

# Oscar Miles -N-



Oscar Miles.



*Oscar Miles, superintendent of the Merit Club, has more experience than I have room for in my small article. I will try my best to display the side of "O" that I had the pleasure of experiencing during our rainy-day phone interview.*

*The 325-acre Merit Club was well-planned, constructed without cutting any corners. Oscar had significant input into the course's design and infrastructure, bringing 30 years' accumulated knowledge and experience to bear on the project.*

While Joel Purpur was busy building the Ark, Oscar and I conversed as the Merit Club shrugged off 2" of rain and had little concern for the radar, which gave every indication we were in for an entire day's worth of soaking. "We needed it," Oscar stated calmly, while Joel was furiously herding pairs of two inside the partially completed structure. Yes, the Merit Club is a superintendent's dream, capable of handling 8" of rain in a 24-hour period.

Mr. Miles was born on November 28, 1939, in Quincy, Illinois. He was number eight of 10 children; they named him Oscar after his father. Those 10 children kept the Miles parents on their toes; Oscar's father lived to be 87 while his mother racked up 97 self-sufficient years. Three of the ten Miles children became superintendents. Oliver Miles was in charge of seven golf courses as the superintendent of the Cook County Forest Preserve courses. Oliver also taught one of the area's first turf courses at a local college. Many superintendents in the area have had Oliver as an instructor. One of Oscar's younger brothers, Timothy J. Miles, is the president of GolfVisions and the father of our cherished editor, Cathy Miles Ralston. Oscar's son Brent is assistant superintendent at Heather Ridge.

Quincy was not always the Mecca of recreation it is today. When Oscar was younger, he would drive his 1957 Ford with the sky top on the cruise from Dettler's Dairy to Maid Rite to A & W. From there, it was down to Sambo's; when the Sambo's went cold, he would continue the cruise path, which returned to the Maid Rite. The guys would pursue showing off their cars, looking for company, from dark to eleven o'clock or so, hanging out on the front bumper showing off their sound systems. Finding a girl to take to the local passion pit was the goal of this cruise. Some nights were better than others in Quincy, Illinois.

Oscar's days of cruising Quincy and picking up girls ended with the happenstance of meeting Mardelle. Oscar met Mardelle at Cedar Crest C.C. in

*(continued on page 10)*



1962 while he was superintendent at Quincy Country Club. Mardelle had been at Cedar Crest for a function; the details are sketchy, however, Oscar asked Mardelle to dance and the romance was kicked in gear to the "twist." They were wed on January 19, 1963, while Oscar was on active duty with the Army Reserve. Next year will be their 40-year anniversary. Oscar and Mardelle have three children: Brent, the youngest; Judy, who has two children; and Sue, who also has two children. This year, Oscar will join the great-grandparent ranks as his granddaughter, Jessica, is expecting a child in November.

Oscar left Quincy after working at Westview Golf Course. Oscar was urged by pro-superintendent Scottie Glasgow and Dr. Fred Grau to go to Penn State University to acquire a formal education. In 1961, Oscar graduated Penn State and left to intern under Robert M. Williams at Bob O'Link. With a PSU Turf Management certificate in hand, he went back to Quincy and took over Quincy Country Club. He was now superintendent of a club he had only been to once, in 1955, to see Sam Snead and Dutch Harrison give an exhibition. Oscar was so intimidated by the country club of Quincy that he wouldn't even park his car, a 1949 Nash, in the parking lot. He left Quincy C.C. in 1964 and, at the ripe age of 24 years old, he was the



*Pictured at the July 2001 wedding of Oscar's granddaughter Jessica are, back row (L to R), Oscar, son Brent and son-in-law Terry; front row (L to R), wife Mardelle, granddaughters Annie, Nicole and Jessica, Jessica's husband Oliver, daughter Sue, grandson Jamie and daughter Judy.*

youngest "fish" in the Chicago "big pond" of upper-tier superintendents when he took over the helm of Olympia Fields. Warren Bidwell was the outgoing superintendent and Warren left some big shoes to fill for young Oscar.

Oscar left Olympia Fields in 1975 after he made a stunning "leisure suit" impression at Broadmoor Country Club. Times were different then, and Oscar doesn't necessarily think that wearing a green

jacket and checkered pants to an interview would fly today, but it worked then, and off to Indianapolis he went. Broadmoor was where Oscar claims he really learned how to grow grass. He was more mature, relaxed and respected. He was treated well by the members, who included him in every event except the club championship. That would make sense as he was proud of a 3 handicap. One member gave "O" a bit of advice, saying, "You would be a big winner in money games if you were a 7 handicap." Oscar took his advice and stopped killing himself in a quest to be a scratch player; rather, he enjoyed his abilities as a good player. One day, a member made Oscar a proposition, "We don't want to see you lose any money in our games, so . . . I will cover your bets, and you give me 20% of your winnings." That took a lot of pressure off "O" and after that, Oscar usually came out a big winner with a wad of cash to prove it.

It was the summer of 1979 and through the tragedy of C-15 decline, Oscar was back in Chicago as superintendent of Butler National. His first Western Open at Butler loomed only 10 months away. But Oscar had prepared for two previous Westerns, at Olympia Fields in 1968



*Volunteers Ken Schar and Roy Wellman manage 20 bluebird nesting boxes on the golf course.*

Photos by Jim Trzinski.





*According to Oscar, this view of no. 7 from no. 13 tee reflects every natural feature of the Merit Club, from the water and wetlands, to the prairie with its vivid wildflowers, to the oak savanna. Clubhouse engineer Judd Hansen took this spectacular shot in October 2001.*

and 1971. During his tenure at BNGC, he added another nine Western Opens to his tally. After a decade at Butler, happy, content and proud, Oscar soon learned that Merit Club president Ed Oldfield, Sr., had other plans for him. You see, Oldfield was working with Bert Getz to develop a jewel of a golf course in the far north suburbs.

The property in question was owned by Mr. Getz and had a long history as a steer-breeding farm. There, Mr. Getz raised prize black Angus bulls for breeding. People would come from all around and bring their cows to be bred at what is now the Merit Club. They would even bring the pregnant cows back to give birth, for the farm had a small veterinary clinic on property.

The Merit Club was to be the collaboration of Oldfield, architect Bob Lohmann and land planner John Zandere. The 325-acre golf course would be well-planned, constructed without cutting any corners. With some persuasion, Oscar was on board,  
*(continued on page 12)*

## BUG OFF! NO INSECTS ALLOWED



Scotts fertilizer plus Merit® delivers superior control of a variety of turf and ornamental insects, such as white grubs, with the ease and effectiveness of granular application.

*Arthur Clesen & The Scotts Company, a winning combination*



**ARTHUR CLESEN, INC.**

Wheeling, IL • 543 Diens Dr. • Wheeling, IL 60090  
Phone: (847) 537-2177 • Fax (847) 537-2210

Tinley Park, IL • 8050 W. 186th St. • Tinley Park, IL 60477  
Phone: (708) 444-2177 • Fax: (708) 444-2199

— [www.aclesen.com](http://www.aclesen.com) —



**The Scotts Company**



and he had significant input into the course's design and infrastructure, bringing 30 years' accumulated knowledge and experience to bear on the project.

In May of 1990, construction began. Oscar and staff would transform the steer farm into one of the area's finest clubs. Today, the Merit Club comprises 21 holes of golf, 18 regular holes and three practice holes. These holes are nestled among 15 acres of water, 35 acres of wetlands, 75 acres of prairie and 20 acres of oak savanna running over 180 acres of meadows. The course has an elevation change of 100 feet, and 75% of the property can be seen from the thirteenth hole.

The property was originally designed to handle a 25-year flood but since has been revised to accommodate a 100-year flood. The discharge of the course is extremely minimal so as not to impact the Des Plaines River or any of the club's neighbors. Oscar and staff work very closely with the CorLands Group, with whom they maintain a conservation easement. Every three months, the Merit Club undergoes an inspection to ensure harmony with the wetlands and their appropriate management. The Merit Club will always remain open space, as it is part of the Liberty Prairie Conservancy.

Oscar is served by his assistant John Nelson, his second assistant, Enrique Valadez, and his other second assistant and mechanic, Joel Guadamma. Oscar is proud of all



Photos by Jim Trzinski.

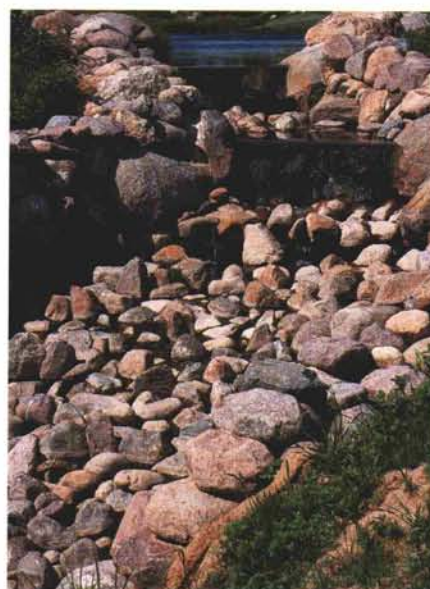
Front row: equipment technician Joel Guadamma; assistant superintendents Enrique Valadez and John T Nelson; intern Zachary Anderson, SIU grad now at U of I for Master's. Back row: interns Scott Verdun, SIU grad, and Jeremy Stull, SIU senior.

the young men who have worked for him over the years. He claims in excess of 60 current superintendents who once worked for him. He is a 12 handicap nowadays, and he chips and putts everyday. He recently hosted the 2000 U.S. Women's Open, which was a huge success. He enjoys surrounding himself with youthful individuals with whom he can share his experience as a means to keep himself sharp.

Oscar looks forward to seeing you at the Merit Club for what should be a tremendous day of golf and your opportunity to see and enjoy one of the top-200 modern-day golf courses.



After work at the Merit Club.



Merit Club staff is rebuilding water features. Pictured is hole no. 3.