

Give a Little, Get a Lot

Superintendent and CGSA member Aaron Little talks about his accomplishments and working at one of Canada's most exclusive courses

▶ Tiger Woods, Hank Haney and Charles

Barkley walk onto a golf course. It sounds like the start of a long-winded joke, but it was the exact scenario that golf course superintendent Aaron Little came face-to-face with one day in the summer of 2009. The three sporting legends came together at Little's course, the exclusive Fox Harb'r Resort in Wallace, Nova Scotia, to play at the Nike Golf Invitational. In a career that has played out like a movie script, filled with private jets, business moguls and breathtaking, ocean-side views, helping to host the world number one golfer is an experience that has stuck out more than any other for Little.

"It was definitely the experience of my career, no question," says Little, a 15-year CGSA member, about hosting one of the most famous sporting figures in the world.

"Leading into (the event) was pretty stressful because it was held June 25 and our property, being coastal, gets very cold months of May and we had a lot of damage that year around our greens and fairways. We had to do a lot of sodding and recovery and luckily we had some good weather around the end of June and things fell into place."

Although Woods, Haney and Barkley are a daunting threesome to prepare for, Little has had a lot of practice with both maintaining a course to high standards and presenting his work to the world's business and sporting elite. The native of Fredericton, New Brunswick began his golf course management career at the age of 14 when he started working on the crew at the Fredericton Golf

and Curling Club under the superintendent, who also happened to be his father.

"It was great, but I won't lie, my father was hard on me because he was trying to teach me the work ethic he had," says Little about the time spent working under his father.

Little worked in Fredericton from 1990 until 2000 when he followed another of his bosses, Barry Scott, to Fox Harb'r where he helped in the construction of the course. He was then offered the job as superintendent in 2004 and has been overseeing the resort's grounds for the last 11 years. This includes supervising the 28 staff under him who maintain everything from the 27 holes on the property to the sprawling ground of the housing developments and the hotel located near the site's 5,000-foot private airplane runway that ferries billionaires in and out.

"It's stressful, but it's pretty rewarding," says Little about working at a course where it's commonplace to see NHL players and the world's most influential business people.

"It's not the mundane maintenance of 18 holes of golf. We have home sites and an aircraft runway. It's exciting. We have a number of resident members who often comment on how well the property is maintained and how they are getting value for their money and this appreciation from these high-end clients is very rewarding."

All the perks and benefits of being the superintendent at Fox Harb'r don't come without more than its fair share of obstacles and speed bumps. Little must contend with the area's harsh climate, the site's remote location and the expansiveness of the property to ensure conditions are exceptional.

"Climate is probably our number one challenge, especially on our oceanside holes," says Little.

"May can be very cold and wet or cold and dry because we're right on the ocean and we get a lot of breeze and there can still be ice out there into the middle of May. That can be a challenge because we don't get much early spring recovery. We use breath-



The 5,000 foot private runway at Fox Harb'r with the golf course in the background.



Little's dedication to maintaining top-notch conditions has Fox Harb'r consistently ranked among the top 100 courses in Canada.

able tarps a lot to accelerate growth if we have damage in the spring."

Finding and retaining staff is another difficulty Little faces at Fox Harb'r. Because the property is remote and far from large population centres, hiring reliable, long-term crew members always takes more time and effort, says the superintendent. To counter this problem, Little looks for workers from the local community, especially retired locals. He also strives to find his team other jobs around the property during the shoulder and off seasons, including building homes or working at the sport shooting area.

Despite these daily challenges, Little has been a huge part in making Fox Harb'r one of the best sites in the country. The superintendent's skill and dedication have not gone unnoticed. The course is continually ranked in the top 100 in Canada and, in 2008, Little received the Atlantic Canada Superintendent of the Year Award.

"That was a huge honour," says Little about the award.

"Being a superintendent with a medium amount of experience at the time, it was really a morale booster to be recognized by my peers."

Little has enjoyed many monumental moments throughout his career, but some of his proudest accomplishments have come from projects that don't often bask in the spotlight. The superintendent counts renovating the property for efficiency purposes among the best work he has done at Fox Harb'r. Between 2008 and

2011, Little spearheaded several initiatives that cut costs, increased value and boosted sustainability, including infilling bunkers on the driving range, shrinking green sites and eliminating unused tee decks on the par-three course, and reducing garden space from 30 acres to 21 acres.

"We looked at the whole property, how we could reduce it and how we could bring labour costs down," says Little about the renovations.

"We've also built 14 home sites on the property to date worth more than a million dollars, and just being able to landscape those in-house in a high-end fashion with no contractor help...was pretty special."

While success is one constant in Little's career in the industry, another is being a member of the CGSA. The Fox Harb'r superintendent and grounds manager has been a part of the association for a decade and a half and the value he sees in membership has never waned.

"I do believe it's important to support the industry as a whole," says Little, "and I think the CGSA does great things. The trade show and the educational opportunities in particular are of high value for everyone in the industry from a learning perspective and the organization also provides great networking opportunities."

After 25 years in the industry, Little still looks for two things when he arrives at work every day; pride in the job and a challenge on the horizon.

"When one challenge is overcome, I'll always be looking for another," says the veteran turfgrass manager about his workplace philosophy.

"We strive to provide tournament conditions on a daily basis...and we pride ourselves on our consistency. I preach pride and the people on my team take ownership of their jobs. I have a high work ethic and I expect that from others as well."

That work ethic and passion for the end product is going to come in handy for Little in the near future; Fox Harb'r has plans to expand its resort, particularly its real estate offerings, and the superintendent will be a part of making these blueprints become a reality. Ultimately, it's the veteran superintendent's love for the profession that will help multiply his already numerous accomplishments.

"I love working with people from all walks of life," says Little about what he most enjoys about his job.

"You get to work with a real mix of people and I've always found that interesting."

With everyone from aspiring turfgrass managers to PGA superstars walking the fairways at Fox Harb'r, the sense of excitement Little finds in his work is sure to continue for some time to come. **GM**

BOS SOD Farms Inc.

Serving Western Canada with quality Bentgrass Sod for 18 years.

1-800-267-7763
www.bossod.com