



## Planting Trees

By Monroe S. Miller

My first thought about planting trees this spring occurred on one of those bitterly cold days right before the Christmas past. I was on the golf course, watching one of our tree trimmers work high in a pin oak that Vince and I had planted in the winter of 1974/1975.

It doesn't seem possible that so many trees around our course — probably the majority of them — were put into the ground during my tenure as Blackhawk's golf course superintendent. A whole lot of them have grown so well that they now need trimming and pruning from skyworkers, not just from the ground.

Rather than experiencing a degree of sadness — such growth marks the passing of a lot of years — I get excited all over at the prospect of planting some new trees this spring. It's one of the real pleasures and rewards of managing a golf course.

Included in this rite of springtime, for me, is the fun of visiting McKay Nursery each spring to personally make my selections. Professor Ed Hasselkus sparked my interest in woody ornamentals when I was a university student. Ken Altorfer took that interest, complemented it with his decades of experience as one of America's best plantsmen and fit it onto our golf course when I was still a young superintendent. That kindness was extended to scores of other Wisconsin golf courses and their superintendents, as well.

Ken's work on our golf course really shows; I am reminded of it every day when I gaze across her acres and see all those beautiful trees we've planted.

Our country seems to be "discovering" trees again, and that's some good news. In September of last year, President Bush urged a "new greening of America" as he proposed a national tree planting campaign. He expressed a feeling that such a plan would be an important, low cost part of his national clean air strategy. He backed up those thoughts with some significant money

for his plan in the budget under consideration in the Congress.

Many newspapers carried photos of the president helping plant a silver maple tree in Sioux Falls, South Dakota as a part of that state's centennial celebration. It looks like the President is discovering what many of us have known for years.

For an earth that seems closer and closer to gagging on its own gasses, the simple biology of a tree offers hope. Some are first realizing that by absorbing carbon dioxide (a major contributor to global warming and the greenhouse effect) during the photosynthesis process, trees can be an important part of the solution to this problem. Planting a tree is something every citizen of our celestial sphere can do to help. Individuals can help solve a worldwide problem. "Think globally," goes the adage, "and act locally."

And if the greenhouse effect never materializes, as some scientists suggest, we'll all be better off for having planted trees, saved energy, provided recyclable resources, reduced acid rain, created wildlife habitats, cleansed the air and made our environment (including golf courses) more beautiful!

The American Forestry Association has launched a program I've read about in hopes of planting enough trees to help heal the planet. They're calling it "Global ReLeaf". They're armed with impressive facts: urban trees (which most of our golf course trees are) can reduce carbon dioxide emissions five to 15 times more effectively than forest trees. Yet we only plant one new tree for four urban trees that die or are removed. Most golf courses have this equation reversed, sometimes to the frustration of our golf players!

It quickly becomes obvious, after considering the above, that planting trees is a good bit more than just a sentimental pleasure enjoyed by a golf course superintendent. The master plans most work from also have tree planting as key features. The whole business of planning, planting and caring for trees is serious and important on golf courses.

And fun. The entire process of recording placement requests from players, moving forward on the master plan and replacing storm damaged or diseased or old trees is enjoyable and satisfying. Deciding on the right tree for a particular site calls on years of experience and hours in the classroom. It brings forth many of Altorfer's Maxims: plant groups in odd numbers, keep them spaced well apart, remember always that a golf course isn't a park, never put a fifty dollar tree in a five dollar hole. I can literally hear him coaching me along, even though he's retired.

Placing the order I've accumulated with Jerry Draeger is almost as much fun as the trip to McKays. He'll fuss about the species he doesn't have or maybe the size he cannot deliver. Often, in the end, he'll say, "maybe I'll run over quick early tomorrow morning, just to see what you're doing."

"Fine," I reply. "Breakfast at Perkins at 6:00 a.m.?"

"See you there."

For years I needed Altorfer's approval. Now I settle, without hesitation,

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I'll confess I experience a certain amount of altruism when I plant a young tree. Many of the trees I've already planted, and most of those I'll plant in future spring seasons, will mature long after I'm gone. The person(s) who succeed me will benefit from what I'm planting. The players of our golf course generations from now will enjoy what our players are providing. Make no mistake: a tree makes a great difference in the landscape the very day it is planted. There is an immediate presence — birds land in a new tree almost before you've finished the planting and mulching! But as a matter of scale alone, the maturity of a tree is awesome and takes a good long while to develop. In that regard, it is for the future.

A good bit of the pleasure of planting trees, as I think about it, may well be the exercise of imagining what this little corner of the world will look like well into the next century, when these young trees have reached their full height and width. It might also be the most difficult. You must resist the temptation to fill an area with several plants,

even though you know that 30 years from now a single tree will be enough.

Planting trees teaches a person patience. You cannot do very much to hurry them up to maturity. It takes quite a number of years for a newly planted tree to occupy significant enough air volume to affect golf. So slow are some that, in frustration, you stop paying attention to their size. Only then do they seem to grow. There's truth in the old saw of nurserymen: the first year it sleeps, the second year it creeps, the third year it leaps.

"Patience, my friend, patience."

Individual trees I've planted over the years evoke special memories, usually of people but of times as well.

Each time I look at one of our University poplars, I think of how cold and snowy it was the spring day they were planted. I've never been more miserable in my life. Not all memories are sweet!

A certain Norway maple reminds me of Vincent's recollections of his friend August Derleth, maybe Wisconsin's most famous and prolific author of all time. I heard about "Augie" while Vince and I were planting that tree.

Another year, while the two of us were planting some new hackberry trees, he told me about "a famous guy" he had been pretty good friends with. Seems that Fightin' Bob LaFollette had a dairy farm close to Vince's family and he used to go over and give the good senator advice on his herd. I'll never forget that conversation.

A group of oaks, provided by a family in the Club in memory of their deceased son, spurs a fond thought for me of a day spent in Waterloo with them and Ken Altorfer as we tagged the specific trees they wanted.

And so that goes, for probably a thousand times. Planting trees is an incredibly personal experience.

A farmer frequently has sentimental ties, for example, to individual animals in his dairy herd. Similarly, I'll bet many golf course superintendents have sentimental feelings about trees they've planted, just like I do.

Fifty years ago, Karle Wilson Baker wrote, "Today, I have grown taller from walking with the trees." In 1990, as in every spring for almost 20 years, I feel that "today, I have grown better from planting trees."

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