

# Patty Knaggs Brings a Woman's Touch to Hazeltine

By GERRY FINN

Golf Course Superintendents Association of New England

Patty Knaggs has been living dreams all of her life. But, this time the dream is too good to be true.

"I'm not suggesting this is the final stop in my career," Patty said during a break from her duties as golf course superintendent at the Hazeltine National Golf Club. "But as far as accomplishing big goals and being able to apply my skills in ultimate surroundings, I don't know if anything could top this."

Hazeltine, of course, is considered one of the true gems in the constellation of championship golf courses. It was the controversial host to the 1970 U.S. Open and was the site of the same competition two years ago after a revampment movement headed by its original architect, Robert Trent Jones, and his colleague son, Rees Jones.

**"I'm familiar with the Open history of Hazeltine,"**

Knaggs remarked. "The course was exposed to a lot of criticism the first time around. But, likewise, it received all kinds of accolades when the 1991 Open was played here. Being part of an Open venue, that's what my professional excitement's all about. This is what I've always wanted."

Hazeltine—located in Chaska, Minnesota—is Patty's second venture into the world of the head golf course superintendent. She landed the position last spring after two years of running the show at another landmark layout, the Westchester Country Club in New York. Before that she was "our Patty."

In fact, Patty's experience as first assistant to Bill Spence at The Country Club convinced her that she had made the right decision when she turned away from a potential law career to try her hand in the golf course superintendent's profession. Those days at The Country Club are unforgettable.

Their highlight was Patty's involvement in the priming of the venerable layout for the 1988 U.S. Open. She was very instrumental in every stage of planning for and carrying out the programs that went into the maintenance phase of the USGA's premier event.

Knaggs was Spence's assistant for four years before she became such an integral part of the operation she actually handled the head superintendent's day-to-day responsibilities while Bill concentrated on an Open agenda.

**"That was the opportunity of a lifetime for me,"** Patty recalled her input into both the Open and overall scene in Brookline. "Being involved in such a prestigious event was a source of personal delight. Then, working with such an outstanding member of the profession (Spence) gave me a career outlook of practically unlimited promise. I can't measure how much my years at The Country Club contributed to my advancement in the field."

Patty's TCC years, in fact, turned into a risky commitment since she had opportunities to branch out onto her own as a head superintendent in the middle of her Brookline stay.

"I wanted to remain there through the Open even if it meant putting a hold on my aspirations to have my own job," Patty told. "When everything's considered, that commitment proved to be the turning point in my career."

**New England had no small part** in that career's beginning, either, since it was another GCSANE stalwart who got the whole thing started.

"That's right," Patty said. "After I had decided to put my political science degree (Syracuse University) in mothballs and see if I could make it as a superintendent, Brian Cowan (Eastward Ho) gave me a big break.

"I had gone through a string of 'no opening' responses from a lot of clubs when Brian hired me. Not only did he give me my first job, he pointed me to the turf school at Stockbridge where Dr. (Joe) Troll became one of my biggest supporters. He and Brian were a big help." The learning experience took over Patty's schedule after that. There were some lean years, some encouraging ones and, eventually, the chance to grow with the profession evolved in her association with Spence at TCC.

**The Hazeltine job has sprung** from those green years in New England and subsequent stopping-off place at Westchester.

"This (Hazeltine) is just about the ideal course for all superintendents to practice their expertise," Patty explained. "Hazeltine is strictly for golfers, administered by golfers. There are no tennis courts, no swimming pool. Members come here to play golf, period. Socializing is secondary. What's even better for me is that I like the arrangement just as much as the members."

Naturally, the tradition that's so much a part of TCC drips over to Hazeltine which apparently is determined to find its way onto the list of revered courses hosting USGA events. In keeping with that approach, its members demand championship conditions at all times. Which is the way Patty likes it.

**"That situation beefs up the challenge,"** Patty said. "But everything here is in the superintendent's favor. The golf course comes first, which means members put their money where their mouths are at budget time. Other than some unsuspecting catastrophe rearing its head, I don't see why I can't deliver a championship course from start to finish of every golf season." Patty Knaggs, then, has found her niche.