

Piloting a plane or a mower, Bromann in charge at Pinewood

By DEAN A. SHOWERS

With his head sometimes literally in the clouds and his feet firmly planted on the ground, superintendent and flying buff Al Bromann uniquely tackles the challenges of owning, operating and maintaining Pinewood Country Club.

Pinewood is owned and operated by Al and Judy Bromann, a Renaissance couple who offer a variety of year-round services in addition to championship golf, and who frequently are challenged by a forest full of turf care and environmental issues.

This winter, for instance, there will be an experiment to deal with snow molds. There once was the question of what to do with a tornado-ravaged wetland in the watershed of the pristine Bearskin Creek that supports native trout and winds through the course's front nine to shape some fairways. Bromann had to wind his way through state and federal regulations when he wanted to clean up the tornado's wetland carnage. In addition, he designed and built an integrated watering system without taking water from the protected creek. He has four ponds scattered on the course, any one of which can supply the others, and he can water the entire course at once.

He uses no insecticides and limits his use of other chemicals, while spot-checking for disease and other problems. His father, who built the course, accidentally devised a family soil recipe for building greens that resist certain area diseases. And while he doesn't call it integrated pest management, that is Bromann's approach in caring for this 550-acre forested expanse, of which about 20 percent is devoted to the golf course.

"The golf course is natural," said Bromann, who also is Pinewood's superintendent, chief architect, head environmentalist, equipment designer/builder and company pilot. "God was really the architect of this golf course. All we did was grow the grass and mow it. There are some poor soils we attend, but other than that, it was all here." It was a classic Bromann understatement, but this man of many talents made his point about the forested setting. He said he performs the numerous tasks at Pinewood because "anyone who owns a golf course in this area, also is out

on that equipment — it's the economics of our short season." (He has designed and built several pieces of equipment, including a ball picker and a sprayer for the snow mold experiment this winter.)

Bromann's wife, Judy, manages the country club's restaurant and its reservations operations, while they both tend to financial management. They have owned Pinewood since succeeding Bromann's parents, who started the club in 1961.

Visitors to the Lakeland Area golf, dine and stay at Pinewood, having traveled from South Africa, Australia, Japan, France and other parts of the world, as well as from the closer key markets of Chicago, Minneapolis and Milwaukee. Today customers fly directly to Pine-wood's well-kept 3,000-foot turf airstrip from as far as New York. Built by Bromann, the turf strip is kept open and healthy every day of the year, despite invasive winter snowplowing.

Pinewood's 18-hole, 6,107-yard, par 72 championship course lies among the great forests once controlled by lumber barons. Today, golfers play about 30,000 rounds annually on the creeping bent-grass greens and Kentucky bluegrass and bentgrass fairways and roughs.

Bromann always has used some form of integrated pest management, although he doesn't use the term to describe his insecticide-free pest and weed control, or careful use of chemicals for disease control. He scouts to monitor pests and diseases, and then spot treats. The only pest that requires control is cutworms, and his

disease problems are limited to the pink and gray snow molds and dollar spot.

"The adult insects freeze up here, but we do have a problem with cutworms," said Bromann. "We know we're getting cutworms by

observing the birds as we mow. I use a natural product — nematodes — to control cutworms."

The snow molds are a different story at Pinewood this year on two fronts. First, after a string of years with very little snow mold damage, the problem was serious last spring. Second, Bromann has opened a new frontier for Pinewood this year in snow mold treatment. He's always been concerned that the only chemical product that seemed to work on snow molds contained

mercury, but that product has been voluntarily withdrawn from the market, so Bromann will experiment this year with a new product and new methods.

"We all get some snow mold up here, but each of us in this area has a different way of putting the greens to bed in fall — sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't," said Bromann. "This year, my greens were a mess, yet another course within eight miles had no problems, and still another nearby course wasn't back by even mid June." He will continue to put his greens to bed in the same manner, but his type of chemical and method of application will change.

Until 1993, Bromann aerated the greens with 1/4-inch tines, 3 inches deep and 1-1/2 inches apart. He also topdressed, fertilized and applied the snow mold chemical twice — once in October when play was limited, then again as late as possible in the year.

This year's experiment, however, calls for using northern Wisconsin's snow and temperature conditions for a special residual effect, and the use of PCNB, a contact fungicide. He has built a sprayer to attach to a snow cat and will apply PCNB on top of the snow-covered greens in January, February and March.

Wisconsin snow frequently forms into layers of what cross-country skiers call "corn snow," which is hard granules formed by temperature changes, as the snow melts slightly and refreezes.

"Our hope is that, by spraying on top of the snow three different times, as each layer reaches the greens and melts, we'll get residual effect and three different treatments," said Bromann.

While Pinewood's disease problems are limited to the snow molds and dollar spot, other area courses have additional plights. Bromann attributes his good fortune to a mixture of serendipity and the available soils when his father first built the greens.

"I believe it's because of the greens mixture my dad used, and which we continue to use today," said Bromann, who doesn't mind sharing the simple formula that uses Pinewood's soil in part. "We just use equal parts of sand, peat and topsoil."

And while he uses no chemicals to control weeds, he does have some weed problems in the four spring-fed ponds he's de-

veloped as sources for his integrated watering system. The ponds are interconnected so that any one of them can be filled by the others. This also permits Bromann to water the entire golf course at once. His chemical-free pond maintenance program consists of guarding against soil erosion to minimize silt, cleaning what silt there is and hand-pulling the weeds. This keeps the nutrients down, and the water quality up.

"We're very fortunate to have the watershed for these ponds," said Bromann. "In the future, I believe the biggest cost golf courses will have is water quality and quantity, and care and maintenance will be costly." The watershed also has created wetlands at various spots around

Pineland. However, they are not an issue, with one exception, since Bromann does not like to disturb wetlands. The exception is a small wetland area that the tornado ripped into six years ago. It wrenched mature trees as if they were young flora, and left a large mess near hole No. 4.

"There was no way to clean it up but to pull the stuff out," said Bromann, who was required to obtain numerous restrictive permits from various state and federal agencies before he could move anything. Bromann's cleanup plan included construction of a pond to give the high ground surrounding the wetland some relief. That allowed him to build an alternative, longer hole No. 4 behind where the wetland was and the pond now is. However, the pond is growing tall grasses and cattails today, a fact that Bromann sees as a kind of vindication to those who were reluctant to approve his permits.

"Maybe they were right," Bromann said. "It keeps wanting to return to a wetland."

IPM is the norm in Pinewood's turf care, but Bromann continually adds evolving practices to make the process more environmentally safe and fiscally sound.

"We try to use diesel fuel instead of gasoline, and we look for ways to use less fuel," said Bromann. "If there's a task to complete, we double it up with other jobs. For example, when we fertilize our greens, we also take out the aerator, and we'll mix lime into the fertilizer to make it work better. These kinds of practices decrease pollutants and also save costs on labor, fuel, equipment and fertilizer."

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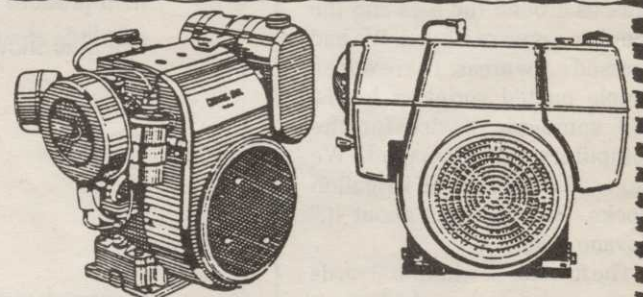
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