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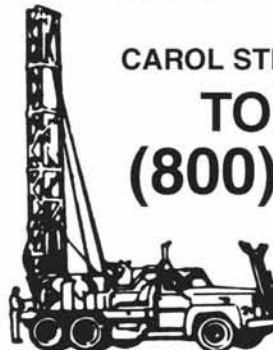
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# The Evolution of the Golf Course Superintendent

*Editor's Note: This article comes from our national organization, Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. GCSAA is also marking its 75th anniversary this year. The celebration continues at the 2002 International Golf Course Conference and Show in Orlando, February 3-10, 2002.*

## Origins of the Game

Golf's introduction to Scotland (between 1424 and 1457) probably came through the merchantmen that sailed into the great harbors on the east coast. Golf was so popular in the 15th century that the fourteenth parliament of King James III decreed on March 6, 1457, that "fute ball (soccer) and golf be utterly cryit-dune," and "nocht to be usit" because the game interfered with archery, an essential element in the defense of the realm.

When the invention of gunpowder at the end of the 15th century reduced the importance of archery, golf again became popular. The Scottish and English paintings and sketches from the early 18th century show golfers playing with maintained fairways and greens, which implies that the work of greenkeeping was well established at that time.

The Royal and Ancient Golf Society of St. Andrews was formed in 1754 and formalized the game by creating a small number of basic rules. In its most rudimentary form, the game consisted of a course, implements (clubs) and a ball. The balls and implements were fairly standard, but the courses varied significantly

depending upon rainfall, wind, variety of grass, land features and the presence of grazing animals (the first lawnmowers).

## The Early Greenkeeper

The Royal Burgess Golfing Society minutes indicated that in 1774, a boy was engaged as "our cady" and considered the first "greenkeeper" with a remuneration of six shillings per quarter year and a suit of clothes. From 1809 to 1820, a person was employed with the title of club-maker and officer, as well as assistant in keeping the green. However, in 1866 a council made up of two members of each of five area clubs was appointed to take charge of the green and pay jointly a person "to make holes, look after the flags and mend the turf." A motion was carried that a professional golfer be employed as a servant of the club and the entire charge of the course be entrusted to him. Tom Morris was introduced and his duties explained.

Morris would keep the putting greens in good order, repair them when necessary and make new holes. He would be allowed one man's labor for two days a week and it would be understood that he was to work under the supervision of the green committee. The newly appointed

chief of the links was paid 50 pounds per year and 20 pounds for the upkeep of the links. Although Morris would retire in 1903 after 40 years as greenkeeper, the basics of some of his maintenance practices are still employed today. Golf historian Horace Hutchinson wrote in his book *Golf*, "The greenkeeper is engaged by the club at a certain annual salary to look after the ground, arrange (sic) the tees and read the riot act to small boys who play off the greens with their irons, and to generally act as custodian. He will also be the overseer of one or more horny-handed sons of toil who, under his directions, roll, sweep and mow the greens and fill up iron-skelps, and other wounds in the grounds."

Hutchinson explained in 1906 that the profession of modern greenkeeper was no easy one and not to be picked up lightly by a caddie or a professional player. He went on to say that it should be a profession unto itself. Hutchinson believed the greenkeeper should have an elementary knowledge of chemistry and botany, and be a man of acute observation.

As the popularity of the game increased, the rules became

more formalized and so did maintenance of the course. And just as the game itself changed, so did the role of those in charge of the playing field. Maintaining a golf course in excellent playing condition while permitting continuous use by golfers in weather that changed seasonally and unexpectedly, demanded knowledge of turfgrass and effective management methods.

Greenkeepers in the United States were greatly influenced by the traditions of England and Scotland. While there is some indication that golf course construction in America was attempted in the early 1800s, the first real golf course was not constructed until the 1890s. However, the challenges of maintaining golf courses in the America were much different than in Europe, thus these professionals had to adapt to the conditions.

### Technology, Education, Community

Just as technology has had an impact on the playing equipment, golf course maintenance has been subject to technological advancements. Automatic, satellite-controlled watering systems have allowed superintendents to use water resources more efficiently, while improving conditions for golfers. Equipment such as triplex mowers, verticutters, aerators and lasers have positively affected the playing surface while causing little, if any, downtime for facilities.

University and privately funded research have resulted in better turfgrass cultivars, environmentally friendly maintenance practices and improved golf course designs. The result is golf courses are better conditioned and can better withstand the effects of weather, traffic and disease than a few decades ago. Turfgrass research was limited until the

1920s when the USGA Green Section was established for that purpose. By the 1960s, most states were conducting turfgrass research. It was also during this time of impressive growth that the occupational title of “golf course superintendent” began to replace the term “greenkeeper.”

Advances in education have had a great impact on the professional growth of golf course superintendents. Until the 1950s, it was common for the superintendent to spend 90 percent of his/her time performing maintenance duties. Today, that figure is nearer to 35 percent as budgeting, scheduling, personnel, research, design and planning activities each command attention. In order to perform those duties, aspiring superintendents could no longer rely solely on serving an apprenticeship as a steppingstone to the top position.

*(continued on page 24)*



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Colleges and universities began offering golf course management curriculums featuring classes in agronomy, business management and communication. The first vocational course for greenkeepers was introduced in 1927 by the University of Massachusetts, which followed shortly with a two-year course of study. In 1957, a two-year course in turfgrass management was started at Penn State. During the 1960s and 1970s, numerous vocational and university turfgrass programs became available and today more than 100 colleges and universities offer two- and/or four-year degrees.

A recent GCSAA study indicates that 95% of golf course superintendents have some post-high school education. For superintendents younger than 30, that number is just over 98%. Approximately 47% of the college

degrees earned by superintendents are in turfgrass management, with 12% in horticulture, 10% in agronomy and 8% in business administration. Continuing education is virtually a requirement for golf course superintendents in order to perform at a high level. Employees who administer the application of chemicals on a course are trained and licensed by various local, state and/or federal governing bodies.

Entrusted with administering a large portion of a golf facility's budget and managing its most valuable asset, the golf course superintendent has become an integral member of the management team. Many have assumed roles such as director of golf, manager of golf course operations, general manager, etc. In fact, a recent reader survey by *Golf Digest* listed the superintendent as the most important

individual employee at a golf course, including the club/course pro, club/grill manager, starter and beverage personnel. As the game and business of golf has grown, so has the recognition of the superintendent as key to the enjoyment of the game and the economic vitality of golf facilities.

"Maintenance is more important to the golfer than design," internationally-respected golf course architect Michael Hurdzan notes. "Given the choice between a well-designed course and a poorly maintained one, or a poorly designed and well-maintained one, the golfer will nearly always choose the better maintained. Maintenance often has a greater influence than design on a course's difficulty and speed of play."

Though education, research and technology enhanced the trade, it was the creation of com-



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munity that elevated the position of the superintendent. The creation of the USGA Green Section in 1920 and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America in 1926 provided a means to network and exchange information for the maintenance of golf facilities.

### The Superintendent Profile

While the golf course superintendent profession has changed over time, it is still largely a combination of art and science. However, financial implications and technological advances have changed the position from one of a laborer to resource manager. Today's superintendent must manage labor, time, materials and finances in a manner that is compatible with the environment, meets financial goals and serves the customer. So what kind of person chooses the superintendent profession? Surveys indicate a passion for the game of golf and/or a desire to work with nature or

experience an outdoor setting as the reason(s) people pursue the career.

An analysis of golf course superintendents in the United States reveals the average individual is 41 years old, earns \$57,057 annually, has been a superintendent for 11 years and has worked at two different facilities. These figures represent the mean, thus significant differences may exist depending on region of the country, the number of holes at a course, course type (private, resort, public), number of employees supervised, size of maintenance budget, etc. Those who complete a rigorous certification program administered by the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America generally earn higher salaries and have a greater opportunity to advance in the profession or in the administration of their golf facility. It is not unusual to find a superintendent who earns well into the six figures.

### The Future

A 1997 study by the National Golf Foundation examined trends in the golf industry for a period from 1986-96. It found the growth in golf facility construction significantly outstripped demand. In real terms, the supply of golf courses grew by 2,350, including a rate of 392 courses per year from 1991-96. In terms of golfer demand, the 1986-96 period saw an increase from 20 to 25 million golfers, however the number of golfers (25 million) and rounds played (460 million) has remained essentially the same from 1990-95.

In 1999, the NGF updated its study and found golf facilities continued to be developed at impressive rates. In 1997, there were 16,010 golf courses; that figure grew to 16,743 in 1999. Annual golf course openings topped 500 for the first time in

*(continued on page 42)*



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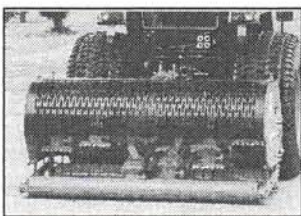
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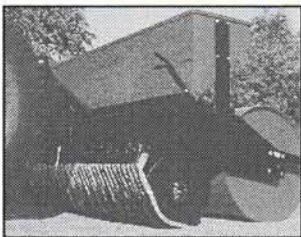
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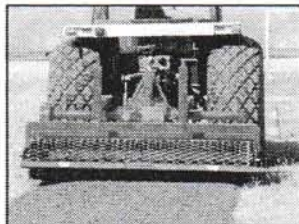
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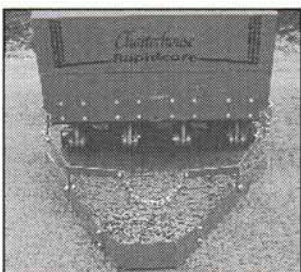
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As you can see, some very positive changes are coming. However, the Board needs the members' input to keep the MAGCS moving progressively forward. I strongly encourage all of our members to consider hosting a meeting, serving on a committee or offering ideas to

enhance our forward momentum. As for any who are contemplating running for the Board in the future, please let Brian Bossert know. I am sure that you, like me, will find serving the Midwest to be an educational and rewarding experience.

The end of the season is finally here. YES! I hope you all enjoy the off-season. My big project will be trying to figure out topics for my next 11 president's messages.

On that note, happy holidays to all. 

**There Is Life After the Golf Course** (continued from page 9)

wake up and discover "nothing." Nothing is planned for that day. If your wife has become accustomed to being home alone for all those years, she is now finding you underfoot. So, you should cultivate other interests while you are still working. Become involved in outside activities. And seek out some activities both of you will enjoy together. Volunteer—numerous organizations need your help and expertise. Give something back to your community and fellow man.

Prior to retirement and while you are still covered by a medical insurance plan, take care of any health needs. Correct any dental problems, have your vision checked and order new glasses, if needed. Schedule complete physicals and related testing. Take care of as many health needs as you can at least six months before your retirement date. Believe me, you may not have a mortgage after retirement, but your medical insurance may be more than any mortgage you once had. It's guaranteed, insurance costs will continue to increase.


To fully enjoy retirement, you need to stay healthy, and to stay healthy you need to keep active—physically and mentally. Eat properly, quit smoking and drink moderately. (That's alcohol, not water.) This is where your hobbies or other interests come into play. And play you should; you worked many hard years and gave up many personal activities and too much of

your family home life. Retirement is your opportunity to make up for those missed opportunities.

When Judy and I retired, we sold our home, packed all of our belongings, said all of our goodbyes and left for Montana. We were moving to a new and strange place. We had visited Bozeman a couple of times and decided it was where we would like to live, but we had no home to move into, no friends here or family, just the two of us. I had anxiety attacks the first couple of months. No job, no activity, living in a rental condo with all of our belongings in boxes packed to the ceiling—I felt lost at times. Sure, we had our retirement funds paying the bills, but there were too many hours in some days. Only after buying a home did the anxiety attacks cease, for I became too busy getting the house in order, both inside and out.

Since then, we have joined a church, joined the Montana

Wilderness Association and participated in weekly hikes with them, become involved in Habitat for Humanity by helping to build homes (Judy and I are co-editors of their newsletter), and joined a snowshoe club for those winter treks. We also take in various sporting events at Montana State University and have season tickets for the Bozeman Symphony Orchestra. I try to fish one day a week, and believe me, the fly-fishing outfit that the Association gave me has had a workout! There is also my woodworking shop to make those woodchips fly. Traveling is truly a wonderful experience. We've explored New Zealand and have toured the Scandinavian capitols and St. Petersburg, Russia.

Now there aren't *enough* hours in a day! This feeling will be your reward, too, if you take the time now to plan for your own active retirement. 

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*Technology advancements brought the bunker rake which has changed very little in 30 years.*



# The Way We Were . . .

# And Still Are



Photos by Bill Ficht

The venerable clubhouse at Wheaton's Chicago Golf Club.

*Change is good. This has long been the mantra for the inexorable progression of things. As Americans, we extol the virtues of change, of progress. Still—how refreshing it is, every once in a while, to find a place where change is not the be-all, end-all. A place where change is even frowned upon. A place that still looks and feels today as it would if you were to enter a time machine and transport back 75 years.*

Chicago Golf Club in Wheaton is such a place. The virtual birthplace of golf in this country, Chicago Golf Club stands as an anachronism among today's golf courses.

Before you even step from the clubhouse to the golf course, the sense of being in another time is prevalent. The furnishings, the décor, the lack of air-conditioning, even the aroma suggest an earlier era. The golf course features none of today's modern trappings—no “back-drop trees” or artificial waterfalls; no holy boulders or lighted fountains. This is golf the way C. B. MacDonald

intended it to be when he designed the course back in 1894, and the way Seth Raynor intended it to be when he completed a redesign in 1921. Chicago Golf Club has been home to numerous championships, including three U.S. Opens and four U.S. Amateurs. Chicago was also host for the legendary 1928 Walker Cup matches, where the U. S. team, capitalizing on Bobby Jones' course record 66, thumped the British team 11-1. In August of 2005, the Walker Cup will make its long-awaited return to Chicago Golf Club; a similar outcome is expected!

The first 18-hole golf course in the United States, Chicago Golf Club is the place where John MacGregor—one of the founding fathers of MAGCS and GCSAA—plied his trade as greenkeeper. For that reason, we selected the timeless Chicago Golf Club as the setting for the “then” and “now” photographs gracing our front and back covers this issue. After all, Chicago Golf Club is the home course of the man who begat us.

To that end, we have many people to thank for the opportunity to photograph these hallowed grounds, among them, golf course

*(continued on page 30)*






Hole no. 2 at Chicago Golf Club holds true to the original Charles Blair MacDonald design.

superintendent Jon Jennings and his staff for their preparation; our models Frank Bucciferro and Ygnacio Hernandez (both employees of Chicago Golf Club); the very friendly and helpful folks at

Jaynesway Farms in Bartlett for sending Joy and her beautiful horse Ed; our photographer, Bill Ficht; and our contributing editor, John Gurke, for costume procurement and behind-the-scene logistics. We

hope you'll enjoy this glimpse back at the way we were, as well as the documentation of the way we are now. 

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