



## FEATURE

John Gurke, CGCS, Associate Editor

# MAGCS— 85 Years and Counting

*The Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents enters its 86<sup>th</sup> year of existence this month. Although we cannot predict what the future holds for our organization, or for the game of golf itself, we can look back on our 85 years as an association and see how it all started, how it has progressed through the decades, and where we stand today. Ten years ago the members of the MAGCS Editorial Committee embarked on a mission to bring our colorful 75-year history to you our members and readers during our diamond anniversary celebration. For eight consecutive months On Course ran these “75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Retrospective” articles, each penned by a different author, and each summarizing a particular decade in our past. This was a huge undertaking that would never have been possible without the diligence and dedication of those authors. I wrote the first and easiest article, since the Twenties were more than half over when our association was born and since there was nobody alive to dispute any points on which I may have taken artistic liberties. Erwin McKone, Chuck Anfield, Larry Tomaszewski, Dave Braasch, Jim McNair, Shane Kissack, and Jon Jennings respectively followed with their own takes on each subsequent decade leading up to the turn of the century. It is from these articles that I have gathered most of the information for this article, which hopefully will serve to refresh the memories of our more senior members and possibly enlighten our next generation of members with this time capsule of their association’s history.*

## **The Roaring Twenties—The Birth of the Mid-West Greenkeepers Association**

The “Great War,” or World War I had ended at the start of the 20’s, Prohibition was enacted forcing many law-abiding citizens to seek entertainment in illegal “speakeasies,” as well as bringing on a rise in organized crime syndicates in the country’s major cities. In spite of this, America was thriving. During this time, on September 13, 1926, a group of sixty greenkeepers from around the nation convened at the Sylvania Country Club in Toledo, Ohio and formed the National Association of Greenkeepers of America (NAGA). Among those sixty men were Col. John Morley, the founding father and first president of NAGA, and John MacGregor, the greenkeeper from Chicago Golf Club in Wheaton, IL. Col. Morley challenged Mr. MacGregor to convene the greenkeepers in the Midwest with the purpose of organizing the district, and within two weeks notices were sent out to over 500 golf clubs in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Indiana. Sixteen

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of those 500 invitees attended the first meeting at the Great Northern Hotel at Jackson and Dearborn Streets in Chicago on November 26<sup>th</sup>, and the association's first officers were chosen. President John MacGregor, vice-president Alex Binnie of Shoreacres, secretary Ed B. Dearie of Ridgemoor and Oak Park Country Clubs, and treasurer Fred Sherwood—all charter members of NAGA—along with their twelve comrades chose Mid-West Greenkeepers Association (MWGA) to be our birth name, and on Christmas Eve in 1926, the association was officially launched.

During those times, professional sports were becoming quite popular, as the first radio broadcasts of events like heavyweight prize fights and the World Series made household names of men such as Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, and Gene Tunney. Golf was among the sports to enjoy huge popularity in the 20's, thanks in large part to characters such as Walter Hagen (winner of four PGA championships including the 1925 tournament held at Olympia Fields, and two Western Opens), Gene Sarazen (winner of the 1922 US Open held at Skokie CC), and Bobby Jones, the amateur phenom from Georgia who, from 1920 to 1929 captured the imagination of a country with victories in three US Opens (and 2<sup>nd</sup> place finishes in four others), four US Amateurs and two British Opens. Jones also led the US teams to Walker Cup victories throughout the decade, including an 11-1 drubbing of the British team at Chicago Golf Club in 1928.

The 20's brought the introduction of the steel shaft to golf, as the sport attracted people from all walks of life. What was needed were courses, and architects like Donald

Ross, Harry Colt, Charles Blair MacDonald, Charles Hugh Alison, William Boice Langford, Charles Maddox, Albert Warren Tillinghast, and Tom Bendelow filled that need with their many projects throughout the country. Among the courses in the Midwest that opened in the 20's were Bartlett Hills, Barrington Hills, Briarwood, Bryn Mawr, Butterfield, Calumet, Edgewood valley, Knollwood, Medinah, Naperville, Olympia Fields North, St. Charles, Twin Orchard, Sunset Ridge, Shoreacres, Mission Hills, North Shore, Ruth Lake, Silver Lake North, Rolling Green, and Villa Olivia. Elsewhere around the country, courses the likes of Seminole, Winged Foot, Olympic Club, Pebble Beach and Firestone.

At local meetings many of the same things we are troubled with to this day were being discussed, like earthworms, moss on putting greens, brown patch and grubs. The end of the decade brought the stock market crash on Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929, leading to the Great Depression which lasted well into the next decade.

### The Thirties—Golf and the Mid-West Greenkeepers Association Weather the Great Depression

Although the Great Depression certainly put a chokehold on the lavish lifestyles and excesses of the Roaring Twenties (it even cost NAGA its nest-egg of \$16,000 when a bank in Cleveland closed its doors), many aspects of American culture seemed unscathed. Hollywood flourished, Superman debuted, and the Chicago Bears won the first NFL championship over the New York Giants. Due in part to the golf boom of

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the past decade, the MWGA was experiencing a flush of new members in the early thirties. The Depression, however, brought new course construction in the thirties to a standstill, and in fact the nation experienced a net loss in the number of courses in play—sound familiar?

Locally, several developments were taking place, such as the addition of newfangled watering systems on courses such as LaGrange, Briargate and Northmoor. Meullermist and Rainbird were the pack leaders in irrigation innovation, with products like ball-drive pop-up heads and horizontal impact drive sprinklers. A few courses did open in the Midwest including Kankakee Elks, Orchard Hills, Pistakee, Pottawatomie, Sportsmans, Timber Trails, Waveland and St. Andrews. Overseeing our association were presidents such as Ralph Johnson, Cyril Tregillus, and Frank Dinelli. It was in the thirties when Augusta National was conceived and built, and the first Masters tournament was held in 1934 (called the Augusta National Invitational) and won by Horton Smith. It was also during this decade that NAGA decided that the name “greenkeeper” alone was not representative of what we were about, and thus changed its name to Greenkeeping Superintendents Association (GSA).

Golf club technology continued to improve, as steel became the choice of shafts for most golfers. No longer did golfers request their brassies, mashies, niblicks or spoons. Gone were the cleeks and baffies. Now clubs were called woods and irons, and they were numbered. It was common for a player to carry several dozen of these clubs around the course, leading to the 1938 USGA 14-club rule which is still in place today. Not only were clubs changing, so were golf balls, when Phil Young, a decent amateur player and owner of a rubber parts company devised a method of creating wound rubber balls with consistently round, properly positioned centers. Titleist was born and golf balls joined steel shafts as items of consistency and precision.

With the threat of war looming, golf maintenance became a lower priority as the calendar turned to 1940.

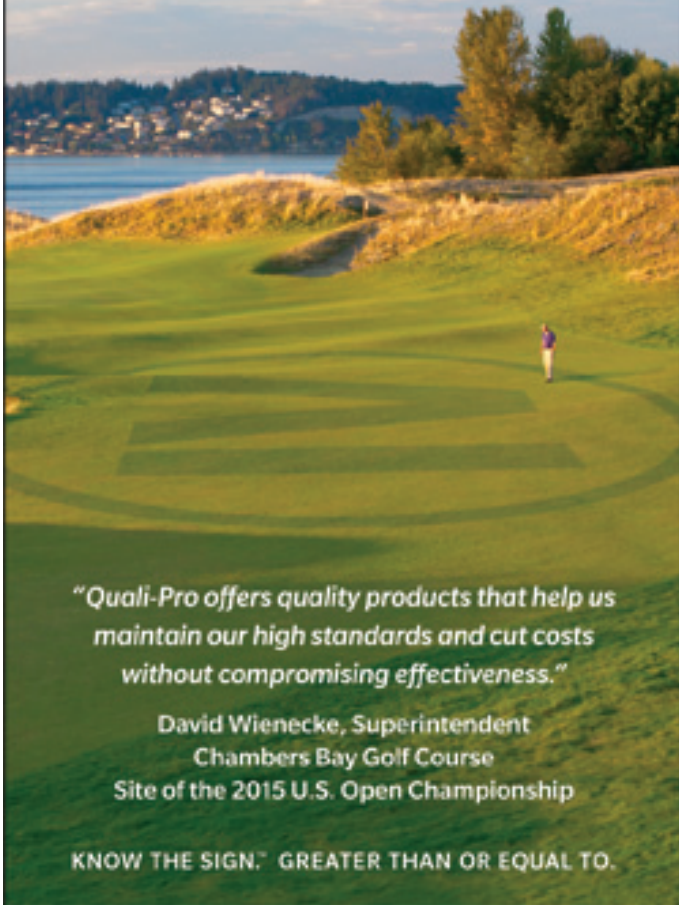
### **The Forties: Golf Takes a Back Seat During the War Years**

December 7, 1941—“a day that will live in infamy.” The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor thrust the United States into World War II, and our nation’s focus united on the war effort in two separate hemispheres. While golf didn’t simply stop during the war, many golf courses were used for war-effort purposes such as military training, agriculture (Augusta National was used to graze cattle and raise turkeys), and even air strips. Local courses were forced to trim expenses and conserve resources, leading several greenkeepers to employ sheep to graze their courses and act as mowers. With the manpower shortages, many courses simply stopped maintaining bunkers, allowing them to grow over, or they tried innovative approaches using machinery to take the place of workers. Women and children became a new component of the golf labor force for the first time. Bob Hope, one of golf’s greatest ambassadors made the rounds on the USO Tour, entertaining troops usually with a golf club in his hand. He would return to the States after the war and help his buddy Bing Crosby promote the “Great Clam-Bake” on the

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Monterrey peninsula that would eventually become the Bing Crosby National Pro-Am (today the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am).

The popular players of the day were Byron Nelson, Ben Hogan, Sam Snead, Jimmy Demaret and Gene Sarazen. 1948 ushered in the first issue of *The Bullsheet*, the official newsletter of the newly-coined Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents (MAGCS). Bob Williams was the man responsible for the name, "borrowing" it from the Fort Campbell, KY camp newsletter known as the Bull Sheet. Other notable superintendents of the day were John Darrah, Ray Gerber, Don Strand, and Melvin Warnecke, all of whom availed themselves of such new technologies as 2,4-D, the herbicide that would revolutionize the war on weeds.

When the war ended, America returned to prosperous times, and golf began its next growth spurt, thanks in some degree to an American president whose infectious love of the game led to the construction of a putting green on the White House lawn. President Dwight David Eisenhower, a hero of WWII and mastermind of the Allied invasion of France, would lead the nation into the next decade—a decade full of promise for golf and our association.

### The Rock 'N' Roll Fifties: Golf Becomes Everyman's Game

The fifties were a new beginning for Americans who had put their lives on hold through the war years. Wanting to catch up on lost opportunities, folks placed more importance on raising their families, honing their careers, and making better use of their recreational time. The suburbs became the settling-down spot after the exodus of people from America's big cities. With this came a renewed interest in golf, and by the end of the fifties, the country would experience a dramatic surge in new construction. Interest in the sport grew throughout the decade, as the number of players choosing to make golf their game of choice grew to over 3 million, and golf courses numbered over 15,000. Daily-fee courses open to the public attracted even the blue-collar workers to the game, creating a demand for new courses that would spur the next building surge. Our national organization changed its name to its current moniker—Golf Course Superintendents of America, and MAGCS celebrated its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Locally, MAGCS experienced one of its finest periods, with three MAGCS members serving as GCSAA president through the decade (Ray Gerber of Glen Oak CC in 1950, Norm Johnson of Butterfield CC in 1954, and Bob Williams of Beverly and Bob O' Link in 1958).

Herbicides came of age in the fifties when many of the pre-emergence materials such as Dactal, Balan, and Betasan were developed. Other options included those dreaded arsenicals like lead arsenate, sodium arsenate, and organic arsenicals (and this was long before protective clothing and respirators came on the scene). The insecticides being used included Chlordane, Bandane, and DDT. Fertility was typically accomplished through the use of soluble materials that provided instant improvement in color and health. Penncross bentgrass seed came on the scene, offering an alternative to the predominantly-used South German strains. The end of the war also helped make steel available again, and production of labor-saving machinery was in full swing. Found in shops

throughout the Midwest were Ford and Case tractors, Jacobson and Toro mowers, and countless other items that allowed for the efficient maintenance of the courses in our area.

The fifties brought televised golf to America's living rooms. Now our heroes of the links were real—men like Arnold Palmer who burst on the scene joining Hogan and Snead. The popularity of Babe Didrickson Zaharius, one of the greatest all-around female athletes ever, laid the groundwork for the establishment of the LPGA in the fifties. The US was dominating international team matches, winning all five Walker Cups and four of five Ryder Cups. The top money winner on the PGA Tour was Ted Kroll who earned a whopping \$72,835! It was the decade of Marilyn Monroe and Elvis, the McCarthy "witch hunts," the end of segregation (Brown v. Board of Education), the start of the Cold War, and the addition of our 49<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> states in Alaska and Hawaii. The members of MAGCS were poised and ready to ring in the next decade, with such a promising future ahead.

### **The Sixties: Milestones and Mayhem**

Golf cruised into the sixties on a wave of popularity. Construction took off despite the nation's many problems. We were involved in an unpopular war in Viet Nam, and on our home front, racial tension was heating up. The threat of nuclear decimation loomed during the Cuban Missile Crisis, our finest leaders were being assassinated such as President John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and Robert Kennedy. The Beatles invaded America in 1964, and by the end of the decade we were all admiring our Raquel Welch posters while catching an episode of Laugh In on TV. We saw the US land a man on the moon, and a guy nicknamed "Tricky Dick" get elected President.

Chicago was a mecca for golf tournaments throughout the sixties. Medinah, Beverly and Tam O' Shanter hosted four Western Opens, while Olympia Fields hosted the 1961 PGA Championship, which Jerry Barber won. Notable course openings in our area were Cress Creek, Ravinia Green, Village Links of Glen Ellen, and Pheasant Run Resort. Ravisloe CC superintendent Roy Nelson led GCSAA as its president in 1963, when MAGCS membership had reached 245. The Illinois Turfgrass Foundation was established by R. Milton Carleton, Bertram H. Rost, George Vaughan, Dr. Ralph F. Voight, and Ben O. Warren to create a fund to support turfgrass research and development at the University of Illinois, which held its first Turf Field Day in 1960. Technology was improving at a rapid rate through the sixties, with time-saving innovations such as the triplex mower making their debuts. The list of superintendents overseeing the area's courses read like a who's who in the world of golf, with names like Ted Woehrlle, Peter and Paul Voykin, Art Benson, John Ebel, Ed Stewart and Warren Bidwell headlining it. After a very politically active decade, most Americans were more than ready to see what the seventies would bring.

### **A Tale of Two Seventies**

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. It was a decade of extremes. The seventies brought many new ideas and innovations into being; however, the decade also meant the demise of many others. The passions of the sixties'

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social revolution evolved into laissez faire attitudes toward civil rights during the seventies. The incident at Kent State University and the decreasing involvement in the Viet Nam War diminished the anti-war protests. The free growth enjoyed during the post-World War II era became burdened by the governmental restrictions of the seventies. It was a time when society began to take a hard look at our planet and implement changes to protect it.

For MAGCS member Jim McNair, who had just begun his career as golf course superintendent in 1970, the memories of purchasing his new Chevy ¾-ton pickup truck for \$3,100 and a new Jacobsen Greens King for about the same price are still vivid. With systemic fungicides still around the corner, the contact products used included Caloclor, lead arsenate and Acti-Dione (cyclohexamide, which has an LD50 of 3)—not much different from 3 decades prior. It would be later in the sixties that the Environmental Protection Agency came into being. Maintenance buildings in the area boasted of Toro 76" Professional mowers, Greens Kings, Cushman Trucksters, Toro Greensmasters and Roseman gang mowers. Green space became a preservation issue and the government even made funding available to municipalities, spiking a mini-building boom in municipal golf development. Around the country things were changing as well, with President Nixon's wage and price freeze, the oil and gas embargo, and the 55-MPH speed limit in effect.

Golf took another step forward with the advent of color television. Now all the lush grass and wild clothes came to us in living color, giving rise to the "Augusta Syndrome" where all courses were now being compared to the pristine conditioning and perfection that the Masters embodies. Technologically, the move to hydraulics eliminated the need for gear boxes, belts, chains, idlers, and countless bearings and bushings. Small engines were becoming lighter and more powerful while the move toward lightweight mowing on large surfaces such as fairways had begun. Architecture and construction were changing to meet the growing need for golf courses that could handle big numbers of rounds—changes like designing larger greens with more pin locations that would spread the wear and tear of all those spiked shoes more evenly. Irrigation systems improved through automation (if you can call it that), cart paths were being built at a record pace to allow for revenue to be realized even after a big rain event, or early and late season.

Locally, MAGCS members were in good hands with suppliers such as Illinois Lawn Equipment, George A. Davis (later Chicago Toro), Nels Johnson, Burdett's, Roseman Tractor, Century Rain Aid, Henry Frenzer, Clesen's, Lemont Paving, and Wally Fuchs' Turf Products. And they needed help after suffering through such turf pests as C-15 decline and the new *Ataenius spretulus* grub that attacked bentgrass roots. The first low-mow bluegrasses were being used (Warren's A-20 and A-34), and DDT was taken off the shelves, giving us back the eagles, herons, and egrets. Labor budgets in the late seventies ranged from \$95,000 to \$157,000 with superintendent salaries anywhere from \$19,000 with housing to \$40,000 without. In 1978, Medinah Country Club offered \$25,000 to \$35,000 for its next superintendent to oversee its three courses. Past MAGCS president Ted Woehrli held the office of GCSAA president in 1977, and superintendents like



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Mike Bavier, Ed Fischer, Dudley Smith, Bruce Sering, and Oscar Miles were among the names plying their trade at area courses.

By the end of the decade, Elvis had “left the building” for good, our embassy in Tehran, Iran had been seized and the Hostage Crisis had begun, and we narrowly averted disaster at Three Mile Island. We also were riding a peak of prosperity and growth in our business, and things were looking bright for the next decade.

### The Radical Eighties

Technology was the name of the game in the eighties. IBM unveiled the first PC, and cable television was launched into households everywhere. Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (aka Star Wars), Geroge Bush’s “Read my lips—No New Taxes,” and Ollie North and the Iran-Contra affair were headlines. The world lost John Lennon and the seven space shuttle Challenger astronauts. The Exxon Valdez, whose captain Joseph Hazlewood ran his tanker aground while drunk, causing more than 11 million gallons of oil to spill into Alaska’s Prince William Sound (and prompting the joke whose punchline was “I said a TanquerAY on the rocks.”) We were entertained by Caddyshack at the theaters and by the ‘85 Bears during their run to Super Bowl XX in New Orleans.

Locally, MAGCS members were hosting PGA Tour stops such as the Western Opens held at Butler National and the 1989 PGA Championship at Kemper Lakes, won by Payne Stewart. Quite a few courses opened their doors in our area, including Bon Vivant, Royal Fox, Carillon, Vernon Hills, White Eagle, Woodbine, Wynstone, Naperbrook, and Fox Run.

Superintendents were constantly battling the demon green speed issue, the decision to convert fairways to bentgrass, Dutch elm disease, and countless other nuisances we still battle today. The association was led through the decade by the likes of Peter Leuziinger, Roger Stewart, Dave Meyer, Jim Evans and Mike Nass.

By decade’s end the Berlin Wall had fallen, and communism was on its last legs, leading to the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union into autonomous republics. This left the US as the world’s only true superpower heading into the nineties.

### The Nineties: Golf’s Boom Parallels America’s Prosperity

Perhaps one of the most influential decades in golf’s history, the nineties embodied the attitude of “if you build it they will come.” Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton was elected President in 1992 and our country experienced more peace and economic well-being than at any other time in history. Studies screamed that we need to build more golf courses to meet the skyrocketing demand, and build them we did! Unemployment was at its lowest in modern times, inflation rate was the lowest it had been in thirty years, home ownership was the highest in the country’s history, and the welfare rolls were reducing. This was the decade of Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls six championships. It was also the beginning of the Tiger Woods era in professional golf, as the phenom from Stanford followed his three consecutive US Amateur victories by turning pro in 1996 and becoming the youngest player to win the Masters (in 1997 at the age of

*(continued on page 12)*

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21 years, three months, and 14 days). The modern golf boom was in full swing.

Not everything about the nineties was good, though. Terrorism, which had been confined to the other side of the world, made its way onto American soil, when in 1993—two years to the day after the end of the Gulf War—a massive explosion occurred in an underground parking garage under One World Trade Center in New York City. Two years later, the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was targeted by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, who drove a rental van full of home-made explosives and ignited it, blowing off half of the nine-story building.

From the start of the nineties to the finish, expectations on golf course conditioning had changed drastically. Spending in maintenance budgets rose dramatically, and the quest for green speed was on. New self-contained rollers and mowers that could cut grass at under a tenth of an inch enabled superintendents to push the limit of speed—sometimes to a fault. The Toro Hydroject aerator emerged as a tool to reduce stress on greens in a minimally-invasive way. Black layer was one of the major concerns for those growing and maintaining USGA greens. There is perhaps no bigger example of the “overgrooming” era than when, in 1997, Paul Latshaw walk-mowed the fairways at Congressional for the US Open. Not to be outdone, Winged Foot Golf Club DOUBLE-cut its fairways with walk mowers for the PGA Championship in August of that year.

The nineties saw a huge rise in environmental awareness. The USGA joined forces with the New York Audubon Society to create the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for

Golf Courses, with Peter Leuzinger spearheading St. Charles CC’s becoming the first course in the US to become a fully-certified sanctuary. The Right to Know Act was passed in 1990, rinse and spill containment systems became mandatory for golf courses in 1993, underground fuel storage tanks came under scrutiny, and superintendents found themselves immersed in regulatory red tape. Safer pesticides such as Dimension and Barricade became available, as did new bent-grasses which could be mowed even lower while showing characteristics like drought and disease resistance. We were changing our courses over to spikeless golf shoes while fighting the new gray leaf spot fungus that ravaged ryegrass stands across the Midwest. This very magazine took another step forward, with its ‘Bull Sheet’ name being changed to “On Course” (marking the second time Bob Williams had named our newsletter), bringing full color to its pages for the first time in its 50 years of existence. Bob’s son Bruce Williams began the decade as our MAGCS president and went on to lead GCSAA as its president in 1996. Local clubs played host to many professional tour stops, as the Western Open moved from Butler National to Cog Hill’s Dubsdread, the Ameritech Senior Open was played at Stonebridge, the US Senior Open took place at Olympia Fields, and the 1999 PGA Championship came to Medinah, when a memorable battle between youngsters Tiger Woods and Sergio Garcia came down to the wire, with Tiger prevailing by one shot. With the internet a regular part of our daily lives, new innovations like superintendent Russ Fink of Tamarack’s Turftalk online, Peter McCormick’s TurfNet, and Michigan State University’s Turfgrass Information File (TGIF) were at our disposal. Cell phones, computerized

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irrigation control, and real-time weather radar assisted us through our workdays. Renovations to old courses and construction of new courses were happening everywhere, and people were waiting in line to play. We were heading into the next century with a full glass of optimism for our game's future.

### **The New Century: What Goes Up Must Come Down**

Soaring high heading into the new millennium, our country was soon to experience its worst moment in its history, when on September 11, 2001 terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners, crashing them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, while the fourth plane crashed in a Pennsylvania field after passengers fought for control with the terrorists in the cabin. Over 3,000 Americans lost their lives, and our country would never be the same again. By the middle of the decade, natural disasters were grabbing headlines, when a tsunami in Asia killed over 225,000 people in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina unleashed her fury on the Gulf coast, destroying much of New Orleans. Arnold Schwarzenegger was elected governor of California, Saddam Hussein was captured and later hanged, and the steroid era in Major League Baseball came to light. America's first African American President was sworn into office, and by late in the decade the era of the corporate bailout had begun. What had been considered "too big to fail" was not, and the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market was followed by a global economic decline. By the end of the decade unemployment had reached 10%, and our nation's budget for 2011 included a whopping \$1.6 trillion deficit.

Golf in the Midwest began the decade at full throttle, as growth of the game and construction continued. Tommy Witt was president of GCSAA in 2001, and things were looking positive. By mid-decade, it was apparent that we had been a bit too optimistic with regard to the growth of the game, and when the economy tanked, so too did the golf industry to a degree. Clubs whose waiting lists were filled were all of a sudden struggling just to keep membership rosters full. The over abundance of high-end public courses began slashing rates to compete for those precious rounds. Management companies were growing in leaps and bounds, taking the reins of many financially troubled properties. For only the second time in history, golf course closings outnumbered openings. MAGCS members found themselves rethinking their entire maintenance operations, dealing with budget cuts and pay freezes. Phrases such as "the new normal" were bandied about regularly. By the end of the decade, some light at the end of the tunnel was visible, but our industry was changed forever, and everyone whose careers were involved in golf knew that the future would be much different from the past. Things taken for granted in the past, such as availability of water, will be our big issues heading into our next 85 years. Technology will continue improve, as GPS and robotics will take on an even larger role in golf course maintenance. While the future of our association looks strong, its 85-year past should not be forgotten—it formed the foundation of who we were, what we are today, and what we will be in the years to come. **-OC**

