

INSIGHT: ONE SUPERINTENDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

By **JERRY WEBB, CGCS**
RIVERWOOD NATIONAL & VINTAGE



I have been a Golf Course Superintendent for 29 years and a Certified Golf Course Superintendent for 23 years. I received my Bachelor of Science Degree from Iowa State University in Agronomy with emphasis in Turfgrass Management and my Master of Agriculture Degree from Iowa State University with emphasis in Turfgrass Management and Pest Management. In 29 years I have had golf course experience, which includes being the construction superintendent at Brookside (now Bulrush) golf course in Rush City and Riverwood National. I have been a golf course superintendent at six different golf courses in Iowa and Minnesota. I have been involved with golf courses all my life. My father and brother are both Class A PGA Golf Professionals.

Built in 2005, the par 72 Riverwood National is an 18-hole, daily-fee, championship golf course located in Otesego. David A. Kirscht was the course architect.

The par 55, Vintage 18-hole executive course was built in 1999.

Why an/or how did you enter the turf management industry?

I worked for my father at the different golf courses he was the golf professional at throughout his career. I started as a caddy in Fargo, then as a bag boy, followed as a cart boy. I then worked in the pro shop for my dad while in high school in Des Moines. I knew from that point I didn't want to be on the golf professional side of the golf business but I still wanted to make my profession golf related. So I decide to pursue Agronomy at Iowa State for my bachelor's degree. I played golf and hockey while attending Iowa State. Then after one season in the International Hockey League I came back to Iowa and began my golf course superintendent career. I received my Masters from Iowa State while I was a golf superintendent at Ames Golf and Country Club.

Who was your professional mentor and why?

It would be my three advisors I had while my many years at Iowa State. Dr. Bill Knoop, Dr. Ron George and Dr. Nick Christians. They all had a large influence on my professional career.

What has been the highest point in your career?

It would be being involved with two golf courses from the beginning of construction all the way through to opening day. A great feeling. Another would be going with my father; who is 86 and brother to the 2008 Masters in Augusta. An equally great feeling.

What has been your lowest point?

There have been a few, but my wife says "everything happens for a reason." After 29 years I'm beginning to actually believe her. So I will leave it at that.

Are your greatest challenges political, agronomic or managerial?

Rounds are down as is the sale of golf equipment. We are not getting the revenues in the golf industry that we had in the 90's. Owners and managers are asking superintendents to have better conditions with less operational money and less staff.

What is the most difficult disease to manage on your course and how do you?

Snow mold diseases are the most variable from year to year because of the changing winter conditions. Over the years I have used different fungicides and tried covers but the constant has always been some kind of anti-transparent with the fungicide. I feel it has helped save my greens and tees in most of the years.

Is it hard to find good help in your area of the state?

For me right now it is easy to find help. Most of my retired part timers return year after year. Then I fill in around them with college kids home for the summer. Then I try to add two turf student interns from Iowa State or another turf school. Counting myself, I only have 12 people for 36 holes so it is not hard to fill in the few positions I have open each year.

Do you have a dog on your crew?

I don't have a dog at Riverwood/Vintage, but I had a Springer Spaniel named "Boo" when I was a superintendent at Ames Golf and Country Club in the 80s. At the time the course had quick coupler fairways so I had a night water person. Boo would go around and chase water all

night and then sleep all day. He was trained to stay out of the bunkers and off the greens. Boo was a memorable dog.

Where will our industry be in 10 years?

Right now course closings are outnumbering openings. In the foreseeable future we won't see growth like the 1990s in the U.S. again. I see equipment getting more efficient with less maintenance required. I think the largest improvements will be in plant breeding and research at the University level. This will provide better quality playing surfaces with less mowing, lower fertilization and less fungicide/herbicide/pesticide needs.

Where would you like to be in 10 years?

Hopefully I'll be looking at retirement. Living in the present home I am in now on the lake and taking care of "my" yard. Working part time at a local golf course in the summer and still playing "senior" hockey with the guys until I can't anymore.

What is your perspective of our state association?

Being a Central District Director back in Iowa in the 80s, I realize how much time and effort is involved "being involved." The MGCSA Board of Directors does a wonderful job in communication with the association, the publication and information in the *Hole Notes* along with the setting up of the many events. I don't know how they find the time and I thank them for it.

Name your foursome:

Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux and Alex Ovechkin would be included in my foursome.

We would play a round of golf and talk about their careers in hockey and then off to the hockey rink afterward for a little pick up hockey game. Alex and I against the Great One and Mario. What a dream.