

# Prairie Home Parade

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



"Just what I need on Labor Day weekend," Bogey Calhoun lamented to Romy Orth over the phone, "another job."

"Been there," Romy replied with a little sympathy in his voice. "But it should be a lot of fun once we get our equipment up there, organized and secured. What red-blooded American boy doesn't like a parade, especially when you are driving a machine right smack in the middle of it?"

Romy and Bogey were trying to figure out if it would be reasonable – or even possible – to drag some

machinery up from the Wisconsin Golf Course Museum to the village of Prairie Lake, north of Madison. Prairie Lake was home to what they claimed was "the biggest small town parade in America" each Labor Day. They called it the Prairie Home Parade.

As Bogey's and Romy's (and a lot of the rest of us) luck would have it, Peter Lindstrom was on the parade committee. Pete is the course superintendent at the Norway Grove Golf Club, a golf course a dozen miles or so north of Prairie Lake. He considers the

daily drive a small price to pay for the privilege of living in his hometown.

Pete took his job on the parade committee seriously and, as he told Romy, "if we are going to keep our title as the biggest small town parade, we have got to get new blood in the parade every year. This should be the year we incorporate golf course equipment in the world famous parade."

Of course, Romy was all for it. He has enough machinery in the museum for three parades and he always said using the display



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pieces several times a year was good for them.

Calhoun put the squeeze on Tom Morris, Scottie Fennimore and Steady Eddie Middleton. Morris, in turn, put the bite on me.

We held a little pow wow with Romy over at the museum and decided if we had plenty of operators around, as well as a mechanic, we could probably pull it off. It was Tom who pointed out that participation in the Prairie Home Parade would be a good way to draw some attention to the GCSAA 75th anniversary.

"They have money for everything else," Steady Eddie said, "and I will bet we could get a big banner from them to carry in front of our section of the parade."

We spent some time – considerable time, really – deciding on which pieces of equipment we should have in the parade. "Deciding" is a charitable word; actually, we argued about it at some length. When it was said and done, we chose the following to trailer up from the museum to Prairie Lake:

1. 1927 McCormick Deering Farmall Fairway tractor with a 5-gang set of Worthington airfield blitzers (on rubber). The standard issue steel wheels with small spuds on the Fairway tractor were replaced with rims and rubber tires for the parade. "Not original," Romy sighed, "but we just cannot help it." Tom Morris was the operator for the parade.

2. The Toro 1947 General tractor with a dump box. This implement probably had the best paint of all the tractors in the museum. Calhoun was allowed to drive it in the parade.

3. Our museum 1954 Ford F-100 pickup truck; Romy drove this vehicle himself.

4. The 1952 Jacobsen F-8 with fairway units. Steady Eddie Middleton – operator.

5. The 1941 Oliver 60 Row Crop

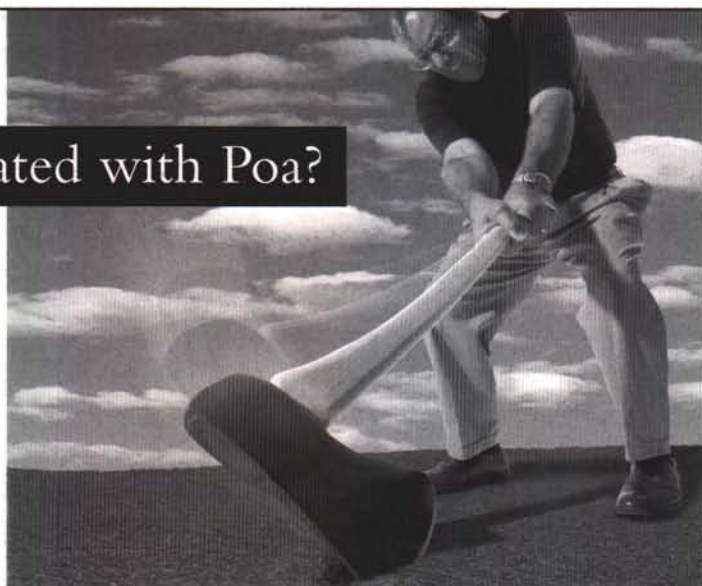
4-speed. We had it hitched to a flatbed hayrack with numerous pieces of hand-operated equipment – 321 Jacobsen greensmower, Ransomes ground driven greensmower, O.J. Noer's Ryan Ren-O-Thin (donated to the museum by Dr. James R. Love) and an old John Bean sprayer with a hand pump. Scott Fennimore was behind the wheel of this beautiful little golf course tractor.

6. Jim Orth helped his dad out and drove a 1959 3-wheel

Cushman truckster in the parade.

7. We brought along the newest tractor in the museum – a 1939 John Deere Model LA tractor (11 hp) equipped with a No. 7 sickle bar mower. It was fully restored and included Montgomery Ward's knobby Riverside tires. Its two-cylinder engine delivered the familiar (to older former farm kids) Johnny Popper sound. The current chapter president was given the privilege to drive it the parade; Romy chewed Kris out for

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five minutes over what would happen if he scratched the fresh paint job.

8. Our Ford 8N brought up the rear (with me at the wheel) with a PTO driven Woods rotary mower.

Romy had a closed trailer he could pull with his big Ford F-350.

We imposed on Paul Derezinski, Gary Huenerburg and Jim Spencer to help us out getting equipment to Prairie Lake and the haul back. Romy was like an old hen until Pete found a couple of places where the equipment could be stored and secured for a few days.

We all made sure our courses were set for play – mainly simulates – before we headed for Prairie Lake.

The parade formed up in an alfalfa field that had just had the third crop of hay taken off. It was on the edge of town, next to the Prairie Home Cemetery.

Romy was nervous, barking orders and cussing us out just in case we made some mistakes (which we didn't). The old tractors purred, the sheet metal shined and reflected the clear September sky, and we all had smiles on our faces.

Prairie Lake's claim to the biggest small town parade in America might be a fact. None of us could believe the people jammed into town to watch us and the other participants and marchers. No one could believe the parade itself, either. There were 12 high school bands forming up. The Zor Shrine had their performing motorcycles and midget cars they are so well known for.

Fire companies, mainly volunteers, came from all over Wisconsin to show off their antique fire engines and the latest ladder trucks. The Prairie Lake Trail Riders Club hosted horse riding groups from Wisconsin (and one from Minnesota). The animals were slick and sleek, and each riding club had its own distinctive colors and riding apparel. "Don't drive the equipment through any horse manure," Romy yelled to us.

"We are going to aim for every pile we see," Bogey yelled back. We laughed at Romy and all of his fussing.

There were antique cars – Model As to a fabulous dark blue and gray 1951 Chevy 2-door hard-top with fenders skirts and glass packed mufflers. One that caught my eye was a 1956 Dodge 3- color tone car with push button gear selection; it must have been a super car in its day.

After the twenty or so cars came the high school floats from PLHS –

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each class was represented and most of the sports teams rode on a hay rack or truck bed of some sort. The Central Wisconsin Antique Tractor Collectors Club challenged our WGCSA lineup – great old tractors representing our agricultural heritage.

The old trucks were a favorite, taking up nearly as much parade room as the cars. The politicians were there. They wouldn't miss this one – the governor and his wife, the state senator and assemblyman, the mayor of Prairie Lake and the area's U.S. Representative made it back from Washington D.C. to ride in the parade in a convertible. Alice in Dairyland was there, too.

The VFW marched with the colors; an Army reserve unit from Madison came up with some military vehicles so they would be represented in the little town parade.

"This is awesome," Steady Eddie said, and we all agreed.

Makes you wonder why we haven't made the effort before," Tom Morris said. "Beats me," Pete Lindstrom said with a mile wide grin.

We took our place in the big parade and worked

hard with parade officials to keep our pace just right. The route down Main Street took us past the John Deere dealership and the Stockbridge Feed and Grain buildings. There aren't many businesses in Prairie Lake, and homes are mixed in with them. We passed the Genesis Lutheran Church on the west side of Main; right across the street was St. Joseph the Worker Roman Catholic Church. Down the street we went, past Copsy's Cheese Factory, the Carnegie Public Library and Stout's Market (the only grocery store in town). The Hasty Tasty Tavern was next and then the Tip Top Café. The parade moved from the south side of town to the north, and we went past Prairie Lake Lumber, the Good News Methodist Church and the Sinclair Gas Station. The Amazing Grace Baptist Church anchored the next block as the businesses thinned and single-family homes increased.

The big lot at Prairie Lake Ford Motors had been cleared of cars, trucks and SUVs, and bleachers took their place. All through town, the crowd was enthusiastic and pretty free with the applause. None of us were used to that and thought it was cool. The Badger

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Turf and Grounds Club all walked along side of our equipment, decked out in their red golf shirts, handing out tees, ball repair tools, golf balls and other freebies we had donated for the event.

We were feeling pretty proud and please with ourselves when our worst dream came true – equipment failure. The '54 Ford F-100 quit. Romy was driving it, luckily, and he bounded out in one leap, cussing and swearing under his breath. In the blink of an eye he had a log chain from the pickup box wrapped around the front bumper and had gotten Calhoun's attention. Bogey stopped the Toro General, Romy snapped the big hook on the chain into the hitch and got back into the truck.

It was so fast and smooth, honestly, I didn't think many in the audience even knew something was wrong. Romy continued to wave and smile!

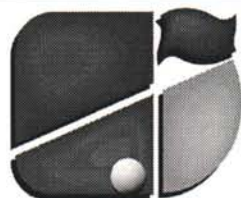
The parade ended out on the edge of town at the high school parking lot and grounds. As soon as we were out of the way Romy was out of the truck and popping up the hood of the truck, looking for the trouble. Calhoun was smiling as swung under the truck and tapped the gas tank with a Crescent wrench.

"Might be out of gas, Romy," he teased. Romy's weathered old face turned Toro red as he turned the switch on and the fuel gauge sat on E. Bogey roared with laughter. So did the rest of us. After some fussing, Romy smiled too. "At least it's an easy fix," he said.

With that we loaded what we could for the back haul to the Wisconsin Golf Course Museum, secured what we could get later, and shook hands all around.

"A slice of Americana," Scott Fennimore observed, "and a darn good way to celebrate Labor Day."

We decided to stop for a refreshment at the Hasty Tasty before we headed back to our homes and golf courses and the glorious days of autumn that were, finally, just around the corner. ♣



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