



LAND FOR GOLFING

By Pat Norton

How interested we all are in the land of Wisconsin. If others out there are like me, then there's very strong interest in "the land". We are basically land managers, of some very beautiful properties, I might add. We are also stewards of the land; we manage our properties with an emphasis on the long-term welfare of the land.

How many times have you driven around your area of the state and seen property not properly maintained? These sites can range from the new subdivision that devotes little attention to erosion control or plantings to the convenience store with absolutely no landscaping to the super discount department stores with their mammoth buildings, mammoth asphalt parking lots, and mammoth amounts of noisy traffic. And precious little landscaping to soften the look of it all.

These developers all have a very poor attitude toward land use. Land to them is something to be developed and exploited for economic gain. Their concern for the almighty dollar is so great that their efforts to keep their completed properties looking good are almost nil. Check out the litter around these businesses the next time that you bless them with your patronage—it's disgusting!

A golf development is a different story. The land is developed for economic gain. It is oftentimes substantially rearranged, and sometimes soil erosion is a big problem. But in the end the land is healed over with lots and lots of grass, trees, shrubbery, flowers and waterways. It is a whole lot more soothing to man and beast to gaze out over a new golf course than the newly paved parking lot at WalMart, don't you think?

I even get disgusted with the landowners at my place of employment. We have lot owners who, despite the covenants and restrictions, totally neglect their golf course adjoining lots. Half buried silt fence, weeds out of control, and inexcusable erosion are all too common. What is most galling is their attitude that their land will sit "as is", looking like an open sore, until they are damn good and ready to correct the problems.

Refreshing are those landowners who constantly care for their properties, whether they own just a half acre or seemingly half of the county. They are out there caring for their land—planting nursery stock every year, constantly fussing over their lawns, and endlessly edging their sidewalks. At times I do feel a twinge of guilt as I watch them labor—usually as I recline on my decaying deck with an Export Lite in hand.

Good land conservation practices are a must for the farmers of Wisconsin, who are our best land stewards. These people live a lifetime on the land and rely on it for their livelihood. Not because it is fun, funky or politically correct to be an environmentalist do these families take such good care of their land. It's because their economic survival depends on it.

Golf course superintendents have many things in common with Wisconsin's everyday agriculturalists. We share with them our love of nature and the outdoors, an interest in agronomy and horticulture, and an attitude that tending to the land is important, more important than making the maximum buck by working at some other endeavor.

Our neighbor here at Cedar Creek has his solid, third generation farmhouse overlooking our shop and the southern end of the golf course. More than a few times Herb and I have been out in his yard at sunset, experiencing the quiet, relaxing time with absolutely no neighbors or traffic noise.

Herb Jr., is a former employee and a good friend. This young sprout recently closed a real estate deal for himself and his bride-to-be. For about \$500 an acre, he purchased 80 acres of land north of LaCrosse. Admittedly this isn't prime farmland, but it would make a great golf course!

Owning land is no big deal to this young man, although he's excited about it. Tending to his land will be second nature to him—it's in his blood. I am more than a little bit envious of young Herb—he's actually owning a piece of the American dream.

What people do with their land is always of interest to me. I like watching real estate development in progress, watching a project take shape.

Of special interest are those properties that are destined to be greenscapes or golf courses. I do believe that land can be intelligently developed and enhanced by man. New golf courses are most times an intelligent use of land, providing that enough acreage is involved to create natural areas and buffer zones.

People who object to golf course development need to understand that developers and managers have a keen interest in the land, the water, and the wildlife that make up most every golf course. The reason we spend the long hours on our courses is for the love of the land.

Owners, board members, and golfers in general should understand that the people out on the course are great land managers. Without us all the land would most certainly return to its original native state.

Fortunately there are those few golfers who do realize what's really important out at the golf course, and we are not talking about the damn handicap sheets in the locker rooms! These golfers are really enjoyable—you get the feeling that they would really love to dig in and plant trees or mow greens.

Most others couldn't care less. They are interested in the game of golf, the competition, the social or business opportunities. They have no idea how it all works, and oftentimes belittle or demean our work.

These people do not share our love of the land, possess our love of nature and the outdoors, and do have a different

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work ethic. These types flock to the golf shop to "shoot the breeze" with the guys, but rarely walk the course just for fun and would never consider visiting the maintenance shop. They would be totally out of their element.

It's a great thing that there are so many new golf courses cropping up all around Wisconsin. They will be intelligently designed and built, wisely grown in and managed, and be a

definite asset to this state. It will be a good use of the land, providing that the landowners truly care for their properties and enhance them over the years.

In many regards, golf course superintendents are like the farmers that we know as friends and neighbors. We all love the land and are devoting our lives to managing it. In the process we are also preserving it for future generations. 🌱

Editorial



A Modest Proposal

By Steve Blendell
Brynwood Country Club

Anyone who has been closely involved with the game of golf for a substantial period of years has probably seen many different golf courses, ranging in condition from lush and manicured to thin and weedy and everything in-between.

I grew up playing, and eventually working on, a golf course where the fairways were as hard as an interstate highway and the greens were sometimes not much different.

I have been fortunate enough to play golf in Scotland where maintenance levels are quite modest. I have also had the pleasure to play golf on some of the most impeccably maintained turf in the United States.

The question that has bothered me for some years now is this one: why do I, and I suspect most other golfers (including professionals), shoot the same scores on golf courses that, having similar degrees of difficulty, are maintained in such different ways? Put another way, if higher levels of maintenance don't lead to better scoring, why do we do it?

Unfortunately, I cannot answer my own question. But I would like to speculate just the same.

I think that it is the nature of American business to try to do better than the competition. In some fields, this has been a blessing to the consumer. When we turn to golf course maintenance, I think that the opposite has occurred.

A famous American author said, "progress was fine, but it's gone on way too long." This should be the motto of the GCSAA.

Golf turf maintenance "improvements" have gone on way too long, actually rendering golf courses less playable than they could be. In addition, the incessant search for better (greener) turf has caused us to utilize too much water, fuel, landfill space, pesticides and other precious commodities.

Using my earlier thought, if "better" turf doesn't provide better scoring, are we justified in using our resources in the amounts that we use them? I think we have reached the point in American golf where we are maintaining for aesthetics, at least partially at the expense of playability.

This discussion leads, at long last, to my modest proposal. I propose the GCSAA direct all members to have firm greens, hard fairways, a tolerable population of weeds, sparse tree populations and rough that is whatever the weather will allow.

Further, I submit that bunker maintenance should be done with the idea that bunkers are a hazard, not a scenic

refuge. At many venues, professionals hope to land in the hazard rather than the jungle that surrounds it. One wonders if the grass isn't the hazard and the sand bunker is a sanctuary for some unknown wildlife species.

I feel that we must all band together and maintain golf turf in a manner that the game of golf demands, not in the manner that a botanical garden requires.

Like that old Lite beer commercial said, "...everything you always wanted in a golf course, and less."

P.S. Don't try this at home... 🌱

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