



## Hidden Greens Golf Course... a Hastings' golf course “gem in the rough”

By Jason Swanson, Superintendent

Hidden Greens Golf Course in Hastings is a public golf course that was built by my parents and grandparents. They still own it today. Farmers by trade, they knew little about the game itself, but owned the land and equipment to build a golf course back when golf wasn't as popular as it is today.

My first actual memory of Hidden Greens Golf Course occurred when I was 5 years old, golfing with my parents who had just opened the doors on the then nine hole facility in

1976. I chipped in on the sixth hole, a par five for an approximate 13, and promptly declared chipping in to be far easier than putting.

I don't remember much of the construction of the front nine, but my parents and grandparents say that I spent hours sitting off to the side and watching all of the equipment in action. They tell me that I was not much of a bother, except for the time that I sat on a ground hornet's nest along the bank of the river on hole number eight. They really

like telling that story! I remember the construction well of the back nine in 1986. That is when I fell in love with the profession. I spent the entire summer at 15 years old driving tractors, dodging bulldozers, and learning a lot of very colorful language.

Fast forward 26 years later, and I am now the Superintendant of the still family-owned facility. I graduated in 1994 from Iowa State with a Turf degree. I came home at 23 years old to try to run a golf course at the same time as my family was building another 18 holes in northern Wisconsin. My grandfather, who ran Hidden Greens at the time, took some of our farm equipment and left

for two full summers to oversee the construction of Hidden Greens North in Solon Springs, Wisconsin.

When I took over the superintendent's position, my assistant at the time was even less prepared than myself. Jay Caneff was a full-time farmer and worked for my great uncle his entire life. He had never held a golf club when he was hired at roughly the same time as I graduated. In hindsight, it is a full on miracle that we are still in business.

Jay turned out to be a turfgrass maintenance natural, and being single at the time, he spent countless hours at the course either working on the (continued on page18)



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grounds or working on his game. Jay is newly married to his beautiful bride, Carol, and has inherited two children and three grandchildren. He has been an invaluable asset to Hidden Greens over the years. Imagine that for 20 years, you have had someone at your facility that you could trust completely on any weekend that you are away. I have had the great fortune to be able to take that precious short break, and know that the guy in charge when I am away will always be there for the course. That alone says more about him than my detailing his disease identification skills, or his ability to “sense” a hydraulic leak (both of which come in pretty handy).

As for myself, I am married now for 16 years to my wonderful bride, Lisa, and we have two great boys. Trey (nine), and Ryan (six), are the center of our world. We spend all winter chasing around the metro area playing basketball. The boys are also big into football in the fall. Thankfully, hockey is a four letter word in our house. The boys currently look at my job as “work” and have yet to realize how great it is going to be to actually grow up on the golf course. I look forward to all of the fun that we will have as a family for years to come. It might help if I would play more golf with them instead of trying to convince them that picking sticks with dad is the most fun EVER!

I should probably mention something about the course here. We are on a 2 square mile State Game refuge just south of Hastings. We share a fence line with Bellwood Oaks,

which as most of you know is managed by Bill Gullicks. It is rather unique that there are two independent, privately owned, 18 hole public courses side by side. We have taken advantage of each other over the years in the form of borrowing equipment, ideas, and the occasional emergency irrigation repair coupler.

Hidden Greens was cut completely out of the oak and pine woods that originally was my grandfather’s farm and hunting grounds. We were one of Joel Goldstrand’s early designs, and he was no stranger to tight, wooded, shot-maker tracks. We play only 6,300 from the tips and are a course where position off the tee is more important than blasting away. I still haven’t learned that lesson, and the driver is still in my bag (actually, I now have 2 drivers). Who doesn’t love a good 120 yard punch out through dozens of trees to 15 feet? I recently conceded that we have predominantly poa/bent greens with blue/rye fairways. I always put the bent first, and that is becoming something of an obvious case of denial.

Jay and I would like to welcome any of you in the industry to come play Hidden Greens this spring for the kick off of the playing season for the MGCSA. The golf events are a great way to enjoy the game and each other. Our entire profession spends way too much time working for the game we love and not nearly enough time playing it. I try to play in as many events as possible every year, and am very happy to be able to host one at my home course.