

July/August 2015

# THROUGH THE GREEN

## **Turf and Technology: Reinhardt is Face Of New Generation**

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- › Wee One Event Pays it Forward
- › Annual Meeting to East Lake



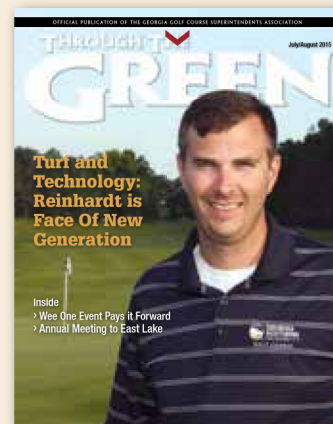


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**Cover:** Patrick Reinhardt at Georgia Southern University Golf Course symbolizes a bright new generation of superintendents.



OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE GEORGIA GOLF COURSE SUPERINTENDENTS ASSOCIATION

## THROUGH THE GREEN

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*Through The Green* is published six times a year by the Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association (Georgia GCSA). Copyright © 2011 Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association, Inc. All rights reserved.

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**Editor's Note:** Bulk Aggregate, a regular advertiser in *Through The Green*, was inadvertently omitted from the May-June issue of the magazine. We apologize for the error.

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# Reinhardt Rides Internet into the New Generation

By Trent Bouts

**A**t various points on the Internet you can find Patrick Reinhardt struggling to poke a pen through the crust of a frozen green, running geese off a pond with a remote control boat or tracking how many steps he takes in a day as golf course superintendent at Georgia Southern University Golf Course in Statesboro. On June 8 by the way, that would be 24,184.

The job still comes down to growing grass but as Reinhardt's generation is learning, and loving, some of the coolest tools for getting that done no longer hang on the wall of the shop. Instead, many are on the phone he carries everywhere he goes – whether that's onto a pump station roof, a fresh mown tee box, or even a bathroom. Connectivity is constant. And instantaneous.

Reinhardt, 33, is one of the rising stars in the superintendent profession, and not just in Georgia. Because of his command of myriad platforms that simply didn't exist a generation ago – Twitter, Vine, Facebook - his stock is on the up and up on a broader stage still.

People across the country can see his work and hear his perspective. More than 1,300 of them value it enough to follow him on Twitter.

That presence also makes him visible to those who cover the profession. His words or images – he is a talented photographer too - have appeared recently in national publications such as *Golfdom*, *Golf Course Industry* and *GCM*. Contrast that with the historical stereotype of superintendents being rarely seen or heard, instead letting their work speak for them through the condition of the golf course.

But here's the thing. Reinhardt is doing none of it for self-promotion. It's just part of doing his job as well as he possibly can. "I consider myself late to the technology bandwagon," he says, of his plunge into Twitter at the end of 2012. "I got switched on to Twitter almost out of necessity. So many college students – our target audience, the people we want to reach – had already moved away from Facebook."

Reinhardt quickly discovered that it wasn't just golfers he could reach in an instant. "I can put out a question about something I might be seeing on one of my greens and have people respond within seconds," he says. "Within an hour I might have 15 responses." And when his followers include some very experienced superintendents, prominent researchers and USGA Green Section agronomists, the feedback is often invaluable.

Patrick Reinhardt grew up in the small town of Monroe, MI just north of the Ohio state line looking out onto Lake Erie. Through high school he was set on the idea of a future in civil and environmental engineering. But like so many before him, he unwittingly arrived at a fork in the career road when he took on summer work at a nearby golf course owned by family friends.





Patrick Reinhardt (inset) has all-round skills that include capturing this photo of a dramatic cloud formation over the golf course at Georgia Southern University.

By the end of his second semester at Michigan State University, the lab in the engineering building was beginning to feel a little like a prison. Both his grandfathers were farmers and, while he was very young when both died, he still spent a lot of time bouncing around on tractors as a kid. “I guess you could say it’s in my blood,” he says.

By contrast, he found that engineering was “really not that much of an outside field.” “I’m not a big fan of sitting inside four walls,” he says. “I like to be out, involved, getting my hands in it.” One thing he did learn from his time in engineering though was that Michigan State ran a great turfgrass management program. So he followed his heart and made the switch.

While still at MSU he secured an internship at The Standard Club in Johns Creek under Mark Hoban. That led to a job upon graduation in 2004. Hoban, now at Rivermont Golf and Country Club, left soon after but Reinhardt stayed for seven and a half years. There he helped current Georgia GCSA president Mike Brown with a major renovation of the golf course. Brown was impressed enough to recommend Reinhardt for a number of superintendent positions but the recession had created a severe bottleneck for assistants looking to move up.

In the end, Reinhardt applied for more than 20 different senior roles before catching his break at Georgia Southern in 2011. Ironically, there wasn’t really a golf course to speak of at that point. Instead, there was a tract of land that used to be known as Southern Links, an 18-hole course that had been shutdown and overgrown for seven years. Georgia Southern University bought the land for \$650,000 and committed about \$3.5 million for the resurrection with Florida-based Bob Walker as lead architect.

“There’s that feeling of accomplishment,” Reinhardt says, of finally hearing something other than ‘thanks, but no thanks.’ “There were a lot of great guys who applied for the job. So I was very grateful to be given the opportunity. But then you sit down and think about it and, yes, there’s a sense of oh, oh, what did I get myself into. I’m leaving a great job working for a great guy and now there’s a multi-million dollar project and I’m going to be the one leading it...this should be interesting.”

And it was.

“It was stressful,” Reinhardt admits. “It wasn’t something that was easy to do. We spent \$3.5 million when most people would spend four and five times that to build a golf course. There are things I would have loved to do that the golf course would have really benefited from but we had to prioritize. You realize when you have to make so many decisions that you are going to get some wrong. You just have to hope you get enough of them right, overall, that people will be happy with the end product.”

Apparently, they are. Golf Digest named Georgia Southern to its list of Best New Golf Courses in 2014. Director of golf Martin Olsson credited a “large part” of that recognition to Reinhardt.

Golfers seem to be happy too. The course neared its 24,000 round target last year with close to a 50-50 split between student and public play. As Reinhardt says, at \$10 to walk 18 and \$25 to ride, “To be a student at Georgia Southern who likes to play golf is a really good thing.”

Reinhardt believes it’s a good thing to be a superintendent there too. He has three other full-time staff but the bulk of his workforce comes





Before and after shots towards the 15th green.

from the student body. “I have a killer staff,” he says. “I love the staff I’ve got. I can’t say enough about them. They’re incredibly smart and dedicated. They’re willing to do just about anything. It’s fun working in this setting. I’m fortunate in that I don’t have a lot of people I have to answer to. It’s nice not having 300 different managers (members) that I have to explain myself to.”

The fact that a university is, by definition, a place of learning sits well with Reinhardt too. “I love experimenting with new stuff,” he says. “But I am still cautious when I do it. If it’s a new product I’m trying I hope it works like the manufacturer says it will. But I expect it probably won’t work quite to the extent they say it will. I think new products deserve a shot and someone has to do it.”

Reinhardt’s experimentation is always underpinned by a sense of “cautious optimism” thanks to his social media network. “There is a core group of us who like to try and push the envelope,” he says. “We bounce ideas off of each other and compare notes.” That exchange helps minimize any risk. It also helps spread the benefit.

When, some 20-plus years ago, GCSAA began urging superintendents to come out of the background, the thinking was that if their work was better understood, it would also be better appreciated and, ultimately, better rewarded. One of the challenges was finding platforms - other than visibility at the driving range and the clubhouse - for superintendents to do that. The Internet, as Reinhardt and others of his generation are showing, presents an array of opportunity. “It’s a wonderful tool,” he says. ■

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Before and after views from the 7th tee.

## Plane Lands on Golf Course



The Maule M-4 220C aircraft which dropped in on Columbus Country Club.

William Smith, CGCS was busy enough hosting the 86th Southeastern Amateur at the Country Club of Columbus but then he had an unexpected visitor. A single-engine aircraft that had lost power came fluttering in for an emergency landing on the 15th fairway. “There was a twosome on the green and I don’t know how close the plane came to hitting them but once it touched down it was only 50 yards away,” Smith says. The pilot survived without injury and there was no damage to the plane.

However, the golf event – which was in the practice round stage - endured more than its share of disruption. “It turned into a circus once the first responders got word,” Smith says. “I think every policeman in Columbus was there.” The plane had just taken off from a nearby airport when it lost power. Witnesses later said they didn’t hear the plane coming until it appeared in view because there was no engine noise.

Smith says it is the first plane he has had drop in during his 38-year career. “I’ve had some hot-air balloons land on the golf course before,” he says. “It was very fortunate for this pilot that the golf course was here because he had nowhere else to go.” Smith says there was minimal turf damage and the tournament was able to be played without a hitch. ■



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