Prestigious climb continues for trailblazing superintendent Patty Knaggs

By HAL PHILLIPS

Patty Knaggs clearly didn’t have time to sit down and discuss the last thing on her mind — namely, her recent hire as head superintendent at Hazelnut National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn. She graciously found time. But over the course of an hour-long interview, Knaggs was never afforded a moment to relax, duty never stopped calling...

She advised crew members on which rain gear to buy; wrangled the grounds crew, including longtime assistant superintendent at Hazeltine National Golf Club in Chaska, Minn., which rain gear to buy; wrangled with an industry rep who couldn’t find the solid tines she needed; excused herself to meet a new rep who had dropped by, duty never stopped calling...

Knaggs came to Minnesota by way of Westchester Country Club, where she was head superintendent for three years. Her experience at the Rye, N.Y., club — PGA Tour stops, a demanding membership — prepared her well for Hazeltine, site of two U.S. Opens including the 1991 affair. Other people bring it up. I’m just doing what I enjoy doing.”

Knaggs gravitated towards Westchester after graduating from the turf management program at the University of Massachusetts in 1983, Knaggs worked on grounds crews at West Point, Eastward Point, in Cornwall-on-the-Hudson, New York.

She served as assistant superintendent at Echo Lake Country Club in Westfield, N.J., and The Country Club in Brookline, Mass., before taking the Westchester job. With her move to the Midwest, there can be little doubt that Knaggs, now 37, occupies the most prestigious position of any female superintendent in the nation. Yet she doesn’t fancy herself a trailblazer.

“Prestigious climb continues for trailblazing superintendent Patty Knaggs.”

“Perception can be reality.”

A month removed from that sweltering May morning, Knaggs’ perception of Hazeltine hasn’t wavered.

“Things are going really well,” she said. “It’s just a wonderful club because all they have is golf. They care about golf like it’s a member of the family.”

But reality has set in.

“Tilings are going really well,” she said. “It’s been fun. You can’t beat a climate where it’s 80 degrees every other day, and the attitude of all the people here has made it so easy for me. “They’re constantly funding new projects here. It’s nice to work for an organization that knows exactly what it wants. The prevailing attitude is, ‘Golf is the reason we’re here. We’re not here for any other reason.’ “That feeling carries over to the grounds crew, including longtime Hazeltine assistant superintendent Dave Deem.

“That’s one of the reasons I felt comfortable coming here. Dave went out of his way to be polite, and he didn’t have to do that.”

Coming in on top of an existing staff is never easy — for a woman in a predominantly male field, the situation might have been quite touchy. But Knaggs maintains the transition has been smoother than smooth — not that it keeps her awake nights.

“I honestly don’t think about it. Other people bring it up. I’m just doing what I enjoy doing.”

Born and reared near West Point, in Cornwall-on-the-Hudson, Knaggs gravitated towards maintenance work from an early age, “because I always liked to be outside.”

She parlayed that interest into a rapidly ascending career.

After graduating from the turf management program at the University of Massachusetts in 1983, Knaggs worked on grounds crews at West Point, Eastward Point, in Chatham, Mass., and Mt. Kisco Country Club in suburban New York.

“Welcome to Minnesota.”

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