



Norm Westfall

# WESTFALL UNIVERSITY

*Ten young men who learned turf management at Wakonda Club may have been trained in the best practical school in the country*

If members of the Norm Westfall alumni association were ever to hold a reunion, some difficulty might be encountered in crowding them into the living room of the comfortable Westfall home near the Wakonda Club in Des Moines, Ia. The reason is that this old-grad group is not an inconsiderable one. It is made up of ten big, well-fed men in their twenties and thirties with a total displacement that would tax the walls of even an outsize room.

Students have been streaming out of Westfall University for about the last 20 years. The length of the curriculum has been about three years. It consists of learning just about everything there is to know about golf course management, and where students coming out of formal schools usually have to serve apprenticeships as assistant supts. or foremen, Westfall U. grads invariably step into jobs as head greenmasters. Clubs around Iowa in particular are always on the lookout for young men who have trained under the Wakonda turf master. Seven of Westfall's ten proteges have settled in Iowa, at least. One, Gerald Hall, though, has strayed to Santa Ana CC in California. Another is a supt. at a club in Kansas City, while one young man has crossed over into Illinois to take a job with a club in East Moline.

Westfall U. always has been a school in which the practical aspects of turf management have been largely emphasized. But Norm Westfall long ago borrowed a page from the college professor's textbook by bringing his trainees into the living room and filling them with strong coffee and theories about the art of green-keeping. "We used to refer to this phase as 'Caffeine College,'" Gerald Hall recalls. "Norm kept refilling the cup and talking about turf disease, watering, mowing and a few hundred other subjects. We always looked forward to that relaxed interval. The best thing about it was that it gave a person a chance to consolidate the knowledge he picked up on the course."

Things, though, weren't and still aren't quite so relaxed when a man is working on the job under Westfall. He is not a driving taskmaster, but when he assigns a job he expects it to be done pretty close to perfection. Says Bill Ward, who graduated from Wakonda to the position of supt. at Short Hills CC in East Moline, Ill. six years ago: "Pop Westfall, as he is known among the fellows who trained under him, is about as patient as any man I've ever met. He'll take all kinds of time to explain how a thing should be done. When you assure him that you have grasped what he has explained, he expects you to be able

# Westfall Alumni Association



Dale Foster



Bob Burns



Leon Hartogh



Richard Winn



Leroy Conard



Gerald Hall



Wendell Boken

to handle the job to the letter. If you don't understand, he'll start at the beginning and go through it again."

### Nobody's A Hired Hand

Gil Collins, supt. at Mirror Lake CC in Kansas City, was attending the University of Iowa and majoring in art when he became acquainted with Norm Westfall in 1955. Collins had been playing golf for two or three years at the time, and, passing Wakonda one day in the early summer, decided it would be interesting to spend his vacation working on the course. Within a month after he was hired he had developed an intense interest in turf work. Westfall took special interest in Collins and encouraged him to learn everything he could about managing a course. Not only that but he constantly stressed learning how to get along with people in order to acquire the crowning qualification that

makes a man supervisory material.

"You admired Pop Westfall for the way he handled people," says Collins. "Nobody was a hired hand to him. He took time to listen to everyone's ideas although he didn't always agree with them. He was firm but he never pushed anyone. He created the kind of atmosphere that made people want to cooperate with him."

### Talks to the Grass

Most of the Wakonda supt.'s former charges agree that Westfall's strong points are knowing how to handle turf diseases and repairing machinery. That doesn't imply, however, that he is deficient in any other phase of course management. "Norm," says Richard Winn, who is at Pine Knolls in Knoxville, Ia., "has a sixth sense for detecting disease symptoms. Most supts. stew and fret over what dis-

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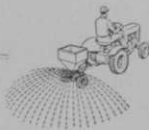
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## Westfall University

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eases to expect next, but Westfall seems to be able to head them off before they take hold. Maybe he talks to the grass." The most comforting thing about having been associated with Westfall, Dick Winn adds, is that a fellow can always depend on him for help in being bailed out when things go wrong.

Bob Burns, who is the supt. at the American Legion CC in Shenandoah, Ia., where he has been for one season, calls attention to Norm Westfall's skill in repairing equipment that has broken down. "He's so good at it that machinery salesmen wring their hands in despair," says Burns. "I've seen mowers around Wakonda that I thought were going to be scrapped, but Norm would fix them up and get another year out of them. He doesn't repair them just for the sake of showing it can be done. They have to be right after they're fixed or he won't take a chance with them on those beautiful greens and

fairways at Wakonda.

"For a fellow who goes out to a small course where the equipment is liable to be in poor shape," Burns continues, "there is nothing that prepares him for coping with it like a few semesters in Norm Westfall's Machinery School."

### Handy with Torches

Leon Hartogh, who has graduated to the assistant supt's position at Wakonda, adds this note as to Westfall's skill in reclaiming machinery that most other greenmasters probably would condemn to the junk heap: "If it weren't for Norm's cutting and welding torches, Wakonda would go out of business. It is unbelievable what he can do with an old piece of equipment."

Hartogh goes on to say that Westfall is unbelievable in many other different ways. "He is as versatile a man as I have ever seen," Hartogh says. "He designed our irrigation system and built our maintenance building. He can do first class plumbing work and as a carpenter he's hard to beat. I think the secret of Pop's skill and versatility is his patient refusal



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to rush into anything. He sizes up a job very carefully before he starts it. After he gets started, you can see everything fall into line just as he planned."

Other young men who have been fortunate enough to break in under the Wakonda turfmaster are Wendell L. Boken, who is at the Ankeny (Ia.) CC; Dale Foster of Crestmoor (Ia.) GC; Don Westfall, Norm's son, who is the pro, manager and supt. at Highland CC in Iowa Falls; and Anthony R. Tysseling, who is presently dividing his time between studying turfgrass management at Iowa State University and working at Wakonda.

#### Extension Student

Westfall also has what you might call an extension student under his wing in the person of Leroy E. Conard, who is in charge of maintenance at Clover Hills, which is also located in Des Moines. Conard never actually worked for Norm Westfall. He started at Clover Hills without any turf training, but with the understanding that Westfall would be his consultant. The arrangement has worked out very satisfactorily. Whenever Conard suspects that something on his course isn't as it should be he hurries over to Wakonda with samples for Westfall to examine. Either that or he keeps in touch by telephone. So, even though he never attended Westfall University, Conard thinks of himself as a paid-up member of the Alumni Association.

Boken, Foster and young Tysseling say there is nothing they can add that hasn't already been said about Pop Westfall. It is as Boken points out: "The fellows ahead of us have said just about all the nice things about Norm that can be said of any man. You can put us down as being in complete agreement. Pop is one hell of a man. There is no doubt about it."

#### Fine Paternal Influence

As for Don Westfall, who was brought up on a golf course and came under as good paternal influence as any man could wish for, he has this to say: "I have never doubted that Dad is quite a guy. If I do half as well as he has and make half as many friends, I'll be quite a success."

Gil Collins probably sums up best the reaction a person has upon meeting Norm

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Westfall: "As Mr. Westfall firmly shook my hand I realized that this was a man who had worked hard all his life and would expect hard work from others . . . But he had a friendly smile and you got the feeling you were welcome . . . I liked the man immediately and hoped he would like me."

### 33 Years in Turf Work

Westfall broke into golf course maintenance in 1932, working under his father-in-law, Bill Keating, who was "one of the best grass men in the business," at the Des Moines G & CC. After six years he was named supt. at Crestmoor GC in Creston, where he remained for 14 years. In 1952, Westfall returned to Des Moines G & CC for a year and then moved into his present post at Wakonda. The Iowa GCSA, in 1961, gave him its first "greenkeeper-of-the-year award" and in 1963, Norm was cited by the USGA for the outstanding work he did in preparing Wakonda for the National Amateur.

Norm Westfall, of course, is somewhat overwhelmed by all the fine things said about him by his onetime assistants. "I

didn't realize that I was going to get this 'This Is Your Life' treatment," he smiles, "but now that I have, I can't tell you how good it makes me feel. If I have helped these young men it was because they were willing to help themselves. Breaking into golf course work isn't easy. At the start it means long hours, only fair pay and seasonal work. These things discourage many young fellows from sticking with it. But at the same time there are as many who find that working with turf is fascinating and go on to become outstanding supts. It's a lucky thing indeed for the golf business that this happens."

It's hardly necessary to say that the golf business was doubly lucky when some 30 years ago Norm Westfall became fascinated with turf.

### National Golf Day Proceeds

The PGA realized approximately \$80,000 from the 1964 National Golf Day. About 69,000 men and 6,600 women took part in the event. A total of 3,609 men and 1,126 women beat Jack Nicklaus' target score.