



**Episode 06**

**Always a class act**

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### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

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### **Podcast Transcript**

Music Intro

**Sara:** Hello and welcome and thank you for tuning in for this episode of Canadian Turf Talks – the final episode in this season, quote-unquote, of Turf Talks. Ummm. Stay tuned, we’re gunna reboot in a few months but we’re going to end on a bit of a high note. So, Cam Shaw is the Manager of the Diploma in Turfgrass – Manager in turf grass management – now that’s a mouthful – at the University of Guelph. And it’s a program that he’s taken, and then is now managing. So, it means that someone who’s actually experienced the ups and downs of the program can take a realistic look at it. How do you how do you feel about that, Reg?

**Reg:** Yeah, I mean, Cam is a longtime friend, him and I have done a lot of work together. And I always enjoy talking with Cam. I think he was a great fit for the role. And I think he’s going to make a significant impact. And I’ve always seen Cam as a great leader. And it’s a great spot for him to sit. You know, he’s seen it from a lot of different perspectives; as a student as a now as the manager, and also as the communication coordinator before that. So, I think he was a great fit. And I’m really excited to hear what he has to say about his career and his past and the status of the CTM as well as where is it going.

**Cam:** Right on. Yeah, I’m excited for this. I can’t say I’m flattered because I feel like I kind of socially peer pressured you both into doing this. So...

**Sara:** Well, I mean, you instigated the whole podcast. So really, this is your brainchild that – ever since my first day – you were like, “Do a podcast! Do a podcast!” Haha!

**Reg:** I think you had to be interviewed. I mean, you must know me well enough to know that I think getting younger people into this industry is going to be key. And I don’t know that this podcast will help that. But we have to get your guys’ program more in the forefront as much as possible. Right? And I know you guys are working hard to do that, but any help makes better. Right?

**Sara:** And it’s been a theme. Like, one of the questions that we ask all of our podcast guests, is that you know, “What’s the biggest issue in the turf industry?” and many of them had said, “Labor shortage.” Right? And getting and retaining good help. So, I mean, that’s where you come in. Right? So, you’re like the cherry on top to answer all of our questions and problems.

**Cam:** I'm sure that the topic of recruitment and staff loyalty, and all those kinds of things will probably come up at least once in this in this podcast. But yeah, I was. I was reviewing the questions. And there's a good number. We're gonna be tested to get through this in an hour with Red and I here. You know that's true.

**Sara:** Oh, I know. Yeah. But we also don't have to cover them all. It's just sort of a guideline. And sometimes we skip them because we cover them. And you know, and in the just so Reg, why don't you start us off?

**Reg:** Sure! So, Cam, as always, a pleasure to see you and chat with you. I know a bit about your background, but just for everyone listening what why don't you tell us a little bit about where and how you kind of got started in the turf industry?

**Cam:** Oh, yes, let's go way back in the wayback machine here – to me as a young spry nine-year-old growing up in the town of Morrisburg and I used to mow lawns in the neighborhood. I would mow pretty much everyone in our block, and I would charge what 10 bucks a head and I just loved that job. I loved going out there, I loved making patterns. I took me about a year to realize that you can make really cool patterns. So yeah, I just I started to love the idea of mowing patterns and caring for turf. It was really just mowing and weed whipping. That's it. But I you know, at that point, it was just a seed being planted. There was nothing really conscious about me as, uhh, pursuing a career path in any way. Cut to me in high school, when my family moved to Aurora and I started Caddying on a golf course, and I fell in love with being on a golf course and I loved the fact that I could play golf for free while I was there caddying. And, and then one day there was inclement weather and there was a huge downpour, and all the bunkers washed out. I didn't know what a washout was, of course I do now, but all the caddies were asked to go and help push up the bunker sand to help prepare for an event that day. So that was my – really my first experience working on a golf course. And again, I loved that. If you can love pushing up and repairing sand bunker faces after wash outs, you know that there's probably something there. Um, haha. So again, these are just little anecdotes that were continuously planting seeds in my head and – but not really noticing what was happening at the time. And so, a few years later, I graduated high school, I started going to university in Peterborough, I was going to Trent University for geography. Physical geography. So, I was studying glacial fluvial geomorphology. And I liked that because I love nature. I loved, like, just the evolution and the procession of all things in the natural world. And I was good at geography. So, I pursued that. And I was tree planting out West, because that was a very lucrative job that helped cover my tuition, and about sort of midway through university, I was like, “You know what? I don't think this is really for me, but I still like the outdoors stuff. I really like tree planting. I think I'm gonna stay out West for a while.” I ended up getting a job at Jasper Park Lodge golf club, and the rest is history. I loved being there. I loved working on that golf course. In fact, I'm embarrassed to say I didn't even know there was a golf course there when I went. I intended to go snowboarding. And I applied as a housekeeper. And they looked at my resume and they saw okay, this guy's caddied on golf courses, he's worked on golf courses... And in fact, I actually had two years working at Magnum Golf Club in Aurora while I was in high school as well. And they were like, “Why don't you work on our golf course?” And I was like, “I didn't even know you had a golf course, perfect!”

**Sara:** The universe intervened. Haha.

**Cam:** So, I did that. And like I said, the rest was history. I loved it. I excelled at it. I made a lot of really good friends. I got promoted into a supervisor's role. And then one day, the former superintendent was working at this kind of wine cellar in town, and I'd speak with him every now and then. And he'd talk with me about you know, how things were on the course. He said, “Well, you know, your supervisor now, do you want to make a career out of this?” And I said, “I would love to make a career out of this, what do I do?” And he said, “Well, you can go to school for it.” And I said, “I didn't even know!” And at the time, there was actually a bunch of different options. There was Fairview College in northern Alberta, there was Old College, Kwantlen College in BC, there's Red River College, which I think was in

Manitoba, there was Seneca College in Ontario, there was Guelph. So, there was like, you know, there was so many to choose from, and ultimately, I picked Guelph. It was close to home. And it was the only program that actually seemed to boast a lot of faculty, and PhDs in turf and a lot of research was coming out of Guelph. But, you know, at the time, I felt like 28 was way too old to go back to school. I wasn't really excited about it, to be honest. But then I got into the program, I loved it. And I excelled as a student because I was learning something that I loved. Then I got into, you know, after I graduated, I ended up working at Burlington Golf and Country Club. And that's sort of how this all happened. If I go back and I think about it, I'm like, there was never really a conscious decision to start a career in turf. It just sort of – like Sara alluded to earlier – the universe kept kind of like, pushing me in that direction. And me, being completely blind, that switch never went off. Like, I had been – before I even consciously chose to follow it as a career path – I think I had gained like 12 years of experience in the industry. And so, there's a lot of funny anecdotes along the way. And a lot of people I have to thank for that. But yeah, I kind of feel like I'm the product of the universe hitting me in the face about a million times and I finally woke up one day and like, understood what it was trying to tell me. So, haha.

**Sara:** Now, I assume that your experience at the University of Golf was good – considering, I mean, you're still here. We never got rid of you. But can you tell us about what it was like taking the two-year program, the diploma in turfgrass management?

**Cam:** Yeah, you know, I never really loved school. I could say I liked school, but I never really loved school. Until I came to Guelph. And there's so much about that equation at Guelph that made that- I don't know – made me love learning. And I do love learning absolutely to this day. But I think a big part of it was me actually making a conscious decision to study something that I was interested in. Whereas before, you're just, you know, it's just kind of society saying, "You have to go to public school. Now you have to go to high school." And like the teachers are telling you, "Now you have to learn math." And it was never on your own terms. So, one of the things I really liked about the diploma program was well, because I was 28, it was short. I got to get my education – the best possible education I could – and get back out into the industry and start working again. But I really liked the University of Guelph atmosphere, I loved the campus life. It was just such a vibrant campus, I felt really connected. I was, you know, I was a part of a number of different sports teams. I worked as the Zamboni driver for the Gryphons varsity hockey team, which was a pretty cool experience. But I loved it. And again, it just was – it helped add to that full university experience where it wasn't just going to classes. Like, I was making friends and I was joining clubs and I was a part of the community of Guelph. Like, the Guelph city is fantastic. There's so many great little pubs and some music and artsy culture happening. So yeah, I really, really loved my time as a student. And I think more than anything else that helps me realize my full potential. You know, I graduated high school with mid 70's, I graduated from Trent University, again, mid 70's. Never really putting in what I thought was like a solid effort. And then when it came to Guelph, the 70's turned into, like high 90's. And it's still having a lot of time to do all those other things that I loved, too.

**Reg:** Definitely, a university town gives that feeling. Right? I mean, Guelph's always been a great place to, to spend some time.

**Sara:** Campus in October is my absolute favorite, and the beautiful orange leaves. And it's just, that's like, that's University to me. I love that.

**Reg:** One of the questions we like to ask is why do you love turf? And I think a lot of people in the industry, you know, it's a passionate industry or pathway in career path for a lot of people. So, what do you think it is about turf alone that really, really drives you, really bring some passion out in you?

**Cam:** Yeah, great, great question. I love this question too. And it's one that I talk with our students about all the time. And as I'm doing recruitment with high schools, like, you know, you gotta find something you're passionate in. Not everyone can have, you know, a job that they love every single day. And that's a really important point that, like, even on the not-so-great days, if you can still enjoy it,

it's probably because you're passionate about it. So, there are a few things that I really, really like about it – I won't even say just turf specifically, I think turf is sort of like the excuse for me to do all the other things that I really enjoy doing. And don't get me wrong! Like, I do love turf. Yeah, like I've always been a passionate outdoors person. I love camping, I love being in the natural environment. I love the elements. Like I love being stuck in a rainstorm or a snowstorm or hail. Like, I like I look at those moments as being these like sort of beautiful, magical natural phenomena. So, I really appreciate the natural world and caring for it and being a steward of the natural world. I love wildlife. I've always been a lover of animals; I think it's probably a product of my father growing up on a farm and us sort of having our family roots in Norfolk County where there's just a lot of agriculture. I love the game of golf. I've been golfing since I was probably six or seven years old, my first set of clubs was a three wood, a seven iron and a putter. And I played- that's all I did – I feel like my parents pawned me off and the golf course was my babysitter, and just played 36 holes a day when I was a kid. So, you know, I think that that really helps too, and then, of course, I love people. And I think that's something that Reg and I share in common, and Sara too. So. So when I look back on it, I think that's really important – if you want to make a career in turf, you have to love a few things. You can't just be passionate about the grass; you have to kind of be passionate about a whole bunch of different things. Because, especially when you get to the point of the manager, the grass plays such a little role. And people play a much bigger role. So, I think you have to really – you have to really like dealing with people, even the people that aren't perfect and maybe cause you problems. So...

**Sara:** It sounds like – all this talk about weather – you're kind of a failed weatherman. I feel like you would have really enjoyed doing those, like, on-site reporting when the when they're like getting hit by stop signs. I feel like you could have done that.

**Cam:** I think everyone wants to be a weatherman. It's the only job only job in the world where you can get paid six figures and be wrong every day.

**Sara:** Haha! No, as you said like, you know, as the nine-year-old walking around the golf course. Did you think that you would ever work at a university someday?

**Cam:** No. No, even as a – when I was at Piper's Heath and I was 34, or 33 years old. I wouldn't have thought I'd be working at the university either. Like this is all very new and shiny to me. It's a very – it's a new love. It's a new passion. And one that I'm particularly flattered to be a part of, but yeah, no, this was never really in the cards, but neither was neither was a career in the turf industry either. So haha!

**Reg:** So just a little bit background for those who don't know, for those who maybe listening, is Cam used to sit in Sara's seat. And Sara succeeded you after you moved on to become the manager of the Diploma for Turfgrass Management. So, my question is like, what is it day to day look like for you now? And kind of, did you think that that – walking into the role – that that's kind of like what would look like?

**Cam:** Yeah, I knew exactly what this job as manager of the DTM program, I knew exactly what this job was. Because when I was in Sara's role, and even previous to that, I was already instructing in the DTM program, and I was a student in the program. So, I actually got to see my role from a variety of different perspectives before I was sitting in it. I saw it as a student in the seats for two years. I saw it as a very active and returning alumni and industry professional. I always stayed active in the program and kept in touch with Rob Witherspoon, who was the former DTM manager before Steve Fleischauer, who was my predecessor. And then, when I was in Sara's role for about three years, I got to see Steve. Steve and I worked very closely get together, just as Sara and I do right now. And we'd go out for lunches and coffees again, just like Sara and I do right now. And I would get to hear about some of the challenges Steve was having. And he certainly made it known to me that he was going to be retiring. And so, my interest in stepping into the role continued to grow as I became more connected to the program. So yeah, I knew exactly what I was stepping into, for sure. Depending on what time of year you're talking to me, my role is different. And that's kind of similar to the communications role too. There's a number of different hats you need to wear in the role. I do a lot of recruiting. We do a lot of

managing of the program at the curriculum level, which is just you know, a lot of committee work and then there is a lot of teaching. And outside of the teaching, outside of class time, there's getting involved in the student extracurricular activities like Sodding the Cannon and in Turf Club. And then in the summertime there's you know, building a stronger network of employers for the program and continuing to strengthen the existing network we have and then visiting students on their internships. So, if you're talking to me between September, and the beginning of April, about 80 to 90% of my job is teaching, and then basically squeezing every last minute I can to keep the program intact, managing it from a higher altitude. And then in the summertime, it's kind of funny, like it's sort of a flip flop to the golf industry. Summer is the busy time for golf and winter is sort of slower, and you kind of do preventative maintenance, and all that kind of stuff. So, in the program, my summer time is when all the students are out working. So that's sort of my slower time. And that's when I take most of my vacation, that's when I do as many, if not all, of the internship visits as possible. I do my best to try to connect more with our alumni that have graduated and keep tabs on them because they can be a huge resource for us. And we do some tinkering as well with our curriculum throughout the summer. We try not to do too much because we want the students to be involved in that. But there is – that's when the majority of the management, recruitment, outreach, and planning for the coming calendar years is done.

**Sara:** What's your favorite part of the job?

**Cam:** Oh, man. So, I love this job. It's my dream job, without question. And I love – actually the other day, last Wednesday, I had to wake up about three, four in the morning to because we went to do a field trip to Woodstock. And then we had Turf Club and sodding the cannon that night. So, it was like a 17-hour day, I don't think I ever worked a 17 hour day when I was working on a golf course, maybe when I was managing a professional tournament or something, but yeah, even on those days, I love it. I really do. And my favorite part of the job is interacting with students. It's... I love having career talks with students, I try not to do too much guiding or advising and more just have a real conversation where I'm asking them poignant, strategic questions to help them answer their own, you know, sort of advise themselves. But then when they do have legitimate questions or they do have ideas of where they want to work, and where they want to be, connecting them with the industry, and then watching those students kind of develop skills to reach out on their own and become more independent, and then secure the job and watch them come back and be very proud of themselves. And then, you know, then they go out on their internships. So, you get this opportunity to kind of watch students grow and evolve, and you get to be a part of that. They're very much in charge of their own destiny. But you certainly get to be a part of that. And that's certainly very, very rewarding.

**Sara:** But on the flip side, what's the worst part of the job?

**Cam:** Yeah, you know, it's sort of self – it's brought on by yourself. And I think any teacher can agree with me on this, and it doesn't matter what you're teaching. There are just days where you walk into a classroom, and you don't have your best – and this is just in any industry, any sport you play, you can't always bring 100%. You have good days, and you've got bad days. And there's nothing more defeating and challenging than walking out of a lecture where you felt like maybe you didn't give it your best or you felt like you weren't as articulate, or you can just see students yawning and nodding off. And you know, we all have these lectures that – there's exciting classes and labs to deliver, and then there's other ones that you have to give and they're maybe not quite as engaging. I find those to be really emotionally draining, and I'll walk out of an hour and a half lecture and I'll just have trouble, like, putting the rest of my day together because I'm just so emotionally exhausted or... And you know, I even come home and Abby, my wife, she'll say, "Cam, how was your day?" And I'm like, "You know, I just I just didn't have magic today." And I think that's the only thin. I really had to dig deep to find that because I do love just about every aspect of this job. There's not a lot to really dislike about this job.

**Reg:** That's great. What do you think has been the most challenging aspect since you took on the role?

**Cam:** Well, I think anyone that's worked in the private sector that then transitions to the public sector would find it to be frustrating, because things move slowly. You know, I think everyone's sort of still driven and motivated by the same thing; you always want results. But I think in a public institution, things just move slower. And there needs to be a lot more collegial discussion. And then, you know, there's just like this hierarchy of committees. And so, when we're making changes, like, if I wanted to make a change to a course, or part of our curriculum, tomorrow, I'd have to put a meeting date aside for our curriculum committee meeting. We'd have to have a pretty lengthy conversation about how we're going to change curriculum, because that's a pretty major change. And then that's gotta go up to a whole other series of committees, and that could take quite a bit of time for it to go up that hierarchy. And so, when we make changes they're, kind of, for like two or three years out. The private sector is really nimble, you can make decisions on the fly. And a lot of times, if you're the manager of the department, you can kind of do them unilaterally. And that's what makes you competitive in the business world. Whereas in the public sector, you're not in the world of business, you're in the world of service. And it's just a bit of a different beast. I can find that frustrating, because I'm impatient. When I see something that needs to be changed in our program, like, I want to change it now. And I'll have a lot of support from our industry focus group, and you know, my colleagues and our alumni that all confirm that these are – this is sort of the correct pathway, but then that may not fit well into the stencil of the university. And I can, I do find that to be frustrating. But at the same time, I'm learning to appreciate that system. This system at the university is in place and is eternally frustrating as it is, it's in place to make sure that that everyone has a chance to see how it's happening, and other programs can learn and develop from that. And there's a lot of very smart people at the university that may see things differently than you. And so, it's on one hand, it's frustrating, but on the other hand, it's actually quite valuable. So, learning to work, that system is an art form. It's a skill and I'm slowly getting better at that.

**Sara:** I hear you. Firstly, I'm a very do it yourselfer. And so, I also struggle against that bureaucracy and you know, the chain of command sometimes working here.

**Reg:** But one of the things I got frustrated because of – like, for instance procurement, right? When you go to buy something, there's this process there. And it was like, the way somebody explained it to me, and the best way the integrity of the process is more important than the results in public as opposed to private, right? Because it's more about following the right process, because there's a reason that process is in place.

**Sara:** Speaking to this, though, that you're saying that it takes like three years to see changes actually happen, what's your five-year plan? I know you're always telling this to the students coming in. You know, "You gotta have a two-year, five-year, 10-year plan." What do you see changing for the diploma program in the future?

**Cam:** Yeah, so I've been in the role, now, three years. So, in January, it'll be three years full circle. And two of those years, this program, well, all programs, all schools, I've dealt with COVID. And so, it was just kind of like, keep the ship afloat and maximize student experience and delivery as much as possible. So, I'll be honest, I haven't really had a lot of time to sit down and formalize a good strong growth strategy. But that said, it frequently crosses my mind. And it's on the top thing to do sit down with our curriculum committee and some of the advisors here at the university and our Industry Focus Group, which is made up of professionals from all different sectors of the turf industry. And there's a few things I'd really like to do. And so, I can think I can summarize them kind of in five points. The first one is leveraging the unique qualities of the DTM program. Now, I talked earlier about the bureaucracies, large institutions like to have everything fit in these nice, streamlined packages. And I think that makes a lot of sense when you have programs that have, you know, 1000 students in them. Right? One of the really cool aspects of our program and it's without question, one of the most powerful parts of our program is that we have such a small class. You know, we have capacity for up to 30. Our perfect class size is about 25. But because we're so small, we can be really nimble. And we could do a lot of things in our program that we wouldn't be able to do if you had 1000 students, right? So, like on

internship visits, you'd never be able to visit 1000 interns going out for the summer. But 22 is manageable, it's very manageable. And what a great opportunity to go out and see your student, build a relationship with them, ensure that they're growing, foster that growth with them. But then also interacting with the employing partner that's there, help them develop and build out their internship program, and maybe recruitment program after. There's an opportunity to recruit while you're there, too. There's always people watching these interns come in and look at how well they're being treated at some of the interesting jobs are being afforded them, you know, they get to go into these closed door meetings with the management team, and they see that attention. They're like, "Man, I'd really like to do that, too. What program is this person in?" "Oh, turf management." And all of a sudden, their instructor shows up. That's pretty cool. And it's an opportunity for us to recruit, and it works really well. This is just one example of a number of different ways where we can really leverage some unique student growth opportunities and experience opportunities with our small program and convincing people at the university that that we can sort of fall outside that mold would be a huge success. So that's, that's one thing I'd like to work towards. I'd really like to continue working on recruitment and outreach. I think that's something our industry is sorely lacking right now. Getting into public schools and high schools, and not even just necessarily recruiting for the benefit of drawing in future turfgrass managers, although that would be a huge bonus, but helping pull back that curtain a little bit and help the greater public kind of understand some of the things that are happening. First, you know, inside the sports turf managers department and inside this golf superintendents department and in sod production, like these are all really cool industries that the public doesn't really know a lot about. So, I think that those are really great opportunities and there's some amazing resources out there early like the GCSAA's first green program has run in Western Canada a few times, and I'd like to see that come to Ontario, and be a part of that – have the university be a partner in that.

**Sara:** You know, even just having school-aged children think that turf management is a thing they can do, or like, lawn care management, or golf course superintendent, you know? If you ask a kid in school right now, what they want to be they'll say doctor, firefighter, or something, you know? Things that they're like, books are written about them, right? And TV shows are written about them. But I challenge you to find a kid in an urban city that has never seen anyone cutting their lawn. You know? Someone is cutting those lawns!

**Cam:** I can only think of one movie in my entire life – outside of Caddyshack, because that's the worst representation of a golf superintendent. But there's been only one other movie that I can name, where I've actually heard someone introduced themselves as a golf course superintendent. And it was Renee Zellweger in Me, Myself and Irene. And she wasn't actually a golf course superintendent. She was pretending to be someone and she called herself a golf course superintendent. I thought like, if those are our two only examples of our industry as a potential career path in popular culture that we've got work to do. So

**Sara:** yeah. But I think I interrupted your list. What was the other things on your list?

**Cam:** Yeah, so I would like to move back through our curriculum and start updating it to reflect the current industry trends. There are a lot of new things that are happening in the industry that we can, sort of, inject into those programs to make sure that we're staying up to date and reflecting what the needs of the industry is going to be. I think over the next little while, we're probably going to – certainly in the next five years – we're probably going to be looking at some new faces coming in for instructors. So, finding and leveraging those people that are out there in the industry that are not only experts in their field, but are excellent at being conduits for information for young people and inspiring growth. It will be a big part of our program, as well. I'd really like to continue expanding on our experiential learning opportunities. So, getting students outside of a classroom, away from PowerPoint lecture-style slides and into holding, touching, feeling, smelling, on buses, going to field trips – all those kinds of things. I just I think you're far better served, especially in this industry, learning from a hands-on approach. And we've already started doing that and I just want to keep that going. And I'd really like to

start in introducing some industry-focused courses. So right now, our program generally kind of teaches turf, from a broad sense, and instructors are challenged to kind of navigate, you know – we might have a student that's interested in sod production, maybe four or five are interested in sports fields, and then we have the lion's share typically focused on golf. So, instructors kind of have to move through and give examples and case studies from these. And I think we'd be far better off kind of focusing on the foundations and then, sort of, later in second year offering some electives that are very career specific. So having like a sports field specific course, maybe one in cricket pitch care and lawn bowling and sort of nontraditional North American turf sports anyway. Have one for sod production. And we could really leverage our industry expertise and industry network to get those programs up and running. So that would be pretty cool.

**Reg:** So, you know, being in the role that you're in and seeing all the students who come in – what courses do you find students really struggle with, and which ones are kind of a little bit easier? So that, you know, if anyone were thinking about, “Hey, I kind of wanna do this turfgrass thing, like, maybe I should spend some time really focusing on this some of the stuff”. Some of the stuff that students go, “Whoa, this is way beyond what I thought!” And then other ones like, “Oh, this is really easy.”

**Cam:** Yeah, good. It's a good question. I think for the most part, and just to preface the question, I think a lot of people that find themselves – not everyone, but a lot of people – that find themselves pursuing turf, are not people that typically excel in an institutionalized learning environment. Like, they may be sort of more vocational. And so, aspects like things like math, or like hardcore science, where they're just being given a lot of memory work, where they have to memorize, you know, plant cell parts, and then understand their function. There's a lot of memory strain and sort of head strain there. And a style of learning that these individuals may not be excelling in. Every class is a little different. We get some, you know, some students that are extremely capable academically, and they actually focus better on those courses than they do on the hands-on courses, and then other years, the other way around. But one thing I can say for sure, is that typically, those students that don't have strong marks in high school, find themselves in our program. Because they're learning all of those same lessons, but through the, I guess, rose colored lenses – or I could say green, emerald color lenses – because they're learning math and science with a purpose, you know? Like, there's an end game there that they can understand that this is to become a turfgrass manager. And that, you know, learning those and memorizing and understand the foundations of those things will help them solve problems later. So, you know, without question, though, it is the like, sort of hardcore science courses. Umm... math, for whatever reason, – even though it's relatively simple math – it generally seems to be a struggle for a lot of students and it's more because they're getting them in word problems, right? So, it's like, you've got a 300-gallon sprayer, and you want to go out and spray. And it's just hard to translate those word problems into a practical setting. Whereas if you put a sprayer in front of them, and when they went to spray greens, they'd probably be able to do the math, no problem, you know? It's just learning it and then, sort of, pulling it out of the ether of a bunch of different words and being able to picture that in a practical setting is challenging. And then we have a landscape plants class course, which is taught by a lovable Mike Van Beek – couldn't ask for a better instructor to teach that course. But a lot of the students generally just aren't – they're not fans of gardens, they didn't enroll in the program to learn about herbaceous woody annuals and perennials and, and flowering plants. So, I think just again, it's more of like an interest's sake, that those are difficult, and they have to memorize, you know, the Latin binomial nomenclature, and they have to spell it correctly. And they have to memorize, you know, 10 a week and they're getting quizzed every single week on it. So, it's just tough to keep up on. So those are those would be the most challenging, but I'm happy to say that, generally speaking, the program's pretty digestible by our students and most really excel in it.

**Sara:** One of the things we've talked about in other episodes of our podcast is Equity Diversity and Inclusion and I have been approached by someone who is a superintendent and he said, “You know, it seems that we're taking this diversity thing to the extreme? And that like, why would we want to



accommodate for someone who has, for instance, vision impairment? They couldn't possibly be a Greenskeeper, because you need to be able to see green." Right? So, do you think there's a limit to the equity and diversity we can offer in this program? And how is the diploma program going to bring in more diverse students?

**Cam:** I think you just – you have to make a conscious effort to make the program accessible. I don't think you can just wake up tomorrow and make something immediately accessible to all groups, right? So, the first thing – and I think it's really important that the university and myself recognize this – is that we're part of being industry leaders. So, we have to be a part of that change, and we have to spearhead it. And so, you know, making our program accessible. For, you know, well – let's say for right now – I think a big issue in the industry is making it accessible for women, young women, and making sure that not only is the industry inviting to them, but then once they're in the industry, that there's like a succession program for them, and they're not being overseen or hitting sort of a, a glass ceiling at some point. And so, we're consciously making efforts, especially when I go out and I recruit at high schools is to develop language and visual images. So that if I'm speaking with a young woman in a high school, she can picture herself in that industry. Instead of just having, you know, a whole bunch of white balding men like Reg and I.

**Reg:** Hey! Speak yourself, speak for yourself.

**Sara:** Haha!

**Cam:** And I'm just using that as an example because that's one that, you know, that the industry has really started to move forward on. And it's one that – as far as making things accessible – it's kind of low-hanging fruit. Like it's the next major aspect of us expanding accessibility, but you bring up a really great one, which is physical impairments or visual impairments or other kinds of accessibility that we may not be thinking about right now. And I think that... I think it's a tough question to answer. If someone if someone has visual impairment, could they be a Greenskeeper? Right now, I think that we're probably lacking the tools in the industry to help that person be successful in their role. But that's all a part of leading the charge. As more people start to see an opportunity and want to pursue the career path, then that drives innovation to develop tools, right? And so, we want to make our program as accessible as possible, so that we attract just about everyone. And then when we start paving the way, when a new person comes in with a new accessibility issue, then we can start figuring out solutions. And it may not be perfect right away, but we're starting it, and probably that individual that's coming in is pioneering it. And then it just keeps getting better. And so, to try to make things fully 100% accessible overnight is impossible, but starting somewhere and then having diversity and accessibility is a key point of our growth. And, you know, I'm looking back at my five points of where I want to be in five years and I'm regretting not including that because actually, when – in my interview for the job, when they asked me a similar question, that was actually in my list of things to do is build more diversity. And not just from a gender standpoint, but from a cultural standpoint; from attracting more international students, attracting people that have different sexual orientations and then ensuring that they feel that they're welcome not just here at the university, but then in the industry after they graduate too.

**Reg:** I will say that was a challenging question, and I think you did a wonderful job of answering it. So, let's change focus a bit here. Let's get more into your career and kind of more personal about Cam Shaw. What would you say has been your biggest consistent struggle yourself personally throughout your career?

**Cam:** Umm... Patience. Patience is a big challenge in a number of different ways. I think anyone that's working with people, needs the patience of Job. Haha! That's a Biblical reference there. But like, you need, you need patience, because you're – if you're not patient, you're just gonna be constantly frustrated. Because people are going to make mistakes. And this is true for any industry, really. But I find that just the seasonal nature of turf, in any aspect of the industry, you're always going to have new

people, you're always gonna have transient people, you're always gonna have people that come in that may not care or be engaged. And I think it's really a test or a measure of any leader's mettle to see how patient they are, and how passionate they are about mentoring and helping those people develop themselves. And maybe you turn one of these unengaged, transient individuals into the next leading turfgrass manager. So, patience has always been a big challenge of mine, particularly because I got into the industry from a career driven point so late, you know? I was in the DTM program as a 28-year-old, sitting beside a 19-, and an 18-year-old, who, you know, they had time on their side. They can go and do like three internships and travel the world. And I was like, you know, I'm about to get married, and I'm going to start a family like I need to get the skills that I need so I can be in a career position and start earning a living. And I was always pushing my employers and my mentors to give me more, and they were always pushing back and saying, like, "Cam, like, you need to just focus on the things ... Like, you need to develop these skills first, before we get here." And I was like, "No, I want to do them all." And so, I've always had some really patient mentors that helped me deal with my impatience. So that was always a big personal challenge.

**Sara:** Speaking of mentors, who are these mentors?

**Cam:** Oh just, you know what? Just about everyone has been a mentor to me. I'm always picking little bits of information and I'm watching other people and seeing what works for them and sort of taking little bits of that and trying to imbibe them into my own sort of program. But without question, my very first boss in my internship, his name was Tom Broder, he was a wonderful leader during my internship in the program. I took a lot away from him. That was a very short time I worked for him. But then after that, after I graduated, I worked for Dean Baker, who is just like, one of the industry legends here in Canada. He's a very close personal friend of mine. He's an instructor in our program, and he's the current superintendent of Burlington. I went to work for him for two years, and you could learn everything you want to learn about dealing with people – you could learn from that person. Dean was just awesome. Tim Muys, who I worked for under while he was at Piper's Heath. Tim was just about one of the smartest agronomists out there; really results driven. I learned a tremendous amount of technical skills and critical thought underneath Tim. You know, we'd have a lot of people coming, stopping by our door, dropping off products, and me being a – you know – young industry turf manager, I'm like, "Oh, this looks cool. Let's try this! Look at these claims in this pamphlet." And, you know, Tim would always be sort of quick to point out, like, "You know, let's actually look at the science behind this, and what are these claims? And is it really worth it? And look at how much it costs. Why don't we just make this product ourselves? Let's order a bunch of the raw materials. And we'll just, you know, put it all together back here in the back by ordering a bunch of brown paper ag bags of boron and all these things." And we would make, you know, these pretty cool witch's brews. And so, he taught me a lot of independence, discipline, and skills. So, I gotta shout out to all three of them. But certainly, since I've been here at the university, our department chair Hugh Earl who is just like one of the most patient leaders. He sort of allows everyone to manage themselves in their own little cubicle and he's always there to support you. So, he's been a pretty cool leader to work under. Sara has been a big help too; she's got a lot of expertise in teaching. Yeah, yeah. You can't see her, but Sara is pointing at herself right now shaking her head, but I rebound a lot of ideas off you Sara, you may not realize it. And certainly, Reg too like, I mean, Red and I kind of came up in the industry together. We befriended each other and grew a strong connection and our love of people and so I could probably sit here and thank people for the next hour. Mike Van Beek has been teaching for like 35 years. He's a wonderful resource too. So, this teaching thing is still new to me.

**Reg:** Success is a team sport.

**Sara:** Yes!

**Cam:** Yeah.

**Reg:** So, okay, that's – I thank you. First off, I think both Sara and I thank you for those comments. Those are very nice to hear from you. Looking back on all that time, and all those things you've done, Cam, what do you think is your proudest moment? And why? What's the thing that really stands out? Like, "Wow, I'm really proud of that."

**Cam:** It's really hard to pick one. Because they're all at different points in my life. I think when I was in the program, when I graduated, I was recognized as the top diploma student at the university. And that was a huge achievement. For me, not just from an academic standpoint, but to prove to myself that I was capable of more than what I had been doing in the past. After I graduated, I was recommended for and ended up winning an award. It was called The Future Superintendent of the Year award and it was put together by the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association and Toro. I think that award, it still exists, but it's not the same as it used to be. So, it was a seven-week paid all-expenses trip to Scotland and Ireland, where you would – you know – each week, you'd be at a different, unbelievable golf course working under a superintendent and team and doing various jobs. So, building rivetted edge bunkers, and sometimes it was just like daily maintenance or planting marram grass in sand dunes and all that kind of stuff. So that, you know, that was a really, really special trip. And of course, that was a national award. So that one was that one hit pretty close to home in terms of being recognized nationally, as having a lot of potential in my field. And there's two others. I'm really proud of my writing as well. I don't do as much of it anymore. But when I was sort of coming up in the industry, we did a lot of writing for the Ontario Golf Superintendent's Association. And I was never really a strong writer, coming into the DTM program, and I think now – maybe I'm not strong – I feel like it's grown quite a bit. And I really enjoy writing. And I think now looking back, I've written about 20 or 25 industry articles, which I'm really proud of.

**Reg:** So, Cam is the greatest title creator of anybody I've ever seen write. I would go to him and be like, "Cam, what should I title this?" And he would always come up with something clever for titles. That was one of my favourite parts.

**Cam:** Yeah, I do like playing with words a little bit. And I think, like, if you were to ask me right now, if I had to pick one, without a question, I – you know – I was floored when I found out that I was awarded this position to manage the DTM program. I mean, I can still remember being in the seat at the back of the class watching Rob Witherspoon lecture and manage the program and think, like, "What a really cool job." And there's only one of those in Canada, you know? Like, "How lucky is that person to have that job?" And then of course, Steve Fleischauer, who is a great friend of mine, got it. And I was very nervous going through the interview process, I wasn't sure if I would be – you know, my academic achievements and merits would have been worthy and what the university wanted. And I was very fortunate for them to select me and recognize and leverage my industry experience and my personal network and the industry to be in the role. And it's really a dream job. And I can just tell you, like, every day, I thank my lucky stars to be in the role. It's not something I ever take for granted. I'm very proud of that.

**Sara:** Well, those are big shoes to fill. And I gotta say that, you know, me coming into your old role, I was also told these are big shoes to fill. So, you left quite an impression on this role as well as the communicator. So, we're happy to have maintained you at the university. Now this is a question I ask everyone, and I think I know what your answer is going to be. What do you think is the – currently and will be – the largest challenge in the turf industry for the next few years?

**Cam:** I think that, certainly, there are some environmental challenges associated with resources. I think access to water is going to become a major challenge. And the challenge is going to not just be how to deal with less water and produce good conditions, it's also going to be – it's really gonna challenge the superintendent and sportsfield managers' ability to communicate with user groups to help them manage expectations and prioritize where those resources are best served. You know, we're lucky here in the middle of Canada, but, you know, what we're seeing happening in California and what – you know –

Arizona has been dealing with for some time, and I'm just naming two of a few different States that are really challenged with water right now. That's just a big issue. I think also recruitment, staffing issues...

**Sara:** That's what I was gonna say.

**Reg:** That seems to be the industry standard answer, right?

**Cam:** I mean, like, that's been going on for some time. I think it's really hit a high in the last two to three years. But I do remember being at the Ontario Golf Superintendents Conference, and I think it was the year it was in Niagara Falls. And this may be five or six years ago, there was an HR professional who was talking – I can't remember his name – And before he gave his talk, but he asked everyone to think about the top three challenges that they were dealing with right now. Everyone had to think about that. And 99% of the people that answered said recruitment was their top challenge. I think number two was the clever anecdote – which everyone in this industry hates – was being asked to do more with less, which is, you know, impossible. You can't do more with less, you just end up neglecting something and hiding it creatively.

**Reg:** I want to expand on that question a little bit here, Cam, is you say recruitment. So, going through the DTM, I'm assuming there's a business course I think I don't know, the curriculum, but I'm assuming that there is – that something that you guys often talk about in that curriculum? Like, how to recruit, you know? That's something that I think as I grew in my career, I really learned a lot, and I wish I had maybe more formal training in. You know? Even where to find people. Like, is that something you guys address in the DTM at all?

**Cam:** So, in first semester, first year, they have a communications course, and the students learn, sort of, personal branding and personal communication. So, we'll talk about how they can get a job. And so, we're kind of looking at it from a different lens but all the same foundations are there. How to navigate, you know, a good employer, how to conduct an interview from the prospective employee's side of things. And then when they flip into second year, we have a Human Resources class, which is taught by none other than Dean Baker, who is probably the best person to do that. And he talks a lot about the staffing stuff. And I can actually tell you confidently that in the last 10 years, I don't think I've ever really seen a posting come from Burlington Golf and Country Club. It's not because they don't like posting, it's because they're just fully staffed all the time. Dean has an incredible way of making his – and I shouldn't say just Dean – like he's got, you know, assistants and Ryan Marangoni is his assistant, a good friend of mine too. And they do a really great job of building a strong culture where people can grow and develop and feel at home and in fact, many of them sort of put their lives on hold because they just love working there so much. And so, I think recruitment is part of it. But when you do recruit, the other part of that piece is how do you keep people. And if you can keep people, the recruitment part actually becomes far less important. And I think if I had to teach you one skill – if you had to pick one – I would much rather teach a manager how to stand up for and nurture and mentor and create an accessible and amicable workplace where they feel seen and welcomed, and they feel like they're a part of something. They're – you know – they're asked questions that could have an impact on the outcome of the day, even if they're just like an entry level employee. These are the kinds of things that help people feel like they're a part of something, and it makes them want to stick around. People just want to go where they feel like they're a part of something. And pay is an important part of that, but I don't think it's the most important part. So, there are a lot of places like, you know, Burlington is not the highest paying golf course – they pay well, but it's not the highest paying, it's because they got a union. And that's saying another thing too, that, you know, they've got a union there, and they've got people continuing to come back. And so, Dean is not the only one, there are a lot of really great managers out there that don't need to post, but those that really struggle with recruitment, I think, need to just take a careful look back and think about what's your recruitment strategy? Are you hiring the right people? Are you leveraging all the possible values of your property? Are you advertising in the right way that you're getting the right people? Are you using the right language? If you're challenged with money, are you

building other staff benefits around that? Like, you know, access to associations and professional development, which you know, doesn't cost a lot and can be easier to sell to an accountant or a controller, rather than an increased wage. So then again, looking at, "Okay, now that I've got these people, how do I keep them here? What kind of like Employee Recognition Programs? What kind of growth tracks? What kind of employee evaluations and development and mentorship can I offer them?" So that you can keep them there, right? And then once people in the industry see that, because everyone's always looking – young, up and comers like myself and Reg when we were doing it, and then there's those versions of us now today, there's lots of too young, keen people. And they're always looking. We teach them to go and work for the properties where they're going to be mentored, and they're going to be developed. People see that, people see those succession plans, and they start to see superintendents and young assistants and young sports field managers graduating and going on to do good things. And they say, "That's a people developer. That's a property where I want to be at." And all of a sudden, now you're starting to get resumes and you don't even have job postings, because people just want to work for you. And so, I think it takes time to develop it. And I think it takes a lot of patience, and it's not for everybody. But if you're the one that's sitting there and complaining about recruitment, I think that there are probably some things that you can do. Now, having said that, there are a lot of really great properties and good managers out there that have real struggles. And I know they've got good programs, and I know they've got good work life balance. So, like this, this lack of skill is a real problem.

**Sara:** Do you have any advice for someone who is showing some interest in coming into the turf industry? Like what's your, what's your elevator pitch to the students that you're trying to recruit? Yeah,

**Cam:** Yeah! So, the first thing I show them a whole bunch of pictures of what it's like working on a golf course, or in a turf department. Right? You're outdoors, you're in the environment, you're working with people. If you don't like these things, this talk isn't for you. Like, you are not going to like this industry if you don't like being outdoors, if being cold makes you uncomfortable, if being wet makes you uncomfortable, if being hot makes you uncomfortable. This talk isn't for you, you guys can go sit out in the hallway. But if that is for you, and if you know, working with the environment and stewarding properties and you know, you don't have to love golf or sports, but if that kind of job is of interest to you, go get a job this summer. That's the first thing I say. Like, I could sit here, and I could give you lots of brochures and I can give you some videos about current students, but you have to decide for yourself and the best way to do that is go and work on a golf course, or in a municipal operation, or with a landscaping crew, or a sod farm for the summer. Go get some real experience, go operate some heavy machinery. And if at the end of the summer, you still think you like it, there's probably a good reason for you to start looking at our program a little bit more critically. I'm always amazed – every now and then we get a few students that have never worked a day in the golf industry. And I'm like, "How did you find out about our program? And how did you decide that this is what you want to do?" You know, but God bless them, and they always end up loving it. So that's usually what I tell students is, "You've got one thing and it's the best thing you have on your side is time." Young high school students. So go and use that time to explore opportunities. And if turf isn't for you, then go find a job working. Now if you want to be an engineer, great, you want to be a lawyer, great. You want to be a doctor, great, go volunteer. Go get some actual workplace experience and that will help you navigate those decisions. And certainly, if turf is for you then reach out to me and I would happily get you in contact with six or seven hungry salivating superintendents in your region. So that you can go and talk about getting a summer job.

**Reg:** It's really great advice there from Cam. So, you know, all that said – so, what's next for Cam Shaw?

**Cam:** Oh, gosh. So, we are just – my wife and I – welcomed our second son Tucker, who's younger brother to older brother Max who's three years old. So, focusing on family and stability right now is really important, and getting sleep. But you know, I think starting next summer, I'm really going to take some action, going back to school. You know, working at this university is a really inspiring place to be.

You're surrounded by some amazingly intelligent people, smart in all the ways that maybe I'm not. And I'd like to, I'd like to start finding ways to go back and chip away towards a master's in turfgrass science in some field. I think that entomology is really underserved in turf in Canada. And I'm particularly interested in soils, soil microbiology, soil structure. And we have some pretty cool people working in soils here at the university that I'd like to bring, like, a little turf flare to. So, you know, who knows? All I know is that if I stay here for 25 years, and I look back, and I didn't somehow improve myself from an education standpoint while working at an educational institution, I would never, never forgive myself. So, I'd really start to like to pursue that. That being said,

**Sara:** That being said, as someone who has a PhD. PhD or whatever degrees or how many alphabet soup at the end of your name doesn't necessarily mean you're going to be the smartest person in the room. I know a lot of smart people who don't have any degrees at all. So, I just got to advocate for those people as well.

**Cam:** That's good to hear you say that. I think I'd like to – I'd like to work towards something with purpose. I'll probably end up taking a lot of sidetrack courses. I'm sure once I started enrolling in courses and I look at what the options are, I'm gonna get a lot I'm really interested in. I'd certainly like to expand more in the areas of environmental management. We have some really good programs here at the university. And too, I think that's a really transferable skills for any turfgrass manager. And that might be something I can bring as an instructor to our students. So yeah, that's my big one is that over the next little while, I'd certainly like to start chipping away towards formally achieving a master's in turfgrass science.

**Sara:** Well, it's been awesome to have you on this podcast, not that I don't get to talk to you enough, it's just good to have this on recording. And now everyone can enjoy our conversations, because it's gonna go live at some point – after I finish editing it. So, thank you for your time. And thank you for doing all that you do for our diploma students. You know, everyone who asks me about our program, I can only say good things about our DTM manager Cam Shaw.

**Cam:** The program does all the work, I'm kind of, you know, I guess I'm the captain of the ship. And that's, and that's great. But the shell of the program is still very much intact since I've taken over. And I loved it when I was a student, and you know, it's one of those things where it's like, if it's not broken, you don't need to change too much. But certainly, we can tweak a few things to make some improvements here and there. So, I'm, I'm very flattered that I invited myself on this podcast.

**Sara:** Hahah!

**Reg:** Hahah! I don't think that was the case Cam. I think for me, personally, any time I get a chance to catch up with you is always enjoyable. You know, we've always enjoyed a pint or two together and throwing ideas around, and very similar mindsets. But thank you for coming. And thank you for giving us your time. And so, we appreciate you coming out.

**Cam:** No, no problem. If you're ever strapped for a guest, you know, I can easily steal some oxygen to fill an hour or so. Thank you again. And congratulations to you both on getting it up and running. And I really do hope – and I guess I'm going to challenge you here – I'm going to close out with a challenge that you keep this going. I know that podcasts are hugely time consuming. There's a reason why I never actually got it up and running when I was in the role. But I love that you have done it. Congratulations to the both of you. And find time and resources and convince your managers that it's worthwhile because we do need one. Canada needs a turf podcast.

**Sara:** It's Canadian turf talks.

**Cam:** Haha.

**Reg:** Cam. Thanks so much, man.

**Sara:** And for the record, that this podcast is not necessarily meant to be an advertisement or infomercial for the University of Guelph, but it just happens that we're very proud of our program and our students. So, it's gonna come up. I hope you enjoyed this episode of Canadian Turf Talks. And join us for our next episode, if there are more episodes to come. We'll see. Cam has just challenged us to put some more in so we'll see if we can rise to that challenge.

**Reg:** Thanks so much Sara. This was so much fun. I really enjoyed doing this with you. We'll see where it goes. We'll see what happens. The future is bright.

#### **Music Outro**

**Sara:** This podcast is brought to you by the University of Guelph and the Guelph Turfgrass Institute.