

Past Presidents

VGCSA Feature: Superintendent
Steven Hewitt, 13th Beach Golf Links



Association involvement

VGCSA Member since 1994

Time on Committee

Committee member 2009-18

Two terms as Vice President

Three+ terms as President

Turf career

Course History:

I began my turf career as an apprentice at Warracknabeal Golf Club in 1990. I was promoted to Superintendent the day I was qualified. During this time, I approached Peter Frewin at Barwon Heads Golf Club (who was then the VGCSA President) about becoming a VGCSA member. In conversation, he said that one of his employees was going to the USA on an internship for 12 months. I expressed interest in the 12 month position which lasted for approximately 6 ½ years (Mark Reid's internship resulted in him becoming Superintendent at The Breaker, Florida and is still there). I arrived at Barwon Heads Golf Club thinking I knew it all and found out quickly that I did not know much at all. I was fortunate to

obtain my current position at Thirteenth Beach Golf Links in November 2000 and have loved every moment.

Study:

Diploma Turf Management

Tournaments:

I was fortunate to volunteer at Hope Island for a Johnny Walker Classic in the late 90s, and I volunteered at last year's Australian Open at the Australian, Sydney. 13th Beach has also hosted eight Men's and Ladies' Vic Opens in my time as Superintendent.

Give us an overview of your course and some of its unique characteristics

Thirteenth Beach Golf Links consists of two courses, the Beach and Creek, along with a housing estate of 150 homes and associated accommodation. A recent development, Cashmore Drive, consists of 130 house lots and a 9 hole short course. We have the contract to maintain both housing estates.

The Beach and Creek courses were designed to be contrasting, with the Beach course occupying the more attractive links sand dune environment and the Creek Course occupying the gently undulating open paddock. The Beach course was designed by Tony Cashmore and the Creek course by Tony in combination with Sir Nick Faldo. The Beach course consists of Fine fescue fairways which is not all that common in Victoria. Vegetation on the Creek course is progressing to the point that it no longer looks like a paddock. Both courses have Penn G2 greens which cope well with the salty reclaimed water used for irrigation.

This summer will be the first that we will go with a preventative fungicide program. We have prided ourselves with using minimal fungicides over the years but last summer was not good. Nature continues to provide its challenges.



Take us through your turf management operations and how have you fine-tuned them during your time as Superintendent?

One of the most defining moments, when I first started working on the Beach course and growing in the turf surfaces, was the process of managing greens. I went from pure *Poa* greens at Barwon Heads which were routinely cored and scarified twice a year, as per the general practice of many golf courses at the time. I was fortunate to work with Mark Gahan who was Construction Superintendent and was also Superintendent at The Dunes Golf Links. Mark had success with a dusting program on greens when dusting was not all that common. He noticed the improved greens surfaces of those that would be blasted with sand out of bunkers from the prevailing winds at the Dunes and, as a result, we have dusted greens routinely since establishment. The greens at 13th Beach have never been cored or scarified. Over the years we have used hydrojects, 5mm solid tines and, only recently, moved towards longer 8mm tines, once per year. The greens profile is quite good for 20 year old greens. We use the same principal for most other surfaces where we core and matt the soil back into the profile as a means of diluting thatch.

Managing Fine fescue fairways has its challenges but is a great contrast to the Santa Ana fairways on the Creek course. Tee tops are either Winter green or Santa Ana. We did use Plateau couch on the Beach course tee tops but have since re-turfed with Santa Ana over the years. The risks of choosing an untried grass. Not sure if I blame Mark Gahan for that or if he blames me!!

In recent years we have used a verti-rake or tiller implement for thatch control. We will rarely use a scarifier now to manage thatch couch surfaces. We even use it on the Fine fescue.

Describe your management style

My management style is, to be firm but fair. I like for the staff to come to work fresh and go home having completed a safe and productive day's work. Staff who do extra are noticed and acknowledged. Those who leave right on time every day stand out for different reasons. I like the staff to have fun at work but draw the line on anything slightly associated to a 'prank', knowing that the situation would snowball if not kept in check. I observe and act, as opposed to getting cross and loud. Staff management has been difficult in recent months as we have two teams operating due to the COVID-19

restrictions, and then myself who keeps somewhat separated from them all. During this time the two assistants, James and Ash, have conducted the day to day management. I am looking forward to the day when there is less 'them and us', where we can have a BBQ as one group.

What inspired you to join the VGCSA Committee?

I was encouraged by Nathan Bennett to join the committee. In my mind, I agreed to a two year term. He then deserted me, moving to Royal Adelaide, and so I had the long trip up the road solo until Steve Burchett came on to the committee. My two year term unexpectedly turned into many, with over three as President. I joined the committee as a way of 'doing my time' for the Association. It turned out to be much more rewarding than anticipated.

The discussions about work and life with Nathan and Steve on the road to Melbourne for meetings were invaluable. For most of my time on committee I used this as my networking outlet, gaining valuable information from those more experienced than myself. This was not the reason why but was a result of my decision to join.

Most pleasing/rewarding moments during your time on the committee?

I saw an opportunity as President to create a more inclusive Association. I encouraged the committee to come alongside new members, for them to feel less intimidated at meetings. Golf groups no longer had groups of mates, they were made of members who may not have known one another. I felt we broke down some barriers.

It was rewarding during my time on committee and still, to this day, that the Association remains financially strong, well patronaged, well supported by sponsors and, as a result, has managed to provide research, support and relevant state specific information to its members.

I had many rewarding moments, the most being personal growth. I am not a natural in front of a microphone but it certainly makes you feel better about yourself when things go well. The more I did this, the less I worried about getting it wrong. I do not think I could have orchestrated the 'Graham Norton' interviews over recent years if it was not for my time on committee and the fact that I did not mind having fun at the expense of myself. As a by-product of this, I was able to be involved with presenting Michael Freeman with Life

Membership of the Association, someone I have admired for many years as a person and in his role at Huntingdale GC.

Any advice to someone considering taking on a committee role?

If you enjoy being around like minded people, enjoy networking and obtaining new information that can help you improve your work and life situation, enjoy being part of something successful, are eager to learn how to manage all the elements and intricacies of an Association, be challenged to grow in confidence and stature as a person, then get on committee, simple as that.

When you get the chance to get on committee, do not perform your committee task during your working day, do it at home or after work. I never let the involvement of being on committee be a distraction to my work, but that's just me.

Favourite course spot

The 'Top Top' tee on the 8th hole, Beach Course. An elevated view looking over holes 6, 7 and 8, the Clubhouse, Lake Murtnaghurt, and holes 12, 13 and 14 at Barwon Heads Golf Club. I remember when building the Beach Course at the time that the 8th tee complex was being constructed. There was a rough path etched into a sand dune rising high above the 7th green with a potential teeing ground on top of a sand dune, nearly the highest point on the property. Late one afternoon the developers Duncan Andrews (owner of The Dunes) and Ian and Philip McNaughton (original land owners), architect Tony Cashmore, Mark Gahan, shaper Barry Hudson and myself, with beer in hand, made the collective decision to take the low path and build a tee nestled low into the sand dune to reduce exposure to the prevailing wind. That is how some of the decisions were made. In subsequent years, with leftover turf from different jobs, we levelled off two small tees near the original location of the proposed high tees. Hence the 'Top' and 'Top Top' tee. Monthly Medals and the Vic Open men play from these tees.

