



# A Report in Autumn

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

It was a hot summer in Wisconsin, at least once summer finally arrived. The cool, wet spring hung on to the point where we wondered if we'd ever see the sun again.

We did. And it rarely rained this past summer, at least on the west side of Madison where our course is located. It was, as the old saying goes, drier than dust. The airport will send the record book a summer total that will be "normal", but we didn't enjoy that normal precip.

It wasn't a very normal summer for a lot of our Wisconsin golf course superintendent colleagues, either. It is my duty as chapter historian to record for perpetuity these events in our careers and lives.

Take Henry Aldrich for example. Hank lost a finger this summer – the index finger on his left hand. It was a freak golf course accident, the kind we all fear. He caught the finger in a cutting unit of Summer Lawn C.C.'s big hydraulic fairway

mower. "And of course, the danged thing was dull," Hank told me. "It more or less chewed the finger off, leaving no chance for reattachment."

The spooky thing is that Henry has the finger in a small bottle of alcohol (or formaldehyde) right on his desk. It made me uncomfortable, and while it was distracting me, Henry said in a stern voice, "Why are you staring at my finger?"

My face flushed and I mumbled some apology. And then he laughed!

"Hey, at least it was on my left hand!" And look what I can do now!"

His finger was severed below the second joint, leaving a small stub above the palm. Hank stuck the stub in his ear first, and then in one of his nostrils.

I burst into laughter; so did Henry.

Then there was Pete Van der Wort's fiasco that

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involved the Green Committee chair. He had bugged Pete to treat his lawn for broadleaf weeds. Pete put it off and put it off and instead of saying "no," finally went over after work and sprayed the guy's yard. Simple enough.

Except, somehow, containers and contents had gotten mixed up and Pete sprayed a good dose of glyphosate. He's now completely renovating the lawn. Prospects for getting a pay raise aren't real bright for Pete right now.

Wisconsin superintendents are a competitive lot and we had the following "Top 10" finishes this year:

1. Mac McDonald came in third in the Pardeeville Watermelon Seed Spitting Contest.
2. Darrell Finnegan heaved a cow chip over 75 feet and came in ninth at the Sauk City Cow Chip Throwing Contest.
3. Schuyler Merry showed the Reserve Grand Champion Polled Herford steer at the Wisconsin State Fair in August. His dad and two brothers are known across the country for their beef herd; Sky just kind of dabbles in the farming operation, "for fun," he says.
4. Mike Dombrinski competed in the State Am at Eau

Claire CC and finished, but not in the top 10 (or the top 50 for that matter). But he finished.

Dave Waldorf, golf course superintendent at the Butterfield Golf Club, completed his ten year journey this past year, finishing Seminary School. He is now an ordained minister in the Lutheran Church. Many of us attended the ceremony in his home church – Bethel Grove – and after his first sermon, Tom Morris said to him, "not short enough." The members of the Club were proud of him but agreed with Tom. "He is singly responsible for our long board meetings," the Club president said. Bogey Calhoun complained that we'll now have to watch our cussing while he's around.

Our buddy Pat O'Brien is a big gardener. And a good one, he claims. "I can grow grass on concrete," Patty says, "because it's better than the red Lake Michigan clay I have to work with at my course." Turns out that Patty was telling the truth.

He ordered seeds this past spring for giant pumpkins and then planted them in a sandy corner of his big garden. The plants grew like crazy; he pinched all the flowers off except two. All summer long he nursed the two pumpkins – lots of Miracle Gro fertilizer and tons of water



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and plenty of TLC. He put scraps of carpet under each pumpkin so no end rot or insect would damage them.

The World Pumpkin Federation had its championship weigh-in in Collins, New York on Columbus Day weekend. Patty bedded the bigger of the two pumpkins on double air mattresses and packed it tight in the box of his pickup with bright bales of straw. Of course, his Ford truck was black.

What a sight – orange pumpkin, black truck, yellow straw – it must be autumn in Wisconsin and Halloween has to be right around the corner!

Pat didn't place when the weighing was over in Collins. He was an amateur among professionals when it comes to pumpkins. But he had a lot of fun, and he can still grow good golf turf on lousy clay soil.

Margie and Matt Millen had twin boys this summer – Phillip and Francis. They were unplanned and unexpected. Matt's 45 and Marg is 42; they looked tired when we all saw them at the WGCSA Couples Weekend. "Well," Bogey Calhoun giggled, "at least you'll have some help on the golf course when the two of you want to retire!"

Speaking of new babies, Lars and Mary Peterson had a new baby boy this summer. Lars is the golf course superintendent of the Harvest Hill Country Club and is an immigrant from Norway. Mary is, you all know, Pete Lindstrom's sister. Lars came to the U.S. as an exchange student from Norway. He fell in love with Wisconsin, went to the UW – Madison and majored in turfgrass science under Dr. Wayne Kussow. He met Mary while working for her brother at Norway Grove C.C. All of that is important so you will understand why they named their new son Oyvind Juul, after the famous Norwegian-American O. J. Noer. Mary wasn't wild about it, but it made some sense.

Surprise – they call him O.J.!

It was a perfect summer for Tony Ryan, despite the hard work and setbacks and other problems associated with building a new golf course. In his case, there is a lot of excitement because he is involved with a new Arnold Palmer designed golf course.

Arnie was in town for a regularly scheduled inspection of progress. He arrived in Milwaukee in the late morning on a Friday in August and drove to the course with his construction superintendent. They spent the afternoon reviewing the work to date, discussing design changes and budgeting issues. It was getting close to supper time and Arnie said he was getting hungry because he had missed lunch.

"We can eat on the way to the airport," the construction super suggested.

"In Wisconsin, on a Friday, you aren't going to eat for a while unless you have a reservation," a foreman suggested. "Fish fries."

"I didn't even think about it," the super replied.

Tony jumped right in. "We would be honored if you

guys wanted to have supper at our house. Laurie always makes more than enough. I can give her a call from my cell phone."

Arnie didn't hesitate and said, "Sure. Great. I'd love it."

So they drove over to Tony's, a matter of a couple of miles. Arnie was completely at ease, clearly was hungry and loaded his plate with mashed potatoes, gravy, meatloaf and well cooked string beans. He washed it down with cold milk and drank black coffee with the Door County cherry cobbler Laurie had made.

As they finished, Arnie was generous with thanks. They drove off for Mitchell Field and the trip back to Latrobe. About a week later Tony and Laurie received a handwritten note from Mr. Palmer and an autographed copy of his autobiography, *A Golfer's Life*. What a deal.

We even had a little excitement at our shop. A jogger found a dead man not 100 yards from our shopyard. I knew something was up when I counted 11 squad cars at the scene, plus an ambulance and the coroner. Turns out he was an older gentleman who had escaped from a detox center a couple of days previous. He died of natural causes and that was that.

So, there you have it – a few of the more interesting events in those always interesting summers on Wisconsin golf courses. Makes you wonder what next year will bring. ♣

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