

# INSIGHT

## One Superintendent's Perspective

(Editor's Note: The following interview of Shawn Swenson, Superintendent at Madelia Golf Course, was conducted by Jack MacKenzie, CGCS. This is the third in a series of State Superintendent interviews.)

### Course and Statistics Madelia Golf Course

City-owned nine-hole track. From the tips Madelia plays 3,192 yards. Opened for play in 1981. Madelia is a young course still growing. The old days of "grip it and rip it" are fading fast as the trees are making the errant shots more difficult to recover from.

### Location

Madelia Golf Course is located in the southwest part of the community approximately 25 miles southwest of Mankato.

### Years in the business and vocational biography

I started working at the Madelia Golf Course in 1993 at the age of 16. Worked my way up through the ranks. Attended Anoka-Hennepin Tech College. I was offered the position of Assistant Superintendent in 1997. In 1998 I became the Superintendent when Harold Davis, the first Superintendent retired.

### Why and/or how did you enter the Turf Management industry?

I love the game of golf and being outdoors. I thought this would be a great opportunity to be involved with the industry and closer to the game. Needless to say, my handicap has steadily increased over the years, due to more work and less play.

### Who was your professional mentor and why?

Without a doubt, Harold Davis. This man took me under his wing and showed me all about golf courses, hard work, ups and downs of being in this position. In 1993 the course flooded, we worked long hard hours rebuilding greens and fairways. He always kept his head high in all the tough times. That prepared me for the floods of 1997 and 2001.

### What has been the highest point in your career?

The day I became the Superintendent of Madelia.

### What has been your lowest point?

The next day when it flooded!

### Are your greatest challenges political, agronomic or managerial?

Political. I have three boards to work with: Park Board, Golf Board, and finally the City Council. The golf course has had a debt since day one. When built, people thought Harold could mow greens with a 22 inch rotary, mow fairways and roughs with the same six-foot PTO driven woods mower. They soon realized how expensive equipment in this industry is. You get a couple of people on the City Council who think they have the answer to everything without knowing the whole statistics or facts and make your life miserable.

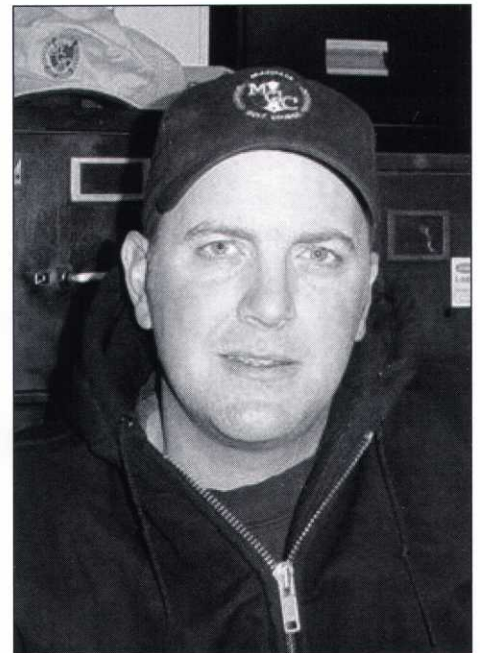
### What is the most difficult disease to manage on your course and how do you?

*I pay my employees well.  
When I was 16 working here  
I made minimum wage and  
got a ten cent raise every year.  
A lot of hard work for low  
pay. I don't want my  
employees to go through that.  
My employees deserve just  
as much credit if not more for  
the great shape of the course.*

I really don't have a single disease difficult to manage, I run into Dollar Spot and Brown Patch once in a while. Chipco 26gt does wonders!

### Is it hard to find good help in your area of the state?

Not really, I pay my employees well. When I was 16 working here I made minimum wage and got a ten cent raise every year. A lot of hard work for low pay. I don't want my employees to go through that. My employees deserve just as much credit if not more for the great shape of the course. I have had two employees go on to college for Golf Course Management. I try to get young employ-



Shawn Swenson

ees that can work 4-5 years for me.

### Do you have a dog on your crew?

No, not yet!

### Where will our industry be in ten years?

Tough to say. Hopefully equipment will get cheaper, wishful thinking!

### Where would you like to be in ten years?

I hope still in this industry, I love the challenge of my job and the rewards of a job well done.

### What is your perspective of our state association and what would you change?

I feel its heading down the right path. We have a strong association that provides a helping hand to the "ditch diggers" of this industry.

### Name your foursome, who would you play with and why?

Tiger Woods, I feel he has pushed golf to the next level, it's now "cool" to be on the golf team. The Bear, I would like to pick his brain about golf course design. Bill Murray, we all need laughter and I would like to beat at least one person in the foursome!