

Chris Blake -N-



Chris, girlfriend Gina and goose chaser Sampson.



Question: What do you get when you combine a new, relatively unknown golf course off Northwest Highway (Rt.14) in Barrington and another great superintendent who is a student of the legendary Oscar Miles?

Answer: A fantastic Chicagoland golf course called Makray Memorial.

Golf Course Superintendent, Chris Blake, has led the golf maintenance operations at Makray Memorial Golf Club since it's new beginning. By "new beginning," I mean that Makray Memorial, before its grand reopening in 2004, used to be called Thunderbird Country Club. Paul Makray purchased Thunderbird in 1962 and improved it each year, providing a sporty course at a very reasonable rate. When he passed away in 1999, his family made the decision to completely redesign and rebuild the course and facilities. They changed the name to Makray Memorial Golf Club in Paul's honor. What a fitting way to honor a loved one!

Having grown up in the industry since the age of eight, Chris Blake has participated in basically all aspects of golf course operation. This Tucson, Arizona, native started by washing balls in the bag room and running around as the "range rat" at Raven Golf Club. Once he turned 16, Chris started on the crew at Raven, working and learning what would turn into his career. Having a love of the game of golf and working outdoors, Chris knew that this was his calling.

From 1996 through 1999, he remained employed by the Raven Golf Company, but his new position was assistant superintendent. After 3 years with Raven, Chris's career goal remained the same. To achieve it, he knew that some background and philosophy would benefit him in his chosen field. He chose to attend Penn State. While in Happy Valley, he learned of a gentleman who loved to teach and mold his assistants and interns into golf course superintendents.

With Oscar Miles as his mentor, Chris spent 2 seasons (1999-2000) as an intern/second assistant for the Merit Club. He wanted to work for a great

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The 18th 555 yard par 5 finishing hole at Makray Memorial.

person he could learn from and to have the opportunity to host a major tournament. This all fell into place for Chris as the Merit Club hosted the 2000 Women's U.S. Open.

Upon graduating from Penn State in 2000, he contacted Sig Kalano at Bull Valley Golf Club in Woodstock. Chris spent 2001 as assistant at Bull Valley. At that time, one of the owners of Bull Valley was redesigning a golf course in Barrington. In 2002, Harry Vignocchi asked Chris to move to Makray Memorial as head superintendent.

Since that time, Chris has totally reshaped this golf course. The once flat Thunderbird is now a hilly, undulating track. All of the greens were changed to USGA specs and seeded Penn G-2. A great coincidence during the reconstruction of Makray was that Northwest Hwy. (Rt. 14) was being expanded at the same time. So, in collaboration with the State of Illinois, the 55,000 semi loads of fill used in Makray's renovation came primarily from the expansion of Rt. 14. Another project that Chris and his staff are

tackling is continued attention to their native areas. There are 30 acres of native areas over the whole property. "We are still trying to get that one dialed in," Chris says.

Being true to his roots and ideals, Chris brings on two interns every year. His intern/assistantship with Mr. Miles made a huge mark. Chris feels strongly about helping educate the future superintendents of our industry.

The members of the MAGCS are in for a real treat come September for our monthly meeting. Besides outstanding conditions on the golf course, the clubhouse at Makray is beautifully decorated. This two-story, stone building provides a relaxing atmosphere. The first level has a restaurant/grille along with the Pro Shop. The top floor, where our meeting will be held, boasts a room that holds up to 300 people. Everyone should put September 25th on their calendars and make sure to attend our monthly meeting at Makray Memorial Golf Club.



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Many ornamental plantings adorn Makray Memorial as pictured around the 13th tee complex.





One of the most aesthetically pleasing pump houses in the Chicagoland area.



The 189 yard par 3 13th from behind the green. The bluegrass surrounds make the tee shot all carry.



Don't get caught in the sand on the 244 yard par 3 17th.



One really gets a sense of the mounding when playing the 7th par 3 at Makray.



The 562 yard par 5 15th from the back of the green.

