

# Bengeyfield tackled challenges for 40 years

BY PETER BLAIS

April 1 marked the end of Bill Bengeyfield's nearly 40-year association with the United States Golf Association Green Section.

"Why am I retiring? There's always a time and this is it," said the Green Section's outgoing national director.

Simple. The kind of statement you'd get from a man attracted to the down-to-earth quality of the people his organization has served.

"It's been a lot of fun," said Bengeyfield, 67, who first joined the Green Section in 1951. "We've enjoyed working with the staff, the superintendents. These are real people, down-to-earth people who get the jobs done.

"The pros get all the publicity. But all they can really do is hit a golf ball well, very well. But that doesn't make them great architects or agronomists. They're the ones that really make golf go."

Bengeyfield's association with the game goes back to his first job as a door boy at Wheatley Hills Country Club while growing up in East Williston on Long Island, N.Y.

He enrolled at Alfred University before being drafted into the Air Force in World War II. He was a navigator on B-25s while rising to the rank of captain.

After his discharge, he went to Cornell University, graduating with a major in chemistry. After graduation, he became an assistant county agent in New York's Westchester County.

"That's where I really got started in the golf business. There were about 40 courses in the county," said Bengeyfield.

"I remember visiting places like Winged Foot, Westchester Country Club and really being fascinated by the people I talked with," Bengeyfield said.

But a budding golf career had to be put on hold when Uncle Sam recalled him for Korea. Bengeyfield was considering committing to a service career when he heard from former USGA Executive Director Joe Dey.

Dey and Richard Tufts, whose family started the Pinehurst, N.C., resort and served as USGA president from 1956-57, recruited Bengeyfield, who joined the Green Section in 1951.

He worked as an agronomist and Western director of the Green Section until 1978, when he became director of golf courses and park maintenance at Industry Hills Golf Course in Industry, Calif.

"I was like a preacher, giving a sermon at every golf course. But I had never sinned myself," explained Bengeyfield of his decision to leave the USGA. "I had to see if the things I'd been talking about really worked. And by George, they did."

Then-Green Section National

Director Al Radko enticed Bengeyfield back to the USGA fold in late 1981.

Bengeyfield was intrigued by the turfgrass research committee Radko had started to look into new grasses that were more disease-tolerant and required less water.

He replaced Radko as director when he retired in February 1982.

"The USGA has expanded right along with the game. We've played a major role in growing grass for golf.

"The management of water is going to be a big thing in the future.

"Courses will have to use less. We're planning to give them better



Bill Bengeyfield  
grass at a lower cost," Bengeyfield said.

The Green Section's commitment to turfgrass research has grown to \$3 million annually under Bengeyfield.

And that figure will increase in the future as the USGA has also committed itself to finding solutions to environmental problems, he said.

Among some of the major USGA-funded, turf research projects expected to bear fruit in the next three to five years, according to Bengeyfield, are:

- Bermudagrasses for Northern courses that are winter hardy and provide a good summer turf.
- Western buffalograsses that can be grown on two-thirds of

U.S. courses and require less than two inches of water a year. That's a dramatic reduction from the 15 inches currently needed by grasses on those courses.

• Bentgrasses for Southern greens that can tolerate the high heat and humidity and provide the smooth putting surfaces Northern golfers are used to.

"Those will be the challenges in the next few years, growing new grasses and environmental issues.

"We think we're the environmentalists. In fact, we're leaders in the field," Bengeyfield said.

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## Bengeyfield

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Despite his retirement, Bengeyfield plans on staying active rather than viewing the game from the gallery.

He is already involved in consulting projects in Spain and Japan and figures to do more overseas and domestic work in the future.

He and wife Betty will spend May through October running Frankfort (Mich.) Golf Course, a nine-hole "Mom and Pop" affair the couple purchased about 10 years ago.

Winters will find them holed up in their Caldwell, Idaho, home.

Bengeyfield also expects to occasionally be in touch with his replacement, or replacements actually.

Jim Snow is being promoted from

Northeast region director to national director. Mike Kenna, who joined the USGA from Oklahoma State University in mid-January, will be director of research, taking over many of the duties Bengeyfield had as chairman of the USGA/GCSAA Turfgrass Research Committee.

"It's reached the point where one man can't do it all," said Bengeyfield. "There are 13 agronomists on the staff now. We had 600 subscribers in 1981 and now it's up to 1,700.

"The research committee invested \$3 million this year. Next year we'll invest even more with all the environmental concerns. Both jobs are on the incline and I'm on the decline."

## Rossi

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Rickey said that after joining NGF, Don soon proved "a master" at working with diverse people with varied attitudes, and bringing those people together.

Don forever spoke highly of others in the industry. Asked his opinion of the NGF's move into the service field, he refused to pass judgment. "I think leadership at the NGF is extraordinary," he replied.

Rickey told the story of the near-collapse of the NGF shortly after Don took over its reins. At that time most of the funding for the foundation came from testing aluminum shafts.

When the aluminum shaft market collapsed, the NGF lost most of its funding and "Don had to go in and fire all these people we had just hired and trained, which is the toughest management assignment there is. Don had to cut the budget 50 percent. He not only managed that but built a very strong organization and handed over a strong organization on his retirement," Rickey said. "But what always remained with me and showed me the character of the man was the way he took care of the people we had to let go. The way he treated them and worked with them to place them in equal or even better jobs was masterful. He had so much compassion and was a fine human

being."

The "sentimental Italian," Don called himself.

Rossi is credited with fashioning the Allied Associations of Golf largely by his own enthusiasm and his genuine love for other people.

Near the end he took that enthusiasm abroad for the golf industry.

As Fullmer said, "He brought the Rossi radiance to the entire world."

If something was good for golf, he supported it.

From the very beginning, he encouraged Golf Course News and me, not because of me or the newspaper especially, but because he knew that by its very existence, the paper would help the game.

And though he wisely tempered optimism with realism, you couldn't dampen his outlook for the golf industry. In our last conversation of length, I asked him: "What if the stock market goes boom?"

His reply: "During the Depression there was more golf played than immediately before or after the Depression because people had more time on their hands and golf was a great outlet."

Calling him a driving force in the industry might actually be underdoing it. Don Rossi was an accelerating force.

He will be missed dearly. But those of us who will be spending time with him in the future can look forward to that time with anticipation.

## Fazios

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erations," said Tom. An emphasis on quality was the most important thing Tom and Jim adopted from George.

"His favorite saying was 'I never want to hear you say that's good enough.' Every time I hear that expression it rings a bell about George," said Tom.

Added Jim: "He wanted to do a good job, no matter what the cost. He told us money was just a by-product of what you did in life. If you are good at what you do, the money will come. And if it doesn't, don't worry. The pride in knowing you do quality work is more important."

As for the future, would Tom want his children to follow in his family's footsteps?

"I look at Jim and his kids. I look at the Joneses. And I look at Pete Dye with his two kids. I guess it's a natural instinct. But I certainly wouldn't force it on them. I've seen enough to know it's not an easy business," he said.

## American Golf buys Riverside

American Golf Corp. has bought Riverside Golf Club outside Dallas Texas.

The par 72, 18-hole course, designed by Roger B. Packard, will be open to the public.

Its facilities include a clubhouse, golf shop, food and beverage facilities and driving range.



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