



Grams Takes the Helm of WGCSA

By **David Brandenburg**, Golf Course Manager, Rolling Meadows Golf Course

Brett Grams found his way to the position of Chapter Manager for the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association (WGCSA) through an unplanned route. But when you think about it, how many of us are doing exactly what we thought we would when we entered college. In reality the position of WGCSA Chapter Manager did not exist 6 months ago so it is unlikely it was anyone's childhood dream job. What is important to Brett; and of benefit to the WGCSA is the fact Brett is working in the industry he loves with people he appreciates.

Brett grew up in Waupun, WI and learned to appreciate the game of golf at Rock River Country Club in Waupun as a junior member living a 1/4 mile from the course. Brett's mom would drop him off in the morning to get in a round before swimming lessons or baseball practice. Although an active sports schedule kept him busy Gram's found time to make some money at a variety of student jobs. He worked at R-Line Foods in Ripon with Ripon Good Cookies and Smuckers Jelly, a cleaning job, and some clubhouse work at the County Club.

His mom encouraged him to find a job with more hours for the summer so Brett applied to work for Kris Pinkerton Superintendent at Rock River in 1989. When Pinkerton moved to Waupaca Country Club, Brett worked for Al Fude for a time until he left to join Pinkerton in Waupaca. Brett worked for Pinkerton in the summer and Jeff Bottensek at Stevens Point Country Club during the spring and fall while at school in Stevens Point. After taking a variety of classes in Natural Science, Business and Natural Resources, Brett settled on Psychology and received his degree while moving up to assistant superintendent at Waupaca.

Brett decided that he needed more turf knowledge if he was going to stay in the golf industry and enrolled at the 2-year program at The Pennsylvania State University, while continuing to work at Waupaca CC. During his second year at Penn State, Pinkerton moved on to Oshkosh Country Club and Brett was given the opportunity to take over at Waupaca. It was not an easy decision, when as a graduate of Penn State he had many internship and assistant positions around the county available to him. Brett decided to stay on at Waupaca and enjoyed the challenges and rewards of being a Golf Course Superintendent.

In talking to Brett it is clear he has great respect for his mentors Jeff Bottensek and Kris Pinkerton for the experiences and guidance they provided as he



Spencer, Nickolas, Nancy and Brett Grams

matured personally and professionally. Grams does joke with Bottensek that he only worked for him because he knew Jeff could help him get in the Penn State Program.

In February of 1998 Faulks Brothers in Waupaca was looking for a person with agronomic knowledge to supplement their sales team. Faulks was growing in a couple directions at the time with a bag line of consumer products and the Greensmix Blending operation that were both going nationwide. Brett along with Jim Trizinski and Christine Faulks concentrated on the Greensmix Maintenance section of Waupaca Sand, selling to golf courses. Faulks had sold products to golf facilities previously but Brett brought a new level of customer service and expanding product line to specifically help golf course superintendents. Brett hit the road to make relationships and the business soon had 15 products exclusively for golf courses through Waupaca Sand and Solutions.

I asked Brett if he missed the day to day golf course activity and although he did, having a growing family he appreciated having weekends off and normal working hours. As a benefit Gram's still worked in the industry and now he could help many golf courses and the superintendents.

Brett's family entered the apartment business and he started to feel the time constraints that come with owning your own business. As luck would have it he took an opportunity to reduce his hours at Waupaca

Sand from 50 to 60 a week to 4-10 hour days. As the apartment business grew into more apartments Brett reduced his hours to around 20 hours per week.

This relationship worked well until with the economic challenges facing all companies Bob Faulks approached Brett and suggested he should go back to full time to grow new business or should consider moving on to allow a new salesperson the opportunity. This happened to be the same time the WGCSA Board of Directors was beginning the process of creating the position of Chapter Manager. Brett who had been the vendor liaison to the board gave up that position when he left Waupaca Sand and soon was considering being an applicant for the Chapter Manager himself.

WGCSA Chapter Manager is a natural fit for Brett given his varied experience in the industry. Golf Course Superintendent at Waupaca Country Club, sales with Waupaca Sand & Solutions, WGCSA Board Vendor Liaison, Northern Great Lakes Golf Course Superintendents Association committee service, and Past President of the Wisconsin Sports Turf Managers Association all provided Brett the experiences he will need to lead our chapter.

With a couple months under his belt, one of Brett's concerns is the membership has not been able to see the fruits of his labor. So far much of Brett's work has been behind the scenes laying the foundation for the future. Brett has updated our antiquated and duplicated member database, is re-creating WGCSA.org and creating the Industry Partner Program to give recognition and sponsorship opportunities to our vendor members in an organized fashion.

Brett realizes he will have some continuing challenges guiding our association and providing service to our members. He pointed out although agronomic systems are not changing that much, communication is changing rapidly as e-mail and websites are the norm, and some members are using facebook, twitter and other online sites to communicate while others don't even have a computer.

Product re-registration and regulation are important member concerns and Brett will be able to organize and lead the members into action when needed to head off unfair and unwise restrictions.

Gram's main goal is to ensure the members feel they are part of the association which is a challenge given the scope of location and differing roles members play. It is important to get information out to all the members. Although Brett sees the national association (GCSAA) taking a greater role in chapter administration and communication, he points out what is good for other states may not be what the Wisconsin members want so it is important to keep our chapter individuality.



Even when coaching the team Brett's golf allegiance comes out with the Titleist Hat.

Brett looks forward to working with leaders of related golf and turf organizations including Monroe Miller and the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association Board to the betterment of both organizations. Brett is proud of the funds the WTA has raised for Turf Fellowships and their endowment fund.

With today's economic challenges Brett feels we need to expand member educational opportunities to help quality managers adapt and survive into the future. He also feels we need to increase our educational opportunities for assistants and staff members to allow them to increase their ability and receive value for their WGCSA memberships. Gram's also sees the opportunity to expand the membership roles by reaching out to non-members to see what we can offer them that they may be missing.

Golf is not just Brett's career choice but it brought him and his wife Nancy together when she was a waitress at Waupaca Country Club. Brett joked that Nancy got him lunch when he was working. Nancy is now an elementary music teacher and although Brett shares an appreciation for music, he does not share Nancy's musical talent.

The Gram's live in Waupaca with their children Spencer 9 and Nickolas 10. The Waupaca area offers plenty to do and the family enjoys fishing on the Waupaca area lakes with their fishing boat. The kids are active in youth baseball, golf and hockey and Brett coaches hockey and golf.

Being the first at anything brings challenges but also the opportunity to set the achievement bar high. As the chapters main man, Brett will increase WGCSA's visibility and importance in the overall golf industry.🌱