



Sometimes the Good Guys Win

The Friday of Memorial Day 2008 started out like any other day. I show up for work, assign daily jobs and send the crew to work. That was exactly how my day was going until I got the first call about a cart in a lake. My first thought was the safety of the crew member who happened to drive in. As I am on my way, I receive a call from my foreman about a cart in the native grass. At this point I realize this is too much of a coincidence, and something is wrong.

Fast forward an hour or so. We have five different carts that have been pulled out of either a lake or a native area. All had been destroyed by vandalism. Greens had been driven over; flag sticks had been broken and stolen; and numerous signs had been destroyed.

You can imagine the headache this creates; I was not prepared to do sod work and get the tractor and chains out that particular weekend. While the crew is working putting the courses back together, I am busy with the Lake County police, putting together a police report as well as taking pictures of the damage – something that you don't learn in school or on the job.

The most difficult part was the feeling of helplessness. Ivanhoe is a course surrounded by homes; this sort of vandalism could happen any day or night. How can you protect yourself from something like this? It was frustrating to have no other option but to file a police report and wait for the justice system to run its course.

This was not the way I wanted to start my first summer, not to mention Memorial Day, at Ivanhoe. Our focus quickly shifted from setting the course for a large day of golf to removing carts from areas where they didn't belong and putting the course back to normal so nobody would notice. This is one of those stresses that we've all heard about but hope never to experience.

Unfortunately for Ivanhoe, we experienced it again. The next weekend, it all happened again. Carts that were damaged a week ago were taken out again. The same people who had taken the carts the first time saved the keys and used them again.

The same damage was repeated. Six different greens were driven over, numerous flag sticks were broken, flags were stolen, and countless tee markers were missing. Again the feeling of sheer helplessness hit me. I thought I had told the police who was causing the damage in my first report. Now it was happening again. The anger and panic were a little overwhelming.

We ran into a little luck on the second incident, as crazy as that sounds. Outside the home of the suspected vandal, we found a receipt for a case of Coors Light — the same beer we found in the carts after both incidents. To an amateur sleuth like me, this seemed like a slam dunk.

It was after the second incident that Justin VanLanduit (Briarwood CC) contacted me to inform me that Paul Voyken (Briarwood CC) was a close personal friend of the Lake County Sheriff. After asking Justin for help, he asked Paul to do us a favor and put in a call to his friend, the Sheriff. Soon after speaking with Justin, I was on the phone with the Lake County Sheriff. Unbeknownst to me, he is a huge golfer. His exact words were, "there is nothing I hate more than vandalism on a golf

course, whatever I can do to help, consider it done." A day or two went by. I was contacted by the Sheriff again and told I should be receiving a call from a detective that day. Now I felt like something was getting done, real progress.

No more than 30 minutes after hanging up with the Sheriff, I was on the phone with Gianni Giamberduca, Lake County detective. He came out to Ivanhoe to inspect the damage. We rode around the course. He wanted to see the

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carts and see where they were deposited around the course. He also wanted to see the location of the home of the suspected vandal.

I showed Gianni the receipt found outside the home of the suspected vandal. He was pleased that we had this and thought we now had some hard evidence. His next step was to take the receipt to the store where the beer was purchased and look over the videotape. Luckily for us, this particular store catalogs all video by the register that made the sale. It was very easy for him to see who purchased the beer and get a name.

For me, the next part was very exciting but also nerve racking. Gianni called me at home, said he had spoken with the young man who purchased the beer, and that he had spilled his guts and told him everything. Gianni said what he would like to do next is stake out the home and go in and question the kid. This was all sounding good to me, until he said he wanted me with him. For those of us who watch crime shows, and I do, it always seemed exciting to go into the suspects house and grill him...until you have to do it. I was extremely nervous about this. I was unsure how it would play out in real life.

We waited in my cart outside of the house, behind some bushes. During this time—about an hour but it felt like a week—we went over how we were going to approach this. He knew what he was going to ask to draw out the real answers. My only job was to look official. Maybe we could make him nervous.

The kid came home, we knocked on the door, and the parents let us right in. We sat down with the young man, told him why we were here and what we planned on doing. This had no effect on him. He quickly asked us to leave, which we had to do. He told us never to come back. At that moment, Gianni became really frustrated with his attitude and wanted to do whatever it took to put him away for this.

Months have gone by. Gianni calls every once in a while to give me an update on the investigation. I am getting frustrated that it is taking so long, but I am relieved we have somebody working for us. Now the bad part; it happens again. Our back door is kicked in, a Workman is stolen, tees, benches, and signs are torn apart. My initial thought is how can this happen? The kid is under investigation for vandalism and he does it again?

The clubhouse also has a break in. Bottles of alcohol are stolen, and small items are moved or removed. We now have the attention of all Ivanhoe staff; to say we are on high alert

would be an understatement. We take drastic measures; new cameras are installed in the clubhouse. At the grounds department, we install a heavy gate. We now have motion sensor lights and cameras. All things we did not want to do, but when your back is to the wall, you do whatever it takes.

2009 goes by without incident. We cruise through the season without a word from anybody from Lake County. I am happy that no vandalism has occurred but a little frustrated that there seems to be no resolution. Toward the end of the season, I actually put it out of my mind; it seems like something in the past.

Out of the blue, in January 2010, I check my mailbox. What do I find...? A subpoena from the Lake County States Attorney's office to appear in court the next week for this case. I was to be in the attorney's office on Monday to go over our deposition; we were scheduled for a week-long trial before the judge.

I sat in the attorney's office with our detective who will appear in court with me. We are going over dates, details, and dollar amounts. All things I had put out of my memory until now. My nerves are racing. I would have to sit on the stand and tell our story. I had no problem with that. It was the fact that the defense lawyers would have their chance to ask me questions as well. The uncertainty of what they might ask had me sweating. This was finally happening and I was a nervous wreck.

As I sat in the waiting room, going over my dates one more time the states attorney comes in to advise me there may be a deal. The defense isn't sure they have a solid case anymore as the judge wants to hear all three incidents today. Originally we were going to take them one at a time, each in front of a different judge. This decision, one judge to hear everything, has spun the case in our favor. Once the plea is put to paper, I am asked if this suits Ivanhoe. I was unsure so I deferred to the attorney. He advised me that this would be acceptable as we could take this plea to civil court and get all of our money back.

In the end all parties are happy with the outcome. The ordeal took three years, and I'm glad it's over. The experience is one that I will never forget. You never know if you'll go through something like this again, but in retrospect I'm glad I did. The range of emotions you feel in dealing with something like this is one that will be hard to find again. **-OC**



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