

# Memories of the Midwest Hospitality Room: We've Come A Long Way

*I want to start off by thanking all those contributors to the 2003 Midwest Hospitality Room, held in Atlanta during the GCSAA Conference and Show this past February. The room was always full of members and their guests; it is the place where everyone comes to meet, whether as a prelude to going to dinner or as a means of getting together. The Board has done a great job in providing a place where we can enjoy food, drink and the companionship of our fellow members.*

*There was so much wrong with those first rooms; they were hot, you could never find anyone it was so crowded, and the ice machines for four floors below and above us were empty. But the fun we had will never be forgotten.*

I am old enough to remember many hospitality rooms, in many different towns and hotel rooms. I couldn't wait to attend my first convention in Houston, Texas. The year was 1969. My wife and I spent our own money, and we couldn't afford to stay at the headquarters hotel. Our inaugural trip to the big fancy hotel for our first hospitality evening was something special. The officers

*(continued on page 32)*



*Bob Johnson serving up the drinks in the era before we started hiring bartenders.*



and directors of the Midwest were the bartenders and hosts. The room was a large room (two double beds), the beer was in the bathtub and the hard stuff was on the table next to the bed.

A few years later, with my expenses paid for, I could stay at the

headquarters hotel. It was easy to go from our room down to the hospitality room, which had now been upgraded to a one-bedroom suite. That was great. We now had a couch and chairs for the ladies to sit on. We also had a bar where the officers and directors could dispense the beer and

other beverages. Although the room was larger, it was still crowded, smoky and still hot.

A few years later, I had been elected as a director of the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents. What a great honor. My first job as director was to be in charge of arrangements, which also included the Midwest Hospitality Room at that year's convention. What do I do? My answer: Talk to Bob and Albie (Bob Breen, Sr. and Albie Staudt). They know the routine. What most members didn't realize was that Bob and Albie, who were the big helpers behind the scenes, also occupied the room that was used as our hospitality room. Okay, now what? Just meet the two of them at 3 p.m. in the hotel lobby. We would go down the street to a local liquor store and do our version of "Let's Make a Deal," and see if they would deliver. Rumor had it that some years, there would be that Midwest member who would volunteer (ha! ha!) to drive to the convention site with a trunkload of supplies, liquid and other. Nothing illegal about that.



*The Hubers with Frank Krueger—the early hospitality “suites” were notorious for low ceilings, smoke-filled air and VERY ugly wallpaper.*



*Greg Thalmann and Don Cross in the 1995 San Francisco rendition. Still a hotel room, but with the newly-acquired hired bartender.*



*A common scene in our early rooms—guests retreating to the halls to breathe some fresh air and enjoy precious elbow room.*

If the beer and liquor were purchased from the hotel, it would have been much too expensive, and we had to do everything to keep expenses in line. Go out and buy potato chips, pretzels and other snacks for the night's bill of fare. Once the supplies had been purchased, that was the easy part; now we had to sneak up the back way, so the hotel people wouldn't see



us, and insist that we use their liquor and bartender. The first night was a big success, two more nights to go, and two more days to secure supplies.

We have now progressed a few more years. Mike Bavier had lost two elections for GCSAA board, but the third time was the charm. We now had champagne, still in the bathtub, but we also had a bartender, and we didn't have to work so we could simply enjoy as officers and directors. There was so much wrong with those first rooms; they were hot, you could never find anyone it was so crowded, and the ice machines for four floors below and above us were empty. But the fun we had will never be forgotten.

The Midwest Hospitality Room has gotten bigger and better. There is a spacious room with three or four bars, a table full of food, plus at least two carving stations. Each night has a different theme with the table decorations to match. The type of food changes from night to night, so there is something for everyone's taste. The cooperation that we have gotten from our vendors has been nothing but spectacular. A debt of gratitude is owed to our vendors who help put on one of the best hospitality rooms at the convention. THANKS!!!



*The bigger, better hospitality suites have one drawback—when they close, the party usually heads to the nearest bar where the likes of Ed Braunsky can be found on the karaoke stage. Yikes!*



*Another common sight back in "the day" – Albie Staudt planted on the one and only available couch while cavorting with OPWs (other people's women, in this case Jan Schmitz and Rose Crockett).*



*Al Fierst with Janet Good, who played a big role in arranging our hospitality suites (until—and he swears to this—he dumped her).*



*The Bruce Williams family enjoying the sumptuous food spread at the '96 Orlando room, complete with carving stations, several tended bars and SPACIOUS accommodations.*

*Editor's Note: This variation on "The Way We Were" is the brainchild of one Dudley Smith, who has also penned the inaugural column. On Course welcomes contributions from our "elder statesmen," experienced superintendents and seasoned commercial members alike. Please share your stories with your Midwest friends!*

*There are many tall tales that we can relate over a pitcher of beer; the true stories are always the best. One humorous incident involves my friend "the Hoosier," Bill Krafft.*

Wild Bill Krafft, two Fs please, was a member of the PGA, an early certified GCSAA member, a Midwest Association and Michigan chapter member. The license plate on his Buick read "PGA." Bill Krafft never missed a monthly meeting, even in such remote places like Bull Valley or Eagle Ridge. He was easily recognized on the course by his dapper attire: long-sleeved white shirt with necktie and white buckskin Footjoys, a la Walter Hagen. Bill was pro-superintendent at Valparaiso Country Club, a private nine-hole club in northwest Indiana. He surveyed the course early each morning, assigned the outside work and then returned to the pro shop to assume his lesson

schedule. His wife, Mary, supervised the dining room and the kitchen in the clubhouse. The Kraffts had a unique "Ma and Pa" operation, and the members loved them.

After the golf season ended, Bill informed his schoolboy helper that he was taking Mary on a vacation to Florida for six weeks. "I have ordered a dozen trees to be delivered, bagged and burlapped. I will mark where I want them planted with these 2" x 2" stakes. You can plant them before the ground freezes."

After the Kraffts had departed for their well-deserved holiday, the area experienced a mild weekend. The

members all came out to get in a final nine holes, but lo, the flagsticks had all been brought in. Aha! There is a stake that will serve the purpose . . .

When the lake-effect snow finally melted in March, and superintendent Krafft toured the layout, no. 8 green now had a 6' Douglas fir growing dead center.

No one could chuckle more when he told this story than Wild Bill Krafft, God bless him!



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# 1926 – 2003: Raymond “Buz” Didier

*Buz Didier passed away at his retirement home in Minocqua, Wisconsin, on Friday, April 4. He was 77.*


Buz was the son of Ray Didier, a charter member of the Midwest Association and superintendent of George S. May's Tam O'Shanter Country Club in Niles, Illinois. When Mr. Didier suffered a heart attack and retired, the Didiers built their own course, Village Green, in Mundelein. The father-son team then did drainage work and rebuilding of greens on many local courses.

Buz attended the University of Illinois and Northwestern and mar-

ried his first wife while still a student. He is survived by three wives—Patti, Elsie and Charlotte—and several grown children.

Local clubs enhanced by the Didier touch include Butterfield C.C., Big Run, Bon Vivant, Carriage Green, Dubsdread and Fresh Meadow, Green Garden, Hickory Creek, Nettle Creek, Northmoor, Rolling Hills and Silver Lake, Tuckaway (Wisconsin) and Villa Olivia.

When asked which venture excited him the most, Buz would reply, “The 36-hole Trophy Club in Grapevine, Texas. I had daily contact with Ben Hogan for two years.”

We enjoyed many fun-filled hours together . . . Blackhawk games, Wrigley Field, trips to the Masters and U.S. Open tournaments, weddings and picnics. Adios partner, we will miss you. 



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# The Muddy State of the Game

*I was introduced to golf in 1956 at a little poor man's golf course in Quincy, Illinois, and have been involved in one way or another ever since. Currently, as an owner of a small golf course management company (and at times larger entities during my career), and having had the opportunity to visit and assess golf facilities in nearly every state in the U.S., I find the current state of the game unsettling.*

*Exceptional maintenance has favorably advanced the game, but often leads to expectations by the golfer that are nothing shy of ridiculous. For example, the pursuit of bunker maintenance—why aren't bunkers a hazard anymore? Most of the time, bunkers are purely aesthetic, and, if you get in one, it had better be as smooth as silk with no grooved rake marks.*

My opinion is (and I am being hypocritical because my livelihood depends on golf's success) that golf has become too much a business pursuit and has deserted its roots as a passionate form of recreation.

This involves all facets of golf's development and operations agenda. Golf is big business now and with serious consequences. The game's emphasis is no longer focused on fun, recreational exercise with a mix of competition—it is now too often focused on competitive, high-energy, serious activity with "the bottom line" in mind.

Some comments regarding the current arena of the golf business follow for your consideration.

## **Golf Development**

Some golf course architects/designers receive fees of \$150,000 to \$2,000,000 to design an 18-hole golf course—these same architects/designers advance the theory of "we need to provide inexpensive courses." Low-cost development is not going to happen anytime soon. Great courses are being built everywhere and I do not begrudge these fees, but let's get realistic. How many new courses, however, require creative golf shots—not just "air mail" golf expertise.

## **Golf Club/Ball Manufacturers**

The ball and clubs are out of control and have removed much of the charm of golf from the equation. What was that charm? Perhaps creativity, mystery, occasional blind shots, not knowing how the ball was going to bounce on hard, dry fairways. Today's balls and clubs have reduced spin, club shaft deflection, you name it. The name of the game is "wind the body up as coiled as possible and release these clubs," and the ball will fly 250-300 yards with little sidespin. With such technology, a relatively good golfer with a fair swing can really perform, and this may be good for the game. However, we (0 to 40-handicappers) have always measured our games against the PGA Tour professional—and, with few exceptions, what we see now is driver, 8-iron to pitching wedge, putt, firing the ball at indisputably well-tucked pins that are, however, located on nearly perfect putting surfaces. Heaven forbid, though, if that green is not perfect. We golf nuts aspire to the majors because the courses

*(continued on page 38)*



and pressure test skill, creativity, shot-making, course management and fortitude. Where are the leaders who must step forward and put a limit on technology before all of our courses are outmoded and we can no longer measure our skills versus the best? These leaders have disappeared. Why? Think economics.

### Golf Course Maintenance

Please note that the past 25 years have seen tremendous advances in every aspect of the golf course maintenance profession and any new course built in the past 10 years is expected to be perfect or its chance of economic success is limited. Whatever happened to the "rub of the green"—many of today's golfers will find that an objectionable phrase. Exceptional maintenance has favorably advanced the game, but often leads to expectations by the golfer that are nothing shy of ridiculous. For example, the pursuit of bunker maintenance—why aren't bunkers a hazard anymore? Most of the time, bunkers are purely aesthetic, and, if you get in one, it had better be as smooth as silk with no grooved rake marks. Of course, just pull out your specially designed, \$110 sand wedge and you'll have no problem. The Tour players must almost

laugh at bunker placement—we would have to reposition fairway bunkers every year to keep up with technology. Greenside bunkers—a Tour player gets in them only rarely—but they look great, don't they?

Fairways are now groomed better than greens were in the 1960s. Lest I sound dated, do 10- to 40-handicappers enjoy hitting more off 1½"-cut grass or moderate 1-1¼" intermediate rough? Not all participants appreciate manicured to perfection, from a golf perspective.

### Golf Course Operations

In the name of customer service, new and regular players are marshaled and approached so often it is annoying. But if we don't provide this attention, we are poor operators. The four-hour round of golf philosophy is a dinosaur. We can all play a golf course in four hours if it measures 6,000 yards, next tees are within 50 yards' walking distance and we aren't trying (or need) to have 200-250 players/day to make enough money to pay the bills. Don't you just love the idea of a warm, heated towel at the turn to cleanse your hands so you can partake of that \$4 to \$7 bottle of beer and \$8 cigar? You can

probably guess what I'd like to do with that towel, but if we don't create the best possible situation, facilities may suffer.

The aforementioned are merely a few examples of the state of the game—a mere speck on a muddy golf ball. There is no need to write a diatribe, but the book could be at least one volume, with conflicting and hypocritical comments throughout. Golf is a great game and will survive, but there is going to be some pain inflicted on those of us in the business.

Despite all of the opinions expressed by all interested in the purity of the game, perhaps we will have to adjust to Power Air Mail Golf. For me, it will be sad, because so much will have been lost from this unique, wonderful game—that is perhaps not so much a game anymore as much as a business. Unless really influential people can reverse the trend, I am afraid we have all lost the opportunity to experience many of the creative and imaginative thrills and disappointments of a game grown too modern.



## FROM THE GCSAA

# 2003 Chapter Delegates Meeting Scheduled for September

*The 2003 Chapter Delegates Meeting will be held Saturday, September 6 and Sunday, September 7 at the Kansas City Airport Marriott in Kansas City, MO.*

At a meeting prior to the Atlanta conference, the GCSAA board of directors discussed the timing of the delegates' gathering and decided to resume a September schedule. The goal is to ensure that chapter delegates have time to relay the outcomes of the meeting to their boards and members at chapter annual meetings and other venues. It also provides chapters and members with more time to discuss and formulate their opinions regarding issues

that are voted on at the GCSAA annual meeting and election.

The importance of the Chapter Delegates Meeting will continue to grow, as the association and its members look toward the future. The opinions and ideas shared at this annual meeting guide the GCSAA board in making decisions that serve the best interest of members, and help superintendents advance in their profession.

Affiliated chapters are required to send one representative—either their voting delegate or an officer—to represent their association at the Chapter Delegates Meeting. The representative should be an actively involved and experienced chapter leader who has a greater awareness of the association initiatives and issues that will be discussed at the Chapter Delegates Meeting.







## THE VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

Bob Williams *Retired*

# More on Professionalism in Golf Course Management

*The following are my observations on and review of some of the "most notable lifetime attributes common to most of our highly successful superintendents." This is the third and concluding installment in this series that has spanned the March, April and now May issues of On Course.*

In all honesty, I sincerely believe that the Midwest GCSA has a proportionately high number of truly professional superintendents who measure up to the qualifications described in this series. Speaking for my generation of some 50-plus years ago, we salute the present generation loud and clear and commend all of you for your continued efforts and successes.

- **Executive ability:** When a leader demonstrates "executive ability," everything moves along with military precision.
- **Mistakes:** Let every mistake be a learning lesson. We all make a few now and then.
- **Diary:** Keep a daily diary or log of detailed operations. (Great job for the interns.)
- **Superintendent contract:** A simple letter of understanding and agreement will do just fine. (More on this subject, later.)
- **Retirement:** Retire "to something you have planned."
- **Long-range financial plans:** Initiate your lifetime plans at an early age. Life insurance, healthcare, children's education, retirement, etc. Seek professional help, and adhere to your plans.
- **Career planning:** Develop a lifetime career plan. Develop a "road map" to reach your objectives. Be on the lookout for unforeseen opportunities.



## BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

Phil Zeinert, CGCS *Elgin Country Club*

*The following are highlights of the MAGCS Board of Directors meeting held Tuesday, April 15 at Bartlett Hills Golf Course. Full meeting minutes, once approved, are available on the Midwest Web site.*

- MAGCS vice president Fred Behnke recently attended the chapter leadership conference at GCSAA headquarters in Lawrence, Kansas. Fred highlighted many resources available to our membership, and these resources are only a phone call or Web site away.
- Director Luke Cella will attend the GCSAA chapter executive workshop. Luke will share ideas and experiences with executives from member chapters of GCSAA.
- MAGCS will donate a planting to the Midwest Golf House in recognition of Earth Day.
- The following are newly welcomed members to MAGCS:
  - Jeffrey Huxtable** Arrow Magnolia Class E
  - Timothy Wozniak** Spectrum Technologies Class E
  - Timothy Anderson** Seven Bridges Golf Club Class C
  - James Chisholm Jr.** Westchester Hill Golf Club Class C
  - Frank Latzke** Cog Hill Class C
  - John Ekstrom** Cantigny Golf Club Class C
  - Samuel Lehrfeld** Odyssey Golf Club Class C
  - Brian Racette** Byrn Mawr Country Club Class C
- Several resumes have been received regarding the MAGCS executive secretary position.
- The scholarship applications have been received and are currently being evaluated.
- The Board approved March expenses of \$32,714.82.
- Past Presidents Council advisor, Ed Braunksy, read the highlights of the past presidents meeting. Many of the ideas and concerns of the Council have already been implemented by the MAGCS Board of Directors.





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