

Jake, our veteran mechanic said to me this AM that he hopes that I have strong teeth and a good digestive system...as he thinks I've bitten off more than I can chew in attempting to install my own oak railing up the staircase at home. He's a very perceptive guy...but what mid-winter man worth his salt doesn't like a challenge?

Hey, it's only a \$1000 worth of undrilled, unmitered, and unfinished oak sitting there next to the TV. Just hand me the assembly instructions and I'll be OK! This mid-winter man has already had his ration of at least two prefab pieces of cheap furniture to assemble this season...I am an assembly pro!

Oak railings, however, don't come with complete instructions. Their installation requires talented craftsmanship...which everyone around me doubt that I possess! So it becomes a game of proving to them...and myself...that I can follow through successfully on this project!

Superintendents on golf courses everywhere soon will begin making the transformation...come out of

hibernation somewhat...and start preparations for springtime...when I like to tell people that our golf course preparations speed up from about 20MPH to 200MPH in 48 hours! The mid-winter man is then a quickly receding image in the rear view mirror of that old pick-up...and those unfinished home projects start to blend in with the décor of the living room.

When that happens the impact of the mid-winter man is complete. He has once again left the household in a shambles...and promises that things will be all buttoned up and completed ...soon...and flies out the door!

The mid-winter woman learns yet again that when the golf course beckons, her man must respond. She knows that however trivial the problem, however unjustified the complaint, or how minute the success...he must be there. Her mid-winter man has departed and been replaced by this hyperactive, overenthusiastic, firebreathing creature who just can't get enough time in at the course!

The mid-winter man is extinct for yet another season. ♣



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The Elusive Spring Season

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



Wasn't it spring back in December? Was the temperature in southern Wisconsin really in the 50s in January? Why did, on some days, February feel like April?

Too often, anymore, you have to let the calendar tell you what season it is, not the weather. Since Christmas, it has been fits and starts, rain followed by a little snow followed by mid-forties temperatures. The grass has been green in places on our course most of the winter season.

The famous rodent from Sun Prairie saw his shadow on Groundhog Day, leading to the conclusion of six more weeks of winter. Six more weeks? We haven't had that much winter in total during the entire cold season.

Regardless of the mild weather, the really warm days of spring will absolutely be here soon. There aren't many frosty nights left with the air full of the delicious smell of wood smoke from fireplaces in the neighborhood. Gosh I'll miss that!

Pretty soon the winds of March and April will be doing their part in the pollination process for some trees, blowing pollen from tree flowers through the air.

It seems the weird unseasonable weather has the big Canadian honkers mixed up, too. I am convinced some of them never did go south this winter and when I have seen them of late they were mostly flying north toward Hudson's Bay.

Aldo Leopold always said the surest sign of spring was a skein of geese flying north. Professor Leopold, by the way, is the one who studied the Canada's and their families. He confirmed the reason you occasionally see a lone bird at the edge of the flock. They are the single

survivors of families that flew south in the fall; the rest of their individual family likely were victims (poor word) of hunting or possibly some tragic accident.

Although they can present problems for a golf course, they are beautiful animals that seem to provide road signs to two of our four seasons.

Soon enough the days will be warm, bringing the bobwhites and the mourning doves, buds and spring break, and golf players. And before you can catch your breath we will move headlong into summer and another golf season on Wisconsin golf courses.

May it be our best ever.

Golf instead of Badger State Winter Games? The prospect would have been laughable if suggested in July, but when reality rolled around, there were courses in our town open the last weekend in January and you could even rent a power cart.

Snowfall for November, December and January was well below normal, and the temperatures were well above normal and in the record-breaking range. At a point in January, Atlanta, Georgia had experienced more snow than Madison, Wisconsin! Lake Mendota, our big lake, may have been officially frozen for a few days but mostly it has been open all winter. We had 50 degree days and January and February (including a record 55 degrees on 1/27) and as I put these words on paper we still have not had a below zero temperature this winter. That has never happened before.

The Badger State Games, our multi-sport winter festival which is the largest in the country to feature

exclusively winter and ice sports, had to cancel some events for the lack of, well, winter.

I wonder if there are any red faces at the Old Farmers Almanac offices in New Hampshire. Their record for being right most of the time is marred by their forecast for this past winter. They predicted Wisconsin's temperatures for this past winter would be below normal in the north and the snowfall above normal.

Wow! Our land grant college – the University of Wisconsin in Madison – has moved up to second place among US universities in research spending. During the 1999-2000 school year the UW – Madison spent \$554.4 million on research and development.

The only university surpassing the UW – Madison was Johns Hopkins, which spent a whopping \$901 million because they have an applied physics lab that does classified research for the Pentagon. The University of Michigan, UCLA, and the University of Washington in Seattle followed Wisconsin, in that order.

The good news continued in January when it was reported that the UW – Madison was 4% ahead of last year in research grants. The College of Agricultural and Life Sciences is getting its share, garnering 15% of the total outside awards.

The statistics speak volumes about the quality of the faculty and staff at Wisconsin and is a measure of enormous success in the effort to make life better for all of the world's citizens.

Wisconsin lost two important emeritus faculty members this past

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winter. I was lucky enough to sit the classroom of each of them as a student at Wisconsin.

Dr. Gerald Gerloff was a professor in the Botany Department. His research interest was plant nutrition, no surprise when you consider he received his PhD in Soil Science at the UW – Madison. He also did postdoc work under the famed Folke Skoog of the Botany Department. Dr. Skoog is known for his research of plant hormones. I remember Dr. Gerloff as an unassuming, friendly person who always was helpful, in and out of the classroom. He was raised on a farm and educated in a one-room school in Nebraska.

What student who ever heard a lecture by Dr. Francis Hole could ever forget him? A faculty member of the Department of Soil Science at the UW – Madison, Dr. Hole was a delight. He loved the science of the soil and conveyed that to students. I recall a time in a lecture when he was wishing he could have a picture window in his basement so he could watch soil forming processes at work! He did research in the process of soil movement by earthworms, insects and other soil animals.

Dr. Hole was an accomplished violin player, which most of his students at one time or another heard him play. Dr. Hole was enthusiastic about Wisconsin soils and in 1983 he led a campaign to have the Legislature name Antigo silt loam our state soil! He also authored SOILS OF WISCONSIN, a book that deserves a place in all of our superintendent libraries.

There will never be another quite like him.

The Grass Roots won an award in the 2001 chapter publication contest sponsored by GCSAA. The winning entry was our March/April 2001 issue of the magazine. This marked 18 consecutive years the Grass Roots has been honored this way.

What is the winning formula? Teamwork. It starts with our unparalleled cadre of authors, who contribute their time and skills freely. The breadth of the material and the depth to which some of it is considered is impressive. Cartoons by STS add humor, and cover artwork by JLS invites everyone to turn the page and see what is inside. The

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From Dave Brandenburg and myself, congratulations to all those contributors. And great big thanks! ♻

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A Long Road Trip

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

In retrospect it probably wasn't the smartest thing to do. Short trips to local WGCSA meetings, turf conferences, field days and other such events are one thing. But it is a long way from Wisconsin to Florida and a lot of things can happen when four golf course superintendents (and friends) ride together to get to the GCSAA conference and show. I mean, when you get four guys traveling together who are normally in charge and making their own very independent decisions, well, let's just say there are bound to be opportunities for disagreement and conflict. And for sure there is a chance there will be a few adventures along the way. Let me tell you about our recent trip.

It was Tom Morris' idea to drive his big red Ford Excursion to Florida and the GCSAA conference. He invited me to ride along, and in turn extended the invitation to Steady Eddie Middleton and Bogey Calhoun. He knew we were all headed to conference alone and weren't taking any vacation time in Florida. "We'll have a great time," Tom said, full of enthusiasm. "And we will be able

to solve many of the world's problems on the way there. My vehicle has plenty of room and we will be able to save our clubs some money. We cans split our travel costs four ways."

Calhoun and Middleton thought it was a great idea. We made reservations at the same hotel back in August or September, bunking two to a room, and didn't think about the trip until after the WTA EXPO. There was minor disagreement about a departure date – Calhoun, of course, wanted to play in the tournament. But Tom solved that quickly with "then you won't be riding with us, Calhoun." We compromised on the seminar days, settled on travel time, and by deduction we then knew when we would leave.

Tom, since it was his Ford, made up a few rules. The first was that all drivers would abide by the speed limit. "Aw, c'mon old feller," Calhoun whined. "That won't be any fun."

"Then you won't be doing any driving," Tom threatened. "That won't be any fun either."

Tom allowed each of us one large suitcase (or two medium ones), a suit bag and a brief case. Calhoun cried again.

"What about my golf clubs?" Bogey wanted to know.

"Rent some when we get there," Tom replied very matter-of-factly. I'm not renting a trailer to haul your golf equipment to Florida. Period. End of discussion."

As we got closer to our departure date, Tom let us know about his travel rules. "That's the beauty of driving your personal vehicle on a trip like this – you get to make the rules," he said. "The driver will determine the radio station. I like this rule since I'll be doing most of the driving. I hope you guys like the oldies stations. Each of you can bring two of your favorite CDs to play on the road, but be reasonable."

"Tom, would music by Brahms and Mahler be OK?" I wondered. He frowned but said nothing.

Calhoun and Middleton groaned, but Tom gave me the OK, albeit grudgingly.

"What do you other guys listen to?"

Steady Eddie loved Frank Sinatra and said he'd bring a coupe of Frank's classic CDs. Bogey piped up with "my two favorite groups are *The Hay Balers* and *The Milking Machines*. Plan on some down home serious country music, boys," he said with the full knowledge that his choices would irritate the rest of us.

"Your turn may never come, Calhoun," Tom said. "I'm bringing my *Vilas Craig and the Vicounts Greatest Hits*

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I knew deciding on eating spots would be a problem, but we decided to defer to that as we went along. Tom liked the buffets since his favorite was the Saturday night, half-price, all-you-can-eat Kielbasa buffets here at home. I favored the Cracker Barrel, and Eddie didn't much care. Calhoun was actually easy – all he ever eats is hamburgers. If he were to dine with the Queen or England or even the Pope, he would order a hamburger and a beer to wash it down.

Tom and Steady Eddie agreed they should share a room since they both were obnoxious snorers. The thinking was they would cancel each other. That left me with Calhoun. He didn't snore, but he was notorious for practical jokes. I warned him not to bother.

Finally, we decided that since we were traveling on two weekends we would try to accommodate each man with two site visits of interest – short stops for sure and definitely not off the main route. Tom wanted to stop at the Ford truck/SUV plant in Louisville and the Ford/New Holland tractor factory in Georgia. Steady Eddie was thrilled by the prospect of seeing the Indy racetrack and

the Kentucky Derby's Churchill Downs. Calhoun was consistent – he was determined we stop at the Jack Daniels distillery in Tennessee and the Miller Brewery we would pass near – “maybe we can sample the finished products!” he said with a wide grin.

Me? I wanted to see President Zachary Taylor's home and burial site in Louisville. In his Army days when he was young he was stationed at Fort Crawford in Prairie du Chien and on occasion visited the Villa Louis mansion. And I also wanted to see an obscure Civil War battle site in Tennessee where the Confederates and a Wisconsin regiment my great-great-great-great grandfather was assigned to during the war fought. Our search for that skirmish site is where this story really begins.

Actually, the variety of the stops was cool and none took too long. There was no complaining or arguing or conflict on the trip. We were having a great time. Well, there was one conflict when Calhoun smelled Tom's truck up really badly and laughed hilariously about it until Tom pulled over and threatened to drop him off at the next airport or bus station. We all backed Tom, and Bogey got the message.

We spent an uneventful night in Kentucky at the



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Family Values Inn, a Christian motel. "We won't even be able to get a beer," Calhoun complained to no avail. "But we will get a good night's sleep," Tom said with confidence.

Early the next morning we headed for the weathered hills and mountains of central Tennessee and the Civil War battlefield I wanted to see. I knew about where it was, but not exactly. We exited the interstate and started the search. Calhoun and Middleton were sound asleep, a blessing since Bogey for sure would have been complaining about time wasted looking for something as unexciting as a Civil War site.

We passed through the center of a small town, population of about a thousand, given as the location of the battle in the history book I had with me. "Better pull over so I can ask somebody for directions, Tom."

Tom drove to the curb and lowered the window so I could ask a gal pushing a stroller down the sidewalk for directions. We must have frightened her, or at least surprised her. "Never heard of it," she said as she quickly went on her way.

"Find a gas station, Tom," I suggested, "and I'll run in and ask again." He did, and the clerk knew exactly what I was talking about. The directions were a little complicated, to

the point where I needed to write them down. It wasn't a major tourist attraction and it wasn't on any main road.

"Can we give it a shot?" I asked Tom. "That's the deal," he replied, although there was a definite enthusiasm deficit in his voice. We wandered up and down the hills on narrow town roads and as we rounded a fairly sharp curve, the big red Ford died.

Tom was flustered as he maneuvered it off to the side of the road. Calhoun and Middleton barely stirred. Tom popped the hood and was looking under it in a matter of seconds. I got out, stretched and looked around to see where we were. There wasn't much to see – we were deep in the country of the South. The landscape was mostly open, although I couldn't tell what agricultural crops were being grown. A few wooded areas added to the beauty. Odd as it seemed, on the left side of the road and down a quarter of a mile or so was a golf course.

"Probably an electronic problem," Tom surmised with surprising calm. "It will take some specialized diagnostic equipment to determine exactly what is wrong. We are going to have to find a Ford dealer."

"Tom, see that golf course?" I asked. "Let's hoof it over and see if the superintendent can give us a hand. He will at least know who to call."

We roused Calhoun and Middleton, told them to stay with the truck, and then we headed off for the golf course. We didn't see a single golfer on the course, so we walked across fairways and roughs toward the shop, which was clearly visible on the edge of the course. As we got closer we could see some activity on the green nearest the shop. "I think they're aerifying," Tom said.

As we approached the green, the small crew stopped working and watched us walking toward them. One of them started walking toward us. "Can I help you?" he asked as we met him. He was sweating and a little out of breath, obviously from working hard.

Tom explained our dilemma and asked if he could tell us whom to call. Of course, he was more than glad to. We felt bad since we both knew how hectic aerification was. Then Tom offered, "we are both in the same business you are and we are headed down to the GCSAA conference." He stopped in his tracks, disbelief on his face.

"You're kidding!"

"No," Tom said. "In fact, two more superintendents are back there with the truck." We could see it from where we stood, bright red and shining in the sun.

"I'm Joe Morris," he said as he extended his hand to each of us.

"I wonder if we're related," Tom said as he shook hands. "I'm Tom Morris!" We laughed at the coincidence.

"I'll fill in for you with your crew if you'll help Tom with the call," I offered. I helped push cores together with one of the guys while the other two started to shovel them into a Cushman.

In a few minutes Tom and Joe were back in Joe's elec-



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