



# GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

By Pat Norton

From the 'good news, bad news' department of the golf news media, we now report these happenings from 'the Land of Lincoln'! (Every time that I hear or read that phrase I really do expect to actually see Lincoln out on the land, splitting rails or something...wouldn't that be a sight?)

And since, like Lincoln, we're all so analytically minded, so liberally open minded, so open to all points of view these days, it should be easy to see how current happenings 'turn both ways'...to see both sides of any situation...and consider things from the other person's point of view.

So, without any further ado, let's pick out ten *summer of 1996* happenings, ranging from the decidedly serious flooding here in Illinois to the almost absurd, which would be my reluctance to dutifully attend my spouse's high school reunion up in Neenah!

1) *The Great Deluge of 1996* — which is the term being used by the Joliet Herald and others to describe the disastrous flooding in ChicagoLand this summer. This was some pretty serious stuff folks, and I'm not talking about golf course damage or course closings...the stories that force a person to count his blessings have to do with people suffering complete loss of their homes, severe damage to property, and serious damage due to water, oil, soil, or whatever other debris washes down a river during flooding. Rainfall totals ranged from 10-16" in about 24 hours. One story printed in the Joliet newspaper told of dozens of homes forever tainted with oil from a Texaco facility that was overcome by flooding. This petroleum facility did have numerous flood retention ponds intended to retain floodwater...however, electric power to their pumps was knocked out for about 30 minutes which allowed quite a bit of oil contaminated water to wash downstream and infect these homes.

Stories like these abound all over the Joliet, Naperville, and Aurora areas, which are only about 30-40 minutes away from Nettle Creek CC, my home away from home. That, in short, is the bad news. And there is lots of it, due to the flooding, all across south ChicagoLand.

The good news, and more than a little ironic, is that those communities and golf courses located south of this area, namely all of us here in Morris and further south of I-80 escaped those rainfall totals by the narrowest of margins. We received only 3.1" during that period, were closed for one day, and ever since have been running carts and providing a golf venue for golfers whose home courses have been closed for two weeks.

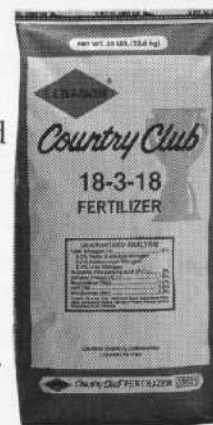
It strongly felt, and still feels, as if we'd been spared this wrath of nature while unfortunate others suffered great personal and property losses. And that is just exactly what happened...some were spared this calamity, while others received the full force of this storm and are still trying to deal with its aftermath. We were extremely fortunate...

2) *Beautiful Weather, Beautiful Turf* — the full irony of this summer's weather is not lost on me or anybody else connected with this golf course. Except for a 25 day period without rainfall in late June/early July, we've had great weather, have great looking turfgrass, and are having a very good season financially! Last spring was a very wet one for the entire north side of ChicagoLand, and the reports are of numerous public courses suffering a great loss of revenue during that period. Top it all off with the July 17 flooding disaster, and I'm sure that those courses that were slammed twice this season by Mother Nature would rather forget 1996 and start over in 1997.

Every morning for the past two weeks we've all needed sweatshirts in the A.M., I haven't had to irrigate at all for a long time, all roughs are entirely greened up and growing actively, and best of all, the temps and humidities are Septemberlike!! And the date today as I write this piece of fluff is July 31!! This is all too good to be true!!

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The down side of this situation is that August is still upcoming and the weather could change for the worse. No big deal...September will truly be here before we know it...in fact, September will probably be here before you all read this!!

The other down side is that so many people are having terrible times this summer due to the weather...it just doesn't seem right to be having such a great summer...due almost totally to Mother Nature.

3) *Annual August Student Exodus* — in which the college students on our staffs leave us high and dry...again! Don't they realize that Cupsetting and Course Setup 101 is just as interesting and valuable as Econ 101? Don't they realize just how much we'll all miss them? Not as the people that they think they are, mind you, but rather as 'a somewhat knowledgeable body' that fills a slot on a soon to be depleted golf course staff...

They, on the other hand, are now counting down the days until 'The Great Escape'...feeling pretty good about themselves, their tough summer of golf course labor, their newfound sense of responsibility, and most importantly, their acquired knack of answering the alarm early every morning.

All of these qualities... that their parents implored us to instill in their offspring back in March and April...are now deeply ingrained in the subconscious minds of these 'young puppies'...for maybe... two or three weeks. Then the 'college lifestyle and habits' override the 'real working world habits'.....sort of like the angel and devil whispering in each ear scenario.

I am reminded, as I write this, of John Belushi in 'Animal House', which we all watched 3-4 times during registration week in late August 1977. Great movie, even greater attitude towards life...which we only occasionally adopted as our own during that school year.

Which only proves that we were all like these current students once upon a time. The good news here is that they've been a tremendous help all summer long and have learned quite a lot about how golf courses operate, while the bad news is that summer and their time with us ends all too quickly.

4) *To Build Or Not To Build* — a new clubhouse, that is. This summer has found our ownership group (in which I have an amount of stock, and an even smaller voice) debating the merits of closing out the lease on our rented, three wide trailer/clubhouse this November and proceeding with a very necessary, and hopefully very modest, custom built clubhouse. The discussions have been very interesting, but not very fruitful. We've decided to be cautious, extend the lease on our current building for a minimum of one year, properly plan and design what we need, and then proceed in the fall of 1997.

It sort of goes back to that old argument about how much clubhouse, how much swimming pool, how many tennis courts, etc....to what extent do these other facilities make sense? The simple question of 'How much clubhouse does an 18 hole public golf course need?' is answered in a variety of ways. From the palaces out there, I'm judging that many courses have delved into the restaurant, banquet, and wedding businesses.

This might make sense if you're surrounded by urban population...if you're surrounded by open land located 4 miles west of a town of 10,000 people, then simply serving the public golfer, and the attendant outings, makes lots of sense to most of us. There is one amongst us who seems

to crave fancier digs, however. We're of the opinion that after he buys everybody out for a strong price, he can build whatever it is that he desires. Let him be the 'banquet and wedding king of Grundy County'!! Best of luck, chump...

5) *Meat and Potatoes* — which is a simple metaphor for a real basic golf course management style..."Give me the meat and potatoes everytime, bud, and pretty much skip your sales pitch about this or that 'bio product' or 'really hot wetting agent'". I am usually not interested!!! The good news is that I've never bitten really strongly on some of this crap, while the bad/sad news is that I've taken a few small bites in my time, had to spit everything out, and remember the bad taste thereafter.

The huge problem with most of these products-there is no solid research, only testimonials from users claiming to see positive results. Also, tell me truthfully that the positive results, if there are any, are due solely to your product!!! Couldn't it be the timely rainfall, nicely moderate temperatures, the spoon feeding application just now kicking in, or any other number of contributing factors? And if you tell me that your product must be applied every two weeks for an entire season in order to see best results, I'll scream!!!

There are so many other possibilities for what's happening out there on those greens that there's no logical and truthful way that any sales rep can claim positive results due to the sole use of their product. I have no check plot against which to compare, and have neither the time nor intention to set up check plots on my practice putting green or bent nursery just so that some slick sales rep can sell me his questionable product...let it rest, fella!!!

I am just not interested, especially after about four months of the season has passed by...I swear that 75% of the sales of these 'cure-all, bio products' are made during the late offseason when superintendents have an extreme case of cabin fever and the itch to produce green, greener, greenest landscapes makes it tough to resist....

6) *Accelerate and Finish Those Projects* — like any superintendent, I love making landscaping and course construction improvements to a golf course. Getting those creative juices flowing, challenging a guy to complete a job as envisioned and budgeted...it's the nuts, baby!!!

This attitude matches almost exactly with the philosophy of our other owners, which is great news for all concerned.

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Concrete carpaths, drainage, extensive sodding, bunker renovation, and new par 3 tees...lots of work, lots of pressure, but also lots of fun and satisfaction...about mid-July we realized that the par 3 tees project would require completion by August 1, mainly because of the imminent departure of some key staffers.

The good news was that things were wrapped up easily by August 1, with great 'grow-in' weather and rainfall following in very nice fashion!

Bad news? Yes, in the sense that green committees, members, or civilian owners take things for granted sometimes and just routinely expect great results on these projects with very little comment or feedback unless there is a problem!

Don't they understand that we all crave the compliments, the encouragement, and the appreciation? Obviously not, sometimes....

7) *Never a Summer Vacation* — for the 16th consecutive year, Susan and I have been through the lack of any sort of summer vacation. During this summer period the family discussion usually is dominated by this fact. We make up for it all nicely by taking the kids to Target, then Sam's Club on Sunday afternoons....it's a heck of a good time.

Thanks so much to all those who were influential during my impressionable, naive years during college and early superintendence...I was most certainly brainwashed into liking this golf course work... I thank you, my children, thank you, and especially my spouse thanks you for all those summers of not spending exorbitant amounts of \$\$\$ on such foolish things as family summer vacations!!!

The good news is that we still have a lot of potential summer vacations upcoming (yea right), while the money saved goes toward a good cause (new golf clubs that get rarely used).....

8) *Another Comment About Golf Cars* — the ultimate good news, bad news discussion of the golfing world. "Hey, hey, the good news is that we're letting the carts out again today...against my better judgement....no loss of revenue due to an overprotective superintendent, eh???"

The bad news is that we're going through a lot of metal studded tires in an attempt to gain traction for golf cars out on our oversaturated, muddy, ripped up golf course.

We've also instituted a 'golfer rescue policy' here that calls for life jackets, lifesaver rescue rings, and power winches on all golf carts...for those inclement days when we've got no choice but to grab those green fees and push those golfers out onto 'Jurassic Park CC'. Keeping the golfers in twosomes, otherwise known as 'the Cub Scout Buddy System', helps tremendously also. If a golfer does rescue his buddy from the torrent, he's entitled to a free round of golf!! If he fails, we never let him golf here again...only the strong survive our scrutiny...

Always remember, fellow golf course agronomists...green fees first, golf course a very distant second.

9) *Spouses' 25th High School Reunion* — after all these years, the spouse should never, ever attend such affairs...it's questionable, really, if the high school alum should even go back in time to the early 70's. But wife Susan bleeds for the 'Neenah Rockets' and life back in Wisconsin, which we both really do miss. So off she went, towing the three children along for company.

By all reports, she had a great time, especially when one of the guys kept up his end of the drunken conversa-

tion with her by repeatedly stating "I gave you that scar on your leg in the sixth grade...I'm so sorry!"

My standard, but very real excuse was that I must toil away another weekend in the grooming of the golf course...which was true.

I am so, so glad that I stayed home. If anything, the alum should attend, have a great time, have a few drinks too many, suffer the next day, and return to her family renewed and refreshed. And that's just about what happened!!

10) *A Comment About the Environment* — my last column earned me a letter of mild rebuke from GCSAA because of my opinions on their 'Environmental Steward Awards'...now I feel a bit like Mike Royko...and frankly I'm proud of it all!!

The good news is that at least 'THE GRASS ROOTS' gets thoroughly read and digested by quite a few in the golf course world. The bad news is that I won't be receiving my complimentary GCSAA author seminar registration....

This publication, totally unlike other other chapter publications that I read, is filled with great articles, columns, and opinions. They are not afraid to be outspoken, and sometimes critical of others. They are not afraid to print strongly opinionated pieces. They are not afraid to print the truth or strongly editorialize when needed.

If you doubt that, try seeing it from another point of view. Would you rather have a chapter publication that contained nothing of interest or value, that displayed tons of advertisements and not much more, and that was read in about fifteen minutes and idly laid aside?

I didn't think so. ♣

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