



"There's Not Much Sit Time."

By Lori Ward Bocher

This may be the shortest Personality Profile in history. It's not that Ed Witkowski, owner of Pendelton Turf Supply, isn't an interesting guy. It's just that he's a man of few words when it comes to talking about himself. His answers are polite, but concise. During the telephone interview I sense that he has places to go, people to see, miles to make.

"You sound like a guy who's on the go all the time. Is that right?" I ask toward the end of the interview.

"Yeah, absolutely," he answers.

"You don't like to sit for very long, right?"

"No, there's not much sit time," he replies.

"What else should we know about you?" I question.

"I'm not too exciting, really," he says.

"What makes you tick? What drives you?"

"Competition, strictly," he admits. "Whether it be sports or work, when my back's to the wall I really concentrate hard and figure out a solution right away."

Early start...

Ed was born in Milwaukee and raised in the suburb of Greendale. His career in the golf industry began at a young age. "I started out caddying at Tuckaway Country Club at age 14," he recalls. "By 15 or 16, I started working full time on the grounds crew. I worked for Ray Knapp, the superintendent at the time. He took me under his wing. I worked there through my years in high school and college."

"Why did you choose to work on a golf course for your first job?" I ask.

"I love working outdoors. And I don't mind getting my hands dirty," he succinctly replies. When Ed worked at Tuckaway it was still hosting the Greater Milwaukee Open. "I first started as extra help. I did a lot of working in sand traps, edging, learning how to rope off the golf course, and doing all the hand raking of the bunkers during the tournament time. I also was kind of like a crew chief, watching over the other kids that were part-timers."

"At that young age, was it exciting working at a tournament?" I ask.

"Very much so, yeah," he replies. "Long hours. It was over the 4th of July weekend. We started at 4:30 in the morning and worked until 8 or 9 at night."

Ed graduated from Milwaukee Thomas More High School in 1978, and then attended the UW-Whitewater where he earned a BS in political science and business. While in college he gained some sales experience by working at a men's clothing store in a

Milwaukee shopping mall.

"After I graduated from college I was still working at Tuckaway Country Club full time," he explains. "Then LESCO was hiring in the area and I accepted the position. I drove the LESCO truck for five years in the south-eastern quadrant of Wisconsin and in northern Illinois. That was from 1983 to 1988."

"Why did you take the LESCO job?" I ask.

"Because I had so much golf course experience - being a spray technician, setting cups, doing all the daily tasks on a golf course," he replies. "I also had some sales experience. So I combined the two and was hired by LESCO." As a LESCO route man, Ed sold the company's line of tee/green fertilizers and pesticides to golf courses.

"I learned a lot of business skills on this job," Ed says. "The people who hired me were excellent teachers and they had a great work ethic - like what I was used to at Tuckaway with Ray. The job really enhanced my knowledge of sales."

Starts his own company...

But Ed didn't see much potential for promotion with LESCO, so in 1989 he started his own business, Pendelton Turf Supply. "I started very small, a one-man organization," he explains. "I started my own little store on wheels."



THOMAS J. EMMERICH
CERTIFIED IRRIGATION DESIGNER

*GOLF COURSE

*COMMERCIAL

*RESIDENTIAL

*MASTER PLANNING

*SYSTEM EVALUATIONS

TOTAL PACKAGE DESIGN SERVICES

T.J. EMMERICH ASSOCIATES, INC.

IRRIGATION CONSULTANTS

N68W W30986 CLUB CIRCLE EAST

HARTLAND, WISCONSIN 53029

262-966-1051

I bought a pick-up truck and a Wells Cargo trailer, put some shelving in the trailer, and basically did route sales - just like I did with LESCO. The business grew as I picked up more and better products." He now carries a full line of seed, fertilizers, and pesticides for tees and greens.

Many of his customers were once his LESCO customers. "During my five-year span with LESCO I had built up a lot of loyalty with my customers," Ed relates. "I had met a lot of great superintendents who became more than customers; they became friends. I got to know their wives, their children, their birthdays, and special events in their families. I wasn't just a route salesman - I was involved with their personal lives."

Ed believes the service he offers with sales is what sets his business apart from others. "I'm accessible," he says. "Every single superintendent can have my personal phone number. They can call me round the clock at home. I've had customers call me at 5:30 in the morning on a Sunday. And we go out of our way. If there's something we don't provide or don't have a contract for, we go out and try to find how we can solve that customer's problems."

The company now includes five full-time workers and one seasonal helper. In the past five years Ed has hired two former golf course superintendents to work in sales - Mike Kozlowski and Todd Fregien. "Our sales have almost tripled since hiring them," Ed says. "Working on my own was becoming too much of a burden. I couldn't handle it all - sales, inventory, purchasing, all the necessary government regulations. I needed some help, I needed to hire some people, and business grew."

Less time on the road...

Ed still conducts some sales on the road, but only about 10 percent of what he originally did. The company's territory runs from Appleton, over to Stevens Point, and down to three counties in northern Illinois (Winnebago, McHenry and Lake). "I spend more time trouble shooting from the office, solving customer problems," Ed points out.

"Are you happy with that change?" I ask knowing some sales people prefer being out on the road.

"Absolutely, I do love it," comes his concise answer.

In addition to the two salesmen, Ed's wife, Mary, works full time as the office manager. "She handles the book-keeping, receivables, payroll, all the internal office work," Ed says. The fifth full-time employee is a delivery person; Ed was in the process of hiring a new one at the time of the interview.

With spring in full force, I ask Ed, "Any messages for the golf course superintendents who are reading this?"


"I hope everybody can keep their chins up in these hard times," he answers. "We've had a lot of grass die over the winter. It was devastating. The older golf courses really took a beating this year."

Family time...

Ed has always been a member of the WGCSA, the GCSAA and the WTA. "Just a member. I'm not too involved because of my family commitments," he points out. "The three kids are active in at least two sports per season. We're just up to our eyeballs in kids' athletics. We spend a lot of family time on weekends, traveling around for sporting events. One of the unexpected things I found in life - I didn't realize that kids could get involved in so many different tournament activities that require a lot of expense and travel. My 15-year-old travels with what's called regional soccer - he travels somewhere in the Midwest every weekend."

The Witkowskis have three children: Karli, 17; Matthew, 15; and Kristin, 11. "I love coaching my kids," Ed says. "I coach tournament baseball and tournament basketball. I love doing my own yard work. And I do enjoy playing golf once in a while. I get in about 25 to 30 18-hole rounds in a year. Most of that golf comes between August and October."

No, there's not much sit time for Ed Witkowski. ♣



*New Course Construction
Renovation and Restoration*

GOLFCREATIONS

Marengo, IL 815.923.1868