



He's Been Down Many Roads in His Life and Career

By Lori Ward Bocher

Interviewing Bob Emmerich about his life is like maneuvering through a maze - the maze of a fascinating mind and interesting career. We take a few steps forward, then backtrack and head in a different direction. Just when I think we've covered one section of the maze, he adds a few more paths to explore. Indeed, Bob has been down many roads in his life and career.

Currently Bob is a partner with his brother, Tom, in T.J. Emmerich Associates, Inc., located in Hartland. They are independent irrigation consultants for golf courses, commercial facilities, and residential properties. Tom started the business in 1992, and Bob joined him in 1996.

Bob has worked in the irrigation business from the ground up - literally and figuratively: He started by digging ditches shortly after graduating from high school; and he got into the business as it was just emerging in the Midwest. At many points in his career his technical knowledge and experience in the business proved to be very useful.

But wait. Let's back up and start at the beginning. Born in Milwaukee, Bob graduated from Messmer High School in 1965. High school was an unusually influential time in Bob's life. It was there that he met his bride-to-be, Kathy, who has been a part of his journey ever since. Extra-curricular activities led him to college and a scholarship. And a job in the high school cafeteria led him into the irrigation business.

"As a freshman I knew I wouldn't be a basketball player," says Bob. "So I became manager of the freshman team. My sophomore year I became manager and trainer of the



varsity team." Already Bob was showing his ability to master a job and move on to the next level.

The Messmer basketball coach was a graduate of St. Norbert College in DePere, and Bob's older brother was a student there and also a sports equipment manager. This helped open the door for Bob to get a partial scholarship as the athletic trainer for all sports at St. Norbert - hence, his choice of college.

Rubs elbows with Green Bay Packers...

Bob worked as the trainer for all four years in college. He has fond memories of sharing the campus with the Green Bay Packers who still have a summer training camp at St. Norbert. This was from 1965 to 1969, during the Glory Years of Vince Lombardi and Bart Starr. Bob met several of the great players. "Bart Starr was a real nice guy," Bob recalls. "He spoke at our athletic banquet the year I was a senior. I ran into him 10 years later at an airport and he still remembered me."

Bob's college major was sociology. "I was going to save the world," he says. "But, ultimately, I realized I couldn't make enough money in it." So we backtrack a few

years to find out how Bob started in the irrigation business when he was just a senior in high school.

Bob worked in the cafeteria to help pay for tuition at his Catholic high school.

While washing dishes one day, he was approached by the man who operated the boiler for the school pool. This man, John Lynch, also owned Acme Lawn Sprinkler Company. "He asked me if I wanted to work for him for \$5.50 an hour," Bob remembers. This was pretty good money back in 1965, so Bob accepted. He worked for Acme the summer before he started college and for four summers after that. Acme installed automated irrigation systems in upscale subdivisions and at commercial properties.

Each summer, Bob earned more responsibility. His first year he dug ditches. "And I realized there's a right way to do that," he adds. Soon he learned how to install plumbing and valves. "The first time I installed valves they were all backwards," he admits. "I had to dig it all up and do it over. I never made that mistake again." Eventually, Bob knew irrigation well enough that he worked the service truck.

He helps write the test...

But let's back up again. During his years at Acme, the State of Wisconsin started a licensing program for irrigation installers. Bob became an apprenticed learner, and then a journeyman. Since this was a new license, tests needed to be developed. Bob helped write the tests that he ultimately would take to get his restricted master plumbing license, a license he still keeps current. While in college, Bob was already showing his ability to get to the core of an issue



Walk mowing greens at Chenequa CC for Jim Shaw.

and to communicate what needed to be done.

Bob graduated from St. Norbert with a degree in sociology in 1969. For the next one and a half years he served on active duty in the Signal Corps of the Wisconsin Army National Guard. At this time, communication technology was rapidly improving and Bob had a natural ability to learn that new technology. He worked his way up to Captain in the Signal Corps. He left active duty in 1970, married Kathy in October of 1970, and served weekend duty in the Guard for eight more years. With his sociology background, Bob feels that the most important lesson he learned from military service was: "Whatever you accomplish, you have to accomplish it through other people." This insight would serve him well in the years to come.

Also in 1970, Bob took a job in the irrigation department at R & S Parts, Inc., in Milwaukee - a Toro distributor - and eventually became the Assistant Manager.

"The irrigation industry was growing rapidly, and R & S needed to be better organized in the way it did business," Bob recalls. "I organized their inventory, formalized a business structure, and started sessions to help contractors place orders more effectively. Coming out of the military, this was all very basic to me."

In 1974, Bob took a job with a pool company for a short time. Then he was snapped up by Toro. "At the time, unbeknownst to me, Toro had a policy of not hiring people away from their distributors," Bob explains. "So after I left R & S Parts, Toro offered me a job as a Technical Sales Rep." Later, Bob was offered a 14-state District Sales Manager position with Toro. In addition to his full-time job, Bob was also attending regular Guard training one weekend a month and a special Guard class a second weekend each month. Consequently, he was off only two weekends a month.

Paralysis throws up a road block...

But let's back up again. There was something else happening in his life at this time. In 1973, shortly

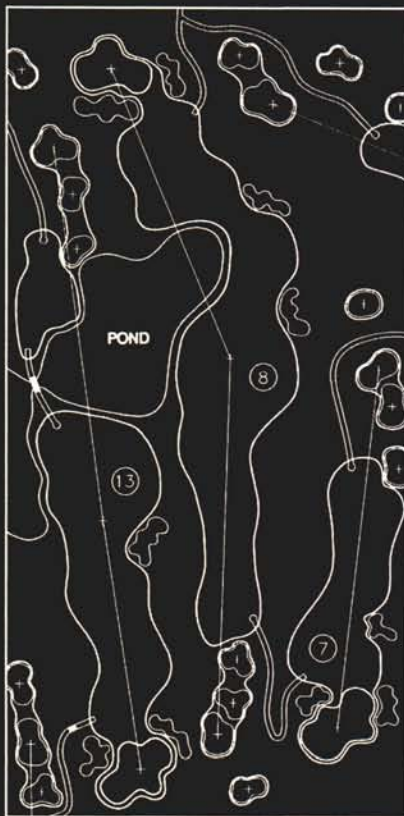


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GPS data collection at the Reid Golf Course for Doug Devries.

before their first daughter, Lisa, was born, Kathy became paralyzed on the right side. Because she was pregnant, the doctors weren't able to take X-rays. So they waited. After giving birth, Kathy became paralyzed on the left side, too.

Three days later, they found the culprit; a tumor on Kathy's spine. Fortunately, it was benign. Unfortunately, it had already caused irreparable damage. Kathy was in the hospital for several months and received outpatient physical therapy for one and a half years. At one point, scar tissue from the first surgery was causing the paralysis to return, so she underwent surgery again. Eventually Kathy regained many abilities, including the ability to walk. But there are lingering effects, such as weakness in her left side.

During Kathy's recovery, Bob was working full time and doing Guard duty two weekends a month. For a time he had to come home every three hours to help Kathy. When their second daughter, Christine, was born in 1977, life was busier than ever.

Bob decided to resign from the Guard so that he'd have more time to be with his family.

From 1974 to 1978, while Bob was a District Sales Manager for Toro, he once again showed his ability to analyze problems and initiate positive changes. He developed training sessions to help irrigation contractors become better at their jobs. He worked with the corporate office to initiate sales forecasting. In 1978 he was promoted to Regional Sales Manager, thus supervising the work of five district managers east of the Mississippi River. In this position, he figured out it would be more advantageous to forecast sales by units, not dollars. He and a plant manager came up with 22 units that should be tracked to predict future sales.

In 1982, Bob was named National Director of Sales for the irrigation division of Toro. His eastern region was already accustomed to unit forecasting, but the western sales region was not. One of his first jobs was to get the western region on board. "It's sometimes difficult to convince

people to do this because sales forecasting isn't so important when business is good," Bob explains. "But it's important when business slows down. When the sales forecasts leveled off, I'd go directly to the vice president and they'd cut back purchasing (for future manufacturing) by 25 percent. I had the facts. I could give them a 90-day notice of a downturn in business."

Commutes to California...

With the Toro irrigation division headquartered in Riverside, California, Bob committed to moving west when he became National Director of Sales. But he never quite made it. For three years, he commuted to California so his family could stay rooted in Wisconsin. Then for a year he commuted to the Toro headquarters in Minneapolis while he served as Director of Customer Education in the distributor development group. Bob managed sales and service training programs for all divisions of Toro.

In 1986, Toro created a National Accounts Manager for the golf

business within its irrigation division; Bob was chosen for the job, one that he could do from his Milwaukee home. Once again, he found himself creating new ways of doing business. As the golf business grew, Toro again wanted Bob to move to California. In 1990, Watertronics Pumping Systems of Hartland offered Bob a job as its Sales and Marketing Manager. With no desire to move, Bob made the decision to leave Toro. His new job meant less travel and more time at home with his family. This suited him just fine.

But before we head down this new road, let's back up again. During his years with Toro, Bob served eight years on the board of directors and executive committee of the National Irrigation Association. He was national president in 1991. "Toro was very supportive of me being involved in this organization," Bob points out.

Now on to his new job, where Bob found himself setting up sales and marketing practices for a smaller, developing company. "Watertronics has a great tech-

nology," he explains. "But they needed sales and marketing help. It was a great opportunity to influence the sales force, programs, manuals, catalogs, et cetera, from the ground up."

Joins his brother in business...

In 1996 Bob joined his brother in the irrigation consultant business. He is quick to point out that it is primarily his brother's business. "He started it. I'm just a minority partner," he says, adding that he is eight years older than his brother and was nearing 50 when he joined Tom. "Our girls were grown, I didn't have to worry about income as much, I was ready to slow down a bit," Bob explains. "My time is more flexible now. I can spend more time with my family."

The brothers split up the work according to their abilities. "We recognize our strengths," Bob says. "Tom is very, very good with design work and calculations, so he does all of the design and field work. I'm more of the sales type, so I do the sales, marketing and administration. I could probably design an irrigation system, but I'd

Bob's Tenets of Sales

- 1: The key to success is the ability to listen.** "I've been called a 3 by 5 carder," Bob says, adding that he always carries 3 by 5 cards with him. "If I try to take notes while talking with someone, I find that they're slightly intimidated and don't talk as much. So I just listen. And when they say something that I really need to remember, I take out one of my cards and ask, 'Do you mind if I write that down?'"
- 2: The average American must be exposed to a new idea five to seven times before they fully understand it.** "I know it takes time for people to learn," Bob says. "I don't get upset when someone doesn't understand all at once. I start a new sales or training project knowing that I'm going to have to chat with these people five to seven times."
- 3: There are three types of buyers: The basic buyer, the analytical buyer, and the emotional buyer.** "This really opened my eyes when I first learned it," Bob admits. "I was trying to get people to buy what I thought they should buy for my analytical reasons. I learned to help people buy what they want to buy as opposed to what I thought they should buy. And I learned to help them buy it in their style, not my style."
- 4: Whatever you accomplish, you have to accomplish it through other people.** Bob discovered this while in the military, and he carried it over into his sales.
- 5: T, 3, 6, 9, 1, 2, 3.** "I do what I have to do today (T)," Bob explains. "But I also analyze what it will do for me in 3, 6, and 9 months, and in 1, 2, and 3 years. This philosophy encourages me to give extra effort each day - to not just get by."

have to do it in pen and ink. Tom uses AutoCAD (computer aided design)." They also employ one full-time AutoCAD draftsman, Ryan Jaeger.

Their competition comes from other independent irrigation consultants and from irrigation distributors. What sets them apart the competition? "The client deals with Tom and me personally; we answer the phone," Bob states. "In addition, we meet the client's needs on time. If we commit to completing a design and estimate by a certain date, we do it, even if it means working nights and weekends."

They also deal with the complete infrastructure and not just one part of the irrigation system. "The water source, the power source and the infrastructure are

equally as important as the irrigation system itself," Bob says. "People often focus on the sprinklers and controllers, but putting together a whole system is equally as important."

What are the differences between working for a large corporation versus your own small business? "When I worked for Toro there were many people to manage and motivate and get together for meetings. Now there are just three people to worry about," Bob says. "I no longer have people reporting to me. I don't miss the day-to-day managing of people, and I don't miss the travel.

"On the other hand, when you own your own business you have to worry about making payroll, generating income, cash flow, and skyrocketing insurance costs," he

adds. "And I do miss some of the contact with people."

But he does enjoy more time with his family. Both daughters still live in the Milwaukee area. Lisa is a St. Norbert graduate and a marketing analyst for Commercial Communications, Inc. Christine graduated from Marian College and works in the development office at Mount Mary College. "Kathy gets all the credit for raising the girls because I was never home," Bob admits.

So that brings us up to date in Bob's life. His journey has been filled with changes. There have been uphill battles and also times to coast. With his zest for life and eagerness to learn and teach others, I don't think Bob would have it any other way. ♣

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