

Restoring Minnesota Valley

By DAN HILL

*Assistant Superintendent
Minnesota Valley Country Club*

The summer of 1997 was a busy, yet exciting time at Minnesota Valley Country Club. Although we came through the winter well, we had a lot of work ahead of us. The club took out a loan to build a new clubhouse, build a practice facility, install a new irrigation system, drill a new well and undergo course renovation.

Clubhouse Construction

Although the maintenance department was not directly involved in building the new clubhouse, we were affected by the site chosen for the new building. The putting green and the well which feeds our pond would need to be moved to new locations. The loss of the putting green made installing a new putting green top priority. It would need to be ready to accept play by September.

Keys Well Drilling was hired to install a new well and cap the existing well. The amount of sand and silt that was dispersed in the process of conditioning the new well came as a surprise to me. In order to avoid the silt and sandstone from contaminating the pond, which is our water supply for our irrigation system, we routed it to the bottom of the 18th fairway. The fairway was then resodded with bent grass out of the nursery.

Practice Facility

We began work on the practice facility in early spring. The facility replaced four rarely used tennis courts and consists of an 11,000 square foot putting green, a 40,000 square foot practice fairway with a target green and a sand chipping

green.

Hartman Companies, in Victoria, Minn., did the excavation and started by tearing down the tennis courts. In order to avoid the large expense of hauling the debris offsite, the asphalt was ground up into class 5 and used to build a much-needed cart path leading to the driving range. This path doubles as the maintenance road.

The practice facility was then shaped, the drain tile was installed, as well as the irrigation system, and the greens mix was brought in. The facility was now ready for us to seed with Providence bentgrass and grow in.

We had a problem with crabgrass on the practice facility fairway. This had been the area under the tennis courts and was a problem we did not expect. It was a difficult problem to solve, as we could not find a recommended control for crabgrass on new bentgrass seedlings. We chose to spray Acclaim at half of the recommended rate. After about five treatments the crabgrass was gone and the bentgrass came in beautifully. The new green was being used by early September. The rest of the practice facility will be open by the summer of 1998.

Installing Irrigation System

A Toro Osmac irrigation system with a Flotronex pump station was installed. The system was designed by Eric Christianson, of Des Moines, Iowa, and we were very impressed with his plan. After consideration of installation bids, we decided on Midwest Irrigation out of East Dubuque,

Ill. Installation began on August 1st and was completed by November 1st, 1997.

The old system was used throughout the summer of '98. Because the old system was a normally closed hydraulic system, and the blueprint was not very accurate, we were apprehensive about starting the project so early. Not surprisingly, the crew with Midwest Irrigation had never seen a normally closed irrigation system.

A normally closed irrigation system differs from a normally open system immensely. In a closed system, if the hydraulic tubing is cut, the head will never come on. In an open system, the head would pop on immediately. Obviously, with a closed system a problem is very difficult to detect. Unless heads are consistently checked, the problem may go undetected until the turf is affected. Because there is no way to track the tubing, solving the problem is very difficult. However, Midwest did an excellent job of keeping the old system operating while installing the new one.

Perhaps the largest effect the installation had on our crew was hand watering the miles of sod due to the trenches from irrigation lines. With the exception of a few unexpected problems, the project went surprisingly well. I was very impressed with Midwest's professionalism and skill. I found it very educational and a great experience in general to work with this company.

Course Renovation

Although the previously mentioned
(Continued on Page 13)

Minnesota Valley—

(Continued from Page 11)

projects were major, the course renovation was our greatest challenge. The course superintendent, Larry Mueller has always felt that Minnesota Valley was a "classic style" golf course. The seminars and books on classic style courses that Larry has taken in over the years has only strengthened this belief. Larry took the opportunity to talk with Tom Doak from Renaissance Golf at the National Convention in Las Vegas. Renaissance Golf specializes in classic style courses. After describing the features of Minnesota Valley to Mr. Doak and his head shaper Jim Urbana, we felt stronger than ever that we had something special here. The information was presented to the club, and the board contacted Renaissance Golf Design to make a personal visit. Their visit concluded that Minnesota Valley was indeed a classic style golf course and had many aspects of a Seth Raynor design. Seth Raynor was a famous 1920s golf course architect who also designed the University of Minnesota, Somerset and Midland Hills.

The club reviewed the information and decided they would hire Renaissance Golf to consult the club on renovation. Although Renaissance Golf was extremely busy, they accepted the project and sent Jim Urbana. Mr. Urbana walked the course once again and then submitted a renovation plan. I felt very fortunate to spend a day so closely with an expert in this field. Mr. Urbana gave much insight about the features of Minnesota Valley and how they had been replicated from many old Scottish courses. In his renovation plan, he suggested we expand our greens back to their original shape, bring back some bunkers that had been lost over the years and rebuild tees that had been built out of character with the rest of the course.

We accomplished the greens expansion project by removing the thatchy bluegrass that had taken over what was once putting surface. The greens lost their original shape over the years, mainly due to downsizing dur-

ing the depression and also World War II when maintenance was minimal. We cut out the existing turf one inch thick in order to assure the removal of the thatch that had accumulated from many years of fertilizer and irrigation. Once the sod was removed and the bare ground was prepped we purchased our bentgrass sod. The sod was custom cut by Country Club Turf to a depth of one inch. The next step was to lay the sod on the native soil. It took many long days of nurturing and hand watering, but the new sod rooted in nicely. We completed all 18 greens this season but have a lot of work ahead of us. In the coming years, maintenance of each green will be equivalent to maintaining two greens. Because the new sod is laid on straight soil, it will demand extra aerifying, top dressing and hand watering until it is comparable to the rest of the green.

We acquired a 1930s aerial map showing the original bunkering of the course. From the map we were able to determine which bunkers had been removed or rebuilt over the years. From Mr. Urbana's suggestions we were able to determine which bunkers to put back in and which ones to rebuild. Placement of the bunkers needed to be altered to accommodate today's golfers. This is due to improvement in equipment of the game, which enables golfers to increase hitting distances. This makes some of the original bunkering obsolete. We hired Hartman Companies for bunker restoration. They did an outstanding job replicating original bunkers on the course.

Over the years, some tees had been rebuilt and were uncharacteristic to the rest of the course. We rebuilt seven of these tees to better fit the classic style golf course. The renovation was complete when the club decided to reverse the nines (ten becomes one, one becomes ten), which is how the course was originally played.

None of these accomplishments would have been possible without the hard work and dedication given by our crew. It was not a typical year at Minnesota Valley, but a busy and successful one. I feel privileged to have been a part of it.

Applications For 1998 MGCSA Legacy Awards and MGCSA Scholarship Awards Are Available at the MGCSA Office

The MGCSA Legacy Awards offer educational aid to the children and grandchildren of Class AA, A, B, C, D and Affiliate MGCSA members who have been active members. The MGCSA provides scholarships to students attending college or vocational programs at any accredited post-secondary institution.

Scholarship recipients are selected on the basis of academic record, potential to succeed, leadership and participation in school and community activities, honors, work experience, a statement of education and career goals and an outside appraisal.

Questions regarding the scholarship program should be addressed to:

MGCSA Scholarship Committee
240 Minnetonka Ave. So.
P.O. Box 617
Wayzata, MN 55391
Phone: (612) 473-0557
Toll Free: 1-800-642-7227
Fax: (612) 473-0576

Applications must be postmarked by June 1, 1998.