



## THE LAST TO KNOW

By Monroe S. Miller

It happens maybe once a month. Usually it is a Thursday when as many of the area course superintendents as can get away for an hour or so gather at the Long Drive Inn for lunch.

Everybody who knows this thinks we go there because of a presumed golf theme at the restaurant.

They're wrong, of course. Anyone who has eaten at the Long Drive knows it has its history with drovers and cattlemen of years past; its interior reflects that heritage. There isn't a single flagstick or golf club on the wall!

Actually, we gather there because the food is good (especially their chili and thick hamburgers), the portions generous and the place is roomy.

And nary a one of us has ever seen a member eating in the Long Drive. We feel comfortable and have a sense of privacy.

In fact, privacy is maybe what we like most. We talk openly and bluntly; some things that end up on the table aren't what players at our clubs and courses would like to hear.

The Thursday tradition of men's day is still pretty strong in our area; although most of us don't care much about the issue of 'who plays when', structured traditional play makes it easier for us to meet for lunches like today's.

I got there kind of early and figured I'd be the first one there. Our rule is that the first to arrive secures a couple of tables.

So I was surprised that the first two faces I saw were those of Scottie Fennimore and Tom Morris. Scottie's been running the Mt. Hope Golf and Country Club for almost a decade.

Seems impossible that a kid who worked for me while in college has been a superintendent for that long.

Tom, on the other hand, has been at the golf course helm of the Maple Leaf C.C., well, forever. Or at least twenty-five years. He's the dean of our area group—calm, confident and super capable. And unflappable, too.

We exchanged pleasantries and I asked who else was coming for lunch.

"I talked to Steady Eddie Middleton this morning," Tom replied, "and he said he might be a little late but he'd be here. The Breezy Hill Golf Club green committee was having a short monthly meeting at 11:00 a.m., but Steady thought it'd be over by noon."

Billie Flagstick had told me yesterday he was planning on lunch at the Long Drive today. I was over at Pumpkin Hollow to see how they were coming with Bill's new maintenance facility. I left with envy—what a shop that's going to be.

Bogey Calhoun had called Scottie to see who all was going out for lunch. Bogey's the most social among us - he'd go nuts if we were at the Long Drive and he wasn't. Usually that's regardless of what's happening at Shady Dell C.C. Boge always says, "that's what I have an assistant for."

It was early enough in the golf season so that we were all in good spirits. Stress and weather and grass problems hadn't worn us down yet, and we were all still upbeat.

My Coke wasn't half gone when Bogey strolled in. Billie was right behind.

"You guys ordered yet?" Billie asked.

"Of course not," came the chorus.

"We're like the Tuesday and Wednesday morning players at our club," Scottie observed. They like to play simultees so they all finish golf at the same time. That means they can lunch together. It makes my job tougher, but it makes sense for them."

"Actually, shotgun starts would be little more than a nuisance or minor aggravation if I knew when they were going to happen," Tom added. "But I'm the last one they tell, if they even tell me at all."

"You know how that goes," Tom mused. "Four guys are walking greens and two are cutting cups. Fairways mowers start on 1 and 10 and mow in order. Everybody is going about things so they don't get caught by the players. Work gets done efficiently and it doesn't interfere with play.

"Suddenly, the bottom drops out of

everyone's stomach as about 30 golf cars descend on the course, all at the same time. We know why, and we're usually mad as hell," Tom continued.

"So instead of having the course ready for play and starting on the rest of the day's work, we're stuck. Five greens uncut, a half dozen cups not moved, and a lot of teed off women golf players. And one frustrated golf course superintendent.

"And all because no one bothered to tell me," Tom said.

"This has been going on for 25 years," Tom added while studying the menu. I'd think the pro shop would get sick and tired of having the players and me rail on them. There seems to be something mysterious in that building that short circuits communication between there and my shop.

"Tell me about it," were the first words from Eddie Middleton, who'd quietly pulled up a chair at our table. "You guys want to know who told me my budget was approved last winter? An office clerk!"

Steady sounded like he was still flabbergasted that no decision maker had thought it important to let him know what equipment Breezy Hill could order for the next golf season or even what they were going to pay him.

Each took a turn sharing what was shaping up as the talk of the day.

"Top this," Billie offered. "I found out about a major outing we had two weeks ago when a couple of pro shop employees were trying to put a target on our par 3 sixth green at about ten o'clock on a Monday morning. First, they hadn't checked with me for permission. And no greens were cut. No cups had been moved. Fairways weren't mowed because we had just sprayed Banner. Most of the crew was out trimming the course for the July 4th holiday. The club host, the golf committee chair and the golf pro all either figured I didn't need to know or forgot. Or didn't care. Or something."

"Fact is, at that late hour we couldn't do much to present the course like it should be," Billie continued. "I



was upset because I was deprived the chance to show a lot of people who love golf and seldom play our course just what we can do and how much fun it can be to play.

"I take it rather personally when my pride is involved."

Like we expected, the meal was what we always get at the Long Drive, perfect for big appetites that were up and moving and working before daylight.

The talk around calendars and finding out what was going on at our courses persisted.

Scott had to tell us of a wild time at Mt. Hope C.C.

"Our club owns the golf carts and I am responsible for them. When I wasn't notified about an outing, not only wasn't the course ready, we were short 28 rental golf carts! And the people playing had prepaid for carts. I guess it was an ugly mess. All I could think is 'there is justice in the world after all.'"

"You'd think the lesson would be so powerful it would never happen again. But we all know better."

I told about the cross country skiing party at our club, planned without any conversation with me.

The guys recounted other nightmares of the past. It ranged from global tourneys at night and subsequent screaming about sprinklers (no one, of course, told the superintendent) to tournament scheduling during the only week set aside for aerifying.

It was all too familiar.

"So why in the hell do these incidents continually occur, at courses all over the country?" I queried. "Why are we always the last to know when we ought to be the first?"

"It has always been that way," Tom answered. A lot of the blame goes to simple oversight. We are generally located at a distance from the clubhouse and the golf shop, and don't work around them very much. If we were in the same building, we'd know about more events."

Scott thought there was merely lip service to intraclub communications and little real dedication to the notion. "We have weekly meetings, the three of us, and still such situations pop up with a regularity just like years past."

"Scores of times I've actually asked about what is upcoming, only to be surprised anyway," he continued.

My opinion, which received some agreement, is that somehow we scramble around and make things right. If recovery wasn't so complete most of the time, we'd know more of what we should.

I also expressed the belief that such incidents will become less and less frequent as our professional status continues to improve. More and more of us go to board meetings; some even occasionally are invited to a golf committee meeting. The more involved we are in planning, the less chance there is for not knowing what's happening.

"Here's the answer," Bogey said as he folded his napkin and put it back on the table.

"We need to lobby the Wisconsin guru of golf, the game's rulemaker and enforcer, to declare failure to communicate with the golf course superintendent a crime against golf.

"Those found guilty must be seriously penalized. The sentence for a golf pro is assignment to the backroom of an 18-hole muni course in southern California that has 140,000 rounds per year. And he cannot pick up a club to play for that entire year.

"The guilty clubhouse manager is sentenced to serve on the crew at Burger King for a minimum of six months.

"Both would be paid at the going rate for backroom boys and BK spoons.

"The guilty golfer who chairs a committee that fails to inform will be sentenced according to the seriousness of the offense. Penalties will range from a complete ban from the game to golf privileges only at Joe's Miniature Golfland."

We had a good laugh, which relieved some of the tension and irritation the subject brought.

"There's only one thing wrong with your idea, Boge," Billie observed.

"Let's just say legislation was passed and enforcement put into place, along with the penalty system."

He paused a bit, and then continued.

"They'd probably forget to tell us about it!"

With that, we all tromped back to work. ♣

## *USGA Green Section — Great Lakes Region*

# **1993 REGIONAL CONFERENCES**

**March 17, 1993**

Westmoor Country Club  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**March 18, 1993**

Town and Country Club  
St. Paul, Minnesota

**Registration: 8:00 A.M.**

**Program: 8:45 - 4:30**

*For more information, contact:*

USGA Green Section, Great Lakes Region (414) 241-8742

OR

USGA Regional Affairs (608) 331-4001