

(climbing the ladder)



John Hardee

Was: Assistant superintendent,
Chicago Golf Club

Is: Superintendent,
Blackberry Oaks Golf Course, Bristol, Ill.

Getting to know you

Blackberry Oaks Golf Course in Bristol, Ill., got what amounts to a two-for-one deal when it landed John Hardee. Lucky them, if you ask Craig Smith.

"I couldn't be happier for him. John helped me advance my career by how steady and solid he was," says Smith, a GCSAA Class A superintendent and eight-year association member whose assistant was Hardee at Chicago Golf Club before Hardee advanced to become a first-time superintendent in May at Blackberry Oaks at age 29. "He's one of the smartest turf guys I've been around. He is perfectly built for this. I heard from his GM. They love him there."

A native of Loris, S.C., Hardee isn't only the superintendent. He doubles as mechanic. He spends the first part of each morning in the superintendent role along with a crew that features Gabe Salazar, a three-decade veteran there. The rest of the time, Hardee is in the mechanic slot. He credits his former co-worker at Chicago GC, Tony Nunes, equipment technician manager and 12-year GCSAA member, for his guidance in the shop.

Until he went to school at Horry-Georgetown Technical College in Conway, S.C., Hardee was uncertain about his career. He grew up in a semi-rural community and took an ag class in high school and, while there, mowed the football field for the Loris Lions. Golf was an unknown for him until Hardee gained exposure by working in college at Barefoot Resort & Golf in North Myrtle Beach, S.C. He volunteered at pro events, including the PGA Tour's Deutsche Bank Championship at TPC Boston and the Wells Fargo Championship at Quail Hollow Club in Charlotte, N.C., and worked at Augusta National Golf Club in Augusta, Ga., to oversee.

Hardee expanded his portfolio by interning at Woodway Country Club in Darien, Conn., where he became an assistant-in-training and then got hired as an assistant, spending two years there. In 2019, Hardee started at Chicago GC. As he progressed, Hardee eventually wondered if he was prepared to take the next step and become a superintendent. "You can question yourself. You think you can do it (be a superintendent), then you think, 'Can I really do it?' I had people tell me I'm ready," he says.

Blackberry Oaks GC confirmed his readiness this spring. "It was kind of validating, that all the hard work you put in over the years wasn't a waste," says Hardee, six-year GCSAA member.

The faith that Blackberry Oaks GC showed in him buoyed his spirits. He even has his golden retriever, Sadie, by his side there. "The owners wanted help making this course better. They're hands off," Hardee says, "and they want everybody here to be successful. I felt like I could give that to them here."

Q:

Name the best movie you ever saw.

A:

"Avengers: Endgame." The 11-year, 20-plus-movie workup to that one climax was something special.

Q:

What advice would you give someone who is thinking about joining this industry?

A:

Listen. There is always somebody that knows something you don't, and any bit of information you can acquire from a colleague can help enhance your journey.

Q:

What's the best compliment you heard from a golfer/member at a course you've worked?

A:

I typically don't get any special compliments other than, "The greens are the best they have ever been." Throughout my time here, I've received many compliments along the lines of that. I just always make sure to give the crew the ultimate credit to the newfound success of the golf course. The crew here is fantastic; they do the majority of the work. I just point the way.

— Howard Richman, *GCM* associate editor