

1954

by Pete Vandercook

1994 marks the fortieth year in business for Illinois Lawn Equipment, Inc. Illinois Lawn Equipment, Inc. was incorporated on October 6, 1954.

In 1952, on his return from active service in the Korean War, Bob Johnson went to work for Ford Aircraft as a test-cell instructor for jet engines. He and his wife moved to Orland Park when their first child was expected, and he began working part-time with lawn mowers.

In 1954, the Worthington Mower Company was looking for a replacement for their distributor in the Chicago area. George A. Davis was the Toro Distributor in this area and had a virtual monopoly on golf course business. Worthington was willing to take a chance on a young man with ambition and signed a franchise agreement. The primary area of responsibility was a very limited area of Chicago, south of Roosevelt Road, through Kankakee County. In subsequent years, Illinois Lawn took over the North Side (from Midwest Turf), Northwestern Indiana (from Steel City Lawn & Garden) and Central Illinois (from Leon Short & Sons and Little Wheels, Ltd.) but that is a different story.

The new company took on additional lines such as Skinner Irrigation, Jari Sicklebar, Atwater-Strong blowers (which then had a 3 h.p. Clinton engine), Night Crawler aerifiers, etc. Jacobsen purchased the Worthington Mower Corporation which then allowed Illinois Lawn Equipment to sell the Jacobsen Homeowner line which kept the company going for many years until they were finally accepted by commercial accounts such as golf courses.

Although I did not personally arrive on the scene until 1963, I had spent five summers (1947-1951) working at Olympia Fields Country Club and would like to make the following observations about life on the golf course in 1954.

In 1954 Bob Williams was the superintendent at Beverly Country Club, Norm Kramer was at Silver Lake, Walter Kilmer was at Ravisloe, Art Benson, Sr. at Aurora Country Club, Emil Cassier at Sycamore Golf Club, Frank Mastrolio at Geneva Club, Albie Staudt at Fox Valley Golf Club, Amos Lapp at St. Andrews, George Dahlman was at Cog Hill, Peter Bild at Woodridge, Ed Stewart at River Forest G.C., and his brother Don at Joliet C.C. Also, Walter Fuchs was at Glen Eagles, Bob Breen, Sr. at Fresh Meadows, Bill Kraft at Southmoor (now Palos C.C.), Ed Wollenberg was at Navajo Fields, and Adolph Bertucci at Lake Shore C.C., Don Strand at Westmoreland, Ray Gerber at Glen Oak, Bill Stuppel at Exmoor, Dom Grotti at Sunset Valley, Emil Mashie at Onwentsia, Frank Dinelli at North Shore, and Howard Baerwald at La Grange.

Although I do not think any of the 1954 circa superintendents are still active superintendents, many of the well-known names in 1954 are still well-known names in 1994. Names such as Williams, Benson, Duehr, Pieper, Leith, Lapp, Woehrl, Fuchs, Breen and Dinelli are examples.

Bear in mind that in 1954

- Top dressing was done with shovels

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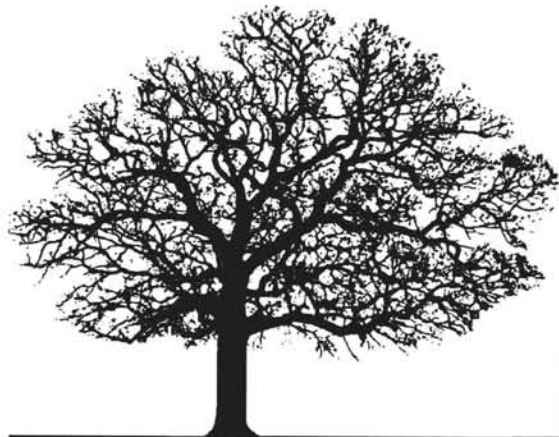


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*"Where Meadow Goes,
the Water Flows"*

(1954 continued)

- A modern irrigation system consisted of snap valves in the center of fairways and sod cups on the greens. Most golf courses used hoses and roller bases.
- Sand traps were raked by hand
- Utility vehicles were non-existent. ("Cushman's" were motor scooters in those days). Golf course workers walked from location to location if a spare tractor was not available.
- Milorganite fertilizer was very popular on golf courses
- Tersan, Semisan, Caddy and Cal-Clor were popular fungicides
- Arsenate of lead was widely used
- West Point drum type aerifiers were used on tees and traffic areas.
- Greens were spiked, drilled or forked by hand. The Greensaire, which later became the Ryan Greensaire was just beginning to be developed
- Collars and tees were often mowed with two-wheel power units called overgreens
- Lapping machines were scarce and hand cranks were common
- Bedknives were shimmed true rather than ground true.

Illinois Lawn Equipment has matured and grown during this forty-year span, and most certainly the turf industry has done the same. The average circa 1954 superintendent would have had trouble envisioning

- Riding triplex mowers on greens
 - Self-contained hydraulically driven fairway mowers
 - Computerized irrigation systems
 - Aerifying on the scale now being practiced
 - Riding trap rakes
 - Top dressing machines
 - Hydraulically driven reels that can be reversed for back lapping
 - Computerized reel grinders
- and many would be shocked by the government's control of fungicides and herbicides, both in terms of availability and use, as well as the O.S.H.A. restrictions that are in effect today. Also, today's green speed and the use of a device called the Stimpmeter (unknown in 1954) would be shocking.

Professionalism, equipment refinement, research, and a lot of hard work have caused remarkable advances during this period of time.

Many thanks to Bob Johnson, Art Benson, Jr., Adolph Bertucci, Paul Voykin, Fred Opperman and Bob Williams for all their assistance in gathering the facts for this article. Might I say on their behalf as well as my own, the information stated in this article is as factual as our memories permit, so please allow for small inaccuracies. I wanted to use a lot of names and I did. I tried not to leave anyone out. I apologize to anyone who should have been mentioned and was not.

I would also like to thank Fred Opperman for the loan of his 1954 **Bull Sheet** file. There was so much information in there that I plan to do another article, entitled "*The 1954 Bull Sheets*". Last, but not least, on behalf of Illinois Lawn Equipment, I would like to express our appreciation to everyone for the loyalty and support that made the last forty years possible.