

SUPER-N-site

Andy Morris and The Country Club of Peoria

Kyle Haines, Onwentsia Club

PHOTOS: ANDY MORRIS

Located roughly 2.5 hours from both Chicago and St. Louis one will find the dividing line between Cubs and Cardinals fans in the far southwest town of Peoria Heights, Illinois. Known for its booming economy with the likes of Caterpillar, Maui Jim and several renowned medical facilities, Peoria Heights is a thriving region located just outside the tollways.

In addition to this thriving location are a number of fun, challenging and historic golf courses. The Country Club of Peoria is no exception.

Founded in 1897, The Country Club of Peoria has a rich history including the 1937 Western Open along with several men's and women's state amateur championships. The Club is located along the scenic rolling terrain of the Illinois River and plays 6,232 yards from the championship tees. It has a strong membership with several reciprocals throughout the United States and Chicagoland area. Since 2004 the Club has undergone various stages of renovation



The Country Club of Peoria is one of the jewels of Central Illinois golf.

tions including new irrigation, regrassing greens, bunker renovations and releveling tee boxes.

Managing the property is golf course superintendent, Andy Morris. Andy has been at The Country Club of Peoria since 2000 and was the assistant superintendent at Weaver Ridge Golf Club in Peoria prior. In his tenure he has served as the President of the Central Illinois GCSA as well as a national committee member of the GCSAA. Andy attended two years at Ohio State University before transferring to Michigan State University to earn his bachelor's degree in turf management and minor in soil chemistry. What some of you may not know about Andy is that the turf profession was actually his second calling – his first being in culinary arts.



Andy and wife Sherri, with Maxwell (11) and Madison (8).



Right out of high school Andy left his small town in central Iowa and headed west to attend the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco. After school he took a job in Napa Valley before eventually becoming the executive chef of the Anhauser-Busch Entertainment Corporation based in California. Here his responsibilities included supervising and training chefs and apprentices at company locations. He was put in charge of projects, oversaw budgets, and reported directly to company officials – very similar to responsibilities of today’s turf professionals.

While Andy was happy with his career in food service, the turf industry presented itself when he and his wife uprooted their family for his wife to pursue her Ph.D. at Ohio State University. It was here, during the golf boom of the mid-1990s, when Andy decided to follow his love for the game and go back to school to pursue a degree in turfgrass management. After ultimately graduating from Michigan State University, Andy quickly moved up the ladder utilizing his years of related experience along with hard work and dedication.

Andy emphasizes how positive mentors have helped him succeed and he is passionate about giving back to the indus-

try. Similar to his training and placement responsibilities with Anhauser-Busch, Andy started an internship program at his golf course with his alma mater. While attending a local seminar five years ago, Andy ran into a Michigan State instructor spreading the word of a growing internship program with Chinese MSU turfgrass students. It didn’t take long for Andy to decide this was something he wanted to partake in.

Officially, the program is called the Michigan State University America-Sino Turfgrass Management Program and is led by instructor, Yusong Mu. Here students earn joint B.S. degrees from one of four local universities in China as well as Michigan State University. Once accepted into the program,

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students are subject to extensive English training and undergraduate coursework. Mu notes that on average 15 professors from the University travel to China each year to teach accelerated turf and other-related courses that they teach in East Lansing. During the Fall semester of their senior year students come to the United States and are placed into an internship program at a participating facility. Prior to starting their internships, however, students go through two weeks of hands-on training with turf equipment at the Hancock Center in East Lansing. For many, this is the first time they've seen or ran turf equipment since the market in China is still evolving. To date the program has graduated 354 students with a 100% graduation rate and continues to grow each year. Participating facilities include many top 100 clubs and research institutions.



The historic Country Club of Peoria sits atop the Illinois River using the natural elevation and undulations to test one's golf skill. Pictured above and right.

"It's been a tremendous success and something I look forward to participating in each year," says Andy. "It's very rewarding seeing how The Country Club of Peoria can have such a global impact for the industry and benefit these students' careers in the booming Chinese golf market." The program is well supported by the membership, too, with members often interacting with interns and bringing their children to learn about life in another country.

Each year Andy takes on one Chinese intern from August through Thanksgiving. He notes how the timing is great for exposure to cultural practices and projects that typical summer interns may not experience. He exposes interns to all facets of the business including making them financially responsible for a project, letting them act as the assistant for two weeks, and conducting their own green committee meeting. After completing their internships, students return to China for their final semester before entering the turf profession. "I would encourage anyone to participate in the program," Andy noted.

Andy will be hosting the MAGCS/ITF Spring Golf Day in May. Those interested in this program can contact instructor Yusong Mu at ymu@msu.edu. 

