



David Murgatroyd: A Memorial

By **Mark Kiennert** Golf Course Superintendent, Bull's Eye Country Club

On Friday April 22, the sun didn't shine as brightly as it usually does in Wisconsin Rapids. I just arrived at work, when I was informed that our neighboring golf course superintendent, Dave Murgatroyd, had been killed in an automobile accident.

His wife, Gloria, survived the crash and is in fair condition, but is facing a long road to full recovery having suffered a severely broken leg, broken vertebrae that will require a full body cast and skin graft surgeries. Our prayers are with her and her family at this most difficult time.

The Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association lost a comrade. I lost a confidant and true friend and an associate in this business world. I would suspect that 50% of our membership had heard of him or would recognize the name but would not be able associate Dave's name with his face as in the latter stages of his career. Dave would only attend select meetings during the year. (Auto races in Atlanta and Bristol would give him an excuse to visit his daughter and son-in-law.) To the other 50%, they simply lost a very good friend. Of the latter group, many served under Dave's tutelage and went on to become golf course superintendents at golf courses of their own. Men like Bruce Worzella, Jerry Kershaski, Jeff Bottensek, Jeff Ruesch, Ron Grunewald, Jim Wunrow either worked for or along side Dave at one point in their careers. My writings simply pale in comparison of the stories they could tell. I'm sure that there are other members that have benefited by having associated with Dave through the years.

Dave served as secretary/treasurer for the WGCSA back in the late 70's or early 80's. Dave would have made a great president had he chose to move through those chairs. When I moved to Wisconsin Rapids, it was Dave who offered congratulations and assistance to any of my concerns. I watched his girls, young as they were, doing all the things that all "grounds persons" would do in daily golf course maintenance. Then to hear of him beam proudly proclaiming of their going off to colleges, their marriages and having becoming a first time Grandpa. I'm not sure of the number of grandchildren he and Gloria shared, but I know his passion for all things were boundless.

For those of you who didn't know Dave or know him all that well, this obituary will give you a glimpse into his personal past. Dave worked closely with his father to build the Ridges Golf Course in Wisconsin Rapids in the early 1960's. The golf course was built on barren sandy tract of land that was good for little more than growing pulp wood. The facility featured a campground and a quarter mile race track for Friday night stock car races. The course was constructed long before it became fashionable to build upscale public golf courses. You have to remember, this was in the days before the super highways. The Ridges had a reputation that branched the Midwest.

The course was built on a shoe string with many recycled materials going into the golf course and into the construction of the clubhouse. To this day, old bridge trusses serve to support the walls and roof of the clubhouse. Dave, having inherited this eccentric trait

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from his father, possessed the consummate skills of "one man's junk, is another man's treasure." Dave would constantly remind me that I couldn't clean out my buildings and throw anything away until he had a chance to go through it. There were times that those "recycled" parts found their way back to Bull's Eye on a piece of equipment. Dave was the type of individual that if he needed something, he would invent it or fabricate it from his stockpile of "gathered" materials. Dave was the first person I would tell that we were going to close the golf course and rebuild Bull's Eye.

Dave was one of those individuals that everyone could call friend. In a crowded room, you could always tell where Murgatroyd was by the noise and constant chatter emanating from that corner. This was usually due to the good natured "ribbing" Dave would endure from his friends, but I kid you not, Dave could and would dish it out as well. I will never forget the time when Dave, after the Ridges had fallen on rough times, suggested to his good friend Jeff Bottensek, that if he quit his current job, could he come to work for him as an assistant. To this Jeff replied that he wouldn't do such a thing as it would be "too costly to retrain him." This became a standing joke among the locals superintendent.

Dave was not afraid to offer his opinions on the subject matter as to how they affected the little guy. Dave was aware of my position on the state board and my interest in the politics on the national scene. I could always get a straight answer from Dave. He would give me one whether I asked for one or not. Dave was a "champion" for the "little guy."

Dave had a profound interest in NASCAR auto racing. Local hero Dick Trickle would call him by name. I remember the time that Dave took me personally to Dick Trickle's race shop in Rapids to meet the man who just won the Winston Cup's "Rookie of the Year"

award. Dave admitted to me later that he was going to introduce me to Dick as the "guy who likes cars without fenders," just to see what kind of reaction he could get out of the both of us. Unfortunately, Dick had just stepped out of the shop and didn't get back before we had to "get back to work" ourselves.

Rarely did you see Dave down. He did profess to me on more than one occasion that the scope of golf business, due to legislative changes and responsibilities, had started to wear thin with him. He would always apologize to me for his lack of education in golf turf. His education came entirely from the "school of hard knocks." I know that he didn't take a backseat to anyone. He was extremely analytical in his approaches to problems and very inventive in his solutions. I could always learn something from Dave.

A change in ownership at the Ridges infused new life and enthusiasm into Dave's life. It presented challenges that he would accept and meet head on. I was certain that the "old Dave" was back when the boyish poking fun with each other had returned. If you were in need of a good "belly laugh," you could just hang around Dave. Anyone who was party to some of the verbal exchanges he would have with Jeff Bottensek, were in for a classical treat. Jeff and I would chide Dave, when he might complain as to how busy he was now with all the changes taking place on the course or in the clubhouse, that it was about time he got used to it as he "hadn't done anything for the past eight years!"

I will miss Dave and his smile, his laugh and his self depreciating humor. He was a rare individual. In some respects he was a man, like his father, a man before his time. The WGCSA benefited by his presence and will be less now with his loss. God bless you Dave, till our paths cross once again. ♡

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