

Long Days, Short Weeks

By David Brandenburg, Editor, The Grass Roots

Midwinter comes every year but it seems as I get older the period goes by faster. The days seem to go by at the same speed but the weeks and months fly by. One day we are celebrating New Years and before you know it you're wondering why the tee markers do not have a fresh coat of paint on them yet because the course might open next week.

For areas north of Milwaukee there has been no shortage of snow days and as I put the finishing touches on this issue the "Blizzard of the Decade" is bearing down on us. Outside of a near complete snow-melt in late December this winter has been consistently cold

in the Fond du Lac area.

The brightest part of the second half of winter is the lengthening of daylight as we move through February. After Dec 21st it takes a while to notice it but then one day in January everything seems brighter on the ride to work and in the evening as we prepare supper.

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to the committee that put together the EXPO for the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association. The education was great and the format kept things flowing through the day. Moving the EXPO to the Kalahari Resort in the Dells sure didn't hurt attendance as the main hall and golf break-out rooms were full. It has to snow or it isn't the EXPO but fortunately Tom Schwab had it snow the day before the show so it did not effect travel as much as other years. (See the article on the EXPO in this issue.)

Happy Retirement and Congratulations to Tom Schmidt, Executive Director of the Wisconsin State Golf Association (WSGA) who retired December 31. Tom served the WSGA for 27 years and 12 in his current post. Tom who was a dentist in his first career did a great job in leading the WSGA through a period of growth and the move to "Golf House" with the Wisconsin PGA and Golf Course Owners Association.

Welcome and Congratulations to Robert Jansen who will succeed Schmidt in running the states leader in golf. Jansen comes to the WSGA from the American Junior Golf Association (AJGA), where he was the vice president of player services. In that role, Jansen was responsible for all functions of the Player Services Department. He was also the main AJGA contact with golf federations around the world. Jansen was responsible for the creation of the Polo Junior Golf Rankings, and he designed the AJGA's Performance Based Entry system. Jansen was born and raised in West Bend, WI and received his B.S. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

GCSAA NEWS

Congratulations continue as we welcome Rhett Evans as the new Chief Executive Officer of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. Evans who was most recently the associations chief operating officer and served as interim CEO with the sudden departure of Mark Woodward.

Before he joined the GCSAA Rhett served as the director of parks, recreation and commercial facilities for Mesa, Arizona. For Mesa he oversaw two golf courses, the Chicago Cubs spring training facility, 2,600 acres of park space and a budget of \$32.5 million.

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EDITORS NOTEBOOK

Evans has a bachelor's degree in sociology with a emphasis in business and a masters degree in recreation management and leadership with a emphasis in public administration from Brigham Young University.

GCSAA has joined our state chapter in offering free job notice posting service for clubs and for members to view the notices. With a increase in opportunities posted it takes a little longer to view the notices at GCSAA.org but the positive of more jobs posted is worth it so check it out.

TECHNOLOGY

Be sure to be make regular visits as a member to WGCSA.com to keep up with association news and updates. Brett Grams is adding new features to the website on a regular basis. Waiting for a check from the club is a thing of the past as meeting registration can take place online 24/7. The job board has been busy lately and to offer clubs free postings the website is the only place to view some notices.

If you are not receiving e-mails from WGCSA make sure your e-mail address is up to date so you can stay informed.

Wisconsin Golfer the publication of the Wisconsin State Golf Association is going electronic at least part time. The magazine will feature three paper copies and three electronic copies. As a advertiser and subscriber in what is a great publication I am not in favor of this move.

I receive a large number of golf publications in print and electronically I can say I do not care for the electronic magazines. I may read an article or two based on the index but I do not go through page by page as I would with a hard copy and I sure do not read the ads.

Although I do not read magazines online I do enjoy the USGA Green Section weekly e-mail updates that have replaced the *Green Section Record*. I was pessimistic at first but rather than put the same magazine online, it has been replaced by weekly e-mails. Each e-mail has the first few paragraphs of 4 or 5 articles that you can then click on to go to the website to read or print off the entire thing. Some online magazines can take forever to load with slower internet or handheld devices where the e-mails updates allow you to pick and choose which files to load. This summer with the heat stress ravaging golf courses across the country provided a great example where the e-mail updates allowed the agronomists to provide valuable insight and information within a 7 day window rather than reading about it next winter.

Even though archives of *The Grass Roots* are available online through the Turfgrass Information File at Michigan State we do not plan on going electronic in the near future. As long as it stays cost-feasible and we have the support of our advertisers we plan to continue to offer hard copies of *The Grass Roots*. I think the WGCSA has the right combination with the website providing news updates and timely information while *The Grass Roots* offers the best of both worlds for our members. Quick updates and association news on the website and valuable research information in *The Grass Roots*.

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THANKS

I want to give a big thank you to the writers who make each issue of *The Grass Roots* special. We can consider ourselves lucky to have such a talented staff of researchers at our land grant university. As I start my fourth year as editor I appreciate all you do to make your publication one of the best in the country.

Thanks also to Chapter Manager Brett Grams who has taken the responsibility of invoicing and working with our advertisers on himself as part of the Industry Partners Program. It allows our vendors a multitude of easy ways to reach their customers while they support the WGCSA. Without advertising revenue there would be no *The Grass Roots* so we appreciate Brett's collection abilities.

Without advertisers there would be no

advertising revenue to pay our bills so a big thank you goes out to the many companies that advertise in each issue. As members be sure to thank your sales representative when they come around for their support of the WGCSA. Their ads and support of *The Grass Roots* increases your education and knowledge of the business. If you have a vendor you use who you notice is not in *The Grass Roots* feel free to do a little arm twisting. I will quote Randy Witt from a few years back when he said "*The Grass Roots* is important because it is the only contact some of our members every have with the association."

Thank you to Beverly Bergemann who has served as our layout specialist first as a employee of Kramer Printing and the past 4 years as a free lance contractor with us. Beverly has also been responsible for our inspiring covers for over 7 years. Thank you for

your service to *The Grass Roots* Beverly.

THE BUSINESS OF GOLF

The challenges of our industry continue as a few more staffs have been laid off as the only option to surviving the winter. Monroe Miller has a great article on that subject in the January / February issue of *Wisconsin Golfer* Magazine. For those of us with only budget cuts we are a step ahead of those laid off and for those laid off for a few months at least you still have a job and for of you who have lost your job you your industries support and prayers for you and your family.

It looks unlikely but hopefully gas prices go down before spring not only for the affect on our budgets but also the loss of money from our customers as more of their disposable income goes in the gas tank. The gas prices will also start effecting freight prices and add surcharges to deliveries and pickups.

Coming Events!

Monday February - 28th WGCSA Spring Business Meeting in Fond du Lac

Monday April 18th - WGCSA Golf Meeting at Geneva National GC, Lake Geneva

Tuesday May 17th - WGCSA Golf Meeting at Royal St. Patrick's GC, Wrightstown

Tuesday June 7th - WGCSA/PGA Super/Pro at North Shore CC in Mequon

Tuesday July 19th - WGCSA Tournament at Brown Deer Park GC, in Milwaukee, WI

Tuesday July 26th - WTA Summer Field Day at OJ Noer Research Facility, Verona

Monday August 15th - WGCSA Golf Meeting at Greenwood Hills GC in Wausau (w/NGLGCSA)

Monday September 19th - Wee One Fundraiser @ Pine Hills C.C. Sheboygan

Fri Oct 7th and Sat Oct 8th - WGCSA Couples Weekend @ Minocqua CC, Minocqua, WI (w/NGLGCSA)

Monday October 3rd - WTA Fundraiser @ Oconomowoc GC, Oconomowoc, WI

Tues Nov 15th & Wed Nov 16th - WGCSA Golf Turf Symposium @ American Club, Kohler

The "2010 State of the Golf Industry Report" was given at the PGA of America conference by Jim Koppenhaver of Pellucid Corporation and Stuart Lindsay of Edgehill Golf Advisors. They used to offer a repeat presentation at the Golf Industry Show but with the restrictions on having meetings during the trade show they were not able to find a available time. A written report will be available in a few weeks from Pellucid's website and provides valuable information on industry trends for daily fee and private golf courses.

You may remember Mr. Lindsay as our keynote speaker from the 2009 Golf Turf Symposium. I realize his message was not cheerful but it was for the most part accurate and important to take into consideration as we try to succeed in these challenging times. For many in the industry the year can be summarized with this quote from their presentation, "The best thing we can say about 2010 is that it is over". Actually many clubs in the Midwest did better than those through the southern half of the country as research shows northern courses have adapted to reduced revenues faster than our counter parts.

A brief recap of their presentation shows average revenue was down 4% across the country with 3% from rounds and 1% from price reductions. The area biggest hit was affordable golf at the average daily fee clubs, which seems to go against common sense but also that segment seems to discount the most reducing revenue.

A re-surfacing discount some golf operators are getting sucked into is "Groupons" or the discount shows you hear on the radio. Each station has a different deal but the average deal is the radio station or paper sells your rounds at a 50% discount. In return they keep 50% of the 50% and the course receives 25% of their normal green fee. Yes that sounds like a bad idea but businesses do it every day and it is sold to you as a way to boost cart, merchandise and food and beverage revenue and repeat business. Boosting revenue and encouraging new repeat business seems like the thing to do until you fully understand the math and the see the research on how many of those discount customers ever come back to your course.

The report shows that time is the biggest factor why people do not play more golf with money as a distant second. The positive for golf course superintendents is course conditions lead why players choose to play a course followed by price. For the all important repeat business the main reasons golfers play a particular golf course over and over is location. Or has Lord Harold Samuel or any real estate salesperson would say, location, location, location.

On a positive note based on weather alone Wisconsin had 8% more playable hours for golf than 2009. Thinking back at our weather and the humidity and rain for weeks on end it does not seem that it possible but my records at Rolling Meadows also show an increase in golf playable days.

We track golf playable days not hours as part of our weather records. Any day that has less than .25" of rain or is between 45 and 105 degrees is considered playable. Of course that does not take into consideration humidity, wind or days closed due to flooding on one had nor does it factor in days with .3" of rain but sun all day but it all averages out.

Fond du Lac had 204 golf playable days in 2010 (we were open 252 days) in comparison to 200 in 2009 (258 open) and 189 in 2008 (233 open). These numbers are part of our end of the year revenue

and rounds reports to follow business trends. If revenue is down and golf playable days are down, it is easy to understand. If revenue is down and golf playable days are up, we have some explaining and work to do!

I will blame it on common sense but will accept some of it was cowardice but I chose not to jump in Lake Michigan with the Polar Bears on January 1. I did go to the beach but the wind whipping the sand and waves did little to encourage me to go in. It is a short torture that provides bragging rights but the minutes after getting wet is torture just the same. The beach is quite a sight as it is packed with thousands of people with 2/3 spectators and the rest swimmers. People of all sorts and sizes with costumes and most sober but some still feeling the pleasure of New Years Eve celebrations or starting over right on the beach. People in their warmest clothes prepared for a quick strip down and jump in the icy water and those not prepared at all for the long walk to and from the car or what lies ahead.

The challenge due to the crowd is finding your things after you jump in. You're a little disoriented and very cold and you zig zag through the crowd so much you not sure where your clothes are. To fix that James Juoni (Assistant Golf Course Manager at Rolling Meadows) who was braver than me and took his third annual dip, brought a flag from his country of heritage, Finland. If being on the beach about to do stupid things does not attract enough attention you raise a Finish flag and everyone is your friend. I think a couple of the Vikings from the Capitol One Commercials came over! Actually a woman from Helsinki did come over to have he picture taken.

So if your looking for something to do January 1 go to Bradford Beach and have some fun, just don't look for me, I probably won't be there.

Spring fever starts to hit as February ends and March begins. The daylight is longer and hopefully we will have seen 40 degrees a few times. Don't forget the spring business meeting is one week early this year and you can register on line at WGCSA.com.

Thanks again for all who make The Grass Roots possible especially our advertisers and most of all the writers!

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