

# Park Hills Golf Course: A Case Study for ACSP Outreach and Education

*Park Hills Golf Course is located in Freeport, Ill., a small city in northwestern Illinois' Stephenson County about half an hour west of Rockford. Dave Fisher, CGCS has been with the golf course since 1982. The golf course is a 36-hole facility with good topography, plenty of open space and a meandering creek that winds through the property. It is a public golf course with its share of outings, leagues and "regulars." David moved his family to Freeport from his hometown, St. Charles, having worked at St. Charles Country Club first as a student intern from McHenry County College and later as assistant superintendent for two years.*



*Dave Fisher explains how this prairie habitat unfolded as part of his facility's participation in the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program (ACSP) and the course's eventual certification.*



*Dave Fisher and a representative for the County Soil Conservation Service explain to the public their cooperative roles as environmental stewards.*

Early in his career at Park Hills, Dave made a commitment to be conservative while at the same time improving the golf course. His crew consisted of part-time students and retirees from the community. After many years of developing a good program for the golf course, Dave made a decision to get involved with the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. Park Hills Golf Course property became an ACSP member in 1998 and was fully certified in all six categories in 2001. Fisher's love for the outdoors and his ability to delegate reinforced his conservative approach and money-saving techniques at an even higher level.

Habitat enhancements are the most obvious improvements in his management scheme as clubhouse windows and other vistas throughout the golf course reveal the rolling hills at Park Hills, showing off many acres of new prairie preserves. Fourteen acres have been returned to Mother Nature and provide habitat for numerous birds, butterflies, bees, rodents and mammals. The changing beauty draws interest and comments from golfing members and friends from the community, especially in May when the lupine are in full bloom.

The program received such widespread acceptance that the Stephenson County Conservation Service and Pheasants Forever from Stephenson County endorsed and provided resources for additional prairie ground. Official tours are given annually to local citizens. The club provides six-person golf carts so those who cannot walk can go out on the grounds to see the prairie; its marvels are not just within reach of able-bodied walkers. Tour-takers listen to representatives from the golf course and the Conservation Service tell stories about the prairie. These tours allow for educational outreach to the community about how to prepare a site for prairie restoration, and care, maintenance and identification of native plant material.

In fact, neighbors to the golf course, Marcia Cox and

*(continued on page 8)*

Deb Schoeder, have a goal to identify at least one new plant a week. They keep a life list of prairie plant material and a photo album. These two dedicated committee members also can be seen monitoring bird boxes weekly. Their bluebird population has exploded. In 2003 they counted more than 90 fledged bluebirds with just 20 bird boxes on the property! In '04, they had about 50 and felt bad about the lower number. Their enthusiasm and pride are very evident.

In mid-2005, Fisher received notice of recertification in all six categories of environmental commitment. The categories are:

- Environmental Planning
- Wildlife and Habitat Management
- Chemical Use Reduction and Safety
- Water Conservation
- Water-Quality Management
- Outreach and Education

He welcomed the opportunity to have a site visit from an independent observer because he was sure his compliance guidelines were a model for other golf course properties to pattern. For example, Fisher locks



*Tours for the public look at prairie restoration examples at Park Hills Golf Course. This type of public outreach and education is a prime example of how the ACSP works.*

down his irrigation pumps during peak-use hours. This guarantees cheaper rates and stabilizes a water-conservation method for the entire golf course. He estimates a savings of more than \$12,000 in electric bills. The pump house is neat as a pin, centrally located and leak-free.

Park Hills Golf Course has a meandering creek throughout the

property. The water quality is quite good as evidenced by the quality of aquatic plants growing in it. However, bank erosion and silting are a never-ending battle. A weir helps keep back the silt, and gabion walls and rip-rap stabilize the steep slopes. This project will take years to complete.

Regarding the category "Chemical Use Reduction and Safety," all



## Charles J. Fiore Nursery

Chicagoland's Largest Selection  
Of Premium Grade Plant Material

Over 1000 varieties of Trees, Shrubs,  
Evergreens, Groundcovers, and Perennials  
*Ready for your immediate pickup or delivery!*

Contact us for a demonstration of

**LANDPRO SYSTEMS III**

*Landscape Management Software*

**16606 West Hwy 22  
Prairie View, IL 60069**

**[www.cjfiore.com](http://www.cjfiore.com)**

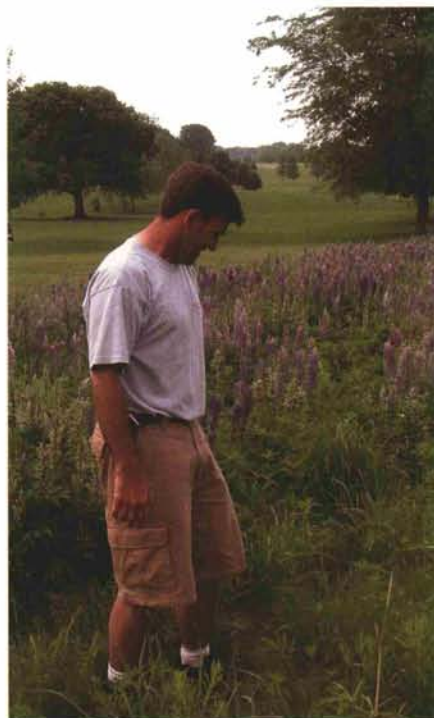
**TEL (847) 913-1414  
FAX (847) 913-9690**

fuel tanks are properly contained. Rinse-pad outflow is across a large stretch of turf, buffering nitrates from open water. Chemical storage is a state-of-the-art building designated for chemical, fertilizer and spray-rig containment, mixing and storage.

Dave's environmental plan is thorough as he keeps good records of activity and announcements are easily read on bulletin boards and pro shop signage areas. He even has a committee for publications in the local newspaper and quarterly newsletter.

This year is the Park Hills Golf Course's 50th anniversary, and a big part of their heritage is the environmental commitment to the community-owned golf course property.

Each generation of golfers will be witness to native trees and great stands of prairie grass habitats. Each generation of wildlife will be given new life on this Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary.



*Fisher looks with pride at the changing prairie.*

*Volunteers Marcia Cox and Deb Schoeder do the bird-box inventory on a weekly basis.*

*Further, one of their goals is to identify one new species of plant in the prairie habitat every week. They know how many birds have fledged from the nest boxes each year and have a wonderful catalog reference of plant life on the golf course.*



*An example of erosion control for stream banks.*

*Each week a new species of plants dominates the prairie. In May, the lupine make quite a colorful show from afar.*



*Is this what he sees?*