

# Brothers *in Arms*



Michael (left) and Vinnie hung out at Metacomet Country Club often when they were kids. This photo was taken in 1967.

*Michael and Vinnie Iacono aren't just siblings — they're bonded in the wonderful world of golf course maintenance*

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF

It's not every day that an assistant superintendent gets so mad at his boss that he chases him around the golf course and threatens him with bodily harm. That is, unless they're brothers.

In the mid-1980s, Michael Iacono was the superintendent of Metacomet Country Club and his younger brother Vinnie was his assistant. One summer afternoon, Vinnie got so angry at Michael that he charged after him down the 11th fairway and shouted not-so-nice words at him. It's not known what Michael did to infuriate Vinnie, and it's unclear whether Vinnie was able to catch Michael.

Today the 49-year-old Michael and the 44-year-old Vinnie smile sheepishly about the incident. It's filed in the family archives.

"It was nothing," Vinnie says with his toothy grin and thick New England accent. "It was just one of those brotherly love things."

Most every man who's had a brother will tell you that male siblings tend to tussle, and even Dr. Phil will tell you it's normal. But brothers act as comrades in the long run, not

combatants. Their blood binds them in an unconditional allegiance.

So it goes with the Iacono brothers. They used to battle like Cain and Abel, but a peace plan has long been in place. When asked if they're best friends, the curly-haired Vinnie says with pride: "We're brothers. It goes beyond friends."

Michael and Vinnie are also peers of their profession. They're bonded in the wonderful world of golf course management and maintenance. Michael is the certified superintendent of Pine Brook Country Club in Weston, Mass., and Vinnie is superintendent of Blue Hill Country Club in Canton, Mass. The private clubs, located in the Boston suburbs, are two of the top high-end golf courses in the area.

It's no wonder the Iacono brothers landed in the field. Their father, Vincent, was a superintendent. When growing up in Providence, R.I., Michael and Vinnie were intrigued with their father's career and would tag along with him to the golf course where he worked.

The course, Metacomet Country Club, is a classic Donald Ross design. Michael and Vinnie adored being with their father at Metacomet, where Vincent worked for 16 years. "Right from the beginning, they wanted to be like their dad," says Pat Iacono, the brothers' mother.

The brothers started working on the course when they were teenagers. Not only did they enjoy the work, they were inspired by it because they got to see the results of it, as in a finely groomed golf course.

"We knew it was a hard job from day one, but we loved doing it," Michael says.

Michael and Vinnie say their father was an innovative superintendent for his time and loved to talk shop with other superintendents. He taught Michael and Vinnie that it was integral to keep a golf course neat and clean, no matter how little money was in the maintenance budget.

Michael and Vinnie say the most important thing their father taught them was to have a sense of urgency about their work. Hence, Michael and Vinnie will never put off today what they can do tomorrow.

The brothers took different routes to arrive

at the profession. Michael attended Providence College and graduated with a biology degree. He then went to work as a lab worker in 1977 for the state ... for three days. Around that time, his father's assistant superintendent left Metacomet. Michael felt like a rookie ready to be called up to the big leagues.

"That was my chance," Michael recalls. "My father said, 'Do you want to come and work for me? I said, 'Yes, please.'"

It was the ticket, Michael thought.

"Just to be outside and growing grass," Michael says. "It doesn't get much better than that."

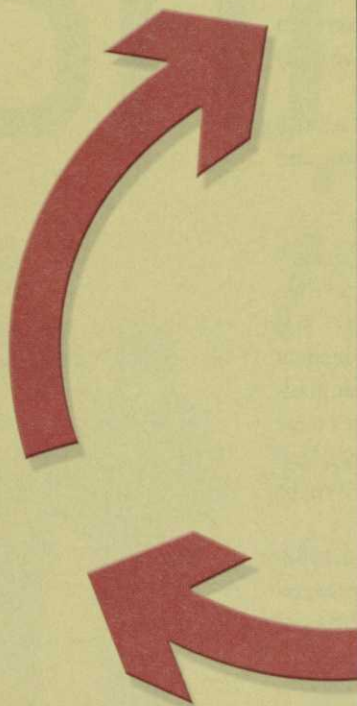
Vinnie's path took another route. He spent some time in the National Guard after graduating from high school. After a stint at a trade school, he enrolled at the University of Massachusetts to study agronomy. He also went to work for his father at Metacomet.

Sadly, their father died suddenly in 1982. The 27-year-old Michael was asked by Metacomet's management to succeed his father as superintendent.

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Michael (left) and Vinnie smile for the camera earlier this year at the New England Regional Turfgrass Conference & Show.



## Superintendents value longer control.

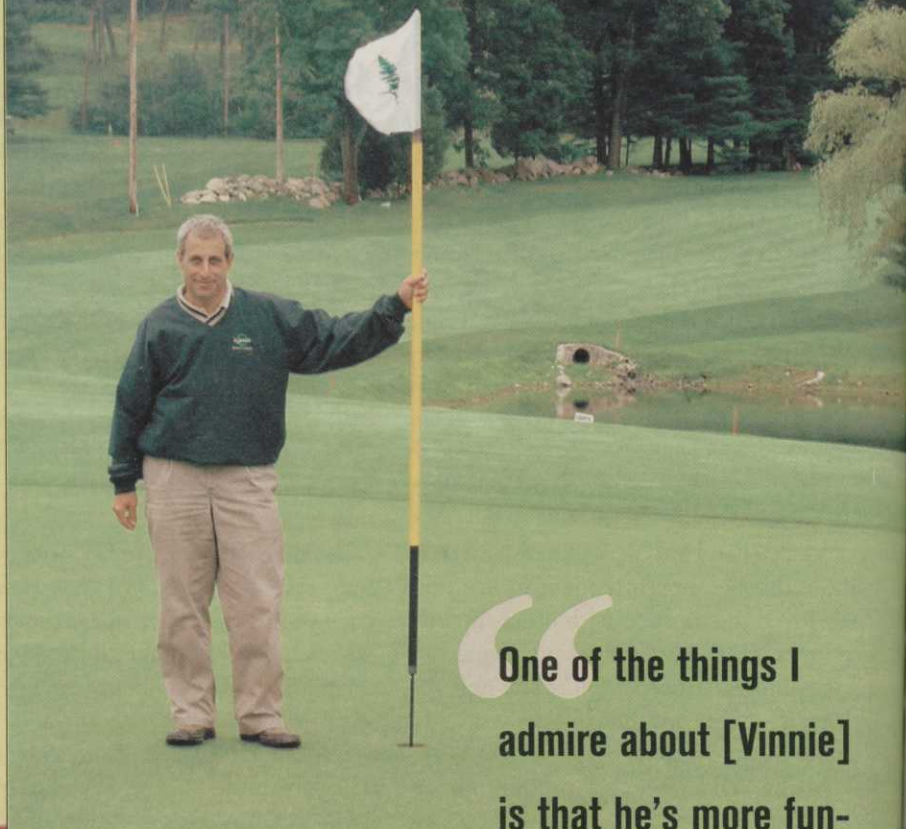
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## Brothers in Arms



**“One of the things I admire about [Vinnie] is that he’s more fun-**

**loving, carefree and gregarious than me.”**

**MICHAEL IACONO**

PINE BROOK COUNTRY CLUB

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“It was scary,” Michael recalls. “I didn’t know what I was doing.”

Vinnie, 21 at the time, became Michael’s assistant. The brothers made a good team but at times got along like ... well ... brothers. They clashed.

Being Vinnie’s boss wasn’t easy, Michael says. He knew he had to be tough on Vinnie if he was going to be tough on the crew. But Michael wondered if he had to be tougher on Vinnie to prove that he wasn’t playing favorites.

“Because we were brothers, he leaned on me a lot,” Vinnie says. “I got frustrated. I probably quit about three times a month.”

Michael says the three years that Vinnie spent as his assistant were tense but productive. He says he missed Vinnie when Vinnie left to be the superintendent at a nine-hole golf course. Despite their brotherly differences, they were a good team.

“It took a couple of years before I found somebody good enough to replace him,” says Michael, who left Metacomet for Pine Brook in 1992.

Pat, who remembers the blowups the

brothers sometimes had when they were kids, admits she was glad when Vinnie moved on.

“I was happy when Vinnie went out on his own,” she says. “They get along much better this way.”

Michael is in his 14th year at Pine Brook, and Vinnie in his 11th season at Blue Hill. Their clubs, located about 12 miles apart, have about six common members.

Vinnie says Pine Brook is a better-designed course. “It’s fun to play and challenging,” he adds. Blue Hill, on the other hand, is designed like a roller coaster. “You have to play it about 10 times to get a feel for it,” Vinnie says. “It’s only 6,300 yards, but it will beat the living daylight out of you the first time you play it because you’re hitting it up and down hills all day.”

Despite the geographic closeness of

their clubs and the fact that they have common members, Michael and Vinnie say their clubs are not competitive of each other. Fact is, the brothers talk on the phone nearly every day during the golf season, discussing various agromonic strategies. They often borrow equipment from each other's courses.

"We drive one another in a good way," Vinnie says. "I don't want to be better than him, but I want to make sure I'm as good as him."

So whose golf course is better?

"The one I'm playing on that day," says Kevin Mendik, who works as an attorney in the area, and is a member of both clubs.

Mendik knows Michael and Vinnie well. He says Pine Brook, where he is a member of the green committee, is known throughout the golfing community for its top-tier conditions

throughout the year. Mendik says Blue Hill is undergoing a renovation that will soon make it one of the top clubs in the Boston area.

"I don't get a sense that they compete against each other," Mendik says of the two clubs and their superintendents. "Some people ask me, 'Which course do you like more, Pine Brook or Blue Hill?' I say, 'I like them both enough to be a member.'"

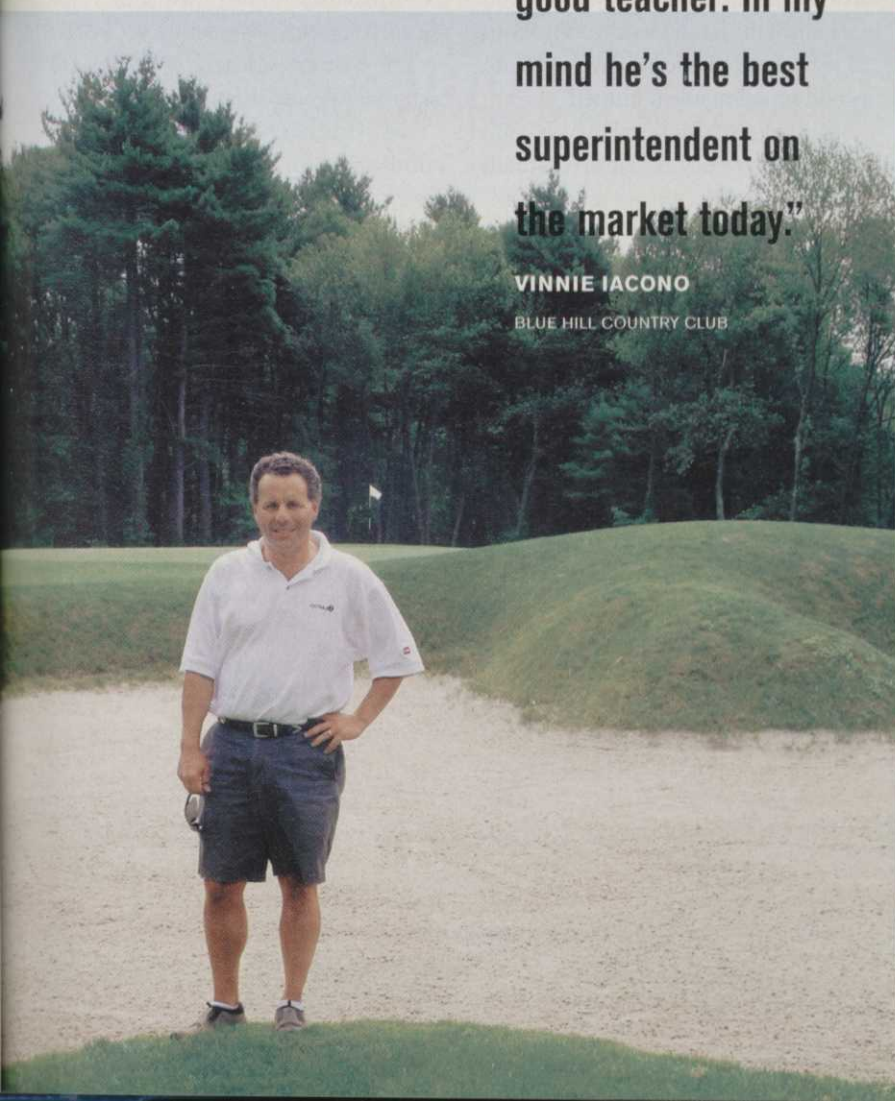
The clubs' common members aren't afraid to give Michael and Vinnie the business when it comes to the golf courses' conditions. Vinnie says he hears it all the time. "I played your brother's place the

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**My brother was a good teacher. In my mind he's the best superintendent on the market today."**

**VINNIE IACONO**

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other day," they tell him. "His place is awesome." To which Vinnie says he tells the members, "Michael is the best."

It's not just his brother who thinks that. Michael is highly regarded by his peers.

"Michael has always been considered as one of the best superintendents in the area," says Paul Jamrog, the superintendent of Metacomet Country Club, who has known the Iacono brothers for about 20 years. "And Vinnie has developed into a good superintendent himself."

Michael and Vinnie realize their work is judged every day. What drives them to succeed is perfection — as in providing members with the best playing conditions possible daily.

"It's not about being a trendsetter or anything like that," Vinnie explains of his management philosophy. "We all find ways to do our jobs according to the situation. Not every golf course is an apple and not every golf course is an orange. You have X amount of dollars to work with, and you want to make your golf course as good as you can for that X amount of dollars."

While they've retired from sparring, Michael and Vinnie still jab each with sharp-edged humor. Michael tells a story about when he turned 13 and went to work for his father. Vinnie also wanted to work for his dad but was too young. Michael would walk out the door and tell Vinnie he was going to the store and would be right back. Then his dad would pick him up at the corner in his car and take him to the golf course.

After hearing his brother's tale, Vin-

**Vinnie shares a hug with his mother, Pat, and Michael. The brothers are proud to admit they're mama's boys.**

nie forms a surprised looks on his face.

"I didn't know that went on," he says with a deadpanned look.

"You didn't notice that I didn't

come back from the store right away?" Michael asks incredulously.

"Obviously, I didn't miss you," Vinnie answers with a wry smile.

The banter aside, the brothers are each other's most ardent supporters.

"My brother was a good teacher," Vinnie says. "In my mind he's the best superintendent on the market today."

Vinnie turns his head and looks at Michael. "I tell you that all the time, but you don't believe me."

Asked to describe each other in a few words, Michael says that Vinnie "loves life."

Vinnie says Michael is "argumentative."

Most everyone who knows them will tell you that Michael is "intense," and Vinnie is "laid back." The brothers agree and wish they were more like each other.

"One of the things I admire about him most is that he's more fun-loving, carefree and gregarious than me," Michael says. "I'm more stoic. Sometimes I wish I was more like him."

Vinnie says he sometimes wishes he was more disciplined like Michael.

"But not a helluva lot," he wisecracks.

They look at each other and cackle. It's clear in their faces that they're glad to have each other as brothers — and fellow superintendents. ■