



# He Just Never Stopped

By Lori Ward Bocher

It's inevitable. Someone on the list for a future *Personality Profile* column passes away before we get around to contacting him. Such was the case with Charles Shiley, superintendent at North Hills Country Club in Menomonee Falls from 1951 to 1972 and a WGCSA president from 1956 to 1957.

What do you do? Call the person who knew him best, his wife of 60 years, Mary Shiley. What do you get? A story about a man whose job was his life, who was still tending flowers and trimming trees at his retirement community when he turned 90. It's safe to say that Charles Shiley outlived and outworked his contemporaries. His death marks the passing of an era when golf course superintendents were known as greenkeepers who retired from the job at a much later date than today's generation of much younger superintendents.

## The early years...

Charles worked on golf courses for 57 years. Born in 1909, he was raised on a farm near Elgin, Ill. In the early 1930's, he began working as a laborer at Rolling Green Country Club in Arlington, Ill. Three years later he became the greenkeeper at Bon-Air Country



Charles and Mary Shiley at their wedding in 1939.

Club, which later was named Windsor Country Club, in Barrington, Ill. And from 1938 to 1943 he was superintendent at the Illinois Country Club in Northbrook, Ill.

"Having grown up on a farm, he just loved working outdoors," says his wife, Mary, whom he married in 1939. "The only time he worked indoors was during World War II. He was too old to go into the service, so they asked him to work at a war plant for two years. But he went right back to the golf course after the war. He just loved working outdoors."

## The move to Wisconsin...

After the war Charles joined the staff at Tam O' Shanter Country Club in Niles, Ill., as assistant superintendent. Then he and Mary and their four sons made the move to Wisconsin. From 1951 to 1972, Charles was superintendent at North Hills Country Club in Menomonee Falls.

"I don't think there was anything he disliked about his job," Mary says. "He just liked working, being outdoors. That was his life. He really didn't talk too much about his work. But he never complained about it. He enjoyed working with the young folks (employees). In fact, his sons even worked for him.

"He always wanted to improve things on the course," she continues. "After he left North Hills, when we came back for visits they would always compliment him on how well he took care of the grounds and the improvements he

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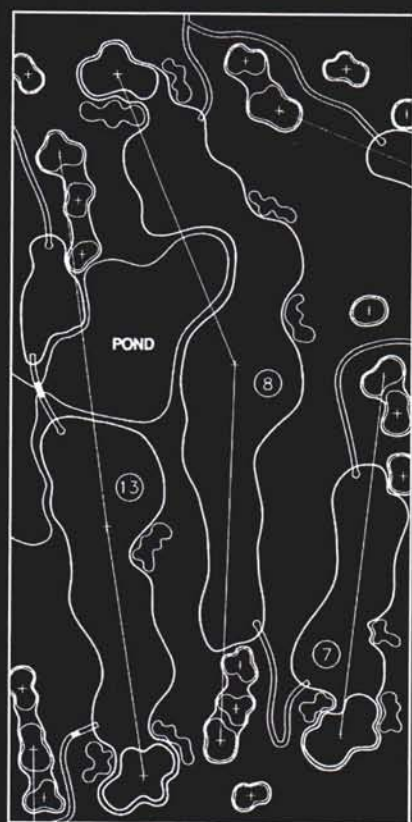
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Charlie had sons Tom, John and Steve on the golf course for a picture, probably North Hills CC.



Charles and Mary with sons Chuck, Tom, John and Steve at Christmas in 1993.

made there.”

Charles left North Hills in 1972 when he was 63 years old. “He was doing his job. Most of the members thought he was doing a good job. But one member decided that they needed a younger man,” Mary explains. “So Charles decided to look for another job because he didn’t feel like retiring yet. Through the superintendents organization, he got a job as superintendent at Plum Tree National Country Club in Harvard, Ill.”

### ***Not ready to retire...***

At an age when most people would retire, Charles found himself working as a superintendent for another 10 years, from 1972 to 1982. He was 73 years old when he retired from this position. But he didn’t stop there. “After a year of retirement, he decided he just had to be busy. He liked working. He just didn’t believe in sitting back and doing nothing,” Mary recalls. “So he went back to

Plum Tree and asked if he could work in the nursery, things like that.”

And so he continued to work at Plum Tree until the Shileys moved into a retirement community back up in Menomonee Falls in 1996. Charles was 87 at the time - and still not ready to stop working. “When we first came here to Tamarack Place (the retirement community),” Mary explains, “he said to the administrator, ‘Sharon, would you mind if I went out and trimmed a few trees? Looks like they could use a little trimming.’”

“And so he went around trimming trees,” Mary continues. “Then he started planting flowers around the building in different spots. Everybody enjoyed it so much. In fact, they were just saying, ‘I wonder who’s going to do the planing now that Charles is gone.’ He also had a vegetable garden out back so people could have fresh vegetables.”

“He used to start the plants from seed in the wintertime in our apartment,” she points out. “And then



This classic photo, taken in mid - to - late 1950s, probably at a WGCSA meeting, shows (Front row) H. Hannaman, Irv Bertran, and Les Verhallen; (Back row) Jack Fram, Paul Jensen, Charlie Shiley and John Stampfl.



Charlie and his friend Lorren Button playing golf in 1983. Notice the Harley Davidson golf car.



Charlie and Mary with grandson Nick playing Bocci Ball at Tamarack Place in Menomonee Falls.

he'd put them out in the summertime. He was always busy with planting or making something. People couldn't get over how he was always doing something. They'd see him out there at 5 o'clock in the morning checking on his plants or checking the rain gauge to see how much rain we'd had the night before."

**Age finally creeps up...**

"He just never stopped. Until about July (of 1999)," she continues, her voice beginning to choke. "He just couldn't do it anymore." Finally, age got the best of this man who, like the Energizer bunny, just kept going and going for 90 years with no major health problems to slow him down. He had suffered from arthritis. He had some prostate problems. He was being treated for skin cancer on his head and ear. And then he started to have trouble breathing. It was his heart. He also had diabetes. And his kidneys were failing. He spent much of

his time in bed and in the hospital.

"The doctor wanted to put him on dialysis, but Charles said 'no,'" Mary recalls. "He didn't want to live this way. Being confined to bed was unusual for Charles. He had to be busy every minute. Like he said to his son, 'I won't have dialysis so I can lay around like this for two more months. It isn't worth it. Just let God take over now.'"

And so he died on October 28, 1999, after five days in a hospice center. "The last two days he couldn't even speak," Mary points out. Her voice still shaking, Mary starts looking for the positive. "But I have to go on. That's life. He lived a good life. He was a good husband and father. He enjoyed his work. He enjoyed living. His work was his life. He never stopped until he just couldn't go anymore."

**Professional involvement...**

While at North Hills in the 50's and 60's, Charles served as president

of the WGCSA from 1956 to 1957. "He enjoyed those meetings," says Mary. "He always wanted to learn more things and better things." He also enjoyed traveling to the GCSAA conventions each year. And, after the kids were grown, Mary joined him on those trips.

"He enjoyed driving. He never wanted to take a plane because he loved looking at the scenery," Mary recalls. "One year we took the train to California to see our children. He enjoyed that very much because he could just look; he didn't have to worry about driving. We took one route going and another route coming back."

They did fly a few times, once on an extended tour to Hawaii when the GCSAA meeting was in San Francisco. "I had always wanted to go to Hawaii because my brother was killed at Pearl Harbor and buried there," Mary points out. "Twenty-five years after he died I finally got to go and see his grave."

The highlight of GCSAA meetings came in New Orleans in 1992 when Charles received his 50-year pin from the association. "That really meant a lot to him," Mary says. "I really can't describe how much it meant. It was thrilling for me, too."

*(At the 2000 convention, when eight more superintendents receive a 50-year pin, the total number of superintendents*



dents who were GCSAA members for 50 or more years will be only 39. Charles truly is part of an elite group.)

**Family life...**

As the wife of a golf course superintendent, Mary was used to the long hours and hectic summers. She knew the family couldn't take long vacations because Charles was busy in the summer and the kids had school in the winter. But she was grateful that, as a superintendent, he was home every night unlike those in many other careers. And she enjoyed the chance to travel to GCSAA meetings. She herself worked in the home most of her life, except for a few years when she worked in a department store at nights, "Just to get out of the house," she says.

The Shileys raised four sons together. Chuck is 60 and living in Greenfield. Tom, 56, has lived in California and now Mississippi. John, a bachelor, is 53 and living in Albuquerque, N.M. Steve, the "baby," is 48 and living in Menomonee Falls. Between them there are five grandchildren, three step-grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. One grandson died of melanoma cancer when he was only 26.

As much as he loved life on the golf course, it's not surprising that Charles also liked to play golf. "When we were in Harvard (Ill.) he had one friend who he'd play golf with once a week," Mary recalls. "Then his friend was killed in a car accident, and that hit him very, very hard. After that, he lost interest and never played golf again."

Charles did have one interest not linked to the links: woodworking. "He used to love to do woodworking," Mary explains. "He made a china cabinet for one son when he got married. He made storage cabinets for the kids. He made a dining room table for one son, with a card table top to put on it for playing cards."

**Author's conclusion...**

As the author of the *Personality Profile* for nearly 10 years, I've learned about and celebrated many lives. But this is the first time my column has celebrated a life that is past. It's the first time my questions have brought the interviewee to tears as she told of the death of her

husband, her grandson, and her husband's good friend.

"I hope this hasn't been too hard on you," I say to Mary as we finish the interview. "I hope I didn't ruin your day."

"I'm just glad someone cared enough to do this for my husband," she answers. ♡



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