

Combined Golf Day at Eagle Ridge Inn & Resort, "The General"

*Randy Kane
Chicago District Golf Association*

For 1998, the Northwest Illinois Golf Course Superintendents are the hosts of the ITF Combined Golf Day, and our site is a familiar one—Eagle Ridge Inn & Resort near Galena. Eagle Ridge has hosted three other Combined days in the last twelve years: 1986, 1989, and 1995. Its North and South courses are the highly regarded works of architects E. L. and Roger Packard, and both courses are perennially ranked among America's 75 Best Resort Courses by *Golf Digest*. For a great escape from Chicagoland, there is no place better than the Eagle Ridge Inn and its fine golf courses and amenities.

Although the North and South courses regularly receive accolades and 4-star rankings, Eagle Ridge has gone itself one better with the creation of a new 18-holer called "The General," in honor of General Ulysses S. Grant, whose post-Civil War home was in Galena. The General is 6,820 yards of thrills and spills, designed by Roger Packard and two-time US Open champion Andy North. The General, which has a course rating from the back tees of 73.8 and a slope of 137, will be the site of the 1999 Illinois State Amateur Championship. The course is meant to be a test of golf, but also fun and challenging for all skill levels. Also noteworthy is that The General was built by Paul Clute and Associates, who were recipients of GCBA's 1995 Builder of the Year award.

If you have been to the Galena Territories, you know there are big, sweeping hills and lots of


Eagle Ridge Inn & Resort

THE GENERAL
AT EAGLE RIDGE



Jim Wyffels, superintendent of "The General."

grand vistas from those hilltops. Packard and North routed The General through some of the most striking and undulating hills and valleys in Illinois. Some holes of The General feature large elevation changes, and the signature 14th hole drops close to 200 feet from tee to green (the fairway looks like a two-lane highway with no shoulders from the back tee!). There are also natural lakes and rock outcroppings that have been incorporated into the design, such as the "quarry wall" behind the 8th green. The General opened just last May but has become a definite "must play" golf course in the Midwest. The view from the picture window at the new clubhouse *alone* is worth the trip.

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Combined Golf Day . . .

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A key player in design, construction, and development of The General was Bob Graunke, CGCS, who is director of grounds for the entire Eagle Ridge Inn & Resort property. Bob has been involved in the golf industry for over 30 years, with the last 25 years or so at Eagle Ridge (the North course opened in 1977). Perhaps only the newest *On Course* readers wouldn't know Bob, or at least know of him; he has been active in Illinois golf associations for many years. For example he has been a board member and president of both the NWIGCSA and Illinois Turfgrass Foundation. In fact, Bob was awarded the ITF Distinguished Service Award in 1993 for all of his contributions and support of education and research activities.

Over the years, as the Eagle Ridge Inn & Resort has expanded in size and scope, the grounds maintenance staff has expanded as well. While Bob Graunke is the majordomo of grounds at Eagle Ridge, there are now three golf course superintendents under his guidance: Lee Rogers is superintendent of the South course, Tim O'Connor is superintendent of the North course, and Jim Wyffels is the superintendent of The General. Lee is immediate past president of the Northwest IGCSA, while Jim is currently treasurer. Since the General is the host course for the Combined Golf Day, we will focus in on Superintendent Jim Wyffels.

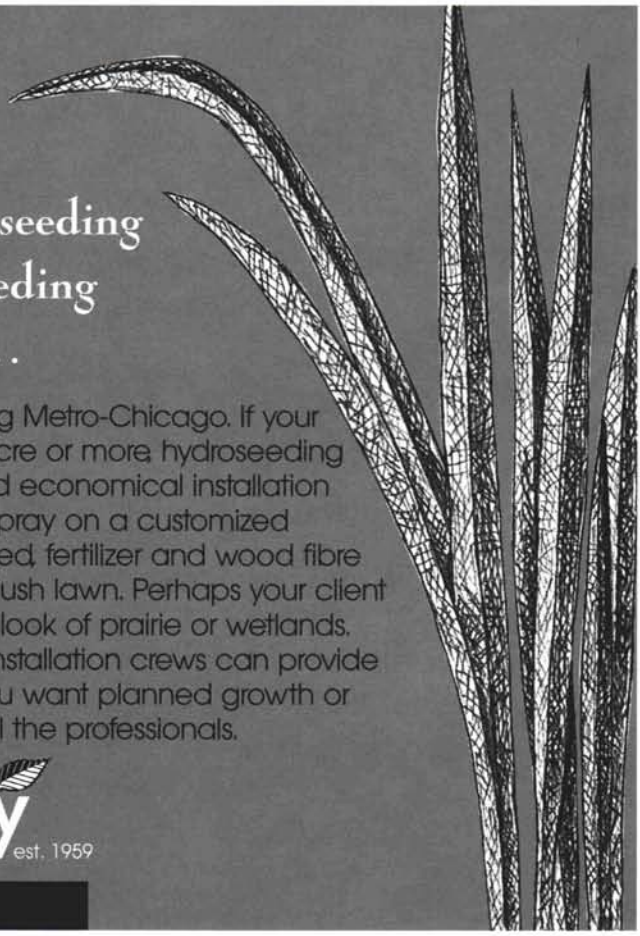
Jim got an early start in the turf business while working with his father on athletic fields in the Quad Cities area. Jim's father, Jim Sr., is a turf/athletic field consultant for C.D. Ford & Sons, which is a wholesaler of lawn and garden products in northwestern Illinois. Jim's early interest in golf took him to Ford Hills G.C. in

Geneseo, where he started working for Superintendent Dennis Peck at the ripe age of twelve. (Note Ford Hills is now called Maple Bluff, and Denny Peck is a co-owner with Bob Graunke.) Jim worked for Denny Peck all through his high school and college years at Ford Hills. Jim attended Black Hawk Junior College in Moline where he received an Associates Degree in Agronomy and where he also played on the golf team. Jim went on to study Turf Management at Illinois State University in Normal, and he is just a few credit hours away from a Bachelor's degree.

Before he could finish at ISU, Jim went to work at Eagle Ridge as a crew leader working under Bob Graunke. He worked his way up to assistant superintendent of the East course in '94 and to acting supervisor of the North and East courses in early '95. By the end of '95, he was spending

more and more time on construction of The General and became the course superintendent for The General in '96.

Jim has been married to wife Krista for three years ("no kids yet, just cats") and has noticed a steady increase in his handicap index since becoming: a) married, and b) involved with the Eagle Ridge project. Also, it is interesting to note that Krista's brother Greg Rounds is a turf student at the University of Illinois and spent last summer as an intern working for Jim on The General. Jim, who turned 27 the end of April, has learned a great deal about growing grass from his father, from Denny Peck and from Bob Graunke. And he is already working on passing along what he has learned to the next "generation" of turf managers. ■



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