

Get a head start.

Get a head start in the demanding race your turf faces from May through September. Pre-stress conditioning and complete True Foliar™ nutrition are essential to starting strong.

To make sure your turf looks great as soon as the race begins, trust the Emerald Isle True Foliar™ Nutrition Programs from Milliken.



For your best turf ever!



Emerald Isle Solutions™

All for One and One for All

Angels Crossing is no miracle. It's just a fine example of teamwork



BY LARRY AYLWARD,
EDITOR

ABOVE

Angels Crossing's team consists of (left to right) Bruce Matthews III, architect; Mike Hill, pro; Bob Thompson, owner; Jim Thompson, general manager; and Roger Barton, superintendent.

Word spread quickly in the small Michigan community of Vicksburg that "something" was going on at the old paper mill site. Then the rumors of a golf course began.

Of course, the main question posed by some residents doubling as skeptics in Kalamazoo County was why would anyone want to build another golf course in already golf-saturated Michigan. And why would anyone want to build a course in a depressed economy?

Local farmer Bob Thompson heard the questions, and he believed in his heart that he had the right answers. For it was in his heart that Angels Crossing Golf Course began.

It all started with the closing of the Fox River Paper Co.'s Vicksburg mill in 1999. The company was the town's largest employer, and 250 people lost their jobs when it shut down because of overproduction in the industry.

The closure also meant a 23 percent loss to the Vicksburg tax base.

"It was a multigenerational employer for a lot of families in this area," Thompson says of the plant. "It was a golden goose."

Thompson, a community leader, knew something had to be done.

"The goal became to try to replace some of the taxes we lost and do something creative to attract people to the area," the 47-year-old says.

Bob spoke with his brother, Jim, about the idea of building a golf course. Jim, an accountant who worked for 10 years as the controller at another course, created a business plan.

The 567-acre site, about half of it comprised of wetlands, had been partially used as spray fields for liquid effluent, the water used to cool giant paper rolls. An isolated area, about one-third the size of a football field, tested at a level

Continued on page 34

Lower the hurdles.

Clear the tough hurdles in the demanding race your turf faces from May through September - heat, drought, humidity, disease, low mowing heights, and compaction.

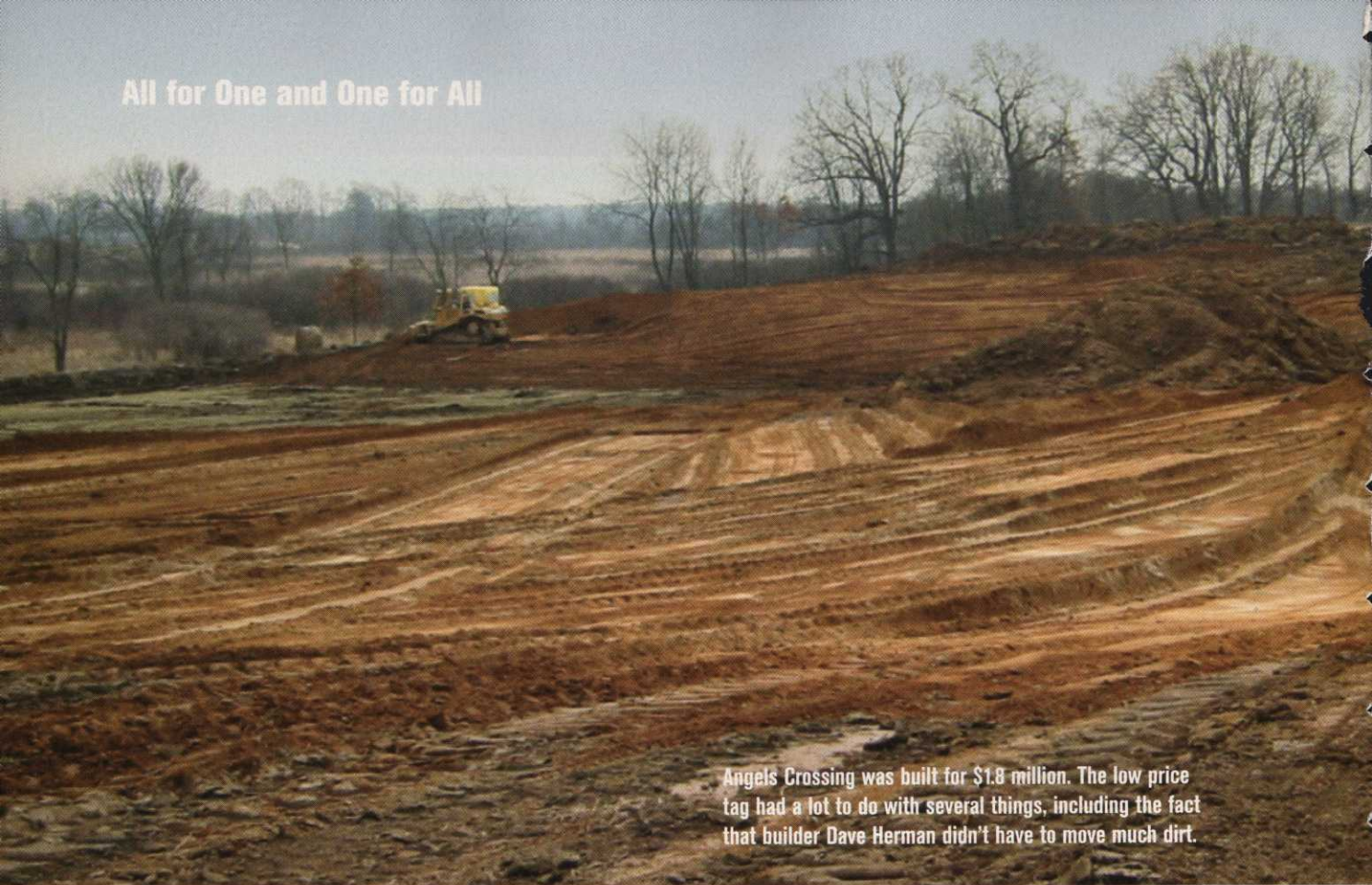
To ensure your turf is physiologically fit enough to be stress tolerant and disease-resistant, trust the Emerald Isle True Foliar™ Nutrition Programs from Milliken.



For your best turf ever!



Emerald Isle Solutions™

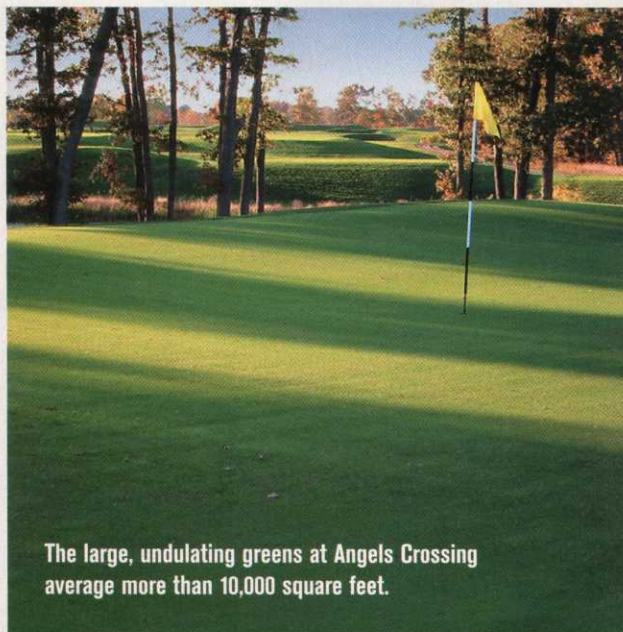


Angels Crossing was built for \$1.8 million. The low price tag had a lot to do with several things, including the fact that builder Dave Herman didn't have to move much dirt.

Continued from page 32

that qualified the site as a brownfield redevelopment. Thompson, who was familiar with the land, purchased it when it was decided the golf course would be built. His business, Fertile Prairie Farms, maintained some of the land when the mill was still operating.

"We used to joke that it would make a great course," Bob says. "It was a joke because the mill had been there since 1904, and the sentiment in the community was that it would never close.



The large, undulating greens at Angels Crossing average more than 10,000 square feet.

"As a community, we needed to respond to the bad news we were given with its closing," Bob continues. "We could do nothing and see what happened, or we could try to turn it into something positive."

Bob and Jim, who's now the general manager of the course, went to the bank to talk financing for the project. After that, everything just fell into place.

"I could write a book about how people found their ways to the project," Bob says. "I don't know if I feel like I had all that much to do with it."

One person that found his way to the project was Bruce Matthews III, a top golf course architect in Michigan and the United States. The Thompsons recruited Matthews to design the 18-hole, 7,100-yard course.

A feasibility study on the area revealed that people would spend around \$35 to play a golf course. That gave Bob and Jim a good indication of how much could be spent on building the course, which was not a lot in comparison to what was being spent on other upscale courses.

Matthews jumped at the chance to design the course. He liked the challenge of creating an upscale course with a bargain green fee.

Matthews adored the land's rolling hills and natural resources. His design has the look and feel of the Golden Age clubs of the 1920s. In his design, Matthews pays homage to some of the old-time architects, including C.B. Macdonald, Seth Raynor and William Flynn. The greens, comprised of L93 creeping bentgrass, are large and undulated and average

Continued on page 36



Finish a winner.

Finish a winner in the demanding race your turf faces from May through September.

To experience consistently great color and quality, even with low mowing heights and tough environmental conditions, trust the Emerald Isle True Foliar™ Nutrition Programs from Milliken.



For your best turf ever!



Emerald Isle Solutions™

All for One and One for All

Continued from page 34

a tad more than 10,000 square feet.

Matthews, who has designed almost 40 courses in Michigan, says Angels Crossing is his favorite project — mainly because of the people involved.

“Everybody has had a turn as a leader,” Matthews says, describing his latest design as “simple elegance.” “It’s been a very cohesive group.”

The course was built for \$1.8 million. The low price tag had a lot to do with several things, including the fact that builder Dave Herman didn’t have to move much dirt. Ponds didn’t have to be dug because the course featured so many wetlands. Sandy soil on the property already met specifications for USGA-constructed greens.

“Bruce’s real genius in the design is that, like the great artists, he chose to reveal beauty rather than create it,” Jim says. “That kept the dirt yardage down while really showcasing the natural features and beauty of the course.”

Coming soon to the property is a clubhouse, another nine holes, and teaching and practice facilities. Oh yeah, a chapel will also be built.

In fact, Bob planned to build the chapel on the property before the golf course. He says it will be constructed in an area on the back of the course that overlooks a creek. The fact that the course was named Angels Crossing is purely coincidence.

“It’s a great example of affordable golf. It has upscale playability, an upscale look and upscale service for a lower price.”

BRUCE MATTHEWS III

Speaking of the name, it was perhaps more difficult to come up with than the course was to build, everyone jokes.

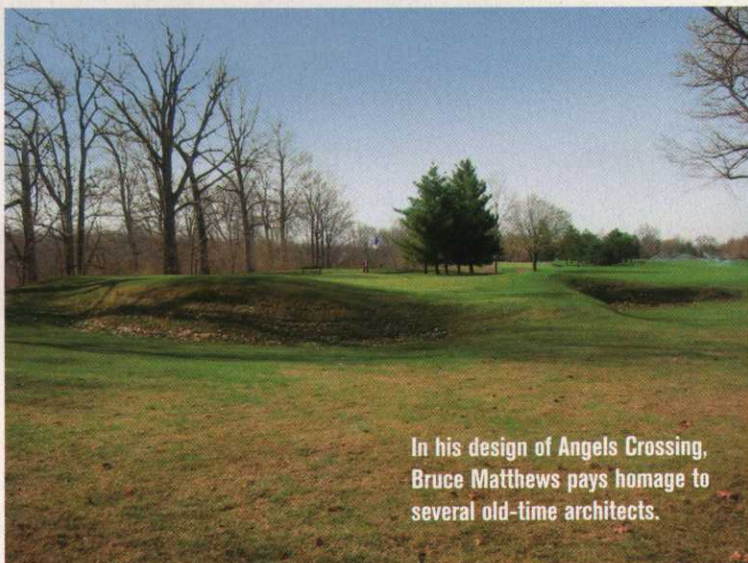
“We had a name for the course every day,” Bob says. “We had a few pages of names to choose from.”

The word “crossing” was a component of several of the names. When Jim suggested “angels” as the word in front of “crossings” — in reference to Bob’s wife Jill’s collection of angel ware — everyone saw the light.

Super service

Angels Crossing features five sets of tees. “If you’re trying to create something for the masses to enjoy, then you have to build something that appeals to all levels of golfers,” Jim says.

The five sets of tees are part of the Thompsons’ plan to



COURTESY OF ANGELS CROSSING

delight their customers. They’re off to a good start, even though the course hasn’t even opened. Last October, Angels Crossing held an open house so people could finally see for themselves what had been going on at the paper mill site. Visitors were invited to jump in golf cars and cruise the course. Such a friendly offering enabled Angels Crossing to make a positive first impression from the vital customer-service perspective.

The Thompsons believe they can make their golf course succeed by providing exceptional customer service.

“Have you ever been to Nordstrom?” Bob asks.

He proceeds to tell about the fabulous customer service the department store’s employees are specially trained to provide.

“Nordstrom believes that if you take care of people when they walk in the store, those people will take care of you,” Bob says. “[Your customers] want to be taken care of.”

Bob wants Angels Crossing’s customers to feel like they’re getting a great value for their dollars. “You don’t make that impression by charging way too much for a can of beer,” he adds.

Course pro Mike Hill says he’ll treat everyone who walks in the pro shop the same way — with dignity and respect. He’ll see to it that other workers in the clubhouse do the same.

Above all, the best value can be found in the \$38 green fee — and that’s with a golf car. Interestingly, the marketing challenge Angels Crossing faces is that it costs too *little*. Jim says he has told people about the course’s style and features, and they expect him to answer “\$100” when they ask him how much it costs to play. When he tells them it’s only \$38 a round, they look at him very skeptically.

“This has happened because the market has been overpriced for too long,” Jim says.

Still, nobody is about to apologize for Angels Crossing’s low green fee.

“It’s a great example of affordable golf,” Matthews says. “It has upscale playability, an upscale look and upscale service for a lower price.” ■



Go the Distance on Pythium Control.



Drive Pythium off your course with Terrazole® 35WP fungicide. Terrazole can be used on newly seeded areas or on established turf where it works with both preventative and curative control. And after years of on-course experience on tees and greens, no resistance has ever been reported. Ask your chemical supplier for Terrazole – Pythium control that goes the distance.

Terrazole is a registered trademark of a subsidiary of Crompton Corporation. Always read and follow label directions. ©2004 Crompton Corporation

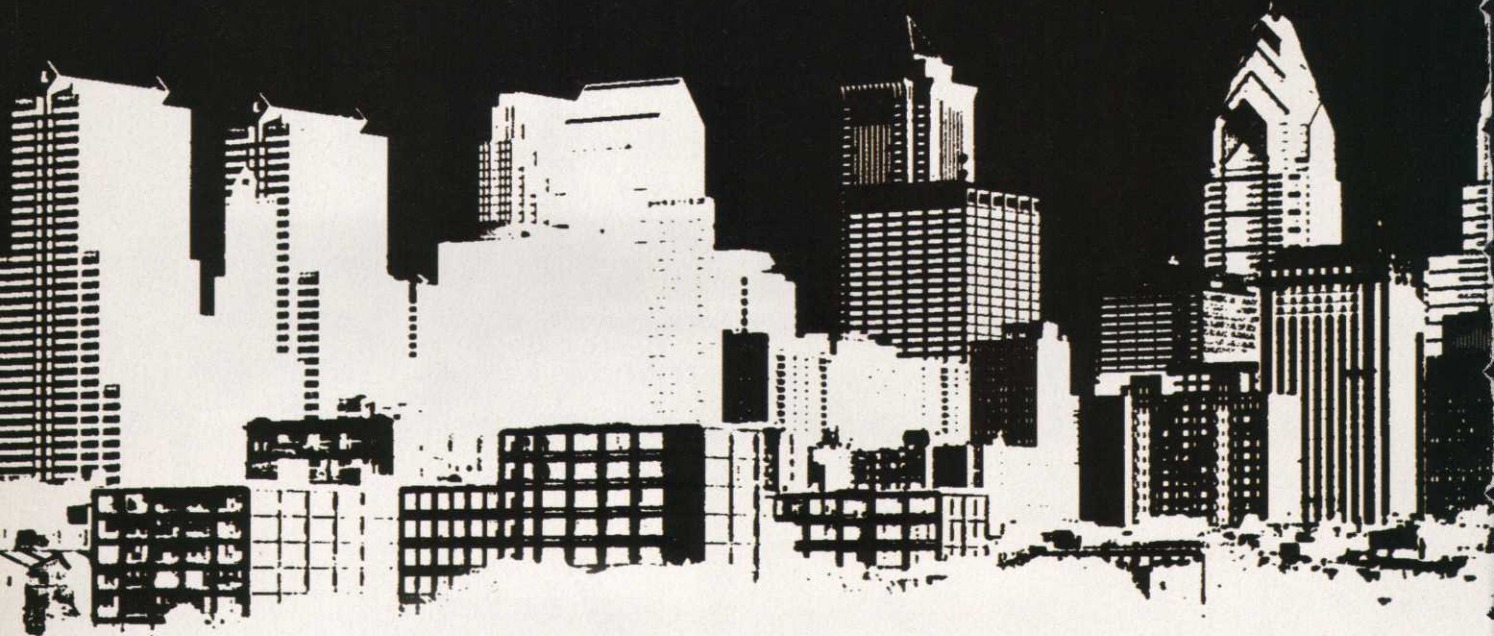
Terrazole®

Crompton

Uniroyal Chemical

www.cromptoncorp.com/crop

In the City



BY BRUCE ALLAR

James Patrick Morgan III is not the type to be wary of ghosts. He's a big-city boy who has seen more than his share of pranks and misbehavior. But one cloudy night when he was out exercising his dog and watering No. 17 at Juniata Golf Club, a city-owned course in north Philadelphia, he had a close encounter of a weird kind.

A hole opened suddenly in the cloud canopy and a moonbeam shone down, like a spotlight, on the exact spot where Morgan had once found a dead body. The ray of light pointed to the place where Al, a well-liked ball shagger who regularly worked the Juniata grounds, had committed suicide (see related story on page 40). Morgan was the first to happen upon his corpse, and he didn't want to be the first to find Al's ghost, too.

"I didn't investigate," says the superintendent, now at the Philadelphia municipal course, John F. Byrne Golf Club. "I took my dog and went right home. I'd had enough experience with that area."

Superintendents, golf professionals and others who work at courses in urban areas often come face to face with bizarre behavior, cruel pranks and senseless vandalism. Often working golf properties situated on city park lands surrounded by open public spaces, they have frequent nongolfing visitors interrupting their routines — and often doing costly damage.

Kevin Greenwell has been the head pro at Shawnee Golf Course, a municipal course in Louisville, Ky., for about seven years. His layout is bordered to the south by Shawnee Park and to the east by undeveloped city-owned land. Along its perimeter to the north and west

FROM FINDING A DEAD BODY (AND HIS GHOST?) TO HAVING TO DEAL WITH HOMELESS PEOPLE BATHING IN THE IRRIGATION SYSTEM, SUPERINTENDENTS AT URBAN COURSES FACE SOME UNUSUAL CHALLENGES



is the RiverWalk, a bicycle-pedestrian path that runs between it and the Ohio River. Greenwell's course is separated by an imaginary, white-staked boundary from some of the city's lower-income areas. Greenwell particularly worries about young bicyclists who use his cart paths as cut-throughs from their neighborhoods to the RiverWalk.

"Do people understand what a white out-of-bounds stake means?" Greenwell asks. "Probably most of them do not. The kids don't know any better. You try to explain it to them, and they think you're badgering them. You're not. You're just trying to explain to them the danger of a golf ball. It doesn't go where it's supposed to. We know that, but the kids don't."

Some of the kids get obsessed with golf cars, looking for any opening to take one on a joy ride. One kid hijacked a car at Shawnee when

its driver was putting on the 15th green, only to find out that the player was a state trooper with the wind — and the determination — to run him down and get it back. Another of Greenwell's golf cars was involved in a high-speed chase with a police car. And a third ended up several miles away in the city's vehicle impound lot after it was abandoned on a city street. ("They wanted to charge me to get it out," says Greenwell, who later managed to get the fee waived.)

Another ongoing problem at Shawnee is caused by ATVs and dirt bikes that run in the roughly 50 acres of undeveloped land to the east of the golf course. A four-wheel-drive ATV did donuts on the second green two years ago, causing what Greenwell estimates was \$3,000 in damage to the ripped-up putting surface.

Continued on page 40

One kid hijacked a golf car when its driver was putting on the 15th green, only to find out that the player was a state trooper with the wind — and the determination — to run him down and get it back.

Continued from page 39

“It dug so deep that it actually had to be sodded,” he says. “The sod’s still a different color from the original grass.”

“Vandalism is a constant problem,” says Marty Storch, golf manager for Metro Parks in Louisville and Jefferson County, Ky. The nine county-operated golf courses have their share of stolen flags, flagsticks and tee markers, as well as golf car heists. But here’s one for the books: About eight years ago, some pranksters brought a shovel and ax to the course. They started on the third green, digging a hole 4 feet in diameter and 3 feet in depth right on the putting surface. Then they went elsewhere on the course, chopped down a tree, hauled it over to the green and re-planted it not far from the flagstick.

The golf manager says that concerns about vandalism at the Jefferson County-operated

courses have risen to the point that he has asked supervisors at each course to track the damage in 2004 — everything from ripped-off flagsticks to golf car thefts. If the expenses are high enough, especially when combined with vandalism in the public parks that surround many of the courses, Metro Parks may consider bringing back park rangers. The rangers haven’t patrolled public parks in the Louisville area in about 20 years.

Security seems to help when urban courses can afford its presence. The links at Forest Park, a near-downtown facility in St. Louis, used to see episodes of assault, larceny and gang activity. Car and truck drivers tore up the course, which runs along a busy city boulevard, with spin-outs after hours — generally when the bars closed. But according to Chad Carpenter, superintendent at the Forest Park layout

Continued on page 42

The Urban Superintendent

‘YOU WON’T BELIEVE SOME OF THE THINGS I’VE FOUND,’ HE SAYS

BY JAMES PATRICK MORGAN III

When superintendents arrive to work in the morning, they wonder what challenges the new day will bring. Will a green be dry or has a disease set in during the night? Were skunks feeding on grubs in the fairways? These are problems that most superintendents experience.

But some of us encounter other problems when we get to work — problems that have nothing to do with the condition of the turf. The “some of us” I’m referring to are superintendents who tend turf at public courses in large cities.

I’m one of those superintendents. I’ve been the superintendent of the John F. Byrne Golf Club in Philadelphia for almost four years. You won’t believe some of the things I’ve found on the course.

Once, I discovered an abandoned car burnt black as the darkest night. And then there was the time I found a dead



BRIAN RUSHING

body, the result of a suicide by an elderly gentleman the night before.

Instead of chasing geese off the course, I and other city superintendents have had to shuffle off the less unfortunate. And imagine the feeling of emptying the trash and coming in contact with a dirty syringe, which I’ve done.

Ever have a member miss a putt and loudly complain? Sure you have. How about that same member pulling out a 38 and discharging a few shots? That happened to me a few years ago. Now that’s deep-tine aerifying, Philly style.

Yes, we still have the same turf worries as everyone else, but being a superintendent in the city offers a greater responsibility. A reason is that some city people see golf courses as retreats from the everyday hassles that await them. I learned this from a gentleman named Al. Let me tell you his story.

Al would walk around the golf course everyday and shag balls, which is nothing unusual. But Al was different. Every ball he found he gave to the local high school teams so the kids didn’t have to buy them. This was Al’s way of giving back to the game and promoting it in his own special way.

One morning I was in the pro shop

Continued on page 44