

He's finally hanging it up. Paul Voykin has announced his retirement at the end of this month. This super superintendent is finally parking his utility vehicle for good at age 77 after more than 47 years in the business.

Amazing.

But what's even more incredible, especially in this I-must-change-jobs-every-five-years-to-get-ahead-in-this-world mentality in which we live, is that Voykin is retiring after almost a half-century at the same club, the Briarwood Country Club in Deerfield, Ill. On top of that, Briarwood is a private club with more than 200 members — and probably just as many opinions on how the putting greens should roll.

Voykin is not only a hard and loyal worker; he's a survivor.

The first thing I wanted to ask Voykin about his retirement when I spoke to him recently was: Why now? Why not keep going until you're 85?

Well, like most retirees, Voykin wants to travel and spend more time with his five children and six grandchildren while he still has the time.

My second question to Voykin was: Why did you work into your late 70s (beyond the life expectancy of a typical American man)? His answer was simple. Voykin says he still had the verve after hitting 65. And he says the club's members kept telling him not to even think of retiring.

It fascinates me that Voykin didn't get bored of Briarwood after so many years. I mean, the man has literally walked every inch of the place's 160 acres. So my next question to Voykin was: Why did you stay at the same place for so long?

I love his refreshing answer to what I asked. Voykin says he kept charged by having spring fever every day, not just during the spring. Having spring fever prompted him to see his course in a different light. A day didn't go by where Voykin didn't appreciate the beauty of his surroundings, from gazing at the glistening fairways after a cool, spring rain to listening to the birds sing new songs every morning.

My next question to Voykin was: How did you manage to stay at the same place for so long, especially a private club? After all, I've heard many superintendents say their jobs are comparable to

At 77, He's Finally Calling It Quits

BY LARRY AYLWARD



PAUL VOYKIN IS NOT ONLY A HARD AND LOYAL WORKER; HE'S A SURVIVOR

that of a Major League Baseball manager. You can make the playoffs one year and get fired the next. So how did Voykin not wear out his welcome?

I love his answer to this question, too, which perhaps epitomizes how we should all approach our jobs. Voykin says he was always honest with everyone. He also treated others with respect and found that having a sense of humor never did him any harm.

I also asked Voykin: Did you ever have an offer from another club to leave Briarwood? His answer was "yes, 22 times." Voykin was offered more money and says Augusta National even called. He considered some of the offers, but no offer was ever enough to lure him from Briarwood.

I also asked Voykin: What was your biggest contribution to the industry? He didn't even have to think about the answer. Voykin says he helped spur golf's environmental movement by lobbying for courses to implement more no-mow zones and plant more wildflowers.

My final question to Voykin was whether he had any regrets. And just as Frank Sinatra sings in "My Way," Voykin says he has a few. A big regret was getting divorced from the love of his life after 18 years. Voykin admits that working seven days a week was not good for his marriage, even though he felt like he had to give his all to his job to support his family. If he could redo one thing, Voykin says he would've spent more time at home with his wife and kids.

Through all the highlights and low lights, though, Voykin will leave Briarwood a thankful man. He was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth and as a kid often ate lard and homemade bread for dinner. Voykin is genuinely appreciative for the life this industry has afforded him.

I suspect that the feeling is mutual.

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