



A Shop Christmas

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

It was an idea born in warm weather and out of frustration.

"We never seem to have time to relax together and chew the fat," Tom Morris lamented one day in late summer. He had stopped at our course to borrow a keystone dragmat and was in a big hurry, as usual.

"Well, Tom," I counseled, "it is a busy time of the year for all of us. Bogey Calhoun said nearly the same thing to me on the phone a couple of days ago. He is frustrated that our friendships seem to be put on hold until the Symposium. Then the holiday rush starts, we get busy inside, and before you know it, the national conference begins. And shortly after that, lately in Wisconsin, spring comes and we are swamped again."

"I know, I know," Tom said. "I've threatened to throw a big Christmas party in my shop just to get the chance to spend some time with you guys. Honestly, I am going

to make it happen this year."

And he did. The invitation came shortly after Thanksgiving, and Tom included our whole gang in the invite.

The same was true for everybody else Tom sent invitations to - Bogey Calhoun, Scottie Fennimore, Steady Eddie Middleton and Oscar Bahl. The invitations included the names of everybody on their staffs as well. All were welcome at Tom Morris' Christmas party. The invitations spelled out what each of us was to bring. We each were responsible for a dish to pass - I was given green jello with pear halves in it. We could tell just from the guys on our crew that we would enjoy some good chow that day.

"Bring two wrapped gifts," the invitation said. "One will be for our present exchange, and here is the name you are responsible for. Bring another that will be

**Our fertilizer has absolutely no effect on ball roll.
Sorry.**

SPRING VALLEY

Step up to an improved level of play by contacting one of our golf greens professionals. Make a toll-free call to 1-800-635-2123 today.

given to a foster child in the area. Use common sense on how much you spend," Tom's note instructed.

It was a thoughtful idea Tom had, a perfect reminder that Christmas is especially a time to remember those less fortunate than us. Over the weeks leading to the Christmas party, in my shop I overheard lots of quiet conversation about what the guys were going to take with them as gifts to put under the tree. In fact, once Dave asked, "is Tom going to have a tree in the shop?" It was fun speculating.

Morris' timing couldn't have been better. It started to snow the day before we were to visit his shop, and continued through the party itself. It wasn't a snowstorm, thank goodness. Snowstorms bring the snow too fast, create problems for those among us who have snow removal responsibilities, and had the potential of disrupting our (and Tom's) well made plans. Weather intervention happened far too often to us; once, just once I hoped the weather would cooperate.

Well, it did. The fresh snow had transformed the urban landscape into white and round and almost unfamiliar shapes. There was enough snow that features on the courses were covered under the beautiful

white and warm blanket. It was also quiet in the city; the snow muffled the usual sound of cars and trucks and horns and sirens.

And as we pulled into Tom's freshly plowed shopyard, it was nearly dark from the leaden skies and the constant snowfall. The lack of light at this mid-morning hour amplified the big, colorful lights Tom's crew had strung on a concolor fir at the edge of the yard. We all marveled at its beauty in the newly fallen snow.

Like many golf course shops, Tom's was a formidable building. It had a high ceiling (probably 18' or more at its peak) and a substantial heated area. I held the door open for our crew and walked in behind them, stomping the snow off my boots once I was inside. As always happens, my glasses immediately fogged up.

Despite not being able to see, my senses all were overwhelmed by the aroma of the shop - that of fresh cut evergreens. The smell was overpowering, intoxicating. I quickly cleaned my glasses to see what the gasps were about. I looked around and evergreen boughs were everywhere. His shop looked like a Bavarian forest - fir, pine, spruce and balsam branches created an atmosphere of Christmas. They decorated

DRESS YOUR COURSE FROM TEE TO GREEN

with **BAYCO**



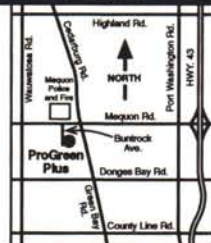
COURSE ACCESSORIES and

ProGreen Plus  **LLC**
A WISCONSIN COMPANY



- Tee Markers
- Ball Washers
- Litter Baskets
- Tee Towels
- Trap Rakes
- Signs
- Fairway Markers
- Hazard Markers
- Flags
- Flag Sticks
- Cups
- Hole Cutter
- and More!

MEQUON NEW BERLIN



CALL...JORDAN SENSIBAR

GOLF COURSE SALES MANAGER

CAR... 414 750-7551 • PAGER... 414 318-4280

TOLL FREE... 1-888-PRO-GREEN

7 7 6 - 4 7 3 3

11020 Buntrock Ave.
242-9100
Fax: (414) 242-2117

16680 W. Cleveland Ave.
789-9550
Fax: (414) 789-9509

door openings, trimmed workbenches and sinks, and arranged boughs in corners.

Tom smiled as he watched our reaction and we, in turn, watched as Calhoun's crew came in. And O.B.'s. And Fennimore's. We all reacted the same—shock to sheer delight, almost like young children.

"Good grief, Tom," Steady Eddie said. "Where did you find so much evergreen material so close to Christmas?"

"Careful timing of evergreen trimming," Tom said. "We saved the task of limbing evergreens on the golf course up one whorl of branches until now. It was part of our Christmas party plan. One could only do this once every few years. Plus, we had a couple of Austrian pines to remove, and those branches and limbs are here. Don't they smell good?"

There was a joyful agreement in the affirmative.

The youngest of Tom's staff - Chris Nelson - was stationed inside the door, bell in hand and a red tripod kettle at his side. Like the Salvation Army Santas we are so familiar with, Chris rang the bell until we had contributed our pocket change and some paper money. "It goes to the Salvation Army," Chris told us. Once we had all given, Chris joined us, without his red suit and white beard!

A substantial though not particularly well-shaped Christmas tree occupied the center of the shop. It was a little thin, harvested from his brother-in-law's woodlot, but decorated with outdoor lights and big glass ornaments. The guys piled their gifts under the tree.

Underneath the powerful aroma of the evergreens was the good smell of food. Outside, a pig was roasting on a portable grill, cooking under the hood of a hickory fire. Two Weber grills were smoking and cooking two large fresh turkeys. Inside, several folding tables had been covered with red and green tablecloths and we set our dishes to pass on them. There were green bean casserole, baked beans, dressing, potatoes, Wisconsin cranberries, corn and more. And there were desserts, lots of desserts including pumpkin pie. A bank of four microwaves were lined up, ready to heat the food at noon.

For the traditionalists among us, Tom offered oranges and peppermint candy and bourbon-drenched fruit cakes. It seemed we could never possibly eat it all. But I knew there would be a valiant effort!

As we drank our black coffee and eggnog and Wisconsin-brewed winter ale, the sound of Christmas music filled the background of the conversations. I listened closely to the beautiful tenor voice of Enrico Caruso's singing "Cantique de Noel" - "O Holy Night" - and Ezio Pinza's "Gesù Bambino." Tom had recordings from James Galway, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, and the choir from Radio City Music Hall. It was wonderful.

The older guys among us had gathered at the picnic tables and were busy visiting about subjects their contemporaries discuss - health, old times, weather and family. The younger guys were in several card games - euchre, sheepshead and hearts. But most important, we were all having a great time immersed in the holiday and getting to know one another.

Before lunch, Tom stood on an upside down five gallon pail and asked for our attention. In his invitation, he had given us instructions to bring something to share about Christmas with the rest who had gathered. I know among our guys there was some tribulation about what that meant. I refused to help because I was having trouble figuring out what I was going to do. The time had arrived and I wondered if would be a success or a bust.

Was I in for a surprise! As Tom asked for volunteers, Olaf Johnshrud and Otto Luchow raised their hands. They were retired farmers who worked on Steady Eddie's staff, pretty much to keep busy and to have some fun. Both were over 70. Ed was lucky to have them, and he knew it.

Both men were dressed in new, dark blue denim bib overalls. Olaf had on a crisp green shirt and Otto was wearing a chambray shirt that was starched and ironed. Both men were wearing old fashioned leather

TournamentTM Golf Course Accessories



Featuring Quality Custom Embroidered Flags, Poles, Cups, Bunker Rakes, Ball Washers & More.

LESCO is the exclusive distributor for



Contact your LESCO Professional Golf Representative or call (800) 321-5325.



LESCO[®]

LESCO is a registered trademark of LESCO, Inc. Tournament and Grow With Us are trademarks of LESCO, Inc. Southern is a trademark of Southern Golf Products, Inc.

work boots that had been polished to a bright shine.

Olaf opened a worn, black leather case and removed a banjo. Otto removed a button accordion from its case. We could all see we were in for some music. Olaf passed around a sheet to each of us; on it were words to two hymns.

"We'll talk you through each hymn," Olaf said. "The first is in Norwegian and you know it as 'I Am So Glad Each Christmas Eve.' The second is in German, maybe our best known Christmas carol, 'Silent Night.' Otto will talk you though that one.

First Olaf: "Jer er sa glad hver julekveld, for da ble Jesus født.
Da lyste stjernen som en sol og engler sang so sødt."

Then Otto: "Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht, Alles Schlaft ein-sam Wacht Nur das Traute hoch heilige Paar, Holder Knabe im lochigen Har; Schläff in himmlischer Ruh, Schlaff in himmlischev Ruh."

They played each tune through before we sang along with these two seemingly incompatible instruments. But the notes blended perfectly and all of us were game to try and sing in two unfamiliar languages.

We sounded good, and Otto and Olaf were beaming from our choral effort and their accompaniment. With our encouragement, they played more carols.

One by one, until we were half done, men young and old stood before their working colleagues to share something of the season. John Sweeney gave the obvious to us - the reading of the Christmas Gospel story from St. Luke. No one even whispered as he read the ancient story from his Bible. Peter Olson gave advice about ice skating and showed us how to properly sharpen skates. He asked Tom if the golf course pond had been plowed for skating or hockey in the afternoon. Tom laughed, but said that although they were under snow, if the guys wanted him to he would push it off. Pete said he was just kidding!

And so it went until Tom said the Christmas dinner was ready. There was merriment and good spirits as we passed through the line, along the tables heaped with good, hot, well-cooked Christmas food. The shop was abuzz with visiting, softly underlain with more Christmas music.


After eating and resting and cleaning up the mess from the meal, we finished our presentations, which as one of the men pointed out, were kind of like a church or school Christmas play. We then exchanged and opened presents, one by one so all could see. Tom got a bottle of expensive Scotch whiskey, I got a new toy tractor and Calhoun was given the newest book by Arnold Palmer. Such fun.

As the afternoon wore on, I sat next to Tom, thanked him for such a wonderful idea and great party. It showed or at least reminded us that the best things in life aren't things. Rather, they are relationships and memories, sunrises and fresh snow and green grass and little children. And Christmas gatherings like this one, where something wonderful happened to each of us.

Gathered together like we were, we could see that golf course superintendents and golf course staffs need to use winter to slow down, at least a little bit. All we do during the grass season is run from one task to another, never done and too often stressed out. This time was our best and maybe only opportunity to retreat and escape from the pressure of the warmer days. Tom's present to each of us, whether intended or not, was to remind us of this. That, and the great memory we will all have of it.

The party gave us all a renewed sense of the simpler, less opulent and less spendthrift times. Such times are those we wish we could recapture or go back to. Of course, we cannot.

But it is up to each of us to keep the real spirit of Christmas alive throughout the year. Tom's party will help with that.

Merry Christmas! 

THE NEXT BEST THING TO RAIN!

- **Complete Course Design and Installation**
 - turnkey or in-house installation
- **Conversion of manual/hydraulic to electric**
- **Repair, Routine Maintenance & On-site Training**
- **In-house CAD Design & CIT Data on Sprinkler Performance**
- **Installation & Upgrade of Pump Stations**
- **Answers to your "how-to ..." questions**

If you have a goal, we have the leadership ...
... personalized service you can depend on



800-554-TORO (8676)