



Matt Gourlay (right) is the new superintendent at Colbert Hills Golf Club. His dad, David Jr., is the chief operating officer of Colbert Hills.

Family Ties

Gourlay family has roots from Scotland to Kansas State

BY ANTHONY PIOPPPI
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

The name Gourlay goes far back into the annals of golf to the game's very roots in eastern Scotland.

The second wife of Old Tom Morris was a Gourlay. John Gourlay earned fame as the maker of feather golf balls. By the middle of the 18th century, "Gourlay" became synonymous with the best golf balls, one of which is part of the United States Golf Association's collection. John also managed the Old Course at the Musselburgh Links, which dates back to at least 1672 and possibly much earlier. It was where the brass-soled club or brassie was invented so golfers could play off an adjacent road. The 4.25-inch diameter hole was first adopted at Musselburgh as well.

The latest addition to the Gourlay family legacy is Matt, 22, who in May took over the position of head golf course superintendent at Colbert Hills Golf Club in Manhattan, Kan.,

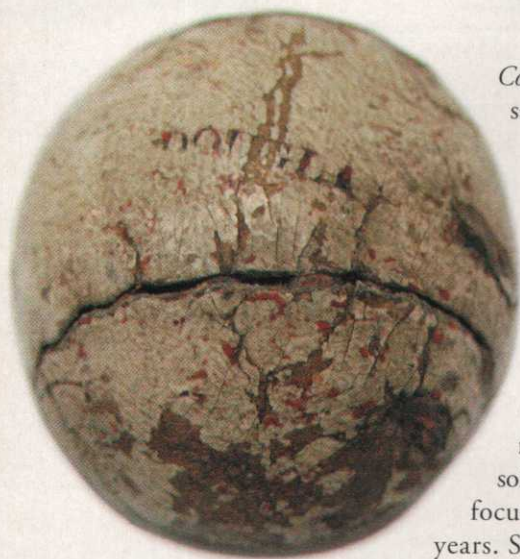
run in conjunction with Kansas State University's turf program. The program is unique in that it requires students of the four-year program to experience the retail as well as the food-and-beverage side of the business. The course's maintenance staff is composed of K-State students.

Matt's father, David Jr., a superintendent by training and Canadian by birth, is the chief operating officer of Colbert Hills, which is owned by the Kansas State University Research and Management Foundation.

David Jr.'s father, David, immigrated to Canada from Scotland in 1948 and was a longtime superintendent and founding member of the Canadian Golf Course Superintendents Association. He first came to Canada in 1943 to train as a navigator for the Royal Air Force in World War II.

Matt Gourlay, who was born in Canada,
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says he never felt forced into the golf world but liked what he saw in the business at an early age.

"I always liked going to work with my father," he says. "I remember sitting on his briefcase to see over the steering wheel.

Matt's mother, Barbara, has an associate's degree in agriculture specializing in turf and ran Standard Soil Consultants, a soil testing business in Canada that focused on the golf market, for 25 years. She now works for the Kansas Ladies Golf Association.

Matt's sister, 23-year-old Lindsay, is a graduate of Kansas State and has a degree in hospitality. She is the food and beverage manager at Woodstone Golf Club in Danielsville, Penn.

The Gourlays moved to Manhattan, Kan., from Canada in the mid-1990s for the Colbert Hills grow-in. Matt began working at the course soon after it opened as a bag boy and then in the pro shop. He was looking for more hours so he made the move to the maintenance staff when it hired more full-time employees.

Eventually, Matt enrolled in the turfgrass department at K-State and made his way up to assistant superintendent at Colbert Hills. His internships include working for Jeff Markow at Cypress Point Club in California and Steve Cook at Oakland Hills Country Club in Michigan.

When Colbert Hills superintendent Kenny Rogers moved on earlier this year, Dave Gourlay decided to advertise the position, although the normal routine was to elevate the assistant.

"It was his turn," the elder Gourlay says. "The only reason I could think of not to promote him was that he was my son."

He later realized the ludicrous nature of that line of thinking.

"I thought, if I hire a new superintendent, who's going to train him?" he says. When Dave realized the answer to that question was Matt, he also realized his son was the right person for the job.

Having a student in a management position at Colbert Hills is not out of the ordinary, the elder Gourlay says, pointing out that

the food and beverage manager of the club took 15 credits during the spring semester and attended summer school.

Even though students hold many of the key positions, the club runs smoothly, Dave says. "It's a fairly simple operation once you get down to it," he adds.

Matt Gourlay says people are wrong if they think he might be getting a break because of the family connection.

"He's quite a tough bugger to work for," Matt says of his dad. "He makes it twice as hard on me because he expects so much more."

Matt's grandfather, Dave, likes the fact that the family tradition will carry on. He was one of a handful of superintendents who attended the founding meeting of the Canadian Golf Superintendents Association in 1966.

"I'm thrilled with it. He's a very ardent young man," he says.

Dave is retired and lives in Aurora, Ontario, with Aurora Highlands Golf Course in view. One of his fondest memories of golf in his native Scotland was the time he was part of a boys' club that journeyed to St. Andrews to play the Old Course, spending the night camped out next to the 17th green.

"I think the fee to play was one shilling and six pence," he says.

Dave has other children who are or were involved with golf besides Dave Jr. Jim Gourlay is the golf coach at Averette University in Danville, Va. His men's team won the 2003 Division III national championship, and he was named national coach of the year the same season. Another son, Ian, was in course construction for a while as a shaper.

Matt looks forward to continuing not only his family tradition but also the K-State and Colbert Hills tradition of training future superintendents. He will have three interns from the school next year that will be in charge of the entire maintenance operation from worker discipline to the daily irrigation program for one week. He also looks forward to working with researchers from the school that conduct experiments at Colbert Hills.

"We're a living laboratory," he says.

And he's a living legacy and another step in a long family line steeped in centuries of golf history. ■