

## ***Most Valuable Technician Award Nomination***



### **Cliff Henning Nomination**

*Submitted by Chris Zugel, the superintendent at Whistling Straits Golf Course in Kohler, Wis., and a 12-year GCSAA member*

**Consistently provides superior service to the betterment of the golf facility:** Cliff Henning's level of detail is unmatched. He is always willing to put in whatever is needed to make sure that the golf facility is not only running, but running at its best. He assists all our needs on the golf course and he is always available to make sure that if anyone needs his help, he is there to assist them. Whether it is checking that the golf carts are operating safely, helping a guest with a flat tire on a personal vehicle or helping them if they are locked out of a car, Cliff is always available to make sure that the end users know how to properly use equipment. From little things like the cart chargers in the cart storage to heavy equipment used for the golf course, Cliff always ensures that everything is operating as it should to ensure the most positive experience.

Destination Kohler is a resort that is comprised of 72 holes of championship golf designed by Pete Dye (Blackwolf Run and Whistling Straits) in Kohler, Wis. Throughout his time, Cliff has worked at both Blackwolf Run and Whistling Straits. He has been a key part of numerous events that have taken place at Whistling Straits and was an integral part of golf course construction for both the Straits and the Irish courses. Cliff did an amazing job keeping the equipment going through the grow-in of two golf courses at Whistling Straits and all the related construction equipment needed to build them, as well as keeping up with the design modifications that have been made throughout the years.

From time to time, the media also notes his dedication, such as during the summer of 2009, when a photo shoot for a major magazine required a helicopter. The helicopter was turned off as the pilot and photographer waited for the sun to rise over the horizon of the shore. When they felt that the light was just right, they readied themselves to take to the air. As the pilot turned the key to start the engine, the key broke! With the light fading, the chances that the photo shoot would be successful were also dwindling. The only way that we could get the helicopter up in the air would be if we could fix it in the next few minutes. The call was made to Cliff; never one to back down from a challenge he hurried to their aid and was able to hot-wire the engine so that they could get into the air. Needless to say, we were very proud of Cliff, and those involved in the photo shoot were also very grateful for his assistance.

All 72 holes at Destination Kohler have been involved in major tournament golf. and Cliff's leadership is nothing less than first rate during these events. In fact he has prepared our fleet of equipment in 1995, 1996 and 1997 for the Anderson World Championship of Golf, the 1998 U.S. Women's Open at Blackwolf Run, as well as the

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1999 Club Player Championship, 2004 PGA Championship, 2005 Palmer Cup, 2007 U.S. Senior Open, and, later this year, the 2010 PGA Championship, all held at Whistling Straits. Thanks in part to Cliff's diligence and keen eye there have been no hydraulic oil leaks during these events (a nice environmental contribution, too).

Golf operations are not the only people that benefit from Cliff's expertise. Cliff also is a fully trained technician in servicing Kohler generators. During major championships, it's not uncommon to see Cliff lend a helping hand keeping the numerous generator sets and HVAC equipment running. He is also there to help any other vendors with their equipment that is buzzing around the golf course during tournaments.

In addition to his expert mechanical skills, Cliff is a certified EMT and first responder. The remote location of the golf courses can become an issue if there is an emergency; almost a half-hour drive for most emergencies. Cliff has responded to numerous incidents on property and provided the necessary assistance for those in need. He's the first one there if a cook cuts open his hand or a golfer is short of breath.

**Exhibits exceptional resourcefulness, innovation or creativity in solving problems:** Cliff not only fixes any issues that may arise, but he works towards creating solutions that improve the long-term effectiveness. He understands what we need as a business to be successful but may not be available to purchase, and he works towards modifying or creating new equipment. He has created numerous new tools from existing ones that had either proven to be not suitable or not durable enough for our application.

One of the many examples is modifying rototillers to allow them to be used to clean weedy natural areas and remain unclogged, or when he converted a set of old walk mowers to a fleet of highly adjustable, very dependable walking verticutters that make it possible for us to vertically mow greens and tees without the worry of a hydraulic leak. Cliff has a creative mind that the senior staff members can recall when he reproduced vintage wooden bunker rakes or whipped up a 18-foot long valve key (every Pete Dye course has at least one!). He modified mower trailers that could not tip a walk mower no matter how erratic the driver. When using spare parts, Cliff created a mechanical service vehicle that would make AAA proud. He has a knack for taking a picture, drawing or even just an idea and making it into reality. He is never satisfied with what others say is good enough if there is a chance that it can be better.

**Exemplifies excellence and integrity in workplace relationships, interactions, and decision-making:** Cliff always puts the success of the business first. He understands that sometimes equipment failure does not always occur at the best times but he is always there to make sure that his customer, whether it is our staff on the golf course, the staff at the clubhouse or the paying golfer has what they require.

There is no need to candy coat Cliff's strong personality because he has ruffled some feathers of new comers to the organization. He's a former Navy sailor who expects much of himself and anyone who sets foot in the shop. Cliff takes the daily success of our golf operation personally; the fact that it takes an army of people that are all using equipment

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that he has repaired or built does not get lost with him. He has little tolerance for trying foolish ideas that have not been well thought out. Cliff has seen golf course seasonal workers come and go; assistant superintendents move up and then move on, and different golf course superintendents arrive. He understands that each member of the team may have a great idea that they really think would benefit the golf course, and weighs each one separately, a difficult task when you have to hear the ideas of over a 100 different employees that they want to be started on right away!

There won't be any confusion about who is in charge in the shop and that things will get done in a system that produces results. Cliff leads a team of mechanical technicians here at Whistling Straits during the growing season and when the season ends each year he has the added responsibility of instructing four assistant superintendents. He guides them while they tackle the preventative maintenance of mowers, vehicles and other miscellaneous tools, readying them for the upcoming season. He takes the time to pass along his years of experience to those that are helping him and in effect teaches them valuable skills that they can use for the rest of their career on the golf course.

But don't let the hard nose, driven personality intimidate you; Cliff could simultaneously give you a memorable earful about the consequences of equipment abuse while bandaging up your finger laceration.

**Effectively manages costs/budgets/inventory while maintaining high quality, dependable resources:** Cliff effectively maximizes all of his resources to the fullest. He insures that we have parts on hand or readily knows the sources for those items, so we can continue to operate without delay. Cliff has made sure to keep up with our shipping companies so that we are at the beginning of the route and not at the end. Cliff has also suggested that other companies are used which have benefited both our operation and the parts supplier by saving time and costs. Realizing that he may not be here until 3 or 4 pm to repair equipment he asked that by placing us at the beginning of the route we would have the parts in our hands and thereby ready to make the repair by the next day.

Cliff is always aware of what is going on with the golf courses. We can count on him to have enough aerification tines on hand to efficiently perform all of our cultural practices. During the winter Cliff insures that we are able to get all the necessary parts we need to service our equipment. He always stays within the budget that is allotted for his department and values the company's funds as if they were his own. He often gives a wide range of options for every purchase and gives his opinion on what he feels would be the best solution. We know that all that he does is not only done by the most cost effective means, but done to such a standard that there is no question that it was done with the utmost quality.

**Demonstrates a commitment to environmentally conscious practices:** Cliff is a steward of the environment. He enjoys being outdoors with his sled dogs, which he competes with in local events. Cliff has been to numerous Iditarods, assisting fellow mushers volunteering his own time to follow his passion. He has spoken to local groups regarding the humane treatment of animals, and was involved in the creation of mountain

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bike trails in a local park. These trails are used by thousands of residents throughout the year, offering an enjoyable venue to experience the outdoors. Some of the trails that he has created prevented land erosion and are used during a national mountain bike completion that is one of the largest in the country.

It is Cliff's responsibility to monitor all of the lubricants and solvents in the shop and that they are disposed or recycled properly. He ensures that all of the metal that is generated as waste at the golf course is recycled and has recently secured a local recycling company to handle our used oil filters. He makes an effort to check fuel and oil filters regularly so that all of the equipment on the golf courses is running as efficiently as possible. Cliff is always up to date on any advances in spill containment and that everyone knows what the procedures are if there were to be an accidental spill.

**Embodies and promotes safety in the workplace:** Cliff is consistently up to date so that all of the equipment is running as it should to be as safe as possible. He ensures that any equipment that is not operating safely is removed from our use until it can be fixed. He never advocates or performs any modification to equipment, even though it may seem to make the task easier, if it might ultimately be unsafe. He ensures that all safety devices are installed and working properly and has often given a pair of his own safety glasses to another worker if he notices that they had forgotten theirs. Cliff works within a comprehensive corporate safety system, derived from high manufacturing and industrial standards. In a shop of three technicians, there has been only a single OSHA recordable accident/incident (a shoulder sprain) in the past six years. Because the terrain on the golf courses is sometimes very steep, Cliff sees that all braking systems work properly so that each employee can feel safe while moving throughout the property. Cliff is very observant of all equipment and takes it upon himself to suggest a better technique as to the operation of the equipment with safety in mind for everyone.