



He Retired from the Course, But NOT from the Game

By Lori Ward Bocher

Retired golf course superintendent Elwood "Woody" Voight may have left the golf course professionally. But he hasn't left it as a player. At his retirement community in Arkansas, he can play on seven different courses, the farthest one being only 14 miles away.

"I play an average of three times a week," he reports. "My wife, Betty, will play at least twice. And we belong to two couples groups that play maybe once a month. Then we go out to dinner and have a few cocktails. It's nice."

In Arkansas, golf is a year-round sport. "The winters are great down here. We get cold and we do get snow occasionally. But we play golf all winter. Normally in the wintertime it gets into the 50's in the daytime when you've got about zero," he adds with a laugh.

Before retiring and moving to Arkansas in 1991, Woody Voight was superintendent for the Ozaukee County Park Commission, which included two golf courses (Hawthorne Hills and Mee-Kwon) and seven parks. He also was president of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association in 1979 and 1980.

Woody considers himself one of the "old timers" who learned about turf by working with it, not by going to school. "I think most of the superintendents are college graduates now," he says. "Maybe a few of the old timers are left. But not many of them are still working."

Born in Illinois, Woody entered the world of golf as a high school student by working at a small 9-hole course. "That was during World War II when we had very little equipment and no chemicals to work with," he recalls.

"After graduating from high school I went into the service, worked at a few other jobs, and then got back into the golf course business in 1955. And I've been in it ever since," Woody says.

His cousin owned a golf course in Ft. Wayne, Ind., and Woody joined him as a business partner in 1955. He had no professional training or schooling. "Just a lot of hard work," Woody says.



Elwood "Woody" Voight

He made the move to Ozaukee County in 1969. "I was very fortunate when I was in Wisconsin," Woody points out. "The Park Commission was really well into the golf end of it. We got along great for the 23 years I was there."

During his early years on the golf course and during his 23 years with the Ozaukee County Park Commission, Woody witnessed a lot of changes in golf course management. "It was almost like going from the Model T to our present cars," Woody relates. "When I first started in the business there were very few chemicals. Then we used chemicals that you can't use anymore.

"And the equipment has come so far," he continues. "It's a lot better." But the better equipment, including riding mowers, didn't allow them to reduce the labor force.

"That's because the demands became greater, too," Woody points out. "Everybody demanded better turf. When I first started in the business we mowed greens maybe three times a week and fairways a couple of times a week. When I quit we were mowing greens every day and fairways five

times a week. We just had to have finer facilities."

He believes the push for finer facilities began around 1960 when there was an explosion in the number of golfers. Consequently, lots of new golf courses were built. "Competition forces you to do a better job," Woody adds.

"I was in the public sector," Woody points out. "But I'm sure it wasn't different in the private sector. The better one golf course got, the better the next one had to get. It just kept going that way."

Having worked on a public course for 23 years, Woody was aware of the differences between public and private courses. "We have no control over who is playing on our golf course," he says. "And I think we get a lot of players who are new golfers. They don't respect the course as much as the people at a private course."

There also are more rounds of golf played on a public course. "When we opened the gates at 6 on weekdays and 5 on weekends, there were people sitting there waiting. They don't have that at the private sector courses," Woody believes.

Through the years, Woody also saw changes in the WGCSA. "It became more professional," he says. "And it grew. When I first started they were having a little difficulty getting people interested in holding offices, things like that. I think that's over with.

"The education of superintendents has helped so much," he continues. "If you don't have that college education now, you can forget it."

Contact with fellow superintendents is what Woody misses most now that he's retired. "Al and I talk about it a lot," he says of his neighbor, Al Vrana, another past president of WGCSA. "What we really miss most is the golf course superintendents. Al and I both went to all the meetings. We really enjoyed getting together with everyone."

Maybe that's why they both continue to read *The Grass Roots*. "I really look forward to it," Woody says. "When

Al and I get it, we sit down and talk about it for a while. Monroe is doing a heck of a good job on *The Grass Roots*.

"We especially enjoy reading articles written by people we know," he continues. "But we don't recognize as many names. Don't see Bill Sell's name anymore. I played golf down here with a guy who was in the service with Bill. He had a few stories about him."

Woody has some words of wisdom to pass on to those readers of *The Grass Roots* who are still working as superintendents. "You'd just better enjoy what you're doing because you couldn't be with a finer bunch of people. I'd say 99 percent of the golfers are really nice people."

In spite of those positive feelings toward the job, Woody felt it was time to retire in 1991 when he was 63 years old. "It got to a point where the job was starting to bother me a little," he recalls. "Rather than letting it get me down, I just said, 'This is it.' And we wanted to retire while we still had time to do some traveling and things like that."

The Voights had purchased a house lot in an Arkansas retirement community long before his retirement. "We always knew that we'd be coming here," he says. "Al Vrana, who lives right next door to me, was here about four years earlier."

Now that he's retired, Woody spends his time playing golf rather than working on the course. But retirement hasn't stopped him from noticing the differences between Wisconsin and Arkansas courses. "The grass grows all year here," he points out. "However, this is a transition zone. They have a lot of bermuda and that turns brown in the wintertime. So we get used to playing on brown grass."

Even though he can golf year-round in Arkansas, he much prefers the playing conditions on Wisconsin courses. "Of course, it's much easier to grow grass in Wisconsin," Woody points out. "In June this year (in Arkansas) it was

90 degrees all month. We don't get the cool weather.

"And we're in the Ozarks. It's mountainous," he continues. "Although the mountains are small, the ground is pretty rocky. That makes it tougher to grow grass. And you've got to watch it when you hit a ball."

Not all of the differences between courses in the two states can be blamed on climate or geology. "They lack a little bit on the management end of it," Woody believes. "But I stay out of it. I did sit down with some golf course officials once to talk about the condition of the golf courses. But they didn't seem to be nearly as knowledgeable as they are in Wisconsin."

In addition to playing golf, the Voights also have enjoyed traveling. "We've taken a lot of short three-day trips down here," he points out. "Last February we went to Florida for a month, just traveling around very leisurely. We don't have to be home on a certain day.

"And in October we drove to the New England States," he continues. "Then we worked our way down the east coast where we met some friends at Hilton Head, South Carolina. Played a little golf with them."

While at home in Arkansas, they're volunteer workers at The Helping Hand. "That's a place where they resell clothes and furniture, and all the money goes to the poor people," Woody explains. "They generate about half a million dollars a year. It's interesting and we meet a lot of nice people."

The Voights aren't the only retirees from Wisconsin who found their way to Arkansas. "There's a Wisconsin Club down here with about 800 members," he points out. "It's just for people from Wisconsin. We have four meetings a year, like a Christmas party, golf outing or picnic. Everybody gets their Packer caps out when the Packers win."

What does Woody miss most about Wisconsin? "The summers," he answers. "Wisconsin has great summers."

He and Betty get back to Wisconsin a couple of times a year to see their three children and six grandchildren. Son Ron is Register of Deeds for Ozaukee County and lives in Port Washington. Daughters Lori and Lynne both live in Cedar Grove with their families.

And, when they return to Wisconsin each July, they get together with old friends and neighbors from Fredonia, their former home. "We have a group of eight couples who spend a long weekend at Fox Hills in Mishicot playing golf," Woody explains. "We've been going up there for about 15 years."

It's clear to see that golf is still a very important part of Woody Voight's life.

Author's Note: My husband, Luke, worked for Woody for two summers at Hawthorne Hills. "I remember he always had a cigar in his mouth," Luke points out. ♣

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4 oz./1000² ft

The advertisement features two products from the company 'cipco'. On the left is a white plastic jug with a handle, labeled '26019 Flo FUNGICIDE'. On the right is a white paper bag labeled 'Alette WDG FUNGICIDE'. Both products are accompanied by a large, bold number '4' and the text 'oz./1000² ft'. A plus sign is positioned between the two products.

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