

Steve Van Acker -N- Crystal Lake C.C.



Larry Tomaszewski

July's MAGCS meeting will be hosted at a seasoned old country club, Crystal Lake, by a seasoned, experienced professional, Steve Van Acker. This is a meeting members won't want to miss!

Growing up on 140 acres of farmland in Huntley, IL, Steve knew his career and future would involve the land. Steve's love of the outdoors and golf, and his agricultural background, really steered his future in one direction. And 43 years later, with more than 25 years in the golf management business, Steve has truly answered his "calling." He has spent the last nine years as superintendent of Crystal Lake C.C.

A destination course, Crystal Lake C.C. was built in 1922 in a small town called Crystal Lake, the last stop on the train line. The original course was 36 holes and changes/improvements continue to occur, thanks to Steve and his staff.

In contrast to the newer, open courses, Crystal Lake lets its age show on a tight 18-hole layout on 135 acres with lots and lots and LOTS of big old trees. Making the course even more challenging are four lakes, more than 70 bunkers and Steve's signature hole, #18.

Yes, Crystal Lake has a venerable history, but as the old saying goes, "What have you done for me lately?" Steve has been busy with:

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Jason, Mary Kay and Steve Van Acker

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An Overview of Management . . .

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superintendent are as follows: payroll, budget, weather statistics, pest control, water usage, training, fuel and waste disposal, soil/water tests and equipment maintenance.

- Budgeting and purchasing were the two topics that generated the most inquiries. At Club Corp, the club manager sets standards for both the budget and capital improvements based on the input supplied by the golf course superintendent, board of directors (if applicable) and others. The budget is supported by the standards determined by the superintendent, with the approval of the general manager, regional superintendent and regional

vice president. Decisions as to length of season, expected course conditions and staff size must also go through the same channel. In order to get approval for capital improvements, the general manager and superintendents must submit request and justification forms to the vice president. Supporting evidence shall include cost versus benefit, support of the club's objectives, safety or replacement of worn out equipment, etc. As is common among management companies, Club Corp has purchasing agreements with major companies based on the quality of the product, service and cost.

In closing, I hope this article has given you a better understanding as to how Club Corp and

other management companies operate. As for the opportunities, they are endless. 

References:

1. Mr. Bruce R. Williams, CGCS, Los Angeles C.C.

Management company list

2. Mr. Jim Faubion, senior vice president, Club Corp

Survey response

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- all landscaping and beautification around the new clubhouse.
- rebuilding green #17.
- resurfacing greens #2, 3 and 14.

During his nine years, Steve has:

- renovated 70 bunkers and implemented five new greens.
- added three new lakes and 300 trees.

All of the above, in only 70+ hours a week!

Steve and his understanding wife, Mary Kay, have been married for 22 years. Their son, Jason, is a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside. Jason's career direction is still up in the air (maybe a future superintendent). In the off-season, Steve and Mary Kay love to travel to places with lots of sun,

sand, water and of course, golf courses. Steve is a devoted Green Bay Packers fan and loves to bowl. And based on his average (190), he is quite good at it.

Challenges, rewards are numerous

The soft-spoken Steve describes his biggest challenges as:

- keeping Crystal Lake C.C. up to his own personal quality and aesthetic standards;
- ensuring that 235 playing members are privileged and proud to be members of Crystal Lake C.C.;
- and finding enough time in his 70+-hour work week to enjoy his family and other hobbies.

His greatest and ongoing professional and personal rewards are:

- receiving continued support and appreciation from the members for a "job well done";

- knowing that once the long, long season is over, he will have serious time for his family, travel, bowling and watching the Packers beat the Bears;
- and beating Bob Lively and taking his hard-earned money.

As a new member of the MAGCS and coming from a totally different profession and background, I found getting to know Steve to be a real pleasure. Golf course superintendents truly love their work. Every season simply reiterates their commitment and desire to make "their" golf courses the best they can be.

Thank you, Steve, and all superintendents for allowing me to be part of your world. 