

Purple Hawk's Roughriders

By KATIE HUMPHREY
Contributing Writer

They come riding over the hill atop their red Jacobson lawn tractors. A morning's work done, the men dismount with smiles on their faces. One stops to hose down his trusty tractor, another gives his a good greasing, while two more make jokes. They are the "roughriders" √ the Purple Hawk's grounds crew.

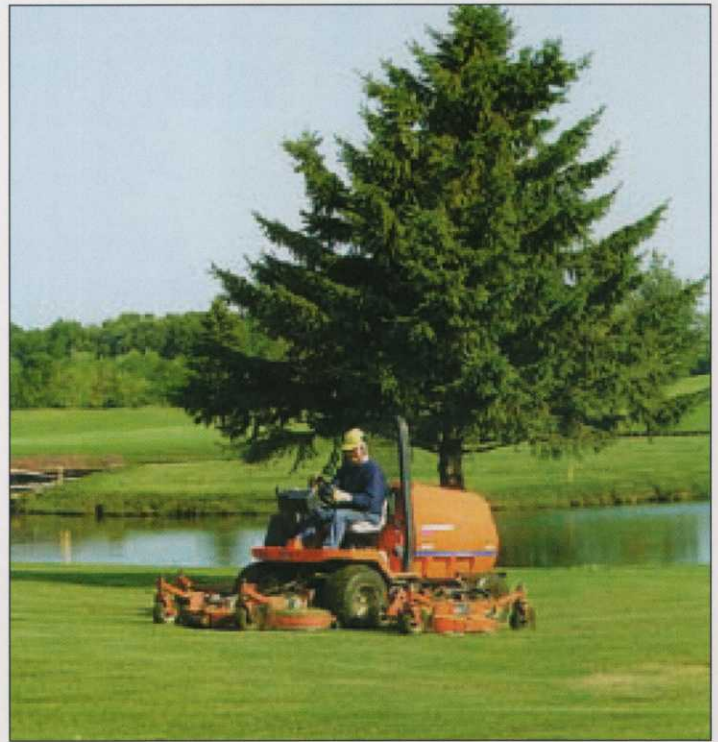
Milt Carlson is the oldest, at 81, and Duane "Red" Olson, 66, is the youngest. At 70 and 77, Dick Anderson and Ray Nordin fall in the middle. But being senior citizens does not slow any of them down √ they are up and out on the course as early as 4:30 a.m. to get it ready for the golfers.

"We love to get up in the morning and watch the day start," Anderson said, speaking for the whole crew.

"I'm always up early in the morning anyhow," Nordin said, echoing Anderson's sentiments.

And it is a rare occasion when someone calls in sick, despite their ages.

"They have all had their ailments and surgeries, but they are



Milt Carlson makes hay.

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all in good health," said Ron Noyce. He added that they are more reliable and responsible than high school students, washing, greasing and oiling their machines after they mow each day.

"The main thing is oil," Carlson said softly, as if he were letting someone in on a secret. Carlson strolled into Noyce's office in 1989, looking for a part-time job after relocating to Braham. Previously, he had worked heavy construction in the McGregor area. Noyce said he knew right away that Carlson was just the person he needed on his grounds crew. Thus, the "rough riders" began.

"He is the head of the senior fleet," Anderson said jokingly.

"Well, they aren't tired of me yet," Carlson responded with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

Ray Nordin came along next, after retiring from Whirlpool. He already had a couple years of golf course maintenance at Town and Country Golf Club, an exclusive St. Paul course. He had decided to move up to Cambridge to be closer to his children, Noyce said. And with a shining recommendation from the St. Paul golf course, in 1992 he joined the grounds crew staff.

For years prior to his retirement from State Farm Insurance, Dick Anderson had had his eye on the part-time grounds crew job at the golf course. He pestered Noyce at every opportunity, reminding him to save him a spot amongst the "rough riders." He is in his fifth summer working at Purple Hawk.

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Roughriders—

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Anderson is the only golfer in the bunch, so he takes advantage of one particular grounds crew perk — free golf balls. “You get to keep all the golf balls you can find,” he said, waving two nearly new balls.

A former over-the-road truck driver, Duane “Red” Anderson has been on the crew for two years and is the newest member. He said he likes that his new job keeps him closer to home, but also gives him something to do.

“You can’t sit in the house and look out the window all the time you know,” he said.

On average, the crew works about 18 hours a week during the summer. They cut most of the 175-acres of grass on Monday and Tuesday mornings and then come back Fridays to work on the greens and tees.

“They have it down to a science, working as a team, each guy with his own territory out on the course,” Noyce said. “If one



Roughriding retirees ready to roll.

guy can’t make it, the others cover for him.”

But usually they all make it. Matter of fact, by the time the snow begins to melt in the spring, the “roughriders” are itching to get back out, Noyce said. They usually get together for a fish fry early in the spring to reconnect before they start cleaning and raking.

As for talk of slowing down, all four members of the crew said it won’t happen any time soon.

“They’ll have to pry us off the machines,” Dick Anderson said with a laugh. The other “rough riders” nodded with agreement, mounted their tractors and drove off into the pole barn.

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