

The Grass Roots

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July/August 1994

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About the Cover:

Brad Wagner's favorite hole at Janesville Country Club is the par 5 fifteenth. A narrow fairway on this long hole leads to a small green with no sand bunkers. "Tournaments are won and lost on the 15th," Brad says.

Janesville Country Club is celebrating its 100th anniversary this summer, and part of the celebration will be hosting the 1994 WSGA State Amateur Tournament.

Cover artwork by new UW-Madison graduate Jennifer Eberhardt.

"You're only here for a short visit. Don't hurry. Don't worry. And be sure to smell the flowers along the way."

— *Walter Hagen*

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(Left to Right) Scott Schaller, Mike Handrich, Tom Schwab, Bruce Worzella, Bill Knight, Mark Kienert, Mike Semler, Joe Kuta and Pat Norton.

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BRACE YOURSELF

By Michael Semler



I had saved the *Wisconsin State Journal* from December 27, 1993 for a particular reason. I had this feeling that in July and August I might want to reminisce about the way things were and the way things might be in the future. You see, I am one golf course superintendent who absolutely, positively hates the months of summer. Never mind what I wrote back in May about the new season and the new challenges. I truly hate the summer months and I am sure this makes some people in the golfing community think I am just a little crazy.

The reason for this is quite simple. While I am watching everyone else around me enjoying themselves golfing, boating, at picnics, traveling, and doing other "normal" summer events, I, like all other superintendents, am working hard trying to keep the golf course playable and in the best possible shape through the most difficult months of the year. Now understand, I truly enjoy my job and the rewards that go with it. It is just that I am bracing myself for the difficult months of July and August.

Golf course superintendents may understand why there are people like me around. When you must face two months like July and August in the golf course management business, there are bound to be a few superin-

tendents with an attitude like mine. You see, I can't get excited about the prospect of having pythium on fairways, crews that seem to lose that little extra something as the summer wears on, and the endless hours I must spend at the golf course to make it perfect. The time commitment involved is very large and the days seem to run together, with no end in sight.

I know that those plans that I talked about back in May are still in place; we are still striving to make progress on the golf course. However, these are some of the most difficult days for golf course superintendents and sometimes things get a little hectic.

Now you see why I am treating myself to the newspaper from December. Because on that day the reported low temperature in Madison was a -12° F. Triple A reported having to make 900 calls to stranded motorists who could not get their cars started. The Wisconsin Badgers were excitedly preparing for the Rose Bowl and the Packers had just clinched a playoff berth. With those thoughts in mind, I will take a goose down parka over a golf shirt any day!

And so, tonight I am going to retire to my basement, make sure the air conditioning is set as cold as it will go, brew a pot of hot coffee, and remember how things might be in the

near future. I may even start a fire in the fireplace. Sometimes this is what it takes for me to make it through these tough days of July and August.

Oh yes, I almost forgot, I could really use a "New Year" right about now. 🍷

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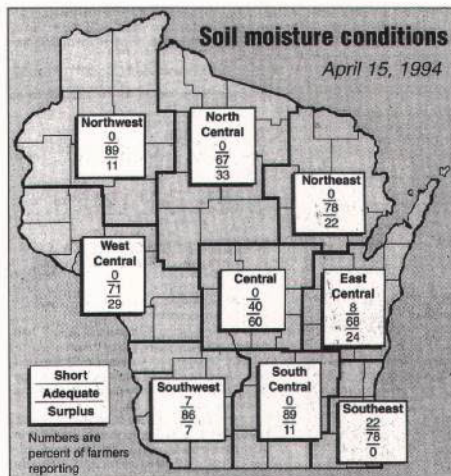
NOW THAT WAS A SPRING!

By Monroe S. Miller

Could it be that, for most of us in Wisconsin, the spring of 1994 will be remembered as one of the kindest and most pleasant early seasons ever for golf courses? I believe it.

I came to that conclusion in the second week of May. Parked under a mature flowering crabapple tree that had blossomed early in spring, I was covered with soft white petals. They were falling like snowflakes; it was an utterly delightful experience.

The whole spring season was wonderful. Except for some shortage of moisture (see graphic below from the Wisconsin Ag Stat Service for status at start of season), it was a great time for golf courses. As I think of it, there were more windy days than I would like, raising cane with those beautiful flowering crab trees, lilacs and mock orange. And, yes, May 1994 in Madison was the sixth driest ever.



Maybe the best part of the spring season of 1994 was that it was actually a season for a change. It started early enough to allow for more traditional opening days, proceeded toward summer with almost no "course closed" conditions and lasted until summer arrived on Memorial Day weekend.

Oh, there were some bumps on the road to summer. Nearly all received snow on April 30th; our town was

buried with eight inches of it! We aerified greens on the afternoon of May 1st, and the snow had melted away by then. Conditions were perfect for that dreaded job.

Here in our town the spring of 1994 will be remembered for an enormous crop of seed from *Poa annua*. And seeding lasted for an inordinate length of time. It was aggravating to players and golf course employees, especially those with allergies. Some trees produced "distress" quantities of seed—silver maple and American elm, in particular—and the oak trees on our course dropped an abundance of flowers. What does it all mean?

We are especially lucky to be in Madison in the springtime. The University of Wisconsin-Madison's arboretum has one of the world's best lilac collections and one of the best flowering crab collections. When these ornamentals are in full bloom, there is no better place in the world to be. The aroma of the lilacs is very nearly intoxicating. Again this spring, the collections were a sight and smell to behold.

What made this a great spring was that it was more than a fleeting moment between winter and summer. It reminded me of a spring I spent in the south while I was in the Army. Spring there lasted and lasted and was such a pleasure that even mean drill sergeants couldn't spoil it!

Summer should be as nice as this spring was.

There is no shortage of good reasons to subscribe to the USGA's Turfgrass Advisory Service. Here is some powerful evidence that even the best golf courses get help from the TAS. From the most recent list published by *Golf Digest*, 40 of the top 50 courses and 73 of the top 100 golf courses subscribe to the USGA service.

The evidence of the value of a visit to your golf course from Jim Latham or Bob Vavrek is overwhelming. If you

aren't a subscriber now, give serious consideration to adding your course to the list of those who are. You'll be in good company.

The Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey publishes a newsletter, and their latest issue seems to say you can put aside your fears of global warming if you live here in Wisconsin or elsewhere in the upper midwest.

Based on their study of weather records and geologic evidence from these areas, geologists predict we are in for some glaciers around here. Sooner than many expected, by the way.

Survey geologist and UW-Madison geographers used evidence gathered from studies of fossil pollen, the shells of ancient marine animals and tree ring data to arrive at their prediction.

The study of pollen in layers of Wisconsin lake or bog sediment shows that from about 12,000 to 10,000 years ago, spruce pollen was dominant in the state. This clue tells researchers climate conditions then were like those found in present-day northern Canada.

Ten thousand years ago, the pollen accumulation changed, and the spruce pollen was replaced by oak pollen and warmer temperatures.

The advance and retreat of glaciers in Wisconsin buried and destroyed evidence of earlier glaciers. However, study from other parts of the world show general global patterns, including glaciers. The chemical composition of marine animal shells in ocean floor sediments shows scientists variations in the size of continental ice sheets over hundreds of thousands of years.

Using such evidence, geologists say there have been patterns of alternating ice ages—each about 90,000 years long—and warm periods in between, each about 10,000 long. This has gone on for about 700,000 years.

It is known from pollen research that the warm period we are now in is about 10,000 years old, which means we are probably at the tail end of it. That could be a bad moon on the rise.

Core samplings from the Greenland ice sheet have shown that larger climate changes happen much more rapidly than previously thought, maybe over just a few years or decades instead of centuries.

Those of us who are "younger" members may see a shorter golf season yet!

We had to call Tom Emmerich for some help with our Toro Network 8000 control system in mid-spring. He solved the problem, and shortly afterward I received evidence that at least one advertiser reads *THE GRASS*

ROOTS. Below is Tom's invoice to me.

For the fourth straight year, new golf course openings have increased in the United States, according to The National Golf Foundation. A 23-year high 358 new courses opened in 1993

Somewhat surprisingly, Wisconsin ranked 9th in the country in 1993 for new openings. The "under construction" category shows Wisconsin ranked fourth in the U.S.! The game in the Badger State appears to be healthy—good news for us.

It sounds like we are going to have to start stocking catalytic converters for greensmowers and fiveplexes in the not too distant future.

The EPA has announced it has set

emission standards for "lawn mowers" and other gasoline-powered tools like chain saws and leaf blowers. Can our other equipment be far behind?

EPA Administrator Carol Browner, who has impressed few I've visited with, said "reducing emissions from those engines will help us assure all Americans have clean, healthy air to breathe."

That is a push and exaggeration, but you will get little argument from me that some refinements to reduce foul exhaust from small engines are necessary and indeed will be helpful.

The EPA claims the 89 million mowers, garden tractors, chain saws and similar outdoor equipment pieces in the country account for 10% of the nation's air pollution. They claim one hour of operation with a lawn mower creates as much pollution as 11 1/2 hours of driving a new car.

EPA said the changes would cost buyers of new lawn mowers roughly \$5 more. By the year 2003, when the new engines are expected to power the bulk of lawn equipment in use, the proposed changes will reduce carbon monoxide in the atmosphere.

We will have company in this EPA small engine effort. Later this summer the agency is going after outboard motorboat engines. Those things really smoke!

There was bad news out of Milwaukee six or so weeks ago. Briggs & Stratton Corporation decided to shift about 2,000 jobs out of Wisconsin.

From a high of nearly 11,000 jobs in the state, the Briggs management had chiseled the number down to around 6,000 before this recent announcement.

Their plan is to move the small gas engine division and some other operations to existing plants in the south and three new plants at unspecified sites. The moves are due to begin in mid-1995 and wrap up in 1997.

One of the reasons given for the move was high wage union jobs. No doubt there were many others.

Many pieces of golf turf equipment are powered by Briggs engines.

Around the 4th of July, the National Weather Service intends to supply several cities around the country with experimental guidance forecasts called the "Ultraviolet Potential Index." The daily ultraviolet index will serve as a warning in the still unselected lo-

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cales when high amounts of ultraviolet light pierce the atmosphere's protective but thinning ozone shield.

The index comes in answer to the epidemic rise in skin cancer, caused by ultraviolet exposure, in Americans in recent years. Clearly, golf course superintendents and golf course employees are especially susceptible to skin cancer. Actually, other health problems are related to ultraviolet exposure, too, such as cataracts and the weakening of human immune responses.

The hope is that Americans will heed such forecasts and be more careful when they venture into the summer sun. It could be that long pants, long-sleeved shirts and wide brimmed hats will become more acceptable summer fashion.

The initial trials with the index, if successful, will become a standard feature in all local weather bureaus in the country in the spring of 1995.

The index will assign ultraviolet risk factors on a scale of 1 to 15, with 15 being the most dangerous. The forecasts will be geared to people at most risk—light-complected, blue-eyed people with blond and red hair.

The National Weather Service said the categories will be:

Minimal Risk (0 to 2): safe to be

unprotected in sunlight on a cloudless day for one hour or more; minimal risk of ultraviolet radiation.

Low Risk (2 to 4): safe 30 minutes to an hour.

Moderate Risk (4 to 6): safe 20 to 30 minutes.

High Risk (6 to 10): skin damage occurs after 13 minutes.

Very High Risk (11 to 15): skin damage occurs in less than 13 minutes.

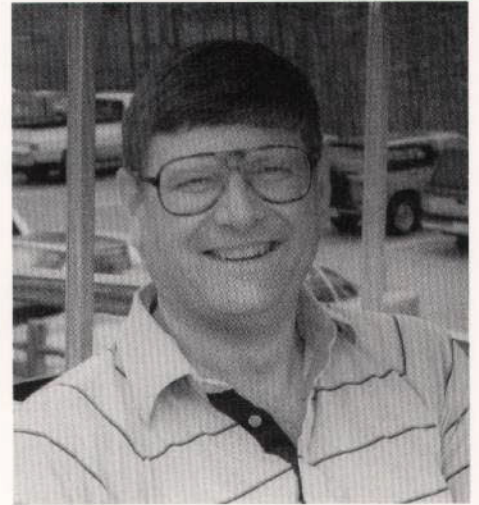
The intensity of ultraviolet exposure varies with geographic location and atmospheric conditions. The closer you are to the polar extremes, the less the risk of exposure. The most intense is, obviously, at the equator. Cloudless days are the most dangerous.

A NWS researcher said that during the height of summer in Chicago, on a cloudless day, the risk would be in the range of 8 or 9 on the UV scale.

Here's a frightening statistic—about one in six Americans will contract skin cancer in their lifetime. Malignant melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, grew at a rate of 321% between 1950 and 1989, with about 32,000 new cases reported each year. More than a million cases of non-malignant skin cancers are now treated annually.

Since so much of the work of a golf course superintendent takes place in the outdoors, we need to be especially vigilant of this increasingly serious disease.

Finally, a photo for your enjoyment. I took Don Steinmetz's picture at the Abbey Springs meeting. He doesn't look as though he is old enough to be a new 25-year member of our state association. He wears the years and miles very well. Congratulations to a great guy! 🙌



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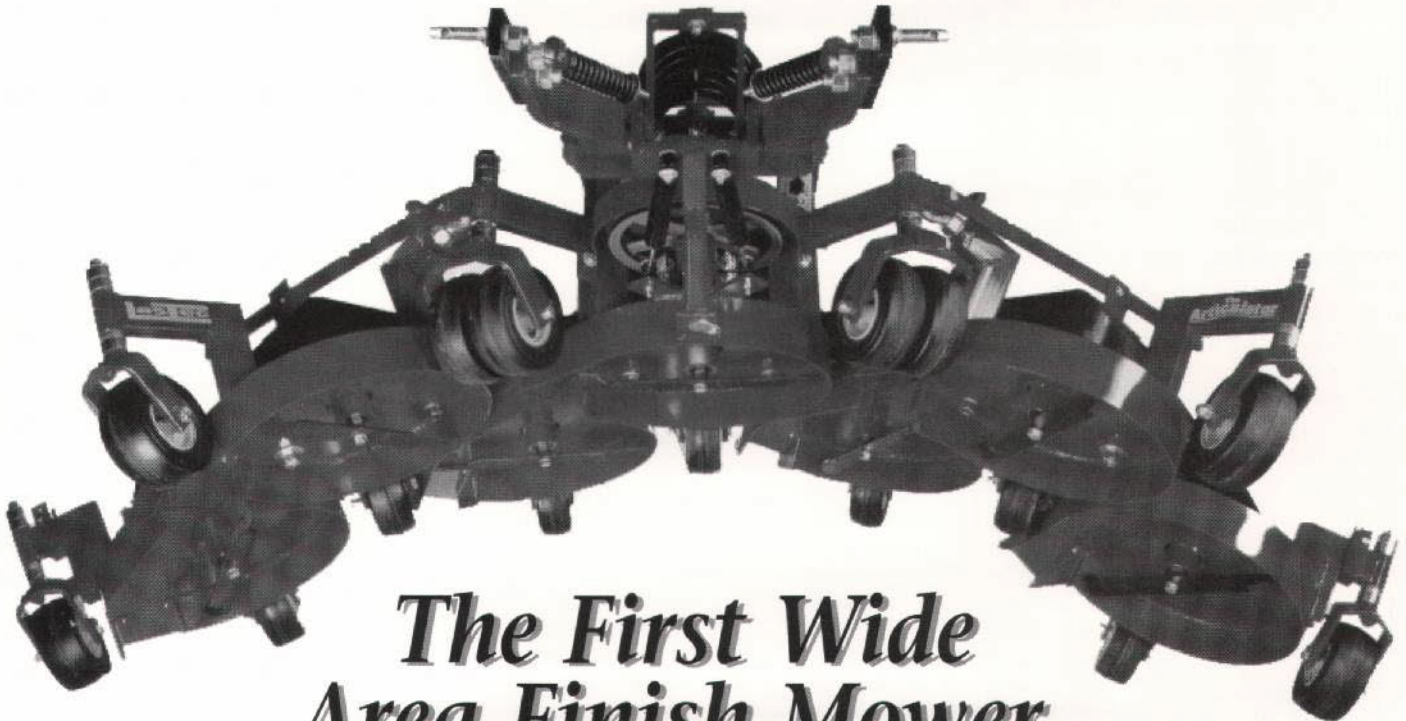
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The Ideal Country Club

By Monroe S. Miller

It was a lot of years ago—I don't recall just when—that I read stories Zona Gale wrote about a fictitious, quaint small town called Friendship Village. She was a Portage, Wisconsin writer in the years around the turn of the century, well known in her time. She spent nearly all of her life in Portage, so I just knew that Friendship was somewhere in our state.

Generally speaking, her stories depicted a pleasant, safe, warm and happy life of her many characters. Her words often made me think of the scenes in many of the Currier and Ives paintings I had seen.

And for years in more recent times I have spent the two hours around supertime on Saturday night listening to Garrison Keillor. I disagree with his politics—his recent foolish defense of Bill Clinton, for example—but his tales of Lake Wobegon, an imaginary town in Minnesota, are fun and humorous. They tempt folks like me to create an image of main street, Bunson Motors, the Chatterbox Cafe, the L.W. Lutheran Church and all else he talks about in that little village. Lake Wobegon is where “the women are strong, the men good looking and all the children are above average.”

I want to go there! And to Friendship Village as well.

The intrigue of these special places has more than a few times inspired me to think about the perfect golf course. Where would it be? What would it look like? How's the weather there? What's its name? Who designed it?

Nowhere have I been able to find out about such a golf course. The only way to satisfy my curiosity is to let my imagination create it.

So here it is. I have named it after the one-room rural Wisconsin school I attended—The Ideal School, the road past our farm—Ideal Road, and our 4-H Club—The Ideal Hilltoppers.

Come visit with me the Ideal Country Club.

Ideal Country Club is located in the driftless area of western Wisconsin.

The terrain is rolling—not severe, by any means—but with just a hint in a place or two of the prairie grasslands on west of it. It is an interesting and beautiful piece of ground.

The Club owns 320 acres although the course occupies far less. This many acres allows for natural perimeter areas and lots of privacy.

There is a modestly-sized natural lake, and as with the stream running through the course, it is spring fed. Because of the way the stream evolved geologically, it never floods and stream bank erosion is never a problem. The lake is weed-free and a deep blue-green in color. Nearly all the golf holes involve either the lake or the stream at some place.

There are many quiet, out-of-the-way places on the golf course. Players always have a sense of solitude and seldom encounter or even see others playing at the same time.

God was kind when he created this piece of property—it is a golf course superintendent's dream come true. The soils are either sandy loam or loam and extremely well drained. There are no rocks within three feet of the surface.

During the course construction practically no soil was disturbed. The result is a complete absence of problem areas due to compaction, profile disruption or destruction of natural drainage.

Since it is an upland site, the landscape is home to climax vegetation typical of that part of the Badger State. Mature oak (many species), hickory, sugar maple, locust and ash are especially impressive. Here and there are groups of evergreens—white pine, cedar and spruce—which are valuable accents to the course and its surroundings.

The Club has defined golf holes only with plants that were moved from elsewhere on the property. Every woody plant had its start in life on these grounds. Wildflowers abound and in the springtime members com-

pete to see who finds the first Lady Slipper, the first bloodroot, the first Jack-in-the-Pulpit and the first bluebell. There are areas along the meandering stream that seem blanketed in blue when the bluebells reach their peak bloom.

At Ideal C.C. the weather is great. Its peculiar microclimate is best described as “moderate”. All four seasons are distinct. Summers are pleasant and mostly cool—“ideal” the players say—although it might reach 90 degrees F. once or twice a year.

Wisconsin superintendents would love the winters at I.C.C. Always, there is lots of snow on the course. It seldom gets above 32°F. in the winter months, but rarely drops below 0 degrees. There has never (NEVER!) been any winterkill on the golf course at I.C.C. Members enjoy ice skating on the pond for at least three months and cross country ski on the perimeter. Staff are given those same opportunities.

Spring is something else; it seemingly lasts forever. The blossoms on the plum, apple, wild cherry, haws and dogwood are colorful and enduring, especially since the winds are light. The average daily temperatures rise slowly with each passing day, bringing the course out of dormancy with ease.

Autumn at Ideal is the best of the four seasons. It is everybody's favorite as it builds from cooler evenings in late August to brilliant color around Columbus Day in early October. It is rather interesting that at the Ideal Club the sugar and red maples have color at least equal to the best New England has to offer. It must be the unique combination of soil and climate at I.C.C. Those brilliant colors are superbly complemented by the subdued visual feast of the many oaks—burr, white, pin, red, chestnut and black. Players say golf is great all days, but the ultimate times are in the fall.

The moderate and entirely pleasant environment at Ideal Country Club means very little disease pressure. The same is true with insect problems. There aren't even any mosquitoes. The weather and excellent soil conditions are so conducive to grass growth that weeds find it nearly impossible to get a start or toehold. They simply cannot compete.

Rain most often at Ideal C.C. comes at dusk and is over by dawn. It is weekly, gentle and seldom accom-

panied by lightning. The course gets something over 40 inches of precipitation each year

You would love the greens at Ideal. There is a gentle roll to each, but not so severe as to limit cupping areas. They are smooth, well drained (as all properly built USGA Green Section greens are), and appropriate for a course named Ideal. They present very few problems, only wonderful putting.

The entrance to the Club is understated and tasteful. You could easily drive right by it. But the winding lane to the clubhouse is flanked on either side by stately American elms, and the ride is like a trip through an archway of leaves. It is wonderful. Many wonder how Dutch elm disease missed these mature trees, but it did.

The clubhouse is a delight. Designed by Wisconsin's own Frank Lloyd Wright, it is built of wood and stone native to the property. It is a comfortable place for dining and relaxing. My favorite room is the library; it's a great place for reflection.

The clubhouse manager at I.C.C. is a congenial gentleman, very capable and bright. He handles his responsibilities with class and aplomb. He has a dining room that is known far and wide for fine food, and his social program is the envy of many. He never meddles in golf course affairs, recognizing he knows nothing about a golf course.

The golf professional at Ideal Country Club runs the best golf shop anywhere, offering goods and implements of highest quality at a fair price. He is a superb and patient teacher of the game, and he is especially good with junior players. Members are always anxious to play in a foursome

that includes the Club pro. He never meddles in golf course affairs, recognizing the he knows nothing about a golf course.

The board of governors is made up of the finest people you'd like to meet. Always there is a mix of professions and expertise. But they see their role as advisory, leaving the three managers—golf course, clubhouse and golf shop—to do the jobs they were hired to do. The board is generous with compensation—nary one of the Club employees ever has to ask for a pay raise. And they have many Club privileges extended to them. The governors are completely open, allowing managers to attend all board meetings. The chairman of the board happens to also be president of the state Audubon Society.

The players at Ideal Country Club don't like a lot of silly amenities on their golf course. Since it is a private course, they don't need a lot of signs telling them which hole they are playing or its yardage. They loathe any yardage markers, refuse to allow a half-way house and never ever want to see a beverage cart on the course. Most want little more than a flag, a stick and a set of tee blocks for each hole.

Members at I.C.C. certainly enjoy annual and perennial flowers around the clubhouse and its surrounds, but find them out of place on their golf course.

Really, the members are the greatest. During aerification, for example, they never complain. In fact, most thank the golf course superintendent for enduring the hassle and hard work for the betterment of the game at Ideal C.C. They are truly grateful.

Players at Ideal are walkers. There

are only five golf cars (all electric) and players are eligible to use one of them only if a doctor says it is necessary. They feel it is necessary to walk to truly enjoy the wonder and beauty and subtlety of the golf course.

It would be tempting to dream of the course that opens on July 4th and closes right after Labor Day. But the golf course and landscape of Ideal Country Club are so beautiful, so delicious, so wonderful that you want to give the players the longest season possible. As a compromise, only 50 rounds a day are allowed.

And none before 8:00 a.m. Also, no simultees are allowed. The course has only one outing a year—a fundraiser for the Wisconsin Turfgrass Association and the UW-Madison College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.

The shop at I.C.C. must have been designed in heaven. It is big yet cozy. Unlike most golf course shops, it isn't a metal building. Rather, traditional construction gives it the look of belonging to the wooded site it occupies. The superintendent's office is roomy, carpeted and equipped with the latest office equipment—fax, copier, computers and cellular phones.

Ideal Country Club has the latest in grass machinery. Each piece has a backup, just in case. And, of course, I.C.C. would only have Ford trucks and Ford tractors.

The Ideal Country Club is quite a place, an environment most golf course superintendents only dream about. As a matter of fact, oftentimes when you are visiting and touring or even playing at I.C.C. you have to pinch yourself to make sure you aren't dreaming.

It is that kind of place. 🌿

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