

HAZELTINE'S JIM NICOL, CGCS

A Gentleman and a Scholar

By RICK TRAVER, CGCS

If you had the opportunity to read the Star Tribune's Sports section on Sunday, April 28, you may have run across an article about Hazeltine National, the PGA Championship most importantly, one of our members, Jim Nicol, CGCS.

Jim is currently the Superintendent at Hazeltine National Golf Club and has been a member of the MGCSA for 23 years. He has held all the offices of the MGCSA Board of Directors with the exception of Secretary. Jim also ran for national office with the GCSAA a few years ago.

Jim has quite the impressive resume. He started out in the golf course business in 1964 at St. Cloud Country Club as a Greensman, and moved to Somerset Country Club for the 1972 season. While working as an intern and later as an Assistant at Lake Geneva Playboy Resort from 1973 to 1978, Jim attended Penn State University, graduating in 1975. He became the Superintendent at Bunker Hills Golf Course in 1978. After an 18-year stay and four Senior PGA events at Bunker Hills, Jim became the Superintendent at Hazeltine National Golf Club, and hopes to retire there on November 1, 2016. *(The significance of that date will become obvious in the next paragraph.)*

Hazeltine National Golf Club was the brainchild of Totten Heffelfinger and Robert Fisher. Both wanted to build a golf course capable of hosting elite international competitions. Designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr. the course was opened in 1962. In just four short years Hazeltine National Golf Club hosted the USGA Women's Open. Then, in 1970, they hosted the USGA Men's Open. After Dave Hill's infamous com-

ment about the "cow pasture" during the 1970 U.S. Open, Robert Trent Jones Sr. and Rees Jones went about straightening some doglegs and strengthening some finishing holes. This left Hazeltine National with nothing but praise after the 1991 U.S. Open. Future events at Hazeltine National are numerous, but include the 2002 and 2009 PGA Championships, the 2003 National Amputee Championship, the 2006 USGA Men's Amateur and the 2016 Ryder Cup Matches.

Jim is married to a wonderful lady in Barbara, "his sweetheart." Jim says. "Vacationing with Barbara during the winter is what I look forward to the most." He enjoys reading, golfing, fishing and time with friends. I had the opportunity to golf with Jim on an extremely hot day at Interlachen during an MGCSA Championship. While I was melting, his game steadily improved. I was lucky we weren't playing for money; if we had I'd be bankrupt.

When Jim looks to the future he believes it comes from fellow superintendents. "We need to focus on keeping current with the constant changes in our profession. Education is the most important tool that we have... the rest will come our way as long as we look to improving ourselves personally and professionally."

In the short time I have known Jim he has always been the consummate professional. I have a lot of respect for his accomplishments and his opinions. Jim is a great guy and has done a lot for our association. I wish him the best in weather and luck as he faces the upcoming PGA Championship.



JIM NICOL, CGCS
Hazeltine National Golf Club

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