

# In the Region – Portland Golf Club

**Superintendent:** Steven Arthur  
VGCSA member since May 2020



## **Turf career**

14 years and change. Started as a mature aged apprentice in 2005 at The Dunes before a six month stint at Rosanna GC before heading to The National for three years. Then turned my hand to bowling greens / croquet courts for six years with a contractor. Moved to Chalambar GC (Ararat) in 2018 as a tree change. Got the Superintendent gig at Portland GC in January 2020.

## **Portland GC Staff structure**

Myself, our first year apprentice and a band of loyal volunteers.

## **Course Overview / Characteristics**

We have 18 holes, with 13 on the same site as the Clubhouse and a road dividing the other five. We have Santa Ana tees, bent/*Poa* greens and fairways which can best be described as a mix of Kikuyu, bent and rye. Our profile is black sand on top of coffee rock, making drainage an issue. There's also a heap of koalas.

## **Turf Management/Operations**

Arriving at Portland, the thing that stuck out straight away was how heavily we relied on volunteers (and they're fantastic) but there was a lack of accountability and record keeping. No spray records, machinery inspections, fuel records, even rainfall records. So there was something of a re-education process with checklists and daily maintenance implemented. Checklists were a massive thing at the National, so it was pretty easy to draw on my time there as inspiration.



## **What course improvements/alterations have you been involved in during your time at the Club?**

We've changed quite a bit at Portland since January – weeds were and are a big problem, so just getting our spray programs right has been

the key. We've reduced tee, fairway and apron sizes to help with this and negate wear, and it's working really well. Also, reducing mown rough, building new cart paths and over sowing/ converting tees from Santa Ana to fescue.

Coastal wattle and Pittosporum infestations are big issues so we've also been really attacking that. We're also midway through a nursery build to help the tees conversion. A monthly course update email to the members has been great for communication and they really appreciate it. With a small staff, the balancing act is making the improvements low maintenance and not super time intensive. It's easy to see things I'd like to do, it's another to put the plan into action. On reflection, the course was really a blank slate when I arrived so it's pretty exciting going forward.



**What is the one piece of machinery you could not live without?**

I have a love/hate relationship with my old as hell 400L spray tank. Wouldn't want to imagine life without it rattling down the fairways.

**What are the pros and cons about being a Superintendent at your course?**

Being the Super at Portland is pretty cool but it can be draining at the same time. Being in a small team with a small budget. It's a real grind to make improvements. When you get something done, you get that real sense of ownership over it, which is good. We're lucky the community are right behind us and there are a lot of phone calls to get free stuff/labour/grants (might become a rep one day!). That might mean things aren't always done 100% how or when you want but the community (and Board) are right behind us, so we just get on with it and do the best we can.

**Describe your management style**

I'd hope my managerial style is diplomatic and encouraging. With so many volunteers, you can

imagine how many opinions/ideas I hear and, without our volunteers, we'd be cooked.

Honestly, being like my old boss Mark Gahan is what I try to emulate. It's been hard sometimes to train our apprentice in corona times. Social distancing, school being one day a week instead of block and lack of volunteers, resulting in us just cutting more, have meant training hours are at a premium.

**If you could change one thing about your job what would it be and why?**

If I could change one thing about my job I'd have the Club hire a mechanic. Not a grease monkey at all and any time I spend in the shed, it's time I'm not spending on course.

**Most pleasing/rewarding moment during your time as a Superintendent**

The best thing we've done in my short time was having a dozen volunteers on a Sunday and Monday, laying about 600 metres of drainage. Really showed the community spirit the Club has and the front nine will now be playable all year round.

**Favourite spot on the course**

Favourite spot on the course is the 7<sup>th</sup> green. Get to stare out at Portland Bay and the Southern Ocean. Also my favourite hole on the property.



I'd also like to say I hope everyone is taking care of their own and their staff's mental health in these difficult times. We can get through this together. Look after each other and have a chat with your mates.