

A Diamond in the Rough



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This was a monumental year for the Chicago District Golf Association, with the opening of Midwest Golf House.

It's also a milestone moment for the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents (MAGCS), one of the first allied associations to join the CDGA's venture. The MAGCS is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year.

Incorporated on Christmas Eve, 1926, the MAGCS—originally founded as the Midwest Greenkeeper's Association—saved its formal celebration for its annual fall dinner-dance, held October 20 at MAGCS President Brian Bossert's home course, Bryn Mawr Country Club.

In the meantime, the MAGCS had commissioned a 75th Anniversary Committee, chaired by President Emeritus Don Ferreri of Seven Bridges, and has been featuring the association's rich history in its monthly magazine, *On Course*. A regular column, "The Way We Were,"

debuted in January; the April through November issues of *On Course* each spotlighted a decade in MAGCS history.

Indeed, this group's history is most worth telling. Superintendents have typically been the most forgotten people in the golf business, but the game couldn't survive without them.



The first 60 greenkeepers—a group that included one woman—gather at the Sylvania Country Club in Toledo, Ohio to found what today is the GCSAA.

Given the 18th-century origins of the game of golf, it's hardly surprising that golf course superintendents existed long before the formation of the MAGCS. They just weren't called superintendents then. In fact, these pioneers did just about everything entailed in the opera-

tion of a golf facility, and it wasn't easy. They endured the hardships of long, irregular working hours and their "offices"—even as late as the 1960s—were unheated barns without plumbing facilities. Pails of sand served as bathrooms.

Now, of course, all that has changed. Most clubs operate with a management triumvirate—a club manager, a golf professional and a course superintendent. Of those three, the superintendent is in many cases the best educated. It's time to give these professionals their due.

The Advent of the Pro-Greenkeeper

The superintendent's evolution is inseparable from golf's evolution. As the 19th century gave way to the 20th, most courses had square-shaped greens and were mowed with hand-pushed mowers. Horse manure was the fertilizer du jour. The early courses didn't have much mounding, as they were built with teams of horses or mules. Greens were mowed to 5/16", a far cry

from the 2/16" used most frequently today. Most courses had fescue grass in the fairways because it required little maintenance and no irrigation. In those distant days, all the work was done by hand; clubs retained a staff of four or five men to handle it. Now, of course, courses employ several times that number and maintenance rosters include specialized technicians to handle mechanical repairs, irrigation operations, chemical applications, floriculture, landscape maintenance and administration.

In the early years of Chicago golf, from 1895 until about 1912, course maintenance was handled by the golf professional. These early hybrids were called pro-greenkeepers, and most were from Scotland. Most noteworthy of this bunch was Jim Foulis of Wheaton's Chicago Golf Club, America's first 18-hole course. He wasn't just a pro-greenkeeper, though. He was

also the U.S. Open champion, at least in 1896 when he won that title at Shinnecock Hills in New York. Foulis' brother Dave served in a similar capacity at Onwentsia in Lake Forest. Bruce Herd, who held the dual role at Flossmoor, was the early leader of the pro-greenkeepers on Chicago's South Side.



*Our founding father
John MacGregor.*

The evolution from pro-greenkeeper to superintendent is an intriguing one. As golf spread throughout Chicago, the green-keeping duties slipped out from under the golf professional's

umbrella. Those who wanted to build courses bought land from farmers, and many farmers became greenkeepers. Their ranks swelled with the arrival of "green-a-keepers"—men of Italian descent who had exceptional "green thumbs," if not the most impressive formal education. Many had been victimized by coal mine disasters in central Illinois and wanted to change professions.

A Family Business

The term "superintendent" emerged in the 1940s. Whatever the name—greenkeeper or superintendent—the profession became, and has remained, a family business. That's especially true in Chicago. Witness these family ties, as provided by Bob Williams, longtime superintendent at Highland Park's Bob O' Link C.C.: Bill Stupple was the early greenkeeper at Exmoor in Highland Park, and his brothers Bob and Alex were pros.

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Gerald Dearie was the superintendent at Edgewater and Medinah, and his brother Eddie held the same job at Oak Park. Later, Gerald's son, also named Gerald, would become Medinah's superintendent. The second Gerald was stung by a wasp on the course shortly after taking the job and died a tragic death at age 27. Frank Dinelli was the superintendent at Northmoor, and his son Joe and grandson Dan worked at North Shore. Joe and Elmer Bertucci began at Exmoor, then moved on. Joe took on Knollwood and brother Elmer was at Old Elm. Their sons Adolph (Lake Shore) and Alfred (Old Elm) also became superintendents. Herman Woehrle worked at Ravisloe and Kankakee and son Ted was at Beverly and Lakeshore. And, of course, Bob and Bruce Williams, who lay claim to the distinction of being the only father-son team to serve as president of the MAGCS and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA). Bruce is now at Los Angeles Country Club.

The elder Williams can recount other family names prominent on the Chicago scene—Stewart, Stand, Saielli, Lapp, Coghill, Gee, Coutre, Gerber, Benson, Kronn, Fuchs, Gruening, Hopphan, Krueger, Meyer, Michael, Mastrole, Miles, Reed, Didier, Breen, Braunsky and Voykin. These names probably resonate with many members of the CDGA.

While the money may not have been great in the early days, job security often was. Glen View Club, for instance, has had a short list of greenkeepers since its incorporation as one of Chicago's first golf courses in 1897. The list includes John H. Duncan, Ed Haupt, Henry Lange, Bruce Sering and, now, Jeff Leuzinger.

Birth of the Mid-West Greenkeeper's Association

The first greenkeepers in these parts were very competitive, adverse to sharing information. That started to change in the 1920s, especially after the founding of the MAGCS. The movement to share knowledge for the common good began with John Morley, a greenkeeper from Youngstown, Ohio. He formed the National Association of Greenkeepers (now known as GCSAA) with the help of John MacGregor of Chicago Golf Club. MacGregor was one of the national group's directors when it originated a few months ahead of the MAGCS on September 26, 1926.

At Morley's behest, MacGregor started the Chicago chapter by writing to 500 greenkeepers in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa and Wisconsin. The first meeting took place November 26, 1926, at the Great Northern Hotel in Chicago with 16 attending. Thirteen were from Illinois, and they soon formed the MAGCS with MacGregor the first president, Alex Binnie of Shoreacres as vice president and

Eddie Dearie of Ridgemoor and Shoreacres as secretary.

In March 1927, the Mid-West Greenkeeper's Association, forerunner of MAGCS, hosted its first national convention and in 1933, MacGregor became its first member to head the national body. He was followed by Ray Gerber (Glen Oak) in 1950 and a string of other MAGCS members who also went on to GCSAA presidency, among them the Williams duo, Roy Nelson of Ravisloe, Ted Woehrle of Beverly, Mike Bavier of Inverness, James Brandt of Danville and William Roberts of Knollwood.

Personalities and Innovations

The MAGCS, in fact, has nurtured personality and innovation throughout its illustrious history. Personality and innovation often go hand in hand, as with Bob Williams, who introduced "technical education" to the Chicago greenkeepers. He first worked on a course at the age of 12, at Bellaire Golf Club in Wauconda. It was a course his father started as part of a housing project. The course didn't survive, but Williams worked in the profession until his retirement from Bob O' Link in 1979. Eleven years later, he was the first superintendent elected to the Illinois Golf Hall of Fame. This October, Ray Gerber became the second.



Family ties abound in this industry. Here, the Dinellis (L to R): Dan, Joe, Frank and Jerry.



More family ties: past presidents of MAGCS and GCSAA, the only father-son duo to hold both offices, Bruce (L) and Bob Williams in 1988.

Williams wasn't the only superintendent with innovative ideas. In the early 1930s, Fred Krueger of Olympia Fields made a movie of his techniques with Gerber as commentator. The short-lived Mill Road Farm course in Lake Forest was the U.S. Golf Association's first involvement in turfgrass matters. Dr. John Monteith maintained an experimental turfgrass garden there in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

Once the national and Midwest organizations were formed, the profession made rapid changes. Tight economic times provoked implementation of some unusual measures. Some courses used sheep instead of mowers to cut grass during World War II; snow fences surrounding greens were to prevent the sheep from grazing there, too. Golfers still had to watch where they stepped in the fairways and rough, however.


Practices became more sophisticated after those trying times. Automatic irrigation systems came first to private clubs, then—in the mid-1960s—to public layouts such as McHenry,



Dudley Smith, president of Midwest Regional Turf Foundation, 1973.

Deerpath and Sunset Valley. Computerization entered the business, too. About the only thing that hasn't changed is cup-cutting. The same tools used for that pur-

pose in golf's early days are still used now.

Superintendents, collectively and individually, are never content to rest on their laurels. Consider the success of the MAGCS; the group numbers more than 800 strong with representatives from over 250 courses and a like number of commercial enterprises in the Chicago area. Rather than merely toast its diamond jubilee, however, the MAGCS is looking ahead to the next 75 years, too. It has established a Long-Range Planning Committee, consisting of Fred Behnke (Mount Prospect G.C.), Mike Bavier (Inverness C.C.), Brian Bossert (Bryn Mawr C.C.), Jan Jarvis and Tony Kalina (Prairie Landing). Working under mandate by the Board of Directors, this group will lead the way in determining where this most dedicated group of individuals goes from here. 

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