

Pat McDonagh



The McDonagh family (L to R): Nannette, Madison (4), Pat and Breanne (6).



Let me paint you a picture! A beautiful, sunny day! Village of Lakewood, IL! RedTail Golf Club (host of the Midwest's July meeting)!

Being an avid golfer (at a young age), Pat spent a lot of free time on golf courses. The opportunity to have a career where he could manage the ongoing maintenance and care of a golf course seemed extremely inviting.

This is the best perk for taking on the responsibility and time of writing a Super-N-Site article for *On Course*: spending an afternoon with the superintendent while playing a round of golf. This affords a great opportunity to discuss the superintendent's career, golf course and future aspirations—and to see the golf course up close and personal. My day with RedTail Golf Club's superintendent, Pat McDonagh, was most enjoyable.

As is the case with most superintendents, Pat had extensive exposure to golf courses before making the decision to make this his career. Being an avid golfer (at a young age), Pat spent a lot of free time on golf courses. The opportunity to have a career where he could manage the ongoing maintenance and care of a golf course seemed extremely inviting.

As is the case with many careers, however, the path to fulfillment took a bit of a detour. Pat graduated from Northern Illinois University with a B.S. in elementary education. Upon graduation, it was off to the classroom. All the while, the question still lingered. Do I want to be a teacher? Yes, no, yes, no, no, no . . . and years later, Pat has never looked back.

After spending numerous college summers working at Country Lakes in Naperville and one year of tutelage at Oak Brook Golf Club under the guidance of superintendent Scott Nissley, Pat set out on his

(continued on page 36)

own with his lovely wife, Nannette.

First stop, Pine Hollow Country Club, Long Island, NY. Pat was hired as assistant superintendent: a great five-year experience to learn the trade and see a lot of major league baseball games. (Pat is an avid baseball fan.) On to Lake Naomi-Timber Trails Club—for an opportunity to be “the man,” golf course superintendent, at a resort course in the Poconos. Lake Naomi-Timber Trails Club was a tremendous two-year experience, but something was missing. Yes, you can take the man out of the Midwest but you cannot take the Midwest out of the man. It was time to go home: family, White Sox, Bears, Naperville and Red-Tail Golf Club. Pat accepted a golf course superintendent position at RedTail Golf Club and has been in this position the last three years.

Pat commented throughout our afternoon that each year, he can see continued improvements in RedTail Golf Club—a very, very good feeling! And he knows

Pat, who is a member in good standing of the MAGCS and GCSAA, enumerates many challenges with his job, from teaching golfers to better respect the golf course to accomplishing goals within a lengthened, everlasting season . . .

best how the course has changed from three years ago to today.

Designed by Roger Packard in 1987, RedTail Golf Club was originally intended to be an extension of a private club, Turnberry: an additional 18 holes for Turnberry’s membership.

Financial difficulties befell the project, and the golf course was sold off to the Village of Lakewood. RedTail opened in 1991. In 1997, the Village of Lakewood agreed to a management contract with the Meadowbrook Golf Group. Both parties mutually agreed that RedTail Golf Club not only could be profitable, but also could provide the village residents a valuable asset.

During my spring visit, Pat pointed out some of the unique topographical and golf course features:

- three ponds that come into play on six holes;
- extremely (and I mean extremely) large bunkers throughout the golf course—a total of 80;
- 65 acres of wetlands;
- two island greens;
- open layout and large tee boxes on 225 acres, which means wind often adds to the challenge (Pat has no control over this!);
- Pat’s signature hole, par-4 #15; and
- Village of Lakewood landmark, the 100-year-old Big Red Barn (a.k.a. Pat’s maintenance building).

Pat is very proud of the continued improvements to the golf course, which include:

- cart paths throughout the golf course;
- ongoing renovation/rebuilding of bunkers;
- completion of drainage projects;

- erosion control and steel reinforcements around the island greens;
- prairie restoration;
- tree planting (20 to 40 trees per year); and
- (with fingers crossed) a new clubhouse and maintenance building in the future.

Pat, who is a member in good standing of the MAGCS and GCSAA, enumerates many challenges with his job, from teaching golfers to better respect the golf course to accomplishing goals within a lengthened, everlasting season, from delivering so much with so little time to always, always trying to spend quality time with his wife and two beautiful daughters Breanne (6) and Madison (4).

When I talk with superintendents, I always ask, “Why?!” Twelve- to 16-hour days, six or seven days a week, on call all the time, budget constraints, staffing problems, limited family time, etc., etc. The answer is generally the same among most superintendents, and Pat’s response is no different.

“I love to be outdoors. I truly take pride in nurturing and improving a piece of land that is near and dear to the residents of the Village of Lakewood. I find deep fulfillment in the preparation, development and upkeep of something the general public can enjoy. I love the game of golf and thoroughly enjoy the time spent with my associates. I love to take my two little girls around the golf course and spend quality time with them.”

And after spending an afternoon with Pat, I learned the good far, far outweighs the bad. Pat, thanks for an enjoyable afternoon at RedTail Golf Club. I look forward to the July meeting.

