

Experimental Green at Cantigny

by Tony Rzadzki, CGCS
Cantigny Golf

Only three other times in my life did my chest heave with pride such as it did shortly after Labor Day this year. I was sitting atop a triplex mower cutting the first stripes into the newly completed experimental green; an 8,000 square foot USGA spec green that will be mowed and maintained at greens height and conditions. A volunteer effort that took two golf seasons to complete, but a project that I feel will provide the golf industry invaluable information concerning water usage, pesticide and nitrate uptake and leaching, and a testing area for new chemicals, fertilizers, wetting agents, etc.

The project was the brainchild of Dr. Hank Wilkinson (University of Illinois) and Dr. Randy Kane (Turfgrass Advisor and Pathologist for the Chicago District Golf Association). After convincing me that all Cantigny had to do was provide the space and maintain the green once it was completed, I agreed that this would be a great endeavor and looked forward to mowing it. Well ... did this middle-aged polack learn a lesson. Dr. Hank's original (and only) plan to get funding sank faster than the Titanic, but I was not to worry, "just keep working T.R., we'll get the dollars to finish this project. "Well, not only am I going to mow this thing ... looks like I'm building it too ... you polack ... never volunteer!

It was late spring 1993. Henry, Randy, and myself got on the phones and began calling every supplier that we could think of that may possibly 'donate' materials or services to help us along. It was amazing! No one denied us, the positive response was overwhelming. Well ... my spirits were lifted and I began to feel better.

Instead of digging down to core out a green, I created a berm around the 8,000 square foot area with spoils from a continuous cartpath project that I had underway. Then I dug in the drain tile to the graded base that existed. That was all the work that I accomplished in 1993. Record rainfall in the midwest always seemed to keep me off the bobcat when I had time to work. I was disappointed and had to wait till next year.

1994 ... the knot in my stomach tightened about the end of April and it didn't let go till August 29th, the day we seeded the west half of the green. It is difficult, to say the least, to cajole donations on a timely basis and by mid July the executives at Cantigny were running out of patience and rather tired of looking at (what they considered) a pile of unshaped sand and gravel. "What is the delay with construction T.R.?" Well ... this was not a typical green and very difficult to construct. After the 'birdseye' pea gravel was in place, the irrigation system was installed on top of it. We decided to have individual watering systems for each quadrant of the green. We felt that in the future the different soil profiles will need their own varying amounts of water. There are 84 pop up heads in this 8,000 ft.2 area! We also had to keep the soils separated. Plywood with double poly plastic draped under it was installed to segregate the soils. Once the soils were in place the plywood was removed leaving the plastic as a flexible barrier. To move in the special soil mix without destroying the irrigation system or the temporary walls became very

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(Experimental Green continued)

tedious. I tightened my belt to the last notch and dug in. Within six weeks the irrigation system, special soil mixes, and remainder of the sod were installed. A tremendous amount of labor on my part, Dr. Kane, and the volunteers got the green ready to seed right on schedule. I don't know how much I can thank everyone.

We seeded the $\frac{3}{4}$ of the green on August 29th. The last $\frac{1}{4}$ of the green contains the variety trials. We were delayed a couple of weeks in seeding because Randy was waiting for specific varieties to come in from Oregon.

Two weeks later my chest heaved with pride just as it did each time when one of my children were born. Throughout all the trials, tribulations, heartache and worry; just as when a child is born, the adventure begins.

Little Prairie on the Golf Course

by Dan Dinelli, North Shore C.C.

Illinois, *The prairie state; The Fighting Illini*. These are metaphors that can be misleading. Yes, a vast amount of Illinois was prairie at one time. Now nearly all of the 22 million acres of prairie originally found in Illinois has long been overtaken by corn and soybeans. A remnant of about 2,300 acres exist today. The Illinois, one of the few Indian tribes once found in Illinois, in fact were passive people, avoiding conflicts when possible. Settlers changed a lot in a short 200 years. Illinois is second to Iowa, having the fewest acres of native vegetation in the United States.

Why should we concern ourselves with this? Each of us will have our own perspective on the issue. However, some facts should not be ignored. The Prairie ecosystem is a highly diverse web of life including many plants, insects, birds and reptiles. This diverse system is what created the fertile top soil that has made Illinois an agricultural giant.

Ten thousand years ago glaciers retreated from Northern Illinois, leaving deposits of glacial till as soil. This infertile soil was home to "pioneer plants." These plants were adapted for infertile high pH soils. As these plants grew and died back each season, they left behind organic matter, which over many years changed the composition of the top soil. Other plants moved in, continuing the process of change. In nature, systems are very dynamic, imposing constant change. Typically change occurs over a very long period of time. The exception is in a catastrophic event, as the one responsible for the extinction of the dinosaurs or what man did to the prairies of Illinois. These events of great change in a short period of time are rare in nature.

Life in the prairies was not easy for man. The density of the vegetation hindered travel. The insects created an uncomfortable environment. Farming the land was difficult, until the invention of the plow. Still with these challenges at hand, settlers wrote about the beauty of prairies. The sea of grasses blew in the wind like gentle waves of the ocean. Flowering forbs added color and grace.

The heritage of the prairie touches us all. In respect and beauty of the prairie, the grounds department at NSCC adds to its existing gardens of prairie and wildflower plantings. We look forward to the establishment of the new prairie planting to the left of the 15 tee and wetland/prairie between 6 and 12 fairways.

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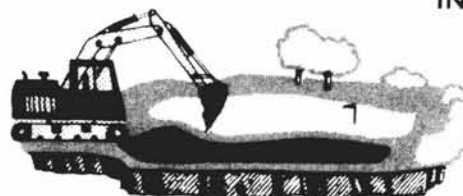
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