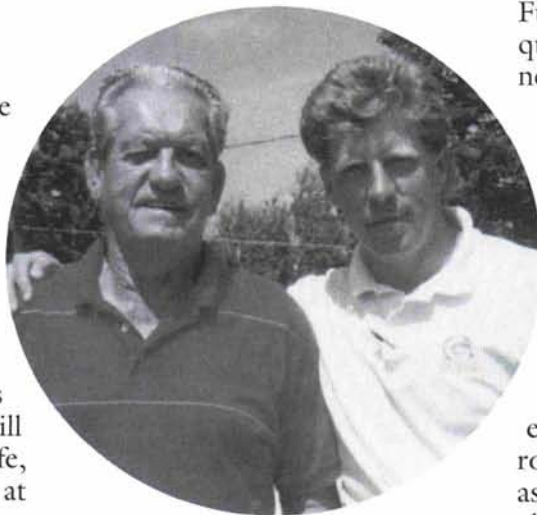


My Friend Walter

Tony Rzadzki, CGCS

For me, it all began one fall afternoon almost 19 years ago. I pulled into the maintenance yard at the Evanston Golf Club, a bit nervous, but full of expectation. For some reason—and I clearly remember this—I took the time to say a prayer. I asked the Lord that “if this job is meant to be, so be it . . . your will be done.” At that time in my life, I was a bit confused, still a kid at the age of 25, and still searching for some path to follow, somewhere to go with my life. Fortunately, destiny was about to answer my call. God heard my prayer and I went in to meet my new friend Walter.



Walter Fuchs
and Tony Rzadzki

It was really quite astonishing, that whole scene so long ago, and really quite marvelous. I tentatively knocked on the maintenance building's creaky metal door. A

loud, boisterous voice yelled, “Come on in, it's open!” As I opened the door, here came Walter Fuchs climbing out of his chair, quickly walking to the door. I'll never forget that gleam in his eye, and that wonderful, warm, genuine smile. I grabbed his hand and he grabbed mine . . . and I had the job. The interview was over just about that quickly. For some reason, it was meant to be.

Walter was looking for a mechanic. I had a little experience, and all of that was with rotary mowers. Walter quickly asked me, “What do you know about reel mowers?” I nervously, but honestly, responded, “Nothing.”

“Good!” Walter brusquely replied. “I'll teach you my way! Do you know how to grind reels or sharpen bedknives?”

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My Friend Walter

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"No, I've never really seen any of that equipment," I sheepishly replied.

"Fine," Walter responded. "The last John Doe we had here nearly broke my grinding stone. When can you start?"

"Maybe in a couple days," I said. I couldn't believe it! I was getting this job!

"Good, I'll see you on Wednesday. Be here at 6 a.m." Walter shook my hand again in that big vise grip of his. I responded in kind, like my father taught me. You know, at times I've wondered if that handshake (the first one) really won Walter over. In any event, one week later I had made up my mind. I was so impressed with Walter and this type of work, I decided that I was going to become a golf course

greenkeeper. At that time I had no idea that I would be the last one of a special breed.

Walter left a wonderful legacy behind. He knew that rewards come to those who are true to their word, honest in their abilities and trustworthy of their God. His fine family is a reflection of the character that Walter lived everyday.

I worked with Walter for four-and-a-half years. One of the things that really impressed me was his

constant zeal, especially since he was in his mid-60s! Walter was never ashamed to grab a shovel, jump on a mower or go spray some more Daconil. After a year or two, I got a handle on the maintenance equipment, and I asked Walter if I could join the crew once my morning maintenance "chores" were done. He quickly took me under his wing and there I was, toe-to-toe with him in the ditches putting in drain tile, downing trees, sodding greens and spraying more Daconil.

After Walt retired, I continued down the career path I had embarked on. Walter had poured a strong foundation for me, helping develop my character. And even though Walt was far away in Florida, I knew that with a phone call I could hear his booming, confident voice once again. Walt traveled north every summer to make the rounds in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin. He and wife Wilhelmina

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On Course With The President

(continued from page 2)

While the search continues, assistants are forced to live on wages that are often one-third or even one-fourth of the compensation of their facilities' superintendents. It is not surprising that an assistant would take a superintendent's position for one-half the compensation of the previous superintendent because this still represents a huge increase in pay for that assistant. More important, it gives that assistant the opportunity to prove himself in his ultimate career goal.

I would never suggest that golf course superintendents should make less money to close the gap. I still believe that superintendents on average are underpaid. However, it may be time for individuals and associations to begin an education program for employers on the importance of the assistant's position and the rationale for increasing assistants' wages or offering them more benefits, such as expenses to go to the national conference. The same can be said for the mechanic's and foreman's positions. We must be willing to assist those who assist us. These people are critical to our success and they deserve our respect, appreciation and support. If we do not demonstrate the proper appreciation, our assistants could ultimately be the swords that sever us from our highly sought after positions. 

My Friend Walter


(continued from page 24)

always took the time to stop and visit me. After my father passed away in 1986, no one else in this world could come close to filling my dad's shoes, except Walter. I believe that during these latter years of Walt's life, his influence over me was more formative than during the few short years that we worked together. You see, under Walter's gruff demeanor and leathered skin was a soft heart of gold. As Walter (and I) grew older, I began to realize how deeply he trusted in God. One of his most-used phrases, "the good Lord willing," really began to sink in.

Walter left a wonderful legacy behind. He knew that rewards come to those who are true to their word, honest in their abilities and trustworthy of their God. His fine family is a reflection of the character that Walter lived everyday.

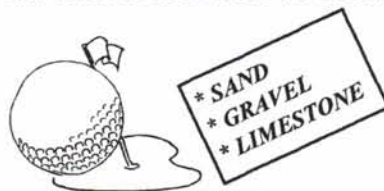
Walter taught me courage and confidence. The ability to accept any challenge (a trait that later in

my life I would need desperately) developed within me for a reason. The reason being: I am the last one—the last greenkeeper Walter trained. In God's wonderful, providential plan, that handshake 19 years ago led me down a path that I am deeply thankful for. All because one man cared enough to take me under his wing and teach me the values necessary for success in life. What a grand distinction!

Walter affected and influenced countless lives all across this country. I may have been the last one, but I am proud to be part of the expansive list of great greenkeepers, long-time friends, and warm and loving family members for whom Walter cared so much. I hope that you, like me, will always remember that marvelous, genuine smile, and the warm, sparkling spirit Walter embodied his entire life. Here was a man to be truly proud of—a man that I was blessed to call my friend. 

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