

“The Best Job I Have Had:” A Superintendent’s Son Reflects

Editor’s Note: Dennis Wilson, superintendent at Sunset Ridge, submitted this piece written at least seven years ago by his son Michael. Now the caddie master at Shoreacres, Michael for many years “would work for me in the summer,” says Dennis. “The part I was so impressed with was the way he describes mornings on a golf course and the men that work there.”

“Mike, it’s 5:30 a.m., wake up! It’s time to go to work, my boy, rise and shine.” This was what I woke up to hearing every morning last summer. It was a summer of many beautiful sunrises and early nights. Getting up that early took some getting used to, of course, but it proved to be worth it. I had a job that I enjoyed thoroughly. I worked on a golf course grounds crew.

... my crew was one big happy family. We all got to work in the morning ready to put in our eight hours of sweat. There were 18 of us that made up the crew. My boss, a turfgrass specialist who’s been in the business for over 30 years, was the ringleader among us. He was a farm boy from Indiana who pounded his work ethic into each and every one of us.

For those of you that don’t understand what we do, we basically make the golf course look the way it does, immaculate. To do this, we all had to enjoy what we were doing. Anyone can go out there and do a half-hearted job and get it done. We, on the other hand, put maximum effort and pride into our work to make the course look the way it should. I personally enjoyed working with the crew as a whole. It was as if we were a family of some sort striving to do a better job every day. The overall feeling of working outside is a relief also. I have never been able to work inside due to a lack of freedom and physicality. The job seemed to let a skill I never knew I had grow to a sort of addiction. This skill was manual labor. I’ve always worked hard but never to my full potential. This was definitely the best job I had yet.

So as I was saying, my crew was one big happy family. We all got to work in the morning ready to put in our eight hours of sweat. There were 18 of us that made up the crew. My boss, a turfgrass specialist who’s been in the business for over 30 years, was the ringleader among us. He was a farm boy from Indiana who pounded his work ethic into each and every one of us. We all respected his decisions and did as he said because he knew best. I once asked a fellow worker, “Why does everyone think he’s so smart?” He said, “I’ve worked here for 17 years underneath him. You work one or two weeks and you’ll see why.” I obviously was a little out-of-line asking that. I soon came to know why everyone respected him so much. He knew what he was doing! Everything my boss did had some reasoning to it. The assistant just getting into the business was lucky to have him as a teacher. The assistant was a guy from Joliet, Illinois. He got a degree in turfgrass science from Joliet Junior College. When the boss was not there, which was very rare, he took over. In the shop was the mechanic, a tall man with a mustache and a rather large frame. He worked on all the machinery, doing jobs like oil changes and sharpening the mowers. This mechanic knew everything from a 440 magnum Chrysler engine to a five-horse Tecumseh. In other words, he was the best. Oftentimes he would be so far ahead of himself that he’d get the whole weekend off.

Most all of us worked 48 hours a week (four on Sunday, four on Saturday and eight Monday through Friday). The rest of us were all the laborers. We were the ones who were on the bottom of the chain but all of us knew we had a place on the team and something would not get done if we were to not

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show up. Most of my coworkers, being Hispanic, were already brothers by blood or brothers-in-law. So the aspect of working together was there. It took them about two weeks to initiate me fully. They all wanted to see if I was a worker or not. I showed them I was worthy by keeping up with them and oftentimes would challenge their strength against mine. After proving myself, we all put forth our maximum effort and sweat trying to get the work done with top-notch quality and speed. With this, I found that my job became part of me.

Being outside with the wind, the trees and the endless cloud-filled skies gave me a sense of freedom no other job ever offered. In the mornings, I would watch the sunrise with blazing colors of red and orange. Dew across the ground and steam rising above the ponds gave off a moist, musty aroma. Whenever I got frustrated with a job, I could look up at the fluffy clouds and inhale a massive amount of air to ease my nerves. The ground was lined with lush green grass and towering trees. The healthy look of all the vegetation eventually rubbed off on me. I felt terrific once I stepped foot on that golf course every morning.

The jobs we were to do involved a discipline called manual labor. As I said before, our boss pounded a work ethic into all of us and we all followed. The first job I had was raking traps. I would be paired up with another to go out with a hand-rake and rake sand traps. We would go all day raking what seemed to be 1,000 sand traps. After the first time, I gained large bubbles of fluid, blisters, all over my hands. My forearms would feel like they were on

fire due to the lactose build-up within my muscle fibers. Once I got used to it, my hands formed large calluses and my forearms bulged with rock-hard muscle. Another job was weeding bush beds and flower beds. Most of the time, this would prove to be a boring, ongoing job. Weeds grow everywhere and are constantly popping up all over the place. Some of the smaller, effort-less jobs included picking up the sticky, stinking garbage from each tee, or soiling and seeding divots. To soil and seed divots, you must fill a bucket with a mixture of soil and special seed called bent. Then you would ride around on a golf cart filling in all the divots made by the golfers on the tees and fairways. This job was very monotonous, especially on a scorching hot day. We also took care of the tennis courts. They were made up of a clay-type substance and needed maintenance every day. We rolled them first with a machine similar to a steamroller, just without the steam. After that, we would brush them to an attractive, playable surface.

I experienced all these jobs, but my absolute favorite was mowing grass. Whether it was the greens, tees, fairways or rough, I loved it. I got on

that sophisticated piece of machinery and went off into my own little world. I got so good at it that my boss often would have me mowing all the eight hours of the day that I was there. Now some might say that they find mowing their lawn easy to do. I agree, it is, but one has to see that a golf course is not an ordinary lawn. We deal with different types of grass that can prove to be stubborn, like humans. All the mowing has to be done a certain way and most of the mowers are very complicated. Knowing how to operate them takes some getting used to. I found it be challenging and also found that I was taking a lot of pride in my work. I'd look back at the job I did and evaluate myself every day.

In conclusion, I feel this was the best job I have had. The people who I worked with were great. Working outdoors in the fresh air was cleansing and I found a sense of discipline called manual labor. I had a great summer and plan on doing it again next year. Anyone even remotely interested should give it a try.



D.B.A. Bill Boyd



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