

He's Challenged By Increasing Demands In Golf Course Construction



By Lori Ward Bocher



You see your course every day. You know it like the back of your hand. But unless you're in the middle of a construction project, how often do you think about what made it the course it is today? Did glaciers or bulldozers form those hills, ponds and wetlands?

And what is the future for your course? Could it be rebuilt to keep up with trends in new course construction – up to eight tees per hole, more wetland areas, more prairie areas, more sand traps, depressions and contours?

Charlie Kisow deals with these issues every day as a golf course construction project manager for The Bruce Company. "It's not getting any simpler," he says of golf course construction. "The trend now is toward more earth moving, more features, more contouring. Now the big craze

is depressions with a storm sewer type drainage system.

"And more tees," he continues. "It used to be three tees per hole. Now it's as many as eight. But I think it's a good concept. The more tees you have, the more suitable the golf course is to a variety of player skill levels. You can change the length of the golf course quite a bit with multiple tees. And, with different angles from the multiple tees, the holes play differently.

"There's definitely a big trend toward more wetlands and prairie



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areas," Charlie points out. "The last job on which I worked had 15 created wetlands."

Drawn to golf courses...

Charlie has been with The Bruce Company since November of 1992. Before that, he worked for golf course architect Bob Lohmann for six years as a construction superintendent. And before that he was the golf course superintendent at Prairie du Chien Country Club for six seasons.

A native of Cambridge, Wis., Charlie grew up playing golf. After graduating from Cambridge High School in 1977, he attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison because, as he says, "It was a good school and fairly close to home. I started out as a business major and didn't like that. So I became a soils major, originally in soil and water conservation.

"But then I came in contact with some turf students. Add that to my own interest in golf, and turf management seemed like a good way to go," he recalls, adding that J.R. Love was his advisor. Charlie graduated in December of 1981 with a BS in soils and a turf emphasis.

He's helped build several courses...

As a construction project manager for both Bob Lohmann and The Bruce Company, Charlie has left his imprint on 11 new courses in Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa. He's also worked on smaller rebuild projects, which comprises about 25 percent of The Bruce Company's business. The new courses he's built include:

Lohmann years:

- LaCrosse Country Club -- remodel
- Cedar Creek, Onalaska, Wis. --18-hole course
- Merit Club, Gurnee, Ill. --18-hole course
- Settler's Hill, Geneva, Ill. -- 9-hole addition
- Indianhead Golf Course, Mosinee, Wis. -- 18-hole course

The Bruce Company:

- Country Club of Wisconsin,

- Grafton, Wis. --18-hole course
- Hunter's Ridge, Marion, Iowa --18-hole course
- Players Course at Geneva National, Lake Geneva, Wis. -- first 9 holes one year, second 9 holes this year
- Thunderhawk, Beach Park, Ill. --18-hole course
- The Meadows of Six Mile Creek, Waunakee, Wis. -- 18-hole course

- The Meadows, Jefferson, Wis. -- 18-hole course
- North Hills Country Club, Menomonee, Wis. -- remodel
- Fox Valley Golf Club, Kaukauna, Wis. -- remodel

Managing people...

As a project manager, Charlie's biggest challenge is managing people. "I supervise all of the people

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involved in construction," he points out, adding that The Bruce Company employs 12 to 30 people per project at any given time. "Managing people is the most difficult for me. Everybody is different, wants different things. Getting people to work together – and to live together when we're out of town – can be difficult. Communication between everybody is a big challenge."

Charlie also keeps an eye on the subcontractors. "We have subcontractors do the irrigation installation and storm sewer work, and the asphalt cart paths and bridges," he points out.

Although he spends some time indoors working on payroll, records and a construction diary, Charlie is out in the field nearly 100 percent of the time. "I do a lot of the design decisions that are made from day to day," he explains. "I work on the engineering of the drainage, which seems to get more complicated with catch basins and storm sewers. I do operate some equipment on occasion, if necessary."

How long does it take to build a course? "It depends on how many bells and whistles. But generally it's between a year and two years," Charlie answers. "We work pretty much year-round, depending on what stage of the project we're in when we hit winter. A lot of times we do some of the rough earth work in winter because we need frost in the ground to get our heavy equipment on low ground. It varies. Last winter I had just about the entire season off. Sometimes I work all winter long."

Permits and financing...

After managing people, Charlie lists "permits and financing" as the next biggest challenges of his job. "Seems like one or the other is always delayed. Then time becomes a challenge. For example, if there's a project scheduled to be done on a certain date and the start of the project is delayed by two months due to permit or finance problems, the people still want it done the same day. It puts

a lot more pressure on all of us to get it done faster. And that seems to be getting more common all the time.

"Permitting can get pretty complicated and cause a lot of delays," Charlie adds. "On our last project, we had verbal permission to proceed, but actually didn't have the Army Corps of Engineers permit until we were done with the project."

Each course is unique...

Every project is different in terms of the time, effort and money needed to transform the original site into a golf course. "I like to compare it to building a house," Charlie says. "How much does it cost to build a house? Well, it depends on how big the house is and how much goes into it.

"The same with golf courses," he continues. "One of the biggest differences in golf courses is in what the owner or architect want to accomplish, and what ideas they use to accomplish their goals.

"And the site conditions vary greatly," Charlie adds. "Some sites lend themselves very naturally to a golf course and don't involve a lot of earth moving. Others are too flat or too hilly for a golf course and involve a lot of earth moving. Sometimes creating wetlands makes the job easier, sometimes it makes it more difficult. It depends on so many conditions."

Charlie works closely with superintendents. "They're usually on site full-time when we get to feature construction," he points out. "For architects, time spent on the course varies. If they're coming from far away, it may be every two to three weeks. If they're close, it may be weekly or biweekly. As far as owners, it depends. Some are here all the time. Some less often."

Likes creating and variety...

In spite of the rigors of golf course construction, Charlie likes his job. "I just enjoy creating something, building something," he says. "And the design aspect of it is very interesting. There's a certain amount of creative input that goes into building a golf course. And there's a variety of dif-

ferent phases in construction – earth moving, shaping, feature construction, irrigation, grassing. We're always going from one thing to another, doing a variety of things on any given day."

The downside of the job? If you work in golf course construction, you expect to spend long periods of time away from home. "I really don't like it," Charlie says frankly. "But it's a part of the job I have to accept. We generally have apartments that we live in while on the job. If the job is too far away to drive home on a regular basis, we have a twin-engine plane so we can be flown home every three weeks for a long weekend. For the shorter-term rebuild work, we generally stay in hotels."

Charlie, who is single, maintains a permanent residence in his home town of Cambridge. In his limited spare time he likes to hunt (mainly waterfowl) and fish. "I also like to play golf, but I don't get to do that very often," he adds.

Guess that's because he spends his time on golf courses in a different way – building new and exciting courses for the hordes of people who are flocking to the sport and creating a demand for his work. ♣

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