



KARL DANNEBERGER, PH.D., *Science Editor*

"What makes the course unique, besides the sand greens and eight holes, is that you play the course with four hickory-shafted clubs and a golf ball that is limited to 60 percent distance of an ordinary golf ball."

Golf off (and on) the beaten path

I have read that 75 percent of the turf related sales is associated with the top 25 percent of the golf courses in the United States. I assume too that the top 25 percent are also the most visible and garner the most public attention. But it begs the question, what are the courses in the lowest percentile like?

I have been fortunate to visit many of these golf courses, in part due to our Ohio State Extension Specialist Pam Sherratt. Pam is often contacted by a local extension agent, a small town, or maybe an owner to make a visit to a golf course. Pam's primary expertise is in athletic fields, so she often invites one of the turfgrass faculty to go under the auspicious purpose to "provide backup." I rarely pass up an invitation even though I know Pam is more than qualified to provide suggestions and recommendations.

I personally enjoy the road trips. It allows me to get out of the office and into the real world. The trips themselves consist of talking turf with Pam with periodic stops at a Dairy Queen, and if we come across one — Starbucks. Many of the destinations are in remote areas. I know we are close to our destination when the voice in Pam's GPS says, "Danger, you are in an

unspecified area, proceed with caution. Make a legal U-turn..."

I am always pleasantly surprised by the visits because they are never what I expected. For example, one visit was made to the Morgan County Fair Grounds and Golf Course in McConnelville, Ohio. The golf course is a 9-hole Par 3 located on the fairgrounds along the Muskingum River.

The course is run by one employee along with volunteers associated with the fair's board. The enthusiasm and love they show to this golf course can't help but make you excited to be around them. The reason for the visit was to help them achieve their goal of better quality greens. I asked about the fairways, and was informed that is where the RVs park during the fair. We focused on improving the greens.

As we were leaving I asked one of the board members if Demolition Derby was still an event at the fair. His reply

was a classic, "Cash for junkers killed the Demolition Derby." I found ways to use that quote a number of times this past summer.

A second example is Glenlaurel Inn in Southeast Ohio. As Pam and I traveled down a rather nondescript winding road and through a hollow, we came upon the golf course, to which Pam said looking at the greens, "It looks like they've started renovating them." My reply was, "Those are sand greens." Pam replied, "Oops," and had a good laugh. This was the first time I have seen sand greens in Ohio. For Pam, it was possibly her first time seeing sand greens anywhere.

Glenlaurel is a luxurious Scottish Inn with an eight-hole Scottish links golf course. Hurdzan Design worked with the owners to lay out the course eight years ago. I asked one of the owners, why eight holes? And he replied with a smirk, "So that you would ask me." What makes the course unique, besides the sand greens and eight holes, is that you play the course with four hickory-shafted clubs and a golf ball that is limited to 60 percent distance of an ordinary golf ball.

Their issue was how to improve the quality of those sand greens. No matter where you go it always seems like the focus of discussion is on improving the quality of greens.

I bring these courses up not to give some agronomic insight or even promote better conditioned courses. What these courses represent, in part, is what is good about golf: the people who have a passion and love for the game and the close attachment they have for the golf course. Whether you're in New York City or the hollows of West Virginia, people who associate themselves with golf are people I like to be around.

Karl Danneberger, Ph.D., *Golfdom's* science editor and a professor at The Ohio State University, can be reached at danneberger.1@osu.edu.