The summer of 1997 was a busy, yet exciting time at Minnesota Valley Country Club. Although we came through the winter well, we had a lot of work ahead of us. The club took out a loan to build a new clubhouse, build a practice facility, install a new irrigation system, drill a new well and undergo course renovation.

**Clubhouse Construction**

Although the maintenance department was not directly involved in building the new clubhouse, we were affected by the site chosen for the new building. The putting green and the well which feeds our pond would need to be moved to new locations. The loss of the putting green made installing a new putting green top priority. It would need to be ready to accept play by September.

Keys Well Drilling was hired to install a new well and cap the existing well. The amount of sand and silt that was dispersed in the process of conditioning the new well came as a surprise to me. In order to avoid the silt and sandstone from contaminating the pond, which is our water supply for our irrigation system, we routed it to the bottom of the 18th fairway. The fairway was then resodded with bent grass out of the nursery.

**Practice Facility**

We began work on the practice facility in early spring. The facility replaced four rarely used tennis courts and consists of an 11,000 square foot putting green, a 40,000 square foot practice fairway with a target green and a sand chipping green.

Hartman Companies, in Victoria, Minn., did the excavation and started by tearing down the tennis courts. In order to avoid the large expense of hauling the debris offsite, the asphalt was ground up into class 5 and used to build a much-needed cart path leading to the driving range. This path doubles as the maintenance road.

The practice facility was then shaped, the drain tile was installed, as well as the irrigation system, and the greens mix was brought in. The facility was now ready for us to seed with Providence bentgrass and grow in.

We had a problem with crabgrass on the practice facility fairway. This had been the area under the tennis courts and was a problem we did not expect. It was a difficult problem to solve, as we could not find a recommended control for crabgrass on new bentgrass seedlings. We chose to spray Acclaim at half of the recommended rate. After about five treatments the crabgrass was gone and the bentgrass came in beautifully. The new green was being used by early September. The rest of the practice facility will be open by the summer of 1998.

**Installing Irrigation System**

A Toro Osmac irrigation system with a Flotronex pump station was installed. The system was designed by Eric Christianson, of Des Moines, Iowa, and we were very impressed with his plan. After consideration of installation bids, we decided on Midwest Irrigation out of East Dubuque, Ill. Installation began on August 1st and was completed by November 1st, 1997.

The old system was used throughout the summer of '98. Because the old system was a normally closed hydraulic system and the blueprint was not very accurate, we were apprehensive about starting the project so early. Not surprisingly, the crew with Midwest Irrigation had never seen a normally closed irrigation system.

A normally closed irrigation system differs from a normally open system immensely. In a closed system, if the hydraulic tubing is cut, the head will never come on. In an open system, the head would pop on immediately. Obviously, with a closed system a problem is very difficult to detect. Unless heads are consistently checked, the problem may go undetected until the turf is affected. Because there is no way to track the tubing, solving the problem is very difficult. However, Midwest did an excellent job of keeping the old system operating while installing the new one.

Perhaps the largest effect the installation had on our crew was hand watering the miles of sod due to the trenches from irrigation lines. With the exception of a few unexpected problems, the project went surprisingly well. I was very impressed with Midwest’s professionalism and skill. I found it very educational and a great experience in general to work with this company.

**Course Renovation**

Although the previously mentioned (Continued on Page 13)
Minnesota Valley—
(Continued from Page 11)

projects were major, the course renova-
tion was our greatest challenge. The
-course superintendent, Larry Mueller has always felt that Minne-
sota Valley was a “classic style” golf
course. The seminars and books on
classic style courses that Larry has
taken in over the years has only
strengthened this belief. Larry took
the opportunity to talk with Tom
Doak from Renaissance Golf at the
National Convention in Las Vegas.
Renaissance Golf specializes in clas-
cic style courses. After describing the
features of Minnesota Valley to Mr.
Doak and his head shaper Jim Urbana,
we felt stronger than ever that we had something special here. The
information was presented to the
club, and the board contacted Renais-
sance Golf Design to make a personal
visit. Their visit concluded that Min-
nesota Valley was indeed a classic
style golf course and had many
aspects of a Seth Raynor design. Seth
Raynor was a famous 1920s golf
course architect who also designed the
University of Minnesota, Som-
erset and Midland Hills.

The club reviewed the information
and decided they would hire Renais-
sance Golf to consult the club on renova-
tion. Although Renaissance Golf
was extremely busy, they accepted the
project and sent Jim Urbana. Mr. Ur-
vana walked the course once again
and then submitted a renovation
plan. I felt very fortunate to spend a
day so closely with an expert in this
field. Mr. Urbana gave much insight
about the features of Minnesota Val-
ley and how they had been replicated
from many old Scottish courses. In his
 renovation plan, he suggested we ex-
 pand our greens back to their origi-
nal shape, bring back some bunkers
that had been lost over the years and
rebuild tees that had been built out of
character with the rest of the
course.

We accomplished the greens expan-
sion project by removing the thatchy
bluegrass that had taken over what
was once putting surface. The greens
lost their original shape over the
years, mainly due to downsizing dur-
ing the depression and also World
War II when maintenance was
minimal. We cut out the existing turf
one inch thick in order to assure the
removal of the thatch that had accu-
cumulated from many years of fer-
tilizer and irrigation. Once the sod
was removed and the bare ground was
prepped we purchased our bentgrass
sod. The sod was custom cut by Coun-
try Club Turf to a depth of one inch.
The next step was to lay the sod on
the native soil. It took many long days
of nurturing and hand watering, but
the new sod rooted in nicely. We com-
pleted all 18 greens this season but
have a lot of work ahead of us. In the
coming years, maintenance of each
green will be equivalent to maintai-
ning two greens. Because the new sod
is laid on straight soil, it will demand
extra aerifying, top dressing and hand
watering until it is comparable to the
rest of the green.

We acquired a 1930s aerial map
showing the original bunkering of the
course. From the map we were able
to determine which bunkers had been
removed or rebuilt over the years. From Mr. Urbana's suggestions we
were able to determine which bunkers to put back in and which
ones to rebuild. Placement of the
bunkers needed to be altered to ac-
commodate today's golfers. This is due
to improvement in equipment of the
game, which enables golfers to in-
crease hitting distances. This makes
some of the original bunkering obso-
lete. We hired Hartman Companies
for bunker restoration. They did an
outstanding job replicating original
bunkers on the course.

Over the years, some tees had been
rebuilt and were uncharacteristic to
the rest of the course. We rebuilt seven
of these tees to better fit the classic
style golf course. The renovation was
complete when the club decided to
reverse the nines (ten becomes one, one
becomes ten), which is how the course
was originally played.

None of these accomplishments
would have been possible without the
hard work and dedication given by
our crew. It was not a typical year at
Minnesota Valley, but a busy and suc-
cessful one. I feel privileged to have
been a part of it.