

# How Does He Stay So Long?

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MGCSA Life Member

I have often said that it is easy to write about someone who has a lot of interests and I am sure that individual has been found in the person of Ronald C. Fabian. Generally we write about former Superintendents. This gentleman has been around so long that I was sure retirement had taken place. Not so! The name Fabian has been associated with Winona Country Club since 1939. It was Ron's father who started work as Golf Course Superintendent at that time.

I had met Ron in March of 1953 at the 25th Annual Turf Conference held at the Curtis Hotel in downtown Minneapolis. He was there to pick up as much information as possible so he could replace his dad as Golf Course Superintendent that Spring. Thus as I began looking for retired "Soups," you would think that 45 years later Ron would qualify.

To digress for a moment — it might behoove us to know that Winona Country Club was opened in 1920 as a nine hole course. The course was designed by Ben Knight, a Scotsman from Aberdeen, Scotland. He seemed to have been a multi-talented individual. He was born in 1889 and



**Great Grandfather Carl Fabian aboard his new Worthington tractor. This picture was taken in 1944.**

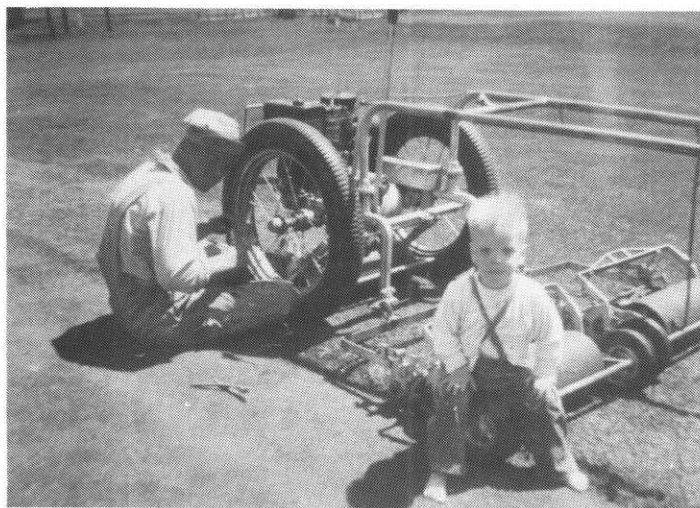
he wound up in Winona, Minnesota and was commissioned to design Winona Country Club in 1919. Upon the opening of the new club in 1920 Ben Knight stayed on as the Golf Pro for the next 31 years and retired in 1951. Winona Country Club is in a beautiful setting. It takes you out of typical Minnesota landscape and puts you in a New England setting such as Vermont. It is located in a deep valley with high, cliff-like, heavily wooded hills surrounding. The geology is so different than the average Minnesota Prairie Golf Course.

Carl Fabian (Ron's father) became Superintendent in 1939 and retired from the course in 1953 at which point Ron Fabian took over. Ron, of course, grew up on the course and began working as a 12-year-old making \$22.50 per 60-80 hour week during the summer. As Ron explains he did everything that had to be done in a crew of 3-4 men.

In 1964 construction began on the second nine and opened in August of 1966, thus Winona Country Club became an 18-holer. Three tennis courts, automatic irrigation and, swimming pool completed in the mid 70's brought the course into "Country Club" status.

In high school Ron became a musician specializing as an accordionist. He often brought his accordion to school and would leave directly from school for a gig. This was his second love and he found it to pay more than he could make on the golf course. He never abandoned the golf business (because of the fickleness of people in entertainment), music was his social expression. He got to travel far and wide, he

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**Ron Fabian working on his Worthington "Overgreen," the forerunner of triplex green mowers. Son Dennis is interested in Mom the photographer. The "Overgreen" had one mower mounted between the large wheels and two following. The operator was accessible by the long handle-bars. Photo taken in 1955.**

emigrated to the USA in 1909 as a 20-year-old with a background in engineering. His talents led him into many endeavors in many parts of the country. Several of his jobs were in association with the construction of Golf Courses. After a short hitch in the U.S. Army during World War I,

# Fabian—

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watched lovers spoon, bar room brawls, played at weddings, wakes and corporate parties. Even after he was appointed Golf Course Superintendent of Winona Country Club in 1953 (succeeding his dad) Ron worked days at the golf club and played with the band at night.

Ron has played all the "big-time clubs" in Minnesota and some better known out-of-state. Ron played the old Prom Ballroom on University Avenue in St. Paul, Schliefs Little City around the corner from my place in Inver Grove Heights, Marigold Ballroom on Hennepin Avenue in Minneapolis, the Playmore in Rochester, Minn., Avalon Ballroom in La Crosse, Wis., Pine Island Pavilion, George's Ballroom in New Ulm and the list goes on including a twice a year trip to Chicago to play the Aragon Ballroom on the North Side and the Trianon on the South Side. As we all know many of these ballrooms have disappeared and Ron has been able to concentrate more on his first love — the golf course.

When Turf Supply Company was an infant and this writer was trying his luck at sales, I would arrive at Winona C.C. rather late in the afternoon (like 4:30) and would have to seek Ron at his Witoka Tavern and Dance Hall. He had bought this place in 1975. Joan, his wife, would open the bar about 3:00 p.m. and Ron would help close it at 3:00 a.m. the next morning. After about five years of working 12 hour nights and 12 hour days they sold it. Ron has been very generous in praise of his wife Joan who carried the load for most of these enterprises.

Ron's outside interests never cease to amaze one. At the time of this interview he had dropped his wife Joan off in Stillwater as she was conning the antique shops and sharpening her eye for value of furniture, jewelry, trinkets,



Pictured from right to left are grandfather Ron, son Dennis, grandson Adam and grandson Lukas.

dinnerware and all those things that go along with estate sales. You see, Joan and Ron also handle estate sales.

Ron's son, Dennis, also has been a great support. Dennis started working for his father at age 16. Ten years ago he was named Assistant Superintendent. Dennis' son, Adam, (age 23) started working for Pat Shortridge in the pro shop and upon legal age joined the grounds crew. Grandson Lukas (Dennis' son) is a two-year veteran of the grounds crew. Ron and wife Joan have been married 46 years (1952). They have five children, 12 grandchildren and one great grandchild.

Ron received his 45-year plaque from the MGCSA and has 24 years as a member of the GCSAA.

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