



# President Brian Zimmerman

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

In the short time I spent in the office of the new President of the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association it was clear Brian Zimmerman is a man in demand as Chief of Operations of the Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation and Culture. Between the phone, pop-in visitors and his blackberry sounding off for new e-mails there is a lot of activity going on in the Milwaukee County Parks office.

Zimmerman takes the distractions and hustle in stride, never losing track of where we were in our discussion. I did learn a guarded secret in how Brian discourages pop-in visitors from taking too much of his time.

Brian Zimmerman grew up in Bellville WI on a 220 acre cash grain and beef operation. He took up the game of golf with his Grandfather a retired dairy farmer. As most farmers Grandpa was an early riser and took the then 10 year old Brian out to Lake Ripley County Club at 5:30 am to play. That led to Brian seeing the golf course maintenance staff in action with their various practices and pieces of equipment.

The WGCSA President started his busy lifestyle early on and had numerous jobs and activities many at the same time. He shared his shortest job was 2 days helping with a hog farm. If the stink was not bad enough the pigs trying to eat his boots led Brian to look for fresh air in other places.

Besides golf course work starting at Nakoma with Randy Smith and Chuck Frasier, Brian had some fascinating side jobs in order to avoid student loans. Brian worked security for concerts and events including backstage work for Rush, Kenny Rodgers, Tanya Tucker and the Black Crows. Between that job and tending bar I am not sure how he found time for sleep given golf course work starts at dawn!

As a student at UW Madison Brian did a formal internship at Maple Bluff Country Club working for Tom Harrison and his Senior Project was work on the 6th Green at Nakoma Country Club. He enjoyed and gained valuable experience from the many construction projects going on at Nakoma over the years.

After graduation Zimmerman was hired as Assistant Superintendent for Gary Johnson at Brynwood Country Club from 1995 to 1998. Then looking to expand his on the job experience Brian went to the municipally owned Washington County Golf Course as the first ever Assistant Superintendent of the newly



Brian, Jill and Carter Zimmerman

constructed Arthur Hills designed layout.

At Washington County Zimmerman was able to experience the public side of the business and the challenges daily fee public golf brings as well as helping put the finishing touches to the new course.

In fall of 1999 Brian was looking for a Superintendents position and luckily had three offers at once and choose Chikaming Country Club in Lakeside MI. He was attracted by the 1920's era design and the opportunity to bring the course up to modern standards. The private course is set about 300 yards from Lake Michigan and is a second or third club for many of its members who come from out of town for summer weekends and vacations.

The club hosted around 12,000 rounds per year mainly in the months of June, July and August. With club support Zimmerman was able to improve the facility with a new irrigation system, redoing 10 of the 18 tee complexes, and a general upgrade to conditions and systems.

The par 71 layout plays 6,384 yards with a slope of 133 and features small greens and mature trees.

After three whirlwind years of improvements to Chikaming the Zimmermans were looking to return to

Wisconsin so Brian applied for and interviewed for the job as Golf Course Superintendent at Brown Deere Golf Course, owned and operated by Milwaukee County and then host to the Greater Milwaukee Open. I suppose you are expecting to hear Brian got that job and worked his way up through the Milwaukee County Golf Division.

No, Brian did not get that job. It went to Tim Wegner who is still there today. Instead on his way home to Michigan from the interview, he received a call and was offered the position of Golf Manager for Milwaukee County overseeing all the golf operations. He was given the task to modernize and evolve the 15 individual golf operations while needing to produce 5 million in revenue.

When Brian left the private club industry and went to Washington County Golf Course it would be considered a lateral or possibly a backwards move for the young professional by some in the industry. However in hindsight the year stop at the Washington County owned facility, gave him municipal experience and helped him obtain his job with Milwaukee County.

In 2007 after leading the golf operations for 5 years Brian became acting Chief of Operations of the entire Milwaukee County Parks Division performing both jobs for a time until the position was permanent.

The Milwaukee County Park system has over 140 different properties covering 15,000 acres, 250 full time employees and 1,200 seasonal employees. Brian has used his leadership and experience to guide his way around the county system. In 2009 the Milwaukee County Parks System was awarded the Gold Medal Award from the National Recreation and Parks Association.

Zimmerman wrestled in high school and is a certified wrestling official. He coached 2 years in Michigan, 1 at Whitnall High School and 2 years at Marquette High School before the time commitment became too much to balance with family and work.

Brian's many college jobs not only allowed him to leave school without any loans it also led to marriage. Brian met his wife Jill when he was bartending in Madison although they did not start dating until he was in Milwaukee. Jill is an aid at the Maple Grove Elementary School in the Greenfield School District. Jill and Brian have a son Carter who attends Cedar Hills Elementary which Brian joked sounds more like a nursing home than a school. Carter is busy like dad and enjoys swimming and dirt bikes. Fortunately he and his friends have a nearby property where they can ride safely.

Brian joined the Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Board of Directors in 2003 and has been preparing for the presidency ever since as he worked his way up the leadership ladder.

The new President of the WGCSA is looking forward to seeing member growth as the economy improves and

the Chapter Manager can reach out to clubs who have not been involved in the past. This year marks the beginning of the Industry Partner Plan to enable our vendors to support the association in an organized easy to choose format while reaching out to their customers.

Also new this year is the use of the Golf Wisconsin for Turf Research Program to allow the WGCSA members raise money for turf research at the O.J. Noer Research Facility. This new program will auction off rounds of golf to the public. This idea, modeled after other chapters similar programs does not require us to reach out to our vendors or clubs but to golfers who will be receiving a value while supporting the turf industry.

As a busy professional and family man Brian welcomes the hiring of our first Chapter Manager Brett Grams and looks forward to the effeminacy Brett will bring the board and chapter overall. Zimmerman has found board service a rewarding and educational experience and invites all WGCSA members to get involved.

The association is in good hands with Brian at the helm and his contacts in Milwaukee leave him a highly recognized figure in the Wisconsin Golf Industry. Congratulations Brian! 🌱



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