



REAL SUPERINTENDENTS III: “With A Little Help From My Friends”

By Monroe S. Miller

Joe Cartpath, Bogey Calhoun and Will Hacker stopped by the shop one day last winter.

Nothing unusual about that, especially in the wintertime. We all get together occasionally for coffee at the Chatterbox Cafe and, since we are all golf course superintendents, visit a lot about golf courses, grass and any one of a hundred other subjects related to our work.

This day the boys seemed somewhat agitated. I didn't know why.

After the usual pleasantries and normal rations of verbal jabbing, I came right out and asked Joe what was obviously bugging him.

“Well, when the last issue of *The Grass Roots* showed up in my mail, I sat down to read it. Just like I always do,” he said.

“Yea,” I replied. “Keep going.”

“I thought it was a great issue until I got to your JOTTINGS feature. That business about a “real” superintendent really aggravated me.”

There was no mistaking that Joe was irritated with me.

“You're starting to sound like Mike Royko,” Bogey chimed in.

Frankly, I was flattered, but told Bogey that the only similarity between Royko and me was that we both wear glasses and appear to have the same barber.

“I'm not even good enough to sharpen his pencils,” I confessed to the guys.

“But why the comparison?” I had to ask.

“Because Royko rips somebody or some institution or something in his column,” Will offered, “every time.”

“Ohhh,” came my reply. I was starting to get it.

“Well, was one of my real superintendent qualifications cruel or vicious?” I queried.

“My kid wears a ponytail,” Bogey said.

“And what's the kid's name?”, was my obvious question. “And how old?”

“Bill, and he's 16,” Bogey answered.

“Hmmmmmmm. So he isn't a golf

course superintendent. Bogey, you do remember that the title referred to real superintendents, don't you?”

“Well, yea, but.....” came the reluctant reply.

“I was sort of peeved a year ago when the bit about earrings came out—my boy was wearing one at the time. But I let it go. This time, you got to me with the one about political parties. I'm a lifelong democrat.” The irritation in Will's tone was impossible to miss.

“Think about it, Willie,” I said. “Do you think I was really picking on you or your kid? Why would I?”

“Besides, if I wanted chop you off at the knees, figuratively speaking, I wouldn't beat around the bush. I'd hit you over the head with a hammer. Figuratively speaking.”

It was then that Joe asked, for the guys, the question “so why do you write those Roykoeske columns?”

“That's easy, fellas, because there are a dozen different reasons. And if you think about it, I'll bet you can come up with many of them.”

“Name one,” Bogey said.

“Let's look at the apparent ones,” I started. “Humor is definitely an intent. Although I'm no comedian, once in awhile somebody comes forth with a “real” chuckle. There isn't enough humor in our business anymore, so this is my attempt at it. After all, where are you, really, if you cannot laugh at yourself on occasion?”

“That's true,” Willie conceded. “I guess you're looking at a little constructive criticism, too.”

“Right on. And a little satire also,” I added.

“Is some of what you say offered with tongue-in-cheek?”, Joe wondered.

“Sure is,” I gleefully answered. “You are starting to see what I am really out to accomplish.”

“I've got to be honest about another motivation. Sometimes I emphasize “buy American” and promote a strong sense of loyalty to our country and our citizens. It's not because I don't like Toyotas or the Japanese or any other country.

“I simply believe, deeply, in taking care of ourselves first. I've been greatly influenced by events in the life of a friend of mine.

“He's just turned 50, and he has spent his entire working life with a company that has manufactured parts for the U.S. auto industry for decades in the Dearborn, Michigan area.

“He and his wife of 27 years have three kids—one has already graduated from college, one is a sophomore at Michigan State and the youngest is a senior in high school.

“Last year, he lost his job. The company shut down—bankrupt. His job is gone, his pension is gone, his dignity is gone. He is having a tough time just putting food on the table, let alone helping kids with college.

“He could well lose his home.

“Here's a guy who worked hard, led a good life, has been good citizen, imparted good values to his family.

“And what's his reward, as millions of Americans drive up and down our highways in foreign cars, as we set record after record trade imbalance and drive our deficit out of sight?

“Tragedy. Unnecessary tragedy if more Americans were buying products made here at home.

“So maybe you now see why I always look at a label before I buy a shirt or look at the stamping before I buy a wrench. I want to buy things made by Americans, whenever possible, so our citizens can enjoy some prosperity. I cannot shake my friend's plight from my mind.

“Few around the world care about us; it's about time we care for our own.”

They guys were silent. I think they were agreeing with me.

“Read any daily newspaper in any American city. Is there anyone out there who doesn't ache for some things of the past? Things like hard work, honesty, integrity and even patriotism? I miss the time when most of our citizens knew the difference between right and wrong—it's not that difficult of a concept—and took pride in their communities.

"I miss the time when crime was unusual, when a child born out of wedlock was shameful, when drugs were unheard of and when television was fun to watch because there was no filth. I miss the times when athletes played sports because it was fun; greed drives them today. Neighborhoods were warm and friendly and safe then. Not so today.

"I miss times when only cops carried guns; now grade schoolers in some American cities pack a rod to school. I liked the years when you could go to a movie with your youngster and not worry about the foul language or explicit scenes.

"We have had a lot of change in our country. Much of it has been for the best. But a whole lot of it hasn't been.

"These 'real' features I've written may be an expression of frustration, a pining to return to better times. Maybe this is my way of advocating even more change, change back to better days."

No argument here," said Willie. Joe and Bogey nodded in agreement.

"Plus, fellas, think about how far down the path of professionalism we have come ourselves. It's definitely been impressive," I said.

"But we have a ways to go. You guys are all superintendents at private

clubs and attend all your club directors' meetings. Do any of those directors—the men, at least—wear earrings or ponytails? Do those directors attend board meetings well dressed and well groomed? Are they successful?"

"Of course they are successful," came the reply in unison.

So why shouldn't we hold ourselves to similar, if not even higher, standards?" I asked.

"Okay, you've made your points. We see," Willie admitted.

"We could probably even come up with some 'real superintendent' qualifications better than yours." Bogey made it sound like a challenge.

And so from a tense beginning at their arrival we moved to a "real" party, putting together yet another list of qualifications for the real golf course superintendent in Wisconsin.

I've sort of decided to let this end the annual list for superintendents. I don't have time to explain each item to colleagues like Bogey and Joe and Will.

But I have been thinking about others; maybe next year at this time, in this space, you'll see a piece about real golf pros or real clubhouse managers or real green committee chairs or real turf salesmen.

Any offers for help?!

For now, here are the fruits from brainstorming with the help of my real friends.

- The real golf course superintendent eschews the self-centered management style of some and prefers to have his management guided by the "golden rule".

- Real golf course superintendents know that managing a golf course isn't ever easy. They recognize that adversity builds character and subscribe to the old saw "when the going gets tough, the tough get going." That's why they idolize Vince Lombardi.

- The real superintendent prefers planning to panic, and he absolutely detests panic driven problems.

- Real superintendents don't like management by crisis, either. They work hard to minimize their exposure to unnecessary crises.

- The real golf course superintendent dislikes telephone answering machines (he does NOT own one), prefers receiving a well written letter in the mail to a fax, and resents being put on hold by call waiting. He prefers more traditional and more personal communications.

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- The real superintendent is a strong participant in the WGCSA, the GCSAA, the USGA and the WTA. In addition to these professional affiliations, he shares his time with at least one of the following: the Boy Scouts, the Rotary Club, the Kiwanis Club or the Lions Club. He is also active at church, his school district or his college alumni group.

- The real golf course superintendent prefers reading *Agronomy Journal* or *National Geographic* over *Playboy* or *Gentleman's Quarterly*. On those rare occasions when he picks up a *Playboy*, he only reads the articles.

- The real superintendent would rather lace up his Red Wings and go for a walk on the golf course or in the woods than belt up in a Porsche and cruise the city streets.

- Real golf course superintendents don't wear shorts to work. They know that sand bunkers are not beaches and that the golf course is not a health

spa. In fact, a superintendent would be better off in a coat and tie than cutoffs; he'd sooner be mistaken for a businessman than a beach bum. Shorts are hardly the wardrobe of a professional person.

His employees don't wear shorts, either.

- The real golf course superintendent wears either boxer shorts or white briefs; he never wears colored bikini underwear. He knows he's no Jim Palmer. He wouldn't want anyone in the lockerroom to get the wrong idea, either.

- The real superintendent doesn't sunbathe. He doesn't have time and, quite frankly, isn't that vain. He is, in fact, quite proud of his "farmer" suntan!

- Real golf course superintendents don't wear pink sweaters to public events where Rod Johnson, Roger Bell and Mike Handrich might see him. One real superintendent did that and was crucified!

- The real golf course superintendent considers the sturdy, native oak trees of Wisconsin real trees, even

though he may like maple, ash and locust, too.

- Even though he may be from Wisconsin, the real golf course superintendent loathes red and white striped flagsticks outfitted with either red or white flags.

Tacky.

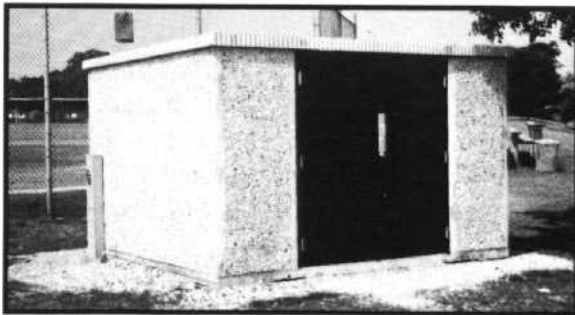
- The real superintendent would rather read a book than play a video game. He'd also rather wear functional clothing than designer clothes and likes LP records better than compact discs.

- Real superintendents prefer power boating over sailing, football over soccer, golf over tennis and hockey over swimming. The preferred are real men's sports.

- The real golf course superintendent would walk for days to see and hear Tim Allen in person. He's a real entertainer. Tim wants to rewire America; the real superintendent wants to rebuild his golf course! Tim Allen and the real superintendents all love "power, man, power!"

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- When the real superintendent has time to play golf (which isn't often), he plays 9 holes and walks all nine. He doesn't ride in a golf car (too decadent) and he does carry his own golf bag. That golf bag, by the way, is small and made of lightweight canvas; this is in direct contrast to the huge garish ones that require a mule to haul around. He leaves that bag style to the pros.

- A real superintendent always reads and follows labels of products he uses; he understands the listed rate is there for a reason. If it calls for a 2.0 oz/M, that is what he uses.

- The real golf course superintendent says what he really thinks and isn't found in the shadows. You know where he stands.

- Real superintendents have a sense of humor and strong personal and professional honesty.

- Real superintendents are not impressed by "trendy" skills or unproven technology and always demand "show me."

- The real golf course superintendent considers a hat part of his work attire. In fact, the real superintendent feels naked without a hat on his head while at the golf course.

And he doesn't like to pay for hats, either, preferring a hat from a salesman to lunch with the same.

He wears a hat 1) to shade his eyes, 2) to keep his head warm, 3) for health reasons (UV) and 4) because he looks darn good in one.

- A real superintendent's family is patterned after the Nelsons (Ozzie and Harriet) and the Andersons (Father Knows Best).

- A real golf course superintendent's favorites are:

MOVIE: *It's A Wonderful Life*

ARTIST: Norman Rockwell

AUTHOR: Mark Twain, closely followed by Zane Gray

POET: Robert Frost

ACTRESS: Mary Tyler Moore

ACTOR: John Wayne

COMEDIAN: Bob Hope

SINGER: Frank Sinatra

SPORTS HERO: Arnold Palmer

MUSICIAN: Benny Goodman

IDOL: Vincent Lombardi

HOLIDAY: Christmas

TV SHOW: *Home Improvement*

- The real golf course superintendent lacks serious CYA attitudes, abilities and skills. He is disgusted by bootlickers. The real superintendent has no hidden agenda and prefers straight talk. He wants to be judged on playing conditions provided with the budget he has.

- The real superintendent always tries to do what is right, "to the gratification of some and astonishment of others", to paraphrase Sam Clemens.

- Real golf course superintendents reject both environmental extremism and environmental irresponsibility. He is prideful of the fact that his profession is providing leadership in securing a healthy planet for future generations.

- The real superintendent, each day on his golf course, takes time to recognize beauty, experience adventure, express the truth, appreciate art and feel peacefulness. The real superintendent is, in a word, civilized. ♣



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