

MIDWEST BREEZES

Charles Anfield, CGCS, *Heritage Bluffs Golf Course*



The West Winds

I called a few guys from the “west” to find out what’s going on in our western MAGCS territory. Everyone was cautiously optimistic about the upcoming season.

Dan Sterr, Vice President of the MAGCS and Superintendent of Stonebridge Country Club said his course came out of the winter in great shape. Dan said there was not much snow mold or winter dessication damage to speak of. His season started out with a little surprise after he charged his irrigation system and he found a leak in a 12” pipe leading from his pump house. Ever the optimist, Dan commented, “I’m glad I found it now instead of in July”. He found a rust hole, 2 inches below a flange in the steel pipe. He thinks the pipe is either just old or may be prematurely deteriorated possibly from his practice of acid injecting. In order to work around the 90 degree fittings and make the repair, he had to dig a sizable hole by contracting out a backhoe. Welcome to 2010.

Dan said he has been staggering bringing on some of his staff back as the grass has begun greening up and the mowing has started. He expects his crew to be fully staffed by May 1.

Dan got an early start on his greens aerification completing the task on April 5. In other project work and part of the “new design mentality”, the Club had Hollebeak Construction

reshape a fairway bunker complex on hole #7. Dennis Wise, from Fazio Design came out last fall and reduced the fairway bunker complex from a 75 yard long waste bunker to a smaller bunker with mounding placed closer to the fairway. He’ll be back this spring to look at the final shaping. Future plans call for reducing the current 37 acres of fairway to less fairway area in an effort to help reduce maintenance and fungicide costs.

I called up Brad Legnaioli, CGCS. He is the Golf Course Superintendent for the City of Elgin. He oversees Golf Course Maintenance at Bowes Creek Country Club, Wing Park Golf Club and the Highlands of Elgin. Brad said he was busy. Ya think! He said he manages to get around to each course every day, although he spends a lot of time “on the road”.

Bowes Creek Country Club is a new upscale public course that opened last October. (Hey Brad, how about a future MAGCS Meeting site?) It’s a Rick Jacobsen design featuring his unique high face bunkers with the fescue “eyebrows”. The Highlands course has undergone an expansion. Nine holes were re-built in 2002 on the old Spartan Meadows site and ten new holes opened last July that are built around an old quarry on site. The nine hole Wing Park, which opened over 102 years ago

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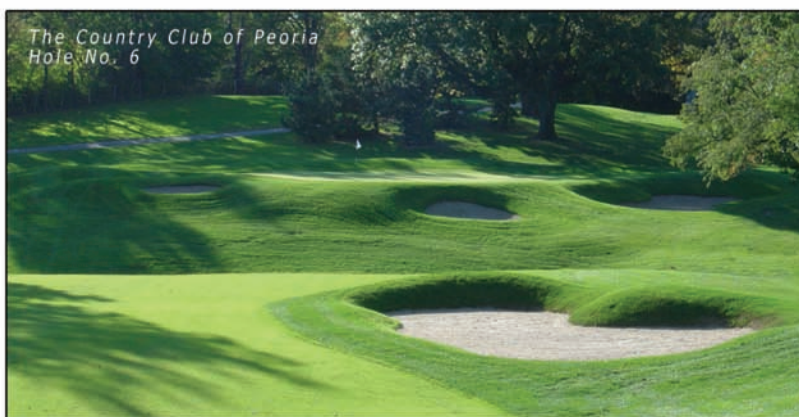


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with its bluegrass fairways and low green fees continues to click along with a loyal local following. Brad said he was very encouraged by the early season golfer numbers on all the courses and is expecting a good year. Brad is looking to get frequent flyer miles for his car and he wears running shoes as part of his daily uniform.

Dan Murray, CGCS of Settlers Hill Golf Course has also seen some good golfer numbers turning out this spring. He opened the course earlier than normal, in the 3rd week of March. For his project work, he expects to continue on his "in house" bunker project work. He is removing sand, re-shaping the sub grade, installing drainage, adding Sand Trapper bunker liners and adding new sand. Dan has observed less sand washing and better overall drainage on the bunkers they have completed work on.

Dan has had to make some budget cuts like everyone else. The ever effervescent Dan Murray: "we've had to trim some costs like everyone else but what are you going to do. Doom and gloom won't get you nothing. We're just trying to be efficient in everything we do". Dan hires a number of retirees to do most of his mowing. I enjoy the retired guys; they've got a great work ethic, except on the cold days". Don't worry Dan; warmer days are ahead of us. Keep up the good work.

Tim Anderson, CGCS, MG, Past MAGCS President (that's a mouthful) from Naperville Country Club also had his course up and running with the favorable March weather. Tim was concerned with the expectations of some of the Members with an early opening. He was not budgeted to bring on his staff this early. Tim commented "the normal guys who play early in the season understand we will not have all the bunkers raked or the ball washers out and all of the other accessories available".

He found that there were members playing, who were normally still out of town this time of year. "I don't think some members are travelling as much and they are more available to play their own course". It took some education on his part to explain that there was nothing wrong and they were following a specific budgeted plan. Tim had to call some of his staff to come in to work earlier than normal that lived in Chicago. Many of his staff are still in Mexico. He's glad to see people playing golf and using the club. "I think it's a pent up demand from the long winter".

Tim and I spoke about the "new mentality" of the business of golf course maintenance. All operations are looking to reduce costs. This translates into a reduction in maintenance practices. The buzz words we "kicked around" were cash flow and sustainability. Our job is to give our board members ideas and practices best suited to the individual club on where we can make those cuts. Before we do that, expectations need to change and this may take a generation or more before it can work. We both agree the "shoulder seasons" of March, April, September and October will determine the fiscal strength of the season. It has become very obvious now that the weather can make or break our golf seasons.

I don't often get to chat with a Master Greenkeeper. Tim said the BIGGA (British and International Greenkeepers Association) certification was not that much more difficult to complete than his CGCS certification with the GCSAA. Tim felt that his professional development is very important to his members perception of his connections and commitment to the golf industry.

That's what's blowing in from the west. **-OC**



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