

The **Buckeye** Doesn't Fall Far From the Tree

One Ohio State graduate replaces another as golf course superintendent at the Scarlet and Gray courses.

Both say a job just doesn't get any better

By **Larry Aylward**
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Gary Rasor recently retired from his dream job. Dennis Bowsher recently began his. Both men have The Ohio State University Golf Club to thank for their pinch-us-to-make-sure-we're-not-fantasizing careers in golf course maintenance.

The 60-year-old Rasor retired last June from Ohio State after 36 years, the last 20 as superintendent of the club's Scarlet and Gray courses. Rasor went out in style, leaving the club shortly after completing a \$4.2-million restoration of the Alister MacKenzie-designed Scarlet Course directed by Columbus-born Jack Nicklaus.

"I felt lucky to be at a place this great," Rasor says. "Very few people get to do the jobs that they absolutely love to go do every single day."

The 46-year-old Bowsher feels lucky to be at Ohio State. In fact, Bowsher, who graduated from Ohio State in 1983 but has been working outside the state for almost 20 years, uses terms like "destiny" as a reason he landed the job. "It's coming home for me," he says.

But Bowsher's vast agronomic experience might have something to do with his getting hired. Most recently he was the superintendent for five years at Virginia Oaks Golf Club in Gainesville, Va.

"Ohio State is extremely fortunate to recruit a superintendent with Dennis' experience, technical skills and commitment to

excellence," said Richelle Simonson, Ohio State's associate director of athletics.

Bowsher began his tenure at Ohio State in May while Rasor was finishing up his. The two men had never met before Bowsher's first day on the job. But because the two spent a few weeks together in the same maintenance facility, Bowsher was able to learn the ins and outs of the job from Rasor, who got a glimpse into his successor's turf-management style.

"He's certainly capable of taking the club to the next level," says Rasor, who wasn't involved in selecting his replacement.

Bowsher acknowledges he has Shaquille O'Neill-sized shoes to fill in replacing Rasor. In his 20 years as the superintendent, Rasor never lost a green or fairway on the Scarlet or Gray, a feat that amazes Bowsher. "It's a testament of his can-do attitude," Bowsher says.

Rasor's "can-do attitude" was formed at an early age. Growing up on a farm in Tipp City, a small town in southern Ohio, Rasor learned the value of hard work as a kid. He also learned to be resourceful, something that helped him in his job at Ohio State.

Rasor graduated from Ohio State in 1969 with a degree in agriculture/agronomy. Ohio State is the only place he has ever worked in his career, except for a nine-month stint at a municipal golf course.

Rasor began his career as assistant superintendent in 1970 and was named superintendent in 1986. Rasor says he never wanted



Gary Rasor (left) and Dennis Bowsher are Ohio bred and graduates of The Ohio State University.

to leave Ohio State because he never thought there was a better job to be had.

Rasor says his biggest challenge at Ohio State was making the most out of not very much. When he was assistant superintendent, he remembers, the carpet on the clubhouse steps needed to be replaced, but there was no money in the budget to do so.

But Rasor had an idea. Aware that the artificial turf at Ohio State's football stadium had just been replaced, he and the crew cut some pieces from the discarded turf to use on the steps. They were proud of their accomplishment. "We figured out a way to fix the steps for nothing," Rasor says.

Rasor remembers when Jack Nicklaus built Muirfield Village Golf Club in 1973 in nearby Dublin. Muirfield, one of the top modern golf courses in the country, was big news for the area.

"People said Muirfield's fairways were better than our greens," Rasor says. "It made you mad, but it made you want to go out and work harder."

Back then Ohio State's athletic department didn't support the golf course financially like it did the football stadium, known as The

'Shoe. That frustrated Rasor because other area courses were spending money to make improvements. But things changed in the mid-1980s. The fees were raised to play the Scarlet and Gray, and that created money to make improvements.

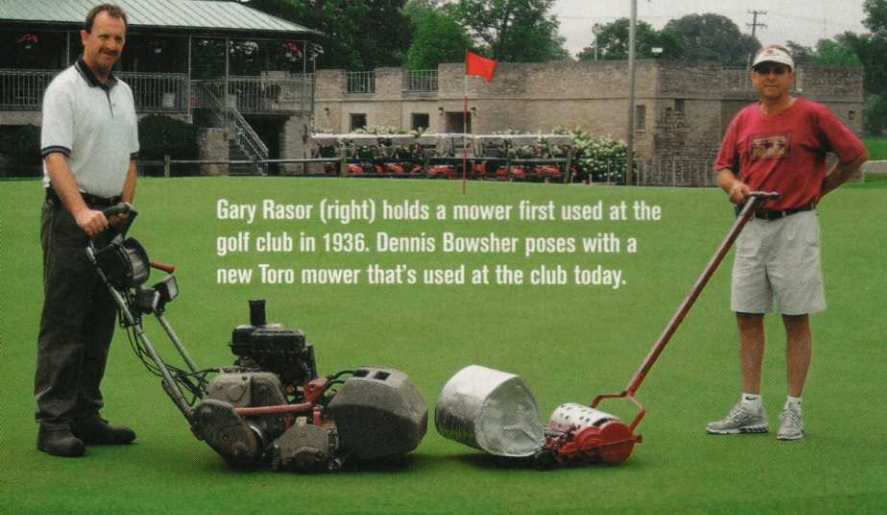
Rasor has some great stories to tell. When Jim Brown became the golf coach at Ohio State in 1972, Rasor remembers him telling legendary football coach Woody Hayes, "I'm going to make this town forget about football and think about golf." A somewhat stunned Hayes replied, "I don't think you can get 80,000 people to watch one of your tournaments."

Under Rasor's watch, Ohio State hosted 10 men's and women's NCAA Golf Championships on the Scarlet Course. Rasor says he'll miss the adrenaline rush that came with hosting the tournaments. Rasor also fondly recalls the big-name golfers who played the Scarlet as youngsters, including Corey Pavin and Tiger Woods, the latter who often struggled with his play on the course.

Of course, a major highlight of Rasor's career was the Scarlet's restoration, which was

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Gary Rasor (right) holds a mower first used at the golf club in 1936. Dennis Bowsher poses with a new Toro mower that's used at the club today.

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DENNIS BOWSHER

SUPERINTENDENT

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY GOLF CLUB

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underwritten by a \$10-million endowment. The course, which opened in 1938, received a major makeover and was closed for a year.

“It was a shot in the arm in my 33rd year,” Rasor says of his excitement for the project. “It put us on the same level with some of the other clubs around here.”

Rasor says it’s easy to retire knowing the course is in good hands. “The easy part is knowing you have someone like Dennis who will step in and keep it going,” he adds.

Rasor’s advice to Bowsher is to keep things in perspective. “When it’s 95 degrees in mid-July, you have to step back and laugh once in a while,” he says.

In the fall, Bowsher was still smiling about landing the job. The most-common phrase coming from his mouth the past five months has been, “It’s good to be home.”

Bowsher grew up in a rural area near Lima, Ohio, about 90 minutes from Columbus. His parents still live there, and his son and daughter-in-law live about two hours away in Akron.

Bowsher worked at a golf course when he was a teenager. He liked the work so much that he explored the opportunity of making it a career. He is a 1983 Ohio State graduate with a bachelor’s degree in agriculture/agronomy.

Bowsher’s first job out of school was as the assistant superintendent at Shawnee Country Club in Lima. He landed his first superintendent job at Thunder Hill Golf Club in Madison, Ohio. For the past 18 years Bowsher has worked as a superintendent at several upscale courses in South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia. “But in the back of my

mind, I wanted to get back to Ohio,” he says.

Bowsher learned about the Ohio State job in January and interviewed for it in March. A few weeks later he learned he had been selected for the post from 140 candidates. Bowsher believes the decision makers liked that he had a corporate background in golf and knew how to spend money wisely. The fact that he was a graduate certainly helped his cause.

“A Nittany Lion certainly wasn’t going to get the job,” Bowsher says with a laugh, referring to Ohio State rival Penn State.

Bowsher had been looking for work in Ohio for several years. He and his wife Jenny longed to return to be closer to their family.

“Apparently, God didn’t want to bring me back until this job was open,” Bowsher says. “To get back and get this position ... that’s the icing on the cake.”

The first day on the job, Bowsher, a big Ohio State football fan, went into the club’s restaurant for lunch. Sitting nearby was former Buckeye football star Archie Griffin, now the president and CEO of the OSU Alumni Association.

“I didn’t run over to him, but I thought, wow, this is neat,” says Bowsher, who receives two season football tickets as part of his job benefits.

Bowsher is also wowed by the Scarlet Course’s restoration, especially the new bunkers. But Bowsher knows those bunkers will also require more handwork because of their maintenance-intensive design. He received permission to hire more workers as part of his \$1.5-million budget for the two courses, which together garner about 65,000 rounds a year.

Both of Rasor’s assistants, Dave Beattie and Dan Trubisky, applied for the superintendent’s job. Beattie, who has worked at the course for 24 years and calls Rasor his mentor, says Ohio State made the right choice in Bowsher.

“He brings a wealth of knowledge,” Beattie says. “It’s a new era now.”

Bowsher glances at Rasor when asked what his long-term goal is as Ohio State’s golf course superintendent.

“I want to be sitting here like Gary is right now and telling you, ‘I’ve given my heart and soul to this golf course and The Ohio State University. And my reward is to retire from here.’”

That would be his dream come true. ■