fishing, camping, hunting, hiking and relaxing at home occasionally.

Assistant Spotlight

By Austin Martinez, Class C, Bella Ridge Golf Club

Without incriminating yourself, what's the funniest or silliest thing you've done on the job?

My silliest thing would be getting stuck on our side winder while growing in the tee of 16. It was the first mow on the hole, and it was thick, but it was also soaking wet, which I did not walk it to check and after almost being done with the mow I come to an area on the tee and pretty much sink into the ground that was very wet. Mind you this was a weekend and not very many people were around, so me being me I try to get unstuck by myself, but that only made it worse. After about 30 minutes I had to call one of our greenkeeper guys to get the tractor to come pull me out, about an hour after we eventually got it out but the damage to the grass was noticeable. To this day you can still see a couple of my ruts and damage is still being repaired, I still laugh at myself every time I drive by the area.

Favorite Moive?

My favorite movie would have to be Happy Gilmore.

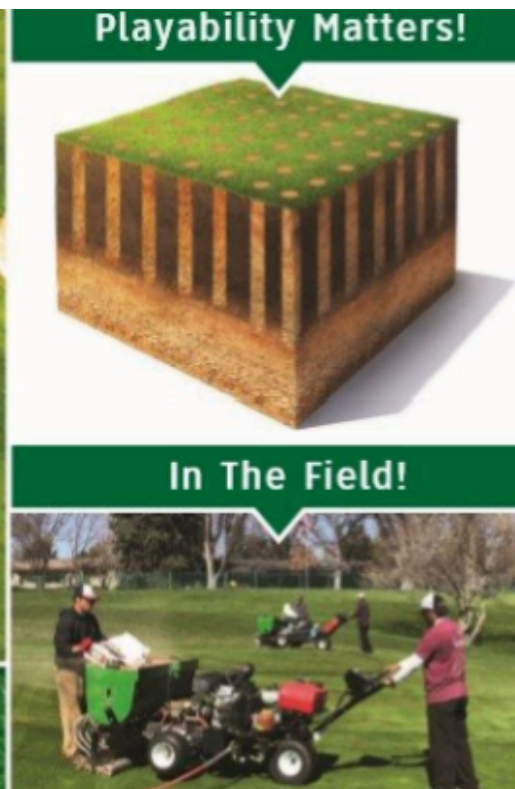
Favorite Restaurant?

Tough choice, but it would have to be Texas Roadhouse (them rolls are phenomenal) or Red Lobster or cooking up my own surf & turf.



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2026 RMGCSA Legacy Scholarship Award Winner

By Emily Hester

I am incredibly thankful to receive the 2026 RMGCSA Legacy scholarship as I enter into my second year at the University of Colorado Boulder. My name is Emily Hester and I am studying Integrative Physiology with a minor in Public Health at CU Boulder. I plan on pursuing a career in Occupational Therapy and aspire to lead a life of service towards helping individuals with disabilities regain motor functions in their daily lives. As I look forward to entering into the fall semester I am excited to continue being an active member in my church community by leading a bible study, leading in retreats, participating in discipleship, and being a volunteer in our homeless street walk ministry. My free time consists of hiking the surrounding Boulder area and I can't wait to explore more of the mountains beyond the foothills. An activity that I enjoy daily is going to the gym to maintain my physical and mental health and continue to keep myself in the best shape possible for my future endeavors. I also enjoy time with various teammates of intramural volleyball teams I have participated in and have gotten to express my competitiveness for the sport. I am especially excited for this next semester to get a job whether that be on campus or off campus and continue to build my resume in that way. The money I receive from the Rocky Mountain Golf Course Superintendent Association will go towards required school supplies such as laboratory necessities, textbooks, and tuition assistance. I am so grateful to have this opportunity through the RMGCSA and I thank everyone for their contribution in furthering my education.



Emily Hester



2026 RMGCSA Legacy Scholarship Award Winner

By Daniel Kubistek

About a year ago, I made the decision to pivot my career path and dive into the turfgrass industry. Being the son of a Superintendent, I have always been surrounded by the profession, but stepping into it myself has been entirely transformative. While I anticipated enjoying the work, I never expected to develop such a deep passion for it. This passion drove me to pursue my Turfgrass Management degree from Penn State University. As one of the most prestigious turfgrass programs in the country, I know this education will lay a critical foundation for my career, creating new opportunities and pushing my professional growth forward. The education itself has only aided in my continued drive to grow and lead the industry to further heights.

Pursuing this education, while no easy task with financial and educational pressures, it has quickly become a goal of mine to achieve this degree by any means possible. That is why I am incredibly blessed and honored to be selected as a recipient of the RMGCSA Legacy Scholarship. This financial support significantly alleviates some of these pressures, allowing me to fully focus on my studies and immediately apply that knowledge to my daily work on the golf course.

My end goal is to become a Superintendent that people can look to as an example of determination. In that role, I hope to pass along the mentorship I have received and continue to champion the pursuit of education. We work in an industry where you can never truly know it all; whether at a major conference or in a casual conversation with a colleague, there is always an opportunity to learn. Chasing that knowledge has led me to where I am and I know it will lead me to where I want to be in my career.

Being involved with the RMGCSA, an organization full of exceptional people who constantly support and elevate one another has been a major influence of my career thus far. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the board, and I hope to serve this chapter and my peers to the best of my ability.



Daniel Kubistek

2026 RMEGI Memorial Scholarship Award Winner

By Daniel Kubistek

I am incredibly blessed and honored to be selected as a recipient of the scholarship given out through the Rocky Mountain Environmental Golf Institute. As the son of a Golf Course Superintendent, I grew up on the fringes of this profession, but officially pivoting my career into the turfgrass industry a year ago has been an entirely transformative experience. While I expected to enjoy the work, I did not anticipate developing such a profound passion for it; a passion that ultimately drove me to enroll in Penn State University's prestigious Turfgrass Management program.

That is why organizations like RMEGI are invaluable. They seek to help and provide those looking to achieve something greater in the turfgrass industry. To be recognized as someone they can put confidence in as a future leader of the industry is very humbling.

My pursuit of this degree from a top-tier program while balancing the realities of daily golf course operations comes with significant academic and financial pressures. This scholarship provides critical relief, allowing me to focus more deeply on my studies and immediately implement what I learn into my daily agronomic practices. This will one day help lead me to my career goal which is to become a Superintendent known for determination and excellence. I want to pay forward the incredible mentorship I have received and champion a culture of lifelong learning. In this industry, education never truly ends; whether we are attending a national conference or exchanging ideas during a casual conversation with a peer, there is always more to learn. This scholarship is a vital steppingstone toward that future, and I am profoundly grateful for the investment in my career.



Daniel Kubistek

National Golf Day: Why Our Voice Matters

By Jordan Diede, Class C, City Park Nine

I was fortunate enough to attend National Golf Day in Washington, D.C., in early May. My trip was supported by NuFarm through the GCSAA's Excel Leadership Program, and I am grateful for the opportunity to represent our profession and our chapter on a national stage.

This was my first National Golf Day, and I wasn't entirely sure what to expect. What I quickly learned was that the event is much more than meetings on Capitol Hill. Over three days, our schedule was packed with advocacy training, discussions with members of Congress and their staff, industry networking, and volunteer work at Old Soldiers Golf Course.

Like many golf maintenance professionals, I do not come from a background in politics or lobbying. Walking into congressional offices was outside my comfort zone. However, it didn't take long to realize that effective advocacy isn't about being a politician, it's about sharing your experience. I know golf, I know the challenges our facilities face, and I know the positive impact our courses have on our communities. That's exactly the perspective lawmakers need to hear.

All National Golf Day participants were representing the American Golf Industry Coalition and advocating on behalf of the entire golf industry. This year, our efforts focused on four key priorities that directly impact golf facilities and the people who work in them.

The first was support for the PAR Act (Parity for Athletic Recreation Act, H.R. 1583), which would modernize outdated tax code language and provide golf facilities with access to financing and disaster relief opportunities currently unavailable to many courses. We also advocated for expanded workforce solutions through H-2B visa reforms, greater flexibility to allow golf-related expenses under FSA and HSA programs, and for federal funding to support the National Turfgrass Statistics Study, which would help establish turfgrass as a recognized crop within USDA baseline data.

What stood out to me most was how receptive lawmakers and their staff were to hearing directly from industry professionals. They want to understand how policy decisions affect businesses, employees, and communities in their districts. No one can tell that story better than the people managing golf facilities every day.

National Golf Day: Why Our Voice Matters

By Jordan Diede, Class C, City Park Nine

The experience also reinforced that advocacy doesn't only happen in Washington. There are opportunities for all of us to get involved locally through our chapter, community outreach, and relationships with local elected officials. Every conversation helps strengthen the future of our profession.

For members interested in becoming more involved, I encourage you to consider attending National Golf Day in the future. The Rocky Mountain GCSA offers grant stipends to help offset travel expenses and make leadership and advocacy opportunities more accessible to our members.

If there's one message I would leave with our membership, it's this: you don't need a background in politics to be an advocate. You simply need a willingness to share your story and explain why our industry matters. The more superintendent voices involved at the local and national level, the stronger our profession will be.

I am thankful for the opportunity to attend National Golf Day and encourage anyone interested in future participation to reach out. Our industry benefits when superintendents are engaged, informed, and willing to speak on behalf of the profession.



Robots and Coffee: The Future of Golf Course Maintenance on Display

By Kevin Abila, Class A

Event Date: May 11, 2026

Autonomous mowers were the featured attraction at this year's RMGCSA West Slope Golf & Education Outing, and it was an event that attendees will be talking about for years to come.

As with most RMGCSA gatherings, the day began with casual networking and conversation among colleagues. Superintendents, assistants, affiliates, and industry partners gathered to reconnect, discuss how their courses emerged from the winter or lack thereof and share insights on new products and industry trends. Meanwhile, the agronomy staff was busy preparing the golf course for another day of golfers taking divots from the meticulously maintained turf.

This year, however, something was noticeably different. Some of the staff members quietly went about their work without stopping to chat. That may have been because some of the "staff" helping prepare the course were robots.

A tremendous thank you goes out to Tiara Rado Golf Course Superintendent Guido Schena, Assistant Superintendent Jeff Muller, and their entire team for hosting the event and presenting the golf course in outstanding condition. Tiara Rado provided a spectacular venue for the 2026 West Slope Golf & Education Outing, with the stunning backdrop of the Colorado National Monument adding to an already memorable experience.

While attendees enjoyed coffee, doughnuts, and conversation, autonomous mowing equipment from Husqvarna, Toro, and FireFly Automatix was hard at work near the clubhouse. Fairway, rough, and tee mowing units were on display and operating throughout the morning, providing attendees with an up-close look at the latest advancements in autonomous turf maintenance technology.

The demonstrations offered an excellent opportunity to observe the equipment in action while speaking directly with manufacturer representatives and distributors. Attendees were able to learn more about the capabilities, setup requirements, maintenance needs, and potential applications of each system.

Robots and Coffee: The Future of Golf Course Maintenance on Display

*By Kevin Abila, Class A
Event Date: May 11, 2026*

Following the outdoor demonstrations, participants returned to the clubhouse for an informative roundtable discussion focused on autonomous mowing technology. The panel featured Drew Hunter of Colorado Golf & Turf, Tyrel Muheim of LL Johnson Distributing Company, and Mark LeBlanc of FireFly Automatix. The discussion was moderated by Andy Nikkari, who guided the conversation through a series of questions addressing the operation, implementation, advantages, and challenges associated with the autonomous equipment currently available from Toro, Husqvarna, and FireFly.

The session quickly evolved into an engaging discussion as attendees posed questions in real time. Participants gained valuable insight into the strengths and limitations of each platform, as well as the differences in installation requirements, operational philosophies, and ideal applications.

One of the most valuable takeaways from the discussion was that there is no single "best" autonomous mower. Instead, each manufacturer offers solutions designed to fit specific operational needs, budgets, and maintenance goals. The conversation also reinforced an important point: autonomous equipment is not intended to replace employees. Rather, it allows facilities to reallocate labor resources toward more detailed and impactful tasks such as course improvements, renovations, landscaping projects, and other high-value maintenance activities.

After the educational session concluded, attendees headed to the golf course for an individual stroke-play tournament. Whether participants found themselves at the top of the leaderboard or endured one of those rounds best forgotten, everyone enjoyed a day filled with outstanding networking, beautiful weather, and spectacular scenery.

Adding to the experience, the autonomous mowers remained on the course throughout the round, allowing golfers to observe how the equipment operates safely and efficiently alongside players. Additional demonstrations were provided by Winsupply and POGO, showcasing soil moisture sensing technology and its applications for golf course management.

Robots and Coffee: The Future of Golf Course Maintenance on Display

*By Kevin Abila, Class A
Event Date: May 11, 2026*

Tournament Results

Gross Individual Stroke Play

1st Place: Drew Hunter

2nd Place: Joe Kunze

Net Individual Stroke Play

1st Place: Chris Pratz

2nd Place: Douglas Choate

Closest to the Pin

#3: Chris Pratz

#8: Doug Jones

#12: Jeff Muller

#14: Douglas Choate

Congratulations to all the winners, with awards generously provided by Buffalo Seed.

Of course, no golf event is complete without the traditional "19th hole." Following the round, attendees gathered for refreshments and networking, with the after-round libations graciously sponsored by Mile High Turfgrass. Another highlight of the outing was the social event held the evening before at Pour Fellows in Grand Junction, sponsored by Winsupply Irrigation and Landscape Supply. The gathering provided yet another opportunity for members to connect, share ideas, and strengthen relationships within the Colorado golf course management community.

A special thank you goes to Kass Severson, Drew Hunter, and everyone involved in organizing and facilitating another successful West Slope Golf & Education Outing. Their efforts continue to provide valuable educational opportunities while fostering the camaraderie that makes the RMGCSA such a strong organization.

If you have never attended the West Slope event, be sure to make the trip next year. Between the education, networking, golf, and opportunity to see emerging technologies firsthand, it is an experience well worth the journey.

Growing Forward: Why Professional Development Matters at Every Level

By David Phipps, GCSAA

In this industry, it's easy to get comfortable. The days are full, the work is demanding, and the routine can feel familiar. But real, meaningful growth rarely happens in comfort. It happens when we challenge ourselves to learn more, to do more, and to become more than we were yesterday.

Professional development isn't just about adding letters after your name. Whether you're an assistant superintendent pursuing the Assistant Superintendent Certificate Series (ASCS), an equipment technician working through the Equipment Manager Certificate Program (EMCP) and Certified Turf Equipment Manager (CTEM), or a superintendent aiming for the Certified Golf Course Superintendent (CGCS), these programs represent something deeper: a commitment to growth, discipline, and pride in your craft. And that commitment doesn't stay confined to the workplace.

At first glance, professional certifications can seem like a career move, and they are. They can open doors, build credibility, and set you apart in a competitive field. But the real value goes beyond promotions or resumes.

When you commit to a program like ASCS, EMCP, CTEM, or CGCS, you're building three important habits. The first habit is **discipline**. Discipline allows you to accomplish your goals by balancing your work, studies, and life. The second habit is **resilience**. You are learning how to push yourself through to completion, even when it is easier to stop. The third and final habit is **confidence**. This is obtained by simply knowing that you've earned your expertise.

Those same habits carry into your personal life. You become more organized, more intentional with your time, and more confident in tackling challenges outside of work. Growth in one area has a way of spilling into everything else.

Not everyone begins with a major certification, and they shouldn't have to. Encouraging staff members to pursue the GCSAA Greenkeeper Certificate can be a powerful first step.

Growing Forward: Why Professional Development Matters at Every Level

By David Phipps, GCSAA

For many, it may be the first time they see a clear pathway for advancement. They will receive recognition for their effort and will gain a deeper understanding of their role in your organization.

That sense of progress matters. Job satisfaction often starts with feeling like you're moving forward. When someone earns that first certificate, it can shift their mindset from "this is just a job" to "this is a career I can build."

None of this happens in a vacuum. Behind every professional who takes that step forward, there's often someone who encourages them to try. As mentors, leaders, and peers, we have more influence than we realize.

Encouraging professional development doesn't require big speeches. It can be as simple as recognizing someone's potential before they see it themselves. Or, sharing your own journey, including the struggles as well as your successes. Either way, when you create a space for learning and support, you will be on your way to celebrating their milestones, no matter how small. Sometimes people hesitate not because they lack ability, but because they lack belief. A few words of encouragement at the right time can be the push that changes a career.

When a team embraces development, something bigger happens. Growth becomes contagious. When an assistant works toward their ASCS, it'll inspire another to start as well. When an equipment tech begins pursuing their CTEM, it raises the standard in the shop and inspires others to do the same. Equally, when a superintendent earns their CGCS, it sets the tone for the entire operation. Quoting a previous GCSAA CEO, Steve Mona always said, "A rising tide floats all boats".

Over time, you don't just have a staff, you have a team of professionals who take pride in what they do and where they're going.

At the end of the day, these programs aren't just about achievement; they're about transformation.

Growing Forward: Why Professional Development Matters at Every Level

By David Phipps, GCSAA

They challenge you to think differently, to lead better, and to take ownership of your future. And in doing so, they shape not only your career, but your confidence, your mindset, and your life outside of work.

Growth is a choice. It's not always easy, and it's rarely convenient. But it's always worth it.

So, whether you're considering your next step or encouraging someone else to take theirs, remember this: the journey matters just as much as the destination, and it starts with a single decision to move forward.

Today, the value of a GCSAA membership could not be higher. There are opportunities for professional growth across every aspect of our membership. Whether you're a student, a crew member, an EM, an assistant, or a superintendent, there's a program to help you elevate your career.



Equipment Manager Spotlight

By Chad Rogers, Class EM, Saddleback Golf Club

How many years have you been turning wrenches?

It started in auto mechanics class my first year of high school, I was 16. That class just opened my eyes. Spent another two years at a Career Development Center after that, and it spring-boarded me into this career for the long haul. I'm 59 now, so you do the math.

What was the first piece of equipment you ever worked on?

Worked on a number of dirt bikes as a kid, primarily Suzuki, but when it comes to golf equipment it was a Cushman Truckster. That was about 24 years ago, when I started at Saddleback Golf Club.



CHAD ROGERS

How many years have you been in the golf industry?

I got into the golf side when I was in my mid-twenties. So we're closing in on 40 years, four decades of this.

Do you hold any certifications?

Equipment Management Certificate Program, Level 1 and Level 2. Currently working toward my CTEM.

What hobbies for you enjoy outside of work?

Video games, and working on my Jeep, because apparently turning wrenches all day isn't enough for me.

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Equipment Manager Spotlight

By Chad Rogers, Class EM, Saddleback Golf Club

What is your favorite piece of turf equipment of all time?

The Toro 5410 fairway mower. That thing is a workhorse. You genuinely cannot beat it to death. That said, since we switched to autonomous mowers, those have become a fast favorite too. The ingenuity behind them is hard to argue with.

When do you prefer spin grind, relief grind, or backlap?

Spin when it calls for spin. Relief when it calls for relief. Each one has its place, that's really all there is to it.

Do you lease or own equipment, and what are the pros and cons of either?

We own. That's the model we prefer, and we often buy used. The pro is straightforward, you own it. The con is it's not always ready to go out of the gate. But that's the tradeoff, and we all know going in what we're signing up for.

What is one piece of equipment you consider a monumental innovation to golf course maintenance?

The autonomous mowers, specifically the Husqvarna CEORA and 580 EPOS. Very little maintenance, they mow around the clock with just a charge cycle built in. The ECHO mower and the Range Picker too. They make life hard and easy at the same time.

In the morning I'll go check where they've drifted or got hung up on a tree line, but fixing it is as simple as pulling out my phone and making an adjustment. Short term, it's like training a dog, or a whole pack of them if that metaphor works for you. Long term, the benefits just stack up. No hoses, no hydraulic fluid, no oil and filter changes, no shop supplies eating into your operating budget. It just charges, goes out, does its thing, and I check the blades and swap them when needed. Still takes expertise. Still takes attention. But it's a different kind of care and feeding, and once you're through the adjustment period, you understand why it's the future.

Equipment Manager Spotlight

By Chad Rogers, Class EM, Saddleback Golf Club

If you could give one piece of advice to someone interested in a career in golf course maintenance, what would it be?

"Learn it. Know it. Live it." That's the ethos, borrowed from Brad Hamilton. But honestly, just absorb as much as you can. Call on people in your community. Get your hands on things. Break something, then fix it, because that's the only way you actually learn. Follow those rabbit holes of your intuition because inspiration is perishable. If you never act on it, curiosity doesn't amount to much. Read your tech manuals. That part isn't optional. Learn to love the grind, no pun intended.

Energy drink or coffee, and how much a day?

Neither. Just water.

What tool is absolutely essential for every golf course mechanic?

A multimeter and a lot of patience. Listen to what your colleagues are telling you about the symptoms. Listen to what the operator has been experiencing. Diagnose from there. The listening part is half the job.



Memorial Tournament Raises More Than \$15,000 for Turfgrass Research

By Jake Jacobs, Class A, Flatirons Golf Course
The Rocky Mountain Golf Course Superintendents Association's annual Memorial Tournament was held at Walnut Creek Golf Preserve and once again proved to be one of the chapter's premier networking and fundraising events. With 124 attendees and an incredible 36 sponsors supporting the day, the event brought together superintendents, assistants, affiliates, industry partners, and friends for a memorable day of golf and camaraderie.

A special thank you goes to L.L. Johnson for their sponsorship and continued support of the RMGCSA and the golf course management profession. Their commitment helps make events like this possible while supporting the future of our industry.

The tournament also served as a tremendous success for the Rocky Mountain Environmental Golf Institute (RMEGI), raising more than \$15,000 for turfgrass research. These funds will directly support research efforts that benefit golf course management throughout the Rocky Mountain region.

The RMGCSA would also like to extend its sincere appreciation to Paul Sibley and the entire Walnut Creek Golf Preserve staff for hosting the event. The golf course was in outstanding condition, and the hospitality, organization, and lunch provided helped make the day enjoyable for everyone in attendance.



Memorial Tournament Raises More Than \$15,000 for Turfgrass Research

By Jake Jacobs, Class A, Flatirons Golf Course

Closest-to-the-Pin Winners

- Hole #4 – Brian McBride, Mile High Turfgrass
- Hole #7 – Jess Humphrey, Snowmass Club
- Hole #14 – Lance Johnson, City of Westminster
- Hole #17 – Nate Lundy, Flatirons Golf Course

Flight Winners

Bender Flight – 65

- Lance Juelfs, Hillsdale Golf Course
- Robert Gonzales, Nutrien

Lyon Flight – 66

- Richard Moore, Aurora Hills Golf Course
- Matt Vance, Aurora Hills Golf Course

Hughes Flight – 61

- Trey Whitaker, Redox Bio-Nutrients
- Jeremiah Stumpff, Broken Tee Golf Course

Cahalane Flight – 65

- Chet Wilmes, Springhill Golf Course
- Eric Strasheim, Murphy Creek Golf Course

Anderson Flight – 66

- Larry Burks, Grand Lake Golf Course
- Sean Clinton, Grand Lake Golf Course

Krueger Flight – 64

- Brandon Bollerud, L.L. Johnson
- Dan Melchior, Retired L.L. Johnson



Memorial Tournament Raises More Than \$15,000 for Turfgrass Research

By Jake Jacobs, Class A, Flatirons Golf Course

The Memorial Tournament continues to honor the legacy of those who helped shape our association while strengthening relationships throughout the Rocky Mountain golf industry. Thank you to all participants, sponsors, volunteers, and supporters who helped make this year's event such a tremendous success. We look forward to seeing everyone again next year.



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Affiliate Angle

By Justin Schust, Class AF, PumpMan Colorado (A Harrington Company)

What is your current affiliate company and your position? How long have you been in this position?

I work for PumpMan Colorado (A Harrington Company) as their new Outside Sales Engineer. I previously worked for Colonial Valves, which is part of Lasco-Westlake (Pipe/Valves and Fittings Line). I covered the Western U.S., serving 300 supply houses and led with 52 Reps in Irrigation and Pools.

Where are you based out of and what territory do you cover?

PumpMan is located in Denver and serves Colorado and Wyoming. PumpMan Colorado is also known as Colorado Water Well.

What are the responsibilities of your company to our industry, and how is your company involved with RMGCSA?

PumpMan brings 40 years of specialized expertise in pump repair, service, installation, and maintenance to Golf Courses' Pump Stations, Pumps, and Wells. For RMGCSA, we bring more options and solutions to Golf Course Pump Station and Irrigation.

What might we be surprised to know about your company?

PumpMan has a very loyal history, with employees who have been with us for 40+ years.



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JOHN KING

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ELIZABETH CRAFT

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Did you go to college? If so, where and what major did you graduate with?

As a 3rd generation Colorado Native, I went to college at Colorado State University (Go RAMs) and graduated with a degree in Economics and started my 1st mortgage company in 2001 selling it to RBC (Royal Bank of Canada) in the 2003 Mortgage boom. I started another and sold my partnership in my 2nd mortgage company in the crash of 2008 to pursue a career and water treatment with DOW Chemical Company.

How and when did you begin working in the golf industry and what do you like most about it?

I grew up with a golf club and played Junior Golf at Twin Peaks GC starting at age 10. I play golf as much as possible, and working for Pumpman allows me to visit golf courses throughout Colorado and build relationships with superintendents and offer services to improve their course.

Tell us a little about your family, and what hobbies or activities you participate in when you are not at work?

Colorado is always home, and I have a very large extended family that still lives there. Recently, I became an empty nester as my daughter attends college at the University of Arizona. Outside of work, you will most likely find me restoring cars, golfing, or fishing. It's rare not to have a trip planned somewhere by the beach, or to sail in San Diego. I plan to retire on a sailboat and island-hop in the Caribbean.



Justin Schust

What are the biggest changes you have seen in the profession since you began your career? Or, what are the most important changes that the company has seen in the past 5-10 years?

One of the biggest changes I have witnessed in the golf course industry is the growing impact of environmental challenges, especially drought, and the increased need to be more strategic with water use. Irrigation technology has made huge strides, particularly with pump control systems (PCLs) and central control systems. These tools have become much more efficient and easier to manage. Additionally, there has been a clear shift toward smarter, more automated operations. With technology like mobile apps and cloud-based irrigation controls, it's much easier to monitor conditions and make quick adjustments based on weather, soil moisture, and overall course needs.

Do you regularly attend RMGCSA meetings or events, if so why are they important?

As a new member, I look forward to meeting everyone and networking.

You get to see many facilities and properties. What is an interesting, new or innovative practice you have seen?

I am very fortunate to see many pump stations, new and old, and, surprisingly, they have not changed much. An average pump station lasts 15-25 years before routine repairs become very expensive or before it risks a complete system shutdown. It has become standard to have a Preventive Maintenance Plan (PMP) to maintain the system either semi-annually or annually. Instead of putting a Band-Aid on the issues, Pumpman Colorado likes to fix them.



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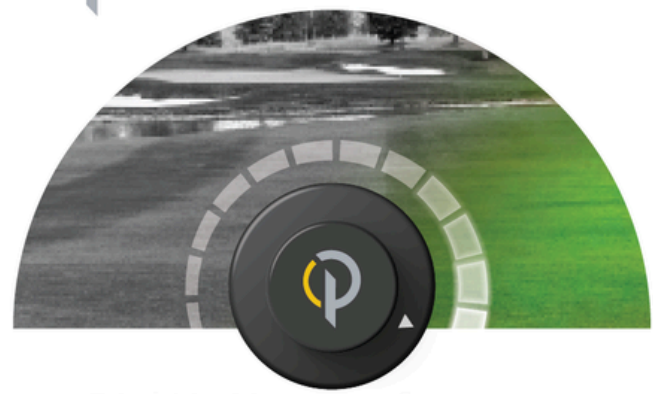
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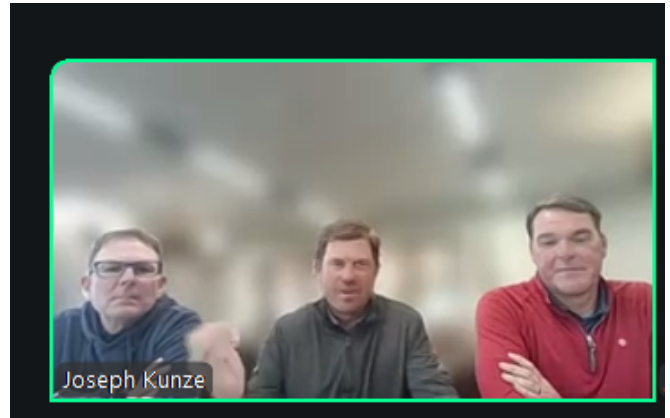
Water Restriction Round Table Recap

By Joe Kunze, CGCS, Class A, City of Arvada, RMGCSA President

With drought conditions and water restrictions impacting golf courses throughout the Rocky Mountain region, water management has become one of the most pressing issues facing golf course superintendents today.

Recognizing the need for collaboration and shared learning, the Rocky Mountain Golf Course Superintendents

Association recently hosted a virtual Water Restriction Round Table via Zoom on Wednesday, April 29th, 2026. The event drew 42 attendees from across the state and featured three golf course superintendents currently managing facilities under varying levels of water restriction.



The round table was composed of Ben Getman of Denver Country Club, Noy Sparks, CGCS of Fossil Trace Golf Club, and Joe Kunze, CGCS of West Woods and Lake Arbor Golf Clubs. Together, they shared insights into how their facilities are adapting to reduced water availability while continuing to maintain playable and healthy turf conditions.

The discussion provided attendees with a candid look at the realities of water management in 2026. While each facility operates under different constraints, including water sources, irrigation infrastructure, budget considerations, and golfer expectations, several consistent themes emerged throughout the conversation.

Participants emphasized the importance of clear communication with golfers and club leadership, strategic prioritization of irrigation, and the need for flexibility as conditions evolve throughout the season. Just as importantly, they reinforced that water management is no longer a short-term adjustment, but an ongoing operational challenge requiring long-term planning and adaptation.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the round table was the openness of the conversation. Panelists and participants shared both successes and setbacks, reinforcing the idea that meaningful progress often comes from honest dialogue and shared experience among peers.

Water Restriction Round Table Recap

Key Themes from the Discussion

Several core topics guided the round table conversation; all centered on the practical realities of managing mandated water reductions while still maintaining playable conditions and managing expectations from golfers and stakeholders.

One important aspect of the event was the level of engagement from attendees. In addition to the three panelists, there was strong participation from superintendents throughout the Zoom audience. Many attendees shared their own experiences, asked questions, and offered perspectives that added depth to the discussion. A number of those comments centered around the importance of staff training and the need to involve as many team members as possible in water efficiency efforts. From irrigation techs to assistants and crew members, properties emphasized that successful water conservation depends on everyone understanding how and why water is being applied.

Strategic Planning for Water Reductions

One of the primary discussion points focused on how superintendents are proactively planning for mandated water savings. Panelists emphasized that successful water management today requires more than reactive adjustments, it demands intentional, season-long planning based on available allocations, historical usage, and evolving course conditions.

Rather than treating restrictions as a limitation alone, participants discussed how they are incorporating water budgets into daily and weekly decision-making. This includes prioritizing key playing surfaces, adjusting expectations across different turf areas, and being willing to accept variability in turf appearance as part of a broader conservation strategy.

Tracking, Reporting, and Verification

Another key topic was how properties are reporting and verifying water usage. With increasing scrutiny from municipalities, districts, and governing agencies, accurate tracking has become an essential part of water management programs.

Panelists discussed the importance of reliable metering, consistent recordkeeping, and internal checks to ensure that reported usage aligns with actual application. In many cases, superintendents are also using data to help tell their story more effectively, demonstrating compliance while also showing the effort being made to conserve water under difficult conditions.

Water Restriction Round Table Recap

Managing Perception and Communicating BMPs

A significant portion of the conversation centered on public perception, particularly the challenge of golfers and neighbors seeing irrigated “nuclear green” turf conditions in the early morning or during irrigation cycles. Panelists acknowledged that these moments can create misunderstandings about water use and course management.

Colorado Best Management Practices (BMPs), and specifically our own facility BMP’s, were highlighted as a critical tool in addressing these perceptions. By clearly defining and communicating our BMPs, superintendents are better able to explain why and how water is applied, and how irrigation practices are designed to conserve resources while maintaining plant health. Education and transparency were repeatedly emphasized as key components in shifting perception.

Tools, Technology, and Cultural Practices

The final major theme focused on the tools and technologies being used to improve water efficiency. Panelists discussed increased use of wetting agents, moisture meters, and soil moisture mapping tools as part of a more data-driven approach to irrigation.

While technology alone is not a solution, it is increasingly being used to support decision-making and reduce guesswork. The group also noted that investing in these tools often goes hand-in-hand with a cultural shift within the maintenance operation, moving toward more precise, defensible, and intentional water use practices.

What’s Next

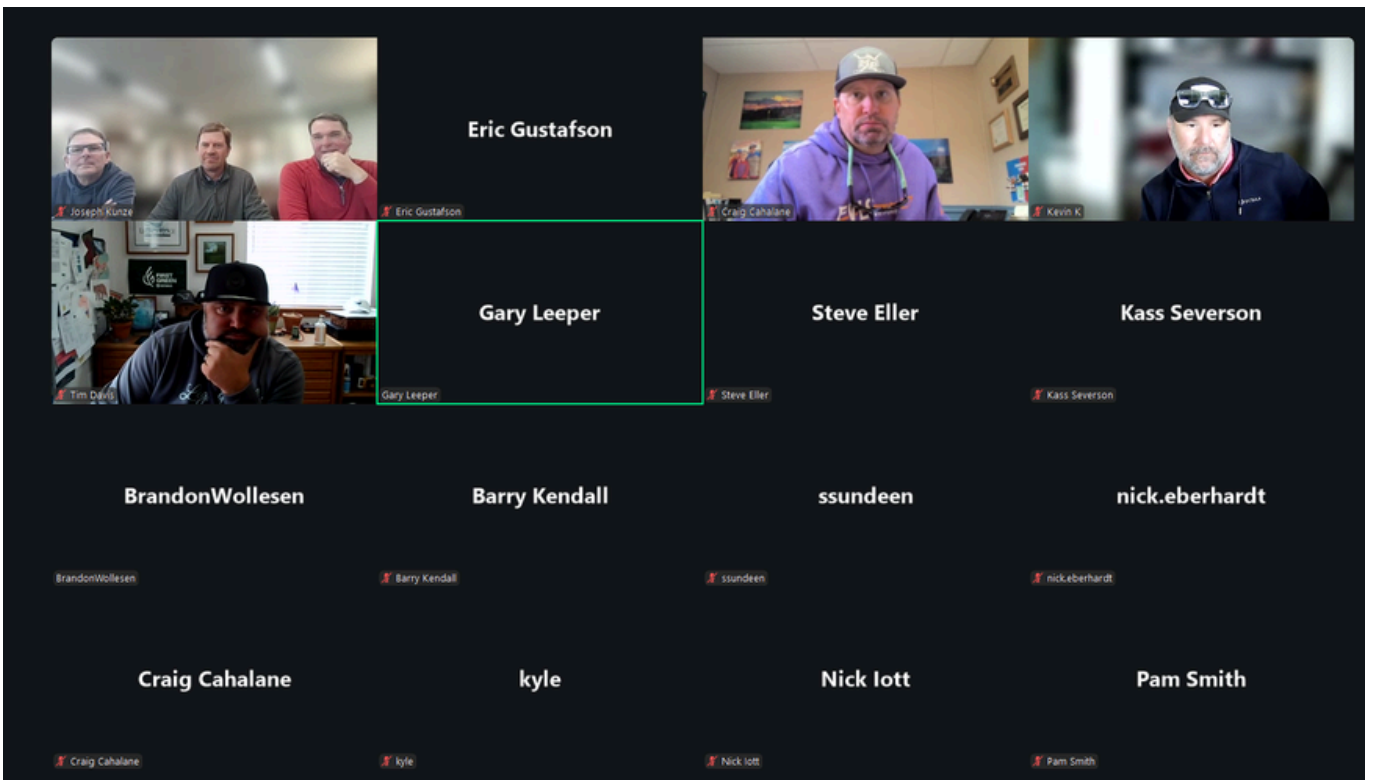
The Water Restriction Round Table reinforced the value of superintendents engaging with one another and openly sharing ideas, challenges, and solutions that can benefit the entire membership. Events like this highlight how much can be gained when professionals facing similar conditions take the time to compare approaches and learn from each other’s experiences.

The discussion was very well received by both panelists and attendees, and there is clear interest in continuing to provide similar opportunities for dialogue moving forward. The Rocky Mountain Golf Course Superintendents Association looks forward to organizing additional discussions on timely topics that impact our region.

Water Restriction Round Table Recap

If you are interested in participating in future round table events or have ideas for topics you would like to see covered, please reach out to info@RMGCSA.org.

Thank you again to all who attended and contributed to making this a valuable and engaging conversation.



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Upcoming Events



<u>Pesticide Workshop</u>	October 22nd <i>*Webinars*</i>
<u>2026 Affiliate Cup</u>	August 11th 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM <i>Pole Creek Golf Club</i>
<u>Fall Classic & Challenge Finals</u>	August 31st 7:30 AM - 5:00 PM <i>Pinehurst Country Club</i>
<u>Best Tournament Ever</u>	SOLD OUT
<u>Annual Conference</u>	November 15th- 17th Denver Marriott West

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From the Rocky Mountain Chapter of GCSAA

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