

The Grass Is Always Greener . . . At The Golf Course

A Superintendent's Wife and "Designated Mower" Tells All

Editor's Note: Susan Jennings is married to Jon Jennings, CGCS, superintendent at Chicago Golf Club in Wheaton.

I grew up on a dairy farm in upstate New York. We had a lot of cows and a lot of grass: fields and fields of grass. You could roll in it, run in it, dig trenches, make mudslides and generally make a mess. Our actual lawn was only about three acres flanked by barns and then all those hay fields. We pretty much ignored our lawn except when Dad stated that it would be mowed. I became the DM (designated mower) at age 11. Little did I know that this would become a very important skill when I became a married person.



Susan Jennings and her top-of-the-line, self-propelled Honda Harmony 21-inch mulching rotary mower.

Back then, I drove a small tractor dragging gangs. Back then, there would have been a lot of dirt and very little green without the broadleaf weeds. Back then, there was no pattern mowing, I drove in progressively smaller circles until I was dizzy and most of the taller weeds were gone. Back then, dandelions added texture; they were considered "special."

Things have changed drastically since back then.

I married a golf course superintendent and moved to the busy Chicago suburbs. We live in a wonderful home sitting on a 0.23-acre lot in a huge subdivision. I am still the DM. When I was pregnant with our first child, my husband thoughtfully bought me a top-of-the-line, self-propelled Honda Harmony 21-inch mulching rotary mower. I am the envy of the neighborhood; we will not even go into the size of my snow blower!

The first summer after our relocation to Chicago, our lawn burnt to a crisp. The bunnies ate the shrubs and flowers. The grubs ate any of the viable grass. Our dandelions overran the lawn and then started to encroach on the neighbors' carefully manicured properties. A concerned neighbor stopped by one day to offer her condolences on the state of my lawn and asked sweetly if maybe I knew of someone who could help. The image of my husband's flawless golf course and his dual college degrees in agronomy and resource economics floated through my mind and I responded that, indeed, I might know just the person.

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The fact was that I had a young toddler at the time and I preferred dead grass to the image of my baby eating Milorganite. With all due respect to the fine folks in Milwaukee . . . well, you get my drift. As Teddy grew out of his bug-, dirt- and worm-eating phase, we got down to work with a comprehensive lawn-management master plan. Like any self-respecting golf course superintendent, my husband implemented a chemical-application plan and then ripped out a quarter of our lawn and laid sod. He gave me a new weedwacker and an additional 100 feet of hose with instructions to water at every opportunity. Then he made a quick escape to the course.

The entire neighborhood watched me haul hose for two months. I used wave sprinklers, rotating sprinklers and variegated hoses. The entire process took over two hours both morning and night. Due to watering restrictions, I was only allowed to water with sprinklers on odd days. On the even days, I often forced the children to look like they were playing in the rotating Elmo sprinkler while I stood and hand-watered hot spots and mangy-looking sod.

Ten-plus years of marriage to a golf course superintendent have taught me to go away, very far away, during the hottest portion of the summer. The children and I flee, every year, to visit family on the east coast for the month of July. We head

back to the old homestead where my sister still allows the clover to rule. This leaves the big guy with sod-watering duty. The first year, shortly after our return from out east, an impressive crew from Rainmakers arrived to install a commercial-grade irrigation system in our lawn. Jonathan Jennings, CGCS had not enjoyed his stint as watering grunt.

The master plan has been fully implemented and I am no longer pitied in the neighborhood. In fact, I am still looking for my award for the most improved lawn. As I stand with my coffee cup in hand and contemplate run times and spray trajectory, the very same neighbor who got the ball rolling in the first place, stops to ask me what to do about some thin spots on her lawn!

I have a serious relationship going with the irrigation controller in my garage and my Honda Harmony and I have pattern mowing (even double-cutting) down to a science. The children have to wander to other yards to pick those special yellow flowers. The bunny issue is unresolved, but a felon relocation program is under serious consideration.

Now, as my oldest child approaches 11, I look forward to handing over my old title of DM. I will happily be promoted to Suburban Lawn Superintendent.



the annual sponsorship ads in the membership directory. Also, each monthly issue of *On Course* would likely include a full-page, alphabetical directory of “sponsors” or “patrons” comprising our supporting vendors and contact names/phone numbers.

I can't go into any more detail at this point as we are in the early stages of investigating this proposal's feasibility. I will at this time ask all members to look for an *On Course* readership survey that will be mailed in conjunction with the July meeting notice. From our commercial members, in particular, we would like feedback on the topic of advertising in *On Course* versus the membership directory, so please take the time to complete the survey as soon as possible and send it back to us. Please do not ignore this call for your thoughts, as a silent voice is never heard. More information will be relayed to you as it becomes available. Thank you for your valuable assistance!



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