

The 2026 season has begun with both challenges and opportunities for superintendents across Ontario. A difficult winter in some regions, persistent ice cover, and a cool spring have delayed turf recovery on many properties. As a result, conversations among members have largely focused on winter injury, recovery strategies, and managing golfer expectations while waiting for consistent growing conditions to arrive.

Facilities across the province experienced varying levels of winter damage, ranging from snow mold breakthrough to more significant ice-related turf loss. The exchange of information between superintendents and industry partners regarding winter protection systems, monitoring techniques, and recovery programs has once again highlighted the strength of our profession and the willingness of members to support one another.

Labour recruitment and retention remain key challenges throughout Ontario. While attracting seasonal staff continues to be difficult, many facilities are finding success by investing in workplace culture, training, career development, and competitive compensation.

Several notable promotions and career advancements have taken place across the region this year, reinforcing the importance of succession planning and creating opportunities for talented assistants and technicians to advance within the profession. It is encouraging to see clubs recognizing and rewarding internal talent while developing the next generation of industry leaders.

One area generating considerable interest is the growing adoption of robotic mowing technology. Several facilities, including Beacon Hall, have begun integrating robotic mowers into maintenance programs, particularly in roughs, green surrounds, and other lower-traffic areas.

Although still in the early stages of implementation, the technology is already showing considerable promise. At Beacon Hall, both our team and the robotic mowers continue to learn and improve over time. As we refine our mapping techniques and the robots continue to enhance performance through firmware updates, the results continue to improve. Early indications suggest they are an excellent tool for maintaining high-profile green surrounds. Their lightweight design reduces mechanical wear and compaction, while frequent mowing delivers a clean, consistent cut with virtually no clipping accumulation. The result is a high-quality playing surface with less turf stress, allowing staff to focus on other details out on the golf course.

Regional education events and industry gatherings continue to provide tremendous value to members. These events offer opportunities to exchange ideas, discuss challenges, and learn from researchers, suppliers, and fellow practitioners. The willingness of members to share experiences and solutions remains one of the greatest strengths of our profession.

We are fortunate to be hosting this year's Summer Shamble at the beautiful Briars Golf Club. Often considered one of Ontario's hidden gems, the original nine holes were designed by Canadian legend Stanley Thompson, with a second nine later added by his protégé Robbie Robinson. Superintendent Mark Patterson and his team always do an outstanding job preparing the golf course, and we are all looking forward to what promises to be a fantastic event.

One lesson that continues to resonate with me is the importance of investing in people. Whether through formal training, mentorship, or simply creating an environment where team members feel valued, strong leadership and culture remain among the most important factors in a successful operation.

As managers, we often focus on agronomy, equipment, and budgets. However, some of the most meaningful gains come from building engaged teams that take pride in their work and understand the purpose behind what they do. Developing future leaders within our organizations benefits not only our own facilities but the profession as a whole.

The start of the 2026 season has reinforced another important reminder: patience and communication are critical. While we cannot control the weather, we can control how we prepare, adapt, and communicate with our teams, members, and stakeholders. The challenges of this spring have once again highlighted the resilience, professionalism, and dedication of golf course maintenance professionals across Ontario, and I remain optimistic about the future of our industry.

Respectfully submitted,

Colin Young
CGSA Regional Director – Ontario