

FEATURE I

Robert Fraley, Fox Bend Golf Course

Lessons Learned Along the Way



Last fall I was having difficulty repairing an irrigation leak. Everything was cut to proper length and all the various pieces were ready to be glued, but there was one irritating problem. After many attempts I couldn't quite shut off the isolation valve to the tee where I was working. There was a small steady dripping, just enough that the pipe wouldn't dry and accept the glue. Then I remembered something my old boss, Jim McNair, taught me years earlier. I headed toward the pro shop and said to the attendant, "Ken, I know this is an odd request, but would you by any chance happen to have a couple of hotdog buns?" He headed into the kitchen and returned with the item I needed to finish my project. When I arrived back at the repair site I carefully shoved the bun inside the pipe the water was coming from. This allowed the water to be absorbed while I quickly glued and connected the parts. In no time the break was repaired, the bun dissolved, and water was running to the tee complex again. Later that week I e-mailed Jim and reminded him of the trick he had taught me and how I was able to put it to use. He replied that he had shown another employee this same method, but the employee misunderstood and shoved the bun, wrapper and all, into the pipe. Oooops! Jim taught me to expect rain later in the day if there was no dew on the grass in the morning. He taught me how to look for localized dry spots, how to sharpen and adjust a reel. He showed me a strong work ethic. He introduced me to the golf course business, and he taught me how to snow ski.

I can recall Dan Sterr locating a drain line with just two metal wires. I was curious as to how it worked, and he showed me how he did it. Take two lengths of wire and bend each into an "L" shape. Insert each into an aerifying tine. Hold the tines loosely in your hand and walk back and forth over the area where you think the drain line might be. Mark with paint where the two wires cross. Many times over the years I have been able to find a pipe or a drain line in this manner. Don't ask me to try and explain the science behind it, all I know is it works! During the season I will run across knots which I like to call "double-half tangles." I smile to myself and take the time to show an employee the "clove hitch" that Dan taught me as we worked together putting out rope and stakes years ago. Dan taught me to calibrate a sprayer, how to prepare for tournaments, and how to clean up after a two-week flood. He helped to show me how important good drainage is to a golf course. Many summers we spent putting in drainage. Whenever I see Dan he still asks me, "How's number five fairway draining, Bob?"

*"Tell me and I forget,
show me and I remember,
involve me and I understand."*

-Anonymous

There are two inevitable questions whenever someone finds out I work at a golf course. The first one is, "What do you do in the winter?" After I graciously explain to them that I actually am kept pretty busy through the winter months, they hit me with their next question. "I have moles in my yard and I've tried everything: bubble gum, soda pop, garden hoses. None of it works. What can I do?" I always respond with what I like to call the "Bob Kohlstedt Tried and True Mole Relocation Method." All it requires is two shovels, a heavy foot, and lots of patience.

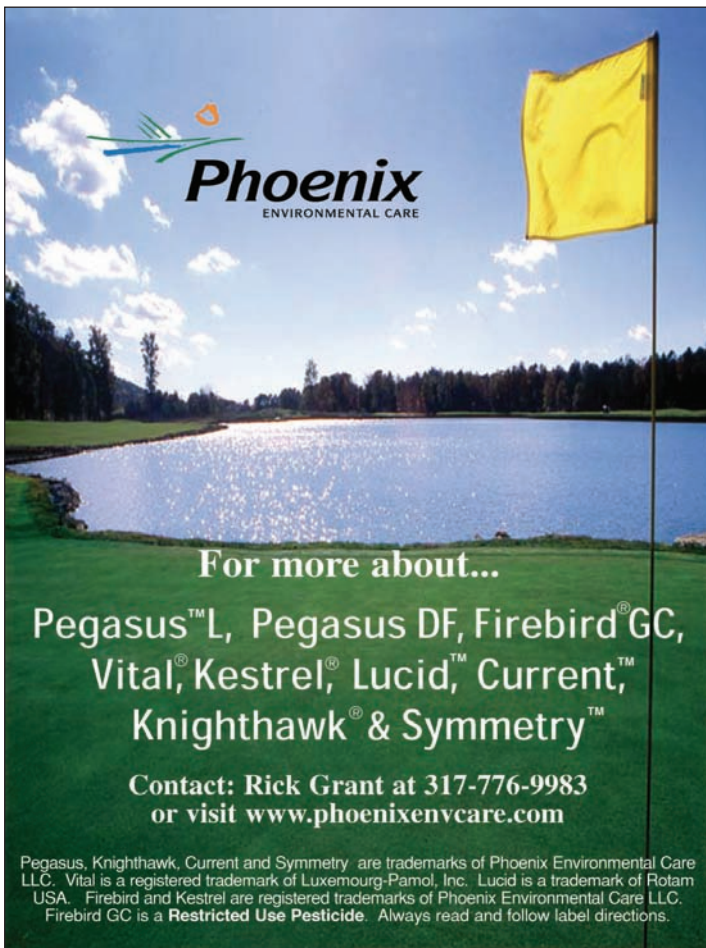
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If, while driving around the course, you notice fresh mole damage, the first thing to do is step it down. You wait patiently until you see new activity. Quickly shove the first shovel into the ground behind the mole to block the tunnel. Then, use the other shovel to pop it out. After capturing the furry fellow, it's time to "relocate" it. Now, I have to confess that, lacking the patience needed, I have never caught a mole this way. However, I have watched Bob catch many moles with this method. It is the most effective method I've seen. I wish I had kept a tally over the years. One of the most important things Bob taught me though was never to be afraid of a challenge. If something isn't working properly or you are faced with a problem, don't be afraid of trying to fix it yourself. He told me that a place where he had worked didn't have the budget to hire out, so they were encouraged to do repairs themselves. I watched and learned as Bob split a John Deere tractor in half to replace a clutch. Last winter, along with our mechanic Bill, he helped me to restore an old Toro 300 Greensmaster. I learned to mediate disputes in a quiet respectful manner by watching Bob. Since I have known Bob he has always shown support and encouragement and listened to other ideas while never looking over my shoulder. His office is always open, and his friendship is well valued.

There have been others. Art Benson showed me the value in tree selection. "Plant them small, Bob. They'll pass up the larger planted tree in a few years and be healthier for it." One fall while driving by a patch of grass which was infested with rust spores, he explained to me that it is common on newly seeded grass the first year. Harry Lovero showed me that if you respect your employees they'll respect you. I had the good fortune to work with Leon and Carole Anne McNair, Jim's brother and sister-in-law, for over twenty years. They always treated me and their other employees and co-workers as family for which I have always been appreciative.

One of the great things about life is the people you meet along the way. The individuals I have mentioned all helped me through the years by what they taught me—not so much by what they said, but by their example. An education provides you with knowledge, but it is the people that are the real gift.

-OC



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