



Jottings From The Golf Course Journal

THE AMERICAN LIBERTY ELM

By Monroe S. Miller

I just returned from a walk on the golf course. It would probably take another Golf Course Superintendent to understand why, in the deep of winter, I need to do that once in awhile. It's been given over to Mother Nature for these months and if, by chance, I happened to see something that needed attention, She isn't going to let me interfere anyway. These wintertime walks seldom have specific determination; instead, they serve to remind one of his purpose and reaffirm peace of mind.

Except today. I had a specific reason to cross the railroad tracks from the shop and walk through the valley that divides the golf course east and west. My destination was the rough area behind the 15th green where, this past November, I planted my first elm tree ever. I wanted to be sure that it was alright and surviving the dangers of small wildlife and cross-country skiers. It was very symbolic to plant this American Liberty Elm; for the first time, I was able to experience the hope and joy and optimism from planting an elm instead of the sadness and tragedy that came from removing hundreds and hundreds of them.

Like so many other Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents, I faced, in the early and mid-1970's, the horrible task given to us by the Dutch elm disease fungus, imported to America from Europe in the 1930's. The disease was spread by the elm bark beetle, which was also imported, and reached its destructive height in Wisconsin about the time I started at Blackhawk Country Club. It was nearly criminal to think that the

only cure for this dreaded disease of one of Nature's most elegant and beautiful trees was removal. We worked at taking out infected branches, using great care to maintain the integrity of their form at the same time. We were constantly disinfecting our equipment to be certain that we didn't become part of the problem in spread. And we started an extensive injection program, hoping to at least stave off the finality of the disease until newly planted trees were large enough to occupy some air space. It was through the fungicide injection program that I got to know the Elm Research Institute and the fine people on their staff. They gave hope to our terrible problem.



One of the reasons I visit New England each autumn is that these annual trips represent a sort of going home again for me. My seven-great grandfather, William Munroe, settled in Lexington, Massachusetts in 1652, an immigrant from Scotland. He and his son William are both buried near the green in Lexington and Cheryl and I visited their graves this fall. My five-great grandfather Phillip Munroe is pillowed in the mountains near the small New Hampshire village of Surry. We travelled to Surry to see the burial ground where he has been resting for nearly two hundred years. I'm really lucky because Cheryl is game for about anything on our vacations in the East and was as excited as me when I suggested we drive twenty or so miles down the road from Surry to another southwestern

New Hampshire village — Harrisville. Harrisville is the home of the Elm Research Institute.

We approached this little town of 700 from the north. It was one of those classic autumn days — the color of the mountains was at its peak, it was crisp and clear and the deep blue sky was miles high. Our first glimpse of the village was across a lake, and on this morning the water was perfectly still and reflected an exact image of the town. We were both overwhelmed. Harrisville is, in every way, pure New England. It is a handsome ensemble of small and modest red brick buildings — mills, homes and, of course, a steepled Congregational Church. The residents have great pride and have preserved the character of Harrisville by restoring many of the structures. The last textile industry in town left in 1970 and they were successful in attracting several small concerns to relocate there. The ERI is one of them.

It occurred to me that there is significant irony about Harrisville. Amidst the old and the picturesque are the new and the technological, vividly demonstrated by the Institute. Located in a renovated 19th century brick mill, the people of the ERI are using the latest technology to help solve a 20th century problem. The great work that they are doing makes them friends to all of America's golf courses.

Concern about dying elm trees inspired one man to take action. John P. Hansel was so troubled by the elms that were dying at his Connecticut home that he founded the ERI in 1967. Hansel, currently the Director of the Institute, saw that if the species was to survive, a national organization was needed to lead a crusade of research against Dutch elm disease. Since its beginnings the ERI has funded research grants which total over \$1,000,000. This research program provides a link between the American Liberty Elm and our land grant college, the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

Dr. Eugene B. Smalley is a professor of plant pathology and forestry at the UW—Madison and is known to many Wisconsin Golf

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Course Superintendents. He has been a leader in the search for a solution to the problem with America's elms, and travelled to Anaheim, California in 1974 to address the GCSAA Conference on Dutch elm disease chemotherapy. In that talk he spoke of research work with elm treatments by trunk and soil injection of benomyl, the results of study of solubilized benomyl and its effect, and the potential of foliar sprays. In his continuing quest for other answers to the "cancer" of the tree world, Dr. Smalley helped in the development of a disease-resistant tree at the UW—Madison. Twenty years ago he had people from around the country send seeds from healthy American elms to him. He planted those seeds, cross-bred the trees, injected them with the DED fungus, cross-bred them again and injected that generation with the fungus to help ward off the disease.

Dr. Smalley sent the root cuttings from the third-generation trees to the Institute in November of 1983. Ezekiel Goodband, Chief Horticulturalist and Propagationist at the ERI, took over from there. He

cultivated the root cuttings until they began to grow. He then cut small leaves from the sprouts, dipped them in a rooting hormone and planted them in a special moss and sand mixture until they rooted and were ready to be planted in soil. He repeated the process over and over, until hundreds of thousands were ready. These small plants, the American Liberty Elm (*Ulmus americana libertas*) were then made available to the public and I feel proud to have one of them back "home" in Madison. I'm sure there are others that have been planted in Wisconsin.

The Elm Research Institute is very hopeful that the American Liberty Elm will go a long way in replacing the beautiful elms we've lost in the past few decades. As Dr. Smalley has pointed out, the trees are semi-resistant, but they are not immune. There are stages in their development when they are vulnerable, but it is when they are small. As they age and mature they lose that period altogether. The ERI is optimistic enough to offer those who plant this new elm tree a 10-year guarantee against DED and during the first ten years will replace any American Liberty Elm

lost to DED with another of the same exact size.

I am already dreaming about how big my tree will be in five and ten years, a statement of confidence when I look and see a plant less than a foot high on this cold winter day. I feel grateful that there are groups like the Elm Research Institute and people like Eugene Smalley that give us hope for the return of the majestic elm. You, too, can join the ERI and become an important part of the comeback story of the elm.

The Institute would love to see the Golf Course Superintendents of Wisconsin, each in his own way, become a "Johnny Elmseed."



BARRETT AWARDED WGCSA SCHOLARSHIP

The College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at the University of Wisconsin — Madison has announced that M. Daniel Barrett has been awarded the 1985-1986 Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association Scholarship. Barrett, a senior Turf and Grounds Management student in the Department of Soil Science, has

five years of golf course experience at Monroe Country Club and a year and a half at Nakoma Golf Club. Dan hails from Monroe.

In an open letter to the membership of the WGCSA, Barrett writes:

"I would like to thank you for choosing me as the recipient of your 1985-86 Superintendents Association scholarship. This scholarship will help me in completing my education at the University of Wisconsin — Madison in turf and grounds management.

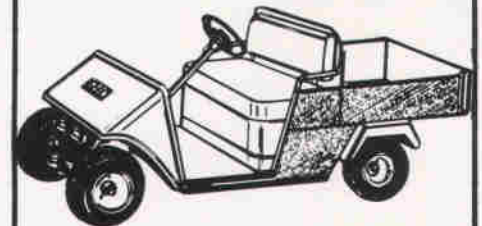
Upon graduating with my bachelors degree in May, I plan on pursuing a career as a golf course superintendent.

Receiving this scholarship from a fine group of professionals such as yourselves means a great deal to me. I again thank you and look forward to becoming an active member of your association in the future."

Sincerely yours,

M. Daniel Barrett

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