

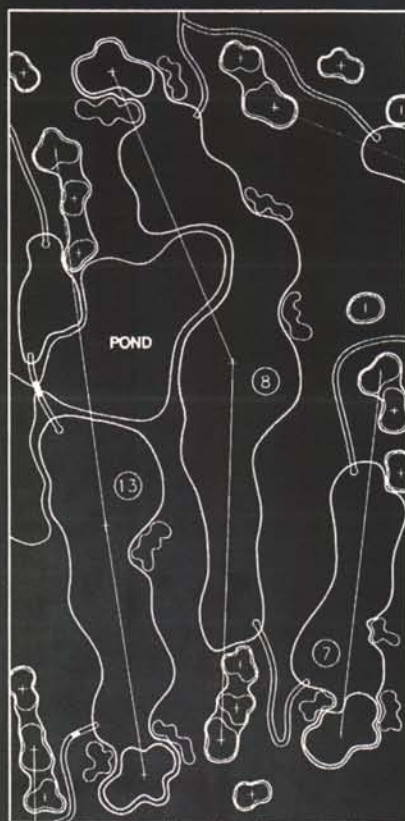
And they are serious, even if they are loud and playing only for tees or washers. By winter's end, there is a champion and his prize usually what every employee covets - an extra vacation day. Card games provide fun for the long days inside during our cold months at the Shady Dell Country Club.

The shop at the Old World Golf Club, in the winter, is more like Morris' - quiet, reserved, peaceful. You may not believe this but Oscar Bahl's crew, all over 45, are puzzlers. They don't monkey around; they are professionals and don't start on a puzzle unless it has at least 7,000 pieces. They eat their lunch at the picnic table and then move over to an oversized card table and quietly work on assembling one of those huge puzzles until lunch break is over. The puzzle they were working on when I visited early in the winter was, curiously, one of a scene of a golf

hole at St. Andrews. The pieces were extremely small and, not surprisingly, almost all green. I couldn't imagine their patience, but there they sat, with O.B. taking slow draws on his pipe, sorting through edges, trying to match colors and features while hardly a word was spoken. No radio or television either, just quiet time in a day during the quietest time of the year on a golf course in Wisconsin.

The group at Steady Eddie Middleton's was sort of a cross between O.B.'s shop and Calhoun's: they played cribbage. Well, modified cribbage. They kept running tallies of everyone's score, switched opponents daily and played from big homemade (years ago!) cribbage boards. Tees were used as pegs and each guy had his winter-long color. Scores were kept on the big blackboard in the shop. In early December a couple of the staff already had scores over 1,000

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points. The winner received a \$100 gift certificate from Farm & Fleet, courtesy of the losers. It is easy to tell that noon hours are fun times at Brezzy Hill CC.

Scottie Fennimore's crew seems never to be involved in any winter games, exactly, although to a man they enjoyed the same thing while relaxing and eating lunch. There are two TVs in the lunch room and they are tuned to soap operas. We always pour the ridicule on them every chance we have. But it is to no avail. They are glued, during the winter at least, on the screwed up lives of fictional beautiful people on the soaps at midday! Try as many of us have, we cannot shame them out of this, ah, somewhat unmasculine habit. We have serious doubts about the crew at Mt. Hope CC and often tell them, "you are beyond all hope!"

Our shop starts winter games once we know we are inside for the duration of the winter months. We have been into trivial pursuit for years. We have boxes and boxes of questions and take turns each lunch break asking those questions - one card per man per day. We have our own rules - minimal time allowed for answers and a grand total of points at the end of winter. It really isn't very fair - you need some history (read that as "age") to answer many of the questions. It leaves the younger crew members frustrated and tempts them to cheat. But even the cheating is easy to detect - a man who doesn't know the state capital of Illinois is not likely to be able to name the two former presidents from Vermont!

If there is a shop that is literally a treat to visit in the winter, it is Sanford Grant's. They are hunters and fishers and during the winter months they take turns each lunch period in preparing a major meal at noon. At the mid-morning break you may well see one of them peeling potatoes and carrots to put

around a venison roast they will feast on at dinner (which is what most people call the noon meal; the evening meal is supper). Around 11:00 a.m. it gets difficult to work, I would imagine, as the most delicious aromas waft through the lunch room, kitchen

and shop. Or, I've been at Mendota Bay CC when they were getting a big wild turkey ready for the Weber grill in time for dinner. The ice fishermen on the staff were set up on Lake Mendota and if the pan fish were hitting, you knew that in a day or two those fish would be in



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the deep frier at mid-day. I have eaten there when they were having a Friday fish fry; it was better than eating candy! Fresh fish, cole slaw (home made by a spouse), warm bread and real salted butter - wow! They may not be gourmet chefs, but they prepare solid, hot,

well-cooked chow that is perfect feed for hard working men during a cold Wisconsin winter.

Winter is what you make it. Heck, I'll bet half the world doesn't even know what real winter or snow is; that is not true for the more universal summer. As I have

traveled about Wisconsin in the winter and visited so many golf course maintenance facilities, what I have seen is that these days of winter are times of contentment. A golf course shop can be a cozy institution in the dead of winter. There is important work to do, make no mistake. But it is work best done at a normal pace and in regular hours. The personalities involved need a slower time in the year to recharge their enthusiasm, to reflect on the season past and the lessons learned from it that will lead to a better season next year. It is a time for planning, though for some that is an informal process. And it is a season of relaxation, a compensation we all have earned during the other months of the year.

However, when the GCSAA conference is over, when the days are perceptibly longer and there is early talk of golf in the club house, excitement rises. The scores from the winter games are tallied, they are put away for another winter, and staff start bring cold lunches again. Soon, always before you know it, there will be green grass.

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Sabel's Education, Career All Wisconsin

By John Mielke

Growing up in Green Bay, Joe Sabel was a lot like most kids who live in a city recognized as Title Town by football fans the world over. Back in the 1960s, the Green Bay Packers ruled the National Football League and put this northeastern-Wisconsin city on the map. Most kids who grow up there are interested in sports and they cheer for the Packers.

Joe was interested in sports. That interest landed him a spot on his high school golf team and as a senior he helped his team reach the Wisconsin State High School Golf Tournament.

He planned to attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison, study pre-med and someday become a doctor. That's a tall order for a young man raising a family. So Joe began looking for a career that didn't require at least eight years of education.

Enter Marc Davison, the superintendent at Green Bay Country Club and one of Joe's neighbors. Davison was well aware of Joe's interest in golf, so he suggested that Joe should study turfgrass management and become a golf course superintendent.

Joe liked the idea and set off to Madison with a new plan.

During his career at the UW - Madison, Joe worked at Nakoma Golf Club with superintendent Clark Rowles. After his junior year, he returned home to Green Bay for an internship with Davison.

This past May Joe graduated from the UW - Madison, and on hand to congratulate him were his wife, Holly, the couple's 3-year-old daughter, Madeline, and their one-year-old son, Matthew.

"It was a challenge," Joe said of his college years, "but it was a great challenge."

Armed with a good education and some solid training, Joe weighed the benefits of several job offers. He chose the first assistant's position at North Shore Golf Club near Menasha. Superintendent Scott Schaller became Joe's new mentor.

"Not too many young men and women come out of school ready to be a superintendent," Schaller said. "Some of the younger people in this business - and I was one of them - think they're farther along than they may be. Joe Sabel isn't like that. And that's one of the things I really, really like about him. He's very understanding of the fact that he has things to learn and he's going to challenge himself to go out and learn them.

"Some young people come in and think, 'I know how to do this, I know how to do that; I'm good at that,' and



UW-Madison 2000 grad Joe Sabel, assistant superintendent at NSGC.



Scott Schaller, golf course superintendent at North Shore GC.

maybe they are at some things. But they usually don't have the big picture. Joe isn't naive to that fact. He realizes he has a lot to learn. And (this realization) is only going to help him because it's going to accelerate the whole process of him becoming a golf course superintendent."

Joe agrees there is always room for improvement. It's something he said he learned from Michael Jordan.

"(Jordan) said that he was always trying to improve," Joe recalled. "This is MJ, the best basketball player in the world. I heard him say this when I was a kid and I was like, WOW, if he still needs improvement then just think of me."

And with Schaller as his coach, Joe has the opportunity to learn and improve.

"I want to hire (an assistant) who has a career goal of becoming a golf course superintendent," Schaller said. "I want the challenge of being able to work with someone, and then that person becomes as aggressive as I am in wanting to learn. Then the two of us try to maintain the golf course at a quality level for the membership.

"I told Joe that the day he graduated - OK, that's reality. Now he has to learn the big picture. He knows a lot from the technical end, but now he's going to learn how to manage people and how to put that all together to create his own program. He has to master our program at North Shore and then take the good points from that, the good points from Green Bay Country Club and the good points from Nakoma Golf Club and put together his own program."

When Joe applied for the job at North Shore, he told Schaller that he didn't think he had enough experience.

"I said, 'I'm not here to hire someone that has 10 years of experience.' I want to hire somebody that is motivat-

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ed and willing to learn," Schaller said.

And so far, the learning process is going well.

"Scott hasn't thrown me into the fire, so to speak," Joe said. "I'm just trying to get my feet wet. I'm doing a little bit of everything so I can train properly. A couple years ago I was a little worried because I wasn't getting all the experience I thought I needed. Now I try to learn every little thing and master the daily routines."

Like most new assistant superintendents, learning the people side of the business may be the most difficult. Just after graduation, Joe attended a future turf managers seminar in Racine, hosted by Textron Golf and Turf. More than 30 university graduates from turfgrass management programs across the U.S. attend the seminar each spring. Tom Alex manages a multi-course operation as director of golf course maintenance at Grand Cypress Golf Club in Orlando, Florida. Alex told the group about the challenges of personnel management - especially for the new assistant.

"I have a few employees, and I know who they are, who will test any of my new assistants - right away," Alex said. "And you have to learn to deal with that. Because if you can't deal with it on the assistant level, how are you going to deal with it on the superintendent level?"

Mike Handrich, superintendent at Racine Country Club added something at the seminar that stuck in Joe's mind. "Mike said, 'Be humble and learn from the crew.' I may know a lot about the technical side of turf management," Joe said, "but the guys on the crew

know the course."

Schaller agrees that working with the crew is key to the development of any assistant superintendent.

"You have to earn (the crew's) respect and that comes with being a hard worker, because they're all hard workers," Schaller said. "If you earn their respect they'll do anything for you. But if you don't earn their respect, you're going to have a hard time. Joe's willing to do anything. Hey, if we've got to grab a weed eater to help someone finish something, he's the first guy to do it. And he doesn't think he's belittling himself because he's grabbing a weed eater."

Joe realizes that another key to earning respect is through communication. It's something he learned in personnel management classes he elected at the UW - Madison.

"There are so many experience levels and so many personalities (on the crew)," Joe said. "Some people are here because they want to learn; they want to be in the business. And some are here because it's a summer job. I need to learn how to communicate with each one of them. I have to vary my styles, get to know all these people. I watch Scott - he's great - how he deals differently with each of the employees. It's awesome."

Part of Schaller's personnel responsibilities include preparing Joe to be a superintendent. Along the way, Schaller will teach him the three steps to success.

"Someone once told me that if you do three things, you'll be successful," Schaller said. "Be productive, do quality work and be efficient doing it. If you do those three things, you'll excel."

In two or three years when Joe starts looking for a golf course where he can make a difference, chances are he'll remember a lot of what he learned from Schaller, Davison and Rowles.

"I like a lot of what Scott's doing and I respect Scott, Marc and Clark - and I'll definitely want to combine their philosophies," Joe said.

But chances are, somewhere in the back of Joe's mind, he'll also remember the words of MJ - Michael Jordan - who stressed continuous improvement.

"Whatever you do you should never stop trying to improve," Joe said. "If you do, I think you'll get bored and complacent. That's why I love this business; there's always something to learn and some way to improve." 🌿





Normal, Wisconsin

By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

Our Club's annual meeting was on December 7 last month. It was cold and windy, and the wind chill made all of us gasp when we drew in our fresh breath of that cold air. The golf course had a thin blanket of snow and the clubhouse was decorated beautifully for Christmas. Mr. Stolper, past president twice removed, reminded me that on the day of the annual meeting he presided over in 1998 we were still playing golf! Indeed, we paved a golf cart earlier in that week of 1998. What a change in weather one can see in two years. In fact, before Thanksgiving 2000 we had to head out to the course and chase away an iceskater who was slapping a hockey puck around the frozen pond in front of our fifth hole.

The four winters that preceded this one were seasons of warmer temperatures that were shorter in length. People come to expect it, I guess, and forget that this is more near normal than they were. Wisconsin's average winter temperature is 17 degrees F., but the last four winters were significantly above that. Last year the average temperature was 21 degrees F.

As we have all learned, El Nino and La Nina weather patterns move into Wisconsin every seven or so years and give us mild winters. Fortunately, several years of mild winters are usually followed by normal winters. That is what we are experiencing now. It may even be that the mild winter of last year that led to our earliest opening ever will lead to a severe winter this year. We will soon know. Even the Old Farmer's Almanac predicted a colder winter for Wisconsin this year; the Almanac is almost

always right! Adding to the evidence of a strong winter is the fact that Milwaukee broke its record for the most snow ever in December. Super!

Winter is, after the Christmas and New Year's holidays, a waiting time. The tempo is slowed up and weather has enforced some seclusion on us. We are, in a real sense, waiting for spring and a new golf season. But the waiting is productive - professional meetings like the WTA Expo and the GCSAA conference are on the horizon. The waiting time is spent behind reel and bedknife grinders, over engines and in offices. The change of pace is an entirely pleasant one.

For now. In a short time, however, in the sunny day of February, there are few among us who aren't a little antsy, a little anxious, even a little apprehensive as we sense that the arrival of spring isn't not far away.

I heard from Bill Roberts at

Christmas. He and the family are doing well. Pat is still working in the medical field. The three oldest girls are now out of high school and Caitlin is four. Willie works some for the PGA, has ties to golf course management near Marquette, Michigan, and is finishing law school. He will take the bar exam in February, and I am assuming he will not then be in a law office behind an ambulance. I think he will do better than that!

As evidence that time flies, he and Pat celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary this past year!

Deer hunting is the fifth season in Wisconsin and it is a bigger event than many realize. This year's deer hunting season in the Badger State yielded a record harvest of over 600,000, ranking it first all time for the bow/gun whitetail kill among all states. We also hold 3rd place (1999; 494,116), 9th place (1995; 467,100) and 10th place (1996; 460,524).

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Although I didn't participate, our shop was responsible for its share of the harvest. Chad Grimm shot a 10 point buck that is now at the taxidermist. So did our association prez. Kris Pinkerton took a 10 point, 160# buck with a 16" spread, non-typical, in Bayfield county on November 21st. He also is going to have it mounted.

Congratulations to all who were successful.

As we get sharpening and grinding equipment up and running, we

may be more inclined to give a second look to a new piece of mowing equipment that would require sharpening. It was developed by the Wolf and Garden Company in Germany.

For \$30,000 you could buy a mower that cuts grass with a laser. Clearly, this machine demonstrates that the future is here, and it may not be long before such technology is made available by the big U.S. turf equipment manufacturing companies. The photo below shows you this new age machine.



It is a great relief that the presidential election is over. It is an even greater relief for the half of the voters (which includes me) who voted for Governor Bush. I could not imagine trading Slick Willie's dishonesty, immorality and lack of ethics for Gore's phoniness and lack of sincerity. The guy comes across to me as a fraud. If you read Gore's book - *The Earth in Balance* - and study Lieberman's record on issues that affect us, it becomes clear we will likely have a better chance of a fair deal from Bush.

Dubya may not be the sharpest knife in the drawer, but his more rational approach to problem solving will suit more of us than Al Gore ever would.

So far I am not aware that there is any substantial ice accumulation anywhere in the state. Ice is the most likely culprit in the winterkill of golf turf, so we can breathe easily. With the cold and snow, it appears that we will finally have a trademark Wisconsin winter.

Hooray! 🌿

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Of Unions, Elections, and Dreams

By **Pat Norton**, Golf Course Superintendent, Nettle Creek Country Club

Initially I'm going to say a few words about unions, like the kind we all read about in US history class, that organized workers and industries in early 20th century America. And somewhat like the kind that are trying to organize golf course laborers down here in Chicago Land... and unlike the unions that one grows in the garden.

Unions are not grown in the garden, you say? Unions and onions are decidedly different, you say? I say that you are probably correct... but they have their similarities. They are both useful and have their place in this world... but can be overdone and overused to the point of leaving a decidedly bad taste in the mouth!

There are, in my opinion, many good reasons for the existence of labor unions here in the USA. In the decades since the Industrial Revolution, labor unions here and around the world have been a real help to the working man and his family.

Indeed, if it were not for the formation of labor unions in various American industries and the laws in this democracy that permit/permitted this sort of labor organizing, American industry and American 20th century history would have been decidedly different! We might not have the great American middle class as we know it today!

Note how many other countries in this world have a much greater gap between the "halves" and the "have nots." Look at some other countries of this modern world. Almost weekly we hear about overseas sweat shops, child labor abuse, over-the-border multinational auto plants exploiting cheap labor, and guess what? Some of our very own American corporations are among the worst offenders at exploiting this situation at the expense of people in many Third World countries!

There are dozens of reasons as to why the USA has become so highly developed... among them the rise of organized labor.

Far more important in the development of our American society has been the idea of people having the freedom to pursue their dreams, utilizing the Judeo-Christian work ethic taught to each generation of American youth.

How many of us were taught to rely on the union to insure our workplace success? Don't we all distinctly remember our parents teaching us the values of hard work, education, and determination in our mutual quest to fulfill dreams? I really don't remember at all my parents teaching me or my siblings that we could expect a labor

union to help us through life's trials and tribulations... keeping us employed no matter our professional value!

Therein lies my basic problem with labor unions. I realize and accept their importance in many workplace situations, but many unmotivated, lazy people work the union system to keep themselves employed! There are many great examples of labor unions being truly needed and valued.

Unfortunately, there are too many examples of extreme problems with labor unions. There are, in my opinion, too many situations in which labor unions protect unproductive, low value workers, which makes for a bad situation for other industrious types... in whatever industry. I have many hardworking friends who are employed in union situations here in south Chicago Land; in fact, the Joliet area is heavily unionized.

They are all industrious, intelligent, creative and mainly concerned with making a good living and providing for



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