



## Landscaper Finds New Love In Golf Course Construction

By Lori Ward Bocher

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The author, a freelance writer located in New London, Wis., writes regularly for five agricultural publications, a turfgrass publication and "The Grass Roots". She graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a B.A. in journalism in 1977 and a B.S. in dairy science in 1981. She currently is vice president of WALSAA — the Wisconsin Agricultural and Life Sciences Alumni Association.

Born and raised on a dairy farm, Ms. Bocher was an associate editor for a national dairy magazine for seven years before moving to New London with her husband, pastor of the First Congregational United Church of Christ.

"It's been kind of a dream come true for me," Lee Bruce says of his landscaping firm's growing business in golf course construction. "I have truly found a love in that end of our business, spending about 95 percent of my time in it. I genuinely enjoy not only the projects we're doing, but also the friends that I've established through the years."

Lee Bruce is president of The Bruce Company of Middleton. One of the 10 largest landscape contracting firms in the U.S., its sales reached over \$13 million in 1989.

Residential and commercial landscape contracting is the company's largest enterprise. The company also has a retail store, a landscape management service and its own nursery and sod farm. But the fastest rising star in the company is golf course construction, which represented 18 percent of the business in 1989 and is expected to exceed 25 percent in 1990.

Bruce has been in the landscaping business ever since he was an 11-year-old boy mowing lawns and plowing gardens. He knows the business from the ground up. So what makes him so excited about his journey into the world of golf courses?

"Generally, you're working with people who are happy and enthusiastic about what they're doing," he says.

"They're excited about the outcome of each project. With landscaping, so often people are doing what has to be done to meet an ordinance. It just doesn't have the same tone."

Bruce uses his enthusiasm, and the fact that his company is primarily a landscaping firm, as selling points when negotiating for golf course jobs. "We tell them that we're doing what we love to do — that we were and are in business without taking golf course projects," he says.

"We want to be in golf course construction because we think it's fun to be here," he continues. "So far, we've gotten most of our work either through the architects that we've developed a relationship with or through referrals from other clients. It's a great industry, and we're tickled to be involved in it."

How did The Bruce Company get into golf course construction? They had tried for many years, but couldn't get their foot in the door because they had no experience. Then, in the late 1970's, the right opportunity came along.

"Things were very, very slow here in the Midwest at that time," Bruce recalls. "I had a friend from Denver who had the opportunity to bid on the second nine holes at the Copper Mountain Ski Resort (Copper Mountain, Colo.). But he couldn't get the bonding. So he called to ask if I would consider working with him. I suggested that we would be happy to bid the job and sublet parts of it back to him. So that's what we did."

With his friend's background in architecture and irrigation, and The Bruce Company's landscaping experience, they were able to qualify for the job.

For the company's second golf course job, they purposely underbid an 18-hole course in Garland, Texas, so that they would have 27 holes under their belt, thus making them eligible to bid for more jobs. "That course is now the Number 1 rated public golf course in the state of Texas," Bruce points out.

To date, they have completed 23 new courses and more than 100 remodeling jobs. Ironically, they were in the business for eight years before they had a job within 500 miles of home — Palatine, Ill. Their biggest project was the Eagle's Nest Golf Course in Silverthorne, Colo., which carried a \$4 million price tag in the mid 1980's. At present, they have two new projects and three remodeling jobs under construction.

Here in Wisconsin, The Bruce Company has had only two new construction projects — the University of Wisconsin Golf Course near Madison and the Lee Travino course in Lake Geneva. At present, the company also is constructing an 18-hole course nearby in Rockford, Ill. — the Norris A. Aldeen Golf Course.

Three of their major remodeling projects in Wisconsin were at the Butte des Morts Golf Course, a Waukesha County golf course and Blackhawk Country Club in Madison.

At the University of Wisconsin course, The Bruce Company did the

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mass earth moving only and completed its share of the work in the fall of 1989. The course is expected to be completed by this fall.

What was special about that job? "Probably the fact that Robert Trent Jones, Jr., is the architect," Bruce replies. "We did more interesting mass earth work on that project than anything we had been involved with previously. He was extremely innovative in his use of earth moving."

At the Lee Travino course in Lake Geneva, The Bruce Company's involvement is just the opposite; it did none of the mass earth moving but is doing all of the shaping and finishing work. "We're hoping for a September completion," Bruce says.

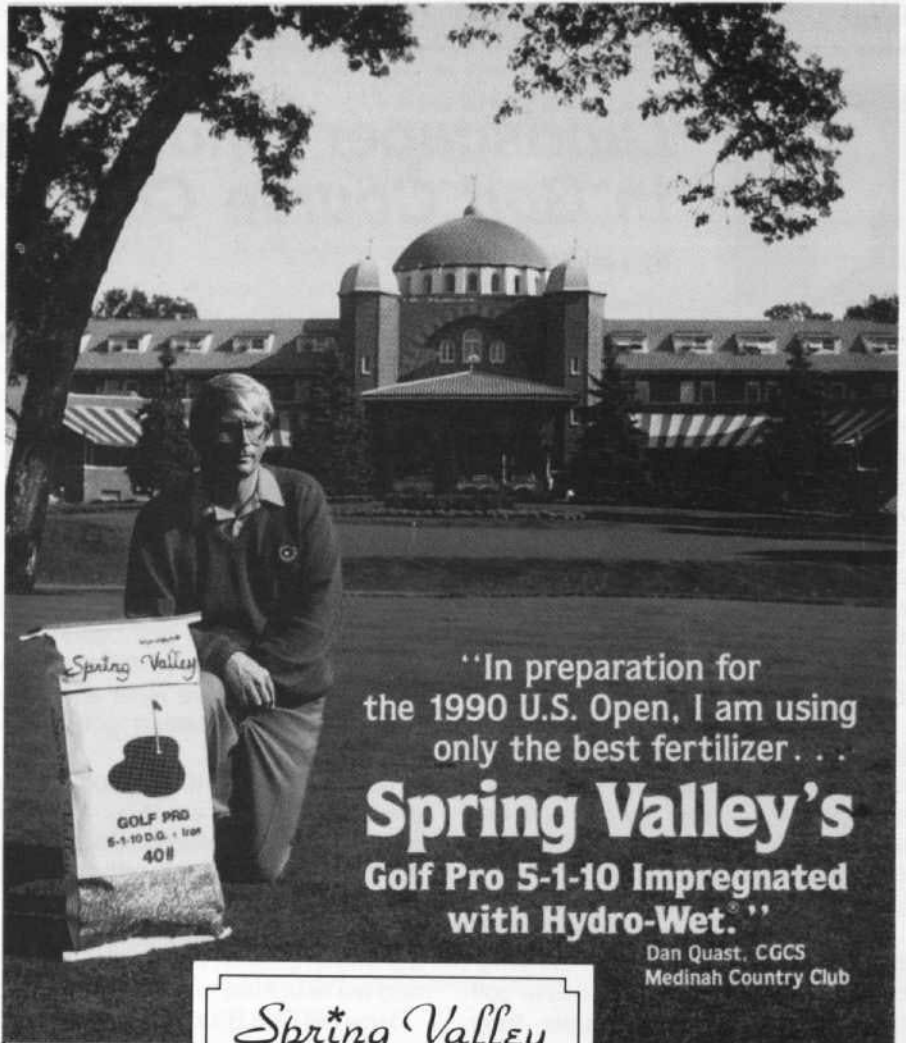
The Lee Travino course is one of three being constructed at the Geneva National. The other two are designed by Arnold Palmer and Gary Player. "Working with the celebrities is an experience onto itself," Bruce says. "Probably the most interesting aspect of this project is the people we're working with and their outlooks on the game of golf in general."

He continues, "As far as the course is concerned, we've got an extremely nice site and there is a great deal of elevation change as well as water on the site. It's one of the most challenging courses that we've worked on."

The Geneva National is just one example of the growing popularity of golf. "Almost everywhere, people say there is a shortage of facilities," Bruce points out. "There are obviously a great number of new people getting into the game."

To date, Lee Bruce has *not* been one of those converts to the game of golf. "So far, I've been able to work around it," he says. "But I'm also thinking seriously about getting involved in the game. You're never too old to learn, so I still qualify."

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