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Turf Student Spotlight: Olympia Fields

(Ashley Ryan Breed, ashbreed@purdue.edu)

Horticulture & Landscape Architecture

From the home turf to the legendary greens at iconic golf course

Story by Ericka Bethel | Photos by Joshua Clark | Video by Steven Doyle | August 19, 2025

Purdue turf scientists making their mark at Olympia Fields

The cups have all been cut and the greens have been watered and mowed to the ideal height. Beautifully manicured turf with a Rolex clock gleaming in the sunshine await the golfers' arrival. What began in 1915 as a private golf club for businessmen and their families from Chicago has evolved into one of the most respected golf clubs in the Midwest: [Olympia Fields Country Club](#).

Two Purdue alumni and, for the summer, a rising Purdue senior are helping to insure that this 200-acre, 36-hole golf course is being maintained at the highest level for patrons. Ethan Flahaven, who graduated in 2018 with a degree in [turf management and science](#), is the north course superintendent. Brody Piel joined Flahaven after graduating from the program in May 2025 to serve as south course assistant superintendent. And Otto Hoehl, a current [horticulture and landscape architecture](#) student majoring in turf management and science, served as a 2025 summer intern.



Shared roots. Unmatched drive. Excellence in Action

"As a kid, I always loved working outside and using my hands and time to make our yard and property look nice. Looking back, I see that as a path to what has led me to where I am today. Every day my team and I are driven to make Olympia Fields look the best that it can for our members," Flahaven said.

Flahaven, Piel, and Hoehl are all at different points in their careers, yet they all have three things in common: a love for sports, a preference to be outside and a passion to create the best turf possible.



Otto Hoehl, current student majoring in turf management and science, 2025 summer intern.



Ethan Flahaven, 2018 turf management and science alumnus, north course superintendent.



Brody Piel, 2025 turf management and science alumnus, south course assistant superintendent.

"Looking back, I would say that agriculture and sports were a large part of leading me to where I am today," Piel said. "In high school, I remember really thinking through what I wanted to do as a career. I had a love of agriculture, but I also wanted to remain involved in sports. I ended up at a Purdue event over the summer with 4-H, and I met [Dr. Bigelow](#), who introduced me to the turf science program."

Hoehl and Flahaven also share similar experiences mowing lawns, working outdoors and being athletes. "I started my first job outside, mowing lawns when I was around 10 years old," Hoehl said. "My first real job was my junior year of high school at a golf course in Hammond, Indiana. Working there was a lot of fun for me. The superintendent was a Purdue grad from the late 70s, and he encouraged me to apply for the program."

Turf scientists, problem solvers, and industry leaders

"What I have learned during my time at Purdue has been instrumental to success in what I am doing every day," Hoehl said.

Armed with the skillset and desire to keep the course in top form, all three Olympia Fields employees spend their day putting things they learned from their time in the classroom at Purdue into

practice.

"Today I'm backpack spraying around the ponds because we have a lot of sedge growing up," Piel said. "I had a lot of experience with this from my time at Purdue. With my knowledge and experience, I was able to mix a concentration that would work. A lot of what I learned at Purdue was to do turf math correctly, and I am now putting that into practice daily."

Hoehl says that his time at Purdue has benefited him in his summer internship, and he is grateful for the connections that helped him find growth opportunities.

"The turf science program at Purdue has given me so many wonderful opportunities. Last year, I interned at another golf course in Utah, and this summer, I am here in the Midwest, close to where I grew up, at another prestigious course," Hoehl said.

While all three note that their soil science, agronomy and meteorology courses prepared them for their roles, they also believe there's a social science component that is vital to their work.

"People talk about the science side of our work, but I don't think that the role of communication gets talked about enough in this industry," Piel said. "A large part of our roles is communicating with people about what we're doing. I think back to some of my classes and how we communicated and how we worked together as a group to get the best out of each other and ourselves."



Otto Hoehl, a current horticulture and landscape architecture student majoring in turf management and science, served as a 2025 summer intern.



Ethan Flahaven, north course superintendent, spends part of his day watering the greens on the course at Olympia Fields.



Brody Piel, south course assistant superintendent, begins each day with preparing the greens on his course by cutting the cups.

Along with benefiting from their Purdue classes, they each credit the closeness of the program and the support they received from the faculty and staff for their success. Piel and Hoehl were both connected to their opportunities at Olympia Fields through turf science professor Cale Bigelow.

“Turf is a very small community, and the Purdue turf community is even smaller and closer,” Flahaven said. “The Purdue turf community extends beyond graduation to helping students and alumni get jobs and alumni to find highly qualified candidates. This kind of community is helpful for everyone.”

This team turns turf science into a hole-in-one

“Every day, we are focused on getting this place ready for our members to come out. These are prestigious golf courses to play, and we need to uphold those standards,” Flahaven said.

With numerous opportunities in sports turf, working at a golf course presents its own set of challenges and benefits. For Flahaven, Piel and Hoehl, they view each task in their day as an

opportunity to utilize their background and skills to create the best environment and playability for golfers.

“Aesthetics are something we work on every day, whether it’s partnering with our horticulture staff, or watering areas with burned grass to make them all look greener and increase playability,” Piel said. “We are dealing with a lot more acreage than a sports turf field, and each day presents different challenges.”



“I have had several members stop me and my team members this summer to let us know that different projects we have worked on look good and have helped to improve the course,” Hoehl said.

“The job brings a different challenge every day, and it’s always something new. You get to be outside and see the results of what you have spent your work on for the day. You also get to see people utilizing the work you have done, which is very rewarding.”

As the three Purdue turf scientists finish another day of shaping a world-class golf experience, they each load their golf carts filled with the tools of their trade, Flahaven speaks up, summarizing what they each have expressed, “Purdue has been instrumental in each of us getting here.”

[CLICK HERE TO SEE THE YOUTUBE VIDEO SPOTLIGHT](#)

Turf Student Spotlight: Ryan Leuck

(Ashley Ryan Breed, ashbreed@purdue.edu)



Horticulture & Landscape Architecture

Small steps to stadium dreams: A turf science student's path to professional sports

Story by Ericka Bethel | November 20, 2025

Finding his turf

Every great journey begins with small steps, and for Ryan Leuck, a junior in [horticulture and landscape architecture](#) majoring in turf management and science, those first steps were taken on the dusty baseball diamonds in southern Indiana. Leuck's passion for turf science has taken him across the country — one field, one lesson, one opportunity at a time — to where he has gained hands-on experience at some of the country's most iconic sports fields.

"I'm a big fan of football, baseball and soccer," Leuck said. "I remember even from a young age being fascinated by different fields and how the teams took care of their fields to make them look manicured and nice for game days. I knew that it would be a dream job if I could be a part of sports in this way."

A path to Purdue



Turf science runs in Leuck's family.

"My uncle is a Purdue turf science alumnus and has vast experience in the field, from being the head groundskeeper for the Indianapolis Indians to helping manage the Little League

Regional field in Whitestown and surrounding Indianapolis athletic fields," Leuck said.

When the time came, Leuck only applied to Purdue. "I knew from my tour and from my uncle that they had a great program," he said. "I was very drawn to the size and leadership of the program and to Purdue, and it has been everything they said it would be and more. The turf program at Purdue has been a very tight-knit community where I have been able to grow as a student and a person."

The instruction and mentorship he receives from professors in the classroom, combined with the hands-on learning opportunities he has experienced on campus, have been crucial to his learning. "Early on, I started to get hands-on learning at Purdue as part of the Purdue Turf Team. This helped me get on our home turf early, and I believe that experience working at Ross-Ade Stadium was instrumental in securing some of my internship opportunities."

Major league beginnings

At the close of his freshman year, the Philadelphia Phillies offered him a summer internship, giving him his first taste of professional turf management.

"My summer in Philadelphia was great and was an awesome first step into professional turf management. I spent a lot of time learning about how to keep an MLB field, which had a high concentration of soil and clay, and the infield nice," Leuck said. "To be able to have my first professional team be one with so much history was really fun."





Gaining ground in the NFL

During his sophomore year, he decided to expand his knowledge in a different sport and league: the NFL.

"I saw an internship posted for the New York Jets and applied and interviewed over fall break. I received a call back this past December letting me know I had received their summer turf internship," Leuck said.

As the only summer turf intern for the Jets, Leuck deepened his understanding of caring for a football field. "I had a wonderful

boss who was big on teaching and letting me gain as many experiences as possible in the industry during my time there. It really was a great learning experience," he said.



His time with the Jets included working their minicamp and summer training camp, which meant long days and many hours. Leuck's mornings often began before sunrise with the scent of fresh-cut grass hanging in the air as he prepared the field for another day's play.

Many of my days were sunrise to sundown. I did everything from filling divots in the field to sweeping and spraying for disease and fungus," Leuck said.

During his time in New York with the Jets Leuck also had his first hands-on experience with professional soccer. As part of his internship, he worked at four FIFA Club World Cup games held at MetLife Stadium. "They brought in new sod for these games, so I got to see that process and help with preparations. It was an amazing opportunity to be involved behind the scenes at such major events," Leuck said.

Looking forward to what is next, Leuck has secured his next internship for the summer of 2026 again with the Philadelphia Eagles.

Lessons beyond the field

Now armed with tangible experience in professional baseball, football and soccer, Leuck has a better understanding of what he might want to do after graduation and the areas of turf in which he still wants to grow.

"These opportunities have been invaluable in giving me real-life experience and the chance to learn and grow from leaders in the biggest sports industries in the world," he said.

For Leuck, the journey is proof that big dreams are built one small step at a time, and every opportunity is a chance to grow, learn and make his mark in the world of sports turf management.

"I would encourage my peers and other students to make the most of their time at Purdue and find ways to grow

and experience all that there is to gain both professionally and personally. You never know exactly all the paths and opportunities that await within your major until you try. I'm so grateful for each opportunity and relationship that I have made already during my college career, and Purdue has played a part in opening every door," he said.

It's Time to Renew Your MRTF Membership!

(Ashley Ryan Breed, ashbreed@purdue.edu)

It's that time of year again! [Renew your membership](#) now to continue receiving all your member benefits through 2026! The discounts on event registration and the knowledge gained by having access to the latest and greatest turf research in the state more than cover the cost of an annual membership. Other benefits (that I am sure you're aware of) are below.

MEMBER BENEFITS	2026 REGULAR MEMBERS	2026 SUSTAINING MEMBERS*
Stay engaged with the latest information on turf management	✓	✓
Increased profit as you learn from the industry experts that the MRTF supports	✓	✓
Take advantage of Continuing Credit Hours (CCHs) at our education events	✓	✓
Reduced registration fees for MRTF education events	✓	✓
Recognition as a member on our website brings enhanced business activity	✓	✓
Foster new relationships and increase your network at our events	✓	✓
Access to a new member-only collection of training videos (approx. 116 videos)	✓	✓
Access to a new MRTF member newsletter	✓	✓
Access to an MRTF-member logo for your company website and business card	✓	✓
Advocacy for legislative issues affecting the turf industry	✓	✓
Funding of the Daniel Turf Center capital project improvements		✓
Funding of the 'sustaining member' student scholarship		✓
Recognition of your support as a sustaining member		✓

Thank you for your continued support of students and researchers at Purdue University to advance the turfgrass industry as a whole. YOU are making a difference in your field and helping to grow future turfgrass leaders for a greener tomorrow.

Upcoming Events That Earn You Credits Toward Your Pesticide License

(Ashley Ryan Breed, ashbreed@purdue.edu)

The MRTF hosts many educational events throughout the year where you can earn credits that keep your pesticide license, through the OISC, current and active. Beyond that, you can rest assured that you are up-to-date on the latest and greatest information presented by the top researchers in the state.

There is an Herbicide Workshop, offered in-person at two locations or in a virtual on-demand format, ongoing into December. Our [on-demand workshop](#) has already opened, but

registration is available until December 18th. Access to the workshop will close at the end of the day on December 19th. The first in-person option is offered in [Burlington, KY](#), and is tomorrow, starting at 8:00 am. The last workshop of the year will be on December 16th, at the W.H. Daniel Turfgrass Research and Diagnostic Center in [West Lafayette, IN](#). This is your last chance to earn credits through MRTF programs until 2026.

The [Indiana Green Expo](#) is the MRTF's largest event, co-hosted with the INLA, and will be held from February 9th - 11th at the Indiana Convention Center, downtown Indianapolis.

We hope to see you at one of these events! For more upcoming events, details, and ways to register, visit www.mrtf.org/upcoming-events/.

2025-2026 MRTF Calendar of Events

(Ashley Ryan Breed, ashbreed@purdue.edu)

February 10-12, 2025

*Indiana Green Expo; Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN
July 8, 2025*

*Turf & Landscape Field Day; Daniel Turf Center, W Lafayette, IN
August 14, 2025*

*Lawn care Diagnostic Training; Daniel Turf Center, W Lafayette, IN
September 23, 2025*

*MRTF Day of Service; Delphi, IN
October 13, 2025*

*MRTF Golf Day-Fundraiser; Warren Course, Notre Dame, IN
November 1 - December 31, 2025 (tentative start date...)
Herbicide Workshop, ONLINE*

November 19-20, 2025

*Turf & Landscape Seminar; Daniel Turf Center, West Lafayette, IN
November 25, 2025*

Herbicide Workshop, Shelbyville, KY

December 16, 2025

Herbicide Workshop; Daniel Turf Center, West Lafayette, IN

February 9-11, 2026

*Indiana Green Expo; Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, IN
July 21, 2026*

Turf & Landscape Field Day, West Lafayette, IN

Other

Day of Service, TBA

