

Superfocus

Dobie continues to leave his mark — at Sharon Club and on his profession

By TERRY BUCHEN

SHARON CENTER, Ohio — It seems Frank Dobie has always been at the head of his class, the top of his profession. His story reads like a "Who's Who" of golf course management.

Dobie started his love affair with golf courses at age 14 at Homelinks Golf Course in Olmsted Falls, Ohio, and later in high school at North Olmsted Golf Club under superintendent Earl Yesberger.

Dobie then entered Penn State's two-year turfgrass management program, graduating in 1960 at the top of his class. That was the year Prof. Burt Musser retired and a young Dr. Joe Duich took over the program. Both men have had a



Frank Dobie

profound influence on Dobie's life.

[Also in 1960, Dobie received a Golf Course Superintendents Association of America Scholarship Award of \$100.]

During his apprenticeship training at Bob O'Link Golf Club in 1959-60, he worked under renowned superintendent Bob Williams in Highland Park, Ill. After leaving Bob O'Link in the fall of 1960, he went to Meadow Brook Country Club in Detroit to work for superintendent Andy Bertoni installing an irrigation system.

Dobie served six years in the U.S. Army Reserves, being honorably discharged with the rank of sergeant. In 1961, after completing six months of active duty, he sought an assistant's job in Cleveland. His mentor, Colin Smith of Shaker Country Club, told him there were no

assistant's jobs available but the superintendent's position at Sleepy Hollow Country Club in Brecksville was open. At age 21, he got the job. In 1963, he became superintendent at Fairlawn Country Club in Akron.

He was offered the position of superintendent in 1964 at The Sharon Golf Club, a new men's club then being built in Sharon Center.

"I've been here since the beginning, 31 years," said Dobie. "My job is primarily superintendent but I'm also general manager. The club is structured so that our president, M.G. O'Neil, really calls the shots and has since the beginning. I'm directly responsible to him, so as far as the membership is concerned."

Being there during the construction phase left its mark on Dobie. He has been altering the design of Sharon ever since. He proudly tells of the more than 40,000 trees planted through the years and the complete facelift on the 4th and 11th holes.

"Before the course was built, there were two farms," he explained. "Part of one farms was a wooded area, mostly sugar maples. But three-quarters of the area was pretty barren."

"Initially, we knew we needed a lot of trees. We had a broad plan to plant a large amount of trees in a short period of time. We developed seven acres of tree nurseries at one point. As they grew, we would transplant them onto the golf course. A big part of the program was patience."

Dobie admits course design and construction is the part of the job he loves most. "Over the years we've put in two lakes; put in a lot of mounding; redid all the bunkers," he said. "I think George Cobb was up here once a couple of years after it was opened. I think he would like the changes we've made because the



The Sharon Club's 15th hole.

original layout's routing is unchanged.

"What has changed is the bunkering; the design of the tees. We've added a lot of tees. Started with two on each hole, now we have four."

Dobie and his mechanic, Gary Bogdanski, have also designed and built a sand packer attachment for the Toro bunker rake and a tournament roller attachment for triplex greens mowers. Yet the modest Dobie gives Bogdanski much of the credit.

"He's a very inventive guy," Dobie said. "With the sand packer and rollers, both times I sort of explained to him what I wanted to do, and he just built it."

Dobie was a co-founder, with Tom Burrows, and the first president of the Penn State Turfgrass Alumni Association in 1969; served on the board of directors and as vice president of Northern Ohio GCSA; received the Mal McLaren Award in 1988 from Northern Ohio GCSA; has been a director of Musser International Turfgrass Foundation since 1974 and its president since 1988. He is particularly proud of the Musser Foundation fund-raising tournaments held at Sharon for the past 21 years, raising more than \$135,000 for turfgrass research.

Dobie has many accomplishments in his career. He has helped to elevate the

turfgrass profession to today's higher standards. He is a true gentleman and the epitome of professionalism.

And the camera has come in handy. The hundreds of slides he's taken over the years will pay off in his latest project: Producing a history book of his club. But considering he's the only superintendent Sharon's ever had, Dobie is an integral part of that history.

"I've had a number of offers over the years. One from Firestone and one from Augusta. But there are only three reasons I would ever leave: If there was no challenge; if I didn't like the people I was working for; or if I wasn't paid a fair wage. And none of those have ever been true."

"I've never gotten bored; not one day."

And how could he abandon the famous Sharon cookies: "Our cook once was making a batch of oversized, oatmeal cookies for the staff. President walked in and had one, and said, 'These are great. You should serve them in the dining room.' So we did."

"Everyone loved them and they've sort of become our trademark. When people come to Sharon, they have to have a cookie. It's sort of interesting: We have this great golf course but we're better known for our cookies."

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