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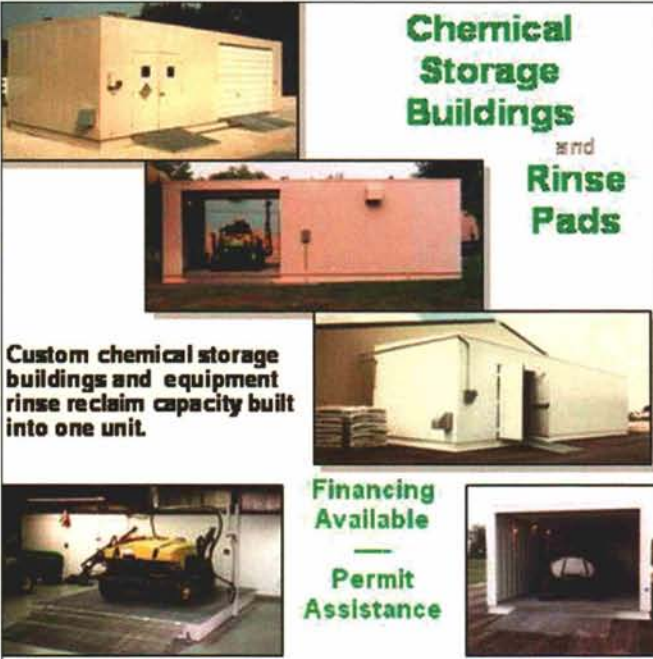
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The Grass Is Always Greener . . . At The Golf Course

A Superintendent's Wife and "Designated Mower" Tells All

Editor's Note: Susan Jennings is married to Jon Jennings, CGCS, superintendent at Chicago Golf Club in Wheaton.

I grew up on a dairy farm in upstate New York. We had a lot of cows and a lot of grass: fields and fields of grass. You could roll in it, run in it, dig trenches, make mudslides and generally make a mess. Our actual lawn was only about three acres flanked by barns and then all those hay fields. We pretty much ignored our lawn except when Dad stated that it would be mowed. I became the DM (designated mower) at age 11. Little did I know that this would become a very important skill when I became a married person.



Susan Jennings and her top-of-the-line, self-propelled Honda Harmony 21-inch mulching rotary mower.

Back then, I drove a small tractor dragging gangs. Back then, there would have been a lot of dirt and very little green without the broadleaf weeds. Back then, there was no pattern mowing, I drove in progressively smaller circles until I was dizzy and most of the taller weeds were gone. Back then, dandelions added texture; they were considered "special."

Things have changed drastically since back then.

I married a golf course superintendent and moved to the busy Chicago suburbs. We live in a wonderful home sitting on a 0.23-acre lot in a huge subdivision. I am still the DM. When I was pregnant with our first child, my husband thoughtfully bought me a top-of-the-line, self-propelled Honda Harmony 21-inch mulching rotary mower. I am the envy of the neighborhood; we will not even go into the size of my snow blower!

The first summer after our relocation to Chicago, our lawn burnt to a crisp. The bunnies ate the shrubs and flowers. The grubs ate any of the viable grass. Our dandelions overran the lawn and then started to encroach on the neighbors' carefully manicured properties. A concerned neighbor stopped by one day to offer her condolences on the state of my lawn and asked sweetly if maybe I knew of someone who could help. The image of my husband's flawless golf course and his dual college degrees in agronomy and resource economics floated through my mind and I responded that, indeed, I might know just the person.

(continued on page 34)

The fact was that I had a young toddler at the time and I preferred dead grass to the image of my baby eating Milorganite. With all due respect to the fine folks in Milwaukee . . . well, you get my drift. As Teddy grew out of his bug-, dirt- and worm-eating phase, we got down to work with a comprehensive lawn-management master plan. Like any self-respecting golf course superintendent, my husband implemented a chemical-application plan and then ripped out a quarter of our lawn and laid sod. He gave me a new weedwacker and an additional 100 feet of hose with instructions to water at every opportunity. Then he made a quick escape to the course.

The entire neighborhood watched me haul hose for two months. I used wave sprinklers, rotating sprinklers and variegated hoses. The entire process took over two hours both morning and night. Due to watering restrictions, I was only allowed to water with sprinklers on odd days. On the even days, I often forced the children to look like they were playing in the rotating Elmo sprinkler while I stood and hand-watered hot spots and mangy-looking sod.

Ten-plus years of marriage to a golf course superintendent have taught me to go away, very far away, during the hottest portion of the summer. The children and I flee, every year, to visit family on the east coast for the month of July. We head

back to the old homestead where my sister still allows the clover to rule. This leaves the big guy with sod-watering duty. The first year, shortly after our return from out east, an impressive crew from Rainmakers arrived to install a commercial-grade irrigation system in our lawn. Jonathan Jennings, CGCS had not enjoyed his stint as watering grunt.

The master plan has been fully implemented and I am no longer pitied in the neighborhood. In fact, I am still looking for my award for the most improved lawn. As I stand with my coffee cup in hand and contemplate run times and spray trajectory, the very same neighbor who got the ball rolling in the first place, stops to ask me what to do about some thin spots on her lawn!

I have a serious relationship going with the irrigation controller in my garage and my Honda Harmony and I have pattern mowing (even double-cutting) down to a science. The children have to wander to other yards to pick those special yellow flowers. The bunny issue is unresolved, but a felon relocation program is under serious consideration.

Now, as my oldest child approaches 11, I look forward to handing over my old title of DM. I will happily be promoted to Suburban Lawn Superintendent.



the annual sponsorship ads in the membership directory. Also, each monthly issue of *On Course* would likely include a full-page, alphabetical directory of "sponsors" or "patrons" comprising our supporting vendors and contact names/phone numbers.

I can't go into any more detail at this point as we are in the early stages of investigating this proposal's feasibility. I will at this time ask all members to look for an *On Course* readership survey that will be mailed in conjunction with the July meeting notice. From our commercial members, in particular, we would like feedback on the topic of advertising in *On Course* versus the membership directory, so please take the time to complete the survey as soon as possible and send it back to us. Please do not ignore this call for your thoughts, as a silent voice is never heard. More information will be relayed to you as it becomes available. Thank you for your valuable assistance!




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GCSAA's First Tee Program Needs You!

In June 1998, GCSAA established its commitment to the World Golf Foundation's First Tee initiative. GCSAA is one of several national organizations directly involved with The First Tee to offer support of The First Tee initiative to bring affordable and accessible golf facilities to communities across the country.

Because GCSAA and its affiliated chapters are represented across the U.S., our members are ideally located to assist with the development of First Tee facilities. GCSAA members stay active in their profession in their communities, supporting golf course management and environmental initiatives. Working with The First Tee chapters across the country, superintendents are providing input crucial to the long-term health of First Tee golf courses and the health of the game.

Currently there are 62 GCSAA First Tee liaisons. The role of a GCSAA liaison varies from city to city. Whether or not your community/state is considering a First Tee or

not, it's important to have a liaison listed in the event of community interest. The opportunity for involvement is endless.

In some communities, superintendents are represented on local First Tee boards; others are highly visible in the actual construction process. There are superintendents volunteering to be a part of The First Tee Life Skills process, and in some communities superintendents are strictly informational points of contact. For example, if someone in their local community requests information regarding The First Tee as the contact, he/she provides the interested party the information. First Tee information kits are sent to GCSAA

members who are The First Tee liaison for their chapter. The kit is a manual full of information to assist the superintendent in answering most First Tee questions. Information can also be found on The First Tee Web site at: www.thefirsttee.org

The MAGCS does not currently have a designated First Tee liaison. If you are interested in giving back to the game in this capacity, please contact a Midwest Board member for further details.

(Editor's Note: The First Tee's Midwest headquarters are located at Midwest Golf House in Lemont.)





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“The Best Job I Have Had:” A Superintendent’s Son Reflects

Editor’s Note: Dennis Wilson, superintendent at Sunset Ridge, submitted this piece written at least seven years ago by his son Michael. Now the caddie master at Shoreacres, Michael for many years “would work for me in the summer,” says Dennis. “The part I was so impressed with was the way he describes mornings on a golf course and the men that work there.”

“Mike, it’s 5:30 a.m., wake up! It’s time to go to work, my boy, rise and shine.” This was what I woke up to hearing every morning last summer. It was a summer of many beautiful sunrises and early nights. Getting up that early took some getting used to, of course, but it proved to be worth it. I had a job that I enjoyed thoroughly. I worked on a golf course grounds crew.

*... my crew was
one big happy family.
We all got to work in
the morning ready to
put in our eight hours
of sweat. There were
18 of us that made up
the crew. My boss, a
turfgrass specialist
who’s been in the
business for over
30 years, was the
ringleader among us.
He was a farm boy
from Indiana who
pounded his work
ethic into each
and every one of us.*

For those of you that don’t understand what we do, we basically make the golf course look the way it does, immaculate. To do this, we all had to enjoy what we were doing. Anyone can go out there and do a half-hearted job and get it done. We, on the other hand, put maximum effort and pride into our work to make the course look the way it should. I personally enjoyed working with the crew as a whole. It was as if we were a family of some sort striving to do a better job every day. The overall feeling of working outside is a relief also. I have never been able to work inside due to a lack of freedom and physicality. The job seemed to let a skill I never knew I had grow to a sort of addiction. This skill was manual labor. I’ve always worked hard but never to my full potential. This was definitely the best job I had yet.

So as I was saying, my crew was one big happy family. We all got to work in the morning ready to put in our eight hours of sweat. There were 18 of us that made up the crew. My boss, a turfgrass specialist who’s been in the business for over 30 years, was the ringleader among us. He was a farm boy from Indiana who pounded his work ethic into each and every one of us. We all respected his decisions and did as he said because he knew best. I once asked a fellow worker, “Why does everyone think he’s so smart?” He said, “I’ve worked here for 17 years underneath him. You work one or two weeks and you’ll see why.” I obviously was a little out-of-line asking that. I soon came to know why everyone respected him so much. He knew what he was doing! Everything my boss did had some reasoning to it. The assistant just getting into the business was lucky to have him as a teacher. The assistant was a guy from Joliet, Illinois. He got a degree in turfgrass science from Joliet Junior College. When the boss was not there, which was very rare, he took over. In the shop was the mechanic, a tall man with a mustache and a rather large frame. He worked on all the machinery, doing jobs like oil changes and sharpening the mowers. This mechanic knew everything from a 440 magnum Chrysler engine to a five-horse Tecumseh. In other words, he was the best. Oftentimes he would be so far ahead of himself that he’d get the whole weekend off.

Most all of us worked 48 hours a week (four on Sunday, four on Saturday and eight Monday through Friday). The rest of us were all the laborers. We were the ones who were on the bottom of the chain but all of us knew we had a place on the team and something would not get done if we were to not

(continued on page 38)

show up. Most of my coworkers, being Hispanic, were already brothers by blood or brothers-in-law. So the aspect of working together was there. It took them about two weeks to initiate me fully. They all wanted to see if I was a worker or not. I showed them I was worthy by keeping up with them and oftentimes would challenge their strength against mine. After proving myself, we all put forth our maximum effort and sweat trying to get the work done with top-notch quality and speed. With this, I found that my job became part of me.

Being outside with the wind, the trees and the endless cloud-filled skies gave me a sense of freedom no other job ever offered. In the mornings, I would watch the sunrise with blazing colors of red and orange. Dew across the ground and steam rising above the ponds gave off a moist, musty aroma. Whenever I got frustrated with a job, I could look up at the fluffy clouds and inhale a massive amount of air to ease my nerves. The ground was lined with lush green grass and towering trees. The healthy look of all the vegetation eventually rubbed off on me. I felt terrific once I stepped foot on that golf course every morning.

The jobs we were to do involved a discipline called manual labor. As I said before, our boss pounded a work ethic into all of us and we all followed. The first job I had was raking traps. I would be paired up with another to go out with a hand-rake and rake sand traps. We would go all day raking what seemed to be 1,000 sand traps. After the first time, I gained large bubbles of fluid, blisters, all over my hands. My forearms would feel like they were on

fire due to the lactose build-up within my muscle fibers. Once I got used to it, my hands formed large calluses and my forearms bulged with rock-hard muscle. Another job was weeding bush beds and flower beds. Most of the time, this would prove to be a boring, ongoing job. Weeds grow everywhere and are constantly popping up all over the place. Some of the smaller, effort-less jobs included picking up the sticky, stinking garbage from each tee, or soiling and seeding divots. To soil and seed divots, you must fill a bucket with a mixture of soil and special seed called bent. Then you would ride around on a golf cart filling in all the divots made by the golfers on the tees and fairways. This job was very monotonous, especially on a scorching hot day. We also took care of the tennis courts. They were made up of a clay-type substance and needed maintenance every day. We rolled them first with a machine similar to a steamroller, just without the steam. After that, we would brush them to an attractive, playable surface.

I experienced all these jobs, but my absolute favorite was mowing grass. Whether it was the greens, tees, fairways or rough, I loved it. I got on

that sophisticated piece of machinery and went off into my own little world. I got so good at it that my boss often would have me mowing all the eight hours of the day that I was there. Now some might say that they find mowing their lawn easy to do. I agree, it is, but one has to see that a golf course is not an ordinary lawn. We deal with different types of grass that can prove to be stubborn, like humans. All the mowing has to be done a certain way and most of the mowers are very complicated. Knowing how to operate them takes some getting used to. I found it be challenging and also found that I was taking a lot of pride in my work. I'd look back at the job I did and evaluate myself every day.

In conclusion, I feel this was the best job I have had. The people who I worked with were great. Working outdoors in the fresh air was cleansing and I found a sense of discipline called manual labor. I had a great summer and plan on doing it again next year. Anyone even remotely interested should give it a try.



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Keeping a Daily Diary of Golf Course Management

As a student intern at Medinah Country Club under superintendent Norm Johnson in 1938-39 and 1940, I spent my first year as his office assistant. In this capacity, I was assigned the responsibility of keeping a daily diary of the entire grounds maintenance operations. This included all aspects except the routine daily procedures such as cup-changing, mowing, etc. I was very favorably impressed with the value of the "daily diary."

As my internship moved along to the assistant position to John McCoy at the Ohio State University courses over four years (interrupted by three years in the Armed Services during World War II), I continued to make use of the daily-diary procedure with very productive results.

By 1947, I was offered the job of superintendent at the Beverly Country Club, where I again found the daily diary a very helpful and useful management tool. Additionally, I used the diary highlights to prepare a weekly report to my greens chairman, which he appreciated very much. Twelve years later, when I moved from Bev-

erly to Bob O'Link Golf Club, I left a complete diary of my 12 years of operations to Ted Woehrle, who replaced me and who had also been a student intern with me for three years.

In my final 21-year tour of duty at Bob O'Link Golf Club, it was routine standard procedure to continue the daily-diary process. However, I did make one important change: with four to six university students in an annual intern program, I assigned each of them the responsibility to keep the diary for a period of four to six weeks. Most all of them have told me of the many benefits they derived from their daily diaries.

While most superintendents today keep a great deal of information on their computers, it is nice to have a shelf full of your annual diaries to reflect upon from time to time. Probably some of you can keep a diary with your word-processing software, which can also serve the purpose very well.

Personally, my long-time use of a daily diary has carried over into my retirement years as I have continued for these past 23 years to make my daily entries and delight in reviewing them from time to time.



BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

Phil Zeinert, CGCS Elgin Country Club

The following are highlights of the MAGCS Board of Directors meeting held Tuesday, May 13 at Bartlett Hills Golf Course. Full meeting minutes, once approved, are available on the Midwest Web site.

- The Editorial Committee and *On Course* editor Cathy Miles Ralston are compiling questions for a survey to be sent to members asking for input concerning potential changes to *On Course* so that we may further improve the magazine.
- Midwest Family Tree corrections, as well as corrections to the directory's conversion table, will be sent with the mid-year updates to the directory.
- Vice president Fred Behnke will be attending a Green Industry meeting in June.
- Luke Cella reported on his recent trip to GCSAA headquarters to attend the Chapter Executive Conference. Listen for an update at the June golf meeting at Prestwick Country Club.
- Scott Speiden is finalizing questions for the membership survey to be sent out this fall. Scott is also finalizing all SOPs for the various committees.
- Erwin McKone reported that the Assistants Committee is busy planning an outing for assistants to benefit the MAGCS Scholarship Fund to be held, tentatively, in early September. The assistants are planning to contribute a feature article to *On Course* on a monthly or bimonthly basis and will write an article on the history of the Dom Grotti competition, which will be held this year at Prestwick Country Club during the June meeting.
- The following new members were approved:

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