And the leader in the clubhouse is Iron Man Gray

Dedication of Franklin Hills superintendent is two-fold, extraordinary

By TERRY BUCHEN

FRANKLIN, Mich. — He handles a heavy work schedule as superintendent at Franklin Hills Golf Club here, serves on the Green Section Committee of the U.S. Golf Association, the board of the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation and the Green Committee for the Golf Association of Michigan (GAM), and is co-chairman of the Michigan Turfgrass Conference. Yet Tom Gray has earned the moniker “The Iron Man” among course superintendents, not for these duties, but because he has played more than 100 rounds of golf every year the past 15 years.

A member of Golf Digest’s national ranking panel the past seven years, Gray’s 138 rounds in 1994 were the most of any golfer with GAM. By mid-June the 1.9 handicapper had played 51 rounds of golf this year. Some would say that is amazing for a person who lives in the Midwest. Gray merely shrugs and goes about his business, much like other Caro, Mich., natives, numbering about 50 people in the golf construction and turf industry.

Among his Caro compatriots are 21 people past and present who have worked for Wadsworth Golf Construction Co., course builder Paul Clute, course architect Tom Fazio and a half dozen superintendents. While Gray comes from a community rich in golf tradition, he lays his accolades at the feet of Ted Woehrle, who as superintendent at Oakland Hills Country Club tutored many on his 18-hole track. He has overseen eight seasons as consultant to current assistants Tom Lawrence, Brett Berry, Darrick Robbins and Jim Johnson, as well as “great mechanics and a very supportive crew that has made me look pretty good over the past seven years.”

The Franklin Hills membership has been very supportive, “which makes it a fun place to work,” he added. “The manager, Michael Habelein, the golf pro, Bill Baldwin, and the superintendent all work together. It’s kind of incredible.”

Last year, Gray’s grounds crew proved its dedication elsewhere. They helped with the turf at the Pontiac Silverdome during the World Cup soccer matches. They worked eight hours at the golf course, then labored at the Silverdome until 11:30 p.m. every day.

“[Dr. John] ‘Trey’ Rogers was a taskmaster in trying to maintain the field,” Gray said. “The crew crawled on their hands and knees picking up every little piece of grass that wasn’t attached to the soil. All of the World Cup games were sold out, so there were only a few tickets for the crew. Most of our crew donated their time.”

The Iron Man credited two other superintendents besides Woehrle for giving him “enough experience in turf to survive” — Ron Foote at Forest Akers Golf Club and Ron Branden when he was at Warwick Hills in Grand Blanc.

Maine Hall inducts Ruby

SOUTH PORTLAND Maine — The late Ernest E. (Pete) Ruby Jr., who logged 53 years of service at Portland Country Club in Falmouth Foreside, will be inducted into the Maine Golf Hall of Fame on Aug. 18 at Sables Oaks Golf Club here.

Ruby, who died in 1986, began at PCC as a laborer in 1951. He was superintendent from 1941 to 1969, and stayed three more seasons as consultant as son Lloyd ascended to the toppost. Longtime PCC pro Hap Malavolta recalls Ruby as a mechanical genius who saved the club untold thousands of dollars. “Before there was any aerator around to give greens breathing opportunity, Pete made his own by welding teeth from a rake onto a roller. He could grow sand from a rake onto a roller. He could grow sands of dollars.”

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