



Post-Crescent photo

Ball with Agnew caricature

Sell has 2,574 Golf Balls - All Different

by Pat Rossey

A pink golf ball started Bill Sell on his way to a collection which now contains a whopping 2,574 different golf balls.

Sell, a tall, slender man with a green cap set back on his gray hair, has been a golf course superintendent for 33 years, and is now with Chaska Golf Course near Appleton.

His hobby began 15 years ago when he found the pink ball marked Cincinnati Tool Grinding Co. "I thought it was a little different and decided to save it," he said.

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Most golf balls in his collection are marked with company or product names or logos. The collection also contains novelty balls and some marked for special events.

"Up until this year, I thought I was the only guy who did this kind of thing. But in our trade magazine I saw an article about a guy in New Jersey with a collection," Sell said.

Sell wrote to him and the man helped him contact another collector in New York and one in Montana. He knows of no other persons with the same hobby.

Sell said there is no real value to the collection. "It is strictly a hobby," he explained. "It just got started and kept blooming. It's real pleasing."

He said that many companies mark golf balls for advertising purposes. "Realistically speaking, there must be hundreds and thousands of companies doing this," he said. "My goal is to collect as many as I can."

The collection includes balls from Greece, Mexico, Australia, Japan and Scotland, the country where golf originated.

One ball features a caricature of Spiro Agnew with "Spiro Who?" printed on the reverse side. Another simply says "Curplunk." One brags, "I beat Nicklaus & Miller."

About 10 years ago, one of Lawrence Welk's employees saw an article by Sell in "The Golf Superintendent," the official publication of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, and sent him a ball marked "Champagne Music of Lawrence Welk."

Sell was once sent a ball that carries the inscription, "Bob Hope Open House - Thanks for the Memories."

Sell swaps duplicates with the handful of other collectors, and friends help him out.

Other golf course superintendents throughout the state and several in other states send him golf balls. He finds many of the balls when the water holes are cleaned at Chaska.

A Chaska display case with part of his collection, and a book which lists the ball markings prompt golfers to add to his collection.

A golfer himself, Sell said, "I play at it. I'm on the golf course all day long, and when I finally get a chance to play, I play about two holes and then remember something else that has to get done. You'd think a guy could slip away once in awhile."