

Who Are These Guys?

The distinguished gentleman on the left in the Ward Cleaver suit is Ray Gerber. The younger fellow on the right sporting the Mike Brady look is Fred Opperman (in a rare photograph taken before the hair on his head migrated southward to his chin). As the years go by and we all get wiser, we tend to become more forgetful. We forget people's names; we forget where we put our keys (which are usually in our hands); or our sunglasses (which are usually on our heads); we forget lots of things.



Ray Gerber and Fred Opperman in 1971

These, though are trivial items that can be found with very little effort. However, history and knowledge of the past—in this case the story of the magazine you are reading right now—can often times be forgotten and lost forever as time goes by. Sure, you may hear the names and possibly even recall the faces, but with each generation that succeeds us, the knowledge of our past gets murkier. For this reason I would like to tell you a little history about On Course magazine and the people who played an integral part in its existence. Some of you were around when this story started, but a good many of you were not. It is for all of you that we present this little look into our past, because, in the words of the Faber College motto, “Knowledge is Good.”



1948

Our association goes all the way back to 1926 when **John MacGregor**, the greenkeeper of Chicago Golf Club, was asked by National Association of Greenkeepers of America founder, Colonel John Morley, to convene the greenkeepers in our area with the ultimate purpose of forming the Mid-West Greenkeepers Association (MWGA). There were 16 charter members when it became official on December 24, 1926. A much more in-depth look at the history of MAGCS and our profession can be found in the April through December, 2001 issues of *On Course*. The magazine, however, was not a part of that history for many years to come.

Around 20 years later, the MAGCS Board of Directors—namely President Don Strand and Paul Burdett—decided it was high time to provide the membership with a monthly newsletter. In January of 1948, the premiere issue of *Bull Sheet* was sent out. The name was conceived by **Robert Williams**, then of Beverly Country Club, who remembered his army company's newsletter at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where he was stationed after World War II, was called *The Bull Sheet*. The maiden issue of our *Bull Sheet* was a two-page mimeo-

(continued on page 30)

graphed publication done completely in-house, with editor Norm Johnson and associate editors William Stupple, Raymond Gerber, John Coghill, Raymond Didier, and Bob Williams responsible for its writing, printing, and mailing. Providing the hand-drawn artwork for each issue was Paul Burdett.

By 1950, *Bull Sheet* had grown enough in size and circulation to warrant its being printed and distributed professionally. Ever-Redi Printing of LaGrange was chosen, and the new format with glossy paper and black-and-white photography was unveiled. Incidentally, Ever-Redi remained our printer from then until January of 1995, making MAGCS its longest-running customer at 45 years. *Bull Sheet* remained much the same from 1950 through June of 1985 (with the exception of 1976 when a 50th Anniversary logo appeared on its covers), when a major format change saw the old Bull logo being replaced by the "Cup Cutter Guy." This was done to highlight the uniqueness of the golf course superintendent's pro-

fession, where the changing of cups was considered the one unique thing we in our industry do. At that time, the cover went from white to a light green (Seafoam perhaps?) to stress the nature of our business—green-keeping.



It was during this version of Bull Sheet—from February of 1972

through July of 1983—that Ray Gerber was its editor. Ray's biography reads like "How the West Was Won." He was born on September 4, 1899, and in 1916, at the tender age of 16, he drove cattle herds from North Dakota to Missouri on horseback. He began his storied career in golf in 1925 when he worked construction on the new Woodhill Country Club in Wayzata, Minnesota. During the winter he cut blocks of ice out of local lakes to be packed in sawdust and stored in sheds for use in the summer (if any of it made it to Wheaton, it was probably delivered by Red Grange). It was in Wayzata that Ray's aptitude for maintaining reel-type mowers was honed, eventually getting him noticed by the Toro Company in Minneapolis. From there Ray went to a new course in New Jersey called Pine Valley in 1926 to work for the Toro Company setting up and maintaining their new mowers. A year later, his new wife unhappy with life out East, Ray and Julia moved to Chicago to work for J. Oliver Johnson, a Toro distributor



28322 Ballard Road
Lake Forest, IL 60045

Telephone: 847-281-9400
Fax: 847-281-9780

- * Irrigation & Pump Station Design
- * Irrigation Installation
- * Drainage Systems
- * Pump Station Installation
- * Irrigation Pipe & Supplies
- * Pond Aerators

HOLLEMBEAK

CONSTRUCTION INC.

SINCE 1969

*Ridge Country Club - Hole 13
Chicago, Illinois*

Golf Course Construction • Renovations • Bunkers
Clearing • Feature Grading • Shaping • Drainage
Tee and Green Construction • Cart Paths • Grassing
Shoreline Stabilization • Pond Construction and Dredging
Laser Tee Leveling • GPS Golf Course Mapping

P.O. BOX 103 • BIG ROCK, IL 60511 • 630-556-3891

where Ray held the distinction of being the “trouble-shooter.” It was back to the golf course in 1928-1929 when Ray assisted in the construction and grow-in of Medinah Country Club’s #3 course. He remained at Medinah as foreman of the #2 course through 1930. The Great Depression years found Ray without a job. He kept busy by towing a trailer, fashioned from the flatbed of a Ford Model A truck and with a reel-grinding machine attached, to area courses to sharpen their mowers. In 1934, Ray was hired on at Sunset Ridge Country Club as foreman. He landed his first and only greenkeeper’s job at Glen Oak Country Club on March 25, 1936, where he remained for 34 years until his retirement. During his amazing tenure at Glen Oak, Ray was very active in local and national golf industry activities, including having an instrumental role in the formation of both the Midwest Turfgrass Foundation at Purdue University and the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation at the University of Illinois. During and after WWII, Ray helped establish golf courses at five veteran’s hospitals in the Midwest. Ray served as president of MAGCS in 1943, 1944, and 1959, and was GCSAA’s president in 1950. His son Donald, a long-time superintendent at Chicago Golf Club, served

“...in 1995 the membership voted by a slight margin to change the name to reflect a more professional image for MAGCS.”

as MAGCS president in 1962, and his assistant Fred Opperman, who took over at Glen Oak when Ray retired, also served as our president in 1976. In 1975, Ray was honored by GCSAA with the Distinguished Service Award.

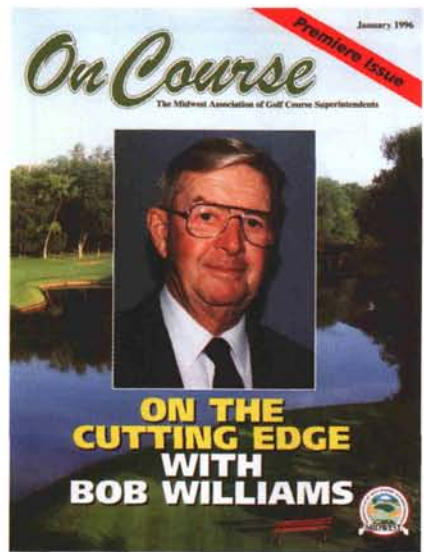
Ray’s and Fred’s friendship and working relationship continued on long after Ray’s retirement. When Ray passed away in July of 1983, Fred was the natural choice to become the publication’s 11th editor, following Ray and those who had preceded him—**Norm Johnson, Don Strand, Bill Stuppel, Bert Rost, Ted Woehrli, Doug Jabaay, Tom Burrows, Dick Trevarthan, and Roger LaRochelle.** Under Fred Opperman’s watch, the magazine retained its look, although its size and circulation increased yearly. In 1991, a MAGCS survey asked members if they felt a name change for their newsletter was needed, and this was voted down in favor of tradition. However, in 1995 the membership voted by a slight margin to change the name to reflect a more professional image for MAGCS. This was a hotly debated issue that caused many sleepless nights for President **Joel Purpur** and his Board. Forms were sent out to the membership requesting suggestions for the new name. Over 200 entries were submitted. From those, five finalists were chosen by the editorial committee under chairman **Dave Blomquist**’s watch: “Windy City Turf,” “Midwest Breezes,” “On the Green,” “Modern Links,” and “On Course.” The chosen name, *On Course*, was submitted by none other than Bob Williams, the same man who coined the original Bull Sheet.

The new name provided the impetus to establish a whole new magazine-type look which would not only include color photography throughout and a bold cover, but retain some of the traditions from its early days, including the “Bull Sheet” and “Midwest Breezes” sections. This was possible only through the contracting of a new printing company with the technology to produce what was required. Darwill Press was the chosen firm and has been producing *On Course* ever since. It was also during this time of change when the MAGCS Board of Directors and Fred

Opperman had the keen foresight to hire graphic artist Mark Karczewski to consult on the transition and provide expertise in the production of *On Course*, which he still handles to this day. Thus the new era began with the January, 1996 issue featuring Bob Williams on its cover



Mark Karczewski



In July of 1999, Fred Opperman decided it was time to retire and move up to Big Sky country in Bozeman, Montana. A search for the 12th editor of our magazine brought **Cathy Miles Ralston** to MAGCS and to *On Course*—a perfectly natural fit for the daughter of **Tim Miles** and niece of **Oscar Miles**, both superintendents and MAGCS members. It was at this time that the contributing editor’s position was established, and yours truly was chosen—a mistake that will haunt MAGCS for many years.



John Gurke, Fred Opperman and Cathy Miles Ralston

Cathy oversaw the format change of March, 2000 which brought a new, fresh look to the cover and throughout and remained editor of *On Course* until February of 2006. Throughout Cathy's tenure, *On Course* continually improved in quality and stature, going to a full color format and garnering back-to-back GCSAA Chapter Publication Awards for best in its class in 2005 and 2006. Executive Director **Luke Cella** took the reins in early 2006, bringing the production of *On Course* under the roof of Midwest Golf House, where MAGCS resides. The future of *On Course* looks bright in Luke's hands as he continues what his predecessors began — to produce a monthly magazine of the highest possible quality that serves the MAGCS membership by including member-contributed articles and information.

That mission is the very reason that the **Ray Gerber Editorial Award** and, subsequently, the **Fred D. Opperman Editorial Award** were conceived — to recognize superintendents and non-superintendents alike for their contributions to *On Course*. The Ray Gerber award was first presented in 1983. It is bestowed annually upon the superintendent whose original article is judged superior by a predetermined panel of five judges based on several published criteria. The Fred D. Opperman award, established in 2002, is based on the same principles as the Gerber, but it recognizes the non-superintendent whose article is deemed best. In order for

either award to be presented, a minimum of six articles must qualify in a given year, which, sadly, is why there have been several years without a Gerber award presentation at the Midwest Turf Clinic.



Dan Dinellie wins the Gerber Award in 1995.



Dave Blomquist wins the Gerber Award in 1990.



Jim Evans captures the Gerber Award in 1988.



Dave Behrman presents Randy Wahler the Gerber in 1985.



Dave Ward wins in 1985.



Joel Purpur pulls down the Gerber Award when color photography was coming into vogue as hair was going out of style in 1993 for most of our past winners.

The glorious history of our association and of the characters that made it tick throughout its 81 years of existence will continue to be the fuel that propels its monthly publication into the future. We look forward to that future and hope that *On Course* magazine can continue to be the leader that it is. With the contributions of its readers—the members of the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents—that future looks extremely bright.

