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MAGCS, 11855 Archer Ave., Lemont, IL 60439
Office: 630-243-7900, Fax: 630-257-0362
E-mail: lcella@magcs.org

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Tim Anderson, Prestwick C.C.
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Dave Braasch, Glen Erin G.C.
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Chad Kempf, Hinsdale Golf Club
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E-mail: chadk@hinsdalegolfclub.org

TURFGRASS ADVISOR

Dr. Randy T. Kane
University of Illinois & CDGA
630-257-2005

EDITOR

Cathy Miles Ralston
Phone & Fax: 847-740-0962
E-mail: on_course@hotmail.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

John Gurke
E-mail: Boomding@aol.com

GRAPHIC ARTIST

Mark Karczewski

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JULY 2004

Volume 58 No.2

FRONT COVER

At Fox Run Golf Links, a look at no. 15 green from no. 16 tee.
Photo by Jim Trzinski.

3 **ON COURSE WITH THE PRESIDENT** **A House of Cards**

Fred Behnke

5 **DIRECTOR'S COLUMN** **Thanks to the "Vets"**

Ed Braunsky

7 **SUPER -N- SITE** **Greg Thalmann, CGCS -N- Fox Run Golf Links**

John Ekstrom

11 **ASK THE "EXPERT"** **Understanding Fungicides**

Henry Wilkinson, Ph.D. and Randy Kane, Ph.D.

17 **FEATURE ARTICLE** **Golf Without Boundaries**

Dave Braasch

21 **HUMOR** **Was This Engagement Meant to Be?**

Dave Braasch

28 **THE BULL SHEET**

John Gurke

32 **MAGCS EVENT** **Seven Bridges and Don Ferreri Put On A Splendid Spring Golf Day**

John Gurke

37 **THE BETTER HALF** **The New Girl**

Susan Jennings

38 **BOARD HIGHLIGHTS**

39 **ON THE MONEY** **How the Fed and Interest Rates May Affect Your Investments**

Larry Tomaszewski

41 **THE WAY WE WERE** **In Vogue: Bunker Renovation**

Nick Baker

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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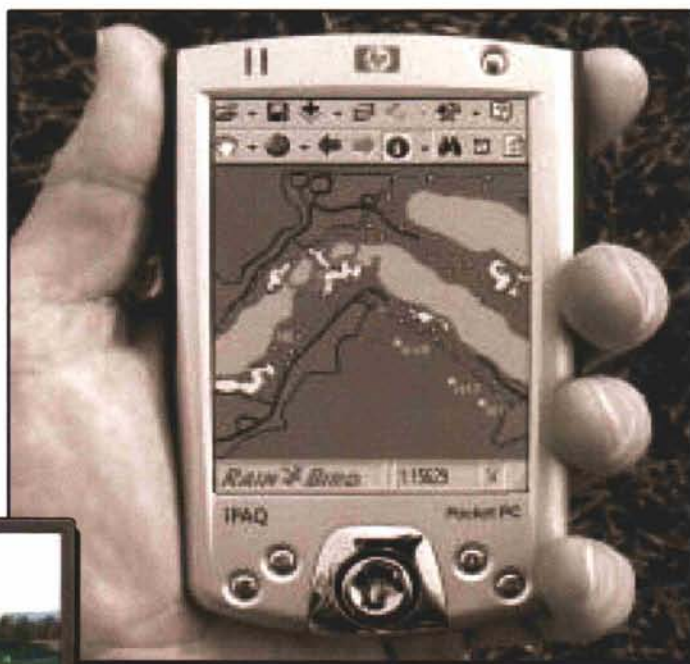
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A House of Cards

It's summer in Chicago and time to kick back with a cold beverage and a good book—unless you are a golf course superintendent.

This business has evolved into a complex array of management challenges. The heightened expectations regarding course conditions have had the effect of making every single aspect of this job more complicated than it used to be—especially when things go wrong!

All that planning and preparation last winter is being put to the test. The juggernaut that is your maintenance operation is chugging along at full steam. The air is thick and heavy so disease scouting is a daily agenda item and the sprayer needs to be packed in ice to cool it down for the next day's work. Irrigation operations are in full swing and the heat is taking its toll on the equipment. The shop is in a constant state of turmoil and a mess. Tempers are frayed, people are getting tired and cranky. Cutworms lurk and grubs are right around the corner.

Let's party!

No, I'm not kidding—have a party!

Break out the grill, ice down some pop, set up some tables and bring the staff in for a midsummer party. Everybody needs a break from the routine and a few laughs. Most important—invite the boss and the greens committee. They need a break too.

* * * * *

I grabbed a six-pack and headed over to visit my friend Budweiser; he's the nuts-and-bolts guy who runs a small, privately-owned, public operation doing the spraying, equipment maintenance and irrigation all by himself. His summer staff tops out at eight and his Hispanic crew is a close-knit extended family. He and I are roughly the same age and he can run circles around me. I like to check in on him periodically because nobody I know gets more done with less than he, and I always learn something. He is "old-school."

I pulled into the shop yard and I knew immediately something was not right. While not exactly pristine, his shop is usually very organized. Now it looked like Baghdad. I parked my truck next to his and went into his office. Paper littered his usually immaculate desk, and trash was overflowing the wastebasket. He looked up from his work and gave me a look.

"Hey Bud, how's it going?"

"Been better." (Budweiser is a man of few words.)

"Looks like it's been a rugged summer for you."

"Yep."

"What happened?"

"Pancreatitis."

"You?"

"Yep."

"You okay?"

"Yep."

"Were you laid up?"

"Yep."

"How long?"

"Ten days."

"Who ran the show while you were down?"

(continued on page 4)

"The boss and his kid."

"This is what you came back to?"

"Yep."

"How long you been back at work?"

"Third day back."

And so it went, back and forth, until I learned all of the sordid details surrounding the decline of Bud and his golf course. We took a brief tour and while the crew kept up with the mowing and course set-up, the greens were in a bad way. I had never seen things so bad at Bud's place.

I mumbled something about him calling for someone to lend a hand, and one look at Bud's face told me it was like offering John Wayne help to get on his horse.

Heading home I realized I learned something from Bud again.

One person cannot do this job alone anymore.

Time was, not so long ago, that many golf courses were able to survive and even thrive with a "greenskeeper" and a crew of seasonal laborers. Irrigation systems were manual or

controlled by mechanical timers that a judicious tap with a ball peen hammer could often repair. Machinery was simpler, lots of belts and sprockets. Disease management was . . . let's just say less complicated. The skill of the greenskeeper was the cornerstone to the conditions on the golf course, especially when the stresses of summer weighed in the equation.

Bud went down without adequate back-up at the worst time of the year and ended up with the second-worst thing that can happen to a super: returning to a disaster and trying to recover turf during the summer.

I know I've said this before, but it bears repeating. This business has evolved into a complex array of management challenges. The heightened expectations regarding course conditions have had the effect of making every single aspect of this job more complicated than it used to be—especially when things go wrong! If it has a moving part, it WILL break and you're going to need more than a ball peen hammer to fix it.

Personnel matters—easier or harder?

Regulatory compliance—easier or harder?

Equipment maintenance . . . pest management . . . licensing . . . safety . . . UST . . . etc.

Sure we have some great tools: better seed choices, lots of neat new pest-control options, efficient water-saving irrigation systems, quiet reliable equipment, but it's a lot to keep on top of all by yourself.

Bud will be the first to admit that his situation was a house of cards. In fact, his plan is to use this fiasco to lobby for some money to hire some skilled help.

Oh, by the way—if you're wondering what the first worst thing is that can happen to a super. It's what happened to Bud, but returning to find the golf course in better shape than before you left.



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Thanks to the "Vets"

We recently celebrated Memorial Day and already the Fourth of July is upon us. I started to think about the fact that these two days honor veterans of our country's armed forces, many people who gave of themselves and created a better world for all of us to live in. With that in mind, I am officially declaring July 1st "Thanks to Veteran Golf Course Superintendents Day" all over this great land. (July 1st is also my birthday . . . it should be a holiday!)

*Let's talk about
all of the things
for which we need
to thank our "vets."
How about all of
the labor-saving
ideas that many
guys have come up
with in the past?
Many "vets" also
experimented with
different fertilizers,
fungicides and
equipment that may
not have been the
best for their turf.*

The February issue of *On Course* had an outstanding cover that showed a lot of guys who made our jobs a lot better. In March, I ran a meeting of the Past Presidents Council at the Bartlett Hills Golf Club. Those in attendance were Kevin DeRoo, Brian Bossert, Al Fierst, Ed Fischer, John Berarducci, Bob Maibusch, Carl Hopphan, Joel Purpur, Luke Strojny, Don Ferreri, Paul N. Voykin, Dudley Smith, MAGCS executive director Luke Cella and our current president, Fred Behnke. Afterwards I sat down and looked again at that February *On Course* and thought about the fact that some of those individuals have made what we do better for a very long time.

Take, for instance, Dudley Smith; this guy was president of the Midwest back in 1967 and he still is showing up for past presidents' meetings! That's more than 35 years since his tenure, folks. Paul Voykin, president in 1972—how come it took him so long to be recognized as "Super of the Year?" Somebody finally woke up! The list goes on. Carl Hopphan . . . has he stopped giving back? Noooooooo!

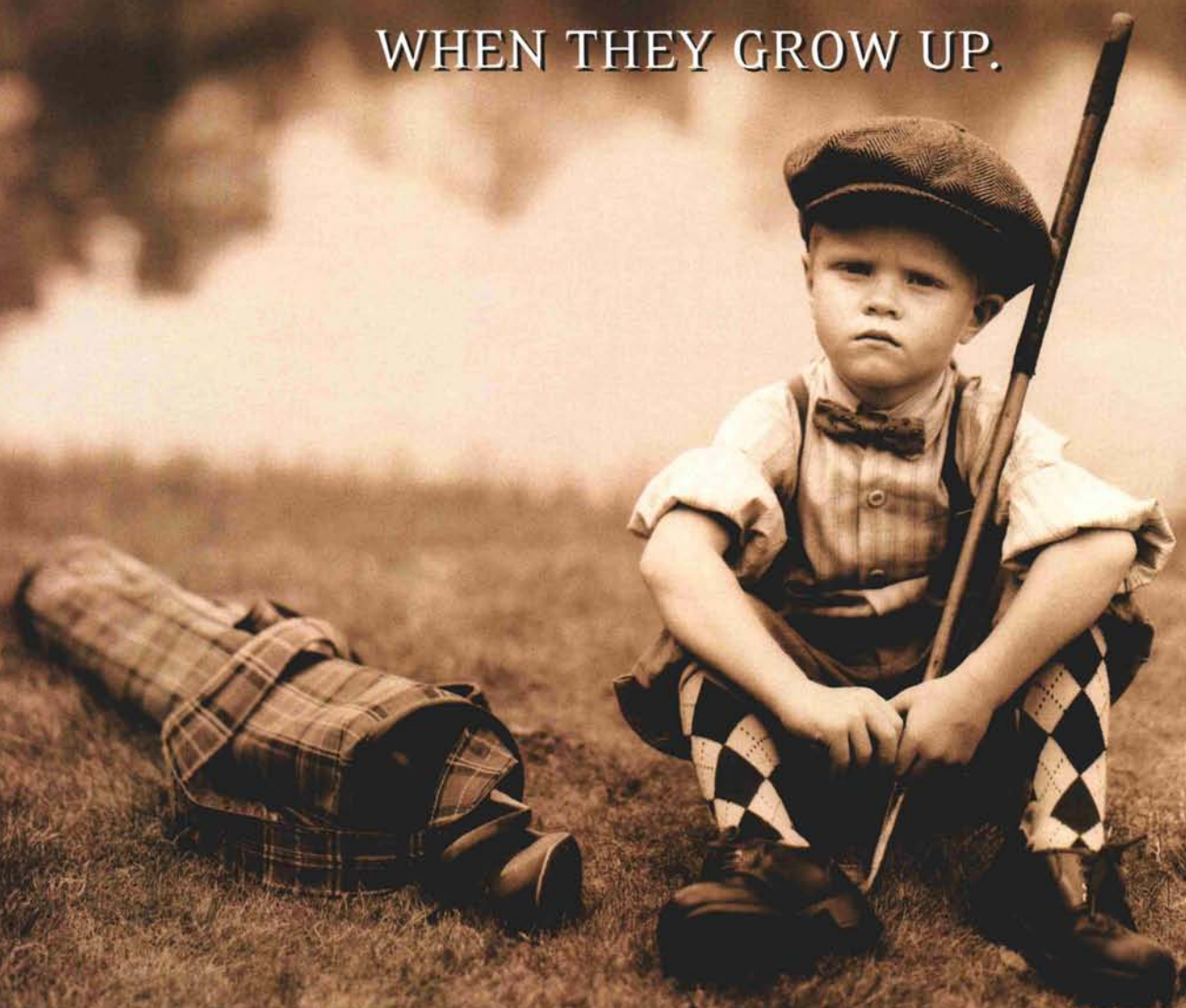
Let's talk about all of the things for which we need to thank our "vets." How about all of the labor-saving ideas that many guys have come up with in the past? Then there is the work ethic that goes along with that. I do not know too many professions where guys don't give 150%, but try to give 180% and then some. We all should be proud of the fact that many years ago, these fellows taught us to work hard, but let's also acknowledge the fact that we need to do the same back home.

Many "vets" also experimented with different fertilizers, fungicides and equipment that may not have been the best for their turf. Many of our "vets" lived the phrase "trial and error." They tried it or used it. It may have failed, but suggestions were made and things were "tweaked" and the whole process started all over again. The final outcome helped us today with our turf-care techniques.

So go out on July 1st and shout out loud (the neighbors will love that one) or pop a balloon and give thanks to all of those "vets" who helped make our jobs today a lot easier. You can also give me a call and wish me a happy birthday. I can't believe I'm 35 already! Ha ha! Have a great rest of the season.



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Greg Thalmann, CGCS -N-



Greg and Ami.



Greg Thalmann, CGCS, is the superintendent at Fox Run Golf Links in Elk Grove Village, IL. The Elk Grove Village Park District owns and operates the course. Fox Run Golf Links is the host site for this month's MAGCS meeting.



No. 10 green.

Photos by Jim Trzinski.

More than 20 years ago, the combined efforts of Centex Homes, Elk Grove Village and the local park district resulted in Centex donating the land to the park district for development of an 18-hole golf course. In the spring of 1982, a design was agreed upon and construction began at Fox Run under the direction of the late Ed Braunsky, Sr. However, the tardiness of the general contractor and subcontractors led the park district to terminate their contracts. The passing of Mr. Braunsky was another huge blow to the project. With big shoes to fill, the park district decided to bring in an employee of its parks department: Greg Thalmann.

Greg Thalmann, CGCS, has been the superintendent at Fox Run since 1983. During Greg's tenure, many improvements and projects have been undertaken. The installation of a continuous cart path throughout the course wrapped up in fall 1992. Additions to the clubhouse included a restaurant, indoor cart storage and new office space. Furthermore, a complete upgrade to the irrigation system included the installation of a double-row setup and addition of rough irrigation. Because the course is built on a flood plain, soil erosion on creek banks at Fox Run is commonplace. On an ongoing basis, the maintenance staff has been installing a rock-bank buffer between the soil edge and Salt Creek, which runs through the property. Moreover, on many of the tee banks and waterways rectangular-shaped wire cages previously filled with rock were shaped properly to make a solid wall to prevent erosion.

Seeing that the maintenance at Fox Run was well in hand with Greg at the helm, the park district charged him with running the entire outfit in 1998. Because filling the dual roles of general manager and superintendent entails many responsibilities, Greg relies even more on his staff of seasoned veterans. According to Greg, his life is a lot easier thanks to his assistant of 20 years, Pascual Perez. Along with Pascual, many of Greg's 15 seasonal staff have been at Fox Run for at least 10 years.

In his time as a superintendent, Greg has dedicated plenty of his time and talents to MAGCS. He was a member of the Board of Directors from 1996 – 2001. During his tenure, he was heavily involved with the Membership, Arrangements, Long-Range Planning, Public Relations and Scholarship committees. His leadership of the Scholarship Committee spearheaded the efforts of the MAGCS to organize the scholarships that are given out today.

(continued on page 8)

For Greg, the best benefit of belonging to MAGCS is simple: "The camaraderie amongst the members is the best thing."

"I would feel at ease calling and asking any member of MAGCS questions."

We all well know that behind a great super is a wonderful supporting cast. Greg's leading lady is his wife of 31 years, Trudi, who works as a dental hygienist. Greg and Trudi have three children: Sarah, Nathan and Abby. Sarah, 26, is a graduate of St. Louis University and an assistant manager of a hotel in St. Louis. She was married on June 18 of this year. Nathan, 24, will be finishing up his degree in criminal justice from Northern Illinois University this August. Abby, 22, is also a grad of St.

Louis University with a degree in nursing. She is an RN at Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago.

When an average golfer comes to play Fox Run, they do not know how a 3" rain affects the course. They care that the course plays to 6,700 yards from the tips and whether or not cart restrictions are in place. However, when the members of the MAGCS come for the monthly golf meeting this July, we will have the inside edge as far as the course and who runs it. We know the behind-the-scenes leader of Fox Run a little better. His name is Greg Thalmann, CGCS.



MORE ABOUT GREG THALMANN, CGCS

YEARS AT FOX RUN

21

MAGCS MEMBER SINCE

1982

GCSAA MEMBER SINCE

1984

YEAR CERTIFIED

1990

EDUCATION

**Western Illinois University,
Fine Arts**

PREVIOUS JOB(S)

**Assistant superintendent at
Mt. Prospect G.C. and
Green Acres C.C.**

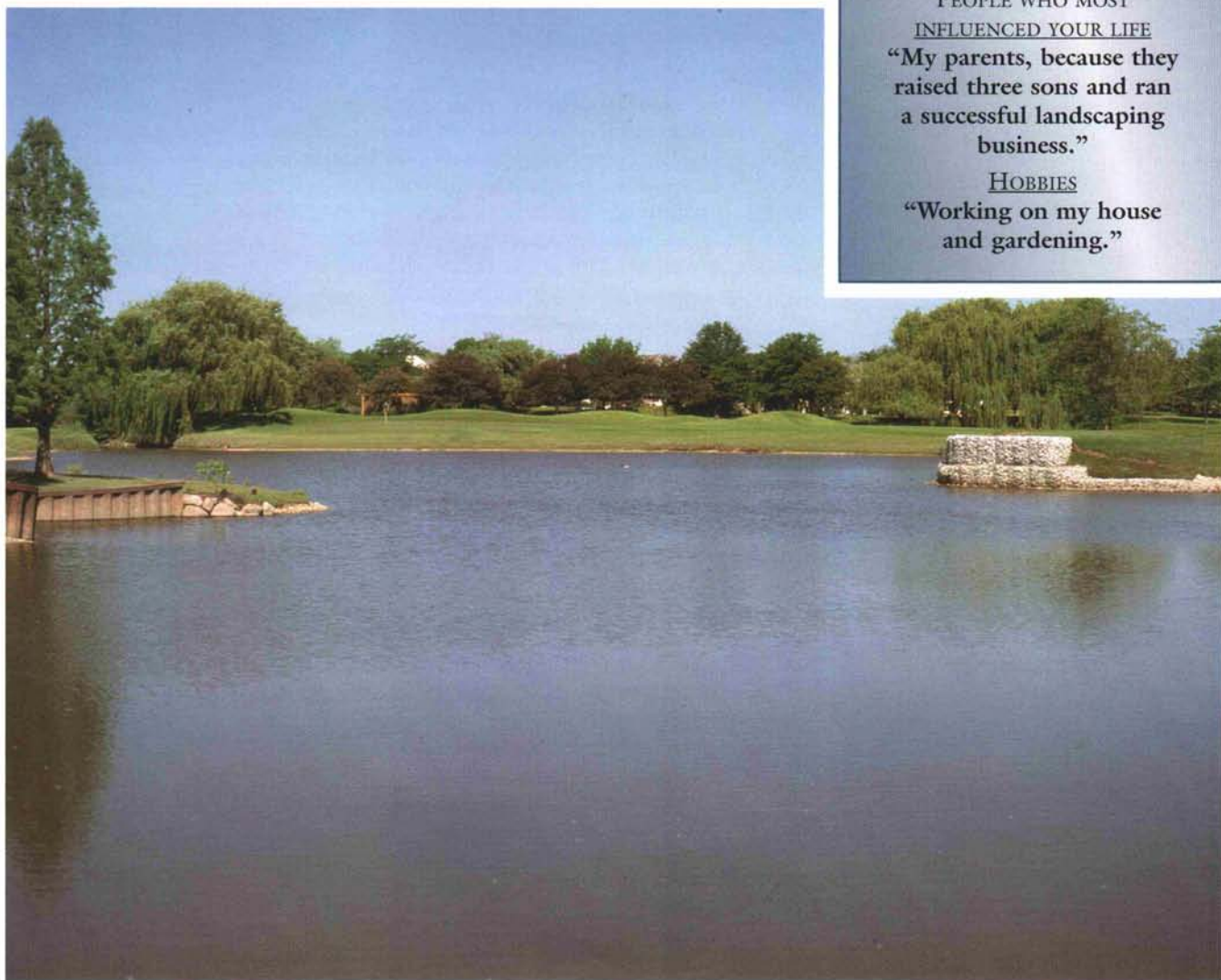
PEOPLE WHO MOST

INFLUENCED YOUR LIFE

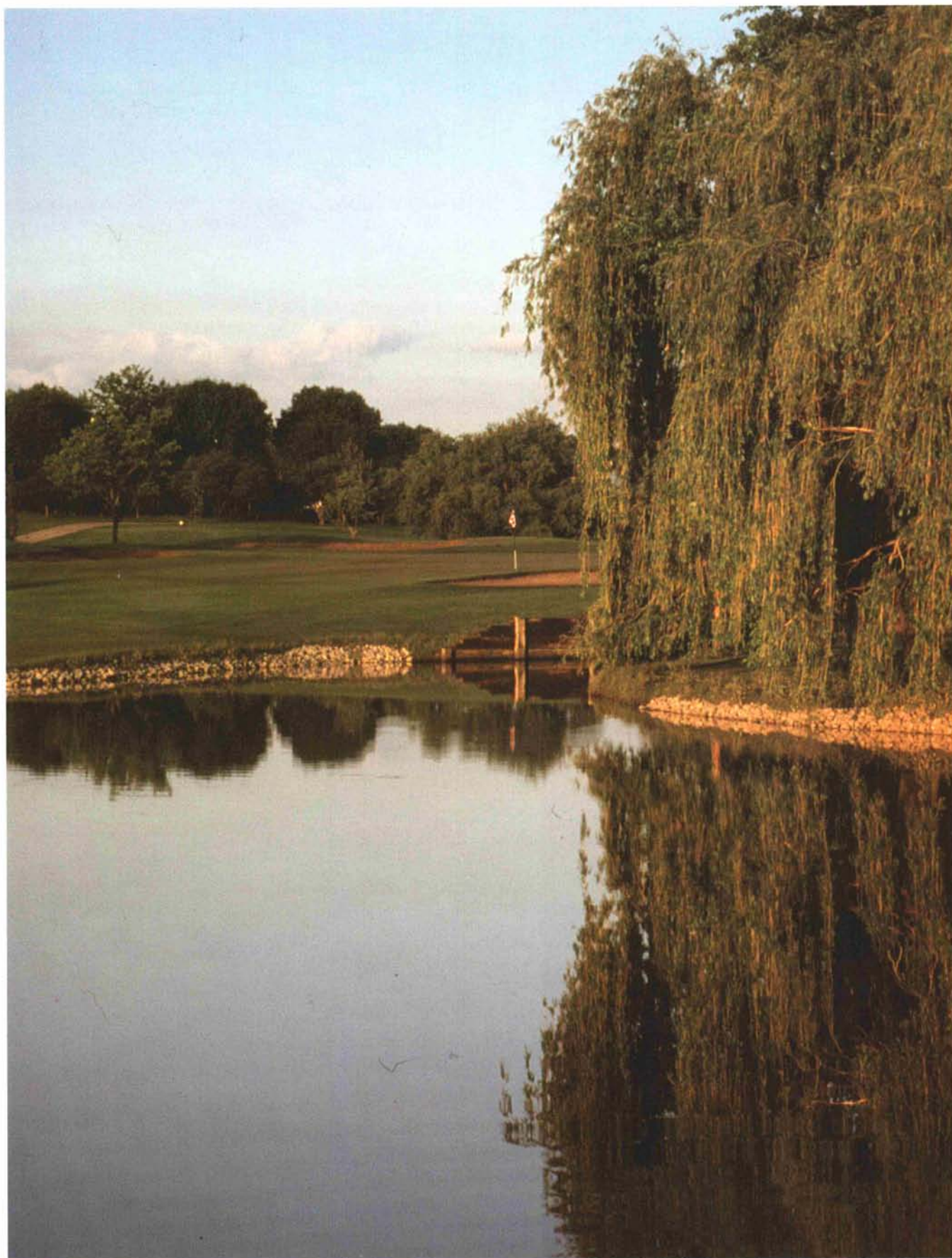
**"My parents, because they
raised three sons and ran
a successful landscaping
business."**

HOBBIES

**"Working on my house
and gardening."**



No. 6 green in the distance with no. 15 tee on the right.



No. 17 green.

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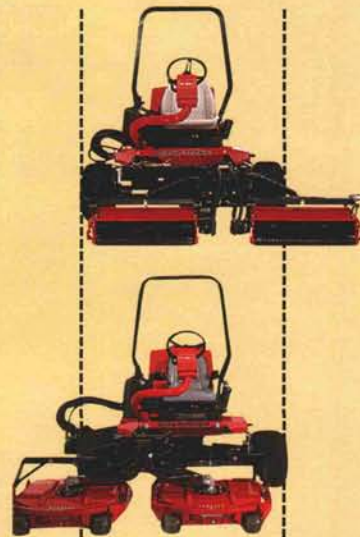
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