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Lovely hole no. 6 at Whisper Creek Golf Club.
(Photo courtesy Whisper Creek G.C.)

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ON COURSE WITH THE PRESIDENT

Luke Strojny, CGCS Poplar Creek G.C.

Fasten Your Seat Belts— It May Be a Bumpy Season

After a chilly March and snow to usher in April, the 2002 golf season has finally begun! Combine the abnormal weather with the need to tighten budgets and you have the ingredients for a very difficult season.

Many superintendents are being asked to cut their budgets due to last season's economic downturn . . . When I ask the powers-that-be from where they would like me to trim all this excess money, the usual answer is "staff."

Many superintendents are being asked to cut their budgets due to last season's economic downturn. I don't know about the private arena, but many of us in the municipal side of the industry do not have much fat to cut out of our budgets. When I ask the powers-that-be from where they would like me to trim all this excess money, the usual answer is "staff." Like most of you, my largest expense is labor. It is the nature of the business—people are needed to run golf courses. Why is it that they want to cut the very commodity that generates revenue? A well-trained and experienced staff will actually save a course money by working efficiently and providing better playing conditions. Conversely, an inexperienced and poorly trained staff can ruin a good course faster than any disease or insect. My point is, cutting staff may be the easiest cut to make, but it is probably not the smartest.

Speaking of staff . . . we took the time early this spring to do some intensive staff training. We covered general golf course safety, equipment operation, Right to Know and our department's specific policies. Our insurance company requires us to review all of these topics at least once a year. I myself learned several things during this year's training.

- Do not take **anything** for granted.
- English-to-Spanish translation takes a lot longer than you ever expected.
- Be prepared for the tough questions.

It seems that even if you have had the same staff for a few years, they may have forgotten everything you ever taught them. (Well . . . not everything.) I was shocked to find out that even some of my most experienced staff did not know or remember some of our most basic safety and operation policies. One of our goals this year is making sure staff continues to be aware of our policies while working. Do not take for granted that your staff knows or remembers.

"Do not mow the collar with the greensmower." I do not know what gets added to this simple statement when translating from English to Spanish. Whenever I give my assistant something to translate, it always takes more time to get out than I expected. I am not sure if he adds extra commentary to a brief statement or the Spanish version just requires more words. Whatever the remark, I usually notice smiles from my staff after my assistant is finished so I suspect something was changed. In any case, I am very lucky because I have a

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The Word, By George!

It seems like only yesterday I was writing my 2001 director's column and here it is, a year later. And what a year it has been! September 11th seems to make all other things seem small, but a few good things happened also. Karen and I were able to get a couple weeks' vacation in and by the second half of the year we were blessed with two more grandkids: a boy in August and a girl in September (just two days after 9-11). I guess things have a way of leveling out.

... MAGCS is setting up a daytime office at the Midwest Golf House in Lemont. This location will be our headquarters for questions and information during business hours, as well as the site for mailing of announcements and referrals via U.S. mail.

While in Phoenix this time, we decided to try to climb Camelback Mountain, which is very close to the resort where we stay. The girls wanted to go along but Gary (the smart one of the group) wanted no part of it. Thinking we would beat the heat, we got up at 6:00 a.m. to get a head start. And sure enough, when we stepped outside ready to take on the mountain, it was a mere 90 degrees and of course, SUNNY. We drove to the trailhead and found we were not the only ones attempting this endeavor. The parking lot was almost full. Our group managed to make it about a fourth of the way before the girls called it quits and waited for me as I went on a little further. When I felt as if I was hiking straight up, I too decided to stop. (I blamed it on the heat and not the fact that I was really in no shape to do this in the first place.) I took a couple of pictures, rested and turned around. When we got back to the resort, I found a tee shirt that said "I Climbed Camelback Mountain." The kind clerk said it was okay to wear it since I at least had made the attempt. Who knows, maybe I'll try it again this year and make it further. (Or maybe not!)

Not quite as formidable as Camelback but still challenging is the new MAGCS Message Board that debuted early in 2002. For some (myself included), confusion reigned at first, but all is now running smoothly and the forum is used by quite a few members. HINT—if you forget your password to the message board, you can retrieve it by going to the login, typing in your user name and then clicking below where it says "Forgot password?" Within a minute or so, your password will be e-mailed to the address with which you signed up.

E-mail delivery of meeting notices started with the March meeting, but that notice was also mailed to all members. Since it was (and still is) sent directly from our Web site and not from the MAGCS computer, I didn't know how the first attempt would fare and wanted to make sure all members received the announcement. As it turned out, I got a list of all e-mails confirmed sent as well as a few that failed (some due to my typing skills). With those results, I decided it would be a good idea to put the monthly announcement itself on the Web site. E-mail messages for announcements as well as job referrals are now shorter and to the point. Please be aware that the online registration form has also been modified. Registering online is by far the best and fastest way, but if you need a hard copy of the form, you can click your Web browser's print button and download the form itself.

I am writing this column at the end of March, so while I can't be sure, it's most likely a reality that MAGCS is setting up a daytime office at the
(continued on page 39)

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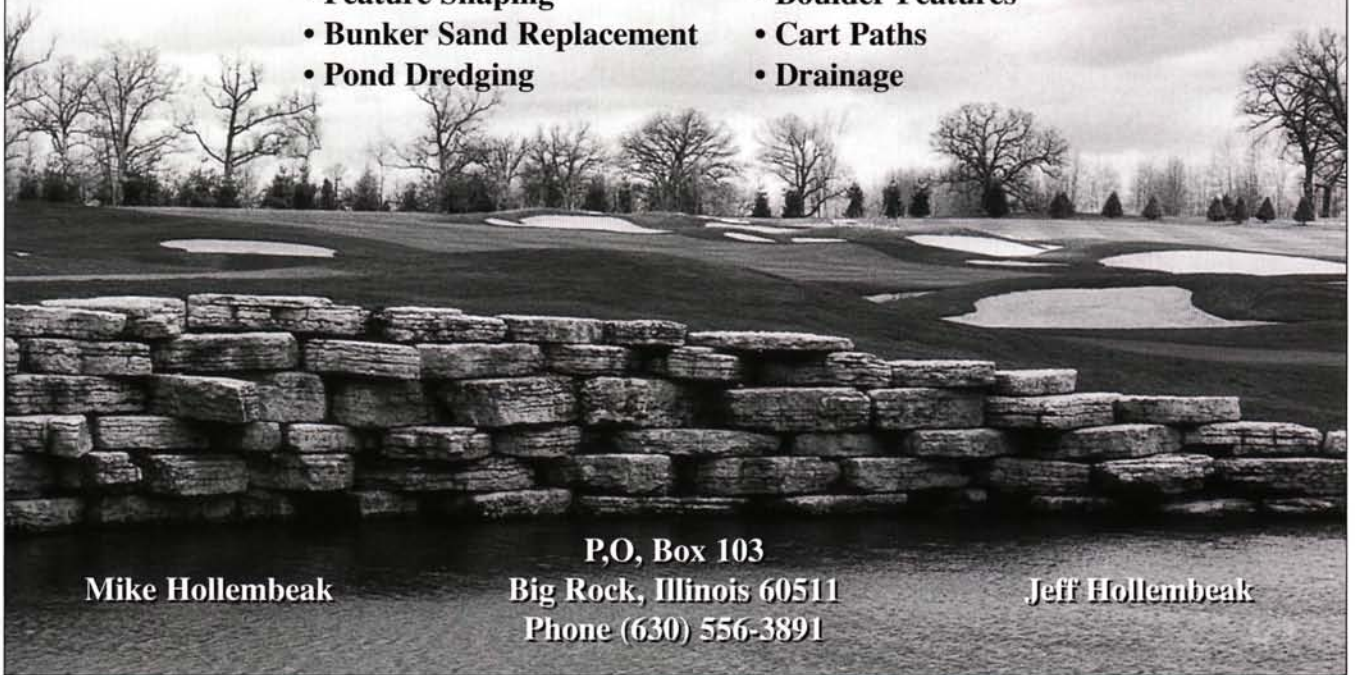
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Jim Wyffels -N-



Jim and wife Krista.

WHISPER CREEK



It's off to the north we go for the May 22nd Midwest meeting/ITF Golf Day at Whisper Creek Golf Club in Huntley, Illinois. Jim Wyffels is at the helm of this Del Webb project codesigned by Greg Nash and Billy Casper. Beginning in 1998, Ryan Central Inc. (of Janesville, WI and Elgin, IL) constructed the 18-hole facility. Lohmann Golf Designs, Inc. was also instrumental in the early development of the project.



Hole no. 13.

Jim is 30 years old, is married to Krista and enjoys watching football and snow-skiing. He started out in the business working for his dad, who is a turf consultant, and soon found that his real love was being on the golf course. At the age of 12, he left his dad's side to work at Maple Bluff Golf Course and has had quite a track record since. He went to Black Hawk College, where he received an associate's degree in liberal arts. From there, he spent several years at Eagle Ridge Inn and Resort, starting out as an intern and slowly working his way up the food chain in the following order: assistant superintendent of the South course, superintendent of the North and East courses, grow-in superintendent of The General (where we played just a couple years ago). From there, he came to Whisper Creek to become the superintendent.

Jim states that the most challenging part of his job is going from grow-in to opening the golf course and does consider himself an environmental steward by implementing such tools as IPM. The most rewarding part of the job is watching the growth of his crew and seeing his assistants go on to become superintendents. Jim takes great pride in knowing that he has made a difference in the lives of those with whom he has had the opportunity to work. When asked what direction he thinks the golf course maintenance industry will be heading in the next 25 years, he responds, "I think you will see more management companies in the future and new golf facilities becoming less extravagant." Jim's professional mentors are Bob

Graunke and Dennis Peck. He explains, "They taught me the real-life day-to-day operations, everything you don't learn in school."

Now for Jim's once-in-a-lifetime experiences, or "funnies" as I like to call them. Two in particular stick out. Jim recalls that at one course, a rabid cow ran through a fence and on to the golf course property. The local police were called in to handle the situation by means of, well, I think you know where I'm going with this. Unfortunately, the story doesn't end with filets on a Weber grill. The second one is on the top five list of bad things a superintendent doesn't want to happen. Opening day at Whisper Creek, number 12 tee, Billy Casper is teeing off and all of a sudden the sprinkler turns on. To this day, Jim claims he had nothing to do with it. Oh, yeah, we believe you, Jim. Giggle giggle. The power of the handheld remote in the wrong person's hand . . .

We will see you at Whisper Creek in May.



Photos courtesy Whisper Creek G.C.

No. 9 green.

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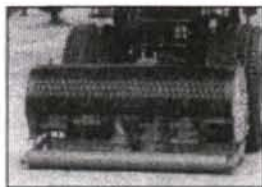
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