



# In Bounds

by Jack MacKenzie, CGCS

It has been just under two years since retiring from my post

as a superintendent and I am often asked the simple, yet complex, question: “Do you miss it?”

Equally simple and complex, my answer: “No, to the concrete realities and yes, to the romance of running a course.”

There once was a time when I saw myself as a golf course superintendent until the day I retired. The challenges of providing optimum playing conditions through inclement weather, increased expectations, economic depressions and political posturing were at once stimulating and rewarding to conquer. Time as the ‘keeper of the green’ upon several courses provided life long lessons never to be forgot.

As hard as I tried in my youth I couldn’t change the weather and finally learned to accept the seasonal patterns and dramatic anomalies as par for the course. Buy good rain gear, use sun block and don’t skimp on winter coveralls tended to be a safe mantra for many years, as I stayed comfortable in the elements. But do I miss the weather

variables?

Nope. It was almost always too wet or dry, hot or cold, icy or draughty, windy or humid. I find I do well inside my climate controlled office.

Back in the old days, course management was pretty simple. Hire enough people during the peak season to get the job done. Expectations were lower and the occasional impact upon play the norm. Shoulder month maintenance? Highly unlikely as most players understood the course was pimped up for the prime months of June, July and August when ‘snow birds’ were in town, kids were out of school and scheduled tournaments ran between Memorial and Labor Days.

That changed during the economic boom of the 1990’s. Greater incomes meant more free time and much more disposable cash. Combined, this led to higher demands upon the golf clubs that led to higher dues/fees that led to greater expectations. Greater expectations required more staffing, equipment maintenance and a much higher degree of management. Of course, all of this possible with enough cash.

Then the economic hard times took hold and it was suddenly do more with less followed by more of the same.

For a while this new challenge was invigorating. And then it wasn't. No, I don't miss the "money stretch".

Politics...well lets just say working with golf course superintendents is delightful!

What I miss the most are the subtleties, the nuances, and the casual natural observations that could easily brighten my day.

In the winter, it was the solitude of tromping through the snow, pole saw upon my shoulder, to trim suckers and redirect tree growth. The quiet was often deafening, broken only by the sound of a crow or at times falling snow.

The spring, with rushing snow melt, stimulated all of my senses as dormant smells awoke, warm sun danced upon my skin, the first robins cleaned the remaining crab apples, dried and likely fermented, and patches of green grass peaked through the left over blanket of white. Soon the troops would be welcomed back for another season of chasing perfection.

Summer-time heralded sun rises, cool dew, rainbows, ducklings, thunderstorms, camaraderie, the orchestrated magic of fine turf management, attaining a peak in perfection, and the internal pride of job completion only to be recycled the following day.

Splashes of reds and oranges upon the blue waters of ponds and creeks with a background of healthy and brilliant green, colored my world in the fall. The summer staff was finally gone and the full timers could enjoy the peace. Projects were to be done, maintenance based on frost delays and "bed-time" schedules implemented. The intensity of agronomics put to rest for another year.

When I ponder my past, I do reflect upon my time as a superintendent and acknowledge that those were some mighty fine years. On balance, and in spite of some bumps in the road, I truly loved my job as a 'keeper of the green'. A great venue, exceptional and dedicated industry friends, pride and the ability to "work out of doors" allowed me to maintain my sanity even during the most challenging of times.

I have landed upon a vocation of equal enjoyment, and feel very fortunate to have done so. The rewards of the job are different, but still gratifying, the challenges much less physical but comparable in logistic planning. And when my soul yearns for an injection of peace, I take a break, grab my staff Sadie and Nugget, and go outside for a little walk about. As it is fall now, I am eyeing up trees to prune, logs to split, leaves to mulch and gardens to put to bed... hmmm, and I still love every minute of it.