



In Bounds

By Jack MacKenzie, CGCS
North Oaks Golf Club

My mother used to share sage advice with her children on a regular basis. Perhaps her most notable comment on life was, "When it is rainy out you must make your own sunshine." This comment was very relevant to a youngster bemoaning the wet weather impact upon playtime and I heard it often. However, as I grew up I realized that "making one's own sunshine" had a much deeper meaning.

Last spring when the snow melted and it became painfully obvious that my course suffered some severe winterkill, dark clouds of anxiety shadowed my heart. The turf upon the wind-swept fairway slopes and exposed greens had the color of the underside of peeled birch bark. Cool temperatures delayed recovery and the course just didn't look good until the early part of June. Life just isn't always fair.

To compensate for the blemishes created by the winter injury, we focused our efforts into shining bright the less obvious aspects of the golf course. The bunker edges were freshened, the cart paths redefined with trimming, the flower gardens re-amended with peat moss and the wood chip beds freshened with clean-smelling pine mulch. These projects kept my mind busy while my track healed itself (of course with a bit of extra TLC). And the improvements brought clarity into a somewhat dreary spring.

Then the rain came to really dampen my spirits. Concerns ranged from soft and soggy conditions to a double whammy when the temperatures turned hot and humid. I was very concerned about what Mother Nature would be doling out next. To remedy my depression my staff and I undertook the beautification of the course with many thousands of flowers. We also installed additional irrigation lines to accommodate a weak loop on the course and continued our spider line drainage program. When the sun did eventually shine, the results of these rainy day projects were no less than fantastic. Again, by focusing upon the positive present and not the negative what-if, we really made a difference in the condition of North Oaks Golf Club.

Brrrr!, so much for the rain, but how about a bunch of coold sunshine? As you know, we have had a very cool summer. Great for growing turf, but my boat has only cut a wake in the lake three times. On the flip side though, the sunny side, my children and I did work as a team on a more regular basis, saw a few movies and just hung out together during the cold snaps. It was fun sharing time with them and watching as they matured.

Mid-summer my siblings and I were dealt a rainstorm of large proportions. Sadness embraced us as we watched our too young mother pass away after a severe fall. Family memories will always bring smiles to our faces and her words of wisdom will continue to echo in our minds as we carry on. But what ray of brightness could possibly have come from this tragedy you ask? I learned to let go of my club.

*"When it is rainy out you must
make your own sunshine."*

For ten days I was unable to be much help around my shop, either I was physically or mentally preoccupied with the family matters at hand. Thus I had to rely upon my assistant, Jeff Schaefer, to continue with his job and pick up on mine in my absence.

Never in my time as a superintendent had I been so helpless to manage my crew. And never had I depended so heavily upon my assistant to fill my shoes. Sure there were long weekends and short vacations during the off-season where my associate could cut his teeth, but these limited experiences were somewhat controlled by me. This time it was different. This time I was unexpectedly out of communication during peak season.

I am proud to say that upon my return to work I witnessed a smooth running and beautiful operation. It was as if I hadn't even been away at all. Jeff Schaefer, my "Assistant Extraordinaire", didn't let me down. Nor did he disappoint my membership with less than ideal conditions. I didn't lose a single employee or blade of grass. The fears I held so tightly to, my fears of giving up control, were totally unwarranted.

This knowledge was a "bright sunny day" during my rainy period. Thanks, Jeff.

Now I am not wishing any family challenges upon anyone. However, I would encourage each of you to learn from my experience. It is okay to let go and let someone else take charge for a while. Sure you are the one ultimately responsible. But the exercise in releasing my management style has taught me two things.

The first is that my course will be there when I get back to it. And the second, much more important impact was upon the confidence my assistant gained through the experience. Today he is a greater asset to me than he was two months ago. Today both of us know that he can handle any challenge placed upon his shoulders, and mine.

Each day as my Mom watches over me and her understanding of life will reverberate in my soul, I will be thankful for her guidance. Her welcomed wisdom will carry me through the next crisis in my life and I will continue to see the sunlight through damp clouds of gray. Until next month, and always, let the sunshine in.

Board Meeting Highlights—

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University of Minnesota Report: Field Days (took place) on July 29. There (was) nine stations to visit. No Mow grasses, fine fescues, fairway bentgrass, etc. Phosphorous training will be held after the field day event.

Andy Hollman is the new man to take Troy Carson's place. He is a research assistant. Current stuff going on at the University includes: New turf plots, ryegrass (NTEP) bluegrass, and poa program changing from Dr. White to Eric Watkins. Undergraduate education will be pumping up the pathology class and adding a turf problem class. Troe Center Building update: Horgan met with 20-30 Architects and the University has narrowed the field to 2 or 3 that they plan to interview further.