

Old Home Day

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



It wasn't an original idea that John Dunn proposed to the board of directors at the Cambourne Hill Golf Club in Trelawny, Wisconsin. He knew of it from family on his mother's side still living back in New England and it seemed as though it would be a wonderful way to get at something he had been wanting to do for several years.

John is one of Wisconsin's more senior golf course superintendents and he had spent most of his career - the last thirty years - at Cambourne Hill, a venerable classic old course in the southwestern corner of Wisconsin.

Trelawny was founded in the 1830s by immigrant miners from Cornwall. They settled in hills and valleys with high hopes of riches from lead and copper and zinc mines newly discovered in the area. The miners were happy to escape the dangerous tin mines and low ore prices in Cornwall, England and brought great skills, strong work ethics and optimism to their new homes in Wisconsin.

Although they eventually built sturdy, tidy limestone cottages for their families, at first they merely built temporary shelters at the mouth of the mine they were working. They covered these holes in the side-hills with tarps or canvas or even a temporary wooden cover and lived like badgers. The name stuck and is used with great pride yet today as we are known far and wide as the Badger State.

John asked the directors of Cambourne Hill if he could schedule a first ever Old Home Day at the club. In 1899 New Hampshire governor Frank Rollins declared an Old Home Week all over New Hampshire. This was to be a week when anyone who had moved away from New Hampshire's many small towns could return at the same time and visit with one another. Over the years, as folks became more busy, it evolved to Old Home Day. They returned also to see what they missed (or imagined they missed), usually the rural landscape, simplicity, independence and their rural origins. It was a day for descendants to return to the land of their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers. For everyone, Old Home Day was a day of nostalgia.

It was that feeling of nostalgia that inspired John Dunn. For thirty years he had managed the golf course in Trelawny with skill and professionalism. He provided players at "The Hill" with excellent conditions on a modest budget. John was progressive yet careful, par-

ticular about details, and completely dedicated to the club, the players and to golf. And he was able to do this so successfully, he said, because every one of those thirty years he had an excellent crew.

A summer at Cambourne Hill was a real prize in Trelawny, allowing John to hire the best kids available. He was demanding of them and had strict rules that absolutely had to be followed. But he was also fair, and after a short time kids realized how important that was. Their seasons at the course gave them a real sense of pride and respect for authority that usually lasted a lifetime.

The thought about an Old Home Day occurred to him as he watched a new employee - Steve McAllister - mow fairways with all the determination he could muster. Steve was a third generation to work for John. His grandfather Frank mowed roughs after he retired from the farm. A short time in town with little to do was all Frank could take. So he asked John for work and John was thrilled to have him. Frank's son Keith had worked full time at Cambourne Hill until he came upon a better opportunity. And now Keith's boy Steve was reporting for work at the same course and for the same man.

John sat on his golf car in the rough between one and ten, and his mind wandered back over the years



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and he thought of all the kids who had worked for him. Half were still in town, from the current mayor Dick Harrison - to the community's only physician, Dr. Jeremy Forester. Kids had worked their way through college at the golf course. Many returned to the community and many more pursued careers all across the state and the nation.

John counted among him former employees a full dozen who had gone to Madison, graduated, and become golf course superintendents. Still others were assistants. And it seemed so strange that the current club president and a couple of the directors had spent summers in his shop, mowing greens and tees, cutting cups and all the other daily tasks of summer on a golf course. As he reflected back, John thought of those wonderful kids who had done so many different things and accomplished so much. One had given his life in Desert Storm; another served in the state legislature. John got lost as he remembered so many of them.

And yet there were some he had lost track of, kids he'd really enjoyed and liked. "I'll have to try to find out about them someday," he thought to himself. It was then, at that instant, that he thought about a golf course staff reunion, a gathering for a day of all the employees on the golf course for the last thirty years. "It'll be like Old Home Day out East," John said out loud to himself.

So Old Home Day was John's proposal to the board. Obviously they were brimming with enthusiasm over the prospect of a reunion. John had hesitated a bit because during the golf season time was a precious commodity, and generous amounts of time would be required to plan such an event.

He shouldn't have worried. As word spread through the club, so did the excitement. Committees were formed; groups went to work on details that ranged from finding the hundreds of people who had worked on the course to a schedule of events for Old Home Day. The momentum brought a spirit to the club John hadn't seen since the centennial celebration.

The clubhouse office staff cross referenced payroll records with John's records to insure no name was left out. The Games Committee considered events for children, for spouses, and for non-golfers. Of course there would be a golf tourney; but there was also swimming and tennis. There were plans made for putting games and chipping contests. A cup cutting competition was planned, along with a parade of old and new golf course equipment.

John Dunn could hardly contain himself as the planning moved along. Invitations were sent out and immediately replies started coming back. The staff found time in afternoons to empty the shop and repaint absolutely every surface. John put together a big scrapbook for each decade - 1970s, 1980s and 1990s.

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The 2000 crew worked on a formidable Plexiglas scoreboard-like feature where each returning employee would write his/her name, spouse, number and names of children, years worked at Cambourne Hill, current job and current address.

The kitchen staff planned great food for the day, from a pig roast cooked over an open fire outside to their famous Cambourne saffron cake filled with raisins and black walnuts. Beer from our best micro breweries and wine from Wisconsin vineyards provided the refreshments.

Word of Old Home Day was all over town. And more than a few of Trelawny's citizens remarked, "I knew I should have taken that job John recruited me for when I was seventeen. If I had, I'd be able to be part of Old Home Day."

A group of the local guys who were going to Old Home Day were talking about mowing roughs at Cambourne Hill with the Farmall B and the set of Airfield Blitzers.

"Whatever happened to the B tractor?" one wondered.

"Chances are John traded it in at Trelawny Motors IH Farm Store. Let's see if anyone there knows."

To make a long story short, they found the tractor abandoned at a farm in weeds that had grown nearly head high. They bought it for \$100, refurbished it and were going to present the key to John Dunn. As one of the guys said, "this old tractor didn't look this good or run as well on the day it was made. John will be dumb struck when he sees it."

The response to Old Home Day was tremendous, beyond the committees' (and John's) wildest expectations. Ninety percent of those invited said, "Yes, I'll be there." Some who were unable to attend sent videos with greetings to John, reminisces of the time they had spent on the CHCC crew, and some looks at their families. It was the next best thing to attending.

The two motels in Trelawny filled quickly, as did those in Eliside, Redruth, Linden and Mifflin. Some stayed with their parents or other family members in Trelawny. Others took advantage of the Housing Committee's offer to bunk with the family of a CHCC member.

Old Home Day dawned bright and clear and cool. The golf course was as magnificent as the day. The early morning was set aside for tee times on the course. A simultee started at 11:30 a.m. In the middle of all the activities - golfing, lunch, horseshoe games, lawn darts, swimming tennis and conversation - was John Dunn. He even took a swing around the golf course driving the beer cart!

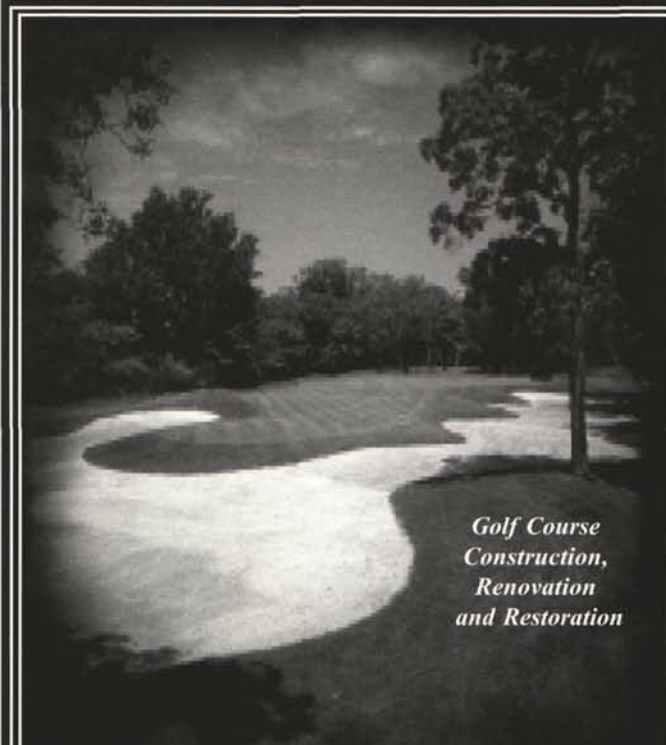
After golf, there was a big family picnic for everyone at Old Home Day. John had spent time with everyone over the course of the morning and the afternoon, but

organizers had a small program planned nevertheless. Each former golf course employee stood, introduced himself or herself and the family with them, gave a sketch of what they were now doing and where they lived, and the summer(s) worked in John's shop. Old friendships were renewed, and new ones were made. The careers followed went from superintendents to professors, farmers to stock brokers, local business owners to one airline pilot. And everything in-between.

As the summer day slipped away and the sun settled down in the western sky, nearly everyone stayed at the club. They talked among themselves of how important their summers at CHCC had been in their youth. It was, for many, their first job and first paycheck. It was where they learned to get up early, to get to work on time and the importance of putting forth their best effort. They learned teamwork and felt camaraderie, made friendships, met spouses and fell in love with golf. Nary a one had a negative comment, maybe a reflection of how time softens the rough edges of almost all experiences. To a person, they were sentimental and nostalgic.

And, as they headed away from Old Home Day, they agreed that, "We must do this again."

"Don't worry," said John Dunn. "We will. We will." ❧



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