



Full-Course Press

By **Jake Schneider**, Assistant Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

The Cubs winning the World Series. Pigs flying. A snowball surviving in Hell. Squeezing blood from a turnip. In my limited time in this industry, the previous list seems more likely to occur than seeing a story in the popular media about the benefits that golf courses provide to their surrounding communities. Ok, to legitimize this article, such a story has an approximately 4000% greater chance of appearing than the Cubbies odds of hoisting the Commissioner's Trophy anytime soon. I digress...

Mere miles from the heart of downtown Madison, I have the privilege of working on a property that is littered with blue jays, orioles, squirrels, cardinals, countless other songbirds and more squirrels. Red-tailed hawks that nest near the top of an adjacent smoke stack circle the property daily and keep our droves of squirrels on their toes at all times (natural selection is alive and well at Blackhawk). In 2009, a family of five turkeys was spotted

on an almost daily basis by 14th and 15th holes, and several deer who apparently took a wrong turn in Albuquerque graced us with their presence. Besides being a virtual wildlife refuge within the hustle and bustle of city life, the turfgrass that lines the course converted thousands of pounds of carbon dioxide into oxygen and allowed millions of gallons of rainwater to filter safely into our ever-depleting underground aquifers. And, the good news doesn't stop there... Just like every other year, several charitable organizations were able to raise thousands of dollars through outings, our members were able to escape their homes and offices for some fresh air and even a little bit of exercise, and me and my fellow Blackhawk employees were fortunate enough to remain gainfully employed.

My (slightly educated) guess is that most of what I just described at Blackhawk could be a narrative of just about any course in the state. So, since I'm preaching to the



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choir, what's my point? Well, with all of the personal, social, and environmental good that comes from our courses, why is it that our industry attracts so much negative attention? (I hope that a question can answer a question) Sure, a lot of the reason is due to the mostly unfounded perception that golf courses are polluters that contribute to surface and groundwater degradation and mysterious illnesses, but I would also argue that we are partially to blame. Although I recognize that there seems to be an inherent humility that comes with our profession, standing in the shadows may not always be appropriate, and I believe that we must do more as an association to generate positive publicity. Following are a couple of positive press generating ideas that have been bouncing around in my mostly-hollow mind:

1. *Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents' Association Environmental Stewardship Award.* Although the proposed title is bulky and uses all of the more-than-four-letter words in my vocabulary, I hope that you get my point. It pains me to no end to admit that the idea came courtesy

of our purple-clad neighbors to the west. After reading about Mr. Paul Diegnau, CGCS being awarded the 2009 Minnesota GCSA Environmental Award, I thought to myself, "Why don't we have an award like that for our association." Although anyone deserving may apply for GCSAA's Environmental Leaders in Golf Award, a similar Wisconsin-based award would shine the spotlight on a deserving course and superintendent in an extremely positive manner on a yearly basis.

2. *Audubon Certification.* Currently, there are only seven Audubon Certified golf courses in Wisconsin. Seven. To me, that's an astoundingly low number. At Blackhawk, we recently began the process of becoming certified. While the 60-plus page packet that you receive seems daunting at first, it becomes very manageable when broken into sections, and it provides a wonderful means of assessing the impact of your maintenance on the environment and scheming for ways to improve. Becoming certified by an organization as well respected as Audubon International would do nothing but reap benefits to you and your course, while doing right by the environment.
3. *Superintendent of the Year.* At one point, I was actually considering writing an article about how absurd and arbitrary I thought it was that the WPGA names pros of the year. In some aspects, naming any one person the superintendent of the year probably is absurd and arbitrary. Considering the wide range of budgets, weather conditions, and standards, among others, determining a recipient would be a daunting task, to say the least. However, at the same time, with so many hard-working, driven and dedicated superintendents scattered throughout our great state it would also be hard to go wrong.

If the day comes that positive stories about golf courses outnumber the negative ones, I might even be OK with a championship run by the Cubbies, maybe. 🌱

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