



## A Look Back at Four Decades of a Golf "Love Affair"

By Erv Graf

### Editor's Note:

*PERSONALITY PROFILE is a new feature in "The Grass Roots" that takes a look at some of the interesting people in our Wisconsin golf course industry.*

*It is fitting that the first of this new feature is an autobiographical article by one of the finest people to ever work in our business. We are going to miss Erv Graf; we can hope, however, he continues to attend an occasional WGCSA meeting for a game with friends and conversation with his many colleagues.*

On January, 1990, I retired after 40-plus years of golf-related service. This decision was not an easy one for me to make. My long time obsession for golf was deeply implanted in every aspect of my life. My job as golf course supervisor for the city of Madison was now history.

In each of our lives, we look forward to a self-satisfied plan to provide retirement status. Each case scenario is different and certainly reasons for retirement are varied. In my case, at age 61, my health, more time with my family and my love of playing golf were prime factors in my decision to retire.

I must admit, though, that after a short post-retirement period, I'm not yet convinced that I made the right decision. I can only honestly answer the many who ask me about my new life. It's still too early to tell.

At a retirement party held for me, I reflected back upon particular highlights, individuals and accomplishments that were special during my career. With your indulgence, I would like to share with you a few of these observations.

A reporter from one of the Madison newspapers called and asked about doing a "human interest" story. A question frequently asked is about a person or persons who may have influenced me the most. Although there were many who came to mind, two people did stand out.

The first was my father, Ervin Graf Sr. Dad was superintendent at Nakoma Country Club in Madison, for many years. Erv "Sr.", in fact, worked for so many years at Nakoma that they lost count at 48 years or so.

Dad got me started at an early age, both as a player and later working for him at Nakoma. I remember Dad telling me to stay in golf, in one capacity

or another, as it would be a profession that I would be proud of later in life. How true that turned out to be. Before Dad died in 1983, I was able to express my thanks to him.

The second person who helped and gave me the opportunity to go into the golf field was James G. Marshall. Mr. Marshall was park superintendent for the city of Madison for many years. He was from a family with a golf background, and therefore golf was rather special to him. After two years of Army service during the Korean conflict, Mr. Marshall offered me the job as the first superintendent at the Odana Hills course in Madison. After eight years at Odana, the job of course superintendent at the new 36-hole Yahara Hills Golf Course was intrusted to me. James G. Marshall was instrumental in the purchase and development of both of these fine city of Madison courses.

I am most thankful that I was chosen to help build and be a part of the development of these courses. Along with Park Superintendent Jim Marshall, I would like to recognize Madison park planner Art Johnson. Art is well known throughout the state of Wisconsin for  
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The pace for Erv Graf this spring is a bit slower; he had time for a picture next to the sundial which honors his father at the Nakoma Golf Club.



Memorial Sundial at Nakoma Golf Club honors Ervin H. Graf, Sr.

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his skills in golf course design. He helped and encouraged me with many projects over the years.

From 1975 to 1990 I held the position of course supervisor. This was a fitting and most rewarding climax to my career. This opportunity was provided by Mr. Dan Stapay, presently park superintendent of the city of Madison.

What highlights stand out in my years as course superintendent and course supervisor?

Being part of the planning, building and development of Odana Hills and Yahara Hills was a great experience. Both of these courses have become known as top-notch municipal courses.

Another highlight was being part of the renovation at the Monona and Glenway golf courses. Having grown up as a youngster next to the nine-hole Glenway course, I felt good about my input to provide improvements to that course.

Over a period of 35 to 40 years, there

are many highlights. The transition from walking greens mowers to the riders was a highlight. If you were mowing 37 greens, averaging 8,000 square feet, with walking mowers, would you not also welcome triplex units?!

I was asked about what I would consider the most satisfying aspects of my job over the many years. As I analyzed this question, two things stood out from the many things that were part of my love affair with golf. The first and utmost satisfaction was the many individual friendships that I had. People you work with, people you play golf with, fellow course superintendents you meet and have respect for make one's life very fulfilling. Many people with true professional skills and a willingness to help and work to make golf the great pasttime that it is, are valued colleagues. What else could be more rewarding and satisfying?

Secondly, a lot of self-satisfaction for me was knowing that I was part of building and developing golf courses

for the city of Madison. The fact that I was part of decision making that influenced golf programming for juniors, seniors and the many regular play golfers who play our courses was extremely rewarding.

It is a great feeling to know that my efforts added enjoyment to the many people who play golf.

Finally, I was asked if I could go back in time, would I like to do the same thing.

Without any reservations, I answered that I certainly would. I found that my father's early advice about golf and its rewards was so true. I had a very rewarding career indeed.

Picture yourself at the end of the day, sitting in front of your club house, or maintenance building. The sun is setting and your sprinklers are coming on. You experience that beautiful golf course setting, and are proud to know that you are part of that picture.



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