



The Mid-Winter Man

By **Pat Norton**, Golf Course Superintendent, Nettle Creek Country Club

As this thought provoking masterpiece is being pounded out on the keyboard...it strikes me that by the time people read this...the phenomenon of the mid-winter man will just about be history for another year. This annual rite of winter...this reconnection to family and a much slower, more simple daily existence...will slowly recede as springtime activity...both within the family and at the golf course...starts to heat up.

Every year the mid-winter experience is just there to be tolerated...I've come to learn. Every year the mid-winter man experience is both enjoyable and a bit maddening. Every year I can't wait for it to start...and then, can't wait for it to be over!

It's one of those periods of recurring experience within a human life that start off being really enjoyable. During the November/early December

phase...the slower pace and time indoors are sort of nice...sort of cozy...and sort of a reward for the big effort just completed. Then, the days stretch through the cheery holidays and the post holiday/Christmas school break calendar complete disorientation thing...which is when things start to turn ugly! And it all begins with that week after Christmas...when people honestly don't know what to do with all of that free time!

Winter break from school is way too long...and much too boring! Normally active, enthused teenagers become pale white, sickly, non-motivated little pests who respond to parental wishes of motivation/housework/home improvement as if self-mutilation is expected during the process. Parents...trying to preserve a sense of normalcy...abandon their offspring temporarily...and break out to a movie and a shared bucket of popcorn. Oftentimes the kids have no idea that the parents have left the property...their main concern is that the electric power and heat continue to comfort them as they pursue chatting on the PC...or wrenching out the "body English" as they attempt to conquer Madden NFL 2002 on Playstation 2.

Whatever happened to sledding, skating, reading, and family board games?? All pretty much a curiosity or completely extinct, I'm afraid. But hey, this mid-winter man does still try the sledding thing...at the insistence of our 10 year old...who must still think that Dad is invincible! Sad to say that when we do go sledding...I'm more worried about my back getting jarred than anything else out there!

After school break is over...I'm totally positive that parents of all students everywhere are totally committed to the idea of confronting the local school board as to why in the world kids need a full two weeks off for the holidays? These school administrators obviously have no children of their own! Have these school districts gone completely nuts??? Have they completely forgotten that too much family time together over the holidays is a terrible thing? Have they ever truly observed kids in their home winter environments during this holiday time off? Do they really think that kids need 14 hours of sleep...followed by complete vegetation in front of the computer or TV? Or do they just not care???

The mid-winter man really gears up in January. He is totally comfortable arriving for work at 8:00 or even

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later. He doesn't mind at all helping a fifth grader review for an upcoming test before school...hauling the kids to whatever athletic or musical practice...or picking up whatever load of middle schoolers at whatever time of day or night. The mid-winter man is always on call...ready to do his duty!

The mid-winter man understands that during this stretch of weeks family is all important. There are tons of basketball games, volleyball games, Sat AM little hoopsters sessions, and family dinners to enjoy...complete with yet another serving of mac and cheese!!

When work does interfere with the lifestyle of the January mid-winter man, he usually spends a fairly slow, leisurely day in the shop or buzzing around town expediting work for the guys doing the real winter work, and leaves for home at 3:00-3:30PM. The winter shop experience is really kind of enjoyable...except for the fact that absolutely no money can be spent...and those machines need attention??? Hey man, let's take it easy on the money being spent...try and recycle that oil one more time...and those filters, bearings, and bedknives look OK for another season!

Truthfully...the big winter juggling act is to make sure that all machinery maintenance and other necessities move along without having to dip too deeply into short term borrowing from the bank! Our department is really only one of the culprits...the bigger spenders are those darn administrative expenses...insurance, bank interest, payrolls for other department managers...some of whom seem to have stolen my idea and transformed it into 'the mid-winter, non-working, out of town manager' sort of experience. Hey, whatever works for them, I guess.

Weekends off mean that superintendents everywhere truly become really great customers of True Value, Menard's, or Home Depot. We get to know the guys at Beatty Lumber on a first name basis...and start attempting home improvement projects in which we have absolutely no expertise or talent...just time.

This mid-winter man really has lots of time...and a home that always seems to require more TLC...and an endless parade of homeowner installed improvements. The big remodeling project this winter involves paint, wallpaper, oak trim, carpeting, and new oak railings. The mid-winter couple are really busy trying to either keep the project moving along...or in the case of the mid-winter wife...trying to hold back the ambition of the mid-winter male as he tries to continually expand the scope of the remodeling project. Actually...the mid-winter project is taking shape nicely...aided by mid-winter access to a maintenance shop that's open 24/7 if needed!

Jake, our veteran mechanic said to me this AM that he hopes that I have strong teeth and a good digestive system...as he thinks I've bitten off more than I can chew in attempting to install my own oak railing up the staircase at home. He's a very perceptive guy...but what mid-winter man worth his salt doesn't like a challenge?

Hey, it's only a \$1000 worth of undrilled, unmitered, and unfinished oak sitting there next to the TV. Just hand me the assembly instructions and I'll be OK! This mid-winter man has already had his ration of at least two prefab pieces of cheap furniture to assemble this season...I am an assembly pro!

Oak railings, however, don't come with complete instructions. Their installation requires talented craftsmanship...which everyone around me doubt that I possess! So it becomes a game of proving to them...and myself...that I can follow through successfully on this project!

Superintendents on golf courses everywhere soon will begin making the transformation...come out of

hibernation somewhat...and start preparations for springtime...when I like to tell people that our golf course preparations speed up from about 20MPH to 200MPH in 48 hours! The mid-winter man is then a quickly receding image in the rear view mirror of that old pick-up...and those unfinished home projects start to blend in with the décor of the living room.

When that happens the impact of the mid-winter man is complete. He has once again left the household in a shambles...and promises that things will be all buttoned up and completed ...soon...and flies out the door!

The mid-winter woman learns yet again that when the golf course beckons, her man must respond. She knows that however trivial the problem, however unjustified the complaint, or how minute the success...he must be there. Her mid-winter man has departed and been replaced by this hyperactive, overenthusiastic, firebreathing creature who just can't get enough time in at the course!

The mid-winter man is extinct for yet another season. ♡



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