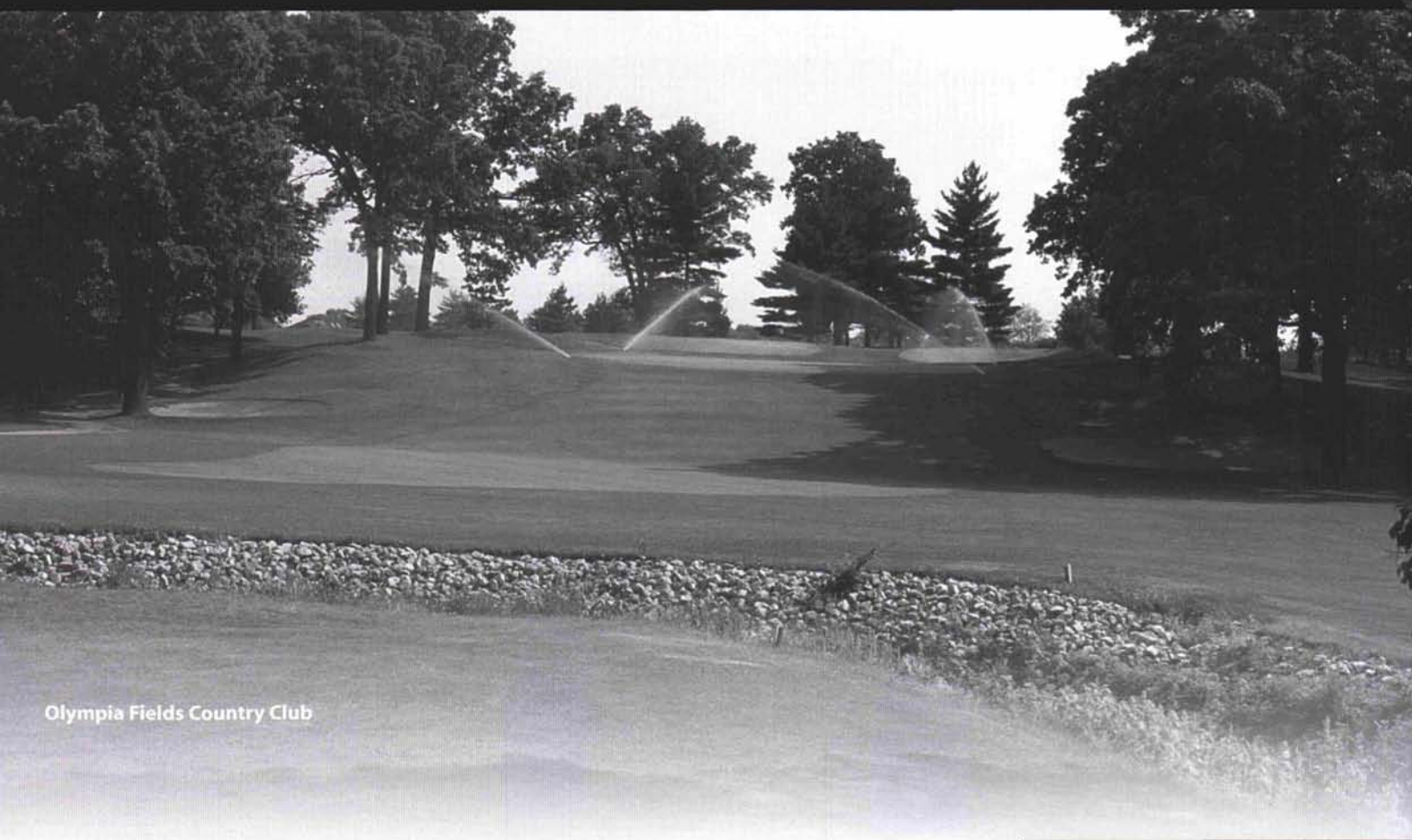


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### FRONT COVER

A swan with an attitude.  
Tom Maple, an award-winning nature photographer based in Ingleside, captured this memorable winter scene.

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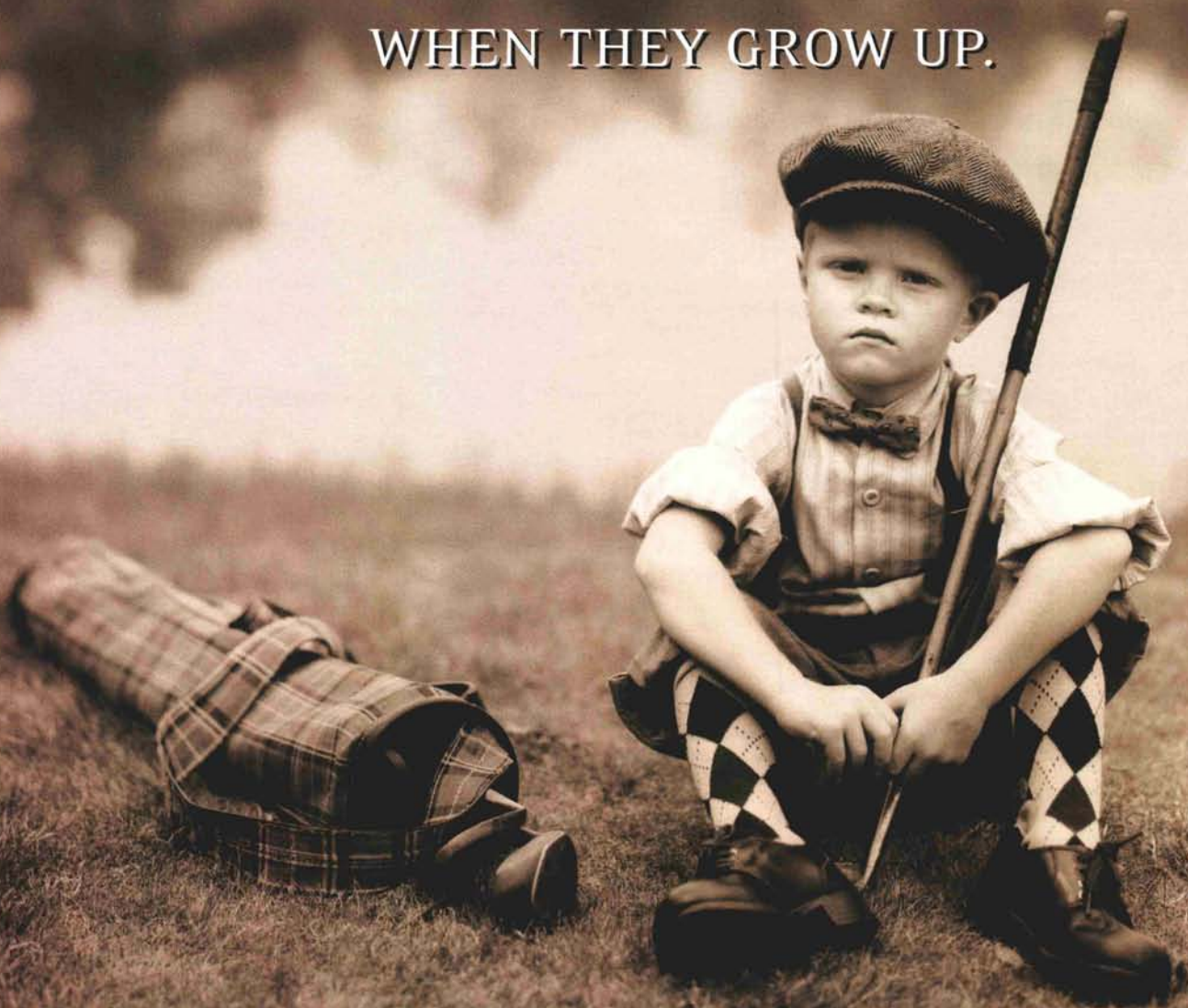
Cathy Miles Ralston

The Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents (MAGCS), founded December 24, 1926, is a professional organization whose goals include preservation and dissemination of scientific and practical knowledge pertaining to golf turf maintenance.

We endeavor to increase efficiency and economic performance while improving and enhancing the individual and collective prestige of the members.

The MAGCS member is also an environmental steward. We strive to uphold and enhance our surroundings by promoting flora and fauna in every facet in a manner that is beneficial to the general public now and in the future.

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## ON COURSE WITH THE PRESIDENT

Fred Behnke Mount Prospect Golf Club

# Great Expectations

*C'mon mom, just leave me alone! I don't want to go to school today! Five more minutes, please. Oh, alright, I'm getting up—jeez!*

I'm told that these things are said in my home far too often. But it's hearsay as far as I'm concerned, you see, because when all of this is going on I'm not there. It's 5:00 a.m. and I'm at work. I'm a golf course superintendent.

It's payback time.

Hopefully, by the time March rolls around, my daughter, Marilu (age 14—ouch), will begin to call me dad instead of “that man.” I'll be able to catch my son, Dan (age 19), red-handed as he goes into my dresser to steal my clean socks. And my wife, Nancy (age 29+), will be able to actually converse with me instead of leaving notes and voicemails.

It is late autumn and the course is put to bed. The shop is actually getting cleaner, and the mountain of paper on my desk is shrinking. Work is being planned and we are able to do more pro-acting instead of re-acting. We're down to a 40-hour week, and burning some vacation time. But there's always something new and different in this wonderful business; we're building a new clubhouse, de-silting our irrigation pond, shopping a washwater recycling system and, oh yeah, I'm president of the MAGCS.

I was elected to the Board of Directors in 1996, and in the last eight years I have had the great, good fortune to work with some of the finest gentlemen and ladies I have ever come to know. My experience on the Board has been wonderful. The enthusiasm and shared respect for the art and science of this profession is invigorating, and I've gained far more than I've given. The services that this Association provides have proven to be invaluable to me in my professional development.

For more than 75 years, our membership has benefited from leadership that has had the vision to foresee and meet constantly changing expectations. Over the past several years, it became evident that if the Association were to continue to move forward, we would need help. And then last year things began to happen. The Midwest Golf House became a reality. A place for us to base our operations was there for the asking. Our wonderful executive secretary, George Minnis, became ill and his duties had to be increasingly assumed by his equally wonderful wife and partner, Karen. Unselfish Board members sacrificed more of their precious time to insure that the MAGCS machinery kept running. However, it became apparent that the situation was a house of cards. Too much was being done by too many and only a magnificent effort by master organizer, President Kevin DeRoo, kept all the oars in the water. It was time to pull the trigger and after an extensive, grueling search we, along with the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation, hired Luke Cella to be our executive director and set up shop in the Midwest Golf House.

*(continued on page 4)*

*I believe we need  
to direct more energy  
toward what I  
perceive to be our  
biggest need:  
external recognition.  
Our partners in the  
business know that  
the golf course is  
THE asset at any  
golf facility.  
All the other services  
and amenities follow  
a well-managed  
and manicured  
golf course.*

Through this turbulent year, Kevin (big shoes) DeRoo, at great personal sacrifice, attended every MAGCS meeting, every event, every Board meeting, every Executive Committee meeting and every ITF function. EVERY ONE! Great leaders rise to the occasion and Kevin really earned his spot on the Past Presidents plaque. I followed Kevin through the offices of the MAGCS. It was a brilliant strategy on my part because I inherited positions that had no strings left untied. Following him now is like being handed the keys to a finely tuned sports car.

Let's take this baby out for a spin!

As president of the MAGCS, I have great expectations for 2004. Our executive director, Luke Cella, will, after a brief settling-in period, assume the management of the business of the MAGCS. The Board of Directors will offer guidance and help Luke get comfortable with the calendar. I have the utmost confidence in Luke and the current Board of Directors. You,

the members, should hold us to the high standards you have for your own operation. Excellence is expected.

So where do we go from here? As tempting as it is to take a deep breath and spend some time fine-tuning the operation, I believe we need to direct more energy toward what I perceive to be our biggest need: external recognition. Our partners in the business, professionals, club managers, architects, et al, know that the golf course is THE asset at any golf facility. All the other services and amenities follow a well-managed and manicured golf course. Should we expect them to promote our profession? If so, we are doing ourselves a disservice. I'm not saying that this is an "us versus them" situation, but it is important to remember that credit should go where credit is due. After all, who's on the carpet when conditions are iffy?

The focus of this Association has always been to "... unite the greenskeepers (that word again) and

golf course superintendents of the Chicago Metropolitan area into a cooperative group for the collection, preservation, and dissemination of scientific and practical knowledge, thus effecting more efficient and economical maintenance of golf courses . . ." That's in our Bylaws and we do a real good job of that. We will continue to do a real good job of that. Where we need to step up is "... thereby improving and enhancing the individual and collective prestige and efficiency of the members . . ." That's right from the mission statement too. I have challenged our new Board of Directors to address this need and you'll be hearing more about this as these outstanding intellects gnaw on this bone.

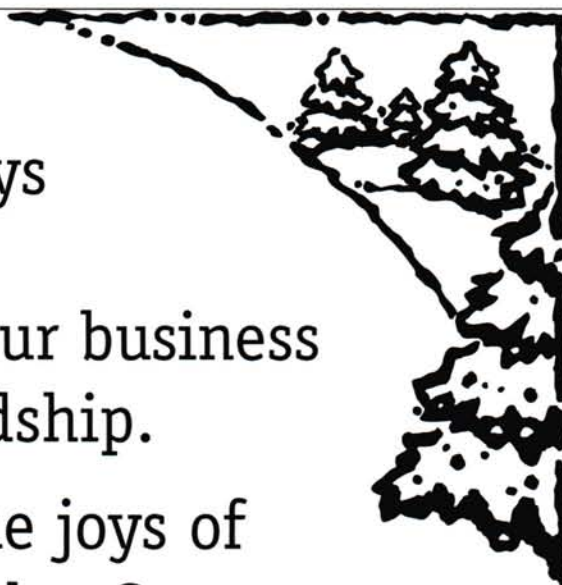
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time than the Holidays  
to express our  
appreciation for your business  
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the Holiday Season  
be yours.



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# And the Survey Says . . .

*As 2003 wanes, the thought occurs: What a year! Not only did my husband and I enjoy the blessing of a third child, but also—for the first time in my professional life—I am quoting Richard Dawson (remember “The Family Feud?”) in print.*

2003 marked the first-ever *On Course* readership survey. Sure, questions concerning the magazine have appeared on past Midwest membership surveys. But until this year, the *On Course* staff and Editorial Committee had never solicited such specific feedback from our audience.

A little history . . . for many years, MAGCS leadership has sensed a high level of membership satisfaction with *On Course*. The general questions posed on past Midwest member surveys confirmed this. In 2003, however, the time seemed ripe to subject *On Course* to greater scrutiny, with a goal of gaining insights that would allow further enhancements to the magazine. In June, Midwest members received a survey that asked them to comment on many diverse aspects of their magazine.

Happily, the participation rate was satisfactory (greater than 10%) and analysis of the results suggested membership's endorsement of the magazine's content, appearance and format. Complete survey results are now available on the MAGCS Web site ([www.magcs.org](http://www.magcs.org)). Some highlights of the results include the following:

- Some 71 MAGCS members responded, a statistically valid response rate.
- Forty-eight (48) noncommercial members responded (mostly Class A/B members) and twenty-three (23) commercial members weighed in.
- The vast majority of our members (82% and 87%, respectively) rated the editorial content and aesthetics of the magazine as excellent/outstanding or very good.
- While “the Bull Sheet” remains the most widely read recurring editorial content in *On Course*, all of our regular columns (“On Course with the President,” “Director's Column,” “Super -N- Site,” etc.) received readership scores between “sometimes read” and “always read.”
- In terms of topics for feature articles, “Ask the ‘Expert,’” etc., respondents were positive about most subject matter but especially enthusiastic about coverage pertaining to major golf course projects, innovations in turf/facility maintenance, turfgrass science and first-person accounts/experiences.
- More than three-quarters of noncommercial members said that the advertising in *On Course* does or could impact purchasing decisions; more than three-quarters of commercial members said they viewed advertising in *On Course* as an invaluable way of reaching their target market and/or supporting the MAGCS.

While feedback was overwhelmingly positive, encouraging the Editorial Committee and *On Course* staff that we are meeting or exceeding most members' expectations of the magazine, survey respondents also provided us with a number of comments and suggestions that we plan to use to further improve the magazine. Among changes planned for 2004 are the following:

*(continued on page 6)*

*For many years, MAGCS leadership has sensed a high level of membership satisfaction with On Course. In 2003, however, the time seemed ripe to subject On Course to greater scrutiny, with a goal of gaining insights that would allow further enhancements to the magazine.*

- Renew our commitment to regular columns that received high ratings from readership but appeared infrequently in 2003, including “Midwest Personalities” and “The Way We Were/Are.” (Note that only greater membership participation will allow us to realize this goal. Please visit the Web site and fill out a “Midwest Personalities” questionnaire. Don’t hesitate to call or e-mail your editor or Editorial Committee chair with topics for “The Way We Were”—if you have an old photograph, advertisement, memo or article, you have an idea!)
- Introduce new content, such as the occasional guest essay and a quarterly news round-up from other GCSAA chapters.
- Maintain an advertising-to-editorial ratio of 50/50 in order to improve magazine aesthetics while affording greater exposure to all ads.

In addition to completing the survey, some members took a moment to express concerns or share suggestions. Here are excerpts from this feedback . . . the good, the bad and the ugly! Where appropriate, I’ve added a further comment of my own.

- I like a variety of topics in each issue.
- Personal issues always interest me. We all work hard at our facilities and allow our golfers to enjoy the greatest courses in the country. Personal struggles, relationships with others, and how we handle these stresses—that interests me.
- The balance of *On Course* is superb. It is difficult to gauge and quantify just what works best. The mix of serious/lighthearted content works VERY well and is a delight to open each month. There is much to cover in the reach of the MAGCS and I, for one, believe that *On Course* does a wonderful job. Keep up the fine work.
- I enjoy some of the articles that have been selected and reprinted from other local chapter newsletters. Maybe a place for one of these in each issue would be nice. *Editor’s note: Because we usually enjoy an abundance of original submissions from MAGCS members, we don’t often look to reprints to fill our pages. But knowing that articles gleaned*

*from other chapter publications are appealing to our readers, we will make it a priority to include good “previously published” material on a more regular basis.*

- [Would like to see] more history of clubs and people from the past that have been involved in the Association. Maybe a “where are they now” article. *Editor’s note: If you have ideas for topics or personalities to cover, let us know!*
- The current format is very good. A nice mix of articles (golf-related) from personal stories to time-sensitive research.
- The Wisconsin association has a couple of superintendents who are regular contributors to their magazine and LOVE to write. Unfortunately I don’t think the MAGCS has anyone that would volunteer for something like that . . . Maybe if we went bimonthly (like Wisconsin) the content would be better. The *On Course* magazine is difficult to read because of all the ads breaking up the flow. *Editor’s note: The Midwest has plenty of outstanding writers, and it would be nice to see these individuals contribute more often. On Course is committed to publishing primarily original material submitted by our members . . . and the higher the participation, the better our magazine will be.*
- Keep article pages together—not on page 3 then to page 26, continue the flow from page to next page. Use the same format as the *Wisconsin Grass Roots* publication . . . *Editor’s note: We have made an effort to reduce the incidence of page-jumping, but sometimes that’s the most viable alternative. Putting together On Course every month is like assembling a giant jigsaw puzzle. The puzzle pieces are text, graphics and advertisements. While we try to “package” each article, keeping each item self-contained, it is not always possible.*
- With the large number of members in MAGCS, I would like to see the “Midwest Personalities” feature in every issue. It’s a great way to learn about our fellow members.
- Introduce a new category of articles: “Get to Know Your Vendors.” We learn a lot about our customers in “Super –N– Site” and there


*. . . achieving  
our goals for the  
magazine depends  
in part on your  
involvement.*

*So share your ideas,  
write an article,  
send us feedback.*

should be that same insight conveyed about the vendors.

For me, the most encouraging aspect of the readership survey was NOT the membership’s overwhelmingly enthusiastic feelings about the magazine. It was the passion for having a good magazine reflected in all the responses, favorable and less-than-glowing. You care about your magazine, and the Editorial Committee and the *On Course* staff work diligently every month so as not to disappoint membership’s expectations. Will we use this survey’s results as an excuse to rest on our laurels and forego further improvements? Absolutely NOT! We have many ideas for enhancing *On Course*, and we are taking the necessary steps to implement those ideas. Just remember—achieving our goals for the magazine depends in part on your involvement. So share your ideas, write an article, send us feedback. Don’t wait for the next readership survey to express your pleasure or displeasure with some aspect of the magazine.

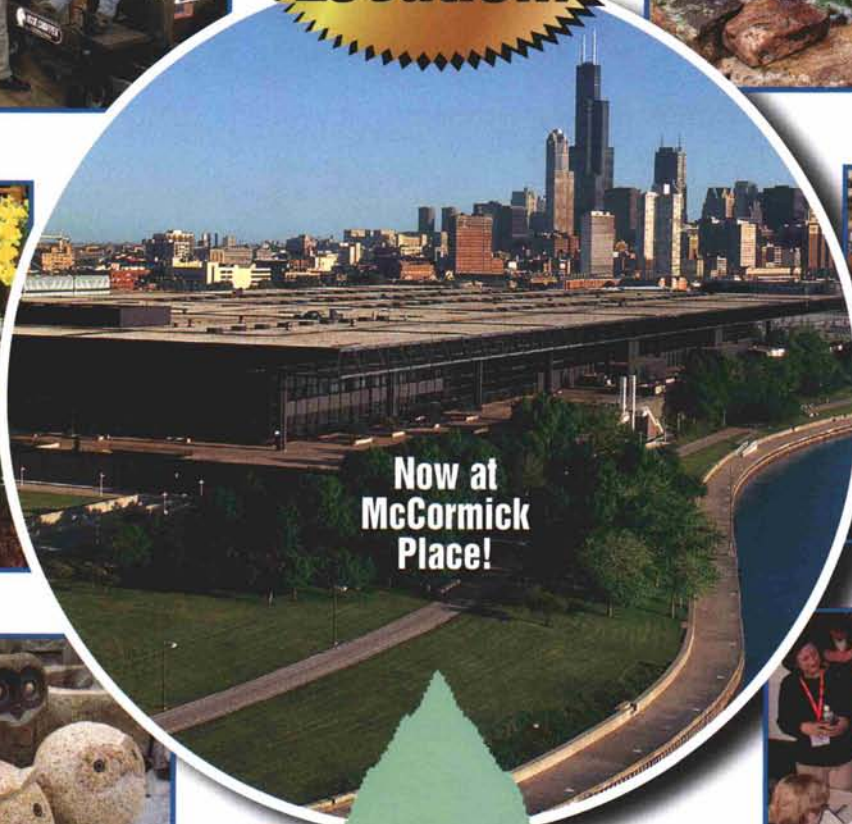
Finally, a hearty thanks to everyone who participated in the readership survey. We promised choice Midwest merchandise to three randomly selected respondents, and our winners are Rod Betterly, Bob Breen, Jr. and Sean Creed. Enjoy!

Happy holidays to all and warmest wishes for 2004. 

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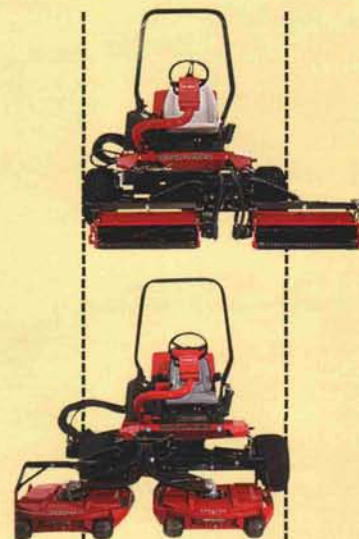
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