

William "Bill" Johnson Celebrates 50 Years with the MGCSA

By JACK KOLB
MGCSA

In the spring of 1953 a young Bill Johnson was a high school junior attending Central High School in Superior, Wisconsin and dreaming about some sort of career after his senior year. He had two cousins, one of whom was Carl Anderson, the Park and Recreation Director with overall supervision of Nemadji Country Club, and the other was Richard "Dick" Hoff who was Superintendent of the Golf Course

It usually is not difficult to get a summer job from a relative, so Bill applied for a position with the grounds crew for the summer of 1953 and was accepted.

Golf was not a part of the Athletic Program at Central High but Bill decided he would learn as much as possible about the game for his own pleasure, taking advantage of the opportunity to learn on the job in his spare time. After playing an 18-hole round with him as part of a foursome at Minneapolis Golf Club, I would say he became very proficient.

In the fall of 1953 Bill returned to Central High as a senior and graduated in the spring of 1954. Again he went back to work for Nemadji but was laid off in the late fall. As many young people discover, there has to be a choice as to whether you want to work for the money involved or do you want a career where you love your job? Bill got his chance to make that choice when he went to work for U. S. Steel. Starting as an apprentice: Bill was trained on a machine making "nails." This machine was fed by a coil of wire or rod (depending on what size nail) and with powerful compression along with tremendous noise produced nails.

OSHA may have been in force at that time but it had not gotten around to checking decibels, the formula used to measure noise. Earplugs or soundproof headsets were not issued. Long after leav-



*Former MGCSA President Bill Johnson
with his friends Zac and Shep.*

ing the plant each day, Bill had ringing noises in his ears and weird sounds affecting his hearing. After a very few months Bill decided he would rather hear the sound of birds, crickets and the call of Lake Superior seagulls, the decision to

stay with the Golf Course was made.

In the Spring of 1955 Carl Anderson came down from Duluth to take the position of Golf Course Superintendent at Woodhill Country Club, replacing Milt Wiley who had taken a position with the Toro Distributor, at that time called "Minnesota Toro Inc."

It is interesting to note that when Bill Johnson and Dick Hoff would come down to the Twin Cities for MGCSA meetings, they usually came by train. Interstate or I-35 was not completed and the train was the better choice of transportation.

Bill Johnson did not waste time in applying for membership in the Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents' Association. The bad news was that applicants at that time had to take an oral exam. In the writer's estimation it was not run fairly. There was bias and much debate over certain questions.

Questions such as the diameter of the putting cup had just been standardized by the manufacturing industry (Standard, Par

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Bill Johnson—

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Aide et al). There were a lot more controversial questions and that particular test was later abandoned. But to Bill Johnson's credit he passed the test and became a MGCSA member on March 26, 1957.

In the Spring of 1965 Bill was invited to the Twin Cities to interview for the position of Course Superintendent at Edina Country Club and got the job.

Joe Rush, the retired former Superintendent at Edina, had assembled a grounds crew that many Superintendents were jealous of. Lorin Maenke, a member of that crew, still works at Edina. Bill continued the reputation of Edina Country Club being a "well groomed" course and was a leader in innovations.

Bill was the first Superintendent in Minnesota to treat his entire fairways with fungicide. At the time Cadminate was the preferred fungicide for the disease called "Dollar Spot." By calculation a golf course with nearly 40 acres of fairway would take

anywhere from 125 lbs. to 215 lbs. of Cadminate.

Cadminate only came in 5 lb. cartons. Suppliers like myself at Turf Supply Company rarely carried up to 10 cartons. Somehow Bill was able to gather enough

"Bill was the first Superintendent in Minnesota to treat his entire fairways with fungicide."

material between other suppliers such as R. L. Gould, Minnesota Toro, his own reserves and possibly other golf courses to get the amount needed for the treatment.

Bill has been an asset to the Minnesota Association. He raised the level of professionalism by organizing a group that exchanged information on budgets, salaries and perks. It raised the awareness of club officials to the fact that they could not have a highly rated club without keeping pace with salary requirements, environmental practices, budgets,

chemicals, improved grass species and ongoing education for their Superintendent.

Bill became president of MGCSA in 1970 and was the first to recognize that MGCSA had to become more sophisticated by having monthly meetings and to have more involvement by the membership. Bill formed specialty ad hoc committees to deal with new issues facing a growing organization, and since the issues were not clearly defined he had to sit and chair many of the committees that were formed

It is good to know that Bill in his retirement has many activities that keep him occupied and happy doing the things he loves. He has a kennel of border collies that he uses in a side business called "Honkers Away." He also has a hideaway up near his home town of Superior. Bill was given an "honorary lifetime membership at Edina Country Club" for his many years of service and when this writer was assigned to do an article on Bill, we had to wait several weeks for Bill to return from a warm part of the country to get his story.

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