

# A Meeting at the Crossroads



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

Our first ever-monthly meeting at the new and heralded Crossroads Country Club generated more excitement and curiosity than any chapter event in quite a while.

A new course will do that; it's always been that way. The anxious feeling course superintendents have comes because golf is a business we love and our part of the business is the golf course. So it is no wonder the field was full and dozens more were driving up for dinner.

The location of the course is interesting to geographers and cartographers as well as to people associated with golf. Located at a spot in the seventh fairway is the exact intersection of the 45° 00' north latitude line and the 90° 00' west longitude line. A granite post marks the intersection, and the longitude/latitude readings are cut into it.

The post marks the exact halfway point between the equator and the North Pole, and one quarter of the way around the globe from Greenwich, England. It is quite a claim to fame for the small Wisconsin village of Poinatowski, 15 or so miles west of Wausau on County Road U.

"Not too hard to understand why they named the course 'Crossroads'" "Bogey Calhoun observed as he and I joined Steady Eddie Middleton and Tom Morris for the trip to the meeting. Over the years we'd frequently traveled together, but with the price of gas as \$3 a gallon, it was the only way to go now.

"I hope they don't serenade us with polka music," Bogey said, making reference to the heavy German and Polish heritage of that area.

"I hope they do," Tom replied, not so much because he liked the accordion and tuba music, but because he knew Bogey really didn't like it.

Actually, we were excited not only to see the course, but Vroman Orth was going to be presented the WGCSA Distinguished Service Award. Most didn't know about it, including Romy, but Tom had gotten wind of it and told us.

Romy doesn't go to a lot of monthly meetings because he is so busy with the Wisconsin Golf Course Museum. A lot of people come through during the season, and he keeps it open everyday. Plus, he has all of the grounds, the research area and the grassed area for the annual statewide mowing contest to keep in tiptop shape. Romy was a perfectionist, and to him, every day at the Museum was the same as our member/guest days. And he and his sons always have

equipment they are working on restoring down in the shop.

He has often told us about how long it takes to design and execute new display plans. We all know that it really is a lot of work. Romy has always grumbled, in a fun sort of way, about how much work it is keeping his workforce of volunteers motivated and moving in the right direction. Since most either are or were (but now retired) superintendents, each one has his own ideas on how things are to be done at the museum. It takes time for them to acknowledge the concept of "Romy's way or the highway."

Romy's contributions to golf have become legendary, not only within our state borders but around the country as well. Other than a small historical display at Golf House once in a rare while, Romy is the foremost keeper of our greenkeeper heritage. As we



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think about it, we kind of wonder why it has taken so long to honor the man.

The DSA committee was able to get Romy so far from home because they told him they had a number of nice pieces that guys wanted to donate to the museum. Of course, that would get the old boy halfway around the world! They wouldn't tell him any specifics, other than the items ran from books to equipment to toys to GCSAA collectibles.

"I love it up nort'," Steady Eddie mused in a serious moment. The ride through the beautiful Wisconsin countryside was inspiring, occasioning a deep sigh from one of us every few miles.

"I cannot believe I am getting paid to make this trip," said a grateful Tom Morris.

"The thing I've noticed over the years about people from 'up north' is that they have a great sense of humor, and they love to play off of the stereotype of the outdoorsy, insular, inbred drunken Packer fan. The truth, which they know, is that they are wiser and more shrewd than the downstaters who actually believe their country bumpkin image."

"Well, since we'll be north of Highway 29, let's keep our eyes open for 'dat turdy point buck!'" Bogey joked.

We were only a few minutes out of Wausau, it seemed, and arrived at the course as the guys were finishing up golf. We snagged a couple of golf cars and gave ourselves a quick tour of the course. I took a picture of my three friends at the granite pedestal marking the course's namesake.

We returned to the clubhouse and joined our colleagues. There was a huge crowd and people seemed to know something was up. I found Romy, shook hands and asked him what the donations to the museum were.

"No clue," he said, but pointed to the corner of the dining room. "I'll bet that has something to do with it."

Off in the corner, left of the head tables as you faced them, was something tented with tablecloths. They were draped over it generously, and a young wait staffer was posted there to keep the nosy people away.

"It's got to be some kind of mowing equipment," Tom Morris speculated.

Calhoun said, "It's another tractor. It's gotta be."

We enjoyed a fabulous meal of pot roast, potato pancakes and mixed vegetables after a crispy spinach salad. Desert was a choice between rhubarb pie and ice cream or apple pie and cheddar cheese.

After the prizes for golf were handed out and other business details were handled, we came to the exciting part of the evening. Romy was called to the podium to accept the newly donated items for the museum.

Frank Knebel came forward and presented Romy with the crystal ashtray given to all who attended the

GCSAA 50th anniversary celebration at the Sylvania CC in Ohio. Included with the ashtray (which was in the original box) was a program autographed by the keynote speaker, none other than Arnold Palmer. His father, Herman, who had attended the event in 1976, gave it to Frank. Romy was absolutely thrilled.

Next came Harry Cowe. Harry helped his assistant carry an old Webb Witch 12" ground driven putting green push mower to the head table. It was made in England and in great condition although in need of paint. Harry decided to leave it to Romy to decide if original condition on this antique was best. We were all amazed and wondered how long it would take to mow a green with a reel less than half of the width we now use. And all agreed it would be hard to push.

Romy was in total awe of the mower. "I've never even seen one," he said as he gave it close inspection.

Rod MacDonald was next; his donation was a restored toy Tonka 1954 Ford pickup truck, about 1/12 scale. It was a real beauty and Romy was really glad to have it for the museum. "More than a few Wisconsin golf courses had this vehicle as a golf course truck 50 or so years ago."

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Finally, Gene Vance came to the podium at the head table. Gene was near retirement and at an age when tractors played a pivotal role in the operation of a golf course. And, as Gene pointed out, Ford made the absolutely best tractors, from the 2N and 8N up through the models made in the 1970s.

"My grandparents farmed in southwest Wisconsin," Gene said as he started his remarks. My grandfather died at a very young age in the early 1950s, and right before he died he had purchased a new 1953 Ford NAA tractor. This tractor was called the 'Golden Jubilee' tractor in honor of Henry Ford's 50th anniversary in the car business.

"My dad's older brother took over the farm, but my grandmother wouldn't allow him (or anyone else) to use Grandpa's new Ford tractor. It was stored in the granary under a heavy old canvas.

"Even after Grandma died, my uncle wouldn't use the Golden Jubilee, out of respect for her wishes. Maybe once a year he put a little gas in it, started it and let it run for a while, just to keep it operating.

"I was at the farm last year when my uncle was getting ready to start it, and we got to talking about the tractor and what would happen to it. I told him about Romy Orth and the WGC Museum, and just like that, he said 'you can have it.'

"So, Romy, here are the keys to this wonderful old tractor." The tablecloth tent was removed and revealed the mint condition tractor.

The clubhouse building was dead quiet. Then, suddenly, everyone started to clap. Romy hugged Gene and said to the crowd, "I'll do my best to take care of her."

We knew he would.

Once the commotion subsided, Romy was called to the podium again. Mike said, "We've got one more thing to give you, Romy."

With that he started his speech about Romy Orth and his importance to Wisconsin golf. Mike spoke about his contributions to the UW - Madison's turf program and the interns he'd employed over the many years he had been a superintendent. He spoke to tournaments he'd hosted, offices he'd held, and careers he had advanced. After his retirement, of course, was the birth and development of the famous Wisconsin Golf Course Museum.

"For all these things, Romy, and more, we present you with our highest honor, the DSA."

Romy was stunned. When a man of few words anyway is speechless, like Romy, he doesn't have much to say. But those few words he uttered, with big tears rolling down his weathered cheeks - "Thanks a lot guys; this means a lot to me" - were all we needed to hear.

There wasn't a dry eye that night at the Crossroads Country Club in Poniowski, Wisconsin. ♣



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