



## These Are Definitely *'The Good Old Days'!!*

By Pat Norton  
Nettle Creek CC

I submit to you, ladies and gentlemen, that there is no better time to be alive and active in the golf course business than right now in the spring of 1997.

In the short view, realize fully that you've just survived another winter in the shop, getting everything ready for springtime and the opening of your golf course. The normal days, relaxing weekends, and slower pace of winter shop work are all coming to a gradual end. Everybody's really looking forward to getting outside, enjoying the sunshine and warmer temperatures, and embarking on another season of golf course adventures.

Here on the southern side of ChicagoLand, we are enjoying our typical early spring. Please note that today's date is March 22...I returned home earlier on this very cool Saturday afternoon after working outside since 7 a.m. on a dry, snow free golf course...that opened for the season two days ago! We have been working outside for two weeks now...have accomplished many miracles...and are waiting for the sod farms to begin production so that we can finish our 'leftover' course remodeling projects.

I spoke to Scott Spear yesterday (who is trying to replace a legend) at Cedar Creek in Onalaska...who says that central Wisconsin miraculously received a walloping two feet of snow late last week...ironically, Scott originally grew up down here in the Joliet area, graduated from the University of Illinois, apprenticed at the Knollwood Club, and then decided that the lure of those Wisconsin winters was more than he could resist. So, he and I sort of traded places...in a strange sort of way.

Speaking of miracles, Jake and I have completed our annual ritual of working through almost all of our equipment...which is still quite new stuff, thereby permitting us to complete this impossibility with just two men! Jake, a retired ComEd maintenance mechanic, prefers to think that it's really about one and a half men doing the equipment work, with this writer being the very weak other half.

I prefer, however, to think of the wintertime superintendent as much more than that...aren't I the one who runs to NAPA, the hardware store, the lumber store, and most importantly, to Dunkin' Donuts on an almost daily basis? Aren't I the one who gets to make the 'command decisions' as to the cutting unit servicing, the reel grinding, the bedknife grinding...and the painting and woodworking projects?

Aren't I also the one who gets to decide that...it's totally too cold to be working out here today...the weather man is telling us not to go out unless it's an emergency...the schools have been called off for the day...my golf professional colleague is working out of the comfort of his home today...and yet we need to be out here working on this golf course equipment that won't be needed for two more months?? I don't think so!!

This decision is easy, says I...we're going home, Jake, my boy!! Besides, I can use my home PC for 'work stuff' this afternoon, which is fun and very dependable since I don't have an office PC! Very logical, don't you think??

By the way, these personal computers are really great...since the coming of Windows 3.1 and Windows '95, I of all people have become somewhat proficient on the word processor. For years I procrastinated...and I can still vividly remember Carl Dowse and Tom Emmerich, then of Reinders Irrigation, trying to teach me to use DOS commands...what a joke!! After a year and a half ago, our family finally broke down and bought our own PC.

Now, I'm sort of like a kid in the proverbial candy shop. I can now put to good use that high school typing class and bang away on this cool little keyboard...and compose/write my documents...reports for the golf course, budget info, BOD presentations...as well as my right wing political commentary...without having to write out my notes on legal pads beforehand. It is really great...

These really are the good old days...and we'll all look back on the good times at the places that we've been, the

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different golf courses that we've managed...which for me has been a real odyssey. I realize that it's been over twenty years since I started working at Blackhawk CC in Madison as a UW sophomore...and although I've really tried to forget most of what I ever learned from Monroe Miller, J.R. Love, and company...I'm struck by the fact that I'm still doing the same thing over twenty years later because...like all the guys reading this...we love what we do for a living!

We may not be as high powered as some commodities trader, corporate attorney, or businessman...but that's definitely OK with me. And I know that I may not make that kind of money in my lifetime, but that's also OK with me. We work on golf courses...we get to work on golf courses...outside with nature...being creative and making golf beautiful and playable, which is also OK with me!

We're also part of a fraternity of people who are very integral to the well being of a hugely popular American and worldwide sport. We are all involved in this great game...making a very good living at it...during a time when its popularity has continued to grow and mature.

Think about it...the game of golf is huge...is there another American sport that gainfully employs so many people nationwide? Is there another American sport that can be so enjoyed by the broad spectrum of the aging American population? Is there really a doubt that this great game will fade in popularity when it, in fact provides so much fun, a sense of camaraderie, a sporting challenge, and a sense of communing with nature...during each and every outing, for each and every golfer?

That is what makes this game unique, and what makes me long for the day that my young family will take a strong interest in the game...which will then continue the connection between the generations of golfers in our family.

Like all golfing superintendents, I long for the day of having time for more than an occasional, rusty round on the links. Someday, my game will be back in a finely tuned condition. Yea right, and my receding hairline is thickening up also...

Ultimately then, I'll be calling ol' Tom Schwab on the telephone, drag his sorry butt out of the nursing home/turf-grass research center, pay for his green fee as per usual,

and proceed to kick his a-- all over Monroe CC, or any other golf course, just like I used to way back in the '80's during our 'whippersnapper days'!!

Seriously though, I've got to consider myself extremely fortunate overall. There are certainly those in this life who 'are doing better' in their careers than others. There are people out there who are really raking in the money...living life in the fast lane...and building up quite a few assets.

I see their methods, though, and I'm quite positive that I'd be really unhappy with that lifestyle and be unable to sustain it. I see some of that and think quite strongly that if that's what it takes to be a successful businessman...sacrificing family and ethics...sacrificing any compassion whatsoever for those less fortunate in this life...all in pursuit of the almighty dollar...then good riddance! That's not at all what's important in this life!

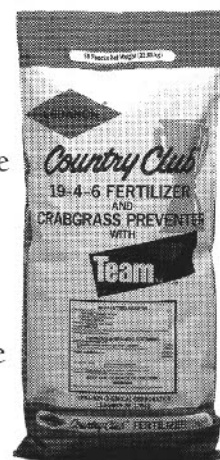
There are also quite a lot of people out there that are much less fortunate than any of us. I see many Hispanic families in this area...quite similar to the Hmong families that I used to see in the LaCrosse area...battling very tough odds, working very hard to 'get in on the good life' here in the United States.

Some of those families are making the transition quite successfully...a few guys that I know personally very well have moved on to much better jobs after working at the golf course over the past few years. These guys work their butts off...two jobs at least so that they can exist while their children get strong public school educations.

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They fully realize that their primary function in life is to literally provide for their families...their children will then at least finish high school, and hopefully college. It's the story of immigrants since the beginning of this country.

On the other hand, I despise the malaise of these young, white, so called 'students' who do absolutely nothing with themselves after high school is finished. They vegetate here in the old hometown, have a very low level of ambition, maybe attend a few junior college classes, and have no plans whatsoever for their futures. I have one young man who was awarded a football scholarship, flunked out in his first year, came back to town with his tail between his legs, and has yet to figure out life as an adult! Someday, in spite of his parents and himself, this kid will figure things out...but, he's sure doing it all the hard way!

And, as frustrating as it is to observe the inaction of these young adults, it's not entirely their fault. Parents in too many of these cases must shoulder some of the blame. Don't children need to learn from a very early age that values such as learning, commitment, responsibility, determination, and moral character are to be the constant expectation of the family?

The good old days are right here and now...it just all depends on how you fill those days...the decisions that each of us makes as we stumble through life. Looking back with 20/20 vision is too easy to do...all of us might possibly like to change a thing or two...which is not possible as concerns the past...but very possible concerning the present and future.

Hey, boys, I'm still on the short side of 40 years...by a few short months...and there're still lots of things that I really want to do in this life. And we all live in this land of great opportunity...so why not take advantage of it all?

They key thing is to look at life optimistically...with great faith in the future. I totally disagree with those who think that this country and world is going right down the toilet! If things are so bad currently, think back on U.S. and world history. Do we live in an age of pestilence, disease, civil or international wars, or economic depression? Some of that is what our parents have lived through and survived. Now, through their perseverance and taking advantage of life's opportunities, they are thriving. We are thriving also, If you compare us to most others on this planet.

Keeping an optimistic outlook is not always easy to do, but it seems to get much easier as life pushes some of us into the early stages of middle age. It's the realization that age and experience give us a positive perspective...a sense of having been through good and bad times...and a sense that we're all doing pretty good in our journey through adulthood.

My parents are both still alive, retired and wintering in Arizona, and seemingly enjoying their golden years. I do wonder how things look from their perspective...they fully realize that, being in their mid-70's...their final years are coming upon them. Do you suppose that they think about that? Do you think that the prospect of dying bothers an elderly parent...or do they feel quite good about their lives and feel a sense of peace and contentment? Do you think that they look back on 'the good old days'?

Parents, even in their final years, can still be an inspiration to their offspring. We can clearly see how they have lived their lives. We can emulate their positive characteris-

tics, and avoid their bad habits. Parents in this generation, including all of us, are more involved in our children's lives. We are the ones now who are setting the example...and providing the wisdom and leadership that our families need!

There have been a few times when we've looked back on the good old days. It's called nostalgia, folks, otherwise known as selective memory. Believe me, my wife Susan and I have discussed many, many times whether we should have ever moved down here to Illinois. Nostalgic videotapes of young Norton children with their Onalaska friends bring back great memories, which can contrast with everyday realities. After a few somewhat tough years of adjustment, life here in small town Illinois is really pretty good!

Older folks always say that it's really important to enjoy children when they're young. We totally agree. It's a blast to watch our twelve year old son mature into adolescence and get phone calls from girls. Likewise, our nine year old daughter has blossomed into quite the young lady as compared to the 'pixie chick' of years past. And our five year old son is no longer a toddler at all...he's sort of a 'ninja wannabe'!

Do you relate? Do you understand what I'm saying? Do you get the big picture? Do you all agree that right here, right now...we're all experiencing the good old days?

These are the good old days, boys! And it's definitely up to each of us to make sure that the good old days keep on coming!!

So...stay out of the taverns...attend church regularly as I do...have faith in the future...play lots of golf...and remember...if you do all of these things...these days will become your good old days!! 🙏

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