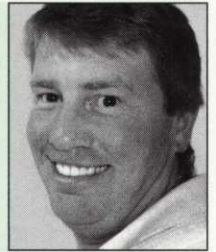


Insight:

One Superintendent's Perspective

Paul Diegnau, CGCS, Keller Golf Course



Keller Golf Course is an 18-hole public golf course located on the east side of St. Paul. It is owned and operated by Ramsey County. It was designed by Paul N. Coates, a Ramsey County engineer, who designed several other golf courses in the Twin Cities and throughout Minnesota. Keller was a regular stop on the PGA tour, hosting the St. Paul Open from 1930 -1968, in addition to the PGA Championship in 1932 and 1954. Other notable tournaments include the Western Open and the USGA Amateur Public Links Championship. The LPGA also used Keller GC as a regular tour stop from 1973-1980 with the Patty Berg Classic.

Years in the Business

I have 22 years in the industry, all as superintendent at Parkview GC, River Falls GC and Keller GC. I was never an assistant, so not only did I jump into the fire feet first, I received a turf degree from the school of hard knocks. I actually have a B.S. in biology from the University of Minnesota.

Why did you enter the turf management industry?

I am no different than 90% of my colleagues: I love the game of golf, being outside and working with Mother Nature. My original intent was to work for the DNR in wildlife or fisheries management upon graduation. I soon realized that this was not going to happen and I responded to an ad for golf course work. The rest is history.

Who was your professional mentor and why?

Tom Haugen, former golf course owner and superintendent, golf course architect, and once upon a time, sales rep for Wilbur-Ellis. He took me under his wing and taught me a lot about the golf industry and golf course maintenance.

What has been the highest point in your career?

Fledging 100 bluebirds for the 2004 season, shattering our previous mark by

some 35 birds.

What has been your lowest point?

Several years ago I reluctantly came to the realization that government is really an inefficient, ineffective, bureaucratic machine and, realistically speaking, there is little I can do to change it.

Are your greatest challenges political, agronomic or managerial?

Definitely managerial as in personnel

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management. Trying to keep 15 individuals all on the same page and working side-by-side in harmony, day in and day out is always very challenging. I am always challenged when attempting to communicate with the non-English speaking members of our staff (I need to improve my Spanish). Throw in the fact that five full-time staff are union employees and that can make things even more challenging.

What is the most difficult disease to manage on your course?

We primarily deal with summer patch, anthracnose and dollar spot. We find that disease intensity for these three pathogens tends to vary dramatically from year to year. We spray curatively only when we absolutely have to or are sure an outbreak is imminent. We try to engage in as many IPM practices as possible and we set liberal disease thresholds.

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

In my nine years here at Keller GC, I have experienced both ends of the spectrum. The first five years I had to beg, borrow, and steal to find quality individuals willing to work. The past four seasons my staff has been stabilized with "retirees" and Hispanic workers. We currently have a great group of people working on the

grounds at Keller.

Do you have a dog on your crew?

Yes, for the past two seasons I have been bringing my dog, Kelli, with me to the course on a regular basis. She is a six-year-old Springer Spaniel/Lab mix that has an affinity for water and chasing squirrels, fox and rabbits. Unfortunately, early this spring she ruptured the cruciate ligament in her right knee while running on the golf course. After an expensive surgery and twelve weeks of rehabilitation she returned the golf course and proceeded to rupture her other knee. Needless to say, she is currently in rehabilitation following her second surgery and probably won't return until next year.

Where will our industry be in ten years?

Technology will continue to innovate the procedures and processes we use to maintain our golf courses on a daily basis. There will probably be fewer golf courses due to decreased demand and/or "Joe Public Golfer's" inability to pay the ever increasing green fee.

Where would you like to be in ten years?

Hopefully, still in this industry and excited to go to work every morning.

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

I believe MGCSA is doing a fine job. As far as change, I would like to see more member participation, less dilution of our association, both local and national (we seem to be losing our identity as our own entity), and attain greater political clout at state and national levels.

Name your foursome, who would you play with?

Freddie Couples (*just to watch that swing*), Charlize Theron (*just to watch her swing*), and David Feherty (*to keep things light*).