

# Mister Mayor

by Monroe S. Miller

*Editors Note: One of my superintendent writing heroes is Monroe Miller, editor of the Wisconsin GCSA's magazine, The Grass Roots. His "Tales From The Back Nine" are always entertaining and inform-*

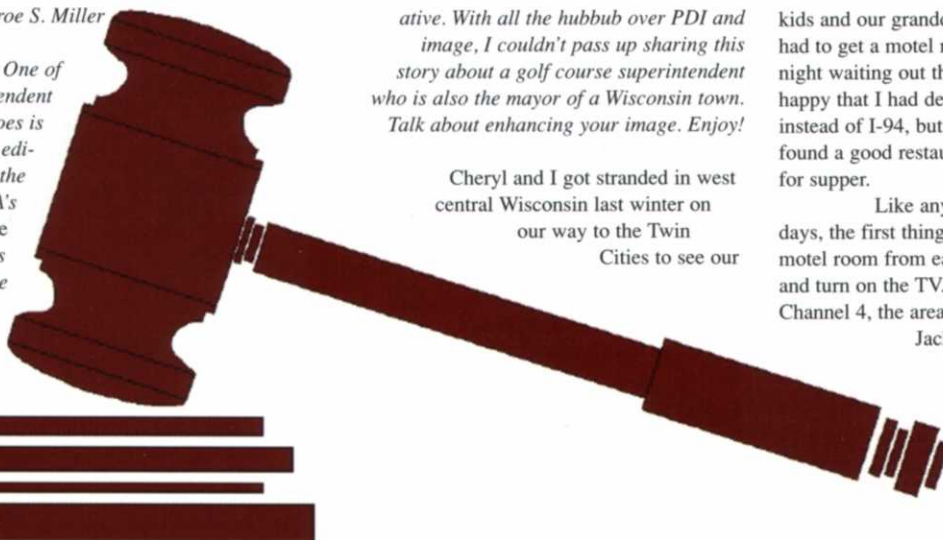
*ative. With all the hubbub over PDI and image, I couldn't pass up sharing this story about a golf course superintendent who is also the mayor of a Wisconsin town. Talk about enhancing your image. Enjoy!*

Cheryl and I got stranded in west central Wisconsin last winter on our way to the Twin Cities to see our

kids and our granddaughter, Grace Kaster. We had to get a motel room and spend a Thursday night waiting out the snowstorm. She wasn't real happy that I had decided to take the scenic route instead of I-94, but the room was clean, and we found a good restaurant (The Fork and Spoon) for supper.

Like any normal American does these days, the first thing I did when we returned to the motel room from eating was to grab the remote and turn on the TV. There before my eyes on Channel 4, the area's public access channel, was

Jack Hauge, golf course superintendent at Splendid



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Valley CC. He was presiding over a meeting of the Bergen city council meeting; the nameplate in front of him said "MAYOR."

It was a good thing Cheryl had a book with her. I was determined to watch Jack manage the business of Bergen, a town of 2,000 with a strong Norwegian influence yet today despite its founding nearly 150 years ago. Jack traced all of his ancestors back to Norway and had visited the home fjord several times.

The meeting was pretty routine, I'd say. It seemed everyone on the council - there were only six of them, plus the mayor - was congenial. Clearly, in a small town there are far fewer divisive issues when compared to, say, Milwaukee or Madison or Green Bay.

This night they were talking about paving a section of Elm Street (the 600 and 700 blocks) and approved a motion to replace the recycling containers with new and larger ones. Both were budgeted items and approval seemed a formality.

There was a brief discussion about new lighting for the ball diamond in Hauge Park. Jack's brief comments put the issue to rest: "The community park was named after my grandfather. He donated the land for it to the city, and it is a special place for me. But if it needs lights now, it needed them when we were in the budgeting process. I am firmly against unbudgeted discretionary spending."

End of that deliberation.

There was one issue that did generate some discussion among the council members.

One member offered a motion to install a stop light at the intersection of Main Street and Lincoln Avenue. The city attorney pointed out the process with the Wisconsin DOT that they would have to comply with. The city engineer gave estimated costs. After weighing both sides of the issue, it was dismissed as unnecessary at this time.

And that was it. Jack had run a well organized meeting with efficiency and brevity, not unlike he ran the golf course at Splendid Valley.

The next morning we went back to the Fork and Spoon Cafe for some breakfast. We sat at the counter, ordered black coffee to drink while looking over the menu, and started to visit a little bit with the local folks who had gathered. Little restaurants like this one always have a regular crowd for each of the main meals of the day. My preference has always been the early birds, and it didn't take long to engage them in conversation about their mayor.

"Did you see him on TV last night?" asked one older fellow in bib overalls and LaCrosse boots.

"I sure did," came my reply as I volunteered, "and I have known Jack for many years. I am in the same business as he is."

"Oh," was the collective response from several within hearing distance.

We ordered bacon, eggs, wheat toast and hash browns with orange juice and milk to drink. The waitress went down the counter and filled the coffee cups.

"How's he doing as mayor?" I finally asked. Norwegians are known to be a little reticent. "Well," came the reply slowly, "we got ourselves a good one. He takes the job way more seriously than any other mayor most of us can remember. And he works dang hard at it, too.

"Bergen has the best streets of any town or village out here in western Wisconsin, maybe anywhere in Wisconsin!"

The breakfast crowd was loosening up a bit.

"And if you think we have good streets in town, our parks are even better. He knows a lot about them because of the golf course he manages. He really shaped up the city crew when it comes to aerifying and mowing. Heck, he even spends a little money to fertilize them and he makes sure the weeds are killed. He does the spraying himself. We couldn't be happier.

"Plus you should see our ball diamonds since Jack has been on the city council. He put watering systems into the soccer fields and the ball fields the city owns, and now we are the envy of everybody out here in this part of the



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country!"

A man dressed in a coat and tie came in and sat at the counter with the rest of us.

"Ask him a few questions about our mayor."

I leaned around Cheryl and explained we were stranded in town last night and had watched the council meeting. "I know the mayor," I volunteered.

"EVERYBODY knows Jack," he said. "He does a really good job - I am on the council and I see him function up close and personal. We hope he sticks with it for a few more terms. He has made it impossible for whoever succeeds him.

"What Jack has done is create some excellent work habits among the public works staff. They seem to have a lot of pride that they didn't have before he was elected to the council. He has chaired both the Parks Committee and the PW Committee and left his clear impression on both.

"Our town now has a brighter, neater appearance. There are never any little unfinished jobs around town. No sloppy work. Everything from picnic tables to city vehicles is in tip-top shape. He expects excellence from people."

We took a breather so we could eat our breakfast - the food was getting cold.

The man in the coat and tie had his

usual coffee and a chocolate donut. Then he continued. "Jack's influence on Bergen has gone beyond the practical and obvious things we have been talking about.

"The city infrastructure is sound. We are on a planned replacement schedule for everything from fire trucks and snowplows to our municipal water supply. We have a carefully developed plan relating to annexation and growth and land use. We have personnel policies, vehicle-use policies and even a protocol for the use of city cell phones. Should the need arise, we are prepared for implementation of a TIF plan. We have a lot of confidence in our city government, due in no small part to Jack Hauge."

I mentioned to him that I knew Jack through our mutual profession. The man smiled and said that he felt there were similarities between a smooth-running golf course operation and a smooth-running municipal operation.

He asked what course I worked for. I told him and then asked if he played any golf.

"Oh, you bet," came the quick answer. "I have belonged to Splendid Valley for many years. In fact, I am the club president this year!"

I almost fell off the counter stool.

"So, when Jack is at the course, you are the boss!"

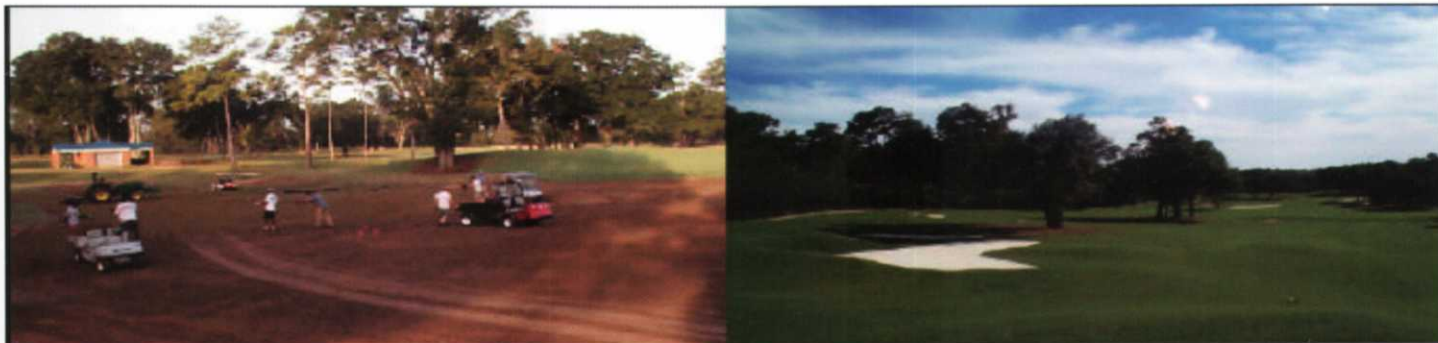
"Yes," came the careful response. "But as soon as I hit the city limits of Bergen, Jack becomes 'Mr. Mayor'."

We talked a little longer about club politics and city politics, and he said he was happy to say Jack was above it all.

I was thinking of my colleagues and all the interesting things they did outside of work. We could count among us an opera singer, a sculptor, a Brown Swiss cattle showman, an author, an amateur flower breeder (irises), a pilot, and an accordion player in a polka band. We even had a mayor in our midst and didn't even know it. What will it be next? The possibilities are limitless, just like the opportunities.

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May/June 2001*

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