

Paul Sandall -N-



The Sandall family: Travis (age 10), Paul, Tanner (age 12) and Maria.

Oak Grove

GOLF COURSE

Where in the world is Alden, IL? No! It is not the night-spot capital of McHenry County. No! It is not the location of an amusement or water park. No! It did not receive the last remaining casino license in the state of Illinois.

Yes! It is a small, quiet farm community located on Route 173 west of the Chain of Lakes. Yes! It is rolling land, large mature oak trees, wetlands and natural grasslands. Yes! It is the home of an 18-hole championship golf course called Oak Grove. Yes! It is the site of the September, 2004 MAGCS meeting hosted by Paul Sandall, superintendent of Oak Grove Golf Course.

Oak Grove Golf Course is a beautifully manicured public golf course owned by the Hammersmith family. It comprises approximately 235 acres of 70-foot-plus majestic oak and cottonwood trees, natural wetlands and grasslands, elevated rolling hills, panoramic views of the surrounding area and undisturbed, undeveloped, beautiful Midwest land. This land used to be part of the Bull Valley Hunt Club. The land is uniquely natural and rustic in presentation. No housing developments! No homes butting up to the golf property! The property is home to numerous wildlife: deer, coyotes, cranes, pheasant, elk (farm off the fifth hole) and all types of waterfowl. Oak Grove is a Certified Signature Sanctuary by Audobon International. It is the 25th golf course so sanctioned.

The golf course was designed by architect Steven Halberg, ASLA. The project began in the spring of 1996, seeding (bentgrass tees, greens and fairways) completed in 1997, and open to the public in 1998. The rustic log-cabin clubhouse (completed in spring of 1999) complements the look and feel of the golf course.

Paul Sandall was hired as the superintendent in March of 2004. Welcome to the club, Paul! By the way,

you are hosting a monthly MAGCS meeting for your associates and peers in September! Paul welcomes the opportunity to visit with his associates and peers and display this golf course gem.

Paul, being an avid outdoorsman and hunter, loves to take the early-morning trips around the golf course. Rarely does he miss an opportunity to see different wildlife on the property. He commented on some of the unique features of the golf course: three acres of fast, undulating greens (averaging in

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Photos by Jim Trzinski.



A distinctive covered bridge adjacent to no. 13 green at Oak Grove.

size from 6,500 to 7,000 square feet), five separate sets of tee markers/boxes on each hole (and separate ball-washers for each hole), wide fairways and natural curves and doglegs on most holes.

Some features unique to the presentation of Oak Grove include the granite markers on each hole displaying the design and layout, and cart-path curbs around the tee boxes and greens for protection of the grounds. The cart path runs throughout the course. The course provides a full-service driving range with mats or grass. Since the golf course is so new, there are only a few minor projects on the agenda: new tee box for no. 8, quick couplers on all greens and installation of a practice bunker and chipping green.

The front nine is more links-style: open prairies, wetland, rolling fairways and changes in elevation. Looking south from the sixth fairway provides a panoramic view of the entire golf course and surrounding landscape. No. 8, a reasonably short par 3, is a full carry over the wetlands (out-of-bounds left). The front nine, from the championship tees, measures more than 3,300 yards.

The back nine runs through the wetlands and majestic tree-lined

topography. Holes 10 and 11 are the signature holes for the back nine. No. 10, called "The Chute," begins from deep in the oak savannah. The hole doglegs left about 150 yards from the green. Don't think about cutting the corner of the dogleg. A number of towering oak trees will quickly change your mind. No. 11 is a truly unique golf-hole design, appropriately nicknamed "Anaconda." This is the ultimate "teaser," a 464-yard par 5. Use your head! Leave the driver in the bag. There is trouble everywhere. Large oaks line most of the remaining back nine holes. The back nine measures more than 3,200 yards.

My recommendation for a day of golf at Oak Grove: Bring an extra supply of golf balls.

Paul and I had a nice discussion about his background and how and why he became a golf course superintendent. Paul is married to Maria (an avid golfer, time permitting with the kids' activities). They have two boys: Tanner (12) and Travis (10). Both Tanner and Travis are deeply involved in baseball, soccer, basketball, football and of course, golf. Paul received his associate's degree in horticulture from Harper College. His hobbies include bow-hunting, bird-hunting and 12-inch softball.

Paul wasn't born to be a golf course superintendent. Sometimes these things just happen! As with a number of superintendents, the love of the outdoors and the opportunity to work with their hands steers them in that direction. And of course, a quality mentor always helps! Paul's would be Tim Davis of Shoreacres. Additionally, a number of quality superintendents kept him on the straight and narrow. Those individuals would be Tom Pritchard, Gilbert Velasquez and Mike Mumper.

It all started with a summer job at Woodstock Country Club, working for Tim Davis laying sod. This was 1981. Paul followed Tim to Shoreacres, working as a foreman and performing numerous other responsibilities for the next seven years. Tim always increased his responsibility in and knowledge of the business. In 1988, Paul moved on to White Eagle Country Club as an assistant superintendent under the guidance of Gilbert Velasquez. He stayed there for two-and-a-half years. From there, he accepted the superintendent position at Woodstock Country Club (following in the footsteps of Tom Pritchard). He ran the operation for the next four years.

For some reason, Paul thought roofing was an ideal career change. That lasted five months. Time to go back to being a superintendent. For the next five or so years, Paul worked at Briar Leaf Country Club in LaPorte, IN and Whitaker Golf Course in New Buffalo, MI. Finally, it was time to come back to Illinois. Paul accepted a position as an assistant superintendent at Park Ridge Country Club. He stayed at Park Ridge for five-and-a-half years, a number of those years with Mike Mumper. In March of 2004, Paul accepted the superintendent position at Oak Grove, a job that was vacated by Brad Legnaioli.

Paul commented that all the superintendents that he has worked for in the past have been invaluable in providing direction and advice. As he changed courses, their wealth of knowledge and experience has always been accessible to him. He specifically commented that Tim Davis, Tom Pritchard and Mike Mumper have been very influential. Their advice of



A view of no. 3 green also reveals some of the natural features that make Oak Grove so beautiful.

“never taking anything for granted” and “taking things a day at a time” has helped him throughout his career. His staff of 14 has made his transition into the new position “seamless.”

Paul’s association with the MAGCS and its members has created lifelong friendships. He commented that a few weeks ago, his son Tanner

ended up playing in an all-star baseball game against Kevin DeRoo’s son. Unfortunately, Tanner ended up on the short end of the score. It is a small world when you consider the size and breadth of the Association. The support of his peers has been comforting. The accolades of golfers walking off the course have been rewarding.

In September, leave your dancing shoes, kids and chips at home! You will be playing some serious golf at Oak Grove Golf Course. Remember! Bring extra golf balls.



No. 8 green.