



Take Me to the River

It was great to have a sold-out event at the opening golf meeting in April. Thanks to Dan Albaugh and his staff at Ruffled Feathers for providing everyone in attendance with a very nice day! Our future meetings were a challenge to schedule. Thank you to the clubs that stepped up and volunteered; we look forward to seeing everybody in Michigan, Illinois and Indiana over the summer. We truly are a "Midwest" Association of Golf Course Superintendents!

I've got to pass along one of the coolest family experiences I can ever recall. Running (jogging to people who don't do it very quickly) is very ingrained with my wife's family . . . in late April, eight members of the Brackenbury family (no ringers allowed) toed the line for an 80-mile relay race in southern Illinois.

For those of you who have not heard; the Midwest Golf House in Lemont opened during the middle of April. I was glad to see a few members drop by before the Ruffled Feathers meeting to see the new quarters. Our Association is fortunate to be one of the organizations allied with the CDGA that can call this building home (well, sort of). I have been asked enough questions to realize that a few items should be clarified. At this point, we will not be moving our Association's operations to the Midwest Golf House. Currently, George Minnis, our executive secretary, does an outstanding job from his home office and our Board hopes George will continue to serve our Association for many years. However, this new venue will host many of our Board and committee meetings and perhaps a monthly meeting next winter. The Golf House features a beautiful, state-of-the-art auditorium that seats 100. This venue will also house a library where we can display memorabilia from our 75-year past and recognize the efforts of the superintendent in a place that is truly a home to the game of golf.

Perhaps the most exciting and valuable aspect of our involvement is the future research that will be conducted at the Midwest Golf House. Dr. Randy Kane is set up with a new lab and greenhouse. The new three-hole golf course that is to be seeded in the fall, perhaps opening next summer, will include plenty of experimental plots. The CDGA has been kind enough to furnish our office with cutting-edge computer equipment and new office furniture. Our nominal lease is less than a small storage space rental and does not go into effect until we "move in" to some extent. The earliest I can foresee something like that taking place would be the upcoming winter, and perhaps the move isn't justified for a few years. The Board continues to weigh this decision and we will keep you posted.

While this would actually be a good juncture to close this month's message, if I did end here then the headline wouldn't make a great deal of sense. So . . . I've got to pass along one of the coolest family experi-

(continued on page 38)

ences I can ever recall. Running (jogging to people who don't do it very quickly) is very ingrained with my wife's family. Some six years ago, while I was returning from a winter golf trip to Florida, I got into a heavy conversation about running with the man next to me on the plane. This guy was absolutely obsessed and it turns out he was returning from Orlando and the Walt Disney World marathon. His two sons ran the race, but he had to bow out a few days prior for health reasons. Well, by the end of the flight the man's wife had started to chime in, started telling me about her daughter (I could see it coming) and actually handed over her daughter's phone number to me (it wasn't my idea). Well, their daughter is now my wife and the

wonderful mother of little Bailey, and running continues to be a healthy way to bind our family together.

In late April, eight members of the Brackenbury family (no ringers allowed) toed the line for an 80-mile relay race in southern Illinois. We started on the banks of the mighty Mississippi and plodded east, ending up at the Ohio River. Hence, the race is called the "River to River," and it was an awesome day. This was strictly a family event for us and we were not racing the clock or anyone else. Actually, we were secretly racing the sun and hoping to finish before the course officially closed at 8 p.m. Our finishing time of 12 hours, 3 minutes ducked us under the deadline by 40+ minutes.

I should point out that no one on the team (named "Team Tommy" after my father-in-law, who, by the way, has got a knuckle sandwich for our contributing editor and his wooden leg comment a few months ago) was in the best running shape of their life. Everyone on the team is a dedicated parent and on most days, there just isn't time for running. In fact, my sister-in-law Darlene (Dar) did some of her training going back and forth on their very long lane while her children played in the yard. For different reasons, the best being, "I thought I was pregnant," she and my wife didn't run at all for three weeks prior to the race.

Race day started with our team van rolling out 15 minutes late at 5:45 a.m. No family of eight should ever expect to leave on time. The van was packed with coolers of water, Gatorade, Power Bars, fresh fruit and not-so-runner-friendly items such as pretzels, peanut butter and jelly, soda, Cheetos, Snickers and a couple of Keystone beers (brother Ronnie

would be the first runner finished and he wasn't driving). We had lettering on the van, letting the other teams know who we were and that we were competing in the "Happy Family Division." The van really only seats seven comfortably, so the early morning rise and the cramped seating had a few of us exchanging frowns, but we were looking pretty sweet in our matching "Team Tommy" t-shirts that Dar worked on until the wee hours the night before. She and Ronnie were graciously hosting 15 for the weekend and it should also not go unmentioned that my mother-in-law Nola, sister-in-law Karen and her friend Bonnie shouldered the biggest responsibility by caring for the four toddlers on race day.

The race itself was very hilly and the weather warm and windy; fortunately, the sun stayed behind the clouds most of the day. To a person, everyone ran great and gave it their all. My wife had not run more than four miles in a day since 1999, so I was pretty proud of her 10.7-mile effort. I got to know what it was like to run at a world-class pace, as my last half-mile was directly down a steep hill and was done at a 4:16-mile pace. The only "Unhappy Family" moment occurred when brother Timmy wasn't ready to grab the baton in his first exchange. He was back at the van pinning on his race number. It didn't take more than 20 minutes before we all loved him again, but there is something disconcerting about watching your team stand still for 90 seconds during a running race (Timmy swears it was only 30 seconds).

There was some time for conversation (we each ran 2.5 – 4 miles three times) between our running stints. My wife's family is a little spread out, so it was nice to catch up. The countryside down

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there was beautiful—a peaceful break from the urban landscape. There were also moments of concern; brother-in-law Doug sure turned a nasty shade of red during his runs. There were also plenty of individual prayers being said and opportunities to support one another. Someone was always waiting for you with a cold bottle of water and a pat on the back when you finished running.

We finished first in the “Happy Family Division” and plan to defend our title next year. The problem there is twofold: I am not sure some of our runners will be game (I know my wife hopes she is pregnant) or willing

to come from four different states to participate (and what are the chances only one team will be in the “Happy Family Division” again?). We relished the county fair-type atmosphere and a cook-out at the finish line where we celebrated our victory on a picnic table with a feast of brats and burgers, corn-on-the-cob and chicken burritos.

The ride home was very quiet and the van was looking pretty “lived in.” Fatigue and a full belly had won us over. We arrived at Ronnie and Dar’s some 16 hours after leaving and everyone was pretty whipped. Fortunately, cousin Mike had the

presence to call for a group prayer in the van before we opened the doors and headed off to the nearest bed. I get a lump thinking about it. It was the highlight of the day, put the whole event in perspective and was the reminder that it is through God, that all these wonderful things come to pass. I was struck with an overwhelming feeling of peace and gratitude; knowing that I had participated in a very special occasion on that particular day. As simple as that seems, I don’t get to feel that way too often. It’s only fitting that prayer and family would be such a large part of a day like that.



On the banks of the Ohio River, Brian and wife Bailey are joined by the rest of the Brackenbury family relay team.