



INSIGHT: *One Superintendent's Perspective*

By **MATT MCKINNON**
The Legacy Courses at Cragun's

The Legacy Courses at Cragun's has two 18-hole courses and a reversible par 3 located in Brainerd, MN. The courses were designed in 1998 by Robert Trent Jones Jr. The Legacy Courses at Cragun's is also an Audubon Certified Signature Sanctuary certified in July of 1998.

I started working on a golf course in 1989. My first job was at Oxbow C.C. in Oxbow, ND. I went to turf school at Anoka Hennepin Technical College from 1992 to 1994.

Why did you enter the turf management industry?

One of the reasons for going into this industry is being able to work outside and not in an office all day. Another reason is working with the irrigation system. I learned a lot those first couple of years and really took an interest in it. Working in North Dakota the clay was not fun to work with but I loved working on the irrigation system so that made the difference for me.

Who was your professional mentor?

The first superintendent I worked for was Tom Feriancek at Oxbow Country Club. He was a very hard working guy and expected you to work as hard but also made work fun for the crew. I feel his work ethic was instilled in me. I also worked for Tom Johanns as his assistant at Bemidji Town & Country Club for three years (1995-1998). Tom gave me the knowledge and experience that made me feel comfortable to move to the next stage in my career.

What has been the highest point in your career?

My high point came when Tom Kientzle gave me the superintendent position here at the Legacy. I never thought that I would become a superintendent of such a large facility before I had ever been a superintendent at an 18-hole facility.

What has been your lowest point?

The low point I had was the year of 2002. It was a very wet and difficult year to grow grass.

Are your greatest challenges political, agronomic or managerial?

I think all three are big challenges. There is not a day that goes by where you do not deal with one or more of them. With a crew this size, managing people is always going to be a big challenge. I give a lot of credit to my assistants Joe Gellerman and Jim Zylstra. They do a great job with the crew. I think if you ask them, managing people is the hardest part of this profession.

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

It seems like the last couple of years it has been snowmold that has been the most difficult to manage. Each year I network with fellow superintendents and try to put together a solid program. However, even with a solid program, Mother Nature does not always cooperate.

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

I have a very good crew but with a crew this large you usually do not have 100% of the crew return each year. We start looking around January for staff to replace anyone that is not going to return for this season. It is hard to find good help so we have to do a lot of interviewing before making any choices.

Do you have a dog on your crew?

Not at this time. I think very soon we will need to hire one.

Where will our industry be in 10 years?

I think we will be doing the same thing but under a bigger microscope. At the Legacy Courses at Cragun's it seems like we are testing water and soil all the time to make sure we are not harming the environment. I also think, with land prices and the world growing so fast, a lot of courses will be closed for development.

Where would you like to be in 10 years?

I enjoy working for Dutch and Irma Cragun. They have taught me a lot about the business part of this industry. In 10 years I hope to be still working at the Legacy Courses at Cragun's.

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

Minnesota has a great association but it seems to be more centered on the Twin Cities. Being on the board has opened my eyes to a whole new part of the association. It is very important to be active in the association, but very hard to do when you do not live in the Twin Cities. One change I would like to see for example is the March Mini-Seminar. I would suggest having two sites, one in northern Minnesota and one in the Twin Cities area. This would allow more people to attend without having to travel a great distance.

Name your foursome?

Tom Johanns, Bill Cox, Mark Fossum and myself. I do not get a lot of time to play golf and when I do it feels like work to me. When I play with Tom, Bill and Mark they remind me that work and being on the golf course do not always have to go hand and hand. Oh, and where is the beverage cart?

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