

Turf's INNOVATORS

These industry leaders are helping to improve turfgrass quality through research, education and practice.

By Keith Carter and Rebecca Larsen

WHEN YOU BOIL IT DOWN, THE prosperity of the golf industry relies on one key element: healthy turfgrass. And numerous advances in recent years have helped golf courses maintain high quality turf at affordable prices.

The effort has been led by a group of researchers, architects, superintendents and service providers who continue to experiment, teach and put new advances into practice. Here, we profile several leaders at the forefront of this effort.

Darren Davis

Superintendent
Olde Florida Golf Club
Naples, Fla.

Davis is one of the golf industry's most tire-



less advocates for improving course maintenance practices across the U.S.

A former president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, he maintains a prolific presence on social media and is a pioneer in using video to share his knowledge with others.

"In our business, being able to communicate effectively, whether through an article, a video or on social media, is a really powerful tool," he said. "I've found that it can create a great connection with everyone from members at your club to your peers in the industry."

For Davis, the job of a golf course superintendent is part art and part science. Davis said he and his staff continually investigate new ways of doing things and experiment with methods or products that might enable them to be more productive.

"We are constantly looking to improve either the level of conditioning or the processes we employ," he said.

He believes advances in turfgrass management and technology in recent years have made sharing knowledge critical.

"This has already mandated and will continue to require golf course superintendents to be proficient in a variety of roles not needed in the past, and continuing education will remain a necessity," he said.



David Doguet Sr.

President
Bladerunner Farms
Poteet, Texas

For more than 30 years, Doguet has been a pioneer in testing, licensing and marketing environmentally friendly turfgrasses for home lawns, sports fields and golf courses. His firm also licenses proprietary grass varieties to U.S. sod farms west of the Mississippi.

The search for the perfect grass led Doguet to focus on two: zoysiagrass and buffalograss. They are known for requiring less water, fertilizer and chemicals than other grasses, making them well suited for courses with water restrictions, periods of drought and/or extreme weather.

The goal has been to introduce improved turfgrass and phase out inferior varieties. Doguet has worked closely with universities and private companies to breed and improve his grasses. His projects include testing done with researchers at University of Georgia, University of Tennessee and Texas A&M.



Shannon Easter

Director of golf maintenance
Broken Sound Club
Boca Raton, Fla.

Broken Sound has established a reputation for its unwavering commitment to the environment. And Easter, who helps direct sustainability efforts on the club's golf course, plays a critical role. He oversees a program that recycles 96% of its food and landscaping waste on the property and turns food waste into compost for the 115-acre course.

Easter also contributes to the club's wide-ranging community outreach. He has made presentations to the Environmental Protection Agency as well as to local homeowners in order to promote awareness of how to reduce their carbon footprints.

Broken Sound uses reclaimed water for irrigation. It also has added more than 30 birdhouses, seven butterfly gardens and 22 beehives. Easter has planted thousands of plants along the perimeters of the property's lakes and has developed an integrated pest management program that emphasizes mechanical and biological controls while minimizing the use of chemicals.

For his efforts, Easter has won numerous awards, including the Environmental Leaders in Golf Award and the Healthy Land Stewardship Award from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

Edric Funk

Director, Toro's Center for Advanced Turf Technology
Bloomington, Minn.

The director of Toro's Center for Advanced Turf Technology since 2017, Funk leads a team of engineers, agronomists and product development specialists. Their mission: to identify emerging trends in the turf industry and to develop new solutions to customers' current needs, while also working on technology that will promote sustainability, labor productivity and efficiency.

The focus of the center's research



includes autonomous equipment, environmental sustainability and alternative fuels.

Funk, whose interest in turfgrass began when he was a youth playing sports, began his career at Toro as a design engineer. In 2003, he was named director of worldwide product marketing for Toro's commercial business.

The best part of his job? "Being surrounded by a team of brilliant and creative individuals who are passionate about making customers' lives easier and fulfilling the company's mission of helping to enrich the beauty, productivity and sustainability of the land," he said.



John Holmes

Founder
Atlas Turf International
LaGrange, Ga.

Holmes has developed a reputation as an innovator and leader in the turfgrass industry, thanks to his knowledge of turf agronomics, his familiarity with turf varieties and testing data, and his cutting edge ideas about technology that can benefit turf science.

Ten years ago, he founded Atlas Turf International, a company in LaGrange, Ga., which supplies quality turfgrass for sports fields and golf courses worldwide. Before that, he was a golf course superintendent for 12 years.

Holmes, who holds a degree in turfgrass management from Lake City College, was vice president of the Asian Golf Industry Federation for many years. He is on the international committee of the Golf Course Builders Association of America and has been involved in golf development in Saudi Arabia.

He continues to work with the best turfgrass breeders to provide more sustainable varieties.

"Ten years ago, there were only a few turfgrasses available that were considered environmentally sustainable," he said. "Now there are many more varieties, allowing projects to use less water or reclaimed water."

Andy Johnston

Director of agronomy/general manager
Sentosa Golf Club
Singapore

Johnston is a man on a mission. His goal: to share the knowledge he has gained about the golf turf industry with as many individ-