

Tommy Witt Interview

by Luke Cella, Supt.
Pottawatomie G.C.

Int.: "What was the most difficult acclimation that you had to make in the transition from Texas to Wynstone Golf Club in North Barrington?"

T.W.: "My biggest challenge here at Wynstone was getting the staff on the same page with me and finding what the Wynstone membership wants. Second, let me just say this, even though I have grown bentgrass on greens in the South, going from four acres to forty acres of bentgrass requires a lot of time and attention. This all ties into what I was saying about my staff. If you've got the right staff, you've got people who can help you."



Int.: "How did the relocation affect your family / personal life?"

T.W.: "For myself, I have always been involved in my profession. I'm at the golf course meeting new people every day, so it's not that difficult for me (to adjust). I have met and come to know some really fine Golf Course Superintendents.

It's certainly harder on your family. In fact, my wife and my kids would still rather live in Texas. My wife is from Minnesota and had no desire to move back north. As she said, she had become pretty soft living in the South, in Texas for ten years. It's not as easy for her to meet new people. She has to do all the work of finding new doctors, schools, etc. These changes can be very frustrating.

It's easier for the kids to meet new people through school, but because we moved up here in the summer, school hadn't started yet. It took the kids a little longer to meet other kids. The first two or three months were very hard. Some people says kids are very durable, (that children) can adapt pretty easily. I don't buy that. The most important things in the world to my wife and me are our children. To watch them struggle, to meet new friends, even cry at times, because they miss their old friends, that's not a sign of durability. Yes, they will endure and they will overcome, but as a parent who loves his family tremendously, it's difficult to see. A move for a three, five and seven year old can be fairly traumatic."

Int.: "What do you most enjoy about being a Superintendent?"

T.W.: "I started working on a golf course when I was eleven, and I like the challenges of what I do. There are a lot of professions in which you are never able to look back and see what you've accomplished. This may answer the question better than anything. (Tommy hands me a photo album filled with before and after pictures of projects he has accomplished.) No matter how big or how small (the project), I am able to look back and see progress. Members or golfers will readily forget these changes, but I think the neat things about our profession is that it's challenging and demanding, and we can really see the fruits of what we do."

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(Tommy Witt continued)

Int.: "What do you least enjoy about being a Superintendent?"

T.W.: "I don't know what I least enjoy, but I'm fairly disappointed with the lack of understanding that the American golfing public has of what it takes to provide premiere golfing conditions. I think for what Golf Course Superintendents go through, and the challenges they face, golfers are basically unappreciative and totally misconceived of what goes on a day to day basis."

Int.: "How are you able to balance your career with your family life?"

T.W.: "I work as hard at that as I do my job. First of all, I fully understand that to provide for my family, I have to have this job. Growing grass and all of its challenges are what contribute to my livelihood. I think Golf Course Superintendents put untold amounts of undue pressure on themselves. We beat ourselves to death. (There is a stereotype that) runs throughout our profession: you're not a good Superintendent unless you work seven days a week, fourteen hours a day. Granted there are times when it takes that, but anybody who thinks they have to work seventy to eighty hours a week all year round, well to me, this just means they're overloaded and may not be the best managers. We can't do it all ourselves. We need to hire qualified assistants and staffs."

In leaving Bent Tree Country Club, (the members) are not going to remember me ten years, five years or even one year down the line and say Tommy used to be here day and night. But your family will always remember (where you were). I'm not going to have my kids twenty or thirty years old and look back and say I never had time for them. I do balance my time, (sometimes) not as much as I like, but as much as I possibly can between work and my family. I would rather be known as a good husband and father than a good Golf Course Superintendent. I strive to be both."

Int.: "What are your hobbies?"

T.W.: "Two hobbies right now, whether one is considered a hobby or just plain fitting it in is spending a lot of time with my kids. My other (Tommy leans back in his chair, outstretching both arms, to two bucks that overlook each of his shoulders) passion is hunting white tailed deer. Illinois has some of the biggest deer on the continent, that's one of the reasons I moved up here".

Int.: "Where do you feel the GCSAA is heading, and what suggestions could you give to our members to help them adjust to any changes?"

T.W.: "The focuses of the GCSAA for the next three to five years are promoting our image, keeping the Golf Course Superintendent at the forefront where environmental issues are concerned, and improving Chapter/GCSAA relations. Those are three fairly large challenges. New departments such as career development, information services, and member services, are all geared towards providing every member with the tools they can utilize to help themselves."

Int.: "As a new Superintendent I look at your career and ask what hasn't Tommy Witt done? I know you must have set goals for yourself throughout your career. What goals have you set for yourself in the future?" (continued page 13) 10

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(Tommy Witt continued)

T.W.: "One of my goals as a Golf Course Superintendent, through my service on the board of directors, is to help this profession unite as an industry. I don't know how to say this exactly, but I hope someday we are all on the same page, on the same team. We would be so much better if we stayed committed to continued learning, if we enhanced our image, and if we conducted ourselves in a professional manner. (These) would all lead to better compensation packages, better benefit programs, stronger job securities, and better images. I'd like to see our profession come together, unify, strengthen, grow, and move forward. It could be done."

I would like to own my own golf course someday. For now, I am like everyone else, I try to do the best I can and survive one day at a time."

Int.: "Name one personal hero/mentor and why?"

T.W.: "I'd say my father. Even though he died twenty years ago, he introduced me to the game of golf; he challenged me to one of my first jobs on a golf course. He woke me up at five o'clock every morning and took me to work. He instilled things in me like what family is, and what it meant when I gave my word to someone. He taught me the immeasurable value of those qualities. As I grow older, these are the things that really matter. It may sound a bit corny, but they mean everything to me because I'm trying to live that in the work place and certainly at home. My dad was my biggest supporter and my biggest fan."

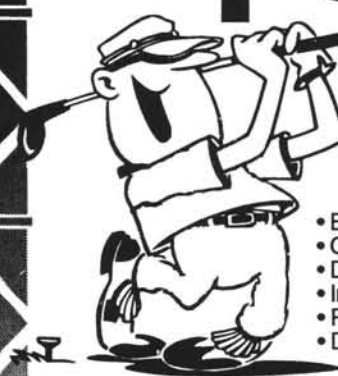


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