



The Real Thing! The New O.J. Noer Facility Manager— Tom Schwab

By Dr. Frank Rossi

If you were walking down the street and bumped into Tom Schwab, the first thing you'd notice is his smile. The new manager of the O.J. Noer Facility is the epitome of the mid-westerner; friendly, mild-mannered, easy-going and compassionate. He is such a likable guy that a sarcastic New Yorker like me thinks he must be up to something. Yet, I know he's the real thing.

Tom was born and raised less than a mile from where I live today, near the Glenway golf course on the near west side of Madison. His mom was a nurse and dad a mailman; they still live in the house he was raised in. One thing about this area is the feeling of an old-fashioned neighborhood, where people are close knit, making up the fabric of a unique Madison community. Tom has two brothers and a sister spread out from McFarland to Dubuque to Denver.

Tom demonstrated consistency at a young age by attending Edgewood School from Kindergarten through High School. Then life became an interesting journey. First, by his own admission, a *ski-bum* in Utah, odd carpentry jobs, real estate, and then finally to the UW-Madison for Forestry. While Tom was in school, he moonlighted as a cab driver (of course, as a New Yorker I was interested in this professional experience). One night while taking a fare, he was held-up at gun point and the person made off with about \$10. Ironically, a few months later, the same person got in the cab to be delivered to the same stop. Tom opted to let him go.

It was in 1979 when Tom went looking for a major that made sense at the UW. Dr. Love must have been waiting for him, just as he waited for a generation of turf majors in Wisconsin. Tom worked at Sun Prairie Golf Club with Dean Scott Russell and then followed the path to Blackhawk CC from 1980-83. A few years were spent becoming indoctrinated at the hands of Monroe Miller and then to South Hills in Fond du lac with Pat Norton. Together these men guided Tom with keen agronomic skills and professional integrity. By the end of 1983, Tom was ready, and Monroe Country Club in Monroe found the real thing.

During his years at Blackhawk CC in Madison, Tom met Diane, whom he would marry in 1988. Diane was completing her Ph.D. in International Education that included a 6 month stint in Africa working with the Peace Corp. Today, Diane is on the staff at the UW in the College of Education. Tom and Diane live down the road from the Noer Facility in Verona with their two daughters Maimoona and Lauren. Maimoona is in high school and Tom simply says she's great; filled with integrity, responsibility and compassion. Lauren is 4 and, having met her, not only does she win you over with her smile (like her Dad), but she loves to play and kid around.

Tom remained Superintendent at Monroe Country Club for 10 years, yet he's always lived in the Madison area and commuted 40 minutes each way. When he arrived at Monroe



Both Tom and Diane are serious skiers.



Tom's family, relaxing at home.

CC, there was no budget and still today he says things are very informal. He loves the layout of the course and the regular challenge of providing a high quality golf course on a modest budget. Anyone who has attended a WGCSA meeting that was hosted by Tom knows how beautiful the place can look.

The one thing I've noticed about most golf course superintendents who enjoy their work is their love of the variety of tasks, plant material and people they encounter. Tom is no exception. And his personal life is no different. He has competed in 10 straight Birkebeiners (cross-country skiing over a 35 mile course), sailboards on the Madison lakes and enjoys volleyball as a player, referee and spectator. His most favorite activity is swimming with the women in his life, especially Lauren.

During the search and interview process that included candidates from several states, Tom provided some progressive ideas for the future of the Facility. He mentioned getting the Facility involved and certified in the Audobon Cooperative Sanctuary Program. He listed several strategies for improving public access to the Facility via tours and demonstrations. Still, the one thing that excites the UW Turfgrass Group is Tom's practical ability and professional insight into growing grass! And when it comes to someone who knows how to grow grass, Tom's the real thing. 🌱