



Golf in Illinois... Same Game, Different Turf

By Pat Norton

Move out of Wisconsin? "Never," we said. "Not a chance. Not to Minnesota, which is just across the Mississippi from our former home in Onalaska. And most certainly not to Illinois...no way...ever!"

So what in the heck are we doing down here in Grundy County, Illinois? How did our little family, born and bred in the Badger State, end up down here in the flatlands south-west of Chicago?

I mean, hey, I've always had this thing about Illinois, growing up on the Wisconsin/Illinois border in Green Country we used to mock 'those flatlanders'. Our family excursions to Chicago were really interesting, but as we all grew older the gravitational pull was strongly toward Madison and the University of Wisconsin.

The only contact that I'd had with Illinois over the past twenty years or so has been through relatives and sporadic visits. We certainly never expected to leave Wisconsin. But...here we are, and liking it!

Illinois really is an okay state, although proximity to Chicago is both positive and negative. Lakeshore Drive, downtown in the Loop, Wrigley Field, etc. are part of Chicago's charm, and so are the 10 p.m. newscasts reporting the day's mayhem. There are some pretty sad and disgusting happenings in that city on a daily basis.

Fortunately, Grundy County is far enough out of the way that we are very much a farm town. I'd much rather put up with grain trucks on Route 47 than drive by shootings on the expressways. We're close enough for lots of golfers to reach us, but far enough away that gangs are not yet a problem.

Believe it or not, there is also a touch of the South here in Illinois. Lots of people work for ConEd (power plants along the Illinois River) who hail from Kentucky and Tennessee. A southern friend, who golfs regularly at Nettle Creek, draws it out nicely when he calls Grundy County "the _ _ _ hole of the Midwest". Needless to say, he's anxious to end his consulting work here and return home.

All things considered, though, I'd much rather live here than downstate. Those communities and counties are really having problems—rural decay, poverty and a lack of good jobs. In short, if you're going to be in the state, the outlying Chicagoland area is the place to be.

And, there are just about a bazillion golf courses down here, and people are really golf crazy. I am truly amazed at the amount of \$\$\$ that males spend on a public golf course, for their green fees, their booze and their tipping. Money flows like water for some of these guys...

With so many courses there's lots of competition for the golfing dollar, and lots of competition for the golf course dollars, too. I've never had so many overlapping suppliers — three suppliers for Milorganite, Lebanon, Par Ex, or just about any other fertilizer product. It is great to have so many choices.

Also, there are lots of opportunities to meet new people and see their courses. We are embarking on an aggressive program to naturalize this golf course, complete with deep roughs, wildflowers, wildlife habitat ...the works. Others have done a nice job with their courses, so it will be interesting to see how it's done.

There have been many negatives about leaving Wisconsin behind. Friends, neighbors, colleagues, schools, a great part-time job that Sue gave up—all are now in our past. Involvement in the WGCSA, the GRASS ROOTS, and living in "God's Country"—part of the past.

Many times there is a regrettable feeling of starting over from scratch, which is much more difficult for wife Susan and children than it is for myself.

My focus was, and still is, is that we were offered a new opportunity which included a 'piece of the pie', which is rare and valuable.

The process of disengaging from Onalaska and plugging in down here in Morris was, for me, very nostalgic. I left Wisconsin on April 22, 1994 in the following manner:

8:00 a.m. - I say goodbye to wife Susan and children in the driveway...they are staying behind to finish the school year and sell our house. I am eager to go, yet reluctant to leave my family. I am leaving my present life behind and heading to the future....

10:30 a.m. - Arrive at Blackhawk Country Club in Madison, dropping off GRASS ROOTS info into the lap of our longtime editor...haven't really seen that course since my college days...also feeling a strong sense of unfulfilled commitment to that journal.

12:00 noon - Arrive at Monroe Country Club to visit Tom Schwab and dump back onto him the information and
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duties of WGCSA treasurer...another feeling of guilt... much stronger feelings of the past...grew up just across the RR tracks from this place and played golf there endlessly as a youngster. By the way Tom, under the trees behind your 13th green was a great romantic hideaway during the summer of '75!!!

12:30 p.m. - Leave Monroe CC behind, winding my way through the backroads/beerroads of Green County...go past Windy Acres Golf Course...the Krieger family continues to do well there...lots of golf there as a kid alsoheading to Rockford, then south to the future...a golf course that definitely needs help and an ownership group that realizes just how much work is ahead for all of us...lots of challenges ahead.

Colleagues who have relocated know all about these feelings and how tough it is for everybody to move on after establishing roots in an area. But, look at it this way. Our common ancestors, in settling the Midwest, had the guts to move on and find the pot of gold. Their hardships were much more difficult as compared to anything that any of us have experienced.

Sometimes their calculated gambles failed. I'm hopeful and confident that our gamble will pay off in future years.

The real hardships of 1994 have been to stomach these idiots who call themselves "Bears fans", call any Wisconsin person "Cheez Whiz", and feel that any three twisted deformed trees on a hillside a vista...which down here does indeed qualify as a vista!

I'll be dipped, though, if I'll ever wear a U of Illinois T-shirt or cap...I don't think I could handle that. And the Illinois River is not a river in the Wisconsin sense of the word ...more like a glorified grain shipping canal.

However, I would definitely zip into Chicago to check out "da Bears" or "da Bulls" anytime...just so long as somebody else is buying the tickets!!! ♣



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